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## Familiarizing the students with the formation of consonant sounds of English

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### Abstract

This article, which attempts to familiarize the bachelor level students with the formation of twenty-four basic consonant sounds of English, is grounded on the qualitative explorative research design that employs syllables as categorical data and consonant sounds as variables under study. The article writer has endeavored to take divergent spellings through keen observation on the formation of diverse consonant sounds after going through the authentic books on the pronunciation of English sounds. Some words in which the particular spellings are silent are also pointed out for providing the students with additional information to suggest that some spellings remain silent in particular words. The students are provided with a brief glimpse about the position of the consonant sound in the words. This article is important to the students who have taken English as a major subject and to the teachers who have to teach speech sounds of English especially phonetics and phonology in the Department of English Education.

**Keywords:** Consonant sounds, English, language, spellings

### Introduction

Teaching speech sounds of English erupts a sense of panic and anxiety not only in the students, but also in the teachers. After a persistent and inquisitive study on the speech sounds and the experiences of teaching for a long period of time made me realize that the difficult topic can be made easy. If the lecture method of teaching is blended with the analytic-linguistic approach, we can familiarize our students with the basic sounds of speech. The article writer has collected different spellings that form consonant sounds in English words. Sometimes a spelling forms a sound. The spelling 's' forms the sound /s/ as in the word 'seat'. Sometimes two spellings form a sound in a word. The spellings 'ss' form the sound /s/ in the word 'miss'. Similarly, the same spelling forms more than one sound if it comes in different words. The spelling 'c' forms /s/, /k/ and /tʃ/ sounds as in the words 'centre', 'cut' and 'cello' respectively. Two spellings can also form more than one sound. The spellings 'ch' form /k/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ sounds as in the words 'chorus', 'chair' and 'chef' respectively.

All the spellings in the words do not always form a sound. They remain silent in the words. They may remain silent in the initial position, in the medial position and in the final position of the words. The spellings 'k' and 'p' are silent in the initial position of the words 'know' and 'psychology' respectively. The spellings 'b' and 'd' are silent in the medial position of the words 'debt' and 'grandmother' respectively. Similarly, the spellings 'b' and 't' are silent in the final position of the words 'comb' and 'depot' respectively. These are just a few examples of silent spellings in the word.

Pronunciation is the tactic of uttering a lexeme in an accepted fashion (Gilakjani, 2016, p. 2) [3]. It is in a common term can be taken as the production of substantial sounds (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 2001, p. 3) [2]. It is a more challenging task to teach pronunciation to the students whose mother tongue is different from English tongue. One of the reasons of these difficulties is that there is not always a perfect correlation between the spellings and sounds they form. Several students can be noticed to commit errors in the pronunciation of inflectional suffixes. The spelling or suffix 's' is pronounced /s/ in the word 'cats', but /z/ in the word 'girls'. The suffix 'es' is pronounced /z/ in the word 'goes', but /ɪz/ in the word 'buses'.

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Similarly, the suffix 'ed' is pronounced / d / in the word 'begged', / t / in the word 'laughed' and / ɪd / in the words 'wanted' and 'needed'. But they hardly know such things. This article is an attempt to familiarize the students with the formation of consonant sounds of English so that they will be able to transcribe the words correctly.

## Theoretical Review of Literature

### Spelling

Spelling is the process of forming words from individual letters according to the principles of underlying accepted usage. Spelling is defined as the procedure or action of writing or specifying the letters of a lexeme (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2003, p. 1701) <sup>[11]</sup> English pronunciation is actually problematic for foreign pupils and it is owing to the fact that spelling and pronunciation are two dissimilar matters (Reid, 2016, p. 19) <sup>[12]</sup>. A spelling in dissimilar words is articulated differently. It creates a sort of confusion in the learners. Having a disreputably confusing feature of English spelling, it is particularly imperative to learn to ponder English elocution in terms of phonemes rather than letters of the alphabet (Roach, 1998, p. 3) <sup>[13]</sup>.

### Language

Language is based on the sound system. Every language has its own sound system. The sound system primarily involves consonant and vowel sounds, known as speech sounds. Speech sounds are the product of structure of articulators and physiology; it is not astounding to find resemblances across languages (Hayman, 1975, p. 2) <sup>[6]</sup>. On the other hand, each language takes an account of sounds, selected from the whole array of conceivable human noises, which is (or may be) dissimilar from the inventories of other languages (Lass, 2010, p. 3) <sup>[9]</sup>. Two languages may have or may not have some similar features of the sound system.

