HOW TEACHERS IN BENIN PRIMARY SCHOOLS VIEW AND TREAT ENGLISH SUPRASEGMENTAL FEATURES OF PRONUNCIATION

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Résumé

Les caractéristiques suprasegmentales de la prononciation en Anglais sont un élément clé pour développer efficacement la communication dans les salles de classe de langue. C'est un aspect essentiel de la communication car il aide les locuteurs à comprendre et à être compris facilement par les autres. Cette étude explore comment les enseignants des écoles primaires du Benin perçoivent et traitent les caractéristiques suprasegmentales de la prononciation en Anglais.
Pour atteindre les principaux objectifs de cette étude, dix (10) enseignants du primaire expérimentes ont été pris en compte. Ils ont été interrogés. Les résultats issus de l'analyse détaillée des données ont indiqué que les caractéristiques suprasegmentales de la prononciation en Anglais sont très importantes pour les enseignants qui sont motivés pour améliorer les capacités d'expression arole et d'écoute de leurs apprenants. Les apprenants sont motivés pour apprendre une langue étrangère, mais en raison du manque de temps consacre à la prononciation selon la planification et du manque de matériels adéquats, les enseignants et les apprenants font face à de nombreuses difficultés pour pratiquer couramment l'Anglais dans leur classe. Par conséquent, les enseignants sont réticents envers les ESFPs.

Mots clés : *prononciation, caractéristiques suprasegmental, planification, problèmes.*

Abstract

English suprasegmental Features of Pronunciation (ESFP) is a key element to develop effectively communication in language classrooms. It is a critical aspects in communication because it helps speakers understand and to be understood by the others easily.
This study explores how teachers in Benin primary schools view and treate english suprasegmetal features of pronunciation. To achieve the main objectives the study, 10 experienced primary schools teachers have been taken into account. They have been interviewed. The results emerging from the detailed analysis of the data indicated that ESFPs are very important to teachers who are motivated to make their learners better in speaking and listening skills. Learners are motivated too to learn a foreign language but the lack of time devoted to pronunciation according to the planning of primary schools and the lack of didactic materials prevent them from acquiring knowledge in English language. This situation makes teachers encounter great problem to practice fluently english language in their class. Therefore teachers are reluctant towards ESFPs.

Key words: *pronunciation, suprasegmental features, planning, problems.*

Introduction

Many languages are spoken in the world. Among them, there is English Language which becomes worldwide language due to its importance in several domains. Also despite the European council's attempts to further the diversity of languages, English is still the undisputed lingua franca. It is the reason why millions of people around the world treat the ability to communicate in English as the gateway to economic prosperity, social mobility and educational advancement (Fulcher, 2007). The ability to speak this language requires some rules that must be strictly followed for better results. In Benin context, English is learnt as second language next to French that is the first language. In Benin, English is learnt from primary schools even in nursery schools.

According to (Anderson-Hsieh et all 1992; Anderson 1993; Brazil et al 1980; de Bot & Mailfert 1982; Munro and Derwing 1995), research in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language (EFL/ESL) has made evident the significance of suprasegmental features (stress, rhythm and intonation) in the comprehension and production of the language.

With the great effort of primary schools teachers to permit their learners acquire good command and communicate fluently in English language, they encounter serious problems due to some factors. Among these factors, there is pronunciation problem which seems to be the greatest. Do teachers of primary schools in Benin teach really pronunciation to their learners? Does the curriculum plan pronunciation teaching really?

Teaching pronunciation, as suggested by McDonough and Shaw (2003) involves focusing on the sounds of language as well as stress, rhythm, intonation and links. Sounds of the language are referred to as segmental features of pronunciation whereas the rest are discussed at suprasegmental level. According to Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (Richard, Platt and Weber, 1985, p.281), suprasegmental are ''units which extend over more than one sound in an utterance such as stress and tone''. Similarity, Ladefoged (2006) explains that suprasegmental features are aspects of speech that involve more than single consonants or vowels. The most relevant features of pronunciation (stress, rhythm and intonation) play a greater role in English communication than the individual sounds themselves.

According to Houedenou (2018), learners in primary schools in Benin encounter terrible problems while pronouncing vowels and consonants that take part into segmental features of pronunciation.

To highlight the significance of suprasegmental features of pronunciation, it is worth pointing out that in some languages, suprasegmental features are occasionally employed distinctively. Suprasegmental features of pronunciation plays an important factor to determine the utterance meaning. As the result, suprasegmental features of pronunciation must be considered as some of the most critical aspects of communication competence to be practiced in English learning and teaching classrooms. It's the reason why, the present studies how teachers in benin primary schools view and treat english suprasegmental features of pronunciation (ESFPs).

