STUDENTS' ENGLISH VOWEL PRONUNCIATION IN HANDLING PHONE CALLS

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Abstract

Language is an important aspect of communication, and is a tool for expressing ourself, thoughts and ideas. Currently, people are required to master a foreign language, one of the most widely used languages is English. In mastering English, as well as learning languages in general, it has been divided into five skills, namely speaking, listening, writing, reading, and structure/grammar. One of the skills discussed in this study is speaking (pronunciation of vowels) in the practice of handling telephone calls. In this study, data collection was collected by using the observation method and the data analyzed in this study were qualitative data. The data was obtained from 20 students of Triatma Mulya University who were taking English course in Post Intermediate Level. Then the data was processed using qualitative descriptive analysis techniques. During the learning process, students experience problems in pronouncing English. This can be seen in the pronunciation of vowel sounds that are not in accordance with the pronunciation standards in English especially vowel pronunciation such as /ɔ/ which becomes /a/, vowel /ɒ/ which becomes /o/, /i:/ which becomes /e/, and vowel /u:/ which becomes /o/. In addition to students' English pronunciation, during the learning process several obstacles were also found, such as barriers from linguistic factors, barriers to mastery of content components including topics, content structure, content quality, and content quantity.

Keywords: speaking, pronunciation, vowel sounds.

INTRODUCTION

Language is an important aspect that cannot be separated from communication. Jendra (2007: 20) states that language is a tool to reflect thoughts, feelings, ideas or in other words language can be said as a free vocal symbol system that is used by community members as a means of cooperation or relationship. One of the language skills that is often used in communication is speaking skill. Speaking skill is the ability to pronounce sounds, articulations or words to express, say, and express thoughts, ideas, and feelings. Listeners receive information through pitch, pressure, and joint placement. If the communication takes place face-to-face, it is coupled with the hand movements and facial expressions of the speaker (Tarigan, 2008).

In globalization era, people are required to have language skills other than their mother tongue. One of the foreign languages which has also become an international language is English. In Bali, English is one of the most frequently used
languages in communicating with foreigners. This is has encourage both businessmen in service sector especially in tourism and make English as one of the skills requirements that must be possessed by workers. The readiness in communication is also a challenge for educational/training institutions and learners who want to work in tourism.

The application of language learning in Indonesia, learners often face obstacles in mastering the language, especially a second language or a foreign language. Some of the factors that cause these obstacles are the result of a learning system that focuses more on the teacher, less involving learners in learning. In mastering English, as well as learning languages in general, it has been divided into five skills, namely speaking, listening, writing, reading, and structure. One of the skills discussed in this study is speaking skill.

Speaking was chosen in the study because at this time many companies not only emphasize writing skills, but also speaking skills properly and correctly according to the provisions of English grammar, especially companies engaged in tourism (hospitality). Companies which are engaged in tourism (hospitality) such as hotels emphasize the ability of their employees to have speaking skills because it is related to communication skills with tourists.

This study aims to find out how students' English pronunciation, especially the pronunciation of vocal sounds spoken during telephone call handling conversations, by students who take English courses at Triatma Mulya University. With this aim, researchers can find out the pronunciation difficulties experienced by students and the factors that hinder students' speaking skills.

Related to previous research that examined the study of phonology, The first study is taken from Sari (2020) entitled “English Pronunciation by Front Office department Students of PPLP MAPINDO”. The results showed that students had difficulty pronouncing consonants and vowels in English where the main factors that became the obstacle were the influence of the first language and the limited linguistic components they had.

The second study by Tilman and Nurhayani (2015) entitled "Errors in Pronunciation of English Front Vowels by Semester 1 Students at the National University of Timor Loros'e". In this study, the data sources came from local students and native Portuguese speakers. The results show that the pronunciation of English vowels by students and native Portuguese speakers is very different from the standard spoken by native English speakers.

The third study by Wahyuni and Widagsa (2017) with the title "A Phonetic Study of Indonesian Vowel Sounds by Indonesian Speakers in the Eastern Region". This study describes the Indonesian vowel sounds produced by students majoring in Indonesian Language and Literature Education who are native speakers of regional languages in eastern Indonesia, especially NTT. The results showed that the vowel sounds of Indonesian were pronounced differently from standard Indonesian. The similarity of this research with the studies above is that they raised phonology as a study of linguistics and the existence of elements of applied linguistics in its implementation.

