

## The Role of Features of Connected Speech in Teaching English Pronunciation

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***Abstract:** Good pronunciation is a batch of good language proficiency. Pronunciation teaching is an area that needs the attention of the teachers and the policy makers and syllabus designers. The learners have to face a lot of problems in learning English pronunciation. The present study throws light on the role of features of connected speech in teaching pronunciation. A questionnaire (regarding features of connected speech) of ten items (on five point likert scale) was filled by 45 secondary level English language teachers. Based on the analysis of data some interesting points have been suggested to improve the students' pronunciation and spoken intelligibility.*

### 1. Introduction

Language gives primacy to speech over writing. Speech is essentially a continuous activity and the individual sounds and their sequences carry no meanings, as a sentence is the collection of meaningful words which convey the full sense. If speech is not connected (continuous), it cannot be called a speech at all. Connected speech is very systematic and it consists of various characteristic features which contribute to the meaning of the connected speech. Followings are the feature of connected speech. The ability of speaking English embodies the correctness of pronunciation and intonation and directly affects the appropriate communication in conversation (Zhang & Yin, 2009 quoted in Akram and Qureshi, 2012).

The teachers do not find the proper time for teaching pronunciation, though they make some bold claims that they give proper time to teach pronunciation in the class, because they do not find that much needed confidence and feel a great sort of reluctance in speaking English in the classroom and this is the reason the teaching of pronunciation is almost abandoned in some of the schools (Akram, 2010).

Teachers should play a positive and an active role in teaching English pronunciation According to Riaz (2008 cited in Akram, 2010), "the role of teachers should be changed to that of a facilitator in the classroom", if we want the young generation to have better oral skill of communication and intelligible pronunciation:

"Teachers in Pakistan must focus on how learning by students takes place for a more complex form of learning to take place. The student has to engage with knowledge and become an active participant in the learning process. In order to bring this about, the teacher's role has to change to that of a facilitator in the classroom".

(Riaz Ismat, 2008)

Features of connected speech (Elision, Assimilation, Deletion and Juncture etc) are not taught in government schools, and maybe this is the reason why students face so many difficulties in the area of pronouncing English (Akram, 2010). Good pronunciation may make the communication easier and more relaxed and thus more successful (Dan, 2006). To teach an inaccurate pronunciation is a common practice of secondary teachers. The key role played by the features of connected speech in teaching English pronunciation has been neglected at large. The present study has been conducted to find out the significance of the features of connected speech in teaching English pronunciation.

## 2. Features of Connected Speech

It is essential to throw some light on features of connected speech.

### 2.1 Weak Forms and Strong Forms of Words

The use of weak forms is an essential part of English language. English spoken in strong form sounds wrong. In connected speech vowels are often reduced to schwa /ə/ and /i/ in stressed syllables. Some English words can be pronounced in two ways, either in form without simplifications or in its reduced form (Roach 1991, 102). Mastering the production of weak forms helps learners to improve their listening skill and confidence as their speech is much more rhythmical and closer to the one of native speaker (Underhill 1994, 64 cited in Kocáková, 2006). The 'strong' and less usual version can be either a word form used in isolation or a word that is highlighted in the sentence, whereas the 'weak' form is the reduced and unstressed version of a word. Kenworthy (1994) gives the following list of strong and weak forms of words.

	<u>Words</u>	<u>Strong form</u>	<u>Weak form</u>
<b>Articles</b>	the	/ði/	/ðə/
	a	/eɪ/	/ə/
<b>Conjunctions</b>	but	/bʌt/	/bət/
	and	/ænd/	/ən/
	then	/ðen/	/ðən/
<b>Personal pronouns</b>	him	/hɪm/	/ɪm/
	us	/ʌs/	/əs/
<b>Indefinite adjectives</b>	such	/sʌtʃ/	/sətʃ/
	some	/sʌm/	/səm/
<b>Prepositions</b>	of	/ɒv/	/əv/
	for	/fɔr/	/fə/
	to	/tu/	/tə/
<b>Verbs</b>	was	/wɒs/	/wəz/

have	/hæv/	/həv/, /əv/
must	/mʌst/	/məst/, /məs/
do	/du:/	/də/
does	/dʌz/	/dəz/

Roach (1991) has given a list of exceptions:

There are certain situations in which the strong form is being used:

- when those words are final in a sentence.
- when they are in contrast with another word.
- when they are being stressed and emphasized or quoted.
- when auxiliary verbs are being used in their negative form.

