Other aspects of connected speech

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Why 'other' aspects of connected speech?

In Chapters 3 and 4, we dealt with the individual sounds, or phonemes, which we use when speaking. Our aim in considering these phonemes was to investigate how they are articulated, so that we are better able to help students over difficulties with understanding and producing these sounds. The ultimate aim of this is, of course, to help students understand and produce not just individual sounds, but the strings of phonemes which make up utterances.

As we have seen in previous chapters, these longer utterances are subject to the influence of the stresses we make, and the tone movements we apply, according to the message we wish to convey. Word stress, sentence stress and intonation are aspects of connected speech, in that they apply (usually) to more than one phoneme. Weak forms, such as where *are* is pronounced as /ə/ in *Her eyes are /ə/ lovely*, are an aspect of connected speech too. (For a fuller explanation and a list of weak forms, see pages 73–75.) In this chapter we will look at further aspects of connected speech, in particular what happens when phonemes meet.

It is useful here to make a distinction between careful speech and rapid speech. The features we are looking at will usually be more evident in rapid, everyday speech. In more careful speech (such as when delivering a talk, for

example, or when modifying our speech for social purposes such as teaching), we may tend to use them less. Certain features may also be more or less common in different accents and varieties of English, and personal habits and preferences also have an influence.

Assimilation

(84)

The term **assimilation** describes how sounds modify each other when they meet, usually across word boundaries, but within words too. If we consider the words *that* and *book*, and look at the phonemes involved, we get /ðæt/ and /bʊk/. If we then place the words into a sentence (for example, *Could you pass me that book, please?*), we notice that the /t/ phoneme at the end of *that* does not sound like it does in the word said on its own. The phoneme /t/ is an alveolar sound (see page 7 for the sound chart), which is formed when the tongue blade forms a temporary closure against the alveolar ridge. If you try saying the sentence a few times over, you will notice that the tongue doesn't actually get there at the end of the word. Rather than having our tongue make the unnecessarily long journey all the way to the alveolar ridge, we employ an economy of effort, and get our articulators (in this case the lips) ready for the next sound, /b/. The modified sound retains its original voice quality, and so we say that the /t/ assimilates to a /p/, both sounds being unvoiced. As a result, we get *Could you pass me* /ðæp bʊk/*?* This is not to say that we give the /p/ its full plosive manner of articulation either, as we would if we were to say the non-word /ðæp/ on its own, merely that our lips are in the position to make a /p/. The best description is that in readying our articulators for the next sound, certain sounds are either absorbed, or modified into others. There is another possibility: the /t/ at the end of *that* could also become a **glottal stop**, where the glottis (the opening between the vocal cords inside the larynx – see page 4) closes momentarily.

Other examples involving the same sounds as the above are:

(85)

Can you see that boy over there?

Where has the cat been all night?

Who's a cute baby, then?

Some rules for assimilation

(86)

1 The phonemes /t/, /d/ and /n/ often become bilabial before bilabial consonants /p/, /b/ and /m/:
   He's a rather fat boy. (/t/ assimilates to /p/)
   She's got an apartment in Manhattan. (/t/ assimilates to /p/)
   He's a very good boy. (/d/ assimilates to /b/)
   There are ten men in the class, and two women. (/n/ assimilates to /m/)

2 /t/ assimilates to /k/ before /k/ or /g/. /d/ assimilates to /g/ before /k/ or /g/:
   Where has that cat been all night? (/t/ assimilates to /k/)
   Can you see that girl over there? (/t/ assimilates to /k/)
   It was a very good concert. (/d/ assimilates to /g/)
   She's a very good girl. (/d/ assimilates to /g/)

3 /n/ can assimilate to /ŋ/ before /g/ or /k/:
   I've been going out too much lately.
   He's bringing his own car.

4 /s/ can assimilate to /ʃ/ before /ʃ/:
   I really love this shiny one over here.

5 /z/ can assimilate to /ʒ/ before /ʃ/:
   We found this lovely little cheese shop in Paris.

The above examples are cases of **anticipatory assimilation**, where one sound changes to another because of the sound which follows. Here are some cases of **coalescent assimilation**, where two sounds combine to form a different one:

6 /t/ and /j/ coalesce to form /tʃ/:
   You went to France last year, didn't you?

