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SHOULD WE TEACH CONSTRUCTION STRESS TO ESL/EFL STUDENTS?

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Abstrak: Guru-guru yang mengajar bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua sering menjadikan buku teks sebagai panduan untuk menyampaikan pengajaran. Ketika mengajar tajuk penekanan kata dalam kata majmuk, guru-guru sering menghadapi masalah. Banyak tajuk yang terdapat dalam teks tentang sebutan bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua, namun tidak ada yang menyatakan tentang penekanan kata dalam kata majmuk (kata nama, kata bilangan, kata adjektif, kata kerja) dan pembinaan kata kerja yang terdiri daripada banyak kata. Setakat ini tidak ada panduan yang jelas tentang aspek penekanan kata dalam bahan-bahan bercetak disebabkan ketiadaan persetujuan pendapat dalam hal tersebut. Rasional mengajar penekanan kata bergantung pada cara penekanan tersebut membentuk fungsi dalam fonologi bahasa Inggeris dan kepentingannya dalam komunikasi lisan. Berdasarkan rasional tersebut, kertas kerja ini diharap dapat memberikan panduan kepada guru tentang apa yang perlu diajar dalam penekanan kata dan mengapa hal tersebut penting untuk pelajar.

Abstract: ESL/EFL teachers often look to their textbooks to guide their choice and presentation of course content. When they come to the topic of construction stress, they are frequently puzzled. Of the many topics typically covered in ESL/EFL pronunciation texts, none is presented quite so erratically as the stress of compound constructions (nouns, numbers, adjectives, verbs) and multi-word verb constructions. Clear guidance on what to include in instruction is not available because a consensus is absent in published materials. The rationale for teaching construction stress lies in the ways these stress patterns function in the phonology of English and their importance in the success of oral communication. On the basis of this rationale, this paper offers guidance on what to teach and why these choices are especially appropriate for learners.

INTRODUCTION

An ESL/EFL teacher is putting together a syllabus for a pronunciation course or for the pronunciation portion of an English course. When the teacher comes to the topic of construction stress – the stress of units like compound nouns, compound adjectives, compound numbers, compound verbs, and multi-word verbs – the picture is unclear. The teacher is forced to ask: Should I include construction stress or leave it out? Do my students really need this content or not? Are these stress patterns important?

Assuming that textbook writers include in their materials what they consider most important for students' success, teachers will hesitate when they come to construction stress because this topic is given quite uneven treatment in pronunciation textbooks compared with other pronunciation topics such as vowel

and consonant contrasts, intonation, vowel reduction and word stress. Sometimes constructions are not mentioned at all (Morley 1979). More commonly, only one or two constructions are noted (Hewings & Goldstein 1998; Heinrichson et al. 1999). Occasionally, we find a generous serving of construction stress information (Dickerson 1989; Dauer 1993).

WHAT SHOULD THE TEACHER DO?

This paper intends to offer some clarity on the matter of construction stress – its role in the sound system, in communication, and potentially in an ESL/EFL curriculum. In the end, we recommend a well-considered course of action to guide the teacher in planning a syllabus.

What Are Constructions? A Definition

Constructions are strings of words – usually two or three in number – which together behave as a single part-of-speech. Constructions can be pluralized, conjugated, modified and used in the same ways as comparable single-word parts-of-speech. That is, constructions are recognized by their behavioral properties. The following gives a comparison of constructions and single words used as the same part-of-speech, namely, as nouns, adjectives, numbers and verbs.

	Construction	**Word**
Noun:	I haven't gotten all of my textbooks.	I haven't gotten all of my books (or texts).
Adjective:	He's a well-respected benefactor.	He's an esteemed benefactor.
Number:	Yours is seat number twenty-three.	Yours is seat number eleven.
Verb:	We backpacked into the hills.	We hiked into the hills.
	She handed her paper in.	She submitted her paper.

