

The Phonetics of English Pronunciation - Week 2

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The Topics

- What's different in English for Germans?
 - How letters represent sounds (orthographic interference)
 - Sounds we can *feel* (consonants)
 - Sounds we have to *listen* for (vowels)
 - Rhythm patterns for words, compounds and phrases (stress)
 - The frequency and function of some melodic patterns (intonation)

Homework: a) Read pp. 106-9 on vowels
b) Answer questions 1-5 on exercise sheet.
c) Go back to the „spelling poem“ (pp. 253-254) and TRY to transcribe the problem words (see task 6 on exercise sheet)

This is a summary of the problem that we heard about more generally last week, putting them into areas that we shall be dealing with in the course of the term.

The homework this week includes written work which you are required to hand in by Wednesday 1st May (18.00) OR Friday 2nd May 10.00.

In other words: If you *cannot* or *do not want* to come to the university *before 10.00 on Friday*, you must hand in the homework *before the holiday*, i.e. Wednesday ☺

The *final* task (see exercise sheet 1 in the file or on the Web) is to try to transcribe the problem words of the poem (NOT the whole poem) phonetically.

1st step: Cover up the transcription. Write the words (in orthography) and say the words to yourself (try to guess if you don't know the word). Leave space after each word for (2) transcription(s)

2nd step: Try to transcribe the word phonetically

3rd step: Look up the word in the transcription of the poem and either mark your transcription as correct or write the correct transcription next to your first attempt.

What's different in English for Germans? (1)

NOT a simple question!

- What sort of English?

- choose your variety! (British, American,)



- but what sort of American or British?



Georgia



Alabama



NW-Brit.Engl



SW-Brit.Engl

- These decisions determine the sound patterns that you aim for
But a “*Standard Variant*” is the usual target accent.
 - E.g. General American with a Mid-Western accent
 - Southern British English (RP?, “Oxford English”?)

Most books (and teachers – including myself) make categorical statements about the differences between English and German pronunciation, thereby – ostensibly – identifying the problems that the German learner faces.

But, English has *a lot of varieties*, and in practice, the target pronunciation may be different from the variant assumed by the book/teacher.

A quite simple example is the choice between American English and British English

(listen to first two files; approx. Standard Southern British (**SSB**) and a mid-Western USA accent (**Illinois**)).

But, American English (or British English) also covers a multitude of different types and pronunciations (listen to the other files: 2 American: **Georgia** and **Alabama**;; and 2 British: **Northwestern English** and **Southwestern English**)

For example, the Southwestern British English speaker pronounces R after vowels (so-called “post-vocalic R”), which very typical of American English.

What's different in English for Germans? (2)

- ...and what sort of *German* do you speak?
- There are large differences between the regional variants, even if the grammar (morphology and syntax) is more or less Standard “Hochdeutsch”.
- No problem in theory..... *if* we were *aware* of our own accent.
But we usually only notice *other* people’s accents!
- Differences between English and German are always described with reference to standard variants
- which can be confusing to the usual “not-quite-standard” learner.

What's different in English for Germans? (2)

...and what sort of German do you speak?

The differences between English and German (and hence the problems for the learner) depend *not only on the target accent*, but also on the *learner’s own native accent*.

- There are large differences between the regional variants of German, even if the grammar (morphology and syntax) is more or less Standard “Hochdeutsch”.
- No problem in theory..... *if* we were *aware* of our own accent.
But we usually only notice *other* people’s accents!

Anecdote:

When I was in Kiel, Schleswig Holstein, I only noticed strong Northern German accents, and the accent of High German speakers in the Saarland appeared very strange. Then I moved to Saarbrücken, and I am now „convinced“ that the whole population of Kiel has since acquired a much stronger North German accent!

- Differences between English and German are always described with reference to standard variants which can be confusing to the usual “not-quite-standard” learner

... So what is the solution?

- First and foremost: AWARENESS
You need to listen (to yourself and to others)
- But we DO need some „tools“ and some practice to help us to *identify* what we hear.
We need:
 - to know what to listen for,
 - to know how to *describe* it and to *represent* it,
 - and to understand *what is behind the description*.
- We need some basic phonetic knowledge 😊

So what is the solution?

- First and foremost: AWARENESS
Start listening to yourself and others.

