

NONVERBAL VOCALIZATION

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Professor Henry Higgins was said to have devised a shorthand whereby he could rapidly and accurately record dialect nuances.

Today's philologist or logologist is not so fortunate. On the one hand, he has the International Phonetic Alphabet which, while relatively simple, can hardly be used rapidly and is far from accurate. On the other hand, he has the complex voiceprint recorder that is so fine-grained that it makes each person's idiolect as individual as fingerprints.

The man in the street has to make do with a simplified phonetic spelling plus diacritical marks over vowels indicating long, short, broad, etc.

For those noises we make outside normal speech, but which still convey information, a number of conventions have become established:

1. Place the tip of your tongue against the back of your teeth, your mouth partly open. Suddenly withdraw your tongue, producing the sound used by parents and teachers to admonish children. (In some Mediterranean and Near-Eastern countries, it means "no".) We spell this sound TSK-TSK.

2. In a similar manner, place the blade of the tongue against the roof of your mouth and quickly withdraw it. This is the sound used to make a horse go, and is written TCHK-TCHK.

3. With your mouth closed, say "um" twice with a glottal stop before the first "um". If this first "um" is stressed ('UM-um), it means "no" and is spelled HUH-UH. If the second "um" is stressed (um-'UM), the sound indicates satisfaction, but there seems to be no convention for spelling it. A prolonged UMMM without glottal stops also indicates satisfaction. If both "um"s are equally stressed with a glottal stop before each ('um-'um or 'UM-'UM), caution is implied.

4. A snore is designated ZZZZZZZ.

5. Place the tip of your tongue close to your velar ridge. Open your lips and at the same time expel air through the opening above your tongue. Then suddenly stop the air flow by pressing your tongue against the velar ridge. The resultant PST is used in America to attract attention. In some European countries it is used to call the cat.

6. Place your upper lip against your lower teeth. Expel air between them, suddenly stopping the air flow with your tongue pressed to the opening. This PFFFT sound indicates that something has terminated, usually ingloriously.

7. Place the tiup of your tongue between your lips. Blow, causing your tongue to flutter, making the sound BRRRT. This "raspberry" denotes derision.

8. Simply pronounce "r" with your lips initially closed to get BRRR. This means "it's cold".

9. Press your lips together in a pursed position and quickly draw in a short breath between them. The resultant sound means "kiss".

10. Place the tip of your tongue close to your velar ridge. With your lips open, expel air through the opening above your tongue. The resultant HISS signifies disapproval.

There are many other nonverbal sounds, but ten seems a nice round number to stop on.

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Oxford University Press (Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP) issued a new quarterly journal, The International Journal of Lexicography, in the spring of 1988. Its professed aim is to "exam[ine] how people inform one another [by dictionaries and similar reference works] ... [discuss] which items are selected to give information about, what information is given about them, and how that information is used." The articles are generally accessible to the educated layman, not being written in the dense jargon so common to most scholarly journals. Two of the four articles have quite wide interest: one deals with the grammatical differences between British and American English, giving many examples of these; the other is a 1978 talk discussing the problems of selecting the limited vocabulary for a beginner's language such as Basic English. Unfortunately, the cost of producing a quality journal with limited circulation is not cheap, and the American subscriber must pay \$62 per year.