


**STRONG AND
WEAK
SYLLABLES**



English
Pronunciation

- Strong syllables
- Weak syllables

baiSER

gaLLEta

GUAgua

This is also
true of
many other
languages

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graph TD; A[baiSER] --> D((This is also true of many other languages)); B[gaLLEta] --> D; C[GUAgua] --> D;
```

It is
necessary

How these
weak syllables
are
pronounced

Where they
occur in
English

Stress

Which is very important in deciding whether a syllable is strong or weak

Elision

Intonation

Syllable
Consonant

We find the
vowel in a weak
syllable tends to
be shorter, of
lower intensity

"data" /deltə/

The weak
syllable contains
no vowel at all

"bottle" /bɒtl/

Stress

```
graph TD; A[Stress] --> B[Strong syllables are stressed]; A --> C[Weak syllables are unstressed];
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Strong
syllables are
stressed

Weak
syllables are
unstressed

The vowel ə
("schwa")

A close front unrounded
vowel in the general area of
i:, I, symbolised i

A close back rounded vowel
in the general area of
u:, U, symbolised u

- ▣ happy /betθ/
- ▣ Better /hæpi/
- ▣ thank you /θæŋk ju/

We also find weak syllables in
word-final position with a coda
if the vowel is ə

- ▣ Open /əʊpən/
- ▣ Sharpen /ʃv:pən/

Inside a word, we can find the
above vowels acting as peaks
without codas in weak syllables

- ▣ “photograph” /fəʊtəgrə:f/
- ▣ “radio” /reɪdiəʊ/
- ▣ “influence” /ɪnfluəns/

In addition, the vowel I can act as a peak without a coda if the following syllable begins with a consonant

▣ “architect” /a:kItekt/

THANK YOU



PHONOLOGY

TAMARA CABRERA
GENNY NAZARENO
VANESSA SISALEMA

4TH «B»

THE VOWEL
("SCHWA")



The vowel ə “(schwa)”

The most
frequently
occurring vowel
in English

Is always
associated
with weak
syllables

It is generally
described as
lax—that is, not
articulated
with much
energy

The vowel ə ("schwa")

Examples

- halfway
- between
- close
- open

➤ *Note.- Not all weak syllables contain ə, though many do.*

The vowel ə (“schwa”)

Learners of English need to learn where ə is appropriate and where it is not



We have to use information that traditional phonemic theory.

We must consider spelling



➤ Spelt with “ a ” ; strong
pronunciation would
have æ

“ *attend*” /ətend/

“ *barracks*” /bærəks/

“ *character*” /kærətə/

➤ Spelt with «ar»; strong pronunciation would have a:

“*particular*” /pətɪkjələ /

“*monarchy*” /mɒnəki /

“*molar*” /məʊlə /

➤ Adjectives endings spelt
“ ate”; strong
pronunciation would
have eɪ

“intimate” /ɪntɪmət/

“accurate” /ækjərət/

“desolate” /desələt/ (although
there are exceptions to this:

“private” is usually /praɪvɪt/)

➤ Spelt with “o”; strong
pronunciation would have
ɒ or əʊ

“tomorrow” /təmɒrəʊ/

“potato” /pəteɪtəʊ/

“carrot” /kærət/

➤ Spelt with “or”;
strong pronunciation
would have ɔ:

“forget” /fəget/

“ambassador” /æmbæsədə/

“opportunity” /

ɒpətʃu:nəti/

**SPELT WITH "E"; STRONG
PRONUNCIATION WOULD HAVE E**

“settlement” /setəlmənt/

“violet” /vaɪələt/

“postment” /pəʊstmɛnt/

- ▣ Spelt with “er”, strong pronunciation would have s:

- ▣ “perhaps” /pəhæps/
- ▣ “stronger” /strɒŋgə/
- ▣ “superman” /su:pəman/

- ▣ Spelt with “u”; strong pronunciation would have a

▣ “autumn” /ə:təm/

▣ “support” /səpə:t/

▣ “halibut” /hælibət/

- ▣ Spelt with “ough” (there are many pronunciations for the letter- sequence “ough”)

