

How to Make Yourself Understood

English I Online Materials

Tips for English Speech Sounds

Unit 2

Focus on Important Information



キーワード (key words)

強勢 (stress) 主強勢 (main stress) 焦点 (focus) 対比的焦点 (contrastive focus)
新情報 (new information) 脱強勢 (de-stress)

Tips for English Speech Sounds

Unit 2 Focus and Important Information

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Scripts and Annotations (スクリプトと解説)

Hello everyone. I'm Jeff Gayman. In Unit 1, we learned that semantic core words are also cores for pronouncing English sentences. Today, we are going to learn more tips on pronouncing sentences based on information structure of the sentence. The key concept is;

“Put a heavy stress on the most important information, and make other elements weak”

Warming Up Quiz: Which Part is Stressed? (Context 1)

Let's start by looking at the following sentences. In answering question A, which word in sentence B do you read the strongest?

Context 1

A: Who is cooking spaghetti?

B: My teacher is cooking spaghetti

In this context, it is clear that *my teacher* is the most important information. Therefore, it is natural to put the heaviest stress on the core word of the subject noun phrase; that is, *teacher*.

My TEAcher is cooking spaghetti

It sounds very strange if you put the heaviest stress on *spaghetti*, instead of *teacher*, in this context. Therefore, when you are asked

A: Who is cooking spaghetti?

if you answer

B: My teacher is cooking spaGHEtti

it sounds as if you are NOT answering the question sincerely. Therefore, which word you should stress the strongest in a sentence is extremely important for making yourself understood correctly.

This may be true in any human language, but since English is a stress-accent language, the correct position of the heaviest stress is crucial in many cases. If you put the main stress on the wrong place, it might lead to a serious misunderstanding.

Points

・単語のレベルでもストレスの位置は重要

→ 複数音節の単語で主強勢の位置を間違えると通じない恐れあり

例： commmunicate – commmunicative – communiccation （よくある間違い： ×communiccate)

→ 複数音節の新出単語は、アクセントの位置を正確に覚えて

Context 2: Object as New Information

OK? So let's consider several other contexts, and check which word should be the strongest. In answering question A, to which word in sentence B do you give the strongest stress in this context?

Context 2

A: What is your teacher cooking?

B: My teacher is cooking spaghetti

This time, the most important information is the object *spaghetti*. Therefore, it is natural to read *spaghetti* the strongest. Let's practice. Repeat after me.

My teacher is cooking spaGHetti <your turn>

Context 3: Verb Phrase as New Information

Too easy? Well, then, how about the next context? Which word do you read the strongest in sentence B this time?

Context 3

A: What is your teacher doing?

B: My teacher is cooking spaghetti

Which part of sentence B carries the most important information, answering question A here? In this context, the verb phrase [*cooking spaghetti*] carries the most important information, since it is giving the required information to the question “doing what?” The subject part is the given information. OK, now, how should we read this sentence most naturally? Very interestingly, the heaviest stress is assigned to the object *spaghetti* again. It sounds very strange if you put the heaviest stress on *cooking* in this context, even though *cooking* is also a part of the important information verb phrase.

Points

<意味の観点から：どの部分が「焦点」Focus か？>

大きく分けて二つのパターン

- (1) Information Focus : 疑問詞に対応する答えになっている部分。新情報 (New Information) とも呼ばれる

Who is cooking spaghetti? My **TEA**cher is cooking spaghetti
 ↳ 必要とされている新情報を提供

What is your teacher cooking? My teacher is cooking spa**GHE**tti
 ↳ 必要とされている新情報を提供

- (2) Contrastive Focus : 前の文脈の何かと対比させている部分

Your teacher is cooking **pizza**, right? No, my teacher is cooking spa**GHE**tti
 ↳ 対比

Your **brother** is cooking spaghetti, right? No, my **TEA**cher is cooking spaghetti
 ↳ 対比

- ・新情報の箇所をしっかりと強く発音しなかったり新情報を差し置いて旧情報の部分をより強く発音してしまうと
 → とてもちぐはぐなやりとりに。場合によっては、誤解されるかも

日本語でも：「何を作っているの？」 「スパゲッティ**は**作っています」(??)

