

Unit 8

Vowels (3)

Some differences between English and German vowels and diphthongs

Slides for the session of
Phonetics with Listening Practice (British)
held on
Tuesday 04 June 2024

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English Department
Saarland University

English Phonetics: Unit 8:

/ɪŋ ɡlɪfə 'net ɪks 'ju:n ɪt 'eɪt/

Vowels (3)

['vaʊəʔz 'θri:]

Some differences between English and German vowels and
diphthongs

['sʌm 'dɪf.jənsəz bə'twi:n_ɪŋɡlɪf_ən 'dʒɜ:mən 'vaʊəʔz_ən 'dɪfθəŋz]

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The goals of today's session are:

- 1 To compare and contrast the typical phonetic realizations of the vowel and diphthong phonemes of English and German

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Vowels (3)

Goals

Experiment

English vowels and
diphthongs (schematic)

Differences
German/English

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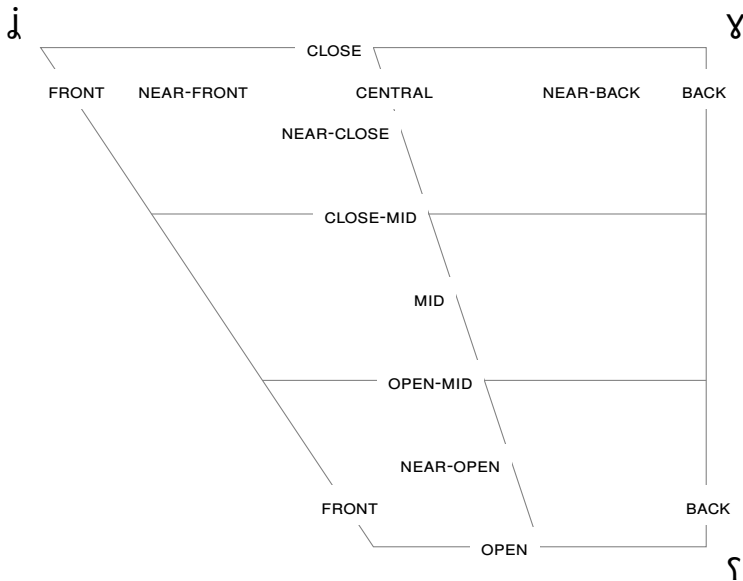
- 1 To compare and contrast the typical phonetic realizations of the vowel and diphthong phonemes of English and German
- 2 To practise some of the English vowels and diphthongs that can be problematic to speakers of various other languages.
- 3 To begin comparing and contrasting the vowels and diphthongs of some of the main dialects of English (such as RP, General American, Australian English, New Zealand English).

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- 3 To begin comparing and contrasting the vowels and diphthongs of some of the main dialects of English (such as RP, General American, Australian English, New Zealand English).
- 4 To encourage students to explore the remaining materials in the folder

www.spence.saar.de/courses/phoneticswithlistening/unit08_20241/

Vowel Quadrilateral



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Vowels (3)

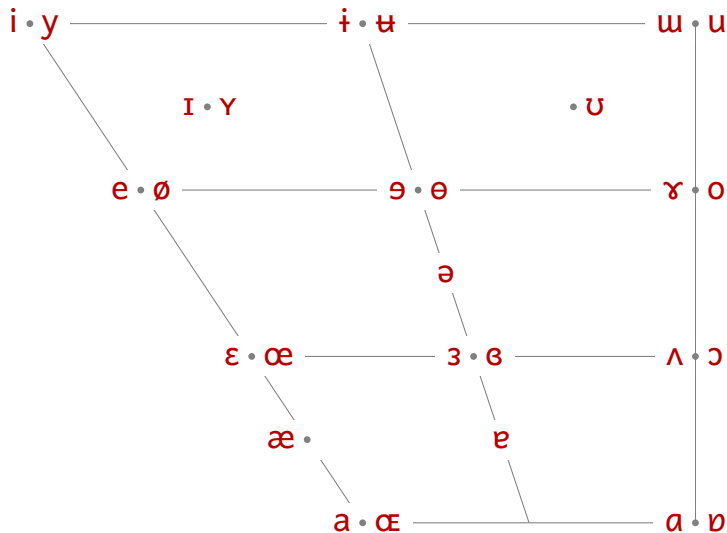
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Cardinal Vowels



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Slides from previous iterations of this course

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English vowels and diphthongs (schematic)

- The following slides constitute a tabular list of all English vowels and diphthongs (dialect: Southern British).

