

THE ROLE OF EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION IN ENGLISH WORD STRESS PATTERNS IN AN EFL ARAB UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

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Abstract

This study presents the results of an investigation into the extent to which explicit instruction in English word stress patterns correlates with better word stress assignment performance by Palestinian EFL university students. The students received three weeks of explicit instruction in the main English word stress rules. In analyzing the differences in the pre- and post-treatment test scores, the researchers found significant increases on the post-treatment test scores which indicate a correlation between explicit instruction in word stress rules and students' performance in word stress assignment. Teaching suggestions and activities are provided to improve learners' word stress assignment performance. The results of this study are of great value to Palestinian linguists, EFL teachers and curricula developers who need to pay special attention to this often overlooked area and, therefore, to ensure that pedagogical materials and teaching activities on word stress become an integral part of EFL curricula.

Keywords: word stress – explicit instruction – Arab EFL learners – stress placement rules

INTRODUCTION

The spoken language contains features which make our speech understood by others. The meaning of a spoken message is not only encoded in contrasting segmental features, but there are also suprasegmental features

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such as stress, pitch, intonation and rhythm that are significant in carrying meaning in the spoken message and giving language its overall appearance (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin, 1996). These suprasegmental features are strong cues for meaning communication since they express attitudinal and emotional meanings and, perhaps, the most significant of all is the speaker's evaluation of what he or she is saying.

Word stress is an especially crucial factor in proper pronunciation and language communication in English. Stress is not on the periphery of language as it is often treated in some language teaching curricula. Failing to pronounce a word correctly or misplacing a stress in a word often results in miscomprehension or changing the meaning of the word (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, 1996; Harmer, 2007; Hebert, 2002; Scrivener, 2005). English word stress is very important to EFL learners and sufficient knowledge and practice in stress placement rules can certainly help enhance learners' communicative competence and language use.

English and Arabic phonological systems vary extensively, not only in the range of sounds and relative importance of vowels, consonants and syllable structures of each language, but also in their suprasegmental features including the word stress placement (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989). Stress in English and Arabic share some features, but there are also noticeable differences. Therefore, difficulties are likely to arise due to differences in the way native speakers of the two languages use stress to express meaning.

This is an area of paramount significance for communicative and linguistic purposes given the complexity of the phenomenon of English stress and the differences between Arabic and English stress systems. Palestinian Arab learners of English face problems in stress recognition and placement which lead to problems in comprehension, speaking and communication. That said, English stress is an area in EFL Palestinian contexts which seems to be under-investigated and under-taught.

In this paper, we present the findings of a classroom research study which examined Arab Palestinian learners' knowledge of English word stress patterns and the effects of explicit instruction in English word stress assignment rules on their word stress performance. In doing so, this study aims to further our understanding of the main stress patterns in English words as perceived and produced by EFL Palestinian university students and provide pedagogically suitable teaching suggestions and activities for purposes of raising learners' awareness and performance of stress placement.

WORD STRESS

Stress can be referred to as the result of a stronger puff of air – or an increased articulatory effort of some kind – which gives relatively greater prominence to some portion of an utterance than to others, creating thereby a suprasegmental signal which is critical for the communication of lexical or affective meanings. The term stress is defined as 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 (Ball and Rahilly, 1999:105; Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, 1996; Hammond, 1999; Roach, 2000). From a perception point of view, a stressed syllable is more prominent than an unstressed syllable if it is louder, longer, higher in pitch and/or the vowel in a stressed syllable is different in quality from neighboring vowels. From a production point of view, stressed syllables involve a greater amount of muscular energy where the lungs produce higher subglottal pressure (Roach, 2000).

Word stress is the term given to the accent or emphasis placed on a specific syllable of a word and it is more or less an invariable attribute of that word if spoken in isolation. The assignment of this stress is as much a part of the pronunciation of a word as are the phonemes themselves. In a multi-syllabic word, one syllable normally stands out as more prominent than the other syllables. Three levels of stress are generally used to describe word stress. Primary stress is the most prominent syllable which is also called tonic strong stress (Roach, 2000). It refers to the heaviest emphasis given to a syllable when spoken in isolation or placed on the most important syllable of an important word in context. Secondary stress involves giving emphasis to a lesser degree to that of the primary stress but still great enough to constitute stressing.

