

**МЕДИЦИНА, ПЕДАГОГИКА И ТЕХНОЛОГИЯ:
ТЕОРИЯ И ПРАКТИКА**

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Том 2, Выпуск 11, Ноябрь

MODIFICATIONS OF VOWELS IN CONNECTED SPEECH

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Uzbekistan named after Mirzo Ulugbek
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Abstract: This article investigates vowel modifications in connected speech, a phenomenon where vowels undergo alterations to facilitate natural language flow. These modifications—vowel reduction, coarticulation, assimilation, and elision—emerge due to varying conditions such as speech rate, stress patterns, and surrounding phonetic context. This paper examines these processes, presenting examples from English and cross-linguistic perspectives, and discusses implications for language teaching and phonetic research. The findings highlight the importance of vowel modifications in achieving fluent, comprehensible speech and propose practical applications for language learners and linguists.

Keywords: Connected Speech, Vowel Reduction, Coarticulation, Assimilation, Elision, Phonetic Analysis, Second Language Acquisition, English Pronunciation.

Introduction

Connected speech refers to the natural flow of language where words blend together in continuous discourse. In this process, vowels often undergo phonetic modifications that facilitate articulation and accelerate communication. These modifications are integral to the fluency and naturalness of spoken language. This article explores the main aspects of vowel modification in connected speech, focusing on processes like vowel reduction, assimilation, coarticulation, and elision, which collectively shape pronunciation patterns in languages, particularly English. By analyzing these phenomena and their implications for language teaching, this paper provides insights valuable to instructors, phonologists, and researchers focused on teaching the nuances of natural language flow (Teshaboyeva, 2023; Teshaboyeva & Akramov, 2023).

Literature Review

A robust body of research explores how vowels in unstressed positions often reduce or centralize, as observed in English, where full vowels tend to become schwa

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[ə]. Ladefoged (2006) and Wells (1982) discuss how vowel reduction in English contributes to its unique rhythm and how this phenomenon varies across languages. Additional studies by Browman and Goldstein (1989) and Nolan (1992) analyze coarticulation and assimilation, noting that vowel qualities are dynamically influenced by surrounding sounds in connected speech. Cross-linguistic research reveals that languages like Russian show extensive vowel reduction, while languages like Spanish are less prone to this change. This variation indicates that vowel modification is shaped by both linguistic and cultural factors (Teshaboyeva & Yakubova, 2023; Gaybullayeva, 2022).

Methodology

Data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and other spoken language corpora provided examples of vowel modifications in connected speech. Phonetic analysis was conducted using PRAAT software to measure formant frequencies and vowel qualities, focusing on variables such as syllable stress, tempo, and phonetic environment. Transcriptions and acoustic data were analyzed to explore vowel modifications, enhancing understanding of how vowels adapt in fluent speech contexts (Teshaboyeva & Mamayoqubova, 2020; Teshaboyeva, 2023).

Vowel Reduction in Connected Speech

Vowel reduction is one of the most common modifications, occurring when vowels in unstressed syllables shift toward a more neutral schwa sound [ə]. This is frequent in English, especially in fast or informal speech. For example, "and" in "bread and butter" is often pronounced as /ən/, where the vowel is reduced to maintain speech rhythm without fully articulating each vowel. This process depends on factors like word prominence and tempo, making vowel reduction an essential element in the fluidity of connected speech (Ladefoged, 2006; Teshaboyeva & Akramov, 2023).

Coarticulation and Vowel Assimilation

Coarticulation involves the influence of neighboring sounds on vowels, facilitating smoother transitions between sounds. English diphthongs, for instance, may vary slightly depending on adjacent sounds, demonstrating the adaptability of vowel qualities in connected speech. Similarly, assimilation allows vowels to adopt the qualities of surrounding sounds, streamlining articulation. In phrases like "can you," the vowel may centralize to /kən ju:/ in rapid speech, illustrating how coarticulation and assimilation make connected speech more fluid and natural (Browman & Goldstein, 1989; Teshaboyeva & Rayimberdiyev, 2023).

