

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG



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GRADUATION PAPER

**THE ROLE OF SENTENCE STRESS IN ENHANCING
ENGLISH SPEAKING COMPETENCE OF HPU
ENGLISH MAJORS**

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NA1201

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HAI PHONG - 2012

BỘ GIÁO DỤC VÀ ĐÀO TẠO
TRƯỜNG ĐẠI HỌC DÂN LẬP HẢI PHÒNG

Nhiệm vụ đề tài tốt nghiệp

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(về lý luận, thực tiễn, các số liệu cần tính toán và các bản vẽ).

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Hải Phòng, ngày tháng năm 2012

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale

In the process of learning, Vietnamese learners tend to pay more attention to the fluency (how fast they could speak) and to the number of vocabulary (how many words they could remember), but less attention to the accuracy (how they could speak a sentence with correct stress and intonation). By that, there should be some changes in the students' awareness in the ways of learning English professionally.

English is the best way for us to have a great deal of opportunities to reach the success in life. Why do Vietnamese students make the wrong stress placement? What can be the cause of those errors? If the answers to these questions can be found, it is hoped that something could be done to help students to avoid or correct them. Therefore, to understand and communicate English effectively the learners should not only pay attention to vocabulary, grammar but master sentence stress as well. However “what is sentence stress?” “How can sentence stress affect communication?” For both English learners in general and HPU English majors in particular, there is little attention to the importance of sentence stress in communication.

All the above reasons have inspired the writer to choose the title of the graduation paper “the role of sentence stresses in enhancing English speaking competence of HPU English majors”.

2. Aims of the Study

Being aware of the fact that sentence stress is an extremely difficult topic and merely well-understood by English learners in general and English majors in particular who put the wrong stress in a sentence.

- Giving the understanding on sentence stress and English speaking competence.
- Showing the relationship among sentence stress, rhythm and intonation along with the relationship between sentence stress and speaking competence.
- Raising English majors' awareness of the existence of the sentence stress and the effective using in enhancing English speaking competence.
- Identifying the sentence stress placement.

3. Methods of the study

Because of the above aims, the following methods are used in the studying process:

- Having discussion with supervisors, teachers, friends, etc.
- Reading reference books and documents.
- Survey questionnaires.
- Accessing Internet.
- Selecting typical examples of related authors.

4. Scope of the study

Stress is an integral part in the sentence and it has pervasive force in meaning interpretation. Besides, there are so many different material resources and researches while my person experience is terminate. Therefore, in my graduation paper, I just focus on the role of sentence stress, its relationship with speaking competence in enhancing English speaking.

5. Design of the study

This paper provides a clear organization consisting three main parts that help an easy exploration and practical benefits gained for readers as well.

Part I is the **Introduction**, which includes Rationale, Aims, Methods and Design of the study.

Part II is the **Development**, which consists of two chapters as following:

Chapter 1: Theoretical background, dealing with definitions of stress, sentence, speaking competence, features of sentence stress, the relationship between sentence stress and English speaking competence, the role of sentence stress in enhancing speaking competence.

Chapter 2: Research methodology.

Chapter 3: Findings and discussion which consists of three parts: findings, some possible problems in enhancing English speaking competence and some suggested solutions for improvement after studying sentence stress.

Part III – Conclusion: restates the knowledge mentioned on the role of sentence stress through three chapters above. A suggestion for further research on sentence stress is also provided in this part.

PART II: DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER ONE: THEORY BACKGROUND

1. An overview of stress and sentence stress

1.1. Definition of stress

Stress on word syllable is an extra force used when pronounce a particular word or syllable (**Peter Roach, 1990**).

Stress is defined as using more muscular energy while articulating the words. When a word or a syllable in a word is produced louder, lengthier, with higher pitch or with more quality, it will be perceived as stressed. The prominence makes some syllables be perceived as stressed.

Stress also can be defined as the relative degree of force or emphasis given to a particular syllable or word to make it stand out (i.e. be easily noticed) from other syllables or words in an utterance. If syllables have stress, they are said to be stressed syllables (or accented syllables). If syllables do not have stress, they are considered to be unstressed syllables (or unaccented syllables).

1.2. What is “an English sentence”?

There are a number of sentence definitions given by different grammarians:

According to **L.G Alexander (1988)**, a sentence is defined as “a complete unit meaning”.

When we speak, our sentence may be extremely involved or even unfinished, yet we can still convey our meaning through intonation, stress, facial expression, etc.

Roloff and Brosseit in the book “*Sentence*” (1973) wrote “sentence is a group of related words that expresses a complete and meaning thought; a statement, a question, a command or an exclamation”.

“A sentence may alternatively be seen as comprising five units called elements of structure: subject, verb, complement, object and adverbial”.

(Randolph Quirk and Sidney Greenbaum).

1.3. What is “sentence stress”?

Sentence stress is the music of spoken English. Like word stress, sentence stress can help you to understand spoken English, especially when spoken fast.

Sentence stress is what gives English its rhythm of “beat”. You remember that word stress is accent on one syllable within a word. Sentence stress is accent on certain words within a sentence.

(<http://www.englishclub.com/pronunciation/sentence-stress.htm>).

As we see that some linguists give many opinions about sentence stress which are useful for learners study English as the second language of them. However, there are students who do not recognize how stresses in sentence are. And as known, sentence stress is the pattern of strong and weak syllables in a sentence.

Sentence stress is the relative degree of force or emphasis that words or parts of words have when they are used in connected speech, that is, in combination with other words forming phrase and sentences.

Before finding out information about sentence stress patterns, we have to find out what stress is. In linguistics, **stress** is the relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word. The term is also used for similar patterns of phonetic prominence inside syllables.

And it can be seen that English is a stress-timed language which is spoken with rhythm. This results from strong and weak stresses that are built into both individual words and sentences. During verbal communication, suprasegmental features including stress, intonation, duration and juncture are important elements in conveying meta-linguistic information such as emotion and identity of the speaker.

(Raphael, Borden & Harris, 2007).

One of them is sentence stress which is a natural part of spoken English and it is also a difficult area to work on for learners and teachers alike. For this reason it's also an area which is often neglected, but this aspect of the language can cause problems for learners in both their speaking and perhaps, more importantly listening. If you do not already know about sentence stress, you can try to learn about it. This is one of the best ways for you to understand spoken English - especially English spoken fast.

1.4. What is “English speaking competence”?

“Speaking”, as **Harris (1977:81)** says, “is a complex skill requiring the simultaneous use of different abilities developed at the different rates”.

Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing and receiving and processing information (**Burn and Joyce, 1997**).

For **Chomsky's "Language"** substitutes "competence" defined as a fluent native speaker's knowledge (largely tacit) of grammaticality — of whether or not putative sentences are part of his language, and according to what structural relationships.

Speaking competence is regarded the measure of knowing a language (**John, 1982**). Therefore, language competence means the ability or knowledge to do something by using language.

2. Levels of stress

There were a simple distinction between “stressed” and “unstressed” syllables with no immediate levels, such a treatment would be a two-level analysis of stress. Usually, however, we have to recognize one or more immediate levels **(Peter Roach, 1990)**.

