

BBN-ANG-141 Foundations of phonology

5. Vowels and R

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outline

recap: vowel categories

presence and absence of R

 rhotic and nonrhotic accents

vowels before R

 historical short vowels before R

 diphthongs before R

breaking and smoothing

 breaking and smoothing without R

hiatus

mergers

sample exam questions

recap: vowel categories

checked vowels: only before consonant

i	e	a	ə	o	u
KIT	DRESS	TRAP	STRUT	LOT	FOOT

recap: vowel categories

checked vowels: only before consonant

i	e	a	ə	o	u
KIT	DRESS	TRAP	STRUT	LOT	FOOT

R vowels: also word finally

i:	e:	a:	ɜ:	ɔ:	u:
NEAR	SQUARE	START	NURSE	FORCE	CURE

recap: vowel categories

checked vowels: only before consonant

i	e	a	ə	o	u
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R vowels: also word finally

i:	e:	a:	ɜ:	ɔ:	u:
NEAR	SQUARE	START	NURSE	FORCE	CURE

free vowels: even before vowel

ij	ej	aj	aw	əw	oj	uw
FLEECE	FACE	PRICE	MOUTH	GOAT	CHOICE	GOOSE

rhotic and nonrhotic accents

	GA	CUBE
<i>rush</i>	rəʃ	rəʃ
<i>brush</i>	brəʃ	brəʃ
<i>burrow</i>	bərow	bərəw
<i>burp</i>	bərp	bə:p
<i>blur</i>	blər	blə:
<i>blurred</i>	blərd	blə:d
<i>blurring</i>	bləriŋ	blə:riŋ
<i>blur out</i>	blər awt	blə:r awt

rhotic and nonrhotic accents

	GA	CUBE
<i>rush</i>	rəʃ	rəʃ
<i>brush</i>	brəʃ	brəʃ
<i>burrow</i>	bərow	bəɾəw
<i>burp</i>	bəɾp	bə:p
<i>blur</i>	bləɾ	blə:
<i>blurred</i>	bləɾd	blə:d
<i>blurring</i>	bləɾɪŋ	blə:ɾɪŋ
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rhotic accents

in General American (GA) all Rs of the spelling are pronounced
(R = spelled R, /r/ = pronounced /r/)

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in CUBE some Rs are pronounced as /r/

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<i>blurred</i>	bləɾd	blə:d
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in General American (GA) all Rs of the spelling are pronounced
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nonrhotic accents

in CUBE some Rs are pronounced as /r/,
some are replaced by /ɾ/ (length)

rhotic and nonrhotic accents

	GA	CUBE
<i>rush</i>	rəʃ	rəʃ
<i>brush</i>	brəʃ	brəʃ
<i>burrow</i>	bərow	bəɾəw
<i>burp</i>	bəɾp	bə:ɾp
<i>blur</i>	bləɾ	blə:
<i>blurred</i>	bləɾd	blə:ɾd
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in General American (GA) all Rs of the spelling are pronounced
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in CUBE some Rs are pronounced as /r/, some are replaced by /ɪ:/ (length); in some both /ɪ:/ and /r/ occur

rhotic and nonrhotic accents

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<i>brush</i>	brəʃ	brəʃ
<i>burrow</i>	bərow	bəreɪw
<i>burp</i>	bərp	bə:p
<i>blur</i>	blər	blə:
<i>blurred</i>	blərd	blə:d
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rhotic accents

in General American (GA) all Rs of the spelling are pronounced
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nonrhotic accents

in CUBE some Rs are pronounced as /r/, some are replaced by /:/ (length); in some both /:/ and /r/ occur



rural rhotic accents in England in the 1950s (Orton & al. 1962–1971)



rhotic dialects in England in the late 20th c. (Trudgill 2000)



nonrhotic pronunciations among whites in the USA (Labov, Ash, & Boberg 2006)

compensatory lengthening (CL)

○ ○ ○ ○
| | | |
b ə r p

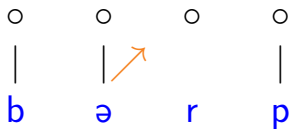
1. [r] pronounced in rhotic English

compensatory lengthening (CL)

