English is a Stress Based Language.

English is considered a stressed language while many other languages are considered syllabic.

What does that mean?

It means that, in English, we give stress to certain words while other words are quickly spoken (eaten!). In French each syllable receives equal importance and therefore equal time is needed. English however, spends more time on specific stressed words while quickly gliding over the other, less important, words.

Let's look at an example:

The modal verb "can".

When we use the positive form of "can" we quickly glide over the can and it is hardly pronounced.

1 We **can** meet here.

But when we use the negative form "can't" we tend stress the fact that it is negative.

2 We **can't** meet here.

Sentence 2 is longer.

So, what does this mean when you speak?

Well, first you need to understand which words we stress . Stress words are

CONTENT words:

* Nouns
* Principal verbs
* Adjectives
* Adverbs

Non-stressed words are

FUNCTION words:

* Determiners
* Auxiliary verbs
* Prepositions
* Conjunctions
* Pronouns



Examples: The beautiful Mountain appeared transfixed in the distance . (14 syllables)

He can come on Sundays as long as he doesn't have to do any homework in the evening . (22 syllables)

Even though the second sentence 30% longer than the first, the sentences take the same time to speak. This is because there are 5 stressed words in each sentence. From this example, you can see that you needn't worry about pronouncing every word clearly to be understood (we native speakers certainly don't). You should however, concentrate on pronouncing the stressed words clearly.

We concentrate on the stressed words rather than giving importance to each syllable. so listen for (and use in speaking) the stressed words. All those words that you thought you didn't understand are really not crucial for understanding the sense or making yourself understood. Stressed words are the key to excellent pronunciation and understanding of English.

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http://esl.about.com/od/speakingadvanced/a/timestress.htm