

Investigating the Impact of EFL Students' Misuse of Prosodic Features on their Face-to-face Interactions from University Instructors' Perspectives

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Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the use of prosodic features by Kurdish EFL undergraduates in their face-to-face interactions inside/outside the classroom from the university instructors' perspectives. The study hypothesizes that the majority of Kurdish EFL undergraduates are not fully aware of the fact that any misuse of prosodic features would probably affect the emotions, feelings, and attitudes that the face-to-face interaction is intended to convey. Building on an analysis of a questionnaire given to 54 university instructors at 10 Iraqi Kurdistan Region different universities, the study concludes that the majority of problems the students face can be related to the misuse of stress, intonation, and other prosodic features. Therefore, EFL instructors should pay more attention to make students learn how to use prosodic features and enable them to send messages adequately while engaging in face-to-face interactions. This would require special classes about prosodic features so that EFL students can overcome the misuse they have in face-to-face communication. This is inevitable because accuracy and fluency in communication require EFL students to master both features: segmental and suprasegmental. The reason behind this necessity could be attributed to the fact that broken and/or incorrect pronunciation can be considered as one of the most prominent factors behind misunderstandings in communication.

Keywords: Intonation, Prosodic features, Stress, Syllable, Teaching/Learning Prosodies.

1. Introduction

There is no doubt that grammatical structure and the use of selected vocabulary may not help a listener understand all aspects of a speaker's utterance. Sometimes a speaker focuses on something in his/her sentence, but a listener may not understand it since neither the speaker nor the listener take prosodic features into consideration, e.g., a speaker's utterance might be sarcastic meanwhile a listener understands it as if the speaker is serious or vice versa. This can be supported by Lehisté's idea that suprasegmental (prosodic) features "do not change the distinctive phonetic quality of the speech sounds but do modify the sounds in a way that may change the meaning of the utterance" (1996, p. 227). In his Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics, Crystal states that in suprasegmental phonetics and phonology the concept of prosody is used "to refer collectively to variations in pitch, loudness, tempo and rhythm" (2008, p. 393). Roach (2002) claims that there is no consensus on the number of suprasegmental features that are found in spoken language and the most commonly mentioned types are pitch, loudness, tempo, rhythm and stress. Additionally, the term suprasegmental which is not used as properties of single segments is used by American scholars while British prefer using prosodic.

The concept of prosody refers to stress, intonation, rhythm, etc. in speech and shows the speaker's emotional and psychological state. For example, through focusing on prosodic features of someone's utterance, a listener may state

whether the speaker orders, commands, speaks ironically/seriously or asks a question. This is because sometimes the same sentence with the same structure may give different interpretations as different prosodic features are used in different positions. So, one can claim that these features might be used to make a distinction, i.e., they can be considered as distinctive features. Kompe states that prosody has a number of functions in human communication; this might be divided into four different roles: “the structuring of turns into clauses and smaller phrases, the marking of the focus, the determination of the sentence mood, and the transmission of emotion” (1997, p. 110).

Prosodic features are crucial in an English speaking community since they mostly show a listener the intended meaning. Moreover, for ESL/EFL students, these features may show students’ level of language proficiency (cf. Wells, 2006; Ricketts, 2014; Yenkimaleki & van Heuven, 2017). Prosodic features also make the speakers’ emotional state clear. Building on the previously mentioned ideas, one can easily claim that prosodic features have a significant role in any face-to-face interaction since they reveal what the speaker wants to convey. To support this claim, one may refer to what has been mentioned by Szczepiek Reed that “prosodic patterns play a significant role in participant’s collaborative accomplishment of conversational activities” (2011, p. 15).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the misuse of prosodic features has an impact on communication failure even when speakers use their mother tongue. In an EFL context, this influence is also noted in face-to-face interactions, and it signals different meanings since the students may have no idea about the differences between the use of prosodic features in their first language and the target one. In fact, this makes the students face more challenges while encoding/decoding messages and creates problems in the second/foreign language learning process. In other words, for most ESL/EFL college students, it is difficult to master English pronunciation perfectly (Wells, 2006; Busà, 2012; Boitsova et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2018). This may lead one to state that the majority of Kurdish EFL undergraduates have problems at the level of segments but mostly at the level of suprasegmental as this study reveals. The current study focuses on the effects of how Kurdish EFL university students use prosodic features while having face-to-face interactions. Moreover, the study is implemented from EFL university instructors’ perspectives.

2. Prosodic Features

Crystal (1992) believes that prosodic features such as pitch, loudness, tempo, and rhythm can be noticed in everyday use of language. As Lass (1984) and Ogden (2012) claim, terminology related to elements larger than segments (i.e., prosodies) is introduced by Firth (1948). Like many other terms, originally, the concept of ‘prosody’ comes from ancient Greek. Matthews states that “prosody is an abstract unit which is realized or potentially realized at two different places in a linear structure” (2007, p. 325). Regarding the concept of ‘suprasegmental’, Carroll (2008) claims that it consists of two parts: ‘supra’ which refers to being above something and ‘segments’ are phones. Ashby (2010) refers to suprasegmental as over and above segments, i.e., go beyond segments. Kompe (1997) makes a distinction between two types of prosodic features: basic and compound. The first type covers a number of features such as loudness, pitch, duration, voice quality, speaking rate, and pause. Meanwhile, features like intonation, accentuation, rhythm, prosodic phrases, and hesitation are referred to as the second type. Moreover, both types can be used with all more-than-one-phonetic units: syllables, words, phrases, sentences, dialogs, etc.

