



## The Plural Marker '<-s >' of English & '<-ha? >' of Limbu : Comparison based on Pronunciation

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the pronunciation of the plural marker <-s> pronounced by the Yakthung/Limbu-speaking English learners. Drawing on a qualitative research design (Taylor, 2016), the study is based on data collected from twenty Grade 8 students at Phidim Secondary School, where English- and Nepali-medium classes are conducted in parallel. In addition, three English teachers participated in the study. As noted by Dirsa and Andika (2022), teachers' practices significantly shape learning outcomes, as they serve as facilitators, mentors, and evaluators in the classroom. The findings indicate that linguistic diversity and instances of overgeneralization (Baihaqi, 2020) pose challenges for learners' pronunciation of plural forms; however, these difficulties can be addressed through creative and targeted instructional strategies. The study highlights the need for both teachers and learners to be aware of pronunciation issues during the teaching-learning process.*

**Keywords:** habit formation; markedness; pronunciation; qualitative research; rhoticity; rule system; stakeholders

### INTRODUCTION

Spelling and pronunciation are distinct linguistic phenomena, yet they remain closely interconnected, particularly in English. This relationship is comparatively less direct in Limbu and several other languages spoken in Nepal. Language is the primary medium through which human beings exchange ideas, emotions, and intentions. As Chomsky (1965) posits, language is a system of rules that enables individuals to generate and comprehend an infinite number of sentences. Through language, we express and interpret threats, promises, greetings, well-wishes, commands, gratitude, and beliefs—all of which shape human

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behavior. Halliday (1975) further emphasizes that language serves multiple functions, including expressing emotions, facilitating interpersonal interaction, and transmitting information. In essence, language allows us to articulate physical, mental, and psychological experiences.

The Limbu language is classified as a pronominalized language (Grierson, 1909), meaning that both the subject and predicate may be encoded within a single word. This structural characteristic distinguishes Limbu from English and has implications for how Limbu-speaking learners acquire English pronunciation and morphosyntax, including the production of plural markers.

Pronunciation constitutes a core component of language (Darcy, 2018). In English, several phonological rules govern the formation and pronunciation of plural nouns (Chen, 2020). Pronunciation-related challenges among second and foreign language learners have increasingly become a global concern. Within this discourse, two contrasting perspectives exist. One school of thought views pronunciation as a critical element of language learning that requires explicit instructional focus, while the other considers it a secondary concern.

This study explores the pronunciation challenges encountered by Yakthung/Limbu speakers in learning English, with a particular focus on the plural marker <-s>. In English, this morpheme is realized in multiple ways -s, z and -iz, depending on the phonological environment. In contrast, the Limbu plural marker <-haʔ> is consistently pronounced in a single, invariant form. This structural difference creates a unique learning challenge for Limbu-speaking learners as they navigate the variable phonology of English pluralization.

In the case of pronouncing the plural marker <-s> in English and <-haʔ> in Limbu, there is a fundamental difference between these two languages. If the same plural marker is pronounced differently in different situations in English, it may create problems for those whose language doesn't have such a phonological system. Those things make learning difficult and even vague.

This paper examines the pronunciation of the English plural marker <-s> and the Limbu plural marker <-haʔ>, highlighting the phonological differences that learners must navigate. By presenting these contrasts, the study aims to enhance learners' understanding of the pronunciation systems of both English and Limbu, regardless of their linguistic background or proficiency level.

The scope of the research is delimited to a) twenty Grade 8 students from Phidim Secondary School and b) the pronunciation of the English plural marker <-s> and the Limbu plural marker <-haʔ>.

## Theoretical Underpinnings

This research is grounded in a multifaceted theoretical framework that explains the pronunciation challenges arising from first language (L1) influence. The primary lens is Optimality Theory (OT), which posits that learners unconsciously select the 'optimal' pronunciation from a set of competing phonological constraints. For Limbu speakers, the

