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An Animated and Narrated Glossary of
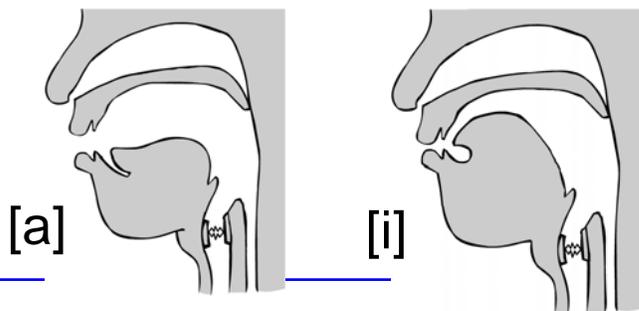Terms used in Linguistics
presents

Vowel

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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 = ?

Slide 2

1

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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].

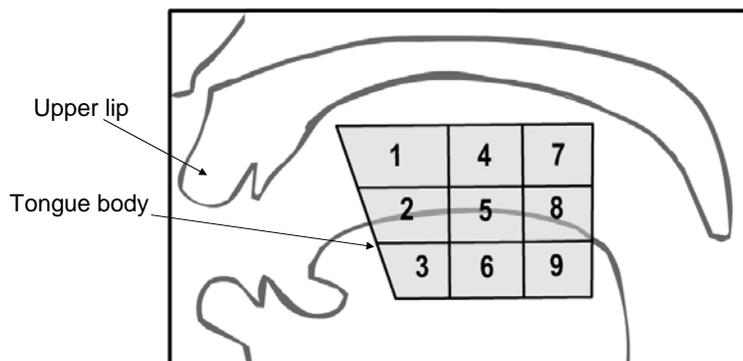[a]   [i]

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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.
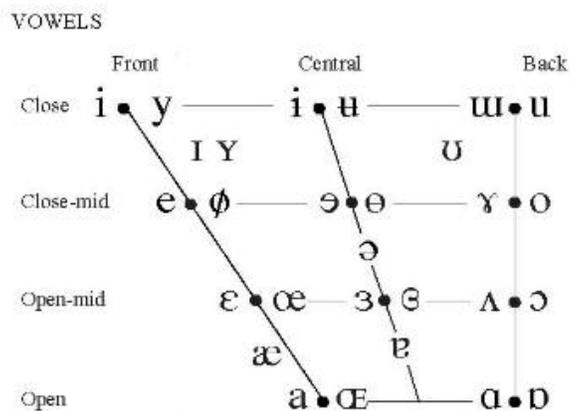
2

Vowel space

Upper lip

Tongue body

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

Slide 5

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

Slide 8

Further reading

Davenport, Mike and S. J. Hannahs (2005) *Introducing Phonetics and Phonology*, 2nd edition, Chapter 4. New York: Hodder Arnold Publication.

Gussenhoven, Carlos and Haike Jacobs (2005) *Understanding Phonology*, 2nd edition, Chapter 1. New York: Hodder Arnold.

Ladefoged, Peter (2001) *A Course in Phonetics*, 4th edition, Chapter 4. Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishers.

Ladefoged, Peter and Ian Maddieson (1996) *The Sounds of the World's Languages*, Chapter 9. Blackwell Publishers.

Tserdanelis, Georgios and Wai Yi Peggy Wong (eds.) (2004) *Language Files*: *Materials for an Introduction of Language and Linguistics*, 9th edition, File 3.4. The Ohio State University Press.

The End