A student-centred approach to teaching word stress:

Applying research findings to the classroom
PhD: aims, studies, findings

Implications for teaching

Phonology, phonetics and pronunciation

Applying principles to teaching word stress
  - Description of exploratory study
  - Initial findings
  - implications
Reflection on teaching:
- poor pronunciation vis a vis other skills
- Ad hoc teaching, but others do less
- Pronunciation under-taught
- And under-researched
- Experimenting with various approaches

Initial focus:
- Does pronunciation teaching work?

Follow-up focus:
- Which particular approaches, methods and techniques are most effective?
Aims

- To investigate what the teacher should or can do about poor pronunciation
- To develop general principles which would provide teachers with a clear rationale for classroom actions and activities relating to pronunciation. This required investigations into what makes it work
- The research involved three studies: a cumulative exploration, development and refinement of ideas as to what makes pronunciation teaching effective.
The context
- Post-intermediate level adult students
- Ages: 18-60, Time in NZ: 0-15 years
- NZ residents, in Auckland.
- Large numbers from East Asia
Focus on absence and epenthesis in syllable codas
- A problem for most of my students
- Negative impact on intelligibility
- The teaching had a positive impact both initially and over time.
One: Explicit Pronunciation Teaching

- An attempt to more tightly define and investigate some of the potential features of effective pronunciation teaching

- Method: quant + qual
  - Regular class (N=21)
  - Explicit pronunciation as regular part of curriculum
  - Teaching: series of short input and practice sessions over two weeks
  - Eclectic approach from ped lit and exp
  - Surveys and interviews
  - Pre- post- and delayed post-tests.
  - Baseline group (N=50) tests at time of pre- and delayed post-tests (beginning and end of semester)
Baseline group: L1 had some influence on error rates, but wide individual variation; over-riding factor is that each individual is different – some quickly notice important features of L2 pron and can produce them, while others never seem to notice them, a question of aptitude.

It is for those who don’t notice that explicit instruction may be of greatest assistance.

The treatment group improved significantly and retained those gains over time: clear evidence for explicit teaching.
Findings: Qual

- Suggested a number of variables for success
  - Awareness raising
  - Critical listening
  - The right kind of metalanguage
  - Helping learners to find rules and patterns
  - Giving feedback
  - Providing opportunities for further practice.

- One approach which was ineffective was syllable explanations
  - Syllables were explained in terms of consonant-vowel patterns
  - Learners did not understand this explanation, led to communication breakdown.
  - Because what learners thought of as final consonant was interpreted by the English listener as C+V (i.e. an extra syllable) fish/fishy
Two: Concept formation processes

- Ethnographic study exploring learners’ perceptions of L2 speech + learning and teaching processes
- Analysis of classroom interactions and interviews to understand how learners interpreted what was being taught, and if and how this was translated into the formation of phonological concepts.
- A number of themes emerged, in particular two variables were isolated and defined:
  - Socially Constructed Metalanguage (SCM)
  - Critical Listening (CL)
(See definitions on handout)
Method

- N=4 (3 Mandarin, 1 Korean); same population as study one
- Focus on syllable coda: epenthesis main problem
- Free pron classes in addition to full-time course, 90 mins x 6
- Series of perception and production tasks: pre- during post and delayed. Semi-structured pre- post and delayed interviews
- Teaching integrated into meaningful context
- Covered three areas (based on conclusions of earlier study)
  - Codas followed by a consonant in onset of following syllable (focus on connected speech, lessons 1&2) e.g. just think
  - Marked codas followed by a pause (more difficult complex codas, lessons 3&4) e.g. he asked
  - The effect of mistakes on meaning and grammar (e.g. comparatives, plurals, lessons 5&6) e.g. drunk snail vs drunker snail
Findings

- Learners made progress after instruction
- Retained or advanced gains 8 months (one 18 months) later
- Increased awareness of what the problem was, although did not understand all the details
- They believed their pronunciation had improved
- They could discern differences between their production and target production
Observations

- One effective aspect of teaching was CL (Fraser 2009)
  - Record learners’ speech and work with them to compare with TL model
  - Learners listen to two versions together; helps to hear the difference between what they think they have said and what TL speaker would think they have said.
  - Hearing many examples helps to develop speech perception and learn where boundaries are between phonological categories.
  - Good metalinguistic communication is key to success in CL