- ・対比されるべき部分をしっかりと強く読まない
 → 言いたいことがうまく通じない不自然な発音に

日本語でも：「**ピザ**が好きなんですよ？」 「いや、スパゲッティ**は**好きなんです」(??)

So it's a rule of English to put the heaviest stress on the object when the verb phrase as a whole carries the most important information.

< Stress-Information Rule in English 1 >

Put the main stress on the object when the *verb phrase* is the new information

In other words, the strongest word is not necessarily the most important part of the sentence, although it is a PART of the most important information.

Points

→ 「**焦点 Focus**」 と 「**主強勢 Main Stress**」 を混同しないで！

- ・ 「**焦点 Focus**」 とは意味上の概念
 - 文のどの部分が、新情報か、(対比されている) 重要な情報か
- ・ 「**主強勢 Main Stress**」 は音韻上の概念
 - 文のどの部分を一番強く発音するか
- ・ したがって、「**焦点**」 イコール 「**主強勢**」 ではない

Context 3

A : What is your teacher doing?

B : My teacher is cooking spaghetti

- ・ doing what? という質問に対する答えなので、B 文における「**焦点**」(新情報) は、cooking spaghetti の部分。しかし、音韻上、この部分全部を強く読むことはない。主強勢は spaghetti の -GHE- の部分のみ。つまり、英語の主強勢と**焦点**との関係には次のような規則がある

< Stress-Information Rule in English 1 >

(目的語を持つ) 動詞句全体が新情報の時、主強勢は目的語に置かれる

Context 4: The Sentence as a Whole as New Information

Let's go on to the next context. Which word do you read the strongest in sentence B in *this* context?

Context 4

A: What's that noise?

B: My teacher is cooking spaghetti

This time, the whole sentence B is the new information, and thus the most important. Now, again, very interestingly, it is most natural to put the heaviest stress on the object *spaghetti* in this context, too. Again, it's one of the English rules to put the main stress on the object when there is an object and the whole sentence is the new information.

< Stress-Information Rule in English 2 >

Put the main stress on the object when the *whole sentence* is the new information

At first glance, the relation between the main stress and the important information looks straightforward and easy. "Give the strongest stress on the most important part of the sentence." However, things are not so

straightforward, as we have just seen. Usually, a sentence carries just one main stress which falls on one word. The new information, however, can be larger than a word in the sentence. Therefore, they are not in a simple one-to-one correspondence.

Specifically, in our current example sentence, *my teacher is cooking spaghetti*, if you put the main stress on *spaghetti*, the possible new information parts can be the object *spaghetti* alone, or the verb phrase *cooking spaghetti*, or the whole sentence.

My teacher is cooking spa**GHE**tti
 most important

My teacher is cooking spa**GHE**tti
 most important

My teacher is cooking spa**GHE**tti
 most important

Points

• Context 4 の B : 文全体が新情報

➔ それでも主強勢は spaghetti の -GHE- のみに (文の単語すべてを強く読むわけではありません!)

< Stress-Information Rule in English 2 >

(目的語を持つ) 文全体が新情報の時、主強勢は目的語に置かれる

Context 5: Verb Alone as Contrastive Focus

OK. Let's consider a few more contexts now. Which word receives the main stress in sentence B this time?

Context 5

A: Has your teacher received the spaghetti delivery already?

B: My teacher is cooking spaghetti

OK, this time, the important contrast is between *received the spaghetti delivery* and *cooking spaghetti*. In other words, the most important information part in sentence B is just *cooking*. Hence, it is most natural to put the heaviest stress on *cooking* in this particular context. Let's practice. Repeat after me.

My teacher is **COO**king spaghetti

<your turn>

Context 6: The Genitive Part of the Subject as Contrastive Focus

Good! OK, let's consider the last context with this sentence. Where do you put the main stress in sentence B in this case?

Context 6

A: Their teacher is cooking spaghetti, right?

