

The Effect of L1 Suprasegmental Features on L2 Learners' Speaking Performance

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Abstract

Understanding suprasegmental features of both English (L2) and Indonesian (L1) will make Indonesian EFL learners able to adjust their verbal communication easily. They will not create misunderstanding and confusion when communication between speakers and hearers take place. Stress, intonation and rhythm which belong to suprasegmental phonemes influence Indonesian learners to produce their utterances if they don't understand similarities and differences of the two languages. This is a reviewed article which elaborates the effect of L1 suprasegmental features on L2 learners' speaking performance.

Keywords: *Suprasegmental feature, stress, intonation, rhythm*

Introduction

Pronunciation in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is one of important factors in communicating with English-speaking people either native speaker or non-native one since pronunciation deals with ways how people produce their utterances. Speaker's utterances in the form of sound production, stress, and intonation—as the pronunciation domain—affect the mutual understanding among speakers of foreign languages if they are making errors in their speech production. Sounds includes consonants, vowels, and diphthongs and stress and intonation refer to suprasegmental in the linguistic study. This paper focuses on suprasegmental features of English and Indonesian and the effect of transferring L1 (Indonesian) stress and intonation pattern into L2 (English) when people acquire and study those two languages.

English (L2) Suprasegmental Features

Stress and intonation play very important role in understanding spoken English. In order to avoid misunderstanding, learners of English as a second and foreign language should pay seriously attention to this matter. Four different tones in English are identified as *fall* [\searrow], *rise* [\nearrow], *fall-rise* [\vee], and *rise-fall* [\wedge], each with

variations depending on the context. Stress is described in relation to both words and sentences. Word-stress is usually applied to single words and it is held that there are some general guidelines about where that stress will fall depending on the way the word is structured. Problems are inevitable for non-native speakers who speak English to native speakers without using word stress especially when the native-speakers are speaking fast. On the other hand, native speakers may find it difficult to understand non-native speakers' utterance if they don't use word stress since native speakers of English use word stress naturally.

The reason why this paper focuses on suprasegmental features as part of pronunciation is that many EFL learners in my class still neglect their pronunciation study and spend more time to focus their study on vocabulary and grammar as the language components to support their speech production, whereas pronunciation is definitely the biggest thing that students notice when they are speaking English, and good pronunciation should be one of the first things that they learn in English. People can live without advanced vocabulary; they can use simple words to say what they want to say. They can live without advanced grammar; they can use simple grammar structures instead. But there is no such thing as *simple pronunciation* on the basis of speech production.

A simple example of how word stress helps us understand English is that by noticing the place of the word stress; for example, if we cannot hear clearly when we are talking to somebody in a crowded environment to determine which word is *photographer* or *photograph* by simply paying attention to the first two syllables like PHOto... or phoTO... because these two words are stressed differently; that is, in the first syllable for **PHO**tograph and in the second syllable for pho**TO**grapher. So, we can guess the meaning of the words by knowing the place of their stress besides knowing the context in the conversation as well. PHOtograph, phoTOgrapher, and photoGRAPHic are successively stressed in the first, second, and third syllable.

So, the word stress in English can be elaborated as follows. First, it is about understanding between speakers and listeners, meaning that a non-English native speaker will easily understand an English native speaker if he/she understands how to use word stress in English. On the other hand, a native speaker will get difficulties to understand a non-native speaker if English word stress is not used when he/she is

talking to each other. For example, listeners will grasp the meaning of “PREsent”, and “EXport” as a “gift” and “product sold in another country” if those two words are stressed in the first syllable. They change the meaning if they are stressed in the second syllable like “preSENT” and “exPORT”; that is, to introduce or to give and to send goods to another country.

Next, it is about the important rules how to put word stress in English and this word stress cannot be separated from the number of the syllable whether or not the word contains two, three, four, or five syllables which determine the location of the stress. Five rules related to the number of syllables are used in the practice of word stress; namely, they are the words stressed in the first syllable as in “PREsent”, “EXport”, “CLEVer”, and “HAPpy”, in the second syllable as in “preSENT”, “exPORT”, “deCIDE”, and “beGIN”, in the penultimate syllable (second from end) as in “GRAPHic”, “geoGRAPHic”, “geoLOGic”, “teleVIsion”, and “reveLAtion”, in the ante-penultimate syllable (third from end) as in “deMOcracy”, “dependaBility”, “phoTOgraphy”, and “geOLOgy”, and the compound words or words with two parts as in “BLACKbird”, “GREENhouse”, “bad-TEMpered”, “old-FASHioned”, “to underSTAND”, and “to overFLOW”.

