

MODULE 2 ENGLISH VOWELS

- Unit 1 English Monophthongs I
- Unit 2 English Monophthongs II
- Unit 3 English Diphthongs and Triphthongs

UNIT 1 ENGLISH MONOPHTHONGS (PUREVOWELS) I

This unit will, with the aids of explanation, illustrations and diagrams, describe to you the English monophthongs otherwise known as the English pure vowels. This Unit will expose you to the first four pure vowels of English. This will be discussed under the following sub-headings:

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 The Trapezium and the Numbering System
 - 3.2 Pure Vowel Numbers
- 4.0 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE)
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Reading List

1.0 INTRODUCTION

I want to start the description of the first four English vowel sounds. But before I do that, let me discuss some preliminaries that are germane to this unit, which is the identification of the vowel sounds at a glance through the trapezium and the numbers. Also, with the aid of the trapezium, you are able to describe which part of the mouth each of the vowel sounds is produced. This occupies the first section of this unit. After this, we then begin the identification and description of the English pure vowels starting with the first four. Only a summary will be presented as a follow-up to what you learnt in previous courses on the English phonology. This unit will discuss the first four pure vowels sounds.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- explain what a trapezium is and demonstrate its importance to the study of the English vowel system;
- draw and fill the vowel trapezium and identify the first four English vowels by number;
- identify and describe more accurately the first four English pure vowel sounds as indicted above; and
- give copious examples of words where the sounds may occur.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

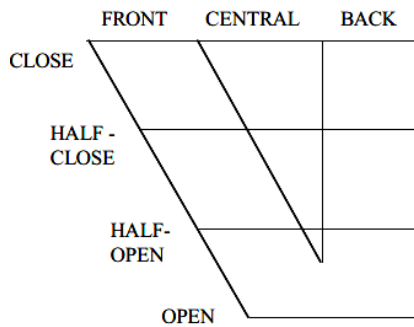
- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 The Trapezium and the Numbering System

A trapezium (trapezoid in American English) is described as a flat shape of four corners that has four straight lines, two of which are of equal length. It is pronounced /trəˈpi:ziəm/. It is used in phonetics to represent the shape of the mouth or the tongue. It is important to us in phonology because it helps us to locate or identify which part of the mouth that a vowel has been produced. This makes our description of the vowels more accurate. It also assists us to remember such locations.

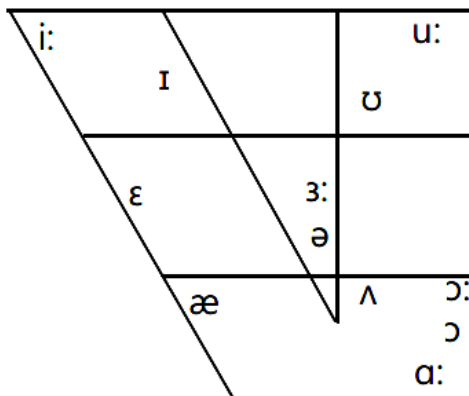
You often notice that we usually describe the vowels sounds with the position they occupy in the mouth during their production and the position of the tongue when such sounds are produced. Thus, when we describe a vowel sound as close, half-close, half-open, open, front, centre or back, we are actually referring to the various positions in the mouth where the described vowel has been produced. Let me illustrate this by presenting to you a labelled trapezium as shown below.



Trapezium Showing Positions of the Mouth

Thus, when a sound is said to be produced at the front of the mouth, such as /f/, we say it a front sound, etc. If a sound is produced when the mouth is closed, such as in the production of /i:/, we often say it is a close vowel sound; and an open vowel, such as /a:/, is said to have been produced if the mouth is fully open in the process of production.

Let me present another trapezium containing the 12 English pure vowels; although, only the first four of them will be considered in this Unit.



Trapezium Showing Positions of the 12 English Pure Vowels

With the aid of these two trapeziums, you can describe vowels that are front or back; close or open. I shall discuss some details in subsequent units of the module.

