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BSc Degree

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English – I (Basic English)
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Stress in Words

Welcome to the class. We are going to talk about stress patterns in words in English. I will explain and describe what we mean by stress. Like at the onset, one more time, I would like you to understand that we are looking at certain underlying patterns. Underlying means certain patterns which we may not notice outrightly when we either hear others speak English or we may not be paying attention to when we speak English on our own.

So, I am talking about two specific aspects, one is listening, the other is speaking. There are certain things that we may not pay attention to. Stress is one such thing. Sometimes, when we pay attention to that, we do not quite get it. We keep wondering why certain words when others speak sound different and if a word sounds different in the sense that when I speak a word that is as a listener and when someone else speaks the same word, if there is a difference between the two, sometimes that causes issues in understanding.

So, a mismatch between listening and speaking can result into difficulty in understanding. These things stabilise, normalise, but we need to understand and when we pay attention to certain things, we get these things set right and that is the sub, impact on our subconscious for the purpose of learning. So, again, what I am trying to tell you is, the underlying pattern of stress that I want to discuss with you today is for the purpose of paying attention to them, so that when we hear others, we do not wonder about these things and if we want to practise this further then we can fix our own words the way we speak.

And thus, such fixing will result into you sounding better. And thus, this discussion. So, the point is, before we fix something in the process of learning, we need to know what is it that I need to fix and therefore I am talking about certain underlying stuff. And once we get these things, once we once we see, and this is the reason why I am calling it underlying pattern, underlying for a very simple reason that they are not quite obvious. And once we see that, it becomes quite apparent to us and we become careful about these things.

So, what is a stress? So, we know about words, we know a word is a group of sounds. We also know that group of sounds in a word is not random. It has a sequence and there are certain sequences which are quite frequent like alternations of consonant and vowel is quite frequent. gemination of two consonants is still okay but not so frequent. A cluster of three consonants is rare, but still okay but a cluster of four consonants at the initial position of a word is not so not at all possible. Heavy clusters of different consonants at different positions in a word is also quite prohibited. We get, we rarely get a word like this. So, we know about certain restrictions in which, the way we get words. So, the bottom line is a word is not a random collection of sounds.

At the same time look at the other flip side of the word. We have only 44 sounds in English, 24 consonant sounds and 20 vowel sounds but it is possible to get infinite number of words, out of these 44 sounds. Doesn't it sound miraculous? We get to understand this miracle in a scientific way once we understand sounds properly and it has impact on developing confidence for us.

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Words

- A single distinct meaningful element of speech or writing, used with others (or sometimes alone) to form a sentence and typically shown with a space on either side when written or printed.

Examples of words: bees, hair, matter, tall etc.



Syllables

- A **syllable** is a unit in a word.
- 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, thus we know about words. We also know that words can have just one syllable or words can have multiple syllables. As you can see, a syllable is a unit of word. So, and this is not quite obvious in a monosyllabic word, because a monosyllabic word is a word by itself and that is also a syllable.

So, there is not much of a discussion about syllable in a monosyllabic word, but when we see the significance of syllabification or syllables in a word, when we start looking at least words with at least two syllables. So, what happens is, we know that each syllable must have a vocalic sound, a vowel sound, in its nucleus.

Once again, I would like to add a footnote here, that when if you read a lot about syllables, you will realise that sometimes a non-vocalic sound can also be the nucleus of a syllable but I do not want to take you into those details. What I want you to know is, most often and so often that we can say almost always, the nucleus, the focal point in a syllable is a vowel sound and therefore, vowels are fundamental to words. So, no syllable is possible without a vowel sound. Therefore, no word is possible without a vowel sound. However, a word is possible only with vowel sounds, a word can be as small as just one sound. So, these are the redundant things about words that we already know.

And once we know the process of formation of words, particularly underlying process, in, that we observe in formation of words, these things sound like general knowledge to us about words. So, I want your attention now to syllables and syllabification. Keep in mind, syllable and

syllabification in a natural way is intuitive to speakers of the language. We do not have, we, it is called, it is a foundational stuff in the sense that native speakers have natural intuition towards syllabification in their, of words in their language.

