

ASPECTS OF CONNECTED SPEECH

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NOTA DE RESPONSABILIDAD

“Las ideas y conclusiones aportadas en esta tesis de grado son responsabilidad exclusiva de sus autores”

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NOTA DE ACEPTACION

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Abstract

According to Weinstein (2001) in the area of English pronunciation teaching, several research studies have shown that Connected Speech instruction can help learners comprehend more easily normal speech used by native speaker and make them sound more comprehensible and natural with less marked foreign accent

Connected speech is a phenomenon in spoken language that collectively includes aspects such as: Stress, Reduction, Content and Function Words, Assimilation, Linking, Elision, Flapping, Glottaling and Blending and that very often create problems to students.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the aspects of connected speech in Standard American English in order to have a more clear vision of them; especially, in a context where English is taught as a foreign language.

Keywords: Stress, Reduction, Content and Function Words, Assimilation, Linking, Elision, Flapping, Glottaling and Blending

Resumen

De acuerdo a Weinstein (2001) en el área de enseñanza de pronunciación del idioma Inglés varios estudios han demostrado que la instrucción en los aspectos inmersos en el Discurso Conectado puede asistir a los aprendices a interpretar más fácilmente el discurso normal utilizado por hablantes nativos y hacer que su discurso resulte más comprensible y natural y con un acento extranjero menos marcado.

El discurso conectado es un fenómeno en el lenguaje hablado que colectivamente comprende aspectos tales como: Acentuación, Reducción, Palabras de Contenido y de Función, Asimilación, Enlace, Elisión, Flap D, Glotalización y Gradación, que muy a menudo causan problemas a los estudiantes.

El propósito de este trabajo es examinar los aspectos del discurso conectado en el Inglés Americano Estándar con el fin de tener una visión más clara de ellos; especialmente, en un contexto donde el idioma Inglés se enseña como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: acentuación, reducción, palabras de contenido y de función, asimilación, enlace, elisión, flap D, globalización, gradación

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Aspects of Connected Speech

Through the years, language teaching has developed to a more communicative process with emphasis on meaningful and authentic materials. Despite this new emphasis, learners still face serious difficulties when it comes to understanding natural native conversations.

A large majority of language teachers speak clearly and provide listening materials full of clearly pronounced and articulated speech which make students feel comfortable and develop their listening and speaking skills based on this style. However, when students face a real life situation, they are chocked and have great problems. The language seems so unfamiliar and fast that they are unable to decipher word boundaries or recognize words or phrases. According to Clarey and Dixson (1963), it all is the result of a simple law of economy by which the organs of speech tend to draw sounds together creating a challenge to students.

This paper examines those aspects of Connected Speech such as stress, content and function words, assimilation, elision, reduction, flapping, glottaling, blending and linking that create problems to students at advanced levels and also to teachers that for some reason have neglected this important issue. At the same time this paper pretends to raise awareness of the importance of what connected speech represents in the learning of a language and specifically in the learning of English as a foreign language.

Significance of the Paper

Most students involved in English language learning agree that they experience difficulties in performing listening activities in class and in interacting with native speakers in real-life situations. When native speakers speak, they do not make any pauses between the words of a sentence. Fluent speech flows and words bump into each other. Therefore, speech rate is a complaint often heard from students, and even students at an advanced level express the same feeling of nonconformity, where the ignorance of vocabulary used is not basically the reason for their lack of comprehension. The reason is that speech is a continuous stream of sounds, without clear borderlines between each word.

When speaking, we adapt our pronunciation to our audience and articulate with maximal economy of movement rather than maximal clarity. Certain words are lost, and certain phonemes linked together as we make an effort to convey our message. These changes are described as features of Connected Speech.

According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, learning a language implies to be able to use it as a communicative tool. Hence, the final goal of learning a language is to be able to express it freely and in any context. In order to achieve this, the learner must first learn how to understand what is being said. The learner's listening proficiency is therefore highly important.

This paper focuses on the field of Connected Speech and constitutes itself as a resource of reference to both teachers and students of English as a foreign language at the University of Nariño who are sometimes not familiar with this issue due to the lack of information available in order to be able to understand and interpret native speaker's thoughts.

Describing English Sounds

In Standard American English (SAT) there are 24 consonant sounds. They may be classified according to their place of articulation, manner of articulation and voicing (Kreidles, 2004). In the table below, the first of a pair of symbols represents a voiceless sound and the second a voiced sound.

Table 1
English Consonants

Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Alveolar	Palatoalveolar	Velar	Glottal
Stop	p b			t d		k g	ʔ
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ		h
affricate					tʃ dʒ		
Nasal	m			n		ŋ	
Liquid				l r			
Glide	w				j		

Table 2
Consonant keyword and their transcription

Consonant	Keyword	Transcription	Consonant	Keyword	Transcription
p	pie	/ paɪ /	ʃ	shy	/ ʃaɪ /
b	buy	/ baɪ /	ʒ	measure	/ məʒə /
t	tie	/ taɪ /	tʃ	chore	/ tʃɔr /
d	die	/ daɪ /	dʒ	jaw	/ dʒɔ /
k	cow	/ kaʊ /	h	high	/ haɪ /
g	guy	/ gaɪ /	m	my	/ maɪ /
f	fee	/ fi /	n	nigh	/ naɪ /
v	vie	/ vaɪ /	ŋ	sing	/ sɪŋ /
θ	thigh	/ θaɪ /	w	why	/ hwaɪ /
ð	thy	/ ðaɪ /	l	lie	/ laɪ /
s	sigh	/ saɪ /	r	rye	/ raɪ /
z	zoo	/ zu /	j	you	/ ju /

In SAE vowels are of two different kinds called monophthongs and diphthongs. A monophthong or simple vowel is a vowel sound which has a constant quality. Diphthongs, on the other hand, are sounds that consist of a movement or glide from one vowel to another. The first part is always longer and stronger than the second part and as the sound glides into the second part of the diphthong the loudness of the sound decreases.

