

Implications of English Word Stress and Sentence Stress in Pronunciation Skills

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Abstract

The study is to seek the word accent of the English causes unintelligibility spoken by students in India. Intelligibility is an important aspect in language learning. To assess one's language efficiency both segmental and supra segmental features will be considered to look into the intelligibility of a person. Present second language learners have problems in pronunciation because of various reasons the major reason is mother tongue influence. Since these students are from regional language background which is syllable timed language but English is non-phonemic. It is produced by a combination of weak and strong syllables and word stress and sentence stress pattern moreover students are learning the second language from the local English teachers who have mother tongue influence too. According to Balasubramanian (1988, p. 131) "anyone using English should learn and acquire the supra-segmental features of native English. This variation between the first language and English causes many difficulties in acquiring the English language. The English word stress and weak forms in English play a significant role for the language to sound natural and fluent. The paper aimed to find the common problems in uttering word stress of student's communication. The discussion helps the students in gaining mastery over word stress and sentence stress in spoken language that would result in proper pronunciation and intelligibility. It examines the word stress patterns and deviations of word stress from Received Pronunciation and its impact on intelligibility. No specific model of divergences in uttering the stress in words emerges which reflects the lack of explicit knowledge and awareness of English word stress. To overcome difficulties in placing word stress in English'

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IMPORTANCE OF WORD STRESS

Like every other language, English words consist of syllables. The vowel sound in each syllable forms the centre. In words with two or more syllables, one syllable is stressed or pronounced with greater prominence. The stressed syllable is called the accented syllable. Peter Roach (2000), in his work on word stress, categorizes four factors that are important in syllable stress. These are the loudness, length, pitch, and quality of the syllable. It is generally accepted that word stress causes a great difficulty to non-native

learners of English. Since it is difficult to predict which syllable of a word is stressed, it is important to learn the placement of stress when learning the word itself. Bansal (1969) states that "A very common fault among Indian speakers is the incorrect stressing of English words, that is different from the usual RP or the pattern of other native varieties". Prof. S. Mohanraj in his book *Methods of Teaching English* defines word stress as: "Stress is the extra breath force we put on a particular syllable which makes it prominent in the word. When the syllable is not stressed the pronunciation of the vowel in that syllable sometimes changes. For example: atom, atomic, photo, photography. Though, the spelling is identical in the two pairs, the pronunciation of vowel changes. In a dictionary stress on the syllable is indicated by (ˈ) mark above the syllable. This is called primary stress. The second syllable which gets a little prominence i.e. secondary stress is indicated by a (ˌ) below the syllable." (Mohanraj, 2010: Pg. 49)

Word Stress in English Language

INTRODUCTION

English has been used in many different countries by speakers that use non-target stress patterns, generally resulting from L1 transfer. The stress patterns of English words have not a clear and unique rule. There are many contributions about this topic, but each one approaches the issue in a different and particular way. To explain the phenomenon of stress pattern is not just to say that stress is the strongest syllable of a pronounced word; this definition will need to be seen from distinct perspectives. One of the important references about the study of word stress in Brazil is in Baptista (1981). She explains that despite the term word stress has been used more and more frequently by contemporary linguists, stress has not a single, clear definition. Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) give their contribution to understand the stress pattern phenomenon better. They argue that "stressed syllables are most often defined as those syllables within an utterance that are longer, louder, and high in pitch" (p.131). Furthermore, what is really perceptible from the listener's point of view is the longest vowel duration in the stressed syllable and higher pitch. According to Baptista (1981), the quality of stress can be described from three different points of view: the physiological; the physical, and the psychological perspective.

