

Listening to English Connected Speech: A Problem and Solutions

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Abstract:

Parsing connected speech has been a constant problem among learners of foreign languages. Cairene Arabic-speaking learners of English find parsing English connected speech significantly problematic. When they listen to spoken connected and running speech, they find locating and recognizing words very difficult. They cannot locate the boundaries between the words or segment the speech. This is in spite of the fact that the speech could constitute of frequent English words, which Cairene Arabic-speaking learners could know well but in citation forms. A number of phonological processes take place in connected running speech, such as contraction, consonant blending, vowel deletion, vowel epenthesis, among others. These phenomena occur based on the prosodic principles of the language, specifically syllable structure and stress. The present paper reports on a learning problem related to segmenting words from English connected speech. It reveals several pedagogical techniques that were applied to solve the problem, however, in vain. A contrastive analysis between Arabic and English is conducted and language transfer based on similarities between Arabic and English are found to be a potential force at play. The paper concludes with theoretical and applied solutions to the problem.

Key words: connected speech, stress, syllable, segmentation