IPA Symbol Equivalents for Lithuanian and Latvian Monophthongs

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The use of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is guided by some principles, one of which is “when two sounds are very similar and not known to be employed in any language for distinguishing meanings of utterances, they should, as a rule, be represented by the same symbol. Separate symbols or diacritics may, however, be used to distinguish such sounds when necessary” (IPA 1999). Since Lithuanian and Latvian languages belong to the Baltic branch of Indo-European language family, to the group of Eastern Baltic languages, these two languages often are placed next to each other as particularly close languages; phonological systems of vowel phonemes are quite similar in both languages. Though, some experimental studies show that, despite of the common Baltic origin, different IPA symbols for some corresponding (very similar) Lithuanian and Latvian vowels are to be used. Could such very similar vowel phonemes of different languages of the common Baltic origin be so of a different quality? A question may be answered by analysing the spectral characteristics and various distinctive features based on the results of the experimental research of the sounds of the contemporary Baltic languages to choose as accurate symbols (equivalents) of the IPA for all the Lithuanian and Latvian vowel phonemes as possible.

Since IPA (revised to 2015) system is very useful in comparative linguistics, the main aim of this report is to provide and explain the choice of the IPA equivalents for the monophthongs of the contemporary Baltic Standard languages.

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