

The **People's Democratic and Popular Republic of Algeria**
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
University of Larbi Ben M'hidi- Oum El Bouaghi
Faculty of Arts and Languages
Department of English

Weak Forms

Lecturer : Mr. A. Taibi & Mrs S. Bechoua


Level : Sophomores

What happens when a strong form becomes weak?

This is a detailed review of the different types of changes which structural words undergo when they become weak. For a complete look-up table of these changes, [try this](#) ▶

• Words which change their strong vowel to ɪ


- **Prepositions**

at for from of to  [5, 14-16](#)


- **Aux verbs**

am, are, can, do, does, had, has, have, must, shall, should, was, were, will, would,  [37-39](#)


- **Adverbs conjunctions articles**

a, an, and, as, but, some, than, that, the,  [36](#)

- **Pronouns**

her them us you your  [29](#)

• Words which change their strong vowel to ɪ (i)


be, been, he, him, is, she, we,  [33, 35](#)

Words which change their vowel before vowels:

		Before consonants	Before vowels	
• r/i to i	be	bɪ, bi	bi	aɪl bɪ 'ðeə aɪl bi 'əʊvə 'ðeə
	he	(h)ɪ, i	(h)i	ɪf ɪ 'wɒnts ɪf i 'ɑːks
	she	ʃɪ, fi	fi	ʃɪ 'wɒnts tu ʃi 'ɔːt tu
• ə, u to u	do	də, du	du	'wɒt də wɪ du 'ɔːl əv əs 'went
	to	tə	tu	tə 'denmɑːk tu 'aɪslənd
	you	jə, ju	ju	'wɪl jə 'kɑːm wɪl ju 'ɑːsk
• add -r	for	fə	fər	fə 'təʊni fər 'æliːs
	her	(h)ə	(h)ər	hə 'mʌðə hər 'ʌŋk!
	there	ðə	ðər	ðə 'kɑːnt bi ðər 'ɪzɒt eni
	are	ə	ər	ə ðeɪ 'ɔːl ər 'ɔːl əv ðəm
	were	wə	wər	wə ðeɪ 'ɔːl wər 'ɔːl əv ðəm
	your	jə	jər	jə 'mʌðə jər 'ɑːnt
articles:	a	ə	ən	ə 'dɔː ən 'əʊpən dɔː
	the	ðə	ði	ðə 'dɔː ði 'əʊpən 'dɔː

H-dropping

- Weak forms which drop their initial h except at the beginning of utterances

had has had have he her him his  [29-35](#)

When strong, when weak ?

Quite often, strong forms are used instead of weak forms. The following is a summary of when strong forms are likely to occur.

(a) Normally weak, but strong when stressed

- foregrounding**

- 'meəriəz'si:nɪmbrɪ'fɔ: Mary has seen him before ◀
- 'meəri'hæz'si:nɪmbrɪ'fɔ: Mary has seen him before
- 'meəriəz'si:n'hɪmbrɪ'fɔ: Mary has seen him before

- comparative stress**

- 'ðɪs 'treɪn 'ɪznt 'kʌmɪŋ 'frɒm 'lʌndən | ɪts 'gəvɪŋ 'tu: 'lʌndən◀
This train isn't coming from London, it's going to London

- evasion of repetition (deaccenting)**

- hi 'dɪd ɪt fə ðə 'pi:pəl əv ðə 'sɪtɪ he did it for the people of the city ◀
- 'gʌvənmənt 'ɒv ðə 'pi:pəl | 'bɑ: ðə 'pi:pəl | 'fɔ: ðə pi:pəl
government of the people, for the people, by the people ◀
- ðə 'mi:l wəz 'gʊd || bət 'weɪtɪŋ 'fɔ: ðə 'mi:l wəz 'tɔ:ʃə
The meal was good, but waiting for the meal was torture ◀

- citation forms**

- 'bɪgə ðæn'mɪ: bigger than me
- 'haʊ dəʒə 'spɛl ðə 'wɜ:d ðæn How do you spell the word "than"? ◀
- aɪ kəd 'du: ɪf jʊ wəd 'aʊnli 'stɒp 'hæsɪŋ mi
I could do it if you would only stop hassling me
- aɪ sed 'kʊd | 'nɒt 'wʊd I said "could", not "would" ◀
- aɪ sed 'ði: 'tɑ:ɡə 'nɒt 'er 'tɑ:ɡə I said "the tiger", not "a tiger" ◀

- in front of pauses**

- aɪd 'laɪk tə 'spi:k tə ði: || 'wɒtɪsɪzneɪm || 'bleʊk u 'selz ɪn'ʃʊərəns ◀
I'd like to speak to the - whatisname - bloke who sells insurance
(Note - on the soundclip I say "the - er - bloke" - perhaps the /i/ in "the" is a result of the following vowel in "er".)

