

## Some Stress Placement Clues for Learners of English as a Second Language

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### 12.1. Introduction

The learning of English word stress in a second or foreign language situation has been described by language scholars as universally difficult. Among many who have expressed this opinion are Banjo (1979), Amayo (1980), Ayodele (1981), Weinrich (1984) Aladeyomi (1998), Atoye (1990) Atoye (2002) Aladeyomi (2003). More specifically Banjo (1979) observes that “the appropriate use of English Stress and intonation is the final hurdle which the vast majority of speakers of English as a second language never manage to cross”. Atoye (1990) is of the opinion that word stress presents second and foreign learners of English with near-insurmountable problems. Aladeyomi (1988) investigates the problems that Nigerian secondary school learners and users of English have in English word-stress placement. His analysis reveals that the subjects have stress problems with most of the test items. Also, Aladeyomi (2003) investigates the level of spoken English performance of the Nigerian television newscasters in order to find out the extent to which they could serve as models for the secondary school learners of English in Nigeria. Some deviations of the performance level of the subjects from Standard English notwithstanding, the study finds their realizations of English segmental and suprasegmentals adequate for the needs of Nigerian secondary students.

It is obvious from this survey that very little attention has been paid to stress placement in the second language context of Nigeria. The present study attempts to fill this gap by providing stress placement clues for learners of English as a second language.

### 12.2. Method and Analysis

Using the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978), the analyst searched through for words endings with selected suffixes. The stress patterns of such words are noted and analysed. Our findings are presented below:

Number of syllables	Number of words	Primary stress placement							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2 syllable words	9	9	-						
3 syllable words	188	-	188	-					
4 syllable words	228	-	-	228	-				
5 syllable words	85	-	-	-	85	-			
6 syllable words	9	-	-	-	-	9	-		
Total	519	9	188	228	85	9			

Table 1: Stress placement in words ending with ‘ion’

Table 1 shows the analysis of words ending with “ion”. Five hundred and nineteen words (519) words ending with suffix “-ion” were analysed to find out their primary stress locations. The words were grouped into 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 syllable words respectively. Nine words (9) were made up of two syllables. All of them received their primary stress on the first syllable. One hundred and eighty eight words (188) were made up of three syllables; all of

them received their primary stress on the second syllable. Two hundred and twenty eight words (228) were recorded for four syllable words, all of which received their primary stress on the third syllable. Eighty five words were recorded for five syllable words, all of which received their primary stress on the fourth syllable. Nine (9) words were recorded for six syllables; all of them received their primary stress on the fifth syllable. Going through the data, it was discovered that all the words, irrespective of the number of their syllables, received their stress on the second to the last (penultimate) syllable. There was no exception to this rule.

The following are examples of stress placement in words ending with “ion”

2 syllable words

1	2
`DIC	tion
`FUNC	tion
`GUMP	tion
`RA	tion
`SANIC	tion

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ion’

3 syllable words

1	2	3
a	`BOR	tion
ab	`SORP	tion
ab	`STEN	tion
ab	`STRAC	tion
ac	`CES	Sion

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ion’

4 syllable words

1	2	3	4
ab	Ne	`GA	tion
ac	Cla	`MA	tion
ac	Cu	`SA	tion
ac	Qui	`SI	tion
ad	Ap	`TA	tion

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ion’

5 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5
Ab	bre	vi	`A	tion
a	bom	i	`NA	tion
ac	cel	e	`RA	tion

ac	ion	mo	`DA	tion
ac	cred	i	`TA	tion

Stress placement in words ending with 'ion'

6 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5	6
con	Sub	Stan	ti	`A	tion
de	Tor	I	fi	`CA	tion
dis	Qual	I	fi	`CA	tion
dis	sat	Sat	is	FAC	tion
e	Lec	Tri	fi	`CA	tion

Stress placement in words ending with 'ic'

Number of syllable	Number of words	Primary stress placement							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2 syllable words	40	40	-						
3 syllable words	105	4	101	-					
4 syllable words	91	-	2	89	-				
5 syllable words	27	-	-	-	27	-			
6 syllable words	3	-	-	-		3	-		
Total	266	44	103	89	27	3			

Table: Analysis of words ending with "ic"

Two hundred and sixty six words (266) words ending with the suffix "-ic" were analyzed to find out their primary stress locations. The words were grouped into 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 syllable words respectively. Forty four words (44) were made up of two syllables. All of them received their primary stress on the first syllable. One hundred and three words (103) were made up of three syllables; all of them received their primary stress on the second syllable. Eighty nine words (89) were recorded for four syllable words, all of which received their primary stress on the third syllable. Twenty seven words (27) were recorded for five syllable words, and all of them received their primary stress on the fourth syllable. Three (3) words were recorded for six syllables; all of them received their primary stress on the fifth syllable. All the words received their stress on the second to the last syllable (penultimate). Four exceptions were recorded in this case.