We emphasize that constructions are recognized by their grammatical properties; they are not characterized uniquely by their stress. In fact, two quite different stress patterns are found for each of the following constructions: compound

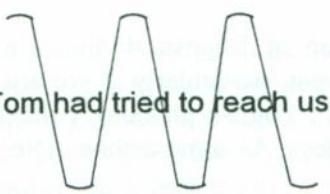
nouns, compound adjectives, compound numbers, compound verbs and multi-word verbs. For example, in "He's a well-respected bénefactor", heaviest stress is on *benefactor,* but in the compound adjective, heavier stress is regularly on *well* and lighter stress is on *respected*: *WELL respected.* The opposite is the case in "The benefactor is well-respécted", where *well* has less stress than *respected*: *well RESPECTED.*[1]

How Do Constructions Fit Into the Sound System?

Ultimately, if we are to teach construction stress, we will do so because we believe that this topic is so integral to the clarity of speech that we cannot afford to omit it from the learner's menu. Is construction stress really that important? Yes, it is, and for several reasons, the first of which is that the stress of constructions is exceptionally important in maintaining the characteristic heavy – light stress alternation of English phrase rhythm. As we will see in the next section, a properly alternating rhythm is essential to intelligibility. To understand how construction stress fits into phrase rhythm, we must review the larger picture of what is known as stress-timed rhythm. We begin by clarifying what is meant by "alternation" or "rhythm". We then discuss the grammatical basis of English rhythm. Finally, we sort out the nature of the sounds in different parts of the rhythm.

The Meaning of Alternation

The term "stress-timed rhythm" is based on the claim that heavy beats or stresses come at approximately equal intervals across a phrase.[2] The heavy – light stress alternation can be visualized as a series of evenly timed peaks of prominence separated by valleys of prominence. To tap out the heavy beats of this sentence, we need only three taps.

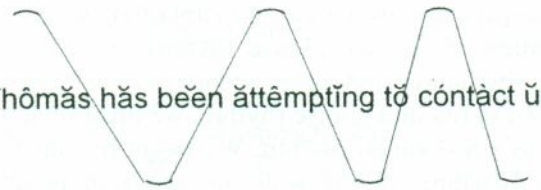


[1] It is not the intent of this paper to present the stress patterns of constructions. Instead, as we go along, we will cite published works that offer accurate descriptions of the patterns. We will, however, draw on the descriptive information to illustrate the main points of this paper.

[2] Stress-timed rhythm contrasts with syllable-timed rhythm in which each syllable has approximately the same degree of stress and duration (Avery & Erhlich 1992: 73–74). These descriptions are two ends of a hypothetical continuum. English, Finnish, Russian are on the stress-timed end; most other languages are closer to the syllable-timed end. *Note:* The graphics shown

In what sense is an alternation present? The description of stress alternation and examples like the one above might suggest that heavy stress appears in every other syllable, with unstressed syllables sandwiched between the stressed ones.

However, as the following sentence illustrates, alternating stress does not mean syllable-by-syllable alternation. Rather, it means that peaks of prominence follow valleys, or vice versa, irrespective of the number of syllables involved. More specifically, while only **one** syllable may occupy a peak, any number of syllables may occupy a valley. Like the sentence above, the one below needs only three taps to indicate the peaks. Where there are many syllables in a valley, these syllables must be compressed considerably in order to keep the peaks coming at a regular tempo.[3]



The Grammatical Basis of English Rhythm

Textbooks commonly distinguish between **content (lexical) words** (main nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs) and **function (grammatical) words** (all other words such as articles, prepositions, pronouns, conjunctions, and all forms of the verb *to be*). The reason for making this distinction is to state the following correlation: An English-style rhythmic alternation is fashioned out of contrasting levels of stress, with content words providing the heavy beats and function words contributing the lighter beats (Hagen & Grogen 1992: 115; Grant 2001: 77–78).

As a broad characterization of English rhythm, this correlation is sufficient. However, it needs refinement, particularly if we are to see where construction stress fits into the picture of English phonology. First, it is not the case that all function words occupy valleys. As some authors note, a subset of function words

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accurately represent the location of peaks but their uneven spacing misrepresents their true timing.

