

II. VOWELS

Vowels differ considerably from consonants. In the articulation of vowels, the pulmonic egressive air enters the mouth cavity and escapes without any obstruction. Like consonants, no two speech organs form either partial or complete closure in the articulation of the vowels. Just the shape of the oral cavity is changed accordingly with the help of lips, tongue and the soft palate. As vocal cords vibrate in the articulation of the vowels, all the vowels are voiced.

The description of the vowels radically differs from that of the consonants. Since no two organs come close enough, the place of articulation is immaterial; the air is released in the same way in the case of all the vowels, so the manner of articulation too is immaterial and as all the vowels are voiced, voiced and voiceless distinction is of little use. The vowel description considers:-

- (a) the position of the soft palate,
- (b) spreading or rounding of the lips,
- (c) the part of the tongue raised and raised upto what degree.

Comparatively, the description of vowels is very much subjective and so inaccurate. More than factual proof, it depends on auditory judgements. The first sight and apparent resemblance is mostly deceptive.

The vowel system of Marathi-English differs considerably from that of the vowel system of English (see vowel chart-II). The English vowels exceed the number of the vowels in Marathi. The major defect lies in the articulation of diphthongs. Because of the mother tongue influence, the number of vowels used by the Marathi speakers is anything between 12 and 20. For the speakers of Marathi from Satara, it is 16. Of course, the recorded number is subject to change for the long and short distinction is not so clear. Unconsciously, the long is used for the short and vice-a-versa. So the number is still likely to come down.

The vowels used by the speakers of English from Satara are as follows:

<u>Monophthongs</u>	<u>Diphthongs</u>
/i:/	/ijə/ (iə/)
/i/	/uə/
/e/	/əj/ (ai/)
/ɛ/	/ɔi/
/æ/	/ɑw/ (au/)
/ɑ/	
/ɔ/	
/o/	
/u/	
/u:/	
/ə/	

Vowel Chart (Pure Vowels)

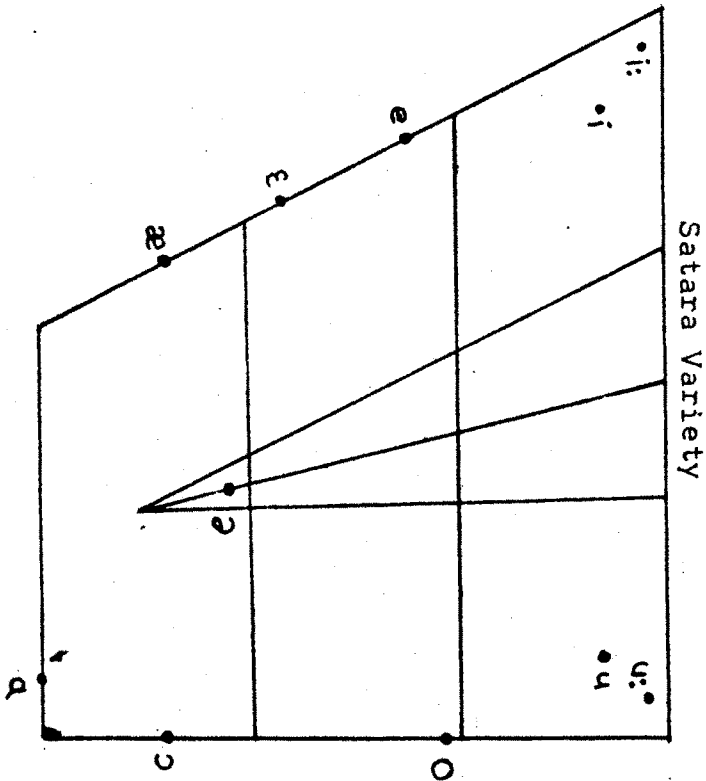
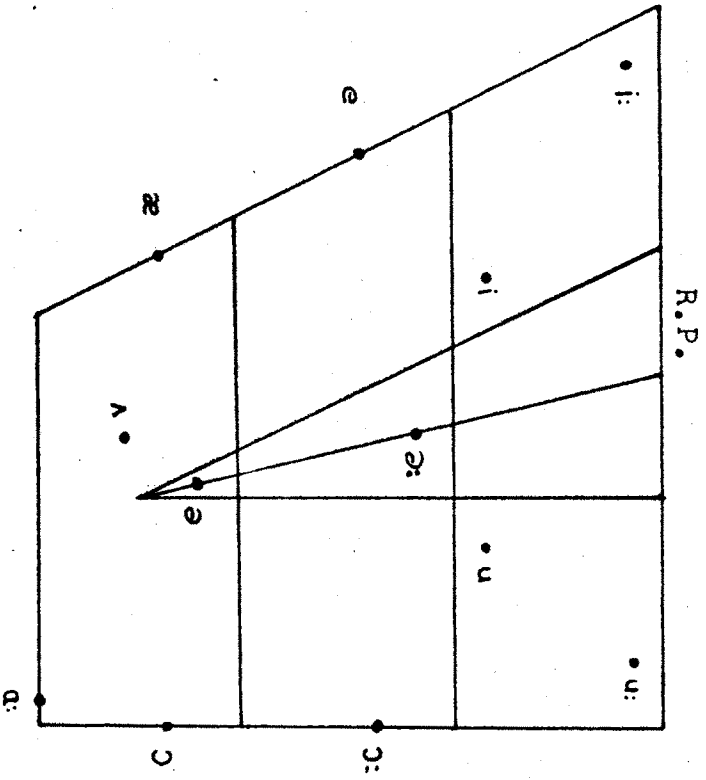


