



IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

English - 1 (Basic English)
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Lecture - 02
Speech Sounds (Vowels) in English

In this class, we will pay attention to sounds in the English language. We know that the way we write English is different from the way we speak. This is in the sense that we write English with the alphabet, which has 26 letters. Those letters, those writing symbols do not completely capture the sounds of the language. So, when we speak, there is more number of sounds in spoken English than the characters in written symbols.

That is to say again; the writing symbols are different from speech sounds. There are 26 characters for writing symbols. We have, we know those symbols as the English alphabet, and they are used to write. When we write a word, we use those letters, those characters to represent sounds. However, there is more number of sounds than letters. There are 26 letters, but 44 sounds.

Out of the 44 of them are vowel sounds, and 24 of them are consonant sounds. So we will take a look at these sounds in a little bit more details to pay attention to their new answers. As we know, paying attention to these details and nuances of the sound system in return helps us understand them in a better way. And then when we use our understanding of these things in a better way, we see the impact of that in our spoken English, and thus, it makes us a confident speaker.

And a confident speaker naturally sounds impressive. So please keep this thing in mind as underlined that understanding these nuances of English sound system. Also, with contrast from the way we speak, the way we use certain sounds from our languages in English is only going to help us understand the way we speak better and sound better to others when we speak.

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Articulation of Vowel Sounds

✓ a	/əp/	/kəp/			
✓ aa	up,	cup			
✓ i	father,	sound,	round	/raʊnd/	
✓ ii	in,	ink,	sink,	drink	
✓ u	clean,	seat,	beat,	feet	
✓ uu	book,	cook,	look,		
	zoo,	boot,	room		

Handwritten notes: *ā*, *ā A*, *ē E*, *ī I*, *ō O*, *ū U*, *sīt*, *seāt*



So we will start with vowel sounds with just some examples of vowel sounds and their articulations. So as we know, in writing symbol, we have five letters to represent vowel sounds. They are a, e, i, o, and u. These are lowercase letters. These are A, E, I, O, and U as uppercase letters. But when we speak vowel sounds, we do make a distinction in the following terms.

So please look at these vowel sounds and their distinction and their uses in words. So we say, uh. Then we say a; we also say aa in English. We also use i; then we use long i, ii. Then we use u and then we use long uu. So we say uh, aa, i, ii, u, uu. We are just taking these six examples to show you the contrast that these three pairs can be contrasted in terms of long and short distinction.

In these three pairs, the first one is short; the second one is long. This short and long distinction is in terms of the duration of time that we take in producing these sounds. So for one, first one, we take a shorter duration. For the second one, we take a longer duration. They become apparently visible in words when we use them. And we are going to look at these distinctions.

One more additional point about vowel sounds to keep in mind that vowel sounds are fundamental in making words. We will discuss this in little more details when we are talking about words. But at this point, we are going to be looking at examples of words from English. So simultaneously, it will be important to keep in mind that

vowel sounds are more fundamental to a word than consonant sounds.

What we mean is, a word is made up by mixing both. You know there are 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds. So if we ignore the small distinction in terms of total numbers, they are almost equal. That is equal in number, equal consonants, equal vowel. Please mind it; we know there are 20 vowels and 24 consonants. They are almost equal.

But vowel sounds are more fundamental, in the sense that we can make a word only with vowel sounds. In other words, to make a word, we must have one vowel sound in that word. Without at least one vowel sound, we do not have a word. This is what it means when we say; vowels are more fundamental for making a word. That is, vowel sounds are more fundamental for making a word.

Also in the same line, please remember, this is true for all languages. This is true for the languages that we speak, such as Hindi, Bangla, Marathi, Gujarati, Punjabi, or Tamil, Telugu, Kannada or Malayalam. Or any language that we speak. English is no exception to that.

So in the process of understanding sound systems in English, I want you to keep this in mind that in the words of English language, there must be at least one vowel. No matter how a small a word is, there must be at least one vowel. If there are bigger words, then there could be more number of vowels. It is also possible that there could be all vowels only, but there must be atleast one.

I think this should be clear to you for making a word and we are going to see. Pay attention to each one of these words. They have a vowel sound in that. So when we say a word like up, the word like up as up and down. The first sound of this word is a. The first sound in the word up is a as opposed to the first sound in the word, father. What is the first sound in the word father? F. Right after that, the sound that follows is aa.

That is a long vowel. So when you say up, pay attention to a, as a vowel sound and when we say father, pay attention to the vowel first vowel aa. You will see the distinction in terms of the duration of the time. So one is the short vowel. The other is a long vowel.

We are giving more examples for us to notice that. So when we look at the second set, when we look at cup. In this word, the vowel is the second sound k, a, p. There are three sounds in this word, k, a, p. Second sound happens to be a vowel, which is a shorter vowel. Then, the second sound in a word like sound. Sound. S, aa, o, n, d. The second sound in this word is aa, and that is longer than a. So one more time, two points, we do see the distinction between short and long in terms of a and aa in these two sets.

