

2.5 The lips

It is obvious that the lips can take up various different positions. They can be brought firmly together as in /p/ or /b/ or /m/ so that they completely block the mouth; the lower lip can be drawn inward and slightly upwards to touch the upper front teeth as in the sounds /f/ and /v/. And they can be kept apart either flat or with different amounts of rounding, and they can be pushed forward to a greater or lesser extent.

Of course, the closed position for /p, b, m/ and the lip-teeth position for /f/ and /v/ are used in English, but apart from this the English do not move their lips with very much energy: their lips are never very far apart, they do not take up very rounded shapes, they are rarely spread very much and almost never pushed forward or protruded. Watch English people talk either in real life or on films and notice how little the lips and the lower jaw move; some people make more lip-movement than others, but it is never necessary to exaggerate these movements. Watch people talking your language too, and see whether they move their lips more than the English. If so, you must remember

In the chapters which follow we shall see how the movements of the organs of speech combine together in forming the sounds of English. You should study the descriptions of the movements very carefully, because what seems a quite small difference may in fact be very important in producing and recognizing an English sound correctly, and the difference between an English sound and one in your language may seem quite small when it is described, but the small difference in the movement of the speech organs may make all the difference between a result which sounds English and one which does not.

Suppose, for example, that in your language you have a /t/-sound which is made by touching the upper front teeth with the tip of your tongue: this is quite often the case. The difference between this /t/ and the /t/-sound of English is that the English /t/ is generally made with the tip of the tongue touching the alveolar ridge just behind the teeth. This may not seem much of a difference to you, but a /t/ which is made on the teeth sounds foreign to an English ear, and although it will be recognized as /t/, it will not sound correct in English.

Friction consonants

For all of them the lungs push air through a narrow opening where it causes friction of various kinds.

/f/ and /v/

For both */f/* and */v/* the speech organs are in the position shown in Figure 12.





Fig. 12 /f/ and /v/

NOTICE

- 1 The soft palate is raised so that no air goes through the nose and it is all forced through the mouth.
- 2 The bottom lip is very close to the upper front teeth: this forms the narrowing and when air is pushed through this narrowing it causes slight friction.
- 3 The tongue is not directly concerned in making these sounds, but it does not lie idle; it takes up the position necessary for the *following* sound, so in *fi*: it will be in the /i/ position whilst /f/ is being pronounced, and in *fri*: it will be in the /r/ position, and so on.

The difference between /f/ and /v/ is mainly one of *strength*: /f/ is a strong consonant, /v/ is a weak one. Also /f/ is never voiced, but /v/ may be. And /f/ is rather *longer* than /v/.

So /f/ is a strong, voiceless, long consonant, /v/ is a weak, perhaps voiced, short consonant.

The bottom lip is raised close to the upper teeth and blow breath



li:f leaf	li:v leave	laɪf life	laɪv live
hɑ:f half	hɑ:v halve	straɪf strife	straɪv strive
kɑ:f calf	kɑ:v carve	reɪf Ralph	reɪv rave
pru:f proof	pru:v prove	weɪf waif	weɪv wave
sɜ:f surf	sɜ:v serve	seɪf safe	seɪv save

These words all contain vowel phonemes which are naturally long, that is to say longer than the vowels /i e æ ʊ ʌ/ in similar positions. The short vowels behave like the long ones when followed by /f/ or /v/, that is, they are shortest when followed by strong /f/ and rather longer when followed by weak /v/, although they are never so long as the long vowels when these are followed by the weak consonant.

Try this with the words below: before /f/ make the vowel quite short, and before /v/ make it a little longer, about as long as the long vowels before /f/. And still make /f/ longer and stronger, and /v/ very short and weak in friction.



stɪf stiff	sɪv sieve	ɒf off	ɒv of
klɪf cliff	lɪv live	rʌf rough	dʌv dove

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NOTICE

- 1 The soft palate is raised so that all the breath is forced to go through the mouth.
- 2 The tip of the tongue is close to the upper front teeth: this is the narrowing where the friction is made.
- 3 The noise made by the friction for /θ/ and /ð/ is not very great, much less than for /s/ and /z/.

Put the tip of your tongue close to the cutting-edge of your upper front teeth. In a mirror you will be able to see the tip. Blow air through this position so that you get some friction, but not too much, not so much as for /s/. Continue the sound and listen to it. /θ/ should make the same amount of noise as /f/, not more. Try /f/ and /θ/ alternately until you get the friction right for /θ/. Now make less friction for /ð/ by pushing the air more gently. The friction for /ð/ when it is properly made can only just be heard. Now alternate the stronger /θ/ and the weaker /ð/ not too much friction in /θ/ and even less in /ð/.

All that I said about strong and weak consonants on p. 25 is true for /θ/ and /ð/. /θ/ is stronger and longer and always voiceless, /ð/ is weaker

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All that I said about strong and weak consonants on p. 25 is true for /θ/ and /ð/. /θ/ is stronger and longer and always voiceless, /ð/ is weaker and shorter and may be voiced. Confusing /θ/ and /ð/ will scarcely ever lead to misunderstanding because they rarely occur in words which are otherwise similar, but if you do not make the difference properly it will be noticeable.

Try the words given below, and be sure (1) that the air passes between the tongue tip and the teeth, and (2) that the friction is never too strong.

θɪn	thin	ðen	then	θæŋk	thank	ðæt	that
θɪŋk	think	ðɪs	this	θɔ:t	thought	ðəʊz	those
θi:f	thief	ði:z	these				

Some people may confuse /θ/ with /f/ and /ð/ with /v/; this is not very important for understanding, since some English speakers do the same, but you should try not to make these confusions because they will be noticeable. Say these words, and be sure that for /f/ and /v/ you are using a lip-teeth action, and for /θ/ and /ð/ a tongue-teeth action.

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