

**Four English glides**  
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**The aim of this poster is twofold:**

**★ provide phonological definitions of the notions of glide and syllabic consonant;**

**★ in the light of the definitions: include // in the English system of glides.**

A glide (or semi-vowel):

★ a transitional sound which functions as a consonant but is more like a vowel phonetically: **a vowel in a consonantal function**

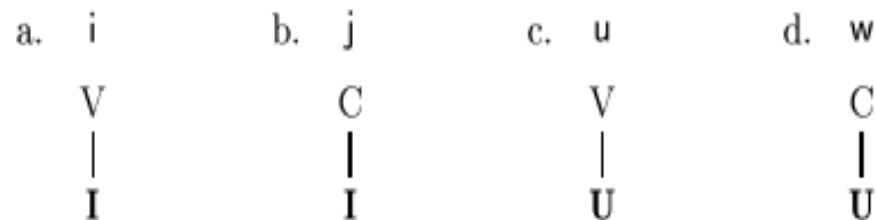
★ may be underlying/lexical (as in English yeast or wing, for example) or derived: a hiatus-filler (via glide formation)

*me [j] and you*

*you [w] and me*

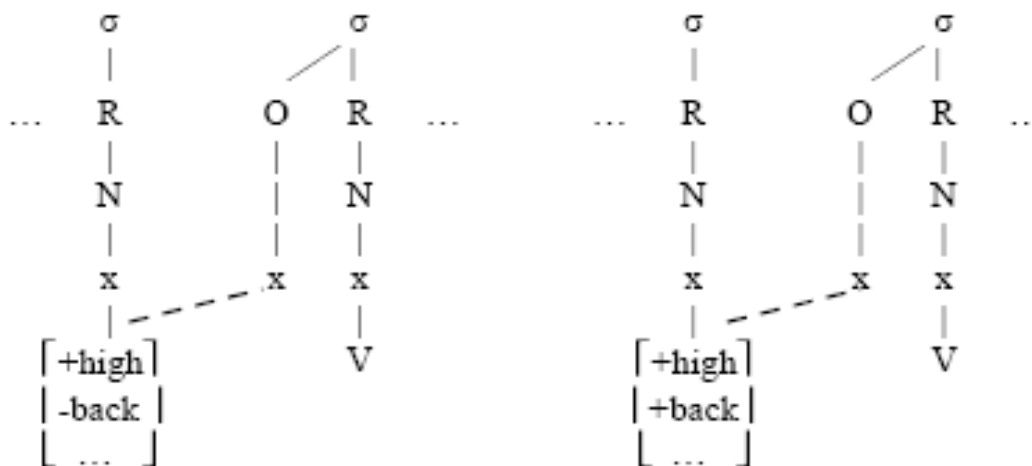
★ takes its melody from the (preceding) vowel but functions to fill a consonantal slot in the supra-melodic structure

★ commonplace: semi-vowels and high vowels only differ in syllabic affiliation: the same melodic expression can attach to either a nuclear (henceforth V) or a non-nuclear (onset or coda – henceforth C) position, where it is interpreted as either a high vowel or a (glide) consonant, respectively, e.g.:



(Szigetvári 1999: 159)

- ★ Therefore, a phonological definition of glides runs as follows:
  - a glide is a melodic expression which can occupy both V and C positions.
  - when lexical: *exclusively* occupies its skeletal slot (see previous page)
  - when a hiatus-filler: left-headed VC sequence (through spreading), e.g.:



*me* [j] and *you*

*you* [w] and *me*

## Syllabic consonants:

★ **consonants in a vocalic function**

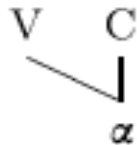
★ (synchronically or diachronically) arise from the deletion of a vowel and the subsequent spreading of the melody of the following consonant

★ That is, **a syllabic consonant is a C-headed branching construction.**

### A side issue:

left-branching VC structure

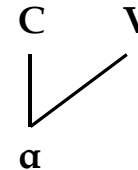
E.g.: Szigetvári (1999: 159ff):



OR

right-branching CV structure?

