

Pronunciation Problems Faced by Indonesian College Students Who Learn to Speak English

Gunawan Tambunsaribu¹, Masda Surti Simatupang²

^{1,2}Universitas Kristen Indonesia

Email: gunawanreza_tamsar@yahoo.com

Abstract: Many researches about English language have been conducted by many researchers related to pronunciation errors by English learners around the world. This research investigates the errors of English pronunciation made by Indonesian college students in Indonesia. This research uses qualitative method with purposive sampling data. Data have been collected from 50 students of Gunadarma University, Jakarta. In collecting data, the researcher typed the mispronunciation words as well as recorded their voice while they were speaking in front of the class. It is found that: 1) English language has many different sounds for a vowel letter (for example: letter 'a' pronounced as [æ], [ɒ], [ə], etc.); 2) Indonesian language does not have silent-consonant and silent-vowel letters (for example: silent g, h, k, and e); 3) The *plossive consonant letters* are not pronounced clearly in bahasa Indonesia such the word *tidak, bebek* and *sebab*, etc. Thus, the Indonesian students have problems the English words such as *think, philosophy, psychology, bright*, etc. In conclusion, many college students in Indonesia are confused to pronounce some English words because they have such inconsistency sounds for vowel letters, vowel-letter combination, silent letters and the sounds of two or three combination of consonant letters. This research is hoped to be very helpful for English teachers especially for teaching TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) to help their students increasing their understanding as well as their pronunciation skills in speaking English. This research may be helpful for English teachers who want to design some teaching methods to overcome the English pronunciation problems faced by college students in Indonesia.

Keywords: *English Sounds; Inconsistency of Vowel and Consonant Sounds; Pronunciation Problems; and English Learners.*

A. INTRODUCTION

Communication is very important in human life daily. Without a communication, it will be difficult to adapt and even to get to know each other in this life. Through communication, we can convey our ideas to others for specific purposes. By communication we can also manifest expressions of feelings or thoughts for others. It will help us as a human being to avoid miscommunications while giving messages, orders, or judgments to others. In addition, communication is a medium in the process of fulfilling the needs of each individual. However, research shows that 70% of errors in many workplaces result from poor communication.

Although the English is only used as second language for students Indonesia, but in fact, they find and use English in their daily life especially in their facing one of their subjects in schools or colleges namely English 1 and English 2 and more than two subjects if they take specific majors in their study. Hence, they should master English in order to pass their study as well as to compete with other people in their life after schools or colleges because English is an International language. The most important skill in English is *Speaking* skill. In speaking English, they also have to master the English pronunciation in stead of the grammar structure.

To compete in international world, Indonesian people should master English speaking. In communicating with other people especially the native speakers, we should imitate the correct pronunciation so the listener will no be confused of what we are talking about. The most problems faced by Indonesian people who start to learn English especially for speaking is the difficulty in pronouncing the English words due to a big differences between the sounds of *Bahasa Indonesia* and English.

There are two problems in this researcher, they are:

1. What kinds of vowel and consonant sounds are mispronounced by the students?;

What are the factors that make the students still mispronounce some English words eventhough they have learned English since they were in elementary and secondary school?

2. Due to the problems mentioned above, the researcher wants to find out the kinds of problem faced by Indonesian students in learning English sounds called pronunciation. In addition, the researcher wants to know the factors that affect the students' English skill in *Speaking* subject.

It is hoped that this research will show the kinds of problems in faced by Indonesian students in learning especially in Speaking class. Besides, by knowing the factors which obstruct students' ability in mastering English pronunciation, the English teachers, especially in Indonesia, are hoped to improve and design more active methods in teaching English pronunciation for their students. By this research, we can also introspect to our previous teaching methods wether it fits or not to related to the level of our students' English skill.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

1. Meaning of Pronunciation

Bachman (1990) stated that there are two main competences in mastering a language. He stated that "Pronunciation or phonology is a part of grammatical competence". The figure below is a language competence diagram.

