

Week 4: The Sounds of Language

LING 201

Spring 2024

Prof. Joseph Pentangelo

Tonight's Plan

1. Quiz #2 (15 minutes)
2. The Sounds of Language
3. How to do blog posts (for those still having trouble)

Quiz #2

Answer any two questions. Don't answer all three!



You have 15 minutes.

1. What are vocal organs used for? Mention two of the vocal organs discussed by David Crystal.
2. According to Peter Ladefoged's chapter in Rickerson & Hilton's book, approximately how many vowels are there in English?
3. What are vocal folds, where are they located, and what is their significance to human speech?

The Sounds of Language

- David Crystal, chapters 4 and 5 (pp.21–33)
- Rickerson & Hilton, chapter 28 (pp.124–127)

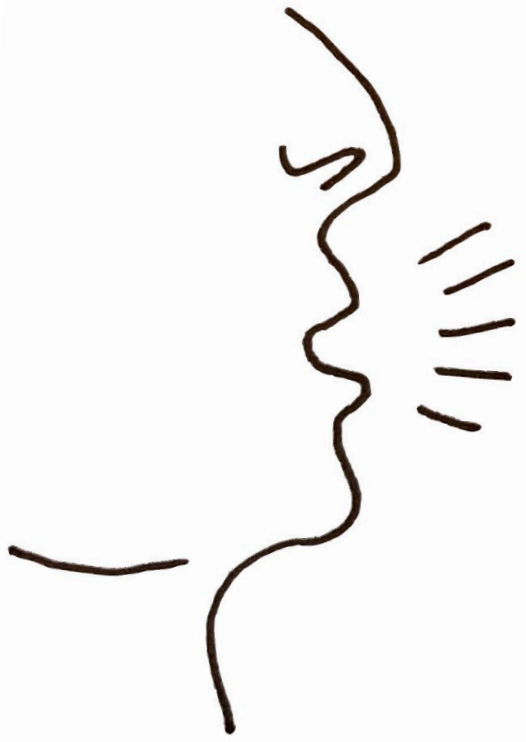
Sound and Text

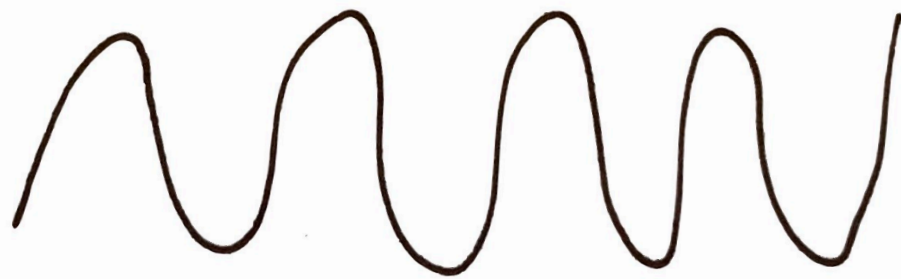
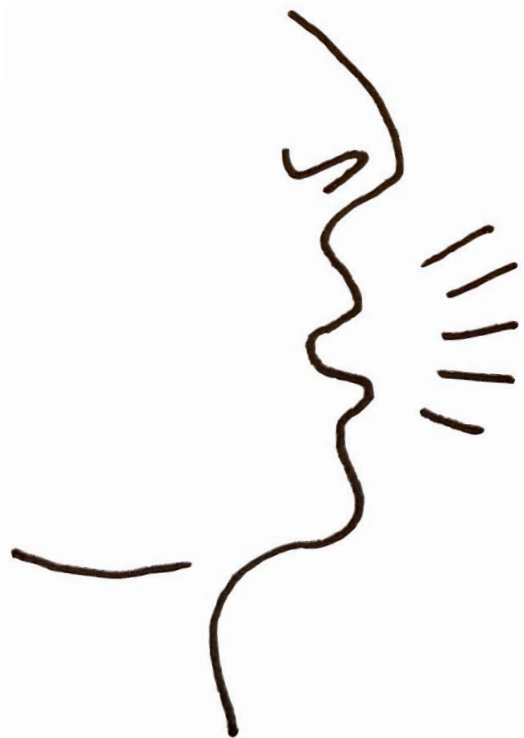
Imagine if musicians thought sheet music was “better” or “more authentic” than actual *music*?