Cup shorter vowel, sound longer vowel. Please pay attention to another thing that we were discussing, which is in a word like up, the sound a is written with the symbol u. Again in the word cup, sound uh is written with symbol u. In the word father sound aa that is a long vowel is represented with a that is symbol a.

And in a word like sound, the long vowel aa-has completely different writing symbol that is o. So this is the way we write this spelling of a word, and we are talking when we say k, a, and p. For a word like cup, we have three sounds /kʌp/ but they are written as c u p. That was the distinction I was trying to make in the beginning that English words are written using writing symbols, alphabet letters from the alphabet.

But when we speak, we use different sounds for that. And today we are talking about those sounds, and we are trying to develop our understanding about those sounds. So that when we speak, we speak properly, we speak appropriately which, in turn, will make us sound impressive and confident.

A word like sound, there is another word round. Again, in this one, you see a second sound, aa being represented with some other symbol. So that is just for you to just for me to point it out to you, and I think we understand that part. Here, I want you to do a small exercise for yourself. The way I have written cup here representing sounds of this word /kʌp/. Here we are writing /ʌp/.

I want you to do this small practice exercise on your own. This will take five minutes, but give you better acquaintance with the vowel sounds that we speak. There are more vowel sounds; you will need to do little more practice for this. But this will be the initiative practice which will help you see the point that we are trying to drive home.

Please write all the sounds of these words that you have on the screen the way I have represented here and then put them under two slant lines. They represent, the slant lines and the letters inside the slant line represent the sounds of a word. So you will be able to see what is what are the sounds involved in each one of these words. So please use it for father, sound and round.

You will see the distinction between the short and long that we are talking about. So to represent this one, you can say when you are writing round, you can say /raʊnd/. So length you can represent by doubling of these letters. Sometimes they are also represented as putting a small line on top of that. But for using it on a piece of paper or typing it on a computer, this is much easier.

So use either one of the two but try to acquaint yourself, try to familiarize yourself with each one of, each sound in these words. That will give you a better familiarity. Moving ahead, we will look at the distinction between short i and long ii. So what we are talking about is short i, in words like in, ink, sink, drink. These are just some random examples of words in which we find short i, for instance.

However, in a word in words like clean, seat, beat, feet, we see the sound i is longer than the ones in the previous set of words. So again, when you write these right sounds of each one of these words, you will see the distinction. Also, do this practice after you have done finding out sounds for each one of these words. Read these words to yourself slow, and when you read this word, these words like up, cup, father, sound, round.

Read the next set in, ink, sink, drink, clean, seat, beat, feet. You will see the distinction. Slightly later you can also see similar sounding words like you see, I have given you an example of this word seat. You can contrast it with another example of a

word like sit. So what I am basically asking is, you can do this, sit. And then you can have another word seat. Try saying these two words; you will see there are only three sounds in both words sit, seat.

/sɪt/, /si:t/. The only distinction is the vowel in the first one is shorter i and vowel in the second one is longer ii. And that makes the distinction in terms of the meaning of these two words. So such a distinction is called phonemic distinction. That is, if one small sound and one small distinction between two sounds, make the distinction between the meaning of the two words that is a big thing.

And that is the distinction we want to capture, not only in similar-sounding words but in most of the words, in many words. So we should be able to say sit when we want to say that. And we should be able to say seat when we want to say that. And this distinction comes, the understanding about this distinction comes when we know that there are vowels in the English language, which are some are shorter vowels, some are longer vowels.

Also when you see, you will see like, a, aa, i. You will see when we say a the tongue in our oral cavity is little retracted. When we say i, ii, stress on the tongue is towards the middle side. And when we say u, uu, we see rounding on our lips. This becomes also important in understanding these sounds. So you can pay attention to these things. And that is what is important for these three sets as well.

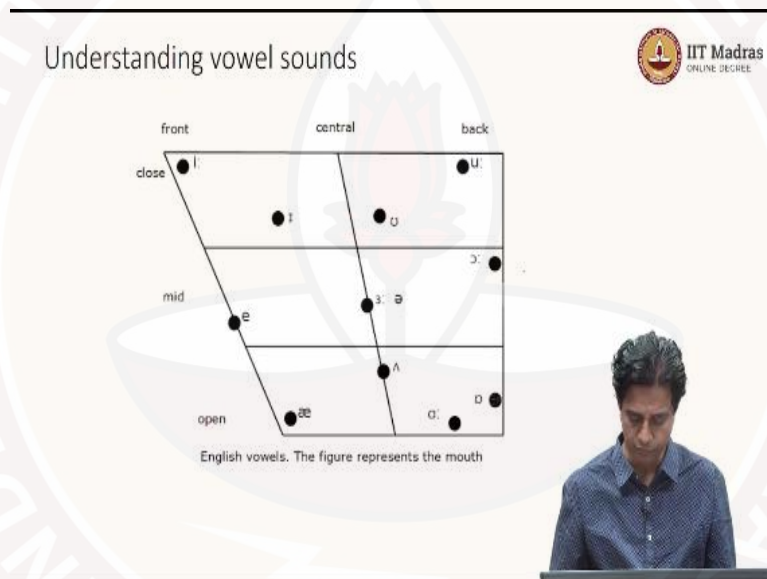
Now, if you pay attention in a similar way to these two, two vowels, u and uu, you see in words like book, cook, look. Each one of them have three sounds like book, /bʊk/. Cook, /kʊk. Look /lʊk/. In each one of these words, the second sound is a vowel, but that is a shorter vowel. And when you say words like zoo, boot, room, we have longer vowels.