I don't want to dive straight in and tell you details of differences between English and German; I would like you to discover them little by little yourself.

- So we DO need some „tools“ and some *practice* to help us get to grips, to identify what we hear. We need:

....to know what to listen for, (car-drivers – or mechanics – can identify little noises that indicate that something is wrong with the car; musicians can hear different instruments playing a theme) ;

... to know how to describe it and to represent it, (if you don't have a name for it, you are reduced to saying things like: „I can hear the whatsit rubbing against the thingamijig“)

... and to understand what is behind the description.

Like all other areas of knowledge and expertise, we need to learn about how things are done; we need to have the right terminology so that we can get hold of the phenomena we are trying to observe.

In short – *we have to understand about how we produce sounds, and we need to be able to name the things we are do, the sounds we are producing.*

What differences/problems are we looking for?

- **Orthography**-based problems (*of course*)
- Differences in the “**sound systems**” (consonants and vowels that English *has* and German *hasn't*)
- **False equivalences** (consonants or vowels that appear to be the same in English and German but are only partially the same. E.g. /l/, /b, d, g/; /i:/, /u:/)
- Problems from **putting sounds together** (consonant clusters, vowel sequences, word stress and vowel reduction)
- Problems from **putting words together** (“ **juncture**” differences, reductions due to accentuation, intonation)

What differences/problems are we looking for?

• **Orthography**-based problems: Our conscious knowledge of language is so tied up with reading and writing, we are constantly in danger of confusing pronunciation with the written form. We continually forget the difference and call sounds “letters” (Buchstaben). Orthography is a necessary representation of the words we use; it is a help in remembering words..... But it is a constant source of interference.

• Differences in the “**sound systems**” (consonants and vowels that English has and German hasn't) – **Can you name any?** E.g. “**th**” (is *one* or *two* problems?); front/short “**a**” (*cat, man, ladder*)

• **False equivalences** (consonants or vowels that appear to be the same in English and German but are only partially the same) **Any examples?**

E.g. /l/ (*leaf vs. feel*) – but it is important to know your own pronunciation (there are regional accents in Germany which also have the difference).

Another example: /u:/ (*shoe ≠ Schuh*)

• Problems from **putting sounds together** (consonant clusters, vowel sequences, word stress and vowel reduction). **Any examples?**

E.g. consonant clusters with “**th**”; Also the danger of separating syllables in words like “deactivate”, “reapply”, “co-existence” etc.

Word-stress has to be learned! Compound words are a common source of problems

• Problems from **putting words together** (“ **juncture**” differences, reductions due to accentuation, intonation). **German** likes to keep words a *little bit more separate*, **English** likes to *run words together* more; German likes to keep the identity of unaccented words a bit more, English tends to reduce unaccented words a bit more.

(The problem is *not* that the languages are *completely* different in these respects, but *more* that they are similar but with differing tendencies.)

Orthographic interference

- Orthography (even after a spelling reform!) is a complex and ultimately inconsistent reflection of the pronunciation!

Demo 1: Düse, brüht, Mythos, Duisburg; Vase, Wahn;
Champignon, Schade vs. Chiemsee, Kiel usw.

Demo 2: caught, court, taut, ought, fort; (US vs. UK?)
hate, bait, eight, Eyot(!);
bison, lesson, recent;

And remember the example of <WIND>?

English: /wind/ or /waɪnd/ & *German* /vɪnt/

So we need some basic phonetic tools! 😊

Orthographic interference

- Orthography (even after a spelling reform!) is a complex and ultimately inconsistent reflection of the pronunciation!

Consider the groups of words in their orthographic form. The same sound can be spelt in different ways. But different sounds can also be represented by the same orthographic means.

This is true for both German and English but *unfortunately* the conventions are not the same, giving a source of errors.

Unfortunately, there is no way round the problem EXCEPT by making sure you know the different conventions for English (you learned the German ones many years ago, and you presumably know most of the English conventions by now).

Unfortunately there are many more exceptions to the conventions in English than in German, and exceptions have to be learned individually!

It is to underline the rather confusing situation in English that I ask you to read the poem in *Exercise E.6 on page 253-4* of the book. It is a good bit of initial familiarisation. Read the orthographic side of the page (out loud to yourself) and then look at the transcription and try to see whether you were aiming at the right pronunciation. If you can work in pairs, you can read it while someone else checks the transcription. *Then try to do the transcription of the problem words, looking up the symbols you are not sure about.*

But in order to be confident about transcription symbols, it is important to understand what lies behind them.