- ▣ “thorough” /θʌrə/
- ▣ “borough” /bʌrə/

- ▣ Spelt with “ou”; strong pronunciation might have oo

▣ “gracious”

/grɛɪʃəs/

▣ “callous”

/kæləs/

PhOnOlOgY

**Close front
and
Close back vowels**

Weak syllables:

They are equal

One close front

[i:] ↔ [ɪ]

[u:] ↔ [ʊ]

Other close back rounded

Strong syllables:

Easy to
distinguish

[i:]

FOR

[ɪ]

[u:]

FOR

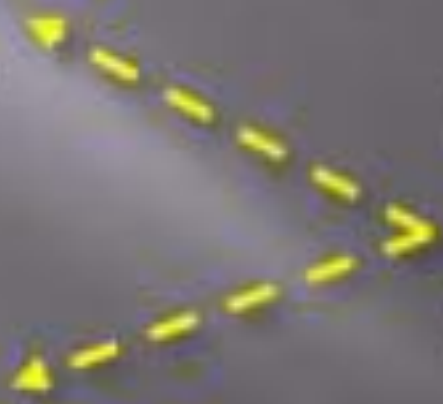
[ʊ]

Example:

“beat” [bi:t]

“bit” [bɪt]

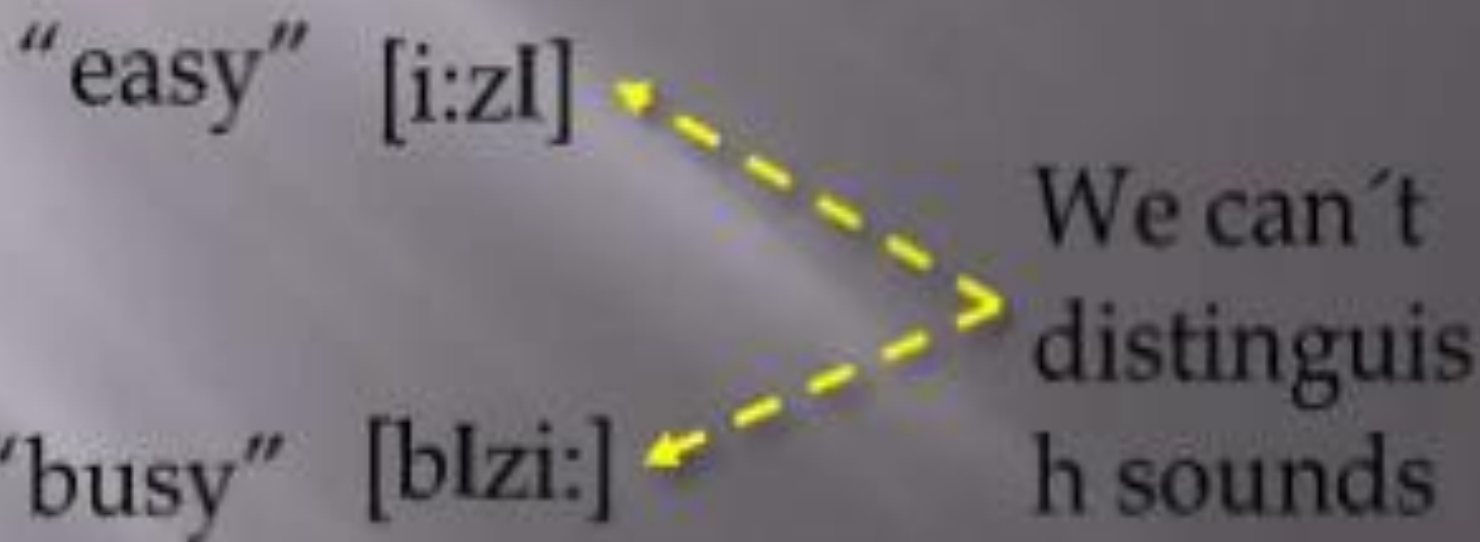
We can
distinguish
h sounds

A diagram consisting of two dashed yellow arrows pointing from the text 'We can distinguish h sounds' to the phonetic transcriptions [bi:t] and [bɪt]. The top arrow points to [bi:t] and the bottom arrow points to [bɪt].

