

ANALYSING LEXIS AND PHONOLOGY IN LEARNING ENGLISH

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Annotation. This article provides information about the role and importance of learning phonology in language teaching and learning. It discusses the use of the sound features used in a language to communicate meaning. The article also highlights the features include phonemes, word stress, sentence stress and intonation.

Key words. chart groups, sounds, vowels, diphthongs, phonemes, phonology, sound features, communicate meaning, word stress, sentence stress and intonation, phonemic symbols, connected speech, connected stream of sounds.

Phonology is the study of the sound features used in a language to communicate meaning. In English these features include phonemes, word stress, sentence stress and intonation. All these symbols represent phonemes. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound that can make a difference to meaning in a language. For example, the s in books in English shows that something is plural, so the sound /s/ has meaning and is a phoneme. Different languages use a different range of sounds and not all of them have meaning in other languages. For example, the distinction between /s/ and /sh/ is an important one in English, where it helps distinguish (notice or understand the difference between two things) between words such as so and show, sock and shock, sore and shore, etc. But in Cantonese, you can use either the /s/ or /sh/ sound in words without changing their meaning,

The phonemes of a language are represented in writing by phonemic symbols, such as /i:/. /ai/ and /S/. Each phonemic symbol represents only one phoneme, unlike the letters of the alphabet in English where, for example, the letter a in written English can represent the // sound in hat, the /et/ sound in made and the /a/ sound in usually. Phonemic symbols help the reader know exactly what the correct pronunciation is. The phonemic script is a set of phonemic symbols which show in writing how words or sounds are pronounced, e.g. beautiful is written /bjutifl/, television is telivign/ and yellow is jelou. When the symbols are written one after the

other to represent a word or group of words they make a phonemic transcription. The phonemes of English are often shown in a chart, called the phonemic chart.

The chart groups the sounds into vowels (sounds made with the mouth partly open and where the air is not stopped by the tongue, lips or teeth. The vowel sound in make /meik/ or in to /sau/) in the top right-hand corner.

Dictionaries always give phonemic transcriptions or words to show their pronunciation. They usually have a list of all the phonemic symbols at the beginning or end of the book, together with an example of the sound each symbol represents.

In the transcription of the word you can see phonemic symbols and also another sign. Dictionary entries for words also use this symbol. The symbol is used to show word stress. Sometimes you see word stress marked in other ways. When we give word stress to a syllable we say it with greater energy and usually higher. We pronounce the other syllables with less energy. especially the unstressed or weak syllables, whose vowels get shortened or sometimes even disappear, e.g. the vowel sound in the last syllable of important, which is pronounced as a schwa /ə/. There are many languages which, like English. give especially strong stress to one syllable in a word, e.g. the Portuguese spoken in Portugal. Other languages give equal length to all the syllables.

Lexical stress is phonemic in English. For example, the noun *increase* and the verb *increase* are distinguished by the positioning of the stress on the first syllable in the former, and on the second syllable in the latter. (See initial-stress-derived noun.) Stressed syllables in English are louder than non-stressed syllables, as well as being longer and having a higher pitch.

In traditional approaches, in any English word consisting of more than one syllable, each syllable is ascribed one of three degrees of stress: *primary*, *secondary* or *unstressed*. Ordinarily, in each such word there will be exactly one syllable with primary stress, possibly one syllable having secondary stress, and the remainder are unstressed (unusually-long words may have multiple syllables with secondary stress). For example, the word *amazing* has primary stress on the second syllable, while the first and third syllables are unstressed, whereas the word *organization* has primary stress on the fourth syllable, secondary stress on the first, and the second, third, and fifth unstressed. This is often shown in pronunciation keys using the IPA symbols for primary and secondary stress (which are ' and ˈ respectively), placed before the syllables to which they apply. The two words just given may therefore be represented as /ə'meɪzɪŋ/ and /ˌɔ:gənəɪ'zeɪʃən/. Some analysts identify an additional level of stress (*tertiary* stress). This is generally ascribed to syllables that are pronounced with less force than those with secondary stress, but nonetheless contain a "full" or "unreduced" vowel (vowels that are considered to be reduced are listed under English phonology § Unstressed syllables above). Hence the third syllable of *organization*, if

pronounced with /aɪ/ as shown above (rather than being reduced to /ɪ/ or /ə/), might be said to have tertiary stress. (The precise identification of secondary and tertiary stress differs between analyses; dictionaries do not generally show tertiary stress, although some have taken the approach of marking all syllables with unreduced vowels as having at least secondary stress.)

In English, stress also influences how sentences and groups of words are pronounced. We say different parts of the sentence with more or less stress, i.e. slower and louder, or quicker and more softly. This is called sentence stress. Normally one word in the sentence has primary or main stress. This is the word which the speaker thinks are most important to the meaning of the sentence. Other words can have secondary stress. This is not so strong as main stress and falls on words which are not so important to the meaning of the sentence as the word with main stress. Other words in the sentence are unstressed. Content words are nouns, verbs, adverbs or adjectives, for example words that give information. Structural words are prepositions, articles, pronouns or determiners, for example words we use to build the grammar of the sentence. It is possible to stress any word in a sentence if the speaker thinks it is important. Putting the stress on an unexpected word in a sentence is called contrastive stress. For example, “The girl ran to the sea and jumped in quickly” This stress that she ran towards the sea and not, for example, away from it. Changing the stress of a sentence changes its meaning. Look at these examples:

The girl ran to the sea and jumped in quickly. (the girl, not another person)

The girl ran to the sea and jumped in quickly. (to the sea, not to any other place)

The girl ran to the sea and jumped in. (jumped in, not in any other way)

Sentence stress is a characteristic of connected speech, i.e. spoken language in which all the words join to make a connected stream of sounds. Some other characteristics of connected speech are contractions, e.g. don't, haven't.

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