

LISTENSPEAK

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IRENE ALTERBAUM



LISTEN

SPEAK

Pathways to Better Speech

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City University of New York



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Preface

The college student of today seeks a place in a highly competitive society. Business and professional advancement is often affected by the ability to communicate intelligently and effectively. Students are increasingly aware that how they speak may be a determining factor for their success or failure in careers and social interactions.

A major concern in public communication is intelligibility--the ability to use appropriate sound, stress and intonation patterns in a manner that facilitates listener comprehension.

Students do not consider it "boring" or a waste of time to improve their speech patterns. Let's take a closer look at these students. Who are they, what are their problems, and how do the materials in this book help solve their problems?

We are speaking of three groups of students:

1. Speakers of English as a Second Language.* More than 400,000 of these students are currently enrolled in our colleges and universities and their numbers continue to swell.
2. Speakers of English as a Second Dialect. Such students include those from countries like Nigeria, Guyana and Kenya, whose first language is English, but whose phonological patterns are at variance with American English.
3. Native speakers. These students speak a dialect perceived as non-standard because of phonological, grammatical and lexical differences from mainstream English.

While all three groups have a common goal, their problems are different. The non-native students need to master a new sound and stress system. The second dialect speakers must modify their patterns to fit the mold of American English, while the native speakers must go through the difficult process of discarding poor speech models and learning acceptable ones. These students need to sharpen their listening skills, improve their speech intelligibility, acquire proficiency in self-monitoring techniques, and develop self-confidence in speaking standard American English.

*We recommend this text for students on the intermediate ESL level and above.

Preface

This book was written to help our students achieve these goals. It represents ten years of work in the classroom developing, revising and refining materials. The text is comprehensive in scope, incorporating a wide variety of exercises and drills, including reading passages and target sound focused dialogues, discussion questions and student enactments.

There are several aspects to this book that we consider unique:

1. We teach the intonation pattern of the language before the sound system. This is not done through the step system, but through an understanding of stress--how duration, volume and pitch affect the melody pattern of the language. Phrasing, pausing and linking are also taught in this section.
2. We use the International Phonetic Alphabet which provides the fastest access to correct sound production.
3. We believe in extensive modelling, immediate feedback and self-monitoring. The student hears, repeats and is immediately corrected.
4. We use humor in our dialogues to encourage the understanding of idiomatic English.

The book has been divided into five parts: an overview of the speech mechanism and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), stress patterns, consonants, vowels, and diphthongs. It should be noted that while consonants and vowels are grouped together, with the consonants preceding the vowels, they can be taught in any sequence desired by the instructor.

Each chapter follows the same highly structured sequence:

1. **Listening/Speaking.** Identifying and perceiving differences between target sounds.
2. **Listening/Writing.** Underlining, circling, segmenting words into sounds and syllables to sharpen listening acuity.
3. **Homework/Review.** Reinforcing class work with written exercises on removeable pages; reading dialogues at home, preparatory to presentation in class.
4. **Reading/Discussion.** Using dialogues as simulated conversation and as a stimulus to free but controlled discussion.

We trust that this guide and workbook will satisfy both students and teachers who are seeking mature and lively college level exercises designed for the improvement of phonological skills.

Perhaps the hopes of our students can be summed up in the words of one of our non-native speakers:

"All my dreams are to speak English like an American. My speech class helped me a lot. It gave me back my self-confidence. Now I think I could talk to the average American and be understood."

We would like to express our appreciation to Jack Ostling, New York City Technical College and to Clara Velazquez, Hostos Community College for their encouragement and support. We are indebted to Jennie Wells, Professor Emeritus, New York City Technical College for her initial assistance and foresight.

We are particularly grateful to our students whose interest and responsiveness contributed to the preparation of this book.

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*/ʌ/ is a central vowel.

