



كلية الدراسات العليا

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# Investigating Difficulties in the Production of Weak Form Words in English Encountered by Sudanese University Students

تقصي الصعوبات في إنتاج الصيغ الانجليزية الضعيفة التي تواجه الطلاب الجامعيين السودانيين

(A case Study of Third Year Students at Al-Nahda College, Khartoum)

*A Thesis Submitted in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of PhD.  
in English Language (Applied Linguistics)*

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## **Dedication**

*This study is dedicated to my father's soul,*

*Hassan Salih Hamad*

*May Allah Almighty grant him Highest Garden in Paradise,*

*Amen*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah the Almighty, who deserves all my prayers and thankfulness. After that, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to all of those who have greatly supported me during the hard work of this study. I am very grateful to my supervisor Prof. Mahmoud Ali Ahmad, for his guidance and supervision; Mr. Ali Johns (Prince Sattam Univ. KSA) for advice and continuous help; Prof. Omar Al-Sheikh Hago (Taiba Univ. KSA) for his inspiration; Dr. Tag Elsir Hassan Bashoum (SUST), May Allah almighty bless his soul, for all his goodness and helpful comments; Dr. Issameldin Al-Fadni (an expert in Education, KSA), for his assistance and useful comments on the questionnaire; Dr. Al-sheikh Al-Faki (Ret. Long-practiced) for his time and efforts; Dr. Lwal John (Al-Nahda College), for his help. I also wish to extend my genuine appreciation to all staff and students of Al-Nahda College, without whom this work would not have come true. Finally, I would like to express my special thanks to all the members of my family and friends for their support and motivation.

## **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to investigate the difficulties of the production of English weak-form words that Sudanese University Students encounter. The major goal, of this research was to evaluate the students' performance in producing these forms (functional words). The instruments used for collecting data and information included were teachers' questionnaire, classroom observation as well as pre- and posttests. The thesis got use of descriptive analytical approach as well as the use of the statistical program of social sciences (SPSS) for producing results. The results confirm that, almost the majority of the participants were unable to produce such forms. This study provides some recommendations to develop the students' production of the English weak-form words, in addition to some suggestions for further studies.

## المستخلص من الدراسة

قامت هذه الدراسة بالاستقصاء عن الصعوبات اللغوية في إنتاج الصيغ الإنجليزية الضعيفة (الكلمات النحوية)، والتي يعجز الطلاب السودانيون، في الجامعات السودانية عن نطقها بصورة صحيحة. فقد كان الهدف الرئيس من هذه الدراسة هو تقييم أداء الطلاب أثناء قيامهم بنطق هذه الصيغ. ومن أجل الحصول على المعلومات والبيانات الدقيقة استخدمت هذه الدراسة وسيلتين هما، استبيان يجيب عنه أساتذة اللغة الإنجليزية في الجامعات السودانية، ووسيلة أخرى هي الملاحظة المباشرة من الباحث لأداء طلابه داخل الفصل، بالإضافة لإجراء اختبارين، أحدهما قبل تلقي الطلاب دراسة وتطبيقاً حول هذا الموضوع، والآخر بعد ذلك. وللحصول على النتائج المرجوة، فقد استعملت هذه الدراسة الطريقة التحليلية الوصفية والبرامج الإحصائية (للعلوم الاجتماعية) وعليه، فقد أظهرت النتائج أن أغلب المشاركين في هذه الدراسة غير قادرين على النطق الصحيح لهذه الصيغ. ومن أجل ذلك احتوت هذه الدراسة على بعض التوصيات والمقترحات وبعض الدراسات الأخرى للمساهمة في تطوير أداء الطلاب لنطق هذه الصيغ.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| DEDECATION -----         | I   |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENT -----    | II  |
| ABSTRACT (English) ----- | III |
| ABSTRACT (Arabic) -----  | IV  |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS -----  | V   |
| LIST OF TABLES -----     | X   |
| LIST OF FIGURES -----    | XII |

| <b>CHAPTER</b> | <b>PAGE</b> |
|----------------|-------------|
|----------------|-------------|

### **CHAPTER 1- INTRODUCTION**

|                                     |   |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 1.0- Overview -----                 | 1 |
| 1.1- Statement of the study-----    | 2 |
| 1.2- Objectives of the study-----   | 3 |
| 1.3- Questions of the study-----    | 3 |
| 1.4- Hypotheses of the study -----  | 3 |
| 1.5- Significance of the study----- | 3 |
| 1.6- Scope of the study -----       | 4 |
| 1.7- Methodology of the study-----  | 4 |

## CHAPTER 2- REVIEW OF LITERATURE

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 2.0- Introduction  | 5  |
| 2.1- English Sentence Stress   | 5  |
| 2.2- Arabic Stress   | 6  |
| 2.3.0 - Weak-form words  | 7  |
| 2.3.1 The ə vowel (“schwa”)  | 8  |
| 2.3.2 Rules for the Use of Strong Form   | 10 |
| 2.3.3 Structure or Function Words  | 11 |
| 2.3.4 The Importance of Learning Weak-Form Words                                       | 16 |
| 2.4 How EFL Learners Deal With Weak-Forms  | 18 |
| 2.5 Previous Studies   | 19 |
| 2.6 Factors influence the Reduction of English Functional Words                        | 31 |
| 2.6.1 Rate of speech   | 32 |
| 2.6.2 Planning problems  | 32 |
| 2.6.3 Segmental context  | 33 |
| 2.6.4 Predictability and Frequency   | 33 |
| 2.6.5 Other factors such as position in utterance, following syllable, and collocation | 33 |
| 2.7 Summary of the Study   | 34 |

## **CHAPTER 3- RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 3.0- Introduction -----                                | 35 |
| 3.1- Methodology of the Study -----                    | 35 |
| 3.2 Research Population and Sample-----                | 35 |
| 3.3 Instruments-----                                   | 36 |
| 3.3.1 Questionnaire -----                              | 36 |
| 3.3.2 Audio Recording -----                            | 37 |
| 3.3.3 Classroom Observation-----                       | 39 |
| 3.4 Procedures-----                                    | 40 |
| 3.5 Data Analysis -----                                | 41 |
| 3.6 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire----- | 42 |
| 3.7 Summary of the Study -----                         | 42 |

## **CHAPTER 4- DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 4.0- Data Analysis, Results and Discussion -----              | 43 |
| 4.1 Result Found from Teachers' Questionnaire -----           | 43 |
| 4.1.1 Articles: <i>the, a, and an</i> -----                   | 44 |
| 4.1.2 Prepositions: <i>at, for, from, of, and to</i> -----    | 46 |
| 4.1.3 Pronouns: <i>he, him, her, them and us</i> -----        | 49 |
| 4.1.4 Conjunctions: <i>and, but, as, than, and that</i> ----- | 51 |



|   |    |
|---|----|
| 4.1.5 Miscellaneous: <i>some</i> and <i>there</i> -----                               | 53 |
| 4.1.6 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: <i>can, could, have, has</i> and <i>had</i> -----      | 54 |
| 4.1.7 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: <i>shall, should, must, do</i> and <i>does</i> . ----- | 56 |
| 4.1.8 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: <i>am, are, was</i> and <i>were</i> . -----            | 58 |
| 4.2 Results and Description of Subjects' Pretest -----                                | 60 |
| 4.2.1 Articles: <i>the, a,</i> and <i>an</i> -----                                    | 61 |
| 4.2.2 Prepositions: <i>at, for, from, of,</i> and <i>to</i> -----                     | 63 |
| 4.2.3 Pronouns: <i>he, him, her, them</i> and <i>us</i> -----                         | 65 |
| 4.2.4 Conjunctions: <i>and, but, as, than,</i> and <i>that</i> -----                  | 67 |
| 4.2.5 Miscellaneous: <i>some</i> and <i>there</i> -----                               | 69 |
| 4.2.6 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: <i>can, could, have, has</i> and <i>had</i> -----      | 70 |
| 4.2.7 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: <i>shall, should, must, do</i> and <i>does</i> -----   | 72 |
| 4.2.8 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: <i>am, are, was</i> and <i>were</i> -----              | 74 |
| 4.3 Results of Subjects' Posttest -----   | 75 |
| 4.3.1 Final Subjects' Scores of Articles -----  | 76 |
| 4.3.2 Final Subjects' Scores of Prepositions -----                                    | 77 |
| 4.3.3 Final Subjects' Scores of Pronouns -----  | 78 |
| 4.3.4 Final Subjects' Scores of Conjunctions -----                                    | 79 |
| 4.3.5 Final Subjects' Scores of Miscellaneous-----                                    | 80 |
| 4.3.6 Final Subjects' Scores of Auxiliary1 -----                                      | 81 |
| 4.3.7 Final Subjects' Scores of Auxiliary2 -----                                      | 82 |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 4.3.8 Final Subjects' Scores of Auxiliary3 .....    | 83 |
| 4.4 Discussion and Confirmation of Hypotheses ..... | 84 |
| 4.5 Summary of the Chapter .....                    | 85 |

## **CHAPTER 5- CONCLUSION**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| 5.0- Introduction.....                 | 86 |
| 5.1 Findings .....                     | 86 |
| 5.2 Recommendations.....               | 88 |
| 5.3 Further Research Suggestions ..... | 89 |

## LIST OF TABLES

| <b>TABLE</b>   | <b>PAGE</b> |
|--|-------------|
| Table 2.1 Vowels pronounced as a schwa -----                     | 9           |
| Table 2.2 Articles -----   | 11          |
| Table 2.3 Pronouns-----  | 12          |
| Table 2.4 Auxiliary Verbs -----                                  | 13          |
| Table 2.5 Conjunctions-----                                      | 14          |
| Table 2.6 Miscellaneous-----                                     | 14          |
| Table 2.7 Prepositions-----                                      | 15          |
| Table 4.8 Teachers' Questionnaire of Articles -----              | 44          |
| Table 4.9 Teachers' Questionnaire of Prepositions-----           | 46          |
| Table 4.10 Teachers' Questionnaire of Pronouns-----              | 49          |
| Table 4.11 Teachers' Questionnaire of Conjunctions-----          | 51          |
| Table 4.12 Teachers' Questionnaire of Miscellaneous -----        | 53          |
| Table 4.13 Teachers' Questionnaire of Auxiliary Verbs1 -----     | 54          |
| Table 4.14 Teachers' Questionnaire of Auxiliary Verbs2 -----     | 56          |
| Table 4.15 Teachers' Questionnaire of Auxiliary Verbs3 -----     | 58          |
| Table 4.16 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Articles -----     | 61          |
| Table 4.17 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Prepositions ----- | 63          |

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Table 4.18 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Pronouns -----        | 65 |
| Table 4.19 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Conjunctions -----    | 67 |
| Table 4.20 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Miscellaneous-----    | 69 |
| Table 4.21 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Auxiliary Verbs1----- | 70 |
| Table 4.22 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Auxiliary Verbs2----- | 72 |
| Table 4.23 Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Auxiliary Verbs3----- | 74 |
| Table 4.24 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Articles-----          | 76 |
| Table 4.25 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Prepositions-----      | 77 |
| Table 4.26 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Pronouns -----         | 78 |
| Table 4.27 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Conjunctions-----      | 79 |
| Table 4.28 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Miscellaneous -----    | 80 |
| Table 4.29 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Auxiliary1 -----       | 81 |
| Table 4.30 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Auxiliary2-----        | 82 |
| Table 4.31 Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Auxiliary3-----        | 83 |

## LIST OF FIGURES

| <b>FIGURE</b>  | <b>PAGE</b> |
|--|-------------|
| Figure 4.1 Results of the Questionnaire (Articles: the, a, an) -----                               | 45          |
| Figure 4.2 Results of the Questionnaire (Prepositions1: at, for) -----                             | 47          |
| Figure 4.3 Results of the Questionnaire (Prepositions2: from, of, to) -----                        | 48          |
| Figure 4.4 Results of the Questionnaire (Pronouns: he, him, her, them, us) -----                   | 50          |
| Figure 4.5 Results of the Questionnaire (Conjunctions: and, but, as, than, that) --                | 52          |
| Figure 4.6 Results of the Questionnaire (Miscellaneous: some, there) -----                         | 53          |
| Figure 4.7 Results of the Questionnaire (Auxiliary Verbs1: can, could, have, has,<br>had) -----    | 55          |
| Figure 4.8 Results of the Questionnaire (Auxiliary Verbs2: shall, should, must, do,<br>does) ----- | 57          |
| Figure 4.9 Results of the Questionnaire (Auxiliary Verbs3: am, are, was, were)<br>-----            | 59          |
| Figure 4.10 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Articles: the, a, an) -----                              | 62          |
| Figure 4.11 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Prepositions: at, for, from, of, to) -----               | 64          |
| Figure 4.12 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Pronouns: he, him, her, them, us) -----                  | 66          |
| Figure 4.13 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Conjunctions: and, but, as, than, that) --               | 68          |
| Figure 4.14 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Miscellaneous: some, there) -----                        | 69          |
| Figure 4.15 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Auxiliary1: can, could, have, has,<br>had)-----          | 71          |
| Figure 4.16 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Auxiliary2: shall, should, must, do,<br>does)-----       | 73          |
| Figure 4.17 Results of Subjects' Pretest (Auxiliary Verbs3: am, are, was,<br>were) -----           | 75          |
| Figure 4.18 Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Articles: the, a, an) -----                           | 77          |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Figure 4.19 Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Prepositions: at, for, from, of, to) ----              | 78         |
| Figure 4.20 Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Pronouns: he, him, her, them, us) ---                  | 79         |
| Figure 4.21 Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Conjunctions: and, but, as, than, that) -----          | 80         |
| Figure 4.22 Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Miscellaneous: some, there) -----                      | 81         |
| Figure 4.23- Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Auxiliary Verbs1: can, could, have, has, had) -----   | 82         |
| Figure 4.24 Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Auxiliary Verbs2: shall, should, must, do, does) ----- | 83         |
| Figure 4.25 Results of Pretest Vs. Posttest (Auxiliary Verbs3: am, are, was, were) -----            | 84         |
| <b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b> -----   | <b>91</b>  |
| <b>APPENDICES</b> -----   | <b>98</b>  |
| <b>Appendix A</b> -----   | <b>98</b>  |
| <b>Appendix B</b> -----   | <b>101</b> |
| <b>Appendix C</b> -----   | <b>108</b> |

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Overview

This chapter presents the outlines of the research problems, and the context of the study. It contains the statements of the study, the objectives, the questions, the hypotheses, the significance, the scope as well as the research methodology of the study.

One of the most important features of English that second language speakers need to be aware of is that English is a stressed-timed language, which means that there is approximately the same amount of time between stressed syllables. In order to fit our words into this pattern, we tend to “squash” or compress other syllables or words occurring between stresses, in order to keep up with the more or less regular rhythm (Mayers, 1981: 422). Therefore, it is of great importance for all learners of English to use the weak-form words in unstressed positions. It will improve their speech enormously, and will help them to acquire the characteristic rhythm of spoken English. 'Unless they use weak forms correctly their rhythm will never be right (J. D. O'Connor 1979).

Weak forms are syllable sounds that become unstressed in connected speech and are often then pronounced as a schwa (Roach 2001). According to Collins & Mees (2003), these words are limited in number and include auxiliary verbs, pronouns, articles, conjunctions, prepositions etc., and 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.

English speakers use weak forms all the time and every single sentence is full of them. But students who are learning English usually use only strong forms which they sound very unnatural and they find it difficult to understand because they are not used to the weak forms and very often they don't even know they exist. This study focuses on a small group of about 35 to 40 of the very common function words in English which are pronounced in mainly two different ways, a weak form and strong form. Weak forms are the normal pronunciations and for this reason learners of English should identify them and use them correctly. This work is, therefore an attempt to investigate whether Sudanese university students of English make appropriate use of the weak forms of English functional words or not.

### **1.1 Statement of the Study**

It is very important to learn how weak forms of English are used since they appear early in any graded syllabus (Majeed, J. 1999). It is a common feature of spoken English; however, in my teaching experience I've found that few Sudanese students at universities actually use the weak forms when they are speaking English.

There are roughly forty weak-form words in English language. This study will investigate the weak forms, which produce by Sudanese university students e.g. 'than' → ðən, 'Better than ever' /betə ðən evə/, not the contracted forms (e.g. 'it is' → 'its'; 'we have' → 'we've'; 'do not' → 'don't'). Since practically all native speakers of British English use the weak-form words, learners of the language need to learn these weak forms to help them to understand what they hear (Roach 2001). The subjects of this study are the Sudanese university students who are likely to face difficulties when they pronounce the weak-form words of English language in connected speech not in citation form.



## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

- 1) To create students' awareness of the significance of using English weak-form words.
- 2) To investigate how Sudanese university students (SUS) can use English weak-form words correctly.
- 3) To examine the Sudanese university learners' ability to reduce the strong form of the English words.

## **1.3 Questions of the Study**

- 1) To what degree are students aware of using weak-forms of English?
- 2) To what extent do students use the English weak-form words correctly?
- 3) Do Sudanese University Students have the inclination to reduce the strong forms of English function words, in connected speech?

## **1.4 Hypotheses of the Study**

- 1) Sudanese university students are not aware or familiar with the use of weak-form words of English and they are likely to have difficulty understanding speakers who do use weak forms.
- 2) Sudanese university students cannot use the English weak-form words correctly.
- 3) Sudanese university students do not have the tendency to reduce the strong-forms of English functional words, in required environments.

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Weak-form words of English language have to be studied for two reasons. First, studying weak forms can help the learners of English to improve their pronunciation of the spoken language.

Because of the influence of their mother tongue (Arabic), the subjects of this study tend to pronounce every word strongly and very clearly which can disrupt the natural rhythm of spoken English. Second, being unaware of the weak-form words of English may inhibit students' comprehension of the English spoken by fluent speakers.

## **1.6 Scope of the Study**

Almost all the words which have both a strong and weak forms belong to a category that may be called function words (Majeed, J. 1999). This study distinguishes between the weak forms and the contracted forms, the contracted forms are made up by the combination of function words, such as 'he'll' /hi:l/ instead of "he will" (Collins & Mees, 2013). Therefore it focuses only on exploring the production of weak-form words of English (defined in Chap2), which pronounced by Sudanese university students in their connected speech.

## **1.7 Methodology of the Study**

This study used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative research methods to describe the experiences of the phenomenon and the nature of the situation as they are lived at the time of the study. Gay, Milla and Airasian, (2009) explains the word quantitative implies massive dependence on statistics to interpret the data collected in this type of research. Quantitative research requires a large sample of participants to give reliable statistics about the investigated phenomena. On the other hand, the qualitative method is the collection, analysis and interpretation of comprehensive narrative and visual data. To obtain information the researcher employs the experimental approach which includes a questionnaire, classroom observation and pre- and posttests for English students of the third year at Al-Nahda College, in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITRETURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter provides a literature review on the major areas which are related to the present study. It contains three sections. Section one deals with the English sentence stress and Arabic stress in general, then the weak-form words in terms of the /ə/ vowel ‘schwa’, the rules for the use of strong forms, the structure of function words, in addition to the importance of learning weak-form words and how EFL learners cope with these words. Section two points out to some theoretical and empirical studies that are related to the production of the weak-form words of English in the area of pronunciation among Sudanese students and other students around the worlds. Section three deals with the general factors, those influence the reduction of English functional words.

#### **2.1 English Sentence Stress**

Stress is defined by Prof. Zapata (2009) as “the relative degree of force used by a speaker on the various syllables he is uttering”. In connected speech, the same syllable or even the same word may be stressed or unstressed depending upon the context of a sentence and the degree of emphasis placed on a certain part of a sentence. According to Zeki Majeed (1999), stress refers to the prominent part of a syllable or a word and it is related to the syllable center (vowel). This prominent is caused by additional breath force. In a series of connected utterances only new words are stressed. The same is true when we have questions and answers. Nouns, adjectives, main verbs, adverbs, demonstratives and question-words are usually stressed in normal utterances, i. e., in the absence of special emphasis. Function words, pronouns, articles, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs and other words such as:

*is, has, there, etc.* are weakened and usually are unstressed. However, the speaker may stress any word to emphasize it for its importance; for example, *I 'thanked him for the 'letter* this is for sentence stress in normal utterances, another example for sentence stress in emphasized utterances is, *Tom likes 'fish (Not meat)* (O'Connor, J.D., (1967).

Un-stressing often results in vowel reduction which is an established phenomenon in Standard English (Carr 1999, Crosswhite 2001). According to Roca and Johnson (1999: 315), “The reduction of stress-less vowels is one of the most characteristic traits of English”. Therefore, the strong vowels in English grammatical words have a tendency to reduce to /ə/ when they occur in sentences. This has been observed to contribute immensely to the typical rhythm of Standard English where there is alternation between stressed and unstressed syllables (Gimson 1975, Jowitt 1991, Hayes 1995, Roca and Johnson 1999). It has been commonly agreed that word stress in English does not operate regularly and it is, largely, not predictable. It is true that some English phoneticians and linguists have tried to work out rules for word stress patterns in English, but they have ended up with many exceptions for each rule (Gimson, 1991; Roach, 1993; Mitchell et al, 1989 among others).

## **2.2 Arabic Stress**

In Arabic, however, stress patterns are largely, regular and predictable. A change in stress is never used to change the meaning of a word. Instead, a word is pronounced with a different short vowel even when it is spelled the same. Many linguists have worked out many rules on the regularities of stress patterns in Arabic. They all seem to agree on the fact that long syllables and/or long vowels are always stressed in words having more than one syllable (Birkland, 1956; Mitchell, 1960; Anis, 1971; Hassan, 1981, 1995 among others).

The difference between the two patterns of word stress in English and Arabic has always been a problem for Arabic learners of English. They are affected by the predictable placement of stress on long syllables and long vowels in Arabic and, therefore, they place stress on syllables having long vowels or diphthongs in polysyllabic English words, which are usually not stressed by English native speakers' e.g.

Phoneme /'fəʊni:m/ becomes /fəʊ'ni:m/

Concrete /'kɒŋkri:t/ becomes /kɒŋ'kri:t/

Arabic students are, therefore advised to learn how to place stress for each bi-syllabic and polysyllabic English word individually when listening to native speakers.

### **2.3.0 Weak-form Words**

There are numbers of words in English which can be pronounced in two different ways, a strong and a weak form. Weak forms are limited in number but their occurrence, in terms of a discourse frequency, is overwhelmingly more common than strong forms. They are among the most used and common words of the English language. They must be regarded as the foundation in the language learning activity. English-speaking people find the strong forms unnatural and learners of English can misunderstand English speakers, who will surely use weak forms (Peter Roach, 2009). 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. And since practically all native speakers of British English use them, learners of the language need to learn weak forms to help them to understand what they hear (Collins & Mees, 2003).

The structures of function words include articles, auxiliary verbs, pronouns, possessives, some prepositions and some conjunctions. The strong forms of these words are used in certain positions, when they are stressed or said in isolation. Some of these words have more than one weak form, but only one strong form. In many of these function words, the vowel sound of the strong form is usually replaced by /ə/ or /i/ when the word is produced in its weak form. For example, the article *the* is pronounced as /ði:/ when said in isolation, but in connected speech it is usually /ðə/ before consonant sounds and /ði/ before vowel sounds. Thus we say: (the house /ðə 'haus/) and (the orange /ði 'orindʒ/). As the ultimate purpose of English learning is to acquire the fluency and understanding of the language, then the mastery of these weak forms becomes imperative for teachers to explain and use them properly in practical every day speech.

### **2.3.1 The /ə/ vowel (“schwa”)**

According to Skander and Burleigh (2000), “the term schwa comes from Hebrew, where it means ‘emptiness’ and designates a Hebrew vowel of the same quality” (cited in Mehmet Demirezen, 2010, p.1568). The schwa is a weak, unstressed sound and it occurs in many words. It represents a mid-central vowel in an unstressed syllable, such as the first syllable of “about”. It is also represented as / ə/ in the International Phonetic Alphabet. It is often the sound in grammar words such as articles and prepositions. The most frequency occurring vowel in English is /ə/, which is always associated with weak syllables. In quality it is mid (i.e. halfway between close and open) and central (i.e. halfway between front and back). It is generally described as lax – that is, not articulated with much energy (Peter Roach, 2009). Getting the schwa sound correct is a good way of making your pronunciation more accurate and natural.

The phonemic symbol for this sound is /ə/. Any vowel letter can be pronounced as schwa and the pronunciation of a vowel letter can change depending on whether the syllable in which it occurs is stressed or not. In the word 'man' the letter 'a' has its full sound - represented by the symbol /æ/. In 'postman' the syllable 'man' is not stressed and the letter 'a' is pronounced as schwa, represented by the symbol /ə/. The sound schwa does not only represent a single letter. In some words it is the sound of several letters or even a whole syllable. This is often, but not only seen in words which have a syllable made up of a vowel letter followed by the letter 'r'. Remember the schwa sound is only used if the syllable which it is in, is not stressed. The table, below shows the all five English vowels, as well as the semi-vowel Y, that are sometimes pronounced as a schwa.

| Schwa | Vowel | Examples  |
|-------|-------|---|
| ə     | a     | About /əbaʊt/    Capable /keɪpəbəl/    Sofa /səʊfə/ |
|       | e     | Enemy /enəmi/                                       |
|       | i     | Incredible /ɪŋkredəbəl/                             |
|       | ɒ     | Opposite /əpəʊz/    Gallop /gæləp/                  |
|       | u     | Focus /fəʊkəs/                                      |
|       | y     | Vinyl /vaɪnəl/                                      |

**Table 1: Vowels pronounced as a schwa**

### 2.3.2 Rules for the Use of Strong Form

- i. For many weak-form words, when they occur at the end of a sentence; for example, the word ‘of’ has the weak form əv in the following sentence:  
‘I’ fond of chips’ → /aim 'fɒnd əv 'tʃɪps/

However, when it comes at the end of the sentence, as in the following example, it has the strong form ɒv:

‘Chips are what I’m fond of’ → /'tʃɪps ə 'wɒt aim 'fɒnd ɒv/

- ii. When a weak-form word is being contrasted with another word; for example: ‘The letter’s from him, not to him → ‘ðə 'letəz 'frɒm ɪm nɒt 'tu: ɪm’

A similar case is what we might call a *co-ordinated* use of prepositions:

‘I travel to and from London a lot’ → ai 'trævl̩ 'tu: ən 'frɒm 'lʌndən ə 'lɒt

‘A work of and about literature’ → ə 'wɜ:k 'ɒv ən ə'baut 'lɪtərəʃə

- iii. When a weak-form word is given stress for the purpose of emphasis; for example: ‘You must give me more money’ → ju 'mʌst 'gɪv mi 'mɔ: 'mʌni.

