

## Segmental and Suprasegmental Production Skills of Ethno-Linguistic Groups of Students

**AIZA S. DALMAN**

Jose Rizal Memorial State University Siocon Campus  
Email: [ronnaizabelle04282011@gmail.com](mailto:ronnaizabelle04282011@gmail.com)

---

### *Abstract*

*The study aimed to determine the segmental and suprasegmental skills of ethnolinguistic groups of students, who were the Muslim and Subanen students, officially enrolled at Jose Rizal Memorial State University Siocon Campus, Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte. The descriptive survey method was utilized through an oral examination. There were 335 respondents involved in the study. The main statistical tools used were frequency count, percentage, chi-square and weighted mean. The findings revealed that the respondents of the study were dominated by ages 18-19, Muslim students, females, first year level and most of them took a Bachelor of Elementary Education. Moreover, most of the students were coming from the Poblacion. It was also revealed that the segmental and suprasegmental production skills of ethnolinguistic groups of students were moderately skillful in terms of vowel sounds and intonation and much skillful for consonant sounds and stress. It further found out that there was only a significant difference existed when analyzed as to the course taken. The findings of the study can lead to pedagogical implications. One possible implication is that the administration may serve this as basis to allocate funds to establish a speech laboratory equipped with speech facilities and equipment to serve as an avenue, where the students can practice and develop their production skills using the English language. Moreover, through the results of this study, the language teachers will be guided that they should give emphasis on the production of vowel sounds and intonation.*

**Keywords:** *Segmentals, Suprasegmentals, Vowels, Consonants, Stress, Intonation.*

---

### **Introduction**

Nowadays, English has been undoubtedly developing throughout the world. It has now become a Lingua Franca among different countries. The reasons these countries people are taught in the English language to serve as a tool to communicate and understand one another.

In Asia, the diffusion of English is developing. English is not only spoken in a country, but it is also a language for communications in the ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. As a result, English is a compulsory subject in schools, especially in primary and secondary schools and children in countries such as the Philippines, Singapore and other nations in Southeast Asia have to learn English (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

Meanwhile, many countries from Asia, including the Philippines have the ultimate goal to attain native-like fluency in English to be indistinguishable from native speakers, this dream has remained a dream and has

not come true, especially along pronunciation as native speakers usually identify them as non-native speakers because of their accent. A large number of second language learners believe that the main source of their communication problems is pronunciation (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014).

In Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte where Jose Rizal Memorial State University is located, the difficulty of the students in producing vowel and consonant sounds and following the patterns in stress and intonation have been encountered since the English language is only used by Muslim and Subanen students when they are inside the campus. Based on the observation of the researcher in her class, the students experienced difficulty in speaking using the target language. They deprived themselves from participating in discussions, especially when done orally for they cannot express their ideas fluently. Additionally, even in the reading selection, the production of speech sounds is inaccurate and the stress and intonation patterns are not followed correctly.

The university aims to produce globally competitive individuals through quality education. It has been the answer of the long felt need and dream of the Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte to have an institution of higher learning that offers quality yet affordable education to Muslim, Christian and Subanen students living in Siocon and in the nearby municipalities.

As the world turns competitive, it is imperative that students must know how to communicate fluently using the English language being the spoken language in the world. Thus, the university offers Speech and Oral Communication as one of the basic subjects in English to the different programs offered. Through this subject, the students would be able to enhance their speaking skills using the language. Moreover, the university included the JEEP (Job Enabling English Proficiency) for Education students only so that after the graduation, they can still land to possible job which is to become call center agents.

It is in this light that the researcher was prompted to conduct this study in order to determine the segmental and suprasegmental production skills of ethnolinguistic groups of students enrolled at Jose Rizal Memorial State University Siocon Campus.

## **Methods Used**

The study utilized the descriptive survey method of research. Data were gathered through an oral examination with the aid of teacher-made questionnaire to determine the profile and the segmental and suprasegmental production skills of ethnolinguistic groups of students. The statistical tools used to treat the data were frequency count, percentage, chi-square and weighted mean.

The study was conducted at Jose Rizal Memorial State University Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte. This is the only University among the so-called Triple S and B (Siocon, Sirawai, Sibuco and Baliguian) and has only three colleges: College of Education, College of Arts and Sciences and College of Industrial Technology. It was created under the Republic Act 9852 on December 2009. By its mandate, it has an authority to offer graduate and undergraduate courses in different fields like Education, Arts and Sciences, Criminology, Agriculture and other degree courses as the Board of Regents may deem necessary to carry its objectives. It also offers short-term vocational and technical courses in different fields of specialization.

