

Stress in English and Arabic: A Contrastive Study

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Received: November 15, 2017 Accepted: December 5, 2017 Online Published: February 3, 2018

doi:10.5539/ells.v8n1p83 URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/ells.v8n1p83>

Abstract

This study is descriptive which describes and compares stress in English and Arabic in order to arrive at the points of similarity and difference. This is primarily achieved by showing its degrees, types, and functions, by surveying the literature available and by contrasting it in the two compared languages, conducting a contrastive study. The study hypothesizes that there is no difference between English and Arabic in terms of degrees, types and functions of stress. The study finds out that stress as a phenomenon exists in both languages and it is not phonemic. In addition, in both languages, it is connected with strong syllables, and its primary functions of stress are emphasis and contrast.

Keywords: contrastive study, stress, English, Arabic

1. Introduction

Stress is the most familiar prosodic feature which is problematic in that it is difficult to describe its actual nature. In English, phonologists are in disagreement about whether to tackle stress from an articulatory point of view (what the speaker does in producing stressed syllables) or from an auditory one (what the characteristics of sounds that make a syllable seems to a listener to be stressed). Many writers say that English word stress is a property of words themselves and to be learned when the word itself is learned. If it is wrongly placed, words become unrecognizable. However, it must be distinguished that in most cases when a native speaker of English comes across unfamiliar words, s/he pronounces them with correct stress. It would be wrong to say that stress pattern is always fixed in English words because stress position may be changed for one of two reasons: either as a result of stressing other words which occur next to the word in the question or as a result of the native speakers being not in agreement on the placement of stress in some words.

In Arabic, stress as a phenomenon is present and it is so clear in standard dialect, but its study is scatted in bits in different references using very traditional references. Some phonologists believe in stress as a property of words while others set a list of rules to stress placement.

The present study deals with stress as a prosodic feature which makes up the prominence of sounds, syllables, words, phrases and sentences. It attempts to answer the following questions:

- 1). What are the rules which one follows to stress a syllable or syllables correctly in English and Arabic?
- 2). What is the extent to which the change of stress placement affects the meaning of a sentence in English and Arabic?
- 3). What are the similarities and differences in stress between English and Arabic?

The study aims at:

- 1). Describing stress in English and Arabic respectively.
- 2). Comparing and contrasting stress in English and Arabic by defining it, showing its degrees, types, and functions.
- 3). Showing to what extent both languages are similar or different from each other as far as stress is concerned.

The present study hypothesizes that there are no differences between stress in English and Arabic in degrees, types, and functions.

The procedures followed in the study are:

- 1). Defining stress, showing its types, placement and functions respectively.
- 2). Comparing and contrasting stress in English and Arabic.

The study is restricted to study and compare stress in English and Arabic. The type of symbols, used for denoting degrees of stress, is adopted by Roach.

The study is expected to be valuable for readers, researchers, translators, teachers who are concerned with stress.

2. Literature Background

In English, stress is defined from an articulatory point of view as the force of breath with which sounds are produced and from an auditory point of view, it is perceived as prominence. It is exchangeable with the term “accent” and it carries meaning.

In Arabic, stress is described as the compression, emphasis on a syllable within a word to make it clear in perception and higher than other syllables in the same word. Some phonologists say that stress means prominence or appearance. Traditional phonologists give stress different terms as prod, height, raising, force of pronunciation, accentuating, and lengthening stir. There is no difference in the definition of stress in English and Arabic. Hypothesis a is confirmed.

In English and Arabic, phonologists use different symbols to refer to stress like bold type, capital letters, and also different symbols like /' for primary stress, /, / for secondary stress.

2.1 Degrees of Stress

In English, some phonologists agree that there are four degrees of stress, they are: primary, secondary, tertiary and unstressed, yet others believe in other three ones: unstressed, stressed unaccented and accented. In contrast, some others mention three types of stress only: primary, secondary, and tertiary and others mentions two degrees of stress (primary and secondary).

