3 FIB - Academic and Professional Speaking Skills

Module 1 - Guidelines for effective pronunciation

INTRODUCTION. Reflecting on the importance of pronunciation

Watch Emilio Botín's speech and reflect on the following as you discuss with your partner:

1. What was your first reaction as Mr. Botín started to speak? Did you find it funny? Why?
2. Do you think his speech is effective? Why?
3. Do you think your English sounds like Mr. Botín's? What is different in your accent?
4. What are your objectives concerning English pronunciation? Do you intend to sound like a native speaker?
5. Make a list of features of English pronunciation that, in your opinion, Mr. Botín should improve. What sounds "foreign" (vowels, consonants, etc)?

1.1. Phonetics and pronunciation

As you probably know, phonetic symbols are a great help when it comes to learning to pronounce English words correctly. Any time you open a dictionary, you can find the correct **pronunciation** of words you don't know by looking at their phonetic transcription. English phonetic symbols are useful to practice the pronunciation of words.

Many words in English can have the same pronunciation but can be written differently with different meanings. For example, `"to, two, and too"` all have the phonetic transcription `/tuː/` . Sometimes, words can be written similarly but have different pronunciations as in the "ough" combinations in thought `/ɔː/` , though `/əu/` , bough `/ɑu/` and through `/uː/` .

Another factor in pronunciation is how the word is stressed, which can also be checked in a dictionary with the help of the phonetic transcription. See, for instance, the stress in these words:

- **con**cept (noun)
- con**cep**tion (noun)
- e**lec**tron (noun)
- elec**tro**nic (adj.)

But it may even become a bit more difficult for Spanish / Catalan speakers to pronounce sentence stress appropriately since English rhythm is different from Spanish and Catalan. For example, try to pronounce these sentences aloud:

- *I like to make an appointment*

- *Neither of us can swim*

So in this module you will find an introduction to basic aspects of pronunciation and phonetics that can help you improve some features of your pronunciation in English and avoid some of the common weaknesses of Spanish / Catalan speakers. We will focus on phonetics for two main purposes:

- To help you become aware of the sounds of English and how pronunciation may affect comprehension of a message in English.
- To use phonetic transcription to check the correct pronunciation of words in the dictionary.

We will mainly look at the segmental level, but we'll also consider some main aspects of suprasegmental features of English pronunciation. These are the main aspects:

- The sounds of English: vowels, consonants, diphthongs
- IPA (International Phonetics Association) transcription. How we "write" the pronunciation of a word.
- Sounds in isolation
- Sounds in connected speech
- Word stress and sentence stress
- Intonation

Key to phonetic symbols

- Vowels and diphthongs

1. iː *as in* **see** /siː/
2. ɪ *as in* **sit** /sɪt/
3. e *as in* **ten** /ten/
4. æ *as in* **hat** /hæt/
5. ɑː *as in* **arm** /ɑːm/
6. ɒ *as in* **got** /gɒt/
7. ɔː *as in* **saw** /sɔː/
8. ʊ *as in* **put** /pʊt/
9. uː *as in* **too** /tuː/
10. ʌ *as in* **cup** /kʌp/

11. ɜː *as in* **fur** /fɜː(r)/
12. ə *as in* **ago** /əˈgəʊ/
13. eɪ *as in* **page** /peɪdʒ/
14. əʊ *as in* **home** /həʊm/
15. aɪ *as in* **five** /faɪv/
16. aʊ *as in* **now** /naʊ/
17. ɔɪ *as in* **join** /dʒɔɪn/
18. ɪə *as in* **near** /nɪə(r)/
19. eə *as in* **hair** /heə(r)/
20. ʊə *as in* **pure** /pjʊə(r)/

- Consonants

1. p *as in* **pen** /pen/
2. b *as in* **bad** /bæd/
3. t *as in* **tea** /tiː/
4. d *as in* **did** /dɪd/
5. k *as in* **cat** /kæt/
6. g *as in* **got** /gɒt/
7. tʃ *as in* **chin** /tʃɪn/
8. dʒ *as in* **June** /dʒuːn/
9. f *as in* **fall** /fɔːl/
10. v *as in* **voice** /vɔɪs/
11. θ *as in* **thin** /θɪn/
12. ð *as in* **then** /ðen /