Part One

Overview of Basic Speech Concepts

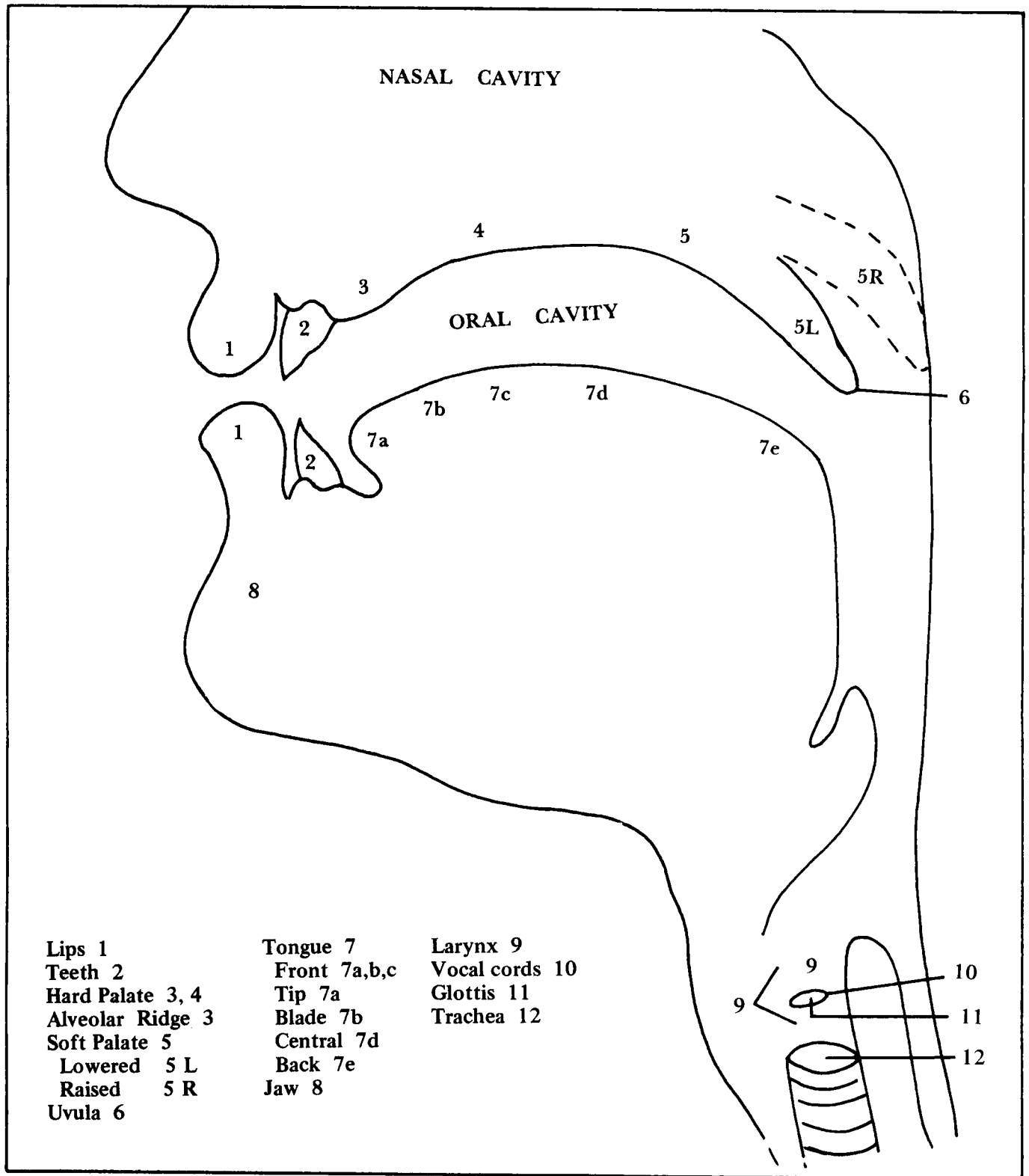


Figure 1. The Speech Mechanism

Overview of Basic Speech Concepts

How many sounds are there in the English language? How many sounds do you hear in the word six? How are these sounds made? These questions are rarely raised. Native American speakers never think about the sound patterns of their language. This is true for all of us. Yet, it is often helpful to second language learners to understand the mechanics involved in the speech process as they begin their study of spoken English.

As college students, pursuing your studies and planning for a career, you may want to improve your speech patterns in English. The introduction to this course will focus on the organs of speech indicating how you can control them to form the sounds that convey your thoughts. You will find that the American English sound system may differ in many ways from your native language. Knowing the sounds of English will clear up confusions you may have in understanding and in pronouncing certain words.

