

# **The Phonetics of English Pronunciation - Week 7**

W.Barry  
Institut für **P**honetik  
Universität des **S**aarlandes  
IPUS

## Let's have a quick look at the homework: First the consonants:

1. What consonantal pronunciation problem do the following words have in common?

a) drive, b) fold, c) clothe, d) breeze, e) web

All have final voiced consonants

2. What other consonantal pronunciation problems do the words contain?

a) drive, /r/ problem: [ɹ] after plosive

b) fold, dark /l/ problem: [ɫ] in postvocalic cluster

c) clothe, /ð/ problem (i.e., FVC is also new sound)

d) breeze, /r/ problem (compare a)

e) web /w/ problem: (bilabial-velar approximant)

1. The identification of the common "FVC" problem is, of course, not really enough.

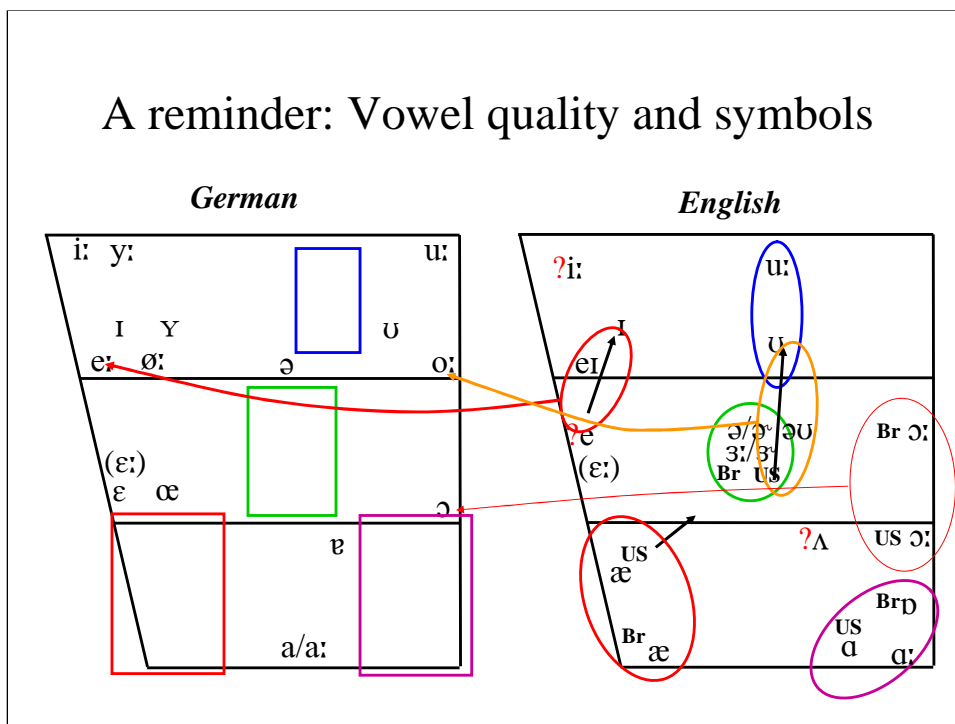
In a), c), d) and e) the VOWEL needs to be lengthened, whereas in b) it is the /l/ that has to be longer than before /t/ (compare "fold" and "colt")

Before we look at the vowel questions:  
a summary of the vowels so far

- Vowels are very *prominent* signals of the sort of accent you speak
- The *symbols* used to represent vowels are only a rough indication of the vowel quality to produce.
- *Nearly all* English vowels (American *or* British) are *phonetically different* from German vowels.
- You need to *understand* what the differences are, *hear* them, and *automate their production!*
- *Read AGAIN* Chap. 5, pp. 105-111 and then *work your way through the vowel sections* (p. 112 ff.)

***It cannot be said too often:*** Please try to digest the fact that just because the same SYMBOL is used to represent a sound in German and English (whether American or English), this does NOT mean that they SOUND the same. Of course, there IS some relationship between the symbol chosen to represent a sound, and the sound itself, but the fine phonetic detail, which you can hear (or must learn to hear), and which makes the difference between a native-like accent and a foreign accent is *almost always* different.

