

The Stuff Everyone Hates More:

VOWELS



Vowels are more flexible sounds

- Place of articulation may be altered by sounds before and after vowels
- Regional, social-class variations in articulation
- Important to transcribe what you HEAR, not what you SEE!
- Think of them as MOVING TARGETS.

Now let's work on vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	i (peat) [aI] ɪ (pit) [ɔɪ]		u (pooh) ʊ (put) [aʊ]
Mid	e (pate) ɛ (pet)	ə (putt, pert, butter)	o (Poe) ɔ (paw)
Low	æ (pat)	a	ɑ (pot)

/taɪm/ = time

/tɔɪ/ = toy

/taʊn/ = town

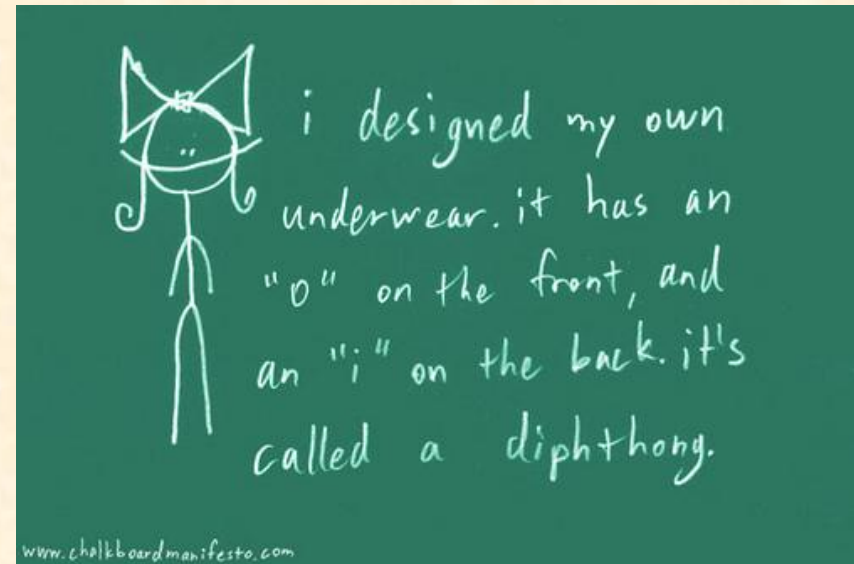
Instead of “long” & “short” vowels, linguists talk about “tense” & “lax” vowels

ə: The All-Purpose Vowel

- Used for mid-central vowel sounds
- Though they may be pronounced a little differently, the different pronunciations are not phonemically significant (they don't distinguish one word from another)
- Some systems use ə for an unstressed mid-central vowel and ʌ for a stressed mid-central vowel

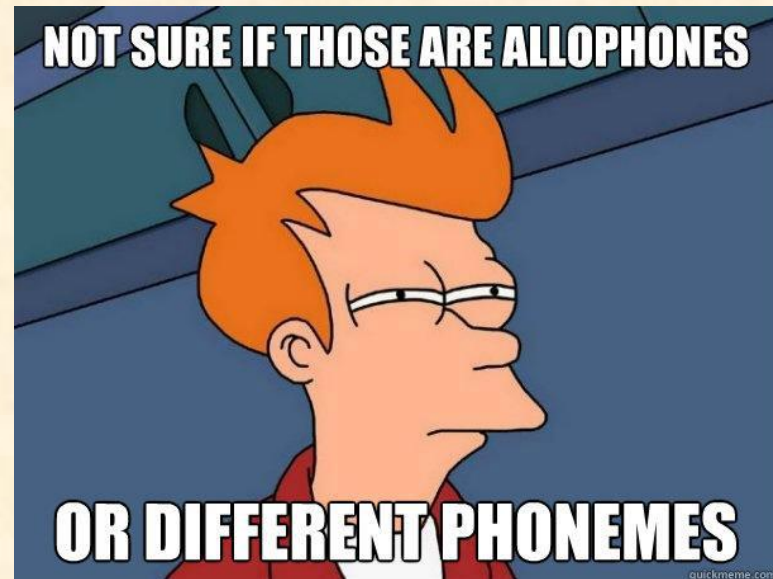
Diphthongs & Glides

- Two distinct vowel phonemes in one syllable=diphthong
- Most important thing is direction in which sound moves (up, but to front or back)
- [aɪ]: my, fight, why
- [aʊ]: now, plough, thou
- [ɔɪ]: boy, noise
- Glides (semivowel before vowel): [fyu] = few, [kyub] = cube



Linguistic Variation

- Speakers in different geographic areas may speak the same language with different sounds
 - Pin/pen
 - Water
 - Nothing
 - “park the car in Harvard Yard”



- Need to make a distinction between *allophones* of the same sounds and distinct *phonemes*
- *Contrastive pairs* vary by only one phoneme: bit/pit or bit/bet. Lose/Dose is NOT a contrastive pair (think about it!).



Causes of sound change (pp. 31-32)

- *Substratum* theory (bringing pronunciation habits from one language into another)
- *Distribution of phonological space*
- *Ease of articulation (and tempo)*
- *Hypercorrection*
- *Overgeneralization*

Just remember....

- Vowels are influenced or ‘colored’ by the sounds around them and by the speed at which the words are being pronounced. There WILL be variation.
- Schwa probably has the most variation because of its unstressed nature.
- Cool article: “[Why Ice Cream Sounds Fat and Crackers Sound Skinny](#)” (*Stanford Magazine*, July 2013)

And this belonged in Tuesday's slide show but I just saw it yesterday.....

