

The Phonological Process of Regressive and Progressive Assimilations on the Lyrics of the Rap Song, “Rap God” by Eminem

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Abstract - Rapping as one of the musical genres essentially involves the speaking or chanting of rhyming lyrics, often set to a beat. The rhyming created by rappers is considered to be one of the most sophisticated styles of poetry. Themes often address provocative subjects such as violence, sex and socio-political issues. Rapping which first gained popularity in the U.S in the 1970s as a kind of street act especially among African-American teenagers now becomes very famous musical genre in the world. The main objectives of this descriptive qualitative research are to find out how the processes of regressive and progressive assimilation are taken place when a very well known rap singer, Eminem, is singing his famous song *Rap God* in his single album and to find out the determinant factor how they happen in terms of place and manner of articulations and voicing. Regressive assimilation happens when the following sound in a word influences the preceding sound as in *light blue* /laɪt blu:/ pronounced rapidly as /laɪp blu:/ whereas progressive assimilation happens when the preceding sound influences the following sound since the preceding sound is too dominant such as in *the* / ɪn ð / which turns to be /ɪn ð / . The result of the research show that based on the data found in the song, there are 21 data of phonological processes of regressive assimilation and 14 data of phonological processes of regressive assimilation and the factors such as place and manner of articulation as well as voicing play very important part in assimilation process.

Keywords: *rapping, genre, regressive and progressive assimilation, place of articulation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Rapping which first gained popularity in the U.S in the 1970s as a kind of street act especially among African-American teenagers now becomes very famous musical genre in the world. This kind of musical genre also known as hip hop has a very specific characteristic as it fuses the rhythm-based lyricism of hip hop music with pop music's preference for melodious vocals and catchy tunes (<http://www.plasticlittleraps.com>). The rhyming created by rappers is considered to be one of the most sophisticated styles of poetry and the lyrics

The lyrics of rap music as a part of hip-hop life style often address provocative subjects such as violence, sex, rebellion

and socio-political issues. Some famous rappers who has released some best seller album are Ice Cube, Drake, Snoop Dogg, 50 Cent, Tupac Shakur, and Eminem.

Regarding the speaking or chanting of rhyming lyrics, often set to a beat, the main objectives of this descriptive qualitative research are 1) to find out regressive and progressive assimilations taken place to the song *Rap God* sung by Eminem. Roach (1998) and Spencer (1996) argue that when we find a phoneme realized differently as a result of being near some other phoneme belonging to a neighbouring word, we call this an instance of assimilation. He further explains that generally speaking, the cases that have most often been described are assimilation affecting consonants

There are two types of assimilation in English, namely regressive and progressive assimilations. Both, however, refers to the change of phoneme, a basic unit of a language's phonology, which is combined with other phonemes to form meaningful units such as words or morphemes (Gimson, 2008:41). The former deals with the phoneme of final consonant (Cf) of a word which changes to become like initial consonant (Ci) of its neighbouring word in some way in other words, the phoneme that comes first is affected by the one that comes after it as in the following words.

Love me /l v mi:/ → /l m mi:/

Whereas the latter occurs if initial consonant (Ci) changes to become final consonant (Cf) as seen in the words below:

Read These /ri:d ði:z/ → /ri:d ði:z/

2) to find out how the assimilations happen viewed from the place and manner of articulations and voicing

2. METHOD

The main data of this descriptive research is taken from the rap song '*Rap God*' sung by an American rapper, Eminem. The song released on October 15th, 2013 deals with the problems faced by Eminem in his career and it has 202 sentences or 1.560 words as recorded by Guinness World

Record . The procedures of how to get the data needed for this research are transcribing the lyrics of the song, analyzing the assimilation occurred when it is sung by the rapper, classifying the kinds of assimilation; regressive or progressive assimilation, analyzing how assimilation happens based on the place and manner of articulation and voicing and drawing conclusion.

