

Doing without [tense/lax] in English

Young-Kook Kwon

(Dongduk Women's University)

Kwon, Young-Kook. 2011. Doing without [tense/lax] in English. *Linguistic Research* 28(3), 605-624. In the phonological account of the vowel system of English, there has been controversy over whether or not the feature pair [tense/lax] is required as a distinctive feature, along with [long/short]. While several phonologists since Chomsky and Halle (1968) have made use of [tenseness] along with [length], others including Lass (1976) and Durand (2005) have either dismissed [tense/lax] as contentless or maintained that it is not required as part of the English vowel inventory. In this paper, we attempt to contribute to the position that [tense/lax] as a distinctive feature can be dispensed with at least in the phonological account of the English vowel system. We will also present an optimality-theoretic account of various surface realizations of English vowels. We will show that all surface vowel patterns of English can be derived without resorting to the feature [tense/lax]; thus some major constraints such as $\mu\mu \leftrightarrow \text{tense}$ and $*V[\text{lax}]\#$ posited by previous studies including Lee (2003) can be eliminated from the English vowel system for the sake of simplicity. (Dongduk Women's University)

Key Words tenseness, length, English, constraints, optimality