ENGLISH CONSONANTS

Prepared by

Lecturer. Ahmed Ismael

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The consonant is a speech sound that is produced either with a partial or complete obstruction to the airflow at a definite position in the mouth. English consonants can be classified, according to the manner of articulation, into five types: friction /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ/, stop /p, b, t, d, k, g, ʧ, ʤ/, nasal /m, n, ŋ/, gliding /j, w, r/ and lateral /l/consonants. The English consonants can be classified in terms of the following criteria:

1. Manner of articulation.
2. Place of articulation and the articulators used to produce a particular consonant.
3. State of the soft palate.
4. Activity of the vocal cords.
5. Strength.
6. Length.
7. Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasal consonants.
8. Aspiration.
9. Devoicing.

Notes:

**1. Place of articulation refers to the POSITION OR POINT where a particular sound is articulated. 2. Manner of articulation is the WAY THE FLOW OF AIR IS OBSTRUCTED OR MODIFIED to produce a particular sound. **

Friction (Fricative) Consonants

The friction consonant is a speech sound that is produced by pushing the air through a narrow opening (narrowing) formed between the organs of speech (articulators). For all friction consonants, THE SOFT PALATE IS RAISED so that all the breath escapes though the mouth. There are nine fricative consonants.

Articulation of

1. Articulation of /f/ versus /v/

For these sounds, the bottom of the lower lip is close to the edge of the upper front teeth to form the narrowing through which the air escapes with slight friction. The tongue does not directly contribute to the articulation of /f/ and /v/, but it takes the appropriate shape necessary for forming the following vowel sound. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	**/f/**	**/v/**
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Labio-dental (The narrowing is formed between the bottom of lower lip and edge of the upper front teeth).	Labio-dental (The narrowing is formed the bottom of lower lip and edge of the upper front teeth).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It lengthens the preceding vowel and/or nasals

2. /θ/ versus /ð/

They are made by making a narrowing between the tongue-tip and the edge of the upper front teeth. When the air is pushed through this narrow opening, it causes a friction noise greater than that produced for /f/ and /v/. Look at the example in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	**/θ/**	**/ð/**
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Dental (The narrowing is formed between the tongue-tip and edge of the upper front teeth).	Dental (The narrowing is formed between the tongue-tip and edge of the upper front teeth).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.

3. /s/ versus /z/

For /s/ and /z/, the tip and blade of the tongue are very close to the alveolar ridge to form the necessary narrowing. The upper and lower teeth are also very close together. The fricative energy for these sounds is greater than that for /f, v, θ, ð/. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	**/s/**	**/z/**
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Alveolar (The narrowing is formed between the tip and blade of the tongue and the alveolar ridge).	Alveolar (The narrowing is forme between the tip and blade of th tongue and the alveolar ridge).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.

4. /ʃ/ versus /ʒ/

For /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, the tongue tip comes close to the back of the alveolar ridge where the narrowing is formed.

The front of the tongue tends to be higher during the production of /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ rather than that of /s/ and /z/. The lips are very slightly rounded. /ʒ/-sound never occurs in word-initial position, but it may occur in wordmedial or word-final position. Look at the examples in your textbook.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	/ʃ/	/ʒ/
Manner of articulation	Friction	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Post-alveolar (The narrowing is formed between the tip of the tongue and back of alveolar ridge).	Post-alveolar (The narrowing formed between the tip of th tongue and back of alveolar ridge).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).	They are vibrating (voiced).
Strength	Strong	Weak
Length	Long	Short
Effect on the preceding vowel and/or nasals	It shortens the preceding vowel.	It lengthens the preceding vowel.

5. /h/

The narrowing is formed between the vocal cords in the larynx so that the air passes between them and produces audible friction. Then, the flow of air escapes out of the mouth which is already prepared to produce the following vowel sound. /h/-sound does not make very much friction noise; yet, it should be pronounced wherever it is necessary to do so. Thus, /h/ pronunciation must not be left out, for two reasons. First, it differentiates words in terms of meaning, for example hi /haɪ/ and I /aɪ/. Second, English native speakers consider leaving out /h/ pronunciation as uncultivated behaviour.

Phonetic Features

Criteria	**/h/**
Manner of articulation	Friction
Place of articulation and articulators	Glottal (The narrow opening is formed between the voca cords).
State of the soft palate	The soft palate is raised.
Activity of the vocal cords	They are not vibrating (voiceless).
Strength	Strong
Length	Long