
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF STRESS IN GERMAN AND ALBANIAN

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyze and clarify the concept of stress in both German and Albanian, while also highlighting the difficulties that may arise during communication between speakers. Stress, both in German and Albanian, plays a crucial role as it directly influences pronunciation and the structure of speech flow. Word stress can change the meaning of words by emphasizing one syllable over another, leading to a more distinct or specific nuance. This paper examines the rules of stress in the two analyzed languages—German and Albanian—by comparing their common principles as well as their differences. Since stress is a fundamental element of languages, understanding its rules is essential for proper comprehension and pronunciation. Albanian has relatively fixed stress rules, whereas in German, stress placement varies due to additional influencing factors. In Albanian, stress remains on the same syllable regardless of word forms, whereas in German, stress shifts depending on the word structure. Intonation and regional dialects also affect stress placement, often leading to incorrect pronunciation when attempting to speak the standard language, causing confusion and ambiguity in communication. The difference is even more pronounced when learning a foreign language, as native language rules may interfere with pronunciation. Unlike the relatively stable and predictable stress system in Albanian, German exhibits significant variations in both stress and intonation. Learning and correctly pronouncing word stress is an additional challenge for those learning German, and it is even more difficult for Germans learning Albanian. In German, vowel length does not alter word meaning, whereas in Albanian, vowel length does not influence stress, which may cause misunderstanding between speakers. Additionally, separable verbs in German greatly contribute to misinterpretation, as separable verbs place stress on the prefix, whereas inseparable verbs with prefixes shift stress to the first syllable following the prefix. Since such a distinction does not exist in Albanian, a solid understanding of grammatical rules in both languages is necessary for accurate pronunciation and comprehension.

Keywords: Stress, Dialect, Comparison, Analysis, Intonation, Stress Rules, Stress Placement, Pronunciation.

1. STRESS IN THE GERMAN LANGUAGE

The term "stress" originates from the Latin word *accentus*, meaning melody or song. Much like how accuracy in notes, rhythm, and intonation is essential for a well-structured song, stress plays a significant role in pronunciation and the flow of speech. Stress not only determines the rhythm and intonation but also allows words or sentences to be pronounced in a way that conveys emotions, irony, sarcasm, or places emphasis on specific words. In other words, stress is essential for ensuring that a speaker's message is understood exactly as it is intended. At its core, stress refers to the way a vowel or syllable is pronounced with greater force, a higher pitch, and a longer duration compared to other syllables in a word. This concentration of emphasis within a sentence or a specific phrase gives it structure and clarity, making the spoken language more understandable and nuanced. In German, stress is applied dynamically. This means that the stressed syllable is pronounced with greater intensity and a raised pitch, contributing to the language's natural rhythm. Although there are general tendencies and patterns, German stress placement does not follow fixed, unchangeable rules. It varies depending on the word and context. Generally, verbs and nouns in German are stressed on the first syllable. For example, in the words *lesen* (to read) and *Garten* (garden), the stress falls on the first syllable. On the other hand, prepositions and conjunctions are typically unstressed in spoken German, such as in words like *auf* (on) and *und* (and). These patterns help create the distinct rhythm and sound that define the German language, ensuring clarity and precision in communication. **Suffixes** can influence word stress. In many cases, stress shifts to the suffix, particularly in words with certain endings, such as *Universität* (university).

- **Foreign loanwords** generally retain their original pronunciation, such as *Restaurant* (restaurant) or *Computer*.
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2. REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN STRESS

Despite standard rules, dialectal differences in German influence stress placement in certain words. Historical linguistic development has led to variations in stress patterns across different regions of Germany.

Table 1: Regional Variations in Stress Placement in German Dialects

Word	Standard German	Northern Dialect	Southern Dialect
Verkäuferin	Verkäuferin	Verkäuferin	Verkäuferin
Universität	Universität	Universität	Universität
Sonntag	Sonntag	Sonntag	Sonntag
Freitag	Freitag	Freitag	Freitag

Source: Author's source

A common misunderstanding may arise when a speaker from the Bavarian dialect in southern Germany (*Süddeutsch, Bairisch*) says *Morgen ist Freitag*, which in that dialect means *tomorrow is Friday*. However, a speaker from northern Germany (*Norddeutsch*) might interpret the same phrase as *tomorrow is my day off*, since in northern dialects, stress shifts within the phrase, altering its perceived meaning.

3. STRESS IN THE ALBANIAN LANGUAGE

In the Albanian language, stress can fall on different syllables:

- On the last syllable, known as **final stress**,
- On the penultimate syllable, known as **penultimate stress**,
- On the second or more syllables before the last one, known as **pre-final stress**.

Stress in Albanian is **dynamic**, meaning that one syllable is pronounced with greater intensity. This characteristic is also found in the **German language**. However, unlike German, Albanian follows two main stress placement rules:

Words ending in a vowel are stressed on the **penultimate syllable** (e.g., *shkolla* – "school").

Words ending in a consonant are stressed on the **last syllable** (e.g., *shkollim* – "schooling").

These rules apply to **compound words** and words that have been modified with **suffixes**.

Rules of Stress in Albanian

- **Stressed syllables** are those that carry the primary force in pronunciation.
- **Stress remains stable** when a word receives grammatical endings, except when a new word is formed.
 - Example: *punëtor* → *punëtoria*.
- **Stress functions at both word and sentence levels**, helping determine the correct meaning of speech.
- In **compound words**, each word retains its original stress.
- **Logical stress** refers to the emphasized word in a sentence that draws more attention.

