The Sound Structure of English (McCully)

CHAPTER 8: Website

CHAPTER 8: VOWELS (1): SHORT VOWELS

COMMENT ON IN-CHAPTER EXERCISES

8.1, PAGE 108: . To help you begin this task, consider the following substitution frame, and insert a selection of short vowels into it in such a way that well-formed English lexical monosyllables result.

As the text states, you will recognise this test: it's a minimal pair test. Examples of words which fit the substitution frame, here given in their standard alphabetic forms, are *pit, pat, pot, putt, put* (though for some speakers *put and putt* don't contrast, a matter explored later in the chapter), *pet*. If you claimed that vowels like /i:/ would fit into the given substitution frame (/pi:t/, *peat*) then that wouldn't be quite right: /i:/ is a long vowel, and the exercise asked you to find short ones.

8.1, PAGES 110-111. These exercises are sufficiently discussed in-text.

Their main object is to help you understandf that among other things, the oral cavity is a hollow shape which can be filled with egressive air. By changing the dimensions of that hollow shape, eg. by moving your lips and tongue, then sounds of different resonances can be produced.

8.1, PAGES 114-15. I often demonstrate this exercise in my own classes. There's plenty of discussion to help you in-text.

It makes you feel self-conscious – fine, then, it makes *me* feel self-conscious - but it does indeed help to *sing* the relevant vowels. Start with /i:/ (a lengthened version of the vowel associated with Cardinal 1), and then – still singing on the same note – lower your jaw. You should generate the vowels whose existence is implied in the diagram on page 113: /i - e - ɛ - æ/. You can try the same exercise with the back vowels, beginning with the highest, closest back vowel shape, /u:/ (a lengthened version of the vowel associated with Cardinal 8).

8.1, PAGE 117.

This exercise is discussed in the paragraph of text directly above. There's nothing I can usefully add here.

8.1, PAGES 118-19.

This is once again an exercise which requires you to pronounce at least two, and very possibly three, contrastive short vowel shapes – those found in the words *put, putt* and *pot*. For some speakers (typically those born in the north of England) there will be no

contrast between *put* and *putt*: both words will be pronounced /pʊt/. On the development of the /ʌ/ phoneme which many speakers have in words such as *putt* and *strut*, please read chapter 10.4.

8.2, PAGE 120. Pronounce the following words aloud, paying particular attention to the height and position of the tongue when you pronounce the underscored syllable in each word (you may not have schwa in every instance, but if not, make a note of what short vowel or other sound occurs): *appear; undo; comma; sherbet*.

This exercise is designed to demonstrate that schwa characteristically occurs in unstressed syllables. It would be neat if we could say that was *always* so, but unfortunately, it isn't: for some speakers, schwa and the short vowel /ɪ/ occur in free variation in the final unstressed syllables of words such as *captain* (old-fashioned RP /kæptɪn/). But generally-speaking (ha!), *the presence of schwa is diagnostic of unstressed syllables*.

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CHAPTER 8: SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO END-OF-CHAPTER EXERCISES

Exercise 8.A. Look at the following list of words. In most varieties of English these words will all contain some kind of short vowel, a description for which, and symbolisation of which, will be found in this last chapter. Try to make a *phonemic transcription* of *all* of these words, paying particular attention to the transcription of the vowels. Here's the list:

rough	cut	midge	met
rock	bread	cough	hymn
head	friend	leant	cap

I shall transcribe these in my own variety of spoken English, which is standard northern British and which has many features of RP:

rough	/rʌf/	**cut**	/kʌt/	**midge**	/mɪdʒ/	**met**	/mɛt/
rock	/ɹɒk/	**bread**	/bɹɛd/	**cough**	/kɒf/	**hymn**	/hɪm/
head	/hɛd/	**friend**	/fɹɛnd/	**leant**	/lɛnt/	**cap**	/kap/

On the use of /ɛ/ for RP /e/ and /a/ for RP /æ/ please read further in chapter 10.4.