THE SPEECH MECHANISM

The speech organs—the tongue, the lips, the lower jaw and the soft palate—are capable of considerable movement. When these articulators work together, they shape various sounds, the consonants, the vowels and the diphthongs. Contributing to this speech machinery are the hard palate, and the upper and lower teeth. These organs are stationary and incapable of movement but they serve as points of contact for the active articulators. The vocal cords are also essential to the speech process.

Tongue

The most flexible articulator in the speech system is the tongue. Think of all the movements your tongue can make. You can point it, groove it, move it from side to side, extend it past the lips, raise or lower it, or have it lie flat in your mouth. Any of the four sections of the tongue may be involved in speaking: the tongue tip, the blade, the mid-section, and the back. (See Figure 1.)

When you raise the tongue tip and press it firmly against the hard palate just behind the upper teeth, you can produce any one of these frequently used sounds /t d l n/ as in tight deed lull and noon. These sounds are often known as lingua-alveolar sounds. Lingua refers to the tongue, alveolar to the upper gum ridge of the hard palate. You are also using the tongue tip when you produce the /s z ʃ ʒ/ sounds in these words cease zoos church and judge.

Overview of Basic Speech Concepts

As you make the sounds / k g ŋ / as in coke gag and singing, can you tell what part of the tongue you are using? It is the back section that is raised and pressed against the soft palate, known as the velum. These sounds are called lingua-velar because the velum is the point of contact for these two articulators.

The mid-section of the tongue is active for the production of the /j/ sound in yellow young and cure. The ability to extend the tongue between the upper and lower front teeth enables us to produce the th sounds in think they and everything. These sounds do not exist in most languages.

The sides of the tongue can also assist in the production of the sounds /s z ʃ ʒ tʃ dʒ/.

Lips

The lips can function alone or they can be used in conjunction with other articulators. You can round your lips or unround them. You can close them firmly or very lightly. The shape of the lips and the degree of tension of the lips may vary so that different vowel sounds can be formed. To produce the vowel sounds /ou/ and /u/ as in toe and two, the lips are rounded. To produce the vowel sounds /i/ / ɪ/ and /eɪ/ as in fee fit and fate, the lips are unrounded. They are stretched and tense for feet and relaxed for fit.

The lips also play a large part in the production of some consonants. The consonant sound /w/ as in war and queen requires considerable lip rounding. The lips can close firmly for /m/ /p/ and /b/ as in man put and buy. Sounds that are formed by the action of two lips are called bilabial. The contact between the lips and the teeth results in the labio-dental sounds /f/ and /v/ in few and view. The word "dental" refers to teeth.

Lower Jaw

Unlike the upper jaw which is fixed, the lower jaw can open and close. The lower jaw opens widely for /a/ in stop, a little less widely for /ɔ/ in law and /æ/ in add. To produce /ʌ/ in cup, /ɜ/ in first and /ε/ in end, the jaw is slightly open.

Palate

The roof of the mouth is called the palate. It separates the nose or nasal cavity from the mouth, or oral cavity. See diagram. There are two major sections:

1. The hard palate which is bony and extends from the upper front teeth to the middle of the roof of the mouth.
2. The soft palate, which consists of muscle and tissue, extends from the middle to the back part of the roof of the mouth. The tip of the soft palate ends in a flap of tissue which hangs down and is called the

uvula. This may be seen when you open your mouth very wide as you look in the mirror.

Hard Palate

If you touch the upper front teeth with your tongue and then move it slowly back along the hard palate, you can feel a bump or a ridge. This is called the upper gum ridge or the alveolar ridge. When you produce the sounds /t d n l/, this is where the tongue tip rests. The affricates /tʃ/ in cheap and /dʒ/ in jeep start at this point with the tongue tip resting lightly on the gum ridge before moving quickly away from the palate. The /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ sounds along with the /r/ sound are made with the tongue tip curled back toward, but not touching the hard palate. They are known as lingua-palatal sounds.

