A comparison between different ways of showing the vowels of English

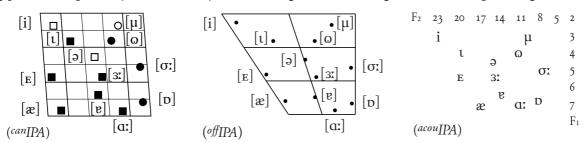
This chapter can be found in the second edition of *English PronunciationS*.

We have already seen (in § 0.17) that, even within ^{off}IPA, different symbols may happen to be used. We now also want to consider the way they are shown in phonetic figures, again within ^{off}IPA, because there *are* differences even in this case, which –instead– should be more uniform, by definition, if accurate.

So, let us have a look at the ^{can}IPA vocogram (in fig A), followed by the ^{off}IPA (vowel) quadrilateral, and by the acoustic chart of 12 British-English monophthongs: [i, t, E, æ, aː], [D, oː, ω, μ], [v, ɜː, ə] (of course, including [i, μ] of unstressed prevocalic positions). As a matter of fact, British English is the more frequently described accent (and generally better so than others).

Although, it has been demostrated long ago, even acoustically, that the lowest and frontest vocoid is [x], however, of IPA continues to show it in an excessively higher position... In spite of that, in fig B-D, we will use this unsatisfactory shape, but with the appropriate can IPA natural-phonetic symbols.

fig A. Three partially different ways of showing 12 British-English real monophthongs.



We will concentrate on the quadrilaterals given by the two regularly updated pronouncing dictionaries of English: *Jones* and *Wells*. Both of them use the quadrilateral shape of ^{off}IPA, but only the former has it with the subdivisions approved by the latest reform (which is not an improvement at all). The latter still shows the previous subdivisions, with two more non-horizontal lines (although, in two figures out of seven, three other horizontal lines are missing by mistake).

As a matter of fact, the current quadrilateral shape and subdivision is so rough that it is not easy to accurately define any precise collocation within its six general areas. This is evident when we consider the quadrilareals that appear in the *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association*, for the 29 languages given there.

Anyone who phonically knows some of those languages can find by oneself various unsatisfactory points, here and there.

But let us go back to the two dictionaries we are dealing with here: fig C-D are a representation of their quadrilaterals regarding the British accent, keeping their collocations, but using Natural Phonetics ^{can}IPA symbols. These are followed by the ^{off}IPA symbols used in those dictionaries, if different, and shown in inverted commas, to focus attention on their *generic phonemic* (and conservative) choice, rather than the phonetic and realistic one, as we show in fig B, although we do this using the official figure, with all its drawbacks, including its aforementioned [æ]-collocation. This is done on purpose, just to make comparisons easier.

One further main problem that remains is that both these dictionaries show the (narrow) diphthongs [ii, µu] as if they actually were two long monophthongs [ii, ui].

By comparing, then, fig B with fig C-D, certain differences are quite obvious, especially in regard to the *seven* diphthongs [11, E1, a9, σ9, a0, 30, μu].

fig B. British-English vocalic elements on offIPA quadrilaterals with canIPA symbols.

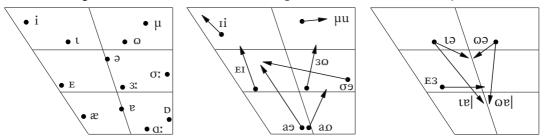


fig c. Jones: British-English vocalic elements on of IPA quadrilaterals with can IPA symbols, too.

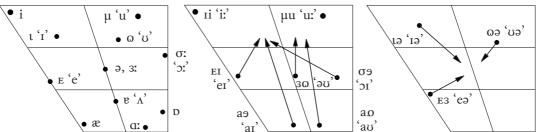
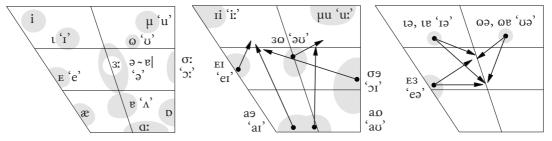


fig D. Wells: British-English vocalic elements on offIPA quadrilaterals with canIPA symbols, too.



At last, in fig E, we give the same British-English vocalic elements on our own vocograms, in order to show how they appear in a clearer and more convincing

way. In fact, any comparisons between different accents become more useful and practicable.

fig E. British-English vocalic elements on ^{can}IPA vocograms with ^{can}IPA symbols. Of course, the taxophones are included, not to convey a false –or partial– image of the actual accent.

