

وقائع المؤتمر العلمي الدولي الثاني للعلوم الانسانية والاجتماعية والصرفة
لكلية التربية للبنات – جامعة القادسية
وبالتعاون مع كلية التربية الاساسية – الجامعة المستنصرية
وتحت شعار (اهتمام الامم بعلمائها ومفكرها دليل رقيها وازدهارها الحضاري)
للفترة 30 - 31 آب 2021

***Enhancing EFL Learners' Mastery of Suprasegmentals via
English Songs***

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Abstract:

The study at hand explores the pragmatic use of English songs in teaching English suprasegmentals to EFL students. Indeed, the stress-timed pattern of English often turns the task of teaching suprasegmentals into a mesh. Among the techniques that an EFL teacher may have recourse to in order to dismantle this suprasegmentals mesh is through the use of English songs. In order to prove the aforementioned point, two tests were administered to 30 licence students of English at the University of Mostaganem. The first test involves producing normal speech utterances to check sentence stress application while the second test involves listening to an English song and reproducing some of its passages. The findings of the study indicate that the use of English songs helps EFL learners enhance their mastery of English suprasegmentals since the musical rhythm of songs assists EFL learners in identifying and eventually mastering the suprasegmentals of English.

Keywords: suprasegmentals; EFL learners; English songs; teaching; English language.

1. Introduction

Pronunciation is an essential element in foreign language teaching/learning as it represents the key to a successful communication. Indeed, mispronunciation may lead to misunderstanding or even a failure in communication. Thus, when attempting to teach/learn a foreign language, pronunciation is among the requisite skills that need to be taught/learned and mastered in order to communicate effectively in that language. Harris (1974) considers correct pronunciation as one of the founding pillars of the speaking skill .

Pronunciation of any language is not only requisite, but also an indicator of how far a foreign learner has achieved in that language. Each language possesses its own phonemic inventory that may be larger or smaller than the inventory of the learner's mother tongue (Trubetzkoy, 1968). Some languages such as English display a complex relation between the graphological system and the sound system so that the letter 'o' may be pronounced as /□□/, /□□/, /□□/ in the words 'hope, sword, word' respectively. Thus, learning how to pronounce sounds (consonants and vowels) is necessary in English since the graphology of that language provides no assistance to how words are to be pronounced .

Besides the complexity of the segments (consonants and vowels) of the English language, its suprasegmental features are also challenging. Suprasegmental features have been defined by Laver (1994, p.152) as "all factors which can potentially be prolonged beyond the domain of the segment". These features include stress (word and sentence) and rhythm among other features and are the elements of pronunciation which assist the foreign learner, if used correctly, in producing sounds in connected speech .

Stress is the initial suprasegmental feature a foreign learner needs to learn and master in order for its pronunciation to be correct and approach a native-like level. Aslam (2007, p.70) defines it as "the prominence that certain syllables carry which makes them stand out from the rest of syllables in a word or sentence". Thus, stress is of two types, namely word stress and sentence stress. Word stress relates to words and is a property of syllables within a word as only one syllable is to receive stress in word. The stressed

syllable in a word is said to be produced with more muscular energy, a higher pitch and more length than an unstressed syllable. In a word such as allow, the second syllable is stressed, and thus it is produced stronger, louder and longer than the first syllable .

Sentence stress, on the other hand, relates sentences in which not all words receive stress, but some words. These words are called content words and are the words that carry meaning in a sentence. They include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs and negative modals. The remaining words are unstressed and are the function words which serve to make the sentence grammatically correct. Aslam (2007) asserts that:

In a sentence, not all words are uttered with the same stress. Generally, all the content words in a sentence are stressed and the function words are unstressed, unless the context demands them to be stressed. The syllable which is stressed when a polysyllabic word is pronounced in isolation will be stressed when it forms part of a sentence also. (p. 77)

Rhythm is another suprasegmental feature that provides the speech of a foreign learner with native-like pronunciation. Thanks to a correct rhythmic pattern, speech is not monotonic or else robotic. Sole (1991) advances that: Speech, as with all bodily movements such as breathing, walking, heart-beat, etc., is highly rhythmical; it tends to have a regular beat. But what marks the beat differ is various languages. Pike distinguished two kinds of rhythm in languages: (i)

syllable-timed rhythm, where syllables tend to occur at regular intervals of time, and consequently all syllables tend to have the same length (e.g. Spanish and French) and (ii) stressed-timed rhythm, where stressed syllables tend to occur at regular intervals. (p.153)

The rhythmic pattern of English is said to be stress-timed. Indeed, timing is equal between stressed syllables in English. To simplify intervals' count, the unit of foot is usually used for rhythm so that the same timing is equal for all feet in an utterance. A foot is said to begin with the first stressed syllable up to, but not including, the following stressed syllable (Turk & Shattuck-Hufnagel, 2013) .

