

The Fourth Lecture:

Phonemic and Phonetic Transcription

There are several different kinds of symbols for one of two purposes basically: phonemic (phoneme) symbols or phonetic symbols. The most important point is that the number of phonemic symbols must be exactly the same as the number of phonemes existed in the language. However, some of our phoneme symbols consist of two characters; e.g., / tʃ / is a phoneme symbol consists of two characters / t / and / ʃ /. There is a difference between phonemic symbols and phonetic symbols because the phonemic symbols do not have to indicate accurate phonetic quality, it is possible to choose among several possible symbols to represent a particular phoneme, but this has made a lot of confusion to students to learn how to use these different symbols. The complexity and expense of using private symbols create problems in typing and printing processes; e.g., /a/ is a practical and usual symbol whereas /æ/ is unusual. Some writers have emphasized on producing a set of phoneme symbols that need the minimum number of special or non-standard symbols while others have thought that the symbols must be as close as possible to the symbols that a phonetician will choose to give an accurate reference to the quality of a sound. There can be disagreements about the most important characteristics of a sound that a symbol has to indicate. The critical property of phonemic system is that a special symbol or special combination of symbols may represent each significant speech sound of a language; therefore, this transcription system overcomes the shortcomings of the current English alphabet.

Thus, it becomes important to innovate two kinds of transcription: *phonemic* and *phonetic*. Fromkin defines Phonemic transcription "is the

phonemic representation of speech sounds using phonetic symbols, ignoring phonetic details that are predictable by rule, usually given between slashes, e.g., /pan/ for 'pan' as opposed to the phonetic representation //p^hān/ ; /p^hool/ ; /t^hen/. Phonemic transcription is one of the traditional exercises in pronunciation teaching by phonetic methods in which every speech must be identified as one of the phonemes and written with appropriate symbol. There are two different kinds of transcription exercises: transcription from dictation, the student must listen to a person or a tape-recording and write down what they hear; transcription from a written text, the student is given a passage of dialogue written in orthography and must use phonemic symbols to represent how she /he thinks it would be pronounced by a speaker of a particular accent. In a phonemic transcription only the phonemic symbols may be used; this has the advantage that it is comparatively quick and easy to learn to use it. The disadvantage is that as one continues to learn more about phonetics he becomes able to hear a lot of sound differences that he was not aware before, and students find it depressing to be unable to write down more detailed information at this stage. The English phonemic system consists of forty four phonemes. Human beings can make many more sounds than these clearly, and when phoneticians are trying to represent sounds more precisely they use a much larger set of symbols. A transcription that is much more accurate in phonetic detail and contained much more information than phonemic transcription is called *Phonetic* transcription. Fromkin supports that by his definition "Phonetic transcription is the representation of speech sounds using phonetic symbols between square brackets. They may reflect nondistinctive predictable features such as aspiration and nasality ,e.g.,[p^hāt] ;[mān] for 'pat' and 'man' " It has two types: a *narrow* or detailed phonetic transcription which contains a lot of information about the exact

quality of the sounds; a *broad* phonetic transcription includes a little more information than a phonemic transcription. Jones believes that broad transcription is the most practical for most linguistic purposes, because it combines accuracy with the greatest simplicity. It is generally recommended in teaching the pronunciation of a foreign language. Narrow transcription is useful in comparative work, and especially when it is desired to make comparisons between the pronunciations of different people who are speaking the same language. Hudson justifies that the narrow phonetic writing is not just difficult. It is quite impractical, since the range of phonetic variation is great and the differences between many of the variants are impossible to hear constantly, or trusted even with training and experience. There is a significant systematic difference between narrow phonetic writing and a certain kind of broad phonetic writing. This difference deals with the reasons for the presence of the phonetic details in the stream of speech that are:

- a. The obligatory pronunciation rules of the language; e.g., /θ/ is preceded by /n/ in 'tenth'. Here it is dental while it is used to be alveolar because /θ/ affects on it.
- b. Idiosyncratic or momentary characteristics of the speaker; e.g., the speaker who has a flu will pronounce /n/ as nasalized /d/ because his nasal cavity is blocked and /n/ may lose some of its nasal quality.

Such phonetic characteristics of speech are no contrastive or non phonemic. The neighboring phones or the individual personality of the speaker determines their presence, so they are not associated with the meanings of morphemes as part of their particular form, and their presence is because of necessity of their neighboring phones, or as a characteristics of the speaker's voice, they cannot make a difference of

linguistic meaning between one utterance or another. The following chart contains the pronunciation symbols used in modern English dictionaries. This chart is adopted from (Int b) with modification

vowels	Consonants
IPA	IPA

ʌ cup, luck b bad, lab

ɑ: arm, father d did, lady

æ cat, black f find, if

e met, bed g give, flag

ə away, cinema h how, hello

ɜ:r turn, learn j yes, yellow

ɪ hit, sitting k cat, back

i: see, heat l leg, little

ɒ hot, rock m man, lemon

ɔ: call, four n no, ten

ʊ put, could ʌ sing, finger

u: blue, food ɒ pet, map

ɔɪ five, eye ə red, try

əʊ now, out ɔ sun, miss

eɪ say, eight ʊ she, crash

əʊ go, home t tea, getting

ɔɪ boy, join tʃ check, church

eəʳ where, air θ think, both

iəʳ near, here ð this, mother

ʊəʳ pure, tourist v voice, five

w wet, window

z zoo, lazy

ʒ pleasure, vision

dʒ just, large
