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Stress in English Long Verbs

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► **To cite this version:**

Quentin Dabouis, Jean-Michel Fournier, Isabelle Girard, Nicola Lampitelli. Stress in English Long Verbs. 25ème Manchester Phonology Meeting, May 2017, Manchester, United Kingdom. halshs-02083696

HAL Id: halshs-02083696

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02083696v1>

Submitted on 29 Mar 2019

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Background and data

Primary stress assignment in English verbs has been analysed in different ways.

All analyses acknowledge that certain suffixes determine the position of stress (e.g. *-ate*, *-ify*).

If we leave out suffixed words, compounds or constructions with semantically transparent prefixes, two parameters have been argued to determine the position of primary stress.

Both are found in early generative phonology (Chomsky & Halle 1968; Halle & Keyser 1971; Liberman & Prince 1977) but have since been pursued separately in different theories.

THE TWO PARAMETERS

Syllable weight

(Burzio 1994; Giegerich 1999; Halle & Vergnaud 1987; Hammond 1999; Hayes 1982)

If the final syllable is heavy, it is stressed (e.g. *molést*, *obéy*)

If it is light, stress falls on the penult (e.g. *astónish*, *devélop*)

Opaque prefixation

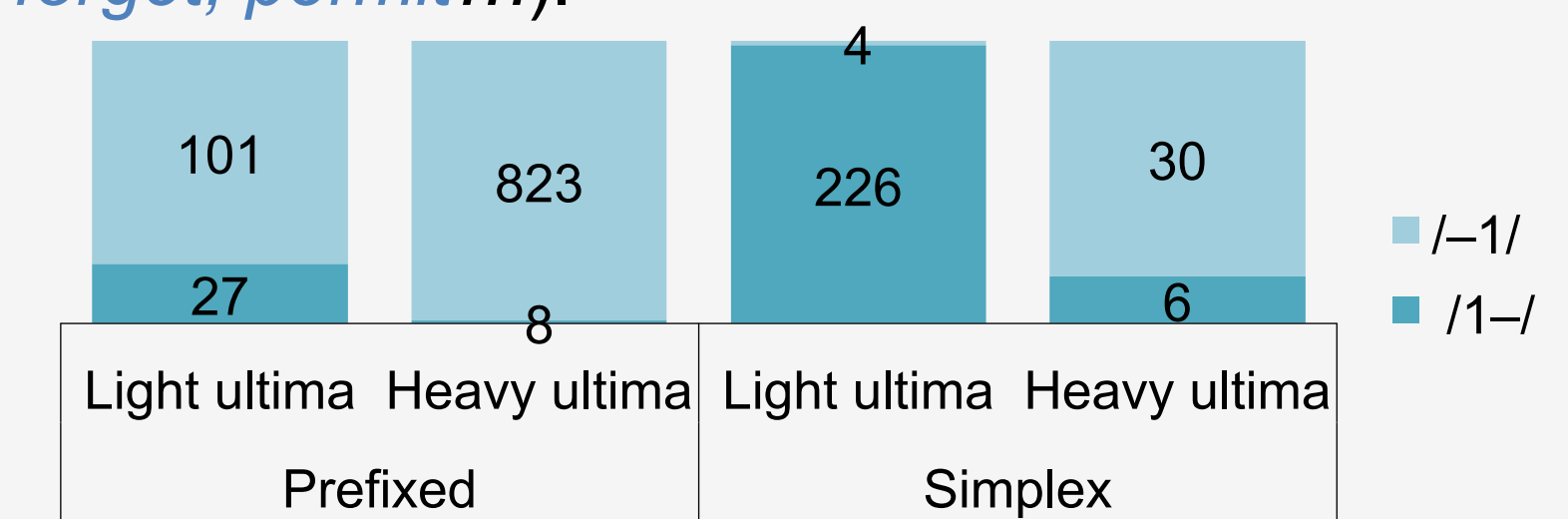
Fournier (2007), Guierre (1979) and Trevian (2003)

Primary stress may not fall on a semantically opaque prefix.

