

Redundancy as a Phonological Feature in the English Language

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Abstract

The study critically examines redundancy as a phonological feature in the English Language. It establishes that it is an integral aspect of the English phonology. The study adopts a survey method using structuralist approach. The study was conducted among the speakers of English language in Benue State University, Makurdi. The sample size of about 60 respondents were taken from a selected number of departments: Languages and linguistics, Mass communication, Religion and Philosophy, Theatre Arts, English language and the Political Science undergraduate students who ranged from 16 - 35 years. The study used the following instruments: oral interviews, personal observations and discussion group to obtain data for the study. The findings reveal that redundancy must be understood and given space in the daily practice of the language. This will enhance effective communication and understanding among speaker of English Language. In fact, failure in speaking the language with a consistent agreement to the entire phonological system (including the redundant features) will sometimes amount to communication breakdown and misinterpretation of the meaning. A close observation has shown that many speakers of English language lack a good knowledge of its phonological system. The speakers' lack of knowledge of what redundant feature is leads to wrong articulation of certain phonemes which are supposed to be redundant and this eventually affects the meaning interpretation by listeners leading to communication breakdown among speakers. The study recommends that phoneticians should expose students to a proper knowledge of redundant features at primary and secondary schools levels.

Key words: English Language, Phonemes, Phonology, Redundancy

Introduction

Language as a human attribute is highly regarded and respected as an integral aspect of any society. It is either conventionally or naturally endowed with a number of features that are found in the four major levels of language analysis (Phonology. Syntax. Morphology and

Semantics). The phonological features deal with the principles which are to guide and determine the phonological system of a given language. English as one of the human languages is also highly principled in its nature and practice. Among these phonological principles we have redundancy as one of the phonological features in the English language, it is indeed one of the aspects which has contributed in building or making up what is referred to as the English phonological system.

Redundancy can generally be referred to as having more linguistic properties than needed or necessary in an expression or a structure. Crystal (2011:406) views it that "as a feature of (a sound, grammar, etc) is redundant if its presence is unnecessary in order to identify a linguistic unit." The above definition states the fact that redundancy is a linguistic feature, and can be found in grammar, phonology and other levels of a language analysis. However, the existence of this feature either in grammar or phonology of a language remains redundant, its presence notwithstanding. In the English language this redundant features are always present as they reflect in so many English words. Some phonemes in the English word only appear to maintain the acceptable structural system of the language. However, they do not actively function or reflect in the pronunciation of such words. Their inactiveness in pronunciation makes them redundant. Then, the English phonology consider such as redundant features. But there are no specific phonemes that are said to be redundant, rather, it is a position and behaviour and phonemes in words that makes them redundant.

This study is aimed at X-raying into the concept of redundancy as a phonological feature in the English language. This is because the poor phonological knowledge displayed by the speakers of English often hampers understanding and comprehension in communication. The study wants to correct and ensure effective application and recognition of this feature within the phonological system of the language

Conceptual Clarifications of Redundancy

Traditionally speaking, redundancy entails expression of ideas using more information than necessary. Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia said redundancy is the construction of a phrase that presents some ideas using information often via multiple means, then is necessary for one to be able to understand the idea. This is also looked upon as "a subset of tautology: is RAS syndrome in which one of the words presented b\ an acronym is repeated outside the acronym". "ATM Machine" "HIV virus". "PIN number". The information here is more than necessary in that the acronym "ATM" in its expanded form means automated teller machine, then adding machine to "ATM" is not necessary.

In the words of Bagha, (www.uenrativephonoluv.htm) "phonology (or phonemics) is the study of sound systems: that is. it studies how speech sounds structures and function in languages". Phonology studies the distinctive features in a given language. This study amounts to how and why individual phonemes has differences in various phonological environment or positions in words. Their varying behaviour based on environment and position manifest what is called phonological features and process. Bloomfield's view in Varshney (2010:79) entails that, phonology is organization of sounds into patterns. In other to fulfill the communication functions, language organizes their materials, the vocal noise, into the current list and well-arranged sound patterns. It is this study of formal organization of sounds of languages that is referred to as phonology. This implies that, conventions in language stipulates specific manner of articulation or pronunciation. The fact again remains that phonological study goes beyond physical representation of phonemes it involves their behaviour, production and even the way

they are perceived or received. These actually entail an indebt study of sounds in a language. The study explains why a particular sound is produced as such, the explanation account for their changes in different environment. For example /b/ is a consonantal Labial and voiced sound, yet it manner of articulation in a word like: "Lamb" denies or disqualifies it as a voiced sound. This is because it is coming after a voiced sound "M" where its perfect articulation will not allow the voicing feature to appear.

Redundancy as a Phonological Feature in the English Language.