1.Literature review

According to Dobrovolsky and Higgins (2001), the flow of speech can be divided into segments (also referred to as phonemes) which are characterized by specific phonetic properties and are known as the smallest linguistic units which make sound to occur. We can listen to each phoneme independently, but the phoneme on its own does not carry any meaning. Spoken language has number of phonological features which extend on spread over more than a simple segment. Kinper and Allan (2004) call these features suprasegmentals. Pronunciation then involves features at: the segment (micro) level and the suprasegmental (macro) level.

Areen and Taha (2014) in English journal, say stress could be assigned as the basic brick of teaching pronunciation. Serious errors in pronunciation, word accent and stress, and sentence pitch, as argued by Gilakjani (2001), appear to give rise to occasional misunderstanding and the necessity to repeat words and sentences while communicating. This problems has been studied in numerous studies reviewed by Otlowski (1998) where it has been indicated that non-native stress may make native speakers comprehend their speeches with more difficulties.

Learners often face serious problems in spelling vowels and consonants. They do not master how to spell vowels sounds in words like hate, hall, ahead, hat, lack, lake. This confusion is realized because learners expect to find a one-to-one correspondence between each sound and its spelling (Wong, 1993). Learners also do this confusion because of interference of the other languages in their environment (Houedenou, 2018). Sometimes, learners fail in words pronunciation due to anxiety and stress in learning a second language. Houmasse (2016) states that the wrong

production of consonant and vowel sounds can lead to stress misplacement in some words. To support the importance stress, one of suprasegmental features, Raimond (2004:42) says the three (3) most important things to achieve comprehensibility in English are stress, stress and stress. Abercrombie (1967:96) remarks that all human speech possesses rhythm. The rhythm of a language is mainly constituted by the ways the language uses stresses (sometimes called rhythmic beats) and accents (pitch prominences).

Phonemes are sounds that, when pronounced incorrectly, can change the meaning of the word (Burns, 2003). Major (2001) in HoaPhan and Sonca Vo states that suprasegmental are referred to as prosody, which includes stress, length, tone, intonation, rhythm and timing. Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007), indicates that prosodic or suprasegmental features are over and above the segmental value therefore suprasegmental are units which govern more than one sound in an utterance. Intelligible pronunciation enables learners to better understand their teachers, follow the news on TV or the radio more easily and join in English conversations, class discussions, role-plays (Gilakjani, 2011). To attend his objectives in intelligible pronunciation, he found that learners can develop their pronunciation if they know that pronunciation is an important skill of learning a language just like reading and writing. Learners should also know that there are standard ways of saying the sound that make up words and groups of words. English suprasegmental features of pronunciation have created a critical region of concern and interest for many researchers (Florez, 1998; Harmer, 2007; Jenkins,2002; Keys,2000; Morley,1991) as humans develop intelligible pronunciation and efficient communications.

Talking about pronunciation, Hall (1997) argued that ESFPs are more important than segmental features of pronunciation. He stated that language learners could practice ESFPs through marking texts for thought groups, shifting emphasis in sentences and changing the moods of scripts by exploring different intonational patterns. To support his viewpoint, Ladefoged (2010) and Johnson (2010) said that ESFPs are perceived to excert great influence on word meaning and part of speech. Those researchers showed the great benefits of developing ESFPs. As consequence of the great interest of many researchers about ESFPs, increasing attention has been placed on providing pronunciation instruction that meets the communicative needs of non- native speakers of English.

2. Objectives of the study

The motivation behind this survey is to examine how teachers in Benin primary schools view and treat English Suprasegmental Features of Pronunciation (ESFPs). This study is qualitative, it shows the frequency that primary teachers use stress, rhythm and intonation while teaching English in their classrooms. This study explores also the availabilities tools in Benin English classrooms.

3. Method

The actual study is a qualitative examination of how teachers in Benin primary schools view and treat ESFP.

3.1. Participants and Sampling Method

Ten primary school teachers are taken into account in this study, six males and four females. They are teaching currently English in primary schools both in Atlantique and Oueme departments in Benin country. They have at least five years of teaching experience. Their ages are comprise between 27 and 38. They are from English department at Abomey-calavi University (ACU) either in Didactic or Applied Linguistic. The following table summarizes the demographic informations of the interviewed teachers.

table1: demographic informations of the interviewed teachers

No	Names	Age	Gender	Teaching experience
1	Jean	33	Male	6 years
2	Christos	27	Male	5 years
3	Ben	28	Male	5 years
4	Cyrille	38	Male	9 years
5	Leon	30	Male	6 years
6	Mohamed	38	Male	8 years
7	Yvette	29	Female	5 years
8	Odile	36	Female	9 years
9	Murielle	37	Female	7 years
10	Bernadette	31	female	6 years

NB: These names of participants are nicknamed

3.2. Instrumentation

To reach the goal of this study and to understand really clear the phenomenon, teachers were interviewed in order to get the right situation of the problem in our primary schools in Benin.

