

SYLLABLE & SYLLABLE STRUCTURE

Syllables are often described as the **phonological building blocks of words**.

Linguistically a **syllable** is defined as a **unit of speech** that is made up of a **syllable nucleus** (usually a vowel) and **one or more optional phones**.

The syllable (marked as σ) has two **immediate constituents**:

- **onset**
any **consonant(s)** that **precede** the **nucleus**
- **rhyme**
the **nucleus** and any **consonant(s)** that **follow** it

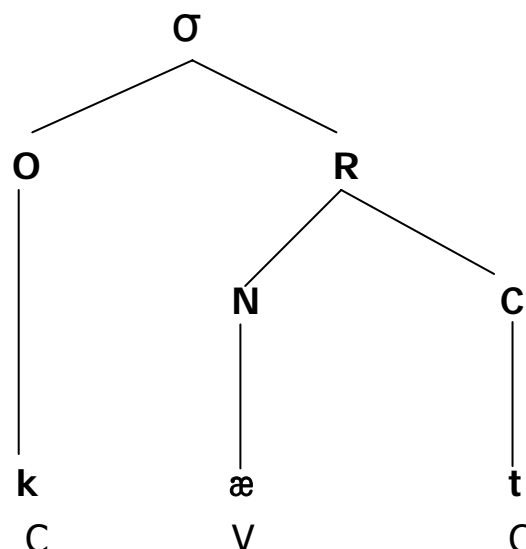
The **rhyme** is further divided into:

- **nucleus**
the 'nuclear' or most sonorous element (usually a vowel)
- **coda**
any **consonant(s)** that **follow** the nucleus

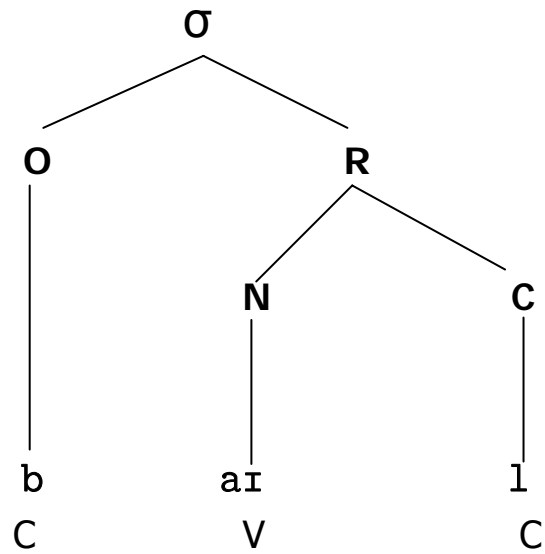
Thus, the syllable structure is represented graphically by means of a tree diagram as follows:

e.g.

