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LESSON 5

OTHER ASPECTS OF CONNECTED SPEECH

A. Assimilation

The term **assimilation** describes how sounds modify each other when they meet, usually across word boundaries, but within words too. If we consider the words *that* and *book*, and look at the phonemes involved, we get /t/ and /ðæt/. If we then place the words in a sentence, (for example: Could you pass me that book, please?), we notice that the /t/ phoneme at the end of that doesn't sound like it does in the word said on its own. The phoneme /t/ is an alveolar sound, which is formed when the tongue blade forms a temporary closure against the alveolar ridge. If you try saying the sentence a few times over, you will notice that the tongue doesn't actually get there at the end of the word. Rather than having our tongue make the unnecessarily long journey all the way to the alveolar ridge, we employ an economy of effort, and get our articulators (in this case, the lips) ready for the next sound, /b/. The modified sound retains its original voice quality, and so we say that the /t/ assimilates to a /p/, both sounds being unvoiced. As a result, we get Could you pass me /p buk/? This is not to say that we give the /p/ its full plosive manner of articulation either, as we would if we were to say the non-word /p/ on its own, merely that our lips are in the position to make the /p/. The best description is that in readying our articulators for the next sound, certain sounds are either absorbed, or modified into others. There is another possibility: the /t/ at the end of that could also become a glottal stop, where the glottis (the opening between the vocal cords inside the larynx) closes momentarily.

Some rules for assimilation:

1. The phonemes /t/, /d/, and /n/ often become bilabial before bilabial consonants /p/, /b/, and /m/.

He's a rather fat boy

She's got an apartment in Manhattan.

He's a very good boy

There are ten men in the class

2. /t/ assimilates to /k/ before /k/ or /g/ ; /d/ assimilates to /g/ before /k/ or /g/

Where has that car been all night

Can you see that girl over there?

It was a very good concert

She's a very good girl

3. /n/ can assimilate to // before /k/ or /g/

I've been going out too much lately

He's bringing his own car

4. /s/ can assimilate to // before //

I really love this shiny one over here.

5. /t/ can assimilate to // before //

We found this lovely little cheese shop in Paris.

6. /t/ and /j/ combine to form /tj/

You went to French last year, didn't you.

7. /d/ and /j/ combine to form /dj/

Would you like a cup of tea?

B. Elision

The term elision describes the disappearance of a sound. For example in the utterance *He leaves next week*, speakers would generally elide (leave out) the /t/ in next, saying /neks wi:k/. Again here, the reason is economy of effort, and in some instances the difficulty in putting certain consonant sounds together while maintaining a regular speech rhythm and speed.

Some rules of elision:

1. The most common elision in English are /t/ and /d/ when they appear within a consonant cluster.

We arrive the next day

When we reached Paris, we stopped for lunch

We bough a lovely carved statuette

2. Complex consonant clusters are simplified

She acts like the owns the place
Teachers use authentic texts to teach
George the sixth's throne

3. /ə/ can disappear in unstressed syllables.

I love you forever.
It's a question of collective responsibility.
I think we should call the police

4. /v/ can disappear in of before consonants

My birthday's on the 11 of November
It's a complete waste of time.
That's the least of my worries.

C. Linking and Intrusion

When two sounds meet, speakers often link them in various ways:

1. Linking /r/

Her English is excellent (/r/ is pronounced)
Her German is absolutely awful. (/r/ is not pronounced)
My brother lives in London. (/r/ is not pronounced)
My brother always phones at the wrong time. (/r/ is pronounced)

2. Intrusive /r/

Princess Diana was a victim of media exploitation.
The media are to blame
It's a question of law and order.

3. Linking /j/

I agree, wholeheartedly
I am
I ought
They are

4. Linking /w/

Go on. Go in.
Are you inside, or are you outside?

Who is

You are

D. Contractions

Contractions occur when two words combine to the extent that the two are pronounced as one word, or one syllable. These have, for the most parts, been conventionalized in written language. Common examples are as follows: I'm, you're, he's.

