

LLCM20AN English Phonetics

Week 3: Syllables (continued), weak vowels

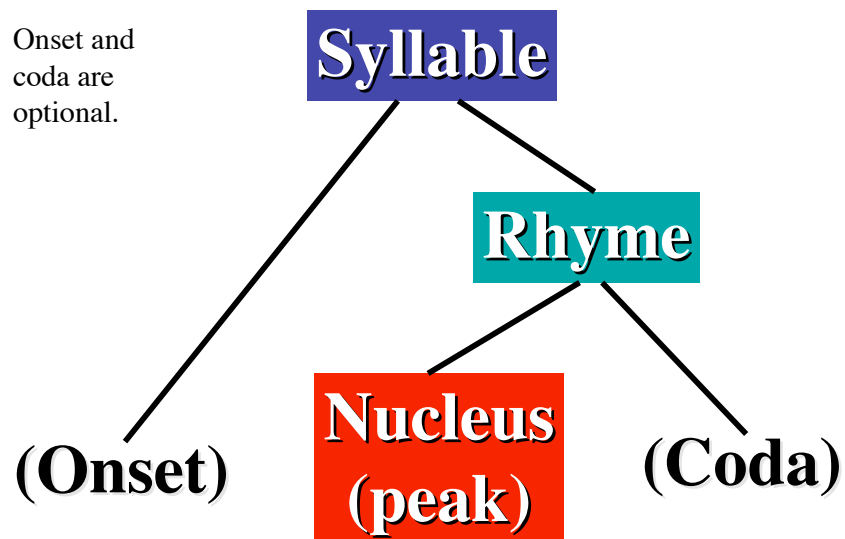
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2007-2008

Syllables

2. Syllable: what is a syllable? (continued)

Structure of a syllable?

Onset and
coda are
optional.



Structure of a syllable: onset

- Three-consonant clusters:
- /s/ + /p t k/ + /l r w j/:

		POST-INITIAL			
		l	r	w	j
S PLUS INITIAL	p	'splay'	'spray'	—	'spew'
	t	—	'string'	—	'stew'
	k	'sclerosis'	'screen'	'squeak'	'skewer'

Roach (1991)

Structure of a syllable: 3. coda

- Syllable final consonant(s).
- An optional element.
- /h r w j/ are not possible in this position.
- A syllable may have 0-4 coda consonants.
Examples: /deɪ / /dek/ /eks/ /nekst/ /teksts/

Structure of a syllable: coda

- Two-consonant clusters:
 - 1. /m n ŋ l s/ + another consonant
Examples: /bʌmp/ /bent/ /bæŋk/ /belt/ /ɑːsk/
 - 2. A consonant + /s z t d θ/
Examples: /bets/ /bedz/ /bækt/ /bægd/ /eɪθ/

Roach (1991)

Structure of a syllable: coda

- Three-consonant clusters:
 - 1. /m n ŋ l s/ + another consonant + /s z t d θ/

		PRE-FINAL	FINAL	POST-FINAL
'helped'	he	l	p	t
'banks'	bæ	ŋ	k	s
'bonds'	bɒ	n	d	z
'twelfth'	twe	l	f	θ

- 2. A consonant + /s z t d θ/ + /s z t d θ/

		PRE-FINAL	FINAL	POST-FINAL 1	POST-FINAL 2
'fifths'	fi	—	f	θ	s
'next'	ne	—	k	s	t
'lapsed'	læ	—	p	s	t

Roach (1991)

Structure of a syllable: coda

- Four-consonant clusters:
 - 1. /m n ŋ l s/ + another C + /s z t d θ/ + /s z t d θ/

		PRE-FINAL	FINAL	POST-FINAL 1	POST-FINAL 2
'twelfths'	twe	l	f	θ	s
'prompts'	prɒ	m	p	t	s

- 2. A consonant + /s z t d θ/ + /s z t d θ/ + /s z t d θ/

		PRE-FINAL	FINAL	POST-FINAL	POST-FINAL	POST-FINAL
				1	2	3
'sixths'	si	—	k	s	θ	s
'texts'	te	—	k	s	t	s

Roach (1991)

Class 3: Weak syllables (weak vowels and syllabic consonants)

0. Some more basic spelling-pronunciation rules (revision)

0.1. <w> effect

<a> /ɒ/ when preceded by /w/

- **<w(h)a> /wɒ/** as in <want> /wɒnt/, <wander> /'wɒndə/, <what> /wɒt/
- (but <water> /'wɔ:tə/)
- (**<qua> /kwɒ/** as in <quality> /'kwɒləti/, <quantity> /'kwɒntəti/, <squash> /skwɒʃ/)
- (but **<ă> /æ/** when followed by a velar /k g ŋ/, as in <wag> /wæg/)