B: No. My teacher is cooking spaghetti

OK, this time, *their* and *my* are contrasted. In other words, *my* is the most important new information in sentence B in this context. Consequently, it's most natural to put the main stress on *my* in this instance. Let's practice. Repeat after me.

MY teacher is cooking spaghetti <your turn>

Points

- Context 5 と Context 6 はそれぞれ対比の焦点を表すために、主強勢が通常とは異なる位置に
Context 5 では、先生はスパゲッティの**宅配を頼んだ**のではなく、自分で**料理している**、という対比を示すために、**cooking** が焦点 (contrastive focus)。その意味を適切に伝えるために、**COOking** に主強勢。(それ以外のところを **cooking** よりも強く読むと、この文脈では大変不自然に)
- Context 6 では、「**彼らの**先生」ではなく、「**私の**先生」という対比を示すために、**my** が焦点 (contrastive focus)。その意味を適切に伝えるために、通常は主強勢を置かれることがない代名詞の **MY** が最も強く発音される。(それ以外のところを **my** よりも強く読むととても不自然に)
- これらの例文は、単語も文法も簡単なものですが、使われる文脈によってどの部分が焦点になるか、そしてその焦点を表すためにどの部分に主強勢を置くかが大変重要であることを示しています。単語をただ左から右へ「発音する」のではなく、**文脈における意味(どの部分が焦点か)をよく考え、適切な主強勢の位置で発音することが通じるための重要なポイント**となります。

Pronouns: De-Stressed Elements

Good. Now let's move on to the second part of today's lesson.

We have just seen that putting the main stress on the appropriate place is very important to convey the sentence information accurately. On the other side of the same coin, it is also important to *de*-stress parts of the sentence which do *not* contain important information. In this lesson, we particularly focus on pronouns such as *I*, *me*, *you*, *he*, *we*, *they*, and so on. In most cases, pronouns have to be pronounced very very weakly. This is quite natural because we use pronouns when the relevant information is already obvious from the

context and thus is not very important. And it would sound strange or the sentence would carry peculiar information if you put a stress on pronouns. Let's consider the following example.

A: What is your teacher cooking?

B: He's cooking spaghetti

We now know that the main stress falls on *spaghetti* in sentence B. Further, *my teacher* is replaced by *he* in sentence B, since it is old information here. So it's most natural to read *he's* as weakly as possible. If you put a heavy stress on *he* in this context, the sentence sounds very strange. So, let's practice. Repeat after me.

He's cooking spa**GHE**tti

<your turn>

Don't put a heavy stress on *he* like

HE is cooking spa**GHE**tti

It would sound very unnatural in this particular context.

Try to speak like

He's cooking spa**GHE**tti

<your turn>

Points

- 一方、代名詞や前置詞、助動詞、冠詞などの「機能語」は、通常、強勢は置かれない。前後の単語の付属品のようにならざるを得ない速く弱く発音するのが自然。下記の A に対して、B と答える時、主語が He となっているのは、動作主が直前の *my teacher* であることが明らかで、意味情報上重要ではないから（重要なのは新情報の *spaghetti*）。→ 意味的に重要ではない *he* を強く発音してしまうと、とても不自然に

A : What is your teacher cooking?

B : He's cooking spaGHE**tti**

日本語でも：「君の先生、何を作っているの？」「**先生が**スパゲティを作ってます」(??)

Good! Now let's look at another example. How do you pronounce *I – like – them* in this context?

A: Have you seen the new computers?

B: Yeah, I like them

Since *I* and *them* are old information in sentence B, and the verb *like* is the most important *new* information, it's most natural to put the main stress on *like*. Let's practice. Repeat after me.

I LIKE them <your turn>

Further, in a natural speed conversation, the object pronoun *them* becomes as if it is a part of the verb *like*, and is pronounced just as “m”, as in

I LIKE'm

Just add a very weak “m” sound, attached to the verb. Repeat after me.

I LIKE'm <your turn>

Now let's consider what will happen if you put a heavy stress on the first person pronoun *I*.