Let me discuss the numbering system of the English monophthongs. Although not conventional, I have found the numbering system as an added advantage in the description of the English pure vowel sounds. This is done such that a number is assigned to a vowel. It was the system used by Daniel Jones in the early days of phonology, which was abandoned by many followers of the sage. The vowel numbers almost coincide with Well’s vowel measurements of each of the pure vowel sounds in English (See Gimson, 1980: 101). In this case the vowel sounds are numbered from 1-12 such as presented below:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
I:	i	e	æ	a:	ɔ	ɔ:	u	u:	ɜ	ɜ:	ə

The numbering system, if you master it facilitates reference to specific vowels during a class or group discussion. I have found it very valuable in my classes. For instance, when a student pronounces a word such as, cup /kɔp/, which most will call cop /kop/, I can always ask the class: What vowel no did you hear him use there? The class will give a rousing response, “Vowel No. 6”. What vowel should he have used? Yet another rousing response, “Vowel no. 10”, and everybody laughs afterwards. Although this does not contribute to the description of the vowel but it has helped to refer to a particular vowel quickly during a discussion. You will learn more details of actual description of the vowel sounds as the module progresses.

One other important lesson you must know is that there is no rushing through this aspect of the course book. You must take a lot of time, as your course facilitator will tell you, to master the correct pronunciation of the vowel sounds.

3.2 Pure Vowel Numbers 1-4: /i:,ɪ,e, æ/

3.2.1 /i:/and /ɪ/

These two are pure vowel sounds that are used as pairs to construct minimal pairs. They are both front vowels because they are produced towards the front part of the tongue. They are also close because the mouth is somehow in the closing position when the sounds are produced. You may crosscheck this in the trapezium in Unit 1.1. You can also crosscheck by using your mirror to carefully watch your mouth and your tongue while producing them. (I hope you do not forget your mirror, a size of your palm, as advised in Module 1. The lady beside you may lend you her make-up mirror if you are nice to her, while you get yours handy next time).

Meanwhile, let’s present a few words where each of the two sounds can occur. In doing this and for the rest of the other phonemes in the module, I shall largely rely on Gimson (1980: 93-217).

1. /i:/

This is a long, close, front, and high vowel sound. The occurrence of a contiguous colon-like symbol /:/, you should remember, is IPA indication that the vowel in

question is produced with a considerable length of time compared with a vowel without such a symbol. Vowel No. 1 can appear as:

e in: he, these, trapezium
 ee in: bee, weed, canteen
 ea in: plead, bead, reason
 ie in: piece, field, siege
 ei in: seize, receipt receive
 i in: machine, police, prestige

Let me quickly warn that this vowel is often not properly enunciated by the second users of English. This is because the phoneme is not often accompanied by the proper elongation it deserves. The two marks behind it, /:/, as already explained, means that we should spend a little time on the phoneme any time it occurs. This makes the portion where it occurs longer in pronunciation. To achieve the proper rendition, you should try and tap twice in your mind when you want to say the word where the phoneme occurs. Let us try the first word used to exemplify Vowel No. 1 above, “he”, which is pronounced as /hi:/. For our practice, let us break the word into two bits – “he” and “e”. This gives us he e, as if you have two syllables. If you are able to repeat this smartly, several times, you will achieve the elongation that the correct rendition of the vowel demands.

2. /I/

This is a short, close, front, and high counterpart vowel sound as shown in no 1 above that can appear as:

i in: pick, rich, win
 e in: pretty, market, wicked
 a in: village, private
 ie in: ladies cities
 y in: city, symbol, rhythm

The difference in the pronunciation of this and Vowel No. 1 is not only marked by length i.e. long versus short, it is equally marked by the position it occurs in the mouth, which you can see in the trapezium. Unlike Vowel No.1 which is close to the extreme beginning of the mouth on both sides (close and front), Vowel No. 2 is closer to the beginning of the middle of the mouth and the beginning of half opened positions. The implications of this are that, whereas Vowel No. 1 is fully closed and at the front front position of the mouth, Vowel No. 2 is closer to the half closed and mid-mouth positions. This gives the latter vowel a sound that is peculiar to it and one that technically differentiates it from Vowel No. 1.

3.2.2 /e/ and /æ/

We shall move on to the second pair, /E/ and /æ/, numbered 3 and 4.

