



Obituary

Professor

A. C. Gimson

1917–1985

Professor A. C. Gimson, President of the IPA, died of a heart attack on 22 April 1985.

His full name was Alfred Charles Gimson, although he chose not to use his first name, preferring to be known by friends and colleagues as 'Gim'. Born on 7 June 1917 in London, he was educated at Emanuel School, Wandsworth, and came to University College London as an undergraduate to read French. It was there, under Daniel Jones and Hélène Coustenoble, that he first studied phonetics. After war service spent as a liaison officer with the French and Polish allied forces, he was appointed lecturer in the Department of Phonetics at UCL. He remained on the staff of the Department (subsequently renamed the Department of Phonetics and Linguistics) until his retirement in 1983. He was promoted to Reader in Phonetics in the University of London in 1961, and to Professor in 1966. From 1971 to 1983 he was Head of Department, in succession to D. B. Fry.

The publication for which Gim will principally be remembered is his *Introduction to the Pronunciation of English* (London: Edward Arnold, 1962; subsequent editions 1970, 1980). Prior to its appearance he had published the occasional scholarly article, but it was the *Introduction* which made his name. In it he succeeded in building on and updating the Daniel Jones tradition of descriptive English phonetics, bringing to it an awareness of structuralist phonemics of the type advocated by Trager and Smith (1951), then still very influential, but resisting the 'tempting' idea of applying 'a logical, elegant, and economical phonemic analysis such as is now commonplace in the United States, involving a very much simplified phonemic notation' (1962: Foreword). Equally, though, he rejected some of Daniel Jones's less plausible claims (such as the 'chronemic' analysis which saw the vowels of *beat* and *bit* as belonging to the same phoneme), leaving a theoretical framework well suited to the practical job of teaching and learning EFL phonetics. The title of the *Introduction* is misleading, since its coverage extends well beyond the introductory. To the phonetic detail already well established by DJ, Gim added a concise but clear historical background, to-

gether with a commentary on the ongoing changes in twentieth-century RP. The book remains the standard work on RP phonetics, even though its theoretical content is by now very dated.

After Daniel Jones' death the publishers of his famous *English Pronouncing Dictionary* invited Gim to take over the task of keeping it up-to-date. He was thus responsible for the 1964 reprint and, more importantly, for the 'revised' 13th edition (1967) and the 'completely revised' 14th edition (1977). In both of these he introduced changes in the transcription system: the minor change of 'əu' in place of 'ou' in 1967, and then the major switchover to a qualitative/quantitative notation of the vowels in 1977, bringing the transcription more or less into line with that of his *Introduction*. This change, seen by some as revolutionary and disturbing, was nevertheless long overdue; and the notation of the paired monophthongs as /i:/, ɪ/, /ɔ:/, ɒ/, /u:/, ʊ/, /ɜ:/, ə/, and of the diphthongs correspondingly as /eɪ, əʊ, ɪə/, etc., has won very general acceptance not only in academia but also among EFL publishers. Gim also changed the first-choice entry for *-ity* words (*quality, sanity*) from the now obsolescent /-ɪtɪ/ to the more usual /-ətɪ/. The most serious criticism that can be levelled against his editorship of *EPD* is his failure to carry out a thorough revision of the headword list: for as it stands *EPD* fails to include an embarrassingly large number of rather frequently used words (of which *aperitif, changeover, citizenry, cursor, doctoral, encapsulate, greaseproof, innovative* and *kamikaze* will have to suffice as examples).

Less well known is Gim's *A Practical Course of English Pronunciation: a perceptual approach*. In spite of its longwinded title, this course has considerable merits, not least the right/wrong and ABX perception drills which form an important part of the accompanying recorded material.

The listening public first became familiar with Gim's voice over the radio in the early 1960's, when he not only presented several programmes for foreign learners on BBC English by Radio but also broadcast a long series of 3-minute contributions as part of the popular 'Today' programme on the national UK network Radio 4. In these Gim demonstrated his skill as a first-rate popularizer of pronunciation topics, injecting a calm objectivity into an area where subjective fervour tends to predominate.

Always anxious to ensure that up-to-date phonetic knowledge and practice reached a wide audience, Gim acted as consultant to a number of publishers in the fields of lexicography and language teaching. He was pronunciation adviser to the influential *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978) and contributed a foreword on The Pronunciation of British English to *Collins Dictionary of the English Language* (1979). He acted as Chairman of the Lingua-

phone Academic Advisory Committee for many years. He was also Chairman of the Examination Board of the College of Speech Therapists, and played an important role in the transformation of speech therapy in the UK into an all-graduate profession—helping to ensure, by the way, that British-trained speech therapists are required to achieve a level of practical phonetic ability undreamed of in other countries.

Gim acted as Secretary of the IPA from 1949 until 1975, latterly combining this office with that of Treasurer. He then continued as Treasurer until his election as President last year. One of the most important changes he introduced was the replacement of *Le Maître Phonétique*, printed entirely in phonetic transcription and consisting mostly of very brief contributions, by the present *JIPA* with its much longer scholarly articles.

As the leading phonetician of British English after Daniel Jones, Gim's influence will long remain. As a kindly mentor and a talented practical teacher he will be remembered with great affection by all who came into contact with him.

J. C. Wells