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THE PHONEME THEORY AND "PRE-PHONEMIC" PERIOD IN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract

This article analyzes the formation and evolution of phoneme theory, with particular emphasis on the contributions of I.A. Baudouin de Courtenay and the transition from the pre-phonemic to the phonemic stage in linguistic science. It outlines the gradual differentiation between speech sounds and phonemes, establishing the latter as functional units responsible for distinguishing lexical and grammatical meaning. The study further examines the multifaceted nature of the phoneme, emphasizing its simultaneous material realization in speech and its abstract, generalized status within the language system. Special attention is given to the relationship between phonemes and their allophonic variants, as well as to the role of phonological oppositions in structuring the phonemic system. Overall, the article underscores the theoretical complexity of the phoneme and its central position in phonological analysis.

Key words

speech sounds; phoneme definition; allophones; phonological oppositions; distinctive function; morphological approach; psychological approach; phonological analysis; segmental phoneme; linguistic abstraction; sound system

The phoneme theory came into being in Russia. Its originator was Prof. I.A. Baundouin de Courtenay (1845-1929), an eminent Russian and Polish linguistic scholar, the founder of the Kazan linguistic school. Baundouin's views upon the phoneme lack consistency, for while he was developing the phoneme theory he changed his standpoint fundamentally more than once. First he tried to analyze phonemes according to their functions in morphemes; he perceived that the same morpheme was not always represented by the same combination of sounds, this theory is called the morphological phoneme theory.

Later he began to search for a unit, which would not be found by the limits of the morpheme. Then he asserts that what really does exist and what is being constantly renewed in the individual mind is the perception of a sound, i.e., the phoneme is defined as "physiological equivalent of the speech sound". Baundouin was an adherent to the so-called psychological school of thought in linguistics.

The term "phoneme" was invented as distinct from "phone" in 1879 by Krushevsky". Thus, both outstanding English linguists were familiar with the theory and term "phoneme" used by Russian linguists. The "prephoneme" period, I.e. when there was no distinction between "speech sound" and "phoneme" until 1870.

The formation of the phonological theory may be divided into 2 periods:

1.The "pre - phoneme" period (when there was no distinction between "speech sound" and "phoneme" until 1870);

2.The "phonemic" period, which began in 1870 and includes the 20th century. In this period the basic phonetic and phonological terms and concepts were proposed and the distinction between (lie actually pronounced speech sounds and the phonemes as functional units of the language was recognized.

The "phonemic" period, which began in 1870 and includes the twentieth century. In this period the basic phonemes as functional units of the language was recognized. The first linguist

to point out this distinction was I.A.Baudouin de Courtenay (1845 -1929), an outstanding Russian and Polish scholar. I.A. Baudouin de Courtenay defined the phoneme as the "psychological" equivalent of the speech sound». But he was aware of the fact that acoustic and motor images of the speech sound do not correspond to each other. I.A.Baudouin de Courtenay also tried to analyse phonemes on the bases of phonetic alternations in morphemes. Besides psychological and morphological definitions of the phoneme, he could considered that words may be realized in notions. I.A.Baudouin de Courtenay repeatedly stated that semantically the utterance breaks up into sentences, into significative words, words into morphological components or morphemes and morphemes into phonemes. As a morpheme is only divided into divided into components of the same nature as itself: these components -phonemes must also be significative.

The speech sounds of a language which constitute all of its morphemes and words are instances, manifestations, or realizations of its segmental phonemes. But it is not always simple and easy to establish the phonemic status of certain speech sounds, i.e. to decide to which phonemes they should be assigned or, in other words, variants (allophones) of which phonemes they are.

The identification of the phonemes of a language is not the only problem in its phonological analysis. Closely connected with this problem is the problem of establishing the phonemic composition of those of its words which contain one or more sounds whose phonemic status is uncertain, the problem of deciding to which phonemes the "suspicious" sounds in such words should be assigned.

The problem of identifying the phonemes in a particular word, is seemingly the same as the first one, the problem of identifying the phonemes of a language,in fact, the two problems are different, though inseparably interconnected.

Naturally, there exist definite principles and methods of solving these problems. Different linguists, however, follow different principles and use different methods, depending on what philosophical and linguistic conceptions or schools of thought, particularly what conception of the phoneme, they adhere to.

It was pointed out that speech sounds can perform this distinctive function only when they are opposed to each other or to no sound in one and the same position. For example, the English words /bid/ — /bed/ , /bæd/ — are distinguished from one another by the vowel sounds [i], [e], [æ] occurring in the same position (phonetic context, or environment). Therefore, these different vowel sounds represent different phonemes in English. In the pair of words /bæd/ bad —— /æd/ add the consonant [b] is opposed to no sound in the same position (zero opposition) thus differentiating the two words. The vowel sounds [æ] and [e] are capable of differentiating the grammatical forms of one and the same word, e.g. the singular form /mæn/ (man) and the plural /men/ (men). This is another proof that [e] and [æ] represent different phonemes in English.

The different consonants [s] and [z] differentiate such words as /ad'vais/ (advice) and /ad'vaiz/ (advise) while the consonants [s] and [t] differentiate the grammatical forms of such a verb as /a:sk/ (ask), viz. /a:sks/ (asks) and /a:skt/ (asked). Therefore, the consonant sounds [s, t] represent different English pronemes, viz. /z/ and /t/ respectively. The actual speech sounds pronounced by the speaker or reader are variants, or allophones, of phonemes.

Speech sounds which have one or more articulatory, and therefore acoustic, features in common and at the same time differ from each other in some degree are said to belong to one and the same phoneme, i.e. are variants of one and the same phoneme, if they, when pronounced one instead of the other, are incapable of differentiating words or the grammatical forms of one and the same word.

For example, in the words /eit/ (eight) and /eitə/ (eighth) the [t] consonants are similar, but at the same time they are slightly different: [t] in /eit/ (eight) is pronounced with the tip of the tongue pressed against the alveoli and is therefore an alveolar consonant, whereas the [t] in /eitə/ (eighth) is pronounced with the blade of the tongue pressed against the upper teeth and is therefore a dental consonant. Yet, if these two different [t] sounds were interchanged, that is the word eight were pronounced with a dental [t] and the word eighth with an alveolar [t], each of these words would still be recognized and understood as such. In fact, it often happens that in certain positions a final alveolar consonant is replaced by its dental counterpart in one and the same word. For example, the final consonant of the above-mentioned word eight is dental when it is immediately followed by the dental consonant [ɵ] or [ð] as in eight thick books or eight then, whereas it is alveolar in other positions, e.g. eight apples.

With the exception of free variants all the other variants of one and the same phoneme are mutually exclusive, i.e. no variant can normally occur in the position in which any other variant occurs; they are in complementary distribution (see the above examples).

The segmental phoneme has a material aspect, in the sense that it exists in the form of a number of articulatorily and acoustically definite speech sounds, its allophones, which all have several common articulatory, and therefore acoustic, features constituting the material invariant of the phoneme. Thus, actual speech sounds, which are always variants of some phonemes, constitute the material substratum of the phoneme.

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