

The Impact of Assimilation and Elision on Teaching English and Arabic Pronunciation: A contrastive study

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Abstract

This study investigates assimilation and elision in English and Arabic, exploring their phonological differences and difficulties for Arabic learners of English. The English language simplifies syllables, while Arabic preserves root structures. Assimilation in English is often regressive, while Arabic allows bidirectional changes. Elision is more restricted in Arabic but happens freely in English. These differences impact pronunciation and language learning. Understanding these differences can develop teaching strategies and lead to pronunciation enhancement.

Keywords: Assimilation, elision, contrastive phonology, Optimality Theory, Arabic learners of English.

تأثير الإدغام والحذف على تعليم النطق في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية: دراسة مقارنة

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المخلص

تتناول هذه الدراسة عمليات الإدغام والحذف في اللغتين الإنجليزية والعربية، وتركز على الفروقات الصوتية والصعوبات التي تواجه متعلمي الإنجليزية الناطقين بالعربية. تميل اللغة الإنجليزية إلى تبسيط المقاطع الصوتية، بينما تحافظ العربية على بنية الجذور. يحدث الإدغام في الإنجليزية غالباً بشكل ارتدادي، في حين يمكن أن يكون في العربية باتجاهين. كما أن الحذف في العربية أكثر تقييداً مقارنة بالإنجليزية. تؤثر هذه الفروق على النطق وتعلم اللغة، وفهمها يساعد في تطوير الاستراتيجيات التعليمية وتحسين النطق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإدغام، الحذف، الصوتيات المقارنة، نظرية الأمثلية، متعلمو الإنجليزية الناطقون بالعربية.

1. Introduction

According to Crystal (1992), phonology is “the study of the sound systems of languages” (p. 300). In contrast to phonetics, which focuses on the physical aspects of speech sounds, phonology sheds light on the way they are systematically organized to convey meaning in a language (Trask, 1999, p. 156).

In general, phonology can be classified into two branches: segmental phonology, which deals with analyzing speech sounds into distinct segments known as phonemes, and suprasegmental phonology, which deals with features that go beyond a single segment, such as stress and intonation (Roach, 2009, p. 47).

English and Arabic are very different languages. English is a West Germanic language that is a member of the Indo-European language family, alongside languages such as Frisian, German, and Dutch (Crystal, 1999). While Arabic is a member of the Semitic language family, which includes a variety of languages such as Aramaic, Ugaritic, and Hebrew (Watson, 2002, p. 1).

Considering the importance and the rather distinct systems of the two languages, it is interesting to investigate the different phonological processes that govern their speech sounds patterns and highlight the most prominent points to be made regarding them.

Phonological processes, such as assimilation and elision, are important to comprehend spoken language. This is because they impact the flow and naturalness when speaking. These processes include the modification or deletion of sounds in rapid speech, which is vital for learners of a second language (L2) to understand, especially when their native language (L1) shows a variety of phonological rules (Roach, 2009, p. 110; Hasan, 2012, p. 454). For Arabic speakers learning

English, the difficulty comes from the differences in the ways these processes happen (El-Hossary, 2016, p. 3; Hasan, 2021, p. 9).

Existing research underscores the pedagogical difficulties faced by Arabic learners, including the erroneous application of gemination rules in English and difficulties with vowel reductions (El-Hossary, 2016, p. 6; Hasan, 2012, p. 460). Nonetheless, there is a scarcity of studies that systematically examine the directionality, phonotactic restrictions, and functional aspects of assimilation and elision in both languages (Eltaif, 2019, p. 4; Salih, 2012, p. 182). This deficiency hinders the creation of focused strategies for EFL learners who are native Arabic speakers.