Chart II

Front Pure Vowels: /i: i e ε æ /

These five are the front monophthongs. The front of the tongue is raised upward upto a certain height in the articulation of these vowels.

/i:/ and /i/

Description: The front of the tongue is raised to a height slightly below but lower than that for its English counterpart and retracted from the close front position. The lips are spread. The tongue is slightly tense with side rims making a loose contact with the upper molars. In this position, the vowel articulated sounds comparatively longer but when it is a short one, the tongue position is slightly different. It is just inclined to the centre and is raised nearly upto the point where it is raised for the long variety. The distinction between the long and short varieties is so negligible that if both the speakers and listeners are not careful enough in pronouncing and listening respectively, the distinction between them goes unnoticed and unfelt.

The Satara speakers of English do produce /i:/ and /i/ but without being aware of the distinction. It would be more correct to say that /i:/ and /i/ just happen to be what they are. So giving individual description of these two vowels is of little use. If the Satara speakers had controlled

length and maintained clear-cut distinction between these two, individual descriptions would not only be possible but necessary. e.g.

street /stɪt/ = /i/ in place of /i:/ and
me /mi:/ = /i:/ in place of /i/.

/e/

Description: The front of the tongue is raised to a height just below the half-close position. The lips are less spread and slightly open. The rims of the tongue make a slight contact with the upper molars.

Here, too, the length of the vowel is not determinate and controlled. Very often it is partially lengthened. So the syllable which has /e/ in it is comparatively longer than its R.P. counterpart /e/. e.g.

get /ge·t/ = /e·/ in place of /e/.

/ɛ /

Description: This vowel is articulated by raising the tongue upto a height just above the half-open position. The lips are fairly open and the rims of the tongue rarely touch the upper molars. R.P. speakers do not have /ɛ / as a pure vowel in their speech.

Sometimes /ɛ/ is used in place of /e/ because the Marathi speakers of English do not distinguish between /e/ from /ɛ/. The remarkable distinction lies in the use of /ɛ/, the pure vowel, for some diphthongs which do not exist in the phonology of Marathi. The diphthongs /ɛə/ and /eɪ/ do not occur because they are reduced to the pure vowel /ɛ/. e.g.

there /d̪ɛɾ/ = /ɛ/ in place of /ɛə/

/æ/

Description: The tongue is raised upto a height just above the fully open position keeping the lips neutrally open. The rims of the tongue very slightly touch the upper molars.

