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**Exploring EFL learners' Difficulties in Perceiving Assimilation and Elision**

**Aspects of Connected Speech**

The Case of Third year Students of English at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia

University, Jijel

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### **Abstract**

The focal target behind conducting this research is to explore the listening comprehension difficulties of third year students at the English Language Department of Mohammed Saddik Ben Yahia-Jijel University of perceiving the native speakers' connected speech involving assimilation and elision aspects. Accordingly, the research in hand hypothesizes that if EFL learners are well-informed and knowledgeable about assimilation and elision application in connected speech, they will face less listening comprehension difficulties. The study is divided into two foremost parts. The first part exposed theoretical issues associated with the listening skill and listening comprehension difficulties. It also shed light on connected speech features with special reference to assimilation and elision aspects. The second part, which is the practical side of the study, dealt with the findings yielded from tow used research tools. A questionnaire that was addressed to sixty students (60) out of three hundred and four (304) and a listening test that was conducted with thirty students (30) from the same population. Thus, the study confirms the research hypothesis and reveals that the lack of knowledge on the application of assimilation and elision is problematic in the process of the listening comprehension. Moreover, students' non-sufficient practice, false estimated vocabulary, the inability to distinguish words boundaries, writing the spoken form of words and tenses contradiction are the main difficulties encountered by third year students while listening to the native speakers' speech. On the light of the results obtained, some pedagogical recommendations and suggestions for future research are suggested ultimately.

**Key Words:** Listening Comprehension, Connected Speech, Assimilation, Elision.

***Dedication***

***In the name of ALLAH, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful***

*I would like to dedicate this humble work to:*

*To the two candles who always enlighten my life, the reason of what I become today,*

*To my beloved mother and my precious father. May Allah bless you.*

*To the roses of my life, my dearest sisters and brothers.*

*To my wonderful teacher and supervisor, to my ideal teacher for her inspiration, support and guidance, the one who provided me with the golden key of this treasure that would never be*

*obtained without her efforts. Thank you, Mrs. **CHIOUKH CHADIA.***

*To all my family and relatives.*

*To my dear friends with whom I shared the university life with its lights and shadows.*

*To all who know me and care about me.*

***Amina***

*I dedicate this humble work to the dearest people in my life.*

*To my gorgeous mother and my precious father for their encouragement, support and love.*

*To my beloved sisters.*

*To my dear brother.*

*To my lovely teacher and supervisor for her guidance, support and golden pieces of advice:*

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*To the candle who always enlightens my life.*

*To my grandmother for her prayers.*

*To all my family and relatives.*

*To all my dearest and closest friends.*

*To all those who love me*

***Meriem***

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Last and not least, we must acknowledge the debt we owe to our families and friends and all who have stood incredibly supportive and very encouraging.

**List of Abbreviations**

**%:** Percentage

**CLT:** Communicative Language Teaching

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**L1:** First Language

**L2:** Second Language

**N:** Number

**OE:** Oral Expression

**Q:** Question

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### **Résumé**

### **ملخص**

**General Introduction**

1. Background of the Study
2. Statement of the Problem
3. Aims of the Study
4. Research Question
5. Hypothesis
6. Research Tools
7. The Structure of the Study

## **General Introduction**

### **1. Background of the Study**

Recently, English got a great importance as a lingua franca. This latter increases learners' motivation to learn English as a second/ foreign language. Thus, tracing back the history of teaching English language, the focus was on teaching linguistic competence (grammar, vocabulary) i.e. writing and reading skills were the most considered. However, with the rise of communicative competence was the aim wanted to be achieved. Accordingly, listening and speaking skills started to gain interest. Adopting communicative approaches with the focus on the listening skill as the starting point to learn how to speak reveals that the learners' exposure to English native speech is prerequisite to enhance their listening comprehension. In other words, EFL learners are generally faced with serious difficulties impeding their listening comprehension as well as their pronunciation. Hence, the listening comprehension difficulties related to the aspects of connected speech; precisely assimilation and elision are what the current study attempts to investigate.

Because of the significant influence of assimilation and elision features of connected speech on learners' listening comprehension, some basic studies are referred to. For instance, Ur (1987) (as cited in Cele-Mercia et al, 2010, pp. 175-176) stressed the idea that assimilation and elision features of native speech are among the main factors causing listening difficulties of EFL/ESL learners. He stated that as a result of the previously mentioned features, learners could not distinguish words boundaries, may make false estimated vocabulary, may fall in a tenses contradiction in their listening and they may write words as they produced with more care given to their meaning. He suggested that they should be instructed only in class and dedicated only to pronunciation teaching and speaking skill teaching. Cele-Mercia et al (2010)

agreed with Ur and were in line with his suggested concept. Additionally, Roach (1991, p. 130) stressed the necessity of working on assimilation and elision phenomena in order to reduce EFL learners' listening difficulties caused by the two mentioned features of connected speech.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

Listening plays an imperative role in EFL learning process. Without this important skill, learners can neither get any language improvement nor achieve communication fittingly. To investigate this issue, many EFL students at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia admitted the fact of facing difficulties when listening to the authentic language. This may relate to the perception of assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech.

Accordingly, listening to connected speech as delivered by the native speakers and which is characterized by the application of assimilation and elision aspects may be an obstacle that impedes the EFL learners from comprehending the delivered message of the speaker while listening. Having that impact on the learners' comprehension, listening difficulties related to assimilation and elision need to be deeply investigated to help the students and the teachers as well get closer insights on its causes and effects so as to help the former overcome it and do better while being tested upon their listening comprehension.

## **3. Aims of the Study**

This research paper is concerned with investigating the issue of learners' difficulties in perceiving assimilation and elision aspects during the listening process. It aims to explore the major difficulties experienced by third year EFL learners at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University-Jijel when they are exposed to assimilation and elision connected speech processes.

## **4. Research Questions**

The current study tends to answer the following questions:

1. To what extent are third year EFL learners at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahya University-Jijel exposed to aspects of connected speech?
2. To what extent are they knowledgeable about the application of assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech?
3. What are the main difficulties they face when they listen to connected speech that is featured by the application of assimilation and elision aspects?

## **5. Hypothesis**

The dissertation in hand hypothesizes that if EFL learners were well-informed and knowledgeable about assimilation and elision application in connected speech, they would face less listening comprehension difficulties. Putting it differently, the current study is based on the hypothesis that the more students were knowledgeable and exposed to assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech, the better their listening comprehension would be.

## **6. Research Tools**

In order to investigate the issue of assimilation and elision difficulties in listening comprehension, the descriptive paradigm is adopted to gather the needed data for the present study. And since it is the nature of the research that implies a specific method, the descriptive designed method is chosen. So, the study in hand tends to describe and mainly explore the listening difficulties of perceiving assimilation and elision. Hence, in this research paper, mainly a quantitative data collection is applied to see the correlation between listening comprehension and assimilation and elision mastery.

Thus, for a more relevant collection of data and adequate results, two forms of tools are used. First, a questionnaire is delivered to sixty (60) third year license students in the department of English at the university of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia-Jijel. Second, a

listening test is conducted with thirty (30) from third year students . The retrieved data are finally analyzed and statistically measured.

### **7. The Structure of the Study**

This study is divided into three chapters, two theoretical parts and a practical one, which is the fieldwork of this research paper.

The first chapter presents the theoretical basis for listening skill; its definition, its significance, its models, types, stages and strategies, L1 and L2 listening. Also, listening activities. This chapter sheds light on listening comprehension difficulties. Namely; its definition and listening difficulties definition, then, it highlights the factors influencing students' listening comprehension process, it gives insights on some suggestions to facilitate that process. Finally, the assessment of listening comprehension is also reviewed within the first chapter.

The second chapter is about connected speech features particularly assimilation and elision aspects. It provides different definitions of connected speech, its importance. It gives insights on assimilation and elision and their common cases and different aspects of connected speech. Then, it sheds light on the activities and materials used to teach assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech. It also reviews the assimilation and elision listening difficulties encountered by EFL learners. Finally, it highlights the role of the teacher in facilitating the learning of assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech.

The third chapter deals with the fieldwork and data analysis and discussion of the learners' questionnaire and test. Finally, the chapter gives some pedagogical recommendations and suggestions for further future research on the light of the findings of the research.

*Chapter One: Listening Skill and Learners' Listening Difficulties*

Introduction

1.1. Definition of Listening

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1.10.4. The Environment

1.11. The Assessment of Listening Comprehension

1.12. Facilitating the Listening Comprehension Process



## **Chapter One: Listening skill and Learners' Listening Difficulties**

### **Introduction**

The current chapter provides some basic issues related to the listening skill starting with its definition and its significance. The different processing models of teaching listening, its prominent types and stages are also portrayed in the chapter along with the listening strategies commonly adopted in the process of language learning. Consecutively, listening in first language (L1) and second language (L2) contexts is exposed and the different types of activities used for teaching listening are as well presented. This chapter also is devoted to highlight the listening difficulties encountered by EFL learners in the classroom. Thus, it puts into plain words both listening comprehension and listening difficulties, the factors that influence learners' listening comprehension, the assessment of the latter in EFL classroom and suggestions about how to facilitate learners' listening comprehension process.

### **1.1. Definition of Listening**

From the early beginning of our lives, the oral form of our L1 is what we are firstly exposed to. This can be only through listening (Rost, 2011, p. 118). It is exactly what helps us learn how to speak; either through imitation of the already heard speech, or creating new one. Thus, many researchers in language learning and acquisition field became more curious to study the process of "listening" concept. However, the complex nature of the listening process makes it difficult for researchers to agree upon one precise definition. Accordingly, many definitions were provided from different perspectives. The simplest one is given in the Oxford Wordpower dictionary which defined the verb "to listen" as "to pay attention to somebody or something in order to hear him/her/it." (2012, p. 467). Saricoban (2012) (as cited in Darweesh, 2014, p. 2) stated that listening refers to one's ability to recognize and understand what others are saying. Rost (2011) stated that he came across many listening definitions; for example,

someone is listening if he could catch what the speaker is saying. Moreover, listening encompasses getting the speaker's idea, decoding his message and harvesting what is in his mind (pp. 2-3). Also, Kanu (2009) stated that listening is the process of making sense out of what was heard (p. 57).

By the 1900s, listening was considered as a passive receptive skill where the listener receives input in form of sounds. This idea was a point of discussion between researchers in the education field. Among them Downs (2008) who asserted that the word listening could be defined as making an effort to hear something or paying attention to do so (p. 1). In the sense that the listener in this process is an active doer; i.e.; listening is an active rather than passive process. Also, Gamble and Gamble (2014) argued that it is an active process because it requires our active participation (p. 93). Purdy and Borisoff (1997) added that the listener should attend, perceive, interpret and remember in order to be able to respond to verbal or nonverbal concerns and information offered by the speaker during a communicative act which they described as an active and dynamic process (p. 8). Moreover, listening was described to be an active behavior and not just hearing sound waves since its process includes three steps: hearing, understanding and judging (Flohr and Peasler, 2006, p. 3). That is to say; the listener mind should be involved.

Besides the mentioned listening definitions, Downs (2008) argued that listening should be differentiated from hearing that is just a physiological process of sound waves the ear absorbs before transferring them to the brain along neural path-ways (p. 1). Watson and Barker (2014) said: "listening is not just hearing" (p. 40). They clarified that the latter is only one of the senses required for an effective listening that is larger and more complex (p. 159). In an assumption of comparing listening with hearing, Deshler, Ellis and Lenz (as cited in Barclay, 2012, p. 4) assumed that while hearing is an ear collection of sound waves, listening

is a brain act of assigning meaning to what the ear has collected. Similarly, Gamble & Gamble (2014) said that hearing is an involuntary and unconscious physiological process, in contrast to listening which is voluntary, conscious and psychological one (p. 93). i.e.; in listening, meaning should be assigned to heard message. To sum up, Jenks and Lee (2017) summarized the difference between the two activities in the level of attention the listener expends (p. 158). Madhukar (2017), to support, came to define an attentive listener as the one who hears not just the words the speaker utters, but also his feelings and intents (p. 64).

Coming to fix a listening concept definition, Bentley and Bacon (1996) (as cited in Wolvin, 2010, p. 11) pointed out that Glenn (1989) had identified an analysis of fifty definitions of listening. In this context, an effort was made to arrive at some consistency for research and educational purposes. So, the International Listening Association agreed to accept the following definition “listening is the process of receiving, constructing meaning from and responding to spoken and/or nonverbal messages.”.

To conclude, listening can be referred to as a complex, active and dynamic process where the listener includes his attention, perception, understanding, interpretation and remembering of verbal and/or nonverbal heard language to be able to respond effectively to the speaker’s needs and concerns he wanted to transmit while speaking.

## **1.2. Significance of Listening**

By the 1970s, research gave more importance to listening skill because traditional teaching methods neglected it as discussed. Similarly, Griffiths (2008) also stated that listening is the first skill a child develops when trying to acquire his communicative ability. She added that it is a permanently important skill in both L1 and L2 people are exposed to in their lives (p. 215). Indeed, it is a needed every day means of gathering information (Sharma and Mohan, 2011, p. 449). In addition, Krashen (1985) (as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 48) argued

that human beings acquire language through receiving comprehensible input. i.e.; to acquire the language they need to be exposed to L1. Similarly, Rost (2009) (as cited in Watson & Barker, 2014, p. 124) acknowledged that listening is what helps us understanding the world around us. Besides, he added that this skill is one of the necessary elements in creating successful communication.

Moreover, Renukadevi (2014) stated that listening is a skill of critical significance in all aspects of life. Most EFL students encounter the foreign speech extensively in their learning process whether inside or outside the classroom. Listening is considered an important skill and primary means in learning a foreign language. It is the most significant part of communication as it is pivotal in providing a substantial and meaningful response. Especially in learning a language for communicative purposes, listening plays a vital role, as it helps the language learner to acquire pronunciation, word stress, vocabulary and syntax. For instance, the comprehension of messages conveyed can be based solely on tone of voice, pitch and accent; and it is only possible when we listen. Without understanding input appropriately, learning simply cannot get any improvement. In addition, without listening skill, no communication can be achieved (Renukadevi, 2014, p.56).

In brief and as highlighted by Agarwal (2008), the ultimate goal of teaching/learning a foreign/second language is achieving communicative and intercultural communicative competence, listening as a half of communication process should be taught/ learnt at all levels in appropriate life domains to be fairly a competent interactor (p. 233).

### **1.3. Models of Listening**

In order to understand how the listening process functions and how learners apply their knowledge in listening comprehension, three processes of comprehension models are developed. These processes are bottom-up, top-down and interactive processes.

### **1.3.1. Bottom-up Processing Model**

Richards (2008) defined the bottom-up processing as “using the incoming input as the basis for understanding the message” (p. 3). Further, he stated that “The process of decoding the listener’s lexical and grammatical competence in a language provides the basis for bottom-up processing” (p. 3). According to Buck (2001), language processing has finite details, from lowest to highest detailed level. He claimed that the acoustic input is decoded first into phonemes to determine single words. Then, this process moves to the higher stages; the syntactical level where linguistic content is analysed to gain a literal meaning. Finally, the listener interprets that literal terms to communicative situation to understand meanings (p. 2). Thus, listening comprehension is based on the listener’s linguistic competence.

### **1.3.2. Top-down Processing Model**

Richards (2008) defined top-down processing as the use of the background knowledge in understanding the meaning of a message (p. 3). On the other hand, Tyagi (2013) defined it as “A listener-based process, the listener tapes into background knowledge in understanding the message meaning” (p. 03). According to Nation and Newton (2009), top-down processes involve the listener in going from the full to the parts. On the other hand, the listener uses his background knowledge of the context to predict what the message can contain and use elements of the message to verify, correct and add to it (p. 40). Hence, listening comprehension is based on listener’s background knowledge expectations.

### **1.3.3. Interactive Processing Model**

Buck (2001) argued that both linguistic knowledge and non-linguistic knowledge are involved in understanding the language system (p. 61). In this point, interactive model comes to combine both bottom-up and top-down processes. Interactive processing model is where listeners apply both their prior knowledge and linguistic knowledge (Renukadevi, 2014, p. 61).

#### **1.4. Types of Listening**

Different types of listening process exist. The most widely agreed upon types are extensive and intensive listening.

##### **1.4.1. Extensive Listening**

Harmer (2007, p. 303) stated that extensive listening occurs when the teacher gives students the opportunity to select by themselves what they want to listen to for pleasure, enjoying and enhancing their language background outside the classroom. In other words, extensive listening takes place outside classroom without the specific purpose to improve learners' listening skills and without the support of a teacher or any other teaching materials (Paper, 2015, p. 05). Materials that can be used by students in this kind of listening are CDs, MP3 players, DVD videos and Internet (Harmer, 2007, p. 134). Renandya and Jacobs (2016) claimed that students are required to be able to understand the heard words automatically and without making efforts, at the same time, comprehending the general and the overall text meaning they are listening to (p. 15).

To sum up, extensive listening is an autonomous way of listening occurs away of classroom without the intervention of the teacher to enhance students' global comprehension with the focus on texts meaning rather than forms.

##### **1.4.2. Intensive Listening**

MCDonough and Shaw (1993) (as cited in Kim, 2004, p. 99) stated that intensive listening, as the name implies, deals with specific items of language sound or factual detail within the meaning framework already established. Moreover, Harmer (2007) asserted that it generally occurs inside the classroom or language laboratories under the teacher's control and guidance for the sake of improving students' listening skill and understanding the way of speaking English (p. 134). Additionally, intensive listening allows students to focus on forms

and sounds of English language in a controlled situation where they can listen to the text more than once and analyse its features and sounds combination (Miller and Soro, 2017, p. 73).

To sum up, intensive listening occurs inside the classroom with the presence of the teacher who plays the guide and controller role in the listening process. Its main goal is making learners able to understand the spoken language.

### **1.5. Listening Stages**

There are three different stages of listening stages of teaching listening: pre-listening, while listening and post listening. In pre-listening, the teacher makes the students aware of a situation. In while listening, the teacher gives the students visual support or guiding questions. Whereas in post-listening, students become active and work with what had heard (Flohr and Pealsher, 2006, pp. 3)

#### **1.5.1. Pre-listening stage**

The pre-listening stage is considered as a warming up and a general preparation to the listening process. Normally, it takes only few minutes to be done. The main goals of pre-listening activities are preparing the student for a listening task by activating their prior knowledge information and guiding students to choose the appropriate purpose and strategy for listening (Richards, 2015, pp. 394-396).

Moreover, Rixon (1986) (as cited in Machackova, 2009, pp. 24-25) stated that, at this phase, the teacher should arrange such challenges that motivate students for the listening task and avoid making it boring for them. All this involves outlining the setting and giving background information, but the teacher should not provide many pieces of information about the listening task in order not to spoil the whole task. At this stage, students can be asked to predict and guess things about missing information or the context of the listening task. Thus,

Willson (2008) (as cited in Solak, 2016, p. 38) stated that the following are issues that should be taken into account during the pre-listening task:

- A pre-listening activity should not be too long. It should be precise and clear.
- The activity should not give too much information about the topic. It should just introduce the topic of the listening activity.
- The teacher should not talk too much. The opportunity should be given to students to show and share their expectations and ideas.
- The pre-listening activity should not be too general and irrelevant..

### **1.5.2. While-listening Stage**

This stage of listening is the focus of the whole listening process in which students get the chance to practise the intensive listening and improve their listening skills and strategies since they focus on understanding the parts of the text and predict words meaning from the context (Richards, 2015, pp. 394-396). According to Rixon (1986) (as cited in Machackova, 2009, pp. 24-28), the goal of activities done during this stage is to help learners to catch the main meaning of the listening text so that they will be able to interpret and comprehend the text. Additionally, the main function of the while-listening activities is to present the sound of the target language. This presentation helps learners to develop their listening comprehension skills and enhance their pronunciation.

In fact, this phase of listening should include tasks such as ticking, circling, marking, ordering, drawing, labeling, selecting, form-filling, marking at list, spotting mistakes, table-completing, or predicting (Bedwell, 2014, pp. 02-03). They all strive for maintaining learners' interest in the listening task.

### **1.5.3. Post-listening Stage**



The post-listening stage comes after the listening process. It aims at checking rather than testing the listening comprehension of the text. Moreover, “in the post listening phase, additional activities are conducted, for review, compensation for the insufficient treatment in the main activities or expansion” (Hamada, 2017, p. 129).

According to Richards (2015), the post listening stage gives the chance to check students understanding of the listening text and deduce errors that occurred while listening by involving microanalysis of the text parts. This process enables students recognize lexical and spoken discourse features. Students also get the opportunity to react to the listening text and it is considered as a way to examine the structure, grammar and vocabulary of the text (pp. 394-396).

Furthermore, the purpose behind conducting post-listening activities is to interpret the manner and the attitude of the speakers and solve problems related to the listening text. These activities give good opportunities for students to work in pairs or small groups and utilize the four fundamental skills (Bedwell, 2014, pp. 2-3).

### **1.6. Listening Strategies**

Foreign/second language learners seek to facilitate and enhance their learning through trying to apply different strategies. According to Oxford (1990), Learning strategies refer to the operations used by learners to help, make easier and faster their learning (1990, p. 7).

In order to distinguish learning strategies types, many classifications trials were carried out by different researchers. For instance, Faerch and Kasper (1984) (as cited in O’Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 43) distinguished three strategies types. They are: learning strategies; which focus on language acquisition resulting from reading and listening skills, communication and production strategies that both serve the language use in listening, speaking and writing skills. Also, effective and ineffective types of strategies could be a view of other researchers. These

types may refer to extent to which they enhance students' learning. But, the two widely known classifications are the ones proposed by Oxford and O'Malley and Chamot.

### **1.6.1. Oxford's Classification (1990)**

Oxford classified learning strategies into two major types. They are direct strategies and indirect ones.

#### ***1.6.1.1. Direct Strategies***

The direct strategies are used for dealing with new acquired knowledge. They encompass three subtypes: memory strategies: for storing, remembering and retrieving the information received through listening, cognitive strategies: for understanding and producing the language that it was listened to in a controlled way and compensation strategies: for an effective language learning in spite of knowledge gaps while listening; like guessing and ambiguity tolerating (1990, p. 14). Accordingly, Oxford (1990) stated that "all direct strategies require mental processing of language." (p. 37).

#### ***1.6.1.2. Indirect Strategies***

The indirect category serve as a general manager of learning through listening. As a type, it includes metacognitive strategies; that coordinate learning while listening process, the affective strategies; that regulate learners' emotions and social strategies guiding learning with others and interacting. They all together may represent learners' focus, organization, guidance, checking, correction and encouragement of their learning during the listening process (Oxford, 1990, p. 15).

### **1.6.2. O'Malley and Chamot's Classification (1990)**

O'Malley and Chamot (1990), however, made three learning strategies types: metacognitive, cognitive and social/affective strategies.

#### ***1.6.2.1. Metacognitive Strategies***

Metacognitive strategies seek to achieve a selective attention for monitoring and evaluating learners' knowledge that is acquired through listening and making them focusing on specific language aspects being learnt. They may include planning, organizing, reviewing and checking/evaluating comprehension after it took place while listening (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 46).

#### ***1.6.2.2. Cognitive Strategies***

Cognitive strategies generally work on facilitating rehearsal processes after a planned organization, summary, deducing or imagery learners have used through making cues, grouping, repeating, guessing or synthesizing for successfully transfer their acquired knowledge into their memory (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990, p. 46).

#### ***1.6.2.3. Social/affective Strategies***

Social/affective strategies aim at making cooperative relations of learners with their social environment. They could be through clarifications questions, peer work and or may be a self-talk; mental redirection of thinking, reducing anxiety or processing an activity path successfully.

### **1.7. First and Second Language Listening**

It is proved that after a child's birth, his cognitive processes get developing. Simultaneously, the acquisition of his listening abilities takes place. But L2 listening processing takes place later on. Additionally, the significant role of the critical period in gaining native-like performance because of sufficient flexibility the brain could have cannot be neglected (Rost, 2005). Technically speaking, L1 and L2 listening processes may be somewhat similar (Flowerdrew & Miller, 2005, p. 27). This is because they both use the same basic neurological processes (Rost, 2005). But, some comprehension barriers like pragmatic constraints and lack of vocabulary could face L2 listeners and make the process more difficult

(Buck, 2001, p. 48). Shiffrin (1998) (as cited in Rost, 2005) also stated that more attention is demanded in L2 listening than in L1 because L2 speech is difficult to be segmented into words.

