Phonetics and Phonology

Maggie Enow — Graduate of the University of Yaoundé I, English Modern Letters

maggie.48hourrfprescue.com

WhatsApp: scan the code on my website

Imprint

From the Library of Maggie Enow

Maggie Enow — Graduate of the University of Yaoundé I, English Modern Letters

maggie.48hourrfprescue.com

WhatsApp: scan the code on my website

This book is FREE. Download it freely, read it, and share it.

Prepared for Maggie Enow's school of English Modern Letters.

All teaching text in this book is original. Examples were written for this book. Phonetic symbols follow the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the standard public notation of the International Phonetic Association.

Contents

- Chapter 1: Speech Sounds and the Organs of Speech
- Chapter 2: The Consonants of English
- Chapter 3: The Vowels of English: Monophthongs and Diphthongs
- Chapter 4: Syllables and Word Stress
- Chapter 5: Connected Speech: Weak Forms, Linking and Assimilation
- Chapter 6: Intonation and Meaning
- A Final Word to the Reader

Chapter 1: Speech Sounds and the Organs of Speech

Learning Aims

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- distinguish phonetics from phonology;
- describe the three branches of phonetics;
- name the organs of speech and explain how the airstream produces sound;
- explain why spelling is an unreliable guide to English pronunciation and why we need a phonetic alphabet.

1.1 Two Ways of Studying Sound

Phonetics is the study of the sounds of speech themselves: how they are produced by the body, how they travel through the air, and how the ear receives them. It asks physical questions and gives physical answers. **Phonology** is the study of how a particular language organises those sounds into a system: which sound differences can change meaning in English, how sounds influence their neighbours, and what patterns they form. Phonetics describes what the mouth does; phonology describes what the language does with what the mouth does.

The distinction appears in the famous pair **phone** and **phoneme**. A phone is any single speech sound actually produced, written between square brackets: [p]. A phoneme is a sound unit of a particular language — a sound whose replacement can change one word into another — written between slashes: /p/. English /p/ is a phoneme because *pin* and *bin* differ only in that sound. The many slightly different [p]-sounds a speaker makes — with a puff of air at the start of *pin*, without one after *s* in *spin* — are its **allophones**: variants of one phoneme that never change meaning.

Phonetics itself has three branches. **Articulatory phonetics** studies the movements of the speech organs. **Acoustic phonetics** studies the sound waves produced, with instruments that measure frequency and duration. **Auditory phonetics** studies how listeners perceive sounds. This book works mainly with the first branch, because a learner can feel and control her own articulators, and that is the road to better pronunciation.

1.2 The Airstream and the Voice

Nearly all English sounds begin with air pushed out from the lungs — the **pulmonic egressive airstream**. The air travels up the windpipe (trachea) and through the **larynx**, the box of cartilage at the top of the windpipe that houses the **vocal cords** (also called vocal folds). If the cords are held loosely apart, air passes silently and the sound produced is **voiceless**, like [s] or [f]. If the cords are brought close together, the passing air sets them vibrating, and the sound is **voiced**, like [z] or [v]. Place your fingers on your throat and say *sss*, then *zzz*: the buzz you feel under *zzz* is voicing. Cover your ears and alternate the two sounds; the voiced one hums inside your head.

Above the larynx the air passes through the **pharynx** (the throat cavity), then into the mouth or the nose. The soft palate (velum) acts as a gate: raised, it closes the nose and air exits by the mouth; lowered, air flows through the nose as well, giving the nasal sounds [m], [n] and [ŋ].

1.3 The Organs of Speech

Within the mouth, the **active articulators** move towards the **passive articulators**. The active ones are the lower lip, the tongue (tip, blade, front, back and root) and the lower jaw. The passive ones are the upper lip, the upper teeth, the **alveolar ridge** (the hard bump just behind the upper teeth — feel it with your

tongue), the hard palate, the soft palate (velum) and the back wall of the pharynx. Every consonant in Chapter 2 will be named by which active articulator meets which passive one: a sound made with both lips is **bilabial**, with tongue-tip on the alveolar ridge **alveolar**, with the back of the tongue against the velum **velar**. Learn this map now and the rest of the book becomes a guided tour of familiar ground.

1.4 Spelling Is Not Sound

English spelling preserves history rather than sound. The same letter stands for many sounds — think of *a* in *cat, car, call, cake, about* — and the same sound is spelled many ways: the sound /iː/ appears in *see, sea, scene, machine, key, quay* and *people*. One written word, *read*, names two pronunciations, present /riːd/ and past /red/. Letters may be silent: *knee, lamb, island, honest*. A learner who trusts spelling will mispronounce daily. The remedy is the **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)**, in which one symbol stands for one sound, always. When a dictionary writes *enough* as /ɪ'nʌf/, it tells you the truth that the spelling hides. From this chapter on, transcriptions in this book use the IPA, between slashes for phonemes and square brackets for finer detail.