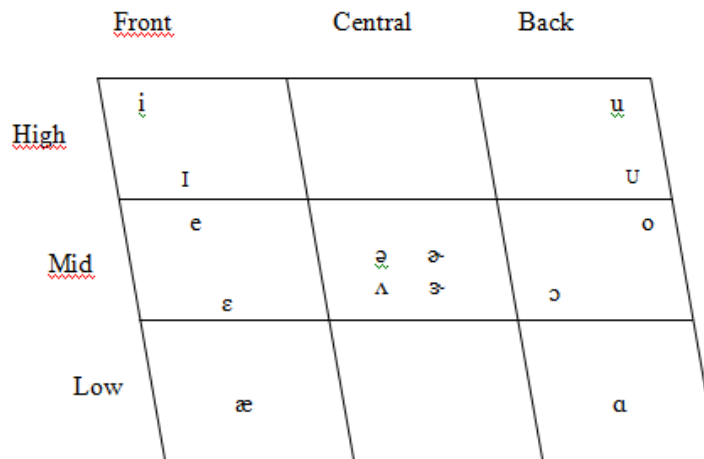


Table 3
Vowel keyword and their transcription

Vowel	Keyword	Transcription	Vowel	Keyword	Transcription
i	leek	/lik/	ə	lover	/lʌvə/
ɪ	lick	/lik/	ɜː	lurk	/lɜːk/
e	day	/de/	u	Luke	/luk/
ɛ	leg	/leg/	ʊ	look	/lʊk/
æ	lack	/læk/	o	go	/go/
ə	butter	/bʌtə/	ɔ	lord	/lɔrd/
ʌ	luck	/lʌk/	ɑ	lark	/lɑrk/

Table 4
Diphthong keyword and their transcription

Diphthong	Keyword	Transcription
aɪ	bike	/baɪk/
ɔɪ	boy	/bɔɪ/
aʊ	town	/taʊn/

The distinction between consonants and vowels is quite simple. If the air is allowed to pass freely through the oral cavity, the sound is a vowel. If the air is partially or totally obstructed in one or more places in the oral cavity, the sound is a consonant.

Stress

The word *stress* means loudness. Stress is a term that is usually applied to words in isolation which have one or more than one syllable. It refers to the property that certain syllables carry which make them stand out from the rest of the word. One of the most interesting points about stress in English is that vowels in unstressed syllables are systematically reduced to / ə / (Dauer, 1993).

about / ə`baut /

In normal speech, words and phrases do not have pauses between them. In fact, a spoken sentence appears like a very long word to a person who is not familiar with the language. In such a situation, stress can help make things easier for the listener. Baker and Goldstein (2008) assert that correct word stress patterns are essential for the learner's production and perception of the English language. Producing the wrong stress pattern can cause great difficulty for the listener in the understanding of the words. Consider the following pair of words:

contrast / `kantrəst / contrast / kən`træst /

As you can see, they are written the same, but in spoken language, it is the location of stress that tells us what we really mean. The first example is a noun and the second is a verb.

Stressed and Unstressed Syllables

In English, words can be made up of one syllable, two syllables or more syllables. In all words of two or more syllables, one syllable is more prominent, louder or more noticeable than the other syllables in the word. This strong syllable is called stressed syllable and the other weaker syllables are called unstressed syllables. Stressed syllables sound louder, are longer and

have clearer vowels and stronger consonants whereas unstressed syllables sound softer, are shorter and are frequently reduced to / ə /.

Vowel Reduction

In English, when you move the stress, you often change the vowel quality. Let us consider the following pairs of words.

ball / bɔl /	balloon / bə`lun /
bit / bɪt /	rabbit /`ræbət/

In the example, when the vowel *a* in *ball* is stressed, it is pronounced / ɔ /, but when it is unstressed, it is pronounced / ə /. This change in vowel quality from a stressed full vowel to a short vowel is called reduction. Vowels in unstressed syllables immediately before or immediately after stressed syllables are usually reduced. Almost any vowel can be pronounced as / ɪ /, / ə /, or / ə̃ / before *r* in unstressed syllables. Generally, front vowels / ɪ /, / i /, / e /, / ε / are reduced to / ɪ / when they are unstressed; low and back vowels / æ, ɑ, ɔ, o, u, u / are reduced to / ə / when they are unstressed.

invalid /`ɪnvəlɪd /	invalid /ɪ`vælɪd /	fast / fæst /	breakfast /`brɛkfæst /
late / let /	chocolate /`tʃɔklɪt /	men / mɛn /	women /`wɪmɛn /

Stressing the Wrong Syllable

Stressing the wrong syllable sometimes creates misunderstandings because people may think you are pronouncing a completely different word. The following words are some examples of why syllable stress is an important component of English.

august /`ɔgəst /	the name of the eighth month
august / ə`gʌst /	majestic or grand
invalid /`ɪnvəlɪd /	a sick or disabled person
invalid /ɪ`vælɪd /	not valid, void

content / `kantent /	the subject matter of a book, speech, etc.
content / kən`tent /	satisfied and happy

Content and Function Words

Content words have independent meanings and can be used independently. They can refer to things, states, qualities, or actions. Function words by a way of contrast do not have independent meanings and can only be used in connection to content words. They usually signal grammatical relationships among content words in the sentence.

Content words include:

principal verbs

nouns

adjectives

adverbs

Function words include:

determiners

auxiliary verbs

prepositions

pronouns

General Rules for Stress Placement

Birjandi and Ali Salmani-Nodoushan (2005) state the following general guidelines and patterns of English syllable stress. It is very important to keep in mind that there are many exceptions to these rules and that English syllable stress can be irregular.

Monosyllable Words

These words do not present any problems because, when pronounced in isolation, they receive the primary stress on their only vowel. When they are part of a sentence, monosyllabic content words are pronounced with full forms of vowels whereas monosyllabic function words are normally pronounced with the weak forms of vowels. The vowels of monosyllabic function words are pronounced fully in two contexts.

- When the word appears in a sentence-final position
- When the word is used emphatically or contrastively.

