Schwa-tegration:

vowel reduction at the ❤ of pronunciation teaching

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pron SIG

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Workshop outline

- vowel reduction in EFL and in Czech English

- vowel reduction in pronunciation teaching

- awareness-raising tasks
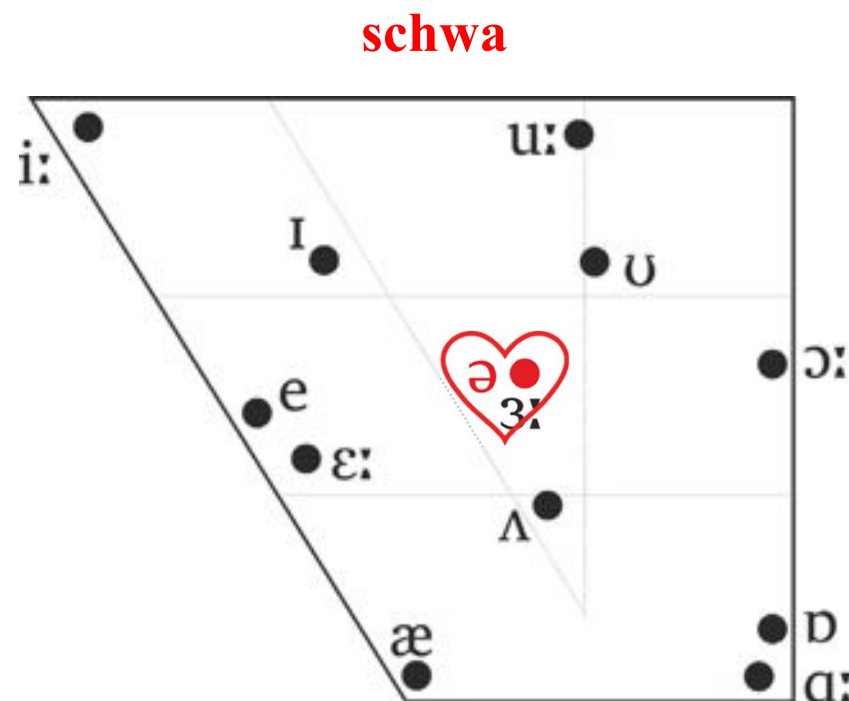
- perception activities

- production activities

Vowel reduction in the EFL context

- ǝ stress and rhythm

- ǝ no systematic vowel reduction in Czech
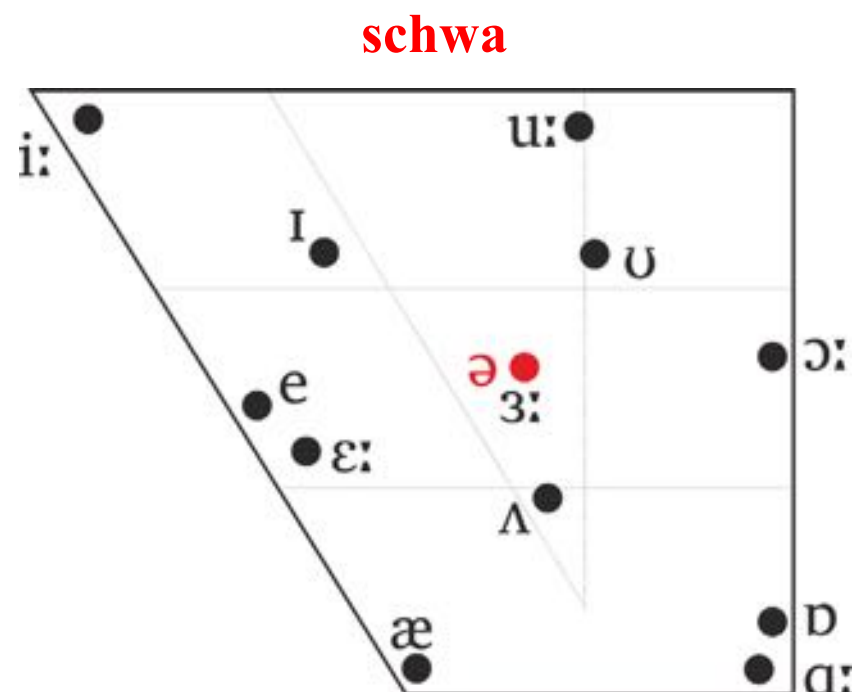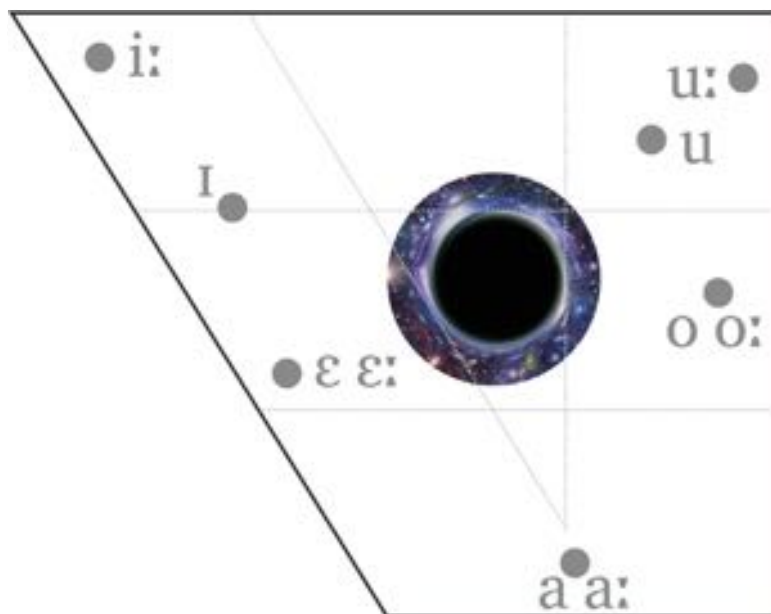
- ǝ *nejkrásnější* [ˈnɛjkraːsɲɛjʃiː]

