

DON'CHA KNOW?
A SURVEY OF ESL TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES
ON REDUCED FORMS INSTRUCTION

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ABSTRACT

The perceptual saliency of spoken English is often reduced creating variation in the way English is spoken in very formal contexts from more naturally occurring English. Reduced forms refer to basic elements of this naturally occurring spoken English, integral and pervasive elements of spoken English, that are seriously neglected in both research and materials development. Reduced forms occur in all registers and styles of speech with pragmatic and syntactic constraints inherent in their use. This study provides an overview of the current literature and a survey of ESL teachers' perspectives on reduced forms instruction. This paper also calls for more research into the role of reduced forms and the development of more authentic teaching materials that support the teacher in a systematic and effective approach to reduced forms instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Language teaching has developed from a time when grammar translation and drills were the norm to a more communicative process, with an emphasis on meaningful and authentic materials considered the most effective way of teaching. Despite this new emphasis on authenticity and communication, language learners still face difficult challenges when it comes to understanding natural native speaker conversations.

It's a common and frustrating experience that many second language learners can relate to. Students are taught grammar and vocabulary, and practice conversations and dialogues to learn a new language. Language teachers speak clearly and provide listening materials that are full of clearly pronounced and articulated speech. Language learners develop their listening and speaking skills based on this adapted English speaking style. Then they arrive at the host country and are shocked and dismayed to

find that native speakers don't actually speak in the way the language is written or in the ways their teachers and listening materials represent the language. The language outside of the classroom seems unfamiliar and fast, and the students are unable to decipher word boundaries or recognize words or phrases. Students who do not receive instruction or exposure to this type of 'real', naturally occurring language, are "going to have a very rude awakening when he [sic] tries to understand native speech in natural communicative situations" (Ur, 1987, p. 10).

All languages have this type of variation from written to spoken texts: "It results from a simple *law of economy*, whereby the organs of speech, instead of taking a new position for each sound, tend to draw sounds together with the purpose of saving time and energy" (Clarey & Dixon, 1963, p. 12). With English, this process of assimilation is combined with contractions, elision, and reduction to produce the connected speech commonly referred to as "reduced forms" (Brown & Hilferty, 1989). Naturally occurring English conversation, whether formal or informal, fast or slow, is full of these reduced forms. This creates a serious challenge for English as a second language (ESL) students who have little or no exposure to reduced forms.

Studies on this widely occurring aspect of English are very limited, yet those that are available are enlightening in that they reveal the complexity of spoken English as well as the dearth of research and materials available to teachers. The primary purpose of this paper is to examine the previous research related to reduced forms and review the various perspectives on how reduced forms should be dealt with inside the classroom with respect to both listening comprehension and pronunciation. I will begin by focusing on what reduced forms are and how they come about, then, turn my attention to the theoretical basis for teaching reduced forms, and then the practical suggestions currently available. Based on this literature review, a survey of ESL teachers' perspectives will be presented. Possible implications for further research will also be discussed.

The Role of Reduced Forms in Spoken English

Reduced forms have been defined as "native speakers' connected speech replete with its contracted forms, elision, liaison, and reduction" (Brown & Hilferty, 1989). In other words, the "real" English used in natural conversations. This type of variation from

written text to spoken text can also be described as sandhi-variation, “a phenomenon which reduces the overt markedness, or perceptual saliency, or morphemes” (Henrichsen, 1984, p. 103). Spoken English is full of reduced forms, for example, *wanna*, *hafta*, *kuz*, and *kinda*, for ‘want to’, ‘have to’, ‘because’, and ‘kind of’, respectively. These are just a few of the many examples of reduced forms in spoken English, which can also be referred to an aspect of “connected speech”.

Although many researchers have defined this occurrence as something that happens in “naturally occurring talk” or “real” spoken English (Jones & Ono, 2000; Guillot, 1999; Marks, 1999; Moh-Kim Tam, 1997; Buck, 1995; Norris, 1995; Hewings, 1993; Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Brown & Hilferty, 1989; Pennington & Richards, 1986; Richards, 1983; Gimson, 1974), many other researchers have classified reduced forms and connected speech as something that occurs in ‘fast’, ‘informal’, ‘relaxed’ or ‘casual’ speech (Norris, 1993; Henrichsen, 1984; Weinstein, 1982; Hill & Beebe, 1980; Brown, G., 1976), while still others neglect to mention this aspect of spoken English at all. Kaisse (1985) argues that connected speech and reduced forms are not informal or due to the rate of speech. Rather, Kaisse, citing Zwicky (1972) as providing the first influential treatment of connected speech, notes that “connected speech is not necessarily either fast or casual since there are rules of connected speech, such as French liaison, that apply at normal rates or even in slow, formal speech” (p. 8). Furthermore, “casual speech is not necessarily fast, nor fast speech necessarily casual” (Kaisse, 1985, p. 8). Reduced forms are a common and typical element of spoken English, found in all registers and all rates of speech. While register and rate may contribute to some rules of appropriateness or production in general, reduced forms affect all areas and types of spoken English.

The majority of literature on reduced forms is found in general English pronunciation texts which outline the stress-time aspect of the English language and the subsequent reduction of unstressed words. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) devote an entire chapter of their book *Teaching American English pronunciation* to “Connected Speech” as well as a chapter to “Word Stress and Vowel Reduction”. Pennington and Richards (1986) deem these “coarticulatory phenomena of the blending and overlapping of sounds in fluent speech” as the “third dimension of pronunciation” (p. 210). Prator and Robinett (1972), and Morley (1991) also devote specific attention to connected speech and reduced forms

as a product of the stress-timed language in their texts on pronunciation.

While English pronunciation can be examined at the segmental level, looking at the sounds of the consonants and vowels themselves, connected speech belongs to a suprasegmental level of pronunciation, focusing on the stress, time, intonation, and rhythm of pronunciation. English is typically considered a stress-timed language, implying a regular rhythm of stressed (and therefore unstressed) syllables. While many languages are based on syllable timing, in which each syllable receives about the same amount of stress, in English, it is primarily “content” words that receive stress while “structure” or “function” words remain unstressed. Content words are words which provide meaning, including nouns, main verbs, adverbs, adjectives, question words, and demonstratives. Function words serve primarily a grammatical function and include articles, prepositions, auxiliaries, pronouns, conjunctions, and relative pronouns (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, pp. 74-76).

Although it is widely accepted that English is a stress-timed language, it is important to note that some argue that English is not truly a stressed-time language. Marks (1999) argues that while this type of classification serves as the basis of most pedagogical approaches to pronunciation, there is no evidence that this is truly the nature of English. Marks asserts, “there are many factors which can disrupt the potential rhythm of a sentence, and we find very often that sentences are not spoken rhythmically at all—the rhythm may be only potential, or latent” (p. 193). Possibly the label ‘stress-timed’ is a convenient and practical pedagogic construct, located at one end point on a continuum with syllable-timed at the other end point.

