

Hong Kong English

Unit 1-2: **PHONOLOGY (1): VOWELS**

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PHONETIC TRANSFER FROM CANTONESE

Cantonese

HK English

跳 [tiu] 

till 

識 [sik] 

sick 

HK ENGLISH VOWELS: NEUTRALISATION OF LONG/SHORT CONTRASTS

[i:]/[ɪ] *heat,*  *hit* 

[e]/[æ] *bet, bat* 

[u:]/[ʊ] *hoot, hood* 

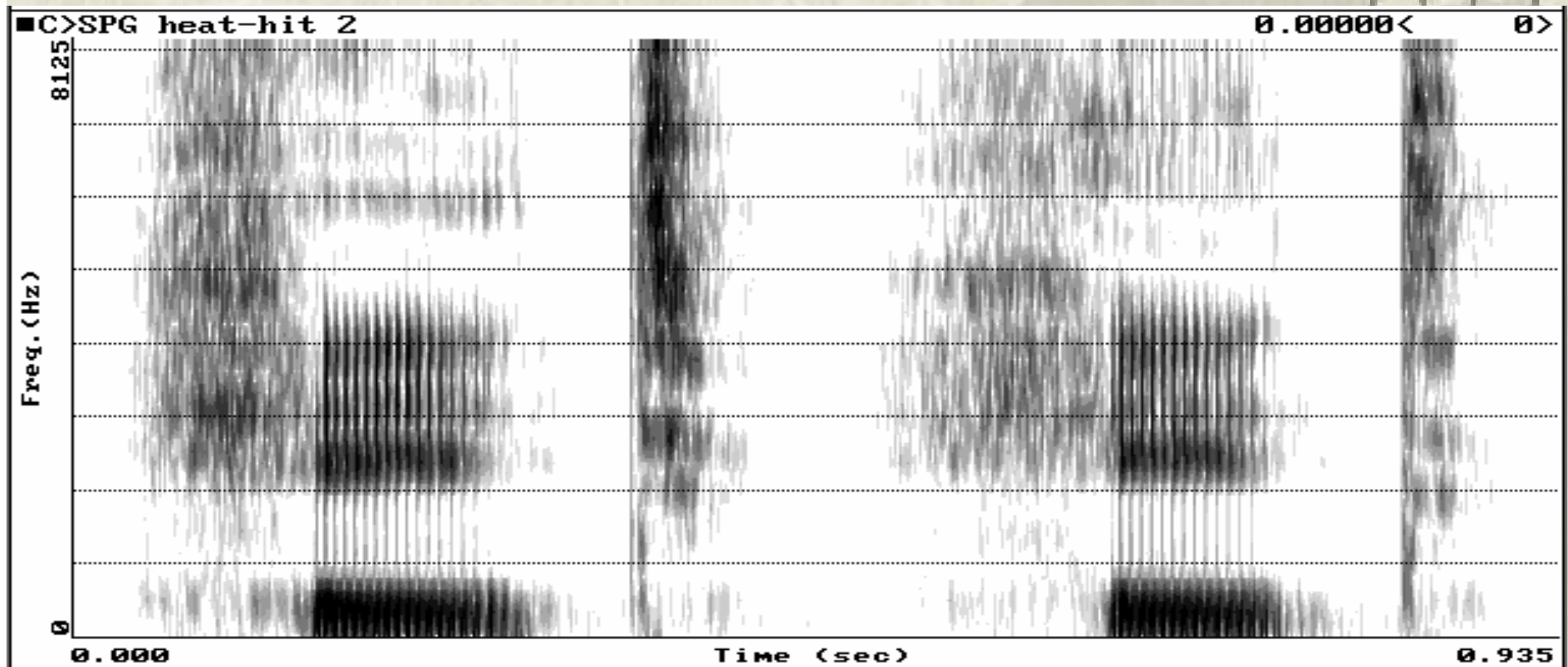
[ɒ]/[ɔ:] *cot, caught* 

[ɑ:] *heart* 

[ʌ] *hut* 

[ɜ:] *hurt* 

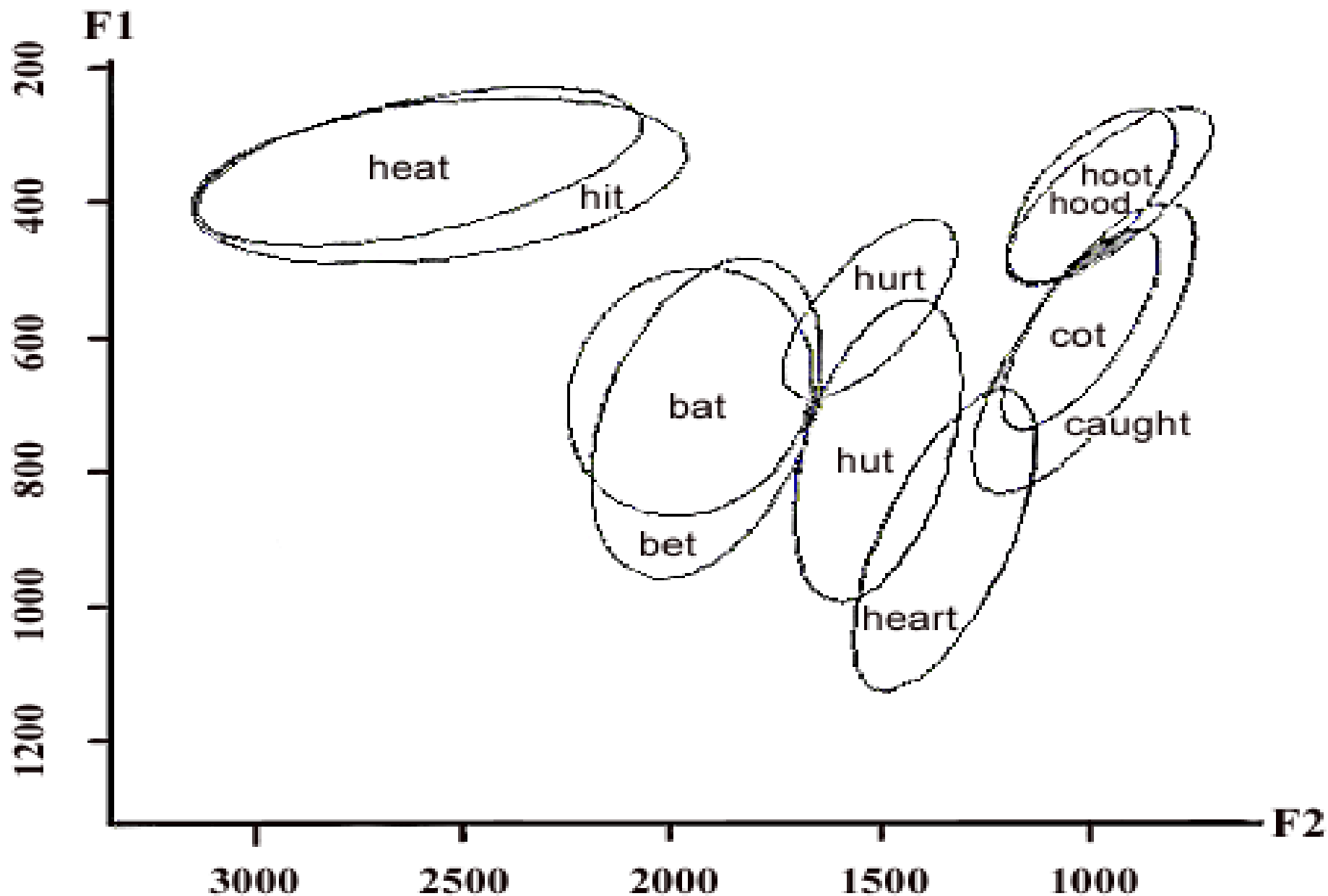
Spectrogram of Hong Kong speaker's pronunciation of *heat* and *hit* (showing identical acoustic properties)