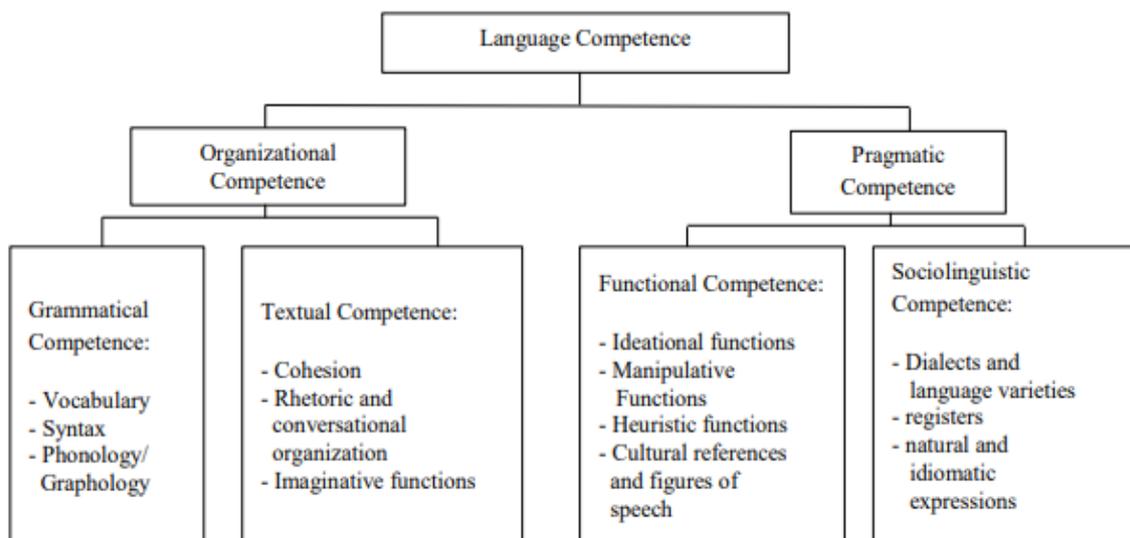


Figure 1. Language Competencies (Bachman, 1990)

Kelly (2000) stated that pronunciation has two main features called *phonemes* and *suprasegmental*. The diagram below are the main features of pronunciation proposed by Kelly.

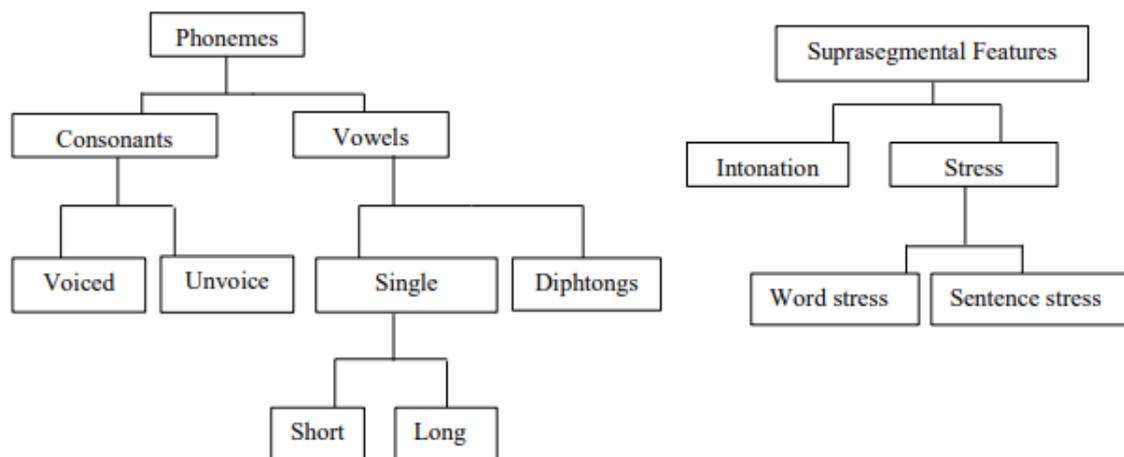


Figure 2. Pronunciation Features (Kelly, 2000)

As Goodwin wrote which was cited in Celce-Murcia (2006) that “Pronunciation is the language feature that most readily identifies speakers as nonnative”, while Seidlhofer (1995) said “Pronunciation is never an end in itself but a means of negotiating meaning in discourse, embedded in specific sociocultural and interpersonal contexts.”