[3] In pedagogical materials, we see variation in the names given to the different degrees of stress, in the uses of stress marks, and in the ways of representing stress levels, e.g. capitalizing, underlining, superscripting circles, dots, or lines, etc. However, they are called or represented, three levels of stress are widely recognized at the **word** level, e.g. *ácrobàt*. For our purposes, we refer to these three levels as major (´), minor (`), and unstressed (?). At the **phrase** level, four degrees of stress may appear because of the added primary phrase stress, e.g. *The âcrobàt is stróng,* where the presence of the primary stress (´) demotes word-level major stress to ˆ. Bowen (1975: 75) has a clear explanation of this stress marking system.

also fills peaks (Hagen & Grogen 1992: 115; Celce-Murcia et al. 1996: 153; Grant 2001: 81). These "loud" function words (to distinguish them from the rest which are "soft" function words) are of three particular types: demonstrative pronouns (*this, that, these, those*), interrogative words (*who, why, how, which, what,* etc.), and negative words and negative contractions (*no, not, never, none, couldn't, won't, didn't, hasn't*, etc.). A good generalization is that loud function words fill peaks with one of their syllables, while soft function words fill valleys with all their syllables.[4]

A second refinement in our picture of alternating stress rhythm, and the one pertaining directly to constructions, is this: It is not the case that all content words contribute a rhythmic peak; some content words are completely in valleys. In most constructions, at least one member constituent is in a valley. In the following examples, where P refers to a peak, and V refers to a valley, *books, class, respected, far, twenty, -teen, packed, handed...in* are totally in valleys. Significantly, these valleys are immediately adjacent to peaks. That is, virtually all constructions contribute to the fundamental pattern of phrasal stress alternation.

Noun: I haven't gotten all of my téxboòks. I'm missing one for my hístory clàss.
P V P V

Adjective: He's a wêll-respècted bénefactor, whose influence has been fâr réaching.
P V P V P

Number: Yours is seat number twènty-thrée. We leave in sêventeèn mínutes.
V P P V P

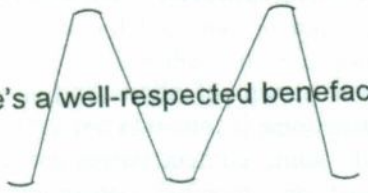
Verb: We bâckpàcked into the hílls.
P V

She hànded her páper ìn.
V P V

Vowel sounds in peaks and valleys. Finally, to explain the sound of vowels in peaks as opposed to the sound of vowels in valleys, authors contrast duration, intensity, pitch and vowel quality in this way: Peak vowels are usually stretched out more than valley vowels; peak vowels are usually louder than valley vowels; peak vowels are usually spoken on a higher pitch than valley vowels (Morley

[4] Some authors include reflexive pronouns (*myself, himself, yourself, ourselves,* etc.) and possessive pronouns (*mine, yours, theirs, ours,* etc.) among the loud function words (Hagen & Grogen 1992: 115). Reflexive and possessive pronouns, however, are always soft function words. They are prominent only when they carry primary phrase stress in a contrast situation. When used in apposition, reflexives are emphatic, e.g. *He himself was hurt.* vs. *He húrt himself.* Possessive pronouns are often part of a contrast, e.g. *A: I see people carrying umbrellas. I wonder where mine is. B: Yours is in the cár. Bob doesn't have his, either.* Beyond such contrasts, reflexive and possessive pronouns fill rhythmic valleys.

1979: 10; Beisbier 1994: 16). These are valid observations. However, we need to be careful not to go on to generalize that full (tense and lax) vowels are peak vowels while reduced vowels populate the valleys (Wong 1987: 40, 42).[5] This simplistic correlation is only half right: Reduced vowels are always in valleys, but full vowels are not always in peaks. The latter half of this observation is crucial; without it, we cannot create an English-style rhythm.



The example above illustrates the three places where full vowels appear in rhythmic valleys. First, the full vowel of *he's* is in a valley as are all soft function words (like *I, my, he, she, on, off, about, between*) that have full vowels. Second, since one content-word component of a construction is usually in a valley (*respected* of *well respected*, above), **all** of its vowels – full and reduced – are in the same valley. Third, if a content word has more than one full vowel, one vowel (the major-stressed vowel) is in a peak, and the other is in a valley along with all its reduced vowels (*bénefàctor*, above). One way to capture these points is to note that vowels marked with ´ and ˆ are in peaks; vowels marked with ` and ? are in valleys, as illustrated in the following graphic. These differences across a phrase are heard as an alternating stress rhythm.