From the physiological point of view, stress means the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is pronounced. Also, the energy that comes from the lungs will strengthen a certain syllable of the word. This definition gives the light impression that a stressed syllable requires more effort of some sort than other syllables. Thus the stress syllables are in some way pronounced strongly than the other syllables. However, according to the physical point of view, frequency is seen as the most relevant factor for recognition of word stress, followed by duration and intensity; while from the psychological point of view, the most important factors would be pitch, length and loudness, respectively. Besides these views, there is the psychological one, which describes stress as loudness. Baptista explains that syllables receiving accent or prominence consist of stress, pitch, quality and quantity. Nevertheless, pitch is seen as the most efficient clue for the English learner. Based on Baptista's (1981) research, there is no agreement among linguists about these terms to give a definition for word stress, but no linguist can deny the role word stress plays in communication.

Chomsky, N. & Morris, H. on the sound pattern of English explain that "when sentence-stress falls on a word of more than one syllable, it usually falls on the syllable that normally receives word-stress: 'I'll meet you tomorrow'" (Chomsky, 1968:28, 2004: 11); these are normally content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.). However, there is the exception when the speaker wants to give emphasis to a certain kind of information; then, the speaker tends to stress the word that carries information that is more important to call the attention of the interlocutor, even if this is a function word, that is a word that expresses grammatical function, such as articles and prepositions,. This kind of change of stress pattern position is done just for communicative and clarification purposes.

The stress of English words usually falls on the root of the word. According to Murcia (2001), the stress patterns of English words are not so simple and there are some factors that may interfere with the stress of a word. The author cites some of them in the following: Stress falls more often on the root or base of a word and less on the prefix; compound nouns tend to receive primary stress on the first element and secondary stress on the second; the suffixes can also influence taking the primary stress themselves, changing the original stress to other syllable, or they may simply not affect the stress pattern of a word. Celce-Murcia (2001) still contributes with the idea that "while our students may still look up the stress of an unfamiliar word in the dictionary, these basic rules will aid them in understanding how the system can function in English" (p. 124). This idea reinforces the usefulness of the present research. In this regard many authors affirm that the stress patterns of

English words are not a simple system of rules, but according to many current studies it is clear the necessity of a good pronunciation for an effective communication also. In this research, it will be explored the potential of pronunciation teaching to achieve this goal.

In a language words are divided into syllable, it could be mono syllable, di syllables, three syllables or poly syllables. When uttering a word, a speaker may not be conscious of dividing words into syllable and giving stress on syllables accordingly. But, the word stress is done unconsciously with correct pronunciation, pitching and intonation while uttering a word. This is called speech patterns or sound patterns. In English language 'word stress' is also called 'accent'. Accent is a specific way of pronouncing a language. For any language even with more than a not many of speakers have noticeable regional, social and individual differences. In this way the language is pronounced by different people; sometimes these differences are affected by other dominant accent but, they are not completely suppressed, they sustain with their own qualities and individuality. Thus, each distinguishable type of pronunciation is called an accent.

The accent depends upon where certain sections of people come from and their experience with accent of that particular place and is able to identify accents among other different accents with more or less accuracy. In this way, there are many English accents like an American accent, a Deep South accent, a Scottish accent, a working-class London accent, a French accent (from a non-native speaker), a Spanish accent and even in India Received Pronunciation (RP). It is important to realize that everybody has an accent: it is not possible to speak a language without using some accent or other. Of course, there is significance for some accents as more familiar than others, or as more admired than others, but it does not matter to create and to develop an accent of a certain place according to their considerations. There could be some sort of sensitivity to some accents but having accent is a common point of language theory. The study of stress patterns of English words is relevant to English learners and researchers of English language teaching because the right placement of stress can help people understand what they are listening from the speaker. According to Celce-Murcia word stress is,

"The increase in muscular energy and respiratory activity is undoubtedly what allows native English speakers to tap out the rhythm of syllables within a word or words within an utterance." (Celce-Murcia, 1996: 131)

