

## 23. Weak and Strong Form

**Objectives:** To tell learners that unlike content words, which have one form of pronunciation, function words can be pronounced in two different ways: stressed and unstressed. Additionally, the practice of the weak form in speech enables learners to understand natural and native-like ways of communication, and to be well-understood by natives as well.

We can divide words into two classes: function words and content words. The former refers to "words whose sole function is to signal grammatical relationships (a role which is claimed for such words as *of*, *to* and *the* in English); the latter refers to words which have lexical meaning, i.e. they have semantic content" (Crystal, 2008, p. 279), such as verbs, nouns, adjectives. Function or grammatical words usually have two types of pronunciation. They are stressed when they are pronounced in isolation; however, when they form a part of connected speech, these words are mostly unstressed. Roach (2000) identifies two main reasons for learning to use, and knowing about weak forms:

First most native speakers of English find an "all-strong form" pronunciation unnatural and foreign-sounding, something that most learners would wish to avoid. Second and more importantly, speakers who are not familiar with the use of weak forms are likely to have difficulty understanding who do use weak forms; since practically all native speakers...use them, learners of language need to learn about these weak forms to help them to understand what they hear (p. 112).

Now for the sake of facilitating things to students, let us organize function words into three tables. Table (16) includes auxiliaries and modals (am are be been is was were had has have do does can could must shall should will would); in Table (17) we include pronouns, and (he, her, him, his, me, she, that, them, us, we, who, you) Table (18) includes prepositions, conjunctions, articles, some titles, and adverbs of place (a, an, the, and, as, at, but, for, from, not, of, Saint, Sir, some, than, there, to).

| Table 16: Auxiliaries and Models |             |            |
|----------------------------------|-------------|------------|
| Words                            | Strong Form | Weak Form  |
| Auxiliaries be / have/ do        |             |            |
| am                               | æm          | əm m       |
| are                              | a:          | ə+c/ ər+v  |
| be                               | bi:         | bɪ         |
| been                             | bi:n        | bɪn        |
| is                               | ɪz          | s/z        |
| was                              | wɒz         | wəz        |
| were                             | wɜ:         | wə+c/wər+v |
|                                  |             |            |
| had                              | həd         | həd əd d   |
| has                              | hæz         | həz əz z s |
| have                             | hæv         | hæv əv v   |
|                                  |             |            |
| do                               | du:         | du+v də+c  |
| does                             | dəz         | dəz z s    |
| Models                           |             |            |
| can                              | kæn         | kn kæn     |
| could                            | kʊd         | kɪ kəd     |
| must                             | mʌst        | məst məs   |
| shall                            | ʃæl         | ʃɪ ʃəl     |
| should                           | ʃʊd         | ʃɪ ʃəd     |
| will                             | wɪl         | əl ɪ l     |
| would                            | wʊd         | wəd, əd, d |

## 23.1. Auxiliaries and Models

I am sending you a letter

aɪ **əm** 'sendɪŋ **jʊ ə** 'letə

you are happy are not you?

**jʊ ə** 'hæpi **ə** nɒt ju:?

They will be there soon

ðeɪ **wɪl bɪ** ðeə su:n

ðeɪ **əl bɪ ðeə** su:n

you will go to school on foot

**jʊ wɪl** gəʊ **tə** sku:l ɒn fʊt

**jʊ'l** gəʊ **tə** sku:l ɒn fʊt

She will be there on Monday

ʃi **wɪl bɪ** ðeər ɒn 'mʌndeɪ

It was the best documentary I have ever seen

ɪt **wəz ðə** best ,dɒkjʊ'mentəri aɪ **hæv** 'evə si:n

ɪt **wəz ðə** best ,dɒkjʊ'mentəri aɪ **əv** 'evə si:n

How were they?

haʊ wə ðeɪ?

How many books had he authored?

haʊ 'meni bʊks **həd hɪ** 'ɔ:θəd?

Do they speak French?

