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Research Article

Phonology of English: Incisive Overview

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Abstract

This paper succinctly examines the phonology of English: by defining the term, exploring its theoretical concepts and examining the major concerns. Indeed, the sound system of a language is crucial in a linguistic study of the language; sounds constitute the framework for the construction of words linguistic stretches. To understand the phonology of English, phonemes have to be explained not just in terms of individual phonemes (vowels and consonants), but also in terms of prosodic features: stress, intonation and rhythm. A phoneme is the smallest sound unit in a language. Phonology relates to the study of phoneme at a level that is different from how sound segments are studied in phonetics. This study is therefore a synopsis of the phonology of English via an elucidation of the phonetics of the language. The study concludes that the phonology of English is essentially the systematic and functional perspectives of sound segments in the language, as in other human languages. In this regard, sounds of a language are structural units constructed through linguistic rules (principles).

Keywords: *phoneme, phonetics, phonemics, phonology, English, overview.*

1. Introduction

The sounds of a language are abstract representations. Thus, the meaning-driven rules that underpin the way they are combined for effective communication, from micro-structures to macro-structures, are worthy of scholarly attention; this study examines the phonology of English within these perspectives. In phonetics, acoustic properties (of sounds) are explained in isolation, whereas in phonology, the linguistic rules governing perceived sounds are explained at a cognitive level. Phonological theories are instructive in explaining the phonology of a language at the cognitive level which emphasizes the features that make phonemes pronounceable and intelligible. Richard Wiese (2006, p. 562) submits that "while the groundwork for phonology was laid in the analysis of many ancient and modern languages, around the beginning of the 2oth century the work by Ferdinand de Saussure (Saussure, 1916), Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (Baudouin de Courtenay, 1972), and Franz Boas (Boas, 1889) was crucial for the formulation of the phonemic analysis in a stricter sense. This was followed in the first half of the 20th century by several important formulations of phonological theory, notably by Edward Sapir (Sapir, 1921), Leonard Bloomfeild (Bloomfeild 1933), Roman Jakobson (Jakobson 1939) and Nikolay Trubetzkay (Trubetzkoy, 1967) ..." In the subsequent sections of this paper, insights from phonological theories are explored to present an overview of the phonology of English.

2. Speech Mechanism by the Human Organs of Speech

Knowledge of the mechanism for producing sounds of a language provides fundamentally tripartite knowledge of the sound system of language: points of articulation, manner of production and acoustic properties. The events in speech production are of three stages: the psychological, the physiological and the physical. The psychological stage involves the formation of a concept in the brain. The physiological stage involves the transmission of the concept to the organs of speech by the nervous system. At the physical stage, there is the creation of varying air pressure by the movements of the organs of speech. Any mechanism that produces sound must make use of a source of energy (the initiator) and a vibrating body (the phonation-producing body). Egressive or ingressive airstream is used for producing speech sounds. However,

English uses only egressive airstream for the process. The lungs are the basic sources of energy in speech production. The lungs expel air through the upper part of the body. The primary vibration (phonation) takes place in the larynx (voice box) through the vibration of the vocal cords inside the larynx. Above the larynx are three interconnected areas (pharynx, nasal cavity and mouth) which are collectively referred to as the "oral tract". These three cavities function as resonance chambers. They process primary vibration to generate secondary vibration quality (resonance). Discrete sounds are produced as the organs of speech process the airstream in the resonance chamber. There is a space between the vocal cords (the glottis). It is held together to produce the glottal stop. The glottis is held open as the pulmonic airstream is expelled with sufficient energy to produce voiceless sounds as in the production of voiceless consonants. Brought close together, the vocal cords vibrate due to pulmonic airstream pressure to produce voiced sounds. The air from the lungs first passes through the trachea (wind pipe), and then goes through the larynx where the vocal cords are located. The vocal cords are two folds of elastic tissues (ligaments) with the potency to expand and contract during speech production. There are different ways by which pulmonic airstream escapes from the pharynx for the production of unique sounds. For example, the soft palate may be lowered so that air escapes through the nose and no air passes out through the mouth because of complete obstruction at some points in the mouth. This occurs in the production of English nasal consonants; and the soft palate may be raised so that no air passes through the mouth as in the cases of all English sounds apart from the nasal consonants.