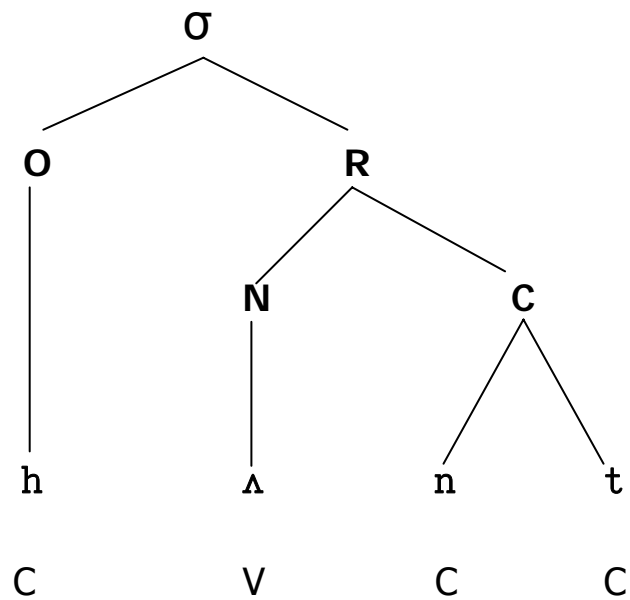
cat - /kæt/



bile - /baɪl/



hunt - /hʌnt/

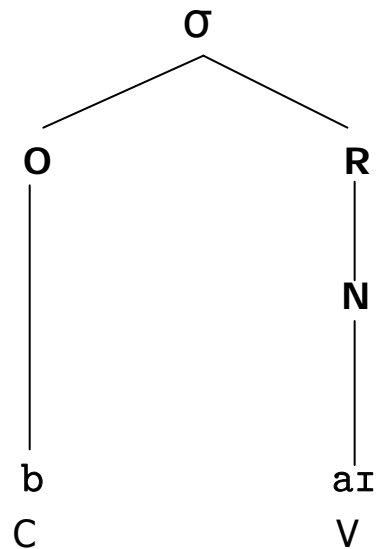


Syllables such as these, that have one or more **consonants** in the **coda** position are called – **closed syllables**.

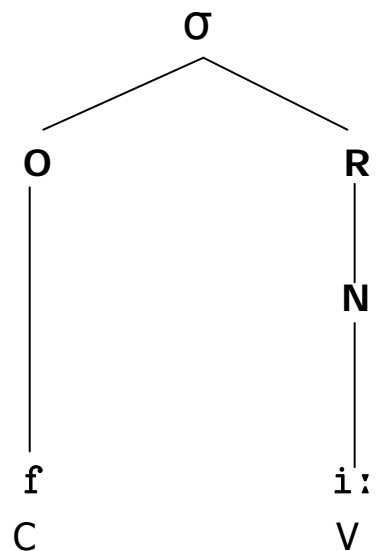
Syllables such as the following that **do not have any consonants** in the **coda** position are called – **open syllables**.

e.g.

buy - /baɪ/



fee - /fi:/

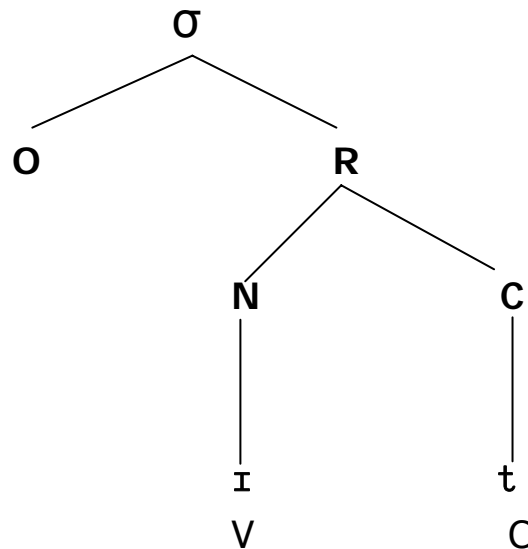


A **coda** with **more than one consonant** is said to be a **branching coda**; and a **coda** with **no consonants** is said to be an **empty coda**.

Just as the **coda** can have none, one or more consonants, the **onset** also may have none, one or more consonants.

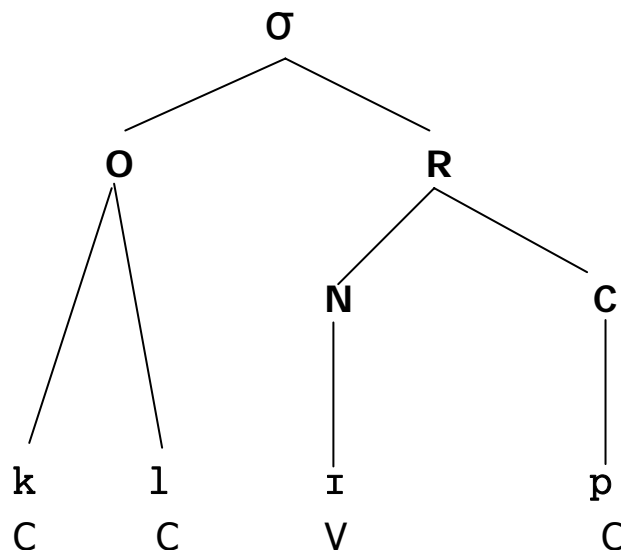
e.g.

