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BA English Honours | Semester I | Calicut University

Foundations of English Language Proficiency

Course Code: ENG1VN102 • Module 2 Notes

MODULE II: SPEAKING

1. The Architecture of Spoken English: The 44 Phonemes

Mastery of spoken English begins with understanding its acoustic building blocks. English is notoriously unphonetic: the English alphabet contains only 26 letters, yet the spoken language comprises **44 distinct phonemic sounds** (in Received Pronunciation). Consequently, a single letter can represent multiple sounds (e.g., the letter 'a' in *cat*, *father*, *about*, and *hate*), while multiple letter combinations can produce the same sound (e.g., *flew*, *blue*, *shoe*, *through*).

To eliminate this orthographic ambiguity, the **International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)** provides a universal, one-to-one symbol system for every human sound. The 44 sounds of English are divided into:

- **20 Vowel Sounds:** Comprising 12 Monophthongs (pure vowels) and 8 Diphthongs (gliding vowels).
- **24 Consonant Sounds:** Classified systematically by Place of Articulation, Manner of Articulation, and Voicing (voiced vs. voiceless).

Phonetic Category	Acoustic Sub-Category	IPA Phonetic Symbols & Standard Illustrative Examples
Monophthongs (12)	Short Vowels (7) Long Vowels (5)	/ɪ/ (*bit*), /e/ (*bed*), /æ/ (*cat*), /ɒ/ (*hot*), /ʌ/ (*cup*), /ʊ/ (*put*), /ə/ (*ago*) /iː/ (*see*), /ɑː/ (*car*), /ɔː/ (*door*), /uː/ (*too*), /ɜː/ (*bird*)
Diphthongs (8)	Centring (3) Closing (5)	/ɪə/ (*near*), /eə/ (*hair*), /ʊə/ (*tour*) /eɪ/ (*face*), /aɪ/ (*price*), /ɔɪ/ (*boy*), /əʊ/ (*go*), /aʊ/ (*mouth*)
Consonants (24)	Plosives (6) Fricatives (9) Affricates (2) Nasals (3) Approximants (4)	/p, b/ (*pin, bin*), /t, d/ (*tin, din*), /k, ɡ/ (*coat, goat*) /f, v/ (*fan, van*), /θ, ð/ (*thin, this*), /s, z/ (*sip, zip*), /ʃ, ʒ/ (*ship, measure*), /h/ (*hat*) /tʃ, dʒ/ (*church, judge*) /m, n, ŋ/ (*man, net, sing*) /l, r, w, j/ (*light, red, wet, yes*)

2. Lexical Mastery: Synonyms, Antonyms, and Contextual Collocation

True speaking proficiency requires an expansive, nuanced vocabulary. Words do not exist in sterile isolation; they operate within complex networks of synonyms (words with similar meanings), antonyms (words with opposite meanings), and collocations (words that naturally co-occur).

LEXICAL PRAGMATICS **The Danger of False Synonymy**

While a thesaurus lists *slim*, *thin*, *skinny*, and *emaciated* as synonyms, their socio-pragmatic connotations diverge sharply: *slim* carries positive aesthetic approval; *thin* is neutral; *skinny* conveys slight criticism; and *emaciated* denotes severe, life-threatening clinical starvation. Fluent speakers select words with precise emotional and stylistic appropriateness.

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3. Suprasegmental Mastery: Word Stress, Sentence Rhythm, and Intonation

Correct pronunciation involves far more than enunciating individual phonemes. In English, meaning is profoundly shaped by **suprasegmentals**:

- **Syllable Stress:** Stressing the wrong syllable renders words completely unintelligible to native ears. Furthermore, shifting stress alters grammatical category (e.g., *PREsent* is a noun/adjective; *preSENT* is a verb; *REcord* is a noun; *reCORD* is a verb).
- **Stress-Timed Rhythm:** English sentences are timed by stressed beats. In the sentence "The **DOG** chased the **CAT** down the **STREET**," the three stressed syllables take the primary time, while the unstressed function words are compressed rapidly between them.
- **Intonation Contours:** The melody of the voice signals grammatical type and speaker attitude:
  - *Falling Tone (↘):* Used for definitive statements, commands, and wh- questions ("Where are you going?"). Signals completeness and authority.
  - *Rising Tone (/):* Used for yes/no questions ("Are you ready?") and polite requests. Signals uncertainty, inquiry, or incompleteness.
  - *Fall-Rise Tone (↘↗):* Used to signal reservation, doubt, partial agreement, or polite disagreement ("Well, I suppose so...").

4. Effective Presentation Techniques and Speech Delivery

Delivering a successful oral presentation requires synthesizing verbal rhetoric with non-verbal physical poise:

- **The Three-Part Macro Structure:** Introduction (Grab attention, state thesis, preview main points) → Body (Two or three distinct points supported by evidence and transition signposts) → Conclusion (Summarize core insights, provide memorable call to action).
- **Signposting Language:** Utilizing explicit verbal markers that guide the audience through the cognitive journey ("Moving on to my next point...", "To illustrate this concept...", "In stark contrast to this view...", "To conclude...").
- **Non-Verbal Mastery:** Maintaining purposeful, triangular eye contact across the audience; open, welcoming hand gestures above the waist; balanced, upright posture without slouching or swaying.

5. Confidence-Building Exercises: Just-A-Minute (JAM) and Role-Play

Overcoming communicative inhibition requires structured spontaneous practice. The **Just-A-Minute (JAM)** format challenges learners to speak on an unexpected topic for sixty seconds without hesitation, repetition, or grammatical deviation. This rapidly develops mental agility, lexical retrieval speed, and improvisational poise. Similarly, simulated professional role-plays (job interviews, client negotiations, hotel check-ins) allow learners to test and consolidate conversational strategies in low-risk, supportive environments.

Advanced Language Proficiency, Applied Phonetics & Discourse Analysis

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1. Foundational Linguistic Principles and Cognitive Frameworks

Developing high-level communicative proficiency within Phonetic Science, Articulatory Mechanics, and Presentation Mastery requires mastering core foundational concepts across the four language skills:

- **Cognitive Processing in Receptive Skills (Listening & Reading):** Comprehension relies on the dual orchestration of *Bottom-Up* processing (decoding acoustic soundwaves, phonemes, morphemes, and letters into recognizable words) and *Top-Down* processing (activating prior knowledge, cultural schemata, and contextual inferences to deduce implied meaning). Advanced communicators seamlessly synthesize both channels to interpret subtext, tone, and rhetorical intent.
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- **Syntactic Architecture and Cohesion:** Sophisticated writing transcends simple sentence coordination. Masterful writers utilize complex subordination, participial clauses, fronted adverbials, and deliberate parallel structures, achieving seamless paragraph cohesion through anaphoric reference and lexical chains.

2. Four-Skills Analytical Competency Matrix

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