

V

V see V FORMS

vagueness (*n.*) see AMBIGUITY

valency (*n.*) A term introduced by the French linguist Lucien Tesnière (1893–1954), which has been particularly influential in the development of models of DEPENDENCY GRAMMAR in Europe and Russia. The term is derived from chemistry, and is used in LINGUISTICS to refer to the number and type of bonds which SYNTACTIC ELEMENTS may form with each other; this ‘combining capacity’ is also known as **adicity** or **arity**. As in chemistry, a given element may have different valencies in different contexts. A **valency grammar** presents a MODEL of a SENTENCE containing a fundamental element (typically, the VERB) and a number of dependent elements (variously referred to as ARGUMENTS, expressions, COMPLEMENTS or **valents**) whose number and type is determined by the valency attributed to the verb. For example, the valency of *vanish* includes only the SUBJECT element (it has a valency of 1, **monovalent**, or **monadic**), whereas that of *scrutinize* includes both subject and DIRECT OBJECT (a valency of 2, **bivalent**, or **dyadic**). Verbs which take more than two complements are **polyvalent**, or **polyadic**. A verb which takes no complements at all (such as *rain*) is said to have **zero valency** (be **avalent**). Valency deals not only with the number of valents with which a verb is combined to produce a WELL FORMED sentence nucleus, but also with the classification of sets of valents which may be combined with different verbs. For example, *give* and *put* usually have a valency of 3 (**trivalent**), but the valents governed by the former (subject, direct object and INDIRECT object) are different from those governed by the latter (subject, direct object and LOCATIVE ADVERBIAL). Verbs which differ in this way are said to be associated with different **valency sets**. The notion is similar to that used in CASE grammar, where cases are sometimes referred to as **valency roles**. See also ACTANT, CIRCONSTANT.

valent (*n.*) see VALENCY

valid (*adj.*) A term used in logic and FORMAL SEMANTICS to describe any argument whose conclusion is a LOGICAL CONSEQUENCE of its premises. A valid SENTENCE is one which is LOGICALLY TRUE.

valley (*n.*) see PEAK, SYLLABLE

value (*n.*) (1) A term introduced into LINGUISTICS by Ferdinand de Saussure (see SAUSSUREAN) to refer to the FUNCTIONAL identity of an entity when seen in the context of a RULE-governed SYSTEM. In his view, LANGUAGE is a system of independent terms, in which the 'value' (*valeur*) of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others, related through the notions of SYNTAGMATIC and PARADIGMATIC association. The notion plays a central role in the later development of STRUCTURAL linguistics.

(2) The term is also used in GRAMMATICAL theory as part of a FEATURE specification, along with feature name. For example, in the specifications [V, -] and [BAR 2], the '-' and the '2' are the **feature values** of the features V and BAR respectively. **Multi-valued** features are often referred to as '*n*-ary' features.

variable (*adj./n.*) (1) A term sometimes used in the GRAMMATICAL classification of WORDS to refer to one of two postulated major word-CLASSES in LANGUAGE, the other being INVARIABLE. **Variable words** are said to be those which express grammatical relationships through a change of FORM, e.g. *boy/boys, walk/walking, nice/nicer*. **Invariable** (or **invariant**) **words** are unchanging, whatever their distribution, e.g. *in, on, and*.

(2) The term has been introduced into SOCIOLINGUISTICS by the American linguist William Labov (b. 1927) to refer to the UNITS in a language which are most subject to social or STYLISTIC variation, and thus most susceptible to change in the long term. Sets of PHONOLOGICAL, GRAMMATICAL and LEXICAL **variables** are described quantitatively with reference to such factors as social class, age and sex, and the results of this co-variation are stated in the form of **variable rules**. Variable RULES are GENERATIVE rules which have been modified so as to specify the socio-regional conditions under which they apply. The notion has been developed primarily in relation to hypotheses concerning the relationship between social variation and linguistic evolution.

