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Word- Stress

Report of Theoretical phonetic

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**Introduction**

Word stress is not used in all languages. Some languages, Japanese or French for example, pronounce each syllable with eq-ual em-pha-sis. Other languages, English for example, use word stress.

Word stress is your **magic key** to understanding spoken English. Native speakers of English use word stress naturally. Word stress is so natural for them that they don't even know they use it. Non-native speakers who speak English to native speakers without using word stress, encounter two problems:

1. They find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially those speaking fast.
2. The native speakers may find it difficult to understand them.

So, in this report we will focus our attention on the accentual patterns of English words. The sequence of syllables in the word is not pronounced identically. The syllable or syllables which are uttered with more prominence than the other syllables of the word are said to be stressed or accented. The correlation of varying prominences of syllables in a word is understood as the accentual structure of the word or its stress pattern.

**I. The nature of English Word Stress**

Any word spoken in isolation has at least one prominent syllable. We perceive it as stressed. Stress in the isolated word is termed ws, stress in connected speech is termed sentence stress. Stress indicated by placing a stress mark before the stressed syllable: Stress is defined differently by different authors. B. A. Bogortsky, for instance, defined stress as an increase of energy, accompan by an increase of expiratory and articulatory activity. D. Jones fined stress as the degree of force, which is accompanied by a stress force of exhalation and gives an impression of loudness. H. Sweet stated that stress is connected with the force of breath. Later, however P. Jones wrote, that “stress or prominence is effected by inherent sonority, vowel and consonant length and by intonation.”’ A. C. Gison also admits that a more prominent syllable is accompanied pitch changes in the voice, quality and quantity of the accented sounds.[2;179]

In disyllabic and polysyllabic words different syllables possess different degrees of special prominence in different positions in relation to the beginning, middle and end of words.

**Word stress** (WS) 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. The analysis of WS can be carried out according to the following parameters:

(i) the nature of English word-stress;

(ii) its degree and syllabic location;

(iii) its functions;

(iv) basic stress patterns of the English words.[3;171]

If we compare stressed and unstressed syllables in the two contract, we may note that in the stressed syllable:

(a) the force of utterance is greater, which is connected with more energetic articulation;

(b) the pitch of the voice is higher, which is connected with stronger tenseness of the vocal cords and the walls of the resonance chamber

(c) the quantity of the vowel is greater, a vowel becomes longer;

(d) the quality of the vowel !& in the stressed syllable is different from the quality of this vowel in the unstressed position, in why it is more narrow than.

On the auditory level a stressed syllable is the part of the word which has a special prominence. It is produced by a greater loud and length, modifications in the pitch and quality. Their physic 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 s tables in a word, which is accompanied by the change of the force 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 mo important feature different types of word stress are distinguished different languages.

If special prominence in a stressed syllable or syllables achieved mainly through the intensity of articulation, such type stress is called dynamic, or force stress.[2;179]

Stress can be studied from the point of view of production and of perception. While producing stressed syllables, speakers use more muscular energy than they do for unstressed syllables. From the perceptual point of view, stressed syllables are recognized as stressed because they are more prominent than unstressed syllables. Phoneticians claim that at least four different factors are important in making a syllable prominent:

1. listeners seem to feel stressed syllables louder than unstressed; thus loudness is a component of WS (Peter Roach explains that if one syllable in a sequence of identical syllables, e.g. ba:ba:ba:ba:, is made louder than the others, it will be heard as stressed);
2. 2) if one of the syllables in the above-given “nonsense” word is made longer, that syllable is heard stressed, so the length of the syllables is another important factor in making prominence;

3) every syllable is said on some pitch (related to the frequency of vibration of the vocal cords which is an essential perceptual characteristic of speech) . If one syllable is said with high pitch as compared to the others then it will be heard as stressed;

4) a syllable can be heard prominent if it contains a vowel that is different in quality from neighbouring vowels. If one of the vowels in the “nonsense word” is changed, the “odd” syllable: will be heard as stressed.

The phonetic manifestation of stress varies from language to language. Indifferent languages one of the factors constituting word stress is usually more significant than the others. According to the most salient feature the following types of word stress are distinguished in different languages:

1) dynamic or force stress if special prominence in a stressed syllable(syllables) is achieved mainly through the intensity of articulation;

2) musical or tonic stress if special prominence is achieved mainly through the change of pitch, or musical tone.