invariant pronunciation of their native plural marker <-ha?> creates a strong constraint that is often incorrectly applied to the English <-s>, which varies as /s/, /z/, or /ɪz/. This relates directly to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, which predicts specific learning difficulties by systematically comparing the phonological systems of the learner's L1 (Limbu) and the target L2 (English). The persistent nature of these mispronunciations is further explained by Habit Formation Theory, which underscores how entrenched L1 phonetic habits require deliberate, repetitive practice to override. Finally, the analysis operates within a morphophonological framework, examining how the abstract plural morpheme is phonetically realized in different linguistic environments, thereby connecting grammatical structure to sound patterns.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research methodology (Elmusharaf, 2023), which involved site visits and direct interaction with participants to understand the authentic challenges in pronunciation. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of how the plural marker suffix <-s> is practiced and taught in real classroom settings, particularly among basic-level English learners in Nepal. A qualitative design was chosen because it prioritizes understanding phenomena from the participants' own perspectives, capturing rich, contextual data on behaviors, experiences, and social processes (Creswell, 2014). This was especially relevant for examining pronunciation—a skill deeply influenced by first language habits and classroom dynamics.

The participants consisted of twenty Grade 8 students from a Nepali medium section of Phidim Secondary School, selected purposefully to represent Limbu-speaking English learners. Additionally, three English teachers from the same school were included to provide insight into instructional practices. Data collection was designed to capture both learner performance and teacher awareness. Students were asked to pronounce three target words—*hats*, *bags*, and *houses*, which were carefully chosen to elicit the three allomorphic sounds of the plural <-s>: /s/, /z/, and /ɪz/. This oral task aimed to assess whether learners naturally distinguished between these phonetic variations. Following this, students completed a written transcription task using the Devanagari script, where they converted singular nouns into plural forms, following a provided example (e.g., *mat* → *mats*). Seating was arranged with one student per bench to minimize peer influence and ensure individual responses.

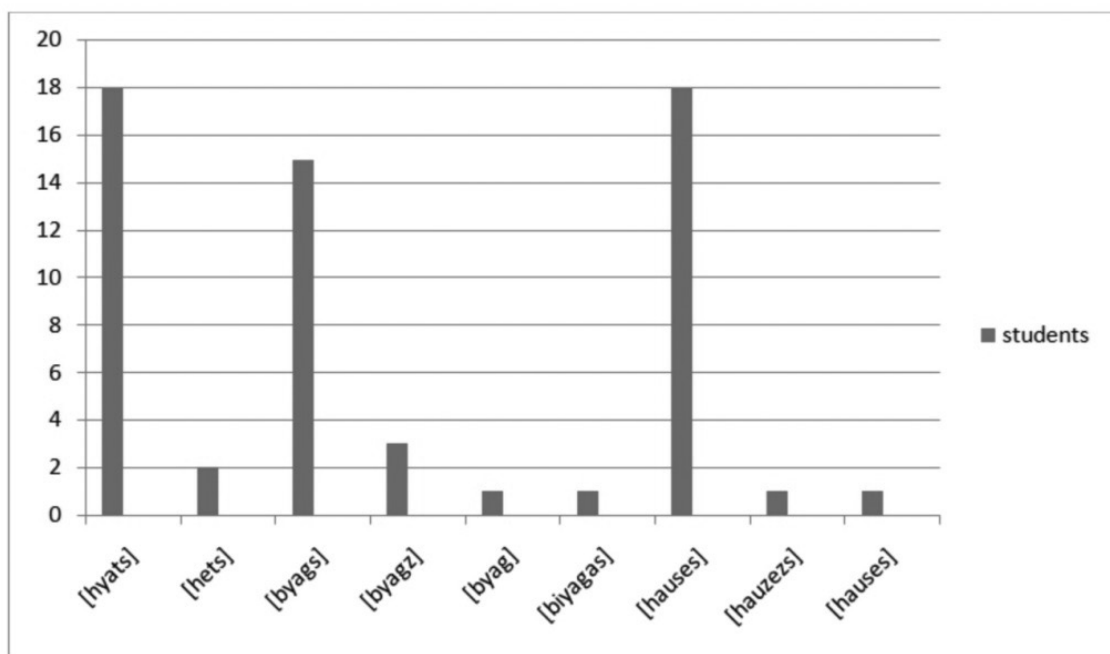
The teachers completed a parallel but more advanced questionnaire. They were first asked to pronounce the same three words aloud, allowing the researcher to assess their own phonetic accuracy. They were then required to transcribe the words using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), or Devanagari if IPA was unfamiliar, followed by a reflective question on their instructional methods for teaching the plural <-s> in speech. This two-tiered approach—combining oral performance, phonetic transcription, and pedagogical reflection—enabled a multidimensional analysis of how pronunciation is modeled, perceived, and taught in a Limbu-speaking EFL context.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The collected data underwent a structured qualitative analysis process involving inspection, cleansing, transformation, and modeling. This systematic approach enabled the identification of meaningful patterns, supported the drawing of evidence-based conclusions, and informed pedagogical decision-making. The major findings of the study are summarized as follows.

