

The Phonetics of English Pronunciation

Session 07

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Topics

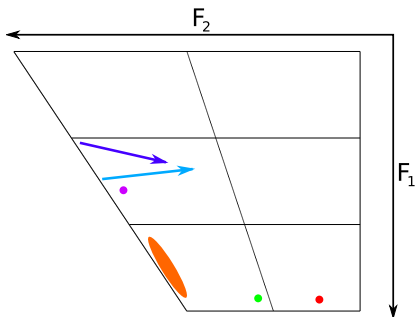
- The vowel /æ/ (as in *bat*, *bag*, *bap* etc.)
- “Diphthongal” English
- Schwa in diphthongs
- Compare the quality of English and German schwa
- Consider how destressing affects vowel quality in English (vowel weakening)
- Look at the consequences of vowel weakening for function words (in English, and compare them with German)
- See how weakening affects consonants as well as vowels
- **Read: Section VI.3, pp. 213-222**

The vowel /æ/

- We know it's a problem vowel because a “strange” IPA symbol is used!
- But it's the sound that's the problem – not the symbol!
- Play with your articulation: [ɛ ɛ̣ æ ɶ a ʌ ʌ]
- **Read: Section III.3, pp. 25-29**
- Listen carefully to the example and imitate!
🔊 *The cat got in through the catflap*

The vowel /æ/ (cont'd)

/æ/	[?]
Conservative RP	[eə]
NE US	[ɛ̠ə]
NZ & SA	[ɛ̠]
(This is what Germans often pronounce)	
SBE & MW US	[æ]
NBE	[a]
Glasgow & Belfast	[ɑː]



Diphthongs

- English is *much more* “diphthongal” than German:
 - /i:/ and /u:/ are slightly diphthongal
 - there is English /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ instead of German /e:/ and /o:/
- The quality of /əʊ/ was discussed last week.
- The quality of /eɪ/ is best described as the /e/ vowel of *bed*, *bet*, *set*, etc. + a short, weak /ɪ/.
- But of course there is *variation* in the onset:
“The *rain* in *Spain* falls *mainly* on the *plain*.”
 - American [eɪ] (and conservative RP!);
 - Southern Standard British: [e̞ɪ];
 - Midlands British [ɛɪ];
 - Estuary English [æɪ];
 - Australian/NZ [aɪ]:

Diphthongs 2

- Both German and British English have ⟨r⟩ diphthongs:

E.g. *vier – fear* American English has
Schur – sure [ɹ] coloured vowels + [ɹ]:
Meer – mare *fear, sure, mare*

- So what's the phonetic difference?

a) The onset quality:

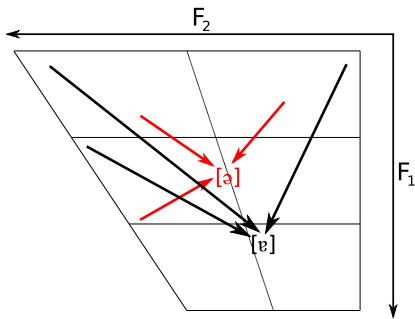
[i] vs. [ɪ]

[u] vs. [ʊ]

[e] vs. [ɛ]

b) The offset quality:

[e] vs. [ə]



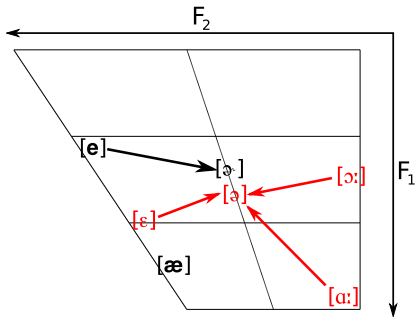
Diphthongs 3: Variation again!

- Take the *air*, *bare*, *care*, *dare*, *fair* diphthongs as an example:
- British English *fair* can be [fɛə] or [fɛ:]
- But *four* can be [fɔ:] or [fɔə] and *far* can be [fɑ:] or [fɑə]

American English has the [ɹ]-coloured schwa in a clear diphthong: [eɹ] / [eɹ]

But the [ɹ]-colouring in US English has obscured the /ɛr/ vs. /eɹr/ vs. /æɹ/ vs. /æɹ/ oppositions in some areas.