3. English Native Speakers' Varieties

There are different regional varieties of English spoken by native speakers:

i. Geographical Variety: It is a user-based variety (dialect).
ii. Functional Variety: It is based on "uses" (as in registers).
iii. Social Variety: This variety indexes the social status of its speakers, as in the dialects spoken by the working class, middle class and upper class native speakers in England.

Adekunbi Ofuya (1999, p. 13) reports that "the most widely spoken dialects of mother tongue English can be grouped into two kinds: RHOTIC and NON-RHOTIC according to whether the pre-consonantal and word final frictionless continuant /r/ in words such as port, tour and chair are pronounced or not..." In addition, Adeknbi Ofuya (ibid. p. 14) presents comprehensive vowel inventories of extreme rhotic Irish English and non-rhotic RP:

	Rhotic Irish	Non-Rhoti RP		Rhotic Irish	Non-Rhotic RP
free	/i:/	/i:/	saw/door/war	/ɔ:/Dr//ɔ:r/	/ɔ:/
big	/I/	/I/	Grew	/u:/	/u:/
bet	/ɛ/	/ɛ/	Book	/U/	/U/
pat	/æ/	/æ/	Hut	/ʌ/	/ʌ/
balm/arm	/a:r/	/a:/	Fire	/ɑIr/	/ɑIə/
cot	D	D	soda/water	/ə/ /ər/	/ə/
firm	/ʒ:/	/ʒ:/	Fair	/e:r/	/ɛə
ray	e:	/eI/	Tour	u:r	/Uə/
fry	/ɑI/	/ɑI/	Now	/ɑU/	/ɑU/
joy	/ɔI	/ɔI/	Go	/o:/	/əU/
fear	/i:r/	/Iə/,	flower	/əUr/	/auə/

Table 1: A Comparison of Rhotic Irish and Non-Rhotic RP Vowel Inventories

Commenting further on native speakers' variety (regional varieties) of English, Adekunbi Ofuya (ibid. p. 14) submits extensively:

> Rhotic English varieties include those spoken in South-Western England, Scotland, Ireland (all in Great Britain); Canada and most of the United States. Non-rhotic varieties are RP and the varieties of English spoken in most of England, Wales, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and variably in Southern United States and Eastern New England. This is the general picture but there are pockets of rhotic speakers in geographical areas that are generally non-rhotic.
>
> The contrasts between rhotic and non-rhotic varieties of English are much more complicated … There are also sharp internal differences between members of each group especially as far as total accent and phonemic distributions are concerned. Generally, however, the differences in their consonant inventories are not too significant. Where differences exist, they are usually of allophonic status such as we have in the phonological rule that changes /s, z, t, d/ to /ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ/ respectively before /j/ or the rule that changes /t/ intervocallically to /r/ in American English.

4. Phonology

To understand how sounds function in a language the rules that produce significant sounds (phonemes) have to be explained. Thus, while phonetics is concerned with the mechanics of sound production and transmission, phonology studies the systems for organizing and patterning sounds. In this sense, "phonetics" and "phonemics" fundamentally define the term "phonology". In phonemic analysis, the phonemes of a language are not only identified, but also, the phonemic inventory of the language is evolved. As a field of language study, phonology is the study of the sound properties of a language beyond segments. Generally, phonology is the study of:

i. how sound segments function in a particular language;
ii. the properties of phonemes;
iii. the systematic combination of phonemes in word formation; and
iv. the universal properties of sound segments in human languages;

In broad terms, phonology is classified into segmental and suprasegmental phonology. While segmental phonology is the study of discrete phonemes (vowels and consonants), suprasegmental phonology is the study of the prosodic (suprasegmental) features of sounds (stress, intonation, pitch and rhythm) which are produced across sound segments, syllables, words and linguistic stretches.

4.1 Segmental Phonology

In this section, tips are presented on vowels and consonants.