- iv. When a weak-form word is being “cited” or “quoted”; for example:

‘You shouldn’t put “and” at the end of a sentence’

ju 'ʃʊdn̩t put 'ænd ət ði 'end əv 'sentəns



### 2.3.3 Structure of Function Words

- a. Articles : *a, an, the.*
- b. Prepositions : *at, to, of, for, from.*
- c. Pronouns : *me, we, us, he, him, them.*
- d. Auxiliary or Modal Verbs: *be, been, am, is, are, was, were, have, has, had, do, does, shall, should, will, would, can, could, must.*
- e. Conjunctions : *and, but, as, who, that, than.*
- f. Miscellaneous : *some, there, not*

| Word | Strong Form | Weak Forms |         |               |              |       |
|------|-------------|------------|---------|---------------|--------------|-------|
|      |             | Normal     | Initial | Before Vowels | After Vowels | Final |
| a    | əi          | ə          | ə       |               |              |       |
| an   | ən          | ən         | ən      | ən            |              |       |
| the  | ði:         | ðə , ði    | ðə , ði | ði            |              |       |

**Table 2: Articles**

| Word | Strong Form | Weak Forms |         |               |              |       |
|------|-------------|------------|---------|---------------|--------------|-------|
|      |             | Normal     | Initial | Before Vowels | After Vowels | Final |
| me   | mi:         | mi         |         |               |              | mi:   |
| we   | wi:         | wi         |         |               |              | wi:   |
| us   | ʌs          | əs         |         |               |              | ʌs    |
| he   | hi:         | i, hi      | hi      |               |              | hi:   |
| him  | him         | im         |         |               |              | him   |
| his  | his         | iz         | hiz     |               |              | hiz   |
| she  | ʃi:         | ʃi:        | ʃi:     |               |              | ʃi:   |
| her  | hə:         | ə, ə:      | hə      | ər            |              | hə:   |
| you  | ju:         | ju         |         |               |              | ju:   |
| your | jo:         | jə         |         | jər           |              |       |
| them | ðem         | ðem        |         |               |              | ðem   |

**Table 3: Pronouns**

| Word   | Strong Form | Weak Forms |         |               |              |       |
|--------|-------------|------------|---------|---------------|--------------|-------|
|        |             | Normal     | Initial | Before Vowels | After Vowels | Final |
| be     | bi:         | bi         |         |               |              |       |
| been   | bi:n        | bin        |         |               |              |       |
| am     | am          | m          | em      |               |              | am    |
| is     | iz          | z/s        | iz      |               |              | iz    |
| are    | a:          | ə          | ər      |               |              | a:    |
| was    | woz         | wəz        |         |               |              | woz   |
| were   | wə:         | wə         |         |               |              | wə:   |
| have   | hav         | əv         | həv     |               | v            | hav   |
| has    | haz         | z/s        | həz     |               |              | haz   |
| had    | had         | əd         | həd     | wər           |              | had   |
| do     | du:         | də         |         |               |              | du:   |
| does   | dʌz         | dəz        |         |               |              | dʌz   |
| shall  | ʃəl         | ʃəl        |         |               |              | ʃəl   |
| should | ʃud         | ʃəd        |         |               |              | ʃud   |
| will   | wil         | l          | wil     |               | l            | wil   |
| would  | wud         | əd         | wəd     | du            | d            | wud   |
| can    | kan         | kən        |         |               | kn           | kan   |
| could  | kud         | kəd        |         |               |              | kud   |
| must   | mʌst        | məs        |         |               |              | mʌst  |
|        |             | məst       |         | Məst          |              |       |

**Table 4: Auxiliary Verbs**

| Word | Strong Form | Weak Forms |         |               |              |       |
|------|-------------|------------|---------|---------------|--------------|-------|
|      |             | Normal     | Initial | Before Vowels | After Vowels | Final |
| and  | and         | ən         |         | ənd           |              |       |
| but  | bʌt         | bət        |         |               |              |       |
| as   | əz          | əz         |         |               |              | əz    |
| who  | hu:         | u          | Hu      |               | hu           |       |
| that | ðət         | ðət        |         |               |              |       |
| than | ðən         | ðən        |         |               |              |       |

**Table 5: Conjunctions**

| Word  | Strong Form | Weak Forms |         |               |              |       |
|-------|-------------|------------|---------|---------------|--------------|-------|
|       |             | Normal     | Initial | Before Vowels | After Vowels | Final |
| some  | sʌm         | səm        |         | sm            | sm           |       |
| there | ðeə         | ðə         |         | ðər           |              |       |
| not   | not         | nt         | Not     |               | nt           |       |

**Table 6 Miscellaneous**

| Word | Strong Form | Weak Forms |         |               |              |       |
|------|-------------|------------|---------|---------------|--------------|-------|
|      |             | Normal     | Initial | Before Vowels | After Vowels | Final |
| at   | at          | ət         | ət      | ət            |              | At    |
| to   | tu:         | tə         | tə      | tu            |              | tu:   |
| of   | ov:         | əv         | əv      | əv            |              | ov    |
| for  | fo:         | fə         | fə      | fər           |              | fo:   |
| from | from        | frəm       | frəm    | frəm          |              | from  |
| into | intu:       | intə       | intə    | intu          |              | intu: |

**Table 7: Prepositions**

The tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7 above: (adapted from Roach, 1998).

Table 6 (adapted from Zeki Majeed. Leeds, UK - 1999)

### 2.3.4 The Importance of Learning Weak-Form Words

Weak form words play a crucial role in both speech production and reception. Mortimer (1985) stated that “a good practical grasp of the weak forms of English is essential to good pronunciation and listening comprehension (1985: 4).

English is a stress-timed language, which means that stressed syllables are equal in timing. In order to fit our words into this pattern, we tend to "squash" or compress other syllables or words occurring between stresses, in order to keep up with the more or less regular rhythm (Mayers [1981:422](#)). Therefore, compressing or "weakening" some sounds is necessary to keep the rhythm of English.

A weak form is the pronunciation of a word or syllable in an unstressed manner. Of course, the difference between the strong form (stressed) and the weak form (unstressed) of a word is not apparent in writing but in speech. These two variations in pronunciation can be drastically different. If spoken in isolation, the weak form of a word would probably be unintelligible. The difference between the two forms can affect meaning.

Here is an example mentioned by Liang Wenxia (2005), to show how strong and weak forms of a single word (that) can change the entire meaning of a sentence: ‘John thinks *that* man is evil’ this version of the sentence, with the weak (unstressed) form of that, means "John thinks all humans are evil." John thinks that man is evil. The other version of the same sentence, with the strong (stressed) form of that, means "John thinks a specific (male) individual is evil." As indicated by this example, if a speaker unknowingly uses the strong form instead of the weak form, misunderstandings can occur.

Some phoneticians - Ortiz Lira (1997), Underhill (1994), Celce Murcia (1996), among others - maintain that mastery of weak forms is crucial not only to understand but also to produce connected speech effectively and appropriately. Failure to produce them will prevent the listener from focusing on the more meaningful words of the message.

Peter Roach (2000) provides two reasons why EFL learners should learn the way weak forms are used. First, most native speakers believe that it is “unnatural” and “foreign sounding” to use the strong form of certain words. An “all-strong-form” pronunciation may sound incomprehensible and disrupt the rhythm of the language, bearing in mind that English is a “stress-timed” language.

Ladefoged (1993:109) contends that: “There is, of course, nothing slovenly or lazy about using weak forms .... Weak forms and assimilations are common in the speech of every sort of speaker of both Britain and America. Foreigners who make insufficient use of them sound stilted”. Not only should learners be able to cope with the weak forms they hear, they must use them when speaking English, if they do not, their speech will present listeners with a surfeit of full vowels (which will make word recognition difficult) and with a surplus of stressed forms (which may make it very difficult for the listener to find his or her way through the message and identify points of focus), Ken worthy (1987:79). Therefore, this study has been conducted to explore the way Sudanese speaking learners of English deal with weak form words, particularly whether they can comprehend, perceive and produce these terms.

## **2.4 How EFL Learners Deal With Weak-Forms**

Appropriate pronunciation of the weak-form words is considered to be one of the most difficult features of English pronunciation for foreigners to acquire. Some phoneticians like - Ortiz Lira (1997), Underhill (1994), Celce Murcia et al. (1996), among others- maintain that mastery of weak forms is crucial not only to understand but also to produce connected speech effectively and appropriately. And the failure to produce them will prevent the listener from focusing on the more meaningful words of the message. The fact that structure words are commonly reduced, explains why learners often do not notice these words when they listen to them. Reduction obscures the words, making them difficult for learners to hear, Gilbert (2008: 13). The fact that these weak-form words are among the commonest in spoken English adds to the second language listener difficulty in segmenting running speech, (For Lynch (2009: 36). In addition to the frequency factor, there are other ones that could be treated as factors of learner and others linked to the characteristics of weak forms. Foreign learners of English, often use strong forms only, and they can still be understood by other speakers of English so that question arises about the importance of learning how weak forms are used. According to Peter Roach (2010: 89) who answered the question ‘why is it important to learn how weak forms are used?’ he mentioned two main reasons: first, most native speakers of English find an “all-strong form” pronunciation unnatural and foreign-sounding, something that most learners would wish to avoid. Second, and more importantly, speakers who are not familiar with the use of weak forms are likely to have difficulty understanding speakers who do use weak forms; since practically all native speakers of British English use them learners of the language need to learn about these weak forms to help them to understand what they hear.



## 2.5 Previous Studies

Many researchers have conducted their studies on the difficulties that face English learners in the field of pronunciation in general and while pronouncing and perceiving weak-form words in particular.

Some studies in the field of Phonetics and Phonology offer opposing views on the teach-ability and learn-ability of this aspect of the English language. On the one hand, some phoneticians -Ortiz Lira (1997), Underhill (1994), Celce Murcia et al. (1996), among others- maintain that mastery of weak forms is crucial not only to understand but also to produce connected speech effectively and appropriately. Failure to produce them will prevent the listener from focusing on the more meaningful words of the message.

In a study conducted by **Nancy & Maria (2008)** focused on the students' perception and production of weak and strong forms of function words. The researcher collected and then analyzed data related to the feature in an attempt to determine whether these forms had been learnt after a period of tuition. This study does provide some insights about this phenomenon in the context examined. All in all, upon examining the empirical data collected from the two experimental situations –perception and production–, which showed that there is evidence that the frequency of occurrence of errors in weak forms is almost always higher than the error rates in strong forms. As regards listening, there was a greater difference (26%) between the percentages of correct perception of weak and strong forms when learners were exposed to a very structured situation like the minimal pair discrimination than in the cloze test where the percentages of correctness were almost even.

With respect to speaking, there seems to be a greater difference in the percentage of correct renderings of weak and strong forms when speaking (15%) than when reading (10%). These findings corroborate to some extent the initial assumption about students' difficulties to cope with the perception and production of weak forms. As regards the first skill, listening, the results provide evidence that the learners were better able to perceive the distinction between full and reduced forms when exposed to a more controlled activity.

With respect to second skill, speaking, the reported results show that it was more difficult for the students to use the reduced forms when producing relatively spontaneous speech. These conclusions highlight the students' need for a greater amount of exposure and speaking practice to give them the perceptual and productive input necessary to develop and establish the target pronunciation patterns examined. In other words, the results displayed call for the implementation of a remediation program that includes self-directed activities so as to raise students' awareness of this problem. These activities should provide intensive training in both skills, listening and speaking, moving from focused practice to more communicative activities.

**Mahdi al- Janabi (2014)** investigated the mastering of the Pronunciation of Weak and Strong Forms of English function words. In accordance with the results of the analysis, this study can draw the following conclusions. The first year students at the Department of English-College of Arts/ University of Baghdad show poor performance in mastering the pronunciation of the weak and the strong forms of the English function words. The students show weakness in both, the recognition and production levels. Scoring the answers shows that only two students among twenty have gained successful marks. The students' answers were randomly done. There is no reasonable justification behind their choices.

The students' poor knowledge in the fields of recognition and production of English weak and strong forms prohibits this study from reaching stable findings. Students' Arabic background reflects its effect on their performance. The students are very poor in using the symbols of transcription. The time allotted for teaching the pronunciation of the weak and strong forms of English function words might not be sufficient. The students need to know the difference between the sounds [ʌ] and [ə].

**Mitleb (1987)** dealt with the issue whether the identification of weak form words evolves during a course they had in phonetics and phonology. The subjects were two groups of Yarmouk University English majors; each consisted of 15 students. The first group, “the inexperienced”, received only segmental training. The second group, “the experienced”, received supra-segmental training including use of weak form words. The subjects were presented with a set of 36 weak form words. Each word was used in both weak form and strong form in English sentences- a total of 72 sentences. The participants had to listen to the sentences and identify the stimuli with “weak” or “strong”. The experienced group significantly performed better than the inexperienced at both weak and strong forms. This was attributed to the fact that the experienced group did a course which covered supra-segmental aspects of English. Both groups however did better with strong forms.

Other researchers, **Flege (1984) and Mackain et al. (1980)** found that experienced learners did better at the segmental level. Unfortunately, the number of subjects in Mitleb's study was not large enough to help generalize the results. Moreover, although the stimuli were used in sentences to contextualize them but the two sentences themselves might have decontextualized the items where each sentence contained only one weak form item.

Possibly, if the items were presented in a text where two or more weak forms were used in each sentence, different results might have been revealed. Moreover, the great number of sentences, 72, the subjects had to listen to might have confused them. More recently, **Sustarsic (2007)** tried to analyze an archive of English native speakers' readings of a short text on the Internet. The text was accessed (read and recorded) by more than one thousand subjects, native and non-native speakers of English, who belonged to more than 175 different mother tongues. The researcher's target was native speakers of English, however.

All recordings were transcribed and analyzed and what concerns us here is his analysis of the weak form of function words. Sustarsic found that many native speakers used the strong form where the weak form was expected, particularly for the indefinite article "a", "at" and "and". This shows that even native speakers are not of one mind in respect of use of weak forms.

Although Sustarsic in this research had not been interested in EFL pronunciation, I examined the pronunciation of those Arab learners in his archive and found that most of them failed to produce weak form words correctly. 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).

**Henrichsen (1984, cited in 1 to 2006)** conducted a research in which he examined the effects of reduced forms in learners' comprehension 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 comprehension.

Based on such researches, several other experiments were conducted to see the significance of systematic instruction about reduced forms in developing learners' listening comprehension abilities. For the purpose of finding the correlation between the presence of reduced forms in speech and the learners' listening comprehension, in addition to the effects of reduced forms instruction on the learners' listening comprehension.

**Matsuzawa (2006)** conducted an experiment over 20 Japanese learners of English hypothesizing that reduced forms do interfere with students' comprehension 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: 63). Matsuzawa reported: The results show not only a serious lack of comprehension of reduced forms among participants but also an improvement in their listening comprehension after explicit instruction in recognizing and understanding reduced forms (2006: 59).

**Brown & Hilferty (2006)** conducted a somehow similar research to find out the effectiveness of teaching reduced forms for EFL learners. The experiment included two groups of 16 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 comprehension. 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 learner' 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).

**Mohamed Laoubi (2010)** investigated the impact of third year students' ability to process some aspects of connected speech on their overall ability to understand naturally spoken English. The main concern was to evaluate the students' performance in listening to the weak forms of grammatical words. Classroom observation had revealed that students seemed to have problems in perceiving them as a result of the language teachers' focus in teaching such forms on the productive level rather than on the perceptive one. Furthermore, these forms were seldom used in the speech of teachers and the students lacked awareness and training. Through a listening test, the researcher had tried to depict the comprehension level of students regarding these forms and to elicit the perception difficulties that they were likely to face in listening to natives. The results confirmed that almost all the tested students were not only unaware of the significance of weak forms in listening, but also they were unable to perceive such forms. As a practical contribution, the study led to some recommendations concerning the teaching of weak forms and the aspects of connected speech in general.

**Akinjobi, Adenike (2004)** discovered through this study that the weak forms of English grammatical words such as determiners, conjunctions, pronouns and auxiliary verbs are scarcely used in Educated Yoruba English. No contrasts were drawn in the use of these words by the EYE subjects who retained them in the same form in both strong and weak contexts. EYE speakers have a tendency to substitute the strong vowel sounds from Yoruba language for the weak /ə/ sound of English in most cases. Consequently, this sound, which is the commonest vowel found in the weak forms of Standard English grammatical words, is scarcely used by the EYE speakers. This has a very remarkable influence on the typical rhythm of educated Yoruba English. Elision, one of the characteristic traits of un-stressing in Standard English is almost absent in EYE.

Where vowels could be totally elided in the weak forms of these grammatical words as in *can* /kn/ and *shall* /ʃl/, where syllabic consonants should constitute the peaks of the unstressed syllables, strong Yoruba vowels are often inserted. All these confirm a preponderance of the strong forms of English grammatical words and a tendency to use strong vowels in Educated Yoruba English.

A thesis conducted by **Matěj Dostál (2013)** which concerned the phenomenon of weak forms of function words in the English language. The first part of the thesis aimed at accenting the importance of weak forms to natural communication among native speakers and presented the most frequent approaches to teaching the target phenomenon. Apart from a detailed classification of the rules which the occurrence of weak forms follows, the most common difficulties Czech students have to overcome while learning this pronunciation feature were mentioned. The practical part of the thesis focused on a research carried out among Czech students of English at an advanced level. It aimed at analyzing the frequency of the reduction of the word *that* according to its grammatical function. The research was namely concerned with the degree to which they distinguished between those cases in which the word *'that'* served as a conjunction or a relative pronoun and should have been pronounced weakly /ðət/, and those when *'that'* had a demonstrative function and ought to have retained its strong form /ðæt/. The results of the research showed that in approximately 63% of suitable cases the respondents correctly reduced the strong form of the word *that* into its weak counterpart. Further division of the participants revealed that there was no significant difference in terms of the vowel reduction between respondents with English phonetics and phonology knowledge (Group A) and those who had never been acquainted with weak forms of function words on a theoretical level (Group B).



A considerable difference was discovered between the two groups, however, in the phonetic realization of the strong form of 'that'. Students from Group B had a significant difficulty in approaching the native-like pronunciation of the low-front English vowel /æ/, the sound of the mid-front vowel /e/ occurring in Czech was frequently detected instead. On the other hand, even though Group A's phonetic realization of the strong form was closer to that of native speakers'.

The distribution of both forms was no more accurate than that of Group B. The results of the comparison of both groups may stem from the usual time limitation of phonetics and phonology courses. While a great amount of time is dedicated to the pronunciation of individual sounds, the phenomenon of weak forms is only touched upon with little opportunity of thorough practice. The results of this research correspond with a study performed by Leánez and Waasaf (2008). They examined both the perception as well as production abilities of Spanish students regarding the most frequent English weak forms.

The comparison of their findings with this study suggests that the numbers of cases in which Spanish learners of English used the weak forms and the respondents in this research reduced the word that were similar. Furthermore, almost no difference was observed in the correct usage of strong forms. It should be emphasized, however, that while Leánez and Waasaf's research dealt with the phenomenon of weak forms as such, the focus of this study was more restricted as it examined one specific word. In conclusion, was discovered that Czech students of the English language at an advanced level show a certain tendency to reduce the strong form of the word 'that' in required contexts. However, the researchers believe that in the case of current and future English teachers, the frequency of using the weak form of that correctly appears to be insufficient.

Hopefully, this thesis will serve as a useful source of information to all English students who are endeavoring to improve their oral performance. Ideally, both the theoretical as well as the practical part of this work will remind English teachers of the often overlooked yet significant phenomenon of weak forms, and will provide them with better understanding of the difficulties and needs of their students. The research shows that the correct usage of that results from a general exposure to the English language rather than theoretical knowledge. It would thus be advisable to incorporate speaking activities focusing on the most frequent expressions containing the word ‘that’ in the pronunciation lessons. This shall help to make the use of that automatic without the necessity of analyzing its grammatical function.

It has been previously discovered by **Alyssa Marren (2011)** that learners of Russian have difficulties with the unfamiliar phonetic rules of the language including stress of words, vowel reduction, consonant devoicing, voicing assimilation, unfamiliar consonant sounds, and intonation. This study found that participants had difficulty with all the above issues when they started learning Russian, and it is only when these pronunciation problems are pointed out and worked on specifically that participants will improve and no longer make mistakes. Previously undiscovered, the largest problem area for students of Russian at the University of Victoria is word stress. As mentioned, stress is crucial to proper Russian pronunciation. It influences the meaning of the word as well as the vowels within a word (vowel reduction). The participants of this study had particular problems putting the correct stress on a word, often reverting to Standard English Stress, with emphasis either on the base syllable or somewhere else. If a word sounded similar in both English and Russian, English speakers would be influenced by their native language and put the stress pattern of the English word onto the Russian word.

This creates an enormous problem not just for proper Russian pronunciation but also proper meaning and understanding. Even when there is more emphasis put on proper stress patterning, students still have issues following correct stress every time. This may be because English speakers have difficulty perceiving stress, as demonstrated by the participants in this study when they had to indicate stress. A vast number had difficulty even knowing where the stress was on very simple words.

For English speakers, professors at the University of Victoria need to put even more emphasis on perceiving and pronouncing stress when learning Russian to ensure stress issues do not continue into the more advanced levels. The problem with stress also influences how the vowels within the word are pronounced. Another issue that many students had was remembering to reduce vowels that are not stressed. English speakers become so influenced by the orthography that they tend to, want to read every single vowel as it is written, giving improper pronunciation. This aspect improved immensely when participants were taught and focused on proper vowel reduction, but it still proved to be an issue where students occasionally stressed the reduced vowels.

Only with knowledge of this process and practice will this problem subside. The conclusion of this research brings a new awareness and understanding for the professors of the University of Victoria teaching Russian. The other issues examined, including proper pronunciation of prepositions, palatalization, and intonation, greatly improved when participants focused primarily on them. These pronunciation problems will persist into more advanced levels of Russian learning if there is not a considerable amount of time spent focusing on these issues alone.

Students with only a brief introduction to the concepts will make mistakes, and if these mistakes are not corrected and focused on, problems for students will persist into more advanced levels. Proper pronunciation and intonation are not concepts that are learned subconsciously, slowly integrated into a learner of Russian's speech. There are, however, considerable improvements in students when pronunciation problems are focused on, and, in some cases, these problems disappear completely. Focusing on the issues then allows learners of Russian to improve their pronunciation and become more proficient in the language. Minor issues that still persisted even after there was focus on proper pronunciation were proper stress and reduction of vowels, as previously mentioned, as well as knowing the center of an intonation contour and properly pronouncing prepositions that are longer than one phonetic sound. However, these are all issues that can be resolved over time with focused instruction and practice. This study found that it is important for learners of Russian to have time to learn and practice proper pronunciation techniques. It is only when these issues are focused on, that students will learn and improve their Russian speech. Proper pronunciation is not subconsciously learned, and if it is not targeted, problems of pronunciation will continue into more advanced levels of Russian learning. The most important issues found for the students at the University of Victoria learning Russian were the stress and vowel reduction rules; two issues that merit much more time and work. Other issues improved considerably only when focused on, including proper pronunciation of prepositions, consonant devoicing, voicing assimilation, palatalization, and intonation. The discoveries in this study will allow the professors at the University of Victoria to have a better understanding of the more important problems students have when learning Russian.

By focusing on the issues laid out here, students of Russian will be able to enrich the understanding of the language and get closer to the goal of proficiency in Russian.

The results of the present research correspond with a study performed by Mr. Mohamed Laoubi and Dr. Safi Eldeen Alzi'abi. They examined both the perception as well as production abilities of Arab students regarding the English weak forms. The comparison of their findings with this study, suggests that the numbers of cases in which Arab learners of English used the weak forms and the respondents in this research reduced the functional words, were similar. Furthermore, almost no difference was observed in the correct usage of strong forms. It should be emphasized, however, that while Mr. Mohamed Laoubi and Dr. Safi Eldeen Alzi'abi s' research dealt with the perception and the production of weak forms as such, the focus of this study was more restricted as it examined only the production ability. In conclusion, it was discovered that SUS of the English language, at an advanced level show a certain tendency to reduce the strong form of the functional words in required contexts. Finally, this study can serve as a useful source of information to all English students who are seeking to improve their oral performance. Hopefully, both the theoretical as well as the practical part of this work will remind and will provide English teachers with better understanding of the difficulties and needs of their students.

## **2.6 Factors influence the Reduction of English Functional Words**

Using ordinary linear and logistic regression models, Jurafsky, D. Bell, et al, (2001), University of Colorado, examined the length of the words, the form of their vowel (basic, full, or reduced), and final obstruent deletion.

For all of these they found strong, independent effects of speaking rate, predictability, the form of the following word, and planning problem dis-fluencies. The results bear on issues in speech recognition, models of speech production, and conversational analysis.