In summary, while authors unanimously believe in the importance of alternating rhythm, they almost universally present the stress of constructions in isolation from the discussion of phrase rhythm. This fact and the simplistic characterization of stress-timed rhythm found in many ESL/EFL pronunciation textbooks have made it difficult for teachers to appreciate the role of construction stress in phrase phonology. However, as soon as we understand that full vowels and whole content words can be demoted in prominence to valley status, we can see that the stress patterns of constructions are part of the alternating peaks and

[5] Tense vowels are the glided vowels /iy ey ay ɔy aw ow uw/; lax vowels are the unglided vowels /I e æ ɪJ ɛ̀ ʊ/; reduced vowels are / ə ɨ /

valleys of prominence so typical of English phrases. The question for ESL/EFL teachers is this: Does the stress alternation generated by constructions matter for communication? The answer to this question has a direct bearing on how teachers ultimately view construction stress and its place in an ESL/EFL curriculum.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES CONSTRUCTION STRESS MAKE IN ORAL COMMUNICATION?

Does construction stress play a role in the intelligibility of spoken utterances? This is the heart of the issue for teachers. If construction stress is in some way critical for clear communication, then it will impact our curricular decision about constructions. Let us assess this question carefully by examining four levels of listener confusion arising from misstress constructions – misunderstanding of particular word strings, misdirecting the listener's attention by the wrong placement of primary phrase stress, missing cues to the presence of a part-of-speech unit creating cognitive overload, and losing comprehension from distorted rhythm. Each level of confusion offers a progressively stronger motivation for giving attention to construction stress in language pedagogy.

Disambiguating Word Strings

Some distinctions in meaning hinge solely on the use of stress. They generally involve a construction and a non-construction. Here are some examples with the constructions underlined. The interpretation of these contrasts is immediately clear to listeners who control English construction stress. For those who do not, they can neither signal such stress-based contrasts nor interpret them when they hear them.[6]

Compound noun

She likes yêllow jáckets but not yéllow jàckets.
[yellow garments vs. stinging insects]
Is it a gôld fish bòwl or a góldfish bôwl?
[fish bowl that is gold vs. a bowl for goldfish]
I fed her dôg bíscuits, but you fed her dóg bìscuits.
[biscuits are what I fed her dog vs. dog biscuits are what you fed her]

[6] Other examples of such pairs can be found in Bowen (1975: 79–82); Lane (1993: 116–117).

Compound number

Here's the bus. Is it the eight thìrty-óne or the eight thírty one?
[8:31 vs. 8:30 one]

Compound adjective

Did you say hîgh-àrched bridge or hîgh, ârched brídge?
[a bridge with a high arch vs. an arched bridge which is high]

Multi-word verb

She'll do it when she gèts aróund tò it. I'll do it when I gêt a rôund Túĭt.
[three-word verb: get around to vs. get an object (a Tuit) that is round]

How important is it to know construction stress to avoid confusions such as these? Given the infrequency of such pairings in ordinary speech, the avoidance of confusion does not constitute a strong motivation for teachers to teach construction stress or for learners to learn it. However, those who understand construction stress have an advantage over those who do not. Still, the rationale for placing a high value on construction stress must come from elsewhere.

Accurate Placement of Primary Stress

One of the principal functions of primary phrase stress is to direct the listener's attention to information that the speaker considers to be a new contribution or new focus in the discourse. The exact placement of primary phrase stress is subject, in part, to the normal placement of the major stress in a word or construction. That is, in the following example, when saying the construction *time zone,* the speaker will put the primary stress on *time,* the word that normally carries the heavier stress when the construction is spoken in isolation. Therefore, to be accurate in one's positioning of primary stress in a phrase, the speaker must know not only word stress but also construction stress.

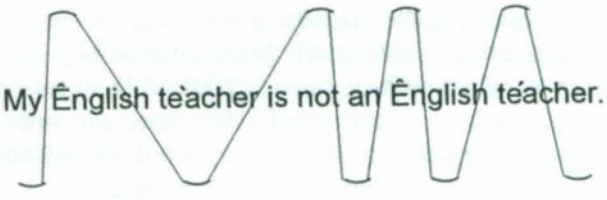
When I landed in Spain, I was in a different tíme zòne.

