A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH AND PERSIAN STRESS[1]

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1. *A brief review of CAH*

The contrastive analysis hypothesis is based on two important assumptions. First, it is believed that the degree of difference between the two languages under analysis corresponds to the degree of difficulty. Second, the degree of similarity is advocated to correspond to the degree of simplicity. Therefore, the greater the differences, the more difficult it will be for the learner to learn a second language, and obviously the more similar the languages, the simpler it will be for the learners.

On the other hand, in the light of many contrastive studies (cf. James 1980; Fisiak 1981; Broselow 1984; Sajavaara 1984; Bot 1986; Odlin 1989; Leather and James 1991; Vroman 1990; Hayati 1995, among others) it has been proved that not all errors are as a result of interlingual interference. However, this does not imply that "interference" has no effect on the process of language learning.

Aside from the theoretical considerations, many people have experienced situations where they have had difficulties in expressing themselves in the second language. For example, the answer to the question "How are you?" is "Thank you" in one language (L1), and "Good, thanks..." in another, say, English (L2). In a situation where such exchanges take place between a native and a non-native speaker, the chances are that the L2 learner, affected by the L1 structure, may automatically use the inappropriate answer. Therefore, interference does inevitably happen; but the question is when and where. (For details on the limitations of CA, see Hayati 1996) That is, it is possible to predict in general that there will be difficulties in learning a second language in certain conditions. But, it is not so easy to predict the type and the source of error without experimental verification.

[1] I would like to acknowledge the very kind support of Professor Ray Cattell and Dr. Peter Peterson of the University of Newcastle for their valuable comments on the earlier version of this paper.

In all, the aim of the present paper is not to evaluate the truth or falsity of the contrastive analysis predictions but to provide a theoretical basis for others to test through experimentation. The results of such a contrastive study could be of help to language teachers, curriculum designers, material developers, etc.

2. *A contrastive analysis of the two stress patterns*[2]

In order to see the most important difference(s) between the two languages in question, it is worth categorizing them as follows:

a. Persian words pronounced in isolation have the strongest stress on one syllable; the rest remain less stressed or unstressed. It is widely agreed that in Persian, stress is predominantly on the final syllable of simple words.

(1) ketab′ (book) ziba′ (beautiful)
madœr′ (mother) name′ (letter)

There are nevertheless some exceptions to this claim; that is, inflectional endings, infinitives of verbs, some suffixes, etc. when added to the dictionary entry form of the simple words, cause a shift of stress (see Ferguson 1957).

(2) mi′-rœv-œm. (I go.)
/VPRE-go(PRE)-PP/
ketab-ha′ (books)
/book-PM/
ziba-tœr′ (more beautiful)
/beautiful-COM/
name-rœsan′ (mailman) etc.
/letter-sender/

In English, on the contrary, it is not so easily predictable. Knowing the number of syllables of the English words, then, one cannot predict the stress placement; for the strongest stress could usually occur anywhere regardless of the grammatical functions of the words. It may fall on the first as in *for′tunately*, on the second as in *rheto′rical*, on the third as in *agricul′tural*, on the fourth as in *misrepresent′*, etc. There are but some cases in which one can partially predict the English word stress (for details see Prator 1957; Kenstowich and Kisseberth 1979; O'Connor 1973).

b. As far as the nominal compounds are concerned, the stress rule is different in both languages. In Persian, it occurs finally but in English it falls on the first member of the compound.

c. In English, compounds consisting of a determiner and/or numerals plus a head let the stress move onto the second member of the combination. In Persian, it is on the first constituent.

[2] The following abbreviations have been used in the paper: VPR (Verbal Prefix), PP (Personal Pronoun), COM (Comparative Marker), PM (Plural Marker), PRE (Present).

d. The head noun in English compounds consisting of a modifier and a head receives the primary stress; in Persian, however, it is the modifier which carries the strongest accent.

e. Some nominal compounds and phrases in English could occur with two alternative stress patterns, as in White′ House and white house′. In Persian, there is only one pattern corresponding to that, i.e. it is finally stressed.

f. The first and the last members of the adverbial phrases in English and Persian carry the primary stress respectively.

g. Interrogatives are stressed in Persian, but unstressed in English.

h. The negative prefixes are stressed in Persian but unstressed or less stressed in English.