A third level of stress is called unstressed which relates to the absence of any recognizable amount of prominence. These three levels of stress can be observed in a single word such as "substitution". The syllable /tu/ exhibits the greatest prominence; the syllable /-tit/ and /-tion/ are least prominent, and the first syllable /,subs/ shows intermediate, or secondary, prominence. Primary stress is normally shown by a superscript mark ['] placed above the stressed syllable, while a secondary stress is shown by a vertical line below the stressed syllable [,] as in [*expla'nation*] or [*cate'gorical*].

Stress in English serves several functions. It is used in the identification of words, their grammatical function and contextual prominence. It influences the form and selection of sounds and the form of morphemes. It signals that the speaker is reacting more strongly at some

point in the discourse or that some significant relationship exists between parts of a sentence, a phrase or a word.

Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin (1996: 133) point out that a characteristic feature of word stress in English is that it can occur on virtually any syllable in the word. The factors which influence stress assignment patterns relate to the historical origin of a word, affixation, and the grammatical category of the word in an utterance. Word stress placement in English mainly depends on the number of syllables including mono-, di- and polysyllabic words, affixes, and/or the grammatical category of the word. These factors are believed to have a significant impact on word stress placement in English. Within long words, some syllables are louder and longer than others, and some syllables are stressed while others are not.

Rules of Word Stress Placement in English

In considering English stress, one needs to distinguish between stress within an utterance (a phrase, a clause or a sentence) and stress within a lexical word. In this paper, we focus on lexical or word stress since it is an area of great difficulty for learners. In addition, there are no significant stress differences between Arabic and English in longer utterances. Unlike other languages, word stress in English is not a straightforward phenomenon since stress can fall on virtually any syllable. In other languages word stress is rather predictable whereby stress can be decided simply in relation to the syllables of the word, as it is the case in French (where the last syllable is usually stressed), Polish (where the stress falls on the penultimate syllable), or Czech and Slovak (where the first syllable is stressed) (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, 1996; Collins and Mees, 2006).

It is commonly argued that English word stress is so difficult to predict that it is best to treat stress placement as a property of the individual word, that is, to be learned when the word itself is learned. Certainly anyone who tries to analyze English stress placement has to recognize that it is a highly complex matter for learners: how can one select the correct syllable or syllables to stress in an English word? That said, in most cases when English speakers come across an unfamiliar word, they can pronounce it with the correct stress if they follow certain rules of stress placement. Roach (2000: 88) identifies three criteria to determine where to put stress in a word:

1. Whether the word is morphologically simple or complex.
2. The grammatical category to which the word belongs (nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc).
3. The number of syllables in the word and its phonological structure.

The stress patterns are often affected by the grammatical category or morphological structure of the word. A clear illustration of this is shown by noun-verb pairs such as ['conduct-con'duct] or ['present-pre'sent], in which the syntactic category of the word determines where the stress falls. Therefore, it is perhaps fit to consider stress in part as rule-governed and learners should learn some of the most useful and frequent patterns.

The placement of word stress in English is mostly variable. Stress is not governed by the number of syllables a word contains but every word has its own stress pattern. A simple word means that the word is not composed of more than one grammatical unit. Due to space limitations, table 1 below illustrates the most common rules for word stress assignment in English.

