

Word Stress in Russian

Written by Administrator
Tuesday, 23 March 2010 01:45 -

Here we will be speaking only about the word stress since there is also the logical stress which accentuates certain word in a sentence. The word stress is a way of differentiating the certain syllable of the word from the others by various means. Generally there are four types of stress:

quantitative - the length of the vowel of the stressed syllable is longer than the lengths of unstressed vowels dynamic - the stressed syllable is more powerful, intensive and loud in pronunciation, sometimes this type is falsely called expiratory since the strength of the syllable is thought to depend on the amount of exhaled air, but these are different phenomena not determining each other quality of the vowel - the stressed vowel gets clear and distinct and therefore acquires special quality

tonic - pitch of the stressed syllable is higher

There are languages which don't have word stress. Syllables do not differ at all. These are Even, Evenk, Kalmyk and others. But the most languages do have it. Each language usually has not only one type of stress, but different types play a certain role in a language. For example, in Japanese and Swedish the tonic stress plays the main role. It did in Ancient Greek as well but it is displaced by dynamic stress in contemporary Greek.

Russian stress has the following features:

the main type of stress is the quality of the stressed vowel: even if all the words in a sentence consist of one syllable and therefore each syllable is stressed one can feel that they are stressed not comparing the stressed syllables with unstressed ones (because there are no unstressed ones) but because of special quality of the stressed vowels, for example *Весь день шёл дождь* (It was raining all the day). Another example: *карандаш* (pencil). Here the last syllable is stressed, the last vowel is the most clear, the last but one is weaker and the first one is very unclear which even can be omitted in hurried speech, the first vowel as well as the second one can be compared to the always unstressed schwa in English

Russian stress is quantitative: the length of the stressed vowel is known to be 1.5 times longer than that of the vowel preceding the stressed one. This type of stress is possible in Russian because there is no opposition between long and short vowels unlike f.ex. Finnish and German where short and long vowels are different phonemes (for example, in Finnish, word "tuli" (fire) cannot be stressed by lengthening the first vowel because we will get another word with another meaning - "tuuli" (wind); by the way it may be interesting that there is word "tulli" (customs) in Finnish as well)

Russian stress is also dynamic, because the strength of the vowel depends on its quality

there is no tonic stress in Russian (there must be no confusing it with rising and lowering tone in a phrase which does exist in Russian in certain types of sentences)

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- quantitative--the length of the vowel of the stressed syllable is longer than the lengths of unstressed vowels
- dynamic--the stressed syllable is more powerful, intensive and loud in pronunciation, sometimes this type is falsely called expiratory since the strength of the syllable is thought to depend on the amount of exhaled air, but these are different phenomena not determining each other
- quality of the vowel--the stressed vowel gets clear and distinct and therefore acquires special quality
- tonic--pitch of the stressed syllable is higher

Not All Languages Have Stress

There are languages which don't have word stress. Syllables do not differ at all. These are French, Even, Evenk, Kalmyk and others. But the most languages do have it. Each language usually has not only one type of stress, but different types play a certain role in a language. For example, in Japanese and Swedish the tonic stress plays the main role. It did in Ancient Greek as well but it is displaced by dynamic stress in contemporary Greek.

Features of Stress

The stress in Russian has the following features:

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- Russian stress is quantitative: the length of the stressed vowel is known to be 1.5 times longer than that of the vowel preceding the stressed one. This type of stress is possible in Russian because there is no opposition between long and short vowels unlike f.ex. Finnish and German where short and long vowels are different phonemes (for example, in Finnish, word "tuli" (fire) cannot be stressed by lengthening the first vowel because we will get another word with another meaning - "tuuli" (wind); by the way it may be interesting that there is word "tulli" (customs) in Finnish as well)
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- there is no tonic stress in Russian (there must be no confusing it with rising and lowering tone in a phrase which does exist in Russian in certain types of sentences)

The Position of Stress in a Word

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Now as we have considered the phonetic nature of stress let's consider its placement in a word. There are two types of stress regarding the association of it with a certain syllable of the word:

- fixed stress - the stress is always associated with a certain syllable of the word, for example in Finnish, Hungarian, Czech, Latvian stress always falls on the first syllable, in Polish it falls on the last but one syllable, in French it falls on the last syllable
- free stress - the stress can fall on any syllable of the word, but each word, of course, has its definite stressed syllable. This type of stress is in Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Lithuanian.

Languages either with fixed or free stress can have one of two following types of stress:

- stable stress - the stress does not change its place within the paradigm (the set of word forms) of the word while being declined or conjugated and in all derived words as well, i.e. if a noun has its ending stressed it will have its ending stressed in all possible cases, the same is true for root or prefix
- moving stress - the stress does change its place within the paradigm of the same word, for example, if a noun in singular form has its root stressed then it can have its ending stressed in plural form. Note, that languages with fixed stress can have moving stress, for example in Polish word "polski" (Polish) the first (last but one) syllable is stressed which belongs to the root, but in Genitive case "polskiego" the second syllable (also last but one) is stressed which belongs to the ending, not to the root

Russian language has free and moving stress which is the most difficult to study. You must learn the stress of each word otherwise you might be not understood or misunderstood. So in this course I will mark the stress of each word by making the stressed vowel bold, for example r

о
род (town), кор
о
ва (cow), молоко
о
(milk), трубопров
о
д (pipeline), палеонтол
о

гия (palaeontology). You see that in these words stress falls on different syllables, from 1st to 5th. But please don't fall into despair, Russian stress is very simple compared to Lithuanian where the stress is free and moving and in addition there are three different types of stress marked with acute, grave or circumflex each of which changes the intonation of the word.

Common Mistakes in Stress Made by Russians

Even Russian people can hardly deal with the stress choice, there are a lot of common mistakes, for example a lot of people say звонит instead of звонИт ([he] phones), договоР

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instead of догов

о

р (agreement, contract), торт

ы

instead of т

о

рты (cakes) etc. And for this reason there are pronunciation dictionaries in Russia usually intended not for transcribing the words but mainly for marking their stress; all the forms of each word that can make people doubt are included in such dictionaries and there are very many of them, for example in the entry "дать" (to give) there are 34 forms of this verb.

Stress Can Change Meaning

There are words which have two ways of stressing accepted in the literary language, for example тво^орог and тво^ор^ог (curds) are both right. You should note that changing the stress in some words leads to totally different meaning, e.g. з

амок (castle)

and зам

о^к

(lock), дор

о

гой (Instrumental case of дорога - road) and доро^ог

о

й (expensive, dear),

у

же (narrower) and уж

е

(already), п

о

том (Instrumental case of пот - sweat) and пот

о

м (then, afterwards). As already mentioned above, Russian has moving stress, but however some words have stable and some words have moving stress, for example words со^б

а

ка (dog), лим

о

н (lemon), пож

а

р (fire) have stable stress since all their forms and words derived from them have their stress on the second vowel of the root (а, о, а respectively) and words пы^к

а

(hand, arm), гор

а

(mountain) have moving stress, since their plural forms п

у

ки (hands, arms) and г

о

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ры (mountains) have their stress on the root and not on the ending. The place of stress in a word can change during historical evolution of the language, for example word м

у

зыка (music) was in 19th century pronounced as муз

ы

ка.