Exercise 8.B. Study the following list of vowel symbols. For each symbol, write out the full descriptive classification for the vowel represented by the symbol. You will need to say whether a vowel is *close*, *half-close*, *half-open*, *open*, then state whether it's *front, back,* or *central*. I have completed the first part of the exercise for you

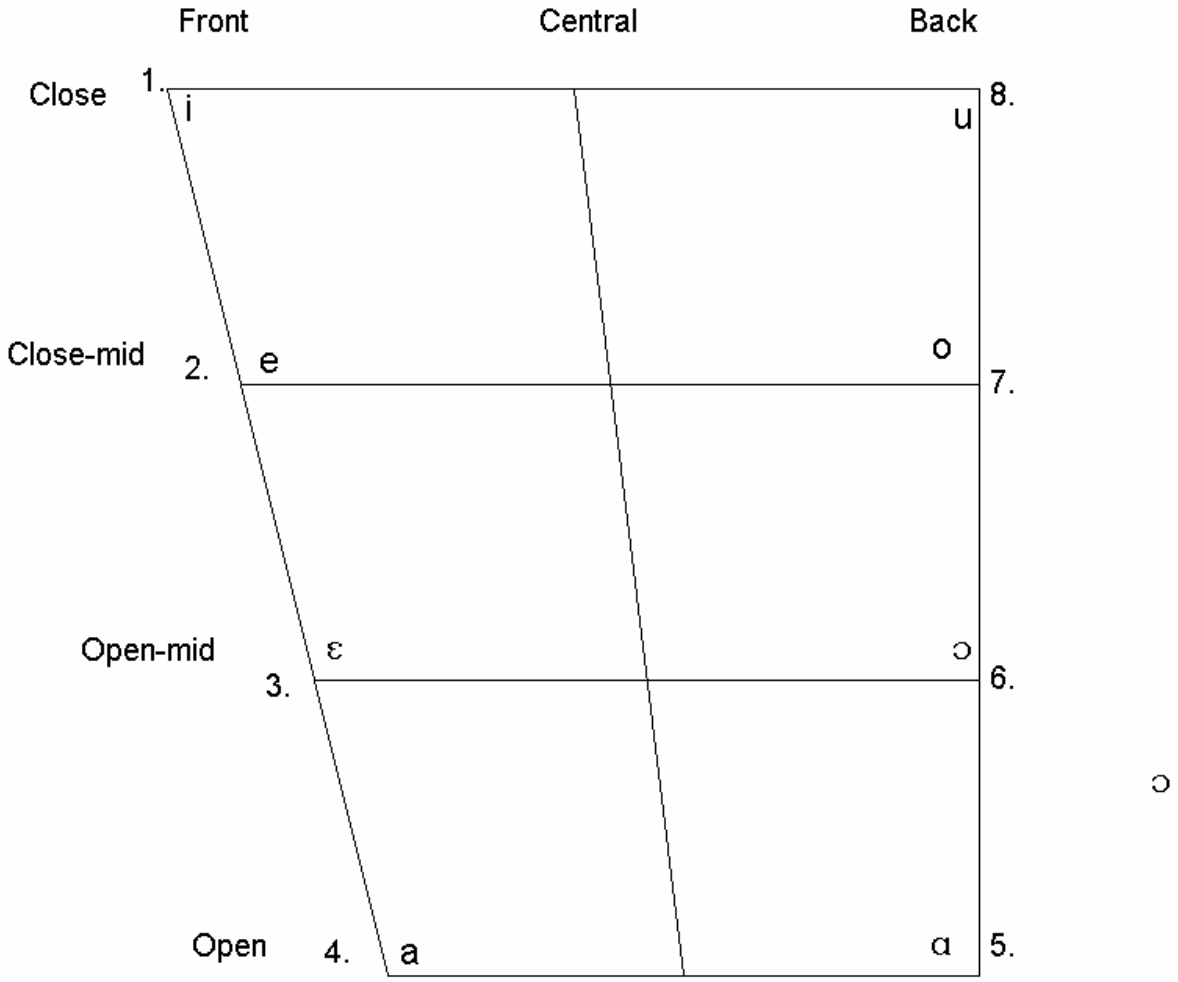
/ɪ/	**close, front**
/ʌ/	**open, central**
/ʊ/	**close, back**

/a/	**open, front**
/ɛ/	**half-open, front**
/ɒ/	**open, back**
/ə/	**central (with neutral lip position)**

<u>Exercise 8.C.</u> Draw a vowel trapezium. On it, insert the following short vowels, symbolised and positioned correctly: (a) a close front vowel; (b) a close back vowel; (c) a half-open [open-mid] front vowel; (d) a half-close [close-mid] front vowel; (e) an open back vowel; (f) a half-open [open-mid] back vowel.

