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AN ANALYSIS OF WORD STRESS IN *THE DEVIL WEARS PRADA* MOVIE

Cooperative Learning Models

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Abstract

Although word stress has received considerable attention in pronunciation and phonological studies, research specifically examining word stress patterns in authentic workplace communication represented through movies remains limited. This study aims to analyze the use and communicative functions of word stress in *The Devil Wears Prada*. A qualitative approach with a descriptive research design was employed. The data consisted of selected words containing identifiable primary stress patterns found in the movie script and audio dialogues. Data were collected through observation and note-taking by repeatedly watching the movie, examining the script, and identifying words with prominent stress patterns. The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis by classifying stress placement, identifying word classes, and interpreting the communicative functions of stress in the dialogues. The findings show that word stress appears in nouns, adjectives, and occupational terms, including "fashion," "assistant," "designer," "important," and "magazine." The analysis indicates that accurate stress placement helps speakers emphasize key

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information, clarify meaning, express communicative intentions, and improve speech intelligibility in workplace interactions. This study concludes that word stress functions as an important suprasegmental feature in authentic spoken discourse. The findings contribute to phonological studies by demonstrating how stress patterns operate in movie-based workplace communication and provide practical implications for English pronunciation learning by supporting the use of movies as authentic materials to improve students' awareness of word stress and other suprasegmental features.

Keywords: Movie Analysis; Pronunciation; Suprasegmental Features; Word Stress; Workplace Communication

INTRODUCTION

English pronunciation plays a crucial role in achieving effective oral communication, particularly for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Among the various aspects of pronunciation, suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, intonation, and pitch significantly influence speech intelligibility and communicative competence. In recent years, researchers have increasingly emphasized the importance of pronunciation instruction because learners often experience communication breakdowns despite having adequate grammatical and lexical knowledge. One of the most essential suprasegmental features is word stress, which refers to the prominence given to a particular syllable within a word. Incorrect stress placement may affect listeners' ability to recognize words and understand intended meanings, thereby reducing communication effectiveness (Ahmed, 2023).

The issue of word stress has become increasingly relevant in English language learning because many EFL learners continue to encounter difficulties in producing and recognizing appropriate stress patterns. Research has shown that learners frequently misplace stress in multisyllabic words, resulting in pronunciation errors that negatively affect speech intelligibility and listener comprehension. These difficulties are often associated with limited phonological awareness and insufficient exposure to authentic spoken English. Consequently, improving learners' understanding of word stress has become an important concern in pronunciation teaching and learning (Sihombing et al., 2025).

From the researcher's perspective, word stress should not be viewed merely as a linguistic feature but also as a communicative tool that contributes to successful interaction. The ability to use stress appropriately enables speakers to emphasize important information,

express intentions, and facilitate listener understanding. This perspective is supported by phonological theories which explain that stress functions as a marker of prominence within speech and assists listeners in processing spoken language more efficiently. Therefore, developing awareness of word stress is essential for learners who seek to improve both pronunciation accuracy and communicative effectiveness (Ahmed, 2023).

Previous studies have examined the relationship between pronunciation and suprasegmental features in various educational contexts. Lubis et al. (2024) reported that suprasegmental features significantly influence speech interpretation and communication effectiveness. Similarly, Sihombing et al. (2025) found that EFL learners frequently struggle with syllable stress, vowel length, and other phonological aspects that affect intelligibility. These studies confirm the importance of pronunciation instruction in supporting successful oral communication.

In addition, several researchers have investigated the use of audiovisual media to improve pronunciation skills. Nakplad et al. (2023) demonstrated that movie-based learning activities significantly enhanced students' ability to identify and produce English word stress accurately. Their findings suggest that authentic audiovisual materials provide learners with meaningful exposure to natural pronunciation patterns and encourage greater engagement in language learning. As a result, movies have increasingly been recognized as effective learning resources for pronunciation development.

Despite these contributions, previous studies have primarily focused on the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction, phonological awareness, or the use of movies as teaching media. Limited attention has been given to the analysis of word stress patterns within authentic workplace communication represented in films. Moreover, few studies have specifically examined how word stress functions in professional interactions and contributes to meaning-making in natural spoken discourse. This situation indicates a research gap that requires further investigation.