○	○	○	○
b	ə	r	p

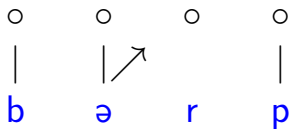
1. [r] pronounced in rhotic English
2. in nonrhotic English
 - a. [r] not followed by vowel delinks

compensatory lengthening (CL)



1. [r] pronounced in rhotic English
2. in nonrhotic English
 - a. [r] not followed by vowel delinks
 - b. preceding vowel takes its place

compensatory lengthening (CL)



1. [r] pronounced in rhotic English

2. in nonrhotic English

- a. [r] not followed by vowel delinks
- b. preceding vowel takes its place

the loss of [r] is **compensated** for by the **lengthening** of the preceding vowel

other short vowels before R

__R#	__RC	__RV	
<i>car</i> ka:	<i>card</i> ka:d	<i>carrot</i> karət	} vanilla CL
<i>or</i> o:	<i>lord</i> lo:d	<i>lorry</i> lorij	
<i>blur</i> blə:	<i>Kurd</i> kə:d	<i>hurry</i> hərij	} NURSE-merger + CL
<i>her</i> hə:	<i>herd</i> hə:d	<i>herring</i> herij	
<i>stir</i> stə:	<i>skirt</i> skə:t	<i>spirit</i> spirit	

- ▶ vowel quality changes in the **last two** cases (unless R is followed by V)

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<i>car</i> ka:	<i>card</i> ka:d	<i>carrot</i> karət	} vanilla CL
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<i>blur</i> blə:	<i>Kurd</i> kə:d	<i>hurry</i> hərij	} NURSE-merger + CL
<i>her</i> hə:	<i>herd</i> hə:d	<i>herring</i> herij	
<i>stir</i> stə:	<i>skirt</i> skə:t	<i>spirit</i> spirit	

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<i>her</i> hə:	<i>herd</i> hə:d	<i>herring</i> herij	
<i>stir</i> stə:	<i>skirt</i> skə:t	<i>spirit</i> spirit	

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 - ▶ **NURSE** is the name of ə:

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 - ▶ NURSE is the name of ə:
 - ▶ formerly different vowels (ə e i) merge in ə:

other short vowels before R

__R#	__RC	__RV	
<i>car</i> kɑ:	<i>card</i> kɑ:d	<i>carrot</i> kærət	} vanilla CL
<i>or</i> o:	<i>lord</i> lɔ:d	<i>lorry</i> lɔrij	
<i>blur</i> blə:	<i>Kurd</i> kɜ:d	<i>hurry</i> hɜrij	} NURSE-merger + CL
<i>her</i> hɜ:	<i>herd</i> hɜ:d	<i>herring</i> hɜrij	
<i>stir</i> stɜ:	<i>skirt</i> skɜ:t	<i>spirit</i> spɪrɪt	

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- ▶ (in fact, there is some quality change in the first two cases too: see next slide)

other short vowels before R

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<i>car</i> k æ:	<i>card</i> k ɑ:d	<i>carrot</i> k arət	} vanilla CL
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<i>blur</i> bl ə:	<i>Kurd</i> k ɜ:d	<i>hurry</i> h ərɪj	} NURSE-merger + CL
<i>her</i> h ɜ:	<i>herd</i> h ɜ:d	<i>herring</i> h erɪj	
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- ▶ this is called the NURSE merger
 - ▶ NURSE is the name of ə:
 - ▶ formerly different vowels (ə e i) merge in ə:
- ▶ (in fact, there is some quality change in the first two cases too: see next slide)
- ▶ words with a short V + r + V (last column) are **CARROT** words

comparing accents (narrow transcription)

control		SSE	GA	BE		SSE	GA	BE
<i>cat</i> kat	<i>car</i>	kar	kɑ̃	kɑ:	<i>card</i>	kɑrd	kɑ̃d	kɑ:d
<i>lot</i> lɒt	<i>or</i>	ɔr	ɔ̃	o:	<i>lord</i>	lɔrd	lɔ̃d	lɔ:d
<i>bluff</i> blʌf	<i>blur</i>	blər	blə̃	blə:	<i>Kurd</i>	kərd	kə̃d	kə:d
<i>hen</i> hɛn	<i>her</i>	hɛr	hə̃	hə:	<i>herd</i>	hɛrd	hə̃d	hə:d
<i>still</i> stɪl	<i>stir</i>	stɪr	stə̃	stə:	<i>skirt</i>	skɪrt	skə̃t	skə:t