This vowel, too, is partially lengthened. So it differs from the R.P. /æ/.

/ɑ/

Description: A part of the tongue between the centre and the back is in a fully open position. The lips neutrally open as they are for /æ/. Here, the tongue rims do not make any contact with the upper molars as they do in the articulation of /æ/.

A major distinction from R.P. /ɑ:/ lies in its length. The R.P. counterpart has always a full length but the Marathi speakers ignore length. In R.P., /ɑ:/ mostly precedes /r/ and

as the post-vocalic /r/ is hardly pronounced, it is indicated by length. For the Satara speakers, they carry their own linguistic habit over to English i.e., emphasizing each and every letter. So /r/ in the speech of Marathi including Satara speakers does not get converted into lengthening. The post vocalic /r/ is pronounced with equal breath and muscular energy. e.g. /r/ in

girl /gær/ /
 bird /bærd/
 cart /kært/ etc.

Back (Round) Vowels:

/ɔ /

Description: The back of the tongue is raised to a height between the open and the half-open position but approximately to the open position. The lips are open and slightly rounded. The tongue is slightly pulled back but does not make any contact with the upper molars.

The lengthened variety of /ɔ / i.e. /ɔ: / is almost absent. So /ɔ:/ is not at all used and if at all used, it is done accidentally. It just happens. A great majority of Satarians replace /ɔ: / by /ɑ /. e.g.

what - /w^hæt/ in place of /wɔt/

water - /wətə/ in place of /wɔ:tə /,
 daughter- /dʌtə/ in place of /dɔ:tə /, etc.

/o/

Description: The back of the tongue is raised to a height a little lower than close position. It is raised higher than for /ɔ:/ . The lips are loosely rounded. The tongue is neither tense nor do the rims contact the upper molars.

R.P. does not have /ə/. In Satara English, actually, it is used to replace R.P. diphthong /əu/. As Marathi does not have /əu/, the Marathi speakers replace it by a pure vowel /o/ or /o:/. e.g., /o/ in

course /kɔ:rs/

boat /bo:t/

dough /dɔ:/, etc.

/u/ and /u:/

Description: A part of the tongue between the centre and back is raised to height a little higher than the half-close position. The lips form a slightly loose-round shape. The tongue is tense.

Here, the problem of length arises. The lengthened variety of /u/ i.e./u:/ is articulated with the back of the tongue raised

to a height just below the close position. The lips are tightly rounded and the tongue is slightly pulled back.

This distinction between /u/ and /u:/ exists both in English and Marathi but the Marathi speakers of English hardly use the right phoneme length at the right place. Mostly /u/ is used for the both. Because of this unnecessary lengthening, the distinction between /u/ and /u:/ gets blurred. /u:/ is used but not with a view to distinction but just that the speaker wants to use it and because the speaker can articulate it and knows that it is to be used but doesn't know where and when to use.

Central Vowel

/ə/

Description: In R.P., /ə/ has a very high frequency of occurrence but for the Marathi and the Satara speakers it has normal frequency of occurrence. It is articulated with the centre of the tongue raised to a height between half-close and half-open. The lips are neutral and the tongue is lax as compared to the other positions.

For the Marathi speakers, /ə/ substitutes all the three R.P. phonemes i.e., /ə/, /ə:/ and /ʌ/.

The reason for the low frequency of occurrence of /ə/ is replacement of it by /ɑ/. Initial occurrence of /ə/ is mistaken for /ɑ/ by Satara speakers as it is done by most of the Marathi speakers. e.g.

admitted - /admitted/ i.e. /ɑ/ in place of /ə/

about /abawt/ i.e. /ɑ/ in place of /ə/.