13. s *as in* **so** /səʊ /
14. z *as in* **zoo** /zuː/
15. ʃ *as in* **she** /ʃiː/
16. ʒ *as in* **vision** /ˈvɪʒn /
17. h *as in* **how** /haʊ/
18. m *as in* **man** /mæn/
19. n *as in* **no** /nəʊ/
20. ŋ *as in* **sing** /sɪŋ/
21. l *as in* **leg** /leg/
22. r *as in* **red** /red/
23. j *as in* **yes** /jes/
24. w *as in* **wet** /wet/

- The phonemes of English and Spanish

English vowels and diphthongs
British English (BE)
iː ɪ e æ ɒ ɑː ɔː ʊ uː ʌ ɜː ə   eɪ əʊ aɪ aʊ ɔɪ ɪə eə ʊə aʊə aɪə
American English (AmE)
i ɪ e (eɪ) ɛ æ ɑ ɔ o (oʊ) ʊ u ʌ ɝ ə ɚ   aɪ aʊ ɔɪ ɑr ɔr ir ɛr ʊr aʊr aɪr
Spanish vowel and diphthongs
i e a o u   ei ai oi ui iu eu au ia ua ie ue io uo

- See how transcriptions are found in the dictionary:

com·pu·ta·tion /ˌkɒmpjuːˈteɪʃn/ n (a) [C, U] (*fml*) (act of) · computing; calculation: *A quick computation revealed that we would not make a profit.* ○ *Addition and division are forms of computation.* ○ *It will cost £5000 at the lowest computation.* (b) [U] use of a computer for calculation.
▷ com·pu·ta·tional *adj* [usu attrib] using computers: *computational linguistics.*
com·pute /kəmˈpjuːt/ v [Tn, Tn·pr] ~ sth (at sth) 1 calculate sth with a computer: *Scientists have computed the probable course of the rocket.* 2 (*fml*) calculate sth; work sth out: *He computed his losses at £5000.*
▷ com·put·ing *n* [U] operation of computers: [attrib] *a computing course.*

com·puter /kəmˈpjuːtə(r)/ *n* electronic device for storing and analysing information fed into it, making calculations, or controlling machinery automatically: *Is the information available on the computer?* ○ *The accounts are processed by computer.* ○ *a digital computer* ○ [attrib] *a computer programmer* ⇨illus.
▷ com·pu·ter·ize, -ise /-təraɪz/ *v* [Tn] (a) provide a computer to do the work of or for (sth): *The accounts section has been completely computerized.* (b) store (information) in a computer: *The firm has computerized its records.* com·pu·ter·iza·tion, -isation /kəmˌpjuːtəraɪˈzeɪʃn; *US* -rɪˈz-/ *n* [U].

- See this table for a comparison between Spanish and English consonants

		Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	E	p b			t d				k g	
	S	p b		t d					k g	
Fricative	E		f v	θ ð	s z		ʃ ʒ			h
	S		f	θ	s				x	
Affricate	E						tʃ dʒ			
	S						tʃ			
Roll	E									
	S				r					
Flap	E									
	S				ɾ					
Liquid	E				l					
	S				l			ʎ		
Nasal	E	m			n				ŋ	
	S	m			n			ɲ		
Approximant	E					r				
	S									
Glide	E	w						j		
	S							j	w	

Exercise 1

Read the following transcriptions aloud. Write down the words that they correspond to.

1. /kəmˈpjuːtə/ _____
2. /dɪˈliːt/ _____
3. /ˈdɪʤɪtəl/ _____
4. /ˈjuːzə(r)/ _____
5. /enʤɪˈnɪə/ _____
6. /ˈprəʊgræm/ _____
7. /ˈprəʊsesɪŋ/ _____
8. /ˈpækɪʤ/ _____
9. /ɪnˈstrʌkʃn/ _____
10. /ˈdeɪtəbeɪs/ _____
11. /ˈspredʃiːt/ _____
12. /ˈʌpgreɪd/ _____
13. /ˈenəʤɪ/ _____
14. /ˈwaɪə/ _____

1.2 Pronunciation. Vowels and consonants

Vowel Sounds

Exercise 1

Listen to the recording and say whether the words are the same (S) or different (D).

