

Basics of
COMMUNICATION SKILLS

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EMESCO

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Speech is a very important ingredient of a person's personality. A person who is articulate, in other words, who is able to express his ideas coherently and speak distinctly, will have a toe-hold in this very competitive world. Being able to speak well gives a person the much-needed self-confidence which in turn betters his performance in any field. When there are two equally qualified persons attending an interview, it is good communication skills which can tilt the balance in an individual's favour. In short, the speaking ability of an individual may either make or mar his career and even his life.

When we talk of good communication skills, there are many components like the choice of words, the grammatical structure of a sentence and pronunciation. In this book, we will be dealing with pronunciation. Since English is learnt as a second language in our country, it has to be learnt in a systematic manner. The purpose of this book is to improve the pronunciation of English of the second language learners. In other words, it deals with spoken language. There are many humanly possible speech sounds in the world. But every language uses only some of these speech sounds called **phonemes**. A phoneme is a minimal distinctive sound unit of a language. The selection and organization of speech sound (phonemes) in a language comes under the preview of **phonology**. Now you might wonder as to how one can make out the phonemes in a language. You take a pair of words like Pat and Mat. In this pair, two sounds (letters here) are the same (-at). The two words differ only in one sound p and m (here letters of the alphabet are used as the reader has not been introduced to phonetic symbols). So by replacing one sound for another in the same environment, if the meaning of the word is changed, then it is a phoneme. These minimally different pairs of words by which phonemes are established are called **Minimal Pairs**.

a	as	in	<u>anger</u>
a	as	in	<u>answer</u>
a	as	in	<u>call</u>
a	as	in	<u>annoy</u>
a	as	in	<u>game</u>
a	as	in	<u>ate</u>
a	as	in	<u>luggage</u>

This disparity between spelling and sound makes a case for phonetics and entails the learning of phonetics.

Substitution of one sound with another

Apart from this above mentioned problem, there is another difficulty that the second language learners of English face. Some of the sounds which are present in English may not be found in their mother tongue and vice versa. Usually, we find that when we don't find an apt word to describe something, we make do with another word with an almost similar meaning. The same is true of pronunciation. When we find that a particular phoneme that is present in English is not there in our familiar list of mother tongue sounds, we substitute that new sound with a sound which is almost like the target sound. This substitution leads to a breakdown in communication.

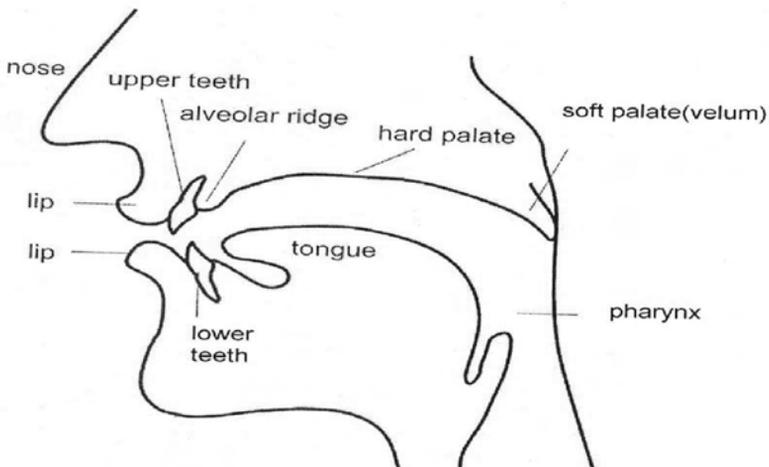
Till now we have looked at only how the sounds or phonemes of English pose a problem for learners of English. Since phonemes are segments in a stretch of speech, these are also called the segmental features. After dealing with these segmental features, we will be looking at other features that make up speech; they are word accent, rhythm and intonation. These are bracketed under one term and are called the supra-segmental features. They are so called because they work at a level above the segmental features. The last aspect of this book deals with inputs on how to improve one's communication skills.