TABLE 1
 Common word stress rules in English

Word type		Where is the stress?	Examples
Two syllables	Nouns	on the first syllable	CEN ter OB ject FLOW er
	Verbs	on the last syllable	re LEA SE ad MIT a RRAN GE
Compound	Nouns (N + N) (Adj. + N)	on the first part	DESK top PEN cil case BOOK shelf GREEN house
	Adjectives (Adj. + P.P.)	on the last part (the verb part)	well- MEAN T hard- HEA DED old- FASH IONED
	Verbs (prep. + verb)		under STAN D over LOOK outper FORM
Phrasal Verbs		on the particle	turn OFF buckle UP hand OUT
Word with added ending	-ic	the syllable before the ending	eco NO mic geo ME tric e LEC trical

	-tion, -cian, -sion		techNician graduAition coHesion
	-phy, -gy, -try, -cy, -fy, -al	the third from the last syllable	phoTOgraphy biOlogy geOmetry
	-meter		paRAMeter therMometer baROMeter

Arabic Word Stress

It is commonly accepted that Arabic has syllable-timed rhythm which means that the time taken to produce each syllable whether stressed or unstressed is the same. English, on the other hand, has stress-timed rhythm where stressed syllables occur at regular intervals with a random number of syllables occurring between stresses. So the rhythmic pattern of an English sentence is dependent on the number of stressed syllables. Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) point out that Arabs fail to adopt the stress-timed rhythm of English. This is often observed in Arab learners stressing all words in a sentence irrespective of their context, nature and importance. This also includes stressing function words which are invariably unstressed in spoken English.

Arabic word stress has been the subject of various studies. The system, degree, placement types, and location of stress in Arabic differ completely from English stress. Arab stress location patterns also differ considerably in colloquial and modern standard Arabic. Arabic lexical stress is more predictable than English stress and has stress placement rules that operate at the word level (de Jong and Zawaydeh, 1999). Word stress is not phonemically contrastive in standard Arabic, but it does bear a strong relationship to vowel length and syllable shape, and the correct word stress aids intelligibility.

The placement of stress is determined by the number and length of the syllables in the word. The general pattern of stress placement is that the last heavy syllable, which falls on the long vowel, receives the primary stress. If the last syllable is long, then the last syllable is stressed, e.g. [ki'taab] 'book', the stress is on /'taab/ which is the last syllable. If the penultimate syllable of a word is long and the last is short, then the second-to-last syllable is stressed [a'boohu] 'his father'. When there are no heavy syllables in a word, then stress falls in some other predictable place. Both Palestinian and Ammani-Jordanian Arabic dialects have a stress pattern where it usually falls on either the penultimate or the antepenultimate

syllable (de Jong and Zawaydeh, 1999). The stress falls on the penultimate syllable if it is heavy; otherwise, it will be placed on the antepenultimate syllable. However, the stress falls on the final syllable if it contains a long vowel or has a consonant cluster. Similar stress placement patterns in Cairene and San'ani Arabic dialects are also discussed in Watson (2002). In Arabic, every syllable, regardless of whether it is short or long, should be clearly and distinctly pronounced. Syllables do not just disappear or get reduced when they are not stressed.

Difficulties in learning English Word Stress faced by Arabic EFL Learners

While there are some similarities between Arabic and English stress systems, noticeable differences exist between them which create problems for Arabic students in producing and comprehending English stress patterns. A learner's inability to recognize stress location would lead to problems in communication. It has been shown that because of the predictable nature of stress in Arabic, Arabic speakers tend to apply the rules of their mother tongue when learning stress in English. Arabic speakers have problems grasping the unpredictable nature of English word stress since English is a stress-timed language (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989).

In a study by Altmann (2006:135), it is found that Arabic speakers experienced greater difficulty in the perception of English stress than speakers of the other two languages with predictable stress in their L1 (i.e., French, Turkish). Correspondingly, Arabic speakers were the worst among those asked to produce the English stress in this study.

English has phonological vowel reduction; most unstressed vowels tend to be reduced to the central vowel, the schwa / /. Heavy syllables will be more stressed than light syllables. Generally speaking, the words that usually receive the stress are: nouns, adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. These words are not usually shortened in the sentence. Other connecting words such as articles, prepositions, conjunctions and helping verbs are normally unstressed.

Unlike English, each single word in Arabic can be stressed. Vowel length is phonemic in Arabic, and therefore, there is no vowel reduction and no weak forms in Arabic such that all vowels are maintained. Thus, there is a tendency among Arab learners to pronounce all short and long vowels. This tends to create speaking problems for Arab learners in that they do not reduce vowels in unstressed syllables, thereby producing language in an unnatural manner.

