Book Review

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1 Introduction

Daniel Silverman’s monograph *Neutralization* is in part a survey and a critical exploration of its topic for advanced students and researchers, in part it advocates the author’s own interpretation of the phenomenon. Traditionally, as far as segmental phonology goes, neutralization is often defined as the absence or the suspension of a phonological contrast in a particular segmental position. Moreover, it has at times been considered detrimental to the proper functioning of language in verbal communication, as it deletes potentially crucial phonetic cues. Silverman, on the other hand, prefers to narrow down the core concept of neutralization to the infrequent cases, where alternations induce complete phonetic homophony of allomorphs of lexically distinct morphemes or words (derived homophony). In addition, he takes issue with the function-negative view of neutralization, arguing that neutralizations in the broad traditional sense are nearly always function-positive in that they tend to aid in parsing.

2 Overview of contents

The contents of the book are organized as follows. Following the frontispiece matter, Chapter 1, “The rhyme and the reason of neutralization”, sometimes referred to as the “Preamble” (pp. xii, 11), introduces the hypothetical language Babelese with schematized properties, but – Silverman says – “less advanced readers may prefer to skip the Preamble until having gotten further into the book” (p. xii). The bulk of remaining text is divided into two main parts, the 143-page-long Part I: “Rhyme” (pp. 15–157) and the merely 39-page-long Part II: “Reason” (pp. 161–199). The two words of these headings are actually meant as technical terms and should, in line with Silverman’s practice elsewhere in the book, have been spelled with small capitals. Thus re-dressed, *RHYME* is defined as “[t]he

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degree of phonetic similarity among lexical forms” and reason is “[t]he degree of lexical distinctness in the speech signal” (p. 203).

Part I: “RHYME” (small caps added, SE), which deals then with the extent of phonetic affinity between different lexical items, consists of four sections, A, B, C, and D. Section A, “Observation and description”, in turn, contains three chapters. Chapter 2, “Topology”, describes how phonetic distinctness fluctuates sequentially in the speech chain. Specifically, periods with a greater number of phonologically contrastive cues are interspersed with periods of fewer cues; some stretches of the speech continuum therefore carry more information, others less. Contrastive cues may be neutralized in certain spans of the speech stream, at edges of a lexical domain (mostly word-finally), and at points (usually affecting unstressed vowels). Correspondingly, establishing a topology of neutralization involves determining “the amount of linguistically significant content in the speech stream in terms of contrastive cues’ manifestation across spans, or at edges or points, in a morpho-phonological string” (p. 203). Studies by Kruszewski, Z. Harris, Firth, Pike, Hockett, Goldsmith, Henderson, and others are briefly summarized in this chapter. Chapter 3, “Taxonomy”, classifies neutralizations with reference to the environments, in which they tend, or do not tend, to arise: positions favoring neutralizations are lexically non-prevocalic, non-initial, unstressed, or affixes. Under the heading “Typology”, Chapter 4 presents Trubetzkoy’s celebrated classification of oppositions and view of neutralization.

Section B, “False positives”, deals with two phenomena that resemble, but are in fact not, neutralizations. In Chapter 5, “Partial phonemic overlap”, Silverman argues that Bernard Bloch’s classic examples by that name constitute neither neutralizations nor instances of phonemic overlap. Chapter 6, “Near-neutralization”, importantly reports on work showing that, at the level of the morpheme or the word, numerous alleged instances of neutralization and merger illustrate near-neutralization and near-mergers rather than complete homophony. Put differently, traces of suspended segmental phonological distinctions are often preserved elsewhere in a given linguistic form.

