

Secondary stress in English words.

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Secondary stress in English words. By **Nóra Wenzky**. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2004. Pp. 248. ISBN [963058039X](#). \$29.

Reviewed by [Karen Steffen Chung](#), *National Taiwan University*

This is a highly detailed study on one specific topic: how to predict secondary stress in any given English word. In Part 1, Wenzky offers a survey of previous studies on the subject, discussing the works of Mark Liberman and Alan Prince (18–28), Elizabeth Selkirk (29–36), Erik Fudge (37–39), Jean-Roger Vergnaud and Morris Halle (40–46), Luigi Burzio (47–53), and Halle (54–59). Based on three test words—*academician*, *dissimilarity*, and *emanatory*—W concludes that Burzio’s theory (*Principles of English stress*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) can best account for the most patterns of English secondary stress, building upon this theory in the rest of her work.

In Part 2, ‘Pre-tonic secondary stress’, W notes that she recognizes only two levels of stress, primary and secondary (not tertiary), and unstressed syllables. She covers such topics as syllable weight and alternating stress, adjacent stresses, stress preservation and affixation, and prefixes and classical compounds.

Part 3 addresses ‘Post-tonic secondary stress’, which occurs mainly in suffixed words (e.g. *propagate*). She devotes a chapter each to the special cases of words ending with *-ative* and *-atory*, noting differences between standard British and American English.

W summarizes her work and presents her findings in Part 4, the main conclusion being that, after testing it on a corpus of almost 1,000 words, she finds Burzio’s (1994) framework, with the addition of Fudge’s classification of prefixes and compound initials (*English word-stress*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984), to be ‘an adequate device for describing stress patterns of English’.

For all the minute details of her study, W does not clearly define exactly what secondary stress is. Is stress, as Ladefoged suggests (*A course in phonetics*, 5th edn., Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2006, pp. 111–14), a binary feature that is either there or not, with variations in level being attributable to intonational prosody? Is there a tertiary or further levels of stress? Or do stress values fall along a relative rather than absolute scale, dependent on the overall structure and prosody of the entire utterance (my personal belief)? W leaves many issues open for further study.

The printing quality and no-frills layout of this volume are reasonably good, though the pages tend to fall out after a period of use. No major typos were spotted. The book lacks an index, a minor inconvenience to the reader, and the bibliography is surprisingly just a page and a half long.

W has produced a solid dissertation, but in its present form it is not very accessible to even a specialist, let alone a general reader. Even if one tries very hard to follow the fine detail presented in this work, one soon gets bogged down and is unable to see the forest for the serrations of the leaves. If W were to revise her work, I would suggest keeping the survey material to an absolute minimum and concentrating instead on offering only the best answers to

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the stated research questions in a more user-friendly format, rather than documenting all the wrong paths tried. This would constitute a worthy and much more accessible contribution to both theoretical and applied linguistics.