3) quantitative stress if special prominence is achieved through the changes in the quantity of the vowels, which are longer in the stressed syllables than in the unstressed ones.

4) qualitative stress if special prominence is achieved through the changes in the quality of the vowel under stress. Vowel reduction is often used as a manipulation of quality in unstressed syllables.

**II. Types of English Word Stress**

Types of English word stress **according to its degree**. One of the ways of reinitiating the prominence of syllables is manipulating the degree of stress. There is controversy about degrees of WS in English and their terminology. Strictly speaking, polysyllabic word has as many degrees of stress as there are syllables in it. Designating strongest syllable by 1, the second strongest by 2, etc., we may represent the distribution Jesses in the following examples:

examination indivisibility

igzeminein indivizibiloti

32415 2536174

But from a linguistic point, i.e. for the purposes of differentiating words from each

and identifying them, the fourth, the fifth and other degrees of lexical stress are redundant English, while the distinctive and recognitive relevance of the third degree of stress is a objective point. The majority of British phoneticians (D. Jones, Kingdon, A. C. Gimson among them) and Russian phoneticians (V. A. Vassilyev, Shakhbagova) consider that there are three degrees of word-stress in English:

• primary — the strongest

• secondary — the second strongest, partial, and

• weak — all the other degrees.

The syllables bearing either primary or secondary stress are termed stressed, while syllables with weak stress are called, somewhat inaccurately, unstressed. American linguists stingiest four degrees of word stress, adding the so-called tertiary stress . Contrary stress differs from tertiary that it usually occurs on the third or fourth pre-tonic syllable, and tertiary is always post-tonic, e.g. administrative, dictionary. category.[3;173]

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. Russian word stress is not only dynamic but mostly quantitative and qualitative. The length of the Russian vowels always depends on the position in a word. The quality of unaccented vowels in Russian may differ greatly from the quality of the same vowels under stress. Stress difficulties peculiar to the accentual structure of the English language are connected with the vowel special and inherent prominence. In identical positions the intensity of English vowels is different. The highest in intensity is /a/, then u:, u, e, u,

The quantity of long vowels and diphthongs can be preserved (a) pretonic and (b) post-tonic position. All English vowels may occur in accented syllables, the only exception is /, which is never stressed. English vowels /i, u, u/ tend to occur in unstressed syllables. Syllables with the syllabic m, n/ are never stressed.

Unstressed diphthongs may partially lose their glide quality. In stressed syllables English stops have complete closure, fricatives have full friction, features of forties/lenis distinction are clearly defined.

Stress can be characterized as fixed and free. In languages with fixed type of stress the place of stress is always the same.

In English and Russian word-stress is free, that is it may fall any syllable in a word:

a) idea sarcastic archaic

b) placard railway

Stress in English and in Russian is not only free but also shifting. In both languages the place of stress may shift, which helps t0 differentiate different parts of speech, e.g. linsult—to inlsult, import—to imiport.

When the shifting of word-stress serves to perform distinctive function, V. Vassil.

Stress performs not only distinctive function, it helps to constitute and recognize words and their forms (constitutive and recognitive functions).

Strictly speaking, a polysyllabic word has as many degrees of stress as there are syllables in it. American and English phoneticians give the following pattern of stress distribution in the word examination. They mark the strongest syllable with primary accent with the numeral 1, then goes 2, 3, etc.[2;180]

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.

‘Most words of more than four syllables have 2 stresses: primary (nuprefixes and entry. The primary stress falls either on the third or the second syllable from the end and the secondary stress falls on the syllable separated from the nuclear syllable by one unstressed syllable: pro-ition, recog ition, etc.

