

The Missing Links

PART SIX

ACCENT ACQUISITION PRINCIPLE: Sound Linking in Rhythm Groups

As is clear from *PARTS THREE & FOUR* of *ACCENT ACTIVITIES*, speech rhythm and timing are important features of accent. To *add* importance to certain words or phrases, expressive speakers make them into meaning focus points, not only pronouncing them louder and with a higher tone of voice but also adding to the length of time it takes to say them. In contrast, speech elements to be *de-emphasized* are said more softly, with lower pitch, and more quickly. They are also pronounced less clearly, which often involves “sound linking.”

Sound Linking in Thought or Rhythm Groups

“Sound linking” is the connecting (and sometimes blending) of sounds of words that belong together *within* thought groups. With sound linking, the last sound of one word is joined to the first sound of the next word—so that the two words together sound like one multi-syllable word. The connection should be smooth, with no sounds left out and no extra sounds added. Here are some examples of sound linking. Notice that when the two words in the first column are joined, they sound exactly the same as the one-word equivalent in the second column. In these examples, the stressed syllables are in CAPITAL LETTERS. The symbol for sound linking is $_$.



Two Words Linked	= One Word
a_CROSS	aCROSS
a_LOAN	aLONE
SENT_her ¹	CENter
can_SERVE	conSERVE ²
can TEST	conTEST ²

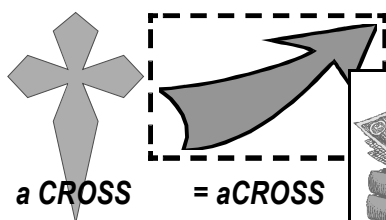
Two Words Linked	= One Word
LOVE_her ¹	LOVer
in_CHOIR	inQUIRE
MARK_it	MARKet ²
a_FENCE	ofFENSE ²
or_DEAL	orDEAL

¹ When a pronoun beginning with the letter *h* is unstressed (reduced) in context, the sound of /h/ is dropped. (The *h* is silent.) For this reason, when the pronouns *he*, *his*, *him*, *her*, and a few others follow stressed syllables, the two words are linked.

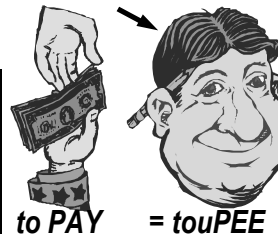
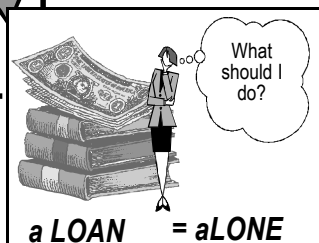
² The reason these words sound exactly the same as the corresponding two-word combinations is that the unstressed vowel sound is “reduced” in pronunciation to either /ə/ or /ɪ/.

Two Words Linked	= One Word
be_FIT	beFIT
DYE_it	DIet
come_POSE	comPOSE
HI,_Jean	HYgene
in_JEST	inGEST

Two Words Linked	= One Word
MY_grain	MIgraine
real_AX	reLAX
per_VERSE	perVERSE
to_PAY	touPEE
under_MINE	underMINE



When the sounds of two words are "linked" in speech, ...



... they may sound like one word.



What are the "rules" for sound linking (the joining or blending of sounds) in American English? There are three situations in which the final sound of one word can be joined to the first sound of the next word within the same thought or rhythm group.³

RULE 1: CONSONANT + VOWEL SOUND. If a word beginning with a vowel sound follows a word ending in a consonant sound, pronounce the consonant at the beginning of the second word. (Don't stop the air of your voice between the two words.) Here are some examples with the linked or blended sounds marked by _ and the pronunciation indicated with phonetic symbols.



