



Application of supra-segmental features for authentic pronunciation of English language: A case study of english language learners of Saran district in Bihar

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Abstract

This research article investigated and examined the supra-segmental features, such as, syllable, stress, rhythm, and intonation, which are also known as the prosodic features or phonetic speech, which is very important for the authentic pronunciation of English. These prosodic features study the different aspects which serve as a garment for the decoration of pronunciation during utterance. The descriptive, analytical and historical approaches were adopted for the purpose of making the research study successful, and achieving the target of the communicative English language learners of Saran district in Bihar. For the successful application of the approaches the survey questionnaires were managed to 125 students who were invited to participate in this research work for the analysis to get the findings for attending the goal. These 125 students were under study of the English language at secondary schools (10+2) level. The students were grouped by the age into tree: - 10-12 years, 13-15 years, and 16 years and above. Two research questions were formulated for the direction and expedition of the research study. The data collection for this research study was analysed in five sections through the application of four gradable items, SA stands for strongly agreed, A stands for agreed, D stands for disagreed and SD stands for strongly disagreed. On the basis of the analysis of the data findings were computed which showed that The Supra -segmental features, such as stress, rhythm and intonation are the basis for intelligibility rather than individual segment, but it was found that the teaching of the features so received don't make such attention in the class and the teachers in the study did not have a good command of the phonetic speech in their communicative English language. After declaring the findings of Saran district English language learners were suggested to attend the available good books on prosodic features, to visit the language laboratory, to listen the radio and television broadcasting language programme and to take help from the competent teachers who know how to teach the spoken English based upon phonetic speech.

Keywords: supra- segmental features, stress, rhythm, intonation, communicative, findings, intelligibility, suggest, competent, analysis, strongly, broadcast

Introduction

The primary concerning of this research study is the techniques of teaching accent, rhythm, and intonation or tonic group patterns to both the learners and the teachers of communicative English language teaching not only in Bihar and India but also all over the world. The materials collected and provided in this research study will be beneficial to both the learners and teachers.

This research work is designed for the learners of the communicative English language in Bihar at secondary schools of (10+2) level so as to solve the problems of Bihar learners who have been facing various difficulties in learning both pronunciation and the spoken English language. English is spoken in Bihar for different purposes, such as, academic, social, professional, political and general communication.

The learners of English language of Saran district in Bihar understand the importance of the communicative skills when they get an opportunity to talk their friends and relatives who know how to speak English language fluently without any hesitation. The students of Bihar state feel the inferiority complex while they don't communicate their thoughts as effective as their friends or classmates from English medium do.

The most burning reason of this adverse situation for the students of Bihar is their teachers who themselves do not have knowledge of authentic English communicative skills.

They speak English language without appropriate word stress and sentence stress, broken rhythm with unusual pauses and faulty intonation patterns. As the result, their communicative English skills are normally unintelligible at both national and international levels.

It is a matter of fact that spoken English plays a peculiar important role even in teaching literature. Bihar students don't know how to read English verses skilfully as they are not familiar with the stress pattern in English language. They are suggested here to learn English language skills based on a received pronunciation based on International Phonetic Alphabets, acceptable at the global level. This is the only way for the English learners to achieve their goal not only in Bihar but also in India and the universe.

This research study is mainly based on the various studies which are so far available in the areas of accent, rhythm, and tonic group in the connected Speech.

Status of English language in Bihar

English is taught in Bihar as the second language. The learners start to study English language in the age when they have acquired their first language. English is taught in Britain, United States of America, Australia and some parts of the Canada as the first language. It is taught as the foreign language in Russia, Pakistan, and Nepal. English is spoken all over the world and occupies the status just as the second position only after Chinese. According to Finegan, " the