One of the language skills discussed in this study is speaking skills in English. According to Iskandarwassid and Sunendar (2009: 239), speaking skills have a close relationship with listening skills. A speaker associates meaning, regulates interaction; who to say what, to whom, when, and about what. In the context of communication, the speaker acts as a sender, while the receiver is the recipient of the message, which is the object of the communication. In communication, one of the important aspects that must be considered is pronunciation. Proper pronunciation is needed to avoid misunderstandings in communication. Muslich (2011:1) states that an in-depth study of speech sounds is investigated by a branch of linguistics called phonology. In the process of sound
formation, there are articulation elements that influence the formation of the sound, both in the form of a vowel segment and a consonant segment. Some places of articulation which include movement of the tongue or lips are as follows (Ladefoged: 2001):

1. Bilabial: upper and lower lips close
2. Labiodental: lower lip close to upper lip
3. Dental: the tip of the tongue position near the upper front teeth
4. Alveolar: the tip or leaf of the tongue that is in contact with or near the alveolar ridge
5. Post-Alveolar: The tip of the tongue is behind the lower teeth and the leaflets touch the front of the palate just behind the alveolar ridge.
6. Palatal: tip of the tongue close to the hard palate
7. Velar: the back of the tongue in contact with the velum (soft palate)
8. Labio velar: two lips close together while the back of the tongue lifts toward the velum.

The vowel symbols along with the articulation position and how to pronounce the articulation can be seen in the following table.

**Figure 1. Vowel Symbols**

![Vowel Symbols Diagram]

In general, the levels of vowel symbols can be seen from the table above which shows the quality of the levels of vowel symbols. For example, [i] is used for high front vowels, [u] for back high vowels, [I] for lower front center vowels. The use of phonetic theory in this study serves as a theoretical framework in analyzing the data and to further examine the learner's mastery of English during telephone handling practice.

**METHOD**

In this study, data collection was collected using the observation method. The observation method is data collection which is done by observing and systematically recording the symptoms being investigated (Rai, 2012: 52). The observation method was used to obtain data regarding the English pronunciation spoken by students during the teaching and learning process, especially in the situation of handling telephone calls. The data analyzed in this study is qualitative data. The data was taken from students of Faculty of Business and Faculty of Tourism who joined the post-intermediate level English course as many as 20 people. The qualitative data in this study is the result of student conversations during the teaching and learning process in the classroom.

The data analysis technique used to analyze the data is descriptive qualitative analysis. In this technique the data is presented with word descriptions to provide a clear picture of the object under study and the problems discussed. Then, data was compared, presented, and the conclusions were drawn sequentially as a series of analytical activities based on literature review, concepts, theoretical frameworks (phonology), and qualitative analysis methods.

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis was observed based on the phonetic theory proposed by Ladefoged (2001). It was found that some pronunciations are not appropriate with English standards. Based on the results of the study, here are some pronunciation errors that are often experienced by learners in English communication.

1. Loss of vowel sound /I/ into /e/
   
   **speech 1:** Alright Ms. Susan, our bellboy will come to your room
   
   **Student:** [belboe]
   
   **English:** ['belbɔɪ]
In the data above, the error lies in the pronunciation of the word 'bellboy'. The consonant 'y' which reads /ɪ/ belongs to the front mid high group which has a higher sound which is pronounced as a vowel sound /e/ which belongs to the front mid group which has a lower sound. This error occurs due to the students' lack of understanding of the pronunciation of English vowels.

II. Changes in the sound /ɔː/ which becomes a vowel sound /a/ and /u/:

• Speech 1: Thank you for your calling.

Student : [kalɪŋ]
English : ['kɔ:ln]

• Speech 2: I'm from Singapore.

Student : [siŋapur]  
English : [sɪŋapɔr]  

The data above shows students' pronunciation errors in pronouncing the words ‘calling’ and ‘Singapore’. In the word calling, the error lies in the letter ‘a’ which reads /ɔː/ in the word. The sound /ɔː/ belongs to the back mid low group, while the sound /a/ belongs to the central low group. The vowel sound /a/ which is pronounced by students is pronounced like the vowel sound /a/ in Indonesian. While in pronounced the word “Singapore”, the vowel /ɔː/ is pronounced as /u/ which belongs to the back high vocal group. This error shows that English (vowels) pronunciation is still influenced by Indonesian language.

