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American English Pronunciation
Class 1

Introduction

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Part I

Why don't people understand me sometimes?
It may be more than just your pronunciation.

1. Pronunciation

- The way a language is spoken
- The generally agreed-upon sounds (phonemes) used to say words in a certain language
 1. hospital (Spanish)
 2. hospital (American English)

1. Pronunciation

- Each word has a “standard” pronunciation that other speakers of the language will understand
- Incorrect pronunciation can change the meaning of a word and cause confusion
 1. down ≠ dune
 2. down ≠ dawn

4

2. Accent

- Slight “acceptable” variations (regional or international) in how a person pronounces these “standard” sounds of a word or language
- These slight differences generally don’t stop one group from understanding the other
 1. down (*Standard American English*)
 2. down (*SE American English*)
 3. down (*British English*)

5

3. Intonation

- The rise and fall of the voice in speaking
- **Falling tone:** statements
 1. That’s good.
 2. You’re the president.
- **Rising tone:** questions
 1. That’s good?
 2. You’re the president?

6

4. Emphasis (Accentuation)

- **The right syllable** (in a word)
 1. The pol-i-**TÍ**-cian is at the ho-**TÉL**.
 2. The pol-**í**-ti-cian is at the **Ó**-tel.
- **The right word** (in a sentence)
 1. **I** need a blue pen.
 2. I **need** a blue pen.
 3. I need a **blue** pen.
 4. I need a blue **pen**.

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7

5. Speed

- **Talking too fast**
 - aim for clarity, not speed
 - give people time to process and respond
- **Not separating ideas correctly (according to punctuation)**
 1. I heard. You okay?
 2. I heard you, okay?

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8

Part II

Let's focus on pronunciation.
Have you had any problems or difficulties in the following areas?

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9

1. Vowels

Vowels can make different sounds

- A: cat, far, game
- E: sheep, bed, race
- I: ship, hi
- O: boy, show, cow
- U: up, fruit

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10

2. Consonants

Use the sounds of English, not Spanish

- y: yellow ≠ Jello
- h: ham ≠ am; hand ≠ and
- r: Sara ≠ Sada
- b – v: boat ≠ vote

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11

3. Letter Combinations

- **voiced th ≠ d**
 1. they ≠ day
 2. there ≠ dare
- **unvoiced th ≠ t**
 1. three ≠ tree
 2. thin ≠ tin
 3. thought ≠ taught

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12

3. Letter Combinations

- **sh** (*not aspirated*)
 1. sheep, wash, ship, shin
- **ch** (*aspirated*)
 1. cheap, watch, chip, chin

Compare:

1. Please (watch/wash) the dog.
2. I hurt my (chin/shin).

13

4. Lost Letter

- **Normally the last letter**
 1. She sharedh her thoughts.
 2. You understand d everything.
 3. He said d he just found d out.
- **This can change the verb tense**
 1. I confused you.
 2. I rememberedd the answer.
 3. I livedd in downtown n New Yorkk.

14

5. Aspiration

Aspiration is a puff of air

- **B vs. P**
 1. rib-rip, tab-tap
- **D vs. T**
 1. mad-mat, bad-bat
- **G vs. K**
 1. bag-back, lag-lack

15

Part III

So how does English pronunciation work?
What can I do to improve?

16

English Alphabet

1. **26 letters**

- Aa, Bb, Cc, etc.

2. **Not phonetic**

- each letter can represent different phonetic sounds and vice versa
- ex: cat, fir (1 letter, 2 sounds)
- ex: saw, dog (2 letters, 1 sound)

17

English Alphabet

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff
Gg Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll
Mm Nn Oo Pp Qq Rr
Ss Tt Uu Vv Ww Xx
Yy Zz

18

International Phonetic Alphabet

1. **44 sounds (phonemes) in spoken English**

▪ /eɪ/, /æ/, /a/, etc.

2. **Phonetic**

▪ one symbol <-> one sound

▪ ex: /kæt/, /fæt/ (2 sounds, 2 symbols)

▪ ex: /sɔ/, /dɔg/ (1 sound, 1 symbol)

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19

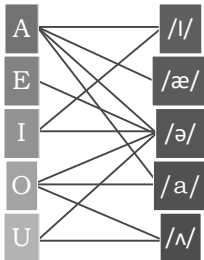
International Phonetic Alphabet

i:	ɪ	ʊ	u:	ɪə	eɪ		
ɛ	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔɪ	oʊ	
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	ɛə	aɪ	aʊ	
p	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

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20

English -> IPA



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21

Spanish -> IPA

A	/a/
E	/e/
I	/i/
O	/o/
U	/u/

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22

Phoneme vs. Allophone

- Phoneme**
 - one unique sound in a language
 - changing a phoneme changes the meaning or understanding of a word
 - plane ≠ plan
- Allophone**
 - a slight variation of a phoneme
 - does not change the meaning or understanding of a word
 - plane (aspirated), airplane (not aspirated)
 - stop (aspirated), stop (not aspirated)

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23

Strategies to Improve

- Listen...**
 - with an active ear (pay attention)
- Be aware...**
 - of the different challenges
 - of the different sounds
- Repeat...**
 - slowly and clearly

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24

Strategies to Improve

4. Take this course! You will...

- learn the different sounds (phonemes) each vowel can make
- practice the most difficult letters and sounds in English
- receive instant feedback from a native speaker on your pronunciation

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25
