



Unit 8

Syllables & Rhythm (2):

assimilation, elision, morphophonology

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(English Phonetics: Unit 8:)

/ˈɪŋ.gɪʃ/ /fəˈnet.ɪks/ /ˈjuːn.ɪt/ /eɪt/

[ˈɪŋ.gɪʃ.fəˈner.əks.juːn.ər.ˈaɪt] (AusE, broad)

(Syllables & Rhythm (2))

/sɪl.əb.əlz/ /ən/ /rɪð.əm/ /tuː/

[sɪl.əb.əlz.ən.ˈɪwɪð.əm | ˈtuː] (AusE, broad)

(assimilation, elision, morphophonology)

/əˌsɪm.əˈleɪʃ.ən/ /iˌlɪz.ən/ /ˌmɔːf.əʊ.fəʊ.nəl.ədʒ.i/

[əˌsɪm.əˈlaɪʃ.ən | əˈlɪz.ən | ˌmɔːf.əʊ.fəˈnɔːl.ədʒ.i] (AusE, broad)

8.1

8.2

1 Assimilation

Assimilation and elision: theory

- Consonants at the edge of one syllable often adapt to neighbouring consonants — becoming more similar to them (ASSIMILATION) or disappearing altogether (ELISION) — so as to make the pronunciation smoother.
- (Assimilation: a change in quality; elision: a change in quantity.)
- Usually assimilation is ‘anticipatory’ — a preceding consonant adapts to a following consonant.
- Alveolar consonants are particularly susceptible to anticipatory assimilation.
- Doesn’t this interfere with the ability of phonemes to signal differences in meaning?
- No.
- There is still enough distinctive information in the syllable edge as a whole.
- You can investigate this further by constructing a ‘feature matrix’ of the phonemes involved.
- The next slide contains examples from Eckert and Barry:

8.3

Assimilation and elision: examples

- [ˈkʌmænd ˈgetɪt] → [ˈkʌmən ˈgetɪt]
- [ˈstænd ˈbæk] → [ˈstæm ˈbæk]
- [ˈwɒt hæz ˈhæpənd] → [ˈwɒts ˈhæpɪnd]
- [ˈpʊl ðə ˈplʌŋ] → [ˈpʊl ðə ˈplʌŋ]

- [ˈkləʊz ðə ˈdɔː] → [ˈkləʊz zə ˈdɔː]
- [bʌt ʔəv ˈkɔːs] → [bʌtəf ˈkɔːs]
- [aɪ kən ˈduː ɪt] → [aɪkɪ ˈduːwɪt]

8.4

2 Morphophonology

Flexional morphophonology: plural and/or genitive

- The regular plural morpheme (typical spelling: ⟨s⟩) is realized phonologically in three different ways:
 - /s/ after a voiceless consonant (typically)
⟨cats⟩ /kæts/
 - /z/ after a voiced consonant or a vowel/diphthong (typically)
⟨dogs⟩ /dɒgz/
⟨mares⟩ /meəz/
 - /ɪz/ after a ‘sibilant’ (/s z ʒ ʒ tʃ dʒ/)
⟨horses⟩ /hɔːsɪz/
- The same applies to the ⟨s⟩ genitive.
- American and Australian pronunciation is more like [əz] than [ɪz].
- Note:
⟨Governors-General⟩ (plural)
⟨Governor-General’s⟩ (genitive singular).

8.5

Flexional morphophonology: past tense

- The regular past tense morpheme (typical spelling: ⟨ed⟩) is realized phonologically in three different ways:
 - /t/ after a voiceless consonant (typically)
⟨faced⟩ /feɪst/
 - /d/ after a voiced consonant or a vowel/diphthong (typically)
⟨fazed⟩ /feɪzd/
⟨laid⟩ /leɪd/
 - /ɪd/ after /t/ or /d/
⟨fated⟩ /ˈfeɪtɪd/ ⟨faded⟩ /ˈfeɪdɪd/
- The following remarks refer to the spelling conventions for libretti (e.g. Handel’s *Messiah*) written a few centuries ago; these often contain past tense endings that have to be pronounced /ɪd/ for purely metrical reasons:
 - In earlier forms of English, ⟨ed⟩ and ⟨’d⟩ were used to spell /ɪd/ and /d/ (or /t/) respectively.
 - In modern English, ⟨’ed⟩ and ⟨ed⟩ are used instead.
 - “His work was soon in rehearsal
Because he always us’ed Purcell” (Flanders and Swann).

8.6

Derivational morphophonology (plus lexical and syntactic stress)

- See Eckert and Barry, pages 239 to 243.
- Pay particular attention to those cases where there is a systematic difference between English and German!
- We can only skim the surface of lexical stress. Although it is important, especially from a contrastive point of view (“English is different from German!”), many of the examples given in Eckert and Barry on pages 197 to 212 are specific to one variety of British English and/or antiquated.
- We will examine some of these issues from a different perspective in the next class.

8.7