


Parvana Jafarova  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4747-5711>
Azerbaijan University of Languages
e-mail: jafarova.parvana@yahoo.com

Monophthongization of central diphthongs

Monoftongizacja dyftongów centralnych

Abstract

English is a global language, learned worldwide as a native, first, and second language. In Azerbaijan, Received Pronunciation (RP) is considered the best accent for teaching English, but its model is outdated and requires revision. Since the 1980s, C. Upton has proposed updates reflecting phonetic changes, adopted in Oxford University dictionaries from the 1990s. Despite efforts to implement the new model, financial and educational challenges persist. Lexicographers, often unfamiliar with phonetics, maintain a conservative approach. This article examines the monophthongization of centering diphthongs in RP, analyzing changes in their quality and quantity. Research conducted at Azerbaijan University of Languages confirms that centering diphthongs are shifting into long monophthongs, a trend accepted across all age groups.

Keywords: monophthong, diphthong, pronunciation, phonetic changes, lexical groups, transcription

Streszczenie

Język angielski jest językiem globalnym, używanym na całym świecie jako język ojczysty, pierwszy i drugi. W Azerbejdżanie w nauczaniu języka angielskiego preferuje się Received Pronunciation (RP), jednak jego model jest przestarzały i wymaga aktualizacji. Od lat 80. XX wieku C. Upton zaproponował zmiany odzwierciedlające współczesne tendencje fonetyczne, które od lat 90. są stosowane w słownikach Uniwersytetu Oksfordzkiego. Wdrożenie nowego modelu napotyka jednak na trudności finansowe i edukacyjne. Leksykografowie, często nieznający fonetyki, zachowują konserwatywne podejście. Artykuł analizuje zjawisko monoftongizacji dyftongów centralnych w RP, badając zmiany ich jakości i ilości. Badania przeprowadzone na Uniwersytecie Języków w Azerbejdżanie potwierdzają, że dyftongi centralne przekształcają się w długie monoftongi, a ta tendencja jest akceptowana we wszystkich grupach wiekowych.

Słowa kluczowe: monoftong, dyftong, wymowa, zmiany fonetyczne, grupy leksykalne, transkrypcja

Introduction

As we know, the language adapts to changing situations. It changes gradually and while observing periodically linguists can even predict upcoming alterations. This study includes alteration of diphthongs into monophthongs, in other words, monophthongization. Monophthongization is the process which diphthongs tend to change into monophthongs. This phenomenon is given special attention when exploring new trends in Received Pronunciation. Thus, in the last few decades, the pronunciation of central diphthongs as monophthongs has become widespread. Here is included the diphthongs of /ʊə/, /eə/ and /ɪə/.

Literature and review

In Modern English C. Upton (Upton, Kretzschmar, Konopka, 2001; Upton, Kortmann, 2008), L. Bauer and P. Trudgill (Bauer, 1994; Bauer, Trudgill, 1998), A. Cruttenden (2008), S. Ramsaran (1990), J. Wells (1997, 2000, 2001, 2008), and many others have widely researched new tendencies in the phonetic system of the English Language. Research of new tendencies is of great importance both from a scientific and educational point of view. As long as the language is spoken, new changes are inevitable. So, linguists should always study living languages.

The purpose

The main aim of our study is correct pronunciation. The language is constantly developing and new changes are emerging. However, the textbooks used in teaching Modern Phonetic System of the English Language are obsolete. As a result, Azerbaijani students who study English as a foreign language become confused when they compare what they study in the textbooks and what they hear while listening to native speakers. C. Upton's model also has a great value for non-native speakers. They are able to find the difference between what they see in the textbook and what they hear through this model. For example, most teachers teach their students to pronounce words in the CURE lexical group as /'kʊə/, but this word is mostly pronounced as /'kɔ:/. The same example can be seen in the pronunciation of sure /'ʃɔ:/. In this article, we try to identify the alteration of diphthongs into monophthongs, and in order to meet our purposes some experiments are carried out.

