

Title: The distress in not stressing and destressing stress in English: Using wordplay to boost awareness, intelligibility, and communicative competence

Abstract

Stress is an integral part of conveying meaning in English at not only the level of the word but also the phrase and rhetoric where it is exploited in English in literature, humor, advertising, and more. Simultaneously, stress marks language variation in regional, generational, and ethnic dialects. Thus, stress bears a great functional load and social load in communicative competence. Yet stress is not generally fully addressed in English as a second language (ESL) courses. Minimal stress pairs such as *a record* (noun) versus *to record* (verb), *a black board* versus *a blackboard*, *to walk the walk*, and so on provide, along with other types of wordplay, an optimal method to have learners notice and practice stress. When combined with a systematic teaching approach informed by second language phonology (intelligibility, comprehensive range of pronunciation from metalinguistic awareness to phonological processes, simultaneous focus on both form and function) and pronunciation/language teaching praxis (noticing, form to function practice), using such minimal stress pairs and wordplay can boost awareness more effectively and facilitate acquisition of stress and its extensive role in English, enhancing intelligibility and communicative competence.

Key words: minimal stress pairs, awareness, functional load, intelligibility, communicative competence

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1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of stress in English appears to be undervalued in English as a second language (ESL) courses (Foote, Holtby, & Derwing, 2011). Yet stress in the form of both word and sentence stress is an integral part of English grammar, varying according to several factors:

- word category: *a record/to record* (noun vs. verb), *had had* (content vs. function word)
- combination of words from different parts of speech: *a sweet sweetener*
- position within a phrase/thought group: *I see the sea* (focus word)

Thus, stress could be deemed to bear a grammatical load as clearly demonstrated in such tongue-tying phrases as *Can you can a can as a canner can can a can?* While native speakers can easily produce this phrase with its varying stress patterns, nonnative speakers may find it difficult due to potential influence from the differing prosodic system of their native language (cf. Munro & Derwing, 1995).

Furthermore, the role of stress in English extends beyond the word and phrase to rhetoric by characterizing transition words and interacting with intonational paragraphs where higher pitch, longer pauses, accelerated rate, and increased volume mark shifts in topics (G. Brown, Currie, & Kentworthy, 1980, cited in Pickering, 2004). In short, stress can be lexical, phrasal, and information-structural. Deviating from the natural patterns of stress by not knowing or implementing stress rules may result in unintended nuances or lower intelligibility (cf. Munro & Derwing, 1995). Yet while “traditional” English grammar and the mechanics of writing (e.g., structure, punctuation) are taught in ESL courses, a perusal of textbooks shows the corresponding phonological aspects to be largely untaught. Thus, learners may be unaware of the role of stress beyond its functional/lexical load to an *intelligibility load* in parsing the relationship between words, phrases, and rhetorical structure; characterizing nuanced speech; and bearing a *social load* in dialects or registers. In sum, stress is an integral part of both oracy and literacy skills, and thereby, crucial to integrating into society.

One possible approach to boost awareness of the meaningful role, features, and rules of stress in English among instructors and learners would be to use wordplay:

- stress-minimal pairs: *By buying bikes...*, *Will will will his estate to Bob.*
- stress wordplay: *I scream* versus *ice cream*, *I do not like them*, *Sam-I-Am* (Dr. Seuss, 1960)

Wordplay offers a means to spotlight stress and thereby promote the acquisition of the phonological aspects of grammar and rhetoric. Furthermore, highlighting the tangible features of stress, such as length, vowel quality, pitch, and intensity, provides concrete features for learners to practice and instructors to clearly assess. This paper advocates a reevaluation of the teaching of stress in English, providing an overview of stress usage and a possible teaching approach with concrete activities so that readers will be able to do the following:

- identify the features and extensive role of stress

- apply principles of second language phonology to the teaching of pronunciation in a do-it-yourself approach to supplement lessons and textbooks and meet the individual needs of learners

2. OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF STRESS IN ENGLISH

The grammatical load of phonology refers to the role pronunciation plays in indicating grammar through changes in segments (i.e., consonants and vowels) and/or suprasegmentals (e.g., word stress, sentence stress, intonation). One clear case of the grammatical load of segments concerns the varying phonological forms for the plural/possessive/third person singular present form of *-s*, namely [z]~[s]~[əz/ɪz]:

- *dogs* versus *cats* versus *foxes*
- *Ben's* versus *Beth's* versus *Bess's*
- *(he) plays* versus *(he) eats* versus *(he) passes*.