III. Change the sound /ɒ/ into a vowel /o/:

• Speech: The rate is 200 US dollar for standard room.

Student : [dɔlar]  
English : ['dɔlә(r)]

The underlined word shows that students have difficulty in pronouncing the dollar word vowel sound /ɒ/ which is included in the back low group. The sound was not produced in the pronunciation of the word ‘dollar’ but tends to use the sound /ɔ/ which belongs to the back mid group according to the writing on the word. Based on the data above, it can be seen that there are still elements of the influence of the first language, where students tend to pronounce the word like pronunciation in Indonesian language.

IV. Changes in vowel sound /iː/ to sound /e/:

• Speech: Miss Susan may I have your flight detail?

Student : [detɑɪl]  
English : ['di:teɪl]

The data above shows students' pronunciation errors in pronouncing the word ‘detail’. The pronunciation of the sound /iː/ which belongs to the long high front group is pronounced as a vowel sound /e/ which belongs to the front mid group and it was pronounced like the pronunciation of Indonesian vowel sounds. The error occurred due to the second language (Indonesian) which still affects the student's vowel pronunciation.

V. Changes in the vowel sound /uː/ which becomes /o/:

• Speech: For hot water please press red button and cool water please press blue.

Student : [kol]  
English : [ku:l]

The error in the data above lies in the pronunciation of the vowel sound in the word ‘cool’. The vowel pronunciation of the word should sound /uː/ but students pronounced it with the sound /ɔ/. In English, when there are two /o/ vowels in one word, the vowel sound changes to /uː/ which belongs to the long back high group instead of /ɔ/ which belongs to the back mid vowel. This error occurs due to the students' lack of understanding in the pronunciation of vowel sounds so that the English pronunciation is still influenced by the first language.
During the learning process, students get some difficulties or obstacles in speaking English. These problems are categorized into two, they are internal factors and external factors. Mastery of linguistic components is one of the internal factors which include pronunciation and intonation, word choice, language structure and language style. For students’ pronunciation and intonation are still influenced by the first language, it is Indonesian or local languages (Bali). While the students’ intonation was still stammering when speaking in English, this happens because of the limited mastery of the language they have. Word choice is also included in the linguistic mastery factor, students tend to use the same and less varied word choices (diction) and this can be seen from students who tend to answer questions given by their interlocutors briefly and use the same words repeatedly.

The limitation of students in mastering the structure of language is one of the factors that become obstacle for them in communication. These limitations often make them afraid to make mistakes. In addition to the linguistic component factors, other factors that also become obstacles are the content components which include the relationship of content to the topic, structure of content, quality of content, and quantity of content. Learners often face obstacles in terms of content mastery, especially in terms of content structure and content quality. It means that, during the conversation process, some learners have a less structured conversation, it made the interlocutor became confused and unfocused. In addition to the factors mentioned above, the learning process is also influenced by outside factors of the learner such as the condition of the room which were being slightly open and it made the noise from surrounding disturbed the process of learning.

CLOSING

Based on the discussion above, several conclusions can be drawn as follows:

1. During the learning process, students experience problems in English pronunciation. Pronunciation errors made by students occur because they are still dominated by the first language which affects the way they speak in English. This affects the mastery of a foreign language (English). Another thing that also influences is the lack of understanding of the linguistic components they have. This can be seen in the pronunciation of vowel sounds that are not in accordance with British pronunciations such as vowel pronunciation such as /ɔ/ which becomes /a/, vowel /ɒ/ which becomes /o/, /i:/ which becomes /e/, and vowel /u:/ which becomes /o/.

2. In addition to students’ English pronunciation, during the learning process several obstacles were also found, such as barriers from linguistic factors, obstacles from component mastery factors including topics, content structure, content quality, and content quantity. In addition to these factors, situations and circumstances outside the learner also provide obstacles and influences during the teaching and learning process which include environmental conditions such as room conditions and the inclusion of sounds that interfere with the learning process.

Bibliography


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