

# 4. Sounds and Signs I

Introduction to Language (Ling 201)

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Spring 2026

# Tonight's Plan

1. Quiz #3
2. Group Presentations  
*10 minutes per group (5 for presentation, 5 for Q&A)*
3. 10 minute break (optional)
4. The sounds of language

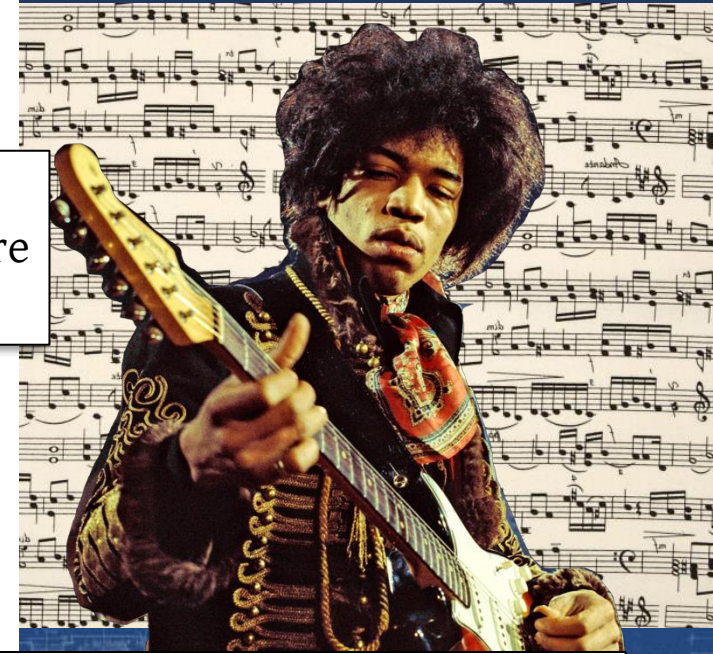
# Group Presentations

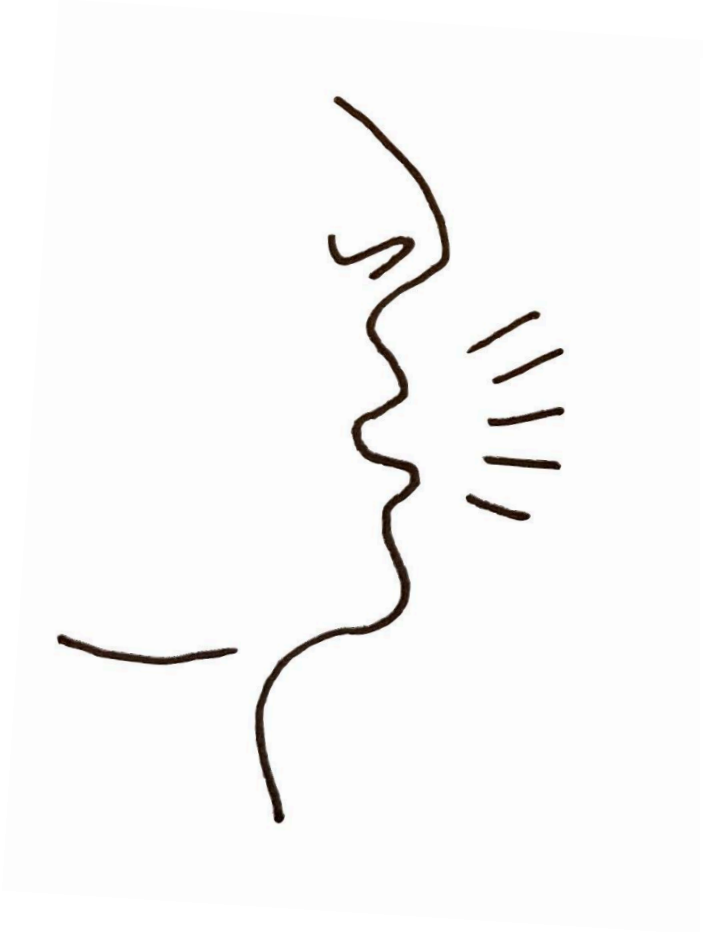
# Sound and Text

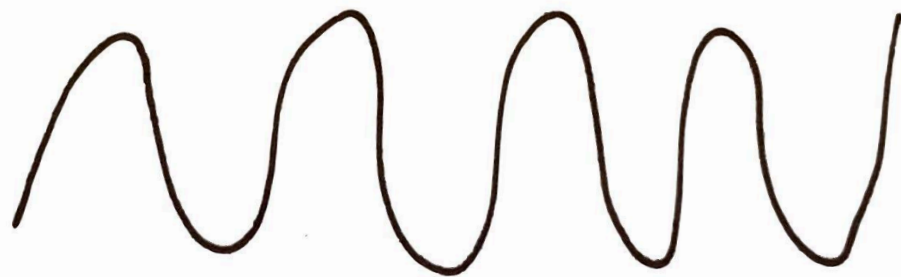
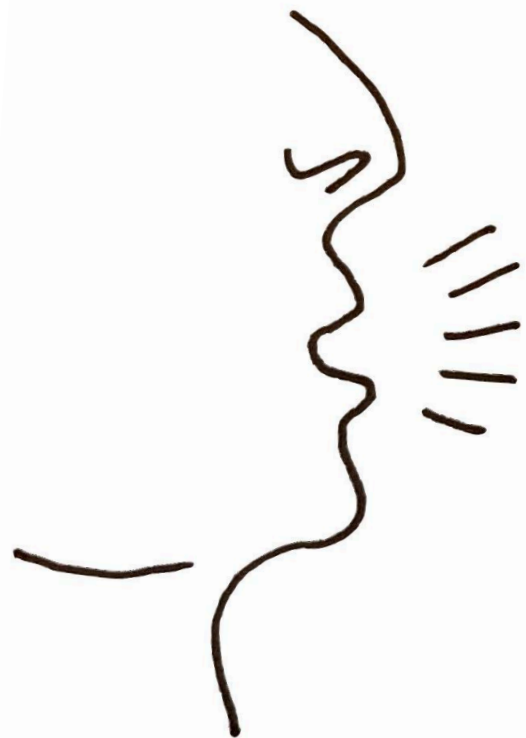
Imagine if musicians thought sheet music was “better” or “more authentic” than actual *music*?

