

English Phonetics

A Theoretical Course

LECTURE 1. Phonetics as a Science.

- The Object of Phonetics
- The Branches of Phonetics
- Interdisciplinary Subjects Connected with Phonetics
- The Connection of Phonetics with Other Branches of Linguistics
- Theoretical and Practical Importance of Phonetics

The origin of the term

The term 'phonetics' is of Greek origin.

It comes from the word φωνή, phōnē, meaning 'sound, voice'

Definition

Phonetics may be defined as an independent branch of linguistics which studies the sound-matter of the language, its semantic functions and the lines of development.

The factors that stimulated the development of phonetics:

- a more thorough acquaintance with the functioning of the human speaking apparatus;
- investigation of numerous scientists who studied languages which had no alphabets;
- compiling alphabets for such languages.

Language as the only medium of thought and the most adequate means of human communication can only exist in the material form of speech sounds.

A sound may be used not only in one and the same word but also in thousands of words which form the vocabulary of a certain language.

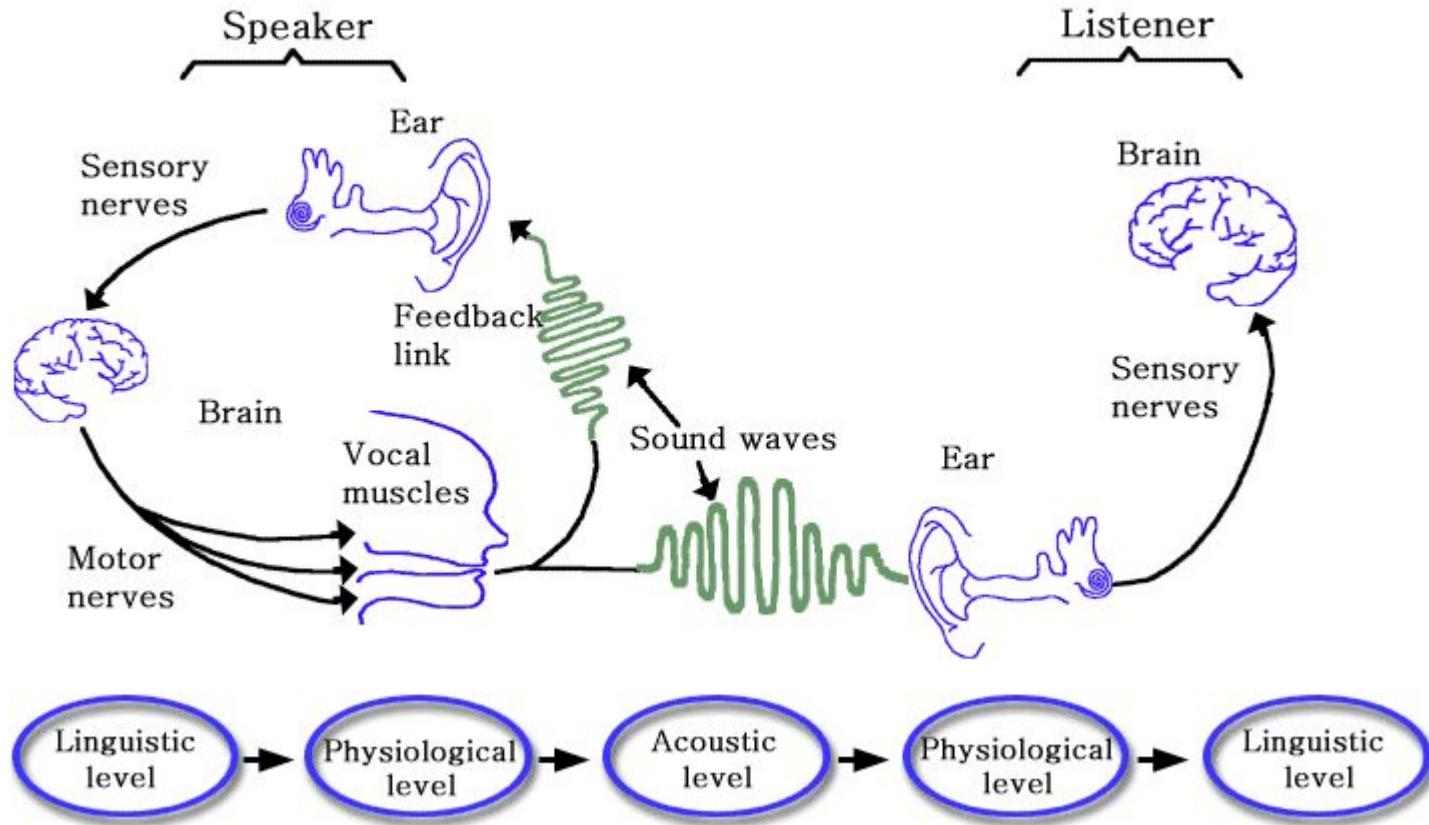
Sounds can be abstracted from concrete words.

The sound part representing a form of the existence of language is to a certain extent separated from its content and makes up the subject matter of phonetics.

Phonetics studies the sound system of the language, or segmental phonemes, word stress, syllabic structure and intonation. So it is primarily concerned with the **expression level** of the language.

