Preface

The series of international workshops on the “History of Speech Communication Research” (HSCR) was initiated in Dresden, in 2015. Its founders expressed their hope in published proceedings that the first event would be followed by more workshops of this kind in the years to come [1: 5]. Indeed, the ISCA Special Interest Group: History of Speech Communication Sciences supported the organization of the 2nd international workshop on HSCR in Helsinki, Finland, and the 3rd international workshop on HSCR in Vienna, Austria (see [2], [3]). The honour to host the current 4th event was bestowed to the Prague Institute of Phonicetics.

The organizing institution is one of the oldest in Europe. It dates back to 1919, when the newly established state, Czechoslovakia, redesigned its university education and the Charles University officials of that period recognized the importance of the systematic approach to the phonetic substance of speech. The first Czech professor of phonetics, Josef Chlumský, was given appropriate support and started the tradition which continues until today (see [4], [5]).

Prague is also known as the cradle of functional structuralism, i.e., a linguistic approach that emphasized communicative functions of language phenomena over the formalistic ones. The Prague Linguistic Circle was founded in 1926 and became a centre of progressive approaches to the matters of human language and its use in speech and in writing. The first generation of Prague linguists is still held in high esteem, even though their work was, due to the unfortunate historical development, not allowed to fully unfold. Both the Nazi and Communist regimes considered independent scientific activities dangerous to their grip on power.

The Prague Linguistic Circle renewed its activities after the fall of Communism. The current President of the Circle will deliver one of the keynote speeches at the workshop. In his speech, Tomáš Hoskovec is faithful to the Prague functional structuralist heritage, while at the same time emphasizing the perpetual concern of speech communication research: the link between the form and function, and the balanced examination of this link.

A tribute to the brilliant minds of the past is also central to the next three contributions to the agenda. Michael Ashby presents his research into the intellectual background of Frieda Goldman-Eisler. A brief but thrilling journey exposes generally unknown facts that put in doubt the presumable strong influence of Prague School, and especially of Karl Bühler on her approach to language research. In her paper, Markéta Vlková discusses the not fully appreciated legacy of Leoš Janáček’s work on speech. The musical genius of the composer is appreciated by many, and his attraction to natural speech melodies is frequently mentioned by musicologists. However, Janáček’s large collection of speech samples still awaits systematic and rigorous attention of speech scientists. Finally, Mária Gósy presents her findings concerning inspired work of Hungarian scholars and thinkers in the area of phonetic transcription. Again, we learn that history is much richer than it seems from cursory remarks in introductory chapters of common textbooks.

The second day of the 4th workshop, as well as the second part of these proceedings, are opened with the keynote speech by Angelika Braun. It is dedicated to several important real-life events – often quite dramatic ones – and their impact on developments in speech communication research. In a captivating way, the reader is led to appreciate the bond between society and science illustrated with specific historical events. The social context is also indicated in the paper by Jan Volin and Pavel Šturm, who use the case of intonational downtrends to demonstrate that historical achievements are often underestimated, and many authors refer incorrectly to the beginnings of research in a certain area. An identical concern is voiced by Jürgen Trouvain in his investigation of the vocal tract enlargement concomitant with
voicing in stops. He, too, shows that the phenomenon was known and analysed earlier than commonly thought.

An interesting journey of discovery through various internal and external circumstances of their laboratory formation process is offered by Rüdiger Hoffmann and Dieter Mehnert. They explore the beginnings of speech communication research at Dresden Technical University with special attention to multiple influences that allowed for the foundation of the department.

The paper by Quintino Lopes and George Brock-Nannestad is clearly a tribute to the exceptional talents of Armando de Lacerda, who developed the technique of chromography to surpass the limitations of kymography. His success was outstanding and made an impact on many laboratories around the world. Here again, the link between phonetic instruments and social aspects of research can be observed.

Despite the current serious situation of the world pandemics and the resulting restrictions on conferences that have been changing from severe to moderate and back again for more than a year, we, the organizers, decided not to cancel the event. We persisted in parallel to the organizers of Interspeech 2021, of which the 4th international workshop on the HSCR is a satellite event. Our efforts thus resulted in yet another expression of admiration for the past achievements in speech communication research. Let us express hope that the series of workshops will continue in the future and the interest in history will grow.

Jan Volín and Pavel Šturm
Prague, July 2021

References


