

Original Article

Investigating the Connected Speech Aspects in Enhancing English Language Pronunciation at the University of Kordofan

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Abstract - The present study was carried out at the University of Kordofan in the Faculty of Education during the period 2021-2022. The study aimed to investigate the influence of aspects of connected speech in enhancing the pronunciation of the English Language, and to view the need and necessity of using aspects of connected speech besides elucidating the importance of aspects of connected speech in enhancing communication. The descriptive and deductive methods were followed. A simple random sampling method was used, where the sample total size was 50 individuals, including English language finalist students in the Faculty of Education. The data was collected through a questionnaire, and statistically analyzed by the SPSS program (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences version 16) using percentages. The results revealed that 96% of respondents agreed that aspects of connected speech enhance pronunciation and communication. There were 92 % of respondents agreed that aspects of connected speech are necessary for speaking a language. 82% of respondents pointed those aspects of connected speech relevance of certain feature. About 70% of respondents agreed that aspects of connected speech help students in speaking the English language. It was concluded that aspects of connected speech enhance pronunciation and communication, are necessary for speaking a language, are relevant to certain features, and help students in speaking the English language. It is recommended that teachers should prepare a list of activities in the aspect of connected speech with pronunciation in the classroom. Further studies should be conducted to figure out the difficulties that students face in speaking in connected discourse. Teachers should raise students' awareness of learning the different aspects of connected speech and implement this feature in speaking the English language. Teachers should teach students the aspects of connected speech as a formal lesson during academic life due to its importance.

Keywords - Connected Speech, Pronunciation, English Language, Communication, University of Kordofan, English Language Teaching, Phonology, Speech Features, Language Learning.

1. Introduction

This study is tackling the main features of connected speech, including assimilation, elision, intrusion, and linking, also known as liaison. Connected speech is spoken language in a continuous sequence, as in normal conversation. It is also called connected discourse. There is often a significant difference between the way words are pronounced in isolation and the way they are pronounced in the context of connected speech. In connected speech, words or syllables are clipped differently than they would be in writing. Assimilation is a phenomenon whereby a sound takes the features of a neighboring sound. Every language in the world has specific characteristics in producing speech sounds; therefore, producing speech is the most important property of any language that distinguishes one language from another. The English language has a special way of producing sounds according to the nature of this language as a timed-stressed language. In the English language, sounds are different when they appear in isolation than when they appear in the company of other words. When sounds are



produced in continuous speech, their characteristics will be totally different because of some processes that happen during the course of speech. The phenomenon of continuous speech, known as connected speech, is such that when native speakers of the English language speak, they never make stops during their speech. A lot of non-native speakers of the English language face a great deal of difficulties in listening to the native speakers because of the aspects of connected speech, when the sounds are completely changed by the native speakers. Therefore, the following study aims to investigate the aspects and nature of connected speech, the roots of the problem, and what causes the problem. What do non-native speakers lack to deal with this problem, and what are the necessary solutions and procedures that should be done.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The study aims at the following:

1. Investigating the influence of connected speech in enhancing the communication of the English language.
2. Viewing the need and necessity of using the aspect of connected speech.
3. Elucidating the importance of the aspect of connected speech in enhancing communication.

1.2. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study comes from the importance of communication in the English language, which measures the competence of language users in understanding and using a foreign language properly. Knowing and realizing connected speech enhances speaking language eloquently and dealing with language in a proper manner, besides improving the skills of listening and speaking. It improves English accent and pronunciation, which play key factors in accent reduction and speaking ability in general, if we want our speech to be understood.