3. RESULT DISCUSSION

Based on the analyzed data taken mainly from the lyrics of the song, *Rap God* sung by a very well-known American rapper, Aminem, and regarding the first objective of this research, it was obtained that there were 35 data on assimilation and 21 data (60%) of the assimilation data obtained belong to regressive assimilation, the phoneme of final consonant (Cf) of a word which changes to become like initial consonant (Ci) of its neighbouring word (Spencer, 1996) as seen on table 1 below:

Table 1: Regressive Assimilation

| Data Code | Sentence | Regressive Assimilation |
|-----------|---|----------------------------|
| D1/L17/R | But for me to rap like a computer must be in my genes | /ɪn maɪ/ → /ɪm maɪ/ |
| D2/L28/R | You don't really wanna get into a pissing match | /pɪsɪ mət / → /pɪsɪm mət / |
| D3/L22/R | Ever since Bill Clinton was still in office | /w z stɪl/ → /w s stɪl/ |
| D4/L37/R | I was signed to Aftermath after the fact | /w z saɪnd/ → /w s saɪnd/ |
| D5/L38/R | How could I not blow? | /n t bl / → /n p bl / |
| D6/L47/R | Let me show you maintaining this shit ain't that hard, that hard | /let mi / → /lem mi / |
| D7/L54/R | and did nothing but shoot for the moon since | / n ɪ b t/ → / n ɪm b t/ |
| D8/L55/R | MC's get taken to school with this music | /wi ðɪs/ → /wið ðɪs/ |
| D9/L62/R | Blow up and being in a position | /ænd bi ɪŋ/ → /æm bi ɪŋ/ |
| D10/L73/R | Little gay looking boy | /lʊki bɔɪ/ → /lʊkɪm bɔɪ/ |
| D11/L74/R | So gay I can barely say it with a 'straight' face looking boy | /kæn beɪli/ → /kæm beɪli/ |

Table 1, Cont.

| | | |
|-------------|---|--|
| D12/L97/R | I should not be woken | /n t bi / → /n p bi / |
| D13/L102/R | We have nothing in common, poodle | / k m n pu dl/ → / k m m pu dl/ |
| D14/L113/R | Just in case 'cause even you unsigned | /ɪn keɪs/ → /ɪ keɪs/ |
| D15/L150/R | I'm devastating more than ever demonstrating | /'devəstertɪ m / → /'devəstertɪm m / |
| D16 /L155/R | I make elevating music | /'elɪvertɪ mju zɪk/ → /'elɪvertɪm mju zɪk/ |
| D17 /L173/R | But look at the accolades these skills brung me | /ði z skɪlz/ → /ði s skɪlz/ |
| D18 /L173/R | I bully myself 'cause I make me do what I put my mind to | /p t maɪ/ menjadi /p p maɪ/ |
| D19 /L185/R | Angels fight with devils | /wɪ devlz/ → /wɪd devlz/ |
| D 20/L189/R | Then you may be a little patient and more sympathetic to the situation | /ænd m / → /æm m / |
| D 21/L194/R | I can't batter the women | /k nt bæte/ menjadi /k m bæte/ |

Meanwhile 14 data (40 %) of the assimilation data obtained belong to progressive assimilation, it happens due to the fact that the phoneme of initial consonant (Ci) of neighboring word changes to become final consonant (Cf) of the previous word as seen in the following table 2.

Table 2: Progressive Assimilation

| Data Code | Sentence | Progressive Assimilation |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|
| D1/L1/P | I'm beginning to feel like a Rap God | / bɪ'gɪnɪ tu / → /bɪ'gɪnɪm nu / |
| D2/L26/P | Syllables, skill-a-holic (kill them all with) | /kɪl ðem/ → /kɪl lem/ |
| D3/L47/P | Let me show you maintaining this shit ain't that hard, that hard | /mem'teɪnɪ ðɪs/ → /mem'teɪnɪm nɪs/ |

Table 2, Cont.

| | | |
|------------|--|-----------------------------------|
| D4/L53/P | <u>Hit the earth like an asteroid</u> | /hɪt ði/ → /hɪt tɪ/ |
| D5/L55/P | MC's get <u>taken to school</u> with this music | /teɪkən tu:/ → /teɪkən nu:/ |
| D6/L65/P | Roll Hall of Fame <u>even though I walk in the church</u> | / i v n ð / → / i v n n / |
| D7/L68/P | <u>On the wall of shame</u> | / n ð / → / n n / |
| D8/L92/P | <u>Kneel before General Zod this planet's Krypton, no Asgard, Asgard</u> | /z d ðɪs/ → /z d ðɪs/ |
| D9/L125/P | <u>put them all in a line</u> | /p t ðem/ → /p t tem/ |
| D10/L154/P | 'Cause I know the way to <u>get them</u> motivated | / t ðem/ → / t tem/ |
| D11/L186/P | Here's <u>what they want from me</u> | /w t ðeɪ/ → /w t teɪ/ |
| D12/L190/P | And <u>understand the discrimination</u> | / nd stænd ð / → / nd stænd d / |
| D13/L193/P | Make <u>lemonade then</u> | /lemə'neɪd ðen/ → /lemə'neɪd den/ |
| D14/L195/P | How the fuck am I <u>supposed to bake them a cake then</u> | /beɪk ðem/ → /beɪk k m/ |