E.g.: Blaho (2001, 2004):



Also: Scheer (2004: 283ff,  
esp. 309ff)  
etc.

Also: Scheer (in press) :-)

Scheer (2004) also argues, rather convincingly, against the traditional view that syllabic consonants exclusively sit in nuclei as he claims that they are always derived by spreading.

What glides and syllabic consonants have in common is the fact that they are what Scheer (2004) calls "phonological hermaphrodites": both of them are mixtures of vocalic and consonantal characteristics.

### Glide

non-branching C/V or V-headed VC

### Syllabic consonant

C-headed VC (or CV)

#### In English:

- ★ traditional phonemic inventories distinguish two glides, /j/ and /w/
- ★ they surface as /i/ and /u/, respectively, when placed in a V position
- ★ they regularly take part in hiatus resolution

- ★ traditionally analysed as emerging from schwa deletion (in schwa+sonorant strings)
- ★ most frequent targets:
  - schwa+/n/ (e.g., *button*)
  - schwa+/l/ (e.g., *bottle*)
  - schwa+/r/ (e.g., *butter* – in rhotic accents, or *natural* – in non-rhotic accents, too)

Note. In certain rhotic accents, syllabic /r/ is not restricted to unstressed positions but is also found in *bird-type* words.

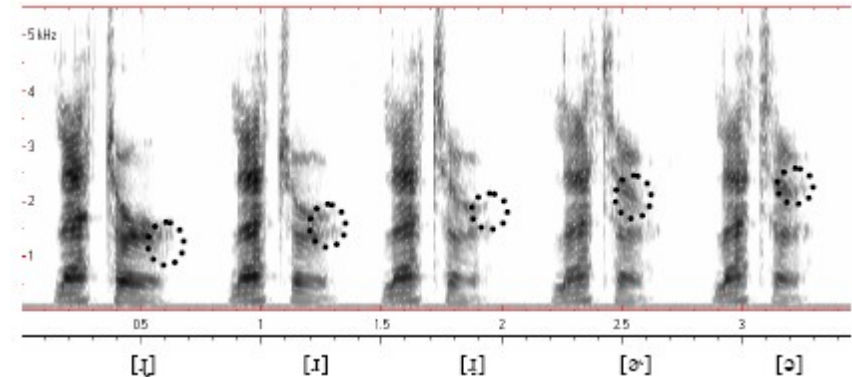
## /r/ as the third English glide:

- ★ e.g., Kahn (1976: 149-151), Harris (1994)
- ★ both phonetic and phonological evidence
- ★ primary phonological argument: interaction with schwa
- ★ several authors have proposed that schwa is a vocalic allophone/variant of /r/, and r-intrusion (as found in most non-rhotic accents) is glide formation (e.g., Szigetvári 1999: 118 fn.117, Krämer 2005, Heselwood 2006)

## non-rhotic r-sandhi (McCarthy 1991: 193):

a.	
The spa seems to be broken. [spa]	= The spar seems to be broken. [spa]
He put the tuna near the table. [tuwnə]	= He put the tuner near the table. [tuwnə]
The boat tends to yaw some. [jə]	= You're somewhat older. [jə]
b. Intrusive <i>r</i>	<b>Linking <i>r</i></b>
The spa is broken. [spar]	= The spar is broken. [spar]
He put the tuna on the table. [tuwnər]	= He put the tuner on the table. [tuwnər]
The boat tends to yaw a little. [jər]	= You're a little older. [jər]

## phonetic similarity of schwa and /r/ (Heselwood 2006: 84):



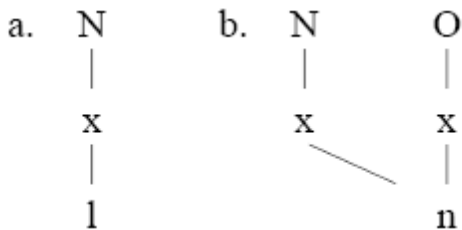
A closer look at the **syllabic consonants of English** (Toft 2002a,b):

