

THE USE OF STRESS IN ENGLISH AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS AT ZARQA UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

Speech tools are varied, one of the most important types used by learners or speakers to communicate is stress. Speakers use stress to highlight the information they think it is important and if people do not use stress, the listener will be confused and there will be a misunderstanding for language. The objectives of the study were as follows: to reveal the most frequent type of word stress among 1st and 4th year students at ZU by given the participants almost 10 minutes to prepare the reading task and then reading it aloud. To achieve the first objective, the researchers interviewed 30 students; 15 of them are on the first year and the rest are at the fourth year. The second objective was to explore the factors which were emerged from the students' interview. To achieve the second objective, the researchers reached the data saturation by interviewed 12 students. The results of the study showed that first year students make mistakes in pronouncing the stress more than fourth year students. The most frequent type of stress that 1st and 4th students made a mistake in was Compound-adjective, while the least one was Two-syllable nouns, the stress on the second syllable. In addition, the factors which lead for such problem were categorized into six factors; the most frequency reason was lack of practice, while the least one was students' motivation.

Keywords: Supra-segmental features, Stress, Undergraduate students, Zarqa University.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Language is very important to communicate; Crystal (2003) claimed that English language is the most used language to communicate between non-native speakers of English. Segmental and supra-segmental features are important in carrying meaning in communication (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin, 1996). Supra-segmental contains several types such as stress, tone, pitch, intonation, and rhythm (Ladefoged, 1993). Supra-segmental features are also express attitudinal and emotional meanings.

Researchers have focused on syntax and morphology more than pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2005). Learning pronunciation is not meant to study the sounds only but also the placement of stress or other types of supra-segmental features (Huwari, & Mehawesh, 2015). On the other hand, if the L2 learners produce the stress wrongly, it might lead to misunderstand the meaning of the words. Researchers such as (Guion, 2005) claimed that there is a need to focus more on supra-segmental features as it is not discussed deeply among ESL/EFL learners. The researchers of this study wish to fill up this gap by identifying the type of stress that students most mispronounce.

Problem Statement

Supra-segmental is important in communication because if the learners mispronounce these features correctly, communication problems will be noticeable. Different researchers such as (An, 2010; and Liu, 2017) said that stress was not studied deeply among ESL/EFL

researchers. Stress is not simple as learners thought. Chouchane (2016) said that ESL/EFL learners have problem in producing the stress correctly because English has no fixed stress rule. This problem caused learners to produce the stress incorrectly, and then caused a misunderstanding in oral communication (Ur, 2003)

Among Arab learners, the problem in stress is quite noticeable because the stress system among both languages (Arabic and English) is similar in some points. Because of that, Arabic learners have problem in producing and comprehending English stress patterns. In addition, Arabic learners use the rules of their mother tongue when they learn English stress (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989). In a study done by Altmann (2006) claimed that Arabic speakers were the worst learners in producing the stress compared with other speakers such as French, Turkish. Kenworthy (1987) declared that Arab speakers produce the incorrect stress in the following places: 1: they produce the stress in the final syllable words ending in a vowel followed by two consonants, as in "difficult", "comfort" and "expert". 2: they produce the stress on the suffixes, words ending in '-est', 'ism', '-less', and '-ness' because these suffixes contains a vowel and a consonant cluster. 3: they produce the stress on the last syllable, if a word ends with a long vowel or a diphthong plus a single consonant as in "irritate", "gratitude" and "institute".

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To reveal the most frequent type of word stress among 1st and 4th year students at ZU
2. To explore the factors behind such problematic.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study would benefit the education stakeholders: students, instructors, and curriculum designers. For students, students will look to the types of errors that they made and trying to avoid them. For teachers and curriculum designers, they will be aware of the types of errors, and frequency of errors that students made. In addition, teachers and curriculum designers can use different methods in the classroom to enhance students' pronunciation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the researchers discuss stress in details.

