

If two sounds **CONTRAST** in a particular language (e.g. [t] and [d] in English)...

- (a) The sounds are **separate phonemes** in that language.

Example: /t/ and /d/ are separate phonemes of English.

- (b) Speakers of that language **pay attention** to the difference between the sounds, and have an easy time perceiving the contrast between them.

- (c) The sounds are in **contrastive** (or **overlapping**) distribution, meaning there are at least some contexts where either sound is possible.

Example: In English, either [t] and [d] can fill in the blank in [ \_\_æjn ].

- (d) There are **minimal pairs** distinguishing the two sounds.

Example: In English, we have have a minimal pair [tæjn] vs. [dæjn] (*train* vs. *drain*).

- (e) It's **unpredictable** which of the sounds you get in at least some contexts.

Example: Given the context [ \_\_æjn ], there is no way of predicting which of the two sounds will be used.

If two sounds **DO NOT CONTRAST** in a particular language (e.g. light [l] and dark [ɫ] in English)...

- (a) The sounds are **allophones of a single phoneme** in that language.

Example: [l] and [ɫ] are allophones of the English phoneme /L/.

- (b) Speakers of that language **ignore** the difference between the sounds, and often have a hard time perceiving the contrast, even when it's brought to their attention.

- (c) The sounds are in **complementary** (or **non-overlapping**) distribution, meaning the places one shows up, the other never shows up.

Example: In English, [l] only shows up before vowels, and [ɫ] never shows up before vowels.

- (d) There are **no minimal pairs** distinguishing the two sounds.

Example: In English it would be impossible to have two words [læmp] and [ɫæmp] that mean different things. Similarly, pronouncing *hill* [hɪɫ] with a light L like [hɪl] sounds funny but can't change the meaning of the word.

- (e) It's **predictable** which of the sounds will be used in a given context.

Example: Given the context [ \_\_æmp ], we know that if the phoneme /L/ is used, the pronunciation will be [læmp], and not [ɫæmp]. Similarly, in the context [ hɪ\_\_ ], it's predictable that the allophone [ɫ] will be used rather than [l].