Pronunciation of Word Inflection: Grammatical Morphemes and Allomorphs

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Abstract

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Languages are constantly changing and adding new words so as English which is a challenging one to learn, as it is full of quirks and exceptions. Languages, having some degree of inflection are synthetic languages. In grammar, inflection is the modification of a word to express different grammatical categories such as tense, case, voice, aspect, person, number, gender and mood. Grammatical morphemes denote grammatical categories of a language such as tense, number gender and aspect. The grammatical morphemes inflect their pronunciation due to the influence of nearby sounds. The differences are not generally reflected in the spellings of the morphemes. The inflected forms of pronunciations of the morphemes are called allomorphs.

Keywords: Word Inflection, Morphemes, Allomorphs, Past Tense Markers, Plural Markers

Introduction

Languages that have some degree of inflection are synthetic languages. In grammar, inflection is the modification of a word to express different grammatical categories such as tense, case, voice, aspect, person, number, gender and mood. The inflection of verbs is also called conjugation, and one can refer to the inflection of nouns, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, determiners, participles, prepositions, postpositions, numerals, articles etc., as declension.

Grammatical Morphemes and Allomorphs

Grammatical morphemes denote grammatical categories of a language such as tense, number gender and aspect. *-ed* and *-s* are grammatical morphemes, indicating (*-ed*) simple past tense as in *he called me* and perfect aspect as in *Catherine has visited*. And the morpheme *-s* makes plurality as in *the books, girls, etc.* In case of third person singular in present tense, the

morpheme **-s** is used to inflect the verb as in *John reads a poem*. In the same way, the morpheme **-s** also marks possession as in *it is Varma's new car*.

In English conversation, the grammatical morphemes inflect their pronunciation due to the influence of nearby sounds. The differences are not generally reflected in the spellings of the morphemes. The inflected forms of pronunciations of the morphemes are called allomorphs. **/d/, /t/ and /id/** are the three allomorphs of the morpheme -**ed.**

The Voicing Variation of the Inflectional Endings

Factually, languages are constantly changing and adding new words so as English which is a challenging one to learn, as it is full of quirks and exceptions. The construction of regular past-tense verbs is generally done by adding **-d** or **-ed** to the verb, and it doesn't change form based on the subject of the verb as in he *pushed*, they *agreed* and she *wanted*.   The verbs, moved, asked and agreed seem alike, ending in **"-ed**."But the difference between the words is the pronunciation of the ending. There are some verbs with a voiceless sound like **/t/** as in *pushed,* and some of them with a voiced sound of **/d/**, as in *agreed.* And some other verbs are pronounced like **/id/** as in *wanted*.

There are a majority of common pronunciation exercises in popular, commercial ESL textbooks which focus on the voicing variation of inflectional endings. Based on the frequency with which these exercises appear, there seems to be a determination in the ESL profession to have our students pronounce these inflectional endings as prescribed with little regard to the students' perceptions of what they need to improve, to the functional load, or to the level to which intelligibility is diminished if an item is mispronounced (Brown, as cited in Derwing & Rossiter, 2002). There are numerous arguments for excluding exercises focused on the voicing variations of inflectional endings from pronunciation curriculums on both linguistic and pedagogical grounds.

Learners are to concentrate on the voicing variation of **/t/** and **/d/** in past tense endings and the **/s/** and **/z/** in plural noun and third-person singular verb endings. The voicing quality of the

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preceding phoneme determines the voicing quality of the inflectional ending. "Voicing" or "voiced" refers to the vibration of the vocal folds in the larynx. The only difference between */t/* and */d/* is the vibration in the vocal folds. For */t/*, the vocal folds do not vibrate and it is therefore a voiceless phoneme, while for */d/*, the vocal folds do vibrate and it is therefore a voiced phoneme. The position of the lips, tongue, and airflow are the same; only the voicing quality varies for these phonemes. Most consonants have voiced and voiceless counterparts *(p/b, f/v, s/z, t/d, k/g)*, and these are often presented in minimal pair drills (Pennington, pp. 22-23).

