

UNIT ONE: WORD STRESS

Lesson 02: Stress patterns

Nature of stress

In English, when a word has more than one syllable, one of the syllables is produced with more force, energy, and prominence than the rest of syllables, this emphasis is called **STRESS**.

For example: ' Carry, a ' go, ' sailor, ' organize, uni' versity.

We mark a stressed syllable by placing a small vertical line (') high up before the syllable. The accented pattern of English word may be considered as **fixed** because the stress falls on the same syllable in a given word but it may be considered as **free** because it may fall on the first, second, third or last syllable in a given word.

For example:

water / ' wɔ:tə/ together / tə' geðə/ information / ,ɪnfə'meɪʃn/ Volunteer / ,vɒlən'tɪə/

Levels of stress

- There are two levels of stress: **primary** stress and **secondary** stress. A third level refers to **unstressed** syllables.

For example: ' Carry, a ' go, ' sailor, uni' versity.

For Example, in the verb **organize**, there are three levels / ,ɔ: gə' naɪz/.

- In some words, we can find a stress which is weaker than the primary stress (called **secondary stress**).

Characteristics of stressed Syllables

From the perceptual point of view, all stressed syllables have one characteristic in common that is **prominence**. Stressed syllables are recognised as stressed because they are more prominent than unstressed syllables.

Factors influencing syllable prominence

1. Pitch:

It is the most efficient factor for recognizing the prominence of stressed syllable, in which the stressed syllable is pronounced with a higher pitch than unstressed ones.

2. Energy of articulation (loudness):

The stressed syllables seem to be louder to the listener's ear than unstressed ones.

3. Quantity/ Duration (length):

Stressed syllables are longer than unstressed ones and take more time to be pronounced than the vowels of the unstressed syllables, which are reduced in length.

4. Quality:

The stressed syllable mostly has strong vowels /e, æ, ɒ, ɑː, iː, ɔː, ɜː, əʊ, aɪ, aʊ/ whereas the weak vowels such as /ə, ɪ, ʊ/ are frequently unstressed in polysyllable words.

In order to decide about stress placement, it is necessary to make use of some or all of the following:

- Whether the word is morphologically **simple or complex** (containing one or more affixes, or being a compound word)
- The **grammatical category** to which the word belongs (noun, adjective, verb, adverb...)
- The **number of syllables** in the word
- The phonological structure of the syllable