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<i>bluff</i> blʌf	<i>blur</i>	blɜr	blə̃	blə:	<i>Kurd</i>	kɜrd	kə̃d	kə:d
<i>hen</i> hɛn	<i>her</i>	hɛr	hə̃	hə:	<i>herd</i>	hɛrd	hə̃d	hə:d
<i>still</i> stɪl	<i>stir</i>	stɪr	stə̃	stə:	<i>skirt</i>	skɪrt	skə̃t	skɛ:t

- ▶ the [r] withers gradually: it is “strong” in SSE, “weak” in GA, absent in BE

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<i>lot</i> lɒt	<i>or</i>	ɔr	ɔ̃	ɔ:	<i>lord</i>	lɔrd	lɔ̃d	lɔ:d
<i>bluff</i> blʌf	<i>blur</i>	blɚ	blə̃	blə:	<i>Kurd</i>	kɚrd	kɚ̃d	kɚ:d
<i>hen</i> hɛn	<i>her</i>	hɛr	hɛ̃	hɛ:	<i>herd</i>	hɛrd	hɛ̃d	hɛ:d
<i>still</i> stɪl	<i>stir</i>	stɪr	stɪ̃	stɪ:	<i>skirt</i>	skɪrt	skɪ̃t	skɪ:t

- ▶ the [r] withers gradually: it is “strong” in SSE, “weak” in GA, absent in BE
- ▶ the preceding vowel is unaffected in SSE, in most cases altered in GA and BE

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<i>bluff</i> blʌf	<i>blur</i>	blər	blə̃	blə:	<i>Kurd</i>	kərd	kə̃d	kə:d
<i>hen</i> hɛn	<i>her</i>	hɛr	hə̃	hə:	<i>herd</i>	hɛrd	hə̃d	hə:d
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<i>lot</i> lɒt	<i>or</i>	ɔr	ɔ̃	ɔː	<i>lord</i>	lɔrd	lɔ̃d	lɔːd
<i>bluff</i> blʌf	<i>blur</i>	blər	blə̃	bləː	<i>Kurd</i>	kərd	kə̃d	kəːd
<i>hen</i> hɛn	<i>her</i>	hɛr	hə̃	həː	<i>herd</i>	hɛrd	hə̃d	həːd
<i>still</i> stɪl	<i>stir</i>	stɪr	stə̃	stəː	<i>skirt</i>	skɪrt	skə̃t	skəːt

- ▶ the [r] withers gradually: it is “strong” in SSE, “weak” in GA, absent in BE
- ▶ the preceding vowel is unaffected in SSE, in most cases altered in GA and BE
- ▶ wrt R, SSE is most conservative, GA is intermediate, BE is most advanced
- ▶ the quality change of the short V before R is called **broadening**; ɑː, əː, and ɔː are broad vowels

diphthongs before R

control	__R]	__RC	__RV
<i>weed</i> wijd	<i>queer</i> kwi:	<i>weird</i> wi:d	<i>weary</i> wi:rij
<i>lute</i> luwt	<i>lure</i> lu:	<i>Lourdes</i> lu:d	<i>lurid</i> lu:rid
<i>cake</i> kejk	<i>care</i> ke:	<i>scarce</i> ske:s	<i>vary</i> ve:rij
<i>vote</i> vəwt	<i>fore</i> fə:	<i>force</i> fə:s	<i>forum</i> fə:rəm
<i>spine</i> spajn	<i>spire</i> spajə	<i>spires</i> spajəz	<i>spiral</i> spajrəl
<i>house</i> haws	<i>hour</i> awə	<i>hours</i> awəz	<i>dowry</i> dawrij
<i>coin</i> kojn	<i>coir</i> kojə	—	<i>Moira</i> mojrə

