

ON THE PERCEPTIBILITY OF MORPHOLOGICAL COUPLINGS IN ENGLISH

Björn Stålhane Andrézen, Institute of Phonetics, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

In order to find out how far a number of morphological couplings are auditorily perceptible in English, the following experiment was made:

Groups of sentences were composed, each group consisting of two or three sentences, altogether 34 sentences. Each group was constructed in such a way that the sentences in it contained a stretch of segmental phonemes that was the same in all of them, but with morphological couplings in different places. E.g.: "He was a captain ..." vs. "It was wrapped in ...". The sentences were read on to tape in random order, and then partially deleted, so that of each sentence only the segments that were identical within the group remained. The thus mutilated sentences were played back to a number of listeners of various categories. The listeners had the original texts before them, and they were asked to decide which sentence each fragment had been taken from.

The proportion of correct identifications was higher than pure chance. It seemed to some extent to depend on the relation between the position of the coupling and the consonant(cluster), and on the quality of the consonant(cluster) itself.

References

- Bloch, B. (1948): "A set of postulates for phonemic analysis", Lg. 24, 3-46.
- Bloch, B. and G.L. Trager (1941): "Syllabic phonemes", Lg. 17, 223-246.
- Hill, A.A. (1962): "Various kinds of phonemes", Studies in Linguistics 16, 3-10.
- Jones, D. (1967): The phoneme, Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons Ltd.
- O'Connor, J.D. and O. Tooley (1964): "On the perceptibility of certain word-boundaries", in In honour of Daniel Jones, D. Abercrombie (ed.), 171-176, London: Longmans.