

IPA News

Obituary

J.D. O'Connor (1919-1998)

Joseph Desmond O'Connor, universally known as 'Doc', was born in 1919. He died at the age of 78 on 15th July 1998. He grew up in Yorkshire at Harrogate but for his senior schooling travelled daily to the Jesuit foundation St Michael's College in Leeds. In 1937 he went on to University College London and there obtained first class honours in French. Then followed war service after which he returned to UCL where he was appointed to the teaching staff of the Department of Phonetics. Except for a few months in 1954 at the Haskins Laboratory in New York, he worked always in the UCL department, though from 1964 to 1973 he ran the large-scale annual University of London Summer School of English at which lectures in English phonology and pronunciation and intonation tutorials were a major feature.

He wrote scores of articles and reviews, some of which were of books only available in French or Danish, many for *Le Maître Phonétique*. He produced several excellent phonetic readers. He was responsible for no doubt the most successful of all elementary books on the phonetics of English as a foreign language *Better English Pronunciation* (second edition 1980, CUP). He will be remembered also for other items like the seminal article 'Vowel, consonant and syllable – a phonological definition' (with J.L.M. Trim), which first appeared in *Word* IX/2 in 1953, and especially for what was no doubt his masterpiece, the remarkably lucid and wide-ranging *Phonetics* (1973, Penguin), which is arguably still the best general introduction to the subject.

Intonation of Colloquial English (with G.F. Arnold, 1961, second edition 1973, Longman) was a very influential book in EFL teaching circles in the sixties and seventies but Doc had been somewhat reluctant to embark on its second edition and ultimately felt inclined to acknowledge more than he once had that there were perhaps *few or no occasions when intonation got in the way of real understanding* (personal communication). Nevertheless, although it has long been out of print except in a Japanese adaptation, the book's rich set of practice materials, admirably recorded by its authors, has remained unrivalled as a compendium of pedagogical examples of English prosodic usage.

University College recognised his splendid contribution to his subject and his important part in the development of his Department by appointing him to a Chair of Phonetics in the session beginning in 1976. At his slightly early retirement from teaching in 1980, very appropriately, the title of Emeritus Professor was conferred upon him. His was a warm unassuming personality and his genuine friendship was treasured by many.

JACK WINDSOR LEWIS
