

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 10 : 2 February 2010
ISSN 1930-2940

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**Does Stress-Shift Lead to
Word-Class Conversion in English?**

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Initial Stress Derivation

Initial-stress derivation is a phonological process in English wherein the parts of speech change. For example, verbs usually but not always become nouns or adjectives when the stress is shifted from the second syllable to the first one. There are however some words in English, e.g. *limit*, *visit*, *remark* etc. with stress on the same syllable whether they are used as nouns or verbs.

This shift in stress is called a suprafix in linguistics. It is a type of affix where a suprasegmental change (such as tone or stress) modifies an existing morpheme's meaning. When the stress is moved, the pronunciation, especially of vowels, often changes in other ways as well. Most common is the reduction of a vowel sound to a *schwa* when it becomes unstressed. In many languages, they are used to differentiate between otherwise identical lexemes, but in some they are used derivationally or inflectionally. An example in English is the creation of initial-stress-derived nouns, as with the word *produce*, for example: it is / 'kɒndʌkt / as noun and / kən'dʌkt / as verb.

The Reason for This Process

This, we believe is probably because the polysyllabic nouns tend to have an unstressed final syllable. Verbs do not have an unstressed final syllable. And this has been there since the early modern period. This is the main reason why the stress difference between nouns and verbs applies generally in English.

The List of Pairs of Words

There are close to 170 pairs of such words (verb-noun or adjective) the frequency of which is a result of the productivity of class conversion. These words justify such changes effected by the stress shift. We give below an exhaustive list of the words that convert the class if stress is shifted from one syllable to the other.

absent - abstract - accent - addict - address - affect - affix - alloy - ally - annex - assay - attribute - augment - belay - bombard - combat - combine - commune - compact - complex- compost - compound - compress - concert - conduct - confect - confine(s) - conflict - conscript - conserve - consist - console - consort - construct - consult - content - contest - contract - contrast - converse - convert - convict - costume - decrease - default - defect - desert - detail - dictate - digest - discard - discharge - discount - discourse - dismount - document - escort - essay - excise - exploit - export - extract - finance - foretaste- foretold - foretold - forward - frequent - gallant - impact - implant - implement - impound - import - impress - imprint - incense - incline- - increase - indent - inlay - insert- insult - intercept - interchange - intercross - interdict - interlink - interlock - intern - interplay - interspace - interweave - intrigue - invert - invite - involute - mandate- - misprint - object - offset - ornament - over count - overlap - overlay- - overlook - override- - overrun - overturn - perfect - perfume - permit - pervert - prefix- - present - proceed(s) - produce - progress - project - protest - purport - rebel - recall - recap - recess- - recoil - record - re-count - redirect - redo - redress - refill - refund - refuse - regress - rehash - reject - relapse - relay - remake - repeat - reprint - research - reset - retake - retard - retract - retread - rewrite - segment - subject - survey - suspect - torment - transfer- - transform - transplant - transect - transport - transpose - undercount- underlay - underline - underscore - update - upgrade - uplift - upset

Some Examples of the Process

Let us take for example, the word *desert* / 'dezət / . When used as noun, it is pronounced like *helpers*, *Nelson*, *senders* etc. However, when the same word is used as a verb, / dɪ'zɜ:t / the vowel in the first syllable sounds / I / as in the words: *if*, *ill*, *in* etc. and that in the second one sound like the vowel sound in the words such as *girl*, *shirt*, *bird* etc. Here is an example of this in a sentence: *We should not desert someone in a desert.* The first *desert* meaning 'to leave' is used as a verb and gets the stress in the second syllable. The second *desert* meaning 'an arid region' is used as a noun and is stressed in the first syllable.

Similarly, the word: *permit* / 'pɜ:mit/. When used as a noun, the vowel in the first syllable of it sounds like that in *dirt*, *curl*, *flirt* etc. and that in the second syllable, sounds like the one in *sit*, *fin*, *lip* etc. But when the same word is used as a verb, / pə'mɪt / the vowel in the first syllable becomes weak as in the words *ago*, *alas*, *avail* etc. Look at this sentence: *You are not permitted to misuse your permit like this.* The first *permit* which means 'to allow' is used as a verb and is stressed in the second syllable. The second *permit* meaning 'a license' is used as a noun and receives the accent on the first syllable.

So is the case with *subject* /'sʌbdʒɪkt / . The vowel in first part of the word sounds like the one in the words: *cut*, *dug*, *mud* etc. and that in the second part sounds like *fit*, *nil*, *dig* etc. when it is used in the noun form. However, when the same word is used as a verb, /səb'dʒekt/ the vowels change. In the first syllable the vowel is a weak one as in the case of *alarm*, *ascend* etc. and in the second syllable, it is / e / as in *sell*, *men*, *jet* etc. Consider a sentence such as this: *The accused subject was subjected to severe punishment by the*

king. The *subject* mentioned in the first clause is a noun and is stressed in the first syllable and the second *subject* receives the second syllable for it is used as a verb.

The word *record* /'rekɔ:d/ is also an interesting case. In the noun form, the vowel in the first syllable sounds like / e / as in *bell, peg, den* etc. and in the second syllable, it sounds like the vowel in the words *caught, lawn, taught* etc. But when used as a verb, / rɪ'kɔ: d / the first syllable in *record* is pronounced as / I / as in *pill, sin, tips* etc. Here is an example: *Please record the details in the record carefully.* Of the pair of words *record*, the first one as a verb is stressed in the first syllable and the second one in the second syllable.

Importance of the Shifting of the Stress in English

Yes, shifting of the stress in English does matter. We have seen in the previous paragraphs how stress-shift results in class conversion. The four pairs of words: *desert, permit, subject* and *record* are just illustrative of how these changes are effected. In effect, any of the words provided in the list above will convert the class of word if stress is shifted from one syllable to the other. Apart from converting the class of the words, it also affects the meaning and the pronunciation in a substantial manner.

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