

## Weak and Strong Syllables

**Objectives:** To distinguish the syllables that can take the primary/secondary stress from those which are usually unstressed.

Weak syllables refer to those syllabic segments which tend to be shorter in duration, lower in intensity (pitch), and different in quality (reference articulation points) . If we consider the word 'driver' /draɪvə/, we can perceive that the second syllable is shorter than the first, less loud, and includes a vowel /ə/ that cannot be found in strong syllables. In the same way, if we examine the word settle /setl/ we notice that it is made up of two syllable /set/ and **the syllabic consonant** /l/, which does not occur in strong syllables (Roach, 2000).

At the end of a word, weak syllables can end in the following vowels:

- i) the vowel /ə/ ("schwa");
- ii) a close front unrounded vowel in the general area of i: and ɪ (symbolized i);
- iii) a close back rounded vowel in the general area of u: and ʊ (symbolized u).

It is worth noting that the close unrounded front /i/ is in a position in-between the close front long /i:/, and the half-close short /ɪ/; and the close rounded back /u/ is placed between the back close long /u:/ and the back half-close short /ʊ/. The vowel /i/ is found in word final position spelt with final 'y', or 'ey' preceded by one or more consonant letters, eg., funny /fʌni/, easy /i:zi/,

and in words like easier /i:ziə/ happier /hæpiə/. We can also find them the prefixes (re- pre- de-) preceding a vowel; in suffixes spelt 'iate' 'ious'. In addition, this sound can be noticed in these function words: he /hi/ she /ʃi/, me /mi/, we /wi/ be /bi/).

Conversely, strong syllables are stressed, and have as a peak of one of the vowel phonemes (i: u: ɜ: ɔ: ɑ: ɔ:), diphthongs eɪ aɪ ɔɪ aʊ əʊ iə eə ʊə, or triphthongs (eɪə aɪə ɔɪə aʊə əʊə). If the last syllable includes a short vowel, it will have a coda.

### 1. Dividing Words into Strong and Weak Syllables

Engineer	architect	architecture	California
s w S	S w s	S w s w	s w S w
ˌɛndʒɪˈnɪər	ˈɑ:kɪtekt	ˈɑ:kɪtektʃə	ˌkælɪˈfɔ:njə
lemonade	elevate	elevator	elevation
s w S	S w s	S w s w	s w S w
ˌləməˈneɪd	ˈelɪveɪt	ˈelɪveɪtər	ˌelɪˈveɪʃən
understand	modify	modifying	understanding
s w S	S w s	S w s w	s w S w
ˌʌndəˈstænd	ˈmɒdɪfaɪ	ˈmɒdɪfaɪɪŋ	ˌʌndəˈstændɪŋ

yellow	supply	harmony	annoyance
S w	w S	S w w	w S w
'jeləʊ	sə'plai	'hɑ:məni	ə'noɪəns
Salad	balloon	bulletin	remember
S w	w S	S w w	w S w
'sæləd	bə'lu:n	'bʊlɪtɪn	rɪ'membə
measure	command	Canada	contagious
S w	w S	S w w	w S  w
'meɪʒə	kə'mɑ:nd	'kænədə	kən'teɪdʒəs
value	result	elephant	develop
S w	w S	S w w	w S w
'vælju:	rɪ'zʌlt	'elɪfənt	dɪ'veləp