<ar> /ɔ:/ when preceded by /w/

- **<w(h)ar> /wɔ:/** as in <war> /wɔ:/, <warm> /wɔ:m/, <wharf> /wɔ:f/
- **<quar> /kwɔ:/** as in <quartz> /kwɔ:ts/, (<quarter> /'kwɔ:tə/)
- (but <quarrel> /'kwɒrl/)

<or> /ɜ:/ when preceded by <w>

- <wor> /wɜ:/ as in <work> /wɜ:k/,
<word> /wɜ:d/, <worm> /wɜ:m/,
<worse> /wɜ:s/, <worth> /wɜ:θ/,
- (but <worn> /wɔ:n/)

0.2. <ld> effect

When followed by <ld>

- <a> /ɔ:/ as in <bald> /bɔ:ld/
- short
- <ě> /e/ as in <hěld> /held/
- long
- <i> /aɪ/ as in <mild> /maɪld/
- <ō> /əʊ/ as in <hōld> /həʊld/

0.3. <a>: neither long /eɪ/ nor short /æ/

<a> /ɑ:/ when followed by [f s θ]
(+stop)

- <a> /ɑ:/ as in <bath> /bɑ:θ/, <grass> /grɑ:s/, <fast> /fɑ:st/, <ask> /ɑ:sk/

But

- <ă> /æ/ as in <măss> /mæs/, <găs> /gæs/
- (cf. <chance> /tʃɑ:ns/, <father> /'fɑ:ðə/)

<a> followed by <l> + <f> or <m>

- <alf> /ɑ:f/ as in <half> /hɑ:f/ (
<halves> /hɑ:vz/), <calf> /kɑ:f/
- <alm> /ɑ:m/ as in <calm> /kɑ:m/,
<palm> /pɑ:m/

<a> followed by <l> + plosive (stop)

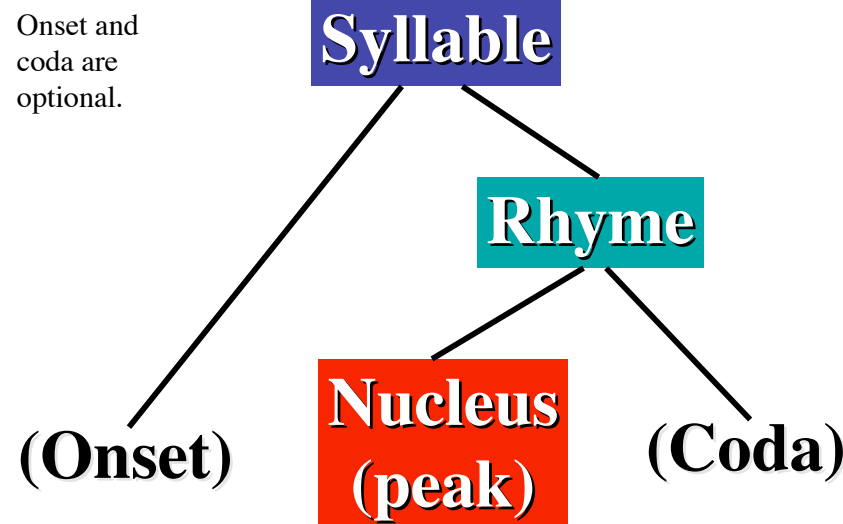
- <a> /ɔ:/ as in <bald> /bɔ:ld/,
<salt> /sɔ:lt/, <halt> /hɔ:lt/
- (cf. <>false> /fɔ:ls/)
- <alk> /ɔ:k/ as in <talk> /tɔ:k/,
<walk> /wɔ:k/, <chalk> /tʃɔ:k/
- (cf. <falcon> /'fɔ:lkŋ/)

<a> followed by <ll>

- <all> /ɔ:l/ as in <all> /ɔ:l/, <tall> /tɔ:l/,
<fall> /fɔ:l/, <call> /kɔ:l/, <stall> /stɔ:l/
- (but <shall> /ʃæl, ʃl/)
- (Also, <almost> /'ɔ:lməʊst/, <already>
/ɔ:l'redi/)

Weak syllables: weak vowels and syllabic consonants

Reminder: syllable structure



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Reminder: nucleus in strong and weak syllables