7 /d/ and /j/ coalesce to form /dʒ/:
   Would you like a cup of tea?

Elision

The term **elision** describes the disappearance of a sound. For example, in the utterance *He leaves next week* speakers would generally elide (leave out) the /t/ in *next* saying /neks wiːk/. Again here, the reason is an economy of effort, and in some instances the difficulty of putting certain consonant sounds together while maintaining a regular speech rhythm and speed.

Some rules for elision

(87) 1 The most common elisions in English are /t/ and /d/, when they appear within a consonant cluster.
   We arrived the next day. (/t/ elided between /ks/ and /d/)
   When we reached Paris, we stopped for lunch. (/t/ elided between /tʃ/ and /p/, and between /p/ and /f/)
   We bought a lovely carved statuette. (/d/ elided between /v/ and /st/)

2 Complex consonant clusters are simplified.
   She acts like she owns the place! (/ækts/ can be simplified to /æks/)
   Teachers use authentic texts to teach from. (/teksts/ can be simplified to /teks/)
   George the Sixth's throne (/sɪkθs θr/ simplified to (/sɪks θr/)

3 /ə/ can disappear in unstressed syllables.
   I think we should call the police. (/ə/ can disappear in the first syllable of *police*)
   I'll love you forever, promise. Well, perhaps. (/ə/ can disappear)
   It's a question of collective responsibility. (/ə/ can disappear)
   Are you coming out tonight? (/ə/ can disappear)
   That's an interesting idea. (/ə/ is not pronounced by many speakers, reducing the number of syllables in the word)
   Have we got any vegetables? (/ə/ is not pronounced by most speakers, reducing the number of syllables in the word)

4 /v/ can disappear in *of*, before consonants.
  My birthday's on the 11th of November.
  It's a complete waste of time!
  That's the least of my worries!

Linking and intrusion

When two vowel sounds meet, speakers often link them in various ways.

Linking /r/

Some accents of English are described as **rhotic** /ˈrəʊtɪk/, which means that when the letter *r* appears in the written word after a vowel (as in *car* or *carve*), the /r/ phoneme is used in the pronunciation of the word (as in /kɑːr/ and /kɑːrv/). Examples are most dialects of American English, Irish English and certain British regional accents. Other accents are **non-rhotic**, and do not pronounce the /r/, so we get /kɑː/ and /kɑːv/. RP (Received Pronunciation) is non-rhotic. When, however, there is a written *r* at the end of a word and it occurs between two vowel sounds, speakers with non-rhotic accents often use the phoneme /r/ to link the preceding vowel to a following one:

(88)
Her English is excellent. (/r/ is pronounced)
Her German is absolutely awful, though! (/r/ is not pronounced)
My brother lives in London. (/r/ is not pronounced)
My brother always phones at the wrong time. (/r/ is pronounced)

Intrusive /r/

Where two vowel sounds meet and there is no written letter *r*, speakers with non-rhotic accents will still often introduce the /r/ phoneme in order to ease the transition. This happens when the first word ends in /ə/, /ɑː/ or /ɔː/. Speakers with rhotic accents tend not to do this:

(89)
Princess Diana was a victim of media exploitation. /əre/
The media are to blame. /ərɑː/
It's a question of law and order. /ɔːrən/
I saw it happen. /ɔːrɪ/

Some speakers also let an /r/ intrude within words like *drawing* (pronouncing it as /ˈdrɔːrɪŋ/) and *gnawing*.

Linking /j/

When a word ends in /iː/, or a diphthong which finishes with /ɪ/, speakers often introduce a /j/ to ease the transition to a following vowel sound:

(90)
I agree, wholeheartedly. /aɪjə/
I think, therefore I am. (Descartes) /aɪjæm/
I am, therefore I ought to be. (G. Kelly) /aɪjæm/ /aɪjɔːt/
They are, aren't they? (linking /j/, and linking /r/) /ðeɪjɑː rɑːnt/

This happens because in order to form /iː/ and /ɪ/, the mouth is in more or less the same position as it is for the start of the semi-vowel /j/.

