

Pačesová, Jaroslava

[Revising the international phonetic alphabet. Ed. Peter Ladefoged]

*Sborník prací Filozofické fakulty brněnské univerzity. A, Řada jazykovědná.* 1991, vol. 40, iss. A39, pp. 120-123

ISBN 80-210-0362-6

ISSN 0231-7567

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/101494>

Access Date: 16. 02. 2024

Version: 20220831

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j) k standardizaci kreolských jazyků jako celonárodních je zapotřebí spojeného úsilí jazykovědců jak místních, tak i zahraničních.

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Publikace podává základní problematiku kreolských jazyků a současný stav bádání o nich. Zaujme nejen lingvisty a sociolingvisty, ale i lingvodidaktiky.

† Jiří Bronec

## REVISING THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET

It is commonly known that the present set of International Phonetic Alphabet symbols has its origins more than one hundred years ago, shortly after the International Phonetic Association was founded in 1887. Though it was revised several times, especially in its early years, very few changes were carried into effect in the last fifty years. As a result, the alphabet is out of date. New theories of phonetics have been developed, so that reconsideration of the principles on which International Phonetic Alphabet rests, is needed. There are no agreed symbols for many recently reported sounds and additional diacritics need to be established for newly described categories of sounds.

Scholars in different disciplines rely on phonetic symbols to convey their meaning. Some form of phonetic alphabet is essential for work in linguistics, speech pathology, computer speech processing, language teaching, studies of ancient manuscripts, singing, criminal voice identification; the list of scholars that require the use of phonetic symbols is no doubt very long. Some of their topics need specialized symbols that are suited only for them. But all of them require a common core for their basic needs. By far the most widely used common core is the International Phonetic Alphabet. This is the set of symbols that the majority of scholars take as the starting point, and then, if necessary, augment with special symbols for their own needs.

Any attempt to revise the International Phonetic Alphabet must — as already shown by Peter Ladefoged in his paper on the Eleventh International Congress of Phonetic Sciences in Tallinn in 1987 — begin by recognizing that the majority of those who use this alphabet are not phoneticians. It also requires the maintenance of the attitude that phonetics is in part a servant to other disciplines. There is, however, another very important point that must be emphasized: *revision of the International Phonetic Alphabet involves revising a theory of phonetics*. It is not just a matter of getting agreement on *what symbols to use*; it is also a matter of getting agreement on *what to describe*. Symbols stand for something; they are shorthand descriptions of sets of phonetic categories. And choosing the symbols required for an international alphabet is a simple task in comparison with choosing the categories that need to be represented by these symbols.

The present International Phonetic Alphabet chart is a theory of phonetics specifying how sounds should be described in terms of particular articulatory categories. For example *l̥* stands for 'voiceless labiodental fricative' while *l̠* is just a shorthand way of writing 'voiced velar stop'. One has, however, consider whether these articulatory terms are still sufficient nowadays. There is quite a number of phonetic theories ranging from acoustically based theories through more traditional International Phonetic Alphabet categories to elaborate articulatory notation systems. The question arises: what do we want our symbols

to symbolize? These considerations force us into thinking about a topic that phoneticians have sometimes considered to be outside their field: why do we need categories? what is this theory of phonetics trying to do? This brings us again to the problem we have mentioned above; International Phonetic Alphabet has many uses. Speech pathologists, for example, may want to think of sounds in terms of articulations, communication engineers in terms of acoustic categories and linguists in terms of distinctive features. The International Phonetic Alphabet was originally devised by linguists for the purpose of describing languages in phonetic terms. It was not set up to be able to symbolize all the different sounds that human beings can produce. Speech pathologists, scholars studying language acquisition and many others may, nevertheless, have these special requirements. To devise a practical alphabet that has no linguistic basis but simply aims at symbolizing all possible combinations of movements of the speech organs would be extremely difficult.

The set of categories represented within the present alphabet is not entirely satisfactory from a linguistic point of view. Historically, the International Phonetic Alphabet was needed largely for practical purposes of language teaching and writing down little known languages, rather than for the furtherance of general linguistic theory. As a result, the symbols reflect categories that differ from those required by present day linguists. Nowadays those categories that make evident how languages work are needed. This means that they should reflect the feature systems that divide and combine segments into natural classes that are made explicit in phonological descriptions.

The final point which should be considered before setting up an international phonetic alphabet is the matter how to limit the set of sounds that has to be described. This problem is addressed in the first two of the historic principles on which the International Phonetic Alphabet is based, viz:

1. *"There should be a separate letter for each distinctive sound; that is, for each sound, being used instead of another, in the same language, can change the meaning of a word."*
2. *"When any sound is found in several languages, the same sign should be used in all. This also applies to very similar shades of the sound."*

The first of these two principles is an early formulation of the phonemic principle. The second starts from the assumption that the same sound can be found in different languages. In other words, it suggests that we should begin by assuming that languages do not differ in innumerable ways. This is an equivalent to what we would now regard as a tenet of Universal Grammar, a statement that there is a universal set of phonetic categories that can be defined independently of any particular language. On the other hand, the problem of how to know when two sounds in different languages should be considered *'very similar shades of the sound'* is not addressed here. One can hardly do so on theoretical grounds. What seems an irrelevant distinction for a foreigner to hear, is completely obvious to native speakers who use it regularly in their language.

