Ibbish

Introduction

Language games can be found in many cultures of the world. There are a few functions for language games but the most popular is to deliberately disguise word meanings so that others are not privy to the subject of one's conversation. Some examples of English language games are Pig Latin, Double Dutch, and Gibberish. These games purposefully manipulate and distort certain linguistic elements of the language such as syllables and phonemes. For example, Pig Latin usually takes the first syllable onset of a word and moves it to the end and places the letters ay [ej] after it. Gibberish on the other uses insertion to manipulate language. Usually a digraph (VC combination) is inserted before every vowel in a word. The insertion of the VC digraph results in a seemingly incoherent babble; however, once an individual understands the concept and adjusts to the phonological distinctions, they will become much more proficient at learning to speak and comprehend Gibberish. There are several variations of Gibberish, such as "Ubbi Dubbi," "Oppish," and "Ibbish." In Ubbi Dubbi the VC sequence "ub" [ʌb] is placed before every vowel. In Oppish, "op" [a: p] and in Ibbish, "ib." The "ib" sequence cannot be identified with any one particular sound such as [ɪb]. In fact, there are three different sounds associated with it depending upon the phonetic environment it is inserted.

This paper will evaluate how Ibbish alters the syllable boundaries of individual words, how speakers manipulate some phonetic elements of words to adjust for the "ib" insertion, and the how this language game remains subservient to the general phonological rules of the English language.

Information for this paper has been gathered from lengthy interviews with two individuals who each have had over fifteen years experience speaking the Ibbish version of Gibberish and from my own working knowledge of the subject.

Preliminary Observations of Ibbish

Generally, the speakers understood that Ibbish can be created by inserting the VC diagraph "ib" before every vowel in a syllable, except before a combination of two vowels. In this case, the insertion occurs before the first vowel of the combination and leaves the second vowel intact. Imitating English orthography, Ibbish looks like the following passage taken from the Gettysburg Address.

> "Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."
>
> F**ib**our sc**ib**ore **ib**and s**ib**ev**ib**en y**ib**ears **ib**ag**ib**o, **ib**our f**ib**ath**ib**ers br**ib**ought f**ib**orth **ib**up**ib**on th**ib**is c**ib**ont**ib**in**ib**ent, **ib**a n**ib**ew n**ib**ati**ib**on, c**ib**onc**ib**eived **ib**in l**ib**ib**ib**ert**ib**y, i**b**and d**ib**ed**ib**ic**ib**at**ib**ed t**ib**o th**ib**e pr**ib**op**ib**os**ib**iti**ib**on th**ib**at **ib**all m**ib**en **ib**are cr**ib**e**ib**at**ib**ed **ib**equ**ib**al.

Looking at the orthographic example above, and with out the visual aid of phonetic transcription, several general characteristics and patterns can be noticed.

1. The general rule of insertion is not stringently applied before every vowel; the VC is not inserted before certain vowels within a word, does not occur before some vowels at the ends of words and there are cases were insertion occurs before a consonant.

2. With the exception of the addition of "ib," the majority of words maintain their original phonetic properties. There are some words, however, where these properties undergo minimal changes but remain consistent with the general phonological rules of English.

3. Syllable boundaries are dramatically influenced.

Phonological Rules and Properties of Ibbish

The general rule of insertion is not always systematically applied based on pronunciation. For example, in the words *score* and *conceived*, "ib" is not inserted before the final silent "e" vowel.

sc**i.b**ore	s**i.b**ev.**i.b**en	d**i.b**e.d**i.b**i.c**i.b**a.t**i.b**ed	c**i.b**on.c**i.b**eived
[skɪbɔr]	[sajbɛvɪbɛm]	[daibɛdɪbɪkɪbejtɪbɛd]	[kajbansɪbijvd]
score	seven	dedicated	conceived
[skɔr]	[sɛvɪn]	[dɛdɪkejtɛd]	[kənsijvd]