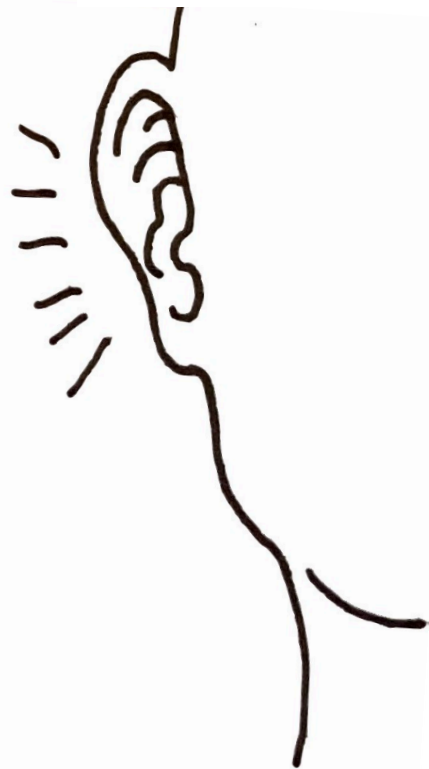
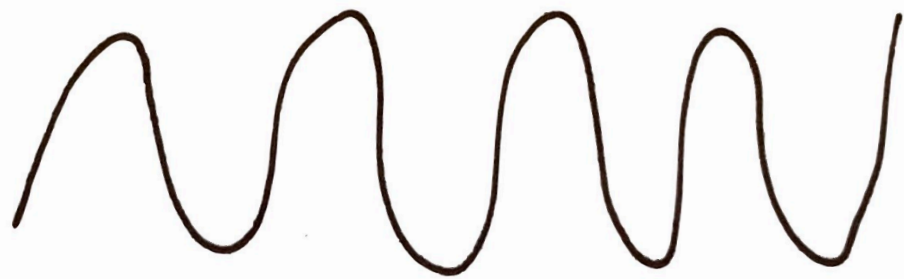
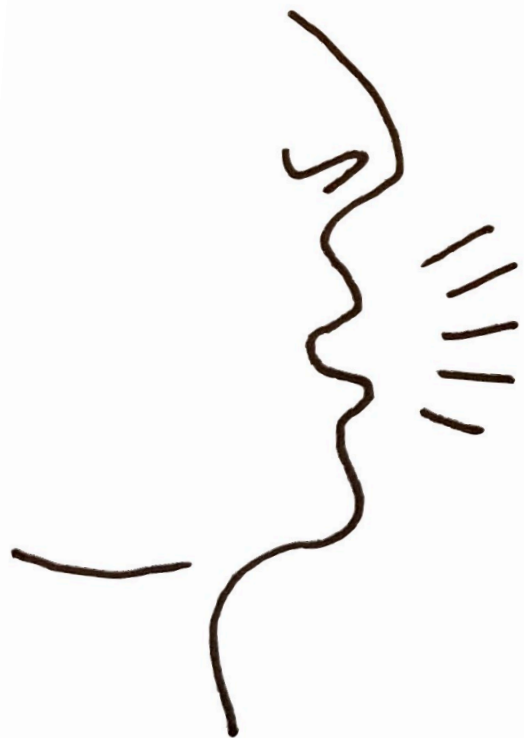
- In linguistics, we care about speech sounds far more than writing systems.
- You might think that written English is better or more authentic than spoken English.
- This is a cultural value that we in linguistics reject.
- The spoken language is what we’re interested in.
- Letters don’t “make” sounds; they *represent* them. Speech comes first.

Or if people thought floor plans and blueprints were primary, and actual buildings were secondary?