We must start thinking in terms of SOUNDS rather than LETTERS.

So we should first see how sounds are defined and described.

Sounds we can feel

- Consonants are *fairly* easy to describe because we can (*mostly*) feel what we are doing to make a difference:

Lips	A		Tongue Tip behind teeth	B		C	Back of Tongue against soft palate
< b a p >		vs.	< b a t >		vs.	< b a ck >	1
< l a b >		vs.	< l a d >		vs.	< l a g >	2
< r a m >		vs.	< r a n >		vs.	< r a ng >	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What about these? 							
< g a ff >		vs.	< g a s >		vs.	< g a sh >	All have <u>friction</u> from a constriction
< p a ve >		vs.	< b a iz e >		vs.	< b e i g e >	
and:			< b e r r y >		vs.	< b e l l y >	No friction; no narrow constriction
			< w e ll >		vs.	< y e ll >	

Sounds we can feel

- Consonants are *fairly* easy to describe because we can (*mostly*) feel what we are doing to make a difference.

Compare the **columns** A, B and C and the **rows** 1, 2, 3. You will have no trouble in saying what the rows have in common and what is different between the columns (I hope).

How would you **describe** the differences between columns A, B and C?
(the constriction of the articulators are at different places in the mouth)

How would you **describe** the differences between rows 1, 2 and 3?

(In 1, the constriction is for longer, and is stronger than 2, and the vocal folds cannot be vibrating during the constriction, whereas they CAN in 2.

3 is like 2 but the nasal cavity is used because the soft palate (velum is lowered to allow air out through the nose. The vocal folds need to vibrate.)

Do we have exactly the same differences between A, B and C in rows 4 and 5?

(They are different places of articulation, but in A the bottom lip is against the top teeth rather than against the top lip (as it was for 1, 2 and 3). In C the constriction is further back than B but it is not so far back as for 1, 2 and 3)

And what are the differences between the two sounds marked in row 6 and in row 7?

(In 6 the tongue tip is touching the palate for the second (/l/) – like 1-3 – but the sides of the tongue don't touch; for the first, the tip of the tongue is raised and pulled back, but doesn't touch the palate.

In 7, the lips are rounded for the first and not the second; for the second, the front of the tongue is raised (but the tip is down)

Describing consonants

- We have just seen, felt and heard that the ***place of articulation*** is important for producing different consonant sounds ([p t k])
- We noted that we can articulate differently at any place of articulation; i.e., the ***manner of articulation*** is important. (e.g. [t s])
- Sometimes we have a ***second articulatory gesture*** that changes the manner of articulation (e.g. [b vs. m], [d vs. n], [g vs. ŋ]).
- What the ***vocal folds*** (Stimm lippen) are doing is also important. If they are vibrating, the sound is „***voiced***“; if they are not, the sound is „***unvoiced***“
- In summary: ***Place, Manner*** and ***Voicing*** are used to classify consonants.

Describing consonants

You need to learn the terms behind the way in which consonants are described: The ***Places, Manners*** that are used to classify consonants (Voiced and Voiceless, I assume are no problem to remember!). We shall come back to this later on.

Sounds we have to listen for.

- Vowels are rather *more difficult to classify* because the mouth is open, and there is very little contact between the articulators.
- You can *hear them very well*, and you can probably hear very *fine differences*, but what words do you use for them?
“**Light**” and “**Dark**” are commonly used.
With <ee> and <oo> - which is “light” and which is “dark”?
- Problem: not many different vowels can be described with these adjectives. *Where does light become dark in:*
<been, bin, bane, ben, ban, barn, Bonn, born, bun, boon>?
- Vowels carry a lot of “accent” information (dialects as well as “native” vs. “foreign”), *so we need to be able to describe them.*

Read: Eckert & Barry, chapter V.1. Vowels, pp. 106-109

Sounds we have to listen for

- Vowels are rather more difficult to classify because the mouth is open, and there is very little contact between the articulators.

(Part of their definition is that they are produced with *no obstruction to the airstream*; they are also always produced with „voice“ = vocal folds vibrating)

- You can hear them very well, and you can probably hear very fine differences, but *what words do you use to describe them?*

“**Light**” and “**Dark**” are commonly used.