(b) weak forms which become strong when final

- Prepositions and auxiliary verbs are strong at the end of utterances; pronouns remain weak:**

14 'aɪ 'kʌm frəm 'braɪtŋ || 'braɪtɪz weər aɪ 'kʌm frəm ◀
 15 'kʌm ət 'sɪks ə'klɒk | 'wɒt ə jə 'getɪŋ æt ◀
 16 dʒə 'wɒnt tə 'kʌm | 'jes aɪ 'wɒnt tu: | bət aɪ 'ka:nt ◀

- **sometimes strong preceding final unstressed pronoun:**

17 aɪ 'wʌndə ɪf jəd 'du: 'sʌmpɪŋ fɔ: mɪ
 18 aɪ 'wʌndə ɪf jəd 'du: 'sʌmpɪŋ fə 'mi: ◀
 19 'sɒk ɪt tu ɪm 'dʒəni ◀ (see also [40](#))

(c) different part of speech

Some words occur as different parts of speech with different stress and vowel quality:

- **that:** weak when relative, strong when demonstrative:

20 'enɪbədɪ ðæt 'dʌz 'ðæt ◀
 21 'ðæts ðə 'mæn ðæt aɪ 'sɔ: _ ðə 'haʊs ðæt aɪ 'bɔ:t ɪz 'ðæt wʌn ◀
 that's the man that I saw - the house that I bought is that one
 22 'ðæt 'bʊk 'sez ðæt 'ðæts ðə 'best 'weɪ tə 'kʊk 'mʌfrʊmz ◀

- **some:** weak when indefinite, strong when adjectival:

23 ðə ɜ səm 'pi:p| 'weɪtɪŋ aʊt'saɪd tə 'si: ju ◀
 there are some people waiting outside to see you
 24 'sʌm 'pi:p| 'ɔ:lweɪz 'get ɒn maɪ 'nɜ:vz ◀
 some people always get on my nerves

- **there:** strong when adverbial, optionally weak when a dummy subject. Can also be weak finally.

25 'ðeəz ðə 'haʊs aɪ wəz 'bɔ:n ɪn ◀
 26 ðə wəz ə 'sʌdn 'saɪləns | 'wɒznt ðə (ðeə ... ðeə) ◀
 (The sound clip gives both weak and strong forms - you may hear either.)

- Some verbs can be both **auxiliary** (weak forms) and **main** (strong forms):

27 aɪ 'dɪdnt 'si: ɪf ɪ əd 'fɪnɪʃt | 'wɒt dɜz ɪt 'mæte ◀
 28 aɪ 'hæd 'flu: 'lɑ:st 'wɪ:k | ʃɪ 'ɔ:lweɪz 'dʌz wɒt ʃɪ 'laɪks ◀

• (d) h-dropping

- **Words beginning with h-** drop the h when weak, but often retain them at the beginning of a sentence

29 I gave her the letter - Tony went to see his mother
 aɪ 'geɪv ə ðə 'lete | 'təʊni 'went tə 'si: ɪz 'mʌðə ◀
 30 His mother came to see him
 hɪz 'mʌðə 'keɪm tə 'si: ɪm ◀
 31 Her mother came to see them
 hɜ 'mʌðə 'keɪm tə 'si: ðəm ◀

- If dropped h leads to V-V, it may reappear:

32 I tried to give her his letter
aɪ 'traɪd tə 'gɪv ə hɪz 'lɛtə ◀

33 She did it for her brother
ʃi 'dɪd ɪt fə hə 'brʌðə ◀

but more often this leads to linking r after ə, ɪ, ʊ or ɜ:

34 aɪ 'traɪd tə 'gɪvər ɪz 'lɛtə ◀

35 ʃi 'dɪd ɪt fər ə 'brʌðə ◀

NOTE: don't drop h's in lexical words!

(e) conjunctions

- **and, but, than** - nearly always weak

36 'meəri ən 'brʌs ə kwɪkə ðən 'mi: bət 'sləʊə ðən 'ju: ◀

(f) auxiliary verbs

37 can: aɪ 'bɪŋk aɪ kən (kŋ) 'du: ɪt ◀

38 will does: 'dʒɒn əl əv 'fɪnɪʃt baɪ 'naʊ | 'wen dəz ɪ 'lɪv ðə 'fæktəri ◀

39 must was were: wɪ məs 'get səm 'mɔ: | 'wɒt wəz aɪ 'seɪŋ | 'weə wə ðə 'ʃɪ
ldrən ◀

- **strong forms finally**, like prepositions

40 can, have: aɪ kən 'du: ɪt ɪf 'ju: kæn | hɪl əv 'fɪnɪʃt bɪfɔ: 'ðeɪ hæv ◀

- **strong when main verbs**

41 see [28](#) above

(g) Negatives are always strong

42 'ðæts 'nɒt wɒt aɪ 'sed

43 'ðæt 'ɪznt wɒt aɪ 'sed ◀

44 ju 'kɑ:nt 'du: 'ðæt ('kænt) ◀

(h) structural words which do not have weak forms:

how if in on off then they up what when where

haʊ ɪf ɪn ɒn ɒf ðən ðeɪ ʌp wɒt wen weə ◀

their does not have a weak form in RP, although you may sometimes hear a weak form ðəɪ before words beginning with a vowel (e.g. "their own"). In GA this weak form occurs before consonants too.