Linking /w/
When a word ends in /uː/, or a diphthong which finishes with /ʊ/, speakers often introduce a /w/ to ease the transition to a following vowel sound:

(91)   Go on! Go in! /gəʊwɒn/ /gəʊwɪn/
        Are you inside, or are you outside? /juːwɪn/ /juːwaʊt/
        Who is? /huːwɪz/
        You are. /juːwɑː/

This happens because in order to form /uː/ and /ʊ/, the mouth is in more or less the same position as it is for the start of the semi-vowel /w/.

Juncture   Try saying the sentence _I scream, you scream, we all scream for ice-cream._ Although the phonemes involved in the underlined words are the same, subtle differences help us tell the deed from the dessert. The same subtle differences in the use of phonemes are also found in the underlined words in the following two sentences:

        The clock keeps ticking. /kiːps tɪkɪŋ/
        The kids keep sticking things on the wall. /kiːp stɪkɪŋ/

The differences in the pronunciation of the underlined words, despite the fact that the phonemes are the same, are differences of **juncture**. A deeper analysis of such examples would show differences in the length of vowel sounds, variations in degrees of syllable stress, differently timed articulation of the consonant sounds and allophonic variations too. So, while the phonemes may be the same, listeners have no difficulty (most of the time) in telling where the join is, and context clearly plays a role here. Other examples showing the same phenomenon are:

(92)   That's my train.
        It might rain.
        The great apes
        The grey tapes

In the pair

        Can I have some more ice?
        Can I have some more rice?

the linking /r/ could lead to confusion over juncture, but again context and subtle differences in articulation help us to judge which one we have heard. Students may not have the necessary background knowledge needed in order to make the distinction.
    Consonants often seem to be attracted across word boundaries:

(93)   You'll need an egg, an olive and an anchovy. (... a negg, a nolive and a nanchovy)
        Put it on. (pu ti ton)

The *negg*, *nolive* and *nanchovy* are obviously non-words, but occasionally the coincidence of sounds can lead to examples where listeners may hear an unintended word:

It's no joke. (snow)
It's tough. (stuff)

A famous example concerns a misheard lyric from the Jimi Hendrix song 'Purple Haze', where the line *'Scuse me, while I kiss the sky* was heard as *'Scuse me, while I kiss this guy*. Assimilation also plays a role here, in the assimilation of the /k/ in *sky* to a /g/.

Contractions   Contractions occur where two words combine to the extent that the two are pronounced as one word, or one syllable. These have (for the most part) become conventionalised in written language. Common examples are as follows:

I'm /aɪm/, you're, he's, she's, we're...
I'm not /aɪm nɒt/, you aren't, we aren't...
Can't /kɑːnt/, won't...
Would've /wʊdəv/, could've...
Couldn't /kʊdnt/, wouldn't...

There are restrictions, however. We can say *You're not* and *You aren't*. We can say *I'm not*, but *I amn't* is unusual, and seen as incorrect. Examples like *would've* and *could've* are often understood by children learning written English as being a contraction of *would of* and *could of*, (the weak form of *of* being the same as the weak (and contracted) form of *have*). For a significant number, this misinterpretation persists into adulthood and is such a common error that it is sometimes to be found on the lyric sheets of pop music CDs.

Should we teach these aspects of connected speech?   In the same way that working on sentence stress and intonation can help students to better understand spoken English, so can working on the other features of connected speech. In many cases, the simple awareness of their existence can help enormously in enabling students to better understand the language they hear. In so saying, the question for this section is answered. Or is it? There are two further questions that arise. Firstly, how far should we actively encourage and indeed train students to produce these features of connected speech, and secondly, should we give the different features equal weight in our teaching?

Over recent years there have been significantly different views expressed on whether to attempt to teach a productive ability in areas such as assimilation and elision. Some take the view that these areas should not be taught because to expect their successful production in students' speech is asking too much. Other commentators take the view that simply exposing students to the features of connected speech is enough in itself since students will then naturally and without prompting incorporate them into their own

speech. If the latter view is true then it will be more likely to occur when the same features occur in the students' L1 (as can be the case with certain types of assimilation, for example).

Others also say these features should be ignored because if students do not produce them, this will not have a damaging effect on the intelligibility of what they say, or because such features will sound out of place in speech that is not entirely fluent. A further reason that has been expressed is that students see such forms as not 'correct' and will be unwilling to overcome their reluctance to use them as a result. Indeed some commentators take the view that a student is right to be reluctant as they see these features of connected English speech as simply signs of laziness and lack of education, and feel that they should be discouraged among native speakers, let alone being taught to students.

