

## Accent, Stress, Rhythm & Connected Speech

Edited By Dr. Ramesh Landge

Depending on what your native language is when you speak English you will have an accent, much like many native English speakers. Their accents depend on from where in their Anglophone country they come and indeed which country.

Often language learners want to speak the **Queen's English** because it is cited as being the gold standard of pronunciation. However, sounding like a nonagenarian lady is not what I would want to teach my students. There is also Received Pronunciation [RP] or the old **BBC English** which is English without a regional accent. This suggests that the listener cannot tell from where the speaker comes. Both the Queen's English and RP are a bit old fashioned and tired now and regional English is the norm. Nowadays BBC newsreaders and announcers come from the length and breadth of the UK and this gives the BBC a more modern sound which embraces all the different regional accents. This, of course, doesn't mean there are no RP speakers; there are plenty, me included; it's just that other accents are now celebrated more and rightly so.

As an English teacher I think that exposing students to different kinds of accents is important as in their real life they will hear and meet people from diverse places all of whom will have a different accent.

Students also need to be understood when they speak, so clear pronunciation is important. Also, when students take English language exams, like the YLE, KET, PET and FCE to prove their level, there is always a speaking test and pronunciation is always examined. Examiners listen for stress, rhythm and intonation as these are important markers of fluency and can change the meaning of a word or sentence. I won't go into too much detail here but this is what they are:

### Rhythm

This is the speed and cadence of how you say a sentence. So some beginner students might say – each - word- in – a - sentence - at - the - same - speed and sound a little like a robot. Developing different speeds and know when to slow down and speed up can give your spoken English more interest.

### Intonation

This is the 'music' of the language. Often questions can be asked with a rising intonation where the pitch goes up. This might be a genuine question to which you don't know the answer. 'John's still on holiday?' said with a rising pitch means it's a question which needs answering. If it's said without a rising intonation it's information that you already know and you may just need confirmation. Intonation can also show emotions like surprise etc.

### Stress

This is saying a syllable or part of a word more strongly and can be at word level. REcOrd is the noun for example of an athletics world record perhaps, whilst reCORD is what you do to a song when you copy it onto a CD.

Stress is also important at sentence level where the meaning can be changed depending on which whole word you stress. I left you with a question last week about how many ways the meaning of a sentence can be changed. Here we go: the words underlined should be stressed. See how it changes the implied meaning.

I thought your brother was a bus conductor. [you thought someone else thought....]

I thought your brother was a bus conductor [you thought I knew he was a bus conductor]

I thought your brother was a bus conductor [not your friend's brother]

I thought your brother was a bus conductor [not your sister]

I thought your brother was a bus conductor [I didn't know he still is a bus conductor]

I thought your brother was a bus conductor [before I thought he was an orchestral conductor]

I thought your brother was a bus conductor [not a bus driver]

So the implied meaning of this short sentence can be changed seven times depending on which word is stressed! Actually, if you stress more than one word in the sentence....let's not go there!

So how important is all this and what or who should I try and sound like?

Well, I think it's quite important to improve students' pronunciation as communicating effectively is the end goal of learning a language. If you decide you like the British accent then try for that but the North American, Australian and New Zealand accents are all good too.

If when you are speaking and people are always asking you to repeat yourself or saying they don't understand, then you might have to improve your pronunciation. To do so by yourself is quite easy. A good way is to watch your favourite English TV programme or listen to a song and mimic what is being said [say exactly what you hear]. Try this one for starters. Record yourself and play it back to see if you sound exactly the same. Do it again and again, over and over. Try to get the correct rhythm, stress and intonation. Listen to yourself again and repeat. You will eventually pick up the slight differences and learn to use them effectively. If you do this you will be speaking like a 90-year-old Monarch in no time!

I haven't decided what to blog about next week. If you or your children have a difficulty with any aspect of learning English, feel free to drop me an email and I'll see if I can blog about it.