### **2.6.1 Rate of speech**

Researchers measured rate of speech at a given function word by taking the number of syllables per second in the pause-bounded region immediately surrounding the word. Unsurprisingly, rate of speech affected all measures of reduction. Daniel et al. (2014) compared the difference between a relatively fast rate of 7.5 syllables per second and a slow rate of 2.5 syllables per second, a range which covers about 90 percent of the tokens, the estimated increase in the odds of full to reduced vowels was 2.2, i.e. the odds of a full vowel at the slow rate was 2.2 times the odds at the faster rate. Basic vowels also become more likely at slower rates, with an effect of about the same magnitude. Rate also did not affect all the words equally. The most strongly affected words were ‘a’, ‘the’, ‘to’, and, ‘and’.

### **2.6.2 Planning problems**

It appears that some dis-fluency is prospective, largely due to speakers’ trouble in formulating an idea, and expressing it with the proper syntax, words, prosody, and articulation. Fox Tree and Clark (1997) suggested that such planning problems are likely to cause words in immediately preceding speech to have less reduced pronunciations. They found this to be true for ‘the’, and suggested that the pronunciation /ði/ is used by the speaker as a signal of impending problems in production. The effect of a planning problem on word length was massive and across-the-board.

### **2.6.3 Segmental context**

A general fact about weakening processes is that the form of a word is influenced by the segmental context—in particular; more reduced forms tend to occur before a consonant than before a vowel (Rhodes 1996, *inter alia*). This may result in an allophonic effect such as the widely studied loss of final /t/ and /d/ (Neu 1980, *inter alia*). Alternatively, it may be an allomorphic one, as in the case of the /ði/ before vowels alternating with /ðə/ before consonants (Keating et al. 1994). Indeed, we found significantly less reduction in all four variables when the next word began with a vowel than when it began with a consonant.

### **2.6.4 Predictability and Frequency**

Jespersen (1923), in commenting on whether higher-frequency words are more likely to have weakened pronunciations, emphasizes that frequency alone can be misleading, if the predictability of the word in its context is not also taken into account. It has been found that no effect of word frequency on any of the measures of reduction. This was probably because there was relatively little difference in frequency among these most frequent words. In general, greater predictability increases the likelihood of reduction. Effects were found in the opposite direction for ‘you’ and ‘I’. In predictable contexts they were both more likely to be full and ‘you’ also was more likely to have a basic vowel.

### **2.6.5 Other factors such as position in utterance, following syllable, and collocation**

Fox and Jazzperson (1995, *inter alia*) examined the effect of word position on reduction and on the likelihood of dis-fluencies. No effect was found for either.

The hybrid nature of the pseudo-utterances may be one reason for this; it may also be necessary to control for additional factors such as turn length, structure, and function. The prosodic context provided by the following word can also be expected to influence reduction variables (e.g. the lengthening rule proposed by Bolinger (1986). Whether the next word's initial syllable contains a full or reduced vowel does affect length of the function word (p=:07), whether its vowel is full or reduced (p=:06), and whether its vowel is basic or full (p=:05), but not the presence of a final obstruent coda. The effects interact strongly with the presence or absence of a consonantal onset in the next word, appear to differ across words in complex ways, and are in general somewhat weaker than the effects discussed above. They require further study, especially with regard to possible relations with effects from stress and intonation.

Collocation effects also explain much of the effect of predictability on reduction of 'of', which was significantly more likely to have no coda in predictable portative constructions (kind of, lots of, etc.) than in other uses (such as thought of, outside of). This suggests that the partitive construction may be stored or unitized as a mental routine.

## **2.7 Summary of the Chapter**

This chapter provided a general description of the English sentence stress and Arabic stress, and focused on the concept of weak form words in particular. It has highlighted some views about the rules, structure and how these forms are important for EFL learners. It has also reviewed a number of studies conducted in the field of English weak-form words.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

The objective and significance of this research have been mentioned in chapter one. The previous chapter has presented the literature review and some factors that influence English weak-form words, as well as the previous studies that concerning this present research. This chapter describes the procedures of the study and includes the research methodology, participants and samples, a description of variables and instruments of the study. The instruments used for data collection and information included classroom observation, a questionnaire for teachers and students' pre- and posttest.

#### **3.1 Methodology of the Study**

The present study adopts the descriptive analytical method. It investigates the current situation concerning the participants' production efficiency level of English weak-form words. Ross (2005) states that, the descriptive research provides information about conditions, situations, and events that occur in the present. Therefore, this study describes the phenomenon, as it is - at the time of the study - then tests the hypotheses of this study, pursuing the obstacles, suggesting solutions and relevant recommendations, and finally, processing the data collected, statistically.

#### **3.2 Research Population and Sample**

According to Richards, et al, (1992: 282) the population refers to any set of items, individuals, etc. which share some common and observable characteristics and from which a sample can be taken.

Berg (2004: 34) states that the logic of using a sample of subjects is to make inferences about some larger population from a smaller one (a sample). The participants of this study were all the third year students of English Language who were under-graduated in the private college of Nahda (in Khartoum, capital of Sudan). They speak Arabic as a mother tongue. They were students with different English pronunciation abilities. The samples of the present study contained two parts; the first part was a group of 30 students of the third year (semi-final) of Nahda College. A pilot study was conducted to 20 students, who were randomly selected for recording samples of English weak-form words in order to evaluate the test items and testing procedures. The second part of the samples was 30 of the English instructors, who were responded to a written questionnaire on the exact words, which were tested by the students.

### **3.3 Instruments**

To confirm the hypothesis and fulfill the aims of this study, a method has been presumed; a production of English weak-form words from different points of view, instructors and students. For this purpose and to obtain rich information, this study employs both a questionnaire and structured familiar sentences (pretest & posttest) for testing the subjects. Additionally, the researcher did classroom observation repeatedly, with many note takings to verify the collected data.

#### **3.3.1 Questionnaire**

The researcher used one of the most common research tools, a structured questionnaire to collect primary data. The questionnaire was prepared in collaboration with a group of experts. It is a list of written questions used to collect qualitative and quantitative data.

A questionnaire is a research instrument consisting of a series of questions and other prompts for the purpose of gathering information from respondents. (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia: 1). It translated the information needed into a set of specific questions. These structured questions include (MCQs) multiple-choice questions and scales. Determining the wording of each question involves defining the issue, using ordinary words, using unambiguous words, and using clear statements. It was organized in a way so that the participants (instructors) feel easy and comfortable to answer and express their opinions. The questionnaires were given to a number of 30 English instructors who answered the questions easily and they were taken as a sample and were analyzed. It contained 36 items, reflected the objectives of the research about the problems of English weak-form words that encountered by Sudanese university students (SUS). In the questionnaire each responder was asked to choose one answer according to the Tri Regression Measurement, which contains five levels: strongly-agree, agree, uncertain (unsure), disagree and strongly disagree. Computer specialists processed the collected data and the statistical procedures, in order to obtain very accurate results and findings and to make sure of the validity of the questionnaire.

### **3.3.2 Audio Recorded Tests (pre- & -posttests)**

The present study engaged pretest and posttest where the students were asked to read a list of sentences including weak-form words. The pretest served as a tool for discovering students' level of the production of the weak-form words in controlled tasks, specifically reading a list of sentences. It was operated to provide information about students' knowledge and production of weak-form words which help the researcher to recognize the concepts which need to be given more attention during training.

At the beginning of this study process, the participants were informed of the objectives of this research and that their identity would be kept confidential in the research report. The participants were recorded for the pretest mostly during their free times in available empty classrooms to secure quiet and undisturbed conditions. Each participant was given an information sheet and a consent form that they were required to read and record. The recordings were conducted in Nahda College. All the students had enough time to prepare the reading and to read out the structured familiar sentences for recording. Adequate reading time was given to all of them so that they could produce careful pronunciation rather than informal speech. All the recordings were made on the same day for the convenience of the students and the consistency of the study. Importantly, the students received no treatment or training before the pretest, but after that they attended a course of the English weak-form words (functional words) that continued for six weeks, consisting of about 40-minute pronunciation practice on average every week. It was planned that one lesson out of four lessons per week would involve 20-30 minutes of pronunciation teaching, the rest of the lessons 10 minutes each. In this period of training, students had sufficient knowledge and practice of English weak-form words which covered facets such as the nature of English schwa /ə/, the rules for the use of strong-form words and the structures of these forms, etc. ...with intensive exercises. As far as the performed exercises are concerned, they were usually carried out at the beginning of a lesson when students' ability to concentrate is at its peak. The training course is intended to establish the main points concerning the topic (weak-form words) as well as to provide a list of the essential items with examples in ordinary spelling and phonemic transcription with intonation marks.

Since the use of weak and strong forms depends, to a considerable extent on sentence accentuation, students are advised to read transcribed texts and mark utterances, which indicate intonation. In sum, weak forms can only be taught and learned in connected speech. They are not a feature of the word, but a feature of the utterance and as such should be taught from the very beginning stages. Trainees are advised to analyze examples and use some recordings as practice material for listening and repetition. After training, the students were asked to perform the same test (posttest). The final recorded test (posttest) took place in a ten-day period after the pronunciation training had finished. The objective behind this training was to enhance the students' awareness of English weak-form words. The outline of this training program is found in Appendix 3.

### **3.3.3 Classroom Observation**

Throughout the researcher's own experience of teaching English in some universities of Sudan (and outside Sudan), for many years, observing diverse pronunciation classes of university students (natural observation) and as a teacher of English language for, almost 25 years, he has always been concerned about his students' mispronunciation and how to correct it. The researcher saw a problem that despite the great efforts that English teachers doing, they could not obtain their objectives in the pronunciation lessons of the production of English weak-form words. The researcher used to take notes about the production of English weak-form words which were expected to be problematic for students or which were replaced by the strong-form words. In other words, classroom observation gave the researcher reasons for doing this research and then it helped him to test the validity of the data collected in the questionnaire. Hopkins, (1993) described classroom observation as a "pivotal activity" which played crucial role in classroom research.

It helps the researcher to investigate the hypotheses, whether the learners are not aware or familiar with the use of weak-form words of English and they are likely to have difficulty understanding speakers who do use them. The researcher did this study to look for explanations for not using the weak-form words correctly.

### **3.4 Procedures**

The participants for this study are selected from the third year of Nahda College, English Program Students. The students are from different regions of Sudan, who had not been to those native countries to have any kind of English exposure. They are, randomly selected for reading sentences and recording samples of English weak-form words. After they, all accepted to take part in this study, the researcher made sure that all the required taping conditions for a good recording tests were in place. Furthermore, the process of data collection was explained clearly in detail to all the participants. The sentences are selected to include each problematic word in various weak-forms of English which include thirty-four words, included in six groups: (a) the articles; a, an, the, (b) prepositions; at, to, of, for, from, (c) pronouns; us, he, him, her, them, (d) auxiliary or modal verbs; am, are, was, were, have, has, had, do, does, shall, should, would, can, could, must, (e) conjunctions; and, but, as, that, than, (f) miscellaneous; some, there. Then, the researcher started to record their speech samples one by one. Each recording lasted a little longer than one minute. Each tape was played at least twice to ensure that all mispronounced words were detected. Finally, all the data was gathered together before being analyzed. The researcher and the teaching assistants listened to the tapes and marked the mispronounced words. The recording samples are carefully analyzed by the researcher and two English native speakers. When encountering uncertainty in deciding whether a sound was mispronounced or not, agreement was sought by two against one of the teachers to give the final evaluation.

The recordings were analyzed through careful repeated listening, and the same procedure of the previous test had been followed. After marking the pronunciation errors, each target sound was counted for its frequency of mispronunciation and statistical analysis was applied to see the frequency distribution of all the target sounds. The target sounds were then ranked from the most mispronounced sounds to the least.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

The researcher, in this study used the descriptive analysis method to assess the performance of the students; regarding their recording performance of the structured sentences, using frequencies, percentages and graphics. The researcher collected the data, of this study, analyzed and organized them very carefully. Firstly, he compiled the students' responses and arranged the numbers according to each statement in first table. Then he counted the total number of students' responses for each item with percentage and listed them in another table. The total numbers of the correct and the incorrect answers of each item, as well as their percentages are organized in a table for easy consideration. Then all students' answers in each part are checked and scored according to the criteria of the study mentioned previously. On the other hand, the researcher converted the teachers' responses, of the questionnaire into percentage and arranged them in tables and graphics. Besides, the elaborate responses of teachers' for each question are also discussed in the finding and discussion part. And all responses to each question are presented and discussed in chapter four. The assessment was done to find out the reasons behind the difficulties of the miss-production of English weak-form words committed by Sudanese university students. And, as mentioned in the preceding section, two instruments were used to collect data for the present study: a questionnaire and a pre- and posttest.

### **3.6 Reliability and Validity of the Questionnaire**

Reliability refers to how consistent a measuring device is. A measurement is said to be reliable or consistent if the measurement can produce similar circumstances. Questionnaires are one of the most popular data collection tools in SLA research because they are an effective way to measure attitudes, behaviors, and opinions of large numbers of human participants (Dörnyei, 2003; Mackay & Gass, 2006). But questionnaires are said to often lack validity for a number of reasons. Participants may lie; give answers that are desired and so on. To make this questionnaire more reliable, it was submitted to some experts and specialists in English Language. They expressed their opinions, gave some advices and make some modifications concerning the statements, the items and the scales of this questionnaire. The questionnaire of this study described as: 1- It was prepared in collaboration with some English language experts. 2- Uses simple items and clear instructions. 3- Uses clear statements, ordinary and unambiguous words. 4-The collected data and the statistical procedures were done by a computer specialist. The SPSS (Version 24.0) was used to calculate the descriptive data obtained: The analysis shows that there was strong positive correlation between the answers given to the items asked: = 0.84%.

### **3.7 Summary of the Chapter**

In brief, this chapter introduced the methodology of the present study and rationalized the research design. The participants included two groups, one group is the students and the second group is the English teachers. Regarding the instruments used which included a questionnaire and a pre & posttests. The chapter illustrated the procedures of the data collection and data analysis used in the study. Finally, the data, which was gathered and analyzed, is presented in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.0 Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

The previous chapter took over the description of the context of this study, including the participants' setting and the process of data collection. In this chapter, all the mispronunciation related to the English weak-form words, which identified in the recorded tests and the results of the questionnaire, are to be analyzed and discussed. As one of the objectives of this study was to investigate how Sudanese university students can use the English weak-form words correctly, then the observed errors would be compared with the pronunciation of native English speech.

### 4.1 Result Found from Teachers' Questionnaire

Thirty English teachers have been teaching at more than five different universities in Sudan, were asked to fill in a questionnaire that surveys their knowledge about pronunciation of strong and weak forms of functional words in English. The questionnaire contains 36 items each of which is intended to target a specific kind of a student's ability to pronounce the English weak-form words with the major purpose which is to enable the researcher to know about their awareness of the rules that determines the use of strong and weak forms in natural connected speech. The respondents had to tick the appropriate option from the five options for each statement in the teachers' questionnaire. The options that were given for each statement are as: strongly-agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly-disagree. The results of teachers' responses are presented below through tables and charts. The tables will show the statements and examples for each one with actual number of responses given to each statement. Then the charts, below the tables will show the average numbers after converting the responses into percentage.

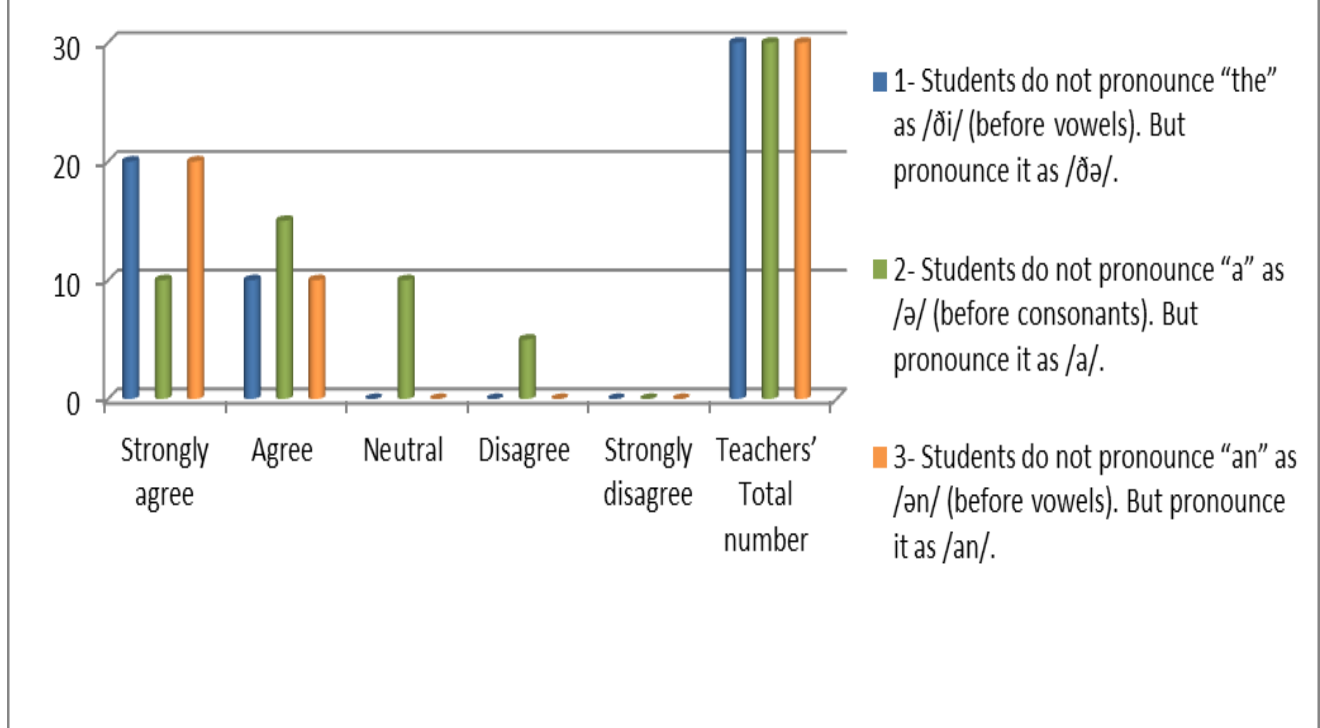
#### 4.1.1 Articles: *the*, *a*, and *an*

| Statement   | Example                                | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “the” as /ðɪ/ (before vowels). But pronounce it as /ðə/. | “Wait for the end”. /weɪt fə ðɪ 'end/. | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|   |  | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “a” as /ə/ (before consonants). But pronounce it as /a/. | “Read a book” /ri:d ə 'buk/.           | Strongly agree    | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |  | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|   |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Disagree          | 5         | 16%        |
|   |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 3- Students do not pronounce “an” as /ən/ (before vowels). But pronounce it as /an/.  | “Eat an apple” /i:t ən æpl/.           | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|   |  | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 8: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Articles**

As shown in the table above, that Sudanese University Students of English language have pronunciation problems with weak-form words. According to the first group of English weak-form words, that the articles ‘the’ and ‘an’ before vowels are expected to be pronounced in their forms /ðɪ/, /ən/ and ‘a’ be pronounced as /ən/ before consonants, in connected speech of Standard English. But the subjects, according to the teachers who conducted this questionnaire, produced ‘a’ as the strong vowel /a/ before consonants more than 83%. They pronounced ‘the’ as /ðə/, before vowels 100% and ‘an’ as /an/ before vowels, 100% (this is, when we add the two positive values strongly-agree and agree together).

**Figure1: Results of Teachers' Questionnaire  
(Articles: the, a, an)**



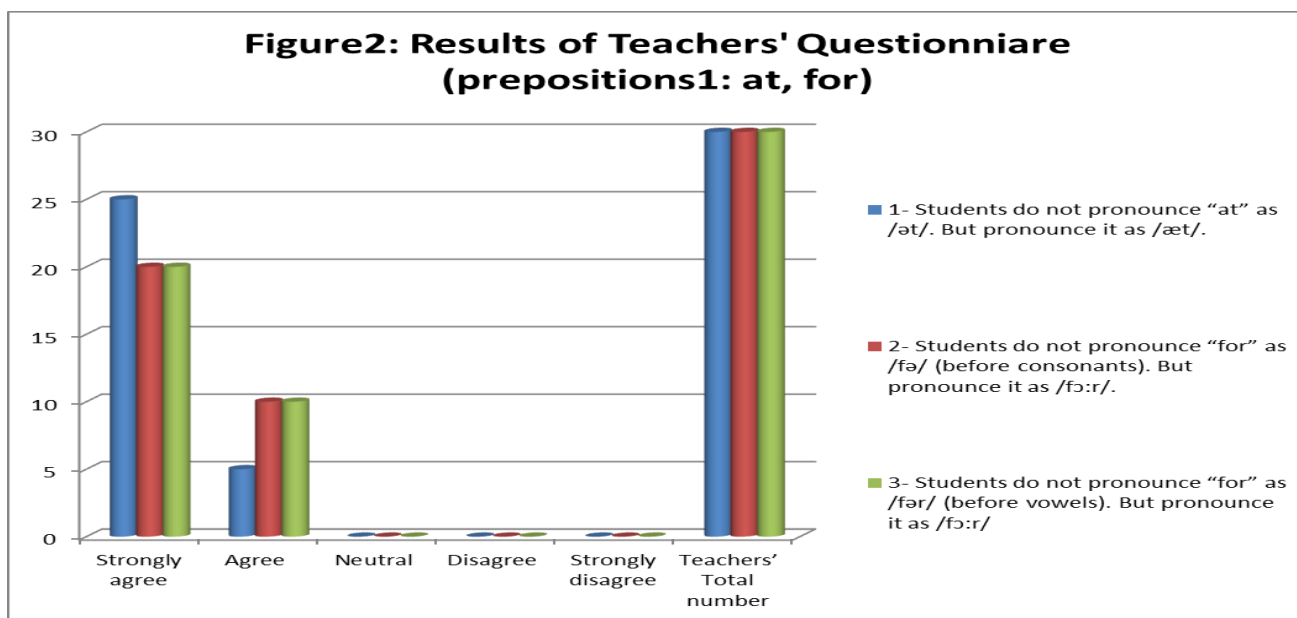
**Figure1.** Results of teachers' questionnaire for the articles: 'the', 'a' and 'an' show that, the teachers agree, with high percentage that students do not pronounce the weak-form words correctly, particularly the article 'the' before vowels and the article 'an' before vowels.

#### 4.1.2 Prepositions: *at, for, from, of, and to*

| Statement  | Example   | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|---|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “at” as /ət/. But pronounce it as /æt/.                                       | “I’ll see you at lunch”<br>/aɪl si: ju ət 'lʌŋʃ/. | Strongly agree    | 25        | 83.3%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 5         | 16%        |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “for” as /fə/ (before consonants). But pronounce it as /fɔ:r/.                | “Tea for two”<br>/ti: fə 'tu:./.                  | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 3- Students do not pronounce “for” as /fər/ (before vowels). But pronounce it as /fɔ:r/.                   | “Thanks for asking”<br>/θæŋks fər 'a:skiŋ/.       | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 4- Students do not pronounce “from” as /frəm/ (in initial or medial position). But pronounce it as /frɒm/. | “I’m home from work”<br>/aɪm 'həʊm frəm 'wɜ:k/.   | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|  |   | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 5- Students do not pronounce “of” as /əv/ (in initial or medial position). But pronounce it as /ɒf/.       | “Most of all”<br>/məʊst əv 'ɔ:l/.                 | Strongly agree    | 25        | 83.3%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 5         | 16%        |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 6- Students do not pronounce “to” as /tə/ (before consonant). But pronounce it as /tu/.                    | “Try to stop”<br>/'traɪ tə 'stɒp/.                | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 9: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Prepositions**

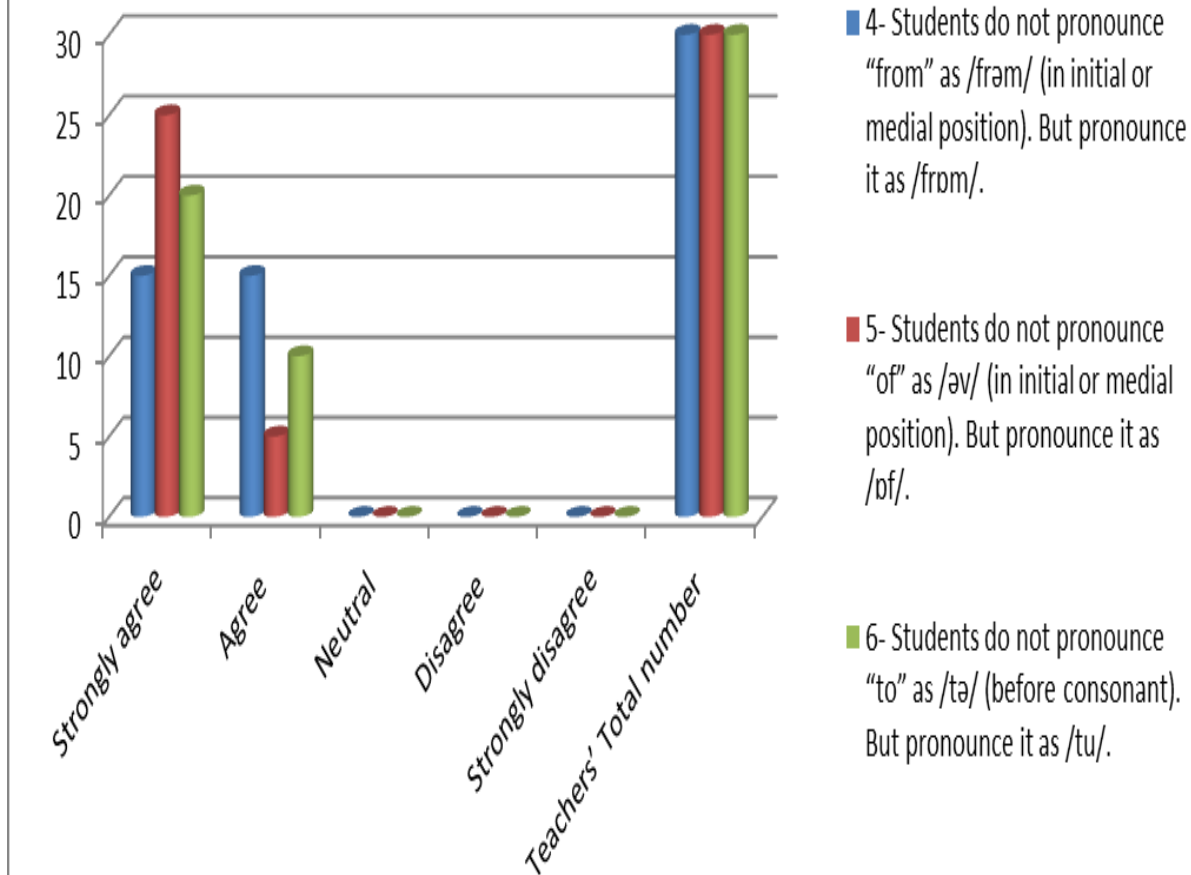
According to table2 above, of the teachers' questionnaire, 'at' which was supposed to be produced as the weak form /ət/ before consonants, in the context of the sentence, was realized as the strong sound [at] more than 83% of the instances of occurrence. 'For', which was expected to be realized as /fə/ before consonants and /fər/ before vowels, it was realized as /fɔ:r/ 100% in case of adding the two positive responses (strongly agree + agree) of the instances. 'From', was expected to be pronounced as /frəm/ (in initial or medial position), but pronounced as /frɒm/ 100% of the instances of occurrence. The majority of the instances of occurrence of 'of' in the data gathered from the questionnaire were realized as /ɒf/ by students, instead of being pronounced as /əv/ (in initial or medial position). 'To', was expected to be realized as /tə/, in its weak positions (before consonant). But it was pronounced as /tu/ 100% when combine the two positive responses (strongly agree + agree).