3.3. Data Accumulation Procedure

An effort was made to guide very serious audition with the participants of the research to construe and undersee the participants' viewpoints about ESFPs. The questionnaires were in English and asked in English. It took a least fifteen minutes to each interview and with the authorization of the participants, the interviews were recorded.
After this step, we transcribed them into written texts and finally analyzed them.

3.4. Data Analysis Procedure

Many researchers conducted qualitative scrutiny on data accumulated through interviews with content analysis. As suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967), constant comparative was employed in the process of data analysis to code the transcribed interviews. Coding schemes are defined and developed during the process of the content analysis. At the end, conclusions are drawn.

4. Result and discussion

Two parts will be taken into account with result and discussion. The first part is the teachers' viewpoints about ESFPs and the second part is dealt with ESFPs practice in Benin primary schools.

4.1. The teachers' attitudes about ESFP
table2: themes and coding schemes on the teachers' attitudes about ESFP

Code	Informations
A1	Significance of ESFP
A2	Oral production and listening skills
A3	Learners' motivation

Talking about the significance of ESFP (A1), all of the interviewed proved the importance of ESFP in language learning and teaching. Three among the participants go further more showing that without ESFP, languages won't have meaning and it can be difficult to understand and

to be understood by the others while speaking. Cyrille, the one that has the most years experienced said ''when I started teaching, I do not care about ESFP but the next year, I realized that my learners had difficulties to communicate''. At the end of his speech, he supported strongly ESFP to help learners acquiring new languages.

Talking about oral production and listening skills (A2), participants told that even though they are English teachers, they have difficulties to communicate all the time in English. We sometimes move in French, that is what one of the participants told. In classroom, some words pronunciation is not mastered, then we go back in dictionary to know and hear the right pronunciation. Teachers said that their learners copy them simply. They sometimes organize meeting to crosscheck their knowledge and finally help the ones that do not understand deeply stress, intonation and rhythm.

English as foreign language makes students be motivated. All learners wish English hour time. They are more motivated to learn English language than French language that they started learning since nursery schools. Learners show their interest in English language even though they encounter serious problems in communication. Some of them ask their classmates to communicate in English when they go back home.

4.2. ESFP practice in Benin primary schools
Table3: themes and coding schemes for neglecting ESFPs

Code	Informations
A4	Learners' reluctance
A5	Lack of time
A6	Lack of Didactic materials

Talking about learners' reluctance (A4), one of the teachers tells: ''none of my learners is reluctant''. They participate actively to the course and don't want us to stop even though time is up. Learners' reluctance is not noted in any school. One of the crucial problems that both teachers and learners encounter is the problem of lack of time (A5). As English is learnt and taught as foreign language, less hour is devoted to. Many teachers tell that they have more than 4 classes per day and must leave a school to another. They add that they meet more than three hundred learners before evening. Not only is lack of time a problem but also lack of materials (A6) is for teachers and learners.

One of the teachers tells us that he is obliged to use his cell phone to make his learners acquire the right pronunciation and all the time use it for most of the activities. "Without appropriate materials, teaching and learning English as foreign language won't be efficient" said most of the teachers.

Conclusion

The current survey was an attempt to qualitative examination on how teachers in Benin primary schools view and treat English Suprasegmental Features of Pronunciation (ESFPs). From the results, teachers as well as learners are motivated in teaching and learning English language. Teachers are conscious about the importance of ESFPs while teaching English as foreign language. This study showed also the great motivation of learners to acquire speaking and listening skills.

Without following the rules of ESFPs, communication would not be understood at all and there would be ambiguity. Due to the lack of time and lack of didactic materials, the use of ESFPs in non-native class create serious problems to both teachers and learners. It's the reason why teachers neglect to teach ESFPs efficiently and sufficiently.

To solve this problem, school authorities should review their participation about the teaching and learning English in Benin environment. They should equip all experimentation schools in didactic materials, recruit teachers and try to create centers that can cover most of the experimentation schools in an area. They should train once more teachers about the new methods in teaching and learning a new language. Finally, school authorities should send time by time teachers to foreign countries where their colleagues succeed in the project to make their learners acquire new language.

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