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Catalan pronunciation & accents

Catalan pronunciation & regional accents (not local dialects)

o. In a somehow condensed form, we are presenting the *neutral* pronunciation of Catalan (rather than ‘standard’, which actually corresponds more to its *mediatic* accent). Catalan main six *regional* accents are included, which means how native speakers actually pronounce Catalan, using the official language, often (but not necessarily) when talking to foreigners.

Habitually, Catalan, Valencian, and Balearic people use their own *dialects*, not only with different pronunciations, but also with peculiar grammars and vocabularies. However, we intend to describe not their dialects, but their pronunciation, for the vowels, consonants, and intonations of official Catalan. In a planned book, with Renzo Miotti, all this will be further dealt with, more completely and systematically.

Spelling peculiarities: *c* /s, k/, *ç* /s/, *g* /ʒ, ɡ/, *Vig#* /Vtʃ/, *j* /ʒ/, *ll* /ʎ/, *lll* /ll/, *ny* /ɲ/, *tg* and *tj* /dʒ/, *ts* /ts/, *x* /ʃ/, *Vix#* /Vʃ/, *tx* /tʃ/, *VttʃV*, *tz* /dz/, *y* /j/, *z* /z/.

Neutral Catalan

1. *Neutral* Catalan, in stressed position, has seven vowel phonemes, *ie* /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/. In unstressed syllables, it has only three vowel phonemes, *ie* /i, ɜ, u/ [i, ɛ, u]. Notice that there is also the possibility to have unstressed /e, ε; o, ɔ/ [e, ε; o, σ], in compounds, and derived or lofty forms, as well as in loanwords. Notice that we prefer /ɜ/ to the commonly found /ə/, because (as can be seen in fig 1) its actual realization is the *canIPA* symbol [ɛ̘] (not *offIPA*), is somehow between [ə] and [ɛ] (not excluding regional variants like [ɐ]).

Before /l, u/ [ʎ, ɫ, u], the phonemes /a, ɜ/ [a, ɛ̘] become [ɑ, ɛ̘] (and /ε, ɔ/ [ε, σ], become [ʌ̘, °ɑ; °ɔ, °σ]). For ⟨*i, u*⟩, Catalan presents /CiV, CuV/, /VjV, VwV/ but /#jV/, /kwV, gwV/, and diphthongs of the /Vi, Vu/ kind. However, in colloquial speech, and in the mediatic accent, /CiV, CuV/ tend certainly to become /CjV, CwV/.

The first vocogram in fig 1 presents /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/, while the second one shows unstressed /i, ɜ, u/. In addition, fig 1 also presents the /Vi, Vu/ diphthongs of Catalan (third and fourth vocograms), and /Vɜ/ diphthongs (fifth vocogram),

fig 2. Neutral Catalan accent: consonants & contoids – taxophones, geophones & xenophones.

m	[m]	[n]	[n]	[ɲ]	n	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	ɲ	[ɲ]	ɲ	
p	b	t	d	[t d]	[t d]				(c ɟ)	[k g]	k g	
									(kç ɟʎ)			
	f	{v}		[ʃ z]	ʃ z				(ç ʎ)	[ç]	[ç]	[ç]
												(w)
	[β]	(v)	[δ]		{z}				j			w (ɹ) (h)
					{s}				{j}			{w}
					r							(r)
					r							
			[l]	[t]		[t]	t		[l]	ʎ	[l]	[l]

shows) and also /ɲ/, which occurs finally or in /ɲN/ (<gm, gn>). Notice that fig 2 contains not only the contoids necessary for the Catalan neutral accent, with taxophones between [], but also regional taxophones, or geophones, or xenophones, between ().

In addition, some symbols appear between { }, because they are both possible (neutral, or colloquial, or mediatic) taxophones and regional variants, too. We did not include indications of either manner or place of articulation, because we are convinced that our devoted readers can perfectly understand what we mean.