- Led to the theme of how pronunciation was talked about (SCM)
  - encouraging learners to describe their perceptions of the target pron
  - Teacher use of board to focus attention on salient aspects of pron
  - Teacher explanation
  - Discussion: Learners’ descriptions of how they heard target sounds was very fruitful in providing a means of communicating about pron.
For example: In explaining epenthesis

- The teacher doesn’t say “Don’t add an extra syllable” but
  - “To me it sounds like ‘drunker snail’ not ‘drunk snail’
  - T writes the difference on the board, essential for focus on salient issue

- T works with learners’ descriptions, e.g.
  - the /k/ in ‘looked’ was described as: ‘/k/ leave place but no sound’ ‘/k/ is quiet, little’, ‘/t/ is stronger then /k/’
  - Weak forms described as ‘soft’
  - Coda of ‘just’ in ‘just think’ described as ‘short’ + hand gesture showing the sound stopped.

- This was an effective way of achieving cross-cultural comm’n; the construction of meaning through a joint effort of all participants, guided by the teacher.

- Learners need to be aware that there is a problem, learn the precise nature of the problem and how to rectify it.
Three: Testing SCM and CL

- Tightly controlled quasi-experimental study
- Immediate effect of 45-50 minute lesson (carefully scripted in advance to ensure variables faithfully reflected in practice)
- Focus on epenthesis only
- Testing the validity of a concept formation approach as operationalised through SCM & CL
- 2x2 factorial design: four groups of six students with combinations of SCM and CL
  - SCM+/CL+; SCM+/CL-; SCM-/CL+; SCM-/CL-
- Exactly the same linguistic items are taught in all four lessons
Summary of variables

- **SCM+:** an attempt to explicitly teach pron, starting from the learners’ perceptions
- **SCM-:** metalanguage from textbooks e.g. count syllables, analyse syllable patterns
- **CL+:** learner listens for contrast between acceptable and unacceptable productions: like SCM it involves helping learners to understand how the sounds are perceived by the native speaker, focus on forming L2 concepts.
- **CL-:** Absence of CL achieved by not allowing for contrast between the target items.
Findings

- Significant immediate effects for SCM+ on production
- Significant immediate effects for CL+ on perception
- SCM+/CL+: significant gains in both perception & production
- SCM+/CL-: significant gains in production (perception gains in perception did not reach significance)
- SCM-/CL+: significant gains in perception (minimal, non-significant gains in production)
- SCM-/CL- made least progress in both perception and prod’n:
  - Four members of this group received SCM+/CL+ lesson and made similar gains to those achieved by the first group to receive this lesson.
- Conclusion: CL helped with speech perception, SCM helped with production, the two together helped with both.
General principles

- Raise awareness of the nature of the problem; communicate explicitly and meaningfully about it (i.e. through SCM).

- Help form category boundaries by presenting contrasts between what the native speaker does and does not perceive as belonging to the category (i.e. through Critical Listening).

- Actively involve learners in the meaning making process (a broadly communicative approach).

- Practice: focus on forming concepts (i.e. compare and contrast, allow for feedback).

- Provide the right kind of corrective feedback (use SCM).

- Define instruction in terms of what helps learners to form and practice new concepts (e.g. SCM and CL).
Phonology represents the way we think about pronunciation:
- each language has its own phonology,
- its own way of thinking about pronunciation,
- its own specific way of categorising sounds in order to make it possible to establish meaning.

Phonology is how we take a continuous stream of sound and extract meaning from it.

Phonetics: an attempt to describe the physical sound without reference to the specific ways in which different languages interpret sounds to establish meaning.

Pronunciation depends on the ability to categorise and is therefore a cognitive phenomenon which is ‘grounded in the human ability to produce, perceive and above all, to categorise sounds, and to form mental representations of sounds’ (Taylor 2002: 79-80).
What is pronunciation?

- The physical representation of the meaning we wish to convey.
- Fraser (2010) provides useful reflections on Saussure’s contribution:
  - Saussure: language as a system of signs
  - Each sign has a signifier: sound or form[tri:] 
  - And a signified: the meaning or content e.g.
The signified and signifier held together in symbolic relationship, e.g. tree

The word ‘tree’ is a sign in which the sound [tri:] is the signifier, representing the signified, or meaning, [tree].