- 1. A strong syllable contains one of the strong vowels as nucleus:
 - Long vowels: /i: ɜ: ɑ: ɔ: u:/
 - Short vowels: /ɪ e æ ʌ ɒ ʊ/
 - Diphthongs: /ɪə eə ʊə eɪ aɪ ɔɪ aʊ əʊ/
 - Triphthongs: /eɪə aɪə ɔɪə aʊə əʊə/
- 2. A weak syllable contains as nucleus:
 - Either one of the weak vowels: /ə ɪ ɪ u ʊ/
 - Or a syllabic consonant: /l n m ŋ r/

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- **2. A weak syllable contains as nucleus:**
 - **Either one of the weak vowels: /ə ɪ ɪ u ʊ/**
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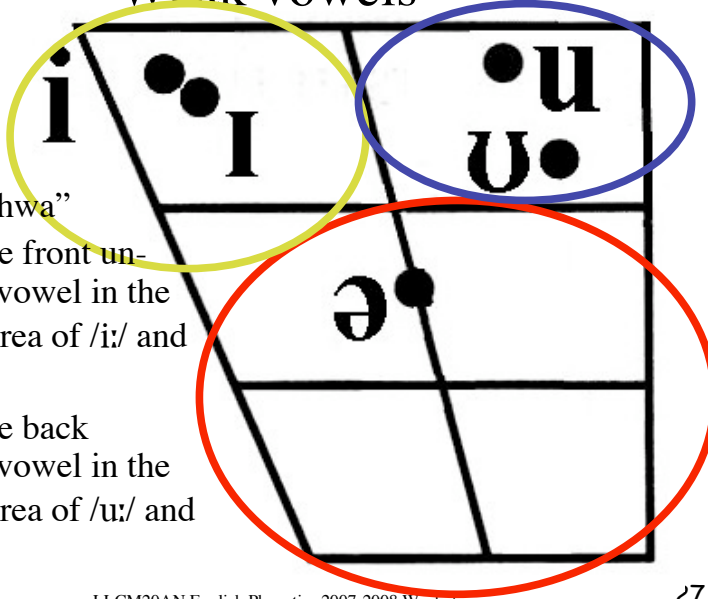
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1. Weak vowels

Weak vowels

- The basic principle: very roughly speaking, think of **the corresponding strong vowel pronounced weak** (with an obscure quality).
- Generally speaking, weak vowels (in weak syllables) are pronounced **with the mouth less open** than strong vowels. -> more closed (high) vowels.

Weak vowels



- 1. /ə/ “schwa”
- 2. A close front unrounded vowel in the general area of /i:/ and /I/.
- 3. A close back rounded vowel in the general area of /u:/ and /U/.

Weak vowels

- N.B. Not all unstressed syllables have weak vowels: there are some unstressed syllables with strong vowels.

1.1. /ə/ (“schwa”)

- The most frequently occurring vowel in English.
- In quality mid (half-way between open and closed / high and low) and central (half-way between front and back), though the quality is not always the same.
- Always associated with weak syllables.
- Not all weak syllables contain /ə/, though many do.

1.1. /ə/ (“schwa”): when appropriate?

- If the speaker were to pronounce a particular weak syllable as strong instead, which vowel would it be most likely to have, according to the usual rules of English spelling?
- (but you have to know which syllables should be weak: studied later)

/ə/ (“schwa”): some examples of spelling

- Spelt with ‘a’; strong pronunciation would have æ
 ‘attend’ ətend  ‘character’ kærəktə
 ‘barracks’ bæɾəks
- Spelt with ‘ar’; strong pronunciation would have ɑ:
 ‘particular’ pətɪkjələ  ‘molar’ məʊlə
 ‘monarchy’ mənəki



- -> “short” pronunciation of <ă> /æ/ and <ǻ> /ɑ:/

/ə/ (“schwa”): some examples of spelling

- Adjectival endings spelt ‘ate’; strong pronunciation would have eɪ
 ‘intimate’ ɪntɪmət  ‘accurate’ ækjərət
 ‘desolate’ desələt (though there are exceptions to this:
 ‘private’ ɪs usually praɪvɪt)

- -> “long” pronunciation of <ā> /eɪ/

- + nouns: ‘senate’ /ˈsenət/ 

- Cf. /eɪt/ in verb endings: appreciate /əˈpriːʃɪeɪt/, 

-  duplicate /ˈdjuːplɪkeɪt/, collaborate /kəˈlæbəreɪt/ 

- N.B. /ˈdjuːplɪkət / (adj., n.)  /ˈdjuːplɪkeɪt / (v.) 

