

How the Cirebonese Dialect Affects Students' English Word Stress

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Abstract. Pronunciation accuracy plays an important role for effective communication in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning. In Cirebon, a city in West Java with a distinct local dialect, students often experience difficulties in placing English word stress when pronouncing English words. However, research that specifically explores how the Cirebonese dialect affects students' word stress is still very limited. This study aims to identify patterns of English word stress misplacement in multisyllabic nouns and adjectives, especially the placement of primary stress across syllables, and to examine the factors influencing these patterns when students pronounce English words. A qualitative research design was employed. Data were collected through a questionnaire to explore students' linguistic backgrounds and through audio recordings of students pronouncing selected English words. The data were analyzed to determine the word stress misplacement and the contributing factors. The findings reveal that students frequently misplace primary stress in multisyllabic words, by shifting stress from one syllable to other syllable. The first language (L1) interference plays an important role in students' English word stress production. This interference related to the differences between the prosodic systems of language and the students' frequent use of the dialect in daily communication. This study concludes that dialectal background plays a crucial role in shaping students' English word stress, highlighting the need for more targeted pronunciation instruction, such as phonological awareness and pronunciation teaching strategies in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Cirebonese dialect; English as a Foreign Language (EFL); university students; word stress

Abbreviations: English as a Foreign Language (EFL); First Language (L1); Second Language (L2)

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization and rapid technology development, the ability to communicate effectively is highly needed, especially in English. As an international language, English is already used in various fields, including education. It is a universal language for international communication and access to global knowledge [1]. As English is widely used all over the world, there is a need for students to acquire communication skills. Mastering English, especially speaking, is important for students to be able to communicate well in a global context and facilitate their career opportunities and societal integration [2]. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, developing good communication skills is one of the objectives in teaching speaking.

Speaking is the process of arranging and sharing meaning in various contexts with other people through verbal and non-verbal. It is characterized by its use of phonic substance as its primary medium. Effective speaking is not only determined by fluency, but can also be by the accuracy of pronunciation. It involves both accuracy and fluency [3]. Pronunciation accuracy is crucial for understandable and effective communication, impacting both speaking and listening. The role of pronunciation is important to personal and social lives, with its teaching influenced by first language (L1) and second language (L2) interactions and comprehension. One of the elements of pronunciation is word stress. Word stress refers to the relative degree of force or emphasis given to a particular syllable or word to make it stand out from other syllables or words in an utterance. Word stress is crucial for achieving pronunciation like native speaker in English and plays a significant role in successful language learning, but it poses challenges specifically for different language background groups. It is important for efficient communication in English and its misplacement can affect comprehension.

In EFL learning, students face challenges in pronouncing words due to the influence of their L1. It is called interference, which is the influence of students' L1 on their acquisition and use of English as L2, resulting in deviations from target language rules. In Indonesia, students often still use local languages in daily communication. One of them is in the Cirebon area, which uses the Cirebonese dialect. The Cirebonese dialect certainly has its own uniqueness and characteristics, which can be different from English. The difference in phonology features, particularly in word stress between the Cirebonese dialect

and English can affect how students produce word stress. Regarding with that, the difference in word stress placement can cause pronunciation inaccuracies. This issue is important to discuss in order to investigate whether it has an impact on the students' speaking performance and communicative effectiveness.

There are several previous studies that discuss the role of pronunciation and the influence of L1 on L2 learning. The first language can affect students' pronunciation [4], [5], [6], [7]. Thus, its L1 pronunciation habits interfere with accurate L2 production, causing systematic errors in specific phonemes. Furthermore, word stress is important to determine the comprehension of spoken language [8]. In this context, students may experience challenges in being understood. Also, lack of pronunciation practice in the classroom makes it difficult for students to produce accurate word stress [9], [10], [11]. However, research that specifically explores how the Cirebonese dialect affects students' word stress is still very limited, especially in the context of undergraduate students in Indonesia.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how the Cirebonese dialect affects students' English word stress among students in one of the public universities in Cirebon. It identifies the patterns of English word stress misplacement and examines the factors influencing Cirebonese students when pronouncing English words. This research is carried out in order to provide a deeper understanding of the influence of the local dialect on English pronunciation. The findings are expected to be able to contribute to English language teaching practices, especially in terms of addressing pronunciation challenges related to word stress.

METHODS

Study area

This study was conducted at a public university in Cirebon, West Java, Indonesia. The research was conducted in the English Language Teaching Department. As part of its curriculum, the department includes courses in English linguistics, phonology, and morphology that support the development of English speaking competence. The institution provides a relevant context for investigating English pronunciation among EFL students who are influenced by local dialects.

