

*Elision as a Phonological Property of
English and Kurdish*

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Introduction

Since this study deals with phonology it is essential to explain what it means. Phonology is the science that deals with the description of sounds and how they function in a particular language showing the relationships among the different phonemes. As a matter of fact, it tries to analyze the restrictions and regularities found in particular language (Roach, 2000: 44-45).

Hayman (1975: 2) gives a similar definition to phonology. He states that it is a scientific study of the sound system in a particular language showing how speech sounds structure and function to enable speakers to use their language for the purpose of communication.

In fact, phonology deals with sound properties such as consonant clusters, assimilation, linking merging, (coalescence) and elision in a given language (Lyons, 1968: 99). So, linking for example, deals with the use of the glides /j/ or /w/ or the intrusive /r/ to replace the glottal stop (Hassan, 1989: 134). Thus it avoids the (v + v)⁽¹⁾ sequence, (Mohammed, 2005: 155). Elision, on the other hand, is the omission of a vowel or a consonant or even a whole syllable

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(1) Means vowel + vowel.

in certain cases. It is characteristic of rapid colloquial speech. Since languages that belong to the same family seem to have similar phonological properties, it is not surprising to find that English, which is a member of the Indo – European languages (Palmer, 1972: 283) as well as Bahdinani Kurdish (BK)*.

Aims of the Study

The present study aims at confirming the view that languages belonging to the same group resemble each other in different linguistic aspects. This is done in this research through studying and analyzing “Elision in English and Kurdish in order to show how far the two language are similar concerning the phonological feature known as “Elision”.

1. Genetic Relationships and Phonological Similarities In English and BK

Historical and comparative studies of the early stages during the nineteenth century about the Indo – European languages provided enough proof of the genetic relationships between them especially in the laws that govern linguistic change (G. C. Lepschy, 1972: 21). Such descriptive methods and the application of comparative approach has disclosed that large groups of languages extending from Ireland to northern India and Chinese Turkistan are descended from a common ancestor. It has also showed that these languages resemble each other beyond the possibility of mere chance and they are

* BK: Short for Bahdinani Kurdish, a variant spoken in Duhik and Ninevah governorates in Iraq.

divergent forms of a single prehistoric language called Primitive Indo – European (Bloomfield, 1973: 13).

Further studies on these language have revealed a number of common properties shared by the sound systems of the world's languages to the extent that phonologists, in some cases, are tempted to claim certain universals among them. Hence we should not be surprised to find striking similarities among languages since speech sound are the product of human anatomy and physiology (Hayman, 1972: 2).

1.1 Elision in English and BK

Elision has always been a feature of the structure of English words of which the weak accented syllables have undergone a process of gradation, i.e. loss of phonemes or obstruction of vowels which result in a kind of contraction (Gimson, 1964: 236).

Simply, elision means the omission of certain sounds in certain words in order to reduce the number of syllables making the pronunciation easier (Al-Hamash, 1983: 73-74). According to Gimson (1974: 238) the omission of consonants is a kind of simplification of clusters involving loss of the alveolars /t/ and /d/ when they occur medially in a cluster of three consonants.

Such disappearance of certain sounds under special circumstances is characteristic of colloquial rapid speech in English (Roach, 2000: 142). Kurdish, like English, shows this phonological phenomenon viz. elision, especially of consonants such as the alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/ in nearly similar contexts.

1.2 Elision In English

Elision, as mentioned earlier, is the omission of a phoneme (vowel or consonant) or more in certain cases. Sometimes a whole syllable is omitted. Elision is characteristic of rapid, colloquial speech (Hassan, 1989: 131).

1.2.1 Types of Elision

A. Elision of Vowels:

This type of elision is likely to take place especially in a sequence of unaccented syllables in respect of / ə / and /ɪ/ (Gimson, 1964: 238).

