AN ANALYSIS OF 'STRESS' IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE:

A STUDY OF THE RULES AND APPROACHES.

Bipin Bihari Dash

Lecturer In English

Dept. Of Humanities

College Of Engineering And Technology, Bhubaneswar

A Constituent College Of B.P.U.T, Odisha

ABSTRACT:

In linguistics stress is the relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word, or to certain words in a phrase or sentence. English is what is known as a stressed language; stressed languages that are with differing levels of emphasis for the different words and syllables in the sentence. Native speakers of English use stress naturally. Word phrase or sentence 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. They find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially those speaking fast and the speakers of English will get insight in learning the rules of stress.

KEYWORDS: *Syllable, word & sentence stress, contrastive stress, stressed & syllable timed language, accent.*

INTRODUCTION

There are four skills of language, listening, speaking, reading, & writing (LSRW). Listening & reading are receiving skills whereas reading & writing are Productive skills. In the language learning process speaking comes after listening. It is proved that effective language learning starts from speech training good speech in English involves command over the system of sounds, stress, and intonation to the

language. It is also believed that other skills cannot be taught effectively until speech is placed on the top priority. In this context, Saleem views: "the sensitivity of speaking to form the nucleus of all linguistic activity"(1983, p.168.). Stress, also known as accent is a phenon that has been termed a key to the pronunciation of an English word. This is also a linguistic feature that creates rhythm in English language. Gilani (1996, p.3) writes: "the study of stress/ accent as a paralinguistic feature is so vital that no one can learn the pronunciation of an English word without learning its accent". Sethi and Dhamija (1989, p.132) points out: "the word accent is an essential part of the word shape".

SYLLABLE

According to Das et al, a syllable is a cluster of sounds which forms either a complete word having a meaning (e.g. red), or a part of a word (e.g. the syllable 'ab' which forms the first of the word 'absent'). Normally, each syllable contains only one vowel (a, e, I, o, or u) or vowel sound.

SYLLABLE TIMED AND STRESS TIMED LANGUAGES:

Language is the vital means of communication. Verities of people and communities are living in the world having different languages with their different written and spoken forms. So far as speaking is concerned these languages may be broadly divided into two categories:

- Stress timed
- Syllable timed

English language is called a stress timed language because the time taken to speak a sentence depends on the number of stressed syllables and not on the total number of syllables. Languages such as Hindi, odia, Bengali etc. on the other hand, are called syllable timed languages, because the time taken to go from one syllable to the next, whether stressed or unstressed, is always the same. The time taken to speak a sentence depends on the total number of syllables and not on the number of stressed syllables, as in English.

STRESS

In English some syllables are spoken with a greater degree of force than the others are. Syllables that are pronounced more forcibly than the others are said to be stressed. Syllables that are pronounced without much force are called unstressed. Roach (1993, p. 85-86) writes: all stressed syllables have one characteristic in common, and that is called prominence; stressed syllables are recognized as stressed because they are more prominent than unstressed syllables.

How important is teaching to place stress on the right syllables in English, it would be worth quoting to Clifford et. al. (1985, p.19) who says that stress: is the key to the pronunciation of an English word and the location of the accent always be learned with the word.

LEVELS OF STRESS

There are two kinds of stress primary stress & secondary stress. According to Bansal & Harrison "The syllable on which there is a pitch change is said to have the primary or tonic accent. Any other prominent syllable is said to have secondary accent. Primary accent is marked with a vertical bar above and in front of the syllable to which it refers secondary accent with a bar below and in front of the syllable.

Examples of primary stress:

'Accident, com'mittee, under 'stand, 'calculate, enter'tain

Examples of secondary stress:

, Anthropology, organization, edu, cate, calcu, late, over, simplification

LEXICAL & PROSODIC STRESS:

The stress placed on syllables within words is called word stress or lexical stress. The stressed placed on words within sentences is called sentences or prosodic stress. Languages in which the position of the stress can usually be predicted by a simple rule are said to have fixed stress. For example, in Czech, Finnish, & Hungarian the stress almost always in first syllable of a word. French words are sometimes said to be stressed on the final syllable. Languages in which the position

of stress in a word is less predictable are said to have variable stress. This applies to English, Russian, Italian, & Spanish.

Concept of stress with structure and content words:

English words can be divided into two categories: content words and structure words. Content words are usually stressed, while structure words are usually unstressed. In certain cases they may receive stress.

Here is a list of the structure/ function words:

Category   **Examples**

- determiners   a, an, the, some, much, more
- pronouns   he, they, anybody, it, one
- conjunctions   and, as , but, then, that, when, or
- prepositions   at, on, in, since, for, to
- auxiliaries   is, am, are, have, has, had, do does did
- modals   shall, may, can would must
- Particles   no, not nor, as, down ,up

Structure words are pronounced in their strong forms in the following cases:

- ❖ auxiliary verbs are generally stressed when placed before sentences to form questions

  e.g.; 'are you coming to the party?

- ❖ When they occur in final position of a sentence.

  E.g. could you please tell me where the hospital 'is?

- ❖ when they are emphasized

  E.g. I am not sure he will recover. But he 'is recovering.

- ❖ pronouns are stressed when they contrast as in:

  E.g. my bike is superior to 'yours.

❖ reflexive pronouns are always stressed when they are used as subject intensifier:

E.g. he did the work him 'self.

❖ prepositions are stressed when:

They occur at the end of a sentence

E.g. who are you speaking 'to?

❖ when two structure words are contrasted

E.g. I go 'to and 'from the station every day.