The signified is the concept referred to, in this case [tree].

Certain objects will be classified as [tree]. This means we think of them as trees. We have a concept of what a tree is.

But different languages and cultures have different ways of viewing the world and different concepts.

So your concept of a tree may be different from mine, or your concept of word stress may be different from mine.

We categorise the world we live in, generally based on our experience, environment, linguistic and cultural.
The signifier is how we can represent that object, how we can pronounce it [tri:].

This representation relies on categorisation of sounds.

These categories are concepts (emic not etic).

Understanding of the concept leads to accurate categories.

While [tri:] may be said in slightly different ways by different speakers, there are certain salient aspects about the sound of the word which we need in order to be able to interpret it.

The point about categories is that they are ways of organising our thoughts.

If we all share the same set of concepts, which tell us how to categorise sounds, it is generally not difficult to produce and interpret the signifier.
However, for the language learner there is an extra difficulty: interpreting and producing the signifier.

It must be remembered the signifier is not a real thing, it is an abstraction representative of a certain way of understanding sound, i.e. phonology.

So as a learner I have to learn how to listen to the language and understand this will be different from my L1.

I have to form new concepts to be able to correctly categorise target language phonology.

The problem is that after many years of looking at it in a certain way we tend to think of it as much more than a way of looking at it, that it is in fact the one and only truth. So we have to untruth. This awareness applies equally to speaking: It involves being aware how the listener is likely to perceive the sounds we produce.
Perception: describe this picture
When you look at the picture, you first need to understand that there is another way of looking at it. You might see a woman.

I can explain this by saying I see a man’s face.

However this might not help you to see it, it just tells you to keep looking.

I can try and explain what to look for, to see the man’s face. This also doesn’t always help: Have to put the salient lines into the foreground and push the other ones into the background, can also be hard to do, to look at it from a different angle.

So, I need to get you to look closely, perhaps draw the outline of the man’s face, to bring it more to the foreground. I may also have to think of other ways to make the second perspective clearer to you.

Now you should be able to see what the differences are.

Of course when you look again later, you may still have difficulty in finding the second perspective.
1) There is a difference
- As a learner, you need to realise you are being misunderstood.
- I can explain this by saying how it sounds to me.

2) Hearing the difference: where it is
- Once you understand that there is a problem you must understand precisely where it is.
- To make it clear where the problem is, I can write it on the board.

3) Understanding what it is and learning how to say it
- I can model and ask you to describe the difference. Then I can ask you to say the two words and I can tell you if they sound the same or different to me and give you feedback in terms of your perception. Hopefully, you will now start to understand what the problem is.
- Another way to help you hear the difference is to get you to listen, record yourself and then listening to make sure there is a clear difference and that it is the same difference in the model.

Because ways of thinking about sounds are deeply entrenched, it will take a great deal of practice and feedback to be able to automatically produce the accurate pronunciation.
The stars are real, but the lines between them are imaginary. Constellations are projections onto a continuous array of stars.

How to teach someone a new constellation

Direct the learner’s attention to the right part of the sky.

Establish several landmarks which both the teacher and learner can recognise. This takes a lot of negotiation to make sure both teacher and learner are referring to the same things.

These landmarks can be used to describe the shape in a way that the learner will understand: requires ongoing dialogue.

Next time you go out the sky will look different so it will take several lessons, and aids such as maps will be necessary. Eventually the constellation will become immediately obvious.

Fraser (2010)
“I was in the staff room and stood up to do some Tai Chi exercises and one of my colleagues imitated my actions. But you know, even though it was similar, she just wasn’t doing it right because she didn’t understand the concept behind the exercises. That’s what I think we mean about understanding the concepts behind the physical actions of pronunciation.”
Many truths

- Language learner: untruth and retruth
- Language teacher: untruth and help the learner to retruth
To take the example of word stress, this is what some of the best books suggest:

**Teaching Word Stress to Students**

Initially, learners need to understand that a basic characteristic of every English word containing more than one syllable is its stress pattern. They also need to understand that even if all the individual sounds are pronounced correctly, incorrect placement of stress can cause misunderstanding. Thus, our first step as teachers is to clarify:

1. how native speakers highlight a stressed syllable (length, volume, pitch);
2. how they produce unstressed syllables (often with vowel reduction);
3. what the three main levels of stress are (strongly stressed, lightly stressed, unstressed).

