

## **Theoretically-based Practical Recommendations for Improving EFL/ESL Students' Pronunciation**

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**Abstract.** The importance of including pronunciation into EFL/ESL classes to improve the intelligibility of students' language is well established both theoretically and empirically. However, the various aspects of experimental findings have not been brought together in such a way as to make them accessible to the language teacher. The purpose of this article is threefold: (a) it discusses the importance of pronunciation in L2 learning and teaching, (b) it reviews the main factors that affect intelligibility and pronunciation, and (c) it presents practical recommendations that show ways of applying the insights obtained from (a) and (b) into actual classroom situation. These recommendations show how pronunciation can be integrated and combined with other communicative activities that, if applied by the language teacher appropriately, they would help L2 learners achieve communicative competence in English and improve their comprehensibility.

### **1. Theoretical Background**

One of the primary goals of pronunciation training in any course, as Morley suggests, is "intelligible pronunciation" – not perfect pronunciation [1]. She believes that "intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence" [1, p. 488]. The attainment of 'perfect pronunciation', as she proposes, should no longer be the objective. Instead, she calls for setting more realistic goals that are reasonable, applicable and suitable for the communication needs of the learner. To her, the learner needs to develop functional intelligibility (ability to make oneself relatively easily understood), functional communicability (ability to meet the communication

needs one faces), increased self-confidence, and the speech monitoring abilities and speech modification strategies for use beyond the classroom.

Similarly, Abercrombie [cited in 2] puts forward the concept of “comfortable intelligibility” as a suitable goal for most learners. Abercrombie defines comfortably intelligible pronunciation as “pronunciation which can be understood with little or no conscious effort on the part of the listener” [cited in 2, p. 93]. That is, learners of English are guided towards ensuring that their pronunciation is comfortably intelligible to both native and non-native speaker listeners since the case today is no longer concerned primarily with native speaker listeners. In other words, English has developed from a foreign language used between native speakers and non-native speakers to an international language, or to a means of global communication, spoken far more often by non-native speakers among themselves than between native speakers [2].

Therefore, it is vital that students learning English for international communication learn to speak it as intelligibly and comprehensibly as possible – not necessarily like natives, but well enough to be understood. And, it is equally important that they learn to understand it when spoken by people with different accents speaking in natural conditions (not just actors speaking standard English in recording studios). In this respect, and as Rajadurai [3] suggests, part of the underlying philosophy of including listening and speaking courses in any syllabus is to teach pronunciation as an integral part of oral communication. The rationale is that it is counterproductive to remove pronunciation from communication and other aspects of language use. So, with the emphasis on the importance of meaningful communication and intelligible pronunciation, it is not enough to leave pronunciation teaching and training to pronunciation classes only or even to listening/speaking classes in some programs.

Practically, and in real life, teachers can almost always squeeze pronunciation into their classes by sheer cunning [3] (see also 3 below) in order, among other things, to reinforce the concepts (if any) that might have been taught before in pronunciation classes (in an ideal English curriculum), increase awareness of the significance of pronunciation as an integral part of the teaching of English as a second language, provide opportunities for practice, and give encouragement and advice to learners as they work towards intelligibility [1].

## **2. Factors Affecting Pronunciation**

The pronunciation of any learner might be affected by a combination of factors which some researchers, for example, [4], [5], [6] and Gillette (1994), and Pennington (1994) [cited in 7] believe to promote or impede pronunciation mastery. These factors include age, personality, mother tongue influence, gender and learning context. It is well acknowledged that age, personality and L1 background are the most important factors that affect learners' mastery of L2 pronunciation. However, these factors are briefly summarized below.

### **2.1. Age**

The influence of age on language acquisition and specifically pronunciation may make adults find pronunciation more difficult than children do and that they probably will not achieve native-like pronunciation. According to the "Critical Period Hypothesis" proposed by Lenneberg, (1967) [cited in 8], there is a biological or neurological period, which ends around the age of 12; after this period it becomes extremely difficult to attain the complete mastery of a second language, especially pronunciation. Conversely, Bialystock (1997), and Bongaerts, Planken and Schils (1997), among others [cited in 8] have shown that adult learners are capable of achieving native-like in an L2. However, the degree of pronunciation accuracy, according to Avery and Ehrlich (1992), [cited in 8] varies considerably from one individual to another. To them, this discrepancy in pronunciation among adult learners means that ESL classroom time can profitably be devoted to improving students' pronunciation (see 2.3).

### **2.2. Personality**

Non-linguistic factors related to an individual's personality and learning goals, attitude towards the target language, culture, native speakers, and type of motivation [4], which are beyond the teacher's control [9], all have their share in the development of pronunciation skills. In addition, the degree of exposure to and use of the target language can support or impede pronunciation skills development. For example, learners who are outgoing and confident and get involved in interactions with native speakers are liable to practice their foreign language pronunciation (Avery and Ehrlich, 1992) [cited in 4]. Conversely, some learners feel uncomfortable trying out new speech rhythm and melody patterns [9], while others feel stupid pronouncing "weird" sounds,

and with time, they decide that it is futile and impossible to learn English pronunciation (Laroy, 1995) [cited in 4]. In this respect, Miller [9] believes that changing – and not changing – speech patterns is affected by how much responsibility the student takes, how much the student practices outside of class, and how ready the student is.

### 2.3. Mother tongue influence

Avery and Ehrlich, 1992 [cited in 4] claim that the sound pattern of the learner's first language is transferred into the second language and is likely to cause foreign accents. The mispronunciations of words by nonnative speakers reflect the influence of the sounds, rules, stress, and intonation of their native language<sup>(1)</sup>. For example, non-native speakers' production of English rhythm was investigated in several studies [10], [11] and by Anderson, 1993 [cited in 12]. These researchers concluded that the transfer from the learners' native language influenced their production of English-like stress alternation across a phrase.

In this respect, Avery and Ehrlich, [cited in 4] point out that the sound system of the native language can influence the learners' pronunciation of a target language in at least three ways. First, when there is a sound in the target language, which is absent from the learners' native sound inventory, or vice versa, learners may not be able to produce or even perceive the sound(s). Second, when the rules of combining sounds into words (i.e., phonotactic constraints/rules) are different in the learners' mother tongue from those of the target language, they cause problems for learners because these rules are language specific as they vary from one language to another. Thirdly, since the rhythm and melody of a language determine its patterns of stress and intonation, learners may transfer these patterns into the target language.

In summary, while there are other factors that influence the learner's L2 pronunciation acquisition [6] (see also 7 below), the factors reviewed above may help ESL/EFL teachers consider what learners from different backgrounds are likely to face when learning English as a second language. These factors would enable the teachers

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(1) This view is also supported by Arabski (1984) [cited in 8] who claims that the acquisition of pronunciation in a second language is controlled by physical processes as well as neurolinguistic ones. That is, there are hundreds of muscles that produce speech sounds. The plasticity and efficiency of these muscles (in the speech organs) directly influence the quality of the speech produced. As a result, children present less influence of the mother tongue into the target language when learning a second language because their phonological muscles are easier to be shaped. Whereas in the older learners, it is harder for muscles to learn new movements or reshape them.

to identify the difficulties in the pronunciation of the target language experienced by non-native speakers in order to help them overcome their foreign accent and consequently improve their pronunciation. In addition, they would also enable teachers to provide efficient pronunciation instruction, and design their teaching methodology according to students' needs.

