

Elements of Pronunciation

Intensive practice for
intermediate and more
advanced students

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Weak Forms

Introduction

A good practical grasp of the weak forms of English is essential to good pronunciation and listening comprehension. This section contains dialogues in which some of the more important weak forms are contextualised. The items selected are all weak forms containing the 'neutral' vowel. The first group of dialogues features individual weak forms. The remaining dialogues are devoted to a selection of sequences of two or three of the items that have first been treated individually. The pronunciation of each weak form is indicated in phonetic transcription, in the heading.

Featured items are identified in the text in a lighter type face.

There may, however, be words not in light type which need to be pronounced weakly if the dialogue is to be spoken properly. Most of such items are featured specifically elsewhere in the book, and their incidental occurrence in other dialogues can be treated as useful revision or as a foretaste. But primary attention should be given to the weak forms actually specified in the heading.

An asterisk after a word indicates that it should be pronounced in its strong form. It is not possible in such a short book to give explanations of the circumstances in which weak and strong forms are appropriate:

e.g. *the* – /ðə/ only before consonant sounds.

from – strong in final position.

that – all demonstratives strong.

Phonetics handbooks will readily provide the relevant basic information, and should be consulted.



1 a /ə/

- A So what went wrong?
 B Well, you said *all I needed was a pencil, a ruler, a piece of wood, a saw, a hammer and a couple of nails.*
 A I said you needed a pencil, a ruler, a piece of wood, a saw, a hammer, a couple of nails, and a bit of common *sense*.†
 B Ah.

† Words in italics should be given extra emphasis.

2 an /ən/

- A I need an immediate answer.
 B You shall have an answer. In an hour or so.
 A I must have an answer now.
 B It's not an easy decision to make. But if you insist on an immediate answer, it must be an extremely reluctant 'no'.
 A Oh.
 B Sorry.
 A Well, I suppose if you *do* need an extra hour or so . . .
 B But I don't, now, do I? An extra drink, yes. Have one? Before you go?



3 the /ðə/†

- A Now the* exercise – the drill.
LISTEN: The pear, the peach, the pineapple.
The* apple, the* orange, the* apricot.
REPEAT.
- B The pear, the peach, the pineapple.
The* apple, the* orange, the* apricot.
- A The father, the mother. The* uncle, the* aunt.
- B The father, the mother. The* uncle, the* aunt.
- A REVISION: Apple. Pear.
- B The* apple. The pear.
- A Good. NEW WORD: End.
- B The* end.
- A Good.
- B Good.

† Only before consonant sounds.
* Indicates a strong form.

4 some /səm/

- A Mm! Delicious, John! Can I have some more?
How d'you make it, by the way?
- B Oh, you need some lean meat, some vegetables, some butter, flour, salt. Chillies. Some garlic, if you've got some*. Lots of things.
- A Who gave you the recipe?
- B Oh, some* woman I know.
- A Well, it really *is* some* dish!
- B So is *she*! Now, you did say you wanted some more, darling?
- A Well... if I'm to have some pudding, perhaps not.



5 and /ən(d)/

- A A whisky and soda. A whisky and water. A brandy and soda.
Three gin and tonics with ice and lemon, and two gin and tonics *without* ice and lemon. And another whisky and soda.
And a glass of water for me.
- B A whisky and soda. A whisky and water. A brandy and soda.
Three gin and tonics with ice and lemon, and two gin and tonics *without* ice and lemon. And another whisky and soda.
And a glass of water for you, sir. Right, sir.
- A No, wait a minute. Let me change that. Let's have...