3 . / e /

This is a short, half-close neutral sound that often appears as:

e in: wet, bed, keg

a in: many, Thames

ea in: lead, dead read

In some textbooks, the phoneme may be written as /e/. To most users of English as a second language (L2), the pronunciation is not troublesome; but to a few, it is. This is because the vowel may be replaced with something similar to Vowel No. 2. You should be careful with it when listen to it being produced by a good model.

4. / æ /

This is a short, half-open sound that often appears as:

a in: bat, man, marry

ai in: plait plaid

L2 users almost always get the vowel wrong as they tend to use only the first part of it /a/ (like in Nigeria) or only the last part of it /e/ (like in Ghana). The best way to approach a good rendition is by starting with the first part and end with the second, i.e. moving from /a/ to /e/ and finally arriving at /æ/; as the bleating of the ewe. Repeated and constant practices will land you on the mid-point between the two parts, which is the desired rendition.

4.0 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAE)

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAE) 1

1. Explain what a trapezium is.
2. Draw and fill the vowel trapezium.
3. Identify the English vowels numbers 1-4.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAE) 2

Identify the vowel sounds in each of these words: leisure, read (Vb+past), best, stick, mad, big, red, fish, rat and deep.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, I have:

- Explained what a trapezium is.
- Demonstrated the importance of trapezium to the study of the English vowel system.
- Drawn and filled the vowel trapezium.
- Explained how you can identify the English pure vowels by numbers 1-4.
- Discussed how you can describe Nos. 1-4 vowel sounds of English.
- Therefore, you should also be able to give copious examples of words where each occurs.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

- a. Of what importance is the study of the trapezium to the study of the English vowel system?
- b. Write two examples each of words where vowels nos. 1-4 can occur; your answers should not be similar to those that are already given in the unit.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

- Gimson, A.C. (1980). *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*. London: ELBS & Edward Arnold.
- O'Connor, J.D. (1980). *Better English Pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roach, Peter. (2000). *English Phonetics and Phonology* Cambridge: Cambridge University.

UNIT 2 ENGLISH MONOPHTHONGS (PURE VOWELS) II

CONTENTS

This is the continuation of my description of the English pure vowel sounds. This unit will, with the aids of explanation, illustrations and diagrams, describe to you the English monophthongs otherwise known as the English pure vowels. This Unit will expose you to Nos. 5-12 vowels of English. This will be discussed under the following sub-headings:

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 Pure Vowel Numbers 5-7: /ɑ:,ɔ:,ɒ: /
 - 3.2 Pure Vowels Numbers 8-12: /ʊ:ʌɜ:/
- 4.0 Conclusion: Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE)
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment
- 7.0 References/Further Reading

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As I pointed out in Unit 3, adequate time must be expended on the mastery of the correct pronunciation of the vowel sounds. It is our miscues, out of inappropriate rendition, that often mark us out as L2 users of English. In learning this, we must smoothing our vowels, do private as well as group practices, several times. If you remember the number of hours a newly born baby has to acquire and master its parents' language, you will imagine how much time you need to practice in order to reach the appreciable levels of intelligibility and acceptability.

Also, in mastering these vowels, you must listen intensely to your facilitator, who is expected to lead the practising exercises, as a good model for classroom learning. You may also avail yourself of the opportunity of practising with the audio cassettes or CDs produced for English pronouncing exercises. The ones easily reachable are those of A.C. Gimson and Peter Roach.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you will be able to:

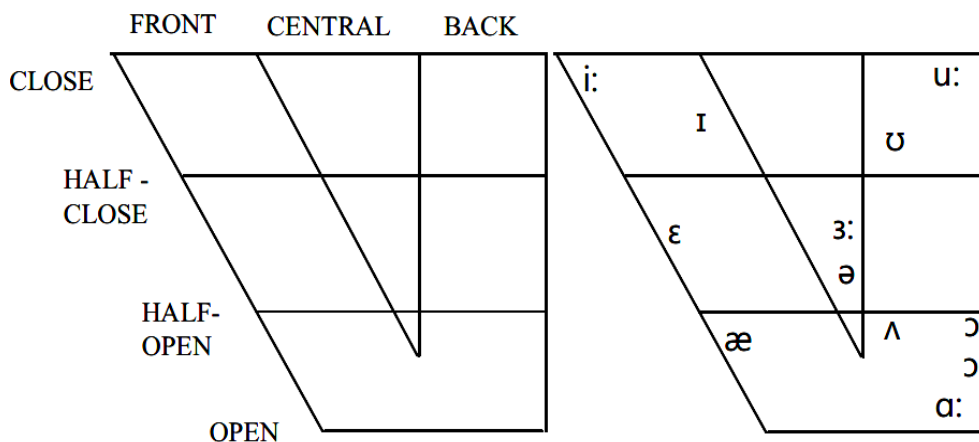
- explain what a trapezium is and demonstrate its importance to the study of the English vowel nos. 5-12;
- draw and fill the vowel trapezium and identify the English vowels by number;
- identify and describe more accurately the Vowels No. 5-12 as indicated above; and
- give copious examples of words where the sounds may occur.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

