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LESSON 4

STRESS PATTERN

A. Word Stress

What is word stress?

Try saying the following words to yourself: *qualify*, *banana*, *understand*. All of them have three identifiable syllables, and one of the syllables in each word will sound louder than the others. So, we get *QUALify*, *baNAna*, and *underSTAND*. (the syllables indicated in capitals are the stressed syllables.) Each stressed syllable, in a word in isolation, also has a change in the pitch, or the level of the speaker's voice, and the vowel sound on that syllable is lengthened.

Stress can fall on the first, middle, or last syllables of words, as shown here:

Ooo	oOo	OoO
SYLLabus	EnGAGEment	UshereTTE
SUBStitute	BaNAna	KangaROO
TECHNical	PhoNETic	UnderSTAND

The words in the first group (Ooo) are all stressed on the first syllables, the words in the second group are stressed on the second syllables, and those in the third group are stressed on the third syllables.

What is unstressed?

In order for one syllable to be perceived as stressed, the syllables around it need to be unstressed. For stressed syllables, three features are identified: loudness, pitch change, and a longer syllable. Unstressed may be described as the absence of these.

Have another look at groups of words in the previous table. In the word *syllabus*, we said that the first syllable was stressed. This logically implies that the final two are unstressed. Also in word *banana*, the first and the third syllables are unstressed, and the middle one is stressed. The same applies to the other words in the table.

On the subject of unstressed syllables, there are various things to notice. The phoneme known as schwa, or the sound of /ə/ can be heard in the first syllable of *about*, in the second syllable of *paper*, and also in the third syllable of *intricate*. The table below shows the incidences of /ə/ with the corresponding written vowels underlined.

Ooo	oOo	OoO
SYLL <u>a</u> b <u>u</u> s	EnGAG <u>E</u> ment	Ush <u>e</u> RETTE
SUBStitute	B <u>a</u> N <u>A</u> n <u>a</u>	Kang <u>a</u> ROO
TECH <u>n</u> ical	Ph <u>o</u> NE <u>t</u> ic	Und <u>e</u> rSTAND

Sound /ə/ is the most commonly occurring vowel sound in English. It never appears within a stressed syllable. Schwa is by nature an unstressed sound. If you try to stress any syllable which naturally contains /ə/, you change its properties, and another phoneme is produced.

As can be seen from the words in the table below, /ə/ can be represented through spelling in a variety of ways. Here are some spellings, with the incidences of /ə/ underlined.

A	As in <u>a</u> r <u>i</u> s <u>e</u> , <u>s</u> yll <u>a</u> bl <u>e</u> , <u>b</u> an <u>a</u> n <u>a</u>
E	As in ph <u>e</u> nom <u>e</u> non, exc <u>e</u> ll <u>e</u> nt, and vow <u>e</u> l
I	As in pup <u>i</u> l, exper <u>i</u> ment, commu <u>n</u> ic <u>a</u> te
O	As in t <u>o</u> mm <u>o</u> rw <u>o</u> , butt <u>o</u> n, and devel <u>o</u> p
u	As in s <u>u</u> pp <u>o</u> rt, bog <u>u</u> s, and diffic <u>u</u> lt

Sometimes whole syllables or word endings may be reduced to /ə/, as in *butter*, *thorough*, *facilitator*, and *polar*. This is common among British English accents, though not so common in US English.

At other times /ə/ is a central sound in syllable, and several written vowels may represent the sound; this is very common in words ending in -ous (like *conscious* and *fictitious*). It also occurs frequently in -al endings (like *spatial*, *capital*, and *topical*), in -ion words (like *session*, *pronunciation*, and *attention*), and -ate endings (like *accurate*, *private*, and *delicate*). You will notice that there is one word in the table on the previous page in which /ə/ does not occur (*substitute*). It is important to remember that not all unstressed syllables contain /ə/, but it is our most common vowel sound.

