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Stress Patterns in Persian and English

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Abstract: Language learning has always been an essential part of effective communication and development. Being accurate in using the second language makes it necessary to be professional in all aspects of L2. One of these neglected but important areas is stress. Stress is melody of conversation and each language has its own stress patterns. Accordingly, negative and positive interferences may happen for EFL/ESL learners. In this regard, the present research provided a contrastive study on the stress patterns of Persian and English. Exploring similarities and differences can help learners to have better understanding of accent when using English language and speak fluently.

Keywords: Stress pattern; English language; Persian language; Contrastive analysis.

1. Introduction

Over years, researchers have tried to find ways to accelerates and ease learners' learning processes. In this regard, Fries (1945) claimed that in learning L2, "the most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner" (p. 9). According to Fries, similarities and differences between L1 and L2 are the main blocks of learning. Lado (1957) stated that "we can predict and describe the patterns of L2 that will cause difficulty in learning and those that will not cause difficulty" (cited in Carl (1990)). These comparisons of similarities and differences between languages are called contrastive analysis. Oller (1971) refers to contrastive analysis as "a device for predicting points of difficulty and some of the errors that learners will make" (cited in Carl (1990)). The theory of contrastive analysis was established by Lado (1957). According to him, learners transfer their L1 pattern to L2 acquisition process. Moreover, he claimed that similar elements between L1 and target language ease learning, while differences harden it. Therefore, by comparing two languages learners' mistakes can be predicted and hence prevented. In addition, instructors and teachers can prepare more efficient instructional materials.

2. Literature Review

In this study, we are going to study one of the problematic areas in speaking, stress patterns. The present research contrastively studied the stress patterns in Persian and English languages. Before we outline and discuss stress patterns in Persian and English languages, we review the literature.

Farsi and English have different alphabet, sound system, and syllable structures. The Farsi alphabet is a consonantal system and contains 32 letters: 23 consonants and 6 vowels as well as two diphthongs and a total of 29 phonemes (Samareh, 2000). Whereas, the English alphabet is based on Latin which contains twenty-six letters: twenty four consonants; twelve vowels; eight diphthongs and a total of forty-four phonemes (Sousa, 2005). Yarmohammadi (1995) believes that contrastive phonology is the process of contrasting and comparing the phonological systems of languages to discover their differences and similarities. Aghai (2011) believes negative transfer occurs when different linguistic elements are present between learners' first and second language and as a result some of these features prevent Iranian English language learners from producing the correct segmental features of the English language. Keshavarz and Ingram (2002) compared Farsi and English sound systems and claimed that the two languages are relatively similar in terms of their phonemes inventories, sharing 21 consonantal phonemes. Yarmohammadi (1969) conducted a research on the Contrastive Analysis of English and Farsi and presented negative transfer of learned L1 habits into English which can be expected from speakers of English. Wilson and Wilson (2001) emphasized the most common pronunciation errors produced by Farsi speakers by suggesting that although Farsi and English are similar in terms of their phonemes, the vowels, consonants and diphthongs that are not shared in both languages can become problematic for Farsi speakers. Moreover, Hall (2007) focused on the pronunciation of Farsi speakers and asserted that the differences between the sound system of English

and Persian influenced their intelligibility. He refers to a foreign accent as the constant occurrence of the phonetic differences from the norms of a language which L1 speakers of that language recognize as unfamiliar to their own language sound system. Learners' with a foreign accent may be intelligible, but understanding them requires more effort, or they may be unintelligible in the sense that they are often misunderstood. Hall (2007) states that in many occasions Iranians complained they were often asked by native speakers to repeat themselves in conversations, or were treated impatiently by those who could not understand the questions or requests that they had expressed.

To contrast stress pattern, we will categorize each group of words and examine them. Words are divided to syllable both in Persian and English; they can be either

	Persian	English
one syllable	/cheshm/	eye
two syllables	/medad/	pencil
three syllables	/khanegi/	vacancy

or even

four syllables /medadtrash/ beautiful
 the word-level prominence in all languages are related to a specific syllable in the word called stress (Hulst, 2010). Stress is a property of words in all languages which give a specific melody to that language. This structural linguistic feature of a word determines which syllable pronounces stronger. Words with more than two syllables can get stress:

	Persian
Simple words	/me'dad/ /asaba'ni/

Generally speaking, it is believed that in Persian the last syllable of words take the primary stress. In other words, strong accent of Persian words sits on the last syllable. However, there are some expectations to this role, inflectional endings, infinitives of verbs, some suffixes, etc. take a different stress pattern (Hayati, 1995).

/mi kesham/
/derakht 'ha/
/Bahush 'tar/

In contrast to fixed pattern of Persian words, stress pattern is not definite in English. They can sit on the first, second, either the third one, but mostly English accent tends to sit near the beginning of the word.