2. Factors Affecting Pronunciation

Since a person has his own mother language, it means that other people can know someone that he is a not a native of that language that he is speaking. The way a person speaks using foreign language is mostly affected by his mother tongue.

There many factors which affect someone’s pronunciation as stated by Kenworthy (1987) cited in (Brown, 2001). The factors are *native language, age, exposure, innate phonetic ability, identity and language ego, motivation and concern for good pronunciation*. Native language mostly influences a learner to study a new foreign language. In term of age, a child under the age of puberty can speak with an excellent pronunciation, speaks like a native speaker, if he has continued to expose an authentic context. In the exposure factor, someone who has lived for some time in a foreign country may not succeed to adapt the culture as well as the language in that foreign country. Innate phonetic ability factor means that a person can adapt well a phonetic coding of a foreign language but for some other people can not. In the terms of identity and language ego, somone’s attitude related to the speakers of the target language can influence a speaker’s ability to the succes in learning of a foreign language. In addition, the motivation for good having a pronunciation, a person may concern about the pronunciation of that language he is learning, but for some other learners maybe not.

3. Problems in Pronunciation

Kelly (2000) mentioned that there are some reasons why some L2 learners have some problems related to the difficulties in L2 Pronunciation, such as:

- a. A student’s mother language may have a relationship between sound and spelling;
- b. An L2 learner may be familiar first with English sounds related to the new sound-spelling relationships while he is learning English;
- c. There may be some of their mother language sounds that English do not have;
- d. There may be some of English sounds which their mother language does not have; and
- e. The English stress and intonation patterns may be strange and confusing to the learners of English.

Hassan (2014) mentioned in his research that there are four factors which many linguists and researchers that have made some problems to English learners to pronounce English words they are “The differences of the sound system between the (L1) and the (L2), the inconsistency of some sounds in English language, the mother tongue interference and the influence of spelling on pronunciation”. The factors are commonly known as linguistic factors. While Moosa (1979) said that the Arab learners who learn English usually build the phonological features of Arabic while they pronouncing English words. They have many problems in distinguishing between English sound and their native language sound. O’Connor (1998) said that the L2 learners who do not enough knowledge about the inconsistency of L2 vowel sounds will lead them to mispronunciation.

Catford (1977), Moosa (1979), and Swan & Smith (2001) mentioned that the sounds of /p/ and /b/ are two different phonemes. These two phonemes are different to each other for the native speakers. O’Connor (1998) said an several English learner had been confusing to pronounce the words containing the letter /p/ and /b/ sounds and they usually pronounced them with the nearest sounds to his mother language.

Yule (1996) mentioned that most of English sounds do not match up while comparing in to the spoken and the written form. The alphabet sounds of English have some inconsistent sounds while they are used in speaking. Carter and Nunan (2001) stated that if the learner of L2 Language doesn’t know the relationship between sound and spelling, it will lead them to mispronounce some words by just looking at their spellings. It means that sound and spelling are two different lesson in learning language.

C. METHOD

This is an empirical study using qualitative method in analysing the data. This research uses purposive sampling to choose the participants. The participants are the students who are learning the subject of *English One*. All the participants are the first semester students, 50 students, of Gunadarma University where the researcher is teaching English.

The researcher lists first all the words that mistakenly pronounced by the students while introducing themselves in the first meeting. Before they spoke in front of the class, the researcher asked them to write first their note about what they would tell in front of the classroom. While they were speaking, the researcher directly typed the mispronunciation words made by each students in computer as well as recorded their voice while they were speaking in front of the class. The researcher then rewrote all the words at home. The following meeting, all the students, the participants, were asked to come forward and individually pronounced all the lists and the researcher records their speaking while pronouncing all the words. At the end of the meeting, the researcher interviewed all the respondents about the factors or reasons why they still made some errors in pronouncing the lists of the words even though they have learned English more than 12 years.