The questionnaire which was used as the instrument in the study had three parts. The first part dealt with the profile of the respondents which included the age, sex, home location, ethnolinguistic group affiliation, course taken, and year level. The second part covered the drills on segmentals which consisted of vowels and consonants which were presented in minimal pairs. Moreover, the third part was on the suprasegmentals which consisted of stress and intonation. They comprised of words and sentences that

the students should pronounce properly and accurately and follow the correct patterns of each word and sentence. Each part of the questionnaire had only 10-item test. The words and sentences used in the questionnaire were taken from the book of Flores (2003).

Before the data gathering commenced, a letter of request to the Campus Administrator of the University was submitted to allow the researcher to administer the questionnaire to the respondents. Upon the approval, the researcher also asked permission from the Dean and instructors to conduct the questionnaire and do the oral examination. When the students were doing the oral examination, the researcher was also recording their voices using a video recorder. The administration of the examination lasted for three weeks for all of the respondents were taken, and the researcher was dependent on their availability.

After the conduct of the oral examination, the researcher checked, tallied, and then referred to the table of rubrics for the description of the performance. These were done to find out the segmental and suprasegmental production skills of the students in terms of the different indicators stated in the rubrics.

## Results and Discussion

### Profile of the Respondents

Of the 335 respondents, they were dominated by ages 18-19, Muslim students, females, first year level and most of them took a Bachelor of Elementary Education. Moreover, most of the students were coming from the Poblacion. The results mean that most of the students stopped studying after graduation, or they graduated high school very late. Yet, age did not hinder them to be persistent of their education, and they likely believe that they need a higher educational qualification in the courses they pursue. Furthermore, female students, regardless of group affiliation still dominated the number of males in the university which deviates the general knowledge that females long before should stay inside the house, tend their children and do the household chores. Meanwhile, most of the students enrolled in Bachelor of Elementary Education since they perceived it as one of the in-demand courses in the community.

Table 1 Segmental Production Skills of the Ethnolinguistic Groups of Students (Vowels)

Skills	Muslim		Subanen		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Total	Percent
VMS	90	33.83	29	42.03	119	35.52
MuS	49	18.42	12	17.39	61	18.21
MS	37	13.91	8	11.59	45	13.43
LS	30	11.28	8	11.59	38	11.34
NS	60	22.56	12	17.39	72	21.49
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100.00</b>
$\bar{X}$	<b>3.29</b>		<b>3.55</b>		<b>3.35</b>	

It is shown in Table 1 the segmental production skills of students in (vowels). The data show that Muslim students were moderately skillful while the Subanen students were much skillful which are evidently seen in their respective means 3.29 and 3.55 that fall within the ranges 2.61-3.40 and 3.41- 4.20, respectively. However, in totality, ethnolinguistic groups of students got the mean of 3.35 which was described as moderately skillful. This means that as to vowel sounds the students were having difficulty in producing them properly and accurately since the vowel letters of the English language have more than one sound which resulted to mispronunciation.

The finding is supported by Graham & Harris (2005) which states that vowel letters often have more than one possible sound, depending on the surrounding letters. Due to this variability, teachers and researchers agree that students have more difficulty learning the sounds of vowels than for consonants. Students who struggle with reading – particularly students with disabilities and students who have less experience with printed words – may be confused by the multiple sounds that are possible for the vowel letters, so they make better progress when they learn and apply just one vowel sound at a time. The rationale for teaching short vowels before long vowels are twofold: to reduce confusability and to demonstrate the rule-based nature of long vowels. (L2) learners encounter many problems in acquiring target language pronunciation accuracy, mostly because of the differences between the sound systems of their first language (L1) and their (L2).

Table 2 Segmental Production Skills of the Ethnolinguistic Groups of Students (Consonants)

Skills	Muslim		Subanen		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Total	Percent
VMS	163	61.28	44	63.77	207	61.79
MuS	33	12.41	10	14.49	43	12.84
MS	15	5.64	3	4.35	18	5.37
LS	12	4.51	3	4.35	15	4.48
NS	43	16.16	9	13.04	52	15.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100.00</b>
$\bar{X}$	<b>3.98</b>		<b>4.12</b>		<b>4.01</b>	

The data show that Muslim and Subanen students were much skillful which are evidently seen in their respective means 3.98 and 4.12 that fall within the ranges 3.41- 4.20 (Table 2) . However, in totality, both ethnolinguistic groups of students gained the mean of 4.01 which was described as much skillful.

