



English Phonological Awareness and Suprasegmental Pronunciation Skills of Education Students in a State University in the Philippines

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Abstract

This study examined the level of English phonological awareness, the extent of errors in intonation and stress, and the relationship between phonological awareness and pronunciation skills among selected education students in a state university in Mindanao, Philippines. Utilizing a descriptive-correlational research design, the study employed phonological and pronunciation tests, with respondents' oral outputs recorded and analyzed through frequency counts, means, Likert scale, scoring rubrics, and the Chi-Square Test of Goodness of Fit using SPSS. Findings revealed that students demonstrated a high level of awareness across most phonemes, particularly monophthongs, diphthongs, and consonants. However, limited awareness was observed in specific phonemes such as /æ/, /ð/, and /ʒ/. Both male and female respondents showed similar and relatively low error rates in intonation and stress. Furthermore, results indicated a statistically significant relationship between phonological awareness and pronunciation skills, suggesting that enhanced awareness of English phonology contributes to improved accuracy in intonation and stress patterns in spoken English.

Keywords

Phonological awareness, Suprasegmental, Monophthongs, Diphthongs, Consonants

1. Introduction

As the significance of the English language grows, and its status of a global language is strengthened every day, a lot of people realize that the only knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary is becoming insufficient. In today's increasingly modernized world, it is not only necessary to comprehend what other English speakers say, but it is also essential to make our speech intelligible for the others. But even though the global character of the English language makes many English learners and teachers realize the need of improving the pronunciation skills, many students still mispronounced word, misplaced stress in sentences and misused intonation patterns (Borges, 2014).

English pronunciation plays a vital role in second language acquisition and requires explicit instruction. Ongoing research in phonology and phonetics is essential to better understand how learners develop native-like pronunciation and how educators can support this process (Diaz, 2014). Phonological awareness involves recognizing and understanding sound patterns in language, while phonetic awareness pertains to the physical articulation of sounds. Due to the abstract nature of phonology, second-language learners must engage with both mental and articulatory aspects of the language. Pronunciation is generally more difficult to master than grammar or vocabulary, as it often depends on innate biological processes that are less responsive to conscious learning (Jilka, 2009). Accurate

pronunciation fosters clearer communication, whereas poor pronunciation may cause misunderstandings.

The individual foundation in second language acquisition contributes to the variation among students in their English language skills, particularly in speaking and pronunciation. Students' pronunciation skills may be influenced by their knowledge of individual sounds and sound combinations, including their ability to recognize phonetic transcriptions that represent the phonemes of words.

It has been observed that many third-year education students in a state university in Mindanao face challenges in accurately pronouncing words based on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). Since pronunciation is a key component of speaking skills, these difficulties often result in unclear articulation during oral presentations, discussions, reports, and other forms of verbal communication.

Specifically, pronunciation issues are often related to the suprasegmental features of speech—namely, stress and intonation. In some cases, a low level of phonological awareness contributes to word mispronunciation. This includes limited understanding of sound patterns such as phonemic awareness, word and sentence stress, onset, and rime.

Relatively, the study on phonological awareness has to deal with an individual skill in pronouncing words. Since phonology and phonemes are prerequisites for the proficient pronunciation of the second language, teachers are encouraged to teach the basics of the sound unit and sound pattern. More importantly, knowing what language learners are aware of the L2 phonological system and specifically, what they are not aware of, has far-reaching practical implications. Language learners can be aided to notice features they do not have an awareness of, thus improving their overall L2 speech accuracy, fluency, and comprehensibility (Souza, 2015).

Furthermore, mispronouncing a word can alter its meaning. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the level of phonological awareness and pronunciation skills—particularly in stress and intonation—of third-year education students at a state university in the Philippines, and to examine the significant relationship between these two variables.

2. Research Questions

This study aimed to assess the English phonological awareness and pronunciation skills of education students enrolled in a state university in Mindanao, with particular attention to suprasegmental pronunciation features such as stress and intonation.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of English phonological awareness of education students in terms of:
 - 1.1 Monophthongs,
 - 1.2 Diphthongs, and
 - 1.3 Consonants, when grouped according to sex?
2. What is the extent of pronunciation errors committed by education students in the suprasegmental features of:
 - 2.1 Intonation, and
 - 2.2 Stress, when grouped according to sex?
3. Is there a significant relationship between English phonological awareness and pronunciation skills of education students in terms of:
 - 3.1 Intonation, and
 - 3.2 Stress?