### **3. Aims of the Paper**

In this paper, I consider some of the reasons Arab learners of English have problems of pronunciation both phonetic and phonological that are responsible for incorrect pronunciation and consequently, sometimes, communication breakdown. I also propose an explanation as to why teachers should focus on certain aspects of pronunciation in order to facilitate Arab students' meaningful communicative ability. The areas of pronunciation such as communicative problem solving strategies, use of stress and intonation for communicative effects, use of weak forms and variation of speech rhythm to reflect the stress timing of English, and awareness of lexical stress patterns can easily be integrated and combined with other communicative activities [13]. Thus, activities such as grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, and writing, when combined with pronunciation wherever possible are more likely to be communicatively meaningful.

In my opinion (see 7 below), because it is hoped that Arab students are going to be responsive and motivated to this way of learning pronunciation, the following objectives will be achieved: a) they will learn the proper articulation of sounds of English; b) they will learn the correct pronunciation of words and practice using them in context; c) they will learn and practice how to appropriately use word and sentence stress, linking sounds and words, rhythm, pausing, and intonation; d) with the right classroom activities, students will demonstrate a greater understanding to the way stress and accent can affect the meaning in English; e) they will benefit from the constant awareness raising activities followed by practical application exercises, and hence become able to note and correct identified problematic areas in their speech which interfere with comprehensibility, and by time, feel less inhibited about approximating English pronunciation; and f) they will find/realize that language skills are all linked together; they cannot be separated, especially listening comprehension and pronunciation: they are closely related.

I also propose some suggestions (see 7) that would help speed up the process of improving students' pronunciation. These suggestions are designed to enable the student to learn, practice and identify particular pronunciation aspects (both segmental and suprasegmental elements) which greatly contribute to communication. These suggestions will work better if teachers follow certain procedures for effective pronunciation teaching. First, teachers should be selective in teaching depending on the student's proficiency level and time available. Second, teachers should always try to motivate students to give their full attention to pronunciation and its significance as it familiarizes them with the sounds and with features of pause, stress, rhythm, and intonation. And third, teachers should give students the chance to incorporate the elements practiced in their own productive/receptive use of the language [14, p. 82-83] and [15, p. 87-88].

#### 4. Causes of Some Pronunciation Problems

Arab speakers of English run into several problems in their efforts to acquire the sound system of English. These problems can be classified into problems with individual speech sounds due to transference of the sound pattern from the first language into the second language and in the placement of sentence stress<sup>(2)</sup>.

##### 4.1. The sounds /v/, /p/, /tʃ/, /θʊ/

The misarticulations of the sounds listed above, in addition to other sounds like /ŋ/, /θ/, /ð/, /r/, /l/ and /dʒ/, as reported by some researchers are all very typical for Arab learners of English (see [8] for a review)<sup>(3)</sup>. Some of these problems are phonological. That is, they result from the influence of the absence of these sounds in the Arabic sound system that fail students to produce the listed sounds correctly and hamper developing listening and speaking skills [16] or even may lead to misinterpretation of

(2) You will probably notice that not all topics are included; some of them are missing – like voicing distinctions, aspiration, final consonant weakening, consonant clusters, elaborations on intonation, phonetic symbols, etc. The reason is, first, these topics do not have as much priority as other topics; and second, they can be taught later.

(3) In this article, I am focusing on the sounds /v/, /p/, /tʃ/, and /θʊ/ because they do not exist in the Arabic sound system and as a result they cause problems to the Arab learners of the English language.

meaning by native speakers of English [8]<sup>(4)</sup>. Other problems occur although the same sounds exist in both languages, but have different phonetic realization.

Regarding the English consonant and vowel sounds that do not exist in the Arabic speech sound system, these include the fricative /v/, the plosive /p/ and the affricate /tʃ/ as well as some diphthongs like /əʊ/, /eɪ/, /ɪə/, etc. For instance, Arabic does not make a distinction between /p/ and /b/ and therefore an overlap is especially noticeable in word initial position. As a result, the sound /p/ is often produced as /b/ and hence often confused. On the other hand, the phoneme /v/ causes a problem, in a way, similar to that of /p/. This problem occurs because /v/ is not present in the Arabic sound system, and therefore, some learners may have the tendency to substitute /f/ for /v/ [8]. This makes it difficult for students to pronounce correctly words containing such sounds. Thus, words like cheap, pen and seven tend to be pronounced /ʃi:p/, /ben/ and /sefn/ respectively.

However, regarding some difficulties in pronouncing some English vowels experienced by Arab learners of English, Barros [8] suggests a future study on some problematic English vowels in order to minimize the accent in a foreign language. Therefore, and because the diphthong /əʊ/ is problematic for most learners, it is included in this paper. Teachers might have noticed that most Arab learners of English, even in advanced levels, would pronounce words like go /gəʊ/ and cold /kəʊld/ as /gɔ: / and /kɔ:ld/.

Contrariwise, other consonants, for instance, /n/, /l/, /r/, and /d/ are present in both inventories, but have different phonetic realizations [8]<sup>(5)</sup>. These differences in the phonetic realizations of “similar” sounds can be one of the causes of the pronunciation problems, Tushyeh, (1996) [cited in 8]. According to Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) [cited in 8], both [n] and [ŋ] exist in Arabic as allophones of the phoneme /n/. In English, on the other hand, /n/ and /ŋ/ are distinct phonemes. Therefore, since in Arabic, the velar nasal [ŋ] only occurs before a velar stop and never word final, learners add the sound

(4) This problem of the absence of some sounds in the source language also applies to other languages; see for example [17].

(5) Although these sounds are not discussed in this article, their phonetic realization can also account for the causes of errors produced by Arab speakers learning English.

/k/ at the end of words ending with /ŋ/ as in “buying” /baɪŋ/ for /baɪŋk/. Similarly, in Arabic /r/ is an alveolar trill (Kharma and Hajjaj, cited in [8]), whereas in British English, it is a post-alveolar approximant phonetically represented as [ɹ]. Because Arab speakers produce this sound the way they do it in Arabic, it contributes to foreign accent but not misinterpretation.

Moreover, the students’ mispronunciation can also be due to the irregularity and inconsistency of the English spelling, Kharma and Hajjaj (1989) [cited in 8]. Arabic spelling is extremely regular in contrast to the graphic representation of sounds in English. For example, the letter “c” has three different pronunciations in the words ocean, cast and ceiling. In addition to that, some Arab learners will tend to pronounce silent consonants (e.g. walk, climb, receipt, etc...) because the Arabic writing system affects reading, spelling, handwriting and pronunciation, Australian Government Publishing Service (1978) [cited in 8]. In addition, a phoneme sound may be represented in different words by several letters or groups of letters [18]. For example, the words limb, hymn, live and sieve all contain the same vowel /ɪ/ despite the various spellings. While, on the other hand, meat, great, and head contain three different vowels, although the three words have identical "ea" spelling, (see also 5).

#### 4.2. Rhythm

Rhythm is one of the big problems in students’ misarticulations as it varies across languages. In fact, quite a large number of students, though having fairly good control of sounds, still speak English in a way that sounds foreign, unnatural and sometimes even not comprehensible. A major factor resulting in this is the improper English rhythm. But, what is English rhythm? Why is English rhythm difficult for Arab students? What are the most common types of errors that Arab students make in English rhythm?

