

# At the talk face

**Mark Hancock**

## Pronouncing /d/ and /t/ at the end of words

The end of a word is a risky place for a /d/ or /t/ to be. It's a very abrasive environment, as the speaker starts to put the mouth in the right position to start the next word, and these final consonants can easily lose the qualities that distinguish them from one another, or disappear entirely. This can be confusing for the listener, doubly so because these phonemes mark the past tense.

### 1 Missing consonants

Learners of English often drop final /d/ and /t/ sounds, especially if they are part of a consonant cluster. This may result in them saying a different word – for example *went* without the final /t/ becomes *when*. The text below is written as if spoken by such a learner. Ask learners to go through the text and insert the missing consonants. Warn them that this may mean changing the spelling of the rest of the word, as in the example of *went* and *when*. Then they should practice reading out the text, making sure they pronounce the consonants they have inserted.

Key:

*I went camping with a friend one weekend. We couldn't find a camp site so we put our tents up in a farmer's field. It was very cold so we built a fire next to my tent. Unfortunately, I didn't put out the fire properly and my tent got burnt. I felt very stupid and I had to sleep in the cold. I wouldn't do that again. Next time, I'll build the fire next to my friend's tent!*

### 2 Minimal pairs

Many learners devoice a final /d/ so that it sounds like /t/, or miss the consonant entirely. This can lead to confusion between words such as *why*, *wide* and *white*. Raise awareness of this by saying words from A, B or C and asking learners to identify which one they hear. Then get learners to say words from the lists themselves for other learners to identify.

### 3 Sentence pairs

Use these sentence pairs to raise the learners' awareness of how meaning can change if they elide the final /t/. Follow a similar procedure as with the minimal pairs in 2.

### 4 Migrating consonants

In connected speech, if one word ends in a consonant sound and the next begins with a vowel sound, we get linking: the final consonant can sound as if it belongs in the next word. For example, *The weren't able to help* sounds like *They weren table to help*. To raise awareness, give the Migrating consonants sentences to the learners and ask them to work out what the properly spelt sentences are. Once they have done this, use the sentences for choral drilling practice as follows: *They weren (gap) table to help*. First you put a big gap between *weren* and *table*, and you gradually reduce it. This can be useful in teaching how to pronounce final /t/ and /d/, because it's often easier for our learners to pronounce the /t/ in *table* than in *weren't*.

Key

1. *She wasn't in the house.*
2. *My tooth isn't aching any more.*
3. *We aren't all here.*
4. *You didn't ask.*
5. *They weren't old enough.*
6. *It wasn't only me.*
7. *He doesn't use the metro often.*
8. *The people didn't unite against the enemy.*

### 5 Past tense poem

Write the boxed words on the board and ask learners to write as many sentences as possible using these exact words only. Then ask them to order their sentences to form a poem. Finally, ask them to read out their poems, being careful to pronounce the past tense endings to distinguish *love* from *loved* etc.

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### 1 Missing consonants



#### The dangers of camping without consonants

I when camping with a friend one week N. We could an fine a camp site so we put our tens up in a farmer's feel. It was very coal so we bill a fire necks to my ten. Unfortunately, I did an put out the fire properly and my ten got burn. I fell very stupid and I had to sleep in the coal. I wooden do that again. Necks time, I'll bill the fire necks to my friend's ten!

### 2 Minimal pairs

A	B	C
why	wide	white
fee	feed	feet
row	rode	wrote
way	weighed	wait
bill	build	built
her	heard	hurt

### 3 Sentence pairs

1. a. He did an exercise.  
b. He didn't exercise.
2. a. She *is* an American, believe me!  
b. She *isn't* American, believe me!
3. a. He *was* an Egyptian, really.  
b. He *wasn't* Egyptian, really.
4. a. I learn a lot.  
b. I learnt a lot.

5. a. I always burn the cakes.  
b. I always burnt the cakes.
6. a. I'm afraid your guess is wrong.  
b. I'm afraid your guest is wrong.

### 4 Migrating consonants

1. She wasn' tin the house.
2. My tooth isn' taking any more. \*
3. We aren' tall here.
4. You didn' task.
5. They weren' told enough.
6. It wasn' Tony me.
7. He doesn' choose the metro often.
8. The people didn' chew night against the enemy.

### 5 Past tense poem

Walter	Wendy	love / loved	walk / walked
watch / watched	didn't	with	away to and

Possible poem:

Walter watched Wendy.

Walter loved to walk with Wendy.

Walter loved to watch Wendy walk.

Walter loved Wendy.

Wendy didn't love Walter.

Wendy didn't love to walk with Walter.

Wendy walked away.

Walter watched Wendy walk away.