Investigating the Difficulties Faced by Iraqi Learners EFL in Using Contrastive Stress

A **Paper**

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بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ

﴿وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْوَاتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ﴾

صدق الله العلي العظيم(آل عمران:١٦٩)

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1. The Problem of the Study

Stress is   as a vital part of both speaking and listening in stress timed-languages .As a result, English is considered as a stress –timed language, so, it is obliged to take the stress into consideration while examining it . Notably , the Stress can occur on both syllables in a word and words in a sentence .Thus. it can be divided into word stress and sentence stress .The Researcher's focus will be on a type of sentence stress which is called Contrastive Stress.

Consequently, the recent paper will answer the following questions:

1-What is Contrastive Stress and its functions ?

2- How does this Type of Stress occur and shift in sentence ?

3- How does this Type of Stress change the meaning in Spoken English

1.2. The Aims of the Study

The Study aims at:

*1-*providing suitable linguistic background concerning Contrastive Stress.

 *2-*providing suitable methods as to make Iraqi EFL able in using Contrastive Stress*?*

1.3. The Hypotheses of the Study

The study is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL Learners will face some sort of difficulty in using Contrastive Stress in an appropriate form by making the unstressed syllable almost as prominent as the stressed syllable in words and giving inappropriate prominence to syllables in sentences.

1.4. The Limits of the Study

- The study is limited to express the linguistic usage of Contrastive Study in English.

1.5. The Procedures of the Study

The study adopts the following procedures so as to achieve its aims:

1-providing a theoretical background about the linguistic usage of Contrastive Stress

2- providing a Diagnostic Test done by Iraqi EFL Learners as diagnose the difficulties of the Contrastive Stress.

3-Comping up with Conclusions

1.6 .The Value of the Study

The study is hoped to be useful to different field of the studies of English and to be of benefit to learners ,teachers ,and text designers.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1.Introductory

This chapter will look at the theoretical part of the current study. Some definitions concerning the Phonological phenomena, i.e. Stress , its nature and levels, that will be presented as to demonstrate the study.

2.2.What is Stress ?

The ability of understanding speech involves the ability of controlling the sound system. One of the important elements of the sound system is stress. **Ladefoged and Johnson (2011:249**) state that <u>**stress**</u> is :

 A suprasegmental feature of utterance. It applies not to individual vowels and consonants but to whole syllable wherever they might be. A stress syllable is pronounced with a greater amount of energy than an unstressed syllable and is more prominent in the flow of speech.

The problem with stress is that if a non-native speaker produces a word with the wrong stress pattern, an English listener may have difficulty in understanding the word. This fact is emphasized by **O'Conner (1980:91)** when he states that stressing the wrong syllable damages the form of the word and may make it very difficult to hear and understand.

Roach (**2009:73**) defines stress as the degree of force used in the pronounciation of a certain syllable**. Gimson (1989:228)** refers to stress as a capcity of the pronunciation for the speaker and the higher sound for the listener. There is a strong relationship between stress and syllable. **Lodge (2009:76)** points out that a stressed syllable is produced with strong energy which makes it unique**. Gussenhoven and Jacobs (2011:32)** also argue that a stressed syllable appears in any words as more prominent than other syllables in the same word.

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2.3. Factors of Stress

Roach (2009:73) indicates that the essential characteristic of stressed syllable is prominence. Roach (ibid:74) points out that this prominence is affected by four important factors :

1. **Loudness** is a component of stressed syllable. Stresses syllables are all louder than unstressed ones. This is a direct result of speech production factors.

2. **Length** is one of the affective component in the prominence. A stressed syllable has a longer duration and strong vowels than unstressed syllable.

3. **Pitch** is a very important part of perceptual characteristic of speech sound. Each syllable of the word is produced either as low or high pitched. Stressed syllable is resulted as higher pitch which makes it prominent.

 4. **Vowel quality** is one of the affective part in determining the prominence of stressed syllable. Stressed syllable contains a vowel that is different from other syllables around it. So that, the prominence of stressed syllable can be showed by comparing it with other syllables near it.

Roach (ibid) states that prominence is made by those four factors in combination and may be made by only one or two of them.

2.4. Placement of stress

Roach(2009:76) divides the languages of the world into two groups on the basis of placement of the stress. The first group contains languages which have fixed place for the stress in words like, French language in which the last syllable is usually stressed. The second group contains languages in which there is no fixed place for stress in words. For example, in English language there is a difficulty to predict the placement of word stress.

