



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
Terms used in Linguistics
presents

Vowel



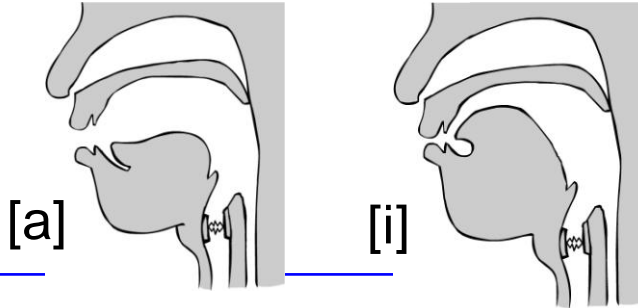
Vowels as letters in the alphabet

- Letters in the alphabet: <a, e, i, o, u> ?
- If so, consider these two words:
 - Pie Vowels = <i> and <e>?
 - Sky Vowels = ?



Vowels as linguistic sounds

- Notice that *pie* and *sky* share certain sounds, similar to the name of the letter *i*.
- We can represent that as [ai].



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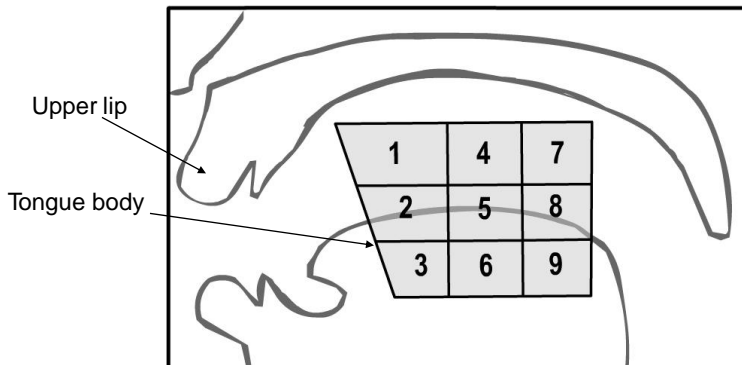
Vowels as linguistic sounds

When thinking of a *vowel as a kind of linguistic sound*, the general understanding is that:

A *vowel* is a linguistic sound made when there are *no obstructions to airflow through the oral cavity*.

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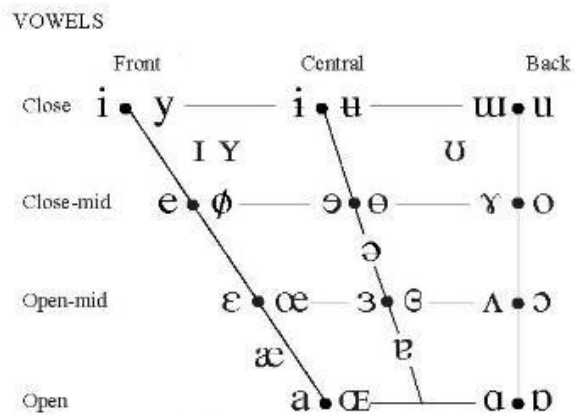
Vowel space



Positions for tongue body to alter the shape of oral cavity.

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Vowel chart



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

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Vowel as nucleus

- Consider the pronunciation of *fine*.
- It is pronounced [fain] for many people.
- The [ai] is what is often called a diphthong, and is sometimes referred to as the vowel of the syllable.
- In fact, in English, the list of vowels given in many dictionaries would include diphthongs like [ai], [ei], [ou], etc.
- This use of the notion *vowel* really refers to the *nucleus* of a syllable.

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Summary

Vowels can be thought of as either

1. The letters <a, e, i, o, u> in the alphabet

OR

2. The sounds made when there is no obstruction of airflow through the oral cavity

OR

3. The nuclei of syllables

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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.