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- The representation is highly schematic, based on a stylized vowel “square”. But even the standard “vowel quadrilateral” is already quite stylized anyway.

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- <http://westonruter.github.io/ipa-chart/keyboard/>

Some terms and definitions (1): ‘stressed’

- A syllable can be either ‘stressed’ or ‘unstressed’, depending on where it occurs within the foot.

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- Example:
/ **Arth**-ur and / **May** have / **left** for / **It**-a-ly
– the beginning of each new foot is shown by a slash; the stressed syllables are printed in boldface type; all other syllables are unstressed.

Some terms and definitions (2): ‘checked’ vs. ‘unchecked’ vowels/Nuclei, ‘open’ vs. ‘closed’ syllables

- A syllable consists of an Onset followed by a Rhyme; the Rhyme consists of a Nucleus followed by a Coda.

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- Example:
 - / **Arth**-ur and / **May** have / **left** for / **It**-a-ly
 - the Nucleus is ‘checked’ in **left** and **It**, ‘unchecked’ in **Arth** and **May** (note that the Onset is empty in **It** and **Arth**);
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 - the syllable is ‘open’ in **May**, ‘closed’ in **Arth**, **left** and **It**.
- These factors play a significant role in determining what vowels or diphthongs can occur in a syllable...

Some terms and definitions (3): ‘reduced’

- If a syllable is ‘unstressed’ in English, it can (and typically does) contain a ‘reduced’ vowel — perhaps shortened in quantity, or simplified in quality, or both.

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- shortened in quantity: ⟨u⟩ [u] (not [u:]) in ⟨rubella⟩ [ru^lbelə] (not [ru:^lbelə]) (N.B.: This occurs in German, too; but the next one does not:)

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- e.g.
[fəʊ¹netɪks fɔ:¹ɪevə] →
[fə¹netɪks fə¹ɪevə]

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English vowels and
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Differences
German/English

Short vowels in stressed or unstressed closed syllables

English			German		
I	ʊ	cf.	I	ʏ	ʊ
e	ʌ		ɛ	œ	ɔ
æ	ɒ			a	

- All six English sounds are distinctively different, i.e. they are phonemes
- /sɪks/, /seks/, /sæks/, /sɒks/, /sʌks/, /sʊks/ are the six different words ⟨six⟩, ⟨sex⟩, ⟨sax⟩, ⟨socks⟩, ⟨sucks⟩, ⟨sooks⟩.
- We'll draw the exact locations of the phonetic realizations of these phonemes on the proper 'vowel quadrilateral' on the whiteboard; and see your handouts from Eckert and Barry (Unit 4) and the Longman Pronunciation Dictionary (Unit 5a / 5b).
- The phoneme / ʌ / varies considerably in its phonetic realization from dialect to dialect. (Why?)
- Which vowel letters can be used to write the phoneme / ʌ / in English?

Reduced short vowel(s) in unstressed open or closed syllables

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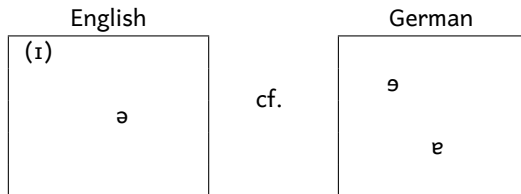
Vowels (3)

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English vowels and
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Differences
German/English



- Australians and Americans tend to use only the “schwa”:
⟨The wicked witch⟩ (‘die böse Hexe’) [ðə 'wɪkəd 'wɪtʃ]
- Speakers of Southern British English would say:
[ðə 'wɪkɪd 'wɪtʃ]
- Note that the German “schwa” is different from the English one.
- Compare English ⟨bitter⟩ ['bɪtə], German ⟨bitte⟩ ['bɪtə],
German ⟨bitter⟩ ['bɪtə].