We must know the sound system of a language to understand that language well. A speaker of a language must recognize the sounds of that language (Harmer, 1990, p. 10) <sup>[5]</sup>. The English teachers play a prominent role in teaching the sounds; therefore they need to be resourceful, trained, knowledgeable and eager. A teacher plays a prominent role in teaching pronunciation. The job of the teacher is to make the pupils skillful to articulate and say words appropriately and to help them to improve their second language (Kenworthy, 1987, pp. 1-2) <sup>[7]</sup>. It requires a qualified and trained teacher.

### Consonant Sounds of English

Consonant sounds are those speech sounds for the production of which there is a sort of obstruction in the vocal tract. Consonants are sounds formed by a closure or narrowing in the vocal tract so that the airflow is either totally blocked, or so constrained that noticeable friction is produced (Crystal, 2003, p. 103) <sup>[1]</sup>. It means consonant sounds are produced when there is an obstruction of the airflow somewhere in the vocal tract. This obstruction is the point of contact between an active articulator and a passive articulator. Articulators are the organs of speech which are involved in the production of speech sounds. The active articulator is the articulator that moves towards the passive articulator in the production of a speech sound. This articulator moves towards another articulator to form a closure of some type in the vocal tract. Sounds are produced

with articulators. Articulators are the parts of the vocal band such as the tongue and the lips that are employed to form sounds (Ladefoged, 2006, p. 4) <sup>[8]</sup>. The lower lip and different parts of tongue are the active articulators. The passive articulator is the articulator that remains motionless in the production of a speech sound. Teeth, alveolar ridge, hard palate, soft palate etc. are passive articulators. Sounds are called speech sounds because they are to be produced through organs of speech. Speech is an exhibition of verbal language that is typically a continuum of sound (Gimson, 1990, p. 44) <sup>[4]</sup>. Consonants are generally articulated by a certain intervention of the vocal organs with the air flow, and so are easier to describe and comprehend (O'Connor, 2000, p. 24) <sup>[10]</sup>. Similar view is expressed by other writers. A consonant is taken as a sound described by constriction accompanied by some degree of friction or stricture followed by release (Verma & Krishnaswamy, 1999, p. 35) <sup>[14]</sup>. Speech sounds can vary from one another in three ways. They can be the identical or dissimilar in pitch, loudness and quality (Ladefoged, 2006, p. 6) <sup>[8]</sup>. We should make our students familiar with speech sounds of English rather than skipping this topic. A language student must master the construction and discernment of the sounds of a specified language (Hyman, 1975, p. 1) <sup>[6]</sup>. His assertion focuses on the importance of learning sounds. There are 24 consonant sounds of English. They are: / p /, / b /, / t /, / d /, / k /, / g /, / tʃ /, / dʒ /, / m /, / n /, / ŋ /, / f /, / v /, / θ /, / ð /, / s /, / z /, / ʃ /, / ʒ /, / h /, / r /, / j /, / w / and / l /.

### Method and Materials

This article is based on the qualitative explorative design which employs the secondary data taken from the books on pronunciation of English. The books are "An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English" by Gimson, "Teaching English Pronunciation" by Kenworthy, "A course in Phonetics" by Ladefoged, "Better English Pronunciation" by O, Connor and so on. The syllables function as data that are categorical in nature and they are extracted through making keen observation of syllables that constitute particular consonant sounds. The observation is the method of this study. Twenty-four consonant sounds are the variables that are highlighted and described from the perspective of their formation.

### Ways of Familiarizing the Consonant Sounds

The article writer employs the following steps to familiarize students with the formation of consonant sounds of English:

- Displaying the chart of consonant sounds
- Presenting and pronouncing each sound.
- Displaying spelling(s) forming the sound.
- Pointing out the position of the sounds in different words.
- Writing the silent spelling in the words related to the sound.
- Pronouncing the words with the silent spelling.

