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PART 1:

The definition of weak forms and some reasons for learning weak forms

a. Definition

→ Weak forms are syllable sounds that become **unstressed** in **connected speech** and are often then pronounced as a **schwa**.

→ An very important **component** of natural and fluent English

Ex: What **do** you want to **do** this evening?

→ In the sentence above, the first 'do' is a weak form and the second is **stressed**.

PART I:

The definition of weak forms and some reasons for learning weak forms

b. Reasons for learning weak-form words:

- ✓ Improve your *listening skills* , especially to understand native speakers.
- ✓ Improve your *speaking skills*. If you want to speak naturally you should pronounce weak forms correctly.
- ✓ Failure on weak forms will affect your *English rhythm*.
- ✓ You will *avoid misunderstandings*.

PART II:

Inventory of weak-form words

- ARTICLES : a, an, the
- CONJUNCTIONS: and, as, but, than, that
- PREPOSITIONS: at, for, from, of, to
- AUXILIARY AND MODAL VERBS: am, is, are, was, were, have, has, had, do, does, must, would, can, will, shall
- PRONOUNS: he, him, her, us, them, there

PART III:

Most common weak forms in English

1. 'the'

Weak forms: **ðð** (before consonants)

'shut the door' /ʃʌt **ðð** 'dɔ:/.
ði (before vowels)

'Wait for the end' /'weit fð **ði** 'end/.

2. 'a', 'an'

Weak forms : **ə** (before consonants).

' Read a book' /'ri:d **ə** 'buk/

ən (before vowels).

' Eat an apple' /'i:t **ən** 'æpl/.

3. 'and'

Weak form: ən (sometimes ɪ after t, d, s, z,ʃ/

' come and see' /'kʌm ən 'si:/

' Fish and chips' /'fɪʃ ɪ 'tʃɪps/.

4. 'but'

Weak form: bət

'It's good but expensive'

/Its 'gud bət lks'pensiv/.

5. 'that'

(This word only has a weak form when used in a relative clause; when used with a demonstrative sense it is usually pronounced in its strong form.)

Weak form: ðət

' The price is the thing that annoys me '

/ ðə 'prais iz ðə 'θiŋ ðət ə'noiz mi/ .

6. 'than'

Weak form: /ðən/

ex : 'Better than ever' /betə ðən 'evə/.

7. ' his'

Weak form: iz , (hiz at the beginning of a sentence)

'Take his name' /'teik iz 'neim /

(Another sense of 'his' , as in 'it was his' has always the strong form).

8. 'her'

(When used with possessive sense, proceeding a noun; as an object pronoun, this can also occur at the end of a sentence).

Weak forms : **ð** (before consonants).

'Take her home' /'teik ð 'hðum/.

ðr (before vowels)

' Take her out' / 'teik ðr 'aut/ .

9. 'your'

Weak forms: **jə** (before consonants)

' Take your time' /teik jə 'taim/

jər (before vowels)

' On your own' /ɔn jər 'ðʊn/

10. 'She', 'He', 'We', 'You':

- 'she' /ʃi/

' why did she read it?' /wai did ʃi ' ri:d it ?/.

' Who is she?' /'hu: 'iz ʃi?/

- 'he' /i/ (the weak form is usually pronounced without h except at the beginning of a sentence).

' Which did he choose?' / 'wiʃ did i tʃu:z/

' He was late, wasn't he?' /hi wəz ' leit ' wɔznt i?/

- 'we' /wi/

' How can we get there?' / haʊ kən we 'get ðeð?/

' we need that, don't we?' / wi 'ni:d ðæt 'dɔʊnt wi/

- 'you' /ju/

' What do you think?' /'wɒt dɔ ju 'θɪŋk?/

' You like it, do you?' /ju 'laɪk It 'du: ju?/

10. 'She', 'He', 'We', 'You':

➔ This group of pronouns has weak forms pronounced with weaker vowels than the /i:/ and /u:/ of their strong forms.