So, what intuition, what intuitive means is, and innately intuitive, what we mean by that is, it is tough to learn for non-native speakers of that language. Nonetheless, it is not impossible to observe and therefore bring in practice and therefore getting matured through the observing patterns underlying words.

So, that is what we know about syllabification. So, words can have one syllable, two syllable, three syllables, four syllables. One more time I would say, one syllable words are huge in numbers. We have two, three, four syllables quite frequently we see in words. Words larger than 5 syllables or 6 syllables are very rare and the reason is very simple that it is difficult to produce and pronounce such words and therefore heavy word, multisyllabic heavy word is not preferred, though technically it is possible to make a multi syllable word. So, the focal point of a word is a vowel sound. Because that point is also true for syllables.

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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 /maer-rij/



So, once we understand syllable, so look at the examples as monosyllabic words like 'sun', 'life', 'break', 'tongue'. We, these are some of the examples of monosyllabic words and there are a lot of them, 'cat', 'rat' and so on. When we see words with two syllables like 'tiger', 'police', 'between', 'marriage', these are random words.

And I will tell you why I picked random words and why I recommend you to pick certain random words. I'll come to that, but let me make my point here that these words, when we look at words with two syllables and here is the point of today's discussion. It is a generic rule in English language is one of the two or one of the many, that is, if we have three syllables, then still one, if we have four syllables, still one, is going to be more prominent than other syllables.

So, I start with disyllabic word, that is, words with two syllables. So, out of the two, one of the syllables is going to be more prominent. This prominence, the way we make one syllable more prominent than the other, is known as stress. So, what we need to get is stress means prominence, stress means bringing something forthright.

So, one of the syllables is going to be more prominent than others. This is the generic rule, this is a rule which has probably no exception. And therefore, we this is how we understand stress. So, then, what is, so this much is not difficult. What is difficult is which one of the two is stressed. This is intuitive to native speakers, but we can always observe and here, at this slide at this screen, I have not tried to bring the prominence in.

But we are, what we are going to do is when we make, for the purpose of writing, we have tried to put stress syllable in caps. So, I will show you that. So, look at the words like 'energy', 'capital', 'suffering', these are all three syllable, three syllabic words. Four syllable words are 'invisible', 'education', 'aquarium', 'infinity', these are four syllable words.

So, the rule is the same. The moment the, because we do not have the question of prominence in monosyllabic word, because prominence by definition comes when we have more than one. So, the moment we have two, three, four and more syllables, one becomes more prominent and this phenomenon is known as stress in English. Now, which one is more prominent than the others is intuitive to native speakers. We see, we understand this part by observing native speakers speak and while observing, if we try to bring that into practice, if we try to imbibe that, we can make our speech also impressive by placing stress at right places.

So, though this is intuitive, there are certain things that we can still talk about it. What I am going to discuss here, hereafter is certain patterns. But these are observable patterns, we cannot take them as rules. They do apply to a large extent, but as you know rules are, only such things are

called rules which cannot be broken, which should not generate exceptions. But so, this is observation, this applies to great extent.

So, let us look at. So, first I want to bring you back to which one of the, so let us look at four words of two syllables, 'tiger'. Which one sounds more prominent to you? 'Tiger', 'between' 'between', 'police', 'police', you make a decision about this. At this point, I am not speaking about it, I think you would have figured it out by now.

And then I want you to, before I look at patterns and before I describe the patterns to you, I am going to put one exercise for you here and the exercise is, see for understanding syllables for understanding stress, it is important to understand syllabification. So, take random 20 words and see the syllabification of it.

If you are taking 20 words, it is highly likely that you will get syllabification of 10 right and then there are tools available these days online, we can help you with those tools. There are dictionaries, there are websites, which give you syllable boundaries, that is, which breaks a word into different syllable for you.