Data and methods

The study of any phonetic material can only be qualitative if it is based on an experiment rather than observation. In order to investigate the tendency of monophthongization of central diphthongs in Modern English, the experiment was conducted using the PRAAT

program on original material taken from the BBC and CNN. Our results were compared with modern dictionaries and recorded. The people involved in the experiments are mainly BBC and CNN news presenters, members of the royal family and political figures. The reason why we took the main part of the audio recordings from the BBC is that RP is widely used in BBC, as well as it is sometimes called BBC accent and BBC pronunciation. The correct selection of the material is important for the efficient conduct of the experiment. For this purpose, about 50 words were involved in the experiment. The results have been compared with theoretical outcomes and illustrated in the article.

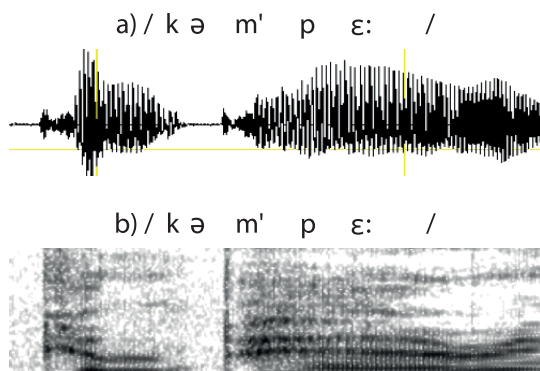
Results

If we look at the Vowel System of Received Pronunciation in C. Upton's new model, we will see great changes in the realization of diphthongs. These changes are both qualitative and quantitative.

SQUARE [ɛə] Upton gave a new model of this sound, which is transcribed as [ɛ:]. He claims that this sound is a long monophthong pronounced in the front semi-open position (Upton, 2008: 35). For native speakers, the diphthong variant of this sound is considered obsolete. Many linguists agree on the fact that the diphthong /eə/ has changed into the monophthong /ɛ:/ (Upton, Kretzschmar, Konopka, 2001; Cruttenden, 2008; Lindsey, 2012). Cruttenden first considered the monophthong as a received alternative to the diphthong, but later he accepted this monophthong (Cruttenden, 2008: 48). Wells (2000: 137) stands on the traditional transcription of the voice and does not consider the length long enough. Upton (2008: 237) believes that the pronunciation of the [ɛə] diphthong is obsolete and we do not find it in the accepted pronunciation. In the words including in the FORCE lexical group, we find a process similar to the process of changing of the diphthong /ɔə/ into /ɔ:/. According to Upton, the pronunciation of the central diphthong in the original RP, is now heard as a long half-open monophthong. He claims that the former pronunciation was rarely used in compound nouns, such as *hairpiece*. Now it is a special element in RP. Upton (2008: 237) admits that speakers of the RP can sound like /ɛ:ʔ/ (off-glide) at the end of the sentence, but this is not a dominant variant, and the modern variant of the word *Square* must be regarded as a simple sound. This sound, along with the vowel in the word *Trap*, is the most prominent difference between the old RP and the new one.

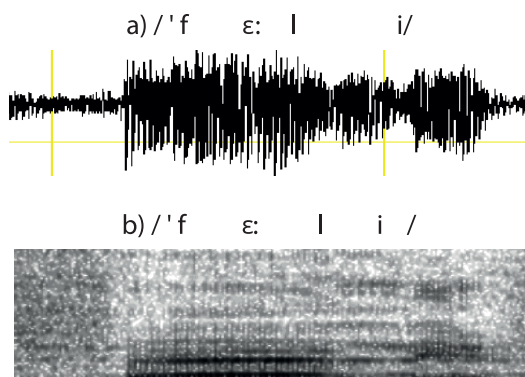
For example:

1. *compare* a) oscillogram, b) spectrogram



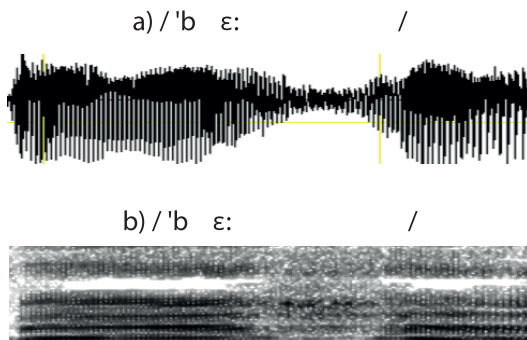
Graph 1.