Hudson (2000) points out that length, stress, and pitch can be considered as common types of prosodies. In addition, Birjandi and Salmani-Nodoushan (2005) state that phoneticians classify suprasegmental features into five different types: stress, tone, intonation, length, and syllable. This classification leads educators and experts to claim that students and others who intend to learn a foreign language should be aware of these features and learn how to use them. For example, to learn Mandarin Chinese, learners should know that Mandarin Chinese native speakers use tone in their daily communication, while this is not found in English. It is noticed that each language has its own choice to make and/or use different types of suprasegmental features (cf. Aitchison, 2010; Mary, 2019; Wu, 2019).

Nunan (2013) mentions two ways in which sound system forms meaning. The first one which is not the main concern of this study focuses on changing sound segment of a word and refers to segmental features. The second way which goes beyond segmental one owns different features is called suprasegmental in which language users sing the words through stress, rhythm, and intonation. According to Lass (1984), prosodies can be divided into six types: sentence prosodies (e.g., intonation counters), word prosodies (e.g., vowel harmony), junction prosodies (e.g., word boundary), syllable prosodies (e.g., length, tone, etc.), syllable-part prosodies (e.g., aspiration), and diagnostic prosodies (e.g., prosody of native lexicon).

2.1. Syllable

Ladefoged (2006) and Crystal (2008) believe that it is not an easy task to define the concept of a syllable since a number of theories in phonetics and phonology attempted to make this issue clear. A syllable has more than one single definition. For example, a syllable can be clarified in terms of sound properties (e.g., sonority and prominence), and sound units organized in an utterance (cf. Carr, 1993). The term syllable is considered as a unit in pronunciation which consists of segments, i.e., more than one single sound which is smaller than a word (Matthews, 2007; Crystal,

2008; Yavaş, 2011). In brief, one may state that a syllable refers to different sound units and there should be vowels in it. For Boyer, each word has at least one syllable which is “formed by the linking of individual sounds within a word to form one unit of unbroken sound” (2001, p. 31). One should bear in mind that random combinations of phonemes do not result in syllables most of the time, because in each language there are rules to be followed in order to combine phonemes together (Birjandi and Salmani-Nodoushan, 2005). This leads one to claim that learning these phonological rules by EFL learners is inevitable.

2.2. Stress

Stress refers to the prominence of a syllable and this makes it more audible. Producing a stressed syllable needs more energy and this makes it more prominent (Ashby and Maidment, 2005; Ladefoged, 2006; Wells, 2006; Lane, 2010; Yavaş, 2011; Mary, 2019). Unlike other syllabic languages, English can be regarded as a stressed language. For Birjandi and Salmani-Nodoushan (2005) and Crystal (2008), this means ‘loudness’ which can make certain syllables stand out in a word. Moreover, English has four stress levels: weak, tertiary, secondary, and primary. In addition, different stress positions affect word meaning. For example, a word like ‘present’ has different meaning and grammatical category as well: ‘PREsent’ is a noun and ‘preSENT’ is a verb.

Carr (2013) believes that native speakers of any language are unconsciously aware of the number of syllable(s) in a word. For example, the perceptual abilities of English native speakers allow them to know which syllable(s) of a word receives a stress, though they may have no idea about stress itself. To support this belief, the case of child’s first language acquisition is given that a child acquires the stress positions in a word without receiving instructions from his/her parents. This would be true for native speakers, but the case is different with non-native speakers. For example, Kurdish EFL university students face serious problems in this regard. As the present study discovers, it is worth noting that the majority of EFL learners are not able to predict the English stress position. The reason behind this could be attributed to the fact that stress can be regarded as a make-up of words and the students should learn it as ‘part of the package’ along with the segments (cf. Ashby, 2010).

2.3. Intonation

The exact definition of intonation is “the use of pitch variation in discourse” (Yavaş, 2011, p. 107). In English, as Nunan (2013) claims, intonation is articulated not to show feelings or emotions rather it can be used to express and manage different functions of conversation. For example, when a speaker ends his/her utterance with an ‘upward inflection’, he/she transmits something to a listener to be waiting for more. Meanwhile, a downward inflection is a message to tell that someone’s turn is over, and in fact this is problematic for EFL undergraduates. Regarding studying the second/foreign language learners’ intonation, Lane (2010) believes that the first language sound system affects ESL/EFL learners’ use of correct intonation. Furthermore, since intonation features can be learnt by the students, one may claim that students who have more practice, they will be able to use intonation more correctly compared with less-practiced students. Finally, Roach (1991) states that intonation has a number of functions: attitudinal, accentual, grammatical, and discourse. Moreover, Tench (1996) believes that intonation has a number of functions such as information organization, communicative functions realization, attitudes expression, syntactic structure indication, and discourse function. Meanwhile, Crystal (2003) mentions six functions: emotional, grammatical, informational, textual, psychological, and indexical.

3. Teaching/Learning Prosodies

Most EFL/ESL learners, including Kurdish university students, may overcome the problems of having bad/poor pronunciation in face-to-face interactions through interacting with native speakers, practicing, using special software programs, and enrolling in online courses. These expected problems need to be managed since, as Mennen claims, poor pronunciation makes communication troubles for EFL learners; they might not be understood by the listeners. At the same time, “poor prosodic and intonational skills can have an equally devastating effect on communication and can make conversation frustrating and unpleasant for both learners and their listeners” (2007, p. 53). The majority of EFL students are in need of learning some new techniques to solve the misuse of prosodic features and enhance their ability.

