



Sudan University of Science and Technology



College of Graduate Studies

Department of English

**Importance of Learning Strong and Weak Forms of Grammatical
Words in Perception of Listening**

أهمية تعلم الصيغ القوية والضعيفة في الكلمات النحوية في إدراك الإستماع

*Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirement of
Master Degree in English Language*

Submitted by:

Adam Mohamed Ishag Yagoob

Supervised by:

Dr. Areig Osman Ahmed Mohamed

2017

Dedication

This work would not have been completed without the precious support and care of many people whose contributions have been equally priceless, and to whom I am deeply indebted. I dedicate this work: To my mother and father for their love and support. To my brothers, sisters for their help and patience, to all my relatives, and to the soul of my grandmother for her high motivation and prayers.

To my close friends with whom I have spent the best moments during my studies; Abdallah , Mohamed Al Hafiz, Emad Awad, Babiker Abaker, and Abdallah Niayer. To my closest friends Al Nazzeer Basher, Ustaz Said, Abu Bakri Khalil, and to the angel that I will never forget my wife Naema Ahmed Abdullatif Othman and my sons Ahmed and Mohamed Adam

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my utmost gratitude to Dr. Areig Osman Ahmed Mohamed who has guided me throughout all the stages of this study. I thank her for all her encouragement, advice, help, patience, and all the precious time she has devoted to all of us.

I am deeply indebted to the librarians who have provided me with important references which have enriched my work. I also owe a particular debt for my friend Mohamed Al Hafiz who has provided me with references and materials that would have otherwise been inaccessible. Special thanks to my friends Esraa and Abdallah Gadem for their priceless support and encouragement. I wish to extend my thanks to my friends and colleagues for their kindness and help. I must also be grateful for respondents for their help. I will not forget all the Batch five's students who have kindly accepted to take part in this study.

Abstract

This study is conducted to investigate the ability of master degree student to process some aspects of connected speech by identifying the sounds of functional words through listening to the sentences and say either strong or weak form while listening to the natural speech of native speakers in English language. The main concern is to evaluate the students' performance of perception in listening to the weak and strong forms of grammatical words. The test and interview have revealed that the master degree students at University of Sudan for Science and Technology seem to have some problems of perceiving in listening to strong and weak forms as a result of learning because they focus in studying such forms on the productive level rather than on the perceptive one. Furthermore, these forms are seldom used in the speech of teachers and the students, lack of awareness and training. Through a listening test, and an interview it has tried to depict the comprehension level of students regarding these forms and to elicit the perception difficulties that they are likely to face in listening to native speakers in English language. The results confirmed that almost all the tested students and interviewed ones are not only unaware of the significance of weak forms learning, but also they are unable to perceive some weak and strong forms well in their pronunciation while listening. As a practical contribution, the study leads to some recommendations concerning the teaching of weak forms and strong forms in aspects of the connected speech, in general the researcher's view point there should be a support to non-native speakers of English language learners in applying accurate ways of learning English phonetics and phonology earlier during the years at schools until students, admission to Universities and there must be qualified teachers in all levels who will make the learners stronger in familiarizing the aspects of English language sound system, students should apply the first skill of an English language in non-native groups to accustom saying the words as well as natural speech through native speakers directly, if possible to compare the pronunciation of single and connected words in the same time to avoid misperceptions of sounds.

ملخص البحث

اجريت هذه الدراسة للوقوف علي قدرات طلاب الماجستير في عملية تحديد اصوات الاشكال القوية والضعيفة في كلمات الوظائف في اللغة الانجليزية عبراستماعهم لاصحاب اللغة الاصليين عند ربط الجمل مع بعضها البعض عندما يتحدثون باللغة الانجليزية حسب قدراتهم العلمية علي فهم الحديث الطبيعي مع أصحاب اللغة الأصليين.

والهدف الأساسي من هذه الدراسة الاهتمام بتقييم أداء طلاب الماجستير بتمييزهم لكلمات الوظائف في اللغة الانجليزية مثلا متى تكون هذه الادوات قوية ومتى تكون ضعيفة عند استماعهم لها من قبل أصحاب اللغة الاصليين في قواعد اللغة الانجليزية تم جمع البيانات لهذه الدراسة عن طريق الاختبار والمعايينات لطلاب الماجستير بجامعة السودان للعلوم والتكنولوجيا قسم اللغة الانجليزية حيث وجد ان لديهم بعض المشكلات في ادراكهم لهذه الكلمات أعلاها كنتيجة تركيز الطلاب في لغة الأم في فهم هذه الأشكال في مستوى انتاجية اكثر من الادراكية.

بالاضافة لذلك هذه الاشكال نادراً ما يتم استخدامها في خطابات المعلمين بصورة صحيحة منذ بداية تعلم هذه اللغة في السن المبكر وايضا عدم وعي الطلاب والتدريب الامثل في نطق هذه الكلمات كاصحاب اللغة وبعد اجراء اختبار الاستماع علي هذه الصيغ وجد مستوى طلاب الماجستير لهم بعض الصعوبات التي تواجههم في استماعهم للجانب اثناء التحدث معهم والنتائج تؤكد بأن اهتمام الطلاب في تعلم نطق كلمات الوظائف وكلمات المحتوى سيستطيعوا ادراك هذه الاشكال كمساهمة تطبيقية لهذه الدراسة يقودنا الي بعض الوصايا التي تخص تدريس هذه الاشكال الضعيفة والقوية منها وجوانب ربط الحديث في العموم علي حسب وجود العوائق التي وجدت اثناء اجراءات الاختبارات والمعايينة ووفقاً لنتائج البحث ينبغي ان تتوفر مساعدة لغير الناطقين باللغة الانجليزية طرق تطبيق دقيقة في علم اصواتها في السن المبكرة قبل دخول الطلاب الي الجامعات وايضاً يجب وجود معلمين مؤهلين في كل المستويات لتقوية الطلاب في مجال اصوات اللغة الانجليزية كي يستطيعوا تطبيق مهارة اللغة الأولى مباشرة في نطق الكلمات جيداً و اذا امكن مقارنة الجمل مع الكلمات لتجنب سوء ادراك الاصوات.

Table of content

Title	CHAPTER ONE Introduction of the research	
No	Item	Page
1.0	Overview	1
1.1	Statement of the Problem	2-3
1.2	Aims of the Research	3-4
1.3	Questions of the Research	4
1.4	Hypotheses of the Research	5
1.5	The Methodology of the Research	5
1.6	Limitation of the Research	6
Title	CHAPTER TWO	
2.0	Introduction	7
2.1	Literature Review	7
2.2	Explanation of Weak Forms	8-9
2.3	The Use of Weak and Strong Forms	9-11
2.4	Manner of Phonological Modifications	12-13
2.5	The Reasons for Weakening the Functional Words	13-15
2.6	Weak Forms and Listening Perception	15-18
2.7	Factors Related to the Characteristics of Weak Forms	18-22
2.8	Factors Related to Foreign Language Learners	22-25
2.9	Weak Forms in EFL-ESL Research	25-28
2.10	Teaching Weak Forms	28-31
2.11	Previous Studies	31-33
Title	CHAPTER THREE Literature Review and Previous Studies	
3.0	Introduction	34
3.1	Methodology	34
3.2	Research Tools	34-35
3.3	Research Sample	35-36
3.4	Procedures, Description	36-37
3.5	The Validity and Reliability of the Study	37-38

Continuation of Table of Contents

Title	CHAPTER FOUR DATA ANALYSIS	
No	Item	Page
4.0	Introduction	39
4.1	Who did you give the money away to ?	39
4.2	What do you want to have a word with me about?	40
4.3	Who did you dance with ?	41
4.4	What do you need five thousand pounds for ?	42
4.5	What is he writing a book about?	43
4.6	Who did you get a present from ?	44
4.7	Who did you buy a birthday card for?	45
4.8	What is he thinking about ?	46
4.9	Where do you want me to give a lift to?	47
4.10	What do you want me to clean the sink with?	48
4.11	Can I have some sphegaty?	49
4.12	Have you got lots of Ham sandwiches? Well there are few	50
4.13	I would like two vegetable curries please, Sorry there is only a little left.	51
4.14	Can I have some chips with my hamburger?	52
4.15	Have you got apple pie today? Yes just a little.	53
4.16	Should the strong and weak forms be learned in pronunciation course only?	54
4.17	In what extend non-native speakers find it difficult to understand native speakers, speech because of the way functional words are pronounced?	55
4.18	In what extend the perception of listening to weak and strong forms need special rules to understand native speakers?	56
4.19	In what extend non -native educators of English should try to apply the right rules in perception of listening to strong and weak forms properly?	57
4.20	In what extend the mother tongue of non-native speakers of English have an influence on perception of listening to weak and strong forms in English language?	58

CHAPTER FIVE

Findings, suggestions, recommendations and conclusion

Title	Item	Page
No	CHAPTER FIVE Findings, suggestions, recommendations and conclusion	
5.0	Introduction	59
5.1	The research findings	60
5.2	Recommendations	60
5.3	Suggestions	61
5.4	Conclusion	61-62
	Bibliography	63
	Appendix	64-66

List of Terms

- 1- **Functional Words:** are (Articles,Pronouns,Prepositions,Conjunctions and Auxiliary verbs in English Language)
- 2- **Content Words :** are (Nouns,Verbs,Adjective,Adverbs and Interjections)
- 3- **Phonetics:**(the acoustic system of sounds)
- 4- **Phonology** (system of how to study sounds)
- 5- **Weak forms:** are reduced forms while speaking through connected speech.
- 6- **Strong Forms:** are citation forms of the words to emphasize events.
- 7- **EFL:** stands for (English as a Foreign Language)
- 8- **ESL:** stands for (English as a Second Language)
- 9- **Proceduralization:** the way of doing something with serial steps
- 10- **Automatisation:** to accustom doing something directly without doubt.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The reason of dealing with this topic it came from the experience of University doctors and teachers who teach students in educational fields in the daily courses, it was noticed that students have difficulties in understanding stretches of natural speech where the weak and strong forms are used.

1.0 Overview

Phonetics & phonology of English language and the importance of learning languages in the world is significant, therefore phonetics is the branch of acoustics which concerns speech sounds including production, perception and acoustic analysis in the same time, and phonology is the study of the sound system of a given language analysis and classification of its phonemes. The researcher has dealt with the problems of master degree students at Sudan University of science and Technology department of English language testing and interviewing them for learning perception of listening to strong and weak forms of functional words in connected speech and how to discriminate between these forms when they are weak and strong. A thorough understanding of the characteristics of functional words and of the English sound-system characteristics it will help them to get a clear image of understanding the reason behind the alternation in pronunciation exerted over this category of words –functional words- in spoken English language should show better results. Who will explore the rules that govern the use of functional words in English and raise some theoretical considerations about the characteristics of functional words that make them go un-noticeable in connected speech, especially from the part of foreign learners might classify experiments which will deal with the problem of listening to strong and weak forms in connected speech phenomena in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English

as Second Language (ESL) situations will also be reviewed. Before that, some basic notions about the nature of listening perception-the context of the problem-and the listening process will be first considered.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Functional words in English are the words that have no dictionary meaning unless been connected with other words to show the specific meaning in sentences, phrases or clauses. Foreign language learning has always been regarded as the mastery of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are regarded as belonging to the same category, which are the receptive skills and speaking and writing to another category, which are the productive ones. All these skills are important; however, there is a tendency in teaching to give much more attention to the productive skills to the extent that the other skills are somehow neglected.

The task of this study is the listening skill for weak and strong forms in English language's phonetics and phonology to identify from sentences through listening to native speakers while speaking. Definitions of listening range from simple ones which are regarded as the simple recognition of speech sounds to the highly complex ones which consider them as a process of involving a wide range of linguistic and nonlinguistic knowledge. In this study, the researcher worked on the phonological knowledge as a part of the linguistic knowledge that is necessary in the process of listening. The researcher focused in learning of weak and strong forms of grammatical words as one aspect of connected speech which is significant in listening and speaking i.e. in production and in reception.