To address this gap, the present study focuses on analyzing word stress in *The Devil Wears Prada*, a popular American movie that portrays workplace communication within the fashion industry. The movie contains numerous authentic interactions involving professional vocabulary, occupational terms, and emotionally expressive language. These characteristics make it an appropriate source for examining how word stress is applied in naturally occurring conversations and how it contributes to communicative effectiveness.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on authentic cinematic discourse as a source of phonological analysis. Unlike previous studies that primarily measured learners' pronunciation performance or evaluated instructional interventions, this study investigates the occurrence and communicative functions of word stress in real conversational contexts represented through film. The analysis is grounded in phonological theory, particularly the concept of word stress as a suprasegmental feature that influences intelligibility, prominence, and meaning in spoken communication.

Based on the issues, research gap, and theoretical considerations discussed above, this study aims to analyze the occurrence and functions of word stress in *The Devil Wears Prada* movie. Specifically, the study seeks to identify the placement of primary stress in selected words and to explain how word stress contributes to clarity, emphasis, and communication effectiveness in the movie's dialogues.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive research design. Qualitative descriptive research was selected because it allows the researcher to explore and interpret linguistic phenomena as they naturally occur in authentic communication. The study focused on analyzing word stress patterns found in *The Devil Wears Prada* movie and examining their communicative functions in spoken interactions. Through this approach, the researcher was able to identify how stress placement contributes to intelligibility, emphasis, and meaning in naturally occurring dialogues.

The data source of this study was *The Devil Wears Prada* movie script and its corresponding audio dialogues. The data consisted of selected words containing identifiable primary stress patterns that appeared in workplace conversations throughout the movie. The words were purposively selected based on their frequency of occurrence and relevance to the research objectives. Data collection was conducted through observation and note-taking techniques. The researcher repeatedly watched the movie, examined the script, identified words with prominent stress patterns, and recorded the phonetic transcriptions based on standard English pronunciation references. This procedure enabled the researcher to obtain accurate and reliable data regarding stress placement in the selected words.

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The analysis involved several stages, namely data reduction, classification, interpretation, and conclusion

drawing. First, the identified words were classified according to their stress placement and grammatical categories. Second, the researcher analyzed the pronunciation patterns by examining the location of primary stress in each word. Finally, the communicative functions of word stress were interpreted based on phonological theories related to suprasegmental features and speech intelligibility. The findings were then presented descriptively to explain how word stress contributes to effective communication in the movie dialogues.

RESULTS

The analysis of *The Devil Wears Prada* identified several words with prominent word stress patterns in the movie dialogues. The selected data consisted of words that were clearly related to the main setting of the movie, namely workplace communication in the fashion and magazine industry. The identified words included nouns, adjectives, and occupational terms that frequently appeared in conversations among the characters. These words were selected because they showed clear primary stress placement and represented vocabulary commonly used in the professional context of the movie.

The findings showed that word stress appeared in different syllable positions. Some words received primary stress on the first syllable, some on the second syllable, and one word received primary stress on the final syllable. This variation indicates that the stress patterns found in the movie were not limited to one fixed structure. Instead, the characters used words with different stress placements depending on the phonological structure of each word.

Table 1. Word Stress Patterns Identified in The Devil Wears Prada

No	Word	Phonetic Transcription	Primary Stress Position	Word Class	Context of Use
1	Important	/ɪmˈpɔːrtənt/	Second syllable	Adjective	Used to emphasize tasks, priorities, and responsibilities
2	Fashion	/ˈfæʃən/	First syllable	Noun	Used in conversations about the fashion industry
3	Assistant	/əˈsɪstənt/	Second syllable	Noun	Used to refer to a professional role or job position
4	Magazine	/ˌmægəˈziːn/	Final syllable	Noun	Used in conversations about publishing and editorial work
5	Designer	/dɪˈzaɪnər/	Second syllable	Noun	Used to refer to fashion-related occupations

Table 1 shows that the selected words have different primary stress positions. Three words, namely *important*, *assistant*, and *designer*, received primary stress on the second syllable. One word, *fashion*, received primary stress on the first syllable, while one word, *magazine*, received primary stress on the final syllable. These findings show that second-syllable stress was the most dominant pattern in the selected data.

The first identified word was *important*, pronounced /ɪmˈpɔːrtənt/. The primary stress occurs on the second syllable, marked by the symbol /ˈ/ before /pɔːr/. In the movie, this word appears in conversations related to duties, instructions, priorities, and decisions. The word is classified as an adjective because it is used to describe the level of significance of a task or situation. The stress on the second syllable makes the central part of the word more prominent in speech.