### **1.8. Listening Activities**

Since listening takes place as a course in English language teaching and learning, it, so, needs to be instructed through activities and tasks. Many scholars sort out differently the activities designed for a listening course. Among them Ur (2012) and Davies and Pearse (2000).

According to Ur (2012), listening tasks should be classified on the basis of the amount and complexity of response required. He listed four types of activities related to a listening course. They are: no overt response, short responses, longer responses and extended responses.

- **No Overt Response**

They are activities in which learners have nothing to do for responding, but their teacher may notice their understanding and following from their facial expressions and body language. For instance, a known a story, joke, or a real-life anecdote to listen to. Song-sing (songs or a play recording to be exposed to). Thus, the teacher should be certain about learners' focus on both words as well as music and tone to arrive at the goal of the listening course. They might be in forms of films, videos and theatre to be watched. In these activities, if the content is well chosen, sufficient and entertaining; learners are likely to understand contents of the listening scripts (Ur, 2012, pp. 108-110).

- **Short Responses**

Ur (2012) asserted that students are required to answer listening tasks write, say a word, give a symbol, or by do a physical movement. These activities might be in the form of ticking off items from a given list or picture. They mark what in relevant or irrelevant after

listening to a description. Activities might also rely on distinguishing true from false statements extracted from already listened passage, either through marking symbols or just saying true or false. Detecting mistakes might be assigned after the learners are exposed to stories or scripts of describing known things. The teacher might include mistakes and incite his learners to detect the erroneous part. (Ur, 2012, pp. 108-102).

- **Longer Responses**

In assigning this type of activities, learners are asked to respond using long answers as full statements. Those activities may include answering comprehension questions (after listening), dictating, note taking, paraphrasing, translating, summarizing and long gap filling (Ur, 2012, pp. 102-108)

- **Extended Responses**

In such kind of tasks, the listening material gives only a part of information and learners are supposed to use their other skills in combination with this listening part to build up their full understanding. Problem solving, interpretations and dicto-glass tasks could be examples for the extended responses type of listening activities. Problem solving like an orally described problem will be discussed to find out suggestions. In interpretations, learners are provided with a piece of dialogue which they have no previous knowledge about and they will guess what is going on from kinds of voices, words, tone, etc. In dicto-glass tasks, students listen to a given text and simultaneously take note; then, they form small groups. In each one, they combine notes trying to reconstruct the original text. After other listening, the teacher comes to display this original text in order to compare it with the reconstructed one (Ur, 2012, pp. 108-110).

Part from Ur's opinion of listening activities classification, Davies and Pearse (2000) asserted that they might be identified according to the listening stages.

- **Pre-listening Stage Activities**

Student might discuss about relevant pictures or experiences, associate ideas with a given topic, or they might write down related questions to be answered while or after listening. (Davies and Pearse, 2000, p. 78).

- **While-listening Stage Activities**

Students might be exposed to a specification of the topic or an aspect of it, specific information to be extracted. They might answer a question, or complete a table, map, or a picture while being exposed to the listening text. Listening here could be considered as a dictation activity to fill gaps or write full sentences (Davies and Pearse, 2000, p. 78).

- **Post-listening Stage Activities**

After listening, learners may give their opinions about the topic, relate similar experiences to it, or write an alike text to what they were listening to. They can even role-play a similar interaction piece, or they may arrange a debate with their teacher and peers (Davies and Pearse, 2000, p. 78).

## **1.9. Listening Comprehension Difficulties**

During discourse, listening tends to be connected automatically to comprehension. Differently stated, when listening, one obviously aims at nothing but comprehending what the listening passage constitutes.

### **1.9.1. Listening Comprehension Definition**

Different attempts are made by the multitude of researchers to define what listening comprehension is. To start with, Rizvi (2005) maintained that comprehension is the act of understanding or the power of the mind to understand. Listening comprehension is the act of understanding the oral message (p. 70).

Kim and Pilsher (2016) defined listening comprehension as one's ability to understand the spoken language at the discourse level and information oral texts that include the process of extracting and constructing meaning (p. 03). Goss (1982) (as cited in Bingol, 2014, p. 01) stated "listening comprehension is a rational phenomenon. Listeners try to establish a meaning when they obtain the information from the listening source".

Alternatively, Vandergrift (1999) (as cited in Assori, 2015, p. 29) maintained that listening comprehension involves active processing of a variety of linguistic elements simultaneously. He further asserted

Listening comprehension is a complex, active process in which the listener must discriminate between sounds, understand vocabulary and grammatical structures, interpret stress and intonation, retain what was gathered in all of the above and interpret it within the immediate as well as the larger sociocultural context of the utterances.

Moreover, Rost (2000) (as cited in Asrita, 2017, p. 3) gave three different definitions of listening comprehension in which he considered it as a cognitive process. They are

- Listening comprehension is a complex, interactive process which has a dynamic construction of meaning. It is a process in which the listeners understand the spoken input from sound distinguishing, prior knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structures, stress and intonation as well as other use of linguistic, paralinguistic, or even non-linguistic clues in the contextual utterances.
- Listening comprehension is an inferential process. It includes a linguistic knowledge and word knowledge, which interact to create a mental representation of what they hear. In order to this mental representation and achieve comprehension; bottom-up and top-down processes are applied.

- Listening is a process of receiving what the speaker actually says, constructing and representing, negotiating and creating meaning through involvement, imagination and empathy. It is explained that a good listener must be able to decode the message, apply a variety of strategies and interactive processes to make meaning and respond to what is said.

### **1.9.2. Listening Difficulties Definition**

Listening difficulties are problems that are likely to disturb the process of listening comprehension. Goh (2000) (as cited in Hamada, 2017, p. 117) defined listening difficulties as all the internal and external characteristics interrupting the understanding process directly related to cognitive procedures at various stages of listening comprehension. So, listening difficulties are the characteristics that hinder learners' understanding of the intended message.

### **1.10. Factors Influencing Listening Comprehension Process in EFL classroom**

There are many factors that influence listeners' reception and understanding of what they hear. These factors lead to make gaps in the input and misunderstanding of the message meaning. Many scholars mentioned in detailed some common factors hindering listening comprehension process. They grouped them into four factors the speaker, the listener, the message and the environment (Hays, 2002, pp.52-54).

#### **1.10.1. The Speaker**

The speaker and the listener are the essential elements in any conversation. However, the speaker may have some characteristics that can influence the listener ability to listen, understand and interpret the message (Hays, 2002, pp. 52-54). Being exposed to unfamiliar accents of speech might be one of the main factors that may hinder speech understanding. Therefore, learners should be exposed to the different varieties of English as the British, American, Australian and other different accents (Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761). Another speaker characteristic that can influence the listening comprehension is the language that the speaker



uses. The speaker usually may use too deduced forms, idioms, slang, or reduced forms. These can affect the learners' listening comprehension process (Brown, 2007) (as cited in Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761). Additionally, emotionality can be a barrier to comprehending listening. When a speaker expresses high levels of emotions (anger, despair ...), the listeners might be in the emotional content of the message and neglect to listen to words (Hays, 2008, pp. 52-54).

### **1.10.2. The Listener**

Several factors can affect learners' comprehension while listening and interpreting speech. These factors include listeners' background knowledge about the topic, language proficiency level, personal conditions and learners' cognitive capacities (Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761). Difficulties can arise if the listener assumes incorrectly what the speaker is attempting to achieve. So, listening to a message about which the listener has insufficient background knowledge makes the comprehension difficult to learners (Hays, 2002, pp. 52-54). Moreover, English is a stress timed language and rhythmic language with diverse intonation patterns. Therefore, it is necessary for listeners to become aware of these language characteristics, so as to facilitate their listening comprehension (Brown, 2007) (as cited in Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761). In addition to the factors mentioned, personal conditions such as interest and motivation might enhance the comprehension (Hays, 2002, pp. 52-54). If the listener is interested and motivated in what is being said, he may find listening easier of this concept. Finally, cognitive capacities play a major role in influencing the listening comprehension. For instance, lack of concentration, forgetting words, difficulty in recalling their meaning or translation, weakness, tiredness, mental anxiety, boredom, limited exposure to the language, bad listening practice and poor listening strategies are all important factors might affect listening comprehension (Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761).

### **1.10.3. The Message**

The message delivered is so crucial to make listening comprehension take place. Thus, it is highly important to consider some message issues as length, content, organization of language forms, amount of information, delivery rate and visual support (Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761). As far as the message length is concerned, it measured the rough out scrutinizing duration or word count. Indeed, large listening texts are associated with more difficult comprehension. Furthermore, it is worthy to state that the more the message comprises unfamiliar contents about which the listener has insufficient background, the more listening comprehension becomes difficult to them. Moreover, language features including the use of colloquial and slang expressions, reduced forms, complex and ungrammatical sentences might be constraints that deprive EFL learners from comprehending the listening scripts. In contrast, well-organized structures, coherence and discourse markers might be used to improve learners' listening comprehension (Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016, p. 127). Speech rate is another characteristic that may make listening comprehension problematic to EFL learners. Faster speech rate has a negative impact on the listening passage's comprehension. Finally, lack of visual support may also be a problem that makes listening comprehension difficult (Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761). Students find difficulty to recognize the spoken form of some words although they might know their written one. So, providing students with the written form of the listening text is very helpful to facilitate their listening comprehension (Hamouda, 2013, p. 139).

#### **1.10.4. The Environment**

Environmental and physical factors might be obstacles to achieve effective listening comprehension. One of these factors is the classroom environment itself such as lighting, temperature and environmental noise. For instance, students can lose their concentration when feeling too dark, too hot, or too cold in a listening class. Additionally, the quality of sounds in

the recording, technical problems with the equipment, background sound in the material and the internal and external room noise such as sounds of traffic, people talk or distortion in the audio sounds are all constraints impeding learners listening comprehension (Vo, 2017, pp. 759-761).

### **1.11. Assessment of Listening Comprehension**

While the purpose of evaluation, as a product oriented, is to judge learning quality by aim of grading, assessment, as an ongoing (process) product aims at improving the learning quality (Joughin, 2009, p. 16). Accordind to Rathon (2004), listening comprehension refers to the ability to understand spoken language at one or more levels; i.e.; including single words, phrases and sentences or connected discourse. Additionally, she stated that three types of listening comprehension tasks have utility in early assessment. They are: single-word vocabulary comprehension measures, sentence comprehension measures and text level comprehension measures (p. 105).

Until quite recently, very few standardized tests of listening comprehension were available and fewer were adequate for psychometric characteristics. As a result, many researchers have either created listening passages for specific investigation, or converted standardized reading measures to listening comprehension measures (Rathon, 2004, p. 105).

Following the same stream of thoughts, Casey and Upton (2008) declared that listening tests were developed in the 1970s in order to measure listening process components (p. 111). However, in (Advances in web-based learning, 2005), two ways of listening assessment were distinguished: listening comprehension tests for high-level understanding of spoken messages; i.e.; sentences, discourse and pragmatic patterns and cloze tests to examine low-level capabilities of learners; i.e.; particular words sound (p. 197). In the same sense, Buck (2001) claimed that there have been three historical developments in testing listening: The Discrete-

Point-Approach, the Integrative Approach and the Communicative Approach (p. 61). The three approaches are explained subsequently:

- **The Discrete-Point-Approach**

During audio- lingual and Aural situational methods, the Discrete-Point-Approach was the dominant one. Its most famous advocate is Lado who believed that language elements could be isolated and separately tested. According to him, presenting language utterances orally after listening to them is the best testing technique this approach used. He suggested tasks like phonemic discrimination; minimal pairs, stress and intonation and grammatical structures and vocabulary in addition to true/false statements, multiple choices questions, paraphrasing and pictures insisting on not to use too much context (as cited in Buck, 2001, p. 62).

- **The Integrative Approach**

Oller (1979) (as cited in Buck, 2001, pp. 67, 68) explained that integrative tests attempt to assess a learner's capacity of his use of all language bits at the same time. i.e.; assessing language processing rather than language elements knowledge. Tests of reduced redundancy can be useful in this approach. They refer to omitting one part of regularity, that can be predicted, in informal language use (collocations, idiomatic expressions and so on).

Additionally, this approach adopted noise tests where learners are asked to listen to given records affected by white noise, then repeat, translate or write what was heard. Moreover, listening cloze tests are of this approach application. They refer to a systematic omission of text words and learners are expected to fill in blanks after listening (as cited in Buck, 2001, pp. 67, 68).

- **The Communicative Approach**

Carrol (1971) (as cited in Buck, 2001, p. 83) opted for the use of the communicative approach to test listening comprehension. This approach aims at discerning whether learners can actually use linguistic knowledge appropriately in target language contexts. Accordingly, authenticity is highly required in the used listening materials and language fluency as well as proficiency are what to be tested in tasks. Thus, group discussions and debates are best examples of assessing listening under the communicative approach.

To sum up, Kingen (2014) stated that because listening comprehension is an invisible process, it is tested through indirect measures. And even the latter are not foolproof, they are among tools used for assessing listening. He illustrated his view with examples like nodding heads, smiling at appropriate times, asking questions or sharing relevant examples between learners while listening. This is for good listeners. However, the quite skillful ones may be tested through making a verbal error, in the listening material, when they seem disconnected by purpose of checking their error noticing (p. 276). Another assessment way is asking learners to describe their thoughts or feelings before listening to something. This aims at identifying what may affect psychologically their listening (Casey & Upton, 2008, p. 117).

### **1.12. Facilitating the Listening Comprehension Process**

In order to make listening comprehension easier, teachers and learners should bear in their minds suggestions that are beneficial to students to overcome some of their listening comprehension difficulties and help them enhancing their listening comprehension.

Accordingly, Bern (1998) (as cited in Osada, 2004, pp. 169-170) proposed some issues that may facilitate the listening comprehension process:

- 1- Being familiar with the listening passage content facilitates L2 listening comprehension.
- 2- The repetition of the listening passage makes listening comprehension easier.

- 3- Using authentic materials rather than pedagogical ones and relaying on videotapes more than audiotapes might be more practical to enhance listening comprehension.
- 4- Listening activities should be provided based on students' needs, interest and level of complexity.
- 5- Being familiar with pronunciation rules and accents of different native speakers helps learners enhance their listening and speaking skills.
- 6- Using body language, gestures and facial expressions are practical to reinforce students' comprehension of the oral message.
- 7- Stimulating students to be exposed to native speakers can reinforce a good habit of listening and train them to better comprehend the listening scripts (as cited in Osada, 2004, pp. 169-170).

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, general presentation of some theoretical aspects of the listening skill and listening difficulties in EFL classroom is presented. The first chapter highlighted the significance of listening as a language skill. The chapter also exposed to different definitions to listening concept. Then, different models, types and stages of the listening process followed by the listening strategies, classified from different perspectives were as well mentioned. Also, in this chapter, the difference between L1 and L2 listening context was highlighted, all along the various activities that might be used to teaching listening were clarified. The chapter shed light on the various factors that affect learners' listening comprehension. Finally, it provided how to assess listening comprehension and some suggestions to enhance EFL learners listening comprehension process.

**Chapter Two: Assimilation and Elision Aspects of Connected Speech**

## Introduction

## 2.1. Definition of Connected Speech

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*2.3.1. Definition of Assimilation**2.3.2. Types of Assimilation*

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*2.4.1. Definition of Elision**2.4.2. Common English Cases of Elision*

## 2.5. Other Aspects of Connected Speech

## 2.5.1. Stress

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## 2.6. Activities to Teach Assimilation and Elision Features of Connected Speech

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## 2.9. Teacher's Role in Facilitating Assimilation and Elision through listening

## Conclusion

## **Chapter Two: Connected Speech Features (Assimilation and Elision)**

### **Introduction**

The current chapter casts light on some important issues about connected speech; namely, definitions, importance, assimilation and elision and its main features including stress, rhythm, intonation, weak forms, juncture and linking. Moreover, the main activities and materials used to teach assimilation and elision are presented. The chapter, as well, sheds light on assimilation and elision listening difficulties encountered by EFL learners. Finally, it points out the role of the teacher in facilitating the learning of assimilation and elision as basic components characterizing connected speech.

### **2.1. Definition of Connected Speech**

Speech is defined as a large variety of pronunciation features that combine together to create its specific sound. English is usually known as a very melodic, sing-song language. It is characterized by a continuous rhythmic stream of sound adjustments at word boundaries (Erbanova, 2014. p.p. 1.2). Putting it otherwise, English language is known as a stress-timed language. This means that it has a stressed syllable in speech at more or less equal intervals. However, many unstressed syllables occur between the stressed syllables (Hancock, 1996, pp. 4-6).

In the past, most English language teachers focused on teaching segmental features to their learners while teaching pronunciation, they usually concentrated on individual sounds (consonants and vowels). In the 1970s, with the rise of communicative language teaching, many scholars began to emphasize the importance of teaching suprasegmental features. They claimed that pronouncing words in isolation is much less important than pronouncing sounds that blend together when communicating as some words and syllables need more stress while others might be reduced (Alameen and Levis, 2015, p. 3).



Firstly, a distinction between pronouncing words in isolation and words in connection should be raised. The form of a word that occurs when it is said by itself is called the citation form while the form of words when they are said together in group is known as connected form. In citation form, at least one syllable is fully stressed and no vowel reduction is occurred. Contrariwise, when words are produced in connected form, they may be pronounced with different degree of emphasis. The key difference between citation speech and connected speech is the degree of emphasis placed on words in connected speech. In semantics, the degree of emphasis is related to the amount of information a word conveys in a particular message in any conversation. However, in phonetics, the degree of emphasis is particularly noticeable for one class of words. For instance, closed-class words such as grammatical words (determiners, conjunctions, prepositions) are very rarely emphasized in connected speech. Thus, their pronunciation in citation speech forms is different from their pronunciation in connected speech (Ladefoged and Johnson, 2011, p.p. 107-109).

Regarding the importance of connected speech, many definitions were made by multitude scholars to define what connected speech is. From their part, Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined connected speech as “spoken language when analysed as a continuous sequence as opposed to the analysis of individual sounds or words in isolation” (p.117). Emerik, Wagner and Wang (2018) stated that connected speech is the natural process of articulating rapid speech because of the phonological modifications in word forms that vary from word in citation form (p. 1). Putting it differently, it is “the changes in pronunciation that happen when words come together and are linked to the words around them.” (Marla, 2013, p.147).

Aligned with the same perspective, connected speech is defined as the spoken language where words join together to form a continuous stream of sounds. Some of these sounds may

be left out, some may be pronounced in a weak way and some may join together (Cambridge English TKT, 2015, p. 9). Moreover, Crystal (2008) maintained that connected speech is a linguistic term referring to the spoken language when occurred as a continuous sequence in a normal discourse. He added that its significance lies in the contrast implied with studies of linguistic units seen in isolation where much traditional linguistic enquiry was focused on. However, he followed, it is now realized that important changes happen to these units where they are said in a connected flow of speech .e.i they started taking into account to the connected speech forms (p. 101).

Pinker (1995, pp.159-160) (as cited in Alameen & Levis, 2015, p. 3) claimed that connected speech processes are the differences from citation pronunciations that occur when words are pronounced in normal spoken conversations. He pointed out:

In connected sound waves, one word runs into the next seamlessly; there are no little silence between spoken words the way there are white spaces between written words. We simply hallucinate word boundaries when we reach the edge of a stretch of sound that matches some entry in a foreign language: it is impossible to tell where one word ends and the next begins (as cited in Alameen & Levis, 2015, p. 3).

Furthermore, Kinght (2012) stated that connected speech processes are changes that happen to sounds when words are put together in groups. Generally, the way sounds are said in connected speech is unlike the way they are said in isolation. Additionally, he listed some basic points that should be maintained about connected speech. They are:

- Connected speech processes generally occur at the edges of words when they come together in sentences.

- Connected speech processes are optional; both connected speech forms and citation speech forms should sound fine. However, citation speech such as unelided sounds is a bit more formal and careful.
- Connected speech processes affects sounds at the phonemic level rather than the allophonic level.
- because connected speech processes affect phonemes, they may lead to confusions and misunderstanding about meaning that phonemes contribute to meaning (Knight, 2012, p.197).

To sum up, what can be inferred from all the already mentioned definitions is that connected speech is a set of changes that affect words when people talk normally. In connected speech, sounds may be modified, omitted, or combined. These changes often make spoken language fast and hard to understand. This is because sounds cannot be heard clearly and they become like a confusing stream of sounds. Thus, connected speech is not sloppy, uneducated, or bad; it is just normal (Marla, 2013, p. 147).

## **2.2. The Significance of Connected Speech**

By the 1970s, with the growing of CLT, scholars and teachers began to emphasize the importance of suprasegmental features because they were mostly ignored in language classes and pronunciation teaching was usually focused on individual sounds as it was previously mentioned.

In fact, there are several factors contributing to make connected speech important. Firstly, it is noticeable that there is no pause between each word in native speakers' speech. They may move easily from one word to the next without pausing. Secondly, English language is described as an extremely malleable language. That is to say, not all syllables are equal, some are weak and others are strong. Almost, weak ones disappear and sometimes cannot be heard at all, whereas, strong syllables are stressed and lengthened (Basquille, 2006, p.p.7-8).

Moreover, English language is described as stress-timed and it is opposed to syllable-timed language. In stress-timed language, there is a tendency for stressed syllables to recur at regular intervals of time and length depending on the number of stresses rather than the number of syllables. By contrast, in a syllable-timed language (such as French and Spanish) this length and time intervals is irregular depending on the number of unstressed syllables separating the stressed ones. That is to say, in spoken English, the number of unstressed syllables between one stressed syllable and the next can differ enormously. As a result, sentences tend to be relatively “elastic words” expand or contract according to their relative importance and there are certain important occurrences where words meet (Basquille, 2006, pp.7-8).

As far as the importance of connected speech is concerned, researchers recognize that suprasegmental features are very important in helping speakers sound natural and be understood (Marla, 2013, p.155). Indeed, Figueiredo (2002) asserted that by features of connected speech, all the phenomena presented in word boundaries in any given language will be understood. So, word-meaning confusions will be avoided when they occur in connected speech. He added that knowing the aspects of connected speech can help learners to pronounce English in a natural way more fluently and mainly make it easier for them to understand native speakers' speech and be able to distinguish between written and spoken English language (Figueiredo, 2002, p. 83).

Every and Ehrlich (1992) (as cited in Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994, p. 115) stated that “extensive work on the aspects of connected speech... will not only contribute to students' ability to produce fluent and comprehensible speech, but also their ability to comprehend the spoken language”. On the other hand, Rogerson and Gilbert (1990) (as cited in Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994, p. 115) pointed out that “Connected speech helps explain why written English is different from spoken English”.

Moreover, it is not necessary for students to learn to produce connected speech themselves. They can usually communicate well even without using the sound changes that take place in connected speech. But in order to help students get prepared for real word English; they need to know connected speech features to help them to understand these changes (Marla, 2013, p.155). In other words, English learners are not obliged to produce the features of connected speech, but they need to be able to perceive them in others' speech, otherwise, their listening comprehension will be affected (Figueiredo, 2002, p. 83). In this respect, Underhill (1994) pointed out:

When learners become aware that a number of phonemes they might expect to hear are not actually produced and when they discover that they can make these sounds disappeared in their own speech, they begin to gain insight which helps them when they listen to rapid connected English (p. 62).

Aligned with Underhill's perspective, Marla (2013) maintained that both the speaker and the listener are in need to features of connected speech to make the former able to speak easily and the latter able to understand easily. On the one hand, the speaker's mouth basically wants to work in the easiest possible way, with the least movement or effort. i.e.; the speaker mouth becomes a somehow lazy. This leads the speaker's articulatory system to take in the shortest and easiest way, to combine sounds together, to change and sometimes to omit sounds. On the other hand, the listener needs to be able to hear the differences of sounds; otherwise, he will not be able to understand what the speaker is saying. Indeed, if words are pronounced distinctly and clearly without too many sounds omitted or added it would be easier for the listener to comprehend speech. In short, the speaker should not make his mouth too lazy or he will not be understood (Marla, 2013, p.148).

To conclude with, we may say that connected speech features are very important for English learners to enhance their pronunciation and also to perceive native speakers' speech easily and make it understandable for them.

