

Engma and English Verb Stress

Q1. Transcribe the following words according to Canadian English pronunciations.

hang hæŋ	singer sɪŋər	sinner sɪnər	binge bɪndɪŋ bɪŋ	Bing bɪŋ
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angry æŋɡri	sangria sæŋɡriə	Chang tʃæŋ ʃæŋ	cringe krɪndɪŋ krɪŋ	finger fɪŋɡər
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Q2. Transcribe the words in the first column below in the IPA, using broad transcription. The third column shows the words divided up into syllables for you. In the fourth column re-write your IPA, this time divided into the same syllable divisions.

astonish	əstənəʃ	a sto nish	ə stə nəʃ
consider	kənsɪdər	con si der	kən sɪ dər
imagine	əmədʒən	i ma gine	ə mæ dʒən
determine	dətərmen	de ter mine	də tər mən
promise	prəməs	pro mise	prə məs

In every multi-syllable word, one syllable is *stressed* which means it is slightly louder, longer, and with slightly higher pitch.

The words above illustrate the basic English stress rule for verbs (it is different for nouns). Get a native speaker in your group to say the words, and determine where the stress falls in these words. Is it:

- (a) On the *first* syllable?
- (b) On the *last* syllable (what linguists call "ultimate")?
- (c) On the *second-to-last* (what linguists call "penultimate") syllable?

It falls on the second-to-last (penultimate) syllable. Many languages target the penultimate syllable for stress (or, as in Latin, the antepenultimate, the one before the penultimate). Some languages, like French, also target the ultimate (last).

Q3. Now repeat the transcription above with the following set of words.

adapt	ədæpt	a dapt	ə dæpt
collapse	kələps	co llapse	kə læps
elect	əlekt	e lect	ə lɛkt
observe	əbzərv	ob serve	əb zərv
lament	ləment	la ment	lə mɛnt

Stress is not on the same syllable as for the last set. Assume the rule above you established in Q2 is basically correct, but that stress is “attracted” to the last syllable when it has a certain shape. What is different about the final syllables in this set, as opposed to and those in Q2, such that now stress is attracted to the final (ultimate) syllable?

The final syllables in these words all end in two consonants, rather than none or just one. You can think of the CC cluster at the end as making the syllable “heavy”, and attracting stress from the usual penultimate position.

Q4. Now repeat the transcription above with the following set of words. This time use NARROW transcription on all the vowels (in particular, the off-glides are relevant to the solution)

erase	ərejs	e rase	ə rejs
corrode	kərowd	co rrode	kə rowd

Again, stress is on the final syllable. These syllables do *not* end in two consonants, so why is stress again moved to the final (ultimate) syllable in these words?

Though the words end in single C’s, the vowels in the final syllables have predictable off-glides (/j/ or /w/) and apparently this also makes the syllable “attractive” to stress, so stress is pulled towards these syllables.

What’s similar in the data in Q3 and Q4 is that the final syllable in each case has an extra sound--an extra C in 3, and an extra glide on the vowel in 4. Across languages, it is common for heavy syllables—syllables with an extra consonant or an extra part to the vowel—to attract stress om tjos wau/

It’s interesting to note that stress is sensitive to the presence of the predictably inserted (non-phonemic glides) glides, e.g. as with [eɪ]. This suggests that stress is not assigned directly to underlying forms (forms with no predictable details), but to forms that have some predictable details added.

Q5. If someone asked you to pronounce the following made-up words, where would you naturally put the stress?

- (i) Would you like a *confomlit* ?
- (ii) Frances *perlept* Mary at the meeting!
- (iii) Fred *perlaid* his beer.
- (iv) Bill made a *tersla* call.

There may be variation in intuitions, but the prediction of the stress rules above is that
 (i) should be next-to-last (penultimate) syllable, "fom", because the final syllable is "light" (only one C at the end, and no glide on the vowel),
 (ii) should have stress on the final syllable, "lept" because there are two C’s at the end of the last syllable (/pt/), so it would attract stress,
 (iii) should also be on the last syllable, because the vowel in the final syllable "laid" contains an off-glide and hence would also be "heavy", and attract stress.
 (iv) should be on the first syllable, which is "heavy" the second syllable /la/ is light, so would not normally attract stress (unless it was e.g. a French borrowing--the French always stress the final syllable)

Note: English stress is overall predictable, but this problem has only covered part of the English stress patterns; for example, nouns often have different stress patterns, borrowings often have borrowed stress, and other complex factors intervene. Most languages have much simpler stress placement rules!