

## **Assimilation**

Of the other pervasive aspects of connected speech is arguably assimilation. Assimilatory processes are much more present, diverse and above all intricate than elision. Assimilation refers to the influence adjacent speech sounds make on each other. Because the various sound features we talked about above do not stay intact when sounds get into contact with each other. Assimilation also is one of the tools whereby speakers attain fluency. If speakers were to produce each single sound in connected speech as if the sound is in total isolation, their utterances would look completely unnatural and disfluency would naturally ensue..

Assimilation could be of a number of types depending of the parameter of classification we choose to deploy.

### **Directionality of Influence**

This simply denotes whether a given sound is influenced by the following or the preceding ones. Under this heading, we can notice the existence of two types, progressive assimilation and regressive assimilation.

**Progressive assimilation** means that a given sound comes under the articulatory influence of the following one. The most talked about quintessence of this type is the various pronunciations of the 's'. As you already know, the 's' behaves differently depending on the nature of the ensuing sound. To break this notion down for the sake of clarity, it is pronounced /z/ when followed by voiced sounds as in cars, lives. On the other hand, when the following sound is voiceless, it is pronounced /s/ as in, hearts, whelps. Some other phoneticians use different names to refer to this type of assimilation: perseverative and left-to-right assimilation.

**Regressive assimilation:** it is a perfect opposite of the former type. It means that a given sound is exerted influence upon by the one preceding it. A good example of this second type is the pronunciation of English voiced consonants when preceded by voiced or voiceless one. Here again, some scholars use different labels: anticipatory and right-to-left assimilation. It is worthwhile to note, however, that by far the two names topping the two types are the most commonly used ones in the literature. (Crystal 2008)

### **Degree of Influence**

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If the parameter used is degree of influence, we would come up with two types: partial and full assimilation.

**Partial assimilation:** if assimilation is said to be partial, then the realization of one sound is not wholly readjusted due to the differing features its neighbour has. In other words, the speech sound keeps part of its inherent identity and acquires some other features of the adjacent sound(s). The following is a good case in point:

Ten pieces: the /t/ sound becomes identical to /p/ in place. It becomes bilabial instead of alveolar.

**Complete assimilation:** it takes place when one of the sounds loses all its features and becomes identical in every respect to another neighboring sound, as in, ten markets. The /n/ becomes fully identical to the /m/ in markets. In that pair also the same process happens: the /t/ in that becomes identical to the /p/ in person.

### **Which Sound Feature is the Recipient of Assimilation**

In other words, is it the place of articulation, the manner of articulation, the position of the velum or the vibration of the vocal folds which comes under influence (which gets altered). Taking this parameter to compartmentalize assimilation would enable us to come up with a whole range of other assimilatory processes.

### **Assimilation of Place**

As the name points out, it designates that the influence adjacent sounds have on each other operates at the place of articulation level. The sound receiving this type shifts its inherent place and adopts the place of the influence-inducer. There are almost as many types falling under this category as there are places of articulation. Nonetheless, I will confine myself here to looking at just a few instances. The overarching aim is not really to provide an all-inclusive account on all the assimilatory processes in action in the English language. The objective is rather to pinpoint the mechanism underpinning the materialization of these processes per se.

**Palatalisation:** when a given sound which in isolation is palatal or palato-alveolar acquires one of these two features of course, after having lost its inherent feature. The following are examples cited from Odgen (2009)

[mis ju] [mifju] miss you

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[wgz JArj] [w93 JArj] was young

[hitju] [hitf ju] hit you

[wud ju] [wud3 ju] would you

I will attach some illustrative accounts on the first example only because the same mechanism governs the ensuing three ones. The first transcription above is that of unassimilated /s/ normally typical of over-careful speech. Hence, the site of our attention is the second one where the alveolar /s/ becomes a palato-alveolar sound. This pronunciation emerges because the /s/ is followed by the palatal /j/. For ease and swiftness of production, the /s/ is produced farther forward in the mouth because the articulators get themselves ready for the production of the palatal sound.

### **Assimilation of Manner**

When the manner of articulation of a given speech sound shift to that of the neighbouring one. It could also be either progressive or regressive.

**Lateral release:** this is one of the commonest types of assimilation under this category. First off, lateral release is typical of English plosive consonants. In the production of individual plosives, the air is released all at once stirring an audible plosion. However, when plosives are followed by the lateral, they tend to pick up the lateralness and lose their otherwise inherent trait: plosive release. Instead of the usual sudden and full release of the airflow, it is released laterally. This process happens—as all other assimilatory processes—because the speech organs towards the end of any sound production start getting themselves ready for the generation of the new sound in the string, hence resulting in a mandatory change in the shape of the oral cavity. Speech-production would be an unbearably cumbersome activity if full attention, as it were, is given to every speech sound produced.

### **Assimilation of Voice**

Here we can only find two types: either a voiceless sound becoming voiced or alternatively a voiced sound losing voice.

**Devoicing:** is the most prevalent type of assimilation of voice. It means that a voiced sound becomes voiceless owing to it being preceded by a voiceless sound. All the voiced sounds in the onsets of the following words become voiceless because of the preceding voiceless sounds: play, pry, quarter.

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## Conclusion

I have endeavoured in this handy manual to cover a number of aspects of English syllable, stress, weak and strong form and two intrinsic aspects of English connected speech. My discussion is by no means all-inclusive. I confined myself to the main hallmarks of the various topics under scrutiny, partly because sophomores at Mila University Centre, at least, most of them are meeting these notions for the first time; they would not be able to know intricate particulars simply and purely because they do not, I would presume, have at their disposal the barest rudiments of the concepts I tackle in the handbook. The other reason is that this manual is meant to incorporate the elements of the syllabus of the second semester. Though I have invested much effort to present the most abridged account coverable in the second-term span, I am sure this is just beyond our grasp.

Pronunciation-fanatics, however, would not feel remotely content with the introductory portrayal the manual has to offer. For this category of students, I would recommend that they poke over the lengthy discussions given by Odgen (2009), to mention but a representative book

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