

# Catalan pronunciation & accents

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## Catalan pronunciation & regional accents (not local dialects)

o. In a somehow condensed form, we are presenting the *neutral* pronunciation of Catalan (rather than ‘standard’, which actually corresponds more to its *mediatic* accent). The six main *regional* accents of Catalan are included, which means how native speakers actually pronounce Catalan, using the official language, often (but not necessarily) when talking to foreigners.

Habitually, Catalan, Valencian, and Balearic people use their own *dialects*, not only with different pronunciations, but also with peculiar grammars and vocabularies. However, we intend to describe not their dialects, but their pronunciation, for the vowels, consonants, and intonations of official Catalan. In a planned book, with Renzo Miotti, all this will be discussed in greater detail, more completely and systematically.

*Spelling peculiarities: c* /s, k/, *ç* /s/, *g* /ʒ, ɡ/, *Vig#* /Vtʃ/, *j* /ʒ/, *ll* /ʎ/, *ll* /ll/, *ny* /ɲ/, *tg* and *tj* /ddʒ/, *ts* /ts/, *x* /ʃ/, *Vix#* /Vʃ/, *tx* /tʃ/, *VttʃV*, *tz* /dz/, *y* /j/, *z* /z/.

## Neutral Catalan

1. *Neutral* Catalan has seven vowel phonemes in stressed position, *ie* /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/. In unstressed syllables, it has only three vowel phonemes, *ie* /i, ə, u/ [i, ə, u]. Notice that there is also the possibility of having unstressed /e, ε; o, ɔ/ [e, ε; o, σ], in compounds, and derived or lofty forms, as well as in loanwords. Notice that we prefer /ɜ/ to the commonly found /ə/, because (as can be seen in fig 1) its actual realization is the *canIPA* symbol [ɜ] (not *offIPA*), which is somewhat between [ə] and [ʌ] (not excluding regional variants like [ɐ]).

Before /l, u/ [ʎ, ʎ; u], the phonemes /a, ɜ/ [a, ɜ] become [ɑ, ʌ] (and /ε, ɔ/ [ε, ɔ], become [ʌ, ɔ; ʌ, ɔ]). For ⟨i, u⟩, Catalan presents /CiV, CuV/, /VjV, VwV/ but /#jV/, /kwV, gwV/, and diphthongs of the /Vi, Vu/ kind. However, in colloquial speech, and in the mediatic accent, /CiV, CuV/ certainly tend to become /CjV, CwV/.

The first vocogram in fig 1 presents /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/, while the second one

shows unstressed /i, ɜ, u/. In addition, fig 1 also presents the /Vi, Vu/ diphthongs of Catalan (third and fourth vocograms), and /Vɜ/ diphthongs (fifth vocogram), together with /ii, uu/, which could not be inserted in previous vocograms, for obvious visibility reasons.

Lastly, the sixth and seventh vocograms show unstressed and two destressed diphthongs. To end with, some peculiarities of the traditional Catalan accent are shown in the eighth vocogram.

fig 1. Neutral Catalan accent: vowels & diphthongs.

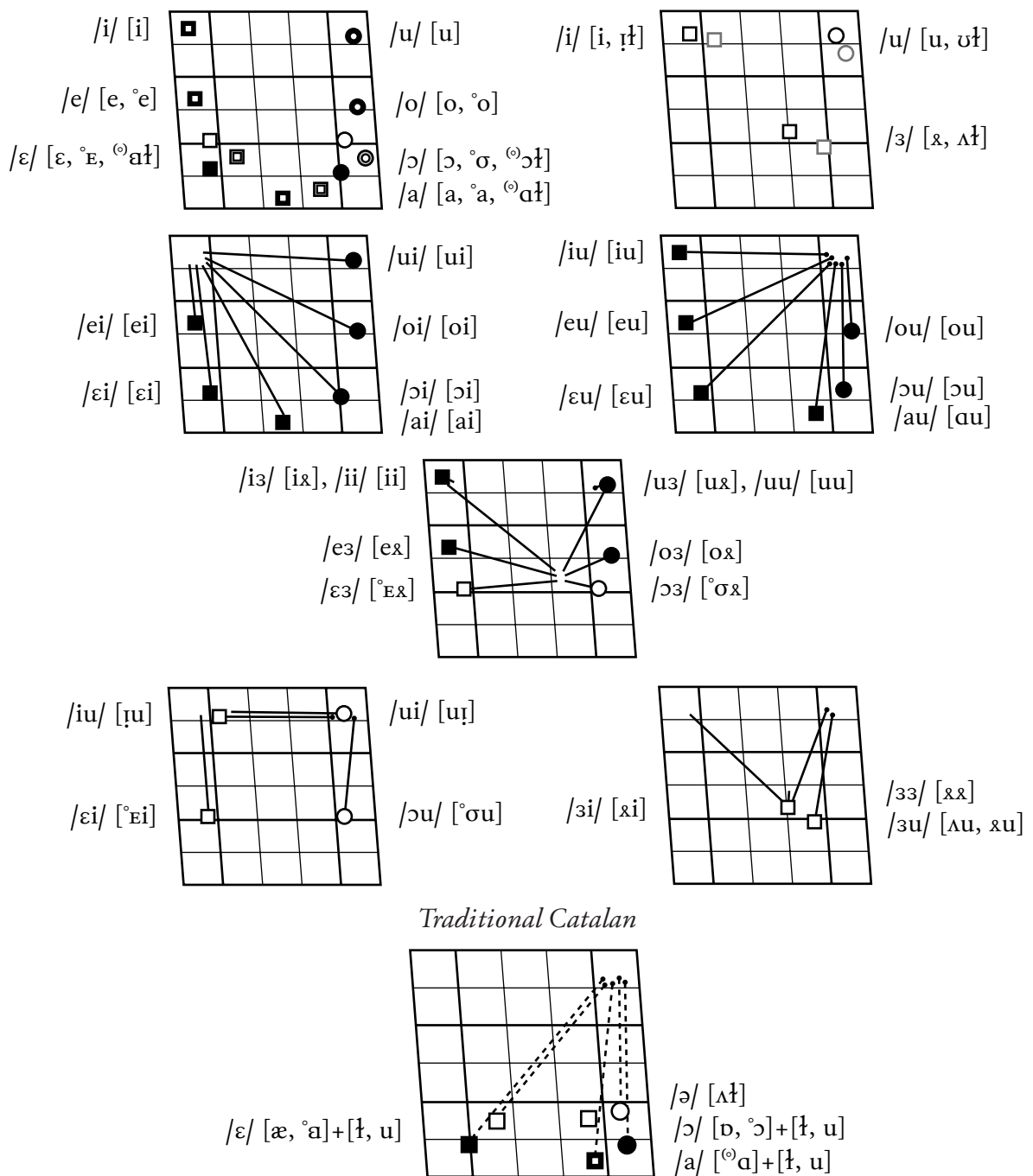


fig 2.0. Neutral Catalan accent: consonants & contoids – taxophones, geophones & xenophones.