### Figure 1

*Students' pronunciation (initial phase)*



Seventeen out of twenty students pronounced 'hats' as [hyats], two as [hets] and one as [hiyat]. Three out of twenty students pronounced bags as [byagz], one as [biyags], one as [bayags], one as [byag] and fourteen as [byags]. One out of twenty students pronounced 'houses' as [haus], one as [hauzezs], fifteen as [hauses] and three as [hauses].

Seventeen out of twenty students could pronounce the word 'hats' properly. Only three out of twenty students could pronounce the word 'bags' properly. Unfortunately, no one could pronounce the word 'houses.'

The teacher is the key person in delivering knowledge and skills. The students learn as the teacher teaches. So, the teacher's classroom performances must be proper, as can be seen in Table 1.

**Table 1***Pronunciation made by the English teachers*

SN	Name of the teachers	words/pronunciation		
		hats	bags	houses
1	T1	[hæts]	[bægz]	[hʌʊdʒɪz]
2	T2	[hɑts(s)]	[bags(s)]	[houses(iz)]
3	T3	[hɑts(s)]	[Bags(s)]	[Houses(iz)]

Competency has a very strong role in learning. It is also greatly associated with teaching and evaluation. If evaluation is not conducted properly, the other factors (i.e., teaching and learning process, etc.) are automatically affected. Yasmin (2023) says that an exam-oriented education system badly hampers the learners' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor competencies.

McCarthy (2025) makes clear that constraints on the output of the grammar influence phonological and syntactic processes. English pluralizes 'hat' to 'hats' (s) but 'bag' to 'bags' (z) due to voicing preferences.

Overgeneralization (Dirsa, 2022) is that a part of the case where the learners learn things without comprehending the word-reference relationship. They also try to apply the same grammatical rule in different situations as can be seen in example (1a-c).

1) English environment: the plural marker <-s>

a) *hat-s*

an object (shaped covering) that is worn on head-PL

hats/hæts/

the plural marker '-s' is just after voiceless sound [t]'

b) *dog-s*

a four-footed barking animal -s

dogs /d ɡz/

the plural marker '-s' is just after voiced sound [g]'

c) *horse-s*

a four-footed animal which is used to ride-PL

horses /hɔ :rs/ (rhotic), and /hɔ :s/ (non-rhotic)

the plural marker '-s' is just after voiceless sound [s]'

(1) Yakthung/Limbu environment: the plural marker <-haʔ>

a. *n-haʔ*

horse-PL

nhaʔ the plural marker '-haʔ' is just after voiced sound [n]'

'horses'

b. *pit-haʔ*

COW-PL

pithaʔ the plural marker '-haʔ' is just after voiced sound [t]'

cows /pithaʔ/

In English, the morpheme -s is added to the base-form noun to make it plural (Adejare, 2019). As a result, the unmarked singular can be converted into the marked plural. From a phonological point of view, the plural marker phoneme -s is realized as /s/, /z/, and /ɪz/ based on whether the noun ends with a voiceless noun-sibilant, voiced noun-sibilant, or vowel or sibilant.

ESL learners feel comfortable producing [s] ('voiceless-s'/example 1, a). If they try to apply the same rule in other cases (1b and c), too, that will be overgeneralization.

The Limbu phonological process is different from that of English. Unlike English, in the Limbu language, the plural marker <-haʔ> is pronounced in the same way. This habit of applying the plural marker rule is reflected in English; as a result, the Limbu-speaking English learners mispronounce the plural marker <-s>.

Beyond Limbu: All the languages that are spoken in Nepal, e.g., Nepali, different pachhas of Rai, etc., also have the same phonological system in terms of the plural marker '-hɽu' in Nepali (as in *cəra-həru* 'birds') and '-tsɽ' in Koyee (as in *silpi-tsa* 'birds') (Rai, 2015).

