



IIT Madras

ONLINE DEGREE

English-I(Basic English)
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Lecture-13
Stress in Words

Welcome to the class. We are going to look at stress in words in English. For this purpose, we are going to look at where the stress is exactly located in a word. In our continuing efforts to look at words in English, for improving the way we speak, improving our pronunciation and therefore making our language impressive, when we speak these elements of language like stress, syllabification, sounds, different places of articulations of sounds, different manners of articulations of sounds; these are important factors which will help us improve our language.

These things build confidence in us, i.e., the improved language, the improved pronunciation, which plays a very vital role when we speak, makes us sound impressive and thus, in turn, it builds confidence. So, in continuation of this effort, we are going to look at syllabification and stress. We have looked at syllabification, but particularly today we are going to look at stress. And remember, all these things are related to words that we need to pay attention to.


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Syllables



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- A **syllable** is a unit of organization for a sequence of speech sounds.
- Syllables have nucleus (most often a vowel) with optional initial and final margins (typically, consonants).
- Words can have several syllables.
 - One syllable words
 - Two two syllable word,
 - Three syllable words,
 - Four syllable words



So, word, as we know, is a unit which is made of sounds. So, sounds come in a different sequence, i.e., consonant and vowel sound, come in a different sequence to make a word which eventually will also have some meaning. So, this is what we mean when we say a word is a distinct meaningful element. A word in language is the meaningful unit when it comes to spoken language, and we are familiar with the examples of smaller words like bees, hair, matter, tall.

We are randomly picking up these words for you to take and see the examples of this. When we look at word very closely, we find that there is something between sounds and words. Basically, what we are saying is, before we reach the level of words, it is not just made up with sounds. Sounds combined together to make a syllable and syllables make a word. So, in between sounds and words, there exists a notion called syllable.

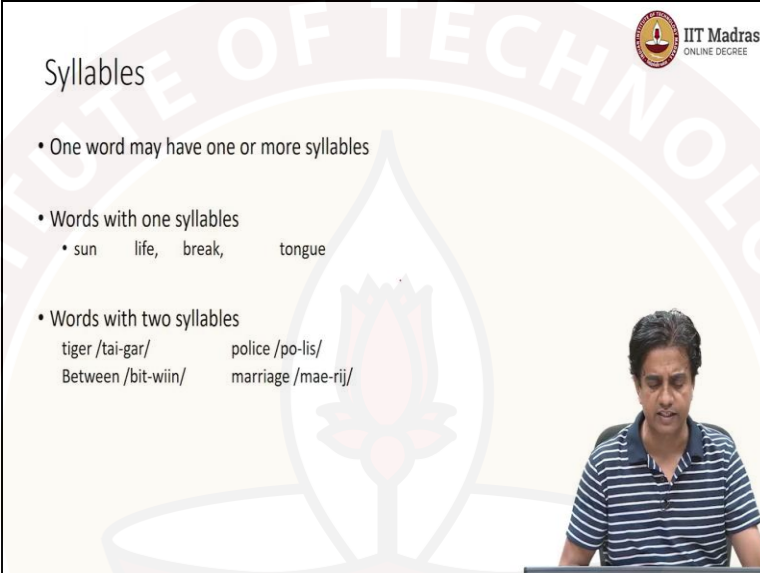
It is also organized with words; it is like a word. Sometimes a whole word is a syllable, but the difference between a word and a syllable is; syllables are parts of words, and unless a word is just a syllable by itself a syllable does not have independent meaning. In other words, if we have a word with two syllables, then each one of them does not have their independent meaning, and also the total meaning of that word is not the combination of the two meaning of the two syllables.

To begin with, there is no meaning attached tested two syllables. So, therefore it is part of a word, and like we have been discussing, every word must have a vowel sound in it. Now it becomes much easier for us to understand that every syllable needs to have a vowel in it and that is the vowel which is called the nucleus of it, of a syllable. So, it is this nucleus which is critical in a syllable.

Now, words can have multiple syllables in it. A word; actually there is no constraint on a total number of syllables in a word. But usually, we do not see words with too many syllables like 7, 8, 9, 10. We do not know words with too many syllables. The minimum number of syllable in a word is one, and there is no limit on the maximum number. However, we do not see words with too many syllables. So, what we see in a word is when we observe a word, we see a lot of words have two syllables, three syllables and four syllables.

This is the range in which we have many, many words in English. So, we will primarily focus on 2, 3, 4 syllable words keeping in mind on both sides. To begin with, words can also be just one syllable. Such a word is called a monosyllabic word, and then there are two syllables, three syllables, four-syllable words where they are in a sequence and, each syllable will have a nucleus vowel in it.