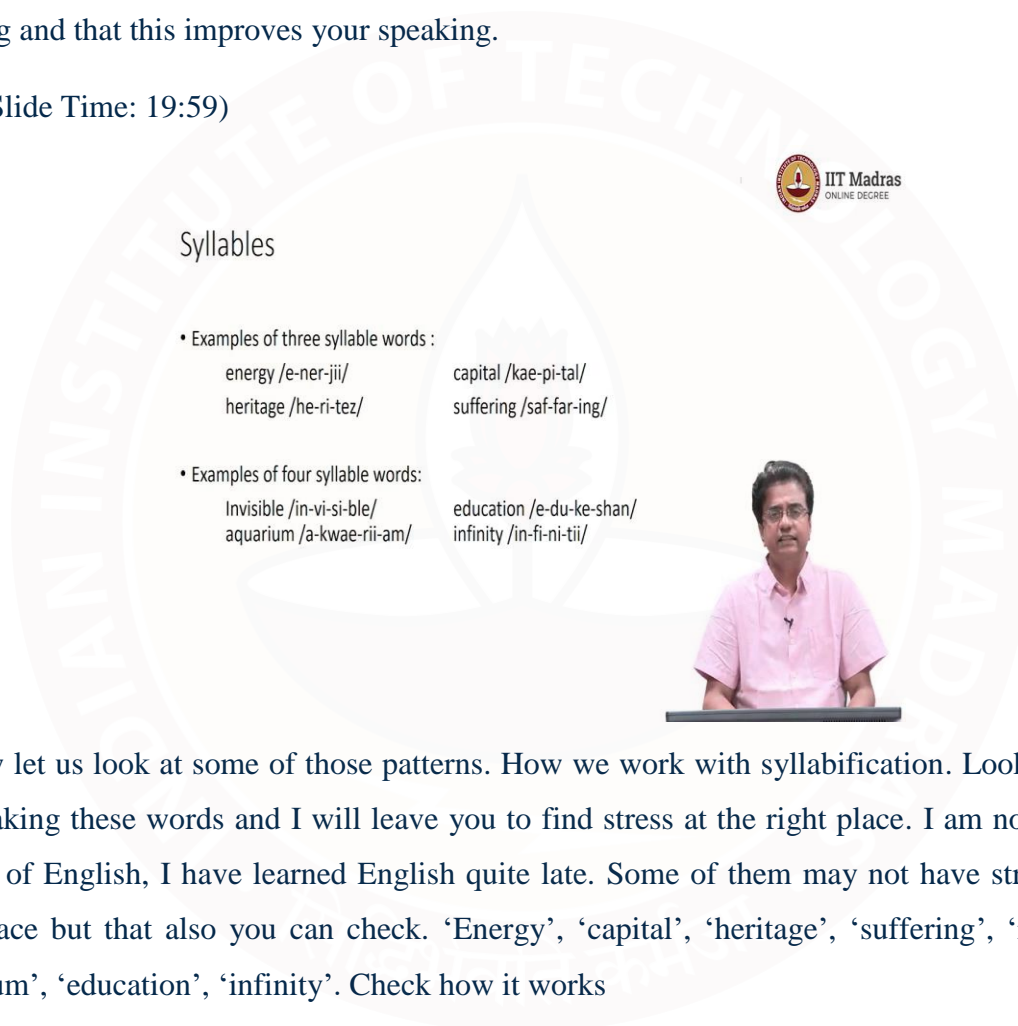
So, what you can do, first you take 20 random words. Do this exercise yourself first. See how many syllables, how many, when you do the syllabification, how many breaks are there, how many syllables have, those words have. Then check your syllabification online or through a dictionary. This will help you set syllabification right and out of 20 words that you have, you may get maybe five one syllable words, five two syllable words, five three syllable words and five four syllable words.

So, basically, what I am trying to tell you is try to get a set of 100 words do this exercise for 100 words and see if you can come up with 20 monosyllabic words, 20 disyllabic word, 20 three syllable words, 20 four syllable words and 20 five syllable words. This is the first stage of exercise and once you have, once you have, this may be a little tedious this may take time. You do not have to do this in one day or one hour but if you continuously work on this, I am quite confident you will get a sense of syllabication in English language. As the second stage of that, because we know that one of the syllables is stressed beginning from words with two syllables, one of the syllables is more prominent. So, either you speak you observe others or again take

help from online tools and you will get the stressed syllable and then try to say that word with intended syllable at the right place.

