

PROSODIES OF INITIALS IN ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

An attempt is made here to illustrate a prosodic analysis of English ('allegro' style), showing that the initial consonants play the major role in determining the pronunciation of English. Some comments on the perception of 'allegro' speech are made which are for further investigation. An insight into the status of liquids in English is presented.

Prosodic analysis as a method of phonological analysis has been well exemplified, mainly through Asian and African languages, but little has been written on European languages, see however /1,2/. The method is basically a top-down analysis which may be completely phonological or phonological explanation for grammatical features /2/. In an analysis of English I have attempted to show how prosodic analysis can make useful generalizations about phonology by starting with the Tone Group (Halliday /3/), the Foot (Abercrombie /4/), the Syllable and the Phonematic Unit. At all these levels abstractions are made called Prosodies and syllable and at the classification of liquids in English. The syllable under each foot consisting of a stressed syllable (plus one or more weak syllables). Please note that in this form of analysis there is no need for a level "Word", although alternative analyses may incorporate it - my approach is basically dealing with speech in an "Allegro" style. In allegro speech the vowels tend to be centralized and thereby lose much of their contrastive features and consonant articulations control to a greater extent intelligibility /5/. The inherent prosodies associated with the initial consonants of stressed syllables thus control the pronunciation of the whole foot. Let us now look at the prosodies of English consonants. Initial consonants in English may be divided into two classes based on phonation, namely Voiced [b d g v ð z ' ʒ dʒ l r m n] and Aspirated [p t k f θ s j tʃ]. . The so-called semi-vowels [j, w, h] are in fact the prosodies associated with syllable structure. Voiced clusters are always Plosive + Continuant [dr-, gl, ar, bl, br] ; Voiceless clusters involving plosives have a period of voiceless-

ness on release which is realized by lack of voicing in the continuant, being the equivalent of aspiration in initial plosives. A three-place cluster involves pre-frication in the form of [s-] before plosives which causes the release phase of the plosive to become voiced: it is thus possible to call this aspiration so that all voiceless clusters initially have an exponent of aspiration. Please note that all clusters beginning with [s, f, θ, ʃ] + continuant, the continuant must be voiced, therefore this justifies my labelling these as aspirates.

It is also possible to divide the initial consonants as to labialization (w-prosody) [θ; ʃ, r, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ], , the others having y-prosody [f, v, l, s, z]. If we turn to the problem of the LIQUID in English we see that, in initial position, there is a contrast between clear [l] and [r] labialized and that in clusters they only combine with their appropriate preceding C on the grounds of palatalization, with the exception of [f] which is open for clustering. Note the restriction on [sr-] which must be [ʃr-] and that [l-] signals a foreign feature, e.g. 'Schloer'. There is thus only one phonematic unit [L] in English, especially as, in final position the only possibility is w-prosody.

This Liquid in English we will call /L/ but it is governed by three prosodies, namely [ʰ w h] and we can observe it across different accents of English. So far, we have only dealt with R.P where [Lʰ-] = 'clear' 'l' and [Lʰ-] = [ɹ] and in final position only [-Lʰ] = 'dark' 'l' occur. In intervocalic position [[l] and [ɹ] can occur contrastively and it is here that we have the possibility of [Lʰ] = [ɹ], [ɹ] and [Lʰ] or [Lʰ] dependent on morphological boundaries, although again these differences are reduced in normal speech. /6/. Common speech defects or malarticulations reflect this stance as initial [ɹ] is often replaced by [w] or [v], namely the w-prosody, and final [l] in monosyllables is replaced by [w] e.g. 'full' [fuʰ] and 'milk' [mɹɹk] where a rounded back vowel shows the prosody. If we now compare other accents of English where e.g. 'post-vocalic' 'r' is pronounced, then in Scots the [l] is always 'dark' with the possibility of non-articulation in syllable-final cf. R.P 'war' [wɹ:] with

Scots 'wall' [wɔ:] : therefore the contrast in Scots in initial position is between [L^w] = [l] and [L^h] = [r].

It has been posited above that there are good reasons for investigating a top-down analysis of speech especially as it provides a different perspective on the relative values of Consonants and Vowels, in that in an analysis of a 'most careful pronunciation' /7/ the characteristics of vowels in 'words' play the major role. We are not dispiriting the fact that words have an important role in the learning and production of language, but we are suggesting that, in normal conversation or communication between two speakers, there is a greater dependence on the prosodic features - prosodies - than on words per se. It is my personal experience that perception on a socio-linguistic acceptability level is a question of one listener matching at different levels the performance of a speaker in terms of congruence/lack of congruence: as follows,

- a) if intonation is congruent, acceptance:
N.B. even if lower levels are observed and,
- b) if intonation is non-congruent - check lower levels for possible congruence. If no congruence at any level, then acceptance of non-native speaker of language. This is basically an area which I should like to pursue, especially within the context of event perception /8/.

Brief Outline of a Prosodic Statement of English

TONE GROUP: (Pre-tonic) Tonic ⁽¹⁻⁵⁾:
Prosodies of pitch
contrasts and voice
quality.

FOOR: Salient syllables plus weak syllables
= S(W¹⁻⁴): prosodies of isochronicity;
W syllables are Syllabic C and central
unstressed vocoids [ɪ, u, ə] represented
prosodically by [v, w, h]

SYLLABLE: Salient syllable = (C)V(C) o/v/w/h

PHONEMATIC UNIT: V = phonemic short vowels
C m as described in article
above plus some finals not
discussed but which mainly
are included in the syllable
nucleus, namely the vowel.

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