

PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS AMONG KUIS STUDENTS

Nur Syahida Mohd Yazid & Zairil Azmir Zaiyadi

*Faculty of Management and Muamalah, International Islamic University College Selangor
syahidaayazid@gmail.com*

ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to find out whether students in Kolej Univerisiti Islam Antarabangsa Selangor (KUIS) can pronounce English words correctly as well as to identify the most common errors produced by the students in pronouncing the words in English. 30 diploma level students from various programmes were selected as the subjects for this study. The data were collected by recording and analyzing the students' pronunciation of selected words. These words were purposefully chosen to test the students' ability to pronounce words that contain fricative consonant, plosive consonant, affricate consonant, silent consonant, pure short vowel, pure long vowel and diphthong. Meanwhile, questionnaire was also administered to the same subjects in order to obtain the demographic data. The findings show that the students do have problems in pronouncing words in English and the most common pronunciation errors found among the students are fricatives followed by pure short vowel and also diphthong.

Keywords: Pronunciation Problems, Categories of Pronunciation, Diploma Students.

Introduction

It cannot be denied that the interference from the native language does exist as for a learners to pronounce words in L2 correctly. The previous studies conducted by for example Hart (1969), Yuichiro (2000), Kho (2011) and Shak et al. (2016) did indicate mother tongue and local dialects as being the factor that causes students not being able to pronounce words correctly in English.

Majority of the students of KUIS are Malays who speak Bahasa Melayu/ Malaysia as their mother tongue. Therefore, it is interesting to find out whether these students do actually have the problem to pronounce words in English correctly.

Difficulties in Learning English Pronunciation

Hart (1969) did a research on the problem facing Malaysians in the correct pronunciation of English tense said that the learner whose mother tongue is Malay or a southern Chinese dialect (namely Hokkien, Cantonese, or Hakka) frequently makes homophones of the English tense and lax vowels /i:/ and /i/, /ɔ:/ and /ɔ/, and /u/ and /u:/. This means that the student is likely to pronounce *leave* as *live*: *caught* as *cot*: and *pull* as *pool*, with resultant misunderstanding on the part of the listener, especially the native English speaker.

While, Zhang & Yin (2009) found that English learners in China may encounter difficulties with English sounds due to the interference from their native language. It is difficult for them to produce certain English sounds which do not exist in Mandarin Chinese. For instance,

some English consonants do not exist in Mandarin Chinese such as /v/, /θ/, /ð/, etc. Therefore, they may substitute these sounds with similar ones in their mother tongue as they cannot find the counterparts in Mandarin Chinese.

Gilakjani (2011) meanwhile stated that among the reasons ESL students have difficulties learning pronunciation are that they are not interested, not exposed to target language often, and that teachers do not highlight the importance of pronunciation nor have the right tools to help their students learn proper pronunciation.

Ahmed (2011) in a research conducted on undergraduates of diverse ethnic backgrounds consisted of Malays, Indians, Chinese & other indigenous groups found out that some sounds were accented wrongly by the subjects showing similarities among all the speakers while others show differences in wrong positional articulations and dropping features.

Previous Studies on Pronunciation Problems

Shak, et al. (2016) states that participants are more likely to make mistakes in pronouncing fricatives consonants. Analysis of the errors indicated that among the problematic sounds are the voiced TH /ð/ (i.e. then, other, they, and that) and voiceless TH /θ/ sounds (i.e. north). Data obtained from this study have also indicated that Malaysian students have problems with pronouncing the /t/, /d/, and /g/ plosive consonants. In addition, it can also be observed from the data collected that the participants have problems with deciding whether to use long and short pure vowel sounds.

Kho (2011) indicates that Mandarin Chinese and Malay appeared to have some influence on English pronunciation. In consonants, for instance /θ/, /ð/, /dʒ/, /ʒ/ and /v/ are unshared sounds specific to English. /θ/ and /ð/ were realised as stops /t/ and /d/ respectively. As for vowels, the diphthong /eɪ/ was substituted with the monophthong /e/, as /eɪ/ does not exist in Mandarin Chinese.

Jumrina (2014) studied the pronunciation of English words among Indonesian students. After analyzing the data about errors pronunciation of English vowel /æ/, /a/, /ə/ and /ə/, the researcher found that the kinds of errors made by the subjects are included in morphology and phonological errors. The subjects made three general errors namely shortening, lengthening and substitution voice.

According to Centerman & Krausz (2011), the results from Swedish students in Sweden show that the students seem to find it most difficult to perceive and produce words containing the /tʃ/ (i.e. cheap) and /ʃ/ (i.e. sheep) phonemes. When one of the sounds occurred in initial position, the students seemed to find it more challenging to perceive and produce than when the /tʃ/ sound occurred in final position, and they instead perceived or produced the /ʃ/ sound. The reverse pattern was apparent when students were asked to produce the /ʃ/ sound as well.

While, the research carried by Hassan (2014) noticed that many Sudanese Students have problems with the pronunciation of monophthongs that have more than one way of pronunciation. Confusing /s/ and /θ/, /z/ and /ð/, /p/ and /b/, /v/ and /f/, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ usually lead some SS to a mispronunciation and they may lead the listener to a misunderstanding.

