

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING  
UNIVERSITY OF DANANG**

**LÊ THỊ AN MỸ**

**ASSIMILATION EXPERIENCED BY QUANG NGAI  
STUDENTS IN PHAM VAN DONG UNIVERSITY  
- PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

**Field Study : ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
Code : 60.22.15**

**M.A. THESIS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE  
(RESEARCH REPORT)**

**Supervisor: NGŨ THIÊN HÙNG, Ph.D.**

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The thesis has been completed at the College of Foreign Languages,  
the University of Danang.

Supervisor: **Ngũ Thiện Hùng, Ph.D.**

Examiner 1: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Phan Văn Hòa**

Examiner 2: **Lê Phạm Hoài Hương, Ph.D.**

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 RATIONALE**

Communicative approach in learning and teaching English in Viet Nam recently has been considered as the top priority, because communication in natural and fluent way will create Vietnamese learners a variety of opportunities to work and to study in English-spoken environment and it is the target of language learning.

Through observation and monitoring my students during teaching time, I realize that even good students also have problems with pronunciation, in terms of acquisition and communication. For advanced students, they recognize well the differences between Vietnamese and English in ending sounds so they normally use English in a way of pronouncing it very clearly and slowly. After spending such a long time of practicing pronouncing clearly and slowly, those students cannot distinguish between the style of causal and rapid speech generated by phonetic assimilation of language flow.

Although there is a variety of English source for reference in the market, there are still a few pronunciation materials that are paid much attention to phonetic assimilation. Besides, special studies on assimilation in practice are still in lack. In such conditions, this research paper is conducted to deal with the problems in order that the appropriate solutions shall be developed to improve pronunciation and communication skill in terms of assimilation in order to help Quang Ngai students in Pham Van Dong University gain their expected achievement.

## **1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **1.2.1 Aims of the Study**

The study is to survey the real situations of pronunciation performance in terms of perception and production of assimilated sound sequences and to find out solutions for improvement of pronunciation in connected speech for Quang Ngai students in Pham Van Dong University.

### **1.2.2 Objectives**

The study tries to fulfill the following objectives:

- To conduct a contrastive analysis of assimilation in English and Vietnamese in terms of phonetic features
- To conduct a contrastive analysis of pronunciation in American English and British English
- To investigate students' attitude on the improvement of language skills and pronunciation problems concerning assimilation
- To survey the pronunciation performance of students in terms of pronunciation in assimilation of sound sequences at phrase and sentence levels
- To suggest effective solutions for the improvement of speaking skill for students concerning assimilation in connected speech

## **1.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

In this study, the change of a sound segment in terms of allophonic variation, i.e. such changes with subtle details that can be represented with diacritics in scripts will not be examined and thus are put out the scope of this study.

#### 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What do students think about drill and improvement of pronunciation as far as assimilation concerned?
2. What difficulties do the Quang Ngai students of English may encounter in performing assimilation in rapid and casual speech?
3. What are the appropriate solutions to improve the situation of pronunciation for Quang Ngai students of English concerning assimilation in rapid and casual speech?

#### 1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The “Assimilation experienced by Quang Ngai students, Pham Van Dong University- Problems and Solutions” is firstly studied in the field of assimilation in language flow in terms of contrastive analysis of samples of students’ speech under the light of acoustics.

The outcome of the study is to produce the practical products and my expectation is to help the local students in Quang Ngai to improve their pronunciation skills in natural speech.

#### 1.6 ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: *Introduction*

Chapter 2: *Review of the literature and Theoretical Background*

Chapter 3: *Research design and Methodology*

Chapter 4: *Results and Discussions*

Chapter 5: *Conclusions and Recommendations*

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 PREVIOUS STUDIES

Assimilation has been a growing interest to many phoneticians and phonologists. By Fromkin, Collins & Blair (1988), Roach (1990) assimilation rules in languages reflect what phoneticians often call co-articulation - the spreading of phonetic features either in anticipation of sounds, or the preservation of articulatory processes. This tendency to “sloppiness” may become regularized as both phonetic and phonological rules of the language.

