



## ENGLISH VOWELS: DIPHTHONGS AND TRIPHTHONGS

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**ANNOTATSIYA.** *Ushbu maqolada ingliz tili unli tovushlar tizimi diftong va triftonglar tanishtiriladi. Aniqlik kiritadigan bo‘lsak, ingliz tovush tizimi undosh va unli tovushlardan iborat. Lekin ularning o‘rtasida muhim farq mavjud. Aniqrog‘i, undosh tovushlar talaffuz qilinayotganda havo oqimi torayadi va to‘siqqa uchraydi, holbuki unli tovushlar tovush hosil qilishda hech qanday to‘sqinliksiz chiqadi.*

*Ushbu maqola ingliz tilidagi unli tovushlarni, jumladan diphtonglar va triphthonglarni muhokama qiladi. Unli tovushlar asosan ikki guruhga bo‘linadi: biri diphtonglar, ikkinchisi triphthonglar, va har ikkisi ham ravon va tabiiy nutqda muhim rol o‘ynaydi.*

**ABSTRACT .** *In this article the English vowel system is introduced along with diphthongs and triphthongs. It is clear that The English sound system involves consonant and vowel ones. But, there is a significant difference between them. To be exact, when consonants are pronounced, the constriction of airflow appears, while vowels are the sounds which has no barrier in sound production.*

*This article addresses English vowels, including diphthongs and triphthongs. Vowels are especially, divided into two categories, one of which is diphthongs and the other one is triphthongs, which both play a crucial role in fluent and natural speech.*

**Keywords:** *English vowel system, diphthongs, triphthongs, sound system, sound production.*

Diphthongs and triphthongs are “a union of two or three vowels” pronounced in one syllable together; they are formed by a quick but smooth movement from one vowel to another that pass over into one another (Rosenthal, 1994). They are found in almost all languages and in British English pronunciations in such examples as “house” [haʊs], “kite” [kaɪt], “gate” [geɪt]; and “fire” [faɪə] “player” [pleɪə] “employer” [ɪmˈplɔɪə]. Those two or three-vowel combinations are named as diphthongs and triphthongs consecutively add to the melody of the spoken language along with the sentence’s prosodic elements. In teaching foreign languages, teachers pay special efforts to teach such features at the elementary level and monitor their students as they develop. The issue of teaching diphthongs and triphthongs to EFL students is often neglected in pronunciation classes and are never included in curriculums as much as short and long vowels are.

What is diphthong? Diphthong is a combination of two vowels pronounced in one syllable. There are diphthongs in almost every language sound system. A diphthong consists of a set of any number of vowels that together sound like two vowels, in contrast to a monophthong, which sounds like one vowel, and a triphthong, which sounds like three. The numbers of vowels in each form are irrelevant. A digraph, on the other hand, is simply a combination of two letters, which can be consonants or vowels and which, if the latter, can be pronounced as a single vowel or more than one. One of the major differences between British English and American English arises when digraphs such as *ae* and *oe*, which are monophthongs and not diphthongs, are replaced by the letter *e*, in words such as *anaemia*, *anaesthesia*, and *haematology*, *oedema*, *oesophagus*, and *oestrogen*. These changes lead to increased consistency of spelling, but are largely reviled among speakers of British English. Hypercorrection can occur when an *e* is mistakenly thought to represent *ae* or *oe*.

Just only eight diphthongs are involved in English phonetics. Diphthongs can be classified according to how the mouth moves as the vowel sound changes. In a wide diphthong the mouth either starts wide open and then closes or vice versa. They are also classified in two groups based on how tongue and mouth move:

1. Closing diphthongs (day, my, boy etc....)

Closing diphthongs are called ‘closing’ since they glide towards a closer vowel (closer than the first vowel of the diphthong) such as /i/ and /ʊ/. McCully (2009) called the closing diphthongs non-centering diphthongs since their tongue movement end in a non-central position (p. 140). In this study, they are called closing diphthongs.

2. Centring diphthongs (care, there, tour etc...)

Centering diphthongs are called ‘centering’ because the ending point is a central vowel called ‘schwa’.

