

LESSON I

The Sounds of English

In the English alphabet there are 26 letters, but these letters produce 44 sounds. For this reason, one letter is used to produce more than one sound. In order to know the correct pronunciation certain symbols denoting these sounds have been devised and standardized. By learning these symbols you will be able to find the correct pronunciation of any word in a standard dictionary. These symbols will also help you to go through the book with guidance for correct pronunciation of words and conversations. These sounds are classified into two types:

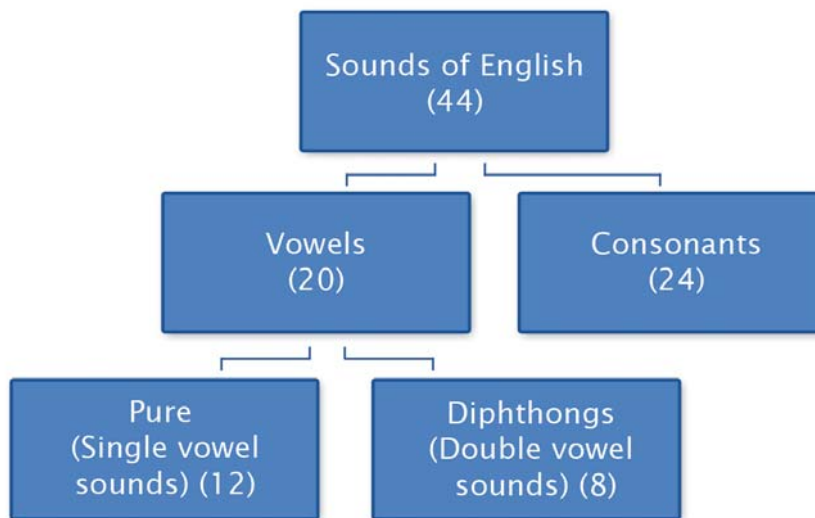


Figure 1.1: Sounds of English

(i) What is a vowel sound?

There are only 5 vowel letters in English (a,e,i,o,u), but the sounds indicated by these 5 letters are 20. A vowel sound is produced when the air comes out of the mouth freely without any blockage or closure in the mouth cavity by the tongue, teeth, lips, etc. The vowel sounds are of two types:

Single vowel sounds: When these sounds are produced, the tongue remains in the same position even when the sound is prolonged. They consist of one sound only and are called pure vowels as in 'sit', 'pot', 'heat', etc. (the underlined letters indicate the single vowel sounds)

Double vowel sounds: These vowel sounds are a combination of two single vowel sounds and in pronouncing them the tongue moves from one position to another. For instance, in the word 'light' the sound of 'i' is a combination of the vowel sounds /a:/ as in 'art' and /i/ as in 'it'. The words 'hair', 'toy' and 'poor' also contain double vowel sounds.

You will find that sometimes two vowel letters may produce a single vowel sound as in 'heat', whereas, a single vowel letter may produce a double vowel sound as in 'light' explained above.

(ii) What is a consonant sound?

A consonant sound is one in which the air stream coming out of the lungs is modified in the mouth cavity by some blockage created by the tongue, lips, etc. When you say the sound of 'p' as in 'pen' a blockage is created in the outgoing breath by closing both the lips and thus, a consonant sound is produced.

The charts on the following pages illustrate all the vowel and consonant sounds of English.

Table 1.1: Vowel sounds in English

S.No.	Symbol	Examples with Common Spellings	Examples with Other Spellings
1	/i:/- ई	Sheep	tea, me, field, key, receive
2	/ɪ/- इ	bit, igloo	gym, bucket, cabbage
3	/e/- ए	egg, net, bet	bread, said
4	/æ/- ऐ	bat, cat, rat, sat	-
5	/ʌ/- अ	but, cut, shut	-
6	/ɑ:/- आ	car, large, march	clerk, heart, guard
7	/ɔ/- ओ	hot, pot, otter	swan, pause
8	/ɔ:/- ओः*	caught, taught	bought, paw
9	/u/ or /ʊ/- उ	put, truth	hood, could
10	/u:/- ऊ	uniform, unity, cube	cue, shoe, new, boot
11	/ə:/or /ɜ:/- अः*	fern, perfect	shirt, purple, earth, worm
12	/ə/- अ	about, alike	-
13	/eɪ/- एइ	tray, pray	train, great, eight, skate
14	/aɪ/- आइ	kite, bite, night, I	tie, fly, height
15	/ɔɪ/- ओय	boy, toy	noise
16	/əʊ/- औ	home, bone, nose	know, grow
17	/aʊ/- आउ	how, now	-
18	/iə/- इअ	ear, fear	deer
19	/eə/- एअ	chair, pair	there, their, square, bear, wear
20	/uə/or/ʊə/- उअ	poor	tour, sure

