

Unit 6



Vowels (2)

The system of English vowels and diphthongs

Print version of the
Phonetics with Listening Practice (British)
presentation given on
13 May 2025

Robert Spence, { English Department | LangSciTech } , Saarland University

6.1

/ˈɪŋ ɡlɪf fəˈnet ɪks ˈjuːn ɪt ˈsɪks/ (phonemic) <English Phonetics: Unit 6> (orthographic) [ˈɪŋ.ɡlɪf
fəˈnɛt.ɪks ˈjuːn.ɪt sɪks] (narrow phonetic: RP)

/ˈvaʊəlz ˈtuː/ /ˈvaʊ əlz ˈtuː/ (phonemic) <Vowels (2)> (orthographic) [ˈvəʊ̯əlz ˈtʰuː] [ˈvəʊ̯.əlz ˈtʰuː]
(narrow phonetic: RP)

/ðə ˈsɪs təm əv ˈɪŋ ɡlɪf ˈvaʊ əlz ən ˈdɪf θəŋz/ (phonemic) <The system of English vowels and
diphthongs> (orthographic) [ðə ˈsɪst.əm əv ˈɪŋ.ɡlɪf ˈvəʊ̯.əlz ən ˈdɪf.θəŋz] (narrow phonetic: RP)

Ist dieses System der diakritischen Zeichen überhaupt wohltemperiert? Will heißen: Ist *Dis* identisch mit
Es? Ist [ɐ] identisch mit [ɛ]?

i.e. is this rocket science, or not??

6.2

1 Goals

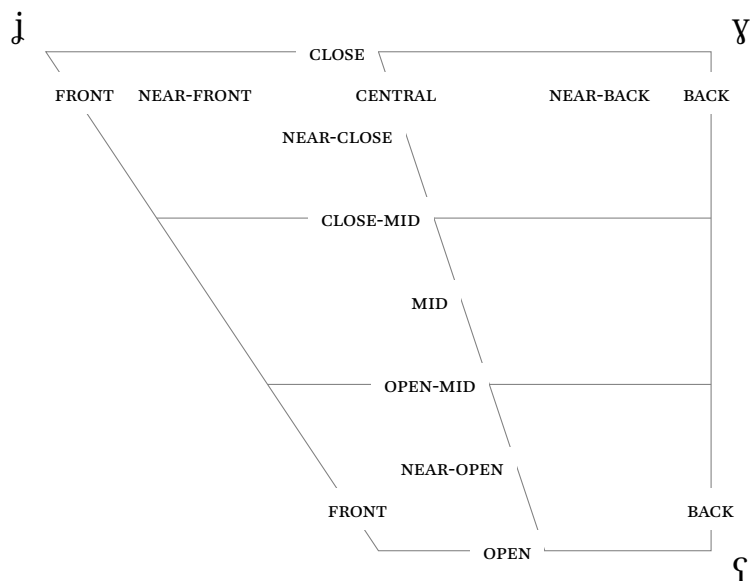
The goals of today's session are:

1. To give an overview of the system of vowel and diphthong phonemes in English
2. To examine the typical phonetic realizations (phones, allophones) of the vowel and diphthong phonemes of English in the Received Pronunciation of British English
3. To begin practising some of the English vowels and diphthongs that can be problematic to speakers of various other languages, especially German

6.3

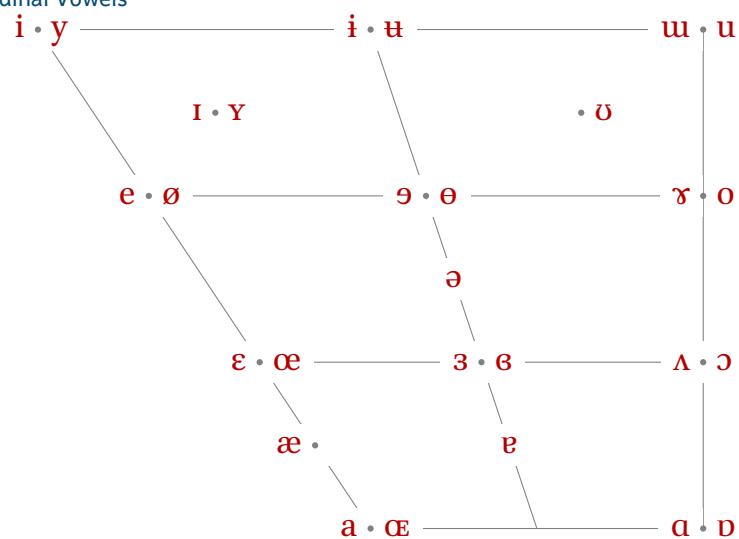
2 The vowel quadrilateral and the IPA cardinal vowels

