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Module: Phonetics

Course Number: 2

Course Titles: 2- Weak Forms

II. Weak Forms

1.1. Introduction

There are a number of well-known English words (just about 40) that can be

pronounced in two different ways called strong forms and weak forms.

eg: I [wəz] `there vs. Yes, I [`wɒz]

These words belong to a category called grammatical words or function words

(auxiliaries, modals, prepositions, conjunctions, articles, pronouns...) as opposed to

lexical words or content words (verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs and question

words).

Function words are frequently pronounced in their weak forms but only the strong

form is acceptable in certain contexts.

1.2. Contexts

1- In the end of a sentence for auxiliaries, modals, and prepositions.

e.g. I’m `fond of [əv] `chips vs. It is `chips that I’m `fond of [ɒv].

e.g. Can [kən] I help you? Yes, you `can [kæn].

2-When two function words are contrasted (and thus emphasized).

e.g. The letter is `from [frɒm] him not `to [tu:] him.

3-When a function word is given stress for emphasis.

e.g. You `must [mʌst] decide now.

NB: Weak form words beginning with `h’ (he, her, his, have) are pronounced with

[h] in the beginning of a sentence. But, `h’ is dropped elsewhere in the sentence.

e.g. Her `car was `damaged [hə `ka: wəz `dæmɪdʒd].

I said her car was damaged [I `sed ǝ `ka: wǝz `dæmɪdʒd].

Strong form of `her’ > I said `her car not yours! [I sed `hɜ: `ka: nɒt `jɔ:z].

e.g. He has done it! [hi əz `dʌn ɪt] – I know he has. [aɪ `nəʊ ɪ `hæz].

• In weak forms, the general rule is the weakening of the realisation of the

phoneme in question.

1- Difference of vowel sound, i.e,. any vowel becomes a schwa. V → [ǝ]

e.g. /bʌt/ → [bǝt] ; /hæv/ → [hǝv] ; /f ɔ:/ → [fə] .

2- Difference of vowel length, i.e. long vowel becomes short vowel VV → V

e.g. / hi: /→ [hi] - /ju:/ → [ju]

3- Absence of sound `h’. /h/ → [Ø]

1- v →[ǝ]

3

1-‘The’ /i: /, [ðǝ], e.g. shut the door [ʃʌt ðə `dↄ:]. Before vowels, eg.the end [ði `end]

2-‘A’ /eɪ/, [ǝ], e.g.read a book [`ri:d ǝ bʊk]. Before vowels, eg.an apple [ǝn `æpļ]

3-‘And’ /æ/, [ǝnd], eg. come and see [`kʌm ǝn (d) `si:] or [ņ] after t, d, s, z, ʃ e.g. fish and chips [`fɪʃ ņ `tʃɪps [yes and no] [`jes ņ `nǝʊ] girls and boys [`gɜ:z ņ `bↄɪz]

4-‘But’ /ʌ/, [bǝt], e.g. it’s good but expensive [ɪts `gʊd bǝt ɪks`pensɪv]

5-‘That’ /æ/, [ðǝt] (vs. demonstrative [`ðæt], e.g. That’s the thing that annoys me. [`ðæts ðǝ `Ɵɪŋ ðǝt ǝ`nↄɪz mi].

6-‘Than’ /e/, [ðǝn] e.g.: Better than ever [`betǝ ðǝn `evǝ]

7-‘your’ /ↄ:/, [jǝ], e.g. Take your time [`teɪk jǝ `taɪm]

NB before vowels ‘r’ is realized, e.g. on your own [`ɒn jǝr `ǝʊn]

8-`Them’ /e/, [ðǝm], e.g. Leave them here [`li:vðǝm `hɪǝ]

9-`Some’ /ʌ/, [sǝm], e.g. Have some more [`hævsǝm `mↄ:]

10- `There’ /eǝ/,[ðə] , e.g. There should be a rule [ðǝ `ʃʊd bi ǝ `ru:l]

NB: before vowels: there is [ðǝr ɪz]

11-`Can’ /æ/, could /ʊ/ → [ǝ] e.g. They can wait [’ðeɪ kǝn `weɪt] You could have done it [ju kǝd ǝv `dʌn it].

12- Have, has, had, /æ/, [ǝ] e.g. Which one have you seen? [`wɪtʃ `wʌn ǝv ju `si:n]

13- Am /æ/, are /a: /, was /ɒ/, were /ɜ:/ → [ǝ]

e.g. He was here a minute ago [hi wǝz `hɪǝr ǝ `mɪnɪt ǝ`gǝʊ]

What am I doing? [`wɒtǝmaɪ`du:ɪŋ]

They were late [`ðeɪ wǝ `leɪt]

NB: In final position: æm, a:,wɒz, wɜ:

e.g. They weren’t as young as we were [ðeɪ `wɜ:nt ǝz `jʌŋ ǝz wi `wɜ:]

14- Shall /æ/ → [ʃǝl]-[ʃļ ] ; Should / ʊ/ → [ʃǝd]

e.g. We shall need to hurry [wi ʃ ļ `ni:d tǝ `hʌri]. You should do it [ju ʃǝd `du: ɪt].