It is worth noting that unstressed syllables containing /ə, i, u / or a syllabic consonant will sound less prominent than an unstressed syllable containing some other vowels. This could be used as a basis for a further division of stress levels, giving us a third and fourth levels.

2.1. Primary stress

- It is the strongest level of stress.
- Primary stress gives the final stressed syllable.
- Primary stress is very important in compound words.

2.2. Secondary stress

- Secondary stress is weaker than primary stress but stronger than that of unstressed.
- Secondary stress gives the other lexically stressed syllables in a word.
- Secondary stress is important primarily in long words with several syllables.

2.3. Tertiary stress

It includes the fully unstressed vowels. An unstressed vowel is the vowel sound that forms the syllable peak of a syllable that has no lexical stress.

2.4. Quaternary stress

It includes the reduced vowels. Vowel reduction is the term in phonetics that refers to various changes in the acoustic quality of vowels, which are related to changes in stress, sonority, duration, loudness, articulation, or position in the word which are perceived as "weakening".

3. Sentence stress patterns

Sentence stress is a natural part of spoken English and students should be encouraged to use it during the course. English is a stress-timed language which is spoken with intonation and rhythm. This results from strong and weak stresses that are built into both individual words and sentences. How can students recognize stresses in a sentence? The main rules for sentence stress in a neutral sentence (one without special emphasis) are as follows:

There are two kinds of word in most sentences: content words and function words. Content words are words that give the meaning in a sentence. For students to produce sentences that have the appropriate stress patterns and thus the appropriate English intonation, it is necessary that they know which words of a sentence are stressed and which is not stressed.

English words can be divided into two groups: content words and function words.

Content words are those words that express independent meaning. Included in this group are:

1. *Nouns*
2. *Main verbs*
3. *Adverbs*
4. *Adjectives*
5. *Question words (why, when, what)*
6. *Demonstratives (this, that, these, those)*

Content words are always stressed.

Function words are words that have a little or no meaning in themselves, but which express grammatical relationships. Function words include:

1. *Articles (a, an, the)*
2. *Prepositions (at, to, of)*
3. *Auxiliaries (will, have and forms of the verb be)*

4. *Pronouns (her, him, it, them)*
5. *Conjunctions (or, as, that)*
6. *Relation pronouns (that, which, who)*

Function words are usually unstressed, unless they are to be given special attention. Function words are words that are essential to make the sentence grammatical correct, but don't have any intrinsic meaning on their own, without content words.

English native speakers may automatically listen to the content words in a sentence while absorbing the function words almost subconsciously. The strong stresses fall on the content words in a sentence while the weak stresses fall on the function words. If a word has a strong stress in a sentence, it is spoken with more emphasis and volume, and more slowly than a word with a weak stress.

The time between the stressed content words is the same, regardless of how many function words there are between them.

4. General rules in sentence stress

“Sentence stress generally occurs on the content word of a sentence to which the speaker is directing the listener’s attention. This is often referred to as the information focus of a sentence. Sentence stress usually falls on the last content word of a sentence”.

(Maureen McNerney and David Mendelsohn, 1997).

This is not always the case, however, as the last content word does not necessarily coincide with the information focus. Variation in sentence stress can be illustrated with a series of questions and answers:

●
Where did he go?

●
He went to Ottawa. (Maureen McNerney and David Mendelsohn, 1997).

If this exchange were followed by:

●
How did he get there?

The answer would not be:

●
He drove to Ottawa.

But rather:

●
He drove to Ottawa.

Or, simply:

●
He drove. (Maureen McNerney and David Mendelsohn, 1997:190).

Here, the place, Ottawa, is no longer the information focus and so does not receive the major sentence stress. The focus is now on the means of transportation

Similarly, the following two sentences convey very different meanings:

●
Harry went to Barbados.

●
Harry went to Barbados.

(Maureen McNerney and David Mendelsohn, 1997:190).

The first sentence is simple statement of fact; speaker is merely reporting that Harry went to Barbados. The second sentence, with the major sentence stress on Harry, has rather different interpretation. The fact that someone went to Barbados is already shared information. The focussed information is that it was Harry and not anyone else who went to Barbados.

Traditionally, if handled at all, pronunciation work on the placement of sentence stress has involved mechanical production of such string as the following, with the major stress being shifted to different positions in the same sentence:

●
My uncle from Calgary's a dentist.

●
My uncle from Calgary's a dentist.

●
My uncle from Calgary's a dentist.

●
My uncle from Calgary's a dentist. (**Maureen McNerney, 1997: 191**)

These rules are called for neutral or normal stress. However, the rule seems to be not very exact for all communication aims of speakers. Sometimes, we can stress a word that would normally be only a structure word (i.e. to correct information).

Example:

● ●
Your car is outside, is it? (**Quirk, 2001: 3**).

Considering another example: stress fall overall words:

●
Actually, he does hate the dog so much. (**Quirk, 2001: 3**).

In such speaking sentence, Pronoun “he” is also stressed to confirm that no one else hates the dogs. Stressed auxiliary verbs does is to emphasize deeply is hatred action. Also “the” is stressed to deal with the dog that all speaker and listener know.

Partly, such exceptions of stress expressed the speaker’s emotion that was told in the part of chapter three-functions of intonation.

5. Sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation

Stress, rhythm, and intonation are all connected with the perception of relative PROMINENCE. We speak of STRESS when we are considering the prominence with which one part of a word or of a longer utterance are distinguished from other parts (**Peter Roach, 1997**).

All students will need practice in English stress, rhythm, and intonation. These are key elements of English pronunciation and, if mastered, can greatly increase the comprehensibility of learner’s speech.

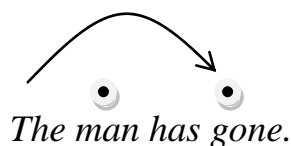
The word ‘like’ is stressed in the following sentence:

Does he like it? (Peter Roach, 1997).

We of RHYTHM when we are considering the pattern formed by the stresses perceived as peaks of prominence or beats, occurring at somewhat regular intervals of time, the recurring beats being regarded as completing a cycle or ‘measure’. Thus, as a language with a tendency for ‘stress-timed’ rhythm, English often shows an identity of rhythm in sentences like the following, provided that the number of syllables does not vary too widely:

The professor’s in London this evening. (Peter Roach, 1997).

We speak of INTONATION when we associate relative prominence with PITCH, the aspect of sound which we perceive in term of ‘high’ or ‘low’; thus we can say that ‘intonation nucleus’ in the following sentence has a ‘falling tone’:



(Peter Roach, 1997).

The *segmental* aspects of the English sound system-consonants and vowels-are often distinguished from the *suprasegmental* aspects-rhythm, stress, and intonation. In this section, we describe the rhythm, stress, and intonation patterns of English phrases and sentences, and some of the modifications of segments that occur as a result of these patterns. If English majors are to develop fluent, natural English, we must consider these aspects of pronunciation as they are essential to the production of connected speech.

5.1. The stress-timed rhythm of English

English is a stress-timed language. In a stress-timed language, there is a tendency for stressed syllables to occur at regular intervals. The amount of time it takes to say a sentence in a stress-timed language depends on the number of syllables that receive stress, either major or minor, not on the total number of syllables. Unlike English, many languages of the world are syllable-timed. This means that the amount of time required saying a sentence depends on the number of syllables, not on the number of stresses.

