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***CONTEMPORARY***  
***ENGLISH LANGUAGE***  
**PRONUNCIATION, SPELLING**  
**AND VOCABULARY**



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## INTRODUCTION

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The present course is primarily meant for Romanian undergraduates that study English. In this course approaches the most important topics from the fields of phonetics, phonology, orthography and lexis, focusing on difficulties encountered in the production and perception of English sounds and in the acquisition of pronunciation and spelling rules.

*Phonetics* is the study and description of speech sounds and of the elements of pronunciation at large, since pronunciation is a complex of sounds (vowels and consonants), syllables, word accent and intonation.

*Phonology* studies the way in which phonetic elements function in a language, the way in which phonemes are organized in a given language, i.e. their combinatorial possibilities. The phoneme is the minimal unit in the sound system of a language.

*Orthography* is very closely connected with phonetics, which in its turn is connected with lexicology, grammar and stylistics. Because of the notoriously confusing nature of English spelling, it is particularly important to think of English pronunciation in terms of phonemes rather than letters of the alphabet.

### **Why is this course book significant and useful?**

Generally, the theory about speech sounds and how they are used in language, i.e. phonetics and phonology, who is needed by people who are going to work with English at an advanced level (teachers included) and who need a deeper understanding of the principles regulating the use of sounds in spoken English. Ideally, the teacher and

the learner of a foreign language should be able to recognize and to produce the sounds of the studied language just like a native speaker.

More specifically, phonetics is important because it formulates the rules of pronunciation for separate sounds and sound combinations. Thus, through the system of reading rules, phonetics helps to pronounce correctly singular and plural forms of nouns, the past tense and past participle forms of English regular verbs.

Secondly, through its intonation component, phonetics can serve to single out the logical predicate of a sentence to show that an affirmative sentence is a question, etc.

Thirdly, through the right placement of stress we can distinguish certain nouns from verbs (e.g. 'object - ob'ject), homonymous words and word groups (e.g. 'blackbird - black 'bird).

### **Course Purposes**

After completing this course you will be able to:

- recognize and produce the sounds of English just like a native speaker
- be aware of and explain the phonetic and phonological phenomena that occur in connected speech
- use stress and intonation patterns correctly in English
- understand the complex relationship between pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary.

### **Course Book Design**

*The first unit* of the course is concerned with defining phonetics and phonology, explaining the connection of phonetics with other

branches of science, introducing the symbols used for teaching the pronunciation of English and identifying the main types of English standard pronunciation.

*The second unit* of this course is concerned with the description of English vowels and their classification. This unit also deals with the diphthongs of English. It is important to understand the main features of the vowels in order to pronounce them correctly.

Just like the second unit, *the third unit* deals with the description of the English consonants, their manner of articulation, their place of articulation and their main features.

As an important purpose of this course is to explain how English is pronounced in the accents normally chosen as the standards for people learning English, *the fourth unit* is devoted to discriminating British English from American English in terms of pronunciation, spelling and vocabulary.

*The fifth unit* looks more closely at the connection between pronunciation and spelling in English and shows that, because of the etymological nature of English orthography, learners of English have to cope with the discrepancies between spelling and present-day pronunciation.

Although English spelling is not a reliable indicator of pronunciation, the chapter presents some pronunciation patterns and markers that can still be found.

*The sixth unit* deals with speech sounds as they occur in normal, connected speech, i.e. sounds that are not isolated, fixed and unchangeable, but units that undergo modifications and affect one another. This unit explains phonetic phenomena that occur in casual speech: linking and intrusive /r/, assimilation, elision, etc. As it is practically impossible to speak English fluently unless the phenomenon of function word reduction is properly understood and applied, the unit ends with the use of the strong and weak forms of function (grammatical) words (articles, auxiliaries, modals, pronouns, conjunctions and prepositions).

*The seventh unit* focuses on larger units of speech such as the syllable and on aspects of speech such as stress. While Romanian is a syllable-timed language (a language which has each syllable pronounced with roughly the same duration), English is a stressed-timed language (a language which has the stressed syllables occurring at regular intervals). This unit also highlights the connection between phonology and lexicology.

*The eighth unit* discusses English as an intonation language by considering tone patterns in English, functions of intonation and the link between intonation and sentence types. The final goal of the unit is to make Romanian learners of English avoid transferring intonation patterns from the mother tongue in the foreign language.

Each of the units presented above starts with *unit aims* and ends with *an outline* of the main issues discussed in the chapter, a list of *key concepts* meant as a check list for revising the main notions before going on, and a brief section called '*further reading*'.

Each new technical term that is introduced in the course is printed in bold type and followed by an asterisk (\*), meaning that the term will be explained in the glossary at the end of the book.

The course book closes with three appendices containing a complete glossary of technical terms (*Glossary*), and a set of exercises suitable for each unit (*Exercises*).

