

# Creating the sounds of a language

CLPE Day  
13th March 2019

**Queen Mary Invented Languages Scheme (QULLS)**

Reading and writing in the national curriculum is taught through synthetic phonics.

- ▶ Familiarity with the concepts behind a sound (phoneme) and letter (grapheme) emphasized very early
- ▶ Conventionality of graphemes; sounds of English; phonemic awareness; blending and segmentation
- ▶ Not easy to make this engaging or fun.

# A new way of approaching phonics

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sounds of a  
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**Our objective:** Finding a novel way of teaching the phoneme-grapheme relationship in a creative and purposeful way.

Basic idea:

- ▶ Having students come up with a language of their own, with its own sounds, and its own way of writing, helps them explore the key concepts while **engaging their imagination**.

# Inventing a Language

Teaching the sounds is based around what we call a map-task. The children draw a map of an imaginary world, with land, seas, forests, mountains, cities, islands.

We're going to invent a language which we'll use to name places and things on the map.

# Consonants

In English, there are sounds made by stopping the air in the mouth and then releasing it.

(1) Practice orally with apa, aba, ata, ada, aka, aga

Now get the children to write these down.

Extension: add other sounds in. The uvular stop (the Q in the Arabic word Qu'ran) is a good one.

**Design choice 1:** We're going to invent a language.  
What stops does your language have? How do you  
write these down?

## Consonants of English

There are also sounds made when you don't stop the air entirely, you just make it turbulent,

- (2) Practice orally with afa, ava, atha, adha, asa, aza, asha, azha, aha

Now get the children to write these down.

Extension: add other sounds in. The velar fricative (the ch in the Scots pronunciation of loch) is a good one.

Question: Some sounds are written in English using more than one letter. Which ones? Sometimes different sounds are not distinguished by the letters we use. Which ones?

**Design choice 2:** We're going to invent a language. What fricatives does your language have? How do you write these down? Will you use digraphs? Will it be consistent?



# Consonants of English

You can also allow the air to come out of the nose, when you stop it in the mouth

(3) Practice orally with ama, ana, anga

Now get the children to write these down.

Extension: add other sounds in. The palatal nasal (the ñ in Spanish) is a good one.

Question: Some sounds are written in English using more than one letter. Which ones?

**Design choice 3:** We're going to invent a language. What nasals does your language have? How do you write these down? Do you use digraphs?

The English alphabet has just 5 letters that are used for vowels: a, e, i, o, u. But English has a lot more vowel sounds than this:

(4)     bait, bet, bit, beat, bat, bot, boat, bite, boot, but,  
          book, bath!

English uses different ways of writing these sounds, often putting two vowel letters together, to write something which is just one sound. Different dialects of English often have different vowel sounds in the same word.

**Design choice 4:** What vowels does your language have? How do you write them down? Do you use digraphs?

**For teachers:** Languages put consonants and vowels together to make a syllable. A syllable is one vowel, with one or more consonants before it, and one or more consonants after it.

A very common syllable is a consonant followed by a vowel (CV), but you can have more complex syllables.

- (5) Checking knowledge: What are examples of a syllable from English that is CVC, CCVC, VCC, CCVCC?

## For Children

- (6) Practice orally: what are some syllables you can form with your consonants and your vowels?
- (7) Write these down. Now put the syllables together in pairs or triples to make words.
- (8) Now give your words meanings. Some of the meanings we want: sea, sky, land, mountain, tree, forest, island, city, bay, ice, fire, volcano, and other geographical terms. Draw pictures of what these words mean.
- (9) Task: make up some words on your own and the read them to a partner: how does your partner spell them? (blending and segmentation)

# The Map Task!

The children then populate the map with names they have created in their language, using also the words for the geographical terms they have developed.

# Inventing a writing system

**Design choice 5:** How is the literature of your language written down? Carved into rocks, painted with brushes, drawn with pens, scratched into stone?



# Inventing a writing system

- (10) Task: each person should choose a word beginning with a different sound, and draw a picture of it. Now pass it to another person whose job is to make it as simple as possible, using the choice about how the language is written to influence the kind of shape. Once this is done, we use it to create a writing system.

**Design choice 6:** What is the order of the symbols in your writing system? What is the order of writing (right to left, left to right, up to down, down to up, boustrophedon!).

# Inventing a writing system

- (11) Task: organize the symbols by which are consonants and which are vowels
- (12) Task: Make capital vs lower case versions of the symbols
- (13) Task: write your words in your writing system on the map.

# Rhyme and rhythm

- (14) Task: take an English poem, and slot in words from your language that fit the rhythm.
- (15) Task: write a nonsense poem in your language, making sure that it rhymes

# Morphology and nouns

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# Morphology in the curriculum

Knowledge of English morphology occupies a **central place** in the national curriculum:

- ▶ Familiarity with basic affixes like *-s*, *-ed*, *-ing* is emphasized very early
- ▶ By the end of KS2, students are expected to understand the concept of an affix and how to use them to create meanings
- ▶ We will talk about how to explore morphology in a **creative** and **purposeful** way
- ▶ English morphology can be mixed into these tasks straightforwardly, to stick more closely to a traditional curriculum.