So once again, pay attention to the distinction between how we write these words and how we, how they sound. When you try to find out the sounds of these words, you will see the distinction in terms of long and short distinction in these three sets of vowels, and it will give you a better understanding about vowels in English, some vowels in English. There are more vowels, as you know, 20 of them.

So how do we know about it? So once again, when we were talking about the distinction, particularly, okay another point. These vowel distinctions that you see, these vowel distinctions are in the languages that we speak as well. These this type of distinction between a and aa, i and ii, u and uu this distinction is available In Hindi. This distinction is available in Punjabi, Bangla, Kanada, Tamil, Telugu any language that we speak these distinctions are available.

So you should be able to find them, and when we speak English, we do speak these sounds as well, and we should be very confident about that about these sounds coming in English from us. These sounds are available in English too.

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So this chart tells you about more vowels of English sound, and this will also give you an understanding of how ii is a front vowel. How i shorter i is slightly central, that is according to the tongue position. And u is a back vowel. But in terms of rounding, lip is rounded. So it is called closed vowel. So then, according to the tongue position, the distinction is front, central and back.

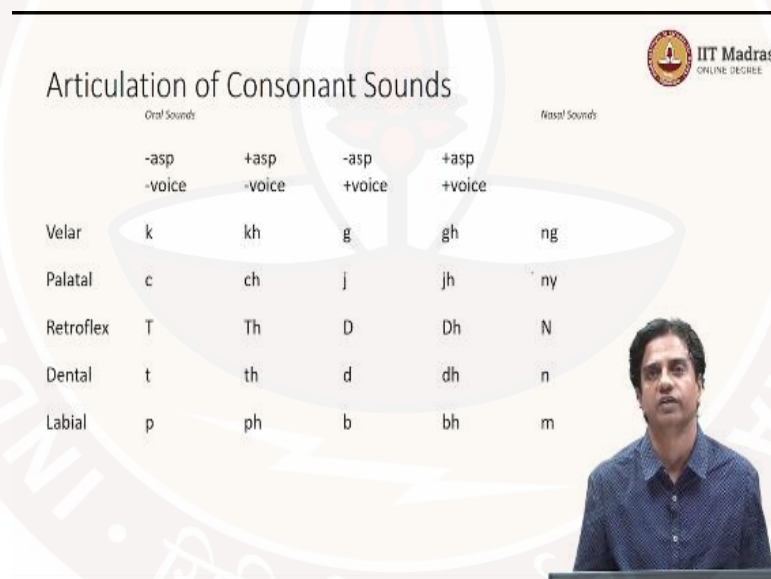
And you can find most of the vowel-like aa. When we say aa, it is a back vowel towards the back. a and aa both towards the backside in the oral cavity, but they are open vowel. They are æ, a, /ɔ:/; they are all mid vowel. So it is not open, not totally close, but they are mid vowels. But some are towards the back; some are towards the

front. So this chart is basically the tongue position and opening and closing of the mouth.

And you can get some idea about the place of articulation of these vowel sounds of English in our oral cavity. We use all of them in our languages as well. Of course, there are some vowels, which may not be available in our languages that way.

But the point here is when we understand the vowels that are similar in our languages also, and they are places of articulation, how they sound in different words, these things will play a big role in our learning of English, our improving English as well. It is important for both those who are learning afresh. It is very important for those also who have been speaking this and paying attention to these smaller details will make you a much more confident speaker.

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	Oral Sounds		Nasal Sounds	
	-asp -voice	+asp -voice	-asp +voice	+asp +voice
Velar	k	kh	g	gh
Palatal	c	ch	j	jh
Retroflex	T	Th	D	Dh
Dental	t	th	d	dh
Labial	p	ph	b	bh

When we use these vowels in different words, and when we pay attention to them, it becomes very important for us. Please do this exercise of writing, finding out vowel sounds in the words that I have mentioned and try to see the distinction. Then try to find, get more words that you speak and for your curiosity, see the vowel sounds in that. In this exercise, if you identify vowel sounds, in many words, you will get to know that there is no word which is possible without a vowel sound. And that is important information about vowel sounds. So thank you for your attention today. See you soon.