No more serious differences are found regarding the stress patterns of the two languages.

3. *Prediction*

Concerning the above analysis, the Persian students learning English may tend to transfer the stress system of their mother tongue. The following general predictions are thus illustrated through sufficient examples to indicate the domain of interference:

A. In relation to simple words, Iranians may usually pronounce most of the English words with the primary stress on the final syllable. Therefore, "depen′dence" is rendered as "dependence′", and "in′dicate" as "indicate′", etc.

B. In terms of English nominal compounds, Iranians put the stress, contrary to its correct system, on the final member of the compound:

(3) black′bird (a special bird) is pronounced
as
black bird′ (any bird with black feathers).

C. In regard to English adjectives, although it may be predicted that Iranian students will not have any difficulty only because the stress patterns of the adj+N type of compounds in the two languages under analysis are the same, there is still some possibility of interference. That is sometimes, appeal to the meaning of compounds may play a role in applying the stress system. Consider the following combinations:

(4)

English	Persian
good boy′	pesœre xub′
	/boy good/

good′ boy

D. Concerning the nominal phrases of determiner-head type, Iranian learners substitute the L1 stress pattern for that of English:

(5) five days′ is pronounced as five′ days;
some years′ is rendered as some′ years, etc.

E. Those nominal phrases with two alternative stress patterns may be pronounced with the second member stressed:

(6)	English	Persian
	White′ House	white house′
	white house′	
	black′board	black board′
	black board′	

However, there is another possibility that Persian speakers of English may use the two alternative stress patterns but not in their correct order:

(7)	English	Persian
Nominal Compound	White′ House	White House′
Adjectival Compound	white house′	white′house

This may happen due to the generalizations mentioned under (b) and (c) sections of the contrast.

F. Iranians may pronounce some of the adverbial phrases by locating the stress, as in Persian, on the most prominent syllable of the first member:

(8) "very well′" becomes "very′ well";

G. Persian speakers tend to pronounce English interrogatives with a primary accent on the question particle:

(9)	English	Persian
	Where do you go′?	Where′ do you go?
	How are′ you?	How′ are you?
	What's your name′?	What's′ your name?

After all, Persian question particles can occur everywhere in the sentence without any specific change in meaning; in English, however, there would be a meaning variation, i.e. placing the word stress on every particle indicates the speaker's emphasis. So, in Where do you go? the speaker means to emphasize "place" and not necessarily "time", "instrument", or any other adverbials.

H. The negative markers are stressed:

(10)	English	Persian
	I won't go′.	I won't′ go.
	I don't know′.	I don't′ know.

4. *Conclusion*

Many researchers in the field of (applied) linguistics have made attempts to remove students' phonological problems by proposing different procedures. In this regard, two points are to be primarily made. On the one hand, whatever the procedure is the students' level is to be taken into account. For instance, it is believed that many adult learners often focus on the message content rather than the form of L2. Therefore, to this type of learners, pronunciation becomes of secondary importance. On the other hand, since the learners may not know where the similarities between the two languages are and even if they know the place of similarity, they may not be aware how similar they are, it is recommended that, while treating the students' problems of pronunciation and accordingly the stress patterns, similarities as well as differences be emphasized.

The whole procedure, therefore, may be divided into two parts: *Formal* and *Natural*. In formal situations, the teacher may use different techniques such as same-different, true-false, multiple-choice items and the like. Since much listening practice must be done to achieve desirable speech production, oral readings may help the students' understanding a lot. In consequence, natural situations can motivate the students to focus on both the form and the content of the utterance. Dialogues of different types, then, are good devices through which a teacher can develop the students' mastery over both speech perception and speech production.

A teacher can also make use of many real and artificial objects to aid the teaching of suprasegmental. Audio- and video-tapes, for instance, as two useful audio-visual aids in collaboration with the teacher's instruction could motivate the students to enjoy it as a variety in learning. In fact, different word- and sentence stress patterns could be practised via stories, plays, games, etc. performed on video- or audio-tapes. However, Kellerman (1992:251) is of the idea that, "...language needs to be less modified and can be more realistic on video tape than that used on audio-tape." In brief, I believe video-tapes can function as a complementary device to the audio-tapes whereby they bring the heard-on-tapes materials before the students' sight, thus making them seem real.

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