Rhythm is the relative regular occurrence of stressed syllables whether they are separated by unstressed syllables or not [19]. Thus, the combination of stressed and unstressed syllables helps to create the word rhythm in English, where the beat coincides with the stressed syllables irrespective of the number of intervening unstressed syllables. To give a simple example, the modal verb can is hardly pronounced if it is used in the positive form (e.g., Sam can come on Friday). Conversely, when the negative form can’t is used, it is stressed (e.g., Sam can’t come

on Friday). As can be seen, the sentence “Sam can’t come on Friday” is longer than “Sam can come on Friday” because both the modal can’t and the verb come are stressed (see also 7.5 and 7.5.1).

Therefore, because most students are unaware of the importance of word stress in English, they tend to randomly put stress on any one of the syllables in a word, and sometimes this leads to a change in meaning. For example, in the word fifteen some students stress the first syllable rather than the second one; therefore, what is heard is not “fifTEEN” but “FIFty.”

Next, there is the difference in the pattern of stress. Arab learners of English are unused to the patterns of stressed and unstressed syllables in English words due to the difference in the comparative force of pronunciation of stressed and unstressed syllables in English and Arabic [16]. That is, in English, unstressed syllable can be pronounced very weakly whereas stressed syllables can be fully pronounced. Conversely, in Arabic unstressed syllables can have full vowels and be pronounced fairly clearly. As a result, and because this area seems to be neglected in the Arab students’ intermediate and secondary school English training, and because they probably are only used to seeing words on paper, they are reluctant to reduce unstressed vowels to schwa /ə/. A good example is the word “banana.” Many students say “BANANA” without being aware that vowels in unstressed syllables are mostly reduced to a short central vowel /ə/, as the vowels reduced in the first and third syllable of “baNAna” (see 7.4.3). It is the vowel reduction that makes the difference between stressed and unstressed syllables very clear in English.

This problem can also result from students’ learning background whereby the rhythmical aspects of pronunciation are neglected or ignored. Furthermore, it can also result from the language of some non-native speaking teachers who often use suprasegmentals inaccurately in a way that affects, among other things, their intelligibility [12].

#### **4.3. Intonation**

Another problem that students face is in the rising intonation of Yes-No questions as they do not know where the problem is and how to pronounce them the right way. Students are usually unaware that the intonation pattern used gives information about

whether an utterance is a statement or a question, the type of question and expected response, or whether something is part of a series of items, or something on its own. For instance, in a statement, the intonation falls on the last syllable of a sentence. If the intonation pattern is incorrect, then the listener receives a confusing message and can be unsure of how to respond.

In addition to that, in dialogues, intonation has a significant function of indicating the speech acts and the intentions of the speaker, and provides a key to the attitude and reaction of the participants [22]. For instance, in a dialogue, a question may be asked by means of a gesture, a single word or phrase with the appropriate intonation.

### **5. Why Encourage Students to Improve Their Pronunciation?**

It is important to make clear to the student why he needs to improve his pronunciation. For example, and regardless of “foreign accent”, incorrect or terrible pronunciation necessitates concentrated listening and leads to occasional misunderstanding. Therefore, words and sentences must sometimes be repeated due to serious errors in pronunciation (still sounds like steel and ship sounds like sheep), word accent (words are frequently accented on the wrong syllable, e.g., con'tent meaning “pleased, satisfied” versus 'content “that which is contained”), and sentence pitch (statements have the ‘melody’ of questions, etc.). This has been indicated in several studies reviewed by Hahn [4] where it has been shown that non-native like stress, for instance, may make native speakers process and comprehend non-native speakers’ speech with more difficulty.

In addition, the student needs to know that improving pronunciation may have greater significance and importance as it supports some aspects like listening comprehension, spelling, reading, and grammar [23]. For instance, some students often experience problems or confusion of spelling about which vowel (letter) to write in hate, hard, ahead, hall, and hat, or before l in bolt or salt. This confusion happens because learners expect to find a one-to-one correspondence between sound and its spelling, and that it originates from misinterpretation of the spelling system, rather than difficulty with the pronunciation of the sounds [23], (see also 4.1).

Moreover, good and intelligible pronunciation will boost the students’ self-confidence by enabling them to better understand their instructors, follow the news on TV or the radio more easily, or join in English conversations, class discussions, role-plays, etc. This can be achieved if students know that pronunciation is an important

skill of learning a language just like reading and writing, for example. In addition, the students should be taught that there are standard ways of saying the sounds that make up words and groups of words. This means that an English speaker (British, Australian, American, etc.) will make and expect to hear sounds and groups of words in a sentence that fit with any one of the standard varieties of English. Therefore, although there is flexibility in the way a learner can pronounce English, if the students want to be clearly understood when they speak English and if they want to be able to easily understand what others are saying, they should improve their pronunciation. Students need to understand that if their pronunciation is more natural, their listening will improve. After all, they cannot recognize sounds they themselves cannot make.

### **6. When to Introduce Pronunciation?**

As mentioned earlier (see 1), teachers should seize the opportunity to slip pronunciation into their classes and make their students aware, at every available opportunity, of the communicative value of, for instance, intonation and placement of emphatic contrastive stress within sentences. Every dialogue, every role-play in speaking, every lexical phrase in grammar or writing, every text in reading that is taught is an opportunity to do this, and each, if possible, can be introduced with both demonstration and practice of how its intonation contour contributes to its meaning and communicative function within the context. Teachers may encourage students experiment with phrases to see how the meaning changes with different patterns of intonation and emphasis. Teachers may also encourage students to adopt the use of weak forms and stress-timed speech rhythm when they are aware of the communicative value of stressing or not stressing pronouns, prepositions and auxiliaries for a particular communicative purpose. Once again, almost every communicative exercise is an opportunity to teach this.

To do this, in each lesson, for instance, 5-10 minutes on pronunciation practice can be set aside either at the end of the lesson or in the middle of the lesson when a prevailing problem is spotted or dictated by the context of the learning situation. Also, (but see 7.1.2), any time and in any class you see a word that ends in a continuant consonant and the next word starts with a vowel like “an eye”, use this pair of words to practice linking. This (or other elements) can be planned or spontaneous, and be integrated into grammar, reading, speaking or any other class as needed.

In grammar activities such as practicing the continuous tense with “always” or the modals must, may, can’t + perfect infinitive, the teacher can teach and practice proper English intonation instead of doing them in the traditional way – which are usually read in an indifferent tone [24]. For instance, in practicing the continuous tense with “always”, the teacher can ask students to imagine that they have worked together in the same group or have been neighbors for a long time. In either case, they have become fed up with one another’s habits and begin to complain:

S1: You’re always using my pen.

S2: You’re always reading a newspaper when there is a lot of work to do.

Likewise, in practicing the modals must, may, can’t + perfect infinitive, the teacher can begin a situation and ask the students to respond spontaneously and naturally, as in the following example:

T :I saw the king in the street.

S1: You can’t have seen the king.

S2: You must have been dreaming.

These activities enable the teacher to demonstrate to his students how native speakers would use the relevant aspects of intonation.

Similarly, in any reading class teachers can include some aspects of pronunciation. For example, students can be made aware beforehand of the pronunciation of difficult words and be advised to focus on elements such as certain sounds, syllables, stress, linking, intonation as they read. After the reading, for instance, students can be advised of pronunciation errors they make, and go over them with the teacher. In this way, a reading class can be a great help for students to develop not only reading skills, but also their pronunciation (and probably their speaking ability).

### **7. What Pronunciation Material(s) to Work on?**

Once students have a clear idea of why they need to improve their pronunciation, the next thing the teacher may consider is what the really important area(s) of pronunciation to focus on is/are, leaving everything else for some later time. This prioritizing can be the only practical approach. But, what might the priority items be? There is a wide choice of materials designed to give students extra practice in different aspects of pronunciation, from individual phonemes to intonation patterns, but how effective these materials are is open to debate.