We see a parallel triplet in the regular past tense morpheme of *-ed* as [d]~[t]~[əd/ɪd] (e.g., *climbed* vs. *walked* vs. *added*).

Stress also plays a systematic role in grammar at the level of the word, the phrase, and rhetorical structure. First, stress can be broken down into smaller *inverse* features (cf. Fry, 1958) as summarized in Table 1. Length, loudness (Kochanski, Grabe, Coleman, & Rosner, 2005), and vowel quality (i.e., full vs reduced; Cutler, 2015; Fear, Cutler, & Butterfield, 1995) are the most critical in indicating the presence/absence of stress. This interplay between segments and suprasegmentals, therefore, requires learners to improve their perception/production of vowels to enhance their perception/production of stress.

TABLE 1. Features of stress

Stressed syllable	Unstressed syllable
Longer vowel	Shorter vowel
Higher pitch	Lower pitch
Louder	Quieter
Vowel quality unchanged	Vowel quality reduced (i.e., tense to lax) – schwa [ə], [ɪ], [ɛ]

At the lexical level, the location of stress must usually be memorized. This placement of stress is oftentimes shaped by rules, such as with disyllabic nouns versus verb pairs, where the stress falls on the first and second syllable, respectively:

(1) *The **convict** was convicted.* (boldface indicates stress.)

At the phrasal level, the placement of stress is determined by whether words are function or content words. Function words have a grammatical function as shown in Table 2. All other words are content words.

TABLE 2. Function words and content words

Function words (“grammar” words)		Content words
Articles	<i>the</i> man	The other words
Pronouns	<i>he, her, them</i>	
Prepositions	<i>to</i> school, <i>at</i> home	
Conjunctions	apple <i>and</i> banana	
Helping verbs	go, <i>will</i> go, <i>will have</i> gone (but <i>can’t</i> go, <i>I am.</i> , <i>I will.</i>)	
‘be’ verb	he <i>is</i> happy	

Content words are stressed, whereas function words are generally unstressed (cf. Fries, 1952; Jones, 1972). For example, the function words *a* in *a dog* and *he* in *he slept* are unstressed, whereas *dog* and *slept* are stressed.

There are a few corollaries to this rule. Helping verbs are stressed if they appear without a main verb as in *I will* vs *I will go*. Negative helping verbs are also stressed (e.g., *can’t*). Indeed, learners often do not make a clear distinction between *I can go* vs *I can’t go* as they seem unaware of the role of stress in distinguishing these two phrases, inviting misunderstandings. That is, the vowel of *can* is reduced to a schwa [ə] or short vowel [ɪ] or [ɛ] because it is unstressed, and the vowel of *can’t* retains the original vowel of [æ] because it is stressed.

We may, however, stress function words for emphasis like the pronouns in the following wordplay.

(2) *I* scream. **You** scream. **We** all scream for ice cream (or **I** scream).

Undeniably, deviating from this default prosody in English by using stress to contrast words conveys meaning just as clearly as grammar and vocabulary do.

(3) **He** didn’t eat it. **I** ate it.

(4) No, thank **you**. (in response to being told “thank you”)

In short, this difference in stress between content and function words in a phrase shapes the prosody of English as a stress-timed language versus a syllable-timed language where the length of each syllable is fairly equal. Hence, the sentence *The **dog** will **eat** the **food*** has three beats despite having six words because the three words of *dog*, *eat*, and *food* are stressed.

In fact, phrases/sentences can reflect stress patterns similar to those of words, as in (5), whereas segmentally homophonous phrases/sentences and words may be differentiated by different stress patterns, as in (6).

(5) *information* versus *Sam can meet him*.

(6) *I see you* versus *ICU*

Moreover, we speak in phrases/thought groups. That is, we pause reflecting structure, making utterances understandable. Stress interacts with pausing so that the final content word (i.e., focus word) in a phrase is by default the most stressed word (i.e., the longest in length, highest in pitch,

loudest in volume; Ladefoged, 2006). Thus, differences in the phrasing of words results in differences in stress (e.g., *grandma* in (7)), as do differences in the position of a word in a phrase (e.g., *please* in (8)).