## 2.2 Assimilation

Assimilation is process found in languages which cause speech sounds to be modified in a way which makes them more similar to their neighboring sounds. Assimilation creates very important part of our utterance. A well known example is that of /t, d, n/ sounds, which, when they are followed by a consonant which does not have alveolar place of articulation, tend to adopt the place of articulation of the following consonant. Thus /t/ at the end of the foot changes to /p/ when followed by /b/ as in the word 'foot ball', giving the pronunciation /fʊp bɔ:l/. A similar case is the assimilation of /s/ to a following /ʃ/ or /j/, resulting in the pronunciation of 'this ship' as /ðɪʃ ʃɪp/ and 'this year' as /ðɪʃ jɪə/.

1. /t/ changes to /k/ in front of /k/ and /g/.
2. /t/ changes to /p/ in front of /p/, /b/ and /m/.
3. /d/ changes to /g/ in front of /k/ and /g/.
4. /d/ changes to /b/ in front of /p/, /b/ and /m/.
5. /n/ changes to /ŋ/ in front of /k/ and /g/.
6. /n/ changes to /m/ in front of /p/, /b/ and /m/.

Underhill (1994 cited in Kocáková, 2006) says that there are several rules teachers need to be aware of, and that should be pointed out when their examples arise:

- a) /t/, /d/, /n/ - alveolar consonants at the end of a word often assimilate to the place of articulation of the consonant at the beginning of the next word:

ten pin	/tem pɪm/
in bed	/ɪm bed/
good boy	/gʊb bɔɪ/

hit man /hɪp mæn/

b) /d/ can change to /g/

good girl /gʊg gɜ:l/

c) /s/ can change to /ʃ/ and /z/ to /ʒ/ when /ʃ/ begins the next syllable:

this shop /ðɪs ʃɒp/ /ðɪ:ʒ ʃɒp/

these shops /ði:z ʃɒps/ /ði:ʒ ʃɒps/

Change in voicing:

a) /v/ into unvoiced /f/ because of the following unvoiced /t/:

have to go /hæv tə gəʊ/ /hæf tə gəʊ/

b) /d/ and /j/ change into /dʒ/:

how d'you do /haʊ djʊ du:/ /haʊ dʒʊ du:/

c) /t/ and /j/ into /tʃ/:

don't you know /dəʊnt jʊ nəʊ/ /dəʊntʃə nəʊ/ (Underhill 1994, 60-61)

### 2.3 Elision

There are many cases where sounds which are produced in words pronounced on their own, or in slow, careful speech, are not found in different style of speech. This particular phenomenon is known as elision. Despite the fact that in a word spoken in isolation a sound would be present, in connected speech it would disappear (Underhill 1994, 61 quoted in Kocáková, 2006)). This kind of reduction occurs mainly in words ending with /t/ and /d/ and particularly when they are between two other consonants. It is usual to explain elision; we find elision most commonly in the simplification, of consonant clusters. Elision occurs when a sound is omitted and it is a typical feature of connected speech.

a) Omission of /t/:

Next please /neks pli:z/

I don't know /aɪ dəʊ nəʊ/

Post the letter /pəʊs ðə letə/

b) Omission of /d/:

Old man /əʊl mæn/

Sandwich /sænwɪtʃ/

Stand there /stæn ðeə/

### 2.4 Liason

Liason is a common feature of continuity and natural flow of speech. To link the words means to join them together and it often entails different types of fusing sounds at word boundaries (Underhill 1994, 65 cited in Kocáková, 2006)). The other version of the term 'liason' is a 'smooth linking':

- final consonant is linked to following initial vowel

- initial consonant is merged in preceding final vowel

## 2.5 Silent Letters

English spellings do not have one to one correspondence with the sounds. There are some spellings which are not given prominence when they come together.