Kenworthy (1987:125) points out that Arab learners tend to transfer three of their mother-tongue speaking habits into English: 1) Learners put

stress on the final syllable of English words ending in a vowel followed by two consonants, as in "difficult", "comfort" and "expert", 2) They tend to place stress on endings such as '-est', 'ism', '-less', and '-ness'. This is because these endings are formulated from a vowel and two successor consonants, and 3) Learners put stress on the last syllable of a word ending with a diphthong or a long vowel plus a single consonant as in "irritate", "gratitude" and "institute".

EXPLICIT INSTRUCTIONS

A wealth of research has underscored the importance of explicit instruction as an effective methodology in teaching language skills (see, for example, Archer and Hughes, 2011; Bomer, 1998; Goeke, 2008; Price, 1998; Serafini, 2004). Explicitness in instruction often refers to the systematic sequencing of instructional procedures in a lesson. More importantly, it involves the degree of clarity in the learners' constructions and their deliberate use of a particular concept, strategy or procedure, calling to consciousness what is being taught and strives to clarify for learners the expectations the teachers have for their learning (Bomer, 1998; Serafini, 2004: 2). According to Goeke (2008: 18), explicit instruction can be provided when the goal is to teach a well-defined body of information or skills that all students must master, assessment data indicate that students have not learned the basic skills, strategies and content, and assessment data indicate that student progress towards mastering skills, strategies or content needs to be accelerated.

While much research has been carried out on establishing a correlation between explicit instruction and improving academic skills in reading comprehension and writing performance, more work needs to be done on the role of explicit instruction and learners' pronunciation and listening comprehension skills. This study taps into this need for effective learning of word stress patterns based on a direct, explicit instructional approach.

METHODOLOGY

The data collected has been analyzed to answer the study's main question: *is there a correlation between explicit instruction in English word stress patterns and improved stress placement performance as evidenced in a post-treatment test?* For purposes of analysis, a total of 80 undergraduate female students majoring in English in a Palestinian university participated in the study. All 80 students were enrolled in an introductory linguistics course, ranged in age around 20 years and were similar in their socio-

economic backgrounds. Their language proficiency is quite similar since all of them were enrolled in the university according to a fixed grade point average GPA in their general secondary school studies and have studied the same English language courses. The students were more or less homogenous in their language proficiency based on the results of their mid-term scores as they were studying the same course. They were at the intermediate and upper-intermediate level of English. None of the students had received explicit instruction in word stress assignment in English in the previous courses.

The participants were randomly assigned to two equivalent groups of 40 students each; one was the control group and the other the experimental group. Students in the experimental group received a total of 9 hours of explicit instruction in word stress rules spanning over a period of three weeks and were delivered by one of the researchers. The students in this group participated in a range of activities and authentic materials that sensitized students' awareness to English word stress and actively engaged them in placing stress correctly on the right syllable and pronouncing stressed words (a number of these activities are included in section 5).

An achievement test was used as a pre- and post-test. The test contained a list of 30 words prepared by the researchers. In the tests, students in both groups were asked to place the stress on the right syllable in each word. The list consisted of 8 categories of words which included noun-verb pairs, compound nouns, compound verbs, compound adjectives, words ending in the suffixes [-sion], [-cian] and [-tion], words ending in the suffix [-ic], words ending in the suffixes [-ee] and [-ese], and words which have phonological reduction in unstressed syllables or weak forms. The researchers believe that these words exemplify the major word stress rules in English that should be part of any learner's knowledge and any instructional syllabus on English pronunciation.

It is worth noting that the words in the test were presented in isolation in accordance with the study purpose. The words used in the list involved different patterns of stress placement rules, and participants were tested on their knowledge of the placement of the stress in the tested words since the study was more interested in assessing the extent to which explicit instruction in word stress can have an impact on stress placement, than in factors which influence their word stress assignment. The same procedures were conducted in administering the pre and post-tests, though a different set of words reflecting the same word stress patterns was used with the experimental group in the post-test. These tests were used to prove group equivalence by calculating the correct answers in the pre- and post-tests and determining their average mean scores for normal distribution of data.