In terms of intonation in English, it can be said that intonation plays important role in conversation since it shares idea between speaker and hearer when they are communicating. The speaker might use *fall*, *rise*, *fall-rise*, and *rise-fall* intonation depending on their intention. For example, a speaker uses *falling* intonation when she/he begins the question with information questions like “What”, “Where”, and “How” as in “What’s your name?”, “Where do you live?”, and “How are you?” Another example, he/she might use *rising* intonation when the speech is intended to ask the hearer a yes/no question such as “Are you an English teacher?” , “Is this bag yours?”, “Does John come to your house every day?” etc. and the speaker is sure that he/she doesn’t know the answer, but the hearer knows the answer. So, the use of *rising* intonation here is that the speaker is asking for a repetition, a clarification, or indicating disbelief.

For the case of *fall-rise* and *rise-fall* intonation, they generally occur in non-final intonation units or sentences. An example of using *fall-rise* intonation when a speaker says “A quick tour of the CIty would be NICE” or when a book seller tries to confirm the customer by saying “A *Life of Arnold*. Let me see, now. Is THAT the

TITLE?” An example of using *rise-fall* intonation here is that when a traveller gets confused and does not want any expectation from others then exclaims “Oh, Lord! perHAPs I could go by aNOther route, by an earlier train?” and the assistant who might listen to the traveller gives comment by saying “Just a moment. HOW much LUggage do you have?” In this case, there is no correlation between the train route and the luggage that the assistant says.

In American English, there are two basic patterns of intonation which comprise the foundation of the American spoken English, the falling tone and the rising tone. Using these two types can make our speech meaningful and make it possible to communicate effectively. When and how our voice rises and falls may indicate different meanings for the same utterance. Say for instance, when we say “Aren’t you lucky?” with rising tone meaning that we really want to know whether or not you are lucky, but when we use falling tone it can mean that you are very lucky.

Indonesian (L1) Suprasegmental Features

Several researchers have already contributed their work on the Indonesian Language related to suprasegmental phonemes. Stack (2005) in his paper *Word Order and Intonation in Indonesian* and Goedemans, R. & E. van Zanten (2005) in their paper *Stress and Accent in Indonesian* provide with some examples in using stress in Indonesian. This is appropriate for this discussion of Indonesian stress because it accounts for secondary stress as well. The basic facts are presented in the following:

ó	jám	‘o’clock’
óó	gúru	‘teacher’
oóó	berápa	‘how much’
òóó	màhasíswa	‘university student’
òóó	màsýarákat	‘society’
òóó	sàndiwára	‘theatre, drama’
òóóó	sòlidarítas	‘solidarity’
òóóó	pàscasarjána	‘postgraduate’

The above list of Indonesian words and their stress show that for polysyllabic words, primary stress falls on the penultimate syllable (in monosyllabic words, the lone vowel is the locus of primary stress). In words with more than three syllables, a secondary stress occurs on the initial syllable.

Patterns can be observed at the sentential level as well. Stress typically falls at the end of each phrase within the sentence; “phrase” referring here to a set of words whose order cannot be changed. In other words, when the various orderings of topic, predicate, and subject are examined, each of those units is considered a phrase, and each of them should have some types of stress at the end.

Poedjosoedarmo (1986; in Stack, 2005) classifies Indonesian intonational contours into three types: *rising*, *rising-falling*, and *flat*. He then associates each basic pitch contour with a type of informational unit: a rising intonation is classified as anticipatory, a rising-falling contour as focal, and a unit with relatively level pitch is termed supplementary. A sentence contains, minimally, one focal unit, and anticipatory and supplementary units may or may not be present. There may be more than one anticipatory and/or supplementary unit, but never more than one focal unit. Further, when anticipatory units are present, they must precede the focal unit, and supplementary units must follow it.