In both cases the final vowel is silent and is not the nucleus of a syllable. Insertion also does not break apart letter combinations that represent a single sound or diphthong. In the word conceived, [ij]remains intact. This pattern occurs consistently. However, words containing sequences of vowels, where three vowel qualities are perceived (i.e. diphthong +[ə]), the sequence is separated by inserting "ib" [aj] before the diphthong, and moves the third vowel quality [ə] into a final syllable with another insertion of "ib" [ɪb] before it.

player	fire	lower	tower
[plejər]	[fajər]	[lowər]	[towə]
pli.bay.i.ber	fi.bi.i.ber	li.bow.i.ber	ti.bow.iber
[plaj.bej.i.bər]	[faj.baj.i.bər]	[lai.bow.ɪ.bər]	[taj.bow.ɪ.bər]

Therefore, the insertion rule needs to be slightly modified to accommodate this pattern; that is to say, insertion of the VC diagraph occurs in the nucleus of a syllable where the nucleus is a non-silent vowel or diphthong, and where there is a triphthong present, insertion occurs before the diphthong and before the [ə].

There are three ways in which "ib" is treated in terms of phonetic characteristics. The "ib" can either be treated as one phonological unit pronounced as [ajb]- this is rare - or the unit is separated by newly created syllable boundaries in which case the "i" is pronounced either as [ɪ] or [aj] and the "b" is always pronounced as [b]. Consider the following words:

bode	brave	stayed	eat	tryst	I
[bowd]	[brejv]	[stejd]	[ijt]	[trɪst]	[aj]
bi.bode	bri.bave	sti.bayed	i.beat	tri.byst	ib.i
[bajbowd]	[brajbejv]	[stajbejd]	[ajbijt]	[trɪbɪst]	[ɪbaj]

After the addition in the word "I," the "ib" remains in the same syllable and is pronounced as [ɪb], the second syllable remains [aj]. The remaining monosyllabic words become disyllabic, separating the "ib" in the creation of new syllable boundaries. In the first syllable, "i" takes the [aj] sound, the "b" moves to the second syllable where the phonetic sounds of the original word remains untouched.

Another general pattern emerging from the research was the way in which the speakers treated the separate pronunciations of the "i" sound in multi-syllable words. For example in the disyllabic words below, the "i" in the first syllable is pronounced [aj] and the "i" in subsequent syllables is always pronounced as [ɪ]. There is no particular reason for this pattern because it occurs consistently in all phonetic environments and is mainly attributed to the speaker's natural tendency to use the high front vowel first and the low back vowel thereafter.

forget	concede	cabbage	father	Rosa
[fɔrgɛt]	[kansijd]	[kæbɪdʒ]	[fəðɻ]	[rowsə]
fi.bor.gi.bet	ci.bon.ci.bede	ci.babb.i.bage	fi.ba.thi.ber	ri.bo.si.ba
[f**aj**.bɔr.g**ɪ**.bɛt]	[k**aj**.ban.s**ɪ**.bijd]	[k**aj**.bæb.**ɪ**.bɪdʒ]	[f**aj**.ba:.ð**ɪ**.bɻ]	[r**aj**.bow.s**i**.bə]

There are instances where the vowel sounds were significantly changed after inserting the "ib" before them. These changes occurred with words beginning with the vowel "a" and having the sound [ə].

above	accordingly	abode	around
[**ə**bəv]	[**ə**kɔrdɪŋlij]	[**ə**bowd]	[**ə**rawnd]
i.bav.ib.ove	i.bacc.i.bor.di.bing.ibly	i.ba.bi.bode	i.bar.i.bound
[aj.b**ej**.ɪ.bəv]	[aj.b**æk**.kɪ.bɔrd.ɪbɪŋ.i.blij]	[aj.b**ej**.bɪ.bowd]	[ɪ.bar.ɪbawnd]

No similar changes were found in other words beginning with the vowels of varying phonetic qualities, as can be noted in the words below.

enter	okay	uncle	eat	and
[ɛntr̩]	[owkej]	[ʌŋkl̩]	[ijt]	[ænd]
i.bent.i.ber	i.bo.ki.bay	i.bun.ci.ble	i.beat	i.band
[aj.bɛn.tɪ.br̩]	[aj.bow.kɪ.baj]	[aj.bʌŋ.kɪ.bl̩]	[aj.bijt]	[aj.bænd]

Note the addition of "ib" before the "le" in uncle.

