COURSE GUIDE

ENG 141
SPOKEN ENGLISH

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CONTENTS **PAGE**

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to **ENG 141 SPOKEN ENGLISH**

ENG 141 is a three - unit course that is taught in the first semester of the B.A English Programme. It introduces you to the basic concepts and techniques of spoken English. It is also designed to equip you with the ability to speak English in a variety of social and academic situations, and to enhance your understanding of academic and non-academic spoken discourse.

WHAT YOU WILL LEARN IN THIS COURSE

Throughout the duration of this course, you will be exposed to activities and techniques that will help to increase your confidence and stimulate further learning in speech communication. The course lays particular emphasis on your ability to recognise and articulate the sounds used in spoken English. Subsequently, special practices aimed at learning the relevant articulatory skills and extracting information from listening texts are also provided – these skills are used as the basis for developing your 'discussion skills.'

The Spoken English course will also empower you, intellectually, to take responsibility for your own learning, by encouraging you to work independently on weaker areas of your listening and/or speaking skills.

This is why practical guidance is provided, and your progress is monitored.

Contact session with your tutorial facilitator will offer you the opportunity to clarify the grey areas as regards the human organs of speech, and the articulation of the sounds of English.

COURSE AIMS

The aims of this course are to:

i. give you a thorough grounding in spoken English,
ii. introduce you to the sound system of English,
iii. develop your pronunciation skills so that your speech is intelligible to the hearer,
iv. expose you to features of segmental and non-segmental sound system of English and
v. correct your pronunciation problems

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, you should be able to:

- articulate English sounds and pronounce English words correctly describe in detail, major features of English pronunciation
- identify and correct pronunciation errors
- develop your articulatory skills and abilities especially as an audience
- centered communicator
- recognise and use stress and intonation correctly.

Please note that the self assessment exercises and tutor marked assignments in this book are essential to the accomplishment of these objectives.

WORKING THROUGH THIS COURSE

This course guide is divided into Modules and units. Within each unit, there are self assessment exercises. You are expected to answer these self assessment questions. Additional requirements for the course will include a final examination. The course guide tells you briefly what the course is all about, what you are expected to know in each unit, what course materials you need use, and how you can work your way through these materials.

COURSE MATERIALS

The main components of the course are:

1. The Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. References
4. Assignments
5. Presentation Schedule

STUDY UNITS

There are 15 units in this course spread through five modules. These are as follows:

Module 1 Fundamental Concepts and Definitions

Unit 1 Speech in Human Communication
Unit 2 The English Sound System

Unit 3 Introduction to Phonetic Transcription
Unit 4 The Human Organs of Speech

Module 2 The English Consonants

Unit 1 Parameters for the Classification of the Consonants
Unit 2 Detailed Description of the English Consonants

Module 3 Detailed Description of the English Vowels

Unit 1 Parameters for the Classification of the English Vowels
Unit 2 Detailed Descriptions of the Vowels

Module 4 The Syllable and Stress in Spoken English

Unit 1 The Syllable
Unit 2 Word Stress
Unit3 Emphatic and Sentence Stress
Unit 4 Problems in Phonemic Analysis

Module 5 Intonation in Spoken English

Unit 1 Definition and Functions of Intonation
Unit 2 Patterns of Intonation; the Falling tune and Rising tune.
Unit 3 Patterns of Intonation; the Falling-Rising Tune and the Rising-Falling Tune.

Each of the units presented above contains a number of pronunciation practices as well as a tutor marked assignment. These are all designed to give you a thorough pronunciation practice, and test you on the materials you have just covered. They will help you to evaluate your progress as well as reinforce your understanding of the material, theses exercises will assist you in achieving the stated learning objectives of the individual units and of the course.

A recording of all the practice material is available on cassettes and CDs. The symbol 📻 in the text indicates exactly what is recorded.

TEXTBOOKS AND REFERENCES

The following texts are useful for the course. It is important that you buy some of them (at least, two).

Abercrombie, D. (1967). *Elements of General Phonetics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Awonusi, S. (2001). *Coping with English Pronunciation*. Lagos: Obaro and Ogbinaka Publications.

Bamgbose, A (1971). *The English Language in Nigeria*. In Spencer (ed). The English Language in West Africa. London: Longman.

Bamgbose, A (1982). *Standard Nigerian English*. Issues of Identification. In Kachru (ed). The Other Tongue: English across Cultures. London: Pergamon Press.

Carr, P. (1999). *English Phonetics and Phonology*: An Introduction. Oxford: Blackwell.

Couper-Kuhlen (1986). *An Introduction to English Prosody*. London: Edward Arnold.

Cruttenden, A. (1997). *Intonation*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cruttenden, A. (2001). *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*. 6th ed., Revised and Edited Version of A. C. Gimson's Original Book. London: Edward Arnold.

Elugbe, B. (2000). *Oral English for Schools and Colleges*. Ibadan: Heinemann

http://www.ex.ac.uk/-bosthause/Lecture/hockett.htm

Kreidler, C. W. (1989). *The Pronunciation of English*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Ladefoged, P. (1993). *A Course in Phonetics*. 3rd. Ed., New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.

Ogbulogo, C. (2002). *Oral English Manual*. Lagos: Sam Ironanusi Publications.

Roach, P. (1999). *English Phonetics and Phonology*; A Self-Contained, Comprehensive Pronunciation Course. 3rd edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Wells, J. C. (1986). *English Accents and their Implications for Spelling Reform*. In Simplified Spelling Society Newsletter, J3

www.bbcenglish.co.uk

PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

Your tutorial facilitator will inform you of important dates for the early and timely completion and submission of your TMAs and attending tutorials. You should remember that you are required to submit all your assignments by the stipulated time and date. You should guard against lagging behind in your work.

ASSIGNMENT FILE

In your assignment file, you will find the details of the assignments you must submit to your tutor for marking. The marks you obtain for these assignments will count towards the final mark you obtain for this course.

Further information on assignments will be found in the assignment file itself, and later in this course guide in the section on assessment.

There are many assignments for this course, with each unit having at least one assignment. These assignments are basically meant to assist you to understand the course.

ASSESSMENT

There are two aspects to the assessment of this course. First is the tutor – marked assignments; second is a written examination. In handling these assignments, you are expected to apply the information, knowledge and experience acquired during the course. The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment will account for 30 percent of your total coursework.

At the end of the course, you will need to sit for a final examination of three hours duration. This examination will account for the other 70 percent of your total course mark.

TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

There are 15 tutor-marked assignments in this course. Each assignment will be marked over ten (10). The best three (that is the highest three of the 10 marks) will be counted. This implies that the total mark for the best three (3) assignments will constitute 30% of your total course work.

The assignments for the units in this course are contained in the assignment file. You will be able to complete your assignments from the

information and materials contained in your references, reading and study units.

When each assignment is completed, send it together with a TMA (Tutor-Marked assignment) form to your tutor. Ensure that each assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline given in the assignment file. If for any reason you cannot complete your work on time, contact your tutor before the assignment is due, to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extensions will not be granted after the due date unless there are exceptional circumstances warranting such.

FINAL EXAMINATIONS AND GRADING

The final examination for ENG 141; Spoken English will be of three hours' duration and have a value of 70% of the total course grade. The examination will consist of questions which will reflect the practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have previously encountered. All areas of the course will be assessed.

It is important that you use adequate time (between the completion of the last unit and sitting for the examination) to revise the entire course.

You may find it useful to review your tutor-marked assignments and comment on them before the examination.

The final examination covers information from all aspects of the course.

COURSE MARKING SCHEME

Table 1: Course marking scheme

ASSESSMENT	MARK
Assignments	Best three marks of the Assignments @ 10% each on the average = 30% of course marks.
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks.
Total	100% of course marks

Table 2: Course Overview

This table brings together the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

	Title of work	**Week's Activity**	**Assessment (end of unit)**
	Course Guide		
Module1	**Fundamental Concepts and Definitions**		
Unit 1	Speech in Human communication	1	Assignment 1
Unit 2	The English Sound System	2	Assignment 2
Unit 3	Introduction to Phonetic Transcription	3	Assignment 3
Unit 4	The Human Organs of Speech	4	Assignment 4
Module 2	**The English Consonants**		
Unit 1	Parameters for the classification of	5	Assignment 5
Unit 2	English Consonants: Detailed Description of the English Consonants	6	Assignment 6
Module 3	**Detailed Description of the English Vowels**		
Unit 1	Parameters for the classification of	7	Assignment 7
Unit 2	The English vowels. Detailed description of the vowels	8	Assignment 8
Module 4	**The Syllable and Stress in Spoken English**		
Unit 1	The Syllable	9	Assignment 9
Unit 2	Word stress	10	Assignment 10
Unit 3	Emphatic and Sentence stress	11	Assignment 11
Unit 4	Problems in Phonetic Analysis	12	Assignment 12

Module 5	**Intonation in Spoken English**		
Unit 1	Definition and function of Intonation	13	Assignment 13
Unit 2	Patterns of Intonation; the falling – tune and rising tune.	14	Assignment 14
Unit 3	Patterns of Intonation; the falling – rising tune, and the rising – falling tune.	15	Assignment 15

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS COURSE

1. In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one ofthe great advantages of distance learning; you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suites you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to the lecturer. In the same way a lecturer might give you some reading to do. The study units tell you when to read and which are your text materials or recommended books. You are provided exercises to do at appropriate points, just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise.

2. Each of the study units follows a common format.
   The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit, and how a particular unit is integrated with other units and the course as a whole. Next to this is a set of learning objectives.

   These objectives let you know what you should be able to do, by the time you have completed the unit. These learning objectives are meant to guide your study. The moment a unit is finished, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. If this is made a habit, then you will significantly improve your chance of passing the course.

3. The main body of the unit guides you through the required reading from other sources. This will usually be either from your reference or from a reading section.

4. The following is a practical strategy for working through the course.
   If you run into any trouble, telephone your tutor or visit the study centre nearest to you. Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. When you need assistance, do not hesitate to call and ask your tutor to provide it.

5. Read this course guide thoroughly. It is your first assignment.

6. Organise a study schedule – Design a 'Course Overview' to guide you through the course.
   Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit and how the assignments relate to the units. Important information; e.g. details of your tutorials and the date of the first day of the semester is available at the study centre. You need to gather all the information into one place, such as your diary or a wall calendar. Whatever method you choose to use, you should decide on and write in your own dates and schedule of work for each unit.

7. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything to stay faithful to it. The major reason that students fail is that they get behind in their coursework. If you get into difficulties with your schedule, please let your tutor know before it is too late for help.

8. Turn to unit 1, and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.

9. Assemble the study materials. You will need your references for the unit you are studying at any point in time.

10. As you work through the unit, you will know what sources to consult for further information.

11. Visit you centre whenever you need up– to– date information.

12. Well before the relevant due dates (about 4-weeks before due dates) visit your study centre for your next required assignment. Keep in mind that you will learn a lot by doing the assignment carefully. They have been designed to help you meet the objectives of the course and, therefore, will help you pass the examination. Submit all assignments not later than the due date.

13. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study materials or consult your tutor. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to space your study so that you can keep yourself on schedule.

14. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit.

Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor marked assignment form and also the written comments on the ordinary assignments.

15. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Check that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in the course guide).

FACILITATORS/TUTORS AND TUTORIALS

There are 12 hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. However, tutorials are not compulsory, but demand driven, and are meant to be problem solving sessions. You will need to contact your tutor for more information about these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor.

Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep a close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter, and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor marked assignment to your tutor before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible.

Do not hesitate to contact your tutorial facilitator by telephone or e–mail. The following might be circumstances in which you will find help necessary. Contact your tutorial facilitator if:

- you do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings.
- you have difficulties within the exercises.
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, with your tutor's comments on an assignment or with the grading of an assignment.

You should try your best to attend the tutorials if you have problems.

This is the only chance to have face-to-face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefits from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn quite a lot from participating in the discussions.

SUMMARY

ENG 141 aims at equipping you with the pronunciation skills required in English which can be easily understood by other educated speakers of English locally and internationally.

Upon completion of this course your articulatory skills should be well developed, particularly because of your ability to master the techniques needed for the correct articulation of English sounds and words. You will also be able to overcome pronunciation problems that you may have.

We wish you success in the course!

MAIN COURSE

CONTENTS **PAGE**

MODULE 1 FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

UNIT 1 SPEECH IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A spoken language is a human language in which the words are uttered through the mouth. Almost all languages are spoken languages.

Computer languages and sign languages are not spoken languages.

Everybody wishes to have a command over communication skills while interacting with people or delivering speech before an audience.

However, the success of any spoken communication activity is based on the simple method of listen, understand, and speak.

The term ‘spoken language’ is often used in contrast to written language; the world's most widely spoken languages all have written forms. The difference between the spoken and written versions of a language can sometimes be quite extreme.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the difference between writing and speech.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 What is Speech?

According to Knowsley (2004), "speech is the universal means of oral communication. It distinguishes humans from the rest of the animal kingdom. Speech (not writing) is considered by linguists as the primary material for study."

There are many varieties of spoken language, many of which are used even on individual basis.

It may interest you to know that speech is innately acquired – unlike writing, which is a skill which has to be learned. It is also a known fact that speech is used constantly by everyone for a variety of functions, from the passing of information to the sharing of emotions. Furthermore, legal, religious, medical and technical languages are all varieties of spoken occupational jargon.

There are no designated human speech organs, but respiratory and digestive organs are adapted to produce speech.

Indeed, speech and writing are two separate systems and an individual's linguistic competence depends on the ability to make a clear distinction between the two.

Listed below are some speech-related expressions that are commonly used in the study of language.

Speech community: This is used to describe a group of people with shared language. The group includes all the speakers of a single language or dialect, and they may be widely dispersed geographically.

Speech recognition (understanding of speech by computer): This refers to a system of computer input and control in which the computer can recognize spoken words and transform them into digitized commands or text. With such a system, a computer can be activated and controlled by voice commands or take dictation as input to a word processor or a desktop publishing system.

Speech synthesis (computer's imitation of speech): This refers to computer – generated audio output that resembles human speech.

Sign Language and Speech

A sign language is a language which uses gestures, motion and expression instead of sound to convey meaning: combinations of hand shapes, movements of the hands, arms or body, and facial expressions.

Sign languages are used by people who are deaf or hearing-impaired. Contrary to popular belief, sign language is not international. Wherever communities of deaf people exist, sign languages develop. As with spoken languages, these vary from country to country. They are not based on the spoken language in the country of origin. And like spoken languages, they developed in antiquity: sign languages are not new, and are no more or less amendable than any spoken language.

3.2 Factors that can Affect the Quality of Speech

There are several factors that can affect the quality of a person's speech.

Among these are:

1. Diseases and disorders of the lungs or the vocal cords, including paralysis, respiratory infections, and cancers of the lungs and throat.
2. Diseases and disorders of the brain, including alogia, aphasias and speech processing disorders, where impaired perception of the message (as opposed to the actual sound) leads to poor speech production.
3. Articulatory problems, such as stuttering, lisping, cleft palate, ataxia, or nerve damage leading to problems in articulation. Tourette syndrome and tics can also affect speech.
4. Problems in the perception of sound and auditory information can affect speech. In addition to aphasias, anomia and certain types of dyslexia can impede the quality of auditory perception, and therefore, expression. Hearing impairments and deafness can be considered to fall into this category.

Thus, it is clear that speech has both expressive and receptive elements.

The purpose of speech can be to convey meaning or to increase social bonds between individuals and/or groups (it is often both). For the latter, shallowness is not a problem. The success of a speech act depends on numerous factors, including the presence or absence of a variety of speech disorders, the ability of the speaker to express the intended

message, and the ability and willingness of the audience to play the role of recipient.

An important concept that needs to be mentioned here, which can also affect the quality of one's speech is Glossophobia.

Glossophobia is used to refer to the fear of public speaking. The term is derived from the Greek 'glosso', meaning 'tongue', and 'phobia', which means 'fear or dread'. It is believed to be the single most common phobia affecting as much as 75% of all people. Glossophobia is considered a social phobia and may be linked to or sometimes precede a more severe anxiety disorder.

The symptoms include intense anxiety prior to or simply at the thought of having to verbally communicate with any group, avoidance of events which focus the group's attention on individuals in attendance, and may even include physical distress, nausea, or feeling of panic in such circumstances. Many people have been known to report stress-induced speech disorders which are only present during public speech.

3.3 Differences between Speech and Writing

As mentioned in 3.1 above, speech and writing are two separate systems and an individual's linguistic competence depends on the ability to make a distinction between the two.

Speech quite normally includes false starts, hesitations, repetitions, and 'fillers' with no lexical meaning such as 'ums' and 'ers', and all sorts of sounds which have no connection with writing as a means of communication. Speech is also normally accompanied by many other non-verbal features which affect communication – such as intonation and stress, facial expressions, physical gestures, and even bodily posture. Interestingly, in the study of language, speech is considered primary and as a system which is entirely separate from writing, especially because humans acquire speech due to their innate programming. Unlike writing which is a skill that must be learnt in the same way as driving, sewing, or cooking.

It may also interest you to know that there still some societies in the world which have no written form of language, but which depend entirely on speech.

Sign language, among the profoundly hearing-impaired (i.e. the deaf and dumb), is a system which can perform all that a spoken language can in terms of communication. In this case, the hands are adapted instead of respiratory and digestive organs in order to communicate.

The organs used in speech are as follows:

lips	teeth	tongue	palate	glottis
uvula	nose	trachea	lungs	pharynx

Speech is normally a continuous stream of sound, and is not broken up into separate parts like writing. This is particularly true because people do not speak in sentences or paragraphs, and some of what is said may not even be distinct 'words'. It has been observed that most people usually make up the content of what they are saying quite spontaneously, without any planning or long deliberation. It is also important to state that speech cannot be revised or edited in the same way as writing, and although most people (unconsciously) employ a wide range of speech varieties in their everyday conversation, their speeches may often be quite inexplicit – because the participants in a conversation can rely on the context for understanding.

Language change takes place far more rapidly in speech than in writing. From our discussion above, we can summarise the characteristics of speech as follows:

- Speech is time-bound…both participants are usually present.
- No time-lag between production and reception, and recipient is available for further reaction on the part of the speaker.
- Intonation and pause divide long utterances into manageable parts, but sentence boundaries are often unclear.
- Participants can rely on extra linguistic cues as facial expression and gesture to aid meaning.
- Contraction, slang, obscenities and meaningless vocabulary are much more tolerated.
- Lengthy co-ordinate sentences are normal and are often of considerable complexity.
- There is the use of intonation – which includes contrasts of loudness, tempo, rhythm, pause, and other tones that cannot be written down.

