

**ASSINGMENT - 2**

**Phonology (5658)**

**THE DIFFERENCE IN THE STRESS PATTERNS  
BETWEEN THE NOUN AND VERB FORMS**

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## 1. Abstract

This research paper explains the nature of stress. The characteristics of stressed syllables on the basis of which we can identify them as stressed and unstressed, have also been highlighted. A comprehensive lesson plan comprising of the necessary stages of preparation, presentation, practice and production for the teaching of difference in the stress patterns between different pairs of words having identical spellings but belonging to different classes of words, has also been presented.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Nature of Stress

**2.1.1.** Stress is an important feature of English. Word stress is the special emphasis that we give to certain syllables in a word. This emphasis is produced by a stronger chest pulse.

**2.1.2.** Only words of more than one syllable are marked for word stress. Stressing a word wrongly can lead to greater misunderstanding than pronouncing phonemes wrongly, hence, of great importance. "Stress may be described as the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is uttered..... a strong force of utterance means energetic actions of all articulatory organs; it is usually accompanied by gesture with the hand or head or other parts of the body; it involves a strong 'push' from the chest wall and consequently strong force of exhalations; this generally gives the objective impression of loudness. Weak force of utterance involves weak action of the chest wall resulting weak force of exhalatory and giving the objective acoustic impression of softness". (**Jones Daniel, An Outline of English Phonetics, p. 245**). According to Daniel Jones, one or more sounds in a word or a phrase are heard to stand out more prominently than their immediate neighbors; and a syllable is essentially a sound sequence containing a peak of prominence. If a word or a phrase contains a number of peaks of prominence, the degrees of prominence are unequal at various peaks. In other words, some syllables of a word or phrase are perceived more distinctly than others.

**2.1.3.** **Jones Daniel** says that the prominence of a given sound may be increased or diminished by means of any one of the three sound attributes, **length, stress, or intonation**. A common and effective means of increasing prominence is to increase

the stress. In English, increase of stress is generally accompanied by a modification of intonation and sometimes by an increase of length.

**2.1.4.** It is important not to confuse stress with prominence. The prominence of a syllable, according to Jones Daniel is its degree of distinctness. “The term stress, refers only to the degree of force of utterance; it is independent of length and intonation, though it may be, and often is, combined with these.” (**Jones Daniel, An Outline of English Phonetics, p. 246**).

## **2.2. Strong and Weak Syllables**

**2.2.1.** In English, many syllables are weak. It is necessary to study, how these weak syllables are pronounced and where they occur in English.

**2.2.2.** A strong syllable described in term of its phonetic characteristics will be the one, having as its centre, one of the vowel phonemes, but not  $\partial$  (**schwa**). According to Jones Daniel, weak syllable on the other hand, can have four types of centre: **(i)** the vowel  $\partial$  (**schwa**), **(ii)** a close front unrounded vowel in the area of **i:** and **ɪ**, **(iii)** a close back rounded vowel in the area of **u:** and **ʊ**, **(iv)** a syllabic consonant.

**2.2.3.** When weak syllables containing vowels are compared with strong syllables, we find the vowels in a weak syllable tend to be shorter, of lower intensity and different in quality, e.g. in the word ‘**father**’ | **fa:òð** |, the second syllable which is weak is shorter than the first, is less loud and has a vowel that cannot occur in strong syllables. In the word ‘**bottle**’, | **b tɪ** |, the weak second syllable contains no vowel at all, but consists entirely of the consonant l.

**2.2.4.** The nature of stress is simple enough – the first syllable of words like ‘**father**’, ‘**open**’, ‘**camera**’ is stressed, that the middle syllable is stressed in ‘**potato**’, ‘**apartment**’, ‘**relation**’ and that the final syllable is stressed in ‘**about**’, ‘**receive**’, ‘**perhaps**’. We marked a stress syllable by placing a small vertical line just before the syllable

**fa:**                      **p tɪt**                      **b t**

### 2.3. The Characteristics of Stressed Syllables

2.3.1. Looking at words, as they are said in isolation is an artificial situation. Except for a few such instances as ‘yes’, ‘no’, ‘possibly’, ‘please’, and the interrogative words such as ‘what’, ‘who’ we do not often say words in isolation. But looking at words in isolation does help us to see stress placement and stress levels more clearly than studying them in context of continuous speech.

2.3.2. We can study stress from the point of view of production and of perceptions; the two are closely related, but are not identical.

2.3.3. 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.

2.3.4. In weak syllables, the most frequently encountered vowels are  $\text{ɪ}$ ,  $\text{e}$  and

(Syllabic consonants are also quite common). We can look on stressed syllables as occurring against a “**background**” of these weak syllables, “..... so that their prominence is increased by contrast with these background qualities. Prominence, then, is produced by four main factors: (i) **loudness**, (ii) **length**, (iii) **pitch** and (iv) **quality**. Generally these four factors work together in combination, though syllable may sometimes be made prominent by means of only one or two of them”.