Test of plausibility: With <ee> and <oo> - which is “light” and which is “dark”?

N.B. There are people with a condition called „synaesthesia“ who experience sounds as colours. They have a ready-made reference system via colours. BUT, there aren't many such people.

With such fine differences possible between different vowels, light and dark isn't sufficient.

Where does light become dark in: <been, bin, bane, ben, ban, barn, Bonn, born, bun, boon>?

Quite a lot of what is heard as „a foreign accent“ is the result of incorrect vowel quality.

So it's important for us to be aware of what determines vowel quality, **and for us to become sensitive to it!**

Describing vowels

- What do you have to do to produce the different vowels in the following word pairs?

	A	B
1.	Igel	Egel
2.	Igel	H a gel
3.	Igel	Hügel
4.	Hügel	Hugo
5.	Beten	Be t ten
6.	Raten	R a tten
7.	Bohle	bo l lern

- What role do your jaw, your tongue and your lips play?

Describing vowels

- Let's look at German vowels first – (you can be sure that you are producing the right vowels)

Consider the word pairs.

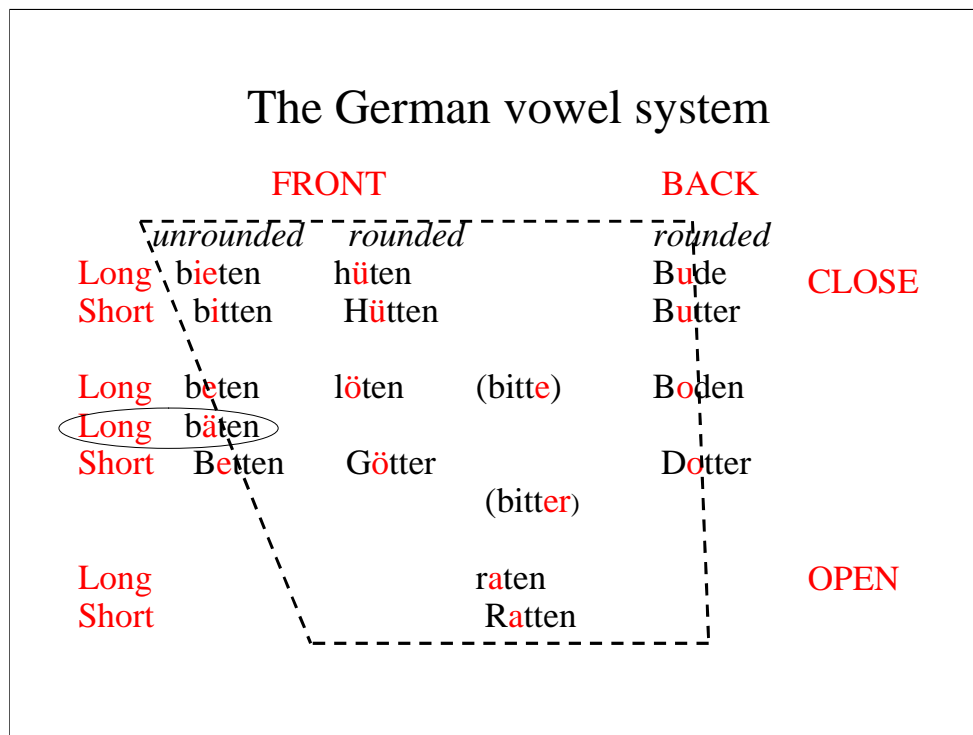
(it's best if you just pronounce just the first syllable of each word of the pair and *try to observe what your articulators are doing*)

You should find that your jaw (with your tongue following it!) adjusts to *different degrees of opening* (rows 1, 2, 5 & 7)

But your tongue body (don't just observe the tongue tip) also moves from *front to back* (row 4)

And your lips change the quality by *rounding and spreading* (row 3)

Finally – there are *long* and *short* vowels (row 6) - *often with different degrees of opening* (rows 5 and 7)



The German vowel system

- If we describe the German vowels according to the *four descriptive criteria* (degree of **opening**, tongue **position** tongue (back or front), shape of **lips**, vowel **length**)

we get an astonishingly orderly system.