m	[m]	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	n	[ɲ]	[ɲ]	{n}	ɲ	[ɲ]	ɲ	
p	b	t	d	[t d]	[t d]				(c ɟ)	[k g]	k g	
								tʃ dʒ	(tʃ dʒ)	(kç gɟ)		
	f {v}	[s z]	[s z]	[ʃ z]	ʃ z		ʃ z	[ʃ z]	(ç j)	[x]	[x]	[x]
	[β]	(v)	[ð]		{z}				(j)			(w)
					[s]				j			w (ə) (h)
					r				{j}			{w}
					r							(r)
					l		[ʎ] ʎ	[ʎ]	[ʎ]	ʎ	[ʎ]	[ʎ]

fig 2.1. Nasals.

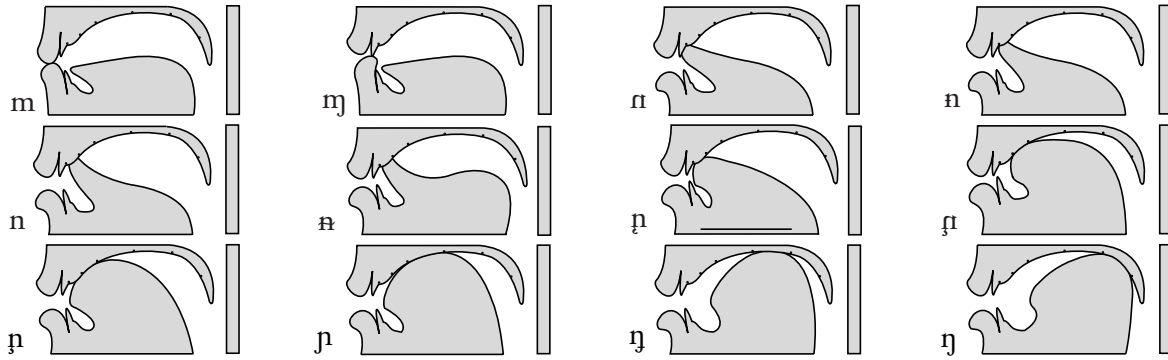


fig 2.2. Stops.

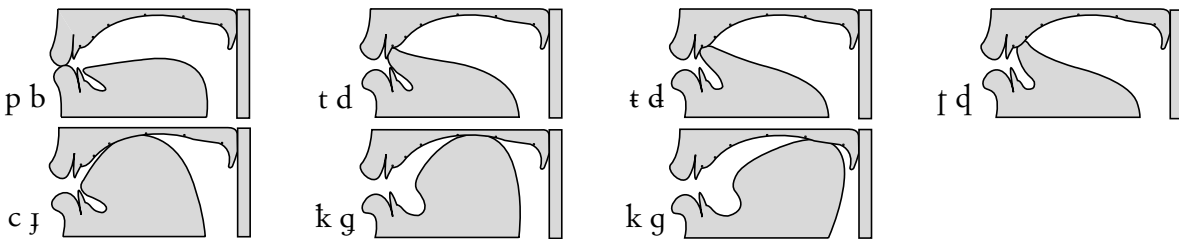


fig 2.3. Stopstrictives.

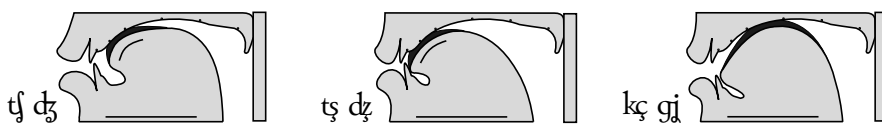


fig 2.4. Constrictives.

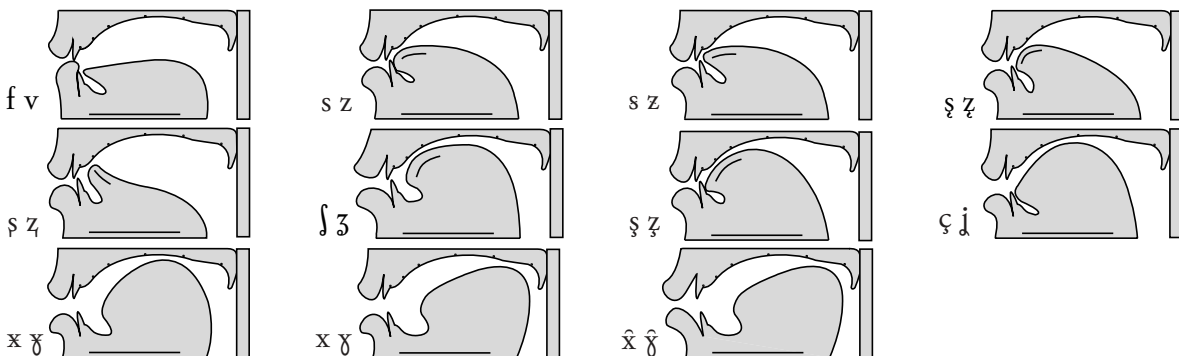


fig 2.5. Approximants, semi-approximants (. . . .), semi-constrictive (---).

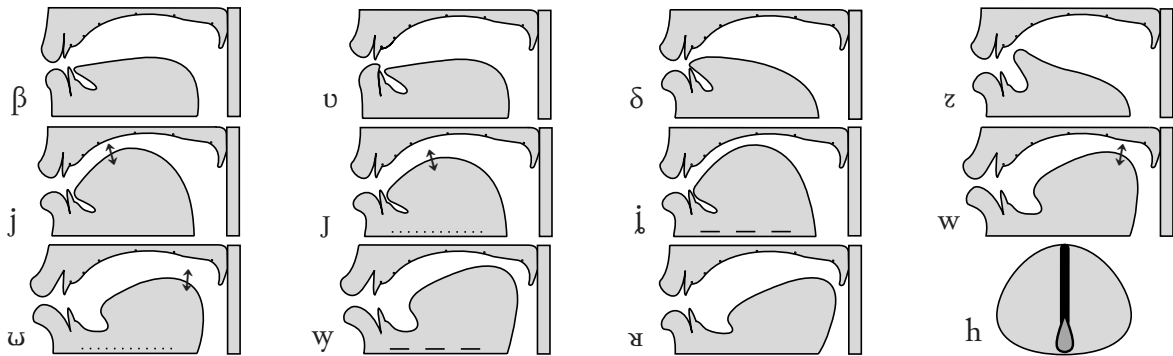


fig 2.6. Trill (r), taps (ɾ, ɽ), semi-tap (s).

