WIKIPEDIA

Syllabic consonant

A **syllabic consonant** or **vocalic consonant** is a consonant that forms a syllable on its own, like the *m*, *n* and *l* in the English words *rhythm*, *button* and *bottle*, or is the nucleus of a syllable, like the *r* sound in the American pronunciation of *work*. To represent it, the understroke diacritic in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is used, ⟨U+0329 ◌̩ COMBINING VERTICAL LINE BELOW⟩. It may be instead represented by an overstroke, ⟨U+030D ◌̍ COMBINING VERTICAL LINE ABOVE⟩ if the symbol that it modifies has a descender, such as in [ŋ̍].[1]

Syllabic	
	
IPA Number	431
Encoding	
Entity (decimal)	̩
Unicode (hex)	U+0329

Syllabic consonants in most languages are sonorants, such as nasals and liquids. Very few have syllabic obstruents, such as stops and fricatives in normal words, but English has syllabic fricatives in paralinguistic words like *shh!* and *zzz*.

Contents

Examples

Germanic languages

In many varieties of High and Low German, pronouncing syllabic consonants may be considered a shibboleth. In High German and Tweants (a Low Saxon dialect spoken in the Netherlands, more Low Saxon dialects have the syllabic consonant), all word-final syllables in infinite verbs and feminine plural nouns spelled *-en* are pronounced with syllabic consonants. The High German infinitive *laufen* (to walk) is pronounced [ˈlaʊfn̩] or (in some accents) even [ˈlaʊfm̩] and its Tweants counterpart *loopn* is pronounced [ˈloːʔm̩]. Tweants scholars even debate whether or not this feature should be

incorporated in spelling, resulting in two generally accepted spelling forms (either *loopn* or *lopen*).

Many dialects of English may use syllabic consonants in words such as *even* [ˈiːvn̩], *awful* [ˈɔːfl̩] and *rhythm* [ˈɹɪðm̩], which English dictionaries' respelling systems usually treat as realizations of underlying sequences of schwa and a consonant (/ˈiːvən/).[2]

In Danish, a syllabic consonant is the standard colloquial realization of combinations of the phoneme schwa /ə/ and a sonorant, generally referred to as schwa-assimilation,[3] e.g. *katten* (the cat) /ˈkatən/ = [ˈkʰætn̩], *dame* (lady) /ˈdaːmə/ = [ˈtɛːm̩], *cykel* (bike) /ˈsykəl/ = [ˈsykl̩], *myre* (ant) /ˈmyːrə/ = [ˈmyːɐ̯], *sove* (sleep) /ˈsɒːvə/ = [ˈsɒːʊ̯], *reje* (shrimp) /ˈraːjə/ = [ˈʁɑːɪ̯], *huset* (the house) /ˈhuːˀsəð/ = [ˈhuːˀsð̩ˠ].

In all four dialect groups of Norwegian, a syllabic alveolar nasal, /n/, may be heard. It is syllabic when following other alveolar consonants and occurs most often in the definite singular form of masculine nouns (see Norwegian grammar) where the schwa has elided, e.g. *bilen* (the car) [biːln̩], where it was originally [biːlən]. With some speakers, the schwa may be have been reinserted, especially for words already ending in /n/ where the syllabic /n/ may have been entirely elided afterward, e.g. *mannen* (the man) can either be pronounced like [mɑ.nn̩], [mɑn] or [man.nən][4][5]. In addition to this, a syllabic /n/ always occurs in words like *vatn* (water) [ʋa.tn̩] and *botn* (bottom) [bɔ.tn̩]. This syllabification of alveolar nasals also appears in some Swedish dialects. In all cases where the alveolar sound becomes retroflex, /n/ also becomes retroflex /ɳ/, e.g. *barten* (the moustache) [ba.ʈn̩] (see Norwegian phonology#Consonants). A contrastively syllabic retroflex /ɳ/ can also be seen in words like *baren* (the bar) [bɑː.ɳ] and *barn* (child) [bɑːɳ]. In some Norwegian dialects, a syllabic alveolar lateral approximant /l/ may be heard in the same circumstances as syllabic /n/, e.g. *puddel* (poodle) [pʉ.dl̩], though it is not as common as syllabic /n/. A syllabic /l/ may also be heard in Bergen, where a following syllabic /n/ has elided completely, e.g. *solen* (the sun) [suː.l̩].[6] In dialects that have palatalisation of some alveolar consonants like Northern Norwegian and Trøndersk, the following syllabic /n/ is also palatalised,[7] e.g. *ballen* (the ball) [ba.ʎɲ̩].

Obstruents

All of the consonants syllabicized in Germanic languages are sonorants. However, the only time obstruents are used syllabically in English is in onomatopoeia, such as *sh!* [ʃː] (a command to be quiet), *sss* [sː] (the hiss of a snake), *zzz* [zː] (the sound of a bee buzzing or someone sleeping), and *tsk tsk!* [ǂǂ] (used to express disapproval or pity), though it is not certain how to define what a syllable is in such cases.