number of those who learn English language as the first language is 300 million and those who use it as an L2 or FL is about 375 million." Yet in the words of Jowitt 2008 and power, 2005, "recent research shows that non-native speakers now outnumbering native speakers by three quarters. According to Buda, who estimates, "out of the 750 million speakers of English only 300 million use it as their first or native language, and the remaining 450 million speak it as an L2 or FL." In this connection, Jowitt (2008), he estimates, "native speakers or native like speakers of English are now about 670 million, while the non-native are about 1800 million. And those who call "middle of the road" are calculated to be between 1200 million to 1500 million." On thorough study of the English language it is found that neither the teachers nor the learners pay their attention in the beginning stage of teaching phonological features that make the learners weak in spoken English. According to Nunan, "in the study of phonology, the supra-segmental feature (also known as the non-segmental or prosodic features) is the area of study that receives less attention than segmental phonology." Cunningham & Mary, Onose and Ukam share their opinions as, "the reason is that the teaching of phonology usually begins with the sound systems and later delves into stress, rhythm, and intonation after segmental phonology has been studied. Sometimes, when the teaching of prosodic features come up for discussion, the learners would have become bored and have lost interest, or they would have felt overwhelmed."

The learned scholar Busa says with lamentation regarding the poor status of prosodic features, "prosody has traditionally been given little relevance in pronunciation classes, which, instead, have focused on the discrimination and articulation of sounds through drills, minimal pair exercises."

The status of the authentic use of the prosodic features is very poor not only in Saran district of Bihar but also in India and the global level.

Research problem

English is taught in Bihar in some of the institutions adopting it as a medium of instruction. But it is found that spoken English in Bihar by the learners is not so much intelligible that can be easily recognized at the global level. The learners do not know how to speak the terms of the non-segmental features. They do not know how to use the stress, rhythm and intonation and many other possible features which are useful material for the spoken English. They have no knowledge to use the four skills of English language, listening, speaking, reading and writing in their speech.

Objectives of the research article

1. The first objective of this research article is to investigate the non-segmental features, such as, stress, rhythm, and intonation which should be tested in pursuance of the performance of Bihar English learners to improve their intelligibility and fluency in spoken English language.
2. The second objective of the research study is the English prosodic features in the speech of Bihar English learners to learn them to maintain the global intelligibility

Research questionnaires

1. To judge the standard of Bihar English learners regarding stress, rhythm, and intonation they use in their spoken English.
2. To find out the relevance of English prosodic features in the speech of Bihar English speakers?

Literature review

Definition of the supra-segmental features: Phonology is based on segmental and supra-segmental information. Segments are related to vowels and consonants. The supra-segmental features also called phonetic features are the speech sound not limited to the single sounds and often extend over the syllable, words and phrases. The supra-segmental features of English language mainly consist of syllable, stress, rhythm and intonation.

The syllable: The syllable is the word or the part of the word which has only one vowel sound. J. Sethi & P.V. Dhamija have defined the syllable, "the unit of the next higher level than the phoneme is called the syllable."

Accent or stress: The relative emphasis is known as the stress or accent which is given to certain syllable in a word, or to certain words in phrase, or sentence. R.K Bansal and J.B. Harrison have defined the accent or the stress, "word accent is an important feature of English. In words of more than one syllable, Not all syllables are equally prominent. Those that are more prominent than others are said to receive the accent."

Rhythm: The strong patterns of sounds, words or the musical notes which are used in music, poetry, and dancing is known as rhythm. J. Sethi and P.V. Dhamija defines, "rhythm in English language likewise refers to the periodic recurrence of certain complexes or patterns of sound utterances constituting a text." Similarly in this connection rhythm according to T. Balsubramanian, "English rhythm is said to be stress timed. This means that in an English utterance, strong or stressed or accented syllables tend to occur at regular intervals of time, irrespective of the number of weak unstressed or unaccented syllables between any two stressed syllables."

Intonation: The rise and fall of the voice of the speaker is known as intonation. Intonation is defined by R.L. Varshaney who says, "Intonation is significant variation in the pitch from one part of an utterance to another. The meaning of English utterance, for example, derives not only from its changing sound pattern and the contrastive, accentual promises already referred, to but also from associated patterns of intonation". Similarly intonation is also defined by, B.L. Kohli and others who say, "Intonation is the tone, the melody, the music of speech. When a speaker speaks, he does not say every word on the same note. There are changes in pitch. There is rise and fall of voice. The study of the changes of pitch is called intonation."