So far, in Vietnam, many studies and researches related to sounds, syllabus in phonetics and in teaching and learning pronunciation in their own location have been conducted, such as Nguyen Khoa Dieu Hanh (2001), English vowel sounds experienced by first year students of English at Danang University- problems and solutions; Duong Bach Nhat (2002) Designing a syllabus of English pronunciation for the first- year students of English at Qui Nhon Teacher’s Training College; Tran Thi Kim Chi (2008) with the thesis: An investigation into English consonants [l]- [n]; [b]- [p]; [t]- [dZ ]; [s]- [ʃ]; [r]- [z] experienced by the Vietnamese learners in Gialai. Nguyen Thi An (2007), An investigation into the pronunciation of English stops experienced by the students at Tuy Hoa industrial college.

The most recent study dealing with assimilation was Ngu Thien Hung (2007)’s investigation into the performance of assimilated sound sequences by Students at College of Foreign Languages, University of Danang. This author has examined cases of assimilation in terms of their dimension of influence from the conditioning sounds on the nearby sounds.

#### 2.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

##### 2.2.1 Aspects of Connected Speech

Connected Speech is the key to gaining a natural, smooth-flowing style of speech. As speech is a continuous stream of sounds, without clear-cut borderlines between them, and the different aspects of connected speech help to explain why speaking English slowly and carefully is so different from spoken English in naturally and fluently.

## 2.2.2 Contrastive Analysis between English and Vietnamese Phonetic Systems

### 2.2.2.1 Final Consonant Sounds in English

Table 2.1 Articulatory representation of English consonant.

MOA \ POA	Labial	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>STOP</b>						
-voice	p		t		k	/
+voice	b		d		ɣ	
<b>FRICATIVE</b>						
-voice	f	θ	s	ʃ		h
+voice	v	ð	z	ʒ		
<b>AFFRICATE</b>						
-voice				tʃ		
+voice				dʒ		
<b>NASAL</b>	m		n		ŋ	
<b>LIQUID</b>						
+voice			l			
+voice			r			
<b>GLIDE</b>						
+voice	w			j	(w)	

-voice	©				(©)	
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### 2.2.2.2 Final Consonant Sounds in Vietnamese

Table 2.2 Vietnamese final consonant sounds distribution

Manner of articulation	Place of articulation		
	Labial	Alveolar	Velar
Voiceless stops	P	t	k
Voiced nasals	M	n	N

### 2.2.2.3 Sounds Joined together in English and Vietnamese

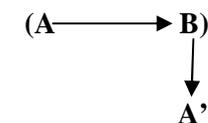
a. Linking sounds in English

b. Linking sounds in Vietnamese

### 2.2.2.4 Sounds Change (Assimilation)

a) Progressive Assimilation

Progressive assimilation is a co-articulation process by which the change the sound segment is brought about by the preceding sound.

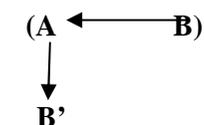


e.g. books [bYk → z]



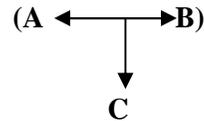
b) Regressive Assimilation

Regressive assimilation is co-articulation process by which the change of a segment is brought about by the following sound.



c) Mutual Assimilation

Mutual assimilation (Coalescence) is a co- articulation process by which a new segment will be made.



T-voicing can be realized in two articulations of flapping:

1. Alveolar tap (better and water)
2. Retroflex flap (dirty, party)

**2.2.3 Syllable Structure in English and Vietnamese**

**2.2.3.1 Syllable Structure in English**

- a) A minimum syllables would be a single vowel in isolation, some syllables have an onset, e.g. “car” [kA:], “see” [si:].
- b) Syllables may have no onset but have a coda, e.g. ‘am’ [ʌm], ‘ease’ [i:z].
- c) Some syllables have onset and coda, e.g. ‘sun’ [sVn], ‘bad’ [bʌd].

