**The Eighth Lecture**

**Consonants versus Vowels**

Davenport and Hannahs distinguish between the consonants and vowels according to the structure of the syllable. They declare that syllable structure plays a very important role in making a major distinction between the types of speech –sound, namely, *Vowels* and *Consonants.* . There are two ways in which ‘vowels’ and ‘consonants’ are defined: in *phonetic* terms and in *linguistic* terms, i.e. in terms of the production of sounds and their function in a given language, respectively. So consonants are speech sounds in which air pushing from the lungs is obstructed in the mouth seriously. They are articulated with either total obstruction of the air-passage or (partial obstruction) with a narrow oral passage so the air escapes and friction is heard*.* Vowels, on the other hand, are speech sounds that do not have obstruction, and narrowing of a degree that would cause audible friction, in the pharynx and the mouth. All other sounds are ‘consonants’. They are speech sounds in which air pushing from the lungs leaves the mouth with no interference and articulated with a free oral passage for the air to escape. It seems, phonetically, that the essential difference is with the degree of stricture, which refers to the distance between the active and passive articulators. Oral and nasal stop consonants, fricatives and liquids all have a stricture of at least close approximation. Liquids and nasals may seem to be counterexamples to this claim because the air flows out freely for them.

However, there is an obstruction in the oral tract in every case; for nasal consonants, complete closure. For liquids, there is a contact between articulators, but it does not extend across the full width of the oral tract. There is a problem in the glides since there is a stricture of open approximation for them. The distinction between consonants and vowels for glides rests not a lot with phonetics as with phonology that means how the sounds function in the language, rather than with the details of their articulation. Pure or true vowels are syllabic, they comprise the main part of the syllable. Glides behave as consonants in that they do not form the nuclei of syllables, but rather occur on the edges of syllables. For English and many other languages a vowel sound is produced with open approximation and it is a syllable nucleus; this will make glides excluded since they are not nuclei. Syllabic liquids as final /I/ and nasals as final /n/ will be excluded because they are not produced with open approximation. Kansakar describes consonants depending on:(1) airstream mechanism which leads us to take into our account that all sounds are articulated with a pulmonic ingressive airstream mechanism, i.e. air is pushed out from the lungs.(2) The state of the glottis during the articulation to show whether there is a vibration in the vocal cords or not. Consonants are classified as voiced and voiceless while all vowels are voiced. (3) The position of the soft palate in which the speech sounds can also be oral or nasal .An oral sound is articulated with the soft palate raised to shut off the nasal passage of air .A nasal sound is articulated with the soft palate lowered to open the nasal passage along with an oral closure. Sometimes the sounds may be nasalized. (4) Active and passive articulators are required. The active articulators move during the process of articulation of the speech sounds but the passive articulators do not move. (5)Stricture involved which refers to the way in which the air passage is restricted by the various organs of speech. There are eight types of strictures involved in the articulation of consonants:

i- Complete closure and sudden release by which the stop or plosive consonants as / p, b, t, d, k, g / are produced. The active and the passive articulators are firmly in contact in order to prevent the lung air from escaping through the mouth. A velic closure will be at the same time. So the soft palate is raised to block the nasal passage of air. When the active articulator is removed from the passive articulator suddenly, the air escapes with a small explosive noise.

ii-Complete closure and slow release in which the oral and nasal passages are closed and the oral closure is released slowly. A friction is heard at that moment without the explosive noise of plosive or stop consonants. Then affricates sounds are produced when a stop followed by friction such as the initial sounds / tʃ, dʒ / in 'chalk' and 'joke'.

iii- Complete oral closure in which there is velic opening when the nasal passage is opened and the lung air escapes freely through the nostrils. A complete oral closure with the active and passive articulators firmly in contact will be at the same time. Then nasal sounds are articulated with this stricture as final / m, n, ŋ / sounds in the following words successfully 'calm', 'learn' and 'thing' .

iv- Intermittent closure: when an oral sound articulated with the active articulator striking several times against the passive articulator permits the air to escape between them intermittently. Trill or rolled consonants are articulated with this kind of stricture as / r / in 'spirit'.

v- Single closure: where /r/ sound may also be articulated sometimes./ r / sound is called a tap or a flap in this case as in 'very'/ r / is pronounced as a tap by some English speakers.

vi- Close approximation in which the active articulator moves to be close to the passive articulator leaving a very narrow opening between them. The lung air escapes through this narrow opening with audible friction. Fricative consonant sounds are articulated with this stricture such as the initial sounds/ f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, h / in the following words successively 'fat', 'vast', 'think', 'this', 'sea', 'zoo', 'should' and 'he'.

vii-Partial closure: when the active and passive articulators make a closure in the centre of the mouth and the air escapes along the sides of the tongue without friction. Lateral consonant sounds are articulated with this stricture as the initial sound /1 / in 'look'.

viii-Open approximation by which a wide gap or opening between the active and passive articulators is made. The air escapes through this gap without any friction. Frictionless continuants or semi-vowels are articulated such as the initial sound / j / in 'yesterday'.