it - /ɪt/



Such syllables are said to have an **empty onset**.

clip - /klɪp/



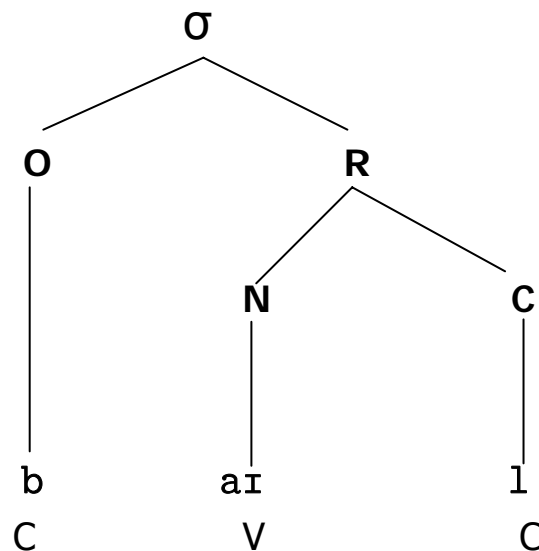
Such syllables are said to have a **branching onset**.

Words may be:

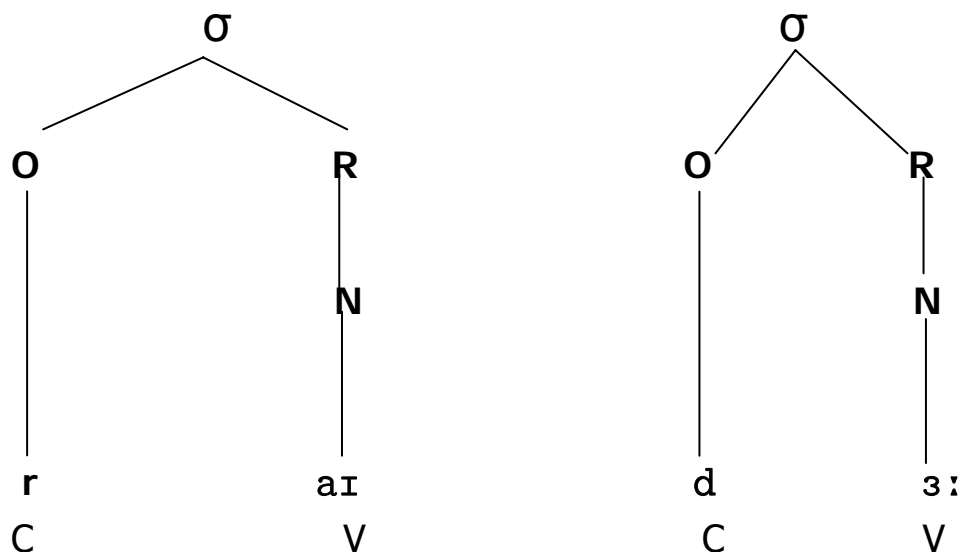
- **Monosyllabic** – words that have only one syllable (monosyllables)
- **Polysyllabic** – words that have two or more syllables (polysyllables)

(Some books also include a third classification – **disyllabic** or **bisyllabic** to refer to words that have only two syllables.)