**2.2.3.2 Syllable Structure in Vietnamese**

*Table 2.3 Vietnamese final consonant sounds*

Place of articulation / Manner of articulation		Bilabial	Alveolar	
			Tip	Upper
Plosives		p	t	k
Sonorant	Nasal	m	n	N
	Non-nasal	u	i	

**2.2.4 Aspects of American English and British English Pronunciation**

*T- voicing*

/t/ is pronounced as a quick tap and is accompanied by voicing, so that it sounds almost like a /d/. The symbol most frequently used in pronunciation dictionaries to show a voiced /t/ is /t̚/

**2.3 SUMMARY**

There is no releasing phase of final consonant and no linking sounds articulated in Vietnamese. They may tend to delete the final sounds and may forget to connect words in natural speech or in the other side, for good students, they recognize clearly these differences may sound so carefully endings that they face difficulties with perception and production in communication.

**CHAPTER 3**

**RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

**3.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD**

The study used contrastive analysis method to find out the differences and similarities of the phonetic features and syllable structure between English and Vietnamese to develop hypotheses for the research.

These hypotheses were tested with qualitative and quantitative result from the data collected from questionnaires and direct recording from diagnostic test.

**3.2 HYPOTHESES**

1. Quang Ngai students of English may be not able to perceive and produce assimilation easily and naturally because of the

differences between English and Vietnamese consonants in terms of their phonetic features.

2. Quang Ngai students of English may either pay too much attention to or drop the ending sounds unconsciously in communication because of the differences of ending sounds between Vietnamese and English.

### **3.3 SUBJECT SELECTION AND DESCRIPTION**

Therefore, 103 students of English (39 in 1<sup>st</sup> year, 53 in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 11 in 3<sup>rd</sup> year) were involved in data collection activity through questionnaire and 30 good students as distributed in 1<sup>st</sup> year: 8, 2<sup>nd</sup> year: 15, 3<sup>rd</sup> year: 7 were selected as informants to take part in the diagnostic test.

### **3.4 THE SAMPLE**

The samples described in this research were the responses from 103 students through questionnaires and recordings to be recorded by 30 good students. The transcripts of TOEFL iBT along with the recording of the speech by native speakers were used to compare and contrast.

### **3.5 PROCEDURE**

1. The first step was to review relevant documents, books, theses, and researches related to the topic published in English and Vietnamese.

2. The second step is to make a preliminary contrastive analysis of phonetic system and syllable structure between English and Vietnamese to identify the similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese pronunciation in terms of assimilation.

3. The third step is to generate hypotheses about problems that Quang Ngai students in Pham Van Dong University may experience in performing English in communication speech.

4. The fourth step is to collect data from Quang Ngai students in Pham Van Dong University through questionnaire and diagnostic test. This step was conducted in two stages as below:

- At the first stage, 103 Quang Ngai students were given questionnaires with questions about their length of learning English, their level, their attitude about the language skills, their problems in pronunciation in communication in term of assimilation (See appendix A).

- At the second stage, 30 strong students were asked to say the words, phrases, sentences in communication speech that contain cases of assimilation (See appendix B). Their performance was recorded and transcribed normally for the analysis with the samples by the native speakers.

5. The data analysis, in the fifth step, is expected to provide information about problems mentioned in the hypotheses. Evidences for hypotheses verification shall be found via data were analysed qualitatively and quantitatively. The frequency in percentage (%) for the occurrence of problems of various types were calculated and tabulated as for the statistical evidence

### **3.6 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION**

The study questionnaire was designed for 18 questions, the items from No 1 to No 4 were to assess students' attitude on language skills. Pronunciation and its role in communication as well as Quang Ngai students' experiences were covered in questions No 5, 6, 7 and 8; Questions of numbers 9, 10, 11 and 12 referred to

students' difficulties and concepts of fluency in pronunciation as well as in communication were considered rather hard to get the accurate information therefore, it was necessary to provide a bit explanation for students by researcher. Moreover, students felt more confident in answering questions 13, 14, 15 and 16 for their experiences in sounding sequence in terms of assimilation. The last two questions aimed to collect students' attitude on teaching methods of pronunciation (See details in Appendix A attached for the questionnaire).

The diagnostic test consisted of 2 parts. Part A was designed for testing the students' perception of the assimilation. This part consisted of 10 words and phrases, each of which contained typical feature of assimilation intended to cause potential problems to students. They were asked to underline their prediction of pronunciation first and then listen to check what they really heard.

