Syllables in connected speech

device available in English to adjust 'un-eurhythmic' sequences of feet; notably, the mirror-image of the input to rule (43) – a pattern of decreasing prominence among feet – cannot be turned into an alternating pattern. Hence the noun 'produce' does not turn into *produce in farm produce; similarly in Lake District, the falling pattern among the two feet in 'district remains unaltered.

As a final demonstration of the Reversal rule, consider the two phrases one-thirteen George Street and John's thirteen lectures. In the former phrase, the stress pattern of one-thirteen should be subject to Reversal, and in the latter that of thirteen: the opposite patterns *one-thirteen and *John's thirteen are clearly wrong. Our Reversal rule (43) predicts precisely this: in (45) only the circled nodes answer the input description of the rule; no other reversal is predicted by rule (43).

(45)

9.3 Syllables in connected speech

In section 9.1 above we studied in some detail the ways in which phonological structure of the foot level and above relates to syntactic structure; our conclusion was that while phonological structure is clearly informed by the syntax, it overrides syntactic structure at least on the foot level, where unstressed syllables may be adjoined to preceding feet disregarding syntactic constituency. In particular, we saw that the formation of feet in connected speech is insensitive to word boundaries.

This investigation into the formation of phonological units in connected speech will now be continued to the level of the syllable: is connected speech a sequence of syllables precisely of the form that we identified in citation forms (in ch. 6), or are there adjustments? In particular, do syllables, similar to feet, spread across word boundaries in connected speech? As we shall see, they do. The phonological structure of connected speech overrides word boundaries not only when syllables are connected into feet but also when segments are connected into syllables.
9.3.1 Liaison

Recall, from section 6.6, the following two features that characterise the syllabification of polysyllabic words: firstly, syllable boundaries are placed in such a way that onsets are maximised (rule (52) of ch. 6); secondly, in certain contexts it is possible for segments to belong to two syllables at once (to be ‘ambisyllabic’). Ambisyllabicity arises to citation-form syllabification wherever rule (52) of chapter 6 makes a consonant part of an onset while at the same time the weight requirement for stressed syllables makes it part of the (preceding) rhyme, as in rubella. Here, the /l/ is ambisyllabic. In most accents of English, both these phenomena – the maximisation of onsets and the possibility of ambisyllabicity – are generalised across word boundaries in connected speech.

Consider the sentence These are old eggs. It is, of course, possible to utter this string as a rapid sequence of citation forms, in which case syllable boundaries would coincide with word boundaries, marked by brief periods of silence and possibly even by glottal stops preceding the word-initial vowels: [ðiːz.?a:.?ould.?egz]. Note also that are, uttered in this fashion, has an /r/-less pronunciation for nonrhotic speakers.

However, this is clearly not an accurate rendering of connected speech for most accents of English (perhaps the only exception being South African English, which does display such a distribution of syllable boundaries – and prevocalic glottal stops – in connected speech). In other accents, for example RP, this syllabification would be found: [ðiː:zaː.roul.degz], where word-final consonants form onsets for otherwise onset-less following syllables. To be precise, such consonants are probably not totally dissociated from the preceding syllables, as the transcription would suggest, but become ambisyllabic:

\[
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{On} \\
/\delta/
\end{array}
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{Rh} \\
/\text{i}/
\end{array}
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{On} \\
/\text{z}/
\end{array}
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{Rh} \\
/\text{ar}/
\end{array}
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{On} \\
/\text{old}/
\end{array}
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{Rh} \\
/\text{e}/
\end{array}
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{On} \\
/\text{g}/
\end{array}
\begin{array}{c}
\text{Sy} \\
\text{Rh} \\
/\text{z}/
\end{array}
\]

Although this maximisation of syllable onsets in connected speech – often called liaison – is most evident in cases such as this one, where onsets that are empty in citation forms are filled by preceding word-final consonants, the phenomenon is not necessarily restricted to such contexts. Similarly, onsets may be maximised in cases like old wine, where the /dw/ sequence may form a connected-speech onset (the /d/ being ambisyllabic); and
perhaps liaison even takes place in with luck, where the /θl/ or /θl/ sequence would not be a possible syllable onset in a citation form. Evidence for or against liaison in such cases is hard to come by; and what complicates the issue is the fact that speech style and tempo are major variables determining the phonology of connected speech. What is clear, however, is that liaison of the kind exemplified in (46) is a feature of all but the slowest performance of connected speech.

