

Lesson 06: distinctive functions of stress

THREE Functions of the Syllable



1. **The constitutive function** of the syllable manifests itself in the fact that the syllabic forms higher-level units-words, accentual or rhythmic groups, utterances. There are distinctive variations in loudness (stress), in pitch (tone), & in duration (tempo, length). Thus, syllable maybe stressed & unstressed, high, mid or low, rising or falling, long or short.
2. **The distinctive feature** of the syllable is to differentiate words & word combinations. Phonemes exist & function within the syllable. Therefore words are actually differentiated by the syllable as one articulatory or perceptible unit. E.g. / bi:t / "beat" & "bead" / bi:d / differ not only in their consonant phonemes / t / & / d /, but also in the length of / i:/, which is conditioned by the neighboring *fortis* and *lenis consonants*.

Syllable division is very important too in distinguishing words & utterances:

/ naitreit / "nitrate" - / naitreit / "night-rate" / neim / "a name" - / neim / "an aim"
/ ai skri:m / "I scream" - / aiskri:m / "ice-cream"

3. The **identificatory function** of the syllable is conditioned by the hearer's perception of syllables as entire phonetic units with their concrete allophones & syllabic boundaries.

The listener identifies two syllables in "plum pie" & "plump eye" bulging with the corresponding boundaries before / p / & after / p /, bec. in the first example / p / is unaspirated & / m / is shorter on account of the following fortis / p /. Thus, shifting of the syllabic boundary causes not only a strong foreign accent, but also misunderstanding on the part of the listener.

The stress Patterns of English words

There are languages in which stress is always falls on the first syllable (as in Czech and Finish), or on the last syllable (as in French and Turkish). Word stress in such languages is said to be fixed. English words is said to be free because stress is not fixed to any particular syllable, in all the words of the language.

- G. Torsuyev, who has made a special analyses of English stress patterns, distinguishes more than 100 stress patterns, which he groups into 11 main types. The most common among them are:
- ⊥ (Words w/1 primary stress as in "after")
 - ⊥ ⊥ (Words w/2 primary stresses, as in "week'end")
 - ⊥_&_⊥ (words w/one primary and one secondary stress, as in 'hair-, dresser, maga'zine).

MOREOVER, though W-s in English is called free, there are certain tendencies in English which regulate the accentuation of words. There are 2 main accentuation tendencies: the recessive and the rhythmic tendency.

- According to the recessive tendency, stress falls on the 1st syllable (e.g. "mother", "father", "sister", "brother") or on the 2nd syllable (e.g. be'come, in'deed, for'give etc.) According to the rhythmic tendency stress is on the 3rd syllable from the end (in'tensity, possi'bility).
- It has also been noticed that the stress of the parent word is often retained in the derivatives. 'Personal-,perso'nality, 'nation-,natio'nality.

N.B. This regularity is sometimes called the retentive tendency in English.

There is one more tendency in English: the tendency to stress the most important elements in words. Such negative prefixes as "-un, -in, -mis, -ex, -vice, -sub, -under, semantically important elements in compound words: well-'known, red-'hot, bad-'tempered.

The functions of word-stress

1. Word-stress has a **constitutive function**, as it moulds syllables into a word forming its stress pattern.
2. Word-stress has a **distinctive function** in English, because exists there different words in English with analogous sound structure which are differentiated in speech only by their stress pattern. E.g.

Noun / adjective verb
'Insult in'sult
'Subject sub'ject

3. Word-stress has an **identificatory function**, because stress patterns of words enable people to identify definite combinations of sounds as meaningful linguistic units. A distortion of the stress pattern may hamper understanding or produce a strange accent