Part B with 2 sections is designed to test students' actual production of assimilation in communication speech. Section 1 and 2 are written in increasing of difficult level from phrase to sentence and questions in full meaning to require fluency in students' performance of assimilation in communication speech. Students were requested to look at phrases and sentences and then speak as naturally as they are communicating to record for data analysis. (See detailed in Appendix B attached for the diagnostic test).

### 3.7 DATA COLLECTION

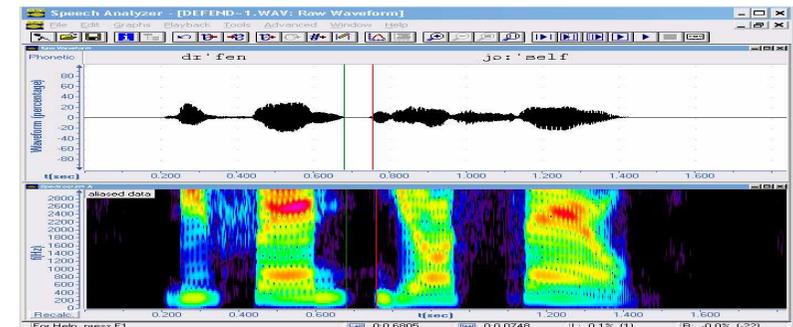
Data was collected from the questionnaires and diagnostic tests.

The questionnaires were delivered to the students mid January, 2011. Two weeks later, the diagnostic test was implemented as the outline of research designed.

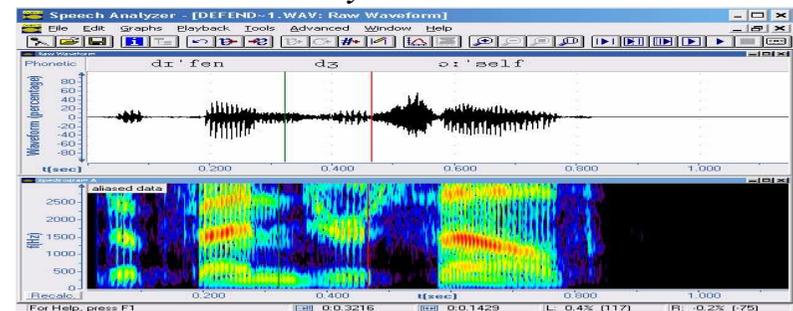
### 3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

All the data then was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively

Data analysis were implemented by using the procedure of tallying frequencies, recording the results, presenting the data in frequency and percentage distribution tables, and analyzing and interpreting the data as described in the research objectives.



*Figure 3.1 Spectrogram of the phrase “defend yourself” performed by a student*



*Figure 3.2 Spectrogram of the phrase “defend yourself” performed by a native speaker*

### 3.9 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The selection of the limited informants made the researcher unsatisfactory about establishing the sample representation. I also failed to get information about the students' actual performance in communication speech that could provide us with reliable evidence to find out various kinds of assimilation. However, I found out the valid and reliable information about true problems in assimilation in their pronunciation productive and perceptive skills through the survey. They are practical problems that many Quang Ngai students in Pham Van Dong University encountered.

## CHAPTER 4

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.1 DATA COLLECTED FROM STUDENTS' QUESTIONNAIRES

##### 4.1.1 Students' Attitudes towards the Importance of Language Skills

**Table 4.1: Students' assessment on the importance of language skill in learning English**

	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (84/ 39)		2 <sup>nd</sup> year (99/ 53)		3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (14/ 11)	
	No of Sts	(%)	No of Sts	(%)	No of Sts	(%)
197/ 103						
Listening 73 (37 %)	34	40.5	36	36.3	3	21.4
Speaking 90 (45.7 %)	30	35.7	52	52.5	8	57.1
Reading 14 (7.1 %)	8	9.5	5	5.1	1	7.1
Writing	12	12.3	6	6.1	2	14.3

20 (10.2 %)						
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As the result shown in Table 4.2, students in 1<sup>st</sup> year focused their choices on listening of 40.5% and then speaking of 35.7%. Meanwhile speaking skill was paid more attention to by students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year of 52.5% and 3<sup>rd</sup> year of 57.1%.