It follows from what has been previously introduced that suprasegmentals are necessary in order for a foreign learner to attain native-like pronunciation. As indicated by Sole (1991, p. 145) “An appropriate stress and rhythmic pattern is more important for intelligibility than the correct pronunciation of isolated segments and, in fact, stress and rhythm determine the pronunciation of segments in English”. Sole (1991, p.145) further writes “Stress and rhythm are suprasegmental aspects that give the overall shape to the word or sequence. If easy intelligibility is to be achieved, it is important to give words their correct accentual pattern and rhythm”. Effectively, suprasegmental features are regarded as the music of speech since the stress-timed pattern of English gives music to speech in English . The musicality that is attributed to English speech by suprasegmental features possesses some commonalities with the elements that make up English songs. Indeed, English songs include a rhythmic pattern that is reminiscent of the rhythm of English, and the beats of musical instruments coincide with the feet of utterances within a song. Such a commonality between English speech and English songs pushes one to wonder if adopting a song-based teaching technique facilitates the process of teaching/learning the suprasegmentals of English . Song-based teaching has been adopted and recommended by some scholars and didacticians to teach some skills in English such as the speaking and the listening skill, in addition to vocabulary enlargement. Simpson posted on the British Council’s Teaching English blog “One of the big problems we all face, whether teaching English to children or adults, is maintaining learners’ interest throughout our lessons. Consequently, we often have to be very creative in the techniques we use. What makes music such a great teaching tool is its universal appeal, connecting all cultures and languages. This makes it one of the best and most motivating resources in the classroom, regardless of the age or background of the learner”.

The technique of song-based teaching pushes one to raise the following research questions in relation to teaching the suprasegmentals of English:

□ How can EFL teachers facilitate the process of learning and mastering English suprasegmentals?

□ Is the traditional method of teaching suprasegmentals (simple exercises) effective in teaching suprasegmentals?

□ Do English songs help in enhancing the mastery of English suprasegmentals?

The subsequent hypotheses may be deduced from the aforementioned research questions:

□ EFL teachers can facilitate the process of learning and mastering English suprasegmentals by integrating English songs in their teaching sessions .

□ The traditional method of teaching suprasegmentals (simple exercises) is not sufficient and needs extra supporting tools and techniques such as song-based teaching .

□ English songs help in enhancing the mastery of English suprasegmentals . This study has been conducted in order to prove that English songs facilitate the acquisition of English suprasegmentals, and to demonstrate that English songs enhance EFL learners' Mastery of English suprasegmentals. This study also aims to demonstrate that English songs add the motivational element to teaching as it attracts the interest and attention of the learner .

2. Scope and Methodology

The study was conducted in Algeria, at the University of Mostaganem Abdelhamid Ibn Badis. The sample of the study was selected from the students of the English department, and included 30 second year Bachelor's degree students. In fact, the second year of Bachelor's degree syllabus in English includes teaching the suprasegmentals of English as part of 'phonetics course .'

A pretest was directed to the participants as they had to produce normal speech utterances and apply sentence stress in such production. Instances of such utterances include 'the doctor will see you now', 'I allow you to leave', 'It is better to stay in tonight'. The participants were asked to identify the stressed words in these sentences, and then produce the sentences stressing just the content words and producing the function words in their weak forms . Two three-phase tests were then administered to the participants. The first phase involves listening to two versions (British and American) of the English song 'Your Song'. The second phase involves listening to the song a

second time and filling in the gaps in the lyrics (written on paper) of the song. In this phase, sometimes content words are missing from the lyrics and sometimes function words are missing. The third phase includes performing the song orally (without singing it) by students. The following passage is a sample of the passages that used in the song-based test :

And you canthis is your.....
It may bebutthat it's.....
Iyou.....
Iyouthat I in.....
Howis while you're in the.....