* ध्वनि के आगे यह चिह्न (:) ध्वनि को लम्बा खींचने का संकेत है। This symbol (:) after a Hindi sound indicates its prolongation.

Note: The vowel sounds from 1 to 12 are single vowel sounds and those from 13 to 20 are double vowel sounds.

Table 1.2: Vowel Sounds

1. /i:/ Sheep 	2. /i/ Zip 	3. /e/ Ten 	4. /æ/ Cat 
5. /ʌ/ Sun 	6. /ɑ:/ Car 	7. /ɔ/ Pot 	8. /ɔ:/ Ball 
9. /u/ Book 	10. /u:/ Moon 	11. /ɜ:/ Bird 	12. /ə/ Around 
13. /eɪ/ Eight 	14. /aɪ/ Kite 	15. /ɔɪ/ Toy 	16. /əu/ Four 
17. /aʊ/ Cow 	18. /ɪə/ Ear 	19. /eə/ Chair 	20. /ʊə/ Tourist 

Table 1.3: Consonant sounds

This list describes the consonant sounds of English. Read the examples aloud and also note the various possible spellings of each sound

S.No.	Spelling	Symbol	Examples with common spellings	Examples with other spellings
1	p - प	/p/	pit, pin	-
2	b - ब	/b/	bit, bat	-
3	t - ट	/t/	time, ten	-
4	d - ड	/d/	door, dog	-
5	k - क	/k/	kite, kit	cat, duck, queen, chemistry
6	g - ग	/g/	get, go	-
7	ch - च	/tʃ/	chop, chick	-
8	j - ज	/dʒ/	judge, jam	giraffe
9	f - फ़	/f/	fan, fun	telephone, rough
10	v - व	/v/	van, vine	-
11	th - थ	/θ/	think, thought	-
12	th - द़	/ð/	that, this	-
13	s - स	/s/	send, see	circle
14	z - ज़	/z/	zip, zoo	pins
15	sh - श	/ʃ/	shop, shoe	invitation, sure, chef, precious, permission
16	s - ज़ [*]	/ʒ/	leisure, pleasure	-
17	h - ह	/h/	hen, happy	-
18	m - म	/m/	man, monkey	-
19	n - न	/n/	nice, night	knife, gnome
20	ing - इंग	/ŋ/	ring, sing, English	tongue
21	l - ल	/l/	leg, long	-
22	r - र	/r/	rat, run	write
23	w - व	/w/	wet, wine	-
24	y - य	/j/	yet, yes	-

* इस ध्वनि का उच्चारण 'ज़' ध्वनि के समान है परन्तु इसमें जीभ के सिरे दान्ती के पीछे से और पीछे (दन्तय तालू की ओर) ले जा कर किया जाता है। This sound is pronounced like the /z/ sound but it is modified by moving the tip of the tongue from the back of the teeth further backwards (towards the teeth ridge).

