

27.

Laterals

27.0. The last manner of articulation is the *lateral* one, in which the tongue, while touching a point on the palatal vault, contracts laterally, thereby permitting air to pass out by the sides of the tongue.

fig 27.1 shows the phoneme /l/ [l] and the diaphoneme /ɫ/ ^{a'b}[ɫ], with its international realization, [ɫ̥], which is a semi-lateral contoid (with no contact with the roof of the mouth), together with the prepalatal taxophone, [l̥], which occurs for /l/ before heterosyllabic /j/, [l̥#j].

fig 27.2 will show several different realizations, which are needed for natural performances of the three neutral accents of English. Actually, not all of their symbols need to be used in simple transcriptions, although they certainly very useful. However, their articulations and co-articulations must be known positively.

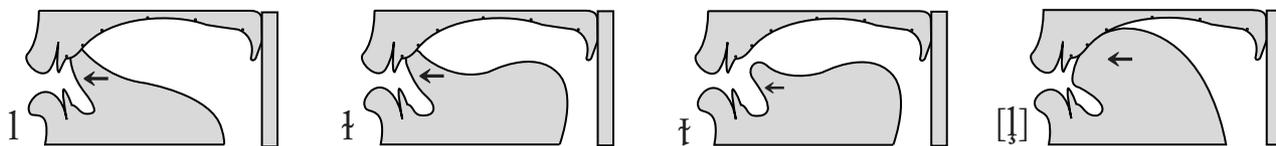
27.1. The only lateral English phoneme, from a strict *intrap*honic point of view, is //l// [l, ɫ], with two very important taxophones, or contextual allophones (together with others, by coarticulation, as we will see). In actual fact, given their considerable importance, from a descriptive and teaching point of view, our diaphonemic transcription makes use of /l, ɫ/ (instead of a more abstract /l/ –which would decidedly be less <interphonic>– for /ɫ/).

There is one caveat: although we have decided to include /ɫ/ among our diaphonemic symbols, this does not imply that we consider it a real phoneme, as no opposition exists in English between /ɫ/ and /l/. It is simply a very useful guide (especially for foreigners) to make a safe and straightforward choice between them.

27.2. On the other hand, in an almost neutral pronunciation, certain speakers may present cases such as:

i^b[^hkhɒd͡lɪŋ] *a*[^hkhɑd͡lɪŋ] /^hkɒd͡lɪŋ/ *codling*
i[^hkhɒd͡lɪŋ, -d͡əlɪŋ] *a*[^hkhɑd͡lɪŋ, -d͡əlɪŋ, -d͡ɪŋ] *b*[^hkhɒd͡lɪŋ, -d͡əlɪŋ, -d͡ɪŋ]
 /^hkɒd͡əlɪŋ/ *coddling* (including even [-d͡lɪŋ], which unifies different pronunciations into one).

fig 27.1. Four indispensable lateral articulations.



27.3. Traditional transcriptions excessively hide many characteristics, including the difference between [ɫ̥, ɫ̥], and the actual fact that, before (a heterosyllabic) /j/, not only does [ɫ̥] not occur, in neutral pronunciation (as, instead, it does before any other consonants), but it is prepalatal, [ɫ̥], after a stressed short vowel, where it is heterosyllabic as to /j/; otherwise, after long vowels or diphthongs, they belong to the same syllable, ie they are tautosyllabic, so the lateral is alveolar, as expected being before a vowel; but, in this case, it is the same even for /V̆V̆ljV̆/:

i^a*b*[^hmɪɫ̥-jən] /^hmɪljən/ *million*
i[^hkhɒɹ̥niiliə; -ljə] *a*[^hkhɒɹ̥niiliɔ; -ljɔ] *b*[^hkhɒɹ̥niiliə; -ljə] /kɔɹ̥niiliə/
Cornelia.