- /ˈsep(ə)rət / (adj.)  /ˈsepəreɪt / (v.) 

/ə/ (“schwa”): some examples of spelling

- iv) Spelt with ‘o’; strong pronunciation would have ɒ
 ● ‘tomorrow’ təmɒrəʊ ● ‘potato’ pəteɪtəʊ
 ● ‘carrot’ kærət
- v) Spelt with ‘or’; strong pronunciation would have ɔ:
 ● ‘forget’ fəget ● ‘ambassador’ æmbæsədə
 ● ‘opportunity’ ɒpətju:nɪtɪ

- -> “short” pronunciation of <ɒ> /ɒ/, <ɔɪ> /ɔ:/

/ə/ (“schwa”): some examples of spelling

- vi) Spelt with ‘e’; strong pronunciation would have e
 ● ‘settlement’ setlmənt ● ‘violet’ vaɪələt
 ● ‘postmen’ pəʊstmən
- vii) Spelt with ‘er’; strong pronunciation would have ɜ:
 ● ‘perhaps’ pəhæps ● ‘stronger’ strɒŋgə
 ● ‘superman’ su:pəmæn

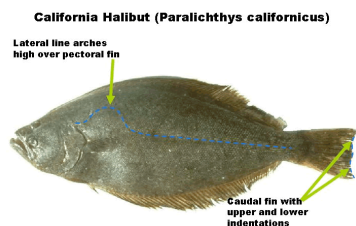
- -> “short” pronunciation of <ɛ> /e/, <ɛɪ> /ɛ:/



/ə/ (“schwa”): some examples of spelling

- viii) Spelt with ‘u’; strong pronunciation would have ʌ
 ● ‘Autumn’ ɔ:təm ● ‘support’ səpɔ:t
 ● ‘halibut’ hælɪbət

- -> “short” pronunciation of <ʊ> /ʌ/



/ə/ (“schwa”): some examples of spelling

- ix) Spelt with ‘ough’ (there are, of course, many other pronunciations for the letter-sequence ‘ough’)
 ● ‘thorough’ θɹə ● ‘borough’ bɹə
- x) Spelt with ‘ous’
 ● ‘gracious’ greɪʃəs ● ‘callous’ kæləs

1.2. Close front unrounded vowel

1. /i/ “happY vowel”

- The word final vowel in “happy”.
- The distinction in strong pronunciation /i:/ and /ɪ/ is not evident in weak syllables (the distinction is **neutralized**).
- The vowel is neither /i:/ nor /ɪ/.
- **/i/**: it sounds like /i:/ but not strong and long.

1.2. Close front unrounded vowel

1. /i/ “happY vowel”

- i) In word-final position in words spelt with final ‘y’ or ‘ey’ (after one or more consonant letters), e.g. ‘happy’ hæpi, ‘valley’ væli, and in morpheme-final position when such words have suffixes beginning with vowels, e.g. ‘happier’ hæpiə, ‘easiest’ i:ziəst, ‘hurrying’ hʌrɪŋ.



- ii) In a prefix such as those spelt ‘re’, ‘pre’, ‘de’ if it precedes a vowel and is unstressed, for example in ‘react’ riækt, ‘preoccupied’ priɒkjupaɪd, ‘deactivate’ diæktɪvət.



1.2. Close front unrounded vowel

1. /i/ “happY vowel”

- iii) In the suffixes spelt ‘iate’, ‘ious’ when they have two syllables, for example in ‘appreciate’ əpri:ʃiət, ‘hilarious’ hɪləəriəs.



- iv) In the following words when unstressed: ‘he’, ‘she’, ‘we’, ‘me’, ‘be’ and the word ‘the’ when it precedes a vowel.

- -> to be covered when we study the “weak-form” words.

1.2. Close front unrounded vowel

2. /ɪ/

In most other cases of weak syllables containing a close front unrounded vowel we can assign the vowel to the ɪ phoneme, as in the first syllable of ‘resist’ rɪzɪst, ‘inane’ ɪneɪn, ‘enough’ ɪnʌf, the middle syllable of ‘incident’ ɪnsɪdənt, ‘orchestra’ ɔ:kɪstrə, ‘artichoke’ ɑ:tɪʃəʊk, and the final syllable of ‘swimming’ swɪmɪŋ, ‘liquid’ lɪkwɪd, ‘optic’ ɒptɪk. It can be seen that this vowel is most often represented in spelling by the letters ‘i’ and ‘e’.

