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of the University of Victoria

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Preface

This volume of WPLC pays tribute to Dr. John Esling (FRSC), Chair of the Linguistics Department at UVIC (2008–2013) and Director of the Phonetics Laboratory, who retired in the summer of 2014 after a long and prestigious career. The contributors to this volume are just some of those who have had the privilege to know John as a colleague, supervisor, teacher, student, and friend.

Dr. Esling received an MA from the University of Michigan, studying with Ian Catford and Kenneth Pike, and a PhD from the University of Edinburgh, working with John Laver, David Abercrombie, and James Anthony. Currently, Dr. Esling is President of the International Phonetic Association; formerly he served as its Secretary (1995–2003) as well as serving as Editor of the Journal of the International Phonetic Association (2003–2011). He has authored over 100 scholarly articles and chapters, and edited the Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics (2006), the Cambridge Handbook of the IPA (1999), and the Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary (2011). He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada in 2009. The diverse contributions within these pages illustrate the impact that Dr. Esling's generosity and exceptional gifts as an academic have had in inspiring his colleagues and students in their own careers.

The publication of this volume coincides with the *Phonetic Building*

Blocks of Speech conference in honour of Dr. John Esling, taking place September 18–20, 2014. We offer this volume as thanks for all that he has contributed to the University of Victoria's Linguistics Department, to the field of linguistics, and of course to each of his students and colleagues.

Carrie Hill, Marianne Huijsmans, Sky Onosson

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The Melky Way

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One of the chains in the putative chain-shift called the Canadian Shift is the movement of high lax front /ɪ/ to mid /ɛ/. The other chain is the movement of mid /ɛ/ to low /æ/. One of the factors about Canadian English phonology that make the chain-shift explanation enticing is the retraction of low front close /æ/ toward a more open, centralized /a/, a change that John Esling was perhaps the first to study systematically (Esling and Warkentyne 1993). In theory, the retraction of /æ/ stimulates a pull-chain by creating a void in the low front vowel space that allows the mid vowel to lower (ɛ tends toward æ) which in turn allows the high vowel to lower (ɪ tends toward ɛ).

Later studies of the Canadian Shift cast doubt upon the chain shift scenario. In particular, studies that use meticulous methods, including Boberg (2005) in Montreal and Roeder & Jarmasz (2010) in Toronto, have failed to find (ɪ)-lowering, that is, the top link in the chain. Though (æ)-retraction and (ɛ)-lowering are fairly robust in these studies, preserving the possibility of a two-part chain shift, the phonetics gets complicated by concomitant (æ)-lowering and (ɛ)-retraction, so that the chain-shift along the peripheral vowel tract is sometimes compromised by centralization of the lax vowels. Hall (2014) shows that (ɛ)-lowering takes place mostly in relatively formal styles, a finding that is consistent with movements along the peripheral tract, where vowels are more distinct. It is also entirely consistent with casual observations of (ɛ)-lowering in public announcements and broadcasts.¹

The (ɪ)-lowering phase is not completely absent but is at best sporadic. Furthermore, its occurrence is compromised by a few lexical variants that seem to be the output of (ɪ)-lowering but actually antedate the Canadian Shift by many years. Chief among these is the word *milk*, pronounced by some people as *m[ɛ]lk*. One of the early discussions linked the *milk/melk* variation to the Canadian Shift by taking as its title the colloquial expression “One of us says *milk* and the other says *melk*,” with the subtitle “Lax Vowel Lowering in Canadian English” (Meechan 1996). The paper did not otherwise mention *milk/melk*, but the title resonated as a well-known observation of a pronunciation variant that had been around for many years. If *milk/melk* had been given due consideration, it would undoubtedly have been excluded from the variants such as *since* as *s[ɛ]nce* and *six* as *s[ɛ]x* that make up the data for variable (ɪ)-lowering. Unlike these variants, as we will show, *melk* for *milk* is lexicalized and

¹ This finding belies the inference that the change is nonstandard, as claimed in some early impressionistic discussions of the Canadian Shift. It appears instead to be a reflex of careful, monitored speech.

invariant in the speech of those who say it. It is recognized by non-linguists and often commented on by them (in statements like the one that serves as the title above). By comparison, the (ɪ)-lowering variants are infrequent and largely unnoticed and have only been reported by linguists since 1995 (Clarke, Elms and Youssef 1995).

A personal account of the sociolinguistics of *melk* came to light, fortuitously, when an undergraduate student at the University of Toronto, Sherry Hucklebridge, intrigued by the linguistic variation she was learning about in class, resolved to solve the mystery of what she calls “one seemingly unexplainable aspect of my speech that has always puzzled me: for one reason or another, I almost never pronounce /ɪ/ [in *milk*] in casual speech.”² Her pronunciation *melk*, she goes on to say, draws attention so that “many of my non-linguistically-bent, Toronto friends regularly comment on it.” Searching for clues that might explain her *melk* pronunciation, Sherry revisited several of her formative environments (a conservative Christian grade school, a horseback-riding academy, a coterie devoted to anime, among others). “None of these early childhood influences provide an obvious answer to the question of /mɛlk/,” she says, “and so I turned next to my sociolinguistic inheritance.” She took pains to elicit the word “milk” colloquially from her three younger siblings, her parents and her grandparents, including her 90-year-old maternal grandmother who seemed a good prospect with her “notable Northern Ontario accent.” Every one of them, without exception, said /mɪlk/. As a last resort, she considered the physiological hypothesis that a slight underbite “might make a high vowel like /ɪ/ more difficult to pronounce.” It was easily refuted, of course, by the fact that she pronounces /ɪ/ in *silk*, *mill*, *billow*, *philodendron* and hundreds of other words with utter, unselfconscious ease. The mystery of *melk* remains.