The researcher listened to the recordings of the students’ speaking result and checked all the list of mispronounced words which the researcher had written before. Then the researcher made sure that all the mispronounced words had been typed all. The researcher then grouped the mispronounced words into two groups namely vowel-sounds and consonant sounds. The researcher also consulted with Oxford online dictionary to look up the correct pronunciation symbols of all the mispronounced words. The researcher then analyzed all the data related to the English vowel and consonant sounds.

D. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Types of Vowel Sounds Mispronunciation

By analyzing as well as collecting the respondents’ answers, the writer finds out that there are many kinds of problems faced by the Indonesian students in learning English

especially in pronouncing English words, they are:

1.1) the Inconsistencies of single-vowel letter sound

a) Sounds of vowel A

- Letter 'a' sounds [ɔ:] as in *what*
- Letter 'a' sounds [ɑ:(r)] as in *car, bar, star, mart, card, cart*
- Letter 'a' sounds [æ] as in *mat, bat, pan, lap*
- Letter 'a' sounds [eɪ] as in *make, tape, bake, lake, ape, age*
- Letter 'a' sounds [ə] as in *ago, a*
- Letter 'a' sounds [əʊ] as in *goal*

The inconsistency of English vowel 'a' sound confuse most of Indonesian students who are learning to speak in English. As the example, a student pronounced the word 'what' as [wæt] instead of [wɒt]. She said that he only knew the spelling of letter 'e' letter. The second example, a student pronounced the word 'ball' into [bal] instead of [bɔ:l]. He said that he pronounced it like Indonesian spelling for letter 'a'.

b) Sounds of vowel E

- Letter 'e' sounds [i:] as in *hero, era, ego, eleven*
- Letter 'e' sounds [ɛ] as in *elephant*
- Letter 'e' unsounds (silent letter) as in *mode, globe, code, phone, tone*

Some of the students pronounced letter 'e' mostly as [ɛ] sound. Therefore, some words that have different sound for letter 'e' which sounds [ɪ] as in the word 'eleven' and 'hero', they mispronounced these two words in to [ɛlɛv(ə)n] and [hɛrɔ]. They said that they only imitated Indonesian sounds for letter 'e'.

c) Sounds of vowel 'i'

- Letter 'i' sounds [aɪ] as in *tight, find, mine, bite*
- Letter 'i' sounds [ə:] as in *sir, flirt, dirt, bird*
- Letter 'i' sounds [ɪ] as in *fin, tip, dish, lip*

The inconsistency of letter 'i' sound also makes problems to Indonesian students. Some of them did not know that letter 'i' has many sounds. Many of the students still pronounced the word 'sir' into [sɪr] instead of [sə(r)]. The second example, some of them pronounced 'bite' into [bitɛ] instead of [baɪt]. They said that they didn't even learn about silent 'e' while they were learning English in their primary and secondary school. That was why they still mispronounced the word 'bite'

d) Sounds of vowel O

- Letter 'o' sounds [u:] or [ʊ] as in *do, to, toes,*
- Letter 'o' sounds [aʊ] as in *cow, now, bow, how*
- Letter 'o' sounds [ɔ:] as in *for, four, door*
- Letter 'o' sounds [əʊ] as in *tone, mode, phone*
- Letter 'o' sounds [ɒ] as in *hot, cop, top, hop*

While pronouncing some English words that contain letter 'o', some of the students mispronounced those words. Some students pronounced 'cow' into /kou/ instead of /kaʊ/. Some students still mispronounced 'tone' into /tɒn/ instead of /təʊn/. Their lack of knowledge in pronouncing silent 'e' made them mispronounced almost the words contain letter 'o' that are ended by silent 'e'.

e) Sounds of vowel U

- Letter 'u' sounds [ju:] as in *mute, nude, cute*
- Letter 'u' sounds [u:] as in *flute*
- Letter 'u' sounds [ʌ] as in *shut, mud*
- Letter 'u' sounds [ɛ:] as in *fur, blur*

The same problems stated above also faced by the students while pronouncing some

words that contain letter 'u'. The inconsistency of letter 'u' sound have made them mispronounced the words such as *nude*, *shut* and *fur*. They mostly pronounced letter 'u' into [ʊ] sound which made them mispronounced the word 'blur' [blɜːr] into [blʊr].