(7) *Let's eat, Grandma* versus *Let's eat grandma*

(8) *Please call me tomorrow* versus *Call me tomorrow, please*

The following minimal stress triplet demonstrates the varying stress levels of the content word *two* versus the function word *to* versus the focus word *two*, with vowel reduction also characterizing the lack of stress in *to*.

(9) *The score is two to two.*

Additionally, stress differentiates words by parts of speech when combined (e.g., adjective + noun, adverb + adjective). The punchline in the following joke ignores the stress differences of *hard drive*: HARD drive “computer storage device” versus hard DRIVE “difficult drive” (capitalization = greater stress).

(10) *Why did the computer feel tired after work? It had a hard drive.*

Variation in stress levels motivated by word category and the tendency for syllable-initial stress in English (Cutler, 2015) allows listeners to parse utterances and readers to disambiguate sentences:

(11) *The good can decay many ways* versus *The good candy came anyways*

Indeed, the following tongue twisters keenly accentuate these varying stress levels, characterizing English prosody.

(12) *When you write copy you have the right to copyright the copy you write.*

(13) *Can you can a can as a canner can can a can?*

Stress patterns are exploited to make sayings, advertisements, and so on catchy and easy to retain information or to evoke emotion through repetitive stress.

(14) *“i” before “e” except after “c”*

(15) *I do not like them, Sam-I-am. I do not like green eggs and ham.* (Dr. Seuss, 1960, p. 12)

(16) *The few. The proud. The Marines.*

(17) *Free at last, free at last... We are free at last.* (Martin Luther King, August 28, 1963)

Moreover, stress relates utterances in discourse: When the last content word of a phrase is the same in a consecutive phrase (i.e., *stress* in (18)), the focus shifts reflecting old versus new information.

- (18) *In this morning's lecture I introduced **stress**. Now I would like to move onto the **rules** of stress.*

Additionally, transition words are stressed, punctuating the direction or structure of a talk. Stress works in tandem with intonational paragraphs, the spoken counterparts to written paragraphs, where new topics are marked by an increase in pitch gradually falling to its lowest point ending the topic (Wennerstrom, 1997). This discursive role of stress requires that it be practiced beyond the word and sentence level (Levis & Pickering, 2004; see Wichmann, 2015, for detailed discussion). In fact, awareness of stress at the phrasal level and how to use it results in quick improvement (see Sardegna, Chiang, & Ghosh, 2016, for discussion).

In sum, stress goes beyond merely having a functional load at the word level (A. Brown, 1988) to an intelligibility load (cf. Munro & Derwing, 1995) at all levels from word to phrase to discourse. Additionally, stress is systematic, carrying meaning commensurate to syntax/word order or morphemes/lexicon in other languages such as the contrastive usage of the *wa/ga* particle in Japanese (Gilbert, 2016, p. vi). Consequently, second language (L2) learners who randomly stress words might cause unintended meanings and misunderstandings (Hahn, 2004) just as those who lack intonational paragraphs may decrease comprehensibility (Pickering, 2004). Furthermore, the unintentional misuse of stress or lack of any pitch variation (i.e., monotone speech) may inadvertently convey a variety of involuntary attitudes (e.g., disdain, unfriendliness, or impolite disinterest [boredom]; cf. Davenport & Hannahs, 2013) or even anger by stressing words, resulting in unintended consequences. Thus, non-target-like understanding of stress impedes the learner's ability to convey or pick up pragmatic cues as well as nuanced intentions, politeness levels, humor, appreciation of poetry or prose, and regional or ethnic dialects. Therefore, the extensive role of stress needs to be addressed in the ESL classroom just as "traditional" grammar oftentimes is due to real-world implications, particularly in second language environments.

3. TEACHING APPROACH

One possible approach to more effectively promoting greater awareness and acquisition of stress is to draw attention to it among learners. Stress minimal pairs and wordplay are ideal in that they isolate the role of stress through neutralizing differences in vowels and consonants. Wordplay also provides controlled practice of stress through prosodic meter. When using wordplay the ESL practitioner might keep the following eight guiding principles in mind.

