THE PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH

pron**ou**nce [prəˈnaʊns]

pron**u**nciation [prəˌnʌnsɪˈeɪʃən]

SO FAR WE HAVE SEEN THAT:

* Pronunciation is regarded by many learners as the most difficult aspect to master because of:
  + Lack of systematic correspondence between graphemes - always written in between angle brackets <c>- and phonemes written between slant brackets /k/ (broad transcription) or square brackets [kh] (narrow transcription with weak forms and diacritics)
  + Structural difference between the set of phonemes in different languages. For example, in Italian we don’t have the dental fricatives /ð/ /θ/
  + Great variety of accents used throughout the English speaking world (native, nativized, foreign accents)
  + Differences in accent can be ascribed to diatopic (variation according to geographical position) as well as to diastratic variation (variation according to gender, social class, age, education)
  + However, in this module we are going to focus exclusively on the description of RP (received pronunciation) and General American, i.e. the two standard accents of British English and American English
  + The two branches of linguistics which deal with the description of sounds are
    - PHONETICS studies the physical characteristics of sounds from the point of view of production (articulatory), transmission (acoustic) and reception (auditory)
    - PHONOLOGY describes the sounds which have a distinctive role in a language (phonemes) In English we have 43 phonemes: 11 vowels, 8 diphthongs and 24 consonants.
* Articulatory phonetics: inventory of articulators
  + Larynx (voicebox) contains the vocal cords (difference between voiced and unvoiced sounds)
  + Pharinx: upper part of the wind pipe (or trachea) which leads to the back of the mouth
  + Velum (soft palate): when it is lowered, the air escapes through the nose; when it is raised, the air escapes through the mouth
  + Hard palate (roof of the mouth)
  + Alveolar ridge: the part of the palate just behind the upper teeth
  + Tongue: can take different shapes inside the mouth and determine a wide range of sounds (tip, centre, back)
  + Lips: upper and lower
  + Teeth

Among the articulators the lower lip, the tongue, the velum and the glottis are ACTIVE ARTICULATORS because the move, whereas the palate and the teeth are PASSIVE ARTICULATORS because they can’t be moved.

* PHONOLOGY: segmental phonology classifies the sounds which have a functional and distinctive role in a language (phonemes) and the way they combine (minimal pairs); suprasegmental phonology deals with units larger than the phoneme, i.e. syllables, rhythm groups and intonation phrases and they related phenomena, i.e. stress, rhythm and intonation
  + SEGMENTAL PHONOLOGY describes phonemes.
  + PHONEMES have no individual meaning (although phonosymbolism AKA sound symbolism has found correlations between certain phonemes and particular meanings, e.g. /gl-/ conveys brightness and light: glamour, glare, glass, glitter, glow); the primary function of phonemes is that of creating semantic oppositions so that words can be distinguished from one another.

[sit] and [set] are a minimal pair because they differ only by one phoneme and have to different meanings.

* + PHONEMES have an abstract nature. They should be considered ‘sound types’ which in actual speech can be realized in slightly different ways depending on their position within a word or on the accent of the speaker.

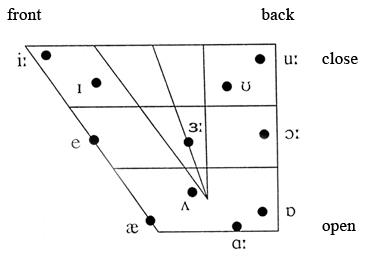
<man> [mæn] RP

[mɑn] Northern British accents

[mæən] GA

* THE PRONUNCIATION OF BRITISH ENGLISH
  + 11 vowels
  + 8 diphthongs
  + 24 consonants
  + /ə/ schwa no phonemic status because it occurs only in unstressed syllables
* VOWELS are described according to:
  + The vertical distance between the tongue and the palate (OPEN VS. CLOSE VOWELS)
  + The part of the tongue which makes contact with the palate (FRONT, CENTRAL, BACK)
  + The position of the lips (ROUNDED, SPREAD, NEUTRAL)
  + The duration of the utterance (LONG VS SHORT)
  + Long vowels are classified as TENSE, short vowels as LAX according to the tension or relaxation of the muscle bundles located at the back of the tongue.

phonetic diagram



* DIPHTHONGS are combinations of two vowels or better a glide from one vowel to another uttered with the same emission of sound. The first element is normally more audible than the second.
  + There are 8 diphthongs: 5 closing (the second element is a closing vowel)
    - /aɪ eɪ ɔɪ aʊ əʊ/
  + and 3 centring (the second element is a centring vowel)
    - /ɪə  eə  ʊə/
  + Closing diphthongs can become triphthongs if a schwa is added
    - /aɪə/ fire lion iron
    - /eɪə/ player layer greyer
    - /ɔɪə/ royal loyal joyous
    - /aʊə/ flour flower our
    - /əʊə/ slower mower