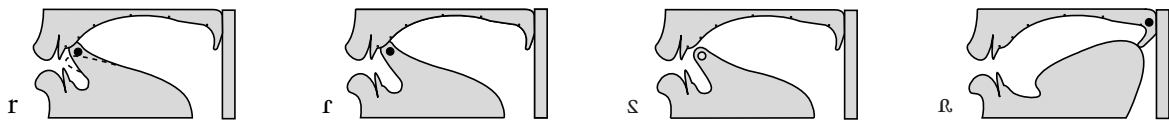
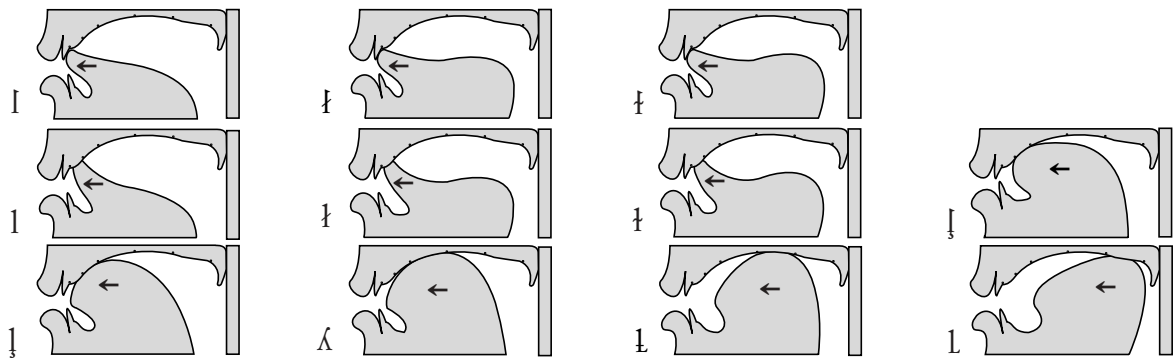


fig 2.7. Laterals.



2. As for the *consonants*, Catalan, in addition to /m, n/ [m, n], has /ɲ/ (with /ɲ≡C/, ie strictly homorganic to a following contoid, as the table of fig 2 clearly shows) and also /ŋ/, which occurs finally or in /ŋN/ (<gm, gn>). Notice that fig 2 contains not only the contoids necessary for the Catalan neutral accent, with taxophones between [ ], but also regional taxophones (or geophones) and xenophones, between ( ).

In addition, some symbols appear between { }, because they are both possible (neutral, or colloquial, or mediatic) taxophones and regional variants, too. We did not include indications of either manner or place of articulation, because we are convinced that our devoted readers can perfectly understand what we mean.

Taxophonically, we find the sequences /ts, dz/ [tʃ, dʒ] (dentalveolar stops and apicoalveolar constrictives – or ‘fricatives’, often erroneously described as stopstricatives (‘affricates’): *gats* /ˈgats/ [ˈgatsʃ] (more clearly [ˈgat-ʃ]), *potser* /putˈse/ [putˈʃe], *botzina* /budˈziɲɜ/ [budˈziɲɜ] (certainly heterosyllabic, when stress is present).

/s, z/ which are normally *apico*-alveolar, [s, z], can often enough be *lamino*-alveolar, [ʃ, ʒ], both in neutral accents and in colloquial and mediatic (and some regional) ones.

3. In *intervocalic* position, we find /ttʃ, ddʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ] alveolar stops (and post-alveo-palatal stopstrictives, with partially *spread lips*, ie [tʃ, dʒ], rather than *protruded*, as in many other languages). The /ttʃ, ddʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ] sequences differ considerably both from plain /tʃ, dʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ] and from the geminates found in other languages, /tʃtʃ, dʒdʒ/ [tʃtʃ, dʒdʒ]): *despatxar* /dɛspətʃa/ [dɛspətʃa], *mitjà* /midʒa/ [midʒa].

However, in non-intervocalic contexts, we have /tʃ, dʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ]: *despatx* /dɛspətʃ/ [dɛspətʃ], *despatx obert* /dɛspətʃ u'βert/ [dɛspətʃ u'βert]).

4. After pauses or consonants, /ʃ, ʒ/ [ʃ, ʒ] increasingly more often correspond to /tʃ, dʒ/ [tʃ, dʒ] (especially in mediatic accents and in colloquial speech): (*un*) *xal* / (un)ʃal, -tʃal/ [(un)ʃal, -tʃal], (*un*) *joc* / (un)ʒok, -dʒok/ [(un)ʒok, -dʒok], but nothing of the kind happens with /s, z/ (contrary to the mediatic or regional accents of many other languages). Generally, /ʃ<sup>#</sup>s, ʒ<sup>#</sup>z; tʃ<sup>#</sup>s, dʒ<sup>#</sup>z/ become [ʃ<sup>#</sup>, ʒ<sup>#</sup>; tʃ<sup>#</sup>, dʒ<sup>#</sup>] (mainly in mediatic accents and in colloquial speech).

The sequences /pl, bl; kl, gl/ are often (though not always) *hetero-syllabic*, with possible lengthening, or even gemination, of non-continuant consonants, ie [C<sup>#</sup>l, C<sup>#</sup>l, C<sup>#</sup>Cl] (more simply: [C-l, C-l, C-Cl]). In non-traditional pronunciations, these sequences can even be *tauto-syllabic* [<sup>#</sup>Cl], eg with /b, g/ [β, γ], which normalize the situation in these four cases, for syllabification, as well.

5. Certain geminations are possible, especially for sonants, written with unasimilated historical spelling: *admetre, cotna, atlas, espatlla* /ɛspətʃa/ [ɛspətʃa]. /l/ is typically (semi-)velarized, [<sup>#</sup>lV, Vʃ, ClV, VʃC, Vʃ<sup>#</sup>] – or [l] (velar, in any context, or prevelar, [l], with tautosyllabic front vowels).

In rhythm groups, /z/, when in contact with another vowel, is regularly elided, even when not shown in spelling: *d'aquí a una estona* //dɛ'ki ɛ unɛ'ɛstɔnɛ// /dɛ'ki (ɛ)unɛ'ɛstɔnɛ/ [dɛ'ki(ɛ)u nɛ'ɛstɔ'nɛ], *que es fa* //kɛ'ɛs fa// [kɛ'ɛs fa] [kɛ'ɛs fa], *que es diu* //kɛ'ɛs diu// [kɛ'ɛs diu] [kɛ'ɛs diu] (notice that, by coarticulation, /z/ is dentalveolar, [z], rather than [ʒ] or [ʒ]).

