INVESTIGATING THE USE OF STRESSED WORDS IN JOB INTERVIEWS AMONGST MALAYSIAN FRESH GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT
Utterances that often contain stressed words assist in communicating the intended message clearly. The correct use of stressed words in job interviews is crucial for interviewees to interact effectively with the interviewer. This study aims to analyse how fresh graduates in job interviews to elicit favourable reviews from interviewers use stressed words. The job interview data, which involved 10 successful interviewees, were gathered from a small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) in Malaysia. The data were annotated with Jefferson’s (2004) transcription notation, which focuses on stressed words. Allwood’s (1976) communicative behaviour framework of phonological patterns and Wong’s (1987) analytical framework of stressed words are used to analyse qualitatively. The findings show that the interviewees used a one-word category, two-word category, phrases and phrases of more than two words. Using these stressed words are crucial because it shows interviewees’ language competency, which is important in securing employment.

Keywords: Stressed words, job interviews, successful, fresh graduates, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION
English is an international language and is often used in job interviews. In Malaysia, especially in the private sector, employers are constantly looking for employees who are not only qualified in their respective fields but who are also proficient in English to ensure effective communication in the work environment.

A few employers who revealed that fresh graduates were not outstanding in job interviews and displayed poor attitudes and personality (JobStreet, 2013; 2014) have highlighted the problem of proficiency. Over the years, the demand for fresh graduates has been on the rise, yet many of these graduates have not been proficient and therefore not offered jobs by prospective employers (Hii, 2007; David, 2009; Mun, 2011; MyStarjob, 2014; Singh, 2018). According to Hausknecht, Day and Thomas (2004), employers select interviewees based on their proficiency, as effective and well-understood communication is vital in the workplace, especially for communication among various departments in an organisation.

Feedback from employers has shown that proficiency is one of the requirements in the employability of graduates (JobStreet, 2013; 2014). Consequently, interviewees need to be sufficiently proficient in forming sentence structures and have good vocabulary, choice of words, and presentation skills in order to convey intended meanings to interviewers. In the present study, stressed words are important in the interview context to convey proper meaning and impress the interviewer. The use of appropriate stressed words at the right moment seemingly has a greater impact during interactions (Everett, Blasi and Roberts, 2015). Employers also mentioned that a speaker who uses stressed words might wish to
highlight what is important about what had discussed in a conversation. A listener can then use that cue to become engaged with the speaker, thereby showing attention and respect, and from this, the listener can respond to the interaction appropriately. They further highlighted that the use of stressed words within an interaction may also project an individual’s ability to communicate professionally, spontaneously, adequately, and respectfully. From the speaker’s perspective, the emphasis of stressed words shows confidence and internal competence such as logic, rationality, accuracy, and precision and other types of analytical competence (Pillai, 2012; Pillai and Lok, 2018).

Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate how Malaysian fresh graduates use stressed words in job interviews elicit favourable reviews from interviewers. This is especially important as prospective employers consider proficiency a vital tool in the job environment and thus a consideration in hiring decisions.

1. Are stressed words used by fresh graduates in job interviews elicit favourable reviews from interviewers

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language Proficiency
Lado (1961), Halliday (2014) and Feyisa (2018) suggest that language proficiency or language ability is connected to communicative language abilities in relation to grammar, vocabulary or word/phrases and sentence structures. His observation supported by Canale and Swain (1980; 1983), Kramsch (1986), Celce-Murcia (1995), Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Feyisa (2018) that four language skills including reading, writing, speaking and listening involve language proficiency. It appears that language ability applied by Canale (1980), Bachman and Palmer (1996) and Celce-Murcia (1995) in communicative competence, which is similar to Lado (1960) on language proficiency skill, or on in other words language ability, communicative competence, language capacity, and language performance are usually applied to denote the competence to apply language familiarity to converse which indicates language proficiency. Lado, Canale, Kramch, Celce-Murcia (1995) and Bachman and Palmer (1996; 2010) definitions were very close in meaning to the definition of communicative competence. The terms were defined as knowledge and abilities/skills for use subsequently show language proficiency. In this case, pronunciation is one of the important criteria to portray speaker’s proficiency.

Stressed words have been more frequently defined in contemporary linguistics as those, which create melody or rhythm during vocalisation (Babtista, 1981). Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) stated that “stressed words are produced in utterances is tone” (Wong, 1987, p. 31). Wong (1987), on the other hand, stated that stressed words were phrases and words consisting of parts of speech, e.g., nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Wong (1987) further stated that stressing words and phrases in an interaction could produce different effects on the interaction. Wong’s (1987) study was focused on teaching pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation and focused on theory and practice. In her study, Wong (1987) found that it is inadequate to teach students about stressing nouns and verbs alone and that students needed to learn how other participants in interactions acknowledge the use of stressed words.
Based on Wong’s (1987) study, stressed words can be categorised as those belonging to the one-word category, two-word category, and phrases. Wong (1987) also found that students in the ESL (English as a Second Language) context use stressed words to show that they were very confident and stern in carrying out any type of interaction whether in formal or informal settings. According to Wong (1987), when a speaker articulates the use of stressed words and phrases, it means the speaker is emphasising the intended meaning and expects the other interlocutor to be able to understand clearly through the words and phrases based on the situation. Two examples of the use of stressed words from Wong’s (1987, p. 64) study are provided in the following.