Satoshi: Hi, Jeff

Jeff: Hi, Satoshi

Satoshi: Have you seen the new computers?

Jeff: Yeah. “I” like them

How do you find the last sentence in this conversation? Since *I* is not new information in usual contexts like this, if you put a strong stress on *I*, it will convey some special intention of the speaker. It may mean, for instance, “I don't care at all what everyone else thinks of the new computers, but *I* like the new computers no matter how *you* feel about it”. Here again, the location of the main stress may drastically change the implication of the sentence.

Points

I – my – me や you – your などは、会話に頻繁に出てくるが、何かとの対比を表す場合以外は、通常、あまり強く発音されることはない。→ 不用意に強く発音してしまうと、思わぬ誤解を与えかねないので注意

Satoshi: Have you seen the new computers?

Jeff: Yeah, “I” like them

ここでIを不用意に強く発音してしまうと、「他の人たちがどう思っているか知ったこっちゃないけど、「俺」は気に入ってるぜ」のようなニュアンスで伝わってしまう恐れあり。

Summary

OK. Let's wrap up.

English is a stress-accent language. Therefore, the location of the main stress in a sentence is extremely important to express your intention accurately. By the same token, it is also important NOT to put any stress on elements like pronouns which usually do not carry important new information in the sentence. If you put a heavy stress on the wrong place in a sentence, you may not be able to make yourself understood successfully. And in extreme cases, it may lead to a serious miscommunication!

OK. How was today's lesson? Remember that in English, it's very important to realize which word carries the heaviest stress, and which words are phonologically very light.

Well, that's all for today. Good luck, keep practicing, and see you next time!

Points

・意味を理解して、強弱のメリハリをつけての発音練習を習慣づけると

- 通じやすくなる（誤解を生む恐れが減る）
- 聞き取り力もアップする

Further Tips (1)

思わぬ誤解を生む I / you の不用意な強勢

久しぶりに会った合った友達に、「今何してるの？」と聞かれて：

友達：What do you do now?

あなた：I am a college student

「大学に通ってるんだ」というつもりでも、不用意に I を強く発音してしまうと、「あなたは何してるか知らないけど、私、大学通ってるんだからね！」というニュアンスに聞こえてしまうかも。

合宿で、友達に「歯、磨いた？」というつもりで、

Did you brush **YOUR** teeth?

文法的には何の問題もありますが、不用意に **YOUR** を強く発音してしまうと、「他人の歯磨き手伝うのもいいけど、自分の歯は、ちゃんと磨いたの？」というニュアンスに聞こえてしまうかも。


Further Tips (2)

My / your への強勢がパターン化されている例

my や your は、通常、前の文脈で述べられたこととの対比を示す場合を除いて、強く発音されないのがもっとも一般的ですが、以下のように、強く読まれるのが普通である例もあります。どちらも日常的によく使う表現です。

「次、君の番だよ」「お次どうぞ」という意味で、Your turn と言いますが、この場合は、**YOUR** turn のように **YOUR** に主強勢を置くのが一般的です。意味上、「(他の誰でもない) あなたの」が重要で、「番」は文脈から明らかで、ほとんどだからでしょう。日本語でも同じ文脈で、「きみ (の番) だよ」のように、「番」は省略できるくらい意味的に軽いものになっていますね。これを your TURN のように turn の方を強く発音するととても不自然になることが多いでしょう。

バスケットボールのチーム練習をしていて (バレーでもサッカーでもラクロスでもセパタクローでもよい)、味方から来たよいパスを受け損なって (打ち損なって) しまい、「ごめん！」と謝る時、My fault と言います。(スポーツでなくとも、自分のミスを認め謝る場合に使えます。) このときも、my に主強勢を置いて **MY** fault というのが普通です。うまくいかなかったので、失敗 fault であることは文脈から明らか。その失敗の原因は「(他の誰でもない) 自分だ」と言って謝っているわけですから、**MY** を一番強く発音するのがこの場合最も自然なわけです。ここでも、my FAULT のように fault の方を強く発音するのは、大変奇妙な感じになるでしょう。



My fault ...