15- ‘Must’ /ʌ/, [mǝst], e.g. You must try [ju mǝs `traɪ]

16-‘At’ /æ/, [ǝt], e.g. See you at lunch [`si: ju ǝt `lʌntʃ]

In final position: What are you looking at? [æt], e.g. [`wɒt ǝ ju `lʊkɪŋ `æt]

3

17-‘Us’ /ʌ/, [ǝs], e.g. all of us [`ↄ:l ǝv ǝs]

18- ‘From’ /ɒ/, [frǝm]; I think it comes from outside [aɪ `Ɵɪŋk ɪt `kʌmz frǝm aʊt`saɪd] But in final position it is [frɒm] ; Where do you come from? [’weǝ dǝ ju `kʌm `frɒm]

19-‘Of’ /ɒ/, [ǝv], e.g. Most of all [`mǝʊst ǝv `ↄ:l]. Final position: [`ɒv]

20-‘To’ /u:/ [tǝ]; to go [tǝ `gǝʊ] but: [tu] before vowels, e.g. to Algiers [tu `a:ldʒɪǝz]

21-‘As’ /æ/, [ǝz], e.g. As soon as possible [ǝz `su:n ǝz `pɒsɪbļ]

22-‘For’ /ↄ:/ [fǝ]; It’s quite hard for me [ɪts `kwaɪt `ha:d fǝ mi] ; It’s quite hard for us [ɪts `kwaɪt `ha:d fǝr ǝs].

23- do, does /u: /, /ʌ/ → [dǝ], [dǝz], e.g. What do they want? [`wɒt dǝ ðeɪ `wɒnt]

Does it ring a bell to you? [`dǝz ɪt `rɪŋ ǝ `bel tǝ ju].

NB: before vowels [du] e.g., Do all people know? [du ↄ:l `pi:pl `nǝʊ]

2 -/vv/→ [v]

1- She, we, he, me, be, the /i: /→ [i], e.g. Who is she? [`hu: ɪz ʃi] 2- You, to, do /u:/ → [u], e.g. What do you think? [`wɒt dǝ ju `Ɵɪŋk] 3-/h/→ Ø

a- He, his, him, and her, e.g. What is his name? [`wɒts ɪz `neɪm]

Ask her to come [`a:sk ǝ tǝ `kʌm]

b-Have, has, had e.g. We have finished [wi ǝv `fɪnɪʃd]

NB: Auxiliaries and modals never have weak forms in the negative, e.g. She hasn’t

finished [ʃi `hæzņt `fɪnɪʃd] ; No I can’t [`nǝʊ aɪ `ka:nt] .

You shouldn’t have done that [ju `ʃʊdņt ǝv `dʌn `ðæt].

1.3 Exercises

1. How are certain phonemes realized in function words? Explain with

examples.

2. What makes a syllable prominent in English ?

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3. Transcribe the following sentences (weak form + stress); then comment on

all aspects of connected speech.

a. Does she know where he comes from?

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b. I knew that the man was locked in the office.

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c. We can call her as soon as we hear the news.

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4. What comment can you make on the pronunciation of ‘for’ in the following

statements?

a. I have been looking for you.

b. It’s the mother’s necklace that she has been looking for

5. In what way are content words different from function words?

6. How are function words reduced in English?

7. Transcribe the following sentences (weak form + stress); then comment on

all aspects of connected speech. What is the tone structure of the last

utterance?

a. They have put their guns in the bright car over there.

b. A good-tempered woman would be more suitable for that job. .

c. There are few things that nobody knows of.

d. Don’t you think that it’s ✓ high time he washed his car?

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8. Transcribe the following sentences. Mark stress and use weak forms where

necessary:

a. He’ll have to run as fast as he can

b. There are things that can be done to help her out.

c. You don’t have to tell us where he comes from?

9. Give a phonemic transcription of the following utterances

a. We can go there alone, can’t we?

b. You should have taken that picture.

c. Don’t you think that he’ll drive us in his own car?

d. Ring me up as soon as you get back home

e. She often talked about those years

f. We can wait for the bus

g. There are some new books I must read

h. The basket was full of things to eat

i. You ought to have your own car

j. Have you taken them from that box?

k. I shall take as much as I want

l. How does this work?

m. She took her aunt for a drive

n. Why should a man earn more than a woman?

o. He wants to come and see us at home

p. It’s true that he was late but his car could have broken down

q. Why am I too late to see him today?

r. Why do they like it?

s. I need that book