

Principles and allusions for the correct standard version Pronunciation

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Abstract:

The paper is an appraisal for the practiced pronouncing words (in isolation) of more than one syllable with varying stress patterns. The other words, he, that, they, had are unstressed. It is on this alternation of stressed and unstressed words that the 'rhythm' of English speech depends. Therefore, ordinarily, it would sound rather odd (and 'un English') if we were to stress every word in an English sentence. In connected speech the stress mark (in the written representation) is used on single syllable words also, if they are stressed, though this is not the practice when such words occur in isolation. Each of these sentences has single-syllable words as well as words of more than one syllable. For example, in sentence 6 the word work has one syllable, but the words 'finished', 'earlier', and ex'pected have more than one syllable each. Notice that, in the sentences, these latter words receive the stress on the same English on which they receive it when said in isolation. This paper also focuses on the different syllables and their application in English.

Keywords: allusions, English, sentences, isolation, speech, pronunciation.

Introduction

The paper is an appraisal for the practiced pronouncing words (in isolation) of more than one syllable with varying stress patterns. We saw that of the several syllables in a word, one or two were stressed or strong while the others were unstressed or weak. In this paper we shall practise stress in sentences.

Just as in isolated words not all the syllables are stressed, so also in sentences not all the words receive stress. Instead, we have a combination of stressed and unstressed words. For example, in the sentence, "He 'said* that they had 'gone", only the words said and gone are stressed. The other words, he, that, they, had are unstressed. It is on this alternation of stressed and unstressed words that the 'rhythm' of English speech depends. Therefore, ordinarily, it

would sound rather odd (and 'unEnglish') if we were to stress every word in an English sentence. Look at the following sentences, for example, and listen to them on the tape:

1. 'Call him 'home.
2. 'Give them the 'book.
3. "Take her for a 'walk.
4. 'Wait for them in the 'hall.
5. 'Buy me some 'rice from the 'shop.

Notice that all the words in these sentences are single-syllable words, and only some of them are stressed. Now listen to them once again for the manner in which the speaker says the unstressed words. You will notice that she moves quickly from one stressed word to the next, slurring over the unstressed words between them, particularly when there are a large number of them. This she does in order to maintain the more or less regular beat provided by the

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Occurrence of the stressed syllables. In slurring over the unstressed words, the vowel in them is sometimes 'weakened'. For example, in sentences 2 and 3, the unstressed words *them*, *for*, *a*, are pronounced /?am/, /for/, /o/ with the weak vowel /o/, instead of /dem/, /fo:r/, /el/. Forms like /oom/, /for/, /o/, which the words that generally remain unstressed in sentences acquire, are called 'weak forms'. We shall study them in section 8.32.

The sentences above have only single-syllable words. However, not all sentences have all words of one syllable only. Look at the following sentences, for example, and listen to them.

- 6 He 'finished his 'work 'earlier than we ex'pected.
- 7 We shall 'call on them to'morrow.
- 8 They've for'gotten to 'sign the 'register.
- 9 Se'lect some of the 'ripe ones.
- 10 'Ask him 'not to inter'fere with them.

Each of these sentences has single-syllable words as well as words of more than one syllable. For example, in sentence 6 the word *work* has one syllable, but the words *'finished*, *'earlier*, and *ex'pected* have more than one syllable each. Notice that, in the sentences, these latter words receive the stress on the same syllable on which they receive it when said in isolation.

When we speak of the rhythm of a sentence, we often refer to the number of stressed syllables and the weak or unstressed syllables between them. For example, take the same sentence again:

He 'finished his 'work 'earlier than we ex'pected.
 2 0 4

(The numerals represent the number of unstressed syllables between the stressed ones.)

You must have noticed that the first syllable, *fi* /fi/, is unstressed. This is followed by a stressed syllable, *fi* /fi/, which is in turn followed by two unstressed syllables: *nished* /nift/ and *his* /hiz/, and so on. There are thus two unstressed syllables between the stressed syllables *fi* and *work*, and no unstressed syllable between *work* and *ear* (the first syllable of *earlier*). Again, there are four unstressed syllables-*lier*, *than*, *we*, and *ex*-between *ear* and *pec* (the second syllable of *expected*). It is clear from this sentence that the number of unstressed syllables between two stressed syllables can vary from nil to four, or even more, within the same sentence. The rhythm of sentences can thus vary depending on the number of stressed syllables they have and the number of unstressed syllables between them.

In the following sections we shall first concentrate on the kind of words that should normally be stressed, and then on the ways in which some unstressed words are weakened in English so as to enable the speaker to maintain the regularity of the beat. We shall also provide practice in the recognition and production of stressed and unstressed words in sentences and in dialogues as well.

Sentence Stress

Given the fact that English sentences have both stressed and unstressed words we ask ourselves the question: 'How do we know which words we have to stress in a sentence?' To answer this question, let us start by looking at the following message in a telegram:

SEND BOOKS SPEED POST

The message can be understood even though it is not a complete grammatical sentence. This is so because the words used in it carry the information the sender wishes to convey. All such words as carry information and are important for meaning are generally 'content' words. Now, what sort of words are content words? They are: nouns, main verbs (except the verb 'to be'), adjectives, adverbs, demonstratives, question-words (*what, where, when, who, why, how, etc.*), and the words *yes, no, and not*.