6. In the infinitives and gerunds, *-r, -t*, which are normally 'silent', with enclitic pronouns, are instead pronounced as /r, t/ [r, t]: *fer* /fe/ but *fer-ho* /'feru/, *anant* /ɛ'nan/, but: *anant-hi* /ɛ'nanti/, *portar* /pur'ta/, but: *portar-se* /pur'tarsɛ/. All word-final stops are invariably voiceless before /V, ʃ, // (ie vowels, voiceless consonants, or tunes followed by any kind of pause) and voiced before /ʃ/ (ie voiced consonants).

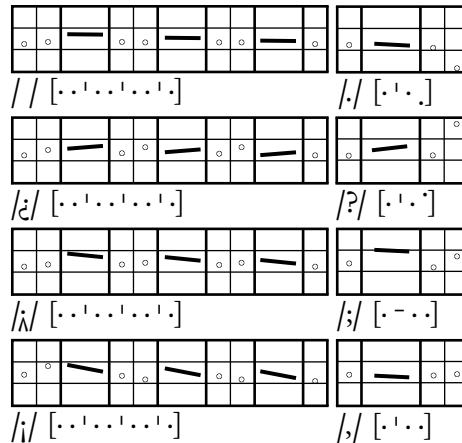
Therefore, *b<sup>#</sup>, d<sup>#</sup>, g<sup>#</sup>* (ie word-final) are regularly /p, t, k/: *tub estret, arab, fred intens, liquid, bioleg i geoleg, llarg*. Vice versa, *p<sup>#</sup>, t<sup>#</sup>, c<sup>#</sup>* change to /b, d, g/ in cases like *prop de, pot venir, esbufec desaprovedor, poc modest*. Even (*t*)*s<sup>#</sup>, tx<sup>#</sup>, Vig<sup>#</sup>* (V = any vowel), are / (d)z, dʒ/ (including *f<sup>#</sup>* [v]) before /V, ʃ/: *els nens* [ɛl'z'nɛnɛs], *tots els jugadors* [tɔt'ɔdzɛl(z) ʒu'ɣa'doʃ], *mateix any* [mɛ'tɛ'zɛn], *vaig demanar* [ba'ɛdʒdɛmɛ'nɛ], *buf estrany* [bu'vɛ'stɾɛn]. Thus, even though neutral Catalan does not have the phoneme /v/, it has [v] as a taxophone.

7. Within word boundaries, very much like what happens in sentences, and in lofty words, loanwords, or derived forms, written *b*, *d* before /ç/, correspond to /p, t/: *substancia*, *obscurir*, *dissabte*, *adquirir*.

Whereas, for *p*, *t*, *c*, *s*/ç, before /ç/, we have /b, d, g; z/ (realized as stops, [b, d, g]): *capdavall*, *abducció*, *futbol*, *anècdota*, *dracma*, *feliçment*, as well as in cases like *viatge*, *dotze* /dɔz, dz/. Regularly, /ps#, λs#/ are [ps#, λs#].

fig 3 shows the four protunes and tunes of the *intonation* patterns of neutral Catalan.

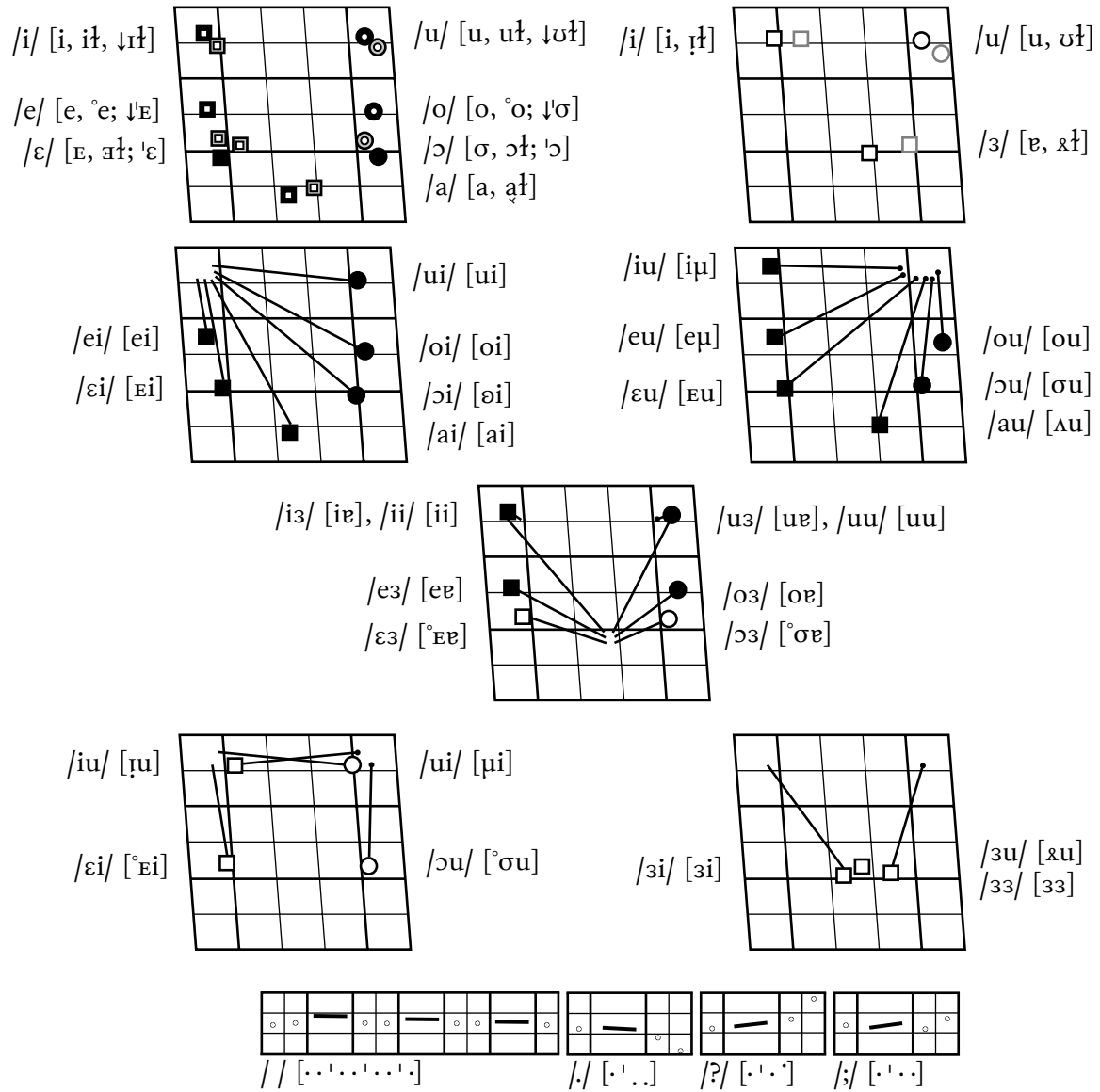
fig 3. Neutral Catalan accent: intonation patterns.



