

Lecture1: THE SUBJECT MATTER OF PHONETICS. THE ORGANS OF SPEECH AND THEIR FUNCTION.

Phonetics began long before there was grammar or linguistics. Phonetics is the science that studies the sound matter of the language, its semantic function and the lines of development. Phonetics is an independent branch of linguistics like lexicology, grammar and stylistics. Phonetics is connected with non-linguistic sciences as psychology.

Phonetics has branches of its own. The most important of them are special phonetics and general phonetics. The aim of the special phonetics is to study the sounds of one language at a particular period of time. It is descriptive phonetics. General phonetics studies the sound systems of several languages. It is a part of general linguistics. Phonetics formulates the rules of pronunciation of separate sounds and sound combinations. The rules of reading are based on the relation of sounds to orthography, the system of spelling rules and present certain difficulties in learning the English language especially on the initial stage of studying.

Through the system of the rules of reading, phonetics is connected with grammar and helps to pronounce correctly singular and plural forms of nouns, the past tense forms and past participles of English regular verbs:

beg - begged [ˈbɛgd]

wish - wished [ˈwɪʃt]

end - ended [ˈɛndɪd]

One of the most important phonetic phenomena - sound interchange - is another manifestation of connection of phonetics with grammar. For instance, this connection can be observed in the category of number. Thus, the interchange of [f-v], [s-z], etc. helps to differentiate singular and plural forms of such nouns.

calf - calves

leaf - leaves

house - houses

bath - bathes

Phonetics is also connected with grammar through its intonation components. Sometimes intonation alone can serve to single out the logical part of the sentence.

ˈHe came home. - Who came home?

He ˈcame home. - Did he come home?

He came ˈhome. - Where did he come?

Phonetics is also connected with lexicology. It is only due to the presence of stress and accent in the right place, that we can distinguish certain nouns from verbs:

ˈabstract - abˈstract

`object - ob`ject

`record - re`cord

These words are called homographs. Homographs can be differentiated only due to pronunciation because they are identical in spelling:

bow[`bou] - bow[`bau]

row[`rou] - row[`rau]

lead[`li:d] - lead[`led]

wind[`wind] - wind[`waind]

Due to the position of word accent we can distinguish between homonymous words and word groups:

`blackbird - `black `bird

`blackboard - `black `board

Phonetics is also connected with stylistics, first of all , through intonation and its components: speech, melody, word stress, rhythm, voice timbre which serve to express emotions through repetition of words, phrases and sounds. Thus, the repetition of the sonant [m] in the lines of the ballad, given below, helps to produce the effect of merriment:

They are twelve months in all the year,

As I hear many men say.

But the merriest month in all the year

Is the merry month of May.

Phonetics has several branches:

- 1) physiological or articulatory phonetics;
- 2) acoustic or auditory phonetics;
- 3) phonological or functional phonetics.

Physiological phonetics studies speech sounds from the point of view of their articulation and in connection with the organs of speech by which they are produced.

Acoustic properties of sounds are investigated by the auditory branch of phonetics.

The phonological or functional properties of phonemes, syllables, accent and intonation are investigated by means of special linguistics which helps to interpret them as socially significant elements.

To understand how speech sounds are produced students of English must have some knowledge of the organs of speech and their function.

The organs of speech are as follows: the mouth cavity, the nasal cavity, the pharynx, the lips, the teeth, the tongue, the roof of the mouth, the larynx containing the vocal cords.

The roof of the mouth is divided into the following parts: the alveolar ridge, the hard palate, the soft palate with uvula.

The tongue has no physical division like the palate. However its surface is conventionally divided into three parts corresponding to the parts of the roof of the mouth. They are: the blade of the tongue with the tip, the front and the back. When the tongue is at rest, the blade with the tip lies opposite the alveolar ridge, the front of the tongue lies opposite the hard palate, the back of the tongue lies opposite the soft palate.

The air (breath) passes from the lungs into the wind-pipe, then through the larynx into the pharynx and into the mouth cavity. If the soft palate is lowered, the air passes through the nasal cavity.

The vocal cords are situated in the larynx. They can be brought together (without complete closing the air-passage) and when the air stream is forced between them, they vibrate and produce voice. When the vocal cords are wide apart, the air stream passes between them freely, they do not vibrate and no voice is produced. The space between the vocal cords is called the glottis.

The organs of speech are divided into movable and fixed. The movable speech organs take an active part in the articulation of speech sounds and are called active organs of speech. They are the lips, the tongue, the uvula, the soft palate and the vocal cords.

The fixed speech organs with which the active organs form obstruction are called passive organs of speech. The passive speech organs serve as points of articulation. They are the teeth, the alveolar ridge and the hard palate.