



Assignment 1

Phonetics is the study and description of pronunciation. It is concerned with what we pronounce and how we pronounce it. Written English and spoken English are clearly very different things. Writing is taken in by the eye whilst speaking is organised sound, taken in by the ear.

During these introductory Sounds of English modules we are concerned primarily with the spoken word. So a priority task for anyone describing sounds is to decide how to represent the flow of speech. Clearly, the conventional written forms are most unsatisfactory, since they often provide little guide to pronunciation. In fact, as Ferdinand de Saussure pointed out, "Written forms obscure our view of language. They are not so much a garment as a disguise."

Consider:

meat, mete, meet

city, pretty

colonel, kernel

some, sum

cord, cawed, cored, chord

whirled, world, whorled

bad, bade

wood, would

alms, arms

sew, sow, so

fir, fur

hymn, him

prey, pray

hair, hare

or, ore, oar, awe

way, weigh, whey

air, heir, e'er, ere

rose, rows

guessed, guest

flower, flour

bird, burred

Linguists, then, when they are concerned with sounds, abandon conventional spelling for the purpose of representing spoken utterances, and use one of the many specially devised systems of notation in which **one** symbol represents **one** sound. Perhaps the best known of these is the International Phonetic Alphabet (I.P.A.).

A number of symbols are ordinary letters used in a consistent and specified way, and some are new letter shapes. They help us to note down and refer to sounds independently of spelling.

A number of I.P.A. symbols are borrowed from the conventional written alphabet:

[b] as in *bird*

[d] as in *dog*

(Note that the symbols representing sounds are put into square brackets in these examples. However, when you attempt your transcriptions please don't use these square brackets.)

Other symbols are variations of alphabet letters: [ɒ] as in *hot*, is an upside down *o*
[ŋ] as in *bang*, is a combination of *n* and *g*
[ɪ] as in *hit*, is a small-size capital *i*

Sometimes obsolete letters are used: [ʃ] as in *dish*

Other symbols are from the Greek alphabet: [θ] as in *thin*

And a few symbols are inventions: [t̪] Welsh *Llanelly*

By such means, the I.P.A. has built up a store of symbols which can, in theory, represent any sound in any language. We can display the complete set of these phonemes by the usual classificatory methods used by most phoneticians; the vowels and diphthongs can be located in vowel quadrilaterals, as will be demonstrated in a later module and the consonants can be placed in a chart or table according to place of articulation, manner of articulation and voicing. The International Phonetic Alphabet is reproduced on the next page.