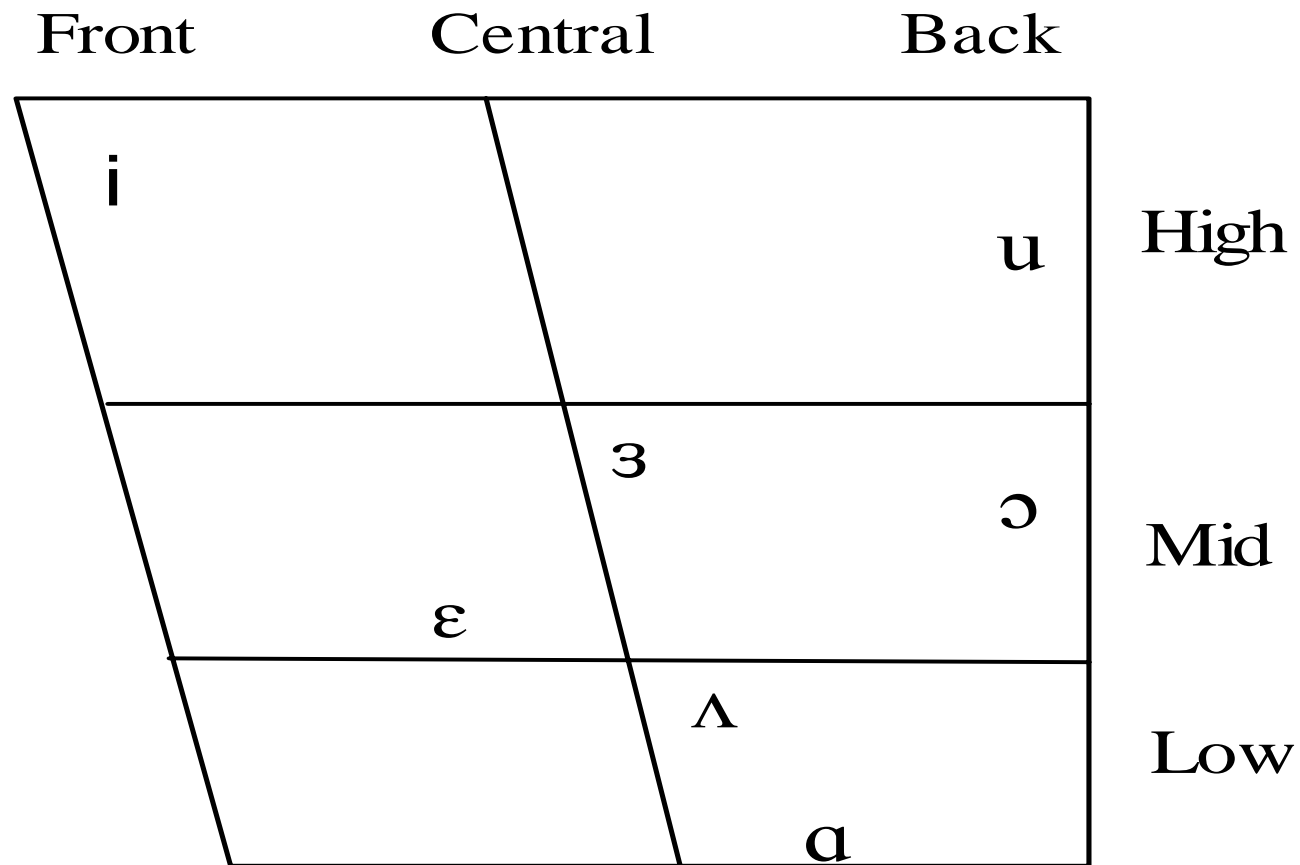
heat 

hit 

Average HKE Vowel Formant Chart



VOWEL CHART FOR HONG KONG ENGLISH



HONG KONG ENGLISH VOWELS & THEIR EQUIVALENTS IN BRITISH R.P.