"easy" [i:zɪ]

"busy" [bɪzi:]

We can't
distinguish
h sounds

A diagram illustrating a phonetic confusion. On the left, the word "easy" is written with its phonetic transcription [i:zɪ]. Below it, the word "busy" is written with its phonetic transcription [bɪzi:]. On the right, the text "We can't distinguish h sounds" is written. Two dashed yellow arrows originate from the right side of this text. One arrow points to the 'z' in the transcription of "easy", and the other points to the 'z' in the transcription of "busy". This indicates that the 'z' sounds in both words are perceived as the same, leading to confusion.

Vowels in Questions:

They sound like [i:] and [u:] when they precede another vowel.

For BBC
pronunciation:

Within strong syllables sound
[i:] is **NEUTRALIZED** in
weak syllables.

Possibilities, using
our symbols:

"easy"	"busy"
[i:zi:]	[blzi:]
]	
[i:zl]	[blzl]

We find **i** occurring:

Words in the final
position “y” or “ey”
after one or more
consonant letter.

<happy> [hæpɪ]

<valley> [vælɪ]

In morpheme-final position
when such words have
suffixes beginning with
vowels.

<happier> [hɪ pɪə]

<easier> [i:ziə]

In the prefix such as those
spelt 're', 'pre', 'de'; if it
precedes a vowel and is
untressed.

<react>

[riːkt]

<create>

[kriːeɪt]

<deodorant>

[diːɒrənt]

In the suffixes : 'iate', 'ious',
when they have two
syllables

<appreciate> [əpri:ʃieɪt]

<hilarious> [hileəriəs]

In the following words
when unstressed:

'he', 'she', 'we', 'me', 'be'
and the word 'the' when it
precedes a vowel.

With [ɪ] the sound is short
close front unrounded
vowel.

<enough> [ɪnʌf]

In weak syllables we found
[u:].

'you', 'to', 'into', 'do'

When they are untressed
are not immediately
preceding a consonant,
'through' [θru:]

