PHONETIC PALINDROMES

SUSAN THORPE
Great Missenden, Buckinghamshire, England
thorped@hotmai1.com

Words which are palindromes may, or may not, sound like palindromes. NOON (n u: n), PEEP (p i: p) and KINNIKINNIK (k i n i k i n i k) sound like palindromes. However, most palindromes with more than 4 letters do not sound like palindromes, an exception being the 5-letter MINIM (m i n i m). The palindromically-inconsistent sounds, sometimes subtle, are, nevertheless, real: MADAM (m æ d æ m), LEVEL (l ɛ v ɛ l), TENET (t ɛ n i t), CIVIC (s i v i k), SOLOS (s ə u l ə u z), DEIFIED (d i: i f a i d) and ROTATOR (r ə u t e i t e r).

On the other hand, there exist words which are not palindromes but which sound like palindromes. These are phonetic palindromes. MAIM (m eI m) is a phonetic palindrome.

Most of the phonetic palindromes considered here consist of 3 phonetic symbols of which the 1st and 3rd

1. the same 2 single letters in the word. In this case, the middle phonetic symbol must represent
   at least 2 letters, and these must not be the same letter otherwise the word itself would be a
   palindrome.

   (b) the same 2 groups of letters in the word. In this case, the middle phonetic symbol may
   represent either a single letter or more than one letter. tʃ ʒ: tʃ (church)

2. different letters/letter groups in the word. Again, the middle phonetic symbol may represent
   either a single letter or more than one letter.

The same phonetic structure may represent more than one word, in which case the words are homophones.

Phonetic symbols used:

Long vowels: i: (as in bean) ə: (as in barn) ɔ: (as in born) u: (as in boon) ʒ: (as in burn)
   e: (as in schnee) j u: (as in use)

Short vowels: I (as in pit) E (as in pet) ə (as in pat) A (as in cull) D (as in pot) U (as in put)...

Nasal vowel: ɔ (as in franc) ɔ (as in bōn Fr.) \ ... e (as in bēbē) a (as in mari – Fr.)

Diphthongs: eI (as in ate) aI (as in bite) aU (as in now) ə (as in boar) əU (as in so)
   oI (as in boy) Ι (as in peer)

Triphthongs: aIə (as in fire) əIə (as in royal) əU (as in lower)

Consonants: many are the same as the letters they represent.

Others: ʃ (as in shoe) tʃ (as in chop) ʒ (as in vision) dʒ (as in jive and edge)
   θ (as in thin)

1. FIRST AND THIRD PHONETIC SYMBOLS REPRESENT
   THE SAME LETTER(S)

**LONG VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbols</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>f (fief – land held in return for feudal service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l</td>
<td>l (leal – loyal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>t (teat)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>b (barb)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>d (dard – in Botany, a fruit spur)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m</td>
<td>m (marm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p</td>
<td>p (parp – a honking noise, esp. a car horn)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t</td>
<td>t (tart)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
dʒ ə: dʒ (George)  p ə: p (perp - abbrev. ‘perpendicular’)
t ə: t (tort) (taut) (taught)  k ə: k (kirk - a church)
n ə: n (nawn - the beard of barley) (norn - a Norwegian dialect)
k ə: k (keak - to cackle)  t ə: t (Teut - coll. abbrev. ‘teuton’)
n ə: n (nain - one’s own)  p ə: p (paip - the stone of a cherry)

SHORT VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL

tʃ ə tʃ (chich - an old name for chick-pea)  d ɛ d (dead)
k æ k (cack - to void excrement)  j ʌ j (shush); also j u j (shush)
ʃ æ ʃ (shash - sash window frame)  f ə f (shish - a prolonged hissing sound)
d əd (daud - to knock, beat)  θ ə θ (Thoth - an Egyptian God)

DIPHTHONG CENTRAL SYMBOL

d əd (daid - dead)  d ət (dait - the honey possum)
m əm (maim)  s əs (sais - a horse groom)
t ət (tait - the honey possum)  tət (tight)

d əd (dowd - a dowdy woman)  d əd (doored)

TRIPHTHONG CENTRAL SYMBOL

l əu l (loyal)  r əu r (rower)  s əs (scious - having knowledge)

CONSONANTAL CENTRAL SYMBOL

ɛks l əks (exlex - beyond the law)

LONG VOWEL CENTRAL SYMBOL

l ə: l (Lille)  k ə: k (cark - distress, anxiety)
s ə: s (cease)  v ə: v (varve - layers of clay and silt)
z ə: z (Zees - letters Z in US)

k ə: k (cork) (calk - to rough-shoe) (cauk - chalk) (cawk - a bird cry) (caulk - Nautical: a drop of liquor)
s ə: s (sauce)
p ə: p (pape - the stone of a cherry)

s ə: s (Suess - surname of Hans E. Suess, an Austrian chemist associated with radio-carbon dating)
t ə: t (tote - a look-out hill)

2. FIRST AND THIRD PHONETIC SYMBOLS REPRESENT DIFFERENT LETTERS/LETTER COMBINATIONS

z ə: z (zoos)  d ə: d (dude)

t ə: t (tute - colloquial abbrev. for tutor)
So far, the 1st and 3rd phonetic symbols have represented consonantal sounds. Examples in which the 1st and 3rd symbols represent vocalic sounds are a lot less common:
The word uh-huh is unusual in having the 1st and 3rd phonetic symbols representing the same letter combination: Λ Λ. The 1st and 3rd symbols below represent different letters/letter combinations:

**LONG VOWEL 1ST AND 3RD SYMBOLS**

a: f a: (Afar – a member of a Cushitic-speaking people of Jibuti and NE Ethiopia)
a: v a: (Avar – a member of a Turkic people prominent in SE Europe from the 6th to the 9th c. A.D.
e: p e: (épée)
SHORT VOWELS 1st and 3rd SYMBOLS

i f i (iffy – doubtful)
i k i (icky, ikky – sentimental)
i l l i (illy – in an ill manner)
e n e (ainé – the elder)
i m i (immy – a type of marble used by children)
i t i (itty – little)

NASAL VOWELS 1st and 3rd SYMBOLS

a’ f a’ (enfant – child)

DIPHTHONGS 1st and 3rd SYMBOLS

a i t a i (Eyetie)

o u b o u (oboe)
o u f o u (oafo – slang for a lout or hooligan)
o u s o u (oh-so – extremely)

3. PHONETIC PALINDROMES WITH 5 PHONETIC SYMBOLS

In these examples, it is either the middle phonetic symbol, or the 2nd and 4th symbols, which represent the vowel sounds.

LONG VOWEL MIDDLE SYMBOL

s t a: t s (starts)

DIPHTHONG MIDDLE SYMBOL

s t e i t s (states)
s t e u t s (stoats)

SHORT VOWEL 2nd and 4th SYMBOLS

s 1 l 1 s (cilice – hair cloth)
k 1 l 1 k (kellick – a heavy stone used as a substitute anchor on small vessels)
k 1 n 1 k (quinic – a vegetable acid found in chinchona barks)
m 1 d 1 m (medimn – an ancient Greek measure of capacity, approx. 12 gallons)

k a z a k (casaque – a woman’s jumper) ∫ a b a ∫ (shabash)

In this example, the 1st and 5th phonetic symbols represent the same short vowel sound; the 3rd (middle) symbol represents a different short vowel sound.

ə s ɛ s ə (assessor)