Stress Placement in Albanian

- In **vowel clusters (diphthongs)**, stress usually falls on the **first vowel** (e.g., *diell, qiell*).
- Stress can **shift** when a word takes a suffix, but not in all cases (e.g., *shkollë* → *shkollor*).
- **Vowel length and stress placement** help differentiate word meanings (e.g., *dhe* "and" vs. *dhé* "earth").

How Stress Functions in Speech

In spoken language, **only one syllable in a word is pronounced with greater force, higher pitch, and longer duration** than the others.

For example, in *lum-tu-ri* ("happiness"), the final syllable *-ri* is pronounced with more intensity than the others.

Thus, **stress** refers to the pronunciation of a syllable with greater force and duration, while the **stressed syllable** is the one that stands out compared to the rest.

Types of Stress in Albanian

- **Final stress** (*fundor*): when stress falls on the last syllable (*punim, shtëpi*).
- **Penultimate stress** (*parafundor*): when stress falls on the second-to-last syllable (*besë, shkollë*).
- **Pre-final stress** (*tejfundor*): when stress falls on a syllable that is two or more places before the last one (*fsheturazi*).

Once a word's stress is set, it **remains stable** and does not move within inflected forms of the word (e.g., *mal* → *maleve*).

Dialectal Variations

In the **Tosk dialect**, the word *këtu* is pronounced *këtu*, maintaining its full form, while in the **Gheg dialect**, it is pronounced *ktë*, which can also be understood as *këtë* ("this").

4. COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO LANGUAGES:

In both German and Albanian, incorrect stress placement can lead to misunderstandings, but the complexities in each language are distinct. One significant factor in German is the existence of separable and inseparable verbs, which increases the possibility of errors, especially for non-native speakers. The placement of stress in German is

not always fixed, and it can change depending on the word's function and its position in a sentence. This variability in stress placement can confuse learners and lead to mispronunciations or unintended shifts in meaning.

For Albanian speakers learning German, a common error is placing the stress on the last syllable in words. This is particularly problematic because, in German, the stress often falls on the first syllable, especially for nouns and verbs. Here are some typical mistakes:

- Instead of *Kultur* (culture), they might pronounce *Kultur* with the stress on the final syllable, which is not standard in German pronunciation.
- Instead of *Problem* (problem), they might place the stress on the last syllable, which is incorrect in the German context.
- *Kinder* (children) might be pronounced with the stress on the last syllable, when the correct pronunciation places the stress on the first syllable.
- *Fenster* (window) might also be pronounced incorrectly, with an unintended stress shift to the last syllable.

These errors are primarily a result of Albanian's tendency to stress syllables differently compared to German, which can lead to miscommunication.

Conversely, German speakers learning Albanian often encounter difficulties in stressing words correctly in the Albanian language. One common mistake is placing the stress on the first syllable of words, which is incorrect in many cases, as the stress in Albanian can fall on various positions depending on the word. For example:

- Instead of *Detyra* (task), Germans might stress the first syllable, saying *Detyra*, which is incorrect in Albanian, where the correct stress falls on the second syllable.
- Instead of *Probleme* (problems), they might place the stress incorrectly on the first syllable, leading to *Probleme* instead of *Probleme*.
- *Familja* (family) might be pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, which again disrupts the intended pronunciation.

Such mistakes made by German speakers can create confusion, as the stress shift could alter the meaning of the word or make it sound unnatural to native Albanian speakers. In both cases, stress misplacement can lead to situations where the listener has to process the incorrect pronunciation, sometimes misunderstanding the speaker's intent.

These kinds of errors not only affect comprehension but can also distort the emotional tone or emphasis of a sentence. For instance, incorrect stress can change the focus of a word, leading to confusion about what is being emphasized in a sentence. In both languages, such errors can make it more challenging for learners to express themselves clearly and for listeners to interpret their message accurately.

The misplacement of stress in either language creates a barrier to effective communication, as the listener may have to adjust their expectations and try to decipher the meaning of the sentence based on context. In more severe cases, the misunderstanding could result in the opposite of the intended message being communicated, which can cause frustration for both parties involved.

By recognizing these common stress-related errors and addressing them through focused practice, repetition, and awareness of the stress patterns of each language, learners can improve their pronunciation and minimize the risk of such misunderstandings.

5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the differences in stress patterns between German and Albanian pose a significant challenge for learners of both languages. Stress placement plays a crucial role in pronunciation and meaning, and any deviation from the correct stress can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, or even communication breakdowns. Since stress patterns in German and Albanian follow different rules, learners often transfer patterns from their native language to the target language, which results in common pronunciation errors. However, these challenges can be overcome with systematic practice and awareness. Through careful listening to native speakers, imitation of correct pronunciation, the use of phonetic tools, and regular speaking exercises, learners can gradually improve their ability to place stress correctly. Exposure to spoken language through conversations, audiobooks, and media also helps develop an intuitive sense of stress placement. The differences in stress placement between the two languages significantly increase the potential for misunderstandings, especially when learners do not consciously apply the correct rules of the target language. This is particularly evident in interactions between German and Albanian speakers, where incorrect stress can sometimes alter the intended meaning of a word or phrase. One effective strategy for improvement is to slow down speech and focus on the rhythm and emphasis of each syllable. By paying close attention to how native speakers articulate words and by practicing pronunciation deliberately, learners can refine their speech and reduce errors over time. Additionally, repetition is a key factor in mastering proper

pronunciation. While achieving fluency in stress placement requires patience, dedication, and continuous practice, it is by no means an impossible task. With consistent effort and structured learning techniques, learners can develop accuracy in pronunciation, ultimately leading to clearer and more effective communication in both languages.

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