



Syncope in Native English Speaker's Everyday Speech

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الترخيم الصوتي في الكلام اليومي للمتحدثين الأصليين لفة الإنجليزية

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Abstract

In order to achieve ease in the pronunciation, speakers tend to recline to various techniques. Among these techniques is that of a syncope which can be defined as the loss of one or more sounds especially unstressed syllable from the anterior of a word It is hypothesized that in everyday speech speakers tend to use syncope as technique to let their speech be rapid or easy to pronounce. The study is conducted to investigate this phonological process as it is used in native speaker everyday speech.

الخلاصة

من أجل تحقيق سهولة في النطق، يميل المتحدثون لاستخدام تقنيات مختلفة، ومن بين هذه التقنيات تقنية الترخيم الصوتي والتي يمكن تعريفها بأنها فقدان صوت أو أكثر، وخاصة المقطع غير المشدد، من مقدمة الكلمة. ومن المفترض في الكلام اليومي أن يميل المتحدثون إلى استخدام الترخيم الصوتي كتقنية لجعل كلامهم سريعاً أو سهل النطق. أجريت الدراسة للتحقيق في هذه العملية الصوتية كما تستخدم في الكلام اليومي للمتحدث الأصلي.

1.Introduction

A great deal of attention has been paid to speech variation especially with the increasing studies on conversational speech. These studies, in their turn, have posited that the amount of reduction and deletion in spontaneous speech is greater than expected (Johnson, 2004). The most obvious sounds reduction is that of schwa deletion in the conversational speech of English on which a number of studies have been conducted. These studies have confirmed that schwa deletion is influenced by multiple factors such as lexical stress position, sonority, lexical frequency, word length, phonotactic environment, and speech style. Hooper (1976, 1978) suggests that the placement of the whether before or after a stressed syllable is a determinant for its deletion. On the other hand, Patterson, *et al.* (2003), reveal that stress environment is the most significant factor affecting schwa deletion. Zwicky (1972) and other scholars concentrate on the fact that deletion occurs when the sonority difference between the consonants neighboring schwa is great enough, i.e. the greater the sonority difference between the consonants surrounding the target vowel, the more the vowel is likely to delete.

Lexical frequency have also been noticed to affect vowel reduction or deletion. Fidelholtz (1975), for example, postulates that higher-frequency words with unstressed vowels in are more likely to reduce than those of the lower-frequency words.

2.On Defining Syncope

Like other terms, Syncope is defined differently by different scholars. For Fillip Carr (2008:173), it is defined as “the deletion (elision) of a vowel, resulting in the loss of a syllable, as in the bisyllabic pronunciation [ˈfæmli] (family), as opposed to the trisyllabic pronunciation [ˈfæmɪli]. In English, this deletion typically affects unstressed syllables”. As for Nordquids (2019) syncope is a “traditional term in linguistics for a contraction within a word through the loss of a vowel sound or letter, as demonstrated, for example, in the casual

pronunciation of cam(e)ra, fam(i)ly, fav(o)rite, mem(o)ry, veg(e)table, and butt(o)ning". He further adds that it "occurs in multisyllabic words: the dropped vowel (which is unstressed) follows a strongly stressed syllable" and that it is "sometimes used more broadly to refer to any vowel or consonant sound that's commonly omitted in the pronunciation of a word". Similarly, Crystal (2003:449) claims that it refers to

"the deletion of a vowel within a word; often contrasted with aphaersis and apocope. Examples include the modern British English pronunciations of such words as *secretary* /'sekɹɪtri/, where American English has /'sekɹɪteri/. Some authors extend the notion to include internal consonant deletion".

To sum up, syncope includes deletion of both vowel and consonant sounds. The vowel that is frequently reduced is the shwa.