1.2) the Inconsistencies of double-vowel letter sound

- a) Double letter 'ea' sounds [i:] as in *clean*, *beat*, *heat*, *meat*
- b) Double letter 'ea' sounds [eə] as in *bear*, *tear*, *breakfast*, *hair*, *fair*, *chair*
- c) Double letter 'ea' sounds [ɪə] as in *hear*, *tear*, *gear*
- d) Double letter 'ee' sounds [i:] as in *feet*, *teen*, *keep*
- e) Double letter 'oo' sounds [ʊ / u:] as in *food*, *book*, *blood*, *flood*, *mood*
- f) Double letter 'oo' sounds [ʌ] as in *blood*, *flood*
- g) Double letter 'ou' sounds [ʊə] as in *tour*
- h) Double letter 'ou' sounds [aʊə] *hour*, *flour*, *sour*
- i) Double letter 'ou' sounds [ə:] *honour*, *colour*, *famous*
- j) Double letter 'ou' sounds [ɔ:] as in *bought*, *brought*
- k) Double letter 'oa' sounds [əʊ] as in *soap*, *boat*, *goat*

The inconsistencies also occur in the *double-vowel-letter* sounds in English. Here are three words that almost mispronounced by the students:

- The word 'hair' is pronounced into [hɜr] instead of [heə(r)]
- 'flood' is pronounced into [flʊt] instead of [flʌd]
- 'bought' is pronounced into [boʊgh] instead of [bɔ:t]

2. Types of Consonant Sounds Mispronunciation

2.1) Single-consonant-letter sound

- soft **g** sounds [dʒ] as in *gene*, *gin*, *general*, *gym*
- soft **c** sounds [s] as in *cinnamon*, *cemetery*
- silent **h** as in *hour*, *honour*, *ghost*
- silent **k** as in *know*, *knee*, *knob*, *knock*

The inconsistencies *single-consonant-letter* sound and the *silent of consonant letter* also made the students confused in pronouncing some English words. Here are three examples that almost mispronounced by the students related to the *single-consonant-letter* sound and the *silent of consonant letter* :

- The word 'gene' is pronounced into [gɛn] instead of [dʒi:n]
- The word 'cemetery' is pronounced into [cemetri] instead of [semetri]
- The word 'knock' is pronounced into the same letter sound [knok] instead of [nɔk]

Because in Indonesian language does not have silent consonant letter and also *soft letter* (like soft 'c' and soft 'g'), most of the students mispronounced many of English words which have *silent-consonant letter*.

2.2) Double-consonant-letter sound

- Double letter 'gh' sounds [f] as in *tough*, *cough*, *enough*
- Double letter 'ph' sounds [f] as in *phase*, *phrase*, *pharmacy*, *philosophy*, *geography*
- Silent letter 'gh' as in *fight*, *right*, *might*, *night*
- Sound of [ch] as in *chalk*, *chess*, *choose*
- Sound of [sh] as in *ship*, *she*, *shoes*, *shop*

The main reason why most of the students encountered difficulties in pronouncing the *double-consonant-letter* because it is seldom found consonant clusters in Indonesian language. In addition, some English words which have three or more consonant letters altogether in a word such as the word **fight**, **psychologist**, **phrase** and other words are very confusing to several Indonesian college students.

The examples of mispronunciation made by the students are as follows:

- 'fight' is pronounced into [fɑɪgh] instead of [fɑɪt]
- 'philosophy' is pronounced into [fɪləsəfi] instead of [fɪləsəfi]
- 'ship' is pronounced into [ʃɪp] instead of [ʃɪp]

2.2) Final-consonant-letter sound

- Letter 'k' as in *think, ink, back*
- Letter 't' as in *bit*
- Letter 'd' as *code*
- Letter 'g' as in *bag*

Most of the students did not pronounce clearly the final consonant letter of English words. The students pronounced the word 'think' into [tɪŋ] instead of [θɪŋ]. Another problem is that the aspirated sounds of final letter 't', 'd', 'g' were not pronounced clearly by the students.