(3) The term is also widely used in GRAMMAR and SEMANTICS in its general sense of a symbol which may assume any of a set of values. For example, a **category variable** (e.g. X) stands for any major word-level CATEGORY (e.g. N, P, Adj); a **bar variable**, in X-BAR SYNTAX, stands for any level of bar projection of X (e.g. Xⁿ stands for X°, X', X''). PRO-FORMS are often analysed semantically as variables, especially when they are BOUND by QUANTIFICATIONAL ANTECEDENTS. In GOVERNMENT-BINDING THEORY, the term refers to an A-bar-bound TRACE.

variable binding operator see OPERATOR (1)

variant (*adj./n.*) A term used in LINGUISTICS to refer to a linguistic FORM which is one of a set of alternatives in a given CONTEXT; it contrasts with **invariant**. The concept is fundamental to the notion of ALLO- (-PHONE, -MORPH, etc.), as illustrated by the **variant forms** of the past-TENSE MORPHEME (/t/, /d/, /-Id/, etc.). The choice of variants may be subject to contextual constraints (**conditioned variants**), or there may be no stateable CONDITIONS – the cases of **free variants** (see FREE).

variation (*n.*) (1) In the study of UNIVERSAL GRAMMAR, a term which refers to the range of possible differences which are found across LANGUAGES. A contrast

is intended with the properties shared by all languages (UNIVERSALS). In OPTIMALITY THEORY, variation is characterized by different RANKINGS of the same set of CONSTRAINTS.

(2) See VARIABLE (2), VARIANT, VARIETY.

variety (*n.*) A term used in SOCIOLINGUISTICS and STYLISTICS to refer to any SYSTEM OF LINGUISTIC EXPRESSION whose use is governed by SITUATIONAL VARIABLES. In some cases, the situational DISTINCTIVENESS of the LANGUAGE may be easily stated, as in many regional and occupational varieties (e.g. London English, religious English); in other cases, as in studies of social class, the varieties are more difficult to define, involving the intersection of several variables (e.g. sex, age, occupation). Several classifications of language varieties have been proposed, involving such terms as DIALECT, REGISTER, MEDIUM and FIELD. For some sociolinguists, 'variety' is given a more restricted definition, as one kind of situational distinctive language – a specialized type of language used within a dialect, e.g. for occupational purposes.

velar (*adj./n.*) A term used in the PHONETIC classification of CONSONANT sounds on the basis of their PLACE OF ARTICULATION: it refers to a sound made by the BACK of the tongue against the soft PALATE, or **velum** (the 'veil' of the palate). Examples in English are [k] and [g], and the *-ng-* sound [ŋ] as in *sing*. Velar FRICATIVE sounds are found in German and Greek, for example, and are transcribed [x] and [[χ]] for the VOICELESS and voiced types respectively. If the velum is raised to shut off the nasal tract, a **velic closure** has been made.

Velar sounds are different from **velaric** sounds. The term 'velaric' refers to a quite different mode of speech production: instead of using an AIRSTREAM MECHANISM involving the lungs, velaric sounds use air generated by a closure in velar position. The back of the tongue is raised against the velum, and articulations are made further forward by the lips or front parts of the tongue. These sounds are usually called **CLICKS**, and have a distinctive role in some languages, such as Zulu. In English, they may be heard in the 'tut tut' sound, and in a few other contexts.

Velarization is a general term referring to any SECONDARY ARTICULATION involving a movement of the back part of the tongue towards the velum. For a sound to be **velarized**, of course, its primary place of articulation must be elsewhere in the mouth, e.g. a [z] sound, normally made in ALVEOLAR position, is said to be velarized if during its articulation the back of the tongue is raised towards the soft palate; this would give the sound a distinctive back (or 'dark') resonance. The term is usually applied to consonants other than velar consonants; it can be used with reference to VOWELS, but such variations in vowel articulation are usually described in different terms ('centralized', 'retracted', etc.). The velarization may be an essential feature of the sound's identity, contrasting with other **non-velarized** sounds, as in the distinction between velarized and non-velarized *s* in Arabic (transcribed [s̤] and [s] respectively). In English, velarization is dependent on context: syllable-final *l*, as in *cool*, is given a velar resonance; this can be compared with syllable-initial *l*, as in *leap*, where the back of the tongue is much further forward in the mouth (towards the palate). A loose auditory label for velar resonance sounds is 'dark' (DARK L, etc.), opposed to 'clear', used for the palatal-resonance sounds. The usual symbol for velarized

