

PHONETIC ILLUSION: notes

Two types of illusion:

1. Sounds are objectively the same, but they are perceived as different.

Example 1

Linguistically naive speakers of Polish believe that the words *smog* ‘smog’ and *smok* ‘dragon’ are pronounced differently. They think that they pronounce [g] in *smog* ‘smog’, even though, spelling pronunciation aside, they actually pronounce [k] (due to Final Devoicing). In the same vein, they believe that words such as *kot* ‘cat’ and *kod* ‘code’ are pronounced differently, even though they are pronounced the same: [kɔt].

Example 2

Linguistically naive speakers of American English believe that the words *betting* and *bedding* are pronounced differently, though they are pronounced the same: [bɛrɪŋ] (due to the rule called Flapping)

2. Sounds are objectively different, but they are perceived as the same.

Speakers of Polish believe they pronounce the same [t] in the following words: *tama* ‘dam’, *trawa* ‘grass’ and *trzy* ‘three’. In actuality the *t*’s are different:

tama – dental [t̪] (default = when there is no assimilation)

trawa – alveolar [t] because [r] is alveolar

trzy – postalveolar [t̠] because [ʂ] is postalveolar

Similarly, speakers of English are convinced that they pronounce the same [t] in *eight*, *eight roses*, *eight churches*. In actuality the *t*’s are different:

eight - dental [t̪] because [θ] is dental

eight – [t] alveolar (default = when there is no assimilation)

eight roses - postalveolar [t̠] because [r] is postalveolar

eight churches – palatoalveolar [tʃ] because [tʃ] is palatoalveolar

CONCLUSION: the existence of phonetic illusion argues for the fact that the actual physical representation of sounds and the mental representation (representation in the mind = what speakers believe to be correct) are different objects. Phonetics studies physical representations while phonology investigates mental representations.

Mental representations of morphemes are called *underlying representations*.