

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH BACK STRESS SUFFIX AT SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: This research paper provides some pedagogical strategies for the teaching and learning of back stress suffix in English drawing data from Seconde class at secondary school. The Explanatory method coupled with the 3Ps method have been selected in order to ease the teaching and learning of the English back stress suffix. It appears that English back stress suffix can be taught, learnt and assessed as other English courses at secondary school. In fact, back stress is twofold namely back stress suffix₁ and back stress suffix₂. In so doing, this work is restricted to back stress suffix₁ also known as penultimate stress. It provides the readers with a lesson plan to deal with this English pronunciation item based on three (3) Ps method: Presentation, Practice, and Production.

Keywords: Teaching, word stress, back stress suffix

ENSEIGNEMENT-APPRENTISSAGE DES SUFFIXES ANTEPENULTIEMES ET PENULTIEMES ANGLAISES AU SECONDAIRE

Résumé : Cette contribution propose quelques stratégies pédagogiques pour l'enseignement et l'apprentissage du «back stress suffixe» en anglais au secondaire avec un accent particulier sur la classe de Seconde. Elle s'appuie sur la méthode explicative et la méthode 3Ps. Il résulte que les suffixes qui portent un accent antépénultième en anglais peuvent être enseignés, appris et évalués au même titre que d'autres cours d'anglais au secondaire. En fait, les suffixes antépénultièmes sont deux catégories, à savoir les suffixes antépénultièmes 1 et les suffixes antépénultièmes 2. Ce faisant, ce travail se limite aux suffixes antépénultièmes 1 aussi connus sous le nom d'accent pénultième. Cet article fournit aux lecteurs un plan de cours pour traiter cet élément de prononciation anglaise basé sur la méthode des trois (3) P : présentation, pratique et production.

Mots-clés: enseignement, accent des mots, suffixes antépénultièmes et pénultièmes.

Introduction

This article aims at highlighting the importance of teaching and learning English back stress suffix at secondary school with particular reference to the class of Seconde¹ at Reconciliation² high school. In fact, the English back stress encompasses two stress categories: back stress suffix 1 and back stress suffix 2. The back stress suffix 1 covers stress assignment on one syllable before the suffix, whereas the back stress suffix 2 is about two syllables before the suffix. This article is restricted to back stress

¹Seconde class is the equivalent of fifth form or tenth grade

²Reconciliation High School is one of the public high schools in Brazzaville (Congo)

suffixɪ also known as penultimate stress. This investigation intends to show that the teaching of English back stress suffix would help learners improve and develop their listening, speaking and loud reading skills during the English learning process. This article, in addition, aims at providing didactic strategies that can guide both teachers and learners deal with the English back stress suffix and take it into account during the English teaching process and assessment. Two questions crop up notably (i) How to teach English back stress suffixɪ at secondary school? (ii) What are the hindrances that impede both the teaching and learning of English back stress suffix effectively in the class of Seconde at secondary school? Moreover, this work hypothesizes that if the secondary school teachers do not cope with the teaching of English back stress suffix in classes because they have not been trained on this English teaching item during their training period and workshops on this English pronunciation items are not organized. To achieve successfully this paper, we are going to focus on the relevance of teaching English suffix stress, the data collection method, the major finding and the teaching and learning of English back stress suffix ɪ.

