

ISBN:978-975-00544-6-4

**VII. INTERNATIONAL  
NEW YORK ACADEMIC  
RESEARCH CONGRESS  
ON HUMANITIES AND  
SOCIAL SCIENCES  
PROCEEDINGS BOOK**

TÜRKİYE, ALGERIA, ALBANIA, AZERBAIJAN, BANGLADESH, CHINA, ETHIOPIA, FRANCE, IRAN, INDIA, INDONESIA, ITALY, KAZAKHISTAN, KOSOVO, LAOS, MOROCCO, NAMIBIA, NORTH MACEDONIA, NIGERIA, PAKISTAN, PHILIPPINES, PORTUGAL, POLAND, RWANDA, SOUTH AFRICA, SPAIN, THAILAND, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, UNITED KINGDOM, VIETNAM, UZBEKISTAN, UNITED KINGDOM, UKRAINE, TURKISH REPUBLIC OF NORTHERN CYPRUS, KYRGYZSTAN, MALAWI

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*FEBRUARY 18-20, 2023*  
(ONLINE & FACE TO FACE PARTICIPATION)  
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BZT AKADEMİ YAYINEVİ©  
BZT ACADEMY PUBLISHING HOUSE 2021©  
TURKEY, USA  
TR: +90543 671 0123 GR: +491774586777

  
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ACADEMY

11 <sup>20</sup> -11 <sup>30</sup>	Sashka JOVANOVSKA Marija TASHKOSKA	<i>Goce Delchev University, North Macedonia Vytautas Magnus University, North Macedonia</i>	SEMANTIC ROLES OF THE PREDICATE IN THE ENGLISH SENTENCES
11 <sup>30</sup> -11 <sup>40</sup>	Natka Jankova ALAGJOZOVSKA Saska JOVANOVSKA	<i>University Goce Delchev, North Macedonia</i>	IMPROVING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION BY STUDYING PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY
11 <sup>40</sup> -11 <sup>50</sup>	Navreet SAHI Jagmeet Kaur BHATTI	<i>Shoolini University, India</i>	RESHAPING AND REINFORCING CULTURAL AND PEDAGOGICAL MODELS: AN ANALYSIS OF MASHA AND THE BEAR AS A MODERN FAIRYTALE
11 <sup>50</sup> -12 <sup>00</sup>	Emmanuel A ONSAY Patric Carl P PARDIÑAS Kayla Mae D TAÑEGRÁ	<i>Partido State University, Philippines</i>	DOES COVID-19 CRISIS INFLUENCE THE LEVEL OF PREPAREDNESS OF GRADUATING STUDENTS FOR THE UPCOMING LICENSURE EXAMINATION? EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE FROM ORDINAL LOGISTIC MODELS
12 <sup>00</sup> -12 <sup>10</sup>	Marijana KLEMENCHICH	<i>International Balkan University, North Macedonia</i>	THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN TEACHING AND LEARNING
12 <sup>10</sup> -12 <sup>20</sup>	Marija STEVKOVSKA	<i>International Balkan University, North Macedonia</i>	DESIGNING AN EFFECTIVE ELT CURRICULUM
12 <sup>20</sup> -12 <sup>30</sup>	Hazel Princess M REBOLLO Charlito D ANDO Norman G BLANCO Sherwin Shane S SISON	<i>University of Mindanao, College of Hospitality Education, Philippines</i>	WORKING CONDITION OF CRUISE SHIP EMPLOYEE ON BOARD
12 <sup>30</sup> -12 <sup>40</sup>	Nhesty M MORANDARTE Adrian M ANASTACIO	<i>Western Mindanao State University, Philippines</i>	POLITICAL PATRONAGE IN LOCAL POLITICS
12 <sup>40</sup> -12 <sup>50</sup>	Piolo O BAGOTAO Vincent Clyde P SALVALOZA	<i>Western Mindanao State University, Philippines</i>	EFFECTS OF ONLINE POLITICAL COMMENTARIES ON THE POLITICAL VIEWS OF STUDENTS
12 <sup>50</sup> -13 <sup>00</sup>	Ericson ALIETO Loise Izza GONZALES Helengrace LAO Kent Adnil LAO Eric-Roland NATIVIDAD	<i>Visayas State University, Philippines</i>	DIGITAL LEARNING IS SOMETHING HERE TO STAY: ATTITUDE AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMPETENCE OF PRESERVICE LANGUAGE TEACHERS



# IMPROVING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION BY STUDYING PHONETICS AND PHONOLOGY

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## Abstract

Language as a sign system can be discussed in terms of articulation i.e. exposing the matter of the sound system as its material formulation. In that sense language can be researched in terms of Phonetics - the sounds, accent, intonation as its material side and Phonology i.e. the sounds and their functional role in the language system. Phonetics and Phonology are two different sciences whereas Phonetics is considered as a helping linguistic discipline which is about the sound notions of the word apart from their linguistic function which is discussed further in Morphology, Syntax and Semantics. Phonetics does not deal with the sound complex and its meaning but the material side of the sounds and human speech i.e. the physiological description of the sounds.

