

Unit 7



Consonants (2)

English consonants from a German point of view

Print version of the
Phonetics with Listening Practice (British)
presentation given on
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English Phonetics: Unit 7:

/ˈɪŋ ɡlɪfə ˈnet ɪks ˈjuːn ɪt ˈsev ən/

Consonants (2)

[ˈkɒnsənənts ˈtuː] (broad)

[ˈkʰɒnsənənts ˈtʰuː] (narrow)

[ˈkʰɒnsənənts ˈtʰuː] (alternative representation of diphthong)

English consonants from a German point of view

[ˈɪŋɡlɪf ˈkʰɒnsənən(t)s fɛəm ə ˈdʒɜːmən ˈp(w)ɔɪnt ə(v) ˈvjuː]

Tuesday 20 May 2025

/ˈtjuːz.deɪ ðə ˈtwent.i.əθ əv ˈmeɪ ˈtwent.i. ˈtwent.i. ˈfaɪv/

[ˈtjuːz.deɪ ðə ˈtwɛnt.i.əθ əv ˈmeɪ | ˈtwɛnt.i ˈtwɛnt.i ˈfaɪv]

7.1

7.2

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/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?

7.3

A tip for producing English approximants

- If you have problems producing the English voiced approximants [w] ('labiovelar'), [ɹ] ('postalveolar') 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' (smooth), not 'turbulent'.
- As an alternative for [ɹ]: start with [ʒ] and gradually *increase* the openness of your mouth.

7.4

Practising English approximants (Sauer 6 1 to 6 2: /w/)

we	Gwendolyn	inward	worm	wolf	bewitch
[wi:]	[ˈgwɛn.dəlɪn]	[ˈɪn.wəd]	[wɜ:m]	[wɒlf]	[bi.ˈwɪtʃ]
wigwam	Wycliffe	Wyoming	where	whistle	while
[ˈwɪɡ.wæm]	[ˈwɪk.lɪf]	[waɪ.ˈɒm.ɪŋ]	[weɹ̩]	[ˈwɪs.l̩]	[waɪl̩]
twist	twine	Twiggy	tweed	twig	Twain
[twɪst]	[twaɪn]	[ˈtwɪɡ.i]	[twi:d]	[twɪg]	[tweɪn]
quite	qualify	quack	quaint	queer	quiver
[kwɔɪt]	[ˈkwɒl.i.faɪ]	[kwæk]	[kweɪnt]	[kwiɹ̩]	[ˈkwɪv.ə]
squeak	squirm	squeal			
[skwi:k]	[skwɜ:m]	[skwi:l̩]	[skwi:θ]		
Gwyn	Quinn	guano	quote		
[ɡwɪn]	[kwɪn]	[ˈɡwɑː.nəʊ]	[ˈkwəʊt]		
dwelt	twelve	Dwight	twice		
[dweɪt]	[twɛɪv]	[dwaɪt]	[twɑɪs]		
wise	vies	wet	vet	Wales	vales
[waɪz]	[vaɪz]	[wɛt]	[vɛt]	[weɪlz]	[veɪlz]
worse	verse	wick	Vic	wiper	viper
[wɜ:s]	[vɜ:s]	[wɪk]	[vɪk]	[waɪp.ə]	[vaɪp.ə]
weird	veered	wine	vine	wary	vary
[weɪəd]	[vɪəd]	[waɪn]	[vaɪn]	[weɪəri]	[veɪəri]

7.5

Practising English approximants (Sauer 6 3: /w/)

Walter wanted vodka and wine. | His advice was too obvious. /ˈwɔːl.tə ˈwɒnt.ɪd ˈvɒd.kəɪ ənd ˈwaɪn/ | /hɪz əd.ˈvaɪs wəz ˈtuː ˈɒb.vɪ.əs/

Winifred read Advanced Linguistics. /ˈwɪnɪ.fred ˈred əd.ˈvɑːnst lɪŋ.gwɪst.ɪks/

Whether the weather be fine | Or whether the weather be not, /ˈweð.ə ðə ˈweð.ə bɪ ˈfaɪn/ | /ɔː ˈweð.ə ðə ˈweð.ə bɪ ˈnɒt/