In this respect, some researchers believe that learning the pronunciation of English does not mean learning how to pronounce the individual vowel and consonant sounds [23], and that teaching phonemes is not enough for intelligibility in communication (Cohen, cited in [25]). Instead, pronunciation teaching should include suprasegmental processes (e.g., connected speech, rhythm, word stress, intonation, etc.) because of their impact on speech intelligibility [26]<sup>(6)</sup>. Nevertheless, the majority of students believe that the most helpful and useful area of pronunciation work is training in segmentals rather than suprasegmentals because the segmental aspects of pronunciation help them improve their pronunciation patterns, enhance their confidence in using English, and above all they are more easily modified than the suprasegmental aspects [2].

In some materials and situations, sounds and words may come before connected speech if there are crucial problems caused by mother tongue interference that affect intelligibility. If this is the case, it should be possible to identify those vowel, consonant and diphthong sounds that cause particular problems to the students (see 4.1). However, the teacher has to note that students may waste time practicing the pronunciation of individual English sounds (phonemes) that they are able to pronounce anyway as these phonemes have similar equivalents in their mother tongue.

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(6) In other words, two groups of features are involved in pronunciation: segmentals and suprasegmentals. *Segmentals* are the basic inventory of distinctive sounds and the way they combine to form a spoken language. In the case of English, this inventory is said to be comprised of about 44 phonemes (20 vowels and 24 consonants), which are the basic sounds that serve to distinguish words from one another. Pronunciation instruction has often concentrated on the mastery of segmentals through discrimination and production of target sounds via drills consisting of minimal pairs like “bad”-“bat” or “seat”-“sit”.

*Suprasegmentals* transcend the level of individual sound production. They extend across segmentals and are often produced unconsciously by native speakers. Since suprasegmental elements provide crucial context and support (they determine meaning) for segmental production, they are assuming a more prominent place in pronunciation instruction [5], [7], and Gilbert, cited in [1]. Suprasegmentals include the following:

- stress: a combination of length, loudness, and pitch applied to syllables in a word (e.g., HAppy, FOOTball);
- rhythm: the regular, patterned beat of stressed and unstressed syllables and pauses (e.g., with weak syllables in lower case and stressed syllables in upper case: they WANT to GO Later.);
- adjustments in connected speech-modifications of sounds within and between words in streams of speech (e.g., “ask him” becomes “askim” /ɑ:skɪm/);
- prominence: the speaker’s act of highlighting words to emphasize meaning or intent (e.g., Give me the BLUE one. (not the yellow one); and
- intonation: the rising and falling of voice pitch across phrases and sentences (e.g., Are you REAdy?).

On the other hand, it is important to note that there are other phonological distinctions which do not involve individual sounds. For example, stress can be distinctive in English, as 'import, being a noun, has a slightly different meaning from im'port, which is a verb. The difference in meaning is indicated by a difference in stress. There are many other pairs like this. Similarly, intonation patterns may serve to indicate differences in meaning. He's coming said with a rising intonation is a question and thus differs in meaning from he's coming said with a falling intonation, which is a statement. The difference in meaning is signaled by the difference in intonation. Therefore, other areas of pronunciation such as communicative problem solving strategies (e.g., asking for repetition and clarification, asking for or giving a synonym, etc.), use of stress and intonation for communicative effect, use of weak forms and variation of speech rhythm to reflect the stress timing of English, and awareness of lexical stress patterns should be integrated and combined with other communicative activities (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, etc.) [13].

Based on these two points, I believe it is equally important to focus on both aspects of pronunciation i.e., segmental and suprasegmental features, and be more selective in teaching depending on the students' proficiency levels, the amount of time available, and any other constraints. In order to achieve this, there are several suggestions (ways) that can be considered. However, these suggestions can be added to or modified depending on the students' level or according to the teacher's discretion.

### **7.1. Suggestion 1: Practicing individual sounds (stops/continuants)**

The rationale behind this suggestion is that it is often difficult for a native English speaker to understand the words of non-native speakers. The problem often lies in the confusion of two sounds or segments as there is a need for a new "habit formation". According to Jenkins [27], habit formation plays a major role in the production of L2 sounds that are phonetically different from those in the L1 because the articulators must be activated in new ways. In other words, in order to master an L2 sound, it is necessary to acquire both physiological knowledge regarding its articulation and an understanding of its place in the phonological system to which it belongs [24]. For this reason, there is a need for non-native speakers of English to learn the phonemic and allophonic systems of English as each language has its own particular sound system and different rules of combining these sounds into words. There is a need, therefore, for the learner to be able to distinguish between the various phonemes of English in order to be able to produce them properly.

### 7.1.1. Initial sounds

The initial sounds which need to be learned are relatively predictable (see 4.1). The pronunciation problems encountered by students will depend, to a large extent, on their language background. The sounds that cause problems for Arab students are, to a large extent, /p~b, v~f, tʃ~ʃ, θʊ~ʊz/ <sup>(7)</sup>. When such a problem is spotted, try to briefly explain with demonstration what the terms “stop”, “continuant”, “voiced” and “voiceless” mean. The rationale behind this phonological aspect is to enable the student to understand the difference between producing sounds that require complete air blockage in the oral cavity, followed by a release of the closure and aspiration for some sounds, and other sounds where the stream of air continues without interruption through the mouth opening. This will also enable the student to understand that without the help of this puff of air (i.e., aspiration), listeners will find it difficult to identify the sound as voiceless. Similarly, the properties or features “voiced” and “voiceless” enable the student to produce, for instance, /v/ and /f/ properly and distinctly.

In order to present this concept to your students, say, for example, the word “leaf”. Continue the final sound until you run out of air. Now say the word “leap”. Tell the students that they will feel that their lips completely block the airflow for the final sound. Ask some students to say these words and alternate the final sounds until they feel the contrast<sup>(8)</sup>. When the concept is clear, put this on the board:

(7) For the time being, the focus will be on consonants.

(8) Optional explanation: Some sounds are called “stops” because the airflow from the lungs is completely “stopped” as the air proceeds out of the mouth. For example, if the tongue blade is pressed against the alveolar ridge and then try to force air from your lungs, there is no place for the air to go. It is stopped. After this closure has been formed and air has been compressed behind it, it is released, i.e., air is allowed to escape, and consequently either /t/ or /d/ is made depending on what the vocal cords are doing.

The nasal consonants /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/ are also called stops because the airflow is obstructed at some point in the oral cavity; but because the velum is lowered, airflow passes through the nasal cavity and as a result nasal stops can be prolonged.

On the other hand, some sounds do not completely block the flow of air from the lungs. The air continues going out of the mouth. You can make these sounds and continue making them without stopping (until you run out of breath!). These sounds are called “continuants”. For example, touch your lower lip to your upper teeth. Now let air out of your lungs and out of your mouth. Don’t move your lips or teeth. You should be able to continue making this sound until you run out of air. Try it! If you make it right, you’ll make an /f/ or a /v/, depending on what the vocal cords are doing.