Before I continue the discussion, let me present, again, another trapezium that contains the mouth position and another containing the 12 English pure vowels.



Trapeziums Showing Positions of the Mouth and the 12 English Pure Vowels

3.1 Vowel Numbers 5-7: /ɑ: ɒ ɔ:/

We now move to the discussion of vowel Nos. 5-7, which are often described as “rounded” because the lips form a round configuration during their articulations. Sometimes the lips form the letter “O” when the vowels are being produced.

3.1.1 /a:/

5. /a:/

This is a long, open, back, and low vowel. You can clearly see the elongation symbol, the colon; which means that, like I explained earlier, necessitates two taps in the mind of production. The mouth is wide open during the production of the sound, and it is produced towards the back of the tongue; and of course the tongue is at its lowest level. The sound appears in orthographical forms as:

a	in: father, tomato, pass
ar	in: far, car, bark,
ear	in: heart, hearth
er	in: clerk, sergeant
al	in: calm, balm, calf
au	in: aunt, laugh

In articulating this sound you must be very careful so as not to confuse it with vowel no. 4 /æ/; although, even, some non-RP native speakers do so, but the RP does not approve of it. That should be our template. Repeated practices, through a good model, is very necessary as the phoneme presents some problems to the L2 users.

3.1.2 /ɒ/and/ɔ:/

This pair of sounds shares identical description with vowel No. 5.

6. /ɒ/

Vowel no.6 is short, back, and low. It appears in words such as:

o	in: lot, sorry, log
a	in: was, want, what
ou	in: cough, trough,
ow	in: knowledge

You may not find it difficult to say because the phoneme shares many properties with our own vowel systems.

7. /ɔ:/

This sound is a long, back and low vowel; it is always paired with vowel no. 6. The vowel appears as:

a	in: war, talk, salt
or	in: lord, horde, born

aw in: paw, jaw, law
ou in: bought, thought,
au in: caught, daughter, fault
ore in: before, more
oo in: floor, door
oar in: oar, board
our in: court, four

You must spend an extra time in its production as the colon sign behind it indicates. It is also one of the difficult phonemes to produce for the L2 users. You may easily get the tricks of its correct rendition if you would double the sound /o/ of “oh” to give you /u:/. Some other words where the sound occurs are: court, fought, ball, fall, short and port.

3.2 Pure Vowel Numbers 8-12: /ʊ u: ʌ ɜ: ə/

3.2.1 /u, u: /

This pair of pure vowel sounds is open and produced at the back of the mouth. The vowels are often used as minimal pairs. The lips take the shape of letter “O” when the sounds are being produced, so they too are described as rounded vowels. But I must tell you that while the latter, /u:/ is not difficult except that you must linger on it, the former, /ʌ/, is pretty difficult. It sounds more as the first part of Vowel No. 7.

8. /u/

Of the pair of sounds, this is a short vowel. It appears as:

u in: put, full, pull
o in: wolf, woman, bosom
oo in look, book, good, foot
ou in: could, should, would

9. /U:/

This is a long sound that appears as:

o in: do, move, lose
oo boost, cool, pool, fool
ou in: group, soup
u in: rude, June
ew, ue, ui, oe in: chew, blue, juice, shoe

Second language users of English often confuse the pair or even completely replace 5 with 6. Watch out so you do not fall a victim.

