

### Vowel Inventories and Standard Lexical Sets

1. The system of vowel phonemes in an accent, plus some basic facts about lexical distribution, can quickly be determined by examining standard sets of words (Wells 1982:117-168):

<u>Keyword</u>	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> example</u>	<u>Other examples</u>
KIT	hid	ship, rib, dim, milk, slither, myth, pretty, build, women
DRESS	head	step, ebb, hem, shelf, effort, threat, bread, ready, any
TRAP	had	tap, cab, ham, scalp, arrow, plaid
LOT	hot	stop, rob, Tom, solve, profit, honest, swan, waffle
STRUT	hut	cup, rub, hum, pulse, butter, done, monk, touch, blood
FOOT	hood	put, full, cuckoo, good, woman, could
BATH	half	staff, path, brass, raft, clasp, blast, ask, after, master
CLOTH	coffee	off, cross, soft, often, gone, Austin
NURSE	her	hurt, curb, turn, burnt, shirt, firm, jerk, verb, term
FLEECE	he	creep, seed, seem, see, needle, these, brief, ceiling, be
FACE	hay	tape, babe, name, change, taper, bass, bouquet
PALM	father	calm, bra, spa, shah, lama, lava
THOUGHT	awe	caught, naughty, ought, taut, applaud, autumn, jaw
GOAT	owe	soap, road, note, robe, hole, so, noble, brooch, bowl
GOOSE	who	loop, mood, boom, boost, move, duke, cube, plume
PRICE	high	ripe, tribe, time, Friday, child, type, eye, fight
CHOICE	boy	boy, noise, void, coin, poison, employ, groin, hoist
MOUTH	how	out, loud, noun, count, flour, crowd, coward, plough
NEAR	here	beer, here, mere, pier, fear, fierce, beard, weird
SQUARE	hair	care, air, bear, their, where, scarce
START	car	far, star, bazaar, sharp, garb, farm, party, heart, market
NORTH	or	for, assort, orb, form, torpor, orbit, normal, quart
FORCE	ore	adore, bore, oar, floor, deport, pork, coarse, fourth
CURE	poor	tour, endure, gourd, gourmet, tourism, mural, curious
happy	city	copy, baby, ready, fluffy, taxi, committee, coffee
letter	paper	better, offer, teacher, meter, calendar, stupor, author
comma	panda	quota, vodka, sofa, about, again

2. The standard lexical sets fall into four basic categories:
  - Lax vowels: basically KIT – FOOT (BATH, CLOTH vary)
  - Tense vowels: basically NURSE – MOUTH
  - Vowels that historically preceded *r*: NEAR-CURE
  - Reduced (unstressed) vowels: *happY – comma*
3. Words that illustrate common major differences in lexical distribution of phonemes:
  - BATH (may group with TRAP or PALM)
  - CLOTH (may group with LOT or THOUGHT)
4. Labov et al (1997, 2006) adopt an historical approach to dialectology – i.e. accents are described in terms of changes from an "initial position" for the vowels: ‘our best estimation of the common base for American English dialects which resulted from the mixing of various English dialects in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries’

nucleus	SHORT		LONG					
	V		Upliding				Ingliding	
			Front upgliding		Back upgliding			
	front	back	Vy		Vw		Vh	
	front	back	front	back	front	back	unrounded	rounded
high	i	u	iy		iw	uw		
mid	e	ʌ	ey	oy		ow		oh
low	æ	o		ay		aw	ah	

- These transcriptions appear to be intended to do double duty as representations of vowel classes, and an approximate indication of the phonetic realization in the starting position.
  - All high front offglides are transcribed as /y/
  - All high back offglides are transcribed as /w/
  - /h/ indicates length or a central ‘offglide’ /ə/
  - /o/, Middle English short /o/, is merged with /ah/ or /oh/ in all American accents.
5. IPA correspondents for Labov’s symbols in ‘textbook’ American English:

SHORT		LONG					
		Upliding				Ingliding	
front	back	Front upgliding		Back upgliding		front	back
		front	back	front	back		
/i/ [ɪ]	/u/ [ʊ]	/iy/ [i:]		/iw/ [ju]	/uw/ [u:]		
/e/ [ɛ]	/ʌ/ [ʌ]	/ey/ [eɪ]	/oy/ [ɔɪ]		/ow/ [oʊ]		/oh/ [ɔ]
/æ/ [æ]	/o/=ah/ [ɑ]		/ay/ [aɪ]		/aw/ [aʊ]	/ah/ [ɑ]	

6. Mapping between Labov's vowel class symbols and Wells' lexical sets:

	SHORT		LONG					
			Upliding				Ingliding	
	V		Front upgliding		Back upgliding		Vh	
nucleus	front	back	Vy		Vw		unrounded rounded	
	front	back	front	back	front	back	unrounded	rounded
high	KIT	FOOT	FLEECE			GOOSE		
mid	DRESS	STRUT	FACE	CHOICE	GOAT		NURSE	THOUGHT
low	TRAP		PRICE		MOUTH		PALM, LOT	

- The NURSE vowel is a rhotic vowel in most American accents, so it doesn't really belong in the position shown.
- MOUTH is shown as a front vowel on the grounds that it is usually [æu] in N. America.

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