27.4. In other contexts, /l/ is alveolar, [l], as in:

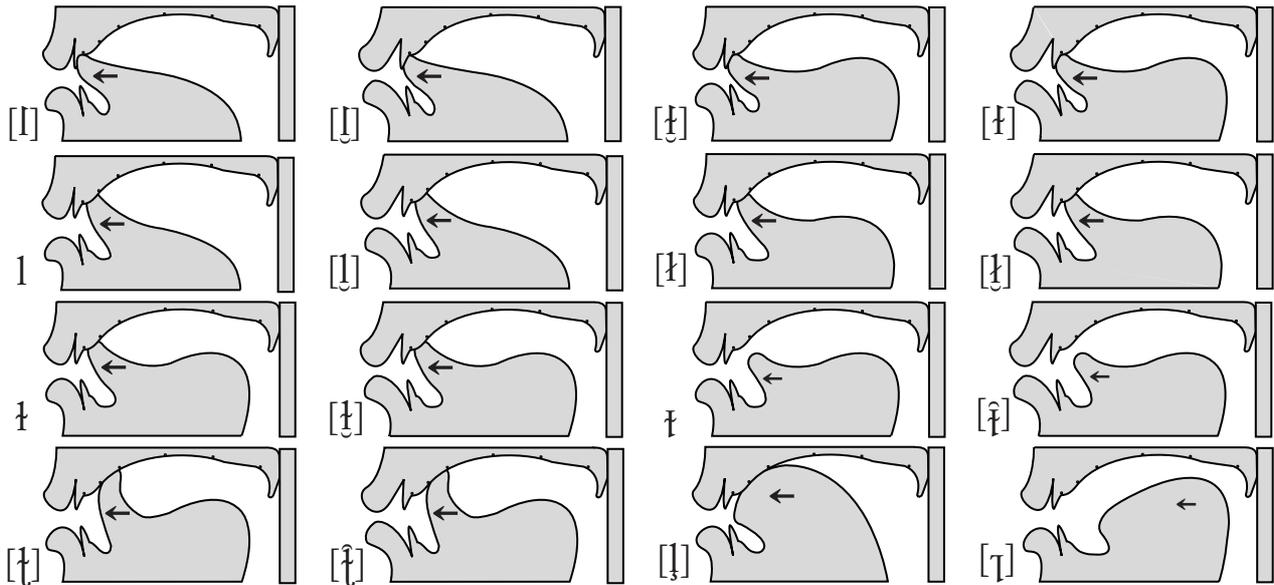
i[^hlʊusaɛt] *a*[^hlʊusaɛt] *b*[^hlɥusaɛt, ʰljɥu-] /^hlʊusaɛt, ʰlj-/ *leucite*.

27.5. Also between a stressed short vowel and another vowel, which makes one syllable with /l/, in the *neutral* (International, American, or British) pronunciation, [l] (not *i*[ɫ̥] *a*^b[ɫ̥]) is used:

i^b[^hfɒl-i] *a*[^hfɑl-i] /^hfɒli/ *folly*
i[^hfɒl-σɔ] *a*[^hfɑl-σɔ] *b*[^hfɒl-ɜɔ] /^hfɒlɜɔ/ *follow*
i^a*b*[^ht̥hɛl-ɪm] /^ht̥ɛlɪm/ *tell him*
i[^hfiilɪt] *a*^b[^hfiilɪt] /^hfiilɪt/ *feel it*
i[^hfɔ:l 'aɔt] *a*[^hfɔ:l 'aɔt] *b*[^hfɔ:l 'aɔt] /^hfɔ:l 'aɔt/ *fall out*
i^a*b*[^hbɪl 'ɛvənz̥] /^hbɪl 'ɛvənz̥/ *Bill Evans*.

27.6. Their distribution, in any case, is rather simple, once it has been clearly explained. As we have said, in diaphonemic transcriptions, it is convenient to use the two primary symbols, /l, ɫ̥/; although (to be

fig 27.2. Important lateral articulations for the three neutral accents of English.



precise) it would be more useful to use at least four symbols, [l, ɫ, ɮ, ɹ] (besides [ɮ] in British [and British-like] pronunciation, before /ɹ, tɹ, dɹ/), in addition to three syllabic ones, [l̥, ɮ̥, ɹ̥].

Furthermore, at least in specific descriptions, the taxophones with dental contact, [l, ɮ], should be indicated, and also those with lip-rounding after V or C that have a labial component): [l̥, ɫ̥, ɮ̥, ɹ̥; l̥̥, ɫ̥̥]. Especially, the coarticulation of labialization is automatic; therefore, it is necessary to mark it only where it is being explained, in order to draw attention to the phenomenon.

27.7. Thus, before vowels, we regularly have /l/ [l]. To be rigorous, lip-rounding also occurs before rounded vowels, by coarticulation:

i [l̥iɹiɻ] *a*'*b* [l̥iɹiɻ] /liiv/ *leave*
i [l̥æst] *a* [l̥æ(ɹ)st] *b* [l̥ɑst] /læst/ *last*
i'*a*'*b* [l̥ɔk] [l̥ɔk] /lɔk/ *look*
i [l̥ɔɛn] [l̥ɔɛn] *a*'*b* [l̥ɔɛn] [l̥ɔɛn] /lɔɛn/ *loin*.