WORDS	HKE VOWEL	RP VOWELS
<i>heat - hit</i>	/i/	/i:/ - /ɪ/
<i>bet - bat</i>	/ɛ/	/e/ - /æ/
<i>hoot - hood</i>	/u/	/u:/ - /ʊ/
<i>caught - cot</i>	/ɔ/	/ɔ:/ - /ɑ/

Comparison of the vowel systems of Singapore (SE), Hong Kong (HKE), Chinese (CE) and Japanese (JE) English

	<u>SE/CE</u>	<u>HKE</u>	<u>JE</u>
/i/	bit, beat	bit, beat	bit, beat
/ɛ/	bet, bat	bet, bat	bet
/u/	full, fool	full, fool	full, fool
/ɔ/	cot, caught	cot, caught	cot, caught
/ɜ/	bird	bird	bird, cart
/a/	cut, cart	cart (/ʌ/ cut)	cut, bat

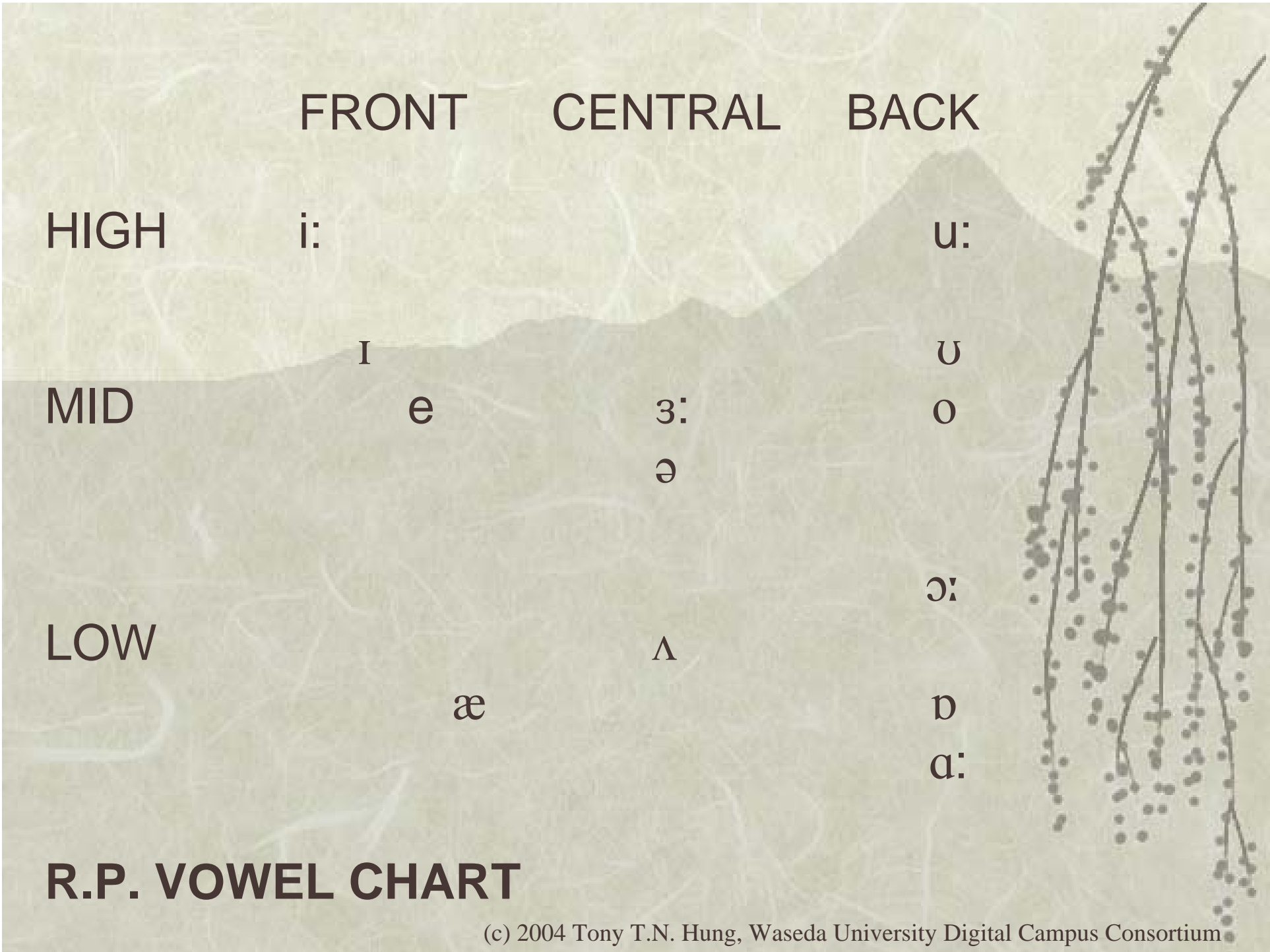
Implications for Intelligibility

- ❖ All languages depend on **contrast**
- ❖ Some contrasts do more ‘work’ than others
- ❖ Number of words in English depending on the following vowel contrasts:

