the symbol, the more open the gap between the tongue and the palate. The frontness and backness of vowels, however, is indicated by the vertical lines.



**c. Diphthong**

The quality of English long and short vowels remains *constant* when they are pronounced. In other words, the speech organs do not change their position. These vowels are, therefore, called *pure vowels, plain vowels or monophthongs*. On the other hand, RP has 8 vowels sequences consisting of *two sounds*; they start with a monophthong, and the quality then changes towards, *but never quite reaches* another monophthong through a gliding movement of the tongue. These vowels are called *gliding vowels, vowel glides or diphthongs* /ˈdɪf.θɒŋ ˈdɪp.θɒŋ/. The first part of the vowel is longer and stronger than the second part.

Glides can be divided into two groups in English namely centring and closing.

- **Centring diphthongs** they are sounds which move towards schwa. There are 3 centring diphthongs in English. / eə / in air, / ɪə / in ear and / ʊə / in tour which is often replaced in RP by / ɔː /

- **Closing diphthongs** they are sounds which move towards close vowels /ɪ/ /ʊ/, three of which move towards / ɪ /, namely /eɪ/ in face, /aɪ/ in mind, and / ɔɪ / in voice. The two remaining closing vowels move towards /ʊ/, namely /əʊ/ in nose and /aʊ/ in mouth.

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**4.3. Intensity of articulation: Tense and Lax**

Tense vowels are articulated with a strong breath force unlike lax vowels which, are articulated with less energy. In English, all tense vowels are long, and all short vowels are lax.

**4.4. English Vowels Phonological Description**

Unlike consonants which occupy the syllable marginal positions, vowels are always the centre of the syllable itself. They can form a syllable without being followed or preceded by any consonant like in “eye”, “owe” and “I”. They can be preceded but not followed by consonants like in “do”, “cry” and “bow”, and they make open syllables. Vowels may be preceded, as they may not be preceded by any consonant and be followed by consonants, and they form closed syllables as in “night” and “eyed”. All vowels can form the centre of the syllable, but short vowels except schwa cannot be in word final open syllables. Thus, there are no words like / tɪ, te, … / but there are words like / tiː, taɪ, … / Vowels that can be final in word open syllables are called free vowels and the ones which cannot be are called checked vowels. Besides, all vowels can be in a stressed syllable except schwa. When vowels are followed by a nasal in a syllable or word final position, they become nasalized: from [f r ɒ̃ m]. Vowels are shortened by pre-fortis clipping: cap [ kʰæ̆p ].

**Vowels**

**Checked & schwa Free**

**/** ɪ e æ ɒ ʊ ʌ ə **/**

Kit Dress Trap Lot Foot Strut & Ago

/ iː ɑː ɔː uː ɜː / **Diphthongs** Fleece Palm Thought Goose Nurse

**Closing Centring /** ɪəʊə /

Near Cure

**Fronting Backing**

**/**eɪ aɪɔɪ **/ /** əʊ aʊ **/**

Face Price Choice Goat Mouth

**Fig 4.1.** Overview of English Vowel System.

Applied English Phonology

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