11. 'him'

Weak form: /im/

' Leave him alone' /li:v im ð'lðun/

' I've seen him' /aiv 'si:n im/

12. 'her'

Weak form : ə (hə when sentence –initial)

' Ask her to come' /a:sk ə tə 'k^m/

' I have met her' /aiv ' met ə/

13. 'them'

Weak form : ððm

'leave them here' /li:v ððm 'hið/

'eat them' /i:t ððm/

14. 'us'

Weak form: əs

'Write us a letter' /'raɪt əs ə 'letə/

'They invited all of us' / ðei in'veɪtɪd 'ɔ:l ðv
əs/.

The next group of words (some prepositions and other function words) occurs in their strong form when they are final in a sentence. This also depends on the intention of the speaker, the situation, the pitch level of the word; examples of this are given.

15. 'at'

Weak form: **ət**

' I'll see you at lunch' /aɪl 'si: ju ət 'lʌntʃ/

In the final position: **æt**

' What's he shooting at?' / 'wɒts ð 'ʃu:tiŋ æt?/

16. ' for'

- Weak form : **fə** (before consonants)

' Tea for two' / ' ti: fə 'tu:/'

- **fər** (before vowels).

' Thanks for asking' /'θæŋks fər 'a:skɪŋ/'

- In the final position: **fɔ:**

' what's that for?' /wɒts 'ðæt fɔ:/

17. 'from'

Weak form: **frəm**

' I'm home from work' /aim 'həʊm frəm 'wɜ:k/

In the final position: **frɒm**

' Here's where it came from' /'hiðz weðr it 'keim
frɒm

18. ' of '

Weak form : **ðv**

' Most of all' /'mðʊst ðv ' ɔ:l/

In the final position: **ɔv**

' Someone I've heard of' /'s^mw^ʌn aiv 'h 3:d ɔv/

19. 'to'

- Weak form : **tə** (before consonants)

'Try to stop' /'traɪ tə 'stɒp/

– **Tu** (before vowels)

'Time to eat' /'taɪm tu 'i:t/

– In the final position: **tu** (It is not usual to use the strong form /tu:/, and the pre-consonantal weak form tə is never used).

'I don't want to' /aɪ 'dʌnt 'wɒnt tu/.

20. 'as'

Weak form: əz

'As much as possible' /əz 'mʌtʃ /əz pɒsibl/

In final position : æz

'That's what it was sold as' /'ðætʃ 'wɒt it wɒz
'sɒld æz/

21. 'some'

This word is used in two different ways:

- In one sense (typically, when it occurs before a countable noun, meaning "an unknown individual") it has strong form: /s^m/

' I think some animal broke it'

/ai ' θiŋk s^m 'æniml ' brðʊk it/

- If it comes before uncountable nouns (meaning "an unspecified amount of"), in such uses it has the weak form: sðm.

' Have some more tea' / 'hæv sðm 'mɔ: 'ti:/

-In final position: s^m

' I've got some' /alv 'gɔt s^m/

22. 'there'

This word has a demonstrative function; it always occurs in its strong form : ðeð (ðeðr before example), e.g.

'There it is' / ðeðr it iz /

'Put it here' /pʊt it ðeð/

Weak forms: ðð (before consonants)

'There should be a rule' /ðð 'ʃʊd bi ð 'ru:l/

ððr (before vowels)

'There is' / ððr 'iz/

In the final position the pronunciation may be ðð or ðeð.

'There isn't any, is there? '

/ ððr 'iznt eni 'iz ðð/ or / ððr 'iznt eni 'iz ðeð/.