### Formation of Consonant Sounds

In this article, the students are familiarized with the twenty-four consonants of Usual English.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / p /

The spellings 'p' and 'pp' form / p / sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Pan, pen, pot, peak, pit, pink, pie, punch, poke, pool, pull, pun, pin, peel, pair, pear etc.
Medial	Spear, speak, speech, spin, spot, appear, happen, happy, spring, spice, spleen, sperm etc.
Final	Lap, heap, rip, hope, rope, gap, map, tap, tape, wrap, sap, grape, shape, cheap, top etc.

The spelling 'p' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
P	Psychology, pneumonia, psyche, psychiatry, psychotherapy, psychologist, receipt, psychic, psycho, pterodactyl, raspberry, pseudonym, psalm, corps, coup, cupboard, ptosis, psalter etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / b /

The spellings 'b' and 'bb' form /p/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	ban, been, boat, beak, bit, bind, book, bunch, break, pull, bun, bear, beer, bare, boot etc.
Medial	rubber, robber, labor, husband, symbol, cabin, cobbler, habit, rabbit, soybean, rubs etc.
Final	rib, ebb, sob, robe, bulb, verb, cube, cub, tube, tub, rub, rob, lobe, globe etc.

The spelling 'b' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
B	Limb, thumb, comb, debt, subtle, doubt climb, bomb, crumb, dumb, lamb, numb, plumber, tomb, womb, jamb, aplomb, succumb etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / t /

The spellings 't' and 'tt' form /t/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words.

Position	Words
Initial	tan, ten, ton, time, tiger, tempo, tide, take, tie, touch, token, tool, tap, tender, teach, type, tin, toil, tear, toad, tone etc.
Medial	Cattle, battle, cats, hats, between, steel, steal, stamp, stain, atlas, little, cotton etc.
Final	Cat, let, beat, bite, heat, spit, spot, net, kite, net, bites, late, hate, seat, site, sight, etc.

The spelling 't' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
T	Castle, Christmas, often, listen, glisten, fasten, nestle, apostle, thistle, whistle, wrestle, gristle, pestle, butcher, hustle, match, mortgage, rustle, soften, witch etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / d /

The spellings 'd' and 'dd' form /d/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Do, dog, dance, danger, double, dead, die, donkey, district, dry, dwindle, door etc.
Medial	Bladder, sudden, middle, cuddle, admit, badly, holds, London, padlock, leader etc.
Final	Lad, bad, head, lead, bread, glad, glide, hide, read, red, feed, need, head, heed etc.

The spelling 'd' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
D	Handkerchief, Wednesday, badge, edge, handsome, hedge, judge, sandwich, wedge, bridge, ledger, grandson, etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / k /

The spellings 'c', 'cc', 'q', 'k', 'ck' and 'ch' form /k/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Cat, cot, cut, queen, quote, quite, kind, kite, chemistry, chloride, chorus, choir etc.
Medial	Soccer, lakes, looks, bikes, hooks, books, bucket, pocket, snakes, shakes, locks etc.
Final	Look, music, stomach, monarch, fantastic, physic, lock, luck, lack, smack, wreck etc.

The spelling 'k' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
K	Knack, knave, knead, knee, kneel, kneel, knew, knickers, knife, knight, knit, knob, knock, knoll, knot, know, knowledge, knuckle etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound / g /**

The spellings 'g' and 'gg' form / g / sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Get, gain, got, goat, god, game, goal, gun, gambler, guide, guidance, grow, garment etc.
Medial	Bags, beggar, eager, hunger, figure, ago, begin, eagle, angry, anguish, argue, juggling etc.
Final	Leg, mug, hug, vague, bag, beg, big, dog, hog, dug, tug, tag, smog, slug, flag, pig etc.

The spelling 'g' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
G	Align, assign, benign, champagne, cologne, consign, design, feign, foreign, gnarly, gnash, gnat, gnaw, gnome, gnomonic, high, light, reign, resign, sign etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound / f /**

The spellings 'f', 'ff', 'ph' and 'gh' form /f/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Fat, fight, five, phone, photo, famous, finger, fantastic, fame, fabulous, phenomena etc.
Medial	Buffalo, affair, defend, offer, differ, selfish, comfort, suffer, laughs, graphs, sphere etc.
Final	Off, leaf, graph, laugh, rough, life, strife, staff, Stiff, triumph, roof, stuff, loaf, cough etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound / v /**

