

The Phonetics of English Pronunciation

Session 04

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Overview

- Problematic consonants (cont'd)
- Practice run of typical test questions
- Articulograms

⟨w⟩ /w/: What a worry!

- Description: Labial-velar glide.
... it's really *an /u/ vowel used as a consonant!*
(Read pp. 69-75)
- Say: “uuuwater”, “uuuuu-ish”, “uuuuu-et”, “uuuu-eather”!
- But one big problem is the orthography!
(We can't escape from our education 😊 German ⟨w⟩ = /v/)
- Another problem is /w/ in consonant clusters (/tw/, /kw/)
... the first consonant *has to have rounded lips too!*
e.g. *twenty twins; quite queer; queen's question*
- And when you have practised and practised... the danger is:
you *over-correct*, “vich is wery vorrying!”

⟨r⟩ /r/ – [ɹ]

- Definition: *Post-alveolar approximant* (= blade of tongue pulled back and raised towards front of palate)
- A “tapped” or “flapped” tongue-tip /r/ is often heard in Scotland and Ireland, particularly between vowels: *very* but the flapped /r/ is the “normal” sort of “R” after ⟨th⟩ [θ]: *three, through, thrash, throw, thrift*
- The /r/ only occurs *before* a vowel and *between* vowels in *British English*. In *American* it also occurs *after* vowels.

British:

American:

fought = *fort* /fɔ:t/; *fought* /fɔ:t/ ≠ *fort* /fɔt/

sought = *sort* /sɔ:t/; *sought* /sɔ:t/ ≠ *sort* /sɔt/

Also: *cart* /kɑ:t/; /kɑt/

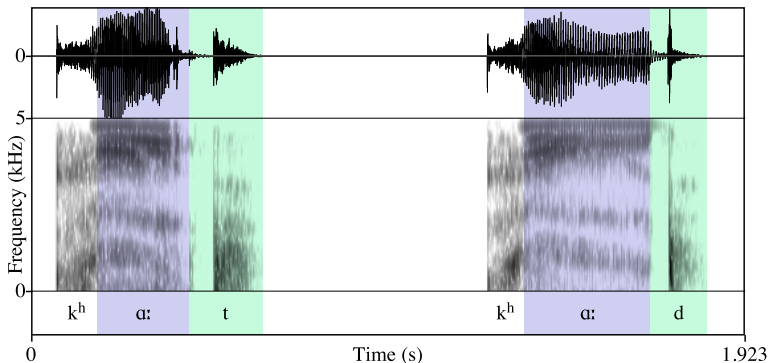
dirt /dɜ:t/; /dɜt/ or /dɜ:t/

Practising your “R”s

- If you have problems articulating the [ɹ] ... *Don't panic!*
Start with [ɑ:ɹ ɹ ɑ:]
Pronounce a long [ɑ:] and slowly *move your tongue tip up and back... then down again* to its [ɑ] position
- *Don't rush it.* Listen to the effect the tongue raising has on the quality of the sound... until you can hear you are producing two syllables.
- Then *practise* your /r/ in words:
 - a) intervocalically (*hurry, ferry, lorry, barrier, sorry*)
 - b) word initially (*right, rock, rat, rub*)
 - c) after /p/ and /b/ (*price, bright, pray, break, prove*)

Final voiced consonants

- We know that German has no FVCs – so *what must we do differently for cart and card* 🗣️, *bend and bent* 🗣️?



$/ka:t/$: shorter vowel
longer, stronger $/t/$

$/ka:d/$: longer vowel
shorter, weaker $/d/$

⟨ng⟩ /ŋ/

- Definition: Velar nasal
- Appears to be absolutely no problem. . .
English has *singer*, *long*, German has *Sänger*, *lang*
- But unfortunately, intervocalically. . .
English has *finger* /'fɪŋgə/, German has *Finger* /'fɪŋe/
- **The basic rule:** (Read VII.1.3, pp. 236-8)
If the word is *monomorphemic*, the ⟨ng⟩ is pronounced [ŋg]
(e.g., *anger*, *linger*) but *hangar* is /'hæŋə/
- But the basic rule is broken with *comparatives* and *superlatives*!
long /lɒŋ/, *longer* /'lɒŋgə/, *longest* /'lɒŋgɪst/

