

SOS POLITICAL SCIENCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
MBA FA 201
SUBJECT NAME: BUSINESS COMMUNICAION

TOPIC NAME: BASIC CONCEPTS OF ENGLISH PHONETICS AND PRONUNCIATION

/ˈɪŋɡlɪʃ/

Systematic, verbal communication is considered what sets humankind apart from other mammals. While the existence of animal language is debatable, the wonders of human language cannot be doubted. Here you will find some of the basics of phonetics in general and pronunciation in American English, in either the video lecture or the text below.

Before viewing the video or reading the material below, it might be interesting to try a little exercise. Find out as much as you can about the pronunciation of these words in *American English*.

flattering

pedagogical

epitome

disciplinarian

perjury

throwback

This task should give you some idea about what kind of information you can get from a dictionary regarding pronunciation. It should also alert you to some of the kinds of information you might get in this introduction to phonetics in general and English more specifically. Since the lecturer and the writers here are most versed in Standard American English, that will be the focus of the pronunciation parts, but most of the concepts can be applied

universally.

We produce language using a number of body parts known as ‘speech organs’ or articulators. The variety and combination of these articulators is possibly what really makes human language more diverse and more complex than animal communications. Here is a useful illustration showing you the parts relevant to the English language. A brief glossary of important terms

Phonetics is the study of the range of sounds which occur in speech, including the way they are produced by the speech organs and their acoustic properties.

Phonology is the study of the distribution of and the relationships between speech sounds, i.e, the system of sounds of a language.

Pronunciation is the way of producing a spoken word, especially so that it is accepted or generally understood.

American English shows – relative to the area it covers – fewer dialectal variations than British English. William Labov (2006) has recently published a very detailed description of these variations, but many of them are considered too minor to entail dialects, and going into such detail certainly goes beyond what is useful for general pronunciation issues. A vast area of the country is dominated by **Standard North American English**, including all of the West, Midland, and Inland North. There are two parts of the USA in which other recognized dialects are spoken: Eastern New England and New York, and the South (see map below).

For teaching purposes, there is no question that Standard NAE is the desired target variety. You will have noticed during your studies that the English spelling system is not systematic nor unambiguous. For instance, *gh* and *ff* represent the same sound /f/ in *cough* and *off*, and *e* is pronounced in different ways in *me*, *met*, and *English*. Much of this has to do with the fact that the English language has just 26 letters, but more than 40 sounds, known as **phonemes**. A phoneme is an abstract unit of sound, the smallest unit of sound which is connected to meaning. Therefore, if you change the first sound of the word *bat* so that the meaning is changed, e.g. to *mat*, then you are dealing with phonemes. If, however, you change that sound without changing the word, for instance by producing the *b* with a big burst of air, you are dealing with an **allophone**, which is a variation in the pronunciation of a phoneme and does not affect meaning.

Phonemic symbols were developed so that both linguists and language learners are able to distinguish between sounds without the confusion of English spelling. Some of these symbols look just like the Roman alphabet you know, but many are different, and there are several systems. The best known system internationally and among linguists is the **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)**. You can see all of the symbols in the chart provided below. (Regrettably, most dictionaries specific to US American English do not use IPA, so their pronunciation keys need to be learned separately.) Phonetic symbols are always written between slashes, so that the words *mat* and *bat* are transcribed as /mæt/

and /bæt/. These words are an example of a **minimal pair**, two words which differ in only one phoneme.

Such pairs are useful for practicing both the production and the reception of such sounds.

Allophones, on the other hand, are written between brackets, so that the sound variation described above is represented as [bhæt].

All English phonemes

Here is a comprehensive list of the phonemes used in English, with the symbols from the International Phonetic Alphabet, some example words in which you will hear the phonemes, and a sound file. There are two files for each of the vowel sounds, as here the pronunciation can differ quite a bit depending on English varieties. The first is American, the second Irish (thanks to Sinead Crowe!). You will notice that in fact her pronunciation is closer to my American accent than to that in British Received Pronunciation, but there are some interesting differences as well. See if you can catch them, if you like!

Phoneme	example(s) in English	Play sound
/p/	play, happen, cap	
/b/	baby, double, tab	
/t/	tidy, flat, hint	

/d/ **d**ust, **d**ad, **c**uddle, **b**ed

/r/ **b**utter, **l**etter, **g**reatest

/k/ **c**ow, **ch**emistry, **q**ueen, **b**ox

/g/ **g**reat, **h**aggis, **h**ug

/f/ **f**an, **h**alf, **c**ough, **o**ften, **c**alf

/v/ vile, **Stephen**, have

/θ/ **therapy**, **thing**, **tooth**

/ð/ **there**, **feather**, **teething**

/s/ **speak**, **sun**, **hassle**, **mess**

/z/ **zebra**, **hazelnut**, **houses**, **tease**

/ʃ/ **sure**, **chic**, **fisherman**, **harsh**

/ʒ/ **beige**, **occasion**,
vision, **exposure**,
usual

/tʃ/ **chores**, **culture**, **hatch**

/dʒ/ **just**, **judge**, **sage**, **agency**

/m/ **m**other, **jamm**er, **ham**, **comb**

/n/ **n**ight, **kn**ow, **hen**

/ŋ/

sing, sang, sung

/h/

who, have, house

/l/

loud, hallway, hello, frugal

/r/

read, write, arrow, drawer

/j/

you, onion, hallelujah

/w/

what, quick, choir

/i/

eagle, perceive, sea, friendly

/ɪ/

sit, in, fringe, gym, lid

/ɛ/

friend, left, **b**ury, **b**erry

/æ/ **mad, laugh, academic, vary**

/ə/ **about, haven't, honor**

/ʌ/ **utter, mud, double**

/u/ **too, two, blue, maneuver**

/ʊ/ **took, should, pulpit**

/ɔ/

honest, **saw**, **flaw**

/ɑ/

clock, **sauce**, **frog**,

/oʊ/

open, goat, flow

/eɪ/

Asian, name, fray

/aʊ/

ouch, shout, now

/aɪ/

eye, tidy, cry

/ɔɪ/

joy, buoyant

/ɪəʳ/

hear, beer, we're

/eə/

bear, chair, their

/ʊəʳ/ **allure, tourist**

/ɜːʳ/ **urn, curb, journey**

/ɔːʳ/ **or, more, war, oracle**

/ɑːʳ/ **armor, car, farce**