## UNIT 1

### THE PHONEMIC SYSTEM OF ENGLISH

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#### Unit outline

##### Unit aims

- 1.1 **Phonetics and phonology**
  - 1.2 **The connection of phonetics and phonology with non-linguistic and linguistic sciences**
  - 1.3 **The importance of phonetic studies**
  - 1.4 **Phonetic symbols and types of transcription**
  - 1.5 **Types of standard pronunciation**
    - 1.5.1 *Received Pronunciation*
    - 1.5.2 *General American*
    - 1.5.3 *Non-Regional Pronunciation*
- Conclusions**  
**Key concepts**  
**Further reading**

### Unit aims

After you have completed the study of this unit you should be able to:

- ❖ define phonetics
- ❖ explain the connection of phonetics with other branches of science
- ❖ point out the importance of phonetics for a teacher of a foreign language
- ❖ recognize the symbols used for teaching the pronunciation of English
- ❖ identify the main type of English standard pronunciation.

### 1.1. Phonetics and phonology

#### ❖ Definition of phonetics

Phonetics is the science which studies the sounds used in speech and provides methods for their description, classification and transcription\*. (Crystal D., 1992: 259).

Speech sounds\* can be analysed from several points of view:

- a. acoustic
- b. articulatory
- c. auditory
- d. functional.

#### ❖ Types of phonetics

a. The *acoustic* aspect falls under the scope of what is commonly called ***acoustic phonetics***\* which studies the physical (acoustic) properties of speech sounds as transmitted between the mouth and the ear.

b. The *articulatory* aspect of speech sound is analysed by the branch called ***articulatory phonetics*** which deals with speech sounds from the point of view of their production, i.e. what organs are used to produce them and what precise movements they perform in order to articulate them.



c. **Auditory phonetics**\* studies speech sounds from the point of view of their perception, i.e. the perceptual response to speech sounds as mediated by the ear, the auditory nerve and the brain.

d. **Functional phonetics** or **phonology** investigates the functional aspect of sounds, accent\*, syllable and intonation.

### ❖ Definition of phonology

While phonetics studies speech sounds as sounds, in all their complexity and diversity, independent of their role in language, **phonology** studies speech sounds, as these are categorised by speakers of a given language; its study unit is called **phoneme**. The actually pronounced speech sounds are called **variants** or **allophones**\* of phonemes.

In standard British English, there are 44 different categories of speech sounds called phonemes. Phonemes are said to differ from each other in terms of certain **distinctive features**\* such as voice, nasality, etc. Phonologists study both phonemes (vowels\* and consonants\*) and prosody\* (stress and intonation) as subsystems of a spoken language.

### ❖ Branches of phonology

The study of speech into distinctive units or phonemes is called **segmental**\* **phonology**, whereas the analysis of prosodic and paralinguistic features in connected utterances of speech is called **non-segmental/ suprasegmental phonology**\*.

## 1.2. The connection of phonetics and phonology with *non-linguistic* and *linguistic* sciences

### ❖ The connection with grammar

Phonetics is connected with non-linguistic sciences such as **anatomy**, **acoustics** and **physiology**. For example, sounds can be described with reference to anatomical places of articulation (dental\*, palatal\*), to their physical structure (the frequency and amplitude characteristics of the sound waves) and are articulated by our organs of speech.

Phonetics is connected with **grammar** because, through the system or reading rules, it helps to pronounce the singular and plural forms of nouns correctly, the singular third form of verbs, the past tense forms and past participles of English regular verbs.

The study of the phonological, i.e. sound structure of morphemes is called **morphophonology\***. In many languages, English included, there are phonological rules which can only be described with reference to morphological structure. Thus, the morpheme 's' can be pronounced /ɪz/ (e.g. *peaches, judges*), /z/ (e.g. *apples, rides*) or /s/ (e.g. *maps, lacks*) depending on the final consonant\* of the base form of the verb to which it is attached.

One of the most important phonetic phenomena - **sound interchange** - is another manifestation of the connection of phonetics with grammar. For instance, this connection can be noticed in the category of NUMBER. Thus, the interchange / f-v /, /s-z /, /θ-ð/ helps to distinguish singular and plural forms of such nouns as: *calf-calves, house - houses, mouth - mouths*, etc.

Vowel interchange helps to discriminate the singular and the plural of nouns of foreign origin: *basis - bases* /'beɪsɪs - beɪsɪz / and also of irregular nouns such as *man - men* /mæn - men/.

Vowel interchange is connected with the TENSE forms of irregular verbs, for instance: *sing - sang - sung*.

### ❖ **Lexicology, semantics, stylistics and pragmatics**

Phonetics is also connected with **lexicology** and **semantics**. **Homographs\*** can be differentiated only due to pronunciation because they are identical in spelling:

*bow* /bəʊ/ - *bow* /baʊ/

*lead* /li:d / - *lead* /led/

*row* /rəʊ/ - *row* /raʊ/

*tear* /teə/ - *tear* /tiə/

*wind* /wɪnd / - *wind* /waɪnd/

Phonetics is connected with **stylistics** through repetition of words, phrases and sounds, lying at the basis of **rhyme, alliteration\***, etc.

The connection with the other linguistic branches (i.e. **semantics, pragmatics**) is obvious due the role played by **accent, stress** and