**Figure2**

The results of teachers' questionnaire for the prepositions: 'at', and 'for' show that, the teachers agree, with high percentage that students do not pronounce these weak-form words correctly, particularly the preposition 'at'.

### Figure3: Results of Teachers' Questionnaire (Prepositions2: from, of, to)



**Figure 3**

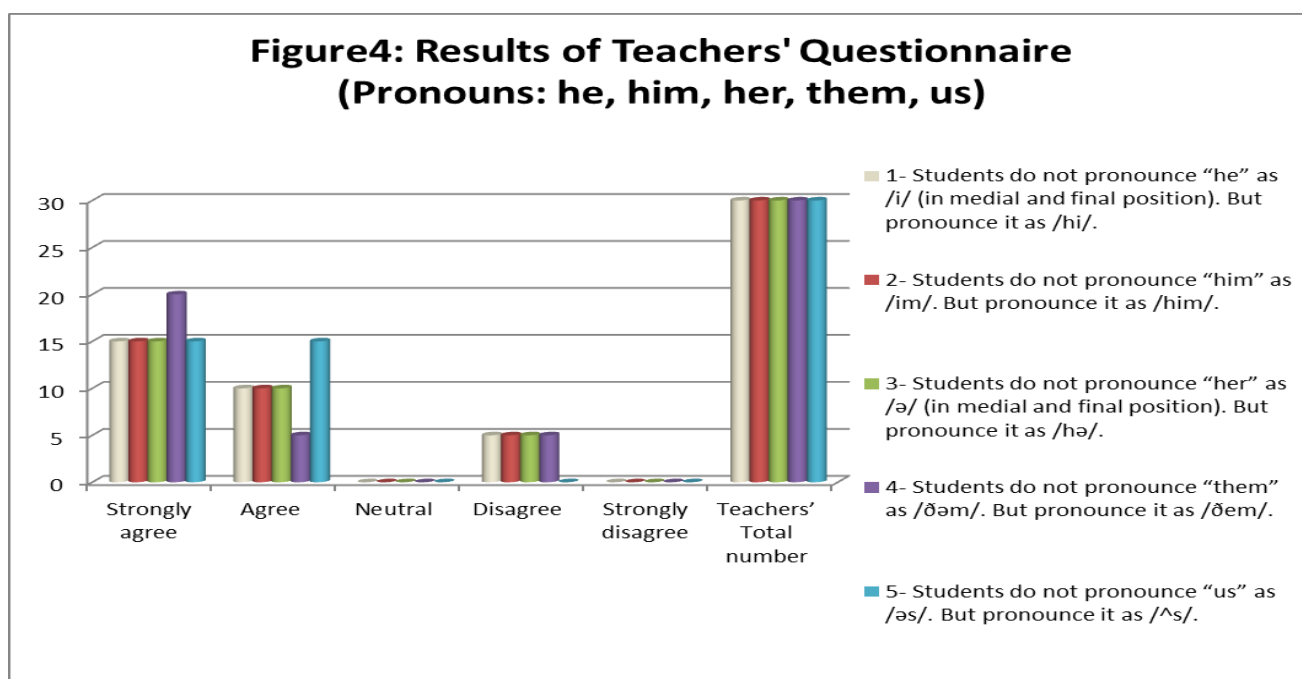
The results of teachers' questionnaire for the prepositions: 'from', 'of' and 'to' show that the teachers agree, with high percentage that, students do not pronounce these weak-form words correctly, particularly the preposition 'of'.

### 4.1.3 Pronouns: *he, him, her, them* and *us*

| Statement   | Example                                     | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “he” as /i/ (in medial and final position). But pronounce it as /hi/.  | Which did he choose?<br>/wɪʃ dɪd i 'tʃu:z/. | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Strongly Disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “him” as /im/. But pronounce it as /him/.                              | “Live him alone”<br>/'li:v ɪm ə'ləʊn/.      | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 3- Students do not pronounce “her” as /ə/ (in medial and final position). But pronounce it as /hə/. | “Ask her to come”<br>/'a:sk ə tə 'kʌm/.     | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 4- Students do not pronounce “them” as /ðəm/. But pronounce it as /ðem/.                            | “Eat them”<br>/'i:t ðəm/.                   | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|   |   | Agree             | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 5- Students do not pronounce “us” as /əs/. But pronounce it as /ʌs/.                                | “Write us a letter”<br>/'raɪt əs ə 'letə/.  | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 10: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Pronouns**

In table 3 above, ‘he’ was not pronounced as /i/ (in medial and final position), but pronounced as /hi/ more than 85% of the instances, when combine the two positive responses (strongly agree + agree) together. ‘Him’ was expected to be pronounced as /im/, but however, it was realized as /him/ 85% similar to the sound ‘he’ because the sound /h/, which is considered as a voiceless palatal fricative, is one of the common sounds to students in their spoken language, Arabic. ‘Her’, which was supposed to be produced as the weak form /ə/ (in medial and final position), students pronounced it as the strong sound /hə/ more than 80% in the context of the sentence, for the two positive responses (strongly agree + agree). ‘Them’ was not realized as the weak form /ðəm/ but students pronounced it as the strong form /ðem/ 73%, for the positive responses strongly-agree and agree. ‘Us’, in this table had the highest percentage of mispronunciation, 100% of students did not pronounce “us” as the weak form /əs/, but pronounced it as the strong form /ʌs/.



**Figure 4** The results of teachers’ questionnaire for the pronouns: ‘he’, ‘him’, ‘her’, ‘them’ and ‘us’ showed that the teachers agreed relatively, with highly percentage that, students replaced the weak-form words by the strong ones.

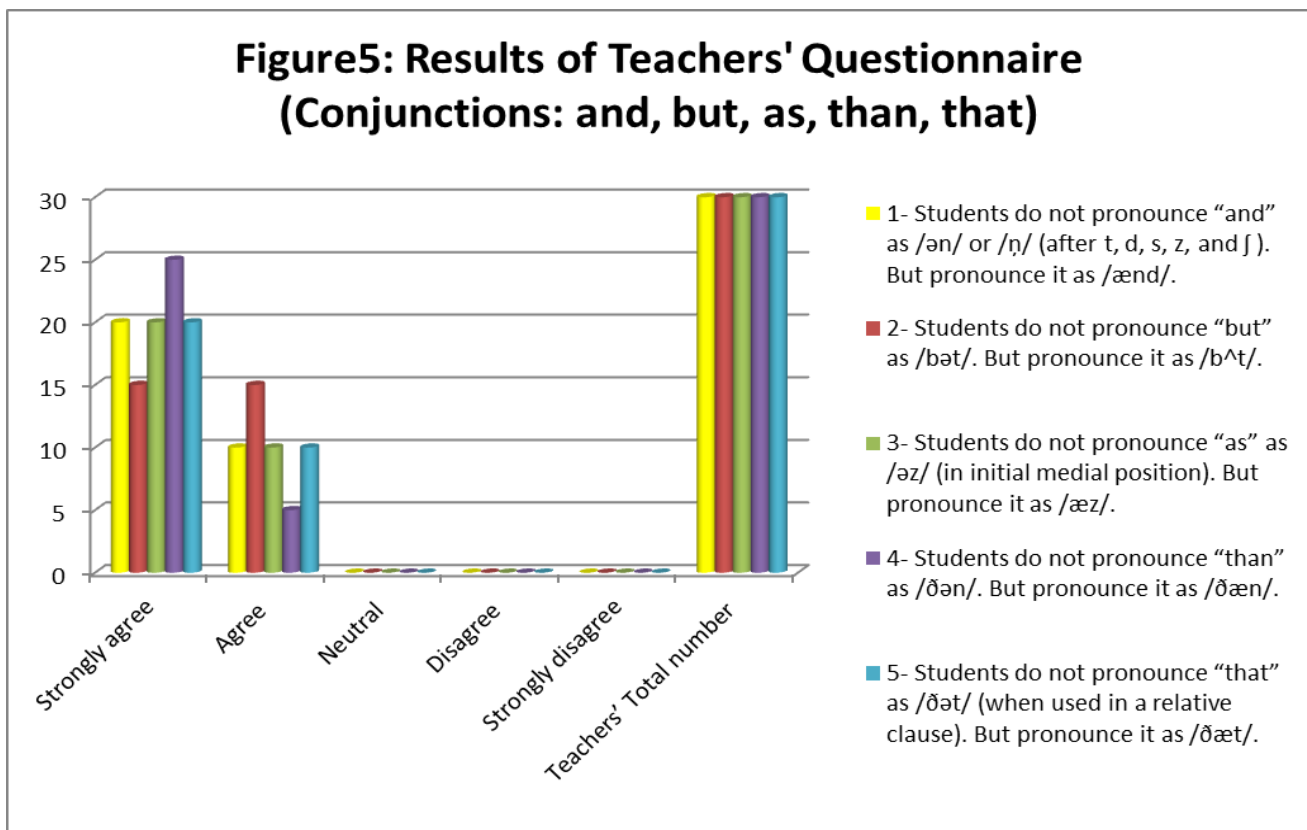


#### 4.1.4 Conjunctions: *and*, *but*, *as*, *than*, and *that*.

| Statement   | Example   | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “and” as /ən/ or /ŋ/ (after t, d, s, z, and ʃ). But pronounce it as /ænd/.   | “Come and see”<br>/kʌm ən 'si:/<br>&<br>“Fish and chips”<br>/'fiʃ ŋ tʃɪps/.         | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|   |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “but” as /bət/. But pronounce it as /bʌt/.                                   | “It’s good but expensive”<br>/ɪts 'gud bət<br>ɪk'spensɪv/.                          | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 3- Students do not pronounce “as” as /əz/ (in initial medial position). But pronounce it as /æz/.         | “As much as possible”<br>/əz 'mʌʃ əz 'pɒsəbəl/.                                     | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|   |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 4- Students do not pronounce “than” as /ðən/. But pronounce it as /ðæn/.                                  | “Better than ever”<br>/'betə ðən 'evə/.   | Strongly agree    | 25        | 83.3%      |
|   |   | Agree             | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 5- Students do not pronounce “that” as /ðæt/ (when used in a relative clause). But pronounce it as /ðæt/. | “The price is the thing that annoys me”<br>/ðə 'praɪs ɪz ðə 'θɪŋ<br>ðæt ə'nɔɪz mi/. | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6       |
|   |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 11: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Conjunctions**

The conjunction ‘and’ is produced, in its weak-forms of standard English as /ən/ or /ŋ/ (after t, d, s, z, and ʃ), but in the table above, according to the teachers’ questionnaire results, it was pronounced as a strong form /ænd/ 100%. The subjects realized ‘but’ as the strong form /bʌt/100% instead of the weak form /bət/. They, also did not realize ‘as’ as /əz/ (in initial medial position), but realized it as /æz/100%. ‘Than’ and ‘that’ which are expected to be weakened to /ðən / and /ðət/ in English sentences, were produced, by the participants as /ðæn/ 100% and /ðæt/ 100% respectively, when the two responses strongly-agree and agree were added together.



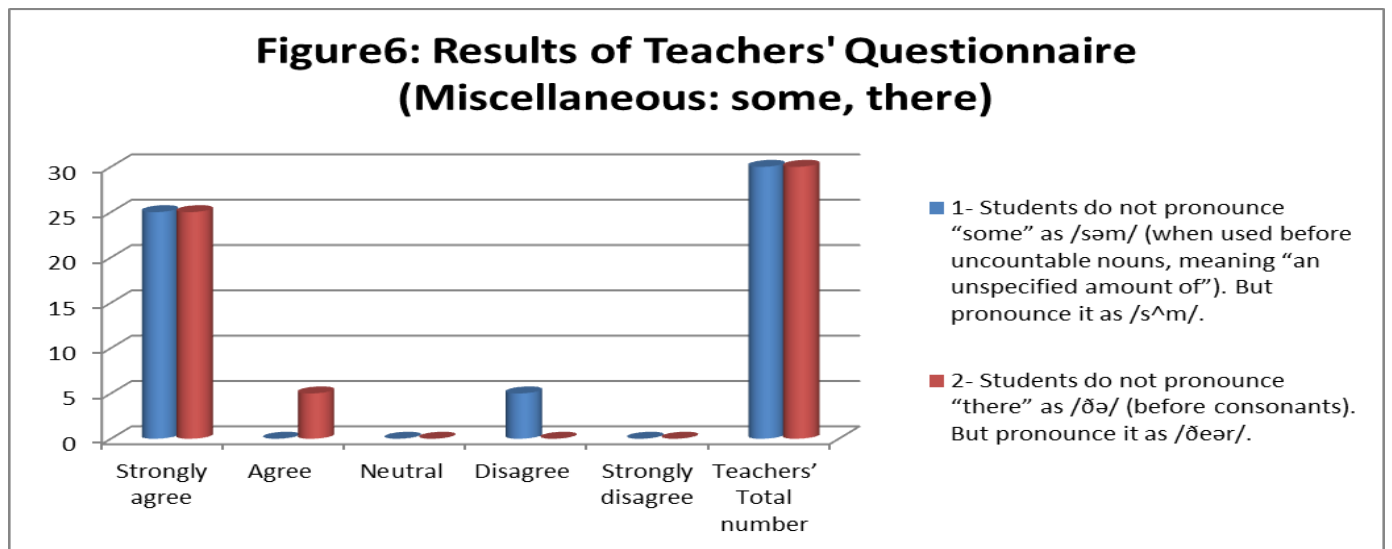
**Figure 5** The results of teachers’ questionnaire for the conjunctions: ‘and’, ‘but’, ‘as’, ‘than’ and ‘that’ showed that if the two positive responses (strongly-agree & agree) were added together the percentages of using the conjunctions’ strong-form words would be 100%.

#### 4.1.5 Miscellaneous: *some* and *there*.

| Statement   | Example  | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “some” as /səm/ (when used before uncountable nouns, meaning “an unspecified amount of”). But pronounce it as /s^m/.<br>But pronounce it as /s^m/. | “Have some more tea”<br>/həv səm 'mɔ:<br>'ti: /.     | Strongly agree    | 25        | 83.3%      |
|   |  | Agree             | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Disagree          | 5         | 16.6       |
|   |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “there” as /ðə/ (before consonants). But pronounce it as /ðeər/.<br>But pronounce it as /ðeər/.  | “There should be a rule”<br>/ðə 'ʃud bi ə<br>'ru:l/. | Strongly agree    | 25        | 83.3%      |
|   |  | Agree             | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 12: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Miscellaneous**

The word ‘some’ was realized in 83% of the instances of production as /s^m/, with the strong vowel /^/ rather than the weak vowel /ə/, and only as the appropriate /səm /, a negligible 16% of the instances of use. For the word ‘there’, which was expected to be pronounced as /ðə/ (before consonants), the subjects pronounced it as /ðeər/ 100%. All percentages were calculated according to the positive responses of the teachers.



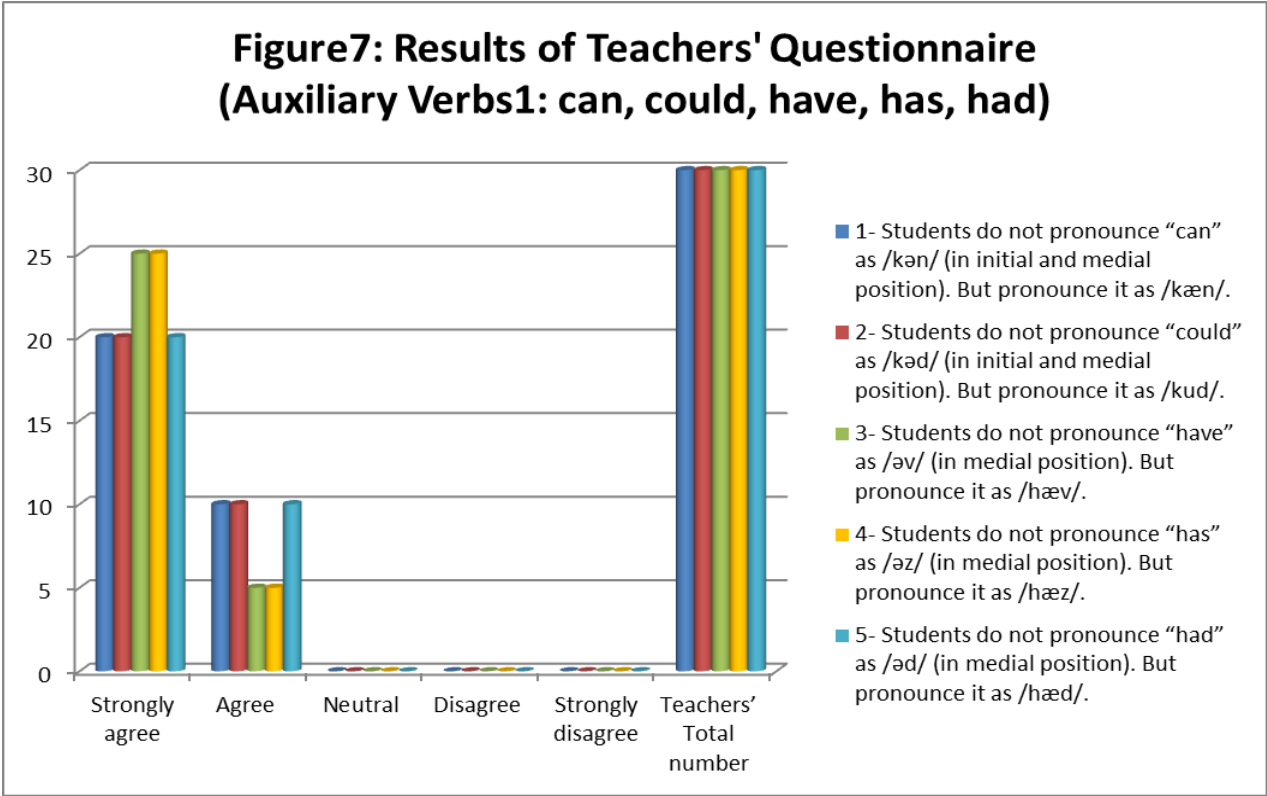
**Figure 6** The chart above shows that the miscellaneous: ‘some’ and ‘there’ had highly percentages of using the strong-form words.

#### 4.1.6 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: *can, could, have, has* and *had*.

| Statement  | Example   | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|---|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “can” as /kən/ (in initial and medial position). But pronounce it as /kæn/.   | “They can wait”<br>/’ðei kən ’weit/.            | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “could” as /kəd/ (in initial and medial position). But pronounce it as /kud/. | “He could do it”<br>/’hi: kəd ’du: it/.         | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 3- Students do not pronounce “have” as /əv/ (in medial position). But pronounce it as /hæv/.               | “Which have you seen?”<br>/’witʃ əv ju ’si:n/.  | Strongly agree    | 25        | 83.3%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 5         | 16.6       |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 4- Students do not pronounce “has” as /əz/ (in medial position). But pronounce it as /hæz/.                | “Which has been best”<br>/’witʃ əz bi:n ’best/. | Strongly agree    | 25        | 83.3       |
|  |   | Agree             | 5         | 16.6%      |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 5- Students do not pronounce “had” as /əd/ (in medial position). But pronounce it as /hæd/.                | “Most had gone home”<br>/’məust əd gɒn ’həum /. | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 13: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Auxiliary Verbs1**

‘Can’ which in weak contexts should be realized as /kən/ (in initial and medial position), was realized as /kæn/ with the strong vowel /æ/, 100% of the instances in which it occurred in the sentence. ‘Could’ was expected to be produced as /kəd/ (in initial and medial position), was produced as /kud/ with the strong vowel /u/ in all the instances of their occurrence (i.e.100%). ‘Have’ was expected to be realized as the weak-form /əv/ (in medial position) the subjects produced it as the strong-form /hæv/ 100% of the instances. Where ‘has’ and ‘had’ were expected to be realized as /həz/ and /həd/ (in medial position) respectively, but they were produced by the subjects evenly, /həz/ 100% and /həd/ 100% of the instances of expected occurrence.



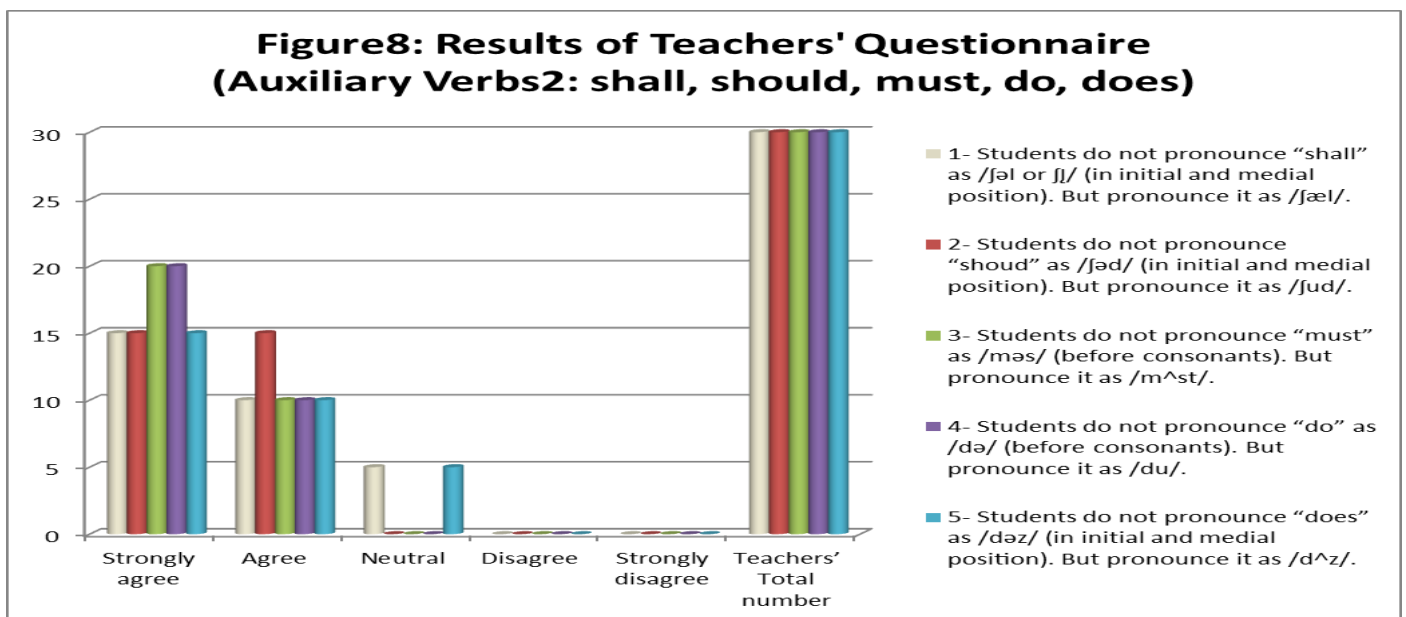
**Figure 7** The chart above shows that the auxiliaries: ‘can’, ‘could’, ‘have’, ‘has’ and ‘had’ had highly percentages of using the strong-form words, especially for has & have.

