

Nasals

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- The basic characteristic of a nasal consonant is that the air escapes through the nose.
- In nasal consonants the air does not pass through the mouth; it is prevented by a complete closure in the mouth at some point.
- Nasals and the three types of closure are:
 1. [m] bilabial (lips)
 2. [n] alveolar (tongue blade against alveolar ridge)
 3. [ŋ] velar (back of tongue against the palate).

The distribution of [ŋ]

1. In initial position we find m, n occurring freely, but [ŋ] never occurs in this position.
2. Medially, [ŋ] occurs quite frequently.
3. It rarely occurs after a diphthong or long vowel, so only the short vowels **i**, **e**, **æ**, **ʌ**, **ɒ**, **u**, **ə** are regularly found preceding this consonant

Approximants

- An **approximant** is an articulation in which the articulators approach each other but do not get sufficiently close to each other to produce a “complete” consonant such as a plosive, nasal or fricative.
- The term “approximant” is usually used to describe only consonants.
- **Approximants are [l], [r], [j], and [w].**

The consonant [l]

- The [l] phoneme (as in 'long' lor), 'hill' hil) is a **lateral approximate**.
- This is a consonant in which the passage of air through the mouth does not go in the usual way along the centre of the tongue; instead, there is complete closure between the centre of the tongue.
- The contact is with the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge
- Because of this complete closure along the centre, the only way for the air to escape is along the sides of the tongue.

The distribution of [l]

- We find [l] initially, medially and finally, and its distribution is therefore not particularly limited.
- There are three allophones of [l]
 1. Clear [l] occurs at the beginning of words such as like, light, lie
 2. Dark [l] occurs after vowels and before consonants such as fill, eel, failed, help, filth
 3. Devoiced [l] occurs after p and k such as play and clay

The consonant [r]

- This consonant is important in that considerable differences in its articulation and its distribution are found in different accents of English.
- It is a post-alveolar approximant.
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The main characteristics of [r]

- The important thing about the articulation of r is that the tip of the tongue approaches the alveolar area in approximately the way it would for a t or d, but never actually makes contact with any part of the roof of the mouth.
- The tongue is slightly curled backwards with the tip raised. Consonants with this tongue shape are usually called **retroflex**.
- A rather different r sound is found at the beginning of a syllable if it is preceded by p, t, k; it is then voiceless and fricative. This pronunciation is found in words such as ‘press’, ‘tress’, ‘cress’.

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- One final characteristic of the articulation of r is that it is usual for the lips to be slightly rounded .
 - The distributional peculiarity of r in the BBC accent is very easy to state: this phoneme only occurs before vowels.
 - Rhotic accents are those accents which have r in final position (before a pause) and before a consonant, while accents in which r only occurs before vowels (such as BBC) are called **non-rhotic**.

The consonants j and w

Characteristics

- These are the consonants found at the beginning of words such as ‘yet’ and ‘wet’ .
- The most important thing to remember about these phonemes is that they are phonetically like vowels but phonologically like consonants.
- From the phonetic point of view the articulation of j is practically the same as that of a front close vowel such as [i], but is very short.
- In the same way w is closely similar to [u].

Characteristics

- Despite this vowel-like character, we use them like consonants. For example, they only occur before vowel phonemes; this is a typically consonantal distribution.
- The indefinite article is 'a' before a consonant (as in 'a cat', 'a dog'), and 'an' before a vowel (as in 'an apple', 'an orange').
- It is the indefinite article 'a' that is found before w and j (as in 'a way', 'a year').
- Another example is that of the definite article. Here the rule is that 'the' is pronounced as **ʃə** before consonants (as in 'the dog' **ʃə** dog, 'the cat' **ʃə** kaet) and **ʃi** before vowels (as in 'the apple' **ʃi** aepl, 'the orange' **ʃi** ɒrɪndʒ).
- We say 'the way' **ʃə** wei and 'the year' **ʃə** jɪə