6 but /bət/

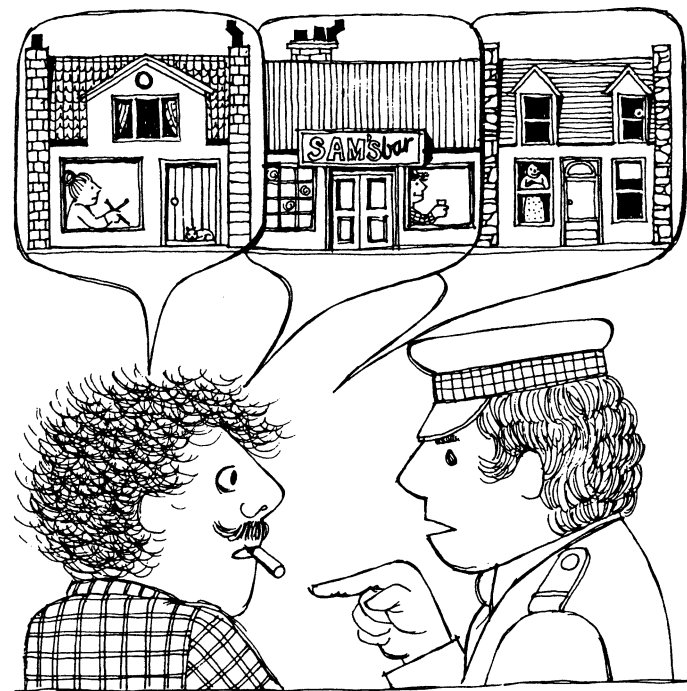
- A But I can't. I'm sorry, but I can't.
 B But you must.
 A I'd like to. But I can't.
 B But I'm depending on you. We're *all* depending on you.
 A I'll do *anything* but that.
 B But *no* one else could do it as well as you!
 A Why not ask Dalia? She could do it even *better*.
 B But she's too *busy*.

7 of /əv/

- A There you are, Betty – a bottle of milk. Three boxes of matches. A can of beans. Two bags of sugar. A packet of biscuits. A jar of jam. A bottle of lemon squash. And two tins of peaches. That's the lot, I think. OK?
 B Thanks, dear. How much was it? Ugh! What's this in the bottom of the bag?
 A Oh, yes. And half a dozen eggs.

8 from /frəm/

- A I had a call from Bill.
 B From Bill? Who's Bill?
 A He's very special. He telephones me from overseas. Every day.
 B Where from*?
 A Oh – from wherever he happens to be: Africa, America, Asia . . . From Australia, this time.
 B He *must* be special.
 A He *hates* to be away from me.
 B Of course, George sometimes rings *me* from the factory. The trouble is, *he* always reverses the *charges*!
 A Oh, *Bill* reverses the charges, of course.



9 at /ət/

- A Where were you at one o'clock?
 B At one o'clock? At my mother's.
 A At two o'clock?
 B At my sister's.
 A And at one thirty?
 B At one thirty, Officer? At a point approximately half way between my mother's and my sister's.
 A At Sam's Bar, in fact?
 B Only for five minutes, at the most. Why?

10 them /ðəm/

- A I saw them together.
 B Where did you see them?
 A In the town.
 B When did you see them?
 A This morning.
 B Did you say anything to them?
 A I told them I should tell you.
 B Which you've now done. Thank you.
 A Aren't you going to send for them?
 B No need. I've already invited them for dinner.
 A Them*? Both of them? Together?
 B Like to join us?

11 us /əs/

- A Let's ask him to let us go.
 B He won't let us go.
 A He can't keep us forever.
 B Course he can.
 A Let's escape.
 B He'd catch us. Anyway, I like it here. He treats us well. Gives us lovely clothes. Lovely food – everything.
 A He must give us our freedom!
 B Don't be greedy.

12 that /ðæt/

- A We all know that we face problems. We know that we face difficulties. We are all aware that the difficulties that we face are not difficulties that will be overcome immediately, or that will be overcome easily. We all recognise that the problems that confront us are not problems that will be solved overnight. But I sometimes wonder if we realise ... if we realise sufficiently that ...
 B That *that** was the clock striking *two*, Frank! Go to sleep!
 A Sorry, dear. Didn't know it was so late. My big day, tomorrow, you know. Ah, well. Goodnight.
 B It's a lovely speech, Frank.

13 as /əz/

- A As John couldn't come, he asked me to come as a substitute. But you're not Julie.
 B No. As Julie couldn't come, she sent me – as a substitute.
 A You know, it looks to me as if John and Julie ...
 B It does, doesn't it?
 A I disapprove of such tricks, as a rule.
 B So do I. As a rule.
 A However, ...
 B Well?



14 as ... as /əz ... əz/

- A You're as cunning as a fox.
 B Cunning? I'm as innocent as a child!
 A And as slippery as a snake!
 B Anyway, believe me, this necklace is unique! And old! Old as the hills!
 A And gold?
 B As good as.*

* Probably strong in this final position, but in very familiar speech could be weak.