## A reminder: Vowel quality and symbols



To remind you of what was explained last week:

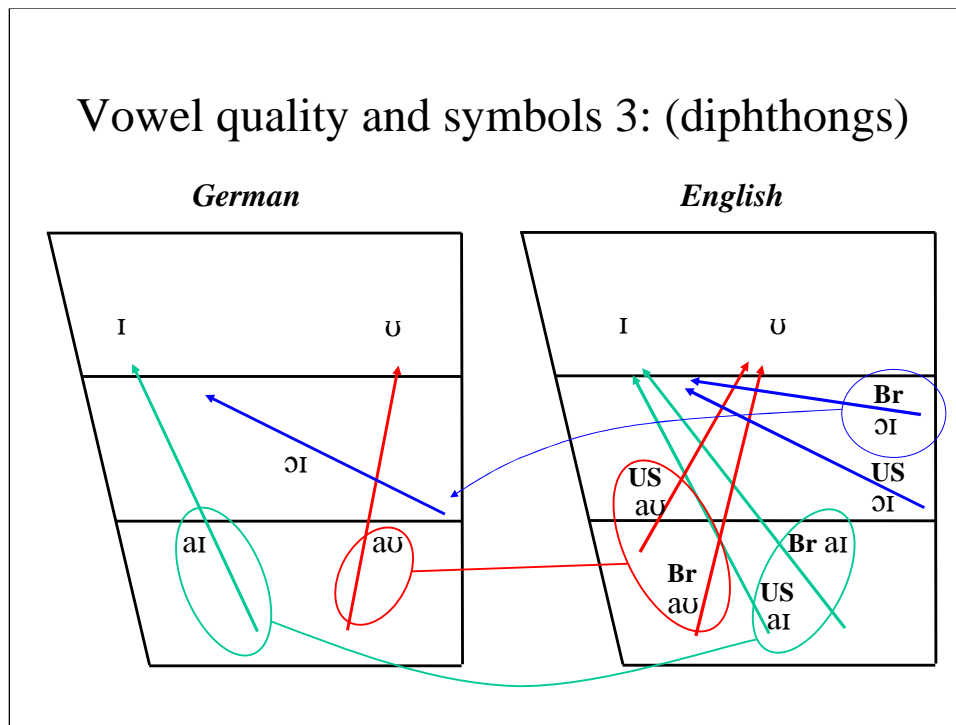
1. The quality of vowels in a particular language are only approximately the same as the qualities defined for the „universal descriptive framework“ (Cardinal Vowels).
2. The choice of symbols is determined by the proximity of the quality to the Cardinal (reference) Vowel quality.
3. That means that the *same symbols may be used in different languages for different vowel qualities*.

This underlines the need to *listen for and learn the particular quality* of the vowels, *NOT just to learn the symbol that is used* to represent it.

Notice that there are many areas of vowel quality that are used in English but are NOT used in German! These are bound to cause problems.

As you grow sensitive to vowel quality and have become accustomed to the standard vowel qualities of a language, you will notice that there are countless regional (and idiosyncratic) variants.

## Vowel quality and symbols 3: (diphthongs)



As we heard last week, the *three main diphthongs are dangerously similar* in German and English.

They are *usually represented with the same symbols*. (remember, they are called "*falling diphthongs*" because the main weight = time and energy is focussed on the first part; the second part is weaker and less precise. The tongue *movement* is actually a closing one; i.e., the tongue moves upwards. For this reason, some people like to call them "rising diphthongs", which can be very confusing! )

Important for us is the fact that the *starting point* of the diphthongs is noticeably different between German and English (and between different variants of English).

## Let's complete the homework discussion ....

3. What is the phonetic difference between the following pairs of apparently equivalent English and German vowels? (underline the correct answer(s))

- a) In „*Busch*“ vs. „*bush*“? The English vowel is  
(i) more (ii) less rounded; (iii) more (iv) less fronted
- b) In „*Vater*“ and „*father*“? The English vowel is  
(i) more retracted (ii) more fronted (iii) less rounded
- c) In „*Katze*“ and „*cat*“? The English vowel is  
(i) less (ii) more open; (iii) more (iv) less fronted
- d) In „*Schott*“ and „*shot*“ The English vowel is  
(i) more open (ii) more closed; (iii) more (iv) less rounded  
and the American English vowel is (in addition)  
(v) more fronted (vi) more retracted

- a) Apart from the different tongue position that you can see on the vowel chart (English vowel more fronted), there is a general tendency for English close and near-close back "rounded" vowels to be less rounded than their German equivalents.
- c) This statement applies to both British English and American English although BE and AE /æ/ can be very different (the AE /æ/ is often closer than the BE variant and can be quite diphthongal: [eə]).
- d) The BE and AE quality for the "shot" vowel is very different and two different symbols have become established: BE /ɒ/ and /ɑ(:)/. The American vowel tends to be longer than the BE vowel, therefore the length marks are often included in the symbol.

