

Syllables and Stress

-Another way to think about language-

SDC 2024

Let's think
about English!

What word in English has the most meanings according to the Oxford English Dictionary?

run

Up

Down

Up



Down



How can you both be up for something and down for something at the same time?

Why do we say we're...

in the car

or

on the bus



Why can we say we're...

unhappy

but not

unsad

What's the difference between...

present

and

present

What's the difference between...

Noun

present

and

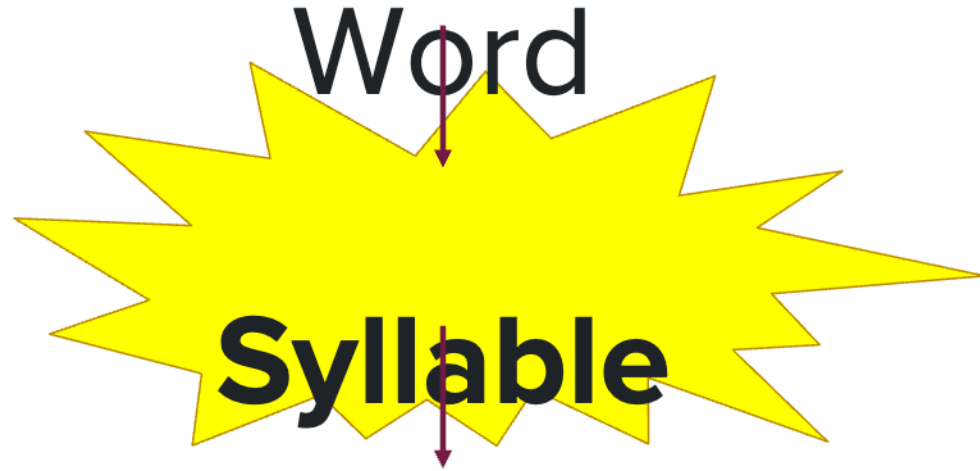
Verb

pre**sent**

Syllables

According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*...

A **syllable** is “a segment of speech that consists of a vowel, with or without one or more accompanying consonant sounds immediately preceding or following.”



Individual sounds
(phonemes)

Experiment time

How many syllables do
the following words
have?

dog

international

in-ter-na-tion-al

extraterrestrial

ex-tra-ter-res-tri-al

cotton

cott-on

supercalifragilistic-
expialidocious

sup-er-ca-li-fra-gi-lis-
tic-ex-pi-a-li-do-cious

florbulon

gortipitty

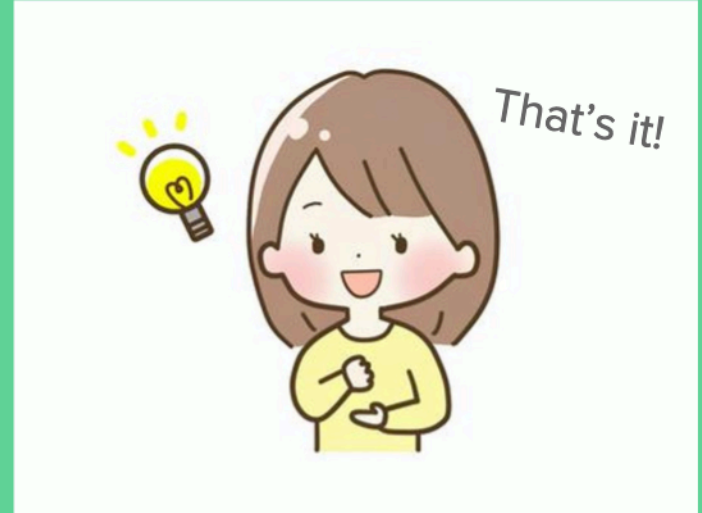
shazaphlodactyl

flor-bu-lon

gor-ti-pi-tty

sha-za-phlo-dac-tyl

We (over)apply our knowledge of our L1 to our target language.



Take, for example...

Osaka



Osaka



O-sa-ka

O-o-sa-ka

東京

to-u-kyo-u

2 Syllables

4 Mora

大阪

o-o-sa-ka

3 Syllables

4 Mora

長崎

na-ga-sa-ki

4 Syllables

4 Mora

出張

しゅっちょう

(shucchō)

Business trip

主張

しゅちょう

(shuchō)

Claim; assertion

周長

しゅうちょう

(shūchō)

Perimeter;
circumference

English:

Subject-Verb-Object

I

ate the apple.

