

ENGLISH ACCENTUATION TENDENCIES

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Abstract: *Learning to lengthen stressed vowels and shorten/reduce unstressed vowels is challenging for most not English people practicing the language. Equally challenging is knowing which syllable to stress in a word. When learners are faced with a new word, they have never heard before, they base stress placement on many of the same strategies that native speakers do: analogy to phonologically similar words, stress patterns associated with classes of words or endings, or syllable structure.*

Key words: *word stress, English language, classes of word stress, words.*

The rules for English stress placement are complex because English has borrowed many words from other languages, especially French, Latin, Spanish, and Greek, with different rules for assigning stress.

The difference between stress and intonation is that stress is the relative loudness of parts of speech where intonation is the variation in the pitch of different parts of speech. Linguists generally believe that there are about 3 to 4 levels of stress in the English language. In most cases, stress does not really change the meaning of words and is more or less associated with the dialect or accent being used. Still, there are some cases, where this assumption is not valid.

Although Loudness has an inherent pitch component, stress as relative loudness sometimes has an added pitch variation. This extra pitch variation is called a pitch accent. Pitch variations are used to change the stress level of a word mostly due to rhythmic constraints imposed by the language.

Word stress in English is free, but the "freedom" of its position is regulated by four accentuation tendencies as a result of its historical development. The first and the oldest of them is the recessive tendency, according to which, stress falls on the first syllable of a word which is generally the root syllable (‘father, ‘sister,

‘husband, ‘water, ‘window, ‘ready, ‘clever), or on the second syllable in words which have a prefix of no special meaning (be‘fore, be‘come, a‘mong, for‘get, mis‘take).

The recessive tendency is characteristic of words of Germanic origin. It has also influenced many disyllabic and trisyllabic words borrowed from French, (‘colour, ‘marriage, ‘excellent, ‘garage, ‘ballet, ab‘stain, de‘pend, ob‘tain, sur‘prise, re‘main, pro‘duce, com‘pose). But: ma‘chine, tech‘nique, po‘lice.

The second tendency is the result of the mutual influence of Germanic and French accentual patterns. It is known as the rhythmic tendency, which manifests itself in stressing the third syllable from the end, (‘family, ‘unity, in‘tensity, po‘litical, a‘bility, a‘cademy, de‘mocracy, in‘finitive, com‘parison, i‘dentify).

Rhythmic stress is especially common for verbs with the suffixes -ate, -fy, -ize, (‘situate, ar‘ticate, ‘qualify, ‘organize).

The accentuation of words ending in the suffix –ion with its variants -sion, -tion, -ation, is also rhythmical in its origin. Nowadays stress falls on the prefinal syllable, but it used to be on the third syllable from the end as the spelling still shows, (ˈnation, ocˈcasion, oˈpinion).

Stress in three and four syllable words is called historically, or diachronically, rhythmical (ˈradical, ocˈcasion, iˈdentity).

In words with more than four syllables we often find the secondary stress, which falls on the first or second syllable.

It may be called synchronically rhythmical stress (adˈminiˈstration, reˈsposiˈbility, ˈpopuˈlarity, ˈphysicˈology, ˈindiˈvisible, etc).

On the auditory level a stressed syllable is the part of the word which has a special prominence. It is produced by a greater loudness and length, modifications in the pitch and quality. The physical correlates are: intensity, duration, frequency and the formant structure. All these features can be analyzed on the acoustic level. "Word stress can be defined as the singling out of one or more syllables in a word, which is accompanied by the change of the force of utterance, pitch of the voice, qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the sound, which is usually a vowel. In different languages one of the factors constituting word stress is usually more significant than the others. According to the most important feature different types, of word stress are distinguished in different languages.

1) If special prominence in a stressed syllable or syllables is achieved mainly through the intensity of articulation, such type of stress is called dynamic, or force stress.

2) If special prominence in a stressed syllable is achieved mainly through the change of pitch, or musical tone, such accent is called musical, or tonic. It is characteristic of the Japanese, Korean and other oriental languages.

3) If special prominence in a stressed syllable is achieved through the changes in the quantity of the vowels, which are longer in the stressed syllables than in the unstressed ones, such type of stress is called quantitative.

4) Qualitative type of stress is achieved through the changes in the quality of the vowel under stress" .

English word stress is traditionally defined as dynamic, but in fact, the special prominence of the stressed syllables is manifested in the English language not only through the increase of intensity, but also through the changes in the vowel quantity, consonant and vowel quality and pitch of the voice.

The analytical question here, which attracted a great deal of attention in the middle decades of the twentieth century, is how many degrees of stress need to be recognized in order to account for all such contrasts, and to show the interrelationships between words derived from a common root, such as ˈtelegraph, teleˈgraphic and teˈlegraphy.

From a purely phonetic point of view polysyllabic word has as many degrees of prominence as there are syllables in it. A. C. Gimson gives the following distribution of the degrees of stress in the word "examination":

The most prominent syllable is marked by figure 1, the second degree of prominence – by figure 2, then goes 3, and so on. However, not all these degrees of prominence are linguistically relevant.

The majority of British phoneticians distinguish three degrees of word stress in English:

1. primary (the strongest stress),
2. secondary (the second strongest) and
3. weak stress (all the other degrees of stress).

The syllables bearing either primary or secondary stress are termed stressed, while syllables with weak stress are called, somewhat inaccurately, unstressed.

In the American structuralist tradition, four such degrees are usually distinguished, and analyzed as stress phonemes, namely (from strongest to weakest):

- (1) 'primary',
- (2) 'secondary',
- (3) 'tertiary' and
- (4) 'weak'.

These contrasts are, however, demonstrable only on words in isolation, as in the compound elevator operator – one of several such phrases originally cited to justify analyses of this kind.

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