

Arab learners' problem in correctly producing words with "ate"

Safi Eldeen Alzi'abi

Department of English, Faculty of Letters, Damascus University,
Damascus, Syria
Alziabi@gmail.com

Alzi'abi (forthcoming) showed that Arab EFL learners failed to stress most words that ended with 'ate' correctly. They tended to stress words such as 'cognate', 'percolate', 'germinate', 'impregnate', 'remonstrate' on the rightmost syllable. However, Alzi'abi's study included a limited sample of words ending with 'ate'. To further explore and verify the above preliminary finding, a follow-up investigation that will include a larger number of similar words ending with 'ate' is warranted.

The purpose of this research is to reveal any coherent pattern in the strategies adopted by subjects, to explore any association with the part of speech of the item in question or its number of syllables with these strategies and to investigate the impact of explicit instructions on subjects' language production.

102 Arab EFL third and fourth-year Jordanian English majors participated in this study. 90 highly infrequent English items ending with 'ate' were used in pretest and posttest pronunciation tasks; the subject had to read the stimuli aloud. A nine-hour stress-training course was run over three weeks to investigate the impact of instruction in stress placement on subjects' comprehensibility and intelligibility. The posttest followed.

A large percentage of Arab EFL learners (94%) appeared to have significant problems in producing English word stresses correctly owing to their tendency to mainly stress ultimate heavy syllables. Almost all subjects performed poorly in the pretest task and failed to produce word stresses correctly. A close examination of the data showed that Arab EFL subjects were prolonging the last vowel in the stimuli and accentuating the syllable having "ate". Only little association of subjects' performance with number of syllables and word class appeared. The scores of the posttest far exceeded those of the pretest. Explicit instruction about proper stress assignment considerably improved subjects' word stress acquisition.

Keywords: Arabic stress, English stress, Arab EFL learners, stress production, words with "ate"