Within every foreign language learning and teaching, the pronunciation i.e. the speaking skill is essential. In order to improve English language pronunciation, one needs to acquire the rules of Phonetics and Phonology that deal with the sounds, their physical properties and the relationship of sounds and meaning along with the phonetic transcription.

**Key words:** English language, pronunciation, Phonetics, Phonology, IPA.

## INTRODUCTION

Language as a sign system can be discussed in terms of articulation i.e. exposing the matter of the sound system as its material formulation. In that sense language can be researched in terms of Phonetics - the sounds, accent, intonation as its material side and Phonology i.e. the sounds and their functional role in the language system. Phonetics and Phonology are two different sciences whereas Phonetics is considered as a helping linguistic discipline which is about the sound notions of the word apart from their linguistic function which is discussed further in Morphology, Syntax and Semantics. Phonetics does not deal with the sound complex and its meaning but the material side of the sounds and human speech i.e. the physiological description of the sounds.

Speech is the communication tool between people. What do people know when they know a foreign language? For native speakers it is automatic (like driving a car) i.e. language exists in the minds of the

speakers and how language works is a puzzle for the linguists. There are many theories, but no consensus. You might think that speaking comes naturally like seeing and hearing. Yet it is not something you can do soon after you are born. Speech is not one of the five senses, and it has to be learned during the first few years of life. All babies cry in the first few seconds or minutes after birth. Crying is the first use of the vocal organs and the first step towards speaking. Thus, the basic anatomy of the speech organs is often studied within Phonetics. Why is it important how speech sounds relate to meaning? The answer is that the speech sound is the medium we use to represent what we are saying: first we hear a stream of sounds and then we relate them to certain meaning. Although there are different ways of communicating, when it comes to telling other people what we want to tell them, what we use most is speech, and this is something which is only available to humans (Roach, 2009). It cannot be denied that human speech characteristics are considered through genetics, but as researchers point out the views of phoneticians who claim that some people have innate predispositions for easier mastering of the voices of foreign languages, and another group of people who study foreign languages master these characteristics with much more effort. Any human being can produce 400 sounds. Only the structure of the human organs of speech allows a particular wide range of sounds which can be put together in extraordinary specific speech.

### 1.1. What is Phonetics?


Phonetics is the study that deals with the sounds of human speech. Though the sounds can be perceived of a particular language as something simple and mundane, it is much more than that. Phonetics is one of the main building blocks in learning a new language. Phonetics teaches about how different words are pronounced verbally by something called International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The IPA stands as a standardized representation of the sounds of spoken language. It was first devised in the 19th century by scientists looking to standardize how some words are said across the world no matter the language barrier. To bypass this, a new alphabet was needed, an alphabet filled with signs that have different sounds. That is called the Phonemic Transcription. Even the great British scholar Henry Sweet defines Phonology as ‘the indispensable foundation’ for the study of language which is still valid as it was long time ago (Roach, 2009). Although Phonetics studies the sound system of the language and the sounds of speech, two branches that deal with sounds can be distinguished – Phonetics and Phonology. They both deal with sounds. No language description is possible without describing the sound system of it. Every language uses a subset of speech sounds.

When the sound system of any language is considered from the point of view of its articulatory, acoustic, auditory characteristics then we allude to Phonetics. When the sounds and its functions are discussed then we deal with Phonology. Phonetics can be divided into many more branches. Phonetics is a much older branch than Phonology. It is the oldest branch. Phonetics is the scientific field which studies speech sounds i.e. not with the meaning of the sounds but how they are produced and heard and their properties. In the everyday interpretation of the sciences, phonetics and phonology refer to the study of speech, their definition in the most general sense remains so. But linguists have traditionally advocated their study and considered them to be two different fields of study. Phonetics deals with the physical aspects of speech production and their relationship to speech perception, while phonology deals with the functional and systemic nature of sounds in certain languages.