Students are taught basic concepts about the ways of weak and strong forms are used in different environments. The basic source of this information is

generally the courses which students were taught in the module of phonetics. The main focus of such courses is to show students different variations of pronunciation that each grammatical word has, and the rules that govern their actual use i.e. the manner and the context of their use. That is to say, what students are learning is the ‘production’ of weak and strong forms. This is significant in the sense that native speakers use them in speech, and since the students’ aim is to speak as naturally as native speakers, the learning of these forms facilitates their task. In addition, the intelligibility of the language students produce will highly depend on their correct use of these forms, more importantly, extensive work with weak and strong forms that will facilitate their perception in natural speech. Students, however, have poor performance as to the perception of these forms. Despite the fact that they have been exposed to the basic concepts that govern the use of weak forms and strong forms, they still have problems in understanding them while listening to connected speech words. The reason for this, as stated earlier, might be that the focus in teaching is given more to production rather than reception. It could be also that students are not aware of the importance of this aspect of connected speech in listening.

1.2 Aims of the research

This study aims to deal with the master degree students of an English department at Sudan University of science and Technology to investigate their ability in listening comprehension of functional words and how to identify weak and strong forms while listening to native speakers using functional words in the speech, and the objective is to diagnose the students’ performance in listening skill, and how do they identify weak and strong forms of functional words in different sentences when these words are used differently according to any situation they occur in sentences. The researcher aimed at understanding the problems that

master degree students face while listening to natural natives, speech and how to perceive the weak and strong forms of grammatical words i.e. the reflections of any misperception of these forms in their comprehension to natives, speech will be shown in this study.

This recurrent phenomenon is very noticeable especially during dictations. Where teachers, extensively use weak forms in speaking, dictating students to show abilities of understanding the meanings of sentences and how to break them down. Very frequently, students ask their teachers to repeat what they say, and it is almost always the weak forms that cause problems. The problem is usually solved when the teacher repeats what he said but with the use of full forms or strong forms instead. As a matter of fact, students have been taught the rules governing the use of weak and strong forms; but despite this, they are still unable to recognize them. This is why, in this research, the researcher tried to question the sufficiency of knowing about these rules in the process of listening, and the importance of raising students' awareness and the significance of developing the listening skill in English language.

1.3 Research Questions

This study raises the following questions

1. To what extent are students aware of the importance of weak forms as an aspect of connected speech that is necessary in developing their listening skills?
2. To what extent can students identify forms of functional words while listening to reduced forms of functional words in English language?

1.4 Hypotheses of the research

This study is conducted through the following hypotheses.

1- Students cannot identify the strong and weak forms taught in the module of phonetics that are enough to get the meaning and understanding of these rules in English phonetics and phonology.

2- Students are not aware of the significance of the strong and weak forms and the rules that govern their use not only in production but also in reception.

1.5 Methodology of the research

The methodology of this research is empirical and analytical it has been performed by designing a test and an interview for collecting data from master degree students of English Language at University of Sudan for Science and Technology to verify the awareness of learning functional words in connected speech while listening to native speakers. The research sample and tools are two major tools **first** one is a test and **second** one is an interview which were administered to the same category of students to collect the relevant data, forty students were asked to answer question which survey their knowledge about the use of strong and weak forms of functional words in English language conversation. Thirty items targeted a specific kind of knowledge with one major purpose which is to enable the researcher to know about students, awareness in rules which determine the use of strong and weak forms in natural connected speech, and ten of them were interviewed to explain the facilitations of learning these functional words in English as well as native speakers do in phonetics and phonology.

1.6 Limitation of the Research

This study limitation is confined of auxiliary verbs, prepositions and conjunctions identification in spoken sentences of English Language through listening to tape-scripts from Headway Upper Intermediate Course done by native speakers aiming at non-native speakers to know the attitude of classifying weak and strong forms, sounds in connected speech of English phonetics and phonology.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review and Previous Studies

2.0 Introduction

This chapter dealt with the problems of perception in listening to strong and weak forms of functional words in connected speech concerning the thorough understanding the characteristics of functional words in English language which helped to get a clear image that stands behind the alternation in pronunciation exerted over this category of words in spoken English by native speakers. The researcher explored the rules that govern the use of functional words in English and raised some theoretical considerations about the characteristics of functional words which made them go un-noticeable in connected speech, especially from the part of foreign learners. Some experiments which dealt with the problem of perception in listening to weak and strong forms and connected speech phenomena in English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as Second Language (ESL) were reviewed. Before that, some basic notions about the nature of perception in listening comprehension process in context of this problem, and the listening process were first considered.

2.1 Literature Review

The purpose of this study is the investigation of abilities of master degree students in connected speech using functional words and content words in English phonetics and phonology and the goal is to see the scope of students, awareness in learning these words and how these words occur in sentences while listening to native speakers speaking and do students face difficulties in understanding the functional words or normally perceive the natural speech.

2.2 Explanation of Weak Forms

Weak forms are belonging to the closed class category of words which are called 'Functional Words' 'Grammatical Words'. In English, as in all other languages, functional words do not have a dictionary meaning the way content words do those of the open class category such as **verbs, adjectives, and nouns** - have. They are limited in number and include **auxiliary verbs, pronouns, articles, conjunctions** and **prepositions** etc. Their main function is to serve as „grammatical cement“ holding content words together, as well as maintaining relationships between higher syntactic units such as phrases and clauses (Collins & Mees, 2003.64). Thus they carry relatively very little meaning. Functional words may combine to form contracted forms e.g. he + will = he'll. Phonologically speaking, functional words undergo a set of modifications in natural speech. Nearly all functional words have two pronunciation forms; a strong form and a weak form. The strong form (also called citation form/ full form) is stressed and it is the pronunciation form that is usually found in the dictionary entry of the word (Brown & Kondo, 2006.33). It is the first form to which foreign learners are usually introduced. The weak form (modified pronunciation) is unstressed, less prominent, and phonemically different from the strong form in both quality and quantity. The common way of weakening functional words is reduction in the vowel quality. This is done by the replacement of the word's central vowel by a weaker one, mainly the „schwa“. Also, weakening may result from the change of consonants and appearance of syllabic consonants (Selkirk, 1996.22) The Prosodic Structure of Function Words. In J. L. Morgan, & K. Demuth. For Roach, this variance in pronunciation is a significant characteristic of the way English pronunciation is modified (Roach, 2002.88). Some functional words have more than one weak form. When the same functional word occurs in different contexts,

the phonological environment exerts significant effects on the way it is weakened. For instance, the word „your“ is pronounced /jə/ when it occurs before a consonant and /jɜ:/ before a vowel: „Take your time“ teik jə taim „On your own“ ɒn jɜ əʊn. In speech, the decision to use one form or another is rule-governed. Generally, this is related to the position where the word occurs, intended emphasis, and meaning.

However, in spoken English, the weak pronunciation form is more frequent than the strong one, and it is described as the normal pronunciation of the word. According to Dretzke (1998:27) *Modern British and American English Pronunciation*. There are almost “forty weak forms which occur in the first two hundred most common words in connected speech. The use of weak forms is considered as one aspect of connected speech which plays a crucial role in both speech production and reception. Mortimer (1985) *Elements of Pronunciations: Intensive Practice for Intermediate and more Advanced Students*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Stated that “a good practical grasp of the weak forms of English is essential to good pronunciation and perception of listening. From the productive point of view, all native speakers use them regardless of the level of formality; and for foreign learners who want to speak as naturally as native the speakers, the learning of weak forms becomes obligatory. From the perceptual point of view and this is more important, the knowledge which listeners have about weak forms facilitates perception and comprehension.

2.3 The Use of Weak and Strong Forms

As stated before, there are rules that are used to identify where a functional word is to be used on its weak form and where the strong one has to be used. Since in English the weak forms are the normal pronunciation form of functional words, and they are more frequently used, it is a good way to focus on the exceptions where the weak form is not used in order to get a clear image of these rules. Hence,

it should be mentioned only the conditions under which the strong form is more suitable, which means that in almost all of the other conditions, functional words have to be weakened.

The strong form is used when the functional word **occurs in isolation**, i.e. out of context. The strong form is used when the word occurs in the final position of the sentence. Pronouns such as „his“, „us“ ... may remain weak in final position.

Where are you from? /frɒm/ I'm home from work. /frəm/ Stay with him. /im/

When functional words are **quoted, they are pronounced strongly**. The word

„**and**“ is a conjunction /ænd/ when the word is emphasized in an utterance, it is stressed to show an intended meaning. Is marry present? _ Yes, she **is** present. In

connected speech, if a functional word precedes a **pause**, it is pronounced in its **strong form**. It is a...er em it is a good idea. /ei/ /ə/. For **auxiliary verbs**, if they

occur in their negative sense, **they are always strong**. She has not found her keys yet. /hæz/ When the word „**must**“ is used in the sense of concluding something, it

is usually stressed (Roach, 1998). He does not reply to the phone calls. He must be in a meeting. /mʌst/ In addition to this, there are some functional words which are

regularly stressed. These are particularly demonstratives (like „this“, „that“, „those“) and interrogatives (like „where“, „who“, „which“, „how“)

(Collins & Mees, 2003:64). Interrogatives such as these do not have a weak form. If the word „that“ is used in a relative clause, it is not stressed. But as a demonstrative

adjective, it „is“ stressed. Who is **that** boy? /ðæt/ I told him **that** I was busy. /ðæt/

Table 2.1

Table 1 Strong and Weak Forms of Common English Functional Words from (Roach, 1998.102)

Functional words	Strong form	Weak Form(s)	Examples	
			Strong Form	Weak Form
'A' 'An'	ei / æn	ə / ən	l:t ən æpl	ri:d ə buk
Am	æm	əm	əz əuld əz ai æm	wai əm ai hlə
And	ænd	ænd/ ən/nd	"ænd lz ə kændʒʌnkʃn	kʌm ən si: /fiʃn tʃips
Are	ɑ:	ə/ər	ðə smlθs ɑ:	hlər ə ðə pleits
As	æz	əz	ðæts wɒt lt wəz səuld æz	əz mʌtʃ əz pɒsibl
At	æt	ət	wɒt ə ju lʌklɪ "æt	aɪ si: ju ət lʌntʃ
But	bʌt	bət	aɪ sed "bʌt nɒt "æt	ɪts gʊd bət ikspensɪv
Can/Could	kæn/kʊd	kən/kəd	al θɪŋk al kæn	ðej kən weɪt
Do/Does	du:/dʌz	də/du/dʌz	sʌm pi:pl du:	wəɪ də ðej lɑ:k lt
For	fɔ:	fə/fər	wɒts ðæt fɔ:	ti: fə tu:
From	fɹɒm	fɹəm	weər lt keɪm fɹɒm	aɪm hæʊm fɹəm wɜ:k
Had	hæd	əd	aɪ θɔ:t wi hæd	məʊst əd gɒn hæʊm
Has	hæz	əz	aɪ θɪŋk ʃi hæz	wɪtʃ əz bi:n best
Have	hæv	əv	jes wɪ hæv	wɪtʃ əv ju si:n
He	hi	i	hɪ keɪm leɪt	ai hɜ:d ðət l wəz ɪl
Her	hɜ:r	hə/ə	lts "hɜ: disiʒn	ɑ::sk ə tə kʌm
Him	him	ɪm	tɔ:k tə "him nɒt tə hə	li:v ɪm ələʊn
Must	mʌst	məs/məst	ʃi sɜ:tnli mʌst	ju məs trai hɑ:də
			Strong Form	Weak Form
Of	ɒf	əv/ɒv/v	sʌmwʌn aɪv hɜ:d ɒv	məʊst əv ɔ:l
Shall/Should	ʃæl/ʃʊd	ʃəl/ʃl/ʃəd	ai θɪŋk wi ʃæl	wi ʃl ni:d tə hləri
She	ʃi:	ʃi	hu: iz "ʃi:	ʃl wəz blɪz
Some	sʌm	səm	aɪv gɒt sʌm	hæv səm mɔ: ti:
Than	ðæn	ðən	haʊ tə spel "ðæn	hi lz tɔ:lə ðən yu:
That	ðæt	ðət	lʌk ət "ðæt	sei ðət ʃi wəz aʊtsald
The	ðI	ðə	weɪt fə ði "end	ʃʌt ðə dɔ:
Them	ðem	ðəm/əm	jə əv tə lʌk fə "ðem	li:v ðəm hiə
There	ðeə /ðeər	ðə/ðər	pʊt lt ðeə	ðə ʃʊd bi ə ru:l
To	tu:	tə/tu	tə lz ðə wɪ:k fɔ:m v "tu:	trai tə stɒp
Was	wəz	wəz	jes ʃl wɒz	ʃl wəz ʌpset
We	wI:	wi	"wɪ: ə gəʊɪn	wi məs du it
Were	wɜ:	wə/wər	ðei wɜ:nt əz kəʊld əz wɪ: wɜ:	θə peɪpəs wə leit
You	ju:	ju	haʊ ə ju;	wɒt də ju θɪŋk
Your	jɔ:	jər	lts "jɔ:z	weər lz jə kɑ:

2.4 Manner of Phonological Modification

The way functional words are modified in speech depends on a number of factors. Brown, J. D., & Hilferty, A. (2006.40). The Effectiveness of Teaching Reduced Forms for Listening. The same functional word may be reduced into two or more distinct forms if it occurs in different phonological environments. Sometimes the degree of reduction is bound to the level of formality. In formal styles, reduction tends to be lighter than in less formal ones. Sometimes, the degree of reduction is linked to factors such as fatigue and laziness, but there is no doubt that it is used in all styles. Here are some common patterns of reduction that are shared by weak forms of English:

2.4.1 Vowel reduction: this feature is found in almost all weak forms. The vowel of the citation form is replaced by another vowel which is weaker. There are three common weak vowel sounds in the English weak forms:

The /ə/ as in „from“, „but“, „and“. /frəm/ /bət/ /ənd/.

The /ɪ/ as in „bee“, „she“, „he“. /bɪ/ /ʃɪ/ /hɪ/.

The /ʊ/ as in „you“, „to“. /jʊ/ /tʊ/.

2.4.2 Sound loss: it is the diminution of the sound quantity of a word. This is done through the omission of sounds from the strong form. Technically this is called „elision“, and it has three types:

2.4.2.1 Omission of initial consonant as in „has“, „them“; /əz/ /əm/.

The consonant /h/ is usually omitted in pronouns unless they occur at the beginning of the sentence. Hence, „him“, „his“ and „her“ will become /ɪm/, /ɪz/, /ə/ or /ər/ respectively.

2.4.2.2 Omission of final consonant as in „and“, /n/ or /ən/.

2.4.2.3 Omission of vowel sound as in „was“, „can“ /wz/ /kn/.

In addition to these common features, the weak form is affected by neighboring sounds. Whether the next word starts with a consonant or a vowel makes a

“variable“ which specifies which weak form is to be used. For instance, the word „for“ has two weak forms:/fə/ and /fər/. If the following word begins with a consonant, the /fə/ form is more suitable. If it begins with a vowel, then the /fər/ form will be used instead. For some words, reduction will result in the appearance of syllabic consonants (e.g. **I can pile them**). Also, like all the other words in connected speech, functional words may undergo different ways of assimilation, linking, and elision.

2.5 The Reasons for Weakening Functional Words

In connected speech, the normal pronunciation of functional words is the reduced form. Till now, the treatment of the notion of weak forms in English has been at the segmental level i.e. at the level of phonemes. It was explored the areas which determine how functional words are normally weakened and have stated the factors which specify how they are weakened such as the word class, phonological environment etc. It is not the phonological environment, however, nor the word class that count for the reason of reduction. The weakening is usually linked to supra-segmental aspects of the English phonological system.

English is a stress-timed language. By this is meant that, at the sentence level, the stress pattern is time-related, having equal intervals between stressed syllables. To maintain this regularity, some syllables have to be compressed in a way that fits this 'rhythm'. Because of that, functional words are normally reduced to achieve this rhythmic regularity. For Dretzke (1998.102-3), the rhythmic pattern of English is bound to the correct use of weak forms. He stated: “...the full pronunciation of [functional words] would distort the rhythmic pattern of English and could lead to constant misunderstanding” (1998: 102-3). It means that the rhythm will be distorted as a result of choosing not to use the weak forms, and, therefore, the 'up and down' rhythmic model will become 'up' only. Hence, the use of weak forms is a logical consequence of the English rhythmic pattern. Similarly, reducing

functional words is a logical result of how English sentence stress is established. Regular weakening of functional words helps the listener to perceive the prominent (stressed) words in the text and, thus, getting a correct interpretation of the intended meaning. If all the words are pronounced with stress, the prominence feature will simply 'vanish' and there would be no distinction between stressed and unstressed words; likewise, the sentence-stress pattern will be lost. Dalton and Seidlhofer suggested that weak forms and sentence-stress are "as inseparable as two sides of a coin" (1994: 113). They further advocated the integration of the two in course-books by treating them simultaneously under the same heading; otherwise, the learners will miss the point.

Another reason for weakening functional words is to achieve a maximum ease of pronunciation. Speakers tend to modify the sounds in different contexts and in different ways in order to facilitate pronunciation (Brow and Kondo, 2006: 35). The speed at which speakers deliver their message affects the way different words are articulated. Generally, in the stream of speech, there is a relatively limited time within which each word is to be pronounced. Given this, in moving from one sound to another or from one word to another, it would be difficult for the speaker to pronounce every word as accurately as it is pronounced in isolation. According to Buck, "The modification to pronunciation that takes place during fast speech is quite extensive. Hardly a word is left unaffected" (2001: 117). That is why words, namely functional words, are open to a considerable set of phonological modification. If we consider the amount of meaning that functional words carry, we can notice the third reason for their weakening in speech. Compared to content words, functional words convey relatively very little information. Content words are stressed namely because speakers consider that they are more important than grammatical words which, in contrary, are often left unstressed. Take for instance the sentence; I--- student--- University --- Oxford. In this „sentence“, even if the

functional words are omitted, we can understand its meaning. Content words convey almost all the meaning and are, consequently, more important. We can even use the knowledge about the grammar of English and about the speaker as compensatory types of knowledge - using the top-down processing mode- and guess the exact missing words (though this is not always possible). Therefore, the weakening of functional words in this case is a result of the amount of meaning they carry compared to content words. That is why most of the conditions under which the full forms are used are examples of emphasis in meaning.

2.6 Weak Forms and Listening perception

In dealing with the notion of weak forms and their importance in listening perception, it is inevitable to refer to aspects of spoken language, namely connected speech. This characteristic represents a big proportion of the difficulties which foreign learners are overwhelmed by while listening to naturally spoken English. As its name implies, words in connected speech are pronounced in chains without any noticeable gaps between them as provided in the written language (Buck, 2001:117). Words overlap between one another and they are linked in many different ways that are referred to as „aspects of connected speech“. These include, but are not limited to, „assimilation“, „linking“, „elision“, „juncture“, and so forth. These are examples of how the pronunciation of individual words alters in spoken language. Foreign learners usually fail to break down chunks of utterances in connected speech, and find it difficult to recognize even the words that they already know. According to Lynch (2009:31), “The major problems in listening to connected speech are lexical segmentation -recognizing where one word ends and the next one begins” (2009:31). Although weak forms are usually treated as a separate criterion in English pronunciation books, many scholars who have approached them stressed that they are one aspect of connected speech just like any

of the ones we have just stated (Brown and Kondo, 2006; 33) (Dretzke 1998:102-3; Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994:113). In different realizations of the weak forms, there is at least one of the aspects of connected speech that is involved, and through which the reduced form is produced, or by which it is affected. Through the aspect of „elision“, we have seen how the sounds in the citation form are eliminated to create the weak form. The word „**and**“, for instance, is usually reduced by eliding the consonant /d/, the vowel /æ/, or both. Through „assimilation“, and this is more frequent, weak forms are modified by the neighboring sounds. For example, the weak form of the word „**can**“ is usually listed as /kən/, but the last sound can be modified if the next word starts with a bilabial sound as in “I can by it” where the /n/ becomes /m/. In addition, weak forms are „linked“ to the words next to them especially using the /r/ sound as in „for us“ /fərˈʌs/. Therefore, the weak form of any functional word can be treated from two perspectives. First, as we have just explained, it can be treated as one of any of the other words that occur in connected speech in which it is open to a wide range of modifications through assimilation, elision, linking etc. and, hence, the weak form contributes to the lexical segmentation problem that foreign language learners encounter. This is due to the fact that functional words are usually monosyllabic and, therefore, linking them to other words makes them sound as parts of words rather than words by themselves. Defining the words“ boundaries, in this case, becomes extremely difficult for foreign learners.

Secondly, and more importantly, a weak form can be treated as an aspect of connected speech which by itself makes a barrier for learners in listening to spoken English. That is, weak forms have central characteristics which make them go unnoticed in spoken language. The main problem for learners is that they cannot perceive accurately the weak forms and fail to draw a link between the sound-form they hear and the citation form that corresponds to it, and which they already

know. Weak forms are just everywhere- there is no conversation or discourse, be it short or long, that does not contain grammatical words. The fact that they are the commonest words in speech makes it necessary for foreign language learners to learn about their use. Otherwise, perception will be difficult (Lynch, 2009:31).

Many phoneticians have called for work on weak forms by foreign learners to enhance their listening ability (Brown and Kondo, 2006; 33) Brown, & K. Kondo-Brown, *Perspectives on Teaching Connected Speech to Second Language Speakers*. (Dretzke; Mortimer, (1984; 158) Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994:133).(Roach (1998:64) acknowledged that weak forms are important in both production and perception. However, he gave more importance to learning weak forms for perception rather than for production and supported this view by stating that learners would not find problems in producing utterances with full forms; their pronunciation would still be understood. However, according to him, any lack of familiarity concerning their use will result in difficulty in understanding utterances in which they are actually used. Hewings (2004:96) went one step further by giving priority for less advanced learners. He claimed that for this category of students it is more important to grasp the aspect of weak forms to improve the listening skill; and he suggested leaving the production part for more advanced learners by encouraging them to use this feature, along with other features of connected speech, in their actual performance.

Mortimer (1985:87) devoted an entire introductory unit to weak forms and emphasized the work on this aspect for listening perception. He suggested the „practice“ of reduced forms through activities including examples and recordings where students would be required to listen to and repeat those forms. Some see that since the use of weak forms in connected speech has to do with the supra-segmental aspects of English, such as rhythm and sentence stress, it is imperative to teach them along with these aspects inseparably (Dalton and Seidlhofer,

1994:113). Brown and Kondo (2006:33) used the term „**reduced forms**“ to refer to all connected speech phenomena including “**citation and weak forms**” (2006: 1) and claimed that there are many reasons because of which connected speech aspects should be taught. Among the reasons, they argued that learners need to make improvements in their overall inter-language, and this can be achieved by the ability to understand and use connected speech. They added, “...the understanding of connected speech can...help language learners understand aural language input” (Brown and Kondo, 2006: 33). Rost (1990, cited in Lynch, 2009.55) considered the ability to discriminate strong and weak forms, and the phonemic change at word boundaries as an enabling skill in the process of listening to running speech.

2.7 Factors Related to the Characteristics of Weak Forms

Weak forms have three main characteristics which make them difficult to understand as the all speakers expect to hear them and recognize without obstacle and these three features are: Phonological modification, physical characteristics and neutralization.

