PHONETICS

Ravshanova Ziyoda Qahramon Qizi [1]

[1] 2 nd year student of the Enlish language course of
philology and language teachin, Faculty of History and Philology,
International Innovative University
For contact:Tel. +998 815 82 03
Ravshanovaziyoda479@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT:
	This article explores the field of English phonetics, providing an in-depth examination of its key components, including articulatory, acoustic, and perceptual phonetics. It discusses the production and characteristics of English sounds, focusing on both vowels and consonants, as well as the subtle differences in pronunciation and the role of accents in shaping speech. The article highlights the importance of phonetic knowledge in mastering English pronunciation, emphasizing its impact on clear communication and understanding. It also addresses how phonetic awareness aids learners in minimizing errors and achieving fluency in spoken English. The study of phonetics is presented as an essential aspect of effective language acquisition, enabling learners to grasp the intricacies of sound production, stress, and intonation in English.

INTRODUCTION. Phonetics is a branch of linguistics that studies the physiological, acoustic, and functional aspects of sounds. It analyzes the sound system of a language, the sounds that exist within it, their pronunciation, perception, and their relationships with other linguistic elements. One of the main tasks of phonetics is to ensure correct pronunciation and to identify the role of sounds in a language.

MONOFTONGS

A monophthong is a single, unchanging vowel sound produced without any movement of the speech organs. In English, there are 12 monophthongs:

/æ/, /ɛ/, /ɪ/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/, /ʊ/, /ɑ:/, /ɔ:/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /əʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/

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These monophthongs can be classified based on four main criteria:

Horizontal Tongue Movement: This refers to the tongue's position from front to back in the mouth.

Front Vowels: /æ/, /ɛ/, /ɪ/

Front-Central Vowels: /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/

Vertical Tongue Movement: This pertains to how high or low the tongue is raised toward the roof of the mouth.

Open Vowels: /æ/, /ɑː/

Half-Open Vowels: /ɛ/, /ʌ/, /ɔː/

Close Vowels: /ɪ/, /ʊ/, /əʊ/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/

Lip Rounding: This indicates whether the lips are rounded or unrounded during vowel articulation.

Rounded Vowels: /ɔː/, /ʊ/, /əʊ/

Unrounded Vowels: /æ/, /ɛ/, /ɪ/, /ɑː/, /ʌ/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/

Duration (Length): This refers to the length of time the vowel sound is held.

Short Vowels: /æ/, /ɛ/, /ɪ/, /ʌ/, /ʊ/

Long Vowels: /ɑː/, /ɔː/, /əʊ/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/

Understanding these classifications aids in accurate pronunciation and listening comprehension in English.

Diphthongs

A diphthong is a single vowel sound consisting of two vowel sounds, where the first sound transitions into another, slightly different vowel sound. For this reason, diphthongs are often referred to as "sliding vowels."

In American English, there are eight primary vowel sounds, which are typically considered as diphthongs. Four of them are "traditional" elongated vowels (vowel sounds pronounced the same as the letter names), but some are also combined with certain vowel digraphs or the letter "R". Here, we'll briefly discuss different diphthongs, but for more information, you can refer to the full section on diphthongs.

Traditional Long Vowels

Apart from E, all other traditional long vowel sounds are diphthongs. These vowels are most commonly assumed to be diphthongs when followed by a single consonant and the silent "e."

Vowel letter	Vowel sound (transcription)	How to pronounce	Example Word

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A	/ei/	eh-ee	tape (/teip/)
A	/ai/	ah-ee	ice (/ais/)
O	/ou/	oh-oo	rope (/roup/)
U	/ju/	ee-oo	cube (/kju:b/)

Other Diphthongs

1. /aʊ/ – This diphthong is pronounced "ah-oo" and occurs with the OU and OW digraphs.

Examples:

found (/faʊnd/)

how (/haʊ/)

cow (/kaʊ/)

2. /ɔɪ/ – This diphthong is pronounced "au-ee" and occurs with the OY and OI digraphs.