Section C, “Explanation”, addresses attempts at clarifying what factors cause neutralizations. In Chapter 7, “Ease of production”, Silverman rejects the belief that neutralizations derive from a tendency to facilitate articulation. In Chapter 8, “Ease of perception” he dismisses the alternative idea that neutralizations might emerge, when speakers actively try to produce speech that is easy to apprehend. Chapter 9, “Phonetic misperception”, criticizes John Ohala’s proposition that neutralizations arise because listeners sometimes misunderstand the phonetic intentions of speakers. Chapter 10, “Semantic misperception: early proposals” approvingly presents André Martinet’s theory of functional load as a factor in
how neutralizations develop: oppositions present in few minimal pairs are more easily suspended than those existent in many pairs. By the same token, Robert King’s famed arguments against the relevance of minimal pairs in this context are found to be faulty. Chapter 11, “Semantic misperception: recent proposals” introduces William Labov’s thesis of a patently passive pressure favoring avoidance of homophony: speech forms that fulfill their intended functions survive, others perish.

Section D, “Exemplification”, offers further data on neutralization and on its settings. Chapter 12, “Case study” (cf. Silverman 2010) describes how Korean puts up with extensive suspension of phonological distinctions, given that these neutralizations actually produce very little lexical homophony. Chapter 13, “Domains of application”, discusses and illustrates the realms of linguistic structure, where anti-homophony operates, including lexicon, morphology, phonology, etc. Chapter 14, “‘Distinctions are drawn that matter’”, portrays some odd cases of neutralization, which, they too, are apparently accepted, since they do not lead to homophony. In general, then, neutralizations are rather freely tolerated in languages, but a passive pressure against homophony does exist. Furthermore, neutralization is for the most part not function-negative in that it does not usually impede the transmission of information from speakers to listeners.

On the contrary, in Part II: “REASON” (again small caps added), Silverman argues that neutralizations are function-positive, since they often aid in parsing the speech chain into morphemes or words. The barely four-page-long Chapter 15, “Cement”, reproduces a notion from Mikołaj Kruszewski that designates the adjustment of a given vocal-tract posture to a following one, signaling the presence or the absence of a word boundary. Chapter 16, “Boundary signals”, summarizes Trubetzkoy’s fundamental classification of such phenomena. Chapter 17, “Prosodies”, briefly goes over the relevant notions of Firth’s prosodic analysis. Chapter 18, “Transitional probabilities” recapitulates a couple of experiments carried out by the U.S. psychologist Jenny Saffran, suggesting that a decrease of phonetic distinctness may actually concur with an increase in semantic distinctness. In Chapter 19, “The power of Babelese”, finally, Silverman sums up the overall results of the study with reference to his hypothetical language.

Most chapters include a short summary or conclusion, discussion questions, and suggestions for further reading. A glossary of some fifty-odd technical terms (pp. 200–203), a list of references (pp. 204–217) covering over 260 titles, a language index (pp. 218–219), and a concise subject index (pp. 220–221) round off the volume.
3 Silverman’s across-the-board dismissal of the “theoretical constructs” feature, segment, phoneme, syllable, and underlying form

Before going into some of the central topics of the monograph, it is necessary to mention a basic background premise that Silverman makes about how phonology is not structured. The premise relates to the notions of phonetic and distinctive feature, phonetic and phonological segment, “the theoretical construct ‘syllable’” (p. 19), and “the structural and generative theoretical construct ‘underlying form’” (pp. 105–106). For, according to Silverman and in tune with some other recent work in phonological theory, phonology suffers from “fallacious assumptions about the functional relevance of sub-morphemic content” (p. 8). Thus, “there is no need to posit segments or underlying representations” (p. 108), “it is far from clear that syllables are genuinely relevant at any functional level of analysis” (p. 179), and, more broadly, there exists “no need for features, segments, syllables, or underlying representations” (pp. 140, 148). The “‘segment’ [is] a theoretical construct we will abandon” (p. 15), he says, and he wants to “rid the morpheme of extraneous sub-morphemic structure (distinctive features, segments, syllables, etc.)” (p. 7) and to “rid […] phonology of its emphasis on positing functional links among mere phonetic correspondents (the hypothetical segment, the hypothetical distinctive feature)” (p. 8). Besides, as far as phonetic and phonological transcription is concerned, “IPA symbols […] are mere visual expedients” (p. 6). In postulating segments, phonologists are illicitly being influenced by alphabetic writing (cf., e.g., Lodge 2009: 12, 42; Port 2011). Therefore, “‘phonemism’ and ‘alphabetism’ […] may be mercifully deposited on to the junk heap of theoretic history” (p. 187).