American flapped ⟨t⟩ and ⟨d⟩

- Non-word-final /t/ and /d/ are not really a problem!
(except for the dental [t̪] before /θ/ and /ð/)
- But American words like
writer letter tighter
rider wider louder
have a “flapped” /t/ or /d/ (phonetically [ɾ] or [ɹ])
- I suggest [ɹ̥] or [t̪̥]: e.g.
[ˈraɪt̪̥ə] [ˈlɛt̪̥ə] [ˈtaɪt̪̥ə]
[ˈraɪɹ̥ə] [ˈwaɪɹ̥ə] [ˈlaʊɹ̥ə]
- **The basic rule:** If the word has the *first syllable stressed* and the *second syllable unstressed*.
- But the rule also applies across word boundaries:
He got away [hi ˈgɑt̪̥ əˈweɪ]; *Put it down* [ˈput̪̥ ɪt ˈdaʊn].

American flapped ⟨t⟩ and ⟨d⟩ (cont'd)

- The sound is not a “stop” or “plosive” consonant phonetically! (it is a “tap” or “flap”, and it is the same for /t/ and for /d/)
- So, are the words in the pairs identical?
No! The preceding vowel is different! (longer before /d/)
- **Note 1:** It is also found in German regional accents – for those who like accents: Schl.-Holst.: *Alles in Butter auf'm Kutter*.
To represent it as a sound we can use what we like; The “official” IPA symbol for the apical tap is [ɾ] which might make you think of an “R” sound. Therefore my suggestion: [t̬]
- **Note 2:** Between /n/ and schwa (/ə/), the ⟨t⟩ is not pronounced. . .

winter enter center

hunter counter gentle

Just like Saarland German: “komm’ runner!”

Historically speaking, they have been *elided*.

Exercise 1

What are the place and manner of articulation and the “voicing” status of the initial consonant in the following words?

	Voicing	Place	Manner
<i>radio</i>	voiced	post-alveolar	approximant
<i>thought</i>	voiceless	dental	fricative
<i>sunset</i>	voiceless	alveolar	fricative
<i>though</i>	voiced	dental	fricative
<i>vase</i>	voiced	labio-dental	fricative
<i>shoes</i>	voiceless	post-alveolar	fricative
<i>tornado</i>	voiceless	alveolar	plosive
<i>sure</i>	voiceless	post-alveolar	fricative
<i>photograph</i>	voiceless	labio-dental	fricative
<i>parasite</i>	voiceless	bilabial	plosive

Exercise 2

What is the phonetic difference (i.e. what do you have to do to pronounce them correctly) between the following word pairs?

- bend* – *bent* longer /n/ before /d/ and weaker /d/ than /t/
- hard* – *heart* longer vowel before /d/ and weaker /d/ than /t/
- bug* – *buck* longer vowel before /g/ and weaker /g/ than /k/
- cold* – *colt* longer /l/ before /d/ and weaker /d/ than /t/
- lived* – *lift* longer vowel before /vd/ and weaker /vd/ than /ft/

It is *not* enough to say: “There is a /d/ in *bend* and a /t/ in *bent*”!

Exercise 3

What problem for German learners of English is there in the following expressions and how is incorrect pronunciation avoided?

down there all that good thinking fight the good fight

Answer: The /n/ in *down*, the /l/ in *all*, the /d/ in *good*, the /t/ in *fight* are all articulated as dental consonants preceding the interdental fricatives: [n̪ ð] [l̪ ð] [d̪ θ] [t̪ ð]

Why is the same strategy not possible in the following expression?

wise thought

Answer: The /z/ in *wise* must be pronounced as an *alveolar* fricative. It would become a different sound if it was pronounced as a *dental* fricative. It is therefore necessary to pronounce the /z/ as a *laminal* (tongue-blade) rather than an *apical* (tongue-tip) /z/, so that the tongue tip is free to move up onto the teeth for the /θ/.

Exercise 4

What are the phonetic difference between the following sounds?

/u:/ /w/ /v/

Answer: The first two are articulated in the same position (as an [u], with rounded lips). The /w/ immediately glides from the [u] position towards the following vowel and is thus heard as a “consonantal” onset. /v/ is a *labio-dental* fricative (upper teeth close to bottom lip) and is *not* produced with *rounded lips*.

Exercise 5

What is the biggest difference in the use of the /r/ in British and American English?

Answer: In American English the /r/ is also pronounced *post-vocally*.

Exercise 6

In which context is the /r/ usually pronounced as an apical flap in British English?