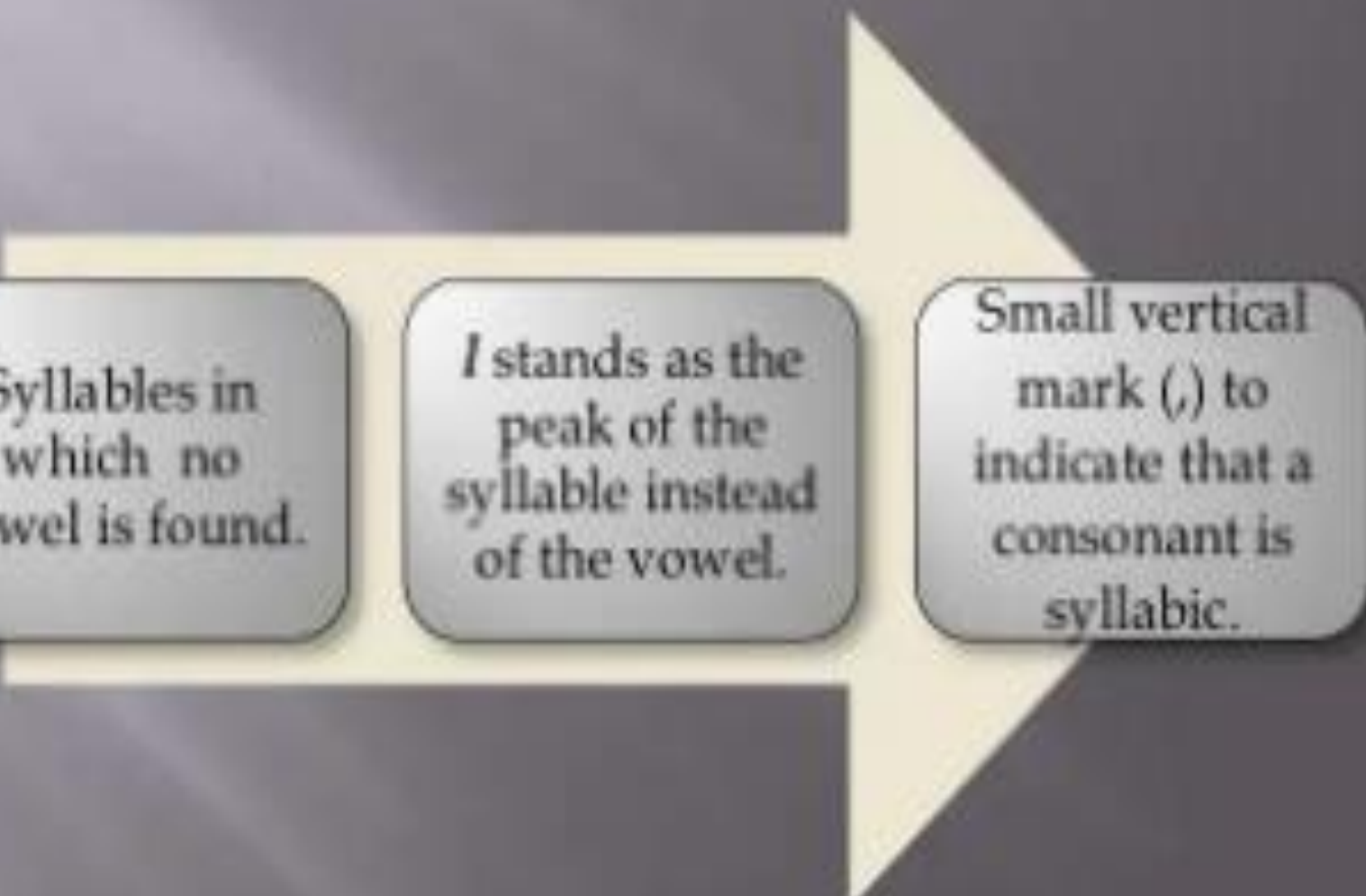
This vowel is also found
before another vowel
withing a word.

<evacuation> [lv □ kjudʃn]

<influenza> [Influenzə]

SYLLABIC CONSONANTS

Syllabic l



Syllables in which no vowel is found.

l stands as the peak of the syllable instead of the vowel.

Small vertical mark (,) to indicate that a consonant is syllabic.

If the preceding consonant is alveolar, the articulatory movement from the preceding consonant to the syllabic *l* is quite simple.

with alveolar consonant preceding:

'cattle' kæt l̩

'bottle' bɒt l̩

'wrestle' rɛs l̩

'muddle' mʌd l̩



with non-alveolar consonant preceding:

'couple' kʌp |

'struggle' strʌg |

'trouble' trʌb |

'knuckle' nʌk |

words usually lose their final letter 'e'
when s suffix beginning with a vowel is
attached, but the / usually remains
syllabic.

- 'bottle' - 'bottling'
bat | - bat | i η
- 'muddle' - 'muddling'
m ʌ d | - m ʌ d | i η
- 'struggle' - 'struggling'
strʌg | - strʌg | i η

Don't have the syllabic *l*

'coddling' (derived from the verb 'coddle')

'codling' (meaning 'small cod', derived by adding the suffix 'ling' to 'cod')

Show a contrast between syllabic and non-syllabic *l*:

'coddling' *ˈkɒd.lɪŋ*
'codling' *ˈkɒd.lɪŋ*

syllabic words spelt at the end, with
one or more consonants letters
followed by 'al' or 'el'.

