



# ASSIMILATION

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# DEFINITION

- When we find a phoneme realized differently as a result of being near some other phoneme belonging to a neighbouring word we call this an instance of **assimilation** (Roach, 1991, p.124).
- **Assimilation** is the influence of a sound on another sound in the neighbouring so that the two become similar.

- If a sound changes influenced by a following sound, it is called **regressive assimilation**.
- If a sound is influenced by a preceding sound, it is called **progressive assimilation**.

# TYPES OF ASSIMILATION

- We can identify three types of assimilation: assimilation of place, of manner and of voicing in consonants.
- **1. Assimilation of Place of articulation – often in rapid colloquial speech**  
**Regressive**

# /t/ changes to /p/ before the bilabials/p, b, m/

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
first base		pocket money	
private property		secret police	
mixed marriage		fruit machine	
direct method		sweet potato	
put back		white meat	
foot brake		that man	

# /d/ changes to /b/ before the bilabials /p, b, m/

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
bad pain		second mate	
blood pressure		good morning	
command post		hold back	
gold metal		lord mayor	
red bag		old man	
united party		gold mine	

# /t/ changes to /k/ before /the velar k/ or /g/

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
credit card		street cry	
first class		flat cap	
cut glass		smart clothes	
		that cake	

# /d/ changes to /g/ before the velar /k/ or /g/

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
cold cream		hard copy	
hard cash		sand castle	
second class		red carpet	
highland cattle		slide guitar	

# /n/ changes to /m/ before the bilabial /p, b, m/

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
iron man		common market	
American plan		question mark	
foreign minister		garden party	
green belt		cotton picker	
human being		pen pal	
queen bee		chicken breast	

**n/** changes to **/ŋ/** before the velar  
**/k/** or **/g/**

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
action group		tin can	
golden gate		town clerk	
human capital		open court	
roman catholic		iron curtain	

/s/ changes to / ʃ / before / ʃ/ /or / j/  
followed by a rounded vowel sound

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
dress shop		bus shelter	
nice shoes		this shop	
nice yacht		this year	
space shuttle			

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
cheese shop		as you	
rose show			
these sheep			

# / θ / changes to /s/ before /s/

Phrases	Transcription	Phrases	Transcription
both sides		earth science	
north south		fourth season	
both sexes		fifth set	

# Assimilation of voice

- Another type of assimilation which is very important is that of voicing. The vibration of the vocal cords is not something that can be switched on and off very swiftly, as a result groups of consonants tend to be either all voiced or all voiceless

# Progressive assimilation in voicing: grammatical endings

/s/ is pronounced /s/ when preceded by a voiceless sound

/s/ is pronounced /əz/ when preceded by a voiced sound

/s / is pronounced /ɪz/ or /w/ when preceded by sibilants:  
/s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/

Transcribe the following words showing assimilation

- likes **s** loves **s**
- lies **s**
- dogs **s** and cats **s**
- clashes **s**

- 'ed' is pronounced /t/ when preceded by voiceless sounds

Example: walked, finished

- 'ed' is pronounced /d/ when preceded by a voiced sound

Example: opened, carried

- 'ed' is pronounced /ɪd/ or /əd/ when preceded by t or d

Example: landed, visited

Transcribe the examples showing assimilation

# Regressive assimilation in voicing

- of course /əf 'k ɔ:s/ instead of / /əv 'k ɔ:s/
- have to /hæf tu:/ instead of / /hæv tu:/

Show assimilation in the following:

- has to
- I have to go
- used to
- I used to live near you.
- suppose to
- you were supposed to leave!