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DISTINCTIVE FUNCTION OF WORD STRESS IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN

(Based on noun-verb and verb-noun)

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Rezumat

Articolul abordează unele particularități ale accentului în limba engleză. Funcția gramaticală a unui cuvânt poate determina accentul în unele cazuri în care același cuvânt poate avea funcții gramaticale deosebite. Ele au accentul pe prima silabă când au funcția de substantive și pe a doua silabă când sunt verbe. Trecerea accentului de pe o silabă pe alta atrage după sine, în cele mai multe cazuri, reducerea sau neutralizarea vocalei din silaba neaccentuată.

The language, the choice and fluency of expression in oral or written speech is an essential element, it is even a criterion of culture. From a person's writing one can learn the cultural level of that person.

Language is regarded to be a means of communication and thinking, as well as an object of understanding. That is why the study of languages and the investigations and researches done in the field of language study, will never stop and there will be always something new to be discovered.

The learning of a foreign language (the English one, in our case) is not an easy matter. One problem that causes the great deal of

difficulty (besides others) in studying the English language is the correct placement of stress in words and statements.

Stress in English is not just an ornament but it has a meaning, by changing the stress pattern of an utterance one can change its meaning completely. That is why nonnative speakers of English language should pay attention to stress placement.

This article is dedicated to the study of word stress and namely the contrastive study of the distinctive function of word stress in English and Romanian.

Stress is defined as the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is uttered. It is essentially a subjective action. A strong energy of utterance means energetic action of the articulating organs. It is usually accompanied by a gesture with the hand or head or other parts of the body, it involves a strong force of exhalation [2, p. 227]; and consequently generally gives the objective impression of loudness. Weak energy of utterance involves weak force of exhalation and therefore gives the objective impression of softness.

One or more sounds in a spoken word or phrase are heard to stand out more prominently than their immediate neighbours.

As far as we know a „syllable” is essentially a small sound group containing a peak of prominence [3, p. 125]. Now, if a word or phrase contains a number of peaks of prominence, it is generally found that the degrees of prominence at the various peaks are unequal. Some of the peaks have much greater prominence than others. In other terms, some syllables of a word or phrase are perceived more distinctly than others.

The prominence of a given sound may be increased or diminished by means of any of the three sound attributes: *length*, *stress* or *intonation*, or by combinations of these. A common and effective means of increasing prominence, proposed by D. Jones, is to increase the stress [2, p. 228].

In English increase of stress is generally accompanied by a modification of intonation and sometimes by an increase of length.

It is useful to point out that it is very important not to confuse *stress* with *prominence*. The prominence of a syllable is its degree of general distinctness, this being the combined effect of the *tamber*, *length*, *stress* and *intonation* of the syllabic sound.

The term „stress” refers only to the degree of force of utterance it is independent of length and intonation though it may be combined with these [2, p. 228].

According to A. Gimson, the effect of prominence is achieved by any or all of four factors: *force*, *tone*, *length* and *vowel colour*. The dynamic stress implies greater force with which the syllable is pronounced.

The English linguists D. Crystal and A. Gimson agree that in English word stress or accent is a complex phenomenon marked by the variations in *force*, *pitch*, *quantity* and *quality* [3, 1980, p. 101].

Peter Roach explains the nature of word stress in a very detailed way in his practical course of „English Phonetics and Phonology”. The nature of word stress is simple enough – practically every one would agree that the first syllable of words like *f`ather*, *`open* is stressed, that the middle syllable is stressed in *po`tato*, *re`lation* and the final syllable is stressed in *a`bout*, *re`ceive*, and most people feel they have some sort of idea of what the difference is between stressed and unstressed syllables, though they might explain it in many different ways [4, p. 85].

Like all phonetic phenomena word accent must also be analyzed from a functional, or phonological, point of view [5, p. 282].

The first function of word accent is its *constitutive* function. It manifests itself in the fact that every word even a monosyllabic has word accent, which is thus the „soul of a word” [5, p. 282]. In the case of a disyllabic or polysyllabic word the constitutive function of word accent consists in creating the shape of such a word as a pattern of relationship among its syllables in the matter of force, pitch, quantity and quality. Word accent gives the finishing touch to

creating the phonetic structure of the word as a language unit, this structure consisting of segmental phonemes joined together into combinations by specific articulatory means and forming syllables organized into the word by its accent.