3.Syllabic Consonant Formation and Syncope (Syllable Reduction)

Syllabic consonant is the consonant that becomes the nucleus of a syllable after the deletion of the vowel that precedes it (usually a weak vowel). In Bauman- Waengler's (2009:388) view unstressed syllables are usually reduced, if the vowel nucleus is reduced and the result will be a syllabic consonant which will constitute the nucleus of the syllable. The chosen sound to be syllabic is the one which is more sonorant. Sonorant consonants are the liquids, glides and nasals. These sonorants, however, are not equal in their sonority. Sonorants like /l/, /r/ and the nasals are of a higher sonority, hence they frequently occur in English. Anyhow, native speakers usually make more reduction by means of syncope. Thus, one can say that syncope is a stage that come after a syllabic consonant formation. In this realm, Szigetv'ari (2002: 139) proposes that there are four stages that underlie syncope. These stages are: firstly, the wide range of vocalic contrasts possible under stress shrinks to a tiny set of three, ə ɪ ʊ (he calls this stage as 3V set); secondly, the sounds in this set will be reduced into ə and this stage is homonymous with the first stage; thirdly, the syllabic consonant is formed, hence loss in the prominence of the syllable is furthered, and finally, syllabicity may also disappear, which in traditional terms is equivalent to the total loss of the unstressed syllable and therefore a syncope is the head in this final stage. The four stages are illustrated in the following way by considering the pronunciation of three selected words:

(1)	a. 3V set	b. ə-only	c. syllabic con.	d. syncope
separate	sepərət	sepərət	seprət	seprət
family	fəmɪli	fəmɛli	fæmli	fæmli
natural	nætʃərəl	nætʃərəl	nætʃrəl	nætʃrəl

It can be concluded that syncope comes finally after syllabicification but speakers do not realize them in this way; they produce the final stage spontaneously.

4.Post- Tonic Syncope

Turcsan (2017) states the grammar of post-tonic syncope stating that it transforms a strong- weak- weak pattern into a strong- weak- trochee by reducing the schwa between a stressed and an unstressed vowel. He further presents sets of the most frequent productive alternations. The first set contains syncopated vowels:

a-before /r/, as in,

(2) separate (adj.), elaborate (adj.), lateral, misery, reference, impoverish, memory, authoring

b-before liquid, /l/, as in,

(3) pedalling, erratically, desolate (adj.), easily, especially, finally, Emily

c-following /n/

(4) national, fortunate, fattening, definite, traditional, seasonal, marginal,

Turcsan (ibid) also suggests that vowel deletion is sporadic in case when the nasal /m/ occur and it is absent with ŋ, as in,

(5) i- unanimous, decimal, mathematician

ii- feminine, geminate (adj.) Germany, nominal, voluminous, hominy

It can be noticed that syncope is after sonority /r> l> n> m/.

The following list are said to lack productive synchronic alternating forms;

(6) vegetable, every, family, general, chocolate, mystery, Barbara, factory, mackerel, et cetera, camera, celery, business

The set below is considered as forbidden syncope or impossible, substandard or regional. Hooper (1978:191) declares that "such pronunciations are stigmatized as substandard regional pronunciations".

5.Pre- tonic Syncope

In this kind of syncope, syncope transforms weak- strong- weak pattern into strong- weak or it transforms weak- strong pattern into a strong pattern. This kind of syncope differs from that of post- tonic syncope as it operates freely in some registers without phonotactic restrictions, as in,

(7) terrific, phonetic, potato, tomorrow, parade, polite

6. Factors Affecting Vowel Reduction

6.1 lexical stress environment

Researchers emphasize that lexical stress environment has an influence on schwa deletion. Zwicky (1972), for example, assures that vowel deletion occurs in two environments: one is when schwa is in word-initial syllable with at least one onset consonant and followed by a stressed syllable (e.g. s[u]ppóse→[spouz]), and the second environment is when the schwa is placed in the second syllable preceded by a syllable containing a stressed vowel (e.g. córp[o]rate→[kɔrpɹət]). Hooper (1978), Patterson et al. (2003) show that words with two or three-syllables are more likely to undergo schwa deletion in post-stressed environment than in pre-stressed environment.

