
UNIT 5 THE VOWELS OF ENGLISH (R.P.)

Structure

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5.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit we shall introduce you to the symbols for the vowel phonemes of English as used in **The Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary of Current English**. (Third edition) and **The English Pronouncing Dictionary** by Daniel Jones 15th edition. We shall describe the vowels of English in detail and also give details regarding their occurrence in accented and unaccented syllables in words and their distribution in the 3 positions in words - initial, medial and final.

After completing this unit you should be able to

- (i) identify the vowel phonemes of English and describe them using the three-term label.
- (ii) distinguish between one vowel and another.
- (iii) recognise the differences in the distribution of the vowels in words.

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 4 we described and classified the consonants of English according to the classificatory criteria we have set up. We discussed in detail the allophones or phonetic realizations of each consonant phoneme, and the combination possibilities of the consonants in sequences within the syllable. We familiarised ourselves with the syllable, the structure of the syllable and the types of syllables in English. In this unit we shall use the criteria in Unit 2 to describe the vowel phonemes of English (R.P.). In order to describe vowels we need to refer to the cardinal vowels. Vowels are much less tangible as compared to consonants, and are therefore much more difficult to acquire when one is learning a foreign or second language. **Cardinal vowels were arbitrarily selected as a convenient descriptive device. They do not occur in a language.** They are of exactly determined and unvariable quality and are peripheral vowels. The highest point of the tongue for each of them lies on the extreme outside limits of the vowel area. They are auditorily equidistant. There are in all, 8 primary cardinal vowels. In the vowel diagram for the pure vowels of English, we have indicated the eight primary cardinal vowels. It is with reference to these points on the diagram that we have described the vowels of English.

5.2 THE VOWEL PHONEMES OF ENGLISH

5.2.1 The Phonetic Symbols

As we said earlier (in Unit 3) the lack of one-to-one correspondence between spelling and sound in English makes it necessary for us to use phonetic symbols to represent the sounds, each symbol, representing one and only one sound. In English (R.P.) there are 20 vowel phonemes. The symbols for each of these as given in **The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English**, Third edition (revised and updated) and **The English Pronouncing Dictionary** by Daniel Jones 15th edition are given below. Examples of each vowel in the initial, medial and final positions in words is given. If a vowel does not occur in any of these positions there is a blank space to indicate this.

Vowels Monophthongs	Initial	Medial	Final
i:	eat	reed	tea
ɪ	it	pit	pretty
e	end	bend	—
æ	add	glad	—
a:	ask	task	star
ɒ	odd	cot	—
ɔ:	ought	caught	paw
ʊ	—	wool	—
u:	ooze	rude	blue
ʌ	up	scrub	—
ɜ:	earth	learn	stir
ə	about	polite	colour
Diphthongs			
eɪ	aim	grade	stay
aɪ	isle	bright	fly
ɔɪ	oil	spill	toy
əʊ	old	gold	know
aʊ	out	doubt	now
ɪə	ear	beard	dear
eə	air	dared	care
ʊə	—	purify	sure

Of the monophthongs or pure vowels, 7 (/ɪ, e, æ, ɒ, ʊ, ʌ, ə/) are short and 5 (/i:, a:, ɔ:, u:, ɜ:/) are long. All the eight Diphthongs are long vowels.

5.2.1 The Pure Vowels of English

The vowels can be plotted on a vowel diagram with reference to the cardinal vowels. We shall first plot the pure vowels.

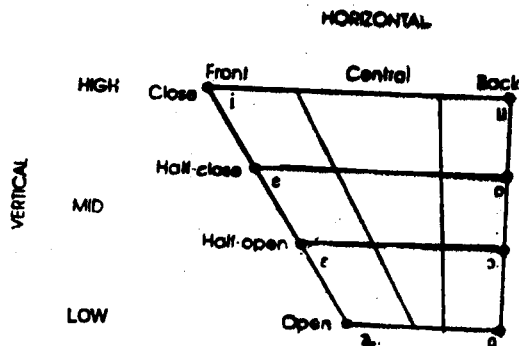


Figure 1: The vowel diagram

Note: The vowels outside the diagram are the primary cardinal vowels.

Since all vowels are voiced in English and there is no nasalised vowel we assume that during the production of English vowels the vocal cords are vibrating and the soft palate is raised to shut off the nasal passage.