A good knowledge of English phonology must include all the phonological features of the language which redundancy is not an exception. This is because redundant features contribute in building the structure and the principles of its systemic nature. Redundant features as a phonological concept are these features which do not appear in the transcription of a word. Matthew (2007:336) says that "the property of having more structure than is minimally necessary. A bridge for example, needs a certain number of components if it is to stand". In practice, however, the structure of a bridge is redundant; hence one component were to fail the others would still be able to ensure that it remain standing. Similarly in languages, a certain number of elements are needed to distinguish each word or sentence from others. But sometimes the structures in which these elements are combined are redundant, so that if an individual element is indistinct the whole may still be correctly understood. This agrees with the view of Martins and Smis (2010:1) on morphology ground which states that "morphology is the study of the internal structure of words." The structure must be in the acceptable uninterrupted systematic nature of the English language. Yet when transcription is made which entails pronunciation of such words, one would notice some features not being present in the transcribed version of the same words. For example. The word "know" mail/, "knife" as /nai'f/ and "Lamb" as /laem/. In which case "k" as a phoneme is behaving strange and against the principle of distinctive feature in English phonology.

Juwitt (2005:88) holds that "Every English word has a fixed accent contour, the contour being constituted by the varying degrees of prominence given to the syllables of the word."

For Jakobson and Halle (1956:1) redundancy is a well-known phenomenon of phoneme or phonological metrics within the framework of the distinctive-features theory. Redundancy in theory means that the specification (either + or -) of certain features of phoneme is predictable given the specifications of certain other features of the same neighboring phonemes and or of a phoneme sequence. This idea of redundancy is creditable and so relevant here because theorists like Jackson. Haris had identified the concept which is hidden to many English speakers. But this work is still relevant because it embrace that aspect of how the redundant features helps the structure of the English phonology as it determines words structure. And word structure is inevitable in determining harmony in words pronunciation and it can as well help people identify the meaning of the word pronounced.

On a similar note, Harris (1996:1) maintains that "in orthodox feature theory, phonological output representations must contain redundant feature values in order to achieve phonetic interpretability. This assumption sits awkwardly with the current view that constraint on phonological well-framedness is expressed over output. The notion held by Harris has a strong foot print and hold on a research of this kind. In that, he has seen redundancy as a necessary feature value in phonological concept. By saying it is until then that we can accurately interpret even phonetics tradition. Phonetics as we know deals with human sounds generally: description, classification and transcription. And as we earlier mentioned, redundant features are all achieve by the help of transcription. Though they are physically seen on syllables of a

given word, which agrees with the acoustic nature of phonetics but they are not seen in transcription. The role play by the articulating phonetics restricts their appearance in transcription. It now entails that the redundant features are noted right from the phonetic principle of human language.

According to Walker as reflected in Fromkin and Rodman (1993:186) the principles of pronunciation are those general laws of articulation which determines the character, and fix boundaries of every language; as in every system of speaking, however, irregular, the organs must necessarily fall into some common mode of enunciation or the purpose of providence in the gift of speech would be absolutely defeated. Resorting to the idea of Ito et al (1995:571) which opined that "some researchers are understandably reluctant to give up the representational advantages of under specification, have proposed that, under the right constraint ranking conditions, certain redundant feature values may be suppressed in output. This is because the output which entails the pronunciation or the phonetics structure does not Authors like Ameachi (2005:325) talks of "silent consonant sounds". According to him many consonant sounds are not pronounced in some English words. Some of such consonant sounds are as follows: Comb, Schema, knowledge, and Listen among others. Details about this examples will be considered in the discussions of findings.

Methodology of the study

The study adopts a survey method where researcher used the structuralist approach or technique to explicate redundancy as a phonological feature of the English Language. The study was conducted among the speakers of the English language in Benue State University, Makurdi. The sample size of about 60 respondents were taken from a selected number of departments: Languages and linguistics, Mass communication, Religion and Philosophy, Theatre Arts, English language and the Political Science. The respondents were majorly undergraduate students who ranged from 16 - 35 years. The researcher used the following instruments: oral interviews, personal observation and discussion group to obtain data for the study. The study also adopts both primary and secondary methods of data collection.

Data Presentation and Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that redundancy does not only exist as a redundant phonological feature of the English Language, but is always present and functional in maintaining the structure of English words. Respondents were able to state their views using some English words within which this feature can be seeing as presented in the tables below:

Table A: General Redundant features

Orthography	Phonemes	Words with redundant features	Transcription/pronunciation
K	/k/	<u>K</u> nowledge	/nɒlɪdʒ/
P	/p/	<u>P</u> sychology	/saɪkɒlədʒi/
D	/d/	Sand <u>w</u> ich	/sænwɪtʃ/
B	/b/	B <u>o</u> mb	/bɒm/
H	/h/	<u>H</u> onour	/ɒnə(r)/
J	/j/	Y <u>o</u> ung	/jʌŋ/
G	/g/	M <u>i</u> ghtily	/məɪtɪli/

Field Study 2018

In the above table, a good example of redundant features in the English Language is presented clearly, the English Orthography is represented on the first column, the phonemes of the same is also represented on the second column while the third column contains English words with a particular redundant features - underlined, and the transcription stating how the word is pronounced.

