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Autosegmental Features, Part 2**More on Pronunciation and Object Pronouns**

There's something very interesting that concerns pronunciation in the first three examples of the *Heads-Up!* on p. 407. It's got something to do with the object pronouns in the top three sentences (She **LIKES** him./I **CAUGHT** them./You **LOVE** her.). Can you figure out what typically happens to the pronunciation of those object pronouns? Think about it and then write down your thoughts.

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The interesting point that I'd like you to become aware of is the fact that in many varieties of English, the initial consonant sound in the words *him*, *them*, and *her* may be dropped so that we end up saying 'im, 'em, and 'er. Actually, 'im is pronounced /ɪm/, 'em is pronounced /əɪm/, and 'er is pronounced /əɪr/. This is another one of those points that are seldom if ever taught in classes. Say those three examples from the *Head's Up!* out loud at your normal rate of speech and you may find yourself doing just what we've pointed out if you're a native speaker.

The question you need to answer is, does this phenomenon happen all the time when we say these object pronouns or is it perhaps that this reduction happens only some of the time? Take another look at the last *Heads-Up* to see if you can figure out the answer to this question. Then come up with your own examples of short sentences that contain these object pronouns. Write down your observations below.

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The answer is that **we almost always drop the initial consonant sound from these object pronouns in typical spoken English**. It doesn't matter whether they're preceded by a verb or a preposition—we almost always omit that initial consonant sound. Here are some more examples for you to say out loud:

I saw -ɪm in the bookstore.
They got it from -əɹ the other day.
We went with -əm to dinner.

One variation is that in some dialects the object pronoun *them* can quite often be reduced to /ðm/ with the vowel dropping out instead of the initial consonant sound dropping out, so we end up with:

I'll write th-m a note.
instead of
I'll write 'em a note.

Many students don't even hear these object pronouns when they listen to native speakers who are making this pronunciation change in a stream of speech. Perhaps that might explain in part why students so often leave out object pronouns when they speak or even write.

As an aside, I think it appropriate to mention here that this phenomenon of dropping the initial consonant *h* also happens to the subject pronoun, *he* (/i/), and the two possessive adjectives, *his* (/ɪz/) and *her* (/əɹ/). Here's what I mean:

- A: I need to see what's-'er-name. Do you know where she is?
B: Do you by any chance mean Sally?
A: Yeah, Sally. Her son just got a job here, but 'e forgot to give me 'is
Social Security number.

An interesting note is the fact that the initial *h* in *her* does not get dropped if it begins a sentence (“Her son just got a job . . .”). The same holds true, of course, for *he* and *his* as well.