consonants is [~], placed through the letter, as in [t̥], [d̥], [t̚]. Some English dialects, such as those of the British Midlands (Birmingham, Wolverhampton, etc.), have several velarized sounds. See also -ISE/-IZE.

velaric (*adj.*) see VELAR

velum (*n.*) see VELAR

ventricular (*adj.*) A term used in PHONETICS to describe a type of sound produced between the ventricular bands, or 'false' VOCAL FOLDS, which lie immediately above and parallel with the true vocal cords. It is not normally used in speech, but ventricular effects involving whisper and VOICE can be heard, the latter sometimes combining with GLOTTAL voice to produce a 'double' or 'diplophonic' voice (or 'diplophonia').

verb (*v.*) (v, V) A term used in the GRAMMATICAL classification of words, to refer to a class traditionally defined as 'doing' or 'action' words (a description which has been criticized in LINGUISTICS, largely on the grounds that many verbs do not 'act' in any obvious sense, e.g. *seem*, *be*). The FORMAL definition of a verb refers to an element which can display MORPHOLOGICAL contrasts of TENSE, ASPECT, VOICE, MOOD, PERSON and NUMBER. FUNCTIONALLY, it is the ELEMENT which, singly or in combination with other verbs (i.e. as a 'verb phrase'), is used as the minimal PREDICATE of a sentence, co-occurring with a SUBJECT, e.g. *she / wrote*. If the predicate contains other elements (e.g. OBJECT, COMPLEMENT, ADVERBIAL), then it is the verb which more than any other is the unit which influences the choice and extent of these elements; e.g. the verb *put* takes both an object and a LOCATIVE adverbial, as in *he put the book on the table*. In many grammatical theories, accordingly, the verb is considered the most important element in sentence structure.

The term **verb phrase** is used in two senses. Traditionally, it refers to a group of verbs which together have the same syntactic FUNCTION as a single verb, e.g. *is coming*, *may be coming*, *get up to*. In such phrases (**verbal groups**, **verbal clusters**), one verb is the **main verb** (a LEXICAL VERB) and the others are subordinate to it (**auxiliary verbs**, **catenative verbs**). A verb followed by a non-verbal PARTICLE (similar in form to a preposition or adverb) is generally referred to as a **phrasal verb**.

In GENERATIVE grammar, the verb phrase (VP) has a much broader definition, being equivalent to the whole of the predicate of a sentence, as is clear from the expansion of S as NP+VP in PHRASE-STRUCTURE GRAMMAR.

The adjective from 'verb', **verbal**, is often used in traditional grammatical description (though one must be careful not to confuse it with 'verbal' meaning 'spoken', as in 'verbal skill', 'verbalize', etc.), for instance 'verbal noun' (= a NOUN similar in form or meaning to a verb, e.g. *smoking*), 'verbal adjective' (= an ADJECTIVE similar in form or meaning to a verb, e.g. *interested*). See also COMMUNICATION, EXTENSIVE, FACTITIVE, MOOD, PERFORMATIVE, SERIAL VERB.

verbal duelling In SOCIOLINGUISTICS, a term which refers to the competitive use of LANGUAGE, within a game-like structure, with rules that are known and used by the participants. It is a genre of VERBAL PLAY – a ritual dialogue in which

each speaker attempts to outdo an opponent by producing an utterance of increased verbal ingenuity. It has been noted, for example, in the ritual exchanges between warriors in classical epic texts as well as in the trading of insults between present-day street gangs.