9.3.2 Some effects of liaison

If, as was demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, syllabic structure is adjusted in connected speech so that certain segments become (parts of) onsets that in citation forms are (parts of) codas, then such restructuring should have certain effects in the segmental phonology: many of the segmental generalisations that were discussed earlier in this book refer to a segment’s position in the syllable. If a phoneme, for example, has an allophone specific to syllable codas and another specific to onsets, then a citation form may display the former allophone while in connected speech the latter may occur. We shall investigate some such cases – not all of them concerned with allophony – in this section.

9.3.2.1 Linking /r/ in RP

Perhaps the most striking evidence for liaison is provided by linking /r/ in nonrhotic accents such as RP. As was discussed in section 3.4 above, nonrhotic accents have a phonotactic constraint whereby /r/ can occur in syllable onsets but not in rhymes. Such accents have retained some residue of historic rhyme-/r/ in the form of the centring diphthong phonemes /əl/, /ɛə/ and /ɔə/, but in other vowels no such traces of historic /r/ are left: bar has the same vowel phoneme /əl/ as spa does. In such accents, then, /r/ occurs only in syllable onsets: it fails to occur in hear /həl/ but it is present in hearing /hərɪŋ/. Consider the following examples:

(47)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a. hammer /hamə/</th>
<th>b. hammering /hamərɪŋ/</th>
<th>c. hammer it /haməɾt/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bar /bər/</td>
<td>barring /bərɪŋ/</td>
<td>bar it /bərɪt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bore /bɔr/</td>
<td>boring /bɔrɪŋ/</td>
<td>bore it /bɔrɪt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>hear /hɪər/</td>
<td>hearing /hɪəɾɪŋ/</td>
<td>hear it /hɪəɾɪt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cure /kjuər/</td>
<td>curing /kjuəɾɪŋ/</td>
<td>cure it /kjuəɾɪt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tear /tɛər/</td>
<td>tearing /tɛəɾɪŋ/</td>
<td>tear it /tɛəɾɪt/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>fur /fʌɾ/</td>
<td>furry /fɜɾɪ/</td>
<td>fur is /fɜɾɪz/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example (47a) shows the range of vowel phonemes that are found in contexts of historic /r/ – note that rhotic accents such as GA and SSE have retained /r/ in these contexts: /hamɔr/, /bɔr/ etc. Example (47b) demonstrates the occurrence of /r/ in RP (and equally, disregarding differences in the vowel phonemes, in rhotic accents) in words that are morphologically related to those in (47a). In these cases /r/ is in the syllable-onset position (hamme. ring, hea. ring etc.) and is therefore not barred from occurring.

What is of interest here is the list of items in (47c), where /r/, although word-final, does occur in the context of the following word beginning with a vowel. This is the phenomenon of 'linking /r/', common in nonrhotic accents including the most formal variety of RP. Liaison provides us with the means of accounting for such cases. With regard to /r/, liaison has the same effect as the regularities of word-internal syllabification do: just as in hammering, the /r/ in hammer it occupies a syllable onset in connected speech (due to liaison) and is therefore pronounced in the speech of nonrhotic speakers.

No account of linking /r/ is complete without a discussion of the closely related phenomenon of intrusive /r/, the insertion of /r/ in the same contexts as those in which linking /r/ is found, but in words where there is no historic /r/ (and, consequently, no /r/ in rhotic accents). Like linking /r/, intrusive /r/ is common in nonrhotic accents, but unlike the former, it is stigmatised in formal RP. Examples of intrusive /r/ are given in (48b). In contrast, no intrusive /r/ is possible after the vowels exemplified in (48c):

(48)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a. Brenda /ə/</th>
<th>b. Brenda and /brendərənd/</th>
<th>c. see it */sirət/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>spa /ə/</td>
<td>spa is /spærəs/</td>
<td>do it */dʊrət/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>law /ə/</td>
<td>law and /lərənd/</td>
<td>lay it */lɛrət/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>idea /ə/</td>
<td>idea is /aɪdərəz/</td>
<td>show it */ʃɔrət/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>skua /ə/</td>
<td>skua is /skʊərəz/</td>
<td>boy is */bɔɹəz/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrea /ə/</td>
<td>Eritrea is /eɪrɪtərəz/</td>
<td>now is */nauɹəz/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? /ə/</td>
<td>? is /...ərz/</td>
<td>why is */wəɹəz/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This distribution raises two questions. First, why does intrusive /r/ only occur in (48b) but not in (48c)? Second, how do formal RP speakers manage to avoid intrusive /r/ (48b) while permitting linking /r/ (47c), given that the vowel phonemes after which they permit linking /r/ are identical to those after which they shun intrusive /r/? This last observation provides the decisive clue to the former question.

