

The Metamorphoses of the Term *Phoneme*

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In a linguistic context, the term *phoneme* is attested in the writings of the Bulgarian educator and natural philosopher Petăr Beron since 1855. Subsequently, the French amateur phonetician Antoni Dufriche-Desgenettes, the young Ferdinand de Saussure and two Polish linguists working in Russia, Jan Baudouin de Courtenay and Mikołaj Kruszewski, adapted it to their different purposes. It was not until Baudouin's student Lev Vladimirovič Ščerba associated the term with the criterion of distinctivity, which Henry Sweet in England and Paul Passy in France had suggested as a guideline for phonetic transcriptions, that it acquired the meaning familiar from European and American 20th century structuralism – a unit “capable of distinguishing meanings”. A survey of these metamorphoses leads to a number of methodological points in the study of linguistic terminology.