It is worth mentioning, however, that tongue movement is not the only requirement when producing a diphthong. Most times, lips and jaw are included in the process. A short and simple word such as ‘no’ requires a rapid and uninterrupted motion of the tongue, the lips and the jaw.

Table 1 below is a classification of the diphthongs in English. Centering diphthongs are usually replaced with a /r/ sound in GA.

Table 1 Diphthongs by Roach (2010)

Centering			Closing				
ending in /ə/			ending in /ɪ/			ending in /ʊ/	
/ɪə/	/eə/	/ʊə/	/eɪ/	/aɪ/	/oɪ/	/oʊ/	/aʊ/
<i>here</i>	<i>there</i>	<i>lure</i>	<i>make</i>	<i>die</i>	<i>boy</i>	<i>goat</i>	<i>now</i>
<i>dear</i>	<i>hair</i>	<i>pure</i>	<i>shame</i>	<i>high</i>	<i>point</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>round</i>

The diphthongs on which this study focuses are the closing ones ending in /ʊ/. These sounds are produced by a back-gliding of the tongue towards a closer vowel. That is, the glide from the first vowel to the second is formed by moving the tongue to the high-back position. The tongue moves closer to the top and the lips are rounded. And the second part of the diphthong is produced at the back of the mouth in the velar area where the glide /w/ is produced (Dobrovolsky et al., 1997, p. 36). To be more exact, the diphthong /aʊ/ starts with the open vowel /a/ and is followed by a glide towards /ʊ/. The diphthong /oʊ/ starts with the open vowel /o/ and glides towards /ʊ/. This particular diphthong starts and ends with lip-rounding, and therefore there is no large movement. However, since the first vowel of the phoneme /aʊ/ is an open vowel, the glide necessitates a larger movement than /oʊ/ does (Roach, 2010, p. 18), as well as more effort on the lips and the jaw. Phonetically, for L2 learners, this might make the diphthong /aʊ/ more audible and visible while /oʊ/ could be more challenging since the movement from the first vowel to the next is not as extensive. See Figure 2 for the movement required for each diphthong.

Ladefoged and Johnson (2011: 92) describe a diphthong as a sound that involves a change within one single vowel. Kelly (2000)'s definition of a diphthong is 'a combination of vowel sounds'. These vowel-like sounds consist of a movement or glide from one vowel to another (Roach, 2010, p. 17).

Being in the vowel category, diphthongs are similar to tense/long vowels in terms of length. However, there are two parts to a diphthong; one starting point and a different end point. Ladefoged and Johnson (2011) states that these beginning and ending points are different from simple vowels.

What is triphthong?

Triphthongs are similar to diphthongs, but are pronounced with three vowel sounds. Triphthong is a combination of three vowels in one syllable. Triphthongs are difficult to pronounce and hear clearly, which leads to misunderstandings among students.

They are very rare in English, like five triphthongs in American one. They appear only when suffixes are added to syllable. Triphthongs are the most complex English sounds in vowel category. They require a glide from one vowel to another and then to a third without interruption (Roach, 2010). There are five triphthongs in GA and they are all composed of a closing diphthong and a schwa sound at the end.

According to Roach, triphthongs are hard to hear and distinguish. They are subject to change in speech tempo and may be speaker dependent, which might be another factor behind perception problems (McCully, 2009). They do not appear often in English. Many words are pronounced with a triphthong only after a suffix is added to the end. Triphthongs are more likely to be considered as monosyllabic sounds in words such as tower /taʊər/ or power /paʊər/. However, in words which involve a suffix such as player /pleɪər/ or lower /ləʊər/, they are more likely to be perceived as bisyllabic sounds (Roach, 2010). Table 2 below shows examples for triphthongs.

Table 2 Triphthongs by Roach (2010)

/eɪə/	/aɪə/	/ɔɪə/	/oʊə/	/aʊə/
<i>layer, prayer</i>	<i>higher, buyer</i>	<i>loyal, royal</i>	<i>lower, mower</i>	<i>towel, power</i>

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