Sentence stress is the main means of providing rhythm in speech. Rhythm is the key to fluent English speech. Imagine a metronome beating the rhythm. The stressed syllables are like the beats of the metronome: regular, loud, and clear. The unstressed syllables between the beats are shortened, obscured, and joined together.

The pattern of stress in this sentence is stressed – unstressed – stressed – unstressed – stressed – unstressed, with equal number of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables. Try to pronounce this sentence rhythmically, it should be easy to do because the alternation of one stressed and one unstressed syllable is easy to reproduce.

Now we have one, two, or several unstressed syllables in the intervals between the stressed syllables, but we have the same amount of time for each interval because the stressed syllables, like the beats of the metronome, have to occur regularly. And the sentence is not very long, so we won't need noticeable pauses between the thought groups.

5.2. Placement of stress in sentences

While all content words receive major word stress, one content word within a particular sentence will receive greater stress than all the others. We refer to this as the major sentence stress. In most case the major sentence stress falls on the last content word within a sentence.

Consider the pronunciation of the sentences below:


Susan bought a new sweater at Creeds.


I walked home in the rainstorm.

 **(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).**

In each of these sentences, the stressed syllable of the final content word receives the major sentence stress.

Within individual words, we distinguished between three levels of stress: major, minor, and unstressed.

With sentences, we must distinguish between four levels of stress: major sentence stress, major word stress, minor word stress and unstressed.

Thus, in the sentence: *“I walked home in the rainstorm”*.

‘I’, ‘in’, and ‘the’ are function words and are unstressed; ‘walked’, ‘home’ and ‘rainstorm’ are content words and receive major word stress; and ‘rainstorm’, in addition, receives the major sentence stress. As ‘rain’ is the syllable of this content word that receives major word stress, it is also the syllable that receives major sentence stress. This makes ‘rain’ both louder and longer than ‘walked’ and ‘home’. Since ‘rainstorm’ is a compound, ‘storm’ receives minor word stress.

In some cases major sentence stress will not fall on the major stressed syllable of the final content word of a sentence. That is, when a speaker wishes to direct the hearer’s attention to some other content word in the sentence, this word will receive major sentence stress. Consider the following dialogue:


Speaker A: *What did you buy at Creeds?*


Speaker B: *I bought a new sweater at Creeds.*

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).

Notice that the second sentence does not receive major sentence stress on ‘Creeds’; but rather on the stressed syllable of ‘sweater’. This is the element of the sentence that Speaker B is directing Speaker A’s attention to. We call this element the information focus of this sentence. Generally, it is the stressed syllable of the content word representing information focus that receives major sentence stress. Most often, the information focus occurs at the end of a sentence. Indeed, a more natural response to Speaker’s a question above would be: ‘I bought a new sweater’, or simply ‘a new sweater’.

5.3. Some major intonation features

Intonation is often called the melody of language since it refers to the pattern of pitch changes that we use when we speak (**Peter Avery, Susan Ehrlich, 1997**).

According to **Peter Roach (1991:133)**, “there is no completely satisfactory definition of intonation, but any attempt at a definition must recognize that the pitch of the voice plays the most important part”.

Firstly, intonation is about how speakers say rather than what they say. Without intonation, it is impossible to understand the expressions and thoughts the words: ‘the melody’ you hear is the intonation.

Secondly, intonation is also the system of levels (rising and falling) and variations in pitch sequences within speech.

In **Accurate English (Rebecca M.Dayer, 2002)**, intonation is the melody of speech, the changes in the pitch of the voice overtime. Intonation can convey meaning directly. Besides being closely connected to grammar and words, it can express a speaker’s emotions (anger, surprise), relationship to the listeners (polite, superior), and attitude toward what they are saying (serious, joking).

The characteristic stress and intonation patterns of English have a profound effect on the pronunciation of sounds in connected speech. In particular, the fact that function words in English are generally unstressed and reduced makes them almost unrecognizable to learners. In this section, the writer provides specific information regarding the ways in which sounds are modified in connected speech. In addition, discussion of the ways in which words is linked to one another in phrases and sentences. Such information is not only important in helping students to improve their production of spoken English, but is also essential in helping students to improve their comprehension.

Sentence stress is the key component of English intonation. Intonation organizes words into sentences, distinguishes between different types of sentences, and adds emotional coloring to utterances. English intonation is quite difficult for Vietnamese learners. Developing the ability to hear, understand, and reproduce sentence stress in speech is the main prerequisite to mastering English intonation.

5.3.1. Classification of Stress

5.3.1.1. Tonic Stress

An intonation unit almost always has one peak of stress, which is called 'tonic stress', or 'nucleus'. Because stress applies to syllables, the syllable that receives the tonic stress is called 'tonic syllable'. The term tonic stress is usually preferred to refer to this kind of stress in referring, proclaiming, and reporting utterances. Tonic stress is almost always found in a content word in utterance final position. Consider the following, in which the tonic syllable is underlined:

- *I'm going.*
- *I'm going to London.*
- *I'm going to London for a holiday (*Ladefoged, 1926: 99*)*

5.3.1.2. Emphatic stress

Emphatic stress is a special case of sentence stress. In conversation, speakers can choose to put the stress in any place in order to emphasize words and to put stress on a word; speakers do one or more of these things:

- + Make it louder
- + Make it longer
- + Make it higher

And the following sentences are examples which show us one reason to move the tonic stress from its utterance final position is to assign an emphasis to a content word which is usually a modal auxiliary, an intensifier, an adverb, etc.

- a. *It was very **b**oring.* (unmarked)
- b. *It was **v**ery boring.* (emphatic)
- c. *You **mu**stn't talk so **l**oudly.* (unmarked)
- d. *You **mu**stn't talk so loudly.* (emphatic)

(Ladefoged, 1926:99)

Some intensifying adverbs and modifiers (or their derivatives) that are emphatic by nature are: Indeed, utterly, absolute, terrific, tremendous, awfully, terribly, great, grand, really, definitely, truly, literally, extremely, surely, completely, barely, entirely, very (adverb), very (adjective), quite, too, enough, pretty, far, especially, alone, only, own, -self, etc.

Emphatic stress may be used in the sentence, usually to compare, correct, or clarify things. Emphatic stress singles out the word that the speaker considers the most important, and in this case even a function word may become stressed.

5.3.1.3. *Contrastive Stress*

In contrastive contexts, the stress pattern is quite different from the emphatic and non-emphatic stresses in that any lexical item in an utterance can receive the tonic stress provided that the contrastively stressed item can be contrastable in that universe of speech.

Example:

- a. *Do you like this one or THAT one?*
- b. *I like THIS one.* *(Ladefoged, 1926:99).*

Many other larger contrastive contexts (dialogues) can be found or worked out, or even selected from literary works for a study of contrastive stress.

