

TEACHING MORPHOPHONOLOGICAL ALTERNATIONS IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION CLASSES

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Abstract: *Morphophonological alternations are an important part of English pronunciation because they show how word forms change when morphemes are added. These changes can be seen in plural endings, past tense forms, possessive markers, stress shift, and vowel or consonant alternations in related words. For learners of English as a foreign language, such patterns may create difficulties in pronunciation, listening comprehension, spelling, and vocabulary learning. This article discusses the role of morphophonological alternations in English pronunciation classes and explains how they can be taught in a practical and understandable way. The article argues that when students learn these patterns consciously, they become more aware of English sound structure and improve both pronunciation accuracy and intelligibility.*

Keywords: *morphophonology, morphophonological alternation, pronunciation teaching, allomorphy, stress shift, English phonology, phonological awareness*

INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation is one of the most difficult areas for many learners because the relationship between spelling and sound is not always clear. A word may look simple in writing, but its pronunciation can change when it is used in another grammatical or word-forming context. For example, the plural ending -s is written in the same way in cats, dogs, and buses, but it is pronounced differently: /s/, /z/, and /ɪz/. The same situation can be seen in regular past tense forms such as worked, played, and wanted. Although all of them end in -ed in writing, their pronunciation is not the same.

These changes are examples of morphophonological alternations. Morphophonology studies the relationship between morphemes and sounds. It explains why a morpheme may have different phonological forms in different contexts. In English, such alternations are common and they play an important role in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Katamba (2005) notes that English word structure cannot be fully understood without considering the connection between morphology and phonology. Similarly, Hayes (2009) emphasizes that sound alternations are part of the way speakers organize and use language.

In many English classes, these patterns are taught separately. Plural endings are usually explained in grammar lessons, past tense endings in verb lessons, and stress shift in pronunciation lessons. However, learners often do not see the connection between these phenomena. As a result, they may pronounce worked as two syllables, use the same stress in photograph and photography, or fail to notice the sound change

in pairs such as electric and electricity. These mistakes may not always prevent communication, but they can reduce intelligibility and make learners' speech sound less natural.

The aim of this article is to discuss how morphophonological alternations can be used in English pronunciation teaching. The article focuses on regular inflectional endings, derivational sound changes, and stress shift in word families. It also offers practical suggestions for helping students recognize, understand, and pronounce these forms more accurately.

Literature Review

Morphophonology is usually described as the area where morphology and phonology meet. Morphology studies how words are formed, while phonology studies how sounds function in a language. When the sound form of a morpheme changes because of its linguistic environment, morphophonological alternation occurs. Spencer (1991) explains that morphemes are not always realized in one fixed form; instead, their pronunciation may depend on the sounds around them or on the morphological structure of the word.

One of the most familiar examples of morphophonological alternation in English is allomorphy. An allomorph is a variant pronunciation of the same morpheme. For instance, the English plural morpheme has three common pronunciations: /s/, /z/, and /ɪz/. The choice depends on the final sound of the noun. In cats, the ending is pronounced /s/ because the word ends in a voiceless consonant. In dogs, it is pronounced /z/ because the word ends in a voiced sound. In buses, the ending is pronounced /ɪz/ because the word ends in a sibilant sound. This shows that English pronunciation follows certain regular patterns, even when spelling does not clearly show them.

The same type of alternation can be observed in the regular past tense ending -ed. In worked, the ending is pronounced /t/; in played, it is pronounced /d/; and in wanted, it is pronounced /ɪd/. These forms are often difficult for learners because they may try to pronounce the written form exactly as it appears. Katamba (2005) argues that such forms demonstrate the close connection between the grammatical structure of words and their phonological realization.

Derivational morphology also includes many important morphophonological changes. When suffixes are added to words, the pronunciation of the base may change. For example, electric becomes electricity, where /k/ changes to /s/. In divine and divinity, the vowel changes from /aɪ/ to /ɪ/. In sane and sanity, the vowel changes from /eɪ/ to /æ/. These changes are more complex than plural or past tense endings, but they are very useful for understanding English word families. Booij (2006) explains that derivational suffixes may influence both sound structure and stress placement in English.