How Writing Differs from Speech

The Written Language

A written language is the representation of a language by means of a writing system. Indeed, writing is clearly a system of human intercommunication by means of conventional visible marks.

Written language is an invention, whereas spoken language has evolved along with homo sapiens. Children will instinctively learn or create

spoken (or gestural) languages. However, written language must be taught.

Written language always appears as a complement to a specific natural language (English, French, American Sign Language, etc.) and no purely written languages (with the exception of computer languages, which are not natural languages) exist. Nevertheless many extinct languages are in effect purely written, since the written form is all that survives.

Interestingly, written English and spoken English are obviously very different things; Writing consists of marks on paper which make no noise and are taken in by the eye, while speaking is organised, meaningful sound taken in by the ear.

T.S.Eliot once remarked that 'an identical spoken and written language would be practically intolerable; If we spoke as we write, we would find no one to listen, and if we wrote as we speak, we would find no one to read. The spoken and written language must not be too near together as they must not be too far apart'

There is no doubt that aspects of written and spoken language are often studied as separate domains and much has been written about how the two mediums differ. Written texts may be neatly classified as planned, organized and transactional while spoken communication is often presented as unplanned, less structured and interactive in nature.

However, features of written language can easily be found in spoken language just as written texts can exhibit aspects of conversation. It is also important to know that Speech is believed to be innately acquired – unlike writing, which is a skill that has to be learned. Furthermore, speech is used constantly by everyone for a variety of functions; from the passing of information to the sharing of emotions.

Writing systems, on the other hand, convey meaning by two means. The first is by the use of symbols which represent sounds and function as surrogates of speech. The second is by the use of symbols that add no phonetic information. These two together are combined in different proportions in different scripts.

It becomes obvious therefore, that speech and writing are two separate systems and your linguistic competence depends on your ability to make a clear distinction between the two.

At this point, it will be useful to present Crystal's (2004) tabulated differences between speech and writing:

Main Differences	sounds versus letters
	permanency
	first and final drafts
	purposes of language
	interaction between listener and speaker

Which comes first: speech or writing?	Speech comes before writing historically Many languages lack a written form Many individuals cannot use written language Children automatically learn to speak but have to be taught how to read

Characteristics of Spoken Language	Repeating first draft status vocabulary grammar intonation
Characteristics of Written Language	final draft status density of content grammar neutrality of social roles punctuation

Unique Written Vocabulary Some words are never really said in ordinary speech	 

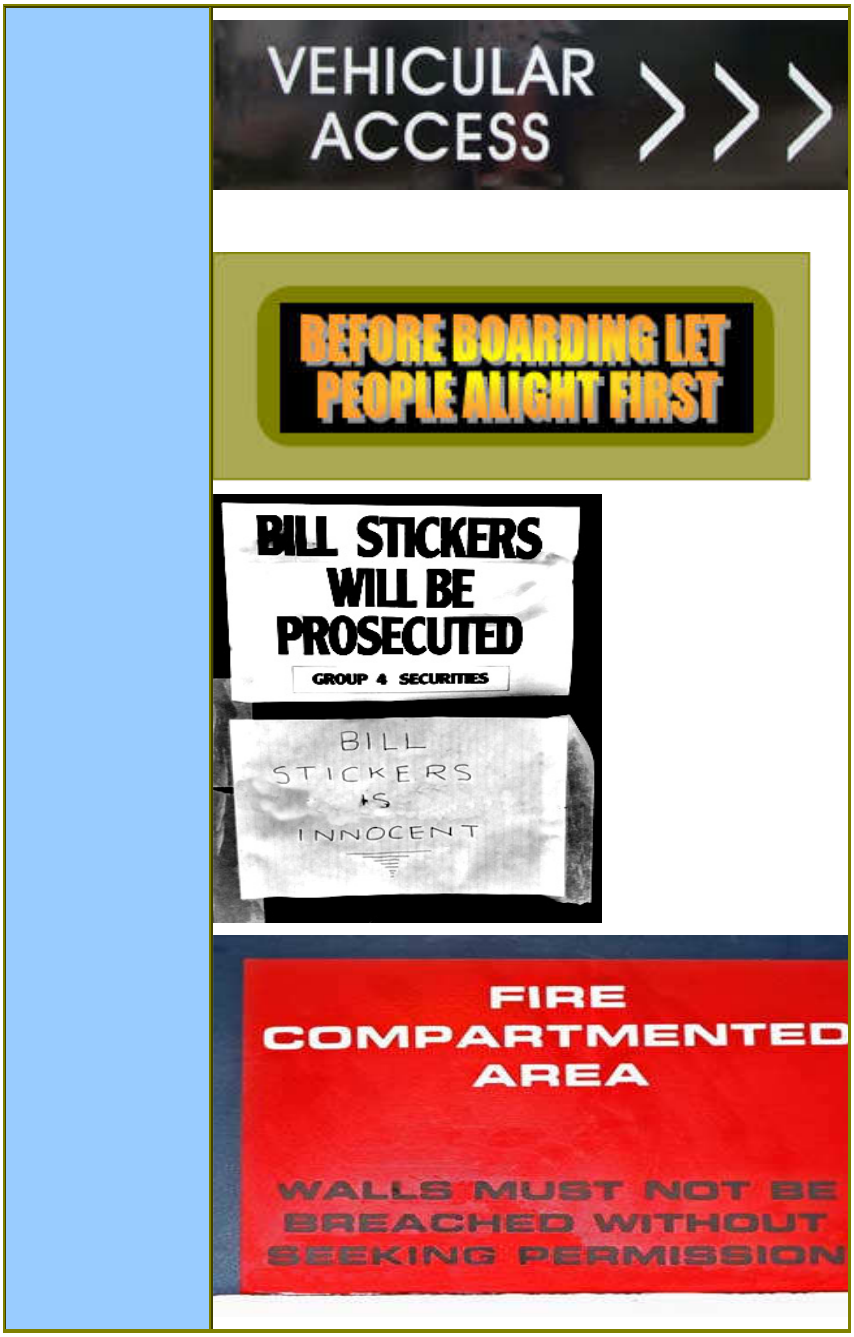

Figure 1.

Source: Crystal, David (2004) “Language and the Internet”

3.4 Advantages of Spoken Language over Written Language

Language is an ever evolving process on planet Earth varying from culture to culture and place to place depending on the needs of the civilization that existed at that timeline. Written language evolved from hieroglyphs – cave wall art (pictographs) – stone or clay tablets – papyrus – paper of arious and writing implements.

Language is a system of conventional spoken or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, communicate. Language so defined is the peculiar possession of humans. Other animals interact by means of sounds and body movements, and some can learn to interpret human speech to an extremely limited extent. But no other species of being has conventionalized its cries and utterances so that they constitute a systematic symbolism in the way that language does. In these terms, then, humans may be described as the 'talking animals'.

Language has a structure or a series of structures and this structuring can be analysed and systematically presented. When language is spoken, a complex series of events takes place. These events are on many planes of experience: physical (the sound waves); chemical (the body chemistry); physiological (the movements of nerve impulses and of muscles); psychological (the reaction to stimuli); general cultural (the situation of the speaker in respect to the cultural system of his society); linguistic (the language being spoken); and semantic (its meaning).

The spoken word is intimate, tied to the very breath and health of the speaker. The written word makes possible the autonomous survival of knowledge - with an oral tradition, it disappears when the oralists have all been killed; but, as people have noted for a long time, writing is impersonal, does not carry emotional intonations as well as speech, and lacks the identifying characteristics (pitch, tone, timbre, rate, etc.) that links speech to a speaker. Certainly, writing displays styles - some people insist they can recognise any particular writer's writing - but it is also not as *idiosyncratic* as speech. Even on the phone, we immediately know the voices of our loved ones. They are distinctive and unique.

Writing is a form of human communication by means of a set of visible marks that are related, by convention, to some particular structural level of language. This definition highlights the fact that writing is in principle the representation of language rather than a direct representation of thought and the fact that spoken language has a number of levels of structure, including sentences, words, syllables, and phonemes (the smallest units of speech used to distinguish one word or

morpheme from another), any one of which a writing system can "map onto" or represent.

Indeed, the history of writing is in part a matter of the discovery and representation of these structural levels of spoken language in the attempt to construct an efficient, general, and economical writing system capable of serving a range of socially valuable functions. Literacy is a matter of competence with a writing system and with the specialised functions that written language serves in a particular society.

Let me re-emphasise that languages are systems of symbols; writing is a system for symbolising these symbols. A writing system may be defined as any conventional system of marks or signs that represents the utterances of a language. Writing renders language visible; while speech is ephemeral, writing is concrete and, by comparison, permanent.

Both speaking and writing depend upon the underlying structures of language. Consequently, writing cannot ordinarily, be read by someone not familiar with the linguistic structure underlying the oral form of the language. Yet writing is not merely the transcription of speech; writing frequently involves the use of special forms of language, such as those involved in literary and scientific works, which would not be produced orally. In any linguistic community the written language is a distinct and special dialect; usually there is more than one written dialect. Scholars account for these facts by suggesting that writing is related directly to language but not necessarily directly to speech. Consequently, spoken and written language may evolve somewhat distinctive forms and functions.

Notwithstanding the foregoing discussions, most contemporary linguists work under the assumption that spoken language is more fundamental, and thus more important to study than written language. Reasons for this perspective include:

- Speech appears to be a human universal, whereas there have been many cultures and speech communities that lack written communication;
- People learn to speak and process spoken languages more easily and much earlier than writing;
- A number of cognitive scientists argue that the brain has an innate "language module", knowledge of which is thought to come more from studying speech than writing, particularly since language as speech is held to be an evolutionary adaptation, whereas writing is a comparatively recent invention.

Of course, linguists agree that the study of written language can be worthwhile and valuable. For linguistic research that uses the methods of corpus linguistics and computational linguistics, written language is often much more convenient for processing large amounts of linguistic data. Large corpora of spoken language are difficult to create and hard to find, and are typically transcribed and written.
The study of writing systems themselves is in any case considered a branch of linguistics.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Summarise in your own words, the differences between spoken language and written language.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Human communication can be realised at two levels; speech and writing. In speech, humans articulate sounds and pronounce meaningful words through the mouth. Speech is considered primary because every normal human being possesses the natural ability to speak, unlike writing which is a more deliberate skill that has to be systematically taught and learned.

The importance of speech as the primary medium of human interaction in different communication situations can therefore, not be overemphasised.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have studied the meaning of speech and analysed closely the factors that can affect the quality of a person's speech. We also studied the advantages of speech over writing.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. How would you define speech?
2. Mention any three advantages of speech over writing.

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UNIT 2 THE ENGLISH SOUND SYSTEM

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Has this truth ever occurred to you - that Language starts with the ear? Well, it may interest you to know that when a baby starts to talk he does it by hearing the sounds his mother makes and imitating them. Thus, the phenomenon called 'speech' has a lot to do with hearing and imitating. – indeed, this is what gives us the gift of 'speech'.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- distinguish the sounds of English from the letters of the alphabet.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Definitions and Problems in Pronunciation

It is essential to first define the term pronunciation before analyzing the problems associated with it.

The Wikipedia online dictionary defines pronunciation as the way a word or a language is usually spoken; the manner in which someone utters a word. This definition is echoed in the American Heritage Dictionary which sees it as a way of speaking a word, especially a way that is accepted or generally understood. It also says that pronunciation could be regarded as a graphic representation of the way a word is spoken, using phonetic symbols. Pronunciation- "pro·nun·ci·a·tion /prəˌnʌnsiˈeɪʃən/ – *noun*" is also defined as the following:

1. the act or result of producing the sounds of speech, including articulation, stress, and intonation, often with reference to some standard of correctness or acceptability.
2. an accepted standard of the sound and stress patterns of a syllable, word, etc.: *He said the pronunciation of "curl" is /kɜrl/ - Spelled Pronunciation[kurl.*
3. the conventional patterns of treatment of the sounds of a language: *the pronunciation of French.*
4. a phonetic transcription of a given word, sound, etc.: *The pronunciation of "pheasant" is /ˈfɛzənt/"*

Source: Dictionary.com Unabridged (v1.1)

The various definitions presented above, confirm the following facts about the term pronunciation:

- it is an act of speech; the act of articulating a sound or word
- it also consists of the transcription of sounds; a phonetic transcription of sounds.

You may have heard the term Received Pronunciation. What does it mean?

Received Pronunciation (RP) is a form of pronunciation of the English language which has been long perceived as uniquely prestigious among British accents and is the usual accent taught to non-native speakers learning British English.

Received Pronunciation is also sometimes referred to as the Queen's (or King's) English, because it is spoken by the monarch, or BBC English, because it was traditionally used by the BBC. Yet, nowadays, these are all slightly misleading. The queen, Elizabeth 11, speaks an almost unique form of English, and the BBC is no longer restricted to one type of accent.

It is important to state clearly that RP is an accent (a form of pronunciation), not a dialect (a form of vocabulary and grammar). It shows a great deal about the social and educational background of a person who uses British English. A person using an RP accent will typically speak Standard English although the reverse is not necessarily true.

It is a known fact that no two people speak exactly alike, and this phenomenon is known as idiolectal differences. But when these differences spread over wide geographical areas to include grammatical

usage, vocabulary and pronunciation, they are called dialects. When the differences are limited to pronunciation, they are known as accents.

At present, there are as many different kinds of English as there are speakers of it. Examples include American English, Australian English, Nigerian English, and South African English. The main problem of English pronunciation therefore, centres on the question - 'How do we decide the sort of English to use as a model?' Interestingly, no one accent can be described as intrinsically superior to another. This is because different accents serve the different communicative needs of different societies.

However, it has been generally argued that the ideal variety is the Standard British English, which in the spoken form is referred to as the Received Pronunciation (RP) – see our discussion above. This is the variety which is used for the mass media, official business and instruction in various institutions of learning in Nigeria. It is called the Educated Nigerian English. A good user of the Educated Nigerian English accent cannot be easily identified in terms of his region or locality in the country. You also need to know that in Nigeria today, there is a tradition of speaking English for general communicative purposes. So, you must strive to acquire the pronunciation accent of the Educated Nigerian English; therefore, your aim should be to acquire a perfect English pronunciation. Unless this is your aim, you will not make all the progress of which you are capable.

3.2 How the Sounds Differ from the Letters of the Alphabet

It is a well known fact that the alphabet which we use to write English has 26 letters, but it may interest you to know that (British) English has about 49 sounds. Inevitably, English spelling will not be a reliable guide to pronunciation (in spoken English) because

- Some letters have more than one sound
- Sometimes letters are not pronounced at all in some English words
- The same sound may be represented by different letters

The Letters of the English Alphabet

The English language has been written using the Latin alphabet from around the 7th century. Since the 5th century, the Anglo-Saxon Futhorc (a kind of alphabet) had been used, and both alphabets continued to be used in parallel for some time.

In the year 1011, a writer named Byrhtferð presented the Old English alphabet which was a reordering of the 26 letters of the Latin alphabet. This was what he presented:

A B C D E F G H I K L M N O P Q R S T V X Y Z Þ Ð Æ

In Modern English orthography, 'þ' and the other two listed above are obsolete, although þ continued its existence for some time, its lower case form gradually becoming graphically indistinguishable from the minuscule 'y' in most handwritings. On the other hand, 'u' and 'j' were introduced as distinct from 'v' and 'i' in the **16th century**, and 'w' assumed the status of an independent letter, so that the English alphabet is now considered to consist of the following 26 letters: Listen attentively to their pronunciations as follows:

Letter	Letter name (IPA)
A	a [eɪ]
B	bee [bi:]
C	cee [si:]
D	dee [di:]
E	e [i:]
F	ef [ef] (spelled eff as a verb)
G	gee [dʒi:]
H	aitch [eɪtʃ]
I	i [aɪ]
J	jay [dʒeɪ]
K	kay [keɪ]
L	el [el]
M	em [em]
N	en [en]
O	o [əʊ]
P	pee [pi:]
Q	cue [kju:]
R	ar [ɑr]
S	ess [es]
T	tee [ti:]

U u [ju:]
V vee [vi:]
W double-u [dʌb(ə)l ju :]
X ex [eks]
Y wy [waɪ]
Z zed [zed]; zee [zi:] in American English

Subsequently, when writing English we use the 26 letters of the alphabet. However, when speaking there are roughly 49 different sounds in English. These sounds are called phonemes.

If you are concentrating on the sounds of English, you need 49 characters to represent all of them. One way of doing this is to use the 'phonemic alphabet', which has some extra characters to represent the sounds in English for which there is no clear equivalent letter or letters.

3.3 The Sounds of English

There are 49 sounds in English. These sounds are made up of consonants and vowels, and there is a system for writing all the sounds of English. It is called the International Phonetic Association (IPA) system. If you know this system you can pronounce any English word perfectly (without the assistance of your tutorial facilitator) by looking in a learner's dictionary (for example, an English Pronunciation Dictionary).

Please be reminded of the fact that the letters of the alphabet can be a poor guide to pronunciation. Phonetic symbols, in contrast, are a totally reliable guide. Each symbol represents one sound consistently.

Here are the various sounds presented in two distinct categories; vowels and consonants.

The Vowels in the Received Pronunciation of British English are as follows:

Short vowels

ɪ	-	bit,	silly
ɛ	-	bet,	head
æ	-	cat,	dad
ɒ	-	dog,	rotten
ʌ	-	cut,	nut
ʊ	-	put,	soot
ə	-	about, clever	

Long vowels

iː	-	cream,	seen
ɜː	-	burn, firm(also shown as əː)	
ɑː	-	hard,	far
ɔː	-	corn,	faun
uː	-	boob, glue	

Diphthongs

aɪ	-	spice,pie	
ɛɪ	-	wait,	fate
ɔɪ	-	toy,joy	
əʊ	-	oats,	note
aʊ	-	clown,	vow
ɔə	-	bored,	poured
ɪə	-	deer,	pier
ɛə	-	hair,	bear
ʊə	-	cure, fuel	

There are also vowel sequences (three vowels pronounced together), and they are called Triphthongs. They are formed by the addition of the / ə / sound to some diphthongs. Here are the five triphthongs in English:

aiə	as in	tyre
auə	as in	tower
eiə	as in	greyer
əuə	as in	grower
ɔiə	as in	royal

All these categories will be discussed extensively in the section that gives a detailed description of the English vowels.

