The English consonants: Definitions and classifications

Consonants sounds are those sounds which are produced with a certain degree of obstruction to airflow; hence they are mainly classified according to how and where the obstruction happens. Consequently, the following criteria are used to classify consonants:

1. **voicing**: voicing is a fundamental term used in phonetic classification of speech sound. Referring to the auditory result of the vibration of vocal cords. Sounds produced while the vocal cords are vibrating are called voiced sound, e.g. /b/, /z/, /æ/, /i/, /θ/, /ð/, /d/; those produced with no such vibration are called voiceless or unvoiced. E.g. /p/, /s/, /f/, /θ/, /ð/, /t/, /∫/. A sound with is normally voiced, but which in a particular phonetic environment is produces with less voice that elsewhere, or with no voice at all, is said to be devoice (symbolized by a small circle beneath the symbol).

2. **place of articulation**: it is one of the main parameters used in the phonetic classification of speech sounds, referring to where in the vocal apparatus a sound is produced. It is usual to represent this parameter horizontally, though as a result this dimension does not some of the variations which can only be identified transversely, e.g. whether one or both sides of the tongue is involved in an articulation or consonants correspond to main anatomical divisions, viz. labial, labio-dental, dental, alveolar, palatal, velar, uvular, glottal, but other places relative to these are recognized, such as terms of auditory criteria, using the horizontal scale of front and back, and the vertical scale of close and open; but because of the lack of a clear anatomical correlate it is less usual of talk about vowels in terms of articulatory 'places' or 'points'.
3- **Manner of articulation:** It is one of the min parameters in the phonetic or phonological classification of speech sounds, referring to the kind of articulatory process used in the sound's production. The distinction between consonant and vowel is usually made in terms of manner of articulation. Within consonant, several articulatory types are recognized, based on the type of closure made by the vocal organs. If the closure is complete, the result is a plosive, affricate. If the closure is partial the result is fricative. If the closure is very slight the result is gliding or semi-vowel. Within manner of articulation also the passage of air is taken into consideration: whether air passed through the oral cavity out through the mouth or passes through the nasal cavity out of the nose; accordingly we have nasal sound which are only three in English namely /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/, all the rest of consonants are oral and all the vowels as well.

Within vowels, classification is based on the position of the tongue, and the type of lip position. They are also classified according to the number of auditory qualities distinguishable in the sound (pure vowel, diphthong, triphthong).

Consonants are described