



PHONETICS

Lecture 1: Stress placement within the word

By Dr. Chelli

Objectives

Make students know about

- the syllable structural properties,
- levels of stress and the characteristics of stressed syllables

Can you define the term 'syllable'?

- **1. Definition of syllable**

A syllable is a single unit of speech which contains, most of the time, a vowel.

2. Syllable structural properties

- If we have a look at the structural properties of the syllables, we can notice that each syllable consists of a **nucleus** (central peak of sonority), usually a vowel, and the consonants that cluster before and after the nucleus are called the **onset** and the **coda** respectively.

<i>Syllable parts</i>	Description	Optional
Onset	Initial segment of a syllable	optional
Nucleus	Central segment of a syllable (core)	obligatory
Coda	Closing segment of a syllable	optional

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- The preceding consonants or consonant cluster before the nucleus are called the “**onset**”.
 - - The consonants or consonant cluster following the nucleus are called the “**coda**”.
 - An English syllable requires a nucleus which is a vowel in most cases,
 - although the consonants [r̩], [l̩], [m̩], [n̩] can be also the nucleus of a syllable (syllabic)

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- **Zero onset:** if the syllable does not contain any consonant before the vowel. E.g.: *I'll, On, Ask*
 - **Zero coda:** when the syllable has no consonant after the vowel. E.g.: *May, Fee, Strew, Troy*

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- A syllable that stands alone is called **monosyllabic**, e.g., horse, train, wide, show...
 - A word containing more than one syllable is called **polysyllabic**, e.g., carry, deliver, organize, transformation, unwillingly, undoubtedly...

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- How does a listener perceives stress?
 - What about the speaker?

The listener perceives stress syllable as loud
While the speaker furnishes effort in its
articualtion

The accented pattern of English word may be considered as **fixed** because the stress falls on the same syllable in a given word but it may be considered as **free** because it may fall on the first, second, third or last syllable in a given word

- Look at these words. What do you notice?
- **water** /'wɔ:tə/
- **together** /tə'geðə/
- **information** / ,ɪnfə'meɪʃn/
- **Volunteer** / ,vɒlən'tiə

Levels of stress

- There are two levels of stress: **primary** stress and **secondary** stress.
- A third level refers to **unstressed** syllables. Example, in the verb organize there are two levels /'ɔ:gənəɪz/. Can you identify them?

In the word organization, there are three levels

- /,ɔ:gənəɪ'zeɪʃn/

5. Characteristics of stressed syllables

- **Pitch**: it is the most efficient factor for recognizing the prominence of stressed syllable, in which the stressed syllable is pronounced with a higher pitch than unstressed ones.
- **Energy of articulation** (loudness): the stressed syllables seem to be louder to the listener's ear than unstressed ones.
- **Quantity/ Duration (length)**: stressed syllables are longer than unstressed ones and take more time to be pronounced than the vowels of the unstressed syllables, which are reduced in length.
- **Quality**: the stressed syllable mostly has strong vowels /e, æ, ɒ, ɑː, iː, ɔː, ɜː, əʊ, aɪ, aʊ/ whereas the weak vowels such as /ə, ɪ, ʊ/ are most of the time unstressed in polysyllabic words.

In order to decide about stress placement, it is necessary to make use of some or all of the following:

- Whether the word is morphologically **simple or complex** (containing one or more affixes, or being a compound word)
- The **grammatical category** to which the word belongs (noun, adjective, verb, adverb...)
- The **number of syllables** in the word
- The **phonological structure** of the syllable