The Learners of English language must use the correct placement of stress. For example, the shift of stress in words such as **(desert) /** ˈ**dezət /** and **(desert) / dɪ**ˈ**zɜ**:**t /** may make confusion if they are not pronounced with proper stress. **Kenworthy (1987:28)** points out this problem and states:

If a non-native speaker produces a word with wrong pattern , an English listener may have great difficulty in understanding the word, even if most of the individual sounds have been well pronounced. In listening, if learners of English expect a word to have a particular stress pattern, they may not recognize it when a native speaker says it. In other words, what they hear doesn't match what they have in their mental dictionary.

According to the above quotation, it is concluded that there is a strong relationship between stress and the class of the word. Gimson (1989:235), McMahon (2002:120), Roach (2009:87), Ladefoged & Johnson (2011:112) and Collins & Mess (2013:132) indicate that English language has pairs of two-syllable words in which the placement of stress play main role in determining their syntactic category (noun, adjective or verb)

Examples:

Words	Nouns	Verbs
conflict	ˈkɒnflɪkt	kənˈflɪkt
import	ˈɪmpɔ:t	ɪmˈpɔ:t
insult	ˈɪnsəlt	ɪnˈsʌlt
abstract	ˈæbstrækt	æbˈstrækt
subject	ˈsʌbdʒɪkt	səbˈdʒekt

2.5. Contrastive Stress

Contrastive Stress Besides its pronunciation, contrastive stress is often signaled by lexical and grammatical features (Cowles, Walenski, & Kluender, 2007). For example, Theune (1999) argues that the existence of alternative items in speech (as in choice questions) and grammatical parallelism are strong predictors of contrastive stress.

Contrastive stress is also associated with "focus-sensitive particles" (Zimmermann, 2008: 156) such as even, (an)other, and only. For example, the small child's use of "That's a BLUE car. That's a GREEN car. That's a ORange car. That's an OTHer orange car" at the beginning of this article has grammatically parallel sentences and a focus-sensitive particle (another).

Contrastive stress may also enhance the noticeability of a set of contrasts in the discourse (Cowles et al., 2007) by signaling the existence of a set of logically related contrasts (e.g., car colors in the previous paragraph),

The sentence stress on ONly in Person 2's turn signals a contrast with a set of other people in addition to Jim that the speakers are likely able to identify, even though the others are not mentioned.

Person 1: Who can pick her UP?

 Person 2: Jim's the ONly one free.

Person 3: SEriously?

Contrastive stress is multifunctional in English (Boer, 1979). It can be used to signal corrections to previous information, such as "But I didn't say ENcourage, I said DIScourage" (Gökgöz, Bogomolets, Tieu, Palmer, & Lillo-Martin, 2016; Zimmermann, 2008).

When the sentence stress signals a possible contrast occurring at the beginning of a speaker's contribution (e.g., It's a BLUE car …), it helps listeners anticipate the forthcoming contrast more effectively (Ito & Mester, 2012).

Finally, contrastive stress has been reported to help resolve interpretations of ambiguity in speech (e.g., "Jim yelled at JOE, but HE didn't pay attention"), especially with relation to which noun phrase is referred to by a pronoun (Cowles et al., 2007).

These three primary uses of contrastive stress (correction, anticipation, and learners resolution of ambiguity) suggest that the feature is important for both for perception and production. For perception, identification of contrastive stress is important in order for learners to interpret the speaker's intended meaning. For production, it is important for them to clearly mark what they are talking about so that listeners can attend to meaning more readily. Successful use of contrastive stress thus holds for improving the comprehensibility of promise.

As a matter of fact, Contrastive stress is used to point out the difference between one object and another. Contrastive stress tends to be used with determiners such as 'this, that, these and those'.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The test is defined by **Al-Juboury (1999:1**) as a means of checking what students can do with the language ,and what they cannot do. So, in this paper ,a description of the test is presented including a short view about the characteristics of a good test , the designation of the test, its material and to whom it is applied.

3.2. The characteristics of a Good Test

3.2.1. Validity

According to **Al-Juboury(1999:22**),validity is "the degree to which a test measures what is supposed to measure." In validity ,two questions must be considered:

1-What precisely does the test measure?

2-How well does the test measure?

In fact, there are four kinds of validity:

a-Content Validity

It is the most important type of validity which means the extent to which the test adequately covers the material to be tested.(**ibid**)

b-Empirical Validity

It is the best way to check the effectiveness of a test and how the test scores are related to some independent.**(Harries.N.D:19-20)**

C .Face Validity

It simply means the way the test looks to the examiners ,test administrators ,educators and the like and its importance should not be underestimated.(**ibid**)

d- Str. Validity

It is the degree to which a test measures the underlying concept it sets out to measure. It is often arrived at by correlating the scores of students on a test for which construct validity is designed with these of a test that is taken as ''bench mark;''**(Boyle and Fisher 2007:66**).