The following are examples of stress placement in words ending with "ic"

2 syllable words

1	2
'ARC	Tic
'BA	Sic
'CAUS	Tic
'CHRON	Ic
'CLER	Ic

Stress placement in words ending with "ic"

3 syllable words

1	2	3
A	‘CER	Bic
A	‘CID	Ic
A	‘COUS	Tic
A	‘CROS	Tic
A	‘CRYL	Ic

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ic’

4 syllable words

1	2	3	4
Ac	A	‘DEM	Ic
Ac	Ro	‘BAT	Ic
Al	Co	‘HOL	Ic
Al	Tru	‘IS	Tic

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ic’

5 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5
Aer	O	Dy	‘NAM	Ic
Ag	O	Ra	‘PHO	Bic
An	Tag	O	‘NIS	Tic
An	Ti	Bi	‘OT	Ic
An	Ti	Pa	‘THET	Ic

Stress placement in words ending with “ty”

Number of syllable	Number of words	Primary stress placement							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2 syllable words	8	8	-						
3 syllable words	35	33	2	-					
4 syllable words	99	1	98	-	-				
5 syllable words	47	-		47	-	-			
6 syllable words	12	-	-	-	12	-	-		
Total	202	42	100	47	12	1			

Table 3 shows the analysis of words ending with “ty”

Two hundred and two words (202) words ending with suffix –ty were analyzed to find out their primary stress locations. The words were grouped into 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 syllable words respectively. Eight words (8) were made up of two syllables. All of them received their primary stress on the first syllable. Thirty five (35) were made up of three syllables; thirty three of them received their primary stress on the first syllable while two of them received their primary stress on the second syllable. Ninety nine words (99) were recorded for four syllable words, and one (1) of them received its primary stress on the first syllable while ninety eight (98) of them received their primary stress on the second syllable. Forty seven words (47) were recorded for five syllable words; all of them received their primary stress on the third syllable. Twelve words (12) were recorded for six syllables. All of them received their primary stress on the fourth syllable. The data shows that words ending with “ty” bear their primary stress on the ante-penultimate syllable. Two exceptions were recorded for third syllable words, and one for four syllable words.

The following are example of stress placement in words ending with ‘ty’

2 syllable words

1	2
‘BOUN	Ty
‘CAT	Ty
‘CHIT	Ty
‘FAT	Ty
‘FAULF	Ty

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ty’

3 syllable words

1	2	3
al	‘MIGHT	Y
‘AM	I	Ty
A	‘PLEN	Ty
‘TROC	I	ty
‘CAR	Rot	Ty

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ty’

4 syllable words

1	2	3	4
a	‘BIL	i	Ty
ab	Nor	‘MAL	Ty
a	‘CU	i	Ty
ad	‘VER	si	Ty
af	‘FIN	i	Ty

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ty’

5 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5
ac	Tu	‘AL	i	Ty
an	I	‘MOS	i	Ty
an	O	‘NYM	I	Ty
au	Then	‘TIC	i	ty
Ca	Pa	‘BIL	i	Ty

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ty’

6 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5	6
Con	sti	Tion	‘NAL	i	Ty
dis	con	ti	‘NU	i	Ty
E	ven	Tu	‘AL	i	Ty
Fa	mic	I	‘AR	i	Ty
In	sen	Si	‘BIL	i	Ty

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ty’

7 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
In	di	Vid	ua	'AL	i	Ty

TABLE 4  
Stress placement in words ending with 'ment'

Number of syllable	Number of words	Primary stress placement							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
2 syllable words	7	7	-						
3 syllable words	73	73	-	-					
4 syllable words	25	3	17	5	-				
Total	105	83	17	5					

Table 4 shows the analysis of words ending with "ment"

One hundred and five words (105) words ending with suffix -ment were analyzed to find out their primary stress locations. The words were grouped into 2, 3 and 4 syllable words respectively. Seven words (7) were made up of two syllables. All of them received their primary stress on the first syllable. Seventy three (73) were made up of three syllables. All of them received their primary stress on the first syllable. Twenty five words (25) were recorded for four syllable words three (3) of them received its primary stress on the first syllable, seventeen (17) of them received their primary stress on the second syllable while five (5) of them received its primary stress on the third syllable. The data shows that words ending with "ment" bear their primary stress on the ante-penultimate syllable. Three exceptions were recorded for four syllables.