The reverse set of views is that these features of connected speech should be taught to students and encouraged in their production, particularly in the case of young children, who tend to be excellent mimics of new language, and better able to adopt unfamiliar pronunciation patterns. Others assert that adult students should be trained in a productive capacity in these features of connected speech, since not to do so will leave students sounding overly formal and somewhat stilted in their speech.

Overall the most common feeling seems to be that some of the features of connected speech are worth working on for productive use and others rather less so. It is possible to gauge which features are generally considered more worthy of attention, and which less, from a review of what items generally receive attention in coursebooks (and supplementary materials), and which do not.

- Contractions (and to some degree, weak forms) are often addressed in published materials; these features seem to be readily accepted as standard teaching points, and useful aspects of language to focus on.
- Linking sounds and intrusive sounds are also focused on in materials but to a lesser degree than contractions.
- Assimilation is also dealt with, but usually only in relation to very specific examples like *don't you?* and *didn't you?* both with a resulting /tʃ/.
- Elision is also taught in coursebooks, but again largely through very specific examples like *Do you live in London?*, and *Where do you live?*, both with a resulting /dʒ/. Other examples of elision (and indeed assimilation) are not so easy to find.

Contractions are probably given the greatest amount of attention of all the features of connected speech because they are represented differently in writing from full forms (*aren't* versus *are not*, for example). Since contractions are easy to represent in a written form, and as students will have to develop a written competence in them, they might as well develop a spoken one as well.

The other features of connected speech have no conventionally written form, so what other measure can we use to decide their value to students as productive tools? The degree to which they contribute to 'intelligibility' is a

possible measure of their value. However, it is true to say that students who do not use these features but whose English is otherwise clear and correct are likely to be perfectly intelligible. An alternative measure is the issue of 'naturalness' of speech. It seems to be the case that native speakers tend not to notice features of connected speech when they are used, but do notice when they are not. Speech without the use of contractions can sound rather over formal in certain situations and indeed at times unfriendly. Certain features have become standardised within words so that it sounds odd if an established assimilation and elision is not used: for example, people who pronounce *sandwich* as /'sændwitʃ/ are in the minority, and the absence of any /t/ in words like *castle* and *whistle* is expected. With regard to word boundaries, on the other hand, we are unlikely to consider the full realisation of /d/ in *good concert* as 'wrong', for example, just as we are unlikely to pay much attention to its assimilation to /g/.

Yet another measure of the value of teaching a productive capacity in the features of connected speech is that of 'teachability'. There are two sides to how teachable an item is; on the one hand there is the likelihood of students being able to perceive the sound contrasts highlighted and put into practice the teaching they receive, and on the other there is the question of how confident the teacher is about being able to explain the issue under study, and deal with unexpected problems that may crop up. A painstaking presentation of *would've, could've, should've* and so on can often be followed by students doggedly sticking to the uncontracted forms in a subsequent practice activity. However, the same can be said for grammar and vocabulary presentations, to a lesser or greater degree. This should not be taken, therefore, as a reflection of the teacher's or students' abilities, but as an inevitability in the process of learning a language. Students will only begin to use new language and new features of language successfully and consistently when these have become fully apparent and relevant to them. Contractions and weak forms, for example, should be considered teachable, but teaching something does not usually guarantee its immediate use. The key thing is that teachers need to be confident in their understanding of the 'rules' of connected speech before attempting to study these with students. A confused explanation can be worse than no explanation at all. An informed teacher is more likely to be aware of the features discussed, and more likely to be aware of when they might be important, and therefore more likely to be able to teach them effectively.

Finally, there is the measure of 'relevance'. Is a productive capacity in the finesse of connected speech relevant to the students' needs and personal pronunciation targets? These are determined usually by the environment in which the students use their English outside the classroom. A student who lives and/or works in a relatively informal English-speaking environment is more likely to come across these features, and to benefit from working on them both receptively and productively. A further aspect to relevance is how relevant the features of connected speech are to the particular language item being dealt with in the lesson. This is important when it comes to thinking about the full integration of pronunciation into language teaching.