Let us imagine, for the moment, a nonrhotic speaker who is illiterate, as well as having no knowledge of the history of the language or of rhotic
Syllables in connected speech

accents. This speaker will probably have acquired linking /r/ as in (47c). But given his poor education, he has no way of distinguishing the contexts for linking /r/ from those for intrusive /r/ (48a, b); he will therefore use intrusive /r/ in precisely those phonological contexts in which linking /r/ occurs, that is, after vowel phonemes that might also be (but in instances where they are actually not) reflexes of historic /r/. For this speaker, /r/ simply occurs indiscriminately, in the appropriate contexts, after the vowel phonemes in (47a/48a) – but not after the vowel phonemes in (48c). The latter are vowel phonemes that cannot be reflexes of historic /r/. However, the RP speaker does not actually need to know this fact in order to make the distinction: they form a natural class in that all of them are high vowels, or at least surface diphthongs with high second elements, while the vowels that attract /r/ are nonhigh. For this speaker, then, a phonological constraint is available that limits the occurrence of linking/intrusive /r/, but there is no phonological constraint that would enable him to distinguish between the two phenomena of linking and intrusion.

How, then, does the formal RP speaker manage to make the distinction between permissible linking and stigmatised intrusion? The answer is by now obvious: not on phonological grounds. He has to draw on knowledge of the history of the language (which he is unlikely to have), or of rhotic accents (which he may have), or of spelling – and formal RP speakers are, as a rule, literate. In whatever way the distinction between linking and intrusion is acquired, it is not one that arises from a phonological generalisation.

9.3.2.2 Allophonic effects

Similar effects of liaison can be observed in the operation of certain allophonic rules: as we noted above, if a given allophonic rule predicts a particular allophone in syllable onsets, then we would expect the implementation of that rule in connected speech whenever liaison has caused the phoneme in question to become syllable onset. We look here at two such rules, both of which were discussed in detail in chapter 8: the rule for clear and dark /l/ in RP (sect. 8.2.1) and that for voiceless stop aspiration (sect. 8.3.1).

Recall rule (3) of chapter 8 whereby the ‘clear’ allophone of /l/ – [I] – occurs in syllable onsets while the ‘dark’ (velarised) allophone [H] occurs elsewhere. Hence we get the following alternation in RP, depending on the position of the phoneme within the syllable:
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(49) a. [f]  
feel  
kill  
tell  

b. [l]  
feeling  
killer  
telling  

As predicted, liaison (49c) has the same effect on the quality of the /l/ as word-internal syllabification does (49b): in both cases the /l/ is in the onset position and is consequently realised as clear. The distribution of the two allophones is as clear-cut as this only in RP. As was noted in section 8.2.1, SSE has little or no clear–dark allophony, and while GA seems to have essentially the same distribution, its ‘clear’ [l] is slightly velarised and therefore less distinct from the dark allophone than it is in RP.

The distribution of aspiration among voiceless stops in connected speech follows similar lines; but again it is less clear-cut than that of the /l/ allophones in RP is. There does seem to be some aspiration in keep it as there is in keeping, in kick it as there is in kicking, etc. However, the facts are obscured by two factors. Firstly, recall that voiceless stops in syllable-final position are subject to glottal reinforcement; this was discussed in detail in section 8.3.1. If we are correct in saying that liaison results in widespread ambisyllabicity (sect. 9.3.1 above) then we would expect the /k/ in lick it, for example, to be both aspirated and glottalised. This seems to be the case; and we do not therefore get the aspirated and nonglottalised allophone that we are looking for in syllable-initial position. Secondly, as was also noted in section 8.3.1, aspiration is a gradient phenomenon which is much stronger in the onsets of stressed syllables than it is in unstressed syllables. In keep it and kick it, it is unstressed and we can expect only weak aspiration. And if we choose stressed second syllables (keep out, kick Eric etc.) we may well experience the failure of liaison to take place altogether: [kʰʔkʔeɾiʔk]. Liaison of syllables seems to be more common within feet than it is across foot boundaries. These are complicated and rather subtle issues; and allophony in connected speech is too much influenced by performance variables such as style and tempo to lend itself to a comprehensive, systematic and formal phonological analysis.

