

The Role of Graphophonemic Awareness in Learning English Language

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ABSTRACT

The study intends to show the relationship between letters and sounds of English language. It primarily **Relationship between written and spoken English language**. It equally gives light on grapheme which is the minimal contrastive unit in the writing system of a language and is enclosed in angle bracket e.g [A]. Phoneme which is said to be the minimal sound unit of the sound system of a language which make contrast in meaning. Diagraph which is said to be a multi letter spelling {usually two or more letters} for a single phoneme e.g /ai/. The study also thrown some light on other important terms that are discussed in the paper e.g alphabetic principle, phonic, diagraph etc. Also some of the discrepancies existing between sounds and letters of English language are expressed in various ways. It further observe these discrepancies in other several languages in the world e.g Chinese, French, German etc. Finally, the ways on how to count phonemes in English Language are highlighted to both the teachers and students.

KEYWORDS: Morphophonemic, Grapheme, Diagraph, Phonic, Language

I. INTRODUCTION

Written words are composed of pattern of letters that represent the sounds of spoken words. Each letter has a specific sound. Graph phoneme deals with how letters and sounds are related to written letters and sounds. Just as like definition of life does not prevent Biologist from studying living things. Problem with regard to the inadequacy of orthography in its ability to represent the spoken language will not prevent us from studying graph phoneme. I shall argue that many issues like diagraph, graphemes, phonemic relation etc can be reviewed and such results constitute concrete progress toward the understanding of the relationship between grapheme and phoneme.

GRAPHHEME

The minimal contrastive unit in the writing system of a language, usually enclosed in slashes and is realised as several allographs e.g /a//b//c/ etc which may be seen as units in COMPLEMENTARY DISTRIBUTION [e.g upper case restricted to sentence initial position, proper nouns etc] or in free variation [as in some styles of handwriting] as phonemic analysis. Thus, grapheme is a written representation of phoneme that is a letter or group of letters representing a sound [David 2008]

PHONEMES

When we speak, we produce a continuous stream of sounds. In studying speech, we divided this stream in to small pieces that we call segment. The word 'man' is pronounced with a Segment 'm', a second segment 'a' and the third segment 'n'. Phoneme is the minimal unit of sound system of a language which make contrast in meaning. The notion of phoneme allowed linguists to group together sets of phonetically similar phones as variants or member of the same underlying unit. The phones were said to be REALISATION of the phonemes and the variants were referred to allophones.

DIAGRAPH

Is a multi-letters spelling [usually two [2] for single phoneme, as in [ng], [tch], [ow] etc.

ALPHABETIC PRINCIPLE

In alphabetic language, the alphabetic principle is the idea that there are consistent relationship between sounds and letters. Understanding the alphabetic principle means appreciating that each sound or phoneme in one's language is written with letter or set of letters. For example, the word 'bay' consist of two graphemes 'b' for the first phoneme and 'ay' for second phoneme. Ball, consist of three 'b' for the first phoneme, 'a' for second and 'l' for the third phoneme

GRAPH PHONEME

The relationship between letters and phonemes. The primary concern of it, is the

relationship between oral and written language. For example, both 'though' and 'choose' have six graphemes but only three sounds. 'Awesome' has seven graphemes and four sounds, while 'knowledge' has nine graphemes and five sounds. This list of non-matches can easily be extended to thousands of other words. These violations, which may be due to silent letters, are not only a problem with respect to the inadequacy of orthography in its ability to represent the spoken language but also a problem that exists even if the number of letters and sounds match. We can outline the discrepancies that exist between the spelling and sounds in the following:

[a] The same sounds are represented by different letters, e.g. /i:/ as in each, bleed, either, achieve, scene, etc. We have the same consonant sound represented by different letters, e.g. /ʃ/ as in shop, ocean, machine, sure, conscience, mission, national etc

[b] The same letters may represent different sounds. The letter 'a' in words such as gate, any, father, above, tall, stands for different sounds. To give an example of a consonantal letter for the same phoneme, we can look at the letter /s/ which stands for different sounds in each of the following: sugar, vision, sale, resume etc

[c] One sound is represented by a combination of letters here are examples: 'think,' rough, 'attempt,' pharmacy etc.