2.7.1 Phonological Modification

One of the factors that leads to confusion as to the perception of weak forms, and words in connected speech in general, is that they are phonologically modified. Weak forms are realized through a mere application of phonological rules that specify how they should be modified. Sounds of the full form are replaced, reduced, or simply dropped resulting in a „new shape“. Phonologically speaking, there is no correspondence between the functional words“ dictionary pronunciation and the modified shape that occurs in running speech. For instance, if the weak form of the word „and“ (/n/) occurs in isolation, it is impossible to identify it as a variation of „and“. The fact that these forms are not identical makes it difficult for

the foreign learner to recognize the modified shape as a model of a functional word. Learners are especially influenced by the written form of the words. As they listen to running speech, they wrongly expect to hear the full form - the one which they deduce from the way the word is written- and thus fail to perceive the weak form. Therefore the problem of perception that learners face is partly due to the sound modification exerted over functional words. According to Buck, "...it is not the sounds themselves...that cause the most perception problem but the way they vary in normal speech" (2001: 117). In addition, weak forms are further modified by the words that occur around them.

This means that even the weak forms will change in different environments and, therefore, resulting in a number of new variants that add more difficulty to foreign learners in segmenting speech and identifying functional words.

2.7.2 Physical Characteristics

From the acoustic point of view, the perception of weak forms is affected by their sound quality and quantity. Vowels and consonants are reduced, i.e. they are replaced by weaker ones or totally eliminated. Such reductions are done because, among other reasons, speakers tend to articulate with less trouble in connected speech by making sound simplifications. Field (2005:132) claimed that, "these simplifications would seem to make life easier for the speaker but harder for the listener" (2005: 132). As for the sound quality, speakers spend less energy in producing weak forms and this will affect their prominence in the utterance. For the quantity factor, given the fact that the majority of weak forms are monosyllabic, these reductions make them even shorter. Learners, as a result, will find difficulties in „hearing“ these words and identifying them from the flow of speech signal. According to Gilbert (2008:142): The fact that structure words are commonly reduced explains why learners often do not notice these words when

they listen to others speak. Reduction obscures the words, making them difficult for learners to hear (2008: 143). The schwa /ə/ is a common vowel that is found in the majority of weak forms. In English, whenever the schwa is the centre of a syllable, this syllable is considered weak.

Characteristically, this vowel is relatively very short; its quality is mid and central (in the mouth cavity) and it is “generally described as lax, that is, not articulated with much energy” (Roach, 1998: 76). These characteristics make it obscured, lower in volume, and, thus, difficult to hear. For instance the sentence “they are playing around” is pronounced as /ðei ə pleɪɪŋ əraʊnd/ in natural speech. The fact that the weak sound /ə/ replaces /ɑ:/ makes the word unnoticeable, as if the learner heard only “they playing around”. In addition, the schwa is represented by so many letters and combinations of letters in written English. Learners who do not expect to hear such sound will not be able to notice it. Gilbert (2008:143) illustrated this point claiming that the schwa stands as a barrier for listening perception to learners who rely on the written language. Similarly, the weak forms that do not contain the schwa are reduced through the replacement of strong vowels by other weaker ones which are also difficult to hear like /u:/ and /ʊ/, /i:/ and /ɪ/, plus syllabic consonants which are the peak of weak syllables such as in /kæn/ and /kn/. Grammatical words are weak in speech namely because they are unstressed compared to content words. Since stress in English is usually linked to prominence, it follows logically that weak forms are less or not prominent. That a syllable is stressed or unstressed is bound to the physical characteristics that can be perceived from the incoming sound signal. According to Roach (1998:76), among the characteristics of prominence, we find „**loudness**“ and „**length**“, which implies that non prominent syllables (**weak forms**) are shorter than and not as loud as other words. For instance, in the next sentence only the

content words are written in bold: **I went** to the **market** and **bought** some **food** and a **couple** of **things** for the **poor woman** that I've **met** on the **street**.

This presentation is analogous to a great extent to the way this sentence is transmitted through the acoustic medium. The functional words will be less prominent and difficult to perceive from the part of the foreign learner, but not for a native speaker. This can be compared to a situation where two persons reading the same sentence from a board but from different distances. The one who is nearer- and in this case will represent the native listener who is equipped by other linguistic and non linguistic information sources - will be able to read the sentence with ease. The other one who stands in a farther position representing the foreign listener who has many linguistic constraints- will have difficulties in reading it.

2.7.3 Neutralization

In some instances the weak forms of different functional words are identical. That is to say, the same weak forms may represent not only one, but a number of grammatical words. When such weak forms occur in different environments, listeners have to decide which functional word corresponds to the weak forms they heard. Generally, such decision cannot be made by relying solely on the sound. Listeners are obliged to use their knowledge about the context to eliminate non-suitable choices. That is to say, there is a need for the top-down processing mode to be activated. For instance, the pronoun „her“, and the article „a“ are commonly reduced as /ə/. In the sentence /Itsəka:/ it is extremely difficult for the listener to guess the exact word if the sentence is used out of context. For foreign learners, this might cause a problem for them. According to Dalton and Seidlhofer, Non native speakers are often insecure in their judgments about the plausibility (reasonability) and relevance of the forms they are hearing. There is also a second kind of contextual information which feeds into the understanding of speech...non

native speakers make up for their lack of competence ...by being more analytical. They rely-often exclusively- on the acoustic information alone (1994: 133-4).

Dretzke (1998:27) has emphasized the importance of knowing about these similarities and suggested a list of regularly occurring neutralized functional words in speech. Sometimes, the listener may infer the right word even if it is used out of context. By applying the knowledge about the linguistic system, it is possible to realize that in the sentence /teIkəwiθju:/, the schwa /ə/ refers to „her“, but not to „a“. The linguistic knowledge is, therefore, an enabling factor; but for most foreign learners, it is the major source of problem.

2.8 Factors Related to Foreign Language Learners

The factors related to foreign language learners which make the weak forms comprehension hard to understand are three factors in general respectively first is general linguistic knowledge second is the knowledge about phonological system and the last is familiarity and exposure.

2.8.1 General Linguistic Knowledge

The linguistic ability of learners is an essential factor in listening. It is suggested that there are a number of linguistic information-sources that interact together in a systematic way and upon which the listener builds an interpretation of the text. Among the most important ones, Buck (2001:117-8) lists five types of knowledge: **phonology**, **lexis**, **syntax**, **semantics** and **discourse analysis**. Processing natural speech in real time requires from the listener to be proficient in almost all of these linguistic features, otherwise, perception might break down. For instance, the ability to perceive different words of an utterance is not sufficient in constructing the intended meaning. The understanding of the message should be supported by a parallel proficiency in other linguistic areas in addition to the knowledge about the phonological system. Foreign learners are in the first position

to face perception problems caused by the insufficiency of knowledge about the target language system. As their linguistic system (inter-language) is not adequately developed, it is common that they suffer greatly from the complexity of the language features and “more problems arise due to insufficient knowledge of the linguistic system.” (Buck, 2001:48).

2.8.2 Knowledge about the Phonological System

Knowing about the phonological system is of primary importance in listening. Buck (2001:48) raised the problem of complexity of the phonological system claiming that it is important to learn in order to facilitate the listening task. He confirmed by stating that “any lack of such knowledge is likely to be reflected in reduced perception”. Martinez-Flor and Uso-Juan (2006:67) suggested that the phonological system is a basic requirement in listening comprehension because learners have to understand the supra-segmental aspects of speech in addition to the segmentation of words into sounds.

Since speech is encoded in the form of sounds, decoding depends heavily on the knowledge about phonology. Consequently, insufficient knowledge about the system – and this is true of the majority of language learners – will be reflected in a partial or even total breakdown in perceiving natural spoken language. As a matter of fact, each language has its own phonology (phonological rules) i.e. the relevant sounds and the acceptable combinations of these sounds differ from one language to another. For foreign learners, this difference could be a source of confusion in understanding and producing utterances in the target language. They face new sounds and new rules that could all hinder the perception of words, in addition to the interference of their mother-tongue sound system.

Even worse, the modification of sounds in connected speech is just another major obstacle. Learners should be, of course, taught the sound system of the target

language and understand that it is important to know about it just like the importance of knowing about the grammar of the language. Jordan (2006:87) claims that knowing about the sound system would be treated in the same way as the semantic features of the language. She adds, Phonological systems are elaborate dances that every human speaker and listener has to master and which usually determine habitual ways of producing and receiving speech sounds (2006: 87). The rules that determine the use of weak forms are beyond any doubt important to master if the perception of spoken English is aimed at. Learners must know about the phonological properties of weak forms and how they are used in connected speech. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994:113) claimed that weak forms are essential for the right sound of English and should not be separated from other aspects of the English sound-system. Learners need to know that weak forms are a necessary part of how the phonology of English works and understand that they occur in all types of spoken language regardless of the level of formality.

2.8.3 Familiarity and Exposure

The learners' lack of exposure to the spoken language stands as a barrier for understanding natural speech. Teachers usually try to adjust their pronunciation of words in a way that helps the learners in understanding them. Adjusted ways of pronunciation are kinds of „unnatural speech“ which native speakers do not use. Compared to adjusted codes, natural speech has many unique characteristics. **First**, it is fast and listeners have to be proficient in order to cope with its speed which is controlled by the speaker. **Second**, natural speech contains hesitations, pauses, repetitions, false starts etc. all of which add difficulty in segmenting words (Buck, 2001:48). **Third**, words in speech are not pronounced as clearly as they are pronounced in isolation due to aspects such as assimilation, elision etc.

These characteristics are rarely found in adjusted pronunciations to which learners are exposed. Consequently, when learners come up to situations where they listen to native speakers, the natural speech will sound unfamiliar for them and they will not be able to understand it. As for the aspects of connected speech, unfamiliarity with weak forms is considered as a major source of difficulties for foreign learners who are usually „shocked“ when they go outside the classroom and listen to native speakers (Peterson, 1991:96).

2.9 Weak Forms in EFL-ESL Research

Research in second and foreign language learning has proved that learners do have problems in listening to speech where weak forms, along with other aspects of connected speech, are used (Brown & Kondo, 2006:33-5). Henrichsen (1984, cited in Ito 2006:5) conducted a research in which he examined the effects of reduced forms in learners“ perception of spoken texts. Two dictations were administered; the **first** was a text pronounced with full forms and the **second** with reduced ones. The results showed that presence/absence of reduced forms affected the learners“ listening perception. Based on such researches, several other experiments were conducted to see the significance of systematic instruction about reduced forms in developing learners“ listening perception abilities.

For the purpose of finding the correlation between the presence of reduced forms in speech and the learners“ listening perception, in addition to the effects of reduced forms instruction on the learners“ listening perception, Matsuzawa (2006:45-7) conducted an experiment over 20 Japanese learners of English hypothesizing that reduced forms do interfere with students“ perception of spoken English. In a pre-test, participants were tested using a listening cloze in which they were required to write down the full forms of sentences after listening to them. Then, over a period of about four hours divided into seven sessions (30 minutes

each), they were given lessons about reductions which included specific instruction about weak forms (definition, context of use, a sample of each) and listening cloze exercises, in addition to an explanation of bottom-up and top-down processing modes. A post-test was administered using the same technique applied in the instruction (listening cloze test) and the resulting scores indicated a significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test. Matsuzawa concluded that learners showed significant improvement in listening to reduced forms, noting that this “improvement did not relate to any specific English proficiency, that is, all participants benefited about equally from the instruction” (2006: 56). Matsuzawa reported: The results show not only a serious lack of comprehension of reduced forms among participants but also an improvement in their listening perception after explicit instruction in recognizing and understanding reduced forms (2006: 59). Brown & Hilferty (2006:40) conducted a somehow similar research to find out the effectiveness of teaching reduced forms for EFL learners. The experiment included two groups of sixteen learners in each. The first group (**experimental group**) received systematic instruction concerning the use of weak forms in addition to dictation-form exercises, all of which were given in ten- minutes daily lessons over a period of four weeks. With the same time-table form, the control group was given only pronunciation drills and sound discrimination exercises. A post test was administered after the lessons to measure the effectiveness of the instruction the experimental group had received. The scores showed significant difference between the two groups, that is, the learners in the experimental group had higher scores than the ones in the **control group**. This led them to conclude that teaching reduced forms does help listening perception.