27.8. However, a special symbol –like [l̥̥]– is not needed, since it is absolutely inevitable to prepare the lips for the rounded vocoids that follow, within the syllable.

In fact, an articulation of /l/ without lip-rounding, [l̥], would somehow be perceived as something <strange>, exactly as for /k, g/ followed either by front vowels or by /j/, or else by rounded vowels or by /w/: the articulations [k̥, g̥] and [k̥̥, g̥̥], respectively, are natural and automatic:

i^ʌ*b*[ˈkhiɪt] [[ˈkhiɪt]] /ˈkiɪt/ *kit*
i^ʌ*b*[ˈgɛt] [[ˈgɛt]] /ˈgɛt/ *get*
i[ˈkɪjɪrʊb] *a*^ʌ*b*[ˈkɪjɪrʊb] [[ˈkɪj-]] /ˈkɪjuːb/ *cube*
i[ˈkɒrɪ] *a*[ˈkɒrɪ] *b*[ˈkɒrɪ] [[ˈkɒ-]] /ˈkɒrɪ/ *core*
i[ˈguːs] *a*[[ˈgʊs]] *b*[[ˈgʊs]] [ˈg-] /ˈguːs/ *goose*
i[ˈkwaɪt] *a*^ʌ*b*[ˈkwaɪt] [[ˈkɪ-]] /ˈkwaɪt/ *quite*.

27.9. Therefore, in particular for /tʃ/, an <objective> pronunciation, obtained by juxtaposing /p/ and /tʃ/, for instance, would produce an effect that may perplex native speakers. Strictly speaking, arguably, [pʃ] would have something less, in comparison with the genuine [[pʃ]], as in:

i[ˈphiipʃ] [[ˈphiipʃ]] *a*^ʌ*b*[ˈphiipʃ] [[ˈphiipʃ]] /ˈpiipʃ/ *people*.

27.10. It is important to notice that, for postvocalic and tautosyllabic *l*, after rounded vowels, in the various languages, labial coarticulation regularly occurs; therefore, it need not be marked expressly, as instead we are doing here. Before heterosyllabic /j/, we find [ɭ] (and [[ɭ]]):

i^ʌ*b*[ˈmɪljən] /ˈmɪljən/ *million*
i^ʌ*b*[ˈbʊljən] [[ˈbʊljən]] /ˈbʊljən/ *bullion*
i[ˈɔːl jəˈniːd] *a*[ˈɔːl jəˈniːd] *b*[ˈɔːl jəˈniːd, jɪ-] [[-ɭ j-]] /ˈɔːl jəˈniːd/ *all you need*.

27.11. Before /θ, ð; ts, dz/, we have [[t, t̥]], [t̥]:

i[ˈfɪlθi] *a*^ʌ*b*[ˈfɪlθi] *a*^ʌ*b*[[ˈfɪlθi]] /ˈfɪlθi/ *filthy*
i[ˈɔːt̥ ðəˈtʰaɪm] *a*[ˈɔːt̥ ðəˈtʰaɪm] *b*[ˈɔːt̥ ðəˈtʰaɪm] *a*^ʌ*b*[[-t̥ ð-]] /ˈɔːt̥ ðəˈtʰaɪm/ *all the time*
i[ˈbɛt̥s] *a*[ˈbɛt̥s] *b*[ˈbɛt̥s] *a*^ʌ*b*[[-t̥s]] /ˈbɛt̥s/ *belts*
i[ˈfɔːt̥s] *a*[ˈfɔːt̥s] *b*[ˈfɔːt̥s] *a*^ʌ*b*[[-t̥s]] /ˈfɔːt̥s/ *faults*.

27.12. With /θ, ð/ + /l/, we have [[l]] (dental, but not velarized, of course):

i[əˈmɛnθ ˈleɪt] *a*[əˈmɛnθ ˈleɪt] *b*[əˈmɛn ˈleɪt] [[-nθ ˈl-]] /əˈmɛnθ ˈleɪt/ *a month late*
i^ʌ*b*[wɪðˈlɛv] *a*[wɪðˈlɛv] [[-ðl-]] /wɪðˈlɛv/ *with love*.

27.13. In British English, before /ɹ, tɹ, dɹ/, /t/ is realized as postalveolar, still velarized [[t̥, t̥̥]]:

i [ʰʃhʉdʒɪən] a [ʰʃhʉdʒɪən] b [ʰʃhʉdʒɪən] /ʰʃhʉdʒɪən/ *children*
 i [σ·(ʃ)ʲɛdʒi] a [ɔ·(ʃ)ʲɛdʒi] b [σ·(ʃ)ʲɛdʒi] [[i σ·(ʃ), a ɔ·(ʃ)-, b σ·(ʃ)-]] /ɔ·(ʃ)ʲɛdʒi/
already.