Table 1.4: Consonant sounds

1. /p/ Pin 	2. /b/ Ball 	3. /t/ Ten 	4. /d/ Deer 
5. /k/ Kite 	6. /g/ Girl 	7. /tʃ/ Chair 	8. /dʒ/ Jug 
9. /f/ Fan 	10. /v/ Van 	11. /θ/ Teeth 	12. /ð/ This box 
13. /s/ Sofa 	14. /z/ Zip 	15. /ʃ/ Ship 	16. /ʒ/ Treasure 
17. /h/ Hat 	18. /l/ Lamp 	19. /r/ Rose 	20. /m/ Monkey 
21. /n/ Nine 	22. /ŋ/ Ring 	23. /w/ Wall 	24. /j/ Yellow 

Now that you have gone through the symbols corresponding to all the 44 sounds of English (also called phonemes), let us practise recognizing them in words written using these symbols (phonemic script). When you get some practice with this, you can look up the pronunciation of any word in a dictionary and find its correct pronunciation. For instance, when you look up the word 'cat' in a dictionary you will find its pronunciation given as /kæt/. Similarly, the phonemic transcription (written conventionally between two bars / /) of the word 'show' in the dictionary is /ʃəʊ/. The symbols used in this book are those which are specified by the International Phonetic Association. However, some dictionaries use a few different symbols, but their corresponding sounds are listed at the beginning of the dictionary.

Exercise 1

Write the spellings (using the English alphabet) under each of the following words which are written in phonemic script.

Phonemic Script	/mi:t/	/ʃip/	/sʌn/	/ræt/	/gəʊt/	/ti:tʃ/
Alphabetic Script						

Phonemic Script	/gəʊ/	/ʃu:t/	/wɔ:tʃ/	/buk/	/kæt/	/əbaʊt/	/si:t/	/bɜ:d/
Alphabetic Script								

You will find the answers to this exercise at the end of Lesson 2.

(iii) Organs of speech

In order to know how to produce the various sounds of English correctly, you must be familiar with the speech organs that are used to produce them.

The English speech sounds are produced with the help of different organs or parts of the mouth. These are lips, teeth, teeth ridge, tongue, the roof of the mouth cavity (consisting of the hard palate and the soft palate at the back), uvula (the soft hanging part at the extreme end of the roof of the mouth), vocal cords (two muscle strips placed horizontally at the top of the windpipe).

See Figure 1.2 ahead to understand where these parts are located.

Some of the organs which you see in the Figure 1.2 can move (the tongue, lower jaw, soft palate, uvula, lips and vocal cords) while some are fixed (upper jaw, hard palate and teeth ridge). When you speak, you can change the position of the movable organs to produce different sounds.

Sounds are produced when you breathe out air from the lungs and this air stream is modified by the movable speech organs. For example, the lower jaw moves so that the lower lip touches the upper teeth when the sound 'v' is produced as is shown in Figure 1.3.

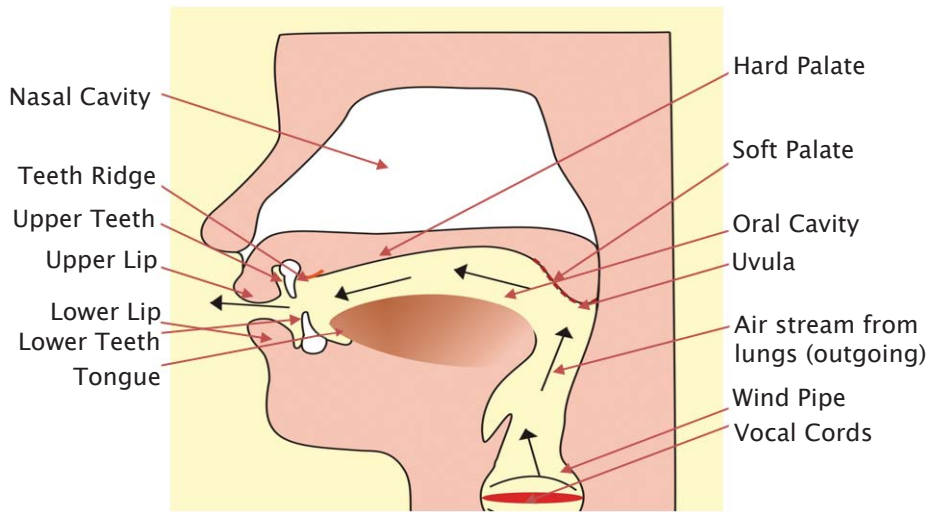


Figure 1.2: Organs of speech

The tip of the tongue moves up to touch the teeth ridge and create a blockage for air which comes out from both sides of the tongue to produce the sound 'l' (see Figure 1.4).

