The International Phonetic Alphabet
Phonetic transcriptions

The International Phonetic Association was founded in 1886 by *Paul Passy*, a French phonetician.

International Phonetic Alphabet: a symbol system based upon an alphabet developed by the British phonetician Henry Sweet.

Why do we need the IPA?

Ideally, an orthographic (=spelling) system would have one written symbol for each spoken sound.

The true alphabetic principle:

> ONE SYMBOL -- ONE SOUND

Does English spelling conform to the true alphabetic principle?

No, it does not.

Arguments:

1.   fl<u>ea</u>, fl<u>ee</u>, p<u>eo</u>ple, sk<u>i</u>   [i]
        <u>ph</u>one, <u>f</u>ly   [f]

> one sound --more than one spelling

2.   <u>th</u>ought [θ],   <u>th</u>ough [ð],   <u>Th</u>omas [tʰ]

        <u>a</u>te [ej],   <u>a</u>t [æ]

> same spelling -- different sounds

3.   m<u>ee</u>t   [i]
         di<u>ff</u>er   [f]

the use of digraphs (=two letters) to represent one sound

4.   lis<u>t</u>en, de<u>b</u>t, <u>k</u>now

silent letters (one letter -- no speech sound)

5.   <u>u</u>se, f<u>u</u>se   [j]

missing letters (one sound -- no letter correspondence)

SPELLING IS *NOT* PRONUNCIATION! WE DO NOT PRONOUNCE
LETTERS BUT *SPEECH SOUNDS*.

THE OBJECTIVE OF THE IPA: There should be a *different* symbol for each of the sounds of speech. The IPA should be capable of representing *all* speech sounds for *all* languages.

In order to avoid the use of too many different symbols, **DIACRITICS** may be employed.

written marks in conjunction with a symbol to indicate the quality of the sound represented.

e.g.,   b<u>ea</u>t   [i]

                 b<u>ea</u>n   [ĩ]

The diacritic [˜] above the symbol indicates *nasalization*.

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE IPA FOR USING DIACRITICS

FIRST PRINCIPLE: It is permitted to use diacritics for representing *suprasegmentals* (length, stress, pitch, intonation)

      e.g., b<u>ea</u>t   [i]

                              short *vs*. long

           b<u>ee</u>   [i:]

SECOND PRINCIPLE: It is permitted to use diacritics to indicate *non-phonemic differences*.

           b<u>ea</u>n   [ĩ]

          /i/

    [i]   [ĩ]   ←   predictable variant

                         allophone
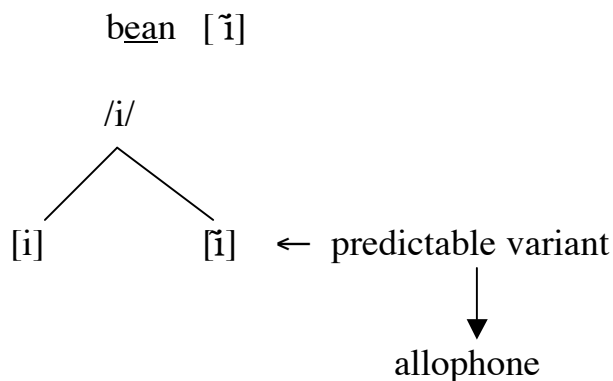
THIRD PRINCIPLE: It is permitted to use diacritics if applying them helps to avoid the use of new symbols.

Contradiction may arise between the SECOND and the THIRD principles.

      e.g., French   mais   [ɛ]   'but'

                        main   [ɛ̃]   'hand'

Phonemic difference! (different meanings)

In case of contradictions, it is preferable to violate the SECOND PRINCIPLE.

There are two levels of transcription:

1. **BROAD TRANSCRIPTION:**

    A simple set of IPA symbols to designate *phonemes* as they are usually produced.

2. **NARROW TRANSCRIPTION:**

    It shows more phonetic details; the use of diacritics indicates something special about the way the sound was produced.

    e.g.,   width

    [wɪdθ]   broad transcription

    [wɪd̪θ]   narrow transcription

[d̪]   The sound was made with the tongue tip closing against the upper front teeth.

> Study Chapter 1, Sections 1.7 and 1.8