

THE SYLLABIC STRUCTURE IN ENGLISH

Najmiddinova Mekhrigul Najmiddin qizi,
teacher of department of English practical course,
Navoi state pedagogical institute,
Toshmurodova Umida Otabek qizi,
student of faculty of English and literature,
Navoi state pedagogical institute
+998907313080
mehrigulnaj@gmail.com

Annotation: *In English there are several types of syllables that are based on their structure and the vowel sound they produce. Understanding and recognizing these different types of syllables is very much important for accurate pronunciation, decoding the words while reading, and improving overall language fluency. In the article, the types and theory of open and closed vowels of syllabic structure are explained.*

Key words: *syllables, open vowels, close vowels, sonorants, voiced fricatives, voiced plosives, voiceless fricatives, voiceless plosives.*

Аннотация: *В английском языке существует несколько типов слогов, которые основаны на их строении и производимых ими гласных звуках. Понимание и распознавание этих различных типов слогов очень важно для точного произношения, расшифровки слов во время чтения и улучшения общей беглости речи. В статье объяснены виды и теория открытых и закрытых гласных слоговой структуры.*

Ключевые слова: *слоги, открытые гласные, закрытые гласные, соноранты, звонкие фрикативы, звонкие взрывные звуки, глухие фрикативы, глухие взрывные звуки.*

Annotatsiya: *Ingliz tilida tuzilishi va unli tovushiga asoslangan bo'g'inlarning bir nechta turlari mavjud. Ushbu turli xil bo'g'inlarni tushunish va*

tanib olish to'g'ri talaffuz qilish, o'qish paytida so'zlarni dekodlash va tilning umumiy ravonligini yaxshilash uchun juda muhimdir.

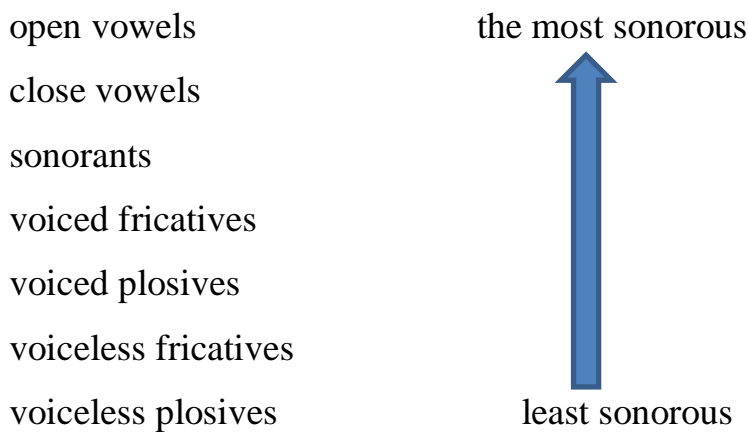
Kalit so'zlar: bo'g'in, ochiq va yopiq unlilar, sonorantlar, jarangli frikativlar, jarangli qo'shimchalar, jarangsiz frikativlar, jarangsiz qo'shimchalar.

Theories on syllable formation and division Speech continuum can be broken into syllables — minimal pronounceable units presenting a cluster or group of sounds.[De Jong, Kenneth; 22].Syllables form language units of greater magnitude: morphemes, words and phrases, each of them characterized by a certain syllabic structure. Thus any meaningful language unit may be considered from the point of view of two aspects: syllable formation and syllable division, which form a dialectal unity. [De Jong, Kenneth; 32].

The syllable is a rather complicated phenomenon and, like a phoneme, it can be studied on four levels: articulatory, acoustic, auditory and functional. Its complex character gave rise to many theories in foreign and home linguistics. [De Jong, Kenneth; 35].

The articulatory study of the syllable was presented in the expiratory theory (chest pulse theory, pressure theory) based by R.H. Stetson. According to it, speech is a pulsating expiratory process and every syllable corresponds to a single expiration. So the number of syllables in an utterance should be determined by the number of expirations made in its production. But the validity of the theory is fairly doubtful. It was strongly criticized by Russian and foreign linguists, because the number of syllables in a word and even the number of words in a phrase can be pronounced with a single expiration. [De Jong, Kenneth; 42].

The acoustic level of the syllable is investigated in the sonority theory put forward by O. Jespersen. It is based on the assumption that each sound is characterized by a certain degree of sonority which determines its perceptibility. Thus it's possible to establish a ranking of speech sounds from the least sonorous to the most sonorous ones:



According to it any sound sequence presents a wave of sonority, which is formed with the most sonorous sound as the center of the syllable and the least sonorous sounds as marginal segments, like in the word *plant* [pla:nt].