verbal group, verbal cluster see VERB

verbal play In SOCIOLINGUISTICS, a term which refers to the playful manipulation of the elements of LANGUAGE, either in relation to each other, or in relation to the social or cultural contexts of language use; also called **speech play**. It is a LUDIC function of language which includes play languages, puns, VERBAL DUELING, riddles and many other genres.

verbal v. non-verbal communication see COMMUNICATION

verbless (*adj.*) A type of CLAUSE recognized in some MODELS of GRAMMATICAL description (e.g. QUIRK GRAMMAR), in which the VERB is omitted (and often the SUBJECT as well), e.g. *When ready, we waited for the signal, Stay at home if possible*. Some classical TRANSFORMATIONAL models of analysis would DERIVE such structures using a process of DELETION. In later GENERATIVE studies such constructions have been analysed as BASE-generated – a type of SMALL CLAUSE.

verb phrase see VERB

verb second (V2) In GRAMMAR, a term describing a language in which the VERB appears as the second element in a CLAUSE. Examples include German and Dutch. German, for example, requires *In Deutschland findet man . . .*, whereas the English equivalent can place the verb third (*In Germany one finds . . .*).

vernacular (*adj./n.*) A term used in SOCIOLINGUISTICS to refer to the indigenous LANGUAGE or DIALECT of a SPEECH community, e.g. the vernacular of Liverpool, Berkshire, Jamaica, etc. The study of **African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)** in the United States has been the focus of several linguistic studies since the 1960s, though terminology has varied repeatedly (terms include **Black Vernacular English, Vernacular Black English, Black English Vernacular, Afro-American English**, or simply **Black English**, with associated abbreviations, e.g. **BVE, BEV**). PIDGIN languages are sometimes called **contact vernaculars**. Vernaculars are usually seen in contrast to such notions as STANDARD, LINGUA FRANCA, etc., chiefly in their lack of conscious attention to its style of speech. The **vernacular principle** is the view that it is this variety which will convey the best insight into the natural speech of a community, and the one which will show the closest connection with the language's history.

Verner's law In HISTORICAL LINGUISTICS and PHILOLOGY, a SOUND CHANGE, first worked out by the Danish linguist Karl Verner (1846–96), which explained a class of apparent exceptions to GRIMM'S LAW. He found that Grimm's law worked well whenever the STRESS fell on the ROOT SYLLABLE of the Sanskrit word; but when it fell on another syllable, the CONSONANTS behaved differently. VOICELESS PLOSIVES then did not stay as voiceless FRICATIVES, but became voiced plosives.

vertical grouping/splitting see REALIZATION (3)

V forms An abbreviation used in SOCIOLINGUISTICS as part of the study of terms of address in various LANGUAGES. Based on the distinction between *tu* and *vous*, the alternative forms of 'you' in French, and on similar CONTRASTS in many other languages (e.g. German *du/Sie*, Russian *ty/vy*), an OPPOSITION is set up between formal (V) and familiar (T) second-PERSON VERB and PRONOUN FORMS. Hypotheses are then developed concerning the system of FORMALITY in use in the language.

via /vaɪə/ (*adj.*) A term used in natural GENERATIVE PHONOLOGY, to refer to the (non-generative) RULES which link distinct UNDERLYING FORMS. For example, *divine/divinity* would be linked by a rule /aɪ/↔/i/, though each form would be listed individually in the LEXICON.

violation (*n.*) In OPTIMALITY THEORY, a term referring to the failure of a FORM to meet (satisfy) a CONSTRAINT. Constraint violations can be all-or-nothing (**binary**) or counted individually (**gradient**). A violation is symbolized by an asterisk in an optimality TABLEAU. An exclamation mark symbolizes a 'fatal' violation, i.e. one which completely eliminates a candidate.

