


# Challenges in English Word Stress for Macedonian Learners: Variation Across Different Learner Profiles

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## The definition of accent vs. stress

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Stress/Accent, accent mark, accent (verb)

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Stress: intensity of utterance given to a speech sound, syllable, or word producing relative loudness

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Accent: An effort in speech to stress one syllable over adjacent syllables

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The word "stress" also means something else if you consider it outside the box of Phonetics and Phonology.

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The main definition according to Hlebec (1995) is that " Accent is a relative prominence of a syllable in a word or a group of words or an utterance due to stress and/or pitch and stress is the degree of force used for the pronunciation of a syllable."



# Types of stress

- Two types of stress can be distinguished in English:
  - strong, which is used in the pronunciation of stressed syllables
  - weak, which is used in the pronunciation of unstressed syllables.
- Pitch is the height of tone, which is reflected as higher or lower frequency of vibration.

A syllable can

- have a primary accent if the pitch varies inside the syllable, a secondary accent if the pitch level
- changes, and a tertiary accent if the stress is just strong without any pitch changes (Hlebec, 1995).



## Stress in Macedonian language

The stress in most native Macedonian words falls on the third syllable from the end:

`кóла` (kó-la) - stress on the only syllable

`же́на` (zhé-na) - stress on the first (of two)

`мажóт` (ma-zhót) - stress on the second (of three)

`зборува́ме` (zbo-ru-va-me) - stress on the second (of four)

Important Exceptions:

1. Monosyllabic words

Stress is on the single syllable (`jác`, `ти`, `тој`).

2. Verbal forms with `ке`: The particle `ке` is always stressed (`ке дојде`, `ке го видам`).

3. Foreign Loanwords

Often keep their original stress (`компјúтер`, `универзитéт`).

4. Emphatic Stress

You can move the stress for emphasis, but this changes the meaning or tone. `Тој дојде́` (He came!) vs. `То́ј дојде` (HE came, not someone else).

English stress is unpredictable and must be learned for each word. It can change the meaning of a word or its grammatical function.

No Fixed Rule:

There is no rule like "stress the third syllable from the end." The stress can fall on any syllable.

- `TA-ble`

- `ho-TEL`

- `a-BOVE`

- `un-der-STAND`

Compared to other languages, English stress patterns are infamously intricate and erratic, with many exceptions to general guidelines. Word etymology, grammatical function (word class), and morphological structure are some of the elements that contribute to this complexity.



# English Stress

Macedonian has a simple, pure 5-vowel system: а, е, и, о, у. Each letter has one consistent sound: `мак` (mak), `мед` (med), `мир` (mir), `мот` (mot), `мука` (muka).

English has a very complex vowel system with around 20 sounds, including diphthongs (two-part vowels).

Short vs. Long: `ship` /ʃɪ/ vs. `sheep` /ʃi:/. Macedonian has only one sound, `и`, so this distinction is very difficult.

#### The Schwa /ə/

The most common sound in English (`a`bout, tak`e`n, penc`i`l). This sound does not exist in Macedonian. A Macedonian speaker will replace it with a full vowel, usually `a` or `e`.

#### Diphthongs

Sounds like in `boy`, `cow`, `go`. Macedonian vowels are pure, so these are often pronounced as two separate vowels or a single, simpler one.

## MACEDONIAN VS. ENGLISH



# Summary



- Word stress in English is most commonly a “memory game” as there are no precisely designated ways to distinguish which words follow the abovementioned “rules” and which do not.
- There may also be limitations on certain phonemes in the language in which stress determines whether they are allowed to occur in a particular syllable, which is a very peculiar characteristic for only a handful of languages and certainly not a part of the Macedonian accent.
- The Macedonian language has one very peculiar and unique accent property that very distinctly separates its stress from other languages like English – “accent wholes” (акцентски целисти).
- Accent wholes are two or more words conjoined into one, jointly held together by one stressed syllable (e.g. кисело млеко - киселòмлеко).

# Impact on Learners:



Macedonian speaker - learning English will often apply the Macedonian stress rule to English words, leading to incorrect pronunciation (e.g., saying `HO-tel` instead of `ho-TEL`).



English speaker learning Macedonian will struggle to remember the fixed stress rule and its exceptions, often putting stress on the wrong syllable.



The image features a light green background with a white border. On the left side, there are several thin, curved grey lines and a thick red arrow pointing to the right. In the center, there is a bright yellow rectangular area with a slight 3D effect, resembling a sticky note. On this yellow area, the words "Thank You!" are written in a blue, hand-drawn, sketchy font. The word "Thank" is on the top line, and "You!" is on the bottom line.

Thank  
You!