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# Monsters!

- ▶ Monsters have come to your island!
- ▶ Take a few creatures of different types, in different numbers, and populate your island.
- ▶ Take a little time to come up with names for them.

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# Talking about multiples

- ▶ For some of your creatures, you may have only put one on your island. For others, you might have multiple.
- ▶ In English, we indicate this difference with *s* at the end of the word:

(1)        monster    monster-**s**  
             dog            dog-**s**

- ▶ In other languages, you add different sounds. In Somali, you add *o* (usually):

(2)        kab        kab-**o**    naag        naag-**o**  
             'shoe'    'shoes'    'woman'    'women'

⇒ Decide on a way to indicate monsters you have more than one of, with one or more sounds!

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# Other plurals

- ▶ English does other things too. You can't add *s* if the word ends in an *s* already, or a *z* or *sh*:

(3)      bus      bus-**es**  
         brush   brush-**es**

- ▶ And some words are just different! Some nouns don't change and some nouns add different sounds:

(4)      sheep    sheep  
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# Sound changes

- ▶ With other nouns, you just change some of the sounds:

(5)      mouse    mice  
          tooth    teeth  
          goose    geese  
          foot     feet

- ▶ And sometimes you change a sound and add an **s**:

(6)      knife    knife-**s**  
          leaf    leave-**s**  
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- ▶ The same change often happens in multiple nouns!

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# Sound changes in other languages

- ▶ The same kinds of changes happen in other languages. In Turkish, some nouns add *-ler*:

(7)      kalem    kalem-**ler**    göz    göz-**ler**  
         'pen'    'pens'        'eye'   'eyes'

- ▶ But other nouns take *-lar*:

(8)      kapı      kapı-**lar**    araba    araba-**lar**  
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⇒ Pick at least one of your plurals and make it different from the others!

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# Teaching other pieces of morphology

This method of teaching morphology is **flexible** and **scaleable**.

- ▶ Any type of affix can be discussed in this way, like tense, but also suffixes like *-ness* and *-ly*.
- ▶ You can add or remove design choices, and make them more or less complex.
- ▶ You can stick to English morphology.
- ▶ You can teach a sequence focusing on different bits of morphology, with students gradually building up a language, each design choice informing the next.

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# Making sentences

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# Syntax in the curriculum

A lot of emphasis on English sentence structure in the national curriculum:

- ▶ Students are expected to learn relatively complex concepts like passive, modal verb, relative clause, subordinate clause, etc.
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Let's try to come up with a **simple** definition of the sentence first.

(1) **Sentence:**

A phrase that can a) stand on its own, and b) describes what someone or something is or is doing.

Why b)?

- (2)
- a. Yes.
  - b. A monster!
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English sentences have a particular **word order**, which is Subject Verb Object:

- (3)
- a. Fatima ate cookies.
  - b. \*Ate Fatima cookies.
  - c. \*Ate cookies Fatima.
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English sentences have a particular **word order**, which is Subject Verb Object:

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*Subject*

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## Other choices

Other languages make different choices! In Bangla, for example, the word order is Subject Object Verb:

(4) Ami boiti porechi.  
I book have.read  
'I have read the book.' (Bangla)

- ▶ **SOV** is very common! It's also the word order of Urdu, Turkish, and Tamil.
- ▶ The other orders are also possible (although OSV is uncertain).

**Design choice 1:** What is the order of subject, verb, and object?











# A short conversation

- ▶ Create a **short dialogue** between some of the monsters on your island.
- ▶ Make sure you stick to the **word order** you chose.
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# Saying, thinking, and believing

Now that we have a dialogue, we can also write a **description** of what the monsters are saying:

- (5) a. I see a volcano!
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Or we can write about what the monsters think:

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# Creating a story

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# Subordinate clauses

This exercise introduces the notion of a **subordinate clause**, which we need to talk about speech and thought.

A simple definition of a **subordinate clause** is as a sentence contained inside of another sentence.

(7) [The monster thinks [that he/she sees a volcano]].

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# Teaching other grammatical terms

Like with morphology, this method is **flexible** and **scaleable**.

- ▶ Different grammatical concepts can be introduced into a created languages, linking them to a **purpose** (like describing speech or thoughts).
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# Punctuation and Speech Acts

CLPE Day  
13th March 2019

**Queen Mary Invented Languages Scheme (QuILS)**

## NC requirements for punctuation:

- Y1 Separation of words with spaces  
Marking sentences with capitals, full stops, ?, !  
Capital letters for names and the pronoun I
- Y2 Commas to separate items in a list  
Apostrophes to mark singular possession
- Y3 Inverted commas for direct speech
- Y4 Other punctuation for direct speech  
Apostrophes to mark plural possession  
Commas after fronted adverbials
- Y5 Brackets, dashes, commas for parenthesis  
Commas to clarify meaning
- Y6 Semi-colon, colon and dash to separate independent clauses  
Use of the colon to introduce a list  
Use of semi-colons within lists  
Bullet points to list information  
Hyphens to avoid ambiguity

We'll tackle some of this large, dry list—showing that it can be taught and learned in **creative** ways.

