



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Challenges in Comprehension of Elision: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students of English in Pakistan**

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**ABSTRACT**

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The present study is concerned with the problems in elision of English phonemes for undergraduate students both in comprehension and production of the selected phonemes. The data for the present study was collected from one hundred undergraduate students through convenient non-random sampling from five universities and five post-graduate colleges. The comprehension of elision was investigated by asking students to comprehend the selected movie clips having instances of elision. The students were then asked to reproduce the same in connected speech for measuring the production of elision. The findings revealed that undergraduate students had no significant issues in the comprehension of elision and could easily understand the native speakers' connected speech and had some idea of the elided sounds there but could not copy the same during their own production in connected speech. The production of the speech by students was mostly without elision of English phonemes. The non-native speakers' slow and watchful speech did not allow instances of elision. The study concludes that speaking skills of the students be given special attention to avoid problems of elision and such like problems in their connected speech.

**Introduction**

English language is the need of the day. For comprehending and understanding English, serious efforts are needed on the part of all stake holders, including learners, teachers and syllabus designers. Second language learners face problems when they try to learn and speak English. Foreign or second language learning has always been a matter of serious concerns for learners and teachers. Among all skills, writing and speaking have got special importance being the skills associated with the production of language (Rost, 1994). The productive skills (writing and speaking), are commonly the most ignored and neglected skills

(Nunan, 1997). Even among these two productive skills, listening skill is commonly the most ignored skill being not included in academic evaluation process. This is one of the reasons that non-native speakers of English face many problems in comprehending English speech. These problems in comprehending English speech become very much prominent in connected speech because in connected speech, most of the English sounds are omitted altogether. According to Brown (1990) three aspects of these problems in comprehending English speech are:

- 1) ESL/EFL learners face problems in listening and processing Native English speech.
- 2) Commonly, the techniques used for listening in classrooms are not relevant to solutions of such problems.
- 3) The instructional materials are not suitable for such skills.

Second language learners of English face problems in comprehending English speech of native speakers. The speech of native speakers is so fast, fluent and rapid that it gives rise to phonological issues - assimilation and elision - in comprehension and production of speech (Brown, 1990; Field, 2003; Cauldwell, 2003; Ur, 1984). In our context, students learning English are taught English sounds in isolation and not in connected speech. As a result, when native speakers converse with each other, second language learners have many troubles in comprehending English speech (Brown, 1990). The words are taught in isolation in classroom and so as a result, the students face problems in completely comprehending English speech sounds in connected speech (Ur, 1984). One such problem is elision. Elision is the "omission of sounds in connected speech" (Crystal, 1989). For target learners of English language, elision is one of the major hurdles to precisely create and perceive an English speech. Elision is the "omission of sounds in connected speech" (Crystal, 1989). According to Firdhani, Indrayani & Mahdi (2018), the course of elision has its vast branches in the subgroup of linguistics which is recognized as phonology. It deals especially with the speech mechanism of a specific language. According to Febriyanti (2015) elision is a complete disappearance of one or more sounds in a word or phrase as an attempt to make a word or phrase easier to pronounce. The process of elision occurs when speakers leave or delete a phoneme out of pronunciation as an attempt to fasten and get rid of difficulties in speech. Elision happens with both consonants and vowels. Elision is applied in connected speech for the frugality of energy, and in other cases the challenging of putting specific consonants sounds at once while keeping a frequent measure and speed. The present research is about to discuss certain characteristics of connected speech in English and realized the most essential kinds of the elision that how they can be identified.

### **Literature Review**

According to Ibrahim (2016) the phenomenon of elision is explained in words of economy of work in which the speech power is reduced. In real sense elision does not bring confusion, but is perceived as a general process. Anyhow, the perspective

and occurrence of elision is believed to be various from language to language and hence, elision is institutionalized and regarded as a factor of society behavior. It is a real fact that elision differs in extent and in frequency of appearance in various languages and situations. According to Azofra (2019) elision is possibly to be lowest in slow watchful speech and greatest in fast eased colloquial forms of speech. They announced that because English displays major differences of stress between syllables. Hence, they ignored portions consequently more cordial and comprehensive in unstressed syllables. Rosa (2002) and Ito (2006) describes that the reasons of elision are no concern to be rooted basically in the people appetite to reduce expenditure of power. They witness that the global appearance of elision is useable in speech and it can be improved in the wordiness of the speech sign. Enough data is delivered for them in average consequences by the sign or signal which is important for the clarification of the communication. The local speakers or the native speakers utilize his observations of these forms both in the clarification and care of his own speech and in the clarification of others. Crystal (1989) is of the view that elision may be described as the dropping of phonemes in a connected speech. Hence, elision is the feature of fast connected speech. Elision is served in order to improve the utterances of sounds simple and easy in connected speech.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Population and Sample**

