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Perceptual features of the sound [š':] in Russian

Abstract

The phonemic status of a consonant [š':] in Russian is still a debatable issue. It is due to a number of features characteristic for this sound. First, [š':] does not have a voiced pair in Russian. Secondly, it is unclear whether this palatalized sibilant has a corresponding non-palatalized pair, since [š':] differs from [š] not only in palatalization but also in length, despite the fact that length as a distinctive feature is completely alien for the system of Russian consonants. The present paper aims to study the perceptual features of [š':] in order to clarify which changes in its parameters may influence its perception. The results of three experiments to perceive stimuli (i) with [č] replaced by [š':], (ii) with [š':] duration reduced and (iii) in the context of a syllable and a combination of syllables showed that the replacement generally deteriorated the discrimination task performance while duration decrease did not produce such an effect meaning that duration cannot be viewed as a distinctive feature of the consonant. Although in the two types of context the consonant was more often perceived as fricative, intervocalic position could result in perceiving an occlusive consonant while syllable-initial position and the previous consonant increased the number of fricative responses. The obtained results add more grounds to considering [š':] as a Russian phoneme and not a combination of two other phonemes.

Keywords: phonological status, perceptual features, experimental phonetics, Russian standard language, palatalized sibilants in Russian

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