4.1.1 Vowel

According to Jones (2000, p. 549), "a vowel is the class of sound which makes the least obstruction to the flow of air." Vowels are situated within syllables. Richards and Schmidt (2010, p. 632) define a vowel as "a speech sound produced without significant constriction of the air flowing through the mouth." The absence of significant constriction of air flowing through the mouth is informed by the fact that the oral cavity is open during the production of vowels, thus preventing the tongue from having friction with certain articulators such as the lips, teeth and alveolar ridge. It is a process that builds air pressure above the glottis. A vowel is the peak (nucleus) of a syllable. In the description of vowels, emphasis is on: tongue height; level of "backness" within the oral cavity; and roundness of the lips. Vowels are generally voiced sounds involving the vibration of the vocal cords. They are grouped into monophthongs (pure vowels), diphthongs and triphthongs. Monophthongs and diphthongs are common in English, although there are triphthongs in the language.[3] In the literature of phonology, numbers are used to refer to them pure vowels and diphthongs:

1. /i:/
2. /I/
3. /e/
4. /æ/
5. /u:/
6. /D/
7. /Ɔ:/
8. /u/
9. /u:/
10. /ʌ/
11. /a:/
12. /ə/
13. /eI/
14. /əu/
15. /ƆI/
16. /Ɔu/
17. /ƆI/
18. /Iə/
19. /eə/
20. /uə/

The list below describes the articulation of discrete pure vowels and diphthongs:

/i:/ – close, front, spread lips

/I/ – front, not as close as /i:/, spread lips, short

/e/ – front, spread lips, short, between half-close and half open

/æ/ – front, spread lips, open mouth, between half open and open tongue

/a:/ back, open lips, long

/D/ – back, open, rounded lips, short

/Ɔ:/ – half close, back, rounded lips, long

/U/ – half close, back, rounded lips, short

/u:/ – close, back, rounded lips, long

/ʌ/ – neutral lips, rounded, short, tongue just below half-open

/ʒ:/ – neutral tongue poition, neutral lips, long

/ə/ – open, short, central (neutral), lax

4.1.2 Consonant

A consonant is a speech sound produced with friction (blockage of airstream) in different ways: complete friction; partial friction (as in lateral); or narrow opening of the mouth that enables airstream from the lungs to escape with friction that can be heard (as in the articulation of fricatives); friction of airstream in the mouth that results in the escape of air through the nose. Consonants are articulated with sound effect that is more felt than what occurs in the production of vowels. They are described in terms of manner of articulation and state of the glottis as generated by airstream pressure. The notion "manner of articulation" has to do with sound qualities produced discretely through the modification of airstream: nasal, stop, fricative, affricate, approximant, flap or trill. On the other hand, the notion "place of articulation" concerns points of the oral cavity where complete or partial friction occurs during the production of consonants: upper lips, teeth, palate, uvula, etc.

Consonants of English RP are described as follows:

/p/ – voiceless bilabial plosive**

/b/ – voiced bilabial plosive

/t/ – voiceless alveolar plosive

/d/ – voiced alveolar plosive

/k/ – voiceless velar plosive

/g/ – voiced velar plosive

/f/ – voiceless labiodental fricative

/v/ – voiced labiodental fricative

/θ/ – voiceless dental fricative

/ð/ – voiced dental fricative

/s/ – voiceless alveolar fricative

/z/ – voiced alveolar fricative

/ʃ/ – voiceless palate-alveolar fricative

/ʒ/ – voiced palato-alveolar fricative

/h/ – voiceless glottal fricative

/m/ – voiced bilabial nasal

/n/ – voiced alveolar nasal

/ŋ/ – voiced velar nasal

/ʧ/ – voiceless palato-alveolar affricate

/ʤ/ – voiced palato-alveolar affricate

/w/ – voiced bilabial semi-vowel

/j/ – voiced palatal semi-vowel

/r/ – voiced alveolar roll

/l/ – voiced alveolar lateral

4.2 Suprasegmental Phonology

In this section of the paper, core concepts in prosodic features are examined: syllable, stress, rhythm, tone and intonation.