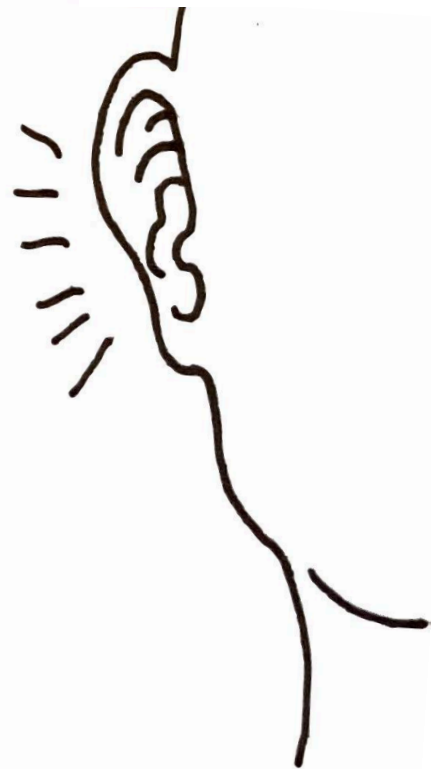
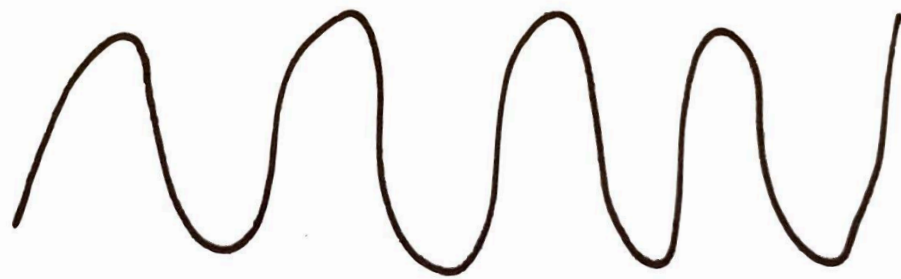
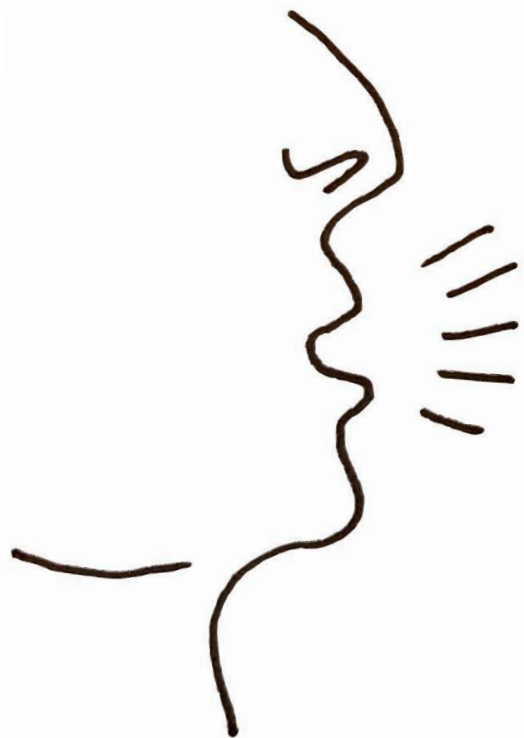
- In linguistics, we care about speech sounds far more than writing systems.
- You might think that written English is better or more authentic than spoken English.
- This is a cultural value that we in linguistics reject.
- The spoken language is what we’re interested in.
- Letters don’t “make” sounds;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

