

An Introduction to the Phonetics of American English

CHARLES KENNETH THOMAS. Pp. 273+x. Ronald Press Company, New York. Price \$4.50.

This book, a revised version of a work originally published in 1947, has three aims: (1) to serve as an elementary introduction to articulatory phonetics, (2) to describe the norms of standard American speech, and (3) to present information on regional variations in pronunciation.

Thomas' book is well written and can be read with pleasure as well as with profit. It is also the only readily accessible source on the phonetic distinctions among American dialects. For readers of this journal, the information about the last topic is probably the most interesting and valuable part of the book. In work on the acoustical characterization and perception of speech sounds, lack of attention to regional variations in pronunciation can vitiate results of expensive and otherwise carefully designed experiments. If it does no more than sensitize the reader to this problem, a reading of Thomas' book will have been amply rewarded.

Unfortunately, the book is marred by a number of more than trivial flaws. The author's discussion of the acoustics of speech can most charitably be described as uninformed. The arrangement of his subject matter is unorthodox to a point of being downright confusing: vastly dissimilar sounds are discussed together (e.g., in Chap. 7, the sounds [θ], [ð] and [ɱ]), while subjects which clearly belong together are treated in widely separate places (e.g., the velar nasal [ŋ] is discussed in part in Chap. 7 and in part in Chap. 19). There is a great deal of useless repetition in the book. The characteristic traits of American dialects, for instance, are discussed twice, once in Chap. 21 and again in Chap. 22. It would have been more useful if the latter chapter had been replaced by a table listing the different "shibboleths" and their regional pronunciations. Recent work on the phonology of American English like that of Smith and Trager and the various critical reactions to the latter are passed over without the attention they merit. The important problem of American intonation, surely one of its most distinctive characteristics, is disposed of in less than a page.

In spite of all these strictures, however, Thomas' book deserves the serious attention of all who are interested in problems of speech.

MORRIS HALLE
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