Example 1
Clerk: THANK you
NNS: THANK you

Example 2
Clerk: THANK you
NS: Thank YOU

Example 1 is a mutual interaction between a clerk and a non-native speaker at the end of a sales transaction. As both interactants used the same stressed words, the conversation appeared to be repetitive. Example 2, however, is an exchange that transpired between a clerk and a native speaker. The native speaker stressed ‘you’ to compliment the clerk. In this example, the native speaker acknowledged the clerk’s compliment. The stressed word ‘you’ takes on a more personal meaning as compared to Example 1.

Wong (1987) found that stressed words could be in one-word form especially in the forms of nouns or compound nouns and verbs, which provide meaningful contributions to the conversations of the interactants as illustrated in Examples 1 and 2. As such, it is evident that the use of stressed words and phrases could affect and influence interactions.

Huluyong (2012) also agreed that content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and question words are stressed as they carry the meaning. Lado (1960) also mentioned that the speaker with a good language ability or proficiency would be able to utter the stressed words or rather, stress the words with intonation to convey the intended meaning in interactions, make the interactions interesting and engaging between two speakers in any types of context. Lado (1960)’s assertions that in accessing a speaker’s language ability or proficiency in determining the speaker’s communicative competence in any context either formal or informal is supported by Canale and Swain (1980; 1983), Celce-Murcia (1995) Bachman and Palmer (1990; 2010). Therefore, further research needs to be conducted in different settings to further investigate the effects of stressed words.

Wong’s approach is similar to Keheo (1995; 1997), Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996), and Mohammed Jasim Betti and Warkaa Awad Ulaawi (2018), who found that stressed words and phrases are an aspect of language that determines a person’s proficiency when a listener cannot hear a speaker’s utterance clearly but is able to understand the message through the use of stressed words. Likewise, Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) also noted that those who spoke fluently used stressed words and phrases to communicate effectively and accurately even in difficult situations. For instance, even if the
words were not heard clearly, it would still be possible to understand the words because of the position of the stressed words.

From a practical perspective, stressed words build trust and understanding, and when used in interaction, may influence and persuade the audience or listeners (Hornby, 1973; Fudge, 1984). However, Segbers and Schroeder (2016) were of the opinion that, in certain contexts of the interaction, stressed words may be necessary to assert authority or avoid miscommunication, particularly in professional settings (Segbers and Schroeder, 2016). Fudge (1984) and Ladefoged (2005), found that in some professional settings, stressed words play an important role in the effectiveness of a speaker’s utterances and in showing self-assurance in interactions while conveying intended meanings. Properly used, stressed words encourage concreteness in meaning during interaction, which is indicative of a speaker’s proficiency.

In line with Wong’s (1987) and Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996) studies on stressed words and phrases, there was a study conducted by Kerry (2009), which found that the input provided by interviewers who were native speakers was crucial for pragmatic learning by the interviewees, who were second language learners. The interviewees were not proficient in English as well as pronunciation, thus not meeting the demands and expectations of interviewers. Therefore, effective communication in job interview interactions involves comprehending questions asked by interviewers and the interviewees providing the appropriate answers, and the key to answering questions effectively is the proficiency of the interviewees (Truman, 2011). The use of vocabulary or choice of words and sentence formation manifests the interviewees’ confidence levels and efficiency. By using stressed words in job interviews, interviewees can enhance their chances of gaining employment (Danial and Mohamed, 2014; Parton and Sabrena, 2013; Rafikul Islam and Mohamed Shukri, 2013).

With regard to the views held by Danial and Mohamed (2014), Parton, Sabrena, Susan, Siltanen, Lawrance, Hosman and Jeff (2013) and Rafikul Islam and Mohamed Shukri (2013), Thomas, Piquet and McMaster (2016) conducted a study to analyse the use of English language and communication skills in a workplace among Bahrain employers and students from a polytechnic. The results showed that Bahrain employers preferred students who were confident, knowledgeable and able to market themselves by using proper vocabulary (words), phrases, and sentence formation in job interviews; however, no emphasis was given to stressed words and phrases in answering questions in job interviews, which is the primary focus of the present study.

In relation to effective communication in job interviews, Allwood (1976) introduced phonological patterns, which include stressed words and phrases, to make the conversations interesting either in formal or informal settings under the umbrella of communicative behaviour. Communicative behaviour is a pattern of communication, which has been developed as a framework by Allwood (1976) based on Swedish culture and patterns of speech. According to Allwood (1976), phonological patterns are analysed from the linguistic perspective. Allwood (1976) also emphasised that phonological patterns might not be related to prosody or any phonetic aspects.

Allwood (1976) proposes that accentuating stressed words and phrases could reveal the speaker’s intentions in spoken interactions. Allwood (1976)’s view is supported by Rafikul Islam and Mohamed Shukri (2013), Parton et al. (2013) and Danial and Mohamed (2014) in that using appropriate stressed words in job interviews is important, for example,
where it is used to describe one’s duties, responsibilities, and experiences clearly. Further, Matthew and Nanette (2007) and Hansen (2010) noted that interviewees could stress appropriate words with ease and confidence when answering questions or elaborating on issues raised during job interviews. Matthew and Nanette (2007) and Hansens’ (2010) views are similar to Canale and Swain (1980; 1983) and Bachman and Palmer (1990) in that for any interaction, whether formal or informal, using appropriate stressed words can create an attentive atmosphere which can engage others during interactions as the interactants would be able to better understand the purpose of the interactions. The use of the correct stressed words in job interviews facilitates comprehension of interviewees by the interviewer (Goffman, 1959; 1972; Holmes, 1995; Lipovsky, 2006). Allwood (1976) also notes that phonological patterns could be associated with politeness, subtleness, and dominance in speech, especially in face-to-face environments.