Rules of word stress

The following list provides a rough guide to stressed syllables. It is more accurate to see these as descriptions of tendencies rather than rules, in that they only tell us what is the true most of the time, and it is always possible to find exceptions:

Core Vocabularies: Many everyday nouns and adjectives of two-syllable length are stressed on the first syllables. Examples are: sister, brother, mother, water, paper, table, coffee, lovely, etc.

Prefixes and suffixes: These are not usually in English. Consider: QUIetly, oRIGInally, deFECTive, and so on. (None the exception, though among prefixes, like Bicycle, DISclose.)

Compound words: Words formed from a combination of two words tend to be stressed on the first element. Examples are: POSTman, NEWSpaper, TEApot, and CROSSword.

Words having a dual role: In the case of words which can be used as either a noun or a verb, the noun will tend to be stressed on the first syllable (in line with the core vocabulary rule above), and the verb on the last syllable (in line with the prefix rule). Examples are: IMport (N), imPORT (V); REbel (N), reBEL (V); and INcrease (N), inCREASE (V).

Levels of stress

For the purpose of practicing pronunciation we distinguish three levels of stress: primary stress, secondary stress, and unstressed. The examples are:

o . O ..
opportunity
O . o
telephone
O . o
substitute

- O refers to primary stress
- o refers to secondary stress
- . refers to unstressed

Exercise 1: Listen to the recording and decide on which syllable the words are stressed, and then read them.

Advertise	impact	salutary	area	interest
Interesting	vegetable	criticize	policy	criticism
Advantage	efficient	majority	appropriate	machinery
Police	develop	idea	development	machine
Action	mention	distribution	explanation	education
Ability	credibility	possibility	reality	reliability
Dynamic	scientific	academic	realistic	fantastic

Exercise 2: Read the following pairs

Verb	Noun
Decide	decision
Derive	derivation
Exhibit	exhibition
Present	presentation
Invite	invitation
Generalize	generalization
Recite	recitation
Examine	examination
Acquire	acquisition
Admire	admiration
Affect	affectation
Export	export
Survey	survey
Protest	protest
Produce	produce
Object	object
Insult	insult
Conduct	conduct
Conflict	conflict
Extract	extract

Increase increase

Exercise 3:

Advertise advertisement

Agriculture agricultural

Architect architectural

Artifice artificer artificial

Autocrat autocracy autocratic

Celebrate celebrity celebration

Constitute constituent constitution

Democrat democracy democratic

Demonstrate demonstrative demonstration

Edit edition editorial

Economy economic

Execute executive execution

Incident incidental

Memory memorial memorandum

Necessary necessity

Officer official

Politics political politician

Ridicule ridiculous

Situated situation

Infinite infinitive infinitesimal

Specify specific specification

Antique antiquary antiquarian

Maintain maintenance

Reside residence residential

Coincide coincidence coincidental

B. Sentence Stress

When we talk about word stress, our unit of analysis is words in isolation, where to place stresses on words. When we say words of more than one syllable in isolation, we will stress one of syllables. When words are arranged together in a sentence or utterance, certain syllables will be stressed in order to convey the most important information. This may cancel out normal word stress. Here intonation is used to give further subtleties of meaning to the syllables we have chosen to stress. Remember also that our spoken language is not tied to sentences. When conversing, we often use incomplete sentences, phrases which would be considered ungrammatical if written down, interrupt each other, backtrack and so on. However, a study of stress within complete sentences provides ‘a user-friendly’ way of drawing attention to the main aspects of how we use stress in speech.

Normally, we give stress to content words: nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, and we do not give stress to the structural or functional words, such as articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, and so on. Those structural or functional words unstressed in sentences are usually pronounced in weak forms of pronunciation. Thus, structural or functional words may have both strong or full forms of pronunciation, as well as weak forms of pronunciation. They will have full forms of pronunciation when they are stressed, and weak forms of pronunciation when they are unstressed.

Exercises 1: Underline the words which are stressed in the following sentences!

1. I thought we would watch a movie or video.
2. We are having our neighbors over for dinner.
3. I want to sleep for as long as possible.
4. I'd like to go hiking or camp at the beach.
5. I need to catch up on our work I didn't get done this week.
6. I have a list of a mile long of things to do.
7. I have got to get ready for a math exam.
8. There is a new exhibit at the art museum I would like to see.