Examples:

boy (/bɔɪ/)

coin (/kɔɪn/)

foil (/fɔɪl/)

choice (/tʃɔɪs/)

3. /əʊ/ – This diphthong is pronounced "oh-ee".

Examples:

royal (/ˈrɔɪəl/)

employed (/ɪmˈplɔɪd/)

noise (/nɔɪz/)

Triphthongs

In rare cases, three vowel sounds can quickly shift from one to another within a single syllable; this combination of three vowel sounds is known as a triphthong (/ˈtrɪfθɔŋ/).

In American English, there are typically three accepted triphthongs: /aue/ ("ah-oo-uh"), /ara/ ("ah-ih-uh"), and /joʊ/ ("ee-oo-uh"). Here, we'll briefly look at each one, but for more detailed information, you can refer to the full section on triphthongs.

This triphthong is pronounced "ah-oo-uh" and occurs after the OU digraph followed by an "R."

Examples: our (/aʊər/)

hour (/aʊər/; He is silent)

flour (/flaʊər/)

sour (/saʊər/)

This triphthong is pronounced "ah-ih-uh" and occurs after the IRE combination.

Examples:

fire (/faɪər/)

dire (/daɪər/)

inspire (/ɪnˈspaɪər/)

Ireland (/ˈaɪərlənd/)

This triphthong is pronounced "ee-oo-uh" and occurs after a strong consonant followed by UR or after the vowels E, Y, or I.

Examples: cure (/kjʊər/), pure (/pjʊər/), fury (/fjʊəri/), curious (/ˈkjʊərɪəs/)

Triphthongs, though quite rare, are an interesting feature in English pronunciation. They contribute to the complexity of English vowel sounds and their subtle transitions between multiple vowel sounds within a syllable.

Language Policy.   Language Policy, on the other hand, deals with the official or unofficial rules related to a language within a certain country or region, including methods of language teaching, development, and promotion. Language policy also examines the relationships between languages in society, their interaction, and the social and political aspects of language use. Language policy is usually implemented by the government, and its goal is to effectively use a language in international and internal communication, preserve culture, and promote language development.

The Connection Between Phonetics and Language Policy:

Setting Pronunciation Norms: One aspect of language policy is the standardization of pronunciation for the official language by governments or organizations. This can directly influence the development and application of phonetic rules.

Language Preservation and Development: Phonetics plays an important role in language learning and teaching. If language policy focuses on preserving and developing a specific language, it requires a deep understanding of phonetics. For instance, restoring the sounds of an ancient language and adapting it to modern speech may require new phonetic discoveries.

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Interlingual Relations: Another connection between phonetics and language policy is seen in the methods of teaching a language across different groups. Language policy determines the methodologies for teaching a language, which affects the phonetic approaches used in pedagogy.

Linguistic Crises and Language Preservation: Some languages may be endangered due to their pronunciation and phonetic structure. Language policy can develop strategies to help preserve such languages. In this process, phonetics plays a crucial role in maintaining traditional pronunciation and preventing changes in sounds.

In general, phonetics and language policy are interconnected, as the preservation, development, and use of a language in contemporary society require the study and standardization of its phonetic system. In these processes, phonetic methods and research assist in the successful implementation of language policies.

Conclusion.   In conclusion, the study of monophthongs, diphthongs, and triphthongs plays a vital role in understanding the phonetic structure of a language. These elements are not only essential for pronunciation but also for the preservation and development of a language. Language policy, through its implementation of standardized pronunciations and teaching practices, helps regulate how these sounds are maintained, taught, and passed on across generations. Effective language policy ensures the uniformity of pronunciation and helps safeguard linguistic diversity, promoting the sustainability of languages in an ever-changing sociolinguistic landscape. Phonetic research, which includes the study of vowel sounds like monophthongs, diphthongs, and triphthongs, is crucial in these endeavors, as it helps establish the foundations for accurate communication, education, and the revitalization of endangered languages.

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