Despite this question of the true nature of stress and rhythm in English, most researchers and teachers accept that English is primarily a stress-timed language. In order to keep the rhythm of the stress-timed language, function words are unstressed. Therefore, these words often become modified in spoken English; “natural-sounding pronunciation in conversational English is achieved through blends and omissions of sounds to accommodate its stress-timed rhythmic pattern” (Clark & Clark, 1977 as cited in Pennington & Richards, 1986, p. 208). Reduced forms are produced when these unstressed function words are blended, contracted, linked, deleted, assimilated, or reduced to combine with other function words as well as content words of a sentence.

The primary way sounds in function words are reduced is through the reduction of vowel sounds from their “strong” form to their “weak” form which replaces a long vowel sound with a schwa vowel sound (Hewings, 1993, p. 48). Auxiliary verbs are often contracted while other sounds, especially the /h/ found in many pronouns and the /d/ in ‘and’, are commonly deleted completely in reduced forms (Gimson, 2001, pp. 252-254). The linking of two words with consonant-consonant, consonant-vowel, and vowel-vowel boundaries is also typical, resulting in the pronunciation of only one sound instead of two. Assimilation is a similar process whereby the linking of consonant-consonant often changes the pronunciation of the first consonant, making it more similar to the second consonant. Palatization is another way in which function words become reduced and is found in many of the most common reduced forms. Palatization occurs when the tooth ridge sounds of /t/ and /d/ are pronounced further back in the mouth, closer to the hard palate, in the same place where the semi-vowel /y/ is pronounced. This occurs most commonly when the last sound of one word is /d/, /t/, or /s/ and the following word begins with the semi-vowel /y/, for example, *didja* and *wouldja*, for ‘did you’ and ‘would you’, respectively (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992, pp. 87-88).

Theoretical Perspectives on Reduced Forms Instruction

The rules for these combinations are very systematic, yet in all of the literature available to me, I have not found a complete text dedicated to these rules or to the framework of rules that affect the usage of reduced forms. If they are covered at all, most provide a very cursory review of the ways in which these can and cannot be combined or reduced. Hill and Beebe (1980) do provide a rather comprehensive set of rules and constraints for blending and contractions in written and spoken English, yet reduced forms and the linguistic and/or pragmatic constraints of usage are not specifically addressed. This is an area of research that is definitely limited with respect to reduced forms. In fact most of the research and literature related to reduced forms calls for increased study of the rules and ways in which reduced forms occur in spoken English (Jones & Ono, 2000; Buck, 1995; Morley, 1991; Rost, 1991; Brown & Hilferty, 1986; Pennington & Richards, 1986; Kaisse, 1985; Henrichsen, 1984).

Although the primary research and literature dealing with reduced forms is found in

pronunciation texts, it is obvious that the presence of reduced forms affects not only the pronunciation of second language learners, but also the listening comprehension of learners. While most descriptions of the process of reduction and the presence of reduced forms in English are from a pronunciation perspective, most research on the effects of reduced forms on ESL students focuses on their listening comprehension.

Listening itself is a complex skill. A listener does not have control of the information coming in and must actively receive and process the input. When the perceptual saliency of the input is reduced, the challenge for learners is significantly increased. Many texts on listening seem to focus on listening strategies yet it seems that strategies may be too broad to focus on when the very comprehension of natural spoken language may be the true challenge (Norris, 1995). In any case, reduced forms will play a role in the students' comprehension level as they are a major part of spoken English.

Henrichsen (1984) examined language learners' listening comprehension when the perceptual saliency of the input is reduced by sandhi variation (reduced forms). Assuming that listening comprehension is a compilation of input as well as the listener's expectations, Henrichsen hypothesizes that learners with a lower level of English proficiency will show a significant reduction in listening comprehension with the presence of sandhi variation. Henrichsen tested 65 ESL students with two different dictation tests, providing sentences with and without sandhi variation. The results show a significant relationship between level of proficiency and the effect of sandhi variation on the scores of the comprehension dictation tests. This correlation between proficiency level and comprehension is significant and enlightening for ESL teachers, yet fails to examine the effects of reduced-forms instruction on the comprehension of reduced forms in spoken English. While proficiency level may affect the listening comprehension of language learners, what role does the instruction of reduced forms play in listening comprehension?

Brown and Hilferty (1986) examined the effects of instruction of reduced forms on the listening comprehension of English as a foreign language (EFL) students. Thirty-two EFL students were randomly selected to make two groups, a control group and treatment group. Four weeks of daily 10-minute sessions focused on reduced forms were provided to the treatment group, while the control group received instruction on minimal pairs. All

students were administered dictation tests, which contained some of the reduced forms that had been part of the previous treatment. After four weeks of instruction, the treatment group showed a significant (almost twice as much) improvement in the reduced forms dictation test over the control group. Both Henrichsen (1984) and Brown and Hilferty (1986) provide significant and important discussions of these results that show the effects of reduced forms on comprehension and the effects of instruction of reduced forms on comprehension. The groundwork for examining what is available for English teachers and how reduced forms should best be taught is set through this research.

Jones and Ono (2000) compared textbook dialogues and actual conversations to examine if the ideal that real speech should be represented in textbooks is actually what occurs in textbooks. The conversations represented in textbook conversations and dialogues were compared with naturally occurring spoken language in order to “demonstrate convincingly that textbook dialogues do not reflect the ways in which real talk is produced in actual interactions” (p. 12). This disparity, they conclude, can be ameliorated by teachers and researchers taking a closer look at real language and increasing the exposure and understanding of real language for their students. G. Brown (1977) reiterated the importance of exposure to and awareness of authentic spoken English: “the main thing (in choosing listening material) is to avoid anything that was originally produced specifically for foreign use...” (p. 157). A. Brown (1995) proposed a common and currently very popular idea about this type of instruction, stating that this focus on authentic material should be matched with meaningful and communicative tasks. In contrast, there are those that support less authentic material that allows learners to focus on the stress-timed element of the language as a basis for learning about reduced forms. Marks (1999) suggests using rhyme and verse as a valuable tool to “provide a convenient framework for the perception and production of a number of characteristic features of English pronunciation which are often found to be problematic for learners” (p. 198). Possibly, the comprehension and awareness of reduced forms can be primarily learned through exposure to authentic and meaningful material while the practice of the pronunciation of reduced forms can employ more constructed dialogue and verse in order to maintain this focus.

