

Raising Reduced Forms Awareness in EFL Learners' Listening and Speaking Abilities Sensibilisation aux formes réduites aux capacités d'écoute et d'expression orale des apprenants d'ALE

Sensibilisation aux formes réduites aux capacités d'écoute et d'expression orale des apprenants d'ALE

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Abstract

This research paper was conducted to investigate and report the phonological problems that Master One English as a Foreign Language students at the university of Adrar face when they listen to spoken discourse, especially when they try to perceive and interpret words that undergo sound modifications at word boundaries, namely assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking and weak forms. The sample comprised a class of Master One with 20 students who were subjected to a small text which is used for two purposes; first, as a cloze dictation test to measure students' ability to recognize words undergoing sound modifications, and the same text was transcribed and given to students where they were asked to provide any instance of reduced forms processes. The results revealed that students had a lot of difficulties in breaking up words into their individual sounds (i.e., lexical segmentation) due to the occurrence of reduced forms that blurred the ends and beginnings of words. With the transcribed text, students produced very few instances of the required reduced forms. The results of the investigation beg the teachers of English to handle and use native-like English.

Keywords: listening difficulties - spoken discourse - word recognition - Sound modification- Reduced forms

Résumé

Ce travail de recherche a été mené pour étudier et rapporter les problèmes phonologiques auxquels sont confrontés les étudiants du Master Anglais comme Langue Etrangère de l'université d'Adrar lorsqu'ils écoutent un discours parlé, en particulier lorsqu'ils tentent de percevoir et d'interpréter des mots qui subissent des modifications sonores aux limites des mots, à savoir l'assimilation, élision, intrusion, liaison et formes faibles. L'échantillon était constitué d'une classe de première année Master de 20 étudiants qui ont été soumis à un petit texte utilisé à deux fins : d'abord, comme teste de dictée pour mesurer la capacité des étudiants à reconnaître des mots subissant des modifications sonores, et le même texte a été transcrit et remis aux étudiants où il leur a été demandé de fournir toute instance de processus de formes réduites. Les résultats ont révélé que les étudiants avaient beaucoup de difficultés à diviser les mots en leurs sons individuels (c'est-à-dire la segmentation lexicale) en raison de l'apparition de formes réduites qui brouillaient les fins et les débuts des mots. Avec le texte transcrit, les étudiants ont

produit très peu d'exemples des formes réduites requises. Les résultats plaident les professeurs d'anglais soient prêts à maîtriser et utiliser l'anglais comme un locuteur natif.

Mots- clés: difficultés d'écoute - discours parlé - reconnaissance de mots - modification du son- Formes réduites

Introduction

In spite of its significance in language learning, listening is still considered the most ignored and misrepresented in ESL/EFL classrooms, and hence, the least well taught language skill. Furthermore, listening is the skill that is recognized as the most difficult to acquire due to its complicated process that allows us to understand and interpret spoken discourse by using different phonetic, phonological, prosodic, lexical, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic sources. Grammatical background knowledge enables listeners to apply morphological and syntactic rules to recognize not only the words inflections but also understand whether the sentences being heard are cohesively and coherently well formed as well. All the same, phonological knowledge is also essential in listening comprehension, since listeners need to know not only the phonemic segmentation of words, but must understand aspects of reduced forms such as assimilation, elision, intrusion, contraction, word stress, sentence stress, linking and weak forms, etc. as well. Indeed, Lynch and Mendelsohn (2002: 194) indicate that one of the distinctive characteristics of listening involves "the presence of a rich prosody (stress, intonation, rhythm, loudness, etc.), which is absent in the written discourse."

Often it is not the vocabulary, nor the grammar, which impedes understanding. Students may know these elements and yet be unable to understand what they hear. The principal reason which leads to their inability to comprehend spoken English is that they have been largely trained in written expression, reading comprehension or tapes where speakers speak especially slowly for foreigners, which is a form of language that does not really mirror the language of the world and facilitates comprehension only artificially. So these students are often absolutely confounded when they encounter spontaneous spoken English as it is delivered in a style to which they have not yet been exposed; it is a style which is more rapid and less explicit than they have been accustomed to follow.