This paper aims to fill that gap by performing a contrastive analysis of assimilation and elision in English and Arabic. Utilizing theoretical frameworks from generative phonology (Chomsky & Halle, 1968, p. 300) alongside empirical evidence from Quranic recitation (Eltaif, 2019, p. 4) and English language corpora, it investigates:

1. The typological distinctions in assimilation (regressive versus bidirectional) and elision (consonant clusters versus hamza deletion).
2. The consequences of these distinctions for Arabic-speaking learners of English.

By integrating cross-linguistic data, this study seeks to increase phonological awareness among learners and guide EFL teaching approaches.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Main Phonological Theories

Phonological theory offers essential frameworks for examining processes such as assimilation and elision. The rule-based phonology model put forth by Chomsky and Halle (1968) suggests that phonological phenomena are controlled by language-specific rules arranged in a particular order. For example, the English case of regressive assimilation (ten bikes → [tɛm baɪks]) is accounted for by a

rule that changes /n/ to [ŋ] when it appears before velar stops (p. 75). On the other hand, Optimality Theory (OT) (Prince & Smolensky, 1993) focuses on universal constraints (such as ease of articulation) that are ranked differently among languages. While English emphasizes Agree(place) to ensure consonant harmony, Arabic assigns a higher rank to Faithfulness, which maintains root consonants even when assimilation occurs (Eltaif, 2019, p. 4).

Articulatory Phonology (Browman & Goldstein, 1992) serves as a link between these theories by conceptualizing assimilation as the overlap of gestures—coordinating speech organs to produce adjacent sounds more effectively. For instance, the assimilation of Arabic solar letters (ال + شمس → [aʃ.ʃams]) entails overlapping tongue movements for /l/ and /ʃ/, thereby minimizing articulatory strain (Dawood & Atawnech, 2015, p. 13). This framework aligns with real-world observations of bidirectional assimilation in Arabic dialects, where both progressive and regressive modifications are present (Hasan, 2012, p. 178).

2.2. Assimilation

Assimilation is classified by directionality into three types:

1. **Regressive assimilation:** This type of assimilation occurs when a certain sound modifies the sound that precedes it. It is also known as anticipatory assimilation, as in English *handbag* → [hambag], where /d/ becomes [m] before /b/ (Roach, 2009, p. 122).

2. **Progressive assimilation:** This type of assimilation occurs when a certain sound modifies the sound that follows it. It is also known as preservative assimilation, as in Arabic *من لنته* → [mil laðatihi], where /n/ assimilates to /l/ (Salih, 2012, p. 177).

3. **Coalescent assimilation:** Two sounds merge into a new segment, e.g., English *did you* → [dɪdʒu] (Crystal, 2008, p. 30).

Understanding the difference between phonetic and phonological assimilation is important. Phonetic assimilation occurs on a gradient and

is dependent on context (for instance, the nasalization of vowels preceding nasal consonants in informal speech), whereas phonological assimilation is categorical and follows specific rules (such as the sun-letter assimilation in Arabic; Eltaif, 2019, p. 5). This distinction poses challenges for Arabic learners of English, as Arabic phonological principles (like gemination) are often incorrectly applied to English phonetic situations (El-Hossary, 2016, p. 6).

2.3. Elision

Elision is explained through deletion rules in generative phonology, where sounds are removed to meet syllable structure requirements. In English, the simplification of consonant clusters (e.g., *acts* → [æks]) adheres to the Sonority Sequencing Principle, which forbids low-sonority sounds (e.g., /t/) in coda positions (Roach, 2009, p. 125). Likewise, in Arabic, the glottal stop [ʔ] is elided in *ابن* → [bn] to prevent syllable violations (Shukri et al., 2013, pp. 160–190). Elision is also influenced by syllable structure:

- English favors CV(C) syllables, leading to schwa deletion in *police* → [pli:s] (Underhill, 1998, p. 61).
- Arabic's CV-heavy syllables permit vowel elision in verb conjugations (e.g., *يقول* → [jaʔu:l]; Hasan, 2012, p. 454).

