How Pronunciation Influences the Reading Ability of Englih Learners

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Abstract

Reading is a complex process of thinking in assigning meaning from printed materials which involve most of the reader's intellectual act such as pronunciation and comprehension in order to receive ideas or information extended by the text. On the other hand, most of English learners are struggling with reading due to their lack of pronunciation which lead them to feel ashamed to read aloud. The objective of this study was to investigate the underlying factors of English learners difficulties in pronunciation. This study was conducted by applying descriptive qualitative research design. This study investigated English learners difficulty of having good pronunciation in order to be able to read English text very well. Twenty six of college students in the first semester were examined in this study. The data was collected through the observation of participants' utterances and recording their voice while they reading English texts. It has been found that all participants were not so familiar with several phonological systems of English which affect them to pronounce English words. These obstacles were concerned with phonemic, phonetic, phonotactic discrepancies between their native language (Indonesian and regional language) and the targeted language (English). This obstacles were found due to several factors such as their lack of vocabularies, less practice in speaking English, and the minimum of supporting in motivations and education facilities including technological stuff since they were in highschool.

Keywords: pronunciation, reading, English learners

1. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is a prominent factor in learning English since it plays a very important role for English learners to communicate and to read. There is a synchronic between vocabulary and meaning if the quality of their pronunciation is good. In addition, pronunciation creates the first impression in communication and it also becomes a guarantee of their ability in speaking and reading English text. Consequently, incorrect pronunciation will create misunderstandings and poor pronunciation becomes one of the big obstacles in understanding the meaning to be conveyed. Therefore, English instructors must attribute proper importance to teaching pronunciation in their classes. However, this fact is very much neglected by many English instructors.

Learning how to pronounce English words like a native speaker is not easy because English and Indonesian language have many different phonetics, vowels, sound and intonation. Unlike Indonesian, English is not a phonetic language which is the principle reason why it is difficult to write and pronounce English words. It is unavoidable that the English learners often did errors in their language learning process. The realization of these errors is important for English instructors in planning of a course. In other words, errors give sign to the English instructors how target language learning will be successfully achieved.

This errors and difficulties in pronunciation seem to be a huge problem for most of English learners. Their different ability depends on language background, exposure to the target language, age, and even interest in the language (Nunan, 2004). In order to have good pronunciation, they need more practice and a huge will of it because it is a matter of habit. Despite of the habit formation of pronunciation, there are still more about underlying factors that they face while learning how to produce English words well. Therefore, this study was conducted to find out the difficulties that the English learners facing in learning pronunciation.

2. METHODS

This study was conducted by applying descriptive qualitative research design. Qualitative means to find out how a theory works in different phenomena which is data collected are in the form of words rather than numbers. Qualitative research is a research that generally done with main objective that is to describe the fact systematically and the characteristics of the object or subject which is analysed correctly (Sukardi, 2003). Specifically, it employs a case study design, which is often used throughout most domains, just as an assesment, when the researcher performs a thorough analysis of a specific situation (Creswell, 2017). By using this design, the facts and the result found in the study was descriptively described in form of words.

This study investigated English learners difficulty of having good pronunciation in order to be able to read English text very well. Twenty six of college students in the first semester were examined in this study. Based on the preliminary data regarding the participants' demographic, most of them were having barriers in pronouncing English words which caused them to have diffciulty in reading English text.

The data was collected through the observation of participants' utterances and recording their voice while they reading English texts. Each participants read the text individually and without the presence of any other participants. The selected mispronounced words were highlighted as the most common error pronunciation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It has been found that all participants were not so familiar with several phonological systems of English which affect them to pronounce English words. These obstacles were concerned with phonemic, phonetic, phonotactic discrepancies between their native language (Indonesian and regional language) and the targeted language (English) as can be seen in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Mispronounced words by participants

Word	The Correct Pronunciation	Mispronounced words by participants				
Angry	/ˈaŋgri/	/ʌŋgri/	/ˈaŋgri/	/ʌŋgri/	/agri:/	/ʌŋgri/
Lion	/ˈlʌɪən/	/ˈli:ən/	/ˈlʌɪən/	/ˈli:ən/	/ˈlʌɪən/	/ˈli:ən/
Sunrise	/ˈsʌnrʌɪz/	/su:nri:s	/su:nri	/syu:nr	/su:nri:s/	/su:nri:s/