Taxophonically, we find the sequences /ts, dz/ [tʃ, dʒ] (dentalveolar stops and apicoalveolar constrictives – or ‘fricatives’), often erroneously described as stopstrictives (‘affricates’): *gats* /ˈgats/ [ˈgatsʃ] (more clearly [ˈgatʃ]), *potser* /ˈputse/ [ˈputʃe], *botzina* /budˈzina/ [budˈziɲɔ] (certainly heterosyllabic, when stress is present).

Often enough –in addition of being apico-alveolar, [ʃ, z] – /s, z/ are lamino-alveolar, [ʃ, z], even in neutral accents, but also in colloquial and mediatic (and some regional) ones.

3. In *intervocalic* position, we find /ttʃ, ddʒ/ [tʃtʃ, dʒdʒ] (alveolar stops and postalveo-palatal stopstrictives, with *spread lips*, or *neutral*, ie [tʃ, dʒ]), as well. The /ttʃ, ddʒ/ [tʃtʃ, dʒdʒ] sequences differ considerably both from plain /tʃ, dʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ] and from the geminates found in other languages, /tʃtʃ, dʒdʒ/ [tʃtʃ, dʒdʒ]): *despatxar* /dɛspətʃa/ [dɛspətʃa], *mitjà* /miˈdʒa/ [miˈdʒa].

However, in non-intervocalic contexts, we have /tʃ, dʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ]: *despatx* /dɛspətʃ/ [dɛspətʃ], *despatx obert* /dɛspətʃ uˈbɛrt/ [dɛspətʃ uˈbɛrt]).

4. After pauses or consonants, /ʃ, z/ [ʃ, z] increasingly more often correspond to /tʃ, dʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ] (especially in mediatic accents and in colloquial speech): (*un*) *xal* /((un)ˈʃal, -tʃal/ [(un)ˈʃal, -tʃal], (*un*) *joc* /((un)ˈʒok, -dʒok/ [(un)ˈʒok, -dʒok], but nothing of the kind happens with /s, z/ (contrary to the mediatic or regional accents of many other languages). Generally, /ʃ#s, ʃ#z; tʃ#s, tʃ#z/ become [ʃ#s, #z; #tʃ, #dʒ] (mainly in mediatic accents and in colloquial speech).

The sequences /pl, bl; kl, gl/ are often (though not always) *hetero-syllabic*, with possible lengthening, or even gemination, of non-continuant consonants, ie [C#l,

C[#]l, C[#]Cl] (more simply: [C-l, C:l, C-Cl]). In non-traditional pronunciations, these sequences can even be *tauto*-syllabic [[#]Cl], ie with /b, g/ [β, γ], which normalize the situation in these four cases, for syllabification, as well.

5. Certain geminations are possible, especially for sonants, written with unasimilated historical spelling: *admetre, cotna, atlas, espatlla* /3s'paλλ3/ [ɔs'paλλɔ]. /l/ is typically velarized, [[#]lV, VllV, ClV, VlC, Vl[#]] – or [l] (velar, in any context, or pre-velar, [ɫ], with tautosyllabic front vowels).

In rhythm groups, /3/, when in contact with another vowel, is regularly elided, even when not shown in spelling: *d'aquí a una estona* //dɔ'ki 3un33s'ton3// [dɔ'ki (3)un3s'ton3/ [dɔ'ki(ɔ)u nɔs'to'nɔ], *que es fa* //k33s'fa// [k3s'fa] [kɔs'fa], *que es diu* //k33s'diu// [k3z'diu/ [kɔz'diu] (notice that, by coarticulation, /z/ is dentalveolar, [z], rather than [ʒ] or [ʒ]).