Stress shift is another important part of English morphophonology. In word families such as photograph, photography, and photographic, stress moves from one

syllable to another. This is not only a theoretical issue; it is also a practical problem for learners. If students place stress incorrectly, the word may become difficult to recognize. Roach (2009) points out that stress is one of the central features of English pronunciation and has a strong effect on rhythm and intelligibility.

In pronunciation teaching, modern approaches pay more attention to intelligibility than to native-like pronunciation. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, and Griner (2010) suggest that pronunciation instruction should include explanation, listening discrimination, controlled practice, and communicative use. Derwing and Munro (2015) also argue that pronunciation teaching should focus on features that help learners become more understandable in real communication. From this point of view, morphophonological alternations deserve more attention because they directly influence how learners pronounce grammatical endings, derived words, and word stress.

Research Methodology

This article is based on a qualitative descriptive approach. It does not present experimental data, but it analyzes common English morphophonological alternations and discusses their pedagogical importance for pronunciation teaching. This type of approach is suitable because the main goal of the article is to explain the teaching value of morphophonological patterns rather than to measure them statistically.

The material for analysis was selected from common English grammatical and lexical forms. These include plural nouns, possessive forms, regular past tense verbs, and derivationally related word families. The selected examples are frequently used in English language teaching and are familiar to most learners at school or university level.

The analysis was carried out in several stages. First, common examples of morphophonological alternations were identified. Then they were grouped according to the type of change: allomorphic variation, vowel alternation, consonant alternation, and stress shift. After that, each group was considered from a pedagogical point of view. Special attention was paid to the difficulties learners may face and to the ways teachers can make these patterns clearer in pronunciation classes.

The study was guided by the following research questions: What types of morphophonological alternations are common in English? Why do these alternations create difficulties for learners? How can teachers use these patterns effectively in pronunciation teaching?

Results and Discussion

The analysis shows that morphophonological alternations are not isolated or exceptional phenomena in English. They appear in many common words and grammatical forms that students meet from the early stages of language learning. However, learners often memorize these forms mechanically without understanding the pronunciation logic behind them. For this reason, pronunciation teaching should help students notice the connection between word structure and sound change.

One of the most useful areas for teaching is the pronunciation of regular inflectional endings. The plural ending -s, the possessive ending -'s, and the past tense ending -ed are written simply, but they have different pronunciations. For example, plural -s is pronounced /s/ in cats, /z/ in dogs, and /ɪz/ in buses. Possessive forms follow the same pattern, as in Jack's, Tom's, and George's. The regular past tense ending is pronounced /t/ in worked, /d/ in played, and /ɪd/ in wanted.

These examples are especially important because they can be explained through clear and practical rules. Students can learn that the pronunciation of the ending depends on the final sound of the base word, not on the spelling. This helps them understand why laughed ends with /t/, although it is written with -ed, and why played ends with /d/. Such explanation also teaches students to distinguish voiced and voiceless sounds, which is a basic skill in English phonology.

Another important finding is that morphophonological alternations can help learners develop word-family awareness. English has many related words that share meaning but differ in pronunciation. For example, electric and electricity belong to the same word family, but the final consonant of electric changes when the suffix is added. Similarly, divine and divinity, sane and sanity, decide and decision show that derivation may change vowels or consonants. These changes are not always easy to predict, but they are useful for expanding vocabulary and improving pronunciation.

For learners, word-family practice is more effective than memorizing each word separately. When students compare produce, production, and productive, they begin to see that word formation affects pronunciation. They also understand that English spelling may preserve the relationship between words even when pronunciation changes. This awareness can support both reading and speaking because students learn to recognize familiar roots in different forms.

Stress shift is another area where morphophonological alternation becomes very important. Words such as PHOtograph, phoTOGraphy, and photoGRAPHic are good examples. The spelling and meaning are related, but the stress pattern changes. Many learners pronounce all members of a word family with the same stress, and this makes their speech less natural. In some cases, incorrect stress may even make comprehension difficult.