Vowel Quadrilateral



6.4

Cardinal Vowels



6.5

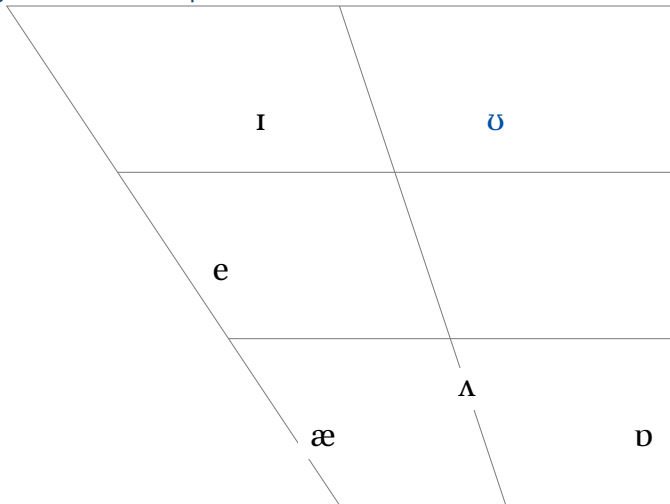
3 English short vowels

English short vowels: lexical sets



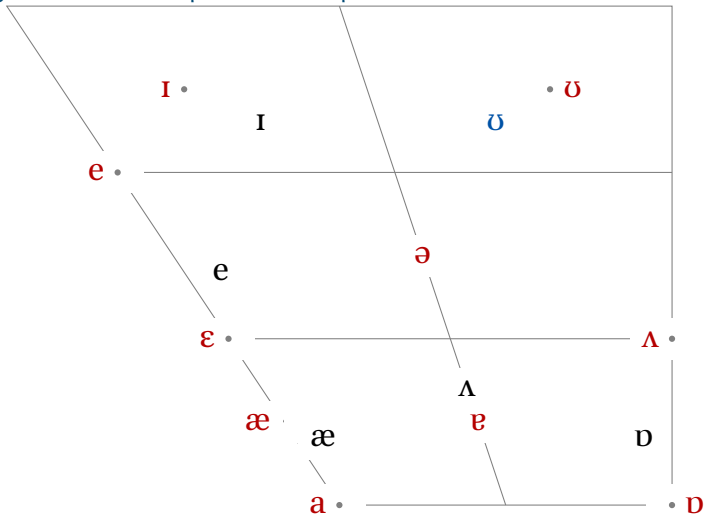
6.6

English short vowels: phonemes



6.7

English short vowels: phonemes compared with cardinal vowels



6.8

English short vowels: examples

pit	pet	pat	pot	putt	put		
/pɪt/	/pet/	/pæt/	/pɒt/	/pʌt/	/pʊt/		
[p ^h ɪt]	[p ^h ɛt]	[p ^h æt]	[p ^h ɒt]	[p ^h et]	[p ^h ʊt]		
bit	bid	wick	wig	nip	nib	hiss	his
[brɪt]	[brɪd]	[wɪk]	[wɪg]	[nɪp]	[nɪb]	[hɪs]	[hɪrɪz]
set	said	debt	dead	etch	edge	cess	says
[sɛt]	[sɛɪd]	[dɛt]	[dɛɪd]	[ɛtʃ]	[ɛɪdʒ]	[sɛs]	[sɛɪz]
fat	fad	back	bag	batch	badge	slap	slab
[fæt]	[fæɪd]	[bæk]	[bæɪg]	[bætʃ]	[bæɪdʒ]	[slæp]	[slæɪb]
cop	cob	knot	nod	lock	log	hops	Hobbes
[kʰɒp]	[kʰɒɪb]	[nɒt]	[nɒɪd]	[lɒk]	[lɒɪg]	[hɒps]	[hɒɪbz]
cup	cub	duck	dug	fuss	fuzz	once	ones
[kʰɛp]	[kʰɛɪb]	[dɛk]	[dɛɪg]	[fes]	[fɛɪz]	[wɛns]	[wɛɪnz]
put	bush	soot	foot	wool	stood	hood	good
[pʰʊt]	[bʊʃ]	[sʊt]	[fʊt]	[wʊɪ]	[stʊɪd]	[hʊɪd]	[gʊɪd]