We describe vowels in terms of the part of the tongue raised and the relative height to which it is raised in the mouth. The front of the tongue can be fairly high in the mouth, as in the case of the vowel in *bead* or it can be slightly lower in the mouth than for the vowel in *bed* for example, in *bid* and lower for the vowel in *bed* and still lower for the vowel in *bad*. Similarly, the back of the tongue is high in the mouth for the production of the vowel in *cool*; it is slightly lower in the mouth for the vowel in *could* and even lower for the vowels in *taught* and *cot*. It is very low in the mouth for the vowel in *calm*.

Another important feature used to describe vowels is the position of the lips during their production. Sometimes the position of the lips is the only distinguishing feature between two vowels. For example, the two vowels /a:/ as in *calm*, and /ɒ/ as in *hot*, are both vowels during the production of which the back of the tongue is low in the mouth. The only feature that differentiates /a:/ from /ɒ/ is the position of the lips. They are unrounded in /a:/ but rounded in /ɒ/.

We have referred to long and short vowels. When we talk about 'long' vowels what we refer to is the relative length of long vowels. In identical environments long vowels are longer than short vowels. For example, the vowel /i:/ in *feet* is longer than the vowel /ɪ/ in *fit*. These words differ in respect of the vowel alone. The two consonants /f/ and /t/ are common to both. Apart from this, each vowel has different degrees of length depending upon the phonetic environments in which it occurs. For example, generally a vowel is longer when it is followed by a voiced consonant or when it occurs finally in a word than when it is followed by a voiceless consonant. For example, the vowel /a:/ in *side* and *sigh* is longer than in *sight*. The /æ/ in *tag* is longer than the /æ/ in *tack*. A vowel in the final position in words is longer than it is before voiced consonants. For example, the vowel /a:/ is longer in the word *car* than in the word *card*. Thus vowel length is a variant which depends upon the position that it occupies in a word.

5.2.1 A Detailed Description of the Vowels of R.P.

The Monophthongs (R.P.)

Of the 12 monophthongs,

- four are front vowels
- five are back vowels, and
- three are central vowels.

Let us first look at the four front vowels, that is, (/i:/, ɪ, e, æ/)

Front Vowels, /i:/, ɪ, e, æ/.

/i:/ as in *seat*

/ɪ/ as in *sit*

/e/ as in *set*

/æ/ as in *sat*

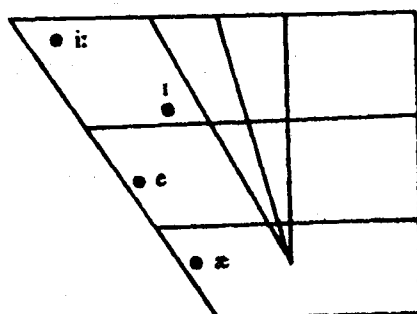


Figure 2: Front vowels

/i:/ as in beat

For the production of this vowel the front of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate. It is very close to the hard palate but not so close as to cause audible friction. The lips are spread, and the tongue is tense. It is a long vowel. It is called a front, close unrounded vowel.

The vowel /i:/ occurs more frequently in accented than in unaccented positions.

Accented positions

bel'ieve
'seizure
ma'chine
po'lice
re'peat
dia'betes

Unaccented positions

decrease
e'conomist
secrete

The use of /i:/ in unaccented positions is however, becoming less frequent. There is a greater tendency to use the vowel /ɪ/, instead in all such positions.

/i:/ occurs in all the three positions in words, i.e. initial, medial and final.

Initial

ease
eel
eve

Medial

seat
belief
breed
people

Final

flea
key
bee
ski

/ɪ/ as in bit

To produce the vowel /ɪ/ the rear part of the front of the tongue is raised, but not as high as it is raised for the production of /i:/. It is raised first above the half-close position. The lips are loosely spread and unlike /i:/ the tongue is lax. It is called a centralised front half-close unrounded vowel. The term centralised front refers to the rear part of the front of the tongue. It is a short vowel.

The vowel /ɪ/ occurs in accented as well as unaccented positions.

Accented

for'bid
'dimple
per'mit
'sister
'interest

Unaccented

e'lect
'surface
'mountain
pre'fer
'wanted

/ɪ/ occurs in all the three positions in words, i.e. initial, medial and final.

Initial

in
ill
if
it
exact

Medial

bin
bill
sniff
guilt
engine

Final

trolley
folly
coffee
city
money

We need to maintain the distinction between /i:/ and /ɪ/. Otherwise, the distinction between a large number of words can be lost. For example,

/ i: /	/ ɪ /	/ i: /	/ ɪ /
eat	it	heel	hill
seat	sit	neat	knit
feet	fit	scene	sin
leave	live	reach	rich
read	rid	green	grin

/ e / as in bed

For the production of the vowel / e / we need to raise the front of the tongue to about half way between half-close and half-open positions. In other words, the tongue is lower in the mouth than it is for the production of / ɪ / and it is not lax as for / ɪ /. The vowel is described as a **front unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open**. It is a short vowel.