4. What is the phonetic difference between the following pairs of apparently equivalent English and German diphthongs? (underline the correct answer(s))

- a) In „Haus“ and „house“? The English diphthong starts  
(i) further forward (ii) further back;
- b) In „Schein“ and „shine“? The English diphthong starts  
(i) further forward (ii) further back
- c) In „Heu“ and „Ahoy“? The British English English diphthong starts  
(i) lower (ii) higher; (iii) more or less the same  
and the American English diphthong starts  
(iv) lower (v) higher; (vi) more or less the same

***Supplementary information:***









***The starting points*** of English and German diphthongs is the most prominent part (they are often called "falling diphthongs" because the energy decreases (falls) during themovement from the first to the second part). "Rising" diphthongs (as in Italian "Uomo") have the main weight on the second element.

(The terms "falling" and "rising" are sometimes interpreted in terms of tongue movement, so the German/English /aɪ/, /aʊ/ etc. are said to be "rising".

For the tongue movement in diphthongs it is better to use the terms "opening", "closing" or "centering". So German/English /aɪ/, /aʊ/ are "falling, closing" diphthongs.)

***The endpoints*** of English and German diphthongs are of course less prominent and therefore less critical. However, if you are a "precise articulator", there is a danger that you will make the endpoints more extreme than they usually are in English (BE or AE). This is especially the case with /aʊ/, where the endpoint in English is further forward and less rounded than German (just like the monophthong /u/).

## So let's listen for the small differences: /i:/

- Listen to the following /i:/ words and say whether what is spoken is German or English:
- German ***Biest*** English ***beast*** 
- German ***Beat*** English ***beat*** 
- German ***flieh*** English ***flea*** 
- German ***Ski*** English ***she*** 
- German ***nie*** English ***knee*** 
- German ***bieten*** English ***beaten*** 
- German ***Vieh*** English ***fee*** 
- German ***lieh*** English ***lee*** 







Concentrate on the slightly changing quality (diphthongization) of the English /i:/.

The German vowel is „purer“ and slightly more „tense“ and extreme.



## Now listen to /u:/ words

- Listen to the following /u:/ words and say whether what is spoken is German or English:

- German **Schuh**      English *shoe*      
- German **Hut**      English **hoot**      
- German **Wudu**      English *voodoo*      
- German **Hindu**      English **Hindu**      
- German **Ruth**      English **root**      
- German **muh**      English **moo**      

American and British /u:/ both differ from German in a similar way.




The back close vowel is also slightly diphthongized in English compared to the purer German vowel.

But the most audible difference is the much more fronted quality of the English /u:/.

## /ʊ/ words vary a lot!







- Listen to the /ʊ/ words in the following sentence:

• He didn't like *books* with *footnotes*   
 

• Well, I like the *book*; I think it's very *good*   
 

The English /ʊ/ (both British and American) is also clearly more „fronted“ than the German equivalent and is also much less rounded (particularly in the English of younger people)

## Be careful with /ɑ:/ words

- Listen to the /ɑ:/ / (*far* and *park*) words spoken by a German :   
- Compare them to the /ɑ:/ / words (*far* and *car*) spoken by an English woman:   

But it's not just the *timbre* of the /ɑ:/ that is a problem:

Don't forget *glass*, *grass*, *dance*, *France*, *plant*, *grant* are pronounced /ɑ:/ in SBE and /æ/ in US :

/glɑ:s, grɑ:s, dɑ:ns, frɑ:ns, plɑ:nt, grɑ:nt/

/glæs, græs, dæns, fræns, plænt, grænt/

And remember: US *part*, *park*, *start* etc. vs. *palm*, *father*, *calm*  
/ɑ:/ /ɑ:/

The British English /ɑ:/ words have three corresponding vowel qualities in American English:

1. The /ɑ:/-/æ/ correspondence for *glass*, *grant*, *grass*, *glass* words
2. The /ɑ:/-/ɑ:/ correspondence for *park*, *car*, *start*, *star* words
3. The /ɑ:/ identity for *father*, *palm*, *calm* words.