**4.1.7 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: *shall, should, must, do* and *does*.**

| Statement  | Example  | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|--|--|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “shall” as /ʃəl or ʃl/ (in initial and medial position). But pronounce it as /ʃæl/. | “We shall need to hurry” /wi ʃl 'ni:d tə 'hʌri/. | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|  |  | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |  | Neutral           | 5         | 16.6%      |
|  |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “shoud” as /ʃəd/ (in initial and medial position). But pronounce it as /ʃud/.       | “I should forget it” /'I ʃəd fə'get it/.         | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|  |  | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|  |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 3- Students do not pronounce “must” as /məs/ (before consonants). But pronounce it as /mʌst/.                    | “You must try harder” /ju məs 'traɪ 'hɑ:də/.     | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |  | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 4- Students do not pronounce “do” as /də/ (before consonants). But pronounce it as /du/.                         | “Why do they like it?” /wai də ðei 'laɪk it/.    | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|  |  | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |  | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 5- Students do not pronounce “does” as /dəz/ (in initial and medial position). But pronounce it as /dʌz/.        | “When does it arrive?” /'wen dəz it ə'raɪv/.     | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|  |  | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|  |  | Neutral           | 5         | 16.6%      |
|  |  | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|  |  | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 14: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Auxiliary Verbs2**

‘Shall’ which in weak contexts should be realized as /ʃəl/ or /ʃɪ/ (in initial and medial position), was realized with the strong vowel /a/ more than 83% of the instances in which it occurred in the sentence. Should was expected to be produced as /ʃəd/ (in initial and medial position), but it was produced with the strong vowel /u/ in all the instances of their occurrence (i.e.100%). In all the instances tested, ‘must’ was produced as /m^st/, with the strong vowel /ʌ/ rather than the appropriate weak form /məs/ and with no elision for the /t/ when it occurs medially in a cluster of three consonants, like the example given above. ‘Do’ was expected to be produced as /də/ (before consonants) and as /d/ before vowels, it was however realized in all the instances tested for both /də/ and /d/, as the strong form /du/100% for all the subjects in the teachers’ questionnaire results when all the percentages were calculated according to the positive responses of the teachers. ‘Does’ was supposed to be produced as the weak form /dəz/ (in initial and medial position), but it was produced by the subjects as the strong form /d^z/.in all the instances of its occurrence in the sentence.



**Figure 8** The chart above shows that the auxiliaries: ‘shall’, ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘do’ and ‘does’ had highly percentages of using the strong-form words, especially for must & do.

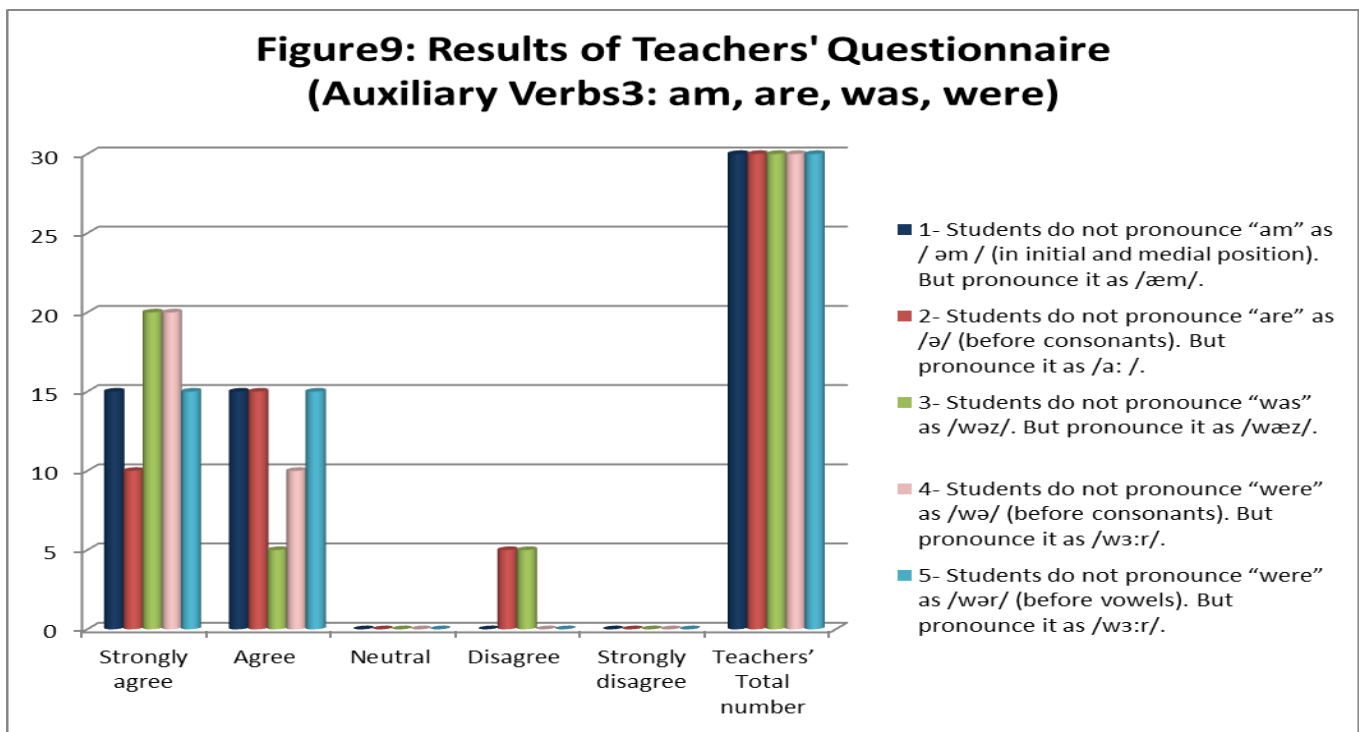
#### 4.1.8 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: *am, are, was* and *were*.

| Statement   | Example   | Obtain            | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|-------------------|-----------|------------|
| 1- Students do not pronounce “am” as /əm/ (in initial and medial position). But pronounce it as /æm/. | “Why am I here?”<br>/'wai əm ai 'hiə/.                        | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 2- Students do not pronounce “are” as /ə/ (before consonants). But pronounce it as /a:/.              | “Here are the plates”<br>/'hiər ə ðə 'pleits/.                | Strongly agree    | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 3- Students do not pronounce “was” as /wəz/. But pronounce it as /wæz/.                               | “He was here a minute ago”<br>/'hi wəz 'hiər ə 'minit ə'gəu/. | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|   |   | Agree             | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 5         | 16.6%      |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 4- Students do not pronounce “were” as /wə/ (before consonants). But pronounce it as /wɜ:r/.          | “The papers were late”<br>/ðə 'peipəz wə 'leit/.              | Strongly agree    | 20        | 66.6%      |
|   |   | Agree             | 10        | 33.3%      |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |
| 5- Students do not pronounce “were” as /wər/ (before vowels). But pronounce it as /wɜ:r/.             | “The questions were easy” /ðə 'kwɛstʃənz wər 'i:zi/.          | Strongly agree    | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Agree             | 15        | 50%        |
|   |   | Neutral           | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Disagree          | 0         | 0%         |
|   |   | Strongly disagree | 0         | 0%         |

**Table 15: Teachers’ Questionnaire of Auxiliary Verbs3**



‘Am’ which was expected to be realized as the weak form /əm/ (in initial and medial position), was produced by the subjects of this questionnaire as /æm/ with the strong vowel /æ/ 100% of the instances. Where ‘are’ was expected to be realized as /ə/ (before consonants), but it was produced by the subjects as /a:/ more than 83% of the instances and with the weak vowel /əm/ a negligible 17% of the percentage in the questionnaire. ‘Was’ was produced by the subjects as /wæz/, with the strong vowel /æ/ 73% and at no instance as the expected weak form /wəz/. ‘Were’ was expected to be realized as /wə/ (before consonants) and as /wɜ:/ (before vowels), but the subjects of this questionnaire pronounced it as /wɜ:r/ 100% in both of the two positions after all the percentages of the results were calculated according to the positive responses of the teachers.



**Figure 9** This figure of teachers’ questionnaire for the auxiliary verbs: ‘am’, ‘are’, ‘was’, and ‘were’ showed that the teachers agree, with high percentage that students substitute the weak-forms of the auxiliary verbs with the strong forms, particularly the words ‘was’ and ‘were’ before vowels.

## **4.2 Results and Descriptions of Subjects' Pretest**

The second part of this study consists of reading pretest and posttest which were designed with the purpose of testing the subjects' ability to produce the weak forms of functional words in naturally spoken English. For Underhill (1989), as mentioned previously, reading is considered a suitable technique when measuring mechanical skills of language production such as pronunciation. This activity makes the learners focus exclusively on form; while speaking makes it focus primarily on meaning. The subjects were given 36 sentences to read. The sentences were neatly typed on sheets of paper and handed to the subjects. These functional words, which are used in the sentences are taken and adapted from different pronunciation exercises which focus on teaching connected speech and weak forms for university learners of English (Roach, 2000; Hewings 2004). The subjects were given the instructions orally to read out the sentences as correctly as possible at a rapid speaking way. Everyone, of the subjects was asked to use his/her smart phone to record the texts and then to send the recordings to the researcher's own phone. The time of this task did not exceed 2 hours for all the participants. To analyze the texts, the researcher relied on his auditory judgment to transcribe, rate and compute the proportion of the correct pronunciation of the subjects individually for the function words and then shared the recording samples with experienced two native English teachers for final assessments. The production of every word was considered incorrect if the function word was produced with its strong form. So, to calculate the percentage of the students with the correct form word, the following process was followed:  $\text{Number of a student with the correct weak form} = 3 \text{ (grade)} / 30 \text{ (total number of subjects)} \times (100) = 10 \text{ (ratio) \%}$ .

This calculation indicated that only 10 % among the whole number of the participants were able to pronounce the weak-form words correctly. The results of the subjects’ tests are presented below through tables and graphics as follow.

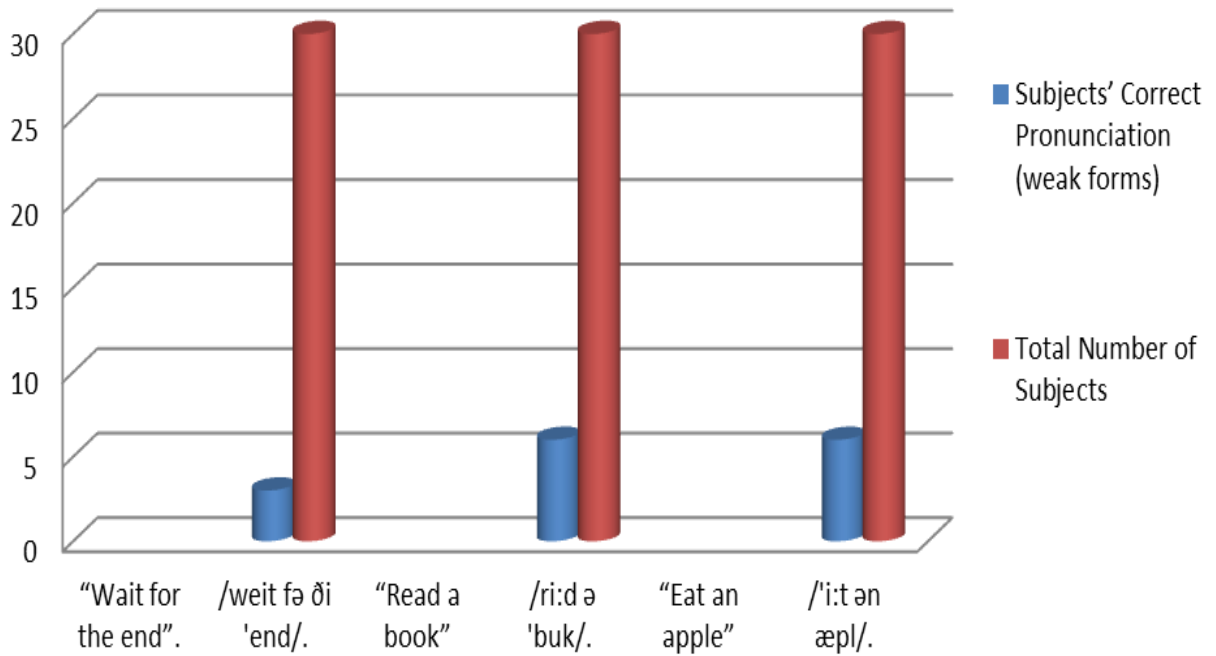
#### 4.2.1 Articles: *the*, *a*, and *an*

| Word Class | Functional Word | Context (sentence)                        | Weak Form | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects’ Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|------------|-----------------|---|-----------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Articles   | The             | “Wait for the end”.<br>/weɪt fə ði 'end/. | /ðɪ/      | /ðə/                               | 3   | 10%         |
|            | A               | “Read a book”<br>/ri:d ə 'buk/.           | /ə/       | /a/                                | 6   | 20%         |
|            | An              | “Eat an apple”<br>/'i:t ən æpl/.          | /ən/      | /an/                               | 6   | 20%         |

**Table 16: Students’ Pretest Pronunciation of Articles**

As the table above shows, the weak forms of the articles ‘the’, ‘a’, and ‘an’ are difficult weak-form words to produce according to the students personal judgments of reading samples in this test. There were only three students out of thirty, only 10% of students able to produce the right-form /ðɪ/ correctly when it is preceded by words begin with vowel sounds. But for the articles /ə/ and /ən/, there were 6 students, 20% for each of the words, who produced the two words correctly. The production of articles is problematic for the students in this test, but not the worst pronunciation when it is compared with the production of the other functional words. The students’ inability to identify ‘a’ in this context means that they have relied exclusively on the incoming sounds.

**Figure10: Results of Subjects' Pretest  
(Articles: the, a, an)**



**Figure 10**

This figure of the subjects' pretest for the articles 'the', 'a', and 'an' showed that students substitute the weak-forms of the articles with the strong forms, particularly the article 'the', /ði/ when it comes before vowels.

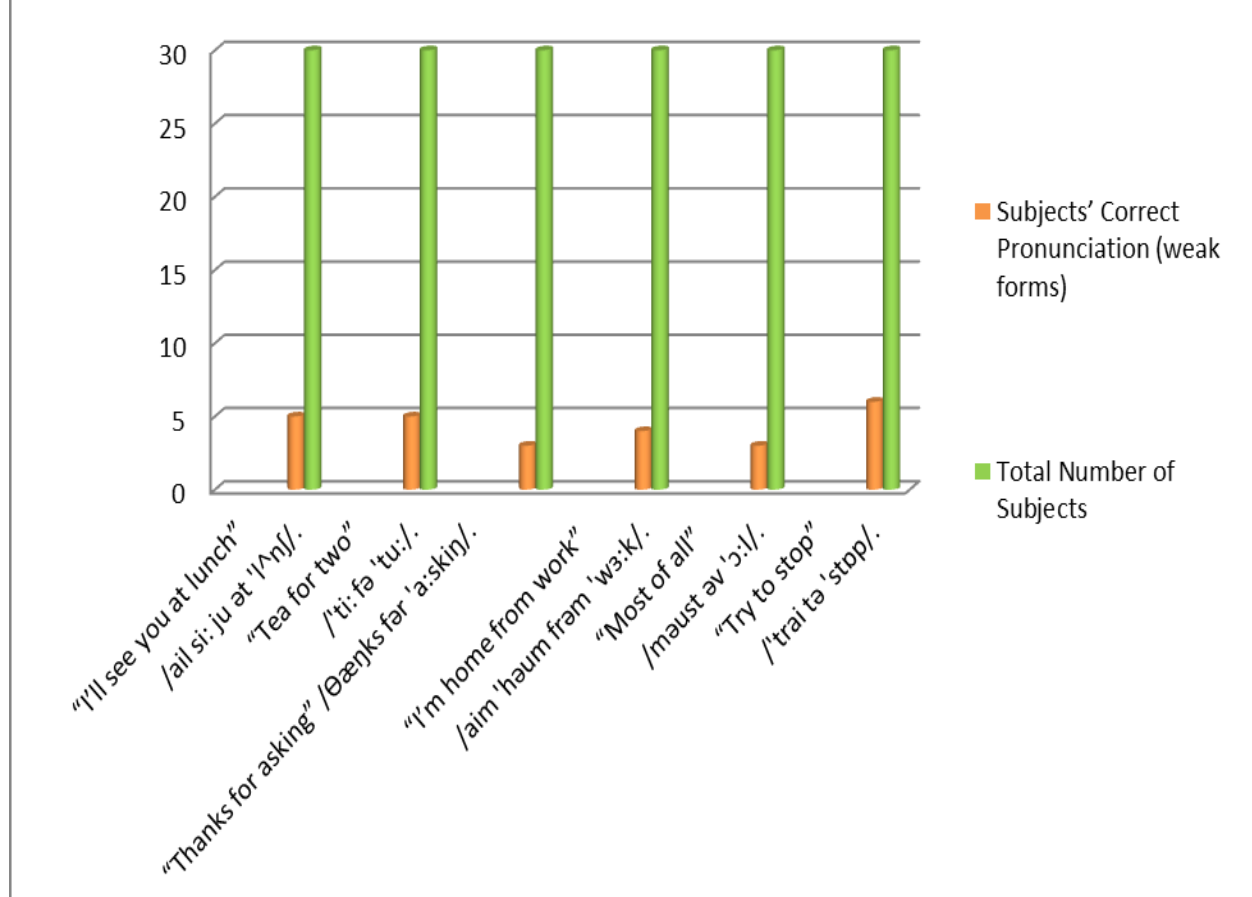
#### 4.2.2 Prepositions: *at, for, from, of, and to*

| Word Class   | Functional Word | Context (sentence)                                | Weak Form | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects' Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|--------------|-----------------|---|-----------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Prepositions | At              | “I’ll see you at lunch”<br>/aɪl si: ju ət 'lʌŋʃ/. | /ət/      | /æt/                               | 5   | 16.6%       |
|              | For             | “Tea for two”<br>/'ti: fə 'tu:/.                  | /fə/      | /fɔ:r/                             | 5   | 16.6%       |
|              | For             | “Thanks for asking”<br>/θæŋks fər 'a:skiŋ/.       | /fər/     | /fɔ:r/                             | 3   | 10%         |
|              | From            | “I’m home from work”<br>/aɪm 'həʊm frəm 'wɜ:k/.   | /frəm/    | /frɒm/                             | 4   | 13%         |
|              | Of              | “Most of all”<br>/məʊst əv 'ɔ:l/.                 | /əv/      | /ɒf/                               | 3   | 10%         |
|              | To              | “Try to stop”<br>/'traɪ tə 'stɒp/.                | /tə/      | /tu/                               | 6   | 20%         |

**Table 17: Students’ Pretest Pronunciation of Prepositions**

The above table shows the prepositions included in the test and the results of the students’ pronunciation to each word. What is interesting about these results, the fluctuating rates of the words’ pronunciation that the students have obtained! The word ‘for’, has two different proportions in the two different contexts, in the first sentence ‘Tea for two’, 5 subjects were able to produce the weak form ‘fə’, but for the sentence ‘Thanks for asking’ only 3 subjects were able to produce it correctly. The words ‘at’ and ‘for’, for instance, were equally produced by 5 subjects for each one. In the sentence ‘most of all’ only 3 subjects (out of 30) have been able to produce the correct word, ‘of’, /əv/. For the word ‘to’, 6 subjects were able to produce the weak form /tə/. This supports the idea that the schwa sound is difficult for foreign learners to produce, compared to other vowel sounds included in the test.

**Figure11: Results of Subjects' Pretest  
(Prepositions: at, for, from, of, to)**



**Figure 11**

The results of the subjects' pretest for the prepositions 'at', 'for', 'from', 'of' and 'to' showed that the subjects did not pronounce these weak-form words correctly, particularly the two prepositions 'for' in 'Thanks for asking' and 'of' in 'Most of all'.

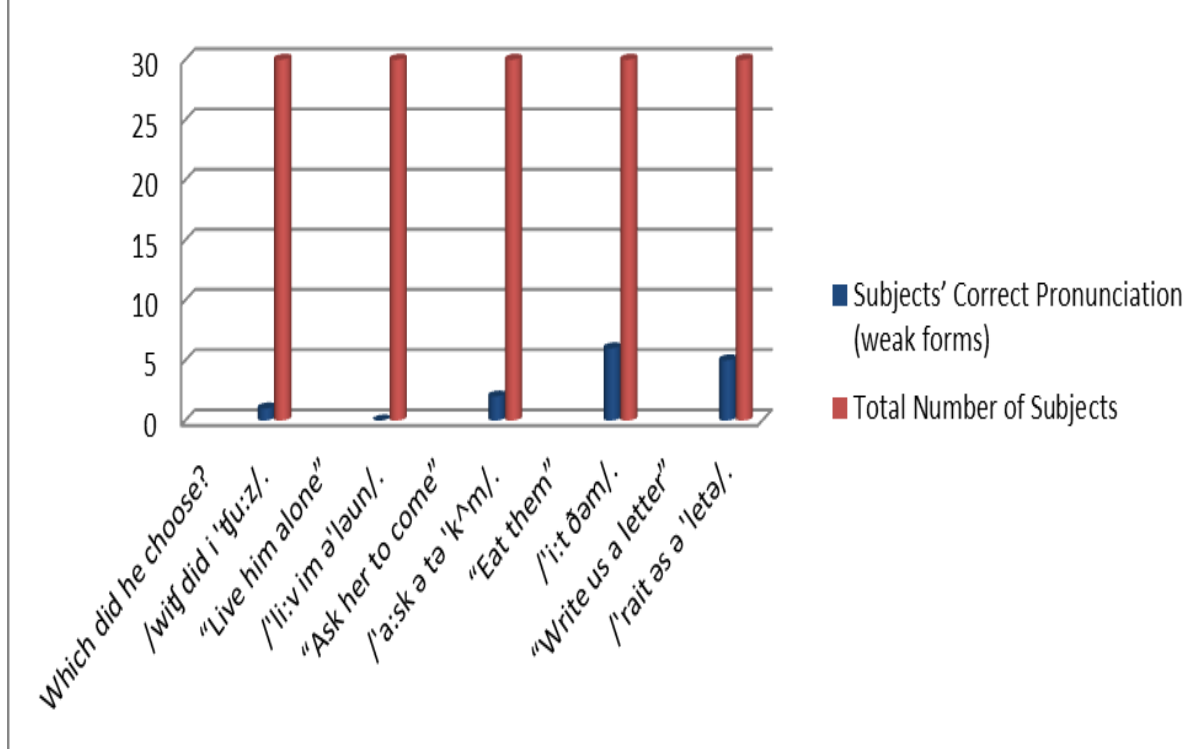
### 4.2.3 Pronouns: *he, him, her, them* and *us*

| Word Class | Functional Word | Context (sentence)                           | Weak Form | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects' Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|------------|-----------------|--|-----------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Pronouns   | He              | Which did he choose?<br>/wɪtʃ dɪd i 'tʃu:z/. | /i/       | /hi/                               | 1   | 3%          |
|            | Him             | “Live him alone”<br>/'li:v ɪm ə'ləʊn/.       | /ɪm/      | /hɪm/                              | 0   | 0%          |
|            | Her             | “Ask her to come”<br>/'a:sk ə tə 'kʌm/.      | /ə/       | /hə/                               | 2   | 6.6%        |
|            | Them            | “Eat them”<br>/'i:t ðəm/.                    | /ðəm/     | /ðem/                              | 6   | 20%         |
|            | Us              | “Write us a letter”<br>/'raɪt əs ə 'letə/.   | /əs/      | /ʌs/                               | 5   | 16.6%       |

**Table 18: Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Pronouns**

The result of this group of pronouns is dissimilar and ranging between the words ‘him’, /ɪm/, which was pronounced correctly by no subject and the word ‘them’, /ðəm/ which was produced by 6 students. ‘He’ was pronounced as /i/ by only 1 subject in the example ‘Which did he choose?’ because the sound /h/, which is considered as a voiceless palatal fricative, is one of the common sounds to students in their spoken language, Arabic (as mentioned previously). ‘Her’, was produced as the weak form /ə/ in the context of the sentence ‘Ask her to come’, only by 2 subjects out of 30. ‘Them’ was not realized as the weak form /ðəm/ but students pronounced it as the strong form /ðem/ 20%. The word ‘us’, in the context ‘Write us a letter’, was produced as /əs/ by 5 subjects only.