### Mediatic Catalan

8. The *mediatic* vowels and main intonation patterns are shown in fig 4.

fig 4. Mediatic Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.



## Regional accents of Catalan

9. In addition to the neutral and mediatic pronunciation, we present the six main regional accents (although there may also be some minor internal local differences), as shown in the map of fig 5.

fig 5. Catalan accents.



## Eastern Catalan

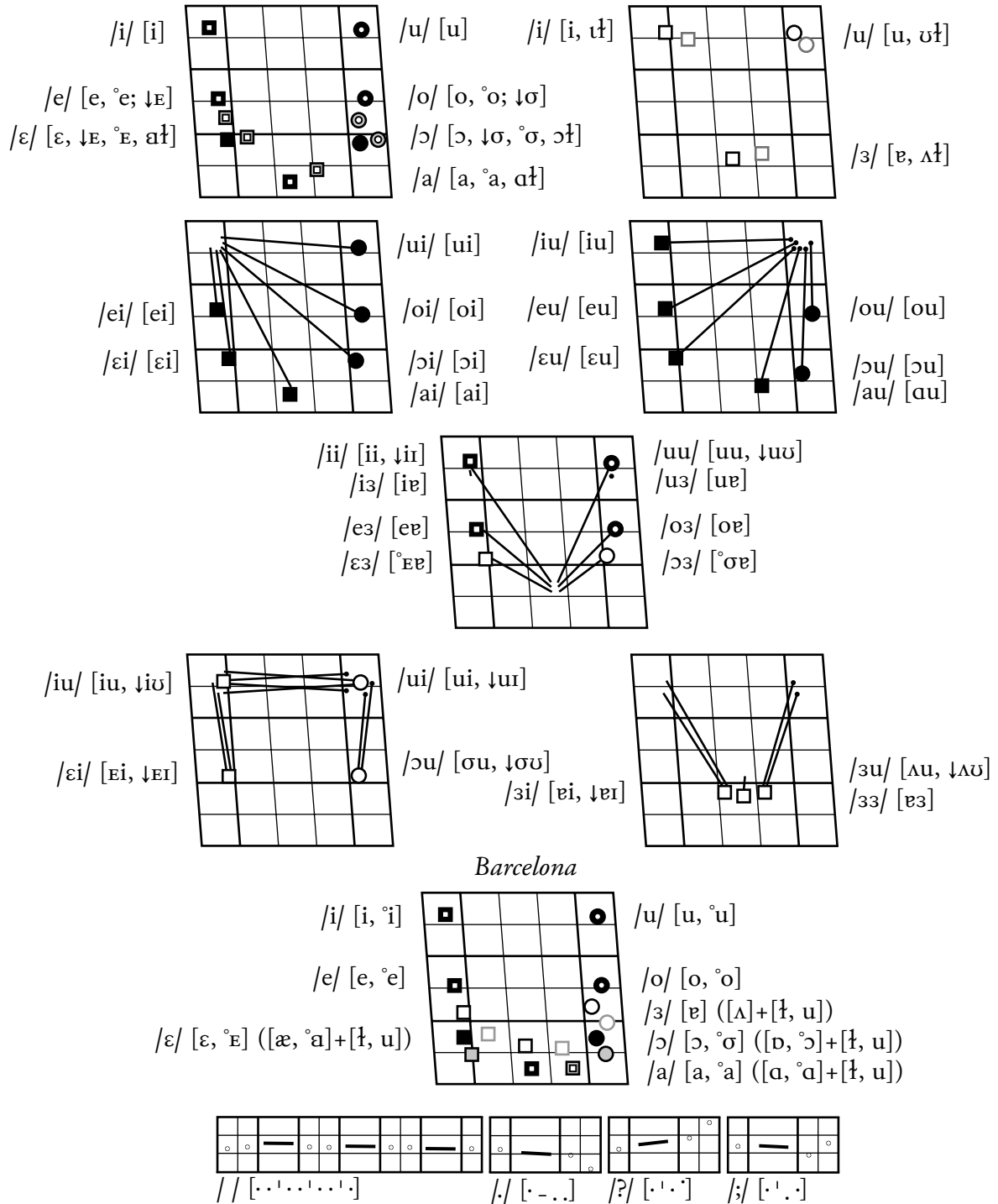
10. *Eastern Catalan*, in dialectal works, is generally called ‘central’. In Barcelona, both under the influence of Spanish and normal evolution, /ɜ/ is [ɐ], or [ʌ] before [ɫ, u]. Many younger speakers tend to have /ɜ/ → /e/ for unstressed *e*. Increasingly more often, /e, ε, o, ɔ/ may be exchanged. /ʎ/ changes to /j/; also, /ʃ, ʒ/ → /tʃ, dʒ/, and,



in intervocalic position, /dʒ/ → /tʃ/; /bl, gl/ → /pl, kl/ (all these features are highly stigmatized, but extremely widespread and influential).

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 6.

fig 6. Eastern Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.



