

The Positive Effect of Listening to Audio Material by a Native Speaker on Placement of English Word Stress

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Abstract: *The present paper aims at investigating the impact of listening to audio material by a native speaker on placement of word stress. The present paper applies experimental design. It has certain sample, third year students, which are chosen from the students who are formally registered for the academic year 2019- 2020 at Faculty of Arts department of English language and literature (O.I.U). Their level in language proficiency ranges between elementary to pre- intermediate. Subjects are given handouts, worksheets and audio materials to train them how to place word stress correctly. They were asked to mark the most stressed syllable within two- syllable and polysyllabic words. However, the paper outlines the following findings *Listening to audio materials by native speaker has positive effect on placement of word stress. *Classroom interventions such as listening to audio materials and handout that were given to the subjects during prescribed course have positive impact on subjects' intelligibility. However, the subjects expressed increased confidence in speaking due to intelligibility which they gained. So, the amount of time subjects spent listening to and practicing along with the audio materials is also a good indication that they are headed in the right direction of improving their pronunciation as well as intelligibility.*

Keywords: Listening, Audio, Native Speaker, English, Stress

1. Introduction

This paper is dedicated and devoted to the importance of word stress in English language in intelligibility. Word stress is extremely important part of English language learning, both in terms of comprehending spoken English and increasing oral intelligibility. However, it can often be a difficult area for learners of English to master successfully. This literature review presents an overview of what word stress is and its importance in intelligibility. Recommendations for further researches in word stress are outlined.

2. Literature Review

Word stress is one of important speech tools because it conveys meaning. It is used by English speakers, regardless they are native or nonnative speakers of English language, to highlight information they think is important. And making mistakes in placing and producing stress marks are irremediable because it lacks legibility. EFL learners can consult their dictionaries to see which word syllable is stressed because each word in English has a definite stress pattern. But, how stress in English works. The English stress system is based on the contrast between stressed and unstressed syllable: this is related to word stress, and stress and unstressed word which is relevant to sentence stress. Stressed syllables are louder and longer than unstressed ones. Moreover, they have pitch or movement of the voice up or down. What will happen if EFL learners do not use stress? English stress is a suprasegmental feature that gives overall shape to words. If intelligibility is to be achieved, it is important to give words their correct accentual pattern. The good way to get intelligibility is to place and produce correct stress pattern. Thus, the pronunciation of a word with wrong stress may distort the shape of words which makes words unintelligible. Therefore, listeners may get confused

because they do not get a message that speaker may want to send. Consequently, producing the right stress pattern at the word and successfully produce stressed and unstressed syllable is the most important way for achieving adequate pronunciation of English. WordStress is the spine of English pronunciation. The role of stress, however, goes far beyond the segmental and supra segmental levels. English stress has an effect on syllable structure morphology, grammar and meaning. To clarify the previous point, let us give some examples which show how stress has strong effect on syllable structure, word forming, grammar and meaning of words. With regard to segmental effects of stress, segments mostly and mainly depend on their positions with the consideration of stress. The clearest case is the relationship between stress and vowel quality. Stressed vowels have their full vowel quality, while the same vowels in unstressed position will be reduced to schwa or the reduced vowels [ɪ, ʊ].

Consequently, consonants undergo significant reduction processes due to stress. Here, are some examples which illustrate how stress effects on consonants. The voiceless [p, t, k] are aspirated in the words apart, take and come but are not aspirated in the words *polite, tonight and baking*. The realization of [p, t, k] in the two sets of words differs because of stress. /p, t, k/ are aspirated if they occur as initial component in a stressed syllable and they are not aspirated in an unstressed syllable.

The fricatives [v, f] in the words divine and fine have the more friction noise than in the word's ivy and dolphin because in the first set of words they occur in a stressed syllable. English syllable structure is a controversial issue. However, currently theories recognize the role played by stress in determining syllable structure and syllable boundaries.