15 than /ðən/

- A Carol's more sensible than Jenny, prettier than Jenny, cleverer than Jenny, and richer than Jenny. So why do I like Jenny more than Carol?
- B And why does Jenny like *me* more than you?

16 there /ðə(r)/

- A There ought to be someone here.
- B There ought to be. But there isn't, I don't think.
- A There's a light in that room.
- B Let's take a look.
- A Oh, my God!
- B Mm. It looks as if there's someone here after all, poor chap. There's a phone over there*. Better ring the police.

17 am /əm/†

- A Why am I leaving? Where am I going? Who am I going with? Where am I staying? When am I coming back? *Am** I coming back? These are questions you'll probably wish to ask me, Barbara, but ...
- B Now, darling. How am I looking?

† 'I'm' – see Dialogue 104.

18 are /ə(r)/†

- A These are the best.
- B These are nice, too.
- A Mm. But these are more suitable, don't you think?
- B They're a bit old-fashioned, perhaps.
- A And they're a bit flashy, I suppose.
- B They are*, yes. Anyway, there are no more in the shop. And we *must* give them their present today.
- A So what are we going to do?
- B Well, Freddie and Paulette are *both* a bit old-fashioned, you know.
- A Yes. But in a flashy sort of way.

† 'You're', 'we're' etc. – see Dialogues 108 and 109.

19 was /wəz/

- A The man was *kind*.
- B He was generous.
- A He was*. Extremely generous.
- B He was popular.
- A Oh, he was very very popular.
- B So when we heard he was ...
- A Yes.
- B I was ...
- A We *all* were.

20 has /əz/†

- A The bus has gone already, Janet.
- B Which has gone? The Sixty?
- A The Sixty Six has gone as well.
- B It must have gone early, unless my watch has stopped. Look – Madge has missed it too. And Rose has missed it. No use running, Rose!
- A Gosh – Rose has put on a pound or two since she last ran for a bus! Oops! No use running, Rose! It's gone!

† 'He's', 'Jack's', etc. – see Dialogue 105.



21 have /əv/†

- A The wheels have dropped off! The wings have broken! It's useless!
 B How many times have you flown it?
 A Only once! I wouldn't have bought it if I'd known!
 B And I suppose if *they* hadn't known, they wouldn't have reduced it to half price. Anyway, we all have* to learn, eh? Oh, by the way, I've bought you this. Got it from Walker's. Like it?
 A Oh, it's marvellous, Dad. Thanks. They had one in Gray's sale, but I couldn't afford it. Thanks, Dad.

† 'I've', 'you've', etc. – see Dialogues 116 and 117.



22 had /əd/†

- A All our money had gone.
 B My jewels had gone.
 A Our clothes had gone.
 B The passports had gone.
 A The air tickets had gone.
 B Everything had been taken.
 A Everything we had*. It'd all gone.
 B Except the present we'd bought you.
 A They hadn't taken that, fortunately.
 B Hope you like it.

† 'We'd', 'you'd', etc. – see Dialogues 122, 123 and 124.

23 does /dəz/

- A He *does** sound nice. But I hope you won't mind if I ask him a few questions, Millicent, such as where does he...
 B Where does he live? What sort of family does he come from? Who... *Whom* does he know that *we* know? What does he do for a living? How much money does he make? That sort of thing, you mean, mother?
 A Yes, dear. And also what does...
 B What does he see in *me*?
 A Apart from your money, dear, yes.