Generally, / e / occurs in accented syllables in words. Sometimes, it may occur in unaccented syllables. For example,

Accented	Unaccented
'celebrate	cen'tenary
'definite	'content(n.)
de'velop	'inquest
e'leven	'insect
in'tensive	

/ e / occurs in the initial and medial positions only.

Initial	Medial
elf	shelf
end	mend
any	plenty
error	festival
effort	effect

/ æ / as in cat

We produce the vowel / æ / by raising the front of the tongue to a position much lower than for the production of / e /. The mouth is thus more open than for / e /. The lips are in the neutral position. The vowel is described as a **front unrounded vowel between the half-open and open positions**. It is a short vowel, but when followed by voiced consonants it becomes as long as the 'long' vowels in similar environments. For example, while in *fat* / fæt / it is shorter than the / i: / in *feet* / fi:t /, in *sad* / sæd / it is almost as long as the / i: / in *seed* / si:d /.

/ æ / occurs in both accented and unaccented positions.

Accented	Unaccented
'absent (adj)	can'teen
'camphor	flam'boyant
'calendar	stam'pede
'drastic	
'jaguar	

/ æ / occurs only in the initial and medial positions in words.

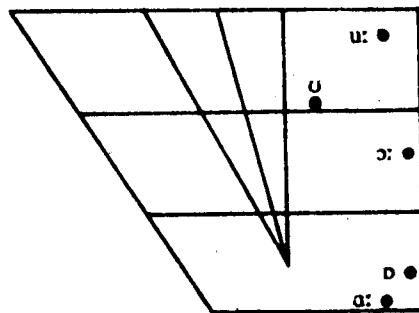
Initial	Medial
affable	classic
angle	elastic
agony	plait
anti	lapse
asterisk	static

It is important for us to maintain the distinction between / e / and / æ /. We can do this by making / æ / much more open than / e /. If we fail to make this distinction than the differences between pairs of words like the following can be lost.

/ e /	/ æ /
bed	bad
fed	fad
said	sad
leg	lag
met	mat
neck	knack
led	lad
gem	jam
merry	marry
ten	tan

Back vowels /a:, ɒ, ɔ:, ʊ, u:/

Now let us describe the five back vowels of English,



- /u:/ as in *foot*
- /ʊ/ as in *full*
- /ɔ:/ as in *caught*
- /ɒ/ as in *cot*
- /ɑ:/ as in *cart*

Figure 3: Back vowels

/ a: / as in arm

For the production of /a:/ the part of the tongue between the centre and the back is low in the mouth i.e. in the fully open position, the jaws are fairly far apart and the lips are neutrally open. It is a long vowel and is called a **back open unrounded vowel**.

/ a: / occurs mostly in accented syllables in words. Its occurrence in unaccented syllables is restricted to words of foreign origin ,ie. 'camouflage', 'espionage', 'garage', 'massage', 'sabotage'.

The vowel /a:/ occurs in all the three positions in words — initial, medial, and final. For example,

Initial	Medial	Final
alms	palms	par
ark	stark	star
art	heart	tar
architect	aghast	debar
article	laugh	far
ask	hearth	car
aunt	clerk	

/ ɒ / as in cot

To produce the vowel / ɒ /, we need to keep the jaws wide open, and the tongue is just a little higher than in the open position. The lips are slightly rounded. **The vowel is thus a back rounded vowel just above the open position.** It is a short vowel.

Like / a: /, the vowel / ɒ / tends to occur in accented syllables.
The vowel / ɒ / occurs in initial and medial positions only. For example,

Initial	Medial
odd	plod
often	soften
olive	collar
opera	crops
oracle	quality
orange	squash
optic	positive

You must have noticed that the main difference between the two vowels / a: / and / ɒ / is the position of the lips. Whereas for / a: / the lips are neutrally open, for / ɒ / the lips are slightly rounded. We have to take care to maintain this difference in the position of the lips in order to distinguish between pairs of words such as the following.