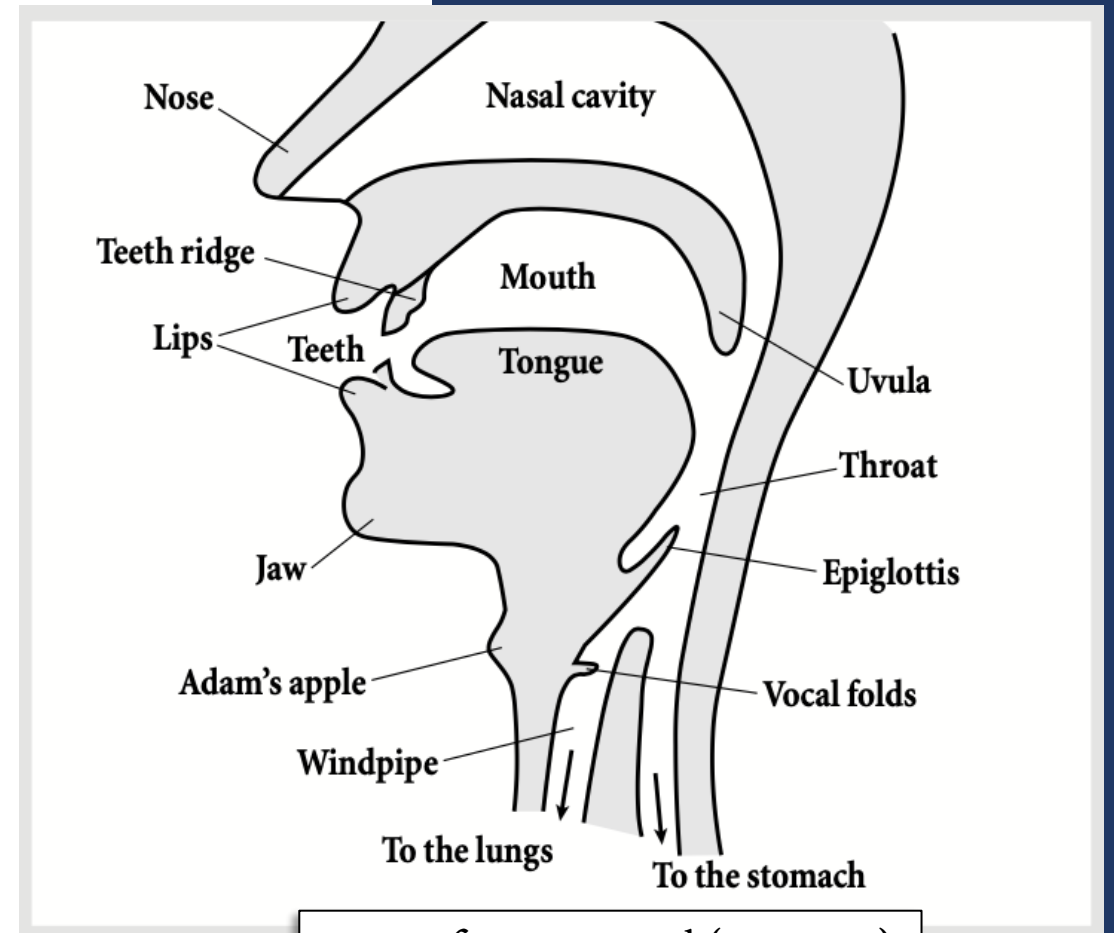


Image from Crystal (2010: 33)

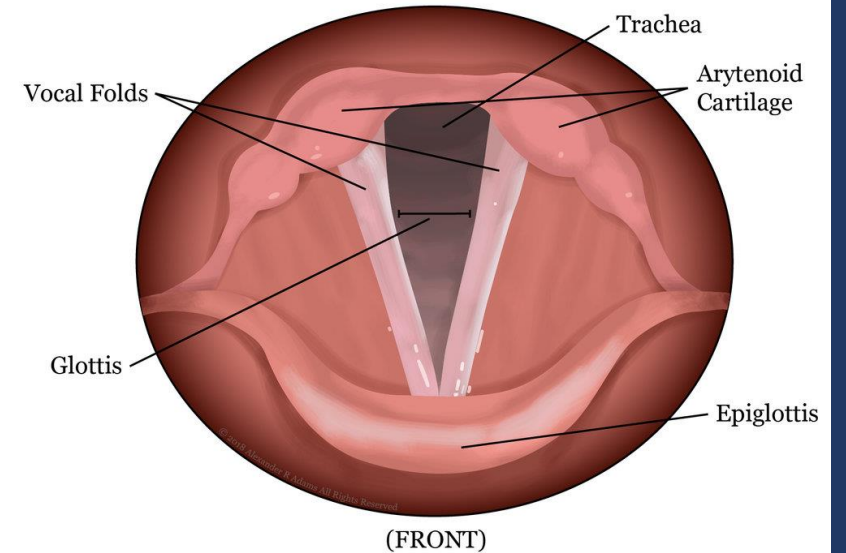
# Voiced and voiceless

- 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]



# Voiced and voiceless

Identify the underlined sound.

Is it voiced or voiceless?

Don't let the spelling throw you off!