Diphthongs [Glides]

Marathi phonology differs radically from the phonology of English as far as diphthongs are concerned (see chartiv). Diphthong is a glide within a syllable (Bansal & Harrison 1972). It begins with the first element and moves in the direction of the second. The number of the diphthongs in R.P. is much bigger than that of the diphthongs used by Marathi speakers.

The diphthongs differ not only in number but also in quality. /iə ai au/ are pronounced as /ijə aj aɪ/ respectively. /ɛə ei əu/ are replaced by pure vowels. /ɛə/ and /ei/ are both replaced by /ɛ/ and /əu/ is replaced by /o/, with or without length.

As R.P. diphthongs can be classified into three groups, so can the diphthongs used by the Marathi speakers of Satara. Groups are based on the second element i.e., the element with which a diphthong ends. The three classes are:

1. Ending with /ə/ = /iə/, /ijə/, /uə/
2. Ending with /i/ = /ai/, /aj/, /ɔi/
3. Ending with /u/ = /au/, /aɪ/

The first class is often called the centring diphthong class and the second is called closing diphthong class.

Vowel Chart (Diphthongs)

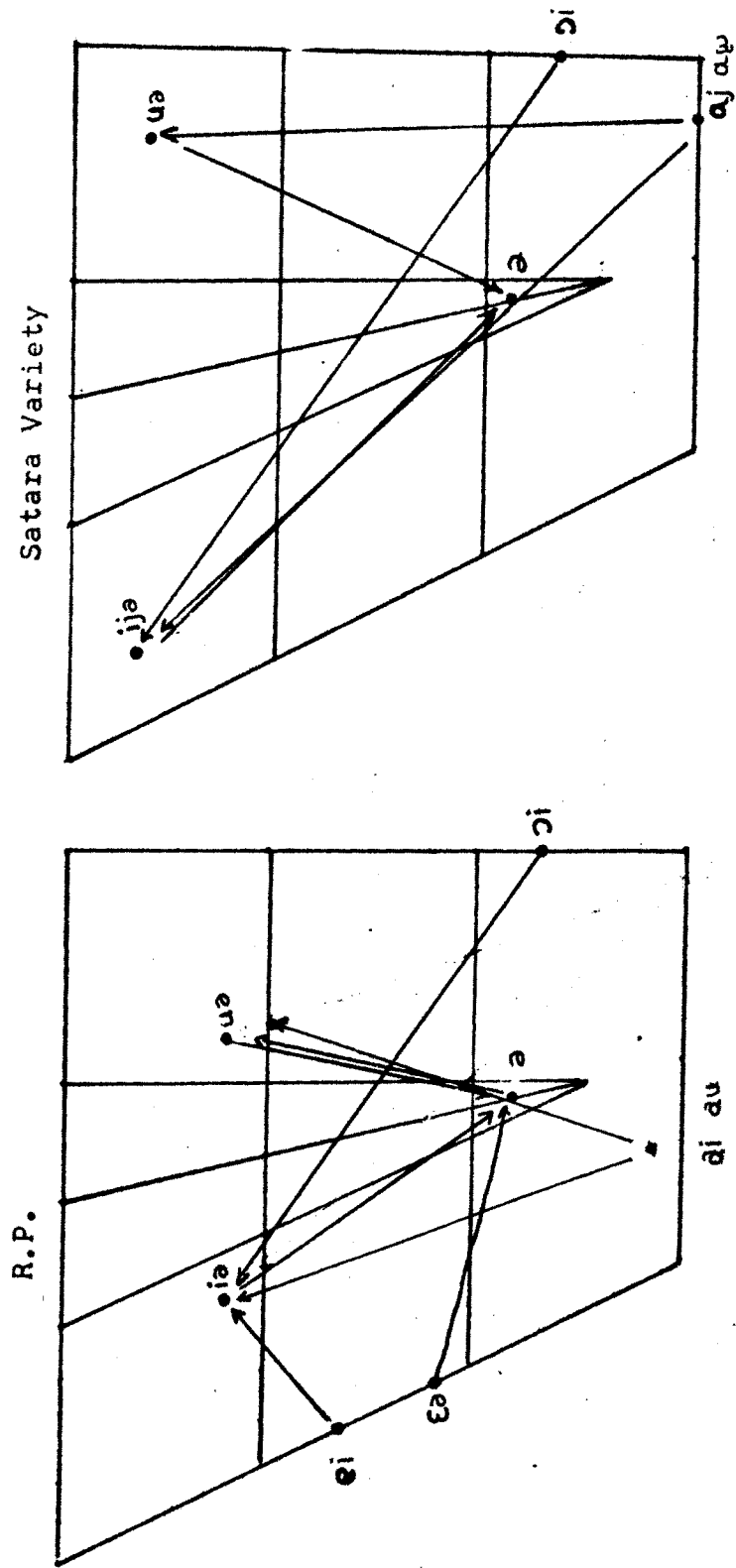


Chart III

/iə / /ijə /

Description: The first element in the articulation of /iə / is articulated with the part of the tongue between the front and the centre raised to a height a little above the half-close position. The tongue is slightly tense and the rims make contact with the upper molars. From there it glides in the direction of /ə /. Now only the centre of the tongue becomes active and the lips change their shape from spread position to neutrally open position.

The above described diphthong is heard very rarely from the Satara speakers. By using /j/ in between the two elements, the diphthong is made a disyllabic utterance. Instead of using /iə /, they use /ijə /. e.g.

fears /p^hijərs / i.e. /ijə / in place of /iə /.

here /hijə / i.e., /ijə / in place of /iə /.

/uə /

Description: In the articulation of /uə / the part of the tongue between centre and the back is raised to a height a little higher than the half-close position. In the articulation of this element, the lips are fairly rounded and the tongue is a little pulled backward. After this it glides in the direction of /ə / where the centre of the tongue gets active and the shape of the lips changes from fairly rounded to neutrally open position.

