Module: Phonetics

Level: L1-FILA

Time Allotted: 90 min

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Lecture 7:Plosives

**Introduction**

A plosive is a consonant articulation with the following characteristics:

One or two articulators are moved against each other so as to form a stricture (obstruction) that allows no air to escape from the vocal tract. The stricture is the total (complete closure). The air is compressed then, it is suddenly released.

When the air escapes it produces a noise called *plosion* and it can be *voiced* or *voiceless.*

**Description of a plosive:**

1. Closure phase: the articulators move to form the stricture
2. Hold phase: the compressed air is stopped from escaping
3. Release phase: the articulators are moved so as to allow the air to escape
4. Post-release phase: happens immediately after the third phase when the sound is heard. The different phases of the plosive all happen rapidly.

English has six plosive consonants: **/p, t, k/, /b, d, g/ +[Ɂ]** glottal stop which occurs frequently in English but just as:

\*An alternative realisation of **/p, t, k/**in certain contexts. E.g. picture pɪɁtʃǝ , little lɪɁl, bottle bɒɁl , clipboard klɪɁbɔ:d /k/ [Ɂ] /t/ [Ɂ] /p/ [Ɂ]

\*Or as an onset to vowels. E.g. and [Ɂænd] I [Ɂaɪ] you and I [ju; ændaɪ]

**Place of Articulation of Plosives**

**-/p, b/** are bilabial: the lips are pressed together.

**-/t, d/**are alveolar: the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge.

**-/k, g/**are velar: the back of the tongue against the velum.

**/p, t, k/**are always voiceless but **/b, d, g/**are sometimes fully voiced, and sometimes voiceless (devoiced) depending on the context:

1. *Initial position*: c+v: the release of **/p, t, k/**is followed by an audible plosion. So, in the post release phase, the air escapes through the vocal cords making a sound like [h]. This is called *aspiration.*

E.g. part [pha:t] – time [thaɪm] – car [kha:]

Thus, **/p, t, k/**are *aspirated* when they are: followed by a vowel + the syllable is being stressed. E.g. paper [‛pheɪpǝ].

But, if **/p, t, k/**are**:**

-preceded by **/s/**

-followed by **/r/, /l/**, there is *no aspiration* i.e.**/p, t, k/** are *unaspirated.*

E.g. stay [steɪ] preceded by /s/

Cry [kraɪ] followed by /r/

Play [pleɪ] followed by [l]

There is also *no aspiration* when the syllable is *unstressed*, even if **/p, t, k/**are followed by a vowel.

E.g. supper [‛sʌpǝ] later [‛leɪtǝ] correct [kǝ‛rekt]

The plosives **/b, d, g/**are only partly voiced in initial position or even voiceless (devoiced). E.g. big [b̥ɪg]

1. *Medial position:* **/b, d, g/** are *fully voiced* between vowels: ago [ǝ‛gǝʊ] about [ǝ‛baʊt] a day [ǝ ‛deɪ]
2. *Final position:*  when **/b, d, g/**occur in final position, they are *devoiced*. E.g. big [bɪg̥] bad [bæd̥]

-Vowels preceding **/p, t, k/**are *shorter* than the vowels preceding **/b, d, g/.** E.g. sat [sæt] vs. sad [sæd̥]

-Voiceless plosives **/p, t, k/**are sometimes called *fortis consonants* (strong)

- Voiced plosives**/b, d, g/**are sometimes called lenis consonants (weak)

- The English plosives can be presented in the form of a table as shown below:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Place of articulation | | |
| Bilabial | alveolar | velar |
| Fortis (voiceless) | p | t | k |
| Lenis ( voiced) | b | d | g |

**References**

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