

The Phonetics of English Pronunciation - Week 10

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Topics

- Transcription practice: “Linking” etc.
- “Cross-word effects”
 - Boundary conditions: Elision and Assimilation
Read: Section VI.4, pp. 223-227
 - Stress patterns in compounds
Read: Section VI.2, pp. 188-212

Transcription Exercise

- *Focus: Linking and Weak forms*
- So segmental problems are not highlighted
 - R-sounds are symbolized with [r] not [ɹ]
 - L-sounds are symbolized with [l] whether they are clear or dark.
 - Final-voiced consonants are not highlighted.
- This *doesn't mean they are any less important!* Please don't forget them.

Assimilation

- *Assimilation* means “changing to become more similar“
- We have already seen that *sounds can change* under the influence of the next word onset:
/t/ → [t̪] before a dental fricative: [pʊt̪ t̪ 'ðɛə(ðɛɪ)]
- In fact *alveolar* word-final plosives /t, d/ and the nasal /n/ *very often change* to become more similar to the initial consonant of the following word (not only before /ð/ & /θ/ :

Just in case [ɪŋ 'keɪs]

On guard! [ɒŋ 'gɑ:d]

Compare German: "*In großen Firmen.*" [ɪŋ gro:sən fɪɐmən]

Let me go! ['lep mi 'gəʊ]

Red button ['reb 'bʌtʌŋ]

Compare German: "*Es steht mir gut*" [ɛʃ ʃte:p miɐ gut]

As we said in the notes to the previous slide, the assimilation of word-final alveolars to the dental place of articulation of the initial consonant of the following word can be seen as a special sort of *linking*.

We dealt with it as a special articulatory fact in connection with alveolars preceding „th“ sounds. But the ease of transition from one word to the next is exactly what „linking“ is. We can see it as „consonant-to-consonant“ linking.

But alveolar consonants do not only assimilate to dental fricatives (though that is obligatory). They may (optionally, in casual speech) lose their place of articulation and become *bilabial* before /p, b, m/ or *velar* before /k, g/ (see the examples in the slide). But note that this is *optional; it is a question of speaking style (more casual) and tempo (fast)*.

Note also, that this sort of change occurs in German in exactly the same way. However, you don't think about it, and the influence of the orthography will make you think you DON'T do it!

But think of expressions like:

"*In großen Firmen*" [ɪŋ gro:sən fɪɐmən]

"*Es steht mir gut*" [ɛʃ ʃte:p miɐ gut]

Assimilation2

- The examples you have just heard are examples of *left-to-right* (or *anticipatory*) *assimilation*.
- We also saw in an earlier lecture that *sounds can change* under the influence of the *previous* word coda (*right-to-left assimilation*):
- In *the* (because it's weak), /ð/ → [z] after /z/:
Lose the way ['lu:z^zə'weɪ]
- Like in German, weak /ən/ endings lose the schwa and assimilate to the preceding consonant:
happen ['hæp^m], *taken* ['teɪk^ŋ], *heaven* ['hev^m],

All the changes in the previous slide showed the effect of the initial consonant of the following word on the final alveolar of the preceding word. I.e., the beginning of the next word was being partially anticipated at the end of the word before it.

However, there are effects in the other direction, sometimes called „carry-over“ (or „perseveratory“) effects. We saw an example of this in an earlier lecture, with the weakened „*the*“ following words ending in /s/ or /z/.

It also happens a lot with the many words ending with schwa + /n/.

This parallels the phenomena in German, where it is even more frequent because there are so many *-en* inflections (verb endings, adjectival endings).

Elision

- **Elision** is leaving something out.
- In casual speech a great deal gets left out (*in German, English and many other languages!*)

E.g. ['hasnmo'men²'tsart] for /'hast du ʔamən mo'ment 'tsart/

- **Too casual** speech shouldn't be practised (it will come naturally if you speak English a lot)

But *consonant cluster simplification* in certain cases is normal, NOT over-casual, and avoids sounding too precise: **Fric + /t/ # Cons** → **Fric # Cons**

E.g.