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Method Used

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design to determine the level of English phonological awareness and its relationship to pronunciation skills, specifically stress and intonation as its

suprasegmental features. Data were gathered through recorded oral tests, which were used to evaluate the respondents' performance in both phonology and pronunciation.

3.2. Research Setting

The research was conducted at a tertiary institution located in the Zamboanga Peninsula region. The College of Education offers degree programs in elementary and secondary education with various major specializations. The institution is recognized for its commitment to quality teacher education through national accreditation and international certification.

3.3. Respondents of the Study

The study involved 30 education students, equally divided between 15 males and 15 females. These respondents were selected through random sampling using the lottery technique. The sample size was intentionally limited due to the nature of the study, which required individual oral pronunciation recordings, making the data collection process time-intensive and focused on qualitative accuracy.

3.4. Instruments of the Study

This study utilized validated test instruments for both phonological awareness and pronunciation skills. The phonological test was based on International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols to evaluate respondents' ability to recognize and produce English sounds. For pronunciation skills, tests focused on suprasegmental features specifically, word and sentence stress, and intonation contours—administered through oral and recorded reading tasks.

The phonological awareness test was categorized into three components: monophthongs, diphthongs, and consonants, while the pronunciation skill test focused on stress and intonation. Test items were adapted from credible sources, including Hector (2012), Tan (1997), and a prior study by Bulabon and Sanggayan (2017). All instruments and corresponding scoring rubrics underwent content validation by the research adviser and English language experts to ensure alignment with the study's objectives. Revisions based on expert feedback were incorporated into the final version before administration to the respondents.

3.5. Data Gathering Procedure

The following steps were strictly observed during the data collection process. Upon completion and validation of the research instruments, the researchers secured formal permission from the Dean of the College of Education to administer the study. Once approval was granted, the researchers oriented the selected respondents on the purpose of the study and requested their voluntary and honest participation.

The validated questionnaires and oral tests were then administered to the participants. Following data collection, three expert raters were invited to assess the respondents' pronunciation skills—specifically in stress and intonation—using a scoring rubric developed by the researchers and refined by the experts. Similarly, the phonological awareness tests were evaluated carefully by the raters.

All responses were then retrieved, and the results were immediately tallied, computed, and analyzed with the assistance of a statistician to ensure accurate interpretation of findings.

4. Results

4.1. Level of English phonological awareness of education students in terms of:

4.1.1. Monophthongs

The phonological awareness test results for monophthongs revealed an overall mean score of 92% among the 30 respondents. A closer look shows that female respondents scored slightly higher at 93%, compared to 91% among males. These findings suggest that both groups exhibit a very high level of awareness of English monophthongal vowel sounds. Notably, the phoneme /æ/—classified as an open-

front vowel—was the least recognized, likely due to its absence in the respondents' native language phonological system.

4.1.2. Diphthongs

In the case of diphthongs, the respondents demonstrated an even stronger phonological awareness. The test yielded an overall mean score of 97%, with female respondents averaging 98% and male respondents scoring 96%. This minimal variation reflects a consistently high level of familiarity with diphthongal sounds across both sexes. The findings imply that respondents are well-exposed to proper diphthong pronunciation, possibly due to consistent engagement with oral language tasks and classroom conversations in English.

4.1.3. Consonants

When tested on their awareness of English consonant sounds, respondents achieved a mean percentage score of 91%. Females outperformed males slightly, with average scores of 92% and 90%, respectively. While the overall performance still reflects a high degree of phonological awareness, the results indicate that female respondents were marginally more proficient in this area. The data suggests that both groups are generally well-acquainted with English consonant pronunciation, although exposure, familiarity, or first-language interference may influence specific performance outcomes.