The listener may be distracted by hearing the primary stress on the wrong component of a construction. In a discourse filled with such misplacements, we know that the listener's processing speed and comprehension will certainly decrease (Hahn 1999). But are these problems serious enough to warrant attention to construction stress in ESL/EFL classes? They are serious, but by

themselves they may still not persuade the teacher to make room in a syllabus for construction stress. Stronger motivations, however, are available.

A Guide to Syntactic Analysis

How does the listener know that the words of a word string form a single part-of-speech and not separate parts-of-speech? The chief way listeners recognize a word string as a unit is by the distribution of stress on the words. Consecutive content words that carry major stress are taken by the listener as consecutive parts-of-speech. A deviation from major stress on content words, as when we demote the stress of one component of a construction, makes the word string identifiable as a part-of-speech unit. In the following example, by the speaker's deviation from major stress on the first instance of *teacher,* we know to interpret the two cases of *English teacher* differently. The first, with lowered stress on *teacher* and only one peak stress, is a single part-of-speech, the compound noun construction. The second with two peak stresses consists of two parts-of-speech, one, the adjective *English,* and the other, the noun *teacher.*



The point is that construction stress acts as a signal to aid the listener's cognitive processing of the sentence. Without these cues, listeners have to test different hypotheses about the grammatical status of word strings, a process that delays interpretation and may ultimately cause the listener to lose the sense of the message. Grant (2001: 51) highlights this point for words, but her point is equally true of constructions: "Listeners of English rely on patterns of stress to help them identify words. The more frequently you misuse stress, the more effort listeners have to make to understand what you are saying." Referring specifically to the contrast of stress patterns in *Ênglish teacher* and *Ênglish teacher* above, Bowen (1975: 78) says it is "one of the most difficult to master for many second-language students of English. Yet it is very common and carries a lot of information which must not be lost if the student is to participate effectively as a listener or as a speaker of English." What is it that is so difficult? What is it that carries so much information? It is the appropriate demotion of major stress to minor stress to create the necessary signal for the listener.

Since construction stress functions as a organizational device to facilitate the listener's processing of syntax, ESL/EFL teachers now have the best reason yet to provide listening and speaking instruction in this area. However, an even better reason than this follows.

A Contributor to Intelligible Phrase Rhythm

Native English listeners expect speech to be delivered to their ears with an alternating peak – valley stress pattern. So important is this pattern to the intelligibility of speech that departures from the pattern can lead to loss of comprehension or to misunderstanding (Kenworthy 1987: 19). This is why all pronunciation textbook writers emphasize the mastery of phrase rhythm. The point of the previous section was to show that construction stress fits into and promotes the expected rhythmic pattern. By using the expected pattern speakers make it easier for listeners to receive the information embedded in the alternation. Utterances containing mis-stressed constructions (lacking appropriate stress lowering) will be harder to understand because the mis-stressing disrupts the anticipated peak – valley alternation; they are noise on the channel distracting from and potentially obscuring the message and raising the irritation level of the listener (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996: 154). Such utterances may also color the listener's perception of the speaker. Grant (2001: 78) observes that English speakers give heavy stress to every word when they are angry or adamant. Therefore, "if you have a tendency to stress every word and syllable equally, you might sound abrupt, angry, or impatient without intending to."

The role of construction stress in maintaining the overall stress alternation of a phrase for the sake of general intelligibility is another significant reason for teachers to add construction stress to their pronunciation curricula.

In summary, the stress of constructions impacts the clarity of communication at various levels. It helps to distinguish particular, otherwise-identical word strings; it properly positions the primary phrase stress within a phrase; it signals the presence of a construction as a unitary part-of-speech; and it implements the customary stress alternation that native listeners depend on for clarity of reception. These progressively significant contributions that construction stress makes to successful communication are of such a magnitude that teachers must include this content in ESL/EFL instruction or else do a disservice to their learners.

SO WHAT SHALL WE TEACH?

