

10. SOME ASPECTS OF CONNECTED SPEECH

10.1 Introduction: Adjustments in connected speech

What is meant by connected speech? /kə'nektɪd 'spi:tʃ/

A good definition is: ordinary spontaneous speech, as opposed to the pronunciation of individual words or phrases in isolation.

A practical example; follow these steps:

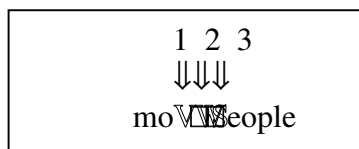
[1] say the word "most". It should be something like /məʊst/.

[2] now say the word "people" (/ˈpi:l/).

[3] finally, pronounce both words together, AND quickly: "most people". Now here we have a problem.

If you did this at a normal speaking rate, you probably found it difficult to say the "t" in the word "most". Why?

Because "t" is now between two consonants:



It is difficult to pronounce three consonants together. Moreover, two of them are plosives

English speakers have a solution for this kind of "pronunciation problem": they simply **omit** the difficult consonant, and say 'mospeople'.

So in this unit we are going to look at the types of PROBLEMS we find when we pronounce English words and syllables together, and what solutions we have in each case.

The problems are difficult sequences of sounds, and the corresponding solutions tend to be simplifications. As we have just seen, the sequence of three consonants in *most people*, which is difficult to pronounce, is simplified by omitting the consonant in the middle, /t/.

In English, as in all languages, sounds are influenced by other sounds in their environment, taking on different characteristics as a result. The pronunciation of some words is different when they are said on their own, or in slow, careful speech, from when they are used in connected speech.

There are two main reasons for most of the adjustments that will be presented here:

- 1) to facilitate the transition between sounds when people pronounce English;
- 2) as we will see during the rest of the course, English has a particular rhythm: syllables are squeezed between stressed elements so that regular timing can be maintained. The things that happen in connected speech also facilitate the natural English rhythm.

Connected speech helps explain why **written English** is so **different** from **spoken English**.

10.2 Linking

Linking (/ˈlɪŋkɪŋ/) is the connection of the final sound (vowel or consonant) of one word or syllable to the initial sound of the next word or syllable.

An easily recognized characteristic of nonnative English is its “choppy quality”; each word is pronounced individually, without any connection to the following word, so that the speech sounds as though someone was tapping out the words.

The ability to speak English “smoothly”, to pronounce words or syllables that are appropriately connected entails the use of linking. Linking is the connection of the final sound of one word or syllable to the initial sound of the next word or syllable.

If there is no pause between two words, they should be linked together so that they sound like one word. Linking means that words should be joined smoothly to each other. If you don’t link words together, your speech sounds choppy. If you practice linking words, your speech will become much clearer.

When English people speak they generally do not pause between each word, but move smoothly from one word to the next. There are special ways of doing this:

a) Linking of vowel to vowel

When a word or syllable ends in /i:/ /ɪ/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, or /ɔɪ/ and the following word or syllable begins with a vowel, there is a **linking glide** represented with the phonetic symbol [j]. Examples:

“say_ it” [seɪ^jɪt]

“my_ own” [maɪ^jəʊn]

Similarly, when a word or syllable ends in /u:/, /əʊ/, or /aʊ/ and the following word or syllable begins with a vowel, there is a **linking glide** represented with the phonetic symbol [ʷ]. Examples:

"blue_ink" [blu^wɪŋk] "how_is" [haʊ^wɪz] "flour" [flaʊ^wə]

Of course, **linking-r** is also included here:

"Is it far? Yes, it's far_away" [ɪzɪt'fɑ:ljəs|ɪts'fɑ:rə'weɪ]

b) Linking of consonant to vowel (resyllabification)

If a word ends in a consonant and the next word begins with a vowel, use the consonant to begin the syllable of the following word. Examples:

"down_and_out" "rush_out" "back_up"

If a word ends in a **consonant cluster** (more than one consonant), and the next word begins with a vowel, do the same. Examples:

"left_arm" "pushed_up" "rest_area"

The technical name of this type of linking is either resyllabification or phonetic resyllabification.

c) Linking of consonant to consonant (gemination)

When you link two consonants that are the same, do not say the sound twice. Say the consonant once, but make it longer. Examples:

"big girls" "nice summer" "with thanks"

There is a special term for this phenomenon; its name is gemination.

In a phonetic transcription, we will represent it with the length mark [:]. This phonetic symbol means "long sound", and is the same we used to represent lengthened vowels. In transcription:

"big girls" "nice summer" "with thanks"
 [bɪ'g:ɜ:lz] [naɪ's:ʌmə] [wɪ'θ:æŋks]

Remember that when a plosive is followed by another plosive, affricate, lateral or nasal, the first plosive is unreleased. This is as a matter of fact another case of consonant to consonant linking.

10.3 Elision

Elision (/ɪˈliːʒn/) is the process whereby a sound disappears or is not clearly articulated in certain contexts. A process in connected speech by which a sound is left out in order to make the articulation easier.