4.2.1 Syllable

A syllable is any unit above the segment. It is fnctional: it conveys: suprasegmental features via phonetic properties; it anchors the arrangement of phonemes; and it functions as organized units of produced speech. The structures of a syllable are discrete: CV (a vowel preceded by a consonant); and CVC (a vowel flanked by a consonant). Syllable positions include: central position (occupied by the V element (peak/nucleus)); initial position (occupied by the C element (onset)); and the final position (occupied by the C element (coda)). The onset position is stronger than the coda. In speech production, syllables represent a reduction in loudness quality from onset to coda. The classification of words as monosyllabic, di-syllabic, tri-syllabic and poly-syllabic is based on the number of syllables in such words: monosyllabic words (big, now, good, come); di-syllabic words (rider, destroy, remove, flower); tri-syllabic words (another, interior, decorate, revival); and poly-syllabic words (invincibility, traditional, monopolistic). The elements in the structure of the English syllable are: (C^{0-3}) V (C^{0-4}). The onset is the initial element of the syllable, with one or more consonants: A one-consonant onset abounds in the underlined elements in: “kit”, “pill” and “tap” while a two-consonant onset is in the underlined elements in: “drag”, “clap” and “blew”. A three-consonant onset is in the underlined elements in: “string”, “stripe” and “script”. The peak (nucleus) consists of the vowel element (an obligatory element) as in the underlined elements in: “tap”, “meat” and “sick”. The coda is the end (final) element of a syllable. It has one or more consonants. A one-consonant coda is in the underlined elements in “look”, “van” and “cut”. There is a two-consonant coda in the underlined elements in: “bind”, “sold” and “risk”. A three-consonant coda abounds in the underlined elements in: “risked” and “lends”. A four-consonant coda is in the underlined elements in: “sculpts” and “lengths”. Scholars hold the view that there cannot be more than four-consonant coda in English.

4.2.2 Stress

Stress is generally used to denote the total perceived pitch, loudness and length when an utterance is uttered. It is a language-specific phenomenon. In English, stressed vowels produce higher pitches, and this implies that they are longer and louder than vowels that are not stressed. However, this is not always the case. In English RP (Received Pronunciation), stressing a syllable implies the use of more energy. As a prosodic feature, stress concerns the degree of force used for uttering a syllable in a word. Jones (1972) posits that stress is “the degree of force with which a speaker pronounces a word or a syllable.” The increase in pitches when stressed syllables are uttered is the product of additional muscular energy (by speakers). The vocal cords in the glottis produce intense vibration in the production of stressed syllables, and in this process, the air pressure in the larynx is much. The English syllable receives different degrees of prominence. Stress is the degree of prominence with which a syllable is uttered; it concerns the syllable rather than segmental phonemes. English words have fixed stress patterns. Types of stress are as follows:

a) Primary stress: It is signified with a superscript as in “ˡrocky”;
b) Secondary stress: It is marked with a subscript as in “ˌcruciˡfixion”; and
c) Weak stress: It is unmarked in most pronunciation dictionaries.

The following tips are useful for placing stress on English words:

a) Every English word has its fixed stress pattern;

b) The stress patterns of grammatical words are such that primary stress is absent in connected speech[4]. However, this is not applicable to cases where stress is placed on them for the purpose of contrast;
c) Prominent syllables do not appear in immediate succession as in the words "ˌoppor'tunity" and "conˌside'ration";
d) In some di-syllabic words, two syllables receive primary stress as in "'blue'print", "'out'grow", "'Ju'ly" and "'cri'sis". But one can be replaced by a secondary stress;
e) Based on the notion of "fixed stress pattern", a di-syllabic English word may have primary stress either on the first syllable or on the second.
f) For the purpose of changing the word class (part of speech) of a word, there can be stress shifting.

4.2.3 Tone and Intonation

Binkert (1999, p. 188) defines tone as "a pitch or change in pitch in a syllable of a word that is associated with a difference in meaning. Tone contours in linguistic stretches are noticeable. A contour (tone unit) is a sequence of tones. In tone languages such as English, tone is used to convey meanings. In words, morphemes (prefixes, suffixes and roots) carry different tones. Just like phonemes have their phonetic properties altered by neighbouring sounds, tone receive the influences of nearby sounds. As concepts in phonology, tone and intonation are functionally inseparable. There are different types of intonations in tone languages. A tone is not an absolute speech; it is relative. In connected speech, a tone is either "high" or "low" in relation to nearby pitches.

Intonation refers to the rising and falling of voice pitches during speech production. Types of intonation include: tune I (falling tune) represented by the symbol \; and tune II (rising tune) represented by the symbol /. The falling tune may be high-falling or low-falling while the rising tune may be full-rising or half-rising. The differences are represented with reduced length of the symbols. Pitch contours are numerously noticeable, although the two basic tunes (Tune I and Tune II) are satisfactory in the analysis of most spoken communication. Tunes can be in other forms: fall-rise, rise-fall, and level tune. Indeed, tunes capture the communicative function of a sentence: statement, question, command and request. Terminal intonation contour is used (at the end of a statement) to indicate completeness, while non-terminal intonation contour is used to indicate incompleteness. Scholars posit that wh- initiated sentences have in-built potential to elicit responses (answers) because the addressees understand that the sentences do not have rising intonation as in:

a) What is your name?
b) Who took it?
c) When will the examinations begin?
d) How many mangoes fell down from the tree?