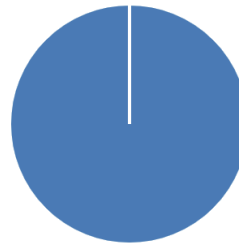
Students who have already taken the course Phonetics are in favor of the question whether Phonetics can help them improve their pronunciation:

1. After you have finished the course Phonetics, do you agree that studying Phonetics can improve your pronunciation?

[More Details](#)

 Insights

- Yes, definitely. 17
- No, not at all. 0



Graph. 1

From one hand, the study of production, perception and analysis of speech sounds is not a new subject. It originates since 500 BC when the Sanskrit grammarian Panini from India included material on this subject in his grammar. On the other hand, much later in the late nineteenth century, various attempts were made to produce a phonetic alphabet. The most critical questions that arise in phonetics and phonology concern the ways in which languages are encoded in their orthographies because they systematically represent sounds on paper rather than in practice, and this is an important aspect of the study of speech. It would be convenient if the spelling, or spelling system, had a single sound or syllable associated with each symbol. This is why David Crystal defines the phonetic alphabet as “an attempt to make a permanent and unambiguous record of what goes on in our speech” (p.168). Finally, in 1889, the International Phonetic Alphabet was formulated and this system is still in use.

## 1.2. The Importance of Studying Phonetics

If the pronunciation of the English language is compared to the pronunciation of the Macedonian language it can be concluded that the relationship between spelling and sounds in English language does not appear to be one-to-one. This means that each spelling symbol does not apply to a single sound (table 1).

Table 1: English vs. Macedonian pronunciation of sounds

Examples:	Answers:
1. fill	а) книга                      1. three                      а) 5
2. drunk	б) теорија                      2. five                      б) 7
3. chew	в) телефон                      3. two                      в) 7
4. single	г) дрво                      4. five or six                      г) 4
5. jungle	д) клупа                      5. five                      д) 5

The relationship between the system of writing and pronunciation in English and Macedonian language can be seen from the above given examples (table 1). The aim of the English spelling system is to represent the sounds used by speakers and at first glance it may look easy but considering the above

mentioned examples seems like that the aim looks a little bit complex in practice. If the Macedonian alphabet consists of 31 letters and the same number of sounds this cannot be said for the English language. The alphabet of the English language has 26 letters but the number of speech sounds is approximately 44.

The International Phonetic Alphabet is a system of phonetic notation based primarily on the Latin alphabet. It was devised by the International Phonetic Association in the late 19th century as a standardized representation of the sounds of spoken language. The IPA (see picture 1) is used by lexicographers, foreign language students and teachers, linguists, speech-language pathologists, singers, actors etc.

I: READ	I SIT	ʊ BOOK	u: TOO	ɪə HERE	eɪ DAY		
e MEN	ə AMERICA	ɜ: WORD	ɔ: SORT	ʊə TOUR	ɔɪ BOY	əʊ GO	
æ CAT	ʌ BUT	ɑ: PART	ɒ NOT	eə WEAR	aɪ MY	aʊ HOW	
p PIG	b BED	t TIME	d DO	tʃ CHURCH	dʒ JUDGE	k KILO	g GO
f FIVE	v VERY	θ THINK	ð THE	s SIX	z ZOO	ʃ SHORT	ʒ CASUAL
m MILK	n NO	ŋ SING	h HELLO	l LIVE	r READ	w WINDOW	j YES

Picture 1: The Phonetic Alphabet

However, students tend to have a lot of difficulties when using the IPA symbols. Some of the symbols are unusual to them and they tend to make different mistakes when doing transcriptions. According to Hlebec, some of the most common transcription errors are the following (1995):

1. Transcribing proper names with capital letters
2. Transcribing silent letters
3. Words consisting of one syllable do not bear an accent mark when transcribed
4. Transcribing punctuation
5. Confusion between the transcription with the spelling

In the table (table 2) below, some practical examples with mistaken and corrected transcription can be found:


Table 2: Transcription errors

Word	Transcription	Mistake	Correct example
England	'ɪŋɡlənd	'ɪŋɡlənd, 'Eŋɡlənd	'ɪŋɡlənd
Chalk	tʃɔ:k	tʃɔ:lk	tʃɔ:k
Chat	tʃæt	'tʃæt	tʃæt
Stop!	stɒp	stɒp!	stɒp
Stop	stɒp	Stop	stɒp

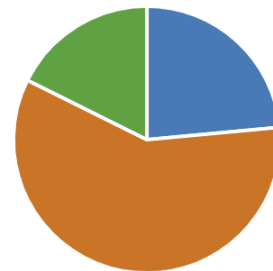
As part of the short study we have conducted, on the question whether the phonetic transcription helps the students in improving their pronunciation the answers are exposed in (graph 2). It is obvious that all the answers are positive which means that students have become aware of the usefulness of the Phonetic Alphabet even though they are facing difficulties and do some mistakes when they use it.