It is believed that EFL students' listening skill would not be improved because most of the teaching materials used by teachers are demystified and does not reflect the real world. For example, Rosa (2002) argues that instructional materials are weak in covering the genuine listening process and pay little attention to the phonological traits that distinguish the speech of native speakers, regardless of how diverse the approaches used are. As a result, if students encounter altered and artificial language in the classroom, they will only fail to understand the genuine language spoken by native speakers, or the one they will hear when they watch television, listen to the radio, or to songs.

One of the elements that contributes to the uniqueness and beauty of English phonology is the way sounds interact when they come into contact. Sounds in streams of speech share similar features at word borders; some are dropped, while others are merely harmonized, others are catenated or blended to form a new sound for easy pronunciation and natural speaking. These linguistic elements, which promote harmony and economy, lead to what is known as reduced speech. Speech is natural; people do not say a word, stop, and then say the next one in the sentence. Words collide during speech, causing the beginning sound of the next

word to interact with the last sound of the word before it. Speech flows naturally and rhythmically, and the sounds at the boundaries of some words can cause people to pronounce them differently.

Brown (1984) argued the teaching of the comprehension of normal, informally pronounced English in the same serious way as the pronunciation of spoken English and the comprehension of written English. Therefore, a study on the aspects of rapid speech will not only contribute to students' competence to comprehend spoken discourse, but also to their competence to produce fluent and comprehensible speech.

In this paper, we investigate the reduced forms phenomena of assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking and weak forms. These sound alterations frequently occur, when native speakers speak their first language at a natural pace and therefore cause troubles to second and foreign language learners while listening.

1. Purpose of the Study

This study aims at providing information about one of the key functions of spoken English, that is, reduced forms potentially affecting comprehension, and to draw certain implications that may be helpful for English as foreign language pedagogy.

The main focus of this study will be the shortened versions of Content words—words with the greatest meaning, like nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs and Function words—words with the least meaning, like prepositions, articles, pronouns, and auxiliaries— arising from assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking and weak forms, since the fact that most of these words when uttered at a normal conversational rate are almost unrecognizable to English as a Foreign Language students.

Given the interrelationship of aural and oral skills and the important role of oral abilities in interacting in a second or a foreign language, this study sought to ascertain if the English reduced forms, which are a necessary component of spoken English, have any influence on the development of the listening comprehension of English as a Foreign Language students at Adrar University and their ability to recognize and use the reduced forms in their daily discourses. Actually, in this study we attempted to find satisfactory answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the reduced forms impede students' comprehension?
2. How far do sound changes at word boundaries affect students' recognition of English words?

2. Statement of the Problem

In written language, learners are assisted in making the jump from carefully controlled materials to less structured reading. However in various aspects of informal spoken English, little or no assistance and very few guidelines are provided. The assumption is made that the

students will automatically understand the spoken language without specific practice in it. On the other hand, when students learn a new word, they usually learn both its spoken and written forms. Their recognition of it is linked to their knowledge of what it looks like on paper and what it sounds like when carefully pronounced in isolation. But they have not, often enough, learnt what it sounds like when uttered quickly in a sentence and placed side by side with other words which may influence its pronunciation. A listener may simply not recognize a word as such or may not even be aware that it exists at all if it is pronounced differently in casual speech than it was in formal speech when it was first learned.

Ur (1984) points out that words become far more difficult to recognize once they are integrated into sentences within colloquial, spontaneous speech. Among these problems are assimilation, elision of consonants, unstressed syllables, disappearance of weak forms, distortion of the component words, or ill-defined word-division in common collocations. Gillian Brown (1984) calls these factors when they combine an "acoustic blur", from which listeners have to try to make over the words that the speaker actually spoke of.

Hymes (1971, 1972) argued that we have to pay attention to language use in its social context. Students have to be exposed to listening to the language in communicative contexts so that they can train their ears to the rhythm and sounds of the language. They need to be made aware of the many aspects of reduced forms such as weak forms, assimilation, elision, intrusion, and linking, etc.

3. Reduced Forms

Reduced forms are defined as the changes that take place in natural speech due to the context or surrounding in which words are found. Brown and Hilferty (1986) employ the phrase "reduced forms" to refer to the processes of elision, assimilation, reduction, and contraction (e.g., *coulda* for *could have*, *hafta* for *have to*, *howarya* for *how are you*, *wanna* for *want to* and *there's* for *there is*). Different terms are used to describe the same phenomenon; for example Crystal (1997), termed them sandhi forms, Ur (1984) called them weak forms, (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin ,1996) used reduced speech forms while Goh (2002) called them connected speech.

