

**THE SOUND PATTERN
OF ENGLISH**

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NOAM CHOMSKY

MORRIS HALLE

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To Roman Jakobson

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PREFACE TO THE PAPERBACK EDITION

In the preface to the original edition of this book we remarked that no treatment "that we have proposed has survived a course of lectures unchanged and we do not doubt that the same fate awaits the grammatical sketch that we develop here." While our record as prophets is in general rather unimpressive, in the present instance we were right on the money: few of the matters treated in this 1968 book have remained unaffected by the developments in phonology that have taken place in the past twenty years. In the light of this the question inevitably arises as to what reasons, other than vanity, cupidity, and/or lack of critical judgment on the part of the authors or our publisher, might justify reprinting this book at this time. Our answer is that while the solutions to many particular problems proposed in SPE are out of date, many of the theoretical issues raised there remain critical to phonology to this day, and in quite a number of instances the solutions proposed in SPE have yet to be improved upon. Moreover, there are few works in phonology that have quite the scope of SPE: it deals both with matters of broad theoretical importance as well as with numerous questions of detail; it attempts to contribute to the theoretical foundations of phonetics as well as of phonology and it embeds its central empirical topic—the phonology of modern English (General American)—on the one hand, in a discussion of parallel phenomena in other languages, and on the other hand, in an account of the historical evolution of the English vowel system.

It is for these reasons, we believe, that SPE remains—and will for some time in the future remain—a book that students of phonology should find worth reading and pondering and arguing with. And the existence of a potential audience of this kind justifies the reprinting of the book at this time.

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