(1) *Noticing is important in acquiring a second language* (Schmidt, 1990; Venkatagiri & Levis, 2007). Stress minimal pairs may jolt learners into noticing stress, particularly when followed by metalinguistic knowledge and practice. Certainly, learners seem to enjoy the playfulness of wordplay, stimulating them to want to repeat it. The varying levels and rules of stress can be gradually introduced through wordplay (e.g., puns, knock knock jokes, Jazz Chants® [Graham, 1978], rap, Mad Gab® puzzles [Mattel Inc, 2015]; see Table 3 for more):

TABLE 3. Samples of wordplay using stress

Type	Example
Stress minimal pairs	<i>I have four fours for Ford.</i> (playing card game)

	<i>We ate eight eights.</i> (order of fast food sets)
Noun/verb pairs	<i>The permit permits you to drive.</i> <i>Please insert the insert into the newspaper.</i>
Parts of speech pairs	<i>He was a lighthouse keeper or light housekeeper.</i> <i>They saw her in the green house or greenhouse</i>
Stress tongue twisters	<i>This is a ship-shipping ship, shipping shipping ships.</i> <i>James, while John had had “had,” had had “had had.” “Had had” had had a better effect on the teacher.</i>
Garden path sentences	<i>The old man the boat.</i> <i>The man who hunts ducks out on weekends.</i>
Oronyms	<i>how mature people vs. how much your people</i> <i>four candles vs. fork handles</i>
Mnemonic devices	<i>In 1492, Columbus sailed the ocean blue.</i> <i>Beer before wine, you’ll be fine.</i>
Sayings, slogans	<i>Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.</i> <i>Melts in Your Mouth. Not in Your Hands. (M&Ms®)</i>
Patterned speech	<i>Miss-iss-ippi</i> <i>042-333-2299 (telephone numbers)</i>
Meter	<i>Romeo, Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo.</i> <i>To be or not to be.</i>
Nursery rhymes, poems, children’s stories	<i>Hickory, dickory, dock. The mouse ran up the clock.</i> <i>One, two, buckle my shoe.</i>
Speeches	<i>We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and the streets (Winston Churchill, June 4, 1940)</i>
Dialect	<i>PO-lice, CE-ment</i> (capitals=stress) (Southern American English, African-American English versus General American) <i>weekEND, adVERTisement</i> (British English versus General American)

Then, instructors can use this growing battery of wordplay examples as warm-up or cool-down exercises and as shorthand to reference the various stress patterns. Instructors can use wordplay in the following manner:

1. Introduce wordplay to highlight the features of stress.
2. Have learners practice as a class or individually.
3. Have learners record the wordplay.
4. Both the instructor and learner evaluate the recording.
5. Have learners perform in front of the class and/or rerecord considering feedback.
6. Gradually create and use a battery of wordplay as warm-up or cool-down exercises.
7. Use individual wordplay to remind learners of features of stress (e.g., word categories: *ship-shipping ship*; contrastive stress: *I scream, you scream...*).

(2) *Pronunciation issues should be considered in a comprehensive manner.* The cause of non-target-like stress usage could be attributed to various causes: lack of knowledge of the features and/or rules of stress, poor perception of the features, poor production of stress features, inability to implement the stress rules, to mention a few. Thus, instructors might examine each of these possible causes on several levels: *prehension* as in *comprehension* or metalinguistic knowledge, perception of stress features, production of stress features, pattern recognition at various levels of stress as in *a white house* versus *the White House*, phonological processes as in implementing stress rules (e.g., pronouncing the modal *can* within a phrase as opposed to in isolation). In short, instructors should implement what we call a *5P approach* to teaching stress (Prehension, Perception, Production, Pattern Recognition, Phonological Processes). To determine the source and extent of pronunciation issues, instructors should (1) diagnose the issue(s) by asking targeted questions, (2) treat the issue(s) through activities and assignments, and (3) gauge the effectiveness of the treatment through assessment tools, reflective teaching, action research, and so on, and asking such questions as the following:

1. Does the pronunciation issue lower intelligibility?
2. Do learners know what the features of stress are (i.e., explicitly ask the learner and/or explain the features)?
3. Do learners avoid trying to use stress? Are they monotone? Or do they stress every word?
4. Can learners perceive the features of stress, in particular vowel quality and length?
5. Can learners physically produce the stress differences in length/vowel quality/pitch level/intensity in an isolated word?
6. Do learners know the rules concerning using stress in phrases, combining words, and so on?
7. Can learners produce stress in all possible environments, including varying levels of stress due to word category, combination of words, emphasis, and so on?
8. Are learners aware of the role of stress and other features used in syntactic parsing/phrasing or rhetorical structure?
9. Can learners perform the phonological processes of stress?
10. Are learners aware of social variation in lexical stress (e.g., English as a Lingua Franca [ELF] vs. UK vs. US vs. Indian vs. non-native varieties or General American vs. Southern American English)?