In teaching reduced forms, this authentic materials disparity seems to stem from the

ongoing debate about whether to teach listening comprehension or actual production of reduced forms. Most of the literature on reduced forms to date, as limited as it is, promotes the instruction of reduced forms with a focus on comprehension over production, especially by second language learners who are not highly proficient (Norris, 1993, 1995; Hewings, 1993; Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Morley, 1991; Rost, 1991; Brown & Hilferty, 1989; Pennington & Richards, 1986; Hill & Beebe, 1980; Brown, G., 1977; Gimson, 1975). Most of these researchers and teachers contend that the level of proficiency required to use reduced forms successfully is very advanced, though all levels of learners can benefit from instruction on reduced forms, in order to increase both their comprehension and awareness of this element of spoken English. Avery and Ehrlich (1992) deal directly with 'connected speech' and the ways in which it is pronounced, yet follow this focus with the following conclusion:

...when our ESL students use 'wanna', 'gonna' and 'dunno', they often sound unnatural...we should probably not insist on having our students produce these forms until their spoken English is fairly advanced. We should, however, introduce these forms for recognition to even basic students as they appear frequently in spoken English (p. 89).

Hewings (1993) provides numerous exercises for pronunciation, yet warns before the pronunciation tasks of connected speech and reduced forms that the emphasis of the exercises is on "listening to the differences between the pronunciation of slow speech and connected speech, rather than on students producing these differences in their own speech" (p. 54). Hill and Beebe (1980) in an attempt to summarize the rules and constraints of blending and contractions, also conclude, "that teachers distinguish between normal speech blending and fast speech blending, encouraging students to develop productive controls over the former but only receptive control over the latter" (pp. 322-323). While these texts directly address the ways in which reduced forms should be taught, there is also literature that is focused specifically on listening comprehension and reduced forms or pronunciation and reduced forms.

The few comprehensive listening comprehension or pronunciation texts that specifically address reduced forms with respect to either of these elements, consider the role of instruction very integral in language learning. Buck (1995) asserts that the

“spoken language is subject to considerable phonological modification, and that words are pronounced very differently from their dictionary citation forms. Of course the changes are quite systematic and students need to learn how the system works” (p. 123). Obviously, Buck promotes instruction of reduced forms in teaching listening comprehension, yet the systematic knowledge that he proposes for instruction is still in need of development. Very little material is available on the systematic use of reduced forms. Norris (1993) also calls for a systematic knowledge of spoken English for increased listening comprehension: “In order to effectively help students improve their listening skills, teachers must be aware of the characteristics that mark informal spoken English” (p. 56). While these two examples recommend a systematic knowledge of reduced forms, they fail to mention that this has never been systematized. For example, Richards (1983) acknowledges that reduced forms are a factor that “influences the work listeners must do to process speech” (p. 224). And while Richards does provide some guidelines for approaching the teaching of listening (e.g., needs analysis, assessment, specific types of exercises), a systematic description of their use is not specifically addressed in the article. This type of treatment of reduced forms, where they are identified as a factor of spoken English, yet not concretely examined or described, is common throughout the literature.

With the literature specific to pronunciation, the treatment is rather similar. Reduced forms are often mentioned as a product of stress-timed language and an aspect of spoken English, but no truly in-depth analysis of reduced forms systems, constraints and nature is outlined. Richards and Pennington (1986) examine the broader focus of pronunciation teaching that has replaced older approaches of segmental pronunciation instruction using drills:

Teaching isolated forms of sounds and words fails to address the fact that in communication, many aspects of pronunciation are determined by the positioning of elements within long stretches of speech... (p. 218).

Richards and Pennington go on to call for more research on the nature of learning and teaching pronunciation. A. Brown (1995) also asserts that the focus in teaching pronunciation must shift away from segmental units of pronunciation, for example minimal pairs drills, and towards a super-segmental level of pronunciation, for example

stress, rhythm, intonation, and voicing. This type of treatment of pronunciation is common in current materials. Although it is beneficial that these aspects of pronunciation are now more in focus as an integral aspect of pronunciation, reduced forms are rarely specifically addressed. This is similar to the call for a systematic knowledge of reduced forms in teaching listening comprehension. While this would seem as though it would be necessary for instruction, this systematic evaluation of the rules and constraints of reduced forms is definitely in serious need of being developed. Furthermore, it appears that few researchers connect the pronunciation aspect of reduced forms with the listening comprehension aspect, dealing with these aspects as separate elements of spoken English.

There are those that propose a focus on both aspects—listening and pronunciation—in the process of teaching reduced forms. Morley (1991) suggests that, “attention to pronunciation-oriented listening instruction was an important component of traditional pronunciation teaching with a primary focus on sound discrimination and identification exercises” (p. 494). This attention to pronunciation while focusing on listening instruction may be a balance between the two elements. This balance is difficult to acquire, with the few researchers who discuss both of these aspects related to reduced forms recognizing the relationship between the two elements, yet often leaning towards one element as a primary focus. Brown and Hilferty (1989) focused primarily on listening comprehension in their study of reduced forms at the Guangzhou English Language Center (UCLA/China Exchange Program), yet question this focus after the treatment was completed. Gimson (1975) directly addresses this issue in the introduction of *A practical course of English pronunciation*, stating clearly:

Before we try to produce sounds which are new to us, it is therefore essential that we should perceive the differences between the sounds in the new language, and between the new sounds and those of own language with which we have become so familiar. This is what the present course sets out to do: drills of listening and discrimination, and only then attempts at performance. (p. 1)

Gimson is not ruling out the instruction of reduced forms as either a listening or pronunciation aspect of learning, but rather first a listening process and then the production process. This supports the idea of raising students' awareness of reduced

forms. Students need to know that what they are listening for in spoken English is different than how it is written. Once this awareness is raised, students can then work on producing this type of spoken English. This goes along with issues of proficiency levels of learners. Beginning level learners will not have the same ability as higher-level proficiency learners in incorporating all elements of reduced forms (Henrichsen, 1984).

Practical Suggestions for Reduced Forms Instruction

Based on this broad range of theories on how reduced forms should be taught, various types of instruction have been suggested. Although the focus of instruction may vary due to proficiency level, all of the exercises and instructional approaches that have been suggested can be adapted for any proficiency level in order to, at the very least, raise learners' attention to the presence of reduced forms in spoken English. Openly discussing and identifying common reduced forms and increasing students' exposure to reduced forms with authentic listening materials is a common suggestion for introducing reduced forms and awareness-raising practices (Guillot, 1999; Rost, 1991; Brown & Hilferty, 1989; Koster, 1987; Snow & Perkins, 1979). Included in these awareness-raising activities are exercises that have students writing in their journals about their personal listening experiences with reduced forms and practicing self-monitoring (Norris 1993, 1995; Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Rost, 1991). With an increased awareness of reduced forms, practice with reduced forms is valued over study of reduced forms, "letting foreign language students listen frequently to the spoken language with all the characteristics of connected speech is no doubt more important than familiarizing them with the theoretical aspects of, for instance, assimilation...practice is much more important than theory" (Koster, 1987, p. 143).