Two Syllable Words

In two syllable words, the placement of stress is simple: either the first or the second syllable is stressed. Two syllable function words usually receive stress on their last syllable. Two syllable content words are stressed in a different way. Two syllable verbs are usually stressed according to their second syllable. If the second syllable contains a long vowel or diphthong, then the second syllable is stressed.

increase / ɪn`kris /

If the verb ends with more than one consonant, then the second syllable is stressed.

condense / kən`dens /

If the final syllable contains a short vowel and one or no final consonant, then usually, the first syllable will be stressed.

open / `opən /

Two syllable adjectives are stressed in the same manner.

fishy / `fɪʃɪ /

For adverbs, the ending *-ly* does not affect stress. Therefore, it is easy to identify the stress for the remaining adjective. The ending *-ly* is usually pronounced / lɪ /

handsome / `hændsəm / handsome / `hændsəmlɪ /

Two syllable nouns generally follow a different pattern. If the second syllable contains a short vowel, the stress usually comes on the first syllable.

chimney / `tʃɪmni /

If the noun does not go by the previous rule, its stress will have to be placed on the second syllable. Nouns that fall in this category are very rare.

increase / ɪn`kris /

Multi Syllable Words

One general clue is that weak syllables never carry stress. Therefore, any unstressed syllable will reduce its vowel into a weaker one. Another hint is that multi-syllable function words carry stress on their final syllable.

nonetheless / nənðə`les/

Prefixes and the adverbial suffix *-ly* usually do not change the pattern of stress.

sensitive / `sensətɪv / oversensitive / ovə`sensətɪv /

Verbs ending in *-ate* or *-ize* receive stress on their antepenultimate syllables. The endings are pronounced as / et / and / aɪz / respectively.

confiscate / ʌkən`fɪskət / vaporize / ˈvæpə`raɪz /

Verbs ending in *-ify* usually take stress on the syllable before the *-ify* ending.

testify / `testəfaɪ /

Other verbs usually take stress on their last syllables, unless when the last syllable contains a short vowel.

intervene / ɪntə`vɪn /

Adjectives ending in *-ate* receive stress on their antepenultimate syllable but the *-ate* ending is pronounced as / ət /.

moderate / `mɒdərət /

Adjectives ending in *-ese* usually receive stress on the syllable containing *-ese*.

Japanese / dʒæpə`nɪz /

Adjectives ending *-ious*, *-uous*, *-eous*, *-ieous*, *-ic*, *-ical*, *-ian*, *-ible*, *-ial*, or *-ive* usually receive stress on the syllable before these endings. There are a few exceptions in connection to the ending *-ic*. For example: Arabic / ˈærəbɪk /, lunatic / ˈlʌnətɪk / and rhetoric / ˈretərɪk /.

dubious / ˈdʊbiəs / grammarian / grə`mɛrɪən /

presumptuous / pri`zʌmpfʊəs/ comprehensible / kəmprə`hensɪbəl /
 spontaneous / spən`tenɪəs / secretarial / səkrə`teriəl /
 public / ˈpʌblɪk/ impressive / ɪm`presɪv /
 biblical / ˈbɪblɪkəl/

Adjectives ending in *-able*, *-al*, and *-ous* usually take stress on their antepenultimate syllable.

corporal / ˈkɔrpərəl / admirable / ˈædmərəbəl / scrupulous / `skrupjələs /

Nouns ending in *-ity*, *-ety*, *-al*, *-ion*, *-ence*, *-ance*, *-acy*, and *-ian* usually take stress on the syllable before these endings.

ability / ə`bɪlətɪ / correspondence / kərəs`pɒndəns / piety / `paɪətɪ /
 importance / ɪm`pɔrtəns/ proposal / prə`pɒzəl/ democracy / dɪ`mɒkrəsi/
 recognition / rɛkəg`nɪʃən / historian / hɪs`tɔriən/

Other nouns usually receive stress on their antepenultimate syllables.

photography / fə`tɒgrəfi /

The endings *-ist*, and *-ism* do not change stress.

organ / ˈɔrgən / organism / ˈɔrgənɪzəm /

Nouns ending in *-ee* usually receive stress on the ending itself. The exceptions are those nouns that include double consonants before the *-ee* ending. For example: committee / kə`mɪti /, coffee / ˈkɒfi/, etc.

referee / rɛfə`ri / devotee / dəvə`ti /

Phrasal Verbs

A phrasal verb is a verb plus one or more particle combination that carries a special meaning. These types of words are very common in English and are often frequently more used

than their one word synonyms. For example, you are more likely to hear *put out the cigarette* than *extinguish the cigarette*.

When an object separates the verb and the particle both the verb and the particle are stressed. However, the particle tends to receive slightly more stress. If there is more than one particle you should stress the verb and the first particle.

I couldn't *figure* that *out*

Why should I *put up* with his smoke?

If the phrasal verb comes at the end of a sentence the particle is stressed.

It doesn't wash *off*

If the phrasal verb is followed by the object, the stress is either on the verb or the particle. In this case the rhythm of the sentence determines what part of the phrasal verb to stress.

I didn't pick up the accordion.

Noun Forms of Phrasal Verbs

Sometimes, the sequence verb plus particle functions as a noun or as a noun phase. In that case, the stress is on the first word (Vaughan, 2002). We say "work *out*" if it is a verb and "*workout*" if it is a noun. Besides, in writing when the sequence functions as a noun, it is written as a single word or with a hyphen.

The car was tuned up.

My car needed a tune-up

I worked out yesterday.

I had a great workout

They let me down

it was a big letdown

The papers were handed out.

We got some interesting handouts

Abbreviations and Numbers

Teen and *ten* numbers are considered the most misinterpreted ones in English. The most obvious difference between these numbers is that the *teens* end in an *n* sound and the *tens* do not. However, this difference is not determining in differentiating these numbers.

Dictionaries agree that the *tens* and *teens* are stressed on the first syllable, though they generally also show that the *teens* can be stressed on the second syllable as well. We can use stress to tell the difference, but not always. Context plays an important role (Orion, 2000). When counting, *teens* are stressed on the first syllable.

thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen /^ˈθɜːtɪn /, /^ˈfɔːrtɪn /, /^ˈfɪftɪn /, /^ˈsɪksɪn /

Before a noun, they are more likely to be stressed on the first syllable.

thirteen candles /^ˈθɜːtɪn kændəlz /

If the teens are in final position, they are more likely to be stressed on the second syllable.

The twins just turned thirteen / ðə twɪnz dʒʌst tɜːnd θɜːtɪn /

On the other hand, abbreviations are always stressed on the last letter.

MBA / ɛm bi ˈe / CNN / si ɛn ˈɛn / FBI / ɛf bi ˈaɪ /

UCLA / ju si ɛl ˈe / USA / ju ɛs ˈe / PhD / pi ɛf ˈdi /

In the case of names of places and people, the stress is always on the last word.

