

Patterns in vowel systems

Module type: Exercise

Class: Phonology

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Instructions*

Across the world's spoken languages, vowel systems tend to follow certain patterns. Three important patterns are: (1) front and central vowels tend to be unrounded, while back vowels tend to be round; (2) low vowels tend to be unrounded, even if they are back; and (3) vowels tend to be fairly evenly spread out in the vowel space to avoid crowding. Consider the following vowel systems for various languages. List the five languages whose vowel systems satisfy all three of these patterns. You may find it helpful to sketch out diagrams for the vowel systems to see how they are structured.

Japanese	Japonic family, Japan	o u e i a
Alagwa	Afro-Asiatic family, Tanzania	u a i o e
Wari'	Chapacuran family, Brazil	ø i y a e o
Abelam	Sepik family, Papua New Guinea	i a ə
Shuswap	Salishan family, Canada	u ε a i ə ɔ
Finnish	Uralic, Finland	æ u ø a i y e o
Dari	Indo-European family, Afghanistan	ɒ a ε u a e i o
Jaqaru	Aymaran family, Peru	u i a
Nimboran	Foja Range, Indonesia	u i o a u e
Uzbek	Turkic family, Uzbekistan	ɔ æ o i u
Tumari Kanuri	Nilo-Saharan, Niger	i a u ʌ e o ə
Woleian	Austronesian family, Micronesia	y o i œ u a e ɒ

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