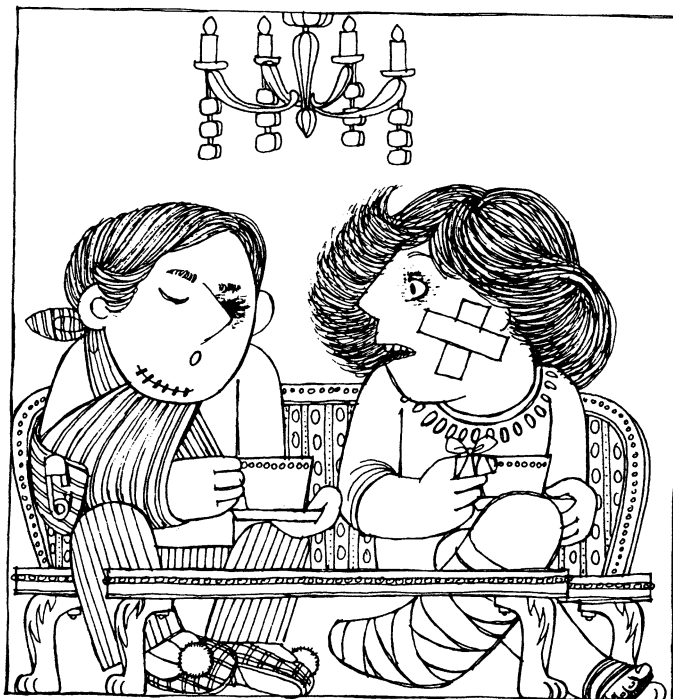
24 can /kən/

- A She can play the flute.
 She can paint pictures.
 She can write poems.
 She can grow plants.
 She can do *most* things.
 What can *I* do? I can't do *any* of the things *she* can*!
 B You can fight.
 A Yes, but who want a girl who can fight?
 B *I* do.

25 must /mə(s)t/

- A Tell me what I must do.
 B You must go to them. And you must confess. Tell them it was *you*.
 A I suppose I must*.
 B You must *trust* them. They'll be lenient†, I'm sure.
 A Yes. Yes, I suppose I must tell them *everything*.
 B Well, perhaps not *quite* everything.
 A Oh?
 B No need to mention *me*, for instance.

† lenient: not severe, tolerant



Selected combinations of two weak forms†

26 /əv + ə, ən, ðə, əs, ðəm/

- A You hate all of them.
 B No. But I dislike *one* of them. Roger, I think his name is.
 A Because of the way he dresses, I suppose.
 B No. Because of a *word* he used in front of an old lady.
 A Oh, yes. I heard. But she's so old-fashioned!
 B Some* of us *are*, I suppose. And anyway, it's hardly a *new* word is it?

27 /tə + ðə, ðəm/

- A All those friends of yours overseas – why not write to them? Or go somewhere. Go to the cinema. Or to the beach. Or to the tennis club. You *can't* sit brooding‡ about that girl all the time.
 B Yes, I think I *will* write to them.
 A Good.
 B She usually goes to the Post Office about five.

‡ brood: to think about (troubles etc.) for a long time

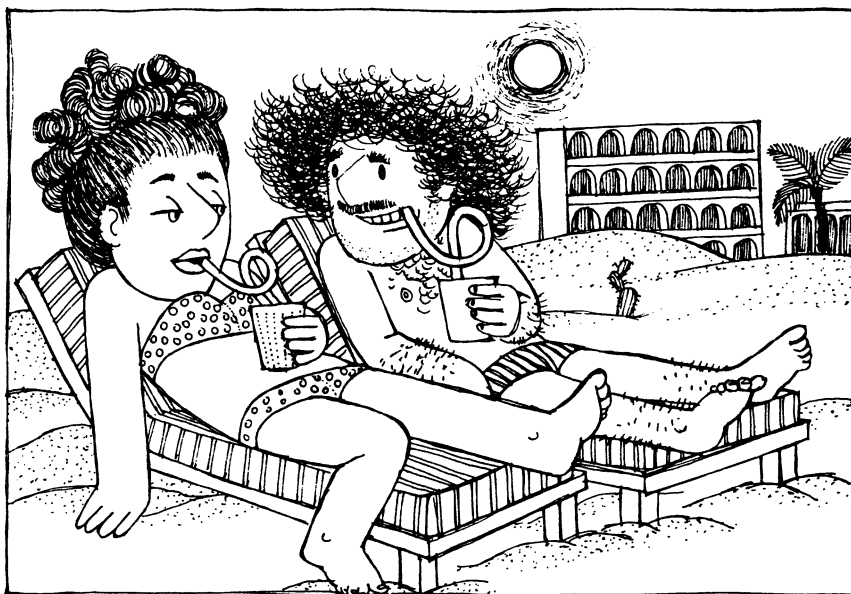
28 /ət + ə, ən, ðə, ðəm/

- A 'Stop *screeching*', did you say? Don't you know I once sang at a concert? At an *international* concert? At the biggest theatre in town? You must look at my press cuttings!
 B I *will* look at them, darling. But I have to be at a meeting at a quarter past seven. And I *would* like a bath. Do hurry up. Please!

† Where *single* weak forms from the selected *pairs* occur, these are also identified in the text.