(i) In the text immediately above I have aligned the terminology of the exercise (a relatively standard, if informal, terminology) with the terms used in the diagram of the vowel trapezium (page 113) .

(ii) Here I repeat the diagram of the trapezium found in-text. The numbers at the margins of the trapezium correspond to Cardinal positions. Notice that nothing is implied about the length of the vowels which fill this trapezium: they can be thought of simply as reference points. ('i', for instance, might be pronounced long (/iː/) or short ((and very slightly retracted): /ɪ/).



<u>Exercise 8.D.</u> Indicate what Cardinal vowel position is associated with the following vowels (ie. your answers will be something like 'associated with Cardinal vowel 5' etc.):

/ɪ/ **associated with Cardinal 1**
/ʌ/ **associated with Cardinal 5 and/or 6 (a tricky one; see further chapter 10. See also Gimson 1994: 104)**
/ɒ/ **associated with Cardinal 5**
/e/ **associated with Cardinal 2**

Exercise 8.E. **Make two *phonemic transcriptions* of the following three pieces of connected English. (All the vowels which should feature in your transcription are vowels we have discussed in the last chapter, ie. they are all short vowels.) Your first transcription should reflect the structure of *your own* spoken variety of English; your second should capture the structure of a *different* variety of spoken English, perhaps that of a colleague, friend, or co-worker. Note what differences there are in the two transcriptions – do those differences show up primarily in consonants, or in vowels?**

i. **'It was a lovely cat,' Pam said, a little sadly. 'Pity it's dead.'**
ii. **The bull rushed to the fence**
iii. **Upon inspection, the goods were (/wə/) damaged**

i.
My variety
/ɪt wəz ə lʌvlɪ kat pam sɛd ə lɪtl sadlɪ pɪtɪ ɪts dɛd/

RP
/ɪt wəz ə lʌvli kæt pæm sed ə lɪtl sædli pɪti ɪts ded/

On word-final unstressed /ɪ/ or /i/ please see further chapter 10.5

ii.
My variety
/ðə bʊl ɹʌʃt tə ðə fɛns/

RP
/ðə bʊl ɹʌʃt tə ðə fens/

iii.
My variety
/əpɒn ɪnspɛkʃn ðə gʊdz wə damɪdʒd/

RP
/əpɒn ɪnspekʃn ðə gʊdz wə dæmɪdʒd/

Links and further reading

One valuable resource is the introduction to and description of the short vowels found in A.C. Gimson (1994) (*Gimson's pronunciation of English*, 4th edition revised by Alan Cruttenden. London: Arnold). This gives vowel-by-vowel descriptions together with notes on the varietal distribution of each vowel, see particularly section 8.9, page 97ff.
Web resources

Try listening to contrasting British English accents.

(1)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/recordings/group/york-helmsley.shtml Here you can listen to Doreen Wardle telling a story about an outside toilet she used to use (and clean out) as a child growing up in North Yorkshire. Listen to Doreen's accent carefully, and try to note down the words in which she uses short vowels. (You might also like to listen to how Doreen pronounces some long vowels – she has a spectacular diphthongal pronunciation of '- seater' in the word 'two-seater', for instance. When I was growing up as an adolescent in North Yorkshire (to which I'd moved from the West Riding), several of my friends spoke like Doreen, and I guess they still do.)

(2)

Once you've listened to Doreen, try listening to three friends talking about the word 'nan' or 'nanny':

http://www.bbc.co.uk/voices/recordings/group/london-clapham.shtml

These friends were recorded in London, but I have a good hunch that at least one of the friends wasn't born in the SE of England. Again, try to note down the words pronounced using short vowels, but as you do this, you might also like to listen particularly carefully to how the three friends pronounce the final syllable of the word 'nanny'. This last piece of careful listening anticipates work we're going to undertake in the next chapter of the text, and will revisit (in some detail) in chapter 10.5.