**dʊ** ðeɪ spi:k frɛnʃ?

She does not attend the morning sessions

**ʃi dəz** nɒt ə'tend ðə 'mɔ:nɪŋ 'seʃənz

How can I call them?

haʊ **kən** aɪ kɔ:l ðem?

haʊ **kn** aɪ kɔ:l ðem?

Could you pass me that book?

**kəd ju** pɑ:s **mi ðæt** bʊk?

Should I invite them to the party?

**ʃəd** aɪ ɪn'vaɪt **ðəm tə ðə** 'pɑ:ti?

**ʃd** aɪ ɪn'vaɪt **əm tə ðə** 'pɑ:ti?

Shall we propose this idea in the conference?

**ʃəl wi** prə'pəʊz ðɪs aɪ'diə **ɪn ðə** 'kɒnfərəns?

Shall I propose this idea in the conference?

**ʃəl** aɪ prə'pəʊz ðɪs aɪ'diə ɪn **ðə** 'kɒnfərəns?

**ʃɪ** aɪ prə'pəʊz ðɪs aɪ'diə ɪn **ðə** 'kɒnfərəns?

Would you give me a lift to the market?

**wəd ju** gɪv **mi ə** lɪft **tə ðə** 'mɑ:kɪt?

They must leave now

ðeɪ **məst** li:v naʊ

ðeɪ **məs** li:v naʊ

| Table 17: Pronouns |             |                          |
|--------------------|-------------|--------------------------|
| Words              | Strong Form | Weak Form                |
| he                 | hi:         | hi, i:, ɪ                |
| her                | hɜ:         | hə(r)+v, ɜ:(r)+v, ə(r)+v |
| him                | hɪm         | ɪm                       |
| his                | hɪz         | ɪz                       |
| me                 | mi:         | mi                       |
| she                | ʃi:         | ʃɪ                       |
| that               | ðæt         | ðət                      |
| them               | ðem         | ðəm, əm, m               |
| us                 | ʌs          | əs, s                    |
| we                 | wi:         | wɪ,                      |
| who                | hu:         | hʊ, u:, ʊ                |
| you                | ju:         | jʊ                       |

## 23.2. Examples of Pronouns in Weak Form

he is as tall as me

**hɪ z əz** tə:l **əz** mi:

**i: z əz** tə:l **əz** mi:

**ɪz əz** tə:l **əz** mi:

The manager can see her in three hours time

**ðə** 'mænɪdʒə **kən** si: **hər** ɪn θri: 'aʊəz taɪm

**ðə** 'mænɪdʒə **kən** si: **ər** ɪn θri: 'aʊəz taɪm

**ðə** 'mænɪdʒə **kən** si: ɜ:r ɪn θri: 'aʊəz taɪm

Would you send him this message?

**wəd ju** send **ɪm** ðɪs 'mesɪdʒ?

This is his car

ðɪs **ɪz ɪz** kɑ:

They informed me that the tax income has not been paid

ðeɪ ɪn'fɔ:md **mi ðæt ðə** tæks 'ɪnkʌm **həz** nɒt **bɪn** peɪd

The teacher is explainig the lesson to us

**ðə** 'ti:tʃə z ekspleɪnɪŋ **ðə** 'lesn **tʊ** ʌs

Call us tonight

kɔ:l **əs tə** 'naɪt

Who has read the whole novel?

**hʊ həz** red **ðə** həʊl 'nɒvəl?

u: **əz** red **ðə** həʊl 'nɒvəl?