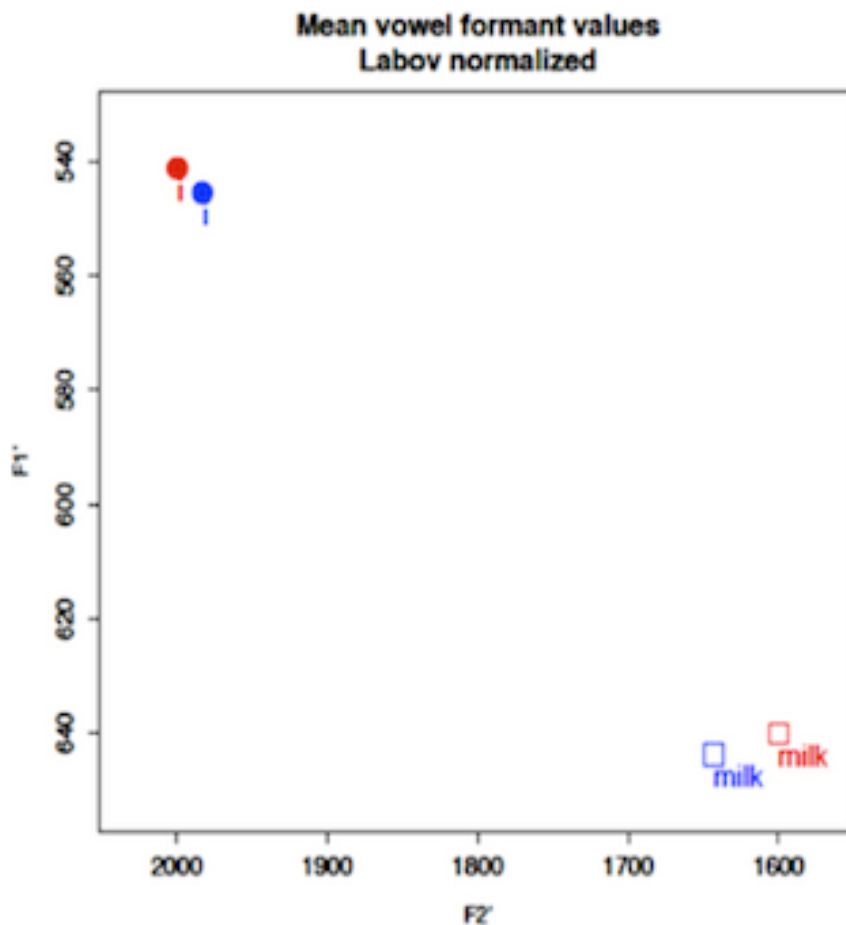
The mystery of *melk* remains not only for Sherry Hucklebridge but for dozens, perhaps hundreds, of other Canadians. We now know that it persists hardily among young adults. Hall (2014) interviewed 60 young people for a study of the progress of the Canadian Shift, 30 women and 30 men, aged 18-28, all raised in the Greater Toronto Area from ages of 8 and 18 or longer. She specifically included the word *milk* in the reading passage (RP) in order to test its congruity against the statistical norms established by other variant words in the sample. Looking at it systematically in the context of other items was intended to provide evidence for it as part of the phonological shift or, instead, as an idiosyncratic lexical development.

In order to examine whether or not the shifted vowel in *melk* may be lexicalized for this word, speaker means for F1 and F2 of the vowel in *milk* from the reading passage (RP) were compared with means for the other /ɪ/ vowels in the RP, for both sexes. Figure 1 shows that all speakers produce *milk* with a lower and more retracted vowel than other /ɪ/ items in the RP. Comparison with the F1 and F2 values for all words indicates that the vowel in *milk* is closer to /ɛ/ than to /ɪ/. T-test results confirm that both F1 and F2 of *milk* are significantly different from the other /ɪ/ tokens (F1: $t = -11.3928$, $p < 2.2e-16$; F2: $t = 17.6864$,

² We are grateful to Sherry for allowing us to cite her comments.

$p < 2.2e-16$). Figure 1 separates males and females (F1 males: $t = -9.3766$, $p = 6.846e-11$; F2 males: $t = 15.3165$, $p < 2.2e-16$; F1 females: $t = -7.0826$, $p = 2.404e-08$; F2 females: $t = 10.4306$; $p = 1.324e-14$). Females have slightly higher F1 values than males for *milk*, while males have slightly lower F2 values, but these differences are not significant (F1: $t = -0.2604$, $p = 0.7955$; F2: $t = -1.2374$; $p = 0.221$).

Figure 1: F1 and F2 of the vowel in milk as compared with speaker means for the other /ɪ/ vowels in the Reading Passage, by sex (women in red, men in blue). Sex differences are not significant.