Worked Examples

Example 1. *Pat* and *bat* differ only in their first sound, /p/ versus /b/, and the meaning changes. Therefore /p/ and /b/ are separate phonemes of English, and the pair *pat/bat* is a **minimal pair** — the standard test for phoneme status.

Example 2. Say *pin* with a slip of paper before your lips: the paper flutters — the /p/ is **aspirated**, [pʰ]. Say *spin*: no flutter — the /p/ is unaspirated, [p]. The sound changes with its position, but no word changes its meaning, so [pʰ] and [p] are allophones of the single phoneme /p/.

Example 3. Transcribe by sound, not spelling: *knight* → /naɪt/ (three sounds, six letters); *phone* → /fəʊn/ (the letters *ph* spell one sound, /f/).

Exercises — Chapter 1

1. State whether each study is phonetics or phonology: (a) measuring how long the vowel in *beat* lasts; (b) showing that /p/ and /b/ distinguish words in English; (c) describing how the tongue moves for /k/.

2. Find minimal pairs for /s/–/z/, /t/–/d/ and /m/–/n/ at the start of words.

3. Say *a pat*, *a bat*, *a mat* with fingers on your throat. Which initial sounds are voiced?

4. Transcribe these words in IPA: *ship, sing, cheap, judge, thin*.

Answer Guidance — Chapter 1

1. (a) Phonetics (acoustic measurement). (b) Phonology (a meaning-distinguishing pattern of one language). (c) Phonetics (articulatory description).

2. Samples: *sip/zip, seal/zeal*; *ten/den, tip/dip*; *map/nap, meat/neat*. Any true minimal pair — same position, one sound different — earns the mark.

3. Only /b/ is voiced: the throat vibrates. /p/ and /m/ — /p/ is voiceless; note that /m/ **is** voiced too, so the full answer is /b/ and /m/ voiced, /p/ voiceless. (Listen again if you missed /m/: nasals are voiced.)

4. *ship* /ʃɪp/; *sing* /sɪŋ/; *cheap* /tʃiːp/; *judge* /dʒʌdʒ/; *thin* /θɪn/.

Chapter 2: The Consonants of English

Learning Aims

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- describe any English consonant by voicing, place of articulation and manner of articulation;
- list the twenty-four consonant phonemes of English in their families;
- explain plosives, fricatives, affricates, nasals, laterals, approximants and the glide /w/;
- avoid the commonest consonant substitutions made by learners.

2.1 The Three Questions

Every consonant answers three questions. **Is it voiced or voiceless?** (Do the vocal cords vibrate?) **Where is it made?** (What is its place of articulation?) **How is it made?** (What is its manner of articulation — how does the air escape?) With those three answers we can describe the whole consonant system, and a description such as "voiceless alveolar plosive" names exactly one sound: /t/.

2.2 Plosives: /p, b, t, d, k, g/

A **plosive** (or stop) is made by closing the vocal tract completely, letting pressure build, then releasing the air in a small explosion. English has six: bilabial /p, b/ (*pat, bat*); alveolar /t, d/ (*ten, den*); velar /k, g/ (*cap, gap*). In each pair the first is voiceless, the second voiced. At the start of a stressed syllable the voiceless plosives are aspirated: *pin* [pʰɪn]. At the end of a word, final voiced plosives are only partly voiced in British English — *cab* ends in a sound shorter and quieter than a learner expects — but the vowel before them is longer than before a voiceless plosive, and that length is the listener's main clue: compare *bat* and *bad*.

2.3 Fricatives and Affricates

A **fricative** narrows the tract so that air escapes with audible friction — a hiss or a buzz. English has nine: labiodental /f, v/ (*fan, van* — upper teeth on lower lip); dental /θ, ð/ (*thin, this* — tongue tip between or behind the upper teeth); alveolar /s, z/ (*sip, zip*); post-alveolar /ʃ, ʒ/ (*ship, measure*); and glottal /h/ (*hat* — friction at the larynx itself, always voiceless). The dental pair /θ, ð/ causes the most trouble worldwide: learners replace them with /t, d/ or /s, z/. The cure is mechanical: put the tongue where the listener can almost see it, between the teeth, and blow gently for /θ/, add voice for /ð/.