Consider the following:

- *She played the piano yesterday. (It was her who...)*
- *She played the piano yesterday. (She only played (not. harmed) ...)*
- *She played the piano yesterday. (It was the piano that...)*
- *She played the piano yesterday. (It was yesterday...)*

5.3.1.4. New Information Stress

In a response given to a wh-question, the information supplied, naturally enough, is stressed. That is, it is pronounced with more breath force, since it is more prominent against a background given information in the question. The concept of new information is much clearer in responses to wh-questions than in declarative statements.

A: What's your NAME?

B: My name's GEORGE.

(Ladefoged, 1926: 99)

“In general, new information is more likely to receive a tonic accent material has already been mentioned. The topic of the sentence is less likely to receive the tonic accent than the comment that is made on the topic”.

(Ladefoged, 1926: 100).

5.3.2. Tune shapes

The shape of a tune is decided partly by the number of important words in the group and partly by the exact attitude, you wish to express. Important words are the words, which carry most of the meaning in a words group. An important word always has a stressed syllable and usually has a change of pitch connected to it.

What do we mean by “important word”? These are the words which carry most of the meaning in a word group.

6. Functions of sentence stress.

- Sentence stress organizes separate words into sentences by making content words stressed and function words unstressed.
- Sentence stress makes the utterance understandable to the listener by making the important words in the sentence stressed, clear, and higher in pitch and by shortening and obscuring the unstressed words.

- Sentence stress organizes the words in the sentence rhythmically, making the stressed syllables occur at regular intervals and jamming together the unstressed syllables between the stressed syllables.
- Sentence stress organizes the words in the sentence into logically connected thought groups by joining the unstressed syllables to the main stressed syllable in the group and marking the end of the thought group with a slight pause if necessary.
- If necessary, sentence stress singles out the most important word in the sentence by giving it emphatic stress.
- Sentence stress marks the end of the sentence by giving the strongest stress to the last stressed syllable with the help of falling or rising intonation.

7. The relationship between sentence stress and English speaking competence

Many students equate being able to speak a language as knowing the language and therefore view learning the language as learning how to speak the language, or as **Nunan, 1991** wrote “success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language”, therefore, if students do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to enhance speaking competence. It may be useful at this point to consider afresh the relation between sentence stress and English speaking competence along with the way in which our notion shows these features.

But does sentence stress matter? It is a difficult area. It can be a difficult concept for students to understand, particularly, if their first language is not stress-timed. In their first language all the words in a sentence are spoken with equal stress. Native speakers of English speak quite naturally with sentence

stress but if you asked one why they did this they would perhaps be unaware that they were even doing it, and at a loss to explain the rules (unless they had specifically studied the subject). Nevertheless, it is an important aspect of spoken English because when a student do not speak with sentence stress they can be hard to understand, even when what they are saying is grammatically correct and really interesting, a situation that can be quite frustrating for students. Understanding sentence stress can also help students to get more out of listening to spoken English.

Sentence stress is not just a phonetic peculiarity of English. Sentence stress has a very important function of marking the words that are necessary for understanding an utterance. When native speakers of English listen to their conversation partners, they listen for stressed words, because stressed words provide important information. It is often difficult to understand the meaning of the sentence in which even one content word is missing. It is also difficult to understand the sentence in which an important word is not stressed or a function word is stressed.

Unstressed function words make sentences grammatically correct. They are not very important in terms of the information that they provide, and their meaning is usually understandable from their immediate surroundings in a sentence. Even if you don't get some quickly pronounced function words, the meaning of the whole sentence will be clear to you.

8. The role of sentence stress in enhancing English speaking competence.

Sentence stress is the governing stress in connected speech. All words have their individual stress in isolation. When words are connected into thought groups, and thought groups are connected into sentences, content words keep their stress, and function words lose their stress. The most important words in the sentence receive stronger stress. The last stressed word in the sentence receives the strongest stress with the help of falling or rising intonation.

Intonation is not only to conveying meaning in spoken English but is also important in conveying the attitude of the speaker towards what is being said. A simple word such as ‘oh’ spoken with different intonation contours can express meanings which range from complicity to shock and disbelief, from surprise to disappointment, from “I didn’t know that” to frustration.

We can see that sentence stress is the rhythm of English. Like word stress, sentence stress will help you understand spoken English more easily even when people speak quickly. Moreover, it also brought to the English accent which makes English become greater and people love speaking it all over the world.

In sentence, stress patterns also will help us hear the difference between similar sentences.

Example: He can **talk**

He **can’t** talk

According to the above example, verbs with the negative “- *n’t*” are always stressed. This helps us to hear the difference between “*can*” and “*can’t*” in the following two sentences, because sentences have different stress patterns.

Students must grasp the function of intonation in conveying attitude and be able to recognize the difference between different intonation contours:

Final falling intonation is the most common pattern used in the production of English sentences. It is used in most statements, and wh-questions. Final rising intonation is used primarily in ‘yes-no’ questions. The rising pitch indicates to the listener that the speaker genuinely does not know whether the answer is ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

Tag question can be produced with either rising or falling intonation. When a tag question is spoken with falling intonation, it is referred to as rhetorical question as no answer is sought; simple agreement is expected: (e.g. It’s hot today, isn’t it?-no answer sought), with rising intonation, the tag question

requires a yes or no answer (e.g. It's payday, isn't it? – possible answer: 'No, payday is tomorrow').


Special kinds of questions can be produced by using rising intonation on a declarative sentence (e.g. 'She's going to Japan?'), in echo questions (e.g. 'She's going where?) or even on a partial repetition of an utterance (e.g. "...an accident?"). These are usually expressions of surprise or disbelief, or requests for confirmation, and are seldom taught in English classrooms. This is probably because they do not fit the regular grammatical rules we all learned. We believe that they should be taught, as students should be made aware of the flexibility of spoken English.


8.1. Final intonation

8.1.1. Rising-falling intonation

Susan bought a new sweater.

Notice that the pitch of your voice rises at the major sentence stress, the first syllable of the word "sweater", and falls over the second syllable of this word. The pitch of the entire sentence is referred to as stress in sentence combined with intonation pattern. The pattern in this sentence is rising-falling. It is the most common intonation pattern in English and is characteristic of simple declarative sentences, commands and questions that begin with a wh-word, such as 'who', 'what', 'when', 'where', 'why', or 'how'. Say the sentences below, concentrating on the pitch change at the word receiving major sentence stress.



He wants to go home



She gave him five dollars for it.



Give her a sweater.



What do you want to do with it?

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).

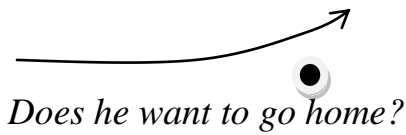
In each case, the pitch rises at the major sentence stress and falls over the remaining part of the sentence. This descent in pitch can be rather abrupt, especially when it must be accomplished over just one syllable as is the case with 'home' in the first sentence. When the voice falls to the bottom of the pitch range, it usually indicates that the speaker has finished speaking.

8.1.2. Rising intonation

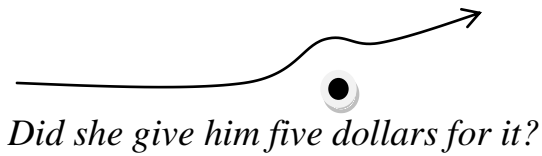
Did Susan buy a new sweater?

