

Lecture No. 5: Detailed Study of Consoants: Allophony in English

What is phoneme?

A **phoneme** is the smallest sound that can make a difference in meaning. In phonetics terms, it is any of the perceptually distinct units of sound in a specified language that distinguish one word from another. For example, the word **car** changes to **far** if you change the phoneme /k/ to /f/. There are 44 phonemes in standard British English (RP). Some of them may be realized differently or have a variety of allophones. Therefore, the **phoneme** is “*the smallest distinct sound unit in a given language*”.

What is allophone?

An **allophone** is any of the various phonetic realizations of a phoneme, which do not contribute to distinctions of meaning. For example, /p/ in **pin** /pɪn/ is aspirated [p^hɪn] and /p/ in **spin** /spɪn/ is unaspirated [spɪn]. The first one [p^h] is an allophone of the phoneme /p/.

1. Phonemic Transcription

Phonemic is a transcription showing the pronunciation of words using a simple set of symbols representing phonemes. It is a transcription usually found in the dictionary which is used between slashes. E.g.: **proposal** /prə'pəʊzəl /, **standard** /'stændəd/, **learn** /lɜ:n/

2. Phonetic Transcription

Phonetic transcription is a transcription with more details about the pronunciation of words, used between two square brackets. In this kind of transcription allophones are represented.

For example, in [prə'p^həʊzəl] the allophone [p^h] is **aspirated** and [ɹ] is **dark & syllabic**.

What is aspiration?

Definition of aspiration: it is when the production of /p/, /t/, /k/ is followed by an audible plosion (burst of noise) in the post release phase, producing a sound like h represented as [h].

Examples of allophones:

1. Plosives: the Voiceless Fortis Plosives /p, t, k/ are **aspirated** [p^h, t^h, k^h] when **initial** in a **stressed syllable**. However, they are **unaspirated** in **final position** or when preceded by /s/.

E.g.: party ['p^hɑ:ti] table ['t^heɪbəl] concert (n) ['k^hɒnsət] appear [ə'p^hiə]
partake stable treat car

2. Lateral: the English alveolar lateral phoneme /l/ has three main allophones:

a. Clear [l] with a relatively front resonance before **vowels** and /j/ or when it is intervocalic

E.g.: lead [li:d] follow ['fɒləʊ] lose [lu:z] sailor ['seɪlə] believe [br'i:lv]

a. Clear [l] with a relatively front resonance before **vowels** and /j/ or when it is intervocalic

b. Dark [ɫ] is articulated with a relatively back vowel, when 'l' is final consonant after a vowel⁽¹⁾ or before a consonant preceded by a vowel⁽²⁾ or as a syllabic consonant⁽³⁾.

1. Feel canal pearl call well all

2. Help salt cold milk film elbow

3. Apple middle eagle table trouble able

c. Voiceless [l̥] the voiced phoneme /l/ becomes voiceless when it is preceded by accented /p, k/

E.g.: class [kl̥ɑ:s] clap [kl̥æp] clean [kl̥i:n] place [pl̥eɪs] pleasure ['pl̥eʒə] please [pl̥i:z]

Exercise for practice:

Exercise 1: Transcribe phonetically and phonemically the following words

Words	Phonemic transcription	Phonetic transcription	Words	Phonemic transcription	Phonetic transcription
Pile	Knight	.....	.....
Pearl	Keen	.....	.....
Penalty	Kingdom	.....	.....
Pursue	Knowledge	.....	.....
Prepare	Question	.....	.....
Purchase	Queen	.....	.....
Council	Scape	.....	.....
Knee	Tension	.....	.....
Kangaroo	Towards	.....	.....
Kitten	Tyranny	.....	.....
Kettle	Tertiary	.....	.....

Exercise 2: Convert the following transcribed passage into English spelling form

[aɪ'hævənt gɒt ə kɑ:r ət ðə'məʊmənt | maɪ kɑ: wəz'stəʊlən lɑ:st'fraɪdər | aɪ left
ɪt ət ðə'steɪʃən ɔ:l deɪ | ənd wen aɪ gɒt bæk ɪn ði'i:vnrɪŋ | ɪt həd'vænrɪʃt | aɪ hæʊp
ði'ɪnʃɔ:rəns'klæmpəri wɪl send mi ə tʃek su:n | səʊ ðæt aɪ kən gəʊ ənd baɪ ə'ɪləðə
wʌn | ɪn ðə 'fju:tʃə aɪ wɪl p'ɑ:k ɪt ɜ:lɪ ɒn t'hæm | wɛl aɪf nɒt rɪ'pi:t ðæt fɔ:l ə'gen]

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