### Connected speech

1. Phonetics and Phonology 3 From Speech Sounds to Words and Sentences: Connected Speech
2. The Segmental Features of Speech Phonemes Consonants Vowels
3. The Supersegmental Features of Speech • Voiced sounds become voiceless (picked, smokes) • Some consonant or vowel sounds become short or long (voiceless fricatives T, high vowels A:) • Some parts of a word (syllable) receive more stress • Stressed syllables are often longer • Unstressed syllables reduce vowel • Some words in a sentence are made more prominent • Varying tone/intonation is used in speech.
4. Assimilation ••••• Ten cars Ten boys Good girl Have to Has to Used to
5. Elision ••••• her him family her confirm comfortable ••••• interesting chocolate government The next day The last car The last train
6. Contractions gonna gotta wanna kinda lemme aint 'cause 'bout going to have got to want a kind of let me am / is / are not because about

7. [7. Word Stress](#)
8. [8. The Notion of a Syllable](#) To learn about word-stress, an understanding of the notion of syllables in words is required. Examine the following sentence: To eat is human; to digest divine. The sentence has seven words and each of the words can be called a unit in the sentence.
9. [9.](#) To eat is human; to digest divine. Just as one can break up a sentence into a number of words, it is also possible to break up words into smaller units, called syllables. Words can be made up of one, two, three or more syllables. For example, the words to, eat and is have just 1 syllable. The words human, digest and divine have 2 syllables.
10. [10.](#) Activity: Count the Syllables yesterday, today, day, examination, impossible Rearrange these words according to the number of syllables each has. Start from the lowest to the highest.
11. [11.](#) Strong and Weak Syllables Syllables are considered as strong and weak depending on the vowels that constitute them. A weak syllable is different from a strong one in terms of its low intensity of sound (loudness) and the relative shortness of the vowel (length).
12. [12.](#) Prominent Syllables In words of more than one syllable not all the syllables are equally prominent, i.e., they are not all said with the same degree of force, but some syllables are more prominent than others. And because they are pronounced with a greater amount of force, the listener generally hears them as louder than the other syllables.
13. [13.](#) Activity: Prominent Syllables Count the syllables in the word. Which is the prominent syllable? • University • Hertfordshire • England • United Kingdom
14. [14.](#) •••• Hert ford shire U ni ver si ty En gland The U nit ed King dom
15. [15.](#) Word Stress A word stress means a prominent syllable word pattern tea.cher • beau.ti.ful •. un.der.stand •. con.ti.nue •.
16. [16.](#) How To Pronounce Word Stress? When a syllable is stressed, it is pronounced • longer in duration • higher in pitch • louder in volume
17. [17.](#) How do you say teacher? Longer Higher teeeeeeeeeee cher tea cher Louder TEA cher All three combined TEEEEEEEEEE cher
18. [18.](#) Word Stress The more prominent syllable in a word is called a stressed or accented syllable. Longer words (words with 3 or more syllables) and compounds often have two or even more stressed syllables with one of the syllables carrying the primary stress and another the secondary stress. All other syllables that are less prominent are called unstressed or unaccented syllables.
19. [19.](#) Practice Saying these Words Oo oO Ooo oOo ooO BABy toDAY QUALify toMORrow afterNOON ACtion beCOME ACCident baNAna underSTAND DOCTor perHAPS INcident phoNETic cigaRETTE
20. [20.](#) Some Practical Tips on Word Stress • In a stressed or accented syllable, it is the vowel sound which is made more prominent and not the consonant sound. That means the vowel sound is made louder, longer and said at a higher pitch. • /E/ is the most commonly occurring vowel sound in English. It never appears within a stressed syllable. Compare: apple/admit; college/collect; devil/donate; proper/perform; sacred/succeed • In case of difficulty in saying a word with the correct stress, pronounce the stressed syllable a couple of times and then quickly add the remaining syllables.
21. [21.](#) Word Stress Rule Where is the stress? Examples Nouns on the first syllable center object flower Verbs on the last syllable release admit arrange on the first part desktop