4. Processes Underlying Reduced Forms

The processes that we have identified as underlying reduced forms are assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking, also known as liaison, and weak forms. Let's consider each of these processes briefly in turn:

4.1 Assimilation

Assimilation refers to the phonological process by which one sound influences the articulation of another sound (Trask, 1996; Crystal, 2008; Pavlik, 2009). The processes of assimilation can be classified in terms of direction as regressive, progressive and coalescent. Regressive assimilation, also known as Anticipatory assimilation occurs when a sound that

comes before alters due to a sound that comes after it i.e. in a sequence of A and B sounds, segment B influences segment A and makes it take some or all of its features. For instance, the words "is" and "she" are pronounced [ɪz] and [ʃi, ʃi:], respectively. However, when these two words appear together, as in the phrase "is she," they are frequently pronounced [ɪʒʃi:] as opposed to [ɪzʃi:]. The subsequent consonant, a palato-alveolar fricative sound, has caused the alveolar place of articulation of the sound [z] to shift to a palato-alveolar articulation.

Progressive assimilation is the process by which a sound picks up some or all of the characteristics of a sound that comes before it; sound A influences sound B and makes it take some if not all of its features. This intra-word assimilation can occur in the forms of nouns, the third-person singular form of verbs in the simple present tense, or the possessive, like in the cases of cats and dogs, jumps and runs, and Pat's and Pam's, respectively. It can also happen at word boundaries, like in the pronunciation of "did you" [dɪdʒu: , dɪdʒə]. 'th-Dropping' is another form of progressive assimilation. High frequency function words are affected, usually determiners beginning with a weak fricative /ð/. Although non-nasal consonants may also be involved, this form of assimilation primarily takes place in a nasal environment, that is, when the previous consonant that initiates assimilation is a nasal. As an illustration, ("it wasn't there" [ɪtwɒznt | ðɛə], "in the" [ɪn | ðə], and "in that case" [ɪn | ðətkeɪs] are realized as [ɪtwɒznnɛə], [ɪnnə] and [ɪnnəkkeɪs]. The dental fricative has changed into alveolar nasal under the influence of the alveolar nasal.

Coalescent or reciprocal assimilation takes place when two sounds affect each other. In terms of degree, assimilation is classified into *partial* or *total* (Crystal, 2008). Partial assimilation, on the one hand, occurs when one sound takes some, but not all, of the phonetic features of another sound. Total assimilation, on the other hand, occurs when one sound takes all the phonetic features of another sound. The two sounds merge together, resulting in a geminate, for example "hot pot" is pronounced as [hɒppɒt], the alveolar plosive [t] has changed into bilabial plosive [p]. The proper form for the phrase "ten bikes" in quick speech is [tembaɪks], not [tenbaɪks], which would sound a little "careful." In this instance, there has been a partial assimilation: the [n] sound has become [m] due to its adoption of the bilabiality of the subsequent [b]. But it hasn't taken on its plosiveness. The assimilation is total in "ten mice" [temmaɪs], where the [n] sound is now identical with the [m] which influenced it (Pavlik, 2009).

4.2 Elision

Elision, sometimes referred to as deletion and gradation, is the process of losing one or more phonemes, typically to make pronunciation easier. Elision can happen to vowels as well as consonants, however it is considerably more often with consonants. Extreme cases of vowel reduction or weakening occur when a word loses all ability to be articulated, such as in the cases of "police," "correct," or "suppose," which become [pli:s], [krɛkt], or [spəʊz]. Only in rare occasions such as in some realisations of the word "perhaps", both consonants and vowels may be elided at the same time, e.g. yielding [præps] (Roach, 2001).

4.2.1 Elision and Assimilation

Elision often occurs in conjunction with or precedes assimilation. That is, elision and assimilation can apply at the same time. For example, when pronounced fully, the word "handbag" is realized as /hændbæg/. However, the /d/ is in a place where **elision** is possible, so "handbag" could be produced as [hænbæg]. Moreover, the elision of [d] leaves [n] in a position for place of assimilation. For this reason, we frequently hear [hæmbæg]. In this final example, we observe once more that processes with reduced forms have the ability to affect meaning: Is [hæmbæg] only a simplified version of "ham bag" or does it incorporate elision and dentalization? In real life, you would likely choose the most likely meaning because you would have more context and understanding of the speaker's customs and preferences. So, in reality, we are rarely confused by reduced forms, although they do have the potential to cause misunderstandings (Pavlik, 2009).