The Consonant sounds are as follows:

p	-	pip,	pot
b	-	bat,	bug
t	-	tell,	table
d	-	dog,	dig
k	-	cat,	key
g	-	get,	gum
f	-	fish,	phone
v	-	van,	vat
θ	-	thick, thump,	faith
ð	-	these, there,	smooth
s	-	sat,	sit
z	-	zebra,	zap
ʃ	-	ship	
ʒ	-	treasure,	leisure
h	-	hop,	hut
tʃ	-	chip	
dʒ	-	lodge,	judge
m	-	man,	mummy
n	-	man,	pan
ŋ	-	sing,	wrong
l	-	let,	lips
r	-	rub,	ran
w	-	wait,	worm
j	-	yet, yacht	

The consonants will be discussed extensively in the section that gives a detailed description of the English consonants.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Write out all the sounds of English as they have been presented in this unit, and give one example of a word where the sound occurs.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We now know that the sounds of English are, indeed, different from the letters of the English alphabet. We can therefore, say that the letters of the English alphabet are the graphic representations of the sounds of English on paper. Interestingly, though, English spelling cannot be regarded as a reliable guide to English pronunciation.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you studied the interesting and captivating differences between the sounds of English and the letters of the English alphabet. The unit also presented insightful information about the way these sounds are pronounced in words.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Think carefully and write out ten pairs of English words that are pronounced alike but spelt differently. See the following ten examples:

i. Male - Mail
ii. Seen - Scene
iii. Sun - Son
iv. Knight - Night
v. No - No
vi. See - Sea
vii. Quay - Key
viii. Hair - Hare
ix. Here - Hear
x. Fare - Fair

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UNIT 3 INTRODUCTION TO PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Can you recall what you studied in the first unit about written English and spoken English? Well, among other things, we mentioned that written English and spoken English are two different communication concepts in the English language. Writing consists of marks on paper which make no noise and are taken in by the eye, while speaking is organised sound, taken in by the ear.

Language starts with the ear, and transcription of spoken English simply refers to the graphic representations of our utterance on paper – using the phonetic alphabet recommended by the International Phonetic Association.

2.0 OBJECTIVE

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- transcribe simple words and phrases in English.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Transcribing Spoken English

There are lots of things to be careful about when doing the transcription of spoken English. The most important is to pay attention to the sounds, and do not be distracted by the spelling of the word or expression.

English spelling is not designed to faithfully represent the sounds of words and is frequently quite misleading in this respect, so it is best to try to ignore it.

It is important to mention that phonetic symbols are a visual aid – you can see that two words differ or are the same in pronunciation. For example, you can see that ‘son’ and ‘sun’ must be pronounced the same way because the phonetic symbols are the same. This implies that phonetic transcription will enable you to use your eyes to aid your ears.

All of these show clearly that although speaking a language is a performance skill, knowledge of how the language works (e.g.; phonetic transcription) is of great value. This means that your knowledge of the 49 sound of English will be of great value to you in this course.

From our foregoing discussion we have been able to establish the following facts; the letters of the English alphabet can be a poor guide to pronunciation and transcription. Phonetic symbols, in contrast, are a totally reliable guide, especially because each symbol represents one sound consistently. Now, at the risk of repeating some of what we have already said, here are some other good reasons why you should know the English phonetic symbols.

- You can use dictionaries effectively. The second bit of information in dictionaries for English language learners is the word in phonetic symbols. It comes right after the word itself.
- Knowing these symbols enables you to get the maximum information from dictionaries.
- You can become an independent learner of English, because you can find out the pronunciation of a word by yourself without asking the tutorial facilitator. Better still, you can easily write down the correct pronunciation of an English word that you hear. This aspect is very important because if you cannot correctly use the phonetic symbols for this purpose, you will end up using the sound values of letters in your own language and this will perpetuate pronunciation errors in your spoken English.
- Phonetic symbols are a visual aid. You can easily see that two words differ, or are the same, in pronunciation. For example you can see that 'seen' and scene' must be pronounced the same because the phonemic symbols are the same. In other words, you can use your eyes to help your ears.
- Phonetic symbols, arranged in a chart, are part of every student's armoury of learning resources. Just as you have a dictionary for vocabulary and a grammar book for grammar, so you need reference materials for pronunciation: the phonemic symbols and simple, key words that show the sound of each symbol will always be very good and simple resource materials for the learning of spoken English.
- Although speaking a language is a performance skill, knowledge of how the language works is still of great value. So, getting good

knowledge of spoken English depends to a very great extent on how good you are in the knowledge of the phonetic symbols of the English language.

Now, take another look at the inventory of English sounds listed in unit 2: 3.3.

3.2 The Techniques of Phonetic Transcription /fəunetik trænskripʃn/

When we transcribe a word or an utterance, we give a direct specification of its pronunciation in the written format. If ordinary spelling reliably indicated actual pronunciation, phonetic transcription might be unnecessary; but often it does not.

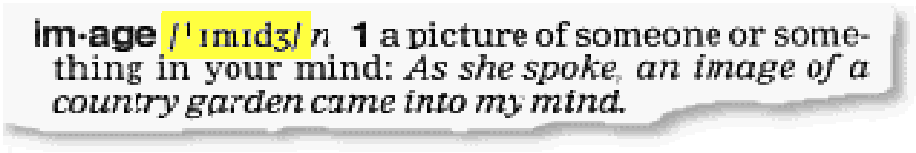
This is obvious when we consider a language such as English, whose spelling displays blatantly irregular characteristics of continuous speech that are not reflected in the orthography.

For you, a passive acquaintance with phonetic transcription will enable you to extract precise and explicit information on pronunciation from a dictionary. The truth is, without this information, you risk being misled either by an inadequately trained ear or by the dazzling effect of the ordinary spelling.

Indeed, with phonetic transcriptions, dictionaries tell you about the pronunciation of words. Phonetic transcription is necessary, because the spelling of a word does not tell you how you should pronounce it.

"Phonetic transcriptions are usually written in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), in which each English sound has a special symbol" (antimoon.com). For example, the phonetic transcription of 'no' is /nəu/ and for 'do' it is /du:/. Note that even though both words have a letter 'o', their phonetic transcriptions are different. That is because they are not pronounced in the same way.

In a dictionary, it looks like this:



Source: [Longman Active Study Dictionary of English] cited in http://www.antimoon.com/how/pronunc-trans.htm

Not all dictionaries give the pronunciations of words. If you are serious about learning Spoken English, you should obtain a dictionary that treats just the pronunciation of English.

It is important for you to know that the 49 phonemes in British English are based on the sounds of Received Pronunciation, and you do not need to have a perfect English accent in order to transcribe words correctly.

You also need to know that the best technique to use is to start learning the consonant symbols first. The reason is simple; the consonants are the easiest because most of them have the same form as a letter of the alphabet (17 out of the 24 consonants are reflected).

Study the following examples carefully, and you will observe that almost all the consonant sounds have the same form as a letter of the alphabet:

very	/ver**ɪ**/
fast	/fa:st/
rough	/r**ʌ**f/
safer	/se**ɪ**fə/
divide	/diva**ɪ**d/
giving	/g**ɪ**v**ɪ**ŋ/

Ambiguous Spellings and Their Implications for Transcription

Some English spellings are entirely ambiguous. If you see the spelling height, you will need to remember that you must get the correct sounds that make up the word. When transcribed, the word becomes /ha**ɪ**t/.

There are so many homographs (same spelling, different pronunciation and meaning) in the English language; they include - bass, bow, buffet, does, gill, lead, live, minute, putting, read, resume, tear, tinged, wind, wound. Interestingly, as soon as we transcribe them, we show the difference in pronunciation. You will need to always remember this interesting phenomenon in your attempt at transcribing English words.

Always bear this in mind – that your pronunciation will differ in some ways from that of your friends or the tutorial facilitator. This is generally due to difference in regional dialect or sometimes a matter of age.

Now, try and pronounce each of the words in every group and see if you can match the transcriptions on the right with the appropriate English words on the left:

1.	pat, pick, pit, spite	/ pɪt /
2.	pet, pant, part, pat	/ pæt /
3.	put, pat, pot, port	/ pʊt /
4.	part, pat, pit, port	/pɑ:t /
5.	pork, pot, port, pet	/ pɔ:t /
6.	punt, pot, put, pat	/ pʊt /
7.	putt, part, pot, pat	/ pʌt /
8.	peat, peak, spite, pit	/ pi:t /
9.	fit, feat, flight, fought	/ fi:t /
10.	feat, fit, fish, fat	/ fɪt /

Here are some pertinent questions that some students have asked concerning transcription. The relevant answers are written below the questions.

Is it Important for the Learners of English to know all the Phonetic Symbols?

To be frank with you, yes. Every profession has specialist knowledge that is not widely known outside the profession. If you are a doctor, you will be able to name every bone in the human body, which most people can't do. If you are a student learning the English language, then you should know the phonetic symbols, which most people don't.

Interestingly, you can learn these symbols by themselves and one day you might be required to transcribe in English using the symbols. So, it is best to be prepared.

Is it Difficult to Learn Phonetic Symbols?

No. This is because 19 of the 49 symbols have the same sound and shape as letters of the alphabet. This means that some words, such as 'pet', look the same whether written with phonetic symbols or letters of the alphabet. That leaves just 30 to learn. Compare that with the hundreds of different pieces of information in a grammar book or the thousands of words in even a small dictionary. It is a very small learning load. Moreover, it is visual and shapes are easy to remember.

What is the Best Way to Learn Phonetic Symbols?

Most learners of English learn grammar from the textbooks which focus on the key areas of the subject, because they are unlikely to have been exposed to any serious formal study of English grammar. They learn by being taught, and this is a very effective way of learning. It is also possible to learn phonetic symbols in the same way. You just need to keep a good English Pronouncing dictionary by your side as you learn the symbols.

Which Phonetic Symbols are the Easiest to Learn?

The consonants are the easiest, because most of them have the same form as a letter of the alphabet (17 out of 24). Therefore, it is best to start by learning a large number of consonant symbols and a small number of easy vowel symbols such as /e/ and /ɪ/. Note, however, that the sound /j/ represents the initial sound of 'yellow', not the initial sound of 'judge'. Experience shows that students are very likely to make mistakes with the symbol /j/, so it needs special attention.

Don't I need to have a Perfect English Accent in Order to use Phonetic Symbols?

No. It is true that the 49 phonemes in British English are based on the sounds of Received Pronunciation, an accent which is not frequently heard nowadays. Researches have shown that most native-speaker learners do not have this accent but still use phonetic symbols. When the symbols are arranged in a chart, each one occupies a box. This indicates that the real sound that you actually hear can vary up to certain limits, depending on the influence of other sounds and on individual ways of speaking. There is not just one perfect way to say each sound - there is an acceptable range of pronunciations. The point is that words such as 'ship', sheep', 'sip' and 'seep' should sound different from each other, not that each sound is pronounced exactly like the sounds of Received Pronunciation. Learning phonemic symbols will help students to understand the importance of length and voicing. Simply knowing that the symbol (**:**) indicates a long sound can be very helpful.

There is no end to our study of grammar and vocabulary but phonetic symbols are limited, visual and physical. They may seem challenging at first but it is like learning to swim or ride a bicycle. Once you can do it, it is easy and you never forget.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Write any 10 English words that you know, and transcribe same using the techniques you have studied in this unit. Check the corrections of your work in any good English dictionary, or better still, check an English pronouncing dictionary.

4.0 CONCLUSION

There is no regular relationship between the way English is spelt and the way it is pronounced. The concept of transcription is really meant to expose you to one of the simple ways to improve your pronunciation skill. There are some categories of words you need to know – homographs (same spelling but different pronunciation) and homophones (same pronunciation but different spelling). This will help you improve on your transcription skill.

5.0 SUMMARY

Transcribing English word and sentences is an interesting exercise. It trains you on how to pay attention to the sounds of English, and not be distracted by the spelling of the given word. In this unit therefore, you studied the meaning of transcription, the techniques of transcription, and the implications of ambiguous expressions for phonetic transcription.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Transcribe the following words:

(1) feat, (2) book, (3) wet, (4) heart, (5) shirt, (6) judge, (7) cat, (8) think, (9) here, (10) see.

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UNIT 4 THE HUMAN ORGANS OF SPEECH

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Speech production is concerned with the actual speech sounds of human languages; how they are pronounced by moving various organs in the vocal tract, perceived by the human ear and their physical properties.

This unit will be more concerned with relationship between the organs of speech that participate in the production of English sounds.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- draw the human organs of speech
- describe the functions of the various organs in speech production.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Organs of Speech

All speech begins with the articulation of speech sounds. When you speak, you produce a string of speech sounds (consonants and vowels), which are arranged in sequence to give words in utterances.

It is important to state here that the organs are essentially parts of the human body which, in addition to their roles in speech production perform important functions in respiration or chewing. However, our concern for now is with their roles in sound production.

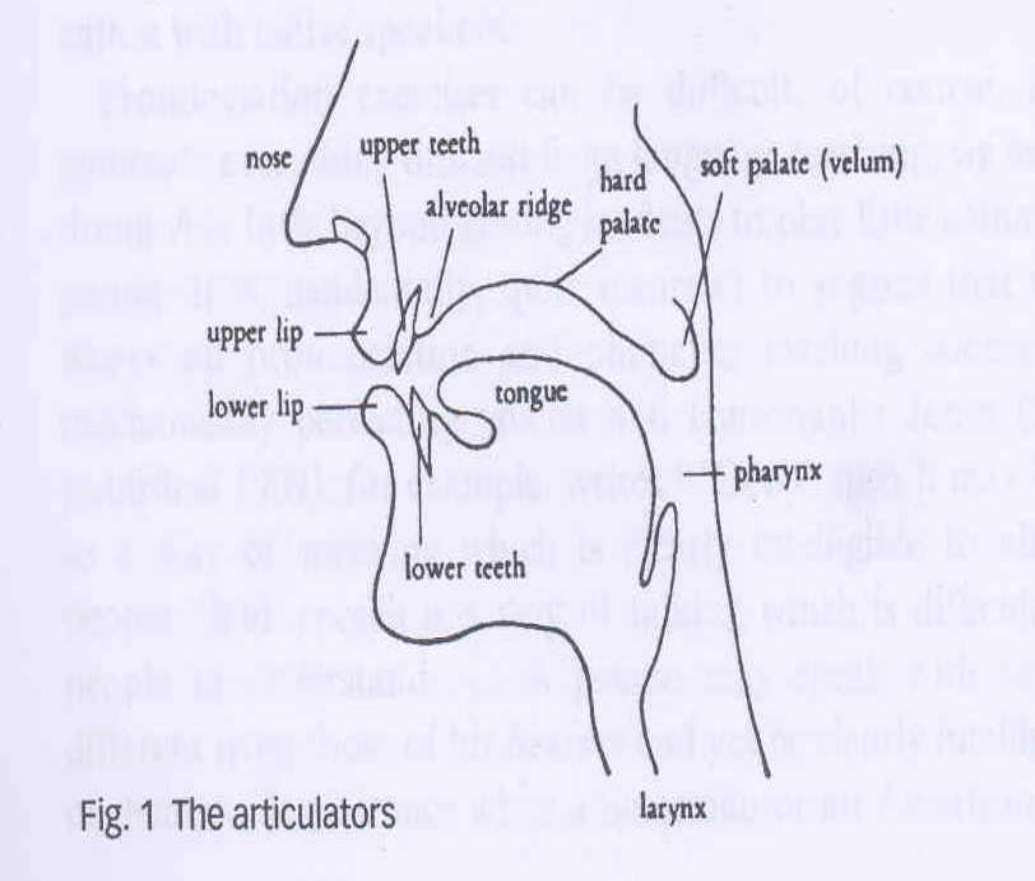

Fig. 1 The articulators

Source: Roach (2000:8) English Phonetics and Phonology

3.2 The Process of Speech Production

Some people may think that the tongue, the teeth and the lips are the only organs necessary for the production of speech, but the issue is, can anyone really produce any speech sound by simply moving the tongue or altering the shapes of the lips? I do not think so. In fact, by the time the tongue, teeth and lips become involved, the process of speech production has gone a long way. The process of speech production therefore starts from the lungs which serve as the 'power house' from which the air flows.

Figure 1 is a diagram showing a side view of the parts of the throat and oral cavity as well as the nasal cavity which are all very important to recognise in spoken English.

3.3 How the Speech Organs Work

When we speak, we breathe normally and as the air stream flows out from the lungs through the narrow space of the wind – pipe, some

sounds are produced. Other organs along the throat and in the oral cavity modify the sound according to the message which the speaker wants to send. It may also interest you to know that the various organs are all encapsulated in three cavities; the oral cavity, the nasal cavity and the pharyngeal cavity. Let us study these cavities one after the other to really understand how the organs in them function in speech production.

The Oral Cavity: This is the mouth. Within this cavity, there are a number of organs which are very important in the production of speech sounds. The **tongue** is one of the organs here, and may be described as the most active articulator. It is the most flexible organ because it moves easily and can, in contact with other organs of speech in the oral cavity, create a total or partial obstruction during the production of consonants.

On the other hand, its distance from the top of the oral cavity influences the quality of the vowel. Although the tongue has no obvious natural division like the palate, it is useful to think of it as divided into four parts as shown in Figure 1 in the preceding page. The back of the tongue lies under the soft palate when the tongue is at rest; the front lies under the hard palate; the tip and the blade (middle) lie under the alveolar ridge. The tip and blade of the tongue are particularly mobile, and can touch the whole of the lips, the teeth, the alveolar ridge and the hard palate. The front of the tongue can be flat on the bottom of the mouth or it can be raised to touch the hard palate. When you say the vowel /a**:**/, you will observe that the front of the tongue is flat on the bottom of the mouth, but when you say /æ / as in ‘cat’ the front rises a little; now say /e / as in ‘met’, and you will observe that the front rises again. If you go on to say / I: / as in ‘see’, you will see that the front rises to a very high position behind the teeth and close to the hard palate. The back of the tongue, on the other hand, can be flat in the mouth, or it can be raised to touch the soft palate, or it can be raised to a position between these two extremes, especially for the vowels / ɔ, ɔ: ʊ, **u**:/ as in ‘pot, fought, put, boot’. Now when you say these sounds in the order in which they have been presented here, you will observe that the back of the tongue rises gradually towards the soft palate.