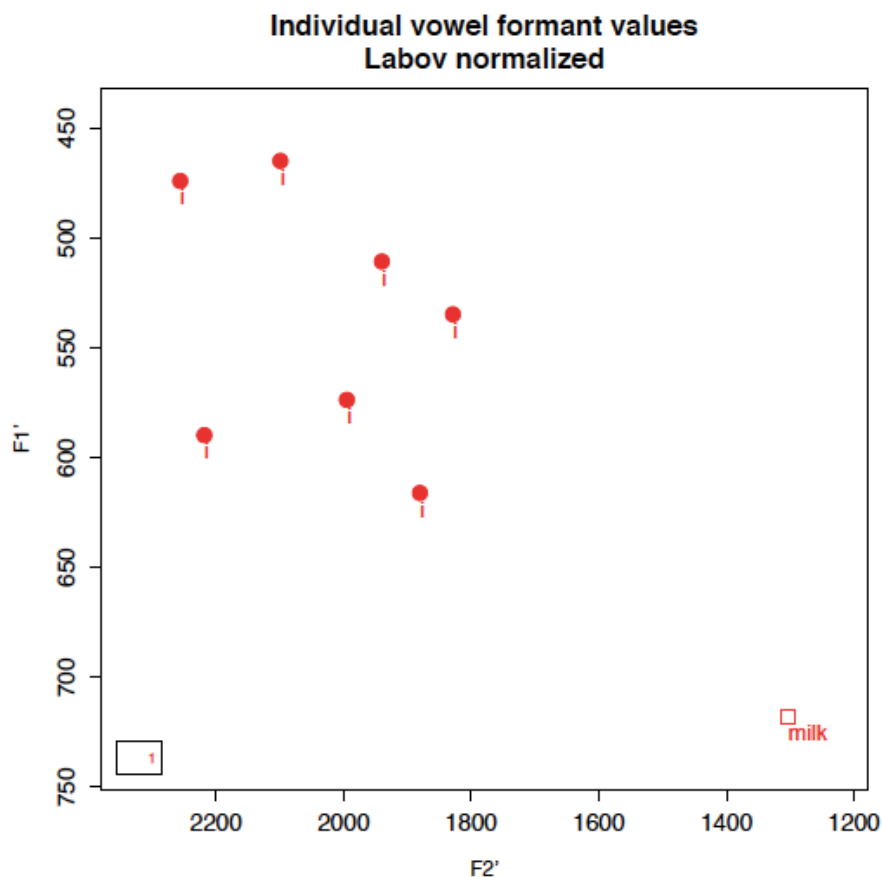


Following liquids are associated with significantly lower F2 values for /ɪ/, and therefore it is not surprising that these speakers appear to show more retracted vowels in *milk*. However, the difference in F1 cannot be explained by

linguistic conditioning, as following liquids were not found to favour lowering of /ɪ/, except of course in *milk*.

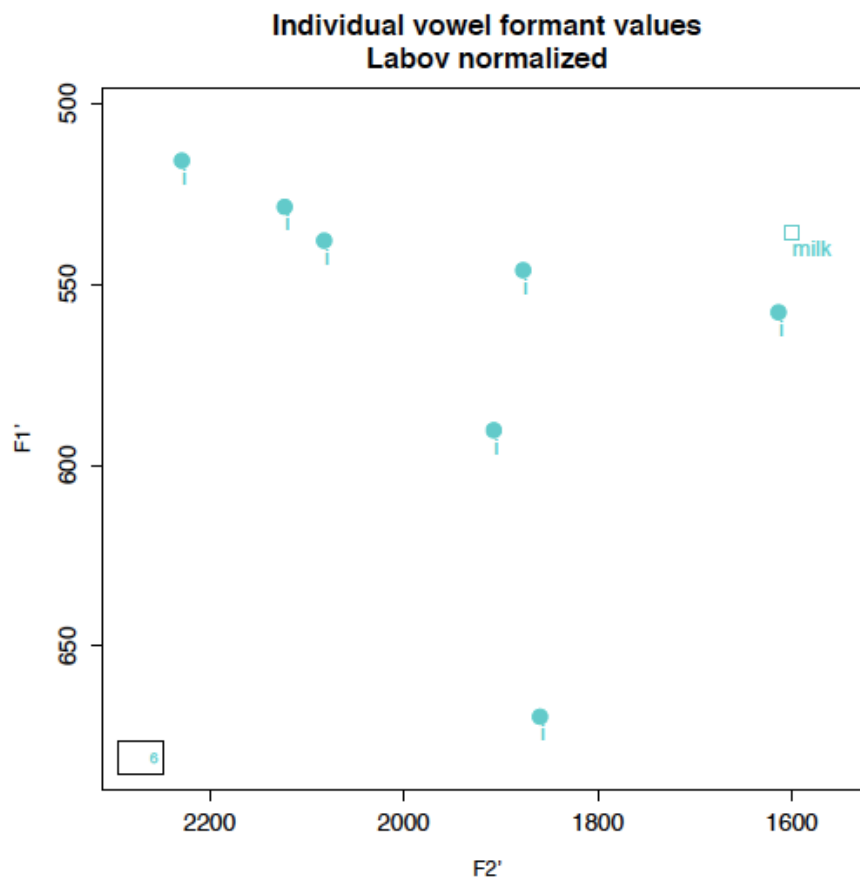
Figure 1 aggregates all speakers in the sample and shows that the mean vowel values are significantly lower and more retracted in *milk* than in the other /ɪ/ words. Needless to say, certain individuals show this tendency more than others. In order to investigate individual differences, each participant's /ɪ/ vowels from the RP were plotted using NORM (Thomas & Kendall 2009). In examining the vowel plots for each individual speaker, two distinct patterns emerged, as expected: many speakers showed a clear difference in F1 between *milk* and the other /ɪ/ tokens, indicating a lower vowel in *milk* than in words like *hit* and *sick*, while others did not lower the vowel in *milk* to the same degree. Figures 2 and 3 illustrate these two different patterns by plotting the /ɪ/ vowels for representative speakers from each group.