This focus on practice with authentic materials is supported by many other researchers and authors (e.g., Buck, 1995; Rost, 1991; Brown & Hilferty, 1989; Prator & Robinett, 1972). Some of the exercises suggested to promote practice include cloze tests and dictation (Norris, 1993, 1995; Avery & Ehrlich, 1992; Brown & Hilferty 1989), analyzing spoken and written texts for stress and rhythm (Guillot, 1999; Norris 1993, 1995; Prator & Robinett, 1972), and read aloud exercises (Moh-Kim Tam, 1997; Prator & Robinett, 1972). Meaningful, purposeful, communicative task-based exercises to

provide this practice must also be a factor incorporated into these activities (Moh-Kim Tam, 1997; Brown, A., 1995; Buck, 1995; Norris 1993, 1995; Snow & Perkins, 1979).

These exercises and suggestions can be very helpful for teachers, but only in a day-to-day way, when what would really benefit teachers and students would be a more thorough understanding of the relationship between listening and pronunciation and the rules and constraints (linguistically and pragmatically) of using reduced forms. This deeper, more systematic knowledge of reduced forms does not need to take away from meaningful and authentic practice with reduced forms. Rather, with a more systematic understanding of how reduced forms work, teachers will be better equipped to guide their students' practice and can promote the development of more authentic and effective teaching materials.

There are of course a multitude of factors that affect language learners' listening and pronunciation development. Awareness, proficiency levels, and saliency are all factors that are directly related to the teaching of reduced forms. Possibly the ways listening and pronunciation are taught may depend more on the goals or needs of students over any of the other factors cited above.

In reviewing the literature on reduced forms, how they come about, and how they should be taught, the lack of relevant research becomes very evident. Obviously, more research is needed in all areas of reduced forms. Many have cited raising the awareness of learners as an integral factor in improving both learners' comprehension and pronunciation of reduced forms. I believe that teachers and researchers also need to raise their own awareness of the role of reduced forms in language learning. Future research should seek to clarify the ways in which reduced forms are used. The focus and approach of teaching reduced forms should also be further researched. It would be helpful to analyze the current treatment of reduced forms in available teaching materials as well as a general survey into teachers' attitudes and practices when it comes to reduced forms. It is only through more research and more awareness of the systematic and pervasive role of reduced forms in spoken English and in language learning that we will begin to answer some of these pertinent questions and be able to provide language students with a systematic framework and practice with which to learn.

In order to understand more clearly the current situation in the classroom with regard

to reduced forms and English teaching, a survey of ESL teachers was conducted. The purpose of the survey was to investigate the perspectives of ESL instructors toward reduced forms and English teaching as well as to understand their familiarity with the role of reduced forms in spoken English. The primary research questions were the following:

1. How familiar are ESL instructors with the role of reduced forms in spoken English?
2. What are ESL teachers' perspectives on the role of reduced forms in teaching listening comprehension?
3. What challenges do ESL instructors face with respect to reduced forms instruction?

METHOD

Participants

A total of 52 survey questionnaires were distributed to ESL instructors throughout Oahu. This included nine surveys that were distributed directly to ESL teachers at the Hawai'i TESOL Conference held in February, 2003 in Honolulu, 16 surveys delivered to all the ESL teachers at the Hawaii English Language Program (HELP) at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, 17 surveys delivered to all the ESL teachers at the English Language Institute (ELI) at the University of Hawaii, Manoa, and 10 surveys sent to ESL teachers at Brigham Young University Hawaii (BYUH). All the surveys, except those that were done at the TESOL Conference, were delivered to the teachers' school mailboxes.

Teachers were able to return the surveys to one volunteer teacher at their school who collected them, or to the researcher's mailbox directly. Of these surveys, 13 out of 16 were returned completed from HELP, 15 out of 17 were returned completed from ELI, and eight out of 10 were returned completed from BYUH. All nine of the surveys administered at the TESOL conference were completed and returned on the same day.

Of the 45 respondents, ESL teaching experience ranged from half a year to 35 years. Thirty-four of the teachers were native speakers of English, and 11 of the teachers were non-native speakers of English, with first languages including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, and Portuguese. Thirty-seven of the teachers also spoke a second, and often third or fourth language, including Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Spanish, Portuguese,

German, French, Russian, Hebrew, Tongan, Vietnamese, and Nepali. The teachers predominantly were involved in intensive English programs as well as English for academic purposes. Two of the teachers were teaching at high school level, while the remaining 43 were teaching at the University or adult levels. Forty of the forty-five teachers had experience teaching reduced forms, five had never taught reduced forms.

Materials

The survey used in this study was developed from an original pilot study involving 17 ESL/EFL teachers enrolled in the UH Manoa Second Language Studies Department graduate program in ESL. Based on this pilot study, and after much feedback and multiple revisions, the final version of the survey was developed (see Appendix). The resulting survey is two pages long and includes 17 questions. Teachers reported that the survey took an average of about five minutes to complete.

The survey began with a short introduction, stating the purpose of the study and a very brief explanation of what exactly the phrase “reduced forms” refers to. There were also three questions directed towards the biographical data of the respondents, including how long they have taught ESL, what languages they speak, and the type of program they are involved with. Fifteen of the seventeen questions were closed-response items, offering either Yes or No options, Likert scales, or checklists in which teachers could check as many elements as were applicable. The items were first aimed at establishing the amount of knowledge and familiarity teachers have with the role of reduced forms in English, followed by items focused on their own experiences and perspectives with teaching reduced forms, and finally on the challenges they face in teaching reduced forms. Two open-ended questions finished out the survey by asking teachers what they would like to see in the future with regard to reduced forms and asking for any further comments the teachers might have.

Like most survey instruments, it should be noted that, despite the multiple revisions of the survey, some teachers found that a few of the closed-response items on the survey did not fully represent their opinions. The most common occurrence of this was in item eight, in which teachers were asked to identify how much time they typically devote to reduced forms instruction in any typical class. Six of the forty teachers who had

experience teaching reduced forms chose not to answer this as they noted it depended on a multitude of factors and they could not provide a generalization. Despite some of these difficulties with a closed-response format, for the most part, teachers were able to complete the survey successfully without too much (written) disapproval.

Procedures

The survey was developed over a period of four months and distributed personally to the office mailboxes of all ESL teachers involved in the ELI and HELP. They were also distributed directly to the office mailboxes of ten ESL instructors at the BYUH campus. The surveys distributed at the TESOL Conference were completed on site. All of the TESOL conference surveys were completed and returned to the researcher the day of the conference. Of the teachers who received their surveys in their office mailboxes, teachers had the option of returning the survey directly to the researcher, dropping the survey off in the researcher's office mailbox, or dropping the survey off with a co-operating teacher involved in their personal ESL program. The teachers were primarily chosen to take part in this survey because of their current involvement in ESL instruction and their involvement in local ESL programs.