2. Connected Speech

Connected speech refers to the natural way words are linked and modified in continuous spoken language. It occurs when speech sounds influence each other across word boundaries, resulting in reductions, elisions, assimilations, and linking phenomena. In everyday communication, people do not pronounce words separately or in isolation; instead, they produce them in a flow, where sounds blend and adjust according to phonetic and contextual factors (Roach, 2020:87). This aspect of spoken language distinguishes fluent, native-like pronunciation from classroom or dictionary-style speech, which tends to emphasize isolated word forms. According to Ladefoged and Johnson (2021:113), connected speech processes are crucial for intelligibility and naturalness in spoken English. They allow speakers to maintain speech rhythm and efficiency, minimizing articulatory effort while preserving meaning. Common processes in connected speech include **assimilation**, where one sound changes to become more like a neighboring sound, as in “green park” pronounced /gri:m pɑ:k/, and **elision**, where certain sounds are omitted, such as the /t/ in “next day” becoming /neks deɪ/. Another feature is **linking**, where final consonants or vowels in one word connect to initial sounds in the next, as in “go on” pronounced /gəʊ wɒn/ (Kelly, 2019:64). These phonological modifications occur unconsciously and reflect the rhythm and speed of spontaneous speech. Furthermore, connected speech is strongly linked to **stress and intonation patterns**. As Field (2019:52) notes, stressed syllables serve as anchors in fluent speech, while unstressed syllables often undergo vowel reduction or weakening. For example, the word “to” may be pronounced as /tə/ instead of /tu:/ in connected contexts such as “going to school.” These reductions contribute to the overall rhythm of English, which is classified as a stress-timed language. Therefore, mastery of connected speech helps learners improve listening comprehension and spoken fluency, since native speakers rarely articulate words in their full form (Brown, 2021:78). From a pedagogical perspective, awareness and practice of connected speech should be integral to pronunciation teaching. Learners often struggle to understand native speakers because they are unfamiliar with how words merge and change in natural conversation (Walker, 2020:44). Teaching connected speech can thus bridge the gap between phonemic knowledge and real-world speech comprehension. Exercises focusing on listening discrimination, shadowing, and rhythm training are particularly effective in helping students recognize and produce natural speech patterns. As Celce-Murcia et al. (2018:112) emphasize, pronunciation instruction that includes connected speech elements fosters not only fluency but also communicative competence. In conclusion, connected speech represents an essential feature of spoken English that reflects the interplay between phonetic, phonological, and rhythmic aspects of language. It enhances fluency, naturalness, and comprehension in communication. For language learners, understanding and practicing connected speech is vital to achieving near-native pronunciation and listening

proficiency. The integration of this feature into language pedagogy contributes to more realistic and effective communication skills development (Gilbert, 2020:93).

2.1. Sample of the Study

A total of 50 undergraduate students in their final year at university participated in this study from the total of 94 through a simple random sampling technique to respond to the questionnaire. Subjects have taught English, and all students willingly participated in the study to give their opinion about the aspect of connected speech.

2.2. Instrumentations

The researcher prepared and administered a questionnaire for the purpose of determining the use of the aspect of connected speech in enhancing pronunciation at Kordofan University. The instrument consisted of 30 questions classified into 3 scales (agree, disagree, and not sure), each one addressed hypnoses mentioned in the first chapter. The researcher conducted a questionnaire applied to a number of English language students in their final year in the department of English Language, based on the distributed questionnaire.

2.3. Statistical Method

The researcher conductor used the program SPSS to handle statistical data analysis. SPSS's statistical package for social sciences, to show the difference through percentages.

2.4. Validation

The validation of a questionnaire utilizes the same principles and procedures as the validation of any measurement. Each question of the questionnaire must be related obviously to the topic under investigation. The arbitration committee, which consists of three expert teachers specialized in the English language, worked at Kordofan University, the faculty of education, department of English language. They hold a Ph.D. degree, and they have reported and modified the statements of the questionnaire, changed items 2, and corrected the spelling errors in item 7, besides deleting items 17 and changing to a new one.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to strict ethical guidelines:

- Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed they could withdraw at any time.
- Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed; no personally identifiable information was collected or stored.
- Data was used solely for academic research purposes.
- Institutional permissions were sought where applicable.

3. Data Discussion and Tabulation

Table 1: Aspects of Connected Speech Enhance Pronunciation And Communication

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	48	96%
Disagree	02	04%
Not sure	00	00%
Total	50	100%

The table above 1 showed that 96% 96%of the sample agreed that Aspects of connected speech enhance pronunciation and communication. Whereas 04% of them, aspects of connected speech enhance pronunciation and communication, and none of them are sure about this statement.

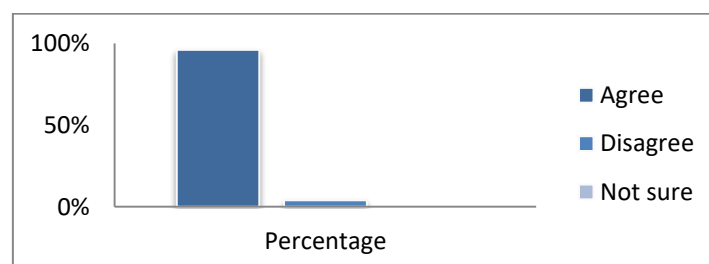
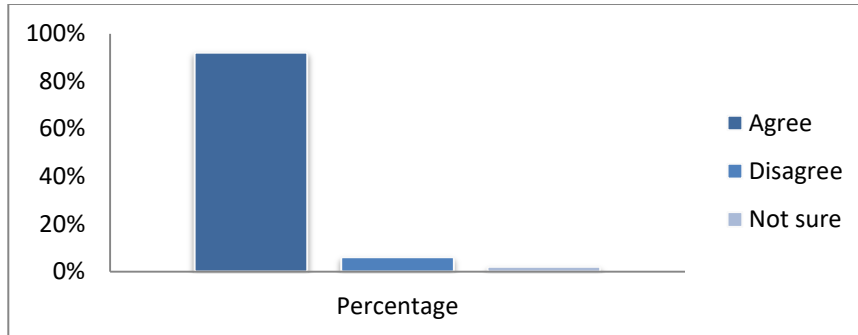