4 Silverman’s alternative: the Gestalt, or unanalyzed-chunk, approach

As an alternative to phonemism and alphabetism, Silverman submits that “phonological structure is built from stretches of speech that are greater in length than individual speech sounds (‘segments’)” (p. 16). In his view, “functional links may be established solely by semantic criteria” (p. 8) and “the spans of the speech stream underlain by a specific linguistic function – morphemes, words, and perhaps certain rote phrases – are the genuine building blocks of linguistic structure” (p. 7). Moreover, “there is no reason to assume that lan-
language users subdivide the words they learn into distinct sound-components unless there is evidence from alternation to do so” (p. 7) – more expressly, “morphemes [...] are the genuine building blocks of linguistic structure, blocks that may only be partitioned into smaller units when there is evidence from alternation to do so” (p. 198; emphasis added, SE). The smaller components of the speech stream “consist of motor routines and acoustic complexes of varying shapes and sizes, involving few if any of the neat, organized, phonetic ‘slices’ – be these slices temporal (loosely, segments), or spectral (loosely, distinctive features) – that linguists typically manipulate” (p. 11). Rather, “any portion of the speech stream that is static – that is, fixed – in terms of its phonetic content may be treated as an unanalyzed chunk – as a Gestalt – due to the simple fact that there is no linguistic evidence suggesting otherwise, since these portions never decompose into smaller units” (p. 197; italics in the original). These “phonological Gestalten – the elements of phonological contrast – come only in two varieties: alternating and non-alternating portions of morphemes” (p. 198).

To illustrate Silverman’s notions of (i) “non-alternating components of morphemes” and (ii) “components in alternation” (p. 7), we may refer to his discussion of his hypothetical language Babelese. This idiom, he says, has three stops, three nasals, three vowels (p. 1):¹

(1) p t k i u
   m n ŋ a

Roots in the language have one of four canonical shapes: CVCV, CVCVC, CVCCV, CVCCVC (pp. 1, 197). Morpheme-internal CC-clusters, furthermore, are limited to combinations of a nasal plus a homorganic plosive, i.e., to mp, nt, ŋk. The nasals and the plosives in these clusters never alternate, hence are not analyzable into individual segments. In particular, morpheme-internal nasal-stop clusters (NC) “bear no linguistic relationship to” (p. 197) word-internal, heteromorphemic nasal-stop clusters (N+C) or nasal-stop clusters across word-boundaries (N#C), but are instead parts of indivisible wholes (Gestalten) without internal analysis. The nasals in N+C and N#C clusters are, however, subject to the same restriction as morpheme-internal pre-stop nasals, for which reason we find conditioned

¹ Silverman uses boldface to mark phonetic as well as typical or standardized pronunciations. In line with his conception of phonology, he does not employ devices identifying types of transcription: “Neither square brackets nor virgules are ever used” (p. xii). When citing examples from Silverman’s text, I follow his transcriptional practice.
allomorphic alternation of the type $\text{taŋkan} \sim \text{taŋkam}$ (before $p$) $\sim \text{taŋkan}$ (before $k$), where a portion of the second root-morpheme vowel and the final nasal vary depending on the following phonological context. Thus, the allomorph $\text{taŋkam}$ will apparently consist of two unanalyzed chunks: (i) the non-alternating $\text{taŋk}$, with part of the qualities of the second $a$ and (ii) the alternating chunk $\text{am}$ with the remaining qualities of the second $a$ and the final $m$ (transcriptions of chunks mine, SE). Furthermore, although Silverman does not seem to be explicit on this point, his phrase “components in alternation” (p. 7), or “components of the speech stream that substitute for one another” (p. 8), presumably means that every member of an alternation is a Gestalt of its own.