As mentioned before that structural or functional words may have strong (full) and weak forms of pronunciation. The following table shows the full and weak forms of pronunciation of those structural or functional words.

Grammatical category	Word	Full form	Weak form	Example of weak form
Verbs	am	æm	m	That's what I'm trying to say.
	are	a:	ə	Where are you from?
	is	Iz	əz/z/s	Where's he from?/Where is he from?
	was		wəz	That's where he was born.
	were	wɜ:	wə	That's where my children were born.
	Do	du:	də	Where do you live?
	does	dʌz	dəz	Where does he live?
	have	hæv	əv/v	He will have left by now./ They've gone.
	has	hæs	həz/əz/ z/s	The baby has swallowed a stone./He's gone.
	had	hæd	həd/əd/d	He had already gone./ He'd already gone.
	can	kæn	kən	I'm not sure if I can lend it to you.
	could	kʊd	kəd	Well, what could I say?
	would	wʊd	wəd/əd	Well, what would you have done?
should	ʃʊd	ʃəd/ʃd	Well, what should I have said?	
Personal pronouns	you	ju:	jə	How do you do?
	your		jə	What does your boss think?
	he	hi:	hI/I	Where does he work?
	him	hIm	Im	I'll give it to him later.
	she	ʃi:	ʃI	She's leaving tomorrow.
	her	hɜ:	hə/ə	I'll give it to her later.
	us	ʌs	əs	They'll give it to us later.
	them	ðem	ðəm	I'll give it to them later.
Prepositions	to	tu:	tə	He's already gone to work.
	at	æt	ət	He's at work, I think.

	of		əv	That's the last of the wine!
	for		fə	He's away for two weeks.
	from		frəm	She comes from Scotland.
Conjunctions	and	ænd	ən/ənd	She's tall and fair.
	but	bʌt	bət	She's here, but Juan isn't.
	than	ðæn	ðən	She's older than you.
Articles	a	eɪ	ə	He's a doctor.
	an	æn	ən	She's an architect.
	the	ði:	ðə	She's the person I told you about.
Indefinite adjectives	any	eni:	ə	Have we got any biscuits?
	some	sʌm	ə	There's some tea in the pot.
	such	sʌtʃ	əʃ	It's not such a big deal, really.

Exercise 2: Read the following phrases

Without his clothes on	a bucketful of ice
A pretty feather	a line of marches
To get one's breathe back	a pair of chairs
A childish mother	a large account
An excellent theme	as good as George
In spite of the truth	a kind of jam
To bathe in the lake	a glass of juice
The growth of the tree	to major in language teaching
A breeze from the south	sufficient for longer journey
To come back to earth	a picture of country valleys
Thanking him for that	in charge of the rally races
Dirty underneath	to think of important matters
doing it for both	ashamed of his own faults
gone far to the north	a polished ability
close it with a cloth	shadows under the eyes
wiser to withdraw	show me what you've done

Exercise 3: Read the following dialogue in pairs

- Woman : Do you have any plans this weekend?
Man : There's so much to choose from on campus that I'm not sure what I'm going to do.
Woman : The football game's on Saturday night, and I'm going with a group of friends. Do you want to go with us?
Man : Of course I'd like to go to the football game. It's the biggest game of the season. And it sounds like fun to go with a large group of people.
Woman : Good. We'll be meeting at the cafeteria for dinner at six o'clock on Saturday night, and then we'll go on to the game together.
Man : That takes care of my plans for Saturday nights. But now I need to make a decision about Sunday afternoon. The music department is sponsoring a concert then, and I'd really like to hear that concert. But there's also a play being presented by the drama department that I really wanted to see. It's too bad those two events are at the same time.
Woman : You know, if you go to the game on Saturday night and a concert or play on Sunday, that doesn't leave much time for studying.
Man : Oh, well. Maybe I can do that the weekend after this one.