

Hong Kong English

Unit 1-4:
**PHONOLOGY (3):
STRESS & INTONATION**

Dr. Tony T.N. Hung

Language Centre

Hong Kong Baptist University

tonyhung@hkbu.edu.hk

Supra-Segmental Features

- ❖ Word stress
- ❖ Sentence rhythm (stress, timing, liaison)
- ❖ Intonation

Is Word Stress Important for Intelligibility?

- ❖ Depends on length of the word – the longer, the less important (e.g. *generalization*)
- ❖ For words of 2 or 3 syllables, much more important.
- ❖ Cf. *im'portant* vs. *'important*
– *'marshall* vs. *mar'shall*

Examples of Stress 'Rules' in English


- ❖ Words ending with the suffixes *-ic*, *-ity* etc. (*'angel~an'gelic*, *'stupid~stu'pidity*):
Stress the syllable immediately before the suffix

SOME PATTERNS OF WORD STRESS IN HKE

Suffixed words


4-syllable words: stressed on penultimate syllable:

'period – peri'odic 

'energy – ener'getic 

'photograph – photo'graphic 

3-syllable words: stressed on first syllable:

'angel – 'angelic 

'acid – 'acidic 

'terrific 

'courage - 'courageous 

Other 4- and 5- syllable words


Stressed on penultimate syllable:


infor'mative 

communi'cative 

tele'vision 

No difference in Verb vs. Noun

1) Verb: 'The government will in'crease the number of flats' 

2) Noun: 'There will not be an in'crease in the number of flats' 

Connected Speech in HKE

- ❖ Syllable-timed – i.e. each syllable occupies more or less equal time
- ❖ Very little liaison (linking of words)
- ❖ No clear intonation pattern
- ❖ Words carry tones – stressed syllables carry a High tone, unstressed syllables a Low tone, but with equal duration

Examples of connected speech



(1) A: Why are you late for the lecture?

B: Oh, I slept in this morning, and there was a huge traffic jam near Chatham Road.



(2) In order to catch up with the rapid advance in technology, six local universities are offering evening training courses on e-commerce and information technology.



(3) Although there is an increase in the number of tourists visiting Hong Kong, the sales and retail sector doesn't seem to have benefited much from this revival in tourism.



(4) The Financial Secretary will give his annual report next April.

Recommended Reading

- ❖ Bolton, K. & Kwok, H. (1990) 'The dynamics of the Hong Kong accent: social identity and sociolinguistic description.' *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 1(1), 147-72.