The second word was *fashion*, pronounced /ˈfæʃən/. This word carries primary stress on the first syllable. As the central theme of the movie is the fashion industry, the word *fashion* appears as an important noun in the dialogues. The first syllable /fæʃ/ receives stronger pronunciation than the second syllable /ən/. This stress pattern makes the word short, clear, and easily recognizable in conversation.

The third word was *assistant*, pronounced /əˈsɪstənt/. The primary stress occurs on the second syllable, specifically on /sɪs/. This word is strongly related to the main character's job position in the movie. The word is classified as a noun because it refers to a person who helps or supports another person in a professional setting. In the movie, the term *assistant* is used in workplace interactions involving duties, responsibilities, and hierarchy.

The fourth word was *magazine*, pronounced /ˌmægəˈziːn/. The primary stress occurs on the final syllable, /ziːn/. This word is classified as a noun and is closely related to the workplace setting of the movie because the story takes place in a magazine company. Compared with the other selected words, *magazine* has a different stress pattern because the strongest syllable appears at the end of the word. This pattern makes the final syllable more dominant in pronunciation.

The fifth word was *designer*, pronounced /dɪˈzaɪnər/. The primary stress occurs on the second syllable, /zaɪn/. This word is classified as a noun and refers to a person who creates designs, especially in the fashion industry. In the movie, this word is related to

professional identity and creative work. The stress placement on the second syllable makes the word clearer when used in conversations about fashion, clothing, and professional roles.

Based on the classification of word classes, nouns dominated the selected data. Four out of five identified words were nouns, namely *fashion*, *assistant*, *magazine*, and *designer*. Only one word, *important*, was an adjective. This result shows that the vocabulary with prominent stress patterns in the selected data was mostly related to objects, professions, and workplace concepts. The dominance of nouns reflects the professional context of the movie, which frequently presents conversations about jobs, fashion products, publishing activities, and professional identities.

The findings also showed that occupational and workplace-related terms appeared prominently in the data. Words such as *assistant* and *designer* directly refer to professional roles, while *magazine* and *fashion* refer to the industry and institutional setting of the movie. The word *important* functions differently because it is used to describe the urgency or priority of certain actions or responsibilities. This shows that word stress in the selected data appears not only in technical vocabulary but also in common words used to manage workplace communication.

In terms of stress position, the second syllable was the most frequent primary stress position in the selected words. Three words received stress on the second syllable, namely *important*, *assistant*, and *designer*. This was followed by first-syllable stress in *fashion* and final-syllable stress in *magazine*. The distribution of stress positions can be summarized as follows: second syllable stress appeared in three words, first syllable stress appeared in one word, and final syllable stress appeared in one word.

Table 2. Distribution of Primary Stress Position

Primary Stress Position	Words	Frequency
First syllable	fashion	1
Second syllable	important, assistant, designer	3
Final syllable	magazine	1
Total		5

Table 2 shows that second-syllable stress was the most frequent pattern in the selected data. The words with second-syllable stress consisted of one adjective and two nouns. Meanwhile, first-syllable stress and final-syllable stress appeared less frequently. This distribution indicates that the stress patterns in the data were varied, although second-syllable stress was more dominant than the other patterns.

The analysis also found that all selected words followed standard English pronunciation patterns. No irregular or nonstandard stress placement was found in the selected data. The characters pronounced the words consistently according to commonly accepted stress patterns. This consistency indicates that the movie provides examples of natural English pronunciation that can be observed through authentic spoken dialogues.

Another finding concerns the complexity of stress placement. The word *fashion* has a relatively simple stress pattern because it consists of two syllables and receives stress on the first syllable. In contrast, *magazine* has a more complex pattern because it contains secondary stress and primary stress, with the strongest stress placed on the final syllable. This word may require greater pronunciation awareness because the primary stress does not occur at the beginning of the word.

The word *magazine* can be considered an anomalous or less predictable example in the selected data. While several words in the data received stress on the second syllable, *magazine* received primary stress on the final syllable. This shows that not all English words follow the same stress pattern. The presence of this word demonstrates that English word stress varies across vocabulary items and may not always be predicted from spelling or word length.

