

### How "exotic" is "non-exotic" phonetics?

Hans Christian Luschützky (Department of Linguistics, University of Vienna)

With respect to "exoticism" in phonetics, a couple of fundamental questions have to be answered in order to settle the matter underlying this concept. First, exoticism, as a pre-scientific notion, implies an ethnocentric point of view on the basis of which phenomena are classified according to a scale of "normality" that takes one's own position as a standard with respect to which other positions are judged as aberrant.

Furthermore, an ethnocentric perspective on phonetics, like on any other object of inquiry in the humanities, is not only inappropriate with respect to its subjective point of view, but also misleading, if self-assessment is insufficient. In this case, the criteria of judgement are not only biased, but also ill-defined.

Second, as far as phonetics proper is concerned, the notion of exoticism falls short of recognizing the intrinsic properties of performance processes yielding surface forms that would never be licensed as canonical in the language where they occur.

Furthermore, ratings of phonetic "normality" versus exoticism often refer to standard varieties of literary languages, neglecting the diatopic and diastratic dimensions of variation. For instance, it turns out that front rounded vowels are far more widely distributed in Europe if the dialectal soil and not the standard canopy is taken as the source of evidence.

In the paper to be presented, especially the second point will be illustrated with examples from European languages and dialects exhibiting properties that would be rated as "exotic" on the traditional account, thus suggesting a negative answer to the question concerning exoticism as a useful concept in phonetics.

A third question concerns the demographic dimension of phonetic properties and phenomena. On the traditional account, systemic frequency is taken as the decisive criterion for establishing exoticism. If a certain feature is present in, say, ten percent of the world's languages (calculated from a balanced sample), it will be considered less exotic than another one appearing only in two percent of the world's languages. But if, among those two percent, there are languages with a population of

hundreds of million people, whereas among the ten percent there are many languages of only little demographic vitality, the notion of exoticism, if fruitful at all in a quantitative frame of reference, has to be reassessed.