★ difference between syllabic // and /n/:

● // is syllabic irrespective of context, whilst the distribution of syllabic /n/ is context-dependent, after both singletons (e.g. *bottle* and *button*) and clusters (in words like *dwindle* and *London*)

● with respect to duration, syllabic // patterns like onset //, not like coda //, nor as a distinct category; whereas syllabic /n/ patterns like coda /n/, and not like onset /n/, nor as a distinct category

★ Toft's conclusion: the representations of the two syllabic sonorants differ:



That is, syllabic // exclusively sits in a V position, while syllabic /n/ is a complex structure filling a VC sequence.



Toft's findings are also supported by facts from /t/-allophony in the so-called **tapping dialects of English** (cf. Balogné 2006): tapping more readily takes place before a syllabic //, since it occupies a V position, therefore that situation simply reduces to the intervocalic case. That is, *bottle* is expected to exhibit the same behaviour (tapped /t/ plus syllabic //) as a word like *atom* does (tapped /t/ plus vowel). In contrast, whenever there is a syllabic /n/, e.g., *button*, the preceding /t/ surfaces as glottalized rather than tapped: the /n/ retains its fundamentally consonantal character (Balogné 2006: 147):

a. *battle*

C	V	C	⇐V
b	æ	t	← l

b. *button*

C	V	C	v	C	v
			\		
b	ʌ	t		n	

Given the definitions of glides and syllabic consonants above, we are led to conclude that **syllabic // is a glide in a V position**, rather than a "simple" syllabic consonant like syllabic /n/.

Independent evidence from accents of English with **l-intrusion**:  
 /l/ corresponds to /ɔ/ (e.g., *saw* = *Saul*) in exactly the same way as /r/  
 corresponds to schwa (e.g., *tuna* = *tuner*) in r-intrusion (e.g., Gick 2002)

e.g.,

<p>a. Its paw was dirty. [pɔ]</p> <p>b. Intrusive l Its paw is dirty. [pɔl]</p>	<p>= Paul went to school. [pɔ]</p> <p><b>Linking l</b> = Paul is at school. [pɔl]</p>
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That is, both liquids take part in cross-morpheme hiatus filling in the form of a kind of glide formation.

→ The above discussion leaves us with **four English glides**: /j/, /w/, /r/ and /l/.

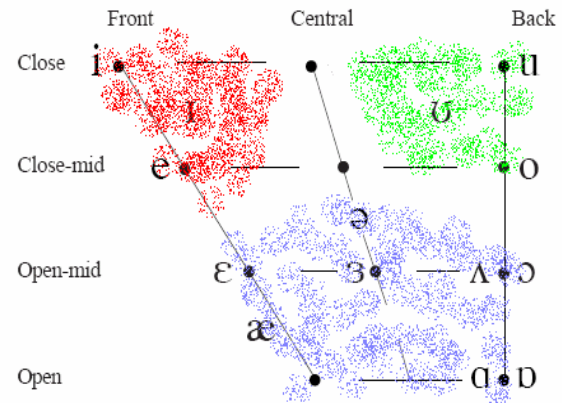
### Typology of English glide systems:

(cf. Sebregts 2001: 43-45)

- rhotic non-l-vocalizing:  
     red: /j/    green: /w/    blue: /ʔ/ or zero
- rhotic l-vocalizing:  
     red: /j/    green: /w/    blue: /l/ (variable)
- non-rhotic (exc. conservative RP, AAVE):  
     red: /j/    green: /w/    blue: /r/

Further issues:

- ★ non-rhotic l-vocalizing accents??
- ★ complementary distribution of r/l-intrusion? no need for four glides in one system?



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