In Arabic, a group of modern phonologists agrees that stress is divided into four degrees which are: primary, secondary, middle and weak and another group believes in the three degrees of stress: primary, secondary and weak whereas others mention two: primary and secondary. Degrees of stress in English are more than degrees of stress in Arabic. Hypothesis b is not accepted and the alternative hypothesis that there are differences between the English and Arabic stress in degrees, is accepted.

2.2 Types of Stress

This subsection views types of stress which exist in English and Arabic.

2.2.1 Word Stress

In English, not all words in English receive stress. Normally, content words receive stress but function words do not receive stress. In content words, the stress placement is decided according to some or all of the following factors:

- i) Its origin (whether it is of Greek or Latin origin).
- ii) Whether the word is morphologically simple, compound or complex (where affixes change word stress). English derivatives do not always follow the stress pattern of the roots they come from, e.g., “person and per” sonification
- iii) The grammatical category of the word (such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs)
- iv) The number of syllables of the word. In one-syllable word, primary stress is on that syllable e.g. heart. In two-syllable words, if a word is a noun, stress has to be on the first syllable e.g. c'onvert and if it is a verb, stress has to be on the second syllable e.g., Conv'ert. In three-syllable words, if the final syllable of verbs is strong, it has to carry stress: e.g., enter'tain. If the last syllable is weak, the stress has to be on the preceding (penultimate) syllable e.g. de'termine. If both the second and the third syllables are weak, the initial syllable carries stress e.g. 'parody. Nouns demand slight different rules. If the final syllable of nouns is weak, or ends with one consonant, the middle syllable carries stress: e.g., di'saster. If the final and middle syllables are weak, the initial syllable is stressed. Adjectives require the same rules. There is a tendency for the antepenultimate syllable to carry primary stress e.g. credi'bility. If words consist of five or six syllables, the primary stress is on the fourth syllable, the secondary stress is either on the first syllable or on the second e.g. organi'sation.

1). The phonological structure of syllables (a syllable, whose core consists of a short vowel (V), does not stress. Stress passes to a neighboring syllable, whose core consists of a long vowel (V:) or VC sequence.

- 2). Every word has only one primary stress.
- 3). Secondary stresses always precede primary stresses in words.

In Arabic, stress is automatic and determined by syllable structure. It is assigned according to the word structure. This means that stress assignment is determined by the syllable structure of the phonological word.

The Arabic syllable is stressed when it includes a long vowel followed by a consonant (vvc) or a short vowel followed by two consonants or more (vcc). Stress is on the penultimate syllable if it is a cvv or a cvc or if the word consists of two syllables and stress is on the antepenultimate if this syllable is cv. Words which have two syllables receive stress on the second syllable toward the end of the word; in three-syllable words, stress is on the third syllable. If there is no syllable of the above types, stress goes to the word first syllable. Stress always falls on the first heavy syllable (cvv or cvc) from the end, barring the final, and never before the antepenultimate.

Some rules of stress placement in Arabic words are:

- i) When the word consists of a sequence of syllables / cv/ the first syllable carries primary stress and other syllables carry weak stresses.
- ii) When a word includes a long syllable /v:/, this syllable receives primary stress and other syllables receive weak stresses.
- iii) When a word consists of two long syllables or more, the syllable which is near to the end of the word receives primary stress and the long syllable which is near the beginning of the word receives secondary stress.

In the place of stress in Arabic words, one has to look at the last syllable in a word, if it is of the fourth or the fifth type, it has to carry stress. Stress in Arabic falls on the last syllable in two cases: in case of stopping (?lwaqf) and if the last syllable is of the fourth or fifth type.

The main stress rules are:

- i). Stress is on the first syllable, no matter what that first syllable is like (strong or weak) e.g. 'ilaa (to, toward).
- ii) Stress falls on the second syllable (the penult) if the syllable is strong (CVV) e.g., ju'huudun (efforts).
- iii) If the second syllable of the word is weak (CV), then stress is on the third syllable (the antepenult) e.g. aa'Simatun (a capital). Stress falls on the syllable which includes a long vowel whether the syllable is in initial 'qaala (he said), medial yu'qaabil (he meets), or final position hu'maa (they both). of the word.