The return rate was quite high, with 87% of the total surveys distributed being returned completed. I believe there are two possible reasons for this high return rate. First, all of the teachers involved were active in ESL teacher training and development, as they were working in programs connected with University ESL programs or taking part in the local TESOL conference. Secondly, the format of the survey was clear and the items were brief.

The completed surveys were coded and the results tabulated. First the overall results were analyzed for general trends among all the teachers. This was followed by an analysis of the results when teachers' answers were organized by specific groups, for example, comparing the responses of teachers with fewer than three years teaching experience to those with three to ten years of experience and those with over ten years experience.

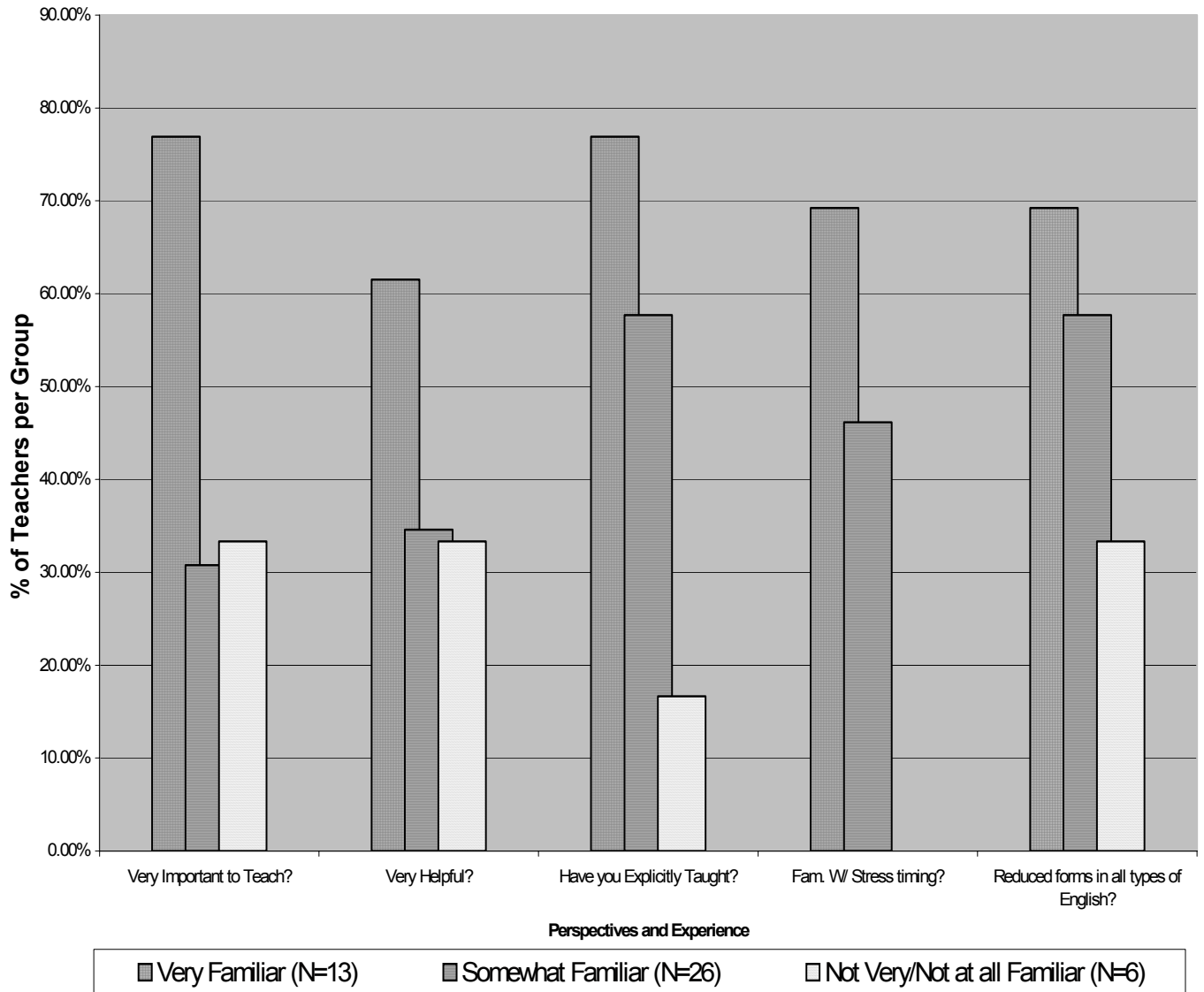
RESULTS

Of the 45 teachers surveyed, 47% (21 teachers) had taken courses on teaching listening comprehension, 20 of these teachers had received instruction on the role of reduced forms in teaching ESL listening comprehension. Only 20 of all 45 teachers had received any training in reduced forms instruction. Twenty-five of the teachers learned about reduced forms from ESL textbooks. Twenty-six of the teachers felt that they were *Somewhat Familiar* with the role of reduced forms in English, while 13 teachers felt they were *Very Familiar* with reduced forms in spoken English, and six chose *Not Very Familiar* or *Not at all Familiar*.

Teachers' Self-Assessed Familiarity with Reduced Forms

Those 13 teachers who chose *Very Familiar* in regard to the role of reduced forms in spoken English also had more training in teaching reduced forms, including taking courses on teaching ESL listening comprehension in which reduced forms instruction was covered, as well as other teacher training that covered reduced forms and information from ESL textbooks. Although over 90% of all the teachers were familiar with linking, deletions, and contractions, and over 80% were familiar with assimilation and the English vowel sound of schwa, these teachers who considered themselves *Very Familiar* consistently had higher average familiarity with these listed aspects of reduced forms. As shown in Figure 1, the most significant difference was in the stress-timed aspect of English. These teachers were much more familiar with the stress-timed aspect of English, with 69% of these teachers marking this option, compared to 46% for those who chose *Somewhat Familiar* and none for those who chose *Not at all Familiar*.

Figure 1. Teacher's self-rating of familiarity with reduced forms compared with key elements of reduced forms.



Another aspect that differentiated these teachers was in item number three which asks teachers to best identify the role of reduced forms instruction. Option one described reduced forms as most often occurring in “fast spoken English”. Option two described reduced forms as most often occurring in “casual, informal spoken English”. Option three described reduced forms as occurring in “all types of spoken English”. Fifty-eight percent of all teachers chose option three, considering reduced forms to be a part of all

types of English. Sixty-nine percent of those who considered themselves *Very Familiar* with the role of reduced forms chose option three, compared to 58% of those that had marked they were *Somewhat Familiar*, and only 33% of those who had marked that they were *Not very Familiar* or *Not at all Familiar*.

