Investigating Ilami EFL Performance in Observing Within-Word Rules Based on Their Gender

Malihe Rajabi\textsuperscript{a}, Habib Gowhary\textsuperscript{a} *, Akbar Azizifar\textsuperscript{a}

\textsuperscript{a}Department of English Language Teaching, Islamic Azad University, Ilam Branch, Ilam, Iran

Abstract

Since in EFL contexts both teachers and students are less exposed to authentic language with a native pronunciation, presenting rules for standard American pronunciation appears to be overarching. Accordingly, providing both learners and teachers with an effective phonological profile is inevitable to achieve a standard American pronunciation. From among the hindrances to achieve a standard pronunciation lack of such a profile seems to be of critical importance. Considering lack of research on the foregoing obstacle in Iranian context, the present study aimed at presenting within-word rules of standard American pronunciation for Ilami EFL teachers in segmental phonology. The current study extracted, first, the within-word rules of standard American pronunciation from authentic sources. The profile developed in the study included 23 within-word rules. Additionally, the present study investigated the roles that might be played by Ilami EFL teachers' gender, in their observing of within-word rules developed in the study. Finally, the study determined if the phonological rules of within-word features of speech were affected by the gender of Ilami EFL teachers. To this end, among the accessible population in the study (all male and female EFL teachers in Ilam province), 40 teachers (20 males and 20 females) were randomly surveyed on interviews for their observing of 23 rules by reading a topically unrelated corpus. Chi-Square tests were conducted to analyze the data. Statistical analysis was run using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The results showed no significant relationship between the gender of Ilami EFL teachers and their observing of within-word rules.

1. Introduction

According to Yates (2013) "Pronunciation, once a mainstay of language teaching and language teacher education has long been ignored or relegated to elective status in EFL classroom and pronunciation is rarely incorporated into instructional objectives, and when it is taught is usually done so in an ad hoc fashion."

*Habib Gowhary Tel: +68545475
E-mail address: h_gowhary@yahoo.com
However, considering the overarching role played by pronunciation in speech intelligibility, the need for practical training in teaching pronunciation is inevitable.

In today's interconnected world, knowing English has been one of the inevitable parts of our lives. The way we speak gives some clues about us to people. Learners with good pronunciation in English are more likely to be understood. The ability to have a fluent, accurate, and intelligible communication is the ultimate goal of learning a language. In English as a foreign language contexts in which learners are not exposed to an authentic language, access to a standard phonological profile is indispensable. To put it another way, to have access to a phonological rules is a helpful source for both teachers and learners through which they can improve their communicative competence. Pronunciation is paying attention to particular sounds of language (segments) and the aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual sounds, (suprasegmentals) such as intonation, stress, phrasing, timing, rhythm suprasegmental aspects of language which are best learned as an integral part of language.

2. Literature Review

Traditional approaches to pronunciation have often focused on segmental phonemes, as they are relate in some way to letters in writing. Many adult learners find pronunciation one of the aspects of English to acquire, and need explicit help from the teacher (Fraser, 2000). Surveys on student needs consistently show that our learners feel the need for pronunciation work in class (Willing, 1989). According to Goodwin, in (Celce-Murica, 2001) lack of intelligibility can be ascribed to both segmental and suprasegmental features.

3. Statement of the problem

If the English language learner is not equipped with good pronunciation, running an effective oral communication is encumbered. While it seems few studies have been done on segmental and suprasegmental features of speech, no study has specifically developed phonological rules for EFL teachers. And no research has examined the relationship between variable of gender and observing within-word rules developed in the present study. Therefore, it seems conducting research projects that can extend this issue and investigate the relationship between foregoing variable and observing the rules in the study is overarching. In order to conduct a new insight into the literature, the current study not only attempts to provide twenty three rules for within-word pronunciation but also to constitute the existence or non-existence of the relationship between the above mentioned variable and observing within-word rules of segmental phonemes.

"Pronunciation is an integral part of foreign language learning since it directly affects learner's communicative competence as well as performance." (Gilakjani, 2012).

Both segmental and supra segmental phonology are important aspect of every language. Therefore, identifying significant pronunciation features (segmental aspect of speech) that cause problems to learners should be taken into account in EFL teaching.

Speech communication is the result of active cooperation between segmentals namely phonemes, allophones and suprasegmental aspects of speech: stress, intonation, and rhythm. Suprasegmental aspects of speech are necessary for speech communication and play a vital role in speech intelligibility.

