



# Unit 6

## Consonants (2)

### English consonants from a German point of view

Print version of the  
*Phonetics with Listening Practice (British)*  
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Robert Spence, LangSciTech, Saarland University

English Phonetics: Unit 6:  
/ˈɪŋ glɪf ə ˈnet ɪks ˈjuːn ɪt ˈsɪks/

6.1

Consonants (2)  
[ˈkɒnsənənts ˈtuː] (broad)  
[ˈkʰɒnsənənts ˈtʰuː] (narrow)  
[ˈkʰɒnsənənts ˈtʰuː] (alternative representation of diphthong)

English consonants from a German point of view  
[ˈɪŋ glɪf ˈkʰɒnsənən(t)s fɪə m ə ˈdʒɜː mən ˈp(w)ɔɪ nt ə (v) ˈnjuː]

4 / 6 frimaire, an CCXXVIII de la République  
[kɑtʁ]/[ si fʁi.mɛ(:)ʁ | ã dɔ.sã.vɛt.hɥit də la œ.py.blik]  
25 / 27 November 2019

[ ˈtʰwɛnt.i.fɪθ əv ]/[ ˈtʰwɛnt.i.sev.(ə)ŋθ əv nə(ʊ).ˈvɛm.bə ˈtʰwɛnt.i.naɪn.tʰiːn]

6.2

## 1 Initial consonants (and consonant clusters)

### The system of ‘initials’ in English

- See the list in your handout, also available at:  
<http://spence.saar.de/courses/phonetics/syllablestructure/initials.pdf>
- This is a list of consonants and consonant-clusters that can occur ‘word-initially’ (i.e. ‘as the Onset of a syllable which is the first syllable in (the phonological realization of) a word’).
- It is based on a formula put forward by Benjamin Lee WHORF in a popular-science article originally published in the 1940s (‘Linguistics as an exact science’. In: B. L. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*. ed. J. B. Carroll. Cambridge (Mass.), M. I. T. Press, 1956.)
- It has been checked against all the words in a major dictionary.
- The system for the beginning of a syllable “in the middle of a word” might be slightly different.
- Can you pronounce all the consonants and consonant-clusters on the list?

6.3

A tip for producing English approximants

- If you have problems producing the English voiced approximants [w] ('labiovelar'), [ɹ] ('(post-)alveolar' or '(palato-)alveolar') and [j] ('palatal'), then start with [u], [ə] and [i], and gradually decrease the openness of your mouth.
- Make sure the airflow is still 'laminar', not 'turbulent'.
- As an alternative for [ɹ]: start with [ʒ] and gradually *increase* the openness of your mouth.

6.4

A further note on pronouncing English /r/

- Note the following positional variants ("allophones") of the English phoneme /r/ that are used by many speakers:
  1. /r/ → [ɹ] ([ɹ] = voiced post- or palato-alveolar approximant);
  2. /pr/, /kr/ → [pɹ̥], [kɹ̥] ([ɹ̥] = devoiced post- or palato-alveolar approximant);
  3. /θr/ → [θɾ] ([ɾ] = voiced alveolar tap or flap);
  4. /tr/ → [tɹ̠] ([ɹ̠] = devoiced retroflex approximant); cf [tʃ].
  5. /dr/ → [dɹ̠] ([ɹ̠] = voiced retroflex approximant); cf [dʒ].
- Note that the IPA symbol [ɹ] can stand for a dental, alveolar, or palatoalveolar voiced approximant, corresponding to the voiced fricatives [ð], [z], or [ʒ].
- If you really want to go into detail, you can indicate that /r/ is normally produced by many native speakers as [ɹ̠<sup>w</sup>], i.e. retracted (not (laminal-) alveolar but (laminal-) palatoalveolar) and labialized (lips rounded), as in ⟨red⟩ /red/ → [ɹ̠<sup>w</sup>ɛd] or [ɹ̠<sup>w</sup>ɛ̠d].

