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**Module: Phonetics**

**Course Number: 1**

**Course Titles: 1- Stress Placement**

**I. Placement of Stress**

1.1. Stress in Two-syllable Words

1.2. Stress in Three-syllable Words

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1. **Placement of Stress**

There is a certain difficulty to select and to place stress on the correct

syllable, particularly for foreigners. English is not one of those languages in which

word stress can be decided simply in relation to the syllables as can be done, for

example, in French (where the last syllable is usually stressed) or Polish (where the

penultimate syllable is stressed) and Czech (where the first syllable is stressed).

English stress is so difficult to predict and the best way for stress placement

is to learn how individual words are pronounced. However, there are rules of stress

placement with of course manyexceptions.

Recent work in generative phonology has yielded some rules to be stated.

They are very complex with too many exceptions. The information to examine is:

a. whether the word is morphologically single or complex,

b. the grammatical category to which the word belongs (nouns, verbs, adjectives...),

c. the number of syllables of the word,

d. the phonological structure of the syllable.

**1.1. Stress in two-syllable words**

One syllable lexical words are usually stressed in a sentence. For two-

syllable words, the choice is simple:

a- **Verbs:** the basic rules are:

**1-** If the second syllable has got a short vowel or only one consonant, then the

first syllable is stressed, e.g. `enter’ [**`**entǝ] – `open’ [**`**ǝʊpǝn] – exception:

`follow’ [**`**fɒlǝʊ].

**2-** If the second syllable has got a long vowel or a diphthong or two consonants,

then the second syllable is stressed, e.g. `apply’ [ǝ **`**plaɪ] – `attract’ [ǝ **`**trækt]

- `insist’ [ɪn **`**sɪst] – `perfect’ (as a verb) [pǝ **`**fekt].

b- **Adjectives:** same rules as for verbs.

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1-First syllable stressed: `lovely’ [**`**lʌvli] – `even’ [**`**i:vņ] – except: `hollow’

[**`**hɒlǝʊ]

2-Second syllable stressed: `correct’ [kǝ **`**rekt] – `divine’ [dɪ **`**vaɪn] – `alive’ [ǝ

**`**laɪv]. A few exceptions: `honest’ [**`**ɒnɪst] – `perfect’ (as an adjective) [**`**pɜ:fɪkt].

**c- Nouns:** the rules are different:

**1-** If the second syllable has got a short vowel, usually the first syllable is

stressed, e.g. `money’ [**`**mʌni] – `product’ [**`**prɒdʌkt] – `larynx’ [**`**lærɪŋks].

**2-** If the second syllable has a long vowel or a diphthong, then that second

syllable is stressed, e.g. `balloon’ [bǝ **`**lu:n] – `escape’ [ɪs **`**keɪp] – `design’

[dɪ **`**zaɪn].

**d- Adverbs and Prepositions:**same rules as verbs and adjectives.

e.g. `towards’ [tǝ **`**wɔ:dz] – `about’ [ǝ **`**baʊt] – `ago’ [ǝ **`**gǝʊ] – `today’ [tǝ **`**deɪ].

**1.2. Stress in three-syllable words**

With three-syllable words, the rules are more complex.

**a-Verbs:**

1- If the last syllable has got a short vowel or ends with not more than one

consonant, then the penultimate syllable (immediately before the last one) is

stressed, e.g. `encounter’ [ɪn **`**kaʊntǝ] – `determine’ [dɪ **`**tɜ:mɪn].

2- If the last syllable has got a long vowel or a diphthong or ends with more

than one consonant, then that last syllable is stressed. e.g. `**؍**entertain’ [entǝ

**`**teɪn] – `resurrect’ [**؍**rezǝ **`**rekt]

NB the first syllable may have a secondary stress.

**b- Nouns:** nouns have different rules:

**1-** If the last syllable has got a short vowel or the diphthong [ǝʊ] and if the

penultimate syllable has got a long vowel or a diphthong or ends with more

than one consonant, then that middle syllable is stressed.

e.g. `disaster’ [dɪ **`**za:stǝ] – `mimosa’ [mɪ **`**mǝʊzǝ] – `potatoes’ [pǝ **`**teɪtǝʊz].

**2-** If the final syllable has got a short vowel and the penultimate syllable has got

a short vowel and ends with only one consonant, then the first syllable is

stressed. e.g. `quantity’ [**`**kwɒntǝti] – `ministry’ [**`**mɪnɪstri] – `cinema’

[**`**sɪnǝmǝ] – `emperor’ [**`**empǝrǝ]

**3-** If the last syllable has got a long vowel or diphthong and/or ends with more

than one consonant, then the first syllable is stressed and the last syllable is

usually quite prominent and may have a secondary stress. e.g. `stalagmite’

[**`**stælǝgˏmaɪt] – `stalactite’ [**`**stælǝkˏtaɪt] – `intellect’ [**`**ɪntǝlekt].

c- **Adjectives:** same rules as for nouns. e.g. `insolent’ [**`**ɪnsǝlǝnt] – `opportune’

[**`**ɒpǝtju:n].