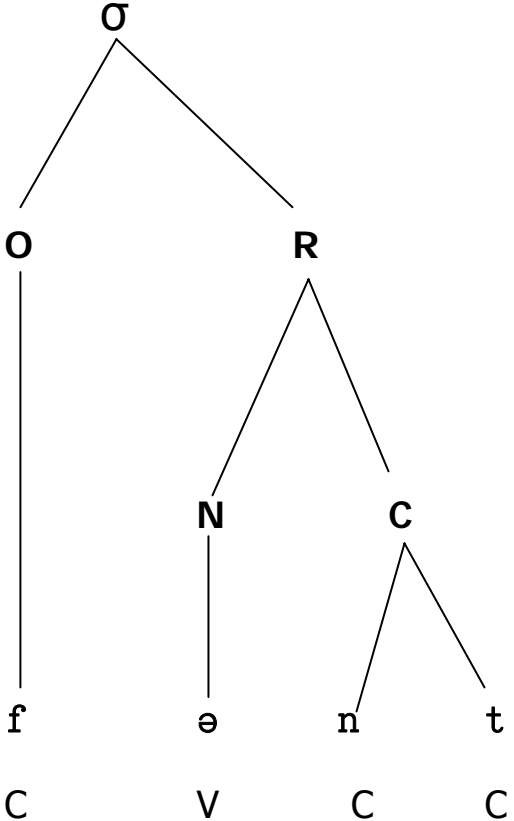
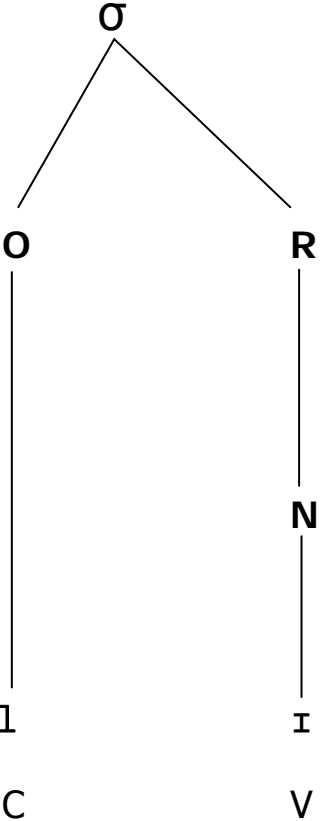
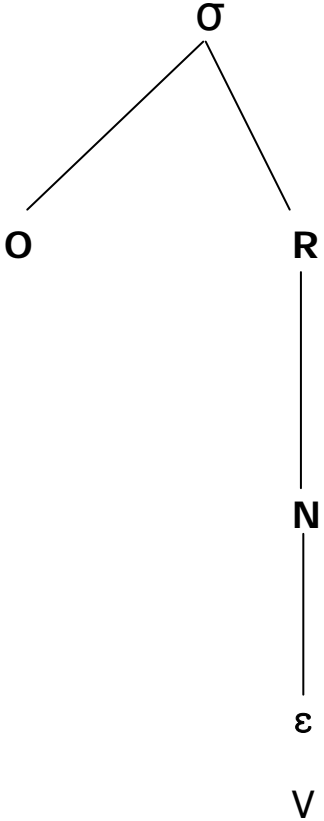
e.g. pit - /pɪt/