### a. Silent /l/ before /m/

Calm                      /kɑ:m/

Alm                        /ɑ:m/

Balm                      /bɑ:m/

### b. Silent /b/ before /t/

Doubt                     /daʊt/

Debt                      /det/

Subtle                    /sətəl/

### c. Silent /k/ before /n/

Knit                      /nit/

Knife                     /naɪf/

Knee                      /ni:/

### d. Silent /g/ before /n/

Gnaw                     /nɔ/

Gnat                      /næt/

Gnome                    /nu:m/

### e. Silent /m/ before /n/

Column                  /kɒləm/

Solemn                  /sɒləm/

Autumn                  /ɒtəm/

### f. Silent /w/ before /r/

Write /raɪt/

Wrath /rɑ:θ /

Wrong /rɒŋ/

#### g. Silent /p/ before /s/

Psychology /saɪkɒlədʒɪ/

Psychic /saɪkɪk/

Psychiatrist /səkaɪətrɪst/

#### h. Silent /b/ before /m/

Bomb /bɒm/

Thumb /θəm/

Climb /klaɪm/

### 2.6 Linking /r/ and Intrusive /r/

The accent used for British English is classed as non-rhotic – the phoneme /r/ is not usually pronounced except when a vowel follows it. In connected speech sound /r/ at the end of a word 'may be pronounced or not, depending on whether following word begins with a vowel or with a consonant' (Underhill 1994, 66 cited in Kocáková, 2006). It is necessary to show in British English entries, cases of potential pronunciation of /r/, mainly in word final position; in other words, it is necessary to indicate, in a word such as 'car' that though the word, when said in isolation does not have /r/ in the pronunciation /ka:/, there is potential /r/ which is realized if a vowel follows (car owner). This is indicated by giving the transcription as /ka:r/, where the super script <sup>r</sup>/ indicates the potential for pronunciation. This is traditionally known as linking /r/.

A controversial question is that if so called intrusive /r/, where the phoneme /r/ is pronounced when no /r/ is seen in the spellings. This is a special type of liaison when many native speakers join the words with the letter /r/ even when it does not occur in the written form. This sound is just inserted and pronounced by the native speakers only. It appears between two words in situation where the first word ends with /ə/ or /ɔ: / and the next word begins with a vowel (Roach 1991, 128):

For example:

Formula A                      law and order

/fɔ:mjələɾ eɪ/

/ lɔ: r n ɒðə/

**2.7 Intrusive /w/ and /j/:**

Underhill (1994 cited in Kocáková, 2006) is of the view that when we have 'vowel-vowel' word junctions the two intrusive sounds **/w/ and /j/** occur:

Intrusive /w/:

You are

/ju: wɑ:/

Go off

/gəʊ w ɒf/

Sue always wants to eat

/su: w ɔ:lweɪz wɒnts tu w i:t/

Intrusive /j/:

He is

/hi: j ɪz/

They are

/ðeɪ j ɑ:/

She always takes my arm

/ʃi: j ɔ:lweɪz teɪks maɪ j ɑ:m/

**2.8 Juncture:**

Juncture is the transition from one segmental phoneme to another. It causes a lot of problems and difficulties for foreign learners to distinguish between two phrases that sound nearly the same. Trager and Smith (1951) recognize four junctures as phoneme:

## 1. Intra or Plus Juncture

a + name

=

an aim

that + stuff

=

that's tough

## 2- Single Bar Juncture ( / ): (indicative of incompleteness)

His brother/ Raza/ isn't here.

Mohammad/ my little brother/ isn't home.

## 3- Double Bar Juncture ( // ): (indicative of uncertainty)

One// two// three// four.