Notice again that the pitch of your voice rises at the major sentence stress. However, rather than a sharp decline in pitch level after the stressed syllable, as with the rising-falling intonation pattern, the voice continues to rise. The sentence stress with intonation pattern in this case is rising and is characteristic of questions that require a simple yes or no answer.

In order to familiarize with this pattern, say the following sentences, concentrating on the pitch of your voice. We present this intonation pattern with a rising stressed words.



Does he want to go home?



Did she give him five dollars for it?

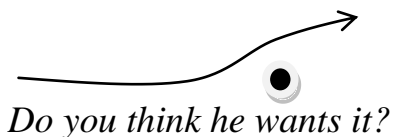


Couldn't she have seen him?

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).



Do you want to give it to him?



Do you think he wants it?

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).

This intonation contour is used to express doubt. That is, the speaker is not sure that the answer to the question is and would like the information supplied. We can turn a simple statement into a yes/no question through the use of rising intonation. For example, we say:



John left town.

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).

With a rising intonation in stressed word, we are not making a statement. We are expressing some doubt regarding the truth of the statement, indicating to the listener that a response is required. Thus, we can see that intonation patterns can contribute to sentence meaning English.

8.2. Non-final intonation

8.2.1. Rising-falling intonation

Complex sentences often have two separate intonation patterns. An example of such a sentence is provided below:

Because of his athletic ability, he was given a scholarship.

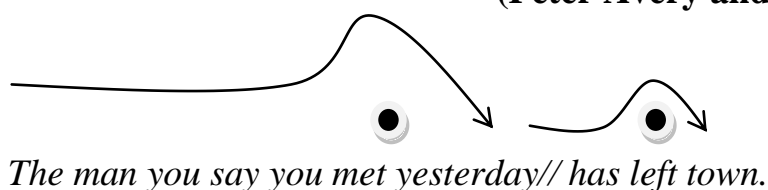
Here the pitch rises and falls on the word ‘ability’, and also on the word ‘scholarship’. On ‘scholarship’, the pitch drifts to the bottom of the pitch range, while on ‘ability’, the pitch does not fall nearly as far. The intonation contour on the first half of the sentence is a non-final rising –falling contour. The following sentences usually have two intonation contours on the second. We represent these contours slightly differently, as shown by stressed words and the arrows. The arrow on the non-final contour does not go as far down as it does for the final contour. (We indicate that there should be two separate contours by use of //.)



When John left the *house* // it was *raining*.

The diagram shows two intonation contours. The first contour starts flat, rises to a peak over the word 'house', and then falls to a level indicated by a dot with a downward arrow. The second contour starts at a lower level, rises to a peak over the word 'raining', and then falls to a lower level, also indicated by a dot with a downward arrow. The two contours are separated by a double slash '//'. The words 'house' and 'raining' are italicized to indicate stress.

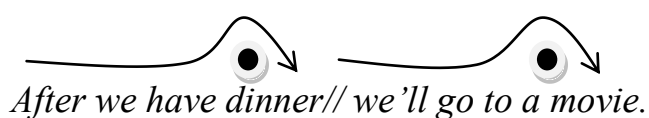
(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).



The man you say you met *yesterday*// has left *town*.

The diagram shows two intonation contours. The first contour starts flat, rises to a peak over the word 'yesterday', and then falls to a level indicated by a dot with a downward arrow. The second contour starts at a lower level, rises to a peak over the word 'town', and then falls to a lower level, also indicated by a dot with a downward arrow. The two contours are separated by a double slash '//'. The words 'yesterday' and 'town' are italicized to indicate stress.

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).



After we have *dinner*// we'll go to a *movie*.

The diagram shows two intonation contours. The first contour starts flat, rises to a peak over the word 'dinner', and then falls to a level indicated by a dot with a downward arrow. The second contour starts at a lower level, rises to a peak over the word 'movie', and then falls to a lower level, also indicated by a dot with a downward arrow. The two contours are separated by a double slash '//'. The words 'dinner' and 'movie' are italicized to indicate stress.

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).

Thus, a fall at the end of the sentence to the lowest pitch possible indicates that our thought is complete, and a fall that is not to the bottom of the pitch range indicates that we still have more to say. It is very useful to bear this in mind when listening to your students' pronunciation. If a student does not have a large enough drop in pitch in ending a sentence, native speakers will expect that there is more to come. This can lead to embarrassing silences and communication breakdowns.

8.2.2. Continuation rise

Susan bought a new sweater, new shoes, and a new dress.

This intonation contour of this sentence is termed a continuation rise and is often used with lists. The pitch of the voice rises slightly on each noun of the list, indicating that we are not yet finished speaking. On the final noun of the list, we find the familiar rise-fall. Pronounce the following sentences in order to familiarize yourself with this pattern.



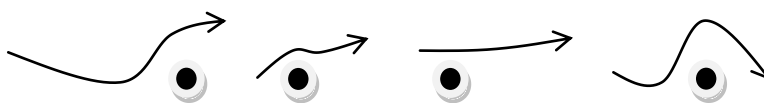
He bought apples, peaches, pears, and oranges.

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).



I'll have two pencils, a black pen, and some ink.

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).



We went to Paris, Brussels, Amsterdam, and London.



I saw Esther, Jane, Neil, and Susan.

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).

Some complex sentences display a continuation rise on the first half rather than a rise-fall.



If you want to get ahead, you have to work hard.

In this sentence, the intonation may rise slightly on the word 'ahead'. Following a slight pause, we find the rising-falling contour on the next clause.

8.2.3. Tag question

Tag question can display either final rising-falling or final rising intonation contours. Their meaning will differ depending on which of these contours is used. Pronounce the following tag questions with the intonation contours indicated:



Deanna's helpful, isn't she?



Deanna's helpful, isn't she?

(Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, 1997).

The first sentence, with a rising contour, indicates that the speaker genuinely does not know whether Deanna is helpful and wants the listener to provide this information. The second sentence, with a rising-falling contour, indicates that the speaker believes that Deanna is helpful and is merely eliciting confirmation from the listener.

Tag questions with rising-falling intonation are very often used to begin conversations. For example, in attempting to begin a conversation with a stranger, one might say:



In uttering this sentence, the speaker is not demanding an answer to a question but rather opening the lines of communication.

8.3. Speaker attitude

Speaker attitude can be signaled through the use of pitch variation in intonation patterns. For example, if we raise our pitch, we may be indicating surprise; if we lower our pitch, we may be indicating anger. If we expand our pitch range (that is, if our high pitches become higher and our low ones become lower), we may be indicating deference. If we narrow our pitch range, we may be indicating boredom. Given the role of sentence stress along with intonation in conveying speaker attitude, there is great potential for English majors to be misunderstood if their stress and intonation patterns in sentences are too dissimilar from the English ones. For example, as Vietnamese words generally consist of only one syllable, Vietnamese speakers may have difficulty in producing the longer words of English with appropriate stress patterns. Furthermore, each syllable of an utterance will receive equal weight, giving Vietnamese learners' English a staccato-like rhythm.

CHAPTER TWO: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. Methodology

The objective of the current part is to outline the research methodology used and demonstrate that the research has followed recognized procedures in this study. It will explain why the method was chosen and provide a detailed explanation of how the research was conducted.