If the vocal cords are together, the airstream forces its way through and causes them to vibrate. Such sounds are called voiced sounds. (If you put a finger in each ear and say “z-z-z-z”, you can feel the vibrations of the sound as it goes through the vibrating vocal cords.) Alternatively, if the vocal cords are apart, the airstream passes freely into the supraglottal cavities. The sounds produced in this way are called voiceless sounds. (If you again put a finger in each ear and say “s-s-s-s”

English stops (oral):	nasal stops
b      d      g	m      n      ŋ
p      t      k	

English continuants:

All other sounds<sup>(9)</sup>

Students should listen and practice in order to develop discrimination ability between stops and continuants<sup>(10)</sup>. This entails listening to a spoken sound, a word, or some minimal pairs repeating (mimicking) them and then choosing one of two possible answers. One of these answers will be (or contain) a stop, the other a continuant, e.g., tank and thank. If the student accurately discriminates the difference between the stops and continuants, the teacher can return to the point where he stopped, unless correction is needed or further explanation is required.

### 7.1.2. Final sounds

The distinction between final stop and continuant sounds is another important and useful phonological aspect for students to learn. Students should learn to practice and recognize the sounds at the end of words because of the effect on listening comprehension and grammatical meaning [3]. For instance, the following final sounds go by very fast in normal spoken English – mostly because auxiliary verbs are generally said as contractions (e.g., He’s gone./ He’d gone. I’ll cut it./ I’d cut it. We care./ We cared. (or third person singular) Walk / walks). Attention can also be drawn to the importance of producing correctly some final sounds in words like “live/life, mouth/mouse, raise/race, watch/wash, etc.” because improper pronunciation of such final sounds can cause perceptual confusion and consequently negatively affect intelligibility.

This kind of practice is important because it enables the learners to correctly identify and produce not just word-initial sounds as illustrated in 7.1.1 but also endings of words, especially when the grammar depends on the presence of a final consonant.

(9) Affricates like the first sound in “chip” and “judge” /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ are combinations of stops and continuants; but this is an unimportant detail unless some students ask.

(10) In this paper, the term “continuant” is used to represent all the sounds that you can produce without interruption of the airstream through the mouth opening such as fricatives, laterals, approximants, etc. The reason behind this is I think it is too early to introduce such terms to students learning English. Regarding the nasals /m/ and /n/, although they are [-continuant], they can be prolonged because the velum lowers and as a result the airstream escapes through the nasal cavity.

This can also help the learners understand and recognize the difference between the features “stop/continuant” (and later probably the terms “fricative, nasal”, etc.), “voiced/voiceless” and so on.

However, one way to help students practice final continuant and stop sounds is, for example, by saying pairs of words where the first word ends with a continuant and the following one starts with a vowel. This can be done by articulating the first element of the first word and slowing down through its final sound as in “an n egg” or “call l l all students.” For stop sounds, the words must be said together, as in “shutup” or “Stopall that noise!” or “Thankyou.” A major advantage of practicing such pairs of words is that it helps in learning linking (see 7.2 below).

## 7.2. Suggestion 2: Linking

When native speakers say a sentence in English, they join or “link” words to each other. Because of this linking, the words in a sentence do not always sound the same as when they (or we) say them in isolation. As a result, linking is very important in English because if students can recognize and use linking, they will understand other people and other people will understand them more easily. However, words are linked according to the following rules:

### Rule 1: Consonant + vowel

In a phrase, when a word ends in a consonant and the next word starts with a vowel, the two words are linked. For example, the following phrases are written like this:

an eye	where are	run out of	put it in a box
(a-neye) (whe-rear)	(ru-nou-tof)	(pu-ti-tino-box)	
[ə-naɪ]	[weə-rər]	[rʌ-naʊ-təv]	[pʊ-tɪ-tɪnə-bɒks]

### Rule 2: Vowel + vowel

If a word ends with a vowel sound and the next word starts with a vowel sound, the words are linked with a sort of either Y or W. For example:

the end of	say it	my aunt	enjoy it
(theYen-dof)	(sayYit) (myYaunt)	(enjoyYit)	
[ðɪ-(j)ən-dəv]	[seɪ-(j)ɪt]	[maɪ-(j)ʌnt]	[ɪndʒɔɪ-(j)ɪt]

you are late	show us how are you	grow up
(youWare late)	(showWare us)	(growWare up)
[jʊ(w)ər leɪt]	[ʃəʊ(w)əs]	[grəʊ(w)ʌp]

Note: The teachers should tell the students not to memorize these rules. If they practice listening to English a lot, they will learn the rules naturally.

### Rule 3: Consonant + same consonant (or blending consonants)

When one word ends in a consonant and the next word begins with the same consonant, the two consonants are blended, or pronounced as one sound. There is no pause between the two words. The followings are examples of some phrases with blended consonants.

For example:

black + cat = (blackat)

big + girl = (bigirl)

famous + singer = (famousingr)

## 7.3. Suggestion 3: Distinguishing between endings

### 7.3.1. Distinguishing between -s endings

The -s ending is found on verbs in the third person singular and on plurals. The -s ending is pronounced differently, depending on the end of the word:

The sounds which condition the /ɪz/ or /əz/ variant (allomorph) are /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, and /dʒ/.

Examples: teaches, boxes, buses, villages

The sounds which condition the /s/ variant (allomorph) are all the voiceless consonants except /s/, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/.

Examples: drinks, stops, hits, sniffs

The sounds which condition the /z/ variant (allomorph) are vowels and voiced consonants (e.g., /m/, /n/, /r/, /v/, etc.).

Examples: carries, brings, father's, drives, stabs

### 7.3.2. Distinguishing between -ed endings

There are three distinct allomorphs (morphemic alternants) of the -ed ending:

/ɪd/ or /əd/ after /d/ and /t/

Examples: waited, invented, needed

/t/ after the voiceless consonants /p/, /k/, /s/, /f/, /tʃ/, and /tʃ/

Examples: missed, watched, helped, sniffed, walked

/d/ after vowels and voiced consonants (e.g., /eɪ/, /b/, /m/, /l/, etc.)

Examples: lived, showed, listened, traveled, used, called, died

#### **7.4. Suggestion 4: Word stress.**

##### **7.4.1. Importance of word stress**

Word stress is an important process whereby particular syllables (or part of words) are stressed within a word. Hence, in spoken English important words like verbs, nouns, adjectives, adverbs, numbers, and negatives (like “isn’t,” “don’t,” “can’t”, etc.) are stressed (see 7.5). This means a stressed syllable is spoken louder in volume, longer in duration, or higher in pitch than an unstressed one.

Students need to know that placing the stress correctly when they are speaking instantly and automatically improves their pronunciation, enhances listeners’ comprehension and facilitates communication [12]. Misplaced stress, in contrast, impedes comprehension and makes speech more difficult to understand. Therefore, non-native speakers who speak English to native speakers without using word stress encounter at least two problems. First, they find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially those speaking fast. And second, the native speakers may find it difficult to understand them. Very often this happens because non-native speakers mispronounce some of the individual sounds in words. At other times, words are not easily recognized because the speaker has stressed the wrong part of the word. To give an example of word stress and its significance, many people have a problem hearing the difference between the words “forty” and “fourteen” if stress is not placed properly – note the difference between FORty and fourTEEN. Hence, it is important for students to learn how a word is stressed at the same time as they learn how to pronounce it.

However, students need also to know that word stress in some other languages is governed by relatively simple principles [18]. In Finnish, Polish and French, for instance, stress is regular or predictable. Thus, words are always stressed on the initial syllable in Finnish, on the penultimate in Polish, and on the last syllable in French. In other languages like English word stress is not always on the same syllable (e.g.

