

Talk a Lot

Focus on Connected Speech

The Techniques of Connected Speech

The main techniques of connected speech are:

Glottal Stops	an empty space without sound, represented in the IPA as /ʔ/
Linking	syllables connect together
Assimilation	a sound changes
Contraction	a word is shortened
Intrusion	a new sound appears – /j/, /w/, or /r/
Elision	a sound disappears
R-linking	syllables connect with /r/ sound

They can easily be remembered using the mnemonic **GLACIER**.

Let's look at each one in turn:

Glottal Stops

The glottal stop, represented by /ʔ/ in the IPA, can replace the “t” sound /t/ before another consonant sound, or replace double “t”. Using a glottal stop instead of double “t” is particularly popular among young people, and can be heard in specific dialects and accents such as London-based accents. Lily Allen is a famous British singer who uses glottal stops a lot in her recordings instead of pronouncing the “t” sound /t/.

For example:

“butter” /'bʌt.ə/ becomes “buh-er” /'bʌʔ.ə/, with a very short pause replacing the “t” sound

“football” /'fʊt.bɔ:l/ becomes “fuh-ball” /'fʊʔ.bɔ:l/

Remember:

It's easier to use a glottal stop than to pronounce /t/ before a consonant sound. Not many English people actually say /'fʊt.bɔ:l/ where you can hear /t/.

Linking

Sometimes it's possible to link one word to the next by joining the sound at the end of the first word to the sound at the beginning of the second word.

For example:

“walked into” /wɔ:k d 'ɪn.tu:/ becomes “walk dinto” /wɔ:k 'dɪn.tu:/

Remember:

It's difficult for English native speakers to fully pronounce two consonant sounds together, e.g. the /k/ and /d/ in “walked” – especially within the space of one syllable, as here. By linking

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the words we can say them separately, whilst also stressing the correct syllables: walked into (stressed syllables are underlined). Linking occurs naturally when a vowel sound meets a consonant sound, and likewise when a consonant sound meets a vowel sound (see p.4.4).

Assimilation

Assimilation means adaptation or adjustment and occurs when two sounds meet that don't flow together easily, e.g. two consonant sounds. The speaker automatically changes one of the sounds to make the words easier to say, by moving their tongue and mouth into position so that they're ready to make the next sound. Let's look at the phrase "eleven minutes", for example. After I have said "eleven" my tongue is behind my front teeth if I pronounce the /n/ sound, which is the wrong position from which to form the next sound, which is /m/. I get around this by changing the /n/ sound to /m/, like this: /ɪ'lev.m 'mɪn.i?z/. (I also replace the last /t/ sound for a glottal stop, which makes the word even easier to say (see above).)

The consonant sounds that you need to watch are /t/, /d/, and /n/ (see table below for examples).

For example:

	before /m/, /b/ and /p/	<u>examples:</u>
/t/	/p/	"meet people" becomes "meep people"
/d/ changes to:	/b/	"good boy" becomes "gub boy"
/n/	/m/	"eleven minutes" becomes "elevem minutes"

	before /k/ and /g/	<u>examples:</u>
/t/	/k/	"got cancelled" becomes "gok cancelled"
/d/ changes to:	/g/	"made clearer" becomes "maig clearer"
/n/	/ŋ/	"own car" becomes "owng car"

	before /j/	<u>example:</u>
/t/ changes to:	/tʃ/	"great year" becomes "grey cheer"

	before /j/	<u>example:</u>
/d/ changes to:	/dʒ/	"walked yesterday" becomes "walk jesterday"

Remember:

The whole point of connected speech is to enable you to speak – and communicate – more quickly and efficiently. It is not necessary in spoken English to pronounce every single consonant! In written English it is, of course, important to spell words correctly with every

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letter in its correct place, but in spoken English fluency and natural speech is paramount, rather than trying to pronounce every single individual sound of every single word.

Contraction

Contractions are the short forms of verb structures, e.g. “she’s” instead of “she is”, or “it’d” instead of “it would”. In spoken English they enable us to say unstressed words (function words, which often have weak stress) quickly, so that the stressed syllables of the content words are emphasised. (See p.12.28 for a full list of contractions.)

For example:

it is > it’s; it has > it’s; you are > you’re; they had > they’d; we will > we’ll; he is not > he isn’t

Remember:

You. Don’t. Have. To. Give. Every. Word. And. Every. Syllable. In. The. Sentence. Equal. Importance. It. Will. Sound. Very. Strange. If. You. Don’t. Use. Sentence. Stress!

Intrusion

This is when a new sound is added between two words – /j/, /w/, or /r/. It happens when a vowel sound at the end of one word meets another vowel sound at the beginning of the next word (see also “R-linking” below).