Stress

Stress is not easily to define, as linguists do not come with agreed definition. For example, Kreidler (2004) define stress as "a property of a word" (p. 70). In addition, Chomsky & Halle (1968) state that "the optimal grammar of English is one in which stress is predicted by rule rather than one in which stress is inherent in the phonological matrix of a lexical entry" (p. 31). While the most agreed definition of stress was "syllable prominence which may derive from several determining phonetic factors such as increased loudness, duration, pitch movement, sound quality or a combination of these factors" (Celce-Murcia, et al., 1996; Hammond, 1999; Roach, 2000).

Stress comes usually with one syllable in a word, which is more noticeable than others. Stress is pronounced with more prominence way, so it can be stands out acoustically and perceptually. Roach (2008) claims that there are four factors which identify the stressed syllable: loudness, length, pitch and quality. He also said that a stressed syllable should be louder than other syllables, longer with a higher pitch, and it should have a vowel which is different in quality with other syllables. Roach (2000) also claimed that stressed syllable from a perception perspective is more important than unstressed syllable if it contains the four factors mentioned above. While from a production perspective, the lungs produce higher sub-glottal pressure of air to produce the stressed syllable

Stress in English

Stress is an important tool in speech to deliver a meaning. To enhance oral communication, pronunciation specialists stress the supra-segmental for the last 20 years (Morley, 1991). Moreover, speakers use stress to highlight the information they believe or think it is important. On the other hand, if the speakers do not produce the stress correctly, the misunderstanding will appear (Alkhuli, 2002).

Stress in English comes only with vowels, so consonants do not take stress. Stressed vowels in English become stronger, louder, and greater in intensity, less centralized in vowel quality and longer in duration than non-stressed vowels (Betti & Ulaiwi, 2018). They also described that stress is problematic because it is hard to describe its actual nature. In addition, phonetic correlates such as duration, intensity, and segmental quality affect the shape of utterance in stress (Ou, 2010).

Stress comes with lexical words such as noun, verb, adjective, and adverb. Hismanoglu (2012) said that lexical stress comes with a specific syllable in a word. Speakers can distinguish lexical stress in two ways; the first one is segmentally. Ladefoged (1993) declares that lexical stress is linked with long or unreduced vowels. The second way is supra-segmentally, lexical stress is related with various acoustic aspects such as fundamental frequency, intensity, and duration (Lehiste, 1996). In English, for degrees of stress were mentioned:

1. Primary stress (strongest stress)
2. Secondary stress (less strong than primary one)
3. Tertiary stress (less strong than secondary one)
4. Weak stress (the weakest one).

The Function of Stress

English stress includes various functions. English speakers use stress to distinguish between the contextual salience and grammatical functions of words. Stress also influences the sound and form selection of word morphemes. It indicates the reaction of speakers at certain point of speech and the significant relations found between parts of a word, a phrase, or a sentence. Celce-Murcia, et al. (1996) state that word stress could virtually occur on any word syllable. Word stress is influenced by the origin of that word, its etymology, and the grammatical category of that particular word. Stress is used to differentiate between compound nouns which consist of an adjective followed by a noun (Betti & Ulaiwi, 2018). It is also used to distinguish between similar words function as nouns and verbs such as present and record. The function of stress is to emphasize certain word or syllable to highlight the meaning we want to deliver.

One of the functions of stress is to originate contrast to decrease the ambiguity in discourse. Stress consists of certain types: emphatic, sentence, pragmatic stress, and grammatical stress. Emphatic stress is utilized to differentiate the sentence from its negation (Betti & Ulaiwi, 2018). Sentence stress usually falls on the final syllable of content words; the exception of that is attributed to the need to indicate a certain presuppositions, attitude, or illocutionary purpose of the speaker. Pragmatic stress involves drawing the attention of the listener to a certain piece of information with the purpose of giving its negation or emphasizing its meaning prominence. Grammatical stress is employed to indicate the grammatical classification of a word (verb, noun, or adjective). The placement of word stress in English relies heavily on the number of syllables of that word, whether it is mono, bi, or polysyllabic words, word affixation, and the grammatical classification of that particular word. The aforementioned factors are believed to have a significant role on the placement of word stress

in English. Concerning lengthy words, some syllables are more prominent than other syllables, where some syllables receive the primary stress, while others are not.