##### 4.1.2 Students' Attitudes towards the Importance of Pronunciation

The rate of 25.2% for the indicator of *yes but not much* in Table 4.6 made us a bit confident because pronunciation is not considered the main obstacle in speech improvement. However, 82.5 % marked *very important* in the role of pronunciation (shown in Table 4.3) brought us the understanding that students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year (30% assessed for *yes but not much*) felt strong enough in pronunciation if it is provable or not.

**Table 4.6: Students' assessment on pronunciation that causes problems in communication in English**

	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (39)		2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (53)		3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (11)	
	No of Sts	(%)	No of Sts	(%)	No of Sts	(%)
Yes 72 (69.9%)	32	82.0	32	60.4	8	72.7
No 4 (3.9%)	0	0	3	5.6	1	9.1
Don't know 1 (0.97%)	1	2.6	0	0	0	0
Yes but not much 26 (25,2%)	6	15.4	18	34.0	2	18.2

#### 4.1.3. Students' Assessment on Pronunciation in Casual and Natural Speech

The selection rate of very comfortable and with not much effort for the sound sequence of [faIt "pQv@tI] declined significantly (38.8%) due to the low number of 1st year students (17.9%) (as compared with students in 2nd year (50.9%) and 3rd year (54.5%)). Meanwhile 45.6% for the indicator of *not very comfortable and with a little effort* was considered quite high, mainly selected by students in 1st year (53.8%) and 2nd year (43.4%) as compared with students in 3rd year (27.3%). In which students in 1st year showed they lacked in confidence of sounding word "fight" ends in alveolar consonant /t/ and the following word "poverty" begins with bilabial /p/, for that reason they assumed *unable* of 5.1% and *don't know* of 2.6% (see in Table 4.14).

**Table 4.14: Students' assessment on pronunciation of ending sounds in fast and casual communication in the phrase of "fight poverty"**

[faIt "pQv@tI]	1 <sup>st</sup> Year (39)		2 <sup>nd</sup> Year (53)		3 <sup>rd</sup> Year (11)	
	No of Sts	(%)	No of Sts	(%)	No of Sts	(%)
103						
Very comfortable and with not much effort 40 (38.8%)	7	17.9	27	50.9	6	54.5
But not very comfortable and with a little effort 47 (45.6%)	21	53.8	23	43.4	3	27.3
With much effort	8	20.5	3	5.7	2	18.2

13 (12.6%)						
Unable 2 (1.9%)	2	5.1	0	0	0	0
Don't know 1 (0.97%)	1	2.6	0	0	0	0

#### 4.1.4 Students' Assumption towards the Differences of Careful and Natural Pronunciation

The figures as described in Table 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18 and 4.19 showed us that students in three groups were confident to say *yes* in the rates of 49.5% and 51.4% for the sound sequences of [kUd ju: help mi:] and [sI"lekt jO: "kQpI@(r)] in comparison with [pl&nt k@"mju:n@tI] (19.4%) and [red bIVd] (25.2%). It is necessary to pay some attention to the indicator of *don't know* in three groups as 26.2%, 29.1%, 37.9%, 21.4% and 27.2% for the sound sequences of [kUd ju: help mi:], [speIs "SVtl], [red bIVd], [pl&nt k@"mju:n@tI] and [sI"lekt jO: "kQpI@(r)] respectively.

#### 4.1.5 Students' Assumption on the Sound Changing between Careful and Natural Speech

In Table 4.20, we kept collecting students' responses on their possibilities of perception whether there were any differences between the ways of careful and natural pronunciation. This question designed aimed at getting information about all types of assimilation assumed by students so that we could not present all as well as its percentage

