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SENTENCE STRESS AND ITS IMPACT ON COMMUNICATION

Abstract: Sentence stress is the pattern of stressed and unstressed words across a sentence. Normally this emphasis is on words that carry important information, although this can change significantly, depending on the specific meaning the speaker wants to communicate. While often overlooked in the study of language, sentence stress plays a crucial role in how we communicate. It's the unsung hero of speech, shaping the rhythm, clarity, and meaning of our spoken words. This article delves into the intricacies of sentence stress, exploring its underlying mechanisms, its impact on comprehension, and its role in conveying nuances of meaning and emotion. Imagine a world without music. No rhythmic beats, no soaring melodies, no captivating harmonies. Now imagine a world without sentence stress. The result would be similarly barren, devoid of the natural cadence and subtle expressiveness that makes language so captivating.

Key words: sentence stress, sentence stress, stressed syllable, stressed words, content words

Introduction. Sentence stress refers to the emphasis placed on specific words within a sentence. This emphasis is achieved by increasing the loudness, pitch, and duration of the stressed syllable. While every word in a sentence is pronounced, stressed words stand out, giving the sentence its rhythm and clarity. Imagine a simple sentence like "I went to the store." Each word is spoken, but the emphasis falls on the word "store," highlighting the location. By highlighting important information, sentence stress acts as a beacon, guiding listeners through the flow of speech and preventing misinterpretations. Sentence stress can profoundly alter the meaning of a sentence, turning a simple statement into a declaration of emotion or a subtle shift in intent. Sentence stress is the backbone of intonation, the natural rise and fall of speech. It contributes to the melodic nature of language, conveying emotions and adding emphasis to certain ideas. A sentence like "Are you **sure**?" can sound inquisitive when the stress falls on "sure," but confident and reassuring when the stress shifts to "you." Sentence stress imbues spoken language with a natural rhythm, making it easier to understand and follow. This rhythmic flow creates a pleasing cadence, enhancing the overall flow and engagement of speech. Content words carry the weight of meaning in a sentence, while function words act as grammatical glue, holding the sentence together. Content words, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and sometimes demonstratives (this, that, these, those), are typically stressed. Function words, including prepositions, articles (a, an, the), conjunctions, and pronouns, are usually unstressed. Stressing involves putting more emphasis on a word or sentence to draw attention to it. Say you're discussing world hunger in your speech. In this case, you would want to emphasize words like 'hunger' and 'poverty' to make sure the audience is drawn to the main idea of your speech.

Words that the speaker wants to emphasize for particular reasons (clarity, emotion, contradiction, etc.) will be stressed. For example, in the sentence "I did **not** say that," the stress on "not" highlights the speaker's denial. From the physiological point of view, stress means the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is pronounced. Also, the energy that comes from the lungs will strengthen a certain syllable of the word. This definition gives the light impression that a stressed syllable requires more effort of some sort than other syllables. Thus the stress syllables are in some way pronounced strongly than the other syllables. However, according to the physical point of view, frequency is seen as the most relevant factor for recognition of word stress, followed by duration and intensity; while from the psychological point of view, the most important factors would be pitch, length and loudness, respectively. Besides these views, there is the psychological one, which describes stress as loudness. Baptista explains that syllables receiving accent or prominence consist of stress, pitch, quality and quantity. Nevertheless, pitch is seen as the most efficient clue for the English learner. Based on Baptista's research, there is no

agreement among linguists about these terms to give a definition for word stress, but no linguist can deny the role word stress plays in communication.

Phrases and clauses. Within longer phrases or clauses, stress can fall on the last word or on the word that carries the most significant meaning in the context. For example, in the phrase "the *big* red *ball*," the stress might fall on "big" or "ball," depending on what the speaker wants to emphasize.

While these principles provide a starting point, sentence stress is highly dynamic and context-dependent. The same sentence can be stressed differently depending on the speaker's intention, the situation, and the overall flow of conversation. For instance, the sentence "Did you *go* to the store?" spoken in a casual setting, might have the stress on "go," emphasizing the action. However, if spoken in a questioning tone, the stress might shift to "you," highlighting a suspicion or doubt. Listeners may not follow your meaning if you don't stress key words in information chunks. Stress is essential for presenting key information clearly. Stressing information words at the end of a sentence or a speech chunk is also important because this is where new information often occurs in English. Stress is one of the most important speech tools used by English speakers to communicate meaning. English speakers use stress to highlight information they think is important. In addition, every English word with more than one syllable or word part has a defined stress pattern. That is, you can look up a dictionary to see which syllable is stressed. English stress is as important as English sounds. You may sabotage your communication and you may risk tiring and confusing listeners. Listeners may not be able to recognise even simple vocabulary if you stress syllables equally or use incorrect word stress. Listeners may not follow your meaning if you don't stress key words in information chunks.

