

## Some Stress Placement Rules in Maithili

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### 1. Introduction

Maithili, like most Indo-Aryan languages, is a stress language. However, stress in Maithili is far weaker than in English. Vowel reduction in unstressed positions is not as great in Maithili as in English. Also, stress in Maithili is less significant, playing only a marginal role in distinguishing words.

This paper will review some of the proposed stress-assignment rules for Maithili and then attempt to rewrite the stress placement rules in the light of data provided in Trail (1973). (For information on probable acoustic correlates of word stress in Maithili, see Yadav 1980).

### 2. Previous Studies

The earliest study of word stress in the Indo-Aryan languages, including Maithili, is that of Grierson (1895a) wherein he argued that these languages:

closely follow the rules of Sanskrit stress-accent (as distinct from the ancient musical accent)... The only difference is that IAV's (Modern Indo-Aryan Vernaculars) do not usually throw the accent further back than the antepenultimate if the word ends in a long syllable. (p. 139)

Grierson's (1895b, 1896) later studies also reiterate the same position.

In his earliest study (1941), S. Jha mentions word stress only briefly, but later (1958) he discusses stress in modern Maithili at greater length and offers the following stress-placement rules:

- (i) Words of one syllable have their vowels always stressed.

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- (ii) In words of two syllables, the penultimate, i.e., the initial vowel gets the accent.
- (iii) But if the final vowel is long and the initial, short, the final vowel has the accent.
- (iv) In words of three syllables, if all the vowels are short or the penultimate is long, the penultimate bears the stress.
- (v) If the penultimate is short and the final, long, the final syllable bears the accent.
- (vi) If the other syllables are short and the ante-penultimate vowel, long, the latter bears the stress.
- (vii) As stress cannot be thrown further back than the third syllable from the end the rules of accentuation in words of three syllables hold good in words of more syllables also. (pp. 59-60)

The crucial problem with most of these previous studies, including those of Grierson, is that these are highly impressionistic. In particular, Grierson's (1895a, 1895b, 1896) studies are especially open to serious objections for the simple reason that he placed all the new Indo-Aryan languages under the same stress rules and it is not clear how large a sample he used in the ten or eleven languages he investigated. Furthermore, the stress-placement rules proposed by previous studies are based heavily on literary spelling rather than actual pronunciation -- a puristic bias to keep the pronunciation closer to Sanskrit is easily noticeable. Also, previous writers have tended to confuse stress with vowel length. For instance, to most of S. Jha's (and of Grierson's) stress-placement rules, vowel length is crucial. However, vowel length is known to be non-phonemic in Maithili. Consequently, the basic premise of these stress rules is untenable.

### 3. Location of Stress

Trail's (1973) word list of approximately 1700 words has been used for this preliminary distributional study of the position of primary word stress in Maithili.

#### Monosyllabic

All monosyllabic nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs are always stressed, e.g.,

['i]	'this'
['ke]	'who'
['mac <sup>vh</sup> ]	'fish'
['d <sup>h</sup> il]	'louse'
['paik <sup>h</sup> ]	'wings'
['nik]	'good'
['leb]	'to take'
['deb]	'to give'
['k <sup>h</sup> əb]	'to eat'

### Disyllabic

All disyllabic verbs in Trail's List and a great majority of disyllabic nouns, pronouns and adjectives (approximately 75%) receive stress on their penultimate, i.e., the initial syllable. Trail (1973) did not include inflected causative verb forms which may receive stress on the ultimate syllable. Examples:

['bəhut]	'a lot'	['kərəb]	'to do'
['ədmi]	'man'	['piəb]	'to drink'
['bekti]	'individual'	['sutəb]	'to sleep'
['t <sup>h</sup> ehun]	'knee'	['ladəb]	'to load'
['ēri]	'heel'	['kaʔəb]	'to cut'
['k <sup>h</sup> opri]	'hut'	['pōʔa]	'nasal mucus'

[kə'ʔa]	'(imp) cause to cut'
[hə'ʔa]	'(imp) cause to move; remove'
[lu'ʔa]	'(imp) cause to rob'
[b <sup>h</sup> ə'ja]	'(imp) cause to exchange'
[p <sup>h</sup> ə'sa]	'(imp) cause to entangle'
[lə'da]	'(imp) cause to load'

The remaining 25% of the disyllabic nouns, pronouns and adjectives have stress on the last syllable,

[bi'rar]	'land fit to grow seedlings'
[kə'rej̃]	'heart'
[k <sup>h</sup> ə'k <sup>h</sup> ar]	'sputum'
[bo'k <sup>h</sup> ar]	'fever'
[kə't <sup>h</sup> or]	'hard'
[gə'rib]	'poor'
[gə'rur]	'a bird'
[g <sup>h</sup> ə'mənd̃]	'pride'
[bi'laĩ]	'cat'
[lə'raĩ]	'war'
[ke'raõ]	'beans'
[mir'čaĩ]	'hot pepper'
[čə'taĩ]	'mat'

Tentatively, it may be concluded that the disyllabic nouns, pronouns and adjectives of Maithili normally receive stress on the ultimate syllable when the ultimate syllable is either closed, i.e., ends in a consonant or a cluster of consonants, or ends in a sequence of vowels--which is diphthongized in surface phonetic forms. There are, however, exceptions, e.g.,