6.2 Sonority

The shwa deletion is said to be related to the degree of sonority of the neighboring (Bybee, 2000). The shwa sound is more likely to be deleted if it is preceded by a consonant of a low sonority and followed by another of a high sonority. The degree of sonority can be tested depending on the following scale presents by Ryu and Hong (2013: 321):

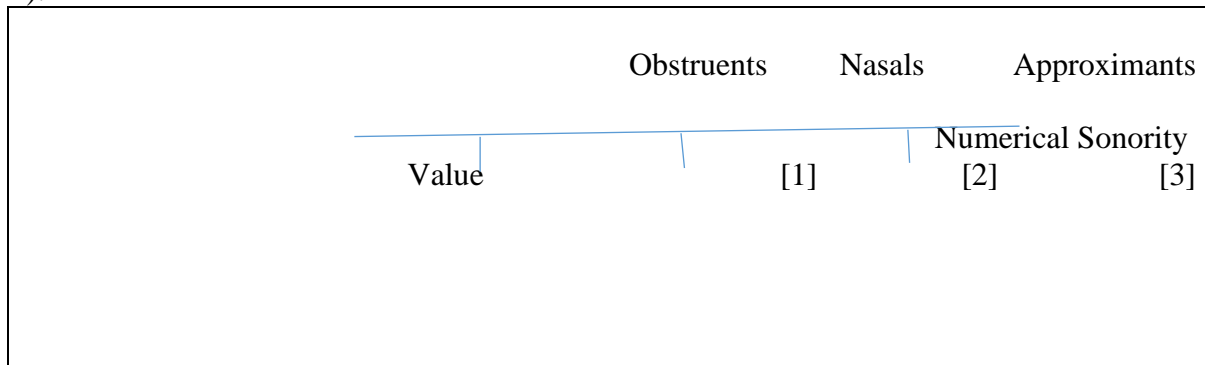


Figure (1) Sonority Scale

6.3 Lexical frequency

Reduction is claimed to be affected by word frequency and word predictability. In Bybee's (2001) view words with high-frequency are reduced more often than those with low-frequency. In the same way, Hume (2004) supposes that phonetic information will be less necessary as long word is more easily to be predicted.

7.Syncope Consonant Clusters

Consonant cluster is defined as a group of consonants that come in sequence in the same syllable. In English phonotactics, consonant clusters are confined to restrictions which determine their types as well as their limited number. However, there is a possibility for forming morpheme- internal consonant cluster post-lexically by means of syncope. Yet, this process is said to a dialectal- specific With the deletion of the vowel occurring between consonants (syncope) the pre and post consonants will be adjacent to constitute a cluster which is not occur in the standard pronunciation

8.Syncope of Consonants

Like many other languages, English search for simplification in speech, therefore, there is always a tendency to drop out certain sounds. Dropping sounds from the medial position is the concern of this paper and there are evidences that prove the existence of such dropping. Shapiro (2017: 133) assures that certain consonant will drop out of a cluster in pronunciation, for example in words like glisten, hasten, whistle, trestle, etc. [t] is usually dropped especially if it occurs before /n/ and /l/. The [t] is dropped as well in a cluster like /-rtg-/ in mortgage. He also states that "the sound /t/ in medial position in a cluster of three consonants typically syncopates (drops out) whatever consonants surround it". In addition, he claims that other consonants may also syncopate episodically, like for example the [b] in clamber, although in this case a (non-traditional) spelling pronunciation is also extant, whereby the [b] is retained (cf. limber). The existence of such process is usually explained in terms of phonetic factors such as the notorious "economy/ease of effort". A systematic phonological purview, however, traced this to the semeiotic relation between the phonological (markedness) values of the sounds involved and the rules of combination (the phonetic pattern) determining pronunciation. These rules of

combination are an icon of the phonological values. In consonant syncope case, the rules map the fact that the syncopated consonant is multiply marked for one relevant feature or another. "Thus /t/ is marked for both the features grave vs. acute and strident vs. mellow", therefore it is dropped out from the relevant consonantal cluster to properly form an iconic realization of its definition in the phonological structure of English (Ibid).