The spellings 'v', and 'f' form / v / sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	van, vain, vein, vote, value, volume, vex, vat, velocity, vacuum, vile, vine, vast, voice etc.
Medial	Over, silver, river, never, clever, nephew, cover, oven, canvas, loved, solved etc.
Final	Leave, live, love, solve, revolve, glove, prove, move, have, dove, heave, of etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound / θ /**

The spellings 'th' forms / θ / sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Thank, three, thatch, thumb, thought, thin, thermal, thigh, throw, think, thaw etc.
Medial	Months, ether, author, anthem, atheist, athletic worthless, lethal, ethics etc.
Final	Earth, birth, mirth, mouth, cloth, bath, depth, month, oath, fourth, fifth, health etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound / ð /**

The spellings 'th' forms / ð / sound in the words. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	This, that, these, those, them, thy, there, their, then, than, the, thine, they, though etc.
Medial	Father, mother, other, southern, gather, either, although, worthy, rather, neither etc.
Final	Smooth, seethe, clothe, bathe, mouth (v), loathe, lathe etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound / s /**

The spellings 's', 'ss', 'c', and 'sc' form / s / sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Sit, seat, scene, scent, centre, city, sell, site, sight, cinema, science, sample etc.
Medial	Pieces, essay, concert, whisper, useless, escape, pencil, losses, misses, buses etc.
Final	Miss, coarse, niece, pus, piece, farce, race, place, palace, hoarse, house, horse etc.

The spelling 's' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
S	Aisle, island, debris, isle, patios, viscount etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound / z /**

The spellings 'z', 'zz', 's', 'ss' and x form / z / sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Zest, zinc, zebra, zero, xylem, zoo, zone, zeal, zenith, zip, zoom, zoology, zap etc.
Medial	Bazaar, husband, bosom, thousand, pansy, lazy, loser, causes, topazes etc.
Final	Topaz, balls, sings, rings, hens, buzz, his, praise, lazy, busy, lads, grows, etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /ʃ/**

The spellings 'sh', 's', 'ch', 'c' 'ss' and 'sch' form /ʃ/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Ship, shine, sheep, shame, sure, sugar, surely, shoe, shop, shy, shake, sharp etc.
Medial	Worship, nation, machine, mission, conscience, special, ocean, cushion, mansion etc.
Final	Wash, bush, push, rush, dish, cash, douche, ruche, mesh, wish, fish etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /ʒ/**

The spellings 's', 'g' and 'z', form /ʒ/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Genre, jabot, gigue, etc.
Medial	Pleasure, leisure, usual, confusion, decision, measure, seizure, vision etc.
Final	Prestige, barrage, rouge, beige, garage etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /tʃ/**

The spellings 'ch', 'tch', 'c' and 't' form /tʃ/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Chalk, chide, children, cheese, change, chain, charm, choice, charge, cello etc.
Medial	Feature, nature, butcher, creature, merchant, mischief, lecture, richer, gesture etc.
Final	Conch, bench, match, watch, coach, poach, larch, march, torch, touch, such etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /dʒ/**

The spellings 'j', 'g', 'dg', 'gg', 'di', 'de' and 'ch' form /dʒ/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Join, jam, joker, jar, joy, joke, jerk, jest, gin, gene, jeer, jest, June, jump, Jew etc.
Medial	Midget, ledger, margin, urgent, major, soldier, grandeur, object, bulges, suggest etc.
Final	Age, edge, large, merge, ridge, huge, change, range, judge, sponge, gouge, dodge etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /m/**

The spellings 'm' and 'mm' form /m/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words.

Position	Words
Initial	Mind, my, motion, meadow, mile, milk, march, move, monkey, meal, mirth etc.
Medial	Summon, comes, commit, summit, summer, timber, omen, smoke, smile etc.
Final	Seem, some, rum, harm, lamp, dim, rim, warm, charm, game, shame, come, alarm etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /n/**

The spellings 'n' and 'nn' form /n/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	New, name, net, noise, notice, nice, note, neighbor, no, neat, nurse, nose etc.
Medial	Manner, dinner, answer, annoy, snake, snug, wonder, many, infant, hunter, unrest etc.
Final	Sun, son, man, fan, ban, can, soon, gone, down, town, mean, lean, shine, fine, gun etc.