Whether the weather be cold | Or whether the weather be hot, /ˈweð.ə ðə ˈweð.ə bɪ ˈkəʊld/ | /ɔː ˈweð.ə ðə ˈweð.ə bɪ ˈhɒt/

We'll weather the weather | Whatever the weather, /wi:l ˈweð.ə ðə ˈweð.ə/ | /wət.ˈev.ə ðə ˈweð.ə/

Whether we like it or not. /ˈweð.ə wi laɪk ɪt ɔː ˈnɒt/

We were invited for a glass of whiskey. /wi wɜː m.ˈvɑːt.ɪd fɜː ə ˈɡlɑːs əv ˈwɪsk.i/

The Wizard of Oz is a wonderful movie. /ðə ˈwɪzəd əv ɒz ɪz ə ˈwʌn.də.fəl ˈmuːvi/

7.6

Practising English approximants (Sauer 6 3: /w/) (continued)

We value the love of our brothers and sisters. /wi ˈvæl.juː ðə ˈlʌv əv ɑː ˈbrʌð.əz ən ˈsɪst.əz/ (N.B. pronunciation of "our")

Is it worth while working in the vineyard? /ɪz ɪt ˈwɜːθ ˈwaɪl ˈwɜːk.ɪŋ ɪn ðə ˈvɪnjəd/

Vampires usually ravish virgins. /ˈvæm.paɪəz ˈjuːʒ.u.ə.li ˈrævɪʃ ˈvɜːdʒ.ɪnz/

What weather will Vivian have in Venice? /wɒt ˈweð.ə wɪl ˈvɪv.i.ən ˈhæv ɪn ˈven.ɪs/

We watched the Woodstock Festival on television. /wi ˈwɒtʃt ðə ˈwʊd.stɒk ˈfest.ɪv.l ɒn ˈtel.ə.vɪʒ.n/

She couldn't find any vegetables at Woolworth's. /ʃi ˈkʊd.ɪnt ˈfaɪnd en.i ˈvedʒ.təb.lz ət ˈwʊl.wəθs/

They visited Worcester and Wolverhampton. /ðeɪ 'vɪz.ɪt.ɪd 'wʊst.ər ənd 'wʊlv.ə.hæm.tən/

Harvard University and the University of Pennsylvania are very well known. /'hɑ:v.əd ju:n.i.'vɜ:s.ɪt.i ənd ðə ju:n.i.'vɜ:s.ɪt.i əv pens.ɪl.'veɪn.ɪ.ər ə 'veri 'wel 'nəʊn/

7.7

Practising English approximants (Sauer 6.3: /w/) (concluded)

There was an old woman and what do you think? /ðeə 'wʊz ən əʊld 'wʊm.ən ənd 'wɒt dʊ ju 'θɪŋk/ She lived upon nothing but victuals and drink. /fɪ 'lɪvd ə.pən 'nʌθ.ɪŋ bət 'vɪt.lz ənd 'drɪŋk/ [lex] And though victuals and drink were the chief of her diet, /ənd ðəʊ 'vɪt.lz ənd 'drɪŋk wə ðə 'tʃi:f əv hə 'daɪ.ət/ This plaguy old woman could never be quiet. /ðɪs 'pleɪɡ.i əʊld 'wʊm.ən kʊd 'nev.ə bɪ 'kwaɪ.ət/[lex] She went to the baker, to buy her some bread, /fɪ 'went tə ðə 'beɪk.ə tə 'baɪ hə səm 'bred/ And when she came home her old husband was dead. /ənd 'wen fɪ keɪm 'həʊm həɪ əʊld 'hʌzbənd wəz 'ded/ [lex] She went to the clerk to toll the bell, /fɪ 'went tə ðe 'klɑ:k tə 'təʊl ðə 'bel/ And when she got home, her old husband was well. /ənd 'wen fɪ ɡɒt 'həʊm həɪ əʊld 'hʌzbənd 'wəz 'wel/