### **2.3. Assimilation**

As it is mentioned above, pronouncing words in their connected form is totally different from pronouncing them in isolation. Thus, connected speech is a set of changes and simplifications that go beyond producing individual words to ease their pronunciation. Thus, English language requires various means that make its pronunciation easier in terms of production, thus to be faster. Among those means is assimilation.

#### **2.3.1. Definition of Assimilation**

The word assimilation could have different meanings. According to Skandera and Burleigh (2011), the word assimilation first came from Latin 'assimilatio' which means making one thing similar to or like another. In phonetics, this concept refers to the process whereby a sound, usually a consonant, becomes more like or identical with a neighboring other as a result of this latter influence (p. 89). Minkova and Stockwell (2009) also acknowledged that assimilation is a change in words pronunciation caused either by or on neighboring other sounds. This change occurs according to speech rate or style. i.e., it is more likely to be found in casual rapid speech than in slow careful one (Minkova & Stockwell, 2009, p. 108). Roach (1983) asserted that "assimilation occurs when a phoneme is realized differently as a result of being near to some other phonemes belonging to neighboring words" (p. 14). More specifically, this similar or identical pronunciation change could result from a left or right neighboring sound (Roach, 2001, p. 57).

#### **2.3.2. Types of Assimilation**

As a phonetic phenomenon, assimilation process -as any others - was described. Accordingly as process, assimilation is viewed from different angles by many scholars. For instance, Minkova & Stockwell (2009) saw that assimilation process can be described from three different perspectives; in terms of the target, the direction and the scope of the resulting similarity. Assimilation can target some or even all of sound's features: voicing, place or manner of its articulation. Also, depending on the direction of the influence between sounds, right-to-left assimilation, left-to-right assimilation or coalescence can be found. Right-to-left (also known as regressive or anticipatory) assimilation occurs when the influence is from the second to the first phoneme. In contrast, Left-to-right (also known as progressive or preservative) assimilation occurs when the influence starts from the first and carries on to the second neighboring sound. However, the case in which a mutual influence happens between the two neighboring sounds and a different sound results, is called coalescence. In terms of scope then, assimilation could be either partial; when only some features of neighboring phonemes assimilate (voicing, place or manner) or total or complete; when the two neighboring segments become completely identical (Minkova & Stockwell, 2009, p. 108).

In addition to what was mentioned above, Roach (2009) said that the most commonly known and agreed one word upon assimilation types are those of place, manner of articulation and voicing (p. 111). These types of assimilation are subsequently explained.

#### **a- Assimilation of Place of Articulation**

As Roach (2009) claimed, the most common type of assimilation is that of place of articulation. It simply refers to changes in place of articulation of a sound. For instance, a final-word alveolar sound followed by another text has a different place of articulation; the alveolar sound assimilates/changes its place of articulation to be similar to the former sound; as in "sit back /'sɪt bæk/ → /'sɪp bæk/" (Roach, 2009, p. 111).

**b- Assimilation of Manner of Articulation**

According to Roach (2009), this assimilation type refers to changes in the manner of articulation. i.e. the sound becomes similar to neighboring ones in terms of their manner of their production. An example could be as a plosive sound that changes into a fricative; as in “get some /'get sʌm/→/'ge'sʌm/” (Roach, 2009, p. 111).

**c- Assimilation of Voicing**

Roach (2009) stated that this type of assimilation occurs in a limited way in English language. It refers to the change of a voiced sound into a voiceless one or vice versa because of the influence of the neighbouring segment ;as in “has to /'hæz tu/→/'hæs tə/” (Roach, 2009, p. 111).

**• Common English Cases of Assimilation**

Both of Ashby (2011) and Roach (2009) agreed upon some cases of assimilation that are commonly known in English pronunciation. They are as follow:



<b>Cases of Assimilation</b>	<b>Example</b>
a- / s / is pronounced / ʃ / before / f / or / j / sounds.	- Nice shoes - Nice yacht
b- / t / is pronounced / p / before / p /, / m / and / b / sounds/.	- Cigarette paper - Put back - Fruit machine
c- / d / is pronounced / g / before / k / and / g / sounds.	- Hard cash  - Closed game
d- / d / is pronounced / b / before / b /, /m/, or /p/ sounds.	- Broad bean - Good morning - Blood pressure
e- / n / is pronounced / m / before /m/, /b/ or /p/ sounds.	- Fan mail - Sun bath - One pair
f- /t / followed by / j / is pronounced /tʃ /.	- Last year
g- /d / followed by / j / is pronounced /dʒ /.	- Had you
h- /t / is pronounced / k / before / k / or /g/ sounds.	- Credit card - Cut glass

**Table 2.1.** *Common English Cases of Assimilation.*

## 2.4. Elision

Next to assimilation, elision is another process characterizing connected speech. Elision is one means that English language speakers are in need of to facilitate their pronunciation.

### 2.4.1. Definition of Elision

Crystal (2008) defined elision as ‘a term used in phonetics and phonology to refer to the omission of sounds in connected speech. Both consonants and vowels may be affected and sometimes whole syllable may be elided’ (p. 166). Kelly (2000) stated that ‘elision describes the disappearance of a sound’ (p. 110). Moreover, Fakinlede (2005) defined the word ‘elision’ as ‘the omission or slurring of a vowel, consonant or even a syllable in pronunciation’ (p. 126). Additionally, Minkova (1991) acknowledged that the English Oxford Dictionary defines

it as the dropping out or suppressing of a syllable in pronunciation before a following vowel or a weak /h/ (Minkova, 1991, p. 44).

#### **2.4.2. Common English Cases of Elision**

According to Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994), elision mostly affects the English sounds /h/ as in “would have /wʊd hæv/ → /wʊd əv/”, /d/ as in “boiled potatoes /bɔɪld pə'tetətəʊz/” and /t/ as in “she didn't do it /ʃi dɪdn̩t du ɪt/ → /ʃi dɪdn̩ du: ɪt/” in addition to the vowel sound /ə/ as in “separate /'sepəreɪt/ → /'sepɪt/” (p. 118). Supporting the same idea, Giegerich (1992) claimed that elision could be mostly found in the simplification of consonant cluster. He illustrated this thought with the loss of /d/ as in “hard disk /hɑ:d dɪsk/ → /hɑ:'dɪsk/” and /t/ as in “next to /nekst tu/ → /neks'tu/” in combination with other consonants (Giegerich, 1994, p. 95). Moreover, he added that elision could be found in vowel sounds and the most frequent one is /ə/ (Giegerich, 1994, p.95).

#### **2.5. Other Aspects of Connected Speech**

In the upcoming section, other features of connected speech features of English pronunciation that may influence words production in groups is portrayed. These features are: stress, rhythm, intonation, weak forms, juncture and linking

##### **2.5.1. Stress**

Stress is a term used in phonetics to refer to the degree of force used in producing a syllable. It is usually marked in transcription with a raised vertical line (ˈ) (Crystal, 2008, p.455). Generally, when a word has more than one syllable; one of these is produced with a more prominent than the others which are unstressed. This prominence is made by pronouncing that syllable slightly louder, holding the vowel a little longer, increasing the pitch and pronouncing the consonants very clearly (Kenworthy, 1987, pp. 9-11).

Richards and Schmidt (2010) distinguished three main types of stress: word stress, sentence stress and emphatic stress.

- **Word Stress**

Word stress refers to the patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in one word. In this type of stress, the syllable with the greatest prominence had the primary stress and the next prominent syllable comprises the secondary stress. Word stress may distinguish between two words that are alike in spelling but different in grammar category (eg: a verb and a noun). For example, IMport as a noun is stressed on the first syllable and imPORT as a verb is stressed on the second syllable (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 560-561).

- **Sentence Stress**

Sentence stress refers to the pattern of stressed and unstressed words in a sentence. Commonly, English sentence stress falls on content words that contain new information. For example, he was going to LONdon, where the strongest stress falls on the first syllable of the word London (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 560-561).

- **Emphatic Stress**

Emphatic refers to the stressed syllable or word that the speaker wants to highlight. Emphatic stress is considered to be contrastive stress when the highlighted word is explicitly or implicitly contrasted with another word ((Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 560-561).

In short, stress is the emphasis that can be given to a part of word or a part of sentence. This stressed syllable is louder, longer and has a higher pitch than the unstressed ones.

### **2.5.2. Rhythm**

The rhythm of speech is defined as “the way that some words in a sentence are emphasized or stressed to produce a regular pattern.” (Cambridge English TKT, 2015, p. 39). This regular pattern may be stated in terms of stressed and unstressed syllables, long and short

syllables and high or low pitch, or some combinations of these variables (Crystal, 2008, p. 417). Rhythm differs from one language to another depending on the sound characteristics of languages. Thus, a distinction between stress-timed languages and syllable-timed languages are made to draw the distinction between the rhythmical structures of languages (Hancock, 1996, pp. 4).

### **2.5.3. Intonation**

Crystal (2008) defined intonation as “a term used in the study of suprasegmental phonology, referring to the distinctive use of patterns of pitch or melody.” (p. 252). Intonation refers to the way the voice goes up and down in pitch while speaking. Additionally, it is the fundamental method of expressing and understanding thoughts and knowing the speaker’s attitude towards the matter discussed (Kelly, 2000, p. 86). Indeed, there is a strong relationship between intonation patterns and grammatical functions. For instance, the word “ready” is considered as a question when it is said with a raising intonation ( ↗ ) while; the same word with falling intonation ( ↘ ) is a statement. Moreover, falling intonation can be associated with certainty whereas raising intonation associated with uncertainty. Therefore, intonation patterns even differ between languages and may even differ as well as between varieties of the same languages (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 299-300).

### **2.5.4. Weak Forms**

Kenworthy (1987) stated that the pronunciation of a word within only one unstressed syllable in a sentence is quite different from when it is stressed (pp.10). In connected speech, words which do not have any important information in sentences are usually unstressed and their vowels are pronounced as weak forms (Cambridge English TKT, 2015, p. 51). In fact, grammatical words such as pronouns (her, him), auxiliary verbs (can, are, does, was), prepositions (to, at, for, from) and connectives (but, and) are the words that tend to have weak

forms. Generally, the short vowel sound in weak forms is always the weak vowel /ə/, except in the case that the original vowel is /i/, it stays the same (Hancock, 1996, pp. 5).

### **2.5.5. Juncture**

Crystal (2010) defined English juncture as “a term used in phonology to refer to the phonetic boundary features which may demarcate grammatical units such as morphemes, words, or clause.” (p. 305). Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2010) defined it as “the boundary between two phonemes accounting for the flow and pauses between sounds in speech.” (p. 305). Indeed, although the phonemes are the same in such words; there are some differences in their pronunciation such as differences in the length of vowel sounds, variations in degree of syllable stress and differently timed articulation of the consonant sounds and allophonic stress (Kelly, 2000, pp. 112.113).

### **2.5.6. Linking**

Linking is defined as “a term used in phonology to refer to a sound which is introduced between linguistic units, usually for ease of pronunciation.” (Crystal, 2008, p. 285). Putting it otherwise, it is “a process in continuous speech which connects the final sound of one word or syllable to the initial sound of the next.” (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 343). In linking sounds, there are mainly two types, linking words ending in a consonant sound to words beginning with a vowel sound and linking words ending in a vowel sound to words beginning in a vowel sound. In this latter, when one word ends a vowel sound and the next word begins with a vowel sound, the words are linked by inserting /w/ or /j/ sound. That is, if the lips are round at the end of the first vowel; the /w/ sound is inserted, whereas; if the lips are wide at the end of the first word; the /j/ sound is inserted (Carmen, 2010, pp. 30). In addition to /w/ and /j/ sounds, /r/ may be also inserted between linking sounds. However, if a /r/ is inserted without being justified in the writing language; this is then called an intrusive /r/ (Hancock,

1996, pp.4-6). This latter is the most familiar example of linking process, as when the r in car is pronounced before a vowel, or when an /r/ is introduced without there being justification in the writing (eg: shah of /ʃɑ:rəv/ (Crystal, 2008, p. 285).

## **2.6. Activities to Teach Assimilation and Elision Features of Connected Speech**

In order to facilitate and enhance speaking (pronunciation) and listening skills, features of connected speech, especially assimilation and elision, it is necessary to teach them.

Accordingly, specialists in the field of teaching adopted different types of activities. Cele-Marcia, Briton, Goodin and Giner (2010) suggested a systematic fashion to teach those aspects. They referred to teaching pronunciation features in multi-skills classrooms. That is to say, integrating the pronunciation of assimilation and elision in other skills and combine information about them with a particular teaching point; for example, phrasal verbs, imperative form, giving advice and so is a good example of teaching these aspects in a multi-skills classroom (p. 175). Sawaengmongkon (2012) clarified that listening or pronunciation activities are more effective because they permit practicing the intended aspects to be learnt either through free practice or a teacher or peer controlled one. Hence, listen and repeat or write tasks might be appropriate. Also, if learners were exposed to language contains assimilation and elision then asked to transcribe some parts of it, this would be much effective (Sawaengmongkon, 2012, p. 570).

## **2.7. Materials Used to Teach Assimilation and Elision**

Teaching assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech, as any other part of teaching, requires pedagogical selected materials or authentic ones. Sherman (2003) acknowledged that authentic audio-tapes and videos are of great effectiveness in a well pronounced language. This specifically serves teaching/learning features of connected speech because of the formality degree the latter has. To be clearer, everyday life speech videos may

provide learners or teachers with the informal conversations they need (Sherman, 2003, p.63). Sawaengmongkon favored this idea considering films as best source that may provide authentic speech and free learning practice (p. 570). However, Roach (2011), in addition to the idea mentioned earlier, emphasized the priority of pedagogical texts in teaching some features of connected speech (assimilation). He even considered teacher-learners speech inside the classroom a source from where they can gradually enhance their pronunciation. This view was strongly directed to EFL teaching/learning because of the complexity this speech is characterized with (Roach, 2011, p.135).

### **2.8. Assimilation and Elision Listening Difficulties Encountered by EFL Learners**

Ur (1987) (as cited in Cele-Marcia, et al, 2010, p. 176) stated that learners may face difficulties in identifying words when listening to a casual and rapid speech delivered by a native speaker (p. 176). These difficulties are mainly summarized in the following points:

- Speech rapidity may cause gaps in words understanding.
- Learners may develop false estimated vocabulary on the basis of their listening.
- Assimilation may cause an inability to distinguish words boundaries, thus inability to recognize their meaning and even their spelling.
- Learners may fall in contradictions in terms of using tense with adverbs of time as a result of elision (as cited in Cele-Marcia, et al, 2010, p. 176).

### **2.9. Teacher's Role in Facilitating Assimilation and Elision through listening**

Ur (1987) (as cited in Cele-Marcia, et al, 2010, p. 176) pointed out to the significant role a teacher may play in facilitating the learning and practice of assimilation and elision. He clarified the way this learning or practice should be proposed that learners should have an overview about connected speech aspects' phenomenon, then a deep and illustrated clarification with an accurate pronunciation should be provided. In other words, the teacher

must be as a first knowledge source for his/her learners. Besides, he/she must be an accurate pronunciation model for them since they will imitate his/her way of pronouncing. Another point the teacher may help learners with in mastering the mentioned features is providing enough practice throughout highlighting each aspect satisfactorily (as cited in Cele-Marcia, et al, 2010, p. 176).

### **Conclusion**

Connected speech features are one of the most important properties of pronunciation. Yet, it is the problematic area facing many EFL learners listening skill. Unfortunately, connected speech features take the less care from the part of learners. As a result, their listening comprehension to native speakers is weak, they even face many difficulties and obstacles that prevent them from comprehending speech while speech. Thus, the chapter in hand attempted to shed light on the pivotal issues in relation to aspects of connected speech precisely assimilation and elision, or initially exposed the different process conducted in connected speech and provided definitions to the two terms “Assimilation” and “Elision. The chapters, as well as, put into plain words the cases in which these two processes occur all long the activities that might be used to teach them. Moreover, the chapter portrayed the different encountered difficulties faced by EFL learners while listening to assimilation and elision. Finally, this chapter concluded by exposing different materials used to teach those two aspects and the role of teachers to decrease the learners’ encountered difficulties.



## **Chapter Three: Fieldwork**

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## **Introduction**

The third chapter is practical in nature. It aims at exploring EFL learners' listening difficulties to perceive the aspects of connected speech particularly assimilation and elision. Thus, in order to shed light on these difficulties and test the aforesaid hypothesis upon which this study is based, two instruments of data collection are used. Thus, the chapter in hand is concerned with the description of the adopted methodology of the current piece of research. A detailed analysis and discussion of the obtained data are presented in the frame of the current chapter as well. Finally, it concludes with providing some pedagogical recommendations and suggestions for further future research. The chapter sheds light as well on the limitations encountered in conducting this research.

### **3.1. Research Design and Methodology**

The current study attempts to explore EFL learners' difficulties in perceiving the assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech. In order to identify at these difficulties, the researchers made use of the quantitative research to data collection. Ernst (2003) (I berer 1 as cited in Ernst, 2003, p. 2) defined quantitative research as the one that is based on data which can be described as numeric, statistic and analytic (p. 2). He added that its aim is to capture relevant facts [...] and explain them usually with empirical analytical methods (I berer 1 as cited in Ernst, 2003, p. 2). Based on the previous clarification, the piece of research at hands is a descriptive design.

A descriptive research, then, was described as useful because it can provide important information regarding the average number of a group, specifically, through gathering data on a representative group of people what allows the researcher to provide a valuable description to this group (Marczyk, De Matteo and Festinger, (2003), p. 16). So, based on the previous clarification, the piece of research at hands is a descriptive design.

### **3.1.1. Population and Sampling**

The population of this study is third year Licence EFL students at the English language Department of at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University, Jijel. Accordingly, a questionnaire was addressed to sixty students, who were randomly selected, out of three hundred and four (60/304) and a listening test was conducted with thirty students randomly selected belonging to the same population. The aim of choosing third year students precisely is that all students have already studied the aspects of connected speech in their second year in the module of “English Phonetics and Phonology”. Accordingly, it is expected that these students have basic knowledge about assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech rules since they had been instructed the lesson of ‘aspects of connected speech’ in the aforementioned module as we have been informed by ‘*Phonetics and Phonology*’ teachers at the same department.

### **3.1.2. Data Collection Tools**

In order to gather data to answer the research questions of the current study, two research tools were used. The first tool is a questionnaire addressed to third year students. The questionnaire is designed to diagnose the difficulties the learners do face while listening to the aspects of connected speech (assimilation/elision). It also attempts to investigate the participants’ awareness about these aspects and identify the ways in which these aspects influence their listening comprehension.

The second research tool used is a listening test set to explore the influence of assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech on the learners’ listening comprehension. The test, as well, attempts to shed light on the major deficiencies the learners are faced with while being exposed to elision and assimilation aspects of connected speech.

### **3.1.3. Description and Administration of the Research Tools**

### **3.1.3.1. Description and Administration of the Questionnaire**

As stated beforehand, the current piece of study attempts to elicit information from the participants about their attitudes towards the perception of the aspects of connected speech, particularly elision and assimilation. Thus, we opted for a questionnaire to gather as much information as possible. In actual fact, Brace (2004, p.4) clarified that a questionnaire can be differently written and used. He stated that the significant role of a questionnaire is to provide a standardized interview across all subjects. That is to say; it is about written questions by which research meets respondent's attitudes and options individually as in the interview. So, a questionnaire is a communication medium between researchers and the subject concerned to answer a set of written questions relevant to the study. Those questions can be close-ended, open-ended, or a combination of both.

#### **3.1.3.1.1. Questionnaire Administration**

The present questionnaire was administered randomly to sixty (60) third-year English language students at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University Jijel. The administration of the questionnaire started on May 26<sup>th</sup> and ended on May 27<sup>th</sup> 2019 (it took two days to be administrated to the targeted sample). The participant students were given approximately half an hour to hand the questionnaire back. It is worthy to state that the researchers were present in classrooms while the participants were filling the questionnaire to provide any further explanation to the students in order to avoid any possible ambiguity and misunderstanding of the questions.

#### **3.1.3.1.2. Questionnaire Description**

The questionnaire comprises twenty-three (23) questions which are divided into three sections. The first section consists of nine questions; eight of them are of close-ended type and a single question implies on the participants to provide clarifications. This section is set to

explore the learners' listening skill and listening difficulties. The second section consists of six questions (6): four are close-ended ones and two require free answers. This section attempts to investigate issues related to the aspects of connected speech generally and assimilation and elision in particular. It also aims at evaluating students' general knowledge and performance towards those aspects. The third section encompasses eight questions (8) some are close-ended ones (five questions) and three others require the provision of free answers. This section is set to shed light on the correlation between the learners' knowledge about the aspects of connected speech and their listening skill. The section aims at eliciting information from the learners to see their exposure to those aspects and to explore the main difficulties they face while listening to assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech.

### **3.1.3.2. Description and Administration of the Test**

To collect data about assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech influence on the process of EFL learners' listening comprehension and the difficulties that might be encountered, a test was administrated to a sample of thirty (30) third-year Licence students of English language at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University. The test is primarily designed to consider the degree to which the targeted population is knowledgeable about the assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech. The test as well aims at shedding light on the most difficulties 3<sup>rd</sup> year students face while listening to native speakers whose speech is

#### **3.1.3.2.1. Test Description and Procedure**

The test consists of thirty short and simple statements pronounced by English native speakers taken from suggested as activities of practice in the [bbclaerningenglish.com](http://bbclaerningenglish.com) website. The test was in the form of audio scripts to which students were exposed. The participants were set to listen to each statement twice then asked to write the statements in the audio scripts.

The selected statements in the test are selected according to different cases of assimilation and elision. They are: assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/ when it is followed by /s/ or /j/, assimilation of /t/ into /p/ once it is followed by /p/, assimilation of /d/ into /g/ if it is followed by either /k/ or /g/, assimilation of /d/ into /b/ when it is followed by /b/, assimilation of /n/ into /m/ once it is followed by /p/, assimilation of /t/ into /tʃ/ if it is followed by /j/, assimilation of /t/ into /k/ when it is followed by /k/, elision of /d/; elision of /t/ and elision of /h/. The test aims at investigating whether the participant students are able to distinguish the assimilated and elided sounds and exploring the difficulties they face when listening to such aspects of connected speech.

#### **3.1.3.2.2. Test Administration**

As denoted beforehand, the test was administered to thirty students out of three hundred and four (30/304) conducted in a period of two days; from the 26<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 2019. The participants are randomly chosen from all the groups of third year student. The overall timing that the test has taken was twenty-five minutes to be conducted and submitted.

### **3.2. Data Analysis**

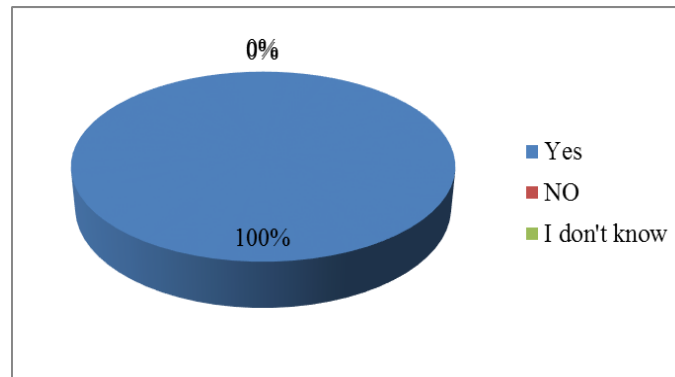
#### **3.2.1 The Questionnaire Results**

##### **3.2.1. The Questionnaire Analysis**

In what follows, the answers of the addressed questions in the questionnaire are represented in the form of pie graphs and reported in form of numerals and percentages.

### **SECTION ONE: Listening Skill and Listening Difficulties.**

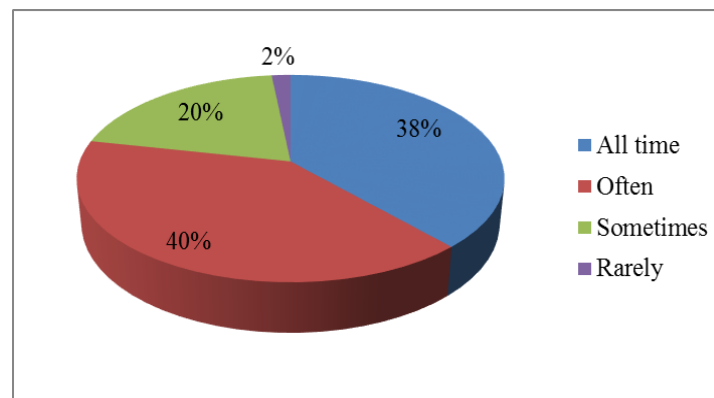
#### **Q1. Do you like listening to English?**



**Figure 3.1. Students' Attitudes towards Listening to English**

The first question was addressed to know students' attitudes towards listening to English. That is to say, the question aimed at checking learners' interest in listening to English. The results obtained revealed that all the participants, which represent sixty students (100%) like listening to English and none of them said "no" or "I do not know". Accordingly, one might deduce that all the participants do have a positive attitude towards listening to English. Thus, showing interest to listen to English may make EFL learners eager to pay more attention to the aspects characterizing native speakers' speech.