The Criteria of Stress

The stress has several criteria's to be added in a word based on Roach (2000) classifications:

1. Whether the word is morphologically simple or complex.
2. Adding stress depends on the part of speech whether a word is (noun, verb, adjective, etc).
3. The phonological structure of multi syllables in the word. For example, the word probability / prɒbə'bɪlɪti / has five vowels so, it has five syllables and five stresses pro+ba+bi+li+ty. In this case, different vowels have different degree of stress. For example, a strong stress becomes stronger, louder and longer than weak stress in the same word.

Types of Stress

Word Stress

Word stress is extremely significant in speech. Words stress is used to identify words' meaning and it could be difficult for listeners to understand the intended meaning without recognizing the stress of a word (Brown, 1990). Underhill (1994) states that spoken words with wrong stress placement are more difficult to understand than words with correct stress placement. The learner's inability to place stress on words is considered as one of the pronunciation errors that leads to confusion between speakers (Ur, 2003). The stress of English words is not placed to all words; only content words receive stress, while function words do not (Amer & Amer, 2011). The placement of stress on English words has certain rules as follows:

- 1- Monosyllabic words receive the primary stress on that one syllable e.g. còme, gò, gèt, sít.
- 2- The second syllable of bisyllabic verb receives the primary stress if it ends with a long vowel, diphthong, or at least two consonant sounds e.g. annòunce, allòw, beliève.
- 3- The first syllable of bisyllabic verb receives the primary stress if the final syllable ends with a short vowel or no final consonants e.g. òpen, ènter.
- 4- The second and third rules are applied to bisyllabic adjective e.g. corrèct, awàke, hàppy, ràiny.
- 5- The stress rule of bisyllabic adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions are the same of rules of bisyllabic verbs e.g. behind, belòw, òver.
- 6- The first syllable of bisyllabic nouns receives the primary if the second syllable contains a short vowel e.g. dòzen, larynx.
- 7- The second syllable of bisyllabic nouns receive the primary stress e.g. ballòon, tabòo, desìgn.
- 8- The penultimate syllable receives the primary stress if the word ends with certain suffixes such as -ous, -graphy, -ial, -ic, -ion, -ty , e.g. couràgeous, històric, opìnion.
- 9- The ante-penultimate syllable receives the primary stress if the words end with a suffix like -ate, e.g. illustrate, hèsitate.
- 10- The first part of compound nouns receives the primary stress e.g. blàckbòard, sùnsèt.
- 11- The second part of compound adjectives end with -ed suffixes receives the primary stress. e.g. half-finished, kind-hèarted.
- 12- The second part of compound adverbs receives the primary stress e.g. south-wèst.

Sentence stress

It means that various words might take the stress. Moreover, only one word should take a primary stress, while other words take lower degree of stress

2.5.3. Contrastive stress (emphatic stress)

The main idea of this type is to use a primary stress in a word for the purpose of emphasis. For example, *The two boys broke the three windows yesterday*. The primary stress comes on different words depended on the word that we emphasis. Such as (the) to emphasis definiteness, (two) to emphasize the number, (boys) to emphasize the doer, and (broke) to emphasize the action.

Free and Fixed stress:

Free stress: It comes with any syllable of a word. Both languages (Arabic and English) are considered as a free stress languages.

Fixed stress: It the opposite meanings of free stress, it has a fixed rule, and it does not come on any syllable of a word. Language such as French and Polish are considered as fixed-stress languages.