6.9

English short vowels: more examples

kit	dress	strap	lot	strut	foot
/kɪt/	/dres/	/stræp/	/lɒt/	/strʌt/	/fʊt/
[k ^h ɪt]	[dɪɛs]	[stræp]	[lɒt]	[strʌt]	[fʊt]

it fits him | big business stinks | Tim hit his shins | /ɪt fɪts hɪm/ /bɪɡ 'bɪznɪs stɪŋks/ /*tɪm hɪt hɪz ʃɪnz/

let's get set | lead's heavy | a gem sale isn't the same as a jam sale | /lets get set/ /ledz 'hevi/ /ə dʒem seɪl ɪz.nɪt ðə seɪm əz ə dʒæm seɪl/

the black cat tried to catch a rat | the back hatstand is for caps | /ðə blæk kæt traɪd tu kætf ə ræt/ /ðə bæk 'hætstænd ɪz fə kæps/

I want to wander in the tropics | Don Johnson is on top | /aɪ wɒnt tu 'wɒndəɪ ɪn ðə 'trɒpɪks/ /*dɒn *dʒɒnsən ɪz ɒn tɒp/

cut up the tough stuff | it's lovely honey and butter | /kʌt ʌp ðə tʌf stʌf/ /ɪts 'lʌvli 'hʌni ən 'bʌtə/

look, full of books | Cook took a look | Cook took Brook's rook | /lʊk | fʊl əv bʊks/ /*kʊk tʊk ə lʊk/ /*kʊk tʊk *brʊks rʊk/

6.10

4 English long vowels and diphthongs

English long vowels and diphthongs (1): lexical sets

FLEECE

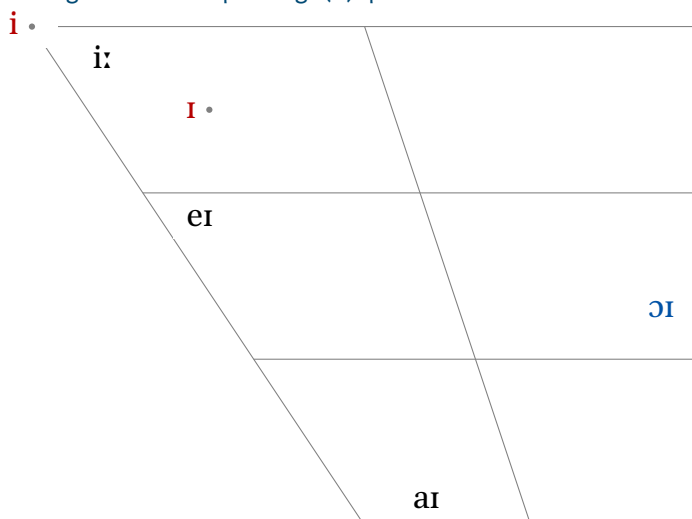
FACE

CHOICE

PRICE

6.11

English long vowels and diphthongs (1): phonemes



6.12

English long vowels and diphthongs (1): examples

fleece	face	price	choice
/fli:s/	/feɪs/	/praɪs/	/tʃɔɪs/
[fliːs]	[feɪs]	[praɪs]	[tʃɔɪs]

fleece	fleas	heat	heed	belief	believe	cease	seize
[fliːs]	[fliːz]	[hi:t]	[hi:d]	[bi.'li:f]	[bi.'li:v]	[si:s]	[si:z]

face	phase	pace	pay	wait	wade	fate	fade
[feɪs]	[feɪz]	[peɪs]	[peɪ]	[weɪt]	[weɪd]	[feɪt]	[feɪd]