9.Data collection, Discussion and Analysis

Syncope is a phonological issue that is related to dialect (being opposed to the standard). For this specific reason, the researcher devoted his search to everyday American accent to get the data from. The collected data are gained from a TV talk show entitled Steve Harvey Daytime Talk Show. This particular program is chosen as it involves different people of different age, personality and social status to be engaged in the conversations. Seven episodes are randomly chosen and investigated to gather the words in which certain sounds are syncopated. The collected data include only the words with syncope. Some of these words are repeated many times throughout the episodes. The data are tabulated within tables that include their transcription before and after being syncopated as well as a reference to their frequencies in each episode. Table (1) Transcription and Frequencies of the Data of Episode (1)

The collected words	Phonemic Transcription	syncopated Transcription	The Deleted Item(s)	Frequencies
Twenty	/ˈtwen.ti/	/ˈtweni/	/t/	5
Family	/ˈfæm.əl.i/	/ˈfæmli/	/ə/	7
Probably	/ˈprɒb.ə.bli/	/ˈprɒbli/	/ə and b/	3
Recently	/ˈri:.səntli/	/ˈri:.sənli/	/t/	2
Happening	/ˈhæp.ən.ɪŋ/	/ˈhæpn.ɪŋ/	/ə/	2
Interview	/ˈɪn.tə.vju:/	/ˈɪnə.vju:/	/t/	3
Uncomfortable	/ʌnˈkʌmf.tə.bəl/	/ʌnˈkʌmftbəl/	/ə/	1
Totally	/ˈtəʊ.təl.i/	/ˈtəʊtl.i/	/ə/	2
scrambled	/ˈskræm.bəld/	/ˈskræməld/	/b/	1
Wanted	/ˈwɒn.tɪd/	/ˈwɒnɪd/	/t/	2
Saturday	/ˈsæt.ə.deɪ/	/ˈsædeɪ/	/t and ə/	1
Comfortable	/ˈkʌm.fə.tə.bəl/	/ˈkʌm.fə.tbəl/	/ə/	2
Camera	/ˈkæmə.rə/	/ˈkæmrə/	/ə/	2
Cameraman	/ˈkæm.ərə.mæn/	/ˈkæmrə.mæn/	/ə/	1
Entertainer	/en.təˈteɪ.nər/	/enəˈteɪ.nər/	/t/	1
Internet	/ˈɪn.tə.net/	/ˈɪnə.net/	/t/	2

Table (2) Transcription and Frequencies of the Data of Episode (2)

The Collected Words	Phonemic Transcription	syncopated Transcription	The Deleted Item(s)	Frequencies
Family	/ˈfæm.əl.i/	/ˈfæmli/	/ə/	5
Recently	/ˈri:.səntli/	/ˈri:.sənli/	/t/	4
Definitely	/ˈdef.i.nət.li/	/ˈdef.i.nli/	/ə and t/	3
Probably	/ˈprɒb.ə.bli/	/ˈprɒbli/	/ə and b/	4
Gentleman	/ˈdʒen.təl.mən/	/ˈdʒen.əl.mən/	/t/	2
Connect	/kəˈnekt/	/kˈnekt/	/ə/	3
Television	/ˈtel.i.vɪʒ.ən/	/ˈtel.i.vɪʒn/	/ə/	1
Comfortable	/ˈkʌm.fə.tə.bəl/	/ˈkʌm.fə.tbəl/	/ə/	2
Twenty	/ˈtwen.ti/	/ˈtweni/	/t/	3
Documentaries	/ˌdɒk.jəˈmen.tər.ɪz/	/ˌdɒk.jəˈmen.tr.ɪz/	/ə/	2

Table (3) Transcription and Frequencies of the Data of Episode (3)

The Collected Words	Phonemic Transcription	syncopated Transcription	The Deleted Item(s)	Frequencies
Unanimous	n.ə.məs/ˈjuːˈn	/ˈjuːˈnæn.məs/	/ə/	2
Samantha	/sæməntə/	/sæmntə/	/ə/	3
Scrambled	/ˈskræm.bəld/	/ˈskræməld/	/b/	1

Exactly	/ɪg'zækt.li/	/ɪg'zækli/	/t/	3
Surgery	/ˈsɜː.dʒər.i/	/ˈsɜː.dʒr.i/	/ə/	2
Reconnect	/ˌriː.kə'nekt/	/ˌriː.k'nekt/	/ə/	2
Madam	/ˈmæd.əm/	/ˈmæm/	/d and ə/	1
Confident	/ˈkɒn.fɪ.dənt/	/kɒn.ˈfɪ.dnt/	/ə/	2
Mental	/ˈmen.təl/	/ˈmen.əl/	/t/	3
Comfort	/ˈkʌm.fə.t/	/ˈkʌm.ft/	/ə/	2

Table (4) Transcription and Frequencies of the Data of Episode (4)