(3) *Student learning outcomes (SLOs) need to be clear and measurable.* Precise wording allows the instructor and learner to pinpoint pronunciation issues and set measureable “can-do” objectives and thus more clearly assess progress and give learners concrete objectives.

By the end of the course, students will be able to do the following:

- list the characteristics of word stress

- mark stressed syllables
- identify reduced vowels/vowel quality
- phrase words into thought groups
- categorize content and function words
- identify the focus word
- produce stressed syllables with longer length, higher pitch, greater intensity, and no vowel reduction under various conditions (e.g., controlled, communicative)
- produce unstressed syllables with shorter length, lower pitch, less intensity, and appropriate vowel reduction (e.g., schwa)
- produce the stressed syllable of the focus word with the longest length, highest pitch, greatest intensity
- produce the correct levels of the stress features for word combinations (e.g., adjective + noun, noun + noun)
- produce transition words with increased stress
- introduce new topics with higher pitch, greater speed (i.e., intonational paragraphs)

(4) *Teaching must be systematic.* An ideal template for teaching pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, Goodwin, & Griner, 2010) has activities move along a continuum from a greater focus on form to a greater focus on function using five stages: description/analysis or metalinguistic awareness, listening discrimination, controlled practice, guided practice, and communicative practice (See Table 4). Listening to, reciting, and reading wordplay examples provide practice of stress in a controlled, enjoyable, and memorable manner.

Additionally, stress must be used in meaningful interactions with simultaneous focus on both form and function (i.e., meaning; Segalowitz & Hulstijn, 2005). Pronunciation activities should be repetitive (to foster automaticity) AND communicative (i.e., focus on meaning; Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 1988), ideally requiring accurate perception and production to be completed (Loschky & Bley-Vroman, 1993; see Sicola & Darcy, 2015, for an overview). Therefore, activities should be embedded into other lessons, emphasizing the role and extent of prosody with other parts of language in context.

Learners must practice stress at the rhetorical level, including intonational paragraphs. Learners should build a battery of practiced talks that they can be tested on. They could use a simple outline to avoid reading speeches as intonation of read speech versus prepared/spontaneous speech differs (Pickering, 2004), to provide a model, and to give learners something to talk about that allows them to concentrate on pronunciation. Additionally, talks boost fluency, vocabulary, mechanics of talks and writing (e.g., structuring, hooks, transition words), and confidence.

TABLE 4. Activities for each step along a form-to-function continuum

Steps	Activities
Metalinguistic awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Marking texts (function/content/focus words, thought groups, etc.) - Quizzes on metalinguistic knowledge (list the physical features of stress; give examples of function words, circle the content words; mark texts; T/F, multiple choice, explain or apply stress rules, etc.) - Explanations (hand-outs, videos, etc.)

Listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total physical response (e.g., please touch/go to/draw pictures of disyllabic noun/verb pairs such as <i>desert/dessert</i>, <i>discus/discuss</i>) - Bingo (noun/verb pairs, e.g., <i>convict</i>, <i>permit</i>, <i>desert/dessert</i>, <i>discus/discuss</i>) - Dictations - Perception tasks (circle what you hear, mark the stressed syllable, etc.) - Extensive listening (e.g., read-along audio books) - Intensive listening (i.e., listen for specific features in short passages, sentences)
Controlled practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Go Fish (do you have [a card of] <i>desert</i> [vs. <i>dessert</i>]?), using minimal stress pairs - Read or recite wordplay (see Table 3) - Speech excerpts (e.g., shadowing, reading with marked script)
Guided practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Freetalking (reply to prompt using stress minimal pairs; in class and/or recordings with self-evaluation and instructor evaluation) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What can/can't you do? - If you had had more money last year, what would you have done differently? - What will you will to your best friend? - When do you feel content? - Describe your favorite dessert? - What advantages can you enjoy by buying things online? - What do you think about the saying "An apple a day keeps the doctor away"? * Be sure to provide a model answer and make sure to tell learners to use the target word(s) when possible. - 20 questions: Guess a famous person/thing/occupation written on a piece of paper on the learner's forehead/back by asking questions (e.g., <i>Can they play basketball?</i>) or receiving clues from other students (<i>I have to practice dancing. I can sing well</i>). - Information gap (e.g., <i>Ellen and/or Aaron can/can't drive</i>)
Communicative practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tasks (practice stress in "mini talks"): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describe data/information in a chart, graph, etc. - Tell how to make something (e.g., peanut butter sandwich) - Tell a story - Give reasons to support an opinion - One-minute impromptu talk on a given topic - Create a commercial with a slogan - Recreate a talk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learners can use talks in the following manner: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Analyze stress usage of a talk. Mark (i.e., circle, underline) the various types of stress (e.g., content, function, focus words) and phrasing of a short talk. Explain the rules for each type. 2. Listen and mark the stress and phrasing of the same short talk. Compare your predictions to what you hear. 3. Record the talk by reading the script and/or based on a simple