diphthongs before R

control	__R]	__RC	__RV
<i>weed</i> wiɪd	<i>queer</i> kwɪ:ɪ	<i>weird</i> wi:ɪd	<i>weary</i> wi:ɪrɪj
<i>lute</i> luwt	<i>lure</i> lu:ɪ	<i>Lourdes</i> lu:ɪd	<i>lurid</i> lu:ɪrɪd
<i>cake</i> keɪk	<i>care</i> ke:ɪ	<i>scarce</i> ske:ɪs	<i>vary</i> ve:ɪrɪj
<i>vote</i> vəwt	<i>fore</i> fo:ɪ	<i>force</i> fo:ɪs	<i>forum</i> fo:ɪrəm
<i>spine</i> spajɪn	<i>spire</i> spajə	<i>spires</i> spajəz	<i>spiral</i> spajrəl
<i>house</i> haws	<i>hour</i> awə	<i>hours</i> awəz	<i>dowry</i> dawrɪj
<i>coin</i> koɪn	<i>coir</i> kojə	—	<i>Moira</i> mojrə

- ▶ **non-wide** diphthongs never occur before R (pronounced or not), but are replaced by an R vowel

diphthongs before R

control	__R]	__RC	__RV
<i>weed</i> wiɹd	<i>queer</i> kwi:ɹ	<i>weird</i> wi:ɹd	<i>weary</i> wi:riɹ
<i>lute</i> luwt	<i>lure</i> lu:ɹ	<i>Lourdes</i> lu:ɹd	<i>lurid</i> lu:riɹ
<i>cake</i> keɹk	<i>care</i> ke:ɹ	<i>scarce</i> ske:ɹs	<i>vary</i> ve:riɹ
<i>vote</i> vɔwt	<i>fore</i> fo:ɹ	<i>force</i> fo:ɹs	<i>forum</i> fo:ɹəm
<i>spine</i> spajɹ	<i>spire</i> spajə	<i>spires</i> spajəz	<i>spiral</i> spajrəl
<i>house</i> haws	<i>hour</i> awə	<i>hours</i> awəz	<i>dowry</i> dawriɹ
<i>coin</i> kojɹ	<i>coir</i> kojə	—	<i>Moira</i> mojɹə

- ▶ non-wide diphthongs never occur before R (pronounced or not), but are replaced by an R vowel
- ▶ only **wide** diphthongs occur before R and only before RV (cf. CARROT)

diphthongs before R

control	__R]	__RC	__RV
<i>weed</i> wi:d	<i>queer</i> kwi:z	<i>weird</i> wi:d	<i>weary</i> wi:rij
<i>lute</i> lu:wt	<i>lure</i> lu:z	<i>Lourdes</i> lu:d	<i>lurid</i> lu:rid
<i>cake</i> ke:k	<i>care</i> ke:z	<i>scarce</i> ske:s	<i>vary</i> ve:rij
<i>vote</i> vɔ:wt	<i>fore</i> fɔ:z	<i>force</i> fɔ:s	<i>forum</i> fɔ:rəm
<i>spine</i> spaj:n	<i>spire</i> spajə	<i>spires</i> spajəz	<i>spiral</i> spajrəl
<i>house</i> haws	<i>hour</i> awə	<i>hours</i> awəz	<i>dowry</i> dawrij
<i>coin</i> koj:n	<i>coir</i> kojə	—	<i>Moira</i> mojrə

- ▶ non-wide diphthongs never occur before R (pronounced or not), but are replaced by an R vowel
- ▶ only wide diphthongs occur before R and only before RV (cf. CARROT)
- ▶ in other environments **wide** diphthongs are followed by /ə/ (but see next slide)

development: breaking and smoothing

diphth.+R > breaking > R-loss > glide loss > long V

<i>queer</i>	ijr	ijər	ijə	iə	iː
<i>lure</i>	uwr	uwər	uwə	uə	uː
<i>care</i>	ejr	ejər	ejə	eə	eː
<i>fore</i>	owr	owər	owə	oə	oː
<i>spire</i>	ajr	ajər	ajə	aə	aː
<i>hour</i>	awr	awər	awə	aə	aː

development: breaking and smoothing

diphth.+R > breaking > R-loss > glide loss > long V

<i>queer</i>	ijr	ijər	ijə	iə	i:
<i>lure</i>	uwr	uwər	uwə	uə	u:
<i>care</i>	ejr	ejər	ejə	eə	e:
<i>fore</i>	owr	owər	owə	oə	o:
<i>spire</i>	ajr	ajər	ajə	aə	a:
<i>hour</i>	awr	awər	awə	aə	a:

► **breaking**: insert ə between glide and r

development: breaking and smoothing

diphth.+R > breaking > R-loss > glide loss > long V

<i>queer</i>	ijr	ijər	ijə	iə	iː
<i>lure</i>	uwr	uwər	uwə	uə	uː
<i>care</i>	ejr	ejər	ejə	eə	eː
<i>fore</i>	owr	owər	owə	oə	oː
<i>spire</i>	ajr	ajər	ajə	aə	aː
<i>hour</i>	awr	awər	awə	aə	aː

- ▶ breaking: insert ə between glide and r
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development: breaking and smoothing

diphth.+R > breaking > R-loss > glide loss > long V

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<i>lure</i>	uwr	uwər	uwə	uə	uː
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 - ▶ *vowel* /vawəl/ > [va:^ːl]

an apparent problem

blurring blə:riŋ, *guitarist* gitɑ:rist

if the long vowel is due to the **loss** of R and CL, how can there be an(other) **r** in such words (ignore the spelling!)

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all word-final Rs are lost

the **r** in these words is **not** the historical/etymological R of *blur* or *guitar*, it is epenthetic (= inserted from “outside”), to repair **hiatus**

hiatus

hiatus: vowel + vowel

recall, only diphthongs occur before another vowel

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 - ▶ *picturesque* piktʃə + esk
- ▶ diphthongs occur word finally, but that's okay, since they may occur before a vowel

hiatus filling

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note

old-school grammarians distinguish between

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- ▶ “linking” R: occurs in rhotic accents too and in spelling

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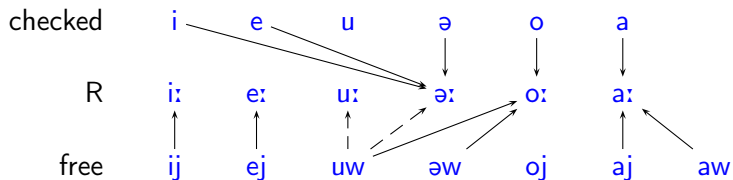
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however, this distinction is **linguistically meaningless**,
so we will just talk about hiatus-filling or epenthetic r

overview of pre-R mergers



overview of pre-R mergers

checked	i	e	u	ə	o	a	
R	i:	e:	u:	ə:	o:	a:	
free	ij	ej	uw	əw	oj	aj	aw

- ▶ the NURSE merger: *fir* = (pre)fer = fur

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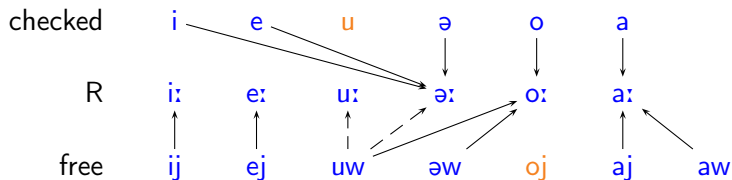
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- ▶ the START–FIRE–POWER merger: *tar* = *tyre* = *tower*

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- ▶ the START-FIRE-POWER merger: *tar* = *tyre* = *tower*
- ▶ checked *u* and the diphthong *oj* have no R vowel counterpart

sample exam question

what does the change *theater* $\theta ij\grave{a}t\grave{a}$ > $\theta i:t\grave{a}$ exemplify?

1. breaking
2. smoothing
3. the NURSE merger
4. the NURSE split

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why are there only three broad vowels?

1. because of the NORTH–FORCE merger
2. because there are fewer long than short vowels
3. because broad vowels do not occur before another vowel
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