An **affricate** is a plosive released slowly into a fricative at the same place: /tʃ/ (*church*) is [t] + [ʃ] fused into one phoneme, and /dʒ/ (*judge*) is its voiced partner. Treat each as a single sound: *why choose* and *white shoes* differ in the boundary, not in the sounds.

2.4 Nasals, Laterals and Approximants

For **nasals** the mouth closes as for a plosive, but the velum lowers and the air escapes through the nose: bilabial /m/ (*man*), alveolar /n/ (*no*), velar /ŋ/ (*sing*). All three are voiced. Note that /ŋ/ never begins a word in English and is spelled with two letters, *ng*, though it is one sound: *singer* is /ˈsɪŋə/, with no /g/ — but *finger* is /ˈfɪŋgə/, with one.

The **lateral** /l/ lets air escape around the sides of the tongue while the tip touches the alveolar ridge: *leaf, ball*. English /l/ has two allophones: a "clear" [l] before vowels (*leaf*) and a "dark" [ɫ], made with the back of the tongue raised, before consonants and at the end of words (*ball, milk*).

The **approximants** /r, w, j/ are consonants by position but vowel-like in manner: the articulators approach without friction. /r/ (*red*) in the reference British accent

is a post-alveolar approximant, and it is pronounced only before a vowel — *car* alone is /kɑː/, but *car engine* has the /r/. /w/ (*we*) is made with rounded lips and the back of the tongue raised; do not replace it with /v/: *west* is not *vest*. /j/ (*yes*) is the consonant twin of the vowel /iː/; note it in *university* /ˌjuːnɪˈvɜːsəti/, where spelling hides it entirely.

2.5 The Consonant Chart in Words

Arrange the twenty-four by place, from the lips to the glottis: bilabial /p, b, m, w/; labiodental /f, v/; dental /θ, ð/; alveolar /t, d, s, z, n, l/; post-alveolar /ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, r/; palatal /j/; velar /k, g, ŋ/; glottal /h/. By manner: plosives /p, b, t, d, k, g/; fricatives /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h/; affricates /tʃ, dʒ/; nasals /m, n, ŋ/; lateral /l/; approximants /r, w, j/. Count them: 6 + 9 + 2 + 3 + 1 + 3 = 24. A description grid of this kind is the consonant counterpart of the vowel chart in the next chapter, and examiners love both.

Worked Examples

Example 1. Describe /g/: voiced (cords vibrate), velar (back of tongue against velum), plosive (complete closure, then release). Three words — *voiced velar plosive* — and the description is complete.

Example 2. *Think* /θɪŋk/ versus *sink* /sɪŋk/: the learner who says *sink* for *think* has changed a dental fricative into an alveolar one and produced a different word. Place, not effort, was the fault.

Example 3. Transcribe: *dogs* /dɒgz/ — the plural ending is /z/, not /s/, because it follows a voiced sound; *cats* /kæts/ — here /s/ follows voiceless /t/. The spelling *-s* covers three sounds, /s/, /z/ and /ɪz/ (*horses*), chosen by the sound before it. Spelling is silent about the rule; phonology states it in one line.

Exercises — Chapter 2

1. Give the three-term description of: /v/, /ŋ/, /tʃ/, /s/.

2. Which consonant phonemes never appear at the start of an English word, and which never at the end? (Consider /ŋ/, /h/, /j/, /w/, /r/ in the reference accent.)

3. Transcribe: *church*, *vision*, *yellow*, *queen*, *wrong*.

4. Say the pairs aloud and name the sound that changes: *fan/van*, *thigh/thy*, *sip/ship*, *day/jay*.

Answer Guidance — Chapter 2

1. /v/ — voiced labiodental fricative. /ŋ/ — voiced velar nasal. /tʃ/ — voiceless post-alveolar affricate. /s/ — voiceless alveolar fricative.

2. /ŋ/ never begins a word. /h/ and /j/ never end one (in the reference accent /r/ also never ends a word before a pause, since it appears only before vowels).

3. *church* /tʃɜːtʃ/; *vision* /ˈvɪʒən/; *yellow* /ˈjeləʊ/; *queen* /kwiːn/; *wrong* /rɒŋ/ (the *w* is silent).

4. /f/–/v/ (voicing); /θ/–/ð/ (voicing); /s/–/ʃ/ (place: alveolar to post-alveolar); /d/–/dʒ/ (plosive to affricate).