The sonority hierarchy offers further insights into elision patterns. In Arabic, lower-sonority consonants such as /h/ are preserved when followed by vowels (e.g., *استطاع* → [istaʕ:a]), while in English, stops in consonant clusters are often elided (e.g., *next day* → [neks deɪ]; Crystal, 2003, p. 158). These distinctions emphasize the necessity for teaching strategies aimed at addressing L1 transfer errors (Lababidi, 2016, p. 2).

3. Assimilation and Elision in English: A Theoretical Analysis

3.1. Assimilation in English

Assimilation can be usually found in rapid, casual speech. It depends on the environment of sounds and the adjacent sound in the following word. Of course, the degree of assimilation can vary according to the speaking rate and style (Roach, 2007, p. 121).

According to Trask (1996), the phonological process of assimilation in English can be defined as “Any of various phonetic or phonological processes in which one segment becomes more similar to another segment in the same word or phrase.” (p. 36). That is, when a certain phoneme assimilates to the place of the following phoneme, for example, the pronouncing *ten pence* as *te[m]pence*, where /n/ assimilates in place to the following /p/ (Ibid).

Crystal (1992) further defines assimilation as “the influence exercised by one sound upon the articulation of another, so that the sounds become more alike or identical” (p. 30).

Katamba (as cited in Salih, 2012, p. 177) asserts that assimilation usually occurs due to the similarity found among the assimilated sounds. They may share the same place or manner of articulation or other characteristics (e.g. in *bad girl*, /d/ and /g/ share the same manner of articulation (stops) and they are both voiced).

In English, assimilation takes place when a sound modifies its phonetic characteristics (such as place, manner, or voicing) to become similar to an adjacent sound, simplifying articulation in connected speech. These phenomena are regulated by feature-spreading rules in generative phonology (Chomsky & Halle, 1968, p. 75) and illustrate markedness constraints in Optimality Theory (Prince & Smolensky, 1993).

1. Place Assimilation:

– The alveolar nasal sound /n/ changes to the place of a following velar stop, as seen in *ten bikes* → *[tɛm baɪks]*, where /n/ transforms into [ŋ] before /b/ (Roach, 2009, p. 122). This conforms to the rule: /n/ → [ŋ] / __ [+velar] / n / → [ŋ] / __ [+velar].

– Likewise, in handbag → [hambæg], the /d/ sound changes to match the bilabial characteristics of /b/ (Crystal, 2008, p. 30).

2. Manner Assimilation:

– Stops can take on the continuous manner of fricatives, as demonstrated in white pepper → [waɪp pepə], where /t/ changes to [p] to align with the bilabial closure of /p/ (Hasan, 2012, p. 177).

3. Voicing Assimilation:

– Voiceless consonants can cause preceding segments to become voiceless. For instance, have to → [hæf tu], where /v/ changes to [f] before the voiceless /t/ (Underhill, 1998, p. 61).

Such processes are clarified through feature–spreading in rule–based models:

- Nasal place assimilation transfers the [+velar] characteristic from /b/ to /n/, supplanting its standard alveolar pronunciation (Chomsky & Halle, 1968, p. 80).
- Within Optimality Theory, Agree(place) is prioritized over Faithfulness, emphasizing ease of articulation over the integrity of segments (Eltaif, 2019, p. 5).

3.2. Elision in English

Elision refers to the disappearance of sounds in certain circumstances. A more technical explanation would be that phonemes may be realized as zero or deleted in particular conditions. Elision, like assimilation, is a feature of quick, casual speech. For learners of English as a foreign language, the importance of elision does not lie in that they should be taught how to use it, but in that they should be aware that native speakers of English often do not pronounce certain phonemes when speaking to each other (Roach, 2007, p. 124).

According to Merriam–Webster dictionary, elision is “the use of a speech form that lacks a final or initial sound which a variant speech form has (such as ‘s instead of *is* in *there’s*)”.

Furthermore, Crystal (2003) defines elision as “omission of sounds in connected speech” (p. 158).

