

# BASIC PHONETICS AND ENGLISH PHONOLOGY

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TOPIC: NON-ASSIMILATORY PROCESSES

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# Introduction

- In our last discussion, we looked at assimilation in English.
- We determined assimilation is an occurrence where a sound is made to be similar to a neighbouring sound.
- That can be a sound before or after, hence regressive, progressive or coalescent.
- Manner, place and voice assimilation were explored.
- This week, we shall examine phonological processes that are not influenced by preceding or proceeding ones.

- Dissimilation
- Deletion
- Metathesis
- Epenthesis
- Vowel reduction
- Insertion
- Coalescence

# DISSIMILATION

- Dissimilation - opposite of assimilation
- results in two sounds becoming less alike in articulatory or acoustic terms.
- The resulting sequence of sounds is easier to articulate and distinguish.
- It is a much rarer process than assimilation.
- One commonly heard example of dissimilation in English occurs in words ending with three consecutive fricatives, such as *fifths* .
- Many speakers dissimilate the final [fθs] sequence to [fts], apparently to break up the sequence of three fricatives with a stop.

# DELETION/ELISION

- Deletion is a process that removes a segment from certain phonetic contexts.
- Deletion occurs in everyday rapid speech in many languages.
- In English, a schwa [ə] is often deleted when the next vowel in the word is stressed
- the deletion of the schwa creates the environment for the [r] to become devoiced.)

- Slow speech                      Rapid speech
- [pəˈreɪd]                      [pəˈeɪd] parade
- [kəˈrəʊd]                      [kəˈoʊd] corrode
- [səˈpəʊz]                      [spəʊz] suppose
- The schwa [ə] is often deleted when the next vowel in the word is stressed.

- Deletion is expressed in terms of a segment becoming zero.
- For example, a consonant can be deleted at the end of a word when it follows another consonant.
- /d/ can be deleted in
  - 'hand' [hænd] to become [hæn];
  - /t/ is deleted in 'list' [lɪst] to become [lɪs].
  - /t/ is deleted in 'locust' [ləʊkəst] to become [ləʊkəs]

- Deletion also occurs as an alternative to dissimilation in words such as *fifths* .
- Many speakers delete the [θ] of the final consonant cluster and say [fɪfs].
- In very rapid speech, both the second [f] and the [θ] are sometimes deleted, resulting in [fɪs].
- More examples:
  - Last time [lɑːst taɪm]            [lɑːs taɪm]
  - Next time [nekst taɪm]            [neks taɪm]

# Other notable forms of deletion/elision

- /h/ is regularly elided from the weak forms of function words
- e.g. *I think he will have told her* / aɪ θɪŋk I wɪl hæv təʊld ə/.
- This is to be heard even in formal speech registers in all varieties of English.
- Because of the linguistic insecurity attached to **h**-dropping in England and Wales it is not uncommon for children to be,
- quite wrongly, corrected by parents, teachers or speech trainers for eliding /h/ in this context.

- Another notable elision connected with weak forms is the deletion, in informal registers, of the dental fricative /ð / in *them* – often condemned as slipshod speech
- this form in fact has a long history going back hundreds of years and is to be heard in NRP and all other accents of English
- Two common words have frequent alternative forms with elision of dental fricatives /θ ð /: *months* / mʌns /, *clothes* / kləʊz /

- Forms of numerals, e.g. *fifth*, *twelfth*, do not elide /θ/ but may instead elide the preceding consonant: /fɪθ twelθ/.
- Elision of /v/ in *of* is especially common before /ð/, e.g. *three of the websites*
- /θri: ə (v) ðə websaɪts /,
- The sequence /tt/ is normally reduced to /t/ in three common verbal forms, i.e.
- *ought to*, *want to*, *got to*:

- When *going to* is used as a tense-former, it is typically pronounced /gənə/,
- e.g. *What's going to happen /*
- This form (sometimes shown as 'gonna' in dialogue) is often criticised by prescriptivists,
- but is in fact the norm in colloquial NRP and all other varieties of native-speaker English.