Figure 2: Speaker 1's RP vowels containing /ɪ/ as compared with *milk*



In Figure 2, Speaker 1's F1 value for *milk* is clearly lower than those of his other /ɪ/ words, while in Figure 3 for Speaker 6, the F1 of *milk* falls within the range of most of her other /ɪ/ tokens.

Figure 3: Speaker 6's RP vowels containing /ɪ/ as compared with *milk*



Each speaker's vowels were further examined statistically by comparing the 95 percent confidence intervals for the F1 values of /ɪ/ with his or her F1 value for *milk*. This analysis showed that of the 60 speakers sampled, 44 have F1 values for *milk* that are significantly higher than the upper range of F1 values for their other /ɪ/ words. The remaining 16 speakers for whom the F1 of *milk* falls within the range of their other /ɪ/ tokens do not appear to share any characteristics that might explain their lack of shifting of *milk*; nine are females and seven are males, and ten are in the lower age range (18-22) and six in the upper (23-28), making them a reasonably representative selection of the larger sample.

These findings provide empirical confirmation, for the first time, of the anecdotal observations about *milk*, and add some further information as well: first, some speakers do indeed pronounce *milk* with a significantly lower vowel than others; second, these speakers, the *melk* group, appear to be randomly distributed in the population, as neither sex nor age nor any other attribute correlates with *melk* usage; and third, the retracted quality of the vowel in *milk* may have originated in the general tendency for following liquid consonants to cause retraction of /ɪ/, though why it advanced further and became lexicalized in this word only and for some speakers but not others remains a mystery.

So now we know something with absolute certainty about the *melk* variant of *milk*. We know that it is not part of the variable output of the (ɪ)-lowering aspect of the Canadian Shift. Our casual observations suggest that it antedates the Canadian Shift, and its occurrence in the speech of 60 subjects indicates that it is more common in the *melk* form than the variants that undergo the rule. In fact, *melk* may not be a variable at all for most people who use it. Certainly, none of the 44 subjects in the sample who lowered the vowel in the direction of *melk* appeared to make any effort to avoid it or ‘correct’ it, even in the relatively self-conscious reading passage. For them, it seems to be an invariant, lexicalized alternative to the standard form *milk*.

Even though that is more than we knew about it until now, we have hardly solved its many mysteries. Linguistically, we know what it is *not*— it is *not* a variant form that results from (ɪ)-lowering. It is *not* a dialect form because it is not associated with any particular region. It is *not* a sociolinguistic variant because it does not occur in the speech of any particular age group or sex group or ethnic group. Even in families, the most basic social unit, it can occur in the speech of one family member and no others. It is *not* phonologically conditioned. It occurs before dark /l/ and after nasal /m/, but neither of those contexts is either necessary or sufficient. It is not attested in any historical record that we know of, and it has no provenance.

What is it? It is a variant pronunciation, nonstandard, that occurs in the speech of many people, sporadic in its distribution and apparently spontaneous in its dissemination. Come to think of it, we have always known that.

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Episodes about the IPA Vowel Chart and a Suggestion for a New Diacritic

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I (first author) was a big fan of the website of IPA Charts with the sound files (<http://www.yorku.ca/earmstro/ipa/>) even before I came to University of Victoria in 2008. I was surprised when I finally found out that these sound files were recorded by Dr. Esling. I heard that one thing he is not happy with on the vowel chart is that, while the high front vowel [ɪ] has its rounded counterpart [y], the high back vowel [ɔ] does not have its own unrounded counterpart. Therefore, he is adding a new symbol, barred [ɪ], to fill in the gap along with his own pronunciation of it.

Incidentally, the vowel corresponding to the letter <u> in standard Japanese is generally transcribed with the high back unrounded vowel [u]. However, Nogita, Yamane, and Bird's (2013) ultrasound study revealed that this vowel as pronounced by linguistically naïve native standard Japanese speakers is central or rather front with lip rounding, and can occur with unambiguous lip protrusion, so its actual realizations are [u - y]. In fact, according to Dr. Esling's recordings on the aforementioned website, both [u] and [y] sound like reasonably good exemplars for Japanese <u> to my ears. Therefore, we use [u] or [y] for this vowel. (Note that in some sound files not recorded by Dr. Esling, [y] sounds deviant from the Japanese <u> based on my impression.)

We hope sometime that we could ask Dr. Esling to make an official diacritic to indicate moraicity. While there is the syllabic diacritic, i.e. [C], there is no moraic (but not syllabic) diacritic in the IPA. We find it somewhat inconvenient when we discuss Japanese which has moraic but non-syllabic segments, such as 'n' in *Honda*. The second author has suggested a half-circle facing up, like the one for extra short [˘] except that it is below the main symbol. Note that a non-moraic segment is most likely automatically non-syllabic. Therefore, if the existing non-syllabic diacritic [˘] is changed to a symbol for non-moraicity, it also automatically indicates non-syllabicity. The mirror image of the half-circle facing down can be the counterpart of non-moraic, i.e., moraic. Therefore, we suggest the half-circle facing up for a moraic-non-syllabic symbol. The table below summarizes the possible combinations.

Table 1: Syllabic and non-syllabic diacritics. '?' indicates that non-moraic syllabic segments are not likely to exist.

	syllabic	non-syllabic
moraic	,	˘
non-moraic	?	ˆ

For instance, although the ‘n’ in *Honda* [honda] and that in *Hanyū* (a surname) [hanju:] in Japanese are usually transcribed with the same broad phonetic transcription, the different phonological statuses of each [n] can be clarified by indicating that the former [n] is moraic but the latter is non-moraic. An illustration of a moraic [n] with the proposed symbol is shown below:

Figure 1: Illustration of moraic [n] with the proposed diacritic.