**Table 4.20: Students' assumption on the possibilities of sound sequence's changing**

The original sound	Students' transcriptions of the sound sequence assimilated
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sequence	1 <sup>st</sup> Year	2 <sup>nd</sup> Year	3 <sup>rd</sup> Year
kUd ju: help mi:	kUd jA: <sup>3</sup> , kUd@ <sup>3</sup> , kU jA:	kUd ju:, kUdu:, kUd chu:	kUd j@, kUd Íu:, kUd Zu:, kUd dZ@
speIs "SVtl	speIs "Vtl <sup>2</sup> , speIs "S@tl	speI "SVtl, speIs "Vtl	speI "SVtl, speIs "Vtl,
red blVd	re"blVd <sup>3</sup> ,	reb"blVd, re"plVd, rek"blVd	re"blVd, ret"blVd, rem"blVd
pl&nt k@"mju:n@tI	plA:nt @"mju:n@tI, plA:n k@"mju:n@tI,	pl&nd k@"mju:n@tI k@"mju:n@dI, pl&g @"mju:nIdI,	pl&nt k@"mju:nIdI, pl&nt k@"mju:nIdI, plA:m k@"mju:n@dI,
sI"lekt jO: "kQpI@(r)	sI"lekt jA: <sup>4</sup> , sI"lekt j@r <sup>3</sup> , sI"lekt O:, sI"lekt ch@, sI"lekt @r, sI"lektO:, sI"lekt chu:	sI"lekt j@, sI"lekch@, sI"lek ÍO: ,	sI"lek ZO: , sI"lek dZO:, sI"lek S@,

## 4.2 DATA COLLECTED FROM STUDENTS' DIAGNOSTIC TESTS

Students' perception via the diagnostic test showed that students in year 1 hardly recognized the assimilation in a sound sequence when speaking naturally and fast, they were asked to circle

the transcription that will be spoken by the native speakers, but mostly they circled the sounds as transcribed in the dictionary. After listening, there was a small number of them circling the assimilated sound sequences, including coalescent assimilation and T-voicing as in ["lA:stjI@], ["let@]. They seemed confused in perceiving labial assimilation on alveolar consonants as in [gUd "pleIs], ["get "b&k].

## 4.3 DISCUSSIONS OF THE RESULTS

### 4.3.1 Students' Attitude on the Improvement of Language Skills and Pronunciation

The 1<sup>st</sup> year students showed their eagerness on listening, maybe because they were new at the vocational environment, so they really wanted to apply what they received from secondary and high schools. Students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> seemed a bit more experienced in that they reflected that they were independent and confident of their knowledge to be ready for producing or sending messages rather than listening.

### 4.3.2 Students' Problems on Perception in terms of Assimilation in Casual and Natural Speech

The assimilation of before bilabial and velar was difficult and strange to them, especially to students in year 1, students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> said yes for the recognition of differences but they could not reflect how they would be assimilated. They transcribed such as [re"blVd], [replVd], [retblVd]. For the sound sequence of [pl&nt k@"mju:n@tI], some students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> recognized the T-voicing but not the velarization assimilation such as [pl&m k@"mju:n@dI], [pl&N k@"mju:n@dI], [pl&ng k@"mju:n@tI], [pl&n k@"mju:n@tI].

### 4.3.3 Students' Problems on Production in terms of Assimilation in Casual and Natural Speech

The same instance as it was in the phrase “defend yourself”, student seemed produce no final consonant /d/ by saying [ ]. Accordingly, while the word “defend” assimilated in Yod coalescence with the word “yourself” by the consonant /d/ in the native speech, these words are separate in student speech. The yellow wave of student appears less than this streak in the spectrogram of the native speaker. And the space between word and word in the speech of an American is closer than the counterpart of the student.

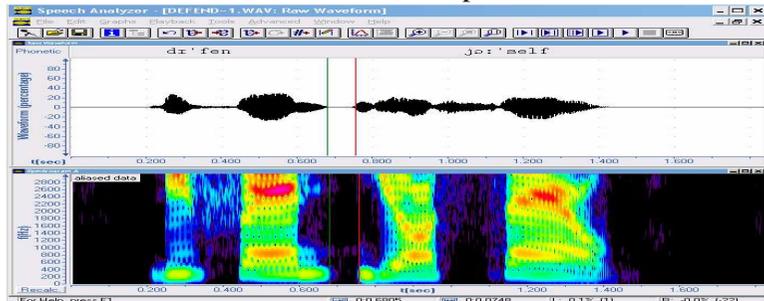


Figure 4.1 Spectrogram of sound sequence [dI'fend jO:self]