### Plural Marker and Plural Marking System in English

The plural marking system in English primarily involves adding the suffix <-s> or <-es> to nouns, with variations based on phonological and morphological rules (Quirk et al., 1985). While regular nouns follow predictable patterns (e.g., cat → cats, box → boxes), irregular nouns undergo changes such as vowel shifts (man → men) or remain unchanged (sheep → sheep). These complexities pose challenges for learners whose native languages, like Limbu, follow different pluralization rules.

There are three ways of pronouncing the plural marker (plural suffix) <-s> (Agustina et al, 2024) as shown below:

#### Rule:1

If the final sound of a word is /p/ or /t/ or /k/ or /θ/ or /f/ (voiceless sound), then the plural marker 's' attached to the noun is pronounced /s/.

#### Rule:2

If the sound of a word is /b/ or /d/ or /g/ or /ð/ or /v/ or /n/ or /m/ or /l/ or /r/ or any vowel sound (voiced), then the plural marker 's' attached to the noun is pronounced /z/.

#### Rule:3

If the sound of a word is /s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/ and their voiced counterparts /z/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/ then the plural marker '-s' is attached to the noun, pronounced /ɪz/.

In the Nepali language, we can make the plural simply by adding the plural marker -hɽu to the noun. However, the plural marker/suffix is used according to the linguistic environment as can be seen below:

- Noun + -hɽu => plural noun, e.g., keta 'boy' + hɽu 'PL marker' => ketahɽu 'boys'
- Because of the plural marker, hɽu the singular demonstrative noun changes into a plural demonstrative noun, e.g., j/yi 'these' + goru 'ox' + hɽu 'PL. marker' => j/yigoruhɽu

'these oxen' [y/jo → j/yi]

- A singular noun can function as a plural noun when it is preceded by a numeral, e.g. aṭ<sup>h</sup> 'eight +dīn 'day' = >aṭ<sup>h</sup>dīn 'eight days'. Here, in Nepali, the plural marker is optional, whereas in English, the plural marker is compulsory.
- The plural marker -hΛru is compulsory in Nepali when the noun is qualified by d<sup>h</sup>erai, e.g., d<sup>h</sup>erai 'many'+pustak 'book'+hΛru 'plural marker' = d<sup>h</sup>eraiṣustakhΛru 'many books.'
- the genitive case <-ko> (of the first noun) becomes <-ka>, then the plural marker -hΛru is added to the second noun, e.g.  
-keṭiko ama 'girl's mother'  
-keṭika amahΛru 'girl's mothers.'

In Limbu, the way we say a word by producing the distinctive sound of a language is commonly termed pronunciation. Yates (2002) says that pronunciation refers to uttering sounds for communication. If the meaning is not understood, we won't know that the pronunciation is correct.

In Limbu, the pronouns show the plural form, and <-haʔ> is the basic suffix to form plural. If the suffix-si is added to the adjective, a plural is formed. If we apply this normal format in verb <mε+stem+ /e etc.>, then the plural form can be formed (Lawati, 2025 AD).

3) Pronoun: aniʔ

a) Adjective: nu:māsi  
beautiful- PL

Beautiful (ladies)

b) Verb: mε-pe [mεbe]  
they-go/pst  
'They went.'

When <-haʔ> is added to the noun, then the singular noun becomes plural. Unlike English, the pronunciation of the plural marker <-haʔ> remains the same, as can be seen (4).

- (4) a. l tchanakca 'one pen'  
c. netchinakcahaʔ 'two pens'  
d. sumsinakcahaʔ 'three pens'  
e. yɔ:knakcahaʔ 'many pens'

The plural marker <-haʔ> is the plural suffix in Limbu. In certain situations, it is not necessarily used when the plurality of the noun is shown by the verb (van Driem, 1987, p.29). As a result, it is not heard, e.g.

(5) nichamsa-haʔ mε-pe:ɔ> nichamsa -haʔ mεbe:  
student-PL. nsA-go/PT  
'Students went.'

The suffix <-m> also indicates the plurality except for the third person (van Driem, 1987, p.101).

- 6) a. First person  
a-lεr-ɔ-u-m-si-m-ɔ-ɔ => alεrumsim  
1-give up-NPT-3p-pA-nsP-pA-i-PF

'We<sup>pi</sup> shall give up them.'