The functions of intonation in human communication make it a front-burner topic in the suprasegmental phonology of English. For example, rising intonation conveys politeness as in:

a) Please sit here.
b) Kindly relax in my office.

In the above sentences, the speaker is not commanding the addressee. The commanding tone of the utterances is removed by the rising tune. Below are some rules for using intonation on linguistic stretches:

a) The falling tune (tune I) appears at the end of exclamations, although it may be used with some degree of length;
b) The falling tune (tune I) ends commands and requests;
c) The rising tune (tune II) is used to indicate pauses in sentences as in the positions of the comma in written texts;
d) A statement ends with a falling tune (tune I);
e) A question ends with a rising tune (tune II);
f) The rising tune (tune II) is used in question tags; and
g) The rising tune (tune II) is used for listing items in linguistic stretches.

In phonology, the falling and rising tunes reveal that intonation is essentially variation of pitches in connected speech. This view corroborates Roach (2000) who opines that intonation is "the variation in the pitch of a speaker's voice used to convey or alter meaning."

6. Theoretical Concepts and Approaches in Phonology

This section of the paper examines theoretical concepts and approaches in phonology: assimilation, dissimilation, deletion, Interlanguage Theory, coarticulation, processes, morphophonemics, interference/intraference, contextual elision and phonological sensitivity skills.

5.1 Assimilation

Assimilation is a cover-term for different articulatory processes. It concerns the effect of one phoneme on another in terms of how sounds in close environment become similar in phonetic properties. For example, a vowel is nasalized before a vowel sound because the velum is lowered in advance for the production of a nasal sound as in "can't" /kænt/.

This is an example of regressive assimilation in which the nasalization moves backwards into a preceding segment. There are discrete types of assimilation: voicing/devoicing, assimilation based on place of articulation and flapping.

In voicing assimilation, voiceless liquids and glides appear after voiceless stops as in "please" /pli:z/ and "proud" /praud/. These sounds are devoiced in this environment. Given the fact that the vocal cords (vocal folds) are not immediately set in motion after the release of the voiceless consonant closure, devoicing is a form of assimilation.

In the examples below, a nasal consonant with same point of articulation as the stop consonant that follows it (bilabial in the case of "possible"/"impossible", /"potent"/"impotent", "permeable"/"impermeable"; alveolar in the case of "tolerable"/ "intolerable","tangible"/"intangible", "transitive"/"intransitive"). This is assimilation based on "place of articulation":

possible	impossible
permeable	impermeable
potent	impotent
tolerable	intolerable
transitive	intransitive
tangible	intangible

In flapping, the articulation of a dental or alveolar stop change to a flap /r/ articulation. In English, it occurs in the production of /t/ and /d/ between vowels, the first of which is generally stressed. Flaps abound in the production of words such as "spinster", "matter", "butter", "writer" and "winter". There are also sentential examples as in "I got it" /ɑIgDrIt/. Flapping changes a non-continuant segment (stop) to a continual segment; flaps are continuants in the phonetic environments of other continuants (vowels).

5.2 Dissimilation

A speech production process that results in two sounds becoming less similar is referred to as dissimilation. Dissimilation can occur in words ending with three consecutive fricatives. For example, when pronouncing the word "faiths", the final /fθs/ sequence is often dissimilated. Consequently, what is pronounced is /fts/; that is, breaking the fricative sequence with a stop.

5.3 Deletion

In natural speech production, a sound segment is sometimes removed from certain phonetic position, especially in rapid speech. For example, a schwa /ə/ is often deleted when the next vowel in the word is stressed as in:

Slow Speech	**Rapid Speech**
"parade" /pəreId/	/preId/
"suppose" /səpəuz/	/spəuz/

5.4 Interlanguage Theory (IT)

The Interlanguage Theory (IT) contends that psychological endowment informs the production of sounds that even native speakers cannot account for, as a result of the abstraction involved; the idea of abstraction is true, considering the fact that the prosodic features of sound inevitably involve the production of infinite discrete sounds in natural human communication, as a proof of the innate biological potentials of the human brain.