1. The relevance of teaching English suffix stress

Indeed, teaching English suffix stress aims at encouraging learners to know the stress pattern of words made of suffixes or to identify the stressed syllable in a complex word during the oral communication. Otherwise, the relevance of teaching this English pronunciation item is to help learners be able to listen to English messages, read texts loudly and speak the target language intelligibly thanks to its prosody. In Congo, the teaching of English suffix stress is part of English curriculum and its goals concern both teachers and learners with the aim to avoid misunderstanding during the oral communication in classes and to help them be familiar with the English sounds system. In fact, it is important to mention that stress placement is affected by the vowel quality within the word in the teaching and learning process when dealing with English language. That is the reason why Roach (2000:88) while debating this issue highlights that “*the English stress placement is a highly complex matter*”. Roach thinks that word stress is a difficult issue to learn and to teach in schools because it requires getting more information about the different parts of a word such as: prefix, root or suffix. Thus, the lack of didactic transposition about this scientific knowledge makes the teaching of English word stress very tricky for the secondary school learners. To illustrate, the teaching of English word stress needs to understand the different grammatical categories and syllable structures of English words. So, these difficulties should be solved in order to simplify the teaching and learning of the stress placement in words and sentences. In fact, Roach underlines that the above complex matters are the obstacles which make the stress items difficult to be taught, learnt and assessed at secondary school. Furthermore, Roach thinks that some word stress rules should be given to help both teachers and learners ameliorate their English conversations in classes. Roach (2000:89) writes that “in most cases when English speakers come across an unfamiliar word they can pronounce it with stress if they follow certain rules of stress placement”. Though these irregularities, Roach provides four criteria that can help both teachers and learners identify the stress placement or the position of stress in a given word.

The analysis of the following criteria, (1) whether the word is morphologically simple or complex as a result containing one or more affixes or being a compound word, (2) the grammatical category to which the word belongs: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, (3) the number of syllables contained in the word, (4) the morphological

structure of these syllables, shows that it is possible to ease the difficulties encountered during the teaching and learning process of English word stress. In fact, when dealing with English stress, it is important to take into account the information related to morphology and phonology in order to explain “the ideas on stress placement in nouns, verbs and adjectives in the simplest possible form”. For Roach, the simplest way is to provide some rules to our learners necessary to know the grammatical category of the word. This technique is suitable for nouns, verbs, and adjectives with two syllables but once we have three, four and more syllable words this method shows its limitations. Therefore, he further says that any rule has exceptions; the best way to master word stress is to consider it as it is shown in the dictionary. Regarding the importance of teaching word stress in English, Roach (idem) writes that the “incorrect placement is the major cause of intelligibility problems for foreign learners and is therefore a subject that needs to be treated very seriously”. In other words, misplacing stress is the source of communication break since no one understands the other persons. Thus, working on the relevance of sounds in oral communication, Kwasau Ayuba (2004:15) enlightens that “now to be able to speak a language, the first thing we need is the sound.” In other words, the teaching of English sounds and stress encourages the secondary school learners to pronounce and stress words accordingly so as to decode the message in writing or orally. Talking about the miscommunication between nonnative speakers and native speakers of English as the result of incorrect word stress patterns, Brita Haycraft (2013) mentions that we may end up sounding like a robot if we do not stress our words in the right place. In fact, Brita Haycraft unveils that English word stress is one of the key issues for the best communication since it keeps the intelligibility of the message conveyed during the conversation. This means that if learners are not trained on the stress pattern, they would fail to recognize the difference between the stressed and unstressed syllables in words or sentences in English language. Also, the relevance of this language item is underlined by Mosher & Walid (2011:71) when they write “English word stress is very important to EFL Learners and practice in stress placement rules can certainly help enhance learners’ communicative competence”. As a matter of fact, Mosher & Walid think that the teaching and learning of the English suffix stress must be taken into account in the course of English in order to enable both teachers and learners to know how to avoid unintelligibility in English. Thus, Celce-Murcia et al (1996) quoted by Jonathan Pierrel (2010: 03) assert that: Studying stress patterns in English are particularly important for speakers of other languages whose stress rules are more regular or different and thus interfere with comprehensibility. In fact, teaching English suffix stress to secondary school learners is very important because the mother tongue they have acquired and the first language they have learnt do not have the same rules concerning the stress assignment or the sound system as in English. Following (Fraser 2006) Graeme Couper (2012:2) says “The implications for pronunciation teaching are significant and emphasize the essential role of learning concept such as syllables, phonemes and word stress as a means to success fully categorizing the sounds of language”. This quotation actually shows that using clear syllables and stress patterns are an important part of speech. The correct word stress in English is crucial for understanding the meaning of words in sentences. In the same way, if a nonnative learner does not pronounce a word accordingly, it will be hard for a native speaker to understand the word. The words or sentences might be correct grammatically, but if they are pronounced or stressed with an unexpected stress pattern, misunderstanding may happen during the oral communication.