Unchecked vowel(s) in unstressed open syllables (1)

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Vowels (3)

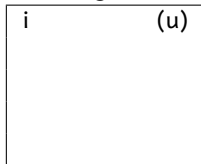
Goals

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English vowels and
diphthongs (schematic)

Differences
German/English

English



Consider the word <city>.

- Some dictionaries give the pronunciation as /'sɪtɪ/
 - This breaks the rule that /ɪ/ (like all other short vowels) can only occur in closed syllables.
 - But it does in fact correspond to the pronunciation used by many upperclass speakers of Southern British English.
- Some highschool English textbooks give the pronunciation as /'sɪti:/
 - This tends to encourage an awkward rhythm in German English-learners.
 - But it does in fact correspond to the pronunciation used in some parts of Britain.

Unchecked vowel in unstressed open syllables (2)

- The modern trend seems to be: to give the pronunciation as /'sɪti/
 - This final vowel is unchecked, and potentially tense, but nevertheless short
 - Eckert & Barry give an elegant solution by saying that the English phoneme /i:/ has two allophones, [i:] as in ⟨beat⟩ and [ɪ] as in ⟨happy⟩

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Differences
German/English

English			German		
i:	u:		i:	y:	u:
		cf.	e:	ø:	o:
	ɜ:		ɛ:		
	ɔ:				a:
	a:				

- There are no front rounded vowels in English.
- The long close vowels in English tend to be slightly diphthongized (closing diphthongs):
- The other long vowels in English tend to alternate with centering diphthongs.

Closing (=‘verengende’) diphthongs

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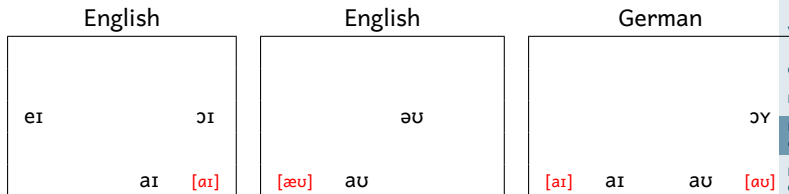
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- IPA symbols are placed roughly at the starting position of the diphthong, i.e. the position from which the gliding movement begins.
- /əʊ/ was originally /ou/
- its original partner /ɛʊ/ has turned into /ju:/
- with the partner absent, there's no 'pressure' on /ou/, so it can 'take up all the space' – becoming /əʊ/ (or even /eʊ/ !)
- Fun fact: <mew>, which for Shakespeare was the noise made by a cat (/mɛʊ/), is now the noise made by a kitten (/mjʊ:/)
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Vowel_Shift

Centering diphthongs

ɪə	ʊə
eə	(ɔə)

- In most varieties of English there is no difference between /ʊə/, /ɔə/ and /ɜ:./.
- Some books write /ɛə/, others /eə/.

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Triphthongs?

eɪə	əʊə	ɔɪə
aiə	auə	

- These tend to lose the middle element: /eɪə/ becomes [e(:)ə], etc.
- /aiə/ and /auə/ go one step further, turning into the monophthongs [a:] and [ɑ:]: <tire> /taɪə/ [t^ha:], <tower> /tauə/ [t^hɑ:]
- Not everyone recognizes the existence of triphthongs; a triphthong may simply be a diphthong followed (in the next syllable) by a schwa.
- But note the difference between disyllabic <prayer> ('Betender') /'preɪ.ə/ and monosyllabic <prayer> ('Gebet') /preə/

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Differences German/English

- Now let's look in more detail at the differences between the vowels and diphthongs of English and those of German

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- Draw several empty vowel quadrilaterals.



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- You might also like to look at the diagrams from the Longman Pronunciation Dictionary:
http://www.spence.saar.de/courses/phoneticswithlistening/unit05_20211/LPD/