

RELAXED PRONUNCIATION DICTATIONS

Why can't someone who has been studying EFL for years still not understand what is being said in an English-language movie? Blame 'teacher talk.'

In this bottom-up exercise, students exercise their aural skills to figure out, piece by piece, a sentence that the teacher enunciates in the way English is really spoken by (some) native speakers!

Here is a summary of some common phonetic shifts that can occur when native English speakers are engaged in conversation, especially if it is relaxed and casual.

ellipsis Something—a word or a sound—is omitted:

You come 'cause of the free food?

Translation: Did you come because of the free food?

linking with vowels When a word begins with a vowel sound, it often links with the word before it:

How muchizzit fora baguvapples?

Translation: How much is it for a bag of apples?



'and'/'or' Small, common 'grammar' words are especially susceptible to reduction:

Would you like bacon 'n' eggs, 'r pancakes 'n' sausage?

Translation: Would you like bacon and eggs, or pancakes and sausage?

ellipsis of initial vowel sounds Initial vowel sounds are susceptible to getting dropped (elided):

Fits okay, I'll wait here.

Translation: If it's okay, I'll wait here.

reductions to the schwa The most common sound in English is 'the schwa' /ə/. (This is, for example, the first sound in the word 'about.')

Any short vowel sound can get reduced to the schwa, usually in unstressed syllables:

Our marrəge was a big məstake, but we cərracted it təday with a dəvorce.

Translation: Our marriage was a big mistake, but we corrected it today with a divorce.

the flap The flap is a quick touching of the tongue to the upper palate of the mouth. (It's close to the sound /d/, and to be honest I can't hear the difference myself. So I will spell it as a double d.) What is ostensibly the sound /t/ will often be reduced to the flap when it is sandwiched between two voiced sounds:

Put a liddle budder in the wadder before you add the pasta.

Translation: Put a little butter in the water before you add the pasta.

reductions with helping verbs Things often get smooshed together when can, could, will, would, should, have and etc. are used:

I gotta admit, I couldna done it without you.

Translation: I have got to admit it: I couldn't have done it without you.

silent 'h' The initial /h/ is often dropped in the personal pronouns *he, his, him, her* and *hers*. This leaves the word starting with a vowel sound, so it links easily with the previous word:

He wanted to seer beforee left, buttis friends were waiting.

Translation: He wanted to see her before he left, but his friends were waiting.

reductions in function words Function words (words that perform a grammatical function) are especially susceptible to reduction and ellipsis:

Joo know how long they b'n here?

Translation: Do you know how long they have been here?

'nt' reduction The sound /t/ often gets dropped in an 'nt' combination.

After twenny inches of snow, he wannid winner to be over.

Translation: After twenty inches of snow, he wanted winter to be over.

dropping initial words The first word or words of a sentence may be omitted if the sentence is comprehensible without them. This happens mostly when the initial words are function words:

Care for some coffee?

Translation: Would you care for some coffee?

the glottal stop The glottal stop is "a consonant formed by the audible release of the airstream after complete closure of the glottis." Clear? Consider how a native speaker, speaking quickly, might render the middle sound of 'something' and 'cotton' in this example:

I think sum*m's wrong with this co*n shirt.

Translation: I think something's wrong with this cotton shirt.

linking with same or similar consonants When a word ends with the same or a similar sound as the first sound of the subsequent word, the two words usually link:

I gottired of that blackat and itstupidail.

Translation: I got tired of that black cat and its stupid tail.

'of' It's short, it's common, and it's a function word. Of course it often gets reduced:

We have a lotta hot chocolate, but we're outta coffee.

Translation: We have a lot of hot chocolate, but we're out of coffee.

Here are more examples.

It's easy to make up your own, too!

[ellipsis]

'Bout three years ago we went inna the choc'late bus'ness.

(About three years ago we went into the chocolate business.)

Ev'ry ev'ning is diff'rent 'cause she never cooks the same thing twice.

(Every evening is different because she never cooks the same thing twice.)

[reductions with modals]

He musta missed the bus. (He must have missed the bus.)

Itsiz own fault. He shoulda been more careful.

(It's his own fault. He should have been more careful.)

You oughta try this. It's great! (You ought to try this. It's great!)

She hasta leave soon. / She's gotta leave soon.

(She has to leave soon. / She has got to leave soon.)

I hafta work this weekend. / I gotta work this weekend.

(I have to work this weekend. / I have got to work this weekend.)

I couldna donnit withoucha. (I couldn't have done it without you.)

[and/or]

I'll have baconineggs, and my son'll have a burgerin fries.

(I'll have bacon and eggs, and my son will have a burger and fries.)

Ja like coffeer tea? (Would you like coffee or tea?)

Will this be casher charge? (Will this be cash or charge?)

[ellipsis of initial sounds]

Fits okay'll bringit back tomorrow. (If it's okay, I'll bring it back tomorrow.)

My the firswun here? (Am I the first one here?)

Zis the firsttime you've done brain surgery, doc? *response:* Zit matter?

(Is this the first time you've done brain surgery, doc? *response:* Does it matter?)

[the importance of stress]

He was **away** for **months**. vs. He was away **four months**.

[reductions to the schwa (ə)]

Our marrəge was a big məstake, but we cərracted it təday with a dəvorce.

(Our marriage was a big mistake, but we corrected it today with a divorce.)

[linking with vowels]

How muchizzit to seeuh movie? (How much is it to see a movie?)

Zithe samizeeother one? (Is it the same as the other one?)

[reductions in function words]

Howzee do that? (How does he do that?)

Howdy do that? (How did he do that?)

Howja do that? (How do you do that? -or- How did you do that?)

She shoulda been more careful, but I guessit coulda been worse.