New York / nu ˈjɔːrk /

Las Vegas / lɑːs ˈvegəs /

Central Park / sɛntrəl ˈpɑːk /

Palm Springs / pɑːm ˈsprɪŋz /

South Africa / saʊθ ˈæfrɪkə /

North Dakota / nɔːrθ də ˈkɒtə /

George Washington / dʒɔːrdʒ ˈwɑːʃɪŋtən /

Bill Clinton / bɪl ˈklɪntən /

Tom Cruise / tɑːm ˈkruːz /

Compound Nouns

A compound noun is a sequence of two or more words that together have a new meaning and function as a single noun. The second element or word of the compound is a noun; the first element is usually a noun but may also be another part of speech. A compound noun may be written as one word, as two words separated by a hyphen, or as two words separated by a space.

popcorn	fruit-cake	school bus
highway	gear-change	wastepaper basket

In a compound the first element describes the second noun, and it is always singular.

a flower garden = a kind of garden that contains flowers

a garden flower = a kind of flower that is grown in a garden

A compound is pronounced like a single word. There is only one main stress, which falls on the first element whether it is simple or complex. The stressed syllable is higher in pitch than the other syllables.

my sunglasses / maɪ `sʌŋglæsɪz/ the post office / ðə `pɒstɔfɪs /

The syllable that is normally stressed in the second noun loses its stress, but retains its vowel quality. That syllable is said to have secondary stress, and it is marked with / ˌ /. Let us consider the following pair of words.

weekend / ˈwi:kənd /	compound noun with unstressed, unreduced syllable
weakened / ˈwi:kənd /	verb with unstressed, reduced syllable

Kenworthy (1988) claims that there are four different compounds to consider: noun compounds, verb compounds, adjective compounds and adverb compounds. Adverb compounds are the least common and are not going to be discussed.

The most important thing to remember in compound nouns is that the placement of stress is on the first part. Noun compounds can actually consist of two nouns or an adjective plus a noun.

tooth brush	airplane
window seat	laundry basket

Compounds formed by an adjective and a noun can be written as one word or a two words.

blackboard	White house
darkroom	English teacher
cheapskates	head doctor

It is really important to differentiate between a compound noun formed from an adjective and a noun, and an adjective plus a noun sequence that does not function as a noun. If this is the case, the stress is on the noun.

<i>White</i> house	white <i>house</i>
<i>English</i> teacher	English <i>teacher</i>
<i>head</i> doctor	head <i>doctor</i>
<i>blackboard</i>	black <i>board</i>
<i>cheapskates</i>	cheap <i>skates</i>

Verb compounds just like noun compounds are stressed on the first part.

<i>Housesit</i>	<i>videotape</i>
<i>Handcuff</i>	<i>ghostwrite</i>
<i>Tiptoe</i>	

In the case of adjective compounds, they are usually stressed on the second part.

My dog's *well-trained*

It's *secondhand*

He's *good-looking*

If compound adjectives are followed by nouns, there is a shift in the placement of stress.

You put the stress on the first word of the compound.

well -trained dog

secondhand bookstore

good-looking haircut

Contrastive Stress

Sometimes, we also stress words to bring out a special meaning or to clarify what we mean when there is confusion. In this case, any word in the sentence can be stressed, including a function word. The following sentences can be stressed in different ways, depending on the meaning that the speaker wants to convey.

Sentence	Implied Meaning
<i>I</i> didn't say he stole the money	someone else said it
<i>I didn't</i> say he stole the money	that is not true at all
I didn't <i>say</i> he stole the money	I only suggest the possibility
I didn't say <i>he</i> stole the money	I think someone else took it
I didn't say he <i>stole</i> the money	maybe he just borrowed it
I didn't say he stole <i>the</i> money	rather than some other money
I didn't say he stole the <i>money</i>	he may have taken some jewelry

Content and Function Words

In connected speech, content words normally keep the qualitative as well as the quantitative pattern of their isolated form. In contrast, function words have two or more qualitative and quantitative realizations depending on whether they are unstressed, which is the

normal case, or whether they are stressed, which happens in special situations and when spoken in isolation. The unstressed realizations are called weak forms and the stressed realizations strong forms or citation forms. Function words are normally weakened and thus they show obscuration of vowel quality towards / ə /, / ɪ /, / ʊ /, reductions in the length of sounds, the elision of vowels and consonants and the assimilation of consonants. Strong forms maintain the full vowel and consonantal quality and quantity.

It should be clear that function words are normally realized as weak forms. Their correct use is especially important, since the full pronunciation of these words would distort the rhythmic pattern of English and could lead to constant misunderstanding. According to Roach (1983) there are about forty function words, which occur in the first two hundred most common words in connected speech.

Table 5
Determiners / Quantifiers

Orthography	Strong Form (s)	Weak Form (s)
The	/ ði /	/ ðə /
A	/ e /	/ ə /
An	/ æn /	/ ən /
some	/ sʌm /	/ səm /, / sm /

Table 6
Pronouns

Orthography	Strong Form (s)	Weak Form (s)
His	/ hɪz /	/ ɪz /
Him	/ hɪm /	/ ɪm /
Her	/ hɜː /	/ hə /, / ə /
You	/ ju /	/ ju /, / jə /
Your	/ jʊr /	/ jə /
She	/ ʃi /	/ ʃi /

He	/ hi /	/ hi /, / ɪ /
We	/ wi /	/ wɪ /
Them	/ ðem /	/ ðəm /, / ðm /, / əm /
Us	/ ʌs /	/ əs /

Table 7
Prepositions / Particles

Orthography	Strong Form (s)	Weak Form (s)
Than	/ ðæn /	/ ðən /, / ðn /
At	/ æt /	/ ət /
for	/ fɔː /	/ fə /
from	/ frʌm /	/ frəm /, / frm /
of	/ ʌv /	/ əv /, / ə /
to	/ tu /	/ tu /, / tə /
as	/ æz /	/ əz /
there	/ ðeə /	/ ðə /

Table 8
Conjunctions

Orthography	Strong Form (s)	Weak Form (s)
and	/ ænd /	/ ənd /, / ən /, / nd /, / n /, / m /, / ŋ /
but	/ bʌt /	/ bət /
that	/ ðæt /	/ ðət /, / ðt /