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- outline (for more spontaneous speech).
4. Evaluate your use of stress in your recording according to set criteria.
 5. Rerecord the talk according to your evaluation and instructor feedback.
 6. Present the talk to the class. (The instructor videos the talk.)
 7. Note your body/hand movement on the beat (i.e., stress) in the video.
 8. Practice the growing collection of talks for biweekly oral quiz or midterm, where you will be asked to present one of the talks randomly chosen by the instructor. (The instructor might “recycle” phrases from the talk in a short follow-up Q&A to the learner about the talk.)
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(5) *A do-it-yourself (DIY) approach allows instructors to supplement lessons and textbooks.* Instructors can tailor lessons to the needs of each learner resulting from individual issues, goals, native language, and so on, and keep the focus squarely on learners as in learners of/learning English as a second language (LESL) rather than TESL, ideally requiring individualized recording assignments.

The DIY approach involves using simple technology to teach/learn stress: recording devices like phones for recording assignments, speech recognition apps to practice stress minimal pairs, Windows Media Player to slow down videos, auto advance Powerpoints to present wordplay in timed karaoke-like practice presentations, and Praat or Audition to show the pitch and other features of words/phrases. Also, instructors can access the Internet for various materials (e.g., advertisements, poems, rap, facebook pun memes).

(6) *Pronunciation lessons may be flipped* – that is, explanations offered outside the class through short, to-the-point videos, audio recordings, handouts, or exercises, leaving more time in class for practice (cf. King, 1993). Also, learners should practice outside of class through doing intensive and extensive listening exercises and making recordings with evaluations by both learners themselves and the instructor.

(7) *Emphasis should be placed on the intelligibility load of stress rather than on merely the functional load* – that is, intelligibility (i.e., meaning is understood) or comprehensibility (i.e., ease of understanding) but not accentedness (i.e., having a non-native accent) (cf. Munro & Derwing, 1995). Insofar as the learner’s pronunciation does not impede intelligibility and/or comprehensibility, intervention through pronunciation practice is not necessarily required. Also, not all usages of stress have an equal impact on intelligibility: high-level pronunciation features have a greater positive impact (e.g., contrastive stress; Levis & Levis-Muller, 2018) and therefore should be prioritized over low-level features.

8) *The social load of prosody should be considered.* Prosody indexes a speaker’s identity (e.g., regional, gender, ethnic, generational) and register (e.g., casual, polite). Without adequate knowledge of this prosody, nonnative learners may lack communicative competence (Hymes, 1966) and may find themselves left clueless in certain interactions where their accent may trigger

social biases, possibly shutting them out of social groups. Thus, the social load of prosody should be weighed against *sufficient intelligibility* where integrative motivation and outside-classroom practice are necessary components in improving L2 pronunciation (cf. Derwing & Munro, 2015). Additionally, common varieties around the world might be considered due to the internationalization of higher education, with many international instructors and students speaking expanding, outer, and other inner circle varieties of English (cf. Kachru, 1992). In this connection, because the importance of stress in ELF appears to be somewhat limited (cf. Jenkins, 2005), a focus on teaching stress must consider the needs of learners in light of global and local norms and constraints (cf. Singapore English; Low, 2015) while valuing expanding, outer, and inner circle Englishes.

In summary, stress plays an outsized role in English in both oracy and literacy skills going beyond a functional or lexical load to an intelligibility load concerning grammar and discourse, and a social load, impacting communicative competence. We therefore hope instructors will utilize minimal stress pairs and wordplay in creating activities to supplement current lessons and textbooks, following suggestions in this article to boost awareness and facilitate the acquisition of stress among L2 learners.

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