3.2.2. Reliability

Reliability means the ability of the test scores .If the same test given twice to the same group pf the students under the same condition,it would give the same results **(AL-Juboury,1999:23).**

3.2.3. Practicality

A test may be a highly reliable and valid instrument but still beyond the means or facilities.Thus, in the preparation of a new test or the adoption of an existing one,it is important to keep in mind a number of very practical considerations.**(Harris.n.d:21**)

3.3. The Subjects

A random sample of students from the Fourth Stage (Morning and Evening) in the Department of English, College of Education for Human Sciences ,University of Babylon, during the academic year(2022/2023).The sample of the diagnostic test consists of thirty students (Males and Females)

3.4.Test Material

The majority of items has been takes from the practical sources and the bibliography as well. The items have been selected in such a way so as to cover the study.

3.5. Test Design

The test consists of one question including ten VARIOUS items. These items have been selected in order to assess the students' **Performance** in Using **Contrastive Stress**.

3.6. Results and Discussion

This following table shows the number of correct and incorrect answers and their percentages as well.

Items	Number of Correct Answers	Percentage	Number of Incorrect Answers	Percentage	Total
1	15	50 %	15	50 %	30
2	15	50 %	15	50 %	30
3	1	3.3 %	29	96.7%	30
4	14	46.7%	16	53.3%	30
5	14	46.7%	16	53.3%	30
6	12	40%	18	60%	30
7	9	30%	21	70%	30
8	10	33.3%	20	66.7%	30
9	15	50 %	15	50 %	30
10	14	46.7%	16	53.3%	30
Total	119	396.7%	181	603.3%	300

Looking at the results of the **Table**, it turns out that the number of incorrect answers is more higher than the correct ones .For examples ,in Items(1),(2),and (9), most students have no problems in using Contrastive Stress   in English .On the contrary ,in items(3),(6),(8) and (10), the majority of the students face difficulties in applying contrastive stress appropriately .For instance, in item(3),which is the highest incorrect response, most students are incapable of defining the meaning of Contrastive Stress" **Contrastive stress, also known as sentence stress or emphatic stress, is a component of prosody that serves grammatical and semantic roles that can help clarify speaker meaning and aid in listener comprehension**

In fact, the results show that most EFL learners face some sort of difficulty in using Contrastive Stress forms in English .

Chapter Four
Conclusions

The conclusions of this paper can be summarized in the following points:

1. Stress placement in English language has separate positions at both simple words, compound words and sentences;

2.placement of stress also has a great function to differentiate between compounds and phrases. Compound words have a primary stress on the first word while phrases have a primary stress on the second word;

3. The place of the main sentence stress is manipulated by the speaker and depends on the information the speaker wants to convey;

4. Sentence stress is affected by the classes of the words in a sentence (content words and function words). Content words always receive the main stress, on the other hand function words are unstressed;

5. There are circumstances in which those function words are usually stressed such as when they show negation, emphasis and contrast;

6. Finally, the points are given above verify the hypothesis of this

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Appendix 1

Q/Choose the appropriate Options with justifications :

1- Contrastive stress does not tend to be used with determiners.

a-True   b- False

---**2-**
Contrastive stress is not used to bring out a given word in a sentence which will also slightly change the meaning.

a-True   b- False

3- When asked a question, the requested information is naturally stressed more strongly.

a-True   b- False

4- a stress imposed on a word or syllable contrary to its normal accentuation in order to contrast it with an alternative word or syllable or to focus attention on it.

a-True   b- False

5- In English, there is a class of minimally contrastive bi-syllabic words in which the relative stress of the two syllables signals the meaning of the word as a noun or a verb.

a-True   b- False

6- The expression of lexical stress may not be different in the speech of non-native speakers.

a-**True**   b- False

7- In English, it is common to stress certain words in order to contrast, clarify, and emphasize. When we stress a word, we make it louder, higher, and longer so that it sounds different from the other words.

a-True   b- False

8- Contrastive stress, also known as sentence stress or emphatic stress, is a component of prosody that serves grammatical and semantic roles that can help clarify speaker meaning and aid in listener comprehension

a-True   b- False

9- There are also times when you may need to stress one or two words in a sentence to emphasize meaning.

a-True   b- False

10-When the syllable stress moves from the first to the second syllable, the part of speech usually changes from Verb to Noun.

a-**True**   b- False