

I. Assimilation

Definition: It refers to the influence exercised by one sound segment upon the articulation of another so that the sounds become more alike or identical (DPL). In other terms, it is a change in the pronunciation taking place at **the ends and beginnings of words**. Thus, when a phoneme is realised differently (unlike when it is pronounced in isolation) as a result of being near some other phoneme belonging to a neighbouring word, we call this an instance of assimilation. Assimilation may vary in extent according to speaking rate and style; it is more likely to be found in rapid, casual speech and less likely in slow, careful speech.

E.g. Is she \longrightarrow / \quad / instead of / \quad /; ten bikes \longrightarrow **tem** baiks/ instead of /ten baiks/

II types of assimilation

1. Regressive assimilation: the sound (generally the final segment of the 1st word) changes because of the influence of the following sound (generally the 1st segment of the second word). E.g. Is she \longrightarrow / \quad / (/ z/ / \quad /) \longrightarrow

Instability of final alveolars: Word final / t,d, n,s,z/ readily assimilate to the place of the following word initial consonant, i.e. whilst retaining the original voicing, /t, d, n / are replaced by bilabials before bilabial consonants and by velars before velar consonants; /s, z / are replaced by palato-alveolars before consonants containing a palatal feature:

/t/ \Longrightarrow /p/ before /p, b, m /, e.g. that pen \quad / \quad p pen/ ; light blue \quad /laip blu:/;
that man \longrightarrow / \quad p m n/
/k/ before /k, g / e.g. that cup, that girl / \quad k k p; \quad k g : l /

/d/ \Longrightarrow /b/ before /p, b, m / e.g. good pen, good boy, good man /gub pen; gub boi; gub m n/
/g/ before /k, g / e.g. good concert, good girl / gug k ns t; gug g l /

/n/ \Longrightarrow /m / before /p, b, m / e.g. ten players, ten boys, ten men / tem pl z; tem boiz; tem men /
/n / before /k, g / e.g. ten cups, ten girls /ten k ps/; ten g lz/

NB: As a result of word final assimilation, / n / may be preceded by vowels other than / i, e, , , / Thus, / n / can occur before long vowels as a result of assimilation. E.g. I've been / bi:n / gardening, she'll soon /su:n / come

/s/ \Longrightarrow /ʃ / before / ʃ, tʃ, d , j/ e.g. this shop; cross channel; this judge; this year / iʃ ʃ p; kr ʃ tʃ nl; iʃ d d ; iʃ ji /

/z/ \Longrightarrow / / before /ʃ; tʃ; d , j/ or sometimes \Longrightarrow /ʒ / (change to fortis) before /ʃ/, e.g. those young men / u j n men/; cheese shop / tʃi: ʃ p/; those churches / tʃ tʃiz/;

II. Coalescence (or reciprocal assimilation): in such type of assimilation, each of adjacent articulations influences the other; e.g. the fusion of [d] and [j] to produce [d] as in: could you.

The process which has led to /t,d,s,z/ +/j/ giving /tʃ, d , ʃ , / may operate in contemporary colloquial speech at word boundaries, e.g. : /t/ + /j/ what $\xrightarrow{\text{you}}$ want ... / watʃu want/; /d/ + /j/ would $\xrightarrow{\text{you}}$... /wud u/; /s/ + /j/ in case $\xrightarrow{\text{you}}$ ed it / in keiʃu ni:d it /; /z/ + /j/ Has your $\xrightarrow{\text{you}}$ come? / h : let k m /.

The coalescence is more complete in the case of /t,d/ + /j/ (especially in questions tags, e.g. didn't you? Could you?etc. In the case of /s,z/ + /j/, the coalescence into /ʃ, / may be marked by extra length of friction, e.g. Don't miss your train / d ump miʃʃ : trein/ ; I can't be sure / ai ka:mp bi ʃ : /

III. Progressive assimilation: the sound (generally the initial segment in the 2nd word) changes because of the influence of the preceding sound (generally the final segment of the 1st word).

E.g. Did you \longrightarrow / did u/ ; lunch score \longrightarrow /l nt k /; this shoe \longrightarrow / i /.

IV. Assimilation involving the state of the glottis: this occurs when both segments become voiced, the assimilation is of voice; and when both segments become voiceless, the assimilation is of voiceless.

E.g.1 Educated Scottish speakers pronounce 'with' as / wiθ /; but when they use it with another word such as 'with them', they pronounce / wiθ em/.

E.g.2 Assimilation of voicelessness: 'of course' → / v k :s/ → / f k :s/
'have to' → / h v t / → / h f t /

2. ELision

Definition: It refers to the omission of sounds in connected speech. Both consonants and vowels may be affected and sometimes whole syllables may be elided. In other terms, a phoneme may be realised as *zero*, or be deleted in certain circumstances. As with assimilation, elision is typical of rapid, casual speech. Here is a small number of instances where elision may occur:

1. Loss of weak vowel after / p, t, k /

In words like potato, tomato, canary, perhaps, today the vowel in the first syllable may disappear; the aspiration of the initial plosive takes up the whole of the middle portion of the syllable, the result will be: /p teit̪ ; t ma:t̪ ; kne ri; p h ps; t dei/.

2. Weak vowels + n, l, or r becomes syllabic consonant. (A syllabic consonant occurs when the weak second syllable contains no vowel at all, but consists entirely of the consonant [l] as in: bottle and button [b tl̪ ; b tn̪], thus [] indicates that the final sound is a final consonant. More examples: 'tonight' → /tnait/ 'police' → /pli:s/; 'correct' → /krekt/.

3. Avoidance of complex consonant clusters. In clusters of three plosives or two plosives plus a fricative, the middle plosive may disappear, hence we may have: acts / ks/; looked back /luk b k/; scripts /skrips/; facts /f ks/; handsome /h ns m/; exactly /igz kly/.

4. Loss of final /v/ in 'of' before consonants. E.g. 'lots of them' /l ts m/; 'waste of money' /weist m ni/

5. Dropping of []: [] is often dropped in: 'always' / :weiz/; 'already' / :redi/; 'allright' / rait/.

3. Linking

It refers to a sound which is introduced between linguistic units, usually for ease of pronunciation. In English, the 'r' is the most familiar example of linking. It is generally used when the second word starts with a vowel.

*Examples of linking 'r': my father and my mother /fa: r/; here and there /hi r/; four eggs /f :r egz/

***Intrusive 'r':** many RP speakers use 'r' as a way to link words ending with a vowel even when there is no "justification" from the spelling, as in: 'formula A' /f :mj l r ei/; 'media event' /mi:di r ivent/.

Nb: the intrusive 'r' is usually added to / , , a: , :/. Consider the examples below:

Russia and China / /; drama and music / ; Shah of Persia /

Law and order / /.