



Research Paper

Modern Perspectives of Assimilation Analysis in English

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Abstract

Assimilation is a phonological process where one sound is changed to be identical or similar to another neighboring sound, which is regarded as the most important type of sound change. This study deals with a gap that there is a lack of a unified framework. By adopting an analytical and descriptive approach, assimilation is being investigated with reference to English. The objective of this study is to develop a comprehensive classification of assimilation in English. The model used for the analysis is composed of 10 perspectives. They are the type of the segment assimilated, the status of the phoneme on the basis of time, origin, on the basis of position in the syntagmatic axis, the degree of stability, the degree of opacity, the direction of influence, the degree of similarity, the distance between sounds, and on the basis of features affected. The findings show that assimilation is a predictable phenomenon. The present study concludes that the descriptive analytical approach suggests more understanding to connected speech.

Keywords: assimilation, direction, distance, phonological features, phonetics, stability

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I. INTRODUCTION

Assimilation refers to the process where a sound becomes more similar to a neighboring sound. Sounds in a word or across word boundaries can influence each other, resulting in modifications in pronunciation during connected speech. When the pronunciation of a word changes due to the effect of sounds in a neighboring word, the phenomenon is identified as assimilation. Recent phonetic research has dealt with this process via the concept of co-articulation, which concentrates on the simultaneous nature of articulatory movements while speech production (Hardcastle & Hewlett, 1999).

Assimilation is one of the main phonological processes in spoken language, since it directly reflects how sounds interrelate in casual, continuous speech. Speech sounds influence each other in systematic ways for the sake of fluency, ease of articulation, as well as rhythmic continuity. Therefore, understanding assimilation is essential to explain how abstract phonological units are realized in real speech.

Assimilation is usually studied through the perspective of limited classification, partial classification. To fill this gap, this study achieves a systematic understanding of assimilation as well as tries to show how assimilation can be studied via phonetic realization and phonological theory. Recent phonetic research deals with the concept of assimilation as co-articulation despite the fact that the latter term refers to the certain sounds that are uttered together. However, assimilation in phonological theory is studied within the phonological theory through certain dimensions, namely direction, degree, and domain. In this paper, the researcher doesn't make a difference between assimilation and co-articulation. Along with many other linguists, the recent work adopts a classificatory model as an all-purpose model. The idea of assimilation suggests the appearance of two segments, at least, whether they are phonemes or allophones, that by affecting each other change their phonetic characteristics. Thus, the assimilée is the segment that is being assimilated and the assimilator is the segment which assimilates another segment. Furthermore, the assimilant is the segment resulting from the assimilation. Theoretically, these categories can be treated as abstract constructs.

II. METHODS

The present study subjects an analytical model. The researcher classifies the types of assimilation according to ten perspectives, namely the type of speech sound, the emic-etic distinction, on the basis of the time of origin, on the basis of the degree of fixity, opacity, direction of influence, degree of assimilate of

similarity, distance, and finally the features affected, data collection takes place in a systematic way where examples are taken from naturally occurring phrases where rhythm, situational patterns play a role in assimilation.

III. RESULTS

Ten examples of assimilation are presented in this section, which are analyzed according to the analytical theory presented above. Each example is given a phonetic transcription and assimilation then is presented.

Data 1: *too soon* → [t^wu: s^wū:n^w]

In this example, lip rounding spreads from the high-back rounded vowel /u:/ and the labio-velar glide environment, affecting adjacent consonants. This is a case of progressive and regressive labial (secondary) assimilation, phonetic in nature, and incomplete, as the consonants retain their primary place of articulation.

Data 2: *good boy* → [g^wub^w b^wɔɪ]

The bilabial plosive /b/ causes labialization of the preceding voiced plosive /d/, which is placed closer to /b/. This is a regressive, contiguous, consonantal assimilation of place, often approaching complete assimilation in rapid speech.

Data 3: *ten cups* → [t^heⁿk^hʌps]

The alveolar-nasal /n/ is heard as a velar-nasal /ŋ/ due to the influence of the following velar-plosive /k/. This represents a regressive, complete, contiguous assimilation of place of articulation, resulting in a phonemic change.

Data 4: *handbag* → [hæmbæg]

The alveolar-nasal /n/ due to the effect of the bilabial /b/ becomes /m/. This is a regressive, complete, consonantal assimilation of place, that is usually observed in rapid casual speech.