**(Roach Peter English Phonetics and Phonology, p.74)**

2.3.5. To begin with let us consider the word ‘**around**’, where the stress falls clearly on the last syllable, and the first syllable is weak. The point to be noted is that, from the point of view of stress, the most important fact about the way we pronounce this word is that “..... on the second syllable the pitch of the voice does not remain level, but usually falls from a higher to a lower pitch”. **(Roach Peter, English Phonetics and Phonology, p.74).**

round

The author further explains, “the prominence that results from this pitch movement, or tone, gives the strongest type of stress; we call this **tonic strong stress** when we wish to refer specifically to this type of stress. It is also called **primary stress**.” (Roach Peter, *English Phonetics and Phonology*, p.74). In some words, a type of stress weaker than tonic strong stress but stronger than that of the first syllable of ‘around’, can be observed, for example in the first syllables of the words ‘photographic’ / ˈfɒtəˌɡræfɪk /, ‘anthropology’ / ˌæŋθrəˈpɒlədʒi /. The stress in the first syllables of the above mentioned words can be called **non tonic strong stress**; it is also called **secondary stress**. The third syllable of ‘activated’, ‘enterprising’, are also quite prominent, but most speakers of English would probably not feel that they were as strongly stressed as the first two examples. It is to be noted however, that unstressed syllables containing , ɪ , or a syllabic consonant will sound less prominent than an unstressed syllable containing some other vowel, for example the first syllable of ‘poetic’ / ˈpɔɪ.ɪk / is more prominent than the first syllable of ‘pathetic’ / ˈpæθ.ɪk /.

## 2.4. Placement of Stress within the word

**2.4.1.** The question of the placement of stress at the correct syllable within the word causes a great deal of difficulty, particularly to foreign learners. English is not one of those languages where word stress can be decided simply in relation to the syllables of the word, as can be done in **French**, where the last syllable is usually stressed, in **Polish**, where the syllable before the last is usually stressed or **Czech**, where the first syllable is stressed. Many writers have said that “..... English word stress is so difficult to predict that the best approach is to treat stress placement as a property of the individual word, to be learned when the word itself is learned.” (Roach Peter, *English Phonetics and Phonology*, p.76). In order to decide on stress placement, it is necessary to make use of some or all of the following information: (i) whether the word is morphologically simple or complex, (as a result either of containing one or more affixes or of being a compound word) (ii) the grammatical category to which the word belongs. (iii) the number of syllables in the word (iv) the phonological structure of those syllable. The rules for the placement of word stress in

two and three – syllable words are different, as they are for words belonging to different grammatical classes.

**2.4.2. Disyllabic words:** Most English words of two syllables have one strongly stressed syllable and one weak one. In some words, the strong stress is on the first syllable and in some words; it is on the second syllable. For example, in the nouns ‘**increase**’ and ‘**insult**’, the first syllable is strong and the second is weak / **ɪn**krɪz /, / **ɪn**sʌlt /. There are however some disyllabic words in which both syllables have strong stress. Such as ‘fifteen’, ‘prepaid’ are double stressed words. Their stress is subject to rhythmical variations in the sentence.

## 2.5 Word Stress For Verbs And Nouns.

**2.5.1.** The choice in case of disyllabic words is still simple, i.e. either of the two syllables will be stressed. For **verbs**, the basic rule is that if the second syllable of the verb contains a long vowel or a diphthong, or if it ends with more than one consonant, that second syllable is stressed. Thus, **apply** : / **ə**plʌɪ /; **attract**: / **ə**trækt /; **arrive** : / **ə**raɪv /; **assist**: / **ə**sɪst /. If the final syllable contains short vowel, and one or no final consonant, the first syllable is stressed. Thus, **enter**: / **ɛ**ntə /; **open**: / **ə**pən /; **envy**: / **ɛ**nvi /; **equal**: / **ɪ**gʊəl /. A final syllable is unstressed, if it contains **ə**, e.g **follow**: / **f**ɒləʊ /, **borrow**: / **b**ɒrəʊ /. There are however some two syllable verbs that seem to be exception to the above, they may be interpreted as morphologically complex, e.g., **permit**: / **p**ərɪt /. Two syllable simple adjectives are also stressed according to the same rule, giving us **lovely**: / **l**əvli /, **even**: / **ɪ**vən /, **hallow**: / **h**ələʊ /, **divine**: / **d**ɪvaɪn /, **correct**: / **k**ɒrɪkt /, **alive** / **a**lɪv /. As with more stressed rules there are exceptions, e.g., **honest**: / **h**ɒnɪst /, **perfect**: / **p**ɜːfɪkt /, both of which end with two consonants but are stressed on the first syllable.