/ a: /	/ ɒ /
cart	cot
cast	cost
last	lost
shark	shock
large	lodge

/ ɔ: / as in caught

For the production of / ɔ: / the back of the tongue is raised to a position higher than for the production of / ɒ /, that is, between the half-open and half-close positions. The lips are considerably more rounded than for / ɒ /. It is thus a **back rounded vowel between half-open and half-close. It is a long vowel.**

The vowel occurs more often in accented positions. Some examples of its occurrence in unaccented positions are-

au'thority, au'tonomous, au'tocracy, or'ganic.

The vowel / ɔ: / occurs in the initial, medial and final positions in words. For example,

Initial	Medial	Final
all	fall	flaw
awkward	crawl	core
order	sword	sore
ought	yawn	straw
oar	board	pour

/ ʊ / as in book

We produce the vowel / ʊ / by raising a part of the tongue nearer to centre than to back and to a level higher than for the production of / ɔ: /, that is, just above the half close position. The lips are closely but loosely rounded, and the tongue is lax. The vowel is thus a **centralised back rounded vowel just above half-close. It is a short vowel.** The vowel occurs in both accented and unaccented positions. For example,

Accented	Unaccented
'woman	'manhood
'sugar	'impudent
'courier	ful'fil
'hoodwink	'careful
'bullock	'circular

/ʊ/ occurs in the word-medial position only. It does not occur before final /ŋ/.

/u:/ as in boot

For the production of the vowel /u:/ we raise the back of the tongue towards the soft palate, that is close to the soft palate but not so close as to cause audible friction. The lips are closely rounded and the tongue is tense. It is called a **back close rounded vowel**. It is a long vowel.

The vowel /u:/ occurs in both accented and unaccented syllables in words. For example,

Accented
'beautiful
'foolish
'frugal
'gruesome
in'trude

Unaccented
'deluge
'value
fru'ition
mu'sician
tu'ition

/u:/ occurs in the initial, medial and final positions in words.

Initial
ooze
oops
ooh

Medial
fruit
brutal
crude
rouge
balloon

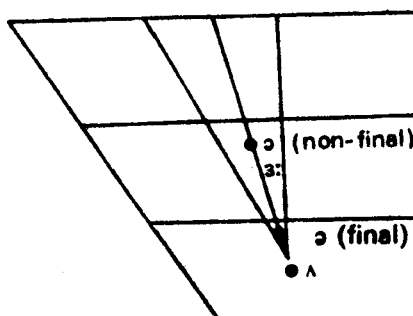
Final
true
flew
clue
through
brew

We must maintain the distinction between /ʊ/ and /u:/, otherwise, the distinction between the following pairs of words for instance, can be lost.

/ʊ/
pull
full
could
wood

/u:/
pool
fool
cooed
suit
wooded

Central Vowels : /ʌ, ɜ:, ə/



/ɜ:/ (non-final) as in *age*
/ɜ:/ as in *shirt*
/ə/ (final) as in *china*
/ʌ/ as in *bus*

Figure 4: Central vowels

/ʌ/ as in but

To produce the vowel /ʌ/ we have to raise the centre of the tongue to a point between the open and half-open position, with a considerable separation of the jaws and the lips neutrally open. Thus the vowel is a **central unrounded vowel** between open

and half-open. It is a short vowel. The vowel occurs mainly in accented syllables, and in some words it occurs in unaccented syllables. For example,

Accented

'butter
e'nough
'flooded
'colour
'study
re'luctant

Unaccented

'catapult
'hiccup
'cucumber
um'brella

This vowel occurs in the initial and medial positions only. It does not occur before /ŋ/

Initial

udder
ugly
ulcer
umpire
oven

Medial

culprit
flourish
govern
rough
slumber

/ɜ: / as in early

For the articulation of the vowel /ɜ: / the centre of the tongue is raised to a position between half-close and half-open. The lips are in the neutral position. /ɜ: / is thus a **central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open**. It is a long vowel.

The vowel /ɜ: / occurs essentially in accented syllables, and sometimes in unaccented syllables. For example,

Accented

'burden
'certain
de'ter
'colonel
'early

Unaccented

'commerce
'foreword
'pervert

The vowel /ɜ: / occurs in the initial, medial and final positions in words. It does not occur before /ŋ /.

Initial

early
earn
earthquake
irk
urban
urgent

Medial

surly
spurn
herbs
shirk
furnish
girdle

Final

spur
prefer
stir
occur
blur

/ə /

The vowel /ə / has two positions, the non-final and the final. For the production of /ə / in the non-final positions in words, the tongue is in the same position as for the production of /ɜ: /, the only difference being that /ə / is a short vowel. The final /ə /, that is, /ə / in the final position in words is produced with the centre of the tongue much lower in the mouth than for non-final /ə /, that is, it is just below the half open position. In the production of /ə / in both positions, the lips are unrounded. Thus /ə / is a **central unrounded short vowel**.

