

The Sound Structure of English (McCully)

CHAPTER 5: Website

CHAPTER 5: SYLLABLES (I): INTRODUCTION

COMMENT ON IN-CHAPTER EXERCISES

5.1, PAGE 63: Think back to Exercise 4.D. If a syllable begins with two consonants, and the first of those consonants is, for instance, /b/, then what can the second consonant be? Try to think of at least 6 words that begin with /b/ followed by another consonant. Each word should be one, and only one, syllable.

Part of the answer is given in-text, and you're prompted towards constructing a

list of examples such as:

blue
bran
bland
breed
blend
brunt

This list could well be supplemented by words such as *brown* (where /b/ is followed by /ɹ/). The point made in the text is that where two consonants begin a syllable, and where the first of those two consonants is /b/, the second consonant can readily be /l/ or /ɹ/, while other possibly-occurring consonants in that position (ie. after initial /b/) either have a very restricted distribution (eg. in bisyllabic words such as *bwana* or *beauty* (/bju:tɪ/) or simply don't occur at all.

5.1, PAGE 63: It's not just /b/ that behaves in this way. Try the same Exercise (4.A) with (mono)syllables beginning /f/ + consonant, and /p/ + consonant.

Your data might look something like this:

flee	(/f+l/)	plea
friend	(/f+ɹ/)	pray
few	(/f+j/)	pew (/p+j/)

5.1, PAGE 65: To reassure yourself that these, or similar, vowel contrasts obtain in your own variety of English, construct at least three more examples (ie. three groups of three words) where the same contrasts hold.

This is answered fairly fully in-text.

5.2, PAGE 69: Can you think of what that situation might be, and construct relevant examples?

This exercise asks you to construct what are explained in the chapter as *compound words*. The examples given in the text directly below the exercise - *dog-house, house-mate, potting-shed* and *sky-dive* – all consist of two lexical words, yet one of these words, the first of the two, is distinctly more prominent than the other. More accurately and specifically, it is one of the syllables of the first word that is perceived to be more prominent (is ‘more stressed’) than any syllable in the second word.

5.2, PAGE 70: To see how compounding works, take the lexical monosyllable *house*, and insert another lexical monosyllable before it in order to make another word at least two syllables long. An example would be *DOG-house*, where the added word appears in capital letters. Try to construct at least five such examples. Don’t worry about whether to spell such words with hyphens or not.

Examples might be

tree-house
greenhouse
mad-house....

Since you’re asked to construct five examples, to this last list might be added

safe-house
smoke-house

5.2, PAGE 71: To make the three-way stress distinctions available in English analytically clear to you, think about the stress patterning of the three syllables of the compound word *sky-diver*. Which word bears primary stress, which weak stress, and which syllable is unstressed?

You should have found that *sky* bears primary stress, *dive* secondary stress, and the little suffix <-er> is stressless.

Similar examples are: *rail-roading*; *sign-painting*; *bread-basket*.

CHAPTER 5: SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS TO END-OF-CHAPTER

EXERCISES

Exercise 5.A. Make simple phonemic transcriptions of the following words, as these are pronounced in your own accent of English. Pay particular attention to the pronunciation and structure of any *compound words* you are transcribing. Use schwa to transcribe the articles *the* and *a*. For other unstressed syllables, you may use either schwa, /ɪ/, or possibly /r/, as appropriate:

- | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| a. the sin-bin | /ðə sɪn bɪn/ |
| b. it's a pitch | /ɪts ə pɪtʃ/ |
| c. the sinner | /ðə sɪnə/ |
| d. the wedding-singer | /ðə wɛdɪŋ sɪŋə/ |
| e. a pin-sticker | /ə pɪn stɪkə/ |

Note: I've transcribed these words in my own accent. Conservative RP speakers might have /e/ instead of /ɛ/ in *wedding*. GA speakers might well have 'r' (symbolised /ɹ/) word-finally in words such as *sticker* (/stɪkɹ/).

Exercise 5.B. In the exercises – here and elsew. here - you'll find that certain words recur. That's partly because we're still working with a very limited range of vowels (the /ɪ/ of *hid*, the /i:/ of *heed*, and the /aɪ/ of *hide*) but also because the same words can be used to illustrate many topics of relevance to the work we've done in chapters 1-3. First, then, study the following phrases (there are 10 of them), and make a simple phonemic transcription of each. Remember that with these simple transcriptions you are illustrating the *underlying system* of speech-sounds that is operative in your own variety of English.

You may use either schwa or /ɪ/, as appropriate, for the transcription of unstressed vowels.

There may be some few speakers reading this for whom the vowel of eg. <fine> isn't /aɪ/. If so, don't worry – just leave that part of the transcription blank, and come back to it after you've read chapter 8.

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| a. He's in Leeds | /hi:z ɪn li:dz/ |
| b. She's nice | /ʃi:z naɪs/ |
| c. Leeds is a fine city | /li:dz ɪz ə faɪn sɪtɪ/ |
| d. A pin is tiny | /ə pɪn ɪz tɪnɪ/ |
| e. It's a bit of a grind | /ɪts ə bɪt əv ə ɡraɪnd/ |

f.	Finish it	/fɪnɪʃ ɪt/
g.	It isn't itching	/ɪt ɪznt ɪtʃɪŋ/
h.	She denied it	/ʃi: dɪnaɪd ɪt/
i.	Bitterness is fine	/bɪtənəs ɪz faɪn/
j.	He's pimping my ride	/hi:z ɪmpɪŋ maɪ ɹaɪd/

Note: GA speakers may find 'r' occurring in eg. *bitterness* (GA /bɪt.ɹnəs/).

On the symbol /ɹ/ see the main text, p.173. This last exercise is set largely to give you extra practice at making simple phonemic transcriptions. Notice again the lack of capital letters and other marks of standard alphabetic punctuation in the phonemic transcriptions.

Links to other sites

There is an excellent general introduction to syllables in the world's languages on wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Syllable>).