

Learn Connected Speech with Matt Purland

The 48 Sounds of English – Predicting Actions in Connected Speech

Proposition: for every English sound at the end of a syllable, native speakers know what action to make, whether the next sound is a consonant or vowel sound. Non-native speakers have to memorise the possible actions and practice intensely.

No action: VC	F	Actions: MOVE FORWARD	MOVE FORWARD & CHANGE	ADD	DELETE		
29%	6%	31%	9%	21%	4%		
(% of sounds using each action out of 80 possible actions; note: some sounds occur more frequently than others)							
Sound at end of a syllable:	If a consonant sound follows:	If a vowel sound follows:	Examples:	Type:	LCS Unit:		
2 exceptional sounds:							
d	mf; change: t	delete before t or in a consonant blend	mf	head for / need to / mild curry / had a	vo con		
t	delete; add a glottal stop (GS)		mf	hot day / hot as	un con		
duplicate	delete (not j / ch); add GS if t, k, p		impossible	this singer / N/A	varies		
2 important short vowel sounds:							
uh (schwa)	no action (VC)	add r or w	a book / pasta is / to a	sh vow	7.3,5		
ii	no action (VC)	add y	happy to / happy ever	sh vow	7.4		
6 short vowel sounds that cannot meet another vowel sound:							
a	no action (VC)	impossible	pla nning / N/A	sh vow	7.2		
e	no action (VC)	impossible	e levator / N/A	sh vow			
i	no action (VC)	impossible	li ttle / N/A	sh vow			
o	no action (VC)	impossible	ho tter / N/A	sh vow			
u	no action (VC)	impossible	ru nning / N/A	sh vow			
uu	no action (VC)	impossible	pu ttting / N/A	sh vow			
6 consonant sounds that are not heard at the end of a syllable:							
h	impossible	impossible	N/A / N/A	un con	4.3		
hh	impossible	impossible	N/A / N/A	un con			
r	impossible	impossible	N/A / N/A	vo con			
w	impossible	impossible	N/A / N/A	vo con			
y	impossible	impossible	N/A / N/A	vo con			
zz	impossible	impossible	N/A / N/A	vo con			
6 voiced consonant sounds in a pair – change in CC (including d + zz, above):							
b	mf; change: p	mf	club night / club at	vo con	5.3		
g	mf; change: k	mf	log the / log in	vo con	4.6		
j	mf; change: ch	mf	edge will / edge of	vo con	5.2		
th	mf; change: tt	mf	bathe with / bathe at	vo con	5.4		
v	mf; change: f	mf	move the / move it	vo con	4.7		
z	mf; change: s	mf	lose the / lose a	vo con	4.4		
7 unvoiced consonant sounds in a pair – do not change (including t, above):							
ch	mf	mf	catch some / catch a	un con	5.2		
f	mf	mf	life was / life in	un con	4.7		
k	mf	mf	pick the / pick a	un con	4.6		
p	mf	mf	keep the / keep a	un con	5.3		
s	mf	mf	pass me / pass out	un con	4.4		
sh	mf	mf	wish me / wish it	un con	5.5		
tt	mf	mf	both men / both of	un con	5.4		
3 friendly consonant sounds – remain in CC:							
l	no action (F)	mf	will be / will it	vo con	5.8		
m	no action (F)	mf	come home / come on	vo con	5.7		
n	no action (F)	mf	sun cream / sun is	vo con	5.6		
1 friendly consonant sound – remains in CV and CC							
ng	no action (F)	no action (F)	ring them / ring a	vo con	3.4		
3 normal vowel sounds – create VC connections or add W							
au	no action (VC)	add w	how they / how I	diph	7.5		
eu	no action (VC)	add w	show me / show us	diph			
oo	no action (VC)	add w	new book / new idea	lo vow			
4 normal vowel sounds – create VC connections or add y							
ai	no action (VC)	add y	my name / my aunt	diph	7.4		
ee	no action (VC)	add y	see the / see a	lo vow			
ei	no action (VC)	add y	pay the / pay out	diph			
oy	no action (VC)	add y	toy was / toy is	diph			
8 normal vowel sounds – create VC connections or add r							
aiy	no action (VC)	add r	hire me / hire a	diph	7.3		
ar	no action (VC)	add r	car park / car and	lo vow			
auw	no action (VC)	add r	our book / our aim	diph			
eir	no action (VC)	add r	there was / there are	diph			
er	no action (VC)	add r	her book / her apple	lo vow			
iy	no action (VC)	add r	here we / here are	diph			
or	no action (VC)	add r	or me / or Alan	lo vow			
uuw	no action (VC)	add r	fewer cups / fewer of	diph			

Key: **voiced consonant sound**, **unvoiced consonant sound**, **short vowel sound**, **long vowel sound**, **diphthong**