Start with those first, those 100 words and then this exercise will automatically take you to a point where you get any word and you will find little uneasiness and restlessness to find right syllabification and right stress at the right place. And once you get this thing, you will get used to this syllabification and placing stress at the right place which will have natural result in your speaking and that this improves your speaking.

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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/

The slide features a large, faint watermark of the IIT Madras logo in the background. In the bottom right corner, there is a small video inset showing a man with glasses and a pink shirt speaking.

So, now let us look at some of those patterns. How we work with syllabification. Look at this. I am speaking these words and I will leave you to find stress at the right place. I am not a native speaker of English, I have learned English quite late. Some of them may not have stress at the right place but that also you can check. ‘Energy’, ‘capital’, ‘heritage’, ‘suffering’, ‘invisible’, ‘aquarium’, ‘education’, ‘infinity’. Check how it works

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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



Here on certain patterns you see, there is a generic. So, as I mentioned, it is unpredictable for non-native speakers and intuitive for native speakers. So, we can only observe patterns. So, one pattern is when we look at when we see a noun, and this is why we need to know class of words. So, when we have either a noun or an adjective which is derived and basically which is derived noun or derived adjective which is what we say a word, when a word or when a noun or adjective stems from one syllable word for example, 'break' and 'friend' like you know we have example 'breakable' or 'friendly'.

So, the word in that is break and friend though and the derived word is breakable, friendly. Then what happens is the stress is usually on the main syllable, that is, original word. So, it is a monosyllabic word and we are adding certain suffix to that and thus it is becoming two syllable word anyway. So, whether it is an adjective or a noun, we have a stress on the primary syllable, the first syllable which is also, I put it as original word.

So, the moment you see a word like this, it is easy for you to predict stress that it is on the original word like 'breakable', 'friendly', 'friendly'. So, I have capitalised the word 'break' and 'friend' to make sure that this is the syllable which is stressed. So, this is one such pattern and that gives an idea that most of the derived words from a noun or from a word, noun or adjective, we can get, we the drive words will have main syllable the original word stressed. Thus we get 'breakable', 'friendly'.

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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



Since, we are talking about nouns and adjectives in a disyllabic noun or adjective, stress is on the first syllable. So, any noun, we are not talking about derived nouns. So, take any noun, most of the time, most of the time, the stress in a noun is going to be on the first syllable like 'present', 'tiger', 'breakfast', 'breakfast'. Some examples of adjectives like 'handsome', 'easy', 'happy'.

So, you see, first syllable in all these disyllabic words, words with two syllables, are being stressed. So, that stress is found on the first syllable. You, we are going to get a stress in two syllable words or three syllable words, four syllable words. The key is to find out where, where lies the stress and we are trying to look at some patterns.

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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



So in a, so we talked about nouns and adjectives. Now, we are going to look at verbs. So, what happens in a disyllabic word, verbs, that is a verb with two syllables, the stress is usually on the last syllable. So, look at a word like 'increase', 'increase', 'begin' these are verbs. So, the two syllables in the word 'increase' is 'in' 'crease'. I have not put this in phonetic transcription purposely because this is how we write these words, and I am only trying to separate two syllables here.

So, 'crease' is the syllable which is being stressed. 'Begin', 'gin' second syllable is the one that is getting stress on it. There could be reasons for that but we do not want to go into further reasons. All we are saying is, disyllabic words verbs with two syllables will have stress on second syllable.

So, and remember a proper stress and understanding of stress, while of course, while speaking, and understanding of syllabification is also going to help us understand when a word is a noun being used as noun, and when a word is being used as an adjective, I am sorry, as a verb. There are so many things that we can learn through this. Why same word can be used as nouns and same word can also be used as an, as a verb?