9.4 Structure simplification in connected speech

We have already seen that connected speech is not merely a sequence of citation forms: in section 9.1 we saw that units larger than words have distinct phonological shapes; in section 9.2 we studied rhythmic constraints and adjustments that operate within such units; and in section
9.3 we saw the liaison that takes place among syllables in speech, as well as some of its segmental effects. Our interest remains with the segmental phonology in this section: we shall investigate here some aspects of structure simplification – the loss of phonological information – that takes place in connected speech. Depending on their position within the suprasegmental structure (in particular on their position within the foot), as well as once again on tempo and stylistic variables, segments may lose their phonological identity by being ‘reduced’ or even lost, or by acquiring phonological features from neighbouring segments through assimilation.

9.4.1 Vowel reduction and weak forms

Recall from chapter 3 that the full range of English vowel contrasts occurs only in stressed syllables; in unstressed syllables, as we saw in sections 3.5 and 8.6, most vowel contrasts are suspended. The only vowel contrast found in unstressed syllables is that between /i/ (as in 'purist) and the central vowel schwa /ə/ ('purest), a vowel that has no specification in either the high–low dimension or the front–back dimension, and that can only occur in unstressed syllables. Words like gymnast, compost, mayhem etc., which do have full vowels in their final syllables, have secondary stress on those syllables. Moreover, the /ə–i/ contrast is, as we also saw in those earlier discussions, rather unstable: many words show free variation (bracelet, duchess etc.); and the contrast is in any case mostly restricted to citation forms, while being suspended in most instances of connected speech. Ignoring, then, some minor analytical details such as the sporadic possibility for /i/ to occur in unstressed syllables, we can state that English has a phonotactic constraint whereby vowels in non-foot-initial positions are schwa – and therefore devoid of any high/low or front/back specifications – whereas in foot-initial positions vowels will have such specifications.

This phonotactic constraint is not restricted to citation forms. In connected speech, schwa can occur in positions in which corresponding citation forms have full vowels; and in such cases the reduction of the vowel can be put down to a loss of stress: a syllable that is stressed in a citation form may be unstressed in connected speech. Consider the following examples:

(50)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Stressed Form</th>
<th>Unstressed Form</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>compost</td>
<td>/'kɒmpɒst/</td>
<td>['kɒmpɒst,hɪp]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>veto</td>
<td>/'vɪ.to/</td>
<td>['vɪtəˌprɛsəˌpəʊzəl]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potato</td>
<td>/pəˈte.to/</td>
<td>[pəˈtɛtəˌpɪlə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uneven</td>
<td>/əˈɪvən/</td>
<td>[rəˈdərənˈɪvən]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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In cases such as these, citation forms contain syllables with secondary stress (and full vowels), while the same forms may occur without those secondary stresses in connected speech, with attendant reduction of the vowel. In structural terms, such cases exemplify loss of structure on two levels: firstly, the loss of a foot in the suprasegmental structure; and secondly, the loss of distinctive features in the segmental representation of the vowel. Such loss of secondary stress may in turn be determined by rhythmic factors and in particular relate to speech tempo: if feet are isochronous (recall sect. 9.2 above) then an acceleration of speech tempo might lead to the dropping of stresses; and weak (secondary) stresses would be obvious candidates for this. On the other hand, the variability exemplified in (50) is clearly not entirely determined by rhythmic context and related variables: many speakers would have potato as /pətətə/ in all contexts, so that citation forms such as /pətəto/ are those of a more formal standard (and even such speakers will tend to have the reduced form in connected speech) and the reduced forms those of a less formal variety of the same accent.

Similar variation between stressed and unstressed forms of the same word can be observed in function words, which are usually cited in their ‘strong’ (stressed) forms (of /əv/, as /əz/ etc.) while in connected speech they frequently occur in unstressed positions, displaying their ‘weak’ forms /əv/, /əz/ etc. Below are some examples:

(51) and /ənd/ the king and [ənd] I
       come and [ən] see
       Fred and [əd]—[ən] I
       bread and [ən] butter
but /bət/ smart but [bət] casual
than /ðən/ stronger than [ðən] I
us /əs/ give us [əz] a break
them /əm/ show them [əm] a drink
of /əv/ Head of [əf] Spanish
       Head of [əv] English
at /ət/ stay at [ət] home
as /əz/ good as [əz] gold

Example (51) is a random selection of words that have strong and weak forms. In such cases, the reduction that takes place when such a function word is placed in an unstressed position in speech results in schwa: again, the vowel loses the ‘structure’ that it has in the citation form. Schwa is the typical and most common vowel found in weak forms, but not the only one:
/ə/ and /ɪ/ tend to contrast in weak forms just as they do in citation forms. Hence she /ʃi/ and he /hi/ reduce to [ʃi] and [hi] in connected speech, as in will she come? [ˌwɪlʃiˈkʌm].