In the absence of a long vowel in a word, stress is generally on the first syllable except when germination occurs in the middle of the word e.g. 'naHnu (we).

2.2.2 Phrase Stress

In English, noun phrases consist of a noun (as head) which is the most important part of the phrase and it is accompanied by one or more other constituents as an article, a pronoun, a numeral or a determiner. The primary stress falls on the noun.

A noun phrase consists of an adjective and a compound noun, the primary stress falls on the first part of the compound noun. In a prepositional phrase, consists of a simple preposition and a noun, stress is placed on the noun. If a prepositional phrase includes a preposition with two or more syllables, there are two stresses. The primary stress is on the noun and the secondary stress is on the preposition. In a prepositional phrase including a compound noun phrase, the primary and secondary stresses are in the noun phrase. In verb phrases, stress is on the notional verb and the auxiliary verbs are pronounced in their weak forms. In an adjective phrase, the primary stress is placed on the adjective and the secondary stress is on the adverb. In compound adjective phrase, the primary stress is on the second adjective, the secondary stress is on the first adjective and the conjunction "and" is pronounced in its weak form. In adverb phrase (a short intensifying expression), the primary stress is on the second item.

In Arabic, the adjective carries primary stress in noun-adjective phrases e.g., fustaanun 'azraq (a blue dress). In the construct case, the stress is on the second element e.g., Kitaabu 'l-waladi (the boy's book). Particles usually carry secondary stress in connected speech e.g. Mina l-madRASati (from school). Furthermore, stress falls on the first element in additional structure (?ltarkiib il?Daafj) e.g., (Academy of Art, ma9had ?ltam0iil).

2.2.3 Sentence Stress

On the one hand, stresses that fall on words are sometimes modified when words become parts of sentences. The most frequent modification is the dropping of some stresses. The position of the strong stress varies according to the stresses of neighboring words in the sentence. The words, which have two strong stresses, when they are said

by themselves, are called double-stressed words. When such words are in close grammatical connexion with a following strongly stressed word, the second strong stress is weakened, and conversely when they are in close grammatical connexion with a preceding strongly stressed word, the first strong stress is weakened.

Additionally, it is said that the stressing of words in sentences varies according to the degrees of emphasis the speaker wishes to give to particular words. There are always words which are of greater importance than others.

The placement of sentence stress is determined by two rules:

- 1) Compound rule assigns primary stress to the leftmost primary- stressed vowel in a noun, verb, or adjective.
- 2) The nuclear stress rule assigns primary stress to the rightmost primary- stressed vowel in a major constituent (stress is treated as a feature of vowels). It is intended to account for all normal stress contours.

Most exceptions are due to pragmatic reasons such as considerations of information structure, contrastive or emphatic information, the need to express a particular attitude or illocutionary purpose, and presuppositions on the part of the speaker about what is new (sentence stress is associated with new information) vs. given information for the hearer.

Any word in a sentence possibly receives primary stress, even function words which are usually unstressed, when produced in isolation. On the other hand in Arabic, sentence stress is changeable depending on the emphasis placed on particular lexical items:

Denotative stress appears on sentences, phrases or words. If a word is important, this word has to receive strong stress or double stress. One sentence is used to give several meanings according to the placement of stress and its intensity at words of a sentence.

A word in a sentence takes primary stress to negate alternatives. Some phonologists call this type of stress emphatic stress.

When a speaker says words in isolation, each one of them takes primary stress. But if one says them all together, only one word of a sentence takes primary stress. One stresses a word according to speaker's purposes such as negating alternatives. Thus, hypothesis c is confirmed.

2.3 Functions of Stress

In English, stress has various functions. Stress is used to distinguish between a compound noun from an adjective followed by a noun.

Stress is used to differentiate identical words as with the nouns 'subject and 'record and the verbs sub'ject and re'cord. The stress is placed on a particular word in an utterance to emphasize it as in: I will 'never give in. (this is a threat). But an unstressed word may be stressed in order to highlight a contrast with something else:

I said 'accept, not 'except.