By developing segmental rules, the current study helps to describe the interaction between speech sounds of language. The rules for segmental phonemes developed in the study include twenty three rules within the boundary of a simple word. They provide a basis for analyzing the data collected in the study. Many adult learners find pronunciation one of the aspects of English to acquire, and need explicit help from the teacher. (Fraser 2000) Surveys on student needs consistently show that our learners feel the need for pronunciation work in class (Willing 1989). According to Goodwin, in Celce-Murica (2001) lack of intelligibility can be ascribed to both segmental and suprasegmental features. A well-organized speech is the result of following some rules. But these rules shouldn't be so much complex so that the learner find language acquisition difficult. Celce-Muricia & Goodwin (1991)

4. Definition of Technical Terms

Profile
Webster dictionary (2012) defines the word profile as "a representation of something in outline.

**Segmental phonemes**
The vowels and consonants of language are known as the segmental phonemes of language. (Richard et al.1992).

**EFL Teachers**
According to (Celce- Murica, 2001) teachers of English as a foreign language are non native speakers of English and are expected to serve as the major model and source of input in English for their students whose oral communication needs mandate a high level of intelligibility and therefore require special assistance with pronunciation.

**Design**
The methodology of choice in the current study is survey in nature. Survey methods are some of the core methods for collecting and analyzing data in sociology David de vaus (2013). The researcher relies upon questionnaires, interviews, mail, or telephone to obtain primary data and to communicate measurement. (Gebremedhin and Tweeten, 1994) Thus, employing a survey method the current study aimed, first, to determine to what extent the participants observe the rules developed in the study and, additionally to generalize the findings of this study to similar population in different contexts.

**Participants**
The accessible population for the current study included male and female English teachers in Ilam city. Forty Ilami EFL teachers (twenty male and twenty female teachers) were randomly selected. Participants who attended the interview were high school English teachers. Table 1 depicts the number and distribution of the participants based on their gender and their observing of segmental rules within words.

| Variable | Total | Segmental rules |  |
|----------|-------|----------------|---|
|          |       | Number | Percentage | Within-word |
| Gender   |       |        |            |            |
| Female   | 20    | 50     | 209        | 251        |
| Male     | 20    | 50     | 225        | 235        |

**Instrument**
For the purpose of the survey study, a corpus containing 23 topically unrelated sentences was utilized. The prepared data was made of sentences each one contained a latent rule behind it. To reduce the possibility of choosing an option in a multiple choice question, oral reciting of the prepared data was preferred. Each participant was asked to read the sentences and words to see if s/he observes the rules or not. In the case of hesitation while reading the items demanding connected speech, the participants were asked for re-reading. The rules within the study all were extracted from valid sources.

**Validity and Reliability**
The reliability of instrument (a corpus made up of non-topically related sentences) was estimated by Cronbach's alpha. Reliability was established for the corpus at $\alpha=.82$. The content validity of the instrument was determined by experts.

**Data Analysis**
The rules were extracted from valid sources. For each participant a mark was recorded by ticking yes or no for each item read by the participant. To analyze the data, the software SPSS (Statistical Packages of the Social Sciences) was run.
Statistical Analysis

As mentioned earlier, SPSS was used to carry out an in-depth analysis of the accumulated data. Based on the research question of the study, the main statistical procedure employed included Chi square tests.

Research Question: Is there any relationship between the gender of Ilami EFL teachers and observing the phonological rules within words?

Research Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the gender of Ilami EFL teachers and observing the phonological rules within words.

The cross-tabulation results of the participants' gender and their observing of within-word phonological rules is illustrated by table 2.

Table 2   Gender-Within word Rules Cross tabulation

| G-WWR  | Female | Male | Total |
|--------|--------|------|-------|
| No     | 251    | 235  | 486   |
| Yes    | 209    | 225  | 434   |
| Total  | 460    | 460  | 920   |

Note: G-WWR= Gender-Within-Word Rules

The number of the female participants who did/did not observe the within-word rules was recorded as 209 and 251 respectively. The number of male participants who did/did not observe the within-word rules was divided as 225 and 235 respectively. Chi-square test was used to check the relationship between gender of Ilami EFL teachers and their observing of the phonological rules within words. Table 3 shows the results.

Table 3  The results of Chi-Square Tests for the gender of Ilami EFL teachers and phonological rules within words

|                      | Value  | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (2-sided) | Exact Sig. (1-sided) |
|----------------------|--------|----|-----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square   | 1.117a | 1  | .291                  |                      |                      |
| Continuity Correctionb | .981  | 1  | .322                  |                      |                      |
| Likelihood Ratio     | 1.117  | 1  | .291                  |                      |                      |
| Fisher's Exact Test  |        |    |                       | .322                 | .161                 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 1.115  | 1  | .265                  |                      |                      |
| N of Valid Cases     |        |    |                       |                      |                      |

As can be seen, there was no statistically significant relationship between the gender of Ilami EFL teachers and the phonological rules within words with the p-value of .322 at the .05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is supported. In other words, the female participants and the male participants were found to have the same performance regarding the phonological rules within words. Accordingly, it can be decided that gender is not an effective factor.

