



IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

English - 1 (Basic English)
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Lecture - 09
Syllables and Words

Welcome to the class. Today, we are going to look at a very specific feature of words continuing our discussion on words and this feature is called syllabification. So we are going to look at syllables. Now we have been talking about words and sounds. You know, when we talk about words, we talk about sounds. The definition of a word is, a word is a meaningful combination of sounds.

That is a word is a combination of sounds, which also gives us some meaning. We say it is a meaningful combination because a word must give some meaning. The meaning of a word is arbitrary. Why a word like cat means an animal. We know when we say cat, we know what it means. We know what it refers to. Why the word cat refers only to that animal is arbitrary.

Why a pen is called pen is arbitrary. So any name is arbitrary. We will look at this aspect some other time. Today, all I want to discuss with you is when we say a word we say it is a meaningful combination of sounds. In other words, it is a combination of sounds, which also gives us meaning. So we will leave it there. We do not want to discuss that. Because a word must also give meaning, that is fine.

So there are only two parts, two things that we discuss when we talk about words and words that they are sounds, and they give us words. We know there are two types of sounds, some are consonant sounds, and some are vowel sounds. To be precise, in English, there are 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonant sounds. And these many 44 sounds are responsible for all possible words that we know, or we do not know in English.

But when we talk about words, there is another thing called syllables that we need to understand. So what is a syllable?

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Syllables

- A **syllable** is a unit of organization for a sequence of speech sounds.
- Syllables have nucleus (most often a vowel) with optional initial and final margins (typically, consonants).
- Words can have several syllables.

- One syllable words
- Two two syllable word,
- Three syllable words,
- Four syllable words

A syllable is something, which is bigger than a sound or and smaller than a word, which simply means, a syllable can have one or more than one sounds in it. But, a syllable is part of a word in a sense that, a word could be just one syllable. There are several words which are just one-syllable words. They are the words are syllable in themselves, and they are called monosyllabic words.

But it is possible that one word may have one word will definitely have one syllable, but one word may have more than one syllables. One word may have two, three, four, five, sometimes more than five syllables as well. But in general what we find is monosyllabic words, words with two syllables, words with three syllables are very common. That is, there are so many in numbers in English.

The moment we start moving ahead that is the moment words become heavier in terms of a number of syllables, words with four syllables, words with five syllables and words with six syllables, the total number of possible words start decreasing. That is simply because of the weight. A heavier word is more difficult to pronounce, to speak, and therefore we do not have too heavy words too many of them.

So the basic point is, a syllable is a unit, which could have multiple sounds, and there could be multiple syllables in a word. Therefore we say it is bigger than a sound but is smaller than a word. That is one way to identify and to understand syllables. When we look at a syllable, we also want to know at the same constraint on that, that there must be a vowel sound in a syllable.

Remember and try to draw inference from what we know about a word. What we know about a word is there must be a vowel sound in a word. So it follows from the point that there must be a vowel sound in every syllable. And this requirement of a vowel sound in every syllable is called the nucleus of the syllable. Nucleus means the fundamental basis. And this is the reason why we say vowel sounds are more basic units of a word.

Because a word is not possible without, every word has a vowel sound because every word has at least one syllable in it and every syllable requires the nucleus. And this nucleus can only be a vowel sound. Apart from this nucleus, it could have an initial and final sounds in it. So they are called there are different names, but there could be more than one sound in a syllable.

That is all we need to understand, and we need to keep in mind. But there must be the nucleus in a syllable. Now when we, let us look at some generic picture of words and syllables. It is like I discussed with you. It is possible to have one-syllable words, two-syllable words, three-syllable words and four-syllable words. We are going to see some examples of it, and we are going to see how they are identified.

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Words and Syllables

- One word may have one or more syllables
- Words with one syllables
 - sun life, break, tongue
son
- Words with two syllables
 - tiger (*tiger*), police (po-lice), between (*bet-ween*),
marriage (*mar-riage*)
tiger

So words with one syllable are examples are son. There are some, this word also has one syllable only, son. Life, break, tongue. Now please do not look at again spelling. Please do not look at the sounds also. The way we identify a word, a syllable is if

there is no break, then no break in the pronunciation of a word, in the way we speak a word, then they are monosyllabic words. Say these words to yourself and see how they sound.

Son, life, break tongue, these are all monosyllabic words without a break. Now, look at two words, two-syllable words. Words like tiger, police, between. One more time hear it. Tiger, police, between. What do we see here? When we say the word tiger, we see after this one; there is a break. Ti-ger. Ti is one syllable, ger is another syllable. Police. Po is one syllable, lice is another syllable.

Between, bit is one syllable, and ween is another syllable. Between bit-ween. This is a two-syllable word, between, between. So when we see in two-syllable words, each syllable, like ti two syllables of tiger ti-ger. Please pay attention to that. Both the syllables have one vowel sound in them. aai in ti the vowel sound in ti is aai ti ger; aa in the second syllable. When we say ger, g a r.

There is a vowel sound a in this syllable as well. So ti-ger. Police, p and o police. L i s police. Between, b i t first syllable v e n second syllable. So in a word with two syllables, we have only taken two, three examples. We see each syllable has got a vowel sound in it. So this also tells us that a syllable is bigger than a sound but is smaller than a word.

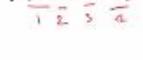
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Syllables

- Examples of three syllable words :

energy (e-ner-gii), heritage (he-ri-teg)	capital (ka-pi-tal), suffering (saf-far-ing)
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- Examples of four syllable words:

Invisible(in-vi-si-ble), aquarium (aqua-rium), 	education (e-du-ke-shan), infinity (in-fi-ni-ti) 
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Now let us look at examples with three-syllable sounds. Energy, e-ner-gii. Heritage, he-ri-tez heritage. This word capital ka-pi-tal. Suffering, saf-far-ing suffering. And then you will see breaking these points and three syllables in each one of them. Each syllable with a vowel sound in it. Examples with four sounds four syllables. They are invisible, aquarium education, infinity.