Teachers' Experience with Reduced Forms Instruction

Forty of the 45 teachers had experience teaching reduced forms. Of these 40, 73% had addressed reduced forms in class when they have come up in context and 58% had explicitly taught reduced forms. Fifty-three percent of the teachers had addressed reduced forms with respect to listening comprehension, while 49% of the teachers had addressed reduced forms with respect to pronunciation.

The group of teachers who had explicitly taught reduced forms (58% of total teachers) had slightly more teaching experience on average, with similar amounts of teacher training dealing with teaching reduced forms. This group considered reduced forms to be *Very important* in teaching ESL listening comprehension, with 58% choosing this option in response to the item "Do you consider reduced forms to be an important element to teach in ESL listening comprehension?" Those who had not taught reduced forms explicitly were more likely to consider reduced forms instruction to be *Somewhat important* in teaching reduced forms instruction (63%). It is important to note that 42 of the 45 teachers considered reduced forms instruction *Somewhat* to *Very important*, with those who had experience explicitly teaching reduced forms more often choosing *Very important*. Forty-three of the 45 total teachers considered it *Very helpful* to *Somewhat helpful* to teach reduced forms (19 and 24, respectively), again with those teachers with experience teaching reduced forms more often explicitly supporting this. It is also interesting to note that those teachers who had explicitly taught reduced forms report on average that their students seem more interested in the instruction compared to teachers who had not explicitly taught reduced forms.

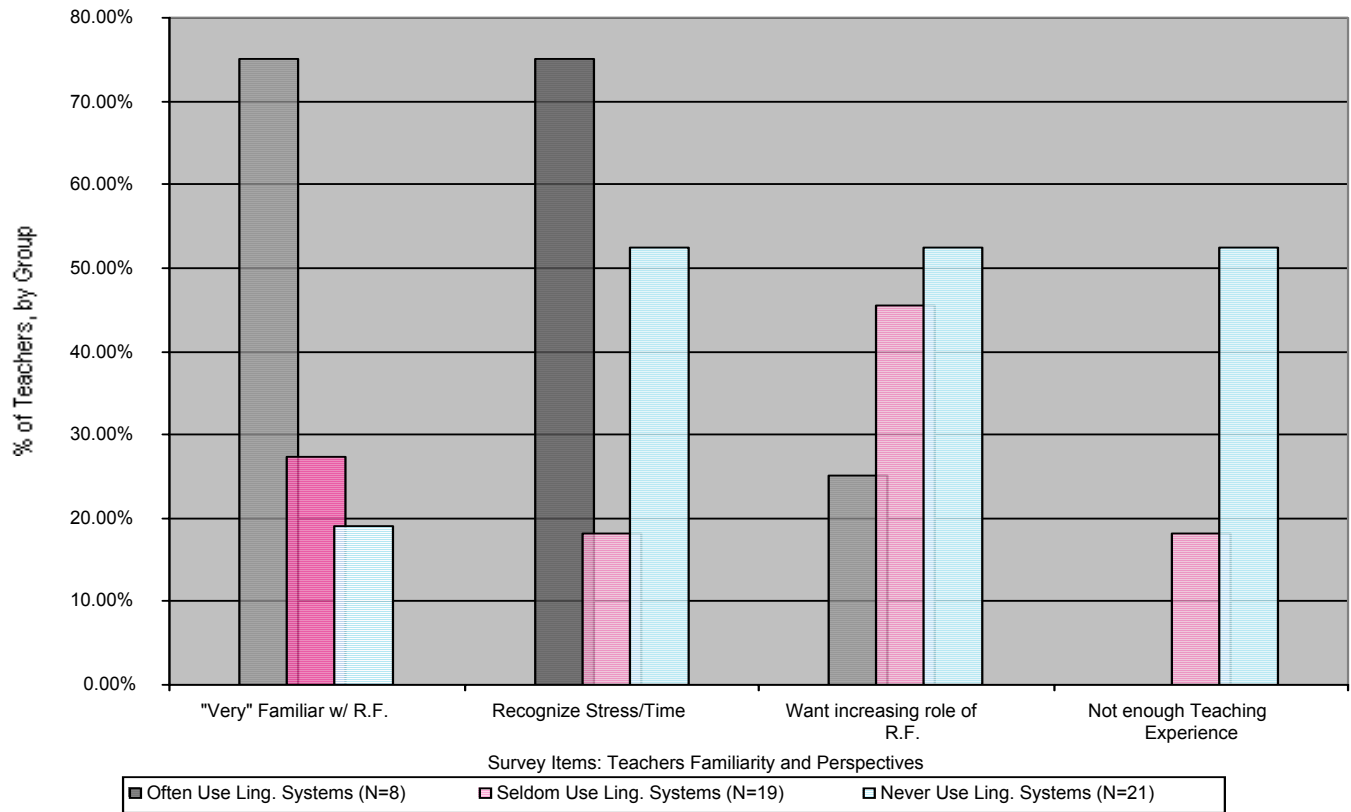
Teachers' Use of Linguistic and Pragmatic Systems with Reduced Forms Instruction

Twenty percent of the teachers often taught reduced forms as a system of linguistic rules and constraints, 48% often taught reduced forms as a system of pragmatic rules and

constraints, and 75% often taught reduced forms within context, using common examples. Teaching reduced forms as a linguistic system of rules and constraints was the least common response, with 53% of the teachers choosing *Never* to the statement “I teach reduced forms as a system of linguistic rules and constraints.” Only 12% of the teachers chose *Never* to the statement “I teach reduced forms as a system of pragmatic rules and constraints”. Seven percent of the teachers chose *Never* to the statement “I teach reduced forms with in context, using common examples.”

The teachers who most often taught linguistic systems when teaching reduced forms were those teachers who considered themselves *Very familiar* with the role of reduced forms, who most often considered reduced forms to occur in all types of spoken English, and who were also most aware of the stress-timed concept of spoken English. As shown in Figure 2, the teachers who seldom taught reduced forms using linguistic systems, or never taught using linguistic systems, wanted to increase the role of reduced forms instruction in their classrooms. These teachers cited *Not enough experience teaching* of reduced forms as one of the main challenges in their instruction. None of the teachers who used linguistic systems in their instruction cited this as a challenge to their instruction, rather most often citing *Not enough time* (62.50%) as the main challenge of instruction. Another challenge cited in reduced forms instruction was *Not enough material*. Fifty-seven percent of the teachers that *Never* taught reduced forms using linguistic systems marked this option, 45% of those who *Seldom* used linguistic systems in instruction marked this option, and only 25% of those who *Often* used linguistic systems in the instruction of reduced forms marked this option.

Figure 2. Teachers' perspectives on reduced forms, grouped by experience teaching reduced forms as a linguistic system of rules and constraints.