Pronunciation plays a great role in foreign language oral performance. In order to produce accurate and understandable pronunciation, it is a prerequisite for EFL university students to have more practice in different related issues to pronunciation, phonetics, and phonology (Lengeris, 2012). Building on this, Kurdish EFL university instructors should see subjects like pronunciation, phonetics, and phonology as more than dealing with sounds only. In fact, they can be seen as more than one single subject because they have fundamental roles in L2 face-to-face interactions. Further, instructors should pay more attention not only to segment and its level, but also to the prosodic features. This could be done via supervising and observing the students’ inside/outside class activities. Derwing and Rossiter claim that instructors have “focused on L1-L2 segmental differences and the discrimination and articulation of individual sound segments in single-syllable words” (2002, p. 156). This might help EFL university students in

understanding similarities and differences between the students' mother tongue and the target language. In EFL context, there should be a movement from focusing on segments towards suprasegments, since different suprasegmental features affect the meaning, and the utterance function might be wrongly comprehended. Because of the students' lack of knowledge and practice, one may state that Kurdish EFL university students are not adequately able to produce and use prosodic features, especially stress and intonation, in their face-to-face communication.

Dieling and Hirschfeld (2000: 47 ff., cited in Hirschfeld & Trouvain, 2007) claim the typology of exercises could help students and instructors. This is important since providing good methods means applying different exercises. Furthermore, they suggest a number of exercises, most importantly: listening (e.g., preparatory listening, identification, discrimination, applied listening), imitation, creative production, applied production, and acting in scenes. In addition, these suggested exercises could help almost all EFL students to be proficient in producing and using English prosodic features in their daily conversations. Kurdish EFL university instructors who teach pronunciation may depend on the above mentioned exercises, since applying the exercises results in improving Kurdish EFL undergraduates' level of proficiency and correct production and use of prosodic features.

In order to have a good result in the students' oral performance, the instructors should explain at least the basics of prosodic features. Hirschfeld and Trouvain (2007), focus on the role of instructor while teaching English prosody. In this regard, they present a number of requirements that EFL instructors may apply, so as to enhance the students' production and use of English in real life contexts. The requirement contains motivating, visualizing, showing knowledge, familiarizing students with deviant forms, checking the students' exercises, providing enough and interesting exercises according to the students' level, focusing on words and other larger units, integrating exercises with different contexts, and combining exercises with different related topics to grammar and vocabulary.

Finally, it is important for university instructors to give adequate feedback on the students' problems in the field of English pronunciation, especially on prosodic features (cf. Weltens & De Bot, 1984; Lengeris, 2012). This makes the students aware of the rules and structures of English prosodies. In addition, though almost all EFL students believe that their errors should be corrected by their instructors, one should refer to what has been mentioned by Engwall & Bälter (2007) that most of the experts in the field of teaching pronunciation do believe that instructors should not correct all errors that students have immediately when they mispronounce in the foreign language. The reason behind this claim could be connected to the idea of protecting the students' self-confidence and improving the students' self-correction.

4. Questionnaire Design and Data Collection

In order to investigate the effects of misuse of prosodic features on Kurdish EFL university students' interaction, a questionnaire is designed to investigate a number of issues in this regard. The questionnaire is randomly distributed among a number of university instructors at 10 public and private universities in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region during the academic year 2019-2020. The instructors selected for this study are of different experience, gender, specialty, etc.

The study instrument consists of two parts. The first one intends to collect data about the degrees the instructors hold, specialization, teaching experience at university level, participation in training course(s) about teaching pronunciation, and so on. The second part consists of 30 Likert-type items in which the instructors are required to show to what extent they dis/agree with the given items. As "the commonly used scaling technique" (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 36), the Likert scale is designed to focus on some certain aspects of prosodic features such as the students' background knowledge, their practice/usage of prosodic features in real life interaction, the instructors' techniques in dealing with teaching English pronunciation, the role of software programs in enhancing the students' ability of using prosodic features, and the needs of training course. The study sample is 54 EFL instructors from different public and private universities of Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The instructors are of different specialties, e.g., English linguistics, applied linguistics, English literature, translation, etc.

Regarding the study tool validity, the questionnaire is given to a number of experts in the field of language teaching, English Linguistics, Applied Linguistics (see Appendix 2). Moreover, to find out the reliability of the study tool, a test-retest method is adopted, and the questionnaire is given to 15 instructors; the reliability of questionnaire is 0.76 and this is a highly coefficient reliability.

5. Data Analysis, Results and Discussion

It is important to note that the questionnaire items are analyzed and discussed according to their relation to a certain category or theme mentioned in the theoretical background. For example, all related items to learning prosodic features (i.e., items no. 4 and 6) and teaching prosodic features (i.e., item no. 16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 29) are put under Learning/Teaching Prosodic Features.

5.1. Instructors' Information

The study instrument is given to 60 Kurdish university instructors, but only 54 of them expressed their attitudes through selecting one of the five given options: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The

study participants are from different universities. Among the participants, 43 of them are MA holders while the others have a PhD; this means 20.37% of the sample are PhD holders and 79.63% are MA holders. Concerning the instructors' specialization, the first part of the questionnaire reveals that 27.77% are specialized in English Language and Linguistics, 25.92% in Applied Linguistics, 22.22% in TESOL, 20.37% in English/American Literature, and 3.7% in Translation. Generally speaking, the instructors have a range of teaching experience at university level; the data shows that 44.44% have 1-5 years of experience, 37.03% have 6-10 years, 7.40% have 11-15 years, and 11.11% have 15-more. Additionally, one of the most remarkable points in the instructors' academic information is their participation in special training course(s) about teaching English pronunciation and/or phonetics/phonology. According to the instructors' responses, only 11 of them participated in related training courses to teach English sounds meanwhile the rest (i.e., 79.63%) did not. Table 1 shows the instructors' personal/academic information:

Table 1. The Participants' Information.