### Western Catalan

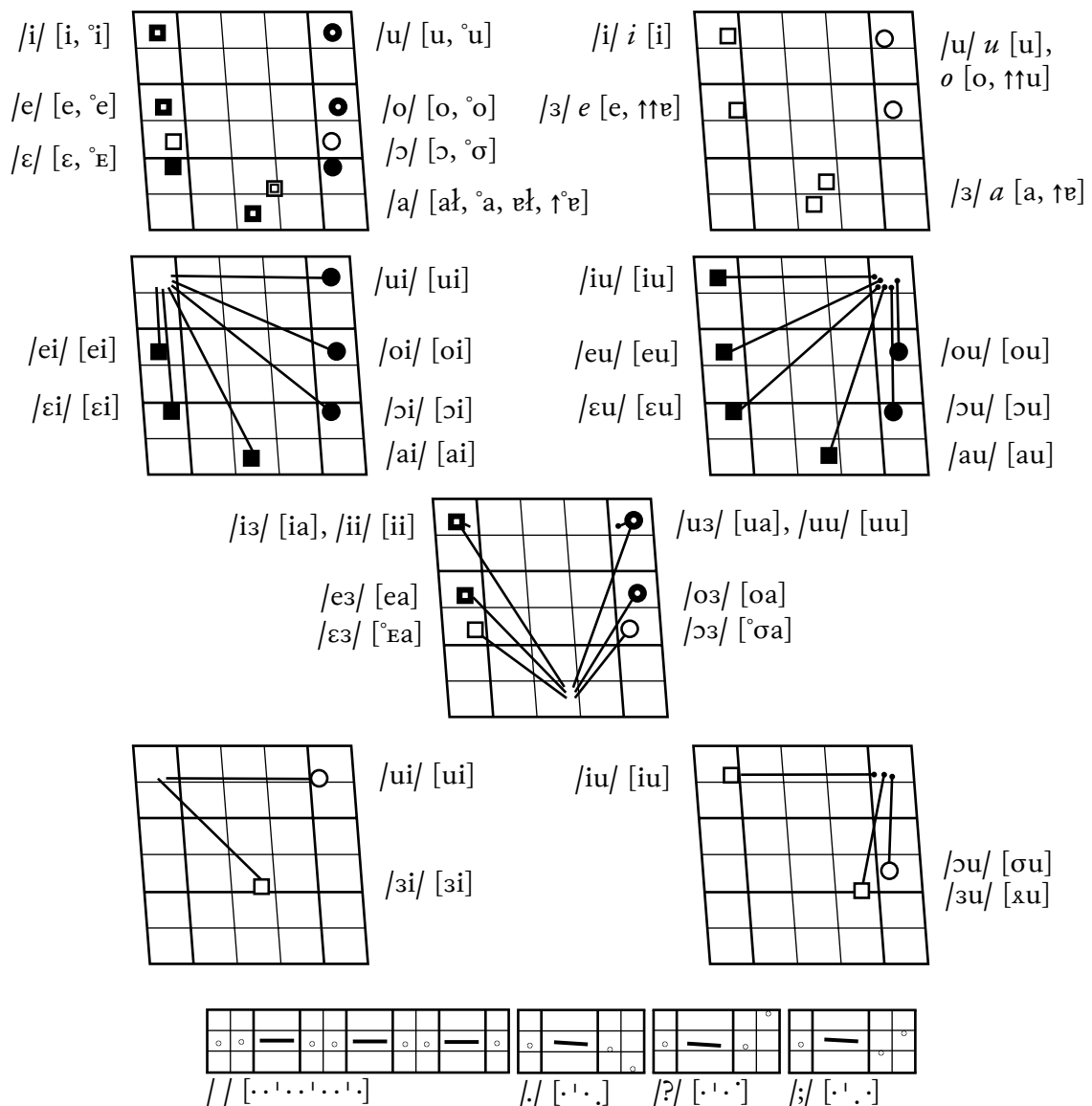
11. *Western Catalan* (including Andorra and Aran) has a different distribution of /e, ε, o, ɔ/ from neutral Catalan, and presents five vowels (instead of just three) in unstressed syllables, too: /i, e, a, o, u/ [i, e, ε, o, u] (even for [aɫ, ɐɫ]). This accent is the most different one from neutral Catalan, as far as its vowel distribution is concerned.

Actually, these two realities are those that have moved less away from their common origin (ie Latin), mainly for their vowels. Let us notice, in particular, that this accent, in comparison with the neutral and eastern ones, for *e*, may practically exchange the vocoids in several words.

In unstressed syllables, /ɜ, ɔu/, in typical accents, may depend on current spelling (as in Spanish), so that, for *e, a, o*, the variants shown are currently heard.

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 7.

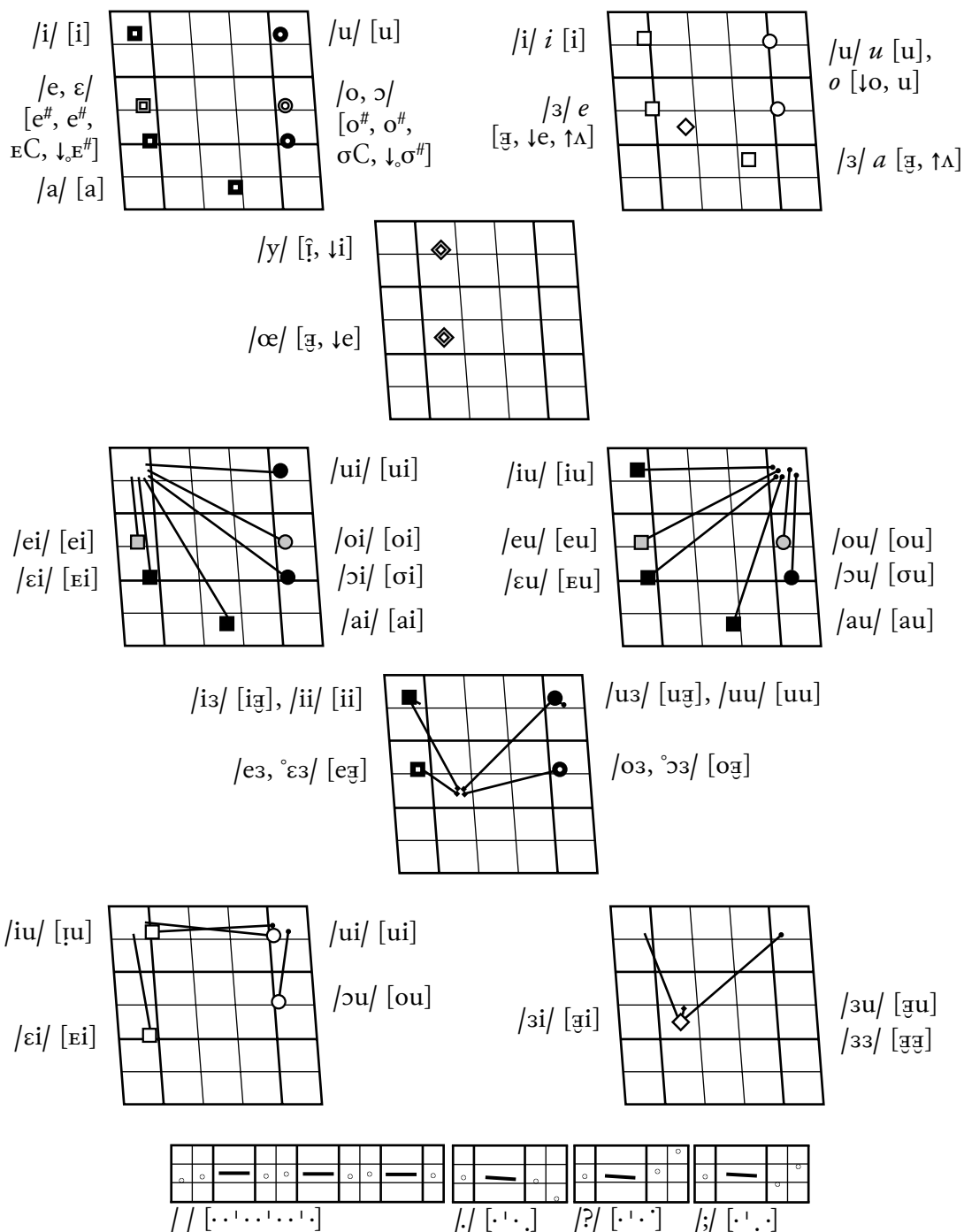
fig 7. Western Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.