['bəhut]	'a lot'
['t <sup>h</sup> ehun]	'knee'

### Trisyllabic

#### Nouns, Pronouns and Adjectives

The majority of trisyllabic nouns, pronouns and adjectives (approximately 75%) receive stress on the penultimate syllable. Examples:

[kən'pət̪ti]	'temple (of the head)'
[kət̪ <sup>h</sup> 'k <sup>h</sup> od <sup>h</sup> i]	'woodpecker'
[b <sup>h</sup> əg'jogni]	'firefly'
[ən't̪ <sup>h</sup> anbe]	'ninety-nine'
[un'çalis]	'forty-nine'
[kən'bəlla]	'earrings'

However, a number of trisyllabic nouns, pronouns, and adjectives (approximately 18%) receive stress on the antepenultimate, i.e., the first syllable, e.g.,

['bər <sup>h</sup> iyã]	'better'
['duniyã]	'world'
['dəhina]	'right'
['tər <sup>h</sup> iya]	'petticoat'
['muk <sup>h</sup> iya]	'leader'
['nariyər]	'coconut'
['d <sup>h</sup> aluwa]	'steep'
['bastəbik]	'true; real'

A few trisyllabic nouns, pronouns and adjectives (approximately 7%) receive stress on the ultimate syllable. Examples:

[hosi'yar]	'alert'
[çəmət'kar]	'skill'
[bəru'war]	'strong'
[əsən'tok <sup>h</sup> ]	'dissatisfaction'
[guri'əl]	'wrapped up'

### Verbs

Most trisyllabic verb infinitives, including causal infinitives, receive stress on the penultimate syllable, e.g.,

[k <sup>h</sup> i'harəb]	'to chase'
[ni'k <sup>h</sup> orəb]	'to clean (vegetable, grain, etc.)'
[nəŋ'raeb]	'to limp'
[k <sup>h</sup> ə'k <sup>h</sup> arəb]	'to clear throat'
[b <sup>h</sup> ə'gaeb]	'to drive away'
[bi'yaeb]	'to give birth'
[hu'laeb]	'to pen up (animals)'
[u'k <sup>h</sup> arəb]	'to uproot'
[kə'ʈaeb]	'to cause to cut'
[hə'ʈaeb]	'to remove'
[lə'daeb]	'to cause to load'
[p <sup>h</sup> ə'saeb]	'to cause to entangle'

There are, however, some exceptions, e.g.,

['pəhũčəb]	'to arrive'
['nihurəb]	'to bend'

What is worth noting is that such trisyllabic verbs receive stress on the same syllable as do their stems, e.g.,

'pəhũč -	'arrive'
'nihur -	'bend'

### Polysyllabic

#### Nouns and Adjectives

Almost all Maithili nouns and adjectives of four syllables have stress on the third syllable from the end, i.e., on the antepenultimate, e.g.,

[bəm'reṭiya]	'left-handed'
[nə'čəniyã]	'dancer'

[u'pədrəbi]	'naughty'
[mə'jakiya]	'humorous'

There are, however, some exceptions. For instance, a small number of quadri-syllabic nouns and adjectives -- mostly borrowings -- receive stress on the penultimate syllable. Examples:

əgər'bətti	'incense' (Hindi borrowing)
əb <sup>h</sup> i'neta	'actor' (Sanskrit borrowing)

In compound nouns of four syllables, the two components retain their original stress patterns--the first component having the primary stress and the second the secondary stress, e.g.,

[ʔaru,təɾəp <sup>h</sup> ]	'all round' (lit. 'four sides')
[bunə,bəla]	'weaver (lit. 'weave + doer')
[bi'rar,bəla]	'owner of the land fit to grow seedlings'
[mir'ʔai,bari]	'pepper garden'
[ən'ʔ <sup>h</sup> anbe,sə]	'ninety-eight hundred'

### Verbs

All verbs of four syllables receive stress on the penultimate syllable. Examples:

[pəhū'ʔaeb]	'to cause to arrive; to deliver'
[g <sup>h</sup> isi'yaeb]	'to drag'
[hərbə'raeb]	'to hurry; to rattle'
[bisbi'saeb]	'to itch'
[ʔulʔu'laeb]	'to scratch an itch'
[dori'aeb]	'to lead on a rope'
[bohi'aeb]	'to wallow'

Like the compound nouns, periphrastic (also called compound) verbs also retain their original stress on the components, but both components receive primary stress. Examples:

[ 'pə <sup>h</sup> a 'lagəb ]	'to follow'
[ 'səje 'jəeb ]	'to escort'
[ 'muri hi 'laeb ]	'to nod (with head)'
[ 'hap <sup>h</sup> i 'kəɾəb ]	'to yawn'
[ 'ənda 'pəɾəb ]	'to hatch (an egg)'
[ 'pərti 'təɾəb ]	'to clear a field'
[ de 'k <sup>h</sup> ar 'kəɾəb ]	'to expose'
[ d <sup>h</sup> e 'kar 'kəɾəb ]	'to belch'
[ si 'kar 'kəɾəb ]	'to hunt'
[ si 'ɟar 'kəɾəb ]	'to decorate'

To sum up, despite a few exceptions, the general pattern is for most verbs of Maithili to receive stress on the penultimate syllable.

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