29 /fə(r) + ə, ðə, səm/

- A How long have I come for*? For a month. Why have I come?
Oh . . . for some sunshine. For the sea. For some good food.
For the wine. For a bit of excitement, I suppose. Why did *you*
come?
- B For the money. I work here.
- A Not *all* the time, I hope.



30 /frəm + ə, ən, ðə, səm, ðəm/

- A I got it from an old friend, who got it from a friend, who got it
from some friends, who borrowed it from the Browns. Where
did you get the idea it was *stolen* from them?
- B I got it from a friend. A mutual friend.

31 /ə(r) + ə, ən, ðə, səm/

- A These are a new type. And those are the type you had before.
Oh – here are some more. These are the very latest. And the
best. Just arrived.
- B Yes, I can see those are an entirely different model. Where are
the handles, by the way?
- A Oh, er . . . Modern design, you see. No handles. No handles
needed, you see.
- B Mm. Ah! What are the *plastic* things in the bottom of the box?
- A Plas . . . Oh, yes. Optional extras, you see.

32 /wəz + ə, ən, ðə, səm/

- A *That* was a poor meal.
- B It was an *extremely* poor meal.
- A The soup was a disgrace.
- B The meat was the toughest ever.
- A All we got for pudding was some tinned fruit.
- B Where was the special sauce?
- A Where was the special dessert?
- B Nothing was the same as last year.
- A Except the bill.
- B And *that* was a bit bigger, actually.

33 /wə(r) + ə, ən, ðə/

- A You were a star. You were the greatest actress of your
generation. You were the most beautiful woman of your time.
You were an inspiration to us all.
- B And *you* were an incorrigible liar, Rupert.
- A Beatrice!
- B You still *are*, thank God.

34 /ðə(r) + ə(r), wə(r)

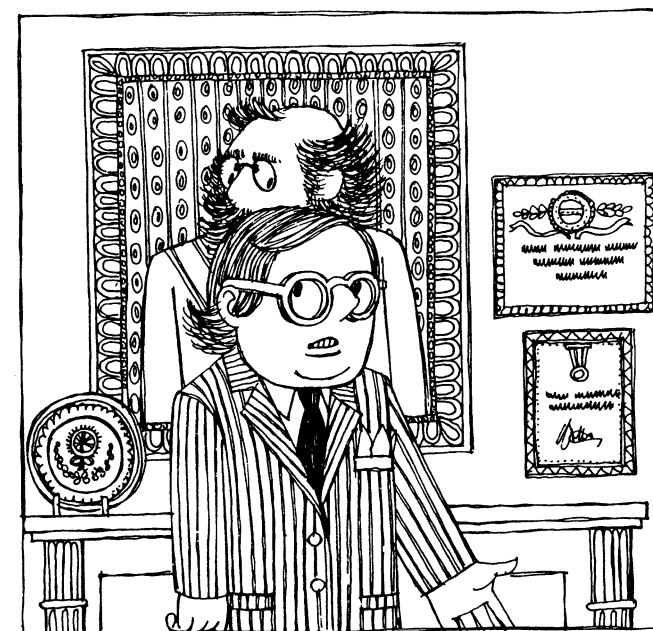
- A There were **five**.
- B There were **four**.
- A There were **five**. *At least five*.
- B There were **only four**.
- A Well, anyway, *one* thing's certain.
- B **What?**
- A There are **only four** now.
- B There are **only three**, in fact.

*Selected combinations of
three weak forms†*

35 /ən(d), bət + əv + ə, ən, ðə, səm/

- A The Company Chairman reminded everybody of the problems we face.
- B And of the difficulties before us.
- A And of the **hard road** that lies ahead.
- B And of an ever increasing need to make sacrifices.
- A And of a **need** to increase our efforts.
- B **He spoke not only** of the problems.
- A But of the **new opportunities**.
- B And of the **new challenges**.
- A And of some **recent plans**.
- B And of a **bright future**.
- A And of a **bright, though distant future**.

† Where *pairs* from the selected *threes* occur, these are also identified in the text.



36 /ən(d), bət + ət + ə, ðə/

- A George wasn't at the meeting, but at a party. A *wild* one.
 B Not at the meeting? And at a wild party? How disgraceful! Where?
 A In town. And at the house of a friend of yours – Josephine. You really must speak to George.
 B I shall *certainly* do that. But at the moment, *she's* the one I must speak to! At Josephine's you say? And at a wild party I wasn't invited to?



