Diphthongs

While the position of the tongue is more or less stable for a pure vowel...
... a diphthong is characterised by a graceful movement from one point to another, for this reason they are also sometimes known as glides.
- In English phonetics they are considered to be ONE phoneme (not two).

Diphthongs

- English diphthongs may cause difficulty

Nowhere is the English spelling system more bizarre than in its representation of diphthongs
Diphthongs

- **closing diphthongs** – the glide is made from a more open to a more close position
- **centring diphthongs** – the glide is made from a more peripheral to a more central position

Diphthongs can also be divided into groups based on the vowel to which they gravitate in the second element. Thus, we have groups that have /ʌ/, /ʊ/ and /œ/ as the second element.

**Diphthongs**

- **Marked with an arrow**, where the dot marks the start of the diphthong (the first “vowel” within the diphthong) and the arrow-head marks the direction of tongue movement (the tongue moves towards the position of the second “vowel”, but doesn’t really make it there).

### Closing diphthongs 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closing Diphthongs</th>
<th>/ei/</th>
<th>/ai/</th>
<th>/ɔɪ/</th>
<th>The tongue moves to:</th>
<th>/i/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Closing diphthongs 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closing Diphthongs</th>
<th>/ɔu/</th>
<th>/au/</th>
<th>The tongue moves to:</th>
<th>/ʊ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Centering diphthongs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centring Diphthongs</th>
<th>/ə/</th>
<th>/œə/</th>
<th>/œə/</th>
<th>The tongue moves to:</th>
<th>/æ/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
American and British pronunciation - diphthongs

• The diphthongs /ei/, /ai/, /au/ and /oi/ are the same in the two pronunciations.

• In BrE /əu/ is used – in AmE /ou/ is used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BrE:</th>
<th>AmE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cold</td>
<td>/kəʊld/</td>
<td>/koʊld/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>/ɡəʊ/</td>
<td>/ɡou/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>/ləʊ/</td>
<td>/loʊ/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

American and British pronunciation - diphthongs

• The centring diphthongs /ia/, /æa/ and /ua/ do not occur in AmE - instead there is a vowel followed by /r/:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>RP</th>
<th>GA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>near, here</td>
<td>nɪə, hɪə</td>
<td>nɪr, hɪr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>square, there</td>
<td>skwəə, ðeə</td>
<td>skwer, ðer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cure, jury</td>
<td>kʃuə, ðuər</td>
<td>kʃur, ðuər</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

American and British pronunciation - diphthongs

• But note that many /ua/ words in both BrE and AmE are pronounced with /oː/. This is more common in BrE than in AmE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BrE:</th>
<th>AmE:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cure</td>
<td>usually kʃuə, sometimes: kʃə</td>
<td>mɪŋ kʃur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pure</td>
<td>usually: ðə, sometimes: ðuə</td>
<td>usually: ðʊə, sometimes: ðɔr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poor</td>
<td>usually: ðɔr, sometimes: ðuə</td>
<td>usually: ðʊə, sometimes: ðɔr</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Triphthongs

• ei + a = eiə - player /pleiə/
• ai + a = aiə - fire /faɪə/
• ɔi + a = ɔiə - royal /rɔɪəl/
• au + a = auə - lower /ləʊə/
• au + a = auə - hour /aʊə/

American and British pronunciation - triphthongs

• In BrE the final r of all triphthongs is not pronounced, but in AmE, the final r is typically pronounced with an r-coloured vowel /ær/:

‘layer’ /ˈleɪər/, ‘fire’ /faɪər/, ‘lawyer’ /ˈlɔɪər/, ‘lower’ /ˈləʊər/, ‘hour’ /ˈaʊər/

• In AmE the quality of the first vowel is different in /əʊər/: it is a back mid vowel: /o/ (in BrE, instead, /əʊə/ is used.)
Study questions

- What are diphthongs? Provide a list of the English diphthongs.
- How can we classify the English diphthongs? What is the classification based on?
- Draw the chart(s) representing the closing diphthongs.
- Draw the chart representing the centering diphthongs.
- Explain the differences in the pronunciation of diphthongs in the British and the American pronunciation.
- Provide a list of the English triphthongs. Give examples of words containing them.
- Explain the differences in the pronunciation of triphthongs in the British and the American pronunciation.
- What are homophones? Provide three pairs for illustration.

Exercises

- Write words for the things in the picture in the correct part of the table.

1. Listen to the sound /bed/. Look at the mouth diagram to see how to make this long vowel sound.

2. Listen to the target sound /bed/ in the words below and compare it with the words on each side.

3. Find a way from Start to Finish. You may pass a square only if the word in it has the sound /aʊ/. You can move horizontally (→) or vertically (↓) only.
IDENTIFY THE DIPHTHONGS AND TRIPHTHONGS USED IN THE FOLLOWING EXAMPLES:

/aiə/ 1. I am tired of being called a liar!
/oi/ 2. I don’t know how to cook but I can boil water.
/auə/ 3. My favorite thing to do is to smell by lovely flowers.
/əʊə/ 4. I don’t like to cut the grass, but it’s fun to use the mower.
/eɪə/ 5. I love cake that has more than one layer.

HOMOPHONES

• A homophone is a word that is pronounced the same as another word but differs in meaning, and may differ in spelling.
Thank you!