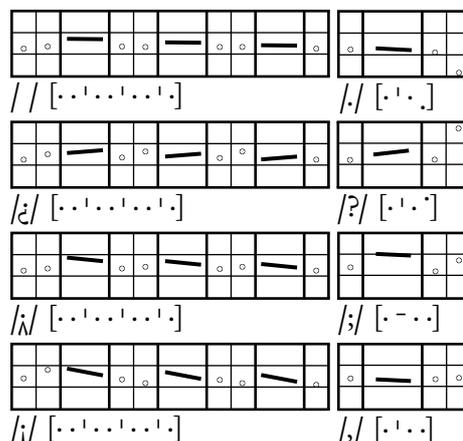
6. In the infinitives and gerunds with enclitic pronouns, -r, -t, which are normally 'silent', are –instesd– pronounced as /r, t/ [r, t]: *fer* /'fe/ but *fer-ho* /'feru/, *anant* /3'nan/, but: *anant-hi* /3'nanti/, *portar* /pur'ta/, but: *portar-se* /pur'tars3/. All final stops are invariably voiceless before /V, C̣/, /| (ie vowels, voiceless consonants, or pauses) and voiced before /C̣/ (ie voiced consonants).

Therefore, *b#*, *d#*, *g#* (ie word-final) are regularly /p, t, k/: *tub estret, arab, fred intens, liquid, bioleg i geoleg, llarg*. Vice versa, *p#*, *t#*, *c#* change to /b, d, g/ in cases like *prop de, pot venir, esbufec desaprovador, poc modest*. Even (t)s#, tx#, Vig# (V = any vowel), are /ɰ(d)z, dʒ/ (including f# [v]) before /V, C̣/: *els nens* [ɔłz'nɛnɔ], *tots els jugadors* [tɔ'dzɔł(z) ʒuɣa'doɔ], *mateix any* [mɔ,tɛ'ʒɔn], *vaig demanar* [bɔdʒdɔmɔ'na], *buf estrany* [bu vɔs'tɾɔn]. Thus, even if neutral Catalan does not have the phoneme /v/, it has [v] as a taxophone.

7. Within word boundaries, very much like what happens in sentences, and in lofty words, loanwords, or derived forms, written with *b, d* before /C̣/, correspond to /p, t/: *substancia, obscurir, dissabte, adquirir*.

While, for *p, t, c, s/ç*, before /C̣/, we have /b, d, g; z/ (realized as stops, [b, d, g]):

fig 3. Neutral Catalan accent: intonation.



Regional accents of Catalan

9. In addition to the neutral and mediatic pronunciation, we present the six main regional accents (although there may also be some minor internal local differences), as shown in the map of fig 5.

fig 5. Catalan accents.



