

Introduction to Sentence Stress

I. Sentence Stress

Sentence stress is considered as **free** because it is largely determined by the meaning to be conveyed. Some words are predisposed by their function in the language to receive the accent. They are called content (lexical words): main verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs.

Content words have in connected speech the qualitative pattern of their isolated forms; therefore, they retain some qualitative prominence even when no pitch is associated to them and when they are relatively unstressed.

Function words (grammatical, structural words) belong to the category of unstressed words, but they may be exceptionally stressed if the meaning requires it. They are words such as auxiliary verbs, modals, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, articles...

Many function words may have 2 or more qualitative and quantitative patterns according to whether they are accented or unaccented.

*The accented form is called the 'strong form' and the unaccented form is called the 'weak form'

* If we want to show stress and intonation at sentence level, several principles should be kept in mind:

- In isolation every word has a primary stress (although stress of monosyllabic words is not indicated).
- Monosyllabic words are not stressed in isolation; however, they always receive stress in a sentence.
- In words stress we identified different degrees of stress, we may do so in sentence stress, too.
- In sentence stress, the last syllable is the strongest. It is called the nucleus (in neutral intonation)

* Sentence stress falls on the **stressed syllable** of all the **content words**.

Sort / / objection / / international / /

It's an international committee. /

* Function words may carry sentence stress if **emphasized**.

I don't think I can do it. /

But I think you can do it. /

* **Polysyllabic** function words may carry sentence stress.

behind / / ago / / until / /

* **Adverbs** are usually stressed, even if they are technically **structural words**.

It's too late to change our minds. / /

* **Adverbs of position** carry sentence stress.

I'm not coming here again. / /

I left it over there. / /

* **Demonstratives** carry sentence stress.

This book is really worth reading. / /

That's the stupidest idea I've ever heard. / /

* **Negatives** are stressed.

I'm not coming here again. / /

We can't expect everything. / /

I hope you won't be annoyed. / /

* **Interrogative pronouns** carry sentence stress.

Why are they here? / /

Remark: Function words may be stressed when they are in isolation, at the end of the sentence or when the speaker wants to emphasize them.

But in neutral intonation, they are weakened, however there are exceptions (interrogative pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, polysyllabic words...)

Activity: Mark stress in this dialogue (neutral intonation)

<p>Ben: Honey, I'm home.</p> <p>Maria: Hi! How are you? How was your day at work?</p> <p>Ben: It was great! I got a promotion! I'll have more responsibilities in the office, but the best news is that I'll have more money at the end of the month.</p> <p>Maria: That's great! Congratulations! I'm really happy</p> <p>Ben: Unfortunately! I have to go to a conference this weekend so I won't be able to go to dinner with your parents this Friday. Sorry to let you down.</p>	<p>Maria: You're sorry? You're sorry??? I'm afraid 'sorry' isn't good enough. I've already told them you're going, Ben!</p> <p>Ben: I know, I know. And I am sorry about it. But as long as you have the chance to see them, it's okay, right?</p> <p>Maria: Fine. But we're going to dinner with them next Friday. No excuses.</p>
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