Teaching English pronunciation skills in India are not considered seriously in the aspect of teaching and learning process. Actually, learning grammar and learning pronunciation is part of learning English. But, Indian

classrooms are confined to teaching literature and some idea of grammar rules which is why the standards of Indian English are at poor quality and students do find difficulty in pronunciation. Although the course writers implicate the speaking and listening activities for the learners, they are not up to the standards to inscribe phonetics in the curriculum. It has become formality in prescribing (LSRW) four skills of English learning till intermediate level. But, most of Indian students do not have phonetics in their syllabus, or most of the students pass out intermediate stage of education without having minimum knowledge of phonetics and proper pronunciation. It is definitely an essential requisite to introduce phonetics from primary studies so that the students

may familiarize to articulate words in a correct way. As phonetics is not in the syllabus of high school standard in Southern India, the students do not comprehend their mistakes in their pronunciation.

Southern dialects in India such as Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam dialects interfere in their pronunciation so that the process of continuity of errors do occur in Indian pronunciation. For example, the following words are pronounced differently in Indian English Pronunciation when compared with Received Pronunciation (RP).

Word	Pronounced by Indians wrongly	RP
1. God	/ga:d/	/gD d/
2. Marriage	/'mereiz/	/marɪdʒ/
3. Hotel	/ ot el/	/həʊ'tel/
4. Vision	/vɪʒn/	/vɪʒ(ə)n

“RP has a very unique system of word stress which poses innumerable difficulties for non-native speakers (NNS) when they try to acquire it. This is so ‘because in an English word of more than one syllable, one of the syllables is pronounced with greater prominence than the other(s)...the syllable which is pronounced with prominence than other(s) is said to be accented.” (Balasubramanian, 133).

Referring to the Indian “style” of English and the word stress and Indian pronunciation Raja Rao from Kanthapura says that:

“After language, the next problem is that of style. The tempo of Indian life must be infused into our English expression, even as the tempo of American or Irish life has gone into the making of theirs. We, in India, think quickly, we talk quickly, and when we move we move quickly. There must

be something in the sun of India that makes us rush and tumble and run on.” (Rao, 27).

Thus, the word stress in English has a captivated fundamental to understand spoken English. Native speakers of English use word stress naturally. Word stress is so natural for them that they don't even know that they use word stress while speaking, unconsciously, they follow word stress. But, when it comes to non-native speakers who speak English to native speakers without using word stress, encounter two problems: they find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially when they speaking fast.

1. The native speakers may find it difficult to understand non-native speakers.

To understand word stress, it helps to understand syllables. Every word is made from syllables. Each word has one, two, three or more syllables.

Word	Syllables	Number of Syllables

Law	Law	1
Demand	de-mand	2
Temptation	temp-ta-tion	3
Transformation	trans-for-ma-tion	4
conversational	con-ver-sa-tion-al	5

An observation is that except some rare words every syllable contains at least one vowel (a, e, i, o, u) or vowel sound. In English language, the stress on words given according to the syllable, suppose, in above words, in the word “transformation” the stress is on third syllable /trænsfə'meɪʃn/. In the word “demand”, the stress is on second syllable/dr'mænd/.

What is Word Stress?

In English language, all the word syllables are not stressed or uttered with the same force or strength. In words

syllable, the emphasis of stress is on ONE syllable and uttered very loudly (big, strong, important) and all the other syllables very quietly.

Suppose the three words: photograph, photographer and photographic, they are not sounded equally when spoken. The difference in stress comes the way Received Pronunciation is used regrading each word. The accentuation of stress in these three words varies accordingly, because, we accentuate (stress) ONE syllable in each word. And it is not always the same syllable. So the shape of each word is different.

Word	Total Syllables	Stressed Syllable
Photograph	‘Pho-to-graph (3)	#1
Photographer	Pho-‘to-graph-er (4)	#2
Photographic	Pho-to-‘graph-ic (4)	#3

If observed the above words, though the words come from same word pattern and gives close meanings or similar meanings according to the parts of speech, the syllables are varied and at the same time, their word stress is varied according to words and syllables. This happens in all words with two or more syllables:

TEACH-er, Ja-PAN, CHI-Na, a-BOVE, conver-SA-tion, IN-ter-est-ing, im-POR-tant, de-MAND.