Written Words	Pronounced ⁴ (but not Written) as:
give_a SPEECH	/ 'gɪ və 'spiːtʃ /
in_another CIty	/ ɪ nə 'nʌ ðər 'sɪ tiː /
know_ANything	/ 'noʊ 'en iː θɪŋ /
make_it SHOrT	/ 'meɪ kɪt 'ʃɔrt /
hear_a lot_of WORDS	/ 'hɪrə rə 'lɑ tə 'wɜrdz /
She typed_out_a TALK.	/ ʃiː 'taɪp 'taʊ tə 'tɔk /

³ According to Rebecca M. Dauer, who wrote *Accurate English*, published by Prentice Hall Regents, Englewood Cliffs NJ 07632 (1993). There are more detailed rules about sound linking and blending in Linda Grant's *Well Said: Advanced English Pronunciation*, Heinle & Heinle, Boston MA 02116, (1993).

⁴ The sound-symbols between slashes / / in the second column are from the International Phonetic Alphabet (the IPA). They are printed in the *IPA Kiel* font as published by Linguist's Software, Inc., Edmonds WA 98020-0580. The small raised letters (superscripts) after vowel symbols indicate complex vowel sounds or diphthongs. There are spaces between syllables. An accent mark ' indicates that the following syllable is stressed, or emphasized. A larger accent mark precedes the meaning focus point.

RULE 2: VOWEL + VOWEL SOUND. When a vowel sound at the beginning of a word follows a vowel sound at the end of a word, “link” or “blend” the two sounds. Instead of stopping the voice between the two words, insert a short /y/ sound after the vowels pronounced in the front of the mouth—/i^y/, /e^y/, /a^y/, and /ɔ^y/. Insert a short /w/ sound after the “back vowels” /u^w/, /o^w/, and /a^w/. Here are examples of sound linking for both Rules 1 and 2.

Written Words	Pronounced⁴ (but not Written) as:
It should be_about five MInutes.	/ ɪt ʃʊd 'bi ʲə'ba ^w t 'fa ^y v 'mɪn ɪts /
We_always_argue_EARly_in the day.	/ wi ʲɔ ^l we ʲzɑ ^r gu ʲwʊr li ʲɪn θə 'de ^y /
No_one_EVer_appears to have the same_opinion.	/ nɔ ^w 'wə 'nɛ və rə 'pi ^y rɪz tə 'hæv θə 'se ^y mə 'pɪn jən / ⁵
Are you_angry_or_anNOYED_at me?	/ ɔ ^r jə ʲwæŋ grɪ ʲl rə 'nɔ ^y dət mi ^y / ⁵
WHO_is going to_agree_on this? ⁵	/ 'hu ʲɪz gəʊn ə 'grɪ ʲɔ ⁿ ðɪs / ⁵
I_am_exTREMELY_agitated.	/ a ʲæ mɛk 'stri ^y m li ʲædʒ ɪ 'te ^y dəd /
Why_are you_igNORing the_issue?	/ wa ʲər jə ʲɪg 'nɔ rɪŋ θɪ ʲɪ ʃu ^w / ⁵

RULE 3: CONSONANT + CONSONANT SOUND. If a word within a thought group begins with the same consonant sound as the last sound of the previous word, simply “hold” or lengthen the sound. Pronounce it as one “long” consonant. Don’t stop the air between the two sounds to pronounce them separately or pause.

Also within thought groups, the “stop” sounds /b p d t g k/ are not “released” at the ends of words. Instead, they are “blended” into the following sound—said almost at the same time.

The following sentences contain examples of all three “sound linking and blending” rules:

Written Words	Pronounced⁴ (but not Written) as:
He didn't_know_what_to DO.	/ hi ^y 'dɪd nt 'nɔ ^w l tə 'du ^w / ⁵
He_asked_his_SECRetary to write_his_speech_for_him.	/ hi ʲæsk tɪz 'sɛ krə 'te ri ^y tə 'ra ^y tɪz 'spi ^y tʃ fə rɪm / ⁵
She PUT_her_written_notes_on_her	/ ʃi ^y 'pʊ d l 'rɪt n 'nɔ ^w t sɔ n l r 'bɔs əz 'dɛsk / ⁵
He was_in_a big_HURry.	/ hi ^y wə zɪ n ə 'bɪg 'h l ri ^y / ⁵
He had_to catch_a PLANE.	/ hi ^y 'hæd tə 'cæ tʃə 'ple ^y n / ⁵