The results in these example experiments are significant in many ways. For the language teacher, they reveal the importance of weak forms“ instruction in developing the learners“ listening skills. They also suggest some teaching

techniques that could be employed in developing the listening skill. For instance, specific instruction about the use of weak forms has been proved to be significant namely through integrating it with listening activities in contrast to giving only pronunciation drills. This may be a better technique than relying only on giving rules to learners. For the processing modes in Matsuzawa's experiment, – bottom-up and top-down – even if their effect in the learners' performance is somehow vague compared to the effects of the exercises they had, many scholars noted the significance of raising learners' awareness to them in teaching listening (Morley, 1991; Peterson, 1991:79). Equally important to the findings in these experiments are the techniques that were used in testing the learners' performances. We note two major ones; the listening cloze test and the dictation test. In the cloze test (also called gap-filling-test), the basic procedure is that test takers are given a transcript of a spoken text in which words are systematically, rather than randomly, deleted and in which they are required to fill in the gaps on the basis of a recording that they listen to. Buck (2001:117) noted that this type of test has unsurprisingly gained much attention due to its popularity. As for its reliability, Templeton reported that cloze tests have "high validity in both theoretical and practical grounds" (1977, cited in Buck, 2001: 117-8). The dictation test is also a common testing technique and "recent writers have also recommended it" (Buck, 2001:117). As its name implies, test takers are given a dictation text where they listen to naturally spoken language and are required to write –in the case of connected speech testing- the full forms in the answer sheet. According to Nagarja (1996:148), this technique acts as a bridge between the spoken and the written form. It integrates the skills of listening to writing. The sub-skills under listening include: understanding the content, identifying weak forms, contracted forms and pauses (1996: 150). Therefore, dictation tests help the researcher to see whether

test-takers are able to recognize words in their natural spoken form. It could also be used as a teaching technique.

2.10 Teaching Weak Forms

A common way of teaching weak forms is based on the idea of giving a list of functional words together with their strong and weak forms in addition to some illustrating practical examples (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994:143). This approach is significant in two ways. **First**, learners are introduced to the idea that weak forms as a characteristic of spoken language; and **second**, they will have some basic knowledge about the use of weak forms i.e. the manner and context of their use. Giving the rules only about the language feature, however, is not sufficient in enabling learners to use this feature. Many writers used the term „declarative knowledge“ to refer to knowledge about the language as opposed to „procedural knowledge“ which is the knowledge about how to use the language or, as (Towel and Hawkins) defined it, “knowledge about the mechanisms which makes the language work in production and perception.” (Towel & Hawkins, 1994:82). This means that, in the case of learning weak forms, learners who are taught using the „common way“ which focuses only on giving the basic rules, are not trained to develop the procedural knowledge. Consequently, when it comes to „using“ weak forms, they will find difficulties in both pronouncing, and understanding them out of the mouths of native speakers. Recent views about the teaching of aspects of connected speech emphasize both declarative and procedural knowledge with more advantage given to the second one. According to Ringbom (2007:53), learners need a transition from declarative to procedural knowledge through a process called „**proceduralization**“ or „**automatisation**“. When they are exposed to a language feature for the first time, learners need to pay conscious attention to that feature and then „practice“ it until it becomes natural and the ability to process it

becomes automatic, faster, and with less effort. In the case of listening to weak forms, automaticity in processing will help learners to free their attention from the form and concentrate on other higher levels of meaning (Ellis, 2003:43). That is why many writers have acknowledged that the importance of the work on developing learners' automaticity in processing natural speech (Buck, 2001; Peterson, 1991; Ringbom, 2007:48). Specific listening exercises have been suggested to teach features of spoken language that are important in listening such as weak forms and connected speech aspects in general. Such exercises focus basically on raising learners' awareness to those aspects. Lam (2002:251) claimed that "It is only when learners are aware of the unique characteristics of authentic listening input that they can be equipped with skills to handle real-life communication" (2002: 251). For instance, Peterson (1991:56) suggested the use of "selective listening exercises" which are based on focusing learners' attention on language form while listening. He considers this type of exercises as a principle of listening perception in the classroom; and taking into consideration the fact that learners do not hear weak forms, articles, word endings etc., he argued that "selective listening points students' attention to details of form and encourages accuracy in generating the language system" (Peterson, 1991: 59). Through this type of exercises, learners will realize the importance of weak forms in listening and they will, consequently, understand the reason for learning them. For the goal of helping learners to recognize unstressed functional words, Peterson (1991:56) suggested the focus on bottom-up processing mode through the use of multiple choice questions. Learners will be asked to listen to sentences and choose one appropriate strong or weak form out of two written ones on the answer sheet. In this case, the idea of bottom-up processing should be first introduced to learners. According to Nation & Newton (2009:42), "learners need to be proficient with those bottom-up processes and ... learners can benefit from being taught how to

listen” (2009:42). Rost (1990:90) suggested „intensive listening“ tasks which are based on the principle of drawing learners“ attention to language features such as phonological features. Contrary to Peterson“s approach, Rost focused on the importance of meaning and suggested that learners have to focus their attention on language features after that meaning has been established. He also stressed the importance of the learners“ participation by suggesting that learners should be given opportunities to discuss and ask about the feature in question.

Similarly, Morley (1991:92) suggested the „language analysis tasks“ to give learners opportunities to analyze the aspects of fast speech. This, according to Morley, will enable them to develop some personal strategies that could help in coping with “natural **contextualized speech**” (1991:92). A technique based on teaching reduced forms by considering meaning in listening perception was proposed by Ito (2006:78) in his discussion of focus-on-form exercises. He proposed exercises which focus on the understanding of any utterance whose interpretation is bound to the accurate perception of reduced forms. That is, failure to perceive the reduced form will logically lead to perception break down even if all the other words in the utterance are recognized. Other types of exercises include what Ito (2006:78) calls „classic activities“ such as read-aloud exercises, *in listening exercises listen and repeat exercises* which, according to him, are commonly used types. Some of these exercises have been proved to be significant in weak forms instruction in ESL, EFL research (c.f. Weak Forms in ESL-EFL Research). The following is a summary of the main points to consider in teaching the perception of weak forms of functional words:

- 1- Introducing the idea of weak forms and making learners understand that it is a feature of spoken language that is found in all styles.
- 2-Raising students“ awareness to the importance of weak forms in listening.

- 3- Making use of focus-on-form exercises to enable learners to pay close attention to the use of weak forms.
- 4- Using listening material with specific exercise types such as dictation and cloze tests in training learners.
- 5-Focusing on Bottom-up processing and training students on how to use this processing mode.
- 6- Working for automaticity in processing with the use of extensive training exercises in listening to native speaker's speech regularly.

2.11 Previous Studies

The 37 essential weak-form words: **Hector Ortiz Lira (2008)** University of Santiago said that Weak forms are an essential feature of English pronunciation. Students, who wish to acquire a high level of oral performance, as is the case of future teachers of English, must be aware of their existence, since failure to produce them will affect English rhythm quite considerably and even lead to misunderstanding. There is a small group of about 35 to 40 very common structural words in English which are pronounced in mainly two different ways—a **weak form** and a **strong form**; some of these words have more than one weak form. In general, weak forms are much more common than strong forms; in fact, weak forms are the **normal** pronunciations and for this reason students should identify them and use them from the very early stages. The most complete and updated information concerning the pronunciation of weak-form words can be found in the two standard pronunciation dictionaries: Wells (2008) and Roach, Hartman & Setter (2006). Here users may find out about regular, occasional and fairly unusual forms.

Aspects of connected speech in English language: **Mr. Mohamed Laoubi (2009) Mentouri University** said that the results obtained from the data analysis

demonstrate that 3rd year students do have difficulties in listening to connected speech regarding the perception of weak forms of grammatical words. As for their knowledge concerning the basics of using weak forms, the questionnaire results have, surprisingly, shown that almost all of them have a serious lack of competence as their scores are very low. This is despite the fact that they have been given lessons concerning reduced forms. The analysis of the definitions they have provided for weak forms reveal that they have very broad information about them. In addition, their performance in the questionnaire show that they are unaware of the reduction rules that govern the use of this category of words in naturally spoken English especially the exceptions of rules. As it was expected, except for one student, all the students are unaware of the importance of weak forms in listening. The teachers' focus on the pronunciation level only with neglecting the perceptual one might have contributed to this state. The students answers concerning the significance of learning about weak forms have been all focused on the productive level which, according to their answers, boosts their ability to articulate appropriately. The only student who has answered that knowing about weak forms is important in listening have had the highest score in the close test. Whereas, among the remaining students, only five students have had above average scores (in the test) and all the others have had below average scores. This suggests that a logical link between the students' awareness and their perceptual abilities is proved to exist. That is, the analysis of the data confirms our hypothesis which is that the students who are aware of the importance of weak forms in listening will perform better than those who are not. Some of the students have had similar high scores in the test despite that they are unaware of the importance of weak forms in listening, and that they have obtained low scores in the questionnaire. An interpretation to this may lead us to think of other variables which could have played a role in facilitating the task for these students rather than

others such as the degree of exposure and familiarity and individual training to listen to connected speech

Sally Butterfield MRC Applied Psychology University, Cambridge United Kingdom : (Received 30 June 1993; revised 18 October 1994; accepted 24 October 1994) Strong and weak syllables in English can be distinguished on the basis of vowel quality, of stress, or of both factors. Critical for deciding between these factors are syllables containing unstressed unreduced vowels, such as the first syllable of automata. In this study 12 speakers produced sentences containing matched sets of words with initial vowels ranging from stressed to reduced at normal and at fast speech rates. Measurements of the duration, intensity, F₀, and spectral characteristics of the word-initial vowels showed that unstressed unreduced vowels differed significantly from both stressed and reduced vowels. This result held true across speaker sex and dialect, the vowels produced by one speaker were then cross-spliced across the words within each set, and the resulting words' acceptability was rated by listeners. In general cross-spliced words were only rated significantly less acceptable than unspliced words when reduced vowels interchanged with any other vowel. Correlations between rated acceptability and acoustic characteristics of the cross-spliced words demonstrated that listeners were attending to duration, intensity and spectral characteristics together these results suggest that unstressed unreduced vowels in English pattern differently from both stressed and reduced vowels, so that no acoustic support for a binary categorical distinction exists; nevertheless listeners make such a distinction, grouping unstressed unreduced vowels by preference with stressed vowels

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology of the Research

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is followed by the clarification of how data were collected, and it gives a short background about this research tools, samples, and procedures, description depending on the validity and reliability of the study tools.

3.1 Methodology

The methodology of this research is empirical and analytical it was performed by designing the test and an interview for collecting data from master degree students of English Language at University of Sudan for Science and Technology to verify the awareness of learning functional words in connected speech while listening. The research sample and tools are a test and an interview which were administered to the same category of students to collect the relevant data. Forty students were asked to answer the questions that survey the knowledge about the use of strong and weak forms of functional words in English which consisted of thirty items targeted a specific kind of the knowledge with one major purpose which will enable the researcher to know about students awareness in exploring rules that determine the use of strong and weak forms in natural connected speech and ten of them were interviewed to explain the facilitations of learning these functional words in English as well as native speakers do in phonetics and phonology.

3.2 Research Tools

Two major tools were used in this research: a test and an interview that were administered to the same category of students to collect the relevant data. Questions were answered through listening to a recorder then words were

identified according to functional words occurrence in sentences, likewise ten students were interviewed to give their view point in process of learning strong and weak forms to verify the matter of how non-native speakers will learn these forms when spoken by native speakers. Moreover the students have been informed that they should write words in rows either strong or weak forms of functional words, but without specifying the type of task they would be given. The reason for doing this is to avoid making the students aware of the answers required in the test. More precisely, the researcher intended to get a clear idea through the test about whether the students are aware of the importance of weak and strong forms in listening and learning or not. By this way, the students' answers were reflected in a better way of their precise perception to weak and strong forms in English language. The second task has been shorter than the first one and it was conducted by interviewing ten students to look for the importance of learning weak and strong forms in English language.