Ultimately, every teacher has to make their own judgements, based on the

above criteria, of how much attention to give to the various features of connected speech. But to return in a way to the original point in this section, attempting to teach a productive competence in connected speech, however successful this turns out to be, is a very good way of enhancing students' understanding of fast and fluent connected speech.

Sample lessons

Below are some examples of how features of connected speech can be worked on in the classroom for both receptive and productive purposes. The examples show certain features being Integrated with the teaching of a language point, being dealt with Remedially, and being Practised in their own right. They also cover a range of different levels.

Lesson 1: 'Getting to know you': Assimilation and weak forms (Beginner to Elementary)

Lesson type: Integrated

Here the teacher utilises the real context of the classroom with a new class, who don't know each other very well. The main aim of the lesson is to teach or revise some basic 'personal information' questions. As part of the language work, the pronunciation of these questions is also being taught. The activity can also be used perfectly adequately with a class who do know each other, but are using role-play for the purposes of practising the language. The lesson focuses on various examples of assimilation and the weak forms which can be used in these questions. Some teachers may feel uncomfortable teaching these pronunciations at such an early stage, and it has been argued that one should teach 'proper' forms before teaching assimilations, elisions and weak forms. However, if pronunciation is to be properly integrated into language teaching, then it's best to start right at the beginning. Remember that students may well be asked the questions they are studying with this 'natural' pronunciation outside the classroom (depending on their circumstances, of course), even if only when signing up for their course.

The teacher writes a large question mark on the board, along with the following words:

Name:
Live:
Job:
Age:

The teacher then points to the word *name*, points to the question mark, gestures to the class, and says 'Ask me a question'. She elicits the question *What is your name?*, and uses her fingers to help students appreciate that there are four words. Pointing to each finger in turn she asks the class to provide the words, not worrying about pronunciation particularly at this stage. Once the class is clear that there are four words, the teacher puts the first two fingers together to elicit *What's*, as opposed to *What is*. This can be

briefly drilled on its own, though only with the aim of helping students to see that these two words are being contracted. The teacher then points to the *your* finger, and says 'pronunciation?', eliciting suggestions. The teacher then drills the weak form /jə/ chorally and individually. Then putting the first three fingers together, the teacher similarly elicits and drills /'wɒts jə/ (some might also pronounce this as /'wɒt ʃə/) chorally and individually. Finally, the teacher uses the last finger to elicit *name*, before drilling the whole sentence. The teacher asks the question to two or three students, before using 'open pairs' (see page 17) across the classroom, with students asking and answering. Students then briefly ask and answer the question with their immediate neighbours (depending on the layout of the class).

The same procedure is gone through for the other questions, with the pronunciations to be worked on listed below:

Live: /weə dʒə lɪv/
Job: /wɒt dʒə duː/
Age: /haʊ əʊld əjuː/

Students are then given a handout with a table on, on which they can record the personal information of other students, as they mingle and ask questions. The teacher can include more information, or adapt the questions as she feels is appropriate for the class. As part of a written record of the language, the teacher can write on the board phonemic symbols to indicate the assimilations and weak forms dealt with for the students to copy down. If the students are not familiar with the symbols, this can act as an introduction to them.

Lesson 2: 'Going to': Weak form (Elementary to Pre-Intermediate)

Lesson type: Remedial

The teacher has been practising *going to* with a class, using a context of talking about plans for a holiday or trip. The students have been working in groups, planning an itinerary for a trip to the UK, and then in new groups each student has outlined their plans to their fellow students. While monitoring this activity, the teacher notices a range of different pronunciations of *going to*. This had not been worked on at the start of the lesson.

Some students are using the weak form of *to* (/'gəʊɪŋ tə/) before both consonant and vowel sounds (/'gəʊɪŋ tuː/ would be more appropriate before a vowel sound, the two being linked by a /w/), some are using /'gəʊɪŋ tuː/ before both vowels and consonants, but without the linking /w/ and some are using /'gɒnə/ or /'gʌnə/, which they have picked up from somewhere.