If EFL learners do not use stress, they may confuse listeners due to unintelligibility and listeners may not recognize even a simple vocabulary if syllables are equally stressed or there is incorrect word stress. Therefore, stress is essential for presenting information clearly. Word stress is a golden key to achieve and understand English pronunciation because it is the best way to understand spoken English especially those native speakers who speak very fast. Word stress is a magic key to understanding spoken English because it is not easy to follow up speakers who make mistakes in placement of stress.

Ladefoged and Johnson (2011: 128) state the functions of stress as follow "Stress has several different functions in English. In the first place, it can be used in sentences to give special emphasis to a word or to contrast word with another. Another major function of stress in English is to indicate the syntactic category of words. There are many noun – verb oppositions, such as an insult, to insult; an overflow, to overflow; an increase, to increase."

Moreover, there is a direct link between knowledge of placing of word and sentence stress that EFL learners had and their ability to communicate. Therefore, EFL Learners do not only need to master grammatical rules and structures of a language but they also need to know how to produce and place word stress correctly. Hence, without syntax, vocabulary and grammar a message between a speaker and listener can be conveyed but without accurate pronunciation nothing can be conveyed. This is why because grammatical mistakes can be remediable.

Knowing a word in English means EFL learners acquire or get different factors including morphological, phonological and lexical aspects. What is concerned here is phonological factor. It is known that English language orthography or spelling system is abstract and involves lexicon which deals with meaning and vocabulary and morphology which studies affixes or derivative suffixes and prefixes.

Hence, lacking words stress may delimitate the comprehension and production process of language because here EFL learners are more hesitant about the correct pronunciation. They are not sure enough about correct pronunciation of words.

Segmental features mistakes are remediable; they can be easily repaired. In other words, segmental features are repairable mistakes misunderstandings which are somehow different from supra- segmental features since making mistakes on supra- segmental features change the meaning and they are irremediable. Thus, mastering suprasegmental features contribute to intelligibility, the ability to be understood well, even more than mastering segmental features.

Brinton (1996:131) states that "Many teachers would claim that a learner command of segmental features is less critical to communicative competence than a command of suprasegmental features, since the suprasegmental carry more of the overall meaning load than do the segmental."

3. How placement of stress is important

When a word has more than one syllable in English, one syllable receives more importance than the others when it is pronounced. This is the syllable that receives the primary word stress. This means that compared to the other ones; the vowel sound of that syllable is slightly louder, longer and at a higher pitch. For example, the word chapter is stressed on the first syllable, chap-, is louder and slightly longer than the second syllable (ter). Moreover, variations in stress are used to differentiate between a noun and a verb as in report (n) and to report (v) here, EFL learners should notice that in the noun the stress falls on the first syllable. But, in verbs, it falls at the second syllable. But this rule is controversial because there are some verbs on which stress falls in the first syllable. This stress has a grammatical function. In other words, it can be said that it is a lexical stress which states whether a word is a verb, adjective, adverb or noun.

It is stated that over 80% of two syllables nouns and adjectives place stress mark on the first syllable while, e.g., "KITCHen and EXTra" (Hammond, 1999). But verbs stress works in the second syllable (consider achIEVE and agREE). The word class rules appear in many English teaching textbooks but there are exceptions for this rule. English stress tends to fall on syllables with longer vowels or when the word ends with two or more consonants. However, it may be that consonant clusters are less important than vowel length and there are many exceptions which are relevant to the above rules (Guion, 2006). Providing clear audio or visual cues to EFL learners to help emphasize word stress as underlining using bold or capitals, listening to record speech by native speakers, circling or using ticks (Lin, Fan & Chen, 1995).

Murcia et al (2005) state that relevant circumstances which control the placement of prominence is emphatic stress when the speaker wants to give special emphasis on a particular element.

Ladefoged (2010:39) claims that "you can usually find where the stress occurs on a word by trying to tap by your finger in time with each syllable. It is much easier to tap on the stressed syllable. Try to say *abominable* and tapping first on the first syllable, then on the second, then on the third, and so on. If you say the word in your normal way, you will find it easier to tap on the second syllable.