**2.5.2. Nouns** require a different rule: If the second syllable contains a short vowel, the stress will usually come on the first syllable. Otherwise it will be on the second syllable, **money**: / **m**ʌni /, **product**: / **p**rɒdʌkt /, **larynx**: / **l**ærɪŋks /, **estate**: / **e**steɪt /, **balloon**: / **b**əˈluːn /, **design**: / **d**ɪzɪn /. Other two syllable words such as adverbs and prepositions seem to behave like verbs and adjectives.

**2.5.3. Word – Class Pairs:** There are several dozen pairs of two syllable word, with identical spelling, which differ from each other in stress placement, in accordance with the word class to which they belong. Some examples are: **abstract**, **produce** etc.

### 3. Lesson Plan: To Teach the Difference in the Stress Patterns between the Noun and Verb Forms.

**3.1. Preparation:** The students will be asked the definition of a syllable. The teacher then brings the attention of the students, to the point in the difference between the pronunciation of words, in situations where the same word acts as a noun and at other instances it acts as a verb. For example,

- 3.1.1. rebel: (N) /    / - (V) /    /**  
 (N) The rebel was punished.  
 (V) The soldiers rebelled against the orders.
- 3.1.2. object: (N) /    / - (V) /    /**  
 (N) He could not identify the object.  
 (V) They objected to his proposal.

**3.2 Presentation:** The teacher, having the students taken a complete notice of a difference in pronunciation of the word pairs, the member of each pair belonging to a different grammatical class, presents the reasons for this difference in complete detail.

**3.2.1** The teacher first of all defines and explains the nature of stress. The concept of strong and weak syllables is made clear to them. The characteristics of stress syllable are explained. The criteria which decide the placement of stress within the word, is explained. The rules for the difference in word 'stress' in disyllabic words, in accordance to the grammatical category to which they belong, are given. The students are then given a list of words, with identical spellings but performing different functions in a sentence, as they belong to different grammatical categories, e.g. **subject, rebel, protest, present, permit**.

**3.3 Practice:** In order to clarify the difference in the stress patterns between the noun and verb forms of words, the phonetic transcription along with the stress symbol placed at the correct place, is shown on charts with the stressed syllable written with a colored marker. The sentences for each word from the word pair is written on one side of the

white board. The students practice the stress patterns of each word. They imitate the teacher's pronunciation and the placement of stress, for word in isolation. The teacher repeats each words and students follow. The students are given sufficient practice in pronouncing the words correctly. After practicing three to four pair of words, they are also given individual attention. Later on, the same words are practiced in the context of sentence as well.

- 3.3.1. Conduct:** (N) /                      / - (V) /                      /  
 (N) His conduct was appreciable.  
 (V) The whole function was conducted by the students.

- 3.3.2. Contract:** (N) /                      / - (V) /                      /  
 (N) The contract was signed by both the parties.  
 (V) Metal contracts under low temperature.

- 3.3.3. Subject:** (N) /                      / - (V) /                      /  
 (N) Math's was his favourite subject.  
 (V) Thousands of people contract Malaria every year.

**3.4 Production:** The students will be given pairs of words with phonetic transcription and stress marks. They will be asked to pronounce the words in isolation and then in sentence. Pairs of word are as follows:-

- 3.4.1. Command:** (N) /                      / - (V) /                      /  
 (N) The archangels followed the Satan's command.  
 (V) Satan commanded his archangels to gather around him.

- 3.4.2. Desert:** (N) /                      / - (V) /                      /  
 (N) They crossed the desert in two days.  
 (V) The dacoits had to desert the village.

- 3.4.3. Present:** (N) /                      / - (V) /                      /  
 (N) She likes the present very much.  
 (V) The trophy was presented to the winning team.

- 3.4.4. Record:** (N) /                      / - (V) /                      /  
 (N) The school record showed him as an excellent student.  
 (V) He was asked to record each and every detail.



**3.4.5. Permit: (N) / - (V) /**

(N) This is your permit.

(V) Please permit me to say.

**4. Conclusion.** In English, therefore, a shift in stress pattern can indicate a shift in the way a word functions. As mentioned above the stress pattern in English word is so difficult to predict that 'the best approach is to treat stress placement as a property of the individual word, when the word itself is learned.' A practice with pairs of words, with words in isolation as well as in the context of sentence, having stressed syllables highlighted, enables the students to learn the placement of stress, conveniently.

**References:**

1. Jones Daniel, An Outline of English Phonetics. Cambridge University Press
2. Roach Peter, English Phonetics and Phonology. Cambridge University Press