schwa

Vowel reduction in the EFL context

- *schwa* is related to stress and rhythm

- /təˈɡeðə/

- crucial rhythmical element

- /ə/ = 25% of all vowels

- non-prominent
  - shorter
  - quieter
  - lower in melody

schwa

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Stressed vowels Long, clear	Unstressed vowels Short, clear	Reduced vowels (schwa) Very short, very unclear
a e i o u	a e i o u	ə ə ə ə ə
Very easy to hear	Easy to hear	Hard to hear

(Gilbert, 2008)

- important to teach to speakers of *schwa*-less L1s

Vowel reduction in Czech English

- ⊖ strongly accented speakers

- ⊖ "schwa" in unstressed syllables of lexical words

(Skarnitzl & Rumlová, 2019)
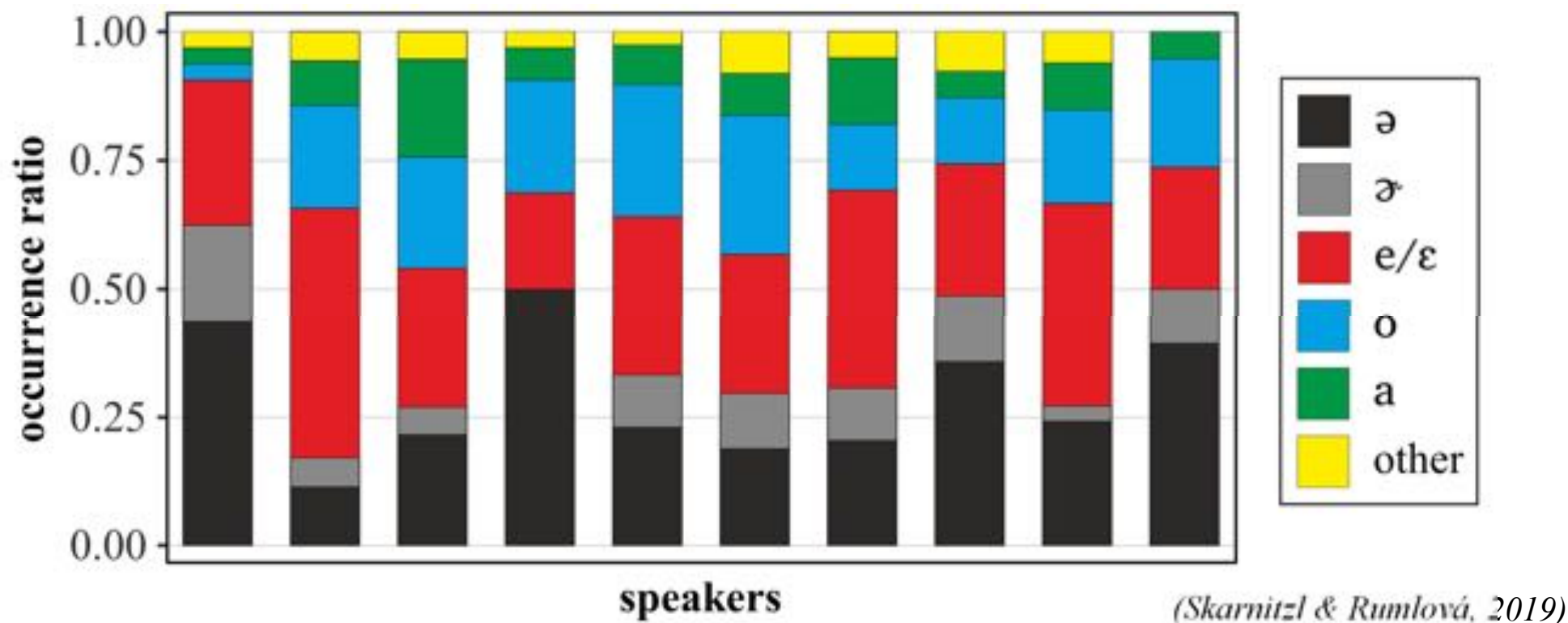
Vowel reduction in Czech English

- ə vowel quality often "correct" in moderately accented speakers
