

Stress and the Lexicon

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Stress position in English words is well-known to correlate with both their morphological properties and their phonological organisation in terms of non-segmental, prosodic categories like syllable structure. For example, stress is often penultimate in morphologically simplex nouns with a heavy penultimate syllable, as illustrated by the word '*agenda*': a.gén.da. In derived words with a so-called stress-preserving suffix, stress is always on the same syllable as it is in the base word. For example, *éffort-less* is stressed on the same syllable as *éffort*, despite the fact that the word *effortless* has a heavy penultimate syllable. By contrast, stress in derived words with so-called stress-shifting suffixes may be on a different syllable than it is in the base word (e.g. *adópt* – *adopt-ée*). Beyond such generalisations, however, English stress assignment is also well-known for its variability, which comprises semi-regularity (generalisations do not always apply), as well as the co-existence of alternative stresses within the same morphological category. In my talk I will present three case studies of stress variability in English speech data. All of them provide statistically robust evidence that stress position is a reflex of how speakers relate the word to be pronounced to other words in their mental lexicon (cf. Hay 2001; Hay 2003; Bermúdez-Otero 2012, 2018). Specifically, they show that semantic transparency and frequency relations within paradigmatic structure have an important say in explaining stress position in English.