### Northern Catalan

12. The *Northern Catalan* accent is partially found in tiny areas above eastern Catalan (bilingual with Spanish), and above them in the (bilingual with French) Pyrenees. Indeed, like in Spanish, it only has five vowel phonemes, since /e, ε/ and /o, ɔ/ are merged, with the taxophones shown in the first vocogram. In addition, in French loans it also has two *xeno-phonemes*, ie /y, œ/ generally realized as the semi-rounded vocoids shown in the third vocogram.

fig 8. Northern Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.



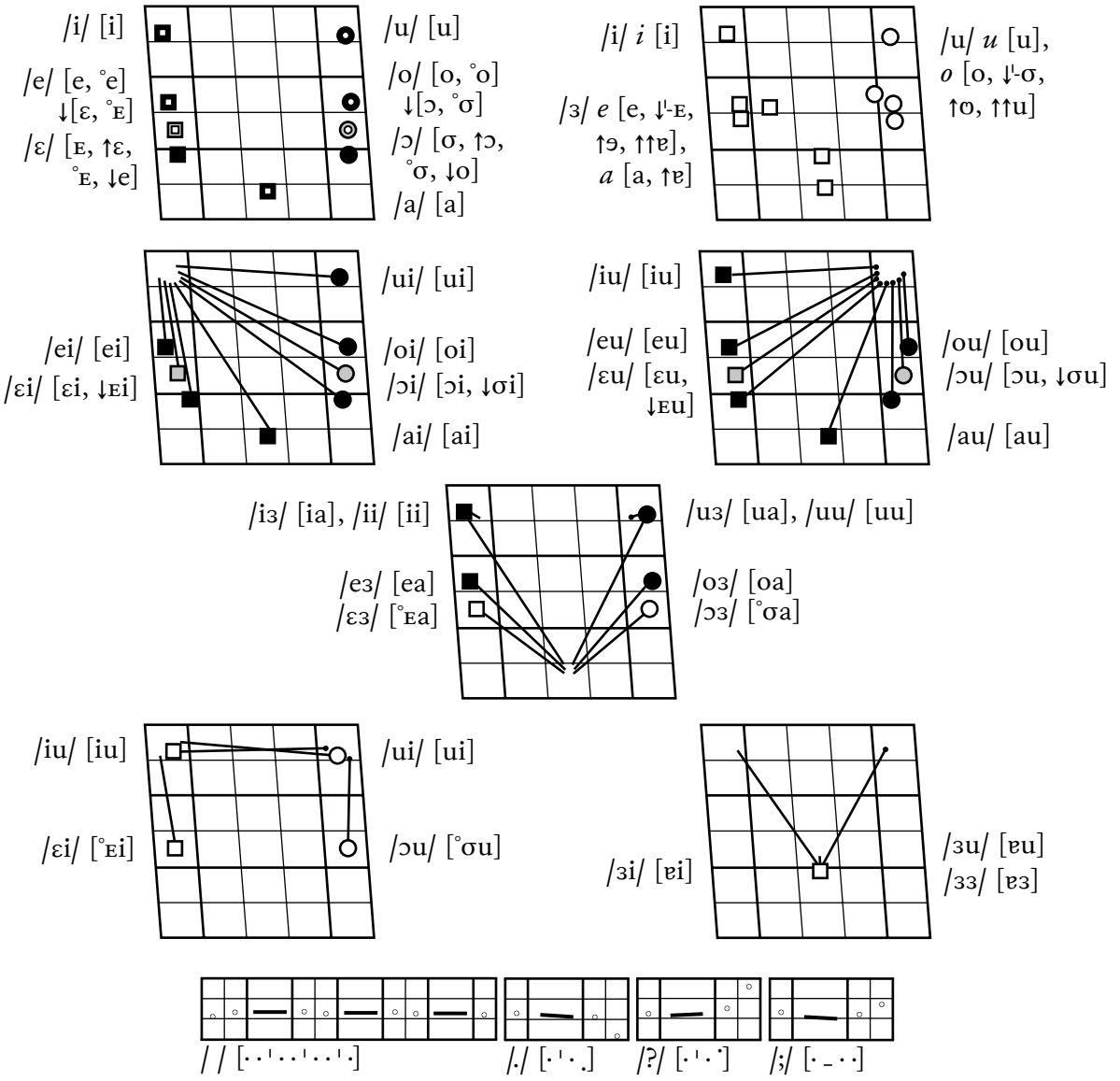
The second vocogram presents the three Catalan vowels occurring in unstressed syllables. However, the peculiar thing is that /ɜ, ɔu/, in broader accents, may depend on current spelling, so that, for *e, a, o*, also the variants shown are heard. In addition, /r, ɾ/ are generally merged and realized as uvular, ie [ʀ] (approximant) or [ʀ] (tap), not only in French loans. For /l/, we usually find [lV, lC, l#].

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 8.

**Southern Catalan**

13. The *Southern Catalan* accent is transitional to the Valencian one, with tiny differences, including a possible use of a real /v/ phoneme, in addition to the taxophone of /f/ [v]. Besides, /l/ tends to be [ɫ] in all contexts. It has seven stressed vowels, but /e, ε; o, ɔ/ are used rather unsystematically, also with intermediate phones, ie

fig 9. Southern Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.