Another important organ in this cavity is the **teeth**. The lower front teeth are not so important in speech except that if they are missing, certain sounds, e.g. / s / and / z / will be difficult to make. But the two upper front teeth are used in spoken English to some extent. Now, put the tip of your tongue very close to the edge of these teeth and blow; this will produce a sound like the English /θ/ in ‘thin’; if you turn on the voice during this /θ/ - sound, you will get a sound like the English /ð/in ‘then’.

The **palate** is yet, another important organ in the oral cavity. As you can see from Figure 1, the palate forms the roof of the mouth and separates

the oral cavity from the nasal cavity. Now, if you make the tip of your tongue touch as much of your own palate as you can, you will observe that most of it is hard and fixed in position, but when the tip of your tongue is as far back as it will go, away from your teeth, you will notice that the palate becomes soft. You can easily see the soft part of the palate if you use a mirror. Turn your back to the right, open your mouth wide and say the vowel /ɑ:/, and move the mirror so that the light shines into your mouth. You will be able to see the **soft palate** curving down towards the tongue and becoming narrower as it does so until it ends in a point called the uvula /ju:vʊlə/. Behind the soft palate, you will be able to see part of the back wall of the pharynx. When the soft palate is lowered, it allows the breath of air to pass behind itself and up into the nasal cavity, and out through the nose. This is the position of the palate for the / m /, / n / and /ŋ / consonant sounds. Apart from the raising and lowering of the soft palate, the whole of the palate, including the soft palate, is used by the tongue to interfere with the air streams.

The hard, fixed part of the palate is divided into two sections as shown in figure 1: the **alveolar ridge** / ælviəʊlə rɪ dʒ / and the hard palate. The alveolar ridge is that part of the gum immediately behind the upper front teeth, and the hard palate is the highest part of the palate, between the alveolar ridge and the beginning of the soft palate. You can touch the whole of the alveolar ridge and the soft palate with the tip of your tongue. The alveolar ridge is particularly important in spoken English because many of the consonant sounds like /t, d, n, l, r, s, z, ʃ, ʒ , tʃ, dʒ/ are made with the tongue touching or close to the alveolar ridge.

The Lips: The oral cavity terminates with the lips, and it is obvious that the lips can take up various different positions when a sound is being articulated. They can be brought firmly together as in /p/ or /b/ or /m/.

They can also be drawn inward and slightly upward to touch the upper front teeth as in the sounds /f/ and /v/. When speaking, some people make more lip movements than others, but it is never necessary to exaggerate these movements. In fact, it is generally believed that English can be spoken quite easily while holding a pipe between the teeth.

The Vocal Cords: The air used in speech, which is usually released by the lungs, passes through the wind – pipe and arrives first at the larynx.

The larynx (Adam's apple) contains two small bands of elastic tissue lying opposite each other across the pharyngeal cavity. These are the vocal cords. They can be brought together tightly so that no air can pass through them or they can be drawn apart so that there is a gap between

them through which the air can pass freely (this is their normal position when we breathe quietly in and out). This opening and closing of the vocal cords is called voice.

Some of the English sounds have voice and some do not. Now, say a long /m/ - sound and put your fingers on your neck by the side of the larynx; you will feel the vibration of the vocal cords. Now, say the word 'may' / meɪ /, still with your fingers on your neck. Does the vowel /eɪ/ have voice? Can you feel the same vibration for /eɪ/ as for /m/? Yes, both sounds are voiced. Now say a long /f/ - sound. Is it voiced? No, it has no vibration.

Subsequently, the English sounds which are not voiced – voiceless sounds – are made with the vocal cords drawn apart so that the air can pass out freely between them and there is no vibration. However, when the vocal cords are close and the air has to be 'forced' through them during the pronunciation of a sound, this will result in the production of a voiced sound.

Some voiced consonant sounds in English have their voiced counterparts. See these examples:

Voiceless / Voiced

/s/ /z/
/f/ /v/
/ ʃ / /ʒ/

Pronounce these words and feel the vibration or non – vibration of your vocal cords;

Seal	/ sɪ:l /	zeal	/zɪ:l /
Few	/fju: /	view	/vju: /
Shine	/ʃain/	genre	/ʒa:nre/

It is also important to let you know that all the vowels of English are voiced.

The Nasal Cavity

Before discussing the importance of the nasal cavity in spoken English, it is important to mention the role played by the velum or soft palate during articulation. The velum is the continuation of the roof of the mouth also called the palate. The harder, bony structure situated towards the exterior of the mouth continues with the **velum** into the rear part of the mouth. The latter's position at the back of the mouth can allow the

air stream to go out through either the mouth or the nose or through both at the same time. Thus, if the velum is raised, blocking the nasal cavity, the air is directed out through the mouth and the sounds thus produced will be oral sounds. If the velum is lowered, we can articulate either nasal sounds, if the air is expelled exclusively via the nasal cavity, or nasalized sounds if, in spite of the lowered position of the velum, the air is still allowed to go out through the mouth as well as through the nose.

If we nip our nostrils or if the nasal cavity is blocked because of a cold, etc, we can easily notice the importance of the nasal cavity as a resonator and the way in which its blocking affects normal speech production. The distinction nasal / oral is essential in all languages and it will further be discussed when a detailed analysis of both English consonants and vowels is given.

We have discussed the oral cavity and the organs that delimit the cavity.

Now, the nasal cavity is a large air-filled space above and behind the nose in the middle of the face. It acts as a resonator in the production of consonant sounds in English. For instance, in the articulation of all nasal consonants, the soft palate is lowered and at the same time the mouth passage is blocked at some point, so that all the air is pushed out of the nose. The nasal sounds /m/, /n/, and /ŋ/ are voiced in English, and the voiced air passes out through the nose. During articulation, the soft palate is lowered for both /m/ and /n/. For /m/ the mouth is blocked by closing the two lips so that the air can flow out through the nasal cavity, while for /n/, the tip of the tongue is pressed against the alveolar ridge and the air escapes through the nasal cavity. Interestingly, for the production of /ŋ/ the back of the tongue is pressed against the soft palate so that the air passes out through the nasal cavity.

These various descriptions confirm the fact that the nasal cavity performs the role of a resonator – providing the proper passage for the air that is used in the articulation of the nasal consonant sounds.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Draw Figure 1 and label all the different parts of the speech organs. Do this several times until you can do it without looking at the diagram in the book.

4.0 CONCLUSION

All languages use the air from the lungs for the production of sounds during speech. But it must be emphasized that in the production of English sounds, the small differences in the movement of the organs of

speech may make all the difference between a result which sounds English and one which does not. It is equally important to mention here that our study of the speech production process has consciously neglected the essential role the brain plays in the articulation of sounds.

We chose to leave aside the discussion of the part played by the brain in the physiology of articulation only because the complexity of the analysis would have taken us too far away from the purpose of this study.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have carefully outlined how the movements of the organs of speech combine together in forming the sounds of English. The various descriptions of the movement of the organs were carefully presented because what may seem to be an inconsequential difference may in fact be very important in producing and recognizing an English sound correctly.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Describe the movement of the tongue in the production of the sounds /ɪ:/, / ɪ /, /e/, and /æ/ .
2. Describe the articulation of the following consonants: / t/, z/, /ʃ/, /dʒ/, and //ŋ/.

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MODULE 2 THE ENGLISH CONSONANTS

UNIT 1 PARAMETERS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH CONSONANTS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

A consonant is a speech sound that is produced by a partial or complete blockage of the flow of air from the lungs by any of the speech organs.

You may wonder why we have to begin our analysis of English sounds with the consonants rather than vowels. The reason is simple; consonants contribute more to making English understood than vowels do. Furthermore, consonants are generally made by a definite interference of the vocal organs with the air stream, and so can be described easily. English consonants are usually classified according to their place of articulation, manner of articulation and the state of the glottis (whether voiced or voiceless).

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- define a consonant
- describe the various parameters used for classifying a consonant
- identify the speech organs used in articulating the consonants.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Place of Articulation

Place of articulation refers to where in the vocal tract a particular sound is produced. The various articulators in the vocal tract can be divided into two groups, namely active and passive articulators. Active articulators are those organs in the vocal tract that can move freely; for example, the tongue. Passive articulators are those organs that cannot move; for example, the organs of the roof of the mouth (Elugbe 2000:21). The different points of articulation where the different sounds are produced will be described below:

Listed below, are the places where articulation occurs for the production of English consonants.

i) Bilabial: the two lips (labia)
ii) Labiodental: the lower lip and the upper teeth
iii) Dental: the tip of the tongue between the upper and lower teeth
iv) Alveolar: the blade of the tongue and the aveolar ridge which is locate behind the gums
v) Palato-alveolar: the blade of the tongue and behind the alveolar ridge
vi) Palatal: the front part of the tongue and the hard palate
vii) Velar: the back of the tongue and the soft palate
viii) Glottal: the opening between the vocal cords.

From front to back, the places identified above are further explained below:

Bilabial

This term describes the action of the lower and upper lips touching each other, as they block the flow of air from the lungs during the production of a consonant. The English sounds; [p], [b], and [m] are bilabial consonants.

The sound [w] involves two constrictions of the vocal tract made simultaneously. One of them is lip rounding, which you can think of as a bilabial approximant – an approximate bilabial sound.

Bilabial Articulation

Labiodental

When articulating a labiodental consonant, the lower lip approaches or touches the upper teeth - to obstruct the flow of air from the oral cavity, so that an audible friction is heard. The English sounds, [f] and [v] are labiodental consonants.

Labiodental Articulation

Dental

In the articulation of a dental consonant, the tip or blade of the tongue touches the upper front teeth, and partially blocks the flow of air from the lungs. The English sounds [θ] and [ð] are dental consonants There are actually two different ways of forming dental sounds:

- The tongue tip can approach the back of the upper teeth, but not press against them so hard that the airflow is completely blocked.

- The blade of the tongue can touch the bottom of the upper teeth, with the tongue tip protruding between the teeth -- still leaving enough space for the airstream to escape.

Dental Articulation

Dental Articulation

Alveolar

The articulation of an alveolar consonant involves the tongue tip (or less often the tongue blade) touching the alveolar ridge (the ridge immediately behind the upper teeth). The English consonants [t], [d], and [n] are formed by completely blocking the airflow at this place of articulation. The consonants [s] and [z] are also articulated at this place, as is the consonant [l]. For the English consonant [r], the tongue tip the tongue tip is curled up toward the post alveolar region (the area immediately behind the alveolar ridge).

Alveolar Articulation

Alveolar articulation

Palato- Alveolar

In the articulation of a palato-alveolar consonant, the constriction is made immediately behind the alveolar ridge, and it can be made with either the tip or the blade of the tongue. The English consonants [ʃ] and [ʒ] are made at this point of articulation, as are the corresponding sounds [tʃ] and [dʒ].

Palatal

As regards the place of articulating a palatal consonant, the body of the tongue touches the hard palate. The English consonant [j] is a palatal approximant – in other words, the tongue body approaches the hard palate, but closely enough to create turbulence in the airstream.

Velar

In a velar consonant, the body of the tongue touches the soft palate, or velum. The consonants [k], [g], and [ŋ] are made at this place of articulation. The diagram below shows the place where a typical [k] or [g] is articulated-- though where exactly on the velum the tongue body hits will vary a lot depending on the surrounding vowels.

Velar Articulation

Velar articulation

Glottal

The glottis is the opening between the vocal folds. In an [h] consonant, this opening is narrow enough to create some turbulence in the airstream flowing past the vocal folds. For this reason, [h] is often classified as a glottal sound in English.

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Write out all the consonant sounds listed as examples above, and then practice articulating (pronouncing) these sounds. As you do so, watch the movement of your tongue in your mouth. See if it corresponds with the various descriptions you have studied here.

3.2 Manner of Articulation

The second parameter used in classifying an English consonant is Manner of Articulation. This helps us to determine the actual nature and extent of the obstructions or constrictions involved during the articulation of the consonants.

The Manner of articulation therefore, explains how the tongue, lips, and other organs of speech are configured to produce a particular consonant sound. The various manners of articulating English consonants are further explained below.

Stops

A stop consonant completely cuts off the airflow through the mouth. In the consonants [t], [d], and [n], the tongue tip touches the alveolar ridge and cuts off the airflow at that point. In [t] and [d], this means that there is no airflow at all for the duration of the stop. In [n], there is no airflow through the mouth, but there is still airflow through the nose. We usually distinguish between nasal stops, like [n], which involve airflow through the nose, and oral stops, like [t] and [d], which do not.

Nasals

The basic characteristic of a nasal consonant is that the air from the lungs escapes through the nose. This is consequent upon the fact that the soft palate must be lowered to allow the air to pass through the nasal cavity. The air does not pass through the mouth because there is usually a complete closure in the mouth at some point. There are three types of closures that can be observed; bilabial (bringing the two lips together), alveolar (placing the tongue blade against the alveolar ridge) and velar (placing the back of the tongue against the palate). These places produce the following consonants; - /m, n, ŋ/

Fricatives

In the stop [t], the tongue tip touches the alveolar ridge and cuts off the airflow. In [s], the tongue tip approaches the alveolar ridge but does not quite touch it. There is still enough of an opening for airflow to

continue, but the opening is narrow enough that it causes the escaping air to become turbulent (hence the hissing sound of the [s]). In a fricative consonant, the articulators involved in the constriction approach get close enough to each other to create an audible frictional airstream. The fricatives of English are [f], [v], [θ], [ð], [s], [z], [ʃ], and [ʒ].

Affricates

An affricate is a single sound composed of a stop portion and a fricative portion. In the articulation of the English [tʃ], the airflow is first interrupted by a stop which is very similar to [t] (though made a bit further back). But instead of finishing the articulation quickly and moving directly into the next sound, the tongue pulls away from the stop slowly, so that there is a period of time immediately after the stop where the constriction is narrow enough to cause a turbulent airstream. In [tʃ], the period of airstream following the stop portion is the same as the fricative [ʃ]. The English consonant [dʒ] is an affricate like [tʃ], but voiced.

Laterals

When you observe carefully, the movement of your tongue when you say the first consonant of [lif] *leaf, you will notice that y*our tongue tip is touching your alveolar ridge (or perhaps your upper teeth), but this doesn't make [l] a stop consonant. Interestingly, air still flows during the articulation of an [l] consonant because the side of your tongue has dropped down and left an opening. (Some people drop down the right side of their tongue during an [l]; others drop down the left; a few drop down both sides.) Sounds which involve airflow around the side of the tongue are called laterals. The [l] consonant is the only lateral in English.

Approximants

In an approximant, the articulators involved in the constriction are more further apart than they are for a fricative. The point being made here is that when articulating an approximant, the articulators are still closer to each other than when the vocal tract is in its neutral position, but they are not even close enough to cause a ‘rush’ of the air passing between them. The approximants of English are [w], [j], [r], and [l].

The Consonant chart of English indicating manners of articulation

1.stops	p	b	t	d	k	g
	pen	bee	tea	day	key	get

2. fricatives	f	v	θ	ð	h
	fan	eleven	thin	the	hat
	s	z	ʃ	ʒ	
	sea	zoo	sheep	leisure	

3. affricates	tʃ	dʒ	4. nasals	m	n	ŋ
	church	judge		man	now	sing

5.lateral approximants	l	6. approximants	r	w	j
	lip		rabbit	was	yet

Source: www.bbcenglish.co.uk

3.3 Voicing

Please go back to Module one unit 4, and study section 3.3 that discusses how the speech organs work. When you read that portion carefully, you will get to understand, in detail, the mechanisms that surround the movements of the vocal cords.

That apart, we need to state categorically that voicing refers to the vibration or non-vibration of the vocal cords during the sound production.

Indeed, the vocal cords may be held against each other at just the right tension so that the air flowing past them from the lungs will cause them to vibrate against each other. Indeed, sounds which are made with

vibration of the vocal cords are said to be voiced, while sounds made without vibration of the vocal cords are said to be voiceless. In other words, it is the presence or absence of vibration of the vocal cords that determines whether a sound is voiced or voiceless. When the vocal cords are apart, then air can escape unimpeded. Sounds produced in this way are said to be voiceless. The easiest example of this is to whisper.

Just whisper right now and see. You would have observed that when you whispered, your glottis was wide open and, therefore, all the sounds produced were voiceless. However, if your vocal cords are very close together, the air will blow them apart as it forces its way through. This makes the cords vibrate, and you will produce a voiced sound.

To feel the distinction between voiced and voiceless sounds is very easy. Place your finger and thumb lightly on your throat. Say sssssss to yourself. Then say zzzzzzz. Repeat these a few times. Then substitute fffffff and vvvvvvv sounds. You should be able to feel the vibration of the cords when you say zzzzzz and vvvvvv, but nothing when you say ssssss and ffffff.

It is also possible to hear the vibration. Instead of putting your fingers on your throat, put your index fingers in your ears and repeat the above sounds. You should hear a low buzzing sound when you articulate zzzzzz and vvvvvv, but hear almost nothing for the other two sounds.

This explanation appears detailed because voicing is important in a language like English where the meaning of a sound often depends on whether that sound is voiced or not.

For example, 'big' carries a very different meaning from 'pig'.
English has many sounds that are paired up in this manner where place of articulation and manner are the same, but the meaning is dependant upon whether the sound is voiced or not.

There are several pairs of sounds in English which differ only in voicing -- that is, the two sounds have identical places and manners of articulation, but one has vocal cord vibration and the other does not. The [θ] of *thigh* and the [ð] of *thy* are one such pair. The others are:

[t]and[d], [f]and[v], [s]and[z], [ʃ]and[ʒ], [tʃ] and [dʒ].

The other sounds of English do not come in voiced/voiceless pairs. The consonant [h] is voiceless, and has no voiced counterpart. The other English consonants are all voiced: [r], [l], [w], [j], [m], [n], and [ŋ]. This does not mean that it is physically impossible to say a sound that is exactly like, for example, an [n] except without vocal cord vibration. It

is simply that English has chosen not to use such sounds in its set of distinctive sounds. (It is possible even in English for one of these sounds to become voiceless under the influence of other sounds that surround such sound, but this will never change the meaning of the word.)

