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A PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF ELISION FOUND IN SZA'S SELECTED SONGS IN 'SOS' ALBUM

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, songs have become the media that helps others to learn and improve their English skill and to influence people's pronunciation. In songs, singers tend to not pronounce several sounds in words based on the conditions and their purposes. The deletion of the sounds in phonology is called elision. The nature of elision may be stated quite simply: under certain circumstances sounds disappear. One might express this in more technical language by saying that in certain circumstances a phoneme may be realised as zero, or have zero realisation (Roach, 1991). Thus, this study aims to find out the kinds of phonological elision that occur in SZA's selected songs in "SOS" album. The data was taken from the speech sound that is pronounced by the singer SZA in her selected songs entitled "Open Arms", "I Hate U", and "Good Days". The data were collected through observing the content and note taking technique by listening to the pronounced words in the songs. The findings are divided into three. There are vowel elision, consonant elision, and syllable elision. In vowel elision, there are two cases found, the first one is /ə/ (2 data) and second case is /ɪ/ (10 data). In consonant elision there are eight cases found, the first one is /t/ (17 data), second case /d/ (10 data), third and fourth cases /p/ and /r/ (2 data respectively), and fifth to seventh cases /v/, /z/, and /n/ are found only in one data respectively. In syllable elision there are three cases found , they are /bɪ/, /ən/, and /ɒm/.

Keywords: Phonological Elision, Songs, Vowel Elision, Consonant Elision, Syllable Elision

I. Introduction

Phonology is the subfield of linguistics that studies the structure and systematic patterning of sounds in human language (Akmajian et al., 2010). The phonology of a language is the set of rules or constraints that describe the relation between the underlying sounds, the abstract units called phonemes and the phonetic forms that can be observed (Ladefoged, 2006). In phonology, there is an articulation system in humans on how to produce certain sounds properly. To be able to produce sounds, the speakers need to produce sounds based on the

phonetic transcription that is formulated in the Standard English either based on the American spelling or British spelling.

Techmeier (1969) stated that proper pronunciation is the most difficult skill in learning a foreign language. Nowadays, music has become the media that helps others to learn and improve their English skill. To help the learners improve their listening and pronunciation skills, songs are the media to help them, apart from that songs could also help them to improve their speaking skills (Murphey, 1992). Also, it has become the most used media that influences people's pronunciation through songs. Even though music could help others to improve their pronunciations, we all should be aware that people produce sounds differently from one another. The differences are based on the conditions and their purposes. Especially how they produce sounds in singing a song. How they produce the sounds has its own style that makes it different from how people usually produce sounds that sometimes accidentally causes some phonological process and one of them is elision. The nature of elision may be stated quite simply: under certain circumstances sounds disappear. One might express this in more technical language by saying that in certain circumstances a phoneme may be realised as zero, or have zero realisation (Roach, 1991). Wolfram & Johnson (1982) also state that in the phonological process of deletion, units which occur in some contexts are lost in others. For example, in a rapid speech the word 'today' /təˈdeɪ/ often pronounced as /tˈdeɪ/. This kind of changing sound is one of the phonological processes of elision or deletion where the /ə/ have zero realisation.

Nowadays, youngsters, especially non-native speakers of English or learners of English as a second language use and also pronounce English based on what they often hear, especially songs. Sometimes how they produce sounds is a bit different from Standard English. As the phenomenon is highly occurring in the pronounced words in the songs. One of the American R&B singer-songwriter SZA is one of the representative singers as the subject of the study. Then, the singer's selected songs in her latest album entitled "SOS" were taken as data source of the study. The researcher chooses the singer and the selected songs in her latest album as the subject because of several reasons. First, because SZA is one of the famous American singers that has topped the charts worldwide, which means that most people listen to her songs. Second, the selected songs in her latest album entitled "SOS" are the most listened to songs compared to her songs in previous albums. Third, even though people listen to English from the native singers, they themselves often simplify the words in order to express their feelings, especially in songs that caused them to shorten the words to get ease of their pronunciation which violates the Standard English, especially the American spelling and how she produced words in this album is worth the investigating. The aim of this research is to find the kinds of elision that are found and how the phoneme elision occurred in SZA's selected songs in "SOS" album.

II. Methods

In this research, the data was taken from the speech sound that is pronounced by the female singer SZA of her latest album. Three out of 23 songs in the album entitled "SOS" were the representative data sources from the album.