For example:

see Andrew	becomes	see y andrew	/ˈsiːˈyændruː/
pay up	becomes	pay y up	/ˈpeɪˈyʌp/
snow and ice	becomes	sno w an dice	/ˈsnəʊ.wənˈdaɪs/
no idea	becomes	no w hy dear	/nəʊ.waɪˈdɪə/
blue elephant	becomes	blue w elephant	/ˈbluːˈwelɪfənt/
saw lan	becomes	soar r ian	/ˈsɔːˈriən/

Remember:

It’s really hard for English native speakers to pronounce two vowel sounds together, so we sneakily slip in a /j/, /w/, or /r/ sound between the two sounds to make the phrase easier to say.

Elision

This happens when a /t/ or /d/ sound at the end of a word or syllable disappears, because it meets a mis-matching consonant sound at the beginning of the next word or syllable.

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For example:

past life	becomes	pass life	/ˈpɑːsˈlaɪf/
rest stop	becomes	ress top	/ˈresˈtɒp/
bored boys	becomes	bore boys	/ˈbɔːˈbɔɪz/

Remember:

Try to pronounce the sounds /t/ and /l/ one after the other. What is your tongue doing? You're probably getting tongue-tied! How much easier it is, then, to say "pass life" instead of "past life". At the end of saying "pass" your tongue is in absolutely the right position to pronounce the /l/ of "life". How wonderful is that thing known as connected speech!

Note: elision also occurs in **individual words**, notably where consonant sounds /t/, /d/, or /n/ meet another consonant sound that doesn't link together smoothly. For example:

investment	/ɪnˈvest.mənt/	changes to	/ɪmˈves.mənt/
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The first /t/ sound is lost so that the mouth can more quickly get to the next sound, /m/. (We also use assimilation to change the first /n/ sound to /m/, so that we can more easily pronounce the following consonant sound, /v/.) Elision often occurs in compound nouns, which are words that we've created by shoving together two shorter words, e.g. in "sweatshirt" /ˈswet.ʃɜːt/ we make the middle /t/ sound disappear so that we get "sweh-shirt" /ˈsweʃ.ʃɜːt/, with a glottal stop replacing the /t/ sound. Another example is "wildlife" /ˈwaɪld.laɪf/, which loses the /d/ sound to become "while-life" /ˈwaɪl.laɪf/. Here are some examples of compound nouns where elision removes the /t/ or /d/ sounds. (For more on compound nouns, see p.16.1.)

/t/ sound removed:

basketball	/ˈbɑː.skɪʔ.bɔːl/
flatmate	/ˈflæt.meɪt/
fortnight	/ˈfɔːʔ.naɪt/
network	/ˈneʔ.wɜːk/

/d/ sound removed:

breadknife	/ˈbreʔ.naɪf/
speedboat	/ˈspiːʔ.bəʊt/
birdbath	/ˈbɜːʔ.bɑːθ/
friendship	/ˈfren.ʃɪp/

R-linking

The /r/ sound at the end of a word isn't usually pronounced, unless the following word begins with a vowel sound, in which case the /r/ sound can be heard as a link between the two words.

For example:

"His mother isn't..." /hɪz ˈmʌ.ðə ˈɪz.nɪt/ becomes: "his mothe risn't" /hɪz ˈmʌ.ðə ˈrɪz.nɪt/

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Remember:

If we don't link "mother" with "isn't" using the /r/ sound, we have a problem: we have to say two vowel sounds together: /'mʌ.ðə'ɪz.nɪt/, which is unnatural for the English tongue. We don't like to say two vowel sounds together (see "Intrusion", above). It's why we have two indefinite articles and say "an egg" rather than "a egg", for example. R-linking also enables us to further stress the first syllable of the next word, "isn't", which has strong stress.


(Note: R-linking also occurs as **intrusion**, when an /r/ sound is added between two vowel sounds that have to be pronounced together (see above).

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The Techniques of Connected Speech – Matching Game

Instructions: cut up some sets of cards – one for each pair or group of students. Students have to match each technique of connected speech (left) with its description (right).

glottal stops 	This sound /ʔ/ replaces /t/ before a consonant sound. <i>For example: "football" becomes "fuh-ball"</i>
linking	A sound at the end of a word joins together smoothly with the sound at the beginning of the next word. <i>For example: "walked into" becomes "walk dinto"</i>
assimilation	This means "adaptation" or "adjustment". When two sounds meet that don't flow together easily, e.g. two consonant sounds, one of them changes to make the words easier to say. <i>For example: "good boy" becomes "gub boy"</i>
contraction	The short forms of verb structures. <i>For example: you are -> you're; they had -> they'd; he will -> he'll, etc.</i>
intrusion	A new sound – /j/, /w/, or /r/ – is added between two vowel sounds to make the transition easier to say. <i>For example: "no idea" becomes "no why dear"</i>
elision	A /t/ or /d/ sound at the end of a word disappears, because the next word starts with a consonant sound. <i>For example: "past life" becomes "pass life"</i>
r-linking	An /r/ sound at the end of a word links with the vowel sound at the beginning of the next word. <i>For example: "pour into" becomes "paw rinto"</i>