

# Description of the articulation of sounds of English:

## the articulation of vowels

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### **Introduction**

English learning is thought of as a crucial target language in Taiwan, especially when English has become a second language after the globalization influences our life and has been a trend all over the world (Yu, 2007). In other words, how and when English should be learned is taken into consideration.

This paper aims at exploring the sound patterns of English, phonetics. According to Yavaş (2006), phonetics can be divided into three distinctive viewpoints, including articulatory phonetics, acoustic phonetics, and auditory phonetics. Articulatory phonetics concerns with how the sounds are produced, and acoustic phonetics is about the physical properties of the sounds, and auditory phonetics deals with the sounds which perceive by hearers (Fromkin & Rodman & Hyams, 2003).

In this paper, there will be some limitations. First of all, the focus will be on articulatory phonetics and acoustic phonetics. What is more, the articulation of vowels is described simply, but without consonants. For instance, it will present only the features of vowel articulation. Finally, the description of the articulation of vowels will be not as explicit as a formal data in detail, however, this paper will present in summary.

## **Summary**

### *2.1 Vowels*

Unlike consonants, vowel sounds are produced by open oral cavity without contacting between articulators and tongue, but by the position of the tongue and lips; moreover, the airstream is unobstructed and the sounds are voiced (Yavaş, 2006 & Sun, 1988 & Finegan, 2004). That is to say, according to Fromkin (2003), vowel sounds are pronounced by the high or low position of the tongue in the mouth, and by the spread or pursed of the lips.

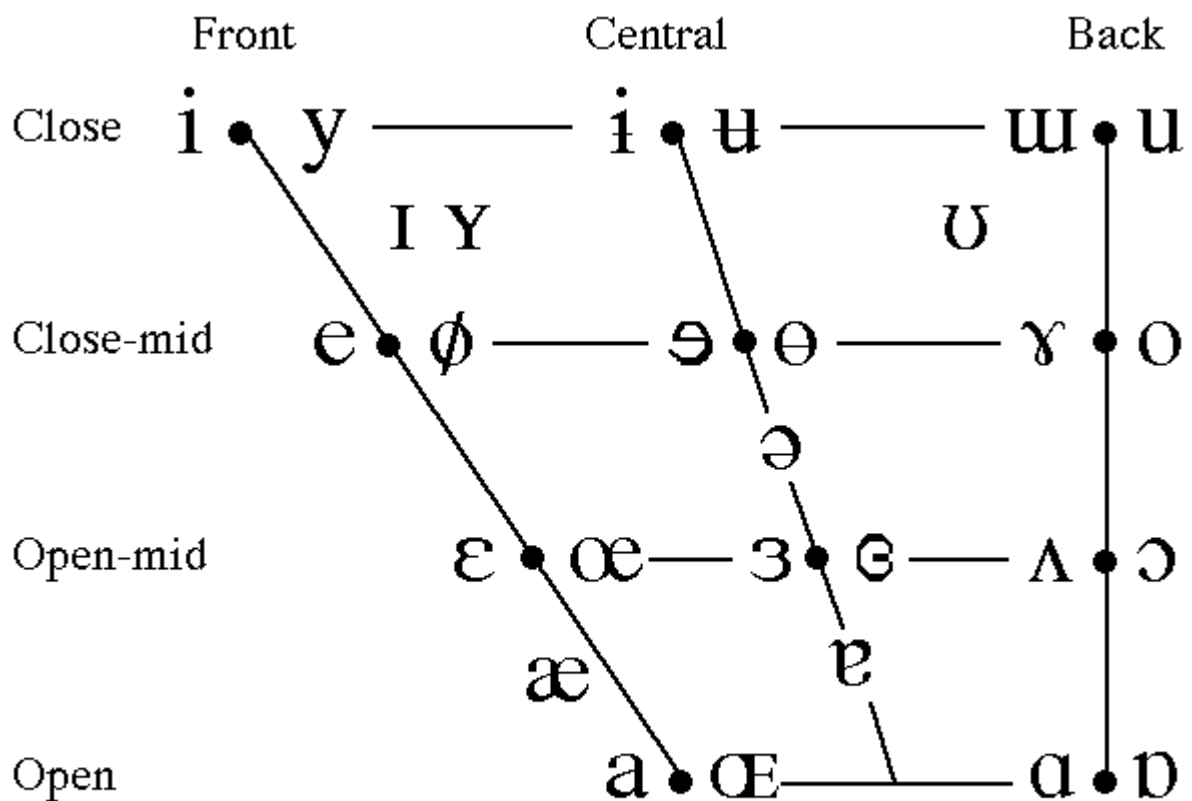
### *2.2 Articulatory Positions*

#### *2.2.1 Tongue position*

Traditionally, the chart of the articulation of vowels presented the vowel positions as the following: the front vowel on the left, back vowels on the right and the central vowels in the middle. Also, there are tongue heights of vowel sounds, including high (or “close”), mid, and low (or “open”). Here, mid can be separate into “high-mid” or “close-mid” and “low-mid” or “open-mid.” (see Figure 1)

#### *2.2.2 Lips position*

As for lips position, it can be characterized as rounded and unrounded vowels. For example, the sounds /ɔ, o, u, u/ are rounded vowels; and then, they belong to back vowels. Indeed, except for the previous four sounds, the other vowel sounds are unrounded. Even though /a/ is a back vowel, it is an unrounded sound. (see Figure 1)



Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.

**Figure 1** English vowels

### 2.3 Diphthongs

Spencer (1996, 1997) defined “diphthong” as two vowels are pronounced as a single vowel in the same time. In short, diphthong is two sounds, vowel+glide (Fromkin, 2003). The vowel sound in words *like* [lajk], the diphthong [aj], *pout* [paʊt], the diphthong [aʊ], and *toy* [tɔj], the diphthong [ɔj], are representation in English.

### 2.4 Other Articulatory Features of Vowels

#### 2.4.1 Tenseness

Tenseness in vowels involves two characteristics, tense and lax (Sun, 1988 &

Finegan, 2004). Tense vowels are longer in duration and more tension of the tongue muscles than lax vowels. For instance, /i, e, u, o/ are tense vowel sounds, and /ɪ, ɛ, ʊ, ɔ/ are lax vowel sounds. In addition, the sounds /æ, ʌ/ belong to lax vowels.

#### 2.4.2 Length

In English, the length of a word cannot change a word (Fromkin, 2003). Moreover, the length of vowel sounds concerns with the duration of vowels. For example, the duration of vowels of *bead* and *beat* are longer than *bit*.

#### 2.4.3 Nasalization

Vowels resemble consonants which possess the characteristic of nasalization. Nasalized vowels occur when the air pass through the nasal passage. In English, nasal consonant affects vowel sounds when the nasal consonant appears after a vowel in the same syllable. Therefore, the tilde (~) will be placed on the top of the nasalized vowel, such as *bean* [bɛ̃n] and *bone* [bɔ̃n].

## **Conclusion**

Every language possesses its rudimentary component, sounds. English becomes an important language which is learned/acquired around the world. For learning English, sounds which are the very beginning element should be learned. On the one hand, although KK phonetic symbols are less taught nowadays in school, learners should maintain the concept of what the sounds are in order to pronounce words correctly. On the other hand, phonics is prevalent; however, this teaching method cannot help learners realize consonants and vowels in detail respectively. Hence, this paper draws on English vowels to facilitate learners to understand the information of vowel sounds, and further help them to comprehend the characteristics of articulation for vowels.

## References

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