

THE ACCENTUAL STRUCTURE OF ENGLISH WORDS

Every word pronounced in isolation has **word-stress**.

- **Word accent (stress)** in a disyllabic or polysyllabic word is a singling out one or more of its syllables by giving them a greater degree of prominence as compared with the other syllable or syllables in the same word.

This greater degree of prominence is effected mainly by pronouncing the stressed syllable:

- a) On a different pitch or with a change of pitch direction in it;
- b) With greater force of exhalation and greater muscular tension;
- c) With an increase in the length of the sounds in the stressed syllable (quantitative changes);
- d) Without reduction (qualitative changes).

In different languages one of the factors constituting word stress is usually more significant than the others. According to the most important feature **different types of word stress are distinguished in different languages.**

1. If special prominence in a stressed syllable is achieved mainly through the change of pitch, or musical tone, such accent is called **musical, or tonic.** This type of word stress is observed in Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese.

2. If special prominence in a stressed syllable is achieved mainly through the intensity of articulation, such type of stress is called **dynamic, or force stress**. European languages such as English and Russian possess predominantly dynamic word stress.

3. If special prominence in a stressed syllable is achieved mainly through the changes in the quantity of the vowels, which are longer in the stressed syllables than in the unstressed ones, such type of stress is called **quantitative**.

4. **Qualitative** type of stress is achieved through the changes in the quality of the vowel under stress.

- In English word stress is marked by the variations in force, pitch, quantity and quality.
- The nature of word stress in Russian differs from that in English. The quantitative component plays a greater role in Russian accentual structure than in English.

Languages are differentiated according to the **placement of word stress**. Traditionally they are divided into those with **a fixed stress** and those with **a free stress**.

- In languages with a fixed stress the occurrence of the word stress is limited to a particular syllable in a multisyllabic word, e.g. in French the stress falls on the last syllable of the word. In languages with a free stress its place is not confined to a specific position in the word (Russian, English).

Stress in English and in Russian is not only free but also shifting. In both languages the place of stress may shift, which helps to differentiate different parts of speech, e.g. 'insult – to in'sult. Thus the shifting of word stress serves to perform **distinctive function**.

Stress also helps to constitute and recognize words and their forms performing **constitutive** and **recognitive functions**.

A polysyllabic word has as many **degrees of stress** as there are syllables in it.

- The **British linguists** usually distinguish three degrees of stress in the word: **primary, secondary** and **weak stress**. Unstressed syllables are supposed to have weak stress.
- The **American scholars** find four contrastive degrees of word stress: loud, reduced loud, medial and weak stresses; or in other terms: primary, secondary, tertiary and weak stress.
- The British conception of three degrees of word stress is accepted as the **teaching norm**.

In spite of the fact that word accent in the English stress system is free, there are certain factors that determine the place and different degree of word stress. V.A. Vassilyev describes **four tendencies**.

1. Recessive tendency results in placing the word-stress on the initial syllable. It can be of 2 sub-types: a) **unrestricted** recessive accent, which falls on the first syllable: **father** ['fa:ðə]; b) **restricted** recessive accent, which is characterized by placing the word stress on the root of the word if this word has a prefix, which has lost its meaning: **become** [bi'kʌm], **begin** [bi'gin].

2. **Rhythmic tendency** results in altering stressed and unstressed syllables, e.g. **pronunciation** [prəˌnʌnsɪˈeɪʃn]. This tendency is very strong in modern English. Due to its influence there are such accentual variants as: hospitable [ˈhɒspitəbl̩], [hɒsˈpitəbl̩].

3. **Retentive tendency** consists in the retention of the primary accent on the parent word, e.g. **person** [ˈpɜːsn̩] – **personal** [ˈpɜːsnl̩]. More commonly it is retained on the parent word as a secondary accent, e.g. **similar** [ˈsimilə] – **similarity** [ˌsimiˈlɪrɪti].

4. **Semantic factor**. It is observed in the compounds:
- a) When compound nouns denote a single idea, e.g. 'blacksmith, 'drawing room.
 - b) When the first element of the compound is most important, e.g. 'birthday.
 - c) When the first element of the compound is contrasted with some other word, e.g. 'flute player, not 'violin player.
 - d) When a compound is very common and frequently used it may have a single stress, e.g. 'midsummer, 'midnight.