Past studies

ESL/EFL studies of English word stress were looked at the effect of mother's tongue on producing the stress correctly. Studies such as (Archibald, 1993) discussed the word stress to show how the first language affected the second learners. In 1997, Archibald in his study showed that the non-stress languages such as Chinese and Japanese showed that they try to learn the English stress lexically. In a dissertation wrote by Altmann (2006) discussed how does native language stress affected second language in regarding to the primary word stress. The researcher compared 7 different L1 group which were (Arabic, Chinese, French, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, and Turkish) and native English speakers. Some of the L1 group which have predictable stress in their native language perceived poorly in the location of stress, while they were like native in production. Moreover, some of the L1 group those who have word-level stress in their native language such as (Chinese, Japanese, and Korean) nor have predictable L1 stress (Spanish) perceived well in the location of stress, while they were quite far from native speakers in production.

A study done by Hasan (2017) discussed Northern Kurdish accent in regarding to the stress. This is based on the production of pairs of segmental parallel syllables occurring in stressed and unstressed positions. 30 native speakers were the participants. The results showed that Northern Kurdish is a stress-accent language. They use both tonal and non-tonal correlates such as duration, word level prominence.

A study done by Liu (2017) explores the production of word stress. The participants of this study were 70 1st year Chinese college students at the English department, Shaanxi Normal University. The students were ranging from 18-20 years old. The researcher asked the participants to read aloud an English story contains almost 600 words, and then the researcher recorded and coded. Moreover, the researcher interviewed the most stress assignment mistaken to discover the factors which lead for the misplacement. The findings showed that students made mistakes in producing the two-syllable words, which was the most frequent error rate, followed by three syllable words. Students refer such problems to difficulty of English words structure, and lack of knowledge of rules on English word stress.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Participants

Thirty participants were recruited from the department of English Language and Literature at Zarqa University, Jordan with the age ranging from 18 to 20 years. 15 students who were at the first year, they have not covered subjects in ZU related to pronunciation and stress such as grammar 1, grammar 2, pronunciation and speech, phonetics course. The rest of the participants who were at the fourth year, they have studied the earlier subjects in ZU. None of the participants were resident of an English speaking country. They study English in formal instruction only. All the students do not have reading disorders or hearing problem.

Procedure and Material

The researchers interviewed 30 students at 1st and 4th year level. The researchers gave the participants almost 10 minutes to prepare the reading task. The reading task was 46 words in English which represent the types of syllable. The researchers interviewed them in a good place. The participants have been interviewed in the language laboratory at Zarqa University. The participants wore a head-mounted microphone. The researchers audio taped and coded their speech. Then, the researchers listened to the recording and marked out the stress assignment errors. In addition to achieve the researchers' objectives, the researchers interviewed students with the most stress assignment errors to discover the factors behind such word stress misplacement.

Reading Task

Reading task is important in research. Researchers need to be aware of various characteristics and procedures include the physical characteristics, the participants, and the time of task (Bachman and Palmer, 1996). They have described the characteristics of the setting for tasks by saying that “the setting comprises the circumstances under which either language use or testing takes place” (p. 68). In addition, Bachman (1990) classified reading test into five categories: 1) testing environment; 2) test rubrics; 3) the nature of the input; 4) the nature of the expected response; and 5) the interaction between the input and the response. These factors can be affected test performance. Students need to be aware of their influences and try to overcome them. The researchers choose this way to investigate students ability to produce the stress on a single word correctly because this way is very useful in reading method as its student centered. The reading task consisted of 46 words stressed on 12 types of syllable mentioned earlier in 2.5.1.

Table 1. Words Stressed

Come	Go	Get	Sit	Neglect	Allow
Announce	Believe	Open	Enter	Letter	Correct
Awake	Happy	Rainy	Behind	Below	Over
Quickly	Dozen	Larynx	Pharynx	Nation	Balloon
Taboo	Design	Conclusion	Courageous	Historic	Opinion
Creative	Illustrate	Hesitate	Anticipate	Isolate	Blackboard
Sunset	Classroom	Sunrise	Half-finished	Kind-hearted	Ill-tempered
Self-employed	South-west	World wise	Worldwide		

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results are presented in two main parts: the types of stress which were most frequent, and the factors that cause such problematic.