Degree	Specialization	Teaching Experience at University	Participation in Teaching Pronunciation Training Course
MA: 79.63%	English Language & Linguistics: 27.77%	1-5 years: 44.44%	Yes: 20.37%
PhD: 20.37%	Applied Linguistics: 25.92%	6-10 years: 37.03%	No: 79.63%
	TESOL: 22.22%	11-15 years: 7.40%	
	English/American Literature: 20.37%	15-more: 11.11%	
	Translation: 3.7%		

5.2. Instructors' Responses

As it is stated, the second part of the questionnaire consists of 30 items; the items cover different related issues to prosodic features such as students' background knowledge and ability, prosodic features and learning/teaching, Kurdish EFL university instructors' feedback, reforming English Department(s) curriculum, using technology by both instructors and students to enhance pronunciation, the necessity of special training courses for instructors, etc. After applying statistical procedures, the researcher found coefficient midst and percentage weight of each single item in the questionnaire. As the results reveal, the range of item's weighted average is between 1.94 and 4.51 and the percentage weight is extended from 38.8 to 90.2. Regarding the most frequent coefficient midst and percentage weight, the data shows 3.94 and 78.8.

5.2.1. Student Awareness and Ability in Using Prosodic Features

After studying English sounds for more than two years at university, students are still not able to use prosodic features in their face-to-face interaction perfectly and this negatively affects their daily interaction. The statistical results of a number of the questionnaire items show that 22.22% strongly agree and 57.40% agree with item no.1, which states that when the students are aware of different types of prosodic features, their spoken language becomes better and more improved. 43 instructors believe that being aware of prosodic features is important to having better performance, meanwhile 12.96% neither agree or disagree with this idea and 7.40% do not support the relationship between awareness and developed interaction. The second item of the questionnaire is about the students' background knowledge. Statistically speaking, most of the university instructors (i.e., 75.91%) do not believe that the students have enough background knowledge about prosodic features, meanwhile only 5.55% support this item and the rest which means 18.51% are neutral.

The students' face-to-face interactions have many characteristics in terms of mis/using prosodic features. According to the collected data, in item no.15, 9.25% of Kurdish EFL university instructors never support the idea that *Kurdish EFL University students' spoken language is clear and understandable in terms of using prosodic features* and 37.03% disagree with this. Only 18.51% of the study participants agree that the students face no challenges in this regard. In fact, 19 instructors, who form 35.18% of the study sample, do not make any decision towards this item. The result of this item leads the researcher to analyze the students' background knowledge and ability in terms of focusing on the prosodic features like stress, intonation, and syllable. The majority of Kurdish EFL university students have problems in using prosodic features correctly. This analysis verifies the study hypothesis. The following table shows the frequency of three related items to Kurdish EFL students' awareness and ability regarding using prosodic features.

Table 2. The Frequency of Items Related to Students' Awareness and Ability in Using Prosodic Features.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	When the students are aware of different types of suprasegmental features, their spoken language becomes better and more improved.	12	31	7	4	0
2	The students have enough background knowledge about prosodic	1	2	10	36	5

	features.					
15	Kurdish EFL University students' spoken language is clear and understandable in terms of using prosodic features.	0	10	19	20	5

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

5.2.1.1. Stress

Generally speaking, stress, like many other linguistic units, can be divided into a number of levels. The items no. 5, 9, 10, 11, and 12 in the questionnaire focus on stress. The result of the twelfth item reveals that 77.77% of the study sample do not believe that *Kurdish EFL students are aware of English stress levels: weak, tertiary, secondary, and primary*, meanwhile only 3.70% strongly support this item and 9.25% agree with the item content and the same percentage is neutral. Regarding the students' word stress awareness, 48.14% disagree with the idea that *Kurdish EFL university students are aware of word stress* and 3.70% strongly disagree meanwhile 25.92% agree with this item. The number of instructors who neither agree nor disagree is 12. Item no.10 is about mastering phrase stress; 7.40%, 12.96%, 66.66%, and 12.96% of the instructors selected agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree successively with the idea that *Kurdish EFL students master phrase stress*. When it comes to a larger unit, which is a sentence, the majority of the study participants (i.e., 83.32%) think that *Kurdish EFL students face no problems in sentence stress* and only 3.7% are against this; other instructors do not make a clear decision. So, it may be claimed that the most important part of students' face-to-face interaction is related to how prosodic features are pronounced. This could negatively/positively affect the students' spoken language. The collected data from the 5th item shows that 44.44% strongly agree with the idea that *Most EFL university students cannot pronounce stress correctly* and 40.74% agree with this. The percentage of instructors who select disagree is only 5.55% and 9.25% do not make a specific decision in this regard. According to this analysis, the majority of Kurdish EFL undergraduates do not have sufficient background knowledge about types of stress, and they do not master word stress and phrase stress; the students cannot master sentence stress and pronounce stress correctly.

Table 3. The Frequency of Items Related to Stress.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
5	Most of EFL university students cannot pronounce stress correctly.	24	22	5	3	0
9	Kurdish EFL university students are aware of word stress.	0	14	12	26	2
10	Kurdish EFL students master phrase stress.	0	4	7	36	7
11	Kurdish EFL students face no problems in sentence stress	1	1	7	30	15
12	Kurdish EFL students are aware of English stress levels: weak, tertiary, secondary, and primary.	2	5	5	27	15

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

5.2.1.2. Intonation

Intonation, for Kelly (2000), is a term that refers to how human being's voice goes up/down in pitch; this falling/rising happens while producing different syntactic units. In terms of intonation awareness, the data shows that the minority of university instructors believe that the students are aware of falling and rising intonation. Statistically speaking, 48.13% of the study participants are against item no.7 that *Kurdish EFL students are familiar with the fact that falling intonation in a sentence functions as a statement, negative, wh-question, etc.* whereas only 16.66% support this item. Unexpectedly, 19 instructors neither agree nor disagree. Furthermore, as data shows, the students are not fully aware of different functions of rising intonation since the students do not have enough information in this regard. According to the 13th item, 42.59% disagree and 14.81% strongly disagree with the idea that *Kurdish EFL students are aware of the functions of rising intonation, e.g., question, implying surprise, etc.* while 24.97% of the university instructors support this item; the rest decides not to decide. Consider Table 4:

Table 4. The Frequency of Items Related to Intonation.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
7	Kurdish EFL students are familiar with the fact that falling intonation in a sentence functions as a statement, negative, wh-questions, etc.	0	9	19	21	5
13	Kurdish EFL students are aware of the functions of rising intonation, e.g., question, implying surprise, etc.	0	13	10	23	8

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

Building on the participants' answers, one can confirm that the majority of Kurdish EFL university students are not familiar with the functions of falling/rising intonation. This confirms the fact that learning EFL intonation is not easy and the students need to understand all prosodic features. Additionally, university instructors can make EFL students familiar with the two basic intonation patterns of English language. Consequently, the students will be knowledgeable about intonation form, function, and meaning in face-to-face interactions (cf. Levis, 1999; Verdugo, 2006).

5.2.1.3. Syllable

To investigate the university instructor' perspectives on the students' awareness of English syllable, items no. 8 and 14 are designed. The instructors' responses prove the claim that Kurdish university students face serious problems in identifying different parts of syllable and this negatively affects their verbal behaviour. As the 8th item data shows, 26 of the participants are not with the idea that *the majority of students are able to define and divide different parts of a syllable, i.e., they know a number of syllables a word has* meanwhile 35.18% of them support this item and the rest chooses 'neutral'. Item no.14 focuses on mastering open and closed syllable and being able to form English consonant clusters correctly. The result demonstrates that 9.25% are strongly against the item that *Kurdish EFL university students have mastery in distinguishing open and closed syllables. They are able to produce correct consonant clusters* and 53.70% disagree with it. This indicates that a great number of instructors do not support this item. The number of respondents who claim to be neutral is 12 and only 8 instructors are with the item. This means that most of Kurdish EFL university students are not familiar with problems related to English syllables and they face real problems while pronouncing consonant clusters in their face-to-face interaction.

Table 5. The Frequency of Items Related to Syllable.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
8	The majority of the students are able to define and divide different parts of syllable, i.e., they know a number of syllables a word has.	0	19	9	21	5
14	Kurdish EFL university students have mastery in distinguishing open and closed syllables. They are able to produce correct consonant clusters.	0	8	12	29	5

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

5.2.2. Learning/Teaching Prosodic Features

The collected data shows that Kurdish EFL university students have problems concerning prosodic features in their interaction. This may lead one to claim that they face difficulties in learning and using these features effectually. For instructors, teaching prosodic features can be considered as one of the difficult tasks. Although the majority of instructors believe that students have the ability to learn (see the results of item no.4 in 5.2.2.1), yet they misuse the features (see. the results of items no.14 in 5.2.1.3 and no.15 in 5.2.1).

5.2.2.1. Learning Prosodic Features

Concerning learning prosodic features, almost all university instructors (i.e., 92.58%) support the claim that through good practice the students can learn more effectively. The results of the 4th item reveal that only 1.85% of the study respondents are against the idea that *Kurdish EFL undergraduates can learn different prosodic features while having more practice* and 5.55% make no decision. This means the undergraduates can overcome certain related problems to misuse of prosodic features via practicing. Additionally, the 6th item of the questionnaire is about the students' emphasis on one feature rather than another. The statistical results of this item show that 5.55% strongly disagree with this and 40.74% disagree. This indicates that 46.29% do not believe that *while learning English, most of the students focus on stress rather than other features*. Only 1.85% strongly agree with this idea and 20.37% agree meanwhile 31.48% of the instructors neither agree nor disagree. So, the students do not mainly focus on stress comparing to other features. To summarize, the students are in need of practicing prosodic features since their systematic practice could enhance the correct use of prosodic features in real face-to-face communication and they do not necessarily prefer one feature rather than another.

Table 6. The Frequency of Items Related to Learning Prosodic Features.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
4	Kurdish EFL undergraduates can learn different prosodic features while having more practice.	16	34	3	1	0
6	While learning English, most of the students focus on stress rather than other features.	1	11	17	22	3

SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree

5.2.2.2. Teaching Prosodic Features

As the present study discovers, teaching prosodic features in EFL contexts is problematic. This could partially be related to the students' reaction and attitudes towards the topic and shortage of sufficient resources and equipment might be considered as another reason. The difficulty of teaching prosodic features is confirmed by almost all instructors. The statistics reveal that 96.29% of the university instructors believe that teaching prosodic features is a difficult task. Meanwhile, only 1.85% disagree with *I think that teaching prosodic features is not an easy task. It requires well qualified instructors* and 1.85% do not decide whether this task is difficult or not. Although teaching different features of prosody in EFL classes is not that easy, yet the instructors of different specializations attempt to focus on correct use of the features and this might help the students in one way or another. Statically speaking, 81.47% of the instructors, without taking into consideration what they teach, focus on prosodic features correct usage in face-to-face communication. This means only 12.96% of them are not with *no matter what subject I teach, I do focus on using correct prosodic features* and, as it is expected, 3 instructors remain with no decision. Additionally, the instructors assist their students with guiding them to improve their ability in listening. The data of item no.26 shows that 94.44% of the instructors agree that *I do teach my students how to improve their listening comprehension* while 1.85% disagree and 3.70% are neutral. Another way to help students to develop their ability in pronouncing prosodic features is through focusing on new vocabulary used by instructors inside the classroom. Among the respondents, 51 instructors support the idea that when *I use new vocabulary in my class, I intend to pronounce it loudly so as to be heard by all students and learn its pronunciation correctly*, whereas only 2 disagree with this and one instructor does not decide in this regard. Furthermore, the 17th item of the questionnaire is related to developing and increasing students' awareness through using pronunciation spelling. This is very helpful especially to hear un/stressed syllables/words. According to the respondents' perspectives, 83.33% are with the item *I usually use pronunciation spelling in order to enhance, develop, and increase my students' awareness in making a distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables* and 7.40% have no clear decision. 9.25% do not agree with the item; this means they do not use pronunciation spellings.