Overall, the results show that word stress in *The Devil Wears Prada* appears in vocabulary that is strongly connected to the movie's professional setting. The selected words represent important aspects of the story, including fashion, publication, occupation, responsibility, and workplace hierarchy. The data also show that primary stress placement contributes to the clear pronunciation of words in the movie dialogues. These findings provide a basis for further discussion on the role of word stress in spoken English and its relevance to pronunciation learning.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that word stress plays an important role in spoken communication in *The Devil Wears Prada*. The identified words, namely *important*, *fashion*, *assistant*, *magazine*, and *designer*, demonstrate that primary stress occurs in different syllable positions depending on the structure of the word. This indicates that English word stress is systematic, but not always predictable from spelling. The occurrence of stress on the first, second, and final syllables shows that learners need phonological awareness to recognize how

stress patterns function in actual speech. In relation to the objective of this study, these findings confirm that word stress contributes to clarity, emphasis, and intelligibility in movie dialogues.

The dominance of workplace-related vocabulary also shows that word stress supports meaning in professional communication. Words such as *assistant*, *designer*, and *magazine* are closely connected to the fashion industry context presented in the movie. Correct stress placement in these words helps listeners identify the speaker's message more accurately. This means that word stress does not only function as a pronunciation feature, but also as a communicative tool that helps speakers convey information effectively. In workplace interactions, clear pronunciation is important because misunderstanding may affect the interpretation of instructions, responsibilities, and professional roles.

These findings are consistent with Ahmed (2023), who explains that stress, rhythm, intonation, and pitch are important suprasegmental features that influence speaking performance and listeners' comprehension. The present study supports this view by showing that stressed syllables make certain words more prominent and easier to recognize in conversations. The findings also align with Lubis et al. (2024), who state that suprasegmental features contribute to speech interpretation and communication effectiveness. In this study, stress placement helps organize spoken messages and supports the listener's understanding of key information.

The results are also related to the findings of Sihombing et al. (2025), who found that EFL learners often experience difficulties with syllable stress, vowel length, and pronunciation accuracy. The word *magazine*, for example, receives primary stress on the final syllable, which may be difficult for learners who tend to predict stress based on spelling or word length. This finding shows that English learners cannot rely only on written forms when learning pronunciation. They need exposure to authentic pronunciation models in order to understand how stress is used naturally by native speakers.

In addition, this study supports the findings of Nakplad et al. (2023), who reported that movies can improve students' ability to identify and produce English word stress. *The Devil Wears Prada* provides authentic examples of spoken English through workplace conversations, professional vocabulary, and emotionally expressive dialogue. Through this kind of movie, learners can observe how stress is applied in natural speech rather than in

isolated word lists. Therefore, movies can be used not only as entertainment media, but also as useful resources for pronunciation learning.

Theoretically, this study strengthens the view that word stress is an essential part of suprasegmental phonology. The findings show that stress affects intelligibility, prominence, and meaning in spoken language. This supports the idea that pronunciation teaching should not focus only on individual sounds, such as vowels and consonants, but also on suprasegmental features. Practically, the study implies that English teachers can use movie dialogues as authentic materials to teach word stress. Teachers may ask students to identify stressed syllables, compare stress patterns, and practice pronunciation based on selected movie scenes.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the data were limited to selected words from one movie, so the findings cannot be generalized to all types of spoken English. Second, the analysis focused only on word stress and did not examine other suprasegmental features such as sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation. Third, the study did not involve learners as participants, so it did not measure the direct effect of movie-based learning on students' pronunciation improvement. Future studies are suggested to analyze a larger number of words from different movie genres and to investigate how movie-based pronunciation activities influence learners' ability to produce word stress accurately.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that word stress plays a significant role in supporting intelligibility and communicative effectiveness in *The Devil Wears Prada* movie. The findings show that primary stress appears in different syllable positions, including the first, second, and final syllables, as seen in words such as *fashion*, *important*, *assistant*, *designer*, and *magazine*. These stress patterns demonstrate that English pronunciation is not always predictable from spelling alone, so learners need phonological awareness to recognize and produce stressed syllables accurately. The use of standard stress patterns in the movie dialogues also shows that word stress helps speakers emphasize important information, clarify meaning, and maintain effective interaction in workplace communication.

This study contributes to pronunciation and phonological studies by highlighting the value of movie dialogues as authentic sources for analyzing suprasegmental features, especially word stress. Practically, the findings suggest that English teachers can use movie-

based materials to help students observe and practice natural pronunciation patterns. However, this study was limited to selected words from one movie and focused only on word stress. Therefore, future studies are recommended to analyze more extensive data from different movie genres, examine other suprasegmental features such as sentence stress, rhythm, and intonation, and investigate the effectiveness of movie-based pronunciation learning in classroom contexts.

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