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A Tribute to John

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Prof. John Esling is a force in phonetics, but more important, he's been a friend for many years. When we were at Michigan in 1971-3, John was the Ear-Tongue-Throat champion. John's perfect scores on transcription tests were noted, of course, but there was much more. One marveled at his rendition of standard American, supported by a supple glottal note that suggested vocal folds with luxurious mucous membranes -- and that was just his presentation of self. The fun began when he did his imitations of Pike and Catford. It wasn't just the accent, timing, and voice quality, it was face and hands and tilt of the head. It really got uncanny when he did pseudo-Italian or mock-Persian. Why is John not on stage? Sid Caesar would slink off in shame.

John's skills could perk up a lunch meeting or a dinner party, but John was bent on putting them to serious use. I assume that one of John's parents was there lurking in his head, scolding him for frivolity and urging him on to an academic career. He just wanted to do phonetics. Even with Pike and Catford at Michigan, the romance and the drafty indoor spaces of Edinburgh got a grip on his imagination. Probably, the prospect of high tea with Prof. Abercrombie, a deeper training in traditional performance phonetics, and a more considered outlook on professional life were the principal attractions that drew John to Edinburgh.

Well, it turns out that Edinburgh was not above the rising tide of quantitative approaches and modern instrumentation. So, while gathering the long view of phonetics at Abercrombie's knee, or at some other joint, John actually plunged into the experimental hurly-burly. The crafted insights of Daniel Jones were trumped by data and statistics. John Laver and Tony Anthony were the pole star and the guide. From that point on, John's path is well documented in the annals of phonetics.

Although the material above may have some minor inaccuracies (the fact checker is off today), there are certain firm constants in John's life and career. John is a man without rancor; he never displays resentment and he frankly admires the work of others. Careerism never taints his judgment. He's a tireless advocate for those village-Hampdens, for the alert and careful colleagues who plainly describe how people really speak, but who never command the applause of listening senates. I salute John Esling, his work, and his spirit.

John Esling, A Canado-American Original

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Research undertaken and lauded all over the world, leadership in international organizations, Royal Society membership, decades of SSHRC funding, the UVic Humanities Award for Research Excellence all attest to John Esling's outstanding career. Well-deserved as all of this recognition is, however, it doesn't capture what makes John special. One of the most original thinkers most of us have ever met, John frames questions in a way particular to him, always bringing new perspectives to bear. Conversation with him is a delight as one's views shift thanks to his particular vision of the world.

Even before his term as Chair of the Department of Linguistics, John demonstrated his care for the Department and the institution with deep engagement not typical of someone maintaining a stellar research profile. His interests and culture go far beyond the field in which he is famous. In one example among many I could cite, John found common ground with a Humanities scholar-in-residence from the Smithsonian whose specialty is ethnobotany from Antiquity to the Renaissance. John's intellectual curiosity, openness and hospitality made a huge difference the way UVic is remembered by our visitor and his partner.

Legions of graduate students have of course benefitted from John's guidance and his generosity. When an opportunity came for UVic doctoral students to join research groups at the Sorbonne, John was the only colleague in the Faculty of Humanities able and willing to take a team to Paris, launching those students onto the world stage in very short order.

Perhaps his roots in the Dakotas or the wisdom of the bees and other company he keeps have helped shape him, but whatever the source of the combination of brilliance and generosity that characterize John Esling, the academic world has greatly benefitted from his contributions. I am honoured to call him my colleague and my friend.

A Tribute to John

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I’ve known John since my time as an undergrad at the University of British Columbia. Well, I didn’t know him personally, but I knew his work. This early introduction came via my interest in dialectology, where John ‘the author’, ‘the phonetician’, was a local figurehead. I’ve since come to know John ‘the person’, ‘the colleague’, ‘the friend’. In these respects I’m among a large and lucky group, and I know it. Large because John always has open arms; lucky because John is not just smart, he’s also wise. John was Department Chair when I interviewed at UVic in 2009, a job he continued in until very recently. All this to highlight that my UVic career started under illustrious leadership.

John, you know very well all that you’ve done for me during my time at UVic. You may not appreciate the magnitude of your collegiality and support, but suffice to say that you created an indelible culture of amiability and joint enterprise. I suppose that one day I too will be Chair (sigh). If I can be even part of the mentor you have been, then I will have played a small part in paying it forward, though the debt will be impossible to pay in full.

I hope you continue to grace our halls with your wisdom, your smile, and your quirky humour. We are all the richer for them.

John Esling: Inspiring More than His Students

Phil Howson

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It was early in my life as a student of Linguistics at UBC. I had only just started doing Phonetics, but I was primarily doing syntax. I had begun a project on Wakashan and the reconstruction of Proto-Wakashan. I stumbled upon a series of papers about the emergence of pharyngeal segments in Nootka. These articles really inspired me, as I found myself turning the pages, reading them all in one sitting. Finishing the articles left me with a sense of satisfaction. These papers were probably some of the most inspiring, pleasant to read papers I have ever come across. That certainly made me more curious about phonetics and inspired me even further to pursue phonetics as my major. I am now in my first year of Ph.D. studies, specializing in Phonetics.

