STRESS CRISIS AND PLACEMENT: PHONO-SYTACTIC ACCOUNT

Michael Alozie Nwala Ph.D

Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Choba, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *This paper examines stress crisis and placement in English using the phono-syntactic alternations theory. It basically notes both the predictable and the unpredictable standard stress pattern and the abysmal stress among some L2 teachers and learners in selected secondary schools is Port Harcourt city. The paper using the descriptive method analyzes the corpus got from the population. The paper observes that stress is abysmally realized among L2 teachers and learners in secondary schools in Port Harcourt city and therefore concludes that efforts should be made by the teachers to overcome this linguistic problem.*

KEY WORDS: *Phono-syntactic, stress. Predictable, abysmal; pedagogical and linguistics.*

INTRODUCTION

Phono-syntactic alternation is a linguistic process that involves an interaction between phonology and syntax. It is subtle but a phenomena occurrence that is evident as the class membership of English words may change in course of speech; secondly, as poor stress placement affects communication. The subtlety of this process is such that most English L2 teachers and learners are not aware of the communication damage abysmal stress causes. According to Malmkjaer (1991) phono-syntactic alternation happens at the phonemic level which is occasioned by change in the use of words in different context. Even though the stress pattern of words is one of the basic information about words, linguists have maintained that there is no way to predict the stress pattern of words especially as the context plays strong role and secondly, as stress can appear either on the first or second syllable as a noun, a verb, an adjective, adverb but that the stress pattern of each word should be learnt when learners come across words (Nwala, 2015).

Most of the times, by omission or commission, correct pronunciation of English words or correct stress placement is not considered by both L2 teachers and learners as part of the assessment of communicative competent in Nigeria. Ayoola (2007) also notes this situation and overgeneralizes that, in terms of spoken English only few Nigerians make the effort to speak internationally intelligible English. The observation should therefore be a matter of serious linguistic and pedagogical concern since English performs the global role of communication. The above postulation should not be overridden by the fact that in language study, more concern is paid to competence than performance. L2 teachers and learners should appreciate the fact that the mastery of the grammar of any language embodies both the linguistic and the pragmatic competence and therefore make both linguistic and pedagogical efforts to master the rudiments of stress

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theory adopted for this article is the phonological analysis, (hereafter, PA). PA is used here to narrowly refers to the observations of a particular spoken language in defined contexts with the aim of describing, explaining, evaluating and accounting for what is found, through phonological rules which entail notation that are regarded as "phonological formulae". Atolagbe (2004) corroborates the above when he notes that PA can be used to deal with single texts, samples of idiolects, dialects and diverse varieties of spoken texts which are then described phonologically; explained and accounted for in terms of phonological rules.

He states further that in PA, any of the following approaches can be employed namely, the phonemic, distinctive features, prosodic approach depending on whether the subject of analysis is phonemes, saprasegmentals, prosodies or rapid/connected speeches.

Crystal (2008) explains that theoretically, within PA, there are two branches of study namely, segmental and suprasegmental phonology. While segmental analyses speech into separate segments such as phones or phonemes; suprasegmental analyses features that extend beyond a segment such as stress, pitch, juncture, intonation contour or prosodies. PA is very useful to the language researcher, linguists, dialectologists, language teacher, literary scholars or anyone interested in language especially, in its spoken form because it exposes the very essence of phonemic realization or behaviours in different context.

Conceptual Review

The main thrust of this article is phono-syntactic alternation and stress. The concept of phonological alteration has been described by different scholars. For instance, Atolagbe (2007), Clarke, Yallop and Fletcher (2007) and Ladefoged and Johnson (2011) agree that the process of phono-syntactic alternation is the change in the phonemic quality of segments in a word in response to the context. This results in the change of the word class or syntactic membership. PA is a double-barreled linguistic study which shows a situational interaction between syntax and phonology.

Ladefoged and Johnson (2011,p.310) define stress as "the use of extra respiratory energy during a syllable"; It is a the phonetic term which refers to the degree of force used in the course of producing a syllables. He notes that there is a usual distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables, with stressed one being more prominent and identified in transcription with a raised vertical line, ('). In the words of Nwala (2016, p.74) "stress is one of the suprasegmental or prosodic features; it is a relative pitch used in the production of a syllable". Similarly, Elugbe (2000) notes that "syllables are produced with varying degrees of energy; syllables said with greater energy are said to be strong or stressed, while those said with less or little energy are said to be weak or unstressed".

