Who Was Standing at the Cradle of Phoniatrics? To Celebrate the 90th Anniversary of the Name of Our Medical Specialty

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Abstract

Since the very beginnings of medicine, physicians have been concerned with the study of normal and the therapy of disturbed verbal communication. However, no professional name for their specific activities has been handed down. The ancient Athenian phonasoi and Roman phonasci were voice trainers and not physicians although they also advised the performers on dietetic and behavioral measures. The British throat specialist Sir Morell Mackenzie was the first physician who called himself – in the eighties of the 19th century – phoniator. Yet, his pioneering work found no echo and was reported only eight decades later. Hermann Gutzmann Sr. is credited as the founder of phoniatrics. In fact, in 1905 he laid the foundation for this specialty but he called it medical voice and speech pathology (Sprachheilkunde). The present-day name of phoniatrics was first used – independently of Mackenzie's proposal – by Miloslav Seeman and Hugo Stern, and it was the latter of the two who introduced it in 1919 to the public. After the formation of the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics (IALP) by Emil Fröschels in 1924, phoniatrics has been accepted worldwide as the official name of medical communicology.

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As early as two centuries before Christ, the ancient Greek φωνή (phoné = voice) became part of the professional title for a category of voice trainers called φωνασκόγ (phonaskói) by the Athenians and phonasci in Rome [1, 2]. The discipline for the formation and improvement of the voice among the Athenians was so comprehensive that, as we are informed by Roman writers, not fewer than three different classes of teachers were employed for this purpose, i.e., the vociferarii, the phonasci and vocales [3]. However, the phonasci were voice pedagogues and not physicians, though they not only improved the performer's voice and indicated the speaker's vocal pitch by means of a windpipe but also watched over his diet, administered clysters (bowel lavations) when necessary, supervised his social behavior and even controlled his sexual contacts [1, 2].

Already in ancient ages, the physicians and philosophers of the Greek and Roman cultural circles were interested in the disorders of verbal communication and their treatment [4], but they and their successors through the centuries coined no specific name for their diagnostics and therapeutic efforts.

The striking lack in the nomenclature of medical specialties motivated the famous and controversial British throat specialist Sir Morell Mackenzie (1837–1892, fig. 1) to amalgamate the ancient Greek words φωνή (phoné = voice) and ιατρος (iatros = physician) into phoniator (voice physician). He listed then 'Phoniator, London' as his cable address in his letterhead (fig. 2), as Luchsinger

Fig. 1. Morell Mackenzie called himself phoniattros.

Fig. 3. Hermann Gutzmann Sr., founder of the medical specialty of phoniatrics.

Fig. 2. The phoniattros letterhead and the signature of Sir Morell Mackenzie (courtesy of Wellcome Library, London).

and Arnold [5–7] and Böhme [8] relate in their treatises. This historic letterhead and Mackenzie's signature from June 28, 1886 may be reproduced here with the kind permission of the Wellcome Library, London. Yet, Luchsinger and Arnold did not specify the date of the letter and they did not disclose their source of information either. In 1973, Arnold [9] wrote only in a general way that the term phoniatrics had been invented in London a century ago. Böhme [8] mentioned the date February 14, 1887, but failed to give any details [10]. Another of Mackenzie's

phoniattros letters from May 31, 1887, is part of a private German collection and not accessible to the public [11]. It is therefore not clear whether the letter reported by Luchsinger and Arnold [5–7] is identical with one of those of which the dates are known.

Mackenzie's pioneering work did not find any echo and remained forgotten for more than seven decades. Even the most meticulous chroniclers did not consider Mackenzie's initiative at all or mentioned it only after Luchsinger and Arnold [5–7] and Böhme [8] had published their treatises [12–15]. The long gap between the original phoniattros letterhead and the recognition of Mackenzie's merit as late as the second half of the 20th century thus remains unexplained and the information link is still missing.

Through his inaugural proclamation in 1905, Hermann Gutzmann Sr. (1865–1922, fig. 3) introduced a new voice and speech specialty into the medical schools. In his lifetime, Gutzmann referred to this specialty as medical 'voice and speech pathology' (Sprachheilkunde) and called himself and his assistants voice and speech physicians (Stimm- und Sprachärzte) [5–7, 16–20].

It was Hugo Stern, who in his obituaries retrospectively coined the term phoniatrics for describing Gutzmann's work [17]. Ever since, H. Gutzmann has been unanimously considered as the founder and even as the father of phoniatrics [19, 20].

Fig. 4. Miloslav Seeman (a) and Hugo Stern (b) gave phoniatrics its name.

