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On English Consonants

In teaching English the difficulties in pronunciation of consonants have been neglected, unfortunately, too, by many authors of English manuals. English consonants are not easy for foreigners to produce, and when pronounced wrongly they influence the pronunciation of the neighbouring vowel and thus make the whole word or phrase sound un-English.

What sort of difficulties is a Pole met with when he learns English? They are of two kinds, 1. phonetical and 2. phonological. The former fall into two groups:

- a. being caused by a different place of articulation of Polish and English consonants, e.g., Polish **n** is dental, English **n** is alveolar
- b. being caused by a different way of articulation, e.g., Polish **d** and **t** are stops¹, English **d** and **t** are plosive.

All these differences are shown in the table on page 128².

The phonological difficulties are connected with different patterns of distribution of Polish and English consonantal phonemes. Single consonants do not cause trouble (apart, of course, from the difficulties mentioned above), except in final position. In Polish in this position there are only voiceless consonants, while in English the opposition voiced-voiceless is phonemically distinctive in final position.

The consonants (θ), (β) and (ŋ) occupy a separate place. The first two are easy sounds to produce, but they are difficult since they do not appear in the Polish phonological system and are being replaced by the nearest Polish equivalents (s) and (z), or (f) and (v) respectively. The sound (ŋ) exists in Polish but not in final position, and hence the pronunciation of „coming" is either (k[^]min) or (k[^]miŋk).

¹ The distinction plosive :| stop is based on the amount of plosion.

² See: W. Jassem *A Spectrographic Study of Polish Speech Sounds*, in *In Honour of Daniel Jones*. London 1964, pp. 334—349.

S. Szober *Gramatyka języka polskiego*, 6th Ed., Warszawa 1963. PWN.

D. Jones *Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary*, 11th Ed., London 1956. J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd.

	Bi-labial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveol.	Palato-alveol.	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d				k g	ʔ
Stop	p b p' b'		t d t' d'				ʃ c	k g k' g'	
Affricate			ʧ ʤ	ʤ ʧ		tʃ dʒ	ʧ ʤ		
Nasal	m m m'		n	n			ɲ μ	ŋ ŋ	
Lateral				l l l'					
Non-lateral				r					
Fricative		f v f v f' v'	θ ð s z	s z ʒ ʒ'	r	ʃ ʒ	ç ʒ φ	x x x'	h
Semi-vowel	w						j j	w w	

P Polish consonants

P English consonants

Consonant groups are more difficult, many of them do not exist in Polish. Here are the examples of English consonant clusters which are not met in Polish³:

a. word-initial

(ør, øw

pj, bj, øj, kj, sj, mj, nj

spj, stj, skj, smj)

b. intervocalic

(sø, fø

ndʒ

ør, øl, øm, øj

lr, lw

kj, ʃj, ʒj, nj

skj, mfr, lfr, lpr, søm, nøm, nøj, ldr

³ See: M. Bargiełówna *Grupy fonemów spółgłoskowych współczesnej polszczyzny kulturalnej*. Biuletyn Polskiego Towarzystwa Językoznawczego, X. Kraków 1950, pp. 1—25.

B. Trnka *The Phonological Description of the Present Day Standard English*. Studies in English (XXXVII — 5th Vol.), Prague 1935.

- fŋkt ʃ, ŋkw, lkr, ŋgl, lgr, ŋgw, nzd, lst, kʃn, nzj)
- c. word-final
(mf, mz, nd, nø, nz, ndz, nz
lv, lb, lø, ld
jd, jz, jn, jl
mps, nts, ŋks, lks, lkt)

The only way to overcome these difficulties leads through properly selected exercises. They will be different for Poles, Germans etc., because they depend on the phonetical and phonological systems of the mother tongue. Of these the teacher must be aware. He must have a minimum knowledge of Polish phonetics and phonology. It will enable him to predict the difficulties and concentrate on them.

These considerations allow us to draw the conclusion, that the manuals of foreign languages should be bilateral and based on contrastive studies of a native tongue and a foreign language.

The paper does not exhaust all the problems like e.g., consonant clusters in word-boundaries. They will have to be solved quickly if we want our students to speak good English.