2. *fairly* a) oscillogram, b) spectrogram



Graph 2.

3. *bear* a) oscillogram, b) spectrogram



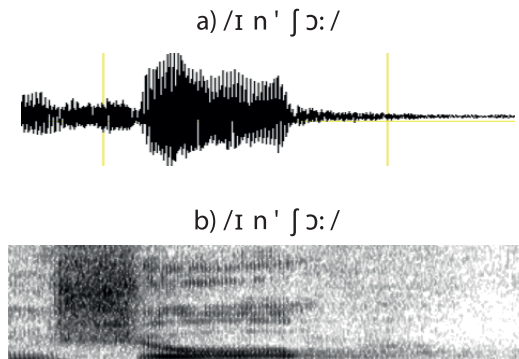
Graph 3.

Apparently, when experimenting the given words, it turns out that the monophthong /ɛ:/ is the most frequently used phoneme.

CURE [ʊə-ɔ:] is a traditional sound consisting of a weakly rounded, slightly closed and back [ʊ] initial sound and a forward central [ə] sound. The change of the diphthong [ʊə] to [ɔ:] is explained by Cruttenden as follows: the first element was pronounced downward and backward [ɔə], and later it became monophthongized and lengthened (Cruttenden, 2008: 140). The traditional diphthong still exists and is pronounced in some words, such as *gourd*, *cruel*. Monophthongized *CURE* is an innovation of the 21st century. In his research, A. Cruttenden talks about complete, well-developed and recent innovations. To the almost complete alternation he attributes the pronunciation of the diphthong [eə] as [ɛ:]. A well-developed change involves the transition of the diphthong [ʊə] to [ɔ:]. This alternation is also accepted by P. Roach, especially in monosyllabic words such as *sure*, *poor*, *cure*, *moor* and *tour*, which the sound is pronounced (Roach, 2004: 239). This change is lexically different. In some monosyllabic words, such as *pure* and polysyllabic *curious*, *endure* and *secure*, as well as in words formed with the suffix ‘er’, such as *doer*, *fewer*, the vowel sound is pronounced as a diphthong [ʊə]. Hannisdal (2006: 153) believes that this diphthong still exists in RP, and he thinks the opinion of its complete disappearance is somewhat exaggerated.

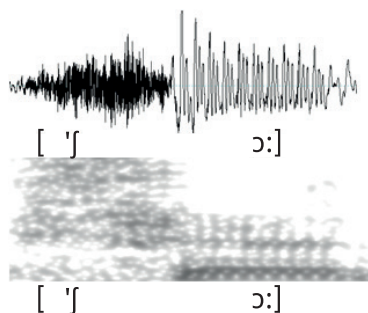
Ramsaran accepts the pronunciation of the monophthong /ɔ:/, but believes that the phoneme status of /ʊə/ cannot be completely denied. So, for some people, it is a contrasting sound in the minimal pairs *cruel* /krʊəl/ and *crawl* /krɔ:l/. Moreover, although /ʊə/ is rarely heard in monosyllabic words, it is often used at the morpheme boundaries of words such as *fewer* /'fjuə/ and *brewer* /'brʊə/ (Ramsaran, 1990: 56).

For example: ensure /ɪ n ʃ ɔ:/ a) oscillogram, b) spectrogram



Graph 4.

In the English monosyllabic word “sure” [ʃɔ:], the acoustic indicators are expressed in the following numbers: f – 195 hs, t – 102 m/sec, I – 68 db (see graph 6).

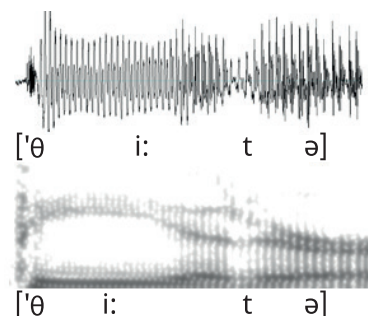


Graph 5.

After experimenting the words *ensure* and *sure* several times, we witnessed the pronunciation of the diphthong /ʊə/ as long /ɔ:/ in the pronunciation of both the old and the young generation. This tendency is listed in the *Oxford Dictionary* (2001) along with the traditional pronunciation form. The result obtained from the experiment coincides with the theory of wide replacement of diphthong /ʊə/ by long /ɔ:/.