It is clear from the above that the purpose of elision is to make the pronunciation faster and easier due to the complexity of some sounds when pronounced together.

Elision in English simplifies complex phonological arrangements, conforming to constraints of syllable structure and hierarchies of markedness.

1. Consonant Cluster Reduction:

- Clusters are made simpler to adhere to the Sonority Sequencing Principle (SSP). For instance, handbag → [hambæg] drops /d/ to avoid a plosive–fricative–plosive sequence (Roach, 2009, p. 125).
- In next day → [neks deɪ], /t/ is removed to correct the /kst/ coda, which breaches SSP’s sonority slope (Crystal, 2003, p. 158).

2. Schwa Deletion:

- The unstressed schwa /ə/ is frequently dropped in quick speech, as seen in family → [fæmli] and police → [pli:s] (Underhill, 1998, p. 61). This illustrates the markedness rule, which disfavors unstressed syllables.

Theoretical Basis:

- Syllable Simplification: English tends to prefer syllables structured as CV(C), resulting in the omission of consonant clusters such as /kt/ becoming [k] in acts, producing [æks] (Roach, 2009, p. 125).
- Markedness Constraints: In Optimality Theory, the constraint ComplexCoda, which prohibits multi-consonant codas, is prioritized over Max-IO, which focuses on conserving input segments, leading to the process of elision (Prince & Smolensky, 1993).

4. Assimilation and Elision in Arabic: A Theoretical Analysis

4.1. Assimilation in Arabic

According to Rahim (2013) assimilation in Arabic is "a process of replacing one sound by another in order to make it similar, more similar, or identical to the neighboring sound" (p. 3). This definition definitely resembles the definition of assimilation in English and follows the same steps mentioned in it.

Al-Marsafi (as cited in Salih, 2012, p. 178) states that there are two types of assimilation in Arabic, namely, the great assimilation and the small assimilation.

The great assimilation occurs when two sounds are assimilated in two different movent words, then the vowel is deleted from the first sound and assimilated into the second to have one sound, for example, "يشفع" "عنده"، "مقعد صدق". While the small assimilation is of two types, complete and partial assimilation (Ibid).

According to Rahim (2013, p. 5), complete assimilation can be defined as "a process in which one sound becomes identical to the second" for example, "من ربهم - مَرَبِّهم من لدنه - ملدنه"،

While partial assimilation occurs when one sound becomes similar to the other sound in some aspects only, for example, "واما من بخل واستغنى" (Ibid).

Arabic assimilation is fundamentally grounded in its morpho-phonological framework, especially in the relationship between the definite article ال (al-) and both solar (sun) and lunar (moon) letters. This phenomenon operates under the constraints of Semitic languages and prosodic structures (Watson, 2002, p. 1; Dawood & Atawnech, 2015, p. 13).

1. Assimilation of Sun and Moon Letters:

– Solar Letters: When the definite article ال is followed by a solar letter (such as /t, d, s/), the /l/ merges with the subsequent consonant, leading to gemination. For instance:

– ال + شمس → [aʃ.ʃams] ("the sun") (Eltaif, 2019, p. 5).

– Lunar Letters: The /l/ stays unmerged before lunar letters (like /k, m, b/), as seen in القمر → [al.qamar] (“the moon”) (Dawood & Atawnech, 2015, p. 13).

2. Nasal Assimilation in Quranic Recitation:

o إدغام بغنة (assimilation with ghunnah): The letter ن (noon) or tanween merges with the subsequent nasal consonants (e.g., /m, n/), as illustrated by:

مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ → [mir.rab.bihim] (Quran 2:5) (Shukri et al., 2013, pp. 95–160).

o إدغام بغير غنة (assimilation without ghunnah): ن merges into non-nasal consonants (e.g., /r, l/), as seen in:

مَنْ لَمْ → [mal.lam] (Quran 90:7) (Eltaif, 2019, p. 7).