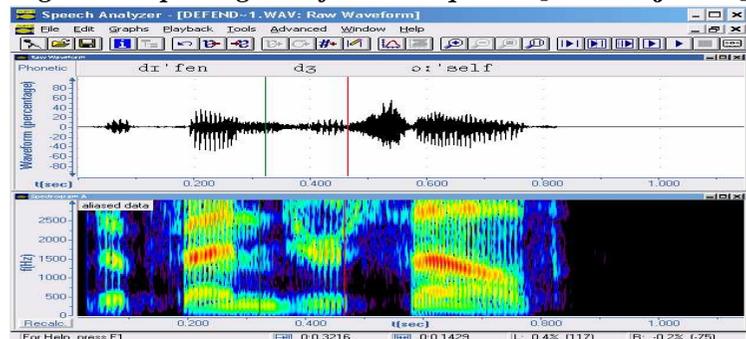


Figure 4.5 Spectrogram of sound sequence [dI'fend ZO:self]

### 4.3.4 The Causes of the Problems

Firstly, as showed in the results from the data analysis of the questionnaire, 47.6% of the students claimed that the differences between Vietnamese and English phonetic systems caused problems to students. They habitually dropped the ending sounds or enunciated them, which limited the possibilities of the influence of the neighboring sounds in coarticulation process.

Secondly, students' awareness of practicing assimilation process is not high enough. They actually focused on expressing their meaning much more than communicating fluently and naturally.

Thirdly, students' chances of communication with foreigners (39.1%) were really rare in Pham Van Dong University. There are not any native speaker experts in charge of speaking skill or pronunciation practice. Moreover, materials for pronunciation (11.5%), particularly for the practice of assimilation are not popularized.

### 4.4 PROPOSED MEASURES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' COMMUNICATION SKILL

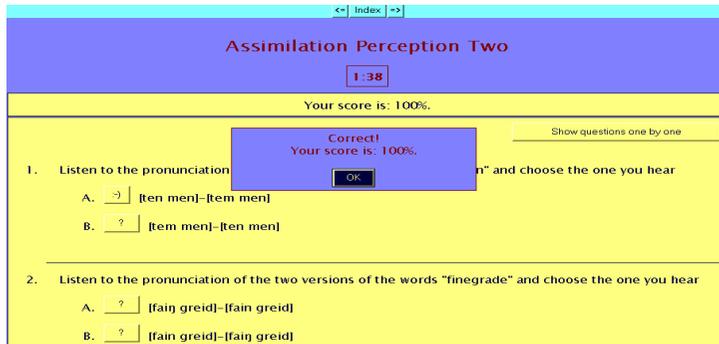
The first solution to be proposed is how to support students to practice pronunciation constantly. Not only the teachers who take responsibility of improving students' capability on communication skill but it is essential to get additional assistance from teachers of other language skills like reading, writing, grammar, etc.

It is necessary to generate speaking English environment as much as possible. Students will be able to experience in real communication at the natural and casual speech so that they will be adjusted and correct themselves as compared with what they really hear in practice.

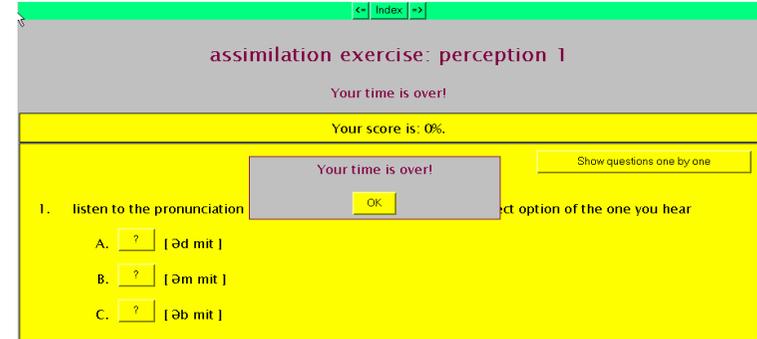
It is a good opportunity for students to surf the foreign languages website in order to practice pronunciation or listening if the teachers in charge of communication skill or phonetics would design exercises to upload by using the software of Hot Potatoes. (see the Figures from 4.16 to 4.24)