Through interaction and observation of groups in some departments as speakers of the English language in Benue State University, Makurdi, the researcher found out that redundant' features exist in the English phonology. It is also noteworthy that these features are not necessarily static. What it entails is that a phoneme may be redundant in the articulation of a given word, but the same sound/phoneme may be well or fully articulated in another word. For example, in the word "psychology" /p/ is a redundant feature, but the same /p/ is not redundant in a word like "part". This changing behavioural nature of phonemes is one of the things which make it more difficult for easy understanding of its functionality and availability in the language.

Table B: The Redundant Features occurring at the Words Initial Position.

Orthography	Phonemes	Redundant features of the word initial	Transcription
P	/p/	<u>P</u> neumonia	/n ju:məv.ni.ə/
K	/k/	<u>K</u> nowledge	/nɒlɪdʒ/
H	/h/	<u>H</u> onour	/ɒnə(r)/
W	/w/	<u>W</u> rite	/raɪt/
K	/k/	<u>K</u> new	/ŋju:/
K	/k/	<u>K</u> nife	/naɪf/
K	/k/	<u>K</u> night	/nait/

Field Study 2018

In the above table, a good example of redundant features in the English Language is presented at the word initial position. The transcription represents the actual pronunciation; however, each of those words contains a redundant feature at the beginning. Interaction with respondents also proved that words initial position can also constitute this phonological feature as stated above. This confirms Harris' (1996) opinion, which states that phonological out representation must contain redundant feature values. Though some people as speakers of the language even in the University do not seem to have an understanding of what this feature is. Some merely speak with little or no consciousness that a feature of this kind has a role to play in determining whether or not their pronunciation is in agreement with the standard of the English phonology.

Table C: The Redundant Features at the Middle Position of the English Words.

Orthography	Phonemes	Words	Transcription
D	/d/	Sand <u>w</u> ich	/sænwɪtʃ/
T	/t/	Apos <u>t</u> le	/ə'pɒsl/
U	/u/	Y <u>o</u> ung	/jʌŋ/
O	/g/	F <u>i</u> ght	/faɪt/
B	/b/	D <u>o</u> ubt	/daʊt/
C	/c/	S <u>ch</u> wepps	/ʃwəps/
H	/h/	Kh <u>h</u> aki	/'ka:ki/

Field Study 2018

In the above table, a good example of redundant features in the English Language is presented at the word middle position. The random appearance of this feature in different words position is an indication of its indispensability in the status of English phonology. This feature contributes in maintaining the convention of the English Language. And convention according to Crystal (2011) is a term in general sense referring to any accepted practice in the use of a language.

Table D: The Redundant Features at the Terminal Words Position.

Orthography	Phonemes	Words	Transcription
B	/b/	B <u>o</u> mb	/bɒm/
E	/e/	Lo <u>v</u> e	/lʌv/
E	/e/	Co <u>m</u> e	/kʌm/
B	/b/	Co <u>mb</u>	/'kəʊm/
Y	/y/	Ke <u>y</u>	/ki:/
E	/e/	kerb <u>s</u> ide	/kɜ:b.said/
S	/s/	S <u>a</u> w	/sɔ:/

Field Study 2018

In the above table, a good example of redundant features in the English Language is presented at the word terminal position. And their reflection in English words is not static; they can appear in any position of the word. It is observed that the English words accommodate this feature at the initials, medial and final positions of the words. This is because each English word has distinct features and it must be maintained. This is why Juwitt (2005) holds that very English word has a fix accent contour, been constituted by the vary degrees of prominence given to the syllables of the words.

Conclusion

This study attests to the fact that redundancy as a feature in English Language has been misunderstood by many speakers of the language. The study however, established that it is an integral aspect of the English phonology. And it must be understood and given space in the daily practice of the language. This will enhance effective communication and understanding among speaker of English Language. In fact, failure in speaking the language with a consistent agreement to the entire phonological system (including the redundant features) will sometimes amount to communication breakdown and misinterpretation of the meaning. Its study has therefore, become a necessity not only for students but for all speakers of the language, hence English is highly considered within the country as a tool for human interaction.

Recommendations

As a foreign language, the phonological system of English language is alien to many English speakers in the country, and this is a major problem. The language is thus spoken with a lot of imbalance phonologically. The study therefore, made the following recommendation:

1. Linguist or scholars should give more attention to the area of phonetics and phonology of the English language. That is a call for more phoneticians who will be able to teach and impact the same knowledge to students at all levels to help the situation.
2. Different and effective teaching methodologies should be applied to see the one that will be much easier for a particular set or level of students to understand what is passed unto them.
3. Government should also provide resources to help in developing linguistics institutes and facilities like active linguistics laboratories and libraries that will aid teaching and learning activities.
4. Students should on their part study English language with commitment, especially in the area of phonology, knowing that it places more demands on students because of its detail nature.

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