The Collected Words	Phonemic Transcription	syncopated Transcription	The Deleted Item(s)	Frequencies
Perfectly	/ˈpɜː.fekt.li/	/ˈpɜː.fekli/	/t/	2
Twenty	/ˈtwen.ti/	/tweni/	/t/	4
Definitely	/ˈdef.i.nət.li/	/ˈdef.i.nli/	/ə and t/	2
Martin	/ˈmɑː.tɪn/	/ˈmɑːɪn/	/t/	2
Unfortunately	/ʌnˈfɔː.tʃən.ət.li/	/ʌnˈfɔː.tʃən.əli/	/t/	3
Family	/ˈfæm.əl.i/	/ˈfæmli/	/ə/	4

Table (5) Transcription and Frequencies of the Data of Episode (5)

The Collected Words	Phonemic Transcription	syncopated Transcription	The Deleted Item(s)	Frequencies
Probably	/ˈprɒb.ə.bli/	/ˈprɒbli/	/ə and b/	2
supposed	/səˈpəʊzd/	/sˈpəʊzd/	/ə/	2
Madam	/ˈmæd.əm/	/ˈmæm/	/d and ə/	2
Central	/ˈsen.trəl/	/ˈsen.trl/	/ə/	3
Family	/ˈfæm.əl.i/	/ˈfæmli/	/ə/	3
Wanted	/ˈwɒn.tɪd/	/ˈwɒnɪd/	/t/	3
Honestly	/ˈɒn.ɪst.li/	/ˈɒn.ɪs.li/	/t/	2
Wonderful	/ˈwʌn.də.fəl/	/ˈwʌn.ə.fəl/	/d/	2
Constantly	/ˈkɒn.stənt.li/	/ˈkɒn.stənli/	/t/	2

Table (6) Transcription and Frequencies of the Data of Episode (6)

The Collected Words	Phonemic Transcription	syncopated Transcription	The Deleted Item(s)	Frequencies
Especially	/ɪˈspeʃ.əl.i/	/ɪˈspeʃli/	/ə/	3
Whatever	/wɒtˈev.ər/	/wɒˈev.ər/	/t/	2
Recently	/ˈriː.səntli/	/ˈriː.sənli/	/t/	2
Accountable	/əˈkaʊn.tə.bəl/	/əˈkaʊn.tbəl/	/ə/	2
Probably	/ˈprɒb.ə.bli/	/ˈprɒbli/	/ə and b/	2
supposed	/səˈpəʊzd/	/sˈpəʊzd/	/ə/	2
Correct	/kəˈrekt/	/kəˈrekt/	/ə/	2
Atlanta	/ətˈlæn.tə/	/ətˈlæn.ə/	/t/	5
Family	/ˈfæm.əl.i/	/ˈfæmli/	/ə/	3
Interview	/ˈɪn.tə.vjuː/	/ˈɪnə.vjuː/	/t/	2
Cameron	/ˌkæm.əˈrən/	/ˌkæm.əˈrn/	/ə/	6
Unfortunately	/ʌnˈfɔː.tʃən.ət.li/	/ʌnˈfɔː.tʃən.əli/	/t/	2
Educational	/ˌedʒ.uˈkeɪ.ʃən.əl/	/ˌedʒ.uˈkeɪ.ʃn.əl/	/ə/	2

Table (7) Transcription and Frequencies of the Data of Episode (7)

The Collected Words	Phonemic Transcription	syncopated Transcription	The Deleted Item(s)	Frequencies
Identical	/aɪˈden.tə.kəl/	/aɪˈden.ə.kəl/	/t/	2
Probably	/ˈprɒb.ə.bli/	/ˈprɒbli/	/ə and b/	4
Constantly	/ˈkɒn.stənt.li/	/ˈkɒn.stənli/	/t/	2

Directly	/daɪ'rekt.li/	/daɪ'rek.li/	/t/	2
Wanted	/'wɒn.tɪd/	/'wɒnɪd/	/t/	2
Family	/'fæm.əl.i/	/'fæmli/	/ə/	3
Definitely	/'def.i.nət.li/	/'def.i.nli/	/ə and t/	2
Atlanta	/ət'læn.tə/	/ət'læn.ə/	/t/	3
Scrambled	/'skræm.bəld/	/'skræməld/	/b/	1
Identity	/aɪ'den.tə.ti/	/aɪ'den.ə.ti/	/t/	4
Recently	/'ri:.səntli/	/'ri:.sənli/	/t/	1

