

SYLLABLE FORMATION: PRINCIPLES AND PATTERNS IN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract: Though the basic phonological elements are phonemes, human inter-communication is actualized in syllables. The syllable as a unit is difficult to define, though native speakers of a language are usually able to state how many syllables there are in a particular word. This article discusses the basics of syllable formation in linguistics. It explains how syllables are formed, their structure, and their roles in different languages. The paper also looks at the rules of syllable formation and their connection to sounds and word structure. This study is useful for students and researchers in linguistics.

Keywords: syllable, vowels, consonants, prefixes, suffixes, phonetics, pronunciation, syllable division.

Introduction

The syllable is a very important unit. Most people seem to believe that, even if they cannot define what a syllable is, they can count how many syllables there are in a given word or sentence. If they are asked to do this they often tap their finger as they count, which illustrates the syllable’s importance in the rhythm of speech. As a matter of fact, if one tries the experiment of asking English speakers to count the syllables in, say, a recorded sentence, there is often a considerable amount of disagreement. The syllable is a phonological entity that is very significant in phonological representations, for it is the unit in terms of which phonological systems are organized with very significant restrictions on the ordering of the elements that make them up. The Swiss linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure in his “Cours de linguistique générale” which was published in French in 1916, suggested that the syllable was based on the opening and closing of the vocal tract as the speaker moves from one sound to the next.

Main part

The syllable is a phonetic unit, which is higher than the phoneme (sometimes equal to it) and one, which centers on a vowel. This vowel represents a peak of sonority. There are two exceptions to the idea that there should be a vowel upon which the syllable is based:

1. Minimum syllables, which might consist of only a consonant (or only a vowel).

2. Syllabic consonants, which mark the syllable instead of vowels.

In addition, the number of syllables depends on the number of vowels. If we have one vowel, so there is one syllable, and so on.

A prevailing characteristic of the English syllable is that of consonant clusters or consonant sequences and vowel clusters or vowel sequences. By consonant clusters or sequences, it is meant the occurrence of more than one consonant together without an intervening vowel and vowel clusters mean the occurrence of more than one vowel without a consonant in between. Such clusters are distributed initially, medially and finally in syllables.

Let us now look in more detail at syllable onsets. If the first syllable of the word in question begins with a vowel (any vowel may occur, though *o* is rare) we say that this initial syllable has a zero onset.

When we have two or more consonants together we call them a consonant cluster. Initial two-consonant clusters are of two sorts in English. One sort is composed of *s* followed by one of a small set of consonants; examples of such clusters are found in words such as 'sting' *stin*, 'sway' *swei*, 'smoke' *sməuk*. The “*s*” in these clusters is called the pre-initial consonant and the other consonant (*t*, *w*, *m* in the above examples) the initial consonant. The other sort begins with one of a set of about fifteen consonants, followed by one of the set *l*, *r*, *w*, *j* as in. When we look at three-consonant clusters we can recognize a clear relationship between them and the two sorts of two-consonant cluster described above; examples of three-consonant initial clusters are: 'split' *split*, 'stream' *stri:m*, 'square' *skwea*. The *s* is the pre-initial consonant, the *p*, *t*, *k* that follow *s* in the three example words are the initial consonant and the *i*, *r*, *w* is post-initial. In fact, the number of possible initial three-consonant clusters is quite small and they can be set out in full.

One of the most noticeable features of English pronunciation is that some of its syllables are strong while many others are weak; this is also true of many other languages, but it is necessary to study how these weak syllables are pronounced and where they occur in English. Finally, words with "strong forms" and "weak forms" are clearly a related matter. When we compare weak syllables with strong syllables, we find the vowel in a weak syllable tends to be shorter, of lower intensity (loudness) and different in quality. For example, in the word 'data' *detto* the second syllable, which is weak, is shorter than the first, is less loud and has a vowel that cannot occur in strong syllables. In a word like 'bottle' *bot*) the weak second syllable contains no vowel at all, but consists entirely of the consonant *l*. We call this a syllabic consonant. When we compare weak syllables containing vowels with strong syllables, we find the vowel in a weak syllable tends to be shorter, of lower intensity and different in quality. For example, in the word 'father' *fa:de* the second syllable, which is weak, is shorter than the first, is less loud and has a vowel that cannot occur in strong syllables. In a word

like 'bottle' bot! the weak second syllable contains no vowel at all, but consists entirely of the consonant I. We call this a syllabic consonant. In the rest of this chapter we will look at the different types of weak syllable in more detail.

There are four ways to split up a word into its syllables:

1. Divide between two middle consonants: Split up words that have two middle consonants. For example: hap/pen, bas/ket, let/ter, sup/per, din/ner, and ten/nis. The only exceptions are the consonant digraphs. Never split up consonant digraphs as they really represent only one sound. The exceptions are "th", "sh". "ph", "th", "ch", and "wh".

2. Usually divide before a single middle consonant: When there is only one syllable, you usually divide in front of it, as in: "o/pen", "i/tem", "e/vil", and "re/port". The only exceptions are those times when the first syllable has an obvious short sound, as in "cab/in".

3. Divide before the consonant before an "-le" syllable:

When you have a word that has the old-style spelling in which the "-le" sounds like "-el", divide before the consonant, before the "- le". For example: "a/ble", "fum/ble", "rub/ble" "mum/ble" and "thi/stle". The only exception to this is "ckle" words like "tick/le".

4. Divide off any compound words, prefixes, suffixes and roots which have vowel sounds: Split off the parts of compound words like "sports/car" and "house/boat". Divide off prefixes such as "un/happy", "pre/paid", or "re/write". Also divide off suffixes as in the words "farm/er", "teach/er", "hope/less" and "care/ful". In the word "stop/ping", the suffix is actually "-ping" because this word follows the rule that when you add "-ing" to a word with one syllable, you double the last consonant and add the "-ing".|

The syllable can be a single word: chair /tʃeə/, a part of a word: English /in-ɡlɪʃ/, a part of the grammatical form of a word: later /leɪ-tə/.

The syllable can be analyzed from the acoustic and auditory, articulatory and functional points of view. The syllable can be viewed in connection with its graphic representation.

Acoustically and auditorily the syllable is characterized by the force of utterance, or accent, pitch of the voice, sonority and length, that is by prosodic features.

Acoustic properties of syllables are studied with the help of intonograph and spectrograph. Electroacoustic analysis made it possible to formulate some rules of syllable division (see below). Spectrograms of Russian IC syllabic structures show, that such syllables are characterized by some noise in the beginning of the vowel and by a vowel-like termination of the consonant: "TC", it is of great importance for syllable division. Auditorily the syllable is the smallest unit of perception: the listener identifies the whole of the syllable and only after that the sounds contained.

The articulatory energy which constitutes the syllable results from the combined action of the power, vibrator, resonator and obstructor mechanisms. Phonologically the syllable is regarded and defined in terms of its structural and functional properties.

Conclusion: The syllable is a very important unit. Most people seem to believe that, even if they cannot define what a syllable is, they can count how many syllables there are in a given word or sentence, understanding the principles and patterns of syllable formation is essential in linguistics as it provides insight into the structure and function of language. Syllables serve as fundamental building blocks of words, influencing pronunciation, stress, and rhythm across languages. By studying syllable formation, researchers can better understand linguistic diversity and the rules that govern sound patterns in various languages. This knowledge contributes significantly to the fields of phonetics, phonology, and language teaching.

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