

The Effectiveness of Placement of Sentence Stress in Intelligibility

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the effectiveness of placement of sentence stress in intelligibility. The following points are considered to be objectives of the present study are: 1- to find out whether EFLLs are able to know which words in a sentence are given more prominence by speakers. 2- To investigate whether listening to audio materials (record speech) has effectiveness on placement of sentence stress. 3- To enhance EFLLs ability to place and produce sentence stress correctly. 4- To draw EFLLs attention to the role of sentence stress on pronunciation enhancement. It applies a quasi-experimental design as the major method of the study and it has certain sample, third year students, which are chosen from the students who are formally registered for the academic year 2019- 2020 at Faculty of Arts department of English language and literature in Omdurman Islamic University. Since the study adopts a quasi- experimental design Test. Teach. Test (T.T.T) is assigned to collect data from subjects. So, they are given a pre-test and then, according to observations taken by researcher handouts, worksheets and audio materials are given to the subjects to train them how to place word stress within a sentence correctly finally they are given post- test. They are asked to mark stressed words within a sentence. The paper outlines the following findings: a- Listening to audio materials by native speaker has positive effect on placement of sentence stress and intelligibility. b- Classroom interventions such as listening to audio materials and handout that were given to the subjects during prescribed course have positive impact on subjects' intelligibility. c- The subjects expressed increased confidence in speaking due to intelligibility which they gained. So, the amount of time subjects spent listening to and practicing along with the audio materials are also a good indication that they are headed in the right direction of improving their pronunciation as well as intelligibility. For further studies, the researcher suggests two topics to be carried out in the future. (1) The effectiveness of intonation and assimilation in intelligibility. (2) The effectiveness of supra segmental features in pronunciation.

مستخلص الدراسة

تهدف هذه الدراسة الي استقصاء فعالية ابراز الكلمة الماكد عليها في الجملة في وضوح المخاطبة بين العينة المستهدفة . تطبيق الدراسة المنهج التجريبي.و تم اختيار عينة الدراسة من طلبة وطالبات السنة الثالثة جامعة امدرمان الاسلامية كلية الاداب شعبة اللغة الانكليزية وادابها والمقيدين للعام الاكاديمي (2019- 2020). تم اختيار طلاب وطالبات السنة الثالثة كعينة للدراسة لانهم درسوا مقرر علم الصوتيات الذي يهدف الي تحسين النطق. اعطيت عينة الدراسة اوراق في كيفية ابراز الكلمة الماكد عليها في الحملة. توجز الدراسة النتائج التالية :

- 1- ابراز الكلمة الماكد عليها في الجملة وكذلك نطق الكلمة المراد توكيدها بزيادة في درجة الصوت مقارنة مع كلمات الجملة له اثر ايجابي في وضوح المخاطبة .
- 2- التدخلات الصفية مثل اوراق العمل التي وزعت علي عينة الدراسة لها الاثر الايجابي علي سهولة ووضوح المخاطبة بينهم.
- 3- تدل نتائج الدراسة علي تحسن ملحوظ في اختيار الكلمة الماكد عليها في الجملة من قبل عينة الدراسة نسبة للتدخلات الصفية المذكورة انفا .
- 4 الوقت الذي استغرقوه في الاستماع الي مواد مسجلة له اشارة جيدة في انهم ماضون في الاتجاه الصحيح لتحسين النطق ووضوح المخاطبة فيما بينهم.

Introduction

This paper is dedicated to the impact of listening to audio materials by native speakers on placement of sentence stress. Sentence stress is extremely important part of English language learning, both in terms of comprehending spoken English and increasing oral intelligibility. However, it can often be a difficult area for EFLs to master successfully. This literature review presents an overview placement of sentence stress. Recommendations for further researches in sentence stress are outlined.

Literature Review

The present study is dedicated to the importance of sentence stress in intelligibility.

Murcia et al,(2000) stated that the bridge between word and sentence stress can be illustrated by comparing the stress pattern of some example words with utterances containing equal numbers of syllables and similar stress patterns:

Multisyllabic	word
Utterance	
Overlook	
Tell the clock!	

Guarantee

can't you see?

Electrification

we took a vacation.

Identification

we went to the station.

For many EFLs, especially those from syllable- timed language backgrounds such as Arabic, simply hearing which elements in a sentence receive stress may be difficult initially. It is recommended providing EFLs with the metrical pattern of limerick (a humorous short poem that has five lines that rhyme.)

Examples of limericks

(1) MARY, MARY

Mary, Mary

Quite contrary

How does your garden grow?

With silver bells,

And cockle shells,

And pretty maids all in a row.

(2) LITTLE JACK HORNER

Little Jack Horner

Sat in a corner

Eating his Christmas pie.

He stuck in his thumb

And pulled out a plum,

And said "What a good boy am I "

Sentence stress gives spoken language natural tune because speakers can speak naturally without negative effect of their mother tongue. Like word stress, sentence stress helps EFL learners understand spoken English. It gives English its rhythm and beat. Celce et al (2000) emphasized that the term sentence stress is used to illustrate various stressed words in a sentence. The following examples clarify how sentence stress and word stress are similar in stress pattern in both multisyllabic words and simple sentence.

Attend / you did.

Mother / pay them.

Education / John is a lawyer.