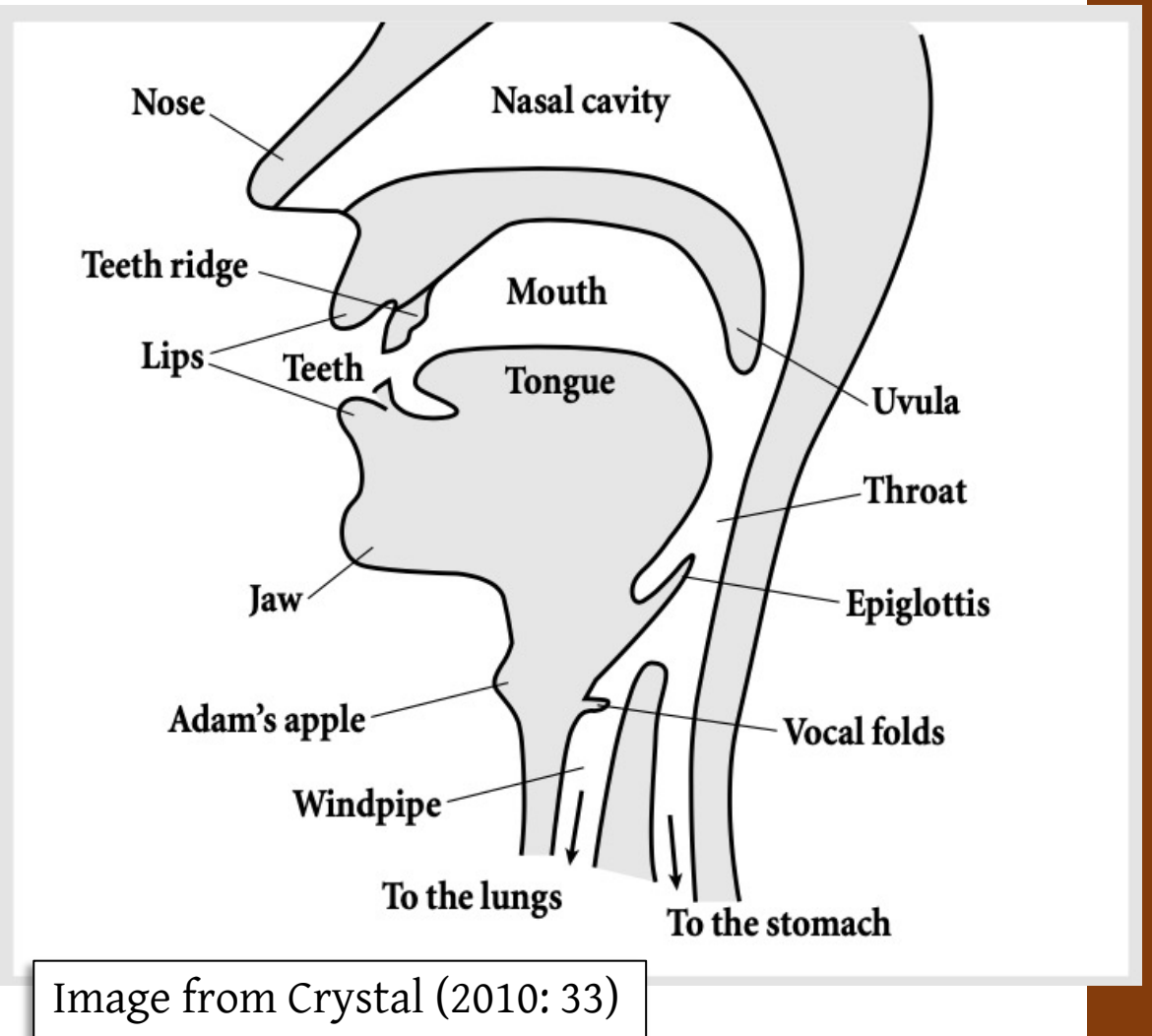






Vocal Organs

- What are your vocal organs?
- When we speak, we use our vocal organs in concert.
- Say the word “kidding.” Feel the way your tongue moves, like a wave, throughout the word.
- The back of your tongue flicks up at the <k>, then the tip flicks up at the <dd>, then the back flicks up again at the <ng>.



