

Talk a Lot

Focus on Connected Speech

Working Out Word Stress – Analysis of a Newspaper Article #1

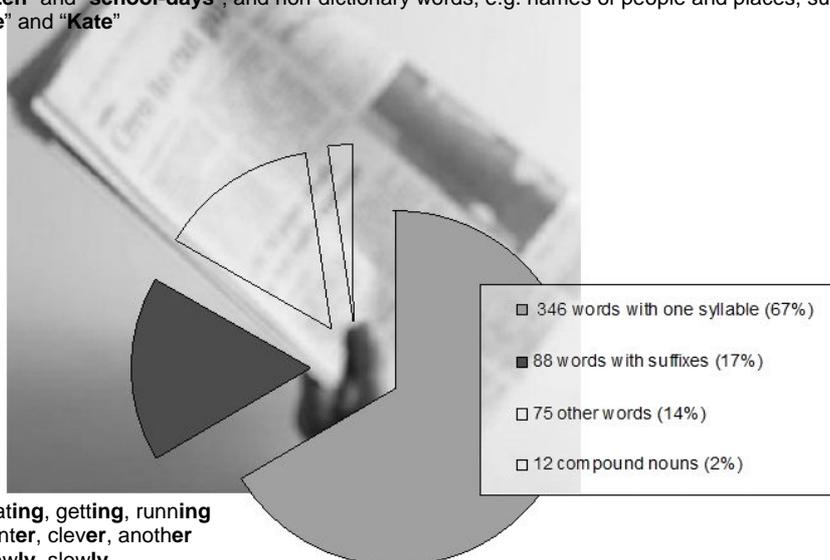
This analysis demonstrates the prevalence of one-syllable words, words with suffixes, and compound nouns in modern English. If we can identify these kinds of words, we can more easily identify word stress because:

- one-syllable words are stressed on the whole word
- suffixes are almost always unstressed
- compound nouns are almost always stressed on the first syllable

We analysed a recent article about holidays from a quality British broadsheet newspaper. 86% of the words used fell into one of the three categories above. We are unable to reprint the article here, but the results of our analysis are as follows. (Note: all examples are from the author of this book, not from the original article).

Total words in the newspaper article extract: **521**

- 67%** There are 346 one-syllable words. If it's a content word, e.g. "go" or "quick", the stress is on the whole word. If it's a function word, e.g. "the" or "at" it will (almost) always be unstressed, and if spoken aloud the weak stress form will be used, if applicable (see p.17.1 for more on weak forms)
- 17%** There are 88 words with suffixes, e.g. "wint **-er**" and "look **-ing**"
- 2%** There are 12 compound nouns, e.g. "**fortnight**" and "**grapefruit**"
- 14%** There are 75 other words, including words with prefixes, e.g. "**a-** bout" and "**com-** pete"; compound words, e.g. "**deep-frozen**" and "**school-days**"; and non-dictionary words, e.g. names of people and places, such as "**Derbyshire**" and "**Kate**"



88 words with suffixes

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| -ing | e.g. looking, eating, getting, running |
| -er | e.g. leather, winter, clever, another |
| -ly | e.g. quickly, newly, slowly |
| -y | e.g. happy, ready |
| -le | e.g. whistle, fizzle |
| -tion | e.g. examination, position |
| -ic | e.g. aromatic, automatic |

Other suffixes found in words from the article

-able, -age, -al, -ant, -bour, -by, -ed, -en, -es, -ey, -ies, -ion, -ment, -n't, -o, -or, -ous, -rict, -try, -ture, etc.

12 compound nouns

e.g. fortnight, grapefruit, sideshow, wardrobe, guidebook, etc.

Action

Why not get your students to do a similar analysis of a short text or newspaper article? Ask them to look for:

- one-syllable words
- words with suffixes
- compound nouns