Eastern Catalan

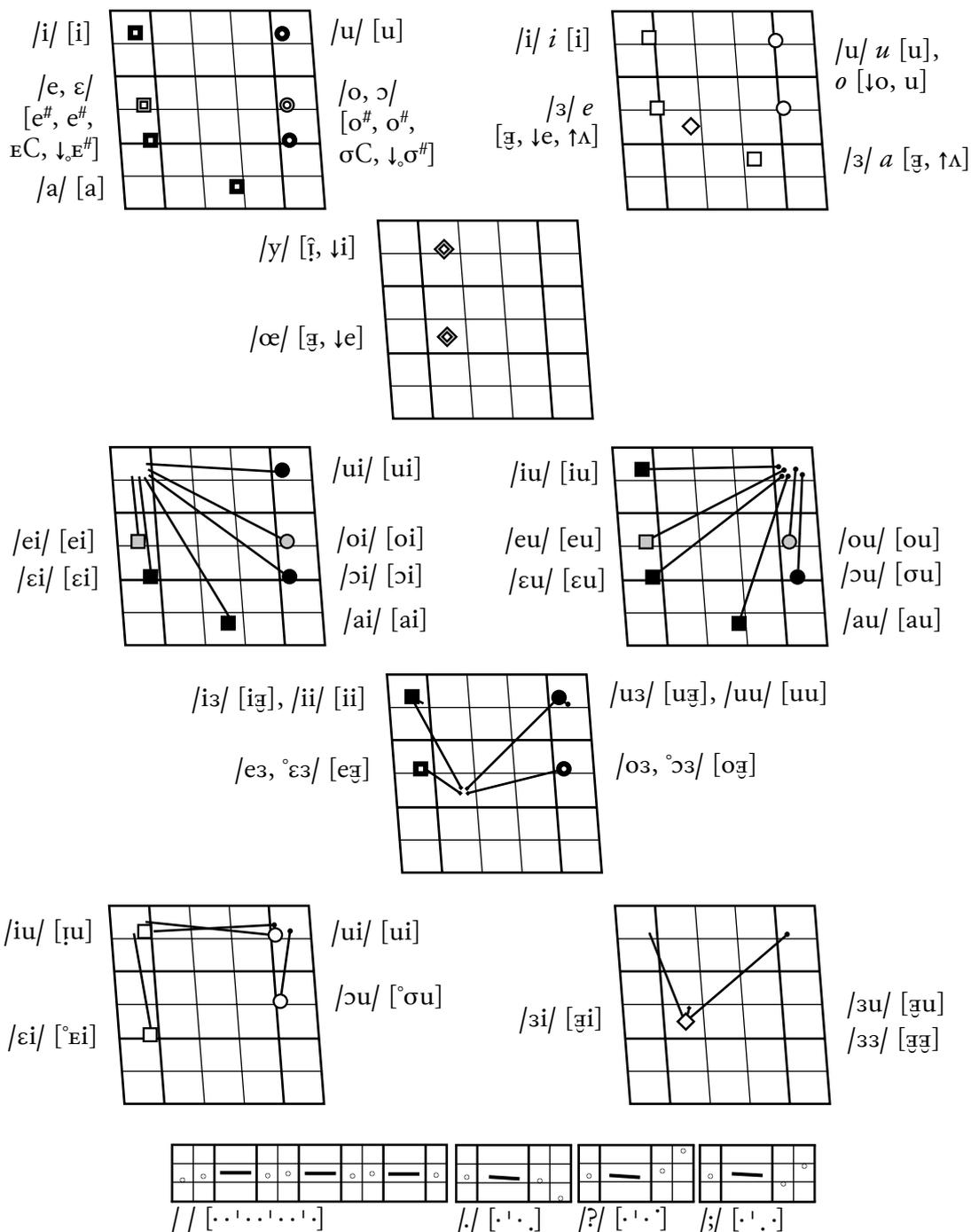
10. *Eastern Catalan*, in dialectal works, is generally called ‘central’. In Barcelona, both under the influence of Spanish and normal evolution, /ɜ/ is [ɐ], or [ʌ] before [t, u]. Many younger speakers tend to have /ɜ/ → /e/ for unstressed *e*. Increasingly more often, /e, ε, o, ɔ/ may appear exchanged. /ʎ/ changes to /j/; even, /ʝ, ʒ/ → /tʃ, dʒ/, and, in intervocalic position, /dɔʒ/ → /ttʃ/; /bl, gl/ → /pl, kl/ (all these features are highly stigmatized, but extremely widespread and influential).

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 6.

Northern Catalan

11. The *Northern* Catalan accent is partially found in tiny areas above eastern Catalan (bilingual with Spanish), and above them in the (bilingual with French) Pyrenees. Indeed, as in Spanish it only has five vowel phonemes, since /e, ε/ and /o, ɔ/ are merged, with the taxophones shown in the first vocogram. In addition, in French loans it also has two *xeno-phonemes*, ie /y, œ/ generally realized as the semi-rounded vocoids shown in the third vocogram.

fig 8. Northern Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.