This is how the sounds are produced with the help of organs in the mouth cavity.

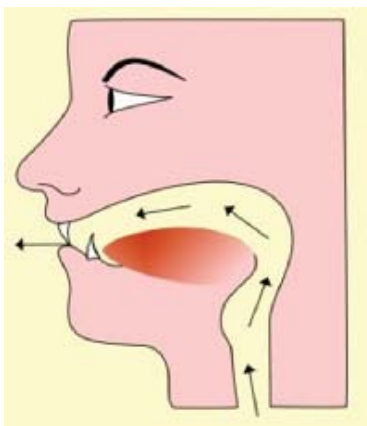


Figure 1.3: Production of the sound /v/

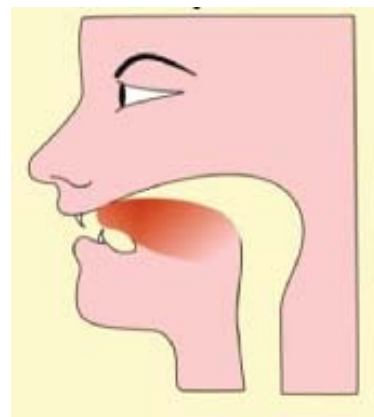


Figure 1.4: Production of the sound /l/

(iv) Voiced and voiceless sounds

The vocal cords vibrate to produce a buzzing sound which is also called the 'voiced sound' for example, the sound of the letter 'j' in the word 'jam' (phonetic symbol /dʒ/).

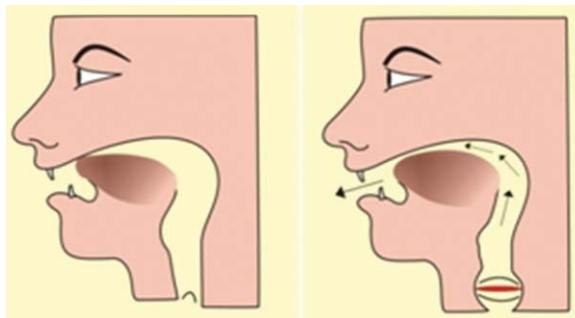


Figure 1.5: Production of the sound /dʒ/

Some other voiced sounds are /b/, /j/, /g/, /v/, /z/, etc. The other type of sounds where the vocal cords do not vibrate are called voiceless sounds e.g. /p/, /t/, /f/, /s/, etc. You can feel the difference between the two types of sounds by touching your throat and feeling the presence or absence of vibrations in voiced and voiceless sounds, respectively.

See the figures given below and notice the production of the voiceless sound /f/ and the voiced sound /v/.

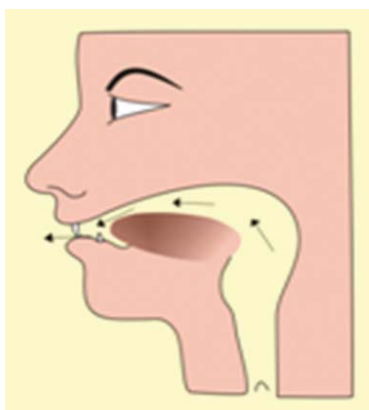


Figure 1.6: Production of voiceless sound /f/

(No vibration in the vocal cords)

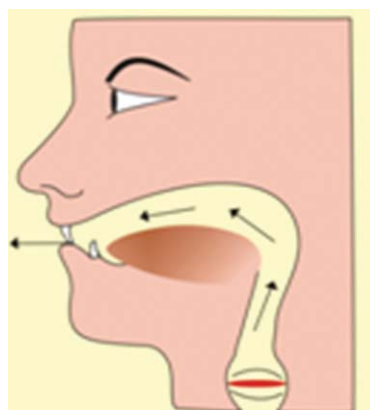


Figure 1.7: Production of voiced sound /v/

(Vibration in the vocal cords)

In this lesson you have been introduced to the various sounds of the English language and how they are produced with the help of the speech organs. In the following lessons you will learn and practise each of these sounds individually.