The place of word-stress in English compound words principally de“rewrite” on the semantic factor, i. e. the element which determines the mean-of the whole compound has a primary stress. But most of the compound possess the nuclear stress on the l element: ‘bookcase, ‘diligence etc, whereas compound adjectives have, as a rule, primary stress on element of the compound ‘well- ?oiown, ibsent-- jinded, etc.[1;34]

**III. Word Stress tendencies**

In spite of the fact that word stress in English is free, there are certain factors that determine the location and different degree of it. Prof. V. A. Vassilyev describes them as follows:

• the recessive tendency;

• the rhythmic tendency;

• the retentive tendency and

• the semantic factor

The first and the oldest of the English lexical stress tendencies (characteristic of all Germanic languages) known as the recessive tendency originally consisted in placing lexical stress on the initial syllable of nouns, adjectives and verbs derived from them and on the root syllable of words which belonged to other parts of speech and had a prefix. In most cases prefixes lost their referential meaning since then, with the result that recessive stress in present-day English of two subtypes:

1) unrestricted: when stress falls on the initial syllable, provided it is not a prefix which has no referential meaning. A great majority of native English words of Germanic origin are stressed this way: father mother husband, ‘wonder

2) restricted: when stress falls on the root of the native English words with a prefix which has no referential meaning now: a’mong, be’come, before,fo,’get, etc.

It is this tendency that determined the incidence of stress in a huge number of disyllabic and trisyllabic French words which had been borrowed into English until the 1 5th century (during and after the Norman Conquest).

The presence in English of a great number of short (disyllabic and trisyllabic) words defamed the development of the so-called rhythmic tendency which results in alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. Borrowed polysyllabic words developed a secondary stress on the syllable separated from the word-final primary stress by one unstressed syllable. These words began to be pronounced, in isolation, on the model of short phrases in which a stressed syllable alternates with an unstressed one: pronunciation.

The retentive tendency consists in the retention of the primary stress on the parent word: person — personal, or more commonly the retention of the secondary stress on the parent word: ‘personal — 1perso’nalily. The difference between constant accent and ‘ retentive stress consists in that the former remains on the same syllable in all the g forms of a word or in all the derivatives from one and the same root, whereas retinal, stress in a derivative falls on the same syllable on which it falls in the parent word, while i other derivatives from the same root it may be shifted e.g.: personal .

There are certain categories of English words stressing of which is determined the semantic factor, e.g. compound words and words with the so-called separable prefix The majority of such words have two equally strong stresses, both stressed parts considered to be of equal semantic importance, with the semantic factor thus canceling rhythmic tendency in word stressing, e.g.

• compound adjectives: hard-working, blue-eyed,

• verbs with post positions sit down, take off

• numerals from 13 to 19:fourteen, sixteen.

It should be noted that the rhythmic tendency becomes operative when such work occur in sentences and the first stress of a double-stressed English word disappears in an immediately or closely preceding word requires stress: a ‘very good-looking ‘girl.[3;175]

**IV. English Word Stress functions**

In discussingaccentual structure of English words we should turn now to the **functional** aspect **of word** stress. Word stress in a language performs three functions.

I. Word stress constitutes. a word, it organizes the syllables of a word Into a language unit having a definite accentual structure, that is a pattern of relationship among the syllables; a wok4 does not exist without the word stress. Thus the word stress forms the constitutive function. Sound continuum become phrase when it is divided into units organized by word stress into words.

II. Word stress enables a person to identify a succession ‘of syllables as a definite accentual pattern of a word. This function of word stress is known as identificatory (or recognitive). Correct accentuation helps the listener to make the process of communication easier, whereas the distorted accentual pattern of words, misplaced word stresses prevent normal understanding.

Ill. Word stress alone is capable of differentiating the meaning of words or their forms, thus performing its distinctive function. The accentual patterns of words or the degrees of word stress and their positions form oppositions, e.g. *‘import* — im’port, *‘billow* — *below.*

Word stress in a language performs the following functions:

1. The CONSTITUTIVE function: it organizes the syllables of a word into language unit having a defmite accentual structure, i.e. a pattern of relationship among th syllables. The word does not exist as a lexica’ unit without word stress.

J. Layer holds the view that lexical stress shows a culminative function: being characteristic property of the word, it is thought to help the listener to judge how many individual words the speaker has produced in a given utterance.

2. The IDENTIFICATORY function: correct lexical stress enables the listener to decode the information in verbal conimuriication adequately, while misplaced word stresses prevent understanding.

