

some, the, from, etc.

Weak forms of function words

A

B15 Some words are not usually made prominent (see Unit 10) in conversation. These include the following groups of function words. (For exceptions, see Unit 22.)

the personal pronouns <i>I, me, we, us, you, he, him, she, her, it, they, them</i>	she SAW me.
the possessive determiners <i>my, your, his, her, its, our, their</i>	he's my BROTher.
<i>each other, one another</i>	they were HITting each other.
the articles <i>a, an, the</i>	it's an OWL.
the determiners <i>some</i> and <i>any</i>	do you WANT some?
the indefinite pronouns <i>some-/anybody, some-/anyone, some-/anything</i> when they are used as the object of a sentence	I didn't SEE anyone.
<i>there</i> used to introduce a sentence	there's some CAKE left.
forms of the auxiliary verbs <i>be, have, do</i> and the modal verbs (<i>shall, should, can, could, etc.</i>) except in negative forms	He was LATE. I can HEAR it.
prepositions (e.g. <i>as, at, for, from, of, to</i>)	they're from SPAIN.
the conjunctions <i>and, but, or, as, than, that</i>	he's OLDER than me.

B

B16 Some of these function words have a *weak* form and a *strong* form. The weak form is the usual pronunciation, but the strong form is used when the word is –

- prominent (see Unit 22)
- said on its own
- at the end of the sentence

	Example with weak form	Example with strong form
The following have weak forms with /ə/: <i>the, a, an, and, but, that, than, your, them, us, at, for, from, of, to, as, there, can, could, shall, should, would, must, do, does, am, are, was, were, some</i>	I can (/kən/) SWIM. this is for (/fə/) YOU.	I CAN (/kæn/) come after ALL. who's it FOR (/fɔːr/)?
<i>she, he, we, you</i> are pronounced with reduced vowels in their weak forms: /ʃi/, /hi/, /wi/, /ju/ (or /jə/)	Are you (/ju/ or /jə/) TIRED?	A: who DID it? B: YOU (/juː/)!
<i>his, her, he, him, her, has, had</i> are often pronounced without /h/ in their weak forms (except at the beginning of a sentence)	was he (/hi/ or /i/) THERE?	HE (/hiː/) was THERE, but SHE (/ʃiː/) wasn't.

C

B17 It can be difficult to hear the weak forms of function words in fast speech, particularly when a number of them come together, because they are often said quickly. Compare:

Important for listening

slow speech: When are you taking him to see her? There are some over there.

fast speech: When /əju/ taking /ɪmtə/ see /ə/? /ðərəsəm/ over there.



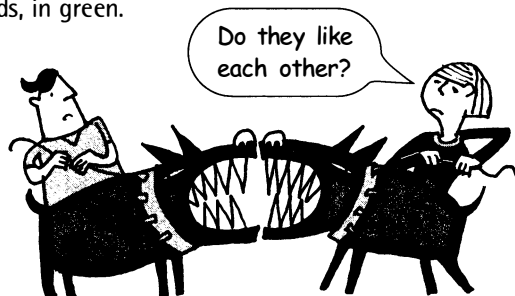
It is not always necessary to produce weak forms in your own speech in order to be understood, but they help to make your English sound more fluent and natural.

Exercises

- 1.1** Listen and repeat these sentences. Prominent syllables are in capital letters. Focus in particular on copying the non-prominent forms of the function words, in green.

B18

- 1 Do they **LIKE** each other?
- 2 I **SAW** somebody at the **WIN**dow.
- 3 There was a **LET**ter from his **BRO**ther.
- 4 There should be some **MORE** in the **BOX**.
- 5 we were **GO**ing to see her **PARE**nts.
- 6 she doesn't **LOOK** as **OLD** as me.
- 7 **WHEN** do you get the **re**SULTS of your **TEST**S?
- 8 I was at **HOM**E from **EIGH**T o'CLOCK.



- 1.2** Do you think the words in **bold** will have their weak (write W) or strong form (S) in these dialogues?

EXAMPLE a A: That ice-cream looks nice. B: Do you want **some**? S

b A: I'm really thirsty. B: There's **some** orange juice in the kitchen. W

- 1 a A: Do you think I should apologise? B: Yes, I'm sure that **would** help.
- b A: Did you get 100% on the test? B: No, I spelt '**would**' wrong.
- 2 a A: I was in Slovenia last weekend. B: What **were** you doing there?
- b A: Why weren't you and Amy at the party? B: But we **were**.
- 3 a A: What have you got there? B: It's a present **from** Alex.
- b A: Is this a card for Simon's birthday? B: No, it's **from** Simon.
- 4 a A: Why did you mark it wrong? B: You wrote '**your**' instead of 'you'.
- b A: We are off to Scotland again in the summer. B: Are you going with **your** sister?
- 5 a A: Can I borrow your screwdriver? B: What do you want it **for**?
- b A: Did the phone ring? B: Yes, it was **for** David.

- B19 Now listen and check your answers. Then say the B parts aloud.

- 1.3** Listen. Write the number of words you hear in each space.

B20

EXAMPLE 2 leaving now 3 staying?

Are you leaving now or are you staying?

- 1 waiting brother.
- 2 I knew going late again.
- 3 take swimming pool?
- 4 I thought station already, wrong.
- 5 go to the zoo, before?
- 6 more books here have.
- 7 He asked money lent
- 8 She told better off going by bus.

Now check your answers in the Key. Then listen again and repeat the sentences.

Follow up: Find a recording of speech at normal speed with a transcript (see Unit 4 for suggestions). Take an extract and try to write down what the speakers are saying. Then check what you have written against the transcript. Note in particular the pronunciation of function words.