3.2.2 /ʌ/

10. /ɔ/

This is a short open vowel articulated between the centre and the back of the mouth. It appears as:

u	in: fun, hut, sun
o	in: come, one, son
ou	in: country, young, cough
oo	in: blood, flood
oe	in: does

Many speakers of English outside the native cycle often drop it in place of vowel No. 6, /ɔ/. Are you a victim? This is an opportunity to master it to show a difference as a major in the English language.

3.2.3 /ɜ: ə/

This is the last pair of the 12 English pure vowels. They are both articulated at the centre of the mouth while the lips are half open, and the tongue is neutral i.e. not raised, lowered or retracted. The two, I dare say, are the most difficult to realise for L2 users; this is because they are completely absent in most of the vowel systems of the African languages. Thus, various alternatives are being used to replace them. For the former, some will realise as: /e/ or /v/; such as /bɜ:d/ OR /bəd/ for bird /bɜ:d/. The latter is realised as: /v/ or /ʌ/ as in /dɜ:ktə/ or /dɜktə/ for doctor /dʌktə/.

11. /ɜ:/

This vowel is long and appears as:

ir,	in: bird, first, girl
er, err, ear	in: her, serve, err, earth, heard
ur, urr,	in: turn, church, nurse, purr
or	in: word, world, work
our	in: journey, courtesy

12. / /

This is the last of the pure vowel sounds; the shortest in duration and on many occasions elided by the native speakers of English. This is why it is sometimes referred to as an “indeterminate vowel” or schwa. Orthographically, it appears as almost all the English vowel letters, a few of which are:

i	in: possible,	e	in: gentlemen,	a	in: woman
o	in oblige,	u	in suppose,	ar	in: particular
er	in: father,	or	professor,	ou	in: famous.

These two vowels, /ɜ:ə/, are almost not existent in most nonnative speakers of English as they are often being replaced by some other vowels as already explained; so again, do not fall a victim, master them.

4.0 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAE)

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAE) I

- i. Explain what a trapezium is.
- ii. Draw and fill the vowel trapezium.
- iii. Identify the English vowels by number.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAE) II

- i. Using your mirror, describe what happens to your jaws while producing /i:/, /ɜ:/.
- ii. Describe the lip configuration in the articulation of /ɔ:/ and /ɔ:/.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE (SAE) III

Identify the vowel sounds in each of these words: mad, big, red, and deep.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE (SAE) IV

Using your mirror, describe as detailed as you can /ɜ: ə/.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, I have:

- explained what a trapezium is.
- demonstrated the importance of trapezium to the study of the English vowel system.
- drawn and filled the vowel trapezium.
- explained how you can identify the English pure vowels by number.

- discussed the identification and how you can describe 12 vowel sounds of English.

Therefore, you should also be able to give copious examples of words where each occurs.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT (TMA)

- a. Of what importance is the study of the trapezium to the study of the English vowel system?
- b. Write two examples each of words where vowels nos. 112 can occur; your answers should not be similar to those that are given in the unit.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Gimson, A.C. 1980. *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*. London: ELBS & Edward Arnold.

O'Connor, J.D. (1980). *Better English Pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roach, Peter. (2000). *English Phonetics and Phonology* Cambridge: Cambridge University.

UNIT 3 ENGLISH DIPHTHONGS AND TRIPHTHONGS

CONTENTS

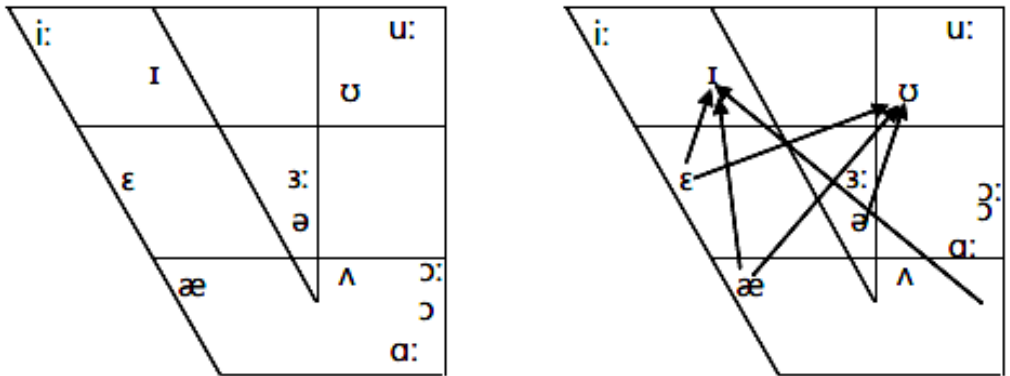
This unit will start our discussion of the diphthongs in the English vowel system. This is done under the sub-headings below.