⁵ Utterances that lend themselves to sound linking are also likely to contain “reduced forms.” Some word reductions in these examples, indicated by phonetic symbols, are *n, *uh, *r, *ta, *ya, *iz, *im, *fer, *er, *gonna, and others. Other small details about the pronunciation of sounds in words in context are mentioned in PART SEVEN and PART EIGHT of ACCENT ACTIVITIES.

EXERCISE 1—TELLING A STORY WITH APPROPRIATE PAUSING & SOUND LINKING. On the left is an amusing anecdote about speech. CAPITAL LETTERS indicate possible meaning focus points, vertical lines suggest likely places to pause, and the linking symbol $_$ shows where sounds can be connected or blended. Up \uparrow and down \downarrow arrows show intonation possibilities.

Prepare to retell the story in your most natural-sounding, fluent American English accent. Unless you disagree with them, follow the pronunciation markings as closely as possible in practicing the story. In relating the story to a partner, a small group, or the whole class, you can read it aloud or “paraphrase” (retell) it in your own words. Either way, use what you know about pronunciation and accent clarity—and other expressive devices—to communicate the point and important details effectively. If your listeners laugh at the “punch line,” then your pronunciation, stress patterns, intonation (tone of voice), pausing, speed of speech, word reductions, and sound linking have probably been very effective!



A BUSINESSman | had $_$ to give $_$ a speech $_$ in $_$ another CITY. \downarrow He didn't know $_$ ANYthing $_$ about $_$ the AUDience, | and he didn't know $_$ what $_$ to SAY, | so $_$ he $_$ asked $_$ his $_$ SECRETary | to write $_$ his $_$ speech FOR $_$ him. \downarrow “Can you make $_$ it nice $_$ and SHORT?” \uparrow he said. \downarrow “These guys | don't want $_$ to hear $_$ a lot $_$ of WORDS. \downarrow It should be $_$ about fifteen MINutes—| at MOST.” \downarrow

Did $_$ the secretary | do what $_$ she was TOLD? \uparrow She certainly DID. \downarrow She typed $_$ out $_$ a SPEECH. \downarrow Then she put $_$ her work | on $_$ her boss's DESK. \downarrow He was $_$ in a big HURry | to catch the PLANE, | so he GRABBED $_$ the papers. \downarrow WHAT $_$ did $_$ he do with $_$ them? \uparrow | He just put $_$ them in $_$ his BRIEFcase. \downarrow

When $_$ he got back | to the $_$ office the next $_$ DAY, | was $_$ he reLAXED $_$ and grateful? \uparrow No, $_$ he was FURious! \downarrow “I thought $_$ I told $_$ you | to make the speech SHORT!” | he yelled. \downarrow “I talked $_$ ON $_$ and $_$ ON | for $_$ almost 45 MINutes. \downarrow Some $_$ of the listeners | fell $_$ aSLEEP!” \downarrow

“Keep $_$ it SHORT? \uparrow I DID!” \downarrow the secretary proTESTed. \downarrow “It was $_$ under FIFteen minutes. \downarrow I typed $_$ it $_$ UP and | put $_$ it $_$ on your DESK—| with two PHOTocopies.” \downarrow

EXERCISE 2—TELLING YOUR OWN STORY. Now find or make up your own short story, amusing anecdote, or (clean) joke. To prepare to tell the story in your most natural-sounding, fluent American English accent, jot down some notes about it—or even print it out. In practicing to tell it aloud, you can add pronunciation markings. Think about where you are going to put meaning focus, rising and falling intonation, pauses, sound linking, etc.

After you tell your story to a small or large group, get feedback on your pronunciation and accent as well as the content of your narrative.