

Words Stress

Outline

- Phonetics of stress
 - Levels of stress
- What do English speakers know?
- Is stress predictable?

Question

- What do we already know about stressed syllables in English?
 - That aspiration occurs there

Phonetics of stress

- Stress syllables are longer, louder, have higher pitch
- Unstressed syllables typically reduce to schwa, centralized [ɪ, ə], or complete vowel deletion
- Typically, we recognize three levels of stress
 - Primary, secondary, unstressed
- IPA transcription
 - [pɪəˌnʌnsɪˈeɪʃn]

What do English speakers know about stress?

- They know that stress is not in fixed position
 - ‘*Object* (Noun) vs. *Ob’ject* (Verb)
 - This is different from many other languages
 - E.g. Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, French
 - Q: what about Slovak prepositions?
 - And similar to other languages
 - E.g. Russian
 - ‘*muka* ‘torment’ vs. *mu’ka* ‘flour’ (though not many pairs like this)

How do they know which syllable to stress?

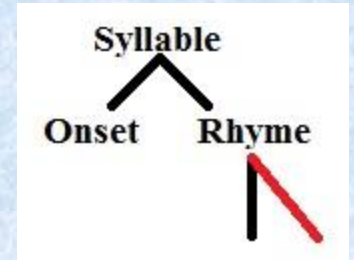
- Hypothesis: speakers of English remember the stress contour of every word they know.
- Test: borrowings
 - Where is the stress in these words?
 - Babushka, Bolshevik, Romanov
 - English speakers: Ba'bushka, 'Bolshevik, 'Romanov
 - Russian speakers: 'Babushka, Bolshe'vik, Ro'manov
 - What about tennis players with *-ova* endings?
- This consistency can't result from memorization. Hence, there must be some systematic way in which we can determine stress location even in words we never heard.

So...

- English is neither like Slovak nor like Russian
- English stress is not fixed (can fall on virtually any syllable in a word) but it is not totally unpredictable either.
- In vast majority of cases, we can determine the stress

Heavy vs. light syllables

- Heavy syllables have a branching rhyme (recall the lecture on syllables)
 - CVV (diphthong or long vowel)
 - CVC coda consonant
- Light syllables have short (or no) vowel
 - CV
 - [əʊ] often behaves as a single V for stress assignment



(rough) Rule of Stress Assignment

a. Noun rule: stress the penultimate syllable if heavy. If the penultimate syllable is light, stress the antepenult.

a.'ro.ma a.'gen.da 'di.sci.pline

b. Verb rule: stress the final syllable if heavy. If the final syllable is light, stress the penultimate syllable.

o.'bey u.'surp a.'tone 'tally 'hu.rry

- So where is the stress in *discipline* and why?
 - Why not disciPLINE if we get *spline*, *decline*,...??
- There are exceptions in morphologically simple words
 - spaghetti, catamaran, orchestra, ...
- Additional stress generalization concern the morphological structure

Affixes and word stress

(Full details in Roach, Ch11)

- Carry the stress themselves
 - Some bi-syllable prefixes
 - Anti-, semi-, ...
 - Some suffixes
 - -ette, -eer, -ese, -ee, -esque,...
- Do not affect the position of stress
 - Most prefixes
 - All inflectional and some derivational suffixes
 - -able, -ing, -ful, -like, -less,...
- Affect the position of stress
 - Stress on the syllable before the suffix
 - -ic, -ive, -ion, -ious,...

Compounds

- Houses
 - Green house, white house
 - Normally, compounds stress the first word to differentiate them from 2-word combinations
- Some compounds stress the second word
 - Bad-tempered, second-class, head-first
 - Mostly adjectives and adverbs

Word stress and parts of speech

- For words that can function as verbs and nouns/adjectives, stress the final syllable if a verb, stress the first syllable if noun/adjective.

Summary

- Things to keep in mind when determining stress (Roach p. 88)

- i) Whether the word is morphologically simple, or whether it is complex as a result either of containing one or more affixes (that is, prefixes or suffixes) or of being a compound word.
- ii) The grammatical category to which the word belongs (noun, verb, adjective, etc.).
- iii) The number of syllables in the word.
- iv) The phonological structure of those syllables.