Examples:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|---|------------|---------------|
| (1) temperature | /tempərɪtʃə/ | → | /tempɪtʃə/ | /ə/ is elided |
| (2) believe | /bɪli:v/ | → | /bli:v/ | /i/ is elided |
| (3) geometry | /dʒiɒmətri/ | → | /dʒɒmətri/ | /i/ is elided |
- “specially among schoolchildren” (Gimson, 1964: 238).
- | | | | | |
|--------------|------------|---|-----------|---------------|
| (4) murderer | /mə:dərə/ | → | /mə:drə/ | /ə/ is elided |
| (5) natural | /natʃənəl/ | → | /natʃrəl/ | /ə/ is elided |
| (6) national | /nəʃənəl/ | → | /nəʃnəl/ | /ə/ is elided |

B. Elision of Consonants:

This type of elision is divided into two types:

1. Established (Historical)

2. Colloquial or contextual

1. Established or historical elision shows that the reduction of many consonant cluster has been established, i.e. consonants were elided throughout history.

Examples

- (7) bought /bo:t/ “gh” are elided
 (8) walk /wo:k/ “l” is elided

Elision can be initial, medial or final initial elision.

Examples

- (9) write /rait/ “w” is elided
 (10) know /nou/ “k” is elided
 (11) gnaw /no:/ “g” is elided

Medial elision:

Examples

- (12) fasten /fa:sn/ “t” is elided
 (13) castle /ka:sl/ “t” is elided

Final elision:

Examples

- (14) lamb /lam/ “b” is elided
 (15) column /koləm/ “n” is elided
 (16) hymn /him/ “n” is elided

2. Colloquial or Contextual elision:

Special consonants are elided when they occur in certain contexts. These consonants are:

- a. /t/ and /d/ which are elided when they occur medially in a consonant cluster:

Examples

- (17) mostly /moustli/ → /mousli/ /t/ is elided
 (18) wrist watch /rist wotʃ/ → /ris wotʃ/ /t/ is elided

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-
- (19) friends /frendz/ → /frenz/ /d/ is elided
(20) builds /bildz/ → /bilz/ /d/ is elided

b. /l/ is elided when preceded by /o:/'

Examples

- (21) always /o:lweiz/ → /o:weiz/ /l/ is elided
(22) all right /o:l rait/ → /o: rait/ /l/ is elided

c. /k/ or /g/ may be elided when they occur after /g/'

Examples

- (23) length /leŋkθ/ → /leŋθ/ /k/ is elided
(24) singer /siŋgə/ → /siŋə/ /g/ is elided

C. Elision of a whole syllable: This kind of elision takes place in rapid speech especially where there is a sequence of /r/ sound.

Examples

- (25) library /laibrəri/ → /laibri/ /rə/ are elided
(26) February /februəri/ → /februri/ /ruə/ are elided

Note: The above mentioned type of elision are to be distinguished from the reduced forms in various types of regional and popular speech which the educated speakers might characterize as vulgar.

Examples

- (27) recognize /'rekənaiz/ /g/ is elided
(28) satisfactory /sasfaktri/ /ti/ is elided
(29) Waterloo /'wo:lu:/ /tə/ are elided
(30) lovely /lʌli/ /v/ is elided

(Gimson, 1964: 236)

The loss of final /v/ in “of” before consonants is also to be noted:

Examples

(31) lots of them /lots ə ðəm/ /v/ is elided

(32) waste of time /weist ə taim/ /v/ is elided.

(Roach, 2000: 143)

2. Elision In Kurdish (BK)

Kurdish, like English, has elision as a phonological feature. Elision, here occurs to some consonants when they form clusters while no sign of historical elision or elision of vowels is found. The elision of consonants appears approximately in the same contexts as it does in English which is also characteristic of rapid speech. Special sounds are omitted to reduce the number of syllables or sounds so as to make their pronunciation easier.

