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## P R O N U N C I A T I O N

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

This Pronunciation module consists of this Description and a set of computerised listening exercises: it teaches you all the speech-sounds of English. The variety taught is Standard Southern British English, spoken most inhabitants of the south of England.

## 2. INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

## 2.1. Consonants

The contrast between voiceless and voiced consonants that is described below is not always fully present in everyday speech: consonants described as voiced are often at least partly devoiced. (Likewise, some voiceless consonants can become voiced in some circumstances.) Some commentators therefore prefer to describe the contrast not as a voiceless/voiced one, but as a 'fortis/lenis' contrast ('fortis' means 'strongly articulated', 'lenis' means 'weakly articulated').

## 2.1.1. Plosives

**p** Voiceless bilabial plosive, aspirated. *pɑːθ path*.

**b** Voiced bilabial plosive. *bɑːθ bath*.

**t** Voiceless alveolar plosive, aspirated. *təʊn town*.

**d** Voiced alveolar plosive. *dəʊn down*.

**k** Voiceless velar plosive, aspirated. *kɑːd card*.

**g** Voiced velar plosive. *gɑːd guard*.

Plosives lose their aspiration after clusters beginning with *s*; so the *t* in *top* is aspirated, for example, but the *t* in *stop* is not.

Plosives are unreleased when followed by another consonant other than a fricative: the pressurised air is not pushed out of the mouth with force, or indeed at all. *tɒp* <sup>ː</sup>'kæt *top cat*, *ɹɒb* <sup>ː</sup>'dʒɔːdʒ *rob George*, *kwɪk* <sup>ː</sup>'lʊk *quick look*. (The symbol <sup>ː</sup> means that the plosive is not released.)

**t** **d** have nasal plosion when followed by *n*, lateral plosion when followed by *l*. 'Nasal plosion' means that the pressure in the mouth is released not through the lips but through the nose, by lowering the velum to allow a sharp, noisy outrush of air. 'Lateral plosion' means that the pressure in the mouth is released not through the full lip-opening, but round the sides of the tongue. The *n* and the *l* that arise in this position are syllabic (described below). *'kɪt̚n* *kitten*, *'ɹɪd̚n* *ridden*, *'kɛt̚l̩* *kettle*, *'mɪd̚l̩* *middle*.

## 2.1.2. Affricates

**tʃ** Voiceless post-alveolar affricate. *tʃɜːtʃ church*.

**dʒ** Voiced post-alveolar affricate. *dʒʌdʒ judge*.

## 2.1.3. Nasals

**m** Voiced bilabial nasal. *miː me*.

**n** Voiced alveolar nasal. *niː knee*.

**ŋ** Voiced velar nasal. *lɒŋ long*.

## 2.1.4. Fricatives

**f** Voiceless labio-dental fricative. *'fɛɹɪ ferry*.

**v** Voiced labio-dental fricative. *'vɛɹɪ very*.

**θ** Voiceless interdental fricative. *θɪk thick*.

- ð Voiced interdental fricative. ðɪs *this*.
- s Voiceless alveolar fricative. hɪs *hiss*.
- z Voiced alveolar fricative. 'lɛɪzi *lazy*.
- ʃ Voiceless post-alveolar fricative. ʃʌʃ *shush*.
- ʒ Voiced post-alveolar fricative. 'mɛʒə *measure*.
- h Glottal fricative. hæʔ *hat*.

Many speakers make ʃ ʒ with rounded lips, and some speakers use the spread tip of the tongue instead of the part behind the tip.

Voiced plosives, affricates and fricatives are partly or wholly devoiced at the beginning or end of a phrase, and when they stand next to a voiceless sound.

əb̥'sɜ:ɫ̥ *absurd*, 'v̥ɛɹɪ *very*, pi:z̥ *peas*. (The symbol ̥ means that the consonant is voiceless.)

#### 2.1.5. Approximants

- ɹ Voiced post-alveolar central-approximant. 'ɹɔ:ɹɪ *Rory*.
- l Voiced alveolar lateral-approximant. lɛɪ *lay*.
- w Voiced labial-velar approximant. wu: *woo*.
- j Voiced palatal approximant. 'j əʊj əʊ *yoyo*.