  - ə mid central vowel

- ə acoustic properties of a prominent vowel
  - ə too long, too "strong"

- ə mid central vowel ≠ reduced vowel
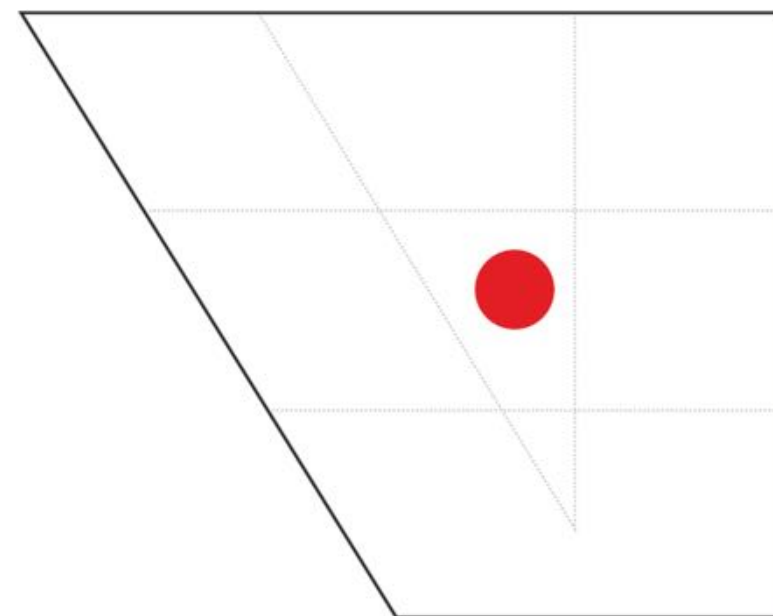
(Volín, Weingartová & Skarnitzl, 2013
Weingartová, Poesová & Volín, 2014
Červinková Poesová & Weingartová, 2018)

Vowel reduction in Czech English

- reduction concerns grammatical words ("weak forms")

- high-frequency words

- prominent realizations "draw too much attention"

- weak form words in Czech English are always too long and strong

(Volín & Johaníková, 2018; Skarnitzl & Rumlová, 2019)

Vowel reduction in Czech English

- tendency to pronounce full vowels (mostly [e o])

- if [ə], it is still too prominent

- lack of **prominence contrast**

- greater problem in grammatical (weak form) words
  than in unstressed syllables of lexical words