At the end of the activity, the teacher elicits some of the itinerary ideas from the students, writing on the board examples like the following:

> visit London
> eat fish 'n' chips
> go to Brighton

The teacher also writes *going to* on the board, and asks the students how it is pronounced, accepting the suggestions from the class with no correction at this stage. He then points to the first verb (*visit*), and asks again how *going to* is pronounced. He listens for /ˈgəʊɪŋ tə/, and takes the opportunity to drill it both chorally and individually. Underneath the word *to*, he writes /tə/. He then elicits the pronunciation of *to* before *eat*, drills, and writes /tuː/ on the board, and writes up a /w/ on the board, to indicate the linking sound. He then elicits the /tə/ pronunciation before *go*, and points out that this is the same as the pronunciation before *visit*.

He elicits the reasons for these pronunciations, and makes a note to do some more work on this in future lessons. Here again, while using alternative pronunciations will probably not affect students' intelligibility, in drawing their attention to the existence of these features in the speech of many native speakers of English, the teacher is helping students to notice features which they may well come across later.

Lesson 3: Phrasal verbs: Linking (Intermediate)

Lesson type: Practice
Materials: A picture of a messy bedroom

The teacher wants to do some work with the class on the linking sounds /r/, /w/ and /j/. The class has recently been working on phrasal verbs, and the teacher decides to use these as a basis for pronunciation work. He initially uses a context of housework, and chooses a selection of phrasal verbs which are deliberately similar in meaning, so that work on the meaning of these is minimal and does not take time away from the main pronunciation focus of the lesson. The teacher shows a picture of a messy teenager's bedroom, and elicits the following verbs and sentences:

He's got to clear away the empty plates and cups.
He's got to clear out his cupboard.
He's got to clear up the mess.
He's got to tidy away his clothes.
He's got to throw out his old clothes.
He's got to throw away his football comics.
He's got to tidy up his desk.

As each sentence is elicited, the teacher drills it chorally and individually, then going on to drill each phrasal verb in turn. When this is done, he writes the verbs on the board, and shows the linking /r/ between *clear* and *away/out/up*, the /j/ between *tidy* and *away/out/up* and the /w/ between *throw* and *out/away*. The fact that some of these may be used interchangeably is dealt with if students ask, but otherwise the teacher keeps the focus on pronunciation. Students are then given a brief practice activity, in which they ask each other how often they themselves clear up, tidy up etc.

As can be seen from the above description, phrasal verbs offer a good opportunity for practising the linking sounds /r/ /w/ and /j/. They can also be used to show how a final consonant can move from the end of the

previous word to attach itself to the beginning of the next word. In other words, the consonant may be 'attracted' across a word boundary as here:

get out (/t/ attracted to beginning of *out*)
walk out (/k/ attracted to beginning of *out*)
come out (/m/ attracted to beginning of *out*)

Lesson 4: Superlative adjectives: Elision (Pre-Intermediate to Intermediate)

Lesson type: Integrated
Materials: Pictures of tall buildings, or a relevant article from a magazine or from the *Guinness Book of Records*

The teacher shows or draws pictures of three buildings of different sizes. The class have recently worked on comparative adjectives, and so the teacher elicits the fact that building A (for example) is taller than B. She then elicits the fact that C is taller than A. She then gestures to indicate all three buildings together, and says *Tell me about C*. She elicits the word *tallest* /tɔːlɪst/. She drills the word to work on the sounds (particularly the /ɪ/ sound in the second syllable). She then drills the sentence *C is the tallest* (the buildings can of course be named, if pictures of real ones have been used), and writes the sentence up on the board.

The teacher then asks the question *Which is the tallest building in the world?*, and waits to see if anyone knows the answer (currently the Petronas Tower, Kuala Lumpur). If not, the answer is given. She writes:

> The Petronas Tower ... tallest building ...

on the board, and asks the class to give her a sentence, eliciting *The Petronas Tower is the tallest building in the world*. This sentence (replace the name of the building with *it*, if this is simpler) is then drilled.

Underneath the words *tallest building*, the teacher writes the phonemic script: /tɔːlɪst bɪldɪŋ/.

She then points to the underlined /t/ phoneme, and asks the students to listen while she says the two words together a few times. She asks if they notice anything about the sound, and elicits the fact that the sound 'disappears', when the two words are said together. She drills the words a few times, and then drills the sentence again, chorally and individually.

She then introduces another idea, the world's biggest country, or fastest mammal, for example, eliciting and briefly practising a sentence to show the same elision of /t/. Ideally, students are then given access to reference material (for example, the *Guinness Book of Records*, or a relevant newspaper or magazine article), and asked to work in small teams to write questions for a quiz. If no reference material is available, students can use their general knowledge to perform the same task, or the teacher can provide them with the information they need.

