

# Teaching the "th" of English

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Lesson Two is aimed at teaching the recognition and production of [θ] and [ð] (see International Phonetic Alphabet) which are used extensively in English (both are usually spelled "th" in English). Because these sounds are new to many non-native speakers of English, including Tongan and Samoan speakers, they might be confused with sounds which are produced in a slightly different position or manner.

As was mentioned in lesson one, it is well to present new sounds in contrast — from the known to the unknown. When neither [θ] or [ð] is known previously, one or the other should be taught first in contrast with a known sound. Then, after the student can both recognize and produce one of these sounds in a speech segment, he is ready to learn the second sound in contrast with the one he has just mastered.

## No Voiced Velars

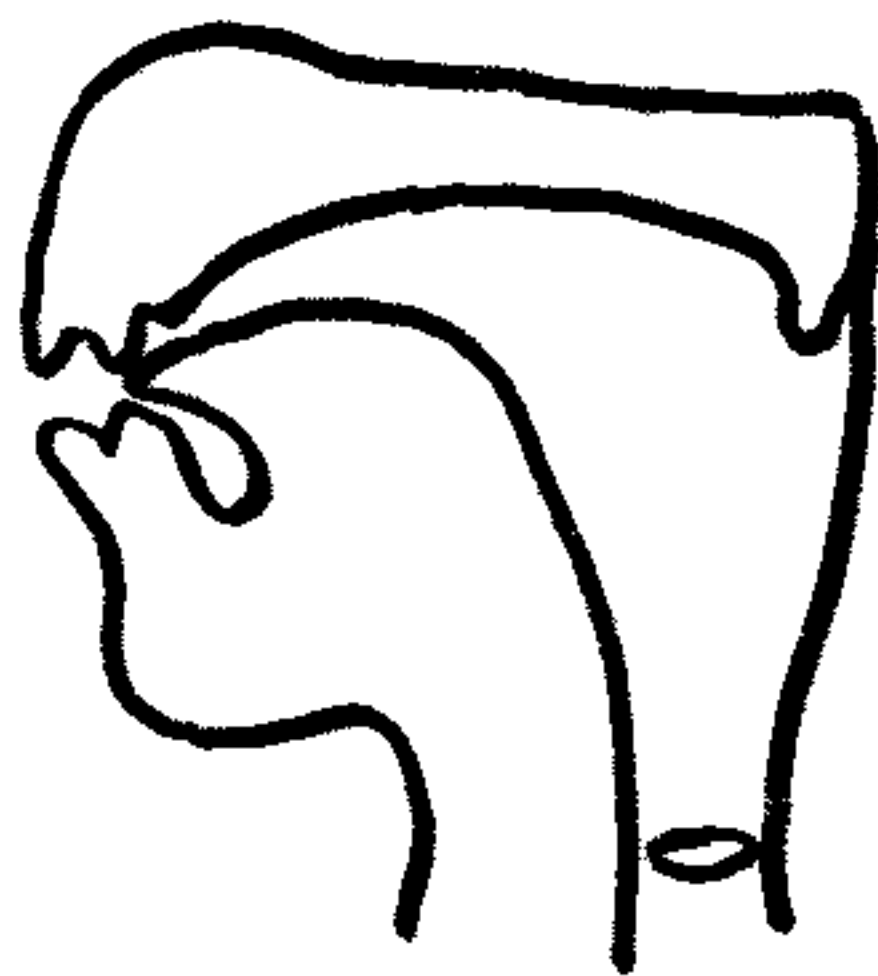
Since neither Tongan nor Samoan have the voiced velar sounds [z] nor [d] but do have the unvoiced velars [s] and [t] it would be best to start by teaching the unvoiced [θ] in relation to one of these sounds. If [s] is chosen for contrast, the teacher might start the lesson by pronouncing two words which have as their only difference the two sounds [s] and [θ] such as "thumb" and "sum" or "some". (Note that spelling and pronunciation in English are not necessarily related and students should not confuse pronunciation with spelling.) As they are pronounced the teacher might put a simple addition problem ( $1+1=2$ ) on the board to represent sum and hold up her thumb to emphasize the contrast in meaning between these two words.

Several pairs of words might then be introduced to show the same contrast. These may be placed on the board or simply a sign for each sound might be put on the board.

The class indicates sound 1 "θ" or sound 2 "s" as the teacher says the words. Included might be minimal pairs like:

stick	thick	miss	myth
sum	thumb	pass	path
mass	math	moss	moth

At this time the teacher should avoid any detailed definition of the words used. It is sufficient to let the students know that there is a difference in meaning and one cannot be substituted for the other. A description of the difference in these sounds should be given, demonstrating that the tongue moves forward from the "s" position—where it is against the ridge behind the upper teeth—until it is between the teeth. This is what makes the contrast between these sounds. Sketching this on the blackboard or showing a previously prepared diagram might prove helpful.



Recognition exercises similar to those given in Lesson 1 should be tried so that the teacher may see whether the students can distinguish the difference in sound.

Exercise 1) A minimal pair is used with the teacher repeating the same word twice or pronouncing the two different words. As this is done—the students say "same" or "different," indicating their ability to dis-

tinguish the sounds. Examples: earth, earth = same lass, lath = different.

Exercise 2 ) Instead of two words the teacher repeats three words, with two alike and one in contrast. The position of the contrasting word is indicated by the students who say 1, 2, or 3. Example: sum, thumb, some 2; math, math, mass 3.

The teacher should move around the room so that she can listen to different student responses and so that the students do not depend on seeing this difference in tongue position as the teacher produces the sound. If the students recognize the difference in sounds, production training may begin. If not, earlier steps should be repeated until recognition is effected, as a student must recognize a sound before he can produce it.

## Tongue Placement

Producing [θ] involves unfamiliar tongue placement — that is, between the teeth. Students should be taught to exaggerate this position in the beginning because only the most experienced speaker can produce the [θ] by placing the tongue against the back of the teeth and forcing air between the small opening between the teeth. (The symbol might suggest the mouth with the tongue out between the teeth).

If students produce a [t] instead of [θ], the teacher should point out the difference between the stop [t] and the continuant produced by friction. At this point the articulatory diagrams can again be used to good advantage by the instructor. If a mirror is available, students might watch themselves make the sounds (they could then practice outside of class using this same device.)

The teacher might evaluate students' production by asking simple questions like the following:

Who do you play with?

I play with \_\_\_\_\_.

Who do you eat with?

I eat with \_\_\_\_\_.

What do you see with?