Factors behind the lack of vowel reduction in EFL

- **spelling**
  - *an acc**u**r**a**te sep**a**rat**io**n **o**f diff**e**rent col**ou**rs is imposs**i**ble*

- **L1 influence**
  - *photograph* [ˈfəʊtəɡrɑːf] × *fotografie* [ˈfotoɡrafɪjɛ]
  - *opera* [ˈɒprə] × *opera* [ˈopɛra]

- **perceptual illusion**
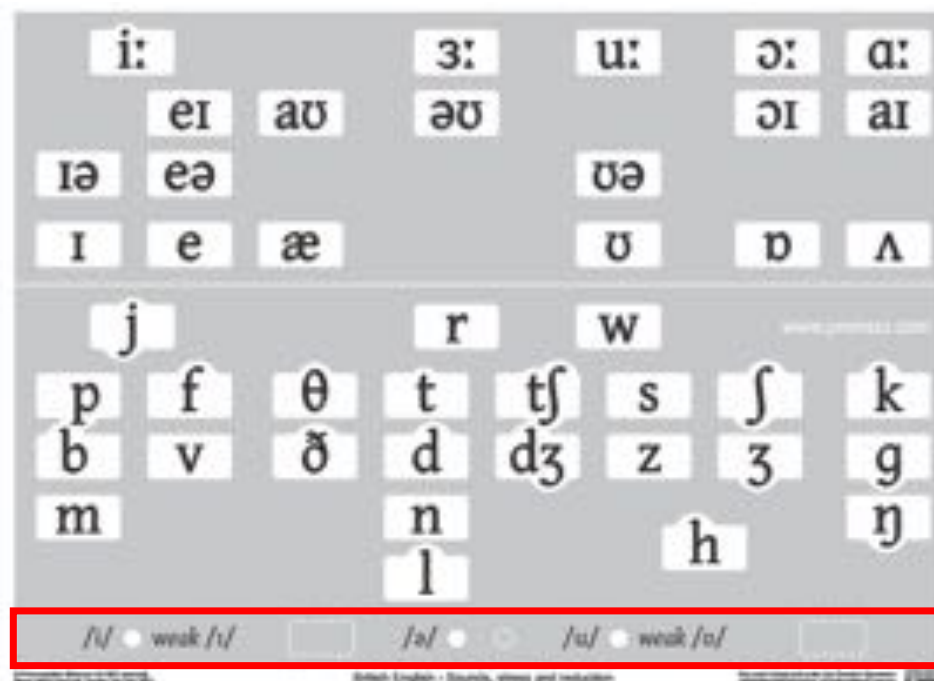
- **ignorance of pronunciation rules**
  - *could have* [kəd ̮əv]
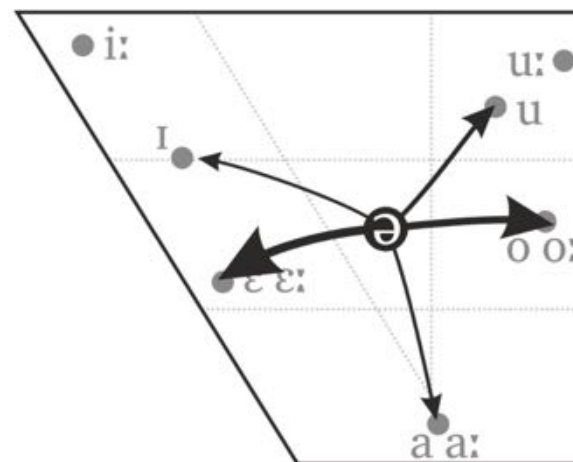
*(Poesová, 2012
Poesová, 2015)*

Vowel reduction in pronunciation teaching

- schwa in the centre of the sound patterns of English

- one of 44 phonemes → a sound on a different level

- PronSci phonemic chart

What teachers should bear in mind

- raising awareness (cognition), perception and production (skills)
- more enjoyment, less anxiety (affective states)
- word and sentence level

  forget, problem, operation

  There is a box for your brother.

- schwa in context (prominence contrast)

  focus on schwa – fəget f**or**get f**ȯ**rget

  focus on stress – for'get forGET for**get**

  fə**GET**

- marking prominence units: forget   problem   your brother
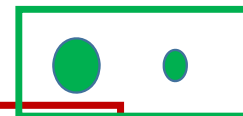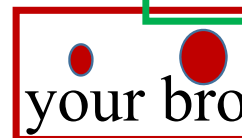
First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks

ə

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks

ə

This is a nice event.

