

THE PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH MINIMAL PAIRS BY GREEK LISTENERS

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This paper describes a reaction time experiment aiming at scaling eleven English vowels according to perceptual difficulty. The hypothesis is that the degree of variation exhibited in the results reflects degrees of inherent perceptual difficulty experienced by native Greek learners of English during aural discrimination of British English minimal pairs. The longer the relative reaction time, the more difficult the discrimination.

Method

One female native English speaker recorded two sets of carrier sentences. Set A ended in minimal pairs which were selected on articulatory criteria and consisted of adjacent gestures, where the possibility of perceptual confusion might arise. Set B consisted of pairs of identical sentences so that all eleven vowels contained in Set A were tested individually.

Results and Conclusion

The rank order of the means represents degree of perceptual difficulty. 'Same' responses take longer than 'different' responses. There is a close correlation between degree of difficulty and error in judgment in the first top timings. 'Same' sounds are processed in a different manner than minimally contrasted sounds.

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