

**Stressed and Unstressed Forms as Recognized by Iraqi EFL Arab  
and Kurdish University Students  
A Sociolinguistic Study**

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**Abstract**

This study aims to investigate the Iraqi EFL Arab and Kurdish University students' ability to recognize the stressed (full or strong) forms and the unstressed (reduced or weak) forms within connected speech of English.

The material chosen includes six auxiliary verbs. The sample of the study is twenty Iraqi EFL Arab and Kurdish fourth year university students of both genders (males and females). The participants are from the University of Baghdad and the University of Duhok.

**Key words:** Stressed forms, unstressed forms, recognition, sociolinguistics

**1. Introduction**

Pronunciation still occupies an important position in the linguistic analysis despite the great efforts that are exerted these days to carry out research works in other fields than pronunciation.

Pronunciation is related to the foreign language learner's ability to be both intelligible and understandable in the foreign language s / he learns. Failure to achieve either of these results in a cut of communication regardless the number of words or utterances a speaker has. Pronunciation is the medium through which a message is conveyed.

Good pronunciation alone is not enough for EFL learner to attain intelligibility and understandability in his / her oral-aural performance. It is the correct pronunciation in the correct and appropriate context of situation that makes sense.

Therefore, this study is meant to observe and measure Iraqi EFL Arab and Kurdish university students' recognition of the subject-matter in terms of linguistic and sociolinguistic factors. The study is thought out and carried out due to field observations felt with which show that the subject-matter is a real problem.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. Stressed and Unstressed Forms

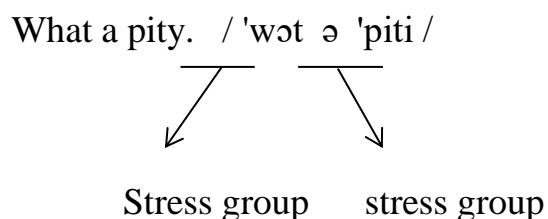
Native speakers of English speak their language in rhythmic groups or units. In this way, certain syllables and words are highlighted while others are de-emphasized. EFL learners have difficulty unstressing (weakening) some syllables while they give undue stress to others. (Goodwin, 2001, p. 121).

In English, many function words are unstressed in certain contexts. Therefore, they have two forms: stressed which is said in a strong way and unstressed which is said in a weak or reduced way or with no or little prominence. (Goodwin, 2001, p. 121).

Gimson (1985: 260) states that accented words in some rhythmic groups are shortened depending on the number of unaccented syllables that follow in the rhythmic group.

Content words in connected speech generally retain prominence even if there is no pitch associated with them. Function words have two forms to be said with. That is, they have both quantitative and qualitative patterns according to whether they are stressed (in special context or when they are said in isolation) or unstressed (as in normal contexts). (Gimson, 1985, pp. 260-261).

Hassan and El-Shayib (1987: 156) refer that a stress group is composed of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable. In speech production, each stress group is given the same amount of time needed to be produced. The following two stress groups are said in the same amount of time.



### 2.2. Recognition

Recognition is attained when a listener successfully perceives and interprets the speech sound waves. As such, perception is first and it is in three stages: the first stage is the interpretation of the acoustic sound waves made by the speech organs with which the second stage is combined to make physical and physiological stages. The third stage is psychological. It includes the composition of the concept taking place at the linguistic level. (Gimson, 1985, p. 9).

Speech perception is a term used in phonetics and psycholinguistics to refer to the listener's ability to recognize a sequence of discrete sounds and linguistic units out of the continuum of speech signals. (Crystal, 2011, p. 447).

Speech recognition is part of auditory phonetics. Hearing is made through the ear which is primarily made and designed to have this function. (Hamash, 1979, p. 154).

### **2.3. Socio-linguistics**

Language and culture are inseparable. A language does not develop and change outside its social context. For a speech community, language is the primary means of communication. (Lado, 1964, p. 23).

Sociolinguistics is, therefore, defined as the study of language in its social context. In sociolinguistics, the role and function of language are examined in the proper context of situation. (Hudson, 1986, p. 1).

### **2.4. Sociolinguistic Factors**

Language variation is the result of a number of factors, some of which are linguistic, others are non-linguistic. Both of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors lead to the fact that no two people use their language exactly alike. Therefore, Jones (1969: 11) argues that there are no two speakers speak quite alike even if they are from the same neighbourhood.

#### **2.4.1.1. Regional Variation**

Herk (2013: 13) states that the physical location is so influential that any study of sociolinguistic variation cannot leave out. Wardhaugh (2010: 28-34) refers that the physical location is a direct cause of regional dialects which characterize the speech style adopted by the residents of a region.

#### **2.4.1.2. Social Variation**

Schmitt and Rodgers (2020: 146) state that the study of language in society is dealt with by sociolinguistics. Each language has a social and contextual dimension. Social factors always affect the what and the how an utterance is said or written.

#### **2.4.1.3. Gender Variation**

Gender variation can best be felt with in narratives, discourse organizations and accent differences despite that both genders live in the same place and vicinity. (Schmitt and Rodgers, 2020, p. 154).

### **3. Research Questions**

The present study tries to find out answers to such questions as:

- a. Are Iraqi EFL university students intelligible and accurate in their L2?
- b. Is there considerable differences between the students of the University of Duhok and the students of the University of Baghdad as far as the subject-matter is concerned as a result of the sociolinguistic differences they both exhibit?