2. Data collection Method

This section aims at selecting the three main tools such as the pilot study, the questions to teachers and learners in order to collect more information concerning the existence of the selected item in the syllabus, its teaching and learning process in classes of Seconde at secondary school.

2.2 Pilot study

As a matter of fact, during the class observation we notice that the different items of English pronunciation are not taken into account while teaching and learning English. This means that teachers do not teach pronunciation as a separate lesson with appropriate strategies the way they do with reading comprehension for example. Pronunciation is limited to some transcriptions of words and repetition. Whereas, the analysis of the INRAP English syllabus in the class of Seconde unveils that the English back stress is included and requested to be taught, learnt and assessed. This signifies that this language item is well-mentioned in the English syllabus of as follows:

(General objective 2: expressing oneself orally/ Specific objective 2.2: produce a message respecting prosody word/ sentence stress, tones, and intonation in connected speech) [...] (General objective 3: Expressing oneself orally/Specific objective 3.5: reproducing accents/ word stress, unexpressive reading, word stress, tones and intonations), INRAP (2002: 9)

2.3 Questions to teachers

The questions to teachers concern the teachers' training background, the teachers' training place, the teaching experience, the presence of back stress suffix in the syllabus, the workshop organizations, and the objectives to teach back stress suffix. Elsewhere, we have interviewed some teachers out of the selected school so as to collect more information about the teaching of English back stress suffix which is well-written in the English syllabus and requested to be taught from 6ème³ to Terminale⁴. The following are the two selected questions to teachers:

- Have you been trained to teach English pronunciation?
- Does INRAP organize workshop on teaching English pronunciation aspects?

2.4 Questions to learners

The questions to learners deal with the learners' training time of learning English, and their lack of motivation by teachers while learning the English pronunciation aspects in the class of Seconde at secondary school. The following are the two selected questions to learners:

- *Which lesson are you more interested in while learning English?*
- *Do your teachers encourage you to learn English back stress?*

³6ème class is the equivalent of the first form or fifth grade

⁴Terminale is the equivalent of the upper sixth form or twelfth grade

3. Discussion and major findings

As a result, the major findings related to the teaching and learning of English suffix stress in the class of *Seconde* through observation, questions and interviews unveil that the first problem that blocks the teaching of English suffix stress is that teachers have not been trained how to teach English pronunciation items at secondary school. As a matter of fact, the following table illustrates how the sample teachers mention that they have not been trained to teach English back stress suffix during their training.

Table 1: Teachers' training background

Have you been trained to teach English pronunciation?		
Answer	Respondents	Percentages
Yes	01	10%
No	09	90%
Total	10	100%

This table shows that the majority of teachers have not been trained on the teaching of English back stress suffix during their training periods at ENS⁵. This latter is the only teacher training college likely to provide the prospective teachers with teaching strategies and learning activities in order to face this language item at secondary school. Few teachers of English assume that they have been trained on how to teach English back stress suffix while learning the course of phonetics and phonology. Indeed, above of all these teachers' opinions about their training background, it is important to mention that those teachers are limited on the way they teach English suffix stress in the class of *Seconde*. That is, they are not skilled to select the English back stress in the English syllabus and to provide a lesson plan by taking into account its different stages such as: Beginning, Presentation, Practice, Production, and Ending, based on English back stress. In addition to that, this selected item is not considered as an autonomous lesson to be taught and tested during the exams in classes. In this perspective, Ondzé Otouba (p.IV) mentions "the teaching of English sounds in secondary school has not received the attention from previous scholar. This is due to the fact that ENS Curriculum does not include phonetic teaching strategies to equip Prospective teachers with adequate teaching English sound mastery." Ondzé Otouba thinks that if English sounds are not taught because ENS does not train and equip prospective teachers with phonetic teaching strategies to motivate them to teach the course of pronunciation at secondary school. He also argues that ENS is the unique place to do so since it is the sanctuary where language teachers are trained to teach items of pronunciation using a lesson plan as in grammar and reading comprehension. In the following lines Ondzé Otouba shows the reason why these items are not taught autonomously to learners at secondary school: "As *prospective teachers were not taught how to teach English sound in the same way English grammar is taught; it is obvious that they are unable to teach English sounds to their learners*". Talking about the disabilities of the secondary school teachers on the teaching of English pronunciation items, Ndongo Ibara writes:

⁵Ecole Normale Supérieure is the Congolese Secondary school teacher training school

This long lasting English language practice in Congo is due to the fact that the teaching of English phonetics and phonology at the Teacher Training College is considered a “poor relation” or a neglected course in language teaching/learning. Teachers’ trainers put forward the idea that phonetics is “devilish” or “hanging judge” so they do not want to face all the hassles of teaching this course.

