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PHONOLOGICAL RULES IN ENGLISH :ANALYSIS OF APPLICATION BY UINSU ENGLISH TADRIS STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Phonology is a linguistic branch that studies the sound system in a language. In English, phonological rules are very important to understand so that pronunciation and understanding of meaning do not experience distortion. These rules govern how sounds are organized, produced, and perceived in communication. However, for English learners as a foreign language (EFL), including English Tadris students in North Sumatra UIN (UINSU), the application of phonological rules is often a challenge. This is caused by differences in the sound system between Indonesian and English and lack of exposure to native speakers. Many students tend to rely on the phonological patterns of their first language, which may lead to mispronunciations or misunderstandings in spoken English. Moreover, limited practice in listening and speaking environments also contributes to the difficulty in mastering phonological aspects. Misunderstanding certain phonemes, stress patterns, or intonation can significantly affect fluency and communication effectiveness. This article aims to analyze the extent to which UINSU English Tadris students understand and apply phonological rules in English and identify common mistakes that occur. Through this analysis, it is hoped that more effective strategies can be developed to help students improve their pronunciation and overall phonological awareness, thereby enhancing their communication skills in English.

INTRODUCTION

Phonology is a fundamental component of linguistic competence that deals with the sound system of languages, including the rules that govern the structure, distribution, and sequencing of speech sounds (Yavas, 2011). In English, phonological rules explain regular patterns in sound changes, such as assimilation, elision, insertion, and linking, which native speakers apply unconsciously in daily communication. These rules are not only essential for accurate pronunciation, but also for effective listening and speaking skills (Roach, 2009).

For learners of English as a second or foreign language, especially student-teachers in training programs such as the English Tadris Department at Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara (UINSU), understanding and applying phonological rules is both a linguistic and pedagogical necessity. Phonological awareness, which refers to the conscious understanding of sound structures in words, has been shown to be a strong predictor of reading and speaking proficiency (Blachman et al., 1999; Munro, 1998). Inadequate mastery of phonological rules often leads to pronunciation errors, miscommunication, and lack of confidence in speaking English (Engen & Høien, 2002).

Moreover, several studies have found that students majoring in English education tend to struggle with applying phonological rules consistently in real-life contexts, despite having learned the theoretical concepts in class (Sari & Pratiwi, 2021). This gap between knowledge and application raises questions about the effectiveness of phonology instruction in teacher education curricula. The situation is particularly significant for English Tadris students, who are not only English learners but also future English teachers expected to model accurate pronunciation for their students.

In addition, phonological rules in English are often different from the students' first language (L1) phonological system, especially for Indonesian learners. For example, the concept of final devoicing or the use of schwa in unstressed syllables is not native to Bahasa Indonesia, making it difficult for learners to produce these features naturally (Dmitrieva et al., 2010). Such contrastive differences further complicate the learning process and call for more targeted instruction and practice.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze the extent to which English Tadris students at UINSU are able to understand and apply phonological rules in their spoken English. By exploring common patterns, frequent errors, and students' awareness of these rules, this research seeks to contribute to the improvement of phonology teaching methods in teacher training programs. The results are expected to help bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical usage, thereby enhancing students' overall language proficiency and teaching readiness.

METHOD

In this research, the author uses qualitative descriptive research to provide a systematic and factual overview of the application of phonological rules in English among students. Qualitative descriptive research is generally not aimed at testing hypotheses; rather, its purpose is to describe existing phenomena related to variables or conditions in a particular context. This study focuses on explaining students' understanding and application of phonological rules in spoken English. The population in this research consists of students from the English Language Education Study Program, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training (FITK), State Islamic University of North Sumatra, in the 2023 Academic Year. The sample selected as the research participants. The researcher provides a series of spoken and written includes some students tasks that contain phonological rule-based elements—such as assimilation, elision, and linking sounds—which the students are required to identify and pronounce correctly.

Data collection involves oral reading exercises, listening tasks, and structured interviews, all designed to assess the students' ability to recognize and apply phonological rules in context.

No	question	option	n	%
1	How familiar are you with the term “phonological rules” in English?	a. Very familiar	3	15%
		b. Somewhat familiar	6	30%
		c. Heard of it, but don't understand	7	35%
		d. Not familiar at all	4	20%
2	Which of the following best describes your understanding of assimilation in English?	a. When two sounds become more alike in connected speech	9	45%
		b. When a word changes its meaning	1	5%
		c. When stress moves to a different syllable	4	20%
		d. don't know	6	30%
3	Can you identify an example of elision in English?	a. /gonna/ for “going to”	12	60%
		b. /t/ in “cat”	2	10%
		c. “I am” as “I m”	4	20%
		d. not sure	2	10%

4	Do you often notice how sounds change when native speakers speak fast?	a. Yes, and understand	4	20%
		b. Yes, but I don't understand	9	45%
		c. Sometimes	5	25%
		d. Never	2	10%
5	Have you ever learned about phonological rules in your English class?	a. Yes, in detail	2	10%
		b. Yes, briefly	8	40%
		c. No, through listening	6	30%
		d. No, never	4	20%
6.	Which aspect of phonological rules do you find most difficult?	a. Identifying the rules in listening	6	30%
		b. Applying the rules in speaking	5	25%
		c. Remembering the types of rules	4	20%
		d. I don't understand any part yet	5	25%
7	In your opinion, which phonological rules affects your speaking fluency the most?	a. Assimilation	5	25%

		b. Linking	7	35%
		c. Elision	4	20%
		d. not sure	4	20%
8	How confident are you when applying phonological rules in daily speaking?	a. Very confident	2	10%
		b. Somewhat confident	5	25%
		c. Rarely confident	8	40/
		d. Not confident at all	5	25%
9	Do you think learning phonological rules in daily speaking?	a. Strongly agree	8	40%
		b. Agree	9	45%
		c. Disagree	2	10%
		d. Strongly disagree	1	5%
10	Which area would you like to improve more in phonolgy	a. Listening and recognizing sound changes	4	20%
		b. Speaking with natural pronunciation	5	25%
		c. Understanding theory and rules	3	25%
		d. All of the above	8	40%