4.2.2 Dropping

Initial <h> is frequently dropped in English unstressed pronouns. Examples of this include "tell her" [tɛlə] or "tell him" [tɛlɪm], "give her" [gɪvə] or "give him" [gɪvɪm], and forms of the auxiliary have, such as "would have" [wʊdəv] or "should have" [ʃʊdəv]. Even in standard reference accents, dropping is common.

4.2.3 Cluster Reduction

In a cluster of two or more consonant segments, often of a similar nature, English speakers frequently eliminate one of the consonants in such clusters to make them simpler. There is a greater likelihood of elision occurring in longer clusters. In order to produce two plosives in a sequence, it would be more difficult to produce voiceless oral plosives since doing so would need two closure stages. Daniel Jones (2006) makes a distinction between intra- and inter-word cluster reductions. For instance, "asked" [ɑ:skt] becomes [ɑ:st], "lecture" ['lɛktʃə] becomes ['lɛkʃə], "desk top" ['dɛsk tɒp] becomes ['dɛs tɒp], "kept quiet" [kɛpt'kwaiət] becomes [kɛp'kwaiət], and "hard disk" [hɑ:d'dɪsk] becomes [hɑ:'dɪsk]. If a reduction occurs inside a word, it may also lead to a reduction in the number of syllables, such as in the examples given in section 4.2 above, which have become mono-syllabic.

4.2.4 Contraction

Contraction is a specific type of elision that involves a set of grammatical rules. It has been used in spoken language for so long that even language purists do not object to it. These days, contractions are acceptable in "proper written English." Additionally, it is somewhat acknowledged in written summaries of spoken materials. A popular way to contract is to use various forms of the auxiliaries have, be, will, and shall. For instance:

-ve: *I've, we've, you've, they've*; potential ambiguity because *have* may either be a full verb or auxiliary;

-d: *I'd, we'd, you'd, (s)he'd, they'd*; rarely *it'd*; potential ambiguity *should/would* vs. *had*;

-s: *what's, (s)he's, it's*; potential ambiguity because *he's* can be either *he is* or *he has*;

-re: *we're, you're, they're*; more rarely *what're*;

-ll: *I'll, we'll, you'll, (s)he'll, it'll, they'll*-s: *what is, (s)he is, it is*; possible ambiguity as *he* can be either *what he has* or *what he is*.

In a different kind of contraction, the negative particle is expressed in a shortened form without the use of an auxiliary, as in *isn't, doesn't, don't, hasn't, haven't, won't, shan't, can't, would't, could't, shouldn't, oughtn't, needn't, mustn't, daren't*.

4.3 Intrusion

Intrusion means an extra sound "intrudes" into the spoken utterance usually a /r/, /j/ or /w/ sound between two other vowel sounds. For example, we frequently hear the /r/ sound interfering after "media", the /j/ sound after "I", and the /w/ sound after "go" in the words "media event", "I always", and "go away." Other instances are "he/j/asked", "she/j/answered", "I want to/w/eat", "please do/w/it", "law/r/and order", "the saw/r/ in the workshop" (Handke, 2008).

4.4 Linking or Liaison

Linking, also called Catenation, is probably what most people think of when they first think of connected speech. This happens when the end of one word integrates into another. Linking occurs when the final consonant sound of the preceding word is joined to the vowel sound at the beginning of the following word. For example, "an apple" [ənæpl], "first of all" [fɜːstɒvɔːl]. Other examples are: I want "this orange" (thisorange), "is he" busy? (isi busy?), "cats or" dogs (Catsordogs).

4.5 Weak Forms

Native speakers of English do not pronounce only strong forms of words. It would sound unnaturally and wrong to them. There are roughly forty English words that may be pronounced either in their strong or weak forms (Roach 2009, p.102). It is very useful to learn to use weak forms as they are an essential part of English speech, otherwise the learners may have difficulties to understand native speakers or speakers who use them. Function words are the majority of words that have both strong and weak variants such as auxiliaries, conjunctions, prepositions, etc. It is more usual for function words to be pronounced in their weak forms. Nevertheless, Roach (1991) lays out a few basic guidelines for using terms in their strong form:

- When a weak form of a word stands at the end of a sentence: 'Here's where it came **from**.'
- When a word in a sentence has a weak form that contrasts with another word: 'The letter is **from** him, not to him.'
- When we want to emphasize a weak form of a word: 'You **must** give me more money.'
- When a word is quoted in its weakest form: "You shouldn't put '**and**' at the end of a sentence" (pp. 102 - 106).