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Syllables

- One word may have one or more syllables
- Words with one syllables
 - sun life, break, tongue
- Words with two syllables
 - tiger /tai-gar/ police /po-lis/
 - Between /bit-wiin/ marriage /mae-rij/

So, to a great extent we have also looked at some of the examples of monosyllabic and disyllabic words like sun, life, break, tongue, these are monosyllabic words. These words cannot be split into two syllables. Words like tiger, police, between, marriages; these are two-syllable words. So, when we say tiger, we say tie and gar; this is one syllable, and this is two-syllable. Police is the one-syllable, this is two-syllable between one syllable—two-syllable marriage, one-syllable, two-syllable.


Just a note here, I have tried to give you these words in these slant lines with how they sound that is what is represented in between these two lines is the sequence of sounds so that it is easier to speak, easier to see and read.

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Syllables

- Examples of three syllable words :
energy /e-ner-jii/ capital /kae-pi-tal/
heritage /he-ri-tez/ suffering /saf-far-ing/
- Examples of four syllable words:
Invisible /in-vi-si-ble/ education /e-du-ke-shan/
aquarium /a-kwae-rii-am/ infinity /in-fi-ni-tii/



So, these are words with two syllables. We have words with three syllables. I am repeating the examples because you have seen these things before energy, capital, heritage, suffering. Words with four-syllables like invisible, education, aquarium, infinity. So these are the words with four-syllables.

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Stress Patterns

Stress patterns in words are mostly unpredictable in English. However, some general rules can be applied to many words

- When a **noun or adjective** stems from a one-syllable word, (for example *break* and *friend*), the stress usually stays on the **syllable** of the **original word**.

Example: break – BREAKable, friend – FRIENDly



Now, before we go and take a look at stress patterns in words, let me make a point here and then I will give you this point at the end of the discussion as well. We can pay attention to these things, but we do not need to be too conscious when we speak a language in practice. Syllabification, i.e., how many syllables are possible in a word and which syllable of that word will carry stress in it.

This is very important for English. This is a very important thing to look at in the sense that when we look at these things, our pronunciation improves and our language improves. It is a big deal in the language. It is important for us to know how do we learn these things. We learn these things by paying attention to these details by paying attention to intricate details about how things are in a language. Syllabification and stress patterns are intuitive to speakers who learn to speak English from the very beginning.

For those who want to learn the language at a later stage, i.e., after 10 or 15 years of age in their lives, it does not come intuitively. Therefore, I have mentioned that it is not a matter to worry about a lot. However, when we are looking at these things when we are careful about these things, it dramatically improves our spoken English. It dramatically improves our spoken content, and we sound very good, impressive.

So, every time we look at a word, we need to find out what are the syllables in this. When we hear people speak, we pay attention to them, and slowly we develop this notion, and we can identify syllables so much so, that we can locate stress on the syllable. So, now let us move ahead. As I just now said, it is unpredictable. There is no specific rule underlying this which can tell you why a word contains stress on the first syllable or second syllable or third syllable. That is what it means when we say it is unpredictable.

However, we are going to discuss a few things if you keep them in mind a lot of words can be taken care of by that. For the rest of it, with the help of this much information, if we pay attention to them, we get there. So, let us look at some of these things. So, the important part about syllables is, every syllable will have a vowel sound in it which is called the nucleus of the syllable.

Now, what becomes important about the stress is, when we start locating stress in a word, stress is on one of the syllables. So, the discussion on stress becomes important when we have at least two syllables in a word. So we need to see, and the moment we have two syllables in a word in English, one of them is going to be stressed. So, what is the general meaning of stress, it is a

technical term. Stress is used very differently in the other context when we are not talking about language.

But the simple meaning of stress in a word is one syllable in a word will be pressed upon, will be louder than the rest of them. Okay. So, just remember one word clearly, distinctively louder, slightly louder than the rest of the syllables. So, if there is a word with only two syllables, one will be louder, one will be not louder. If there are three syllables in a word, one will be louder, and two of them will not be louder, i.e., two of them will not be louder.

So, what is important for us to see is again look at it when there are two syllables, one of them must be stressed. It is also important for us to see if there are two or more than two syllables in a word, only one syllable can be stressed. In a word, we usually do not have more than one stressed syllables. There are some words in English which have got secondary stress, but they are not that prominent. Therefore, it is not important to talk too much about secondary stress, i.e., words with two stress.

And even in the cases of secondary stress, secondary stress is very mild. So, the rule of thumb is, in English words if you have more than one syllable, one syllable is definitely stressed and irrespective of the number of syllables in a word that is, in a word which has at least two syllables, only one syllable can be a stressed. These are the two critical factors which are universal in nature about stress and for us to remember, to learn, to pay attention to.