Elision is extremely common in spoken English. One familiar case is the contracted form of auxiliary verbs. Examples that you will easily recognize are:

<u>Full form</u>	→	<u>Contracted form</u>
I have gone mad	→	I've gone mad
phonetics is wrong	→	phonetics is wɒŋ
she has passed the test	→	she's passed the test

In "I have gone mad", the auxiliary have is unstressed, because it is a function word. Unstressed parts of the spoken message tend to be reduced or deleted altogether:

/aɪ həv ɡɒn 'mæd/	→	/aɪ v ɡɒn 'mæd/
↓↓↓		

When a sound (consonant or vowel) is left out, that's a case of elision. Elision is a very clever way to save time and effort when you pronounce English. Native speakers are so clever that they do it all the time. And they do it in the following circumstances:

a) Elision of vowels

Unstressed vowels tend to be very weak and reduced in English. Remember, there is normally a big difference between

STRONG (stressed)	WEAK (unstressed)
VOWELS	VOWELS

Because unstressed vowels are weak, they are sometimes left out when people speak English; they undergo what is known as an elision. When are weak vowels left out? In the following cases:

a.1 Unstressed vowel following a stressed syllable (syncope)

In words where the unstressed /ə/ or /ɪ/ follow a stressed syllable, the unstressed vowel tends to be left out.

Examples:	<u>SLOW SPEED</u>	<u>NORMAL SPEED</u>
	stressed syllable	
	↓	
int[ɛ]resting	/ 'ɪn tə rɛstɪŋ/	/ 'ɪnrɛstɪŋ/
med[i]cine	/ 'm e dɪ sən/	/ 'medsən/
sev[e]ral	/s e və rəl/	/ 'sevrəl/
diff[e]rent	/ 'dɪ fə rɛnt/	/ 'dɪfrɛnt/

In these words, it is very frequent that the vowel between square brackets [] is omitted. Very frequently this vowel is the vowel / ə / or / ɪ /. The loss of stress, and, thus, of prominence, affects the vowel quality and changes it into a weak vowel, less prone to be prominent.

a.2 Loss of unstressed initial vowel/syllable (aphesis)

In very informal, colloquial English the initial vowel or syllable of a word may be omitted IF it is unstressed. Examples:

			<u>SLOW</u>	<u>VERY FAST</u>
"because"	becomes	"cause"	/bɪ 'kɔz/	/kɔz/
			↓	
"about"	becomes	"bout"	/ə 'baʊt/	/baʊt/
			↓	

It is not recommended that you do this when you pronounce English, but you will find this phenomenon very often when hearing natives speakers.

b) Elision of consonants

b.1 Loss of /t/ and /d/

When these consonants are in the middle of a cluster of three consonants in a word, they are normally lost. In words that end in /nd/, /d/ is frequently omitted.

Examples:

"windmill" becomes "winmill" /'wɪn d mɪ l/
↓

"restless" becomes "resless" /'rɛs t ləs/
↓

"exactly" becomes "exacly" /ɪ g'z æ k t l i/
↓

"hand" becomes "han" /h æ n d/
↓

b.2 Loss of a plosive in a cluster of three consonants

When a plosive is in the middle of a clusters of three consonants formed by two words, it is normally lost.

Examples:

"first three" becomes "firs three" /'fɜːs θriː/
↓

"banned for life" becomes "bann for life" /'bænd fə'laɪf/
↓

"thank God" becomes "than God" /'θ æ ŋ k 'g ɒ d/
↓

Remember, however, that if the following word begins with a vowel, there is no elision. Instead, linking takes place:

East_End wild_animal

b.3 Simplification of consonant clusters

Some consonant clusters (=group of consonants) are notoriously difficult to pronounce:

"asked"	/æskt/
"lists"	/lɪsts/
"clothes"	/kləʊðz/

The occurrence of 2 and, especially, 3 consonants, implies considerable articulatory effort. Native speakers relax their articulation in the pronunciation of consonant clusters. One alternative to ease this articulation is dropping one consonant, usually the one in the middle.

<u>WORD</u>	<u>CANONICAL FORM</u>	<u>DELETION</u>
"asked"	/æskt/	æst
"lists"	/lɪsts/	lɪss (lɪs:)
"clothes"	/kləʊðz/	kləʊz

10.4 Assimilation

Assimilation is the alteration of a speech sound to make it more similar to its neighbors. It is the process of simplification by which a speech sound is influenced by the surrounding sounds to make them more similar.

The consonant /n/ changes to [m] or [ŋ], depending of the consonant that follows:

"one beer" [wʌm 'biə]

"one cup" [wʌŋ 'kʰʌp]

In these examples we have an assimilation of the nasal to the following consonant to make the nasal more similar to the neighbouring consonant. This process eases the transition from one consonant to the other and makes articulation possible, especially when the rate of speech is fast.

[w ʌ n	b	ɪə]	→	[w ʌ m	b	ɪə]
alveolar	bilabial		←	bilabial	bilabial	
nasal	plosive			nasal	plosive	
voiced	voiced			voiced	voiced	

If we pay attention to the example above, we can observe that the articulation of the two sounds involved become more similar: from an alveolar nasal voiced sound we change into a bilabial nasal voiced sound. With the new production we approximate the articulation of the nasal sound to the articulation of the plosive sound following. With this change only one articulatory feature differs (nasality). The rest are the same.

