



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 sɐm kək mɪn/ → [sai sum kɛp 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”

ī = accusative suffix

[labial]

ī → u

The accusative suffix / ī / 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<sup>w</sup>

→

tubok<sup>w</sup>

“nodule”

tək<sup>w</sup>ats

→

tuk<sup>w</sup>atz

“to hang”

k<sup>w</sup>etʃepe

“anthrax bacterium”

k<sup>w</sup>adʃak

“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 Yiu for translating the French into English.

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## Further Reading

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- Chomsky, Noam and Morris Halle (1968) *The Sound Pattern of English*. MIT Press.
- Davenport, Mike and S. J. Hannahs (2005) *Introducing Phonetics and Phonology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Hodder Arnold Publication.
- Ettlinger, Marc. (2004). Palatalization and Labialisation in Mafa (Handout). Invited presentation at the Society of Linguistics Undergrads Symposium. University of California, Berkeley, CA. Retrieved 30 May 2009 from <http://ling.northwestern.edu/~met179/ling/slugs.pdf>
- Gussenhoven, Carlos and Haïke Jacobs (2005) *Understanding Phonology*, Chapter 5, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Hodder Arnold.
- Kenstowicz, Michael J. (1994) *Phonology in Generative Grammar*. Blackwell Publishers.
- Odden, David (2005) *Introducing Phonology*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sagey, Elizabeth (1986) The Representation of Features and Relations in Non-Linear Phonology, *PhD Dissertation*, MIT.

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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.