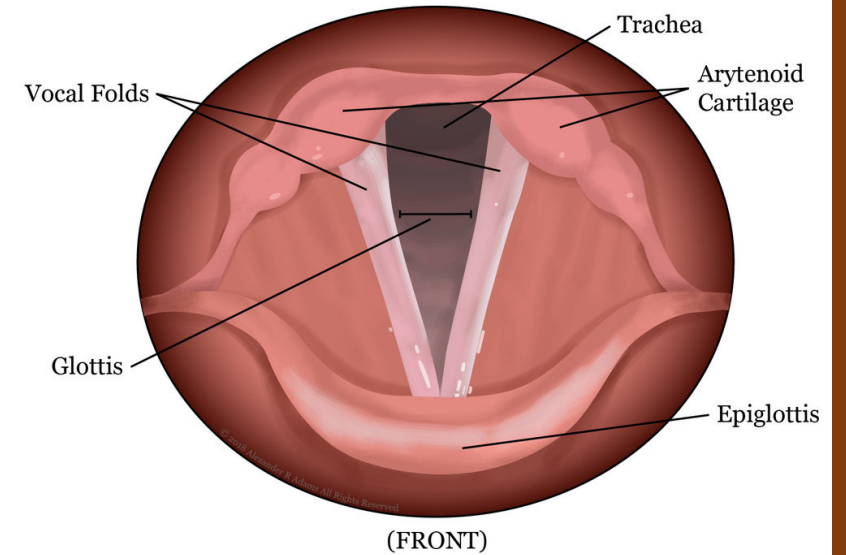
Voiced and Voiceless

- Our vocal folds close to protect our lungs.
- They also vibrate when we make voiced sounds.
- What are some voiced sounds?

[z] [b] [v] [l]

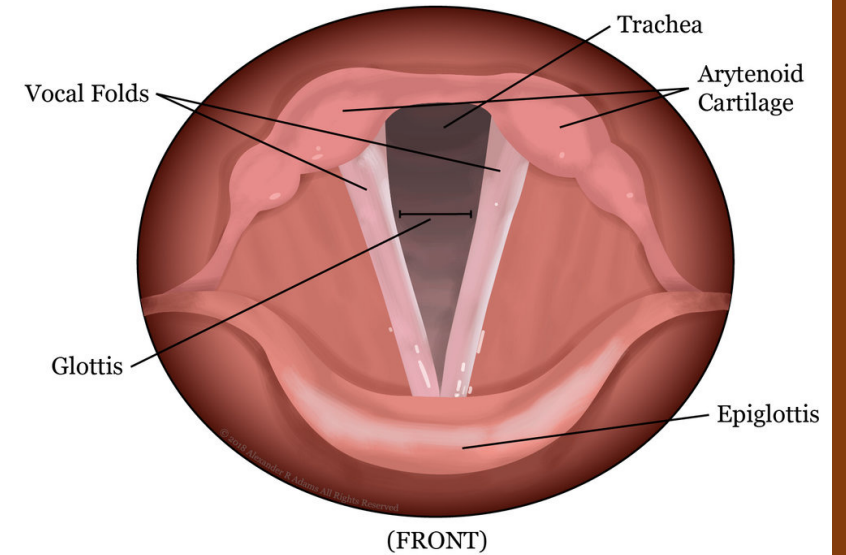
- Feel the vibration.
- Contrast these with voiceless sounds:

[s] [p] [f] [l̥]



Pitch and Intonation

- Each language has its own melody.
- We raise and lower our pitch as we speak.
- Our vocal folds vibrate faster to raise our pitch.
- They vibrate slower to lower our pitch.
- How do we intone questions vs. statements?
“You love eggs.” vs. “You love eggs?”



Nasal Sounds

- Our velum – the soft part at the back of the roof of our mouth, that our uvula hangs down from – works as a sort of door between our mouth and our nasal cavity.
- When it's lowered, air can escape (and come in) through our nostrils.
- When it's raised, it can't.
- It's lowered for nasal sounds. What are the nasal consonants in English?

[m]

[n]

[ŋ]

← Crystal writes this as [ng]. This is atypical.

- nodding – what's the difference?