The term phoniatrics has been closely connected with the names of Miloslav Seeman (1892–1975, fig. 4a) and Hugo Stern (1877–1941, fig. 4b). There is no evidence that these authors knew and took over Mackenzie's proposal despite the statement made by Luchsinger and Arnold [5–7] that a new name, phoniatrics, was given to Gutzmann's specialty after Mackenzie listed phoniatros as his letterhead, and despite Böhme's [8] claim that Seeman and Stern took over this term. On the contrary, both Seeman and Stern indirectly or explicitly declared their individual or common authentic authorship and never mentioned Mackenzie as their inspiration.

Eva Sedláčková and her husband Karel Sedláček [21] stated categorically that Prof. Seeman created the name of the specialty of phoniatrics by analogy with psychology-psychiatry and phonetics-phoniatrics in the sense of medical phonetics. E. Sedláčková and K. Sedláček were for many years the closest collaborators of M. Seeman. It may therefore be taken for granted that they passed on Seeman's personal opinion.

As early as 1921, Seeman [22] declared the study of voice physiology to be one of the most interesting tasks of phoniatrics. In 1922, he established at the Prague Otologic Clinic an outpatient department for diseases of speech and voice and impaired hearing [23]. However, already in his very first publications from this service, he

introduced himself as phoniatrics assistant and special assistant of phoniatrics, respectively [24, 25], and an article written by him was titled 'Principles of phoniatric treatment after uranoplasty' [26]. In 1929, Seeman's service was assigned an independent phoniatric department [27], which was transformed into the world's first phoniatric clinic and laboratory of the Medical Faculty of Charles University, Prague in 1967 [28, 29].

In an unpublished manuscript by Seeman and Lašťovka [30], Seeman claimed the common authorship of the name phoniatrics for himself and for Stern, stating that this term was introduced by them in 1920. This version was supported by Böhme [8] in his textbook. The names of the same authors, but in reverse order (Stern and Seeman), appear in some historical reviews by Zehmisch [20, 31].

H. Stern testified that he, for the very first time, publicly introduced the name phoniatrics at a meeting of the Austrian Otologic Association held in Vienna on June 30, 1919. In his own transcript of this presentation [32], he stated:

Phoniatrics – voice and speech specialty (Stimm- und Sprachheilkunde) – has been trying to reasonably keep pace with the progress of rhinology and today we are able to say: to satisfy the interest of proposing a correct indication, also the functional (experimental) phonetic diagnosis belongs to the clinical diagnostic work of

this field. I hope to have thus shown one of the ways that lead from laryngo-rhino-otology to phoniatrics and to have given a guideline to a closer relationship between the two special disciplines.

Stern then added the following explanation:

At this point, I am introducing for the first time the expression 'phoniatrics' («Ich führe an dieser Stelle zum ersten Male den Ausdruck *Phoniatrie* ein»). There are names for all medical disciplines and they have general validity in the international world of scientists. Till now, this has not been the case for our special discipline. The term logopedics (Logopädie), introduced by Fröschels several years ago, appears to me to be no lucky choice as it seems to partially represent only the mental contents of language, partially the pedagogic aspect of therapy. Having introduced the name 'phoniatrics' I believe that I have found the right expression. It includes – even the philologists confirmed it to me – all disorders as well as their medical therapy that belong to the sphere of the voice and speech physician. Last but not least, I want to characterize a certain independent position of this special discipline. Phoniatrics of course is closely connected with all other medical disciplines (and further especially with phonetics, psychology, philology and physics). However, phoniatrics has made such remarkable progress over the last two decades that it is only a matter of a short time before it develops into an independent specialty.

There is no evidence to suggest that Seeman and Stern were aware of Mackenzie's phoniatros-headed letters. They worked together in Vienna and knew each other well. It is thus most probable that they coined the term

phoniatrics – independently of Mackenzie – in one of their discussions and that either of them subsequently considered this invention as his own. On the occasion of his presentation, Stern eventually introduced this new expression to the public. According to Seeman [4], the term phoniatrics was first used for this specialty by Hugo Stern in Vienna as late as 1920 to facilitate international communication. Stern's exclusive priority is supported by numerous authors [15, 31, 33–37].

The term phoniatrics has since been accepted as the name of the medical discipline of communicology worldwide. In 1924, Emil Fröschels founded the International Association of Logopedics and Phoniatrics. The official organ of the IALP, *Folia Phoniatrica*, was founded by Richard Luchsinger, Miloslav Seeman and Jean Tarneaud in 1947. European phoniatricians set up their union (UEP) in 1970.

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