Table 9
Auxiliaries

Orthography	Strong Form (s)	Weak Form (s)
can	/ kæn /	/ kən /, / kn /, / kŋ /
could	/ kʊd /	/ kəd /
have	/ hæv /	/ həv /, / əv /, / ə /
has	/ hæz /	/ həz /, / əz /, / z /, / s /
had	/ hæd /	/ həd /, / əd /, / d /

will	/ wɪl /	/ ɪ /
shall	/ ʃæl /	/ ʃəl /, / ʃɪ /
should	/ ʃʊd /	/ ʃəd /, / ʃd /, / ʃt /
must	/ mʌst /	/ məst /, / məs /
do	/ du /	/ dʊ /, / də /, / d /
does	/ dʌz /	/ dəz /,
am	/ æ /	/ əm /, / m /
are	/ ɑr /	/ ə /, / r /
was	/ wʌz /	/ wəz /, / wɪz /
were	/ wɜ /	/ wə /
would	/ wʊd /	/ wəd /, / əd /, / d /

Flapping

One feature characteristic of most varieties of North American English is the so called flapping of medial / t / and / d / in words such as *city* and *muddy*, resulting in a rhotic sound usually represented by the symbol / ɾ / or / ɽ / in the International Phonetic Alphabet. According to Weinstein (2001), it takes place when an alveolar stop / t / or / d / is preceded by a stressed vowel and followed by an unstressed vowel. Flapping is almost categorical in normal fast pronunciation and leads to homonyms.

latter / `læfə /	ladder / `læfə /	matter / `mæfə /	madder / `mæfə /
mettle / `mɛfəl /	meddle / `mɛfəl /	betting / `bɛfɪŋ /	bedding / `bɛfɪŋ /
outty / `aʊfi /	audi / `aʊfi /	Adam / `æfəm /	atom / `æfəm /

However, the conditions for flapping are not fully understood. Schuh (2001), proposes the following conditions:

- Flapping applies to alveolar stops before an unstressed vowel within words or before any vowel across a word boundary.

- When not in initial position.
- Flapping also occurs even if / r / precedes. For example, *hearty* and *hardy*

Glottaling

Glottaling involves the replacement of a sound by a glottal stop symbolized by / ʔ /. It is formed by a brief closure of the vocal folds which blocks completely the air coming from the lungs. Glottal stops are more common in emphatic British English. The replacement of / t / for / ʔ / is very frequent. However, Shockey (2003) highlights three conditions:

- / t / must be followed by a consonant other than / h /.

not now / nat nau / [nɑʔnau]

- / t / must be preceded by a sonorant sound.

battle / bætl / [bæʔl]

- / t / must be in the coda of the syllable, not in the onset.

button / bʌtən / [bʌʔn]

The last example, shows that glottaling often interacts with syllabic consonants. That is, it can also take place after a stressed vowel and before a syllabic consonant at the end of a syllable or word.

When / t / is followed by a bilabial or velar consonant there is a choice of pronunciation. One may perform assimilation and change / t / into / p / or / k / or one may glottal the / t /.

hot potato / hat pəteto / [hapəteto] [hɑʔpəteto]

right kind / raɪt kaɪnd / [raɪkaɪnd] [raɪʔkaɪnd]

In negative contractions there are two alternatives. It is possible to choose glottal the / t / of the *n't* ending or elide it.

don't delay / dont dɪle / [donʔdɪle] [dondɪle]

Assimilation

Garcia and Maidment (2005) interpret assimilation as the process by which two or more sounds become more similar to each other. This process is achieved when one of the sounds takes characteristics from the other one. Generally speaking, there are three types of assimilation:

- Assimilation of place.

ratbag / ræt bæɡ / [ræpbæɡ]

oatmeal / otmil / [ɒpmil]

- Assimilation of manner

Indian / ɪndjən / [ɪndʒən]

soldier / soldjə / [soldʒə]

- Assimilation of voice

have to / hæv tu / [hæftə]

has to / hæz tu / [hæstə]

In English, when the alveolars / t /, / d /, / n / are followed by bilabial consonants / p /, / b /, / m / they may become bilabial or they may become velar stops when they are followed by / k / or / g /.

/ t / changes to / p / before / m /, / b / or / p /

not me / nɒt mi / [nɒpmi]

light blue / laɪt blu / [laɪpblu]

that person / ðæt pɜːsən / [ðəpɜːsən]

/ d / changes to / b / before / m /, / b / or / p /

good morning / gʊd mɔːnɪŋ / [gʊbmɔːnɪŋ]

mud bath / mʌd bæθ / [mʌbæθ]

bad pain / bæd pen / [bæbpen]

/ n / changes to / m / before / m /, / b / or / p /

Green point / grin pɔɪnt / [grɪmpɔɪnt]

open book / opən bu:k / [opəmbuk]

input / ɪnpʊt / [ɪmpʊt]

/ d / changes to / g / before / g / or / k /

had gone / hæd ɡɒn / [hæɡɒn]

bird call / bɜ:d kɔ:l / [bɜ:ɡkɔ:l]

/ t / changes to / k / before / k / or / g /

that car / ðæt kɑ:r / [ðækɑ:r]

fat girl / fæt ɡɜ:l / [fækɡɜ:l]

/ θ / changes to / s / before / s /

bath seat / bæθ sit / [bæsit]

both sides / boθ saɪdz / [bosɑɪdz]

/ n / changes to / ŋ / before / k / or / g /

tin can / tɪn kæn / [tɪŋkæn]

Golden gate / goldən ɡet / [goldəŋɡet]

In the same way, the sequence / nt / can become / mp / or / ŋk /.

front garden / frɒnt ɡɑ:dn / [frɒŋkɑ:dn]

couldn't be / kudnt bi / [kubmpbi]

Since the alveolar stops / t / and / d / can be often deleted, there will be a lot of situations in which an alveolar stop may be deleted or assimilated to the following sound. For example

couldn't be / kudnt bi / [kubm bi] [kubmpbi]

cold cream / kold krim / [kɒlkrim] [kɒlɡkrim]

In the case of the alveolar fricatives / s / and / z / they can change to / ʃ / or / ʒ / respectively when they are followed by / j / or / ʃ /.

miss you / mis ju / [mɪʃə] nice shop / naɪs ʃɒp / [naɪʃɒp]

sees you / siz ju / [sɪʒə] please show / plɪz ʃoʊ / [plɪʃo]

Syllabic / n / may become / m / or / ŋ / when preceded by a bilabial or velar plosive in the same word and followed by a consonant in the same or the next word or by pause.

open / opən / [ɒpən] [ɒpm]

bacon / bekən / [bekn] [bekŋ]

Coalescence

Coalescence is defined as a form of assimilation where two adjacent sounds become a single one. In English this occurs when the alveolar / t / and / d / are followed by / j /.