27.14. Before a pause, or before another consonant, we have [[ʃ, ʃ̥]], [ʃ]:

i a b [ʰbʉʃ] /ʰbʉʃ/ *bill*
 i a b [ʰbʉʃʰ] /ʰbʉʃʰ/ *built*
 i [ʰhɛʃ] a [ʰhʌʃ:] b [ʰhʌʃ:] a [[ʰhʌʃ:]] /ʰhɛʃ/ *hull*
 i [ʰfσ·ʃ] [[-ʃ̥]] a [ʰfɔ·ʃ] b [ʰfσ·ʃ] a b [[-ʃ̥]] /ʰfɔ·ʃ/ *fall*
 i [ʰfσ·(ʃ)k] [[-(ʃ̥)k]] a [ʰfɔ·(ʃ)k] b [ʰfσ·(ʃ)k] a b [[-(ʃ̥)k]] /ʰfɔ·(ʃ)k/ *Falk*.

27.15. In the case of words with /ʃN[#]/, we generally find nasalization, which, again, need not be marked explicitly:

i [ʰkhʉʃ:n] [[-ʃ̥:n]] a b [ʰkhʉʃ:n] [[-ʃ̥:n]] /ʰkʉʃ:n/ *kiln*
 i [ʰɛʃ:m] [[ʰɛʃ̥:m]] a [ʰɛʃ:m] b [ʰɛʃ:m] [[-ʃ̥:m]] /ʰɛʃ:m/ *elm*.

27.16. When /ʃ[#]/ and a word-initial vowel meet, with no pause between, we have [[l, l̥]]:

i [ʰfiilʉʃ] a b [ʰfiilʉʃ] /ʰfiilʉʃ/ *feel it*
 i [ʰσ:l 'σɔvəɪ] [[-l̥ 'σ-]] a [ɔ·ʃ 'σɔvəɪ] [[-l̥ 'σ-]] b [σ:l 'ɔvəɪ] /ɔ·ʃ 'ɔvəɪ/ *all over*.

27.17. As far as intense (or <syllabic>) *l* is concerned, //l̥//, we find lip-rounding after consonants with a labial component, /m, p, b; f, v; ʃ, ʒ; ʃ, ʒ; ɹ, w/. In addition, before vowels within words, we have [[l̥, l̥̥]]:

i b [ʰkhɔdʒl̥ɪŋ] a [ʰkhaɔdʒl̥ɪŋ] /ʰkɔdʒl̥ɪŋ/ *coddling* (cf § 27.2)
 i [ʰʃhɪɛmbʌl̥ɪŋ] a [ʰʃhɪɛmbʌl̥ɪŋ] b [ʰʃhɪɛmbʌl̥ɪŋ] [[-bʌl̥ɪŋ]] /ʰtɪɛmbʌl̥ɪŋ/ *trumbling*.

27.18. However, before vowels belonging to a following word, a semi-velarized alveolar articulation, [[ʃ̥, ʃ̥̥]], is found in American and British English (even before front vowels), although it is also possible to use the common symbols [ʃ, ʃ̥]:

i [ʰlʉʃ̥ ʰɛli, -ɹ̥, ʰɪə-] a [ʰlʉʃ̥ ʰɛli] b [ʰlʉʃ̥ ʰɛli] [[-ʃ̥ ʰ-]] /ʰlʉʃ̥ ʰɛli/ *Little Italy*
 i [ʰphiip̥ ʰiɪŋ, -ɪŋ] a [ʰphiip̥ ʰiɪŋ] b [ʰphiip̥ ʰiɪŋ] [[-p̥]] /ʰpiip̥ ʰiɪŋ/ *people eating*.

27.19. Lastly, before a pause or a consonant, we have [ɫ̪, ʃ̪]; while, after /θ, ð/, the contact is dental:

i [lɪɫ̪, -ɾ̪] *a* [lɪɫ̪] *b* [lɪɫ̪] /lɪɫ̪/ *little*
i [ˈeŋk̪] *a* [ˈʌŋk̪] *b* [ˈeŋk̪] /ˈeŋk̪/ *uncle*
i [ˈtʰeɪb̪] *a* *b* [ˈtʰeɪb̪] [-b̪] /ˈtʰeɪb̪/ *table*
i [ˈɔːf̪] *a* [ˈɔːf̪] *b* [ˈɔːf̪] [f̪] /ˈɔːf̪/ *awful*
i [ˈbɛnθ̪] *a* *b* [ˈbɛnθ̪] [-nθ̪] /ˈbɛnθ̪/ *benthal*.