Intonation is learnable and teachable (cf. Kelly, 2000) and according to the findings of the present study this is not without problems. To detect this, item no.19 attempts to show the difficulty of teaching intonation compared with other features. As the study data demonstrates, 11.11% of the instructors strongly agree and 53.70% agree with the fact that *according to my experience, teaching intonation (among other features) is the most difficult because of having different patterns and it is difficult to be heard*, meanwhile only 5.55% disagree and 29.62% neither agree nor disagree. This indicates that the instructors of pronunciation and phonetics/phonology face challenges in teaching prosodic features and, to be more specific, intonation. The instructors who teach English sounds sometimes do their best to integrate activities required for prosodic features with other activities even outside the classroom and this is intended to be helpful for the students. In answering the 23rd item of the questionnaire, 53.69% of the instructors support the idea *while teaching English sounds, I try to integrate prosodic features activity with students' other works whether inside or outside the classroom* and 40.74% stay with no decision. This means the rest disagree. Related to this item, it is believed that even activities of other EFL classes can be used to make progress in the student's verbal use of prosodic features. Responses to item no.24 show that 75.91% of the instructors are with the item that *different activities and works from non-pronunciation classes could be used as sufficient source to enhance Kurdish EFL undergraduates' correct usage of prosodic features*; this shows that the majority of the university instructors have a positive perspective towards making use of different EFL class activities in developing the acceptable use of prosodic features so as to make the students' speech more intelligible. A small number of instructors (i.e., 3.70%) do not agree with integrating relevant and irrelevant activities into pronunciation tasks and 20.37% of them are neutral. Finally, the researcher specifies an item of the questionnaire for helping students with consonant clusters since this is one the most problematic issues (cf. Lane, 2010). The statistical results of the 29th item show that 77.77% of the study sample agree with *I do encourage and help my students to pronounce and use consonant clusters* and only 1.85% do not agree and 20.37% neither agree nor disagree. Table 7 shows the frequency of teaching prosodic features items.

Table 7. The Frequency of Items Related to Teaching Prosodic Features.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
16	No matter what subject I teach, I do focus on using correct prosodic features.	12	32	3	7	0
17	I usually use pronunciation spellings in order to enhance, develop, and increase my students' awareness in making a distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables.	11	34	4	5	0
18	I think that teaching prosodic features is not an easy task. It requires well qualified instructors.	19	33	1	1	0

19	According to my experience, teaching intonation (among other features) is the most difficult because of having different patterns and it is difficult to be heard.	6	29	16	3	0
23	While teaching English sounds, I try to integrate prosodic features activity with other students' works whether inside or outside the classroom.	4	25	22	3	0
24	Different activities and works from non-pronunciation classes could be used as sufficient source to enhance Kurdish EFL undergraduates' correct usage of prosodic features.	10	31	11	2	0
25	When I use a new vocabulary in my class, I intend to pronounce it loudly so as to be heard by all students and learn its pronunciation correctly.	29	22	1	1	1
26	I do teach my students how to improve their listening comprehension.	28	23	2	1	0
29	I do encourage and help my students to pronounce and use consonant clusters.	13	29	11	1	0
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree						

5.2.3. Instructors' Feedback

Ambrose et al. (2010) states that feedback refers to any information given to students by their instructors about certain behaviours, so as to make the students more aware about their future behaviour. Because of its importance in the field of teaching/learning, item no.22 is about giving correct feedback to the students while having face-to-face communication. The data shows that 74.06% of the instructors support the idea of giving feedback to the students, while only 7.40% do not agree with this item. The rest which constitutes 18.51% neither agree nor disagree with providing EFL students with necessary feedback on their pronunciation mistakes. This reveals the majority of Kurdish EFL university instructors (i.e., 40 among the others) correct the students' pronunciation mistakes. Building on this, the students' oral performance is supposed to be better.

Table 8. The Frequency of Items Related to Providing Students with Feedback.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
22	I always do give my students correct feedback for their pronunciation mistakes.	9	31	10	4	0
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree						

5.2.4. The Use of Technology by Instructors/Students

In general, technological devices and their application are used in teaching/learning a second/foreign language (Salaberry, 2001; Ahmadi, 2018). Because of the importance of technology, items no.3, 20, and 21 are designed to shed light on a number of related issues to the role of computer in teaching sounds and the students' reaction in this regard. The 3rd item focuses on the students' reaction and shows that 46.28% of the university instructors believe that *Kurdish EFL undergraduates have positive reaction towards using some certain computer program/Software, Mobile Apps, Internet to improve their ability regarding prosodic features and use the features as well*. The reason behind this could be attributed to the fact that most of Kurdish university students spend most of their free time on the Internet. The number of instructors who do not agree with this item is 14 which means 25.92% and the rest neither agree nor disagree. Since the students have a good reaction towards technological devices and applications, the instructors of pronunciation should take this into account and depend on technology in their classes. In item no.20, *while teaching Pronunciation, Phonetics and/or Phonology, I do recommend my students to download speech visualization programs such as WASP, PRAAT, Visi-Pitch IV, etc.*, the number of instructors with 'strongly agree' is 8, 'agree' is 22, 'neutral' is 19, 'disagree' is 4, and 'strongly disagree' is 1; this constitutes 14.81%, 40.74%, 35.18%, 7.40%, and 1.85% successively. The result can be used as a good recommendation for all EFL/ESL university instructors to depend on speech visualization programs (cf. Lane, 2010). The final related item to technology is no.21; according to the collected data, 55.55% of the respondents use a sound lab to teach English sounds. The percentage of instructors who do not support item no 21 that *during teaching English pronunciation, I do use Computer-aided Pronunciation (CAP)* is 11.1% and 33.33% are neutral. This result could be used to find and use a correct way to help Kurdish EFL university students' oral performance.