Theoretical Basis:

- Morpho-Phonological Rules: The assimilation of solar letters adheres to a specific rule within generative phonology: /l/ → [Ø]/__[+coronal]/l/ → [Ø]/__[+coronal]. This deletion leads to gemination to maintain syllable weight (Watson, 2002, p. 45).
- Optimality Theory: The constraints Agree(place) and Geminate take precedence over Faithfulness, necessitating assimilation for ease of articulation (Eltaif, 2019, p. 5).

4.2. Elision in Arabic

In Arabic, elision is also the omission of certain sounds (vowels or consonants) in the pronunciation of words. It occurs due to the difficulty of pronunciation as well.

Ateeq (as cited in Hasan 2012, p. 454) argues that the sounds that are usually omitted in Arabic are [a], [y] and [w].

In Arabic, elision functions within the framework of prosodic morphology, where root-and-pattern structures (such as فعل /faʿala/) regulate sound omission to preserve the integrity of syllables (Hasan, 2012, p. 454).

1. Vowel Elision:

o Verb Conjugation: Unstressed vowels are removed to conform to templatic structures. For instance:

يَقُولُ (yaqūlu) → [ja.qu:l] (“he says”) (Hasan, 2012, p. 454).

o Quranic Recitation: Short vowels (like /a, i/) are omitted in pausal forms, exemplified by:

الرَّحْمَنُ → [ar.raħ.ma:n] (Quran 1:1) (Shukri et al., 2013, p. 180).

2. Consonant Deletion in Dialects:

o Elimination of /ħ/ in Levantine Arabic: In quick speech, the voiceless pharyngeal /ħ/ is frequently omitted, such as in:

هَلَّا /ħalla/ → [ˈa.l:a] (“let’s”) (Al-Wer, 2007, cited in Hasan, 2012, p. 460).

o Absence of Glottal Stop: The hamza /ʔ/ is omitted in the imperative form of verbs, for example:

أَكَلْ /ʔakala/ → [kul] (“eat!”) (Shukri et al., 2013, p. 190).

Theoretical Basis:

- Prosodic Morphology: Elision keeps the standard CV(C) syllable structure intact. For instance, the removal of /i/ in يَصِفُ → [ja.sʰf] (“he describes”) upholds the faʕala template (Watson, 2002, p. 89).
- Templatic Constraints: The root-oriented morphology of Arabic disallows variations from triconsonantal roots (e.g., كَتَبَ /k-t-b/ meaning “writing”), necessitating vowel elision to preserve the root (Hasan, 2012, p. 460).

5. Contrastive Theoretical Analysis

5.1. Universal Principles

Both English and Arabic utilize assimilation and elision to enhance articulatory ease and comply with markedness constraints (Prince & Smolensky, 1993; Watson, 2002, p. 45). For example:

• Ease of Articulation:

- English reduces consonant clusters (next day → [neks deɪ]) to avoid complex codas (Roach, 2009, p. 125).

– Arabic omits glottal stops in imperative verbs (أكل → [kul]) to lessen articulatory strain (Shukri et al., 2013, p. 190).

• **Markedness:**

Both languages tend to avoid marked forms such as /CCC/ clusters, leading to elision (e.g., English acts → [æks]; Arabic استطاع → [istaʕ:a]) (Hasan, 2012, p. 454; Crystal, 2008, p. 158).

5.2. Main Differences

5.2.1 Directionality of Assimilation

- English: Primarily exhibits a regressive pattern (e.g., ten bikes → [tɛm baɪks], where /n/ changes to [m] before /b/) (Roach, 2009, p. 122).
- Arabic: Shows bidirectional patterns, incorporating both progressive and regressive types:
 - o Progressive: من لذته → [mil laðatihi] (/n/ → [l] preceding /l/) (Salih, 2012, p. 177).
 - o Regressive: الشمس → [aʃ.ʃams] (/l/ transforms into [ʃ] before solar letters) (Dawood & Atawnech, 2015, p. 13).

