

The Sounds of language

According to linguists, the sounds of language can be broken into two main categories:

Phonetics: The study of each individual speech sound, for example R, W or A.

Phonology: The study of how speech sounds pattern together to create words and phrases.

Terminology Related to Phonetics

Articulatory Phonetics: The study of how speech sounds are produced by the human voice.

Acoustic Phonetics: The study of airflow mechanics, such as sound waves and breathing.

Phoneme: A distinct sound in language. A sound that affects the meaning of a word.

Allophone: Variations of a phoneme, that typically occur in a specific position within a word

Terminology Related to Articulatory Phonetics

Aspiration: A medical term for breathing. The action or process of drawing or releasing breath.

Articulators: The parts of the mouth used to pronounce language.

Terminology Related to the Articulators

Mobile Articulators: Articulators that move. These are the tongue and the lips.

Immobile Articulators: Articulators that do not move. These are the teeth, alveolar ridge, palate, velum, uvula, and pharynx

Terminology Related to The Mobile Articulators

Tip of the tongue: The very front of the tongue.

Blade of the tongue: The long middle part of the tongue. This can be divided into Front and Back.

Root of the tongue: The very back of the tongue, where it attaches to the mouth.

Terminology relating to immobile articulators

Alveolar Ridge: The bony ridge behind the top teeth.

Palate: The roof, or top of the mouth, behind the alveolar ridge.

Velum: The soft palate. If you run your tongue along the top of your mouth, you can feel where it gets soft.

Uvula: This is the little punching bag at the back of your mouth. You can see it if you open your mouth very wide.

Pharynx: The cavity behind the nose and mouth. The very top of the throat.

Glottis: The part of the larynx consisting of the space between the vocal folds (commonly called vocal cords). It affects voice modulation through expansion or contraction.

Terminology Relating to the Glottis

Glottal Stop: A consonant formed by the audible release of air after the complete closure of the glottis.

Released Sound: The act or manner of ending a sound. Allowing the air to release to conclude the sound.

Unreleased Sound: A stop with no audible release; a stop consonant with no release burst. The act of forming the sound and then stopping before the air has been released.

Terminology Relating to Consonants

Consonants: A basic speech sound in which the breath is at least partly obstructed.

Consonant Cluster: Two or more consonants pronounced together, one right after the other, within the same syllable.

Dual Articulation: Two consonants produced simultaneously. In English this is the X sound.

Syllabic Consonants: A consonant that takes the place of a vowel and forms a syllable on its own. In North American English, this can be R, L, M, and N.

Place of Articulation: Where in the mouth and throat the sound is produced. Where the tongue is placed and how the lips are shaped.

Manner of Articulation: How in the mouth and throat the sound is produced. How the airflow is manipulated by the articulators.

Voicing: Whether or not the vocal folds (commonly called vocal cords) are vibrating. If they are vibrating the sound is 'Voiced'. If they are *not* vibrating the sound is 'Voiceless'.

Stop: A sound produced by completely stopping the airflow, such as in B or T.

Fricative: A sound produced by constricting a part of the articulators, such as S or V. The air can still flow but the constriction causes "frication".

Affricate: A combination of a Stop and a Fricative, such as church or judge.

Terminology Relating to Vowels

Vowels: A speech sound created by an open vocal tract. The vocal folds always vibrate when articulating a vowel, making all vowels Voiced sounds. The English letters for vowels are A, E, I, O, U, only 5 letters, but there are 20 to 24 vowel sounds in English, depending on which linguist you talk to and what dialects you study.

Diphthong: When two vowels are pronounced, one right after the other. Just like the other vowels, in English the sounds of a diphthong are rarely reflected in the spelling.

Monophthong: When a single vowel is pronounced.

Terminology Related to Acoustic Phonetics

Bernoulli Effect: Part of a principle in hydrodynamics that states, the velocity of a fluid substance is directly proportional to the pressure within a chamber. For example, consider the function of the lungs. On an inhale the rib cage is expanded. This makes the pressure within the lungs less than the pressure outside of the lungs. So air rushes into the lungs because the velocity of the air outside the lungs is increased due to a decrease in pressure inside the lungs. The same goes for the exhale. The muscles in the ribcage are contracted, which compresses the ribs inward. This increases the pressure within the lungs, making it greater than the pressure outside of the lungs, and thus the air rushes back out again to the lower pressure area. (It is not necessary to fully understand this concept to learn pronunciation – I just find it really interesting!)

Terminology Related to Phonology

Stress: Gives particular emphasis or importance to something. In the case of English, this usually refers to syllables.

Reduced Vowel: Reduction makes something smaller or less important. This is phonetics **and** phonology. Reduced vowels are articulated with less muscular effort.

Syllable: A unit of pronunciation having one vowel sound. Most commonly this will be a consonant followed by a vowel. However, it may also be consonant-vowel-consonant, or simply be a vowel on its own. In many cases in North American English, it may also be a single consonant in the form of a syllabic consonant, though most native speakers are unaware of this fact. Syllables come in many shapes and sizes and may form the whole or only a part of a word.

Foot: A two syllable grouping.

Trochi: A foot with the stress on the first syllable.

Iamb: A foot with the stress on the second syllable.

Dactyl: A three syllable grouping with the stress placed on the first syllable

Intonation/Intonational Contour: The rise and fall of the voice over the course of a phrase or full sentence.

Tone/Tonal Contour: The rise and fall of the voice over the course of a single word.