		/	:s/	i:s/		
Club	/klʌb/	tjlu:b/	/kləʊb/	/tjlu:b/	tjlu:b/	/kləʊb/
Tree	/triː/	/trei/	/triː/	/triː/	/trey/	/triː/
People	/ˈpiːp(ə)l/	/ˈpeːple/	/ˈpiːp/	/ˈpəple/	/ˈpeːpli/	/ˈpiːp(ə)l/

a. Consonant error

Based on the Table 1 above, the researcher found out that most of the participants face difficulties in pronouncing consonant phonemes between /k/ and /tʃ/, also /v/ and /f/. The Indonesian phoneme /tʃ/ is distinct from the English phoneme /tʃ/ where the English /tʃ/ is sometime articulated as [k]. Whilst, the Indonesian phoneme /tʃ/ is never pronounced [k] wherever it occurs in the word. In English, for instance, the letter 'C' is articulated as [k]. Like in the words hercules, club, and stuck, they mispronounced the word by the utterance / həːtʃt kjʊliːz /, /tʃlu:b/, and /stutʃ/. They still produce consonant "C" as /tʃ/.

This phoneme / v / also caused them to not able to pronounce the English words. It was found that this phoneme / v / does not exist in Indonesian language phonological system. Almost all Indonesian words having this letter 'v' are derived from European languages. Consequently, wherever this letter 'v' occurs in Indonesian word, it is generally pronounced as / f / phoneme or / p / phoneme. So the twenty participants of this study much have difficulty pronouncing English words possessing this sound 'v' in all positions since this / v / is not used in the Indonesian phonological system like in the word Valley.

a. Vowel error

It was found that most pronunciation error also happened with vowel. Especially in vowel "A" that sometimes pronounced as / æ, ə, e, ʌ /. As a result, the participants failed to produce English words fluently and accurately. In the English phoneme / ʌ / comes out only in word initial and medial positions, but the /ʌ/ phoneme is not recognized in the Indonesian phonological sound system. This / ʌ / phoneme in English is spelt with most vowel letters and their combinations, for examples: -u- in *sunrise* becomes /ˈsʌnrʌɪz/ , -oo- in *blood* becomes /blʌd/. Sometimes, / ʌ / can complete the functions of a short open vowel contradicted to both / æ / and / a /. Since the English / ʌ / is represented by these letters, the 5 students of this study are unearthed having much difficulty in pronouncing English words owning the / ʌ / sound.

Furthermore, the English phoneme / u / also comes out only in word medial and final positions, but the Indonesian phoneme / u / appears in word initial, medial, and final positions. The English / u / possesses one variant such as / ʊ / without having allophonic alternatives. They are independent phonemes in English but not in Indonesian language because they do not transmit any meanings in the Indonesian phonological system. In addition, participants discovered not able to differentiate the short sound of / ʊ / and the long one / u / in English. As a result, when they pronounce English words having the phoneme / u

/, they were affected by the Indonesian / u /, for example, they may articulate the word **Shoot** [/ʃoːt/] should be [/ʃuːt/].

Having analyzed the participants error in pronouncing some words, the researcher interviewed all participants. From the interview, the writers get the researcher found out that the participants barriers in pronouncing English words were because of several reasons; first, their lack of vocabularies; second, they seldom to practice English, and the last is the minimum of supporting in motivations and education facilities including technological stuff since they were in highschool.

4. CONCLUSION

After conducting the qualitative method by implementing descriptive study in investigating twenty six of college students as English learners' pronounciation, it was found that the students' still face difficulties to pronounce words appropriately. After drawing the conclusion, the researcher would like to offer some suggestions based on the result and to complete this research. For the English learners, practice regularly how to pronounce a word very well by any means that can be helpful. For the English instructors, there are many techniques that can be used in teaching reading in general and pronounciation in particular since finding out an appropriate technique in teaching will create fun learning atmospheres and help them to learn enjoyably.

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