5 Pronunciation for listeners 1

A Connected speech: weak forms of short grammar words

1 Listen, you're going to hear six groups of phrases. All the phrases in each group have one word in common. What is it? (Clue: It's one of these short grammar words: an, as, a, or, and, of.)

Example:
1 going about in a T-shirt
2 We were up there for a week.
3 Put them in a bowl.
4 I'd booked a room.

It can be difficult to hear these short grammar words because, in conversation, they are usually pronounced very weakly.
- They all have the same weak vowel sound: /ə/.
- Consonant sounds may be cut, e.g. and may be pronounced the same as an.
- They may link to sounds before or after, e.g. book a room sounds like book a room.

2 Listen and read the phrases that go with these pictures. The phrases are written wrongly. Rewrite them correctly.

1 a cup of tea and a biscuit
2 one of two bags of ice
3 try a neat bitter fruit
4 a pine to milk an a loaf of bread
5 as cool does a block of vice
6 a piece of cake on a nice cream

3 How would you explain the mistakes in Exercise 2?

Example:
1 A cup of tea and a biscuit sounds like a cup of tea an a biscuit because:
   - the f is cut from the word of so it's pronounced like a
   - the d is cut from the word and.

B Spoken English: thinking time

Writers usually have time to plan what they're going to put next. Speakers usually don't. When speakers don't know what to say next, they often:
- insert a noise such as um or er Fish and, um, chips!
- stretch a word Fish and, chips!
- repeat a word Fish and, and chips!
This is to give themselves thinking time.

4 Listen and show where the speaker inserts a noise using ▲.

1 … and it's warm.
2 … but when the sun's shining, excellent mood.
3 I thought I'd do a mushroom risotto.
4 … and we were up there for a week …
5 Indeed, yes, right, this is probably enough for two people.
6 … one day, you want to send your, your daughter …
7 … and family's very important …
8 … the older I get as well, it obsesses me more and more.

5 Listen and underline the words which the speaker stretches.

Notice there is often a pause after the stretched word.

1 … and if you wanna go to an Italian deli, you'll find that …
2 I guess you see, you know, there's all these, sort of …
3 … then put in the rice.
4 … and I, I think it's, er, it's good for me …
5 I think, yeah, I, I would like to have the lifestyle …
6 … and then, so that's how I knew that I absolutely loved it 'cause he was taking part in this, er, TV show
7 particularly in terms of the impacts of climate change and
8 so when the opportunity was presented to me
9 which is not that oil's going to run out
10 … in our local community to become more resilient
11 I now have to learn to like

6 Listen and circle the words or phrases which the speaker repeats.

1 … I think it's looking positive.
2 … with, er, a load of Chelsea supporters.
3 … I think it's eight and a half metres …
4 … and that should be warmed then in a saucepan …
5 … to add to the risotto.
6 … and then just garnish it with, er, fresh parsley and then serve.
7 … especially maybe if you had children as well …
8 … for example, um, if you're famous person …
9 … so that was incredible.
10 It's like adding spice to food.
11 … the impact of increasing energy costs …
12 … and again how we depend on huge shopping centres …
13 … and begin to create that kind of, er, future for ourselves …
14 … and I think a lot of the ideas that are coming out of that …

7 Listen again to the audio extracts for Lessons 2 or 4. Try to identify where the speaker inserts a noise, stretches a word or repeats a word or phrase.