5.5 Coarticulation

In coarticulation, contiguous sounds are captured together in the articulatory process, towards effective and intelligible pronunciation of mono-syllabic, di-syllabic, tri-syllabic and poly-syllabic words. The articulators (e.g. the vocal cords) have inbuilt potential to facilitate coarticulation. Speech production reveals unacceptable and strange acoustic properties if certain segments are not coarticulated, especially in rapid speech. In this regard, Michael Dobrovolsky's (2004) submission is instructive:

> Due to the rapidity of speech (we can produce many segments in a second) and the design of the vocal tract, if our goal is to produce a [pl] sequence, we cannot make the [p] and then make the [l]. Indeed, early speech synthesizers that produce speech this way were practically unintelligible. Rather as the sequence [pl] is produced, the tongue tip will start to move toward the alveolar ridge before the lips separate. The term coarticulation is used for situations such as this in which more than one articulator (here the lips and the tongue tip) is active …"

5.6 Processes

The term "processes" refers to an articulatory process that has to do with facilitating speech production via the combination of segments, and changing the phonetic properties of subsumed segments. However, not all phoneticians believe that "processes" facilitates articulation[1]. According to Michael Dobrovolsky, "articulatory adjustments that occur during the production of connected speech are called processes. Processes change the nature of the individual segments. Their cumulative effect often results in making words easier to articulate, and in this sense, they are said to make speech more efficient. For example, when speakers of English nasalize the vowel of book, they do not delay lowering the velum until the exact moment the nasal consonant articulation is reached. Instead, most English speakers begin lowering the velum for a nasal consonant almost as soon as they articulate the vowel that precedes it.

In a parallel manner, when speakers pronounce [k] as more palatal in a word such as key, they are speaking more efficiently from the point of view of articulation since they are making a less drastic adjustment in moving from articulation of a more palatal [k] to that of high front vowel than they would make in moving from a velar [k] to a high front vowel …"

5.7 Morphophonemics

In natural languages, sound segments are affected by word formation patterns (morphology). The phonetic qualities or features of sound segments are invariably determined by the structure of words that accommodate such segments. This phenomenon is referred to as "morpophonemics". William O' Grady and Videa de Guzman (2004) submit that "… an /æ/ that occurs in front of a nasal consonant will be nasalized (e.g., [kænt] 'can't' vs. [kæt] 'cat'), an /æ/ that occurs before a voiceless consonant (e.g., [hæ:d] 'had' vs. 'hat'), and so on. Pronunciation can also be sensitive to morphological factors including words' internal structure. The study of this phenomenon is known as morphophonemics … Morphophonemic phenomena are extremely common in language. A famous example from English involves the way that we pronounce the plural suffix -s …"

5.8 Interference and Intraference

The influence of mother tongue (MT) in the learning of a foreign language or second language is arguably obvious. This is informed by differences between the internal systems of mother tongue and that of an alien language. Subsequently, speakers transfer linguistic features of mother tongue (MT) into a second language. This situation is common in English as a Second Language (ESL) context. Unlike interference, intraference is not an inter-language phenomenon. It is an intralanguage phenomenon (that occurs within a particular language). Omowumi Bode Steve Ekundayo (2018) presents extensive perspectives on interference and intraference:

> interference is associated with the concepts of Contrastive Analysis and Language Transfer which are based on the assumptions that second language learners have the tendency of transferring the features of their native and/or first language to their second language utterances (James, 1980, p. 14). Another term for interference is negative transfer, which manifests at all the levels of linguistic organization. The most common in ESL are the phonological types in which the normative speakers impose the fossilized phonological system of their native languages on their second language, at the segmental and suprasegmental levels, which make non-native Nigerian English assent sounds different from native English accents, such as the Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American English (GAmE)…
>
> The application of the word intraference may be traced several independent outstanding works separated by time and long distances … Croft (2000) says that "different elements of the same language can interfere with each other if they share enough linguistic substance", and the intraference occurs when language items are affected by different dialects, sociolinguistic variants or other structures of the same language (pp. 111-165). According to Ekundayo (2000), intraference is "the habit of transferring the rules and dynamics of a language from a section where they have been established and where they acceptably operate to another section within the language where they hitherto used not to operate. Since such a transfer is within the language, it is better tagged intraference, which is the reverse of interference" … the interplay of cognitive sociolinguistic and linguistic dynamics makes a language user produce intraference features. When a new idea or experience confronts language users, they fall back on the dynamics, loopholes and rules of the language (re)deploy them to convey the new experience or idea. This effort may generate a new linguistic structure, or an existing term may be expanded to accommodate an additional meaning for the new experience (pp. 16-20). Intraference features emanate from the reassignment and redeployment of the items of a language that normative speakers/writers have in their competences to hitherto new areas and contexts. The linguistic factor generates the five major types of intraference: phonological, morpho-syntactic and lexico-semantic with many subdivisions…