**Q2. If yes, how often do you do per day?**

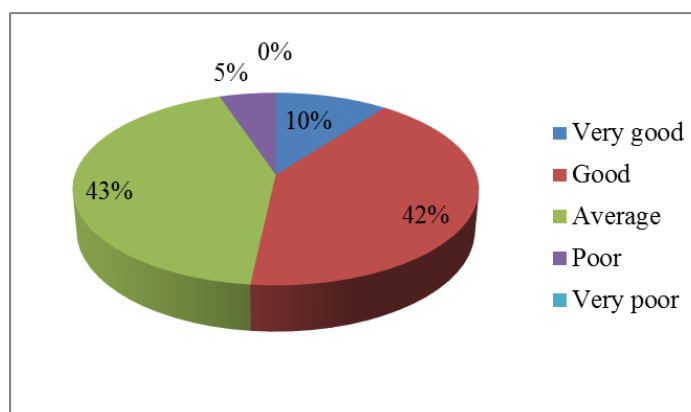


**Figure 3.2. The Frequency of Listening to English**

The second question attempts to investigate about the Learners' extent of exposure to English per day. The findings indicate that twenty-three out of sixty students (38%) revealed

that they listened to English all time and twenty-four students out of sixty (40%) opted for ‘often’ option. However, twelve participants (20%) opted for sometimes as an answer and only one student (2%) opted for rarely. The results show that the majority of the participants are exposed satisfactorily to the spoken language. Given that, the participants are regularly working on enhancing their listening comprehension ability.

### Q3. How would you evaluate your listening skill?

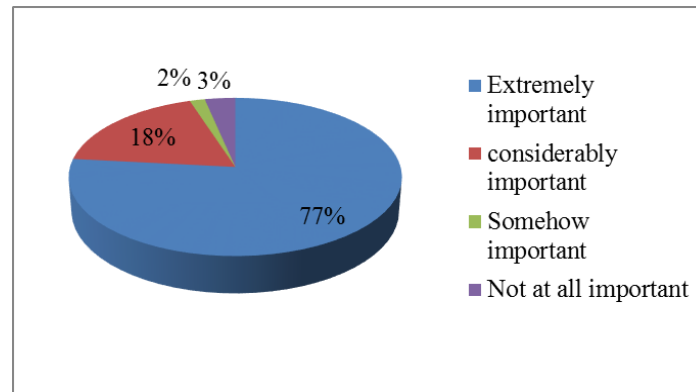


**Figure 3.3. Students' Estimation of their Listening Level**

Concerning the third question, it was addressed to diagnose the participant learners' level in listening to English. The responses maintained that only six students out of sixty (10%) reported that their level was “very good”. Twenty-four students (42%) evaluated their level as being good and twenty-five (43%) considered their level as being average. This simply means that half of the involved participants seem to be satisfied with their level of listening to English. Moreover, only three students (5%) reported that their level was poor and none of them considered his/her level as poor. From the gathered data, it is evident that a considerable number of students seems to have an acceptable level in listening to English. So, we expect them to face few difficulties while listening to English.

### Q4. To what extent do you think listening skill is important in your English language learning process?

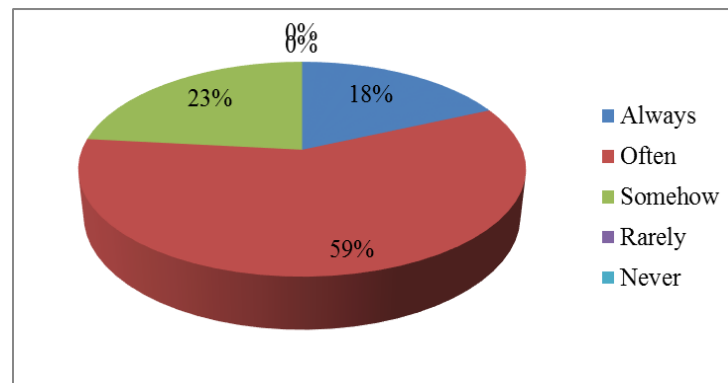




**Figure 3.4. Students' Perspectives about the Listening Skill Importance**

The fourth question is set to identify the learners' perception towards the importance of listening in the English language learning. This question aims at highlighting whether learners are aware about the significance of listening skill in enhancing the process of English language learning. As displayed in the figure above, forty-six students out of sixty representing (77%) believed that listening is extremely important in the English language learning process and eleven students (18%) considered listening as being considerably important. Only one student (2%) declared that listening is somehow important while two others (3%) pointed that it is not important at all. The findings reveal that the participants are conscious about the importance of the listening skill in enhancing their English language learning process.

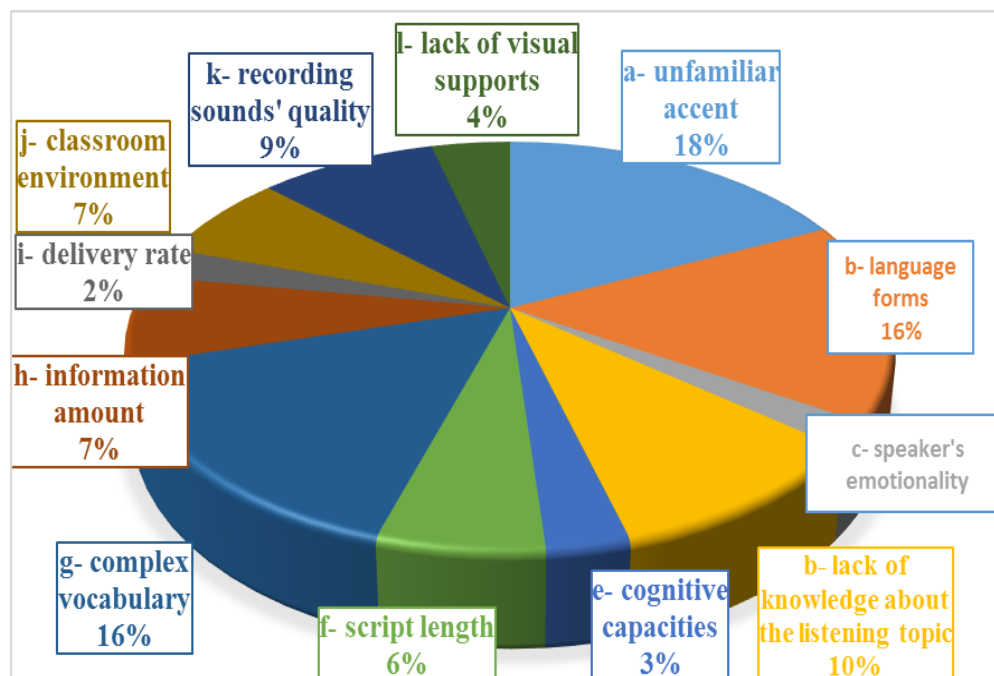
**Q5. How often do you succeed at comprehending the content of the listening scripts you are exposed to?**



**Figure 3.5. The Frequency of Success in Comprehending the Listening Scripts' Content**

The fifth question is designed to elicit information from the participants about the frequency of being successful at comprehending the content of exposed listening scripts. That is, it aims at measuring their ability to understand the listening messages. Eleven students out of sixty (18%) reported that they are always successful at comprehending the listening message, thirty-five of them representing (59%) claimed that they often succeed at understanding the messages of the scripts, fourteen students (23%) are somehow successful and none of them (0%) claimed that he/she is rarely or never are successful. From this, as the majority of the learners involved seem to be able to comprehend the message while listening, so, we expect them to be good enough at listening comprehension.

**Q6. Among the following difficulties, which one(s) do you usually face while listening to a script?**

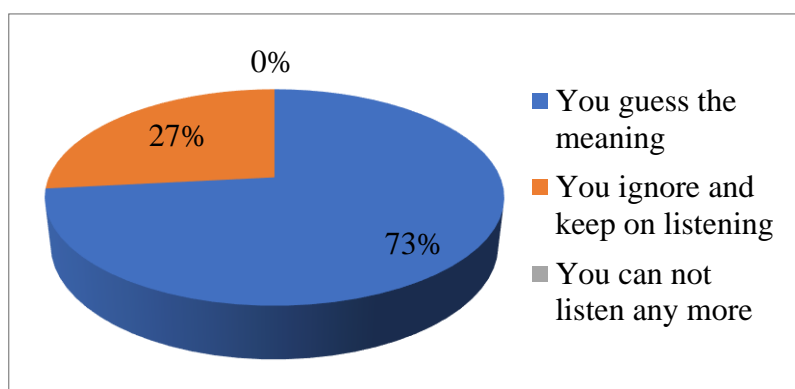


**Figure 3.6. Students' Listening Difficulties**

The sixth question aims at eliciting information about the most listening difficulties faced by students. In this question, many listening difficulties are provided in the form of options and were asked to choose more than one option if necessary. Thus, the percentage of the mentioned difficulties was given according to the total number of students' ticks and not according to the total number of the selected population. A high portion, as demonstrated in the pie chart, is given to unfamiliar accents difficulty selected by thirty-six students (18%). The next chosen difficulties are the one related to language forms and complex vocabulary; both options were selected by thirty-two students (16%) for each difficulty. Moreover, twenty students (10%) stated that they face difficulty when they had no enough knowledge about the listening topic. Eighteen students (9%) argued that they had difficulties in recording sounds' quality. The number of students who claimed that they faced difficulties in both information amount and classroom environment was fourteen students (7%). Then, twelve students (6%) claimed that they found difficulty when the listening script was long. However, eight students

declared they found difficulty when there was a lack of visual support and only six students (3%) responded that they faced difficulty because of their cognitive capacities. Finally, only four students (2%) stated that they had difficulties in both speaker's emotionality and delivery rate. According to the results demonstrated above, being exposed to unfamiliar accents and complex vocabulary are the most encountered constraints the participants are faced with while listening to English. (See Appendix B)

**Q7. Among the following strategies, which one(s) do you usually make use of whenever you are faced with comprehension difficulties while listening to a passage/script?**

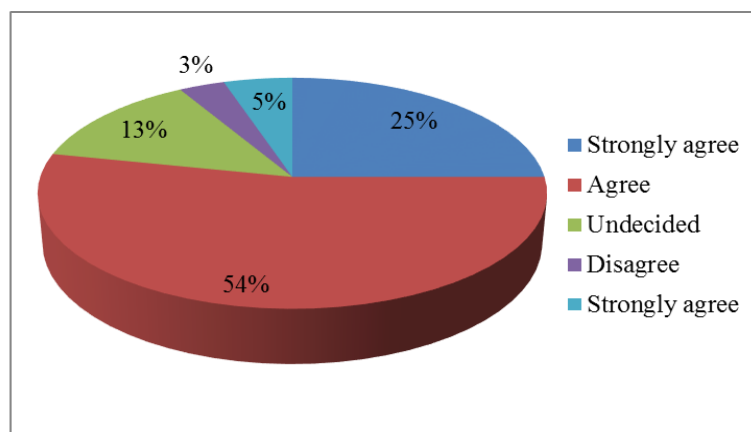


**Figure 3.7. Listening Comprehension Difficulties and the Use of Listening Strategies**

The seventh question is designed to enquire about the strategies used by students whenever they were faced with comprehension difficulties while listening to a passage. According to students' responses, forty-four out of sixty students (73%) admitted that they guessed the meaning. That is to say; those students do not focus on each word's meaning, they rather strive to get the general idea of the listening passage. Moreover, sixteen students (27%) said that they ignored and kept on listening. However, none of them reported that he/she could not listen any more. This means that students keep doing efforts while facing listening difficulties throughout guessing the meaning from the context. Furthermore, it can be said that students redirect their attention and try to focus more when they are faced with listening

comprehension difficulties. Finally, we conclude it seems that most of participants are able to control their listening.

**Q8. To what extent do you agree that authentic listening materials are more helpful than pedagogical ones (those that are meant for teaching/learning)?**



**Figure 3.8. Students' Perceptions of the Significance of Authentic Listening Materials**

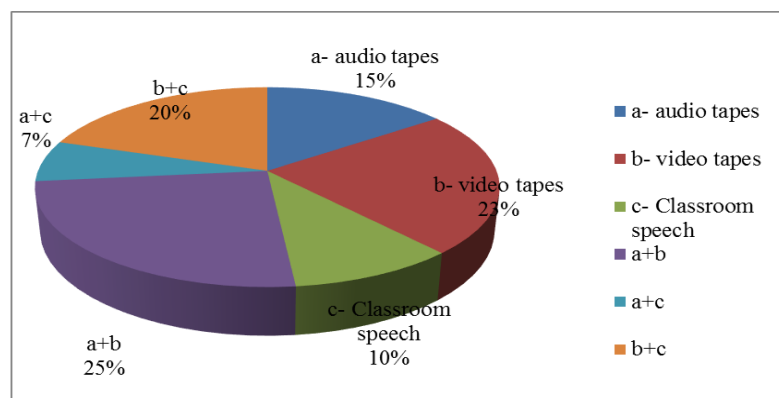
This question was designed to enquire about students' views towards authentic listening materials. It aims at getting insights on whether learners consider authentic listening materials as more helpful than pedagogical ones. As it can be seen from Figure 3.8, fifteen out of 60 participants representing (25%) opted for strongly agree and thirty-two students (54%) opted for agree. While eight students (13%) were undecided if authentic materials are more helpful or others, only two students (3%) showed their disagreement and three students (5%) strongly disagreed. This denotes that the majority of the participants consider authentic listening materials more helpful than pedagogical ones.

Seeking to get further insights about the issue, the participants were asked to provide justifications. Yet, only twenty-seven students among sixty (45%) provided justifications that are almost similar ones. Therefore, their answers are summarized subsequently:

- Pedagogical materials are boring.

- Authentic listening materials make students more interested, motivated and attract their attention.
- Using authentic listening materials is simpler and more fun to work with.
- Authentic listening materials are unlimited and always have a more room for exploitation.
- Authentic listening materials make students familiar with different accents and pronunciations.
- Authentic listening materials provide students with real conversation situations and give them the opportunity to master their listening skill.

**Q9. What kind of materials does your Oral Expression (OE) module teacher use during a listening session?**



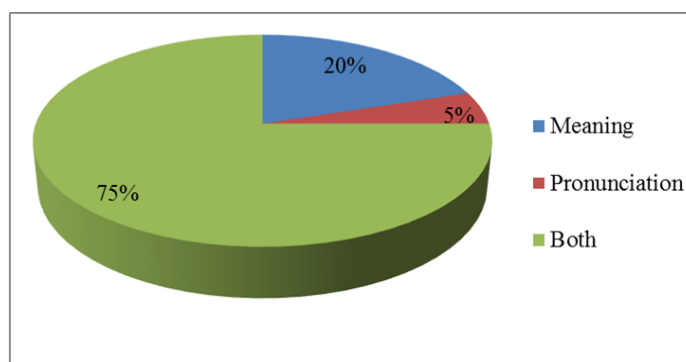
**Figure 3.9. Types of Materials Used in Listening Sessions**

The ninth question in the questionnaire was designed to enquire about the kind of the listening material used by OE module teachers during a listening session. It is noteworthy to state that OE is precisely targeted as a module since it is the only one in which third year students are taught the listening skill. Thus, the question attempted at getting insight on the variety of the listening materials to which OE teachers expose their learners. The results obtained reveal six students out of sixty representing (10%) opted for classroom speech, nine students (15%) stated that their teachers made use of audio tapes. Fourteen students (23%)

reckoned that their teachers relied on video tapes to teach them listening. Moreover, approximately half of students (31 students representing 52%) in this question selected two types of materials used by their OE teachers during listening sessions. For instance, fifteen students (25%) declared that their teachers of OE used both audio tapes and video tapes during listening sessions. Twelve students (20%) claimed that their teachers used both video tapes and classroom speech and only four students (7%) maintained that their teachers made use of both audio tapes and classroom speech during listening sessions. According to the findings, audio and video tapes are the most used listening materials that OE teachers use to teach listening. Hence, exposing learners to videos in which native speakers communicate is practical as their speech paves the way for the learners to be exposed to authentic speech. Given that, the learners would have ample opportunities to notice the different aspects characterizing Native speakers' speech.

## **SECTION TWO: Aspects of Connected Speech (Assimilation/ Elision)**

### **Q10. When you listen to an English listening script, do you focus on?**

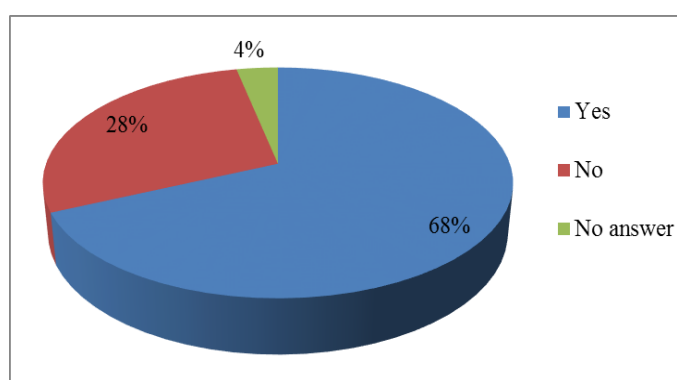


**Figure 3.10. Students' Focus while Listening to English Scripts**

The tenth question is set to investigate students' focus while listening to English. That is to say, this question is targeted to consider whether learners generally focus on the speaker's pronunciation or on the meaning of the message while listening, or they focus on both of them.

While twelve out of sixty students (20%) declared that they focused on meaning and only three students (5%) stated that they focused on pronunciation. Forty-five students (75%) admitted that they focused on both of meaning and pronunciation. According to the results, it seems that the involved participants are aware of the role of understanding speaker's pronunciation in facilitating the process of comprehending the meaning of the listening passage.

**Q11.** Have you ever been instructed/taught aspects of connected speech in classroom?

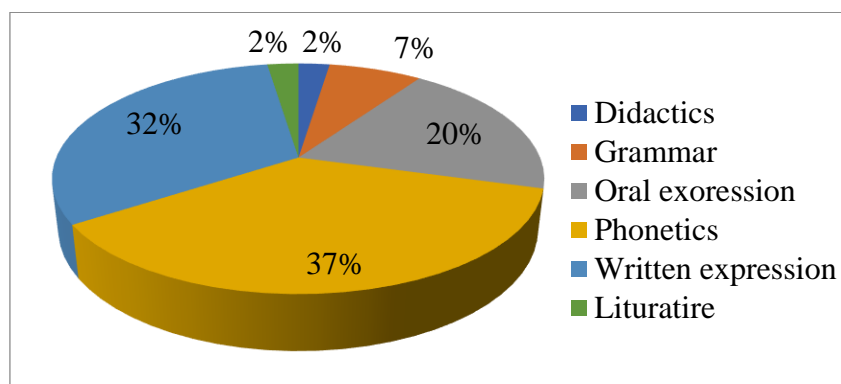


**Figure 3.11. Aspects of Connected Speech Instruction**

This question attempts to elicit information about the instruction of the aspects of connected speech. It aims at denoting whether the involved participants have already been taught aspects of connected speech in classroom or not. The results gathered reveal that forty-one out of sixty students (68%) were already instructed connected speech features in classroom Seventeen students (28%) reported that they were not instructed those aspects and two students (4%) did not provide any answer. Having the majority of the students who confirmed the fact of being instructed the aspects of connected speech simply means that the majority of the involved population is equipped with the basic knowledge about these aspects. Accordingly, we expect them to be good at detecting the different features of connected speech in the process of listening.



**Q12. If yes, in which module (s)/class (es) have you been taught these aspects of connected speech?**



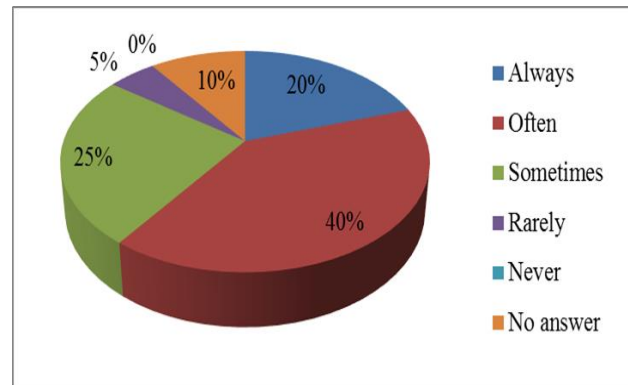
**Figure 3.12. The Modules of Instructing the Aspects of Connected Speech**

This question is addressed for those students who said “Yes” in the previous question. The students were asked to mention the module in which they have been taught the aspects of connected speech. Students’ responses are presented in the above figure. The answers obtained from these questions are surprising as the majority of the participants mentioned unrelated modules to teach aspects of connected speech such as didactics, grammar, literature and written expression. It seems that students could not distinguish between aspects of connected speech and parts of speech or reported speech.

**Q13. To what extent are you able to identify/perceive features of connected speech in English while listening to native speakers?**

This question is set to enquire about students’ frequency of the perception of connected speech aspects. The aim behind addressing this question is to assess the ability of students to identify features of connected speech in English while listening to native speakers. Each aspect is presented individually with a brief explanation to the obtained results and at the end, an overall explanation about students’ frequency to identify these aspects is given.

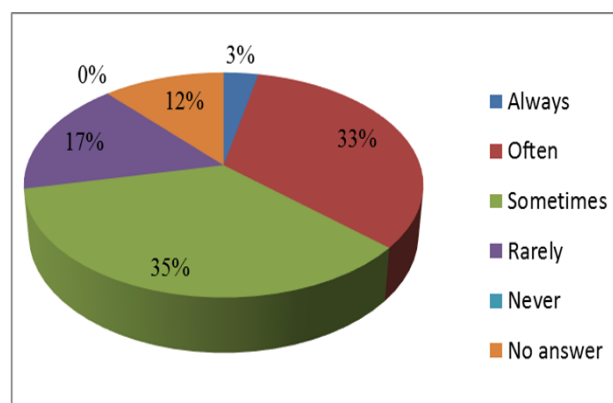
**a- Stress**



**Figure 3.13. The Frequency regarding Stress Perception**

As it is clearly presented in the above figure, twelve students out of sixty (20%) claimed that they were always able to perceive stress while listening to native speakers. Twenty-four students (40%) reported that they were often able to identify it. Additionally, fifteen students (25%) maintained that they were sometimes able to identify stress. And only three (5%) students pointed out that they were rarely able to perceive stress while none of them opted for never option. Unfortunately, six students (10%) did not answer at all.

#### **b- Assimilation**

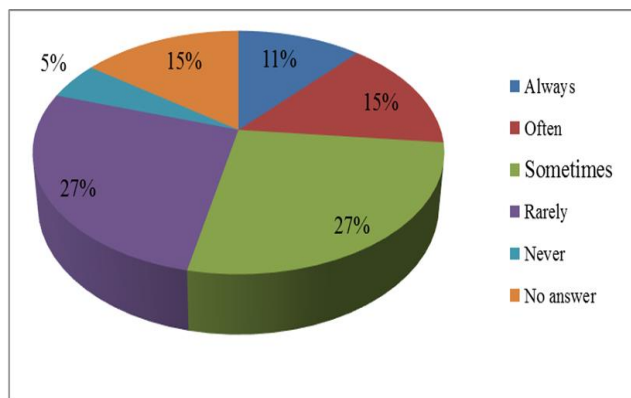


**Figure 3.14. The Frequency regarding Assimilation Perception**

The participants' responses demonstrate that only two students (3%) were always able to identify assimilation while listening to native speakers. However, twenty students (33%) declared that they were often able to perceive it. Twenty-one students (35%) reported that they

could sometimes identify assimilation and ten students (17%) said that they were rarely able to perceive assimilation while none of them opted for never. Additionally, seven students (12%) did not answer at all.