- b. Second person  
*kɛ-n nch-ø-u-m-si-m-ø => kɛn nchumsim*  
 2-be 1left over-PT-3P-pA-nsP-pA-PF  
 'You<sup>p</sup> saved them (e.g., money, etc).'

The morpheme of agent non-singularity takes place in 1→→2 forms, as can be seen in (7a-b).

- 7) a. *cum-nɛ-ø-tchi-ge-ø*  
 meet-1→2-NPT-nsA-e-PP  
 'We'll meet you.'
- b. *ha:-mʔna-ø-ø*  
 divide-1 piece/PT-P-PF  
 'We<sup>pe</sup> divided [something].'

We find variants while dealing <-haʔ> with the phonemes /k, t, p/. When <-haʔ> precedes the sounds /k/, /t/ and /p/, they glide into [khaʔ], [thaʔ] and [p<sup>h</sup>aʔ] respectively as can be seen

- 8) a. -k+haʔ => khaʔ  
*mik-haʔ => mikhaʔ*  
 eye- PL  
 'eyes'
- b. -t+haʔ => thaʔ  
*pit-haʔ => pitthaʔ*  
 cow-PL  
 'pitthaʔ'
- c. -p+haʔ => phaʔ  
*hup-haʔ => hupphaʔ*  
 knot-P  
 'knots'

In Limbu, /k/, /kh/, /ŋ/, /c/, /t/, /th/, /n/, /p/, /ph/, /m/, /y/, /l/, /w/, /s/ and /h/ are found word initially and /k/, /ŋ/, /t/, /n/, /p/, /m/ and /ʔ/ are found word finally (Lawati, 2021). The detailed information is given (10a-s).

- 10) a. *kakwa-haʔ => kakwahaʔ (a + haʔ)*  
 potato-PL  
 'potatoes'
- b. *khɛra-haʔ => khɛrahaʔ (a + haʔ)*  
 rumour- PL  
 'rumours'
- c. *ŋa-haʔ => ŋahaʔ (a + haʔ)*  
 fish - PL  
 'Fishes (fish more than one species)'
- d. *cɛbo:t-haʔ => cɛbo:tthaʔ (also 'cɛbo:thaʔ') (t + haʔ)*  
 throat - PL



- e. 'throats'  
*t ŋme-haʔ => t ŋmehaʔ (e + haʔ)*  
 treaty- PL  
 'treaties'
- f. *thaʔpa-haʔ => thaʔpahaʔ (a + haʔ)*  
 step-father- PL  
 'step-fathers'
- g. *namlo:tti phurŋ-haʔ => namlo:tti phurŋhaʔ (i + haʔ)*  
 head-flower- PL  
 'head-flowers'
- h. *p :t-haʔ => p :tthaʔ (also 'p :thaʔ') (t + haʔ)*  
 mushroom- PL  
 'mushrooms'
- i. *pakco-haʔ => pakcohaʔ (o + haʔ)*  
 little finger- PL  
 'little fingers'
- j. *phak-haʔ => phakkhaʔ (also 'phakhaʔ') (k + haʔ)*  
 pig- PL  
 'pigs'
- k. *ma-haʔ => mahaʔ (a + haʔ)*  
 mother- PL  
 'mothers'
- l. *y k-haʔ => y kkhaʔ (also 'y khaʔ') (k + haʔ)*  
 fort- PL  
 'forts'
- m. *l k-haʔ => l kkhaʔ (also 'l khaʔ') (k + haʔ)*  
 share- PL  
 'shares'
- n. *laŋ-haʔ => laŋhaʔ (ŋ + haʔ)*  
 leg- PL  
 'legs'
- o. *liʔ-haʔ => liʔhaʔ (ʔ + haʔ)*  
 bow- PL  
 'bows'
- p. *wa:tti-haʔ => wa:tthihaʔ (i + haʔ)*  
 ornament- PL  
 'ornaments'
- q. *s ksa-haʔ => s ksa-haʔ (a + haʔ)*  
 letter (language)- PL  
 'letters'
- r. *sam-haʔ => samhaʔ (m + haʔ)*  
 spirit- PL  
 'spirits'
- s. *hap-haʔ => happhaʔ (also 'haphaʔ') (ʔ + haʔ)*  
 nest- PL  
 'nests'

Language is inherently tradition-based and consists of core components such as phonemes, morphemes, lexemes, syntax, grammar, semantics, pragmatics, and context. This section focuses specifically on morphophonology. However, many learners – and the curriculum itself – lack adequate attention to these foundational elements.