- pencil case bookshelf greenhouse Word type Two syllables Nouns (N + N) (Adj. + N) Compound Adjectives (Adj. + P.P.) Verbs (prep. + verb) on the last part (the verb part) well-meant hard-headed old-fashioned understand overlook outperform
22. [22.](#) Word type Phrasal Verbs Where is the stress? Examples on the particle turn off buckle up hand out -ic the syllable before the ending Word with added ending economic Geometric electrical -tion, -cian, -sion Technician graduation cohesion -phy, -gy, -try, -cy, -fy, -al Photography biology geometry -meter the third from the last syllable Parameter Thermometer barometer
23. [23.](#) Words which Function both as Nouns and Verbs Word conduct contrast desert increase insult object permit protest record refuse Noun /'kʌndɔkt/ /'kʌntrɜːst/ /'dezEt/ /'Inkriːs/ /'Insɔlt/ /'ʌbdGIkt/ /'pɑːrmIt/ /'prEUtest/ /'rekO:d/ /'refjuːs/ Verb /kEn'dɔkt/ /kEn'trɜːst/ /dI'zɑːt/ /In'kriːs/ /In'sɔlt/ /Eb'dGekt/ /pE'mIt/ /prE'test/ /rI'kO:d/ /rI'fjuːz/ 23
24. [24.](#) Activity: Word Stress Copy and mark the stress in these words. Switzerland activity character divorce prefer New Zealand already develop engineer introduce Minister atmosphere depend contact comfortable 24
25. [25.](#) Tonic Stress When we speak certain words stand out in the utterance. Depending on their focus, speakers choose which words to accent or highlight more. Generally, words are highlighted for their importance, interest or newness and in normal speech, it is generally the last stressed syllable of a sentence or a phrase which is made to stand out. Examples: • I 'hate 'milk. • 'That's my 'house. • 'Where're you 'going in the 'evening? • 'Nobody 'wanted to 'talk to him .
26. [26.](#) Tonic stress • • • • I 'hate 'milk. 'That's my 'house. 'Where're you 'going in the 'evening? 'Nobody 'wanted to 'talk to him . Tip: Nouns tend to be focused more often than verbs, adjectives, or adverbs.
27. [27.](#) Tonic Stress The speaker may however decide to make some other word prominent depending on the context and the purpose of communication. Notice, how the speaker emphasizes a different word in these statements. 1. My 'wife 'hates 'milk. (She however, likes coffee or tea) 2. My 'wife 'hates 'milk. (I want to clearly indicate what she really dislikes strongly) 3. My 'wife 'hates 'milk. (Although my children and I like it )
28. [28.](#) Tonic Stress: Practice Student A: If the Principal does not take back what she said to me this morning, I am going to leave this college. Student B: What did she say? Student A: She asked me to leave the college.
29. [29.](#) Tonic Stress: Practice ANNOUNCEMENT Ladies and Gentlemen, I have some good news and some bad news. First, the good news. The dive that you just watched in the Olympic Diving event was the winning dive. Now, the bad news. The swimming pool was empty.
30. [30.](#) Rhythm in Connected Speech English belongs to the group of languages which are said to have a stress-timed rhythm. The basic principle of stressed-timed rhythm is placing the right emphasis on significant bits of information-carrying words and quickly passing over words and structural items like pronouns, auxiliaries, articles, prepositions and so on that are contextually less significant.
31. [31.](#) Rhythm in Connected Speech • • • • 'One, two, three, four.' 'One and two and three and four.' 'One and a two and a three and a four.' 'One and then a two and then a three and then a four.'
32. [32.](#) Stress-based Vs. Syllable-based Rhythm

