

Lecture :Speech Sounds and Morphology

1- What is the difference between a phone, a phoneme and an Allophone?

- A **phone** is the smallest unit in speech sound (the production),it is the actual physical produced sound that we can hear.
- A **phoneme** is the smallest unit in the sounds of language (the patterns and their combination). It is the mental representation of the sound not the sound itself. It is the part stored in our brain when we actually produce, for instance, the sound /p/. It is the smallest unit that distinguishes meaning between sounds in a given language. **Examples:** pin and bin, die and pie, pill and bill.

In the word pin, we have three phonemes, if we change one of them, the word changes, and so does its meaning. Therefore, /p/ and /b/ are considered two different phonemes.

- An **allophone** refers to the different ways to pronounce the same phoneme while keeping the same meaning. This can be seen in the various ways different speakers of the English language pronounce 'water.' The part "Allo" in "allophone" means "other" in Greek. An American English speaker will pronounce water with a "d" instead of like other English speakers with a "t" in the center of the word. These different ways in which a word can be pronounced are then called an Allophone.

2- Why do we need phones, phonemes, and allophones?

If we take the example of the word *puff* we can write out the phonemic representation (with phonemes using slashes) and the phonetic representation (with phones using brackets).

/pʌf/ : the slashes are used in broad transcription

[pʌf] : the brackets are used in narrow transcription

By looking at the broad transcription, /pʌf/, we can know how to pronounce the word *puff*.. However, what if we wanted more information about how the word actually sounds? Narrow transcription can help us with that.

Narrow transcription just gives us extra information about how a word sounds. So the word *puff* can be written like this in narrow transcription:

[p^hʌf]

Here, we see that the [p] is aspirated. This means that when pronouncing the sound [p], we have an extra puff of air that comes out. We notate this by using the superscript ^h.

So you are probably asking yourself, why don't we just put the ^h in the broad transcription? Remember that broad transcription uses phonemes and by definition, if we change a phoneme in a word, we will get a different word. Look at the following:

/pʌf/

/p^hʌf/

However, in English, an aspirated *p* and an unaspirated *p* don't change the meaning of a word. That is, you can pronounce the same sound two different ways, but it wouldn't change the meaning. And by definition, if we change a phoneme, we change the meaning of a word. That means there's only one /p/ phoneme in English. If we were speaking a language where aspiration does change the meaning of a word, then that language could have two phonemes, /p/ and /p^h/. Since it doesn't change the meaning in English, we just mark it in narrow transcription.

Since, the sounds /p/ and /p^h/ are not different phonemes, they are allophones of the same phoneme/p/. Allophones are used in phonemics to study accent variation, such as, British, American, BBC English, rhotic and non-rhotic accents. Etc. There are allophones for both vowels and consonants.

3- The difference between Phonology and Morphology.

Phonology has been described as the study of **speech sounds** and their **patterns**. It is a study based on **Phonemes**, *or the smallest significant unit of speech*.

Morphology is the study of **Morphemes**, *or the smallest significant unit of grammar patterns (linguistic system) or of a word that has grammatical function and meaning that cannot be further divided*.

Example: cat (one morpheme) / cats (cat +s, two morphemes)

Cook (one morpheme) / cooked(cook+ ed, two morphemes)

Unbreakable (un+ break + able, three morphemes)

When we say Phonology is the study of speech sounds, we refer to Phonetics, which is mainly concerned with the physical nature of speech sounds (production). When we speak of their patterns, we are in the realm of phonemics

4- Free and bound morphemes.

a-Free morphemes :words like room, sky, fair, school , girletc may stand alone meaningfully (they are free morphemes) and they may be attached to other units known as bound morphemes eg: fair fairly ,school schools , mistake mistakable, sky skies –room rooms –girl girlish. Free morphemes can occur freely on their own and in isolation.

b-Bound morphemes :They do not stand by themselves ,yet they carry full grammatical meaning eg: ly –s –es – ish. They are prefixes and suffixes that can't occur on their own and in isolation.

5- Allomorphs

Often, morphemes which fulfil the same function have slightly different forms. If you look at the following three words, you will notice that the written form of the morpheme “ed” is the same, so is the function (indicating the past tense), but the pronunciation is different. Therefore, the morpheme “ed” has three various forms known as “allomorphs”.

Killed === /d/

Protested == /Id/

Slipped == /t/

Therefore, /d/, /t/,/Id/ are the variation forms or the allomorphs of the morpheme ed.

Another example is the morpheme “in” that is used in English to form the opposite of a word such as, capable and incapable. Often, however, the negative morpheme changes “n” to the consonant of the word it prefixes: legal, illegal, regular, irregular, mobile, immobile.

‘il, im, and ir’ can thus be called allomorphs.

6- Derivational and inflectional morphology

Morphology fulfils two main functions in English.

- **Morphemes** can be used to form new words:

Beauty+ ful= beautiful/ danger + ous= dangerous.

This category is known as **derivational morphology** and it often involves a change in word class. It also involves:

Prefixation: re +turn = return / uun + true = untrue.

Suffixation: man+ ly = manly / wicked + ness= wickedness.

Affixation: un+ speak + able = unspeakable/ sub+ conscious+ ly =subconsciously.

- **Morphemes** can be used to inflect verbs and nouns:

look+s/ look+ing/ look+ed/ tree+s.

This category is known as inflectional morphology and it never involves a change of class, it usually marks plurality, possession, changes the tense. It often involves suffixes used with verbs, nouns and pronouns.