Phonetics also deals with the **content level** because only meaningful sound sequences are regarded as speech.

The Speech Chain



from Denes & Pinson, 1993

Physiological level

Every speech sound is a complex of finely coordinated and differentiated movements of speech organs. So they can be considered from physiological point of view as a physiological phenomenon having its **articulatory** and **auditory** aspects.

Acoustic level

Like any other sounds in nature, speech sounds should be considered as vibrating particles of air or **sound waves**. In other words, they must be treated as a variety of matter moving in time and space. Thus, we may say that speech sounds can be investigated as a physical phenomenon having its **acoustic** aspect.

Linguistic level

Phonemes, syllables, stress, and intonation are linguistic phenomena which constitute meaningful units (morphemes, words, word-forms, utterances). Sounds of speech perform different linguistic functions, thus having their **functional** aspect.

The branch of phonetics which is concerned with the way the vocal organs are used to produce speech sounds is called **ARTICULATORY PHONETICS**. It consists in observing the movements and positions of human organs of speech in pronouncing various speech sounds.

The branch of phonetics which occupies itself with the physical properties of speech sounds is called **ACOUSTIC PHONETICS**.

AUDITORY PHONETICS is concerned with speech perception, principally how the brain forms perceptual representation of the input it receives.

The branch of phonetics which studies speech sounds as units of communication is called **PHONOLOGY**.

Other divisions of phonetics

General phonetics

It deals with all the sound-producing possibilities of the human speaking apparatus and the ways of using them in language for the purposes of human communication.

Descriptive phonetics

It deals with a sound structure, phonetic means of expression of meaning and articulation in a particular language.

Historical, or evolutionary, phonetics

It establishes regular changes of speech sounds on different stages of the development of a given language or a given group of kindred languages.

Comparative phonetics

It is closely connected with the historical one and deals with the correlation of sound systems of two or more kindred languages.

Practical, or normative, phonetics

It studies the substance, the material form of phonetic phenomena in relation to meaning.

Theoretical phonetics

It is mainly concerned with the functioning of phonetic units in language.

Interdisciplinary subjects connected
with phonetics

Sociophonetics

It studies the ways in which **pronunciation interacts with society**. It is primarily concerned with the nature of different kinds of English pronunciation used by **different age groups in various situations**: namely, when talking to equals, superiors, subordinates or when trying to inform, persuade, agree, disagree, praise, complain, compliment, rebuke, etc.

Phonostylistics

It deals with the main stylistic peculiarities of existing functional styles which are displayed in a variety of texts generated in everyday communication.

Five intonational styles distinguished by M.O. Sokolova

- Informational style
- Academic or scientific style
- Publicistic or oratorical style
- Declamatory or artistic style
- Conversational or familiar style

Speechology

It is oriented towards the optimization of linguistic communication and tries to make an exact and concrete analysis of what actually happens when people speak.

The Connection of Phonetics with Other Branches of Linguistics

Lexicology

The distinction of words is realized by the variety of their appearances. The phonetic laws of a given language determine the sound composition of words.

Morphology

Sound interchange helps to distinguish:

- basic forms of irregular verbs (sing – snag – sung);
- nouns and adjectives (strength – strong);
- nouns and verbs (extent – to extend, advice – to advise).

Syntax

Any division of a sentence is realized with the help of pauses, sentence stresses and melodies. Changes in pausation can change the meaning of an utterance.

- *One of the travelers said | Mr. Parker was very suspicious.*
- *One of the travelers | said Mr. Parker | was very suspicious.*

Stylistics

Phonetics is connected with stylistics through repetition of sounds, words and phrases which is the basis of rhythm, rhyme, alliteration and is used as a special device in both prose and poetry.

The day is cold, and dark, and dreary;
It rains, and the wind is never weary;
The vine still clings to the moldering wall,
But at every gust the dead leaves fall,
And the day is dark and dreary.

(extract from 'The Rainy Day'
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)



The theoretical importance of phonetics

Phonetics is a fundamental branch of linguistics and no language description is complete without phonetics.

The practical aspect of phonetics

- the basis of teaching to read and write;
- foreign language teaching;
- teaching correct pronunciation and eloquence to actors, singers, radio and TV announcers, public figures, etc.;
- eliminating dialectical features from pronunciation of dialect speakers;
- logopedics (speech therapy);
- deaf-and-dumb pedagogy;
- sound technology.

Reading list

- Борисова Л.В., Метлюк А.А. Теоретическая фонетика английского языка : [Учеб. пособие для ин-тов и факультетов иностр. яз.] / Борисова Л.В., Метлюк А.А. – Мн.: Выш. школа, 1980. – С. 5-16.
- Паращук В. Ю. Теоретична фонетика англійської мови: Навчальний посібник для студентів факультетів іноземних мов / Паращук В. Ю. - Вінниця, НОВА КНИГА, 2005. – С. 9-20, 125-126.
- Теоретическая фонетика английского языка: Учеб. для студ. ин-тов и фак. иностр. яз. / М. А. Соколова, К. П. Гинтовт, И. С. Тихонова, Р. М. Тихонова. – М.: Гуманит. изд. центр ВЛАДОС, 1996. – С. 6-38.