This process of assimilation is made unconsciously, to allow for an ease of articulation and economy of muscular effort.

Assimilation occurs very frequently in English, both within words and between words. It happens, and it does so in three different directions:

1. Progressive Assimilation

2. Regressive Assimilation

3. Palatalisation

1. ⇒ Progressive assimilation

In a sequence of sounds A+B, sound A changes sound B. In other words, the conditioning sound precedes and affects the following sound. Very clear examples are the rules for the regular plural and regular past tense:

Plural	Conditioning sound	⇒	Assimilated sound
"bags"	b æ g + s ending		b æ g ⇒ z
"books"	b u k + s ending		b u k ⇒ s
Past tense	Conditioning sound	⇒	Assimilated sound
"laughed"	l æ f + d ending		l æ f ⇒ t
"moved"	m u: v + d ending		m u: v ⇒ d

Progressive assimilation also happens in some contractions:

Contraction	Conditioning sound	⇒	Assimilated sound
"it's"	ɪ t + z		ɪ t ⇒ s

[ɪ	t	z	]	→	[ɪ	t	s]
alveolar	alveolar	alveolar			alveolar	alveolar	alveolar	
plosive	fricative	fricative			plosive	fricative	fricative	
voiceless	voiced	voiced			voiceless	voiceless	⇒ voiceless	

2. ← Regressive assimilation

In a sequence of sounds A+B, sound B changes sound A. In other words, the assimilated sound precedes and is affected by the conditioning sound. This is the most common type of assimilation in English. The two examples we saw before are cases of regressive assimilation:

[w	ʌ	n	b	ɪə	]	→	[w	ʌ	m	b	ɪə]
		alveolar	bilabial				bilabial	←	bilabial			
		nasal	plosive				nasal		plosive			
		voiced	voiced				voiced		voiced			

[w	ʌ	n	k	ʌ	p	]	→	[w	ʌ	ŋ	k	ʌ	p]
		alveolar	velar					velar	←	velar				
		nasal	plosive					nasal		plosive				
		voiced	voiceless					voiced		voiceless				

Regressive assimilation occurs frequently in modals “has to” / “have to” (expressing obligation) and “used to” (expressing habitual action in the past):

“have to” becomes “haf to”
 “has [z] to” becomes “ha[s] to”

[h	æ	v	t	ə	]	→	[h	æ	f	t	ə]
labiodental		alveolar	labiodental		alveolar		labiodental		alveolar			
fricative		plosive	fricative		plosive		fricative		plosive			
voiced		voiceless	voiceless	←	voiceless							

[h	æ	z	t	ə	]	→	[h	æ	s	t	ə]
alveolar		alveolar	alveolar		alveolar		alveolar		alveolar			
fricative		plosive	fricative		plosive		fricative		plosive			
voiced		voiceless	voiceless	←	voiceless							

The last type of regressive assimilation that is common in native-speaker speech is when we find a sequence of sibilants /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ/. Examples:

“his [z] shoe” becomes “hi [ʃ]oe”
 “this [s] show” becomes “thi [ʃ]ow”

"his [z] sigh" becomes "hi [s:]igh"

[h ɪ z ʃ u:] → [h ɪ ʃ ʃ u:]
 alveolar palato-alveolar **palato-alveolar** ← palato-alveolar
 fricative fricative fricative fricative
 voiced voiceless **voiceless** ← voiceless

[ð ɪ s ʃ əv] → [ð ɪ ʃ ʃ əv]
 alveolar palato-alveolar **palato-alveolar** ← palato-alveolar
 fricative fricative fricative fricative
 voiceless voiceless voiceless voiceless

[h ɪ z s aɪ] → [h ɪ s s aɪ]
 alveolar alveolar alveolar alveolar
 fricative fricative fricative fricative
 voiced voiceless **voiceless** ← voiceless

3. ⇔ Palatalisation

In a sequence of sounds A+B, A and B are combined into C. In other words, this is a reciprocal assimilation. The first sound and second sound in a sequence come together and create a third sound:

Sound A + Sound B
 ↓
 Sound C

All cases of palatalization involve an alveolar consonant + the approximant /j /:

Sound A	Sound B	Sound C	Examples
/s /		⇒ [ʃ]	<u>iss</u> ue he's coming this <u>ye</u> ar
/z /		⇒ [ʒ]	Does <u>yo</u> ur dog bite?
/t/	+ /j /	⇒ [tʃ]	Is that <u>yo</u> ur dog?
/ts /		⇒ [tʃ]	He hates <u>yo</u> ur hairdo
/d/		⇒ [dʒ]	Did <u>yo</u> u pass the exam?
/dz/		⇒ [dʒ]	He needs <u>yo</u> ur help

As with linking, the amount of assimilation that occurs in native-speaker speech depends on the formality of the situation, the rate (speed) of speech, and the style of the speaker.