Sanskrit

Sanskrit ऋ *ṛ* [r̩] and ऌ *ḷ* [l̩] are syllabic consonants, allophones of consonantal *r* and *l*. This continues the reconstructed situation of Proto-Indo-European, where both liquids and nasals had syllabic allophones, r̩, l̩, m̩, n̩.

Slavic languages

Many Slavic languages allow syllabic consonants. Some examples include:

- Czech and Slovak *r* [r] and *l* [l], as in the phrase *Strč prst skrz krk* 'stick your finger through the

throat' (in both languages). Slovak also has long versions of these syllabic consonants, *ŕ* and *Ĺ*, e.g.: *kĺb* [kl̩ːp] 'joint', *vŕba* [ˈvr̩ːba] 'willow', *škvŕn* [ʃkvr̩ːn] '(of) spots'. Czech also has *m̥* and *n̥*, e.g.: *sedm* [sedm̥~sedn̥] 'seven'.[8]

- Slovene [m̩], [n̩] and [l̩] in non-native words, e.g. Vltava.[9]
- Serbo-Croatian *r* [r], such as in *trčati* 'to run'; *l* [l], such as in *Vltava* 'Vltava'; and *n* [n], such as in *Njutn* 'Newton'. In Serbian dialects between the Kupa river and Velebit of pre-war Croatia, other consonants are also syllabic. For example, *t* [t̩], such as in *mostć* (which is *mostić* 'small bridge' in standard Croatian); and *č* [tʃ], such as in *klinčć* (which is *klinčić* ('clove') in standard Croatian).[10]
- Macedonian *р* [r], such as in прв [ˈpr̩f] 'first', врцки [ˈd͡zr̩t͡ski] 'peepers', срце [ˈsr̩t͡sɛ] 'heart', незадржлив [nɛˈzadr̩ʒlif] 'irrepressible', ’рбет [ˈr̩bɛt] 'spine', ’рѓа [ˈr̩ɟa] 'to rust', ’рчи [ˈr̩t͡ʃi] 'to snore', etc.

Sinitic languages

Several Sinitic languages, such as Cantonese and Hokkien, feature both syllabic *m* ([m̩]) and *ng* ([ŋ̍]) that stand alone as their own words. In Cantonese, the former is most often used in the word meaning 'not' (唔, [m̩]) while the latter can be seen in the word for 'five' (五, [ŋ̍]) and the surname Ng (吳, [ŋ̍] or 伍, [ŋ̍], depending on the tone), among others.

Syllabic fricatives

A number of languages have **syllabic fricatives** or **fricative vowels**. In several varieties of Chinese, certain high vowels following fricatives or affricates are pronounced as extensions of those sounds, with voicing added (if not already present) and a vowel pronounced while the tongue and teeth remain in the same position as for the preceding consonant, leading to the turbulence of a fricative carrying over into the vowel. In Mandarin Chinese, this happens for example with *sī, shī, and rī*. Traditional grammars describing them as having a "buzzing" sound. A number of modern linguists[11][12] describe them as true syllabic fricatives, although with weak frication. They are accordingly transcribed ⟨sź̩, ʂź̩, and ʐź̩⟩ respectively.[13]

However, for many speakers, the friction carries over only into the beginning of the vowel.[14] The tongue and teeth remain where they were, but the tongue contact is lessened a bit to allow for a high approximant vowel with no frication except at the beginning, during the transition. John Wells at University College London[15] uses the detailed transcriptions ⟨szᵚ̈⟩ for *si* and ⟨ʂzʲ̈⟩ for *shi* (ignoring the tone), with the superscript indicating the "color" of the sound and a lowering diacritic on the *z* to indicate that the tongue contact is relaxed enough to prevent frication. Another researcher suggests ⟨s͡ɯ̽⟩ and ⟨ʂ͡ɨ̽⟩ for *si* and *shi*, respectively, to indicate that the frication of the consonant may extend onto the vowel.[16] Some speakers have even more lax articulation, opening the teeth and noticeably lowering the tongue, so that *sī shī rī* are pronounced [sɯ́ ʂɯ́ ʐɯ́], with the same vowel [ɯ] in each case and no r-coloring.

Standard Liangshan Yi has two similar "buzzed" vowels that are described as syllabic fricatives, [β̩, ɻ̩]. The former may even be trilled [ʙ̩].