In relation to Allwood (1976)’s view on communicative behaviour, Jensen (2003) utilized Allwood’s (1976) framework to conduct a study on professionalism in intercultural job interviews and to analyse the content of Chinese job interviews. Jensen (2003) found that a misunderstanding had occurred between the Danish interviewer and Chinese interviewee. The interviewer had initially been confused by the interpretation given by the Chinese interviewee. It was only later; that the Danish interviewer was able to make the interviewee understand the question asked and, after several attempts, managed to get the required answer. Jensen (2013) concluded that, in an intercultural job interview, miscommunication might happen frequently due to cultural differences, different interview formats, poor vocabulary, and lack of proficiency.

The studies done by Allwood (1976; 1977) and Jensen (2003), show that Allwood (1976)’s work was more focused on interactions. For the present study, phonological patterns are prolific because they serve as a framework for analysing the use of stressed words to increase fresh graduates’ proficiency and effectiveness in job interviews.

Even though Allwood (1976) focused less on stressed words in his studies, other researchers conducted studies on stressed words in different contexts. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996), Hahn and Hahn and Laura (2004), Poedjosoedarmo (2004) and Silveira, Zimmer and Alves (2006) conducted several studies on stressed words with similar objectives in the classroom context on ESL or EFL students in relation to pronunciation, English stressed words, and prefixes and suffixes in different contexts of different countries, cultures, and mother tongues. It was found that English stressed words are essential in interactions either in the ESL classroom context or in any type of context using English as a language. They emphasised that, in any interaction, stressing the wrong words and phrases could lead to the listener wrongly interpreting a message. Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996), Hahn (2004), Poedjosoedarmo (2004), and Silveira, Zimmer and Alves (2006) further emphasised that stressed words and phrases may play an important role in interactions in better comprehending messages and portraying the speakers’ proficiency.

To conclude, a number of studies have been conducted on pronunciation, English stress patterns, and interactions and on linguistics and communication and employability skills in relation to proficiency. There have yet to be studies attempted on job interviews in relation to phonological patterns of stressed words in a Malaysian context. Employing Wong (1980)’s view of one-word and two-word forms and phrases with Allwood (1976)’s view on phonological patterns as the basis, the current study hopes to achieve a detailed
understanding of stressed words derived from fresh graduates which may help interviewees improve their proficiency in job interviews.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Setting**
The data for this case study was collected from a small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Approval and consent letters were obtained from the organisation as well as the interviewees. The organisation was a small business industry that comprised of not more than 150 employers which is overseen by one Chief executive officer (CEO), two general managers, and a few departmental managers. This organisation provides consultancy services and auditing services to other organisations for International Standards Organisation (ISO) certifications. Its services are linked with the following entities: International Register of Quality Assessed Organisation, Medical Device Authority, Malaysia Timber Certification Council, Department of Standards Malaysia, Accreditation Services for Certifying Bodies (Europe), programme for the endorsement of forest certification and international accreditation. This organisation usually conducts walk-in interviews twice a year: one in May and the other in December. For the job interviews conducted in this study, the organisation had advertised positions for marketing officers, auditors, compliance officers, administrative officers, and customer service officers.

**Sampling of the Study**
They were ten successful interviewees participated in the study. They were fresh graduates and their English language proficiency up to MUET Band 2-3. These successful interviewees were chosen in the present study because the instances of stressed words in job interviews used by them would be beneficial or informative to those who may have been unsuccessful or too reserved in interviews or for undergraduates preparing for job interviews. They were all fresh graduates with bachelor’s degrees from public universities in various disciplines such as business administration, marketing, management, education, and economics. All the interviewees were in the age range of 23 to 25 years and of mixed races. The interviewees had been shortlisted based on an English placement test they were given prior to the four-hour training, the results of which were required to be 45% and above. The placement test is consisted of three sections namely; section 1 on grammar-multiple choice question (MCQ), section 2 on reading comprehension and section 3 on writing.

**Instrument of the Study**
The only instrument used in the present study to collect data was the audio recording device. The researcher to the organisation provided it and recordings were made by the interviewer. Hence, there was no bias, prejudice, or favouritism introduced into the procedure by the researcher, and the recordings were considered to have been objectively acquired. The job interviews were conducted in three weeks, during working hours, and the durations of interviews were between 15-20 minutes. The standard interview questions which was structured by the organisation used in job interviews. For instances; self-introduction, strengths and weakness, who should we hire you and what would you like to achieve in five years’ time. The study adapted Jefferson’s (2004) transcription notation for the stressed words (see Appendix A-Underline Text-Indicates the speaker is emphasising or stressing the speech.). Abbreviations were used for the interviewees and interviewer, e.g., Interviewee 1
was abbreviated as IE1, and the Interviewer was indicated by the abbreviation IR. The interviewer who is a representative of the organisation who involves in recruitment. The interviewer has more than 25 years of working experience and he is the authorised person to make decision.