The reason is, for native speakers, stress patterns makes them different. And this is called applying principle of economy through, principle of economy in the structure of language and application of principle of economy is one of the specific features of human mind and you we

can understand these details at a later point, but I am just bringing in this idea of principle of economy, because learning of language and developing underlying patterns of language is part of subconscious development in human mind.

So, same word is being used as a noun or a verb, that is because they are going to have different stress patterns. The stress patterns one more time is, if we have a two syllable nouns, stress on the first syllable, initial syllable. If we have two syllables, a verb with two syllables, usually stress on the second syllable.

So, look at some examples, how we differentiate the nouns and there are some words, we are giving you just few examples, like 'decrease' an 'object'. So, how are we going to say decrease as noun, 'DEcrease', 'DE crease'; as verb, 'deCREASE', 'deCREASE'; 'object', 'an OBject', 'an OBject', 'an OBject'. So the stress on the initial syllable. As verb, 'to OBject', 'to obJECT', stress on second syllable 'ject', 'to object'.

This helps us differentiate nouns from verbs when they are when the same word is used for nouns and verbs, both. Yet another pattern is when you have compound nouns, that is, two nouns merged together to form a new word, the stress is on the first word that is first syllable, like 'bookshop, bookshop'. So, the stress is on book not on shop. 'Notebook, notebook', stress is on 'note', this is easy pattern to see. I put my footnote one more time that there are so many patterns, we do not have a list of all of them, we are only trying to put a few to get a sense of it.

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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



When we have words which end with this suffix like ‘-tion’ like in ‘station’ or ‘tension’ or ‘-cian’ like ‘education’, ‘permission’ and ‘physician’. The stress is usually on penultimate syllable. Penultimate means second last syllable, not on the last one not on ‘tion’ or ‘cian’ but the syllable before that. So, when you see a word like this, we have used this word before ‘education, education’, the predictable stress in this word is not on last one, ‘t, i, o, n’ that syllable, but ‘ca’. ‘e du ca tion’ the ‘ca’ syllable will have a stress on it, because that is the penultimate two; this is last one, is the second last one. ‘Permission permission’, so the second syllable is going to be stressed in that. ‘Physician’ or ‘magician’ or these types of words, they are quite productive patterns of word formation in English.

So, it is easy to determine the presence of stress in the penultimate syllable in these words. Same thing applies when we have a derived word from ‘-ic’ suffix like ‘realistic’, ‘strategic’. See, each of these words, these types of words have ‘-ic’ suffix at the end ‘strategic, strategic, strategic’, ‘realistic’. It, this is also quite productive pattern in English. So, again, this just is on the penultimate syllable, that is, the second last syllable, realistic.

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



Few more patterns for us to think about. A word, it is tough to talk about these patterns but nonetheless, they seem to be working therefore we are talking about them. When we have words ending with long EE or long OO like a word like ‘guarantee’ or ‘shampoo’, then we have a stress on the last syllable.

So, where stress get, so these sounds are syllable by themselves and they carry a stress on them. So, we have words like 'guarantee', this has three syllables, the last syllable itself gets the stress. 'Shampoo' the last syllable 'oo' gets the stress in this word. I have already talked about this, that when we get a word where we do not have these patterns being applicable, then as speakers of Indian English, speakers of English in India, we do not stress anyone, any syllable because putting syllable, putting a stress at the wrong syllable that is purposely putting a stress on a syllable where it should not appear does not sound good.

Sometimes that might sound a little awkward too. So, this is why I say if we are not sure about it, we do not need to stress, we need to be naturally speaking the way we speak English in India. However, looking, applying some of these patterns and observing patterns, making a list of the word, of some words, few words with one with two syllables, three syllables, four syllables, and then trying to find syllable at the, right syllable the syllable which carries this stress, and paying attention to this will help us speak properly that and here by properly I mean with a stress and the right syllable and we are going to sound better.

So, the purpose of this discussion was to observe certain patterns of syllabification and stress and finding out which one of the two or three or four syllables is carrying the stress becoming more prominent. This discussion has implications for improving our speaking. Thank you so much.