4.2. Extent of pronunciation errors committed in the suprasegmental features

4.2.1. Intonation

The data revealed that all 30 respondents, consisting of 15 male and 15 female students, committed an equal extent of errors in the pronunciation test, specifically in terms of intonation. Both groups were generally described as less erroneous, indicating that only a few intonation-related mistakes were recorded.

This finding suggests that learners of both sexes have a relatively good awareness of intonation patterns in English pronunciation. It also implies that the occasional use of oral activities and pronunciation drills in classroom instruction has helped minimize intonation errors during speaking and oral reading tasks. These instructional strategies appear to contribute to the development of learners' suprasegmental pronunciation skills over time.

4.2.2. Stress

All respondents in the study, consisting of 15 male and 15 female students, demonstrated an equal extent of errors in the pronunciation test concerning stress. The results show that 100 percent of the participants were generally classified as less erroneous in this aspect of pronunciation. This indicates that both sexes committed only a few stress-related errors during the assessment.

The outcome suggests that oral activities and pronunciation drills are regularly implemented in classroom instruction. Such practices help students gradually improve their pronunciation, particularly in managing stress in spoken English during oral reading or speaking tasks.

4.3. Significant Relationship between English Phonological Awareness and Pronunciation skills

The results show that the respondents obtained a computed chi-square (χ^2) value of 10.800 with a p-value of .001, which is lower than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates a statistically significant result in both intonation and stress as components of pronunciation skills, as both features yielded the same computed value. Consequently, the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between English phonological awareness and pronunciation skills in terms of intonation and stress is rejected.

It can therefore be concluded that a significant relationship exists between English phonological awareness and the suprasegmental features of pronunciation, specifically intonation and stress.

Moreover, respondents with a high level of phonological awareness tended to commit fewer pronunciation errors. Those who demonstrated strong awareness of English phonological sounds were found to have the least number of errors in both intonation and stress.

5. Discussion

The findings of the study reveal that third-year education students exhibit a very high level of English phonological awareness across all tested areas—monophthongs, diphthongs, and consonants—with slight performance variations between male and female respondents. Notably, diphthongs registered the highest mean awareness, suggesting that frequent classroom exposure and oral practice significantly contribute to the mastery of these vowel combinations. However, the phoneme /æ/ emerged as the least recognized among monophthongs, likely due to its absence in the respondents' native language, highlighting the impact of first-language interference on specific sound recognition. Similarly, consonant sounds such as /ð/ and /ʒ/ showed slightly lower awareness, though overall proficiency remained high across both sexes.

In terms of pronunciation skills, both male and female respondents were found to be less erroneous in the suprasegmental features of intonation and stress. This balanced performance indicates that regular oral activities and targeted pronunciation drills play a critical role in developing accurate and confident speech delivery. The statistical analysis further confirmed a significant relationship between English phonological awareness and pronunciation performance, particularly in intonation and stress. Learners with higher phonological awareness committed fewer errors in these features, suggesting that strengthening students' foundational understanding of English sound systems can effectively enhance their spoken proficiency and overall communicative competence.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that both male and female respondents demonstrated a very high level of English phonological awareness across all categories of phonemes—monophthongs, diphthongs, and consonants. In terms of pronunciation skills, specifically the suprasegmental features of intonation and stress, both groups committed nearly the same number of errors and were generally described as less erroneous.

Moreover, a significant relationship was found between English phonological awareness and pronunciation skills in both intonation and stress. The statistical results revealed that higher phonological awareness is associated with fewer pronunciation errors in these areas. Thus, respondents who were highly aware of the sound patterns in English were more accurate in their pronunciation, particularly in the use of proper intonation and stress patterns.

The study recommends that English teachers focus on specific phonemes that students find challenging, rather than broadly revisiting all sound categories. Oral exercises, pronunciation drills, and speaking activities anchored on the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) should be integrated into lessons to help students apply their phonological awareness in actual speech. Remedial sessions targeting suprasegmental features—particularly intonation and stress—may also be implemented to address remaining pronunciation errors and enhance spoken accuracy. Furthermore, students should be encouraged to actively participate in class discussions, oral tasks, and formal English conversations to practice and internalize correct pronunciation patterns, ultimately strengthening their overall speaking competence.

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