Recently, I had the pleasure of meeting Dr. Esling and I have to say he is as intelligent and thoughtful in person as I had imagined. His presentation that day was long, but interesting. I'm not sure I have ever been to a presentation which lasted two hours, yet was interesting all the way through. To me, that speaks volumes about his ability and skill as a Linguist and a Professor. Certainly, the community will miss his contributions greatly when he retires.

A Tribute to John

Marianne Huijsmans
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I was lucky enough to be an undergraduate at UVIC while John was still lecturing. I'll never forget the experience of learning from him (... or the many quirky moments that highlighted the semester, such as the time he brought Yorick, a skull, to class...), though I might, sadly, forget the muscles of the pharynx. The information was challenging, dense, but creatively illustrated, with John frequently producing a series of intriguing sounds generally impossible to imitate. Moreover, I remember being particularly attentive at every 8:30 a.m. lecture, just so I wouldn't miss those moments when John's eyes would subtly twinkle and he would deliver some priceless moment of humor embedded in the midst of a cloud of information. And by the end of semester, we had learned the anatomy of speech as a dynamic whole; a systematic interweaving of systems and synergies.

I remember being particularly fascinated during one lecture on the anatomy of the inner ear. I couldn't resist staying after class to ask a few more questions. John was apparently delighted to satisfy my curiosity. In his generosity and enthusiasm, he soon provided me with more information than I could comprehend, but his expertise was so intriguing and inspiring that it awoke a similar kind of enthusiasm. And certainly, this conversation was followed by others like it...

Now as an MA student in the department, I continue to be awed and inspired by John, his questions, his ideas and his knowledge. Each meeting with John, whether in the lunchroom, hallway or office, is rich with humor, facts, ideas and quirky creativity. Thank you, John, for all you contributed to the education of the students in the department. We certainly hope you will continue to be around.

Personal Tribute to John Esling

John Laver

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I have known John since 1972, and am extremely pleased to be able to offer my personal tribute to him.

I was his PhD thesis supervisor at the University of Edinburgh. John needed the bare minimum of supervision, being clearly destined for an outstanding career in academic phonetics. He and I share a significant research interest in the categorization of voice quality and vocal register, the subject of his thesis -- John is also an expert in the transcription of voice quality and voice quality measurement. But this, valuable though it certainly is, is far outweighed by John's ground-breaking analysis of the activities involved in the production of pharyngeal, laryngeal, epiglottal and aryepiglottic sounds. His experimental investigations using videofluoroscopy, laryngeal ultrasound, laryngoscopy, endoscopy and acoustic techniques, together with his clear expositions of how these sounds are produced and their auditory counterparts, have clarified what was previously more vaguely understood by the majority of phoneticians, including myself.

John has gone on to a very distinguished career, with more than 100 scholarly publications, major editorships of both the *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* and the *Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary*, the Presidency of the International Phonetic Association, and the editorship of the *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*. These and many other achievements have led to his very well deserved Fellowship of the Royal Society of Canada, recognizing his outstanding contribution.

Looking through his authored and edited publications, my view is that John very thoroughly merits his standing as a phonetician's phonetician, and I congratulate him very warmly.

A Tribute to John

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One of the most captivating lectures I attended while at the University of Victoria was the day Dr. Esling walked into our Physiology of Speech Perception course wearing a headband, on which he had affixed meticulously cut out pictures of the Sensory and Motor Homunculus. He continued to wear the headband while maintaining a deadpan delivery of his talk about brain anatomy. This example (among countless others) illustrates how his superior knowledge was never overshadowed by his sense of humour or his eagerness to share his passion about speech with his students. I feel incredibly lucky to have crossed paths with not only a brilliant mind, but also a thoughtful teacher. Congratulations on your retirement!

Tribute for John Esling

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John Esling was the Chair of Linguistics when I arrived at UVic in 2010. I learned a great deal from John about how things work in the Linguistics department, and at UVic generally. In particular, he showed me that UVic is a generous place, with plenty of room for compassion and benefit of the doubt. He showed a passionate loyalty to his concept of UVic, participating fully in the life of the university, and staunchly defending it against the onslaughts of bean-counters and budget cuts. I continue to find his vision an inspiring and hopeful one.

As Chair, John often spent time chatting with faculty members and students in the graduate students' lounge—a human touch that made an important difference in my experience of the department, especially in my early days at UVic. John's conversation and correspondence were (and are) always witty and challenging. He has certainly challenged me to discover and defend my positions on a number of issues, for which I am always (if sometimes belatedly) grateful.

One gets the sense that John regards those around him much as he might regard his bees: objectively, perhaps not uncritically—yet always with respect, and a joking camaraderie. I wonder what the bees think of John, as they go about their bee business; they probably aren't fully aware of the care and attention he lavishes upon their world, as he does upon ours. But they surely benefit from it all the same.

Thank you, John. Don't be a stranger.

A Tribute to John

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Though I didn't take any courses with John Esling, I can certainly say that I learned a great many things from him through various conversations on a wide range of topics, sometimes on a wide range of topics within the same conversation. I first worked directly with John when he was the Chair of the Curriculum Committee and I was proposing the addition of a new course: LING 325, Lexical Semantics. John helped me think through the implications of the new course on other courses and on the department's programs. I witnessed first-hand how he thought about curriculum and had to work hard to keep up with his ideas. When John was the Department Chair, he was very supportive of sessional lecturers, and, as someone who had made the choice of sessional teaching over a faculty position, I feel fortunate to have had John as my boss for 5 years. He was generous with his time and ideas, and I have good memories of conversations about teaching, research, language, and linguistics, and all sorts of topics in between. Thanks, John, for being such a fascinating individual and thanks, too, for the honey.