5 A special concern: neutralizing alternations in lexically minimal pairs

Turning to the main focus of the monograph, neutralization is “a conditioned limitation on the distribution of a language’s contrastive values” (pp. i, xi; 31–32 [here in italics]; similarly pp. 4, 202). More precisely, “[i]n the broadest sense of the term, neutralization involves the dynamic reduction and/or the static limitation of contrastive values within a lexical form” (p. 15). But given the multitude of items in the lexicon, “most alternations do not involve minimal pairs such that particular alternations derive homophones” (p. 125). Therefore, Silverman puts forth a “new” (p. 11) and “especially narrow” (p. 58) definition of neutralization, viz., one that equates neutralization to “derived homophony” (pp. 4, 130) or more exactly “[d]erived homophony at the morpheme- and/or word-level” (p. 202), what he calls NEUTRALIZATION (in small caps). Thus, “NEUTRALIZATION results from an alternation that derives homophones” (p. 4). As the latter definition suggests, Silverman chooses to view NEUTRALIZATION, not at the level of the individual phonological segment, but at the level of whole morphemes, words, or lexical forms. That is, only derived homophones, e.g., German [raːt] ‘wheel’ < /rad/ versus [raːt] ‘advice’ < /rat/ – if, in fact, they are completely neutralized (Röttger et al. 2014) –, not heterophones like German [raːt] ‘wheel’ versus [roːt] ‘red’, reflect a NEUTRALIZATION, since the latter word pair remains distinct due to the different vowel qualities.2 I sum up the resulting picture in Figure 1.

2 I retain standard transcriptional practices here.
Proposed effects of neutralizations on the communicative function of language

According to Silverman, the function of language is to convey information from speaker to listener (p. i). Depending on how neutralizations affect overall phonological distinctions between morphemes or words, he sees them as (i) function-neutral, (ii) function-negative or (iii) function-positive. His main individual theses are:

(2) i. “neutralizing alternations almost always maintain heterophony, and hence are usually function-neutral” (p. 194); that is, heterophone-maintaining alternations are “function-neutral in the sense that lexical semantic distinctness remains stable” (p. xi)

ii. “neutralizing alternations are function-negative only to the extent that they derive homophones” (p. 194); such cases are “rare instances” (p. xi)

iii. “neutralization is often function-positive, by serving as an aid to parsing” (p. 194); that is, neutralization “may serve as an aid to parsing the speech stream into its functional (morphemic and lexical) components” (p. xi)

His main conclusion is then: “the only function-negative consequence of neutralization occurs in those rare, passively curtailed circumstances when it derives homophony, that is, neutralization. Otherwise though, (traditional) neutralization is not merely function-neutral, but is, rather, function-positive” (p. 156; cf. also p. 165). On the basis of these observations, Silverman derives his “overarching proposal” (p. 130; similarly, p. 125):

(3) “[neutralizing] alternations are more likely to be present in a language if they do not significantly increase the level of homophony”
Using Silverman’s own three key terms rhyme, reason, neutralization, (3) translates into principle (4) (p. 194; similar wordings on pp. 10, 11, 133, 139, 140, 146, note especially p. 141):

(4) “phonological rhyme may [...] increase until encountering a counter-pressure inhibiting undue decreases in phonological reason, in the form of neutralization”

In view of (4), language tolerates quite a lot of variation (p. 149):

(5) “variation in speech – even phonetically unnatural variation – may naturally evolve in a language, provided the phonetic distinctions have immaterial consequences for semantic distinctions”

7 Problems for non-segmentalism and the unanalyzed-chunk approach: two illustrative cases

As it is impossible in a short review to touch on more than a fraction of the many important issues raised by this rich, thought-provoking text (cf. summary of contents), I will limit my comments to (i) the unanalyzed-chunk theory for morphemes, particularly its nearly total committal to non-segmentalism, (ii) one of the fundamental principles that Silverman skillfully brings to the fore, viz., the communicatively compensatory effects that arise when a contrast persists in one phonotactic position, while it is neutralized in another position, and (iii) the need to formulate an explicit approach to the language user’s recovery of neutralized forms.