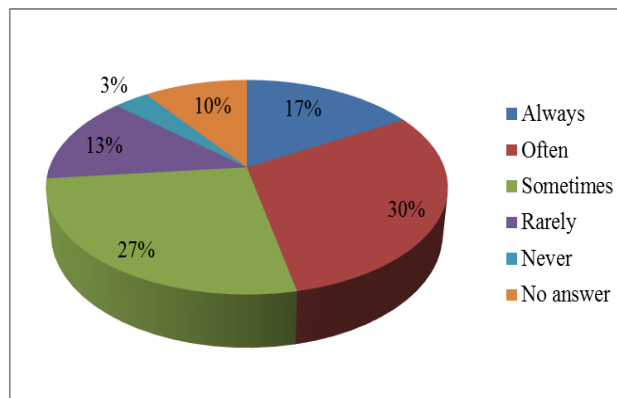
### c- Elision



**Figure 3.15. The Frequency regarding Elision Perception**

Seven participants out of sixty (11%) reported that were always able to identify elision while listening to native speakers. Nine students (15%) pointed out that they were often able to perceive elision. Moreover, sixteen students (27%) declared that they could sometimes perceive elision. Similarly, sixteen participants (27%) reported that they rarely perceived it. Finally, only three students (5%) stated that they were never able to identify elision and nine of them (15%) did not give any answer at all.

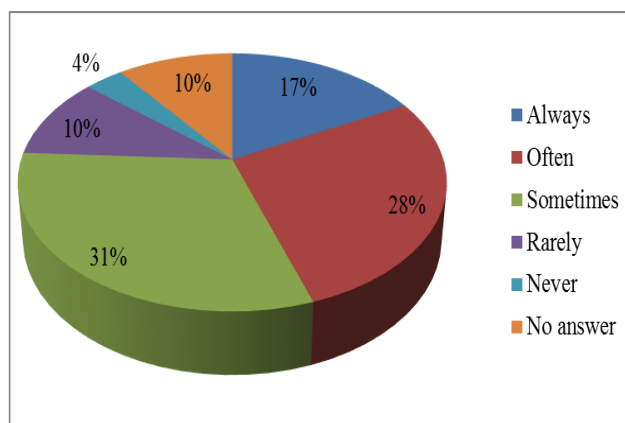
### d- Weak forms



**Figure 3.16. The Frequency regarding Weak Forms Perception**

As it can be seen from the above figure, ten students out of (17%) said that they could always perceive weak form in native speakers 'speech. Eighteen students (30%) opted for often option. Sixteen students (27%) opted for sometimes. Moreover, eight students (13%) opted for rarely and only two students (3%) opted for never. Unfortunately, nine students (10%) did not answer.

#### **e- Rhythm**

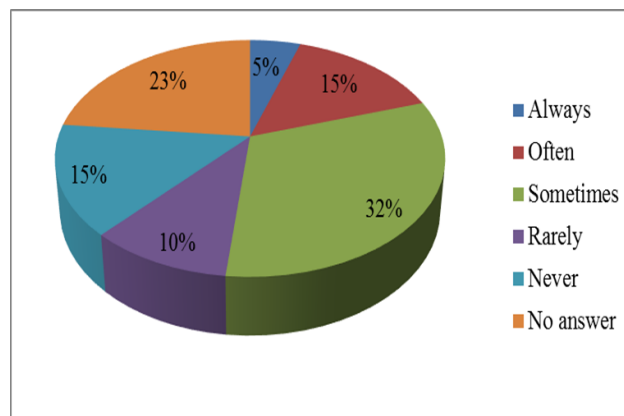


**Figure 3.17. The Frequency regarding Rhythm Perception**

Ten students out of sixty (17%) argued that they always perceived rhythm while listening to native speakers. However, eighteen participants (28%) claimed that they could often identify rhythm. Sixteen students (31%) reported that they were sometimes able to

perceive this aspect and six students (10%) pointed out that they were rarely able to do so. Additionally, only two students (4%) opted for never option and six others (10%) did not answer at all.

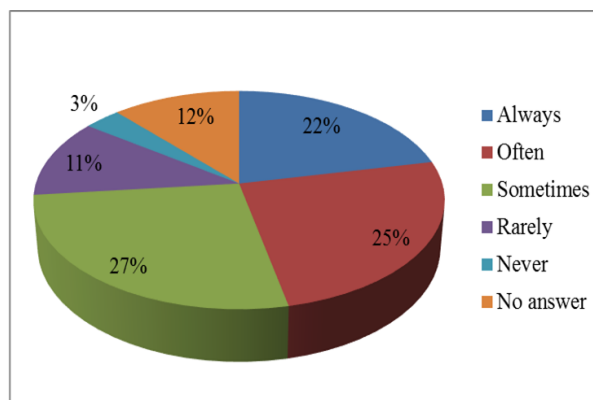
#### f- Juncture



**Figure 3.18. The Frequency regarding Juncture Perception**

From figure 3.18, only three out of sixty students (3%) declared that they could always identify juncture while listening to native speakers. Then nine students (15%) stated that they were often able to identify the aspect being mentioned and nineteen participants (32%) could sometimes do. Moreover, six students (10%) opted for rarely while nine (15%) students expressed that they could never succeed at identifying juncture aspect. Unfortunately, fourteen participants (23%) did not answer.

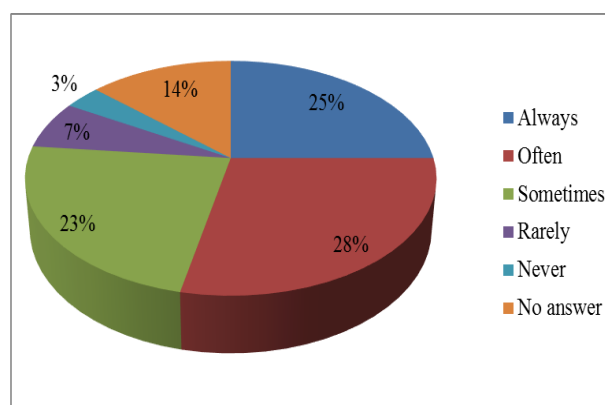
#### j- Intonation



**Figure 3.19. The Frequency regarding Intonation Perception**

Concerning intonation aspect of connected speech, thirteen students (22%) claimed that they could always identify it while listening to native speakers. Fifteen others (25%) responded that they could often do. Moreover, sixteen participants (27%) pointed out that they were sometimes able to do. Meanwhile, seven students (11%) confirmed that they rarely succeeded at identifying intonation. Only two students (3%) argued that they could never do and seven other students (12%) did not provide any answer.

#### **g- Linking**



**Figure 3.20. The Frequency regarding Linking Perception**

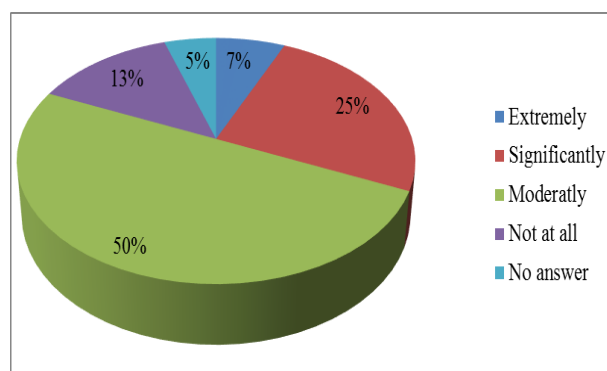
Fifteen students out of sixteen (25%) reported that they always perceived linking while seventeen ones (28%) stated that they often perceived it. Fourteen students (23%) confirmed that were sometimes able to do. However, four students (7%) acknowledged that they could

rarely identify linking and two students (3%) negated their ability to do. In addition, seven students (14%) did not give any answer at all.

Based on the obtained results from the discussion of students' perception ability to each aspect of connected speech, the majority of students stated that they were successful at identifying features of connected speech in English while listening to native speakers. Overall, we can deduce from the provided findings that the involved participants might have an average level at detecting the aspects of connected speech.

**Q14. To what extent do you think you are knowledgeable about the following?**

**a- Assimilation**

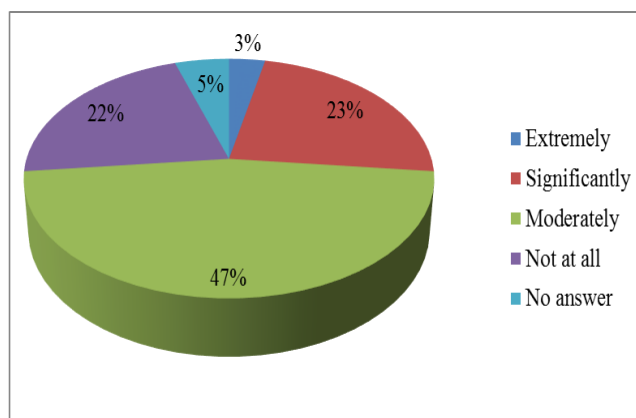


**Figure 3.21. Degree of Knowledge about Assimilation Practice Rules**

The fourteenth question is addressed to enquire about students' knowledge about assimilation and elision. This question was addressed to investigate students' knowledge about the mentioned features. As far as the assimilation aspect is concerned, half of the participants from the selected population (50%) asserted that they had a moderate knowledge about the rules of practicing assimilation. Moreover, fifteen students out of sixty (25%) claimed that their knowledge about assimilation is significant and only four others (7%) reported that they were extremely knowledgeable. However, eight students (13%) declared that they were not all knowledge and three students (5%) did not answer at all. Thus, it seems that the majority of

students evaluate their knowledge about assimilation as being moderate. So, in a way or another the majority of them may face problems while listening to the native speakers whose speech is characterized by overuse of this aspect.

### **b- Elision**



**Figure 3.22. Degree of knowledge about elision practice rules**

The figure above represents the participants' responses towards their knowledge about the rules governing the practice of elision. Twenty-eight students (47%) reported that their knowledge about elision rules of practice was moderate. Fourteen students (23%) claimed that they were significantly knowledgeable about this and only two students (3%) considered their knowledge about it as being extreme. However, thirteen students (22%) claimed that they were not knowledgeable at all and three other students (5%) did not give any answer.

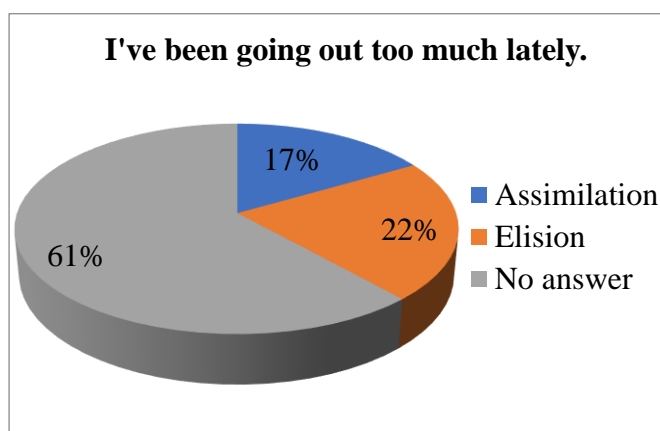
According to the obtained results, it could be deduced that the majority of the selected population is knowledgeable about assimilation and elision aspect of connected speech. That is why we expect that the students' answers about the following question will be relevant and adequate.

**Q15. Would you please tick the appropriate option to indicate the aspect of connected speech (assimilation or Elision) applied in each of the subsequent statements, indicate the**



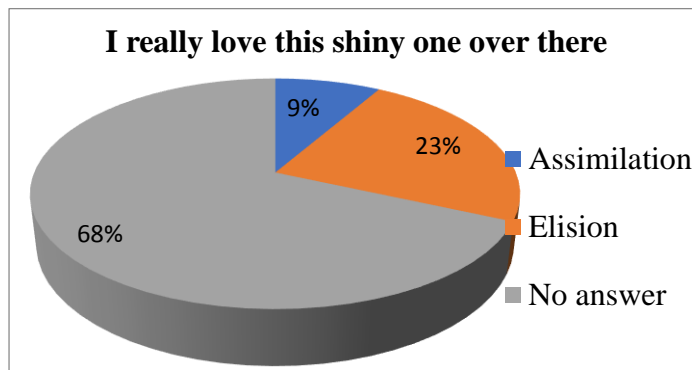
**modified sound and then provide its phonemic transcription (the elided/assimilated sound).**

The fifteenth question is an important one as it is designed to diagnose the participants' real knowledge about assimilation and elision aspects. It is also worthy as a question as it in the form of practice to see the relevance of the answers provided in the previously asked questions (Q13, Q14). Thus, it seems that it is complex as a question. This is why it was seen appropriate to divide it into two parts for the sake of analyzing it deeply. Accordingly, this question requested students first to tick appropriately an identification of either assimilation or elision presented in given ten statements. It aims at evaluating the participants' knowledge about the mentioned aspects. The gathered results are presented as follow:



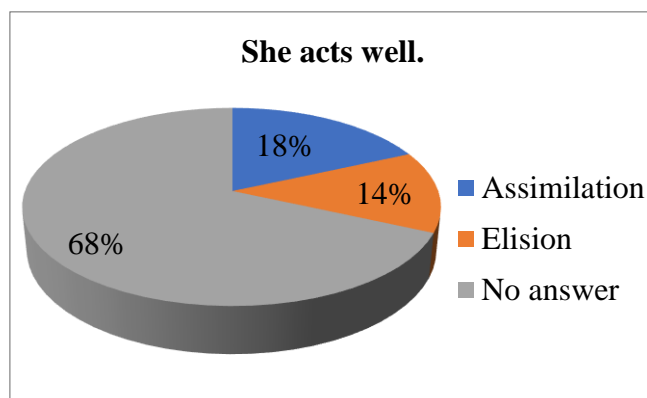
**Figure 3.23. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of /h/ Elision in Statement One**

The figure above shows that among sixty students (100%), ten (17%) said that assimilation was the applied aspect and only thirteen students (22%) could detect that was elision, which is the correct answer. Unfortunately, more than half of the participants (thirty-seven) (61%) did not answer this part of question.



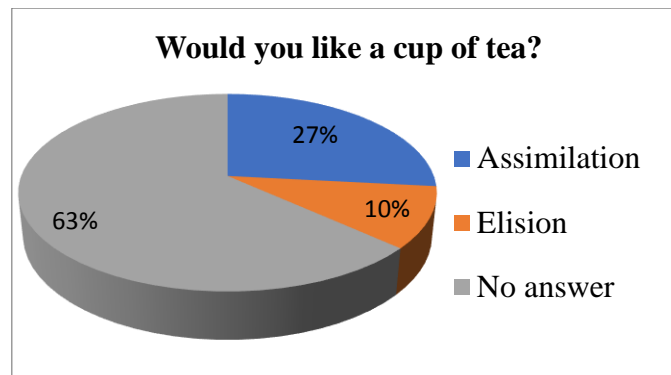
**Figure 3.24. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of /s/  
Assimilation into /ʃ/ in Statement Two**

The obtained results reveal that just five students (9%) were able to identify assimilation, which is the correct answer, in the given statement. Fourteen other students (23%) considered that elision was the applied process, however, the remaining participants (forty one) (68%) did not answer.



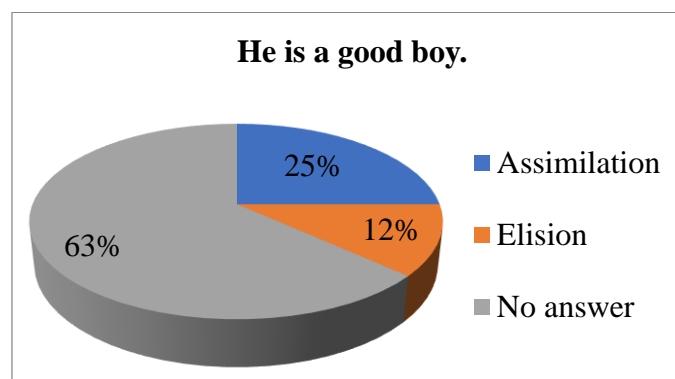
**Figure 3.25. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of /t/ Elision in  
Statement Three**

The related results demonstrate that eleven students out of sixty (18%) thought that assimilation is the aspect shown in the given statement. Only eight students (14%) succeeded at identifying that it was elision, which is the correct answer. Unfortunately, forty-one others (68%) gave no answer.



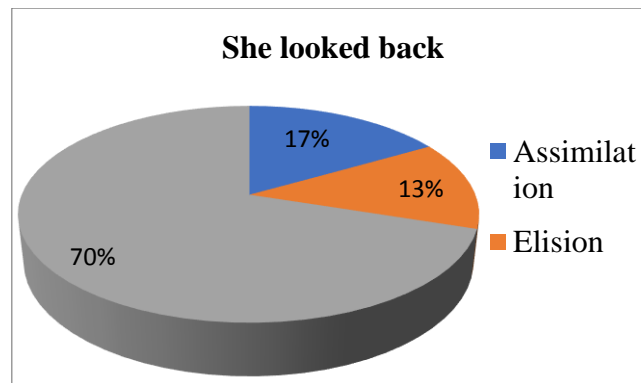
**Figure3.26. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of /d/ Assimilation When Followed by /j/ in Statement Four**

Figure 3.26 shows that among the whole selected population, only sixteen students (27%) could notice that the intended aspect of connected speech is assimilation, which is the correct answer. Six of them representing (10%) claimed that elision is the practiced aspect and thirty-eight others did not provide any answer.



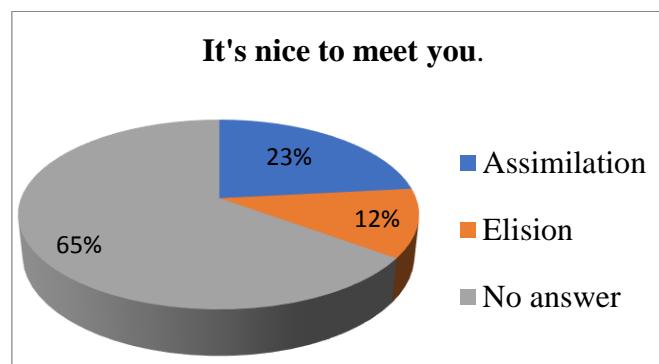
**Figure3.27. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of /d/ Assimilation when Followed by /b/ in Statement five**

The above figure clarifies that fifteen participants out of sixteen (25%) noticed that it is assimilation, which is the correct answer, that was presented, seven other students saw that it was elision and thirty-eight others did not select any choice.



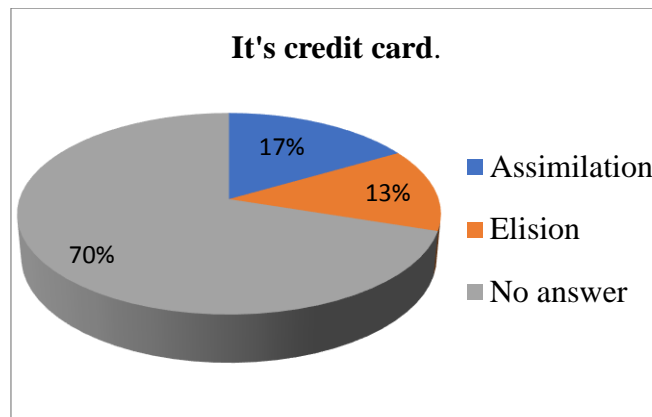
**Figure 3.28. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /b/ in Statement Six**

Ten students out of sixteen representing (17%) succeeded at discovering the assimilation aspect of connected speech, which is the correct answer. Whereas, other eight students claimed that it was elision and the remaining forty-two students (70%) gave no answer at all.



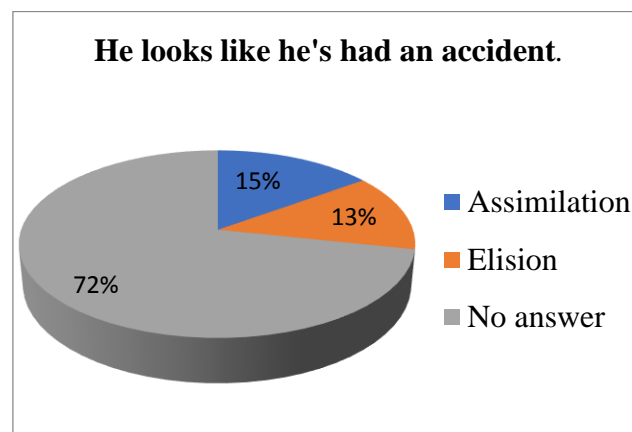
**Figure 3.29. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /j/ in Statement Seven**

As the figure above demonstrates, fourteen out of sixty (23%) participants thought that assimilation, which is the correct answer, was the applied aspect in the given statement while seven others (12%) said that it was elision and the majority i.e., thirty-nine other students (65%) provided no answer.



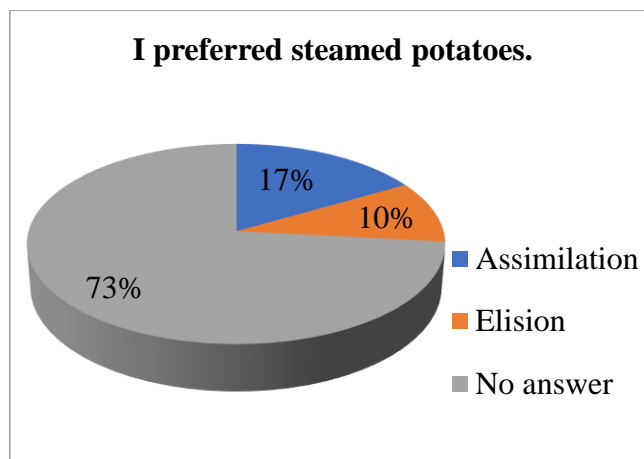
**Figure 3.30. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /k/ in Statement Eight**

The figure above gives insight about students' responses which are as follow: eight students (17%) could distinguish that the meant aspects was assimilation, which is the correct answer, whereas, ten others (13%) considered it as elision and all of forty-two students (70%) did not give an answer.



**Figure 3.31. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of Elision of /h/ in Statement Nine**

The related results reveal that nine students (15%) said that the aspect of connected speech presented in the statement is assimilation. Eight other students (13%) could grasp that it was elision, which is the correct answer forty-three other ones (72%) did not answer.

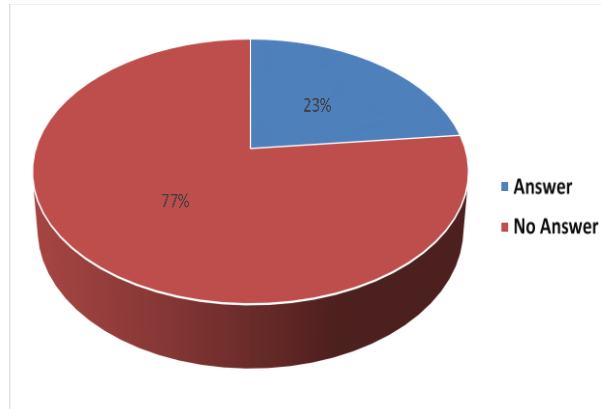


**Figure 3.32. Students' Performance regarding the Identification of Elision of/d/ in Statement Ten**

The above figure clarifies that out of sixty students (100%), ten (17%) thought that it is elision that was presented. Unfortunately, only six students (10%) succeeded at noticing elision, which is the correct answer and forty-four students (73%) did not provide any answer.

Move on to the second part of the fifteenth question, the results will be presented as follow:

In this question part, students were requested to indicate the modified sound with providing its phonemic transcription in each of the given statements. The aim of this question part is to investigate students' performance towards assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech.



**Figure 3.33. Students' Performance regarding the Identification and Transcription of the Modified Sounds**

The figure above shows that out of sixty students (100%), only fourteen (23%) provided the identification and transcription of the modified sounds presented in the given statements. The remaining forty-six others (77%) did not answer unfortunately.

Accordingly, the following results are out of fourteen (23%) as a total number of students.