A pretest was again directed to the participants to test rhythm. They were asked to divide normal speech utterances to feet and identify the head of each foot. A three-phases test was also directed to the participants in relation to rhythm. The first phase involved listening to a passage of the song 'Your Song'. The second phase involved dividing the sentences in the passage into feet. The third phase included identifying the head of each foot. The following is the passage that was directed to the participants to test rhythm:

So excuse me forgetting but these things I do
You see I've forgotten if they're green or they're blue
Anyway the thing is what I really mean
Yours are the sweetest eyes I've ever seen

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the pre-test about sentence stress are tabulated below. The first table reports the results of content words identification as indicated below.

**Table 1:
Content Words Identification**

| | Success in identifying all content words | Missing the identification of some content words |
|----------------|--|--|
| Sentence one | 35% | 65% |
| Sentence two | 24% | 76% |
| Sentence three | 31% | 69% |
| Sentence four | 28% | 72% |
| Sentence five | 32% | 68% |

The following table represents the results of weak forms use:

**Table 2:
Weak Forms Use**

| | Use of Weak Forms | Use of strong Forms |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Sentence one | 10% | 90% |
| Sentence two | 6% | 94% |
| Sentence three | 2% | 98% |
| Sentence four | 18% | 82% |
| Sentence five | 13% | 87% |

The third table indicates the results of sentence stress application as indicated below.

Table 3:
Sentence Stress Application

| | Stress Content Words | Unstress Function Words |
|----------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Sentence one | 15% | 20% |
| Sentence two | 19% | 13% |
| Sentence three | 26% | 19% |
| Sentence four | 12% | 24% |
| Sentence five | 23% | 15% |

The former three tables indicate that sentence stress application by students was not at a high percentage. In all of the pre-test's sentences, not all content words were identified by the participants and the weak forms of function words were used by a few participants. Furthermore, a few participants could stress content words and unstress function words .

The subsequent tables reveal the results of the three-phases test about sentence stress. The first table presents the results of the fill-in-the-gaps phase in which the participants were asked to listen to the song and identify the missing words (content words or function words.)

Table 4:
Identification of Missing Words

| | Success in Identifying all Missing Words | Missing Some Words |
|----------------|--|--------------------|
| Sentence one | 65% | 45% |
| Sentence two | 57% | 53% |
| Sentence three | 68% | 42% |
| Sentence four | 70% | 30% |
| Sentence five | 74% | 36% |

Table 5:
Apply Sentence Stress

| | Stress Content words | Unstress Words | Function |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------|----------|
| Sentence one | 62% | 58% | |
| Sentence two | 54% | 61% | |
| Sentence three | 68% | 64% | |
| Sentence four | 70% | 56% | |
| | | | |
| Sentence five | | | |

Sentence five

The previous tables which represent the results of the three-phases test demonstrate that listening to the song helped the participants since the percentage of the participants that could identify content and function words increased within the test as opposed to the pre-test's results. Furthermore,

more participants did stress content words and unstress function words in the three-phases test than in the pre-test .

The results of the pre-test about rhythm are tabulated below.

Table 6:

Identification of Stressed Syllables

| | Identify All Stressed Syllables | Missing Some Stressed Syllables |
|----------------|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Sentence one | 23% | 83% |
| Sentence two | 16% | 84% |
| Sentence three | 8% | 92% |

Table 7:

Dividing Sentences to Feet

| | Success | Failure |
|----------------|---------|---------|
| Sentence one | 10% | 90% |
| Sentence two | 6% | 94% |
| Sentence three | 4% | 96% |

It appears from the above tables that the participants had difficulties in identifying all the stressed syllables in the pretest. Furthermore, few succeeded in dividing the sentences of the pretest into their constituent feet .

