



## Classification and Phonological Opposition of Vowels in French Language

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**Abstract:** This article discusses classification and phonological opposition of vowels in French. Vocalic system - the phonemes of the French language, their phonological contrasts and their specificities have been analyzed on the basis of examples. The characteristics of vowel sounds in French were analyzed. Similar and differential vowel signs were revealed. The stylistic traits related to the pronunciation and writing of vowels in French have been defined. The scientific literature on the analysis of vowel sounds available in the French language was read and analyzed. Methodical, orthographic, phonetic features related to the pronunciation and writing of vowel sounds are analyzed.

**Key words:** language, phoneme, musical tone, mouth opening, morpheme, consonant, stressed closed syllable, relevant distinction, nasal vowel.

### INTRODUCTION

The richness of any language means, first of all, the variety of complex processes that this language has. Thanks to these processes, the language becomes more diverse, colorful, strong, flexible, full of emotions, able to express all the subtle aspects of human thinking. According to E.Sepir: "Language is important because it is a leader in the scientific study of culture." [ Сепир Э. Избранные труды по языкознанию и культурологии. – М.: "Прогресс", 2001. – С.132 ] In fact, language is a tool that forms a person who accepts mentality, values, traditions and customs, a way of understanding the world through language. The ideas of one-way influence of culture on language or influence of language on culture confirm the interdependence and connection of language and culture, their integral linguistic unity.

Also, language, as an important part of culture, reflects national culture in the process of communication. For this reason, in linguistics, attention has always been paid to the issue of the interrelationship of language and culture, to the problems of normalization of speech, which is a part of the nation's own custom, tradition, culture, and compliance with laws and regulations.

In addition, as the science of linguistics thoroughly studies all the changes taking place in the language, the rapid development of science, technology and digital economy, naturally, the emergence of various new currents, directions, and new scientific theoretical views of modern linguistics will cause it.

The number of phonemes is different in different languages. Varies from 30 to 50 in Western languages. Languages have different proportions between vowels and consonants: in French -15 vowels and 20 consonants, in English - 21 vowels and 25 consonants; sometimes it constitutes a system where the richness in consonants makes up for the relative poverty of vowels, ie in Russian - 6 vowels and 37 consonants, in Spanish - 5 vowels and 25 consonants. (in Uzbek - 6 vowels and 25 consonants).

The qualitative varieties of the sounds of a language are very numerous, nevertheless they do not present all the relevant characteristics with phonematic value. Thus Russian knows 4 phonic varieties of the phoneme [ e ] ranging from the most closed in the word "сети", between two wet



consonants, to the most open in the word “цеп” “эта” all four of which however only include a single phonological value, that of the phoneme [ e ]. On the other hand, in French, the same phonic varieties constitute phonematic oppositions which are at the base of the two phonemes – [ e ] closed and [ ε ] open (e).

## METHODES

The lexical-semantic, grammatical, cross-sectional and statistical analysis methods were used to cover this topic. The collected materials were analyzed with the help of comparative, lexical, semantic, grammatical, comparative and statistical methods widely used in modern linguistics.

The diversity of phonic systems is realized in different phonematic oppositions used in languages. Such, for example, Russian which widely uses the opposition “hard consonants - wet consonants” unknown to French, while the French language uses in vocalism several phonematic oppositions that Russian does not know: “oral vowel - nasal vowel”; “labial front vowel - non-labial front vowel”.

The particular character of the phonetics of a language manifests itself in the quantity of phonemes, their qualities, the phonological oppositions and the phonetic characteristics and their possible combinations. French phonetics includes two major distinct sound classes. 15 vowels and 20 consonants. To delimit these groups of phonemes, there are several criteria and in particular the physiological, acoustic and phonematic criteria.

Also in this article A. Martinet, Ph. Martinon, Gordina M.V., M.Grammont, P. Fouché, L.P.Kammans, M. Gougenheim scientific works and educational literature of scientists were analyzed.

