



Unit 10

Syllables & Rhythm (1):

assimilation, elision, linking

Print version of the
Phonetics with Listening Practice (British)
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<English Phonetics: Unit 10:>
/ˈɪŋ.ɡlɪʃ/ /fəˈnet.ɪks/ /ˈjuːn.ɪt/ /ten/
[ˈɪŋ.ɡlɪʃ.fəˈnet.ɪks.ˈjuːn.ɪtˈten] (AusE, broad)

<Syllables & Rhythm (1)>
/ˈsɪl.əb.əlz/ /ən/ /ˈrɪð.əm/ /wʌn/
[ˈsɪl.əb.əlz.ən.ˈrɪð.əm | ˈwʌn] (AusE, broad)

<assimilation, elision, linking>
/əˌsm.əˈleɪʃ.ən/ /iˌlɪz.ən/ /ˈlɪŋk.ɪŋ/
[əˌsm.əˈleɪʃ.ən | iˌlɪz.ən | ˈlɪŋk.ɪŋ] (AusE, broad)

10.1

10.2

1 Assimilation (and elision)

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. (In French, anticipatory assimilation is also common: « le tragique destin des Romanov » [lətʁazikdestɛ̃dɛʁomanɔv] → lətʁazikdestɛ̃dɛʁomanɔv])
- Alveolar consonants (such as /t d s z l/) are particularly susceptible to anticipatory assimilation in English.
- 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 could investigate this further by constructing a ‘feature matrix’ of the phonemes involved. (Have you dealt with this topic in your theory lectures?)
- The next slide contains examples of assimilation:

10.3

Assimilation and elision: examples

- The first 8 examples are from Eckert and Barry:

- ['kʌmənd 'getɪt] → ['kʌməŋ 'getɪt]
- ['stænd 'bæk] → ['stæm: 'bæk]
- ['wɒt hæz 'hæpənd] → ['wɒts 'hæpɪnd]
- ['pʊt ðə 'plʌg] → ['pʊt ðə 'plʌg]
- ['kləʊz ðə 'dɔ:] → ['kləʊz zə 'dɔ:]
- [bʌt (?)əv 'kɔ:s] → [bʌtəf 'kɔ:s]
- [aɪ kən 'du: ɪt] → [aɪkŋ 'du:ɪt]
- You can find many more exercises on the following wonderful website:
<https://www.englishpronunciationmadrid.com/assimilation/>

10.4

2 Linking

Linking (Liaison)

- **Why Germans sound so strange (!):** [ʔaɪn ʔastɛrɔ'i:t] ('ein Asteroid')
- **Consonant-Vowel Linking:** VC V → VC_V not VCʔV /ən/ /'æst ə ɪɔɪd/ → [ən_ 'æstəɪɔɪd]
- **r-linking:** V₁(r) V₂ → V₁rV₂ (V₁ = a ə ɔ ə ɪ ə e ə ɔ ə a ə ə ə) /pɔə(r)/ + /ɪt/ → ['pʰɔə^rɪt] (pour it)
- **Intrusive r:** V₁ V₂ → V₁rV₂ (V₁ = ɔ: ɜ: ə) /pɔ:/ + /ɪt/ → ['pʰɔə^rɪt] (paw it)
- **Intrusive j:** V₁ V₂ → V₁jV₂ (V₁ = i: eɪ aɪ ɔɪ) /si:/ + /ɪt/ → ['si:jɪt] (see it)
- **Intrusive w:** V₁ V₂ → V₁wV₂ (V₁ = u: əʊ əʊ) /səʊ/ + /ɪt/ → ['səʊ^wɪt] (sew it)

Let's look quickly at "Dialectal Differences".

10.5

3 Additional Reading

Additional Reading

If you have time, look at the scans of the pages from Eckert and Barry that are here:

http://www.spence.saar.de/phonetics/unit11_20241/

10.6

4 Listening Exercises

Listening Exercises

Simon Roper: An Upper-Class Southern British Accent, 1673 - 2023:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KYaqdJ35fPg>

(This relates to the work we did in Unit 5.)

Halliday 1970: 57-59 Study Unit 1: Rhythm

http://www.spence.saar.de/arcanum/phonetics/Halliday1970/Study_Units_01-10/Unit_01/

The text is here:

http://www.spence.saar.de/arcanum/phonetics/Halliday1970/The_Book/2193_001.pdf

10.7

5 Homework

Homework

Have a look at the text of "Dialectal Differences". Check to see if there are any words that end with difficult consonant clusters. How would you go about making it easier for someone to pronounce these words?

Check every word which begins with a vowel sound (not necessarily a vowel letter, and not a 'silent' consonant letter). Is there consonant-vowel linking at the beginning of the word? Is there an 'intrusive' /r/, or /w/ or /j/?

10.8