

Re: Why does this vowel change its length?

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"Arnold Zwicky" <zwicky@Turing.Stanford.EDU> wrote in message news:cfu5tc\$a66\$1@news.Stanford.EDU...

> in article <ed2a6a11.0408151953.497a071e@posting.google.com>,

> A Gwilliam <devnull@southernskies.co.uk> wrote:

>

> >I've noticed that, at least for me, the vowel /æ/ is long in some

> >words but short in others. I even have a minimal pair, although

it

> >seems unlikely to me that this offers proof of two separate

phonemes:

>

> >Short: bad[æ] (verbal form), cad, dad, fad, had, pad, rad, tad

>

> >Long: bad (not good), lad, mad, sad

>

> >For what it's worth, "badly", "madly", and "sadly" all have long

> >vowels also, but "laddish" has a short one.

>

> >Do other people make this distinction? And can anyone see any

sort

> >of a pattern here?

>

> i don't recall having seen this particular pattern before, but you

> could see if it's mentioned in the British Isles volume of John

> Wells's *Accents of English*.

Something similar is mentioned, on p288, as a possible feature of some RP and "near-RP".

> what it does remind me of is the split of /æ/ into what Charles

> Ferguson labels /æ/ and /æ:/ (well, his symbols are ash and ash with

a

> macron over it, which I've asciiied here) along the eastern seaboard

> of the u.s., from Boston to Washington. the reference is:

>

> Ferguson, Charles A. 1975. 'Short a' in Philadelphia English.

> M. Estellie Smith (ed.), *Studies in linguistics in honor of George*

sci.lang: Re: Why does this vowel change its length?

- > L. Trager (*The Hague: Mouton*), 259–74.
- >
- > (*this follows up on a 1930 article by trager on this very phenomenon.*)
- >
- > *the phonetic realization of the distinction varies from place to place*
- > *(and time to time and social group to social group), and the sets of*
- > *affected words also vary.*
- >
- > *the core of the affected vocabulary is words with historical /&/*
- > *followed by syllabic-final /m n/ or /f T s/, which have /&:/: this*
- is
- > *essentially the set in which british english has /a:/ rather than*
- /&/.*
- > *the phenomenon is, from a historical point of view, pretty clearly*
- > *contextual lengthening.*

Not all British English, of course. (Speaking as someone from northern England, where we don't have the long vowel in the likes of "bath", "grass" and "chance".)

- > *the interesting stuff is the exceptions to this, and the situation*
- > *before /d/. ferguson reports /&: / in monosyllabic adjectives ending*
- > *in /d/, except for "sad". (i have /&/ in "glad" as well.)*
- >
- > *in any case, the distribution that gwilliam reports is not quite*
- like
- > *any i've seen (though i agree that "bade" has /&/ and "bad" /&: /),*
- but
- > *it's very close to the u.s. eastern seaboard stuff before /d/: /&/*
- is
- > *the default, with /&: / in most monosyllabic adjectives (which are*
- also
- > *adjectives of emotion). ("lad" with a /&: / is the surprise here.*
- > *maybe "vernacular affectively tinged monosyllables" is the class in*
- > *question.)*

The Wells description also focuses on adjectives with following /d/ as the words that get the longer vowel.

I don't have anything like this, although I'm pretty sure my accent qualifies for Wells's "near-RP"; for me all the words in question have a short [a], like the vast majority of words in Wells's TRAP and BATH classes.

Jonathan