

Lecture No. 1 (Second Year)

Chapter Ten: Stress in Simple Words (pages-73-75)

In a string of syllables, one syllable is often described as being the strongest among them. This syllable is often perceived and/or produced as being stronger than the others. Thus, a syllable is made strong in terms of perception (**hearing**) and production (**producing**).

A strong syllable is made while exerting more muscular effort. This means that muscles that are responsible for expelling air from the lungs are often more active.

It is not easy to identify which syllable is the strongest in a given utterance. However, this task can be made easier if one uses instruments such as speech analysis software, which can show which syllable is the strongest and can attract the stress.

There are four different factors that make a syllable prominent (stronger) than other syllables within an utterance:

1. **Loudness:** A syllable that attracts the stress in the utterance is made and heard as louder than other syllables. If a syllable is made louder than others it is mostly likely a stressed syllable.

2. **Length:** Length is one of the important aspects related to prominence. If a syllable is stressed, it is often pronounced longer than other syllables.
3. **Pitch Level:** A syllable that is produced with a high pitch level is often chosen to be stressed. On the other hand, a syllable with a low note and less vibration of the vocal cords is considered unstressed because it is pronounced with a low pitch level.
4. **Quality:** A syllable with a different quality i.e. the structure of its rhyme (the vowel and the coda) is different from other syllables' in the same utterance, is likely to be stressed.

Generally, these factors work together to make a syllable more prominent and hence stressed.

Levels of Stress

The discussion above hints at a plus-minus analysis of stress. In other words, it suggests that a syllable is either stressed or unstressed in an utterance. Actually, this not totally true.

There are degrees of stress in between stressed (plus) and unstressed (minus). A syllable is either stressed or unstressed is not well supported with regard to stress placement in English.

The strongest syllable in an utterance is often stressed and given **primary stress**, and a syllable that is very weak is **unstressed**. However, a syllable that is strong but not given primary stress is also found and given **secondary stress**. A syllable that is weak but not the weakest may be given a **tertiary stress**.

So far, we have been discussing four levels of stress which are:

Primary stress ---- the strongest syllable

Secondary stress --- strong syllable

Tertiary stress --- weak

Unstressed syllable – the weakest

Anyway, in this course we will only be concerned with primary and unstressed levels.