Module: Phonetics

Level: L1- FILA

Time Allotted: 90 min

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Lecture 1: The Sounds of Language

**What is Phonetics?**

Language is the most essential means of human communication. It has two (2) different manifestations: the spoken and the written forms. Linguists consider *speech* as the *primary medium* of language expression. Thus, they give priority to *speech sounds* (vocal system). Each language has its limited range of sounds called the *phonic medium***.** This term was introduced by John Lyons (1981) who says: ‘speech is made of continuous bursts of sounds’.

Thus, phonetics may be defined as the study of the phonic medium which can be analysed from three (3) points of view:

1. *Articulatory phonetics:* it studies the way speech sounds are produced by speech organs and articulators.
2. *Acoustic phonetics*: it deals with the physical properties of sound waves created by the activity of speech organs.
3. *Auditory phonetics*:it studies the perception of speech sounds by ear and brain.

In order to represent speech sounds, there was a real need for a conventional (standardized) system of phonetic transcription called: **IPA** (International Phonetic Alphabets) which was established in 1888.

 There are two types of phonetic transcription:

\*broad transcription: it gives a distinctive representation of speech sounds.

\*narrow transcription: it gives a detailed transcription of speech sounds including diacritics.

Language has different accents pronounced differently by people from different geographical places, different social classes, different ages, and different educational backgrounds. Thus, English has different accents, but the one that we will concentrate on is Standard British English which is used by news readers on BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) TV and radio. It is also used in schools and universities and it is also called R P English *(Received Pronunciation English)*. We notice that there are differences between British and American accents and also northern and southern British English, but there is no implication that certain accents are inferior or less pleasant than others.