CHAPTER TWO

PRODUCTION OF SPEECH

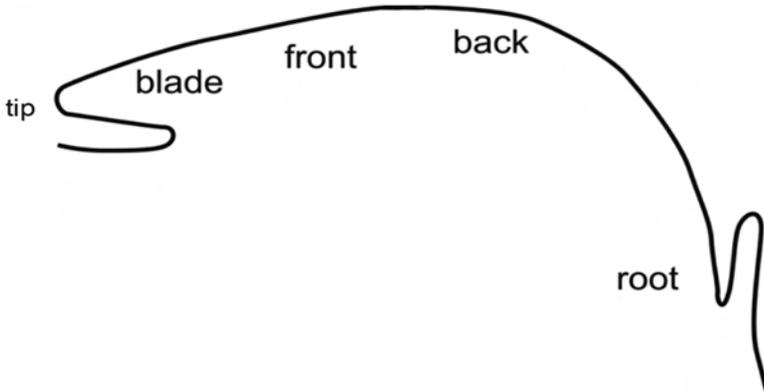
2.1 Speech Mechanism

Before we go on to the sounds, it is necessary that we have an understanding of the articulators involved in Speech Production. Let me briefly describe the speech mechanism. Air is the basis for all speech sounds – air that flows out of the lungs is modified into speech sounds by the action of certain organs of our body. Our speech organs are the lungs, the larynx and the organs in the mouth. Organs above the larynx are called **articulators**. So we have the pharynx, the roof of the mouth, i.e. the palate, divided into the hard palate and soft palate called the velum, the alveolar ridge, the tongue, the teeth and the lips. With your tongue, you can touch and feel – the hard, bony, concave part is the hard palate, and the soft, fleshy part is the soft palate or velum. The other articulators are the lips, the tongue, and the teeth. The rough area behind the teeth is called the teeth ridge or the alveolar ridge. In the oral cavity, the lower jaw, tongue and lips are the active articulators, whereas the upper jaw is the passive articulator, so called because it is immobile.



Picture of the Speech organs

The tongue also has five parts – there is no clear-cut division but it is usual to have sub-divisions of the tongue – tip of the tongue, the blade, the front, the back and the root of the tongue.

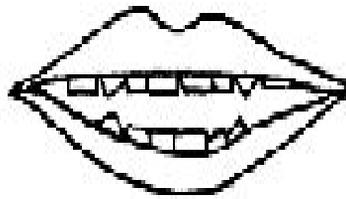


Picture of the parts of the Tongue

While speaking, the lips also take three different positions – 1) Spread 2) Neutral 3) and round. But spread and neutral are usually put under one umbrella term – unrounded. So while describing vowels, the position of the lips is either rounded or unrounded.



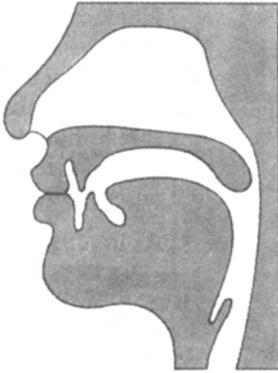
Rounded



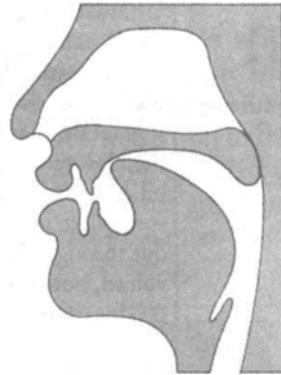
Unrounded

Picture of the three different positions of the lips

The soft palate or velum functions like a valve. It can either be raised, thereby blocking the passage of air into the nasal cavity or it can be lowered, allowing air to flow through the nasal cavity.



(air passage into the Nasal cavity is open)



(air passage into the nasal cavity is blocked)

Picture of soft palate acting as a valve –

Nasal sounds

Production of Nasal Sounds

This is the position of the velum, or the soft palate for nasal sounds. Soft palate is lowered and the oral passage is blocked at some point in the oral cavity and air flow out through the nose.

Oral sounds

Production of Oral Sounds

This is the position of this velum or soft palate for oral sounds. Soft palate is raised blocking the passage of air into the nasal cavity thus producing only the oral sounds.

In the larynx, which is also called the voice box, there is a pair of lip-like structures called the vocal cords. Between the vocal cords, there is an opening called the glottis. During normal breathing they are wide apart; but during the articulation of some sounds these vocal cords vibrate and for some others, they don't. The sounds produced when they don't vibrate are called voiceless sounds, and the sounds produced when they vibrate are called voiced sounds. This can be demonstrated through a simple exercise. Plug your ears with your fingers and produce /Ssss---/ and /Zzzzzz---/. You will realize that