We suggest beginning the presentation of word stress with a brief discussion of the nature of stress. Explaining to learners that stressed syllables are different in nature than unstressed syllables (i.e., are either longer, louder, and/or higher in pitch) can be reinforced by holding up a rubber band and stretching it to show the lengthened syllable. Figure 5.18 shows how text graphics can help reinforce this concept for relative beginners.41 For more advanced learners, it may be helpful to provide written examples of word stress patterns.

Next, we need to examine the primary dilemma faced by our students – namely, hearing and predicting where stress falls in words. As mentioned earlier, word stress in English is not nearly as predictable as it is in languages such as French or Polish; nor does English indicate irregularly placed stress patterns through stress or accent marks in the spelling, which is the case in Spanish.

Nonetheless, stress placement in English words is for the most part a rule-governed phenomenon, and explicit teaching of word stress patterns should be a part of the ESL pronunciation curriculum. When addressing this in the classroom, it is the teacher’s task to minimize students’ frustration and to clarify the systematicity of stress placement in words.
If a word has more than one syllable, you give stress to one of the syllables. To give it stress, do one or more of these to the syllable:

- Make it longer. *Saturday*

- Make it louder. *Saturday*

- Make it higher. *Saturday*

We can show stress with circles: each circle is a syllable and the bigger circle shows which syllable has the stress. For example, *Saturday* is Ooo.

Listen to the conversation and listen to the stress patterns of the words in bold type.

A: When do you begin your holiday?
   O O O o o

B: On the thirtieth of August.
   O o o O o

A: That's next Saturday!
   O o o

B: We're leaving in the afternoon.
   o o O

A: And when are you coming back?

B: Saturday September the thirteenth.
   o O o o o O

A: Thirtieth?
   O o o

B: No, thirteenth!
   o O

Figure 5.18 Introducing word stress (From *English Pronunciation in Use* [Hancock 2003, 52])
What do you think of these suggestions for teaching word stress?

What is missing?

- The learner’s perspective
- Recognition that this is the English perspective: a phonological categorisation

What assumptions do they make?

- They can recognise the stress: that they understand the concept and can see how it is different from the concept of stress they may have in their L1s
- They understand the concept of syllable in English (it may be different in their L1s)
a case study of teaching word stress:

The participants

Nine students (on degree prep course)
Chinese (3), Japanese (2), Indonesian, Korean, Spanish, Russian
Free class during mid-semester break: 10 am to 3 pm over three days. (invited based on diagnostic)

Data collection

Quant: Speaking: read 40 individual words and 25 words in sentences (pre-, post, and delayed) Listening and underlining stress
Recording of teaching and teacher reflection
Learner reflection: discussion and feedback forms each day
Teacher writes his name the board *Graeme*

- **T:** How many parts do you hear in my name?
- **S1:** ‘3’ (and all the others agree: Gra/e/me.)
- **T:** I hear two parts: Gra eme
- **T:** My name in Maori is Kereama. How many parts?
- **Ss:** 4
- **T:** So that tells me the Maori heard 4 parts in Graeme.
- **T:** To learn another language we have to understand how they hear it, how they think about it.
What about your names?

- Say your name? (Going around the class)
- I hear .....parts.
- How many do the rest of you hear?
- How many do you hear?
- They had a great deal of fun as they often came up with different numbers, The Japanese speakers also checked “Graeme” again and decided it should have had four parts.
- Different ways of hearing pron in different languages
- Conclusion: understand how many parts we hear in a word and remember English way of understanding may be different.
What's the difference?

- Look at my name again: Gra eme
- What's the difference between the 2 parts?
- 1st part: longer, change in tone, stronger, accent, stress
- How much more is the 1st part than the 2nd?
- S: Double
- Look at Ke re a ma: where is the stress?
- Ss: “a”
- T: How much more? Twice?
- Ss: No, just a little (Next slide for board work)
Compare languages

- **English**
  
  Two ways to make stress: Graeme Graeme

- **Maori**
  
  Ke re a ma
Students draw circles for their names, then for each other’s names

Student comments:

- There can be more than two sizes, different sizes in different languages.
- Meimei (Heard as 2 syllables, but could be four to my ears) says her parents say the second Mei very short /me/ but her friends say it long /mei/. Words sound different when people speak fast.
- I realised how different the Spanish ‘r’ is from the English ‘r’. People didn’t understand my name, the always heard a ‘d’ so I have changed that. But when I’m back home people say I have changed my accent in my Spanish.
- Stress is always on the last syllable in Russian, so it’s hard to get it right. It’s difficult to know where to put the stress.