visibility (*n.*) A term used in GOVERNMENT-BINDING THEORY for a CONDITION from which much of the content of the CASE FILTER can be derived. An ELEMENT is **visible** for theta-marking only if it is assigned Case. On the basis of this condition, a NOUN PHRASE can receive a THETA ROLE only if it is in a position to which Case is ASSIGNED, or is linked to such a position (as in *there is a lamp in the room*, where Case is transferred from *there* to *the lamp*).

visual sonority see SONORITY

vocable (*n.*) see PHONETICALLY CONSISTENT FORM

vocabulary (*n.*) LINGUISTICS uses this term in its everyday sense, reserving for its technical study the use of terms beginning with LEXI- (see LEXIS, LEXICON). A distinction is often made, especially in language learning, between **active** and **passive** vocabulary: the former refers to lexical items people use; the latter to WORDS which they understand, but do not themselves use. See also DEFINING VOCABULARY.

vocal-auditory channel A term used in the study of COMMUNICATION to refer to one of the human sensory modes which can be used for the transmission and reception of information. It provides the frame of reference within which the study of PHONETICS proceeds, and constitutes the majority of the subject-matter of LINGUISTICS (which of course is also concerned with the written LANGUAGE).

vocal bands see VOCAL CORDS

vocal cords Two muscular folds running from a single point inside the front of the thyroid cartilage (Adam's apple) backwards to the front ends of the arytenoid cartilages; also called **vocal folds**, and sometimes (though not usually in PHONETICS)

vocal lips or bands. The vocal cords are very flexible, being shaped by the combined activities of the associated cartilages and muscles. The space between them is known as the **GLOTTIS**.

The vocal cords have several functions. Their main role in speech is to vibrate in such a manner as to produce **VOICE**, a process known as **PHONATION**. When the cords are not vibrating, two main alternative positions are available. They may be tightly closed ('adducted'), as when the breath is held – a process which produces a **GLOTTAL** stop upon release. Or they may remain open ('abducted'), so that the breath flowing through the glottis produces audible **FRICTION**, as in whispering and the [h] sound. Other 'phonation types' are possible, by varying the mode of vibration of the vocal cords in various ways, as in **BREATHY** and **CREAKY** voice. Varying the thickness, length and tension of the vocal cords also produces the different **REGISTERS** in voice production, such as the distinction between 'falsetto' and 'chest' voice. Lastly, by varying the rate and strength of vibration of the vocal cords, variations in **PITCH** and **LOUDNESS** can be introduced into speech.

The question of how precisely the vocal cords operate, from a physiological viewpoint, has been the subject of controversy, and is still not wholly understood. The most widely held theory maintains that the cords are set in vibration aerodynamically, solely by a reaction taking place between their elastic properties and the subglottal air-pressure involved – this is known as the 'myoelastic' theory of voice production. An alternative theory, developed in the 1950s, argued that the cords are set in motion as a result of periodic **NEURAL** stimulation and contraction of the muscles – this was known as the 'neurochronaxiac' theory.

vocal folds see **VOCAL CORDS**

vocal fry see **CREAKY**

vocalic (*adj.*) (**voc**) One of the major **CLASS FEATURES** of sound set up by **GENERATIVE** phonologists in their **DISTINCTIVE FEATURE** theory of **PHONOLOGY**, its opposite being **non-vocalic**. Vocalic sounds may be defined **ARTICULATORILY** or **ACOUSTICALLY** in this approach: they are sounds where there is a free passage of air through the **VOCAL TRACT**, the most radical **CONSTRICTION** in the **ORAL CAVITY** not exceeding that found in [i] and [u], and the **VOCAL CORDS** being positioned so as to allow spontaneous **VOICING**; acoustically, there is a sharply defined **FORMANT** structure. Non-vocalic sounds lack one or other of these conditions. See also **VOWEL**.

vocalization (*n.*) (1) A general term used in **LINGUISTICS** and **PHONETICS** to refer to an **UTTERANCE** viewed solely as a sequence of sound. No reference is made to its linguistic structure, and indeed, in such phrases as 'infant vocalization', there may be no such structure. In a somewhat more restricted sense, the term is sometimes used referring to the use of sound involving **VOCAL-CORD** vibration – a vocalization is then 'any voiced sound'.