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Objectives
- 3.0 Main Contents
 - 3.1 The Closing Diphthongs /eɪəʊaɪaʊɔɪ/
 - 3.2 The Centering Diphthongs /ɪəeəʊə/
 - 3.3 The Triphthongs: /aɪəəʊəɪə/
- 4.0 Self-Assessment Exercises (SAE)
- 5.0 Summary
- 6.0 Tutor-Marked Assignment (TMA)
- 7.0 References/Reading List

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This unit will undertake the description of the English diphthongs and triphthongs. For the purpose of continuity, I will continue from the last number after the last pure vowel.

I hope you still remember that a diphthong is a glide from one pure vowel to another pure vowel. If you know that a pure vowel is also called a monophthong then you will know why a combination of two vowels is called a diphthong (“di” for two). There are eight of them, but the first five, traditionally called the closing diphthongs, will be the occupation of the first section of this unit; while the centering diphthongs will occupy the second section of the unit. The last section of the unit will be dedicated to a discussion of the English triphthongs. I have tried to make a sketch of them below and placed them beside the monophthong trapezium so you can see how one pure vowel glides to another to make up the diphthong. I will make references to this in the course of the discussion.



Trapeziums showing the monophthongs and formed diphthongs

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to identify and describe the English diphthongs and the triphthongs.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

3.1 Closing Diphthongs: /eɪəʊaɪaʊɔɪ/

Before I proceed, let me explain the concept of the “closing” feature of this set of diphthongs. These diphthongs are initiated by five pure vowels, namely: / e ə æ ɔ /.

They glide or move towards two hosting pure vowels, namely: /ɪ, ʊ/, which happen to be closing vowels. This is why these two sets of pure vowels have given “birth” to these closing diphthongs.

13. /eɪ/

The diphthong trapezium shows a glide that is initiated around the half-close region of the mouth ends up at a region around the close/back of the mouth. A glide such as this gives rise to the closing diphthong above. It appears as:

a in: late, Kate, day
 ai in: rain, fail, wait
 ei in: eight, weight, rein
 ea in: great, break steak

14. /əʊ/

Like in number 13, this diphthong moves from the half-close position to the close and back region. It appears as:

o in: sow, oh, both
 oa in: soap, road, toast
 oe in: foe, hoe, toe
 ou in: soul, though, shoulder

15. /aɪ/

This diphthong glides from a front open position near vowel No. 4, /æ/, as indicated in the trapezium, to the front close region where we have the hosting pure vowel no. 2, /i/. Some varieties of the diphthong extend till the front back of the mouth. It appears as:

i in: time, right, wide
 y in: dry, why, by
 ie, ye in: lie, die, pie
 igh, in: fight, light, high
 eigh in: height freight
 e, uy, in: eye, buy, guy
 ei, a in: either, eider, aisle

16. /aʊ/

This is a counterpart to No. 15 but its host to which it glides resides at the back close region. It appears as:

ou in: house, sound, plough, bough
 ow in: now, cow, how

17. /ɔɪ/

This diphthong glides from the back open region to the front close region it appears as:

oy in: boy, ploy,
oi in: noise, choice, point
uo in: buoy

3.2 The Centering Diphthongs: /ɪəeəuə/

Look at the pure vowel trapezium, locate the centre of the mouth and note a pair of pure vowels prominently located there. One of the pairs, the schwa, plays host to these four diphthongs; this is the reason they are described as centring diphthongs.

18. /ɪə/

This is a centring diphthong initiated from the front close region. It appears as:

ee, ere, ea, in: deer, dear, here, tear (Nn.)
ei, ie, i in: weird, fierce, fakir
ea, ia, eu, eo in: idea, Ian, museum, theological

19. /eə/

This centring diphthong is initiated at the half-close region. It appears as:

are in: care, rare, share
air in: air, fair, pair
ear in: bear, pear wear, tear (vb.)
ei, ere, a in: their, heir, there, Mary

Among many speakers of English as a second language, diphthongs Nos. 14 and 15 are often being confused such that no. 14 submerges 15. Take time to avoid the confusion.