1. When a vowel is articulated, the speech organs are all tensed in a more or less regular fashion, the muscular tension not being localized. It is by this particular physiological character called widespread tension that vowels differ from consonants, the latter being characterized by localized tension. Thus for the consonants, there is a rapprochement of the organs of speech and even an occlusion which constitutes a considerable obstacle to the passage of air through the resonance cavities. For vowels, on the other hand, the oral route is more or less free.
2. From the acoustic point of view, any vowel is a musical tone par excellence. (According to the latest research in acoustics, it seems that the vowels are not exempt from noise), whereas any consonant is a noise to which the musical tone can be added. Among the consonants there are some phonemes in which the musical tone dominates and which therefore form a class of sounds, called “sonants”. However, their physiological and syllabic character are clearly of the “consonant” type, the sonants are ranked among the latter.

From the phonematic point of view, a vowel always forms a syllable, it is a syllabic sound par excellence. All vowels in French are therefore syllabic. On the other hand, French consonants do not constitute syllables on their own, except for a few interjections - pst! .... , or onomatopias - frirt! Etc It is the voice that is the basis of all vowels. The vowel timbre which is also called “characteristic” is formed in the resonating cavities, such as the oral cavity, the nasal cavity, the pharynx. The voice is the result of the vibration of the vocal cords.

## RESULTS

It is important, for the analysis of the system of phonemes, to bring out the linguistic formal criterion. This criterion is, according to A.Martinet, that of “distinctive relevance”. Here is his method of phonological analysis. The French sound “l” of the word “lac” is a different sound from the deaf “l” of the word “peuple”, but this difference in sound is not used in the French language to distinguish between words or morphemes of words, it is purely positional, sound in this case is



not a relevant distinctive feature, as is the distinction between “b” and “p” in the words: “pierre” and “bière”. [ A.Martinet // Encyclopaedia of Linguistics / Philipp Strazny, editor. — New York, Oxon: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2005. — C. 48—50. — ISBN 1-57958-391-1. ] The two “l”s in the Russian words “мел” and “мель” where the ear perceives two different “l”s are not two phonemes, the degree of openness of these vowels not being a distinctive feature in the Russian language, relevant.

By contrasting the vowels according to their distinctive features, we come to group them in series.

Ex: open series - closed series.

This opposition emerges for three groups of French phonemes, having as a mark of opposition the degree of opening of the buccal resonator. Mouth resonator opening:

“ɛ” - open - “e” - closed

“œ” - open - “ø” - closed

“ɔ” - open - “o” - closed

Opposition [ ɛ ] open - [ e ] closed. The distribution of two, “e” timbres tends to be determined by position, the rule being: open timbre in closed syllable, closed timbre – in open syllable. The general tendency to use the closed timbre in the absolute ending maintains a clear opposition of the two “e”s (fait -fée; dès – dé; lait – les; mais – mes). In addition, a length distinction is made for the open “ɛ” phoneme maintained by the spelling of “k”, “ai”, opposed to the spelling “e” + double consonant.

A.Martinet also talks about the tendency of the triple opposition of phoneme “e” and the tendency of the young generation to the benefit of the qualitative difference for the opposition “ɛ” open long - “e” open short of type bête - belle, bête - bette, ... The distinction “open vowel - closed vowel” is hampered by vowel harmonization, by consonantal entourage, by analogy and sometimes by spelling.

The opposition of two “eu” [ œ – ø ]. The opposition of two “eu” [ œ – ø ] is considered as having little extension, the stamp of the closed [ ø ] being little represented in the French vocabulary, with the exception of the opposition of the suffixes in “eux” and “eur”. The strong position of this opposition is the closed syllable: young and young, but most often the timbre is determined by the consonantal entourage, we find the closed variety before b, g, s, t, d, k, and the tr group (ex: neutral and the open variety) in other cases. For some, the difference between young and young is not only that of timbre, but also of length. This quantitative nuance is carried out in the pronunciation of good of French. The “eu” is always closed at the end of words.

