

Phonetics

Phonetics : The word 'phonetics' has been derived from the word 'phone' which means a single speech sound used for human speech. So phonetics can be defined as the systematic study of speech sounds, their production and the signs used to represent them in an act of transcriptions.

Phoneme : A phoneme may be defined as the smallest functional unit of the system of sounds of a language. Phonemes by themselves separately convey no meaning. For example, /k/ by itself meaning nothing. English has 44 phonemes.

R.P : R.P stands for 'Received Pronunciation'.

IPA : IPA stands for International Phonetic Association. It also means International Phonetic Alphabets used internationally for phonetic transcriptions.

Voiced sounds : All sounds produced with the vibration of vocal cords are called voiced sounds. So, all the pure vowels (12) and 15 consonants sounds such as /b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /ð/, /z/, /dʒ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /r/, /w/, /j/ possess this quality and hence are called voiced sounds.

Voiceless sounds : Sounds produced without the vibration of vocal cords are called voiceless sounds. They are applicable to consonants sounds only and they are 9 in numbers such as /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /θ/, /s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /h/.

Vowels : Vowels may be defined as voiced sounds in the production of which there occurs no obstruction either partial or complete of the air passage. In English we have 12 pure vowels.

Diphthongs : The word 'diphthong' takes its origin from Greek and means 'double sounds'. A diphthong is the combination of two vowel sounds. It is also called a gliding sound. It starts with one vowel and ends in another and thus changes its quality in the course of its production. In English we have 8 diphthongs.

Consonants : A consonant may be defined as a sound both voiced or singable and voiceless or unsingable caused by a partial or complete obstruction of the breath stream or air passage. English has a total of 24 consonants of which 15 are voiced and 9 voiceless.

Plosives : A plosive sound is one for the production of which the air passage is completely closed and the soft palate touches the back of the throat. Then the air is blocked by the lip and suddenly the air escapes with a small explosion. For example - /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/

Fricatives: A fricative sound is one for the production of which some sort of friction takes place while the air passage is restricted and it meets obstruction. They are 9 in numbers. For example:

/f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/

Affricates: An affricates sound is one wherein a combination of explosion and friction takes place. They are 2 in numbers like /tʃ/, /dʒ/

Nasal

Nasal: A nasal sound is one for the production of which the soft palate is lowered so that air stream can escape through the nose. They are 1 - /m/, /n/, /ŋ/

Lateral: A consonant (/l/) in which the tongue tip blocks the centre of the mouth and air goes over the sides of the tongue.

Frictionless continuant : When the active articulator tip of the tongue is brought just behind the passive articulator, for example - alveolar ridge they are remains plenty of space between the two articulators, the air can pass between them without friction. The consonant sounds which are produced in this way are called frictionless continuant. for example - /r/ :

Semi-vowels : The semi-vowel is the semi-consonant sound. The speech sounds have the articulation of a vowel but it is shorter in duration and treated as consonant's sound. They are - /j/, /w/ .

The places where the consonants will be silent.

/p/ — 'p' is silent in some words. Like- Pneumonia, psalm, psychology, cupboard, receipt

/b/ — 'b' is silent before 't'. Like- debt, doubt, subtle. It is also at the end of a word after 'm'. For example- comb, dumb, tomb, lamb, thumb.

/t/ — It is silent between 's' and 't'. Like- castle, wrestle, apostle. It is also silent between 's' and 'm' as in Christmas, between 's' and 'n' as in fasten, listen, hasten. In a few proper names 'th' takes /t/. Like- Thames, Thomas.

/d/ — It is silent between 'n' and another consonant. For example- handsome, handkerchief.

/g/ — 'g' is silent at the end of the words like- sign, reign, foreign. It is also silent at the beginning of some words. Like- gnat /næt/, gnash /næʃ/. It is also silent in some words ending in 'gm'. For examples phlegm /flem/, diaphragm /daɪəfræm/.

/θ/, /ð/ — In written English 'th' takes both /θ/ and /ð/. In the middle of a word between vowels 'th' takes /ð/. For example - rather, father. But between a consonant and a vowel it takes /θ/. For examples - wealthy, healthy, anthem. It is also silent in some words like asthma /æsmə/

/s/ — When 'c' and 'sc' stand before 'e' and 'i' and 'y' takes the sound /s/. Like - scent /sent/, science, cent. The spelling 's' or 'ss' may take either /s/ or /z/ sound. For example - boys /bɔɪz/, plays /pleɪz/, ass /æz/, as /æz/

/ʃ/ — Words beginning or ending with 'sh' usually indicate /ʃ/. For example - shape. After l, n and r - 'sion' stands for /ʃn/ as in compulsion, tension. But 'sion' if preceded by a vowel takes /zən/ as in decision, confusion, television.

/h/ — It is silent after prefix 'ex' like exhaust, exhibit, exhort.

/v/ - An 'n' in writing is silent after 'm' at the end of a word as in hymn, autumn, condemn.
/n/ - English letters 'ng' normally take /n/ sound. Like - anger, thing. But sometimes 'nk' also take /ŋ/ sound. Like - think /θɪŋk/ or sink /sɪŋk/.

- A written 't' is silent before some consonants like - f, k, d and m as in calf, half, wall.
- A 'w' in writing is silent before 'r' as in write, wrong, wrist.