Pronunciation comprises two major components (Kelly, 2006): phonemes and suprasegmental features. Phonemes include vowels (monophthongs and diphthongs) and consonants (voiced and voiceless), while suprasegmental features encompass intonation and stress at both the word and sentence levels. Mastery of these elements is essential for producing accurate and intelligible speech.

### Strategies for Implementing Pronunciation Development

Effective pronunciation instruction requires structured strategies that align with learners' linguistic backgrounds and learning needs. In the context of teaching the English plural marker -s to Limbu-speaking students, pronunciation practice should involve explicit instruction, auditory discrimination exercises, and communicative activities. Research suggests that incorporating phonetic training, minimal pair drills, and multisensory techniques can significantly enhance learners' pronunciation accuracy (Derwing & Munro, 2015). Moreover, using interactive methods such as peer practice, teacher modelling, and corrective feedback fosters an engaging learning environment. By implementing these evidence-based strategies, teachers can help students overcome pronunciation challenges and improve their spoken English proficiency. This research prescribes action research as a method.

#### Action Research Cycle

Action research (AR) is an ongoing process since it (AR) functions in a circle: planning -> acting -> observing -> reflecting. Research is done, the fundamental problem is found out, it is implemented, and it is observed whether it is working or not. Finally, the researcher tries to reflect on whether the problem has been solved or not. The main purpose of action research (Stringer 2014) is to increase the effectiveness of the work. It finds out the problem and the solution. If the problem is partially solved, the cycle will go round again and again until the the solution is met.

- **Problem Identification**

To diagnose students' actual pronunciation, the teacher should crack a common tongue twister just to refresh their tired minds. Then he/she should start asking them to read out some words that end in /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /θ/, /b/, /d/, /g/, /ð/, /v/, /n/, /m/, /l/, /r/ and /s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/+s to check their pronunciation output. This helps to identify students' problems.

- **Intervention**

The teacher should apply the following activities for at least one week. If no change is found, then he/she should replan and redo the action research cycle. To do so, he/she would do

these activities:

### **Demonstration-1**

By displaying flashcards, the teacher should read out (pronounce) the words that end in /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /θ/ voiceless sounds. There would be a comparison between the English and Limbu languages, too. The previous day's practices should be repeated the next day as an evaluation. That day would decide whether the objective is achieved or not.

### **Demonstration-2**

By displaying flashcards, the teacher should read out (pronounce) the words that end in /b/, /d/, /g/, /ð/, /v/, /n/, /m/, /l/, and /r/ voiced sounds. There would be a comparison between the English and Limbu languages, too. The previous day's practice would be repeated the next day as an evaluation. That day would decide whether the objective was achieved or not.

### **Demonstration-3**

To support pronunciation development, the teacher should begin by displaying flashcards and modelling the pronunciation of words ending in sibilants—both voiceless (/s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/) and voiced (/z/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/). This activity should include a brief comparison of English and Limbu pronunciation patterns. In the next stage, the teacher should integrate technology by discussing "*Problems in Pronouncing the English Plural Marker -s for Limbu-Speaking Basic English Learners*" using a laptop and projector through PowerPoint and by showing relevant YouTube videos. Students should also be guided to search for instructional videos independently.

The following day, the teacher should repeat the previous activities as a form of reinforcement and evaluation. Throughout the process, the teacher must encourage rather than discourage learners, listen actively, and maintain a positive, welcoming attitude.

A friendly teacher-student relationship is essential, combined with constructive, positive correction. Negative feedback can demotivate learners, whereas intrinsic encouragement fosters long-term motivation (Williams, 2011). The teacher's responsibility extends beyond supporting responsive students to also actively engaging less responsive or introverted learners. Understanding learners' home environments and sociolinguistic backgrounds further enhances effective instruction.

## **Pronunciation Bingo**

Pronunciation Bingo is an engaging and interactive classroom technique that supports students in distinguishing and articulating challenging sounds, particularly the English plural marker -s. The activity promotes active listening, phoneme recognition, and repeated oral practice—key components of effective pronunciation instruction (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). By including words representing the three plural allomorphs (/s/, /z/, /ɪz/), learners can notice pronunciation patterns and reinforce them through meaningful play. The repetitive and enjoyable nature of the game enhances retention and sustains motivation.