The tables exhibit that syncope is not associated with a certain part of speech. Words of different parts of speech are syncope. Words like 'camera and internet' are nouns whereas 'comfortable and wanted' are adjectives. Similarly, 'totally and probably' are adverbs. Obviously, the vowel that is syncope is only one type which is /ə/. It is found in different words in the above table. The word comfortable/ʌn'kʌmf.tə.bəl/, for example, the /ə/ is deleted in the syllable before the last, forming a cluster of consonants –mftb- /ʌn'kʌmftbəl/. Another word with the sound /ə/ being syncope is the word 'especially' /ɪ'speʃ.əl.i/. The sound /ə/ is deleted to produce /ɪ'speʃl.i/, permitting the adjacency of -ʃl- to be formed. Example for consonant syncope is that in the word 'interview' /'ɪn.tə.vju:/. /t/ sound is syncope leaving the rest to be pronounced as /'ɪnə.vju:/. Another example where a consonant is deleted is that in the word 'wonderful' /'wʌn.də.fəl/. The /d/ sound is deleted and the resulting pronunciation is /'wʌnə.fəl/. However, /t/ and /d/ are not the only consonants sounds being deleted, the data reveal that /b/ sound can also be deleted, as in the word 'scrambled' /'skræm.bəld/ where /b/ is deleted to produce /'skræm.əld/. The difficulty in pronouncing 'scrambled' with /b/ lead to such syncope. There is also a case where both the neighboring sounds a vowel and consonant are syncope as in the case with the word probably /'prɒb.ə.bli/. Both /ə/ and /b/ are syncope leaving the rest to produce /prɒbli/. Moreover, in a word like 'definitely' /'def.i.nət.li/, both /ə and t/ are syncope when pronounce. Thus, this word is pronounce as /'def.i.nli/. Besides these changes that is resulted out of applying syncope, there is another change that undergoes as a result of this application, that is stress. Stress is affected, particularly in case of vowel syncope. A word like 'comfortable' /'kʌm.fə.tə.bəl/ in which the primary stress is on the initial syllable and the other two syllables are equally weak syllables, will be changed to have a strong – weak – trochee structure because of the deletion of the /ə/ sound in this word.

Conclusions

The collected and analyzed data exhibit that most of the syncope words have multiple syllables. In addition, these words are among the most frequently used words. Thus, the need for syncope can be traced to the fact that their frequent usage requires the need for facilitating their pronunciation. Syncope is a deviation of the standard pronunciation that involves both vowels and consonants and sometimes it extends to include a syllable. Vowel syncope is limited to /ə/ deletion, which itself might affect the structure of the pronounced word as its deletion affects on the formation of consonant cluster and on stress. Vowel syncope is triggered by a sequence of unstressed vowels in English. Consonants syncope is somehow different as it has no affect on stress, but it has an effect on the structure of the pronounced word. Syllable syncope, on the other hand, is limited to certain words especially those of repeated segments. Their being repeated harden the fluency, a fact that lead speakers to apply syncope.

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- Episode Titles and Date**
1. The Steve Harvey Show 28/2/2019 - Church Donation; Hey Steve!; Straight Talk; Harvey's Hundreds.
 2. The Steve Harvey Show 26/2/2019 - Doing Nothing; Hey Steve!; Date Our Mom; Harvey's Hundreds FULL.
 3. Ask Steve (Harvey) Funniest Moments Part 6 (HD).
 4. The Steve Harvey Show 22/2/2019 - Wait 90 Days; Hey Steve!; Straight Talk; Before We Go.
 5. Steve Harvey show March 31 2017 Holly Robinson Peete, Two Moms Who Connected in an Unlikely Way full.
 6. Steve Harvey March 28, 2017 hd release Steve Helps A Female Cop Find Love! , A&E's "60 Days In".
 7. The Steve Harvey Show 11/3/19 - Quitting; Hey Steve!; Lost in Translation; Harvey's Hundreds.