STRESS VARIATION

There are several pairs of words in English which have the same spelling but belong different grammatical classes. Such words can be used either as nouns or as verbs. However, there is a shift in stress in these words. When they are used as nouns, the stress is on the first syllable and when used as verbs, they are stressed on the second syllable.

Examples;

Nouns	**verbs**
'con-duct	con-'duct
'ob-ject	ob-'ject
'pre-sent	pre-'sent
'pro-cess	pro-'cess
'ex-port	ex-' port

STRESS SHIFT

It should not be assumed that words with the same stem will keep the primary stress on the same syllable. Indeed, stress shift in derivatives is quite normal, e.g.,

a' cademy, aca 'demic, a cade' mician

indi' vidual, individu' ality, individual' listic

'politics, po' litical, poli' tician

' photograph, pho 'tography, photo' graphic

'diplomat, 'di plomacy, diplo' matic

'certify, cer 'tificate certify' cation

CONTRASTIVE STRESS;

Stress is not always pre-determined, but can be moved from its normal position in a sentence. take, for example, the sentence 'I did not take the test yesterday'. Normally, stresses would fall on the content words only, giving us the pattern:

I did not 'take the 'test 'yesterday'.

But if the stresses are placed on other syllables, which do not normally take stress special meanings can be created. For instance:

> ➢ 'I did not take the test yesterday. (Somebody else did.)
> ➢ I' did not 'take the test yesterday.(I did not take it)
> ➢ I did not' take the test yesterday.(I did something else with it)
> ➢ I did not take 'the test yesterday. (I took a different way)
> ➢ I did not take the 'test yesterday.(I took something else)
> ➢ I did not take the test 'yesterday.(I took it some other day)

COMPOUND WORDS:

In compound words, that is, words consisting of combinations of two words, the primary accent is generally on one element.

Examples:

▪ **primary accent on the first element**
e.g. 'Anything

'Backbone

'Earthquake

'Goldsmith

In compound nouns, the stress is on the first part

e.g. 'Blackbird

'Greenhouse

In compound adjectives, the stress is on the second part

E.g. good-' natured   Old- 'fashioned

in compound verbs, the stress is on the second part

E.g. over 'flow

Under 'stand

WHAT IS WORD STRESS?

In English, we do not say each syllable with the same force or strength. In one word, we accentuate ONE syllable. We say one syllable very loudly(big, strong) and all other syllables very quietly.

WHY IS WORD STRESS IMPORTANT?

Word stress is not used in all languages. Some languages, Japanese or French for example, pronounce each syllable with equal emphasis. other languages, English for example, use word stress.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.

RULES OF WORD STRESS IN ENGLISH

There are two very simple rules about word stress:

- ✓ One word has only one stress.
- ✓ We can only stress vowels, not consonants.

ANALYSIS OF STRESS RULES ON THE WORD

Here are a few rules for accentual patterns in English words.

(1) Words with weak prefixes are accented on the root, and not the prefix.

E.g. a 'broad, ad 'vice, a 'mount, at 'tend, be'tween, com'pose, de'velop, re'duce

(2) The inflectional suffixes –es, -ing, -ed, and the following derivational suffixes do not affect the accent: -age, -dom, -en, -er, -ess, -ful, -less, -let, -ly, -ment, -ness, -or, -some, -ward.e.g.,

match	' matches
begin	be 'ginning
want	' wanted
break	' breakage
free	'freedom
bright	'brighten
board	' boarder
god	' goddess
care	' careful
class	' classify
aim	'aimless
book	' booklet
bad	' badly
appoint	ap'pointment
bitter	' bitterness
conquer	' conqueror

fear   ' fearsome

back   ' backward

(3) words ending in –ion have the primary accent on the last syllable but one.

   e.g. qualifi'cation, culti'vation, imagi'nation, exami'nation

(4) Words ending in –ic, -ical, -ically have the primary accent on the syllable preceding the suffix, e.g., apolo'getic, e'lectrical, patri'otic, sympa'thetically.

(5) Words ending in –ity, are accented on the syllable preceding the suffix, that is, on the third syllable from the end- the ante-penultimate syllable,

e.g., e'quality, possi'bility, mo'rality, origi'nality

(6) Words ending in –ial, -ially have the primary accent on the syllable preceding the suffix, e.g., cere'monial, es'sential, confi'dentially,

(7) In words of more than two syllables ending in –ate, the primary stress is placed two syllables before the suffix, that is, on the third syllable from the end, e.g.,' fortunate, 'separate, 'educate

(8) Words ending in-ian are stressed on the syllable preceding the suffix,

e.g., li'brarian, mu'sician, poli'tician

(9) Words ending in-ious are accented on the syllable preceding the suffix.

e.g., in'dustrious, lu'xurious, vic'torious

(10) The following suffixes take the primary accent on their first syllable.

-aire   million'aire

-eer   ca'reer

-ental   funda'mental

-ential   exis'tential

-esce   acqui'esce

-escence   effer'vescence

-esque   gro'tesque

-ique   phy'sique

-it is   neu'ritis

CONCLUSION:

The important thing from the learners point of view is that putting stress on the right syllables when one speak English is extremely vital. It is clear that there are no strict rules for determining the stress in English. Here we have presented the valuable and fundamental things about stress. In order to need the clarity about the expression the use of stress is very essential. it is expected that my effort would help the learners knowing and learning about the nature of stress in English language. This analysis would encourage and support the students to explore the subject in a greater depth.

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