Data Analysis Procedure
This study used the qualitative research approach (Jackson, 2011; Creswell, 2014). The data to be selected and analysed, as well as quantity of accurate excerpts were decided based on a number of real life interaction researches (Li, 2002; Chatwin, 2004 & Kovacs, Morgan, Levine & McCrann, 2012; Creswell, 2014), as well as objectives and the theoretical framework discussions that represent the whole population sample. Therefore, the data were collected from the real setting, as mentioned above, and only accurate excerpts were chosen for the analysis. At the same time, Wodak (2013) also noted that due to some cases’ stringent situation to obtain authentic data were based on the emergence from the data. Even one excerpt can be considered to have significant value to contribute for the entire study. The job interview data was analysed by utilizing Allwood’s (1976) communicative behaviour framework of phonological patterns which refers to sound when one speaks and the sounds consist of tone, stress or the sound of speech, and Wong’s (1987) approach of one-word, two-word, and phrases categories were also used to analyse the data. Allwood’s framework emphasises on tone and stressed words, whereas Wong’s (1987) approach on stressed words can be divided into three categories, one-word and two-word forms and phrases, which a speaker uses by stressing the words or phrases. This stressing by the speaker is done to emphasise the intended meaning to allow the other interlocutor to understand clearly.

Reliability and Validity
In order to check the stressed words, an audacity program (Olle, 2015) has been used. This program is an open source and used for multilingual audio editor and recorder software that is used to record and edit sounds. The only software program allowed to be used verbally by the organisation after negotiations by the experts based on the terms and conditions imposed on the researcher (see appendix B-iv- You were required to use ONLY our facilities such as desktop, recorder, stationary and consider giving additional facilities if it was required. As for the transcription process, you were STRICTLY not allowed to use any software tools for the transcription process. Any transgression of this rule would incur severe consequences including discarding/deleting of the data and severe actions would be taken on you, possible legal actions.). However, it is restricted to taking photos or screen shots of the wave movements and is attached in the article. Three experts (one native speaker and two non-native speakers under tight security as there were two representatives from the above organisation assigned to observe the verification process did the audacity verification process on stressed words. The biodata for academic staff is not provided as the experts requested this as their preference. The verification was confirmed and agreed by more than 90% by the experts as per Miles and Huberman (1985) mentioned that the experts involved in verification process should mutually agree the inter-rater reliability. Seale (1999) noted the importance of trustworthiness in qualitative data when humans are experienced. After verifying the stressed words through the program, the experts cross-checked with the researcher and it achieved 90% similarity with the experts. The audacity program was also used in the previous studies of Chaolei, Jia and Shanhong (2007) and Kucukoglu (2012) to
check the wave movement to ensure choice of the correct stressed words. In light with the audacity program, based on the previous studies by Chao (1932), Cheng (1968), Lieberman (1975), Fokes, Bond and Steinberg (1984), Cheng (1987), Campbell and Beckman (1997), Ho (1997), Yanhong, Shawn, Alexander, (2008) and Liu (2017), the judgment agreement rate between the two judges was 98%. In cases of discrepancy in judgment, the two judges listened to the recording and made a final judgment on stressed words. In their studies, the sample of wave movements were not provided in articles in the form of figures. However, those studies as mentioned earlier were conducted with different objectives and the findings were varied which may not be pertaining to the present study except the used of audacity program in determining the stressed words. Getting job interviews data in the real setting in Malaysia is subjected to [Section 4 of the Data Protection Acts, 1988 and 2003] the data are authentic and carry value for the present study. As Yin (1984; 2009) Lincoln and Guba (2000) and notes that data collected from authentic environment comes with the list of limitation could significantly contribute for studies in various ways.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
The findings reveal how stressed words and phrases uttered by interviewees could bring about favourable impression in interviews. The analysis of the interviews was done based on three categories consisting of one-word and two-word forms and phrases (Wong, 1987). Each category showed how the successful interviewees used stressed words and what denoted the effectiveness of using such words. Under the one-word category, the stressed words found were verbs, adjectives, and pronouns, whereas two-word forms and phrases comprised a combination of prepositions with verbs, definite articles with nouns, pronouns, reflexive pronouns and possessive adjectives, while phrases consisted of more than two words.

One-word category
Excerpt 1 illustrates some examples of stressed words of the one-word category used by IEs 12, 13, 14, and 15, which manifest the interviewees skills and abilities in performing certain tasks from their internship experience.

Excerpt 1: Stressed verbs
587 IR What did you like or dislike during the internship (.) I mean about your duty?
588 IE12 Well… I would say… I **enjoyed** the people I worked with (.) it was a friendly and fun atmosphere and I actually enjoyed going to work each morning. (showing emotions)

642 IR Well… what did you like or dislike about your previous job?
643 IE13 Hmm… what I liked about my previous job is… that I was able to learn other work (.) that was not in my job description…

666 IR What major challenges and problems did you face?
667 IE14 … you mean how I **handled** them… Mr (.) I went there for internship… I **did** my level best over there but too much of politics (.)…

712 IR … what major challenges and problems did you face and how did you handle them ya…
713 IE15 the most recent challenged I **faced** was (.) **resolving** team conflict… ya… hmm
The stressed verbs shown in Excerpt 1 that were utilised by the successful interviewees were ‘enjoyed’, ‘liked’, ‘handled’, ‘did’, ‘faced’, and ‘resolving’ to describe their experiences while doing internship. The terms ‘enjoyed’ and ‘liked’ demonstrated the interviewees fond memories of their internship experience, which referred to an earlier friendly working environment. For example, in line 588, the stressed word ‘enjoyed’ showed IE12 could work in a team and was able to communicate well with others to create a friendly working environment. Another example is found in line 643, where the stressed verb ‘liked’ portrayed IE13’s fondness of the previous job and his/her keen interest to learn other jobs.