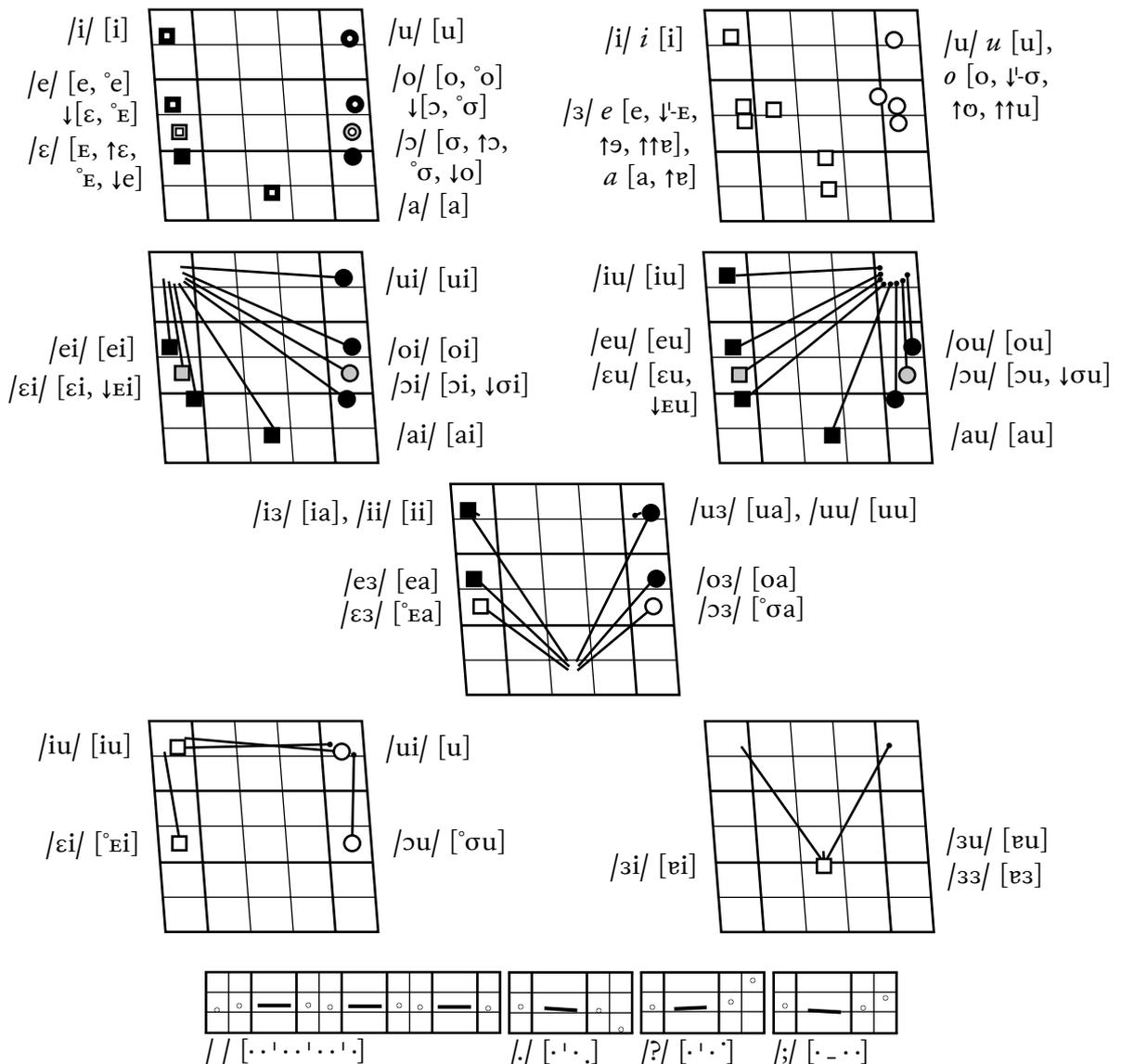
The second vocogram presents the three Catalan vowel occurring in unstressed syllables. But, the peculiar thing is that /ɜ, əu/, in broader accents, may depend on current spelling, so that, for *e, a, o*, also the variants shown are heard. In addition, /r, r/ are generally merged and realized as uvular, ie [ʁ] (approximant) or [ʀ] (tap), not only in French loans. For /l/, we usually find [lV, lC, lʃ#].

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 8.

