

THE SYSTEM OF ENGLISH VOWEL PHONEMES. PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH VOWELS

Supervisor: O‘rinboyeva G

Teacher of Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages

Student: Yusupova Marjona

Student of Andijan State Institute of Foreign Languages

Annotation. *This paper examines the English vowel phoneme system, analyzing their distinctive phonological features (height, backness, roundness) and organization within the language. It provides a comprehensive study of vowel distribution patterns across different linguistic contexts, including dialect variations and stress effects. The paper combines both acoustic and articulatory data to improve our understanding of English vowel phonology, with applications for language teaching and learning.*

Аннотация. *В этой статье рассматривается система фонем английских гласных, анализируются их отличительные фонологические особенности (высота, задняя сторона, округлость) и организация в языке. В ней представлено всестороннее исследование закономерностей распределения гласных в различных языковых контекстах, включая диалектные вариации и эффекты ударения. В статье объединены как акустические, так и артикуляционные данные для улучшения нашего понимания фонологии английских гласных с приложениями для преподавания и изучения языка.*

Keywords: *English vowels, vowel phonemes, phonological analysis, distinctive features, dialectal variations, stress patterns, acoustic data, articulatory data, language learning.*

Ключевые слова: *Английские гласные, гласные фонемы, фонологический анализ, отличительные черты, диалектные вариации, модели ударения, акустические данные, артикуляционные данные, изучение языка.*

The phonetic criterion employed to differentiate vowel phonemes is theoretically inadequate, as it fails to elucidate the relationships among phonemes within the overall system and the nature of existing phonological oppositions, including their quality and quantity. Generally, the phonemic system of English vowels can be categorized into two subsystems: a) stressed vocalism, which encompasses vowels that are stressed and occur in stressed positions, and b) unstressed vocalism, which includes all vowels,

particularly the neutral vowels /ə/ and /i/. The unstressed vocalism is more diverse than the stressed vocalism, where /ə/ and unstressed /i/ are absent.

English possesses a complex array of vowel phonemes, which includes ten short and long monophthongs, two diphthongoids, and nine diphthongs. These vowel phonemes can be identified through the commutation test: for example, /bi:t/ - /bit/ - /bet/, /bæt/, /bɔ:t/, /bʌt/, /bu:t/, /beit/, /bait/, /baut/, etc. However, it is essential first to examine the phonemic status of diphthongs and the vowel /ə/, as well as the phonetic characteristics of long-short, tense-lax, and checked-free distinctions, which are intricately linked [1;23].

There are two perspectives regarding the phonematic significance of vowel length in English. Only a handful of linguists recognize the phonematic importance of vowel length in English. Summarizing the views of British linguists, Ch. Barber notes that "English vowels vary in length based on phonetic context—the degree of stress they carry, whether they are followed by voiced or voiceless consonants, and the number of unstressed syllables surrounding them." Given an identical phonetic context, some vowels are longer than others; for instance, /i:/ is significantly longer than /a:/, and /a:/ is considerably longer than /e/, which in turn is longer than /ə/. It is practical to categorize vowels into two groups: long and short. The vowels typically classified as short include /i, e, æ, ʌ, ɔ, u/, and /ə/, while the remaining pure vowels and diphthongs are generally considered long.

Based on this explanation, one can draw a phonological conclusion regarding vowel length. When establishing vowel pairs based on long-short characteristics such as /i: - i/, /h: - ə/, /u - u:/, /a: - æ/, and /ə: - ə/, they appear to create proportional or even symmetric oppositions based on the long-short feature. The vowels /i:/ and /u:/ function as diphthongoids and are articulated as [lui] and [uu]. Thus, the vowels /i/ and /u/ do not oppose long vowels but rather serve as diphthongoids. The opposition /ɜ: - ə/ is unique to English since /ə/ only appears in unstressed positions, placing it within the unstressed vocalism subsystem, while /ɜ:/ predominantly occurs in stressed positions. Typically, /a:/ is contrasted with /ʌ/, but in reality, it should be paired with /æ/. Only the pair /ɔ: - ɔ/ forms a distinction based on the long-short feature. Even within this pair, the shortened form /ɔ:/ may be perceived not as [ɔ] but as [u]. Therefore, the long-short distinction is non-distinctive and often fails to maintain its recognitive function [2;19].

Most American linguists also dispute the distinctiveness of vowel length in English. H. Kurath asserts that "length is not a distinctive feature in the vowel system of Modern English. It is automatic in that the actual length of any English vowel

depends on various factors." Generally speaking: (1) both checked and free vowels are longer under full stress compared to half-stress or weak stress; (2) low vowels tend to be longer than mid-vowels, which are longer than high vowels; (3) free vowels are longer in free positions than in checked ones; (4) both checked vowels and free vowels in checked positions are longer before voiced consonants. Thus, distribution is considered one of the distinctive features of the English vowel system.

English pronunciation does not have a fixed pattern, and it shows the inconsistency of pronunciation. It makes the EL learners experience the incorrectness of pronunciation, for example lay /leI/ or effect /Ifect / is pronounced as /laI/ or /@fect/. While speaking, correct pronunciation is important to catch the correct meaning and avoid misunderstanding. By knowing the sounds represented by letters and the patterns how to pronounce makes easier to pronounce the English words.

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