The study data were analyzed using the statistical package (SPSS). T-test for independent sample was used to measure the statistical differences in the mean scores of the students' pre- and post-tests in both groups in order to determine the overall effect of instruction. The study hypothesized that in case there was an increase on the experimental group's post-treatment mean test score, this suggests that the intervention yielded a change in the subjects' stress placement performance, and therefore we are in a better position to ascribe this improvement to their cognitive knowledge of stress assignment rules and their ability to make use of this knowledge. Consequently, ELT teachers and curricula developers should capitalize on students' cognitive awareness of the rules of word stress patterns. Conversely, if there was no progress in the experiment group's performance, we may argue that the methodology of explicit instruction has no significant impact on their performance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study results show that there were no statistically significant differences in the average mean values of true answers on the pre-test between the control and experimental groups (39.21) and (39.16) respectively. This indicates that the participants in the two groups were quite similar in their knowledge of English word stress patterns, and we are in a better position to attribute any changes in the mean score of the post-test of the experimental group to explicit instruction in word stress placement rules.

In analyzing the differences between the pre- and post-test mean scores of the experimental group, it is found that there has been a reasonably significant increase in the post-test mean score. To illustrate, the pre-test mean score of correct answers that started at 39.16 went up to 70.40 on the post-test with an increase of about 30 percent on the post-test (see Table 2). The matched-pairs t-test performed showed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between the pre- and post-tests attributed to explicit instruction of word stress patterns. Further, the standard deviation dropped 2.1 points in the post-test 13.67 than in the pre-test. This indicates that methodology of explicit instruction effected positive change in students' performance.

TABLE 2
Mean score of True answers

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre_Test Gains	40	13.00	80.00	39.1667	15.77227
Post_Test Gains	40	30.00	88.00	70.4000	13.67252

For all measures, students' answers on the pre-treatment test show that students did not perform well on this test and that students showed a tendency to stress the wrong syllable in a word. This finding indicates students' lack of knowledge of the main English word stress rules. For instance, students were evidently unable to distinguish stress placement in the cases of noun-verb pairings, compound verbs and nouns and words which end in suffixes in [-sion], [-tion], [-cian], and [-ic]. One can also notice that the students' answers were rather unsystematic and random and involved much guessing. That is, some students placed stress correctly on some words belonging to one word category, but then they placed stress incorrectly on a similar word belonging to the same category. Other responses were consistent with Arabic word stress placement patterns. This seems to be related to the fact that students tended to transfer their native phonology to the production of words, as in words which have English phonological vowel reduction.

Data analysis of the experimental group's pre-test and post-test gains scores of by points and percentages has shown that all students have gained more points on their post-test in all word categories (see Table 3). These gains in the students' post-treatment scores represent an improvement in the students' performance in word stress placement and indicate that the methodology of explicit instruction has yielded positive impact on the students' ability to place stress correctly.

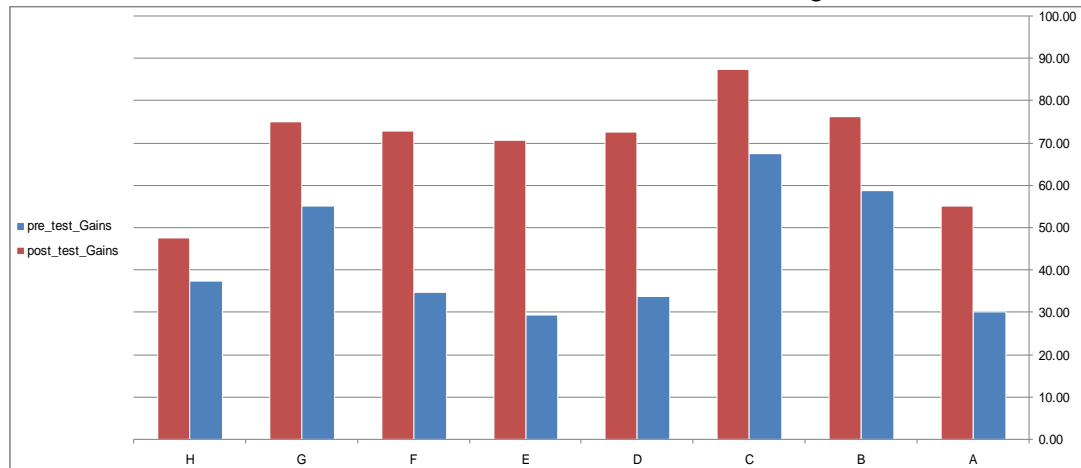
TABLE 3
 Average Mean Score of Gains in Pre-test and Post-test Categories