Methodology

The research study was conducted in 10+2 secondary schools in Saran district of Bihar. The adopted four secondary (10 + 2) schools which were finally selected were Jabalpur High school (10+2) Chapra, Government girls high

school, Chapra, Zila School, Chapra and Bhagawat vidya pith senior secondary school Chapra. The number of respondents who were selected and managed was 125. They were administered questionnaires which were used for data collection. the selected respondents were grouped by age into three:-10- 12 years, 13- 15 years, and 16 years and above. The first two groups were provided 56.6 percentage of the questionnaires, the third group made up of students preparing for SSCE were given 43.4%. It is obvious by the distribution of the questionnaires that 65% of the total number of questionnaires went to the senior school sections and 35% went to the junior section. The teaching process of syllable, stress and intonation for 10 weeks were carried out among the respondents. The pre- test examination was also conducted to test the progress. The respondents were asked to read and speak loudly some selected words, phrases, and

sentences so that their progress in the skills of reading and speaking with the use of the authentic syllable, stress, rhythm, and intonation in their spoken English may be examined. The data were analysed based on the respondents self-report in five sections through the application of the four gradable items namely:-SA- strongly agreed, A - agreed, D- disagreed and SD -strongly disagreed. The results of the questionnaires were analysed and calculated in frequencies and percentages in order to Support the findings.

Analysis and results

The results obtained on the basis of the collected data are presented and analysed in frequencies and percentages pursuant to the questions which guide the research study.

Table 1: Dispense of respondents based on the teaching method

SL No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
1.	Features of Spoken English- syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation are taught in the secondary school we attend.	12	9.6	22	17.6	34	27.2	57	45.6	125	100

There is only one item presented in the table 1 mentioned above, which reveals that the non- segmental features of English language are taught in the secondary schools. 12 or 9.6% respondents are strongly agreed, while the number of

respondents who agreed only is 22or 17.6%.On the other hand the number of disagreed and strongly disagreed is 34 or 27.2% and 57 or 45.6% respectively.

Table 2: Teachers’ ability in teaching of non- segmental features of English language

SL No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
2.	The English teachers teach these prosodic features of syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation in the class	27	22	23	18	25	20	50	40	125	100
3.	The focus of English teachers more on individual sound than on the non- segmental features as syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation	67	53.3	30	24	16	12.7	12	10	125	100
4.	Only the teachers use these non-segmental features while they are talking to the learners in the class	2	2	7	5.3	55	44	61	48.7	125	100

There are three items – 2, 3, and 4 in the table no.2 mentioned above. These items explain the role and competency of the teachers in teaching the non-segmental feature of English language. In item 2 the number of respondents who is strongly agreed is 27 or 22%, while those who agreed, are 23 or 18%. On the other hand those who disagreed are 25 or 20% and the number of respondents who are strongly disagreed is 50 or 40%. It is clear from this report the majority of respondents were not satisfied by the teaching process of the teachers. The item -2 of the same table depicts that 67 or 53.3% respondents out of 125 were

strongly agreed while 30 or 24% were agreed with the teaching process of the teachers regarding teaching stress, rhythm, and intonation. On the other hand the number of respondents who disagreed is 16 or 12.7% while the strongly disagree are 12 or 10% in number. The item – 4 of the same table shows the effectiveness of the teachers. 2or 2% of them are strongly agreed through the process of teaching of non- segmental features, while 7or 5. 3% are agreed positively. On the other hand the number of respondents who disagree and strongly disagree is 55 or 44% and 61 or 48.7% respectively.

Table 3: Test table for response’s and usefulness of application of non- segmental features in the speech of an individual

SL No.	Item	SA		A		SD		D		Total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
5.	Learners can apply these features of syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation in their own speech	8	6.7	13	10	62	50	42	33.3	125	100
6.	The apply of syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation in spoken English is useful	75	60	33	26.7	17	13.3	0	0	125	100

There are two items in table no.3. These are items five and six. In item -5, eight or 6.7% respondents are strongly agree with usefulness of these stress, rhythm and intonation and in their speech, while 13 or 10% are agree only. On the other hand the number of respondents who are strongly disagree are 62 or 50%, while 42 or 33.3 percent are disagree. It is obvious on the analysis of the item 5 that the majority of respondents of Bihar English language learners face too difficulty to use these non- segmental features in their spoken English language.

The item six of the same table, 75 or 60% of the respondents strongly agree that the usefulness of stress, rhythm and intonation in spoken English language is very useful regarding the intelligibility, while 33 or 26.7% are only agreed with their usefulness.

