Influence of L1 Word-Stress Patterns on Pronunciation of Persian English Speakers.

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ABSTRACT *This study aims to figure out the influence of L1 word-stress patterns on pronunciation a group of Persian English speaker students at tertiary level in India. For this purpose, 60 topically unrelated sentences including 60 different target words with primary stress on different syllables were selected. The target population of this study were 24 Iranian students. In order to meet the objective of the study, each participant was asked to read the target sentences and his performance was audio recorded to examine the pronunciation of the target words in question. Finally an effort was made to contrast L1 and L2 stress patterns to figure out whether the pronunciation errors in the Inter-language of Persian English speakers were the results of Language Interference (LI).*

1. Introduction

The possible differences between the suprasegmental features of Persian and English have a great potential to influence the pronunciation of Persian English speakers. Stress, intonation and rhythm are widely thought to be the most important factors effecting intelligibility. Inadequate stress can significantly alter meaning and the ability to communicate in a language. A language learner who does not learn appropriate stress can experience constant misunderstandings and may even at times appear abrupt or rude. For example, considering the difference in meaning between the following two sentences:

Can you **GIVE** me that book please?

CAN you give me that book please?

The first example shows what word would be typically stressed in English. The focus of the sentence is on "give" and whether you are able to give someone the book or not. In the second example, however, the emphasis is placed on "can" rather than "give". This question makes it sound like the speaker doubts whether you actually are physically able to move and give the book or not. This may cause some misunderstandings between the speakers and ultimately could lead to frustration.

2. Word Stress in English

Considering stress rules in English, there are two different basic approaches that have emerged in the research fields: Chomsky and Halle (1968), who offers complex phonologically-based rules, and Garde (1968), who presents stress rules with respect to affixation. Chomsky and Halle (1968) outlined phonological rules that rely mainly on syllable weight and the notion of lax vs. tense vowels.

As far as suffixation is concerned, in the stress rules of Garde (1968), there are generally two categories as -ly and -ness that are identified as neutral suffixes which do not influence the placement of the stress and non-neutral suffixes that can be further divided into two sub-categories as non-neutral non-stressed suffixes which have an effect on the stress placement and move the stress to another syllable of the word than the suffix, for instance –tion, -ity, -ate, and non-neutral stressed suffixes which draw the stress on themselves (e.g. –aire, -ee, -ese).

Like Chomsky and Halle phonologically-based rules, the Garde's work was embraced by some other scholars such as Guierre (1979, 1984, 1985), Fudge (1984), and Fournier (2007). In short, the arrangement of word stress in English by easy and simple rules is not predictable. The historical nature of the English language which is a mixture of both Germanic and Romance components, which have different stress rules, has led us to a fact that it may emerge chaotic in its word stress rules. English shows irregular word stress that does not generally fall on the same syllable.

3. Word Stress Patterns in Persian

Persian word stress rules depend on lexical category and morphological classes within a category. Table 6.1 below indicates the places of main stress on some Persian words from different categories:

Categories		
Noun	Adjective	Verb
/ ke**'tɑ**b / "book"	/ divu**'ne** / "crazy"	/ xa**'rid** / "s/he bought"
/ nim**'kat** / "bench"	/ta**'miz** / "clean"	/ xa**'ri**dam / "I bought"
/xor**'ʃid**/ "sun"	/zi **b'** / "cute"	/ **'raf**tam / "I went"
/roy**'ɑ** / "dream"	/ bo**z'org** / "big"	/ **'mix**are / "s/he buys"
/ zende**g'i** / "life"	/ Ga**v'i** / "strong"	/ **'mix**are / "s/he buys"
/ Tava**f'oG** / "agreement"	/ ka**s'if** / "dirty"	/ **'be**ʃin / "sit"
/ ʔɑbgarm**'kon** / "water heater"	Xo**n'ak**/ "cool"	/ **'na**midɑnest / "s/he didn't know"
/ mɑ**ˈʃin** / "machine"	/ Gol**'dɑr /** "colourful"	/**'na**ʃin / "don't sit"

Table 6.1: The pace of primary stress on words from different categories

The examples in the first and second columns of the table above show that for nouns and adjectives the primary stress goes on the final syllable of the word. For the verbs as it was shown in third column, however, the pattern is not clear. Whereas in / xa**'rid** /, the main stress is on the final syllable, / xa**'ri**dam / exhibits main stress on the penultimate syllable and in / **'mi**xare / on the antepenultimate syllable. As a result of such significant differences, different stress rules have been proposed for nouns and adjectives on the one hand and verbs on the other as follows:

- Word stress in Persian is simply predictable regardless of the apparent structure of the word and it can be mainly recognized by the type of lexical category.
- Stress rule for simple, complex and compound nouns and adjectives, and for simple verbs (verb without overt affixes):

a) The primary stress of simple noun and adjective in isolation is on the last syllable.

b) Primary stress on derived (complex) words is on the rightmost syllable.

c) Like simple and derived (complex) words primary stress on compound words is on the rightmost syllable.

d) Rightmost syllable of simple verb takes main stress.

