

Lecture 4: ASSIMILATION AND ELISION

Two adjacent consonants within a word or at word boundaries often influence each other in such a way that articulation of the sound becomes similar to or even identical with the articulation of the other one. This phenomenon is called assimilation. Assimilation may affect all the features of the articulation of a consonant or only some of them. We speak of:

- 1) Assimilation affecting:
 - a) the point of articulation;
 - b) both the point of articulation and the active organ of speech.
- 2) Assimilation affecting the manner of the production of noise.
- 3) Assimilation affecting the work of the vocal cords.
- 4) Assimilation affecting the lip position.
- 5) Assimilation affecting the position of the soft palate.

Assimilation affecting the point of articulation takes place when the alveolar variants of the phonemes [d], [t], [n], [l], [s], [z] are replaced by their subsidiary dental variants if they are adjacent to dental consonants phonemes [θ], [ð]:

Tenth, read this, has the

Assimilation affecting the active organ and the point of articulation takes place in the following cases. In words with the prefix con-, when it is followed by the consonants [k], [g], the forelingual alveolar [n] is replaced by the backlingual [ŋ] if the prefix bears either a primary or secondary stress:

Congress [kɒŋɡres]

In the case when a vowel is between [n], [k] in an unstressed syllable, it is omitted in a rapid speech:

Bacon [beɪkŋ]

Assimilation affecting the manner of the production of noise takes place in the following cases. When the constrictive noise fricative [v] occurs before the occlusive nasal sonorant [m] at the word boundary between *me* and *give*, *let* in rapid speech they are likely to be assimilated to [m]:

Give me [ɡɪmɪ], let me [lemɪ]

Assimilation affecting the work of the vocal cords takes place in the following cases. A voiceless consonant may be replaced by a voiced one under the influence of the adjacent voiced consonant. Thus, the voiceless [s] in *goose* is replaced by the voiced [z] in the compound noun *gooseberry* under the influence of the adjacent [b]. A voiced consonant may be replaced by a

voiceless one under the influence of the adjacent voiceless consonant. Thus, in the word *used* [ju:zd] the consonants [z] and [d] have been replaced by the voiceless consonants [s] and [t] before *to* – namely in *used to* [ju:st tu] meaning ‘accustomed to’.

Assimilation affecting the lip position takes place when labialized subsidiary variants of the phonemes [k], [g], [t], [s], etc. are used under the influence of the following bilabial sonorant [w]:

Quick, twenty

Assimilation affecting the position of the soft palate takes place when nasal consonants influence oral ones. In *sandwich* [‘sænwitʃ], *kindness* [‘kainnis] the consonant [d] influenced by the preceding [n] changes to the consonant [ŋ] and then disappears.

Assimilation may be of three types as far as its direction is concerned: progressive, regressive and reciprocal.

In progressive assimilation the assimilated consonant is influenced by the preceding consonant. For example, in the word *place* the fully voiced variant of the consonant phoneme [l] is assimilated to [p] and is replaced by a partly devoiced variant of the same phoneme. In ‘*What’s this?*’ [z] is replaced by [s] under the influence of [t].

In regressive assimilation the preceding consonant is influenced by the one following it. The voiced consonant [z] in *news* is replaced by the voiceless consonant [s] in the compound *newspaper* under the influence of the voiceless sound [p].

In reciprocal or double assimilation two adjacent consonants influence each other. For example, in *twenty* [‘twenti], *quick* [‘kwik] the sonorant [w] is assimilated to a voiceless plosive consonant [t] and [k] by becoming partly devoiced. In their turn [t] and [k] are assimilated to [w] and are represented by their labialized variants.

In rapid colloquial speech certain notional words may lose some of their sounds. This phenomenon is called elision. Elision occurs both within words and at word boundaries:

Phonetics [fou’netiks] – [f’netiks]

All right [o:lrait] – [o:rait]

Next day [‘nekst’dei] – [‘neks’dei]

- Loss of [h] in personal and possessive pronouns and the forms of the auxiliary verb *have*.
- [l] tends to be lost when preceded by [o:]: *always, already, all right*
- In cluster of consonants: *next day, just one, mashed potatoes*
- Inserting of sounds
- Linking [r] (potential pronunciation of [r]): *car owner*

- Intrusive [r]: [r] is pronounced where no *r* is seen in the spelling *china* and *glass*:
it is not recommended to foreign learners.