Soft Palate

Unlike the hard palate, the soft palate is capable of movement. It can be raised and lowered. When the soft palate is raised, it closes off the passage-way to the nose. Nearly all English consonants and vowels are emitted through the mouth. Sounds that are made in this way are known as oral sounds. When the soft palate is lowered, sounds are directed through the nose. These sounds are called nasal sounds, and there are only three in the English language, /m n ŋ/ as in my know and sang.

When you raise the back of your tongue to produce /k g ŋ/, the point of contact for these lingua-velar sounds is the soft palate or the velum.

Teeth

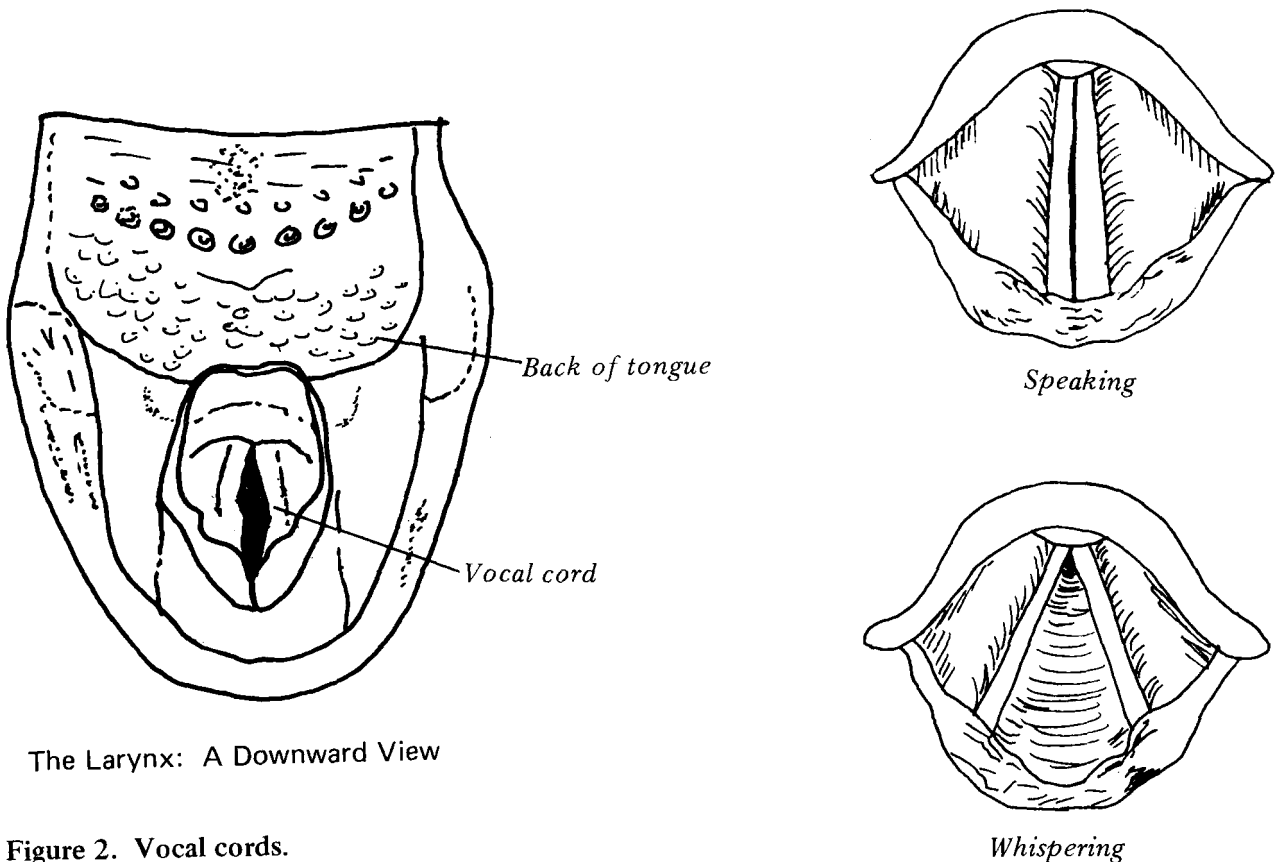
The upper and lower (front and side) teeth are used with other articulators to produce sounds. The biting edges of the upper and lower front teeth are close together for the production of /s z ʃ dʒ/. The sides of the tongue meet the upper side teeth to form the /s/ and /z/ sounds, and the voiced and voiceless th in they and thumb. Can you feel your upper front teeth pressing lightly on your lower lip when you produce /f/ and /v/ in few and view? When you observe yourself in a mirror, you can easily see the point of contact for these labio-dental sounds.

