EXAMINING THE INFLUENCE OF STRESS ON SPEECH: A CASE STUDY AT HOA SEN UNIVERSITY

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| Abstract

This article explores English suprasegmental features, specifically stress placement and pronunciation in both single and compound words, using Roach's (2009) framework. Stress is crucial for conveying meaning in spoken language. Challenges faced by English learners, such as accurate stress, intonation, and pronunciation, are discussed. The article delves into stress placement in single words, illustrating its role in differentiating similar-sounding words and conveying nuances in questions, commands, and exclamations. It also covers stress hierarchy, including primary stress, secondary stress, and unstressed syllables. Complex words, involving affixes and compounds, are examined. Affixes' impact on stress in root words is discussed, as is the varied stress in compound words. In summary, mastering stress and pronunciation is vital for effective English communication. This article provides insights into stress principles, aiding learners and educators. Roach's (2009) research informs this critical aspect of language acquisition.

1. Introduction

Roach's (2009) comprehensive examination of suprasegmental characteristics in the English language has been widely acknowledged for its practical and insightful contributions to the field. His work not only offers functional insights but also provides a clear and concise overview of these linguistic traits, shedding light on their role in conveying meaning across a broad spectrum of contexts. Suprasegmental features, as outlined by Roach (2009), constitute a crucial component of effective English communication,

encompassing stress, rhythm, connected speech, and intonation. These features represent patterns of sounds that, when combined, shape the meaning of words and sentences in the English language.

The influence of suprasegmental features, particularly stress, on spoken English has long been a subject of interest in the field of linguistics. While Roach's (2009) work has laid a solid foundation in understanding these features, various researchers have contributed to the discourse by investigating their impact on speech in different contexts. Smith (2015), for example, delved into the connection between suprasegmental features and comprehension in second language learners, highlighting the importance of stress patterns in facilitating understanding.

Beyond grammar and vocabulary, learners of English often grapple with the complexities of pronunciation, intonation, and accent, all of which play pivotal roles in effective communication (Nghi & Khuong, 2021). These challenges are particularly pronounced among individuals using English as a second language in diverse and demanding situations (Brown, 2018). A thorough grasp of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), regional accents, and the intricacies of pronunciation is imperative for learners seeking to predict and master stress placement within words (Gupta & Johnson, 2020).

The significance of accurate pronunciation, especially in the initial stages of English language acquisition, cannot be overstated. A solid foundation in pronunciation is not only a prerequisite for effective communication but also a catalyst for the development of personal speaking skills in daily interactions (Jones & Lee, 2017). Roach's (2009) research, alongside the insights of numerous scholars, continues to serve as an invaluable resource in addressing these linguistic challenges and enhancing our understanding of stress's pivotal role in spoken English.

In this study, we aim to build upon the insights of Roach (2009) and the broader body of literature in the field by conducting a case study at Hoa Sen University. Our research will specifically examine the influence of stress on the speech patterns of students within this academic environment. By investigating stress in a real-world educational context, we hope to contribute to the existing knowledge on language acquisition and pedagogy. Furthermore, this research will provide practical insights into the application of suprasegmental features, particularly stress, in the context of English language learning at Hoa Sen University.

2. The Influence of Stress on English Word Perception
The perception and proper pronunciation of words are central to effective English communication. Within the realm of phonetics and phonology, stress plays a vital role in differentiating meanings, especially in cases where words have similar pronunciations but different stress patterns (Roach, 2009). Stress, a key suprasegmental feature in English speech, is utilized to convey nuanced meaning and emphasize specific words or phrases. This paper explores the multifaceted role of stress in English word perception and

pronunciation, delving into its functions in distinguishing word meanings, emphasizing elements within sentences, and conveying speaker emotions.

2.1. Stress in English: A Suprasegmental Fundamental

Stress, as defined by Roach (2009), is a fundamental suprasegmental feature of English speech that aids in conveying a wide range of meanings. Its primary functions can be categorized into two main aspects: differentiation of word meanings and emphasis within sentences.

2.1.1. Differentiating Word Meanings

One of the fundamental functions of stress is to distinguish between words that share similar vowel sounds but possess different meanings. Consider the words "conflict - /ˈkɑːn.flɪkt/" and "conflict - /kənˈflɪkt/." The distinction in meaning between these two words is entirely reliant on the placement of stress within the word. Such subtle differences in stress patterns contribute significantly to effective word perception (Roach, 2009).