Answer: Following the dental fricative /θ/ (e.g., *throw*, *thrifty*, *through*, etc.)

Exercise 7

In which contexts does the British English /l/ differ from Standard German /l/ and what is the difference?

Answer: *Post-vocalically*, either syllable-finally or in a syllable-final consonant cluster (e.g., *te//*, *se/dom*, *fe/t*). In these positions /l/ is “dark” (i.e., is pronounced with a raised tongue dorsum to produce an accompanying [ʊ] colouring).

Does /l/ behave the same in American English as in Standard British English?

Answer: No. American English /l/ tends to be pronounced more darkly pre-vocalically than British English /l/.

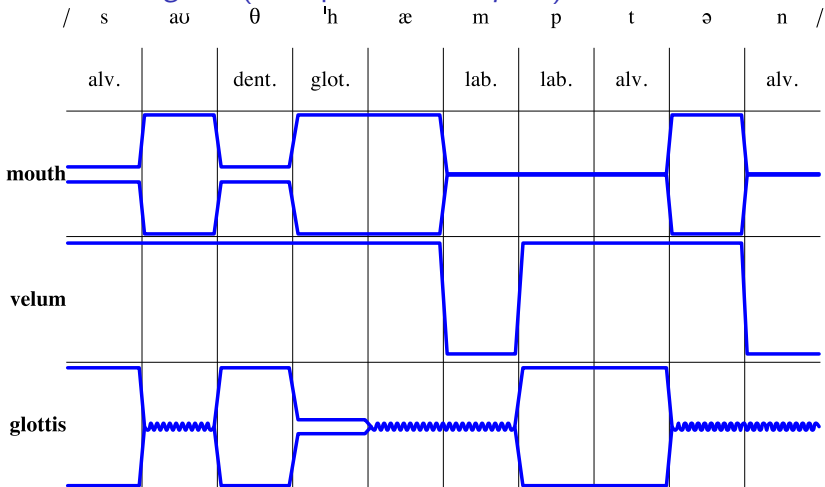
Exercise 8

Why and how does the letter sequence ⟨ng⟩ sometimes cause pronunciation problems?

Answer: Under certain morphological conditions, it is pronounced as /ŋg/ (even before schwa (/ə/), which is *not* possible in German).

Now – to help you think about sounds

The *articulogram* (example: *Southampton*)



Here's one for you to do at home

- Draw an articuloqram for the expression

absent-minded

- Make a transcription in IPA
- Follow the conventions of the articuloqram you have just seen:
 - the *mouth* (oral cavity) can be open or constricted (either full closure or a narrowing to create friction) at different places. (So don't just pay attention to your lips; your mouth can be closed or the opening narrowed to a fricative position even if your lips are open!)
 - the *velum* controls the aperture to the nasal cavity. It is lowered for nasal sounds and raised for oral sounds.
 - *glottis* (the opening between the vocal folds); when the vocal folds are adducted, they can vibrate; if they are opened, they result in voiceless sounds. (Note if they are adducted a bit and kept fairly stiff, they allow friction to arise at the glottis. This is necessary for /h/ – a glottal fricative.)

Danger points

Take a text. . .

George was the tenth person to walk past the playground and wonder what the three piles of sand were doing in front of the school. But the others walked on, while he lingered a while, worried by a half-remembered comment from one of his colleagues in the Council offices.

How many “danger points”?

- ⟨th⟩ related
- FVC related
- /l/ related
- “R” related
- ⟨w⟩ related
- ⟨ng⟩ related

Danger points (cont'd)

Try at home with the sequel:

One of the secretaries had whispered rather loudly to her friend that there were plans being hatched to close the local primary school and bus the children to the neighbouring village. The doors and windows would then be bricked up to discourage vandals, pending a decision on the future use of the building.

Summary

- We completed our tour of “problematic” consonants in English:
 - “new sound” problems
 - “distribution” problems
 - In both cases we need to look at them in terms of how they fit into the *sounds around them*.
 - Sounds are not produced in isolation; the smallest unit of pronunciation is the *syllable* and most of our utterances are syllables fitted together for *words* and *phrases*.
- We did a short practice run of typical test questions.
- We introduced the *articulogram* as a means of *schematically visualising speech production*.

Homework

- a) Analyse consonantal problems in text
- b) Draw articulogram

You do *not* have to hand anything in this week!