Research Methodology

Two types of instruments were used in order to collect the data. The first type was a pronunciation test that was used in to detect the problems of pronunciation among the subjects of the study. The pronunciation errors were diagnosed into six categories following the categories of errors found in the research by Shak et al (2016). They were fricative consonants, plosive consonants, affricate consonants, silent consonants, pure short vowels and pure long vowels. Utilizing the phonemic transcription in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary: International Student's Edition (2010), the recording was replayed many times and the pronunciation errors were noted.

Another type of instrument used was questionnaire in order to collect background information of the respondents.

The subjects were comprised of 30 diploma students in semester 2 from different programmes who were taking English II (NDWU1052), offered by Pusat Pengajian Teras (PPT), KUIS. Thirty respondents were randomly chosen from the NDWU1052 class out of the thirty respondents where (10) were male and (20) were female.

Analysis and Findings

Table 1 illustrates the errors produced by the students when pronouncing the words in English. The most common error is fricatives consonant with 25.8%. The second highest error produced by the students is diphthong with 20.5%. This is followed by affricate consonant with 16.5% and pure short vowel 15.4%.

Table 1: Errors produced by students when pronouncing words in English

TYPES OF PRONUNCIATION ERROR	PHONETIC SYMBOL & WORD		FREQUENCY OF ERROR FOUND	TOTAL
Fricative Consonant	/θ/	Think	19	64 (25.8%)
	/z/	Was	30	
		Phase	15	
Plosive Consonant	/p/	Pail	19	23 (9.4%)
	/t/	Attempt	3	
	/d/	Fold	1	
Affricate Consonant	/dʒ/	Obliged	29	41 (16.5%)
	/ʒ/	Measure	4	

	/tʃ/	Which	8	
Silent Consonant	/w/	Wrap	5	11 (4.4%)
	/h/	Hour	6	
Pure Short Vowel	/i/	Wind	10	38 (15.4%)
	/ə/	Opinion	19	
		Correct	9	
Pure Long Vowel	/i:/	Wind	10	20 (8%)
		Succeed	9	
	/ɔ:/	Warm	1	
Diphthong	/aɪ/	Obliged	29	51 (20.5%)
	/ʊə/	Tour	17	
	/eɪ/	Take	5	
TOTAL				248 (100%)

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that KUIS students do have problems to pronounce words in English correctly. It also found out that the most common errors produced by the students in pronouncing words in English are fricative consonants, pure short vowels and diphthongs.

The findings of this study also show similarities with the findings of research done previously. For instance, Shak et al. (2016) and Kho (2011) also found that fricative consonants were the main problems encountered by Malaysian students when pronouncing words in English.

Meanwhile, Hart's (1969) findings are also in line with the findings of this study in which one of the main difficulties to pronounce in English among Malaysian students is attributed to the problem that the students have in differentiating between long vowels and pure short vowels.

Recommendations

As an implication of this finding, it is recommended that language teachers or instructors should:

- 1) reduce interference from the students' native language.
- 2) teach their students more extensively English phonetics.
- 3) train their students to use International Phonetics Alphabets so that they can always be able to check their pronunciation.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, S. (2011) Similarities and differences of wrong English Pronunciation among the Chinese, Indian and Malaysian Speakers. *Proceedings of the 4th International Online Language Conference (IOLC2011)*.
- Centerman, S. & Krausz, F. (2011). Common L2 Pronunciation Errors. Dissertation (Unpublished). Retrieved 11 February, 2017 from <http://dspace.mah.se/bitstream/handle/2043/11660/SofiFelixfinal%20version.pdf>
- Gilakjani, A.P. (2011). A study on the situation of pronunciation instruction in ESL/EFL classrooms. *Journal of Studies in Education*, 1(1), 1-15.
- Hart, D.C. (1969). Some English Pronunciation Difficulties in Malaysia. *ELT Journal* XXIII (3): 270-273. Retrieved 11 February, 2017, from <http://eltj.oxfordjournals.org/content/XXIII/3/270.extract#>
- Hassan, E.M.I. (2014) Pronunciation Problems: A case study of English Language Students at Sudan University of Science and Technology. Retrieved 30 January, 2017, from <http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ells/articles/viewFile/42575/23274>
- Jumrina. (2014) An Analysis of Students' pronunciation errors in English. Thesis. Retrieved January 30, 2017, from <http://eprints.ung.ac.id/1115/>
- Kho, I.C.Y. (2011) An Analysis of pronunciation error in English of six UTAR Chinese students' undergraduates. Retrieved 30 January, 2017, from <http://eprints.utar.edu.my/264/1/EL-2011-0805055-1.pdf>
- Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2010) International Student's Edition (Eighth Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roach, P. J. (2009). *English phonetics and phonology: a practical course* (Fourth Edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Shak, P., Lee, C.S., & Stephen, J. (2016) Pronunciation Problems: A case study on English Pronunciation Errors of Low Proficient Students. *International Journal of Language Education Applied Linguistics (IJEAL)* 2016, Vol. 4, 25-35. Retrieved 2 February, 2017, from http://ijleal.ump.edu.my/images/volume4/IJLEAL004.SHAK_et_al.pdf
- Yuichiro, S. (2000) Pronunciation and Grammar of English in Malaysia. B.A. Thesis. Retrieved on 11 February, 2017, from www2.kumagaku.ac.jp/teacher/~judy/classes/zemi/s1papers2000/sakiyama.rtf

Zhang, F. C. & Yin, P. P. (2009). A study of pronunciation problems of English learners in China. *Asian Social Science*, 5(6), 141-146.