Radford et al (2009:41) reaffirms that "compare the words transport in means of transport and to transport goods, we can hear an important difference in pronunciation. In means of transport the first syllable, tran-, gets greater emphasis than the second, - sport, while in to transport goods it is the second syllable which gets the greater emphasis. This emphasis is called stress, and we say that in means of TRANsport the first syllable bears stress, while in to transport the second syllable is stressed."

Lexical stress: Stress distinguishes part of speech what is meant whether the word is a noun, a verb or an adjective. For example, if we compare the word transport in "means of transport", which is noun and "to transport goods" which is

verb, we can hear different pronunciation. The phonetic spelling of the word transport, which is noun according to IPA, is [ˈtɒns.pɔːt] while the phonetic spelling of the word transport which is a verb is [ˌtɒns.pɔːt]. To sum up, placement of stress may change the parts of speech.

It is worth mentioning, when teaching vocabulary to present stress patterns of each word and the oral practice of new word should include word stress practice (Field, 2005). EFL learners may rely more heavily on word by word learning of stress patterns particularly if they are from syllable timed languages such as Arabic. This word-by-word learning may occur when learning new vocabulary. It is important to be reminded that word stress learning cannot be taught in isolation. It is clearly linked to other aspect of pronunciation vocabulary learning and grammar. Although English word stress has been demonstrated to have certain regularity it is still more complex than in other syllable timed languages, a fact that discourage many teachers and textbooks writers from teaching stress prediction techniques (Baptista, 1989). It is unfortunate that pronunciation textbooks give very limited guidance on word stress patterns.

(Murcia: 1987) states that teaching word stress in her in her communicative way is more difficult than teaching phonetic aspect of pronunciation. However, she suggests method of teaching word stress to students through listening discrimination activities followed by guided practice and then communicative practice using games (Celce- Murcia, Briton, Goodwin, 1996).

Hence, we move to another point which is phrasal stress. In a natural pronunciation each separate word receives amount of emphasis, in other words a separate word gets stressed on a syllable that is louder, longer and higher in pitch. Stressed syllable is produced by pushing more air out of lungs compared to unstressed syllables. It has more respiratory energy than neighboring unstressed syllables.

Gussehoven and Jacobs (2011:214) state that "The question of how stress is realized depends on how the question a language chooses to use the structural position represented by the foot. English is a language that makes very clear distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables. Stress has various functions in English. It differentiates whether a word is noun, verb or adjective, take this pair of words as an example which emphasize how placement of stress can distinguish syntactic category of words "an insult "and "to insult"

Culter, in his paper which was published in (1984), states that word stress patterns are an integral part of the phonological representation of word in mental lexicon. They are not generated by rules. This is why native speakers generate and produce stress naturally. But nonnative speakers have to follow certain rules of stress placement and then listen to native speakers who produce stress naturally so as to produce stress accurately and precisely.

4. Strong and weak syllables

It is of great importance for EFL learners to know how to place word stress precisely. But, to absorb or comprehend

this procedure and process of placing word stress; they have to differentiate between strong syllables and weak ones. It is worth mentioning to shed some light on importance of word and sentence stress because mistakes on word stress make it very difficult for hearers to get words. In addition to this, stressing wrong syllable in a word can make the word very difficult to hear and understand; simply because there is misunderstanding. On the other hand, stressing a word wrongly and differently can change the meaning or even type of a word. Having a look to the word desert (n) which is noun and the word desert (v) which is verb to how stress functions to differentiate between two words.

It is worth mentioning that, stressing words incorrectly which means pronouncing them wrongly can make listeners feel irritated and get nothing and then communication between speaker and listener has been cut. When learners stress words they should use five characteristics of stressed syllables which are longer, louder, changing pitch from other unstressed syllables, it is said more clearly and it uses bigger facial movement. This procedure can be applied when you look in a mirror and see facial movement mainly your jaw and lips. It is also important for learners to recognize unstressed syllables and their characteristics which contradict stressed syllables.