**Table 3.1.***Students' Performance regarding the Assimilated Sounds and their Transcription*

	Identification				Transcription			
	Correct		Incorrect		Correct		Incorrect	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/ (statement 2)</b>	5	8%	9	15%	3	5%	11	18%
<b>Coalescence of /d/ +/j/= /dʒ/ (statement 4)</b>	14	23%	0	0%	14	23%	0	0%
<b>Assimilation of /d/ into /b/ (statement 5)</b>	9	15%	5	8%	7	11.5%	7	11.5%
<b>Assimilation of /t/ into /b/ (statement 6)</b>	2	3%	12	20%	1	2%	13	21%
<b>Coalescence of /t+/j/= /tʃ/ (statement 7)</b>	13	21%	1	2%	11	18%	3	3%
<b>Assimilation of /t/ into /k/ (statement 8)</b>	3	5%	11	18%	2	3%	12	20%

Concerning assimilation, the gathered data confirm that only five students (8%) could identify the assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/, whereas, nine others (15%) could not. In the same case of assimilation, no more than three students (5%) successfully transcribed the assimilated sound, while eleven students (18%) failed. This means that most students are not able to identify and transcribe the assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/. Surprisingly, all of the fourteen students (23%) did well in both identification and transcription of Yod-coalescence /d/ +/j/ =/dʒ/ in the



second case; that is to say; none of them (0%) faced difficulty in both identifying and transcribing the modified sound. This may refer to the sufficient exposure to this assimilation case. Move on to the assimilation of /d/ into /b/, nine students (15%) were able to identify it correctly in contrast with five others (8%) who could not. In terms of transcription, students' number was equal concerning both correct and incorrect transcription forms (seven students in each case) (11.5%). In case of assimilation of /t/ into /b/, only two students (3%) could identify it correctly while twelve others (20%) failed to do. Taking transcription into account, one own student (2%) succeeded at doing it correctly whereas, all of the remaining others (thirteen) (21%) did not.

In the second Yod-coalescence /t+ /j/ = /tʃ/, it was found that thirteen students (21%) out of fourteen (23%) did successfully detect it and only one student (2%) could not identify it. In the same case, it was found that eleven students (18%) correctly transcribed the sound that is modified, while three others (3%) did not. In the last assimilation case, which is the one of /t/ into /k/. It was found that among fourteen students' answers (23%), only three (5%) were correct concerning the identification of the assimilated sound, however, the other eleven (18%) were incorrect. In transcription answers, two students (3%) answered correctly, whereas twelve others (20%) unfortunately could not do.

**Table 3.3.***Students' Performance regarding the Elided Sounds and their Transcription.*

Statements	Identification				Transcription			
	Correct		Incorrect		Correct		Incorrect	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Elision of /h/ (statement 1)</b>	8	13%	6	10%	2	3%	12	20%
<b>Elision of /t/ (statement 3)</b>	5	8%	9	15%	1	2%	13	21%
<b>Loss of /v/ (statement 4)</b>	4	7%	10	16%	4	7%	10	16%
<b>Elision of /h/ (statement 9)</b>	4	7%	10	16%	3	5%	11	18%
<b>Elision of /d/ (statement 10)</b>	3	5%	11	18%	2	3%	12	21%

Elision is the second aspect of connected speech the fifteenth question was concerned with. The table above reveals that concerning the elision of /h/, eight students (13%) were able to identify what should be elided correctly. Six students (10%), in contrast, were not able to do. In terms of transcription, it was found that only two students (3%) did correctly transcribe the word containing elision of /h/, whereas, twelve other students (20%) did not.. In /t/ elision, then, five students (8%) succeeded at making the identification of this elision. However, the remaining nine (15%) did not do correctly. Taking transcription into account, one own student (2%) could do it correctly and thirteen other ones (21%) could not do so.

The fourth statement in the given table in the questionnaire was intended to deal with the loss of final /v/ before a consonant in 'of'. The gathered data show that only four students (7%) paid attention to this sound elision, while ten others (16%) were not aware of it. Concerning the previously mentioned loss of sound, only four students (7%) could correctly transcribe the intended word and ten others (16%) could not do. Another /h/ elision was dealt with, but it was intended to check students' ability to distinguish the contradicted form of 'he is' from the present form of the verb 'to be' with the third singular pronoun 'is'. The obtained results confirmed that among fourteen students (23%), only four (7%) did successfully identify where elision took place, however, ten other students (16%) could not find it. Moving to the transcription, just three students (5%) were able to transcribe words that are concerned with pronunciation change and eleven students (18%) were not.

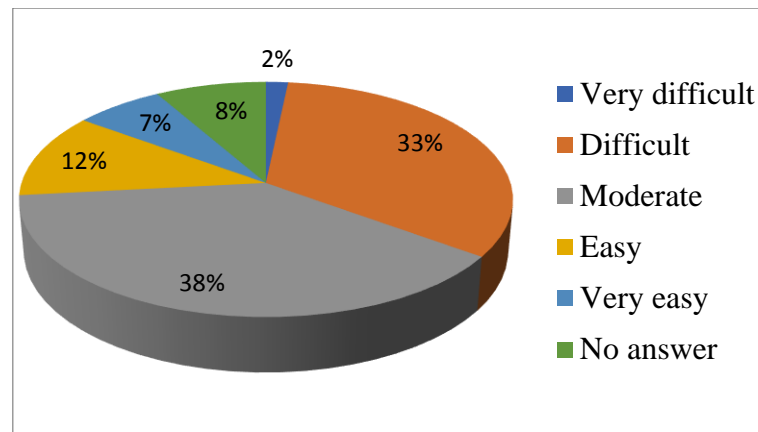
The last elision case was the one of /d/. The table above clarifies that only three students (5%) did correctly detect where this elision exists, however, eleven others (18%) did not do. And in terms of transcription, it was correctly done by only two students (3%) where twelve others (20%) did it in a wrong way.

- **General Result from tables' (3.3. and 3.4.) Analysis**

In addition to the incorrect answers concerning assimilation and elision' identification and the transcription of the modified sounds, the high number (forty-six) or proportion (77%) of students who did not provide any answer could illustrate that most of them fail in achieving this task successfully and are less knowledgeable than they claimed. In other words, most students face difficulty in indicating assimilation and elision and making a correct related transcription.

### **SECTION THREE: Listening and Assimilation/Elision.**

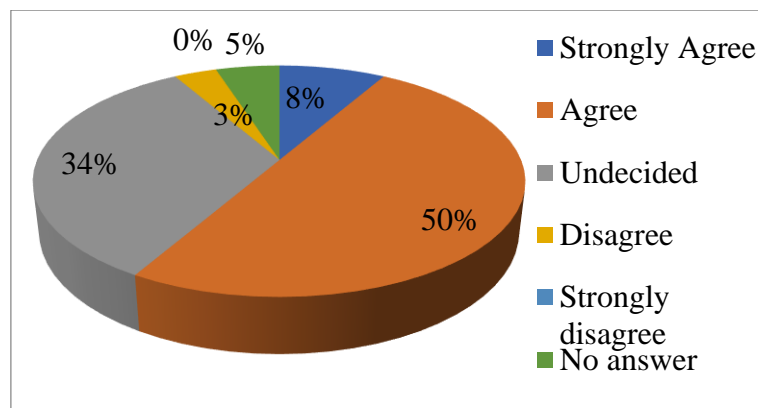
#### **Q16. How do you find listening to English native speakers?**



**Figure 3.34. Students' Perceptions regarding Listening to English Native Speakers**

The sixteenth question is set to enquire about the participants' opinions towards listening to English native speakers. The obtained results showed that out of sixty students, only one (2%) said that he/she found listening to English native speakers very difficult. Twenty students (33%) stated that they found it difficult, twenty-three other students (38%) acknowledged that the fact of listening to native speakers was moderately difficult for them and seven students (12%) reported that it was easy for them to be comprehended. Four students (7%) among the selected sample said that they found it very easy, whereas five others (8%) did not tick any of the suggested choices. Based on these data, the majority of students seem to be able to grasp English native speech.

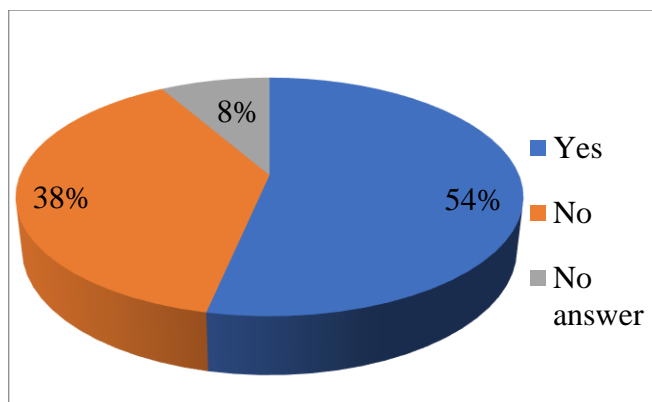
**Q17. To what extent do you agree that the features of connected speech make listening comprehension process difficult?**



**Figure 3.35. Students' Agreement on the Contribution of Connected Speech Features in Making Listening Comprehension Difficult**

In question seventeen, the participants were asked about their agreement on the fact that the features of connected speech make the listening comprehension process difficult. The aim behind asking this question is to get insights on whether students are aware of the already mentioned idea. The data reveal that only five students out of sixty (8%) did strongly agree with the mentioned idea, thirty students (50%); as the highest proportion; agreed with the same idea, while twenty others (34%) could not decide. However, only two students (3%) disagreed with the already mentioned idea and three students (5%) did not answer the question. These results denote that the majority of the involved participants are conscious about the effect of the aspects of connected speech in facilitating/impeding the process of listening comprehension.

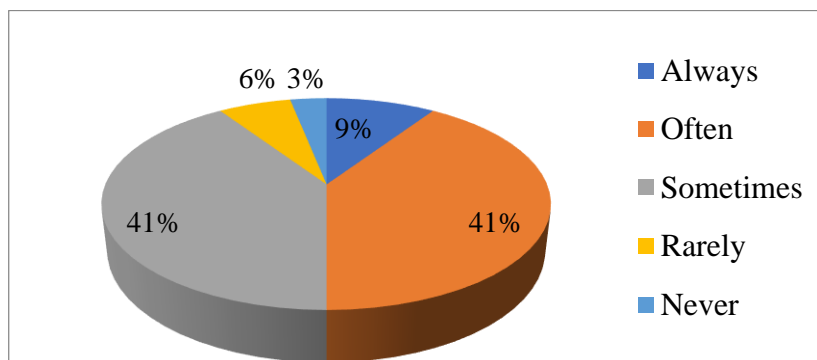
**Q18. Does your teacher of OE expose you to the different features characterizing connected speech in English? If yes, please answer the subsequent two questions (Q19/20)**



**Figure 3.36. The Exposure to Connected Speech Features in OE Classes**

The aim behind addressing the eighteenth question is to see whether the involved participants are exposed enough to the different aspects of connected speech in OE classes as it is the only module in which third year students are given the opportunity to be exposed to native speakers' speech. Based on the obtained results, it is found that thirty-two students out of sixty (54%) said yes, twenty-three other students (38 %) said no and five others (8%) did not answer the question. It could be concluded that the majority of OE teachers do expose their students to connected speech features. This can reflect that those teachers do believe in the mentioned features' importance in building students' listening skill and making listening comprehension process easier.

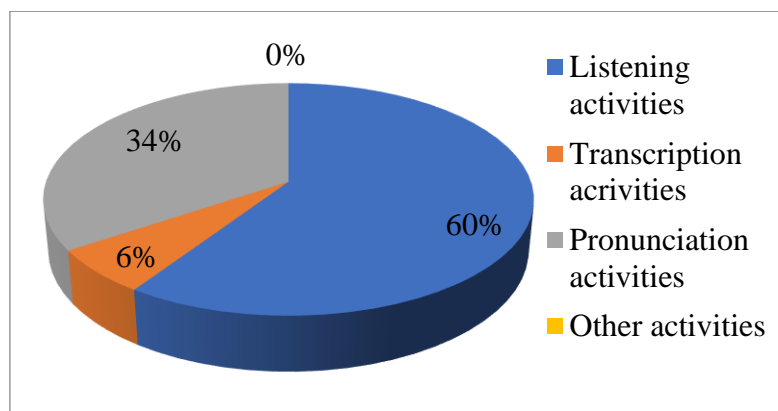
**Q19. How often does he/she do?**



**Figure 3.37. The Frequency of Exposing Learners to Connected Speech Features**

The question is related to the previous one. It aims at identifying the frequency of exposing the participants to the connected speech features by their OE teachers. From the answers gathered, only three students out of (9%) reported that their OE teachers did always expose them to the features of connected speech. Thirteen students (41%) declared that their teachers often did, the same students number (thirteen) (41%) reported that sometimes their OE teachers exposed them to what was mentioned above. However, two students (6%) claimed that they had rarely been exposed to the aspects of connected speech by their OE teachers and only a student (3%) stated that s/he was never exposed to those aspects in OE class. These results demonstrate that the majority of the participants are often or sometimes exposed to the intended features. This, again confirms that OE teachers' give importance to the role that the features of connected speech play in enhancing the listening comprehension.

**Q20.** Which kind of activities does he/she adopt to expose you to the aspects of connected speech?

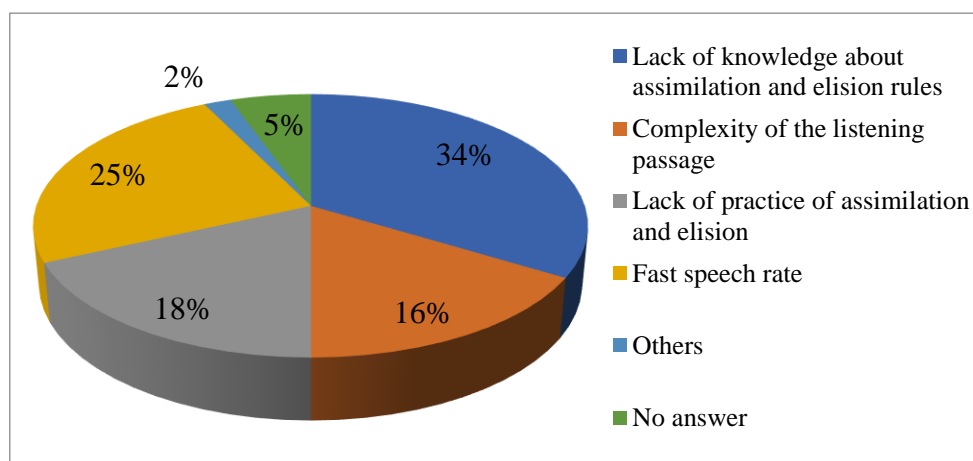


**Figure 3.38. Types of Activities Adopted to Teach Aspects of Connected Speech**

This question is related to the eighteenth question. It was addressed to indicate which types of activities are used by OE teachers to expose their learners to the aspects of connected speech. As the above figure demonstrate, nineteen students (60%) said that they were exposed

to aspects of connected speech through listening activities, only three other students (6%) claimed that their exposure was through transcription activities, eleven students, then, (34%) stated that their OE teachers used pronunciation activities to highlight features of connected speech for them. Yet, none of the selected students mentioned other kinds of activities than the ones mentioned beforehand. Thus, listening activities are the most relied on type of task to teach the features of connected speech as this type precisely paves the way for EFL learners to identify those processes exercised naturally in native speakers' speech

**Q21. According to you, comprehending assimilation/elision is difficult while listening to a passage/script because of:**



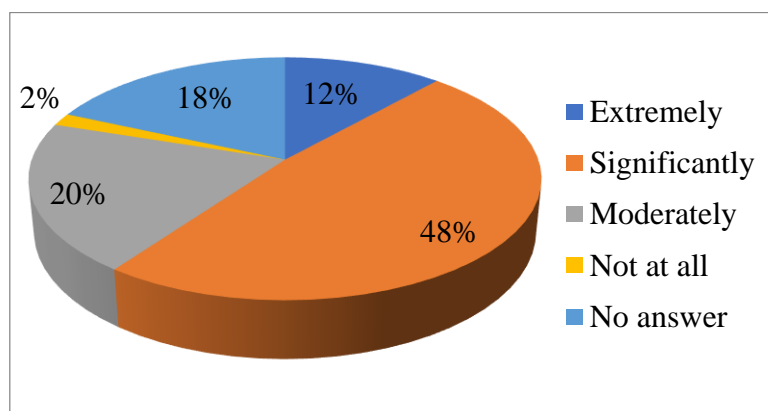
**Figure 3.39. Assimilation and Elision Comprehension Difficulties while Listening**

This question was set to enquire about the most causes that make assimilation and elision comprehension difficult while listening to a script. The question is a multiple answer one; i.e. students were not restricted to tick only one difficulty. So, the received answers show that thirty-seven students (34%) reported that they did not comprehend listening passages of native speakers because of lack of knowledge about assimilation and elision rules. Eighteen out of sixty students (16%) faced this difficulty because of complexity of the listening passage



itself, twenty others (18%) did face the same thing because of lack of practice of these aspects and twenty-seven other students (25%) declared that did not comprehend the passage because of the fast speech rate. Among the eight remaining students, two (2%) reported that they had other causes that made them facing comprehension difficulties concerning assimilation and elision but they did not mention them and six (5%) did not provide any answer to this question. In analyzing the data, it can be concluded that the main causes behind students' major comprehension difficulty while listening to scripts comprising assimilation and elision is the lack of knowledge about these aspects. Speech rate and lack of practice are also of considerable influence. The results yielding from this question are contradicting with the ones obtained from the fourteenth question where students evaluate their knowledge about these two aspects as significant (25% for assimilation and 23% for elision) and moderate (50% for assimilation and 47% for elision).

**Q22. To what extent do you consider students' incomprehension of assimilation and elision affects negatively the comprehension of the listening scripts?**



**Figure 3.40. Students' Attitudes towards the Incomprehension of Assimilation and Elision Effect on the Listening Comprehension**

This question is designed to identify the students' perspectives on the extent to which the assimilation and elision incomprehension affects the listening comprehension.

As the figure above denotes, seven students (12%) reported that the fact of not comprehending assimilation and elision processes affects their listening comprehension. Twenty-nine others (48%) opted for 'significantly' option and twelve other students selected moderately as a response. However, only one student (2%) considered that assimilation and elision did not negatively affect his/her listening comprehension and unfortunately, eleven students did not answer.

From the results above, half of the participants acknowledged that those two features of connected speech do significantly affect the listening comprehension process in a negative way. This thing reflects that the involved participants are conscious about significant effect of assimilation and elision on making listening comprehension process complicated or easy as a process.

**Q23. Please, add any further suggestions or recommendations regarding the learning of aspects of connected speech (assimilation and elision) to decrease EFL learners' listening difficulties.**

Unfortunately, only few participants (ten students out of sixty 6%) suggested some recommendations. Some of them are stated subsequently:

- Students are supposed to know more about assimilation and elision rules and to practise more listening to English native speakers.
- In order to avoid the abstract nature of assimilation and elision teaching, OE teachers should provide more practice about these aspects.
- Students should be exposed to different accents of English native speakers.

### 3.2.1.2. Discussion of Questionnaire Results

The handed questionnaire is of crucial importance as it gives to the researchers the opportunity to know about the involved third year students' perspectives on the effect of the learning of assimilation and elision on listening comprehension process.

To start with, questions from one to nine were devoted to enquire about students' listening skill and listening difficulties. According to the students' answers, it is noticed that the majority of the students are satisfied with their level in listening to English and have positive attitudes towards English listening since the majority of them declared that they have a good average in listening to English. Moreover, they reported that the listening skill is very important in English language learning process. However, they claimed that they face a wide range of difficulties when they come to listen to this language. Moreover, students expressed that authentic listening materials are more helpful than pedagogical ones. Then, they stated that their OE teachers use videos as basic material to teach listening more than any other types.

The second part of the questionnaire was concerned with students' perception and performance towards aspects of connected speech, especially, assimilation and elision. The first addressed question was concerned with identifying the students' focus while listening to an English script. The majority of them stated that they focused on both of the message meaning and the speaker's pronunciation. The results obtained from the eleventh and the twelfth question show that students have been instructed aspects of connected speech in phonetics and oral expression classes as they claimed. However, they gave some strange answers about the modules in which the instruction of these aspects took place; such as grammar, literature, didactics and written expression. The results obtained from the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth questions are contradicting. On one hand, students' answers on

question thirteen and fourteen show that the majority of participants are able to perceive features of connected speech in English while listening to native speakers and they are knowledgeable about assimilation and elision rules. On the other hand, the majority of them failed at identifying the two aspects in the given statements provided in the table of question fifteen.

In the third section and concerning the sixteenth question, one half of the selected population considered listening to English native speakers moderate and easy. Moreover, the majority of them agreed with the idea that the features of connected speech make listening comprehension process difficult. The results gathered from the eighteenth question show that the majority of the participants declared that their OE teachers did often expose them to the different features of connected speech throughout choosing listening activities.

In the twenty-first question, students claimed that they were not able to comprehend assimilation and elision while listening to a given passage because of the lack of knowledge about these aspects' rules, fast speech rate and lack of practice of the mentioned features. Accordingly, there was a kind of contradiction along students' responses as highlighted beforehand.

All in all, the results obtained from the questionnaire reveal that third-year EFL learners in the department of English language at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia regard listening an important skill. Nevertheless, they acknowledge that they face difficulties while listening to them and that makes the comprehension process intricate and problematic. Among those difficulties is the insufficient knowledge about the rules governing the practice of assimilation and elision processes in native speakers' speech.

### 3.2.2. Analysis of the Test

#### 3.2.2.1. General Analysis

This section is about the analysis of the involved students' performance in the test. It is worthy to remind the reader of the current dissertation that the test was set to shed light on the errors that are related to the identification of assimilation and elisions aspects of connected speech while listening to English native speakers.

The thirty participants were set to listen to thirty statements individually and they were handed with sheets of papers so as to write the statements to which they are exposed. These statements are categorized according to the different cases of assimilation and elision they contain. It is worth mentioning that other errors are committed in written statements, which do not affect the perception of assimilation and elision placements, and they were not taken into consideration.

As a first step in the analysis, students' overall performance in the test is considered. The researchers counted for each given statements the number of its correct placement perception forms and incorrect ones. In order to find the total number of performed statements; the number of the target statements (30) multiplied by the number of the participants (30), as a result, the total number is 900 ( $30 \times 30 = 900$ ); 630 students' answers among 900 are about assimilation cases and 270 others are about elision cases.

**Table 3.3**

*Students' Overall Performance in the test*

<b>Answers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Correct statements</b>	324	36
<b>Incorrect statements</b>	576	64
<b>Total</b>	900	100

As displayed in table 3.5, the total number of correct statements in which assimilation and elision placements are perceived is three hundred-twenty-four statements (324) with a percentage of (36%), while the one of those that were incorrectly perceived is 576 with a percentage of (64%). The results demonstrate that the majority of the participants failed at perceiving assimilation and elision in the given statements. Although the thirty statements included in the test are short to the extent that we expected them to be easily detected by third year students, the results of the test reveals the participants' disability in perceiving assimilation and elision practices while listening. As a result, we may say that third year students are experiencing serious listening difficulties in perceiving assimilation and elision.

### **3.2.2.2. Detailed Analysis**

This section provides the detailed analysis of participants' performance in the test. Thus, students' responses are classified into two categories: statements comprising assimilation practices, and statements involving elision ones. Assimilation and elision categories are classified as well according to the cases of each. These cases are assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/ whenever it is followed by either /ʃ/ or /j/, assimilation of /t/ into /p/ when it is followed by /p/, assimilation of /d/ into /g/ whenever it is followed by /g/ or /k/, assimilation of /d/ into /b/ once it is followed by /b/, assimilation of /n/ into /m/ if it is followed by /p/, assimilation of /t/ into /tʃ/ when it is followed by /j/, assimilation of /t/ into /k/ whenever it is followed by /k/, and elision cases which are: elision of /d/, elision of /t/, and elision of /h/. Moreover, students' committed errors of each case are presented in form of tables. These errors are closer to the written form of words containing assimilation and elision, and they are repeated in students' answers. Other errors were not taken into account because they are strange, ambiguous, meaningless, and irrelevant to the assimilated and elided sounds, while other words containing these aspects in some answers were let blank.

### 3.2.2.2.1. Assimilation Identification

**Table 3.4.**

*Students' Overall Performance towards Assimilation Identification*

<b>Answers</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Correct</b>	219	35%
<b>Incorrect</b>	411	65%
<b>Total</b>	630	100

The above table shows the overall students' performance of assimilation perception. The results obtained reveal that while 65% of students' answers (411) were incorrectly perceived, only 35% were correctly answered by 219 students. Based on these results, it can be deduced that assimilation is one of the main challenges that may interfere in students' listening comprehension process when listening to English native speakers.