To begin with the first-mentioned point: potentially, non-segmentalism and the unanalyzed-chunk approach to morphemes face numerous challenges. Whether and in what ways long unanalyzed sub-morphemic chunks or approximately segment-sized units are linguistically and psychologically real, is hard to determine. Focusing on Silverman’s adoption of a fairly strong version of non-segmentalism in phonology, I will consider only two linguistic test cases, alliteration and metathesis, both of which appear to be at odds with the non-segmentalist assumption.
7.1 Alliteration of initial segments as a discourse device

The device of alliteration is attested in several language groups, but is especially prominent in the Germanic languages. Here, it occurs in formulaic expressions (e.g., English *rhyme and reason*, though this particular example is apparently a 16th-century literary importation from French) as well as in verse, notably in older varieties of Germanic. For illustration we may quote a verse from the Old Norse poem *Hávamál*, where I have put the alliterating units in boldface (Evans 1986: 41, strophe #11; English translation by Larrington 1999: 15):

(6) **Byrði betri**
    *berrat maðr brautu at*
    *en sé mannvit mikit;*
    *vegnest verra*
    *vegra hann velli at*
    *en sé ofdrykkja qls.*

No better burden
can a man carry on the road
than a store of common sense;
a worse journey-provisioning
he couldn’t carry over the land
than to be drunk on ale.

Alliteration in verse is a feature of discourse or running text, not a grammatical phenomenon, but it does have a bearing on whether its users can perceive segments or not. Recall Silverman’s dictum (7) (p. 7, emphasis in the original):

(7) “there remains no way to relate components of the speech stream to each other by any other than *semantic* means”

Moreover, according to Silverman (p. 198, italics by SE; similar statements occur three times on p. 7):

(8) “morphemes [...] may *only* be partitioned into smaller units when there is evidence from *alternation* to do so”

Both (7) and (8) relate to spoken language. The age of the Hávamál strophe #11 is not known and the strophe could be post-literary, but alliterative Germanic poetry as such is believed to have its ultimate roots in spoken language, not in written language, i.e., it was supposedly originally composed and passed on orally (Evans 1986: 2, 7). If this assumption can be upheld, propositions (7) and (8) will be in severe doubt. Silverman’s dictum (7) is contradicted by the patterns in (6). Excepting perhaps the discernibly related forms *byrði* ‘burden’ (acc.) and *berr* ‘carries’, the linked *b*-alliterations *betri* ‘better’, *brautu* ‘road’ (dat.), *byrði*,
the **m**-alliterations *mikit* ‘much’, *mannvit* ‘good sense’, and the **v**-alliterations *verra* ‘worse’ (acc.), *vegra* ‘move, carry, lift’, *velli* ‘ground; field’ (dat.), *vegnest* ‘provisions for a journey’ all fail to be semantic in the structural semantic sense intended by Silverman. Contrary to the “no way” stipulation of (7), supposedly unanalyzable chunks of morphemes in (6) are analyzed into still smaller units, i.e., segments, by “other than semantic means”. Furthermore, in violation of principle (8), these segments do not emerge as the consequence of an alternation.

