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L.No - (42)
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English (Hons.)

DIII / Paper VIII / Linguistics.

Topic: vowel phonemes or vocoids

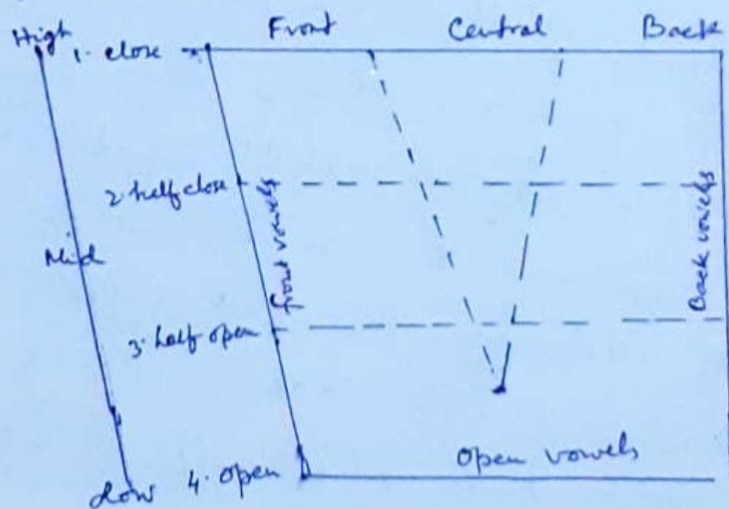
There is a fundamental difference between the consonant phonemes and vowel phonemes in the way they can be described. If, on the one hand, we can describe a consonant sound by pointing to its place of articulation and manner of articulation in addition to stating if they fall in the category of voiced sounds or unvoiced ones, a vowel gets described by way of indicating the two variables of (i) the position of the tongue and (ii) the position of the lips. Vowels are articulated by air passing through different mouth shapes caused by the two aforesaid variables and all vowels are voiced. The lip differences in articulating vowels are easily perceived by the onlooker but it is really difficult to see or feel the differences in the tongue shape while pronouncing different vowels. Thus we can describe

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a vowel by indicating these three reference points: -

- (i) The position of the tongue (~~front, central, back~~)
(close, half close, half open, open)
- (ii) The part of the tongue involved
(front, central, back)
- (iii) The position of the lips.
(unrounded, rounded)

We can show the different vowels of English on a vowel chart known as "conventional vowel diagram" devised by Daniel Jones, the British phonetician: -



Dimension 1. Height of the tongue. Dimension 2. The part of the tongue used.

fig:- Daniel Jones' "conventional vowel diagram".

As far as the vowel phonemes of R.P. is concerned, they may be divided into

- (i) monophthongs and
- (ii) diphthongs.

Monophthongs are such pure sounds in which, at the time of articulation, the tongue and lip position remains unchanged. In the case of diphthongs, on the contrary, the process of articulation is more complex as the gliding or shift from one vowel sound to another is evident which entails a change in the position of tongue or lips or both.

Thus, in terms of vowel quality we can divide them, as they occur in the R.P., into the two following groups:-

- (i) Pure vowels: (12 in number)
 /i:/, /e:/, /æ:/, /a:/, /ɔ:/, /ɒ:/, /u:/, /ʊ:/, /ɪ:/, /ʌ:/, /ə:/, /ɜ:/

- (ii) Diphthongs: (8 in number)
 /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, /əʊ/, /iə/, /eə/, /ʊə/ .

(concluded)