

Lectures in Linguistics

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Sound Patterns

Linguistics is concerned with the spoken word. So a priority task for anyone describing sounds is to decide how to represent the flow of speech. The international Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is the best devised system of notation. A number of IPA symbols are borrowed from the conventional written alphabet:

[b] as in 'bird'

[d] as in 'dog'

Other symbols are variations of the alphabet letters:

[ɒ] as in 'hot' is an upside down α .

[ŋ] as in 'bang' is a combination of *n* and *g*.

[ɪ] as in 'hit' is a small-size capital *i*.

Sometimes phoneticians use diacritics which are supplementary marks added to the phonetic symbols in IPA. For example, two dots (:) indicate length, (ː) indicate that the sound is velarized, and the diacritic (◌̥) indicate that the sound is voiceless.

Every language has its own phonemes, consonants and vowels, that constitutes syllables and morphemes. A phoneme is the smallest segment of sound which can distinguish two words. Take the words *pit* and *bit*. These differ only in their initial sound, *pit* begins with /p/ and *bit* begins with /b/. this is the smallest amount

by which these two words could differ. Similarly, take the words *pet* and *pit*. These differ only in the vowel. Pairs of words such as *pit* and *bit*, *pit* and *pet* which differ only in one phoneme are called minimal pairs.

The Phonemes of English

Received pronunciation is the widely spoken variety of British English used by educated people in south-east England. There are 44 phonemes that can be divided into consonants and vowel. The latter can be subdivided into pure or unchanging vowel, as in *bet*, *bit*, *bat*, *but* and diphthongs or gliding vowels, in which the voice glides from one vowel to another, as in *boat*, *buy*, *bay*.

Consonants

/ŋ/ as in *sing*

/θ/ as in *thin*

/ð/ as in *then*

/p/ as in *pill*

/b/ as in *bill*

/t/ as in *tin*

/d/ as in *din*

/k/ as in *cot*

/g/ as in *got*

/m/ as in *meat*

/n/ as in *neat*

/l/ as in *lake*

/f/ as in *fast*

/v/ as in *vast*

/s/ as in *sink*

/z/ as in zink

/ʃ/ as in ship

/ʒ/ as in beige

/h/ as in hat

/tʃ/ as in chin

/dʒ/ as in George

/w/ as in wet

/j/ as in yet

Vowels

/ɑ/ as in pat

/ɒ/ as in pot

/ʌ/ as in but

/ɑː/ as in part

/e/ as in pet

/ɪ/ as in pit

/iː/ as in peat

/oː/ as in port

/ʊ/ as in put

/uː/ as in boot

/ɜː/ as in bird

/ə/ as in ago

/eɪ/ as in bay

/aɪ/ as in buy

/oɪ/ as in boy

/aʊ/ as in cow

/əʊ/ as in boat

/ɪə/ as in beer

/eə/ as in bare

/ʊə/ as in doer

Allophones: these are variations of the phonemes which might so noticeable or not . Some phonemes in English such as lateral /l/ has two allophones one is dark as in [kastɪ] (castle) , and a light one , such as [lɪps] (lips). Sometimes the variation is random. These slight differences pass unnoticed. When sounds vary randomly they are said to be in free variation.

At other times the variation is predictable in which the sounds are conditioned by the sounds round it. Take the English phoneme /p/ in the beginning of a word is pronounced with aspiration (a puff of air). After /s/ this aspiration disappears. In short, the aspirated variant [p^h] and the unaspirated /p/ are allophones of the phoneme /p/, and each occur in predictable environments, and so they are said to be in complementary distribution.