Teaching stress shift requires more than giving a rule. Students need to hear the difference, mark the stressed syllable, repeat the words, and use them in context. For example, they can compare sentences such as I took a photograph, She studies photography, and This is a photographic image. In this way, learners understand that stress is connected with word formation and sentence rhythm.

The results also suggest that morphophonological alternations should be taught step by step. At the beginning, teachers can use familiar examples and ask students to notice differences in pronunciation. For instance, learners may listen to cat-cats, dog-dogs, and bus-buses and try to explain why the endings are not pronounced in the same

way. This discovery-based activity makes the lesson more active and encourages students to think about sound patterns.

After students notice the difference, the teacher can explain the rule in a simple way. It is important not to overload learners with too many technical terms at once. Instead of beginning with theoretical definitions, the teacher may first use examples, then introduce terms such as voiced sound, voiceless sound, sibilant, or allomorph. This makes the explanation more meaningful and easier to remember.

Controlled practice is also necessary. Students need enough repetition to pronounce forms correctly. They can practice lists such as helped, watched, kissed, then played, opened, cleaned, and finally wanted, needed, decided. However, repetition alone is not enough. Learners should also use these forms in short phrases, dialogues, and personal sentences. For example, they can talk about what they did yesterday using regular past tense verbs. This helps them move from rule knowledge to real speech.

Listening activities are equally important. Some learners may know the rule but still fail to hear the difference between /t/, /d/, and /ɪd/ in natural speech. Teachers can use short recordings, dictation, word sorting, or minimal contrast activities. When students listen carefully and classify the forms, they develop both perception and pronunciation skills.

Reflection can make pronunciation learning more effective. Students can record themselves, listen to their own pronunciation, and compare it with a model. This is especially useful for university students because it develops independent learning skills. They can identify their own mistakes and understand which patterns need more practice.

From a pedagogical perspective, morphophonological alternations connect several areas of language learning. They are not only pronunciation rules; they are also related to grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and listening. When students learn the pronunciation of plural or past tense endings, they also revise grammatical categories. When they study word families such as nature–natural or economy–economic, they improve vocabulary and word stress at the same time.

For philology students and future English teachers, this topic has additional value. It helps them understand the linguistic system of English more deeply. Future teachers need to know not only how to pronounce words correctly, but also how to explain pronunciation patterns to learners. Therefore, morphophonological alternations can be included in courses such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, lexicology, and English language teaching methodology.

It is also important to mention that not all alternations should be taught in the same way. Regular inflectional endings can be taught through clear rules, while derivational alternations often require comparison, memorization, and repeated exposure. Teachers should choose examples according to learners' level. At lower levels, plural and past tense endings may be enough. At higher levels, stress shift and derivational changes can be introduced through academic vocabulary and word-family analysis.

Overall, the discussion shows that explicit teaching of morphophonological alternations can improve learners' pronunciation awareness. It can help them understand why English words change their sound form and how these changes can be predicted or learned. This makes pronunciation teaching more systematic, meaningful, and connected with real language use.

Conclusion

Morphophonological alternations are an important feature of English because they show the relationship between word formation and pronunciation. They can be seen in regular grammatical endings, possessive forms, derivational word families, vowel and consonant changes, and stress shift. Although these patterns may seem difficult at first, many of them can be taught in a clear and practical way.

The article has shown that morphophonological alternations have strong pedagogical value. They help learners pronounce plural and past tense endings more accurately, recognize word-family relationships, understand stress movement, and improve their general phonological awareness. These skills are important not only for correct pronunciation but also for listening comprehension, vocabulary development, and intelligibility.

Pronunciation classes should therefore include morphophonological patterns as a regular part of instruction. Teachers can begin with familiar examples, guide students to notice sound changes, explain the rules, and then provide controlled and communicative practice. Such an approach makes pronunciation learning more conscious and effective.

For university students, especially those studying English philology or language teaching, morphophonological alternations are particularly useful. They provide a bridge between theory and practice. Students learn how English sounds function in real word forms and how this knowledge can be used in teaching. Future research may examine the effectiveness of teaching morphophonological alternations through classroom experiments, learner recordings, or pre- and post-test analysis.

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