5. Conclusions

The prime goal of the current study was to provide Ilami EFL teachers with within-word phonological rules in the segmental area of pronunciation. The present study also aimed at getting new insights into the variable of gender that might influence English pronunciation of Ilami EFL teachers and the existence or non-existence of any relationship between the variable of gender and observing the phonological rules within words in segmental speech area. Data were collected through an interview (mainly aimed at asking the participants to read sentences or words) whose validity and reliability was approved through Alpha Cronbach and expert judgments respectively. The researcher adopted Chi-Square tests to determine the relationships. The following presents the discussion of the findings.
6. Discussion

The research questions sought to find any significant relationship between the gender of Ilami EFL teachers and their observing of the phonological rules within words. The results of Chi-square test showed that observing the phonological rules within words is not affected by the gender of Ilami EFL teachers and the null hypotheses for the research questions was supported.

Supporting the null hypotheses for the segmental aspects of speech in the study and the occurrence of no relationship between the variable of gender and observing phonological rules of within words may be a good indicator of neglecting pronunciation (specially segmental aspects of speech) as one of the important aspects of language learning. This in itself, shows that in an EFL context like Ilam in Iran, teachers are seeking just the ways to make students translate and memorize content vocabularies without any agony for correct and standard pronunciation or even using the words in sentences and connected speech. In an EFL context like where the researcher selected to conduct the project, working on vocabularies and reading comprehensions is the center of attention rather than speaking and pronunciation proficiency. And this in turn, is because the text book material designers/developers have overlooked pronunciation. Consequently, teachers have ignored this important aspect of language learning as it has slightly been dealt with in text books. In fact the reason for marginalizing pronunciation is that In Iran as an EFL context English language is considered as a pass to get higher degrees, and/or promotions.

The literature on pronunciation suggests a need for developing textbook materials to be taught as pre-service courses for teachers. Thus, the need for authentic sources which are simply understood and equipped both teachers and learners with a standard pronunciation is obvious.

7. Appendix

1.1 WITHIN WORD RULES

Rule 1: Labiodentalizing of /m/ and /n/ (Assim.)
1. He invited us to watch the latest movie in the comfort of his own home.

Rule 2: Velarization of /n/ to /ŋ/ (Assim.)
2. His words remained incomplete.

Vowel lengthening

Rule 3: Vowel lengthening in +V lenis stops
3. There was a dog under the cab watching the people on the side walk.

Rule 4: Nasal plosion in syllabic nasals(Assim.)
4. Button your lips" all of a sudden she shouted at her classmate."

Rule 5: Nasal plosion if nasal is in the initial position. (Assim.)
5. There may be a link between madness & creativity.

Rule 6: Lateral plosion in words. (Assim.)
6. Farmers were driving the cattle along major roads in the middle of the night.

Rule 7: Interdental fricative elision. (deletion)
7. He had not washed his dirty clothes for months.

Rule 8: Retroflexion of alveolar nasal/n/ after [ɾ]
8. The barn was burning in the fire.

Rule 9: Nasal /m/, /n/ devoicing (progressive assimilation)
9. Last week I went to the seaside and found some small snails.

Insertion Rule

Rule 10: Schwa insertion
10. Every engine has a piston.

/ng/ pronunciation. (Assim.)

Rule 11: Pronounced as/ ng/ in the middle of a monomorphemic word.
11. I cut my finger.

Rule 12: Pronounced as /ŋ/ in words with two morphemes. (Assim.)
12. He is a singer.

Rule 13: Before a syllabic nasal (Insertion)
13. Batman is my son's favorite actor.

Rule 14: Alveolar stop affrication if followed by /s/ just across words. (Assim.)

14. The train was carrying drugs.

Rule 15: Neutralization of vowel contrasts due to r-coloring with front & back mid vowel series. (R-coloring)

15. Mary's going to marry so she's merry.

Deletion

Rule 16: /t/ deletion in unstressed syllables

16. Winter is coming

Rule 17: /t/ deletion before a syllabic nasal.

17. I go on internet at 8:00 in the morning.

Rule 18: Deletion in the c+c+c if middle consonant is /t/, /k/ or /th/.

18. He usually asks about the social facts.

Rule 19: Vowel and diphthong lengthening before voiced stops.

19. That kid can't ride a camel.

Rule 20: Elision

20. Factories are mostly built in suburbs.

Rule 21: Forties stops aspiration at the beginning of stressed syllables

21. I will pay for dinner

Rule 22: Dissimilatory deletion of /ɹǝ/ to /ǝ/.

22. He is one of my best professors.

Rule 23: Epenthesis

23. Those students speak English

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