5.2.2 Morphological Interaction

- Arabic: The root-and-pattern morphological system (e.g., كتب /k-t-b/ meaning “writing”) imposes restrictions on assimilation. For instance, assimilation of solar letters maintains the integrity of the root structure ال + شمس → [aʃ.ʃams] (Watson, 2002, p. 89).
- English: The linear morphological structure permits greater freedom in assimilation, as seen in handbag → [hambæg], which is not influenced by morpheme boundaries (Crystal, 2008, p. 30).

5.2.3 Syllable Structure

- Arabic: Syllables are predominantly CV-heavy (e.g., كتاب [ki.ta:b]) and have restrictions on complex codas, leading to a preference for vowel elision (يَقُولُ → [ja.qu:l]) (Hasan, 2012, p. 454).

- English: Allows for complex codas (e.g., texts [tɛksts]), but segments may be elided to adhere to sonority hierarchies (texts → [tɛks]) (Roach, 2009, p. 125).

5.3. Case Study: Nasal Assimilation

Language	Process	Example	IPA	Theoretical Account
English	Regressive place assimilation	<i>input</i> → [ɪmpʊt]	[ɪm.pʊt]	Feature–spreading (Chomsky & Halle, 1968, p. 75)
	Progressive voicing assimilation	Egyptian Arabic <i>kitāb</i> <i>giddid</i> → [ki.ta:bkid.did]	[ki.ta:bkid.did]	Templatic constraints (Hasan, 2012, p. 460)

- **English:** Nasal place assimilation occurs exclusively in a regressive manner, influenced by the ease of articulation (Roach, 2009, p. 122).
- **Arabic:** In dialects, progressive voicing assimilation indicates that morphological considerations (such as maintaining root consonants) take precedence over sequential phonotactics (Eltaif, 2019, p. 7).

6. Pedagogical Challenges in Teaching Assimilation and Elision to Arabic Learners of English

The phonological phenomena of assimilation and elision in connected speech pose considerable challenges for Arabic speakers learning English because of the differences in structure between the two languages. These difficulties stem from differing rules related to sound alteration and omission, frequently resulting in mispronunciation.

6.1 Assimilation Challenges

As mentioned above, Assimilation in English is categorized into three main types: regressive (for instance, "hot potato" transforming into /hɒp pə'tetəʊ/), coalescent (like "is that you?" compressing into /ðætʃu/), and

progressive (as seen with plural morphemes such as "cats" /kæts/ versus "dogs" /dɒgz/).

However, Arabic primarily utilizes regressive assimilation in specific instances, where emphatic consonants affect adjacent sounds. This is because English places a higher priority on Agree(place) over Faithfulness, which promotes regressive assimilation (Prince & Smolensky, 1993), while Arabic emphasizes Faithfulness(root), restricting assimilation to templatic boundaries (Watson, 2002, p. 45).

This difference poses teaching challenges. For example, Arabic students frequently struggle to use coalescent assimilation in English, pronouncing phrases like "did you" as /dɪd ju:/ rather than the more fluid /dɪdʒu:/. Furthermore, these learners may excessively apply Arabic regressive rules which may lead to changing sounds inappropriately (El-Hossary, 2016, p. 6). These mistakes arise from the Speech Learning Model (SLM), which indicates that learners process second language sounds through the lens of their first language phonological system, resulting in the incorrect categorization of unfamiliar patterns (Flege, 1995, cited in El-Hossary, 2016, p. 10).

6.2 Elision Challenges

Elision patterns serve to further distinguish between the two languages. In English, elision can occur in syllabic consonants and consonant clusters. However, as discussed above, in Arabic, elision mainly impacts sentence-final vowels and irregular consonant clusters. This difference leads to common pronunciation mistakes among learners.