If we are persuaded that construction stress is important content for learners, then we must ask how much of such information can be justified for inclusion in the

limited time available in an ESL/EFL curriculum. A number of criteria are potentially relevant to this decision: the practical utility of a construction, its frequency of use, the difficulty of learning the stress patterns, the potential for confusion from ignoring certain categories, and learners' propensity for errors with certain constructions.

The last criterion merits special emphasis; others will be mentioned as we discuss individual constructions. Experience tells us that learners from many language backgrounds mis-stress constructions in two main ways. First, some learners regularly stress the last word in a phrase. Let us call this the learner's default stress position. The effect of this strong inclination is to disrupt the stress pattern of all phrases containing constructions that require lowered stress on the last content word. Such disruptions can also send unintended meanings, as in *Justin is the clinic's head doctor*. If Justin is the clinic's psychiatrist (*heád dòctor*) stress lowering on *doctor* is mandatory; the absence of stress lowering will convey that Justin is the clinic's supervising physician (*heâd dóctor*) (Bowen 1975: 82). Second, since most languages tend to have a phrase rhythm that gives every syllable equal time and stress, students will not naturally demote the stress of non-final words. This is the learner's default rhythm. Again the effect is to disrupt the expected stress pattern of phrases containing constructions. It may also lead to ambiguity as in *I need twenty two cent stamps*. Is this 20 2¢ stamps or 22 1¢ stamps? Stress lowering on *cent* conveys the former meaning; stress lowering on *two* conveys the latter.

Stress differentiation is a characteristic of all constructions. Because of their default stress and default rhythm tendencies, learners will find it especially difficult to demote to a stress valley any construction constituent, whether in final or non-final position. As a consequence, their natural stress preferences will negatively affect every construction they use and the overall intelligibility of their speech.

Let us now consider the various constructions and the rationales that may be relevant for including them in or excluding them from a course syllabus.

Compound Nouns

Noun constructions are highly frequent in every field of endeavor and common in technical and non-technical vocabulary. They must rank highest on a teacher's priority for constructions to include in course content. However, compound nouns pose a challenge because two types must be distinguished. While most compound nouns carry heavier stress on the first element of two, such as *desktop,*

window pane, water cooler, many others have the heavier stress on the second of two, such as *kitchen table, evening paper, metal hydride, family business.*[7] The first type of compound noun deviates from the learner's default rhythm and will require special attention and practice to lessen the stress on the second element. However, even though learners will be more comfortable with the second type of compound noun, stressed on the second element, the teacher must still present this type in order to distinguish it from the first (stress initial) type (Hahn & Dickerson 1999a,b,c).

Of particular importance among the categories of stress-final compound nouns is the category of personal names, a type of compound noun stressed on the last component of the name, whether the name consists of a first and last name, a first, middle and last name, or a first name, middle initial, and last name. Despite the students' default stress tendency, they will want to introduce themselves by pronouncing their names as they are accustomed to doing in their native languages, using a non-English stress and rhythm. However, if they wish to be understood clearly by English listeners, they must pronounce their names as English listeners expect, namely, by giving the last word of their names the greatest prominence, even though it may sound odd and unnatural.

Compound Adjectives

Adjective constructions are much more common in writing than in speaking. Furthermore, while they are uncomplicated in their stress when modifying nouns, as in *snow-càpped mountains* and *frêsh-bàked pies*, they are much less straightforward as predicate adjectives, as in *The mountains were snow capped* and *The pies were frèsh báked.* On the basis of a lower frequency in speech, the complexity of the stress rules, and the fact that comprehension is little impaired by mis-stressing because there are few other structures a compound adjective can be confused with, we place this construction low in our list of pedagogical priorities even though any disruption of the rhythmic alternation is undesirable.