(2) In **PHONETICS**, a term referring to the process of changing a **CONSONANT** articulation so that it becomes more **VOWEL**-like. For example, some regional **ACCENTS** of English, such as Cockney, have vocalized final /-l/, so that /wel/ is produced as [weʊ].

vocal lips see VOCAL CORDS

vocal organs The collective term for all the anatomical features involved in the production of speech sounds, including the lungs, trachea, oesophagus, LARYNX, PHARYNX, **mouth** and nose.

vocal qualifier see VOICE QUALIFIER

vocal tract A general term used in PHONETICS to refer to the whole of the air passage above the LARYNX, the shape of which is the main factor affecting the QUALITY of speech sounds. It can be divided into the NASAL tract (the air passage above the soft PALATE, within the nose) and the ORAL tract (the mouth and pharyngeal areas, or CAVITIES). In a more general application, the term is used in the sense of VOCAL ORGANS, including all the features of the respiratory tract involved in the production of sounds, i.e. lungs, trachea and larynx as well.

vocative (*adj./n.*) In LANGUAGES which express GRAMMATICAL relationships by means of INFLECTIONS, this term refers to the CASE FORM taken by a NOUN PHRASE (often a single noun or PRONOUN) when it is used in the function of address (including both ANIMATE and inanimate entities). English does not make use of the vocative case ('the vocative') inflectionally, but expresses the notion using an optional noun phrase, in certain positions, and usually with a distinctive INTONATION, as in *John, are you ready?*

vocoid (*n.*) A term invented by the American phonetician Kenneth Pike (1912–2000) to help distinguish between the PHONETIC and the PHONOLOGICAL notions of VOWEL. Phonetically, a vowel is defined as a sound lacking any CLOSURE or narrowing sufficient to produce audible FRICTION. Phonologically, it is a unit which functions at the centre of SYLLABLES. In cases such as [l], [r], [w] and [j], however, these criteria do not coincide: these sounds are phonetically vowel-like, but their function is CONSONANTAL. To avoid possible confusion, Pike proposed the term 'vocoid' for sounds which are characterized by a phonetic definition such as the above; the term 'vowel' is then reserved for the phonological sense. Its opposite is CONTOID. Since the 1980s, the term has become fashionable in FEATURE geometry models of phonology, where it is often used to designate one of the two chief classes of segments (the other being consonants).

voice (*n.*) (1) A fundamental term used in the PHONETIC classification of speech sounds, referring to the auditory result of the vibration of the VOCAL CORDS; also called **voicing**. Sounds produced while the vocal cords are vibrating are **voiced** sounds, e.g. [b, z, a, i]; those produced with no such vibration are **voiceless** or **unvoiced**, e.g. [p, s, h]. A sound which is normally voiced, but which in a particular phonetic ENVIRONMENT is produced with less voice than elsewhere, or with no voice at all, is said to be **devoiced** (symbolized by a small circle beneath the symbol) – examples are the reduced voicing on voiced PLOSIVES in a word-final position as in *bib, bed* [b^hɪb], [bed^h].

This contrast is considered to be of primary significance in phonological analysis, and is used as a main parameter of classification both in PHONEMIC and DISTINCTIVE FEATURE theories of PHONOLOGY. **Voiced**, for example, is one of the

SOURCE features of sound set up by Chomsky and Halle in their phonological theory (see CHOMSKYAN). Voiced sounds are defined ARTICULATORILY, as those where the vocal cords are in a position which will enable them to vibrate in an airflow. Its opposite is **non-voiced** (or **voiceless**), referring to sounds where vocal-cord vibration is impossible, because of the wide gap between them.