/ə/ is the only vowel that occurs only in unaccented syllables in words. For example,

ac'count
a'chieve
'leisure

particular
'gather
'effort

'zealous
'metre
su'spect

/ə/ occurs in the initial, medial and final positions in words. For example,

Initial
about
above
abroad
appear
arrest
attend

Medial
currant
potato
perhaps
conductor
alcohol
amorous

Final
cellar
texture
writer
litre
thorough
data

The Diphthongs Of English (R.P.)

The diphthongs are vowels in the production of which the tongue moves from one position in the mouth towards another position. In order to indicate this glide (movement) from one position towards another, the phonetic symbols for each diphthong is a combination of the two vowels – one in which the tongue is in position initially and the other towards which the tongue moves. The two symbols represent a single sound and not two sounds.

Of the eight diphthongs,

- (a) in three the tongue glides towards /ɪ/, that is, /eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ/
- (b) in two the tongue glides towards /ʊ/, that is, /aʊ, ɔʊ/, and
- (c) in three the tongue glides towards /ə/, that is, /ɪə, eə, ʊə/.

The diphthongs in which the tongue moves towards the vowels /ɪ/ and /ʊ/ are called **closing diphthongs** and those in which the tongue moves towards /ə/ are called **centering diphthongs**.

Closing diphthongs gliding to /ɪ/

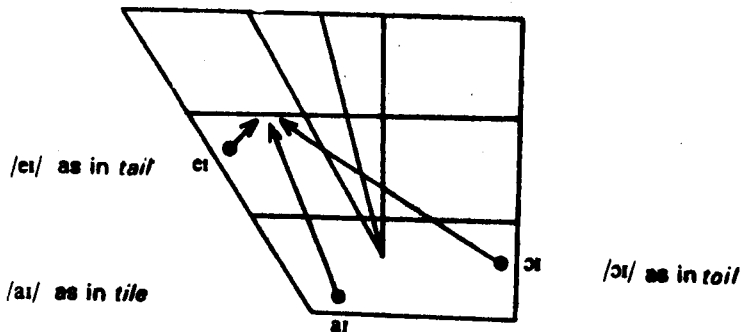


Figure 5: Closing diphthongs gliding to [ɪ]

/eɪ/ as in gate

The glide starts from a point just below the front, half-close position and moves in the direction of /ɪ/. With the movement of the tongue towards /ɪ/, the lower jaw moves upwards closer to the upper jaw than it was for /e/, the first element of the diphthong. The lips are spread.

The vowel occurs in accented and unaccented syllables. For example,

Accented	Unaccented
di'splay	'survey (n)
'neighbour	'hesitate
a'fraid	'earthquake
cur'tail	'mainstay
'radar	'tolerate
'savour	

/ei/ occurs in all three positions, that is, initial, medial and final, in words.

Initial	Medial	Final
age	acquaint	grey
aim	persuade	convey
eight	crave	prey
amiable	blade	weigh
apron	great	whew
apex	freight	sleigh

/aɪ/ as in bite

For the production of /aɪ/ the tongue glides from a point near the front open position, towards the RP-vowel /ɪ/. Along with the glide the lower jaw moves from an open position to an appreciably closer position. The lips, which are in the neutral position at the beginning gradually change to a loosely spread position as for /ɪ/. The vowel occurs in both accented and unaccented positions.

Accented	Unaccented
'either	i'dentity
'icicle	i'dea
de'cline	pri'ority
'trial	'advertise
sa'liva	'qualify
be'nign	

/aɪ/ occurs in all the three positions in words—initial, medial, and final.

Initial	Medial	Final
ailse	design	buy
eyes	sight	fly
ice	twice	high
idle	bridal	dye
ivory	rhyme	lie
identical	primary	sigh

Closing Diphthongs gliding to /ɪ/ : /ei, aɪ, ɔɪ/.

/ɔɪ/ as in boy

For the production of /ɔɪ/, first, the back of the tongue moves towards the position between open and half-open and the lips are open rounded. Then the tongue glides in the direction of the vowel /ɪ/. The lips which are open rounded at first, change to neutral towards the end. The jaw movement is less than for the diphthong /aɪ/.

Generally, the vowel occurs in accented syllables. Its occurrence in unaccented syllables is rare.

