

Lecture No. 2 (Second Year)

Chapter Ten: Stress in Simple Words (pages-75-77)

Placement of Stress within the Word

The process of placing stress on the correct syllable is not an easy one.

This is basically due to the fact that stress in English is not fixed on one position in all cases. Any syllable in a multi-syllable word can attract the stress in English, and being stressed is not an inherited feature to any syllable.

To elaborate, in a word of four syllables, for example, any one of the four syllables can take the primary stress. In several other languages, the stress is fixed on one particular syllable which always attracts the stress regardless of any thing missing or available.

In **French**, for example, the **last syllable** is usually stressed, so any French word is directly and easily stressed on its final syllable. The same is true in **Polish** where the **syllable before the last** is usually stressed, while in **Czech**, the **first syllable** is stressed.

- Is learning each word stress individually a good idea?

Actually, some scholars suggest that English words stress should be learnt for all words one by one. So, whenever, a learner learns a new

word she should learn where the stress is given. This is unfortunately impossible.

- Why?

1. We have thousands of English words in the dictionary of the language and learning them by heart is totally impossible.
2. New words are being created, may be every day, and this makes learning them a tiring task.
3. Word stress may change when the word is used in connected speech. A word alone may be stressed on the first syllable, but when it is part of a long utterance, its stress position might change.
4. There are words that have more than one correct stress position, and this also adds more difficulty to the learning task.

There are four factors that decide which syllable is to be stressed in a word of more than one syllable.

Factor One: The morphological structure of the word i.e. is it simple, complex (with affixes), or compound (combined with one or two words to make new words)?

Factor Two: The grammatical category of the word i.e. is the word a noun, a verb, an adjective or

Factor Three: The number of syllables in the word is also important.

Factor Four: The phonological structure of the syllable i.e. what is the structure of the rhyme (the vowel and the consonants after the vowel if any).

The most important factor among these is **FOUR**. We should look at the type of vowel found under the nucleus and whether there are any consonants under the coda.

Take these tips which organise syllables from strong to weak:

1. A rhyme with a **long vowel** such as /i:/ or a **diphthong** such as /aɪ/ with or without a coda is the **strongest** structure.
2. A rhyme with a short vowel such as /ɪ/, /o/, or /e/ followed by at least one consonant is **less strong but still strong**.
3. A syllable with one vowel such as the **schwa**, /i/ or /u/ and one coda is also **weak**, **syllabic consonants** also make the syllable weak.