Chapter 3: The Vowels of English: Monophthongs and Diphthongs

Learning Aims

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- describe vowels by tongue height, tongue position (front/back) and lip shape;
- list the twelve monophthongs of the reference accent and give a keyword for each;
- list the eight diphthongs and describe their glides;
- explain the difference between long and short vowels and the special role of schwa.

3.1 What Makes a Vowel

For a vowel, the airstream flows out with no closure and no friction; the sound is shaped entirely by the position of the tongue and lips, which turns the mouth into a tuned resonating chamber. Vowels are normally voiced and form the heart (nucleus) of every syllable. We describe them with three questions that mirror the consonant questions. **How high is the tongue** — close, mid, or open? **Which part of the tongue is highest** — front, central, or back? **What are the lips doing** — rounded, spread, or neutral? A fourth practical feature is **length**: long or short.

3.2 The Twelve Monophthongs

A monophthong is a vowel of steady quality — the tongue holds one position. The reference British accent has twelve.

Long vowels (five). /iː/ *fleece* — close, front, spread lips: a long, tense sound. /ɑː/ *father, palm* — open, back, neutral. /ɔː/ *thought, north* — mid-back, rounded. /uː/ *goose* — close, back, strongly rounded. /ɜː/ *nurse* — mid, central, neutral; the vowel of *bird, her, work* in this accent, with no /r/ pronounced.

Short vowels (seven). /ɪ/ *kit* — near-close, front, short and lax: the partner of /iː/ differs in quality as well as length, so *ship* and *sheep* differ twice over. /e/ *dress*. /æ/ *trap* — the open front vowel between *e* and *a*. /ʌ/ *strut* — central, the vowel of *cup, love, blood*. /ɒ/ *lot* — open, back, slightly rounded, short. /ʊ/ *foot* — near-close, back, rounded, short: partner of /uː/. And /ə/, **schwa**, the mid central vowel that appears only in unstressed syllables: the first and last sounds of *about* /əˈbaʊt/, the middle of *teacher* /ˈtiːtʃə/. Schwa is the commonest vowel in English, and Chapter 5 will show why: unstressed syllables shrink towards it.

Pairs to drill: /iː–ɪ/ *sheep/ship*; /uː–ʊ/ *fool/full*; /ɑː–ʌ/ *cart/cut*; /ɔː–ɒ/ *port/pot*; /æ–e/ *bad/bed*; /ɜː–ə/ — the same central area, but /ɜː/ is long and stressed, /ə/ short and never stressed.

3.3 The Eight Diphthongs

A **diphthong** is a glide within one syllable from one vowel position towards another: the tongue moves, and the ear hears one syllable with a changing quality. English has eight, in two families.

Closing diphthongs glide towards /ɪ/ or /ʊ/. Towards /ɪ/: /eɪ/ *face* (as in *day, late*), /aɪ/ *price* (*my, light*), /ɔɪ/ *choice* (*boy, coin*). Towards /ʊ/: /əʊ/ *goat* (*no, home* — note the starting point is central schwa in this accent, not "oh"), /aʊ/ *mouth* (*now, house*).

Centring diphthongs glide towards /ə/: /ɪə/ *near*, /eə/ *square*, /ʊə/ *cure*. They arise historically where an /r/ once stood after the vowel, and in accents that pronounce that /r/ (such as most American accents) they are analysed differently — a reminder that vowel systems belong to accents, not to the language in the abstract. Cameroonian English, like other West African varieties, often realises /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ as steady monophthongs [e] and [o]; learners aiming at the reference

accent should practise the glide, while remembering that their home variety is a legitimate system, not a mistake.

3.4 Length, Stress and the Learner

Length in English never works alone: long vowels are also tenser and often slightly diphthongised, and every vowel shortens before a voiceless consonant — the /iː/ of *beat* is shorter than the /iː/ of *bead*. For the learner, the practical rules are these: learn each vowel with a keyword; drill the pairs that your own first language does not distinguish; and mark vowel length in your notebook transcriptions with the length mark /ː/ whenever it belongs. A mispronounced consonant usually still lets the listener guess; a wrong vowel, multiplied across every syllable, is what makes speech hard to follow.

Worked Examples

Example 1. Describe /æ/: open (tongue low), front, lips neutral, short. Compare /ɑː/: open, back, long. The pair *cat/cart* in this accent, /kæt/ and /kɑːt/, differs in frontness and length together.

Example 2. Transcribe: *day* /deɪ/, *night* /naɪt/, *boy* /bɔɪ/, *go* /gəʊ/, *now* /naʊ/, *here* /hɪə/, *hair* /heə/, *tour* /tʊə/ — the eight diphthongs, each in one keyword.