The job of stress is to create contrast (to reduce fuzziness in speech). Another type of stress is used to distinguish a sentence from its negation. This is emphatic stress.

English main sentence stress often falls on the stressed syllable of the final content word of a sentence and most exceptions are due to the need to express a particular attitude or illocutionary purpose, and presuppositions on the part of the speaker about what is new vs. given information for the hearer. The function of pragmatic stress is basically to call the attention of the listener to a particular point of information with the purpose of contrasting it with another or giving it more force or nuance of meaning. In addition, grammatical stress is used to show the grammatical category of a word (noun or verb). Stress is used to distinguish a word from a phrase (idiom). It is also used in a discourse to signal new as opposed to old (given) information.

On the other hand in Arabic, stress in words is used to show the construction of form. Arabic stresses ?alf il?θnajn to distinguish it from form of the past verb (?astaTa9a, he could) by ?alfathaa ilqaSiira.

Arabic uses stress to express different situations as surprise, interrogation, cynicism, emphasis, and warning. A speaker uses the same word with a different stress to express different meanings. Stress is used to express attractiveness, dramatization, solicitation, jibing.

Stress is used to distinguish the meaning from antonym. Furthermore, stress in Arabic is used to show some words and tools in sentences like: wh-question marks, solicitation, tools of negation (?alnafi) and prohibition (?alnahi). Stress falls on these words to show the functions of the structure. It is used to determine the required meanings and declare it.

Some functions of stress are common for both languages whereas others are limited to one language. Hypothesis

d is disproved. Thus, the alternative hypothesis, which is stated that Functions of stress in English are different from those in Arabic, is accepted.

3. Methodology

The methodology adopted in this descriptive contrastive study is based on studying the degrees, types and functions of stress in English and Arabic respectively. Three steps represent the layout of this contrastive study: description, analysis, and comparison. Stress is comprehensively described in English first and then in Arabic. This is followed by an analysis of the data available in the literature review. All the Arabic examples are written in phonetic transcription and then translated into English. The last step is making a comparison between the two languages in terms of stress. Based on that comparison, some similarities and differences between the contrasted languages are arrived at along with some implications for pedagogy and research.

4. The Conclusions

4.1 The Similarities and Differences

In the light of the comparison of stress in English and Arabic, some similarities and differences are arrived. The similarities include the following:

- 1). Stress, in the literature about the two languages, is the degree of force (or power of pronunciation) that is used in producing a syllable and it is received as loudness or prominence in perception.
- 2). Syllables not sounds carry stress. Stress is used to distinguish a syllable from the preceding and following syllables for certain purposes (such as emphasis, contrast, etc.).
- 3). Stress is associated with strong syllables and every word has only one primary stress.
- 4). Stress is of three types: word stress, phrase stress and sentence stress.
- 5). Articles do not receive stress in both English and Arabic but they are sometimes stressed for certain purposes in English.
- 6). Stress is used to emphasize a meaning and negate alternatives in both languages.
- 7). The placement of stress in sentences depends the relative importance of words in this sentence. The most important word carries the stronger stress.
- 8). Stress is used to determine the required meanings and declare it.
- 9). Stress in both languages is nonphonemic since the substitution of one type of stress by another does not bring a new meaning and there are some exceptions to this rule.
- 10). In both languages, stress is used to express certain purposes like emphasis and contrast.

The differences arrived at include the following:

- 1) Stress in English is variable whereas stress in Arabic is fixed. Arabic includes a list of rules that are used for stress placement. Whereas English includes stress placement rules that are applied on a limited number of noun-verb pairs.
- 2) In Arabic, stress is not used to distinguish word class. Whereas in English, stress is used to distinguish word class. The first syllable of nouns is stressed whereas the second syllable of verbs is stressed.
- 3) In Arabic, one uses stress to distinguish letters from marks e.g., when one stresses ?l?l?θnēn as in: katabaa (they wrote) to show the function of ?l?l?θnēn in the sentence and to distinguish it from form of the past verb kataba(he wrote) al-fathaa alqaSjra.
- 4) In Arabic, some words are stressed to express certain meanings whereas in English, this meaning is expressed by stress.
- 5) In Arabic, stress appears clearly on the independent pronoun e.g., (Kul, all). In English, pronouns usually do not receive stress.
- 6) In Arabic, stress is on auxiliary verbs to emphasize them or to show a certain purpose.
- 7) In Arabic, stress falls on supplements (almukamilat) such as: (fahasb), (faqT), (qaT), (albata).
- 8) In English, prepositions, articles, conjunctions, pronouns, auxiliaries and adverbs are stressed for specific purposes.
- 9) In Arabic, stress in words is used to show the construction of formula as: (maDruub, beaten), stress is on ?l?nēn to show the formula of (almaf?uul, the object. In English, there is no such a thing.