# EPENTHESIS

- Epenthesis is a process that inserts a syllabic or a non-syllabic segment within an existing string of segments.
- For example, in careful speech, the words *warmth* and *something* are pronounced [wɔrmθ] and [sʌ mθɪ ŋ].
- It is common in casual speech for speakers to insert a [p] between the [m] and the [θ] and pronounce the words [wɔrmpθ] and [sʌ mpθɪ ŋ].
- Consonant epenthesis of this type is another example of a coarticulation phenomenon.

- In English,
- the articulatory transition from a sonorant consonant to a non-sonorant appears to be eased by the insertion of a consonant that shares properties of both segments.
- Notice that the epenthesized consonants are all non-sonorant,
- have the same place of articulation as the sonorant consonant to their left,
- and have the same voicing as the non-sonorant consonant to their right.

Word	Non-epenthesized pronunciation	Epenthesized pronunciation
<i>something</i>	[sʌmθɪŋ]	[sʌmpθɪŋ]
<i>warmth</i>	[wɔrmθ]	[wɔmpθ]
<i>length</i>	[lɛŋθ]	[lɛŋkθ]
<i>prince</i>	[prɪns]	[prɪnts]
<i>tenth</i>	[tɛnθ]	[tɛntθ]

From O'Grady, W. & Archibald, J. (2000). *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction*. Toronto: Pearson.

- Vowels may also be inserted epenthetically.
- This may not be common in English but we shall illustrate it using Turkish, O'Grady & Archibald (2000) indicate that in Turkish, a word never begins with two consonants.
- When words are borrowed into Turkish, an epenthetic vowel is inserted between certain sequences of two initial consonants, creating a new and permissible sequence.

• Source word	Turkish form
• <i>train</i>	[t i ren]
• <i>club</i>	[k y lʏp]
• <i>sport</i>	[s w port]

# METATHESIS

- Metathesis is a process that reorders a sequence of segments.
- This often results in a sequence of phones that is easier to articulate.
- It is common to hear metathesis in the speech of children, who often cannot pronounce all the consonant sequences that adults can.
- For example,
- some English-speaking children pronounce *spaghetti* as *pesghetti* [pəskɛri]. In this form, the initial sequence [spə], which is often difficult for children to pronounce, is metathesized to [pəs].

- The pronunciations of *prescribe* and *prescription* as *perscribe* and *perscription* are often-cited examples of metathesis in adult speech.
- In these cases, metathesis appears to facilitate the pronunciation of two successive consonant-*r* sequences in each word.
- Other examples:
  - Ask- aks
  - Wasp – waps

- Because many cases of metathesis are diachronic, or historical in nature,
- some cases of metathesis may appear to be arbitrary.
- Within the Metathesis in Language Database several languages are listed as having no clear motivation,
- either phonetic or phonological, and can be considered to be arbitrary.

- metathesis can be grounded in the perceptual constraints of the specific language.
- Because languages vary with respect to both the phonetic realization of sounds and syllable structure constraints,
- the optimal order of sounds may vary depending on how perceptual constraints interact in a given language.
- For example, Old English metathesis involves /sk/ becoming [ks] (e.g., /aske/→[akse] 'ash') following a stressed syllable,
- while Colloquial French metathesis involves /ks/ becoming [sk] on the final, stressed syllable (e.g., /fiks/→[fisk] 'fish').

# VOWEL REDUCTION

- In many languages, the articulation of vowels may move to a more central position when the vowels are unstressed.
- This process is known as (vowel) reduction
- Typically, the outcome of vowel reduction is a schwa [ə];
- this can be observed in pairs of related words that show different stress placement such as:
  - *Canada* [k<sup>h</sup> æ nədə] versus *Canadian* [k<sup>h</sup> ənédjɪən].

- If you listen carefully to these words, you'll notice that the first vowel is [æ] when stressed (in *Canada* );
- but schwa when unstressed (in *Canadian* ).
- And the second vowel is [ej] when stressed (in *Canadian* ) but schwa when unstressed (in *Canada* ).
- Since we cannot predict what vowel a schwa may 'turn into' when it is stressed,
- we assume that [æ] and [ej] are basic to the words in question and are reduced in unstressed position.