5. The Study Subjects

The participants in the study were a class of 20 Master One students from Adrar University. They are graduate students and their levels of English are high intermediate and advanced. Their age varied between 21 and 40 years old. They have all been taught the reduced form processes during the first semester. They have one hour and a half lecture and one hour and a half TD per week. All subjects reported to have started studying English from middle school. None of the subjects reported to have travelled or spent some time in a country where English is the native language.

6. Methodology

This study's objective is to evaluate the participants' proficiency with the reduced forms of English. In addition to teaching these forms once a week during the first semester, we administered a dictation that included a sampling of the reduced form processes they had already learned in class. We had the students listen to a short text containing these reduced forms. The text was read three times in different rates: slow, relaxed, and fast pronunciations. While listening, students were asked to write down the full forms of the words that represented what they were hearing. Pauses were provided between each reading to give students time to write. The results were obtained by counting up the number of reduced forms instances the students had managed to write down (see Brown & Hilferty, 1998, for more on reduced forms dictations). The same material was re-employed as a transcription text. Students were given the transcribed text and were asked to add the various aspects of reduced forms at the underlined words. And for each instance, they were asked to say whether the indicated place is assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking or weak form. The sample text contains fifteen instances of reduced forms: four instances of assimilation, four instances of elision, one instance of intrusion, two instance of linking and four instances of weak form. The data were displayed in straightforward statistical tables, and the examinees' performance trends were indicated by the figures in handling the aspects under study.

7. Presentation of Data

The number of correct answers and their percentages are shown in table one below. They are obtained by counting the number of students who successfully recognized and wrote down all the expected words that underwent modifications.

Full words	Nature of reduced forms	Number of right answers	Total percentages of right answers
1. first	elision	06/20	30%
2. of	weak form	12/20	60%
3. this year	assimilation	03/20	15%
4. this year are	linking	00/20	00%
5. are	weak form	08/20	40%

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6. bound	elision	00/20	00%
7. to	weak form	13/20	65%
8. plagued	elision	00/20	00%
9. in the	assimilation	00/20	00%
10. of	weak form	14/20	70%
11. department	assimilation	01/20	05%
12. saw Ian	intrusion	00/20	00%
13. once in	linking	07/20	35%
14. in Boston	assimilation	04/20	20%
15. Boston	elision	20/20	100%
			29.33%

Table 1: Students' performances in fast speech dictation

The figures in table two below are the number of correct answers and their percentages. They are obtained by counting the number of students who successfully produced and transcribed the expected words with the proposed instances of reduced forms.

Aspects of reduced forms	Number of items	Correct answers	Percentage
1. Assimilation	04	09/20	45%
2. Elision	04	12/20	60%
3. Intrusion	01	00/20	00%
4. Linking	02	08/20	40%
5. Weak forms	04	10/20	50%
			39%

Table 2: Students' performances in transcription task with features of reduced forms

7.1 Descriptive Data of Fast Speech Dictation

The cloze dictation test results are summarized in table three below. The findings demonstrate that the 88 accurate responses are significantly far below average. Similarly, the percentage (29.33%) is very low and far below average. Accordingly, these findings indicated that Master One students found difficulties in recognizing words when uttered at a normal conversational rate, especially assimilated words.

Variable	Number of items	Number of participants	Correct answers	Percentage
Cloze dictation	15	20	88	29.33%

Table 3: Descriptive Data of Fast Speech Dictation

7.2 Descriptive Data of Transcription Task

Table four recapitulates the results of the transcription task. The results indicate that the number of correct answers (140) is below average. Likewise, the percentage (35%) is below average. Therefore, these findings showed that Master One students failed to recognize and produce the various aspects of reduced forms.

Variable	Number of items	Number of participants	Correct answers	Percentage
Transcription task	15	20	140	39%

Table 4: Descriptive Data of Transcription Task

8. Results

This section introduces the results obtained from the analysis of the cloze dictation test and the transcription test.

