

## Topic 5: Connected Speech and Intonation

### Slide 26: Connected Speech – Rhythm

- English is **stress-timed**: stressed syllables tend to occur at roughly regular intervals, causing varying gaps for unstressed syllables.
- **Rhythm**: A pattern of strong-weak syllables. For example, in “*The CAT sat on the MAT.*”, strong syllables fall on *CAT* and *MAT*.
- This leads to alternation: unstressed syllables are shortened (often to schwa) so speech fits the rhythm.
- Contrast with syllable-timed languages (equal duration per syllable).
- Rhythm makes English sound “bouncy” or syncopated to learners of other languages.

### Slide 27: Assimilation (Connected Speech)

- **Assimilation**: A sound becomes more like a neighboring sound in place, manner, or voicing.
- **Regressive (anticipatory) assimilation**: A sound changes because of a following sound (e.g. “*won’t you*” pronounced [wəʊn tʃu:] → [wəʊn.tʃu:], the /t/ becomes /tʃ/ before /j/).
- **Progressive**: A sound changes because of a preceding sound (e.g. nasal place changes: “*ten boys*” /tɛn bɔɪz/ → [tɛn bɔɪz], or “*ten park*” [tɛm pɑ:k], /n/ → /m/ before /p/).
- Common assimilations: place of articulation (n→m before labials, n→ŋ before velars), voicing assimilation in consonant clusters.
- More likely in fast, casual speech.

### Slide 28: Elision and Linking

Speech often omits or inserts sounds to smooth transitions. **Elision** is the dropping of sounds, especially in clusters (“*next please*” → /nɛks pli:z/ dropping /t/). **Linking** is inserting a glide to connect vowels (“*go on*” → [gəʊwɒn], inserting /w/). These processes maintain fluency and rhythm in rapid speech.

- **Elision**: Common in consonant clusters (e.g. *sandwich* ['sænwɪdʒ], dropping /d/; *camera* ['kæmrə], dropping /ɹ/).
- **Linking**:
  - Vowel-to-vowel: insert /j/ or /w/ (e.g. “*see it*” [si:j ɪt], “*go out*” [gəʊw aʊt]).
  - /r/-linking (in non-rhotic accents): “*far away*” [fɑ:ɹə'weɪ], adding /r/.
- These rules of connected speech are key to understanding and producing natural English sound sequences.

## Slide 29: Intonation – Tone Units

- **Intonation** is the pitch movement (melody) of phrases and sentences, conveying attitude, grammar, or discourse function.
- Speech is divided into **tone units** (intonation phrases), each with one nucleus (tonic syllable that carries the main pitch movement).
- **Tone unit structure:** Prehead (optional unstressed words), Head (stressed words before the nucleus), Nucleus (stressed syllable with the main tone), Tail (optional words after nucleus).
- Example: In "*I WANT a coffEE*", the nucleus might be "*cof-*" with a falling pitch (indicating statement).
- Intonation can indicate sentence type: e.g. falling for statements, rising for yes/no questions.

## Slide 30: Major Intonation Patterns

- **Falling tone (↘):** High to low pitch on the nucleus, used in most statements and wh-questions (e.g. "*He's coming ↘.*"). Conveys finality.
- **Rising tone (↗):** Low to high, used in yes/no questions or to show uncertainty (e.g. "*Are you coming ↗ ?*"). Suggests continuation or question.
- **Fall-rise (↘↗):** Pitch falls then rises on the nucleus; often conveys reservation or politeness (e.g. "*Well ↘↗, I'm not sure.*").
- **Rise-fall (↗↘):** Pitch rises then falls; can express surprise or strong emotions (e.g. "*Yes ↗↘!*" emphatically).
- Different combinations (high/low heads, tail) create nuanced meaning (e.g. contrastive stress: "*He didn't go!*" vs "*He didn't go!*").

## Slide 31: Summary – Prosody in English

- English prosody combines **stress, rhythm, and intonation** to convey meaning beyond individual sounds.
- Stress-timed rhythm with reduced syllables and connected-speech processes makes English flow naturally.
- Intonation patterns (falling, rising, etc.) add meaning (questions, lists, emphasis, emotion).
- Mastery of connected speech and intonation is essential for fluent, comprehensible English and for expressing subtleties in meaning.