2. Purpose of the survey questionnaires

The main purpose of survey is to do research students' attitude toward the role of sentence stress in enhancing English speaking competence.

There are 6 questions conducted in order to study about their general attitude toward sentence stress (importance, effectiveness, frequency).

The survey is the basic for my study "*The role of sentence stress in enhancing English speaking competence of HPU English majors*".

A survey within the scope of the study is conducted at HPU. The major aim of the study is to collect and analyze the data regarding the recognition and the utilization of sentence stress. To find out the attitude of students towards the needs of enhancing English speaking competence. To concern the EI majors' awareness of the importance of EI sentence stress.

The findings are served as the cornerstone for the technique suggestions in the next chapter.

3. Data analysis based on students' survey questionnaires

Question 1: Students' English learning time

The table below indicates the time of learning English of all the third year English majors. As it can be seen from the table, of all the students, none of

them has learnt English for 1-3 years, there are only 7.5% of the students who have been studying for 3-5 years. Whereas, the percentage of students studying English more than 7 years is five times higher than those students, 67.5%. The rest of these students with 25% have spent around 5-7 years studying. From the figures, it is clear to see that almost students have been acquired to study English for quite a long time, from the secondary school. Very few students have just started learning English. It is likely that there would be some differences in their proficiency.

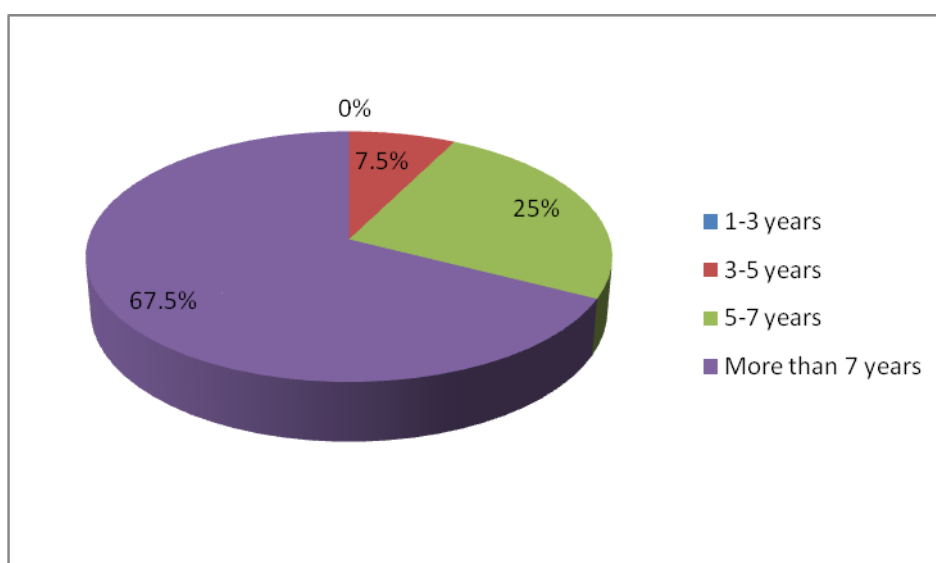


Figure 1: Students' English learning time

Question 2: The most favourite lesson of English majors

The chart below shows the most favourite lesson in their views. It can be seen that a high percentage of the students (70%) like speaking lesson. The number of students like writing lesson about 12.5%. These statistics show that productive skills are concentrated. Although, in high school, is not considered as important as other skills, most students in this study now realize its importance. The rest likes receptive skills, but this is only a small number (listening: 10%, reading: 7.5%).

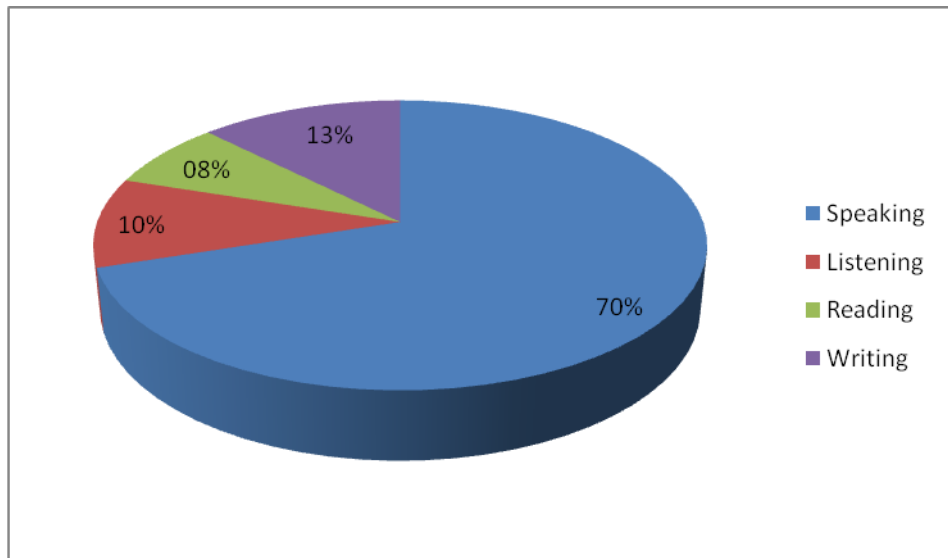


Figure 2: Students' interest in learning English skills

Question 3: Students' attitude towards sentence stress

As it can be seen from chart 3 below, the majority of students often are not very attentive to sentence stress when they speak English accounts for 32.5% while a number of students are very attentive to stress in sentence only 10% this demonstrated that although they are students of English major, they have not still determined about sentence stress.

