

The Diphthongs

Objectives: This lesson tends to help learners distinguish between vowels (fixed reference points), and gliding vowels which involve a movement from one position to another in the mouth.

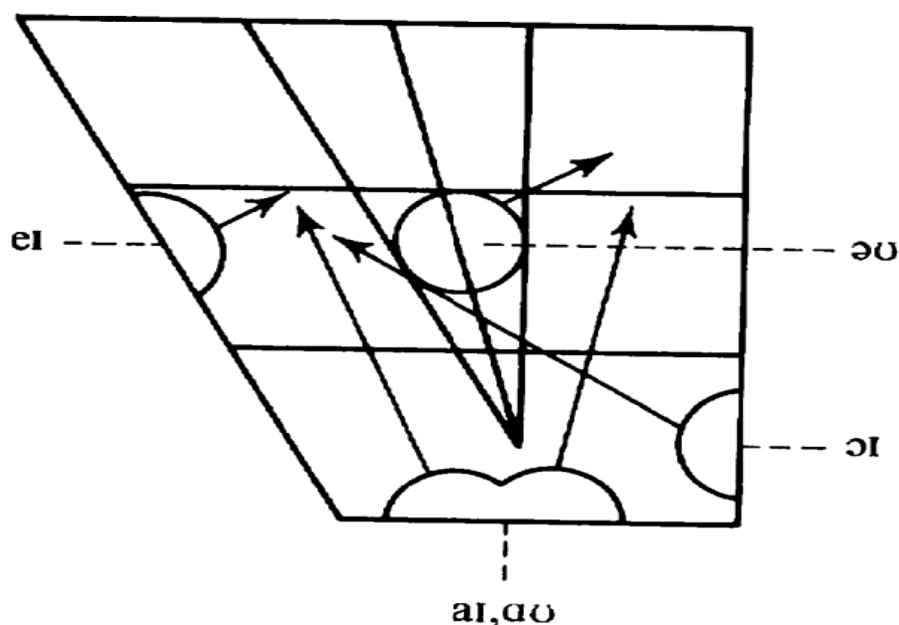
14.1. Definition:

When we talk about pure vowels, we usually define them with reference to the part of the tongue involved in the production of vowels, the distance between the part of the tongue and the roof of the mouth, and the duration of vowel production (whether short or long). At the same time, these are always referred to as fixed points of articulation. For example, we can describe them as close/mid/open/, or as front/center/back vowels. Another point that should be raised concerning the vowel production, which is the detectable 'quality'. If there is some detectable change in quality, we call them gliding vowels. Crystal (2008) notes that "if two auditory elements are involved, the vowel glide is referred to as a diphthong" (p. 517). If three elements are involved, we call the sound as triphthong. However, if no perceivable quality is detected, that is, the quality remains unchanged, the sound is referred to as pure vowel. However, when we talk about diphthongs, we usually mention the beginning and the ends of the glide. In other words, we mention the starting point from which of the tongue moves, and the point to which it has reached. For example, the production of the diphthong / aɪ / involves a glide from back open position to a front close position.

14.2. English Diphthongs

As far as the Received Pronunciation is concerned, we can identify eight diphthongs (Jones, 1956). These include: eɪ aɪ ɔɪ əʊ ɪə eə ʊə

Diphthongs can be classified into two groups: closing, and centering diphthongs. The first group (eɪ aɪ ɔɪ əʊ) involves a glide to the front/back close position (see fig 12). However, the second group (ɪə eə ʊə) involves a glide to the center position (see fig 13).

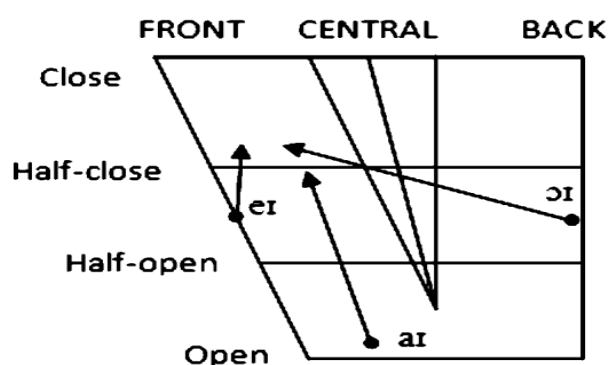


The Closing Diphthongs, Gimson, 1980, p. 310

3. Closing Diphthongs

As it is included in table (15), we can organize the closing diphthongs into two groups:

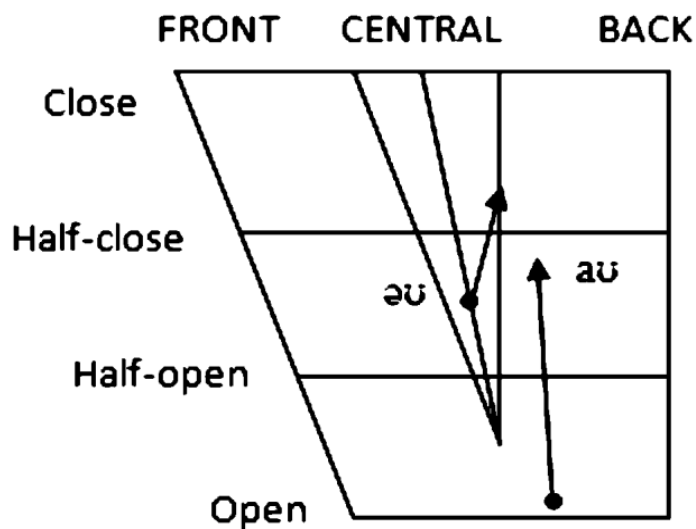
one group includes the diphthongs whose glides moves towards the front close position, and the others, which glides towards the back close position. Let us start with the diphthongs whose glides end in the front close position. These diphthongs include /eɪ/, which involves a glide from front mid to close position; /aɪ/, which involves a glide from the front open to the front close point; and /ɔɪ/ which glide slides mid back to front close position.



Front Closing Diphthongs

We can also speak of two diphthongs whose glides move towards the back close position.

We have /aʊ/, which glide moves from open back to close back point; and /əʊ/, which glide moves from the mid center to the back close position.



Back Closing Diphthongs

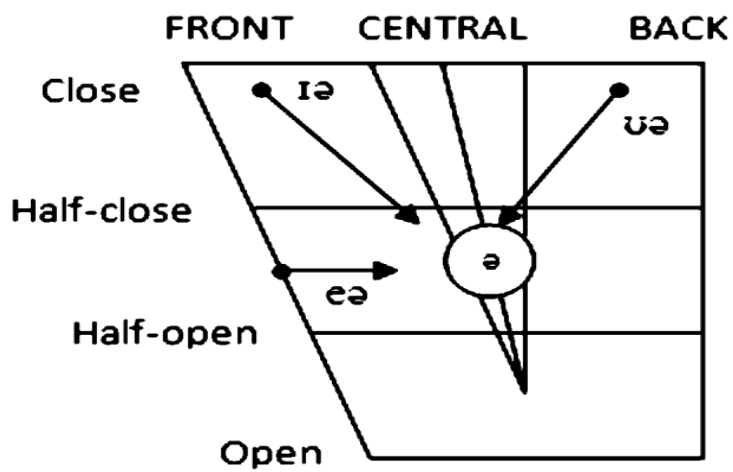
Practice: Examples of Closing Diphthongs

Table 5: Closing Diphthongs

<i>/aɪ/</i>	<i>/eɪ/</i>	<i>/ɔɪ/</i>	<i>/əʊ/</i>	<i>/aʊ/</i>
wait	weɪt	nɔɪzi	fɔɪl	naʊ
rait	reɪt	ə' nɔɪ	dəʊ	ə' laʊ
fart	feɪt	bɔɪz	nəʊ	haʊ
mart	meɪt	səʊ	bɪ'ləʊ	ə' baʊt
lart	leɪt	ə' gəʊ	ɔɪl	kaʊ

4. Centering Diphthongs

As fig () suggests, centering diphthongs include */eə/ /ɪə/ /ʊə/*. The first involves a glide from front mid position to the centre; the second moves from the front close to the centre; and the third slides from back close to the centre.



Centering Diphthongs

4.1. Examples of Centering Diphthongs

Centering Diphthongs

/eə/	/ɪə/	/ʊə/
beə	sfiə	ɪm'pjʊərɪti
meə	driə	tʊə
heə	kliə	pjʊər
ðeə	hiə	ʃʊə
weə	niə	pʊə
sweə	fiə	spʊə