3.3 Research sample

Fifty students were divided into two groups according to the research tools in first one forty students identified strong and weak forms in the test to survey their knowledge about the usage of strong and weak forms of functional words in English language the test comprised 30 items in fifteen questions for each question there were two functional words to be identified with one major purpose which will enable the researcher to know the awareness of these students in using strong and weak forms in natural connected speech. In the second one ten students were asked to answer the questions that aimed at general background about strong and weak forms. The students were allowed to answer in interview whatever language would express their opinions. Items generally were introductory questions which were supposed to give the students an overview of the subject of the test to identify

weak and strong forms in the sentences, and to give the researcher an idea of familiarity of the concept in a process of perceiving the strong and weak forms in spoken English, and what is the importance of strong and weak forms perception in listening process and learning in the test students were given two choices to write strong or weak form in the boxes in addition respondents who were interviewed to give justifications to what extent should non-native speakers try to learn strong, and weak forms when spoken by native speakers in English language did not know about reduction rules and really found it difficult to answer and were distracted by incorrect answers.

3.4 Procedures, description

The informants in this study are fifty master degree students in English language at Sudan University of Science and Technology they have received specific instruction about the use of strong and weak forms in English module of Phonology. In addition to their previous knowledge when they were young including four years at the university implies that they have at least an average or above average proficiency of English language phonetics and phonology. The second part of this study consists of listening gears to the purpose of testing the students' ability to perceiving of weak and strong forms of functional words in natural spoken English. The informants were instructed to listen to a record of fifteen sentences spoken naturally by the native speakers. Each sentence consisted of two functional words pronounced in its weak or strong form. To know whether they were able to identify weak and strong forms or not, the task was fulfilled by writing the underlined words in boxes according to the sounds were heard from the speaker on the basis of what they have listened to. Hence, the test's results translated students, ability and disability of dealing with weak and strong forms in connected speech sentences.

According to their ability to replace the words in the test it would be directly related to the degree of successful language processing. To avoid any interference from the context on which the students relied on guessing the correct sound of the item in the sentence. In evaluation of students, performances however the functional words were the only items that were marked. The audio version of the sentences were taken from different pronunciation exercises of Headway Upper Intermediate course book which focuses on teaching connected speech and weak /strong forms for upper intermediate learners of English language. The researcher has selected fifteen sentences from different listening exercises, to avoid wasting time in searching for each sentence during the test, the relevant records of sentences from the number of sentences in each exercise were indicated, copied, and grouped into audio track. In addition, all the sentences were of a high sound quality without any background.

Thus students were not used to the listening exercises, the researcher has devoted a pre-listening phase to explain the task and the students were given instructions depending on their ability to recognize the sound of words. **First**, they recognized the word sound then they had written it/them down **second**, when they did not recognize the word sound well they asked the researcher again to replay the audio provided. **Thirdly**, when they thought that a word was given did not correspond to any functional words in the audio version certainly they put the wrong answer. During the test, the students were allowed to listen to each sentence only twice after listening to each sentence the informant was given enough time to write down the words.

3.5 The validity and reliability of the study tool (test):

The researcher has designed a test for collecting data in doing this research, and the test was verified by five University doctors in addition to the supervisor, and

teachers related to the study of this field. After that calculated the reliability and validity by using the following equation:

$$\text{Validity} = \sqrt{\text{reliability}}$$

$$\text{Where: Reliability Coefficient} = \frac{2r}{1+r}$$

N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
40	.738

$$= \frac{0.738*2}{0.738+1}$$

$$= \frac{1.476}{1.738}$$

$$=0.849$$

$$= \sqrt{0.849}$$

$$\text{Validity} = 0.92$$

This is an accepted reliability coefficient ($r_c \leq 1$)

These two types of tools which were used to collect the data the **test** and an **interview** were valid enough to depend on them in doing this research, because these tools have ascertained the goal of this research in the importance of learning weak and strong forms perception of listening process in English phonetics and phonology.

Chapter four

4.0 Introduction

This chapter will be explaining the data analysis in form of tables to carry out the whole percentages and total explanations according to respondents, decision in this test of fifteen questions plus an interview answers.

Data Analysis

4.1 Students cannot identify the strong and weak forms taught in the module of phonetics that are enough to get the meaning and understanding of these rules in English phonetics and phonology.

Table 4.1

Q1- Who did you give **the** money away **to**?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	To	The	To	The	
Words	To	The	To	The	
Frequency	31	8	9	32	40
Percentage	77.5%	20%	22.5%	80%	100%

This table shows the answer towards the preposition word **to** 77.5% of the respondents believe that is a strong form and 22.50% indicated that it is a weak form, also it is found that 80% of respondents explained that the definite article **The** is a weak form and 20% of them put it as a strong form, the preposition **to** is 77.5% of the respondents answered it as strong form, therefore students were sure that when the functional word comes in final position will be pronounced strong according to the word place. And the definite article **the** in a second column is the highest degree that signifies its weak form, also the respondents know that when the functional word comes in the middle of the sentence it supposed to be a weak sound in English phonetics and phonology unless it is not negative auxiliary or emphasizing case occurrence. It is a very good answer shown in this table.

Table 4.2

Q2- What do you want **to** have a word with **me** about?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	To	Me	To	Me	
Words					
Frequency	11	26	29	14	40
Percentage	27.5%	65%	72.5%	35%	100%

This table clarifies the answers towards the preposition **to** in column two 72.50% of the respondents said that it is a weak form and 27.50% indicated that it is a strong form, also it is found that 65% of the respondents believe that an object pronoun **me** in the first column is a strong form and 35% identified that it is a weak form, the preposition **to** in the second column verifies that a quite number of students are true which means that the students are aware of its usage as well as in the first question in table (1) it is clear from the rule of initial or the final position of functional words use in the sentences, but when it comes in the middle it will be pronounced as a weak form in English phonetics and phonology, but when it is quoted, negated or emphasized it is vice versa. The object pronoun (**me**) although is really weak form, but 65% of the respondents thought that it is strong form it means that all respondents were not familiarized to such sound well In order to recognize its sound from weak to strong form if they had thought about the functional words when they occur in the middle of the sentences, they would not have been answered it that way that is why mastering the rules of English weak and strong forms in learning phonology will improve their knowledge in English language's functional words when they listen to the natural English speech from Native speakers while speaking.

Table 4.3

Q3- Who did **you** dance **with**?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	You	With	You	With	
Words					
Frequency	24	28	16	12	40
Percentage	60%	70%	40%	30%	100%

This table explains the answers towards the pronoun **you** in column one that 60% of respondents identified it as strong form and 40% answered as a weak form, also it is found that 70% of the informants pointed to the preposition **with** as a strong form, and 30% of them as a weak form, note that 60% of the students, chose a pronoun **you** in this position is a strong form so it tells that they have not listened to this word's sound well and did not realize that it is a weak form according to the functional words, rule occurrence in connected speech of English phonetics and phonology, whereas the word position is in the middle it must be weak form, and 40% of them said that it is a weak form therefore their knowledge towards functional words occurrence in the middle is good, so they should be pronounced in a weak reduced sound in English phonology, but the preposition **with** 70% indications verify that respondents knew any initial position or final position's occurrence of any functional word entails strong sound in English phonetics and phonology in general as something in common to whole English language learners, or speakers all over the world. Only 30% told that it is weak because they were not sure that weak forms always occur in the middle of the sentence.

Table 4.4

Q4- What **do** you need five thousand pounds **for**?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Do	For	Do	For	
Words					
Frequency	16	29	24	11	40
Percentage	40%	72.5%	60%	27.5%	100%

This table expounds that the answers towards an auxiliary verb **do** 60% of the respondents have identified that it is a weak form and 40% of them pointed that it is a strong form, also it is found that 72.5% of respondents signified that a preposition **for** is strong form it is true that this functional word in this position is strong it means that the students were sure about it, but a few number of the respondents anticipations were incorrect according to its weak form, also 60% of the informants explained that the auxiliary verb **do** is weak in this position, of course it is weak form, because it occurs in the middle of the sentence so if the respondents did not know the rule, they would not have answered it as a weak form in this position, and 40% said that it is a strong forms because they were hesitant about its position, and they did not recognize its sound to identify it properly according to its sound while they were listening to the tape recorder so they need to be well trained in learning weak and strong forms in English phonetics and phonology to acquire good knowledge of functional words while listening to native speakers in English.

Table 4.5

Q5- What **is** he writing **a** book about?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Is	A	Is	A	
Words	Is	A	Is	A	
Frequency	20	8	20	32	40
Percentage	50%	20%	50%	80%	100%

This table tells the answer towards the verb to be **is** 50% of the informants have shown that it is a strong form and 50% of them believe that it is a weak form, also it is found that 80% of the respondents identified that an indefinite article **a** in the second column is a weak form in this table, but especially the verb to be **is** 50% ,and 50% in both columns that students signified as strong and weak, so all of the respondents were hesitant to identify this word and its proper sound because they did not know the rule that is why they mixed up between strong and weak form's rule to think about initial, middle position rules of the functional words in connected speech, that was the main reason behind the misunderstanding of the words, position, therefore this verb to be **is**. Is not easy for students to identify while they are listening to the native speakers speech in a conversation that takes place among the learners in using English weak and strong forms in Phonetics and phonology, but the indefinite article **a** 80% indicates that the students are completely aware of this indefinite article when it occurs in the middle it should be reduced to a weak sound in connected speech in English phonetics and phonology according to the weak and strong forms of functional words classification while listening to native speakers in English language.

Table 4.6

Q6- Who **did** you get a present **from**?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Did	From	Did	From	
Words	Did	From	Did	From	
Frequency	23	32	17	8	40
Percentage	57.5%	80%	42.5%	20%	100%

This table codifies the answers of respondents towards an auxiliary verb **did** 57.5% of the informants decoded it as a strong form and 42.50% it as a weak form, also it is found that 80% of these respondents indicated that the preposition **From** is strong form and 20% of them said it is weak form, according to the highest percentage of the preposition **from** in the first column in this table tells that the students are strongly sure of this functional word's position, and it deserves to be strong, because they have mastered some functional words, and understood that when they occur at the end of the sentences they are strong forms that is why their answer to it as strong is a good example which shows the ability of the respondents in identifying it when it comes at the end, middle or in the beginning in English sentences using connected speech for classifying functional words, but the auxiliary verb **did** due to informants, answer in this position the word is not a strong form as they answered by percentage of 57.5%, it is really weak form and they did not know the real answer for it that is why they confused to cope, and how to identify it correctly if they thought about the auxiliary verb **do** in question four table (4), they would not have answered it wrong, so they suppose to apply the same rule as well as they did in the previous table, and 42.5% said it is weak they are right, but the number is too little for the lack of their knowledge to this word's position.

Table 4.7

Q7- Who **did** you buy **a** birthday card for?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Did	A	Did	A	
Words	Did	A	Did	A	
Frequency	34	6	6	34	40
Percentage	85%	15%	15%	85%	100%

This table classifies the answers of question seven towards an auxiliary verb **did** in the first column 85% of the respondents chose it as a strong form, and 15% only identified it as a weak form, also it is found that 15% of the respondents elucidated that an indefinite article (**a**) is strong form, and 85% of informants in the second column classified it as a weak form. The auxiliary verb **did** its answer which shows the highest point in the first column as a strong form is totally wrong answer in this table it is supposed to be a weak form as its occurrence in the middle of the sentence if the respondents had gone back to question six in table six, they would have answered it correct according to the same rule of functional words when they occur in the middle of the sentence in English language's connected speech, but they have answered it without thinking about functional words rule in connected speech linking forms, and 85% of the respondents told that an indefinite article (**a**) is a weak form in this position it means that they are right, because they were sure about this functional words, position is weak in this sentence according to their knowledge, and only 15% of them indicated that the indefinite article (**a**) is strong form, because they were not sure about the rule of this functional words, position in this sentence while they were listening to identify the word type in its real sound that needed as it is in the middle.