The focal unit of a sentence corresponds to what the speaker believes to be the most important element in the sentence. Anticipatory units are considered “relatively important,” containing “information which is old or given in some respect, but whose relationship to the rest of the clause is not deducible from previous information given in the text” (Poedjosoedarmo, 1986 in Stack, 2005). Finally, the information conveyed in a supplementary unit is relatively unimportant to the discourse. If this analysis holds true for the data elicited, it will help explain not only the intonational contours of the topicalization examples (and thus their information structure), but their syntactic structure as well.

Another data of Indonesian corpus (Sari, 2011) indicated that such word *sih* has two distinct intonation contours: *falling* and *rising*. She then illustrates, in (1) the *falling* tone indicates an emphasis of the speaker’s certainty of the existing topic.

(1) Sr: |tapi alhamdulillah *sih* kalo saya, mahasiswa saya bandel-bandel|

↙
sih

but thanks God [*sih*] as for me, my students were (behaving) bad
|tapi setelah lulus hampir mereka bekerja semuanya|

but after graduating almost all of them got a job.

Sari then explains that the speaker emphasizes gratitude by using a terminology of her faith as she asserted her opinion about the situation with her students after graduation. On the other hand, when preceded by a question word, *sih* has a rising intonation. In (2) and (3), *sih* becomes the emphasis of the inquiry respectively.

(2) M: |Di mana *sih* kosnya?|

(3) M: |berapa *sih* sebulan?|


Sih

Where is [*sih*] your rented place?


Sih

How much [*sih*] is the rent per month?

In this instance, *sih* provides a sense of urgency from the speaker to expect response to the question ‘dimana’ (where) and ‘berapa’ (how much). The speaker asserted her enthusiasm in finding out about the rent’s cost and location. When *sih* is used to emphasize an interrogative statement, the particle follows the question word used by the speaker. Thus, *sih* has a rising intonation.

From those researchers’ point of view, it can be concluded that the Indonesian Language, as a matter of fact, has intonation countours such as *falling*, *rising*, *rising-falling*, and *flat* like what English has. Those characteristics will influence Indonesian EFL learners of English when it is used for verbal communication in terms of their exposures—the Indonesian is exposed more than English. Therefore, the effect of suprasegmental of L1 exists in producing verbal communication of L2.

The Effect of L1 Suprasegmental Features on L2 Learners’ Speaking Performance

After knowing the characteristic of the two languages, the positive and negative transfer experienced by ELF learners will determine their success in acquiring and studying L2 (English). The first transfer which both L1 and L2 share similarity will ease learners to adjust their language use, while the latter one which both L1 and L2 have differences will take longer time to adjust their language use since they have to be more difficult to learn based on the hierarchy of difficulty in SLA. This transfer will lead to EFL learners’ errors in acquiring and studying the language and this error can be explained as follows. First, errors are different from mistakes. Errors are systematic, but mistakes are unsystematic errors that occur in one’s native language or in a second

language acquisition. Errors are significant to the *teacher* to show a student's progress, to *investigator* to show how a language is acquired and strategies the learner uses, and to the *learner* to be able to learn from these errors.

Next, the classifications of errors illustrated by some researchers through their studies are (1) interference errors or L1 transfer, (2) intralingual errors or incorrect application of language rule, and (3) developmental errors or construction of faulty hypothesis in L2 (Richard, 1971 in Larsen-Freeman, D. & Michael H. Long. 1997). Three categories according to Dulay and Burt (1974) are (1) development, (2) interference, and (3) unique and according to Stenson (1974) include induced errors meaning that errors which result from incorrect instruction. Finally, the corrections of errors are recommended to be done by self-correction or with the help of their classmates instead of correction by the teacher if it is done in a severe or intimidating way.

Conclusion

In conclusion, EFL learners' style of stress and intonation pattern in L1 (Indonesian) affects the style of L2 (English). Both Indonesian and English share similarities in the locus of monosyllabic; that is, the vowel becomes the stress and the sentence patterns can be both observed at the sentential level. Differences take place in both languages if changing the locus of primary stress in English will change the meaning—but not in the Indonesian. Learners are still influenced by their L1 (Indonesian) at the level of sentence pattern particularly the use of *rising intonation* in Indonesian beginning with information questions like “Apa”, “Dimana”, “Mengapa”, etc., which are still brought to the use of L2 (English) when they have to produce *falling intonation* in English beginning with “What”, “Where”, “Why”, etc..

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