2.1.2. Emphasis within Sentences

Stress is also employed to emphasize specific words or phrases within sentences, thereby drawing the listener's attention to the emphasized elements. This function is particularly evident in questions, commands, and exclamatory sentences.

Stress in Questions

In interrogative sentences, the stressed syllable often indicates the speaker's attitude or serves to clarify the meaning of the question. Consider the following cases:

- Case 1: "What ˈis your name?" - Stress on "is" indicates a straightforward question.
- Case 2: "ˈWhat is your name?" - Stress on "what" conveys surprise or confusion regarding the listener's name.
- Case 3: "What is ˈyour name?" - Emphasis on "your" signifies the speaker's desire for clarification regarding the listener's identity.

Stress in Commands

Commands utilize stress to reflect the speaker's attitude or explain the intended meaning of the command. Different stress patterns may be employed to emphasize specific words or phrases within commands:

- Case 1: "ˈOpen your book" - Stress on "open" conveys a clear command to the listeners.
- Case 2: "Open ˈyour book" - Stress on "your" emphasizes the listener's responsibility.
- Case 3: "Open your ˈbook" - Stress on "book" highlights the specific item essential for the listener's use.

Stress in Exclamations

Exclamatory sentences, characterized by an exclamation point, express the speaker's emotions, including astonishment, exasperation, adoration, or demands. While exclamations are generally avoided in academic and business writings, they are notable for their emphasis on particular words or phrases:

- Case 1: "The bank robber shouted 'Get down on the floor now!'" - Emphasis on "now" underscores the immediate demand for patrons to assume a seated or prone position.
- Case 2: "The bank robber shouted 'Get down on the floor now!'" - Stress on "on the floor" reiterates the specific location where individuals must comply with the robber's order.
- Case 3: "The bank robber shouted 'Get down on the floor now!'" - Emphasis on "get down" underscores the critical nature of complying with the robber's instructions by sitting or lying down.

Mastering stress placement within English words is a fundamental aspect of effective communication. It enables the differentiation of word meanings and emphasizes specific elements within sentences. Stress's role in questions, commands, and exclamations is pivotal in conveying intent and emotion. Understanding the nuanced functions of stress enhances word perception and pronunciation, contributing to clearer and more effective English communication.

3. The Multifaceted World of English Stress Patterns: A Comprehensive Exploration

Mastering English pronunciation and understanding the intricate world of stress patterns is essential for effective communication. English stress is not a simple binary concept of "stressed" and "unstressed" syllables; it encompasses a multifaceted spectrum. In this comprehensive analysis, we will delve into the different levels of stress, explore primary stress, secondary stress, and unstressed syllables, and investigate how stress is placed within words, considering various grammatical categories and word types.

3.1. Levels of Stress

Roach (2009) asserts that English stress is far from a binary concept, with clear distinctions between "stressed" and "unstressed" syllables. This notion of stress is not a two-level analysis; instead, it involves a nuanced understanding of stress as a multi-level phenomenon (p.76). Roach further categorizes stress into three main levels during language production: primary stress, secondary stress, and unstressed syllables.

3.1.1. Primary Stress

Primary stress is the pinnacle of emphasis within a word, characterized by longer duration, louder volume, and a higher pitch (Roach, 2009, p.75). In general, primary stress is placed on the most significant syllable within a word or a root word. Interestingly, one-syllable words are unique in that the single syllable carries its primary stress when used in isolation, or it may be recognized as unstressed. For example, the one-syllable word "please - /pliːz/" inherently bears primary stress. In dictionaries, primary stress is conventionally indicated by an apostrophe on the top line.

3.1.2. Secondary Stress

Secondary stress is of lower intensity than primary stress but still plays a crucial role in English pronunciation. It typically depends on the position of primary stress within a word. In dictionaries, secondary stress is marked by a small apostrophe on the bottom line, resembling a comma. It is important to note that not all words exhibit secondary stress. To enhance English pronunciation and communication, it is essential to consult reputable dictionaries like the Cambridge Dictionary or the Oxford Dictionary to identify primary and secondary stress accurately.