[d] A single letter may represent more than one sound. This can be seen in the /x/ of exist, the /u/ of union and the /h/ of human etc.

One or more of the above conditions are responsible for the discrepancies between spelling and sounds, and may result in multiple homophones such as rite, right, write and wright etc.

The lack of the consistent relationship between letters and sounds is quite expected if we consider that the alphabets English uses try to cope with the forty-four sounds with its limited twenty-six letters. Since letters can only tell about spelling and cannot be used as reliable tools for pronunciation. There are other reasons for these inconsistencies in English, such as the necessity of naming things [expressive reason], the contact among people [communicative reason], the sociolinguistic reason and so on and so forth.

DIFFERENCES AMONG LANGUAGES

English is an alphabetic language, because each sound or phoneme in the language is written with a letter or letters. For example, the /t/ sound is represented in written English by the letter 't'. In contrast, a single Chinese character stands for an

entire morpheme or word. In Chinese, a word such as 'talk' is represented by one or two characters, and none of the characters contains a part that corresponds to the /t/ sound or any other specific sound in the world

Languages such as French, German and Spanish use the same alphabet as English but make regular use of "diacritic marks" to guide pronunciation. Diacritic marks that are common in Spanish are the 'cedilla' beneath the letter 'c' to indicate the /s/ sound [as in curacao], and the 'tilde' above the letter 'n' to indicate the /ny/ sound as in manana

Other alphabetic languages, such as Russian, Greek and Hausa contain some letters that are similar to or the same as our own, as well as many letters that are different. In short, there are many systems for representing sounds with letters or phonemes. But among alphabetic languages, English is one of the most phonetically irregular. The /s/ sound, for example, can be represented by the letter 's', 'sc' or 'ss', as in the words 'soft', 'science', 'ice' and 'mossy'. Adding to the irregularity is the fact that these letters do not only convey the /s/ sound;

1. An 's' is sometimes pronounced /z/, as in the word 'busy'
2. A 'sc' is sometimes pronounced /c/, as in the word 'fascism'
3. 'c' is sometimes pronounced as /s/ as in the word 'appreciate'
4. An 'ss' is sometimes pronounced as /sh/ as in the word 'passion'

Notice that the sound /sh/ can be represented by 'sh', 'c', 'sc', 'ss', 'ch' or 'ti' [as in motion].

These are just a few of the many examples of phonetic irregularities in English. These irregularities occur not only across the words but also within them. In the word 'discussion', for example, there are three different pronunciations of this. From these examples, it should be understood why mastering graph-phonemic application can be difficult

HOW TO COUNT PHONEMES IN SPOKEN WORDS

In talking about phonemes as distinct from letters, we symbolize them with Roman letters inside slash marks, for example /t/. Since diacritic marks are hard to type, I try to use the most common spelling of the phoneme as a symbol, for example /ch/ for the first sound in chair. For the short vowel I use lower case letters [e.g. /a/ as in hat] and for the long vowels I use upper case letters

[e.g /A/ as in rain]. Letters are italicized without slash marks around them.

Many strategies can be used to promote student's understanding to the relationship between sounds and letters. People should not be confused with 'phonics' which refers to a method of teaching letter-sound-correspondence. We are going to convey phonological awareness to understand how better graph phonemic knowledge can be acquired.

Oral languages is acquired naturally, in the sense that even if adult did not make deliberate attempts at the foundation, children would gradually learn how to comprehend and produce speech. In contrast, other knowledge about writing would probably not be acquired unless some instruction were given, [Mann2003]. I believe if we can :

1. Identify medial long vowels in spoken sound words
2. March sounds within words families such as /wh/ in 'whale' and /ing/ in 'king'
3. Identify consonant diagraphs such as /sh/, /ch/, in 'ash' and 'chalk'
4. Blend phonemes such as /sh/, /oo/ to 'make 'shoe' etc we may not no doubt be able to count phonemes in spoken words.'

Here is a challenge what words could we use for these phonemes;/a/, /k/, /s/, and /t/. Note that you don't have to use the letters a, k, s and t. For example, the word asked is made from these phonemes[/a/s/k/t/].However counting phonemes is surprisingly hard in English because there is rarely a neat one-to- one march between phonemes and letters.