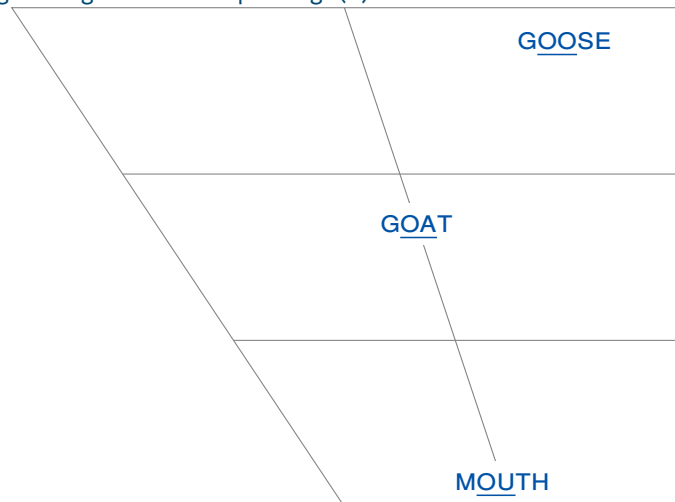
price	prize	ice	eyes	wright	ride	dice	die
[praɪs]	[praɪz]	[aɪs]	[aɪz]	[raɪt]	[raɪd]	[daɪs]	[daɪ]

choice	Choy's	Joyce	joys	quoit	coy	Boyce	boys
[tʃɔɪs]	[tʃɔɪz]	[dʒɔɪs]	[dʒɔɪz]	[kɔɪt]	[kɔɪ]	[bɔɪs]	[bɔɪz]

It's the bee's knees! Peachy keen! Squeaky clean! Lean and mean!
 The rain in Spain stays mainly in the plain. (K)no(w) pain, (k)no(w) gain.
 Try it – you'll like it! "I like Ike!" ("I like Pike!") Mike's on Skype.
 Noisy toys point to boys. (This one's been reported to the gender police.)

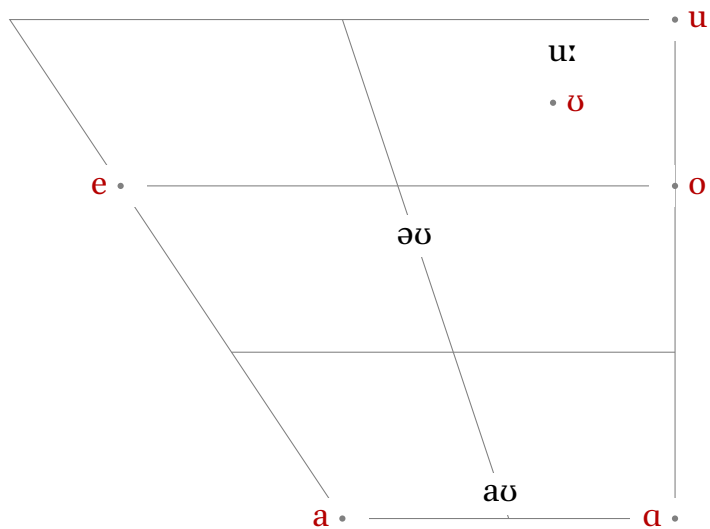
6.13

English long vowels and diphthongs (2): lexical sets



6.14

English long vowels and diphthongs (2): phonemes



6.15

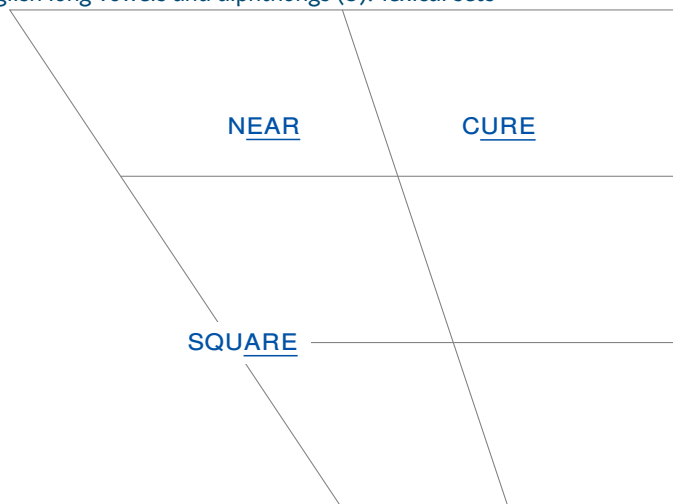
English long vowels and diphthongs (2): examples