**Figure12: Results of Subjects Pretest  
(Pronouns: he,him,her, them, us)**



**Figure 12**

The results of the subjects' pretest for the pronouns: 'he', 'him', 'her', 'them' and 'us' showed that, students replaced the weak-form words by the strong ones. The lowest proportion is the weak-form /ɪm/ in the e.g. 'Live him alone'



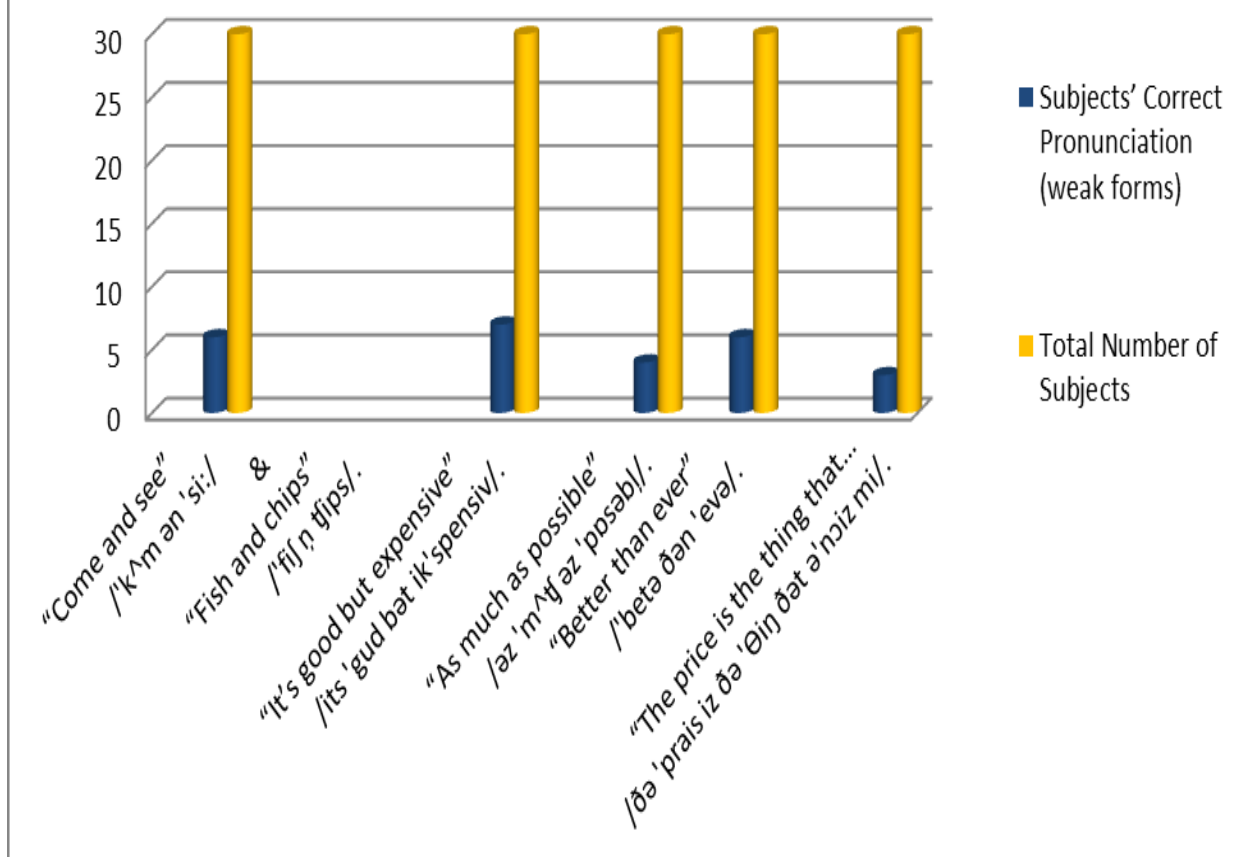
#### 4.2.4 Conjunctions: *and*, *but*, *as*, *than*, and *that*.

| Word Class   | Functional Word | Context (sentence)  | Weak Form        | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects' Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|--------------|-----------------|---|------------------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Conjunctions | And             | “Come and see”<br>/kʌm ən 'siː/<br>&<br>“Fish and chips”<br>/'fɪʃ ɪ 'tʃɪps/.        | /ən/<br>&<br>/ɪ/ | /ænd/                              | 6   | 20%         |
|              | But             | “It’s good but expensive”<br>/ɪts 'gʊd bət<br>ɪk'spensɪv/.                          | /bət/            | /bʌt/                              | 7   | 23%         |
|              | As              | “As much as possible”<br>/əz 'mʌʃ əz 'pɒsəbl̩/.                                     | /əz/             | /æz/                               | 4   | 13%         |
|              | Than            | “Better than ever”<br>/'betə ðən 'evə/.   | /ðən/            | /ðæn/                              | 6   | 20%         |
|              | That            | “The price is the thing that annoys me”<br>/ðə 'praɪs ɪz ðə 'θɪŋ<br>ðət ə'noɪz mi/. | /ðət/            | /ðæt/                              | 3   | 10%         |

**Table 19: Students’ Pretest Pronunciation of Conjunctions**

The results in the table above showed that the students’ production of conjunctions is of a relative difficulty. For instance, among the two first sentences where ‘and’ occurred, not more than 20% of the subjects have pronounced /ən/ & /ɪ/correctly in the sentence ‘Come and see’ and ‘Fish and chips’ respectively, while in the other four sentences, the percentages of correct pronunciation range from 23% to 10%. This means that the students’ ability to recognize conjunctions in this test has been partly linked to the context where each word occurs.

**Figure13: Results of Subjects' Pretest  
(Conjunctions: and, but, as, than, that)**



**Figure 13**

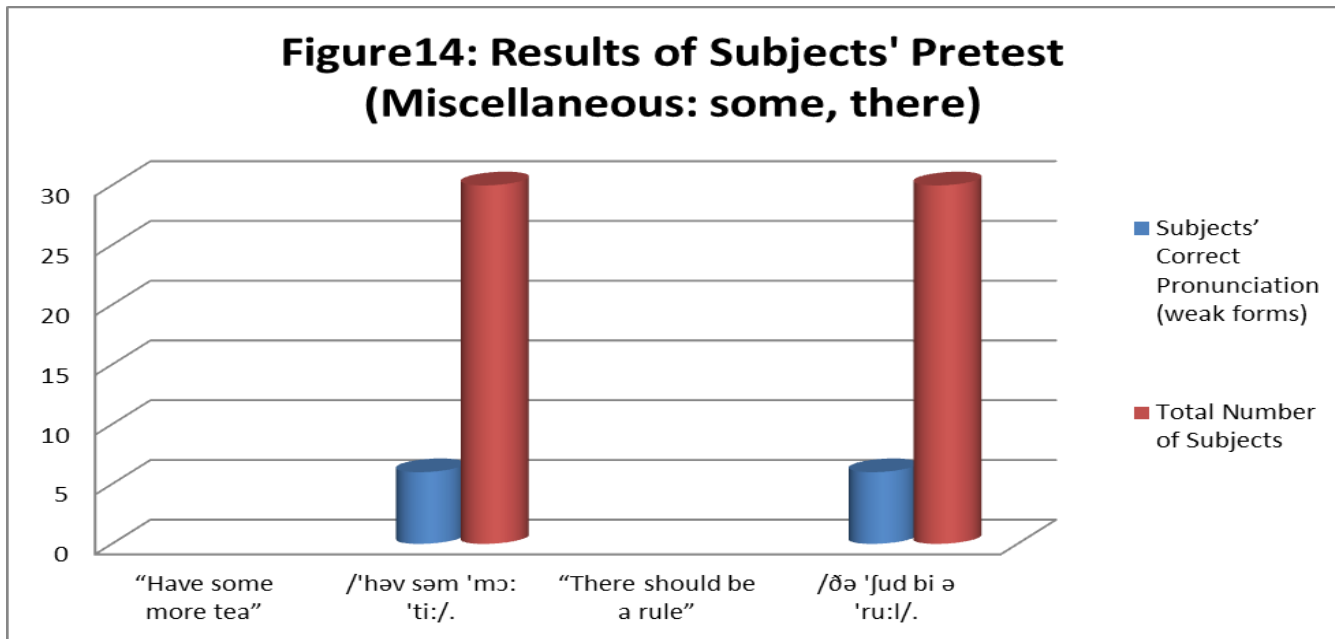
The results of the subjects' pretest for the conjunctions: 'and', 'but', 'as', 'than' and 'that' showed that the percentages of using the conjunctions' strong-form words were very high. The lowest proportion is the weak-form /ðət/ in the e.g. 'The price is the thing that annoys me'.

#### 4.2.5 Miscellaneous: *some* and *there*.

| Word Class    | Functional Word | Context (sentence)                                | Weak Form | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects' Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|---------------|-----------------|---|-----------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Miscellaneous | Some            | “Have some more tea”<br>/'hæv səm 'mɔ: 'ti: /.    | /səm<br>/ | /s^m/                              | 6   | 20%         |
|               | There           | “There should be a rule”<br>/ðə 'ʃud bi ə 'ru:l/. | /ðə/      | /ðeər/                             | 6   | 20%         |

**Table 20: Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Miscellaneous**

The table above suggests that students found it more difficult to use weak forms than strong forms when producing miscellaneous, /səm/ in the sentence ‘Have some more tea’ and /ðə/ in the sentence ‘There should be a rule’. In fact, this task showed, also a greater difficulty, only 20% who were able to give weak forms.



**Figure 14** The chart above shows that the miscellaneous: ‘some’ and ‘there’ had highly percentages of using the strong-form words.

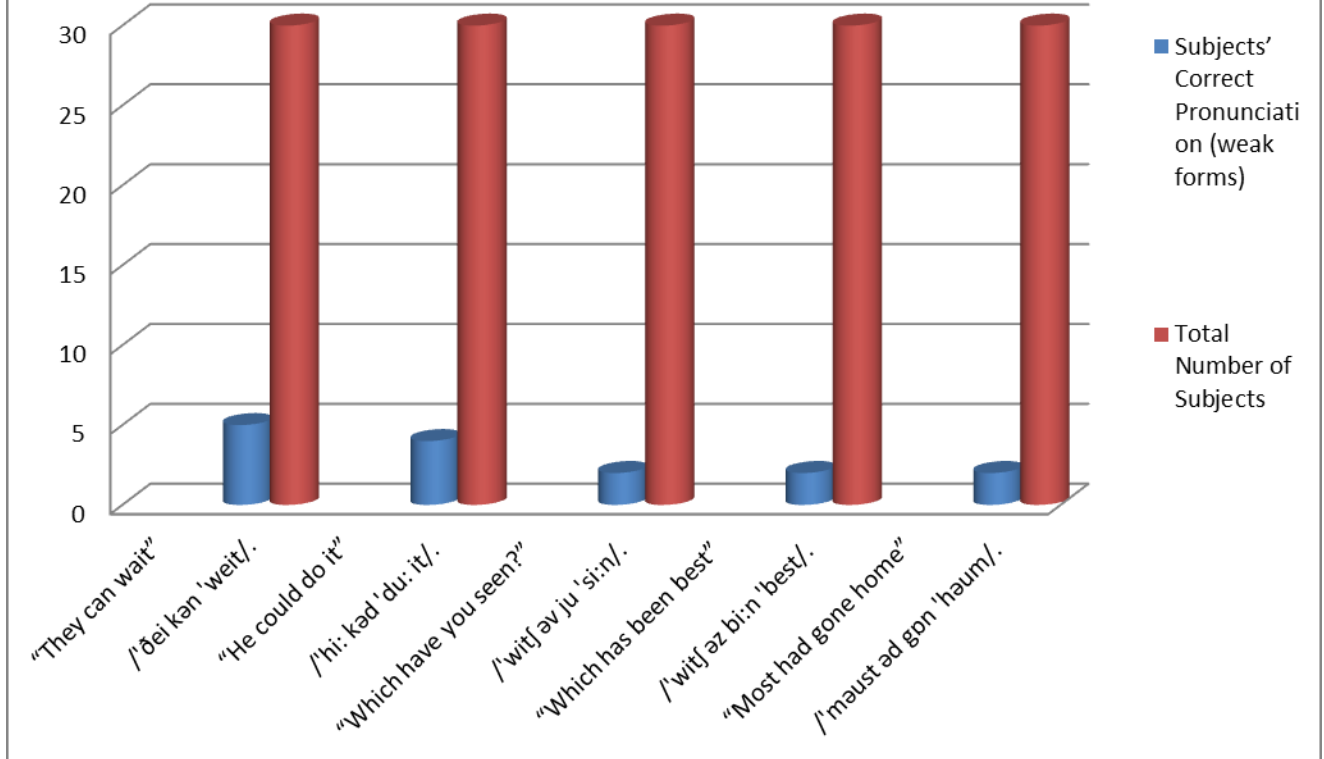
#### 4.2.6 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: *can, could, have, has* and *had*.

| Word Class               | Functional Word | Context (sentence)                              | Weak Form | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects' Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|--------------------------|-----------------|---|-----------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Auxiliary Verbs (group1) | Can             | “They can wait”<br>/’ðei kæn ’weit/.            | /kən/     | /kæɪn/                             | 5   | 16.6%       |
|                          | Could           | “He could do it”<br>/’hi: kəd ’du: it/.         | /kəd/     | /kud/                              | 4   | 13%         |
|                          | Have            | “Which have you seen?”<br>/’witʃ əv ju ’si:n/.  | /əv/      | /hæv/                              | 2   | 6.6%        |
|                          | Has             | “Which has been best”<br>/’witʃ əz bi:n ’best/. | /əz/      | /hæz/                              | 2   | 6.6%        |
|                          | Had             | “Most had gone home”<br>/’məʊst əd gɒn ’həʊm/.  | /əd/      | /hæd/                              | 2   | 6.6%        |

**Table 21: Students’ Pretest Pronunciation of Auxiliary Verbs1**

The above table demonstrates that the students have had a serious problem in the pronunciation of the weak forms of auxiliary verbs group1, can, could, have, has and had. More than 80% of the students have been unable to produce the weak forms of almost all the words listed. The researcher noticed that the words ‘have’, ‘has’, and ‘had’ were somehow difficult for the students compared to the other auxiliary verbs. And no more than 2 students, from the total number of 30 students were able to produce the weak-form words, /əv/, /əz/ and /əd/ for the words have, has, and had respectively. But all the remaining words, however, have been extremely difficult.

**Figure15: Results of Subjects' Pretest  
(Auxiliary Verbs1: can, could, have, has, had)**



**Figure 15**

The chart above showed that the auxiliaries: ‘can’, ‘could’, ‘have’, ‘has’ and ‘had’ had highly percentages of using the strong-form words, especially for has, have and had.

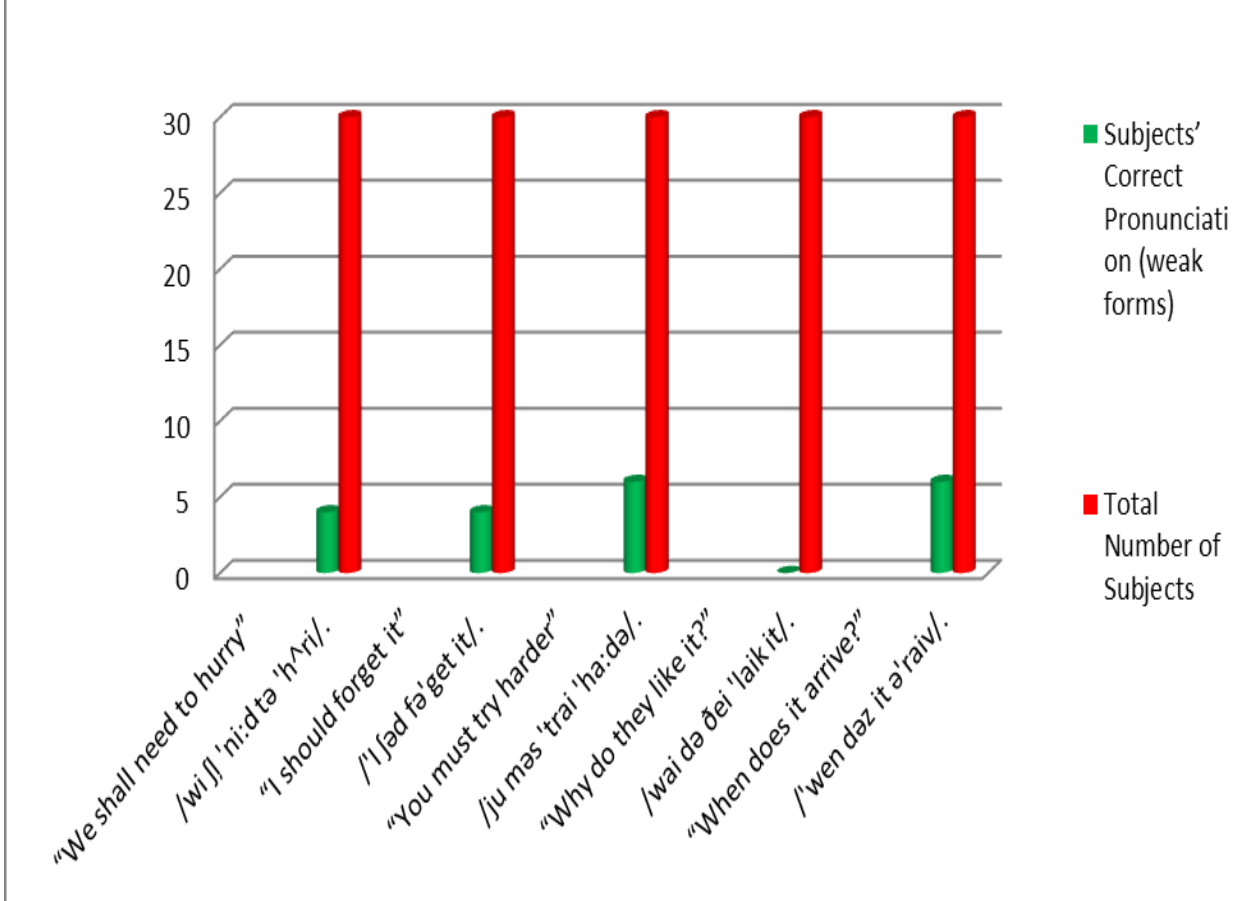
#### 4.2.7 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: *shall, should, must, do* and *does*.

| Word Class               | Functional Word | Context (sentence)                                   | Weak Form | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects' Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--|-----------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Auxiliary Verbs (group2) | Shall           | “We shall need to hurry”<br>/wi ʃl̩ 'ni:d tə 'hʌri/. | /ʃl̩/     | /ʃæɪ/                              | 4   | 13%         |
|                          | Should          | “I should forget it”<br>/I ʃəd fə'get it/.           | /ʃəd/     | /ʃud/                              | 4   | 13%         |
|                          | Must            | “You must try harder”<br>/ju məs 'traɪ 'hɑ:də/.      | /məs/     | /mʌst/                             | 6   | 20%         |
|                          | Do              | “Why do they like it?”<br>/wai də ðei 'laɪk it/.     | /də/      | /du/                               | 0   | 0%          |
|                          | Does            | “When does it arrive?”<br>/'wen dəz it ə'raɪv/.      | /dəz/     | /dʌz/                              | 6   | 20%         |

**Table 22: Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Auxiliary Verbs2**

The table above, shows that the auxiliary verbs group2, also were problematic for the subjects entirely. But the weak-form word ‘do’ /də/ was the most difficult form among the subjects of this study, and no one has had the ability to produce it. For ‘shall’, only 4 students were able to produce the weak-form /ʃl̩/, which is a syllabic consonant, a problem that foreign learners of English face. Similarly, the weak-form of the word should /ʃəd/ that was produced by 4 subjects out of 30. The results, also show that 20%, 6 subjects were able to pronounce the weak forms /məs/ and /dəz/ of the words ‘must’ and ‘does’, respectively.

**Figure16: Results of Subjects' Pretest  
(Auxiliary Verbs2: shall, should, must, do, does)**



**Figure 16**

The chart above showed that the auxiliaries ‘shall’, ‘should’, ‘must’, ‘do’ and ‘does’ had highly percentages of using the strong-form words, especially for the weak form /də/.

#### 4.2.8 Auxiliary (modal) Verbs: *am, are, was* and *were*.

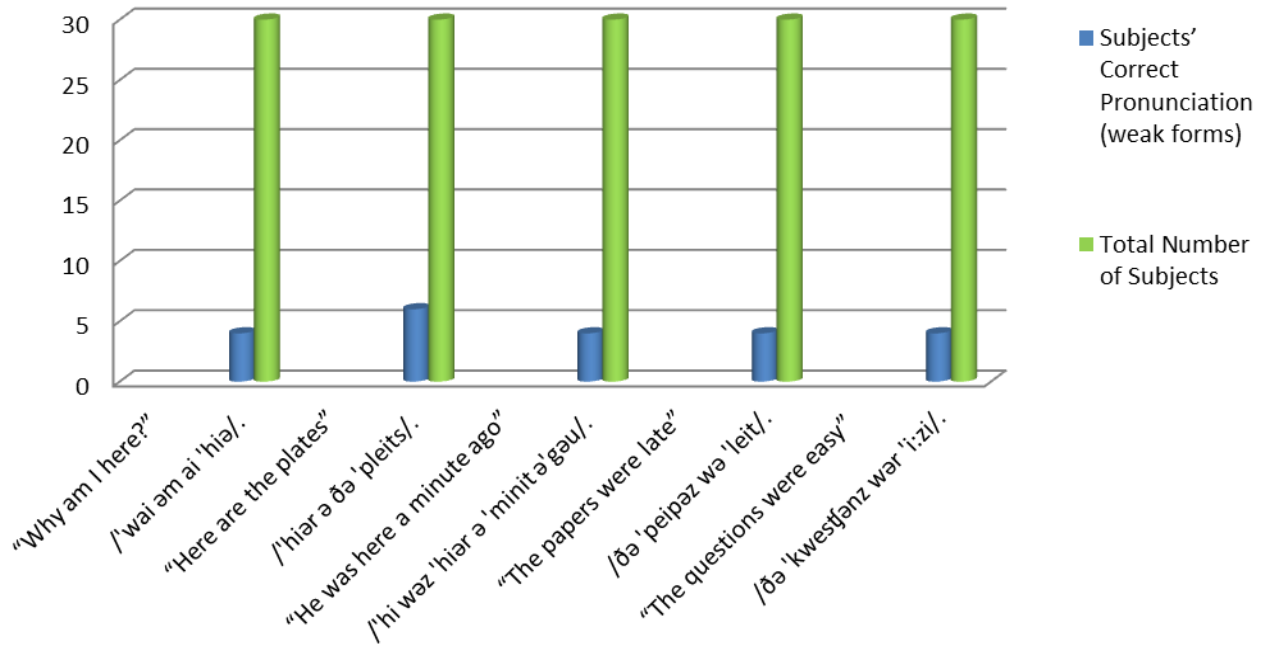
| Word Class               | Functional Word | Context (sentence)   | Weak Form | Strong Form (produced by subjects) | Number of Subjects' Correct Pronunciation | Percentages |
|--------------------------|-----------------|--|-----------|------------------------------------|---|-------------|
| Auxiliary Verbs (group3) | Am              | “Why am I here?”<br>/'wai əm ai 'hiə/.                       | /əm/      | /æm/                               | 4   | 13%         |
|                          | Are             | “Here are the plates”<br>/'hiə ə ðə 'pleits/.                | /ə/       | /a:/                               | 6   | 20%         |
|                          | Was             | “He was here a minute ago”<br>/'hi wəz 'hiə ə 'minit ə'gəu/. | /wəz/     | /wæz/                              | 4   | 13%         |
|                          | Were            | “The papers were late”<br>/ðə 'peipəz wə 'leit/.             | /wə/      | /wɜ:r/                             | 4   | 13%         |
|                          | Were            | “The questions were easy”<br>/ðə 'kwɛstʃənz wə 'i:zi/.       | /wər/     | /wɜ:r/                             | 4   | 13%         |

**Table 23: Students' Pretest Pronunciation of Auxiliary Verbs3**

The table above reflected a continuation for describing the auxiliary verbs group3. For the word ‘are’, the weak form /ə/, in the context ‘Here are the plates’ was pronounced by 6 students only. But more than 87% of the students entirely have been unable to pronounce the weak forms of almost all the other words listed. That is only 4 students, 13% of subjects were able to produce the weak-form words of; /əm/, /wəz/, /wə/, and /wər/ for the words am, was, were, respectively.



**Figure17: Results of Subjects' Pretest  
(Auxiliary Verbs3: am, are, was, were)**



**Figure 17**

This figure of students' pretest for the auxiliary verbs: 'am', 'are', 'was', and 'were' showed that all students substituted the weak-forms of the auxiliary verbs with the strong forms.

### 4.3 Results of Subjects' Posttest

A posttest was done to measure whether there any significant difference between the performances of the two reading tests. After analyzing, rating, and computing the proportion of the correct pronunciation of the subjects individually for the function words, the result got out was not significantly auspicious and this was due to the fact that subjects did not do well on this test.

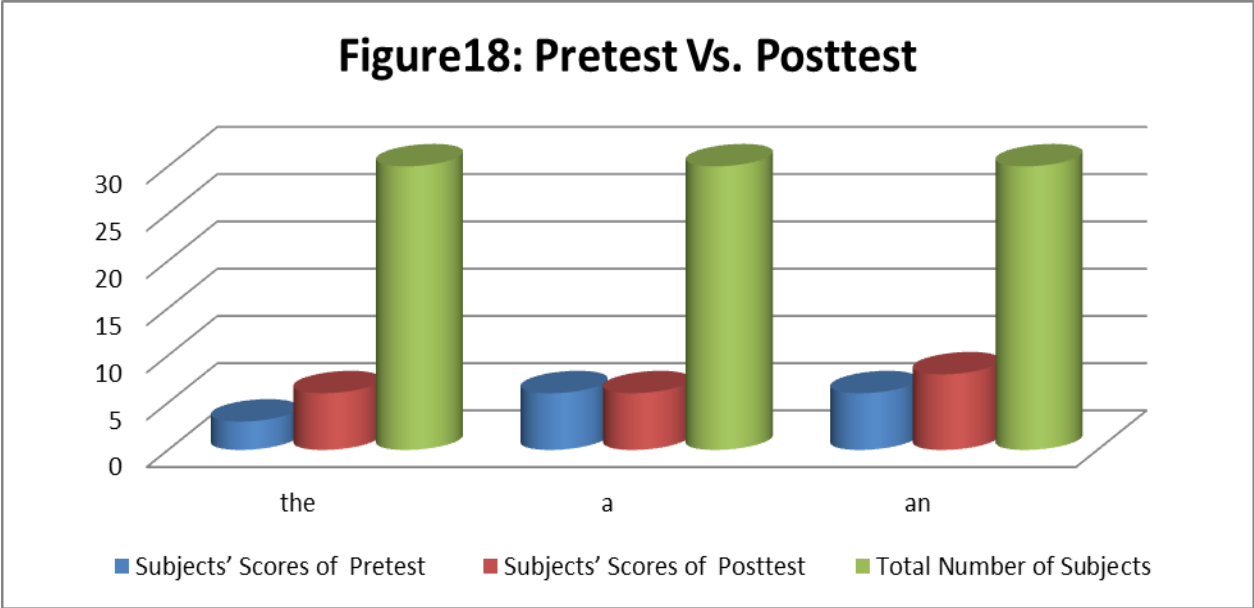
The results, this time showed no big difference existed between the performances of the two groups; the experimental group which received a six-week training program and the control group that didn't. It appeared that no relationship existed between subjects' knowledge and production of weak forms, and their results of their pronunciation. This was in line with the researcher's expectations and it corroborated the findings of other researches. The number of cases with correct pronunciation before and after the experiment was low, except for very few forms like the miscellaneous 'some' and 'there', the conjunctions 'and' and 'but', and the auxiliaries 'shall', 'should', 'must', 'does', 'am', 'are', and 'were'. Therefore, it would appear that weak pronunciation of all function words is completely unnatural for students.