Ndongo Ibara (2016:414)

The use of the terms “*devilish*” or “*hanging judge*” by Ndongo Ibara depicts the disabilities of the previous teachers of that course before 2012 at the teaching training college to transpose phonetics and phonology into pronunciation through the teaching strategies and learning activities in order to eliminate everything difficult related to the sounds and stress teachings at secondary school. The results of the teachers’ interviews reveal that during their training period at university they have never been trained to teach English word stress at secondary school. However, they enlighten that phonetics and phonology at university has been taught to help prospective teachers improve their speaking skill in English and get more information about the scientific knowledge of this course. In other words, the course of phonetics and phonology has not been transposed didactically in order to motivate teachers of English face the teaching of pronunciation items such as word stress and others at secondary school. Finally, the majority of our interviewees have attested that English phonetics and phonology has been one of the trickiest courses they learn during their training period at ENS. In addition to that, it appears the lack of organizing workshops on the teaching and learning of English suffix stress. Indeed INRAP⁶’s authorities do not organize workshops about teaching and learning English suffix stress to help teacher and learners deal with this pronunciation item without any difficulty. This signifies that unlike this language item is well-mentioned in the English syllabus as follows:

(General objective 2: expressing oneself orally/ Specific objective 2.2: produce a message respecting prosody word/ sentence stress, tones, and intonation in connected speech) [...] (General objective 3: Expressing oneself orally/Specific objective 3.5: reproducing accents/ word stress, unexpressive reading, word stress, tones and intonations). INRAP (2002: 9)

Teachers of English are not encouraged and motivated to teach and test it in classes of Seconde at secondary. Hence, Peter Roach (2006, 6) writes that “Pronunciation teaching is not popular all the time with teachers and language – teaching theorists, and in recent years it has been fashionable to treat it as a rather out dated activity” In other words, the analysis of Roach illustrates the Congolese case where the educational authorities and the teachers training college do not facilitate the teaching and assessing of English pronunciation items at secondary school. Thus, results collected on the teachers’ views about the organization of workshops by INRAP concerning the teaching of English back stress suffix at the secondary school are presented in the table below.

⁶Institut National de Recherche et d’Actions Pédagogiques is the Congolese Secondary school section for pedagogical research

Table 2: workshop organization

Does INRAP organize workshop on teaching English pronunciation aspects?		
Responses	Respondents	Percentages
Yes	00	00%
No	10	100%
Total :	10	100%

In fact, workshops on the methodologies on the teaching of English word stress at secondary school in our country are not organized by inspectors and teachers of English. This confirms that a great number of Congolese teachers and inspectors of English and also Congolese educational authorities are not interested on the teachings of that aspect of the English pronunciation, for they neglect it due to its harsh aspects. In other words, we can say that Congolese educational authorities do not create opportunities to enable teachers of English to teach English word stress effectively in the secondary school. Consequently, no teacher is able to create or invent some strategies and techniques to help learners implement the English back stress during their oral communications and no testing exercise is requested during the exams. The last following analysis is related to the learners' motivation on learning English pronunciation based on back stress¹ by their teachers:

Table 3: Learning English back stress 1

Do your teachers encourage you to learn English back stress 1?		
responses	respondents	Percentages
Yes	05	10
No	45	90
Total	50	100

