

Feeling Stress: A Haptic Approach to Teaching English Lexical Stress

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Prosodic features help listeners decode sentence structure, speaker emotion, and communicative intent. However, in second language acquisition (SLA), prosody is often overlooked, particularly in instructional settings where time constraints and curriculum design prioritize segmental pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Hahn, 2004). The variability and context dependence of prosody make it especially challenging to master (Atoye, 2005). Furthermore, for learners of English whose first language is syllable-timed (e.g., French, Polish) or tonal (e.g., Mandarin), acquiring the stress-timed rhythm of English poses challenges. While recent tools increasingly adopt multimodal approaches combining visual and auditory cues, e.g., Englishville (Costille, 2022), BetterAccent Tutor (Komissarchik & Komissarchik, 2000), the use of haptic cues for the perception and acquisition of lexical stress remains understudied, highlighting the need for a dedicated tool. To address this gap, my planned project will examine whether haptic cues enhance learners' ability to perceive and produce lexical stress. It introduces a mobile application designed to represent lexical stress patterns through audio-synchronized vibrations, with higher-intensity vibrations corresponding to stressed syllables and lower-intensity vibrations to unstressed syllables. Engaging the tactile modality alongside auditory input, the tool aims to make lexical stress more perceptible to learners and to increase their metalinguistic awareness. The presentation will outline the application's design principles, technical implementation, and pedagogical rationale. It will also discuss a planned empirical study evaluating the effectiveness of haptic cues in improving learners' perception and production of lexical stress.

References

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