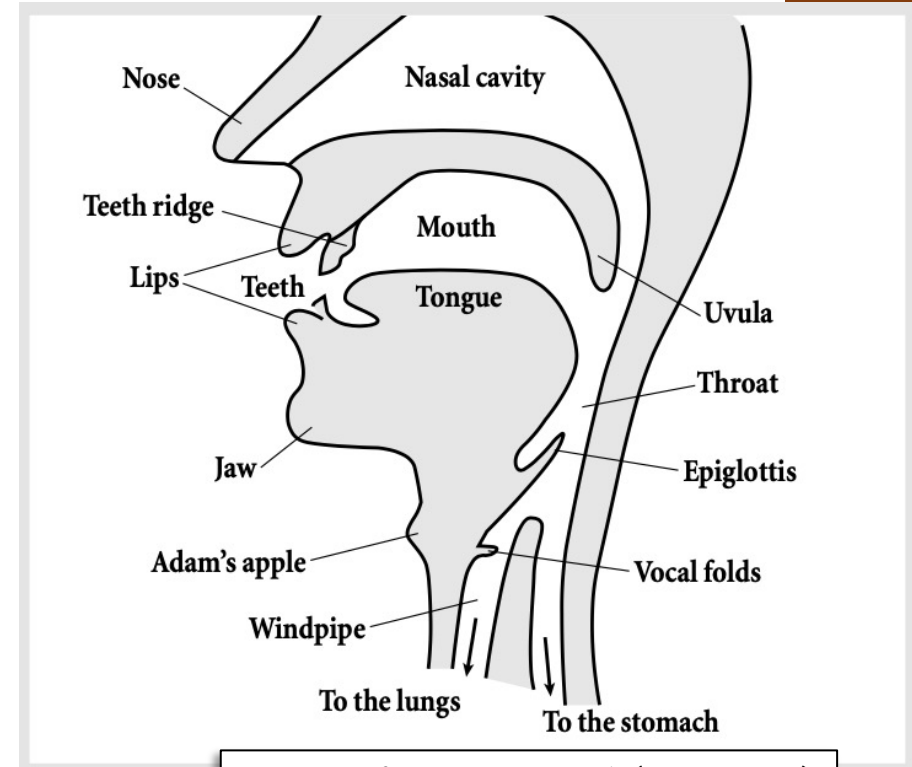
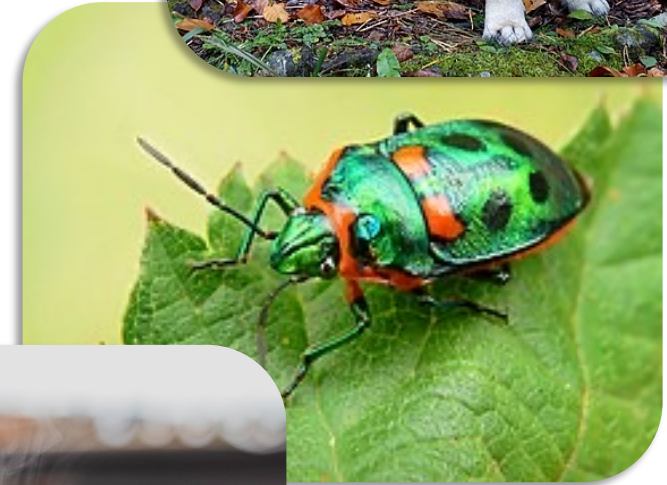
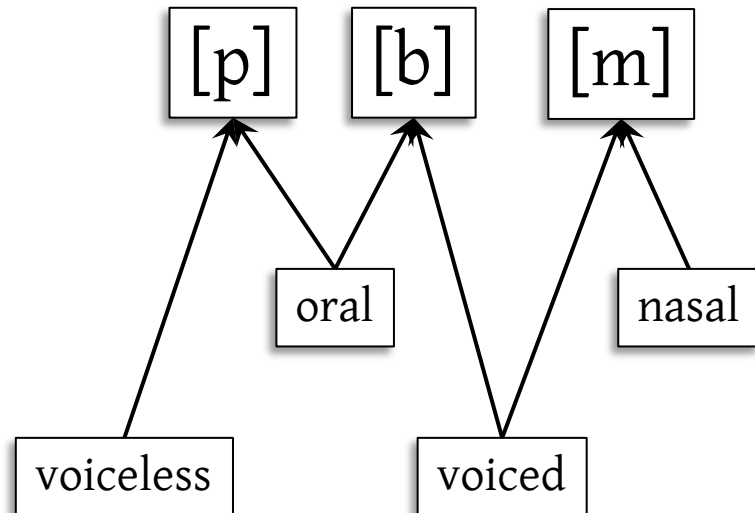