The only vowel to spoil the symmetry is the one in „bäten“ (which has disappeared in many Northern regional accents

(bäten = beten; Säle = Seele)

I have placed the rounded front vowels *further back* than the unrounded ones because liprounding *makes the mouth longer* so the tongue is *further back relative to the mouth opening*

We could now start describing English (British and American) vowels

But I would rather wait till you have tested this descriptive system and can compare vowel qualities.

Please try out your own vowels!

See whether (and how) they fit the scheme we have here.

Rhythm patterns I

- In German it isn't: BER-LIN, DORT-MUND, SAAR-BRÜC-KEN
but: Ber-LIN, DORT-mund, Saar-BRÜC-ken
- In English it isn't: LON-DON, TOR-QUAY, DUM-BAR-TON
but: LON-don, Tor-QUAY, Dum-BAR-ton

Word stress is as important for the identity of a word as the sequence of consonants and vowels!

Both German and English use word stress to define word-shapes

- sometimes **just** stress: um-FAH-ren vs. UM-fah-ren
EX-port (N) vs. Ex-PORT (Vb)

But they don't do it in quite the same way phonetically

Rhythm patterns

But we don't speak in single vowels; nor even in single syllables made up of consonants and vowels.

We use *words*, often with two or more syllables,

We mostly use *phrases* with several words.

Both words and phrases avoid having equally prominent units next to each other:

Let's look at *words* first:

- In German it isn't: BER-LIN, DORT-MUND, SAAR-BRÜC-KEN
but: Ber-LIN, DORT-mund, Saar-BRÜC-ken
- In English it isn't: LON-DON, TOR-QUAY, AB-ER-DEEN
but: LON-don, Tor-QUAY, Ab-er-DEEN

Word stress is as much part of the identity of a word as the sequence of consonants and vowels.

Both German and English use word stress to define word-shapes

- sometimes **just** stress: um-FAH-ren vs. UM-fah-ren
EX-port (N) vs. Ex-PORT (Vb)

But they don't do it in quite the same way phonetically

The phonetics of word stress

- < Ber-LIN > [bɛʁ'li:n] in German but [bə'lm] in (British) English.

Both languages reduce the *duration* of unstressed vowels

Both languages reduce the *loudness* (energy), but

Only English reduces the vowel *quality* of unstressed vowels

Some examples:

'conference, /'kɒnfərəns/ con'fer, /kən'fɜ:/

'telephone, /'teləfəʊn/ te'lephony, /tə'lefəni/

phi'losopher, /fɪ'lɒsəfə/ philo'sophical, /fɪlə'sɒfəkəl/

The phonetics of word stress

- < Berlin > is /bɛʁ'li:n/ in German but /bə'lm/ in (British) English.

(You can see why transcription is important!)

The unstressed syllable is *shorter* than the stressed one in both languages

The unstressed syllable is produced with *less energy* than the stressed one in both languages

But the vowel quality is only *reduced* (to schwa) in English (schwa is the short „neutral“ vowel)

The examples show related words which have the stress placed differently. A vowel which is stressed in one word may be unstressed and become schwa in the other.

The stress of words together!

- If words are formed by other words

The problem of *compound words*

No problem, they're like German, aren't they?

E.g. 'cushion + 'cover → 'cushion,cover
'piano + 'teacher → 'piano-,teacher
'vacuum + 'cleaner → 'vacuum-,cleaner
but ... + 'salesman → 'vacuum-,cleaner 'salesman

So not all English „compounds“ behave like German compounds!

'Wimbledon + 'Common → ,Wimbledon 'Common

'Regency + 'Crescent → ,Regency 'Crescent

Note also: *Not all „compounds“ are written as a single word!*

The stress of words together!

If words are formed by other words, i.e., are *compounds* they have a specific stress pattern. In German this is strong + weak (we mark it as ' + ,)

Many English words behave in the same way:

E.g. 'cushion + 'cover → 'cushion,cover
'piano + 'teacher → 'piano-,teacher
'vacuum + 'cleaner → 'vacuum-,cleaner
+ 'salesman → 'vacuum-,cleaner ,salesman

An orthographic difference between English and German is that not all English „compounds“ are written as one word

Also, Not all English compounds are stressed like German compounds!