Procedures

Students Selection

This research applied a qualitative research design to explore how the Cirebonese dialect affects students' English word stress. The students consisted of five students of the third semester from the English Language Teaching Department. The students were selected purposively based on their academic background and the use of the Cirebonese dialect as their L1.

Data Collection

The data were collected through questionnaires and voice recordings. The questionnaire was used to obtain students' background information, including personal data, region of origin, mother tongue, and their first exposure to learning English. The questionnaires were distributed to the students through a Google Form and were completed within three days. Meanwhile, the voice recordings were conducted to analyze students' word stress patterns. The students were asked to pronounce a list of English words, and were recorded using voice notes features on WhatsApp application for further analysis.

Data Processing

After collecting the data, the recordings were transcribed and analyzed. The students' pronunciation of word stress was compared with the standard English word stress patterns. A list of words was compiled to identify and examine the stress patterns produced by the students.

Data analysis

The data analysis was conducted by examining the influence of the students' linguistic background on their English word stress production. The analysis followed these steps:

- Grouping the words based on the number of syllables
- Identifying and counting errors in word stress.
- Classifying the types of errors.
- Analyzing the connection of linguistic background with pronunciation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Linguistic Background

Based on the questionnaire data, most students used the Cirebonese dialect in daily communication. Three students were from Cirebon, while two were from Indramayu. Most of them started learning English at the elementary school level. The detailed student information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Student's data

Students	Place of Origin	Residence	L1	Dialect	Start Learning English
Student 1	Cirebon	Cirebon	Indonesian	Cirebonese	Elementary School
Student 2	Cirebon	Cirebon	Indonesian	Cirebonese	Elementary School
Student 3	Cirebon	Cirebon	Indonesian	Cirebonese	Kindergarten
Student 4	Indramayu	Cirebon	Indonesian	Javanese, Cirebonese	Junior High School
Student 5	Indramayu	Cirebon	Indonesian	Javanese, Cirebonese	Elementary School

As can be seen in Table 1, all students live in Cirebon, although their places of origin are different. Three students are from Cirebon, while the other two are from Indramayu. Student 1, 2, and 3 were born and raised in Cirebon and speak Indonesian as their first language. In their daily communication, they frequently use the Cirebon dialect. In terms of learning English, Student 1 and 2 started learning English at elementary school level, while Student 3 started learning English earlier, which is in kindergarten. Then, in contrast to the previous students, Students 4 and 5 came from Indramayu but lived in Cirebon. Both of them identified Indonesian as their first language. However, what is different from Students 1, 2, and 3 is that they use Javanese and Cirebon in their daily communication. This indicates that the students have a more diverse linguistic background, with the use of several local languages in their communication. Regarding English learning experience, Student 4 started learning English in junior high school, while Student 5 started at elementary school level.

In conclusion, the students shared several common characteristics. All of them identified Indonesian as their first language and frequently used the Cirebon dialect in everyday communication. This same linguistic background is very relevant to this study, because the continuous use of the Cirebon dialect can influence the production of word stress in English. However, some differences were found, including the students' place of origin, use of additional dialects, and the time when they began learning English. These differences may contribute to their English pronunciation and provide insight into the relationship between linguistic background and English word stress production.

The Cirebonese Dialect on Word Stress

Based on the results of five students' recordings, it was found that the Cirebonese dialect influences students' English word stress production. Some students produced incorrect stress placement in multisyllabic words. Errors were found in three and four syllables words such as "Snapdragon", "Unexpected" and "Accomplishment", where the stress was incorrectly assigned. The detailed results can be seen in table below.

Table 2. Results of students' recordings in two syllable words

Table 2 shows the students' word stress production for two syllable words, "Magnet" (/ˈmæɡ.nət/) and "Campus" (/ˈkæm.pəs/). The results indicate that all five students successfully identified and produced the correct primary stress on the first syllable in both words. No stress placement errors were found for the two syllable words included in this study.

In the word "Magnet" the correct stress placement is on the first syllable "Mag" as indicated by the apostrophe above. When pronouncing this word, all students were able to pronounce it correctly and place the stress on the correct syllable, which is in the first syllable. There were no errors in word stress placement in this word. Then, in the word "Campus" the correct stress placement is on the first syllable, also indicated by the apostrophe above. In this word, students were also able to place the stress in the correct position. The absence of stress placement errors indicates that the influence of the Cirebonese dialect was not yet apparent in the production of these particular words. This finding indicates that students were generally able to apply appropriate stress patterns to relatively simple words.