33. [33.](#) Angin Utara dan Matahari Ketika Angin Utara dan Matahari sedang bertengkar mengenai siapa yang lebih kuat, datang seorang pengembara yang memakai jubah. Kedua-duanya bersetuju bahawa sesiapa yang berjaya menyebabkan pengembara tersebut menanggalkan jubahnya akan dianggap lebih kuat. Lalu Angin Utara pun meniup sekuatnya, namun semakin kuat angin bertiup semakin rapat pula pengembara tersebut memeluk jubahnya sehingga akhirnya Angin Utara pun mengalah. Kemudian Matahari memancarkan sinarnya dan dengan segera pengembara tersebut menanggalkan jubahnya. Akhirnya Angin Utara terpaksa mengaku bahawa Matahari lebih kuat daripadanya.
34. [34.](#) The North Wind and the Sun The North Wind and the Sun were disputing which was the stronger, when a traveller came along wrapped in a warm cloak. They agreed that the one who first succeeded in making the traveller remove his cloak should be considered stronger than the other. Then the North Wind blew as hard as he could, but the more he blew the more closely did the traveller fold his cloak around him; and at last the North Wind gave up the attempt. Then the Sun shone out warmly, and immediately the traveller took off his cloak. And so the North Wind was obliged to confess that the Sun was the stronger of the two.
35. [35.](#) Rhythm in Connected Speech • He 'bought a 'pen. • He 'bought it to'day. • He 'bought it from them to'day .
36. [36.](#) Activity: Rhythm in English If you're happy and you know it clap your hands xx If you're happy and you know it clap your hands xx If you're happy and you know it and you really want to show it clap your hands xx \*stomp your feet \*say hurray \*say we are
37. [37.](#) 'Strong' and 'Weak' Forms • I went to the station and booked two tickets for my father and his best friend. • Who's his best friend? • It's a woman. • You mean, he has a girl friend! • Yes, he does have a girl friend. I was surprised when I got to know.
38. [38.](#) We saw stressed and unstressed syllables in individual words
39. [39.](#) Something similar happens in complete sentences
40. [40.](#) Where are you from?
41. [41.](#) Where are you from? I'm from London.
42. [42.](#) Where are you from? I'm from London.
43. [43.](#) Where are you from? I'm from London.
44. [44.](#) Where are you from? I'm from London.
45. [45.](#) ɒ Where are you from? ə I'm from London.
46. [46.](#) Are they from Italy?
47. [47.](#) Are they from Italy? Yes, they are.
48. [48.](#) Are they from Italy? Yes, they are.
49. [49.](#) Are they from Italy? Yes, they are.
50. [50.](#) Are they from Italy? Yes, they are.
51. [51.](#) ə Are they from Italy? ɑ: Yes, they are.
52. [52.](#) some words have two pronunciations
53. [53.](#) a weak form from / frəm / are / ə /
54. [54.](#) and a strong form from / frɒm / are / ɑ: /
55. [55.](#) the weak form is the usual pronunciation
56. [56.](#) the weak form is the usual pronunciation it's used when the word is unstressed
57. [57.](#) the strong form is used only when the word is stressed
58. [58.](#) the strong form is used only when the word is stressed eg. when it's the last word
59. [59.](#) the vowel is simplified (in most cases) to ə or ɪ

60. [60.](#) which words have weak and strong forms?
61. [61.](#) prepositions auxiliary verbs modal verbs pronouns possessive adjectives possessive pronouns conjunctions articles
62. [62.](#) which words only have strong forms?
63. [63.](#) nouns main verbs adjectives adverbs
64. [64.](#) aux. verbs weak form strong form am əm æm are ə ɑ: have həv hæv had həd hæd does dəz dʌz
65. [65.](#) modal verbs weak form strong form can kən kæn will wɪl wɪl would wəd wʊd shall ʃəl ʃæl must məst mʌst
66. [66.](#) articles weak form strong form a ə eɪ an ən æn the ðə ði:
67. [67.](#) Situations where weak forms become strong
68. [68.](#) the end of the sentence
69. [69.](#) Where are you from?
70. [70.](#) Yes, I am?
71. [71.](#) No, I'm not?
72. [72.](#) auxiliary or modal substitutes or includes the main verb
73. [73.](#) I can't speak German but my friend can.
74. [74.](#) Do you like English coffee? No, I don't.
75. [75.](#) negatives
76. [76.](#) I can't speak German.
77. [77.](#) You aren't listening.
78. [78.](#) the stress is always on 'not' even when it's abbreviated
79. [79.](#) Look at this passage from Charles Dickens' A Tale of Two Cities How many weak forms can you find?
80. [80.](#) It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.
81. [81.](#) It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.
82. [82.](#) it wəs thə best əf times, it wəs thə worst əf times, it wəs thə age əf wisdom, it wəs thə age əf foolishness, it wəs thə epoch əf belief, it wəs thə epoch əf incredulity, it wəs thə season əf Light, it wəs thə season əf Darkness, it wəs thə spring əf hope, it wəs thə winter əf despair, wi həd everything before əs, wi həd nothing before əs, wi wə all going direct tə Heaven, wi wə all going direct thi other way—in short, thə period wəs so far like thə present period, thət some əf its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, fə good ə fə evil, in thə superlative degree əf comparison only.