The opposition “ɔ” open - “o” closed. This distinction is based on phonetic differences much more obvious than those of the two “o”. The door position of this opposition is the accented closed syllable of the type: “saute-sotte”, “môle-molle”. There is a tendency to only pronounce the closed vowel in the absolute final (photo, stylo) and to keep the open timbre in the open position in an unstressed syllable, ex: donner [ dɔ - ne ], sonner [ sɔ - ne ]. There are several floatings for the pretonic “o” which is often influenced by the spellings: o, au, eau, or the influence of the consonant “z” which closes the preceding vowel. We can still mention the opinion of Damourette and Pichon on the peculiarities of “brusque” and “tendre” timbres of [ o ] in words of the type: pot - peau. We also indicate the quantitative distinction made by certain subjects which is added to the distinction of timbre.

The three opposition pairs (open - closed) belong to the series of mid-opening vowels. As for the other phonemes of this group, they acoustically belong to the wide buccal resonator vowels and form them grouped in one zone of the spectrum. The vowels u, i, y belong to the closed series.



The degree of their openness does not involve, according to the descriptions of M.Grammont, P. Fouché, L.P.Kammans, any phonological differentiation.

Ph. Martinon indicates a slight difference in timbre between tonic and atonic vowels and some change in duration when the “i” is followed by “I” particularly in verses. [ Ph.Martinon. Comment on prononce le français: traité complet de prononciation pratique avec les noms propres et les mots étrangers. Paris : Larousse, 1913. Nombreuses rééditions. ] A.Martinet manages to identify only a few cases of distinctions of the “bout - boue” “sur - sûr”, type, in which M. Gougenheim sees a relevant distinction (ému - émue and above all: sur - sûr).

After having examined the cases mentioned in final position and in closed syllable, A.Martinet concludes that the distinction of timbre of these vowels is very limited: it is, where it occurs, rather quantitative, and manifests itself in young people. The same question was asked for the distinction of “e” closed in final position: armé - armée, collé - collée. From a phonetic point of view, this distinction is as follows: the “e” of “armé” - more open than the “e” of “armée”, the brevity going hand in hand with the opening. As for the phonological distinction, it is only done by a very small number of people.

## DISCUSSION

The French nasal vowels constitute a series, opposed to the series of the corresponding oral vowels. A.Martinet incontestably proves that there (in the regions of the South of France) where the pronunciation of nasals is accompanied by an occlusion, we are in the presence of two phonemes: vowel plus nasal consonant. The question of the distinctive mark of this group of phonemes arises as follows: is it the articulation of the soft palate which, on lowering, leaves a passage in the nasal cavity, communicating to these vowels their nasal timbre, or is it product - some change in the mouth articulation of the corresponding oral vowels.

The opposition “nasal vowels - oral vowels” is realized in the following combinations:

1) nasal vowel / oral vowel.

ex: passer – penser

gâter – ganter

beauté – bonté

2) (rarer) nasal vowel / oral vowel + nasal consonant:

ex: pan – panne

camp – canne

don – donne

3) nasal vowel + nasal consonant / oral vowel + nasal consonant.

ex : emm(e)ner - am(e)ner;

(nous) tînmes - thème;

(nous) vînmes - vrine.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that vowels have a special and important role in the phonetics of the French language. Speech sounds are units that are pronounced by a person and cannot be divided into other parts. When making speech sounds, the air coming out of the lungs passes through the



respiratory tract - the larynx to the throat, from there to the oral cavity or nasal cavity, and goes out.

For perfect study, analysis, comparison and statistical analysis, it is necessary to study the scientific theories stated by linguists and to read a lot of literature in order to respond to them. Usually long vowels are pronounced strong and short vowels weak. Acoustically, long, semi-long, short and very short vowels are distinguished. Long and short vowels can be found in French as well as in English and German. In order to give them an acoustic definition in the system of French vowel sounds, we should first of all pay attention to their physiological description. In particular, it is appropriate to take into account the physiological factor to define a certain vowel phoneme in French.

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