

Lecture 5: SYLLABLE AND WORD STRESS

Syllable is the shortest segment of speech. Syllable may be defined as one or more speech sounds forming a single uninterrupted unit of utterance which may be a whole word (e.g. man, I) or part of it (e.g. morning).

There are two types of syllables distinguished depending on the kind of speech sound it ends in:

- 1) A syllable which ends in a vowel sound is called an open syllable;
- 2) A syllable which ends in a consonant sound is called a closed syllable.

The division of English words into syllables is governed by the following principal rules. The English long monophthongs, diphthongs and the unstressed short vowels always occur in a phonetically open syllable when they are separated from a following syllabic sound by only one consonant:

Meeting ['mi:-ti]

Voices ['voi-siz]

Army ['a:-mi]

Ordinarily ['o-di-nə-ri-li]

People ['pi:-pl]

Garden ['ga:-dn]

A short stressed vowel in the same position, i.e. when separated from a following syllabic sound by only one consonant, always occurs in a closed syllable, the syllable boundary being within the consonant:

City ['siti]

Many ['meni]

Spanish ['spæni]

Little ['litl]

WORD STRESS

The basic rules of English word accentuation are: in the most disyllabic words the accent falls on the initial syllable:

Ready ['redi]

palace ['pælis]

In disyllabic words with a prefix which has lost its meaning the stress falls on the second syllable, that is to say, on the root syllable:

Begin [bi 'gin]

pronounce [prə'nauns]

In disyllabic verbs ending in **-ate, -ise, -ize, -fy** the stress falls on the last syllable:

Dictate [dik'teit]

surprise [sə'praiz]

In most words of three or four syllables the accent falls on the third syllable from the end of the word:

Family ['fæmili]

cinema ['sinimə]

The accent on the third syllable from the end is especially typical of polysyllabic verbs with the suffixes **-ize, -fy, -ate**:

Recognize ['rekəgnaiz]

qualify ['kwɒlifai]

The accent falls on the third syllable from the end of the word before the following suffixes:

-logy *psy'chology*

-logist *bi'ologist*

-graphy *ge'ography*

-grapher *ge'ographer*

-cracy *de'mocracy*

The accent falls on the second syllable from the end of the word before the following suffixes:

-ian *phy'sician*

-ience *ex'perience*

-ient *ex'pedient*

-cient *e'fficient*

-al *pa'rental*

-ial *e'ssential*

-ual *ha'bitual*

-eous *cou'rageous*

-ious *de'licious*

-iar *fa'miliar*

The accent falls on the final syllable formed by the following suffixes **-ee, -eer, -ier, -ade, -esque**.

The root syllable in such words has secondary accent;

Refuge ['refju:dʒ] – *refugee* [ˌrefju'dʒi:]

Employ [im'ploi] – *employee* [ˌimploi'i:]

Picture ['piktʃə] – *picturesque* [ˌpiktʃə'resk]

Most words of more than four syllables have two stresses: primary(nuclear) and secondary. The primary stress falls either on the third or the second syllable from the end. In most words the secondary stress falls on the syllable separated from the nuclear syllable by one unstressed syllable:

Pronunciation [prə,nʌnsi'eɪn]

Patriotic [ˌpætri'otɪk]

In many derivative nouns the secondary stress falls on the same syllable which has the primary stress in the original word:

'organize - ,organi'zation

pe'culiar – pe,culi'arity

If the original word has both a primary and a secondary stress, the secondary stress in the derivative word remains on the same syllable, while the primary stress changes its place and falls on the syllable preceding the suffix:

Recommend [ˌrekə'mend] – *recommendation* [ˌrekəmen'deiʃn]

Some English words have two primary stresses, the second being the nuclear one. Most English words which have two primary stresses are formed with prefixes or suffixes. One of the two primary stresses falls on the root syllable, the other on the suffix or the prefix:

Chinese [ˈtʃaɪ'nɪz]

trustee [ˈtrʌs'ti:]

Illegal [ɪ'liɡəl]

Numerals from 13 to 19 are pronounced with two primary stresses: the first primary stress falls on the root syllable and the nuclear stress falls on the suffix **–teen**.

Words with separable prefixes also have two primary stresses. They are as follows:

- 1) **un-, dis-, non-, in-, il-, im-, ir-** as negative prefixes

Disappear [ˈdisə'piə]

Non-final [ˈnɒn'faɪnəl]

Irregular [ɪ'reɡjʊlə]

- 2) **ex-** meaning 'former'

ex-president [ˈeks'prezɪdənt]

- 3) **re-** denoting repetition

rewrite [ˈri:'raɪt]

- 4) **under-** with various meanings (subordination, assistance, insufficiency):

underdo [ˈʌndə'du:]

- 5) **anti-** meaning 'contrary to':

antiwar [ˈænti'wo:]

- 6) **sub-** meaning 'subordinate', 'assistant':

sublibrarian [ˈsʌ blai ˈbreəriən]

7) **inter-** meaning ‘among’:

‘inter’national

8) **mis-** meaning ‘wrong’:

‘mis’behave

9) **vice-** meaning ‘in place of’:

‘vice-’president

10) **over-** meaning ‘too much’:

‘over’excite

11) **pre-** meaning ‘before’:

‘pre’war

12) **out-** meaning ‘surpass’:

‘out’go

13) **arch-** meaning ‘chief’:

‘arch’bishop

14) **ultra-** meaning ‘utmost’:

‘ultra’modern

There are some compound nouns which have:

a) the nuclear accent on the second element, the first being unstressed:

mankind [mæn ˈkaind]

b) the nuclear accent on the first element and the secondary on the second which is pronounced on a low level pitch:

hair-dresser [ˈheə ˈdresə]

c) the pre-nuclear primary accent on the first element and the nuclear one on the second:

ice-cream [ˈaɪs ˈkri:m]

tea-pot [ˈti: ˈpɒt]

Compound adjectives have a primary stress on each element of the compound:

Well-known [ˈwel ˈnaʊn]

Light-blue [ˈlaɪt ˈblu:]

Composite verbs also have two primary stresses:

To ‘get ‘up

To ‘come ‘in

To ‘go ‘out