goose	goat	mouth			
/gu:z/	/gəʊt/	/maʊθ/			
[gʊːs]	[gəʊt]	[maʊθ]	[mɛʊθ]	[maʊθ]	
moot	mood	use (n.)	use (v.)	proof	prove
[mʊːt]	[mʊːd]	[jʊːs]	[jʊːz]	[pɹʊːf]	[pɹʊːv]
goat	goad	dose	doze	close (n.)	close (v.)
[gəʊt]	[gəʊd]	[dəʊs]	[dəʊz]	[kləʊs]	[kləʊz]
mouth (n.)	mouth (v.)	house (n.)	house (v.)	bout	bough
[maʊθ]	[maʊð]	[haʊs]	[haʊz]	[baʊt]	[baʊ]

Whose shoe's loose? Sue knew. Hugh's tune is due in June.
 I suppose so. It's Flo's go. Oh no, don't go home alone.
 How now, brown cow? Out out, town mouse! Clouds and showers.

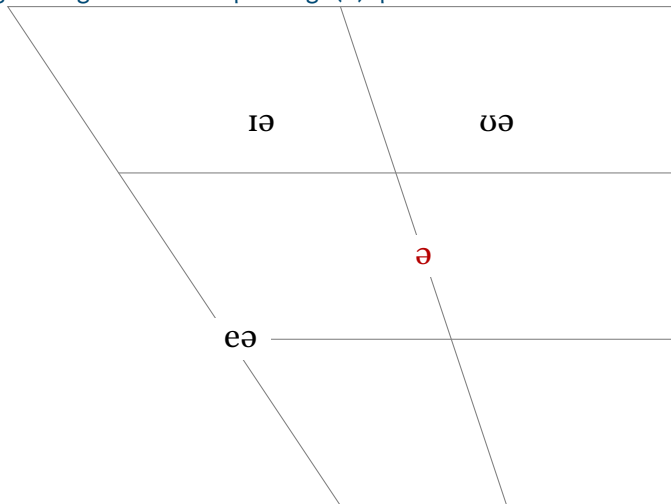
6.16

English long vowels and diphthongs (3): lexical sets



6.17

English long vowels and diphthongs (3): phonemes



6.18

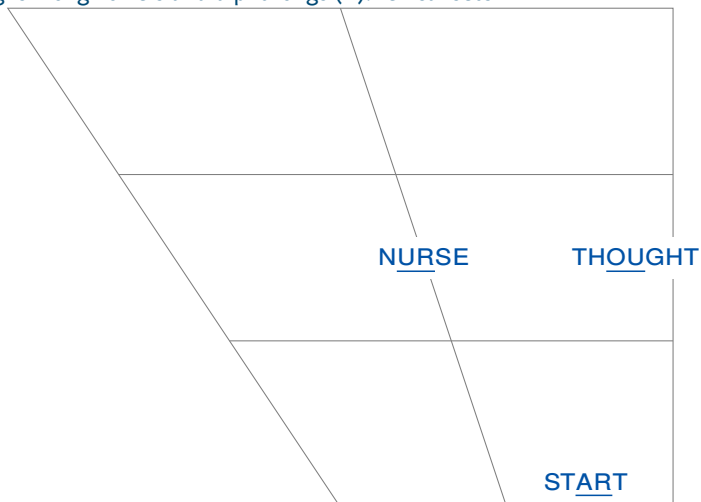
English long vowels and diphthongs (3): examples

near	square	cure				
/nɪə/	/skweɪə/	/kjʊə/				
[nr̩ə]	[skwɛ̃ə]	[kjʊ̃ə]	[kjɔ:]			
pierce	peers	fierce	fear	weird	beard	
[pʰɪəs]	[pʰɪr̩z]	[fɪəs]	[fɪə]	[wɪr̩əd]	[br̩əd]	
scarce	scares	there	their	they're	mayor	prayer
[skeɪs]	[skeɪz]	[ðɛ̃ə]	[ðɛ̃ə]	[ðɛ̃ə]	[mɛ̃ə]	[pɹ̩ɛ̃ə]
your	you're	sure	pure	poor	Europe	
[jʊ̃ə]	[jʊ̃ə]	[ʃʊ̃ə]	[pjʊ̃ə]	[pʰʊ̃ə]	[ˈjʊ̃ɹ̩.əp]	

Here and there, we're aware of Peter Pears paring a pair of pears.
 Here they're all ours; there they're all theirs.
 This is your big "But you're Jean Ure, aren't you?" moment!
 Are you sure (/ʃʊ̃:/ <Shaw>)? No, I'm Shakespeare!