Approximants are devoiced when they follow a voiceless plosive. tʃi: *tree*, pl̥ɛɪ *play*, kw̥ɪk *quick*. (The symbol ̥ means that the consonant is voiceless.)

l is 'clear' when it is followed by a vowel or is between vowels, 'dark' in other positions. With a 'clear' l, the tip of the tongue touches the alveolum, the body of tongue is not tensed and the back of the tongue is not drawn back or pressed down; with a 'dark' l, the back of the tongue is retracted and pressed down, and the tip does not necessarily touch the alveolum. lɪm *limb*, mɪl̥ *mill*. (The symbol ̥ means that the l is 'dark'.)

#### 2.1.6. Treatment of ɹ

The treatment of ɹ in this variety of English requires special mention. Worldwide, varieties of English fall into two types: 'rhotic', in which an r in the spelling is pronounced wherever it appears, and 'non-rhotic', in which an r in the spelling is consistently omitted in particular circumstances. Standard Southern British English is non-rhotic. Non-rhotic varieties are also used in Australia and New Zealand; rhotic varieties are found in Canada, Scotland, Ireland and the USA.

The behaviour of ɹ in non-rhotic varieties of English is absolutely consistent:

- when ɹ falls before a consonant or at the end of the phrase, it is omitted. pɔ:t *port*, æ: 'ti:tʃə *our teacher*.

- when it falls before a vowel within the word, or before a vowel in the following word, it is retained. ə'ɹʌʊnd *around*, fəɹɪ'fɛkt *for effect*.

- the two rules given above mean that ɹ can appear and disappear according to whether a word is at the end of the phrase or not. 'hɪə *Here!*, 'hɪə *ət* 'la:st *Here at last!*.

- when two vowels fall together - for example, at the end of one word and the start of another - then an 'intrusive r' is inserted, even though there is no r in the spelling. The vowel before the ɹ must be a: ɔ: or ə. 'ʃa:ɹ əv 'pɜ:ʃə *Shah of Persia*, 'θɔ:ɹ ɔ: 'fɹi:z *thaw or freeze*, 'pæstəɹ ən 'tʃɪps *pasta and chips*. The correctness of this intrusive r is disputed by a few commentators.



- ends with mid central unrounded vowel. **skwɛə** *square*.
- ɔə Starts with open-mid back rounded vowel;  
ends with mid central unrounded vowel. **dɔə** *door*.
- ʊə Starts with close back rounded vowel, lowered;  
ends with mid central unrounded vowel. **kjʊə** *cure*.

**dɔə** is an alternative for **dɔ:** - in words where no consonant follows the vowel-sound, many speakers use sometimes one sound and sometimes the other. The second element of **ɛə** is often omitted, leaving a long monophthong.

### 2.2.5. Triphthongs

Triphthongs such as **aɪə** and **əʊə** (*fire, hour*) occur in careful speech. They are often reduced to **a:**, **ə:**, and are not dealt with in this module.

## 3. SOUNDS IN FLUENT SPEECH

### 3.1. Mouth position

All languages have a characteristic position of the mouth, a way of holding the vocal organs that colours the overall sound. For English, the focus is in the centre of the mouth, in the space behind the alveolum and below the hard palate. There is little tension in the muscles of the cheeks and lips, and not much lip-rounding. The jaw is slack, moves freely between half-open and open positions, and is often retracted.

### 3.2. Rhythm

English makes a strong contrast between stressed and unstressed syllables. It has a 'stress-timed' rhythm, which means that the intervals of time between stresses are approximately equal, irrespective of the number of syllables spoken during each interval. Some syllables are therefore considerably drawn out, while others are very short, barely articulated. This rhythm is very different from, for example, that of Cantonese or Punjabi, where the syllables are uttered at a steady rate.

### 3.3. Stress

Getting the stress on the right syllable is important if you are to understand and be understood. In English, one syllable of each word - and always the same syllable of that word - is stressed, but which syllable it will be is not predictable by rule; you therefore have to learn the stress with each word. In this course, stress is shown by the ' , which means that the immediately following syllable is stressed.