She left Sunday. **Precise:** [ʃi 'left 'sʌndi]; **normal:** [ʃi 'lef 'sʌndi]

The last post. **Precise:** [ðə 'lɑ:st^ɹ 'pəʊst]; **normal:** [ðə 'lɑ:s 'pəʊst]

In phonological terms, dropping a sound (like dropping the schwa in „*happen, taken, heaven*“, etc.) is called **elision**. It can happen in casual speech to sounds that are not essential for the identity of the word.

Since the structure of language is highly redundant (it has to be because we don't always hear every detail of what is said) that is the case for many words in context. So elision takes place in all languages, and it occurs in places where it is articulatorily „more economical“ (= easier!) if the sound is dropped.

When you speak a foreign language, you usually speak more slowly than most native speakers, so extreme elision should not occur. As you improve, and speak more quickly, elision will occur in ways that are articulatorily determined, so we do not really need to practise them.

But there are some consonant clusters that become simplified in non-casual speech, and if German learners of English don't reduce them they sound over-precise (and pedantic).

The most common of these is the **final /t/** (an alveolar again!), when it occurs **after a fricative and is followed by a consonant**.

Speak the examples in the slide and observe what your articulators are doing.

- A full /fts/ in „*left Saturday*“ requires you to make a full alveolar closure after the /f/ and then introduce the complex /s/ slit into that closure. Since the initial /s/ is more important than the final /t/, the full closure part easily disappears.

- In „*last post*“, the /s/-groove in the tongue tip has to be closed for /t/. Since the /p/-closure follows immediately, the auditory effect if the /t/ closure is negligible, so the fine tongue adjustment can be left out at no cost to understanding.

A common German mistake:

- *Within* words there is a notorious „elision site“ which rarely gets taught and which betrays German learners:
- Words ending in <-tion> that are derived from words ending with **plosive** + /t/ lose the [t] and have just /ʃ/. In phonology it is said that the /t/ has been “palatalised“.

E.g. *except* [ek'sept] → [ek'sepʃən] NOT [ek'septʃən]

interrupt [ɪntə'rʌpt] → [ɪntə'rʌpʃən]

correct [kə'rekt] → [kə'rekʃən]

- But it is only with <-tion> that the palatalisation lead to the *elision* of the [t] element.
In “capture“, “rupture“, “lecture“, “structure“, /t/ *remains*:
[ˈkæp.tʃə], [ˈrʌp.tʃə], [ˈlekt.tʃə], [ˈstrʌk.tʃə].

The /t/ is not a very stable sound, and it is not only during the concatenation of words that it can disappear.

The <-tion> ending is a common pronunciation trap for German learners.

Although a /tʃ/ is pronounced in “capture“ ([ˈkæptʃə]), “lecture“ ([ˈlektʃə]), etc., only /ʃ/ is pronounced following a /p/ or a /k/:

Compare “caption“ ([ˈkæpʃən]) and “election“ ([ɪˈlektʃən]) with the words above.

Also, words with <-ntion>, i.e., when /n/ precedes the <-tion>, are also pronounced with /ʃ/:

“intention“ ([ɪnˈtenʃən]), “mention“ ([ˈmenʃən]), “attention“ ([əˈtenʃən]), etc.

Other cases of /t/ palatalisation where the /t/ remains are words ending in <-tual>, in words like “nuptial“ ([ˈnʌp.tʃʊəl]), “factual“ ([ˈfæktʃʊəl]), “eventual“ ([ɪˈven.tʃʊəl]), etc.

But “essential“ – with <-ial> – ([əˈsenʃəl]) has no [tʃ] but only [ʃ].

A common German mistake (cont.):

- But, of course, <-tion> doesn't *always* lose the [t] (there are *always* exceptions!)
- The words where a [tʃ] is pronounced are derived from a few verbs ending in /st/:

ingest, digest, [...¹dʒest] → [...¹dʒes.tʃən]

And, of course: *Question* ['kwes.tʃən]

There is no difference between <-tion> and <-ture> endings if the consonant preceding the /t/ is /s/.