### 7.2 Metathesis of segments as a productive structural alternation

In addition, consider the phenomenon of metathesis, notably segment (as opposed to mere feature) metathesis. Metatheses of various kinds occur, of course, in child language (e.g., Swedish child language *bysk* for *byxa* ‘trousers’, *oskå* for *också* ‘also’, *sask* for *sax* ‘pair of scissors’, Rebecka 2;6; or her twin sister’s *faksit* for *faktiskt* [ˈfaktist] ‘actually’, Vanja 2;7), in speech errors (Swedish *sveten smäller* for *smeten sväller* ‘the mixture is rising’), in loan adaptation (Basque *mukuru* ‘pile’ < Latin *cumulum* (m) ‘pile’, further examples, e.g., in Egurtzegi 2011), and so forth, but of special interest to us here is segment metathesis as an active synchronic alternation in the structure of a language. A familiar case is the Faroese metathesis of /sk/, which is best known to occur before the neuter ending /t/ in monosyllables, when the cluster is preceded by a vowel or a nasal consonant. Illustrative examples from Lockwood (1977: 24) are the adjectives *feskur, fesk* ‘fresh’, *frískur, frísk* ‘healthy’, *franskur, franskt* ‘French’, whose neuter forms are pronounced with reversal of the segments [sk] to [ks]: [fɛkst], [frʊkst], [fraŋ̊kst]. Although the Faroese process affects strikingly few items, it is regular. Moreover, there is little or no reason to describe it as a combination of deletion and insertion, a recourse that is sometimes taken by analysts who want to ban metathesis as a phonological process. Hence, Faroese metathesis would appear to be a clear counterexample to a strict non-segmentalist approach. In his thorough general overview of metathesis, Buckley (2011: 1402) observes:

metathesis as a phenomenon is important evidence in favor of the category segment [...]. [...] it is impossible to describe reorderings coherently in terms of disparate features or phonetic cues: the essential property of metathesis is that it moves all features associated with a segment, and the cues that instantiate these features are affected as a group. [...] The need to refer to discrete segments even to characterize metathesis, and even more so to provide a theoretical analysis, presents particularly good evidence against suggestions that segments have no psychological reality, and are a mere artifact of an alphabetic writing system [...]

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7.3 Conclusion

In sum, Germanic verse alliteration shows that in language use there are other than semantic means to relate segmental components of the speech stream to one another and that segments may be extracted from the speech stream even when there is no alternation. In addition, metathesis of the kind attested in Faroese constitutes a living structural process operating on two individual segments. Furthermore, from a performance point of view, Germanic consonant alliteration and Faroese segmental metathesis involve similar language-user skills as German alternation-induced neutralization. The existence of such phenomena speaks against the unanalyzed-chunk approach to intra-morphemic substance. If language users are able to extract from the speech signal the essentially segment-sized ends of alternating allomorphs such as German *[raːt]*-[*raːd*]-, why should they not also be able to grossly identify segments elsewhere in the morpheme or assess the rough boundaries of segments in general? Is perchance ‘horizontal’ slicing of phonetic morphs, which Silverman does not argue against, simpler than ‘vertical’ slicing? He offers no explanation. Oddly, in spite of resolutely dumping the idea of segmentation in phonology (though not in morphology), he does not develop a non-segmental transcription system, but continues to speak and transcribe in terms of time-honored segments.

8 Contrast reduction in one place often entails increased relevance of cues elsewhere

Whereas Silverman may face difficulties maintaining his predominantly non-segmental, unanalyzed-chunk approach, these complications by no means affect the heart of his analysis of neutralizations. A highly significant underlying tenet throughout the book, deriving from Kruszewski, Trubetzkoy, etc., is that the negative effect of neutralizations in one position in the morpheme is often made up for by cues in another position acquiring greater relevance. For instance, in Silverman’s Babelese, where morpheme-internal **CC**-clusters are limited to combinations of a nasal plus a homorganic plosive, the occurrence of a **CC**-cluster, whose first consonant is not a homorganic nasal, immediately signals a morphological boundary (p. 167). Thus, a static limitation or dynamic curtailment of information density in one position in the speech chain is frequently compensated for by benefits that arise from the cues that are preserved in other positions.

Fully in line with Silverman’s conception of the functionally normally negligible overall effects of neutralization is, for instance, the fact that, depending on
the language, there may be a mass of normal phonetic means that can operate in conjunction in order to secure access to erased morpheme, word and phrase boundaries in utterances (cf., e.g., Eliasson forthcoming).

