**English Pronunciation Pod 29 - Introduction to the Consonants of English:**

This podcast teaches you the difference between voiced and voiceless consonants.

In this week's podcast, we're going to learn about voiced and voiceless consonants.

Learning the difference between voiced and voiceless consonants will make your pronunciation more accurate and will make your accent sound more like a native speaker.

Many of the consonants of English can be divided into two categories: voiced and voiceless.

\*Today's podcast will not cover all the consonants. Future podcasts will cover specific consonants in greater detail. But before doing that, it's important to understand the difference of voiceless and voiced consonants.

**The focus of this week’s podcast is:**

* **Learning to hear and say the difference between a voiced and a voiceless consonant**
* **Practicing these differences in some key words**

So let's begin by explaining what exactly voiced and voiceless consonants are.

Simply put, voiced consonants involve our voice, the vibration of our vocal folds; voiceless consonants do not involve our voice.

**Exercise: Hearing and Saying the Difference:**

Let's try to hear and feel the difference between voiced and voiceless consonants.

Place your fingers on your Adam's apple. The Adam's apple is the bump on the front of your neck. This is the area where your vocal folds are located.

Now say the sound /s/, like in the word "see". .../s/

Now do this again but say the sound /z/ like in the word "zoo". .../z/

Notice how you can feel vibrations on the sound /z/ but not when you say /s/. This is because /s/ is a voiceless consonant and / z/ is a voiced consonant. We use our vocal folds to say /z/ but not to say /s/.

What's interesting is that /s/ and /z/ have *exactly the same* tongue position but the only difference is that /s/ is voiceless and /z/ is voiced. Even more interesting is that many voiced consonants in English have a voiceless partner and similarly, (most) every voiceless has a voiced partner.

For example, let's look at the consonants / f / and / v/. Make the sound /f / like in "fun" or "fan" while touching your vocal chords. Please listen and repeat /f/.

Now put your teeth and lips in the exact same position as /f/ but add your voice. Please listen and repeat.

As you can see, the result is a /v/ sound. This is because / f /and /v/ have the same lip and tooth position. Their only difference is the *vibration* of the vocal folds in / v /. Let's alternate between / f /and / v /.

I recommend that you use a small mirror to see how the position is the same for both consonants. The only difference is the vibration of your vocal folds.

Please listen and repeat. /f/ ... /v/

**Why is this Important for my Pronunciation?**

It's important to master the differences between voiced and voiceless consonants because many students of English often make a voiced consonant sound voiceless or vice versa, a voiceless sound voiced. This is just one of several factors which can result in an accent. It can also be quite confusing to the listener.

**Exercise:**

Here's a list of the consonants of English divided into voiced and voiceless pairs.  
(\*This list only contains consonants which have a voiced or a voiceless partner)

Let's practice saying each pair while we gently touch our vocal folds to feel the vibrations or the absence of vibrations. The tongue and lip position will be the same for each pair- the only difference will be the voicing. (Main spellings are in **< >** )

**Voiceless Consonant         Voiced Consonant**

/p/                                                 /b/

/k/                                                 /g/

/t/                                                  /d/

/f/                                                   /v/

/s/                                                  /z/

/ʃ/ <sh>                                  /ʒ/ <usually spelled<s> but has a few spellings

/tʃ/  <ch>                               /dʒ/ <g> <j>

/θ/ <th>                                 /ð/    <th>

Now let's do the same exercise except with words. I'm going to say a pair of words. The words are exactly the same except for one consonant in each word. The first word contains a voiceless consonant. The second will contain its voiced equivalent.

If you look in the mirror when you say each pair, there should be no difference in what you see. They should look exactly the same.

**Exercise: listen and repeat the following pairs of words, paying careful attention to voicing.**

**Voiceless Consonant         Voiced Consonant**

pie                                              buy

could                                          good

tie                                                die

fan                                              van

Sue                                             zoo

cash                                          casual

cheap                                         jeep

teeth                                          teethe

As you can see, some consonants are more difficult than others to pronounce. This is because your native language may not have the consonant or because the consonant may not appear at a specific point in a word.(beginning, end or middle)