7.8

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 postalveolar approximant);
 2. /pr/, /kr/ → [pɹ], [kɹ] ([ɹ] = devoiced postalveolar approximant);
 3. /θr/ → [θɹ] ([ɹ] = voiced alveolar tap or flap);
 4. /tr/ → [tɹ] ([ɹ] = devoiced retroflex approximant); cf [tʃ].
 5. /dr/ → [dɹ] ([ɹ] = voiced retroflex approximant); cf [dʒ].
- Note that the IPA symbol [ɹ] can stand for a dental, alveolar, or postalveolar 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 [ɹ^w], i.e. retracted (not (laminal-) alveolar but (laminal-) postalveolar) and labialized (lips rounded), as in <red> /red/ → [ɹ^wɛd] or [ɹ^wɛ̃d].

7.9

One more reason why English /r/ [ɹ] is postalveolar

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

7.10

Practising allophones of /r/:

wrist	rock	Rome	race	raze	rhetoric
[ɹɪst]	[ɹɒk]	[ɹəʊm]	[ɹeɪs]	[ɹeɪz]	[ˈɹet.ə.ɹɪk]
proud	practice	priest	crib	crest	Christ
[praʊd]	[ˈprækt.ɪs]	[ˈpriːst]	[kɹɪb]	[kɹɛst]	[kɹɪst]
try	chai	trip	chip	drain	Jane
[tɹaɪ]	[tʃaɪ]	[tɹɪp]	[tʃɪp]	[dɹeɪn]	[dʒeɪn]
trill	drill	trout	drought	trawler	drawler
[tɹɪl]	[dɹɪl]	[tɹaʊt]	[draʊt]	[ˈtɹɔ:l.ə]	[ˈdɹɔ:l.ə]
through	thrombosis	throw			
[θɹu:]	[θrɒm.'bɒs.ɪs]	[θrəʊ]			
here	here and there	hither	hither and thither		
/hɪə/	/hɪə ən ðeə/	/hɪð.ə/	/hɪð.ə ən 'ðɪð.ə/		
<hier>	<hier und dort>	<hierher>	<hierher und dorthier>		
hence	thence	hens			
[hens]	[ðens]	[heːnz]			
<hierhin>	<dorthin>	<Hühner>			

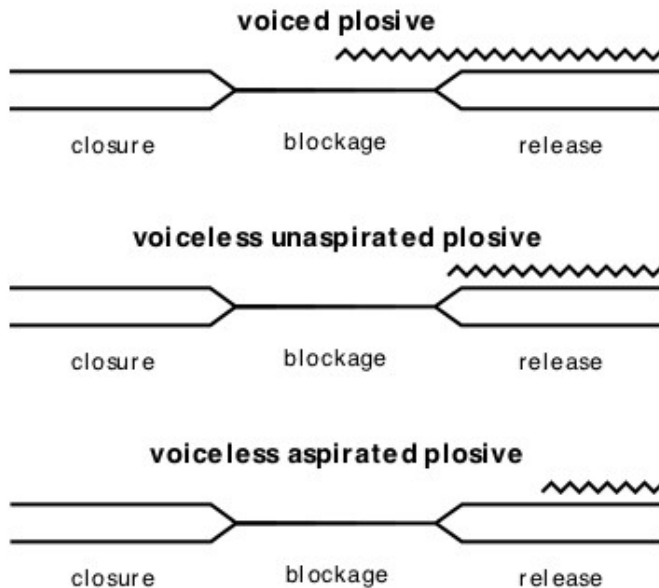
7.11

What follows the sound? What precedes the sound?

- Note that people start preparing for a sound before they get to it:
 - /ertθ/ → [eɪ̯t̪θ]
 - (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:
 - /'pɒpɡʌn/ → ['pʰɒ̥p̚,ɡʌn]
 - (devoicing of the lenis velar plosive);
 - but note that this is still different from the voiceless fortis velar plosive in ['pʰɒ̥p̚,kʰɔ:n]

7.12

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

7.13

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/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.

7.14

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.

7.15

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".

7.16

3 Some work for you!

Homework (if you haven't done it already...)

- Read the chapter on sound-spelling correspondences: http://www.spence.saar.de/courses/phoneticswithlistening/unit04a_20211/englischephonetik_06.pdf

7.17