5.9 Contextual Elision

As the name implies, contextual elision has to do with context-sensitive omission of phonemes in speed-driven speech production. As part of the natural mechanism of speaking, enabled by the inbuilt biological potentials of the human organs of speech, certain sounds are dropped as others are captured in spoken communicative situations, irrespective of the linguistic code (language) being used for the spoken communication. Taiwo Soneye (2018) avers that "… contextual elision deals with a sound that exists in a word said in isolation but it is dropped when preceding another word. It is, according to Li-hua (2013: 728), formed in "continuous spoken chains according to adjacent phonemes as well as speed time and volume of the speech". Contextual elision is therefore speed dependent. This obscuration of sounds is a feature of words or word boundaries in phrases. Obscuration in the context of this paper refers to the concealment of sounds in certain environments in the production of utterances. This non-realization of sounds in connected speeches is a consequence of the modifications that occur in the form of words as they undergo reduced articulations …"

5.10 Phonological Sensitivity Skills

As part of linguistic competence, speakers can explore individualistic awareness and mastery of the morphophonemics of sounds and transfer such mastery or knowledge to practical situations of language use (spoken communication). Sounds are not arbitrarily constituents of words; the combination of the former and the latter is essentially part of the internal system of a language. Consciousness of the constituent structures of words in terms of phonetic properties is instrumental in individualistic demonstration of phonological sensitivity skills. Taiwo Soneye (ibid.) reports that Stanovich (1986: 362) succinctly defines phonological sensitivity skills as "conscious access to the phonemic level of the speech stream and the ability to cognitively manipulate representations of this level." Phonemic awareness/sensitivity according to Ball and Blachman (1991) is the ability to recognize that a spoken word consists of a sequence of individual sounds.[2] Commenting further on Phonological Sensitivity Skills, Taiwo Soneye cites Stanovich (1992, 1993) who "describes the term 'awareness' as a generic term to encompass a continuum from shallow to deep to deep sensitivity while Read (1991) sees it as having access to phonological structure. The main thrust of this theory is that it is concerned with the structure of words rather than their sense …"

6. Conclusion

This study examines the phonology of English, paying attention to the basic components: segmental and suprasegmental dimensions of spoken English. A systematic study of sound patterns, phonology is crucial is crucial in the analysis of natural languages. The sound patterns that generate words are functionally and organized; as a matter of linguistic rules, wrong combination of sounds does not communicate meaning in words and stretches. Thus, sounds are abstract entities. Given the fact that there are regional varieties of English spoken by the natives, this study is restricted to the phonology of English RP (Received Pronunciation); the segmental phonemes presented in the study are therefore conventional representations of vowels and consonants in the English lexicon[5] This study is immersed in phonemics, as it captures not just sound segments, but also the rules that underpin their combination, thus revealing their communicative functionality.

Notes

[1.] See Michael Dobrovolsky (ibid. p. 39) for examples of this submission. The author also states two basic reasons "for the existence of articulatory processes. Some processes result in a more efficient articulation of a series of sounds in that the precise timing and coordination of speech is relaxed to various degrees. Other processes result in a more distinct output, which is easier to perceive than fluent and rapid everyday speech. Although these two types of processes might at first appear to be contradictory, each serves a particular end in speech production."

[2.] According to the author, "this stream of sounds in the English language and its varieties follow certain phonological rules which speakers either acquire unconsciously in case of NSE or learnt consciously in case of ESL."

[3.] Examples of triphthongs include:

/eIə/ as in: "spontaneity" /spDntəneIti/

/aI^/ as in "triumph" /trƆI^mf/

/əuI/ as in "microelectronics" /mƆIkrəuIlektrDnIks/.

[4.] While "grammatical words" are form/structure words such as pronouns, auxiliary verbs, prepositions and articles. "Content words" are lexical word such as nouns, lexical verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

[5.] However, some of the phonemes presented in this study are not the exact ones preferred; but they will suffice for an integrative overview of the phonology of English.

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