23. 'can', 'could'

Weak forms: /kən/, /kəd/

'They can wait' / ðei kən 'weɪt/

'He could do it' /hi: kəd 'du: ɪt/

In final position: /kæn/, /kʊd/

'I think we can' /aɪ 'θɪŋk wi kæn/

'Most of them could' /'mʌʊst ðv ðem kʊd/

24. 'have', 'has', 'had'

Weak forms: ∂v , ∂z , ∂d (with initial h in initial position)

' Which have you seen?' /'wiɪf ∂v ju 'si:n/

' which has been best?' /' wɪɪf ∂z 'bi:n 'best/

' Most had gone home' /mɒst ∂d 'gɒn 'hɒm/

In final position: **hæv**, **hæz**, **hæd**

' Yes, we have' /'jes we ' hæv/

' I think she has' /ai ' θɪŋk ʃi ' hæz/

' I thought we had' / ai 'θɔ:t wi ' hæd/

25. 'shall' 'should'

Weak forms : ʃəl or ʃl ; ʃəd

'we shall need to hurry' /wi ʃl 'ni:d tə 'hʌri/

' I should forget it' / ai ʃəd fə'get it/

In final position: ʃæl , ʃʊd

' I think we shall' /ai 'θɪŋk wi 'ʃæl /

' So you should' /səʊ ju 'ʃʊd/

26. 'must'

e.x: 'she left at 8 o'clock, so she must have arrived by now'

→ when 'must' is used in this way, it is rather less likely to occur in its weak form than when it is being used in its more familiar sense of obligation'

1/ Weak form: m̩s (before consonants)

'You must try harder'

/ju m̩s'trai 'ha:d̩/

2/ m̩st (before vowels)

'He must eat more' /hi 'm̩st 'i:t 'mɔ:

3/In final position: m^st

'she certainly must' /ʃi 'sɜ:tɪli 'm^st/

27. 'do', 'does'

1/Weak forms:

'Do' dð (before consonants)

'Why do they like it?' /'wai dð ðei 'laik it/

Du (before vowels)

' why do all the cars stop? ' /'wal du ɔ:l ðð 'ka:z 'st ɔp/

'Does' dðz

' When does it arrive? ' /wen dðz It ð'raɪv/

2/In final position: du:, d^z

' we don't smoke, but some people do'

/wi: dðʊnt 'smðʊk bðt 's^m 'pi:p! 'du:/

' I think John does' /ai ' θiŋk 'dʒ ɔn d^z/

28. 'am', 'are', 'was', 'were'

1/ am → /əm/

'Why am I here?' /wai əm ai 'hiə?/

2/ are → /ə / (before consonants)

'Here are the plates' /hiə r ə ðə 'pleɪts/

→ /ər/ (before vowels)

'The coats are in there' / ðə 'kəʊts ə r In ðeə/

3/ was → /wəz/

'He was here a minute ago'

/hɪ wəz 'hiə r ə 'mɪnɪt ə'gəʊ/

4/ were → wɜ (before consonants)

'The papers were late' / ðə 'peɪpəz wɜ 'leɪt/

→ wɜr (before vowels)

'The questions were easy' / ðə 'kwɛstʃənz wɜr
'i:zi/

5/ In final positions: æm, a:, wɜz, wɜ:

'She's not as old as I am' / ʃɪz 'nɒt əz 'aɪ æm/

'I know the smiths are' /aɪ nəʊ ðə 'smlθs a:

'The last record was' / ðə la:st 'rekɔd wɜz/

'They weren't as cold as we are'

/ ðeɪ ' wɜ:nt əz 'kəʊld ə 'wi: wɜ:/.

Questions?




A hand holding a piece of white chalk is writing the word "Questions?" on a dark, textured chalkboard. The hand is positioned on the right side of the frame, with the index finger and thumb holding the chalk. The word is written in a casual, slightly cursive script. The chalkboard has a mottled, dark grey surface with some lighter patches and faint, illegible markings from previous writing.

Questions?

when do weak forms
become strong?

1.

the end of the sentence



Where are you from?



Yes, I am.



No, I'm not.

2.

Negatives

Two blue circles are positioned above the text. The circle on the left is small, and the circle on the right is significantly larger.

I can speak German.

ə




I can speak German.



I can't speak German.



I can't speak German.



You aren't listening.



I'm not listening.

the stress is always on 'not'
even when it's abbreviated

3.

auxiliary or modal substitutes or
includes the main verbs

I can't speak German



but my friend can.

Do you like English ?



No, I don't.

4.

double stress for emphasis



I do like your hat!

EXERCISE: How many weak forms
can you find?

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

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