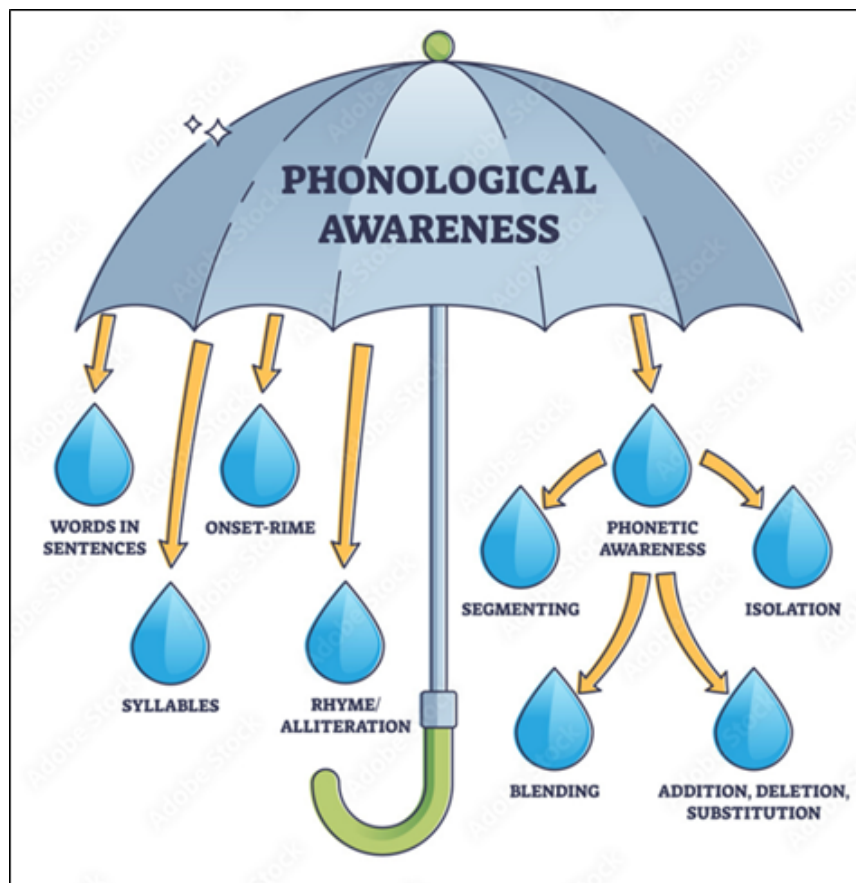# GO WITH THE FLOW! SYLLABLE STRUCTURE RULES!

You might think of a syllable as being something singular. But there's a lot more to a syllable than meets the ear.

Languages and their related dialects have innate rules that govern the structure of what can be in a syllable. And this structure has a large influence on the sound of the language.

THE SYLLABLE SANDWICH
Parts of a syllable include the middle of the syllable (like the meat of the sandwich). This part is required. It's the most sonorous part – usually one or

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more vowel-like sounds. A word like "oh" has just a nucleus[oʊ].

The next two parts—the bread of the syllable sandwich—have the most variation.

ONSETS

Onsets are the optional beginning of a syllable, before the nucleus–one or more consonants typically go here. Languages vary as to how many consonants can fall into here… and if so, which consonants can make a cluster.

For example, you may have noticed that English has consonant clusters in the onset in a word like "Christmas" [kɹ] while a language like Japanese does not have this feature. Therefore Christmas might be pronounced as "ku.ri.su.ma.su" (where the periods separate syllables). You can see that in this accent, the [k] and [r] are separated by a vowel since they can't stick together in the onset.

CODAS

Codas are the optional ending of a syllable, after the nucleus—one of more consonants can reside here in some languages. English can have up to four consonants clustered together here in a word like "lengths."

Languages tend to prefer onsets over codas. When speakers of languages that *disprefer* codas—like Italian, for example—encounter words with one too many consonants at the end of a syllable, they may push some of the sounds to a new syllable. So a Native Italian speaker might encounter a phrase like "birthday cake" might sound something like "bir-tha-day cay-ka."

BONUS TIP

If the target accent or if your accent is influenced by another language that uses the same or a similar character set, ex. a speaker of German-accented

English learning American English (or vice-versa), look for situations where the same letter creates different sounds between the languages. For example, American English uses [ɹ] in the onset and rhotic sounds like [ɚ] in the coda, while German uses [ʁ] as an onset and drops the coda r with its non-rhotic sound. Also, the letter "s" in an "str" onset cluster will sound like an [s] in English but it will make the "sh" [ʃ] sound in German in the same context. Hence the differences between "street" vs. "straβa"—so we might predict a German learning English might pronounce "street" with an "sh" sound and an "r" that makes friction in the back of the throat.

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