3. The DISTINCTI YE/CONTRAST WE function: word stress alone is capable of differentiating the meanings of words or their forms. It should be mentioned though that most words in most languages that use word stress linguistically do not possess minimal pairs based on stress. But still there are about 135 pairs of words of identical orthography in English which could occur either as nouns (with stress on the penultimate syllable) or as verbs (with stress on the final syllable), with a very small number of cases the location of lexical stress alone being the differentiating factor: import (noun) — import (verb), ‘insult (noun) — in’sult (verb).[4;130]

**V. Variation in word stress**

The stress patterns of some English words are liable to variations of different kinds. There is free variation of stress location due to some rhythmic and analogical pressures, both of which entail in addition considerable changes of sound pattern in words[3;182], e.g.

1. in some words of three syllables, there is variation between’---and-‘—patterns: *deficit, integral (adj), exquisite*.

2) similarly, in words of four syllables, there is variation between first and secon syllable stressing: *hospitable, formidable, despicable.*

Pronunciation patterns of such words due to the variation in stress placement have the status of **alternative pronunciation forms** which occur in educated usage.

Cases of variable stress placement caused by the context is known as ‘**stressshift**’. When a word of several syllables has a stress near the end of thc word, and is followed by another word with stress near its beginning, there is a tendency for the stress in the first word to move nearer the beginning if it contains a syllable that is capable of receiving stress, e.g. the word *academic* in isolation usually has the stress or the penultimate syllable /-dem-/. However, when the word *year* follows, the stress often found to move to the first syllable /k-/; the whole phrase ‘*academic year*’ will have the primary stress on the word *year*, so the resulting stress pattern will be ‘*academic ‘year*. In isolation, we say f*undamental* and *Japanese* with primary stress on -*ment* and -*nese*, in connected speech these words may have a different pattern: greater stress on *fund*- and *Jap*-.

**VI. English Word Stress - Does It Really Matter?**

Yes and No.

Yes, if you are a non-native speaker speaking to a native English speaker.

No, if you are a non-native English speaker speaking to another non-native speaker.

English language teaching theory has traditionally been based on native English forms, more specifically British and American English varieties. In today's international community however, where more than 1 billion non-native English speakers use English as a lingua franca, teaching theory is changing to focus on English as an International Language (EIL).

According to linguist Jennifer Jenkins' research on the English language, there are certain factors in English pronunciation that can influence the degree of intelligibility between a speaker and listener. Word stress is one of these factors if you are speaking with a native English speaker, but Jenkins has found that when two non-native speakers interact in EIL, word stress has little influence on intelligibility.

So why are native speakers so stressed about word stress?

Stress indicates identity

Anyone who has ever zapped between BBC and CNN has probably noticed the differences between standard British and standard American word stress. It has caused quite a CONtroversy (US), or should I say, "conTROVersy" (UK).

To a native English speaker, a certain word stress is considered appropriate or inappropriate depending on where the person is from. "Inappropriate" word stress can really rub listeners the wrong way because it deviates from their norm and indicates that the speaker is an "other" - an outsider. This can be quite FRUStrating (US)/frusTRATing (UK) for the non-native speaker who is just trying to get his point across.

After hours spent in a language LABoratory (US), or laBORatory (UK) if you prefer, non-native English speakers are still at a loss when it comes to speaking to native speakers internationally.

"So which variety is correct?" This is the most common question. Answer: "It depends who you ask!" Stress indicates different meanings of identical words

In one case however, word stress can cause problems whether you are a native speaker or non-native speaker of English: words which are spelled the same, but have different meanings (and different word stress).

Word stress can also differentiate a word's part of speech - more specifically whether the word is a noun or a verb. There are many examples of words which in their noun form take their stress on the first syllable, but in the verb form are stressed on the second syllable. Say the following words out loud: PROgress - proGRESS, OBject - obJECT, REcord - reCORD.

We would never say, "She wants to REcord a REcord one day," but rather, "reCORD a REcord." Unfortunately this isn't a blanket rule, and there are plenty of English words which sound the same both as verbs and as nouns: travel, picture, promise and visit are a few examples.

So what is the non-native English speaker to do? Sticking to the form you are most comfortable with.

Communication is a two-way street with compromise and understanding at both ends. If you meet people who can't accept the way you speak, then they're probably not worth speaking with anyway!

**Conclusion**

Stressed words are the key to excellent pronunciation and understanding of English. Word stress is not an optional extra that you can add to the English language if you want. It is part of the language! English speakers use word stress to communicate rapidly and accurately, even in difficult conditions. If, for example, you do not hear a word clearly, you can still understand the word because of the position of the stress.

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