Challenges and Needs of Teachers

Most teachers typically spend 10% or less of any typical class session on reduced forms instruction. Forty-two percent of the teachers cited *Not enough material* and *Not enough time* as the primary challenges they face in reduced forms instruction, as well as 40% of the teachers citing *Not in the curriculum*. Forty-four percent of the teachers would like to see the role of reduced forms instruction increasing in their classroom, while 56% were satisfied with the amount of reduced forms instruction in their classrooms.

In response to the open ended item, “What would you like to see in the future with regard to reduced forms instruction?”, 35 teachers responded. Fifty-four percent of those who responded called for more materials on reduced forms. Twenty percent of the teachers called for more instruction and materials available that address the pragmatic

aspects of reduced forms. One such respondent wrote, “Social attachment (meaning) in use of reduced forms is very difficult to explain/teach to students No correct pragmatic rules and explanation pragmatically” (sic). Another respondent stated, “More emphasis on how the use of reduced forms varies. For example, understanding/comprehending reduced forms is important, but students who will use English as a lingua franca with other NNSs might become less comprehensible if they use too many reduced forms. They need to be aware of this.” Fourteen percent of the respondents would like to see more teacher training with respect to reduced forms. Other answers ranged from a focus in all four skill areas to those who would like a focus on authentic materials for listening or speaking.

DISCUSSION

Clear trends emerged from the survey, providing answers to the research questions as well as suggesting areas for the development of pedagogical application and further research.

How Familiar Are ESL Instructors with the Role of Reduced Forms in Spoken English?

ESL instructors consider themselves familiar with the role of reduced forms in spoken English, though teachers have little specific training in reduced forms instruction, with most information stemming from ESL texts. These texts rarely develop the systematic linguistic and pragmatic constraints of reduced forms, rather focusing solely on common examples. Those teachers that received more training in reduced forms instruction were also those who more often explicitly taught reduced forms, including the linguistic systems of reduced forms. A majority of the teachers were familiar with most of the elements involved with reduced forms except for the element of stress-timing in spoken language. This may explain why instructors tend to teach in context, with common examples, rather than through the system of linguistic rules and constraints.

Fifty-eight percent of the teachers identified reduced forms as occurring in all types of language while 42% chose reduced forms as occurring in casual, informal spoken

English. This 42% identifies with the role of reduced forms that is most often supported by current ESL textbooks, which typically supply common examples of reduced forms in casual, informal English conversation with little information about the systems in place that produce them. So while there was little direct training in reduced forms instruction, the majority of teachers felt familiar with the role of reduced forms in spoken English and had some experience teaching them. Possibly due to this lack of specific training, very little time is spent on reduced form instruction, and when it is taught, it is typically taught using common examples. This despite the fact that most teachers (especially those who explicitly teach reduced forms) report their students seem *Very* or *Somewhat interested* in reduced forms.

In response to this trend, more materials must be developed both for teachers and students that go beyond supplying common examples of reduced forms. These materials should provide teachers, and consequently their students, with more information about the role of reduced forms in spoken English and the systems in place that produce and affect them.

What Are ESL Teachers' Perspectives on the Role of Reduced Forms in Teaching Listening Comprehension?

Almost all of the teachers considered reduced forms to be an important and helpful aspect of a learner's listening comprehension, yet most teachers typically spend 10% or less of any typical class session on reduced forms instruction. Moreover, more than half of teachers believed reduced forms occur in all types of spoken English, which would seem to further strengthen its important and beneficial role in ESL instruction, yet these perspectives do not change the small amount of instruction learners receive on reduced forms in spoken English.

Although the majority of teachers felt reduced forms occur in all types of spoken English, when reduced forms were taught, most of the teachers covered only the common examples found in context, rather than explicitly teaching reduced forms within their linguistic and pragmatic systems. The 18 teachers who had taught reduced forms explicitly were also those who had the most training, felt the most familiar with reduced forms, recognized the stress-timed element of English more, and more often taught the

linguistic systems of reduced forms. These teachers were also those who on average rated their students' interest in reduced forms instruction the highest.

Almost all of the 45 teachers reported that the overwhelming majority of their students seemed *Somewhat* to *Very interested* in reduced forms instruction. The students' apparently high level of interest in this topic not only shows the teacher how helpful and important reduced forms instruction is, but also reaffirms to the teacher that reduced forms are indeed a valid and integral aspect of spoken English. One teacher commented that the teacher's perception of their students' interest was "not relevant". I argue that students' interest is directly related to student motivation and needs. The students are interested in those aspects of English that affect them (for example, reduced forms, which occur throughout all spoken English). Furthermore, the attitude of the students towards this aspect of spoken English must affect the teacher's own perspectives on reduced forms instruction.

The final item on the survey was an open response item, asking teachers for any insights or opinions that were not covered by the survey that they felt were important. Three of the comments exemplify the range of perspectives on reduced forms instruction. One teacher, who had not had specific training in reduced forms, but did consider reduced forms to be in all types of spoken English, and had taught reduced forms in context, wrote:

In most (but certainly not all) cases, teaching formal usage and yes, even *formal* [italics added] pronunciation serves students best. Reduced forms are a real part of the language, but they can be learned without heavy emphasis.

Another teacher, who felt that reduced forms most often occur in casual, informal English, and addressed reduced forms only in context, wrote:

So much depend on the purpose of their English classes. If the purpose is just *conversational* [italics added] English, it is much more important than *academic, formal* [italics added] English, where it is less important to stress.

The final example comes from a teacher who had specific training in teaching reduced forms in each training context given in the survey. This teacher also identified reduced forms as occurring in all types of spoken English, and wrote:

I have had students (who never were exposed to R.F.) [sic] tell me that for the first

time, they felt they were truly learning, plus, the confidence factor is relevant. I'd see student faces after I talked with other native speakers, their confidence could be shattered. We didn't use textbook English.

All of these teachers spoke from personal experience. Yet, it is interesting that the first two examples, which de-emphasize the role of reduced forms instruction, use the terms *formal* and *conversational* (or rather, "*just*" *conversational*) and *academic*, while the third teacher described two native speakers (NS) talking in front of a non-native speaker (NNS). It seems as though the first two, while possibly raising valid points about the value of needs analysis, seem to ignore the fact that in formal and academic, as well as conversational, language two NSs will not speak in "textbook English", but rather will use reduced forms, or connected speech. The more the NNS students are aware of these phenomena, the more they will be able to successfully comprehend and communicate in all areas of communication, including academic and formal settings.

Along with the development of more materials for teachers and students, more teacher training with respect to reduced forms instruction is necessary in order to more closely tie teachers' mostly positive perspectives on reduced forms instruction with their actual in-class experiences.

What Challenges Do ESL Teachers Face with Respect to Reduced Forms Instruction?