TEAcher, jaPAN, imPORtant). This means that in English stress is given to certain words while other words are quickly spoken. As a result, word stress is not an optional extra that you can add to the English language if you want. It is part of the language as it can play a phonemic role, contrasting lexical pairs of verb/noun as in inCREASE (v)/ INcrease (n), obJECT (v)/ OBject(n), etc. It can also show oppositions between compounds and phrases. For instance, in the sequence English teacher, if primary stress is assigned to the first word and the second word bears a weaker stress, the compound means “a teacher who teaches English”. If, however, primary stress is assigned to the word “teacher” and a secondary stress to “English”, the phrase means “a teacher who is English.”

#### 7.4.2. Types of stress patterns

To better understand word stress, students need to understand syllables first. For example, teachers can tell the students that a syllable is a division of a word based on the vowel. Each word has one, two, three or more syllables (see [19] for more details). Every syllable contains a vowel or a syllabic consonant. For instance, the words dog, green, and quite are one-syllable words; quiet (qui-et), and orange (o-range), little /litl/ are two-syllable words; expensive (ex-pen-sive) and unfriendly (un-friend-ly) are three-syllable words; interesting (in-ter-est-ing) is a four-syllable word; and unexceptional (un-ex-cep-tio-nal) is a five-syllable word. Hence, the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables (or “stress pattern”) of a word is important for the recognition of a word. In this respect, change of stress pattern can have a grammatical function in English and results in pairs of words like subJECT (verb) and SUBject (noun), CONtent (noun) and conTENT (adjective).

#### 7.4.3. Where to put the word stress in English?

There are some rules that govern the placement of lexical stress in English. But, the rules are rather complicated! Probably the best way is to ask students to learn word stress as they learn new vocabulary<sup>(11)</sup>. However, there are two very simple rules for word stress which can make it easier to deal with. First, one word has only one stress. That is, one word cannot have two stresses, although there can be a “secondary” stress

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(11) Students should be encouraged to use the dictionary to learn the stress pattern of every new word they learn. They can keep, for example, a vocabulary book, or make a note to show which syllable is stressed – usually by placing an apostrophe (') just before the stressed syllable. (The notes at the front of the dictionary will explain the system used.)

in some words. But, a secondary stress is much weaker than the main (primary) stress, and is only used in long words. And second, in stressed syllables vowels are long and clear (e.g., round vowels will be rounded, high vowels will be high, etc.) whereas in unstressed syllables vowels are often very short and unclear (schwa /ə/). For instance, notice the difference in the length of the three vowels in the English word “banana” /bəˈnænə/. Although they are all spelled with the same letter, the first and last vowels are pronounced in an unclear, shortened way. The reason for this shortening is in order to make the middle vowel (the stressed one) more easily noticeable by contrastive lengthening.

As a result, schwa /ə/ is the most common vowel in the spoken language because so many unstressed vowels are pronounced as schwa. It is one of the most difficult differences between written and spoken English because it does not correspond to any letter in the alphabet as can be seen from the following list of words in which it appears: attempt /əˈtempt/, suggest /səˈdʒest/ (in the first syllable); emphasis /ˈɪmfəsɪs/, presently /ˈprezəntli/ (middle syllable); picture /ˈpɪktʃər/, father /ˈfɑːðər/, nation /ˈneɪʃən/ (final syllable). Students not only need to learn to lengthen the stressed vowel, but they also need to be able to use the shortened schwa sound in their speech (which is difficult for many English learners). They, in addition, need to practice hearing it because the Arabic language maintains the integrity of vowel sounds, so the frequent use of schwa in English is a major barrier to listening comprehension for Arab learners.

However, there are some more, rather complicated, rules that can help students understand where to put the stress (although there are many exceptions; see [19] for details; see also the Appendix for classroom ideas).

1. Two-syllable words: Most two-syllable nouns or adjectives are assigned stress to the first part. In the following examples, stressed syllables are in CAPITAL letters: CHIna, TAbLe, PENcIl, EXport, HAPpy, CLEver, ...
2. Most two-syllable verbs are assigned stress to the last syllable: exPORT, adMIT, beGIN, ...
3. Words ending in -ic, -sion, -cian, -tion are assigned stress to the syllable before the ending: GRAPhic, ecoNOMic, coHESion, techNICian, graduAtion, ...
4. Words ending in -phy, -gy, -cy, -al, -meter are assigned stress to the third from the last syllable: phoTOgraphy, biOlogy, deMOcracy, CRItical, paRAMeter, ...
5. Compound words (words with two parts):

First, compound nouns (e.g., noun + noun or adjective + noun) are assigned stress to the first part: DESKtop, PENcil case, BOOKshelf, BLACKboard, TOOTHbrush, ...

Second, for compound adjectives, the stress is assigned to the second part: well-MEANT, old-FASHioned, bad-TEMpered, ...

Finally, for compound verbs (preposition + verb), the stress is assigned to the second part: underSTAND, overLOOK, outWIT, ...

6. Phrasal verbs versus compound nouns derived from phrasals: For many of the phrasal verbs (two-part verbs), correct word stress is especially important as they have compound noun counterparts. In phrasal verbs, the preposition gets the word stress. If they have a noun counterpart, however, stress is assigned to the first part: let DOWN / LETdown, print OUT / PRINTout, take OVER / TAKEover, ...

### 7.5. Suggestion 5: Sentence stress

Sentence stress, like word stress, is a very crucial concept because it gives English its rhythm. Sentence stress can help learners to understand spoken English, especially when spoken fast. So, just as words have stressed syllables, sentences contain regular patterns of stressed words. Furthermore, the pitch of the voice constantly changes from one level to another: level, falling or rising in various different types of phrases and sentences. This is probably what happens to learners who listen to utterances in a linear way, giving equal importance to each word in sequence, show very poor listening strategies [29] – they often complain that it is too fast. What these students are missing is, first, that native speakers focus on words that carry important meaning (i.e., “content words”; see below). And second, words that carry important meaning are placed at or toward the end of an utterance.

In addition, sentence stress is accent on certain words within a sentence. But, which words in a sentence receive stress? Basically, the words that receive stress are considered “content words” such as, nouns (e.g., kitchen, Peter, car), main verbs (e.g., visit, sell, give), adjectives (e.g., red, big, beautiful, interesting), adverbs (e.g., often, carefully, quickly) and negative auxiliaries (e.g., don’t, aren’t, can’t) (see 7.4.1). These words communicate the most important ideas in the sentence. They carry the meaning or the sense behind the sentence.

Non-stressed words, on the other hand, are usually “function words” (or structure words) such as determiners (e.g., the, a, some, a few), auxiliary verbs (e.g., do, have, can, must), prepositions (e.g., on, at, before), conjunctions (e.g., and, but, because) and

pronouns (e.g., they, she, us). These words communicate less important information in a sentence. But, sometimes function words may carry sentence-stress if emphasized in some way or to correct information. For example, How do you spell “than”?, “I don’t think I can do it” – “But I think you can do it.”

#### 7.5.1. How sentence stress works?

In order for students to learn how sentence stress works, teachers can, for example, tell them to remove all the “function” words from a sentence; the sentence will still have a certain amount of meaning and can be understood.

Examples:

She should have gone to the park with John.

We are taking a break.

The teacher has changed the schedules.