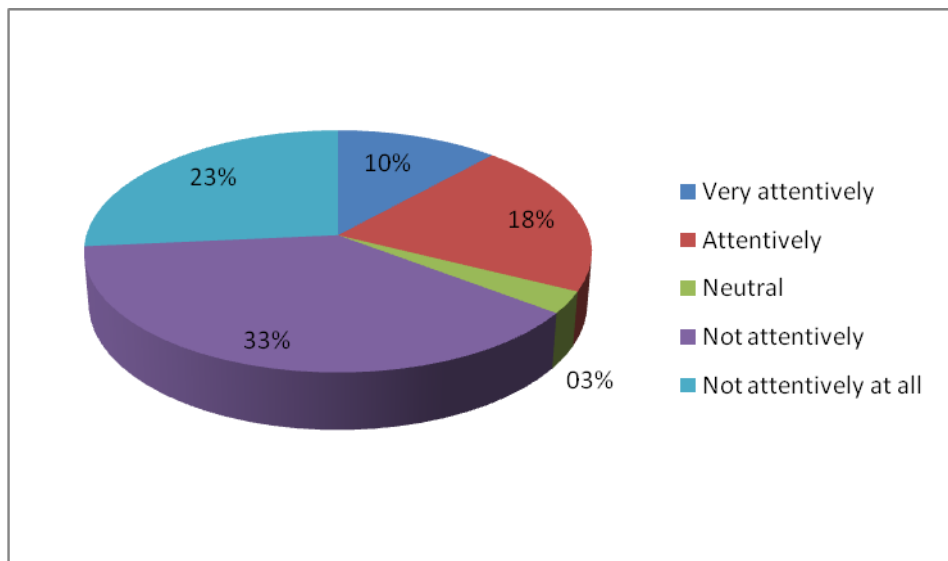


Figure 3: Attention of English sentence stress

Question 4: The importance of sentence stress

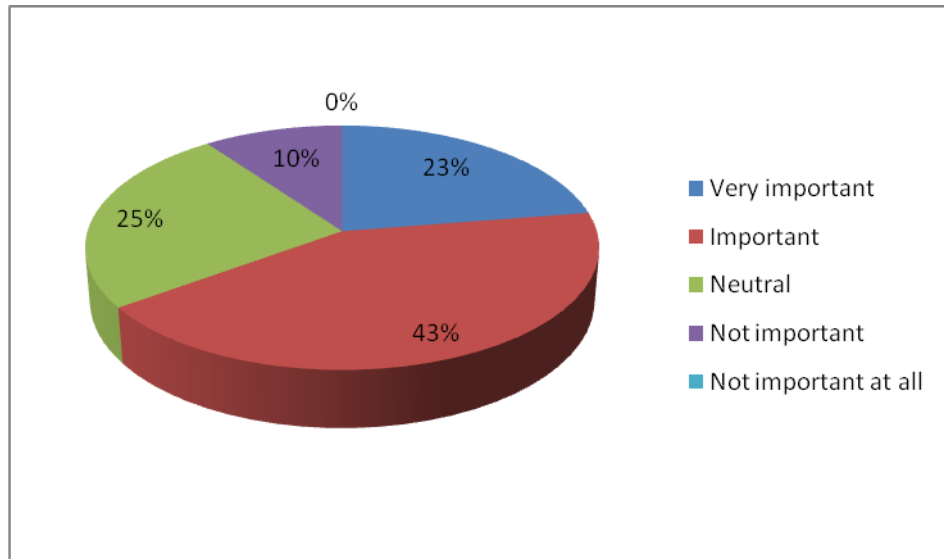


Figure 4: The importance of sentence stress in enhancing speaking competence

To some extents, the students' favourite lesson and their thought of speaking competence affect their attitude towards stress in sentence. According to the chart above, most of them realize the important role of sentence stress, which occupies 42.5%. Meanwhile, 22.5% of them thought sentence stress is important for enhancing speaking competence.

None of them thinks that sentence stress is not very important. This shows their awareness of the important of sentence stress. The thought that sentence stress is neutral takes up 10%. This can reflex that HPU majors are aware of the essence of sentence stress to them in their study.

Question 5: Students' opinion in producing accurate sentence stress

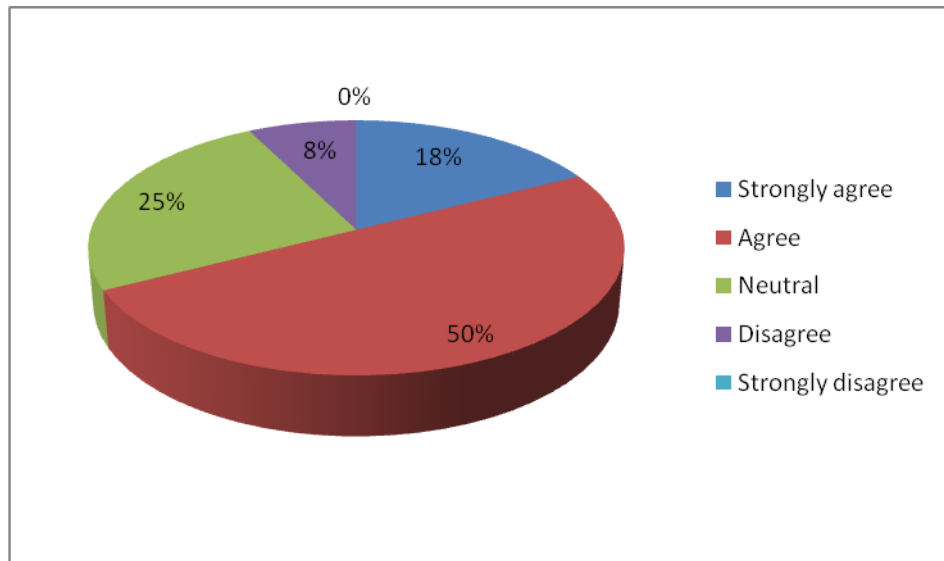


Figure 5: The effectiveness of producing accurate sentence stress

The first impression is that half of students a strong agreement towards sentence stress. 50% of them strongly agree producing accurate sentence stress that will support the speakers to convey their meaning and none of them denied the role of producing accurate sentence stress. However, a problem, their strong attitude, cognition and utilization sentence stress in enhancing speaking competence are two different problems. So their attempts in learning, applying sentence stress in communication need to be determined.

Question 6: The frequency usage of English sentence stress

The chart below shows 13 of them (32.5%) indicate that they never use sentence stress while speaking. Some of them about 12.5% often use sentence stress in communication, representation, and reading. 25% of them rarely use sentence stress in English speaking competence and that is 22.5% sometimes use stress in sentence. They said that they only determined to grammar and vocabulary much.

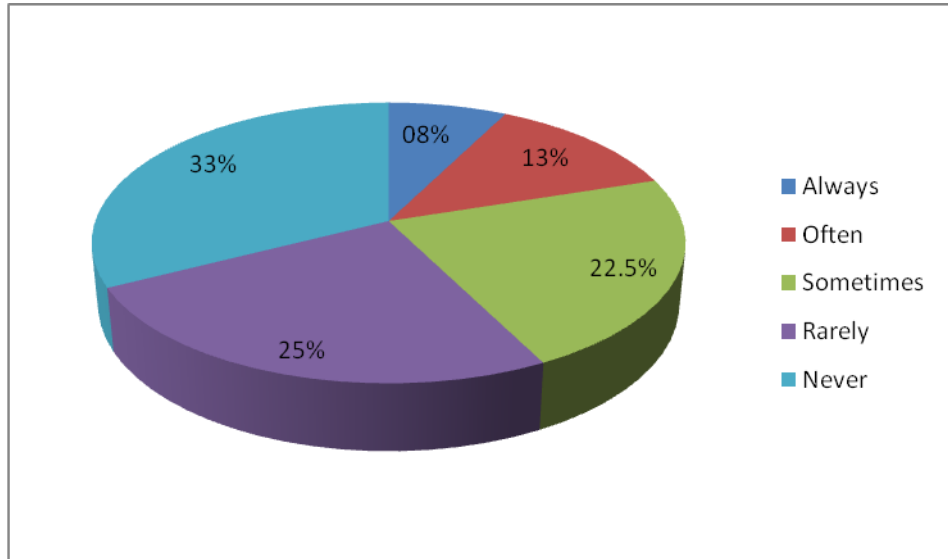


Figure 6: The frequency of using sentence stress in English speaking

CHAPTER THREE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Findings

As the survey is restricted to only a small number of students, surely the result cannot reflex the real situation of English majors speaking competence at Haiphong Private University. Nevertheless, it is hoped that the findings and discussion following can give useful information to some extends.

