

## 24.900: Introduction to Linguistics

### Major and Natural Classes of Sounds

#### 1. Noncontinuants and continuants

##### *Noncontinuants:*

- Stop sounds (including nasal stops) are noncontinuants. There is a total obstruction of the airstream in the oral cavity.

##### *Continuants:*

- All other consonants (all non-stop consonants) and vowels are continuants. The stream of air flows continuously out of the mouth.

#### 2. Obstruents and sonorants

##### *Obstruents*

- Non-nasal stops, the fricatives, and the affricates form this natural class. The airstream may be fully obstructed as in non-nasal stops and affricates, or partially obstructed as in fricatives.

1. **Continuant obstruents:** *Fricatives*. The air flows continuously out of the mouth, though it is somewhat obstructed.

2. **Noncontinuant obstruents:** *Non-nasal stops and affricates*. There is a complete blockage of the air during the production of these sounds.

##### *Sonorants*

- Sounds that are not obstruents (nasal stops, vowels, liquids [l] and [r] and the glides [w] and [j]). These are produced with relatively free airflow through either the mouth or the nose.

#### 3. Consonantal and vocalic

##### *Consonantal:*

- Nasals, liquids, and obstruents. Although quite strange, these three groups form a natural class in some important ways. (NB: Not all consonants are consonantal. Glides, in particular, are nonconsonantal consonants. They pattern with the vowels.)

##### *Vocalic*

- Vowels and glides form this nonconsonantal class of sounds.