

University of Tikrit

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Stress

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1 .Introduction

Word stress is the emphasis placed on a particular syllable within a word. English uses stress phonemically, meaning changing the stressed syllable can change the meaning.

This chapter covers:

- 1 Definition of word stress
- Stress patterns in English
- Rules and tendencies
- Stress in multi-syllabic words
- Exceptions and irregular stress

2 .Features of Stressed Syllables

- Louder
- Longer duration
- Higher pitch
- Clear vowel quality

Example:

- record (noun) → /'rek.ɔ:d/ – first syllable stressed
- record (verb) → /rɪ'kɔ:d/ – second syllable stressed

Tip: Stress can distinguish nouns and verbs in two-syllable words.

3 .Two-Syllable Words

3.1 Nouns and Adjectives

- Usually stressed on first syllable

-Examples:

-TAbLe /'teɪ.bəl/

- HAPpy /'hæp.i/

3.2 Verbs

- Usually stressed on second syllable

- Examples:

-reLAX /rɪ'læks/

- reQUIRE /rɪ'kwɪər/

Tip: Teach students noun-verb pairs to notice stress shift.

4 .Multi-Syllabic Words

-Stress usually falls on one primary syllable

- Secondary stress may occur in longer words

-Examples:

- banana /bə'nɑː.nə/ – stress on second syllable

-photography /fə'tɒɡ.rə.fi/ – stress on second syllable

Exercise: Identify primary and secondary stress in words.

5 .Word Stress Rules and Tendencies

-Words ending in -ic, -sion, -tion → stress penultimate syllable

-geoGRAPHic /,dʒiː.ə'græf.ɪk/

- conVERSION /kən'vɜːʒ.ən/

- Words ending in -ee, -eer, -ese → stress final syllable

-employEE /ɪm'plɔɪ.i/

- volunTEER /,vɒl.ən'tɪər/

-Words ending in -cy, -ty, -phy, -gy, -al → stress antepenultimate

-democraCY /dɪ'mɒk.rə.si/

- geoLOGY /dʒi'ɒl.ə.dʒi/

Tip: Stress rules are tendencies, not absolute; always verify with dictionary or IPA transcription.

-Minimal Pairs to Show Stress Difference

- CONtract (noun) /'kɒn.trækt/

- conTRACT (verb) /kən'trækt/

- PREsent (noun) /'prez.ənt/

- preSENT (verb) /pri'zɛnt/

Exercise: Students practice noun-verb stress shifts aloud.

-Summary – Word Stress

- One syllable usually carries primary stress

- Stress can distinguish nouns and verbs

- Longer words may have secondary stress

-Stress rules guide but don't guarantee correct pronunciation

-Stress affects vowel reduction in unstressed syllables

Sentence stress refers to the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables across a sentence. It gives English its characteristic rhythm.

-Content vs function words

- Stress patterns in sentences

- Weak forms and vowel reduction
- Rhythm and intonation

2 .Content Words vs Function Words

- Content words: nouns, main verbs, adjectives, adverbs → usually stressed
- cat, sleep, happy, quickly
- Function words: pronouns, articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs → usually weak
- the, is, on, can

Example:

- The cat is sleeping on the mat.
- Stressed: cat, sleeping, mat
- Weak: the, is, on, the

3 .Weak Forms

- Function words often use reduced vowels: /ə/, /ɪ/, /ʊ/
- Examples:
- and → /ənd/ or /ən/
- to → /tə/
- for → /fə/

Tip: Teach students to blend weak forms smoothly for natural rhythm.

4 .Stress-Timed Rhythm

English is a stress-timed language: time between stressed syllables is roughly equal

-Unstressed syllables are shortened to fit the rhythm

Example:

- I want to go to the cinema.

- Pronounced naturally: /aɪ wɒnt tə ɡəʊ tə ðə 'sɪn.ə.mə/

Tip: Clap or tap stressed syllables to internalize rhythm.

5 .Intonation and Stress

-Stress patterns interact with intonation (pitch movement)

- Rising intonation often signals a question

- Falling intonation often signals statement or finality

Example:

-You are coming? → rising pitch on coming

-You are coming. → falling pitch on coming

6 .Teaching Tips

-Identify stressed words: circle content words in sentences

- Mark weak forms: underline articles, prepositions, auxiliaries

- Practice reading aloud: exaggerate stress and reduction at first

- Use rhythm exercises: clap/tap stressed syllables

- Listen and repeat: mimic native speaker rhythm and intonation

7 .Summary – Sentence Stress

- Content words → usually stressed
- Function words → usually weak
- Weak syllables often undergo vowel reduction
- Stress creates rhythm and intelligibility in English
- Sentence stress interacts with intonation to convey meaning