

Introduction to Sentence Stress

Sentence stress is considered as **free** because it is largely determined by the meaning to be conveyed. Some words are predisposed by their function in the language to receive the accent. They are called content (lexical words): main verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs.

Content words have in connected speech the qualitative pattern of their isolated forms; therefore, they retain some qualitative prominence even when no pitch is associated to them and when they are relatively unstressed.

Function words (grammatical, structural words) belong to the category of unstressed words, but they may be exceptionally stressed if the meaning requires it. They are words such as auxiliary verbs, modals, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, articles...

Many function words may have 2 or more qualitative and quantitative patterns according to whether they are accented or unaccented.

*The accented form is called the 'strong form' and the unaccented form is called the 'weak form'

* If we want to show stress and intonation at sentence level, several principles should be kept in mind:

- In isolation every word has a primary stress (although stress of monosyllabic words is not indicated).
- Monosyllabic words are not stressed in isolation; however, they always receive stress in a sentence.
- In words stress we identified different degrees of stress, we may do so in sentence stress, too.
- In sentence stress, the last stressed syllable is the strongest. It is called the nucleus (in neutral intonation)

* Sentence stress falls on the **stressed syllable** of all the **content words**. Function are most of the time unstressed except in certain situations.

Exercise: Transcribe the following words, the full sentences

Committee, international, participate, interesting, conference

It's an international committee.

He participated in an interesting conference

Exceptions: Function words may be stressed in the following situations

Transcribe the underlined words

* Function words may carry sentence stress if **emphasized**.

I don't think I **can** do it.

But I think you **can** do it.

* **Polysyllabic** function words may carry sentence stress.

behind ,ago , until ...

* **Adverbs** are usually stressed, even if they are technically **structural words**.

It's **too** late to change our minds.

* **Adverbs of position** carry sentence stress.

I'm not coming **here** again.

I left it over **there**.

* **Demonstratives** carry sentence stress.

This book is really worth reading.

That's the stupidest idea I've ever heard. /

* **Negatives** are stressed.

I'm **not** coming here again.

We **can't** expect everything.

I hope you **won't** be annoyed.

* **Interrogative pronouns** carry sentence stress.

What are you doing?

Who is that person over there? /

Remark: Function words may be stressed when they are in isolation, at the end of the sentence or when the speaker wants to emphasize them.

But in neutral intonation, they are weakened, however there are exceptions (interrogative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, polysyllabic words...)

Activity: Mark stress in the following paragraphs

In Algeria and around the world, the image of the family continues to change. The traditional family in which the man was the breadwinner, the woman the homemaker and the children numerous and obedient, is giving ways to new ideas about what the modern family should look like.

Homework: Mark stress in the following paragraphs and underline the nucleus (neutral intonation.

Canada is one of the best countries in the world to live in. First, Canada has an excellent health care system. All Canadians have access to medical services at a reasonable price. Second, Canada has a high standard of education. Students are taught by well-trained teachers and are encouraged to continue studying at university. Finally, Canada's cities are clean and efficiently managed. Canadian cities have many parks and lots of space for people to live. As a result, Canada is a desirable place to live