Tribute to John H. Esling, the Larynx Guru: Professor, Supervisor, and Friend

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I got to know John Esling literally from the inside-out. I first “met” him sometime late in my undergraduate phase. I was finishing my undergraduate degree when my interest in pharyngeals started to bud. It may have been because Darrin Flynn (Howe) had directed my attention to the peculiar case of Morley Stoney, where its Siouan-inherited velar fricatives had metamorphosed into pharyngeals. Or perhaps it was exposure to the rare Bzyb recordings stored on DAT tape in the University of Calgary’s Phonetic Inventory¹: this dialect of Abkhaz (Northwest Caucasian) has pharyngealized uvular fricatives – quite a treat for the ear. Whatever the case, Michael (‘Mike’) Dobrovolsky² must have taken notice. One day, he handed me a VHS tape entitled *John Esling, Pharyngeal Articulations, 1998*, and said, “you had better take a look at this”. Well that night I dusted off the old VCR and popped in the video, not really knowing what to expect. The articulatory ballet entranced me. There was John’s larynx, doing what I considered to be a miraculous performance of complex motions. Through each iteration of the carrier sentence <He hit i_i quickly>³, I saw new developments. First was the glottal fricative, nothing too shocking; then came the glottal stops. This is when I first became aware that these were more than just “glottal”. Next came the pharyngeals, and I could not quite believe what I was seeing. Those lesser known, upper parts of the larynx started to do *pliés* and *arabesques* in ways I never thought possible – and, wow, what a sound could be heard during the underscore of <i_i>! But the *pièce de résistance* was surely what followed: there was a lighting change (a stroboscope was engaged), and then John’s larynx started to perform a graceful *fouetté en tournant* – aryepiglottic trilling (although I do not think I realized what to call it at the time). At that moment, my fate was set: I had to learn more from this mysterious phonetician, whom I could only recognize from the inside.

I came to the University of Victoria in 2006 with the expectation of doing my Master’s research on pharyngeal sounds (essentially, I wanted to stick tiny cameras into peoples’ heads). I first met the outside of John during my introductory visit to the UVic Department of Linguistics. I was green, I was keen,

¹ Courtesy of Sean Fulop (Department of Linguistics, Fresno State University, California) much of the data can be freely accessed at
<<http://zimmer.csufresno.edu/~sfulop/UCPI/UCPI%20index.html>>.

² Michael Dobrovolsky passed away in October 2012.

³ A sentence carefully designed with vowels that optimize viewing of the larynx.

I was excited – I was ready to get my hands on the laryngoscope. I found John⁴ in the department kitchen preparing tea and introduced myself as his new MA student. John asked what I was hoping to do. I explained that I wanted to look at pharyngeal sounds using laryngoscopy. John looked dour. He said, “We’ve done that already. Now we’re listening to pre-babbling babies in O and P language environments.” My heart sank. I did not readily deduce what “O” and “P” languages⁵ were, and I certainly had not one iota of interest in being stuck for several years listening to the irritating sound of babies crying. I was thus struck with the horrible realization that I might have made the wrong decision of where to do my graduate research.

But all did not turn out so disastrously. After overcoming my initial disappointment, I tried to keep an open mind about the babies. However, it turned out that baby sounds were not to be part of my graduate school experience. On the first day of my first seminar in graduate-level phonetics taught by John, it came out that we (phoneticians) were in need of a good 3D model of the larynx. Like lightning my hand shot up – “I can do that!” I shouted, greedily not wanting any of the other students to have a chance at the opportunity. And so it came to be that John would sponsor me to develop just such a model: I was saved from the sound of screaming babies.

Working with John was always rewarding, but it was not always easy, especially for a student with an underdeveloped sense of self-confidence. When I took my first great step forward in producing a 3D rendering of the larynx, I ran to John excitedly to show him the progress I had made: he rather flatly remarked that it looked like a “deformed rabbit”⁶. As time rolled on, I had to develop a thick skin, as John was fond of making zoomorphic interpretations of my models and, later on, my other research endeavors (which usually involved some form of imaging). Surely my favorite of these observations is John’s statement that one of my later versions of the 3D larynx gave him the impression of a “vampiric turkey”.

My time as a graduate student at UVic under John’s supervision, first as a Master’s student and then as Ph.D. student, was filled with a bounty of opportunities to travel and rub shoulders with many of the great speech researchers. Almost all of these opportunities were because of John’s support and his encouragement to get the work “out there”. These trips afforded some of the most memorable moments in my time as John’s student. My most vivid memory is of my sojourn with John and Allison Benner in München in 2007. In my naïveté of German cuisine, I made the mistake of ordering a *Topf* (pot) for dessert one evening. What arrived at the table was a gargantuan cast-iron pan brimming with an *ungeheuerliche* mash of overly rich, calorie-laden ingredients. It left a

⁴ I must add that he was sporting a very dashing beard at the time.

⁵ Later I would discover that these were cover terms for languages with largely oral sounds (“O languages”) and those that also have sounds with active involvement of the pharynx and larynx (“P languages”), such as Bai and Moroccan Arabic.

⁶ Perhaps apropos for the UVic environment at the time which was swarming with bunnies.

deep impression on me. Not because it was delicious mind you. Rather it was because when one eats in the company of John, one is under duress to eat every last bite – and so eat every last bite is what I did. (Oh the crapulence!) That trip, I also had the awkward experience of sharing a bed with John. We had two hotel rooms booked, but there were three of us (me, John, and Allison). Naturally, Allison took one of the rooms for herself; John and I were left with the *Planes, Trains and Automobiles* experience⁷. But what is most indelibly burned into my memory about that trip is waking up to the sight of John’s face hovering eerily over mine and John saying, in an off-putting manner, “Wir haben Müsli”. So, yes, I slept with my professor. Life goes on.