We have seen in this section that for various possible reasons a syllable that bears some stress in a citation form may be unstressed in connected speech, and that in such cases the vowel in such a syllable will be reduced to schwa. However, this particular case of the reduction of vowels to schwa does not exhaust the possibilities of reduction that may be found in speech. Vowels may be reduced to the extent of total loss; similarly, consonants may be reduced. The list of weak forms (51) contains several cases of such reduction beyond schwa. We shall look at these in the following paragraphs: the phenomenon of reduction may affect segments, syllables and (as we have already seen) feet.

9.4.2 Reduction, elision, assimilation

Let us start with bread and butter [ˌbrednˈbætə], given in (51) above. Similar cases were discussed in section 9.2.2.4 in relation to the structure of feet in connected speech; in the present discussion they provide examples of reduction resulting in the loss (elision) of segments: compared to the citation form /and/, all that is left of the word in this context is a syllabic [n]. We deal with the elision of the vowel first.

Elision of schwa is common especially before sonorant consonants: given that it is possible for such consonants to be syllabic, they will occupy the peak of the syllable (thereby preserving the syllable) in cases where the vowel is elided. Indeed, we saw as early as in section 3.5 that schwa is optional in many such contexts even in citation forms: button may be phonemically analysed as /bətən/ or /bətn/, little as /ˈlɪtl/ or /ˈlɪtl/, and so forth. However, it would appear that such free variation in citation forms is restricted to unstressed final syllables; unstressed initial or medial syllables have schwa in citation forms – but not necessarily in casual speech. Consider the following:

(52)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a. /poˈlis/</th>
<th>b. [plis]</th>
<th>c. [plis]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>police</td>
<td>/poˈliːz/</td>
<td>[pliːz]</td>
<td>[pliːz]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canoe</td>
<td>/ˈkɑːnu/</td>
<td>[ˈkʌnu]</td>
<td>[ˈkʌnu]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>balloon</td>
<td>/ˈbɑːlən/</td>
<td>[ˈblən]</td>
<td>[ˈblən]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>solicitor</td>
<td>/ˈsɔlɪtər/</td>
<td>[ˈslɪtə]</td>
<td>[ˈslɪtə]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>federal</td>
<td>/ˈfɛdərəl/</td>
<td>[ˈfɛdərəl]</td>
<td>[ˈfɛdərəl]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>catalyst</td>
<td>/ˈkætəlist/</td>
<td>[ˈkætəlist]</td>
<td>[ˈkætəlist]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>botany</td>
<td>/ˈbɑːtəni/</td>
<td>[ˈbʌtni]</td>
<td>[ˈbʌtni]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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In (52b) schwa is elided before sonorants; the syllable is maintained through syllabicciy of the sonorant. But in even faster speech, reduction can go yet further, affecting the syllable itself and also eliding unstressed vowels before obstruents. In (52c) sonorant consonants are no longer syllabic (except for the final one in federal); hence police, canoe etc. have monosyllabic pronunciations in fast speech. In solicitor the penultimate vowel is elided, with or without maintenance of that syllable through syllabicciy of the /s/. Notice that in this column, containing hypothetical ‘fast-speech’ forms (but omitting various other allophonic details), the structures left over from the various elisions are in violation of phonotactic constraints that we established in chapter 6 for citation forms: the [kn] in canoe is not a possible syllable onset in citation forms; and syllabic [ʃ] (solicitor) is similarly impossible in such forms.