Table of Voiced / Voiceless English Consonants

voiced	*Voiceless*		*Voiced*	*Voiceless*
b	p		r	
d	t		l	
v	f		m	
g	k		n	
z	s		ŋ	
ð	θ		j	
ʒ	ʃ		w	
dʒ	tʃ			h

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Study the consonants in this chart and write out the sounds that tend to pose articulatory problems for you. Make sure that you write out a word for each of these sounds and then pronounce each word out loud to yourself.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We have been able to understand clearly how the consonants of English are classified – place of articulation, manner of articulation, and voicing. These classifications emphasise the fact that unlike vowels, the consonants of English are usually produced with an audible friction.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you studied the parameters used in distinguishing consonants – which constitute the way an English consonant is produced. We have been able to identify three factors used in classifying the consonant sounds, namely - place of articulation, manner of articulation, and the state of the vocal cords.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Write down two columns with the headings voiced and voiceless.

Now, look at these sounds and indicate which sounds you think carry voice and which do not; /t, d, g, b, v, f, s, z, p, k/

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UNIT 2 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF ENGLISH CONSONANTS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we discussed, in detail, the various parameters used in classifying English consonants; the place of articulation, manner of articulation and voicing. In this unit, a detailed description of all the consonants of English is presented. The consonants are being described first because they contribute more to making English understood than vowels do. Furthermore, consonants are usually made by a definite interference of the vocal organs with the air stream, and so are easier to describe and understand. It is therefore, important to emphasise that in dealing with the consonants you must first learn the distinguishing features of each one, so that one consonant will not be mistaken for another consonant. Then, you need to consciously cultivate the ability to correctly articulate the consonants, distinguish them from vowels and other consonants, and be able to interpret their spelling symbols.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Upon the completion of this unit, you should be able to:

- recognise the consonants and their phonetic representations
- identify the notations used in describing each consonant
- describe the consonant sounds accurately.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Chart of the Consonants

There are 24 consonant sounds in English. Majority of the consonants are produced with air passing through the oral cavity (mouth), while for just a few, air passes through the nasal cavity (nostrils).

The chart below shows the phonetic symbols for the English consonants. The consonants occur in pairs with voiceless consonants on the left and voiced consonants on the right.

PLACE **MANNER**	**Bilabial**	**Labiodental**	**Dental**	**Alveolar**	**Palato-Alveolar**	**Palatal**	**Velar**	**Glottal**
Stop	**p b**			**t d**			**k g**	
Affricate					**tʃ dʒ**			
Nasal	**m**			**n**			**ŋ**	
Fricative		**f v**	**θ ð**	**s z**	**ʃ ʒ**			**h**
Approximant	**w**			**r**		**j**		
Lateral Approximant				**l**				

3.2 Description of the English Consonants

The 24 consonants of English presented in the chart above are described in detail below. They are described here using the relevant parameters. Study these descriptions carefully, and practice articulating the sounds in the various words given.

STOPS (PLOSIVES)

/p/ and /b/

/p/:- This is the voiceless bilabial stop. During its production, the air pressure, which builds up behind the two lips, which are pressed firmly together, is released with an explosive noise. They are also called plosive consonants. The spelling symbol for the /p/ sound is usually "p", and 'pp' but the 'p' is not pronounced in words like; psychology, empty, psalm, pneumonia.

It is important to remember that the consonant can occur either at the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of words as in probe, chapter, lump /b/:- This consonant sound has a similar process of articulation

with /p/. The only difference between the two sounds is that while /p/ is voiceless, / b / is voiced. The spelling symbols for /b/ are “bb” and “b”, and these can occur in any part of a word.

Interference Problems

Some languages like Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa and English have these sounds in common, except /p/. For example, some Hausa speakers have problems pronouncing /p/. Consequently, many say ‘fafer’ instead of ‘paper’. ‘feofle’ instead of ‘people’. Interestingly, many linguistic groups have their own problem areas, as we shall see later. But what is really important is to ensure that this problem is effectively corrected by the appropriate pronunciation drills.

Although the /b/ sound is generally not difficult for most Nigerians to articulate many still pronounce the sound in words where it should not be articulated. For example, many speakers still pronounce the final /b/ in the following words:

crumb, womb, thumb, comb, succumb, lamb, tomb
debt, doubt, subtle, plumber, debtor, doubting, subtlety
It is important to state that the letter ‘b’ is not pronounced in the final mb sequence in English words.

Practical Exercises

Listen carefully to the pronunciation of the following words where /p/ and /b/ are contrasted as minimal pairs. Practise pronouncing these words on your own. You may use them in sentences of your own.

/p/ /b/	/p/ /b/	/p/ /b/
pack / back	supper / rubber	mop / mob
pat / bat	repel / rebel	tap / tab
palm / balm	simple / symbol	cap / cab
peer / beer	happy / shabby	rope / robe
pay / bay	paper / labour	rip / rib

Now, practice pronouncing the following words where the sounds /p/ and /b/ are silent. First listen carefully to their recorded pronunciations and then try pronouncing the words out loud:

/p/empty, psalm, pneumonia, psychology

/b/crumb, womb, thumb, comb, succumb, lamb, tomb, debt, doubt, subtle, plumber, debtor, doubting, subtlety.

/t/ and /d/

These are the alveolar stops. To produce each of these sounds, the tip of your tongue should make contact with your alveolar ridge and this action will obstruct the flow of air from your lungs. When the tongue tip is lowered suddenly from the teeth ridge the breath rushes out with a slight explosion or popping noise. /t/ is the voiceless alveolar stop, while /d/ is the voiced counterpart.

The spelling symbols for the /t/ sound are ‘t’, ‘tt’, ‘Th’, ‘ed’ as in ‘take’, ‘written’, ‘Thames’ and ‘looked’.

Note that the “t” is not pronounced in words like:
listen, castle, wrestle and Christmas.

The spelling symbols for /d/ are ‘d’, ‘dd’, ‘ed’ as in do, ladder, moved.
Please note that this consonant sound is not pronounced in a word like ‘handsome’.

Interference Problems

These sounds do not pose any serious problem to most Nigerians. However, It has been observed that Efik – Ibibio and other related groups tend to have a problem with the /t/ consonant when it occurs between vowels. It is often common to hear an Efik – Ibibio speaker say ‘berrer’ instead of ‘better’. It is important to mention that sometimes many speakers tend to pronounce the ‘d’ letter in words like ‘handsome,’ ‘handsel’, ‘handkerchief’, and ‘Wednesday’.

Like we mentioned before, everyone can improve even if they have no great talent for language.

Practical Exercises

Listen carefully to the pronunciation of the following words where /t/ and /d/ are contrasted as minimal pairs; they are articulated at the beginning, middle, as well as the end of words. Then pronounce these words out loud to yourself.

/t/	/d/	/t/	/d/	/t/	/d/
ten	den	latter	ladder	breast	bread
torn	dawn	whitish	widish	coat	code
try	dry	breathing	breeding	ant	and
town	down	water	warder	pat	pad
tab	dab	wetting	wedding	rot	rod

/k/ and /g/

These consonants are known as the velar stops. During the articulation of each of these sounds, the back of the tongue is in firm contact with the soft palate, and the soft palate is raised, so that the breath is trapped for awhile. When the tongue is lowered from the soft palate the breath rushes out of the mouth with a slight explosion or popping noise.

The fundamental difference between the two is that /k/ is voiceless, while /g/ is voiced.

The spelling symbols for /k/ are; ‘k’, ‘c’, ‘cc’, ‘ch’, ‘q’, and ‘ck’ as seen in the following words; kick, cash, account, chemistry, liquor, quick. It is important to remind you that the /k/ sound is silent in words like knife, know, knowledge, knew, knit.

On the other hand, the spelling symbols for the / g / consonant are ‘g’, ‘gh’ as in go, mug, ghetto, and ghastly. But you need to also remember that the sound “g” is not pronounced before “n” at the beginning or end of words, as in the following examples: gnaw, gnash, sign, and reign.

The sound is also not pronounced before “m” at the end of words like ‘paradigm’, and ‘diaphragm’.

Interference Problems

It has been observed that the velar consonants do not pose serious problems to most Nigerians. However, it has to be mentioned that many Efik – Ibibio speakers are unable to distinguish clearly, between the voiceless /k/ and the voiced /g/. Sometimes, we may hear ‘kood’ or even ‘koot’ instead of ‘good’.

Do you experience interference from your language? Always remember that the key is to listen carefully as well as practice the sounds you have problems pronouncing regularly.

Practical Exercises

Now, listen to the following examples where the two consonants are contrasted at the beginning, middle, and end of words. Try and pronounce each word aloud after listening to the aural production.

/k/	/g/	/k/	/g/	/k/	/g/
cane	gain	licking	digging	pick	pig
curl	girl	market	target	lack	lag
kilt	guilt	lacking	lagging	thick	dig
crow	grow	thicker	bigger	lick	league
cold	gold	weaker	eager	peck	peg.

FRICATIVES

Fricatives form the largest class of consonants in English. When studied carefully, you will observe that except for /h/ which stands alone, the fricatives all occur in voiceless and voiced pairs.

Fricatives have an interesting characteristic; when they are produced, air escapes through a small passage that is made as the relevant organs of speech are brought in contact but not close enough to cause a total obstruction to the flow of air. The air stream therefore escapes with some frictional noise, through the little space between the articulators.

There are nine consonant phonemes whose main sound all have friction as their most important feature; /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h /.

/f, and v/

The production of / f / involves the upper front teeth and the lower lip.

The partial obstruction caused by the contact between the upper teeth and the lower lip produces a continuous frictional noise as the air stream passes through the oral cavity. There is no vibration of the vocal cord because the glottis is wide open during the production of the consonant.

This is why it is called the voiceless labio-dental fricative which can be spelt as ‘f’, ‘ff’, ‘fe’, ‘ph’, and ‘gh’ as illustrated in the following words: ‘fine, coffee, life, philosophy, and laugh’.
On the other hand, / v / is the voiced labiodental fricative sound. Its production is similar to that of / f / in all respects. The sound is always spelt “v” except in a proper noun like “Stephen”.

Interference Problems

Fricatives do not pose serious problems to Nigerian speakers, although it is important to mention that some speakers of Hausa language tend to substitute /f/ for /p/. The word 'father' is pronounced as 'paza' and 'poolish' instead of 'foolish'.

In fact, many other speakers from this linguistic group often substitute /b/ for /v/. So, they say 'bery' instead of 'very'. 'You are bery stupid' instead of 'You are very stupid'.

All of these can be overcome easily if the people concerned engage in the regular practice of articulating these sounds.

Practical Exercises

Listen to the following examples where the two consonants are contrasted at the beginning, middle, and end of words. Then pronounce these words out loud to yourself.

/f/	/v/	/f/	/v/	/f/	/v/
fast	vast	suffer	cover	leaf	leave
feel	veal	rougher	lover	proof	prove
ferry	very	proofing	proving	surf	serve
feeler	velar	defied	divide	fluff	glove
few	view	refuse	reviews	strife	stive

/ θ / and / ð /

These are the dental fricative sounds. / θ / is voiceless while / ð / is voiced. When articulating each of these consonants, the soft palate is raised so that all the breath is forced to go through the mouth. The tip of the tongue moves close to the upper front teeth; this is the narrowing where the friction is made.

The only spelling symbol for these consonants is "th".

Interference Problems

The dental fricatives do not exist in Nigerian languages. So, many Nigerian speakers of English usually experience difficulty in pronouncing the sounds.

Many educated Nigerians often pronounce /θ/ as ‘t’. Consequently, such forms as ‘tink’ and ‘pat’ are pronounced instead of ‘think’ / θink/ and ‘path’ / paθ/.

Similarly, many Nigerians pronounce / ð/ as ‘d’. For example, they pronounce ‘day’ instead of ‘they’ / ðei/, and pronounce ‘dis’ instead of / ðis/.

At this juncture, it is important to make it very explicit when to pronounce / ð/ and / θ/. It is very important to always remember that in such cases where ‘th’ is pronounced as ‘t’, the appropriate pronunciation is / θ/.

Furthermore, in situations where ‘th’ is pronounced as‘d’, the appropriate pronunciation is / ð/.

Practice Exercises

Listen carefully to the following examples where / θ / and / ð /are contrasted at the beginning, middle, and end of words. You should also pronounce each word out loud as a practice technique.

/ θ /	/ ð /	/ θ /	/ ð /	/ θ /	/ ð /
thin	then	author	other	growth	loathe
think	this	earthy	worth	tooth	smooth
thief	these	Martha	mother	both	clothe
thought	those	nothing	brother	wreath	breathe
thirst	there	anthem	either	faith	bathe

/s/ and /z/

To articulate these consonants, the soft palate is raised so that all the breath is forced to go through the mouth. During this action, the tip and blade of the tongue come very close to the alveolar ridge so that there is a considerable narrowing at this point; not near the teeth and not near the hard palate either. The teeth come close together but do not touch one another. Interestingly, the friction for these sounds, especially for /s/, is much greater than for /f, v, θ/ and / ð/.
It is also important to state that while the vocal cord vibrates during the production of /z/, there is no vibration of the vocal cord as /s/ is produced. So, /s/ is a voiceless alveolar fricative while /z/ is the voiced alveolar fricative sound.

The spelling symbols for /s/ are ‘s’, ‘sc’, ‘c’, and ‘x’ as in ‘slip, science, cease, and lax’. Meanwhile, /z/ has the following spelling symbols ‘z’, ‘s’, and ‘x’ as in ‘zip, plays and exact’.

Interference Problems

Some Nigerian speakers tend to have problems in the correct pronunciation of these sounds. For example, some Hausa speakers pronounce /ð/ as /z/. ‘I’m the one’ becomes ‘I’m ze one’. On the other hand, some Yoruba speakers often confuse /s/ for ‘sh.

So, we hear [si keim] instead of [ʃi keim] (she came).

That apart, there are many instances in which there is confusion over the pronunciation of the letter‘s’ in English words. But an easy way out is to bear the following techniques in mind;

- In spoken English when forming plural nouns, always remember that /s/ occurs after these voiceless sounds: /p, t, k, f, ʃ, s, tʃ / as in laps, parts, books, chiefs, churches, brushes, buses, etc. On the other hand, /z/ occurs after voiced sounds like /d, b, n, m, ŋ, ð, etc/. Examples are;

  cards, tabs, songs, names, lanes, wives, clothes. It is important to note that /z/ is also used to make the plurals of words that end in vowels. For example, toes, tomatoes, potatoes.

- You also need to know that when pronouncing words that are nouns the /s/ sound occurs, while /z/ occurs for verbs and adjectives. See the following examples; device – (noun) /s/, devise – (verb) /z/ Close – (noun) /s/, close – (adjective) /z/.

Practical Exercise

Listen carefully to the following examples where / s / and /z /are contrasted at the beginning, middle, and end of words. Thereafter, pronounce each word out loud to yourself.

/ s /	/z /	/ s /	/z /	/ s /	/z /
seal	zeal	looser	loser	ice	eyes
sink	zinc	lacy	lazy	lace	days
sip	zip	fussy	fuzzy	place	plays
said	zed	racing	raising	coarse	cause

/ ʃ / and / ʒ /

/ ʃ /

The production of / ʃ / involves the tip, blade and sides of the tongue.

The contact between the sides of the tongue and the upper sides of the teeth creates the groove through which the airstream escapes with a frictional noise. The blade of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate while the front part makes a light contact with alveolar ridge. There is no vibration as the consonant is produced. / ʃ / is therefore, a voiceless palato – alveolar fricative.

The consonant /ʒ / is the voiced counterpart of / ʃ /, and is therefore known as the voiced palato- alveolar fricative.

The consonant / ʃ / has the following variant spellings: 'ss', 'si', 'tio', 'sci', 'ch', 'che', 'sch', 'ti', 'ci'. While / ʒ / has the following spelling symbols: 's', 'g', 'z', and 'sio', it is important to state that this consonant does not usually occur at the beginning or end of an English word.

Interference Problems

Many Yoruba speakers tend to pronounce 's' instead of / ʃ / or /ʒ / in words like 'sure', 'television', 'nation', 'evasion'. The obvious reason for this is that these sounds do not occur in the Yoruba language itself. If you are one of those experiencing this challenge, read the following carefully; According to Ogbulogo (2002), the combination '–sion' is usually pronounced / ʃ / or / ʒ /. If the '–sion' combination occurs after consonants, it is pronounced / ʃ / as in the following words: 'emulsion, compulsion, tension, version, and mansion'. If the '–sion' combination occurs after vowel sounds, the / ʒ / pronounced as in the following words: 'invasion, persuasion, occasion, erosion, cohesion, lesion, corrosion, division, diversion, decision, intrusion, and fusion'.

Practical Exercises

Listen carefully to the pronunciation of the following groups of words where / ʃ / and / ʒ / are contrasted at different positions in the words.

Pronounce these words out loud to yourself as a practice exercise.

/ ʃ /	/ ʒ /	/ ʃ /	/ ʒ /	/ ʃ /	/ ʒ /
sure	vision	nation	evasion	mission	erosion
passion	pleasure	special	seizure	bash	beige
douche	garage	mention	barrage	posh	rouge

/ h /

The / h / consonant is the voiceless glottal fricative sound which is produced as the flow of air passes through an open glottis to the oral cavity. It is the airstream which passes through the open glottis to the open mouth that produces the friction which gives rise to the sound. The spelling variant for this sound are: ‘h’, and ‘wh’ as reflected in the following words: ‘hat, behave, whole and whore’.

Please note that although this consonant always occurs before a vowel, it does not occur at the end of an English word, and is not usually pronounced at the beginning of words like: ‘hour, honour, and heir’. The / h / sound is not also pronounced in words like ‘vehicle, exhibit, and exhaust’.

Interference Problems

Again, the major problem here is that some Nigerian speakers of English tend to pronounce /h/ in words where it should not be pronounced. For example, Nigerian speakers of English from different linguistic backgrounds pronounce the /h/ sound clearly in words like ‘hour’, ‘honour’, ‘heir’ and ‘honest’. Yoruba speakers often exhibit these ‘traits’ in their pronunciation of these sounds.