Also, phonemes are pronounced with amazing speed, enabling us to communicate our thoughts rapidly. How fast can you say, 'He stuck in his thumb and pulled out a plum'. That takes me about three minutes to say it normally. Again, that sentence contains twenty eight phonemes. This mean I am saying over nine phonemes every seconds. Let us try a couple of words for a starter. How many phonemes has the word 'rich' and 'pitch'.

The word 'rich' has three phonemes, even though it has four letters. The combination /ch/ stands for the mouth move at the beginning of the word chop. But the word pitch also has three phonemes, you can tell because it rhymes with rich. Do not be fooled by the /tch/ spelling, which represents /ch/ after short vowel/i/. Moreover. Two kinds of spellings get teachers messed up, diagraphs and clusters.

DIAGRAPH

A diagraph is a multi-letter spelling [usually two or more] for single phoneme. Diagraph can be consonants like /ck, /ll/, /,ng/ /tch/ etc or vowels like /ee/, /ew/, /igh/, /ow/ etc. In either way, the combination stands for one mouth move.

The diagraph /ng/ can fool some people. The /ng/ combination directs you to move the back of your tongue against the roof of your mouth to block the air , as you make a sound in your throat, the air comes out of your nose in a kind of humming. Try it, you will find it is distinctly different from /n/ made with the front of your tongue and /g/ which is an explosive sound rather than a humming.The diagraph /ow/ can also be a fooled. It can be pronounced /o/ or /ou/ and in both cases our mouths travel as we say it, our lips move toward a kissing shape which is the starting position for the phoneme /w/. But /w/ is only found at the beginning of syllables. Thus, whether /ow/ represent/o/ o or, /ou/, it stands for a single phoneme.

CLUSTER CONSONANTS

The cluster consonants like /dr/, /pl/, /st/, /spl/, /nk/ etc are combination of single consonant pronounced in a rapid sequence. Each consonant retains its distinctive mouth move, but sometimes individual phoneme are blurred a bit to make a smooth sequence. For example the /d/ and /r/ at the beginning of drive, when clustered gear toward /gr, which is how sometimes appear in children's spellings.

In counting consonant clusters, you must breakthe cluster in to separate phonemes to get an accurate count. A common problem in counting phonemes is failing to split cluster in to separate phonemes, thus getting an undercount

The trickiest seems to be those involving the phonemes /r/ and /l/ which are common in many consonant clusters. Note the tongue and lip position for /l/ behind the upper front teeth. A good strategy in distinguishing a diagraph from a cluster is to stretch it. No matter how slowly you say a digraph, it is still one mouth move. But by stretching a cluster, you should be able to identify its individual mouth and count each one.

Let us examine the word stretch. If you elongate the beginning of this word, you would find three separate phonemes, /s/, /t/ and /r/. If you can recognise diagraphs and clusters, you will be able to count phonemes successfully, Before I go further, I am going to introduce a useful terms:

Grapheme; A grapheme could be either a single letter or diagraph. It is a letter or letter

combination that represents a single phoneme within a word. A grapheme is the spelling of a phoneme.[Mann,2003]. Digraph are graphemes spelled with more than one letter, usually two. We need many diagraph because English has more phonemes [44 than letters which are 26].

Our most popular consonants digraphs in English involve the letter /h/,/ph/, /sh/and /th/. Other diagraphs have silent letters, for example, /kn/, /wr/ and /ck/. Let me remind you once again about the trickiest of diagraph /ng/ say sing. Say last phoneme in sing. Feel where your tongue is. That is /ng/ mouth move. We spell same phoneme with the grapheme /ng/ in words like think, king, think etc.

Most vowel combination are diagraphs. All the long vowels commonly use diagraph spellings in one –syllable words, e.g brain, speak, speed, fight etc.

I am going to count phonemes in some words for you, explaining my thinking. I will startwith chop. Stretching it out, I find /ch/, /o/ and /p/. Thee phonemes. The /ch/ is a digraph. Let me try the word shy which has two phonemes, /sh/ which is diagraph and /ai/ which is another diagraph. Again, let us look at the word throat. The /th/ is a diagraph. , it count as one. Also, /oa/ is a vowel diagraph. Stretching throat, I find, /th/, /r/,/o/, /t/, four phonemes. Cluster are blend together either 2 or 3 phonemes [Mann,2003]

Here are helpful rule for counting the phonemes in clusters: if you can break ‘ em up” . You can’t break diagraph like /sh/ because they represent one single mouth move. But slow it down all and your mouth is still just doing one thing. But slow a cluster and you will find a succession of mouth moves.