Conclusion: Stress is different in different languages

End of this stage of lesson. Further practice follows but these ideas are referred back to when giving feedback.
Students listen to ten pairs of 2-syllable words: One with correct stress, one incorrect – taken from diagnostic tests.

They write down if the word sounds the same or different and describe the difference, better, make notes.

Discuss how the unstressed syllable sounds, and differences in different languages

Conclude two things: where it is and how it is produced

Put words in columns according to where the stress is.

Students note if nouns, verbs, adjectives, look for pattern

S’s work in pairs, saying the words to each other giving feedback. (Teacher also)
Students put words in sentences, record them on Wimba voice board (A tool we have available on Blackboard, through AUTOnline), then listen and make notes of difficulties. Classmates and teacher also listen and give feedback.

- [Link](https://autonline.aut.ac.nz/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab_tab_group_id=_2_1&url=%2Fwebapps%2Fblackboard%2Fexecute%2Flauncher%3Ftype%3DCourse%26id%3D53816%26url%3D)
- [Link](https://autonline.aut.ac.nz/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp)
Listening for stress: 3+ syllable words

- Students listen to ten pairs of 3-syllable words: One with correct stress, one incorrect – taken from diagnostic tests.
- They write down if the word sounds the same or different and describe the difference, better, make notes.
- They then listen again for the sound of the unstressed syllables.
- Use the dictionary to check how the unstressed sounds should sound (led to questions re- phonemic chart.
- http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/
- Which sounds are most common?
- Put the words into columns according to where the stress is: (Shown through circles: Ooo, oOo, oOoo, ooOo)
Speaking practice

- S’s work in pairs, saying the words to each other giving feedback. (Teacher also)
- Students put words in sentences, record them on voice board, then listen and make notes of difficulties. Classmates and teacher also listen and give feedback.
Communicative practice: Role Play

You work for a bank and you are on the committee which decides who to give credit to.

These people are applying for a $50,000 loan but you only have funds to give a loan to one person.

Negotiate with the committee to decide who you will choose.

Discuss these issues for each applicant (Take a few minutes to make notes before you start):

- Their jobs:
- How reliable they are:
- Credit history:
- Their current wages and sources of revenue:

In making your choice, consider the financial constraints facing each applicant as well as the current economic situation and whether the applicants will be able to repay their loans.

I attempted to frame it so that they would use some of the words they had been practising
Applicant 1: Mechanic, good credit history, regular wages ($1,000 a week net), married with three children, own home with a mortgage (paying $300 a week), needs money to extend house for an extra child.

Applicant 2: General Practitioner, no credit history, been in New Zealand for one year, unmarried, renting for $500 per week, needs money to buy a share of a medical practice. Income fluctuates, but hopes to use revenue from the practice to repay the loan.

Applicant 3: Courier messenger: $1,200 a week, paying $250 a week rent, living with a partner, no assets, has had one bad debt (for a washing machine he didn’t pay off), needs the money to buy a diamond ring when he marries his partner.

Applicant Four: Lawyer, currently unemployed, starting course as a life coach, has a house with a mortgage (paying $500 a week), a good credit history and some savings (declining fast). Needs the money to cover current bills until she finishes her studies and gets established (Not eligible for a student loan).
Secondary stress

- The unstressed syllables are often very short but other times they are normal length.
- Students listen to 4 pairs of words with secondary stress: One correct, one incorrect – taken from diagnostic tests.
- They write down if the word sounds the same or different and describe the difference, better, make notes.
- They then listen again for the sound of the stressed and the unstressed syllables.
- Discuss the differences in stress. Can you hear two stresses in each word? Is one stronger?
- Check in the dictionary
- What do you notice about the pattern? Where does the main stress fall?
Working out Secondary stress

Look at these words from AWL1 and mark where you think the primary and secondary stress will be. Put a single line under the vowel with the secondary stress and a double line under the vowel with the primary stress.