In line 667, the stressed verbs ‘handled’ and ‘did’ expressed IE14’s ability in performing the work. The stressed verb ‘handled’ was expressed well to show IE14’s capability in managing a situation, and ‘did’ was emphasised to indicate IE14 could cope with challenges and problems encountered.

In line 713, the stressed verbs ‘faced’ and ‘resolving’ showed IE15 expressed capability in settling issues or finding solutions to problems.

The use of stressed verbs by IEs 12, 13, 14, and 15 may enable them to effectively articulate their capabilities and skills learned during their internship, thus it may creates a favourable impression, perhaps it portrays interviewees’ proficiency. The correct use of stressed verbs to highlight the answers to the questions posed by the interviewer showed that the interviewees were proficient to apply stressed verbs appropriately in conversations.

Adjectives are used to elaborate or describe a particular noun; hence they help intensify speech and make for an interesting interaction as mention by Feyisa (2018), Thus, the use of stressed adjectives by the interviewees’ in interactions with the interviewer could their proficiency. Excerpt 2 shows stressed adjectives used by IEs 8, 13, and 26.

Excerpt 2: Stressed adjectives

430 IR …how do you give your attention to your…customer?
431 IE8 Sure (.) well… I should be polite to customers. Give them good service (.) even if…the customer is wrong…

640 IR …what were your responsibilities during your internship?
641 IE13 Sir…during my internship (.) I was positioned in Administration and Human Resources Department… I was also able to assist the customer service position by helping the company’s client to make sure that they were able to meet the personnel that they intent to meet and make sure that they were comfortable while waiting.

1113 IR …why are you looking for a job?
1114 IE26 I am looking for a job as I am seeking to gain more knowledge from this company (.) also I want to further improve my wisdom from time to time (.) I heard your company has achieved numerous awards and frankly speaking…I think it will be an advantage for me.

In line 431, IE8 stressed ‘polite’ and ‘good’ to emphasise attitude and service to the customers even though the customers could be wrong. The stressed adjectives portrayed a much elaborated and detailed explanation in response to the question asked, which may have been seen as constructive by the interviewer. The other stressed adjectives ‘able’, ‘sure’, and ‘comfortable’, found in line 641, demonstrated IE13’s capability in and certainty about the previous tasks performed. Adjectives such as ‘able’ and ‘sure’ displayed IE13’s confidence and competence in the task aimed at convincing the interviewer. Apart from that,
‘comfortable’ was stressed to make customers feel at ease and relaxed while waiting. The stressed adjectives used by IE13 reflects IE13’s attentiveness towards customers, which was an asset to the company.

Other examples of stressed adjectives, i.e., ‘more’ and ‘numerous’, are found in line 1114. The use of ‘more’ referred to IE26’s desire for additional knowledge in this industry, and ‘numerous’ referred to the organisation having obtained several awards and recognition in competitions under the small to medium-sized enterprise (SME) category. This indicated IE26’s interest in seeking for more information about the company as well as being eager to work for the organisation, which was an optimistic outlook sought by employers. The stress on adjectives by interviewees when answering questions enabled them to accentuate their skills, experience, abilities, and proficiency to the interviewer.

The last stressed one-word forms presented were stressed pronouns, which were used by IEs 15, 17, and 27 in place of nouns, as shown in Excerpt 3.

Excerpt 3: Stressed pronouns

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>720</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>what is your plan in five years’ time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>721</td>
<td>IE15</td>
<td>...I also foresee <strong>myself</strong> to continue my pursuit during my free time in environmental conversation work...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>794</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>...how do you evaluate success then?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>795</td>
<td>IE17</td>
<td>I evaluate success in terms of <strong>my</strong> personal good aim or target or interest being achieved to a great extent...so much so that it brings benefit to <strong>my</strong> society or my students and I will be rewarded proportionately in due course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1149</td>
<td>IR</td>
<td>What is your first impression about this company?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1150</td>
<td>IE27</td>
<td>In <strong>my</strong> opinion (...) I believe that the company has a good reputation...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The other pronoun found was ‘my’, which specified the possessiveness of IE15, IE17, and IE27. ‘My’ personal, ‘my’ society, ‘my’ opinion are stressed words used to show personal views and belonging. By stressing the pronoun ‘my’, IE15, IE17, and IE27 were shown their confident and self-assured of their views and future prospects. The use of stressed pronouns provided interviewees the opportunity to articulate to the interviewer in a very attentive way in delivering relevant information based on the questions asked by the interviewer. Perhaps, this enabled the interviewer to grasp the answers provided without requiring further clarification, which may pointed to the proficiency of interviewees, which was one of the main requirements of employers in their hiring process.

This finding for the one-word category on stressed verbs, adjectives, and the pronoun by IEs 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, and 26 showed that interviewees emphasis on cues or keywords was useful in conveying intended meanings, even though the interviewees may not have been very proficient or able to articulate clearly and confidently. The use of keywords may also have enabled the interviewer to quickly get a sense of the interviewee’s message, thus reducing the need to seek clarification and enabling the interviewer to ask focused questions.

