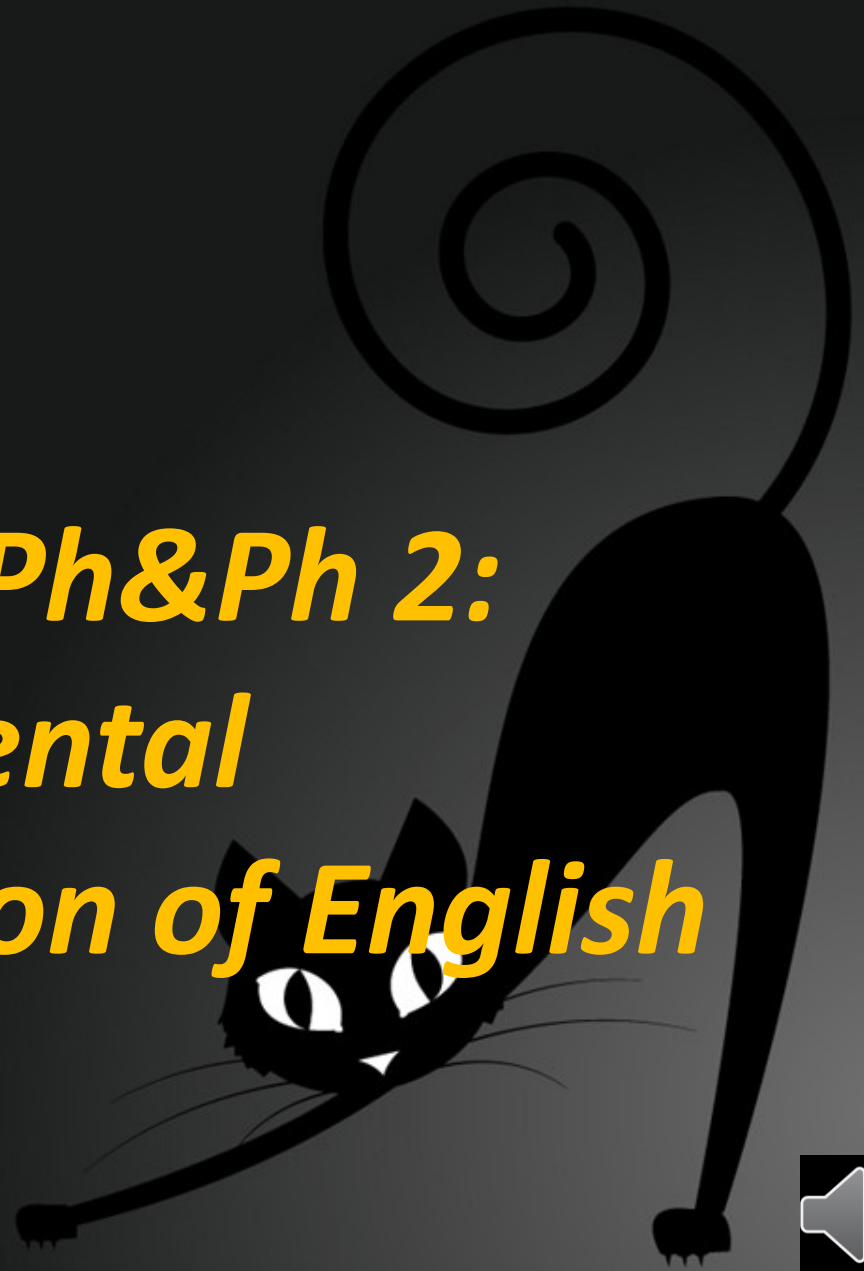


***PRACTICAL Ph&Ph 2:  
Suprasegmental  
pronunciation of English***



# Prosodic (suprasegmental) features include:

- Stress
- Rhythm
- Intonation
- ... and secondary features such as voice quality, tempo and loudness.



# Suprasegmental features

... influence all the segments in both their realisations and overall perceptions.

... are important indicators of the speaker's gender identity, age, level of education and social status, more so than individual words and sounds.

... in lay terms, they could be characterised as the way a speaker uses his/her voice.



# Stress in English

## a) Three basic facts

- The prominent syllable of each content word is *stressed*.
- Stress is a combination of *loudness, pitch* and sometimes longer *duration* (length).
- Grammar words and those considered unimportant to the utterance are *weak forms* (reduced words and syllables).



# Stress in English

## b) Idiosyncracies

- The alterations of stressed (accented) and unstressed (reduced) syllables are referred to as *gradation* and are the result of the historical development of English where the Germanic OE underwent the influence of French.
- Compare the stress patterns of German, French and your mother tongue.



# Stress in English

## c) Vowels as carriers of voice

- Vowels have their full qualities in stressed syllables.
- Rarely, they have their full qualities as *strong vowels* in words such as *impact* ['impæʔt].
- The schwa /ə/ or the syllabic /n/, /l/, /r/ are used in most unstressed syllables.
- More in *Gimson Word Stress* in the course's Learning Materials in the IS.