When you look at some patterns which work to a great extent, it is like when you have a word where a stem of the word is a noun or an adjective; you see the stress usually is on the syllable with the original word, i.e. if you have a derived word for example; breakable, friendly. What is important about it? We are deriving this word from break.

By adding able, by adding ly, we are deriving this word from an original noun like a friend. So, in such derived words from nouns and adjectives, we have stress on the original word that is if it is derived from break, the stress is on break, so we say breakable. So, break gets stressed. I have

indicated in your slides, I have indicated the letters in the capital, which indicate that this is the part which is carrying stress in this word.

Friendly, friendly so this word friend is stressed. So that is, to a great extent an observable pattern and we see that this is how it works.

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• With most of the **disyllabic nouns and adjectives**, stress is on the **first syllable**.

Examples: Nouns

PRE-sent
TI-ger
BREAK-fast

Adjectives

HAND-some
EA-sy,
HA-ppi

Now talking about nouns and adjectives, when you see them in two-syllable words, now first we talked about words which were derived from nouns and or adjectives. Now we are looking at nouns and objectives which are not derived ones, the actual nouns, actual adjectives. And if there are two syllables in there, then it works in the same way, in the sense that the first syllable of noun or adjective will be stressed. So, if you are looking at nouns and adjectives and if there are two syllables in them, what you are going to see is the first syllable is going to be stressed.

When you see examples like present, present obviously I am saying it in a way so that you can see the stress on the first syllable. In a normal speech, speakers may not be that obvious about letting you see the stress. Nonetheless, when you pay more and more attention to these things, you get to see this stress. You train your ears for finding this stress, and this kind of training makes us not just impressive but and others understand us clearly.

And when we are trained, then we hear others also very clearly. So, the first one is present, so the first syllable is stressed. The first syllable TAI is stressed in a word tiger. In a word like breakfast, this one is stressed. So, in a word like handsome, the first one is stressed; in a word like easy, so these are adjectives, the first one is stressed. Happy, this one is stressed. So, this is again the general pattern which you can see.

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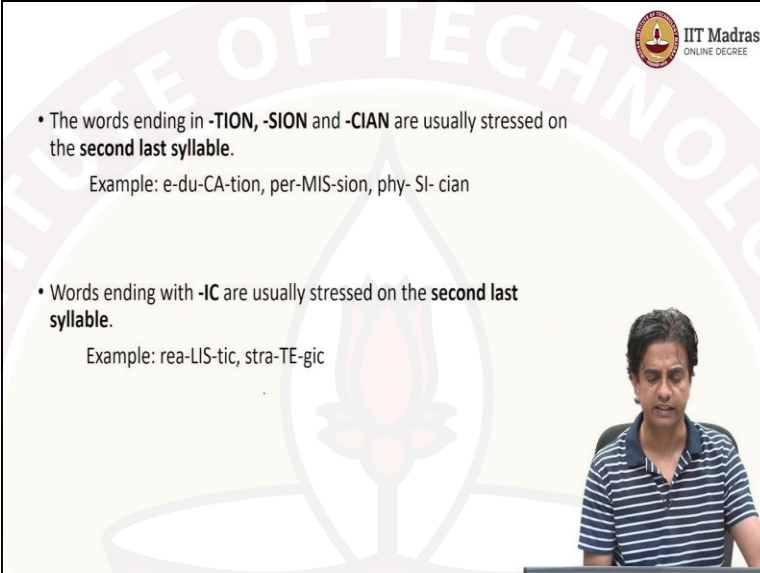
- With most **disyllabic verbs**, stress is on the **last syllable**.
Example: in-CREASE, be-GIN
- To differentiate between a **noun** and a **verb** with the same spelling, **stress position changes**.
Example: a DEcrease (Noun) to deCREASE (Verb)
 an OBJECT (Noun) to obJECT (Verb)
- In **compound nouns** (two words merged into one) the stress is on the **first part**.
Example: BOOKshop, NOTEbook

But, what happens in disyllabic words, the second syllable is stressed that is we are calling it last syllable because we are talking about disyllable words. So, in a word with two syllables, the last syllable is the second syllable. So, if we have a word like in this 'to increase', so, the second one gets stressed 'inCREASE' 'beGIN' 'beGIN' this one will get stressed. be-GIN, to be-GIN. Now you see; you look at it further, so if you know that lot of words are used as nouns and also as verbs. How do we distinguish when it is a noun anyway when it is a verb?

Stress plays an important role in that. So, with this much of information in a word with two syllables, if it is a noun, first one will get stressed. If it is a verb, the second one will get stressed. When we say a Decrease, you know that the first one is getting stressed.

An Object, you know this is getting stressed. When we use the same thing as a verb like we saw in inCREASE and beGIN. We see to deCREASE, so the second one is getting stressed. To object, this one is getting stressed. Similarly, we see yet another pattern that when we say compound nouns like BOOKshop and NOTEbook again, the first one is stressed. So, in a BOOKshop, the first one is getting stressed. NOTEbook, first one is getting stressed.