➤ Stress is therefore almost systematically root-initial (e.g. *begin*, *commit*, *apprehénd*, *contrádict*, *embéllish*, *envélop*, *inhibit*)

Previous work: dissyllabic verbs

A previous study (Dabouis & Fournier, in prep.) on 2,544 dissyllables shows that a purely weight-based approach misses the 101 verbs with stressed light ultimas, which are often common words (e.g. *admit*, *become*, *discuss*, *forget*, *permit*...).



WHICH PARAMETER CAN BEST ACCOUNT FOR THE LOCATION OF PRIMARY STRESS IN VERBS?

Methodology

Most studies on English stress actually rely on way too few examples to seriously argue in favour of any given theory.

For this study, using the Laboratoire Ligérien de Linguistique's Dictionary Database, we extracted **1976 verbs** from Jones (2006) – syntactic categories from the Macquarie Dictionary.

Converted nouns and syntactic structures

Converted Nouns: 348

Using semantics, dates of first appearance in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (online) and word frequency, we identified no less than 348 verbs that are actually converted nouns, and always preserve the stress pattern of the noun.

A few examples: *advantage*, *autograph*, *barbecue*, *condition*, *engineer*, *honeymoon*, *marinade*, *remedy*.

This constitutes an important part of the data: 17.6%

Syntactic structures: 386

Semantically compositional constructions whose leftmost formative is a prefix or an adverbial particle tend to behave as two distinct phonological domains, as evidenced by stress clashes (e.g. *dèprógram*, *mismánage*, *òutbáalance*) or morphological geminates (e.g. *dì[ss]jatisfy*).

We found 263 constructions with transparent prefixes and 123 with an initial adverbial particle (among which only *undergo*, *undertake* and *understand* are semantically opaque – included below).

Primary stress is always on the base, on the same syllable as when it is used as an independent word.

Five exceptions only: *cóuntercharge*, *cóunterpoise*, *cóuntersign*, *cóuntersink*, *óversew*

Suffixed verbs

Suffix-induced stress: 615

-(i/e)fy: 89 words, all stressed /(-)100/, e.g. *divérsify*, *glórifify*, *rárefy*, *solémnify*, *vílify*

-ate: 497 words, stressed /(-)100/, regardless of derivation (e.g. *órigín > originate*; *matúre > maturate*) or morphological structure (e.g. *démonstrate*, *equivocate*, *hydrógenate*, *súbjugate*, *célebrate*).

Very few exceptions:

➤ /(-)10/: *detrúnicate*, *èquilibraté* and *inspíssate*

➤ /1000/: *óxygenate*, *péregriinate*, *térgiversate*

➤ and 7 potential /(-)1000/ with medial hiatus: *álienaté*, *amélioraté*, *detériorate*, *órientaté*...

➔ Analogical (?) extension: 14 words in *-ute* or *-ite*, stressed /(-)100/ (e.g. *cónstitute*, *éxpédite*, *pérsecute*) except 3 in *-tribute* which vary between /(-)10/ and /(-)100/: *attribúte*, *contribúte*, *distribúte*.

-esce: 9 words, all stressed /-1/ (e.g. *àcquiésce*, *èfflorésce*, *lùminésce*) + *rèminisce*

Other: *bùccanéer*, *elèctionéer*, *appórtion*, *disillúision*, *envíision*

Neutral suffixes: 337

Primarily words in *-ize* + *awáken*, *imáagine*, *múltiPLY*, *próphesy*.

➤ 323 words with no stress shift (e.g. *cánon > cánonize*, *expériméntal > expériméntalize*), including 75 stressed /(-)1000/ (e.g. *chárácter > chárácterize*, *cápítal > cápítalize*, *général > généralize*) and 1 stressed /-10/: *pròpagánda > pròpagándize* (all others are stressed /(-)100/).