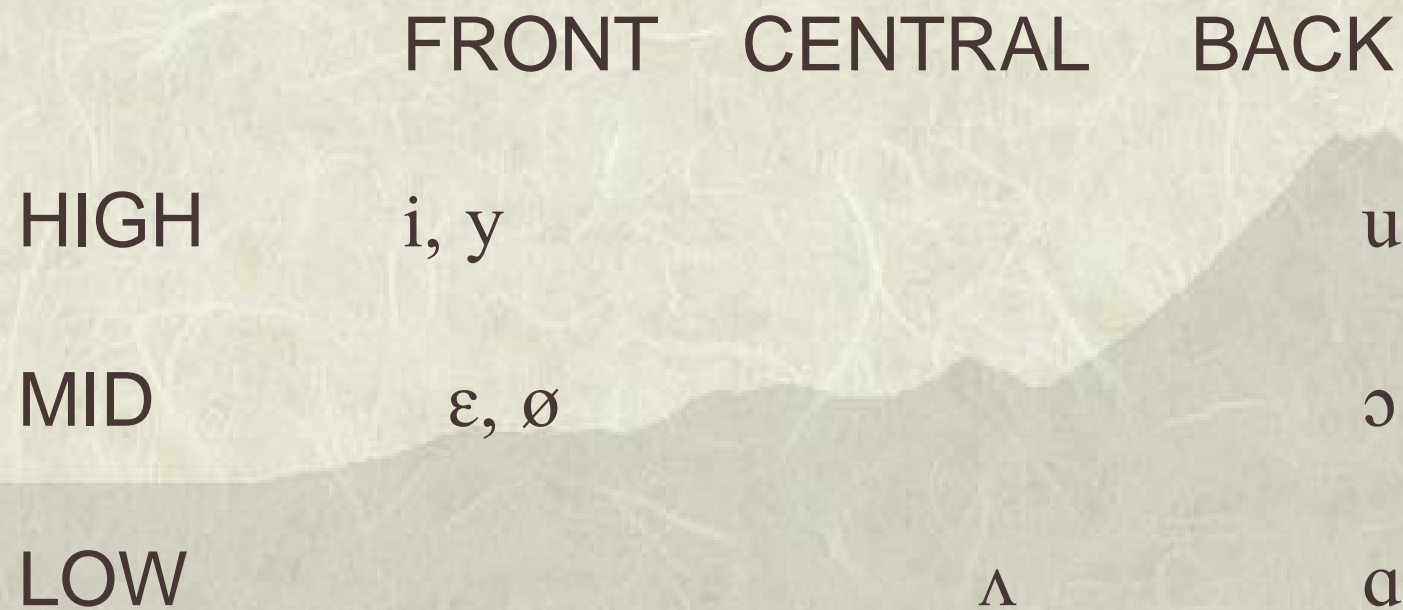
[i:/ɪ]	(e.g. <i>beat/bit</i>):	471
[e/æ]	(<i>bet/bat</i>):	302
[ʌ/ɑ:]	(<i>duck/dark</i>):	172
[ɒ/ɔ:]	(<i>cot/caught</i>):	157
[ʊ/u:]	(<i>pull/pool</i>):	18