(2) A CATEGORY used in the GRAMMATICAL description of SENTENCE or CLAUSE structure, primarily with reference to VERBS, to express the way sentences may alter the relationship between the SUBJECT and OBJECT of a verb, without changing the meaning of the sentence. The main distinction is between ACTIVE and PASSIVE, as illustrated by *The cat bit the dog* and *The dog was bitten by the cat*: in the first sentence, the grammatical subject is also the actor; in the second sentence the grammatical subject is the goal of the action – it is ‘acted upon’, and thus ‘passive’. There will be certain differences in the emphasis or style of these sentences, which will affect the speaker’s choice, but the factual content of the two sentences remains the same. In other languages, further contrasts in voice may be encountered, e.g. the ‘middle’ voice of Greek (which included verbs with a REFLEXIVE meaning, e.g. *She cut herself*), and there are several other types of construction whose role in language is related to that of voice, e.g. ‘reflexive’, CAUSATIVE, ‘impersonal’ constructions. Voice contrasts may be formally marked in the verb (e.g. by INFLECTION, WORD-ORDER or the use of special AUXILIARIES), or elsewhere in the sentence (e.g. by the use of passive ‘agent’); the English passive can involve all three factors, as in *I was kicked by a bull*.

voiced (*adj.*) see VOICE (1)

voice dynamics A term used by some PHONETICIANS as a collective term to refer to vocal effects other than VOICE QUALITY and SEGMENTAL features, e.g. LOUDNESS, TEMPO, RHYTHM, REGISTER. These effects are capable of differentiating MEANINGS and SPEECH communities, and are thus held to be within the purview of LINGUISTICS.

voiceless (*adj.*) see VOICE (1)

voice-onset time (VOT) A term used in PHONETICS, referring to the point in time at which VOCAL-CORD vibration starts, in relation to the release of a CLOSURE. In a fully VOICED PLOSIVE, for example, the vocal cords vibrate throughout; in a voiceless unaspirated plosive, there is a delay (or LAG) before voicing starts; in a voiceless aspirated plosive, the delay is much longer, depending on the amount of ASPIRATION. The amount of the delay, in relation to the types of plosive, varies from language to language.

voiceprint (*n.*) A display of a person’s voice based upon a SPECTROGRAPHIC or similar output. The analogy is with the term ‘fingerprint’, and the claim is sometimes made that a person’s voice is as individual as fingerprints. Several legal cases have in fact used voiceprints as evidence of SPEAKER IDENTIFICATION. But, while there are several idiosyncratic features in a spectrogram of a person’s voice, it is not the case that such displays are always unequivocal indications of identity. It is difficult to visually compare and interpret sets of spectrographic features, and the limitations of the display techniques used must always be borne in mind.

voice qualifier A term used by some linguists as part of their analysis of the PARALINGUISTIC features of the voice; also called a **vocal qualifier**. Examples are the expression of various emotional states, such as anger or sarcasm, by means of vocal effects such as a ‘harsh’ or ‘tense’ quality – effects which are sometimes specific to individual languages. The term VOICE QUALITY is sometimes used in a general sense to include these effects.

voice quality A term used in PHONETICS to refer to the permanently present, background, person-identifying feature of speech; also called **voice set**. All phonetic features contribute to this notion: an individual’s voice quality derives from a combination of such factors as PITCH height, LOUDNESS level, TEMPO and TIMBRE of speaking. Labels for the many qualities that can be produced tend to be impressionistic and ambiguous, e.g. a ‘cheery’, ‘haughty’, ‘sullen’ voice. A terminological problem also arises because such labels may be used in both a non-linguistic way (as described above) and in a LINGUISTIC or PARALINGUISTIC context, as when someone who normally does not have a voice one would call ‘sullen’ deliberately adopts such a voice to communicate a particular emotional state. To classify such latter effects, terms such as VOICE QUALIFIER or ‘para-linguistic feature’ are available, but ‘voice quality’ is also commonly used.