The following tables present the results of three-phases test about rhythm:

Table 8 :
Identification of Stressed Syllables (Feet Heads)

| | Identify all Stressed Syllables | Miss Some Stressed Syllables |
|----------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Sentence one | 53% | 47% |
| Sentence two | 60% | 40% |
| Sentence three | 55% | 45% |
| Sentence four | 67% | 33% |

Table 9:
Dividing Sentences Into Feet

| | Success | Failure |
|----------------|---------|---------|
| Sentence one | 64% | 36% |
| Sentence two | 73% | 28% |
| Sentence three | 68% | 32% |
| Sentence four | 81% | 19% |

It appears from the above tables that the integration of song helped participants as they could identify more stressed syllables (feet heads) than they did in the pre-test. Moreover, the participants succeeded in dividing the sentence into feet if compared to the pre-test which was a failure .

A Comparison between the results of the pre-test and those of the test re sentence stress revealed that listening to the song enhanced the application of sentence stress by 72% of the participants. Besides, a comparison between the results of the pre-test and the test re rhythm demonstrated that 56% of the participants identified more easily foot boundaries and feet heads in the song-based test than in the normal speech test .

4. Conclusion

In sum, it appears that English songs help improve EFL learners' application and mastery of suprasegmentals. Indeed, songs make the stress pattern of English prominent since the stressed syllables will correspond to musical beats and this will attract the ear of EFL learners and assist them in the identification of the stressed syllables. Moreover, songs also make the stress-timed rhythm clearer to identify by EFL learners since the equal timing between stressed syllables is accentuated by the equal length that exists between musical beats.

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Appendices
Appendix 1
"Your Song"

It's a this.....
I'm not one of those who can.....
Ihave muchbutif I.....
I'dawhere wecould.....

If Isculptor,then again, no
Orman who makes potions traveling show
I knownot much butthe bestdo
.....gift issong andone'syou

And you canthis is your.....
Itbe quitebutthat it's.....
Iyou don't.....
Iyouthat I in.....
Howis while you're in the.....

.....sat roofkicked offmoss
Wellfewverses wellgot
.....cross
Butsun's been quite kind whilewrotesong
It'speople likekeepturned on

Somebut theseI.....
YouI'veif they'reor they're.....
.....theis what I.....
YourstheI've ever.....

Appendix 2
"Your Song"

It's a little bit funny this feeling inside

I'm not one of those who can easily hide
I don't have much money but boy if I did
I'd buy a big house where we both could live

If I was a sculptor, but then again, no
Or a man who makes potions in a traveling show
I know it's not much but it's the best I can do
My gift is my song and this one's for you

And you can tell everybody this is your song
It may be quite simple but now that it's done
I hope you don't mind
I hope you don't mind that I put down in words
How wonderful life is while you're in the world

I sat on the roof and kicked off the moss
Well a few of the verses well they've got me quite cross
But the sun's been quite kind while I wrote this song
It's for people like you that keep it turned on

So excuse me forgetting but these things I do
You see I've forgotten if they're green or they're blue
Anyway the thing is what I really mean
Yours are the sweetest eyes I've ever seen

تعزيز إتقان الصفات الفوق المقطعية عند متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عن طريق الأغاني الإنجليزية

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مستخلص البحث:

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى الاستخدام التداولي و الادائي للأغاني الإنجليزية في تدريس الصفات الفوق المقطعية للغة الإنجليزية لطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. في الواقع ، نمط النبري للغة الإنجليزية غالبًا ما يعسر مهمة تدريس الصفات الفوق المقطعية. من بين التقنيات التي قد يلجأ إليها مدرس اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من أجل تخطي هذه الصعوبة هي استخدام الأغاني الإنجليزية أثناء تدريس الصفات الفوق المقطعية. و من أجل تبيان الفكرة السالفة الذكر، تم إجراء اختبارين لـ 30 طالب ليسانس تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية وذلك بجامعة مستغانم. حيث يتضمن الاختبار الأول إنتاج جمل عادية للتحقق من تطبيق النبر في الجملة. بينما يتضمن الاختبار الثاني الاستماع إلى أغنية إنجليزية وإعادة إصدار بعض مقاطعها. كما تشير نتائج الدراسة إلى أن استخدام الأغاني الإنجليزية يساعد متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية على تعزيز إتقانهم للصفات الفوق المقطعية للغة الإنجليزية لأن الإيقاع الموسيقي للأغاني يساعد المتعلمين في تعيين ثم إتقان الصفات الفوق المقطعية الكلمات المفتاحية: الصفات الفوق المقطعية، متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، أغاني إنجليزية، التدريس، اللغة الانجليزية.