#### **a- Assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/ when Followed by either /f/ or /j/**

**Table 3.5.**

*Students' Performance of Assimilation of /s/ Perception*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Correct</b>		<b>Incorrect</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1-Can you <u>just</u> <u>sh</u> t the door, please?	15	50	15	50	30	100
2-This <u>y</u> acht is beautiful.	5	17	25	83	30	100
3.He always makes <u>y</u> ou feel good.	2	7	28	93	30	100
<b>Total</b>	22	24	68	76	90	100

The table above reveals students' performance regarding the perception of assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/. The overall results show that while sixty-eight students (76%) perceived the assimilation of /s/ incorrectly, twenty-two others (24%) perceived it correctly. That is to say;

the majority of the students were not able to identify the assimilation of /s/ while listening to English native speakers.

To start with, the first statement to which the students were exposed was about the assimilation of /s/ followed by /ʃ/. It was illustrated by the example ‘Can you just shut the door, please?’ in which assimilation takes place in ‘just shut /dʒəʃət/'. The results obtained denotes that half of the participants (15) representing (50%) identified the assimilation of /s/ followed by /ʃ/ correctly, and the other half did not.

Moreover, the second and the third statements were about the assimilation of /s/ followed by /j/. In the second example ‘this yacht is beautiful’ in which assimilation application occurs in ‘this yacht /ðɪʃˈjɒt/', only five students (17%) succeeded at identifying assimilation of /s/ followed by /j/. Whereas, twenty-five other students (83%) failed to do. In the last statement ‘he always makes you feel good’ in which the assimilated sounds are identified in ‘makes you /ˈmeɪkjə/', only two students (7%) answered correctly, however, twenty-eight others (93%) could not do.

These results suggest that most participants were not able to perceive the assimilation of /s/ when it is followed by either /ʃ/ or /j/ while listening. That is to say, the majority of the participants misheard the words comprising assimilation of /s/ followed by /ʃ/ or by /j/ to which they were exposed



**Table 3.6***Students' Major Committed Errors Regarding the Perception of Assimilation of /s/*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Students' Committed Errors while Listening</b>
just <u>sh</u> t	/dʒəʃət/	Jush chut jus chut jushat
This <u>y</u> acht	/ðɪʃ'jɒt/	This shakt the chackt
Makes <u>u</u> you	/'meɪkjə/	Magziyou make sure you make show you

Table 3.6 shows the main errors the participants committed when writing statements as they listened to the assimilation of /s/ when it is followed by /ʃ/ or /j/. It is noticed from the table that some students wrote what they were listening to as it was pronounced; for instance, 'jushut' and 'juchut' in statement number one. In addition, some other students guessed irrelevant words they thought they heard; words that have no meaning in English. For example, 'this shakt' and 'the chackt' in the second statement. Besides, some students speculated and wrote grammatically/lexically correct structures, but with no relevant sense. Examples such as 'make sure you' and 'make show you' in the third statement could illustrate this idea.

**b- Assimilation of /t/ into /p/ when Followed by /p/**

**Table 3.7.***Students' Performance of Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /p/ Perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-There are lots of great <u>p</u> arks in London.	18	60	12	40	30	100
2- I love <u>s</u> plit <u>p</u> ea soup.	2	7	28	93	30	100
3-My <u>m</u> ate <u>p</u> icked us up from the airport.	5	17	25	83	30	100
Total	25	28	65	72	90	100

As the table illustrates, the overall performance of the students in detecting and perceiving the applied assimilation within the three given statements (1,2 and 3) ( the assimilation of /t/ followed by /p/ ) is as follow: only twenty-two correct answers (24%) .out of ninety (100%) were successfully detected. However, sixty-eight others (76%) were not. In other words, most students failed at identifying /t/ assimilation when it is followed by /p/ while listening to English native speech.

In order to test students' performance regarding /t/ assimilation followed by /p/, three statements are given to them. Concerning statement number one; 'There are lots of great parks in London', the assimilation of /t/ mentioned before takes place in 'great parks /'greɪ'ppɑ:ks/'. In this example, eighteen students (60%) out of thirty (100%) succeeded at identifying /t/ assimilation when it is followed by /p/, however, twelve other students (40%) did not. In the second statement; 'I love split pea soup' where /t/ assimilation followed by /p/ occurs exactly in 'split pea /splɪ'ppi:/', only two students (7%) among thirty ones perceived it correctly. The other twenty-eight students (93%), then, unluckily misperceived it. In the third statement, three students were exposed to; 'My mate picked us up from the airport', it contains an assimilation of /t/ followed by /p/ expressed exactly in 'mate picked /'meɪ'ppɪkt/. The

obtained results show that only five students (17%) did correctly notice the mentioned /t/ assimilation, and the remaining twenty-five other students (83%) did not.

These results may suggest that the majority of the involved participants could not perceive the assimilation of /t/ followed by /p/ while listening to native speakers of English. i.e.; they developed false vocabulary that is closer in pronunciation to the correct one\_ of course, based on their listening\_.

**Table 3.8**

*Students' Committed Errors Regarding the Perception of Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /p/*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Students' Committed Errors while Listening</b>	
Great <u> parks</u>	/g'rei'ppa:ks	greape parks grey parks green parks	grealparks greak parks
Split <u> pea</u>	/splɪ'ppi:/	Sleapy split ep spealy splying splits epea	splay pea spacy speecy spaggeti salt
Mate <u> picked</u>	/'meɪ'ppɪkt/	may picked mail picked maide picked	

Table 3.8 reveals that the major errors students committed while listening to statements contain the assimilation of /t/ when it is followed by /p/. Based on the analysis of those errors, it can be seen that some students wrote words as they sounded with no attention paid to their ambiguous meaning such as: 'greap parks' (statement 1). Some other students omitted words' original sounds and replaced them either by assimilated ones or others, like in 'splay pea' (statement 2), 'greak parks' (statement 1) and 'mail/mail picked' (statement 3).

**c- Assimilation of /d/ into /g/ when Followed by either /k/ or /g/**

**Table 3.9.***Students' Performance of Assimilation of /d/ followed by /k/ or /g/ Perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-Last night we had <u>g</u> uests for. dinner.	13	43	17	57	30	100
2-Can you print out a hard <u>c</u> opy?	13	43	17	57	30	100
3-I'd love to walk down the <u>r</u> ed <u>c</u> arpet one day	8	27	22	73	30	100
<b>Total</b>	34	38	56	62	90	100

The above table shows students' performance results of perceiving assimilation of /d/ into /g/. So as to check students' awareness of this assimilation case, three statements, which comprised the assimilation of /d/ when it is followed either by /g/ or /k/, were exposed to them. The results reveal that among ninety students' answers, only thirty-four (38%) were considered correct, and the remaining fifty-six answers (62%) were not. i.e. the majority of students were not able to identify the assimilation of /d/ followed by either /g/ or /k/ when listening to English native speakers.

The first statement 'last night, we had guests for dinner' is used for the sake of highlighting /d/ assimilation when it is followed by /g/ that exists in 'had guests /'hæg'gests/'. In this example, thirteen students (43%) out of thirty (100%) were successful at perceiving /d/ assimilation followed by /g/ shown. Meanwhile, seventeen (57%) other students were not.

The second statement: 'can you print out a hard copy?' contains the already stated case of assimilation specifically in words 'hard copy /'hɑ:g'kɒpi/'. This example was correctly answered by thirteen students (43%) among thirty (100%), and in a wrong way by other

seventeen students (57%). In addition, statement number three; ‘I’d love to walk down the red carpet one day’ also illustrates the /d/ assimilation followed by /k/ in words ‘red carpet /reg'kɑ:pt/'. Only eight students (27%) in this example were able to perceive the mentioned case of assimilation in a correct way, however, twenty-two others (73%) were not.

The stated results indicate that the majority of participants participated in the test are unable to identify the assimilation of /d/ when it is followed by /g/ or /k/ while listening. This may be as a result of their false estimation of words, or the inability to distinguish these latter boundaries, in addition to the wrong use of tense.

**Table 3.10.**

*Students' Committed Errors Regarding Assimilation of /d/ Perception*

Statements	Transcription	Students' Committed Errors while Listening		
Had <u>g</u> uests	/hə'ggests/	hag guest	have guest	make guest
		hagguest	hag best	had desk
Hard <u>c</u> opy	/'hɑ:g'kɒpi/	hole copy	half copy	have gopy
		a high copy	haggopy	her gopy
Red <u>c</u> arpet	/'reg'kɑ:pt/	reg capet	a reycopy	ricoffee
		rek carpet	regcopy	rebparcs

The table above highlights the main errors the students committed in writing the statements they listened. The statements were set to perceive the assimilation of /d/ into /g/ or /k/. Thus, some participants wrote words as they were pronounced without considering the influence of assimilation aspect of connected speech like in the first statement ‘hag guest’, in the second statement ‘haggopy’ and in the third statement ‘rek carpet’. Also, some students could not distinguish words boundaries as the case of ‘hargguests’ (statement 1) and ‘rebcapet’ (statement 3). Moreover, three other participants used grammatically correct words

but they were away from the ones they were exposed to ‘half copy’ and ‘a high copy’

(statement 2).

**d- Assimilation of /d/ into /b/ when Followed by /b/**

**Table 3.11**

*Students’ Performance of the Assimilation of /d/ Followed by /b/ Perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1- I am sorry if I was <u>rude</u> before.	5	17	25	83	30	100
2- My car had to be towed <u>back</u> to the garage.	2	7	28	93	30	100
3- You should <u>buy</u> him a present.	12	40	18	60	30	100
<b>Total</b>	19	21	71	79	90	100

The students were exposed to three statements in order to obtain this performance results. After being exposed to the three statements, only nineteen answers (21%) among ninety (100%) perceived correctly the assimilation of /d/ into /b/ when it is followed by /b/, and seventy-one answers (79%) were wrong answers. This denotes that most of students failed at getting a correct perception of the assimilation of /d/ into /b/ when it is followed by /b/ during their listening process.

In statement number one; ‘I am sorry if I was rude before’ where /d/ assimilation followed by /b/ is applied exactly in ‘rude before /’ru:’bbr’fɔ:’/, only five students (17%) perceived the applied assimilation. In contrast, twenty-five other students (83%) did not. In the second statements, then; ‘My car had to be towed back to the garage’, the assimilation case of /d/ followed by /b/ is expressed in ‘towed back /’təʊ’bbæk’/. In this example, only two students (7%) succeeded at perceiving the mentioned assimilation case correctly, while twenty-eight

students (93%) did not. Statement number three; ‘You should buy him a present’; contains the assimilation of /d/ sound when followed by /b/ precisely in ‘shouldbuy /ʃə'bbai/'. The results of the students’ perceptions of assimilation case expressed in this example are as follow: twelve students (40%) out of thirty (100%) perceived /d/ assimilation into /b// accurately, and the remaining eighteen (60%) did not.

The stated results denote that most of the participants could not identify the assimilation of /d/ into /b/ when followed by the bilabial sound /b/ in an accurate way. Their misperception of the given applied aspect might be associated to their listening difficulties as they misused tenses and were unable to distinguish words boundaries or even recognize their meaning or spelling

**Table 3.12.**

*Students’ Committed Errors Regarding Assimilation of /d/ Followed by /b/ Perception*

Statements	Transcription	Students’ Committed Errors while Listening		
Rude <u>before</u>	/ru:'bbi'fɔ:/	read for	ruby for	reab before
		reforce	repefor	re-before
		re be for	really for	ry before
Towed <u>back</u>	/təʊ'bbæk/	toe back	go back	turn back
		to back	took bag	top back
		two back	to be back	term buk
Should <u>buy</u>	/ʃə'bbai/	show by	shob by	shoap I
		shout buy	she by	shy buy

As demonstrated in the table above, the participating students committed errors in perceiving the assimilation of /d/ into /b/ when followed by /b/. Some students wrote the spoken form of the words without taking into consideration the changes that may affect the citation form of words as it is shown in ‘re before, reab before, toe back, shob by, and show

buy'. Other students predicted some vocabulary in their answers that is similar to the concerned words like in 'two back, to back, and to be back' in the second statement, and 'shy buy' in the third one. These results suggest that the students are not aware of the connected forms of words and they just focus on words in isolation.

**e- Assimilation of /n/ into /m/ when Followed by /p/**

**Table 3.13.**

*Students' Performance of the Assimilation of /n/ Followed by /p/ Perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-I own <u>ten</u> pairs of socks.	11	37	19	63	30	100
2-He did not do it <u>on</u> purpose.	24	80	6	20	30	100
3-I would love to live <u>in</u> Paris	23	77	7	23	30	100
<b>Total</b>	58	64	32	36	90	100

The table above reveals the students' performance of perceiving the assimilation of /n/ into the bilabial sound /m/ whenever it is followed by /p/. The overall results demonstrates that fifty-eight students' answers (64%) out of ninety (100%) are correct, while thirty-two others are not. To be clearer, the majority of students could successfully distinguish the application of the assimilation of /n/ into the /m/ bilabial. This signifies that the majority of the students face less difficulties in perceiving the assimilation of /n/ followed by /p/.

Concerning the first statement used to illustrate the previously mentioned case of assimilation; 'I own ten pairs of socks', /n/ assimilation followed by /p/ takes place in words 'ten pairs /'tem'peəz/'. It is remarked that eleven students (37%) out of thirty (100%) answered correctly, whereas, nineteen others (63%) provided wrong answers. In statement number two, then; 'He did not do it on purpose', assimilation of /n/ followed by /p/ exists in words 'on



purpose /'ɒm'pɜ:pəs/. Twenty-four students (80%) identified the assimilation of /n/ into /m/ correctly when it is followed by /p/, and only six others (20%) did not. The third statement; 'I would love to live in Paris'; contains a /n/ assimilation that is followed by /p/. It is highlighted in words 'in Paris /'ɪm'pærɪs/. In this example, twenty-three students (77%) managed at identifying the applied assimilation correctly. and seven others (23%) did not.

Those results denote that the majority of the students are able at identifying /n/ assimilation sound when it followed by /p/ during the listening process. The fact of encountering less difficulties in detecting this aspect of connected speech precisely may be due to the fact that they are exposed to it satisfactorily.

**Table 3.14.**

*Students' Committed Errors Regarding Assimilation of /n/ Followed by /p/ Perception*

Statements	Transcription	Students' Committed Errors while Listening		
<u>Ten</u> pairs	/'tem'peəz/	anti-part	to me part	team parts
		them pairs	temperature	to mepair
		tem pairs	teem pairs	tea pairs
<u>On</u> purpose	/'ɒm'pɜ:pəs/	my purpose	him purpose	
		with purpose	team purpose	
<u>In</u> Paris	/'ɪm'pærɪs/	me paris	embarressed	
		leaving paris	living paris	

The above table unveils the major errors committed by the participating students while writing the statements they listened to about assimilation. As displayed in the above table, some students omitted the original sound in the word and replace it with the assimilated one such as 'tem pairs, teem pairs' in the first statement, while other students replaced the word in which assimilation occurred with another one containing the assimilated sound like in 'him

purpose, them purpose, and me Paris' in the first and the third statement. That is to say, students did not use their cognitive capacities to diagnose what they were listening to, they were just interested in writing what they heard. Additionally, some students added some words and expressions that are grammatically correct but have nothing to do with the real statement's meaning and actual words; they provided answers such as like in 'temperature, team parts, tea pairs, team purpose, my purpose and embarrassed'.

**f- Assimilation of /t/ into /tʃ/ when Followed by /j/**

Table 3.15. *Students' Performance of the Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /j/ perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-That shirt won't <u>suit</u> you.	8	27	22	73	30	100
2-I <u>bet</u> your boss doesn't know.	5	17	25	83	30	100
3-Can I <u>get</u> you anything?	22	73	8	27	30	100
<b>Total</b>	35	39	55	61	90	100

The above table gives insight into the students' performance of the assimilation of /t/ into /tʃ/ when followed by /j/ perception. Three statements were exposed in the listening test to the participants in order to identify this assimilation case. As the results displayed in the table above, five correct answers (39%) among ninety were counted, however, all of the fifty-five others were false. This means that the majority of students do face difficulties in perceiving this type of assimilation i.e., assimilation of /t/ followed by /j/.

In statement number one; 'That shirt won't suit you', assimilation of /t/ followed by /j/ is found exactly in words 'suityou /'su:tʃju:'. It was successfully distinguished by only eight students (27%) among thirty, while the other twenty-two students (73%) could not identify it. The second statement; 'I bet your boss doesn't know' contains an assimilation of /t/ that is

followed by /j/. It is placed in words ‘betu your /'betʃ'jə/’ where it was correctly identified by only five students (17%). In contrast, twenty-five wrong answers were provided (83%). Lastly, statement number three; ‘Can I get you anything’ expresses assimilation of /t/ followed by /j/ in words ‘getu you /'geʃ'ju:/’ that was correctly perceived by twenty-two students (73%), and wrongly by the other eight ones (27%).

The reported results denotes that more than half of the participants do face difficulties in perceiving /t/ assimilation into /tʃ/ when it is followed by /j/. The overall findings reveal that the majority of students are unable at detecting Yod coalescence assimilation (/t+j/→/tʃ/) while listening to English native speakers.

**Table 3.16.**

*Students’ Committed Errors Regarding Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /j/ Perception*

Statements	Transcription	Students’ Committed Errors while Listening		
Suit <u>u</u> you	/'soʊ'tʃju:/	suits you	switch you	so teach you
		sweat to you	so to you	sweat show you
Bet <u>u</u> your	/'betʃ'jə/	bouching you	be switch you	betch you
		be teach you	be touch you	better you
Get <u>u</u> you	/'getʃ'ju:/	gets you	getch you	get she you
		getting you	get show you	get so you

The above table displays the students’ committed errors of perceiving the assimilation of /t/ into /tʃ/ whenever it is followed by /j/. The table shows that some of the participants wrote the words of the exposed utterances as they are pronounced; for instance, ‘switch you’ in the first statement, ‘boutching you, betch you’ in the second statement, and ‘getch you, get she you’ in the third one. However, some other students added words and sounds that are

similar to the assimilated ones like in ‘so teach you’ in the first statement, ‘be touch you’ in the second one, and ‘get show you’ in the third one.

**g- Assimilation of /t/ into /k/ when Followed by /k/**

**Table 3.17.**

*Students’ Performance of the Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /k/ Perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-Don’t let it get <u>c</u> old.	16	53	14	47	30	100
2-There is no short <u>c</u> ut to learning a language.	4	13	26	87	30	100
3-I didn’t like that <u>c</u> ake.	24	80	6	20	30	100
<b>Total</b>	44	49	46	51	90	100

The table above demonstrates the students’ performance of the perception of the assimilation of /t/ into /k/ when it is followed by /k/. The results obtained reveal that approximately half of the participants’ answers (forty-six) representing (51%) were incorrectly perceived in terms of the /t/ assimilated sound when it is followed by /k/, while forty-four participants’ answers representing (49%) were successfully perceived.

More specifically, in the first statement; ‘don’t let it get cold’ in which assimilation takes place in ‘get cold /ge’kkəʊld/’, sixteen students (53%) perceived the assimilated sound correctly, and the remaining fourteen students (47%) got it in a wrong way. However, in the second statement; ‘there is no short cut to learning a language’ in which assimilation occurs in ‘short cut /ʃɔ:’kkʌt/’, only four students (13%) identified the assimilated sound of /t/ into /k/ followed by /k/ correctly, and the remaining twenty-six participants (87%) identified it incorrectly. Moreover, in the last statement; ‘I didn’t like that cake’ in which assimilation takes place in ‘that cake /ðæ’kkeɪk/’, twenty-four students (80%) were able to identify the

assimilated sound of /t/ followed by /k/ correctly, while only six students (20%) students were unable to do.

These results denote that listening to connected speech causes gaps in words understanding to the majority of the participants as learners were unable to distinguish words boundaries and they provided irrelevant vocabulary items while listening to the statements.

**Table 3.18.**

*Students' Committed Errors Regarding Assimilation of /t/ Followed by /k/ Perception*

Statements	Transcription	Students' Committed Errors while Listening		
Get <u>c</u> old	/ge'kkəʊld/	gets cold	check cold	get old
		gap cold	gak old	set take old
Short <u>c</u> ut	/ʃɔ:'kkʌt/	sure cut	sure the cut	
		sure key cut	sure cake cut	
That <u>c</u> ake	/'ðæ'kkeɪk/	thake cake	that gave	
		the kake	done cake	

The table presents the main errors the students committed when writing statements to which they were exposed. The statements are about the assimilation of /t/ into /k/ followed by /k/. Accordingly, some students deleted the assimilated sound and replaced it with another one like in 'gap cold, done cake, and sure the cut', while some other participants replaced it with the assimilated sound itself; for instance, 'gak old, sure cake at, and thake kake'. By contrast, some students omitted the original sound from the words like in 'the cake'. Finally, other participants gave other words and assumed vocabulary according to what they were listening to; such as in 'check cold, set take old, sure key cat, and that gave'. These results demonstrate the students' inability and deficiency in listening comprehension

### 3.2.2.2.2. Elision Placements

**Table 3.19.**

*Students' Overall Performance of the Elision Identification.*

	N	%
<b>Correct</b>	105	39
<b>Incorrect</b>	165	61
<b>Total</b>	270	100

The table above represents the overall performance of the participants in perceiving elision. The results reveal that of two hundred-seventy students' answers (270), one hundred-five (105) representing (39%) are correct, however, the remaining one hundred-sixty-five (165) answers (61%) are incorrect. According to these results, it is deduced that elision is an effective factor affecting the students' listening comprehension.

#### a- Elision of /d/

**Table 3.20.**

*Students' Performance of the Elision of /d/ Perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-My best friend <u>d</u> let me borrow his car.	25	83	5	17	30	100
2-Don't hold <u>d</u> back, say what you mean.	10	33	20	67	30	100
3-He bikes rolled <u>d</u> down the hill without him.	1	3	29	97	30	100
<b>Total</b>	36	40	54	60	90	100

The above table is about the students' performance of perceiving elision of /d/. The results show that among ninety participants' answers, thirty-six (40%) were correctly perceived/, whereas, fifty-four students' answers (60%) were considered as an incorrect one.

The results obtained from the first statement; ‘my best friend let me borrow his car’ in which elision is placed in ‘friendlet /fren'le/’ reveal that the majority of students (twenty-five students out of thirty) representing (83%) were able to identify the elided sound /d/, and only five students (17%) failed at providing correct answers. Moreover, in the second statement; ‘don’t hold back, say what you mean’ in which /d/ elision takes place in ‘holdd back /həʊl'bæk/, ten students (33%) got the answer correctly while twenty others (67%) did not. Then, in the last statement; ‘he bikes rolled down the hill without him’ in which elision occurs in ‘rolledd down /rəʊl'daʊn/, only one student answered correctly, and unfortunately, twenty-nine others answered incorrectly.

These results suggest that students are unaware of the elision of /d/ sound. These results may also suggest that they are unable to distinguish words boundaries, and they develop false assumptions and vocabulary on the basis of their listening.

**Table 3.21.**

*Students’ Committed Errors Regarding the Elision of /d/ Perception*

Statements	Transcription	Students’ Committed Errors while Listening		
Friend <u>l</u> et	/fren'le/	freen	freanly	
Hold <u>d</u> back	/həʊl'bæk/	go back	hoe back	whole back
		holl back	how back	hope back
		home back	who back	her bag
Rolled <u>d</u> down	/rəʊl'daʊn/	role down	real down	rule back

The above table shows the main errors students committed while writing the statements they have listened to regarding the elision of /d/. It is noticeable from the table above that some students wrote words as they were pronounced without /d/ sound; for instance, ‘holl back, whole back, rule back, and frienn’. Moreover, some other students estimated some

vocabulary that is away from the meant words; such as in ‘how back, home back, hope back, her beg, who back, real down, and ‘role down’.

**b- Elision of /t/**

**Table 3.22.**

*Students’ Performance of the Elision of /t/ Perception*

Statements	Correct		Incorrect		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
1-I can’t stand the rain.	23	77	7	23	30	100
2- It must be time to leave.	24	80	6	20	30	100
3- I don’t want it.	25	83	5	5		100
<b>Total</b>	72	80	18	20	90	100

The obtained results from table 3.24 represents the students’ performance of the elision of /t/ perception. As shown in the table, the majority of the students’ answers (seventy-two) representing (80%) were successfully perceived, while eighteen participants’ other answers (20%) were incorrectly perceived regarding this sound elision.