From the above examples what is sum up is that the function of word and sentence stress is to create the rhythm of an English utterance. The rhythmic structure which is similar to musical phrase classifies and categorizes English language as stress- timed language. This means that the length of an utterance depends on the number of stresses rather than the number of syllables. Word stress is accent on one syllable within a word.

Some Rules for Sentence Stress in English.

- 1- Content words are accentuated or stressed.
- 2- Structure words are unstressed.
- 3- Time between stressed words are same.

In English sometimes structure words are accentuated or stressed what is said here there are exceptions for rules. The following example shows how some structure words are stressed

“They have been to the USA. Have not they?”

“No, THEY haven’t, but WE have.”

(B) I NEVER said she stole my money.

English language which is, different from other languages, described as stressed- timed language this means that the length of an utterance depends on the number of stresses rather than the number of syllables. As a result of this difference, EFL learners whose mother tongue is a syllable- timed language tend to stress syllables equally without decreasing unstressed syllables. Therefore, to solve the above problem EFL learners should listen carefully to native speakers who speak English naturally so as to know well how native speakers reduce unstressed syllables when dealing with word stress and accentuate content words that carry information in a sentence.

When words are said in connected speech, it is differently pronounced from saying them in isolation. Speakers may want to give more emphasis to a certain words. While, word stress is decided by language rule and can be thought of pronunciation as fact but there are some exceptions, sentence stress is decided by speaker choices. The speaker usually but not always chooses content words which carry more information than function or structure words such as auxiliaries, pronouns, prepositions and determiners. But, have a look to the following sentences which show even function or structure words can be stressed because the speaker give them more emphasis than content words.

(A) You made everyone believe Angela stole your money.

(B) I never said she stole my money.

(A) Don’t lie. You sometimes said she stole your money.

- (A) You have been thinking she stole your money.
(B) I never SAID she stole my money.
(A) You keep complaining that someone stole your money.
(B) I never said SHE stole my money.
(A) She only BOROWED your money.
(B) I never said she STOLE my money.
(A) You tell people that she likes to steal money.
(B) I never said she stole MY money.
(A) AND you tell people she steals from you.
(B) I never said she stole my MONEY.

From the above dialogue, words in capital letters are stressed even though some of them are not content words such as (I, and, she and never.)

Statement of the Problem

As it was observed by the researcher, the problem is generally seen or noticed in the struggle of Sudanese EFL learners (hereafter SEFLLs) university level to deal with sentence stress properly. In fact, during teaching at different universities, the researcher observes that university students do not pay enough attention and care about how stress falls in English words. So, they made mistakes when dealing with sentence stress because they do not know how stress falls in different words. To state the problem, the researcher uses some procedures such as classroom observations so as to see some difficulties that might students encounter.

Based on these classroom observations, the researcher formed general understanding of the problem. For example many (SEFLLs) who have attained advanced English proficiency levels are still having difficulties in communicating due to low intelligibility.

Objectives

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

- 1- To find out whether EFLLs are able to mark or highlight a word in a sentence which is given more prominence compared to the rest of words.
- 2- To investigate whether listening to audio materials (record speech) have positive impact and effectiveness on placement of sentence stress.
- 3- To enhance EFLLs ability to place sentence stress correctly.

Questions of the study

- 1- Is there a significant effect of listening to audio- materials by native speakers on placement of sentence and stress?
- 2- Are there significant differences between the experimental groups and control groups?

Hypotheses

- 1-There is a significant effect of listening to audio- materials by native speakers on placement of sentence stress.
- 2-There are significant differences between the experimental groups and control groups.

Methodology

This paper adopts quantitative experimental method, since; this paper investigates the effect of listening to audio- materials by native speakers on placement of sentence and stress.

The Population and Sampling

The population is students who recently registered in English language as foreign language programme at faculty of Arts in Omdurman Islamic University and they constitute and form total population of the present paper, and they register for the academic year 2019- 2020.

They share same qualities such as age, and number of years of school where they studied English language. In addition the admission of these students in the university is according to certain marks that they got in secondary school certificate examinations. Pre- test and post are given to the subjects to collect data. The data which was collected from

Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	T.Test	Sig
Control-post- test	70	9.3857	2.24120	69	-5.035	.000
Experimental-post- test	70	10.7571	1.88384			

Also, the above table shows that there is a significant statistical difference between experimental group and control group. This statistical result between the two groups which concerns with the subjects' answers to post test part two questions. The mean of experimental group (10.75) is greater than the mean of control group (9.38). This difference between two means indicates that there is a statistical significant difference between two groups. And it also emphasized and agreed with what had been hypothesized. It was hypothesized that there are significant differences between experimental group and control groups.

Conclusion

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

- 1- Listening to audio materials by native speaker had positive effect on placement of sentence stress.
- 2- Classroom interventions such as listening to audio materials and handout that were given to the subjects during prescribed course have positive impact on subjects' intelligibility.

the subjects, using pre and post tests, analyzed through the computer programmed SPSS by a statistical data analyst. The study results are presented in form of tables.

A table shows statistical results of the subjects' performance in placement of sentence stress

3- The result of this study indicates that there is noticeable improvement in placement of sentence stress.

4- The subjects expressed increased confidence in speaking due to intelligibility which they gained. So, the amount of time students spent listening to and practicing along with the audio- materials is also a good indication that they are headed in the right direction of improving their pronunciation as well as intelligibility.

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