The data of this research was collected through observing the content and note taking technique. As Khotari (2004, p. 7) explains, one of the methods and techniques of collecting the data is audio listening. The technique of collecting the data was by finding the lyrics, listening to the songs, note taking the phonetic transcriptions. The data were typed in lists comprising words or phrases featured with the assimilations that are found by identifying the phonetic transcription differences between the singer and Oxford Learner's Dictionaries. The online dictionary containing both the British and American spellings is used as the source information of the Standard English pronunciation. However, as the singer is American, the pronunciation is compared to the American spelling.

The analysis of this research was presented in the descriptive qualitative method. The data of this research was collected through observing the content and note taking technique. As Khotari (2004, p. 7) explains, one of the methods and techniques of collecting the data is audio listening. The following steps are, find the lyrics, find and listen to the songs, note taking the strange pronunciation, compare to online Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, analyze the findings with the theory proposed, and present the data in the table.

III. Findings and Discussion

Findings

The three selected songs of SZA entitled "Open Arms", "I Hate U", and "Good Days" in the "SOS" album show three types of elision. The interpretations of the data are formed in the following Table 1.

Table 1. Data Findings of Phoneme Elision

No.	Type of Sounds	Phonemes Elision	Case
1.	Vowel	ə → Ø	2
		ɪ → Ø	10
2.	Consonant	p → Ø	2
		t → Ø	17
		d → Ø	10
		v → Ø	1

		z → ∅	1
		n → ∅	1
		r → ∅	2
3.	Syllable	bɪ → ∅	1
		ən → ∅	1
		ɒm → ∅	1
Total			**49**

Discussion

Vowel Elision

Table 2. Vowel Elision

No.	Word	Standard American English Pronunciation	SZA Pronunciation	Phoneme Elision
Case 1				
V1	about	/əbaʊt/	/baʊt/	/ə/
V2	non-violent	/naːn vaɪələnt/	/naːn vaɪlənt	/ə/
Case 2				
V3	life	/laɪf/	/laf/	/ɪ/
V4	I’m	/aɪm/	/am/	/ɪ/
V5	myself	/maɪˈself/	/maˈself/	/ɪ/
V6	I’ll	/aɪl/	/al/	/ɪ/
V7	I’ve	/aɪv/	/av/	/ɪ/
V8	while	/waɪl/	/wal/	/ɪ/
V9	fountains	/faʊntɪnz/	/faʊntnz/	/ɪ/
V10	I	/aɪ/	/a/	/ɪ/
V11	my	/maɪ/	/ma/	/ɪ/
V12	try	/traɪ/	/tra/	/ɪ/

There are two kinds of vowels in the lyrics that are not pronounced by the singer. They are the schwa /ə/ and the short vowel /ɪ/ as shown in Table 2. The data sample is marked by the cardinal number preceded with the abbreviation of Vowel that is V, for example V1 means Data of Vowel Elision number 1.

The word *about* (V1) loses its schwa /ə/ in /əbaʊt/ because this vowel is considered as the unstressed syllable compared to the strong final syllable with the /aʊ/ diphthong. Meanwhile, the data (V2) is a compound word. The elision in *non-violent* was found in the second word, where the /ə/ in the triphthong of /vaɪələnt/ is not pronounced because the triphthong itself is rather difficult to pronounce, very difficult to recognise and needs a careful pronunciation to produce the triphthong (Roach, 2009). The elision occurs because it sounds weaker than the preceding two vowels .

In relation to the elision of /ɪ/ vowel, the data (V3-V12) that mentioned in Table 2 have /aɪ/ diphthongs. The /ɪ/ is not pronounced because it is unstressed and also the weaker part compared to the first sound in the diphthong (Roach, 2009), which leads to the second vowel elision.

Consonant Elision

In consonant elision, there are seven consonant sounds that are not pronounced from the words. They are /p/, /t/, /d/, /v/, /z/, /n/, /r/ as shown in Table 3. The data sample is marked by the cardinal number preceded with the abbreviation of Consonant that is C, for example, C1 means Data of Consonant Elision number 1

Table 3. Consonant Elision

No.	Word	Standard American English Pronunciation	SZA Pronunciation	Phoneme Elision
Case 3				
C1	empty	/empti/	/emti/	/p/
C2	keep	/kiːp/	/kiː/	/p/
Case 4				
C3	whereabouts	/werəbaʊts/	/werəbaʊs/	/t/
C4	whats	/wʌts/	/wʌs/	/t/
C5	weight	/weɪt/	/weɪ/	/t/