Phonemic Variations of English

Students have to master the phonemic variations of English, as there is little to gain from mastering the allophonic variations of English. As said above, the only difference between */t/* and */d/* or */s/* and */z/* is the feature of voicing quality. So, it is the only difference between the pairs of sounds is the vibration of the vocal folds. These pairs of sounds can represent either phonemic or allophonic variations. A phonemic variation is one in which the variation produces a distinct word with a distinct meaning. No rules are associated with when the phoneme is voiced or voiceless. The voicing quality is determined strictly by the meaning of the word, as follows:

Voicing Quality Producing Phonemic Variation

VOICELESS	VOICED
bat	bad
fat	fad
feet	feed
great	grade
face	phase
ice	eyes
rice	rise
race	raise

cease	seize

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Past Tense Markers

The alveolar plosives, **/ t /** (voiceless) and **/ d /** (voiced) are inflexional suffixes when used for making past and past participle forms of verbs. The suffixes are always represented by the letter **-d** or the letters **-ed**. The different pronunciations of these suffixes are governed by the following rules.

1. These suffixes are pronounced **/ t /** after voiceless consonants other than **/ t /.**

For example

kicked	/ kɪkt /
laughed	/ lɑːft /
locked	/ lɒkt /
pushed	/ pʊʃt/
stopped	/stɒpt /

2. The following are pronounced **/ d /** after voiced sounds (remember, voiced sounds include vowels) other than **/ d /.**

For example

begged	/ begd /
called	/ kɔːld /
loved	/ lʌvd /
played	/ pleɪd /
robbed	/ rɒbd /

3. They are pronounced **/–ɪd /** when the root verb ends in **/ t /** and **/ d /.**

For example

handed	/ 'hændɪd /
hunted	/ 'hʌntɪd /
lamented	/ lə'mentɪd /
landed	/ 'lændɪd /
loaded	/ 'ləʊdɪd /
wanted	/ 'wɒntɪd/

Plural Markers

Both Alveolar Fricatives / s / and / z / are inflexional suffixes and plural markers. These are used for making plurals and possessives of nouns and simple present tense third person singular forms

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of verbs. The suffixes are always represented by the letter *-s* or the letters *-es*. The different pronunciations of these suffixes are governed by the following rules.

1. These suffixes are pronounced /-s / after voiceless consonants other than / s /, / ʃ /and / tʃ /.

   For example

cats	**/ kæts /**
cooks	**/ kʊks /**
coughs	**/ kɒfs /**
cups	**/ kʌps /**
months	**/ mʌnθs /**

2. The following are pronounced /-z /after voiced sounds (remember, voiced sounds include vowels) other than / z /, / ʒ /and/ dʒ /.

   For example

bags	**/ bægz /**
boards	**/ bɔːdz /**
calls	**/ kɔːlz /**
cities	**/ sɪtɪz /**
comes	**/ kʌmz /**
cows	**/ kaʊz /**
ears	**/ ɪəz /**
goes	**/ gəʊz /**
loathes	**/ ləʊðz /**
loves	**/ lʌvz /**
plays	**/ pleɪz /**
rubs	**/ rʌbz /**
sons	**/ sʌnz /**

3. They are pronounced /-ɪz /when the root (i.e., singular noun or the infinitive form of the verb) ends in / s /, /z/, / ʃ /, / ʒ /, / tʃ /and / dʒ /.

   For example

buses	**/ bʌsɪz/**
bushes	**/ bʊʃɪz /**
catches	**/ kætʃɪz /**

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edges	/ edʒɪz /
garages	/ gærɑːʒɪz /
roses	/ rəʊzɪz /

Conclusion

Literally, languages are constantly changing and adding new words so as English which is a challenging one to learn, as it is full of quirks and exceptions. Inflection is the modification of a word to express different grammatical categories. Grammatical morphemes denote grammatical categories of a language such as tense, number gender and aspect.

In the spoken form of English, the grammatical morphemes inflect their pronunciation due to the influence of nearby sounds. The inflected forms of pronunciations of the morphemes are called allomorphs. The voicing quality of the preceding phoneme determines the voicing quality of the inflectional ending. Thus, the learners are advised to concentrate on the voicing variation of */t/* and */d/* in past tense endings and the */s/* and */z/* in plural noun and third-person singular verb endings and to master the phonemic variations of English, as there is little to gain from mastering the allophonic variations of English.

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