'panel'	p æ n
'petal'	pet
'kernel'	k ɜ ɹ̩ n
'pedal'	ped
'parcel'	p a ɹ̩ s
'Babel'	be ɪ b
'papal'	pe ɪ p
'ducal'	dju ɹ̩ k

BBC ACCENT

- A close back rounded vowel instead (e.g. 'bottle' botu)

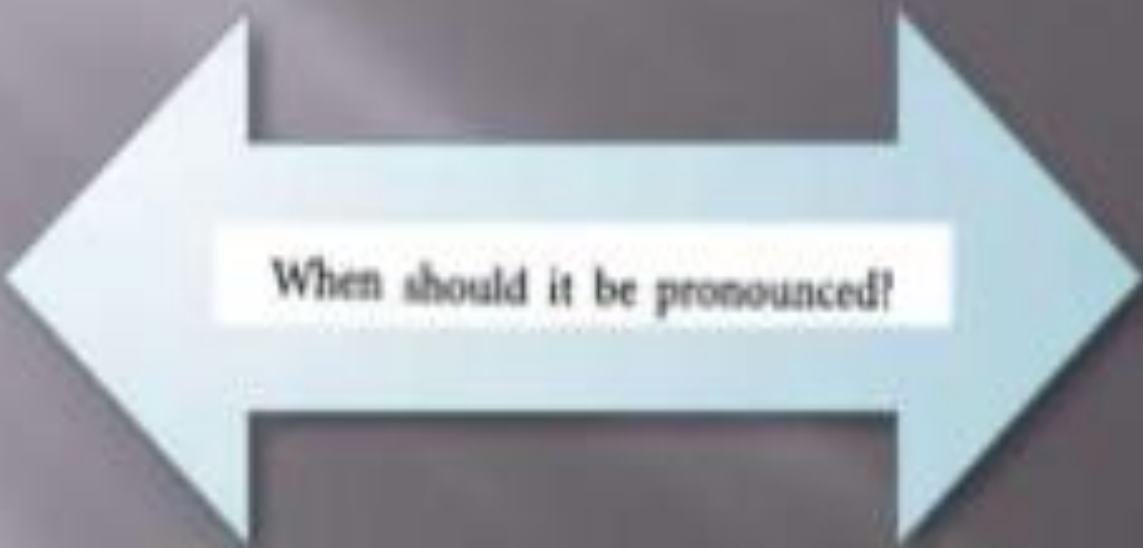
it is not obligatory to
pronounce syllabic
l, əl may used instead:
'missal' or m i s ə l



note!

Syllabic n

Of the syllabic nasals, the most frequently found and the most important is n



When should it be pronounced?

A general rule could be made that weak syllables which are phonologically composed of a plosive or fricative consonant plus an are uncommon except in initial position in the words.