9 Resolving neutralizations in lexical storage and retrieval

In his study, Silverman applies, as we saw, a decidedly functional perspective, the function of language being the transmission of information from speaker to listener. In view of this, it is notable that he does not explore the linguistic and cognitive means by which listeners might be assumed to identify or recover non-neutralized alternants of neutralized forms. One reason for this partial lacuna might be that he dismisses the notion of underlying representation and regards the alternations as surface alternations. Nevertheless, the concept of neutralization has a basic directionality built into it: one form, the non-neutralized one, is in a sense primary, and the neutralized form secondary. In fact, Silverman himself regularly speaks of derived homophony, and derivation implies a direction. However, the prime reason for the omission is presumably that phonologists have thus far paid only modest attention to a systematic analysis of the properties of phonological and linguistic rules or constraints, which in combination with cognitive processes enable the recovery of basic phonological forms (cf., e.g., Eliasson 1997, with references).

10 Minor formal matters

The study is well edited. Just a few formal points deserve mention, one of them being terminological. Silverman’s three small-cap key terms rhyme, reason and neutralization tend more to blur than to enhance his readers’ understanding of the text. Instead of the opaque rhyme and reason, the transparent expressions ‘(degree of) phonetic similarity’ and ‘semantic distinctness’ would have been more reader-friendly. Similarly, locutions like ‘derived homophony’ are more straightforward than “neutralization” (in small caps, as opposed to “neutralization”). Besides, the expedient of lower-case capitalization as such is not entirely felicitous. Even in the book itself, rhyme and reason are misprinted in lower-case letters (“rhyme”, “reason”, pp. vii, 1, and in the running head on odd-numbered pages of Chapter 1), and what was intended to be neutralization on p. 126, line 13, comes out as “neutralization”. In speaking, the distinction
between small caps and lower-case letters will, of course, neutralize function-
egatively without a trace. As for other rare inadvertencies in the book, Niels
Davidsen-Nielsen, an earlier explorer of the concept of neutralization (Davidsen-
Nielsen 1978), sees his name misspelled in both the text (p. 52) and the bibliogra-
phy. Page references such as in “Trubetzkoy (1939:290)”, “Trubetzkoy (1939) […]
(p. 79)”, etc. (p. 168, 42, and passim) actually refer to pages in the English trans-
lation of that work from 1969 (i.e., Trubetzkoy (1939 [1969: 290]), etc. On p. 169,
the “examples from German […] nm mch mtz nb np ng nf nw pw pfw fw”,
meant to illustrate phonemic-group boundary signals in that language, severely
confuse sound and conventional German spelling. The Russian expression for
‘for this’ on p. 170 should read iz+ɛtəvə. For readers, who seek to retrieve Abby
Kaplan’s study on homophony, listed in the bibliography, p. 210, and essential to
Silverman’s argumentation in Chapter 12, an amended reference is given below
(Kaplan 2011).

11 Concluding remarks

The phenomenon of neutralization is fundamentally important in phonology (see
also Iverson and Salmons 2011, and Yu 2011a or 2011b), but has not been investi-
gated to the extent that it deserves. Silverman’s knowledgeable study therefore
comes quite timely. As a survey of work, it laudably considers also phonological
investigations that have often fallen by the wayside in the mainstream generative
and OT-dominated phonological tradition. As a research monograph in its own
right, it raises an abundance of theoretical issues worth pursuing in depth. Many
phonologists will remain unconvinced by the attempt to abolish features, seg-
ments, phonemes, and phonological or underlying forms. The belief that phono-
logical segmentation and phonemes is the sole product of alphabetic writing will
also not be shared by everybody.3 On the other hand, Silverman skillfully brings
out the strong (albeit passive) tendency in language, whose end effect is to com-
pensate for the loss of distinctions in one structural position by the increased
relevance of distinctions in other positions. A further major contribution of his
study of considerable significance to future work is his functionally based classi-
fication of neutralizations.

3 Cf. Ladd (2014: xiv): “It is not that the string model is simply misguided: after all, it is the foun-
dation of one of the most successful technologies in human history, namely alphabetic writing”.

References


Eliasson, Stig. forthcoming. The typology of syllable and word languages and Swedish phonological structure.


