

So many compound words! In Episode 5, I talked about syllable stress and compound nouns. In Episode 6, I talked about stand-alone compound verbs. In this episode, syllable stress and compound adjectives.

[TITLE SLIDE: The Music of English, Episode 7 - Syllable Stress &
Compound Adjectives]

First, as you know, an adjective always describes a noun. Compound adjectives can be short (This kitten has **deep-blue** eyes.) Long (Notre Dame des Victoires is a **329-year-old** church in Quebec City.) They can include adverbs, nouns, past participles, present participles, and even numbers. (I'm going to eat a *2000-calorie old-fashioned dark-chocolate mouth-watering ice-cream* sundae.)
Delicious.

Compound nouns are usually stressed on the first word (**haircut**). Stand-alone compound verbs are always stressed on the second word (**fly away**). Compound adjectives? Hmm.

There's a **78-storey** condo at Yonge and Gerrard—a **78-storey** condo.
Let's go exploring on a **cross country** bicycle—a **cross country** bicycle.
Justin Bieber is a **well-known** singer—a **well-known** singer.
Astronauts work in a **high-risk** job—a **high-risk** job.
Are you sure these are **fat-free** cookies—**fat-free** cookies?

Did you hear it? There was a gentle rising and falling of the pitch, and the rhythm bounced from the first word of the compound adjective to the noun it described:

(**78-storey** **condo**, **cross country** **bicycle**, **well-known** **singer**) The first word describes the second word of the compound adjective, so it has a little more weight. Then, together, they describe the noun to make it memorable. (How high is the condo? It's 78 stories. Where can you ride this bicycle? (A)cross the country. Has anybody heard of Justin Bieber? Oh, he's well known!)

But when the compound adjective is composed of two short words, you have two possibilities. You can stress the first word of the compound adjective, then the noun (a **high-risk** **job**) or you can speak both words of the compound adjective on the same pitch with equal rhythm and save the biggest stress for the noun they're describing (**fat-free** **COO**kies).

And if we make the compound adjectives a little more complex?

It's a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

We'll find up-to-the-minute reporting on TV.

My four-and-a-half-year-old daughter started school.

Suddenly the music changes. The pitch moves up and down a little more frequently and the rhythm becomes bouncier, bumpier. You can really feel the difference. Try it with me.

once-in-a-lifetime experience: **once-in-a-lifetime** experience

up-to-the-minute reporting: **up-to-the-minute** reporting

four-and-a-half-year-old daughter: **four-and-a-half-year-old** daughter

See what I mean?

Since that last example contained a number, I want to take a moment to talk about an **all-too-common** error. Another compound adjective: very bouncy, very melodious. This “**all-too-common** error” for speakers of English as a Second Language is to make compound adjectives with numbers plural.

You’ll notice I didn’t say, “78-stories **s** condo.” I said, “78-storey condo.” “Storey” was singular. I didn’t say “four-and-a-half-years **s**-old daughter.” I said “four-and-a-half-year-old daughter.” “Year” was singular.

We wouldn’t say a “three-hours movie.” We’d say “a three-hour movie” or “a two-week holiday” or a “40-mile-an-hour” speed limit: “hour,” “week,” “mile”—all singular.

So listen carefully ... differently ... to make sure you’re hearing the grammar accurately and to really tune into the sounds of the pitch and the rhythm, the music of English.

This episode ends with a song by Ian Robb, who immigrated to Canada from Britain. It’s called “Garnet’s Home-Made Beer” and it’s written like an old-fashioned ... oh, that’s a compound adjective you heard earlier ... an old-fashioned “sea shanty,” which is a kind of song the sailors used to sing while they were working on the big merchant sailing boats. It’s about a foul-tasting (another compound adjective) a “foul-tasting beer” that makes anybody who drinks it violently sick. The link to the song is below, but you might be wise to drop by *The Canadian Pronunciation Coach* blog first to download the lyrics, not just to see the compound adjectives, but because I explain some of the words you might not recognize. And while you’re there, download the transcript of this episode for listening practice.

And remember:

- Listen with attention.
- Keep practising.
- Be patient. And, above all,
- Don't give up.

I'm Phyllis, The Canadian Pronunciation Coach. I'm glad you dropped by. Thank you.

Ian Robb "Garnet's Home-Made Beer"
(lead singer is Garnet Rogers)

Song at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GI8P5Fhc5yU>

Lyrics at:

<http://www.canadianpronunciationcoach.com/blog/>