

Description of Consonant Sounds

Each consonant sound must have certain distinctive features on the basis of which it should be separated from the other sounds. For the sake of bringing out the distinctive feature of a consonant sound, that is to describe and classify it, the following parameters can be taken into account.

- (I) The nature of the air-stream mechanism
- (II) the state of glottis (voicing)
- (iii) the position of the velum or soft-palate (oral/nasal)
- (iv) the articulators involved (active/passive)
- (v) the nature of stricture (obstruction of the air-stream)

The nature of air-stream mechanism indicates whether the sound produced is pulmonic, glottalic or velaric on one hand, and egressive or ingressive on the other hand.

The state of glottis indicates whether a sound is voiced (when glottis is closed) or voiceless (when glottis is open). In the case of wide open position of vocal cords, the air-stream passes so smoothly through glottis without causing vibration in the vocal cords and the sounds produced with such a position of vocal cords are called voiceless sounds, such as /p/, /t/, /k/. On the other hand, ^{when} vocal cords are loosely drawn together resulting into the narrowing of glottis, the sounds produced in this position are called voiced sounds, such as /b/, /d/, /g/ etc.

The position of the velum shows whether a sound is oral or nasal. The

closed position of the lips produces oral sounds as the air passes through mouth and likewise the closed position produces oral sounds as the air passes through nose. We have three oral sounds /p/, /b/ and /m/ in English and all other sounds of English are oral sounds.

During the articulation of a consonant at least two articulators are involved. These articulators may be classified as active and passive depending on their movement during articulation. The articulator which moves towards another is called active articulator and the other one that remains static is called passive articulator. For example, lower lip and tongue are active articulators which move towards upper lip and roof of the mouth respectively whereas the upper lip and roof of the mouth are considered to be passive articulators as they remain passive. On the basis of these articulators, a particular sound may be distinguished.