Alternatively, if they remove the “content” words from a sentence, they will not understand the sentence. The sentence has no sense or meaning. As a result, content words are stressed because this makes the rhythm of the English language which is to a large extent determined by strong beats falling on the stressed syllables of words [18, p. 340]. Thus, in the above example, “She should have gone to the park with John” the rhythm is determined by the stress pattern of the words “gone”, “park” and “John.” The words “she should have”, “to the”, and “with” are normally unstressed. This rhythm changes the speed at which native speakers speak the language. That is, because the duration of each syllable is equal, a single syllable or several syllables will tend to take roughly the same amount of time [18]. Therefore, in our sentence, there are three syllables before GONE, and two syllables between GONE and PARK, and one syllable between PARK and JOHN. But, the time between GONE and PARK and between PARK and JOHN is the same. This means the group of unstressed words “She should have”, “to the” and “with” take the same amount of time to pronounce. In other words, because English is stress-timed, speakers manage to cram unstressed syllables together, in between the stresses, in such a way that the stresses occur at more or less regular time intervals. To do this, native speakers say “she should have” quickly, “to the” slowly, and “with” more slowly because English does not depend on the number of syllables but on how many syllables it contains.

In this respect, one important spin-off from this area of pronunciation that students will have the opportunity to learn is the reduction of function words in connected speech. Below are some examples of reduced forms:

Reduced Form	Long Form
D'ya...	Do you...
How're ya doing?	How are you doing?
Niceta meetcha.	Nice to meet you.
It's raining cats 'n' dogs. It's raining cats and dogs.	
Whaddaya do?	What do you do?
I wanna go to ta London. I want to go to London.	
We kin swim.	We can swim.
I'm gonna go ta London. I'm going to go to London.	
I've gotta go.	I've got to go.

In addition, in rapid, informal speech, past forms of modal verbs are reduced:

would have come	→	would've come	or	would'a come
should have said	→	should've said	or	should'a said
could not have been	→	couldn't 've been	or	couldn'a been

Furthermore, sometimes the letter “h” is not pronounced at the beginning of English words. In a few words, like “honest” and “hour,” it is never pronounced. In other cases, the “h” is pronounced except in the following situations:

- when a pronoun or auxiliary word beginning with /h/ is unstressed, and
- when it does not come at the beginning of a phrase

When these two conditions exist, the /h/ sound is dropped, and the word with the “h” is connected to the previous word. This happens very often with pronouns.

For example:

Long: I don't know what to get her.

Short: I don't know what to get 'er.

Long: Has he arrived yet?

Short: Has 'e arrived yet?

Long: Is he asleep?

Short: (izzi) asleep?

Long: Where have you been?

Short: (where uv) you been?

In the following examples, the /h/ is not dropped if it is in a stressed word or at the beginning of the phrase.

Can I help you?

I hope so.

He's so little.

From these examples, students should see that they need not worry about pronouncing every word clearly to be understood. They should, however, concentrate on pronouncing the content words clearly rather than giving importance to each syllable. If students can practice this, they will soon find that they can understand and communicate more because they begin to listen (and use in speaking) stressed words. They will also find that all those words they thought they did not understand are really not crucial for understanding the sense or making themselves understood. Stressing the content words is the key to excellent pronunciation and understanding of English.

#### **7.5.2. How to teach sentence stress?**

Below are some suggestions that teachers can introduce, use and adapt according to the students' levels and abilities which the teachers can gauge and decide.

- To begin with, in the regular class, use sentences (e.g., from grammar, reading, listening classes) that the students have produced during some kind of activity to begin awareness raising by reading a sentence aloud to the students pronouncing each word carefully. The sentences should be relatively simple and have as many monosyllabic words as possible. Have some students repeat the sentence after you slowly, with a little “over-emphasis” on the stressed words. Read the sentence a second time in natural speech.
- Ask students which reading seemed more natural and why it seemed more natural. Explain the idea of English being a “stress-timed” language.
- Talk about the differences between stressed words and non-stressed words in a sentence taken from class and write it on the board. Underline the stressed words and ask students to try reading them aloud and concentrating on stressing important words and gliding over function words.
- Ask students to look through sentences (e.g., during grammar activities) and underline the words that should be stressed (in the activity). (If possible, choose short and long sentences in order to make them notice how some of the shorter sentences actually have more stressed words than

the longer ones. The shorter sentences can often take longer to speak than longer sentences with many function words.) After they have found the stressed words, they can practice reading some sentences aloud.

- In reading classes, for example, students need to know where to pause in sentences when reading a passage aloud. Failing to pause in the right places will make the listener unable to follow his meaning or thought. The teacher, therefore, can find thought groups activities [21] in order to teach students how to pause properly. This can be done in grammar, writing or reading classes where students can put a slash (/) between thought groups in a passage in a reading class or commas in a sentence or a paragraph in a writing class before asking them to read it aloud. The students can then try different pauses in different places to get different meanings<sup>(12)</sup>. This activity helps students get the experience of the effect of pause placement on meaning [21].
- By time, a certain amount of sentence stress will develop in the students naturally through constant listening and imitation. Making this process part of their pronunciation development should help their listening comprehension and ability to sound more natural when speaking English.
- (This is probably more appropriate for advanced or higher level students and, therefore, it could be used at a later stage.) After repeating some sentences, start clapping a rhythmic beat. Insert the sentences into this rhythm. According to Miller [15], the use of body movement such as clapping and tapping as well as providing a lot of listening and repeating helps students internalize the rhythm patterns of English. The students are likely to have initial difficulty with this, as they will instinctively start trying to correspond the number of words to the number of beats. Repeat this sort of activity whenever the time allows.
- Choose a sentence and write it on the board and ask them to fit the entire sentence into the number of claps corresponding to the number of stressed words in the sentence. First allow them to try and do it on their own. Then say the sentence aloud and emphasize the stressed words. They should be

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(12) To show the importance of pauses and punctuation in a writing class, write, for instance, the following words *A woman without her man is nothing* on the chalkboard and tell them how an English teacher asked his students to punctuate it correctly. All of the males in the class wrote *A woman, without her man, is nothing*. All the females in the class wrote *A woman: without her, man is nothing*. This kind of activity shows the students not only how important correct punctuation is but also how different pauses lead to different interpretations. It also shows how commas in writing are replaced by pauses in reading or speaking.

able to hear the number of beats based on this. Practice this with a variety of sentences whenever the time allows. This process should raise the students' awareness of sentence "beats" as opposed to number of words.

- Another useful and fairly interesting activity that can make students aware of accent and stress is "contrastive stress". This kind of activity will help students to better understand how stress and accent (intonation) can affect meaning in English. For example, the sentence "John and Sally walked to the small restaurant yesterday evening" can be said in nine different ways, giving some kind of new information simply by using different stress and intonation for each word. This aspect can be practiced (e.g., in speaking classes) in any dialogues or skits which require students to disagree because the focus tends to shift from one word to another.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper provides some principled suggestions in which students' pronunciation of a foreign language can be improved. It was argued that both the teacher and the student should know that native-like pronunciation is neither essential nor realistic to communicate clearly and effectively. However, a reasonable and attainable goal is to be able to communicate as clearly and as effectively as possible for the learner's own purpose. This can be achieved if EFL/ESL teachers focus on the students' needs, level and ability, incorporate pronunciation into their oral skills and other classes and focus on both segmental and suprasegmental features whenever there is opportunity and time.

The paper also argued that pronunciation must be viewed as more than correct production of individual sounds or isolated words. Instead, it must be viewed as a crucial and integral part of communication that should be incorporated into classroom activities. Students should start concentrating on how the words and sentences sound rather than concentrate on what the words mean.