NEAR [ɪə] – phonetically, this sound is a diphthong consisting of an unrounded, closed, front initial sound [ɪ] and a middle central [ə] sound moving forward. Unlike other diphthongs, this diphthong has different variants according to its second element. So, sometimes longer or raised forms can be found, for example, *here* /'hɪə/ or /'hɪɑ:/ The monophthongization of the diphthong /ɪə/ to /ɪ:/ is considered to be a recent innovation. Unfortunately, this trend has not been sufficiently investigated. The linguists who studied it much (Lindsey, 2012; Collins, Mees, 2019) are based on auditory observations and did not give much space to acoustic research.

For example, the monophthongization of the diphthong in the word *theatre* can be found in modern English like /'θi:tə/ The acoustic parameters of the English two-syllable word “theatre” [θi:tə] are expressed by the following indicators: basic tone frequency – 194 hs, 162 hs, length – 210 m/s, 91 m/s, intensity – 71 db indicates that it is 69 db (see graph 6).



Graph 6.

According to the results obtained from the experiment of the word *theatre*, we find out that the central diphthong /ɪə/ has changed into the long vowel /i:/. This trend has recently become widespread among young people and it is also observed in RP.

Discussion

Generally, the process of researching alternations is very difficult. Language is developing and new tendencies always appear. The traditional symbols which are widely used in textbooks and dictionaries are old versions of the English Phonetic System. This article aims to study alterations in English diphthongs. However, without experimental analysis we cannot confirm the changes that have happened recently in the English Language phonetic system.

Conclusion

So, in this article, we tried to analyse the trend of monophthongization of central diphthongs in modern English through the experiments. As it can be seen, the results obtained from each experiment proves the correctness of the theoretical views given by linguists. This research will help the teachers and students of EFL classes in Azerbaijan be aware of the latest innovations and take them into account while teaching and learning the English Language Pronunciation, as the social significance of good pronunciation has always been present.

References

- Bauer L. (1994), *Watching English change: an introduction to the study of linguistic change in standard Englishes in the 20th century*, London: Longman.
- Bauer L., Trudgill P. (1998), *Language Myths*, London: Penguin Books.
- Collins B., Mees I.M. (2019), *Practical Phonetics and Phonology*, London: Routledge.
- Cruttenden A. (2008), *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*, London: Hodder.
- Hannisdal B.R. (2006), *Variability and change in received pronunciation. A study of six phonological variables in the speech of television newsreaders*, PHD dissertation, Bergen: University of Bergen.
- Lindsey G. (2012), *The British English vowel system (blog post)*, <https://www.englishspeech-services.com/blog/british-vowels/> [accessed: 20.03.2024].
- Ramsaran S. (1990), *RP: fact and fiction*, [in:] Ramsaran S. (ed.), *Studies in the Pronunciation of the English: A Commemorative Volume in Honour of A.C. Gimson*, London–New York: Routledge, pp. 178–190.
- Roach P. (2004), *British English: Received pronunciation*, “Journal of the International Phonetic Association”, vol. 34, pp. 239–245.
- Roach P. (2009), *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Upton C., Kretzschmar W.A., Konopka R. (2001), *The Oxford Dictionary of Pronunciation for Current English*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Upton C. (2008), *Received pronunciation*, [in:] B. Kortmann, C. Upton (eds.), *Varieties of English: The British Isles*, Berlin–New York: Mouton de Gruyter, pp. 237–252.

Wells J.C. (1997), *Whatever Happened to Received Pronunciation*, [in:] *II Jornadas de Estudios Ingleses: 13 al 16 de noviembre de 1996*, Jaén: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Jaén, pp. 19–28.

Wells J.C. (2000), *British English pronunciation preferences: a changing scene*, “Journal of the International Phonetic Association”, vol. 29(1), pp. 33–55.

Wells J.C. (2001), *IPA transcription systems for English*, <https://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/ipa-english.htm> [access: 20.05.2024].

Wells J.C. (2008), *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*, London: Longman.

Ten utwór jest dostępny na licencji Creative Commons Uznanie autorstwa-Na tych samych warunkach 4.0 Międzynarodowe.