The second function of word accent or, to be more precise, of its position and degree is the *distinctive* function. This function makes word accent a separate, supra – segmental, or prosodic, phonological unit, which may be called, in the traditional – *emic* terminology, the *wordaccenteme*, the term *accenteme* being introduced by V. A. Vassiliev. The number of word accenteme in a language with three word accents is determined by the numbers of the latter's distinctive degrees.

In English the primary and weak word accentemes perform only the word – distinctive function. eg: `import, n - im`port, v

Secondary and tertiary stresses must also be regarded as a separate, but single word accenteme in English, because this accenteme may be opposed to the primary accenteme for distinctive purposes, while secondary and tertiary stresses may be considered to be in complimentary distribution if we define secondary stress as pre - tonic and tertiary stress as post – tonic. No minimal pairs of English words have been found so far in which a pre – tonic secondary stress is opposed to weak stress. I. Wolfson suggest one such pair: *certific`ation* [sə'tifi`keiEn] – the act of certifying and *certific`ation* [sə:,tifi`keiEn] – providing with a certificate.

However, D. Jones, in his „Pronouncing Dictionary” (11th edition, 1957) gives one and the same accentuation for both words, viz – [sə:tifi`keiE(ə)n], while in Webster's Dictionary the two accentuations are given, apparently, as free accentual variations.

A relatively small number of words of the same morphological structure differ in the position of word stress. In this case the apposition of accentual structures differentiates the meaning of the word. The shifting of words stress may or may not cause changes in

the sound quality or/and quantity. eg: v. *accent* [æk`sent] - n.[`æksent] or [`æksənt]

The opposition of the primary stress is capable of differentiating the parts of speech:

nouns	verbs
combine [ˈkʌmbain]	[kəm`bain]
conduct [ˈkʌndʌkt]	[kən`dʌkt]
export [ˈɛkspA:t]	[ik`spA:t]
progress [ˈprɔʊgres]	[prə`gres]
subject [ˈsʌbdʒekt]	[səb`dʒekt]

Similar examples can be found in Romanian:

eg: n. mătura - v. mătur`ă (forma perfectului simplu, indicativ, persoana a III-a singular a verbului a mătura); n. `era(epocă) – v. er`a(formă de imperfect, pers. a III-a singular a verbului a fi)

Taking into account the above examples, it is worthy to note that they consist of simple words, nouns and verbs. This category of words can be analyzed by simply shifting the stress from one syllable to the next one without any change in the morphological structure of the word. In this case when the stress is shifted some changes are caused in the sound quality or quantity. For example in the word *present* [ˈpresent] as a noun the stress falls on the first syllable. In the pronunciation of the verb [pri`zent] the sound [e] is changed into [i] and the stress is shifted on the second syllable and which is more, a new sound appears in the pronunciation of the verb and namely [e] between [z] and [n].

Another examples of this kind for instance the word *conduct* [kən`dʌkt] as a verb with the stress on the second syllable, but in the noun [ˈkʌndʌkt] the stress is shifted on the first syllable and the sound [ə] from the verb [kən`dʌkt] is reduced to [ʌ] in the noun [ˈkʌndʌkt].

Unlike in English, in Romanian the distinctive function of word stress or the shifting of the stress has another kind of influence on words. And namely in Romanian this function is often used for

lexical (semantic), lexico-grammatical and grammatical (morphological) purposes.

In Romanian such words like: *mijloc, mobilă, para, acele, mătură, cîntă*, taken in isolation outside the context do not tell us anything about the meaning, category or grammatical form of the given word. The stress placement characterizes, individualizes the word:

e. g: `mijloc „centru” – mij`loc „procedeu, metodă”

`mătură (substantiv) – mătu`ră (forma perfectului simplu, indicativ, pers. III, sg. a verbului „a mătura”)

In English the shifting of the stress influences and produces changes in the quality and/or quantity of sounds. In Romanian the distinctive function is used in lexical (semantic), lexico-grammatical and grammatical (morphological) purposes.

So, the nature of the distinctive function of the stress in Romanian is different in comparison to the English one.

As a general conclusion, it can be mentioned that pronunciation teaching should be communicative; i. e. the teaching of a foreign language in general, should base its methods, principles of teaching on oral speech as well as on written.

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GROUP WORK IN TEACHING GRAMMAR

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Rezumat

Tehnica lucrului în grup a devenit foarte populară și este utilizată frecvent în predarea limbilor străine, deoarece permite