Fig. 1 Aspects of Connected Speech Enhance Pronunciation and Communication

Table 2: Aspects of Connected Speech Are Necessary For Speaking A Language

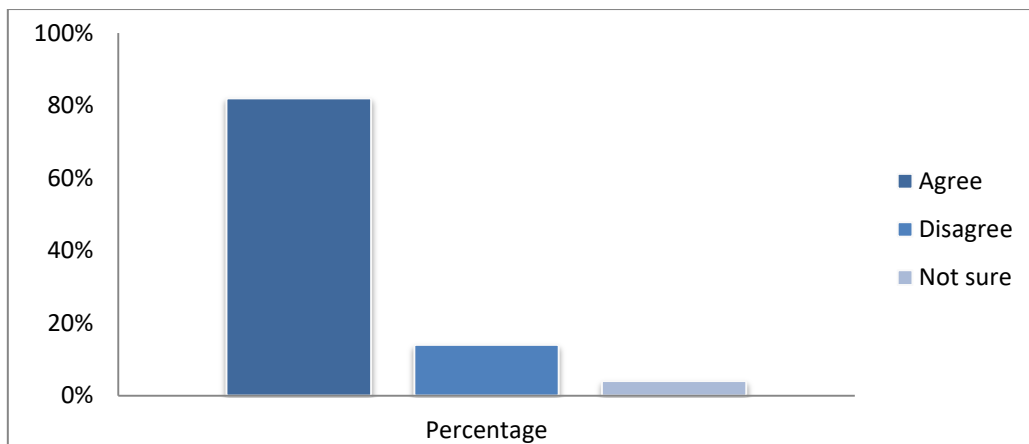
Options	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	46	92%
Disagree	3	06%
Not sure	1	02%
Total	50	100%

It is shown in the table 2 that 92% of the sample agreed that Aspects of connected speech are necessary for speaking a language. Whereas 06% of them disagreed that Aspects of connected speech are necessary for speaking a language. This means that Aspects of connected speech are necessary for speaking a language.

**Fig. 2 Aspects of Connected Speech Are Necessary For Speaking A Language****Table 3: Aspects of Connected Speech Relevance of Certain Features**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	41	82%
Disagree	07	14%
Not sure	02	04%
Total	50	100%

The table 3 clarified that 82% of the sample agreed that aspects of connected speech are relevant to certain features. Whereas 14% of them disagreed that, Aspects of connected speech relevance of certain feature, Only 04% of them are not sure about that, This means Aspects of connected speech relevance of certain feature.

**Fig. 3 Aspects of Connected Speech Relevance of a Certain Feature****Table 4: Students in Higher Education Face Difficulties in Applying the Aspects of Connected Speech**

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	41	82%
Disagree	06	12%
Not sure	03	06%
Total	50	100%

It is noticed from the table 4 above that 82% of the sample agreed that Students at higher education face difficulties in applying the aspects of connected speech. Whereas 12% of them disagreed that Students in higher education face difficulties in applying the aspects of connected speech. Only 06% of them are not sure about this. This means that Students in higher education face difficulties in applying the aspects of connected speech.

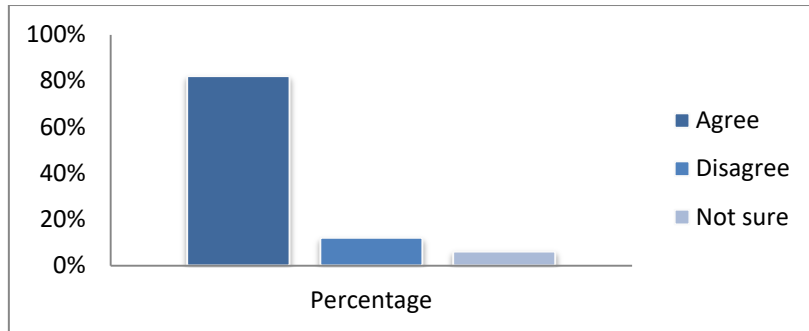


Fig. 4 Students in Higher Education Face Difficulties in Applying the Aspects of Connected Speech

Table 5: Aspects of Connected Speech Help Students in Speaking the English Language

Options	Frequency	Percentage
Agree	35	70%
Disagree	09	18%
Not sure	06	12%
Total	50	100%

It is justified in the table 5 over that 35% of the sample agreed that aspects of connected speech help students in speaking the English language. At the same time, 09% of them disagreed about Aspects of connected speech that help students in speaking the English language. This means that Aspects of connected speech help students in speaking the English language.