Vocal Cords

If you place your fingers at your throat and swallow, you can feel a bump moving up and down. What you are feeling is the larynx, or voicebox. It is situated on top of the trachea or the windpipe leading to the lungs, and contains two small powerful muscles known as the vocal cords or vocal bands.

As you breathe in, air is taken into the lungs. As you breathe out, the air passes through the vocal cords. The force of that exhaled breath stream causes the vocal cords to vibrate as they are pushed together and apart. When the vocal bands are apart, there is no vibration, and voiceless sounds such as

/p/ in pipe, /f/ in fish /h/ in who are produced. When the vocal bands come together and vibrate, you produce voiced sounds such as /m/ in my, /b/ in boy and /i/ in eat. The opening or space between the vocal cords is called the glottis; this opening is very wide in whispered speech.



The process of speaking, then, depends upon two closely related systems. When we talk, we are using:

1. The articulatory system which includes the tongue, the lips, the lower jaw, the teeth, and the hard and the soft palate. These organs shape the sounds we produce to form words.
2. The phonatory system which includes the breathing apparatus and the vocal cords responsible for producing voiced and voiceless sounds, an important feature in English speech. In addition, this system enables us to convey feeling and meaning through the vocal techniques of raising or lowering pitch, increasing or decreasing loudness, and lengthening and shortening vowel sounds.

THE SOUND SYSTEM OF AMERICAN ENGLISH

A key to understanding and speaking a second language is knowing the sound system which is used to form words. An efficient tool for perceiving sounds quickly, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is used all over the world for the transcription of sounds. (See chart 1.1.)

When you review the IPA aloud with your instructor, you will note that every sound is represented by a written symbol marked by a pair of slash lines. The letters s or ce are sounded as /s/ in the words see and race. The letter s in the word his is pronounced /z/. Although there are twenty-six letters in the alphabet, there are approximately 46 sounds as shown on the IPA charts. We have all been taught that there are 21 consonants and 5 vowels, a e i o u. However, according to the IPA transcription of General American dialect, there are 25 consonant sounds, 14 vowel sounds and 6 diphthong sounds.*

As you become more familiar with this phonological system, the differences between the sounds of your native language and those of American English will become more apparent. Spanish, French and Italian speakers do not use the breathy /p/ in pie; therefore their pronunciation of this word will be similar to buy. Speakers of Asian languages often confuse /l/ and /r/ so that there are no distinctions between glass and grass. In numerous instances, you will find yourself using the lips, tongue and jaw a little differently. Learning to identify the sounds of standard American English and knowing how to produce them will give you a better feeling about yourself when you speak.

At times, you will find that there is no consistent relationship between English spelling and pronunciation patterns. The IPA will help you to note that a sound may be represented by different spelling patterns. The vowel sound /i/ in eat is represented by different spelling patterns as in meat, meet ski and receive.

Let's look at the word six. How many letters do you see? Obviously, the answer is three. But how many sounds do you hear? Let's transcribe the word six into phonetics. Remember, one symbol represents one sound. The first sound is /s/, the second is the vowel sound /i/, the third is the /k/ and the last sound is /s/. Therefore, there are four sounds in the three letter word six. This system of recording the sounds of the spoken language will help you to see as well as to hear the actual pronunciation of the spoken word.

In addition to its relationship to your pronunciation, the sound system is closely linked to the meaning of your words for the listener. How well you are understood by listeners determines your intelligibility and your effectiveness as a speaker. The substitution of /s/ for sh as in sip instead of ship or the omission of the final /t/, producing the word can instead of can't may change the word and consequently its meaning for the listener.

*The Kenyon symbol system is used phonemically in this text to record General American Dialect (GAD), the most commonly used speech pattern heard on television and radio.

