



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

[labial]



Basic Idea

- The word “labial” comes from a Latin word *labium*, meaning **lip**.
- [labial] is a **phonological feature**.
- It is used as a **distinctive feature** for distinguishing different phones/phonemes/segments.
- It is also used as a distinctive feature for capturing a **natural class** of segments.


Definition

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A phone/phoneme X is [labial] if in the articulation of X one or both **lips** are involved.

By the definition given,

- Consonants such as [p, b, m, f, v] are [labial]
- Vowels such as [u, o] are [labial]
- The glide [w] is [labial]

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[labial] as a natural class

- Across languages (like Cantonese, Tulu and Mafa), one can see the feature [labial] at work.


Cantonese

/sai sem kek mɪn/ → [sai sum ke**p** mɪn]

wash heart change face

The labiality of [m]
triggering /k/ → [p]

“turn over a new leaf”

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[labial] as a natural class

Tulu (Kenstowicz 1994:462)

kattī “bond” kappu “blackness” uccu “snake”
 ï = accusative suffix
 [labial] ï → u

- The accusative suffix / ï / becomes rounded (i.e. [labial]) if
1. it is immediately preceded by a [labial] C or
 2. the nearest preceding V is [labial]

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[labial] as a natural class

Mafa (Ettlinger 2004)

Vowel become [labial] if there is a [labial] consonant after it.

təbak^w → tubok^w “nodule”
 tək^wats → tuk^watz “to hang”

k^wetʃepe “anthrax bacterium”
 k^wadafak “to whiten”

Nothing happens to all vowels which are preceded by a labialized consonant

The translation of the above items was originally written in French. Thanks to Stephen R. Anderson and Suki Yu for translating the French into English.

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The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)
An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.
Hong Kong Baptist University.

