University of Tikrit

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Subject: Phonetics

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Syllables and Feet

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It’s a lot easier to count syllables than to give them a satisfactory definition. If the entire class were to count the syllables in this paragraph, there would be considerable agreement about the number, but probably not about where each syllable begins and ends.

The fact that syllabic writing systems developed before alphabetic systems suggests that syllables are very salient linguistic units. That children seem to be able to associate symbols with syllables before they can associate symbols Delahunty and Garvey 106 with phonetic segments also points to the importance of the syllable. Every syllable (symbolized as $) consists of at least a nucleus (symbolized as N), which is typically a vowel.
The nucleus may be preceded by an onset (symbolized as O), consisting of one or more consonants, and followed by a coda (symbolized as C), again consisting of one or more consonants. The nucleus and the coda together make up a unit called the rhyme (R).
Because vowels are high in sonority, a syllable nucleus is usually a vowel.
However, a consonant with high sonority, such as [l,r,m,n,N] may also be a nucleus. The sonority level of a syllable thus rises from the onset (if there is one) up to a peak in the nucleus and falls off again in the coda. In this respect, the onset and coda are (almost) mirror images of each other.
Parts of syllables may be repeated for poetic effects.
Of these repetitions, rhyme is the most important: it involves repeating the rhyme of syllables, usually at the ends of lines, as the rhyming words in the following stanza show: (4) Piping down the valleys wild, Piping songs of pleasant glee, On a cloud I saw a child, And he laughing said to me: (William Blake, Introduction to Songs of Innocence) The syllable onsets,

[w] of wild, [tS] of child, [gl] of glee, and [m] of me are not part of Blake's rhymes. Repeating onsets, or first sounds in onsets, as in then and there, creates alliteration. Repeating nuclei, as in Mikey likes it, or the incredible edible egg creates assonance. In speech, syllables are combined into rhythmic units called feet, which are also of considerable importance in scanning lines of poetry.

Each foot consists of at least one stressed syllable (its energy peak) and one or two 107 Phonetics and Phonology unstressed syllables. Feet are differentiated from each other by the number of stressed syllables they contain and by the position of the stressed (S) syllable(s) relative to other syllables in the foot. In (5), S represents a stressed syllable and U an unstressed one; the stressed syllable of each example word is bolded. (5) Iambic: [U S] today Trochaic: [S U] trochee Anapestic: [U U S] intervene Dactylic: [S U U] personal Spondaic: [S S] good news In English, stressed syllables tend to be approximately equally far apart in time; as a result unstressed syllables may be articulated slower or faster, depending on the type of foot. (See Beers (2003: 339) Appendix I: the 175 most common syllables (as ordinarily spelled) in the 5,000 most frequently occurring English words.)

Articulatory Phonetics

• Most speech sounds are produced by pushing air through the vocal cords

– Glottis = the opening between the vocal cords

– Larynx = ‘voice box’

– Pharynx = tubular part of the throat above the larynx – Oral cavity = mouth

– Nasal cavity = nose and the passages connecting it to the throat and sinuses

Consonants: Place of Articulation

• Consonants are sounds produced with some restriction or closure in the vocal tract

• Consonants are classified based in part on where in the vocal tract the airflow is being restricted (the place of articulation)

• The major places of articulation are: bilabial, labiodental, interdental, alveolar, palatal, velar, uvular, and glottal

Consonants: Place of Articulation

• Bilabials: [p] [b] [m] – Produced by bringing both lips together

• Labiodentals: [f] [v] – Produced by touching the bo=om lip to the upper teeth

• Interdentals [θ] [ð] – Produced by pu@ng the 0p of the tongue between the teeth.
• Alveolars: [t] [d] [n] [s] [z] [l] [r] – All of these are produced by raising the tongue to the alveolar ridge in some way
• [t, d, n]: produced by the tip of the tongue touching the alveolar ridge (or just in front of it)
• [s, z]: produced with the sides of the front of the tongue raised but the tip lowered to allow air to escape
• [l]: the tongue tip is raised while the rest of the tongue remains down so air can escape over the sides of the tongue (thus [l] is a lateral sound)
• [r]: air escapes through the central part of the mouth; either the tip of the tongue is curled back behind the alveolar ridge or the top of the tongue is bunched up behind the alveolar ridge
Palatals: [ʃ] [ʒ] [ʧ] [ʤ][j] – Produced by raising the front part of the tongue to the palate
• Velars: [k] [g] [ŋ] – Produced by raising the back of the tongue to the soI palate or velum
• Uvulars: [ʀ] [q] [ɢ] – Produced by raising the back of the tongue to the uvula
• Glo5als: [h] [ʔ] – Produced by restric0ng the airflow through the open glo@s ([h]) or by stopping the air completely at the glo@s (a glo5al stop: [ʔ])