Now go into groups to do the activity on your sheets.

shack

ocean

veil

border

castle

nuisance

fortress

jungle

monk

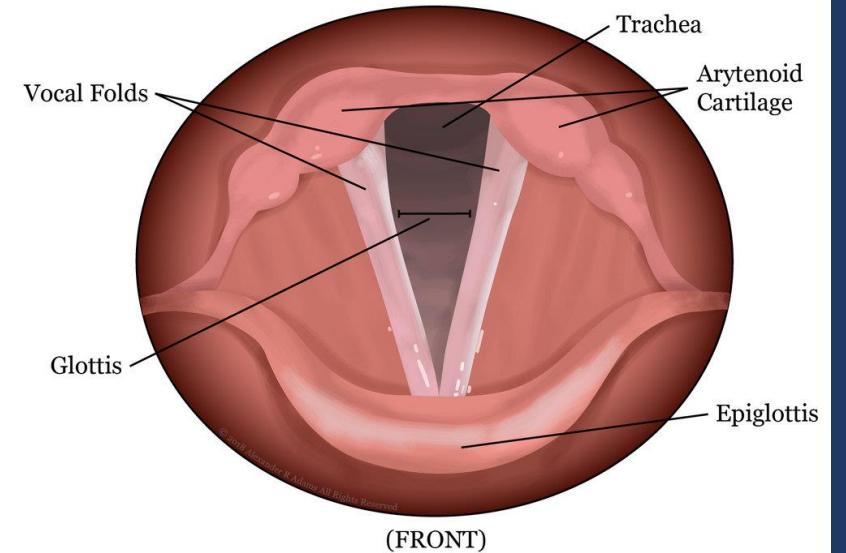
arctic

wretched

thistle

# Pitch and intonation

- Each language has its own melodies.
- 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, which 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 nonstandard.

- nodding – what's the difference?

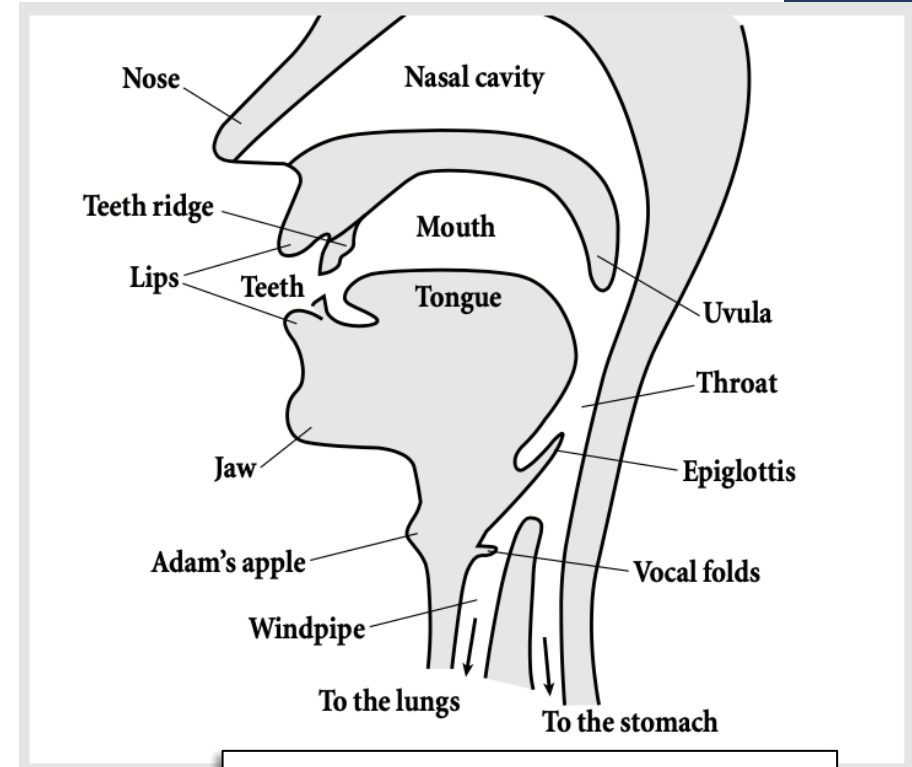
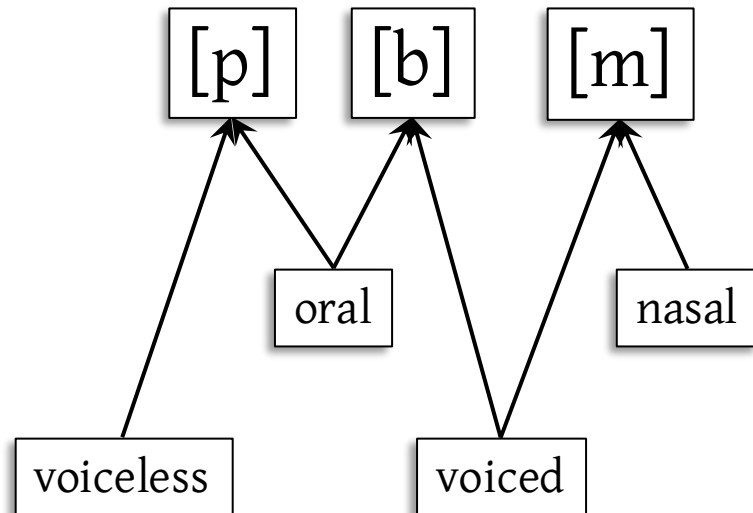