Example 3. *Photograph* /ˈfəʊtəgrɑːf/ contains schwa in its second syllable even though the spelling shows *o*. In *photography* /fəˈtɒgrəfi/ the stress moves and the first vowel becomes schwa instead. Stress decides which vowels shrink; Chapter 4 takes up the pattern.

Exercises — Chapter 3

1. Give keywords of your own for /iː, ɪ, ʊ, uː, ʌ, ɒ/.

2. Describe /ɔː/ and /e/ by height, front/back, lips and length.

3. Transcribe: *meet, meat, set, sat, cot, caught, full, fool*. Which pairs sound identical in the reference accent?

4. Mark each word's diphthong, if any: *late, light, boat, bout, coin, fear, chair, poor, plain (steady or glide?)*.

Answer Guidance — Chapter 3

1. Samples: /iː/ *see*; /ɪ/ *sit*; /ʊ/ *put*; /uː/ *too*; /ʌ/ *sun*; /ɒ/ *hot*. Any accurate keyword is acceptable.

2. /ɔː/: mid (open-mid), back, rounded, long. /e/: mid (close-mid to open-mid), front, neutral/spread, short.

3. /miːt, miːt, set, sæt, kɒt, kɔːt, fʊl, fuːl/. *Meet* and *meat* are identical — homophones: spelling differs, sound does not.

4. *late* /eɪ/; *light* /aɪ/; *boat* /əʊ/; *bout* /aʊ/; *coin* /ɔɪ/; *fear* /ɪə/; *chair* /eə/; *poor* /ʊə/ (also often /ɔː/ in modern usage); *plain* /eɪ/ — a glide, like *late*.

Chapter 4: Syllables and Word Stress

Learning Aims

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define the syllable and divide English words into onset, nucleus and coda;
- state the main rules and tendencies of English word stress;
- explain how stress changes between related words and between noun and verb pairs;
- mark stress correctly in transcription.

4.1 The Syllable

A **syllable** is a peak of sonority — a pulse of sound built around a vowel (or, occasionally, a syllabic consonant, as in the second syllable of *bottle* /ˈbɒtl̩/ and *button* /ˈbʌtn̩/). Its parts are the **onset** (consonants before the vowel), the **nucleus** (the vowel itself) and the **coda** (consonants after it). *Strand* /strænd/ has a three-consonant onset /str/, nucleus /æ/ and a two-consonant coda /nd/. English allows heavy clusters — *strengths* /streŋθs/ packs three consonants on each side of the vowel — which is why learners from languages with simpler syllables insert vowels to break clusters up, saying "sutrand" for *strand*. The repair to aim for is not insertion but practice: build the cluster slowly, sound by sound, then speed up.

4.2 What Stress Is

A **stressed** syllable is pronounced with greater force: it is louder, longer, higher or lower in pitch, and its vowel keeps its full quality, while unstressed syllables weaken towards schwa. Stress is marked in transcription with a vertical stroke

before the syllable: /ˈtʃaɪnə/ *China*, /tʃaɪˈniːz/ *Chinese*. Words of more than three syllables may carry a secondary stress, marked /ˌ/: *photographic* /ˌfəʊtəˈgræfɪk/.

4.3 Tendencies of English Word Stress

English stress is partly free — it must often be learned word by word — but strong tendencies help.

Two-syllable nouns usually stress the first syllable: *'table, 'money, 'teacher*. **Two-syllable verbs** often stress the second: *a'rrive, be'gin, for'get*. This tendency produces the famous noun–verb pairs: *a 'record* (noun) versus *to re'cord* (verb); likewise *'import/im'port, 'present/pre'sent, 'conduct/con'duct, 'permit/per'mit*. The pattern is a tendency, not a law — *'promise* and *'visit* are verbs with first-syllable stress — but it is reliable enough to be worth learning as a first guess.

Suffixes steer stress in regular ways. *-tion, -sion, -ic, -ical* pull the stress onto the syllable just before them: *'educate → edu'cation; 'atom → a'tomic*. *-ee, -eer, -ese, -ette* carry the stress themselves: *employ'ee, engi'neer, Camerou'nese*... (in the reference form, /ˌkæməruːˈniːz/). Neutral suffixes such as *-ful, -ness, -ly, -ing* leave the stress where it was: *'beautiful, 'happiness*.

Compound words usually stress the first element when they are nouns: *'blackbird* (the species) versus *a black 'bird* (any bird that is black), *'greenhouse, 'bookshelf*. Compound adjectives and verbs vary: *bad-'tempered, over'take*.