call them all

kɔ:l **ðəm** ɔ:l

kɔ:l **əm** ɔ:l

kɔ:lm ɔ:l

Table 18: Articles/prepositions/ conjunctions/adjectives

| Articles/prepositions/ conjunctions/adj |             |                          |
|---|-------------|--------------------------|
| Words                                   | Strong Form | Weak Form                |
| a                                       | ei          | ə                        |
| an                                      | æn          | ən, n                    |
| the                                     | ði:         | ðɪ+v    ðəc              |
| and                                     | ænd         | ənd, nd, n               |
| as                                      | æz          | əz                       |
| at                                      | æt          | ət                       |
| but                                     | bʌt         | bət                      |
| for                                     | fɔ:         | fə+c    fər+v    fr+v    |
| from                                    | fɹɒm        | fɹəm    frm              |
| not                                     | nɒt         | nt    n                  |
| of                                      | ɒv          | əv    v    ə             |
| Saint                                   | seɪnt       | sənt    snt    sən    sn |
| Sir                                     | sɜ:         | sə+c    sər+v            |
| some                                    | sʌm         | səm    sm                |
| than                                    | ðæn         | ðən    ðn                |
| there                                   | ðeə(r)      | ðə                       |
| to                                      | tu:         | tə                       |

### 23.3. Articles/prepositions/ conjunctions/adjectives

I have read an interesting article

aɪ **hæv** red **ən** 'ɪntrɪstɪŋ 'ɑ:tɪkl

He speaks English and French fluently

**hi** spi:ks 'ɪŋɡlɪʃ **ənd** frɛntʃ 'flu(:)əntli

**hi** spi:ks 'ɪŋɡlɪʃ **nd** frɛntʃ 'flu(:)əntli

**hi** spi:ks 'ɪŋɡlɪʃ **n** frɛntʃ 'flu(:)əntli

Look at the board

lʊk **ət** **ðə** bɔ:d

lʊk **ə** **ðə** bɔ:d

She is a good student, but she does not attend all the courses

**ʃi z ə** gʊd 'stju:dənt, **bət ʃi dəz** nɒt ə'tend ɔ:l **ðə** 'kɔ:sɪz

Good bye for now

gʊd baɪ **fə** naʊ

Would you give me a piece of paper

**wəd jʊ** gɪv **mɪ ə** pi:t **əv** 'peɪpə

**wəd jʊ** gɪv **mɪ ə** pi:t **v** 'peɪpə

**wəd jʊ** gɪv **mɪ ə** pi:t **ə** 'peɪpə

aɪ həv kʌm frəm 'ɪŋɡlənd

aɪ **əv** kʌm **frəm** 'ɪŋɡlənd

### 23.4. Exceptions

Phoneticians delineate four situations where we can use strong form instead of weak form in connected speech:

- a) When the function words occur at end of a sentence: weə ər jʊ frəm?
- b) When there is a contrast between two weak forms in the same utterance: /aɪ trævl tu: ən frəm lʌndən baɪ bʌs/
- c) When a weak form is stressed for the purpose of emphasis: ju: mʌst kʌm fɜ:st.
- d) When we cite weak forms in our speech: wɪ məs prənaʊns ðə wɜ:d 'kæn' in wi:k fɔ:m

**23.5. Practice:** Transcribe the following sentences according to the criteria of the weak form.

**Objective:** To measure the extent to which learners can use weak and strong form.

- 1- I am a postman .....
- 2- She does not come on time .....
- 3- He is leaving early today .....
- 4- They speak English and French .....
- 5- The door is open; you can come in .....
- 6- This is your book .....
- 7- They are my nephews .....
- 8- You are as tall as me .....
- 9- The boys are at home now .....
- 10- Should I be there by nine o'clock? .....
- 11- Can they speak English fluently? .....
- 12- She has never been to England .....
- 13- I speak English, but I do not speak Italian. ....
- 14- Could you help me? .....
- 15- Would she attend the meeting? .....
- 16- I am waiting for you. ....
- 17- Would give me a piece of chalk? .....
- 18- They have just arrived from Britain. ....
- 19- We had just phoned them .....
- 20- Look at her; she is talking to him .....
- 21- You must call the police .....
- 22- Shall I tell you the story? .....
- 23- We shall not take care of them .....
- 24- He has gone by car .....
- 25- She was with us in the meeting .....
- 26- Who has won the match? .....