Practical Exercises

Now listen to the following pairs of words; one word with /h/ and one without the letter: Pronounce the words to yourself and see if you got them right.

harm	arm
heat	eat
hedge	edge
hair	air
hall	all
hill	ill

AFFRICATES

/ tʃ / and /dʒ /

There are two parts to an English affricate: an initial stop and a final fricative. The consonants / tʃ / and /dʒ / are the only two affricates found in English. They are stop consonants of a special kind. The air is trapped as for all stop consonants, but it is released with definite friction of the / ʃ, ʒ / kind. During the articulation of these sounds, the flow of air is totally obstructed by the articulators and this obstruction is slowly released. It is the gradual release of the airstream that marks an important difference between the articulation process of the affricates and that of the plosives.

Remember that the production of the stops involves a total obstruction of the airstream but the airstream is immediately released.

In the production of /tʃ /, the blade and rims of the tongue form a total obstruction to the airstream with the alveolar ridge while the front of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate. The vocal cords do not vibrate during the production of this consonant, and is therefore called the voiceless palato-alveolar affricate. The spelling variants for this sound are: ‘ch’, ‘ture’, ‘teous’, ‘tual’, and ‘t’.

The / dʒ / is the voiced palato-alveolar affricate sound, and it is usually articulated in the same way as the / tʃ / consonant sound. Spelling symbols for the consonant are: ‘j’, ‘g’, ‘dg’, ‘d’ as in ‘just, gender, ridge and soldier’.

Interference Problems

Most Nigerian speakers of English whose languages do not have double articulation of consonants, often have problems in pronouncing these consonants. For example, many Yoruba speakers are known to pronounce ‘s’ instead of /tʃ /. For example, the word ‘church’ is pronounced ‘shursh’. This phenomenon is also noticeable in the spoken English of people from the Ijaw linguistic group.

That apart, the consonant /dʒ / is often pronounced /j/ as in ‘you’/ by many Efik-Ibibio speakers. For example, many speakers from this group will pronounce ‘jump - /dʒ ʌ.p/ as /j. ʌ.p/. While the speakers from Ijaw will pronounce it as ‘zump’. Many have been known to say ‘zump’ instead of ‘jump’.

Now, if you are still having problems with this sound, spend some time on these sounds and practise them consistently.

Practice Exercise

Listen carefully to the pronunciation of the following groups of words where /tʃ / and /dʒ / are contrasted at different positions in the words. You should also pronounce these words out loud to see if you got the pronunciation right.

/tʃ /	/dʒ /	/tʃ /	/dʒ /	/tʃ /	/dʒ /
chin	gin	batches	badges	rich	ridge
cheer	jeer	watching	lodging	search	surge
choice	Joyce	kitchen	pigeon	fetch	edge
choke	joke	riches	ridges	catch	cadge
chain	Jane	catching	cadging	watch	lodge

APPROXIMANTS

There are four consonants in English known as approximants because their articulation approximates or is close to that of vowels. There is very little obstruction in the production of approximants. This group is further divided into two namely, the glides /r, j, w/, and the lateral /l/.

The production of the glides consists of a quick, smooth, non-friction glide towards a following vowel sound. The consonants are; /r, j, w /.

We need to study these sounds individually so that the processes involved in their articulation can be better understood.

/ r /

This is the voiced alveolar sound and it is also called a liquid. To articulate the sound, the tip of the tongue comes very near the alveolar ridge but does not touch it. The rims of the tongue touch the upper molars while the air stream passes over the centre of the tongue without friction. The vocal cords vibrate, and this makes it appropriate to describe /r/ as a voiced frictionless alveolar liquid. It does not occur at the end of a word. The usual spelling symbol is ‘r’.

Interference Problems

It has been observed that some Nigerian speakers From the Tiv/Idoma linguistic groups in Benue State sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between the /l/ and /r/ sounds in spoken English since these two sounds can be used interchangeably without affecting the meaning of such words in the Nigerian languages concerned.

However, the reverse is the case in the English language, because an interchange of the /l/ and /r/ sounds in English will definitely affect the meaning of the words where they appear. For example: “lag” and “rag” the /l/ and /r/ letters/sounds in these words are significant and convey meanings.

Study the words given below and listen carefully to the way they are pronounced. Can you hear the contrast between the sounds in the words?

/l/	/r/	/l/	/r/
lock	rock	play	pray
lead	read	flesh	fresh
led	red	blew	brew
light	wright	ply	pry
loot	root	bleed	breed

/w/ and /j/

These two consonants are bilabial and palatal approximants respectively. They are also called semi-vowels. They occur in words like /w/ as in ‘win’ and /j/ as in ‘yes’. The two sounds function as consonants but they are described as semi-vowels because their production does not involve friction because the tongue is sufficiently far from the roof of the mouth to enable the air from the lungs to pass through freely without noise.

/w/

To articulate /w/, the back of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate to a position slightly higher than it takes for the production of /u: /. At the same time, the lips are as rounded as they are for /u:/ while the vocal cords vibrate. Although the upper and lower lips do not make any contact as to obstruct the flow of air, /w/ is described as a voiced bilabial consonant.

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words where /w/ is clearly articulated. Thereafter, repeat the words out loud to yourself.

wear	swear
wise	twice
wimp	swim
well	swell
win	queen

/ j /

In the production of /j/, the front part of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate to a position slightly higher than it takes for the production of / I: /. The lips are spread while the vocal cords vibrate.

This is why the / j / consonant is described as the voiceless palatal semi-vowel sound. Interestingly, when / j / follows /p, t, k/ it loses the voice which it usually has, and is made voiceless; this causes some friction to be heard, and it is important to do this because otherwise the stop consonants may be heard as /b, d, g/.

You must always take care not to confuse the phonetic symbol / j/ which represents the letter "y" and the 'j' which is the letter for the phonetic symbol / dʒ /. The sound / j / has the following spelling symbols; y, ew, eau, ue, ui, as in yam, stew, beauty, argue, suit, humid.

Interference Problems

The major problem observed with the above mentioned sounds is that many speakers from the Efik-Ibibio group mispronounce the /dʒ / sound as /j/. However, the /w/ sound does not present any problem to speakers.

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words where /j/ is clearly articulated in words:

yard hew computer yacht

In the following words, /j/ is not word- initial but is pronounced like a quick, weak /i:/ - sound before the following vowel:

beauty due few view value music new

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words where /w/ and /j/ are contrasted in words. After listening, pronounce the words out loud to yourself.

/w/	/j/
wear	year
woke	yolk
woo	you
watch	yacht
swam	stew

/l/

In the production of the lateral /l/, the tip of the tongue is in contact with the alveolar ridge thereby causing a particular obstruction of the air stream, which passes along the sides of the tongue. The sound is voiced and there is no friction. The usual spelling symbol is 'l', but the sound is silent in words like 'palm, walk, yolk, would, calm, calf, chalk, should' etc.

Interference Problems

This sound does not pose pronunciation problems to most Nigerian speakers of English. However, some people tend to overstress the sound in some words where its pronunciation should be silent.

Now, listen carefully to the pronunciation of the following groups of words where /l/ appears at the initial, middle and end of the words. Ensure that you also pronounce the words out loud to yourself as a way of practicing the pronunciation of the words.

leaf	feeling	owl
learn	allow	tail
letter	foolish	mile
lost	believe	bill
loose	holiday	sell

NASAL CONSONANTS

The nasal sounds in English are consonants which are produced when the soft palate is lowered to close the oral cavity so that air stream passes through the nasal cavity.

There are three phonemes in English which are represented by nasal consonants; /m, n, ŋ /
/m/ and /n/

All languages have consonants which are similar to /m/ and /n/ in English. Note the following movements of the organs of speech during the articulation of these consonants:

- The soft palate is lowered for both /m/ and /n/ in English.
- For /m/ the mouth is blocked by closing the two lips, for /n/ by pressing the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge, and the sides of the tongue against the sides of the palate
- Both sounds are voiced in English as they are in other languages, and the voiced air passes out through the nose.

It is important to remember that the /m/ sound is called the voiced bilabial nasal consonant, and the spelling symbols for this sound are ‘m’ and ‘mm’ as in man, stream, limit, bomb, comb, accommodation, ammonia, ammunition.

The /n/ consonant, on the other hand, is the voiced alveolar nasal. It is spelt as ‘n’ or ‘nn’ as in net, ten, sign, naughty, winner, and sinner.

It should be stated too that this consonant is usually silent when it occurs after “m” in word - final positions as in “damn” and “hymn”.

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words where /m/ and /n/ are contrasted in words.

/m/	/n/
foam	phone
sim	sin
warm	one
smear	snare
some	son

/ ŋ /

This is the velar nasal consonant. It is the third English nasal consonant and the only one likely to cause trouble for learners because many languages do not have a consonant formed like / ŋ /.

During the articulation of this sound, the following things happen:

- The soft palate is lowered and all the air passes out through the nose.
- The mouth is blocked by the back of the tongue pressed against the soft palate
- The sound is voiced, and does not occur at the beginning of an English word.

The spelling variants for the sound are
"ng" as in: singer, ringer, sing, ring, wing, winger, anger, angry, hungry, wrung.
"nk" as in 'bank', 'thank', 'sink', 'blink', and 'think'.

Interference Problems

The sounds /m/ and /n/ occur in basically all Nigerian languages. So, there is no interference problem associated with these sounds.

However, the observation made by scholars about the /ŋ/ sound is that the articulation of the sound is usually not so audible in the speeches of many Nigerians.

Pronunciation Practice

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words where /m/, /n/ and / ŋ /are contrasted in words.

/m/	/n/	/ ŋ/
sim	sin	sing
ram	ran	rang
tom	ton	tongue
some	son	song
simmer	sinner	singer

It is important to state at this point, that for you that is currently taking this course, the regular practice of the so-called problem sounds is mandatory. This will ensure your proficiency in the articulation of these consonant sounds.

3.3 Pronunciation Exercises

Listen carefully to the pronunciation of the following minimal pairs and practise pronouncing them on your own.

Voiced and Voiceless Sounds

/ b / / / p /

bull / pull
big / pig
bin / pin
bowl / pole

/ g / / / k /

gold / cold
good / could
goat / coat
gate / Kate

/ d / / / t /

die / tie
down / town
dime / time
dim / Tim

/ v / / / f /

van / fan
vine / fine
view / few
very / ferry
oval / offal

/dʒ / / / tʃ /

gin / chin
June / tune
Lunge / lunch
Jew / chew
Hedge / fetch

/z/ / / s/

these / this
as / mass
has / hassle
puzzle / pestle

/ ð / / θ /

the / thing
thou / thousand
this, / think
them, / through
clothes / cloth

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Go back and practice the articulation of all the consonants that you have studied in this unit. Pay particular attention to the sounds [θ, ð, tʃ, dʒ, ŋ ʃ , and ʒ].

4.0 CONCLUSION

Interestingly, we have observed that no two consonants are alike in English, and you need to take out some time to study the consonants which do not occur in Nigerian languages, and are therefore substituted with other convenient consonants which occur in your mother tongue.

It is important to always take care not to confuse a consonant sound of English with a letter of the alphabets since there may be no regular relationship between a consonant and its spelling symbols.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have been exposed significantly to the detailed description, articulation and analysis of the English consonants.

Different graphical descriptions were also presented to make explicit the meaning and understanding of the consonant sounds. The pronunciation practice exercises were meant to give you a through grounding in the production / articulation of the consonants.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Listen carefully. In this test there are three words to a line. One of these words will be pronounced. Identify the word that is pronounced, and write the letter that corresponds to that word on your answer sheet. There are no examples for the test

		A	B	C
i.	1.	kin	tin	pin
ii.	2.	speaks	sticks	sneaks
iii.	3.	rib	limb	nib
iv.	4.	wasp	lisp	whisk
v.	5.	bomb	born	burn
vi.	6.	try	cry	fry
vii.	7.	bent	sent	went
viii.	8.	tin	thing	this
ix.	9.	breed	breath	breathe
x.	10.	decrease	decrees	degrees
xi.	11.	slim	skin	spin
xii.	12.	cheap	joke	ship
xiii.	13.	choke	joke	woke
xiv.	14.	singer	sinner	sinker
xv.	15.	ate	earth	eight
xvi.	16.	burned	banged	band
xvii.	17.	prompt	pumped	pact
xviii.	18.	posed	paused	post
xix.	19.	pinched	hinged	pitched
xx.	20.	basked	asked	waxed.
xxi.	21	sprint	strip	brisk
xxii.	22	through	though	rough
xxiii.	23	passed	basked	flask
xxiv.	24	winked	winged	wringed
xxv.	25	finger	singer	linger

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MODULE 3 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE ENGLISH VOWELS

UNIT 1 PARAMETERS FOR THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE ENGLISH VOWELS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous module you learnt about the English consonants. Among other things, we mentioned some important reasons why we had to begin with the description of the consonants. We said that consonants contribute more to making English understood than vowels do. We also said that consonants are generally made by a specific and definite interference of the vocal organs with the air stream, and this makes them easier to describe and understand. In this module we shall learn the English vowels. We shall get to know that like consonants, vowels are also sounds, and the principle underlying the production of vowels is the same as that which underlies the production of consonants.

Interestingly, vowels are more difficult to describe because there are no physical articulators apart from the tongue to use to describe their production. However, there are basic principles that guide the production of vowels.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- explain the parameters used in classifying the English vowels
- correctly identify the vowels of English from the inventory of English sounds

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Parameters

According to Elugbe (2000), the quality of a given vowel sound depends on the shape of the vocal tract as determined by the tongue, the lips and the soft palate, which controls the velic passage.

When we studied the classification of consonants in the previous module, we found that three basic parameters are used in classifying consonants; *Voicing*, *Place of Articulation* and *Manner of Articulation.* In the case of the vowels, their classification differs from that of the consonants in at least two ways:

Unlike consonants, the tongue makes no direct contact with the roof of the mouth or oral cavity in the production of vowels.

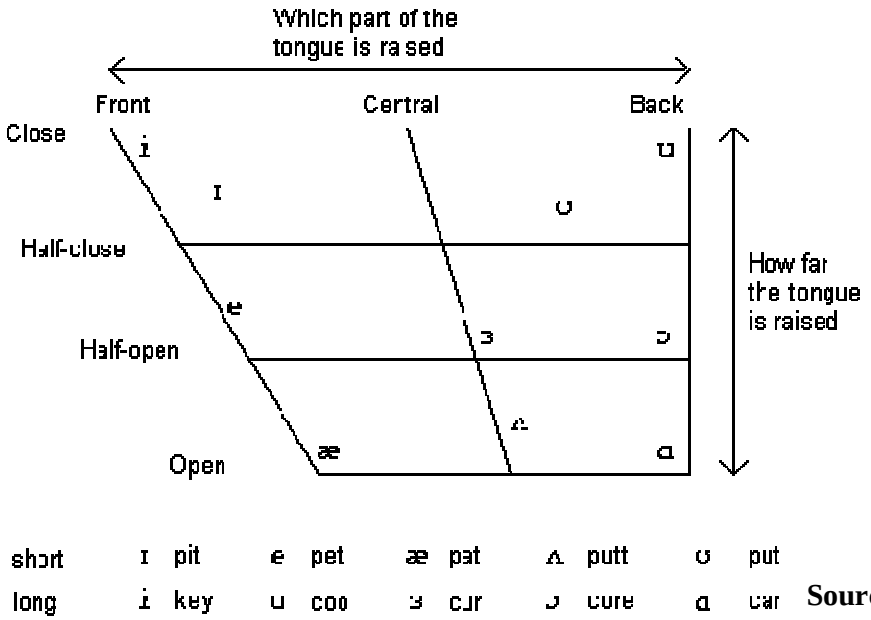
All vowels are naturally voiced because they are produced with vibration of the vocal cords.

These differences make the classification of voicing, place and manner of articulation quite redundant in the case of vowels.

Vowels are classified according to four parameters; Tongue Height (vertical), Tongue Horizontal position, Shape of the Lips and vowel length. These are discussed in detail below.

3.2 Tongue Height (Vertical)

This refers to how high or how low the tongue is in the oral cavity, and the distance between the upper surface of the tongue and the palate.
See diagram 1 below:



Source:

www.ex.ac.uk/-lecture/hockett.htm

From the diagram given we can make the following observations:

when the front of the tongue is flat on the bottom of the mouth, and the distance between the upper surface of the tongue and palate is open, you produce the vowel /a:/ as in ‘star’.

When you raise the front part of the tongue a little, and the distance between the tongue and the palate is open, you produce the vowel /æ/ as in ‘pat’.

When you keep your mouth as wide open as possible and you raise the front higher again, and the distance between the tongue and the palate is more close than open (close mid), you produce vowels like /e/ as in ‘met’.

When you raise the front part of the tongue to a very high position such that it is hidden behind the teeth, and the distance between the tongue and the palate is close, you produce /i:/ as in ‘sea’.

It is important to mention that with each vowel, the tongue is raised a little higher than the previous position until it gets to the highest position.

3.3 Tongue Position (Horizontal)

This describes how front or back the tongue is. For instance, the front part of the tongue is involved in the production of the front vowels /i:/, ɪ/, /e/, and /æ/. The back of the tongue is used correspondingly in the production of the back vowels; /a: / /o: /, /o/, /u/, /u: /. See diagram 2 below:

Vowels

	Front	Central	Back
High	/i:/ /I/	/ə/	/ʊ/ /u:/
Mid	/e/	/ ʌ	/ɔ/ /ɔ:/
Low	/æ/	/3:/	/a/

Tongue is raised from here

Source: http://facweb.faoman.edu/~wrogers/phonemes/phone/pde/po.htm

Now, do the following quickly, to really get a feel of what we are talking about here:

Let the back of your tongue move very close to the soft palate, and let air be quickly drawn inwards as you produce the vowel /u:/ (go from /u:/ to /i:/ and back again to see the difference in the high front and high back position of the tongue).

Lower the back of the tongue a little from /u:/ to produce /u/ as in ‘put’

Lower the back of the tongue a little more for / ɔ:/ as in ‘fought’

Lower the back of the tongue the more for / ɔ / as in ‘pot’.

Did you notice any changes in the position of the tongue in the production of these words?

At this point, it is important to quickly remind ourselves what we have done so far. We have been able to establish the fact that tongue ‘height’ and ‘frontness’ are two very important aspects of vowel classification.

You can arrange the vowels in a grid according to these two dimensions. The bottom of the grid is usually drawn shorter because there is really not much room for the tongue to maneuver as the mouth opens more.

To get a feel for these distinctions, pronounce the words under diagram 2 and note where your tongue is and how close it is to the roof of the mouth.