The types of stress

The results of this research are presented based on the research objectives. The first objective was: To reveal the most frequent type of word stress among 1st and 4th year students at ZU. Table 2 shows the frequency errors for students when they pronounce stress.

Table 2: Error frequency for 1st and 4th year students at ZU

	Types of syllable	Words	Frequency for first year students	Frequency for fourth year students
1	Compound-adjective	Half-finished, kind-hearted, ill-tempered, self-employed	51	47
2	Two-syllable nouns. Stress on the second syllable	Ballòon, tabòò, design	40	36
3	Two-syllable nouns, 2 nd syllable has a short vowel stress on the first syllable	dòzen, làrynx, phàrynx, nation	37	25
4	Bisyllabic verb	nèglect, allòw, annòunce, beliève	35	13
5	Word ending with suffix -ate	illustrate, hèsitate, anticipate, isolate	31	23
6	Words with suffix	Con`clusion, couràgeous, històric, opinion, creative	31	19
7	Compound-adverb	South-wèst, world wise, worldwide	30	18
8	Compound-nouns	blàckbòard, sùnsèt, `classroom, sùnrise	19	13
9	Two-syllable adjective	corrèct, awàke, hàppy, rainy	14	9
10	Monosyllabic	còme, gò, sít, gèt	12	7
11	Bisyllabic verb but final syllable contain a short v, final c	òpen, ènter, lètter	10	3
12	Two-syllable adverb	behind, belòw, òver	6	3

The results show that first year students make mistakes in pronouncing the stress more than fourth year students, because first year students in some cases they do not know how to pronounce the words correctly, also the 1st year students have not studied 5 subjects in the university yet which are *pronunciation and speech, phonetics, grammar 1, grammar 2, and speaking skill*. On the other hand, students at the 4th year, they have taken these subjects, so, their background knowledge is better than 1st year students. But both groups are still having the same problem. Table 1 shows also that both groups have shared the most and least frequency type of word stress which is compound- adjective 51 errors for the 1st year students and 47 errors for the 4th year students while the least was committed in the two-syllable adverb as 6 errors for the 1st year students and 3 errors for the 4th year students.

Factors accounting for the Misplacement of Stress

The second research objective of this study was to explore the factors that make students pronounce the stress incorrectly from students' perspectives. The researchers interviewed 12 students. Table 2 shows the most factors which were mentioned by the participants of the study.

Table 2. Shows factors frequency

Nu	Factors	Frequency
1-	Lack of Practice	12
2-	Inadequate Knowledge of Syllabic Structure	10
3-	Mother tongue interference	10
4-	Mispronunciation of Vowels	9
5-	The way of teaching the stress	8
6-	Students' motivation	8

The above table shows that students at ZU mentioned some reasons of their errors as follow: the most frequency reason was lack of practice, while the least one was Students' motivation.

Lack of Practice

Lack of practice was the most frequency cause mentioned by all students. Some students said that they do not speak in English always, never speak outside the classroom, and they have never moved to native speaking countries.

Student 3 said that: *Ohh, I do not practice English at all, it is only when I have an exam.* Student 5, for example, said that *for sure, if I stay in USA, or UK, then my pronunciation and speaking will be very good. But now I do not use the language.* Another student said that: *In Jordan where do I live, people around me do not speak English, so, they affect me.*

The results of this study are in line with various findings such as Saiful study. In his study, the Indonesian participants said that they do not practice English always, even though they have never been in a native country before, so that they can learn easily. He also adds that Indonesian schools do not provide good facility to practice speaking skill.