Apart from the rising and falling of the pitch of the voice due to the energy exerted, stress can also be primary, secondary and even unstressed. The primary stress which is the main stress and which is produced with a stronger force is marked with an acute accent /′/ while the secondary stress is marked with a grave accent/ˆ/. The unstressed as it were received neither an acute none a grave stress, it is produced with almost no force. This paper is within the confines

of the primary stress; hence both the secondary and the unstressed syllables are not investigated.

The difference in the use of force to produce syllable warrants a difference in pronunciation. According to Adewale (2015,p.19) pronunciation is "the way a word or a language is spoken or the manner in which someone utters a word". McArthur (1996) gives a broader insight to the definition of pronunciation and says that it is the act or result of producing speech sounds which includes articulation, intonation and rhythm and that it can also be regarded as the sound system of a language.

METHODOLOGY

Here, the paper adopts a simple descriptive design. A descriptive research design according to Olaitan,Ali, Eyo and Sowande (2000, p. 83), employs the study of large and small population by selecting and studying sample chosen from the population to discover the relative incidence distribution and interrelation of social and psychological variables. Drawing from the foregoing, we note that Aquino (2006, p.7) also affirms that descriptive research design is 'fact-finding with adequate interpretation. According to him, descriptive method goes beyond the gathering of data to include the objective and basic assumption of the data. The importance of a descriptive research design is that it describes "what is, as it involves the description, recording, analysis and interpretation of the present nature, composition or processes of phenomena" (Manuel & Medal 1977, p.25). Using this method, we described the morphological and syntactic variation of some selected English words, with regard to their different stress patterns and the abysmal stress form of Nigerian L2 teachers and learners. The abysmal stressed words were randomly selected through a direct observation, during classroom contact (teaching and learning) exercises involving senior secondary students of five selected schools in Port Harcourt city of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Analysis
For the analysis, we first of all present the standard stress placement of words, and thereafter show the abysmal stress placement of Nigerian L2 teachers and learners. To do this, we used the uppercase system to show stressed syllables

The predictable stress type

Nouns	Verb
Insult	inSULT
IMport	imPORT
EXport	exPORT
SUBject	subJECT
PREsent	preSENT
CONduct	conDUCT
EScort	esCORT
CONtrast	conTRAST
CONStruct	consTRUCT
CONtest	conTEST
INcrease	inCREASE
OBject	obJECT
DIScharge	disCHARGE

CONcord	conCORD
ADdict	adDICT
ANnex	anNEX
CONflict	conFLICT
DIgest	diGEST
PROceed	proCEED
PROduce	proDUCE
PROject	proJECT
PROcess	proCESS
REbel	reBEL
REcord	reCORD
REfuse	reFUSE
SURvey	surVEY
SUSpect	susPECT
TRANSform	transFORM
SUPplement	supPLEMENT
TRANSport	transPORT
Upset	upSET
TORment	torMENT
CONvert	conVERT
ACcent	acCENT

The unpredictable stress type

a.   Stress on the second syllable but with a difference in one phoneme

Verb	Noun
resTRAIN	resTRAINT
adVISE	adVICE
comPLAIN	comPLAINT
reSPOND	reSPONSE
exTEND	exTENT
preTEND	PreTENCE
sucCEED	sucCESS
imPORtant	imPORtance
oFFEND	oFFENCE

b.   Zero alternation with stress on the first syllable

Verb	Noun
COmment	COmment
HiGHlight	HIGHlight
COMbat	COMbat
COMfort	COMfort
ACcess	ACcess
CONtact	CONtact
WiTness	WiTness
WONder	WONder
LAbour	LAbour
CENtre	CENtre

c.   Zero alternation words with stress on the second syllable

Verb	Noun
disPUTE	disPUTE
conSENT	conSENT
diVORCE	diVORCE
misTAKE	misTAKE
aDDRESS	aDDRESS
esTEEM	esTEEM
resPECT	resPECT
disTRESS	disTRESS
disSENT	disSENT
emPLOY	employ

The above data shows a change in the assignment of stress on syllables. As nouns, the stress is assigned on the first syllables; but as verbs the stress is placed on the second syllables. This change is always observed in the voicing of the syllables during the production of the words. The change in the position of the stress placement necessitates a change in both the pitch as could be heard during speech production. This is the general linguistic situation at the level of phono-syntactic alteration or interaction between phonology and syntax in stress placement.