(She should have been more careful, but I guess it could have been worse.)

How long yuh b'n workin' here? (How long have you been working here?)

Gimmee 'nidea 'v wuhcher gonna do 'fore yuh doit, will yuh?

(Give me an idea of what you are going to do before you do it, will you?)

I jis gotta gowanna diet 'n' loosome weight.

(I've just got to go on a diet and lose some weight.)

I'm gonna hafta study ferizlongizI can tonight to get ready for the testomorrow.

(I'm going to have to study for as long as I can tonight to get ready for the test tomorrow.)

Zlongiz yer goin' inna the kitchen, joo git meeuh peesuh pie?

(As long as you're going into the kitchen, would you get me a piece of pie?)

He shoulda benearanourago, rat least called.

(He should have been here an hour ago, or at least called.)

We hafta leavin five minutes 'fwe don' wanna misser plane.

(We have to leave in five minutes if we don't want to miss our plane.)

[-nt reduction]

After twenny inchizzuh snow, he wannid winner to beeyover.

(After twenty inches of snow, he wanted winter to be over.)

It duzzin madder fee enners the contest now.

(It doesn't matter if he enters the contest now.)

There are plenneeuh dennists in town. (There are plenty of dentists in town.)

Few donttellim you tookit, he won' missit.

(If you don't tell him you took it, he won't miss it.)

[the flap]

Pudduh liddle budder in the wadder before you add the pasta.

(Put a little butter in the water before you add the pasta.)

Wancher tea hodder cold? (Do you want your tea hot or cold?)

Whudduyuh do on the weekends fer fun? (What do you do on the weekends for fun?)

Whudduyuh doin' Saddurday? (What are you doing Saturday?)

You oudda seeya doctor 'bou' that righddaway.

(You ought to see a doctor about that right away.)

Let's waidd'll the weather's bedder. (Let's wait until the weather is better.)

That poor liddle boy's been waidding to go duh the bathroom franour.

(That poor little boy's been waiting to go to the bathroom for an hour.)

[dropping initial words]

Care for some coffee? (Would you care for some coffee?)

Sounds like a good idea. (That sounds like a good idea.)

Leaving now? (Are you leaving now?)

Got a minute? (Have you got a minute?)

Know anything 'bout computers? (Do you know anything about computers?)

Mind if I smoke? (Do you mind if I smoke?)

Some*n wrong? (Is something wrong?)

Wanna go out for dinner tonight? (Do you want to go out for dinner tonight?)

Stay up too late last night? (Did you stay up too late last night?)

[can vs. can't]

I **can't** come tomorrow, but I can **make** it **Saturday**.

I can **tell** that he's **Asian**, but I **can't** tell what **country** he's from.

My aunt can **come** to the party. — **My aunt can't come** to the party.

[the glottal stop *]

I haven't ea*n all day, and I'm ge*n mighty hungry.

(I haven't eaten all day, and I'm getting mighty hungry.)

I think some*n's wrong with this co*on shirt.

(I think something's wrong with this cotton shirt.)

Wha* was that noise? (What was that noise?)

She's go*en tired of wai*n for him every day.

(She's gotten tired of waiting for him every day.)

It's impor*nt that your answers be wri*en in pencil, not ink.

(It's important that your answers be written in pencil, not ink.)

[linking with same or similar consonants]

There've beenno earthquakessinseventeen hundred.

(There have been no earthquakes since 1700.)

I felttiredtill I sat in thisseat. (I felt tired till I sat in this seat.)

Tha'teswassso hard! (That test was so hard!)

The kidswamallevening while the parentstookareof getting dinnerready.

(The kids swam all evening while the parents took care of getting dinner ready.)

Let'seeyif my mommight have some leftoverrice 'n' beans.

(Let's see if my mom might have some leftover rice and beans.)

Blackatser bad luck, so don'ttry duh peddem.

(Black cats are bad luck, so don't try to pet them.)

She likesugar wither coffee, and she'ssure to complainif she doesn't getit.

(She likes sugar with her coffee, and she's sure to complain if she doesn't get it.)

They playttennis 'n' talk'tilllunch time.

(They played tennis and talked till lunch time.)

Whadee giver? (What did he give her?)

[of]

Snow is kinduh nice to lookat, but I'm sickuh shovelinnit.

(Snow is kind of nice to look at, but I'm sick of shoveling it.)

We havuh lotuh hot choc'late, but we're outuh coffee.

(We have a lot of hot chocolate, but we're out of coffee.)

He orderduh cupuh coffeenuh cupluh donuts.

(He ordered a cup of coffee and a couple of donuts.)

[silent h]

He wanniduh seer beforee left, buddy had no time.

(He wanted to see her before he left, but he had no time.)

Thisiziz firs'time here. (This is his first time here.)

Whatsiz name, 'n' whatsee do? (What's his name, and what's he do?)

I've had a problem withiz son, buddy doesn't knowit yet.

(I've had a problem with his son, but he doesn't know it yet.)

Wheredee go? Zee know the movie startsin five minutes?

(Where did he go? Does he know the movie starts in five minutes?)

Tellem I'm not wai'in forem anymore.

(Tell him/them I'm not waiting for him/them anymore.)

[questions beginning with have/has]

View finished the work I gave you? (Have you finished the work I gave you?)

Zit stopped raining? (Has it stopped raining?)

Vi answered your question? (Have I answered your question?)

[-ty and -teen]

My cousin Joe is 16 years old, but my cousin Susan is 80.

We invited 13 people to the party, but 30 came.

14,000 years ago, the glaciers receded, leaving over 40,000 lakes behind.

[common phrases]

Wuhchuhdoin? (What are you doing?)

Wuhtsuhmatter? (What's the matter?)