

Phonetics and Phonology
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PHONOLOGICAL PROCESSES



Phonological Process

- In connected speech, the usual aim is for **ease of communication rather than complete accuracy**. Therefore, speakers unconsciously draw on a number of phonological processes to aid that ease of communication. There are a good number of such processes.



- Speech production is not a series of isolated events. The process of articulation is a complex one. The articulatory organs are operating independently of each other, and many **fine adjustments** are carried out very rapidly as we speak. As a consequence, speech production often results in the articulation of **one sound affecting that of**

another.



- Articulatory adjustments that occur during the production of speech are called **processes**. Their cumulative effect often results in **making words easier to articulate**, and in this sense they are said to **make speech more efficient**.



- Some processes appear to **make articulation less, not more efficient**. English speakers, for example, often lengthen consonants and vowels when they are asked to repeat a word that someone has not heard clearly.

“It’s Fred.”

“Did you say, ‘It’s red’?”

“No, I said, ‘It’s Fffreed!’”



Assimilation

- Assimilation is resulted from the influence of one segment on another. It always results from **a sound becoming more like another nearby sound** in terms of one or more of its phonetic characteristic (e.g. assimilation of place, assimilation of manner, and/or assimilation of voice).

- **Assimilation of place** can be demonstrated by ratbag (that is, [ˈræpbæg]) or oatmeal (that is, [ˈəʊpmi:l]) where the /t/ sound is replaced by a /p/ sound. This is because the alveolar plosive /t/ is simplified into the /p/ sound which is closer to the bilabial plosive /b/.



- **Assimilation of manner** refers to when two different manners of articulation influence each other to form a different type of manner of articulation. Examples of this are the pronunciation of [Indian] as [ˈɪndʒən] or the pronunciation of [səʊldʒə(r)]. This is because the plosive /d/ combines with the approximant /j/ to form the affricate /dʒ/.



- **Assimilation of voice** is illustrated by the pronunciation of "have to" with an /f/ sound rather than the /v/ sound (i.e., [ˈhæftə]) as the voiced fricative is followed by a voiceless consonant.



The reasons for assimilation

- (a) the tongue cannot always move quickly enough to get from one position to another in order to articulate the next sound, or because
- (b) the mouth is too busy anticipating the following sound. In either case, it approximates the sound before moving on to the next segment of sound.

- (Further reading: *An Introduction to Phonetics: 132; Contemporary Linguistics: 53.*)



Dissimilation

- **Dissimilation is the opposite of assimilation. It results in two sounds becoming less alike in articulatory or acoustic terms. The resulting sequence of sounds is easier to articulate and distinguish. It is a much rarer process than assimilation.**

- One commonly heard of dissimilation in English occurs in words ending with three consecutive fricatives, such as *fifths*. Many speakers dissimilate the final [fθs] sequence to [fts], apparently, to break up the sequence of three fricatives with a stop.



Deletion

- Deletion is a process that removes a segment from certain phonetic contexts. It occurs in everyday rapid speech in many languages. In English, a schwa [ə] is often deleted when the next vowel in the words is stressed.

- Deletion also occurs as an alternative to dissimilation in words such as *fifths*. Many speakers delete the [θ] of the final consonant cluster and say [fifs]. In very rapid speech, both the second [f] and [θ] are sometimes deleted, resulting in [fis].



- (Further reading: *An Introduction to Phonetics: 134; Contemporary Linguistics: 55.*)



Epenthesis

- Epenthesis is a process that inserts a syllabic or a non-syllabic segment within an existing string of segments.
- For example, in careful speech, the words *warmth* and *something* are pronounced [wɔːmθ] and [sʌm.θɪŋ]. It is common in casual speech for speakers to insert a [p] between the [m] and [θ], and pronounce the words [wɔːrmpθ] and [sʌmpθɪŋ].

- (Further reading: *Contemporary Linguistics*: 55-56.)



Metathesis

- Metathesis is a process that reorders a sequence of segments. Metathesis often results in a sequence of phones that is easier to articulate.

- It is common to hear metathesis in the speech of children, who often cannot pronounce all the consonant sequences that adults can. For example, English-speaking children may pronounce *spaghetti* as *pesghetti* [pəsketi:].



- (Further reading: *Contemporary Linguistics*: 56.)