The other group shows the exact problem with stress, why scholars insist that the stress pattern of each word should be learnt. Here we see stress in an unpredictable fashion, a situation perhaps that contributes to the abysmal stress placement by   most Nigerian L2 teachers and learners. The data below got from direct observation shows the abysmal use and placement of stress on syllables.

Wrong Stress by L2 teachers	*The standard Stressed*	*Wrong Stress by L2 teachers*	*The standard Stressed*
abaTOIR	ABattoir	purCHASE	PURchase
calENdar	CALender	safeGUARD	SAFEguard
charCOAL	CHARcoal	triBUNE	TRIbune
colLEAGUE	COLleague	urINE	URine
bathROOM	BATHroom	waistCOAT	WAISTcoat
bisCUIT	BIScuit	wardROBE	WARDrobe
boyCOTT	BOYcott	watchMAN	WATCHman
brandDY	BRANdy	whiSKY	WHIsky
coMMA	COMma	whiteWASH	WHITEwash
eDIT	EDit	workSHOP	WORKshop
saLAD	SAlad	groundNUT	GROUNDnut
haRASS	HARass	matTRESS	MATtress
horMONE	HORmone	miGRAINE	MIgraine
rainCOAT	RAINcoat	moRON	MOron
ranSACK	RANsack	taXI	Taxi
reLAY	RElay	oZONE	Ozone
reTAIL	Retail	tyPIST	Typist
perFUME	PERfume	proTEIN	PROtein
perMIT	PERmit	fronTIER	FRONtier
peTROL	PETrol	heLEN	Helen

pinPOINT	PINpoint	hyGIENE	Hygiene
coloNISE	COLnise	taLISman	TALisman
comproMISE	COMpromise	tantaMOUNT	TANtamount
favriCATE	FABricate	telePHONE	TELephone
fortiFY	FORtify	teleVISE	TELevise
eduCATE	EDUcate	theoRISE	THEOrise
gloriFY	GLORify	toleRATE	Tolerate
indiCATE	INdicate	tresPASS	TRESpass
occuPY	Occupy	victiMISE	VIctimise
oxiDISE	OXidise	specuLATE	SPEculate
paraLYSE	PARAlyse	stipuLATE	STIpulate
qualiFY	QUAlify	subsiDIZE	SUBsidize
quantiFY	QUANtify	summaRISE	SUMmarise
puncTUATE	PUNctuate	vapoRISE	VAporise
puriFY	PURify	hurriCANE	HURicane
scaVENger	SCAvenger	celeBRATE	CELebrate
simpliFY	SIMplify	cineMA	Cinema
reveNUE	REVenue	cylinder	Cylinder
rheTORic	RHEToric	tenTAtive	TENtative
roTAtory	ROtatory	harmaTTAN	HARmattan
rustiCATE	RUSticate	chriSTOpher	CHRIStopher
sacriFICE	SAcrifice	mainTEnance	MAINtenance
satisFY	SATisfy	triBAlist	TRIbalist
susTENnance	SUStenance	orCHEstra	ORchestra
syntheSIZE	SYNthesize	recogNISE	REcognise

Observations

The data clearly shows that stress placements in the English language have no common pedagogical predictability. The native speakers of English are able to assign stress correctly in all situations because it is part of their natural inheritance and linguistic endowment. The unpredictability in the placement of stress on syllables causes wrong and abysmal stress placement by L2 teachers and learner. It is a crisis situation because there is no known pedagogical remedy that is linguistically holistic.

Apart from the above, most L2 teachers and learners are not even aware of a phonological process such as phono-syntactic alternations operating within English words, hence, phonologically, the syllables are produced the same. There is hardly any perceivable change in the phonetic quality of the syllables, as the same degree of force is exerted in primary, secondary stressed syllables. The paper also observed that there is the challenge or influence of bilingualism evident in the L2 teachers and learners pronunciations of English words. The tonal nature of the indigenous languages interferes in their spoken English.

CONCLUSION

Thus far, the paper has investigated the predictable and the unpredictable nature of stress placement on syllables in the English language. The theory of PA, which defines the interaction between phonology and syntax, provides information on the changes in the phonetic realization

of syllables due to the placement of stress; it does not serve as a pedagogical instrument to L2 teachers and learners of the English language. This leads to an unwholesome and abysmal placement of stress on syllables by the L2 teachers and learners, which affects communication, hence, the description of it by this paper as a crisis situation, whose remedy is not in sight.

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