The most serious drawback of this theory is that many English syllables contradict it. For example, in this case a sound sequence like stops [stops] should have three syllables instead of the actual one. [Breen, Gavan; 15]

Further experimental work resulted in a lot of other theories, but the question of the articulatory and acoustic mechanism of syllable formation is still open in phonetics. It might be fair to suppose that this mechanism is similar in all languages and can be regarded as a phonetic and physiological universal. [Breen, Gavan; 19]

The theory of muscular tension by L.V. Shcherba has prevailed for a long time in Russian linguistics. It states that the syllabic peak in most languages is formed with the help of a vowel or sometimes a sonorant, and the phonemes preceding or following the peak are marginal. The syllable is defined as an arc of muscular tension in which the tension of articulation increases within the range of prevocalic consonants and then decreases within the range of postvocalic consonants. This theory has been further modified by V.A. Vassilyev, who suggested that the physical parameters of pitch, intensity and length also vary within the range of the syllable. So on the speech production level the syllable can be treated as an arc of articulatory effort which combines the changes in the muscular tension of articulation and the acoustic data.

Still all the theories mentioned above analyze the syllable either on production or perception levels. An outstanding Russian linguist and psychologist N.I. Zhinkin has made an attempt to combine these levels of analysis in the so called loudness theory. [Breen, Gavan; 25] His experiments showed that the loudness of sounds depends on the variations of the pharyngeal passage modified by the narrowing of its walls. [Breen, Gavan; 27] Thus the increase of muscular tension results in the increase of actual loudness of a sound. So on the perception level the syllable is the arc of loudness which correlates with the arc of articulatory effort on the production level, since variations in loudness are due to the work of all speech mechanisms. [Breen, Gavan; 35]

Speaking about the definition of the syllable, it is perfectly obvious that no phonetician has so far succeeded in it. The attempts to define the concept of the syllable resulted in the existence of different approaches.

Some linguists treat the syllable as a purely articulatory unit universal for all languages, which lacks any functional value, because its boundaries do not always coincide with those of morphemes. [Breen, Gavan; 45]

Still the majority of linguists regard the syllable as the smallest pronounceable unit with a certain linguistic function which refers to the structure of a particular language. [Breen, Gavan; 49] In this case the definition of the syllable tends to single out the following features:

- a syllable is a chain of phonemes of varying length;
- a syllable is constructed on the basis of the contrast of its constituents, usually of vowelconsonant (VC) type;
- the nucleus of a syllable is a vowel, but there are languages in which this function is performed by a consonant;
- the presence of consonants in a syllable is optional;
- the distribution of phonemes in the syllable follows the rules of a particular language.

Syllable formation in English

The syllabic structure of all languages can be characterized from the point of view of two aspects: syllable formation and syllable division which are inseparable from each other. Let us begin with the study of the first aspect.

Syllable formation in English is generally based on the phonological opposition 'vowel vs. consonant'. Vowels are usually syllabic while consonants are not, with the exceptions of [l, m, n]. The English language possesses a great variety of syllable types. [Harper, Douglas; 23]

V.A. Vassilyev classifies syllable formation in English on the basis of the type of phoneme the syllable ends in. He states the existence of two types of syllables:

(1) open syllables ending in a vowel phoneme (I [aɪ], me [mi:], spy [spaɪ], spray [spreɪ]); [Harper, Douglas; 25]

(2) closed syllables ending in a consonant phoneme (it [ɪt], and [ænd], ants [ænts]). [Harper, Douglas; 33]

The linguist underlines that these are phonetic syllables which distinguish the actual pronunciation of a word. They shouldn't be confused with orthographic syllables into which words are divided in writing and which are used in the system of reading rules. [Harper, Douglas; 35]

M.A. Sokolova, V.D. Arakin and other linguists suggest another approach. They define four types of syllables in English on the basis of the number and arrangement of consonants with a vowel. [Walker, Christopher; 43]. These are:

(1) fully open syllables, which consist of a vowel sound only (V type): are [a:], or [o:], I [aɪ]; [Walker, Christopher; 46].

(2) fully closed syllables, in which a vowel is between consonants (C) CVC(C) type): cat [kæt], jump [ʌmp], plan [plæn]; [Walker, Christopher; 49].

(3) syllables covered at the beginning, in which a consonant or a sequence of consonants precede a vowel (CC)CV type): so [sku], spy [spaɪ], screw [skru:]; [Walker, Christopher; 51].

(4) syllables covered at the end, in which a consonant or a sequence of consonants follow a vowel (VC(CC) type): on [n], old [kuld], acts [ækts]. [Walker, Christopher; 55].

Certain peculiarities of the system of English phonemes admit the existence of types of syllables which consist of consonants only, with the nucleus [l, n, m]. [Walker, Christopher; 62]. These are:

- (1) syllables of CC type (table [teɪbl], taken [teɪkn], rhythm [rɪðm]);
- (2) syllables of CCC type (decent [di:snt], seldom [seldm]);
- (3) syllables of CCCC type (students [stju:dnts]);
- (4) syllables of CCCCC type (functional [fʌŋkʃnl]).

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