8.1 Students' Responses to the Cloze Dictation Test

A glance at table one above shows that a great number of participants failed to recognise and write down the full form of the words that underwent modifications, i.e. their performances were far below average (29.33%). For instance, none (00%) of the 20 participants could produce the right spelling of the words "this year are" undergoing linking, "bound" undergoing elision, "in the" undergoing assimilation and "saw Ian" undergoing intrusion. With the exception of function words (prepositions) like "of" and their weak form, the remaining percentages of correct items are either below average or weak. (60%, 70%), "to" (65%) and the word "Boston" undergoing elision (100%). This means that the students were unable to perceive the words that underwent modifications at word boundaries. Accordingly, the percentages of the words "first" undergoing elision (30%), "are" with weak form (40%) and "once in" undergoing linking (35%) are below average while the percentages of the words undergoing especially assimilation like "this year" (15%), "department" (05%) and "in Boston" (20%) are very weak. The obtained results revealed that students had difficulties when listening to spoken discourse due to their lack of awareness of the features of reduced forms.

8.2 Students' Responses to the Transcription Test

A close look at the figures in table two above indicates that students' performances were far below average, i.e. only (39%) of the proposed instances of each feature of the reduced forms was recognised and represented in the phonetic transcription. Except for the aspects of elision (60%) and weak forms (50%), students produced (45%) of the proposed instances of assimilation, (40%) of linking but none of the participants (00%) could produce the proposed

instance of intrusion. These findings demonstrated how students' ignorance of reduced forms traits prevented them from recognizing words they were familiar with.

9. Discussion

This section covers the data analysis's findings and attempts to answer the two research questions stated earlier.

- 1- To what extent do the reduced forms impede students' comprehension?
2. How far do sound modifications at word boundary affect students' recognition of English words?

9.1 Reduced Forms Impede Students' Comprehension

Much research on reduced forms features proclaims that aspects of English phonology in general, and in particular, the issues being studied, are necessary for understanding and being comprehensible while speaking English as a second or foreign language in this world of globalisation (Roach, 2000; Rost, 2001; Matsuzawa, 2006; Rogerson, 2006). In order to answer the first research question, a cloze dictation test was administered to see to what extent the reduced forms impede students' comprehension. The results from the fast speech dictation clearly show that students have a very low awareness of the aspects of reduced forms phenomena. Their performances were far below average. The majority found difficulties in appropriately writing down most of the full words proposed to them. These results obviously show that speed of delivery and pronunciation are the reason behind students' listening barriers. These features of pronunciation were scarcely studied and were consequently problematic. Hence, the lack of awareness of sounds modifications at word peripheries such as assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking or weak forms explains the students' unsatisfactory results on the cloze dictation test.

9.2 Sound Modifications at Words Boundaries Affect Students' Recognition of English Words

Sound features at word borders are shared across streams of speech; some are harmonised, some are omitted, others are fused or blended to form a new sound for a smooth articulation and simple pronunciation. To answer the second research question, a transcription task was conducted to see to what extent the sound modifications at words boundaries affect students' recognition of English words. The results from phonetic transcription task indicate that students' performances were below average. Most of them were unable to transcribe the words with the various aspects of reduced forms. The undeniable truth that students could not recognize the words that underwent modification was anticipated because of their being unaware of the reduced forms processes. Put differently, the students were not able to recognize words that underwent modifications in their final sounds and the words that caused their modifications as well.

Conclusion

This paper reports on a study done with Master One students of English at Adrar University and to draw attention to the difficulties they encounter when listening to English spoken discourse, specifically when dealing with reduced forms particularly assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking and weak forms. The data were gathered from two main sources: a listening test and a transcription test. The results of the study reveal that many students find difficulty in perceiving words that undergo sound changes at word boundaries. In other words, they perform much below average when producing and transcribing the desired qualities. These records lead us to recommend that in order to improve listening comprehension skills, students should be taught explicitly and methodically about how to modify sounds in speech. We also recommend teachers to expose students to extensive bottom-up listening activities in order to put an end to or at least reduce comprehension problems and aid in achieving a better degree of English proficiency since learning these phonological processes in a second or foreign language is more challenging.