The syllables that are not stressed are weak or small or quiet. Native speakers of English listen for the STRESSED syllables, not the weak syllables. There are two very important rules about word stress:

1. One word, one stress. (One word cannot have two stresses. So, if two stresses are heard, then we hear two words, not one word.)
2. The stress is always on a vowel.

Why is Word Stress Important?

Word stress is not used in all languages unlike the English, some languages are pronounced each syllable with equal tone. It can be observed that English for example use word stress. Word stress is not an optional extra that added to the English language whenever one wants it to use it according to his will but, it is part of the language. English speakers use word stress to communicate rapidly and accurately, even in difficult conditions. For example, even when one does not hear a word clearly, still one can understand the word because of the position of the stress. Observing, the two words photograph and photographer, supposedly, if one talks to friend on phone regarding some photos and if the line is not clear. Then, one cannot hear clear. In that case, if one hears the first two syllables of one of these words, photo, then the doubt arises whether it is photograph or photographer? But, with word stress one can know immediately which word it is because in reality generally we hear either PHOto or phoTO, which means the stress is on either first syllable or second syllable. So, without hearing the whole word, one can comprehend the context and can understand the word, probably the word could be PHOto-graph or photo-grapher. This is a simple example of how word stress helps us understand English. There are many, many other examples, because, people use

word stress all the time, without thinking about it or sometimes leaving it in the speech.

Where to Use Word Stress?

There are some rules about which syllable to stress. But, sometimes it becomes complicated for non-native speakers. Probably, the best way to learn the stress pattern is from experience of language and its usage in speech. First is to observe the language or to refer the stress in the dictionaries and to develop it in spoken English in daily practice or its usage.

Suppose, one learns a word, he/she should learn its stress pattern also. And one should develop making habit of keeping a book for noting which syllable is stressed. It is better to follow the dictionary always in learning process. Many dictionaries provide information with the phonetic spelling of a word, where it shows which syllable is stressed, usually with (‘) just before or just after the stressed syllable. Generally, the notes at the front of the dictionary provide with descriptions how to use it. For example, the word ‘plastic’, there are two syllables for it and syllable #1 is stressed.

Example	Phonetic spelling: dictionary A	phonetic spelling: dictionary B
Plastic (Plas-tic)	/plæ'stik/	/'plæstik/

A student's success in the "campus recruitment" is mainly based on their presentation of communication skills. An English language Communication Skills Lab (CS Lab) is a facility where a student can learn a language with the help and guidance of a teacher through a system, to improve his/her speaking and listening capacity. The Communication Skills Lab can receive inputs from recorded tapes, audios and videos, CDs, etc. The lab develops among the students a habit of listening and speaking with accurate pronunciation. Students can record their own voice and play back for self-evaluation. It acts as a platform for learning, practicing and producing language skills through interactive lessons and communicative mode of teaching. Language laboratories are for drills and for listening comprehension. It is also used for consolidating the learning. Communication Skills may have objectives, purposes, and functions to work upon.

Its Objectives

The Communication Skills Lab focuses on the production and practice of sounds of language and

familiarizes the students with the use of English in everyday situations and contexts.