Arabic speakers might over-elide sounds in English, for example, omitting the /n/ in "government" (/gʌvəmənt/ instead of /'gʌvənmənt/), or under-elide, unnecessarily keeping sounds, as seen when pronouncing "correct" completely as /kə'rekt/ rather than the elided /k,rekt/ (El-Hossary, 2016, p. 6). The Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) accounts for these challenges, suggesting that learners find it difficult to

recognize L2 elision rules if they do not have corresponding categories in their L1 (Best, 1995, cited in El-Hossary, 2016, p. 10).

Furthermore, the root-and-pattern system in Arabic limits elision to vowel positions (يَصِفُ → [ja.sʕf]), in contrast to English, which allows for more flexible consonant elisions (family → [fæmli]) (Hasan, 2012, p. 454; Underhill, 1998, p. 61).

In addition, the predominance of CV structures in Arabic compared to English's complex codas accounts for Arabic's avoidance of vowel reduction, while schwa deletion is common in English (Eltaif, 2019, p. 10).

6.3 Teaching Recommendations

In order to tackle these difficulties, instructors should focus on examples of contrastive drills that emphasize the differences in assimilation, such as contrasting assimilated words with their non-assimilated counterparts. In addition, contextualized listening tasks utilizing authentic native speech samples, such as podcasts, news clips, or film dialogues, can assist learners in identifying natural patterns of elision in connected speech. Furthermore, visual representations, such as diagrams that illustrate articulatory movements for coalescent sounds, along with explicit error correction methods that compare Arabic and English examples featuring elided English words, are also important. By prioritizing these strategies, instructors can improve learners' proficiency in managing and understanding English connected speech hence enhancing their pronunciation.

Conclusion

Phonology is the branch of linguistics concerned with the study of the different patterns and combinations of speech sounds. It is one of the most important disciplines that enable us of understanding the different phonological systems of languages.

Due to the wide variety of topics included under the umbrella of phonology, this paper shed the light on certain phonological processes that occur in both English and Arabic. As it is significant for Arabic learners of English as a foreign language to understand certain phenomena in English and compare them with similar phenomena in Arabic in order to acquire correct pronunciation and comprehend connected speech.

The paper investigated two phonological processes, assimilation and elision. It discussed the different types of the two and the differences and similarities found in the two languages. Different examples were given to further illustrate the two processes.

Assimilation occurs when one sound assimilates to another neighboring sound. That is, it becomes more similar to it. It happens with consonants only. Whereas elision is the omission or deletion of a certain sound from a word, whether a vowel or a consonant.

Both assimilation and elision are phonological processes that occur rather unconsciously for the purpose of facilitating pronunciation. They usually happen when a speaker is talking rapidly and casually without paying attention to his/her speech.

This paper demonstrates that assimilation and elision in English and Arabic adhere to distinct phonological principles. English tends to simplify syllables in order to accommodate intricate consonant clusters (e.g., next day → [neks deɪ]), while Arabic focuses on maintaining root consonants and morphological structures (e.g., ال + شمس → [aʃ.ʃams]). Significant distinctions include directionality, the interaction between morphology and phonology, and the structure of syllables.

Assimilation in English primarily occurs in a regressive manner (e.g., ten bikes → [tɛm baɪks]), whereas Arabic permits both progressive and regressive alterations (e.g., kitāb giddid → [kita:b kiddid]). In Arabic, elision is restricted to vowels, while English freely applies it to both

vowels and consonants (e.g., family → [fæmli]). Furthermore, Arabic favors CV syllable structures, contrasting with English's acceptance of complex codas (e.g. *texts* [tɛksts]).

These phonological distinctions present challenges for Arabic speakers learning English, leading to errors like the mispronunciation of reduced vowels or the excessive application of Arabic gemination rules. Future research could examine these matters through articulatory and acoustic investigations, along with pedagogical approaches aimed at enhancing pronunciation training. Grasping these differences aids in fine-tuning teaching strategies for pronunciation improvement of Arabic speakers learning English as it enriches their understanding of phonological systems.

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