Japanese:

Subject-Object-Verb

(私は) りんごを 食べた。

(*watashi wa*) *ringo wo tabeta*

I

SUBJ apple OBJ ate.



Why?

Well, think about it like this...

finite

definite

thesis

synthesis

What's happening here?

finite
definite

thesis
synthesis

What's happening here?

fi-nite

the-sis

de-fi-nite

syn-the-sis

What's happening here?

fi-nite

de-fi-nite

[aɪ] > [ɪ]

the-sis

syn-the-sis

[i] > [ə]

The *spelling is the same*, but the **sound** has changed!

fi-nite

the-sis

de-fi-nite

syn-the-sis

[aɪ] > [ɪ]

[i] > [ə]

insight

incite

desert

desert

dessert

present

present

Similarly, with
English
comparatives and
superlatives...

1 比較級

2つを比べて、「…よりも～です」と言うときは、〈形容詞[副詞]の比較級 + than〉の形を使います。

1. 形容詞 [副詞] + -(e)r

Daniel is **taller than** his brother.

Ken can run **faster than** Yuji.

2. more + 形容詞 [副詞] (比較的長い形容詞や副詞)

Baseball is **more popular than** soccer in our school.

3. good や well のような形容詞 [副詞]

Meg is a **better**★ singer **than** Kumi.

I like summer **better than** winter.

比較級・最上級の作り方は巻末資料⑨「形容詞・副詞比較変化表」(p.138)で調べよう。



1 比較級

2つを比べて、「…よりも～です」と言うときは、〈形容詞[副詞]の比較級 + than〉の形を使います。

1. 形容詞 [副詞] + -(e)r

Daniel is **taller than** his brother.

‘Long comparative adjectives and adverbs’ -> “long words”

未
変
化

2. more + 形容詞 [副詞] (比較的長い形容詞や副詞)

Baseball is **more popular than** soccer in our school.



Meg is a **better**★ singer **than** Kumi.

I like summer **better than** winter.

What's happening here?

tall

interesting

taller

more interesting

happy

beautiful

happier

more beautiful

What's happening here?

tall

tall-er

happy

ha-ppi-er

interesting

more in-te-res-ting

beautiful

more beau-ti-ful

Pronunciation

Grammar



What can we do?

Does this mean we should teach our students every single pronunciation pattern in English?

NO!



English word stress is extremely inconsistent and unintuitive to learn because it's riddled with exceptions and differs between dialects!

For example:

BRP = British Received Pronunciation
GAE = General American English

- aadult (BRP) vs adult (GAE)
- garage (BRP) vs garage (GAE)
- advertisement (BRP) vs advertisement (GAE)
- aunt (as in ahnt) vs aunt (as in ant)

So what can we *really* do?

By knowing how English and Japanese are different, we can...

- help students become more aware of these differences and think about them as they learn.
- create informed lessons, presentations, and activities

You as an ALT:

- When drilling pronunciation, draw attention to accent marks on vocab words.
- Encourage students to mark stressed syllables (accent marks, underlining, etc) on new words and in readings

Targeted Activities

- Minimal pairs / Fill-in-the-blank
- Speed reading / tongue twisters
- Step Game
- Bingo

Minimal Pairs / Fill-in-the-Blank

bag - beg

nag - bag

bag - batt

Minimal Pairs / Fill-in-the-Blank

bag - beg

nag - bag

bag - bat

resume - resume

present - present

dessert - desert

Speed Reading / Tongue Twisters

Speed reading - Give the students a list of words with different syllable stress and have them try to read the list as accurately and quickly as possible.

Tongue twisters - Similar to speed reading

Challenge Sentences

“Jake lives in the desert and wants to resume writing his resume because he just finished his dessert.”

Step Game

- Repetition-based game.
- You say a word, and the students repeat it back to you. If they say it correctly, they take one step towards you.
- Goal: For the students to reach you. **BUT** if even one person makes a mistake they all have to go back and start from the beginning.

To summarize...

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- Language learners' L1 (native language) impacts their L2 (second language) acquisition in many ways.
- We, as ALTs, can think about how speaking Japanese impacts students' learning of English, and adjust how we assist in the classroom accordingly.

Thank you

