

## Lesson 10

### Distinctive features

A phoneme is opposed to all other phonemes of its subsystem in several ways. /p/ has to be defined as an unvoiced bilabial plosive to account for all the oppositions found with the other consonants in English. These three features (voiceless, bilabial, plosive) are said to be **the distinctive features of /p/**.

### Allophones

Each phoneme can be described as a maximal set of distinctive features. We have seen that /p/ must be described as 'voiceless bilabial plosive' to account for all the oppositions it can be found in. **Every sound which is a realisation of a given phoneme must show the same set of distinctive features. The realisations of phonemes are called allophones.** All allophones of a phoneme share the same set of distinctive features but each one can also show **additional features**.

For example the phoneme /p/ is realised as [p<sup>h</sup>] as in "pit", and as [p] in "cup".

[p] and [p<sup>h</sup>] are said to be allophones because:

- 1- They can both be described as voiceless bilabial plosives.
- 2- If we substitute one for the other we do not get any change in meaning but rather an odd pronunciation.

\*Note that these non-phonological variations are not always perceived.

\* More systematic instances of allophones may be due to regional accents.

## Lesson 11

### The Syllable

**The syllable** is a unit of speech consisting of a phoneme or a sequence of phonemes.

**The syllable** is defined by the way in which vowels and consonants combine to form various sequences. Vowels can form a syllable on their own or they can be the “centre” of a syllable, preceded or followed by one or more consonants.

**The syllable** is a unit of speech consisting minimally of one vowel and maximally of a vowel preceded by a consonant or consonant cluster and followed by a consonant or consonant cluster.

**Monosyllabic words:** words which consist of one syllable only. There are not many examples of **monosyllabic words** consisting of only a vowel in English (are, or, I, eye, owe...).

### Syllable Structure

The construction of a syllable is always organised around a vowel which is the **nucleus** (the indispensable element of the syllable). What comes before the nucleus is called **onset** and what follows is called **termination**. Neither onset nor termination are necessary. They occur separately, or together with the nucleus, as illustrated in the table.

A syllable can be divided into three parts:

- a* The beginning, called the **onset**
- b* The central part, called the **nucleus** or **peak**
- c* The end, called the **coda**, **final** or **termination**

## Clusters

Both onset and termination can consist of one or more consonant phonemes. Two or more consonants in the onset or in the termination form **consonant clusters**.

## Onset cluster

The largest **onset consonant cluster** can consist of three elements. In this case the first one is necessarily /s/.

/s C C nucleus/      (C stands for “consonant”)

Two consonant onset clusters are more frequent. Possible combinations are exemplified in the following table.

## Termination clusters are:

Case 1- Two-consonant clusters in termination

Case 2- Three-consonant clusters in termination

Case 3- Four-consonant clusters in termination