The present study is descriptive in nature and Descriptive research design was used for the present study. This design suited the present study because the design helped us in identifying and describing the problems. Since this study was descriptive in nature, it demanded more quantitative data, therefore, quantitative approach was used for its data collection. Population of the study was all undergraduate students. A total of one hundred students, aged 18-22, were selected as a sample from five universities and five post-graduate colleges. The convenient non-random sampling technique was used for the selection of those one hundred participants. From each institution ten students were selected to participate in the study. The students were selected from 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> semester from English department. Only those students were selected who were willing to participate in the study. The students from English department were purposively selected as these students had studied English phonetics and phonology and had some idea about elision in English words.

### **Instrumentation**

A proficiency test was used as a research tool to collect the data and to determine the problems in listening and speaking skills of the students in terms of comprehension and production of elision of certain English sounds in connected speech.

## Data Collection and Analysis

A few clips from English movies having examples of elision were selected and the participants were asked to write down what they heard in those clips. Every clip contained utterances having elision of certain phonemes. A high quality microphone was used for collecting the data from the selected participants in order to minimize outside noise. The responses of the participants were collected in places where elision was involved in the process of connected speech in those clips. This part of the test was meant to find out the ability of the students to comprehend the connected speech having instances of elision. The second part of the test was about the production of the selected movie clips. The production by the students helped us in identifying the difference of elision in speech of the non-native speakers (undergraduate students learning English). The two parts of the tests investigated both listening and speaking skills of the students in terms of identifying the elision of English phonemes. The collected data was carefully analyzed to figure out the problems in elision. After analysis of the collected data, the researchers found huge difference between comprehension and production. The researchers felt no need of any statistical test. The correct and incorrect percentages for these choices helped the researcher to approve (or disapprove) the hypotheses about various uses in elision of English phonemes. After calculating and tabulating the data received, the results were analyzed and discussed in the light of the research questions asked.

## Results and Discussion

The clips having elision of /t/, /d/, /h/, /v/, / /, /θ/, /ð/, elision of whole syllable, historic elision, elision of initial vowels and elision of medial vowels in connected speech from the selected three movies were selected to examine the problems in elision. The students were asked to comprehend the selected clips for the elision of above mentioned sound. After the analysis of the data, the following results were found.

**Table 1**  
**Elision in Comprehension**

	<b>Correct Responses</b>	<b>Incorrect Responses</b>
Elision of /t/	70.5%	29.5%
Elision of /d/	74.1%	25.9%
Elision of /h/	82.7%	17.3%
Elision of Schwa / /	84.7%	15.3%
Elision of /v /	72.5%	27.5%
Elision of /θ/	80.7%	19.3%
Elision of /ð/	81.7%	18.3%
Elision of Whole Syllable	74.7%	25.3%
Historic Elision	86.3%	13.7%
Elision of Initial Vowels	86.2%	13.8%
Elision of Medial Vowels	95.7%	4.3%
<b>Average Percentage</b>	<b>80.9%</b>	<b>19.1</b>

The above table shows that undergraduate students had no significant problem in comprehending the connected speech from the selected movie clips. In the elision of /t/, the percentage of the correct responses is 70.5% while the percentage of incorrect responses is 29.5%. It shows that the students had no significant problems recognizing the elision of /t/ sound and could comprehend the sentence having elision of this sound. In the elision of /d/, the undergraduate students also had no significant problems in comprehending the connected speech from the selected movie clips having elision of /d/ sound. The correct responses of the students are 74.1% while the incorrect responses are 25.9% which indicate that the students had no significant problems recognizing the elision of /d/ sound and could comprehend the sentence having elision of /d/ sound. Furthermore, in the elision of /h/ sound, the correct responses of the students were 81.7% while the incorrect responses were 18.3%. It shows that the students had no significant problem in comprehending the elision of /h/. Moreover, in the elision of / / sound, the students responded with the correct percentage of 84.7% and incorrect percentage of 15.3% which is not a significant problem.

