

Phonological Reduction - Characteristics of Connected Speech



Instructions: In order to better understand some of the features of spoken language that make listening comprehension difficult for learners, let's review some typical phonological processes that occur in connected speech. Read the document aloud and respond to the prompts with your partners.

Elision

Consonant Cluster Reduction: One common form of reduction in connected speech is **elision**. This occurs when a phoneme present in a word pronounced in isolation disappears when the word is pronounced in connected speech. With consonant sounds, this most often occurs with the letters T and D in consonant clusters. These sounds can be elided when they stand between two other consonants and they belong to the same syllable as the preceding consonant.

- “**Facts**” - the T sound occurs between two consonants and belongs to the same syllable as the C sound.
- “**Hands**” - The D sound occurs between two consonants and belongs to the same syllable as the N sound.
- “**Last lesson**” - The T sound occurs between two consonants and belongs to the same syllable as the S sound.

Now practice pronouncing the full and reduced forms of the following words and phrases.

- Lifts
- Firstly
- Collects
- Accepts
- Fields

- Software
- Coastguard
- Fact-finding
- Grandfather
- Childcare

- Lift me
- Best friend
- React badly
- Kept quiet
- Hold tight

H Dropping: There are plenty of Spanish words that start with a silent “h”. In English, however, the “h” is only silent in some words like “honest” and “honor” BUT in fluent speech the “h” in “he”, “him”, “his” and “her” can be dropped and the rest of the word becomes the final syllable of the previous word. Read the sentences below in the full and reduced forms. The phonetic transcription of the elided part is provided.

- **Does he** like it? /dʌzi/
- **Is he** at work? /izi /
- Have you **seen him**? /sɪnɪm /
- I **took her** to the doctor. /tʊkɜr/
- He lives **with his** parents. /wiðɪs/
- We **gave him** a present. /geɪvɪm /

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Informal Reductions: In informal speech we often reduce “going to” to /gʌnə/ and “want to” to /wʌnə/. Read the sentences below in formal and informal ways.

- What do you **want to** do tomorrow?
- We’re playing basketball tonight. **Want to** come with us?
- Mom says I have to go to bed now but I don’t **want to**.

“Want to” can always be replaced with /wʌnə/ but “going to” and /gʌnə/ are not always interchangeable. Read the lines below and mark in **bold** examples that can be pronounced as /gʌnə/.

- A: Where are you going for vacation?
- B: I’m going to Spain.
- A: What are you going to do in Spain?
- B: We’re going to go to a soccer game.
- A: Who are you going with?
- B: I’m going to travel with my mom and dad. Oh and my sister is going too.
- A: You should practice your Spanish!
- B: Yeah, I’m going to.

We can also reduce the past form of the modals “could have”, “should have”, and “would have” to /kʊdə/, /ʃʊdə/, and /wʊdə/ in informal contexts. Read these sentences in a formal and informal way.

- You **should have** let me know you were traveling and I would have driven you to the airport!
- Be more careful. You **could have** hurt somebody!
- I really **should have** studied more in high school. I **would have** gotten better grades. Then I **could have** found a better job.

Assimilation

Assimilation occurs when a phoneme in the isolated word changes into another phoneme when used in connected speech. This most often occurs in a consonant at the end of one syllable that is changed to in order to more closely match the place or manner of articulation of the consonant that begins the following syllable. There are many types of assimilation but let’s just consider a few examples. Read the rule then pronounce the phrases in their full and assimilated forms.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● T becomes a P before P, B, or M.<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Wet paint - wep paint○ Jet black - jep black○ White mice - waip mice● D becomes a B before P, B, or M<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A bad person - a bab person○ A loud bang - a loub bang○ Red meat - reb meat● N becomes M before P, B, or M<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Brown paper - Browm paper○ A thin book - a thim book○ Lean meat - leam meat | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● T becomes K before K or G<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Hot coffee - hok coffee○ Quite good - quike good● D becomes G before K or G<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ A red gate - a reg gate○ A bad group - a bag group● N becomes ŋ before K or G<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Green covers - greeŋ covers○ Twin girls - twiŋ girls |
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Can you write any additional phrases that feature these assimilation processes?

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