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IS INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET A PERFECT ALPHABET

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In the case of written languages, or languages that are used only as spoken languages, the special signs that are not found in the official alphabets need to be used. In the process of publishing ancient texts recorded with different writing systems, the signs in the official alphabets are insufficient. Particularly, there is a need to use special signs in the transcription of phonetic details of speech. Various transcription systems have been developed to meet this need. Among them, the International Phonetic Alphabet, which is developed with the pretention of showing the sounds of all known World languages, is the most widely used system. In spite of all its advantages and prevalence, the International Phonetic Alphabet is also criticized. In this paper, the International Phonetic Alphabet will be briefly introduced and the main criticisms directed to it will be emphasized.

Key words: International Phonetic Alphabet, phonetic alphabet, transcription.

Introduction. In its true nature, human language is a natural verbal system. Writing as a text is a secondary and artificial stage for languages. The writing of languages may be in different ways. In transferring formal languages into writing, extremely simple principles are considered. Using a different sign (letter) for each phoneme in spoken language is the principle that is considered as a pioneering factor. Allocating a separate letter for each sound in the official alphabet of the Turkey Turkish is a good example for this. Aside from some letters that were formed with the influence of the Russian writing tradition, it is possible to claim that the same principle also goes for the official alphabets of some other Turkic written languages like Kirghiz and Kazakh.

Special signs that do not exist in the official alphabets must be used when writing the languages that are only used in spoken form (like dialects) and that do not have written language types or writing the languages like Turkey Turkish that are formal languages. The signs in official alphabets are inadequate in the writing stage of the old texts that are recorded in different writing systems when research is being conducted on them.

In actual fact, the same criteria are not used in writing every oral text. In determining the criterion, the purpose of the prepared text gains importance. If the meaning is to be sought in the text, then, it will suffice to determine the basic phonemes in the language in question, and transfer them into written form, which is called *phonemic transcription* [1, 490]. For example, the speakers of Standard Turkey Turkish discriminate only one single /n/ sound. For this reason, one symbol will suffice to correspond this sound in phonemic transcription.

However, in order to state that the articulation of the /n/ sound in the word *yonga* “chip” is different from the word *nasıl* “how”, it is necessary to use *allophonic/phonetic transcription* ([1, 490]; in other words, specific signs are placed below or above the /n/ sound, or a new sign is used. This example, which is given for Standard Turkey Turkish is also valid for languages that do not have written forms, and of course, for dialects.

What is International Phonetic Alphabet? Several trials have been made by linguists to develop systems to represent sounds in written form in the best way in situations where official alphabets that are used in writing standardized languages do not suffice. One of these is the International Phonetic Alphabet [2].

International Phonetic Alphabet is one of the search for a system that will eliminate hesitations on which sounds the signs represent in published texts and that will bring a consensus among researchers. This Alphabet was developed by *Phonetic Teachers' Association* established in France in 1886; and was given the latest form in 2005. This association was later named as the *International Phonetic Association* [3, 264-269]. In published texts, both the Association and the Alphabet are generally referred to with the abbreviation “IPA”. In the present manuscript, this alphabet is also abbreviated as “IPA”.

The system that was developed with the IPA claimed that it could show all the sounds in all languages; and was prepared in such a quality that may enable the notation of sounds that might be detected later in time. In order to ensure this, the IPA includes many characters and discriminative signs like [ɔ], [ʃ] and [ŋ] which are designed specifically [2].

IPA is a phonetic transcription alphabet whose usage and prestige are at the highest level. Hundreds of studies published served this alphabet. This alphabet is used by various specialists who deal with various notations of speech throughout the world like phoneticians, linguists, dialect teachers, philology teachers, speech scientists, speech and language therapists, teachers of the hearing impaired, language teachers, and spelling system organizers.

The IPA also provides symbols for suprasegmentally information (word boundaries, stress, intonation) and for refining the pronunciation of an utterance (e.g. aspiration).

Since the IPA has the advantage of being known commonly, it is based on the Roman Alphabet; however, it also includes additional letters and symbols from various other sources. These additions were necessary because the types of the sounds in languages were much more than the letters in the Roman Alphabets.

The purpose of the IPA is to provide a separate letter for each sound that may alter the meaning of a word in the same language, in other words to provide a separate letter for each sound that has a “*distinctive feature*”, with the statement in the principles set by the Association in 1888 (The Principles” led the development of the IPA along the history of the Association; and these are listed in the Appendix 1 that is between the 159-160th pages of the Handbook).

In this way, the difference between the first sounds of the words *kâr* [car] ‘profit’ and *kar* [kar] ‘snow’ in Turkish may be shown by using the “c” and “k”. It is the same situation in the last consonants of the words *sol* [sol] ‘opposite of right side’ and *sol* [sol] ‘a note in music’ (Although the alphabet of the Turkey Turkish was prepared with the principle of “a separate letter for each phoneme”, the /c/ and /k/ sound and /t/ and /l/ sounds given in the above example are shown with the same letters. As a matter of fact, the sounds being different phonemes is valid for the loan words coming from foreign origin).

Although the purpose of the IPA is ‘providing a separate letter for each phoneme’, it also enables the notation of allophones. In other words, the unitary principle in preparing the alphabet is set aside sometimes to enable the notation of the phonemic differences that are noticeable within one single phoneme.