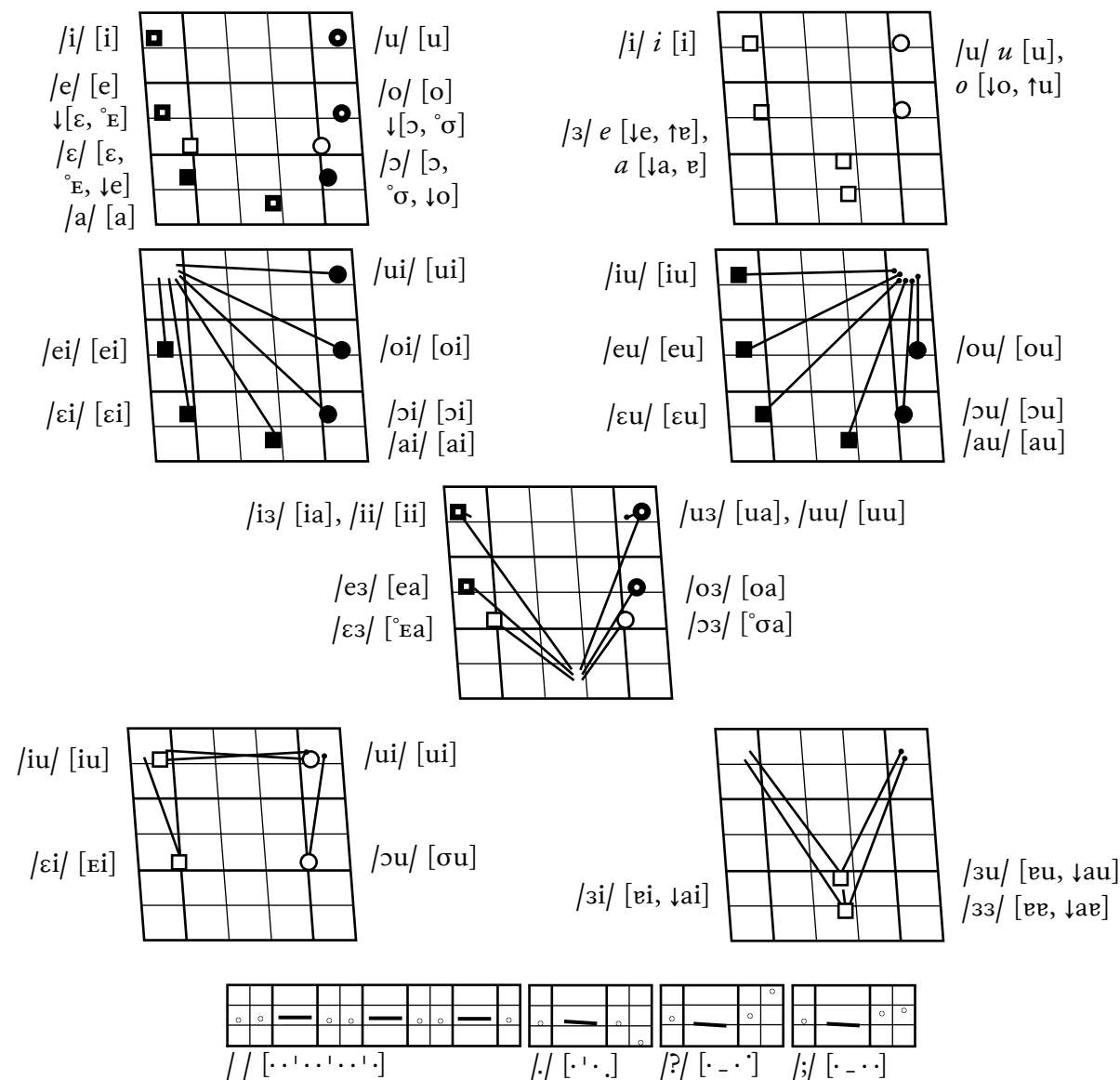
[ɛ, σ], in addition to unmerged timbres for /ɜ/, mostly based on spelling. The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 9.

### Valencian (Catalan)

14. *Valencian* Catalan, or simply *Valencian*, has seven stressed vowels, /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/, and five in unstressed syllables, /i, e, a, o, u/ (shown in fig 10, together with its intonation patterns). Notice that /ε, ɔ/ are fairly centralized, [ɛ<sub>F</sub>, °ε<sub>F</sub>; ɔ<sub>F</sub>, °σ<sub>F</sub>]. It traditionally distinguishes /b, v/ <math>b, v</math>; after pauses, /b, d, g/ are [b̰, d̰, ɡ̰]; /s, z/ become [s̰, z̰] after /i/. Compared to neutral Catalan, it may have no /ʒ/, usually substituted by /dʒ/: *gent* [ˈdʒent], *joc* [ˈdʒok].

The sequences /CjV, CwV/ can be almost systematically [CiV, CuV], as on the Balearic Isles; /ʎ/ is only found for Latin *l*- and *-ll*-, not for ‘palatalized’ *Cl*, *liV* clus-

fig 10. Valencian (Catalan) accent: vowels & intonation.



ters. Besides, we find /j/ [j], but [g<sub>j</sub>] after nasals or pauses; /l/ [l] (but also [l]).

In Valencia and its outskirts, though also sparsely in the Valencian territory, both under the influence of Spanish and normal evolution, we generally find no voiced stopstricative phonemes, nor voiced grooved constrictives. We do find, however, the assimilated phonetic realizations [z, ʒ; dz, dʒ] before voiced consonants.

In *broader* accents, for /sC/, there is often [hC], or assimilation to the following consonant, even with gemination, [CC], as in eastern Andalusian. /ʎ/ coalesces with /j/ [j, g<sub>j</sub>]. Likewise, /w/ is often 'gw/' [w, ɣ]; besides, /v/ → /b/. All these broad features are highly stigmatized but extremely widespread.

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 10.

### Balearic (Catalan)

15. *Balearic* Catalan, or simply Balearic, in addition to /i, e, ε, a, ɔ, o, u/ (shown in fig 11, together with its intonation patterns), may also have stressed /'ɜ/ [ʎ] and /ɜ/ [ɜ, ɜ<sup>#</sup>] as a marked feature of local dialects; for /ε, a, ɔ/ it has [e, a, ɔ] and [æ, α, ɒ] + [ɫ, l, u]. We also find /o/ (and more rarely, /e/ too, which often alternates with /ɜ/).

/ʎ/ is mainly found in words deriving from Latin *l-* or *-ll-*, whereas those with 'palatalized' *Cl, liV* clusters have /j/; /l/ can always be [ɫ, l], in any context. Besides, /v/ tends to be different from /b/. The palatal taxophones of /k, g/ [c; ɟ, ɟ] before /i, e, ε, a, ɜ/ and word-final /k/ [c] are noteworthy. Often /b, g/ may not present the usual taxophones [β, ɣ] (while [δ] for /d/ is generally present).

There is a less typical accent, especially in Majorca, resulting both from Spanish influence and normal evolution, which exhibits the vowels given in the broader vocogram; for /l/ we may find [lʎ], whereas it never has /ʎ/ (which becomes /j/).

Increasingly more often, we also find: /v/ → /b/, /ʎ/ → /tʎ/, and /j/ → [V<sub>j</sub>] and [l<sup>#</sup>g<sub>j</sub>, ɟg<sub>j</sub>] (word-initial, after a pause, or after /n/). In Minorca, we can find /r<sup>#</sup>/ [r<sup>#</sup>].

Not all accents have words with /'ɜ/ [ʎ] and /ɜ/ [ɜ, ɜ<sup>#</sup>], as in Felanitx, where, however, broader versions of some other vowels occur, with peculiar timbres, as: /ε, e/ → [ɛ], and /a/ → [A], /ɔ/ → [ɔ].

The vowels and main intonation patterns of this accent are shown in fig 11.

fig 11. Balearic Catalan accent: vowels & intonation.