Stress shift in families. Related words move their stress as suffixes are added, and the vowels change with it — the *photograph / photography / photographic* family from Chapter 3: /ˈfəʊtəgrɑːf/, /fəˈtɒgrəfi/, /ˌfəʊtəˈgræfɪk/. Three words, three stress patterns, three different first vowels. This is why pronunciation must be learned word-family by word-family, not guessed from spelling.

4.4 Sentence Stress in Brief

Within a sentence, content words (nouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs) are stressed and function words (articles, auxiliaries, prepositions, pronouns) are usually weak — the pattern that Chapter 5 explores. Word stress and sentence stress obey one principle: English beats time with its stressed syllables, and everything else is fitted in between. Learners who stress every syllable equally sound painstaking but hard to follow; learners who find the beats sound fluent even with simple vocabulary.

Worked Examples

Example 1. Divide and label: *splash* /splæʃ/ — onset /spl/, nucleus /æ/, coda /ʃ/. *Texts* /teksts/ — onset /t/, nucleus /e/, coda /ksts/: four consonants in the coda, the heaviest simple example in common use.

Example 2. *They will present the present.* Transcribe the two forms: the verb /prɪˈzent/ (stress second syllable, first vowel reduced to /ɪ/) and the noun /ˈprezənt/ (stress first syllable, second vowel schwa). One spelling, two sound-shapes, chosen by grammar.

Example 3. Mark the stress: *economy* /ɪˈkɒnəmi/; *economic* /ˌiːkəˈnɒmɪk/. The suffix *-ic* pulls stress onto the syllable before it, exactly as the rule predicts.

Exercises — Chapter 4

1. Divide into onset, nucleus and coda: *green, stopped, asks, blue*.

2. Mark the main stress: *banana, hotel, begin, window, important, understand*.

3. Give the noun and verb transcriptions of *import* and *permit*, and make one sentence using each form.

4. Predict the stress of: *celebration, artistic, volunteer, kindness* — then say which suffix rule you used.

Answer Guidance — Chapter 4

1. *Green* /griːn/: onset /gr/, nucleus /iː/, coda /n/. *Stopped* /stɒpt/: onset /st/, nucleus /ɒ/, coda /pt/. *Asks* /ɑːsks/: no onset, nucleus /ɑː/, coda /sks/. *Blue* /bluː/: onset /bl/, nucleus /uː/, no coda.

2. baˈnana, hoˈtel, beˈgin, ˈwindow, imˈportant, underˈstand.

3. *Import*: noun /ˈɪmpɔːt/, verb /ɪmˈpɔːt/. *Permit*: noun /ˈpɜːmɪt/, verb /pəˈmɪt/. Sentences: any grammatical pair, e.g. *The import of rice rose. They import rice.* / *You need a permit. Will they permit it?*

4. celeˈbration (*-tion* pulls stress before it); arˈtistic (*-ic*); volunˈteer (*-eer* carries stress); ˈkindness (neutral suffix, stress unchanged).

Chapter 5: Connected Speech: Weak Forms, Linking and Assimilation

Learning Aims

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- explain why English sounds different in conversation from the sum of its dictionary forms;
- recognise and use the weak forms of common function words;
- describe linking, assimilation and elision with examples;
- use these processes to improve both listening and fluency.

5.1 Words in Company

A word pronounced alone wears its full, **strong form**. In a sentence, function words that carry little information are pronounced in a reduced, **weak form**: shorter, quieter, with a vowel drawn towards schwa. *And* alone is /ænd/; in *bread and butter* it is /ən/ — /ˈbred ən ˈbʌtə/. *To* is /tuː/ alone, /tə/ before a consonant (*going to school* /ˈgəʊɪŋ tə ˈskuːl/), /tʊ/ before a vowel. *Of* /ɒv/ becomes /əv/; *a* and *the* are /ə/ and /ðə/ before consonants, /ði/ before vowels (*the apple* /ði ˈæpəl/). Some forty common words have weak forms, among them *can* /kən/ (*I can go* /aɪ kən ˈgəʊ/ — contrast *Yes, I can*, where *can* stands at the end and keeps its strong form /kæn/), *must* /məst/, *some* /səm/, *that* as a relative /ðət/, and the auxiliaries *have, has, had, do, does, was, were* in their unstressed uses.

Weak forms are not careless speech; they are the grammar of spoken English. A learner who gives every word its strong form sounds like a reading machine and, worse, cannot understand natives, whose sentences are full of reductions the learner has never been taught to hear. Listening skill is largely weak-form skill.