This may be done with the diacritics added to the basic units or without diacritic. For example, the sound /v/, which is pronounced with double lips neighboring rounded vowels in the Turkey Turkish may be shown with symbol [β]: in spelling and in phonemic notation /kovuk/, in pronunciation and allophonic notation [koβuk] ‘cove, hollow’. Or, to show some sounds, double symbols may be used. For example, Standard Turkey Turkish /ç/ sound is shown with symbol tʃ in the IPA.

With the help of technological opportunities today, there are many webpages on the Internet to facilitate the understanding of the IPA. For example, the IPA sounds are introduced with plenty of examples on the webpages of P. Meier [4]. The sound recordings on the languages whose sounds are introduced in the manual mentioned above may also be downloaded from the Internet [5]. The IPA fonts that may be used on the computer may be downloaded from the Internet pages of SIL International: <http://software.sil.org/products>.

Is the IPA flawless? Despite all the superiorities, the IPA has some flaws, and it has not found a usage among linguists all over the world without exception.

The IPA, which is used with the highest frequency by international linguistic circles, was criticized by many linguists especially mainly from the USA because it included many complex signs, and it was even rejected. However, it is also reported that it has become accepted although slowly in the USA where it had the lowest usage in the past [6,183].

Among the reasons the linguists in the USA for not using the IPA, it is shown that people do not know how to use it. The real reason is sought in other points. One of the most common reasons is *having put the signs, which are preferred for certain sounds, into usage to create a tradition in a regular and common manner* [7, xii].

It is also a fact that the system which is named as the “American transcription” has become traditionalized in the USA. The American tradition has its own roots that go back as far as translation-text applications that were fed on the studies that were conducted in late 19th Century on local languages in the Northern America by American scientists.

American translation text is based on the proposals released in 1916 for a transcription system that would be used in publishing the grammar and texts of the Indigenous languages of the Americas by a committee that was formed by the *American Anthropology Association*. These proposals presented a transcription system that had the quality of being a response to the principles that were different from those of the IPA [7, xii].

While the IPA sought an alphabet that presented “two letters without diacritic signs” for the sounds that oppose with each other in languages that supported various symbols for “many detailed tones of the sounds”, American scientists sought a “practical” system for their publishing. American transcription was considered practical in that it tried to avoid the formation of special characters that are not usable in fonts to facilitate the publishing of a text.

This system approves a phonetic approach instead of a transcription that prioritizes Phonetic details. This intensifies on the needs of the American scientists specifically rather than being universal; and aims to find a character for the sounds that are found routinely in the Indigenous languages of the Americas rather than having a universal coverage. In addition, the American tradition cares for the “compositional aspect” more than that in the IPA in symbolizing [7, xii].

Conclusion and recommendations.

Although it still has many opponents in international linguistic circles, IPA preserves its prevalence. More important than this, this alphabet does not have any alternatives in terms of international spread and commonness. It seems that in a near future, the IPA will stay without any opponents in terms of being spread in the international field among transcription systems.

It seems inevitable to use the IPA in transcriptions in Turcology because of its properties in terms of international spread and detailed notation of sounds. In this field, it has become clear that the use of the IPA is necessary in terms of facilitating the reading of linguistic research by international linguists, or to facilitate the use of such studies by linguists.

However, many of the criticisms of American linguists against IPA can also be taken in terms of the specific conditions of the field of the Turcology. Furthermore, the IPA has not become widespread among the Turcologists in Europe. When all these conditions are considered, it seems the best reasonable way to create a specific transcription system for Turcology as based on sound scientific foundations and to use this system in our research. By providing the list of IPA translations used in our research as a list, we will ensure that our publications are easily followed in international linguistic circles [8].

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ХАЛЫҚАРАЛЫҚ ФОНЕТИКАЛЫҚ ӘЛІППЕНІҢ ЖЕТІЛДІРІЛУІ

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Мақалада халықаралық фонетикалық әліппенің өзекті мәселелері баяндалады. Жазу тілдері болған жағдайда, ресми әліпбиде табылмаған арнайы белгілерді халықаралық фонетикалық әліппеден пайдалану қажет. Әртүрлі жазу жүйелерімен жазылған ежелгі мәтіндерді жариялау барысында ресми әліпбидегі белгілер жеткіліксіз. Атап айтқанда, сөйлеудің фонетикалық ерекшеліктерін транскрипциялауда арнайы белгілерді қолдану қажет. Бұл қажеттілікті қанағаттандыру үшін әртүрлі транскрипциялық жүйелер жасалады. Олардың ішінде, барлық танымал әлемдік тілдердің дыбыстарын көрсетуде дамыған халықаралық фонетикалық әліппе ең кең таралған жүйе болып табылады.

Түйін сөздер: халықаралық фонетика әліппесі, транскрипция, жазу жүйелері,

РАЗВИТИЕ МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО ФОНЕТИЧЕСКОГО АЛФАВИТА

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В статье рассматриваются актуальные проблемы международного фонетического алфавита. Символы, которые не найдены в официальном алфавите, должны быть в международном фонетическом алфавите. Недостаточно знаков в официальном алфавите при исследовании исторических текстов, написанных в разных системах письменности. В частности, необходимо использовать специальные символы в транскрипции фонетических особенностей речи. Для этого создаются различные системы транскрипции. Среди них наиболее распространенная система – международный фонетический алфавит.

Ключевые слова: международный фонетический алфавит, транскрипция, система письменности.