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis: Student Knowledge of Phonological Rules in English (Tadris Bahasa Inggris, UINSU). This study was conducted to evaluate the level of knowledge and awareness of phonological rules among students of the English Education (Tadris Bahasa Inggris) Program at UIN Sumatera Utara. A total of 20 students participated in the questionnaire. The findings are summarized as follows:

1. Familiarity with Phonological Rules

Most students (65%) were either somewhat familiar or had heard the term “phonological rules” but lacked a clear understanding. Only 15% of respondents stated they were very familiar and confident in explaining the concept. This indicates a need for clearer exposure and explanation of this linguistic concept in the curriculum.

2. Understanding of Assimilation

Although assimilation is a basic phonological process, only 45% of students correctly identified it as the process where two sounds become more alike. A significant portion (30%) admitted not knowing the answer. This reflects a lack of foundational understanding of core phonological concepts.

3. Recognition of Elision

The majority (60%) correctly recognized “gonna” as an example of elision, showing that students are more familiar with real-life or informal spoken examples rather than technical terminology. This may suggest that students learn more about phonology through exposure to native speakers and media.

4. Awareness of Sound Changes in Fast Speech

Although 90% of students said they noticed sound changes when native speakers talk fast, only 20% claimed to understand the reasons behind them. This gap shows that passive recognition is not matched by theoretical knowledge, which limits students’ ability to apply such rules in their own speech.

5. Phonological Rules in the Classroom

Only 10% of students learned phonological rules in detail during English classes, while 70% either learned them briefly or through listening. This highlights a curricular shortcoming, where pronunciation and phonology may not be receiving enough attention in instruction.

6. Most Difficult Aspects

When asked about the most challenging part of phonological rules:

- 30% reported difficulty identifying rules in listening.
- 25% struggled with applying them in speaking.
- 25% stated they did not understand any part at all.

This shows that students face challenges in both comprehension and practical usage, with a notable number still lacking a basic grasp of the subject.

7. Phonological Rule Affecting Fluency the Most

Most students believed that linking (35%) and assimilation (25%) most affected their fluency. This suggests that students notice these patterns in real-life communication, yet may not have formal instruction to support their awareness.

8. Confidence in Applying Phonological Rules

A large number of students reported low confidence:

- Only 10% were very confident.
- 65% were either rarely or not confident at all.

This shows that students lack both practice and encouragement to implement phonological knowledge in speaking.

9. Perception of Phonology's Role in Fluency

An overwhelming majority (85%) agreed or strongly agreed that phonological knowledge can improve fluency. This reflects a positive attitude toward learning, despite limited current understanding.

10. Areas Students Want to Improve

40% of students selected “all of the above,” indicating an interest in improving listening, speaking, and theoretical knowledge. This reinforces the need for an integrated approach in phonology teaching that combines theory and practice.

The findings of this study reveal that while students of the English Education (Tadris Bahasa Inggris) Program at UIN Sumatera Utara show a positive attitude toward phonological knowledge and its role in enhancing speaking fluency, their actual understanding and application of phonological rules remain limited.

Most students are passively exposed to phonological phenomena such as assimilation, elision, and linking through listening activities or interaction with spoken English, particularly via media or native speaker input. However, this passive recognition

is not supported by sufficient theoretical knowledge or classroom instruction. Only a small percentage of students (10–15%) demonstrated confidence and familiarity with phonological concepts, while a larger proportion expressed uncertainty or confusion, especially in practical application during speaking.

Furthermore, the low level of confidence in using phonological rules and the identification of multiple areas as difficult—such as listening, speaking, and understanding theoretical aspects—suggest that students are not receiving enough structured phonology education. This gap emphasizes the need for improvements in curriculum design, teaching methodology, and practice-oriented phonological training.

In conclusion, an integrated and practical approach to phonology instruction is necessary to enhance students' awareness, confidence, and fluency. Incorporating more detailed and interactive phonology lessons in English language teaching can support students in bridging the gap between theory and real-life communication, ultimately leading to better pronunciation, fluency, and overall oral competence.

CONCLUSION

The study of language sounds, known as phonology, is crucial for understanding how we construct and interpret spoken language. Syllables, as fundamental units of sound sequences, form the building blocks that hierarchically combine to create larger linguistic units: phonemes form morphemes, morphemes form words, and so on, ultimately leading to complete discourse. While this hierarchical order is theoretically ideal, practical speech often exhibits deviations.

A key concept within phonology **is** phonological awareness, which encompasses the ability to recognize and manipulate the sound segments in spoken words. This is distinct from, though inclusive of, phonemic awareness, which focuses on individual speech sounds. Strong phonological awareness is consistently linked to improved reading skills, as it enables individuals to break down words into their constituent sounds and connect these sounds to their written forms. Conversely, deficiencies in phonological awareness can hinder reading development, making it difficult to process words efficiently and transfer learned sound-letter correspondences to new vocabulary. Therefore, fostering phonological awareness, particularly in young children, is a critical step in developing literacy.

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