Data 5: *bad girl* → [bæg gɜ:l]

The alveolar-plosive /d/ assimilates to the velar /g/, to follow on in a velar-plosive. This is a regressive, complete assimilation of place of articulation. It occurs across word boundaries.

Data 6: *this shop* → [ðɪʃ ʃɒp]

The alveolar-fricative /s/ in *this* /ðɪs/ becomes post-alveolar /ʃ/ due to the effect of the following post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/. This is a regressive, complete assimilation of place, producing a new surface segment.

Data 7: *used to* → [ju:st tu:] / [ju:s tu:]

The voiced alveolar-fricative /z/ becomes voiceless /s/ due to the influence of the following voiceless-plosive /t/. This is a regressive, partial assimilation of voicing, phonemic in effect.

Data 8: *dogs* → [dɒgz]

The plural morpheme /-s/ is realized as /z/ after the voiced consonant /g/. This is a progressive assimilation of voicing, morphophonemic in nature, and stable across speech styles.

Data 9: *fickle* → [fɪkəl]

The plosive /k/ is released laterally before the following lateral /l/. This denotes airstream-direction assimilation, where the plosive release of adapts to the articulatory properties of the following consonant.

Data 10: *sometimes* → [s[^]ˌm̩ntaɪmz]

In this example, the alveolar-nasal /n/ is influenced by the following bilabial-nasal /m/. The /n/ becomes bilabialized and is realized as /m/. This is a consonantal, regressive, contiguous, partial assimilation of place of articulation. The transformation occurs across a morpheme boundary in connected speech and is variable, depending on speech rate.

The following is a comprehensive comparative table analyzing sample examples you provided: *sometimes, too soon, good boy, and ten cups*:

Table (1): A Comparative Table of Connected Speech Processes in Selected English Phrases

Example	Assimilable	Assimilator	Type (Consonantal/Vocalic)	Synchronic/Diachronic	Inter/Intra-lexemic	Variable/Stable	Transparent/Opaque	Direction	Completeness	Contiguity	Feature Assimilated
<i>sometimes</i> [sm̩ntaɪmz]	[m]	[n]	Consonantal	Synchronic	Inter-lexemic	Variable	Transparent	Regressive	Complete	Contiguous	Place (bilabial → alveolar)
<i>too soon</i> [tʰuːsʷuːnʷ]	[s]	[uː]	Consonantal with vocalic influence	Synchronic	Inter-lexemic	Variable	Transparent	Bidirectional (progressive & regressive)	Partial	Contiguous	Secondary articulation: labialization
<i>good boy</i> [gʷubʷbʷɔɪ]	[b]	Following [b]	Consonantal	Synchronic	Inter-lexemic	Variable	Transparent	Regressive	Complete	Contiguous	Secondary articulation: labialization
<i>ten cups</i> [tʰeᵏʰʌps]	/n/	/k/	Consonantal	Synchronic	Inter-lexemic	Variable	Transparent	Regressive	Complete	Contiguous	Place (alveolar → velar)

IV. DISCUSSION

The previous analysis of ten examples of assimilation in English connected speech proves that assimilation is a systematic, patterned phonological process rather than a random phonetic change. Assimilation adjustments in the previous examples lead some phonological features appear mainly the place of articulation which precedes voicing and labialization. In sequences of nasal plosive or fricative-fricative usually regressive assimilation takes place. Furthermore, immediate proximity of segments results in the frequent co-occurrence of contiguous assimilation. This supports the phonological theory of assimilation as discussed by Abercrombie (1967) and Pavlik (2009) where regressive assimilation is the dominant feature. The speakers expect the following sound before they complete the utterance. Furthermore, individual features like place and voicing play a great role in the distinction between complete and partial assimilation. Although nasal place assimilation and place assimilation in examples like handbag and used to cope with the previous studies of English assimilation, The present study managed different dimensions within a unified classificatory model which is also pedagogically important in teaching English pronunciation.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to give a precise work of assimilation in English language based on ten analytical perspectives. Assimilation may occur within word level or within word boundaries. Moreover, it may occur due to the effect of the surrounding sounds. Thus, assimilation is important in keeping articulatory fluency, which leads to the major function of assimilation, namely ease of articulation.

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