Southern Catalan

12. The *Southern Catalan* accent is transitional to the Valencian one, with tiny differences, including a possible use of a real /v/ phoneme, in addition to the taxophone of /f/ [v]. Besides, /l/ tends to be [ʎ] in any contexts. It has seven stressed vowels, but /e, ε; o, ɔ/ are used rather unsystematically, also with intermediate

fig 9. Southern Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.



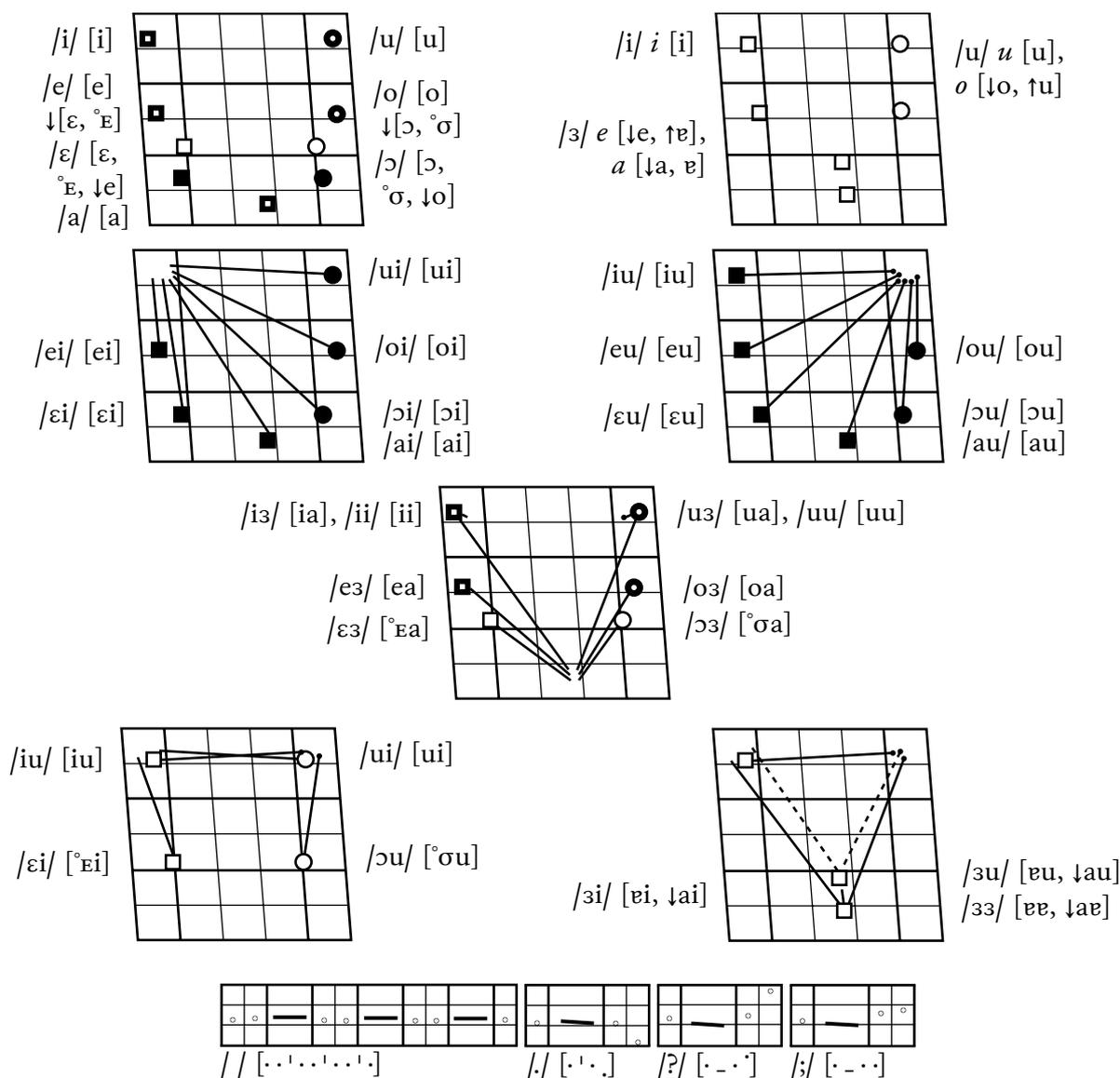
phones, ie [ɛ, σ], in addition to unmerged timbres for /ʒ/, mostly based on spelling. The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 9.