Language games (LGs) are widely recognized for increasing learner engagement and

creativity. Once learners understand the structure of one game, they can often generate similar variations. In Pronunciation Bingo, students receive Bingo sheets containing words such as *desk* or *beak*. The teacher presents a sound flashcard – e.g., /e/ – and students must identify and display the corresponding word on their sheet. The game may be played individually, in pairs, or in groups. As Wright (2006) notes, LGs allow extensive opportunities for oral practice and collaboration. Throughout the activity, the teacher must provide clear guidance on the relationship between graphemes, phones, and phonemes.

### Rhyming Activities

Rhyming activities also support pronunciation development by engaging learners in repeated sound patterns, which reinforce phonetic accuracy, stress, and intonation (Ihsani et al., 2025). For Limbu-speaking learners who struggle with English plural endings, rhymes that highlight plural forms help draw attention to the contrasting allomorphs of *-s*. Teachers can introduce paired rhyming words such as *say-day* or *cow-how*, and students repeat after the teacher to practise target sounds:

T: *maps* [mʌps]

Ss: *maps* [mʌps]

T: *dogs* [dɔːgz]

Ss: *dogs* [dɔːgz]

T: *louses* [laʊ.sɪz]

Ss: *louses* [laʊ.sɪz]

These activities help learners internalize plural marker pronunciation through modeling, repetition, and guided practice.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study concludes that the pronunciation of the English plural marker *<-s>* presents a significant and systematic challenge for Limbu-speaking EFL learners, primarily due to phonological transfer and overgeneralization stemming from their first language. In Limbu, the plural suffix *<-haʔ>* is phonetically invariant, whereas English employs three allomorphs (/s/, /z/, /ɪz/) governed by morphophonological rules. The research revealed that learners consistently overgeneralized the voiceless /s/ sound, likely because it is perceptually salient and aligns with the simpler, fixed pattern of their L1. Furthermore, teacher data indicated varying levels of metalinguistic awareness and inconsistent instructional focus on these phonetic distinctions, suggesting that pronunciation is often not addressed with explicit, rule-based pedagogy. The findings underscore that this is not merely a learner issue but a systemic educational gap. A lack of targeted phonetic training, coupled with traditional, exam-oriented teaching methods, fails to equip students with the auditory discrimination

and articulatory skills necessary to master English phonology. However, the action research interventions demonstrated that structured, contrastive, and engaging instruction—using techniques such as minimal pair drills, multimedia aids, and pronunciation games—can lead to noticeable improvement, confirming that these challenges are remediable with informed pedagogical strategies.

The implications of this research extend to multiple stakeholders in language education:

- a. **Instructional Practice:** Educators should transition from implicit modeling to systematic, rule-based pronunciation instruction. This entails integrating explicit phonemic awareness activities and contrastive analysis of L1 and L2 phonological systems into regular lesson planning.
- b. **Curriculum and Materials Development:** There is a compelling need for context-sensitive curricular design. Syllabi and teaching materials intended for Limbu-speaking and other Nepalese learners should incorporate dedicated phonological components that preemptively address predictable L1 interference patterns, including the plural allomorphy.
- c. **Teacher Education:** Pre-service and in-service teacher training programs must prioritize the development of teachers' phonetic and phonological competence. Training should equip educators with both the theoretical knowledge and practical methodologies required to diagnose and address pronunciation errors effectively.
- d. **Methodological Innovation:** The efficacy of communicative, student-centered techniques is corroborated. The adoption of technology-enhanced tools, gamified learning, and action research cycles is recommended to create an engaging and metacognitive learning environment that fosters consistent practice and receptive feedback.
- e. **Avenues for Further Research:** This investigation underscores the necessity for expanded scholarly inquiry into cross-linguistic phonological influence within Nepal's multilingual landscape. Subsequent research could productively examine other grammatical morphemes, employ longitudinal designs to assess retention, and investigate the acquisition of suprasegmental features.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

1	First person	ns	non-singular
2	Second person	P	Patient
3	Third person	PF	Perfective
A	Agent	Pl	Plural
e	exclusive	PP	Passive participle
I	inclusive	PST	Past tense
NPT	Non preterit	S	Subject/student
		T	Teacher

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