Posture, pasture, gesture, etc., have the and /tʃ/ pronunciation, as expected, but so do the <-stion> words such as „*question*“, „*(in)digestion*“, etc.,

Word-stress patterns

- *This is a tricky area sometimes deceptively easy.... sometimes frustratingly confusing*
- Firstly: *Stress mistakes are very noticeable*
(because stress functions as a signal for the important parts of an utterance)
- Secondly: there are related words in German and English which can differ in their word-stress placement. Many of these are regular suffix differences and are easily learned:

	<i>English</i>	<i>German</i>
<-tion>	unstressed	stressed
<-ual>	unstressed	<-uell> stressed

We have already underlined the fact that *any new word* should be checked for its pronunciation, and that includes *checking the word-stress pattern* in words of more than one syllable.

Regular differences between related words in German and English are soon mastered. You are presumably very aware that <...tion> words in English have the main stress immediately before the unstressed final syllable, while they always bear the lexical stress in German: E.g., *attraction* [ə'trækʃən]. vs. *Attraktion* [atrak'tsjo:n].

Other suffix differences are the *-al* words in English (*virtual, partial, segmental*), which are all unstressed vs. the *-al/ell* words in German (*virtuell, partiell, segmental / segmentell*).

Other suffixes do not differ in their stressing behaviour; e.g. English *-ic* and German *-isch* as in *iconic* and *ikonisch*.

Word-stress patterns - compounds

- This is a particularly dangerous area for German learners of English. Why?
- In English, **compounds are not always written as one word** like they are in German:

Mädchenhandelsschule (Girls' Business School)

- And semantically equivalent compounds *sometimes* have the *same* stress pattern as German, sometimes NOT:

die 'Haupt,straße (the 'High ,Street) (*strong-weak*)

but: 'Schatz,insel (,Treasure 'Island) (*weak-strong*)

(We also use the terms “*primary stress*“ and “*secondary stress*“ for *strong* and *weak*)

But the area of **compound words** is also confusing because there are some **parallels** and some **divergencies** between English and German (both in spelling conventions and in the stress allocation):

Established English compound-word expressions are often written as separate words (though they are also sometimes hyphenated).

Examples:

Written as one word: 'green,house, 'lawn,mower, 'gamesman,ship, 'glad,rags, etc.

Written with a hyphen: 'grave-,digger, 'hand-me-,down, etc.

Written separately: 'door ,handle (but 'door,bell), 'cookery ,book, 'leap ,year (but 'leap,frog) etc.

The *default* stress pattern for established compounds, even when written as separate words, is with the **stress on the first syllable** with a secondary stress on the second lexical element (see all the examples above).

This is the same as in German and there lies the problem, because **there are exceptions** (as there are in German, but you know those!)

Stress patterns - There are some rules!

- **Basic Principle 1:** In English, both 'xx,xx (strong+weak) *and* ,xx'xx (weak + strong) are common
- in contrast to *predominantly* 'xx,xx (strong+weak) in German.

- Rules to help us with the English exceptions:

“**Place names**” have mainly ,xx'xx (weak + strong) :

,Park 'Lane, ,Piccadilly 'Circus, ,Ridley 'Avenue,
,Green 'Park, ,Bayswater 'Road, ,Pheasant 'Close

And with more parts to the name, the stress stays on the last element: 'Buckingham ,Palace 'Road, 'Tottenham ,Court 'Road

Exception: 'xx-,Street

'High ,Street, 'Oxford ,Street, 'Regent ,Street,

There are some groups of words that diverge for the default compound pattern, and if you can learn these, life will become much easier!

Place names – as used in addresses have the main stress on the second element

– *except for* _____ *Street*)

Your 5th exercise

(To hand in by Thursday 18.00)

Print this page in „Notes Page“ format and transcribe the following sentences in the lower half of the page. Please transcribe with all *weak forms*, *linking forms* and *segmental variants*, and mark with ' the *stressed* syllable of the *accented* words (i.e., the words that are „important“ for the message of the sentence):

1. There was no excuse for leaving the old lady standing in the middle of the road,
2. Constant practice is boring, but it is essential for success.
3. How could the group have avoided the frictions and disagreements that led to their break-up?
4. They had no idea who the last person was who saw the young girl on Monday.
5. Where on earth have I put my spectacles?

Transcribe and mark the *primary* (') and *secondary* (,) stress in the following address names:

Eton Place; Brighton Road; Carnaby Street; Ridley Avenue; Oxford Street; Pageant Court;
Gordon Square; Smugglers Wharf; Conduit Street; Chestnut Lane; Pheasant Close.