# COALESCENCE

- It's usually either the consonant on the left or the right that has a dominating influence on the other.
- In coalescence, both consonants influence each other and fuse together to form a new one, often an affricate
- **Yod-Coalescence**
- Involves a fusion of an alveolar plosive or fricative, followed by a semi-vowel /j/ and a back vowel, either /u:/, /ʊ/ or /o:/.

- This is generally manifested in forms of the pronoun *you*, such as in *would you*, *could you*, *should you*, *did you* or *he/she knows your name?*
- **U-Coalescence'**
- Involves a combination of alveolar plosive/fricative and usually a <u> in spelling, but without a graphemic indication of an intervening semi-vowel, i.e. a <y>.
- commonly occurs in words:
- *tune, dune, fortune, century, nature/natural, (un)usual, mixture, texture, picture, pressure, creature, opportunity, situation, actually, pleasure* or *treasure* in the speech of many speakers of (British) English (Cruttenden, (1994)

- Consider the words or constructions below:

- *assume,*
- *stupid,*
- *student,*
- *substitute,*
- *opportunity,*
- *promised*
- *yesterday*

- They often exhibit this kind of coalescence, too,
- but seem to be somewhat more optional, especially the words beginning with <st>

# COALESCENCE

- It is also described as a situation where two contiguous segments coalesce or are replaced by a single segment.
- A good example of coalescence is found in geminate segments (also called doubled consonant or doubled vowel).
- Geminate consonants occur in English only at morpheme boundaries:
  - nighttime,
  - bookcase,
  - solely,
  - non-null.

# NEUTRALIZATION

- Phonemes lose their distinction in a particular phonological environment.
- A common example that is used refers to the American English accent where the phoneme /t/ and /d/ become a flap [ɾ] if they occur in between two vowels.
- In this case, „bitter“ and „bidder“ become homophones.
- This is an example of flapping.

# INSERTION/LIAISON

- the insertion of an extra sound in order to facilitate the articulation of a sequence.
- In this process, a consonant or a vowel is inserted.
- Some RP speakers insert the sound /r/ in contexts where there is no historical /r/.
- if a word ends with a non-high vowel and if it precedes another beginning with a vowel.
- This feature has been called the „intrusive r’
- For example, when speakers say „law and order“, an intrusive „r“ may be inserted and it will be produced as [lɔ: ren ɔ:də].

- With most speakers of non-rhotic English, it is also possible
- to hear linking *r* when there is no **r** in the spelling. This is termed **intrusive *r***.
- *the sofa in the catalogue* / ðə səʊfə r ðə kæt(ə)lɒg/
- *my idea of heaven* / maɪ aɪ'dɪə r əv hevn(ə)n/
- *we saw a film* /wɪ sɔː r e fɪlm/
- Intrusive *r* is heard after the vowels / ɑː ɔː ə / and the diphthongs terminating in / ə /.

Collins & Mees ( 2013 ) observe that:

Many native speakers are aware of the existence of intrusive *r* and many seem to make a conscious effort to avoid it

(especially after // *ɑ:* / and / *ɑ: ɔ:* /).

It is often considered by English people (particularly the older generation) as 'lazy' or 'uneducated' speech.

- Nevertheless, it is a characteristic feature of NRP, and is also heard from the overwhelming majority of those who use any non-rhotic variety of English.

- Some native speakers will insert a glottal stop in the following examples:
- *the sofa in the catalogue* /ðə səʊfə r̥ ðə kæt(ə)lɒg/
- *my idea of heaven* / maɪ aɪ'dɪə r̥ əv hev(ə)n/
- *we saw a film* /wɪ sɔː r̥ e fɪlm/
- This, in a conscious effort to avoid producing an /r/ link.
- But, interestingly,
- many of those who condemn intrusive *r* vociferously are unaware of the fact that they regularly use it themselves.

# References

- Collins, B & Mees, M.I (2013). *Practical phonetics and phonology: A resource book for students*.UK: Routledge.
- Cruttenden, A. (1994). *Gimson's Pronunciation of English* (5th ed.). London: Edward Arnold.
- O'Grady, W. & Archibald, J. (2000). *Contemporary linguistics: An introduction*. Toronto: Pearson.