**Figure 4.16 Interface of the software to design exercises on computer**



**Figure 4.17 Display of scoring**

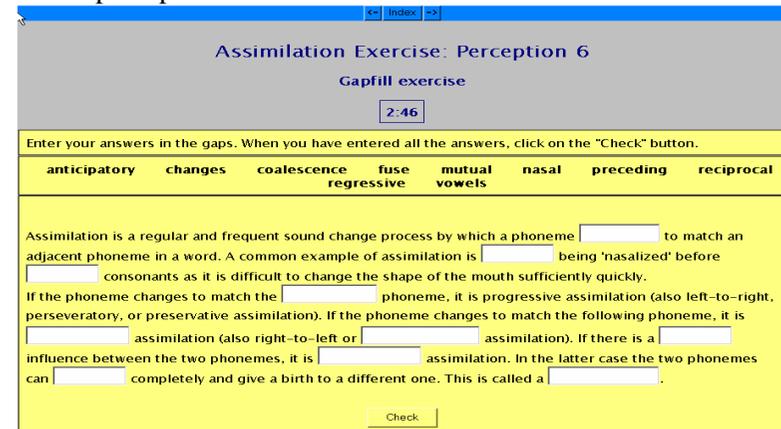


**Figure 4.18 Display of timing**

In Figures 4.17 and 4.18, these exercises help students much in the process of self- study, they may check the answer key by themselves or speed up the time of finishing the exercises.

Degree of difficulties should be increasing via free, semi-control and control exercises as they are designed in Figures from 4.17 to 4.24.

Perception 6 Exercise as described in Figure 4.22 is controlled by filling gaps to enlarge students' understanding on assimilation in terms of perception.



**Figure 4.22 Display of Controlling on Assimilation**

## 4.5 SUMMARY

### CHAPTER 5

#### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

##### 5.1 CONCLUSIONS

1. Although most students showed their attention to communication skill, they did not take into account of the phonetic features of sounds that are considered the prerequisite for linking and reducing sounds, which serve as one of the triggers or activators of assimilation.

2. When making speech or communication, students virtually focused on how to obtain both accuracy and fluency. In practice, enunciation in slow speech performed by students and the strong influence of the mother tongue actually hindered them from fluency. This manifested in the phonetic fact that they very often dropped the final sounds or had tendency to enunciate every word in stead of performing assimilatory sequences of sounds in casual and rapid speech, which cause them to drop ending sounds and fail to link neighbouring ones to create assimilation of various types.

3. It was found that no students in 1<sup>st</sup> year were able to recognize as well as to perform accurately assimilation in the sound sequences. Even though most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students could perceive confidently assimilation in the sound sequence at phrase and sentence levels, not many of them were capable of producing assimilation in natural and fast speech.

4. Students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 3<sup>rd</sup> year can differentiate skilfully the types of Yod coalescence (mutual assimilation) and T- voicing

(flapping); however, they actually met difficulties in bilabial and velar assimilation

5. The 1<sup>st</sup> year students have spent 45 periods of pronunciation practice but not of phonetics, so that they still showed their confusion of perception and production of assimilation. While students in 2<sup>nd</sup> year has just finished the phonetic course so they could recognize well the types of assimilation, specifically mutual assimilation and T-voicing. They also performed even better than the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students did. It is an unexpected result that the students in 3<sup>rd</sup> year still reflected their confidence on perception in terms of assimilation but not on production. Therefore, it is clear to see that the process of pronunciation practice did not go well with many students.

##### 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Students in the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> years also need time for pronunciation practice.

2. In Pham Van Dong University the website for each faculty has just been set up so that it were really a helpful access for students if teachers would upload the exercises with the support of pronunciation soft wares.

3. In terms of assimilation, during practicing, teachers should assign students to collect samples of assimilation performed.

4. Measures of assessment should be developed via softwares on computer set and should be conducted constantly to record the accurate progress of each student. It is also the effective option for self- study and self- assessment.

##### 5.3 LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

In the phase of searching for the study cases, we had to read a variety of books for references such as TOEFL, TOEFL iBT, IELTS, to choose appropriate books to look for the cases of assimilation. We decided to select TOEFL iBT for our study.

It is also suggested to further research to evaluate the textbooks that have been circulated at universities in the Central region of Vietnam in terms of assimilation in communication.