20. /uə/

This diphthong begins at the close back region of the mouth and goes on to meet the host at the centre of the mouth. It appears as:

oor in: poor, moor
ure in: pure, endure cure, sure
ur in: curious, spurious during
ewer in: sewer
our in: tour, dour gourd

3.3 The Triphthongs: /aɪə, aʊə, ɔɪə/

From “tri”, it should be clear that there are glides not only from one pure vowel to another but also from the second vowel to the third, so three pure vowels are involved. Hence the name: triphthong (compare with diphthong (2), and monophthong (1)). Most of the time, the first of these three sounds receives the stress, and so is pronounced with greater effort while the last in the series receives the least effort. Gimson (1980: 139) describes them as “diphthongs + /ə/”. You will notice that all of them end at the centre region of the mouth. They are also referred to as complex sound formations because of the configurations of the mouth – lips and the jaws – that have to take about three shapes during their production. This forms the content of this unit. I will continue the numbering system from the last number; though the numbers are not so mandatory as is the case with the monophthongs.

21. /aɪə/

This triphthong starts at the open region, goes to the front close region and ends at the middle of the mouth. The tongue too has a complex movement during the articulation as it moves from the low position to the high position and finally to the neutral position. The triphthong may appear as:

ire, (u) yre in: fire, hire, tyre, buyer, tyre

ie(r) in: tier, pliers, crier society

igher in: higher, buyer

ai in: trial, liar

iro, ion in: iron, lion, pavilion

22. /aʊə/

This triphthong also starts at the open region, moves to the back close region and ends at the middle of the mouth. The triphthong appears as:

our in: our, hour, flour

ower in: power, shower, flower

23. /əɪə/

The triphthong begins to move from the front half-close region rising slightly to the front close region then ends at the centre of the mouth. It is another complex triphthong as it involves a multiple configuration of the jaws and the lips. It appears as:

a/e-yer in: player, greyer

24. /ɔɪə/

This triphthong moves from the back close position to the front half-close region and ends at the middle of the oral cavity. It has a complex configuration, too, and appears in the following orthographical forms:

oyer in: employer

In the description of the English vowels, one last bit is to observe the shape of the lips during production because the lips form into different shapes when you produce any sound, whatsoever. You can easily do this by using your mirror, as advised in Module One; you can also observe someone produce them. By doing this, you will notice that the lips are in the neutral position as when you say the word “set”, spread as when you say “seat” or round as when you say “suit”.

Secondly, using the criterion of the distance between the upper and lower parts of the mouth you can now say if a vowel sound is close, half close, and half open or open altogether, as indicated in the trapezium. Also, using the criterion of the position in the mouth, you can state if a vowel is front, central or back.

Lastly, we often describe vowels also by the position of the tongue during production. Thus, it is possible to describe a vowel sound as high as when you realise “heal”; neutral or rest as when you realise “hell”; and low like when you realise “hall”. Apart from learning to pronounce and perceive sounds correctly, our duty as prospective phoneticians and phonologists, is to be able to accurately describe the human speech sounds that we hear or the particular language in which we specialise; for you and I, English. This is what this module has brought to you.

4.0 SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISES (SAE)

- i. Using your mirror, describe the three centring diphthongs.
- ii. Check the dictionary for two more examples of the closing diphthongs just treated.
- iii. Using your mirror, describe the four triphthongs.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have learnt, with illustrations that:

- A diphthong is a glide from one pure vowel sound to the other, which are mainly of two types namely:
 - i. Closing diphthongs and
 - ii. Centering Diphthongs.
- A triphthong is a combination of three (tri-) pure vowel sounds.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

- a. With adequate examples, how have the closing and centring diphthongs earned their names?
- b. Draw a trapezium and locate 2 closing and 2 centring diphthongs and 2 triphthongs in it.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Gimson, A.C. 1980. *An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English*. London: ELBS & Edward Arnold.

O'Connor, J.D. (1980). *Better English pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Roach, Peter. (2000). *English Phonetics and Phonology* Cambridge: Cambridge University.