we can find words like

'tonight' tənait,

'canary' kənəri,

'fanatic' fənætɪk,

'sonata' sənətə

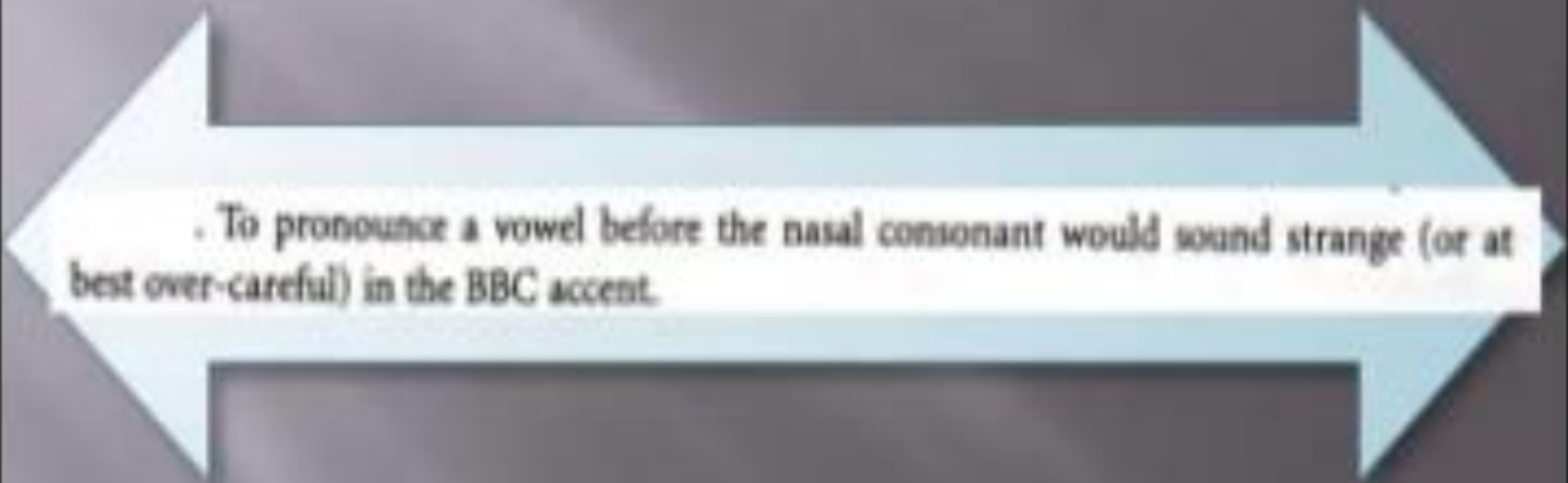
with ə before n

medially and finally

'threaten' θretⁿ

'threatening' θretⁿɪŋ

we find much more commonly a syllabic n



. To pronounce a vowel before the nasal consonant would sound strange (or at best over-careful) in the BBC accent.

Syllabic n

is most common after alveolar plosives and fricatives

of t, d, s, z

followed by n the plosive is nasally released by lowering the soft palate

'eaten' i:t̚n̚

the tongue does not move

soft palate is lowered at the end of t so that compressed air escapes through the nose.

We do not usually find ŋ after

'sullen' sʌləŋ

l, tʃ, dʒ,

'Christian' as krisʃən

i or j

though this word may be pronounced with t followed by

'pigeon' as piʤən

In words where the syllable following a velar consonant is spelt 'an' or 'on'

'wagon' wæɡən

'toboggan' tɒbɒɡən,

the more usual pronunciation being

After bilabial consonants, in
words like

'happen', 'happening', 'ribbon'

we can consider it equally acceptable to pronounce
them with syllabic n

or with ən

hæp̩n, hæp̩nɪŋ, rɪb̩n

hæpən, hæpənɪŋ, rɪbən

In a similar way, after velar consonants in words like

'thicken', 'waken',

syllabic n is possible but ən is also acceptable.

After f, v, syllabic n is more common than ən

(except, as with the other cases described, in word-initial syllables)

Therefore

Thus 'seven', 'heaven', 'often'
sevn hevn, ofn than sevən, hevən, ofən.

are more usually

In all the examples given so far the syllabic n has been following another consonant; sometimes it is possible for another consonant to precede that consonant, but in this case a syllabic consonant is less likely to occur.

If n is preceded by l and a plosive, as in

'Wilton', the pronunciation wiltən

is possible, but wiltən is also found regularly.