2. The Factors to Pronunciation Problems

- a. The Indonesian language sounds and English sounds are very different. The *consonant clusters* in Bahasa Indonesia are seldom found excluding the letter 'ng' such *bayang, ruang, kosong*, whereas in English we can find many words that has the combination of two or more consonant letters stand aside which are very confusing to several Indonesian student th pronounce them, for example the words *bright, gadget, know, kept, bought, caught*. In addition, There is no any silent consonant letters and also soft letter (like soft 'c' and soft 'g' in Indonesian language.
- b. The inconsistency sounds of some English letters (vowel and consonant letters) which have been mentioned in the discussion also made the students in Indonesia encounter the difficulties in pronouncing many of English words.
- c. The disorders of Bahasa Indonesian, as a mother tounge of Indonesian students, which affect their pronunciation in speaking English. In Bahasa Indonesia, the sounds of final consonantas is not pronounced clearly, such as *bebek, sebab, kebab, cowok, cewek*, etc. Thus, the most problem encountered by the students was the pronunciation of final-letter sound of English words.

E. CONCLUSION

The big differences between English and Indonesian language is that Indonesian language does not have silent letters (i.e. silent 'e' and silent 'g') and also fricative and affricative sounds. In addition, Indonesian people do not recognize the combination of double consonant letters in a word. The big differences related to the the morphology cause many problems to Indonesian students while they are pronouncing English words.

Because English is still a 'foreign language' to Indonesian students mind, many students have not been encouraged yet to improve their English language skills especially in speaking. In addition, their most important obstacle is because some of their English teachers and lecturers did not actively communicate using English when they were studying English in the classroom. They are more often taught in one-way-learning method. They were usually only asked and forced to memorize vocabularies and then have them to write some sentences or stories in English.

From the interview results, more than 50% of the respondents had stated some reasons why they still lacked or did not understand the pronunciation of English words. Here are their statements related to the reasons why they still did not have enough skills in pronouncing English word:

1. They were rarely trained by teachers in schools regarding to English pronunciation.
2. They rarely practiced speaking and reading aloud English texts in the classroom.

3. They only learned how to make sentences instead of listening and speaking practices at school.
4. Learning methods of their teachers in schools were very passive.
5. They were only asked to memorize vocabularies including Verb-I, Verb-II and Verb-III when learning English at school.
6. They were only required by the teacher to learn independently by looking up English dictionaries and told them to memorize some vocabularies related to their English lessons.
7. Their teachers also seldom spoke actively using English while teaching English in the classroom.

It is hoped that the findings of this research are helpful especially English learners to design some teaching methods to overcome the problems faced by Indonesian college students related to English pronunciation. This research may be also very helpful for English teachers in general especially for those who teach the subject of TEFL, *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*, in order to encourage and their students to improve their understanding as well as their pronunciation skills in speaking English. This research can be also helpful for other researchers, who are interested in English pronunciation, as their additional information in finding solution to English pronunciation problems faced by Indonesian students in general.

REFERENCES

- Bachman, L. (1990). *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, D.H. (2001). *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. New York: Pearson Education.
- Carter, R., & Nunan, D. (2001). *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Catford, J.C. (1977). *Fundamental Problems in Phonetics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Celce-Murcia, M. (2006). *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*. Singapore: Heinle & Heinle.
- Hassan, E. M. I. (2014). Pronunciation Problems: A Case Study of English Language Students at Sudan University of Science and Technology. *Journal of English Language and Literature Studies*, 4(4).
- Kelly, G. (2000). *How to Teach Pronunciation*. Essex: Pearson Education.
- Kenworthy, J. (1987). *Teaching English Pronunciation*. New York: Longman Group Limited.
- Moosa, M. H. (1979). *Difficulties of Learning the Pronunciation and Structural Differences Between Arabic and English*. (MA Dissertation, Library of Saudi Arabia, Educational mission, Texas).
- O'Connor, J. D. (1998). *Better English Pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Seidlhofer, B. (1995). *Pronunciation Awareness: Some thoughts on pronunciation in teacher education*. Speak Out! Newsletter of the IATEFL Pronunciation. Special Interest Group, 6, 12-16.
- Swan, M., & Smith, B. (2001). *Learner English: A Teacher's Guide to Interference and Other Problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (1996). *The Study of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.