Evidently the majority of learners argue that no teachers of English encourage them to learn English back stress 1. However, they explain that teachers encourage learners to repeat everything when dealing with written activities related to grammar, language functions and vocabulary lessons. In addition to that learner mention that they are encouraged to join English clubs, listen to BBC broadcast in order to improve their pronunciation and their speaking abilities. In this regard, it is important to enlighten that teachers of English encounter some difficulties to create strategies and activities in order to encourage learners dealing with English pronunciation based on back stress 1. In accordance with the above description, Moedjito (2008, 130) writes "The first thing the teacher needs to do to improve the teaching of English sounds is to identify the objectives of his teaching. These include: accurate pronunciation, correct intonation, good phrasing and fluency, intelligible communication of meaning and communicative competence." Evidently, dealing with techniques for effective teaching of English sounds, Meodjito emphasizes on the role of a teacher of English at his or her phase of preparing the new language item before going into the classroom. Here, the teacher's role is to elaborate some expectation that the learners should have at the end of the lessons in one side and to provide some effective techniques and different kinds of exercises that can help the learners achieve these qualities in another side.

4.1 Teaching and learning English back stress at secondary school

This section aims at showing the way the lesson of English back stress suffix should be taught, learnt and assessed through the method of 3Ps (Presentation, Practice and Production) in the classroom. First of all, the teacher should mention that the term “suffix stress” is related to the teaching of English stress based on the suffix of words. This includes back stress, auto stressed suffix and neutral suffix stress. When teaching stress, the teacher should tell the learners that once they have identified the suffix concerned with the lesson, they have to go backward. That is to say, they count syllables starting from that suffix to the beginning of the word. In fact, back stress refers to the stress assignment going from the suffix to the root or prefix. As such, there are two kinds of back stress suffix: back stress suffix₁ (penultimate) and back stress suffix₂ (antepenultimate) stress. Secondly, the teacher underlines that, the term “*back stress suffix₁*” refers to the position of the stress which falls on one syllable immediately after the suffix. Considering the word "relation" for example, we have the suffix is (ion), the root is (late) and the prefix is (re). Based on back stress suffix₁, the following structure is an illustration:

Syllable 2 ← syllable1 ← suffix
 re late ion

As a result, the stress falls on syllable n^o1 after the suffix that is “late”. The following words illustrate back stress suffix in English: Commercial, residual, physician, discussion, relation, proficient, delicious, ambitious, economic, comprehensible, identity, biology, industrious, militia, hypnosis, instinctive, carnivorous, miraculous, adventurous, adulterous, inhabit, intrepid, extinguish, appendicitis, outrageous, and parameter.

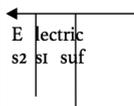
Teaching card 1:
English back stress: Case study of penultimate stress

Level: Seconde
 Subject: English
 Matter: Pronunciation
 Title of the lesson: The English back stress suffix “ic”
 G.O.2: Expressing oneself orally
 S.O.2.2: Stressing suffixes in English words
 Teacher: ONDZE OTOUBA R.G.

Date: Friday, February 9th 2022
 Duration: 1hour

Documents:
Phonetics and Phonology: A resource book for Teaching English complex word stress, (Roach).
Teaching Aid: Oxford Dictionary of English
 Cours de Phonétique et Phonologie: (ENS)

Performance objective	Teaching strategies	Learning activities	Evaluation	Time
P.O: By the end of the lesson, learners should be able to stress words with the back stress suffix properly.	<p align="center">Beginning</p> <p>Warming up Good morning class! What’s the date today?</p> <p>Pre - requisites -The teacher asks learners to provide the different types of English suffix stress.</p> <p>-The teacher selects the English back stress suffix and asks learners to provide a list of its common spellings (letters).</p> <p>-The teacher asks learners to provide seven words illustrating the seven spellings quoted above.</p> <p>-The teacher selects the spelling “ic”.</p> <p align="center">DAY LESSON</p>	<p>Good morning sir! Today is, Friday, April 10th 2019.</p> <p align="center">Answer 1: The different types of English back stress suffix are: back stress suffix 1, and back stress suffix 2.</p> <p align="center">Answer 2: The common spellings related to the English back stressed suffix are: <i>ial, ic, cy, ity, tion, ian, phy...</i></p> <p align="center">Answer 3: The seven words: memorial, economic, agency, identity, operation, politician, photography.</p>	<p>Task 1: Provide the different types of English back stress suffix?</p> <p>Task 2: Provide a list of the common spellings related to the English back stressed suffix?</p> <p>Task 3: Provide seven words illustrating the seven spellings quoted above.</p>	5'