In addition, the article also shows that teachers can help students by highlighting elements such as sounds, syllables, stress and intonation. Once the students understand the functions of these elements, they will know what to focus on and can build upon this basic awareness. In the meantime, the activities that the teachers may introduce can do the following. First, they can actively encourage the students' actual production, build pronunciation awareness and practice through classes. Second, they can encourage them repeatedly to monitor their own pronunciation and practice their

speaking skills as much as possible in and outside the classroom – because changing pronunciation habits is hard work and requires time and effort from the students. Finally, they can improve their self-confidence in daily encounters in and outside the classroom with native (and non-native) speakers by gradually building skills in listening and speaking in both formal and informal situations. Some of the models that the students can listen to are their lecturers, TV, and English radio stations.

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## APPENDIX

### Classroom Ideas

Below are some exercises which give the students practice in pronouncing the words with the correct stress pattern. Ask them to guess where the stress falls and form a rule.

- Which syllable is stressed in the following pronouns:  
himself, herself, themselves  
[Reflexive pronouns have the stress on the last syllable]
- Which syllable is stressed in the following verbs:  
suspect, reject, progress, conduct, decrease
- Which syllable is stressed in the following adjectives (or where does the stress fall on words ending in -ious, -eous, and -uous )?:  
delicious, nutritious, ambitious, obvious, industrious, spontaneous, simultaneous, instantaneous, ambiguous, superfluous  
[The stress usually falls on the syllable before -ious, -eous, and -ous.]
- Which syllable is stressed in the following nouns:  
animosity, revolution, anthropology  
project, convert, rebel, survey  
dropout, takeoff, slowdown, turnover
- Read these pairs of words and say the difference in meanings:

GREENhouse – greenHOUSE      DEsert - desSERT

- Which word is stressed in the following two-word verbs:  
take out, put down, turn on, check in
- Which syllable is stressed in the following words (or which part of the word has the main stress)?:  
newspaper, headache, classmate, bathroom,  
football, seaside, motorway, handbag  
[The main stress is likely to be on the first word.]
- Which word is stressed in the following combinations:  
table manners, train ticket, fire station, police car
- Is the stress pattern the same or different in the following words:  
accelerate, accelerated, accelerating?  
accelerating, acceleration, economy, economics
- Which syllable is stressed on the following compound words (or which word has the main stress in these two-part words)?:  
policymakers, candlestick makers, candycane wrappers,  
town center, black magic, science fiction, black hole  
[The main stress in a compound formed from two separate words (or two words which usually collocate) is likely to be on the second word]
- Where does the stress fall on words ending in -ic, and -al?  
bureaucratic, typical, analytical, economical, strategic, dynamic, systematic,  
problematic, anthropological  
[The stress usually falls on the syllable before -ic and -al.]
- Where does the stress fall on words ending in -ial and -ual ?  
essential, potential, beneficial, commercial, gradual, individual, actual  
[The stress usually falls on the syllable before -ial and ual.]
- Where does the stress fall on words ending in -ible, -ity, and -ify ?  
flexible, incredible, impossible, probability, responsibility, productivity,  
fatality, modify, diversify  
[The stress usually falls on the syllable before -ble, -ity, and -ify.]
- Where does the stress fall on words ending in –ain, -ee, -eer, -ese, -ette, -esque?  
entertain, employee, mountaineer, Lebanese, cigarette, picturesque  
[The stress usually falls on the last syllable.]
- Where does the stress fall on the following numbers?  
thirty – thirteen    eighty – eighteen  
In the numbers 13 to 19, stress the first syllable and -teen.

thirTEEN, fòurTEEN, fifTEEN

For 20, 30, 40, etc., to 90, stress the first syllable only.

THIRty, FORty, FIFty, SIXty

- How do you say this telephone number?  
(310) 555-0162  
When saying telephone numbers, English speakers will understand you better if you:  
pause after the area code  
pause after the first three numbers, then the next two pairs of numbers  
raise your voice before every pause  
lower your voice at the end

**Example:**

area code (310) 555-0162

three-one-zero ^ five-five-five ^ zero-one ^ six-two



- How many syllables do the following words have:  
chocolate          Wednesday  
sandwich          send a witch  
accessibility, compatibility, vulnerability  
prayed - parade / can't - cannot / sport - support  
blow - below / walked - walk it / closed - closet  
1. rested, planted, listed, winded, faded  
2. missed, watched, helped, sniffed, walked  
3. planned, climbed, closed, walked
- What do the verbs in group 1 above have in common? Group 2? Group 3? What is the rule? (In the Regular Class, ask students, for example, to think of some (regular) verbs and ask class if the past tense adds a syllable.)  
[Rule: All regular verbs which end in the letter “t” or “d” have an extra syllable in the past. All other verbs don’t. This syllable number distinction is far more important than the sound that comes before –ed]<sup>(13)</sup>.

(13) Some ESL learners tend to produce extra syllables when speaking English, so both listening comprehension and intelligibility are improved when students learn to notice the number of syllables (see 7.4.4). If English speakers are asked to count the number of syllables in a given word or sentence, they often tap their fingers as they count, which highlights the importance of the syllable in the rhythm of speech. Therefore, all practice with syllable number should be accompanied by some physical gesture, such as tapping the table or moving a foot [19]. This physical movement is far more effective than merely taking mental notice. Thus, the difference between “can’t” and “cannot” and “prayed” and “parade” is one tap versus two.

As can be seen, this is a huge area. However, there are many ways that you can use to help your students (see also 6). For instance, during any class (such as reading, grammar, etc...) students may come across many new words, some of which they may like to use in writing or speaking. Perhaps one effective method is to raise your students' awareness of the issue of word stress and to encourage good learning habits. To do this, you can get students used to the idea of marking or highlighting the stress when they note down items of vocabulary in their note-books. You can also make them aware of the symbols used by dictionaries to indicate primary and secondary word stress. It is also worthwhile practicing the pronunciation of the longer words which they may need. One of the problems for students is how to give the word the correct stress. Another problem is that students pronounce each syllable with equal length, i.e., they can usually lengthen a syllable, but cannot shorten a syllable.

Another way to help students is that a quiz, for example, can be included for predicting stress patterns based on parts of speech and suffixes. The teacher can help students discover and generate rules instead of telling them rules (e.g., the pronunciation of the -ed ending in the past tense of some regular verbs). They can generate word stress pattern rules from the words that they have learned and apply the rules to the words that they do not know. In this way, students are not memorizing the rules but internalizing them.

( / / / / )

. إن أهمية دمج اللفظ في مواد اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أو كلغة ثانية ترسخت على الصعيدين النظري والتجريبي لتطوير وضوح لغة الطلاب؛ إلا أنه لم يتم تقديم نتائج البحوث بطريقة يستطيع مدرس اللغة الوصول إليها بسهولة. يرمي هذا البحث إلى تحقيق ثلاثة أهداف: (أ) مناقشة أهمية اللفظ في تعلم اللغة الثانية وتعليمها، (ب) عرض العوامل الرئيسية التي تؤثر على اللفظ ودرجة وضوحه، (ج) تقديم توصيات عملية تبين طرق تطبيق الأفكار التي تم الحصول عليها من (أ) و (ب) في قاعة الدراسة. وتبين هذه التوصيات كيفية تكامل ودمج اللفظ مع نشاطات التواصل الأخرى التي ستساعد متعلمي اللغة على إحراز مقدرة التواصل في اللغة الإنجليزية وتطوير فهمهم، وذلك إذا قام المدرسون بتطبيق هذه التوصيات بشكل ملائم.