#### 4.3.1 Final Subjects' Scores of Articles

| Weak Form Items (articles) | Subjects' Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects' Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The                        | 3                           | 10                          | 6                            | 20                          |
| A                          | 6                           | 20                          | 6                            | 20                          |
| An                         | 6                           | 20                          | 8                            | 26.6                        |

**Table 24: Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Articles**

The percentage of improvements in the table above was considered according to the degree of reduction of the weak forms. The table showed that very little pronunciation progress detected in this group of words. However, the proportion of schwa pronunciation to full vowel production in this group is not so clear-cut.



**Figure18:** showed that the subjects of this study made no progress in the articles

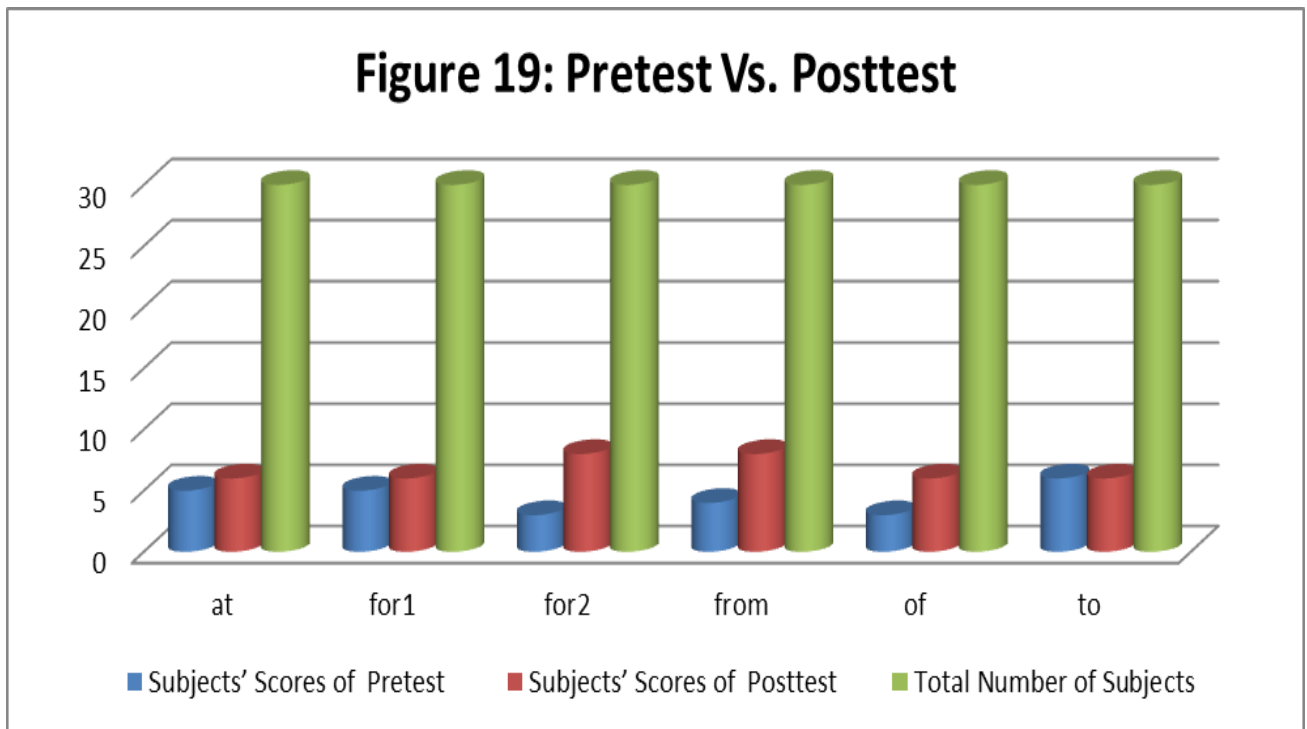
**4.3.2 Final Subjects’ Scores of Prepositions**

| Weak Form Items (prepositions) | Subjects’ Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects’ Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| At                             | 5                           | 16.6                        | 6                            | 20                          |
| For1                           | 5                           | 16.6                        | 6                            | 20                          |
| For2                           | 3                           | 10                          | 8                            | 26.6                        |
| From                           | 4                           | 13                          | 8                            | 26.6                        |
| Of                             | 3                           | 10                          | 6                            | 20                          |
| To                             | 6                           | 20                          | 6                            | 20                          |

**Table 25: Subjects’ Pretest vs. Posttest of Prepositions**

It was revealed from this group that all the words were produced with a full vowel. There is no much change of progress happened to the subjects after they received the training of the prepositions.

The table above showed that 5 students were succeeded to reduce the schwa of the word ‘for2’, 4 students were done for the word ‘from’ and only 1 student was succeeded to reduce the schwa of the prepositions ‘at’ and ‘for1’.



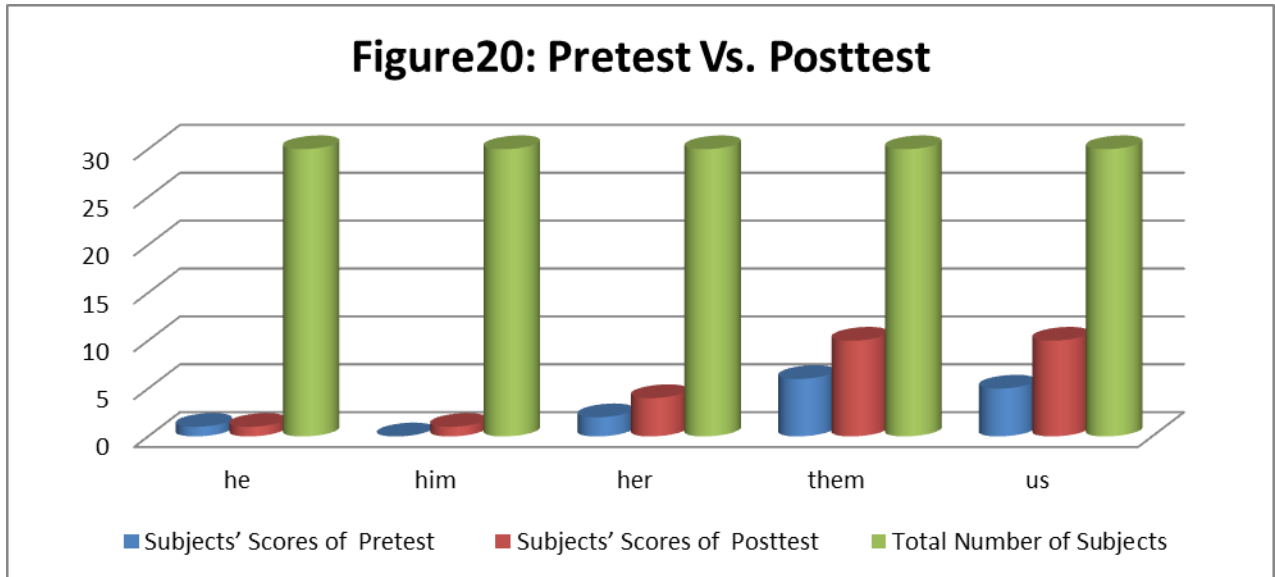
**Figure19:** showed a little reduction of schwa for the words ‘for2’, ‘from’ and ‘of’.

### 4.3.3 Final Subjects’ Scores of Pronouns

| Weak Form Items (pronouns) | Subjects’ Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects’ Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| He                         | 1                           | 3                           | 1                            | 3                           |
| Him                        | 0                           | 0                           | 1                            | 3                           |
| Her                        | 2                           | 6.6                         | 4                            | 13                          |
| Them                       | 6                           | 20                          | 10                           | 33.3                        |
| Us                         | 5                           | 16.6                        | 10                           | 33.3                        |

**Table 26: Subjects’ Pretest vs. Posttest of Pronouns**

The table above showed that the number of participants, who used the full form of the words which include the consonant sound /h/ in this category, was considerable. All the words were pronounced with, relatively full forms, but with a little advance for the words ‘them’ and ‘us’.



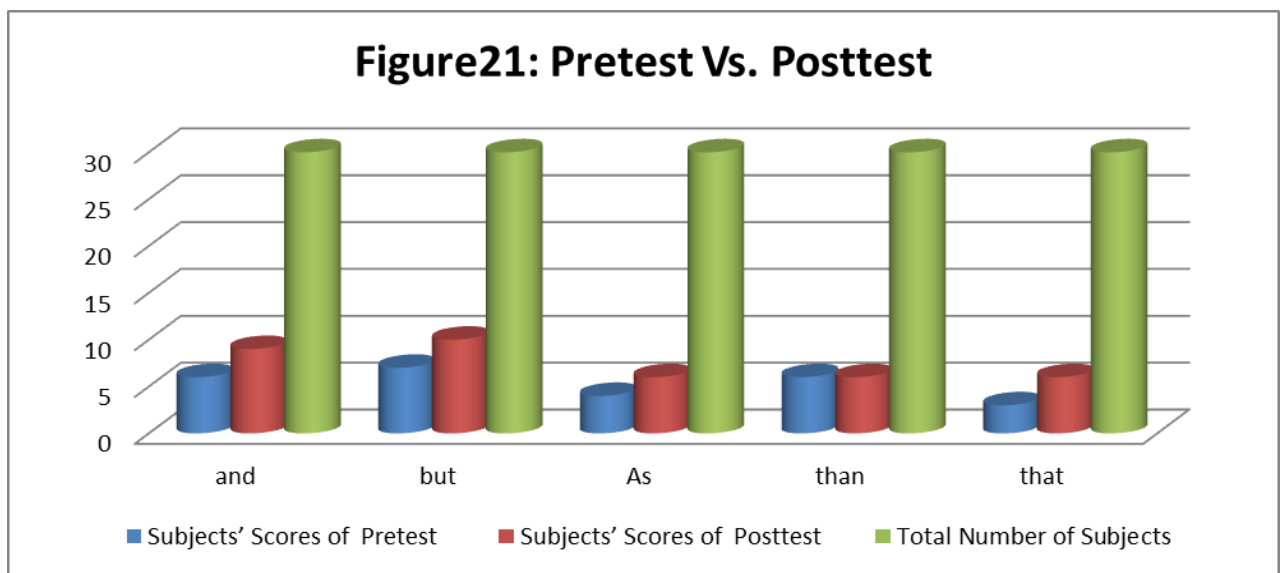
**Figure20:** showed a little reduction of schwa for the words ‘them’, ‘from’ and ‘us’.

#### 4.3.4 Final Subjects’ Scores of Conjunctions

| Weak Form Items (conjunctions) | Subjects’ Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects’ Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| And                            | 6                           | 20                          | 9                            | 30                          |
| But                            | 7                           | 23                          | 10                           | 33.3                        |
| As                             | 4                           | 13                          | 6                            | 20                          |
| Than                           | 6                           | 20                          | 6                            | 20                          |
| That                           | 3                           | 10                          | 6                            | 20                          |

**Table 27: Subjects’ Pretest vs. Posttest of Conjunctions**

The situation in the pronunciation of weak forms was considerably different. The number of cases with accurate pronunciation before and after receiving 45 day training was extremely low, except for very few words which were mostly pronounced correctly. Therefore, it would appear that weak pronunciation of the conjunctions is completely unnatural for students, like the other functional words, and it is quite clear that they had not been instructed on the weak forms of the other grammatical words before.



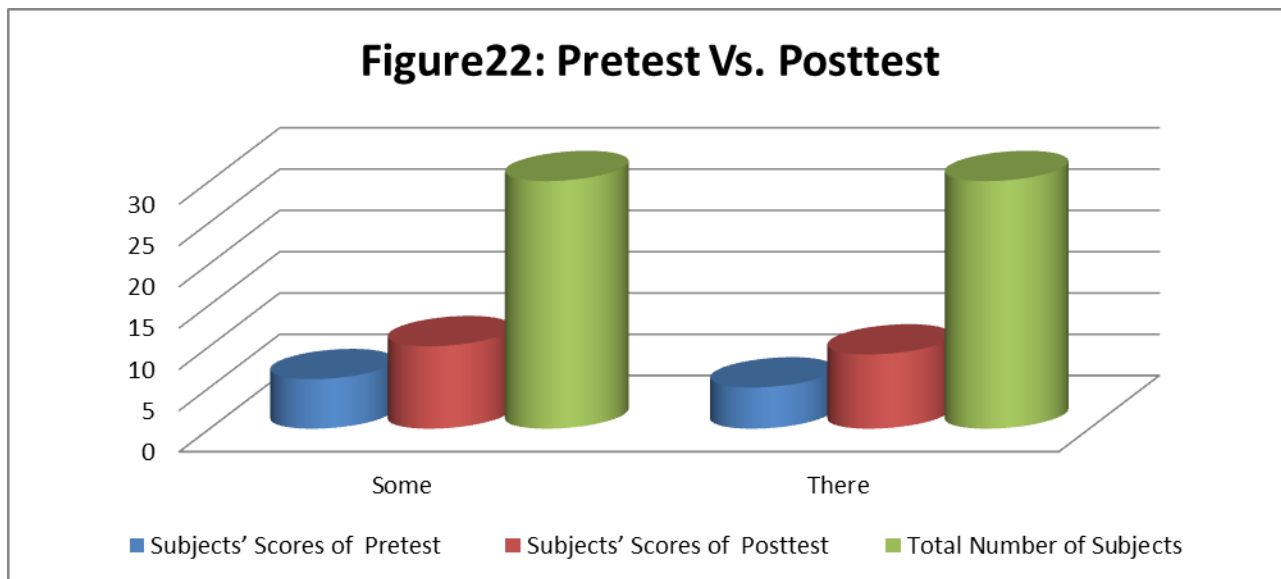
**Figure21:** showed a little reduction of schwa for the words ‘but’, and ‘and’.

#### 4.3.5 Final Subjects’ Scores of Miscellaneous

| Weak Form Items (miscellaneous) | Subjects’ Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects’ Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Some                            | 6                           | 20                          | 10                           | 33.3                        |
| There                           | 5                           | 16.6                        | 9                            | 30                          |

**Table 28: Subjects’ Pretest vs. Posttest of Miscellaneous**

The total mean score of the pretest of miscellaneous forms, was 5.5, and for the posttest score, was 9.5, this increased to 4 students in the post test after they received the training. This indicated slowness in the improvement of pronunciation in the posttest.



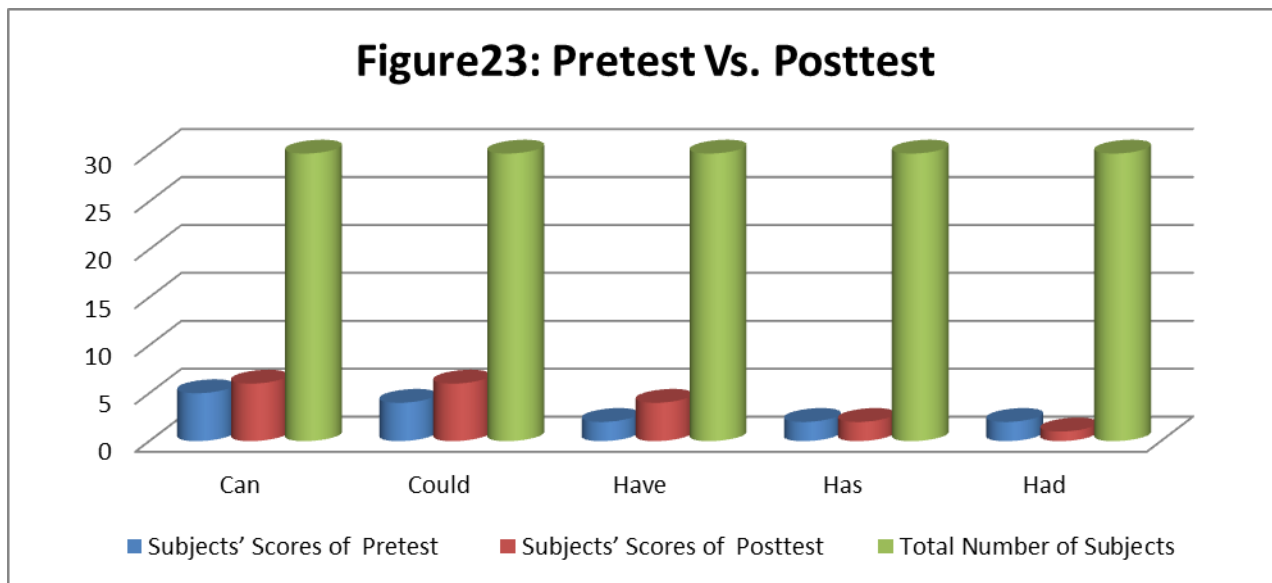
**Figure22:** showed almost no difference in the reduction of schwa for both words ‘some’, and ‘there’.

#### 4.3.6 Final Subjects’ Scores of Auxiliary1

| Weak Form Items (auxiliary1) | Subjects’ Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects’ Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Can                          | 5                           | 16.6                        | 6                            | 20                          |
| Could                        | 4                           | 13                          | 6                            | 20                          |
| Have                         | 2                           | 6.6                         | 4                            | 13                          |
| Has                          | 2                           | 6.6                         | 2                            | 6.6                         |
| Had                          | 2                           | 6.6                         | 1                            | 3                           |

**Table 29: Subjects’ Pretest vs. Posttest of Auxiliary1**

For this group of auxiliary forms1, in the table above, there is no statistical difference in the improvement of students, in pronunciation of weak-form words before and after the tests. The difference between total post-pre mean of the group was only 1.



**Figure23:** showed almost no big difference in the reduction of schwa for this group.

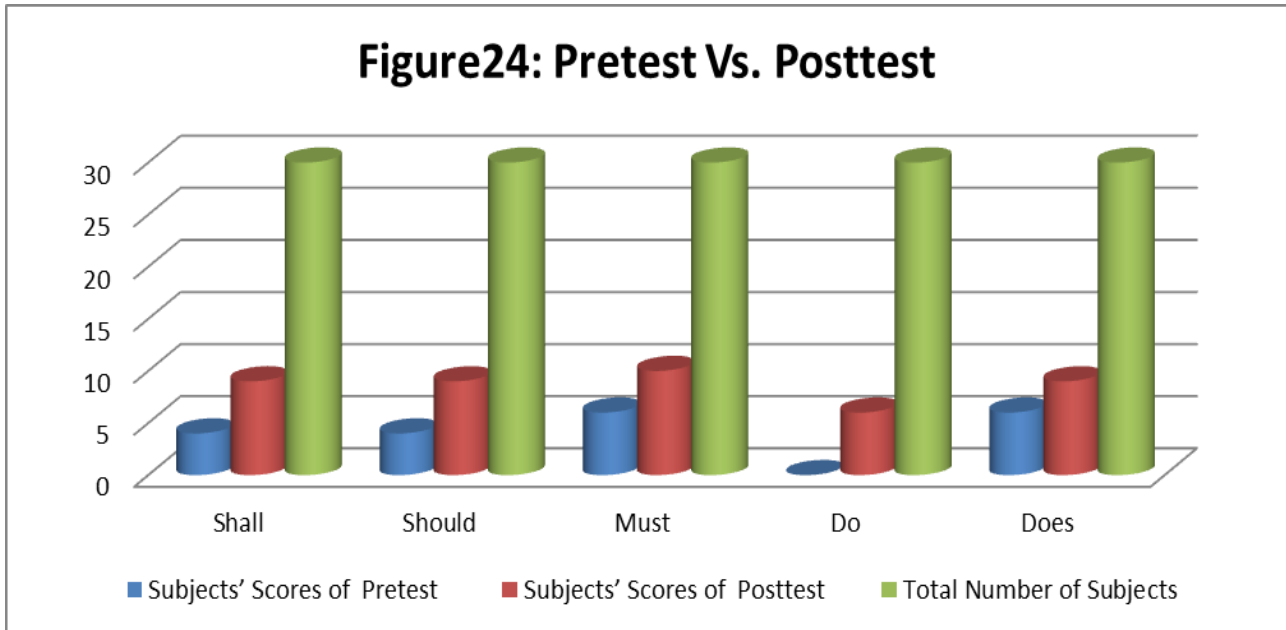
#### 4.3.7 Final Subjects' Scores of Auxiliary2

| Weak Form Items (auxiliary2) | Subjects' Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects' Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Shall                        | 4                           | 13                          | 9                            | 30                          |
| Should                       | 4                           | 13                          | 9                            | 30                          |
| Must                         | 6                           | 20                          | 10                           | 33.3                        |
| Do                           | 0                           | 0                           | 6                            | 20                          |
| Does                         | 6                           | 20                          | 9                            | 30                          |

**Table 30: Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Auxiliary2**



This group of auxiliary verbs reflected the same tendency that was observed previously in the first group. There was no statistical difference in the improvement of students, in pronunciation of weak-form words before and after the tests.



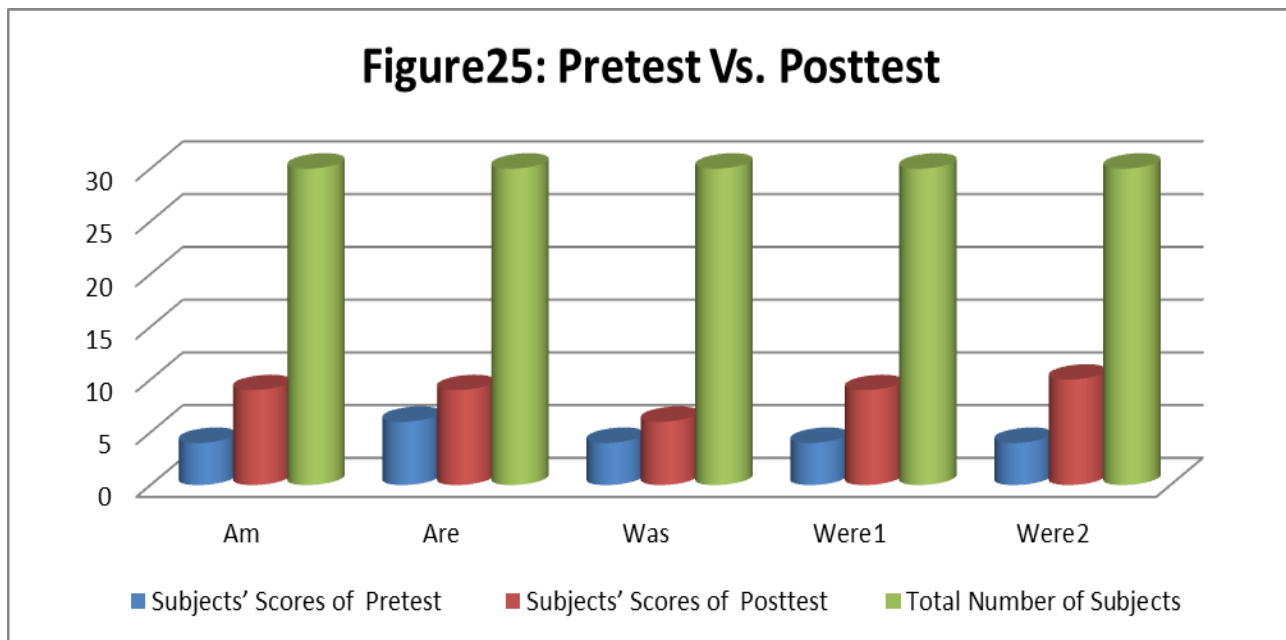
**Figure24:** showed also no big difference in the reduction of schwa for this group.

#### 4.3.8 Final Subjects' Scores of Auxiliary3

| Weak Form Items (auxiliary3) | Subjects' Scores of Pretest | Ratio of succeeded subjects | Subjects' Scores of Posttest | Ratio of succeeded subjects |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Am                           | 4                           | 13                          | 9                            | 30                          |
| Are                          | 6                           | 20                          | 9                            | 30                          |
| Was                          | 4                           | 13                          | 6                            | 20                          |
| Were1                        | 4                           | 13                          | 9                            | 30                          |
| Were2                        | 4                           | 13                          | 10                           | 33.3                        |

**Table 31: Subjects' Pretest vs. Posttest of Auxiliary3**

The weak forms of auxiliary<sup>3</sup> which appeared in the table above are very similar to all the categories of grammatical words that may undergo reduction (prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, adjectival, etc...). This suggests that students found it more difficult to use weak forms than strong forms when producing relatively spontaneous speech.



**Figure25:** showed that the subjects of this study made no progress in the production and perception of auxiliary verbs.

#### 4.4 Discussion and Confirmation of Hypotheses

The hypotheses, of this study estimated that Sudanese university students are not aware or familiar with the use of weak-form words of English and they are likely to have difficulty reducing strong-forms. The research revealed that the subjects' overall tendency towards the strong form reduction was generally greater than expected. The subjects have a tendency to substitute the strong vowel sounds for the weak /ə/ sound of English in most cases.

Consequently, this sound, which is the most common vowel found in the weak forms of Standard English grammatical words, is inaccessibly used by the Sudanese university students when they speak English. In, almost all the cases when the weak form should have been used, the participants intended to reduce the word in terms of length as well as quality. Elision, as the omission of a phoneme or more, which considers one of the characteristic traits of unstressed syllable in Standard English, is almost absent in the English of Sudanese university students. Where vowels could be totally elided in the weak forms of these grammatical words as in could /kəd/, then /ðən/, to /tə/, etc. All these confirm a plurality of the strong forms of English grammatical words and a tendency to use strong vowels in subjects' speaking of English. Finally, one can easily conclude that Sudanese University Students did not do well in pronouncing weak form words. They failed to pronounce most of the items correctly. This result supports the researcher's expectations that producing weak forms is very problematic for the subjects and it converges with those obtained by other researchers. Then, this problem was not, privately Sudanese student' dilemma, but many other EFL learners encountered similar difficulties.