Compound Numbers

Two- and three-part numbers (e.g. *thirty-five, seven hundred and twelve*), and the *-teen* numbers (e.g. *seventeen, nineteen*) are considered compound constructions. Given that nearly all numbers (except 1–12, and the single-word *-ty* numbers, e.g. *eighty*) are compounds, the fact that numbers pervade every part of our lives, and their stress patterns – whether or not they modify a noun – are simple and

[7] Since these compound nouns have no unique stress pattern marking them as a syntactic unit, their first element is perceived as more adjective-like. Nevertheless, since they behave as part-of-speech units in the grammar, they qualify as compound nouns (Quirk et al. 1972: 241, 1013).

consistent, we must give this construction high priority in designing our syllabus (Hewings & Goldstein 1998: 58, 71; Hahn & Dickerson 1999a,b,c).[8]

Compound Verbs

Two separate words, written together or hyphenated, and used as a verb are considered a compound verb, such as *to proofread, to skydive, to air-condition.* They are largely consistent in their stress and therefore add little complexity to the learning task. However, in verb position, they are unlikely to be mistaken for any other part of speech. Given that they are also not high in frequency in ordinary speech, we would rank them low in pedagogical importance.[9]

Multi-Word Verbs

Two- and three-word verbs, also known as phrasal verbs, have a verb head as a separate word and one or two particles that are also separate words, e.g. *to look out for, to read through, to break up.*[10] They are never written together nor are they hyphenated. Multi-word verbs are so prolific in English that entire dictionaries have been devoted to them, e.g. Courtney (1983). As Celce-Murcia and Larsen Freeman have commented, phrasal verbs "are ubiquitous in English; no one can speak or understand English, at least the informal register, without a knowledge of phrasal verbs" (1999: 425). Furthermore, English speakers coin new ones all the time. Bowen, in his pronunciation text, notes that "the use of phrasal verbs is perhaps the most productive pattern of lexical creativeness in modern English. New combinations are constantly being added to the lexicon" (1975: 256). Since an English speaker cannot *get away from* phrasal verbs, and the stress patterns are remarkably uniform, it is important that we present this

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[8] Many texts make the erroneous claim that the difference between *thirteen* and *thirty*, and other such pairs, is a difference in second-syllable stress versus first-syllable stress (e.g. Prator & Robinett 1985: 21; Hagan & Grogen 1992: 157; Beisbier 1994: 20; Grant 2001: 54). In only *one* position is this true – phrase final without a following noun; when these numbers modify a noun, *both* have first-syllable stress: *thîrteèn désks, thîrt? désks. Thîrteèn désks* promotes the alternating stress pattern.

[9] Also sometimes erroneously included under the term compound verb are verbs with Anglo-Saxon prefixes, as in *understand, overflow* (Prator & Robinett 1985: 21). These are not compound verbs but prefix-stem verbs stressed by word-stress rules, not construction-stress rules.

[10] Adding to the confusion of patterns is a confusion of terms. A few textbook writers refer to phrasal verbs as compound verbs (English 1988: 62). Phrasal verbs and compound verbs are entirely different structures. Furthermore, compound verbs conform to the compound stress rule (as do compound nouns, compound adjectives, and compound numbers); phrasal verbs do not.

construction to learners and give them ample practice using their stress (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996: 142–143; Hahn & Dickerson 1999a,b,c).[11]

Of the five main categories of constructions, strong motivations exist for including three in a pronunciation course (compound nouns, compound numbers, multi-word verbs) and excluding two from a pronunciation course (compound adjectives, compound verbs). Learners whose listening skills are tuned to recognizing constructions by their stress patterns and whose speaking skills enable them to render these constructions with appropriate rhythm-promoting stress alternations will greatly enhance their aural comprehension and oral comprehensibility.

CONCLUSION

We opened this discussion with the question, Should we teach construction stress to ESL/EFL learners? The conclusion is now apparent: Yes, we should. We must do so because the stress of constructions plays a significant role in the listener's ability to understand and interpret the in-coming speech stream. But we must also be realistic. Since we cannot ordinarily devote huge portions of our pronunciation curriculum to construction stress alone, we must make choices of what to teach. On the basis of our experience, we recommend that teachers introduce compound nouns, compound numbers, and multi-word verbs because these constructions promise the most payback in terms of intelligible speech for the effort the learner will expend in learning them.

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[11] The common misinformation about multi-word verbs is that they are always stressed on the (first) particle (English 1988: 62; Lane 1993: 131). They are stressed in this way only in one syntactic structure: Whether separable or inseparable, the verb head and the first particle are stressed equally when an object carries the primary phrase stress. Other multi-word verbs are stressed on the verb head.

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