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks
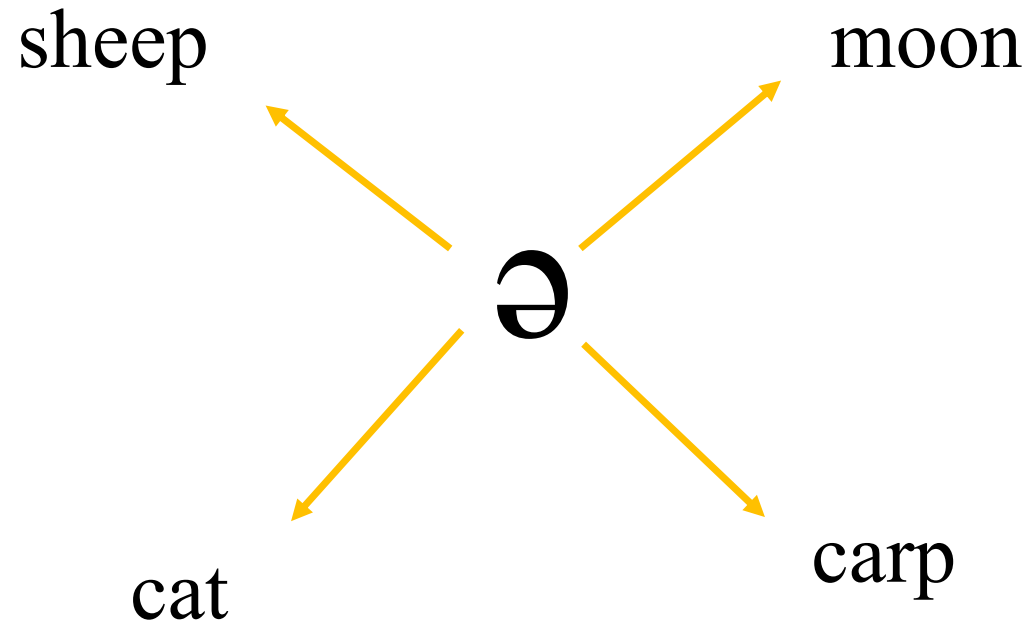
sheep   moon