6.5

One more reason why English /r/ [ɹ] is *post-* or *palato-*alveolar

(in Onset position in native English words:)		/m/	/n/	/w/	/l/	/r/	/j/
alveolar fricative	/s/	/sm/	/sn/	/sw/	/sl/	—	/sj/
palatoalveolar fricative	/ʃ/	—	—	—	—	/ʃr/	—

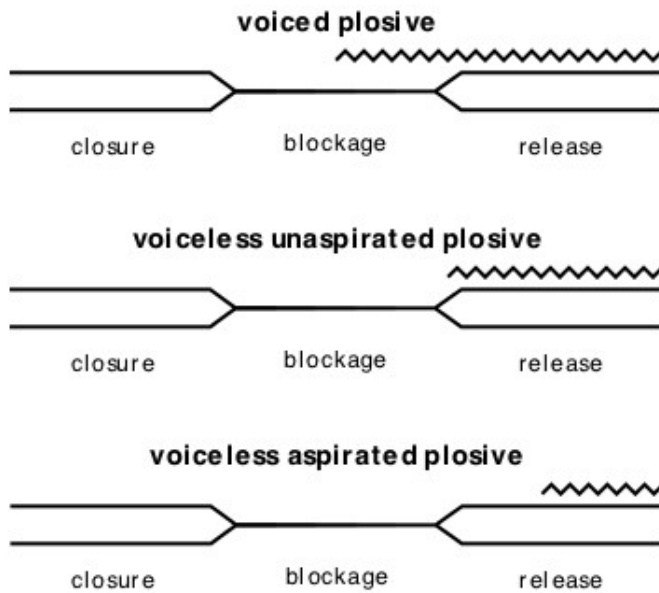
6.6

What follows the sound? What precedes the sound?

- Note that people start preparing for a sound before they get to it:
  - /ertθ/ → [eɪt̪θ]
  - (dental t instead of alveolar t, because of the following dental fricative) ...
- ... and are still recovering from the preceding sound when the next one starts:
  - /'pɒpɔɹɪn/ → ['p<sup>h</sup>ɒp̚,ɹ̠ɪn]
  - (devoicing of the lenis velar plosive);
  - but note that this is still different from the voiceless fortis velar plosive in ['p<sup>h</sup>ɒp̚,k<sup>h</sup>ɔ:n]

6.7

Voice Onset Time (see Wikipedia article)



Frz. ⟨gâches⟩	Engl. ⟨gash⟩	Frz. ⟨caches⟩	Engl. ⟨cash⟩
		Kölsch ⟨Kölsch⟩	Hochdt. ⟨Kölsch⟩
voiced	voiced	voiceless	voiceless
(fully)	(partially)	unaspirated	aspirated

6.8

## 2 Final consonants (and consonant clusters)

The system of ‘finals’ in English

- See the list of ‘finals’ in your handout, also available here:  
<http://spence.saar.de/courses/phonetics/syllablestructure/finals.pdf>
- This is a list of consonants and consonant-clusters that can occur ‘word-finally’ (i.e. ‘as the Coda of a syllable which is the last syllable in (the phonological realization of) a word’).
- Many of the combinations only occur due to the inflexional and derivational morphology of English words: ⟨-(e)s⟩, ⟨-ed⟩, ⟨-th⟩, etc.
- The system would be even more complicated if we included the possible ways a syllable can end in the *middle* of an English word.

6.9

Voiced final consonants

- The most important thing to practise is:
  - producing a voiced final consonant.
- The secret is to remember
  - that such a consonant has to be lenis (weak, relaxed) in English, not fortis (strong, tense) as in German,
  - and that the relaxedness applies to the whole of the Rhyme (including the Nucleus). Don’t rush! Don’t “clip” the vowel! Take your time!
- Try practising this now:

⟨bit⟩ [bɪt]	⟨bid⟩ [bɪd]	⟨bead⟩ [bi:d]	⟨beat⟩ [bi:t]
(‘bisschen’)	(‘bieten’)	(‘Perle’)	(‘schlagen’)

- When practising, turn the voice off right at the beginning of a voiceless final consonant, but let it go right through and beyond a voiced one, producing a slight schwa at the end.

6.10

### Don't try too hard!

- How do you pronounce <clothes> ('Kleider') – as opposed to <cloths> ('Tücher'), the plural of <cloth> ('Tuch')?
- Officially: /kləʊðz/, so therefore [kləʊðz]
- But if you're lazy, try [kləʊvz] or [kləʊz:]
- Why?
- You're in the neutral position (schwa), then you start closing your lips slightly, as if for w; then you have to get from there to z, but the tip of your tongue gets horribly in the way. So just "smooth things out a bit".

6.11

## 3 Some work for you!

### Homework

- Read the chapter on sound-spelling correspondences (see email).

6.12