# Rhythm in English

## a) Timing of stresses

- Czech and Slovak are syllable-timed languages. Each syllable, stressed or unstressed, is allowed an equal amount of time.
- English is a stress-timed language. Utterances can be divided into stress groups, i.e. logical segments of speech containing one stressed syllable plus no, one or more unstressed syllables before and after it. Stress groups have the same duration no matter how many syllables they contain, see e.g. a Halloween rhyme with stress groups divided by bar lines:



# Rhythm in English

## b) Exercise

'Trick or | 'treat | 'Trick or | 'treat |  
'Give me | 'something | 'nice to | 'eat |  
'If you | 'don't | 'I don't | 'care |  
'I will | 'smell your | 'under | ,wear.





# English stress and rhythm

## c) The three rules

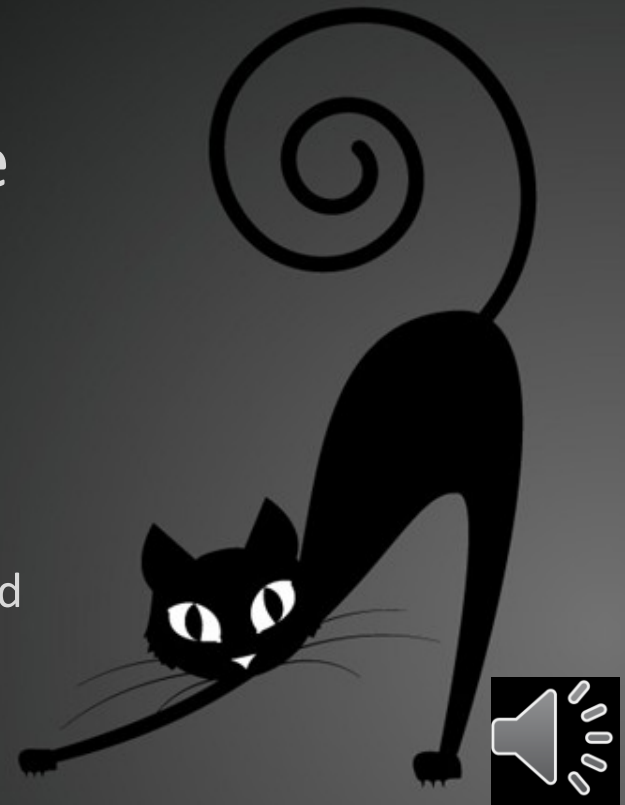
- You only stress words you wouldn't leave out in a text message
- Stressed syllables are at constant distances from each other
- Any unstressed syllables at the beginning of a stress group are said very quickly.



# Rhythm in English

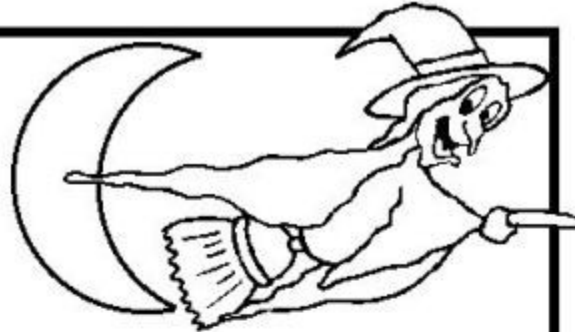
## d) How it works

- Simple stress patterns are common in casual speech and their perception is key for intelligibility.
- Regular stress and rhythm can be important in news reporting and lecturing where the regularity and predictability contributes to comprehension.
- Try how the above rules work on a more complicated Halloween rhyme:



# Rhythm in English

## e) Exercise



### Five Little Pumpkins

Five little pumpkins sitting on a gate.  
The first one said, "Oh, my it's getting late!"  
The second one said, "There are witches in the air."  
The third one said, "But we don't care."  
The fourth one said, "Let's run, let's run!"  
The fifth one said, "Isn't Halloween fun?"

Then Woooooo went the wind  
And OUT went the lights.

And five little pumpkins rolled out of sight.



# Rhythm in English

## f) More in the IS

- For more practice, see *Gimson Sentence Stress* in the course's Learning Materials in the IS.



# Intonation in English

## a) Why not treated here

... can only be learned by observation of appropriate models.

... will take care of itself if stress and rhythm are well grasped and the *nucleus* is correctly signposted.

... is often an indicator of a regional/social dialect.



# Intonation in English

## b) The nucleus

- ... is the key stress in a segment of speech. Cz/SI = end, Eng = nucleus.
- *Workout music source.*
- *- Let's go to the theatre.*
  - *The Players' Theatre?*
- *This is a pre-recorded Halloween revision of suprasegmental behaviour in English.*



# Prosodic behaviour in GenAm and GB compared #1, #2

GenAm **devotion to vowels;**  
**vowels more open, nasal setting**  
GB **devotion to consonants**

**voice carries more**  
**voice carries less**



#3, #4

tempo slower, louder in vol.

tempo faster, quieter in  
volume

volume decreases during  
utterance

volume increases during  
utterance





#5, #6, #7

more items stressed

fewer items stressed

narrower pitch range

wider pitch range

volume used for emphasis

pitch used for emphasis



# Reflection point:

Do the above speech habits indicate differences in mentalities, degree of speakers' confidence or just generally accepted language behaviour?

In what ways do our mother tongues' suprasegmental behaviours differ?



# Have a spooky Halloween!

## Sources:

- *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*
- Gimson, A.C. *A practical course of English pronunciation*
- Collins and Mees *Practical Phonetics and Phonology*
- Meier, P. *Accents and Dialects for the Stage and Screen*