Table 9. The Frequency of Items Related to the Use of Technology by Instructors/Students.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
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3	Kurdish EFL undergraduates have positive reaction towards using some certain computer program/Software, Mobile Apps, Internet to improve their ability regarding prosodic features and use the features as well.	4	21	15	13	1
20	While teaching Pronunciation, Phonetics and/or Phonology, I do recommend my students to download speech visualization programs such as WASP, PRAAT, Visi-Pitch IV, etc.	8	22	19	4	1
21	During teaching English pronunciation, I do use Computer-aided Pronunciation (CAP).	3	27	18	1	5
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree						

5.2.5. Reforming English Departments' Curriculum

In order to meet the requirements of modern society and market needs, all institutes' curricula should be up to date and practical. In the English Departments of Iraqi Kurdistan universities, the students usually study subjects on English sounds in two academic years and could not be measured as a good way to familiarize them with all essential aspects of the English sound system. To make learning prosodic features successful and use them appropriately in face-to-face interactions, 74.07% of university instructors advocate the suggestion that *Kurdish EFL university students should study different related issues to English sound system throughout the four academic years, i.e., they should have at least one subject about English pronunciation in each academic year* and only 11.11% instructors do not agree with that opinion and 8 instructors are neutral. Regarding moving from theory to a practice-oriented syllabus, almost all Kurdish university instructors (i.e., 96.29%) support the recommendation that *the syllabus of English Pronunciation, Phonetics, and Phonology must be more practice-oriented. The students must apply what they study in face-to-face interaction inside/outside the classroom* and only 3.70% do not have any sort of decision. The result of the 28th item proves that no one is against the idea of practicing the lesson in face-to-face interactions even outside the classroom. Having more practice guarantees better oral performance with correct use of prosodic features.

Table 10. The Frequency of Items Related to Reforming Curriculum of English Department(s).

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
27	Kurdish EFL university students should study different related issues to English sound system throughout the four academic years, i.e., they should have at least one subject about English pronunciation in each academic year.	17	23	8	6	0
28	The syllabus of English Pronunciation, Phonetics, and Phonology must be more practice-oriented. The students must apply what they study in face-to-face interaction inside/outside the classroom.	30	22	2	0	0
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree						

5.2.6. The Need for Training Courses

As it is shown in the first part of the questionnaire, the majority of Kurdish EFL university instructors (i.e., 43) have not participated in any sort of training course for teaching pronunciation and this, of course, affects their teaching methodology negatively. Because of the lack of appropriate training courses, 87.03% agree with the last item of the questionnaire that *university instructors need training courses to be run by English native speaker experts, about teaching English pronunciation, phonetics, and phonology* meanwhile 7.40% do not support this item and only 5.55% stay neutral. Building on the data, one can claim that the university instructors need certain training courses. This might be done via online training courses since it is less expensive and more practical nowadays.

Table 11. The Frequency of Items Related to Training Course.

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
30	University instructors need training course to be run by English native speaker experts, about Teaching English Pronunciation, Phonetics, and Phonology.	27	20	3	4	0
SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree						

6. Conclusions

Most non-native English speakers have problems with the correct use of prosodic features. At the heart of the misunderstanding cases in the Kurdish EFL undergraduates' face-to-face communication are the problems related to the misuse of stress, intonation, and syllables. Students' lack of adequate knowledge about prosodic features can create a failure in their face-to-face communication. This makes problems for their instructors, colleagues, and themselves. Moreover, the majority of Kurdish EFL undergraduates are not fully aware of the different types of prosodic features, especially word stress, phrase stress and they are not able to pronounce stress correctly. Mastering sentence stress is also problematic for the students; this creates problems in their face-to-face interaction. In addition, Kurdish EFL students are not well familiar with syllables of English and they have serious problems with pronouncing consonant clusters while communicating.

The Kurdish EFL university instructors do not frequently write the transcription of new vocabulary, meanwhile they often correct their students' pronunciation mistakes. The instructors who teach English sounds, phonetics, phonology face challenges in teaching intonation in particular. Though the instructors do their best through applying different activities related to English sounds while teaching; they are in need of participating in training courses for teaching English pronunciation run by English native speakers' specialist/expert.

The university students usually use different technological devices and applications. They regularly spend their free time online, so they have positive reactions towards using different software and mobile apps to improve their ability in using prosodic features in face-to-face communication.

Finally, all Kurdish EFL university students should understand how prosodic features work in real life communication, i.e., they should be familiar with various ways of recognizing and producing different prosodic features as used by native speakers to avoid communication misunderstandings. The students are in need of having a number of ear-training activities and material that enables them to overcome the misuse of prosodic features through marking the features in their written performance as dictation. Promoting Kurdish EFL undergraduate students' ability to recognize and pronounce correct forms of prosodic features is a prerequisite to enhance their spoken performance. This could be done via well-designed curricula and well-planned classes including various instructional activities.