3.4 Lip Rounding

This refers to the shape of the lips in the production of certain vowels. During the production of any vowel, the lips may be pushed forward into a round shape or drawn backwards into a spread and flat (closed) shape. At other times, the lips are neutral because they are neither rounded nor spread. Now try the following;

Say a long /i:/ as in pee [iiiii]

Now say a long /u:/ as in you [uuuuu]

Did you observe the changes in the shape of the lips? A careful study of the shape of your lips in the front of a mirror will clearly show that the lips are spread when we say [i:] and rounded when we say [u:]

Interestingly, if you say [æ] as in ‘back’ or ‘mat’, you will observe that the lips are neither spread nor rounded.

3.5 Duration (Vowel Length and Quality)

This has to do with the time spent during the production of certain vowels in comparison to others, and the muscular activity involved in the production. It may interest you to know that in English, there are short vowels as well as long ones. We show that a vowel is long by adding a colon after it. For instance, /i:, a:, u:/ etc.

Now, take a look at these tables that show the short and long English vowels of the International Phonetic Association (IPA).

SHORT VOWELS

IPA		Examples	IPA		Examples
æ		C*a*t, b*a*d, tr*a*p	ɛ		b*e*d, n*e*t, dr*e*ss
ə		*a*bout, comm*a*	ɪ		k*i*t, b*i*d, h*y*mn
i		happ*y*, glor*i*ous	ɒ		h*o*t, *o*dd, w*a*sh
ʌ		d*u*g, r*u*n, str*u*t	ʊ		b*oo*k, p*u*t, f*oo*t

LONG VOWELS

IPA		Examples	IPA		Examples
ɑ:		c*ar*t, *ar*m	ɛ:		h*air*,d*a*re, v*a*rious
ɚ:		h*er*, n*ur*se	i:		M*ee*t,s*ee*, fl*ee*ce
ɔ:		p*or*t, s*aw*	u:		b*oo*t, t*oo*

Source: http://facweb.faoman.edu/~wrogers/phonemes/phone/pde/po.htm

Many speakers of English often make the mistake of not distinguishing between the short vowels and the long vowels.

Now say the words in the various boxes in the tables out loud. Did you notice any difference in the length of the vowels?
Indeed, in each of the boxes in the tables of vowels above, there are two differences:

There is a difference in quality. Here, the tongue position is higher and more directed to the edges of the vowel area for the long vowels than for the short ones.

There is also length difference. This is also called difference in quantity.

This is why we can say that the way the vowels are written in the examples above show the differences in quality and quantity. Note that quantity and length refer to duration. This is why we say that it takes longer to produce the vowel [u:] than [ʊ] in words.

So, it is important to remember that duration refers to the time it takes to produce a vowel, while quality refers to the way the vowel sounds in our ears.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

Now try and find more examples to exemplify the pairs of similar, but different vowels based on ‘duration’ and ‘quality’.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Describing vowels is a bit more difficult than describing consonants.

This is because within the bounds of the 'vowel-space'(generally around the palatal region) there are literally infinite numbers of possible vowels, and any one person's vowels are different from any other person. This of course means that a general description of a vowel is much more an approximation than an exact description. Of course, there are parameters for describing vowels, just as there are for consonants. These parameters include the tongue position, the shape of the lips and the duration of the production of the vowels.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we tried to acquaint you with the various parameters used for the classification of the English vowels. We explained how the tongue position can be manipulated or changed in two different ways; vertically and horizontally. We also studied how lip rounding (shape of the lips) and vowel duration are used as relevant parameters to classify the vowels. Clearly, therefore, the parameters for describing vowels are completely different from the ones used in describing the consonants.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

How would you distinguish between the vertical and horizontal tongue positions as they are used in the classification of English vowels?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 2 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE VOWELS

CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the previous unit, we learned that English vowels are generally described using certain important parameters which are the tongue position, lip rounding and duration. In this unit, you will study in detail, English vowels and why they are regarded as distinct sound units that must be studied carefully. This is especially because of the tendency to confuse vowels that are closely related in articulation.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

At the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify all the vowels of English
- describe the physical characteristics of the vowels
- improve your production of English vowels.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 Categorisation of Vowels

A vowel is any vocal sound that can be made continuously with no blockage of the oral cavity. So, the lips are open, and the tongue is not touching the interior of the mouth also known as the oral cavity.

The "oral cavity" excludes the larynx. The different ways the vibrations and tensions in the larynx affect the quality of a vowel are called

phonation and the simplest phonation is called voicing. A sound is voiced when the vocal chords, which are cartilages inside the larynx, vibrate. In all languages, without exception, most vowels are voiced.

The English language has only voiced vowels. These vowels are categorised into three major groups; The Monophthongs, Diphthongs and Triphthongs, all of these vowels must be learned by listening and imitating.

3.2 The Monophthongs (Simple Vowels)

An English monophthong or simple vowel is a single sound made with the free flow of air from the lungs out of the mouth (oral cavity). The mouth passage is not blocked in any way by any of the speech organs like the tongue, teeth and lips. It is particularly important to know that although the tongue moves and the shape of the lips changes according to the kind of vowel being produced, the air stream flows out freely without any obstruction.

The monophthongs are further sub classified into short vowels and long vowels. The long vowels have two dots or a colon after them, while the short vowels have none. All of these vowels are usually categorized into front vowels, back vowels, and central vowels thus;

Front vowels	Back vowels	Central vowels
iː, ɪ, e, æ	uː, ʊ, ɔ, ɔː, aː	ə, ɜː, ʌ

These vowels, as we have already noted, are determined by changes in position of the lips, tongue and palate, but you also need to know that these changes can be very slight and difficult to detect.

The Vowel Chart

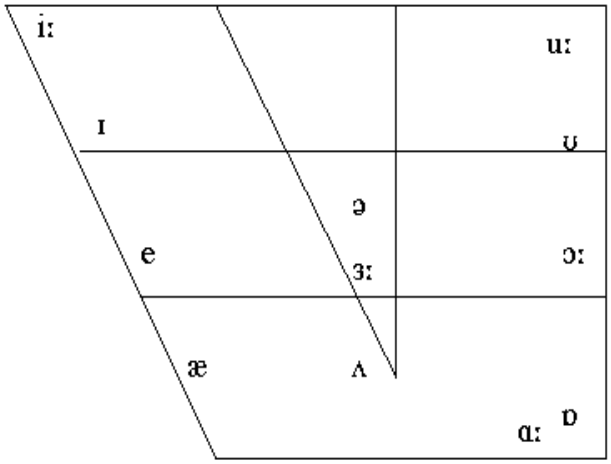
The vowel chart is quite a complicated looking diagram. All that it is trying to do is to represent where the tongue lies in relation to the openness of the mouth when you sound a vowel. So the front closed vowel /iː/ means that your tongue is in a forward position in the mouth which is in a relatively closed position. Try saying it to yourself and then contrast it with the open back sound in the diagram.

The vowel charts presented here, attempt to map the positions of the tongue and jaw in articulating vowels. It is worth mentioning that, as it is so difficult to determine the exact position of the lips, tongue and palate, there is no single agreed upon vowel chart.

It is important that you study the various simple vowels presented in the chart A because this will provide you with the needed opportunity to really appreciate the differences in the production of the different simple vowels.

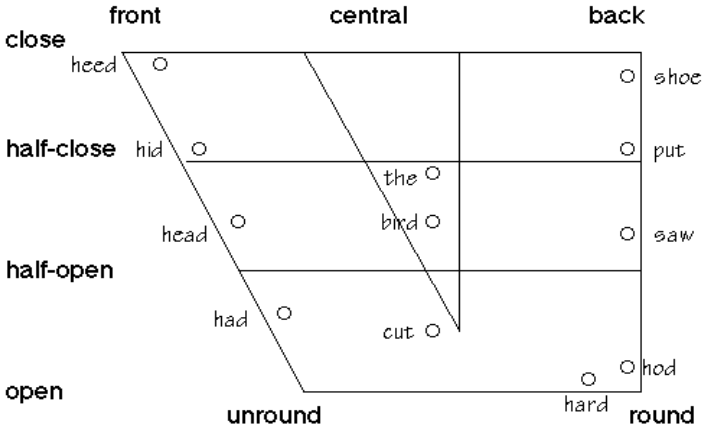
For instance, vowel chart B illustrates the monophthongs according to the various positions of the tongue. Please compare this with vowel chart A where some words containing these vowels are presented. Pronounce these words out loud. Did you observe the various positions of your tongue?

The Monophthongs presented in a vowel parallelogram illustrates the tongue position in the oral cavity during the production of the simple vowels.



Vowel Chart A

The tongue is raised from here:



Vowel Chart B

Source: www.wikipedia.free-encyclopedia

Detailed Description of the Monophthongs (Simple Vowels)

An English monophthong or simple vowel is a single sound made with the free flow of air from the lungs out of the mouth (oral cavity). The mouth passage is not blocked in any way by any of the speech organs like the tongue, teeth and lips. It is particularly important to know that although the tongue moves and the shape of the lips changes according to the kind of vowel being produced, the air stream flows out freely without any obstruction.

Monophthongs, just like other vowels, as we have already noted, are determined by changes in position of the lips, tongue and palate, but you also need to know that these changes can be very slight and difficult to detect. The fact is that although it is easy to see and to feel the lip differences, it is very difficult to see or to feel the tongue differences, and this is why all English vowels must be learned by listening and imitating.

English has twelve monophthongs which are divided into seven short and five long vowels. An alternative way of organizing them is according to where (in the mouth) they are produced. This method allows us to describe them as front, central and back. We can qualify them further by how high the tongue and lower jaw are when we make these vowel sounds, and by whether our lips are rounded or spread, and finally by whether they are short or long. This scheme shows the following arrangement:

The Front Vowels

These are the simple vowels that are articulated towards the front part of the oral cavity. They are four in number and are as follows:

/ i: /

This is a long vowel which is produced with the tip of the tongue tucked in against the lower front teeth while the lips are slightly rounded. This vowel is articulated the same way as vowel / ɪ / which is the short form of / i:/. However, the /i:/ vowel has many spelling forms that are different from the / ɪ / vowel. For instance, ‘ea’ – eat, ‘ee’ – see, ‘ei’ – receive etc.

Interestingly, the two vowels do have some spelling forms that are similar. See these examples:

/ i: /	/ ɪ /
'e' - even	'e'- except,
'ie' - thief	'ie'- sieve

One thing though, that will help you to distinguish / i: / from / ɪ / is that / i: / is longer than / ɪ / as well as different in the quality of the sound.

Now, practice pronouncing these pairs of words and pay attention to both the length of the vowel and their quality.

/ i:/	/ ɪ /
eat	it
sheep	ship
wheat	wit
cheek	chick
reach	rich

Interference Problems

The most likely difficulty Nigerian speakers often face with these vowels is that many speakers in Nigeria do not distinguish between the long / i: / and the short / ɪ / in their articulation, especially in connected speech.

Now listen to these sentences and select the correct option used:

Place the spoon on the other …(cheek / chick)
This is the (sheep / ship) I talked about yesterday
Driving in Lagos is a game of (wheats / wits).

/ e /

This is the third front vowel sound. It is a short vowel and is produced by raising the front part of the tongue towards the alveolar region of the

mouth. If you take a quick look at the vowel charts on pg 72, you will see that the lips are half –way between open and close.

This vowel occurs in so many Nigerian languages. So, many speakers do not have any difficulty in articulating the sound.

Listen to the pronunciation of the following groups of words where / i:/, / ɪ /, and / e /are contrasted:

/ i:/	/ ɪ /	/ e /
lead	lid	led
wheat	wit	wet
been	bin	Ben
cheek	chick	cheque
feel	fill	fell

Practise these words and be sure that each word really sounds different.

/æ/

This is the fourth front vowel. It is a short vowel, and is produced when the front part of the tongue is slightly raised towards the roof of the mouth.

This vowel does not occur in Nigerian Languages, and so, many speakers of English in Nigeria often face some difficulty in the articulation and identification of this sound. Many speakers pronounce the sound as ‘ah’which suggests wrongly, that it is a back vowel.

Typically, the /æ/ vowel is spelt ‘a’ in English. For instance; cap, bad, pack

An unusual spelling symbol for this sound is ‘ai’ as in plait.

Interference Problems

This is a very difficult vowel for many Nigerian speakers. Many often end up pronouncing the ‘ah’ sound in place of the /æ/ vowel.

Listen to the following words where the sounds / ɪ /, / e /, and /æ/ are contrasted in words. After listening, pronounce the words yourself and see if you got them right.

/ ɪ /	/ e /	/æ/
bid	bed	bad
pit	pet	pat
sit	set	sat
knit	net	gnat
bit	bet	bat

Now listen to these sentences and write out the words that contain the front vowels you have just studied.

1. I bet you bat better than your fans in the fens'
2. I bet you bat better than your fans in the fens
3. I can bet with my leg that they'll beat you in the league'

The Back Vowels

These are vowels that are usually articulated towards the back part of the oral cavity. As you articulate the back vowel sound, the shape of your lips is usually rounded making your vocal tract narrow.
The vowels are as follows:

/ a:/

This is a long vowel which may be described as a back vowel even though it is actually articulated with the part of the tongue between the centre and the back. While the lips are in neutral position, the jaw is fully open.

The most visible spellings of this vowel are 'ar', 'a', 'al', 'au', 'ear', 'er' - car, pass, palm, laugh, heart, Berkshire.

Interference Problems

Some people tend to pronounce the long /a:/ as if it is the short / æ/ but the difference between the two vowels is clearly illustrated in the following pairs of words:

/æ/	/ a:/
ban	barn
pat	part
cat	cart
bat	bath
pack	park

Pronunciation Practice

Now listen to these sentences and try reading them out loud to yourself.

‘My hard – hearted aunt had a fat cat in her flat’
‘Can I have a chat with you about the chart?
‘Put the cat in the cart, please.

/ ʌ/

This is a short vowel articulated with the back of the tongue while the jaw is ‘open’. The lips are rounded for the pronunciation of this vowel.

The common spelling symbols for this vowel are: ‘o’, ‘au’, ‘ou’, ‘a’ - as in ‘dog, laurels, cough, and want’.

It is important to mention that the short vowel / ʌ / is a bit like /a: / in quality though of course they must be kept separate. For / ʌ / the lips may be slightly rounded, for /a:/ they may not. Now pronounce the following words out loud:

/a:/	/ ʌ /
lark	lock
card	cod
dark	dock
last	lost
carp	cop

Interference Problems

The major problem observed in the speech of many Nigerians is that this vowel is often pronounced as the long / ɔ:/.

/ ɔ: /

This vowel is a long back vowel that is produced by raising the back of the tongue to a height where the jaw is between the 'half close' and 'half-open' position. The lips are usually rounded. This vowel has many spelling symbols: 'al', 'aw', ar', 'au', 'oar', 'oa', 'or', 'oor', 'ou', 'o' – see the following words: 'walk, saw, quarter, caught, soar, broad, more, door, bought, and force'.

Interference Problems

The main problem here is that many Nigerians tend to use this long vowel to replace its short counterpart / ʊ / in many English words.

Listen to the following pairs of words where the vowels / ɔ / and / ɔ:/ are contrasted, and then pronounce them out loud to yourself and see if you got the pronunciations right:

/ ɔ /	/ ɔ:/
shod	shored
cod	cord
wad	ward
Poll	Paul
spot	sport

/ ʊ /

This is a short vowel which may be described as a back vowel although the tongue part used for the articulation is nearer the centre than the back of the tongue. The lips are rounded while the jaw is in a 'close' position. The vowel has the following spelling symbols; 'u', 'o', 'oo', 'ou' as in – 'put', 'women', 'foot', 'could'.

Listen to the pronunciation of the words in the groups below. Pronounce the words out loud to yourself and see if your pronunciation is alright;

/ ʊ /	/æ/
book	hat
foot	fat
look	lack
put	pat

/u: /

This long vowel is articulated with the back of the tongue raised to a height just below the 'close' position while the lips are rounded. If you pronounce 'woo', the oral cavity becomes narrow as the lips are rounded, while the back of the tongue is raised.

It is not difficult to pronounce this vowel because many Nigerian languages have a vowel that can be approximated to the English /u:/.

However, it is not easy to identify the spelling symbols for the long /u/ because the vowel has many spelling symbols which are as follows; 'o', 'oo', 'ew', 'eau', 'u', 'ue', 'ui', 'iew', 'oe', 'ou' as in – 'do', 'spoon', 'chew', 'beauty', 'rule', 'true', 'fruit', 'view', 'shoe', 'you''.

Pronounce the following words and sentences, and pay attention to the differences between the short /ʊ/ and the long /u:/:

/ ʊ /	/u:/
foot	food
could	cooled
full	fool
pull	pool
wood	wooed

"Luke booed the fool whose foot was in the food"
'Pull the book out of the fire!', she shouted angrily
'Peter wooed the lady he should have booed'

The Central Vowels

/ ʌ /

For the articulation of this vowel, the centre of the tongue is raised while the jaw is 'open'. The lips are neutrally shaped. See vowel chart A. The spelling symbols for this vowel are; 'u', 'o', 'ou', 'oo', 'oe' as in – 'hut, come, young, blood, and does'.

Interference Problems

This vowel does not occur in Nigerian languages and Nigerian speakers of English find it difficult to pronounce it properly. It has been observed that many Nigerians tend to pronounce / ʌ / as / ɔ/ but there is much qualitative difference between the two vowels. The sets of words below are used to show the contrast between / ʌ / and / ɔ / on the one hand and between / ʌ / and /æ/ on the other.

/ ʌ /	/ ɔ /	/æ/
hut	hot	hat
stuck	stock	stack
cut	cot	cat
luck	lock	lack
cup	cop	cap

Now, pronounce these words (above) out loud and see if you got the differences between them.

/ ɜ: /

To produce this vowel, the centre of the tongue is raised to a height between ‘close’ and ‘open’ position and the lips are neutral in shape.. The various spelling symbols for / ɜ:/ are as follows:
‘ir’, ‘er’, ‘or’, ‘ur’, ‘ear’, ‘our’ as in – ‘bird’, ‘her’, ‘work’, ‘church’, ‘search’, and ‘journey’’.

Interference Problems

Many speakers in Nigeria usually find it difficult to pronounce this long central vowel correctly. It is a known fact that many educated speakers often pronounce the vowel wrongly as /e/. Consequently, many speakers in Nigeria are quick to say /ʃ et/ instead of /ʃɜ:t/ for the word ‘shirt’.