Valencian (Catalan)

13. *Valencian* Catalan, or simply Valencian, has seven stressed vowels, /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/, and five in unstressed syllables, /i, e, a, o, u/ (shown in fig 10, together with its intonation patterns). Notice that /ε, ɔ/ are fairly centralized, [ɛɞ, °ɛɞ; ɔɞ, °σɞ]. It traditionally distinguishes /b, v/ b, v; after pauses, /b, d, g/ are [b̥, d̥, g̥]; /s, z/ become [ʃ, z̥] after /i/. Compared to neutral Catalan, it may have no /ʒ/, usually substituted by /dʒ/: *gent* [ˈdʒent], *joc* [ˈdʒok].

The sequences /CjV, CwV/ can be [CiV, CuV], almost systematically, as on the Balearic Isles, /ʎ/ is only found for Latin *l*- and *-ll*-, not for ‘palatalized’ *Cl*, *liV* clus-

fig 10. Valencian (Catalan) accent: vowels & intonation.



ters. Besides, we find /j/ [j], but [g_j] after nasals or pauses; /l/ [ɫ] (but also [l]).

In Valencia and its outskirts, but even sparsely in the Valencian territory, both under the influence of Spanish and normal evolution, we generally find no voiced stopstricative phonemes, nor voiced grooved constrictives. We do find, however, the assimilated phonetic realizations [z, ʒ; dz, dʒ] before voiced consonants.

In *broader* accents, for /sC/, there is often [hC], or assimilation to the following consonant, even with gemination, [CC], as in eastern Andalusian. /ʎ/ coalesces with /j/ [j, g_j]. Likewise, /w/ is often 'gw/' [w, ɣ]; besides, /v/ → /b/. All these broad features are highly stigmatized but extremely widespread.

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 10.

Balearic (Catalan)

14. *Balearic* Catalan, or simply Balearic, in addition to /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/ (shown in fig 11, together with its intonation patterns), may also have stressed /'ɜ/ [ʕ] and /ɜ/ [ɜ, v[#]] as a marked features of local dialects; for /ε, a, ɔ/ it has [e, a, ɔ] and [æ, α, ɒ] + [ɫ, u]. We also find /o/ (and more rarely, /e/ too, which often alternates with /ɜ/).

/ʎ/ is mainly found in words deriving from Latin *l-* or *-ll-*, whereas those with 'palatalized' *Cl, liV* clusters have /j/; /l/ can always be [ɫ, l] in any context. Besides, /v/ tends to be different from /b/. The palatal taxophones of /k, g/ [c; ɟ, ɟ] before /i, e, ε, a, ɜ/ and word-final /k/ [c] are noteworthy. Often /b, g/ may not present the usual taxophones [β, ɣ] (while [δ] for /d/ is generally present).

There is a less typical accent, especially in Majorca, resulting both from Spanish influence and normal evolution, which exhibits the vowels given in the second vocogram; for /l/ we may find [lVɫ], whereas it never has /ʎ/ (which becomes /j/).

Increasingly more often, we also find: /v/ → /b/, /ʎ/ → /tʃ/, and /j/ → [Vj] and [l[#]g_j, ɲg_j] (word-initial, after a pause, or after /n/). In Minorca, we can find /r[#]/ [r[#]].

Not all accents have words with stressed /ɜ/ (ie /'ɜ/ [ʕ] and /ɜ/ [ɜ, v[#]]), as in Felanitx, where –however– broader versions of some other vowels occur, with peculiar timbres, as: /ε, e/ → [E], and /a/ → [A], /ɔ/ → [ɔ].

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 11.

fig 11. Balearic Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.