The question arises, then, if teachers feel, in general, that reduced forms instruction is important and helpful, and that reduced forms occur in all types of spoken English, and that their students seemed to be *Very to Somewhat interested* in reduced forms, why is there such a limited focus on reduced forms in the classroom? Forty-two percent of the teachers cited *Not enough material* and *Not enough time* as the primary challenges they face in reduced forms instruction, and 40% of the teachers cited *Not in the curriculum*. The primary concern of the five teachers who had not taught reduced forms at all was *Not enough available material*.

In the open-ended responses, 35 teachers provided answers to the item, "What would you like to see in the future with regard to reduced forms instruction". Nineteen of the 35 teachers called for more material to be developed. Seven specifically mentioned materials for pragmatics and five called for teacher training. While lack of time is a

challenge for teachers, lack of material is what may in fact keep teachers from more instruction. Teachers themselves would like more material that promotes reduced forms instruction beyond what is now available.

CONCLUSIONS

As with any research, there are limitations to this study. To begin with, the survey instrument itself could have been improved to provide more options on the Likert scales. Also some questions were possibly not clear enough, for example, item eight which asked how much time in general a teacher may spend on reduced forms. Sixteen of the 45 teachers felt uncomfortable with the available choices and wrote in an alternative answer, commented on the answer they chose, or skipped this item all together.

The survey also did not delve into specifics of instruction that may have been of interest for materials development or future research. For example, the survey failed to ask any questions related to different proficiency levels and instruction. The survey also did not differentiate enough between reduced forms instruction with respect to listening comprehension and pronunciation. Despite these limitations, the survey did provide an insightful summary of ESL instructors' knowledge, perspectives, and challenges when teaching (or not teaching, as more often is the case) reduced forms in spoken English.

This paper has attempted to provide an overview of the current literature on reduced forms and an analysis of ESL teachers' opinions and perspectives on teaching reduced forms. It has become clear throughout this process that reduced forms are an integral and pervasive aspect of spoken English that is seriously neglected in both research and materials development. Without further research into the role and systematic nature of reduced forms in English, and the effects of teaching reduced forms, little will change. Materials must also be developed that answer the needs of the teachers. Furthermore, these materials must be developed in a systematic way, which not only introduces common examples, but the linguistic and pragmatic systems that go along with these forms. Along with these materials, teachers should have the opportunity for teacher training in the role of reduced forms in spoken English, and the effects of reduced forms instruction. Hopefully, with the importance of authentic materials becoming more and

more the fashion of English listening and speaking materials, the importance and significance of reduced forms as a major aspect of communication will increase in the awareness of researchers, teachers, materials developers, and students.

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APPENDIX

UH Manoa M.A. survey Spring 2003 All information will remain confidential and anonymous.

The purpose of this survey is to investigate the opinions, perspectives, and attitudes of ESL instructors towards the teaching of reduced forms. Reduced forms refer to a common aspect of spoken English. Another name for reduced forms could be "connected speech". (For example, some common reduced forms are "gonna" for "going to" or "couldja" for "could you".)

How long have you taught ESL? _____

First language _____ Other Languages _____

Type of program _____

1. Have you taken courses on teaching ESL listening comprehension? _____ YES _____ NO
 If so, were teaching reduced forms covered in these courses? _____ YES _____ NO
 Were reduced forms covered in any of your teacher training? _____ YES _____ NO
 Did you learn about reduced forms from ESL textbooks? _____ YES _____ NO
 2. How well do you understand the role of reduced forms in spoken English?
 _____ Very well _____ Some what familiar _____ Not very familiar _____ Not at all
 3. Which description *best* reflects your view of the use of reduced forms? (Please check one.)
 _____ Reduced forms occur most often in fast spoken English.
 _____ Reduced forms occur most often in casual, informal spoken English.
 _____ Reduced forms occur in all types of spoken English.
 4. Please check all the following aspects of reduced forms with which you are familiar:
 _____ Assimilation of sounds
 _____ Linking of sounds
 _____ Deletions of sounds
 _____ Contractions
 _____ Stress-timed languages
 _____ Identifying content words and structure words
 _____ The English schwa sound
 _____ Other _____
 5. Do you consider reduced forms to be an important element to teach in ESL listening comprehension?
 _____ Very important _____ Somewhat important _____ Not very important _____ Not important at all
 6. How helpful do you feel reduced forms instruction might be for your students' listening comprehension?
 _____ Very helpful _____ Somewhat helpful _____ Not very helpful _____ Not helpful at all
 7. Have you taught reduced forms in your classes? (Please check all that apply.)
 _____ I have explicitly taught reduced forms in my class.
 _____ I have addressed reduced forms in my class when they have come up in context.
 _____ I have addressed reduced forms with respect to student's pronunciation.
 _____ I have addressed reduced forms with respect to student's listening comprehension.
 _____ I have never taught reduced forms in my classes.
 _____ Other _____
- If you have never taught reduced forms, please skip to question 14.**
8. In any given class session (for example one 50 minute class period), how much time do you typically devote to reduced forms instruction?
 _____ 100% _____ 80% _____ 60% _____ 40% _____ 20% _____ 10% _____ 0%
 9. With respect to reduced forms instruction, what percentage of your students seem to be:
 Very Interested? _____ %
 Somewhat Interested? _____ %
 Not very interested? _____ %
 Not interested at all? _____ %
 Other? _____
 10. I teach reduced forms as a system of *linguistic* rules and constraints.
 _____ Often _____ Seldom _____ Never
 11. I teach reduced forms as a system of *pragmatic (appropriate social contexts)* rules and constraints.
 _____ Often _____ Seldom _____ Never
 12. I teach reduced forms within context, using common examples.
 _____ Often _____ Seldom _____ Never

13. What are the challenges you face when teaching reduced forms: (Please check all that apply)
- Not enough time available in the course.
 - Not identified as a need by the students.
 - Not enough available material.
 - Not in the curriculum.
 - Not enough experience teaching reduced forms.
 - Other _____
14. Even if you have not yet taught reduced forms, what challenges do you think you might face: (Please check all that might apply)
- Not enough time available in the course.
 - Not identified as a need by the students.
 - Not enough available material.
 - Not in the curriculum.
 - Not enough experience teaching reduced forms.
 - Other _____
15. Would you like to see the role of reduced forms in your own ESL classroom in the future
- Increasing Staying the same Decreasing
16. What would you like to see in the future with regard to reduced forms instruction?

17. Are there any insights or perspectives about reduced forms not covered by this survey that you think are important or valuable?

Thank you for your time and cooperation. The results of this survey will be written up as a scholarly paper at UH Manoa ESL Department. If you have any questions or concerns, you can reach me at imoana@iwon.com. If you would like a copy of the results of this paper, please provide your email address.

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