Sounds such as /s/ and /t/ that signal differences in meaning as in the examples sip for ship and can for can't are known as phonemes. Each phoneme possesses its own characteristics or distinctive features. These may be acoustic or articulatory. We may hear sounds that differ because they are voiced or voiceless such as /b/ or /p/. Most phonemes are orally produced and emitted through the mouth but three, the /m n ŋ/, can be distinguished as nasal sounds emitted through the nose. Some sounds such as the plosives /d/ and /g/ may be perceived as "exploding" after a brief stoppage of air. The fricatives /s/ and /z/ are distinguished from other phonemes on the basis of their hissing and buzzing qualities. A phoneme may share articulatory features with other phonemes such as /m/ or /b/ produced with the two lips close together; yet a distinctive feature of /m/ is nasality. So in contrasting the words me and bee, the listener is alerted to the differences in these words and in their respective meanings by the phonemes or sounds at the beginning of the words.

A phoneme may be defined as a family of sounds. You may know a family where everyone looks a little different, but they all have the same last name. The /t/ phoneme may be viewed in a similar way. If you produce the following words--time attend letter hit-- you will discover that the /t/ sounds in these words do not sound exactly the same nor are they produced in exactly the same way. The initial [t] in time or the [t] followed by a vowel in the stressed syllable in attend is breathier and more aspirated than the short medial [t] in letter. The [t] in hit is even more weakly aspirated in final position. All three [t] variants are slightly different from each other and are known as allophones. But all the [t] allophones are voiceless and recognizable as members of the [t] family.

Speech Communication Barriers

It is equally frustrating and confusing for the speaker and the listener when speech patterns are unclear. One student told us that while taking this course, she learned why people had laughed at her when she said she liked "Chinese foot" instead of "Chinese food." Her pronunciation changed the meaning of the message and therefore, our student received a different reaction from her listener than she had expected.

There are several reasons why a speaker may have difficulty in getting a message across to a listener. One problem may be that the speaker fails to produce final consonants. When the final /p/ in pipe is omitted, another word, pie, is heard. Failure to distinguish row road wrote because of the omission of the final consonant imposes an unnecessary burden on the listener. Unless the tongue tip is raised to the upper gum ridge for the /d/ in cold, this word is reduced to coal. Another problem may be that the voiced /z/ in knees is replaced by the voiceless /s/ in niece, thereby misleading the listener. Inaccurate placement of the articulators and incorrect voicing of sounds may result in indistinct, or unintelligible speech. Failure to use the lower jaw actively may cause you to sound indistinct and muffled. Speaking with the jaw clenched or nearly tightly shut results in considerable listener discomfort.

The omission, substitution, addition and distortion of sounds alter the words produced, obscure meaning and interfere with listener comprehension.

Another problem in pronunciation is misplacing stress or accenting the wrong syllable as in the words ab SENT, stu DENT, eco no MICS. Often the native listener loses interest because this speech pattern is different from what he expects to hear.

These problems tend to increase when you are speaking for longer periods of time in more formal speech situations. These are the more complex public communication events in which you may be giving oral presentations or reports before a group, providing explanations and directions, receiving and giving long telephone messages.

Applying Basic Phonological Concepts

Knowing the sound and stress patterns of standard American English is fundamental to the improvement of your listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The homework exercises on pages 12-14 following the IPA charts will serve as a guide for your learning and practicing basic phonological concepts. They can be done in class or at home and corrected in the class over a period of several lessons. They will help you to:

1. Pronounce the sound not the letter.

Example: /g/ not 'gee,' /b/ not 'bee';

2. Recognize if the sound is voiced or voiceless.*

Example: /t/ is voiceless (VL), /d/ is voiced (V)

3. Divide a word into its component sounds.

Example: The word fix has four sounds /f i k s /

4. Recognize and produce the final consonant.

Example: have /v/ half /f/ come /m/

5. Recognize and to produce consonant clusters.

Example:	/st/	<u>stop</u>		<u>meant</u>	/nt/
	/str/	<u>street</u>		<u>reached</u>	/tʃt/
	/ʃr/	<u>shrink</u>		<u>helped</u>	/lpt/

*If a sound is voiceless, you can feel considerable air emitted through your mouth and no vibration at your larynx.

If a sound is voiced, you can feel the vibration at your larynx and no air emitted through your mouth. All vowels are voiced.

Contrast /p/ and /b/ and you can feel the differences in vibration more easily.