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Using a Dictionary

English Pronunciation & Sound Symbols

Teachers and students of English often come across many new words. Looking at the spelling of many new words does not always help one to pronounce them correctly. A single letter in English can represent several different sounds. For example, the letter 'a' sounds different in **'sad'** and **'car'**. Again, take the words cat, kite and **chemistry**.

The initial sound for each of these words is the same, /k/, although they are spelled with three different letters c-, k- and ch-.

What can teachers or students then do when they do not know how to pronounce or say a new word? They can look the word up in a dictionary.

All the words that a dictionary contains are known as entries. For each entry, immediately after the word comes the information about how to pronounce that word. To understand that one needs to know the English sound symbols.

Each symbol stands for a sound you hear in English. Each sound is known as a phoneme. In phonemic transcription, a word is written according to its basic sounds within two slashes/-/.

For example /pm/ consists of three phonemes:/p/, /I/, /n/. Thus, **cat** in phonemic transcription would be / kæt /.

Learn the symbols for English sounds from the **sound symbol** chart given below.

ENGLISH SOUND *Symbol* Chart

p	t	k	f	s	θ	∫	t∫
b	d	g	v	z	ð	ʒ	dʒ
h	l	r	w	m	n	ŋ	j
I	iː	uː	ʊ	eɪ	ɪə	əʊ	
ə	ɜː	ɔː	ɒ	aɪ	eə	aʊ	
e	æ	ɑː	ʌ	ɔɪ	əʊ	ʊə	

Notice that the chart is divided into four colours.

The **blue** section contains symbols of some consonant sounds that correspond to the sound of the letters as we know them. Two example words for each symbol are given below.

P	pet, pink	v	village, visit
t	tin, two	z	zebra, zoo
k	king, cap	h	hill, hen
f	fish, fan	l	little, lamp
s	sun, sand	r	road, rich
b	ball, bus	w	we, with
d	dish, doll	m	men, many
g	get, gun	n	net, needle

The one sound in this section that speakers of Bangla usually have a problem with is represented by the symbol /z/ as in zoo or zebra, since this sound is not there in Bangla language, speakers of Bangla need to learn this sound. Otherwise they may pronounce the initial sound in zoo as the initial sound in Jew.

The **yellow** section of the chart contains the vowel sounds in English.
The symbols for the sounds and example words with those sounds are given below:

I	hill, mill	cː	floor, port
iː	heel, meal	ʊ	clock, pot
uː	two, pool	e	pen, red
ʊ	pull, bull	æ	pan, sad
ə	the, above	ɑː	car, park
ɜː	bird, first	ʌ	jump, but

Some of the above vowel sounds are not used in speaking Bangla. For example.

| iː | tea, meal | ə | letter, mother |
| uː | cool, food | ɑː | car, park |

The **purple** section contains sound symbols which are not possible to recognize unless one learns them. Two example words for each sound symbol are given below.

θ	think, thanks	ʒ	measure, treasure
∫	shoe, shop	dʒ	june, joy
t∫	chair, chicken	ŋ	sing, wrong
ð	this, their	j	you, yellow

Notice that in Bangla, there is no sound like the one represented by the symbol/ʒ/ as in pleasure or treasure. So, a speaker of Bangla would very often replace the actual/ʒ/ sound in Englihs with the sound symbolized by dʒ/ as in jam of june.

One has to practice a lot to learn this sound represented by the symbol, /ʒ/.

The **green** section of the chart contains symbols of sounds which have two vowel sounds together. These are called **'dipthongs'**.

Example words **dipthongs** or the two vowel sounds together are given below.

ei	hate, wait	eə	chair, pair
iə	ear, tear	aʊ	cow, plough
əʊ	blow, go	ɔi	toy, enjoy
ai	eye, sky	ʊə	tour

We need to learn and practise saying these sounds carefully.

Activity-1

A. Match the **first sound** in these words with their **phonemic** transcription.

Example:

three /θ/, **c**old /k/

1. sugar /θ/
2. jug /k/
3. thin /∫/
4. class /dʒ/
5. there /n/
6. physics /t∫/
7. know /ð/
8. chalk /f/

B. Match the **last sound** in these words with their phonemic transcription.

Example:

bo**y** /oi/, ma**t** /t/

1. health /m/
2. rose /θ/
3. thumb /f/
4. rough /z/
5. sea /s/
6. buy /ŋ/
7. rice /iː/
8. ring /aɪ/

C. Match the following **words** with their phonemic transcriptions.

Example. sport/spɔːt/

1. sport /pɒl/
2. half /fuːd/
3. pull /spɔːt/
4. food /hɑːf/
5. although /pleit/
6. bird /flæt/
7. flat /ɔːlðəʊ/
8. plate /bɜːd/

Activity-2

Read the following list of minimal pairs. The words in the list show different vowel sounds of English. Write down the phonemic symbol for each vowel sound. The last two are done for you.