Since the assimilation process occurs to consonants as Roach (1998) states that generally speaking, the cases that have most often been described are assimilation affecting consonant, there are three elements which cannot be apart from assimilation process and how to produce consonant sounds. Those are *place of articulation*, *manner of articulation* and *voicing*. Place of articulation deals with the location at which two speech organs such as lower and upper, lower and upper lips, tongue, hard and soft palate etc., approach or come together in producing a speech sound; whereas manner of articulation concerns with the degree of obstruction or the type of channel imposed upon the passage of air at a given place of articulation, as denoted by such categories as stop (plosive), fricative, affricate, nasal, lateral and approximant (semivowel) (<http://www.dictionary.com>) and voicing deals with Sounds which can be voiced or voiceless. Voiced phonemes engage the vocal chords. Voiceless phonemes don't engage the vocal chords.

Here are the sample data analysis based on the three factors on which the classification of consonant sound is based

Regressive assimilation

Data 1

.....But for me to rap like a computer must be in my genes (D1/L17/R)

The word in my /in maɪ/ becomes ɪn maɪ/ when they are pronounced in a rapid way by a rapper. It means Cf in one word changes to become like Ci of its neighbouring word. It is called as regressive assimilation. Based on the analysis of place articulation, phoneme /n/ which belongs to alveolar sound becomes /m/, bilabial sound and in terms of manner of articulation, they belong to the same classification, namely nasal sounds and seen from the voicing point of view, they belong to voiced sounds.

Progressive assimilation

Data 1

... I'm beginning to feel like a Rap God (D1/L1/P)

From the data 1 taken from regressive assimilation, it can be explained that assimilation happens to the underlined word, *beginning to* / bɪ'ɡɪnɪ tu / which turns to be /bɪ'ɡɪnɪ nu / when those words are pronounced in a rapid way by a rapper. The phoneme /t/ (Ci) changes to become like phoneme /n/ (Cf). It means the progressive assimilation occurs. Based on the analysis of place of articulation, it can be explained that phoneme /t/ turns to become /n/ not / / as they both belong to alveolar sounds. Viewed from manner of articulation, phoneme /n/ and / / have the same characteristics, that is nasal sound and analyzed from voicing, they belong to voiced sounds. The following table 3 can expectedly facilitate us to know the classification of consonants.

Table 3: Place and manner of articulation

| | Place of articulation | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-------------|--------|----------|-------------------------------|---------|-------|---------|
| | Bilabial | Labiodental | Dental | Alveolar | Palatoalveolar (Postalveolar) | Palato- | Velar | Glottal |
| Voiced | p b | | | t d | | | k g | |
| Voiced | | f v | | s z | | | | h |
| Voiced | | | | | ʃ ʒ | | | |
| Nasal | m | | | n | | | ŋ | |
| Lateral | | | | l | | | | |
| Approximant | | | | | | r | | |

(Roach, 1998:62)

From the data analyzed, it can be obtained that instead of rapid pronunciation of the rapper, either regressive or progressive assimilations takes place due to the similarity of the consonant sound classification which are grouped into place of articulation, manner of articulation and voicing.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the data analyzed taken from the rap song called *Rap God* sung by a famous American rapper, Eminem, it can be concluded that assimilations consisting of 21 data (60 %) of regressive assimilation and 14 data (40%) of progressive assimilation are found in the song. Since assimilation is related much to consonant sounds, it can be a part of three factors determining classification of consonant sounds, namely the place of articulation, manner of articulation and

voicing. In other words, the changing phonemes as they are influenced by initial or final consonant of other words well known as assimilation must be in line with the three elements as explained earlier.

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