5.2 Linking

English hates a gap between words. Where one word ends in a consonant and the next begins with a vowel, the consonant is carried over: *an apple* sounds as /ə ˈnæpəl/, *turn off* as /ˈtɜːˈnɒf/. In the reference accent, words ending in the letter *r* pronounce a **linking r** before a following vowel: *far away* /ˈfɑːr əˈweɪ/, *four eggs* /ˈfɔːr ˈegz/, though *far* alone is /fɑː/. Some speakers extend the same /r/ to words that never had one — *law and order* with an "intrusive r" — a widespread feature to recognise, though learners are advised to link only where the spelling has an *r*. Between vowels, /j/ and /w/ glides also smooth the join: *I agree* /aɪ jəˈgriː/, *go on* /gəʊ wɒn/ — the glide is the consonant twin of the vowel just heard.

5.3 Assimilation and Elision

In **assimilation**, a sound takes on a feature of its neighbour. The alveolar consonants /t, d, n/ shift towards bilabial before /p, b, m/ and towards velar before /k, g/: *ten bikes* may be heard as /ˈtem ˈbaɪks/, *good girl* as /ˈgʊg ˈgɜːl/. The alveolar fricatives become post-alveolar before /ʃ/ and /j/: *this shop* /ˈðɪʃ ˈʃɒp/, *would you* /ˈwʊdʒuː/. Assimilation is optional and gradient — careful speakers do less of it — but it is universal in fluent speech, and examiners of listening comprehension test it constantly.

In **elision**, a sound present in the careful form disappears. The commonest case is /t/ and /d/ between consonants: *last night* /ˈlɑːs ˈnaɪt/, *handsome* /ˈhænsəm/, *exactly* often /ɪgˈzækli/. Whole syllables may go in fast speech: *library* as /ˈlaɪbri/, *police* as /ˈpliːs/. Elision is not an invitation to sloppiness in careful speaking; it is a fact to know so that the spoken language stops sounding like a foreign code laid over the written one you learned.

Worked Examples

Example 1. Transcribe as spoken, not as cited: *Fish and chips, please.* → /ˈfɪʃ ən ˈtʃɪps ˈpliːz/. Three reductions: *and* weakens to /ən/; the rest keep strong forms because they carry the message.

Example 2. *I must go now.* Careful: /aɪ məst ˈgəʊ ˈnaʊ/ — *must* in its weak form /məst/. Contrast *You mustn't be late,* where the negative *mustn't* /ˈmʌsənt/ is stressed and strong.

Example 3. *Next day* in fluent speech: /ˈneks ˈdeɪ/ — the /t/ of *next* is elided between consonants, and nothing is lost, because the listener's grammar restores it.

Exercises — Chapter 5

1. Give the weak forms of: *and, to (before a vowel), of, can, was, the (before a consonant).*

2. Transcribe in connected form: *a cup of tea; turn it off; far from home and near it.*

3. Name the process (assimilation, elision or linking) in: (a) *ten men* heard as /ˈtem ˈmen/; (b) *stand back* heard as /ˈstæn ˈbæk/ losing its /d/; (c) *law and order* pronounced with a smooth consonant carry-over in *an egg*.

4. Explain why *Yes, I can* uses the strong form of *can* while *I can swim* uses the weak form.

Answer Guidance — Chapter 5

1. *and* /ən/; *to* /tʊ/ before a vowel (/tə/ before a consonant); *of* /əv/; *can* /kən/; *was* /wəz/; *the* /ðə/.

2. /ə ˈkʌp əv ˈtiː/; /ˈtɜːn ɪt ˈɒf/ with linking of /n/ and /t/ across the boundaries; /ˈfɑː frəm ˈhəʊm ən ˈnɪər ɪt/ — note linking /r/ in *near it*.

3. (a) Assimilation (/n/ → /m/ before /m/). (b) Elision (loss of /d/ between consonants). (c) Linking (consonant carried into the next word: *an egg* /ən ˈeg/).

4. In *I can swim*, *can* is unstressed inside the sentence and reduces. In *Yes, I can*, the word stands finally and carries the whole answer's emphasis; final position and stress both demand the strong form /kæn/.

Chapter 6: Intonation and Meaning

Learning Aims

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- define intonation and identify the tonic syllable in an utterance;
- describe the falling, rising, fall-rise and rise-fall tones and their core meanings;
- use intonation to distinguish questions, statements, lists and attitudes;
- explain how intonation interacts with grammar and politeness.