- 1.To expose the students to a variety of self-instructional, learner-friendly modes of language learning.
- 2.To help the students to improve the habit of reading passages from the computer monitor, thus providing them with the required facility to face computer-based competitive exams such GRE, TOEFL, GMAT.
- 3.To enable them to learn better pronunciation through stress on word accent, intonation, and rhythm.
- 4.To train them to use language effectively to face interviews, group discussions, public speaking.
- 5.To initiate them into greater use of the computer in resume preparation, report writing, format making.
- 6.To maintain good linguistic competence through accuracy in grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary.
- 7.To enrich the discourse competence, to prepare the learner to be able to produce witten text and speech

Another prominent way of testing accents is to check whether certain pairs of words are pronounced identically or differently. Here are some useful pairs; in each case, the

words are pronounced identically by some speakers but differently by others as in the case with American speakers and English speakers:

-	horse / hoarse	noun UK /hɔ:s/ US /hɔ:rs/ /	adjective UK /hɔ:s/ US /hɔ:rs/
-	threw / through	verb UK /θru/ US /θru:/	preposition, adverb UK /θru:/ US /θru:/
-	dew / do	noun UK dju:/ US du:	verb UK du / US du
-	nose / knows	noun [C] UK /nəz/ US /noz/	verb UK /nəʊ/ US /noʊ/
-	pull / pool	noun/ pʊl/ / pu:l/ verb /pʊl / / pul/	
-	poor / pour	adjective UK /pu:/ US /pu:/	adjective UK /pɔ:r/ US /pɔ:r/
-	whine / wine	noun UK waɪn / US waɪn	verb UK waɪn / US waɪn
-	winter / winner	noun UK 'wɪntə / US 'wɪntər	verb UK 'wɪnə / US 'wɪnər
-	court / caught	noun UK kɔ:t / US kɔ:t	noun UK kɔ:t / US kɔ:t
-	caught / cot	noun UK kɔ:t / US kɔ:t	verb UK kɔ:t / kɔ:t
-	farther / father	adjective UK 'fɑ:ðə / US 'fɑ:ðər	adjective UK 'fɑ:ðə / US 'fɑ:ðər
-	god / guard	noun UK gɒd US / gad	verb UK gɑ:d / US gard
-	hair / air	noun UK heə / US hɛr noun UK eə / US ɛr	
-	there / free	adverb UK ðeə / US fri	adverb UK ðɛr / US fri
-	stir / stare	noun UK stɜ: / US stɜr	verb UK steə / US ster
-	buck / book	noun UK bʌk / US bʌk	noun UK bʊk / US bʊk
-	higher / hire	adjective UK 'haɪə / US haɪər	adjective UK 'haɪə / US 'haɪər
-	marry / merry / Mary	verb UK məri / adj 'mɛri / noun 'meəri	US 'mɛri / 'mɛri / 'mɛri

Observe that, in the USA, an accent is usually considered to be just one aspect of a dialect; in Britain, the two are regarded as largely independent, at least in principle. Note that the word accent is also used, very informally, to mean diacritic: one of the little marks placed on a letter to indicate something about its pronunciation, as in 'café' 'learned'.

Various Stress Patterns

Twosyllablewords	Threesyllablewords	Longerwords
`husband	`literature	`aristocrat
`stomach	`character	`benefactor

Stress in English words varies from word to word. In some words, the stress falls on the first syllable while in other words; it falls on the second, third, or the fourth syllable.

Here a few examples of words stressed on different syllables:

Words stressed on the first syllable:

`dozen	`advertise	`chauvinism
`stupid	`industry	`pomegranate

(ii) Words stressed on the second syllable:

<i>Two syllable words</i>	<i>Three syllable words</i>	<i>Longer words</i>
nar`rate	ap`pendix	par`ticipant
bal`lon	ef`ficient	ri`diculous
be`gin	de`velop	re`sponsible
draw`ee	sa`liva	ap`preciate

(iii) Words stressed on the third syllable:

Three-syllable words	Four -syllable words	Fivesyllable- words
garan`tee	appli`cation	irre`sponsible
ciga`rette	appo`sition	satis`factory
engi`neer	appa`ratus	irre`pressible
corre`spond	corre`spondence	elec`tricity

Primary and Secondary Stress

While most of the words in English have only one stressed syllable, fairly long words (or those consisting certain prefixes, such as re-meaning 'again', and some compound words) may have to stressed syllables. For example, understand, recommend, revisit, inability, etc. In such cases one of the stressed syllables has the main or primary stress, and the other, the secondary stress. Where there is only one stress, it is the primary stress though in