P.O 1: At the end of this lesson section, learners should be able to stress words with the English back stress suffix 1 based on the spelling “ic”.	<p>Today, we are going to study the English back stress suffix based on the spelling “ic”.</p> <p align="center">1- Presentation⁷</p> <p>The teacher provides the conditions about the stress placement of words written with the letters “ic” as their suffixes. The teacher recalls that the stress placement goes from the end of the word to its beginning because the suffix is the key to determine the stress position.</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p>1-When the letters “ic” are at the final position of a word, the stress is placed on the syllable immediately after the suffix. Examples: electric, specific, Economic, Atlantic, arithmetic...</p> <p>2-when the syllable after the suffix “ic” is weak, the stress falls on the second syllable. Hence, it shifts to back stress suffix² Examples:</p>	Learners look at the teacher's demonstration and listen to his pronunciation carefully.		15'
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<p>politics, heretic, lunatic...</p> <p>2- Practice The teacher pronounces the above words slowly, asks learners to repeat and provide their own words orally.</p> <p>3- Production -The teacher allows learners to write their own words derived from adjective stressed on the syllable immediately before the suffix on the board. -Then, the teacher asks learners to copy down the summary of the lesson in their copybooks.</p> <p>4- Evaluation 1- Applied exercise The teacher asks learners to identify and stress words written with the letters "ic" on the syllable immediately before the suffix.</p> <p>2- Follow up activity The teacher asks learners to provide their own words written with "ic" stressed on the syllable immediately before the suffix.</p>	<p>Learners repeat after the teacher and provide their own words orally.</p> <p>Answers L1: democratic L2: bureaucratic L3: academic</p> <p>They copy down the summary of the lesson.</p> <p>Answers n°1 1- archaic 2- geographic 3- characteristic Note: Lunatic and rhetoric are <i>weak syllables</i>.</p> <p>Answers n°2 1- energetic 2- fantastic 3- terrific 4- realistic</p>	<p>Task 4: Repeat after me and provide your own words orally.</p> <p>Task 5: Write your own words derived from adjective stressed on the syllable immediately before the suffix on the board.</p> <p>Task 6: Copy down the summary of the lesson in your copybooks.</p> <p>Task 7: Stress words written with the letters "ic" on the syllable immediately before the suffix in the following list: <i>lunatic, archaic, geographic, rhetoric characteristic</i>.</p> <p>Task 8: provide words written with "ic" stressed on the syllable immediately before the suffix.</p>	<p>10'</p> <p>15'</p> <p>10'</p>
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Conclusion

This paper has been an attempt to facilitate the teaching process of English back stress suffix at secondary school. The target population was the fifth grade learners at Reconciliation High in Brazzaville (Republic of Congo). The first observation is about the contrast concerning the existence of the notion in the national curriculum against the non-teaching of that notion. It is well known that speaking a language presupposes mastering its sound patterns together its grammar aspects. The first and main obstacle that prevents teachers from teaching English pronunciation aspects is the lack of training at the Teacher Training College. Since independence to the year 2012, the course of Phonetics and Phonology which is supposed to be helpful accordingly fails to transform scientific knowledge to learnable and learning knowledge. As a result, Phonetics and Phonology were taught as sciences providing prospective teachers with information regarding the description of English sounds. Nothing has been said on the teaching of these sounds for communicative purposes. Furthermore, INRAP which is supposed to provide in training service to teachers, lacking expertise, could not organize workshop. All of that has a negative impact on the teaching of English in general and English pronunciation aspects particularly. Finally, this paper shows that it is possible to teach English back stress the same way we teach grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, writing and language functions. There is a lesson plan which illustrates a step by step procedure for the teaching, learning, and assessment of English pronunciation aspects using the 3Ps cycle as a methodology. So, this lesson plan corroborates the fact that pronunciation can be separately taught and learned in a similar fashion like grammar. Teachers are then encouraged to try this in order to improve their teaching strategies and increase learners endeavor to learn English.

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