C6	hate	/heɪt/	/heɪʔ/	/t/
C7	its	/ɪts/	/ɪʔs/	/t/
C8	spent	/spent/	/spen/	/t/
C9	can't	/kænt/	/kæn/	/t/
C10	front	/frʌnt/	/frʌn/	/t/
C11	ain't	/eɪnt/	/eɪn/	/t/
C12	present	/preznt/	/prezn/	/t/
C13	silent	/saɪlənt/	/saɪlən/	/t/
C14	urgent	/ɜːrʤənt/	/ɜːrʤən/	/t/
C15	conflict	/kaːnflɪkt/	/kaːnflɪk/	/t/
C16	used	/juːst/	/juːs/	/t/
C17	ambushed	/æmbʊʃt/	/æmbʊʃ/	/t/
C18	dipped	/dɪpt/	/dɪp/	/t/
C19	text	/tekst/	/teks/	/t/
Case 5				
C20	bored	/bɔːd/	/bɔː/	/d/
C21	played	/pleɪd/	/pleɪ/	/d/
C22	found	/faʊnd/	/faʊn/	/d/
C23	mind	/maɪnd/	/maɪn/	/d/
C24	respond	/rɪspɑːnd/	/rɪspɑːn/	/d/
C25	pretend	/prɪtend/	/prɪten/	/d/
C26	happened	/hæpənd/	/hæpən/	/d/
C27	scrambled	/skræmbəld/	/skræmbl/	/d/
C28	hold	/həʊld/	/həʊl/	/d/
C29	armored	/ɑːrmərd/	/ɑːrmər/	/d/

Case 6				
C30	of	/əv/	/ə/	/f/
Case 7				
C31	feels	/fiːlz/	/fiːl/	/z/
Case 8				
C32	soon	/suːn/	/suː/	/n/
Case 9				
C33	permission	/pərˈmɪʃn/	/pəˈmɪʃn/	/r/
C34	air	/er/	/e/	/r/

In case (3), the word *empty* (C1) is not pronounced because of the preceding /m/. Both the consonants were from the same place of articulation which is bilabial. The /p/ is not pronounced because the singer emphasizes the /m/ which made the /p/ become weak and considered not audible. The similar elision also happens in the word *keep* (C2), the /p/ is not pronounced because of the /m/ consonant. In the lyrics, the word *me* comes after the word *keep*. The following /m/ in *me* made the /p/ in *keep* not pronounced because the singer gave more emphasis to the /m/ in the word *me*.

Consonant /t/ elision in case (4) data numbers (C3—5) are not pronounced because of the rhyming purposes. The singer needs to catch the tempo of the songs, thus the /t/ is not pronounced. In the word *hate* (C6) and *its* (C7), the /t/ is not pronounced because the consonant changes into a glottal stop.

Meanwhile, data numbers (C8—19) are called as consonant cluster reduction where the final consonant group or cluster of two sounds is reduced to a single consonant sound (Green, 2002). This reduced consonant cluster is produced without the final sound, which is omitting the final sound.

The consonant clusters /nt/ in (C8—14) were reduced to /n/, therefore the /t/ consonant sound is not pronounced.

The consonant cluster /kt/ in *conflict* (C15) was reduced to /k/, therefore the /t/ is not pronounced.

The consonant cluster /st/ in *used* (C16) was reduced to /s/, therefore the /t/ is not pronounced.

The consonant cluster /ʃt/ in *ambushed* (C17) was reduced to /ʃ/, therefore the /t/ is not pronounced.

The consonant cluster /pt/ in *dipped* (C18) was reduced to /p/, therefore the /t/ is not pronounced.

The consonant cluster /st/ in *text* (C19) was reduced to /s/, therefore the /t/ is not pronounced.

Other elisions occur in case (5), this consonant elision was similar to the previous /t/. Roach (2009) states the plosion following the release of p, t, k and b, d, g is very weak and often not audible. Especially if there is a vowel before the plosion sound. In (C20) and (C21) the singer decided to not pronounce the final /d/ sound because of its weak final sound. Meanwhile, the rest of the data are included as consonant clusters. The data in (C22—29) were reduced into a single consonant sound (Green, 2002).

The consonant clusters /nd/ in (C22—26) were reduced to /n/, therefore the /d/ is not pronounced.

The consonant clusters /ld/ in (C27—28) were reduced to /l/, therefore the /d/ is not pronounced.