To properly assist students in developing their listening abilities, teachers are required to be aware of the features that mark spoken English and use this knowledge to design activities that can make students become efficient listeners. Students should be exposed to a great deal of practice in order to get accustomed to recognizing the reduced forms when they occur. They need to have a firm grounding in the "phonological code" of English (i.e., the rhythm, stress, intonation, and distinctive sounds of spoken English) in order to decipher the flow of sounds they hear (Brown, 1990: 151). Students need to learn to control the phonological code of the target language sufficiently to be able to use the richness of the cues at this level. Since students of Master One lack the phonetic information about words, especially at their boundaries, we are suggesting that teaching pronunciation in the English as a Foreign Language classroom will heighten their awareness of reduced forms phenomena and thus improve their listening comprehension.

Pedagogical Implications

The outcome of the study suggests that Master One students could develop their listening skill if they were aware of the sound alterations caused by assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking and weak forms - reduced forms phenomena. To overcome this, teachers can teach listening and pronunciation strategies. The teaching of pronunciation should exist to educate students about the interrelationship between listening and speaking. The understanding difficulties caused by the blurring of sounds at word borders pose a severe challenge to students. Students may be able to increase their listening comprehension if they understand the sound alterations caused by assimilation, elision, intrusion, linking, and weak forms. When students begin to practice reduced forms aspects, they begin to realize their significance for comprehensibility. If students' awareness of reduced forms phenomena increased, they could be able to prepare themselves for the kind of sound patterns they would encounter in normal native speech.

Brown (1984) points out that the main aim in teaching students how to understand English as it is normally spoken by natives must be to help them recognize and use the reliable signals in the spoken form of the foreign language. We suggest appropriate practice material into the implementation of language courses, so that they would be systematically divided into both repetition or comprehension exercises and production exercises.

It is noteworthy to mention that knowledge of reduced forms is more beneficial for students receptively than actively. Having said that, raised awareness of the features of reduced forms and active usage will help students gain insights into the language, and become better listeners and speakers of English (Underhill 2005, p58).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Cloze Dictation Test

Instruction: Listen and fill in the missing gaps.

"The _____ few days _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ be _____ by uncertainty _____ light _____ the _____ head's resignation," she said, when she _____ _____ _____.

"The first few days of this year are bound to be plagued by uncertainty in the light of the department head's resignation," she said, when she saw Ian once in Boston.

Instruction: The Appendix B: Transcription Test

following short text, in IPA transcription, requires the correct addition of various aspects of reduced forms at the underlined words. For each instance, say whether the indicated place is (i) ASSIMILATION (ii) ELISION (iii) INTRUSION (iv) LINKING or (v) WEAK FORMS:

/ ðə fə:st fju: deɪz ɒv ðɪs jiə ɑ: baʊnd tu: bi: pleɪgd baɪ ʌnsə:tntɪ ɪn ðə laɪt ɒv ðə dɪpɑ:tmənt hedz rezɪgneɪʃn / ʃi sed wen ʃi sə: iən wʌns ɪn bɒstən /

1. = elision / /
2. = weak form / /
3. = assimilation of place / /
4. = linking / /
5. = weak form / /
6. = elision / /
7. = weak form / /
8. = elision / /
9. = assimilation / /
10. = weak form / /
11. = assimilation / /
12. = intrusion / /
13. = linking / /
14. = assimilation / /

15. = elision / /

/ ðə **fə:st** fju: deiz **ɒv ðɪs jɪə a: baʊnd tu:** bi: **pleɪd** baɪ ʌnsə:tntɪ **ɪn ðə** laɪt **ɒv** ðə **dɪpɑ:tmənt** hedz
 rezɪgneɪfŋ / ʃɪ sed wen ʃɪ **sə: ɪn wʌns ɪn bɒstən** /

1. = elision / ..fə:s.. /
2. = weak form / ..əv.. /
3. = assimilation of place / ...ðɪʃɪə..... /
4. = linking / .. ðɪʃɪəɑ:.. /
5. = weak form / ..ə.. /
6. = elision / ... **baʊn**... /
7. = weak form / ..tə.. /
8. = elision / ..**pleɪd**.. /
9. = assimilation / ...**ɪnə**... /
10. = weak form / ..əv.. /
11. = assimilation / ... **dɪpɑ:pmənt** ... /
12. = intrusion / ... **sə:(r)ɪən**... /
13. = linking / **wʌnsɪn**... /
14. = assimilation / ... **ɪ(m)bɒstn**... /
15. = elision / **bɒstn**... /

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