

Weak Forms

Words might be classified as grammatical and content words. Grammatical or functional words don't have dictionary meaning while content words have lexical meanings in dictionary. Some grammatical words may be pronounced in two ways which are called strong form and weak forms. For example, the word "**that**" in the sentence: "*That is a book*" is pronounced in two different ways. It might be pronounced with strong form /ðæt/ or with weak form /ðət/. The difference between the two forms can effect on the meaning of the sentence. Here is an example to show how strong form of a single word "**that**" can change the entire meaning of the sentence:

"John thinks that man is evil."

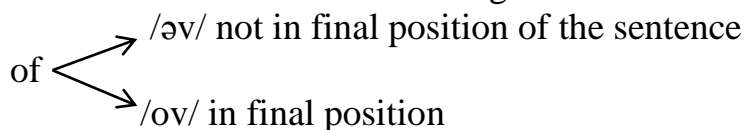
This version of the sentence, with the weak (unstressed) form of **that** /ðət/, means "John thinks all humans are evil". While if the sentence is uttered with a strong form (stressed) "**that**" /ðæt/, it will be understood as:

"John thinks a specific male (individual) is evil."

Weak forms of grammatical words should be distinguished from contracted form (I shall = I'll), (we have = we've). The change in the former (the first one) is only in pronunciation while the change in the latter (the second one) is in spelling and pronunciation (contract).

Weak forms belong to category of words called grammatical words which include (auxiliary verbs, prepositions, conjunctions,... etc.). These words are more frequently pronounced in their weak forms. However, they are pronounced in their strong forms in certain circumstance, these circumstances can be formulated as in the following:

- 1- Weak form words become strong at the end of the sentence, e.g.:

of 

Example: I'm fond of chips. /aim fond əv 'tʃɪps/

Chips are what I'm fond of. /'tʃɪps ə 'wɒt aim 'fond ov/

Many of grammatical words do not occur at the end of the sentence, e.g. (**the, a, an, your**). Sometimes words (grammatical) like (**she, he, we, you, her, their**) do occur in their weak form in final position.

- 2- When a weak form word is being contrasted with other words becomes strong e.g.:

The letters **from** him, not **to** him. (Contrast)

/ðə'reɪtəz 'frɒm ɪm not 'tu: ɪm/

It should be strong because these two grammatical words are contrast.

3- Co-ordinate propositions

I travel to **and** from London a lot.

/ai 'trævɪ tu: ən frɒm lʌndən ə 'lɒt/

A similar case is what might be called co-ordinate use of proposition.

Example:

A work of and about literature.

/ə 'wɜ:k 'ɒv ən ə'bout 'lɪtrətʃə/

4- When a weak form is given stress for purpose of emphasis e.g.

You must give me more money.

/ju 'mʌst gɪv me 'mo: 'mʌni/

5- When a weak form word is being cited or quoted, it is pronounced strongly, e.g.:

You shouldn't put "and" at the end of the sentence.

/ju: 'ʃʊdn̩t 'put ænd ət ði 'end əv 'ðə 'sentəns/

"**And**" which is usually weak, but here it is strong because it is quoted.

Weak form words spelt with -h- (e.g. her, have, had) at the beginning of the sentence are pronounced with initial /h/. Otherwise, the sound /h/ is omitted in other context when it will be in the middle or final position, e.g. "**her, have, had**".

Example: which has been best? /'wɪtʃ əz bi:n 'best/

In a summary, the functional words are words that have little semantic content (meaning) of their own, but tend to have more grammatical or referential function in relating content words or higher syntactic units to one another. Function words are essentially closed class words, such as pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliaries, etc. In general, weak forms do not tend to occur in sentence-final position or in contrastive/emphatic use. The tables below show listing of these words, together with their strong or dictionary form, as well as their potential weak forms.

1- Determiners/Quantifiers:

<i>orthography</i>	<i>strong form(s)</i>	<i>weak form(s)</i>
the	ði:	ðɪ, ðə
a/an	eɪ, ən	ə, ən
some	sʌm	səm, sm̩

2- Pronouns:

<i>orthography</i>	<i>strong form(s)</i>	<i>weak form(s)</i>
his	hɪz	ɪz
him	hɪm	ɪm
her	hɜː	hə, ə, ɜː
you	juː	jʊ, jə
your	jɔː	jə
she	ʃiː	ʃɪ
he	hiː	ɪ
we	wɪː	wɪ
them	ðeɪm	ðəm, əm
us	ʌs	əs, s

3- Prepositions/and Particles:

<i>orthography</i>	<i>strong form(s)</i>	<i>weak form(s)</i>
at	at	ət
for	fɔː	fə
from	fɹɒm	fɹəm, fəm, fɪm
of	ɒv	əv, v
to	tuː	tə, tʊ
as	az	əz, z
there	ðeə	ðə
than	ðan	ðən

4- Conjunctions:

<i>Orthography</i>	<i>strong form(s)</i>	<i>weak form(s)</i>
and	and	ənd, ən, ɒd, ɪ
but	bʌt	bət
that	ðat	ðət

5- Auxiliaries:

<i>Orthography</i>	<i>strong form(s)</i>	<i>weak form(s)</i>
can	kan	kən, kɪ
could	kʊd	kəd
have	hav	əv, v
has	haz	əz, z
had	had	əd, d
will	wɪl	l

shall	ʃal	ʃəl, ʃl, l
should	ʃʊd	ʃəd
must	mʌst	məs, məst
do	du:	də, d
does	dʌz	dəz, z
am	am	əm, m
are	ɑ:	ə
was	wɒz	wəz
were	wɜ:	wə
been	bi:n	bɪn

PLEASE

**Review the Most Common Weak-Form Words in Your Text
Book on Pages 90-95**