However, the use of stressed words in any interaction displayed the speakers’ proficiency in the language and portrayed their ability in communicating effectively. The interviewees used stressed words to answer the questions attentively, which reflected their ability, self-assurance, curiosity, and introspectiveness towards a situation or task. The above finding agrees with those of Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (1996), Hahn and Laura...
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(2004), Poedjosoedarmo (2004), and Silveira, Zimmer, and Alves (2006) in that they emphasised that stressed words always have a great impact on listeners in any type of interaction, either in formal or informal settings. Using stressed words in job interviews showed the interviewees’ keen interest in obtaining a job. The use of stressed words and phrases also revealed their proficiency. In any formal or informal interactions, using appropriate stressed words could create an attentive atmosphere, which might engage others during interactions as the interactants would be able to understand the purpose of the stressed words. Finally, any interview situation should always be concerned with the interviewee trying to convince the interviewer that he/she is qualified to be hired. Therefore, the use of stressed words and phrases to emphasise the interviewee’s qualifications, skills, experience, etc. is an important requirement for being successful in an interview.

Two-word category
Stressing by using two-word forms appears to have a favourable impact in interviews as it displays the interviewee’s knowledge and proficiency, as shown in Excerpt 4.

Excerpt 4:

718  IR     Why should we hire you?
719  IE15    …I am sure that my resume has impressed you (laugh) hopefully (laugh)…or allowed you to see my potential in this company (laugh)…
728  IR     what were your responsibilities?
729  IE16    …In addition to that (. ) I was also put in charge of producing the company’s high flyer…this was a simple photoshoot (. ) design and conceptualising activity…
752  IR     why should we hire you?
753  IE16    I am highly capable of multi-tasking duties yet still delivering them effectively and efficiently… I don’t retract on challenges and look forward to growing with your company as a member of your team (laugh)
780  IR     What major challenges and problems did you face?
781  IE17    Well (. ) the major challenges will be to organise well the (. ) classroom and make the students learn eagerly the lessons…
830  IR     Tell me what is your greatest strength?
831  IE18    hmmm…possessing and keeping a positive attitude and always looking for a workable solution to a situation (. ) even if it might challenge by my colleagues or the supervisor (. ) finding ways to consult is a valuable tool…

In line 719, ‘impressed you’ and ‘my potential’ were stressed by IE15 in reference to his/her resume. The stressed words ‘impressed you’ are a combination of verb + subject pronoun, the use of which resulted in a favourable outcome from the interviewer. In using ‘my potential’, a possessive pronoun + adjective, IE15 acknowledged his/her capability and was very self-assured about his/her ability to carry out tasks.
In line 729, the stressed words ‘in charge’ emphasised IE16’s responsibilities and the trust the previous employer had in him/her. By stressing ‘in charge’, the interviewee was apprising the interviewer that s/he was a trustworthy and responsible person. IE16 also used the two-word stressed forms ‘highly capable’ and ‘look forward’ in line 753 to demonstrate IE16’s capability and interest in the company in terms of accepting any challenges and growing with the organisation. Employers value these characteristics highly in employees that they hire.

In line 781, IE17 stressed ‘learn eagerly’, portraying IE17’s interest in seeking more knowledge and work experience in the industry. In line 831, ‘to consult’ was stressed to show IE18’s attitude about seeking advice from superiors so that any problems that arose could be solved. The final example of a two-word stressed form was ‘high quality’ found in line 1150. In this interaction, IE27 described his/her confidence in the organisation by using the words ‘high quality’, indicating s/he had researched about the organisation prior to attending the interview, which was likely to be perceived favourably by the interviewer. The stressed words under the two-word category used by IEs 15, 16, 17, 18, and 27 revealed their capabilities, views, responsibilities, trustworthiness, and eagerness for knowledge and experience. Their focused use of the two-word stressed forms could show that they had the requirements, including proficiency, to be considered for selection by the interviewer. This concurred with Thomas, Piquet and McMaster’s (2016) findings that soft skills, proficiency, and career development training would enhance the quality of performance of employees in a workplace.

**Stressed phrases**
The stressed phrases consisting of three or more words are primarily used to reflect the interviewees’ skills, abilities, and qualifications, which can be seen in Excerpt 5.

**Excerpt 5:**

702 IR Tell me about yourself?
703 IE15 I am XXX. I am XX years old this year. I am a graduate with first class honour in Environmental Science and Management from University of Malaya. I want this job based on your company’s vision and mission. It is in line with my personal mission statement too… and that made me felt assured and comfortable to work here…

720 IR What is your plan in five years’ time?
721 IE15 I would say… in five years’ time… I foresee to be promoted to a higher position in this company. I also have a plan to execute various environmental management plans…

729 IR What did you like or dislike about your previous job?
730 IE15 I liked the fact I was working under a very experienced boss… yes… this gave me the opportunity to absorb as much as possible about the event management industry…

745 IR What was your biggest accomplishments or failure in this position?
746 IE16 … well the biggest accomplishment was securing the biggest media exposure 50 media partners and two local interviews and coverage for the event as it was a first ever…