Ə

cat   carp

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks

sheep
/iː/

moon
/uː/

Ə

cat
/æ/

carp
/ɑː/

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks

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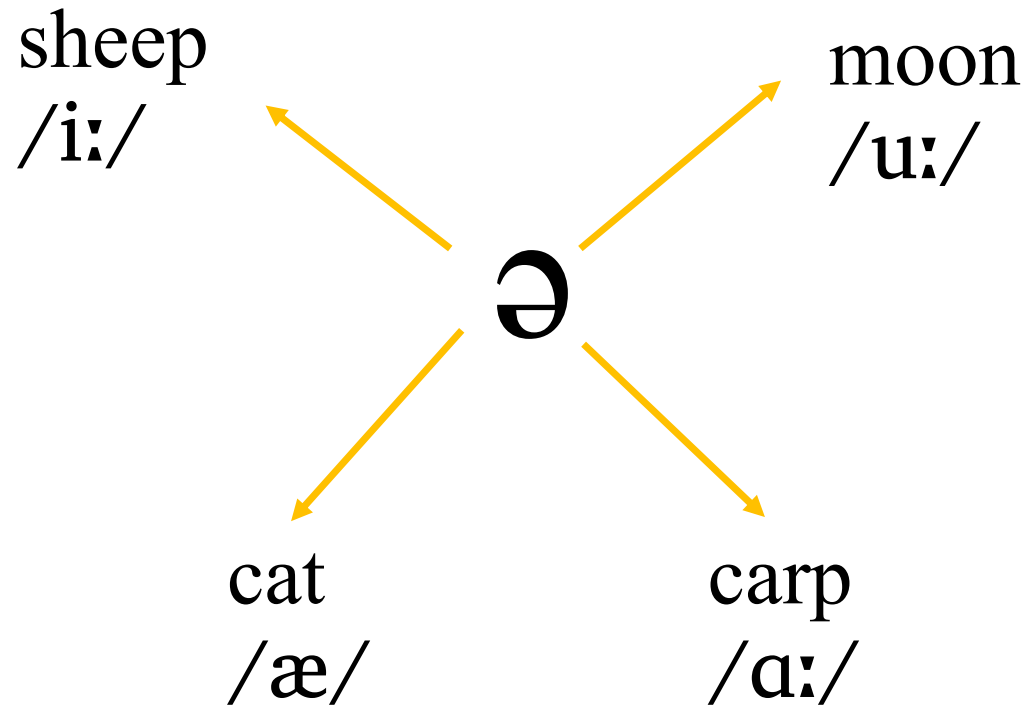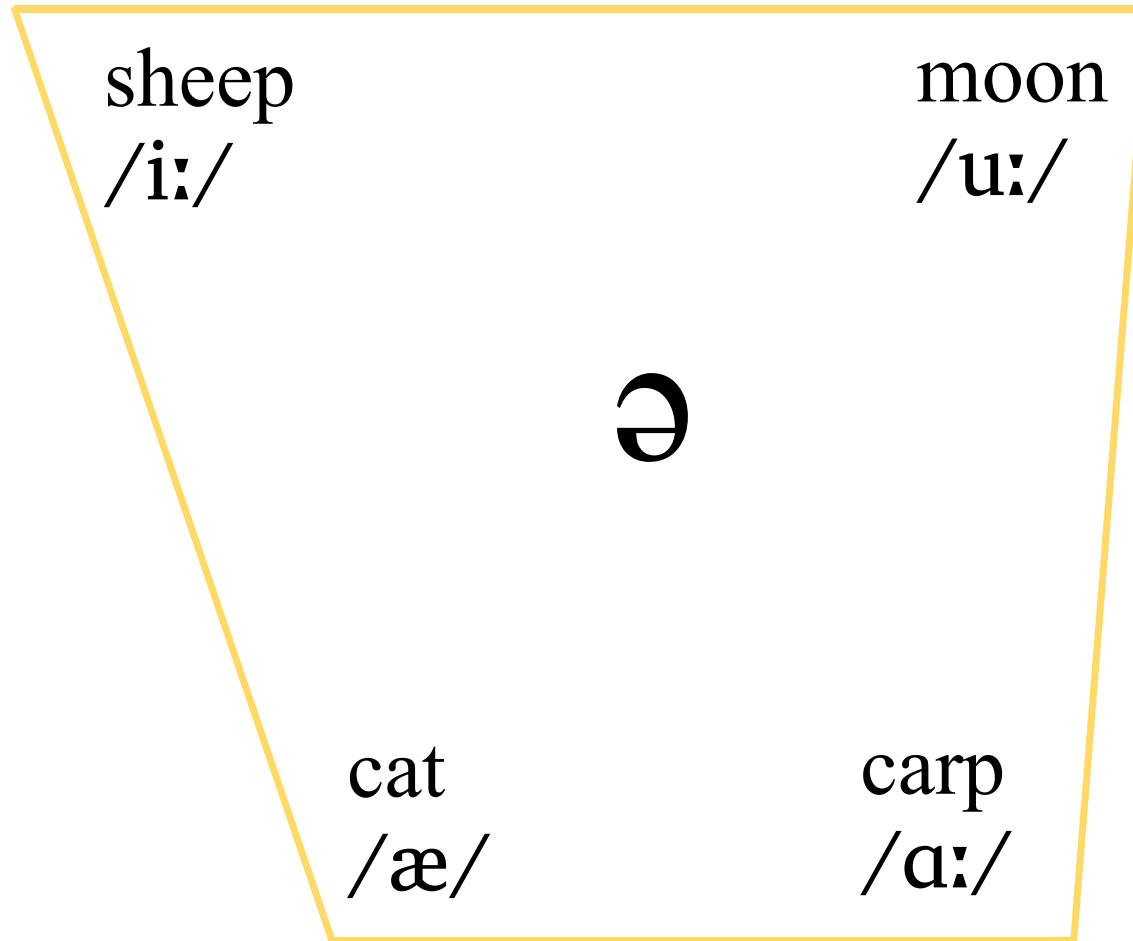
First encounter with *schwa* – discovery activity

a) /**piː** pə **piː** pə **piː** pə **piː** pə **piː** pə **piː** pə **piː** pə **piː** pə/

b) /**tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə **tiː** tə/

c) /**piː** tə **piː** tə/

Peter

First encounter with *schwa* – stuttering

- ə Can you stutter?