Let me say these words, these words again, and I want you to notice their syllabification. In-vi-si-ble, a-qua-rii-am, e-du-ke-shan and in-fi-ni-tii. So e-du-ke-shan four syllables. Infinity in-fi-ni-tii. I have tried to roughly identify these syllables for you. Aquarium, a-qua-rii-am. So there are breaks between syllables in a word, and every syllable must have a vowel sound in it.

The rules of syllabification is intuitive to speakers of English. There are not rules that can tell us about how syllabification is actually done. But when we pay attention to spoken speech in English and we try to speak the way, that is speak with proper syllables that is proper syllabification identifying each syllable, then we sound very close to the way it should be spoken.

So, instead of saying so if we say four-syllable words with only two breaks, then they could be misunderstood and sometimes not intelligible to hear us. Therefore, once again, I will try to underline the point that the process of our efforts in understanding the process of syllabification, our efforts in trying to identify syllables is yet another effort in the direction of making our pronunciation impressive and speech confident.

So we when we identify them, we want to speak using this syllabification. We need to identify these syllables when we speak. And the composition of syllables is going to be helpful for us, that is our when we know that every syllable must have a vowel sound, this knowledge will help us check the syllabification process. So this is how we look at syllables.

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Syllables

- A syllable consists of three segments –
 - nucleus, onset, rhyme, coda
- Nucleus : a vowel or syllabic consonant, obligatory in most languages
- Onset- a consonant or consonant clusters
- Rhyme – contrasts with onset and splits into nucleus and coda

So like I mentioned in the beginning, a syllable must have a nucleus. The other things in other parts of the syllables are known as onset, rhyme, coda and these, but these are not you see it is good to know about them. But these are not important things to remember for learning English or learning a language.

However, our familiarity with the process of syllabification and the fact that there are multiple syllables, there could be multiple syllables in a word is going to be helpful and useful for us. So this helps you understand what a nucleus is, what is onset and what is a rhyme. Please look at it, but you do not have to memorize them.

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Syllables

- Nucleus a vowel or syllabic consonant, obligatory in most languages.
- Coda: a consonant, optional in some languages, highly restricted or prohibited in others.
- Whenever words in English have more than two syllables, one of them is more accentuated. For example, the word ba_NA_na..

So again, this tells you something about nucleus that a vowel or a syllabic consonant is obligatory in most languages. A vowel must be the nucleus. Then we have a coda.

And whenever we have words in English have more than two syllables, one of them is more accentuated. That is one of them is more stressed.

And I will talk about this process of stress on syllables to make our speech more impressive, very soon. But meanwhile, I want you to do the practice of the syllabification. One more time take a few more words. This time, take the help of a dictionary. Dictionaries usually help you check your syllabification. Say those words to yourself and see how many times you observe breaks.

Then, check those words in the dictionary and then check actual breaks. Identify vowel sounds in each syllable. And then try to see when we have more than two syllables which one is getting more stressed? That you will be ready for another session on stress patterns in English words. That I will come soon and talk to you about.

At this point, once you are done with this exercise not only, you feel more confident, but you identifying syllables in your own speech helps you make it make your speech more impressive and emphatic.

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Words

- A single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others (or sometimes alone) to form a sentence and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed.

Examples of words: bees, hair, matter, tall etc.

At this point of our discussion, at this point, when we are discussing words, I want to add very quickly one specific thing that you find in traditional grammar books. They are called parts of a speech. This slide tells you a little bit more about word. So please take a look at this, and you will understand.

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Words

Words combine to form phrases and sentences. All words belong to categories called word classes (or parts of speech) according to the part they play in a sentence. The main word classes in English are listed below.

- Noun – Book, cat, Ram
- Verb – play, sing, cry
- Adjective – tall, beautiful, red
- Adverb – loudly, really, very
- Pronoun – She, him, that

Parts
of
Speech

When we move beyond words, we see words fall in different categories. And these categories are known as parts of a speech in traditional grammars. So we have words fall in grammatical categories, and we can also call them grammatical categories like nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns.

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Words

- Preposition – on, at, in, above
- Conjunction – but, for, if
- Determiner – a, an, the
- Interjection – Hello!

Prepositions, conjunction, determiners, and interjections. So these are several examples of parts of a speech. Here, one more time I do not want you to memorize these things. In fact, as a matter of principle, in learning a language, we do not need to memorize anything. We only need to understand things properly.

We need to slow down our speed; we need to write, we need to look at the details, we need to look at nuances, subtlety and pay attention to them. What I mean by slowing down is to pay proper attention to them. This process builds our understanding stronger. And once our understanding becomes stronger about these nuances, they start showing up when we speak. This is the most robust process of learning.

Therefore, what is important here is to pay attention to what we know as parts of our speech is, it simply means different grammatical categories. All possible words in our spoken language can be identified in some of these categories. These categories also become important when we start looking at sentences. Therefore they are called parts of a speech. We will have more sessions on parts of a speech.

And each one of these categories in details for you to understand. But more important than understanding this part also is to understand the process that helps us make a sentence. So very soon, we will see you with another set of our discussions. Meanwhile, have a practice of identifying these categories.

When you have a word, identify the category of that word, whether it is a noun, or an adjective, or something else, and take some more words and look at the syllabification with the help of the dictionary. This will definitely help you build your understanding of these nuances and eventually make you an impressive speaker. Thank you.