Can't you? / kænt ju / [kæntʃu]

Did you? / dɪd ju / [dɪdʒu]

Voice assimilation is not very common and it is restricted to some structures such as *have to*, *has to*, *used to* and *of course*. In these cases, assimilation is regressive. Therefore, / v / becomes / f / because the following sound / t / or / k / is voiceless. This type of assimilation only affects / v / and / z /.

have to / hæv tu / [hæftə]

has to / hæz tu / [hæstə]

of course / əv kɔrs / [əfkɔrs]

used to / juzd tu / [justə]

newspaper / njuzpepə / [njuspepə]

it was spectacular / ɪt wəz spɛktækjʊlə / [ɪt wəspɛktækjʊlə]

/ ð / Reduction

This is a process in which an initial / ð / becomes assimilated to a previous alveolar consonant. For example:

in the club / ɪn ðə klʌb / [ɪnəkʌb]

In the examples the / n / is normally longer than usual which constitutes in compensation for the loss of the dental fricative. In this case the lengthened consonant is the only cue to differentiate the definite from the indefinite articles (in the club / in a club). Other examples are:

get them / get ðəm / [gettəm] read this / rɪd ðɪz / [rɪddɪz]

fail the test / feɪl ðə tɛst / [fellətɛst] cinemas there / sɪnəməz ðɛr / [sɪnəmæzzɛr]

takes them / teɪks ðəm / [teɪksəm] in the house / ɪn ðə haʊs / [ɪnəhaʊs]

Linking

Linking is a way of joining the pronunciation of two words so that they are easy to pronounce. There are four main situations where linking happens in English (Dale & Poms, 2005).

- When consonants are followed by consonants.

left there / lɛft ðɛr /

- When consonants are followed by vowels.

left it / lɛft ɪt /

- When vowels are followed by vowels.

go away / go əwe /

- When / t /, / d /, / s /, / z / are followed by / j /.

When a word ends in a consonant and the next word begins with another consonant, the first consonant sound must be linked to the second without releasing it.

help Bob / hɛlp bɒb / [hɛlpbɒb]

If the two sounds are the same, the first sound must be hold and lengthened.

bad dog / bæd dɔg / [bæd:ɔg]

When a word ends in a consonant sound and the next word begins with a vowel sound the consonant sound must be moved to the next syllable.

hold on / hold ɒn / [hɒl dɒn]

come in / kʌm ɪn / [kʌ mɪn]

turn over / tɜ:n ovə / [tɜ:n ovə]

When a word ends in a vowel sound and the next word begins with another vowel, a short /j/ must be introduced after front vowels and a short /w/ after back vowels.

may I? / me aɪ / [mejaɪ] yellow Audi / jɛlo aʊdi / [jɛlowaʊdi]

/t/, /d/, /s/, /z/ + /j/ Sequences.

When the sounds /t/, /d/, /s/, /z/ are followed by a word that starts with /j/ both sounds are connected. These sounds connect not only with written /j/ sounds but they do so as well with the initial unwritten /j/ sound of syllables and words (Ortiz, 1982). They form a combination that changes the pronunciation. For example, did you? / dɪd ju /, becomes [dɪdʒə]

/d/ + /j/ graduation / grædjueɪʃən / [grædʒueɪʃən]

gradual / grædjuel / [grædʒuəl]

/s/ + /j/ bless you / blɛs ju / [blɛʃə]

press your hands / prɛs jə hændz / [prɛʃə-hændz]

/ z / + / j /	casual / kæzjuəl /	[kæzuəl]
	visual / vizjuəl /	[vizuəl]

/ t / + / j /	can't you? / kænt ju /	[kæntʃu]
	don't you? / dont ju /	[dontʃu]

Elision

Brown (1990) interprets elision as the process that involves the dropping of a consonant or vowel, or both that would be present in slow or careful pronunciation of a word in isolation. The most common consonants involved in this process are / t / and / d /. Consider the following examples:

last year / læst jɪr /	[læsjɪr]
aspects / æspekts /	[æspeks]
ground pressure / graʊnd preʃə /	[graʊmpreʃə]
banned for life / bænd fə laɪf /	[bænfəlaɪf]

In English the sounds / t / and / d / are very unstable and undergo phonological processes. As an example, is the fact that they are the only ones which can be elided under certain conditions (Ladefoged, 2001).

- They must be in the coda of the syllable, not in the onset.
- They must be preceded by a consonant of the same voicing. Therefore / t / must be preceded by a voiceless consonant and / d / by a voiced consonant.
- The following sound must be a consonant different from / h /.

According to these conditions, they may be elided when they are in the middle of a sequence of three consonants.

last night / læst naɪt / [læsnaɪt]

locked door / lɒkt dɔː / [lɒkdɔː]

send them / sɛnd ðəm / [sɛndðəm]

Elision may occur within a word and it often affects the suffix of the regular past tense which means that tense is often indicated by context. Therefore, the expression / ðe lʊk bæk / could mean *they look back* or *they looked back*.

In spite of being a very frequent process in connected speech, there are some exceptions that should be taken into consideration (Harris, 1994).

- In the weak form of *and* / d / may be elided whatever the following sound is.
- In negative contractions such as *don't*, *didn't* and *can't*, / t / may be elided although the preceding sound / n / is voiced. Elision can take place in these words even if the next word begins with a vowel or / h /, but not if the negative contraction is followed by a pause.

don't shout / dont ʃaʊt / [donʃaʊt]

can't think / kænt θɪŋk / [kænθɪŋk]

didn't dare / dɪdnt deɪ / [dɪdndɛɪ]

Kreidler (2002) affirms that in spite of being the most common elided consonants, alveolars / t / and / d / are not the only consonants that can be elided. In fact, it is possible for any consonant to be elided in certain circumstances. The following consonants are frequently elided: / h /, / ð /, / θ /, / v /, / k /, / l /.

