Speech and Pronunciation Instruction
To Improve English Language Learners’ Understandability

A First Literacy Professional Development Workshop

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Word Stress

Content Words and Structure Words

Content Words: “... the words that carry the most meaning.”
Mastering the American Accent
- Lisa Mojsin (p.85)

Content Words are said louder and longer.

I’ve been waiting for ages.
I’m afraid you’ve made a mistake.
They changed the schedule at the end of April.
They are usually:

- **nouns**
  - I want a bacon **sandwich**.
  - Grace asked for a new **bike**.

- **verbs**
  - I **have** to go.
  - Please, don’t **go** now.

- **adjectives**
  - The soup was **tasty**.
  - The concert was **nice**.

- **adverbs**
  - The class went **well**.
  - Give it to me **now**.
Structure Words

Structure words: “... generally don’t carry as much importance or meaning...”

Mastering the American Accent
by Lisa Mojsin (p.88)

❖ articles  The kids got a dog from the pound.
❖ pronouns  Where was it?
❖ indefinite pronouns  Did you see anyone at the show?
❖ prepositions  The price of gas has gone up twice since last year.
❖ conjunctions  I asked her why she was sad, but she didn’t tell me.
❖ auxiliary verbs  I haven’t seen him since last Christmas
Content Words

- nouns
- verbs
- adjectives
- Adverbs

Structure Words

- articles
- pronouns
- indefinite pronouns
- prepositions
- conjunctions
- auxiliary verbs
Structure words are reduced in speech.

These words are reduced to *schwa* most of the time.

Their full sound, i.e. as they are pronounced in isolation, changes to a schwa /ə/ as in *up, cup, because* and *does*. 
To becomes /tə/.
• I’d like to see you tonight.
• We need to do this now.
• He did it to please you.

For becomes /fər/.
• Hey! Wait for me!
• This is for Bill, not for you.
• I’m looking for my keys. Have you seen them?

As becomes /əz/.
• That’s not as much as you said.
• As soon as I got home, I called him.
• They went out to eat as always.
And becomes /n/.
• He painted the chairs black and white.
• I like bacon and eggs for breakfast.
• My father and I are going fishing.

Can becomes /kan/.
• I can go with you now.
• You can call me any time.
• They can get their passports tomorrow.
To becomes /tə/.
• I’d like to see you tonight.

As becomes /əz/.
• That’s not as much as you said.

For becomes /fər/.
• Hey! Wait for me!

And becomes /n/.
• He painted the chairs black and white.

Can becomes /kən/.
• I can go with you now.
The main stress is usually on the first word.
• She likes playing computer games.
• Did you buy that with a credit card?
• She went to the bookstore.
• Juan and his brother are taxi drivers.

The main stress is usually on the second word.
• It’s also near public transportation.
• She went to the new store.
• Juan and his brother are new drivers.
• We watched the terrible game.
Verb Phrases

Usually stress the last word.

✓ I can go there now.

✓ He doesn’t study every day.

✓ David wants to go with you.

✓ I have lived here for five years.
When a verb is in the negative form, the stress changes.

- I can do it.  
- I can’t do it.
- He should try it.  
- He shouldn’t try it.
- I’d like it.  
- I wouldn’t like it.
Word Stress

**Noun - Noun**
Stress the first noun.
- I lost my **credit** card.

**Adjective - Noun**
Stress the second word.
- That’s a good **card**.

**Verb Phrases**
Stress the last verb form.
- I **can go** there now.
- He **doesn’t study** every day.
My wife Julie and I had a great time dancing together and seeing all of our old friends.

You just got back from a long hard day at the office. You’re exhausted. All you want to do is take off your jacket, put down your briefcase, and relax over a great dinner. Then just as you’re about to sit down at the table, the phone rings.
Thought Groups

Thought Groups: “... words that belong together as a grammatical unit.”

- Grouping words naturally helps listener understand.

- There is a very short pause between one thought group and another.

- One word in each thought group usually gets the most stress.

- It conveys key information.

Mastering the American Accent
-Lisa Mojsin (p.91)
In reading, punctuation facilitates thought group formation. Grammar is the oral guide.

Identifying grammatical units helps place the pauses in a sentence. (e.g. *a beautiful woman*)

- Noun phrases
- Verbs and adverbs (*spoke rapidly*)
- Verbs and objects (*climbed tall trees*)
- Verb phrases (*was going to call you*)
- Prepositional Phrases (*after class, at the library*)
- Clauses (*When I was a boy…*) (*The student who came in late…*)

Some sentence units are small and should be separated, i.e. they are not combined

- She saw him.
- It’s her book.
- Did you lose it?
My wife Julie and I had a great time dancing together and seeing all of our old friends.

You just got back from a long hard day at the office. You’re exhausted. All you want to do is take off your jacket, put down your briefcase, and relax over a great dinner. Then just as you’re about to sit down at the table, the phone rings.
## Different T Sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Held T</th>
<th>T Before N</th>
<th>T After N</th>
<th>T Between 2 Vowels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cat</td>
<td>shorten</td>
<td>interview</td>
<td>city</td>
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<tr>
<td>late</td>
<td>kitten</td>
<td>twenty</td>
<td>little</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eight weeks</td>
<td>button</td>
<td>internet</td>
<td>party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it was</td>
<td>curtain</td>
<td>center</td>
<td>total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Tr-
- try
- traffic
- train
- trade

- The **cat** ate the food outside, on the **mat**.
- The **international** conference took place in **Atlanta** and on the **internet**.
- I haven’t **forgotten** to buy the **curtain**.
- I’ll eat it a **little** later.
- What is the **trouble** with **Tracy**?
MASTERING THE AMERICAN ACCENT

An Introduction to the Sounds of English
Sources:

**Mastering the American Accent**
Lisa Mojsin, M.A.

**Pronunciation Pairs**
Ann Baker & Sharon Goldstein