Inadequate Knowledge of Stress Structure

Almost all students 10 out of 12 mentioned that they do not have enough background of the types of stress, where to use it, or what do you by stress. Student 4 said that: *I am at the first year student, I have never heard about the types of stress.* I am weak in it. Another student said: *Even I am almost near to graduate but I still can't differentiate between strong and weak syllable.* Student 9 said, for example: *I do not have enough information about stress, so, sometimes, I pronounce it wrongly, I know.*

This factor was mentioned by Liu (2007). For example, the participants of his study were not known that strong syllable is almost stressed, while the weak syllable is unstressed.

Mother Tongue Interference

Students believe that because of their mother tongue is not English, so, they cannot learn everything of a foreign language. Almost all students 10 out of 12 believe about the mother tongue interference. Student 5 said that *I can't pronounce the stress correctly in a world because I can't differentiate the rule of stress between my first language and a foreign language that I learn.* Another student also referred his mother tongue by saying that *when I speak in English, I still remember the stress in Arabic, which I think affected my pronunciation.*

This result of this study is in line with various researches such as Saiful study among Indonesian speakers. The participants of his study said that mother tongue interference is one of the problems that we faced when we produce a single word stress.

Mispronunciation of Vowels

The vowel in Arabic is quite different than vowels in English. So that students produce the vowels in English incorrectly, as vowels in English is divided into four parts 7 short sound, 5 long sounds, 8 diphthong sounds, and 5 triphthong sounds. One student said that *In general I can't produce the stress correctly*. Another student said *You come to my weakness part, I can't differentiate between the types of vowels whether short or long*. This factor was mentioned by Liu (2007), which mean Chinese participant and Jordanian participants produce the vowels incorrectly, which affect their stress.

The Way of Teaching the Stress

Teaching stress and pronunciation is the most difficult part for the teachers because different teachers have different ways. Some students might get them easily, while others might not get it because their ways. In this research 8 out of 12 have mentioned such cause. For example, student said *I try to understand the stress and how to use it, but unfortunately our lecturers have not covered that in their syllables. So, I try my own way, but I still not success*. Another student said also *my teacher taught us the stress but I cannot understand her way in teaching*. In addition, student 8 said *the way my teacher in school taught me the correct way to produce the stress is totally different my lecturer in the university. So, they confused me*.

This problem was mentioned by various researchers and findings. Saiful in his study said that in Indonesian school, teachers have not paid attention on the way of producing the stress; they just focused on a written exam, not spoken one. That's why Indonesian speakers and students do not realize the importance of producing stress in their speech. He adds that unqualified English teachers in Indonesian schools are also a problem.

This factor was also mentioned by Liu (2007), they said that throughout the interview process students mentioned that teachers have not focused on teaching the stress, while they asked the students to follow the way of producing the words without explaining such rules.

Students' motivation

8 students out of 12 claimed that they do not know how to produce the stress because they are not caring of a foreign language in general or they focused on different part such as writing, listening, grammar rather than producing the stress correctly. One student said that *I think grammar and other parts of skills are more important than stress because stress does not change the meaning of the word, so people will understand me easily*.

The results show that various researches all over the world are in line with this study. The findings of Saiful study showed that Indonesian speakers thought that English is a difficult language to acquire, so they do not focus to learn it. This factor was also mentioned by Liu (2007). In his study, the participants said that also they do not care on the stress, because their aim is to pass their exams only.

CONCLUSION

This study has been conducted to investigate some problems encounter the students of English department at ZU. The objectives of the study were as follows: to reveal the most frequent type of word stress among 1st and 4th year students at ZU, and to explore the factors behind such problematic. The researchers interviewed 30 students; 15 of them are on the first year and the other 15 are on the fourth year. In addition, the researchers interviewed 12

students to discover the factors which lead for such problem. The results of the study showed that first year students make mistakes in pronouncing the stress more than fourth year students. The most frequent type of stress that 1st and 4th students made a mistake in was Compound-adjective, while the least one was Two-syllable nouns. Stress on the second syllable. In addition, the factors which lead for such problem were categorized into six factors; the most frequency reason was lack of practice, while the least one was students' motivation.

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