1. .
2. .

3. .

4. .

5. .

6. .

7. .

8. .

9. .

10. .

Exercise 2

a) Pronunciation: the letter a. Can you pronounce these words?

1. bad had happen rang man (/æ/)
2. darling afternoon rather ask glass (/ɑː/)
3. came strange day say train (/eɪ/)
4. call talk saw (/ɔː/)

b) b) Put these words in group 1, 2, 3 or 4.

wait, hate, hard, glass, start, law, car, bath, late, ball, black, make, paid, arm, rain, tall, hat, part, happy, half, past, awful, may, all, stand, walk

1. .

2. .

3. .

4. .

c) Special pronunciations:

1. what wasn't want watch swan (/ɒ/)
2. many any again says said ate (/e/)
3. about America England umbrella (/ə/)

Exercise 3

Pronunciation /əʊ/ . Say these words and expressions:

- know
- go
- don't
- I know
- I won't
- I hope so
- so
- hope
- won't
- I hope
- I don't know
- I won't go

Exercise 4

These words all have the letter e in the first syllable. In some of the words, e is pronounced /e/ ; in others, it is pronounced /ɪ/ . Can you divide the words into two groups, according to the pronunciation of e? What is the reason for the difference?

- become
- employment
- relations
- depend
- end
- return
- democracy
- every
- revolution
- demonstration
- held
- secretary
- economy
- medal
- separate
- effect
- president
- seven
- election
- reform
- vegetable

Exercise 5

Vowel number 12 (also called schwa) is a very important sound because it is very often pronounced in unstressed syllables. It is similar to "vocal neutra" in Catalan.

a) Decide which ten of the following words contain the sound /ə/

- iron
- fibre
- Africa
- century
- replaced
- countries
- paper
- pulp
- Norway
- correct
- machine
- needed
- Germany
- industry

- serious
- adults
- exported
- shortage

b) In all of these words, the last syllable is pronounced /ə/. Look at the spellings. Then say the words after the recording.

- heater
- centre
- wear
- cooker
- theatre
- hair
- computer
- departure
- their
- calculator
- figure
- Africa
- transistor
- mirror
- similar
- sugar
- there
- here
- where
- hear
- cinema
- idea

Exercise 6

a) Pronouncing the letter 'u'. Listen to the pronunciation of each group of words and try to make a rule. After you have worked out all the rules, say which group each of the words in the box belongs to.

1. bus cut drug much dustman under
2. university music tune produce fuel cure communicate
3. rule ruin suitcase superstition blue glue
4. nurse turn church

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burglary introduce stupid jump universe
hut butter fruit suit amused burn customs
use true computer purpose run
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b) Notice these common exceptions.

- put
- pull
- push

- busy
- business

c) Of course, 'u' is usually pronounced /ə/   when it is not in a stressed syllable, as in these words:

- figure
- literature
- (and other words ending in -ure)
    - suppose
    - surprise
    - until
    - industry
    - fortunate

Exercise 7

Pronunciation of au and ou. Say these words after the recording

1. /ɔː/   automatic cause daughter fault authority dinosaur
2. /aʊ/   without housewife hours sound bound accountant
3. /ɔː/   pour your four course
4. /ə/   unconscious previous serious colour neighbour favour

Exceptions:

- aunt laugh draughtsman
- because cough
- should could would
- trouble double couple cousin enough
- you through group
- although
- journalist

Exercise 8

Listen and circle the words you hear. Then write the sounds that are being compared.

A		B		C		D	
low	law	white	wait	now	know	here	hair
so	saw	lied	laid	loud	load	beer	bare
boat	bought	file	fail	found	phoned	steered	stared
close	claws	like	lake	doubt	dote	ears	airs
coke	cork	rise	raise	towns	tones	really	rarely