Image from Crystal (2010: 33)

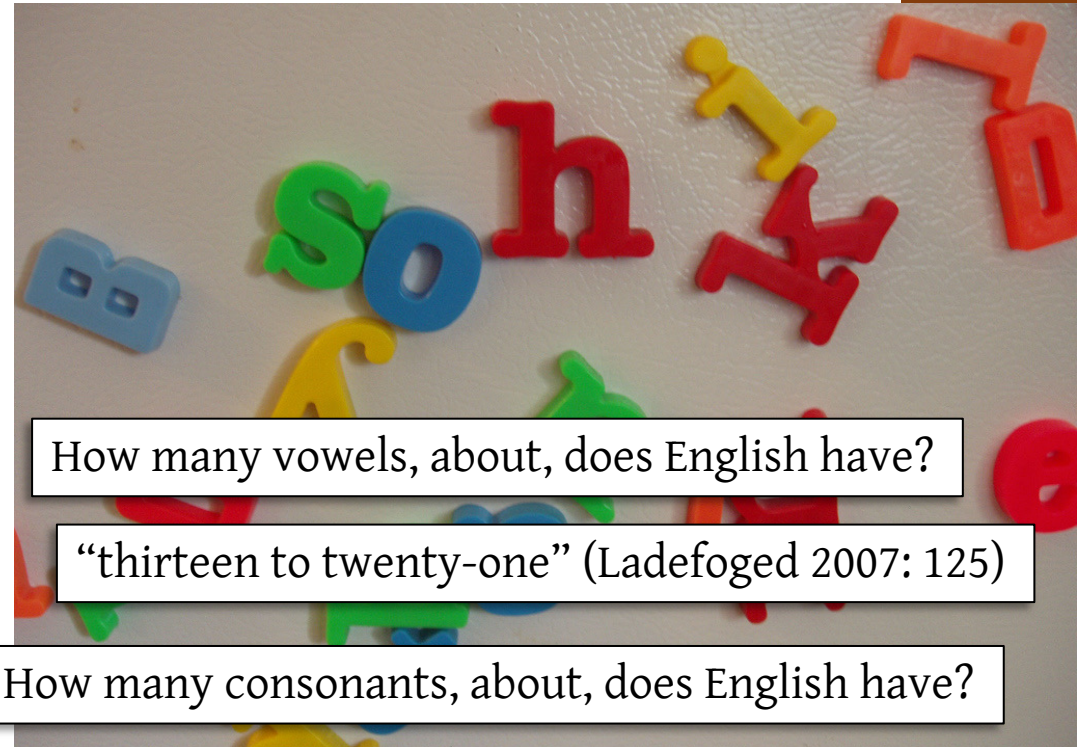
Labial Sounds

- The words *pug*, *bug*, and *mug* are identical, except for their first speech sound.
- What's the difference between the following?



Vowels and Consonants

- In linguistics, when we talk about vowels and consonants, we're talking about sounds, not letters.
- Vowels are clear, voiced, continuous sounds that serve as the nucleus of a syllable.
- Consonants come before or after vowels, and usually involve the airflow being blocked or constricted in some way.
- All spoken languages have vowels and consonants. Some are really common; others are rare.



How many vowels, about, does English have?

“thirteen to twenty-one” (Ladefoged 2007: 125)

How many consonants, about, does English have?

“twenty-two” (Ladefoged 2007: 125)

<th> [ð] is pretty rare

[p] is super widespread

Assignments:

- Before next week's class, read page 42–63 in *Language Files*. There will be a quiz on this reading at the start of class.
- By 11:59pm this Friday (23 February), post a response to this week's discussion thread.