These two historic principles imply that we should start setting up a set of categories by making sure that we can symbolize all the contrasts that can occur within any single language; and that we should also compare different languages to determine what should be considered as distinct sounds. This is essentially the approach adopted by Ladefoged and Maddieson in their attempt to assess how many different 'places of articulation' must be recognized. They suggest that there are seventeen, namely *bilabial, labiodental, linguolabial, interdental, apical dental, laminal dental, apical alveolar, laminal alveolar, apical retroflex, laminal postalveolar, sublaminal retroflex, palatal, velar, uvular, pharyngeal, epiglottal and glottal*. (For details, cf. Peter Ladefoged & Ian Maddieson, *(Some of) The Sounds of the World's Languages: (preliminary version)*. UCLA Working Papers in Phonetics, 64, 1986). The 17 items seem, in our opinion, to be much too detailed for

an everyday International Phonetic Alphabet chart. Most phoneticians would not, in all probability, need to symbolize, for example, *labiolinguals*. On the other hand, International Phonetic Alphabet must be capable of doing this because *labiolinguals* contrast with *labials* and *dentals* or *alveolars* in a small group of languages spoken in Vanuatu.

One way of reducing the complexity in the International Phonetic Alphabet chart would be to group the categories. Ladefoged & Maddieson (l. c., Table 2) suggest a hierarchical arrangement of places of articulation. The basic articulatory regions, namely *labial*, *coronal*, *dorsal*, *radical* and *laryngeal* are supplemented with lingual attributes, specific places and general articulatory terms, cf. the following characteristics: the labial articulatory region has zero lingual attribute and three specific places termed 1. *bilabial*, 2. *labiodental* and 3. *linguolabial*;

the coronal articulatory region has three lingual attributes, namely 1. *laminal*, 2. *apical* and 3. *retroflex* and nine specific places termed 1. *interdental*, 2. *laminal dental*, 3. *Laminal alveolar*, 4. *laminal postalveolar*, 5. *palatal*, 6. *apical dental*, 7. *apical alveolar*, 8. *retroflex postalveolar* and 9. *subapical palatal*;

the dorsal articulatory region has zero lingual attribute and two specific places termed 1. *velar* and 2. *uvular*;

the radical articulatory region has zero lingual attribute and two specific places termed 1. *pharyngeal* and 2. *epiglottal*;

the laryngeal articulatory region has zero lingual attribute and one specific place termed *glottal*.

The difference between at least some subgroups could be then designated by means of diacritics. This proposal has the added advantage that it shows some of the relations among categories. It also makes explicit which differences are more marked in the sense of being more unlikely to be found distinguishing words in a language. In addition, this arrangement exemplifies a convenient way of showing the relationship between detailed phonetic specifications and the terms used in other feature systems. The question whether the set of features or categories that are to be symbolized is complete remains, however, open.

As far as additional symbols to represent sounds not previously considered are concerned, one of the next historic principles of the present International Phonetic Alphabet, namely "*Diacritics should be avoided, being trying for the eyes and troublesome to read*" should be reevaluated. This principle was originally introduced as a counter-measure to the prevalent nineteenth century habit of piling several diacritics onto a single symbol. Nowadays it is quite normal practice to use a single diacritic above a symbol and/or another one below. According to Ladefoged, this practice should be encouraged because it shows the similarity among symbols that refer to the class of sounds that is defined by the diacritic. What remains to be done is to decide what categories or features should be symbolized by means of diacritics. Diacritics also have the advantage of being easy to handle on a typewriter or in a computer word processing system. With a single diacritic stored in a dead key one can extend the set of different symbols by a very large number. The International Phonetic Alphabet was developed before the widespread use of typewriters and suffered because the International Phonetic Association never recognized the advisability of offering an alphabet that could be easily managed on a typewriter. Let us hope that the present International Phonetic Association who is supposed to authorize a revised International Phonetic Alphabet, will not make the same kind of mistake by overlooking the need for computer compatibility.

There is, however, a potential problem in the widespread use of computers. Peter Ladefoged works with a Macintosh computer, using, for the phonetic symbols, a font that is available at the Linguistic Department, UCLA, Los Angeles. The existence in the public domain of fonts such as this should offer considerable help in the

standardization of symbols. But it may also have the opposite effect, as it is now easy for people to develop their own sets of symbols. Let us hope that we do not have a proliferation of many personally defined symbols.

There are no doubt other topics that will have to be considered before we have a truly revised International Phonetic Alphabet. But whatever is done, it seems that the most important thing is to have thorough discussion that takes notice of the two points emphasized above: first, all users of the International Phonetic Alphabet must be encouraged to have their say; and, second, it is not just a set of symbols that are being revised, but a whole theory of phonetic description. Discussion of possible alternatives, preferably through the pages of the Journal of the International Phonetic Association (formerly *Le Maître Phonétique*) are needed. Scholars are urged to send any ideas, large or small. Those who wish to do more may also submit more comprehensive papers on this topic direct to the editor of the Journal. M. Shirt, Department of Linguistics and Phonetics, University of Leeds, and C. Henton, Program in Linguistics, University of California have volunteered to submit a report summarizing all the discussion. This report will be published in the Journal and voted on in due course. It is hoped that in this way lasting improvements in one of the most important and widely used tools in the field of phonetics will be made.

*Jaroslava Pačesová*