- Stress rule for Complex verbs:

a) While stress falls on the last syllable of simple verb but the addition of prefixes to it changes the pattern of stress to the leftmost syllable, for instance; /dɑ**nest**/ "knew" is changed to /mi/(3rd ps) + /dɑnest/ = /'**mi**dɑnest/ «s/he knew" and finally it is changed to /na/(negative markers) + / '**mi**dɑnest/ = / '**na**midɑnest/ "s/he did not know" by adding these prefixes.

b) Two types of suffixes are distinguished: stresses and unstressed suffixes. The stressed suffixes such as plural markers, ordinal number markers, comparative and superlative markers make no difference to the stress pattern since they take the main stress of the word, so the primary stress in these words is on the last syllable like simple ones, for instance; /da'**raxt**/ "tree" + /ɑn/ (plural marker) ===> /daraxt'**ɑn**/ "trees"

/dah/ "ten" +/om/ (ordinal number markers) ===> / dah**'om**/ "tenth"

/zi**b'ɑ**/ "beautiful" + /tar/ (comparative markers) ===> zibɑ'**tar**/ "more beautiful"

/zi'**bɑ**/ "beautiful" + /tarin/ (superlative markers) ===> / zibɑ'**tarin**/ "most beautiful"

c) However, the unstressed suffixes such as nominal suffixes, personal suffixes, e zafe (-e) and the indefinite suffix /-i/ never take the stress of the stem to which they are attached, for instance;

✓ **Nominal suffixes:**

/ke'**tɑb**/ "book" + /am/ "my" (nominal suffix) ===> /ke'tɑbam/ "my book"

/ke'**tɑb**/ "book" +/at/ "your" (nominal suffix) ===> /ke'tɑbat/ "your book"

/ke'**tɑb**/ "book" + /aʃ/ "his" (nominal suffix) ===> /ke'tɑbaʃ/ "his book"

✓ **Personal suffixes:**

/ge'**reft**/ "took" + /am/ "I" (personal suffix) ===> / ge'**reft**am/ "my book"

/ge'**reft**/ "took" +/i/ "you" (personal suffix) ===> /ge'**reft**i / "your book"

/ge'**reft**/ "took" + /im/ "we" (personal suffix) ===> /ge'**reft**im/ "we took"

✓ **Indefinite Suffix:**

/ke'**tɑb**/ "book" + /i/ (indefinite Suffix) ===> / ke'**tɑb**i/ "a book"

4. Findings

By analyzing the collected data from target population of this study and based on the different stress patterns of Persian and English at word level, the most important differences between the two language in question are categorized to figure out the errors that Persian English speakers encountered as follows:

4.1 Simple Word:

Most of the target population pronounced the English words with the primary stress on the final syllable based on the stress patterns of their L1, for example:

English	Persian
'**den**tist	den'**tist**
ina'**bility**	inabili'**ty**

4.2 Nominal Compounds:

In nominal compounds the stress falls on the final member of the compound in Persian, but in English it occurs in the initial compound, so based on these differences most of the participants put the stress on the final member of the English nominal compounds, for instance; **WHITE** House (a special house) is pronounced as White **HOUSE** (any house with white colour).

4.3 Determiner/Numeral plus Head:

As in Persian a compound consisting of a determiner/numeral plus a head has the stress on the first member of the combination, but in English, it is on the first constituent, Persian English speakers pronounced ''that **CAT**'' and ''these **BOOKS**'' as ''**THAT** cat'' and ''**THESE** books'' with stress on the first member of the combination, respectively.

4.4 Modifier plus Head Compound:

Most of the participants pronounced a compound including a modifier and a head with the primary stress on the modifier noun as it is usual in Persian, so the compound ''five **DAYS**'' was pronounced as "**FIVE** days" with stress on modifier instead of head.

4.5 Adverbial Phrase:

As in Persian the first and in English the last member of adverbial phrase take the primary stress respectively, some of the participants pronounced the adverbial phrases by locating the stress on the first member, for instance;

English	Persian
Very **NICE**	**VERY** nice
Completely **WRONG**	**COMPLETELY** wrong

4.6 Interrogative:

While in Persian the interrogatives carry the stress, some of the participants pronounced the English interrogatives with a primary stress on the question particle, for example:

English	Persian
When do you **come**?	**When** do you come?
Where **are** you?	**Where** are you?
How is your **son**?	**How** is your son?

4.7 Negative Prefix:

As In English the negative prefixes are unstressed but they are stressed in Persian, some of our target Persian English speakers put the primary stress on the negative markers, for example:

English	Persian
I will not **GO**.	I will **NOT** go.
I cannot **SEE**.	I can**NOT** see.

5. Conclusion:

The focus of contrastive analysis of English and Persian stress in this study was around two important assumptions. First, the degree of differences between the two languages in question at stress level shows the level of difficulty for the Persian English speakers. Second, the level of stress similarity is supported to relate to the level of simplicity. In this way, the greater the differences, the more troublesome was for the speakers and clearly the more similar the languages, the less complex was for them.

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