Elision generally takes place in (BK) in medial consonant clusters. Thus it is contextual elision which involves special sounds. The following sounds tend to be elided:

1. /t/ when occurs medially in a cluster of usually two consonants:

Examples

(33) /dastʃo/ → /dasʃo/ “basin for washing hands after meals”

(34) /dast mal/ → /dasmal/ “handkerchief”

(35) /do:t mam/ → /do: mam/ “cousin (girl)”

(36) /dast gurk/ → /das gurk/ “glove”

(37) /bist dʒara/ → /bisdʒara/ “twenty times”

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- (38) /bist bar/ → /bisbar/ “twenty stones”
(39) /kurt tir/ → /kurtir/ “shorter”

b. /d/ may be elided when it occurs medially in a consonant cluster.

Example

- (40) /sad dʒa:ra/ → /sadʒa:ra/ “a hundred times”
(41) /kind ka/ → /kinka/ “lower (some thing)”
(42) /bilind tir/ → /bilintir/ “higher”
(43) /bilind kir/ → /bilinkir/ “make something higher”

c. /n/ is elided when it occurs in a cluster with an other consonant.

Example

- (44) /min gout/ → /mi gout/ “I said”
(45) /min xar/ → /mi xar/ “I ate”
(46) /min di: t/ → /mi di: t/ “I saw”
(47) /min so: t/ → /mi so: t/ “I burnt”

It is be noted that the alveolar consonant /z/ is elided when it precedes /ʒ /.

Example

- (48) /ʔazʒ i:/ → “I, too (also)”

Notice how elision takes place in some loan words from Arabic which contain consonant clusters in medial or final positions.

Examples

(49) /ʃeix ʃams/ → /ʃei ʃim/ /x/ is elided "شيخ شمس"

(50) /malik ʃeix ḥasan/ → /mali ʃei sin/⁽¹⁾ "الملك الشيخ حسن"

/k/, /x/, /h/ are elided, while the first /a/ in /ḥasan/ is elided but the second /a/ is changed into /i/ to make pronunciation easier.

3. Conclusion

The study has revealed that both English and (BK) have elision as a phonological property. The alveolar plosives in both languages are elided when they occur medially in consonant clusters. In (BK) the sounds /n/, /x/, /t/ are omitted when they are used medially in clusters with other, consonants. Elision is found to be characteristic of rapid speech. In English, consonant sounds such as /t/, /d/, /l/, /k/, /g/, and in certain cases a whole syllable are elided as a feature of colloquial rapid speech. Vowels, too, in a sequence of unstressed syllable are elided. The study has showed that (BK) does not have established or historical elision or the elision of vowels as in English.

(1) /h/ is a voiceless, pharyngeal fricative.

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الحذف كظاهرة صوتية في اللغتين الانكليزية والكردية

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الملخص

أظهرت هذه الدراسة بلأن الحذف صفة مشتركة وشائعة في نظامي الصوت في الانكليزية والكردية (لهجة بهدينان) إذ إن هذه الظاهرة وخاصة فيما يخص الأصوات الصحيحة مثل /d/, /t/ تكاد تظهر في المواقع نفسها لدى تتابعهما مع أصوات صحيحة أخرى في وسط الكلمات أو بينها تلك الأصوات إضافة إلى أصوات صحيحة مثل /k/, /g/, /t/ في الانكليزية و /x/, /n/, /z/ في الكردية يصيبها الحذف أيضاً في مواقع متماثلة في اللغتين. والظاهرة هذه ليست إلا نتيجة لسبب رئيس وهو اختصار الألفاظ وتقليل أصواتها لتسهيل عملية التلفظ في الكلام السريع.

لقد بينت الدراسة ايضاً أن هناك حذفاً تاريخياً قديماً لأصوات صحيحة معينة وحذفاً لأصوات العلة في المقاطع الضعيفة في اللغة الانكليزية في حين لا يوجد مثل هذا النوع من الحذف في اللغة الكردية.

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