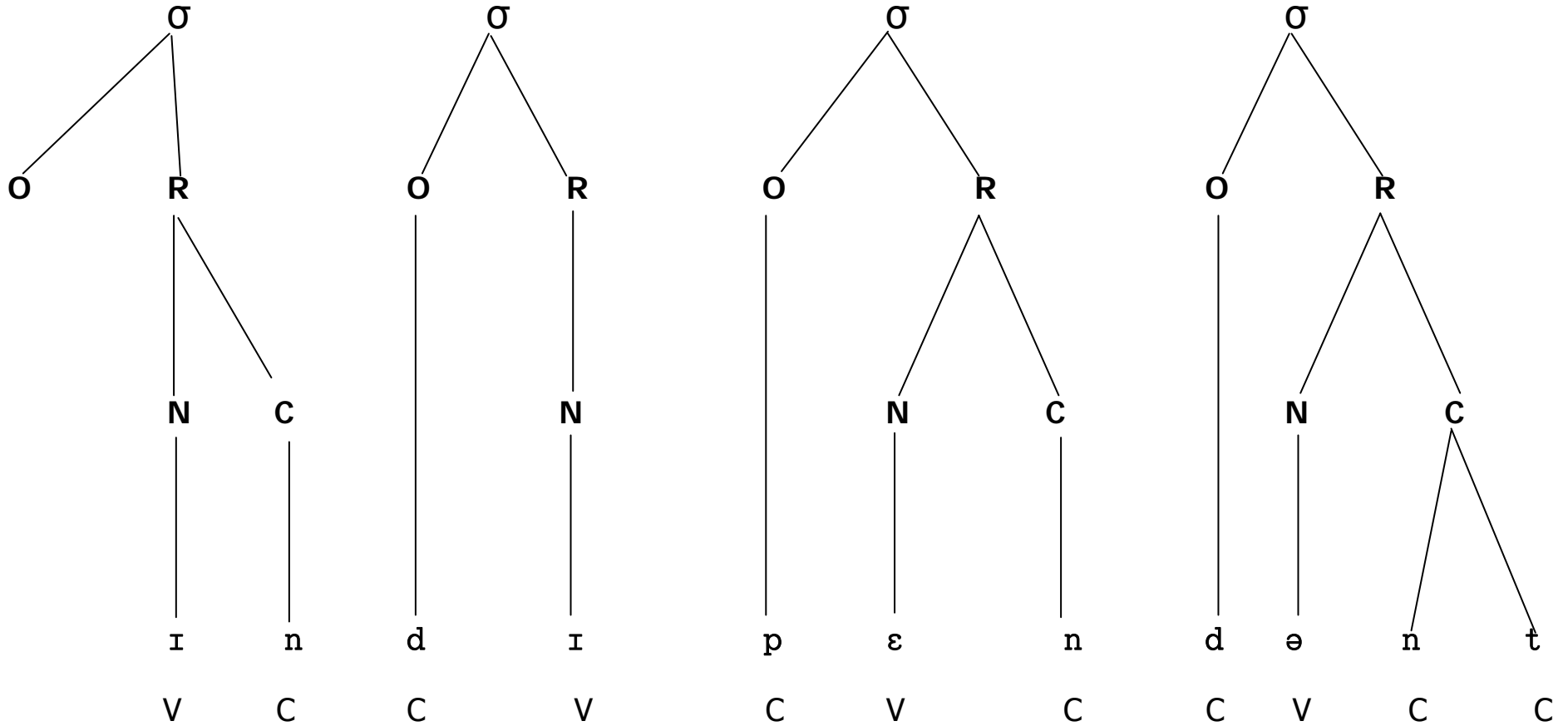
rider - /raɪ.dʒɪ:/



elephant - /ɛ.lɪ.fənt/



independent - /ɪn.dɪ.pɛn.dənt/



How many syllables are there in these words?

- **antidisestablishmentarianism**

(a 19th Century movement in England opposed to the separation of church and state; has 28 letters; is probably the best-known “longest word”)

- **floccinaucinihilipilification**

(longest English word recorded in Guinness Book of Records, 1992; has 29 letters and means – *estimating as worthless*)

- **pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanoconiosis**

(defined as ‘a lung disease’ caused by the inhalation of very fine silica or quartz dust’; has 45 letters; the longest word ever to appear in a non-technical dictionary – The Oxford English Dictionary)

- **an.ti.dis.es.tab.lish.ment.ar.ian.ism**

(10 syllables)

- **flocc.in.au.ci.ni.hi.li.pi.li.fi.ca.tion**

(12 syllables)

- **pneu.mo.no.ul.tra.mi.cro.sco.pic.si.li.co.vol.
ca.no.co.ni.o.sis**

(19 syllables)