The examples of weak forms in (51) above also exemplify the elision of consonants. The final /d/ of /and/, for example, is likely to be elided in come and see [kəmə'siː]; similarly, give them may be ['gəvəm]. In both cases, the elision of the consonant results in the simplification of a consonant cluster: the /d/ drops out of the /nds/ sequence in the former case, and the /d/ out of the /vɒd/ cluster in the latter. Again, this kind of consonant elision and cluster simplification is not restricted to weak forms of words. Here are some more examples:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{West Germany} & \quad /\text{west}'dʒəmən/ & [\text{westdʒəmən}] \\
\text{thousand times} & \quad /\text{θaʊzənd}'tæmz/ & [\text{θaʊzəntæmz}] \\
\text{hold still} & \quad /\text{hol}'stil/ & [\text{holstil}] \\
\text{textbook} & \quad /\text{tekst'buk}/ & [\text{teksbuk}] \\
\end{align*}
\]

In addition, sequences of identical (‘geminate’) consonants at word and morpheme boundaries are usually simplified in connected speech:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{keenness} & \quad /\text{kənəs}/ & [\text{kənəs}] \\
\text{bus-stop} & \quad /\text{bʌs}'stɔp/ & [\text{bʌstɔp}] \\
\text{weight-training} & \quad /\text{wet}'trænəŋ/ & [\text{weɪtrenəŋ}] \\
\text{call Linda} & \quad /\text{kəl}'lɪndə/ & [\text{kəlɪndə}] \\
\end{align*}
\]

The final type of structure simplification found in connected speech is \textit{assimilation}, the spread of features of a given segment onto a neighbouring segment. This was discussed in some detail in section 8.2.2, where it was noted that assimilation in English is of the ‘anticipatory’ kind; that is, segments anticipate features of following segments – the spread of features is ‘leftward’. We also noted then that assimilation is a ‘true’ allophonic phenomenon in that it is insensitive to nonphonological structure (for
example, word boundaries). We shall find this confirmed in our present, second examination of the phenomenon, but we shall also see that assimilation in connected speech is a phenomenon more powerful than the allophonics that we discussed in chapter 8: in casual speech, assimilation frequently causes the breakdown of phonemic distinctions that are operative in citation forms. Once again, we can draw our first examples from the list of weak forms in (51), where voicing assimilation occurs in of [oʃ] Spanish vs. [ʌv] English. Similarly, compare the citation form us /ʌs/ with the weak form give us [ʌz] a break. In both cases, the voicing contrast between obstruents is suspended by virtue of the assimilation process. Here are some further examples:

(55) ten pounds /tenpaʊdz/ \[tempaʊdz\]
in Crewe /ɪnkrə/ \[ɪŋkrə\]
miss you /mɪʃju:/ \[mɪʃju: \]
basket-ball /ˈbæskət-bɔl/ \[bæskət-bɔl\]

Assimilations such as these are extremely common in casual speech, illustrating once again the simplification – even the breakdown – of the phonological structure found in citation forms. [m] is not an allophone of /n/; but here we have [tem] as a realisation of ten. The /n/-/m/ contrast is suspended, in casual speech, in this context, as are other consonant contrasts in the other examples.

To gain a final impression of just how much phonological information present in citation forms may be lost in casual speech, consider the examples given below. These are more complex than earlier ones in that they display reduction, elision as well as assimilation at the same time:

(56) grand piano /ˈgrændpəʊnə/ \[grampju:nə\]
hand Colin (the money) /hændkəln/ \[hæŋkəln\]
bread and butter /bredændbʌtə/ \[brebændbʌtə\]

In grand piano, piano loses a syllable, in that /i/ turns into nonsyllabic [j] – [pj] becomes syllable onset; /o/ is reduced to [ə]; grand loses its final /d/, and the /n/ assimilates to the (now) following /l/. In the second example, the final /d/ of hand is elided and the /n/ assimilated to the following /k/ – nevertheless, the context ‘the money’ makes it unlikely that the phrase is misunderstood as hang Colin. And finally, the /and/ in bread and butter is reduced, through reduction, elision and assimilation, to [m]; and this assimilation spreads further to the left so as to turn bread into [breb]. How, one wonders, is it possible to understand casual speech? Examples such as these demonstrate quite clearly that the more casual or fast speech is, and
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the more an utterance deviates from the maximal clarity of citation forms, the greater is the role that the context plays in its comprehension.

Suggested reading to chapter 9

Section 9.1 On phrasal stress and compound stress see Liberman and Prince (1977), Hogg and McCully (1987: sect. 3.2) and, paying special attention to compounds with 'phrasal stress', Fudge (1984: ch. 5). On intonation the specialist literature should be consulted: for example, Halliday (1970), Ladd (1980), Cruttenden (1986).