The consonant cluster /rd/ in the word *armored* (C29) was reduced to /r/, therefore the /d/ is not produced.

Both the consonant cluster elision in /t/ and /d/ occur due to the influence by the phonology of African-American English. Green (2002) stated that word final consonant groups such as /nd/ and /st/ are reduced to single consonant sounds /n/ and /s/, respectively. That is, some speakers of varieties of English may produce the word *kind* /kaɪnd/ as *kin* /kaɪn/ in certain environments.

The elision of /v/ (C30) that occurs in the word *of* is not pronounced because of the preceding consonant. In the lyrics, the preceding word *of* is *sick*. The /ə/ in the word *of* is not pronounced because of the preceding final /k/ in the word *sick* from /sɪk əv/ of to /sɪk ə/. This elision was very typical in a casual speech that leaves only the /v/ in a voiced context (Roach, 1991).

The elision of /z/ consonant in the final word of *feels* (C31) is not pronounced because it is followed by other consonants. The word *feels* was followed by the word *like*. Thus, the final /z/ is not pronounced because of the following initial /l/ in the word *like* in order to prevent consonant-consonant sequences (Wolfram and Johnson, 1983).

Nasal /n/ elision in the final word of *soon* (C32) is because of the rhythm purpose. Pronouncing the /n/ sound in *soon* requires coordination between the nasal airflow and the articulation of the following vowel sound *I*. In fast speech, especially singing, simplifying the pronunciation by not enunciating the /n/ sound can make the phrase easier to sing quickly.

The /r/ elision in the word *permission* (C33) and *air* (C34) is not pronounced because of the influence of African-American English dialect that the singer got from her father who is half African and half American. The African-American English speakers have a rule of r-deletion

except before a vowel (Fromkin et al, 2013). In this case the word *permission* and *air*, the /r/ was located after the vowel, therefore the /r/ is not pronounced.

Syllable Elision

There are three syllable elision found in the selected songs as shown in Table 4 below:

Table 4. Syllable Elision

No.	Word	Standard American English Pronunciation	SZA Pronunciation	Phoneme Elision
Case 10				
S1	because	/bɪˈkəz/ /bɪˈkɔːz/	/kəz/	/bɪ/
Case 11				
S2	until	/ənˈtɪl/	/ˈtɪl/	/ən/
Case 12				
S3	from	/frɒm/	/fr/	/ɒm/

The word *because* (S1) is one of a syllable elision because the singer pronounced the word as *'cause* /kəz/ which made the onset and peak of the first syllable of *be* /bɪ/ is not pronounced. The similar case occurs in the word *until* (S2) where the singer pronounced the word as *'til* which made the onset and also peak in the first syllable of *un* /ən/ is not pronounced as similar as the previous word. The last syllable elision of the word *from* (S3) lost its peak and coda where the singer only pronounced the *fr*/fr/ and not pronounced the *om* /ɒm/. Three of the syllable elisions occur in order to get ease of the pronunciation, especially in singing a song. In order to catch the rhythm, the singer tends to shorten the word.

IV. Conclusion

The nature of elision may be stated quite simply: under certain circumstances sounds disappear. One might express this in more technical language by saying that in certain circumstances a phoneme may be realised as zero, or have zero realisation (Roach, 2009). There are 49 sound elisions found in the selected songs "Open Arms", "I Hate U", and "Good Days" by SZA in her latest album entitled "SOS". Out of 49 elisions, they are divided into three. There are vowel elision, consonant elision, and syllable elision. In vowel elision there are 2 cases found, the first one is /ə/ (2 data) and second case is /ɪ/ (10 data). In consonant elision there are 7 cases found, the first one is /t/ (17 data), second case /d/ (10 data), third and fourth case /p/ and /r/ (2

data respectively), and fifth to seventh case /v/, /z/, and /n/ are found only in one data. And in syllable elision are found 1 case of each syllables /bɪ/, /ən/, and /ɒm/.

The reasons for the elisions are varied. From the analysis, it can be taken the implicit conclusion, those are the weak and unstressed vowels in diphthongs and triphthongs are usually not pronounced, when two consonants from the same place of articulation are adjacent, the first consonant is not pronounced due to the emphasis on the second consonant, in consonant clusters, the final consonant is not pronounced, the influence of African-American English on the pronunciation, also in rapid or casual speech during singing, some consonants at the end are omitted to simplified the pronunciation for rhyming purposes.

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