# The QuILS approach

In this presentation, we'll:

1. Present the **possibilities for punctuation from different languages**.
2. Identify **design choices**: how can the shape and placement of English punctuation be changed for constructed languages?

We'll focus on the punctuation for:

- ▶ Convention (capitalization)
- ▶ Separation of words, clauses
- ▶ Different types of speech act (declarative, question, reports/quotation, exclamation, command)

# Capitalization

English *capitals* are a special set of characters used for sentence-initial letters, names, and for the pronoun “I”.

(1) **T**here were two people who discovered **C**olumbia,  
**T**ony and **I**.

▶ In German, nouns are also capitalized:

(2) Zwei **L**eute waren hier.  
two people were here  
'Two people were here.'

▶ In Fijian, only proper names are capitalized:

(3) au a raici **S**oto.  
I PAST see Soto  
'I saw Soto.'

Decisions: **How will capitals be distinguished from non-capitals?**

**What will be capitalized?**

- ▶ Beginning/end/entirety of some words?
- ▶ Beginning/end of sentences?
- ▶ Names only?
- ▶ Nothing?

2 little whos  
(he and she)  
under are this  
wonderful tree

– [2 Little Whos] excerpt by E. E. Cummings

# Separating words

In English, *spaces* separate words.

- ▶ In Mandarin, nothing separates words:

(4) 我们是朋友。  
wǒmén shì péngyǒu.  
'We are friends.'

# Separating clauses

In English, **commas** can separate clauses which form a sequence or list. **Dashes** and **brackets** do so too.

- ▶ The car stopped, then it started, and it stopped again.
- ▶ The car stopped—and then it started—and it stopped again.
- ▶ The car stopped (and then it started) and it stopped again.

Decision: **How are words and clauses separated?**

For English reporting verbs (e.g. *say*, *saw*, *shout*), the combination of **comma** + **quotation marks**, or **colon** + **quotation marks**, replace the word *that*.

- ▶ John said loudly *that* Mary will eat carrots.
- ▶ John said loudly, “Mary will eat carrots.”
- ▶ John said loudly: “Mary will eat carrots.”

An additional comma is placed after a **fronted adverbial**.

- ▶ **Loudly**, John shouted, “Mary will eat carrots.”

Decision: **How can the English demarcations be changed?** Think about different signs or placements.



# Declaratives and questions

In English, declaratives have falling intonation and are marked with *full stops*. Questions have *rising intonation*, and are marked with ?

- ▶ In Japanese, *both* declaratives and questions end in full stops, shaped ◦. Questions are additionally marked with か *ka*:

(5) いきますか◦。  
ikimasu ka  
'Are you going?'

- ▶ In Spanish, inverted question marks are used to start a question:

(6) ¿Cuántos años tienes?  
'How old are you?'

# Declaratives and questions

Decisions:

- ▶ Are there **intonational differences** between declaratives and questions?
- ▶ **What** punctuates them?
- ▶ **Where** will the markers appear?

# Speech acts: Quotations

Using a quotation indicates that the speaker is reporting a sentence. In English, inverted commas (“ ”) are placed **around** the quotation.

- ▶ Japanese quotes are contained in 「 」。 と *to* is added **after** the quote.

(7) 「はい」と言った。  
hai **to** itta.  
‘I said “yes”.’

Decisions:

- ▶ **What** marks quotations?
- ▶ **Where** is the punctuation mark placed relative to the quote?

# Speech acts: Exclamations and commands

In English, ! marks:

- ▶ Surprise (“What a big dog!”)
- ▶ Frustration (“Crap!”)
- ▶ Commands (“Go over there!”)

In Spanish, inverted exclamation marks are used at the start:

- ▶ ¡Guau! (“Wow!”)
- ▶ ¡Y tú quién te crees? (“Who do you think you are?!”)

In Hinuq, commands are marked by a separate word:

- (8)      uniwersitet-ma t’ot’r-**o**!  
          university-in    study-IMP  
          ‘Study at the university!’                    (Forker 2013: 229)

# Speech acts: Exclamations and commands

Decisions:

- ▶ **How** and **where** is surprise/frustration marked?
- ▶ What sign(s), or words are used to mark **commands**?

- ▶ In modern Mandarin, ~ marks a carefree attitude.

(9) 我们是朋友~~  
wǒmén shì péngyǒu  
'We are friends (lalala)'

Decision: **Can other attitudes have a specialized marking as well?**



# Monsters!

Apply our new punctuation system to the dialogue between monsters you created in the last session.

One monster (e.g. the Monster King) can be especially talkative. Try to use all aspects of the new punctuation by creating various speech acts for it:

- ▶ Declaratives (in formal speeches to its people)
- ▶ Questions (regarding important state affairs)
- ▶ Commands (for its servants)
- ▶ Exclamations (What surprises or frustrates it?)
- ▶ Quotations (What did its Prime Minister say yesterday?)

Will there be **stylistic differences**? (e.g. giving a formal speech vs. informal dialogue during the court jester's performance)



Thank you for listening!  
Reflections, thoughts, comments?