Having written their questions, the teams take turns to ask them to the other teams; a point is awarded when a team gives a correct answer.

Competitive activities like this can often be rewarding and motivating as classroom activities, and this particular task gives the students the opportunity to practise the grammatical form of superlative adjectives as well as a feature of their pronunciation, when put together with a following noun. Of course, examples where the following noun begins with a vowel sound (e.g. *biggest animal*) will not show elision of /t/, but this can be used as a contrast in order to further underline just when the /t/ can disappear.

Lesson 5: Elision and other features of connected speech (Intermediate to Advanced)

Lesson type: Practice
Materials: Sound or video recording of natural speech

The teacher uses a cassette or video recording where one or two people are talking. The source of the recording is not very important; the teacher could even use a coursebook tape recording which has previously been used for another classroom purpose. However, the more relevant and interesting the tape is to the students, the more useful it will be in helping them to work on the features the teacher wants to investigate.

In the following example, the teacher is using a tape of himself talking about his family. He plays the tape, integrating its use with some comprehension questions or other tasks if it is appropriate to do so. The students having listened to the tape, the teacher briefly explains the pronunciation feature (in this case elision) and plays the tape again up to the first example which is *I live in South London, with my wife and* /ən/ *three children...*

He stops the tape at this point, and uses phonemic script on the board to help underline the point, showing the weak form of *and*, and how the /d/ has been lost, comparing it with how the word sounds when said with its 'full' pronunciation /ænd/. The teacher then asks the students to listen out for the next example of elision, and to shout out when they think they have spotted one.

When this happens, the teacher asks the student who has shouted out to explain the elision to the rest of the class (describing any related weak forms), coming to the board and writing it down using phonemic script if necessary. The students then briefly discuss whether or not they feel this is an appropriate example, with the teacher acting as adjudicator as necessary. The process can be repeated until the teacher is happy that students are confidently spotting examples of the feature.

Students are then given a transcript of the tape. This could be all in phonemic script if the students feel confident using it, or just written out alphabetically, whichever the teacher feels is more appropriate. In this lesson the students are given an alphabetic transcript, and are asked, while listening to the tape, to underline words or pairs of words together where they feel that they have spotted an example of elision. The tape is played in sections of about 10–15 words at a time (depending of course on the actual content, natural pauses between tone units provide the best opportunities to stop),

giving students time in between to make their annotations to the transcript. The tape can be played as many times as the students seem to need, or as the teacher feels is still useful. It is important that the students are given time at the end to compare and discuss their answers with each other, and that the feedback from the exercise is thorough, with each example being dealt with, explained and practised as necessary. It is important that the tape is not too long, and that it includes clear examples of the features being worked on.

Practice lessons like this can be invaluable in helping students to decode rapid, connected speech. While we may not realistically expect all students to incorporate such features consistently into their own language, they are at least becoming aware of these features.

Following on from the previous activity, students can be asked to prepare a short talk on the same topic as the tape they have watched or listened to. Alternatively, students might choose to discuss an issue raised on the tape. Ideally, the students' presentations or discussions will be taped, and the resulting samples of spoken language can be analysed for the features being concentrated on.

If enough tapes are available, groups of students can work together to analyse samples, preparing an analysis, or giving each other advice with regard to the features being studied. The teacher will, at times, need to act as adjudicator, and perhaps also intervene to correct advice which doesn't quite work.

Conclusions

In this chapter we have looked at the technicalities of connected speech:
- assimilation, or the ways in which sounds can affect or modify each other when they meet.
- elision, or how phonemes can disappear.
- the ways in which adjacent sounds can be joined, and how other sounds are used to ease the movement from one sound to another.
- the junctures between sounds, and how there are subtle clues which help us to discern where one word ends and another begins.
- weak forms (which were first introduced in Chapter 6), and contractions.

We have thought about why it is useful for students to study these aspects of connected speech, and described how they can be studied and practised in class.

Looking ahead

Chapters 3 to 7 have examined the main features of English pronunciation, and suggested ways in which these can be meaningfully dealt with in the classroom. We now move on to examine the complex relationships between pronunciation and spelling.