This implies that as to consonant sounds, Muslim and Subanen students were able to produce the sounds properly and accurately. This means that for them, consonants are easier to produce than the vowels which is substantiated by Zimmer (2014). According to her, consonant sounds make speech clear, crisp and intelligible, which make the speech easier to understand. Consonants are easier to learn than vowels. There is usually only one way to pronounce each consonant sound. Once you learn to position your teeth, tongue and lips for a consonant sound, you can insert it into any word and be fairly accurate.

Table 3 Suprasegmental Production Skills of the Ethnolinguistic Groups of Students (Stress)

Skills	Muslim		Subanen		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Total	Percent
VMS	68	25.56	22	31.88	90	26.86
MuS	84	31.58	24	34.78	108	32.24
MS	50	18.80	15	21.74	65	19.40
LS	20	7.52	7	10.14	27	8.06
NS	44	16.54	1	1.45	45	13.43
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100.00</b>
$\bar{X}$	<b>3.42</b>		<b>3.86</b>		<b>3.51</b>	

The data shown in Table 3 reveals that Muslim and Subanen students were much skillful as evidently seen in their respective means 3.42 and 3.86 that fall within the ranges 3.41- 4.20. Hence, in totality, both

ethnolinguistic groups of students gained the mean of 3.51 which was described as much skillful. This entails that as to stress, Muslim and Subanen students were able to follow the proper stress patterns of words which means that somehow their native languages and the English language have similarities in stress patterns.

In contrary, Elder, Golombek, Nguyen, & Ingram (2005) refuted the finding that the students were much skillful in stress. They point out that many learners of English have word stress production errors. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to draw learners' awareness of all features of word stress.

Table 4 Suprasegmental Production Skills of the Ethnolinguistic Groups of Students (Intonation)

Skills	Muslim		Subanen		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Total	Percent
VMS	6	2.26	4	5.80	10	2.98
MuS	54	20.30	13	18.84	67	20.00
MS	106	39.85	36	52.17	142	42.39
LS	70	26.32	9	13.04	79	23.58
NS	30	11.28	7	10.14	37	11.04
<b>Total</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>100.00</b>
$\bar{X}$	<b>2.76</b>		<b>2.91</b>		<b>2.80</b>	

The data show that Muslim and Subanen students were moderately skillful which are evidently seen in their respective means 2.76 and 2.97 that fall within the ranges 2.61-3.40 (Table 4). Hence, in totality, both ethnolinguistic groups of students gained the mean of 2.80 which was described as moderately skillful.

This implies that as to intonation, Muslim and Subanen students were having difficulty following its proper patterns. This means that though the students know the patterns, but when they speak, they will then be misguided of their first languages since according to Amer (2010), it is clear that English intonation is restricted to English. It is not the same as any of other's language intonation. Therefore, it is wrong to believe that intonation is the same in all languages. For that reason, the learner should learn the type of intonation, the functions and the meaning of English tones. Moreover, the finding of the present study is corroborated by the study of Flores (2009) which revealed that suprasegmental phonemes are acquired yet not fully mastered by the students. He also pointed out that students need to be given more activities and opportunities where they could develop their skills in observing proper stress and intonation in any given utterance since according to Fries as cited by him, suprasegmentals are very important because a change of stress is a change of meaning as well as in intonation.

Table 5 Test of Difference on the Segmental and Suprasegmental Production Skills of Ethnolinguistic Groups of Students When Analyzed as to Course Taken

Course Taken (Segmentals – Vowel)	Performance	Muslim	Subanen	Total	X <sup>2</sup>
Education	High	52	7	59	<b>48.600*</b>
	Low	20	5	25	
Arts	High	46	13	59	
	Low	24	7	31	
Business	High	8	2	10	
	Low	6	1	7	
Allied Health	High	30	1	31	