83. [83.](#) Intonation in Speech Read out this conversation: A: Done? B: Nearly. A: Shall we go then? B: Not yet. A: When? B: Just wait .
84. [84.](#) Intonation When we speak a language we do not say every word on the same note or the pitch . There are changes in the pitch, just as in music. The pitch of the voice keeps on changing constantly as we speak and as a result the tone of our utterance may indicate a rise, a fall or it may remain level and steady
85. [85.](#) Note the manner in which these sentences in a conversation may be said: ••••••••  
‘Tomorrow is a holiday’ ‘Is tomorrow a holiday?’ ‘I wish tomorrow was a holiday!’ ‘Do you know if tomorrow is a holiday?’ ‘Tomorrow is a holiday, isn’t it?’ ‘If tomorrow is a holiday, tell him not to come.’ ‘Just realised tomorrow is a holiday: we don’t need to submit our work. Let’s celebrate.’
86. [86.](#) Intonation This constant variation in the pitch of the voice over a stretch of speech is called intonation. No living language in the world is spoken on a monotone all the time. Each language has its own characteristic intonation patterns and so has English.
87. [87.](#) Intonation and Grammar ••••• Wh-word questions: falling intonation Yes/No questions: rising Statements: falling Question-Tags: 'chat' - falling; 'check' - rising Lists: rising, rising, rising, falling
88. [88.](#) Intonation: Statements
89. [89.](#) Intonation: Asking Yes/No Questions
90. [90.](#) Intonation: Asking Wh- Questions • What time does the game start? • Where is it going to be held? • How are we going to go? • Who do you think may win?
91. [91.](#) Intonation: Lists
92. [92.](#) Intonation Indicates Attitudes Intonation is perhaps the chief means by which the speaker reveals his attitudes and emotions. To the listener/s it can indicate whether the speaker is being friendly, formal, impatient, sympathetic etc. Note the difference made out by the change in the tone of the voice in these examples .
93. [93.](#) How many different ways can these be said? • A: Hello! • B: Hello! • A: What’s your name? • B: What’s your name? • A: I’ve seen you somewhere. • B: I’ve seen you somewhere.
94. [94.](#) Activity: English Rhythm and Intonation •••••••••••••••• `John likes fish. (not Peter, but John) John `likes fish. (there is no question of his not liking fish) John likes `fish. (not meat, or poultry) She can `dance. (declarative sentence) She can ,dance. (question) Close the ,door. (request) Close the `door. (command) `Thank you. (genuine gratitude) ,Thank you. (a casual ‘thank you’) She’s `beautiful. (positive statement) She’s vbeautiful. (sarcasm) 95
95. [95.](#) Teaching Spoken English How can we use this phonetic information and the phonological rules to teach Spoken English?
96. [96.](#) Tips • There are variations in English speech; not everyone speaks English the same way. • There are EXCEPTIONS to most rules in English. • It is always helpful to use a ‘reliable’ dictionary. • Be aware of common mistakes made by speakers in the region. • In case of difficulties, help students understand how sounds are made. • Help students learn to sound out words instead of just listen and repeat. • Remember that there are useful websites which help you practice spoken English.