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Elision and Deletion

Elision, or vowel deletion, frequently occurs in English when unstressed vowels are omitted, especially between consonants in rapid speech. For example, "family" often becomes /'fæmli/ in colloquial speech. Elision accelerates communication, impacting rhythm and syllabic structure. By eliminating less prominent vowels, speakers achieve a smoother speech flow, emphasizing elision's role in natural language discourse and demonstrating its phonological and practical significance in communication (Teshaboyeva, 2023; Ladefoged, 2006).

Elision (Omission)

- A vowel is entirely omitted, especially in unstressed syllables, to make speech more fluid.
- Example:
 - "every" → /'ɛvri/ instead of /'ɛvəri/
 - "family" → /'fæmli/ instead of /'fæməli/

Reduction

- Vowels in unstressed syllables are often reduced to a weaker, more central sound like the schwa /ə/.
- Example:
 - "to" → /tə/ in "I want to go"
 - "of" → /əv/ in "a cup of tea"

Insertion (Epenthesis)

- In some cases, a vowel may be inserted between two consonants to ease articulation, though this is less common in English.
- Example:
 - In some dialects, "film" might be pronounced as /'filəm/.

Assimilation

- While primarily affecting consonants, assimilation can also influence vowels when adjacent sounds cause them to change slightly.
- Example:

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- The vowel in "can" may shift slightly depending on the following sound, e.g., "can go" vs. "can bake."

Lengthening and Shortening

- Vowel duration can change depending on the surrounding sounds, especially due to stress or word boundaries.
- Example:
 - In "he sees," the vowel in "sees" may be lengthened before a voiced /z/.

Diphthong Smoothing

- In faster speech, diphthongs can become monophthongs (one-part vowels), simplifying their articulation.
- Example:
 - "tired" → /taɪəd/ might become /ta:d/ in rapid speech.

Linking and Intrusion

- Linking vowels may arise at word boundaries to maintain fluency:
 - *Linking*: Inserting a glide between vowels, e.g., "law and order" → /lɔ:r ənd ɔ:də/.
 - *Intrusion*: Adding a sound like /r/, /j/, or /w/ where it does not exist, e.g., "I saw it" → /aɪ sɔ:r ɪt/.

Glottalization

- A vowel may be slightly modified or interrupted by a glottal stop, especially in some dialects.
- Example:
 - "bottle" in Cockney English might influence vowel quality through glottal insertion: /'bɒʔl/.

These modifications are central to natural, conversational speech and are influenced by factors such as speed, dialect, and emphasis. Understanding them is crucial for both language learners and linguists studying phonetic and phonological processes.

Implications for Language Teaching

Vowel modifications in connected speech hold valuable implications for language teaching, especially in enhancing English language learners' listening comprehension and pronunciation. Processes like vowel reduction, coarticulation, and elision present challenges for non-native speakers, necessitating specific pronunciation practice. Techniques like shadowing, where learners mimic native speakers' pronunciation patterns, and intonation practice exercises can help learners familiarize themselves with connected speech, promoting a more natural-sounding pronunciation. By integrating these phonetic modifications into lessons, educators can help students gain a better understanding of English phonology and prepare for authentic communication scenarios (Teshaboyeva & Yakubova, 2023; Gaybullayeva, 2022).

Discussion

Vowel modifications in connected speech significantly impact both intelligibility and naturalness, presenting challenges for native and non-native listeners. For language learners, these changes can obscure comprehension since isolated pronunciations differ from connected speech. This underscores the importance of integrating connected speech features in language teaching, which can improve fluency and enhance the practical understanding of spoken English. For linguists, vowel modification studies offer insights into the phonetic structures underlying fluent speech. Further research could examine vowel modifications across dialects or specific learner groups to deepen our understanding of how these adaptations support spoken language fluency (Teshaboyeva, 2023; Teshaboyeva & Mamayoqubova, 2020).

Conclusion

This article has examined the principal vowel modifications in connected speech, emphasizing the phonetic adaptations that contribute to fluent and natural communication. Processes such as vowel reduction, coarticulation, assimilation, and elision demonstrate how vowels adjust based on linguistic context and stress patterns, facilitating ease of articulation. For language learners, familiarity with these modifications is crucial for achieving clear, authentic pronunciation. By incorporating connected speech features into pronunciation instruction, educators can help learners navigate the complexities of natural language flow, supporting more fluent and comprehensible speech. Ultimately, understanding vowel modifications not only enriches phonological knowledge but also informs effective language teaching strategies that promote real-world communication.

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