Table 4.8

Q8- What is **he** thinking **about**?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	He	About	He	About	
Words	He	About	He	About	
Frequency	11	33	29	7	40
Percentage	27.5%	82.5%	72.5%	17.5%	100%

This table identifies the answers towards the subject pronoun **he** 72.50% of the respondents classified it as a weak form and 27.50% clarified that it is strong form, also it is found that 82.5% of the informants explained that a preposition **about** is a strong form, and 17.50% signified it as a weak form. Note: in question eight 72.5% answered that the subject pronoun **he** is weak form, and this indicates that these students are aware of using the pronouns well in the connected speech when they are listening to the native speakers in English language, and they also know the rule when the pronouns occur in the middle of the sentences in connected speech English language they should be weak according to functional words rules in English phonetics and phonology.

This analysis in the matter of fact also shows that 82.5% of the respondents have responded that the preposition **about** is strong in this position, and this number is quite enough for the correct answer it means that these students are surely aware of classifying this word in this position in process of dealing with listening to English native speakers phonologically and they were able to identify the sound of this word as strong form without hesitation merely its exposition to them.

Table 4.9

Q9- Where **do** you want me **to** give a lift to?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Do	To	Do	To	
Words					
Frequency	11	33	29	7	40
Percentage	27.5%	82.5%	72.5%	17.5%	100%

This table elucidates the answers of respondents towards an auxiliary verb **do** 72.50% of the students classified that it is a weak form and 27.50% identified it as strong form, also it is found that 82.50% of informants believe that the preposition **to** is a strong form and 17.50% of them believe that it as weak form. A note about an auxiliary verb **do** in question nine in the second column signifies that it is the highest degree, and this is a good number to indicate that the students are surely felt confident in their answer to this word exactly, because many of them thought about the same word in question four table four that when this auxiliary verb comes in the middle of the sentence it is reduced to be a weak form according to their recalling of the previous answer to it that is why they were able to identify the word's position and its type without hesitation, also the result of 82.5% concerning the preposition **to** is not strong form as they have answered it in this position, because they have forgotten the rule if they have seen how did they answer the first question in this test, they would have been aware of answering this question correctly so both functional words **Do/To** are supposed to be weak forms in this case, because they are occurred in the middle of the sentence not initial or final position to interrupt their minds of classifying them in this questions, briefly it means that the students felt floundered to deal with these words here so they need to revise the ways of learning weak and strong forms in English language.

Table 4.10

Q10- What do you want **me to** clean the sink with?

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Me	To	Me	To	
Words					
Frequency	20	22	20	18	40
Percentage	50%	55%	50%	45%	100%

This table explicates the answers towards an object pronoun **me** 50% of the respondents identified it as a strong form and 50% of them said that it is a weak form, also it is found that 55% of informants explained that the preposition **to** is strong form, and 45% of the respondents decoded it as a weak form in this position an object pronoun **me** half of the respondents stated that it is strong and the other half stated that it is a weak form, but in the first column clarifies that the first half are totally wrong in their answer about it as a functional word in this position, because it occurred in the middle of the sentence, so according to the rules of the functional words in English phonetics and phonology's connected speech when they occur initially or in final position are always strong, but in the middle they are weak, and the second half of the respondents elucidated that it is a weak form and this is true it shows that the students have answered it as a weak form, so they are aware of it in contrast to the same object pronoun in this question in the first column, because they knew that this word occurred in the middle of the sentence that is why they did a little bit well by identifying it through listening to native speakers, speech in English language, also the preposition **to** shows that 55% of the respondents in column one chose it as strong form in this position, but according to its place in question one and two they were able to identify the same preposition easily, but here they have totally failed to cope with this functional word in this question.

Table 4.11

Q11- **Can** I have **some** spaghetti? Yes of course there is a lot

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Can	Some	Can	Some	
Words	Can	Some	Can	Some	
Frequency	31	9	9	31	40
Percentage	77.5%	22.5%	22.5%	77.5%	100%

This table exposes the answers towards a modal auxiliary verb **can** 77.50% of the respondents identified that it as a strong form, and 22.50% chose it as a weak form, also it is found that 77.5% of informants signified that the quantitative word or a determiner **some** is a weak form, and 22.50% have shown that it is a strong form. Concerning the answer of a modal verb **can** in this table clarifies that 77.5% of the respondents classified it in this position as a strong form of course they are fully right about it, because they know that when the functional word is initialized in the sentence the rule should be applied is a full form sound in English phonetics and phonology it is clear that strong forms are normally occur initially or finally, so this number is quite enough to believe that students are aware of using strong and weak forms in some positions correctly.

The determiner **some** 77.5% of the students explained that it is weak form it means that they are aware too about this word that is why they have identified it as a weak form in English phonetics and phonology's connected speech according to their previous knowledge of perceiving the strong and weak forms while listening to native speakers in English language, thus this indicates that it is a good number of respondents to give a citation of how to understand the weak and strong forms directly through listening to recorders , news on television or a radios.

Table 4.12

Q12- Have you got lots **of** Ham sandwiches? Well there **are** few

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Of	Are	Of	Are	
Words	11	32	29	8	40
Frequency	27.5%	80%	72.5%	20%	100%

This table in question twelve explains the answers of the respondents towards the preposition **of** 72.5% of informants decided that it is a weak form, and 27.50% explained it as a strong form, also it is found that 80% of the respondents illustrated that the verb to be (**are**) is a strong form, and 20% of them elucidated that it as a weak form. Concerning the verb to be (**are**),s result 80% which indicates that is a strong form here is really great number of the respondents identified it as a strong form in this position as they assumed were correct, but unfortunately the answer is totally wrong because they did not know how to catch up the sound of this word while listening if they had gone back to question five to realize how did they answer to the verb to be (**is**) as they mentioned that it was a weak form, they could have been able to deal with verb to be (**are**) in this position, also 72.5% of the respondents identified the preposition **of** is a weak form in the second column of course they are very good, because they have recognized that when the preposition occurs in the middle of the sentence it is reduced to be pronounced weak according to their previous knowledge that mostly the functional words which occur in the middle of English language sentences in connected speech are generally weak forms in English phonetics and phonology.

Table 4.13

Q13- I **would** like two vegetable curries please, Sorry **there** is only a little left.

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Would	There	Would	There	
Words					
Frequency	28	21	12	19	40
Percentage	70%	52.5%	30%	47.5%	100%

This table elucidates the answers towards the modal auxiliary verb **would** 70% tells that the majority of respondents in column one classified it as a strong form, and 30% of them decoded it as a weak form, also it is found that the 52.50% of informants explained that the adverb of place **there** is a strong form, and 47.50% identified it as a weak form. Note: an answer of 70% to a modal verb (**could**) as a strong form is incorrect in this position, because the occurrence of this word is in the middle of the sentence if the respondents thought carefully about this word in this position they would have given a very good answer, but according to their lack of knowledge they were not able to cope with such cases of different functional words in English language, thus they have committed the same mistake in listening to a very simple modal verb from native speakers to know when it will be strong or weak, and the adverb of place **there** in column one is also 52.5% of the informants have illustrated that it is a strong form, but this word due to its position is also weak form actually, so this is why some words are very difficult for the students to recognize and identify in English phonetics and phonology in their sounds especially non-native speakers are not able to understand such words, therefore most of the non-native speakers tend to catch up words sounds in isolation more than connected series, it means that they do not apply the rule of the reduced forms in English language in learning and practising functional words in connected speech as well as native speakers do.

Table .4.14

Q14- Can I **have** some chips with **my** hamburger? Sorry there aren't any left.

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Have	My	Have	My	
Words					
Frequency	11	33	29	7	40
Percentage	27.5%	82.5%	72.5%	17.5%	100%

This table in question fourteen clarifies the answers towards an auxiliary verb **have** that 72.5% of the respondents identified it as a weak form, and 27.50% have taken it as a strong form, also it is found that 82.50% of the respondents explained that the possessive adjective **my** in column one is a strong form, and 17.50% illustrated it as a weak form, the number of respondents is quite good in this percentage of 72.5% result as a weak form for an auxiliary verb **have** it means that students, anticipations of this answer is indicating that they are able to identify the functional words like **have** whenever they hear its sound spoken by native speakers in English language particularly when it occurs in the middle of the sentence, and also the possessive adjective **my** has been shown as a strong form in the first column so if students thought about functional words, rule in English phonetics and phonology they might have classified it as a weak form, because it is in the middle of the sentence, and they have already taught that when any functional word as -auxiliary verbs, prepositions, articles and pronouns- occurs in the middle of the sentences they are always weak forms, but in this question the word **my** according to its sound is heard clearly as if it is a strong form that is why a large number of respondents identified it as a strong form so it is a good number to be considered that students were aware to recognize the sound of this word in listening to native speakers, conversation in English language, but unfortunately an answer is totally opposite in this position.

Table 4.15

Q15- Have you got apple pie today? Yes just a little.

Answers	Strong		Weak		Total
	Have	A	Have	A	
Words					
Frequency	32	5	8	35	40
Percentage	80%	12.5%	20%	87.5%	100%

This table shows the answers towards an auxiliary verb **have** 80% of the informants classified it as a strong form, and 20% identified it as a weak form, also it is found that 87.5% of the respondents decoded the indefinite article (**a**) as a (weak form), and 12.50% of them illustrated it as a strong form, also in this table 80% of the students have shown that an auxiliary verb **have** in column one is a strong form in this sentence, therefore this is an excellent number which indicates that the respondents were capable to classify this word according to its position in this sentence as it occurred initially that is why its familiarity made them to recognize the sound merely spoken by natives in English language.

The nicest of all is that the last indefinite article (**a**) in the last question is the highest degree in the whole test, because it illustrates that 87% of the respondents answered it as a weak form in this sentence, and it is true, also the students have given their concentration deeply to this article to identify it, so they thought about the same article which was exposed in question five in the same test, and it occurred in the middle of the sentence that is why they were able to do well in this question to show this high percentage which is the best of all answers in the test for identifying strong and weak forms of functional words in this research.

The interview analysis

These five questions were answered by master degree students of Sudan University of science and Technology about learning English language phonetics and phonology particularly the importance of learning weak and strong forms in listening perception of native speakers, speech sounds using strong and weak forms in the sentences conducted in this research.

4.2 Students are not aware of the significance of the strong and weak forms and the rules that govern their use not only in production but also in reception.

Table 4.16

Q1- Should the strong and weak forms be learned in pronunciation course only?

Q1	Frequency	Frequency	Total
Number	6	4	10
Percentage	60%	40%	

This table identifies the answers towards question one (**Should the strong and weak forms be learned in pronunciation course only?**) 60% of the respondents recommended that an English words pronunciation should be learned by courses only according to their point of view that weak and strong form sounds are possible to be learned in specific subject which comprises the process of teaching and learning, and it should be guided through any institution to facilitate for non-natives to cope with weak and strong forms of natural spoken English language by native speakers. Thus the respondents verified that it is very difficult for non-native speaker to learn an English reduced forms of functional words sounds by themselves, but 40% of them said that it is not extremely necessary to learn these forms by courses, students can do it automatically through listening only, that means any language can be learned by imitation, and be mastered by practising it and repeating then will become very useful gradually later.

Table 4.17

Q2- To what extent non-native speakers find it difficult to understand native speakers, speech because of the way functional words are pronounced?

Q2	Frequency	Frequency	Total
Number	8	2	10
Percentage	80%	20%	

This table tells the answers of the respondents towards the second question (**To what extent non-native speakers find it difficult to understand native speakers, speech because of the way functional words are pronounced?**) 80% of informants illustrated that it is difficult for non-native speakers to pronounce the functional words properly in a very short time, because native speakers speak very fast so that is why non-native speakers find it difficult to catch up the functional words sounds recognition during the speech of native speakers in English language while non-native speakers listening to weak and strong forms. According to the lack of knowledge in phonetics and phonology, also 20% said that they do believe that learning English depends on imitation if someone applies and follows very simple ways, it will be familiarized how to pronounce the functional words correctly without hesitation even if you are non-native speaker for the time being the learners can cope with such cases by listening instantly due to their view point that when a learner finds a real environment of learning the foreign language they might become professionals of the language without coming across any rule in the language itself as well as people who go abroad before learning that country's language if they go there they first face the language barrier, but after sometime they become good speakers in communication with natives and even understand the culture and its people's habits.