Minimal Pairs – Vowels and diphthongs

	i	e	æ	ɔ:	ɒ	ɔ:	ʊ	u:	ʌ	ɜ:	ə	eɪ	aɪ	ɔɪ	ɔʊ	aʊ	ɪə	eə	ʊə	null	cons
i:	471	338	394	316	362	489	82	381	301	309	66	561	532	98	527	157	133	144	38	170	64
ɪ		316	498	183	383	271	61	222	456	178	362	334	257	59	358	88	48	28	7	1348	
e			302	142	227	212	43	130	233	147	36	250	222	57	213	118	32	30	11		
æ				179	409	179	56	159	425	160	11	256	237	29	240	103	23	31	9		
ɔ:					172	156	34	75	172	127	11	184	125	37	169	51	46	48	22	61	
ɒ						157	73	141	300	153	1	218	172	22	203	96	26	19	8	46	
ɔ:							56	142	168	180	21	251	207	71	243	106	82	92	23	88	
ʊ								18	19	41	1	61	52	3	28	15	6	8	3		
u:									119	74	9	234	200	45	208	97	26	33	11		
ʌ										126	4	211	148	29	181	85	18	20	7		
ɜ:											8	182	141	33	149	63	35	41	14		
ə												82	20	3	48	3	none	7	none		
eɪ													353	90	336	154	41	47	15		
aɪ														56	269	166	43	33	13		
ɔɪ															75	33	14	7	6		
ɔʊ																115	42	44	13		
aʊ																	22	18	6		
ɪə																		67	22		
eə																			19		
	i	e	æ	ɔ:	ɒ	ɔ:	ʊ	u:	ʌ	ɜ:	ə	eɪ	aɪ	ɔɪ	ɔʊ	aʊ	ɪə	eə	ʊə	null	cons







R.P. VOWEL CHART



CANTONESE VOWEL CHART

Perception of English vowel contrasts by Hong Kong learners (percentage of correct identification of key words)

	HKE Speaker	British Speaker		HKE Speaker	British Speaker
heat	 60%	 53%	hit	 60%	 67%
bet	40%	47%	bat	67%	60%
hoot	87%	73%	hood	93%	33%
cot	67%	80%	caught	73%	87%
heart	93%	87%	hut	87%	67%
hurt	100%	100%			

HKE DIPHTHONGS

[eɪ] *hate* 

[aɪ] *height* 

[aʊ] *house* 

[oʊ] *coat* 

[ɔɪ] *toyed* 

[ɪə] *here* 

[ɛə] *hair* 

[ʊə] *poor* 

DIPHTHONG SHORTENING IN HKE:

(i) /eɪ/ →


[eɪ]

play 

[ɪ]

lake [lɪk] 

(cf. *lick*)

take [tɪk] 

tick)



save 



pain [pɪn] 



(cf. *ping*)


rain [rɪn] 



ring)





(ii) /oʊ/ → [oʊ]
low 
clothe 

[ʊ]
joke [dʒʊk], soak [sʊk] 
loan [lʊŋ], bone [bʊŋ] 

(iii) /aʊ/ → [aʊ]
now 
house 

[a]
town [taŋ], noun [naŋ],
down [daŋ] 

(iv) /ɔɪ/ → [ɔɪ]
boy 
noise 









[ɔ]
point [pɔɪnt]  (cf. pond [pɔŋ]) 
coin [kɔɪn]  (cf. con [kɔŋ]) 





Diphthong-Shortening Rule in HKE
(*an approximation*)

$VV \rightarrow V / _ [+stop (+back)]$

(‘A diphthong is shortened to a monophthong when followed by a (velar) stop’)

RAISING OF /aɪ/ & /aʊ/ in HKE

(i) [aɪ] → [Λɪ]
tide  tight 
wide  bike 
tries  twice 
rice  nice 

(ii) [aʊ] → [Λʊ]
loud  out 
browse  house 

Partial generalisation: ‘[aɪ] and [aʊ] are raised to [Λɪ] and [Λʊ] respectively when followed by a voiceless consonant.’

Recommended Reading

- ❖ Hung, T.T.N. (2002). 'Towards a Phonology of Hong Kong English'. In K. Bolton (ed), *Hong Kong English: Autonomy and Creativity*, pp.119-140. Hong Kong University Press.

Hung, T.T.N. (2002) 'English as a global language and the issue of international intelligibility'. *Asian Englishes, Vol.5, No.1, pp.4-17.*