'Wimbledon + 'Common → ,Wimbledon 'Common

'Regency + 'Crescent → ,Regency 'Crescent

It is possible to create some rules to help – we shall be returning to compound stress and phrasal accentuation later – But.....

If you learn a compound-word phrase, learn its stress-pattern too.

It's a question of awareness again!

Sentence melody - intonation

- The problem with English and German intonation is
 - ... that the phonological system is practically the same,
 - ... but the contexts and situations in which the melodic elements are used (i.e. their communicative function) may be different,
 - ... or at least some are used a lot less frequently and others a lot more frequently.
- a) *Der ↗Mann im schwarzen ↗Hut ist der Poli ↘zeipräsident.*
Der ↘Mann im schwarzen ↘Hut ist der Poli ↘zeipräsident.
The ↘man in the black ↘hat is the po ↘lice commissioner.
The ↗man in the black ↗hat is the po ↘lice commissioner
- b) *Ich ↘mag ihn ↗nicht, aber ich ↘muss mit ihm zu ↘sammenarbeiten.*
I don't ↘like ↗him, (but I ↘have to ↘work with him.)

Sentence melody - intonation

A small terminological explanation (so that we don't talk at cross purposes): Although the word "**Betonung**" has the equivalent base morpheme to "**intonation**", i.e., "**ton(e)**",

Betonung is normally understood and translated as "stress":

Wortbetonung = *word stress*; **Satzbetonung** = *sentence stress* (also "**accentuation**")

A source of confusion may be that sentence accentuation is the "skeleton" on which the melody is hung. I.e., part of the melody is the rhythm carried by the accented + unaccented syllables. But that is the same in both English and German, so what happens melodically?

The "**tonal accents**" (as they are called) can have a **rising** or a **falling** tonal movement.

- The problem with English and German intonation is ... that the phonological system is practically the same, (i.e., the sort of tonal movements and combinations of tones) ... but the contexts and situations in which the melodic elements are used (i.e. their communicative function) may be different ... or at least some are used a lot less frequently and others a lot more frequently (this would suggest that their „messages“ are not identical ... which could lead to emotionally laden misunderstandings! Example of differences: Are both these versions of the following sentence i) acceptable, ii) normal, iii) are they exactly the same in their „message“?

- a) *Der ↗Mann im schwarzen ↗Hut ist der Poli ↘zeipräsident.*
Der ↘Mann im schwarzen ↘Hut ist der Poli ↘zeipräsident. (Insistent, e.g. In radio advertizing)
The ↘man in the black ↘hat is the po ↘lice commissioner. (for me „neutral“ English)
The ↗man in the black ↗hat is the po ↘lice commissioner (This sounds slightly more „insistent“, as if the speaker is trying to convince someone, not just inform them)
- b) *Ich ↘mag ihn ↗nicht, aber ich ↘muss mit ihm zu ↘sammenarbeiten.* The fall-rise on ↘mag ihn ↗nicht, is usually only accepted if the sentence is continued. (Was ist Ihre Meinung?
I don't ↘like ↗him, (but I ↘have to ↘work with him.) The first part of the sentence can easily stand on its own: A sentence with open implication.

Summary

- We have now got a general overview of what sort of problems have to be faced.
 - In the coming weeks, we shall learn more about these areas, and specifically what it is that makes learners of English sound German.
 - The goal is to make you aware....
and to motivate you to listen to yourself and to the models that you are given to imitate.
 - Knowing about the problems is – of course – not enough, and only you can change your pronunciation.
- NOW for the homework

Summary

Explanation of my approach:

There is a didactic choice between giving you an overview of the problems and going through the areas one by one.

The overview CAN be daunting – but I hope it has been stimulating;
The step-by-step approach CAN mean that you lose your orientation.

My decision was to show you the *whole picture* and then fill it in bit by bit.
That means that when we come back to an area to talk in more detail about it, the nature of the basic problem is already familiar.

Homework

1. Read: p. 106-109
2. Answer questions 1-5 on the exercise sheet by consulting the slides and notes (copy from file or download)
3. Transcribe the keywords in the poem (p. 253-4)

N.B. Please give Name, Matrikelnr. and Fachrichtung

Hand in (on paper)

by 18.00, Wednesday 1st May 2008 or Friday by 10.00

Building C7.2, 4th floor, Room 4.11 (box outside door)