In particular, in statement number one; ‘I can’t stand the rain’ in which the elided sound /t/ is placed in ‘can’t stand /’kæn’stænd/’, twenty-three students (77%) identified the /t/ sound in a correct way, while seven others (23%) did not do. Moreover, in the statement number two; ‘It must be time to leave’ in which the sound /t/ is elided in ‘must be /’məs’bɪ/’, a high number of students’ answers (twenty-four answers) representing (80%) was correct, and only six students perceived it incorrectly. Concerning statement number three; ‘I don’t want it’ in which elision takes place in ‘don’t want /dəʊn’wɒnt/’, twenty-five students (83%) answered correctly and only five students (17%) failed at providing correct answers.



These results may suggest that students are knowledgeable about the elision of /t/. The fact of having that high percentage of correct answers simply denotes that most of the participants are familiar with this case of elision since it is the more known and the easier case of elision and it is frequently used EFL learners and speakers in general.

**Table 3.23.**

*Students' Committed Errors Regarding the Elision of /t/ Perception*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Students' Committed Errors while Listening</b>	
Can't stand	/kæn'stænd/	Can stand Understand	again cancel and
It must be	/məs'bi/	I Tomas be muss be	mass be masby
Don't want	/dəʊn'wɒnt/	do want dow want	done want they want

The table above is about the students' committed errors regarding the perception of /t/ elision while writing statements to which they were exposed. Based on those errors, it can be deduced that some students were unable to identify the elided sound /t/, and they omitted it from their answers; for instance, 'can stand, muss be, mass be, and done want'. However, some of them provided false vocabulary like in 'understand, I Tomas be, and again'.

### c- Elision of /h/

**Table 3.24.**

*Students' Performance of the Elision of /h/ Perception*

<b>Statements</b>	<b>Correct</b>		<b>Incorrect</b>		<b>Total</b>	
	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
1-We think <u>he</u> 's left the country.	7	23	23	77	30	100
2- They let <u>him</u> leave early.	2	7	28	93	30	100
3- They offered <u>her</u> a promotion.	4	13	26	87	30	100
<b>Total</b>	13	14	77	86	90	100

The above table illustrates students' performance of perceiving the elision of /h/ sound. The overall results related to this case demonstrate that among ninety participants' answers, only thirteen (14%) were correctly. However, seventy-seven others (86%) were incorrectly perceived.

The first example given to students to test their perception of the elided sound /h/ is 'we think he's left the country' in which elision aspect takes place in 'think he's /'θɪŋkɪz/', only seven students (23%) answered correctly. By contrast, the twenty-three other students (77%) were failed at identifying the elided /h/ sound. Then, in the second example; 'they let him leave early' in which the elided sound appears in 'let him /'letɪm/', twenty-eight participants (93%) unfortunately could not perceive the elided sound /h/, and only two students (7%) could do. Accordingly, in the last example; 'they offered her a promotion' in which the elided sound /h/ is placed in 'offered her /'ɒfədər/', twenty-six students (87%) were unable to identify the /h/ sound, and only four others (13%) were able to do.

These results suggest that students are unable to distinguish words boundaries when they are listening. Thus, they are unable to recognize their correct form and even their meaning.

**Table 3.25.**

*Students' Committed Errors Regarding the Elision of /h/ Perception*

<b>Elision Placements</b>	<b>Transcription</b>	<b>Students' Committed Errors while Listening</b>	
Think <u>h</u> e's	/'θɪŋkɪz/	thinks things	is thing these
Let <u>h</u> im	/'letɪm/	let them let im	let team let tim
Offered <u>h</u> er	/'ɒfədər/	offer their offer the	offereder offer a

Table 3.25 is about the main errors the participants committed while writing the statements they were exposed to while listening to regarding the elision of /h/. Based on what is presented in the table. It is noticeable that they deleted the sound /h/ from their answers like in 'is, let im, and offer the'. Some other students provided other similar grammatical structure such as in 'let team, things, offer their, and offer her'. Moreover, some other students combined the word in which the elided sound occurred with the preceded word, for instance, 'letim, thinks, things, and offeredr'. It is, then clear that the participants do face major problem in perceiving the elision of the /h/ sound. Hence, the misperception of this aspect of elision may cause many difficulties to them in listening comprehension process.

### **3.2.2.3. Discussion of Test Results**

Based on the data obtained from the different sections of the test, the results reveal that the vast majority of the participants failed at writing all the statements containing assimilation and elision while they have listened to correctly.

Based on students' performance of the statements comprising assimilation, the most common assimilation case that the participants failed to identify when writing the statements is the assimilation of /s/ into /ʃ/ when followed either by /f/ or /j/ case with the percentage of 76%, followed by the assimilation of /t/ into /p/ when followed by /p/ with a percentage of 72%. Moreover, the participants failed at identifying assimilation of /d/ into /g/ whenever it is followed by either /g/ or /k/ case with a percentage of (62%), followed by the assimilation of /t/ into /tʃ/ when it is followed by /j/ with a percentage of (61%). Additionally, they failed at writing statements regarding the assimilation of /d/ into /b/ when followed by /b/ with a percentage of (60%), and the assimilation of /t/ into /k/ when followed by /k/ with a percentage of (51%). However, the majority of the participants succeeded at identifying the assimilation of /n/ into /m/ when followed by /p/ with a percentage of (64%).

As far as the performance of the participants in perceiving the elision cases is concerned, the most common case in which the participants failed at perceiving when writing statements they were exposed to is the elision of /h/ with a percentage of (86%), followed by the elision of /d/ with a percentage of (60%). However, the majority of participants succeeded at identifying the elision of /t/ with a percentage of (80%).

The obtained results from students' performance in the test indicates that students, who failed at perceiving assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech when writing the given statements, are unknowledgeable about these aspects. Moreover, those students faced challenges when listening because of lack of practice related to these aspects. Additionally, students are unable to distinguish words boundaries while listening, thus, they are unable to recognize words' meaning and even their spelling. Besides, they wrote what they were listening to as pronounced by the speakers in the audio test without diagnosing the heard sounds. The results obtained also show that the participants generally develop false estimated vocabulary towards the listening words, and they generally fall in contradiction in terms of tenses. The committed errors may result from the act of adding, omitting or even combining sounds/words students perform when they are listening to assimilation and elision.

### **3.3. Comparison of Questionnaire's and Test's Results**

After a careful and thorough analysis of data collected using different tools, we attempt to compare the questionnaire and the test results. The aim behind this comparison is to check whether there is a correlation between the findings provided in the questionnaire and the ones obtained from the test. Comparing between the findings of each paves the way for the researchers to see the extent to which the students were honest in their answers, and if the obtained results from both the questionnaire and the test go hand.

Starting with questionnaire results, it was found that the majority of students stated that their focus while listening is directed to both speaker's pronunciation and message content. However, the test results show that the students neglected both of them when facing difficulties. Additionally, the questionnaire's results clarify that students' performance towards assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech perception in the fifteenth question go hand in hand with those of their performance in the test, and which they illustrate students' failure at perceiving the most common English cases of assimilation and elision. Those results, themselves, are contradicted with students' views about their knowledge and perception ability concerning assimilation and elision that were shown in the thirteenth and fourteenth questions of the questionnaire. Moreover, half participants stated that listening to English native speakers is considered to be moderate if not easy as a process to them. In contrast with test' results, it is found that most of the students do face serious challenges while listening to English native speech, especially, the one in which assimilation and elision features of connected speech are applied.

In short, the analysis of the gathered data has been worthy significant to confirm that third-year license students do experience listening comprehension difficulties when listening to speech contains the aspects of connected speech, in particular, assimilation and elision features. That is, to have accurate findings, we addressed a questionnaire for third-year license students of English at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahya university. And since the use of questionnaire as a tool of study might not yield very precise and accurate data, we relied on a listening test for students to see whether their answers on the questionnaire reflect their real level and performance in this study. Hence, the findings resulting from the two adopted research tools are in contradiction in terms of student's views about their knowledge related to assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech and their perception while listening to

native speech that contains those two features in particular. All in all, the majority of the involved third year students do face difficulties while listening to that kind of speech where assimilation and elision are applied.

### **3.4. Pedagogical Recommendations**

In the light of aforementioned data gathered from the two applied research tools, we propose the following pedagogical recommendations so as to develop EFL learners' perception of the aspects of connected speech namely assimilation and elision to enhance their listening comprehension. Thus, taking into consideration the following recommendations might help both the students and the teachers to facilitate the listening comprehension process.

- Students should practise the language a lot in order to minimize their listening comprehension difficulties and to develop their language comprehension.

#### **• To Students**

- Students should be aware about the importance of listening and study that basic language skill seriously. Bearing in mind that in doing so, they would be good at mastering the the language.

- Students should listen extensively to the authentic English language to be exposed to the varieties of the aspects of connected speech characterizing speech.

- Students should familiarize themselves with the fast speech of the natives so as to be able to cope with the speakers' high speed of delivery when listening in the classroom.

#### **• To Teachers**

-Teachers of phonetics should devote more time to teach thoroughly the theoretical issues related to the application of connected speech processes in the classroom.

- Teachers of phonetics should stimulate the students to practise the aspects of connected speech throughout relying on listening activities that end with speaking practices in the classroom.
- Teachers of OE should encourage their students to talk about their listening problems and propose solutions to them.
- Teachers of OE would devote some time for presenting different English accents in which the different aspects of connected speech are applied. They should also try to use techniques to facilitate their learners' listening comprehension and overcome the major difficulties they encounter while listening to the native speakers.
- OE module teachers may cooperate with phonetics module teachers so as to focus on the deficiencies that most learners encounter in terms of speaking and listening skills.

• **To Decision Makers**

- An additional phonetic session(s) should be scheduled in order to provide enough time for essential and more complex lessons explanation (especially in 2<sup>nd</sup> year).
- A practical phonetic session should be arranged in language laboratories for an appropriate practice to the students on the theoretical issues dealt with in phonetics class.

### **3.5. Limitations of the Study**

The present study aimed at exploring EFL learners' difficulties while listening to aspects of connected speech with special reference to assimilation and elision. Accordingly, some difficulties were encountered, and they are subsequently listed:

- Time constraint was a major constraint we were faced with in conducting the present study as the time given to conduct the practical part was limited. Hence, this prevented us from conducting an experimentally designed study.

- Most of the of laboratories 'equipment in the English Language Department were damaged was a major difficulty we were faced with while conducting the test.
- Because of time constraints and the long period of strikes the Algerian universities went on prevented us from involving more than thirty participants in the test. As the current study is descriptive in nature, it could have been better to increase the number of the participants.

### **3.6. Suggestions for Further Future Studies**

In the list of findings of the present study, we recommend researchers for further studies in the field to consider the following:

- Due to time constraints, it was impossible to have an experimental study to explore EFL learners' difficulties while listening to the aspects of connected speech with reference to assimilation and elision. Conducting an experiment to investigate this issue would yield statistical data that are beneficial to confirm or reject the already stated hypothesis and the results of this exploratory study.
- Conducting a cross-sectional study to compare the listening difficulties in the three years of license in the English Language Department would be beneficial to see how the listening skill is developed by the end of each year.
- Other pieces of research to investigate other connected speech aspects like juncture, weak forms, and linking are highly beneficial.
- Investigating the correlation between students' assimilation and elision perception and EFL learners' oral proficiency is needed.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter was concerned with the collection of data from the students' questionnaire and test that both aimed at exploring EFL students' listening difficulties of perceiving the aspects of connected speech with reference to assimilation and elision. The chapter, then,



provided the analysis and discussion of the results of the implemented tools of research. The findings reveal that students do experience serious difficulties when they are listening to native speech contains assimilation and elision aspects. Additionally, it was found that these learners' difficulties are originated from various factors, mainly; students' lack of knowledge about these aspects, their lack of practice, false assumed vocabulary when listening, students' inability to distinguish words boundaries, and they fall in contradiction in terms of tenses. As a results, students sometimes add, omit, or combine sounds and even words. The chapter in hand explained some limitations that were encountered while conducting this piece of research and suggested, as well, some research recommendations and further research suggestions.

### **General Conclusion**

Recently, the interest in listening skill has increased remarkably by the growing number of studies related to listening in second language and foreign language context. Learners of English as a foreign language are surrounded by the target language whether inside or outside the classrooms. Many of the students, however, encounter difficulties in comprehending the listening tasks. The study in hand has started from the point that learners' listening comprehension is affected when listening to connected speech whose features are assimilation and elision due to different causes hampering their listening ability.

The current research is made up of three chapters. The first chapter presented a theoretical background about the most important issues on listening in general and the listening comprehension difficulties in particular. The second chapter discussed important issues about connected speech features in general and assimilation and elision aspects in particular. The last chapter provided a description of the research instruments used in this study, students' questionnaire and test. The results were analysed and discussed to end up with some conclusive points.

The findings of the study revealed that EFL third year students at the University of Mohammed Saddik Ben Yahia- Jijel encountered serious problems when it comes to comprehending speech in which assimilation and elision aspects are applied. It also reveals that the main causes of these problems were the students' lack of knowledge about assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech and the lack of practicing these aspects. Other causes of students' listening incomprehension of speech comprising assimilation and elision processes is linked to students' false estimated vocabulary, the inability to distinguish words boundaries and the inability to recognize their meaning and even their spelling. Besides, it is found that students sometimes write what they are listening to as it was pronounced

regardless the meaning of the written words, and the fact that they are connected to each other. Additionally, students fall in contradiction in terms of tenses use when they are exposed to speech comprising assimilation and elision. As a result of these difficulties, students generally add, delete, or combine words or sounds when they listened the authentic connected speech. Thus, these study's findings confirm the research hypothesis that was already stated .

To conclude, the findings of the present study were compatible with the findings of other studies that have dealt with learners' listening comprehension difficulties when listening to speech contains assimilation and elision aspects of connected speech (eg: Ur, 1987). In fact, there was an agreement among researchers that listening to English natives arises a lot of difficulties for EFL learners. This implies that learning the listening skill is not an easy task. It needs time, wide exposure to the target language, and a lot of practice to master the most frequent aspects of connected speech. Therefore, EFL teachers need to encourage their learners to listen as much as they can do to improve their listening skill abilities.

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## Appendix A

### Students' Questionnaire

*Dear students,*

You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire which is an attempt to gather information needed for the accomplishment of a master dissertation entitled “**Exploring EFL Learners’ Difficulties in Perceiving Assimilation and Elision Aspects of Connected Speech**”. We would be so grateful if you could sincerely answer the following questions, so please, give as precise answers as you can. Tick (✓) your answer(s) in the corresponding box (es), and make a full statement whenever necessary. Be sure that the answers you provide will certainly remain confidential and will only be used for research purposes.

Thank you in advance for your time and your collaboration.

#### **SECTION ONE: Listening Skill and Listening Difficulties.**

##### **Q1. Do you like listening to English?**

a. Yes  b. No  c. I don't know

##### **Q2. If yes, how often do you do per day?**

a. All the time  b. Often  c. Sometimes  d. Rarely

##### **Q3. How would you evaluate your listening skill?**

a. Very good  b. Good  c. Average  d. Poor  e. Very poor

##### **Q4. To what extent do you think listening skill important in your English language learning process?**

a. Extremely important  b. considerably important  c. Somehow important   
d. Not important at all

**Q5. How often do you succeed at comprehending the content of the listening scripts you are exposed to?**

- a. Always  b. Often  c. Sometimes  d. Rarely  e. Never

**Q6. Among the following difficulties, which one(s) do you usually face while listening to a script?**

- a. Unfamiliar accents  b. Language forms (idioms, slangs, etc.)   
c. Speaker's emotionality (anger)  d. Lack of knowledge about the listening topic   
e. Your cognitive capacities  f. Script length   
g. Complex vocabulary  h. Information amount   
i. Delivery rate  j. Classroom environment ( noise, temperature, etc.)   
k. Recording sounds' quality  l. Lack of visual supports

**Q7. Among the following strategies, which one(s) do you usually make use of whenever you are faced with comprehension difficulties while listening to a passage/script?**

- a) You guess the meaning   
b) You ignore and keep on listening   
c) You cannot listen any more

**Q8. To what extent do you agree that authentic listening materials are more helpful than pedagogical ones (those that are meant for teaching/learning)?**

- a. Strongly agree  b. agree  c. undecided  d. disagree   
e. Strongly disagree

Please explain why?

.....  
.....  
.....  
**Q9. What kind of materials does your Oral Expression (OE) module teacher use during a listening session?**

- a. Audio tapes       b. Video tapes       c. Classroom speech

**SECTION TWO: Aspects of Connected Speech (Assimilation/ Elision)**

**Q10. When you listen to an English listening script, do you focus on?**

- a. Meaning       b. Speaker's pronunciation       c. Both of them

**Q11. Have you ever been instructed/taught aspects of connected speech in classroom?**

- a. Yes       b. No

**Q12. If yes, in which module (s)/class (es) have you been taught these aspects of connected speech?**

Please mention the module (s)

.....  
.....

**Q13. To what extent are you able to identify/perceive features of connected speech in English while listening to native speakers?**

Features of connected speech	Frequency of perception/identification				
	Always	Often	sometimes	Rarely	Never
a. Stress					
b. Assimilation					
c. Elision					
d. Weak forms					
e. Rhythm					
f. Juncture					
g. Intonation					
h. Linking					

**Q14. To what extent do you think you are knowledgeable about the following?**

Connected Speech Application Rules	Extremely	Significantly	Moderately	Not at all
Assimilation				
Elision				

**Q15. Would you please tick the appropriate option to indicate the aspect of connected speech (assimilation or Elision) applied in each of the subsequent statements, indicate the modified sound and then provide its phonemic transcription (the elided/assimilated sound).**

Statements	Assimilation	Elision	Transcription of the elided/assimilated sound (s)
1. I've been going out too much lately.			Identification:..... Transcriptio.....
2. I really love this shiny one over there.			Identification:..... Transcription.....
3. She acts well.			Identification:..... Transcription .....
4. Would you like a cup of tea?			Identification:1.....2..... Transcription 1.....2.....
5. He is a good boy			Identification..... Transcription.....
6. She looked back			Identification:..... Transcription .....
7. It's nice to meet you.			Identification:..... Transcription .....
8. It's a credit card.			Identification:..... Transcription .....
9. He looks like he's had an accident.			Identification:..... Transcription .....
10. I preferred steamed potatoes.			Identification:1.....2..... Transcription 1.....2.....

**SECTION THREE: Listening and Assimilation/Elision.**

**Q16. How do you find listening to English native speakers?**

- a. Very difficult  b. Difficult  c. Moderate  d. Easy   
 e. Very easy

**Q17. To what extent do you agree that the features of connected speech make listening comprehension process difficult?**

- a. Strongly agree  b. Agree  c. Undecided  d. Disagree   
 f. Strongly disagree



**Q18. Does your teacher of OE expose you to the different features characterizing connected speech in English?**

- a. Yes       b. No

**If yes, please answer the subsequent two questions (Q19/20)**

**Q19. How often does he/she do?**

- a. Always    b. Often    c. Sometimes    d. Rarely    e. Never

**Q20. Which kind of activities does he/she adopt to expose you to the aspects of connected speech?**

- a. Listening activities
- b. Transcription activities
- c. Pronunciation activities
- d. Others, please specify.....

**Q21. According to you, comprehending assimilation/elision is difficult while listening to a passage/script because of:**

- a. Lack of knowledge about assimilation and elision rules
- b. Complexity of the listening passage (unfamiliar vocabulary)
- c. Lack of practice of assimilation and elision
- d. Fast speech rate
- e. Others

If others, please specify

.....

**Q22. To what extent do you consider students' incomprehension of assimilation and elision affects negatively the comprehension of the listening scripts.**

a. Extremely  b. significantly  c. moderately  d. not at all

**Q23. Please, add any further suggestions or recommendations regarding the learning of aspects of connected speech (assimilation and elision) to decrease EFL learners' listening difficulties.**

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

**Thank you for your cooperation.**

## Appendix B

Table 3.1.

Students' Listening Difficulties.

Listening Difficulties	Students' ticks	Percentage %
a- Unfamiliar accents	36	18%
b- Language forms (idioms and slangs)	32	16%
c- Speaker's emotionality (anger)	4	2%
d- Lack of knowledge about the listening topic	20	10%
e- Cognitive capacities	6	3%
f- Script length	12	6%
g- Complex vocabulary	32	16%
h- Information amount	14	7%
i- Delivery rate	4	2%
j- Classroom environment (noise, temperature)	14	7%
k- Recording sounds' quality	18	9%
l- Lack of visual supports	8	4%
Total	200	100%

## Appendix C

**Task: Listen carefully to the given scripts, then rewrite the full statements you have listened to.**

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....
6. ....
7. ....
8. ....
9. ....
10. ....
11. ....
12. ....
13. ....
14. ....
15. ....
16. ....
17. ....
18. ....
19. ....
20. ....

21. ....
22. ....
23. ....
24. ....
25. ....
26. ....
27. ....
28. ....
29. ....
30. ....

Thank you for your cooperation!

## Résumé

L'objectif principal de cette étude est d'explorer les difficultés de compréhension rencontrées à l'écoute des étudiants du troisième année au département de langue anglaise de l'Université Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia-Jijel, tout en écoutant le discours des locuteurs natifs impliquant les aspects de l'assimilation et l'élision. En conséquence, cette étude suppose que si les apprenants d'anglais comme une langue étrangère sont bien exposés à ces aspects du discours (assimilation et 'élision), et informés sur l'application de ces derniers au discours connecté, ils auront moins de difficultés à comprendre le discours écouté. Cette étude est divisée en deux parties principales. La première partie est théorique et tend à exposer des sujets liés à la compréhension de l'écoute et aux difficultés de compréhension du discours. Il a également mis en lumière les caractéristiques de la parole connectée avec une référence particulière aux aspects de l'assimilation et l'élision. La deuxième partie, qui incarne le côté pratique de l'étude, traitait les données dérivées des outils de recherche utilisés. Un questionnaire a été adressé à soixante étudiants (60) sur trois cent quatre (304) et un test de la compréhension de l'écoute a été effectué avec trente étudiants (30) de la même population. Ainsi, l'étude confirme l'hypothèse de recherche et révèle que le manque de connaissances sur l'application de l'assimilation et de l'élision est problématique dans le processus de compréhension. Sur la base des résultats obtenus, certaines recommandations pédagogiques et suggestions pour des recherches futures sont finalement suggérées.

## ملخص

إن الهدف من إجراء هذا البحث هو استكشاف صعوبات الفهم التي يواجهها طلاب السنة الثالثة في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة محمد صديق بن يحيى-جيجل أثناء الاستماع إلى خطاب المتحدثين الأصليين المتصل، والذي يتضمن جوانب ظاهرتي الإدغام والحذف الصوتي. وفقاً لذلك، يفترض هذا البحث أنه إذا كان لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية معرفة جيدة لقواعد وكيفية تطبيق هاتين الظاهرتين في الكلام المتصل، فسوف يواجهون صعوبات أقل في الاستماع. وقبل كل شيء، تنقسم هذه الدراسة إلى قسمين: حيث يكشف الجزء الأول القضايا النظرية المرتبطة بمهارة الاستماع وصعوبة فهم الكلام المستمع إليه. كما يلقي الضوء على ميزات الكلام المتصل مع إشارة خاصة إلى جوانب ظاهرتي الإدغام والحذف الصوتي. أما الجزء الثاني؛ وهو الجانب التطبيقي لهذه الدراسة؛ فقد تناول النتائج التي خلصت إليها وسائل البحث المستخدمة لجمع البيانات اللازمة لإجراء هذه الدراسة: استبيان تم توجيهه إلى ستين طالباً (60) من أصل ثلاثمائة وأربعة (304)، واختبار سمعي أجري مع ثلاثين طالباً (30) من نفس العينة. ومن تحليل نتائج هذه الدراسة، تم تأكيد فرضية البحث المتنبأة والتوصل إلى أن قلة المعرفة بقواعد ظاهرتي الإدغام والحذف الصوتي وكيفية تطبيقها تخلق صعوبة في عملية فهم الخطاب المتصل للمتحدثين الأصليين. على ضوء النتائج التي تم الحصول عليها، يتم في نهاية المطاف اقتراح بعض التوصيات والمقترحات البيداغوجية للبحث في المستقبل.