Sciences	Low	19	1	20	
Agriculture	High	8	14	22	
	Low	4	7	11	
Industrial	High	29	6	35	
Technology	Low	20	5	25	
<b>Total</b>		<b>266</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>335</b>	
<b>(Segmentals – Consonant)</b>					
Education	High	50	6	56	
	Low	22	6	28	
Arts	High	40	12	52	
	Low	30	8	38	
Business	High	7	2	9	
	Low	7	1	8	
Allied Health	High	29	1	30	<b>50.466*</b>
Sciences	Low	20	1	21	
Agriculture	High	7	13	20	
	Low	5	8	13	
Industrial	High	31	6	37	
Technology	Low	18	5	23	
<b>Total</b>		<b>266</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>335</b>	
<b>(Suprasegmentals-Stress)</b>					
Education	High	48	6	54	
	Low	24	6	30	
Arts	High	38	12	50	
	Low	32	8	40	
Business	High	7	2	9	
	Low	7	1	8	
Allied Health	High	28	1	29	<b>50.268*</b>
Sciences	Low	21	1	22	
Agriculture	High	7	14	21	
	Low	5	7	12	
Industrial Technology	High	28	6	34	
	Low	21	5	26	
<b>Total</b>		<b>266</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>335</b>	
<b>(Suprasegmentals-Intonation)</b>					
Education	High	14	4	18	
	Low	58	2	60	
Arts	High	18	6	24	
	Low	52	14	66	
Business	High	4	1	5	
	Low	10	2	12	
Allied Health	High	12	1	13	<b>63.78*</b>
Sciences	Low	37	1	38	
Agriculture	High	5	5	10	
	Low	7	16	23	
Industrial	High	13	5	18	
Technology	Low	36	3	39	
<b>Total</b>		<b>266</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>335</b>	

**Legend:**

d.f.	=	11
c.v.	=	19.675
ns	=	not significant (HO not rejected)
*	=	significant (HO rejected)

Table 5 shows the computed chi-square value of 48.600, 50.466, 50.268 and 63.78 exceeded the critical value of 19.675 at 0.05 level of significance with 11 degrees of freedom. This leads to a rejection of the null hypothesis of no significant difference. There is therefore a significant difference on the performance of Muslim and Subanen students on segmentals (vowel and consonant) and suprasegmentals (stress and intonation) when analyzed as to the course taken. This means that the courses taken is an indicator of difference on the performance of the students. This indicates that the students enrolled in different courses differ in segmental and suprasegmental production skills. Some of them faced difficulty in the production of the sounds and patterns since different courses have different priorities to learn and various skills to master as to the focus of the courses. This means that not all courses give importance to the proper production of sounds. Furthermore, they presumably have different speech production foundations and experiences.

## **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of the study, the respondents of the study are at the ideal age for college education, female-dominated, and most of them aspire to become teachers. Moreover, the students from different colleges taking different courses have varied segmental and suprasegmental production skills since they presumably have different speech foundations and speech enhancement experiences. It is also concluded that the ethnolinguistic groups of students find vowels as hard-to-pronounced sounds since a single vowel letter has multiple sounds, unlike consonant sounds. Furthermore, they have difficulty in intonation since this is an utterance-based while stress is a syllable-based.

However, during the analysis as to the test of difference, age, sex, group affiliation, year level, and home location were no longer included in the presentation in this study because they bear no significant difference, which means that these will not be indicators that the two ethnolinguistic groups of students differ in the production skills of suprasegmentals and segmental.

## **Pedagogical Implications**

The findings of the study can also lead to pedagogical implications. One possible implication is that the administration may serve this as basis to allocate funds to establish a speech laboratory equipped with speech facilities and equipment to serve as an avenue, where the students can practice and develop their pronunciation using the English language. Moreover, through the results of this study, the language teachers will be guided that they should give emphasis on the production of vowel sounds and intonation.

## **References**

- Amer, W. (2010) Issues in comparative linguistics, Gaza: IUG Print.
- Azeem, e.al., (2011). English language policy in Malaysia: Demystifying the diverse demands of nationalism and modernisation. In Saran Kaur Gill (Ed.). Special Flores, Carmelita et. Al. (2003). Effective speech communication. Published by National Book Store. Quad Alpha Centrum Street, Mandaluyong City. IV Edition. issue on the English language situation in Malaysia: Policy, nativization and standards. Asian Englishes.

- Elder, C., Golombek, P., Nguyen, T. T., & Ingram, J. (2005). Vietnamese acquisition of English word stress. *Tesol Quarterly*, 39(2), 309-319.
- Graham, S., & Harris, K. (2005). *Writing better: effective strategies for teaching students with learning difficulties*. Brookes Publishing Company. PO Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285.
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2010). English as a lingua franca in ASEAN: A multilingual model. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Wa-Mbaleka, Safary (2014). European Journal of Research and Reflection in Educational Sciences Vol. 2 No. 4, 2014 ISSN 2056-5852 Progressive Academic Publishing, UK Page 17 [www.idpublications.org](http://www.idpublications.org) 84
- World Bank (2012). "Chad–Education Sector Reform Project (PARSET)" Project Appraisal Document, Report No.23797.
- Zimmer, Sandra (2014). Accent reduction: Why pronouncing consonants is more important than pronouncing vowels. <http://www.self-expression.com/speaking-freely>

