FEATURES OF CONNECTED SPEECH

Every utterance is a continuous, changing pattern of sound quality with associated features of quantity, pitch and stress. It is important to note that a word in isolation is pronounced differently to the pressures of its sound environment or of the accentual or rhythmic group of which it forms part.

These variations may affect the word as a whole, e.g. weak forms of structural words in an unaccented situation; or it may especially affect the sound used at word boundaries, which will undergo a series of phonetic adjustments e.g. assimilations, elisions and liaison forms. The extent of these variations will depend mostly on the speed of the utterance, since the slower and more careful the delivery, the greater the tendency to maintain a form near to that of the isolate word.

We do not always speak in the same way, but we adapt ourselves to situations by using different styles. This means that we vary our choice of vocabulary and grammatical structures depending on the formality or informality of the circumstances. In the same way, we make a series of phonetic adjustments, which include features such as:

- **tempo**, or speed of delivery;
- **rhythm**, or regularity of prominent syllables and words;
- **continuity**, or place and length of pauses;
- **muscular tension**, or articulatory precision
- **weak forms, assimilations, elisions and links.**

ASSIMILATION

Assimilations are changes in pronunciation that take place under certain circumstances at the ends and the beginnings of words (that is, changes at word boundaries), when those words occur in connected speech, or in compounds.

Assimilation is something that varies in extent, according to speaking rate and style; it is more likely to be found in rapid, casual speech than in slow, careful speech. Sometimes the difference caused by assimilation is very noticeable, and sometimes it is very slight. Generally speaking, the most common assimilations occur with consonants, that is, when a word ends in a consonant and is immediately followed by a word that starts with a consonant.

There are two types of assimilations:

a) **recessive** assimilation, which occurs when the following consonant influences the preceding one, for example the word *is* is pronounced [ɪz] and the word *she* is pronounced [ʃiː]; but when these two words occur together, as in the phrase *is she?*, they are often pronounced [ɪʃiː] rather than [ɪzʃiː]. The alveolar place of articulation of the sound [z], has changed to a palato-alveolar articulation, under the influence of the following consonant, which is a palato-alveolar fricative sound.
b) **progressive** assimilation, which occurs when the preceding consonant influences the following consonant. This can occur word internally, as for example in the case of the plurals of nouns, the third person singular form of the Simple Present Tense of verbs or the possessive, e.g. *cats - dogs; jumps, runs; Pat's - Pam's*. It can also occur at word boundaries, as for example when ‘did you’ is pronounced [dɪd juː].

Assimilations are not compulsory in many languages, including English: that is to say a speaker may, if he chooses, avoid making them. When they are made, however, they have the effect, whether they are progressive or regressive, of producing some economy of effort in the utterance of a sequence of words. The result of the assimilation is to reduce the number, or the extent, of the movements and adjustments that the speech-producing organs have to perform in the transition from one word to the next.

Assimilations save effort by means of three different sorts of changes in the sequence of speech-producing movements:

a) **Changes involving the state of the vocal folds: assimilation of voice or assimilation of voicelessness.**

Assimilations of voice are common only in Scottish English. For example, in the compound words blackboard and birthday, the words black and birth, which normally end in voiceless consonants, may be pronounced with voiced ones.

Assimilations of voicelessness are common in all types of English. Some examples of regressive assimilations of this type are the phrases: 'of course' and 'have to' pronounced with the voiceless consonant [f] instead of the voiced [v]; or the compound word 'newspaper' with the voiceless [s] instead of the voiced [z]. An example of progressive assimilation of this type occurs when the word 'is' is pronounced [s] in 'what’s, it’s'.

b) **Changes involving the position of the soft palate: oral /nasal.**

These assimilations are rare, or non-existent, in English, but they are found in other languages as in Spanish, for example in "un buen día", where the vowels [u,e] have a certain degree of nasality in anticipation of the nasal consonant that follows them. In French, for instance, the phrase "une langue moderne" may be pronounced [yn lɔ̃ mɔ̃drən] where /ʒ/ replaces, by a regressive assimilation of nasality the [g] that would be used when the word is said in isolation.

c) **Changes involving movement of the articulators: changes in the place of articulation.**

This is by far the most frequent type of assimilation in English, and a wide variety of examples can be found. The more familiar and the faster the style of speech, the more frequent such assimilations are likely to be. In the majority of cases they are **regressive**. Some examples are *is she* [ɪzʃiː]; *ten minutes* [tɛnˈmiːnɪts]; *I'm going* [aɪ məʊŋ]

The sounds most easily affected by this type of assimilations in English are the **alveolar consonants**: [t-d-s-z-n]. Following the rule, transcribe the phrases below assimilating the alveolar consonants to the place of articulation of the following consonant:

a. [t, d, n] become [p, b, m] when followed by a bilabial consonant, e.g.
   