Accented
an'noy
em'ploy
disap'point
re'joice
'oyster

Unaccented
employ'ee
'exploit (n.)
'convoy

/ɔɪ / occurs in all the positions in words – initial, medial, and final.

Initial

oil
ointment
oyster

Medial

coil
anoint
hoist
loiter
poison

Final

boy
alloy
enjoy
deploy
toy

We need to maintain the distinction between / aɪ / and / ɔɪ / so that there is no confusion between pairs of words such as the following.

/ aɪ /

buy
bile
file
isle
tie
ply
vice

/ ɔɪ /

boy
boil
foil
oil
toy
ploy
voice

Closing diphthongs gliding to / ʊ / : / əʊ, aʊ / .

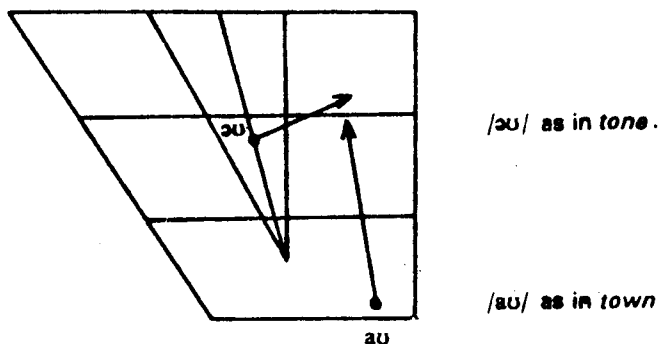


Figure 6: Closing diphthongs gliding to /ʊ/

/ əʊ / as in boat

For the diphthong / əʊ / the glide is from a central position between half-close and half-open, and moves in the direction of / ʊ /. The movement of the jaw is very slight. The lips are neutral at the beginning of the glide and become rounded towards the end.

The vowel occurs in both accented and unaccented syllables. For example,

Accented

be'low
cor'rode
fe'rocious
sup'pose
'shoulder

Unaccented

do'nate
'fellow
'sparrow
to'mato
'pillow

/əʊ/ occurs in all the three positions- initial, medial and final.

Initial	Medial	Final
oak	boast	foe
ogre	mauve	go
oval	smoulder	no
own	cocoa	sew
over	ghost	though

/aʊ/ as in cow

For the production of the diphthong /aʊ/ the tongue glides from a point between the back and the central open positions towards /ʊ/. The jaw movement is as extensive as for the diphthong /aɪ/. The lips are neutral at the beginning of the glide but become rounded towards the end.

The vowel occurs mostly in accented syllables, and seldom in unaccented syllables. For example,

Accented	Unaccented
a'round	'anyhow
'boundary	foun'dation
'groundnut	'eyebrow
sur'round	
'scoundrel	

/aʊ/ occurs in the initial, medial and final positions in these words.

Initial	Medial	Final
oust	bounty	bough
ounce	drown	cow
out	fountain	brow
owl	ground	plough
	thousand	sow

Centering diphthongs of English (R.P.) /ɪə, eə, ʊə/

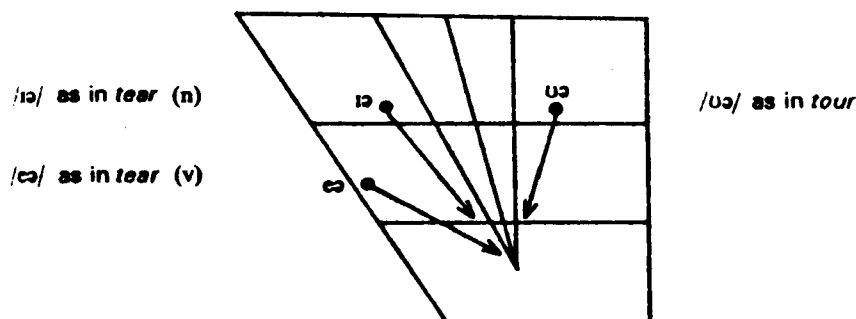


Figure 7: Centering diphthongs gliding to [ə]

/ɪə/ as in here

The glide begins at the position for the RP vowel /ɪ/, that centralised front unrounded vowel just above half-close and moves towards the opener variety of /ə/ when /ɪə/ occurs in the word-final position (as in rear, here), and in the direction of the less open variety of /ə/, when it is not final in the word (as in feared, weird). The lips are neutral throughout the articulation of /ɪə/.