In the case were "ib" was inserted before a consonant, it always occurred in words where [r], [n], [m], and [l] were pronounced as syllables. For example, the words in the table below, you can hear the syllabic [l] in words like little and people, the syllabic [n] and [m] in kitten and prism, and the syllabic [r] in ladder and batter.

ladder	kitten	batter	little
[lærr̩]	[kɪʔn̩]	[bærr̩]	[lɪɾl̩]
li.badd.i.ber	ki.bitt.i.ben[1]	bi.batt.i.ber	li.bitt.i.ble
[laj.bær.br̩]	[kɪ.bɪʔ.ɪ.ben]	[baj.bær.ɪbr̩]	[lɪɾ.ɪ.**bʊl**

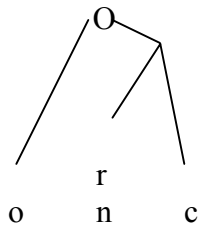
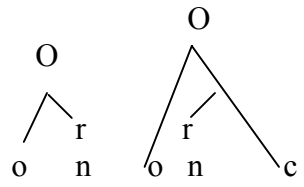
people	prism
[pijpl̩]	[prɪzm̩
pi.beo.pi.ble	pri.bis.i.bm
[paj.bij.pɪ.**bʊl**]	[praj.bɪz.ɪ.**bɪm**]

Inserting "ib" altered the syllabic pronounciations of [l] [n] and [m]but not [r]. The addition of [b] caused both speakers to add a monophthong vowel betten the [b] and syllabic consonant. For example, [**bʊl**] Neither speaker changed the glottal [ʔ] in kitten nor the flap [ɾ] in ladder, little, and batter with the addition of "ib".

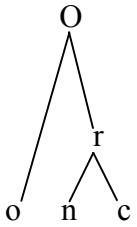
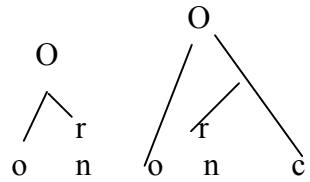
Syllables and Stress Patterns

As can be gathered from the information presented thus far, insertion of "ib" alters syllable characteristics of particular words and changes the stress patterns as well. The most obvious change is the addition of syllables where a single syllable word can becomes multi-syllabic, shifting the boundaries considerably.

[1] I have guessed at the transcription of *kitten* and *batter* in Ibbish as they were accidentally omitted in the original paper.--*jof*

Thrashed	Thribashed
	
[θr æ ʃt]	[θr ɪ b æ ʃt]

In this example, new syllable boundaries are created because the word becomes disyllabic with the addition. In the altered word, [θr] remains an onset in but now has the [ɪ] as its nucleus both forming the first syllable. The [b] gets placed in the second syllable as the onset with [æ] as the nucleus and the [ʃt] as the coda completing the syllable. The syllable shape of first word is CCCVCC. The syllable shape of the altered word changes to CCCV.CVCCVC. Although altered it stays within the boundaries of the known syllable inventory of English . Notice again creation of new syllable boundaries and the shift on onset, nucleus, and coda of the word plant. The newly created syllables contain CCCV and CVCC patterns.

plants	Plibants
	
[pl æ nts]	[pl ɪ b æ nst]

Some Final Notes on Subject

The individuals interviewed for this paper have each been speaking Ibbish for the past 15 years. Each was taught the basics by their mother who had been speaking it for well over 25 years. Interestingly, both women were given the basic rule similar to the one given in the introduction of this paper and subsequently practiced in conversations with their mother. When asked if they were given any other specific instructions regarding insertion of "ib," for example, in front the of letters "le" in the word little or not to insert before the silent "e" like in the word in score, both women agreed that they were not made aware of any special exceptions to the rules. In fact, both women said that they

unconsciously knew where the “ib” should get inserted. Basically, this would confirm that the general rules of English are applied to Ibbish and does not deviate from them in any instance that could be gathered from this research.