7. Recommendations

The present study recommends that Kurdish EFL instructors and students should pay much attention to prosodic features. This could be fulfilled through instructors' instructions about this problematic issue. The instructors can also guide the undergraduates to watch certain English movies and TV programs to make them familiar with how native speakers of English use prosodic features; this would reduce the students' common mistakes and enhances their pronunciation.

In order to make EFL undergraduates proficient English language users, it is recommended to include different related topics to speaking skills in the four-year curriculum of English departments. It is believed that studying pronunciation and phonetics and phonology, listening and speaking, etc. for only two academic years is not enough to allow graduates use English and communicate satisfactorily.

The content of some subjects such as Pronunciation and Phonetics and Phonology in English departments should be modified. This reform should cover almost all the subjects in order to make EFL students capable of using the target language appropriately in real life contexts. Furthermore, in the teaching of English phonetics, phonology, and pronunciation, EFL instructors have to show their students how native speakers recognize and produce prosodic features. This consequently gives students an opportunity to learn this aspect of English phonology.

Finally, technological devices and programs can be used by the EFL instructors and students to increase the students' awareness of the use and importance of prosodic features in interaction. Kurdish EFL undergraduates should be recommended to download and use speech visualization programs such as WASP, PRAAT, Visi-Pitch IV. This may give them an opportunity to use prosodic features correctly and have more effective face-to-face communication.

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Appendix 1

Kurdish EFL University Instructors' Questionnaire

Dear Sir/Madam,

This questionnaire is designed to investigate the impact of misuse of prosodic features by the Kurdish EFL undergraduates in their face-to-face interactions. To find out their mistakes, a questionnaire is designed to be given to the instructors in order to know what mistakes the students make while communicating. Kindly read the questionnaire and answer all the items, please. Your answers are used for research purposes only. Thanks for your time and cooperation.

The Researcher

Part One: The Participants' Information

Please tick (✓) one option only and write your specialization.

Degree: MA ☐ PhD ☐

Specialization:

Teaching English pronunciation, Phonetics, and/or Phonology: Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Teaching Experience at 1-5 years ☐ 6-10 years ☐ 11-15 years ☐ 15- more ☐

University:

Participation in teaching pronunciation training course Yes: ☐ No: ☐

Part Two: Choose only one option, please.

(SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, N = Neutral, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree)

Item No.	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
1	When the students are aware of different types of suprasegmental features, their spoken language becomes better and more improved.					
2	The students have enough background knowledge about prosodic features.					
3	Kurdish EFL undergraduates have positive reaction towards using some certain computer program/Software, Mobile Apps, Internet to improve their ability regarding prosodic features and use the features as well.					
4	Kurdish EFL undergraduates can learn different prosodic features while having more practice.					
5	Most of EFL university students cannot pronounce stress correctly.					
6	While learning English, most of the students focus on stress rather than other features.					
7	Kurdish EFL students are familiar with the fact that falling intonation in a sentence functions as a statement, negative, wh-questions, etc.					
8	The majority of the students are able to define and divide different parts of syllable, i.e., they know a number of syllables a word has.					
9	Kurdish EFL university students are aware of word stress.					
10	Kurdish EFL students master phrase stress.					
11	Kurdish EFL students face no problems in sentence stress.					
12	Kurdish EFL students are aware of English stress levels: weak, tertiary, secondary, and primary.					
13	Kurdish EFL students are aware of the functions of rising intonation, e.g., question, implying surprise, etc.					
14	Kurdish EFL university students have mastery in distinguishing open and closed syllables. They are able to produce correct consonant clusters.					
15	Kurdish EFL University students' spoken language is clear and understandable in terms of using prosodic features.					
16	No matter what subject I teach, I do focus on using correct prosodic features.					
17	I usually use pronunciation spellings in order to enhance, develop, and increase my students' awareness in making a distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables.					

18	I think that teaching prosodic features is not an easy task. It requires well qualified instructors.					
19	According to my experience, teaching intonation (among other features) is the most difficult because of having different patterns and it is difficult to be heard.					
20	While teaching Pronunciation, Phonetics and/or Phonology, I do recommend my students to download speech visualization programs such as WASP, PRAAT, Visi-Pitch IV, etc.					
21	During teaching English pronunciation, I do use Computer-aided Pronunciation (CAP).					
22	I always do give my students correct feedback for their pronunciation mistakes.					
23	While teaching English sounds, I try to integrate prosodic features activity with other students' works whether inside or outside the classroom.					
24	Different activities and works from non-pronunciation classes could be used as sufficient source to enhance Kurdish EFL undergraduates' correct usage of prosodic features.					
25	When I use a new vocabulary in my class, I intend to pronounce it loudly so as to be heard by all students and learn its pronunciation correctly.					
26	I do teach my students how to improve their listening comprehension.					
27	Kurdish EFL university students should study different related issues to English sound system throughout the four academic years, i.e., they should have at least one subject about English pronunciation in each academic year.					
28	The syllabus of English Pronunciation, Phonetics, and Phonology must be more practice-oriented. The students must apply what they study in face-to-face interaction inside/outside the classroom					
29	I do encourage and help my students to pronounce and use consonant clusters.					
30	University instructors need training course to be run by English native speaker experts, about Teaching English Pronunciation, Phonetics, and Phonology.					

Appendix 2

Jury Members

S.	Names	Academic Qualification	Place of Work
1	Dr. Anis Behnam Naoum	Professor	University of Al-Hamdaniya
2	Dr. Fatimah Rashid Hasan	Professor	Salahaddin University-Erbil
3	Dr. Hoshang Farooq Jawad	Assistant Professor	University of Sulaimani
4	Dr. Dler Abdullah Ismail	Lecturer	University of Sulaimani