## 4- Double Cross Juncture ( # ): corresponding to the orthographic period of full stop, indicative of assertion.

# one # two # three # four

The first one is known as plus juncture, the other three are called terminal junctures. Double bar at the beginning and at the end of an utterance shows that the utterance is complete.

According to Roach (1991) those phonetically resembling connections or 'junctions' consist of words that are easily recognizable in a way they are pronounced in isolation:

Might rain X my train

Keep sticking X keeps sticking

All that I'm after today X all the time after today

## Method

### 3.1- Participants

The participant comprised 45 (25 male and 20 female) government school teachers from different schools of Punjab at secondary level. The selected participants were from different age groups and they were having the same level of qualification i.e. M.A. in English.

### 3.2- Instrument

In order to know the opinion of the teachers related to features of connected speech in pronunciation teaching, a questionnaire was given to the teachers to fill in. The questionnaire, comprised of ten questions, was based on Likert scale from strongly agree (SA) to strongly disagree (SDA).

### 3.3- Procedure

The teachers were requested to fill the questionnaires. The data was collected in a quite frank way to facilitate the participants. The data was collected in about twenty minutes. Data, gathered from the questionnaire, was analyzed and the results with distribution of frequency and mean scores have been discussed as under.

## 4. Results and Findings

The following table presents the findings of the study and it also highlights the frequency and mean scores with standard deviations.

**Table 1: Frequencies and Mean Score with Standard Deviation**

Statements	SA	A	NO	DA	SDA	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Pronunciation is very important to learn English language.	32	13	0	0	0	4.71	.458



2. I know what connected speech is.	43	02	0	0	0	4.96	.208
3. I know features of connected speech.	38	07	0	0	0	4.84	.367
4. I know and teach assimilation while teaching pronunciation.	42	03	0	0	0	4.93	.252
5. I know and teach elision while teaching pronunciation.	41	04	0	0	0	4.91	.288
6. I know and teach liaison while teaching pronunciation.	39	06	0	0	0	4.87	.344
7. I know and teach weak forms of English while teaching pronunciation.	41	04	0	0	0	4.91	.288
8. I know and teach contractions while teaching pronunciation.	41	04	0	0	0	4.91	.288
9. I know and teach deletion while teaching pronunciation.	41	04	0	0	0	4.91	.288
10. I know and teach juncture while teaching pronunciation.	29	16	0	0	0	4.64	.484

Pronunciation is very important to learn English language. There are 32 teachers who strongly agree with this item. 43 out of 45 teachers strongly agree that they know what connected speech is. 38 teachers know the features of connected speech. 42 teachers know and teach assimilation while teaching pronunciation. The table shows that 41 teachers know and teach elision while teaching pronunciation. It also indicates that 39 teachers know and teach liaison while teaching pronunciation. Out of 45 teachers, 43 teachers know and teach weak forms of English while teaching pronunciation. 41 teachers know and teach contractions while teaching pronunciation. 41 teachers know and teach deletion while teaching pronunciation. 29 teachers strongly agreed with the item that they knew and taught juncture while teaching pronunciation.

The above table shows that all the teachers strongly agree with the questionnaire items. All of them understand the importance of the features of connected speech and all of them stress the teaching of these features of connected speech in teaching English pronunciation.

## 5. Conclusion and Suggestions

The present study is in line with Akram & Qureshi (2012) who opine that teachers should know their weaknesses and strengths with regard to English pronunciation and they should serve as role models for the learners. The teachers have shown a great enthusiasm related to the features of connected speech but the fact is students don't understand all these phenomena and they face a lot of problems in learning English pronunciation. This study supports Morley's (1991) study in which he stresses the supra-segmental elements of pronunciation and communicative competence in teaching English pronunciation. Likely, this study emphasizes the importance and role of the features of connected speech in learning and teaching English pronunciation. The study also stresses the teaching of features of connected speech as these contribute to the meaning of the connected speech. The study stresses that teacher training in pronunciation is needed, both at the pre-service stage, and as part of ongoing professional development programs as Akram (2010) indicated in his study.

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