

University of Sétif-2
Department of English Language
Phonetics Course (1st Year Classes)
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Lecture Two

Definition of Phonetics

It is the study of the **speech sounds** used in the languages of the world, how they are produced by the **articulators** of the human **vocal tract**, how they are realized acoustically, and how this acoustic realization can be digitized and processed. It is the art which studies practical data about pronouncing and perceiving the sounds of speech that are used for communication purposes. Therefore, it aims to provide an objective description of speech.

Branches of Phonetics

There are three main branches/areas of this discipline and the focus will be on the first one.

Articulatory phonetics

The study of how speech sounds (**articulators**) are formed (**or 'articulated'**) in the mouth is called **articulatory phonetics**. It is also known as “the physiological mechanisms” of speech production by human beings (Brinton & Brinton, 2010). It concerns with the sounds of speech produced by the organs of speech and how the vocal folds adjust the flow of air while it is passing through them for producing different sounds (Zhu, 2015). To put it another way, it studies the **ways the vocal organs or vocal tract are used to produce speech sounds**.

Acoustic phonetics

It focuses on the **physical properties** of speech sounds of language (duration, frequency, intensity, and quality) that are generally measured by spectrographs to depict **waveforms** and **spectrograms**. This branch also looks at how articulatory and auditory phonetics link to acoustic properties.

Auditory phonetics

It is concerned with how people **perceive speech sounds**, i.e. how the sound waves activate the listener's eardrum, and how the message is carried to the brain in the form of nerve impulses. This branch deals with the **physiological processes** involved in the **reception of speech**.

Difference between Phonetics and Phonology

phonetics and phonology (both from the Greek root phon-'sound'), the two subfields of linguistics concerned with speech sounds. Traditionally, **phonetics** deals with **measurable, physical properties** of speech sounds themselves, i.e. precisely how the mouth produces certain sounds, and the characteristics of the resulting soundwaves; while **phonology** investigates the **mental system** for representing and processing speech sounds within particular languages. In recent years, however, **the two fields** have increasingly **overlapped in scope**.

Phonetics which is a **concrete entity** is concerned with the physical manifestation of all speech sounds (in any language) and how they are **produced, transmitted, and perceived**; an outsider's view of the sound matter. Phonology, the **abstract entity**, studies the patterns of sounds within the system of individual languages; concerned with the **structure and function of sounds**; an insider's view of the sound matter. Phonology is the study of how these sounds are **categorized, contrasted, and organized** into larger structures in each language i.e., it studies the **sound systems of languages** and **how sounds function** in relation to each other in **a language**.