So: *merry* = *Mary* = *marry*



Practice Expressions

	British	US
“You can’t drink <i>beer here!</i> ”	[bɪə hɪə]	[bɪər hɪər]
“It’s a <i>sure cure!</i> ”	[ʃʊə kjʊə]	[ʃʊər kjʊər]
“I’ve a <i>spare pair!</i> ”	[spɛə pɛə]	[spɛr pɛr]

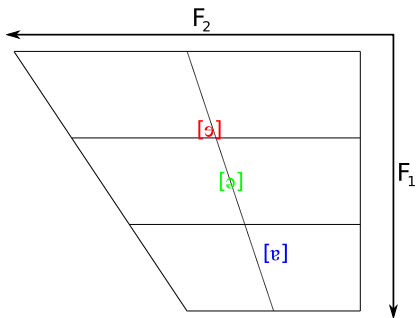
Common (British) variants:

- /ʊə/ → [ɔ:] ... so *sure* ~ *shore*; *poor* ~ *paw*
- /ɛə/ → [ɛ:] is an even more modern development
... so *care*, *pair*, *lair* ~ [k^hɛ: p^hɛ: lɛ:]

Read: Section V.3.6, pp. 168-175

The unstressed vowel [ə]

- We have already covered the difference between English “schwa” [ə], and seen part of the difference with the centering ⟨r⟩ diphthongs:



Listen for the differences:

	German	English
bitte	bitter	bitter
Locke	locker	locker
Klippe	Klipper	clipper
Linde	linder	Linda

Remember: in American, [ə] does not occur in ⟨er⟩ words! It is [ɛr].

Where does [ə] occur?

- One big difference between English and German is the change in quality that affects unstressed vowels:

In English they become schwa!

- We see this in related words where the stress shifts:
philosopher vs. *philosophical*
/fɪ'lɒsəfə/ /fɪlə'sɒfɪkəl/
constable vs. *constabulary*
/'kɒnstəbəl/ /kən'stæbjələri/
- This *weakening of unstressed vowels* also occurs in running speech, where grammatical words (*function words*) are mostly unstressed.

Function words

- Grammatical words are not semantically important. They merely bind the sentence together. Therefore they tend to be unstressed!
- *Unstressed = less time and effort in articulation*
I.e. a reduction in the phonetic distinctiveness
- We don't say:

Can I borrow the car for the rest of the day?
[kæn] [aɪ] [bɔɹəʊ] [ði:] [kɑ:] [fɔ:] [ði:] [rest] [ɒv] [ði:] [deɪ]

We say:

Can I borrow the car for the rest of the day?
[kən] aɪ 'bɔɹə ðə 'kɑ: fə ðə 'rest əv ðə 'deɪ
US 'bɔɹə 'kɑ fə

Function words (cont'd)

- The binding word “par excellence” is, of course *and*
“*time and again*” [ˈtaɪm ən əˈgeɪn]
“*coffee and cakes*” [ˈkɒfiː ən ˈkeɪks]
“*ham and eggs*” [ˈhæm ən ˈegz]
- Other categories are:
 - prepositions:** *to, for, from*
 - articles:** *the, a, an*
 - clause linkers:** *because, that, as, but*
 - comparative structures:** *than, as ... as, so ... as*
 - pronouns:** *he, him, she, her, we, us, you, they, them, his, our, your, their*
 - auxiliary verbs:** *is, are, was, were, has, have, had*
 - modal verbs:** *will, would, shall, should, can, could*

Prepositions

- **to**

*it fell **to** the floor* [ɪt 'fel tə ðə 'flɔ:]
*come **to** tea* ['kʌm tə 'ti:]
*time **to** go home* ['taɪm tə ɡəʊ 'heɪm]

- **for**

*do it **for** my sake* ['du: ɪt fə 'maɪ ,seɪk]
*no time **for** tears* ['nəʊ ,taɪm fə 'tiəz]
*right **for** the job* ['raɪt fə ðə 'dʒɒb]

- **from**

*a present **from** heaven* [ə 'prezənt frəm 'heɪvən]
***from** me to you* [frəm 'mi: tə 'ju:]
*it came **from** nowhere* [ɪt 'keɪm frəm 'nəʊwɛə]

Clause linkers

- **because**

because I say so [bɪkəz aɪ 'seɪ səʊ]

I left *because* I felt ill [aɪ 'left bɪkəz aɪ felt 'ɪl]

- **that**

I knew *that* I could do it [aɪ 'nju: ðæt aɪ kəd 'du: ɪt]

don't say *that* I can't ['dəʊnt seɪ ðæt aɪ 'kɑ:nt]

