



An Animated and Narrated Glossary of  
Terms used in Linguistics  
*presents*

# Phone



## *Different notions*

Consider these pairs of English words:

text [tekst]

textual [tekstʃəl]

rite [rait]

ritual [ritʃəl]

act [ækt]

actual [æktʃəl]

[t] ~ [tʃ] alternation

## Different notions

[t] ~ [tʃ] alternation

??

[t]                      [tʃ]

1. **underlying identity**  
same phoneme /t/
2. **same number of speech units**  
[t] and [tʃ] are each a consonant segment
3. **difference in compositionality**  
[t] requires only ONE articulatory gesture  
[tʃ] requires TWO articulatory gestures: plosive+fricative

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## Different notions and terms

1. The underlying identity of forms in alternation is called **the phoneme**. [For surface phonological/phonetic units corresponding to segments/phones.]
2. The speech unit corresponding to what we typically understand as consonants or vowels is typically called the **segment**.
3. The speech elements that make up complex segments like [tʃ] is called ??.

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## Phone

- One possible answer is to think of a phone as a particular configuration of the articulators (i.e. one singular articulatory gesture).
- Thus,  
Affricates = 2 phones, e.g. [tʃ], [pf], ...  
Prenasalized stops = 2 phones e.g. [mb], [nd] ...

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## Phones, Segments, Phonemes

Use of these terms are confusing.

Sometimes, people use

segment = phoneme  $\neq$  phone

segment = phone  $\neq$  phoneme

Here, we are suggesting

segment  $\neq$  phoneme  $\neq$  phone

abstract temporal unit  
that is the phonetic form  
of a phoneme

underlying form

singular configuration  
of articulators, i.e. a  
gestural unit.

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## The End

Wee, Lian-Hee and Winnie H.Y. Cheung (2009)  
*An animated and narrated glossary of terms used in Linguistics.*  
Hong Kong Baptist University.