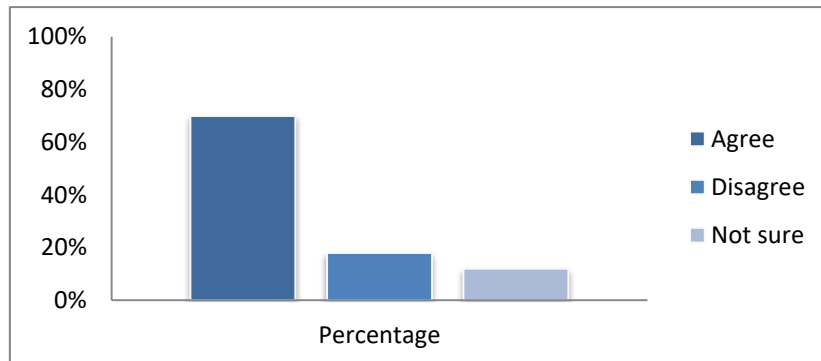


Fig. 5 Aspects of Connected Speech Help Students in Speaking the English Language

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4. Discussion

The findings of this study clearly indicate that the majority of students at the University of Kordofan recognize the significance of connected speech in improving their English pronunciation and communication. However, while the results show strong agreement percentages, a deeper analysis reveals that students' positive perceptions are closely linked to their practical experiences in learning and using English in academic and social settings. Most respondents (96%) agreed that aspects of connected speech enhance pronunciation and communication, which suggests that students perceive fluency and naturalness as major outcomes of mastering connected speech features such as assimilation, elision, linking, and intrusion. This reflects what Roach (2020:87) and Kelly (2019:64) emphasized—that fluent pronunciation depends not only on individual sound accuracy but also on the smooth connection of words in speech.

Students believe that connected speech enhances pronunciation because it brings them closer to the authentic rhythm and stress patterns of English. In a stress-timed language like English, the mastery of connected speech allows learners to produce speech that sounds natural and comprehensible (Field, 2019:52). Moreover, students likely associate connected speech with communicative confidence; when they use linking and reductions effectively, they sound more like native speakers, which increases self-efficacy in communication. This finding is consistent with Brown (2021:78), who pointed out that connected speech is central to the perception of fluency and intelligibility in English communication.

Nevertheless, the study also identified challenges that hinder students from applying connected speech effectively. A considerable percentage (82%) of the respondents agreed that students face difficulties in applying the aspects of connected speech. These challenges may stem from insufficient exposure to authentic spoken English, limited pronunciation practice in the classroom, and a lack of formal training on connected speech features. Many learners are trained to pronounce words individually, as they appear in textbooks, rather than as part of connected discourse. Similar challenges have been observed in other contexts; for example, Alghamdi (2020:115) found that Arab EFL learners often struggle with assimilation and elision due to differences between English and Arabic phonological systems. Likewise, in African EFL contexts, researchers such as Moyo (2019:88) reported that limited listening input from native speakers contributes to poor connected-speech comprehension among university students. These comparisons suggest that the problem is not unique to Sudan but is widespread across EFL environments where exposure to natural spoken English is limited.

Furthermore, 70% of respondents indicated that connected speech helps them speak English more fluently, while 92% considered it necessary for effective communication. These results highlight the pedagogical value of incorporating connected speech in pronunciation teaching. The findings correspond to studies from Asian EFL contexts, where similar interventions in pronunciation training, especially using listening and shadowing exercises, significantly improved students' oral fluency (Lee, 2021:53). Thus, integrating connected speech instruction in the curriculum at the University of Kordofan could bridge the gap between theoretical phonetics knowledge and real-world communicative competence.

5. Limitations and Future Research

Although the study achieved its objectives, some limitations should be acknowledged. The sample was restricted to 50 final-year students from one university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other Sudanese or African universities. Additionally, the study relied solely on questionnaire data without incorporating qualitative interviews or classroom observation, which could have provided deeper insights into learners' actual pronunciation practices. Future research should expand the sample size and adopt mixed methods to include listening tests or oral performance analysis. Comparative studies among EFL learners in other African and Arab universities would also be beneficial to explore how linguistic and socio-cultural factors influence the acquisition of connected speech features. Further research may also examine the effectiveness of specific teaching techniques such as audio-visual input, shadowing tasks, or phonological awareness training in enhancing students' ability to perceive and produce connected speech naturally.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study reaffirms that connected speech is a vital component of English pronunciation and communication. Students at the University of Kordofan demonstrate strong awareness of its importance, but still face practical challenges in its application. Therefore, EFL instructors should design pedagogical interventions that emphasize connected speech through continuous listening, imitation, and contextual pronunciation practice. By strengthening the integration of connected speech in pronunciation courses, learners will not only enhance their fluency and comprehensibility but also develop confidence in oral communication within academic and real-world contexts.

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