/ h / is normally elided when it is a weak form of function words. If the dropped *h* leads to a vowel vowel sequence, it may reappear, or lead to *r* insertion.

I think he will have told her / aɪ θɪŋk hi wɪl həv told hɜː / [aɪθɪŋkiwɪləvtoʊldɜː]

/ ð / is elided in *them* in informal speech when it is used as a weak form.

help them / hɛlp ðɛm / [hɛlpəm]

The interdental / ð /, / θ / are frequently elided in nouns such as *months* and *clothes*

months / mʌnθs / [mʌns]

clothes / kloθz / [kloz]

In words like *fifths* / fɪfθs / and *sixths* / sɪksθs /, where three fricatives occur in a row, one or two of them are frequently elided.

fifths / fɪfθs / [fɪfs] [fɪθs] [fɪs]

/ v / in *of* is elided especially before / ð /. However it can also be elided before other consonants in rapid speech.

one of the boys / wʌn əv ðə bɔɪz / [wʌnəðəbɔɪz]

full of beans / fʊl əv bɪnz / [fʊləbɪnz]

In more rapid speech, / v / is sometimes elided before / m / in the verbs *give*, *have* and *leave*.

give me some tea / gɪv mi səm ti / [gɪmɪsəmti]

do you have my book? / du ju hæv maɪ buk / [dujuhæmaɪbuk]

leave me alone / liv mi əlɒn / [limiəlɒn]

/ k / is elided in the past form of *ask* and in forms beginning with unstressed *ex* / ɪks / especially when the word has been mentioned previously.

asked him / æskt hɪm / [æstɪm] expected / ɪkspektɪd / [ɪspektɪd]

excursion / ɪkskɜːʃən / [ɪskɜːʃən] extraordinary / ɪkstrədɪnəri / [ɪstrədɪnəri]

/ l / is regularly elided following the vowel / ɔ /. This process is historically established in words like *talk* and *walk*.

also / əlso / [əso]

all the citizens / əl ðə sɪtɪzənz / [əðəsɪtɪzənz]

Even in slow English, in words beginning with *all* the /l/ is elided.

altogether / əltəgeðə / [ətəgeðə]

all right / əlraɪt / [əraɪt]

always / əlweɪz / [əweɪz]

/l/ can also be elided in the suffix *-ly*. It occurs frequently in *certainly* and more rarely in *mysteriously* and *charmingly*

certainly / sə'tænli / [sə'təni]

mysteriously / mɪstɪriəsli / [mɪstɪriəsi]

charmingly / tʃɑːmɪŋli / [tʃɑːmɪŋi]

Schwa Elision

In syllabicity /ə/ may disappear making the following consonant /n/ or /l/ syllabic /n/ or /l/. However, in this case schwa does not disappear. It just transfers to the following consonant. That is why some authors consider this disappearance a kind of fusion rather than an elision process.

cotton / kətən / [kətn]

However, in other cases it is possible to talk about real schwa deletion.

history / hɪstəri / [hɪstri] traveling / travəlɪŋ / [travlɪŋ]

federal / fedərəl / [fedrəl] counselor / kaʊnsələ / [kaʊnslə]

In these cases, schwa may be elided without making the following consonant syllabic and resulting in the loss of one syllable.

history / hɪstəri / three syllables

history / hɪstri / two syllables

In some cases / ə / elision may happen when the schwa precedes the stressed syllable but it is not generally possible.

police / pəlis / [plɪs]

Occasionally, the schwa may be elided when the following consonant is other than / r /, / l /, / n /. For example:

tomorrow / təmərə / [tmərə]

suppose / səpəz / [spəz]

tomato / təmetə / [tmeto]

canary / kənəri / [knəri]

Blending

Blending refers to any two word sequences where the word boundary is blurred. Typically, blending consists of contractions and blends. Contractions are those word boundaries that have a conventionalized written form whereas blends are typically contracted spoken forms that do not have a conventional written form (Crystal, 208).

Table 10
Contractions

Full form	Contraction	Pronunciation	Full form	Contraction	Pronunciation
I am	I'm	/ aɪm /	I am not	I'm not	/ aɪm nɒt /
I have	I've	/ aɪv /	I have not	I haven't	/ aɪhævənt /
I had	I'd	/ aɪd /	I had not	I hadn't	/ aɪhædənt /
I will	I'll	/ aɪl /	I will not	I won't	/ aɪwɒnt /
I would	I'd	/ aɪd /	I would not	I wouldn't	/ aɪwʊdənt /
you are	you're	/ juːr /	you are not	you aren't	/ juːrnt /
you have	you've	/ juːv /	you have not	you haven't	/ juːhævənt /
you had	you'd	/ juːd /	you had not	you hadn't	/ juːhædənt /
you will	you'll	/ juːl /	you will not	you won't	/ juːwɒnt /
you would	you'd	/ juːd /	you would not	you wouldn't	/ juːwʊdənt /

he is	he's	/hɪz/	he is not	he isn't	/hɪznt/
he has	he's	/hɪz/	he has not	he hasn't	/hihæzənt/
he had	he'd	/hɪd/	he had not	he hadn't	/hihædənt/
he will	he'll	/hɪl/	he will not	he won't	/hiwɒnt/
he would	he'd	/hɪd/	he would not	he wouldn't	/hiwʊdənt/
we are	we're	/wɪr/	we are not	we aren't	/wɪərnt/
we have	we've	/wɪv/	we have not	we haven't	/wɪhævənt/
we had	we'd	/wɪd/	we had not	we hadn't	/wɪhædənt/
we will	we'll	/wɪl/	we will not	we won't	/wɪwɒnt/
we would	we'd	/wɪd/	we would not	we wouldn't	/wɪwʊdənt/
they are	they're	/ðer/	they are not	they aren't	/ðeərnt/
they have	they've	/ðɪv/	they have not	they haven't	/ðehævənt/
they had	they'd	/ðed/	they had not	they hadn't	/ðehædənt/
they will	they'll	/ðel/	they will not	they won't	/ðewɒnt/
they would	they'd	/ðed/	they would not	they wouldn't	/ðewʊdənt/

Table 11
Blends

who are	who're	/huə/	what are	what're	/hwɑr/
who will	who'll	/hʊl/	who would	who'd	/hʊd/
when are	when're	/hwɛnə/	when will	when'll	/hwɛnl/
how are	how're	/haʊə/	how will	how'll	/haʊl/
what are	what're	/hwɑr/	what will	what'll	/hwɑtl/
where are	where're	/hwɜə/	where will	where'll	/hwɜl/
why are	why're	/hwɑr/	why will	why'll	/hwɑil/

Implications

The process of learning spoken English is not a simple issue as it seems to be. It is a complicated task that involves many variables. Learners have to attend to what is being said, process, understand, interpret, evaluate and finally respond to it.