voice set see VOICE QUALITY

voicing (*n.*) see VOICE (1)

voicing lag see LAG

voicing lead see LEAD

volition (*n.*) A term used in the SEMANTIC analysis of GRAMMATICAL CATEGORIES, referring to a kind of relationship between an AGENT and a VERB. A **volitional** verb or construction is one where the action takes place as a consequence of the agent’s choice, e.g. *Mary left*. A **non-volitional** verb or construction is one where the agent has no determining influence on the action, e.g. *Mary slipped*. Many verbs allow both interpretations (e.g. *X hit Y* – accidentally or on purpose?). The notion has also had a contrastive role in the analysis of the meanings of certain AUXILIARY verbs in English: for example, the volitional sense of *will* in *I will go* (in the sense of ‘it is my decision to go’) is distinguished from other senses, such as characteristic action (*They’ll sit there for hours*).

vowel (*n.*) (V) One of the two general CATEGORIES used for the classification of speech sounds, the other being CONSONANT. Vowels can be defined in terms of both PHONETICS and PHONOLOGY. Phonetically, they are sounds articulated without a complete CLOSURE in the mouth or a degree of narrowing which would produce audible FRICTION; the air escapes evenly over the centre of the TONGUE. If air escapes solely through the mouth, the vowels are said to be ORAL; if some air is simultaneously released through the nose, the vowels are NASAL. In addition to this, in a phonetic classification of vowels, reference would generally be made to two variables, the first of which is easily describable, the second much less so: (a) the position of the lips – whether rounded, spread, or neutral; (b) the part of the tongue raised, and the height to which it moves.

Relatively slight movements of the tongue produce quite distinct auditory differences in **vowel** (or **vocalic**) **quality**. Because it is very difficult to see or feel these movements, classification of vowels is usually carried out using ACOUSTIC or AUDITORY criteria, supplemented by details of lip position. There are several systems for representing vowel position visually, e.g. in terms of a **vowel triangle** or a **vowel quadrilateral** such as the CARDINAL VOWEL system.

These sounds are usually voiced, though some languages have been analysed as having ‘voiceless’ vowels, e.g. Portuguese. From a phonological point of view, vowels are those units which function at the CENTRE of syllables. In some approaches, the term ‘vowel’ is reserved for the phonological level of analysis; VOCOID is then used for the phonetic level (as opposed to CONTOID, for the phonetic equivalent of a consonant). The usefulness of this distinction is in relation to those sounds which are vowel-like in articulation, but which function as consonants in syllables: [r], for example, is phonetically very similar to a vowel, but it occurs at the margins of syllables, as in *red*, *car*. In such cases, it is sometimes clearer to talk of a ‘vocoid with consonantal function’.

In establishing the **vowel system** of a language, several further dimensions of classification may be used. One criterion is in terms of the duration of the vowel (whether relatively ‘long’ or ‘short’ vowels are used). Another is whether, during an articulation, there is any detectable change in quality. If the quality of a vowel stays unchanged, the term **pure vowel**, or MONOPHTHONG, is used, e.g. the standard British pronunciation of *red*, *car*, *sit*, *seat*. If there is an evident change in quality, one talks instead of a **gliding vowel**. If two auditory elements are involved, the vowel GLIDE is referred to as a DIPHTHONG, e.g. *light*, *say*, *go*; if three elements, as a TRIPHTHONG, e.g. *fire*, *hour* (in some pronunciations). In the DISTINCTIVE FEATURE theory of phonology, the term VOCALIC is used as the main feature in the analysis of vowel sounds.

Yet another way of classifying vowels is in terms of the amount of muscular TENSION required to produce them: vowels articulated in extreme positions are more ‘tense’ than those articulated nearer the centre of the mouth, which are ‘lax’: cf. *seat* v. *sit*, *flute* v. *foot*. See also ANAPTYXIS, HARMONY.

vowel gradation see GRADATION

vowel harmony see HARMONY

vowel quadrilateral see CARDINAL VOWELS

vowel shift see SOUND CHANGE

V-place (*n.*) see CONSTRICTION, PLACE

V-slot (*n.*) see SLOT (2)