   Lend me that pen. [];
   
   You'd better do it now! [ ];
   
   He did it on purpose. [ ]
There’re ten men kicking a red ball in the field. [ ];

b. [t, d] become [tʃ, dʒ] - yod coalescence-, when followed by [j], e.g.
   She came last year. [ ];
   There’s a man behind you. [ ];
   He met you last year. [ ];
   John, get your sister out of the car! [ ];
   I’ll let you out, doggie. [ ];
   Would you try speaking in Portuguese? [ ];

c. [s, z] become [ʃ, ʒ] when followed by [j, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ] e.g.
   Her voice shook. [ ];
   In case you do it. [ ];
   Here’s yours. [ ];
   He was shot. [ ];
   Red roses charm people. [ ];
   Is George coming? [ ];
   Has Charles arrived? [ ];

d. [t, d, n] become [k, g, ń] when followed by [k, g, w], e.g.
   Have some hot cakes! [ ];
   I should go now. [ ];
   He’s driving his own car. [ ];
   Let Guy do it. [ ];
   He got one cake for Alice. [ ];
   He told Cathy he had seen Bob. [ ];
   Jane bought ten bottles of red wine in this shop last year. [ ];

ELISION

Elision is used to refer to the omission of sounds in connected speech. Both consonants and vowels may be affected, and sometimes even whole syllables may be elided. Unstressed structural words, such as and and of are particularly prone to be elided, as when the f is dropped in cup of tea (cf. cuppa tea), or the a and d are dropped in boys ’n girls. Within polysyllabic words, vowels and consonants in unstressed syllables are regularly elided in conversational speech or normal speed, e.g. camera /kæmərə/; probably /ˈprɑbləli/; February /ˈfɛbruəri/. Complex consonant clusters are also often reduced, e.g. twelfth becoming /ˈtwelθ/ or /twelf/.

We can find elisions of two types:

a. Word-internal:
   ♦ weak, central vowels /ə, i, u/ are elided when they occur in unaccented syllables between two consonants, specially if the following consonant is /r, n, l/. Examples: certain /ˈsɛrtən/; importance /ɪmˈpɔrtəns/; student /ˈstjuːdənt/; impatience /ɪˈmenʒəns/; vision /ˈvɪʒən/; classical /ˈklæsɪkəl/; arrival /əˈrɪvl/; nasal /ˈnæsəl/; etc.

* note that schwa [ə] must not be elided when a nasal consonant precedes the sequences [-dən, -tən], e.g. London, abandon, sentence, Washington.

♦ alveolar consonants are elided when they occur between two consonants, e.g. handsome /ˈhænsəm/, postpone /ˈpəʊspaʊn/, asthma /ˈæstəmə/, (notice that this rule has been applied to asked /ˈæskt/, even though the consonant in the middle is not an alveolar.
b. At word boundaries:

   - **word-final alveolars** [t, d] are generally elided* when they are preceded and followed by other consonants, especially when the following consonant is a plosive, e.g. 
     - *next* turn /nekst'tən - nɛks'tən/; *best* joke [best `dʒəʊk - bes`dʒəʊk]; *send* two /sɛnd 'tu: - sen'tu:/; *rubbed* down /rʌbd daʊn - rʌb daʊn/.

* there is a tendency to retain [t, d] if the following word starts with [h], e.g. guest house, send home.
* there is a tendency to retain [t] in the sequences [-nt, -lt], e.g. sent them, spoilt child.

   - *[h] is elided* in unaccented, non-initial *he, his, her (self), him (self), have, has, had, and sometimes who*, e.g. *Give him his pencil,*[gɪv ɪm ˈpensəl]; *George has seen her twice* ['dʒərɪ əz ˈsɛn ə ˈtwɔɪs].

  * if the preceding word ends in an optional /r/, only one ( [h] or [r] ) of them should be elided, e.g. *Peter himself did it,* [ˈpɪtə ɪmself ˈdɪd ɪt - ˈpɪtə himself ˈdɪd ɪt].

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**COMPRESSIONS**

These occur when:

a. a vowel is reduced to a semivowel, as in the case of *to open* [təˈpen], in English; and of *agua y aire* [aˈwa ˈaɪɾe] and *como te iba diciendo* [komə tiˈba ðiˈsaendo] in Venezuelan Spanish.

b. a diphthong becomes a monothong, e.g. *tomorrow morning* [təˈmɔːrəˈmɔːnɪŋ].

c. *word - internally in the following cases:*
   - ♦ when we pronounce either [ə] or [ɑ] instead of the diphthong [uə], in words like *actually, usually, valuable;*
   - ♦ when we pronounce [ə] instead of the diphthong [uə], in words like: automobile, extrovert, mobility, *November, omission, romantic, vocation.*
   - ♦ when we pronounce [jæ] instead of [iə], and [wə] instead of [uə], in words like *envious, brilliant, influence, annual.*

Practice with the following examples in informal colloquial style:

