Vowels

The Phonetic Description of Vowels

- The Traditional Classification

Vowels of English
- Pure Vowels (Monophthongs)
- Double Vowels (Diphthongs)
- Triphthongs
At the end of the lesson, students are able to:

describe and classify English vowels in terms of phonetic description
How are vowels produced?

- To explain the production of vowels, we can use the following descriptions:
  
  1. **Tongue height**: *(high, mid, & low)*
     - How close the tongue is to the roof of the mouth?
  
  2. **Advancement of the tongue** *(front, central, & back)*
     - How front or back the tongue is?
  
  3. **Lip-rounding**: *(rounded, neutral, unrounded)*
     - What does the shape of the lips look like when making the vowel sound?
Lip positions in vowel articulation

spread

neutral

rounded

(Clark & Yallop, 1993: 66)
English Vowels

- It is common for English vowels to be categorised under two major groups:

  1. Monophthongs (Pure vowels)
  2. Diphthongs (Double vowels)

- Some phoneticians describe another group of vowels known as *triphrthongs*
Monophthongs (pure vowels)

What are these?

• Vowels with a single perceived auditory quality, made by the movement of the tongue towards one position in the mouth

• e.g.: [a, i, u, ə]
• NB: Refer to: [English monophthongs.mht](http://www.btinternet.com/~ted.power/esl0104b.html)
Short Vowels

- There are 7 short vowels:
  - \( \iota \) - pill, ship, bit
  - \( \epsilon \) - bed, head, shed, said
  - \( \ae \) - mat, had, cap
  - \( \AA \) - but, shut, butter
  - \( \v\) - top, cough
  - \( \u \) - book, could
  - \( \vartheta \) - sister, butter
Long Vowels

- There are 5 long vowels:
  - iː - peel, sheep, beat
  - aː - father, hard, mask
  - ɔː - nought, course
  - uː - boot, rude, food
  - ɔː - hurt, shirt, bird
High front vowels

[ iː ] - long vowel ( sheet, heat, feet )
[ ɪ ] - short vowel ( pit, dig, bill )

- distinction between the two is also referred to as tense vs. lax

Mid front vowels

[e]/[ɛ] - short mid front unrounded
- e.g. in bed, shed, head
- **Low front vowels**

  \[\textit{æ}\] - short low front vowel in English
  - e.g. in \textit{mad, hat, lap}

- **Low back vowels**

  \[\textit{ɑː}\] - long low back unrounded
  - in \textit{father, hard, cast}

  \[\textit{ɒ}\] - short low back round
  - in \textit{dog, hot, shock}
- **Mid back vowels**
  - [oː] - low mid back round
  - in *bought, course, short*

- **High back vowels**
  - [uː] - long; in *shoe, rude, mood*
  - [ʊ] - short; in *took, could*

- **Central vowels**
  - [ʌ] - in *cup, lust, hut*
  - [ə] - in *bitter, ago, the*
  - [ɜ] - in *nurse, shirt, herd*
Diphthongs

- Vowels with two vowel qualities; the quality changes within a syllable (NOT simply a sequence of two vowels)

- Its production involves a glide in the movement of the tongue;

- There are 8 diphthongs:
  
  [au, uə, ei, əi, əe, ai, ɪə, ʊə]
  
  - as in: cow, tour, pay, boy, hair, shy, fear, show
Diphthongs ending in [ɪ]

[əɪ] - pay, gate
[ɔɪ] - boy, alloy
[aɪ] - high, bye, die

Closing (front) diphthongs
Diphthongs ending in [ʊ]

[au] – how, loud

[œu] – no, dough, low

Closing (back) diphthongs
Diphthongs ending in [ə]

- [uə] - poor, sure
- [eə] / [ɛə] - hair, pear
- [iə] - here, fear, sheer

Centering diphthongs
Triphthongs

- Vowels which consist of a diphthong & the mid-central vowel [ə]; they are made up of 3 vowels

- There are 4 English triphthongs

  [auə], [iə], [iɛ], [aiə],
  - as in: tower, player, loyal, higher
Triphthongs

[εie],  [εie],  [εic]
How much do you know?

1. What vowel sounds are present in the underlined segments of the following words? (in received pronunciation, RP)
   - hair
   - cupboard
   - torch
   - tournament
   - charge

2. Name the following vowels in terms of the three term classification of vowels.
   - [a]
   - [ae]
   - [u]
   - [u]
   - [ɔ]
   - [iː]

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