Table 3. Results of students' recordings in three syllable words

In Table 3, the data on the results of the students' word stress production on three syllable words are provided. The words to be pronounced were "Maximum" (/ˈmæk.sɪ.məm/) and "Snapdragon" (/ˈsnæp.dræg.ən/). In the word "Maximum" the correct stress placement is on the first syllable. The results show that all students correctly placed the primary stress on this word, which is on the first syllable. Then, in the

word “Snapdragon” the primary stress falls on the first syllable “Snap”, while the second syllable “drag” receives secondary stress. Student 3 failed to maintain the primary stress on the first syllable, resulting in an incorrect stress placement that should have been on the first syllable. Meanwhile, the other four students produced the correct primary stress pattern on the first syllable.

The errors found in the word “Snapdragon” indicate that three syllable words may present greater difficulties than two syllable or simple words. Although all students managed to produce the correct stress on the word “Maximum”, there was one student who shifted the stress from the first syllable to the second syllable. This suggests that some students may experience uncertainty when determining the position of primary stress in longer words. This finding may reflect the influence of the students’ linguistic backgrounds. In the Cirebonese dialect, word stress is generally not as pronounced as in English. As a result, students may have difficulty placing the correct English stress pattern when pronouncing unfamiliar multisyllabic words.

Table 4. Results of students’ recordings in four syllable words

Table 4 shows the results of the students’ word stress placement on four syllable words “Unexpected” (/ˌʌn.ɪkˈspek.tɪd/) and “Accomplishment” (/əˈkʌm.plɪʃ.mənt/). It can be seen that four students correctly placed the main stress on each word, while one student produced an incorrect stress pattern. If being compared with the results for two syllable words, the findings indicate a decrease in accuracy as the number of syllables increases. The occurrence of word placement errors in “Unexpected” and “Accomplishment” indicates that longer words pose a greater challenge for students in identifying and producing the correct stress position.

In the word “Unexpected” four students correctly placed the stress on the third syllable. Meanwhile, Student 5 placed the stress on the second syllable. Furthermore, in the word “Accomplishment” Student 5 placed the stress on the third syllable. The correct stress in the word “Accomplishment” should be on the second syllable. These errors may be due to the complexity of stress assignment in English. Students may have difficulty recognizing which syllable should receive primary stress in longer words, leading to misplaced stress during pronunciation. The observed pattern suggests that students’ ability to produce correct word stress decreases with increasing word complexity. Although most students demonstrated awareness of stress patterns in English, longer words require greater phonological processing and this makes stress placement errors can happen.

Students’ Word Stress Accuracy

The results show that students demonstrated high accuracy in two syllable words such as “Magnet” and “Campus”, with 100% correct stress placement. However, errors were found in three syllable and four syllable words. For example, “Snapdragon” showed 20% incorrect stress, while “Unexpected” and “Accomplishment” also showed similar error rates. These findings are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Percentage of incorrect word stress

Table 5 summarizes the students’ accuracy of word stress production across multisyllable words. The results show that two syllable words achieved the highest accuracy rate, with the word “Magnet” and “Campus” both achieving 100% correct stress placement. This means that all students placed stress on the correct syllable. Meanwhile, for three syllable words, the word “Maximum” also achieved 100% accuracy, while the word “Snapdragon” showed a lower accuracy rate of 80%. This was due to one student’s incorrect stress placement. Similar like three syllable words, for four syllable words, the word “Unexpected” and “Accomplishment” each achieved 80% accuracy, indicating that there were still errors in stress placement within the spoken words.

The pattern can be observed from these findings is as the number of syllables increases, the frequency of stress errors also increases. No errors were identified for two syllable words, while one error occurred for three syllable words and four syllable words. This suggests that word length can influence students’ ability to accurately produce English word stress. These results support the assumption that English word stress remains a challenge for EFL students whose linguistic background is characterized by the use of the Cirebonese dialect. This pattern suggests that the influence of local dialect may become more pronounced as the phonological complexity of English words increases. These findings provide initial evidence that students’ linguistic backgrounds may contribute to variations in their pronunciation performance, which will be discussed further in the next section.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that students demonstrated better performance in producing word stress in two syllable words than in three syllable and four syllable words. This pattern suggests that the complexity of word stress production increases as the number of syllables increases. This may be due to the simpler stress patterns in shorter words, while multisyllabic words require a more complex understanding

of stress placement. This finding is consistent with previous studies which state that students tend to experience more difficulties with suprasegmental features in longer words [12], [13], [14]. This may be due to differences in stress placement and intonation across languages [15]. Cirebonese certainly has its own unique characteristics. The Cirebon dialect exhibits several characteristic features. These include the release of the letter (s) in words, the discharge of the letter (m) in words, the phoneme change of the letter (a) to the letter (e), the addition of the letter (e) at the end of words, and the release of vowel letters such as (i) in words [16]. Also, intonation in the Cirebonese dialect tends to rise when pronouncing words. This aligns with studies suggesting that a more rising intonation may contribute to difficulties with suprasegmental features in longer words [17]. The differences in dialectal characteristics between the Cirebon language and English result in pronunciation that may differ. This relates to the concept of L1 interference, where the phonological system of the first language affects the production of a second language. Phonological interference occurs when the phonological rules or sounds of one language affect the pronunciation and sound system of another, leading to changes in speech production and potential communication problems [18]. The differences between phonological system in the Cirebonese dialect and English may lead students to transfer their native stress patterns when pronouncing English words.

