

#PronouncingThingsIncorrectly:
Initial phonological generalizations of a novel Internet word game
Rachael Tatman – University of Washington – rctatman@uw.edu

Summary: #PronouncingThingsIncorrectly is a language game popularized by Chaz Smith on Vine, a micro video-blogging platform. These mis-pronunciations show a number of interesting phonological processes. While these processes are not categorical—they are often disregarded in favor of humorous homophony, such as the pronunciation of "pop secret" as "poop secrete"—they are robust, productive and are an intriguing new source of phonological data.

Data: Vines in this genre generally follow the same structure: the Viner first announces "Pronouncing things incorrectly" (usually with the camera at an odd angle, while making a face or affecting an odd voice quality) and then shows a series of shots of text, generally on packaging or street signs, while pronouncing the text incorrectly. A total of twenty-five mispronounced words from three separate Vines are included in this analysis, but the patterns described here can be found in other Vines, including those produced by other Viners (e.g. StereoDaKing 2015, Rodster 2015).

Vowel Harmony: There is a strong tendency towards vowel harmony in the mispronounced words, as in 1 and 2.

1. Tomatoes: /tə'meɪ toʊz/ → /to 'mo toz/
2. Skittles: /'skɪt lɪs/ → /skɪt 'tɪ tɪl ɪz/

This was quantified by, for each word, dividing the number of total vowel types by the number of vowel tokens. So the mispronunciation /'ti di/ (for tide) has only one vowel type, /i/, across two vowel tokens, and would thus have a value of 0.5. A word for which all vowels were different would have a value of 1. For all multisyllabic English words, the vowel harmony value averaged 0.91, while for the mispronounced words it was 0.73. This difference was significant under a paired t-test $t(17) = 2.69, p < 0.05$.

Stress Assignment: Primary stress was reassigned in two-thirds of the multisyllabic words. In a strong majority of cases, 70% of multisyllabic words, the new stress assignment was consistent with trochees assigned right to left.

3. Lunchables: 'lʌntʃ ə bəlz → lyn 'tʃʌb les
4. Seventh: 'sɛv ənθ → sə 'vʌn ðə

Re-syllabification: Another common process was orthography-based re-syllabification which had two main forms. First, word-final vowels were produced as syllables, as in 5-7. Second, in words with double consonants, each consonant is produced as a separate syllable, as in 5 and 2.

5. Mayonnaise: meɪ ə'neɪz → meɪ ɒn nə nə 'æs i
6. Tide: 'taɪd → 'ti di
7. Peroxide: pə'ɪɒk saɪd → pi ɪɒk 'si di

These processes are otherwise very uncommon or non-existent in English. The #PronouncingThingsIncorrectly language game is an intriguing source of novel data and may represent a useful way to target data elicitation, especially for questions relating to stress placement and the influence of orthography on speech.

References

- Rodster (2015, June) *#pronouncingthingsincorrectly* [Video file]. Retrieve from <https://vine.co/v/eeJZK5gUPqZ>
- \$tereoDaKing (2015, May) *#Pronouncingthingsincorrectly* [Video file]. Retrieve from <https://vine.co/v/eKzx0OZ5AEI>
- Smith, C. (2015, April) *#PronouncingThingsIncorrectly Pt. 7 (IB Quinn And Joe)* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vine.co/v/eBMZK0j1nLK>
- Smith, C. (2015, May) *#PronouncingThingsIncorrectly Pt. 8 at da groshwery stow* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vine.co/v/em2wuYT26Vp>
- Smith, C. (2015, September) *#PronouncingThingsIncorrectly Pt. 12* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://vine.co/v/eQvv79FP2nV>