Words Which Are Stressed
 ex,ami`nation

,possi`bility

,re`wind

,re`visit

such cases, we may speak of the stress without using the adjective 'primary'. e say that a given word is stressed on such-and-such syllable, we mean that it carries the primary stress on that syllable; it may or may not have a secondary stress as well. While the primary stress is marked above the line of writing, the secondary stress is marked below the line of writing- in both cases in front of the stressed syllable. Here are some examples:

It may not be noted that no stress mark is necessary in a word consisted of one syllable only although even such a word is also stressed when said in isolation. The primary stress, as already stated, is the most important stress.

Functional Stress

There are a number of two syllable-words (but certainly not all of them) which function both as noun (or adjective) and as verb, e.g., conduct, convict, etc. whenever such words occur in sentences, the stress is (a) on the first syllable when they are used as noun or adjective, and

(b) on the second syllable when used as verb. The following examples illustrate the point. 1 (a) Her `conduct is good. (Noun)

(b) She con`duct herself well. (Verb)

2 (a) What is our `import policy? (Adjective)

Here are some more words which are stressed on the first syllable when used as nouns or adjectives and on the second when used as verbs:

WORDS	NOUN/ADJECTIVE	VER B
absent	`absent	ab`sent
compound	`compound	com`pound
conflict	`conflict	con`flict
contrast	`contrast	con`trast
decrease	`decrease	dec`rease
desert	`desert	de`sert
export	`export	ex`port

It may be noted, from the phonemic transcriptions given above, that apart from a change in the placement of stress, in most cases, certain changes in vowels also take place with a change in the function of such words.

Some Generalizations

From the foregoing account of stress in compounds, you may have arrived at a few points of general information about them. These are summed up below.

1. Compounds consist of two or three (seldom more) simple words, called 'elements'.
2. The number of two-element compounds is much larger than that of three-element compounds.
3. Most of the two-element compounds consist of a noun+noun, in which the first noun modifies the second. Also, in most cases, the resulting compound is a noun too.
4. By far the largest number of two-element compounds are stressed on their first elements.

5. In connected speech (i.e. in phrases and sentences, all double-stressed

Compounds retain only one stress. Which one they retain, depends on their position in the phrase or sentence:

(a) if followed by another stressed word, they retain the first stress; (b) otherwise, they retain the second stress.

CONCLUSION

As there are many Indian languages, their influence on English hampers the general intelligibility of Indian English. Such influence is normally called MT I (mother tongue influence). Universities, colleges and multinational companies are working towards accent neutralization so that the English of Indian speakers will become globally intelligible. For instance, when an employee working for a multinational company interacts with a person from another part of the world, it is important that his accent is neutral and intelligible so that there is an effective communication. Bansal (1969) says, "English spoken in India does not

differ radically from native English in vocabulary and grammar, though there are some well-known differences. In pronunciation, a large number of people deviate from both British and American English in a number of ways." He further states, "As language is primarily a means of communication, we must ensure that we retain at least those features not only phonological and phonetic, but also those related to clear, articulate speech in absence of which mutual intelligibility is likely to be affected." Other features that cause unintelligibility to a native speaker are stress and intonation, the supra-segmental features of utterances (Balasubramanian, 1988, p. 131). According to Balasubramanian (1988, 131) "anyone using English should learn and acquire the supra-segmental features of native English. Word stress is not used in all languages unlike the English, some languages are pronounced each syllable with equal tone. It can be observed that English for example uses word stress. Word stress is not an optional extra that is added to the English language whenever one wants it to use it according to his will but, it is part of the language. English speakers use word stress to communicate rapidly and accurately, even in difficult conditions. For example, even when one does not hear a word clearly, still one can understand the word because of the position of the stress.

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