27.20. Often, many transcriptions present sequences of /əɪV/, because they refer to slow or careful speech:

i *b* [ˈnɒvəɪɪst] *a* [ˈnɒvəɪst] /ˈnɒvəɪst/ *novelist*
i [bəˈliɪv] *a* *b* [bəˈliɪv] /bəˈliɪv/ *believe*
i [pəˈliɪs] *a* *b* [pəˈliɪs] /pəˈliɪs/ *police*
i [kəˈlɪzən] *a* [kəˈlɪzən] *b* [-zən] /kəˈlɪzən/ *collision*.

27.21. Currently, though, we find /ɫ̪V/:

a [[ˈnɒvɪɪst]] *b* [[ˈnɒvɪɪst]] /ˈnɒvəɪst/ *novelist*
a *b* [[bɪˈliɪv]] /bəˈliɪv/ *believe*
a *b* [[pɪˈliɪs]] /pəˈliɪs/ *police*
a [[kɪˈlɪzən]] *b* [[kɪˈlɪzən]] /kəˈlɪzən/ *collision*.

27.22. It is interesting to compare the following forms, which generally maintain a slight difference in syllabic structure, in comparison with the cases previously seen:

i [ˈbliɪtʃ] *a* *b* [ˈbliɪtʃ] /ˈbliɪtʃ/ *bleach*
i [ˈplɪɪz] *a* *b* [ˈplɪɪz] /ˈplɪɪz/ *please*.

27.23. We will now report, though not recommend, the frequent insertion of a homorganic stop before /θ, s, ʃ/ (not /f/) preceded by /t̪/:

i [ˈfɪɫ̪θi] *a* *b* [ˈfɪɫ̪θi; -ɫ̪θi] *a* *b* [[-ɫ̪θi]] /ˈfɪɫ̪θi/ *filthy*
i [ˈfɔːʃs, ˈfɒʃs] *a* [ˈfɔːʃs; -ɫ̪ts, ˈfɒɫ̪-] *b* [ˈfɔːʃs; -ɫ̪ts, ˈfɒɫ̪-] *a* *b* [[-ɫ̪ts]] /ˈfɔːʃs/ *false*
i [ˈwɛɫ̪ʃ] *a* [ˈwɛɫ̪ʃ, -ɫ̪ʃ] [[-ɫ̪ʃ]] *b* [ˈwɛɫ̪ʃ; -ɫ̪ʃ, -ɫ̪ʃ] *a* *b* [[-ɫ̪ʃ]] /ˈwɛɫ̪ʃ/ *Welsh*.

27.24. This occurs with /z/, as well, but more rarely:

i [ˈbɛɫ̪z] *a* [ˈbɛɫ̪z; -ɫ̪dz] *b* [ˈbɛɫ̪z; -ɫ̪dz] /ˈbɛɫ̪z/ *bells*
i [ˈfiɪɫ̪z] *a* *b* [ˈfiɪɫ̪z; -ɫ̪dz, ˈfiɪɫ̪-] /ˈfiɪɫ̪z/ *feels*.

27.25. On the other hand, the reverse simplification may also be heard, as in:

i [firiːz̥] a ' b [fiːɪd̥z̥; -t̥z̥, 'fiɪt̥z̥] a ' i [[-t̥z̥]] /'fiɪd̥z/ *fields*
 i [bɛɪts̥] a [bɛɪts̥, -t̥s̥] b [bɛɪts̥, -t̥s̥] [[-t̥s̥]] /'bɛɪts/ *belts*.

27.26. However, especially when there are possible ambiguities (and grammemes {-s, -'s}), spelling is better respected:

i [wɔːɪz̥] a [wɔːt̥z̥] b [wɔːt̥z̥] /'wɔːt̥z/ *walls*
 i [bɪɪz̥] a ' b [bɪt̥z̥] /'bɪt̥z/ *Bill's*.

27.27. In non-neutral American pronunciation, /l/ can be realized as [ɫ] (sometimes even [t̥]) before vowels or /j/. This can also occur in New Zealand, in northern Wales, but most of all in Scotland. On the other hand, in Ireland, in South Africa, and in southern Wales, usually, [l] may be heard, even before consonants or pauses.