6.1 The Music of Speech

Intonation is the melody of the voice — the pattern of pitch changes across an utterance. Every utterance has one syllable that carries the main pitch movement: the **tonic syllable** (or nucleus), usually the stressed syllable of the last content word that carries new information. In *I bought a RED car*, the tonic falls on *red* if the colour is the news; in *I BOUGHT a red car* (I didn't borrow it), the tonic moves to *bought*. Moving the tonic moves the meaning, though the words stay the same. Before the tonic, the pitch pattern is called the head; after it, the tail. For most purposes the tonic and its tone do the essential work.

6.2 The Main Tones

The **falling tone** (high fall or low fall) signals completeness and finality. Statements: *It's raining.* Wh-questions asked neutrally: *Where are you going?* Commands: *Sit down.* The speaker presents the matter as settled.

The **rising tone** signals incompleteness and openness. Yes/no questions: *Are you ready?* Lists (each item rises except the last, which falls): *tea, coffee, and juice.*

Echo questions and polite requests: *Could you repeat that?* The speaker hands the matter to the listener.

The **fall-rise** falls then rises on one syllable or across a tail: *It's possible...* It implies reservation, contrast or an unfinished thought: *He's a good worker* (fall-rise on *good*) suggests a "but" is coming. In answers it softens disagreement: *Not really* with a fall-rise is gentler than with a fall.

The **rise-fall** climbs then drops, expressing strong feeling — enthusiasm, surprise, sarcasm: *That's wonderful!* Used carelessly it can sound mocking; used well it carries warmth.

6.3 Intonation and Grammar

Intonation can overrule word order. *You're coming* with a fall is a statement; with a rise it is a question, though not a word has changed. Question tags split by tone: *You're coming, aren't you?* with a falling tag seeks agreement ("I expect yes"); with a rising tag it asks a genuine question ("I'm not sure"). Adverbials at the front of a sentence usually take a rise or fall-rise and a small pause, separating them from the main clause: *In the morning, we left.* In reading aloud, punctuation is the written shadow of these patterns: commas invite rises, full stops invite falls.

6.4 Attitude and Politeness

Beyond grammar, intonation carries attitude. The same words *Thank you* can be warm (rise-fall), routine (low fall) or grudging (flat, low, and level). A request with a falling tone sounds like an order; with a rise it sounds like a favour asked. Learners are often judged rude or bored not for their words but for their tunes, because they transfer the intonation of their first language into English sentences. The remedy is listening with the melody in mind: when you shadow a recording,

copy the tune before you copy the words. Meaning lives in the words; manners live in the music.

Worked Examples

Example 1. Mark the tonic and tone: *She doesn't live here any more.* Tonic on *more* (or on *here* if place is the contrast), falling tone — a complete, final statement.

Example 2. *Would you like tea, coffee, or juice?* Rises on *tea* and *coffee*, fall on *juice*: the rises say "the list is not finished", the fall closes it and the question.

Example 3. Contrast: *He's clever* (fall) — plain statement, perhaps praise. *He's clever* (fall-rise on *clever*) — reservation: clever, but... The listener waits for the qualification the tone has promised.

Exercises — Chapter 6

1. Mark the tonic syllable in: (a) I said the BLUE one, not the green one. (b) She gave the book to ME. (c) We arrived on TUESDAY.

2. Choose the tone: (a) a neutral wh-question; (b) a yes/no question; (c) the last item of a list; (d) a reply showing reservation.

3. Explain the difference in meaning between *You're ready, aren't you?* with a falling tag and with a rising tag.

4. Say *Thank you* three ways — warm, routine, grudging — and describe each tune in words.

Answer Guidance — Chapter 6

1. The tonic is the syllable carrying the contrast: (a) BLUE; (b) ME; (c) TUES(day) — the stressed syllable of the tonic word.

2. (a) Falling. (b) Rising. (c) Falling. (d) Fall-rise.

3. Falling tag: the speaker is fairly sure and invites agreement. Rising tag: the speaker is genuinely unsure and asks for information.

4. Warm: rise-fall, wide pitch movement. Routine: low fall, narrow movement. Grudging: low, level, quiet, with little movement at all. Exact descriptions vary; the point is that pitch movement, not words, carried the attitude.

A Final Word to the Reader

You have travelled from the single sound to the melody of the whole utterance: the organs of speech, the consonants and vowels, the syllable and its stress, the reductions of connected speech, and the tunes that carry attitude. Pronunciation is a physical skill as much as a mental one — it lives in the tongue and the ear. Practise aloud daily, transcribe what you hear, and let recordings be your mirror. The sounds of English are finite and learnable; this book has given you the complete map.

— Maggie Enow, Graduate of the University of Yaoundé I, English Modern Letters