- constitute  constitution
- estimate (n)  estimation
- identify  identification
- indicate  indication
- legislate  legislation

What do you notice about the pattern?

What vowels are used in the syllables with secondary stress and with no stress?
Secondary stress: Speaking

- Students record the pairs of words, listen and check where they have put the stress.
- Then choose ten new words from the AWL which can end in –ion and put them in sentences.
- Listen to your recording and check where you have put the stress on the words you have chosen.
- The suffix changes where the stress falls and often leads to a secondary stress. We saw this with the example “ion” or “tion”.
Read through AWL 1, 2, and 3. Look at the headwords and see how you can change them by adding a suffix (e.g. –ion, –ic, -ical, -ically, -able, -ability, -ial, -ive, -ity). Here are a few examples in the table below, focusing on the difference between the noun and the adjective. Then make your own list.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>noun</th>
<th>adjective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>analysis</td>
<td>analytical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politics</td>
<td>political</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>economy</td>
<td>economic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>finance</td>
<td>financial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>benefit</td>
<td>beneficial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resident</td>
<td>residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concept</td>
<td>conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legality</td>
<td>legal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formality</td>
<td>formal</td>
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<tr>
<td>origin</td>
<td>original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>availability</td>
<td>available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>injury</td>
<td>injurious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When do we use secondary stress?

Make your list below and record your pairs. You can just choose nouns and adjectives, or more if you prefer.

Listen to your pairs and then a classmate’s. Try to make a list of the patterns.

Now choose more words from the first three academic word lists, put them into sentences and record them.
S’s are told to prepare for a discussion of the problems, the possible solutions and how they can be paid for.

I recorded some key words and phrases as a model for them to listen to. I listen and give feedback.

Then they choose some of those words, add their own, and put them into sentences. I listen and give feedback.

Followed by the discussion.
Discuss how you would explain word stress to someone else who has the same first language as you.

Make some notes here before you start:

- The differences between word stress in English and other languages
- The most difficult things about understanding English word stress
- The best ways to improve the way I use word stress in English
- Other ideas
How did the learners understand it?: Their views on the differences between English and other languages

- **Feng**: In Chinese we have kind of **frozen stress** for each word which is not like in English where we can’t pronounce a word if we haven’t heard it before. In Japanese it’s more like **change the wave of the sound**.

- **Junjie**: Chinese always use **stress emphasis** the sentence. English always use **stress for understanding**.

- **Meimei**: Compare English with Chinese most English words have more than 2 syllables but there is **only one syllable in each word in Chinese**.

- **Okjm (Korean)**: We don’t have stress in single word, instead we have **intonation in sentence**. Also, we pronounce the words exactly as they are written. **People can understand without stress**.
How did the learners understand it?:
Their views on the differences between English and other languages

- **Gracia:** Unlike Spanish, in English you don’t have rules to put stress in words. In Spanish you use the tilde which tells you to put the stress in this part of the word.

- **Tamiko:** When I hear English I identify a different number of syllables from English and other language speakers because my mother tongue is Japanese. In Japanese we pronounce only vowels and consonants and I don’t pay attention to stress in Japanese therefore I heard English in different way.

- **Sakura:** English stress is required to have accent, stress, intonation, rhythm very much. If we don’t use it, especially native speakers can’t understand the English. However, Japanese does not need to use strong accent, stress and rhythm. Only intonation is needed.
The most difficult thing about understanding English word stress

- **Feng (Chinese):** In English we can’t pronounce a word if we haven’t heard it before, not like in Japanese in which all sound is from that sound chart.
- **Junjie (Chinese):** It’s very difficult to understand the stress for the same word (adj, verb, noun).
- **Meimei (Chinese):** For me, the most difficult thing is pronouncing the long words because they have more stress and unstress.
- **Okjim (Korean):** Even with the same spelling, they pronounce differently, and some words are silent, and noun and verb have different stress. If the word has many syllables, it’s hard to find the stress. There is no exact pattern to pronunciation.
The most difficult thing about understanding English word stress

- **Gracia**: I think the most difficult this is pronunciation and spelling because English the way you write is different from the pronunciation.

- **Tamiko**: The difficulty is where I should put the stress into words that change the position of the stress when they change the for, for example, ‘economy’ and ‘economic’. Even though I understand the difference, I put the wrong stress when I say the sentence.

