

Eng. (Hons)

DIII / Paper VIII / Linguistics

Topic continued: The Consonants of English (V)Nasal Consonants

Like most of the other languages, English, too, has nasal consonants. In fact it has three of them and all are stop phonemes. The three of them are /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/.

In the case of all nasal consonants, the soft palate is lowered and at the same time the oral passage is blocked at some point, so that all the air flow is routed through the nasal passage as they are pushed out. The respective positions of the speech organs are shown below in the figure A and B to produce the nasal sounds (consonants) /m/ and /n/ respectively -



Figure A: organ position for the bilabial stop /m/ (nasal)



Figure B: organ position for the Alveolar (nasal) stop /n/

- ②
- ① Soft palate is lowered for both /m/ and /n/
 - ② For /m/ the oral passage is blocked by the help of the two lips. For /n/ it is done by pressing the tip of the tongue against the alveolar ridge and the sides of the tongue against the sides of palate.
 - ③ Both the consonants are voiced and in both the cases the air stream is allowed to pass through the nose.

The third nasal consonant: /ŋ/

The third nasal stop consonant is /ŋ/, in which the speech organs are positioned like below:—

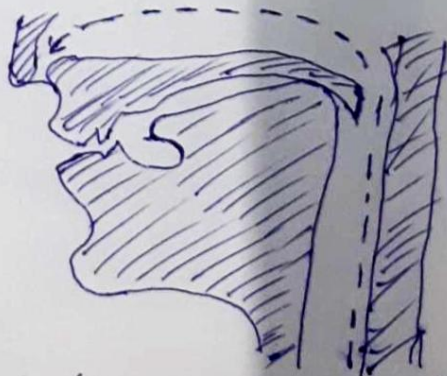


Figure C: speech organ position for /ŋ/
(Velar nasal stop consonant)

- ② The soft palate is lowered and all the air is blocked ~~in~~ through the oral cavity to enable it to pass out through the ~~to~~ nose

(2) The oral blockage is achieved ^{by} pressing the back of the tongue against the soft palate.

(3) Like the other two nasal consonants /m/ and /n/, /ŋ/ is also a voiced consonant.

The following are the respective examples of this group of nasal stop consonants:-

/m/ as in /mæn/ (man) and /mu:n/ (moon)

/n/ as in /nevə/ (never) and /nest/ (nest)

/ŋ/ as in /mɔ:nɪŋ/ (morning) and /sɪŋ/ (sing)

Lateral consonant: /l/

As for the lateral consonant /l/, we have the air passing round the sides as the air stream is obstructed in the middle by tip of the tongue meeting the alveolar ridge firmly. The consonant is voiced having no friction.

Example of the lateral consonant /l/ are:-

/l/ as in /li:f/ (leaf); /lets/ (letter);
as in /bi:li:v/ (believe); /əlaʊ/ (allow) etc.

—X —X —X (to be continued... in the next lecture)