

Flap assignment

1. (a) Give two examples of words with either a /t/ or a /d/ in what is called the “underlying representation,” but where the /t/ or /d/ is transformed by a phonological rule into a flap. (The underlying representation is the abstract form of the speech sound, which is different from the “surface phonetic form” – the actual speech sound that is pronounced. We’ll talk more about these terms *underlying representation* and *surface phonetic form* pretty soon.) (b) Give both the ordinary spelling of each word *and* the phonetic transcription. (c) ***Explain why the /t/ or /d/ was transformed into a flap.*** The explanation will always be the same: /t/ and /d/ are pronounced as a flap [ɾ] when these (abstract) phonemes are intervocalic (i.e., between two vowels), but only when the ***second*** vowel is unstressed. *Use examples other than those that were used in class.*

Example: “kitty” [kɪɾi]: The abstract phoneme /t/ is transformed into a flap because the /t/ is intervocalic and the ***second vowel*** is unstressed vowel (or any other words to that effect).

2. Give two examples of words with either a /t/ or a /d/ in the underlying representation but which the /t/ or /d/ ***not*** is transformed by a phonological rule into a flap. ***Explain why the /t/ or /d/ was not transformed into a flap.***

Examples:

“candy” [kændi]: The underlying /d/ is not intervocalic, so the flapping rule does not apply.

“adept” [ədəpt]: The underlying /d/ *is* intervocalic, but the 2nd vowel is ***not*** unstressed, so the flapping rule does not apply.

Notes:

1. ***Letters are irrelevant.*** The flapping rule depends on what speech sounds (or phonemes) are in a word, *not* how it is spelled. *Spelling is irrelevant to all sound-pattern rules.*
2. ***The assignment needs to be turned in.*** I’ll tell you when it’s due. The assignment will be graded pass/fail. If a good-faith effort has been made, you’ll have a chance to fix any errors and resubmit. Hand-written assignments are fine, but I need to be able to read the thing. This is sometimes a problem.
3. **Phonetic symbol font:** If you want to type the assignment, you’ll need to install a phonetic symbol font. I would recommend installing these fonts even if you don’t have an immediate need. The fonts will come in handy.
 - a. Go to my web page for 2040 (<http://homepages.wmich.edu/~hillenbr/204.html>).
 - b. Go almost all the way to the bottom. For Windows users, click the ‘Phonetic font installer’. Mac users need to look at the notes just below this.

Notes

1. **The flapping rule:** The most common problem by far was not getting the rule right. The phonemes /t/ and /d/ turn into flaps when these sounds occur between two vowels (i.e., intervocalic), *but only when the second vowel is unstressed*. Quite a few students had this backwards, or made no reference to the stress of the second vowel.
2. **Explanations:** The second most common problem was picking good examples but not explaining them. If the flapping rule applied, why did it apply? If the flapping rule did not apply, why not; i.e., what *specifically* blocked the flapping rule from applying? It is not enough to say that the conditions for the flapping rule were not met. Which condition(s)?
3. **Letters vs. speech sounds (or phonemes):** The flapping rule – and absolutely every phonological rule in absolutely every language – is framed in terms of *speech sounds* or *phonemes*, not letters. Letters are entirely, completely, irreversibly irrelevant to sound-pattern rules. This is an extremely important idea. It's essential to keep the concepts of letters and speech sounds separated in your head.
4. **Casual speech:** The flapping rule does not occur only in casual speech. It occurs in careful speech as well. Pronouncing “kitty” as [kɪrɪ] instead of [kɪtɪ] is not laziness and it's not sloppy speech and it's not a mistake. The flapping rule is a full-fledged, legitimate rule of English. You will sometimes hear broadcasters, trying to produce clear, well enunciated speech, avoid the flapping rule (e.g., pronouncing “Haiti” as [hɛtɪ] rather than [hɛrɪ]). This is misguided. There's nothing wrong with the flap.
5. **Case:** We still have a few students using upper-case phonetic symbols: [P] is not the same as [p], [T] is not the same as [t] ...
6. **Spelling:** The word is *precede*, not *proceed* or *procede* or *proceede*.
7. **Your textbook:** One of you wonderful students looked at your textbook to see what the author had to say about the flapping rule. He says that the flapping rule applies when /t/ or /d/ are *post-tonic*, which is just another way of saying *following a stressed syllable (or, equivalently, a stressed vowel)*. This is the way I used to teach it, but it turns out that it's not quite right, even though it will work *almost* all of the time. Take the word “mayday” (the word that pilots and ship captains use when they're in trouble). Even though it follows a stressed vowel, the /d/ does *not* become a flap; it's an ordinary [d]. Why? The first syllable is definitely stressed, but the second syllable is *not* unstressed. This is way ahead of the game, but the second syllable in “mayday” receives what is called secondary stress. We'll talk about secondary stress later, but for now all that's important is to learn the rule as I taught it in class: the rule applies when the /t/ or /d/ is intervocalic, preceding an unstressed vowel. You'll be fine.