On the other hand the respondents of Bihar English learners 17 or 30. 3% are strongly disagree and no respondents are disagree that with the usefulness of stress, rhythm, and intonation in the communicative English language.

Table 4: Test table for division of the respondents on the basis of the usefulness of materials for teaching non-segmental features of English language.

SL No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
7.	The books or materials available contain these features of syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation	63	50	34	27.3	10	8	18	14.7	125	100
8.	The textbook available explain the particulars segments more than non-segmental- syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation	75	60	38	30	8	6.7	4	3.3	125	100

The table 4 mentioned above contains two items- seven and eight. This table shows the distribution of the respondents regarding the available materials for teaching of the non - segmental features of communicative English language teaching in Saran district of Bihar. The item -seven of the table-4 depicts that 63 or 50% of the respondents are strongly agreed and 34 or 27.3% respondents are agreed with the idea that the books available contain the non - segmental features of English language and have been

written in an intelligibility manner. On the other hand there are 10 or 8% and 18 or 14.7% respondents who are disagree and disagree strongly respectively.

The item eight of the same table, 75 or 60% are strongly agree, while 38 or 30% respondents are agreed only that the textbooks deal with the segmental features more than the non-segmental features. On the other hand 8 or 6. 7% and 4 or 3.3 % are disagree and strongly disagree with the view of respondents.

Table 5: Test of learners responses of understanding of non- segmental features of Bihar English language learners

SL No.	Item	SA		A		D		SD		Total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
9.	Adverse interpretation of the listeners regarding the speakers who do not use syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation in the spoken English language	43	34	53	42.7	8	6.7	21	16.6	125	100
10.	The percentage of learners of English language who have understanding of these	3	2	15	12.7	43	34	64	51.3	125	100

	features of syllables, stress, rhythm and intonation										
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In Table- 5, there are two items 9 and 10. The item 9 explains that only 43 or 34% respondents are strongly agreed with the view that the absence of stress, rhythm, and intonation in the spoken English create an idea to the listeners who can be expert in English. Similarly 53 or 42.7% are agreed only. 8 or 6. 7% respondents are disagree and 21 or 16.6% respondents are strongly disagree. Item -10 of the same table explains that 3 or 2% respondents are strongly agreed that the learners of English language in Bihar having nearly an average understanding of the non-segmental features of communicative English language. Accordingly 15 or 12.7% are agree, 33 or 34% respondents and 64 or 51.3% are disagree and strongly disagree respectively.

Discussion of the findings

This research study is based on the supra-segmental features in which non- segmental features- syllable, stress, rhythm, and intonation have been explained in details to find out the standard of spoken English in Saran district of Bihar English learners. This discussion is based on the findings depicted in Items-1to 10 of the tables (1to 5)

It is found that the students of Saran district of Bihar English learners do not know how to speak English language as intelligible as the English based learners. They seldom use the non -segmental features of English language in their speech. They have themselves accepted that they do not know how to speak English as intelligible as English based speakers do.

They have given a number of reasons. The books available for study deals with the segmental features more than the non - segmental features stress, rhythm and intonation. The teachers are also dependent on the books only. Hence as per the view given by the respondents of Saran district of Bihar English learners. There is not such a situation of learning the spoken English either inside or outside. If the proper management is made for the spoken English in Bihar the Bihari can also speak English language as intelligible as English learners of English language country.

Conclusion

We expect to have shown the importance of syllable, stress, rhythm, and intonation in determining the realisation of non-segmental features of English language for the learners of Bihar. It is found that the stress, rhythm, and intonation are the basic elements for intelligibility adequacy and fluency in a speech and that they should be consistently practised by the teachers who know them properly. This research study encourages the understanding of language as communication rather than a set of isolated segments.

Recommendations

1. It is essential for the curriculum and syllabus designers to focus more on the supra-segmental features of pronunciation rather than the particular segments.
2. The oral English textbooks having the targeted features of non- segmental phonology should be supplied to the library.
3. The well-equipped the language laboratory should be established in the institutions from the early stage.

4. Television and radio programmes in English language should be established.
5. The teachers should be compelled by the state government or the central government to improve their spoken English based on supra-segmental features.

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