

Lecture 2: THE CLASSIFICATION OF ENGLISH CONSONANTS

Articulatory classification of English consonants

There are two major classes of sounds traditionally distinguished in any language - consonants and vowels.

A vowel is a voiced sound produced in the mouth with no obstruction to the air-stream. A consonant is a sound produced with an obstruction to the air-stream. The organs of speech are tense at the place of obstruction. In the articulation of the voiceless consonants the air-stream is strong while in voiced consonants it is weak.

The particular quality of a consonant depends on the work of the vocal cords, the position of the soft palate and the kind of noise that results when the tongue or the lips obstruct the air-passage.

Consonants are usually classified according to the following principles:

- 1) according to the type of obstruction and the manner of the production of noise;
- 2) according to the active speech organ and the place of obstruction;
- 3) according to the work of the vocal cords and the force of articulation;
- 4) according to the position of the soft palate.

According to the type of obstruction English consonants are divided into occlusive and constrictive (щелевые). Occlusive consonants are produced with a complete obstruction formed by the articulatory organs; the air-stream is blocked in the mouth cavity. Occlusive consonants may be noise consonants and sonorants.

According to the manner of production of noise occlusive noise consonants are divided into plosives and affricates. In the production of plosive consonants the speech organs form a complete obstruction which is then quickly released with plosion:

English - [p], [b], [t], [d], [k], [g]

Russian - [n], [ɔ], [m], [ɒ], [κ], [ɔ]

In the production of affricates the speech organs form a complete obstruction which is then released so slowly that considerable friction occurs at the point of articulation

English - [tʃ], [dʒ]

Russian - [ʧ], [ʤ]

In the production of occlusive sonorants the speech organs form a complete obstruction in the mouth cavity which is not released, the soft palate is lowered and the air escapes through the nasal cavity:

English - [m], [n], [ŋ]

Russian - [м], [н]

Constrictive consonants may be noise consonants (fricatives) and sonorants. In the production of fricatives the speech organs form an incomplete obstruction:

English – [f], [v], [ʃ], [ʒ], [s], [z],

Russian – [ф], [в], [ц], [з], [ш], [ж]

In the production of constrictive sonorants the air-passage is wide so that the air passing through the mouth doesn't produce friction and tone prevails over noise.

Constrictive sonorants are:

English – [w], [r], [j], [l]

Russian – [л]

According to the active organ of speech English consonants are divided into labial, lingual and glottal. Labial consonants may be bilabial and labio-dental.

Bilabial consonants are articulated by two lips:

English – [p], [b], [m], [w]

Russian – [п], [б], [м]

Labio-dental consonants are articulated with the lower lip against the upper teeth:

English – [f], [v]

Russian – [ф], [в]

Lingual consonants may be forelingual, mediolingual and backlingual. Forelingual consonants are articulated by the blade of the tongue, the blade with the tip or by the tip against the upper teeth or the alveolar ridge. According to the position of the tip English forelingual consonants may be apical and cacuminal. Apical consonants are articulated by the tip of the tongue against either the upper teeth or the alveolar ridge:

English – [t], [d], [l], [n], [s], [z], [ʃ], [ʒ]

Russian – [т], [д], [л], [н], [с], [з], [ш], [ж]

Cacuminal consonants are articulated by the tongue tip raised against the back of the alveolar ridge:

English – [r]

Russian – [р]

Mediolingual consonants are articulated with the front of the tongue against the hard palate:

English – [j]

Russian – [й]

Backlingual consonants are articulated by the back of the tongue against the soft palate:

English – [k], [g]

Russian – [к], [г], [х]

Glottal consonants are produced in the glottis. [h]

According to the point of articulation forelingual consonants are divided into dental, alveolar, palato-alveolar, post-alveolar. According to the point of articulation mediolingual and backlingual consonants are called velar and palatal.

According to the work of the vocal cords consonants are divided into voiced and voiceless. According to the force of articulation consonants are divided into relatively strong (fortis) and relatively weak (lenis). English voiced consonants are lenis. English voiceless consonants are fortis. They are pronounced with greater muscular tension. The following English consonants are voiceless and fortis:

[p], [t], [k], [f], [s], [h], [ʃ], [θ],

The following English consonants are voiced and lenis:

[b], [d], [g], [v], [z], [m], [n], [w], [l], [r], [j], [ʒ], [ð]

The Russian voiceless consonants are weaker than their English counterparts, the Russian voiced consonants are stronger.

According to the position of the soft palate consonants are divided into oral and nasal. Nasal consonants are produced with the soft palate lowered while the air passage through the mouth is blocked. The air escapes through the nasal cavity. English nasal consonants are:

English – [m], [n], [ŋ]

Russian – [м], [н]

The rest are oral. Oral consonants are produced when the soft palate is raised and the air escapes through the mouth.