This diphthong is invariable in the speech of most of the Satara speakers. If at all any variation is seen, it is very marginal.

/ai/ /aj/

Description: The first element of the diphthong /ai/ is articulated with the part between centre and back of the tongue. It lies in fully open position and then the glide begins in the direction of /i/. Instead of the previous part, now the part between the front and the centre of the tongue gets active and is raised to a height a little higher than the half-close position. The lips change their shape from neutral to slightly spread position and the tongue is a little tense.

Again many people especially many Satara speakers use a slightly different diphthong from that described above. The second element /i/ in /ai/ is replaced by /j/. So the substitute diphthong uttered is /aj/. e.g.

why /w^haj/

prices /praɪsɪs/ etc.

/ɔi/

Description: The first element in /ɔi/ is articulated with the back of the tongue raised to a height between the half-open and the half-close position. To form a glide, instead of the back of the tongue the part between the front and the centre gets

active. The lips change their shape from rounded to spread and the tongue is tense in the articulation of both the elements.

Some speakers replace /ɔi/ by /ai/ but the number of such a speakers is very small. The first element is mispronounced and that makes all the difference.

/au/ /ɑw/

Description: In the articulation of /au/, the part between the centre and the back of the tongue is raised to a height slightly higher than the open position. Most of the times it lies quite flat in the mouth. While glide is being formed the same part of the tongue is raised higher than the half-close position. The lips change their shape from open to the neutral position. The tongue is tense in the articulation of the second element.

The second element is actually articulated with lip-rounding but the Satara speakers often neglect this important aspect and it results in a deviation from R.P. /au/. The second element is pronounced as /w/. Thus it becomes /ɑw/. e.g.

about /abɑwt/

now /nɑw/.

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