INTRODUCTION TO WORD STRESS

In English, when a word has more than one syllable, one of the syllables will be produced with more force, energy, and prominence than the rest. This emphasis is called *stress*. We mark a stressed syllable in transcription by placing a small vertical line (ˈ) before the start of the syllable. One word cannot have two stresses. If you hear two stresses, you hear two words. It is true that there can be a "secondary" stress in some words. But it is much smaller than the primary (main) stress, and it is only used in long words containing more than two syllables.

- ***Stress in monosyllabic words*** is not marked in dictionary. E.g.: Far /faː(r)/, Post /pəʊst/.

- ***Stress in polysyllabic words*** is marked with (ˈ). E.g.: Correct /kəˈrekt/, dictionary /ˈdɪkʃənr i/.

Features of word stress

1. **Loudness:** Stressed syllables seem to be louder to the listener's ear than unstressed ones.

2. **Duration or Syllable length:** Stressed syllables are longer than unstressed ones and take more time to pronounce than the vowel of the unstressed syllables, which is reduced in length.

3. **Vowel quality:** the stressed syllables mostly have strong vowels (e.g., /aː/, /iː/, /ɔː/, /ɜː/, /əʊ/, /aɪ/, /aʊ/ …etc.), whereas the weak vowels (e.g., /ə/) are frequently unstressed in polysyllable words.

4. **Pitch of the voice:** 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.

Levels of stress

- **1st Level: *The primary stress*** or (the accent) is strongest type of stress in prominence, that is, (longer, louder, and higher in pitch). E.g.: fashion /ˈfæʃn̩/, event / ɪˈvent /, language /ˈlæŋgwɪdʒ/.

- **2nd Level: *The secondary stress*** is weaker than the primary stress in prominence. E.g.: Examination / ɪgˌzæmɪˈneɪʃn /, Photographic /ˌfəʊtəˈgræfɪk /, Rewrite /ˌriːˈraɪt /.

- **3rd Level: *Unstressed or zero stress*** which is the absence of stress. It can be found in the weak syllables /ə,ɪ,ʊ/ and syllabic consonants. E.g: Money /ˈmʌni/, Design /dɪˈzaɪn/, Enter /ˈentə(r)/.

The choice of stress placement depends on the type of words (i.e., *simple words*, *complex words*, or *compound words*) and the rules governing stress in each of them.