Sinologists and linguists working in the Chinese analytical tradition frequently use the term **apical vowel** (舌尖元音 *Shéjiān yuán yīn*) to describe the sounds above and others like them in various

Sino-Tibetan languages. However, this is a misnomer, as the tongue is actually laminal. The nonstandard symbols ⟨ɻ̩ ɻ̟̩ ɥ̩ ʮ̩⟩ are commonly used to transcribe these vowels in place of ⟨z̩ z̻̩ z̩ʷ z̻ʷ⟩ or ⟨C͡ɯ̟ C̻͡ɨ C͡ʉ̟ C͡ʊ⟩, respectively. The term *apical vowel* should not be taken as synonymous with *syllabic fricative*, as e.g., the bilabial syllabic fricative [β̩] in Liangshan Yi is not pronounced with the tongue.

Other languages

Berber, Salish, Wakashan and Chemakuan languages have syllabic obstruents in normal vocabulary, such as Nuxálk [pʰ.tɬʰ.kʲʰ.tsʰ], [s̩.pʰs̩] "northeast wind", [s̩.χʲ.s̩] or [sχʲ.s̩] "seal blubber", [ɬ̩.qʰ] "wet", [t̬ɬ̩.ɬ̩] "dry", or [nu.jam.ɬ̩.ɬ̩.ɬ̩.ɬ̩] "we (ɬ̩) used to (ɬ̩.ɬ̩) sing (nu.jam.ɬ̩)".

In Standard Yoruba, the consonants *m* and *n* may be syllabic and carry tone like vowels. However, they always stand alone as syllables and cannot stand as syllable nuclei.

In Baoulé, *m* or *n* may be syllabic. As a stand-alone word, it means "I" (first person subject pronoun), as in *N ti baule* [n̩ tī bāūlē] "I speak Baoulé". Its quality varies with the consonant following it, as in *M bá aiman* [m̩ bá āīmān] "I will come tomorrow".

The Hungarian word *s* [ʃ̩], a high-register variant of *és* "and", is a syllabic consonant.

Japanese is frequently described as having a syllabic N, which has its own "syllabic" letter in Japanese kana, but it is actually moraic. The only actual syllabic consonant is a syllabic nasal as an informal variant of *un* "yeah", similar to syllabic nasals with similar meanings in English.

See also

- ɲ̩

References

1. International Phonetic Association, *Handbook*, pp. 14–15.
2. For example, see the Pronunciation guide (http://www.merriam-webster.com/help/MWOL%20Pronunciation%20Guide.pdf) of the Merriam-Webster dictionary.
3. Grønnum, Nina (June 1998). "Danish". *Journal of the International Phonetic Association*. **28** (1–2): 99–105. doi:10.1017/S0025100300006290 (https://doi.org/10.1017%2FS0025100300006290). ISSN 1475-3502 (https://www.worldcat.org/issn/1475-3502).
4. Sandøy, H. (1993) "*Talemål*", Novus forlag, Oslo. ISBN 82-7099-206-2.
5. Skjekkeland, M. 1997 "*Dei norske dialektane - Tradisjonelle særdrag i jamføring med skriftmåla*", Høyskoleforlaget AS, Kristiansand S. ISBN 82-7634-103-9.
6. Pettersen, E. 1990 "*Bergens bymål*", Novus Forlag AS, Oslo. ISBN 82-7099-167-8
7. Bruyninckx, Harmegnies (October 2000). "A STUDY OF PALATAL SEGMENTS' PRODUCTION BY DANISH SPEAKERS" (https://www.isca-speech.org/archive/archive_papers/icslp_2000/i00_3909.pdf) (PDF). *ISCA Archive*.
8. Bělič, Jaromír (1972). "Sedm, sedmnáct, sedmdesát…" (http://nase-rec.ujc.cas.cz/archiv.php?art=5615). *Naše řeč*. **55** (2–3): 72–78.
9. Toporišič, Jože. 1992. *Enciklopedija slovenskega jezika*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, p. 377.
10. Finka Hrvatski dijalektološki zbornik knjiga 7 svezak 1

11. Jerry Norman (1988). *Chinese* (Cambridge Linguistic Surveys). Cambridge University Press. P. 142.
12. S. Robert Ramsey (1987). *The Languages of China*. Princeton University Press. P. 45.
13. San Duanmu (2008). "Syllable Structure in Chinese (http://www-personal.umich.edu/~duanmu/10ChineseSyllable.pdf)" (ch. 4). In *Syllable Structure*. Oxford. 304 pp. Accessed Feb 21, 2013.
14. UCLA Phonetics Lab Data: [1] (http://www.phonetics.ucla.edu/appendix/languages/chinese/chinese.html).
15. John Wells (March 15, 2007). "Chinese apical vowels (http://www.phon.ucl.ac.uk/home/wells/blog0703a.htm). John Wells's phonetic blog. *Accessed Feb 21, 2013.*
16. Kwan-hin Cheung, 1992. "北京話 '知' '資' 二韻國際音標寫法商榷" [IPA transcription of the so-called 'apical vowels' in Pekinese], in T. Lee, ed., *Research on Chinese Linguistics in Hong Kong*, Linguistic Society of Hong Kong.