If s precedes, as in 'Boston', a final syllabic nasal is less frequent,

while clusters formed by nasal + plosive + syllabic nasal are very unusual:

thus 'Minton', 'lantern', 'London', 'abandon' will normally have ə in the last syllable and be pronounced

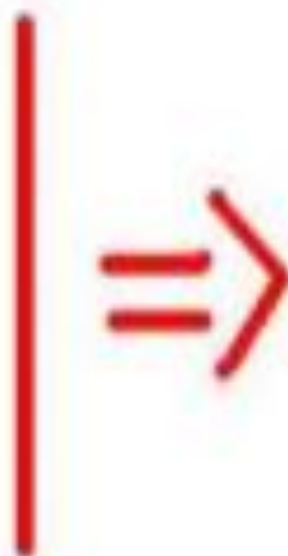
mɪntən, lɛntən, lʌndən, əbændən.

Other

nasals also discourage a following plosive plus syllabic nasal, so that for example 'Camden' is normally pronounced kæmdən.

Syllabic m,ŋ

syllabic



assimilation

elision

happen =

hæpŋ

hæpŋ

hæpən

uppermost =

ʌpɹəʊst

ʌpəʊst

syllabic velar nasals

thicken =

θικῆ

θικᾶν

θικῆ

broken key = bræukŋ ki:

$n \neq en \Rightarrow \eta$

SYLLABIC “r”

- ☐ In many accents of the type called “rhotic”
- ☐ In american accents, the syllabic r is very common .
- ☐ Examples : the word “particular”
 - Americans
 - BBC pronunciation
 - Future
 - Teacher
 - Never

COMBINATIONS OF SYLLABIC CONSONANTS

- ⊞ It isn't unusual to find two syllabic consonants together.
 - Examples:
 - National
 - Literal
 - Visionary
 - Veteran
 - In BBC the "schwa" vowel is very very weak.

NOTES ON PROBLEMS AND FURTHER READING

- ▣ This about preliminary notions without a full explanation.
- ▣ Familiar with the differences between stressed and unstressed and nature of the "schwa"
- ▣ In the same way with "i" , "u"

▣ **LOGMAN PRONUNCIATION
DICTIONARY**

▣ **THE CAMBRIDGE ENGLISH
PRONOUNCING DICTIONARY**

NOTES
FOR
TEACHERS

Introduction of the 'schwa' vowel has been deliberately delayed until this chapter, since the author wanted it to be presented in the context of weak syllables in general. Since students should by now be comparatively well informed about basic segmental phonetics, it is very important that their production and recognition of this vowel should be good before moving on to the following chapters.



This chapter is in a sense a crucial point in the course. Although the segmental material of the preceding chapters is important as a foundation, the strong/weak syllable distinction, and the overall prosodic characteristics of words and sentences are essential to intelligibility. Most of the remaining chapters of the course are concerned with such matters.

Written exercise

The following sentences have been partially transcribed, but the vowels have been left blank. Fill in the vowels, taking care to identify which vowels are weak; put no vowel at all if you think a syllabic consonant is appropriate. But put a syllabic mark beneath the syllabic consonant.

1. - a particular problem of the boat was
leak

p t kj l pr bl m δ b t w z l

1 ə pətɪkjələ prɒbləm əv ðə bəʊt wəz ə li:k

2.- opening the bottle presented no
difficulty

p ɒ δ b tl pr z nt d n d f k

2 əʊpənɪŋ ðə bɒtl prɪzɪntɪd nəʊ dɪfɪklti

3. there is no alternative to the government's proposal
ð r z u ð ð v ð g v nm nt spr p zI

3 ðər ɪz nəʊ ɔːltərnətɪv tə ðə ɡʌvnmənts prəpəʊzəl

4. - we ought to make a collection to cover the
expenses

w i t t m a k k n t d v ksp
is z

4 wi ɔ:t tə meɪk ə kəleɪkʃən tə kʌvə ði ɪkspensɪz
(also possible: k|ekʃən)

5. finally they arrived at a harbour at the edge of the mountains

faiŋi δet ətavd at ə hæ:bar at ði edʒ əv ðə mauntinz

5 faiŋi δet ətavd at ə hæ:bar at ði edʒ əv ðə mauntinz
(also possible: hæ:br)