Table 4.18

Q3-To what extent the perception of listening to weak and strong forms need special rules to understand native speakers?

Q3	Frequency	Frequency	Total
Number	7	3	10
Percentage	70%	30%	

This table expounds the answers towards the third question (**To what extent the perception of listening to weak and strong forms need special rules to understand native speakers, speech while listening?**), 70% of the respondents classified that understanding weak and strong forms should be studied in specific subject that illustrates the proper rules when these forms to be strong or weak, according to the word position and its class in grammatical sentences they also believe that the understanding of these forms is better to be learned from native speakers to accustom the ways they pronounce the words in their own language instead of depending on other sources in a process of learning English language as a foreign language, also 30% of the informants expounded that due to their view point these forms should not be learned through specific rules, but the learners suppose to learn them through applying the communicative ways of speaking in learning time particularly in early age of schooling then will be enhanced normally, but the difficulty is where and when students learn these forms arbitrarily it will take long time for learners to become good speakers especially for non-native speakers of English language.

Table 4.19

Q4- To what extent non -native educators of English should try to apply the right rules in perception of listening to strong and weak forms properly?

Q4	Frequency	Frequency	Total
Number	1	9	10
Percentage	10%	90%	

This table exposes the answers towards the fourth question (**To what extent non -native educators of English should try to apply the right rules in perception of listening to strong and weak forms properly?**) 10% of the respondents reported that they have experienced good ideas during their learning in English language that non-native speakers teachers of an English language in schools particularly in secondary level do not apply English pronunciation rules due to the lack of their previous knowledge of weak and strong forms, generally in English language definitely in some African countries where an English is taught as a foreign language, but 90% of the respondents explained that as they believe every English teacher applies the rule in process of teaching, but the lack of facilities cause obstacles for non-native teachers to attain positive perception of listening to such forms in the process of learning and teaching English language in their countries, and they also explained that an English language teachers should be trained to be the best guidance who will be able to convey the message to their students with a method that needed to be especially when they are communicating in English to make them feel free in the second language skills. Thus the students will immediately find themselves better if their teachers apply better ways in teaching English language phonetics and phonology properly.

Table 4.20

Q5- To what extent the mother tongue of non-native speakers of English have an influence on perception of listening to weak and strong forms in English language?

Q5	Frequency	Frequency	Total
Number	8	2	10
Percentage	80%	20%	

This table explicates the answers of the respondents towards the fifth question (**To what extent the mother tongue of non-native speakers of English have an influence on perception of listening to weak and strong forms in English language?**) 80% of the respondents answered by saying that learning L1 in the early age before L2 it has a great influence in learning the second language besides your mother tongue, because they believe that non-native speakers, learners when learning any new language beside their mother tongue to communicate or guess the meaning they first think in their mother tongue before thinking about the acquisition of the new language that is why non-native speakers of English language face difficulties in learning English, but 20% of the respondents explicated that the problem is not the mother tongue, because they believe that the matter of environment, attitude in learning process itself, and motivation also language features, and the character, these factors play a very big role in acquiring new languages, and to know the important aspects of the second language besides the mother tongue, also they have mentioned that there are many non-native speakers who became professionals in English language without been abroad before.

Hypotheses Verification: These two hypotheses were reliable, and have fulfilled the goal in the importance of learning and understanding weak and strong forms in connected speech of English language sentences while listening to functional words spoken naturally by native speakers.

Chapter five

Findings, Suggestions, Recommendations and Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This chapter includes findings, suggestions, recommendations, and the conclusion of the research.

5.1 Findings

By the end of this research the researcher has found the following findings.

1- The results revealed that most of the students have problems that made them to misunderstand the weak and strong forms while listening to native speakers, speech in English language, and how to identify the reduced forms of functional words in connected speech from sentences in English language.

2- In some cases, the researcher found that in many sentences of the test answers were wrong answers in identification of functional words where the majority of the students have classified were very simple to be realized as weak or strong, but the respondents were not able to answer in a correct way.

3- Some questions were very clear to respondents thus they did not face any problem to categorize and diagnose the functional words, identity in listening and perceiving the sound of the word easily due to their previous knowledge of an English weak and strong forms.

4- The misunderstanding of weak forms in English phonetics and phonology reveals that this misperception factors that the researcher has already discussed in the theoretical part have shown the details of these patterns in addition to the students' typical answers that inability of breaking down the chunks of sentences is one of the factors caused the misperception of weak forms while listening to native speakers, speech sounds.

5- In many cases, the students' answers indicated that they have been unable to hear the weak forms to catch up the word's real sound to identify whether they are weak or strong forms during the test.

5.2 Recommendations

According to these research findings and suggestions the researcher has made the following recommendations for the importance of learning weak and strong forms in English language's phonetics and phonology.

1- There should be a support to non-native speakers of English language learners in applying accurate ways of learning English phonetics and phonology earlier.

2- In schools before students, admission to Universities there must be qualified teachers in all levels who will make the learners stronger in familiarizing the aspects of English language words, sound system.

3- Students should apply the first skill of an English language to accustom saying the words as well as natural speech through native speakers directly, if possible to compare the pronunciation of single and connected words in the same time to avoid misperceptions of sounds.

5.3 Suggestions

According to the research findings the researcher has come up with the following suggestions for further studies in this field to facilitate the ways for non-native speakers of English language in process of learning and teaching weak and strong forms of functional words while listening to native speakers of English language.

1- Educational institutions should be responsible of implementing best programs of teaching in non-native English countries to encourage students of the non-native

speakers in learning weak and strong forms perception in listening to the native speakers in the early age of learning English language.

2-It is better for an English teachers to avert code-switching during the class when explaining to students in order not interrupt the learners, minds from bi thinking in acquiring language two as a second language.

3- An English teachers should have good training to cope with any aspect of a foreign language in teaching classes; therefore this phenomenon of teaching needs right qualifications in any field specialization.

5.4 Conclusion

This research dealt with the listening abilities of functional words concerning the perception of listening to weak and strong forms of grammatical words in natural connected speech, on the light of their awareness, and the significance of knowing the use of these words in listening process. In addition, the researcher has questioned the sufficiency of knowing about the rules, only, to enable the students to cope with reduced forms in natural speech of the native speakers in contrast to non-native speakers.

The results showed that the students did not have difficulties in some cases in recognizing the reduced forms and in some cases they have a lack of awareness of the significance of weak and strong forms learning in listening. The results also revealed that being aware is very significant as a teacher in helping the students to cope with weak and strong forms is good in natural spoken English. This is in addition to other factors such as training, familiarity and exposure etc. It is a fact that listening comprehension as a language skill, as opposed to other language skills, has received very little attention in language curricular. Foreign learners are taught how to be proficient writers, speaker, and may be good readers too. The fact

that these skills are the most noticeable from the students' performance in the classroom has given them a kind of priority in both teaching and assessment. Whereas, among other reasons that imbedded nature of listening has greatly contributed to its ignorance in language teaching. Consequently, foreign language learners whose listening skill is not adequately developed will, undoubtedly, face difficulties in understanding natural spoken language. This ignorance is also the result of wrong concepts about listening, especially the one that considers listening as a passive skill. They need to change and challenge such view is extremely important if communicative ways in language teaching are applied.

This study has focused only on one part of the whole listening comprehension process which focused on the students ability to decode the incoming sounds of weak and strong forms of functional words in sentences through natural spoken English by native speakers and how to identify them. More precisely, this piece of research has been devoted to gain a thorough understanding an actual effects of students, awareness in the importance of learning weak and strong forms and the effects of their ability to perceive such words in comprehending native speakers speech sounds while listening in recorded speech.

Bibliography

- Anderson, A., & Lynch, T. (1988). *Language Teaching: Listening*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - Brown, J. D., & Hilferty, A. (2006). The Effectiveness of Teaching Reduced Forms for Listening Comprehension. In J. D. Brown, & K. Kondo-Brown, *Perspectives on Teaching Connected Speech to Second Language Speakers*.
 - Brown, J. D., & Kondo-Brown, K. (2006). Introducing connected speech. In J. D. Brown, & K. Kondo-Brown, *Perspectives on Teaching Connected Speech to Second Language Speakers*.
 - Buck, G. (2001). *Assessing Listening*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - Collins, B., & Mees, I. M. (2003). *Practical Phonetics and Phonology: a resource book for students*. London: Routledge.
 - Dalton, C., & Seidlhofer, B. (1994). *Language Teaching: Pronunciation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 - Dretzke, B. (1998). *Modern British and American English Pronunciation*.
 - Brown, & K. Kondo-Brown, *Perspectives on Teaching Connected Speech to Second Language Speakers*.
 - Martinez-Flor, A., & Uso-Juan, E. (2006). Towards Acquiring Communicative Competence Through Listening. In E. Uso-Juan, & A. Martinez-Flor, *Current Trends in the Development and Teaching of the Four Language Skills*.
 - Morley, J. (1991). listening comprehension in second /foreign language instruction.
 - Mortimer, C. (1985). *Elements of Pronunciations: Intensive Practice for Intermediate and more Advanced Students*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
 - Nagarja, P. (1996). *English Language Teaching: Approaches, Methods, Techniques*. Orient Longman Private Limited.
 - Peterson, P. W. (1991). A Synthesis of Methods for Interactive Listening.
 - Selkirk, E. (1996). The Prododic Structure of Function Words. In J. L. Morgan, & K. Demuth,
 - Ortiz Lira (2008) University of Santiago
 - Wells (2008) and Roach, Hartman & Setter (2006).
 - Mr Mohamed Laoubi (2009) Mentouri University
- Sally Butterfield MRC Applied Psychology University, Cambridge United kingdom: (Received 3 0 June 1993; revised 1 8 October 1994; accepted 24 October 1994)

Appendix

Sudan University of Science and Technology

College of Languages- Department of English

MA Diagnostic test for teachers on phonology

Read and listen to the following sentences and decide either weak or strong forms of the functional words, then write them down in the boxes. The underlined bolded words at the **beginning**, in the **middle** or at the **end** of the sentence.

A-Who did you give **the** money away **to**?

Strong	Weak

B-What do you want **to** have a word with **me** about?

Strong	Weak

C-who did **you** dance **with**?

Strong	Weak

D-What **do** you need five thousand pounds **for**?

Strong	Weak

E-What **is** he writing **a** book about?

Strong	Weak

F-Who **did** you get a present **from**?

Strong	Weak

G-Who **did** you buy **a** birthday card for?

Strong	Weak

H-What is **he** thinking **about**?

Strong	Weak

I-Where **do** you want me **to** give a lift to?

Strong	Weak

J-What do you want **me to** clean the sink with?

Strong	Weak

A-**Can** I have **some** sphegaty? Yes of course there is a lot

Strong	Weak

B-Have you got lots **of** Ham sandwiches? Well there **are** few

Strong	Weak

C-I **would** like two vegetable curries please, Sorry **there** is only a little left.

Strong	Weak

D-Can I **have** some chips with **my** hamburger? Sorry there aren't any left.

Strong	Weak

E-**Have** you got apple pie today? Yes just **a** little.

Strong	Weak

An interview questions

1- Should the strong and weak forms be learned in pronunciation course only?

.....
.....
.....
.....

2- To what extend non-native speakers find it difficult to understand native speakers, speech because of the way functional words are pronounced?

.....
.....
.....

3- To what extend the listening perception to weak and strong forms need special rules to understand native speakers?

.....
.....
.....
.....

4- To what extend non -native educators of English try to apply the right rules in perception of listening to strong and weak forms properly?

.....
.....
.....
.....

5- To what extend the mother tongue of non-native speakers of English have an influence in perception of listening to weak and strong forms in English language?

.....
.....
.....
.....