Now, listen carefully as the following groups of words are pronounced.

And then pronounce the pairs of words yourself. Make sure you pay attention to the differences between /ɜ: / and the other vowels.

/ ɔ: /	/ɜ:/	/a:/	/ɜ:/
ward	word	parch	perch
born	burn	hard	heard
warm	worm	cart	curt
cord	curd	barn	burn
torn	turn	pard	purred
/e/	/ɜ:/	/ ʌ /	/ɜ:/
end	earned	cub	curb
yen	yearn	such	search
debt	dirt	shut	shirt
best	burst	hub	herb
edge	urge	fun	fern

It is important to emphasise here that for you that is currently learning this course, you should be careful in identifying the spellings that use /ɜ:/. This is because you can easily mispronounce this vowel because of a wide range of possibilities as illustrated in the contrasts above.

/ə /

This is a short central vowel sound called the schwa. It is produced by raising the tongue towards the roof of the mouth while the lips remain in a neutral position. We shall study this vowel in detail soon.

Meanwhile, it is important to realize that /ə/, unlike the other vowels, is not represented by specific spelling symbols. Yet, it is a very important vowel that should be used correctly if one must pronounce English words properly in sentences and connected speech.

This vowel is represented by many letters usually in unaccented (unstressed) syllables. See the following examples;

‘a’, ‘er’, ‘u’, ‘re’, ‘ou’, ‘our’, ‘o’, ‘ar’, ‘ough’, as in – ‘alone, concert, column, there, famous, colour, kingdom, backward, and thorough’.

Interference Problems

A close observation will show that this central vowels of English is absent from the sound inventory of any Nigerian language. So, many Nigerian speakers of English , when confronted with this sound in

English words, often replace the sound with the nearest equivalents in their mother tongue – For instance, in 'again' the /ə/ sound is articulated like the diphthong / ei /, while in a word like 'famous' the /ə/ vowel is replaced by the / ɔ:/vowel.

Pronunciation Practice

Listen carefully as the following words are pronounced, and then practise pronouncing them on your own.

/ə/

Initial position	**Medial position**	**Final position**
obey /əbei/	dinners /dinəz/	measure /meʒ ə/
approve /əpru:v/	contain /kəntein/	sailor /seilə/
attend /ətend/	menace /menəs/	picture /piktʃə/
allow /əlaʊ /	hindered /hindəd/	Africa /æfrikə/
adore /ədɔ:/	ignorant /ignərənt/	chauffeur/ʃ əʊfə/

SELF ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Read the following pairs and groups of words as numbered – if possible into a tape – in such a way that a listener will be able to tell them apart.

(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)
feel	fill	turn	torn
eat	it	burn	born
sheep	ship	bird	board

(v)	(vi)
hat, hurt, hot	fill, feel, fail
bad, bird, bored	pill, peel, pail
car, curt, cot	wick, weak, wake,

3.3 The Diphthongs

This is another class of vowel sounds. Like the simple vowels, there is no obstruction to the free flow of air out of the mouth when a diphthong is pronounced or articulated. But unlike simple vowels, they contain two vowel sounds, which are usually pronounced as a single sound. This is why it is said that in spoken English, a diphthong (also gliding vowel) is a vowel combination involving a quick but smooth movement from one vowel to another, often interpreted by listeners as a single vowel sound or phoneme.

While simple vowels, or *monophthongs*, are said to have one target tongue position, diphthongs have two target tongue positions.

Furthermore, while simple vowels are represented in the International Phonetic Alphabet by one symbol: for example, the English "sum" as /s ʌ m/, diphthongs are represented by two symbols, for example English "same" as /seim/, where the two vowel symbols are intended to represent approximately the beginning and ending tongue positions.

English diphthongs can be divided into two groups; falling diphthongs and rising diphthongs. Falling (or descending) diphthongs start with a vowel of higher prominence (higher pitch or louder) and end in a vowel with less prominence, like /aɪ/ in "eye", while rising (or ascending) diphthongs begin with a less prominent vowel and end with a more prominent vowel, like /ʊə/ in "your". In closing diphthongs, the second element is closer than the first (e.g. [aɪ]); in opening diphthongs, more open (e.g. [ɪə]). Closing diphthongs tend to be falling, and opening diphthongs are generally rising, because open vowels are louder and therefore tend to be more prominent.

Centring diphthongs begin with front vowels like /ɪ, e, ʊ/ and end in a central vowel, the schwa /ə/.

It is important to emphasise that for ‘two vowels’ to be regarded as a diphthong, they must belong to the same syllable. A syllable is the smallest unit into which a word can be divided.

There are eight diphthongs in English, and their phonetic representations clearly indicate the initial and final vowels represented in the diphthong sound. Remember that for an accurate articulation, your tongue should glide from the first vowel in the diphthong to the second vowel in the diphthong.

See the following presentation of English diphthongs

aɪ	-	spice,	pie
eɪ	-	wait,	fate
ɔɪ	-	toy,	joy
əʊ	-	oats,	note
aʊ	-	clown,	vow
ɪə	-	deer,	pier
ɛə	-	hair,	bear
ʊə	-	cure,	fuel

Presented below are the diphthongs in English, their groupings and their various production techniques:

3.3.1 The Rising Diphthongs

During the production of a rising diphthong, the tongue moves from the position of a lower vowel up to and terminates at a position for a higher vowel.

The following sounds are classified as rising diphthongs and their descriptions are as follows;
/ eɪ/.

This is the diphthong used in ‘day’ which is pronounced /de**ɪ** /. For the production of /e**ɪ** /, there is no identifiable break between /e/ and /**ɪ**/.

Rather, the change from the /e/ vowel quality to the /**ɪ**/ vowel quality is a gradual process which follows the gliding movement of the tongue.

This means, therefore, that /e**ɪ**/ is just one vowel sound. The same thing can be said of all the diphthongs in English. In the production of the diphthongs, the first part is usually articulated with great energy which gets gradually reduced with the glide towards the final part of the diphthong. The articulation of /e**ɪ**/ actually starts with a sound whose quality is like that of /e/ and ends with another sound which has the quality of /**ɪ**/. The lips are ‘spread’ for the production of /e**ɪ**/.

The common spelling symbols for this diphthong are; ‘a’, ‘ai’, ‘ay’, ‘ei’, ‘ey’, ‘ea’ as in – *face, rain, pay, eight, they, break*.

Interference Problems

Many speakers of English in Nigeria often pronounce /eɪ/ as /e/. This is an error in pronunciation which you should always avoid.

Now, listen to the pronunciation of the following pairs of words which show the contrast between /e/ and /eɪ/, and then pronounce the words out loud to yourself:

/e/	/eɪ/
let	late
fell	fail
men	main
wet	wait
west	waist

/əʊ/

In the production of this diphthong, the glide begins with the centre of the tongue and moves to a position between the centre and the back with a slight closing movement of the lower jaw. The shape of the lips is neutral at the beginning of the articulation but becomes rounded at the end. The diphthong has the following spelling symbols; ‘o’, ‘oe’, ‘oa’, ‘ou’, ‘ow’ as in – go, toe, goat, soul, slow.

This diphthong does not pose pronunciation problems to most Nigerians.

Pronounce the following pairs of words, paying attention to the contrast between /əʊ/ and / ɔ: /:

/əʊ/	/ ɔ: /
code	cord
bone	born
poke	pork
note	naught
load	lord

/aɪ/

The articulation of this diphthong starts with a sound which has the quality of /a/ but the quality changes with the gradual glide towards /ɪ/.

If you pronounce the word ‘eye’, you will observe that the opening of the mouth gets smaller with the closing movement of the lower jaw following the glide towards /ɪ/. In writing, the /aɪ/ diphthong is represented with the following spelling symbols;

‘i’, ‘ie’, ‘ye’, ‘igh’,’eigh’, ‘uy’ as in – ‘time’, ‘lie’, ‘dye’, ‘high’, ‘height’, ‘buy’.

The pronunciation of this diphthong does not create any problem for speakers of English in Nigeria.

However, you need to practise the pronunciation of the following words which are used to show the contrast between /aɪ/ and /ɪ/ on the one hand and between /aɪ/ and /æ/ on the other;

/ɪ/	/aɪ/	/æ/	/aɪ/
sit	site	cram	crime
kit	kite	fat	fight
fin	fine	sat	sight
bit	bite	jab	jibe
stip	stripe	rap	ripe

Note that these examples are not exhaustive. Try and find more.

/aʊ /

The tongue glide for the articulation of /aʊ / starts at a position between the centre and the back, with a closing movement of the lower jaw. The gradual tongue glide towards /ʊ/ agrees with the closing movement of the jaw.

The shape of the lips changes from neutral to a rounded position. This diphthong has a few spelling symbols which are shown below:

‘ow;, ‘ou’, ‘ough’ as in – ‘cow’, ‘out’, and ‘plough’.

Now, pronounce the following pairs of words and pay attention to the contrast between /æ/ and /aʊ/.

/æ/	/aʊ/
band	bound
hand	hound
rand	round

mass	mouse
lass	louse

/ ɔɪ /

For the articulation of this diphthong, the tongue glide begins from the back towards the front and the lips which are 'rounded' gradually become spread as the tongue glide moves towards /ɪ/. There are only two spelling symbols for the diphthong. These are; 'oi' and 'oy' as in – 'boil' and 'boy'.

It is important to note that 'ouy' is an exceptional spelling as in 'buoy' which is pronounced as 'boy'.

Speakers of English in Nigeria do not usually experience any difficulty in pronouncing this diphthong, but it is necessary to show the contrast between / ɔ: / and / ɔɪ / as in the following words:

/ ɔ: /	/ ɔɪ /
corn	coin
bore	boy
ball	boil
call	coil
jaw	joy

Note that in all the diphthongs we have studied so far, the tongue is rising from a lower position to a higher one. There was no instance when the opposite happened. This is why these diphthongs are called rising or closing diphthongs.

3.3.2 The Centring Diphthongs

In a centring diphthong, the tongue starts from a position which is nearer the periphery of the vowel area and moves away from there towards a more central position. There are three diphthongs in this category, and their descriptions are presented below:

/ɪə/

If you pronounce the word 'here', you will observe that the shape of your lips remains neutral from the beginning of the articulation of the diphthong to the end while the glide begins with a tongue position for /ɪ/

and moves in the direction of /ə/. The spelling symbols for /ɪə/ are as follows:

'ere', 'ear', 'eer', 'eir', as reflected in these words; here, hear, beer, weird

This diphthong does not pose any problem to the Nigerian speaker.

Now, pronounce the following pairs of words, paying attention to the contrast between /au/ and /ɪə/.

/aʊ/	/ɪə/
how	hear
bough	bear
now	near
cloud	clear

/ ɛə /

To produce this diphthong, the glide begins from the front part of the tongue towards the centre. The shape of the lips is neutral throughout the production. Some words with /ɛə/ may have a final 'r' in the spelling but the 'r' is not pronounced unless it is followed by another word beginning with a vowel. In writing this diphthong is spelt as follows:

'air', 'are', 'eir', 'ere', 'ear' as reflected in the following words; hair, care, their, there, swear

Interference Problems

Many Nigerians often mispronounce this diphthong as /ɪə/. You are therefore advised to study the differences between these /eə/ and /ɪə/.

The following pairs of words clearly show the contrast between the two diphthongs. Listen carefully as they are pronounced, and then read the words out loud to yourself.

/ɪə/	/ ɛə /
here	there
wear	where

fear	fair
peer	pair
dear	dare

/ʊə/

The production of this diphthong involves a tongue glide from the position for the production of /u/ towards the position for the production of /ə/. The shape of the lips changes from rounded to neutral. The typical spelling symbols for this diphthong are ‘oor’, ‘ure’, ‘our’ as in – ‘boor, sure, and tour’.

Interference Problems

The problem observed here is that many Nigerians often mispronounce /ʊə/ as / ɔ:/. If you have this problem, then you need to listen carefully to the pronunciation of the following pairs of words, and then practise their pronunciations yourself:

/ ɔ:/	/ʊə/
bore	boor
pore	poor
shore	sure
tore	tour
yaws	yours

Although Nigerian languages do not have diphthongs, the English diphthongs are not particularly difficult to pronounce.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Indicate the diphthongs used in the following words. Enclose the symbols in slanting lines as in the example:

Word		Diphthong used
e.g.	eye	/aɪ/
i.	coat	----------
ii.	point	----------
iii.	wait	----------
iv.	crowd	----------
v.	queer	----------

3.4 Vowel Sequences (TRIPTHONGS)

We mentioned in the preceding section that Tripthongs are those sounds that consist of a movement or glide from one vowel to another and then onto a third. They are very similar to diphthongs, but have an extra schwa on the end of the diphthong. They are also referred to as 'vowel sequences'.

Indeed, a tripthong is a vowel with three qualities; a beginning quality, a middle quality, and an ending quality. This is why tripthongs are regarded as vowel sequences in English. They are glides which, in terms of duration in production, are longer than long vowels and diphthongs. The lip position is usually neutral. The tripthongs are five in number and are as follows:

/eɪə/, /aɪə/, / ɔɪə /, / əʊə /, / aʊə /

/aɪə, aʊə /

These two tripthongs are usually put together because they have the same starting point of production - /a/. The middle points tend to be weak in production; perhaps because of the strong vowels the sequence begins with.

Now, listen to the following words as the tripthongs / aɪə/ and / aʊə / are contrasted. You should also pronounce the words to see if you got the pronunciations right.

/aɪə/	/ aʊə /
tyre	tower
quiet	tired
buyer	bower
flyer	flower
iron	riot

/ eɪə, ɔɪə , əʊə /

These three tripthongs are not as common as the first two. They are pronounced like the normal diphthongs smoothly followed by the schwa /ə/. However, the middle vowels do not need to be weakened.

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words in the groups below. Ensure that you also pronounce them out loud to yourself to see if you got them right.

greyer	employer	grower
player	royal	followers
betrayer	lawyers	thrower
slayer	broilers	sower

It is important to mention here that you need little or no effort to articulate the tripthongs accurately in spoken English, although you still need to practice them regularly.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Read the following sentence aloud and write out the words that contain tripthongs. Indicate the tripthong in slanting strokes beside the words they are found.

“Darling, I’m dialing your maid by the bar near the fire” said the liar.

3.5 The Schwa

Please recall that in module 3 unit 2, we made mention of the schwa, and said specifically that its most important characteristic is that it is a weak central vowel.

The schwa vowel /ə/ is regarded as the vowel that occurs most frequently. It is a short version of /ɜ:/. It is particularly short and indistinct when it is not final. See the following examples:

again -/ əgen/, contain - /kəteın/, postman - /pəustmən/

In final position, that is before a pause, as in ‘better’ - betə, ‘Asia’- eıə
The vowel is difficult to pronounce because it varies from one context to another. In fact, there is no single letter in the English alphabet that represents the schwa (cf. 3.2).

Listen to the pronunciation of the following words in the groups below. You need to also pronounce them out loud to yourself to see if you got them right.

alone	conc**er**t	kingd**om**
col**u**mn	enorm**ou**s	fav**our**
theat**re**	thor**ough**	backw**ar**d

Please note that all the letters in bold print are the spelling symbols that represent the schwa vowel in English words.

Interference Problems

There are two main difficulties with this vowel: first, to identify it, that is to know when it is this vowel you should be aiming at; and second, to get the right quality. In the first case, do not be deceived by English spelling; there is no single letter which always stands for this vowel. So, always listen carefully and you will hear numerous examples where this vowel is used by many educated Nigerian speakers. In the second case, it is useful to learn, through printed texts, when it is adequate to use this vowel.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 4

Now, pronounce the following words that contain the schwa vowel; and see if your pronunciation got the schwa vowels correctly.

perhaps - /pəhæps/,	menace - /menəs/,	account- /əkaunt/
America - /əmerıkə/	murderer - /mɜ:dərə/	collar - /kɔ lə/
flatter - /flætər/	sooner - /su:nə/	picture - /pik tʃə/

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 5

Read the following sentences carefully and identify the words that contain diphthongs.

i. “Hugo chose to chew over the loose loan rules”
ii. “The old man hoped to hop home because his boss had got his goat”
iii. “They stayed there and stared at the hay in their hair”
iv. “A tale of toil sailing for safe soil in haste, hoisting a false flag”
v. “I’d mow more, but my toe’s torn!” he moaned mournfully.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You now know that although English vowels are really not so difficult to articulate, they must be learnt by listening and imitating. It is however, essential to emphasise that the most important organs needed for the proper articulation of the vowels are the tongue, jaw, shapes of the lips and an intelligent manipulation and handling of the flow of air from the lungs through the mouth cavity. You must always remember that there must be differences between the vowels as you pronounce them.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, you have studied the vowels of English, their physical shapes as well as how they are articulated. Practical and relevant pronunciation practice was also given to help you improve on your pronunciation of these vowel sounds. All of these were provoked to consolidate your knowledge of these sounds of English. It was also evident, from the various descriptions of the vowels, that one fact remained paramount. The fact is that the actual sounds that you use for the English vowels are not as important as the differences that you make between them.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT – PART A

Listen carefully. There are ten groups of words in this assignment, and each group is lettered A, B, C. One word is read in each group. Write down the word you hear.

Listen to the following example:

Example 1 A it B eat C ate

The word which I pronounced is ‘eat’; so the correct answer to example 1 is B. This is recorded by writing the word ‘eat’ on your answer sheet

Now get ready to answer the rest of the test on your answer sheet.

	A	B	C
i.	ear	err	air
ii.	here	hair	her
iii.	beard	bird	bared
iv.	spear	spur	spared
v.	purr	pair	peer
vi.	were	war	where
vii.	steer	stir	stare
viii.	fair	fear	fur
ix.	mere	myrrh	mare
x.	beer	bare	burr

PART B

i. You will hear one of the following sentences at a time; then choose (A), (B), (C), (D), (E) or (F) as the word or group of words most relative in meaning to the sentence that you have heard.

ii. There is no example for this test, so you need to think carefully before choosing an answer.

1.	John was the larger	(A)	They couldn't see
2.	John was the lodger	(B)	The bigger of the two
3.	They lost it in the dark	(C)	In the furnished room
4.	They lost it in the dock	(D)	On the farm
5.	She heard a calf	(E)	And a sneeze
6.	She heard a cough	(F)	Near the ship

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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