Word CATEGORY	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Pre_test_Gains	30.00	58.75	67.50	33.75	29.29	34.79	55.00	37.50
Post_test_Gains	55.00	76.25	87.50	72.50	70.71	72.71	75.00	47.50
Mean Difference	25.00	17.50	20.00	38.75	41.43	37.92	20.00	10.00

The clustered bar graph below (see figure 1 below) shows that the pre-test scores, which started lower, have proportionally risen in the post-test scores for all word categories. Significant differences, however, can be observed in the categories where the post-test scores were significantly higher than others. For instance, there were significant increases in the word categories (D), (E) and (F) which were related to noun-verb pairs, words ending in the suffixes /-tion/, /-sion/ and /-cian/ and compound nouns respectively. This may be due to the fact that the word stress rules for these categories were more straightforward than the other word categories. The word category (H), which was related to vowel reduction in unstressed

syllables, had the lowest mean difference, about 10.00. One can clearly argue the students are still facing difficulty in learning to place stress correctly in words having phonological vowel reduction due to the mother-tongue interference.

FIGURE 1
 Students' Pre-test and Post-Test Gain Scores on Word Categories



As we have just shown, the participants had a much higher level of success with the task. Given that the participants had a similar profile in the same program and were exposed to the same instructional method and syllabus, it is reasonable to assume that the major contributory factor to the increased level of stress placement performance was that they had been exposed to a methodology explicitly focusing on teaching stress placement rules. This was the only observable variable in the context of this study.

Given the fact that the study lasted for two weeks during which students received only six hours of classroom instruction, the researchers hypothesize that this increase would have been more significant if the study had lasted longer and the students were exposed to more instructional time and content.

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS AND TEACHING SUGGESTIONS

The findings of this study have implications for EFL teachers, teacher trainers, and curriculum and material developers. Of all the areas of phonology, word stress is the most accessible for both students and teachers. Word stress is part of the identity of a word and therefore teachers can build

students' confidence by drawing their attention to and practice the patterns of word stress that do exist. This can be done by answering the following questions:

- What is word stress?
- Why word stress is important?
- What are the main rules of word stress?
- How can I help my students master word stress?

To facilitate the process of learning word stress, the following teaching suggestions and activities are recommended:

Teachers can expose students to listening for word stress. This can be done by starting learning by tapping, humming, and tracing the patterns for two-syllable words. Although the stressed vowel is clear and easier to hear than the unstressed vowel, it still takes practice before students learn to raise the pitch and lengthen stressed syllables, (Gilbert, 1994). In case of having words spelled alike such as [REcord / reCORD] and [SUBject / subJECT]. The important thing for the teacher is to make the nouns sound different from the verbs by lengthening the stressed syllables whether or not students say a native-like schwa in the unstressed syllables.

It is convenient to clarify that students may need help identifying the parts of speech in the two-syllable words. Teacher can train their students to stress the first syllable in most two-syllable nouns and adjectives, and stress the last syllable in many two-syllable verbs.

Learning the stress on three- or four-syllable words necessitates having the students listen, tap the rhythm, and repeat what they hear, while concentrating on the stressed syllable. One of the best games for teaching the stressed syllables of these words is the echo game. Students are recommended to use arm movements to practice word stress in three- and four-syllable words and phrases. This activity is enjoyable because of its chant-like quality and movement. After repeating playing the echo game, students are recommended to make up short conversations using the words they just practiced.