Sentence stress transcends mere clarity and meaning. It's also a powerful tool for conveying emotions and creating different shades of meaning. Consider these examples:

Improving your use of sentence stress can significantly enhance your communication skills, making your speech more engaging, comprehensible, and impactful. Here's a roadmap for achieving mastery:

Listen, Learn, and Absorb: Immerse yourself in spoken English, paying close attention to how native speakers stress words in different contexts. Observe how they use intonation and pauses to emphasize key information. Thus, the word stress in English has a captivated fundamental to understand spoken English. Native speakers of English use word stress naturally. Word stress is so natural for them that they don't even know that they use word stress while speaking, unconsciously, they follow word stress. But, when it comes to non-native speakers who speak English to native speakers without using word stress, encounter two problems: hey find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially when they speaking fast.

Practice Makes Perfect: Record yourself speaking and listen back to identify your stress patterns. Are you stressing words consistently in the right places? Are you using the right intonation to convey your intended meaning?

When you give a presentation, it's important to pause enough to signal that you are introducing a new topic. Pause at the end of one section and before you start a new one. Then state the new topic and pause so the listener can get ready for new information. Speech without pauses and speech chunks can overwhelm the listener with 'too much information'. The listener may feel 'lost' in a 'forest' of words. Without chunking and pausing, it will be hard for listeners to follow your meaning and know where they are in your presentation. How do students of English learn to speak like native speakers? Everyone knows that pronunciation is important, but some people forget about sentence stress and intonation. The cadence and rhythm of a language are important for fluency and clarity. Languages of the world vary greatly in word and sentence stress—many languages stress content words (e.g., most European languages) while others are tonal (e.g., Thai) or have little to no word stress (e.g., Japanese). Practicing sentence stress in English helps students speak more quickly and naturally. Fortunately for teachers, students usually enjoy activities like the one in the worksheet below! After one of our subscribers asked us for resources on sentence stress this week, I thought I'd share some tips and a worksheet that you can use in class. Sentence stress occurs when we say certain words more loudly and with more emphasis than

others. In English, we stress content words because they are essential to the meaning of the sentence. In general, shorter words or words that are clear from the context don't get stressed. The focus stress is used to emphasize the most important word in the sentence. In the example above, the focus stress is on the word "cat." This means that the speaker is emphasizing. In a language words are divided into syllable, it could be mono syllable, di syllables, three syllables or poly syllables. When uttering a word, a speaker may not be conscious of dividing words into syllable and giving stress on syllables accordingly. But, the word stress is done unconsciously with correct pronunciation, pitching and intonation while uttering a word. This is called speech patterns or sound patterns. In English language 'word stress' is also called 'accent'. Accent is a specific way of pronouncing a language. For any language even with more than a not many of speakers have noticeable regional, social and individual differences. In this way the language is pronounced by different people; sometimes these differences are affected by other dominant accent but, they are not completely suppressed, they sustain with their own qualities and individuality. Thus, each distinguishable type of pronunciation is called an accent.

Embrace the Content Words: Consciously focus on stressing the most important words in a sentence, ensuring that your listener clearly understands the core message. Practice using natural intonation patterns to highlight important information and create a pleasing rhythm in your speech. Don't be afraid to experiment with stress patterns, but always keep the meaning and context in mind. Stress falls more often on the root or base of a word and less on the prefix; compound nouns tend to receive primary stress on the first element and secondary stress on the second; the suffixes can also influence taking the primary stress themselves, changing the original stress to other syllable, or they may simply not affect the stress pattern of a word. Celce-Murcia (2001) still contributes with the idea that "while our students may still look up the stress of an unfamiliar word in the dictionary, these basic rules will aid them in understanding how the system can function in English.

Conclusion. Sentence stress is a powerful tool for expressing emotions, adding emphasis, and engaging your audience. Practice using it to convey surprise, excitement, frustration, or sarcasm, adding another dimension to your communication. Sentence stress, though often overlooked, is a fundamental aspect of spoken English. It's the subtle yet powerful element that transforms words into meaningful sentences, conveying information, emotion, and intent with remarkable clarity and nuance. By understanding and practicing sentence stress, you can become a more effective communicator, engaging your audience and making your speech more compelling and understandable. It's time to embrace the unsung hero of speech and unlock the full potential of your spoken language.

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