- ə produce the word *foot* with a stutter
- ə produce the word *ball* with a stutter

- ə *train* → *terrain*

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks (focus on spelling)

- Listen and circle the parts with /ə/:

  pepper, marmalade, yoghurt, potato, melon, vanilla, celery, raisin, famous

  pepper, marmalade, yoghurt, potato, melon, vanilla, celery, raisin, famous

- Which letters or combinations of letters represent /ə/?

  <er> <a> <ur> <o> <e> <i> <ou>

  pepper, marmalade, yogurt, potato, melon, vanilla, celery, raisin, famous

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks (noticing)

- ǝ Notice the difference between the English word and its Czech counterpart.

  marmalade × marmeláda

  yoghurt × jogurt

  melon × meloun

  vanilla × vanilka

  celery × celer

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks (playing with prominence clues)

- ə Say the nonsense word dooby in the following ways:
  - 1st syllable long, 2nd shortly and vice versa
  - 1st syllable high, 2nd low and vice versa
  - 1st syllable aloud, 2nd quietly and vice versa
  - 1st syllable with *schwa*, 2nd with a full vowel and vice versa

First encounter with *schwa* – awareness-raising tasks (summary)

- ə introduction of the sound schwa and its symbol /ə/
  (relaxed articulatory setting – Friday afternoon sound)

- ə discovery activity: a) **/piː** pə **piː** pə/   b) **/tiː** tə **tiː** tə/   c) **/piː** tə **piː** tə/

- ə stuttering

- ə circle/underline/colour the parts with /ə/ (spelling)

- ə mother tongue equivalents (noticing)

- ə playing with prominence clues (higher, louder, longer, full vowel quality ×
  lower, quieter, shorter, reduced vowel quality)

- ə indicating prominence units/contrasts in words and phrases

Perception exercises – Raise your hand

- Listen and raise your hand (alternatively a card with the schwa symbol) when you hear schwa in a word or phrase.

Perception exercises – Raise your hand

ə Listen and raise your hand (alternatively a card with the schwa symbol)
when you hear schwa in a word or phrase.

water

all my life

mobile

around

surprise

begin

common

Japan

Glasgow

made of silk

ə

Perception exercises – Raise your hand

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water
all my life
mobile
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common
Japan
Glasgow
made of silk

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Perception exercises – Raise your hand

ə Listen and raise your hand (alternatively a card with the schwa symbol) when you hear schwa in a word or phrase.

*wat*er

*a*round

*sur*prise

comm*on*

*Ja*pan

made of silk

ə

Perception exercises – Words without schwa

ə Listen and in each group circle the word without schwa *(Baker, 2006)*.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
listen	horse	doctor	teacher	answer
banana	butter	question	hat	mother
cup	flower	window	pizza	shop

Perception exercises – Words without schwa

ə Listen and in each group circle the word without schwa *(Baker, 2006)*.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
listen	(horse)	doctor	teacher	answer
banana	butter	question	(hat)	mother
(cup)	flower	(window)	pizza	(shop)

Perception exercises – How many schwas?

ə Listen and show how many schwas you hear in each word.

taxi driver

farmer

carpenter

photographer

pilot

window dresser

secretary

office assistant

Perception exercises – How many schwas?

ə Listen and show how many schwas you hear in each word.

taxi driver – 1

farmer – 1

carpenter – 2

photographer – 3

pilot – 1

window dresser – 1

secretary – 1(2)

office assistant – 2

Perception exercises – Weak or strong?