37 /ən(d), bət + fə(r) + ə, ðə, səm/

- A I know why you came – you came for a drink, and for some food, and for a talk with the boys, and for the television.
 B I *swear* I came here not for a drink and for the various other things you mention, but for the chance to see your pretty, smiling face again!
 A Oh, Victor!
 B So bring the food and drink, and switch on the television, and tell me where the boys are, my darling – there's a good girl.

38 /ər + ət + ə, ðə/

- A My parents are at a meeting and my sisters are at the cinema. I'm all alone. Like to join me?
 B Sorry, but *my* parents are at the theatre, and my little sisters are at the moment expecting me to bath them and put them to bed.
 A Oh.
 B Like to read them a story?

39 /wəz + ət + ə, ən, ðə/

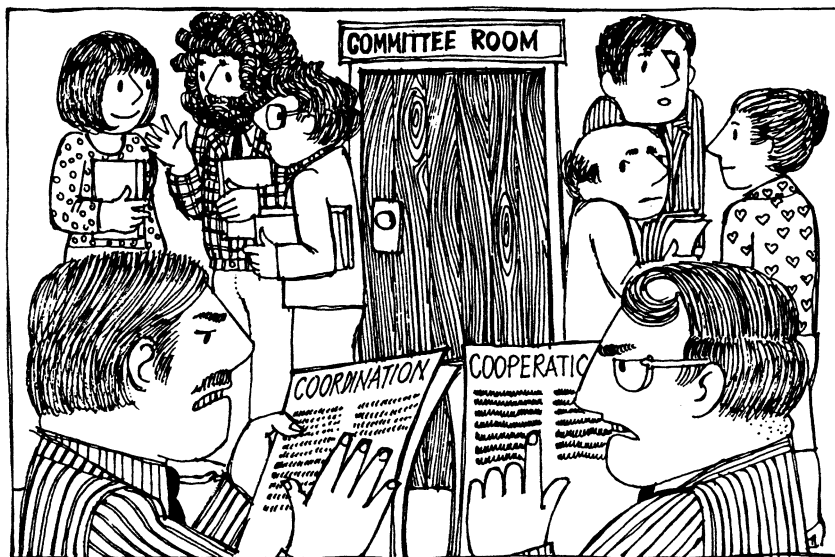
- A Last year it was at a restaurant. The year before, it was at an expensive hotel, and the year before that, it was at the factory itself – in the canteen. And that was the *best* party, I thought.
 B Yes. But *that* was at the time when your *wife* was in charge of the canteen!

40 /wər + ət + ə, ðə/

- A How terrible! Just imagine, *we* were at a concert, enjoying ourselves, while *you*, poor thing, were at the hospital, with a broken leg!
 B And a couple of very nice nurses!

41 /ə + frəm + ə, ðə/

- A Steven and Mark are from the Ministry. Robert and Sam are from the Local Government Offices. And the others are from a variety of interested organisations. We're here to discuss *co-ordination*. Who are you?
- B Simon and I are from the Ministry. The other members of our committee are coming soon. We're here to discuss *co-operation*. And this is *our* room.



42 /wəz + frəm + ə, ðə/

- A *This* was from the garden! *That* was from the garden! And *this* was from the garden! Our own garden! Aren't they superb?
- B And look at *this*! The best of all! *This* was from the garden, too, was it?
- A *That* was from a shop.
- B No, no, no. I meant *that*. *That's* the one I meant – not *that*.
- A Good.

43 /əv + əs, ðəm + ə(r), wə(r), kən, məst/

- A Only three of us are on the short-list, and *he's* the favourite.
- B Surely *none* of them can know about his private life? Or they wouldn't *consider* promoting him! One of us must do our duty!
- A If all of us were perfect, Martin, I'd agree with you. But I *must** confess...
- B Yes, James? Needless to say, you can trust *me*! Absolutely!
- A I'm glad to hear it. But perhaps more important, in this case: *You* can trust *me* – I'm sorry to say.

44 /ðə(r) + ə, wə, wəz + ə, ən, səm/

- A Anything for me?
- B There were some telephone calls. I said you'd ring back. There are some letters. Oh, yes – and there was an inquiry. *Someone* asking about something called Weak Forms. Have we got any?