3.1.3. Unstressed Syllables

Unstressed syllables constitute the lowest level of stress. These syllables often contain the schwa sound or a syllabic consonant (Roach, 2009). They are pronounced more quietly and with lower pitch. Unstressed syllables are frequently found at the beginning or end of words, contributing to the rhythm and melody of spoken English.

3.2. Diagram of Pitch

A diagram provided on page 75 of Roach's work in 2009 illustrates the highest and lowest pitch levels, offering a visual representation of stress patterns.

3.2.1. Placement of Stress

The placement of stress in English words is a significant challenge for learners, impacting accurate pronunciation and overall language proficiency. Roach addresses this challenge in his linguistic studies, proposing that stress in English words can be determined by analyzing syllable structure, grammatical categories, phonological syllable structure, and word type (complex or compound).

3.2.2. Syllable Structure

Syllables in English can be broadly categorized into two main types: strong and weak.

- **Strong Syllables**: These comprise a rhyme with either a syllable peak (a long vowel or diphthong) with or without a following consonant (coda). Alternatively, a strong syllable may consist of a syllable peak with a short vowel (schwa) followed by at least one consonant (Roach, 2009, p.76).
- **Weak Syllables**: Weak syllables include vowels such as /ə/, /ɪ/, /u/, and syllabic consonants. The presence of a coda is typically unacceptable when the vowel is /ə/.

3.3. Stress Patterns in Different Word Types

The placement of stress in English words varies depending on their grammatical category and word type.

3.3.1. Two-Syllable Words

In two-syllable words, stress can fall on either the first or second syllable. When the last syllable is weak, the first syllable is generally stressed, and vice versa.

- **Noun and Adjective**: Stress is typically placed on the syllable near the beginning of the word for nouns and adjectives.

- Examples: "people (n) - /ˈpiːpl/," "pretty (adj) - /ˈprɪti/."
- **Verb**: Verbs, in general, tend to have stress towards the end of the word.
  - Examples: "answer - /ˈænsər/," "finish - /ˈfɪnɪʃ/."

3.3.2. Three-Syllable Words

Three-syllable nouns usually have primary stress on the first syllable, although secondary and third syllable stress can occur but are less prevalent.

Comprehending the intricate world of English stress patterns is a journey that requires diligent study and practice. The multifaceted nature of stress, encompassing primary stress, secondary stress, and unstressed syllables, adds depth to the pronunciation and rhythm of the language. Learners and speakers alike benefit from a nuanced understanding of stress patterns, enhancing their overall communication skills.

4. Conclusion

In the intricate realm of English language acquisition, the mastery of pronunciation stands as a cornerstone of effective communication. The ability to articulate words with precision and clarity is paramount, for within the rich tapestry of the English lexicon, lies a subtle yet profound nuance - the art of stress placement. It is this art that bestows upon learners the power to convey precise meanings and differentiate between words that, despite similar phonetic garbs, bear distinct lexical identities.

The bedrock of English fluency rests upon understanding the rules that govern stress placement. This knowledge is not merely an auxiliary skill but a pivotal element in the journey of linguistic competence. As we've traversed the expanse of this article, we've ventured into the realm of stress in single words, peeling back the layers of complexity to reveal its inner workings. It is through this understanding that learners gain insight into the linguistic mosaic that shapes spoken English.

Yet, our exploration doesn't end here; rather, it sets the stage for a more profound understanding of the English language's intricacies. Stress placement in compound words, a topic touched upon briefly in this article, beckons for deeper exploration. It is a terrain where the fusion of two words creates a new entity, each contributing its unique stress pattern to the amalgamation. Such compound words form an integral part of English vocabulary, and the ability to decipher their stress patterns is another step towards linguistic proficiency.

In conclusion, the art of mastering English conversation extends far beyond mere word choice and syntax. It finds its core in the mastery of pronunciation and the nuanced understanding of stress placement. The journey toward linguistic competence is an odyssey that requires diligence and an insatiable curiosity for the subtle interplay of sounds that shape our words. As we continue to explore the multifaceted world of English phonetics and phonology, we embark on a quest to not only communicate but to do so with eloquence, precision, and the rich tapestry of stress patterns that define the English language.

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