Indeed, John Esling is an eccentric individual⁸. Spend a little time with him and you may find yourself bewildered by his desultory conversational style, his frequent and often obscure references, and his uncontrollable urge to manipulate his voice quality while speaking⁹. But he has a scintillating wit and he is an incredible wordsmith, even if his approach is somewhat oblique. I would often think of him as the phonetician version of the Delphic Oracle and his graduate students as the Pythian priesthood, frantically trying to record every granule of wisdom that he would utter. I often found myself contemplating the cryptic things he would say for some time afterwards, only to finally realize the profound insights they contained. His knowledge of phonetics and mastery of language has evidently allowed him to perform some unbelievable feats: I have witnessed him hold a conversation in Portuguese with a native speaker, even though (to my knowledge) John has had little, if any, formal training in the language. John also had a habit of playing with different accents whenever he would review a document I had written. Even though I think he was sometimes poking fun at my writing when he did this, I still enjoyed every minute of it.

I feel deeply proud to have been John’s student. His passion for the human voice is infectious and his scientific curiosity has done a great deal to push forward our understanding of the role of the larynx in speech and beyond. It was indeed a great honor that I was able to be part of his team. As a phonetician, John comes from a background that emphasizes the role of listening – auditory analysis, which is a tradition that I believe is fading as we become more and more reliant on technology to do the listening for us. While quantitative approaches to linguistic research are necessary and indeed essential to good research, I hope to also carry forward John’s emphasis on auditory analysis. Listening affords an opportunity for phonetic insight that cannot be found in numbers alone. It was John’s auditory attention to phonetic detail that led him to establish a very productive research program and to shed light on the less understood mechanisms of the larynx. He and others were then able to apply his findings to the very earliest sounds that human beings make on their journey to becoming linguistically enabled. I have little doubt that his contributions to the field will continue to resonate and drive research for many decades into the

⁷ Well, without the vibrating bed, cans of beer, and “pillows”, mind you.

⁸ But what linguist is not?

⁹ Although one might level this charge at any phonetician.

future. And even though, as his former student, I am biased in the matter, I nonetheless feel assured in my belief that he ranks among the very greatest of all phoneticians.

A Tribute to John

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John Esling is retiring from a most distinguished career this year and I am honoured to have been asked to participate in this tribute. I have had the privilege of being one of John's graduate students at the University of Victoria. Over 18 years ago, I arrived in Canada wanting to work on language assessment. John warmly welcomed me to the department, spoke enthusiastically about his ongoing research, in 'phonetics', and was excited that the department now had a Persian speaker who could contribute to the Phonetic Data Base he was developing at the time. But you didn't have to study phonetics to do research with John. He was very supportive of students with diverse interests and kindly did everything possible to facilitate their progress. In fact, John started putting my doctoral research in motion right away by purposefully introducing me to people on campus. Only five weeks into my first semester at UVic, I found myself at a meeting with the dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the directors of the English Language Center exploring ways to assess the English language proficiency of foreign graduate students. And when, after that meeting, I rushed to his office overwhelmed and worried that things were happening too fast too soon, he reacted with calm and good humour, assuring me that I was the right person for the job and that my work on that project could even potentially lead to a thesis. It did!

As a supervisor, John never turned me away when I sought his help, yet he coached with a style which rarely included giving straight answers. He had this amazing ability to keep you engaged in long discussions and raise new questions about issues you had not considered before. John helped me get through graduate school and write a thesis by providing critical counsel and 'asking' questions, not answering them. His particular manner of mentoring taught me to pay attention to details at a level I had never yet experienced. He remains to this date a model for the ways I direct my graduate students, and for that I am most grateful.

There is so much more I could say about John. He is brilliant, with an exceptional sense of humour; he is an excellent professor and a fine gentleman.

Congratulations, John, it has always been a pleasure to work with you!

Tribute to Dr. John Esling

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People say that first impressions are the most lasting. In Eastern Europe we tend to judge people not only by the way they look, but also by the way they talk. Correct pronunciation is vital both while using our native tongue – the Russian language spoken in a bilingual Belarus is Belarusian accented (the so-called ‘trasianka’ tongue) – and while acquiring a foreign language in order to eliminate a distinct local accent.

Thoughts and ideas of Dr. John Esling devoted to the nature of accents, voice quality, phonetics in the classroom, and multimedia approach to learning verbal communication skills and phonetic transcription played a significant part in shaping my pronunciation pedagogies. Moreover, the latest version of the Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary co-edited by Dr. Esling is a bedside book for many of my colleagues in Belarus.

We have never met with Dr. John Esling. However, his works have greatly influenced foreign language teachers and their students. Long live Dr. Esling and continue to be inventive, innovative and initiative!

Dr. Esling, You Gave Me a Chance

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There was a day,
Back in 1984
Living with friends,
We students were poor.

Mike came to our class
And said there's a job
In Dr. Esling's
Phonetics Lab.

I jumped at the chance
Though I had not a clue
What kind of work
Phoneticians do.

On a VT100
Terminal screen
Joy Division type spectra
Were black and green

The tire-sized disks
That stored all the data
Loaded into a machine
The size of a refrigerator

While bewildering at first
He showed me the way
To do all the steps
I was a Junior RA