

# Did you mean four or for? Insights into EFL learners' pronunciation

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## Concerning vowel reduction (VR)

- Change in quality and quantity of unstressed vowels towards a more central vowel sound (Underhill 1994)
- Connected speech processes including VR contribute to “the regularity of English rhythm” (Alameen and Levis 2015)
- Learners need to be aware of the connection between the use of strong and weak forms and speech rhythm and accentuation patterns.” (Rogerson-Revell 2011: 174)
- “All-strong form” pronunciation is unnatural and foreign-sounding (Roach 2009: 89)

## Results

	B1 LEVEL	B2 LEVEL	C LEVEL
Strong form	93%	90%	85%
Weak form	5%	9%	12%
Mispronounced e.g. /et/	2%	1%	3%

Vowel reduction is a problematic area, even for proficient EFL speakers (Gonet et. al 2010).

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## What next?

Yes, vowel reduction should receive more attention in the EFL classroom. But how?

Intelligibility as a goal, non native-likeness.

Presenting the weak form as a pronunciation norm, not the strong one.

e.g. *It's from /frɒm/ Philip, not for /fɔː/ Philip.* – emphatic stress

e.g. *What are you afraid of /ɒv/?  
I'm afraid of /əv/ spiders.*

*Who are they? They are four students.  
Who are these books for? They are for students.*

## Experiment

What was tested?

**Pronunciation of prepositions** (AT, FOR, FROM, OF, TO) across three different levels (B1, B2, C).

**Goal:** Is the correct use of weak forms affected by increased language proficiency?

**Participants:** n=91 trained in vowel reduction

B1 level n=11, B2 level n=36, C level n=44

**Task:** You want to tell your classmate that your friend Matt lives in London. Use from in your statement.

## References

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