

Class: 碩研英一甲

聲韻學理論期末報告

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### Topic: Stress in English

Every language has a system of stress on its own way. As we know non-native speakers can speak English but they still have to face the difficulty in understanding each word especially when the speakers talk too fast. The last decade the researches in this field have been done by many linguists. In my study, I have collected the data and looked at the details about stress of English. There are six parts in my study: “They are stress in simple words, stress in words with prefixes and suffixes, reduced vowels in unstressed syllables, shift in stress and stress in compound words.” It is important for non-native speakers to dominate all these 6 patterns when they use English to have a conversation with others.

Fromkin et al. (2007:287) proposed that “native speaker of a language know the syllable, which is a phonological composed of one or more phonemes and has a nucleus which is usually a vowel.” Native speakers can distinguish between primary stress and secondary stress because the knowledge of language is in their mind. They easily recognize and receive the words when they are talking to others. However, non-native speakers seem not possess this language knowledge in English, they develop this ability through some scientific experiments

In English, a word consists of one or more than one syllable. A stressed syllable, which is marked in bold letters are taken as primary stress in the word. An unstressed syllable, which is marked in original are taken as secondary stress. “In a stress syllable the vowel sound is higher in pitch, and is held longer than in the other syllables in the word.” (Orion, 1997, p.20). In comparison with unstressed syllables has a lower pitch and shorter vowels in the word.

**Stress in simple words.** I have listed the stress in different syllable words. The stress syllable is marked by word in bold. The details are in the following examples:

1. One-syllable words: **have, like**

2. Two-syllable words:

Ⓐ Stress on first syllable: **ar**-my, **den**-tist

Ⓑ Stress on second syllable: per-**haps**, gui-**ter**

3. Three-syllable words:

Ⓐ Stress on first syllable: **ac**-ci-dent, **dan**-ger-ous

Ⓑ Stress on second syllable: lo-**ca**-tion, in-**sur**-ance

Ⓒ Stress on third syllable: dis-a-**ppoint**, en-gi-**neer**

4. Four-syllable words:

Ⓐ Stress on first syllable: **lit**-er-a-ture, **sec**-re-tar-y

Ⓑ Stress on second syllable: ex-**per**-i-ence, cer-**tif**-i-cate

© Stress on third syllable: con-ver-**sa**-tion, in-for-**ma**-tion

The four-syllable words never pointed out the stress put on the last syllable.

5. Five and six -syllable words: re-**frig**-er-a-tor, au-to-bi-o-**graph**-ic

Here are more complex rules in showing the stress for five and six-syllable words and polysyllabic words which included two or more than two syllables. Further discuss in the following examples.

**Stress in words with prefixes and suffixes.** The majority of these words in English come from other languages. When a word added to a prefix before the root, which is the base part of a word and the stress usually keeps the same but the meaning changes. On the contrary, when a word added to a suffix before the root, the stress usually changes and the meaning still remind the same.

Comparison between stress with prefix and suffix

Prefix/suffix	Root	Prefix/ suffix added	Stress		Meaning	
dis- (prefix)	<b>agree</b>	dis + agree	dis-a- <b>gree</b>	same( ✓ )	opposite of agree	same( )
				change( )		change( ✓ )
re- (prefix)	<b>write</b>	re + write	re- <b>write</b>	same( ✓ )	doing again	same( )

				change( )		change( √ )
-ical √ √ (suffix)	<b>alphabet</b>	alphabet	al-pha- <b>bet</b> -ical	same( )	relating to	same( √ )
		+ical		change( √ )	alphabet	change( )
-tion (suffix)	<b>accuse</b>	accuse	a-ccu- <b>sa</b> -tion	same( )	state of	same( √ )
		+tion		change( √ )	accuse	change( )

Kreidler (2004) found that “When a prefix or a suffix of Old English origin is added to a word, it has no effect on the position of stress.”(p.79), for example:

**neigh**-bor → **neigh**-bor-hood (stress on the syllable of “neigh”)

**thought**-ful → un-**thought**-ful (stress on the syllable of “thought”)

In contrast, Kreidler (2004) also found that “Words of Greek, Latin, or French origin often show a change of stress when an affix is added or change.”(p.79), for example:

**ori**-gin → o-**rigi**-nal (stress on the syllable of “ori” changes to that of “rigi”)

**pho**-tog-ra-phy → pho-to-**graph**-ic (stress on the syllable of “pho” changes to that of graph”)

**Reduced vowels in unstressed syllables.** “The most frequently occurring vowel in English is /ə/, which is always associated with weak syllables. In quality it is mid (that is, half-way between close and open) and central (that is, half-way between front and back). It is

generally described as lax, that is not articulated with much energy.” (Roach, 2004, p.82). In words of two or more syllables, the reduced vowel sound is marked by /ə/. The reduced vowel sound is called as a schwa (/ə/).

For example:

1. **attend** → /ə **tend**/

2. **character** → /**kæ** rəktə/

\*Note: The reduced vowel is marked by *italic*; the stressed syllable is marked in bold.

**Shift in stress.** A group of stress word is an exceptional issue. They have the same spellings but the meaning may change when the stress marked in the different syllables.

Roach (2004) suggested that “A large group of two-syllable words of paired nouns and verbs with identical spelling which differ from each other in stress placement, apparently according to word class(noun, verb or adjective).”(p.110).

For example:

1. conduct → /**kand**ʌkt/; (N); (Stress on first syllable)

→/kən**d**ʌkt/; (V); (Stress on second syllable)

2. produce → /**prad**juːs/; (N); (Stress on first syllable)

→/prə**d**juːs/; (V); (Stress on second syllable)

3. subject → /ˈsʌbdʒɪkt /; (N); (Stress on first syllable)

→/səbˈdʒekt /; (V); (Stress on second syllable)

4. present → /ˈpreznt /; (N/ A); (Stress on first syllable)

→/prɪˈzent /; (V); (Stress on second syllable)

\*Note: Stressed syllable is marked in bold. N=noun; V=verb; A= adjective.

**Stress in compound words.** A group of words are combined with two words or more words which parts of speech could be nouns, verbs or adjectives. Compound words have their own meaning. Sometimes are extracted the meaning from two words and sometimes are referred to particular meaning. Fromkin et al. (2007) claimed that “We place primary stress on the adjectival part of a compound noun upon (which may be written as one word, two words separated by a hyphen, or two separate words) but we place the stress on the noun when the words are a noun phrase.”(p.287). In addition, the meaning of placing on the noun of a compound word differs from that of adjectival part of a compound word.

For example:

1. white + house → **Whitehouse** (“the president ‘s house”)

white + house → white **house** (“a house painted white”)

2. red + coat → **Redcoat** (“a British soldier”)

red + coat → red **coat** (“a coat that is red”)

### **Conclusion:**

In stress unit of word class, stress plays as an important role. It helps the speakers comprehend the meaning in the words when they communicated with people. Different syllable words have different patterns in the field of stress. Through the many researches, the systematic rules are found out by linguists, speakers can follow these rules to build up the knowledge in English. Complex words in affix, speakers know the stress does not change but the meaning does for the words in prefix. In suffix complex words behave vice versa, speakers notice that the reduce vowels presents the weak syllable in the words. Moreover, a set of word class with the same spelling but they may have different meanings and shift their parts of speech based on their stress location in the word. Finally, a compound word comes from two different words and develops different interpretation due to that stress changes the location.

## References

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