## 4. SOUND-CHANGES IN CONNECTED SPEECH ('SANDHI')

In all languages, sounds get changed when words are joined together: in English, for example, the final *t* of *west* is pronounced when the word stands alone, but not in such phrases as *West Country*. The linguistic term for such changes is 'sandhi'. Sandhi changes can make the language unintelligible if you are not prepared for them.

The list below includes most of the changes made in Standard Southern British English. Not all speakers consistently make all the changes described here - people make fewer changes on more formal occasions, for example. In this course, these changes are made in some examples but not in others, as seems appropriate in the immediate context. This mimics what you will hear from native speakers.

## 4.1. Treatment of t, d and n

When t is at the end of the phrase or before another consonant, it may be reinforced by a simultaneous glottal stop. dɪ'pɑ:ʔt *depart*, fɔ:ʔt 'nɒks *Fort Knox*. (The symbol ʔ denotes a glottal stop.)

t d can change to p b or k g to match the place of articulation (bilabial, velar) of a following plosive. 'fak gɜ:l *fat girl*, 'jəʊb bɪldɪŋ *road building*, ə bɪp pɪ'kju:lɪə *a bit peculiar*, gʊb 'praɪs *good price*, jɛg 'kɹɒs *Red Cross*. Similarly, n changes to m or ŋ to match a following plosive or nasal. θɪm 'bʊks *thin books*, tɛŋ 'kʌps *ten cups*, græm 'mɑ:stə *Grand Master*.

t d can be omitted when they fall at the end of a syllable and have at least one preceding consonant, and are followed by a consonant (except h) at the start of the next syllable. wɛs 'wɪnd *west wind*, bɹʌʃ 'kɒtŋ *brushed cotton*, bɒks 'sɛt *boxed set*. Deletion is not possible in, for example, *wet wind, round up, felt heavy*.

## 4.2. Syllabic ŋ and l̩

Word-final unstressed ən and əl change to syllabic ŋ and l̩ under certain conditions. For syllabic ŋ to result, the final ən must be preceded by a single consonant, not a cluster; if the consonant is p b k g or m, then syllabic ŋ is rare, but after other consonants it is frequent. Syllabic l̩, by contrast, is frequent after all consonants and after clusters (and is 'dark'). 'ʌvŋ *oven*, 'græpl̩ *grapple*, 'fʌnl̩ *funnel*.

## 4.3. Dropping of h

h can be omitted; but only in function-words, only in unstressed syllables, and not at the start of a phrase. So it cannot be deleted in *your handbag, that's hers, he's coming*. It can, however, be deleted in *that's her boss, when he comes*.

## 5. GLOSSARY

**Advanced:** a vowel where the tense part of the tongue is further forward than usual; a consonant where the tongue articulates with the roof of the mouth at a point slightly further forward than that specified.

**Affricate:** a plosive followed immediately by a fricative at the same point of articulation, the two sounds coming so close together that they sound like one sound.

**Alveolar:** the tip of the tongue articulates with the alveolum. See 'Alveolum'.

**Alveolum:** the bony ridge behind the upper front teeth.

**Approximant:** the articulators, by shaping the air-stream through the mouth, create a resonance, but not a hiss.

**Aspirated:** followed by a strong puff of breath, as though blowing out a candle. See 'Unaspirated'.

**Back:** a vowel where the back part of the tongue is tense.

**Bilabial:** the upper and lower lips articulate together.

**Central:** a vowel where the centre of the tongue is tense.

**Central-approximant:** the sides of the tongue touch the molars.

**Centring:** a diphthong in which the tense part of the tongue moves towards the centre of the mouth.

**Close:** a vowel where the tense part of the tongue is near to the roof of the mouth.

**Closing:** a diphthong in which the tense part of the tongue moves towards the roof of the mouth.

**Devoiced:** changed from voiceless to voiced. See 'Voiceless'. See 'Voiced'.

**Diphthong:** a sound consisting of two vowel-sounds that glide imperceptibly one into the other. Some writers use the term to mean 'two vowel letters', which is not the same thing. See 'Monophthong'.

**Fricative:** the air-stream through the mouth is made sufficiently narrow to cause hiss, but not completely blocked.