	English
Simple words	pencil /'pensl/ gigantic / dʒaɪ'gæntɪk/ Japanese /dʒæpə'ni:z/

As far as other constructs are concerned, the stress patterns are different in both languages:

	Persian	English
Nominal compounds	/ketab'khane/ (second part)	'bookstore (first part)
Complex compounds	/masule 'ketabkhane/ (second part)	'bookstore clerk (first part)
Compounds with determiner or number	/'dust am/ (first part)	two 'drugstores (second part)
Compounds with modifier	/ketabe 'mohem/ (second part)	important 'book (second part)
Compounds with two stress patterns	black 'bird (second part)	black 'bird 'black bird (first or second; depends on the meaning)
Indefinite determiners	/'hame kelasha/ (first part)	all 'classes (second part)
Adverbial phrases	/'besiyar ziyad/ (first part)	too 'much (second part)
Prepositional phrase	/dar 'hayat/ (second part)	in 'yard (second part)
Interrogatives	/'koja zendegi mikoni?/ (wh- particle)	where do you 'live? (unstress, intonation of sentence is at the end)
Negative markers	/dars 'ne mikhanad/ (negative prefix)	she doesn't 'study. (unstress, intonation of sentence is at the end)

As it is shown above, Persian speakers of English may transfer most of their L1 stress patterns to L2. Accordingly, they may face problem with stress patterns in English. All simple words in Persian are last syllable stressed, thus learners may pronounce *passage* /pæ'sɪdʒ/ instead of *passage* /'pæsɪdʒ/ by mistake. Similarly, learners put the first stress in nominal compounds of English on the last part and pronounce *'drumbeat* as *drum'beat*. Complex compounds, compounds with more than one noun, have similar stress pattern as nominal compounds. Extra nouns don't change the accent in both Persian and English languages. In pronouncing compounds with determiner or number, Persian speakers of English pronounce *my 'book* as *'my book*; they have learned to articulate such compounds with more accent on the first part. However, compounds with modifier have identical stress patterns (in Persian and English) which help learners in positive transfer of second stress of Persian on modifier to second stress of English on head noun as */moaleme 'dana/*, *wise 'teacher*. Albeit, the stress pattern of some nominal compound, in English, is not fixed and it is changed based on the meaning and context. English speakers differentiate between *'White House* and *white 'house*; the first one means the famous White House in Washington D.C., while the second one means a house which color is white. Persian speakers, however, pronounce both of them as *white 'house*, a negative interference from their mother tongue; such differences result in misunderstanding and confusion.

As opposed to Persian, English phrases containing indefinite determiners put the accent on the head noun: *each of 'students*. Persian indefinite determiners carry the strong stress on the first member: *'har daneshamuzi/*. With regard to adverbial phrases, Persian speakers put much emphasis on the first element: *'kheili kam/*, as a result they may put the primary accent of second element in English on the first element: *vey 'few* (English pattern) to *'very few* (Persian pattern). Prepositional phrases in Persian have their strong accent on the last member: *in 'Iran*; likewise English, strong accent sits on the head noun: *at 'university*.

Finally, contrary to Persian, interrogatives and negative markers don't take stress in English, their stress defined based on the intonation of the whole sentence or clause. Hence, Persian learners articulate the follow sentence *what time is it?* (English pattern) as *'what time is it?* (Persian pattern) (*/saat 'chand ast?/*). Similarly, the interference result in *I 'don't work* (Persian pattern) (*/kar 'ne mikonam./*) instead of *I don't 'work* (English pattern). Table 1 summarizes stress patterns of Persian and English.

Table-1. Stress Patterns in Persian and English

	Persian	English
Simple words	Last syllable	Intended to sit on the first syllable
Nominal compounds	Prominent syllable of the second element	Prominent syllable of the first element
Complex compounds	Prominent syllable of the second element	Prominent syllable of the first element
Compound with determiner or number	Prominent syllable of the first element	Prominent syllable of the second element
Compound with modifier	Prominent syllable of the second element	Prominent syllable of the second element
Compounds with two stress patterns	Prominent syllable of the second element	Prominent syllable of the first or second element; depends on the meaning and emphasis
Indefinite phrases	Prominent syllable of the first element	Prominent syllable of the second element
Adverbial phrases	Prominent syllable of the first element	Prominent syllable of the second element
Prepositional phrases	Prominent syllable of the second element	Prominent syllable of the second element
Interrogatives	Prominent syllable of the interrogative word	Interrogatives don't take stress
Negative markers	Negative markers take stress	Negative markers don't take stress

Generally speaking, positive and negative transfers may happen for EFL/ESL Persian learners. Differences between two languages in stress patterns are much more than their similarities. Due to that, Persian learners may face more difficulties in pronouncing English words, compounds, phrases and etc. Being a fluent speakers, Persian learners should concentrate on differences on strong and weak accent of English words and compounds. To this end, teachers and instructors should pay more attention in teaching English accent. They should teach learners about these differences and similarities and help them pronounce stress patterns correctly.

3. Conclusion

The study contrastively investigated differences and similarities between stress patterns of Persian and English. As the study indicated in eleven stress patterns, Persian and English are similar; compounds with modifiers and

prepositional phrases. Stress sits on the prominent syllable of the second element. In the other ten patterns, Persian and English show dissimilarities. Thus, it is probable that EFL/ESL Persian learners transfer the pattern of their L1 to L2 negatively. It is necessary that teachers pay more attention to correct pronunciation of stress patterns to avoid interferences. Audi-visual aids should be implemented to improve learners' learning accents.

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