#### 4. Methodology

In accordance with the objectives of the study, the data are collected through a sample and a recognition test.

##### 4.1. Description of the Sample

The sample of the study is made up of twenty fourth year Iraqi EFL Arab and Kurdish university students. The Arab students are ten in number and of both genders (five males and five females) from College of Arts, College of Education Ibn Rushd and College of Education for Women of the University of Baghdad.

The Kurdish students are ten in number and of both genders (five males and five females) from College of Languages of the University of Duhok. The study is carried out in the academic year 2020-2021. Both Arab and Kurdish students are chosen randomly.

##### 4.2. The Test

In order to collect the data, a recognition test is constructed. The test material includes six auxiliary verbs chosen among the most frequently recurrent ones in every day conversation.

The test material is recorded by a native speaker of British English. Participants are instructed to listen carefully to the tape-recording and then transcribe phonemically each auxiliary verb given to them in a sentence in a test paper before them.

#### Auxiliary Verbs – Stressed and Unstressed Forms

Forms	Stressed Forms	Unstressed Forms			
		Normal	Initial	Before Vowels	After Vowels
have	/ hæv /	/ əv /	/ həv /		/ v /
do	/ du: /	/ də /		/ du /	
must	/ mʌst /, / mʌs /	/ məs /		/ məst /	
would	/ wud /	/ əd /	/ wəd /		/ d /
been	/ bi:n /	/ bin /			
could	/ kud /	/ kəd /			

##### 4.3. Scoring Scheme

The criterion followed in this test is a right / wrong criterion. The model adopted is the RP model prescribed for Iraqi students by the educational authorities. Each auxiliary verb is given two marks.

#### Distribution of Marks

Auxiliary Verbs	Marks Allotted
have	2
do	2
must	2
would	2
been	2
could	2
Total Marks Allotted	12
Minimum Pass Mark	6

**5. Results****5.1. University of Duhok**

Participant No.	Auxiliary Verbs (6 MKs)
1	1
2	0
3	1
4	0
5	2
6	0
7	0
8	0
9	0
10	0
11	0
12	0
13	1
14	1
15	0
16	5
17	2
18	0
19	0
20	1
Total Percentage of Pass	0 %
Total Percentage of Failure	100 %

**5.2. University of Baghdad**

Participant No.	Auxiliary Verbs (6 MKs)
1	2
2	1
3	2
4	0
5	2
6	2
7	0
8	1
9	0
10	0
11	2
12	0
13	0
14	0
15	1
16	1
17	2
18	0
19	1
20	1

Total Percentage of Pass	0 %
Total Percentage of Failure	100 %

Male participants are arranged from 1-10 while female participants are arranged from 11-20. This arrangement includes both universities for purposes of easiness in statistics.

## 6. Findings

The results show that students of both universities manifest remarkable failure with minor differences in the auxiliary verbs. These minor differences do not bring about a considerable change in the overall result.

It is found out that using the stressed form rather than the unstressed form makes the Iraqi EFL university students relatively intelligible in their L2 but inaccurate. Inaccuracy most often results in unintelligibility.

It is also found out that phonemic transcription is not well mastered and Iraqi EFL university students show poor transcription due to poor recognition and poor mastery of the phonemic symbols.

## 7. Recommendations

- a. Practice should be given extra attention. The more they practice, the easy they use the foreign language.
- b. Abiding by the prescribed model of pronunciation is a must. Without a model, pronunciation testing becomes difficult, if not impossible to carry out.
- c. Rules of pronunciation should lead to perfect oral performance. They are means to an end.

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**Appendix A.****Recognition Test**

Date:

Material Tested: Auxiliaries

Participants' Description: 4<sup>th</sup> year students. Dept. of English

Participant's Name:

University of \_\_\_\_\_ / College of \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: a. M b. F

Examiner: Ajwad Thamir Abood

**(A). Auxiliary Verbs.**

Listen carefully, and then transcribe phonemically the underlined bold type word in each sentence.

1. We did not find you in the office. Where **have** you been?

/ /

2. Well, I have not seen you before. Where **do** you live?

/ /

3. We can't be late. We **must** leave in a good time.

/ /

4. I'**d** like to go.

/ /

5. He has **been** studying English for five years.

/ /

6. You **could** try my new car.

/ /

**Researchers' Brief Bio.**

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قياس قدرة الطلبة العراقيين العرب والكورد الدارسين للغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية على  
تمييز الصيغ ذات النبر المشدد والغير مشدد  
دراسة اجتماعية لغوية

أجود ثامر عبود

ا. م. د. مي اسطيفان رزق الله

الخلاصة

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى استقصاء قدرة طلبة اقسام اللغة الانجليزية العراقيين العرب والكورد على تمييز الصيغ ذات النبر المشدد والغير مشدد في الكلام المتصل في اللغة الانجليزية. تتكون مادة البحث من ست افعال مساعدة تمثل الاكثر تداولاً اما عينة الدراسة فتتكون من عشرون طالبا وطالبة يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية من جامعتي بغداد ودهوك.  
**الكلمات الأساسية:** الاشكال ذات النبر المشدد، الاشكال ذات النبر الغير مشدد، تمييز الاصوات، علم اللغة الاجتماعي.