Regarding compound nouns, Gilbert (1994) states that such nouns have a stronger stress and a higher pitch on the first element of word. The pitch falls on the second word, even in complex compounds such as [AIRport TAX]. Although compound nouns are the most common, there are also compound verbs such as [BABySIT] and [TAPdance], and compound adjectives such as [SECondhand] and [AIR conditioned]. When these compound adjectives are used at the end of a sentence, the stress usually shifts to the last word. *I bought it SEcondHAND. Is the room AIR conDitioned?*

A common activity suggested by Harmer (2007: 256) involves focusing students' attention on stressing weak vowel sounds occurring in words instead of focusing on stressed syllables. Thus, teachers can draw attention to the schwa /ə/ in words like /f 'tɒgr f / (photographer), or /'klu:l s/ (clueless).

Knowledge of and practice in analyzing English syllable structure system is especially useful in overcoming pronunciation problems. Al-Saidat (2010) suggests introducing a comparison between the short and long syllable patterns of both English and Arabic to pinpoint differences in the two languages and to eliminate predicted errors.

Marking stress in words can be a very helpful learning activity. Here teachers can use a clear easy-to-see way of marking stress on the board and on handouts for students. This is by using big circle - small circle (O o) method. It is very easy to see and has the added advantage of identifying the number of syllables in the word as well as the stressed syllable. The teacher focuses on one word and puts the stress on its different syllables in turn. For example:

o o O computer	O o o computer	o O o computer
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Students should follow the teacher in saying the word in different ways, while exaggerating the stressed syllable and compressing the unstressed ones. The teacher can ask the students which version of the word sounds 'the best' or 'the most natural'. By hearing the word stressed incorrectly, students can more easily pick out the correct version. Scrivener (2005) suggests a way of teaching word stress with the teacher modeling new words in context by writing a common sentence or phrase on the board and pronounces them. Then he or she gets students to repeat the sentence and gives them honest feedback. The teacher provides students with a list of words and ask them to put the words into the correct column based on whether stress falls on the first, second or third syllable.

CONCLUSION

This study examines predictions of English word stress assignment patterns by a group of Palestinian EFL university students. Participants following a period of explicit class instruction in English word stress have shown evidence of knowledge of stress placement rules. Data analyzed indicate that explicit instruction in word stress patterns is pedagogically advantageous since it has a direct impact on students' ability to place stress correctly in a word. Participants were able to determine where the stress

falls in each word according to the stress rules learned. The low pre-test scores seem to be primarily due to the fact that little attention have been paid to teaching English word stress in Palestinian curricula. Further, the unpredictability of English stress and the various origins of the English language as well as influences from mother tongue phonology pose serious challenges to Arab learners when learning English word stress.

It seems that most students tend to transfer the native language system to the foreign language. This means that stress distribution and functions are transferred to English. Therefore, by comparing the stress system of the native language with that of the language to be learned, we can locate and describe the learning problems. This comparison needs to be carried out systematically using linguistically sound description of stress phonemes and their distribution in patterns of words, phrases, and sentences. A careful systematic instruction in stress placement requires teachers to provide ample practice for students in distinguishing the stressed syllables from the unstressed syllables, identifying different word stress patterns and build a working knowledge of word-stress relationship.

This classroom research study aimed to highlight an often overlooked area of Palestinian language teaching and EFL curricula despite their importance to language learning and use. This area deserves more attention from linguists, language teachers and curricula developers, and suggestions on pedagogical materials and teaching activities should be incorporated in EFL curricula. More instructional time must be paid by EFL teachers in teaching the supra-segmental features of the language, especially the stress. Arabic students must study word stress carefully and amply in order to give their language its shape and naturalness. As we have seen, stress is a very complicated matter in English, but it is rule-based in Arabic. Stress degrees and patterns are variable between the two languages. Therefore, teachers and learners are recommended to give more emphasis to the use of stress. Explicit instruction positively influences student performance as it provides a scaffolding upon which further teaching of stress comprehension and production can take place.

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