Only 11 exceptions with stress shifts (e.g. *canál > cánalíze*, *advért > ádvértize*, *morále > demóralíze*, *épilógue > épilógize*, *gélátin > gelátiníze*, *vólatile > volátílizé*, *Galvání > gálváníze*, *hypnósis > hýpnótíze*, *apòtheósis > apòtheosíze*, *pánegyric > pánegyrize*, *imáage > imáagine*)

(24 verbs in which *-ize* is attached to a bound root are treated below)

Opaque prefixed verbs

Free bases: 90

Semantically non-compositional prefixed constructions with a free base.

Stress is always the same as in the base: *adméasure*, *confígure*, *encóurage*, *réassúre*, *rèprésént*, *súperpóse*, *ùnderstánd*... except *rétrograde*.

This includes 4 parasynthetic formations: *aggrándíze*, *acclímátíze*, *embólden*, *enlíven*

Bound bases: 104

In most cases, stress is indeed on the first syllable of the root: *àpprehénd*, *cònt rádíct*, *intercépt*, *intèrmit*, *rétrogréss*, *amórtíze*, *contínue*, *demólish*, *elícít*, *inhábít*, *remémber*

Only 13 words (12%) do not have primary stress on the root: *círcumcise*, *círcumscribe*, *cómpliment*, *discómfit*, *éxorcize*, *implemènt*, *importúne*, *improvise*, *intèrpret*, *óccupy*, *récognize*, *réconcile*, *súpervise*

Overall, in opaque prefixed verbs, these exceptions represent 7% of the data.

A weight-based approach would not only fail to account for all these cases except *discómfit*, *importúne* and *intèrpret*, but also *intèrmit*, *intromít*, *prètermít*, *amórtíze*, *impóverish* and *rétrogréss* (and hardly applies to free base cases).

Other verbs

Compounds (and assimilated): 61

Diverse root + root structures with various stress patterns.

Examples: *túrbocharge*, *bábysít*, *cròssexámíne*, *dóuble-párk*, *vívíséct*, *gènufléct*, *flábbérgast*, *júxtapóse*, *décuple*, *quíntuple*

Simplex and bound base + suffix: 35

17 bound base + *-ize* stressed /(-)100/ (e.g. *fráterníze*, *órganíze*, *sánítíze*) except *etérníze*

8 simplex stressed /(-)10/: *bámboozle*, *canóodle*, *finágle*, *malínger*, *manóeuvre*, *sequester*, *skédáddle*, *solicít*

10 simplex stressed /(-)100/: *anályse*, *damascène*, *gállivant*, *manácle*, *manífest*, *massacrè*, *minístèr*, *monítòr*, *oríent*, *paralyse*

(some of these are arguably not simplex, but their structure is particularly opaque)

Our theory predicts /(-)100/, which leaves 9 unexplained cases.

Discussion

Long verbs are morphologically complex

- If we discount the 348 converted nouns, our corpus contains **1628 actual verbs** of 3 syllables or more (which means probably all frequent ones and a number of rarer cases)
- Long verbs are essentially complex (versus simplex): only a few of them can be analysed as simplex, and even some of those few could be challenged.

Stress is morphology-driven

- ≈ 60% of the data have a stress pattern determined by their suffix (directly or through stress preservation)
- Nearly all other verbs (≈ 36%) are prefixed: following the model set by transparent (syntactic) structures (2/3 of all prefixed verbs), all of them assign primary stress on the root.

Syllable weight isn't better than morphology

- If both approach attain similar efficiency in the case of prefixed bound bases, the morphology approach yields a far more coherent understanding of the behaviour of the whole class.
- This is crucially confirmed by the inability of the weight-based approach to account for the predominantly final stress of dissyllabic prefixed verbs with light ultimas.

Opaque prefixation: a plausible parameter?

- Often thought to be "unlearnable" or "not real morphemes", prefixed words which are semantically opaque have often been analysed as if they were morphologically simple.
- There is evidence from a variety of combinatorial, phonological and psycholinguistic facts that these opaque structures can be accessed by speakers, and our studies imply they must be visible to the phonology (Dabouis 2017).