- **as**

he went out *as* I came in ['hi: went 'aʊt əz 'aɪ keɪm 'ɪn]

he laughed, *as* I expected [hi 'lɑ:ft əz aɪ ɪks'pektɪd]

- **but**

it's naughty *but* nice [ɪts 'nɔ:ti bət 'naɪs]

small *but* expensive ['smɔ:ɪt bət ɪks'pensɪv]

Comparatives

- **as ... as**

as soon as possible [əz 'su:n əz 'pɒsɪbəl]

it's as good as ever [ɪts əz 'gʊd əz 'evə]

- **not so ... as**

not so good as I'd like ['nɒt sə 'gʊd əz aɪd 'laɪk]

it's not so bad as it seems [ɪts 'nɒt sə 'bæd əz ɪt 'si:mz]

- **not so ...**

(how are you?)

not so bad, thanks ['nɒt sə 'bæd 'θæŋks]

Pronouns

- **he, him, his, her** often lose the /h/
is he happy? [ɪz i 'hæpi]
I found him [aɪ 'faʊnd ɪm]
it's his first attempt [ɪts ɪz 'fɜːst ə'tempt]
did he tell her [dɪd i 'tel ə]
- **she** and **we** are just shortened (/i:/ becomes [i])
did she know? [dɪd ʃi 'nəʊ]
we never knew [wi 'nevə 'njuː]
- **you** and **your** can be the same in British English
you did your best [jə 'dɪd jə 'best]

Pronouns (cont'd)

- **them** and **us** become [ðəm] and [əs]
*I saw **them** come* [aɪ 'sɔ: ðəm 'kʌm]
*she told **us** the truth* [ʃi 'tɔʊtɪd əs ðə 'tru:θ]
- **they**, **their**, and **our** can be shortened and “de-diphthongised”
*did **they** know?* ['dɪd ðe 'nəʊ]
*what's **their** name?* ['wɒts ðeɪ 'neɪm]
*it's **our** first holiday* [ɪts ə 'fɜ:st 'hɒlɪdeɪ]

Auxiliary and modal verbs

- the verb **to be** is often reduced even in orthography... and should *always* be reduced in speech, *unless stressed*
 - what **is** the time?* ['wɒts ðə 'taɪm]
 - those **are** mine* ['ðəʊz ə 'maɪn]
 - that **was** stupid* ['ðæt wəz 'stju:pɪd]
 - they **were** very unhappy* [ðei wə 'veri ʌn'hæpi]
- if **have** isn't used as a *full verb* or *stressed* as an auxiliary, it is also reduced
 - what **has** happened?* ['wɒts 'hæpɪnd]
 - what **have** you done?* ['wɒt əv jə 'dʌn]
 - their dream **had** come true* [ðe 'draɪ:m əd klʌm 'tɹu:]

Auxiliary and modal verbs (cont'd)

- the modal verbs **will, would, can, could, shall, should** are also reduced... unless they're stressed

<i>what will you do?</i>	[ˈwɒtɪ jə ˈduː]
<i>what would you do?</i>	[ˈwɒt wəd jə ˈduː]
<i>how can you do that?</i>	[ˈhaʊ kən jə ˈduː ˈðæt]
<i>how could we help?</i>	[ˈhaʊ kəd wi ˈhelp]
<i>we shall do what we can</i>	[wi ʃəl ˈdu wɒt wi ˈkæn]

Auxiliary and modal verbs (cont'd)

- **combinations** of auxiliary and modal verbs are reduced too (unless they're stressed)

*she **could have** done
anything she wanted*

[ʃi **kəd əv** dʌn 'eniθɪŋ ʃi 'wɒntɪd]

*they **have been**
all over the world*

[ðeɪ **v bɪn** 'ɔ:t əʊvə ðə 'wɜ:ld]

*he **will have** left by now*

[hi **əl əv** 'left baɪ 'naʊ]

Now for an exercise!

Transcribe the following text – marking the syllables you would stress when reading, and also marking the contextual variants we have learned about

*When the girls reached home, there was nobody
[wɛn ðə 'gɜ:tlz 'ri:tʃt 'həʊm ðə wəz 'nəʊbədi
there. All the windows were dark, and there was not
'ðɛə 'ɔ:tl ðə 'wɪndəʊz wə 'dɑ:k ən ðə 'wɒznt
a single sign of life.
ə 'sɪŋɡl 'saɪn əv 'laɪf]*