- Are the words pronounced weakly or strongly in the following sentences?
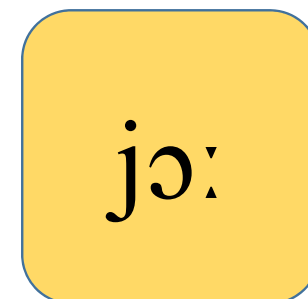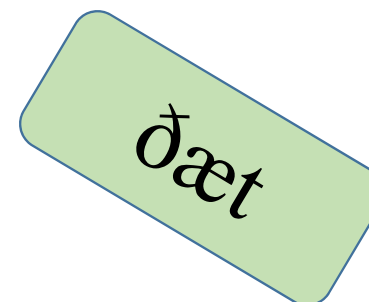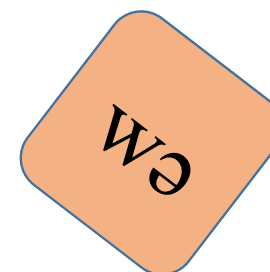
1. were
2. your
3. were
4. your
5. your
6. that
7. that
8. that
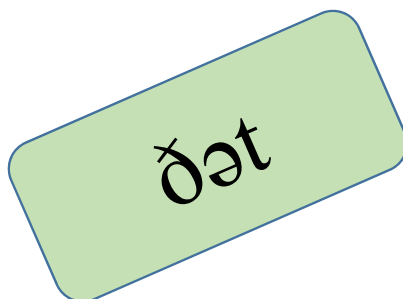
ðət

jə

wə

wɜː

ðæt

jɔː

Perception exercises – Weak or strong?

- Are the words pronounced weakly or strongly in the following sentences?
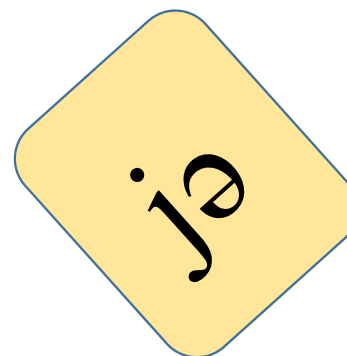
    1. were – W
    2. your – S
    3. were – W
    4. your – W
    5. your – W
    6. that – S
    7. that – W
    8. that – W

Perception exercises – summary

- Raise your hand

- Words without schwa

- How many schwas?

- Weak or strong?

Production – partial transcription in words

bee

buttəfly

məs**qui**to

spidə

crocədile

octəpəs

gə**rill**ə

eləphənt

kangə**roo**

liən

Production – partial transcription in dialogues

What dəs he **do**?   He's ə **shop** əssistənt.

Where dəs she **work?**   She **works** in thə **ci**nəmə.

Where dəs he **work**?   He **works** in ə **fac**təry.

Production – partial transcription of a short text

He took this pictə in 1949 in Jəpan. He wəs working fər ə magəzine. They wanted photos əf fishəmən. Thə people in thə photo were ə fishəmən called Petə, his wife, ənd their little baby boy. Petə wəs leaving tə go tə Canədə ənd thə phətogəphə wanted tə take ə photo əf him ənd his wife in front əf thə boat.

Production – analogies between word and sentence levels

- Produce the following words with the right reductions.

forgive
Japanese
polite
correct
overrun
balloon

Production – analogies between word and sentence levels

- Produce the following words with the right reductions.

  forgive – for Jim
  Japanese – made of cheese
  polite – her light
  correct – her neck
  overrun – should have done
  balloon – at noon

Production – analogies between word and sentence levels

Ə Produce the phrases. Do you remember the words with the same stress pattern?

for Jim
made of cheese
her light
her neck
should have done
at noon

Production – energy profile

AMERICA

A**ME**RICA → AME**RI**CA → AMERI**CA** → **A**MERICA → A**ME**RICA

crocodile, personality, banana, surprising, hospital

Conclusion

- ə schwa as a frequent topic in teaching

- ə importance of phrase/sentence level

- ə noticing – perception – production

  - ə let Ss notice (*Weak or strong?*)

  - ə let Ss experience and experiment (*Energy profile*, *Dooby*)

  - ə suppress the written form

- ə „important nothing" ↔ other elements in the sound system

Feedback – reflection

- One thing that was new for me:

- One thing I have never thought about before:

- One activity I'd like to perform with my class. Why?

- Your own recommendation and things that work for your students.

[ˈθæŋk ju fə jərˌəˈtenʃən]

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