The students soon realize the importance of sentence stress in English speaking. With this positive attitude, they will have effective way to learn English.

2. Some possible problems encountered by English majors in enhancing English speaking competence.

Nowadays, English is considered as a global language because it is the main language used in transactions. However, when learning English as the second language, we both found that we have to face with many difficulties. We are afraid of communicating with foreigners because we find it difficult to understand what they said. While listening, we realize some words, but cannot understand the meaning of the whole sentence. When foreigners speak out, they often stress on the important parts in a sentence, in other word, that's sentence stress. From years studying English and from experience of my American and Vietnamese English teachers, the writer summarizes some difficulties that English majors often face, and give out some solutions for those problems.

2.1. Misunderstanding of meaning caused by wrong placement of stress

Stress in sentence does not have any typical rules (the rules for it seems to be quite general) so it is possible for English learners to make mistakes of stress

placement. And this difficulty is the most typical for learners when they study sentence stress.

For example:

Some of our friends are studying and working in China.

In fact, if it is a general positive sentence to inform, stress will only fall on **our friends, studying, working, and China**. If it is to emphasize that **friends** do not belong to us, they belong to others, stress will fall on the pronoun there. However if this sentence is changed into a declarative sentence, the stress may change and it decides what is the core of the question.

2.2. Misunderstanding of meaning caused by changes in sentence stress.

Stress in each sentence type keeps its own rules. So if speakers do not pay attention to stress, listeners will get the misunderstanding of meaning that caused by changes in sentence stress, especially to interrogative sentence.

Example: *Was he a famous actor in THOSE days?* [Quirk, R, 2003,192]

When the stress fall on **THOSE** that means “I know he once a famous actor- but was it then or later?”

Was he a FÁmous actor in those days?

When the stress falls on *Famous* that means “I know he was an actor in those days- but was he a famous one?”

2.3. Communication breakdown caused by wrong use of stress

That can be known when speakers put stress on functional or notional words (content words or structure words). It is not easy to indicate when notional

words are stressed because it bases much on the attitude of speakers and what they want to express in their speaking sentence.

The Browns, I love so much.

As focused above, article “**the**” is notional word so it is unstressed in accordance with the rules of sentence stress, in speaking, however, **the** in such sentence must be stressed to inform that speaker love all members in Brown’s family. Otherwise, listeners will think that speaker loves color in Brown.

3. Some suggested solutions.

3.1. Be aware of sentence stress

The unstressed words (such as preposition, articles, and pronoun) do not carry as much “weight” as the stressed words; they become much smaller in length, and are most abbreviated. Sentence stress is not “fixed” like word stress. In fact, learners can stress words that are normally unstressed in order to highlight different meanings.

Firstly, learners have to be aware of the rules of sentence stress. Thank to that rules they can realize what receive primary stress and what receive secondary one.

Besides correct rule application of sentence stress, speaker expressed his attitude that listeners must..

Secondly, it is important to concern about sentence stress that varies according to communicative purpose in order to gain what the speakers emphasize.

3.2. Pay attention to the ways of speaking English

It is not possible, of course, to learn sentence stress and rhythm just by talking about them. Listening and repeating should become the most important part of

your work on pronunciation. You should always choose the textbooks that come with corresponding listening materials. When you practice repeating sentences after the recorded speaker, always mark sentence stress and reduced unstressed words.

By observing and listening the ways foreigners speak especially English, learners can identify the correct patterns of stress and this helps to improve their speaking. There are some procedures that you can follow:

- ✓ First, you can start by imitating the word stress.
- ✓ Then, you should pay attention to the sentence stress
- ✓ After that imitate and repeat the sentence one after another.
- ✓ Finally identify the stress patterns yourself so that you can do it yourself the next item.

From our perspective, in case we do not have chances to communicate with foreigners, we can rely on conversation on films or listen to the talk on television to master stress patterns. Pay attention to some expectations for sentence stress. Anyway, practice makes perfect.

3.3. Keep a detailed knowledge of English grammar

By the way, learners can distinguish among all English word class such as verbs, nouns, adjectives, pronouns, etc. That will help learners overcome the first difficulty.

Moreover, whenever do learners study on sentence stress, they must concern about how many kinds of sentence stress are. To tell about sentence stress, we need to care to stress on the smaller units of sentence.

3.4. Express speaker's attitude to their speaking

The way can solve the third difficulties. If speakers express their attitude in speaking, they naturally show where functional or notional words are stressed and avoid misplacement of stress in sentence.

3.5. Practice speaking English frequently

As focused above, the fourth difficulties is very outstanding to the research. So speaking practice can bring learners not only the way to speak as native speakers but also the self-confident.

Besides, learners are able to gain the rule of sentence stress easily instead of learning by heart all the above rules.

In short, the writer has just listed some authentic and possible solutions to master English sentence stress. Hoping that they can bring learners bit knowledge of sentence stress and days by days, Vietnamese will speak English as native English.

PART III: CONCLUSION

Through three chapters above, it is clear that the paper has dealt with some aspects of sentence stress. Particularly, the role of sentence stress is emphasized and mainly focused in English intonation patterns.

Sentence stress is another golden key for speaking and understanding English. With sentence stress, some words in a sentence are stressed (loud) and other words are weak (quiet).

The first chapter of the graduation paper's development is "theoretical background" which introduces an overview of involving in main knowledge of chapter two. The concepts of sentence stress are identified clearly according to many points of view. Some functions of sentence stress are also found in this chapter. This chapter has helped the readers have a look about English sentence stress; general rules of sentence stress and sentence stress patterns as well. In which the writer mainly concentrates on sentence stress patterns in types of major intonation patterns, and relationship between sentence stress and English speaking competence in order to help learners to understand the speakers' attitude towards what they are saying together with understanding the role of sentence stress in enhancing English speaking competence.

The second chapter the writer just focus on research methodology.

The third is also the last chapter is the implication of the study. This chapter helps the show some possible problems encountered by learners in using sentence stress patterns, and some suggested solutions to improve sentence stress is also mentioned here. Thus, in order to help the learners towards better understand native speaker speech and English speaking competence, the writer just focus on the role of sentence stress in enhancing English speaking competence of HPU English majors.

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APPENDIX

STUDENTS' SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear students!

This survey questionnaire is designed to find out your attitude and your expectation toward English speaking competence. Yours answers will be used for research purposes of my graduation paper entitled **“The role of sentence stress in enhancing English speaking competence of HPU English majors.”**

Thank you very much for your cooperation in completing this survey questionnaire!

Please answer the following questions by ticking () where appropriate.

1. How long have you been learning English?

- 1-3 years 3-5 years 5-7 years More than 7 years

2. Among four these following skills which is the most difficult for you?

- Speaking
 Listening
 Reading
 Writing

3. Do you attend to sentence stress while speaking?

- Very attentively
 Attentively
 Not very attentively
 Not attentively

4. How is sentence stress important for you?

- Very important
- Important
- Neutral
- Not very important
- Not important at all

5. Producing accurate sentence stress supports the speakers to convey their meaning?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

6. How often do you use sentence stress in communication?

- Always
- Often
- Sometimes
- Rarely
- Never