- **Sakura**: In Japan, there are some Japanese English, e.g.) intonation. It can be difficult to pronounce in English accent.
The best ways to improve the way I use word stress in English

- **Feng:** *Listen* carefully and *study the pattern* which might be helpful. I think *watching the news* is the fastest way to improve or watch an interesting *movie* over and over.

- **Junjie:** *Ask* teacher and native speaker to help me, and *correct* my mistakes.

- **Meimei:** I think the best way to improve is *check with the dictionary* and *practise* more.

- **Gracia:** One way is *use a dictionary* but not always you have access to look at the word in the dictionary, so another way is to *listen* to the English speakers and try to imitate them. *Listen* to music, TV, radio, and *practise* them.
The best ways to improve the way I use word stress in English

- **Okjim**: Listen a lot and practise a lot until you get used to it and try to pronounce correctly. Compare with model pronunciation put the words in a sentence and read it.

- **Tamiko**: The best way to improve is to listen to the correct way to put stress and say the words aloud. Another way is to understand the pattern of English stress.

- **Sakura**: Listen to native speakers’ accent and dictate and imitate. Also, reading phonetic sign is helpful. Practise and listen well.

**Other Ideas:**

- **Feng**: Do more listening and remember how they speak it.

- **Junjie**: The university builds pronunciation lessons for ESL students because word stress is difficult for us.
Summary of ideas about the best way to work on pronunciation

- 6 x Practise (+ imitate + compare + say the words aloud)
- 5 x Listen: carefully, to English speakers, to media etc.
- 2 x dictionary
- 2 x focus on pattern
- ask for help,
Did they improve? Some very preliminary results:
Percentage correct

- Okjim
- Gracia
- Meimei
- Feng
- Junjie
- Tamiko
- Sakura
Means: Words correct (percent: 40 items)
Words in context correct (percent: 61 items)

Pre test
Post test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Sentences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>67.15</td>
<td>63.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>92.85</td>
<td>85.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Learners wanted to be analytical, saw the need for explicit instruction, and they reported liking all aspects of lessons:

- cross-linguistic discussions helped them understand it is a matter of perception, that phonology itself is abstract.
- critical listening, practising and getting feedback, use of Wimba voice board in computer lab.
- Role plays were enjoyed and seen as a good chance for further practice, some noted that they still tended to get the stress wrong, but had increased awareness.
- online dictionary, explanations and discovery of patterns with suffixes.
- There was considerable concern with the mismatch between spelling and pronunciation; representative of a literary bias.
Learners focused on both perception and production, seeing them as equally important.

They showed signs of starting to understand that it’s not just where the stress is but how it is realised.

They found lessons helpful and wanted more.

In terms of metalanguage used by students,

- focus on parts of words as syllables,
- Students described the stressed syllable as: longer, change in tone, stronger, accent, stress

I noticed they tended to think of syllables in terms of the onset consonant rather than the vowel.
Guidelines for teachers

- Learner-centred approach
  - start with your students’ knowledge and experience and work from there towards forming new concepts.
  - use of such materials as I’ve outlined here.
- Teacher as translator: from TL perspective – textbook approach – works if learner can see it from TL perspective.
- Help the learner to understand it is not the actual sound that is important but the way the native speaker interprets the sound.
- Use contrast to show what is and is not perceived as being in the target category; raise awareness of the gap and give feedback.
Guidelines for teachers (Cont’d)

- Learners must understand salient differences: that, where, what, how
- Acoustic explanations can give further support; but remember a physical explanation is phonetic and we are really talking about phonology.
- Consolidate teaching and concept formation to enable automatic use in fluent speech
- Practice with listen, repeat, record, compare, feedback
- Concepts not usually formed on the spot but evolve slowly as understand different aspects
Where to from here?

- Exploratory study only
  - Materials worked quite well, will be revised
  - Lessons successful, further analysis may point to more detailed description of key factors
  - Testing instruments need more development, esp. for testing perception, but also data analysis.
  - Need to better define role of unstressed syllables in relation to word stress and determine how to measure (any thoughts from the phoneticians appreciated)

- For the teacher:
  - What do you think about untruthing, and the analogies we used to try and describe the process learners go through?