

First Year (second Course) Seventh Lecture

Chapter 5: The Vowels of English (p. 79)

After we finish dealing with the description and the distribution of consonants, now it is time to deal with the description and distribution of vowels.

- **How do vowels differ from consonants?**

Phonetically speaking, as we have stated before, consonants are produced with various types of **obstruction** to the air flow i.e. the air flow **does not go out freely**, there is always at least one organ of speech that is completely, partially, or even approximately hindering the air from passing freely.

Whereas, vowels are produced **without obstruction** to the air stream i.e. the air **goes out through mouth freely** without being hindered. The organs of speech do not prevent the air from going out of the mouth.

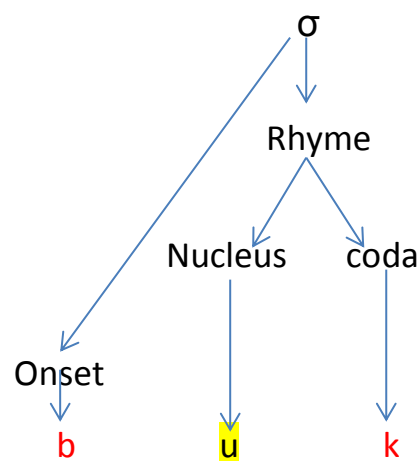
- Vowels are **all voiced**, while consonants can be **voiced or voiceless**.
- Vowels are all **oral**, while consonants can be **nasal or oral**.

When we pronounce the vowel sound /i:/ we feel that the air flow is pushed out freely without any obstruction in the vocal tract. Yet, if we

pronounce the consonant sound /t/, for example, we can feel that the air is trapped for a short time behind the alveolar ridge before it bursts out with explosion.

Phonologically speaking, consonants are always found in the margins (onset and coda) of the syllable while vowels are found under the **peak** or the **nucleus** of the syllable.

In the word "book", for instance, we have two consonants (/b/ and /k/) and one vowel that is /u/. The consonant /b/ is under the onset and the consonant /k/ is under the coda, while the vowel /u/ is under the nucleus of the syllable as in the tree below:



The description of vowels requires different criteria from those used for consonants.

- **Do you remember the criteria used for the description of consonants?**

The description of vowels requires the following criteria:

1. Lips rounding
2. Tongue Height
3. Tongue position (tongue advancement)

- **One of these criteria is easy to describe, while the other two are difficult, which one is easy, and why?**