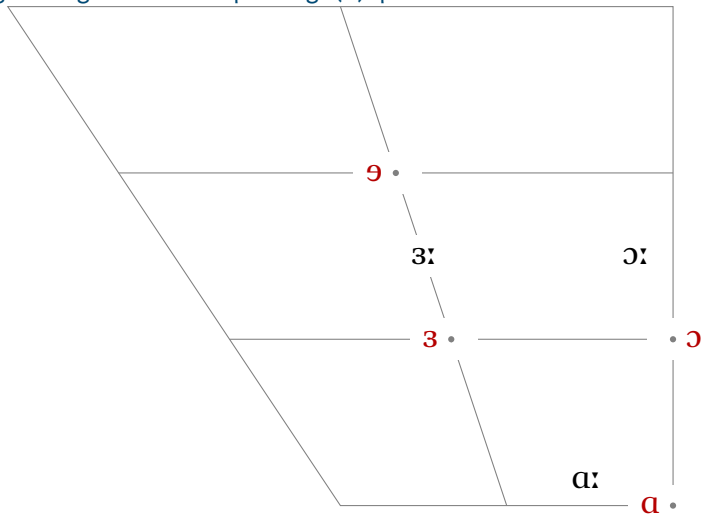
6.19

English long vowels and diphthongs (4): lexical sets



6.20

English long vowels and diphthongs (4): phonemes



6.21

English long vowels and diphthongs (4): examples

start	nurse	thought
/stɑ:t/	/nɜ:s/	/θɔ:t/
[stɑːt]	[nɜːs]	[θɔːt]

part	staff	starve	cars	bar	bra
[pɑ:t]	[stɑ:f]	[stɑ:v]	[kɑ:z]	[bɑ:]	[bɪɑ:]

search	surge	merch	merge	fir	prefer	fur
[sɜ:tʃ]	[sɜ:dʒ]	[mɜ:tʃ]	[mɜ:dʒ]	[fɜ:]	[pɪi.'fɜ:]	[fɜ:]

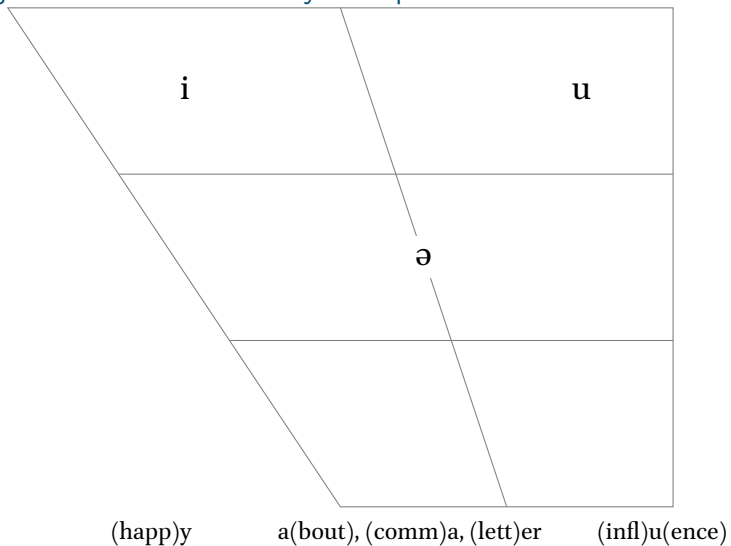
law	war	court	cord	course	cores	sauce	saws
[lɔ:]	[wɔ:]	[kɔ:t]	[kɔ:d]	[kɔ:s]	[kɔ:z]	[sɔ:s]	[sɔ:z]

Ma parks Pa's car | last dance, last chance | a large farmyard
Percy turned, when he heard the girl's words | birds searched the earth for worms
you're four boards short | Lord Gordon caught naught | coarse gorse tore your horse

6.22

5 English reduced vowels in weak syllables

English reduced vowels in weak syllables: phonemes



6.23