

VOWEL SOUNDS & VOWEL LETRS.

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The first article in *HERALD* for Feb. interested me. Mr. Gholson has discovered, perhaps rediscovered, the true nature of those vowel sounds heretofore styled diphthongs. They are not a union of two simple vowels - an impossibility - but sounds emitted while the organs of speech change from the position for one simple vowel to that for another. The term 'Glide Vowel' is therefore more appropriate than 'diphthong'. The exact number of Eng. vowels is yet unsettled, but it will now be easier to classify such vowel sounds as orthoepists admit to be distinct. All may be classed as Simple Short, Simple Long, or Glide Vowels.

Simple Short Vowels are free sounds uttered quickly while the organs of speech are in a fixed position. The vowels of this class are *i* in *pin*, *e* in *pen*, *a* in *pan*, *o* in *not*, *u* in *nut*, *ü* in *put*. True, with some individuals and in some localities these Short or stopt vowels become lengthened or drawn out; but they are susceptible of a short, crisp utterance which can not be given to other vowels. The *Simple Long Vowels* are made while the organs of speech are in a fixed position, and the sounds, if not essentially long, may be prolonged without producing a sense of incorrect pronunciation. Try *beet* with *bit*; *naught* with *not*; *pool* with *pull*. The *Simple Long Vowels* are *ah* in *bar*, *aw* in *ball*, *ee* in *beet*, *oo* in *boom*; and to these must be added *uh* in *burr* - altho *uh* occurs before *r* only - and *o* as heard in New England pronunciation of *whole*, *stone*, and some other monosyllables, but also heard when *o* is unaccented, as in the first syllable of *propose*, *polemics*, etc. The *Glide Vowels* are *i*, *oi*, *ow*, *ew*, also *a* in *fail*, *a* in *fair* and *o* in *oat*. The glide in *i* is from almost any open or medial vowel, *ah*, *ü* or even *ö* to the close vowel *i*. *Oi* glides from *aw* to *i*. *Ow* from *ah* to *u* in *put* - not from *o* in *oat* to *u* in *put*, as stated p. 45. *Ew* begins with *i* and ends with *oo*, *a* in *fail* begins with *e* and closes on *i*; *a* in *fair* begins on *a* or *e* and glides to *ü* in *up*; *oh* begins with pure unaccented *o*, heard in the first syllable of *propose*, and glides towards *oo*, but does not include *oo*. The vowels noted stand thus:

| | | | | | | | |
|----------|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| SIMPL | { | a | o | e | u | i | u |
| SHORT V. | { | oat | oat | pet | cut | pit | put |

| | | | | | | | |
|---------|---|------|------|-------|-----|------|------|
| SIMPL | { | ah | aw | o | uh | ee | oo |
| LONG V. | { | jar | jaw | whole | fur | feel | fool |
| GLIDE | { | i | oi | ow | ew | a | a |
| VOWELS | { | file | foil | fowl | few | fade | fair |

I do not consider any of the above mentioned to be "Shade Vowels;" nevertheless it may not be necessary to distinguish by different letters the *o* in *whole* from the *o* in *oat*; or the *u* in *cut* from the *u* in *put*; or the *a* in *fair* from the *a* in *fade*. Phoneticians are divided upon this point, and I think none but individual decisions can be arrived at, until the ears of people generally have been cultivated to discriminate sounds with much greater exactness than now. My experience during thirty years of teaching fonetic print, is that children discriminate sounds easily; and I would rather teach them with an alphabet which denoted all recognizable vowel sounds, than with one which provided signs for only a part, leaving the remainder to be guessed at; especially if I desired to teach exact and correct pronunciation.

With other teachers of fonography, I find it very difficult to get pupils to appreciate the difference between *ah* and *o* in *oat*. In N. York, the pronunciation of such words as *not*, *what*, *was*, is *naht*, *hwah*, *wahz*; the *ah* being cut short; and so when teaching Fonetic Short-hand, rather than delay, I let students vocalize in accordance with their own pronunciation.

Another point: Teachers in public schools have frequently consulted me as to the real vowel sound in *God* and *dog*. To cut the *o* short in pronouncing *God* as they do in *rod*, seems to them irreverent, while they do not consider *God* in good taste. "Now," say they, "what is the true vowel sound?" I told them, the quality of the vowel is *aw*, but that the sound should be made shorter than when pronouncing the word *Maud*. This shortened *aw*, required for *God*, is, I think, no more uncertain a sound than the shortend *ah* in *ask* and *pass*, as uttered by persons who do not say *ask* and *pass*, the latter being the more common pronunciation.

Again; in such words as *Lord* and *cord*, can we say that the vowel sound is that of *o* short as in *lot*? The sound is as truly *aw* in *lord* as in *law*; and in an exact fonetic print both must have the same representation. For the present we dispose of the perplexity by calling the sound of *r* when following a vowel, a "corrupting influence;" for it is a fact that the *r* element is frequently present when any peculiar difficulty arises in determining the proper vowel sound, or vowel letter to be used. But a distinct sound is no less when it occurs before a particular consonant, as the *aw* sound in *lord* (*soft*, *broth*, *cross*, etc., or other illustrations); or when it is heard only before one certain consonant, as *u* in *urn*, which sound occurs only before *r*. The *a* in *fair* also occurs only before *r*, unless drawn out *a*, heard among natives of the Southern States in their pronunciation of *past*, *ask*, *basket*, (*paast*, *aask*, *baasket*), etc., is considered the vowel in *fair*. To my ear it is the same, minus the glide towards *r* which cannot be avoided in uttering *pair*, *care*, *their*, etc.

—Mr S. CLARE writes from Toronto that he would not like to see an alphabet of S. R. A. adopted—he is not alone.