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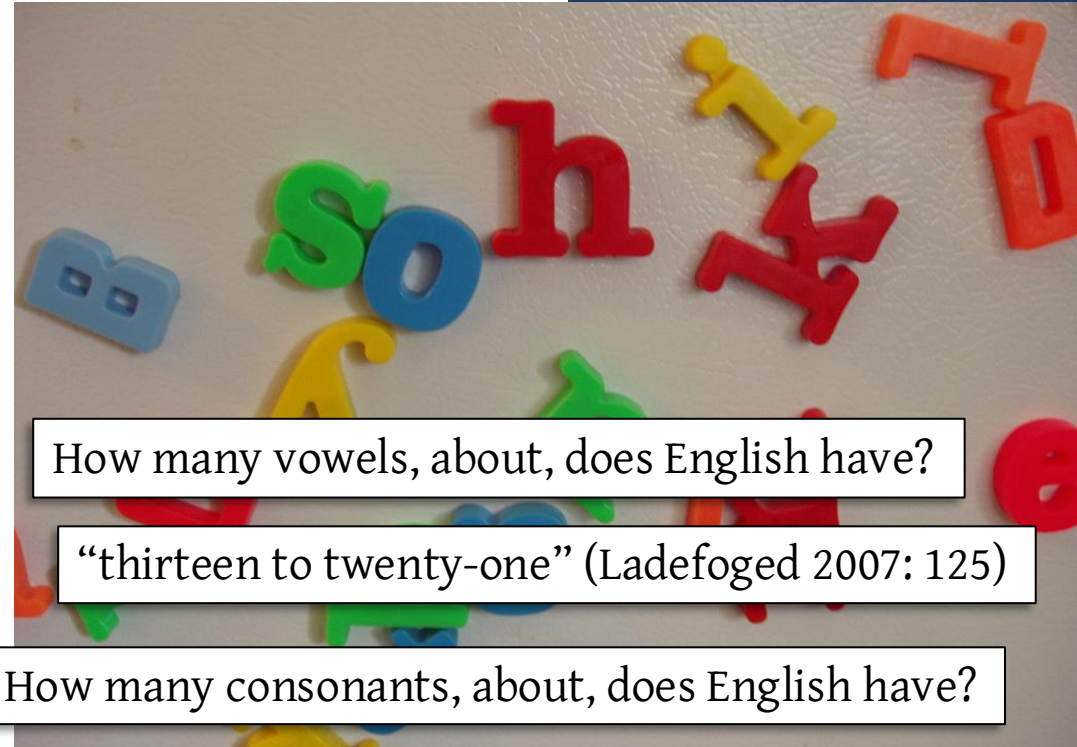
# Labial Sounds

- 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

# For next time:

- Read *Language Files* pp.42–63
- There will be a quiz on this reading at the start of class