1. pat / /
2. pet / /
3. fill / /
4. feel / /
5. shut / /
6. shirt / /
7. pot / /
8. port / /
9. pool / /
10. pull / /
11. hut /ʌ/
12. heart /ɑː/

Vocabulary

Homophones

There are many words that are spelt differently but are in fact pronounced the same. For example:

| male-mail | rain-reign |
| stair-stare | bored- board |

Words that are pronounced the same way but are spelt differently, and have different meanings, are called Homophones.
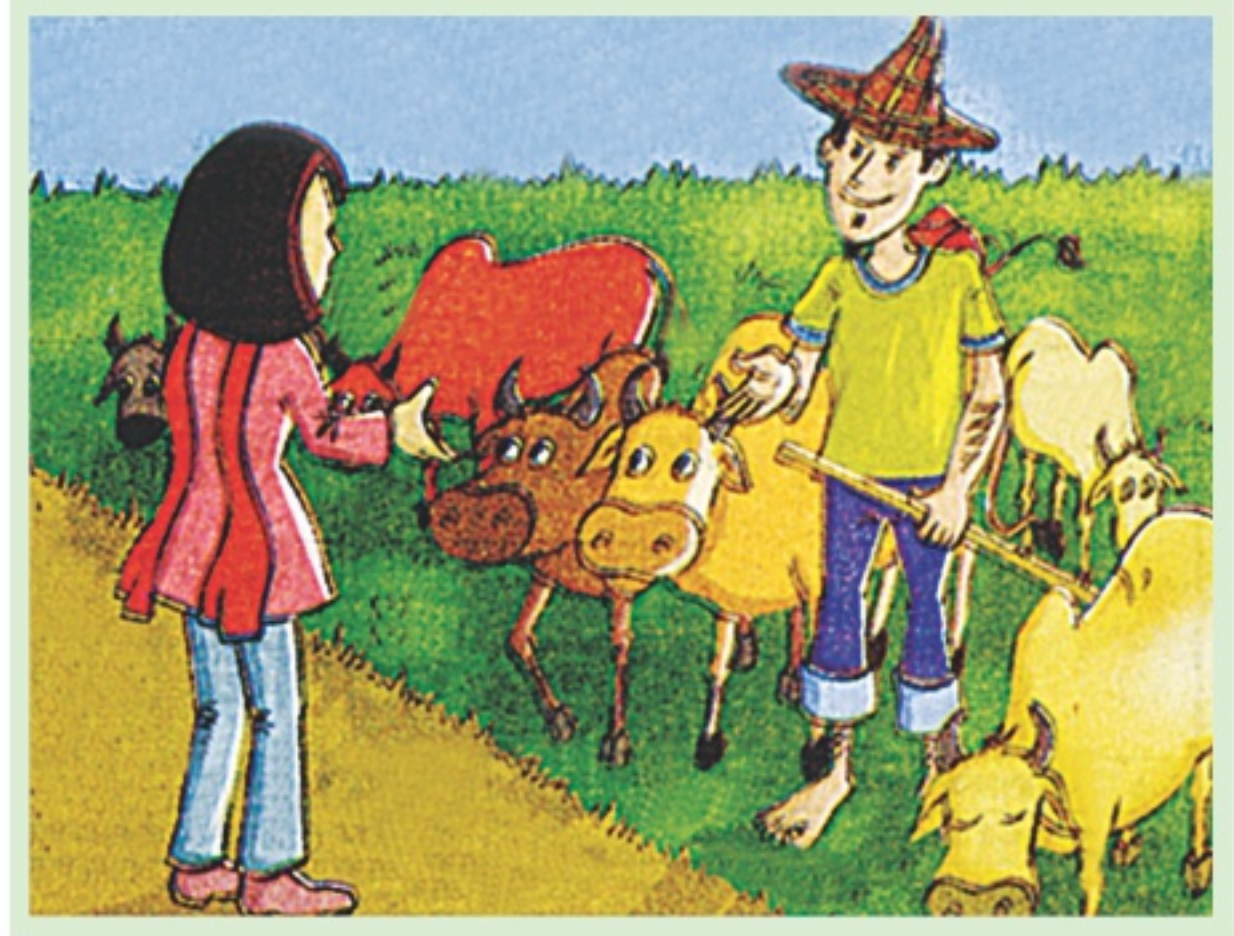
There are a lot of jokes made with homophones. Here is one such joke for you. See if you can catch the play on words. Look up any word you don't know in your dictionary.

A city girl who has never been in a village goes to visit a farm in a remote village for the first time. When she sees some cows grazing in the filed, she's ecstatic and cries out,

"What a lovely bunch of cows!"
The farmer corrects her, "Herd of cows, Miss."

"Of course I've heard of cows!" she replies.
"No I mean a cow herd," explains the farmer.

She ends the conversation by saying, "So what do I care? I have no secret from a cow!"

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