780 IR What major challenges and problems did you face?
781 IE17 … the major challenges will be to organise well the (. .) classroom and make the students learn eagerly the lessons…. ensure they can read (. .) listen (. .) speak (. .) write enormously well in their English language
Excerpt 5 shows the stressed phrases used by IEs 15, 16, and 17. In line 703 IE15 states that s/he was a graduate followed by ‘first class honour’ and ‘my personal mission’ to indicate his/her capabilities and willingness and ‘comfortable to work here’, stressed by IE15, showed not only his/her eagerness to work but also displayed good knowledge of the organisation, which could be viewed favourably by the interviewer. ‘Execute various environmental’ was stressed to express IE15’s future plans for the organisation as well as indicating that his/her academic qualifications were suited for the job. These stressed phrases strongly emphasised by IE15 seemed to portray his/her strong personality and optimistic outlook, which are qualities sought by employers. In line 730, ‘very experienced boss’ and ‘opportunity to absorb’ were used by IE15 to show his/her gratitude towards the superior as well as the willingness to learn new skills, in this case, the event management industry. The stressed phrases used by IE15 showed his/her appreciation for the superior who possessed leadership skills and gave IE15 the opportunity to learn and practice various skills. The stressed phrases also showed that IE15’s proficiency in answering questions in a clear and detailed fashion could receive favourable reviews from the interviewer.

In line 746, IE16 stressed the phrases ‘securing the biggest’ and ‘two local interviews’ in answer to the interviewer’s direct question “What are your biggest accomplishments?” The answer given and the stressed phrases used showed IE16 to be a very capable individual and proficient, which are attributes interviewers look for in interviewees. In line 781, IE17 used ‘write enormously well’, which was another expression of consistency in work, where continuous improvement of writing skills was maintained until the desired results were realised. This stressed phrase indeed highlighted to the interviewer IE17’s personality of perseverance and hard work. These interview interactions showed that it was important for interviewees to use stressed phrases when interacting with the interviewer to establish proficiency in the interactions to ensure a favourable outcome in the interview. This is because the stressed phrases work as keywords in the interactions that may cause the interviewer to take notice of the interviewee, which could lead to a favourable outcome for the interviewee.

The study showed that, when stressed words and phrases were used proficiently in interviews. The outcome could be favourable for the interviewee, as shown by IE15, IE16, and IE17, who were successful in their interviews because of their appropriate use of stressed words and phrases that highlighted their capabilities, knowledge, communication skills, and language proficiency, which determined they were qualified for the current market demand.

This study supports Allwood’s (1976) notion that stressed words play an important role in interactions, especially in job interviews, as they enable interviewees to communicate in a proficient and efficacious way with the interviewer to promote favourable outcomes. Stressed words and phrases also enable the interviewee to express the important aspects of his/her work experience, skills, and qualifications in an effective manner with little need for the interviewer to seek clarification. The study revealed that stressed words give greater prominence, impact, or intensity, where the one-word and two-word forms and phrases exhibit confidence and effectiveness in interview settings when used with good proficiency by interviewees. The accurate elucidation of the interviewees’ capabilities, experience, etc. depends not only on being proficient but also on making strategic use of stressed words and phrases to create a favourable impression on the interviewer, thereby greatly improving their prospects of being selected for the job. It should also be noted that the use of stressed words and phrases by interviewees does not end with the interviews alone because it can equally be
applied at the workplace or in meetings, speeches, etc. to enhance speech and communication.

Table 1 illustrates the use of stressed words and phrases by successful interviewees. They used stressed verbs, adjectives, and pronouns in the one-word category, word pairing in the two-word category, and phrases. The effective use of appropriate stressed words portrays an interviewee’s proficiency and that s/he is be able to talk confidently.

Table 1: Use of stressed words and phrases by successful interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One word-category</th>
<th>Verbs</th>
<th>Adjectives</th>
<th>Pronoun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enjoyed</td>
<td>Polite</td>
<td>My</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Liked</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Myself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Handled</td>
<td>Sure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Did</td>
<td>Comfortable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faced</td>
<td>More</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Resolving</td>
<td>Numerous</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two word-category</td>
<td>preposition + verb</td>
<td>To consult</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>verb + subject pronoun</td>
<td>Impressed you</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>possessive pronoun + adjective</td>
<td>My potential</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>In charge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Highly capable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Look forward</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Learn eagerly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>High quality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phrases</td>
<td>First class honour</td>
<td>My personal mission</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Execute various Environmental</td>
<td>Very experienced boss</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunity to absorb</td>
<td>Securing the biggest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>two local interviews</td>
<td>Write enormously well</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the one-word category, the successful interviewees emphasised verbs, adjectives, and pronouns. The stressed verbs in the speech were assisted greatly by highlighting to the interviewer that s/he was providing the right answers, whereas the stressed adjectives portrayed the ability to provide answers considered impactful to the interviewer. Finally, the stressed pronouns demonstrated interviewees’ confidence and self-assurance. The stressed
one-word category of words provides not only intonation to speech but patterns that are useful in interactions.

The two-word and phrasal verb categories indeed reflected on the interviewees’ capability, proficiency, and efficiency of language use. Similar to the one-word category, stressing two-word forms and phrases provided patterns and melody to the speech. The hearer in this professional context, the interviewer, was able to scan the important information through the stressed words. In other words, stressed words in conversations represent effectiveness of information delivery, especially in job interviews, as stated by Danial and Mohamed (2014), Parton et al. (2013) and Rafikul Islam and Mohamed Shukri (2013).