When this vowel occurs in accented syllables in words e.g. *theory, idea*, the first element /ɪ/ is more prominent than the second. The diphthong in these cases is called a **falling diphthong**. In unaccented syllables in words the second element of this diphthong ə becomes more prominent than the first, e.g. the second syllable of *idiom* and of *easier*. The diphthongs in this case is known as a **rising diphthong**. Thus in these two words, the vowel /ɪə/ in the first syllable (which is accented) is a falling diphthong, and in the second (unaccented) it is a rising diphthong. From what we have said above it is clear that /ɪə/ occurs in accented as well as unaccented syllables in words.

Accented

'theorem
'theatre
mu'seum
my'sterious
'xerox

Unaccented

theo'logical
'curious.
'impious
idio'matic
'nuclear

/ɪə/ occurs in all three positions- initial, medial and final, though its occurrence in the initial position is rather restricted.

Initial

ear
earmark
erie
era
Ian

Medial

weary
serious
beard
fierce
zero

Final

deer
near
severe
idea
cheer

/eə/ as in rare

For the diphthong /eə/ the glide begins in the front between the half-close and half-open position, closer to the half-open position, and moves in the direction of /ə/. The glide moves in the direction of the opener /ə/ if /eə/ occurs finally as in *bear, rare*, and in the direction of the less open variety of /ə/ if it occurs non-finally as in *scarce, various*. The lips are neutrally open throughout the production of the glide.

/eə/ occurs in accented as well as unaccented positions in words. For example,

Accented

de'clare
re'pair
'various
'daring
hi'llarious
question'naire

Unaccented

'bugbear
'compere
'hardware
'fanfare

/eə/ occurs in the initial, medial, and final positions in words. For example,

Initial

aeroplane
aerodrome
heir
airy

Medial

aquarium
caring
gregarious
scarce

Final

chair
share
their
wear

It is important for us to keep the two vowels /ɪə/ and /eə/ distinct, in order to avoid any confusion between pairs of words such as the following.

/ɪə/

ear
beer

/eə/

air
bear

/ɪə/

here
mere

/eə/

hair
mare

cheer	chair	pier	pear
deer	dare	rear	rare
fear	fair	sheer	share

/ʊə/ as in tour

For / ə / the glide starts from the tongue position for the vowel / ʊ / and moves towards the vowel / ə /, that is, to an opener variety of / ə / if / ʊə / is word-final (sure, cure), and a less open variety of / ə / if it occurs in the medial position. / ʊə / is a falling diphthong if it occurs in the accented position as in injurious, 'curious, and a rising diphthong if it occurs in an unaccented syllable, as in 'influence and in indi'vidual.

/ ʊə / occurs both in accented and unaccented positions.

Accented

- 'furious
- en'dure
- 'rural
- 'truant
- 'tourist

Unaccented

- 'influence
- 'tortuous
- indi'vidual
- 'manual
- 'virtuous

/ ʊə / occurs in the medial and final positions only

Medial

- fluent
- brewries
- superfluous
- jury
- spurious

Final

- cure
- poor
- secure
- sure

5.3 LET US SUM UP

There are 20 vowels in English (R.P.), 12 of which are monophthongs or pure vowels and 8 are diphthongs. All the vowels are oral, that is, there are no nasalised vowels in English (R.P.). Also, all the vowels are voiced. Five of the monophthongs, ie. / i: , a: , ɔ: , u: , ɜ: / and all the diphthongs are long. The monophthongs comprise 4 front vowels, 5 back vowels and 3 rounded, the others are all unrounded. Regarding their distribution in words, / ʊ / occurs only medially, / e, æ, ɒ, ʌ / occur initially and medially, and the rest occur in all three positions. The vowel / ə / is the only one that occurs only in unaccented syllables in words. / i: , e , a: , ɒ , ɔ: , ʌ , ɜ: / generally have a strong tendency to occur in accented syllables in words.

Of the eight diphthongs, three glide towards / i /, that is, / eɪ , aɪ , ɔɪ /, two glide towards / əʊ /, - / aʊ /, and three glide towards / ə / - / ə /, eə, ʊə / . The first two groups are called closing diphthongs (the glide is towards the closer vowels / i / and ʊ / while those in the last group are called centering diphthongs because the glide is towards the central vowel / ə / . When the centering diphthongs occur word-finally, the glide is towards the opener variety of / ə / . If the diphthongs / iə and ʊə / occur in accented syllables, their first element, [i] or [ʊ], is more prominent than the second [ə]. These are called falling diphthongs. In unaccented syllables, their second element [ə] is more prominent than the first. These are called rising diphthongs. The occurrence of / ɔɪ , aʊ , eə / in unaccented syllables is rather restricted. With the exception of / ʊə /, which occurs medially and finally, all the diphthongs occur in all three positions in words – initial, medial and final.