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• The words ending in **-TION**, **-SION** and **-CIAN** are usually stressed on the **second last syllable**.
Example: e-du-CA-tion, per-MIS-sion, phy-SI-cian

• Words ending with **-IC** are usually stressed on the **second last syllable**.
Example: rea-LIS-tic, stra-TE-gic

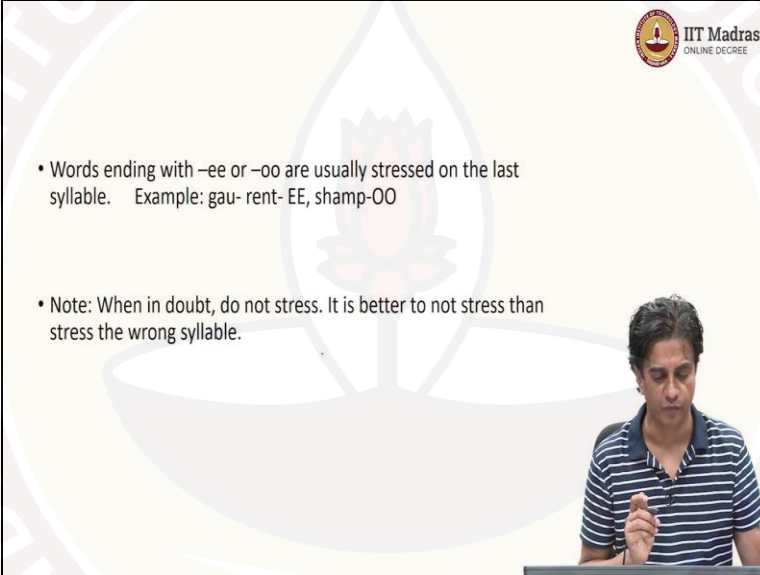
So, this much is the general pattern about nouns and verbs. Derived nouns, derived adjectives and how to differentiate between two things when the same word is used as nouns or verbs. And when we look at compound nouns, rules are pretty much clear that as long as it is a noun, the first one is stressed. If it is a verb, the second syllable is stressed. We see some more pattern when we go to the second level of observing patterns; we see some more patterns.

Such as you know, there are a lot of words in English. I am going to talk about sounds which end with TION like when we spell them in a word; we end the spelling with TION or SION or some words end with CIAN. So, in a word like station, education. In a word like permission, in a word like physician. So, we notice that the stress is on the syllable which is right before these things tion or sion or cian or tion or cian, the stress is on the syllable right before that.

So, in a word like education, this has four syllables e-du-CA-tion, but we see the stress on this one CA. In permission, stress is on this one, and physician stress is on this one. Similarly, if there is a word which is ending in IC, a lot of words end with that in English. Rea-LIS-tic, again the stress is on the second last syllable or the syllable before this marker. Stra-TE-gic, the word end with this, the syllable, this syllable second this second last syllable, so in both these words there are three syllables.

So the second syllable is stressed. But remember, we can say the second syllable gets stressed, what we can say is the second-last syllable gets stressed.

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- Words ending with -ee or -oo are usually stressed on the last syllable. Example: gau-rent-EE, shamp-OO
- Note: When in doubt, do not stress. It is better to not stress than stress the wrong syllable.

And we observe these patterns. Okay. When similarly there are things like, when a word ends in ee or oo like gua-rent-EE or shamp-OO, in such cases, the stress is on the last syllable with these sounds not just because of that but also because they are vowel sounds. So, when you were like guarantee, the last syllable gets stressed. Shampoo, the last syllable gets stressed. So, we do find some patterns; we do observe some patterns when we hear people closely.

But, as I mentioned in the beginning, stress is intuitive to speakers. You can develop your intuition about this with practice. But if it is not coming right way, that should not lead us into not speaking. We can learn these things; we can acquire this intuition only when we begin to

Speak. So, keep speaking what will happen is initially, you will not get stress. So, I have tried to put it here that when you are in doubt, don't stress any syllable, speak normally. Okay.

Of course, it is going to be a little tough for people to understand. But at least you will get away from the fear of putting stress in the wrong syllable. Okay. So, for speakers learning to speak English at a later stage normally, we observe that they do not stress any syllable in a word. It is okay. But, learning to observe which one syllable, which of the many that is if there are 2, 3, or 4, which one of these syllables is stressed. That itself can improve our speaking dramatically, and we sound impressive.

So, with this little idea, our effort in noticing syllables that is what we call as syllabification. And then at the second stage, our effort in noticing which one of the syllables are stressed is an important area to pay attention. Thank you so much.