1. How do you do! [ˈhau dju: ˈdju:]
2. I'm gonna buy it. [aɪ ˈɡʌnə ˈbeɪ tɪt]
3. Right you are! [raɪtju ˈɑː]
4. I don't know why. [aɪ ˈdɑːnə ˈwaɪ]
5. What did he do? [ˈwɛ dɪd ˈdjuː]
6. I'm glad. [aɪ ˈɡlæd]
7. I should think so. [aɪ ʃʊð ˈθɪŋk ˈsəʊ]
8. How are you folks? [haʊ ˈfɔːks]
9. It happened once. [ɪt ˈhæpən ˈwʌns]
10. Do you want one? [dju ˈwʌnt ˈwʌn]
11. They haven't been. [ðə ˈhæbən ˈbɛn]
12. I didn't want to. [aɪ ˈdɪnt ˈwʌnt tuː]
STYLES OF PRONUNCIATION

First of all let’s review the terms dialect, idiolect and register (DIALECT & RELATED TERMS handout)

Although from the phonetician’s point of view it is difficult to draw a precise dividing line between the different styles of pronunciation, we will adopt the styles presented by Finch and Ortiz (1982:82):

1. **Formal** which is characterized by slow tempo, precise articulation, and high frequency of accented words. It is used in formal recitations, church services, etc. Foreign learners should not use this style of pronunciation for normal, everyday use.

2. **Unhurried Colloquial** It is the slower of the conversational styles. It uses a high frequency of accented words, a minimal number of contextual assimilations and elisions and precise articulation.

3. **Informal Colloquial.** It is the most informal of the conversational styles. It is faster, uses a maximum number of assimilations, elisions and compressions; lax, slurred articulation and a reduction of accented words.

We can put the two conversational styles on a scale, with the Unhurried Colloquial at the formal end and the Informal Colloquial at the informal end. Nevertheless, there is an infinite number of styles in between, depending on the situation, the topic, the backgrounds of speaker and listener, and the relationship between them.

To play safe, you as a foreign learner should adopt, for production, the Unhurried Colloquial style, as long as you are exposed to the Informal Colloquial in the advanced stages, so as to become a “passive” user of it, in order to understand it with ease.

On the production side, once you have mastered the pronunciation of the citation forms (those appearing in pronouncing dictionaries) and acquired an easy command of spoken English, you can start dealing with problems of linking words together. The better you become in the use of the language, the easier it will be to use the features of connected speech. You should aim at the systematic and consistent use of the more common elisions and assimilations.

In order to develop your "receptive fluency" you will require a theoretical description of the Informal Colloquial style and systematic exposure to spontaneous, informal, conversational English. This will enable you to gradually understand a message from very informal conversational styles.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**CONNECTED SPEECH** A term used in linguistics to refer to spoken language when analyzed as a continuous sequence, as in normal utterances and conversations.

**UTTERANCE** What is said by any one person before or after another person begins to speak. For example, an utterance may consist of one word, one phrase, one sentence, or of more than one sentence.

**PROMINENCE** A term used in Auditory Phonetics to refer to the degree to which a sound or syllable stands out from others in its environment. The following factors are important to make a syllable prominent: differences in quality, length (quantity), pitch and stress.
QUALITY A term used in Auditory Phonetics and Phonology to refer to the characteristic resonance, or timbre, of a sound which is the result of the range of frequencies constituting the sound's identity. Articulatorily, those frequencies are caused by the vibration of the vocal folds and modified by the resonators as the air passes through them. Therefore, we can say that articulatorily, quality depends on the shape of the resonators. Variations in both vowels and consonants are describable in terms of quality, e.g. the distinction between /i/ and /e/.

QUANTITY Auditorily, it is that property of a sound that enables us, using only our ears, to place a sound on a scale going from short to long. From the perceptual point of view, it is referred to as length.

PITCH Articulatory, pitch is caused by the frequency of vibration of the vocal folds; the tenser they are the faster they vibrate, and the higher (acute) the note. Auditorily, it is that quality of a sound, in terms of which, it can be placed on a scale running from high to low, or acute to grave.

STRESS Articulatorily, stress in caused by greater muscular energy and breath force. Auditorily, it is perceived as loudness. So we can say that it is that quality of a sound that enables us, using only our ears, to place it on a scale from loud to soft. There are three levels of stress:

a) strong or primary, e.g. a round.
b). secondary, e.g. photo graphic.
c. unstressed, e.g. a round.

COMPLEX WORDS are of two major types:

1. AFFIX words, made from a basic stem or base form with the addition of an affix. Affixes can be of two sorts in English:
   - prefixes, which come before the stem, e.g. un + happy and
   - suffixes, which come after the stem, e.g. happi + ness.

2. COMPOUND words, which are made of two (or occasionally more) independent English words, e.g. loud/speaker, second-class.

CONTENT (FULL, LEXICAL) WORDS. These are words that refer to a thing, quality, state, or action and which have meaning (lexical meaning) when the words are used alone. Content words are mainly nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.

FUNCTION (FORM, EMPTY, GRAMMATICAL, STRUCTURAL, STRUCTURE) WORDS These are words that have little meaning on their own, that is, when standing in isolation, but which show grammatical relationships in and between sentences. Conjunctions, prepositions, articles, auxiliary verbs (including modals), pronouns, are function words.

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