## Now, of course, the /ɔ:/ words

- British English (but not American English) /ɔ:/ is *more closed* than German /ɔ/.

Compare the following phrase spoken by a German and an English speaker:

The *orders* were *ignored*



A *short* talk



She *bought* a *horse*



N.B. American English /ɔɪ/ as in *short, horse, orders, ignored* also has a *closer* vowel quality than German /ɔ/.

But American /ɔ:/ (*without* following /r/) as in *bought, taught* is more open, i.e. *longer but similar quality* to German /ɔ/.

So /ɔɪ/ and /ɔ:/ have a different quality in US-English:

E.g., *bought – port*; *chalk – cork*; *paw – pour*

The British /ɔ:/ words also have different American English correspondences, depending on whether they are spelt with an <r> after the vowel or not.


The words *without* <r> in the spelling (e.g. *caught, taught, fought, daub, broad, law, clawed, hawk*, etc.) have a more open quality in American, similar to the German /ɔ/ (and in some American variants unrounded and almost [ɑ:] quality).

Those with <r> (e.g., *short, hoard, cork, bored*, etc) tend to have a closer quality at the beginning (more like the British English /ɔ:/) but then they move to the postvocalic R quality.


## And now the /ʌ/ words

- The temptation is to pronounce English *luck* like German *Lack*.

Can you say whether the following words spoken by a German or an English speaker?

G-dann/E-done 

G-Matten/E-mutten 

G-hat/E-hut 

G-patt/E-putt 

G-Lack/E-luck 

American English /ʌ/ is *less open* and rather *more centralized* than SBE /ʌ/ (very close to [ɜ:])

The English word *luck* is NOT the same as German *Lack*.

British English *luck* has a quality similar in quality to the standard German vowel in the second syllable of *Butter*. But it is not so easy for a German to use that vowel in a stressed syllable because it is always unstressed in German.

The American English *luck* vowel is more central (very similar to the British English /ɜ:/ as in BE *bird*, *word*, *stirred* etc .... which is, itself not without problems for Germans – see below.)

## American /ɑ/ and British /ɒ/

- Both these variants of the vowel in “lock”, “pot” etc. fall into an “empty space” in the German system.
- The closest German vowel (as in „Topf“, „Locke“ etc) is less open and more rounded than either English variant.
- Listen to the pairs of British English + German words and decide which is English and which is German:



- The American English /ɑ/ is **more open** and **less rounded** even than SBE /ɒ/; in fact it is quite “spread”.....  
in fact a shortened German /a:/ is an acceptable American /ɑ/  
**AE "tot" (kid; "a tiny tot") ~ German "Tat"**

The American English version of the *got* vowel is very close to the German /a:/ vowel as in *Staat*, *Vater*, *Tat* usw. though not quite as long.



## The stressed central vowel /ɜː/

- Here the interference is from German [œ], a **rounded** vowel; i.e., German **Törn** for British English **turn**.

Can you say whether the following words are the German loanwords or the (British-)English words?

Server  G      Churchill  E      Guernsey  G

Wordsworth  E      Gerschwin  G

Surfer  E      Terminal  G

In **American English** /ɜː/ does not occur because there is always an /ɹ/ following.

It is therefore **symbolized** with [ɜ˞] or [ɜɹ].

The quality is dominated by [ɹ]. **It is like a syllabic R**

The German vowel that interferes with this vowel is too rounded and diphthongal.

In British English there must be no lip-rounding, and the vowel is like a hesitation sound.

The American English vowel is like along American R sound. This makes it sound more like the German substitute vowel. But there must still be no lip-rounding.

## Summing up....

- We have surveyed the *English vowels* which are *close* to vowels in the *German* system.
- Sometimes the *symbols* used are *the same*, but you have been shown that there are *phonetic differences*..... You must *build an auditory picture* of the differences
- Equally important is the *feel in your mouth* that you associate with the sound. This *should feel strange* to start with because it is a *new position*.
- *Still to come*: The notorious /æ/, and the diphthongs
- *For homework*: Chap. 5, pp. 105-111 and then *work your way through the vowel sections* (p. 112 ff.)