10) In English, there are three types of derivational suffixes in items of their influence on stress placement: suffixes preserve stress, suffixes shift stress and suffixes attract stress.

In Arabic, additions are accounted with the syllables of a word and according to these syllables, stress is determined.

11) In English, stress is determined according to the syntactic, morphological and phonological factors whereas in Arabic, stress is determined according to the number and the kind of existing syllables.

4.2 General Conclusions

Throughout the present study, a number of conclusions are arrived at:

- 1). Stress is associated with physical effort (force of production) and received as perceptual phenomenon (loudness or prominence).
- 2). Stress as a phenomenon exists in English and Arabic. Arabic traditional phonologists do not study stress and modern phonologists' study is still elementary. In English, stress is studied in detail.
- 3). The forms of stress in English are more than the forms of stress in Arabic.
- 4). Types of stress are alike in both languages: word stress, phrase stress and sentence stress.
- 5). Stress in Arabic is not free (predictable) since it follows certain rules whereas it is free (not predictable) in English. There are some rules in English which are applied on a limited number of words. Some phonologists say that in English, one has to memorize stress when the word itself is learned.
- 6). Stress is non-phonemic in both languages and there are exceptions for this general rules in English and Arabic.
- 7). Stress is connected with strong syllables in both languages not with weak ones.
- 8). Primary and secondary degrees are the most common degrees of stress in both languages. Every word has only one primary stress in both.
- 9). In both languages, words may include more than one type of stress.
- 10). The placement of stress in both languages depends on the phonological and morphological structure.
- 11). The syntactic structure of words is considered in the placement of stress in English but it is not considered in Arabic.
- 12). Emphasis is the primary function of stress in both languages not with weak syllables.
- 13). In Arabic, stress is used to differentiate between consonants and vowels whereas in English uses stress to differentiate between word class.

5. Implication to Practice and Research

The theoretical and practical sides of the study lead to some pedagogical implication as follows:

- 1) It is recommended that Arabic teachers and learners of English have to pay more attention to stress in English because it is different from that of Arabic.
- 2) Arabic learners of English ought to have a very clear idea of the use of stress in English because the placement, existence or absence of stress affects meaning.
- 3) Stress ought to be brought to the ground as a feature of classroom communication throughout regarding stress in every day speech.
- 4) Learners ought to have very clear idea about the similarities and differences of stress between their mother tongue and English for helping them to understand stress in both languages and use it.
- 5) Real world contexts have to be accompanied with the proposed textbook in TEFL in Iraq in order to make the role of the suprasegmentals clearer to the learners including stress.
- 6) Learners have to be taught how to use stress to achieve affective communication.
- 7) Conversation courses ought to be added to the second and fourth year at the departments of English to enrich the learners' speaking and listening skills.
- 8) The teacher ought to use the laboratory to make the learners practise stress.

In so far as the study implication for further research, the following areas need investigation:

- 1) A contrastive study can be conducted about intonation and rhythm in English and Arabic.
- 2) A study of stress in political discourse.
- 3) A study of stress in legal language in courtrooms.
- 4) Investigating the effect of using stress on the language of advertising.
- 5) Awareness and use of stress by Iraqi EFL university students in the Iraqi Departments of English.
- 6) A study of the persuasive power of using intonation in presidential election discourse.
- 7) A study of rhythm in political speech.
- 8) A contrastive study of stress between tone and intonation languages.

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