**ER 5.2 Voicing**

When we speak, our vocal cords can be kept open, or they can be made to vibrate (which they do very fast, at several hundred times per second). When they vibrate, the sounds are called ‘voiced’, and when they do not, they are ‘voiceless’ sounds. All vowels and diphthongs are voiced, but consonants can be made with or without voicing. You can in fact often put consonants into pairs, one being voiceless, the other voiced. /t/ and /d/ are examples: the first is unvoiced, and the second voiced. Other voiceless/voiced pairs are /s/ and /z/, /p/ and /b/, /f/ and /v/. There’s also /θ/ and /ð/ – in StE /θ/ is the first sound in the word ‘thing’, and /ð/ in the word ‘the’.

The voiceless/voiced distinction is useful in (among very many other things) the description of dialects. In the text you will see that the West Country dialect tends to voice some sounds which in StE are unvoiced. An example given in the text is *fen* which in the West Country can be written and pronounced *ven(n).* One example not given in the text is northern and southern English pronunciations of the consonant in *us.* A southern English person will say /ʌs/ (unvoiced), while a northerner (and a Scot) will say /ʌz/ (voiced).