The spelling 'n' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
N	Autumn, column, condemn, damn, hymn, solemn, government etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /ŋ/**

The spellings 'ng' and 'n' form /ŋ/ sound of English. It can occur in the two positions of words. It does not occur in the initial position of the word, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	
Medial	Kings, rings, donkey, tank, rank, sank, think, single, finger, anger, hunger, angry etc.
Final	Ring, sing, spring, strong, bring, string, rang, song, wrong, long, tongue etc.

**Formation of the consonant sound /l/**

The spellings 'l' and 'll' form /l/ sound of English. It can occur in the three positions of words, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Love, like, lunch, load, long, lamp, lion, link, lottery, lake, loan, light, look, late, etc.
Medial	Blow, glow, glad, slow, fly, silly, yellow, collar, alloy, pulley, foolish, million, allow etc.
Final	Feel, Fill, call, doll, bull, hall, oil, boil, spoil, pole, pile, smile, pale, pearl, pool, pull etc.

The spelling 'l' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
L	Would, should, calf, half, salmon, talk, yolk, could, etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / r /

The spellings 'r' and 'rr', 'wr' and 'rh' form / r / sound of English. It can occur in the two positions of words. It does

not occur in the final position of the word in isolation, but it can occur if it is followed by a vowel sound in connected speech, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Red, ride, right, write, wrong, rhythm, reel, road, roam, read, rank, rude, raw, etc.
Medial	Spring, mirror, sorry, furry, hurry, arrive, diary, dairy, dowry, very, arrow etc.
Final	Car arrived, father entered, sister enjoyed, pair of, elder uncle etc.

The spelling 'r' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
R	Smart, card, heart, dark, bird, burn, horn, born, first, thirst, burst, herd etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / h /

The spellings 'h' and 'wh' form / h / sound of English. It can occur in the two positions of words. It does not occur in the final position of the word, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Heart, home, hide, homely, hart, hard, hat, hot, hut, high, whom, hear, horse etc.
Medial	Ahead, behave, perhaps, anyhow, manhood, abhor, adhere, behind etc.
Final	

The spelling 'h' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
H	Honest, hour, honour, heir, heiress, exhaust, vehicle, vehement, anchor, archeology, architect, archives, chaos, character, characteristic, charisma, chemical, choreograph, chorus, Christian, Christmas, echo, ghost, when, where, whether, which, while, white, why etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / w /

The spellings 'w', 'wh' and 'u after q or g' form / w / sound of English. It can occur in the two positions of words. It does not occur in the final position of the word, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Weed, win, wet, when, which, wood, womb, word, woke, wear, wire, weird etc.
Medial	Twig, twin, swam, twelve, twice, queen, quell, quick, quite, quaint, acquaint etc.
Final	

The spelling 'w' is silent in the following words.

Silent spelling	Words
w	sword, wrack, wrangle, wrap, wrapper, wrath, wreak, wreath, wreck, wrestle, wriggle, wring, wrinkle, wrist, writ, write, wrong, wrot e, awry, playwright etc.

#### Formation of the consonant sound / j /

The spellings 'y', 'u', 'ew', 'eu', 'eau' and 'ui' form / j / sound of English. It can occur in the two positions of words.

It does not occur in the final position of the word, for example:

Position	Words
Initial	Yak, yesterday, yam, yolk, yearn, year, yang, yell, yellow, yard, yawn, yawl, your etc.
Medial	Beauty, duty, music, new, few, value, view, tune, abuse, cure, huge, pure, manure etc.
Final	

The article writer considers that this article will be able to provide the students and teachers with the basic concept of the formation of consonant sounds of English. They will be able to learn the position of a particular consonant sound in the words and silent letters in the words. It will make easier for the teachers to teach the pronunciation of consonant sounds to some extent. The teachers and students are advised to notice the pronunciation of each spelling in words by consulting the English Dictionaries or good grammar books on pronunciation.

### Conclusion

Familiarizing students with the formation of consonant sounds is a challenging but exciting task. If we have a strong desire for learning a difficult thing like sound, we can learn. This article concludes that different spellings can form a speech sound, the same spelling is pronounced differently according to its position in the words, and some spellings are silent in the words. Correct pronunciation of words can be a matter of disputes, but we should try our best to follow the pronunciation of some sort of the Standard English to make our expression understandable and clear.

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