**1.3. Complex Words**

There are two major types of complex words:

Basic stem (root) + affix: **un**happy – beauti**ful**

Complex words: prefix suffix

Compound words: ice cream ; housewife ; sugar-free

**1.3.1. Affixed Words**

**Affixes:** there are three possible effects on word stress:

**1-**The affix itself is stressed, e.g. the prefix `semi’ is stressed in the word

`**semi**circle’ [**`**semisɜ:kļ] – the suffix `ality’ is stressed in the word `perso**`**n**ality**’.

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Person [**`**pɜ:sņ] >> person**ality** [**؍**pɜ:sǝ’nælǝti]

**2-**The word is stressed as if the affix was not there:

Pleasant [**`**pleznt] >> **un**pleasant [ʌn **`**pleznt]

Market [**`**ma:kɪt] >> market**ing** [**`**ma : kɪtɪŋ]

**3-**Stress on the stem but shifted to another syllable:

Magnet [**`**mægnǝt] >> magnet**ic [**mæg **`**netɪk]

1-Suffixes carrying primary stress are:

`-ain’: (for verbs only) entert**ain** [**؍**entǝ **`**teɪn]

`-ee’: refug**ee** [**؍**refju **`**dʒi:]

`-eer’: engin**eer** [**؍**endʒɪ **`**nɪǝ]

`-ese’: Japan**ese** [**؍**dʒæpǝ **`**ni:z]

`-ette’: cigar**ette** [**؍**sɪgǝ **`**ret]

`-esque’ pictur**esque** [**؍**pɪktʃǝ**`** resk]

2- Suffixes which do not affect stress placement are:

`-able’: comfort**able** [**`**kʌmftǝbļ]

`-age’: anchor**age** [**`**æŋkǝrɪdʒ]

`-al’: norm**al** [**`**nɔ:mļ]

`-en’: thick**en** [**`**θɪkǝn]

`ful’: grace**ful** [**`**greɪsfļ]

`-ing’: amaz**ing** [ǝ **`**meɪzɪŋ]

`-ish’: Ir**ish** [**`**aɪrɪʃ]

`-less’: homeless [**`**hǝʊmlǝs]

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`-ly’: huried**ly** [**`**hʌrɪdli]

`-ment’: place**ment** [**`**pleɪsmǝnt]

`-ness’: good**ness** [**`**gʊdnǝs]

`-ous’: poison**ous** [**`**pɔɪzǝnǝs]

`-fy’: glori**fy** [**`**glɔ:rɪfaɪ]

`-wise’: like**wise** [**`**laɪkwaɪz]

`-y’: funn**y** [**`**fʌni]

3-Suffixes that influence stress in the stem (root), i.e., stress remains in the stem but

shifts to the last syllable (in the stem). These suffixes are:

`-eous’: advantage [ǝd vva:ntɪdʒ]→ advantag**eous** [**؍**ædvǝn **`**teɪdʒǝs]

`-graphy’: photo [**`**fǝʊtǝʊ] → photo**graphy** [fǝ **`**tɒgrǝfi]

`-ial’: proverb [**`**prɒvɜ:b] → proverb**ial** [prǝ **`**vɜ :biǝl]

`-ic’:climate [**`**klaɪmǝt]→ climat**ic** [klaɪ **`**mætɪk]

`- ion’: perfect [**`**pɜ:fɪkt] → perfect**ion** [pǝ **`**fekʃņ]

`-ious’:injure [**`**ɪndʒǝ]→ injur**ious** [ɪn **`**dʒʊǝriǝs]

`-ty’: tranquil [**`**træŋkwɪl] → tranquillity [træŋ **`**kwɪlǝti]

`-ive’:reflex [**`**rɪfleks]→ reflex**ive** [rɪ **`**fleksɪv]

**1.3.2. Compound Words**

Compound words are called so because both words can exist independently

as English words. Sometimes, they are written as one word such as armchair –

sunflower – policeman. Sometimes, they are written with a hyphen such as: ice-

blue, and sometimes they are separated such as desk lamp.

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**Placement of Stress in these words**

**1-** If the first word is adjectival, stress is on the second.

- Loudspeaker [**؍**laʊd **`**spi:kǝ] – bad-tempered [**؍**bad **`**tempǝd] – cold-blooded [kǝʊld

**`**blʌdɪd]. The first part may carry a secondary stress when the word is too long.

**2-** If the first word is not adjectival, stress is on the first word.

- Sunflower [**`**sʌnflaʊǝ]**-** suitcase [**`**su:tkeɪs]

**3-** If both words function as adverbs, usually the second word is stressed

- North-East [**؍**nɔ:θ **`**i:st]

**4-**If the first word is a number, stress is on the second one

**-**Second class [**؍**sekǝnd **`**kla:s]

**5-**If compounds function as verbs where the first word is an adverb and the second

is a verb, stress is on the second word.

- downgrade [**؍**daʊn **`**greɪd] – back-pedal [**؍**bæk **`**pedļ]