

Lecture 9 Compression, smoothing, prelateral effects

1. **COMPRESSION** = making two syllables into one.

1.1 (i) *maddening* 'mæd ŋ ɪŋ → 'mæd nɪŋ

(ii) *lenient* 'li:n i ənt → 'li:n jənt

(iii) *diagram* 'daɪ ə græm → 'daə græm

1.2 Words like these are **varisyllabic**. Generally, the uncompressed version is more usual in rarer words, in slow or deliberate speech, and the first time a word occurs in a discourse; the compressed version is more usual in frequently-used words, in fast or casual speech, and if the word has already been used in the discourse.

1.3 Compression typically arises from a sequence of X plus Y, where X is any vowel (or syllabic consonant), and Y is any **weak** vowel. In types (i) and (ii) it is the X that loses its syllabicity; in type (iii) it is the Y.

1.4 A strong vowel at Y prevents compression: *radiate* (cf *radiant*), *moderate* adj. (cf. *moderate* v.).

Type (i): X is a syllabic consonant (process alternatively analysed as “elision of /ə/”)

fattening, listener, fastening, Tottenham; battling, tickling, whistling, basically;

battering, federal, separately, deliverance, secretary, memory;

national, liberal, reference; out and about, as a matter of fact, a neighbour of mine

Sometimes compression is historical/categorical (lexically determined): *gentler, simplest, disastrous, angry;*

marvellous, battery, camera, factory, opera, sparkling (?);

(categorically not:) *cookery, redolent, Hungary; cautionary, dictionary*

Compression is **fed** by syllabic consonant formation:

passionate 'pæʃ ən ət → 'pæʃ ŋ ət → 'pæʃ nət

national 'næʃ ən əl → 'næʃ ŋ l → 'næʃ n l

Type (ii): X is /i, u/, becoming [ɪ, ʊ] or [j, w] (perhaps making a ‘crescendo diphthong’)

convenient, Australia; happier, dubious, premium, radiant; happiest, ugliest, various; don't be afraid

influence, undergraduate; genuine, innocuous, annual; about to explode

Type (iii): X is a strong vowel (diphthong), Y is usually /ə/ or /ɪ/ (becoming [ə], [ɪ]).

- Does English have **triphthongs**? How many syllables in *fire*? Are *lyre* and *liar* different?
- Hypothesis: compression usually presupposes **Smoothing** (thus making a ‘derived diphthong’, e.g. [aə]). If this is true, there are no true triphthongs in English.

2. **SMOOTHING** (/_V)

(a) $V_{ii} \rightarrow \emptyset$ where $V_i V_{ii}$ is a diphthong

(b) $V \rightarrow \text{lax}$ where V is a long vowel

(a) /aɪ, aʊ, eɪ, əʊ, ɔɪ/ → [a, a, e, ə, ɔ]

fire, science, dialectal; nowadays, sour, Gower; trying, ploughing; Malaya, deity; Noah,

*slower; staying, going; loyal, enjoying; —also a possible ‘derived monophthong’ [a:] in *fire, sour**

(b) /i:, u:/ → [ɪ, ʊ]

agreeable, museum, theological; being, seeing; fluent, truancy, brewery; doing, newest, ruinous

3. **PRELATERAL EFFECTS***

(i) Breaking $\emptyset \rightarrow \text{ə} / X _ \dagger$ where $X = \{i:, eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ\}$

feel, sail, mile, oil (cf. betrayal, trial, royal); yield, mild

(ii) Darkening $\text{əʊ} \rightarrow \text{ɒʊ} / _ \dagger$

roll, bowl, golden, shoulder; ? bowling, roller

(iii) i to schwa $i \rightarrow \text{ə} / _ \dagger$

readily 'redili → 'redəli (feeds s.c.f., → 'redli), *easily, funnily, mightily*

*These processes are variable, and not classical RP. In ‘Estuary English’ $\dagger \rightarrow \text{o}$ (fed by (i), (ii)).