### 3. Can the Phonetic Transcription help you in improving your pronunciation?

[More Details](#)

 Insights

- I strongly agree. 4
- I agree. 10
- Neutral. 3
- I disagree. 0
- I strongly disagree. 0



Graph. 2


### 1.3. Phonetics vs. Phonology


It is very important to point out the most essential purpose of Phonetics which is to explain how to pronounce the standard English chosen as such by the local population in England - Great Britain i.e. the Received Pronunciation (RP). This study gives answers to the questions such as why it is necessary to learn the theory related to Phonetics and Phonology i.e. the theoretical knowledge is necessary for anyone who is interested in learning and understanding the use of sounds in the English language. Students usually have Phonetics and Phonology as two different courses, and they are conscious of the differences between these two scientific fields. This is confirmed by the question in the survey (Graph 3):

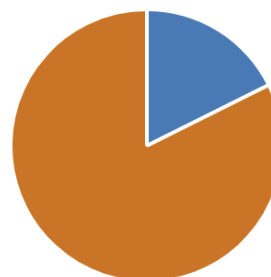


## 2. Are Phonetics and Phonology the same scientific fields? (0 point)

[More Details](#)

 Insights

 Yes	3
 No	14

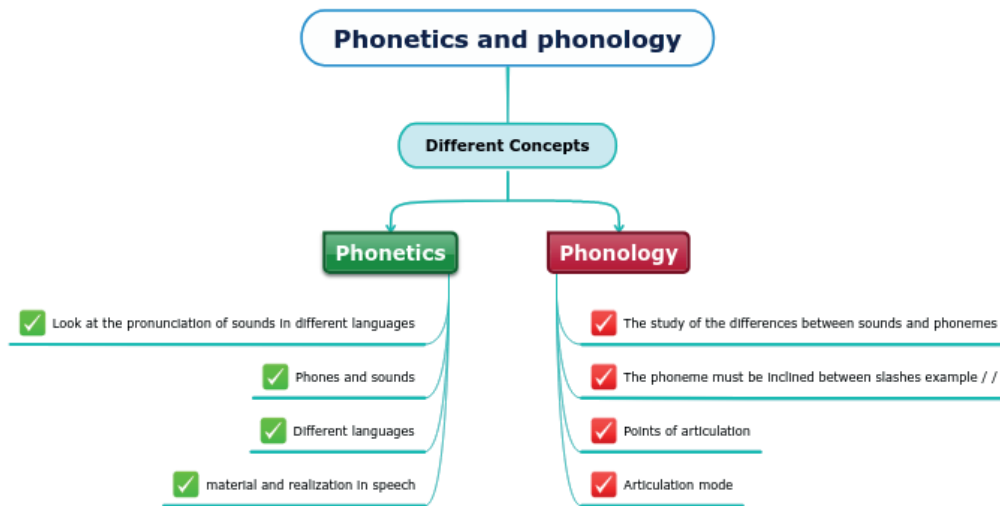


Graph 3

Bigger percentage of the students who participated in the survey are aware of the differences between Phonetics and Phonology which were discussed above. The three participants who answered positively are probably students who achieved low results studying the course. Phonology or the study of sounds deals with the sound nature of language and its functional meaning. Phonology is one of the core fields that composes the discipline of linguistics, which is defined as the scientific study of language structure. One way to understand what the subject matter of phonology is, is to contrast it with other fields within linguistics (Odden, 2005). Sounds, accent, intonation can be seen as functional elements of the language system that fulfill different role in that sense. The basic functional element is the sound and the study of phoneme has a central place in Phonology. Every sound as segment of speech fulfills a different role in the language system. As mentioned previously, Phonology studies the relationship of sounds and their meaning.

### Conclusion

It can be summed up that it is important to learn and master the theory of pronouncing words i.e. the places and types of articulation in order to be able to get acquainted with the phonological features of the sounds (see pic 30). It is essential to point out the purpose of Phonetics which is to explain how to pronounce the standard English chosen as such by the local population in England - Great Britain or (RP). The theory related to Phonetics and Phonology is much more than needed in order to improve pronunciation and sound more like a native speaker. Theoretical knowledge is obligatory for anyone who is interested in learning and understanding the use of sounds in the English language especially the IPA which is easily accessible in any English dictionary. However, in order to be able to use it and make a practical implementation of it, the basic rules of the speech sound i.e. the phonemes and allophones must be acquired as they are essential in differentiating the distinctive and non-distinctive features.



Pic. 2

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