Exercise 1:

Read the following sentences!

1. At the hospital

- a. How long have you been sick?
- b. Put out your tongue.
- c. Take a deep breath and hold it.
- d. I am going to write you a prescription.
- e. If you don't feel better in three days give me a call.

2. What are your plans for the weekend

- a. I thought we would watch a movie or video.
- b. We are having our neighbors over for dinner.
- c. I want to sleep for as long as possible
- d. I'd like to go hiking or camp at the beach.
- e. I need to catch up on our work I didn't get done this week.
- f. I have a list of a mile long of things to do.
- g. I've got to get ready for a math exam.
- h. There 's a new exhibit at the art museum I'd like to see.

3. At the airport.

- a. We have to check in here.
- b. Do you want to get the plane?

- c. Look at this line. We're never going to make it.
- d. Are they going to serve food?
- e. When are we going to arrive?
- f. We have to fasten our seatbelts now.
- g. Do you want to sit by the window?
- h. We have to go through custom.

4. At a café

- a. Are you open or closed?
- b. Will you pass me the cream and sugar?
- c. Is that a seven or one on the bill?
- d. This table and that one are open.
- e. What's your favorite dessert?

5. What's up?

- a. I'm working on another English assignment.
- b. Have a seat. We're just about to start a video.
- c. I'm waiting for a friend to arrive.
- d. I have an appointment at eleven, so I need to leave in a minute.
- e. A. May I speak to Mr. Abbot?
B. I'm sorry. He's on another line. May I take a message/
A. No, thanks. I'll call again in a little while.

6. In a class room.

- a. Am I going too fast
- b. Does it make sense?
- c. Am I late?
- d. What does it mean?
- e. Is it raining out?
- f. Does it look like rain?

7. Reflection

- a. Understanding fast talk is almost impossible for me.
- b. Linked words sound strange.
- c. I understand everything my classmates say.
- d. I want to speak as fast as native speakers.
- e. Linking will let me understand native speakers better.

8. messages.

Hi, Jack, I'm sorry, but we have to work late tonight. I'll come as soon I'm done. But I'm not sure about the time. It might take me until ten or eleven to finish. See you in a while.

You have reached the office of Tom Moore, Department of engineering. I'm away from my desk right now or with a student. My office hours are from one to two, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. Please leave a message, and I'll get back to you as soon as I can.

9. At school

A: Do you think you passed the test?

B: No, I think I've failed. This class is so hard for me.

A: Oh, come on. You're smart. You'll pass.

B: I'm glad you believe that because I'm sure don't.

A: Are there any eggs left?

B: I think we ate them all.

A: Darn, I wanted to make an omelet.

B: What about heating up some of that left-over rice and chicken.

A: No, I'm tired of rice. Any other ideas?

B: Yeah. Let's go out.

Exercise 2: Read the following dialogues in pair

Man : I talked to my great-grandmother on the phone this morning.

Woman : Your great-grandmother? Do you talk with her often?

Man : I try to call her at least once a week. She's a really wonderful woman, and she's over eighty-five years old. I enjoy talking to her, because she's so understanding and because she gives me good advice.

Woman : What advice did she have for you today?

Man : (laughs) She told me to be careful because a big storm is coming.

Woman : She said that a big storm is coming? Is she a weather forecast?

Man : Not exactly. She says that she can feel it in her bones when a storm is coming. I know it sounds funny, but when she feels it in her bones that a storm is coming, she's usually right.

Woman : That's not actually so funny. When people get older, the tissue around their joints can become stiff and swollen. Just before a storm, the air pressure often drops, and this drop in air pressure can cause additional pressure and pain in swollen joints. So when your great-grandmother tells you she thinks a storm is coming, she probably has some aching in her joints from the decreasing air pressure.

Man : Then, I had better pay more attention to my great-grandmother's weather forecasts!