5. Statement of the Problem

The problem of the present study is generally seen or noticed in the struggle of Sudanese EFL learners (hereafter SEFLs) university level to deal with word stress properly. In fact, during teaching at different universities, the researcher observes that university students do not pay enough attention and care about how stress falls in English words. So, they made mistakes when dealing with words and sentence stress because they do not know how stress falls in different words. So, I decided to carry out the present thesis to overcome as far as possible difficulties that might encounter SEFLs to deal with word and sentence stress properly. To state the problem of the present study the researcher uses some procedures such as classroom observations so as to see some difficulties that might students encounter. Based on these classroom observations, the researcher formed general understanding of the problem. For example, many (SEFLs) who have attained advanced English proficiency levels are still having difficulties in communicating due to low intelligibility.

6. Objectives of the Study

The following points are considered to be objectives of the present paper:

- 1) To find out whether EFLLs are able to mark stressed syllable when dealing with word stress.
- 2) To investigate whether listening to audio materials (record speech) have positive impact and effectiveness on placement of word stress.
- 3) To enhance EFLLs ability to place and produce word and sentence stress correctly.

Questions of the paper

The paper is going to answer questions that are related to the impact of listening to record speech on placement of word and sentence stress. However, questions are stated as follow:

- 1) Is there a significant effect of listening to record speech by a native speaker on placement of word and stress?
- 2) Do EFLs make mistake when they produce and place word and sentence stress?

7. Hypotheses of the Study

The paper is going to test the following hypotheses.

- 1) There is a significant effect of listening to audio materials by a native speaker on EFLs' production and placement of word and sentence stress.
- 2) There are significant differences between the experimental groups and control groups concerning listening to record speech by a native speaker.

8. Methodology

This paper adopts quantitative experimental method, since; this paper investigates the effect of listening to audio material by a native speaker on placement of English word stress.

The Population and Sampling

The population is students who recently registered in English language as foreign language programme at faculty of Arts in Omdurman Islamic University.

They constitute and form total population of the present paper, and they register for the academic year 2019- 2020. They share same qualities such as age, and number of years of school where they studied English language. In addition, the admission of these students in the university is according to certain marks that they got in secondary school certificate examinations. The data which was collected from the subjects, using pre- and post-tests, analyzed through the computer programmed SPSS by a statistical data analyst. The study results are presented in form of tables.

Below is a table No (11) which shows statistical results of part one (question 1- 10) between control group and experimental group. The mean of experimental (4.7) group is greater than a mean of control group (3.58) which indicates that there is a significant difference between two groups.

A table shows statistical results of pre- test (part one questions)

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T. Test	Sig
Control	70	3.5857	1.50836	69	-5.033	.000
Experimental	70	4.7429	1.48114			

Below table emphasizes that there is a significant difference between control group and experimental group concerning part two pre- test because the mean of the experimental group (10.95) is greater than the mean of control group (8.94). This statistical result supported and strengthened what was hypothesized in chapter one. (See hypotheses of the study)

Table 12 shows statistical results of pre- test (part two questions)

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T. Test	Sig
Control	70	8.9429	1.88730	69	-6.157	.000
Experimental	70	10.9571	1.95185			

9. Summary and conclusion

Based on statistical results which were stated the following findings are summarized:

- Listening to audio materials by native speaker had positive effect on placement of word stress.
- Classroom interventions such as listening to audio materials and handout that were given to the subjects during prescribed course have positive impact on subjects' intelligibility.
- The result of this study indicates that there is noticeable improvement in placement of word stress.
- The subjects expressed increased confidence in speaking due to intelligibility which they gained. So, the amount of time students spent listening to and practicing along with the audio- materials is also a good indication that they are headed in the right direction of improving their pronunciation as well as intelligibility.

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