#### **4.5 Summary of the Chapter**

In this chapter, the researcher has dealt with the pronunciation abilities of the third year students of Al-Nahda College concerning the production of weak forms of grammatical words in naturally connected speech, on the light of their awareness of the significance of using these words in pronunciation of English. The results showed that the students had difficulties in pronouncing the reduced forms.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestions**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This final chapter summarizes the findings of this study. The discussion of the findings and recommendations for future research, are also provided. It begins with an overview of the objectives of the study and compares the findings of this study with previous results of other similar studies. The major findings of this study are then summarized to provide answers to the objectives posed in the methodology chapter. In addition, implications for theoretical development and practical application are considered. Finally the chapter concludes with suggestions for farther reading in this field.

#### **5.1 Findings**

This study is concerned about the mispronunciation of weak forms of function words in English language. Therefore, the objectives of the study are; to build students' awareness of the importance of using English weak forms; to investigate how Sudanese University Students (SUS) can use English weak-form words correctly; and to examine the Sudanese university learners' ability to reduce the strong form of the English words. Away from a detailed categorization of the principles that the occurrence of weak forms follows, the most common difficulties (SUS) have to overcome while learning this pronunciation feature, were mentioned. The practical part of this study carried out among (SUS) of English at a university level. It aimed at analyzing the frequency of the reduction of the weak-form words according to their grammatical functions.

The results show that the students do not have the tendency to reduce the strong-forms, they cannot use them correctly and they lack the awareness of the significance of weak forms in English pronunciation. Further division of the participants; reveal that there is no significant difference in terms of the vowel reduction between respondents with English phonetics and phonology knowledge, and those who had never been acquainted with weak forms of function words on a theoretical level. They also reveal that being aware is very significant in helping the students to cope with weak forms in naturally spoken English. This is added to other factors such as training, familiarity and exposure etc. There are three major factors behind this problem; first, the use of some sounds instead of the schwa sound /ə/. In pronouncing articles, students use /a/ instead of schwa sound /ə/, e.g. ‘an’ /ən/ pronounced as /æn/. In the case of prepositions, they use /æ/, /ɔ/ and /u/ instead of the schwa /ə/ e.g. the words ‘at’, ‘from’ and ‘to’, respectively. In regard to pronouns, students use /e/ and /ʌ/ instead of the schwa sound /ə/, e.g. ‘them’ pronounced as /ðem/ and ‘us’ as /ʌs/ instead of /ðəm/ and /əs/. Pronouncing conjunctions, the participants use the sounds /æ/ and /ʌ/ instead of the schwa, e.g. ‘and’ /ən/ pronounced as /ænd/ and ‘but’ /bət/ as /bʌt/. For miscellaneous pronunciation, students replace the schwa /ə/ by the sounds /ʌ/ in the word ‘some’ and the diphthong /eə/ in the word ‘there’. Regarding the auxiliary verbs, students substitute the schwa by the sounds /æ/, /u/, /ʌ/, /a:/, and /ə:/ in the words ‘can’, ‘could’, ‘must’, ‘are’, and ‘were’, respectively. All these cases of fossilization of sounds could be classified as L1 Interference. Thus; the Arabic language has an impact on the pronunciation of weak-form words. A particular sound which does not exist in the first language poses a difficulty for the second language learners to produce. Second, the inconsistency of English vowels is another factor. Most of Arab learners of English, unless they have mastery of the pronunciation of each vowel sound, pronounce /e/, /ɔ/, /ʌ/ and /a/ in the place of /ə/.

This is because of their first background about each sound. So, they configure this thought in their minds as if each sound has only one kind of pronunciation. Learners need to understand that English is a non-phonetic language since there is no one-to-one correspondence between the graphemes and the sounds actually pronounced. Third, it seems rather clear that SUS lack understanding of English phonetics. And they need to study the production of English vowels. According to Han, lack of understanding is a potential cause of fossilization. In her book, she develops the idea of Perdue (1993) who sees that this factor can have negative impact on learners' motivation to learn (cited in Han, 2004).

## **5.2 Recommendations**

- i- The awareness of English weak-form words, within English language learning programs, can be the first step of understanding English native speakers.
- ii- English teachers can integrate pronunciation practice into lessons so that students can have more opportunities to practice the English weak-form words in some meaningful context.
- iii- To know the difference between the sounds /ʌ/ and /ə/, students need to be given some drilling exercises related to such errors, so that they can be more aware of their tongue, mouth, lips and teeth positions and shape.
- iv- Underhill, (1994) suggests various sound production activities that require the learners to discover their sound production capacity, and place the new sounds of L2 in their biological sound production device such as the use of vocal cord, vertical and horizontal position of the tongue etc.
- v- The recurrent use of various listening aids is very important in improving the students' standard of pronunciation learning English as a foreign language.

vi- Because of the difficulties in English functional words, students have to listen to native speakers of English more and more to realize and distinguish the nature of English weak-form words.

vii- Students should be motivated to watch some English programs or learning films on TV, radio or any visual media. These programs may offer live exposure to English pronunciation learners.

viii – Students have poor knowledge in the fields of production of English weak and strong forms. So, teachers can provide a variety of exercises and activities, such as having situational dialogues, paragraph readings, short presentations, picture descriptions, and interview exercises in or outside classrooms.

ix- Teachers should focus on giving systematic exercises and activities, to their students, from word, phrase, to sentence level.

x- Teachers can ask students to listen and read some popular song lyrics aloud to practice weak-form words.

xi- Finally, proficient English pronunciation is a ‘long journey’. Knowledge only, cannot be enough. Therefore, it is important that teachers of English should make their students vigilant of their pronunciation and provide resources as well as clear guides to help them constantly correct and self-study to improve their English pronunciation.

### **5.3 Further Research Suggestions**

- It is of great importance, according to the findings of the present study for every learner of English language to work hard on his English pronunciation in order to make his English communication without much exertion.

The practical part of this study shackled its extent to the pronunciation of the weak-form words among Sudanese university students', nonetheless; it would be suitable for further researches in the area of the English stress to be carried out so as to reveal the main rhythmical difficulties of Sudanese University Students' pronunciation.

- Further research suggestions would have to be on making much effort of the students to include other variables such as the degree of exposure.
- It should be a priority for every student of the English language to Deal with other connected speech aspects such as assimilations, illusions etc.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

Structured sentences include the investigated 'weak-form words' of the study.  
Responded by Students (pretest & posttest)

#### (1) Articles:

a- Wait for **the** end.

b- Read **a** book.

c- Eat **an** apple.

#### (2) Prepositions:

a- I'll see you **at** lunch.

b- Tea **for** two.

c- Thanks **for** asking.

d- I'm home **from** work.

e- Most **of** all.

f- Try **to** stop.

#### (3) Pronouns:

a- Which did **he** choose.

b- Live **him** alone.

c- Ask **her** to come.



d- Eat **them**.

e- Write **us** a letter.

**(4) Conjunctions:**

a- Come **and** see.

b- Fish **and** chips.

c- It's good **but** expensive.

d- As much **as** possible.

e- Better **than** ever.

f- The price is the thing **that** annoys me.

**(5) Auxiliary (modal) Verbs:**

a- They **can** wait.

b- He **could** do it.

c- Which **have** you seen?

d- Which **has** been best?

e- Most **had** gone home.

f- We **shall** need to hurry.

g- I **should** forget it.

h- You **must** try harder.

i- Why **do** they like it?

j- When **does** it arrive?

k- Why **am** I here?

l- Here **are** the plates.

m- He **was** here a minute ago.

n- The papers **were** late.

o- The questions **were** easy.

**(6) Miscellaneous:**

a- Have **some** more tea.

b- **There** should be a rule.

## Appendix B

Structured questionnaire includes the investigated ‘weak-form words’ of the study.

(Responded by Teachers)

(1) **Articles:** How do Sudanese University Students use the weak-form words of English articles: *the*, *a*, and *an*.

| Statements  | Responses                |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
| i- Students do not pronounce “the” as /ði/ (before vowels). E.g. ‘Wait for the end’. /weɪt fə ði 'end/. But pronounce it as /ðə/. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii- Students do not pronounce ‘a’ as /ə/ (before consonants). E.g. ‘Read a book’ /ri:d ə 'buk/. But pronounce it as /a/.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii- Students do not pronounce ‘an’ as /ən/ (before vowels). E.g. ‘Eat an apple’ /i:t ən æpl/. But pronounce it as /an/.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**(2) Prepositions:**

How do Sudanese University Students use the weak-form words of English prepositions;  
*at, for, from, of, and to.*

| Statements  | Responses                |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
| i- Students do not pronounce ‘at’ as /ət/. E.g. ‘I’ll see you at lunch’/ail si: ju <b>ət</b> 'lʌŋʃ/. But pronounce it as /æt/.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii- Students do not pronounce ‘for’ as /fə/ (before consonants). E. g. ‘Tea for two’ /'ti: <b>fə</b> 'tu:/. But pronounce it as /fɔ:r/.                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii- Students do not pronounce ‘for’ as /fər/ (before vowels). E. g. ‘Thanks for asking’ /θæŋks <b>fər</b> 'a:skiŋ/. But pronounce it as /fɔ:r/.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv- Students do not pronounce ‘from’ as /frəm/ (in initial or medial position). E. g. ‘I’m home from work’ /aim 'həum <b>frəm</b> 'wɜ:k/. But pronounce it as /frɒm/. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| v- Students do not pronounce ‘of’ as /əv/ (in initial or medial position). E. g. ‘Most of all’ /məʊst <b>əv</b> 'ɔ:l/. But pronounce it as /ɒf/.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| vi- Students do not pronounce ‘to’ as /tə/ (before consonant). E. g. ‘Try to stop’ /'traɪ <b>tə</b> 'stɒp/. But pronounce it as /tu/.                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

### (3) Pronouns

How do Sudanese University Students use the weak-form words of English pronouns; *he*, *him*, *her*, *them*, and *us*.

| Statements   | Responses                |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|  | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
| i- Students do not pronounce 'he' as /i/ (in medial and final position). E.g. 'Which did he choose?' /wɪʃ dɪd i 'fju:z/. But pronounce it as /hi/. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii- Students do not pronounce 'him' as /ɪm/. E. g. 'Live him alone' /li:v ɪm ə'ləʊn/. But pronounce it as /hɪm/.                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii- Students do not pronounce 'her' as /ə/ (in medial and final position). E. g. 'Ask her to come' /a:sk ə tə 'kʌm/. But pronounce it as /hə/.    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv- Students do not pronounce 'them' as /ðəm/. E. g. 'Eat them' /i:t ðəm/. But pronounce it as /ðem/.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| v- Students do not pronounce 'us' as /əs/. E. g. 'Write us a letter' /raɪt əs ə 'letə/. But pronounce it as /ʌs/.                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

#### (4) Conjunctions

How do Sudanese University Students use the weak-form words of English conjunctions; *and, but, as, than, and that*.

| Statements  | Responses                |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
| i- Students do not pronounce 'and' as /ən/ or /ŋ/ (after t, d, s, z, and ʃ). E.g. 'Come and see'/'kʌm ən 'si:/ & 'Fish and chips'/'fɪʃ ŋ tʃɪps/. But pronounce it as /ænd/.                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii- Students do not pronounce 'but' as /bət/. E. g. 'It's good but expensive' /its 'gud bət ik'spensiv/. But pronounce it as /bʌt/.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iii- Students do not pronounce 'as' as /əz/ (in initial medial position). E. g. 'As much as possible' /əz 'mʌʃ əz 'pɒsəbl/. But pronounce it as /æz/.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| iv- Students do not pronounce 'than' as /ðən/. E. g. 'Better than ever' /'betə ðən 'evə/. But pronounce it as /ðæn/.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| v- Students do not pronounce 'that' as /ðət/ (when used in a relative clause). E. g. 'The price is the thing that annoys me' /ðə 'praɪs ɪz ðə 'θɪŋ ðət ə'nɔɪz mi/. But pronounce it as /ðæt/. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**(5) Miscellaneous**

How do Sudanese University Students use the weak-form words of English miscellaneous; *some* and *there*.

| Statements   | Responses                |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|  | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
| i- Students do not pronounce ‘some’ as /səm/ (when used before uncountable nouns, meaning “an unspecified amount of”). E.g. ‘Have some more tea’/həv səm 'mɔ: 'ti: /. But pronounce it as /s^m/. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ii- Students do not pronounce ‘there’ as /ðə/ (before consonants). E.g. ‘There should be a rule’/ðə 'ʃud bi ə 'ru:l/. But pronounce it as /ðeə/.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**6) Auxiliary (modal) Verbs**

How do Sudanese University Students use the weak-form words of English auxiliaries; *can, could, have, has, had, shall, should, must, do, does, am, are, was, and were*.

| Statements  | Responses                |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Strongly Agree           | Agree                    | Neutral                  | Disagree                 | Strongly Disagree        |
| i- Students do not pronounce ‘can’ as /kən/ (in initial and medial position). E.g. ‘They can wait’/ðei kən 'weit/. But pronounce it as /kæn/. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

|   |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| <p>ii- Students do not pronounce ‘could’ as /kəd/ (in initial and medial position). E.g. ‘He could do it’/hi: <b>kəd</b> 'du: it/. But pronounce it as /kud/.</p>               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>iii- Students do not pronounce ‘have’ as /əv/ (in medial position). E. g. ‘Which have you seen?’ /witʃ əv ju 'si:n/. But pronounce it as /hæv/.</p>                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>iv- Students do not pronounce ‘has’ as /əz/ (in medial position). E. g. ‘Which has been best’ /witʃ əz bi:n 'best/. But pronounce it as /hæz/.</p>                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>v- Students do not pronounce ‘had’ as /əd/ (in medial position). E. g. ‘Most had gone home’ /'məʊst əd gɒn 'həʊm /. But pronounce it as /həd/.</p>                           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>vi- Students do not pronounce ‘shall’ as /ʃəl or ʃl/ (in initial and medial position). E. g. ‘We shall need to hurry’ /wi ʃl 'ni:d tə 'hʌri/. But pronounce it as /ʃæl/.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>vii- Students do not pronounce ‘shoud’ as /ʃəd/ (in initial and medial position). E. g. ‘I should forget it’ /I ʃəd fə'get it/. But pronounce it as /ʃud/.</p>               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <p>viii- Students do not pronounce ‘must’ as /məʊs/ (before consonants). E. g. ‘You must try harder’ /ju məʊs 'traɪ 'hɑ:də/. But pronounce it as /mʌst/.</p>                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



|  |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| ix- Students do not pronounce ‘do’ as /də/<br>(before consonants). E. g. ‘Why do they like<br>it?’ /wai <b>də</b> ðei 'laik it/. But pronounce it as<br>/du/.                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| x- Students do not pronounce ‘does’ as /dəz/<br>(in initial and medial position). E. g. ‘When<br>does it arrive?’ /'wen <b>dəz</b> it ə'raiv/. But<br>pronounce it as /dʌz/. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| xi- Students do not pronounce ‘am’ as / əm /<br>(in initial and medial position). E. g. ‘Why am<br>I here?’ /wai <b>əm</b> ai 'hiə/. But pronounce it as<br>/æm/.            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| xii- Students do not pronounce ‘are’ as /ə/<br>(before consonants). E. g. ‘Here are the<br>plates’ /'hiə <b>ə</b> ðə 'pleits/. But pronounce it as<br>/a:/.                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I- Students do not pronounce ‘was’ as /wəz/.<br>E. g. ‘He was here a minute ago’ /'hi <b>wəz</b> 'hiə<br>ə 'minit ə'gəu/. But pronounce it as /wæz/.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c- Students do not pronounce ‘were’ as /wə/<br>(before consonants). E. g. ‘The papers were<br>late’ /ðə 'peipəz <b>wə</b> 'leit/. But pronounce it as<br>/wɜ:r/.             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d- Students do not pronounce ‘were’ as /wər/<br>(before vowels). E. g. ‘The questions were<br>easy’ /ðə 'kwesʃənz <b>wər</b> 'i:zi/. But pronounce<br>it as /wɜ:r/.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## Appendix C

The outlines of the training program of the English weak-form words

(Received by students)

### WEEK 1

The first week is concentrated on two areas:

(i)- The structure of the weak-form words (function words) of English in general.

a. Articles : *a, an, the.*

b. Prepositions : *at, to, of, for, from.*

c. Pronouns : *me, we, us, he, him, them.*

d. Auxiliary or Modal Verbs: *be, been, am, is, are, was, were, have, has, had, do, does, shall, should, will, would, can, could, must.*

e. Conjunctions : *and, but, as, who, that, than.*

f. Miscellaneous : *some, there, not*

(ii)- The schwa sound in particular.

The trainees started their lessons by introducing the /ə/ symbol. They were asked to articulate this sound many times until they had been familiar with it. The exercises were aimed primarily at raising awareness of this specific phoneme and its functions in creating prominence contrasts. Then students were asked to produce pairs of schwa + different full vowels several times, e.g. /ə i: ə i:/, /ə ɔ: ə ɔ:/ etc., and to concentrate on the tongue movements from schwa to full vowels and back.

## WEEK 2

This week put forth on the rules for using strong forms. And how the trainees can identify and practice the fairly simple rules that the strong form is used, as in the following cases:

(1) For many weak-form words, when they occur at the end of a sentence; for example, the word ‘of’ has the weak form əv in the following sentence: ‘I’m fond of chips’ → /aim 'fɒnd əv 'tʃɪps/

However, when it comes at the end of the sentence, as in the following example, it has the strong form ɒv:

‘Chips are what I’m fond of’ → /'tʃɪps ə 'wɒt aim 'fɒnd ɒv/

i. When a weak-form word is being contrasted with another word; for example: ‘The letter’s from him, not to him’ → ‘ðə 'letəz 'frɒm im nɒt 'tu: im’

A similar case is what we might call a *co-ordinated* use of prepositions:

‘I travel to and from London a lot’ → ai 'trævl 'tu: ən 'frɒm 'lʌndən ə 'lɒt

‘A work of and about literature’ → ə 'wɜ:k 'ɒv ən ə'baut 'lɪtrəʃə

(2) When a weak-form word is given stress for the purpose of emphasis; for example: ‘You must give me more money’ → ju 'mʌst 'gɪv mi 'mɔ: 'mʌni.

ii. When a weak-form word is being “cited” or “quoted”; for example:

‘You shouldn’t put “and” at the end of a sentence’

ju 'ʃudnt put 'ænd ət ði 'end əv 'sentəns

## WEEK 3

This week is centered on: (1) indefinite articles; a , an (2) conjunctions; and , but (3) prepositions; at, of, for, from (4) the verb to be; be, am, are, is, was, were, been.

1. The indefinite article: <a>/<an>

a) strong forms: /ei/ and /æn/

The strong form is used exclusively in the context of quotation and receives stress in this context: You say [ei] before a consonant but [æn] before a vowel.

b) weak forms /ə/ and /ən/

The weak form is used elsewhere.

[ə] boy was bitten by [ən] alligator.

2. The conjunction <and>:

a) strong form: /ænd/

Used in the context of quotation, for emphasis and in impatient usually impolite answers where it receives stress and question-like intonation:

- I love you!

- [ænd]...??? (meaning: 'So what?!?!')

- Do you have anything apart from cosmetics in your purse?

- Hmm...I've got cosmetics [ænd] cosmetics...

b) weak forms: 1) /ən/ or 2) /n/, is used in normal speech: Read this again [ən] again until you remember it! You use 2) in fast speech before a consonant:

Dumb [n] dumber.

3. Prepositions: <at, of, for, from>

a) strong forms: /æt, ɒv, fɔ:(r), frɒm/

Used sentence finally, for emphasis, quoting, and optionally between two unstressed syllables. In the first three contexts receive stress.

What are you staring [æt]?

b) Weak forms: /ət, ə(v), f(ə)(r), frəm/

Used elsewhere.

I got it [frəm] my father [ɒn] my 10th birthday.

I'll stay [wið] you [fr] a week.

That is not my cup [ə] tea.

4. The verb 'to be' <be, am, are, is, was, were, been>:

a) strong forms: /bi:, æm, a:(r), iz, wɒz/

Used sentence initially in questions, sentence finally, in question tags, for emphasis, quoting.

- [a:] they playing our favorite song?

- Yes, they [a:].

He isn't too eager to help you, [iz] he?

b) Weak forms: /bi, (ə)m, ə(r), (r)z, wəz, wə(r), bin/

Used in other positions, as an operator in wh-questions.

They [ər] in China and they [ə] coming back in June. I've never [bin] to Ukraine

## WEEK 4

This week is intensified on: (1) the auxiliary verbs; do, does, must, can, could, shall, should, will, would (2) pronouns in nominative; you, he, she, we.

6. The verb 'to have' <have, has, had>

a) Strong forms: /hæv/, /hæz/ and /hæd/. Used sentence finally, in question tags, sentence medially as a lexical verb (meaning 'to possess something')

- Have you seen his newest movie?

- Yes, I [hæv].

He [hæz] three flats in Manhattan and two in Hollywood.

I [hæv] to stay longer at work.

b) Weak forms: 1) /həv/ or 2) /əv/ or 3) /v/ and 1) /həz/ or 2) /əz/ or 3) /z/ and 1) /həd/ or 2) /əd/ or 3) /d/.

Used as an auxiliary verb. 1) are used sentence initially or after a word ending in /ə/. 3) are used after a vowel and 2) are used elsewhere.

She[z] made a complaint against you.

John and Peter [əv] done something terrible.

[hæd - həd] you been there before that day?

7. The verb <do, does>

a) Strong forms: /du:/ and /dʌz/. Sentence finally, as a lexical verb.

- Yes, I am sure he [dʌz].

- We'll [du:] plenty of exercises!

b) Weak forms: 1) /də/ 2) /du/ and 1) /dəz/ or 3) /dz/

Used as an auxiliary verb 2) used before vowels, 3) in very fast speech [dəz] he know what to do? [du] I look as if I was your twin brother?

8. Conjunction <but>

a) strong form: /bʌt/

Sentence finally, metaphorically meaning 'doubts'. There are still some ifs and [bʌts].

I think you are right [bʌt]...

b) Weak form: /bət/

Used elsewhere.

I could have tried to help her [bət] did not have knowledge enough to do that.

9. Modal verbs <must, can, could, shall, should, will, would >:

10. Pronouns in nominative <you, he, she, we>

a) Strong forms: /ju:, hi:, ʃi:, wi:/

In emphatic contexts, sentence finally.

- So it was really [ju:]!?

- If [ʃi:] can't, nobody can!

b) Weak forms: /ju, 1) hi or 2) I, ʃi, wi/ Elsewhere. 1) used sentence initially, 2) used elsewhere.

I bet [i] can't count to 8723680276350287436.

[ʃi] was so excited that [ʃi] forgot to put on her clothes.

## WEEK 5

This week is focused on: (1) pronouns in accusative; me, you, him, her, us, them (2) pronouns in genitive; you're his her, their (3) pronoun/subject filler; there (4) modifier; some.

11. Pronouns in accusative <me, you, him, her, us, them>

a) strong forms /mi:, ju:, him, hɜ:, ^s, ðem/

Emphatic context, quoting...

It is [hɜ:] to whom I wrote the letter....

b) weak forms: /mi, ju, (h)im,, (h)ə, (ə)s, ðəm/

Elsewhere, sentence initially only the forms with /□/ are attested. They are not stressed.

I hate [im]!

12. Pronouns in genitive <your, his, her, their>

a) strong forms: /jɔ:(r), hiz, hɜ:, ^s, ðem/

Sentence finally, for emphasis.

Is this car [hiz]?



b) weak forms: /jə(r), (h)ɪz, (h)ə/

Elsewhere. /h/-initial forms are used sentence initially and after shwa.

He was doing [ɪz] best not to disappoint her but she did not care.

<their> is not reduced to shwa!

13. Pronoun/subject filler <there>

a) strong form: /ðeə(r)/. As a pronoun...

He has hidden it [ðeə].

b) weak forms: /ðə(r)/

Elsewhere: as a subject position filler (dummy subject):

[ðər] has been a terrible misunderstanding.

14. Modifier <some>:

a) strong form: /s^m/ before nouns, meaning an unidentified object/person, in the environment of weak syllables, sentence finally:

[s^m] Mr Smith is waiting for you outside the building.

[s^m] of them may be dangerous.

My mother made a delicious cheesecake, would you like to have [s^m]?

b) weak form: /səm/ Before mass nouns to mean an unidentified amount of sth. before a count nouns meaning several:

I found [səm] coins.

I need [səm] water.

## Week Six

The last week is concentrated on (1) comparative particle; than (2) preposition/particle to (3) demonstrative/relative pronoun that.

16. Comparative particle <than>:

a) strong form (sentence finally, emphasis): /ðæn/

What is he bigger than?

b) weak form (elsewhere): /ðən/

I'm better [ðən] you.

17. Preposition/particle <to>

a) strong forms /tu:/: sentence finally

Where are you going [tu:]?

b) weak forms 1) /tə/2) /tu/1) before consonants, 2) before vowels:

I'm going [tə] Japan. I want [tu] open a shop.

18. Demonstrative/ relative pronoun <that>

a) strong form /ðæt/: as a demonstrative pronoun

Why did you do [ðæt]?

b) weak form / ðæt /: as a relative pronoun

I told you [ðæt] I didn't like you.

*The end*