Usually, learners of English as a foreign language feel that they cannot manage this spontaneous speech when facing real-life situations causing in most cases, avoidance of further contact. This situation is often due to four factors:

First, teachers rely too much on first language research findings. According to Anderson and Lynch (1988), a few years ago there was very little research into the field of listening in a foreign language and as a result, all the activities were highly influenced by the knowledge about first language listening.

Secondly, there is a tendency of neglecting listening for perception activities. Unfortunately, the focus in most cases is based on listening for comprehension when categorizing the activities. If we move directly into the field of listening for comprehension it is most probably that we cause more frustration and confusion than learners can handle.

Thirdly, we tend to use easy and enjoyable tasks rather than challenging ones. Teachers should prepare students to be challenged and even frustrated in order for them to master what they have to.

Finally, sometimes teachers use listening activities to favor other language goals. Easily, we may end up doing discussions and writing tasks rather than teaching listening. Teachers of English as a foreign language should not expect that students use the same strategies as native speakers do when performing a listening episode. Without the correct understanding of how these elements are interrelated, it is very difficult for learners to use strategies to understand a message.

Learners should be guided to recognize these aspects rapidly and accurately enough to make intelligent guesses about the content of what they have just heard. In order to teach pronunciation, it is important to identify clearly what is it that we are going to teach and what are the specific objectives for our students. In other words, we first should decide what model to teach. In the past, that model was focused on the written language and the goals for students were to be able to read and understand texts. Fortunately, today the model is focused on authentic spoken language and the final goal for students is to communicate effectively; which involves read, write and understand the language.

If we really want to succeed in the teaching of pronunciation, we should consider it as something more than correct pronunciation of phonemes. It must be viewed as a crucial part of communication and students and teachers should participate together in the total learning process. The teacher must establish feasible and appropriate goals for the communication needs of the students and his or her role must go beyond being just a checker of pronunciation. The teacher should act as a coach and give the correct feedback that encourages learners to improve constantly.

If these aspects are correctly combined, students can be expected to reach the goals and do well in the learning a foreign language. However, if students really want to improve their listening skills it is their responsibility to listen to as much English as possible and engage conversations with native speakers whenever possible.

Conclusions

Just as in Spanish, in English stress fulfills the function of identifying the more significant syllables and words, that is, the units of information of a message. This is what permits the possibility of differentiating between pairs of words that are written the same, but pronounced differently as in the case of nouns and verbs such as *invalid* /'ɪnvəlɪd/ which is stressed in the first syllable when used as a noun and *invalid* /ɪn'vælɪd/, stressed in the second syllable when used as a verb. As we can see in the previous examples, one of the most outstanding features of the English language is that when the syllable of a word is found in a weak or unstressed position, the vowel is often reduced to schwa / ə /. This sound is the most common in English and is always associated with weak syllables and replaces any vowel in an unstressed position.

In the same way the learner should know which syllable to accentuate in a word, he must also know which words to accentuate in a sentence according to the amount and type of information they carry. Generally speaking, content words are accented, whereas function words are realized as weak forms and may constitute a real challenge for most learners since they are pronounced more quickly and at a lower volume. However, special meaning can be conveyed if we modify their rules of accentuation.

If we focus our attention on normal speech, we find that speakers concentrate specifically on what they say, rather than on how they say. In other words, they tend to articulate sounds in the most efficient manner when conveying a message, leading to suppression of sounds and changes in their pronunciation in order to make them easier to pronounce. Hence the importance for learners to take into consideration that in normal native conversations some sounds that are expected to be heard are not in fact pronounced which is a clear indicator that context plays an important role to clarify meaning when elision processes take place.

As for those changes in sounds, often known as assimilation, it is feasible to state that they occur because of the impossibility for the organs of speech to move quickly enough to get from one position to another in order to articulate them; although some authors affirm that it is just a simple law of economy.

In English, / t / and / d / are two of the most common sounds involved in processes such as elision, assimilation, linking, glottaling and flapping. Frequently, we find that in a sentence words do not always sound the same as when they are said individually or in isolation. Linking implies that words are joined smoothly to each other to avoid speech from sounding unnatural or choppy and requires certain modifications. Learners can overcome the problems of linking words together once they have mastered the pronunciation of citation words, and have acquired an easy command of the spoken language. The more competent they are in the use of the language, the more naturally this feature will be for them. Accurate instruction in linking favors the improvement of listening and speaking skills.

Glottaling and flapping are also two of the most common processes that affect directly / t / and are very often misunderstood and although their rules may result very similar, they are markedly different. Therefore, if we are not certain how to pronounce a / t / in the middle of two vowels, the most advisable is it to pronounce it as a pure / t / sound rather than making the mistake of pronouncing it as a flap where it is clearly a glottal and vice versa.

Reduced forms are also another component of the language that often creates great confusion among learners. Contractions and Blends occur in everyday speech and are widely used by native speakers even in very formal contexts, and their use is one of the reasons why learners state that English is very difficult to understand since they involve unstressed vowels, elision and assimilation of sounds. The use of contractions helps sound more casual and improves

the rhythm of the language. Blends on the other hand, are very informal contractions that are said very frequently but rarely used in writing.

If we really want to improve in the learning and teaching of English as a foreign language, we should make it not just a mental activity which is really important but a physical one. One of the reasons why it is hard to understand a foreign language like English is that we typically learn it; especially if the setting is a classroom and the style of the teacher is not the most appropriate.

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