Notes on Syllabification

- To this point, we've looked at the properties of individual PHONEs. A PHONE is the smallest unit of phonological representation.

- A larger unit that will also be relevant to phonological representation is the SYLLABLE.

- We'll practice syllabification of English words first.

- You may have learned in school that you can tell the number of syllables in a word by clapping.

- As a native English speaker, you will have SUBCONSCIOUS intuitions about how words should be syllabified.

- For the moment, we will represent syllable boundaries using a .

telegraph   [tɛ.lə.græf]

accident   [æk.sə.dənt]

plow   [plaʊ]

- A syllable in *any* language consists of up to three components:

- A NUCLEUS (N): The core of the syllable. Every syllable *must* contain a nucleus. To put it differently, if you find three nuclei in a word, you will have three syllables (or three "handclaps").

- An ONSET (O): A syllable can also have an onset (although it does not have to). The onset is the consonant, or consonants, that precede the nucleus in a syllable.
    - o   We will find that languages place restrictions on which consonants can fit together into an onset.

- A CODA (C): A syllable can also have a coda (although it does not have to). The coda is the consonant, or consonants, the follow the nucleus in a syllable.
    - o   We will also find that languages place restrictions on which consonants can fit together into a coda.
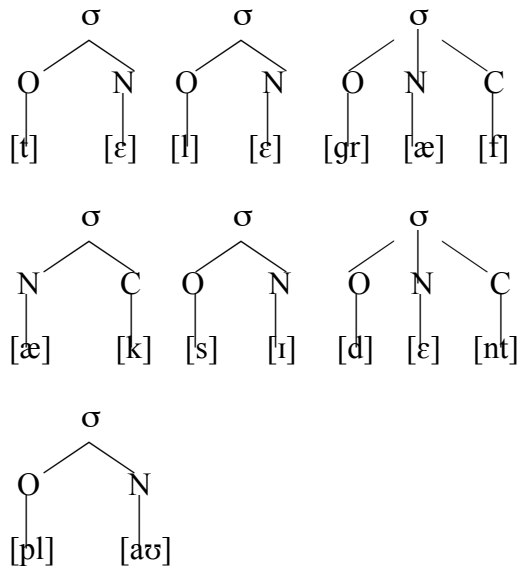
σ = syllable

- The process of assigning nuclei, onsets, and codas to syllables is called SYLLABIFICATION.

- The structures you have drawn above are SYLLABIFICATION TREES.

- We will learn a syllabification algorithm ("recipe") that will accurately represent what goes on in English and cross-linguistically.

> **THE SYLLABIFICATION ALGORITHM :**
> 1.) Scan the word and find the nuclei. Every vowel/diphthong is a nucleus (N). Every syllable has one nucleus. Draw a line from the N to the syllable level (σ)
> 2.) Gather consonants into onsets (O). A syllable may have an onset or it may not. Attach O to σ level.
> 3.) Gather up the remaining consonants into codas (C). A syllable may have a coda or it may not. Attach C to σ level.

- **If you follow this algorithm, you will not go astray in this class / on homeworks / on quizzes.**

    o   There are a few words where there are more complex things going on so the algorithm will seem to make the wrong predictions. We will talk about these apparent exceptions as they arise. However, for a working hypothesis of how languages (*all* languages, not just English) work *in the general case*, the algorithm is very useful.