Beside of that, the influence of daily language use also contributes to pronunciation patterns. Since most students frequently use the Cirebonese dialect in their daily communication, the phonological features of this dialect are strongly internalized. As a result, these features are transferred when speaking English. This is in line with previous studies that state daily language use influences pronunciation patterns through systematic variations driven by social and linguistic factors, including habitual and occupational influences [19].

The finding also highlights the occurrence of stress shifting among some students. Students do not omit stress on words but they transferred the primary stress from the target syllable to another syllable within the word. For example, Student 3 shifted the stress in the word “Snapdragon” from the first syllable to the second syllable. Similar with that, Student 5 shifted the stress in the word “Unexpected” from the second syllable to the third syllable. In the word “Accomplishment” student 5 shifted the stress from the second syllable to the third syllable. It shows that the students were aware that one syllable should receive greater prominence. However, they experienced difficulty determining the correct positions of primary stress. The presence of stress shifting indicates that the challenge lies not in producing stress itself but in accurately assigning stress according to English phonological rules.

The occurrence of stress shifting can be related to differences between the prosodic systems of English and the students’ linguistic backgrounds [20]. English relies on lexical stress as an important feature for signaling prominence within words, and the position of stress may vary across syllables depending on the word. Meanwhile, stress tends to be less salient in Indonesian and local dialects such as Cirebonese. Previous studies have shown that Indonesian lacks lexical stress, with prominence being realized using boundary properties rather than fixed stress patterns [21]. This resulting in students’ limited awareness of lexical stress as a distinctive feature when learning English. Although the students appeared to recognize the need to assign prominence to one syllable, they did not always place the primary stress on the target syllable. Students transferred the stress to another syllable within the word. This suggests that the students were able to produce stress but experienced difficulty applying English stress rules accurately, especially in multisyllabic words. Therefore, the observed stress shifts also reflect the influence of students’ first language prosodic patterns on their English word stress production.

The findings of this study also have pedagogical implications for English language teaching. Since stress misplacement are mainly found in multisyllabic words, pronunciation teaching should place more emphasis on word stress patterns, especially in more complex vocabulary. Explicit explanations of stress placement rules can be provided by combining listening and repetition activities to help students recognize word stress more accurately. Furthermore, introducing students to authentic spoken English through audio recordings, videos, and classroom pronunciation practice can increase their awareness of the suprasegmental features of English. Since students tend to transfer phonological patterns from their linguistic background, pronunciation instruction should also encourage students to compare English stress patterns with their local dialect. Such activities can help students develop a greater awareness to English word stress and improve their comprehension in oral communication. It can support more effective and accurate English pronunciation of the students.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to identify patterns of English word stress misplacement in multisyllabic words and to examine the factors influencing these patterns when students pronounce English words. The findings revealed that most students were able to produce correct word stress patterns in two syllable words.

However, misplacements began to appear in three syllable and four syllable words, indicating that the complexity of word stress production increases as the number of syllables increases.

The study also identified stress shifting, when students transferred the primary stress from the target syllable to another syllable within a word. These findings suggest that the students were aware of the need to assign prominence to one syllable but experienced difficulty determining the correct position of primary stress according to English phonological rules. The occurrence of stress misplacement and stress shifting indicates that English word stress remains challenging in multisyllabic words.

The first language (L1) interference contributes to these difficulties. Differences between the prosodic systems of English and the Cirebonese dialect, along with the frequent use of the dialect in daily communication, can influence students' production of English word stress. Students may transfer familiar pronunciation patterns from their linguistic background when producing English words. Based on these findings, greater attention should be given to pronunciation instruction, especially in teaching word stress.

This study contributes to the growing research on the relationship between local dialects and English pronunciation among EFL learners. By examining word stress production among students who regularly use the Cirebonese dialect, the study provides insights into how local linguistic backgrounds may influence the acquisition of English suprasegmental features. These findings may serve as a reference for future studies investigating pronunciation challenges among learners from diverse dialectal backgrounds. Future studies are recommended to involve a larger number of students and a wider range of lexical items to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between local dialects and English word stress production.

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