Likewise, in the elision of /v/, the undergraduate students responded with the correct percentage of 72.5% and incorrect percentage of 27.5%. The percentage shows that the students were good in comprehending the elision of /v/ sound in connected speech. In the elision of /θ/, the students were also good. They responded with the correct percentage of 80.7% and incorrect percentage of 19.3%. It indicates that the students comprehended the elision of /θ/ from the movie clips. They had no significant problem in the comprehension of the elision of /θ/. The participants had no significant problems in comprehending the connected speech from the selected movie clips having elision of /ð/ sound. The correct responses of the students were 81.7% while the incorrect responses were 18.3% which indicate that the students had no significant problem in comprehending the elision of /ð/ sound. Moreover, in the elision of whole syllable, the participants responded well with the correct percentage of 74.7% and incorrect percentage of 25.3%. The correct responses of the students show that they had no significant problem in comprehending the movie clips for the elision of whole syllable. Furthermore, the results show that the participants had no problem in comprehending the movie clips for the elision of a historic sound. The correct responses of the participants were 86.3% while the incorrect responses were 13.7%. Likewise, the participants had no problem in comprehending the movie clips for the elision of initial vowel sound. The correct responses of the participants for the elision of initial sounds were 86.2% while the incorrect responses were 13.8%. The percentage shows that the participants were good in comprehending the movie clips for the elision of initial sound. Finally, the results demonstrate that the participants had good comprehension level as they comprehended the elision of medial vowel sound from the selected movie clips. The percentage of correct responses was 95.7% while the percentage of incorrect responses was just 3.4%. It shows that the participants had no significant problem in comprehending the native speech for the elision of medial sound. It is inferred from the average percentage of the correct responses which is 80.9% that the

undergraduate students have good level of comprehension as they comprehended the selected movie clips for the elision of different sounds correctly.

### **Results of Elision in Production**

The students were asked to produce the movie clips in their written forms. The students were then asked to write down the phonetic transcription of the sentences and identify if any of the sound/syllable has been omitted in their speech. The activity was meant to analyze if the students had any idea about the elision of the elided sounds. These participants had studied phonetics and phonology and had been taught about the phenomenon of elision in the class. The selected sentences were pronounced and transcribed by these students. After the analysis of the data, the following results were found.

**Table 2**  
**Elision in Production**

	<b>Correct Responses</b>	<b>Incorrect Responses</b>
Elision of /t/	28.6%	71.4%
Elision of /d/	23.3%	76.7%
Elision of /h/	17.4%	82.6%
Elision of Schwa / /	11.4%	88.6%
Elision of /v /	16.2%	83.8%
Elision of /θ/	14.9%	85.1%
Elision of /ð/	12.3%	87.7%
Elision of Whole Syllable	10.2%	90.8%
Historic Elision	36.7%	63.3%
Elision of Initial Vowels	7.2%	92.8%
Elision of Medial Vowels	3.5%	96.5%
<b>Average Percentage</b>	<b>16.5%</b>	<b>83.5%</b>

The above table shows the results of elision in production in connected speech. The participants were asked to listen to the movie clips carefully and then utter the sentences by themselves. Only 28.6% of the participants' elided sounds like native speakers in their speech while 71.4% of the participants, in spite of the elided sounds being there, were uttering the full sentences. During their own speech (as non-native speakers of English), they do not elide English sounds and produce the full version of the sentences or words. Furthermore, 23.3% of the participants uttered the given sentences with the elision of /d/ sound while 76.7% of the participants uttered the given sentences without the elision of /d/ sound. Moreover, only 17.4% of the participants produced the given sentences correctly with /h/ sound being elided while 82.6% of the participants pronounced the given sentences without elision of /h/ sound.

The sentences with the elision of schwa / / sound were correctly produced by only 11.4% of the participants while 88.6% of the participants produced the give sentences without the elision of / / sound. The results indicate that the students though are able to comprehend the connected speech of English native speakers, in spite of the elided sounds there but during their own speech (as non-native speakers

of English), they do not elide English sounds and produce the full version of the sentences or words. Likewise, the sound /v/ was correctly elided by only 16.2% of the participants in their speech while 83.8% of the participants failed to elide the /v/ sound like native speakers in the production of the given sentences. Similarly, 14.9% of the participants were good to elide the /θ/ sound whereas 85.1% of the participants failed to elide the /θ/ sound in their speech. In the same way, the sound /ð/ was elided by 12.3% of the participants though 87.7% of the participant failed to elide the sound /ð/ in their production of the sentences. The percentages indicate that the participants were producing full sentences without the elision of the sounds like native speakers.