They is never weak. But **them** has a weak form and may even lose the initial consonant - ðəm or əm.

Activities

Activity one

In the following sentences, the transcription for the weak-form words is left blank. Fill in the blanks, taking care to use the appropriate form.

1. I want her to park that car over there.
aɪ wɒnt pɑ:k kɑ:r əʊvə
2. Of all the proposals, the one that you made is the silliest.
ɔ:l prəpəʊz|z wʌn meɪd sɪliəst
3. Jane and Bill could have driven them to and from the party.
dʒeɪn bɪl dɪrɪvən pɑ:ti
4. To come to the point, what shall we do for the rest of the week?
kʌm pɔɪnt wɒt rest wi:k
5. Has anyone got an idea where it came from?
eniwʌn gɒt aɪdɪə weər ɪt keɪm
6. Pedestrians must always use the crossings provided for them.
pədestriənz ɔ:lwɪz ju:z krɒsɪŋz prəvaɪdɪd
7. Each one was a perfect example of the art that had been developed there.
i:tʃ wʌn pɜ:fɪkt ɪgzɑ:mp| ɑ:t bi:n dɪveləpt

Activity two

Mark the underlined words *w* if you think they will be weak and *s* if you think they will be strong.

- 1 I could speak English when I was twelve.
- 2 I wasn't very well yesterday, but I am today.
- 3 A: Are these your gloves? B: Yes, they are. Thanks!
- 4 A: I don't think you were at the lesson last week, were you? B: I was!
- 5 A: I didn't think the singers in the band were very good. B: Oh, I thought they were!
- 6 A: Have you got a pen? B: Just a minute, I think I have, somewhere.
- 7 A: Has the lesson started? B: Yes, it has, but you can go in.
- 8 A: Where does he live? B: Near the old town hall. Do you know where that is? A: Yes, I do.
- 1 A: Are you going to talk to him? B: No, I think he should talk to me first.
- 2 A: Shall I phone her? B: Yes, I think you should.
- 3 A: You see those people over there? Do you know them? B: I know her, but I don't know him.
- 4 A: What are you going to give him? B: I think I'll give him a shirt. What about you?
- 5 Let him come in and ask him what he wants.
- 6 She says she'll bring her money tomorrow.
- 7 I'm tired ... shall we go now?
- 8 Everybody's leaving. What about us? Shall we go, too?
- 9 Tell us when you're ready.
- 10 A: Who broke that window? B: He did! C: No, I didn't, she did!

Activity four : Fill in the weak forms in the phonetic transcriptions. Use only ə, I, i & u.

a) 'Have you seen the time?'

| h___ v j___ si:n ð___ taim |

b) 'What have you done today?'

| wɒt ___v j___ dʌn t___dei |

c) 'That was really annoying.'

| ðæt w___z riəl___ ___nɔɪj___ŋ |

d) Your bike has got a puncture.

| j___ baɪk ___z gɒt ___ pʌŋtʃ___ |

e) 'Shall we go to the pub for a beer?'

| ʃ___l w___ gəʊ t___ ð___ pʌb f___r ___ bɪə |

f) Most of them have finished.

| mɔːst ___v ð___m ___v fɪn___ɪʃt |

Activity five : Mark the stress patterns of the word groups. Draw a line through the weak form words. Pay special attention to the pronunciation of the weak form words in the sentences.

Example: in fact all of you . - - . .

- 1. at the end of the morning _____
- 2. you will all be able to ... _____
- 3. from the college office _____
- 4. at nine o'clock in the morning _____
- 5. at four o'clock in the afternoon _____
- 6. most of you _____
- 7. from nine in the morning _____
- 8. till eight in the evening _____
- 9. open at the same times _____
- 10. sports clubs and examinations. _____

Activity six : Transcribe phonemically the whole sentences.

- 1. I want her to park that car over there.
- 2. To come to the point, what shall we do for the rest of the week ?
- 3. Has anyone got an idea where it came from ?
- 4. She can do a lot but her parents didn't want her so.
- 5. Is it Ann or you who sent that email to my friend ?