In order to expand this telegraphic message into a complete grammatical sentence we can add other words, which are generally structure words. These are: personal pronouns, auxiliary verbs, articles, conjunctions, prepositions, and 'to be' verbs (*am, is, are, was, were*). Thus the expanded message would be: *Could you send me the books by Speed Post?* Since these structure words do not carry information or convey meaning, they are generally unstressed or weak, whereas content words, which do convey meaning, are generally stressed.

Rhythm

We have seen that in English sentences content words (i.e. ., essentially the words that are important from the point of view of meaning) are generally stressed and structure words are generally not stressed.

Native speakers generally move quickly from one stressed syllable to the next, and the regular recurrence of beats heard on those stressed syllables constitutes the characteristic rhythm of English. To achieve this rhythmic beat they adopt two main devices:

- they glide or slur over structure words, and

- they join words together.

(i) The "gliding or slurring over structure words" results in weakening or shortening of the structure words. For example, in the sentence:

They 'said that 'Shyam had ar'rived (.),

the words *that* and *had* have the 'weak forms' /dat/ and /had/. These will be dealt with in detail in 8.32.

(ii) The "joining of words" results in 'contractions'. For example, in the sentence:

They've con'firmed that he's 'not in 'town (.),

The words *they've* and *he's* are the contracted forms of *they have an he is*.

We shall deal with the second device, i.e. ., contractions, first.

Contractions

Let us look at the following examples of contracted forms:

1. I'm, he's, they're, we'll, we'd, they've
2. isn't, aren't, wouldn't, hasn't, haven't

In 1, the weak forms of the auxiliary verbs, *am, is (or has), are, will, had (or would), and have* are attached to the pronouns *I, he, they, we, we and they* .*

In 2, while the auxiliary verbs retain their full form, the weakened form of the negative *not*

(i.e. ., *n't*) is attached to them: *isn't, aren't, wouldn't, hasn't, haven't*.

Let us now discuss the first type of contracted forms, namely, pronoun plus weakened auxiliary. Read the following pairs of sentences aloud:

- 1a I am sure he will enjoy himself.
- 1b I'm sure he'll enjoy himself.

The weak form of *is or has*, namely, *'s* can also be attached to nouns, e.g. ., *John's* (meaning *John is* or *John has*), *cat's* (meaning *cat is* or *cat has*).

- 2a She is not at home.
 - 2b She's not at home.
 - 3a He is arriving this evening.
 - 3b He's arriving this evening.
 - 4a We are too tired to walk.
 - 4b We're /wia/ too tired to walk.
 - 5a They are planning to go on a holiday.
 - 5b They're /dea/ planning to go on a holiday.
 - 6a I will go to Delhi tomorrow.
 - 6b I'll go to Delhi tomorrow.
 - 7a He will see you at seven o'clock.
-

7b He'll see you at seven o'clock.

8a She would have done it for you if she had had the time.

8b She'd have done it for you if she'd had the time.

9a I would have done it for you if you had asked me.

9b I'd have done it for you if you'd asked me.

10a I have bought a new pen.

10b I've bought a new pen.

11a He has gone away.

11b He's gone away.

12a We have placed an order for the drinks.

12b We've placed an order for the drinks.

Pronunciation of English words, as we discussed earlier in Chapter 2, has its own problems. Some of these problems can, however, be solved if we keep in mind a few guidelines suggested below. These guidelines largely pertain to some groups of spelling sequences that behave in some particular ways.

Silent Consonant Letters

Silent consonant letters constitute one of the problem areas in respect of pronunciation of English words. To solve some of the problems of the learners, a few spelling sequences containing silent letters are discussed below.

- (i) *b* is always silent in the spelling sequences *mb* and *bt* occurring in the word-final position:

comb	numb	bomb	limb	debt
lamb	thumb	womb	climb	doubt
tomb	succumb	plumb		

b is also silent in *plumber, bomber, subtle, redoubtable*.

- (ii) *d* is always silent in the spelling sequence *dj*:

adjective	adjunct	adjacent
adjudge	adjoin	adjutant
adjourn	adjust	adjudicate

- (iii) *g* is silent in the spelling sequence *gm* or *gn*:

phlegm	gnarl	champagne	sign
paradigm	gnash	poignant	resign
	gnat	physiognomy	assign
	gnaw		consign
			malign
			campaign

However, *g* is not silent in certain derivatives formed from such words.

Examples: phlegmatic, paradigmatic, signature, resignation, malignant

- (iv) *h* is silent in the spelling sequence *gh* and in the word-final position:

ghost	ghetto	ah
aghast		eh
ghastly	oh	

Note: *h* is also silent in *John, Thames, Thomas*.

(v) *k* is always silent in the word-initial spelling sequence *kn*:

kneel	knee
knob	knight
knave	knowledge
knife	knock

Exercise 1: Transcribe the following words phonemically and make corrections by looking up the *Advanced Learner's Dictionary*:

ghost, gnash, adjust, limb, womb, ghetto, gnat, adjoin, doubt, plumb, debt, knob, resign, poignant, phlegm

Conclusion: Pronunciation of English words, as we discussed earlier in Chapter 2, has its own problems. Some of these problems can, however, be solved if we keep in mind a few guidelines suggested below. These guidelines largely pertain to some groups of spelling sequences that behave in some particular ways.

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