Only 10.2% of the participants were able to elide whole syllable when they were asked to utter the given sentences while 89.8% of the participants find it difficult to elide the whole syllable and were producing the sentences in full form. Only 36.7% of the participants were good in the historic elision whereas 63.3% of the participants were facing difficulty in the historic elision. The results indicate that the students though are able to comprehend the connected speech of English native speakers, in spite of the elided sounds there but during their own speech (as non-native speakers of English), they do not elide English sounds and produce the full version of the sentences or words. The undergraduate students found it difficult to elide the historic sound in their speech. In the elision of initial vowel sound, only 7.2% of the participants were good enough to elide the initial vowel sound while 92.8% of the participants were unable to elide the initial vowel sound. Most of the participants were producing the given sentences with full form without eliding the initial vowel sound. Finally, in the elision of medial vowel sound, only 3.5% of the participants were able to elide the medial vowel sound in their utterances of the given sentences whereas 96.5% of the participants failed to elide the medial vowel sound. They were producing the sentences without eliding the medial vowel sound though they were good at comprehending the speech of native speakers, in spite of the elided sound being there.

The overall results indicate that the students were able to comprehend the connected speech of English native speakers, in spite of the elided sounds being there but during their own speech (as non-native speakers of English), they do not elide English sounds and produce the full version of the sentences or words. It is inferred from the average percentage that non-native speakers of English find it difficult to elided sounds in their production of sentences. Only 16.5% of participants were able to elide sounds in their speech while 83.5% of the participants failed to elide sounds in their speech.

## **Discussion**

The results show that the undergraduate students had no significant problems in the elision of English phonemes in comprehending the connected speech of native speakers. But, these students could not elide English phonemes like native speakers in their production of connected speech. It means that undergraduate

students had no significant issues in the comprehension in elision and could easily understand the native speakers' connected speech and had some idea of the elided sounds there but could not copy the same during their own production in connected speech. The findings confirm that the undergraduate students face fewer problems in comprehension of elision compared to the elision in their own production in connected speech. The students had no significant problems in comprehending the elision of /t/ sound in the connected speech of native speakers. The contextual clues in the movie clips helped them grasp the elided form of the word and so to comprehend the entire message. The data shows that the correctly identified elided form has contextual reason more than syntactic ones because elision is a complete disappearance of one or more sounds in a word or phrase to make the words and sentences easier to pronounce. The process of elision occurs when speakers leave or delete a phoneme out of pronunciation as an attempt to fasten and get rid of difficulties in speech.

The presence of elision was especially lacking in the speech produced by non-native speakers. The findings show that undergraduate students during their own speech (as non-native speakers of English) did not elide English sounds and produced the full version of the sentences or words. The students during their comprehension of English connected speech took help from contextual and linguistic clues as the /t/ sound is elided when it comes between two consonants and its elision does not make the word difficult to comprehend. The data show that students had learned enough input for English as a second language to comprehend the connected speech of native speakers but not fair enough to produce the same in their own connected speech. Same was the case for comprehension and production of other speech sounds like /d/ and /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /h/ and / /. The comprehension of these elided consonants and vowel was easy as compared to their production. The comprehension of vowel / / at initial, medial and final positions was the easiest one for students. The elision at medial position of vowel in turn was easier than at initial and final positions. The comprehension of historic elision too was quite easy for students more than the comprehension of the elision of the whole syllable.

The findings of the present study as a whole suggest that the comprehension of native speakers' speech is comparatively easy for students than production by the students like native speakers. The non-native speech of the students was slow and watchful and as a result few instances of elision were found out. On the other hand, the native speakers' connected speech was fast and the instances of elision were identified by students and the problems in comprehending the speech were not significant for undergraduate students because their presence did not create any confusion and with the help of linguistic and contextual clues, the comprehension was successful. Elision differs in extent and in frequency of appearance in various languages and situations and so, the students during their production most probably because of limited practice of English speaking skill did not elide English phonemes in their connected speech.



## **Conclusion**

The present study was concerned with the problems in elision of English phonemes for undergraduate students. Elision of English phonemes happens in fast connected speech of the native speakers of any language. The study investigated both comprehension and production of the elision of the selected phonemes. The students were asked to comprehend the selected connected speeches and produce the same speech later. The findings of the study show that students had no significant problems in the elision of English phonemes in comprehending the connected speech of native speakers. But, these students could not elide English phonemes like native speakers in their production of connected speech. It means that undergraduate students had no significant issues in the comprehension in elision and could easily understand the native speakers' connected speech and had some idea of the elided sounds there but could not copy the same during their own production in connected speech. The findings confirm that the undergraduate students face fewer problems in comprehension of elision as compared to the presence of elision in their own production in their connected speech. The study concludes that practice of connected speech for non-native speakers should be included in teaching phonology courses to make their speech native-like. The elision of consonants, vowels and whole syllable should be specifically focused on in every course. The students along with listening comprehension be trained in speaking skills as well. The lack of practice on the part of the second language learners create problems for them in producing native like speech.

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