The following are example of stress placement in words ending with 'ment'

2 syllable words

1	2
`AUG	Ment
`FRANG	Ment
`LA	Ment
`MOVE	Ment
`PLACE	Ment

Stress placement in words ending with 'ment'

3 syllable words

1	2	3
ad	`JUST	Ment
a	`DORN	Ment
ad	`VANCE	Ment
a	`MAZE	Ment
a	`MEND	ment

Stress placement in words ending with ‘ment’  
4 syllable words

1	2	3	4
ac	`COM	plish	Ment
ac	`COU	tre	Ment
ad	`VER	tise	Ment
ag	GRAW	dize	Ment
as	`TON	ish	Ment

TABLE 5  
Stress placement in words ending with ‘gy’

Number of syllable	Number of words	Primary stress placement							
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
3 syllable words	2	1	1	-					
4 syllable words	20	-	-	20	-				
5 syllable words	22	-	-	-	21	1			
6 syllable words	3	-	-	-	3	-	-		
Total	47	1	1	20	24	1			

Table 4 shows the analysis of words ending with “gy”. Forty seven words (47) words ending with suffix –gy were analyzed to find out their primary stress locations. The words were grouped into 3, 4, 5 and 6 syllable words respectively. Two words (2) were made up of three syllables. One (1) of them received its primary stress on the first syllable while one (1) of them received its primary stress on the second syllable. Twenty words (20) were recorded for four syllable words. All of them were received their primary stress on the third syllable. Twenty two words (22) were made up of five syllables. Twenty one (21) of them received its primary stress on the fourth syllable while one (1) of them received its primary stress on the fifth syllable. Three words (3) were recorded for six syllable words. All of them were received their primary stress on the fourth syllable. The data shows that words ending with “gy” bear their primary stress on the ante-penultimate syllable. One exception was recorded for three syllables and one exception was recorded for five syllables.

The following are example of stress placement in words ending with ‘gy’ 3 syllable words

1	2	3
`EU	Lo	Gy

Stress placement in words ending with ‘gy’ 4 syllable words

1	2	3	4
A	`NAL	o	Gy
A	`POL	o	Gy
Chro	`NOL	o	Gy
Cos	`MOL	o	Gy
E	`COL	o	Gy

Stress placement in words ending with ‘gy’ 5 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5
Ae	Ti	`OL	o	Gy
Ar	Chae	`OL	o	Gy
Cam	Pa	`NOL	o	Gy
Em	Bry	`OL	o	Gy
En	To	`MOL	o	Gy

Stress placement in words ending with ‘gy’ 6 syllable words

1	2	3	4	5	6
Bac	te	Ri	`OL	o	Gy
Mi	cro	Bi	`OL	o	Gy
Pal	ae	On	`TOL	o	gy
Psy	cho	Bi	`OL	o	Gy

### 11.3. Findings

All the words ending with “-cian” and “-ion” in our data bear the primary stress on the penultimate syllable irrespective of the number of syllables each word contains. No exception was recorded. Similarly, all words ending with “-ic” bear the primary stress on the penultimate syllable as words ending with -ion. No exception was also recorded in this group. Words ending with “-gy” and “-ity” bear the primary stress on the ante-penultimate syllable. Words ending with “-ment” have their primary stress located on the second syllable in all the samples. Overall, we observe that words ending with the same suffix have regular stress patterns; very few exceptions to the rules were recorded; words ending with the same suffixes generally belong to the same word classes.

### 12.4. Conclusion

Given the regularity of primary stress on the same syllable in words having the same ending, the analysis reveals that the exercise could be useful for pedagogical purposes. Teachers of English as a second language should, therefore, start using the rules as early as possible to improve the present poor standard of spoken English amongst learners in Nigerian schools.



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