5.4 KEY WORDS

Monophthongs:	Vowels which do not change in quality even when they are made long.
Diphthongs:	Vowel sounds in which there is a glide from one vowel quality to another which the same syllable.
Front vowels:	Vowels produced by raising the front of the tongue.
Back vowels:	Vowels produced by raising the back of the tongue.
Central vowels:	Vowels produced by raising the centre of the tongue.

5.5 EXERCISES

I Give three examples of your own for each of the vowels given below. Make sure you check your answer with the pronunciation of that particular word in the dictionary.

/i: e, æ au, ɪə, ɒ, ʊ, u:, eɪ/

II Describe the vowels in the words given below. For example,
card Vowel: / a: / back, open unrounded vowel.

Feet : Vowel : / i : / front, close unrounded vowel.

boot (b) wool, (c) flood, (d) afraid, (e) though, (f) tutor, (g) prefer, (h) bear, (i) crawl, (j) curious.

III Give two words as examples for each of the following vowels.

- (a) /i:/
- (b) /e/
- (c) /æ/
- (d) /ɒ/
- (e) /ə/
- (f) /aʊ/
- (g) /eɪ/
- (h) /ɔɪ/
- (i) /ʊə/
- (j) /ʌ/

You could check your answers with the transcription of the words in the dictionary.

IV Write down two pairs of words to distinguish between each of the following pairs of vowels.

Example : /e/, /æ/

/e/	/æ/
bet	bat
said	sad

(a) /ɪ/	/e/
(a) /æ/	/a:/

- (b) /ɑ:/ /ɒ/
- (c) /ɑ:/ /ʌ/
- (d) /eɪ/ /aɪ/
- (e) /eɪ/ /ɔɪ/
- (f) /e/ /uə/
- (g) /ʌ/ /ɜ:/
- (h) /eə/ /ɔɪ/
- (i) /e/ /eɪ/

You could use your dictionary to check your answers.

- V Divide the following lists of words into groups according to the vowel each word contains. On the top of each group of words write down the symbol for the vowel the group of words contains: bread, strand, blow, cloud, float, store, food, call, drenched, caught, heart, smooth, snake, break, crown, waist, plough, pear, prove, sieve, sky, stare, carve, plaits, barrage last, surface, balm, baton, right, circle, pretty, ticket, pair, reign. mould, friend, world, cried.

5.6 ANSWERS TO EXERCISES

- II
- (a) vowels : /u:/
description : back close rounded vowel.
 - (b) vowel : /ʊ/
description : centralised back rounded vowel, just above half-close.
 - (c) vowels : /ʌ/
description : a central unrounded vowel between open and half open
 - (d) (i) vowels : /ə/, (ii) vowels : /eɪ/
description : (i) a central unrounded short vowel just below half-close (ii) a glide from a point just below the front half close position towards the vowel /ɪ/
 - (e) vowel /əʊ/
description : a glide from a central position between half-close and half-open, towards the vowel /ʊ/. The lips are neutral at first and then become rounded.
 - (f) (i) vowel / u:/, (ii) vowel /ə/
(i) description : back close rounded vowel
(ii) description : central unrounded short vowel near the half-open position.
 - (g) (i) vowel /ɪ/ (ii) vowel /ɜ:/
(i) description : centralised front half-close unrounded vowels,
(ii) description: a central unrounded long vowel between half-close and half open.
 - (h) vowel /eə/
description : a glide from the front between the half-close and half-open position towards the central vowel /ə/
 - (i) vowel /ɔɪ/
description : a back rounded long vowel between half-open and half-close.
 - (j) vowels : (i) / uə/ (ii) / ɪə /
(i) description : a glide from the centralised back rounded vowel just above half-close towards the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open
(ii) description : a glide from the centralised front unrounded vowel just above half-close towards the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open.

V	/ e /	/ æ /	/ ɔʊ /	/ aʊ /
	bread drenched friend	strand plaits baton	blow float mould	cloud frown plough
	/ ɔ: /	/ u: /	/ a: /	/ eə /
	store call caught	food smooth prove	heart carve last balm barrage	pear stare pair
	/ aɪ /	/ ɜ: /	/ eɪ /	/ ɪ /
	shy right cried	surface circle world	snake break waist reign	sieve pretty ticket