Many clusters involve /l/ [bl, cl, fl,] /r/ [fr, gr, pr] /s/ [sp, st, sw]. Some people say the phoneme /l/ sound like a flying saucer;/lll/. Others compare its sound to a blender;/lll/. Stretch these words and listen forf/l/ in flop, splash etc as you say these words slowly, you should hear that blender at work. Let me count a couple of words with /l/ clusters for you. Flop is first, stretch it out, ffflllo-o-p. Hear the blender, my mouth is making four moves; /f/l/o/p/, would not it be nice if every word with four letters had four phonemes.

Let’s try splash. It starts with three consonants clustered together; /s/p//l/. Then comes the vowel /a/ and a final phoneme /sh/, spelled with a diagraph. Count as s/p/l/a/sh- five phonemes.The phoneme /r/ sound like a chain saw, /rrr/. Other say it sounds like a growling dog, /rrr/. Say these words and listen for /r/; bring, grape, treat etc . You have to growl a little as you say each word. I’ll count a

couple of words with /r/ clusters for. Stretch out the word;‘bring’, /b/r/i/ng/. I detect /b/ / /r/ /i//ng/ four phonemes. Don’t be fooled by that tricky /ng/ which is diagraph.

One other common phoneme in /s/, an easy one to spot because it makes a distinct sound like air leaking out of a flat tire. I will count the phonemes in the word slow. Stretching it, /sssllllloooo/. Easy, /s/, /l/ and/o/ three phonemes. Here is a hard one, sprout. Stretching it, we have /sssprr/, three phonemes so far. If you can break up, what remains is /ou/ /t/, two more phonemes and these give five phonemes all together.

MORE HELP ON LEARNING HOW TO COUNT PHONEMES WORDS

I want you to make a chart of the phonemes you can think of. I want you to copy or print out the phoneme map below and fill in all the phonemes you can think of. I’ve started out with some examples;

Mapping the forty four English[phonemes] letters

CONSONANTS				VOWELS		
Stop		continnants		long/short/others		
Voiced; /unvoiced;		voiced; unvoiced				
/b/	/k/	/l/	/f/	/A/	/a/	/oo/
/H	/H	/H	/H	/H	/H	/H

Consonants always involve some friction. You can stretch continuants like /f/ and hold them until you run out of air. In contrast, stop like /t/ are made by blocking off air and then releasing it with a mini explosion.

With voiced phonemes like /l/, you make sound with your vocal cord. With unvoiced phonemes like /k/, you don’t use your vocal cords. Fricative are continuants like /s/ that leak air. Nasals are continuants like /m/ where the air comes out in your nose

Vowels are really different mouth shapes we make as we vocalise. Long vowels are the sounds of letter names like /A/. Short vowels can be spelled with one letter. The short vowels are found at the beginning of each word in this sentence; Ask Eddy if Ada is up?. They are difficult to recognise because they are defined by relatively slight differences in the shape of the mouth. Other vowels like /oi/ are neither long not short. Most of them are diphthongs, meaning that your mouth changes shape as you are saying them [see Gimson,[1980].

II. CONCLUSION

The act of spelling involves reproducing the correct sequence of letters for a particular word. Written English is partly phonetic and partly morphological [Simonsen and Gunter,2001]. This is one of the reasons why the English language has some 250 different spellings for it's about 44 phonemes[Mann,2003]

Anyway, there are many more causes than these which provoked a revision of the English spelling and a change in pronunciation [as we may see with Great Vowel Shift]. For example, the invention the printing press, the increase of translations, the influence of other languages such as French, Spanish, Italian, German, the deeper study of classical languages like Hebrew[a part from Latin and Greek], the appearance of new social classes like the Bourgeoisie the birth of imperialism[Expansion of the English language and contact with other European languages]. Basically that period was a pot of boiling ideas and all kinds of movements which unsurprisingly changed the world's views[thoughts, philosophies etc] and consequently language, due to the fact that both are closely related.

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