As Wong (1987) noted in professional interaction or in any social context, stressed words create greater impact and confidence. Linguistically, using stressed words in any context increases impact in interactions (Hornby, 1973; Wong, 1987). In this case, a job interview is a professional context, and the utterance of stressed words portrays a speaker’s proficiency as well as creates an interest and engagement between two speakers (Celce-Murica, Brinton, & Goodwin, 1996; Pillai, Zuraidah Mohd Don & Knowles, 2012).

CONCLUSION
The stressed words of the one-word category, two-word category, and phrases used by successful interviewees provided positive outcomes in the job interviews. The interviewees were able to answer questions effectively by using stressed words and phrases.

The stressed words had the effect of intensifying their answers and displayed proficient use of stressed words and phrases constructively. This finding does not show the total number of occurrences of the one-word category, two-word category, and phrases but only the stressed words that were used effectively based on the standard interview questions. Under the one-word category, verbs, adjectives, and pronouns were used in stressed words, which displayed the ability to perform certain tasks. The two-word category consisted of preposition + verb, verb + subject pronoun, possessive pronoun + adjective forms, and phrasal verbs. For phrases comprised of three or more words, it is inferred that stressing a phrase in speech could produce a positive impact in the interview and display proficiency. Generally, stressing with forms of the one-word and two-word category and phrases may function as keywords in the interaction, especially in a professional setting, which might cause the interviewer to conclude that the interviewee has potential. When the interviewer showed eagerness to listen to an interviewee, it could be deemed to be an indication that the interviewee was under consideration to be hired.

This study has highlighted the crucial needs and benefits of the strategic use of stressed words and phrases to perform well in job interviews. However, it is also realised that these advantages could only be manifested if interviewees had sufficient proficiency. Therefore, greater emphasis should be placed on improving the proficiency of undergraduates to enable them to use stressed words and phrases effectively in interviews.

Additionally, teachers should also highlight the importance of using stressed words and phrases in job interviews in employment course modules. They should focus on certain key words and phrases that can clearly demonstrate the interviewee’s ability to perform well in interviews. Current undergraduates could also learn about the use of words and phrases which elaborate the key concepts linked to an organisation, such as International Standard Organisation (ISO), marketing, customer service, and environmental sustainability.
Moreover, the importance of current undergraduates being knowledgeable about topical issues to develop their own future plans for the organisation that they plan to work for, as was highlighted by one of the interviewees, cannot be underestimated.

While the findings and implications of this study are promising, it must be taken into consideration that this study was limited in terms of conditions as mentioned earlier in the methodology part. The researcher was not allowed to be present for observation of the interviews or to perform the audio recording of them. The interviewer in private and under strict confidence recorded all the interview sessions. If these restrictions were not imposed, the significant data on stressed word utterances with verbal expressions could have been obtained for the current study.

Nevertheless, this study has revealed that skills, abilities, academic excellence, and experience can only go so far to assist an interviewee in getting a job as the key to being successful in a job interview lies in good proficiency, which enables undergraduates to make good presentations in order to impress interviewers. A good interaction in a job interview may include the use of stressed words and phrases to ensure that information is precise and indicative of the interviewees’ proficiency.

Indeed, in the current job climate, the undergraduate has to possess not only good academic qualifications, skills, knowledge, and experience but also proficiency in order to apply the language effectively. This is especially true with regard to the usage of stressed words and phrases in meaningful interactions, such as employment interviews, in order to interact confidently with the interviewer to maximize the chances of being employed.

REFERENCES


Li, W. (2002). What do you want me to say?’ On the conversation


# Appendix A - Transcription Notation Symbols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>[ text ]</td>
<td>Brackets</td>
<td>Indicates the start and end points of overlapping speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Hey what is it /</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes see there</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Hey what is it /</td>
<td></td>
<td>I got to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>=</td>
<td>Equal Sign</td>
<td>Indicates the break and subsequent continuation of a single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>interrupted utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: If you wish to</td>
<td></td>
<td>work here, you must work hard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: = must work hard</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(# of seconds)</td>
<td>Timed Pause</td>
<td>A number in parentheses indicates the time, in seconds, of a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>pause in speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>...</td>
<td>Longer Pause</td>
<td>Indicates a longer pause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(.)</td>
<td>Micropause</td>
<td>A brief pause, usually less than 0.2 seconds.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>. or ↓</td>
<td>Period or Down Arrow</td>
<td>Indicates falling pitch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>? or ↑</td>
<td>Question Mark or Up Arrow</td>
<td>Indicates rising pitch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>.</td>
<td>Comma</td>
<td>Indicates a temporary rise or fall in intonation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>Hyphen</td>
<td>Indicates an abrupt halt or interruption in utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>underline</td>
<td>Underlined Text</td>
<td>Indicates the speaker is emphasising or stressing the speech.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>:::</td>
<td>Colon(s)</td>
<td>Indicates prolongation of an utterance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( ? )</td>
<td>Question Mark</td>
<td>Indicates unintelligible speech, difficult to understand, poorly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>articulated and enunciated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( )</td>
<td>Bracket</td>
<td>Indicates a description of the context.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e.g.:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(laughs)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Transcription Notation Symbols (Jefferson, 2004).*