

INTERFERENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE IN PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH SEGMENTAL SOUNDS

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ABSTRACT

This research was aimed at investigating the interference that occurs in the speaking of English by EFL learners. When students are unfamiliar with new words and they attempt to pronounce them without prior knowledge on how to pronounce them correctly, they may produce errors and may even fossilize such errors. Thus, the teachers are advised to halt the repetition of such errors and direct the students to practice correct pronunciation. This research was focused on investigating the interlingual errors that the students produced as a result of the interference and at finding solutions as to how to avoid such interlingual errors through methods that can be applied by their teachers. To achieve these purposes, the writer applied a process method. First, collecting data in the field, then selecting samples, separating them into sound classifications and comparing the English pronunciation of the samples taken using phonetic transcription, and finally, analyzing the data using phonological theories. The findings showed that mispronounced sounds resulted from the interference are as follows: [ph], [th], [kh], [f] for grapheme “ph”, [v], [θ], [ð], [z] for grapheme “s”, [ʃ], [ks] for grapheme “x”, and [i:], [u:], [æ], and [e]. Therefore, teachers are recommended to apply the Audio-lingual Method, the Phonetic Method, pronunciation drills, Behaviorist Learning Theories (sound imitating), and Phonic-based Approaches to improve the students’ pronunciation of the consonant and vowel sounds. They are recommended to implement the given methods to ensure that their students to pronounce the sounds correctly in order to avoid the interlingual errors caused by the interference of their L1.

Key Words: Interference, Consonant, Vowels, Pronunciation, First Language (L1), Indonesian, English.

INTRODUCTION

A modern Islamic boarding school in Indonesia usually requires its students to communicate in formal languages, English and Arabic, to increase their capacity in these languages. As communicating in English and Arabic languages is compulsory, all students attempt to use the languages although occasionally they are misled and accidentally use the phonological patterns of the language incorrectly. This is a typical situation when students are in the process of learning a new language besides their mother tongue. Their first language (L1) easily penetrates into their target language (TL). Accordingly, it develops into a negative language transfer or so called interference, which results in interlingual errors.

This problem has emerged at the Darul Ulum (DU) Islamic Boarding School because the students' knowledge of the TL is insufficient to accomplish a proper language usage in their daily use. They build their own language sound patterns based on their prior knowledge, which occasionally contradicts the correct language sound patterns of English. The students practically use Indonesian pronunciation sounds then transfer them into English. This leads them to produce interlingual errors. The errors occurring in their English sound patterns include the pronunciation of several consonant and vowel sounds.

The English language used daily by the students in DU includes interlingual errors in their communications. Since they use this type of language daily, they apply it and believe that it is the correct pattern of the language. Naturally, they will continue this accidental custom until they are made to realize that it is incorrect. Utilizing the incorrect phonological patterns, they possibly misinterpret the TL and it may subsequently cause misunderstandings in communication between them and other users.

Regarding this exploration, the writer poses two questions relating to this issue. They are:

- (1) What are the transferred sounds emerging in the pronunciation of English by the DU students because of L1 interference?
- (2) What are the solutions that the teachers of English at DU should implement to have the DU students avoid these mispronunciations?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

English as a Foreign Language

Applying English as a foreign language means that not every learner will understand native English and be able to receive and reproduce it perfectly. Since English is not used in-country in daily communications, the competency of English learners varies significantly. They face a great deal of difficulty and many problems to comprehend spoken English especially that of native speakers. Consequently, the native speakers will find comparable difficulty and problems in comprehending the English spoken by Indonesians as long as the capacity of the Indonesians does not reach the level of the English native speakers.

L1 Role in English Language Acquisition

A mother tongue may assist learners in learning the TL when both languages have similar patterns, which make them easily transferrable and hence able to apply the patterns into the TL. Justice (2004:15) asserts "...there is not a perfect correspondence between spelling and sounds in English...". This logic or illogic of English is truly distinctive from Indonesian, which always has a similar way to pronounce phonemes which are usually pronounced as they are written. In reality, Indonesian students often imitate this practice when they pronounce or read English words.

Mitchell and Myles (2004, cited in Block, 2003) conclude that the cross-linguistic role of the L1 will influence the TL. Thus, it is recommended to deeply separate which parts that may transfer and which not since there are positive transfer which assists learners to use the TL acceptably and negative transfers that are wrong in the TL.

Phonological Aspects of Language

One of the most important elements is the segmental sounds of English, which for many Indonesian students are complicated to pronounce well. Although the segmental sounds or so called consonants and vowels exist in all languages in the world, they have distinctive and variations when comparing one to another. These fundamental sounds need to be pronounced accurately to accomplish the correct sounds of the English language to achieve exact meanings and comprehension. Justice (2004) strongly recommends that to be like

a native speaker, every student should learn to hear and pronounce English well.

All languages in the world comprise a variety of phonological elements compared one to another. The differences will cause some difficulties to the learners of the TL. Especially if the elements of the TL are completely contrasting and different from the L1 phonological patterns, they will be difficult to apply and will bewilder new learners. Consonants, Allophonic Variations, and Vowel Sounds in English

Yong (2001) mentions that English comprises 24 consonants and 22 vowels. Aitchison (1992) and Gibbons (2002) further state that English has a total of 44 phonemes. Table 1 presents place and manner of articulation as well as the manner of voicing of consonants in English (adapted from Justice, 2004).

Table 1. Place and Manner of Articulation and Voicing (source: Justice, 2004).

Manner of articulation	Voicing	Place of articulation						
		Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop/plosive	Voiceless	/p/			/t/		/k/	
	Voiced	/b/			/d/		/g/	
Fricative	Voiceless		/f/	/θ/	/s/	/ʃ/		/h/
	Voiced		/v/	/ð/	/z/	/ʒ/		
Affricate	Voiceless					/tʃ/		
	Voiced					/dʒ/		
Nasal	Voiced	/m/			/n/		/ŋ/	
Liquid	Voiced				/l/	/r/		
Glide	Voiced	/w/				/j/		

Table 2 that follows is an allophonic variation table summarized from Celce-Murcia, et al. (2010:9). It includes phonemes and their variations within the phonemes themselves.

Table 2. Allophonic Variations (source: Celce-Murcia, et al., 2010).

Phonemes	Allophonic variation
/p/	[p ^h]
	[p]
	[p ⁰]

Table 2 continued...

/t/	[t ^h]
	[t]
	[t ^o]
/k/	[k ^h]
	[k]
	[k ^o]

Table 3 presents height and frontness as well as tenseness of vowel sounds (adopted from Justice, 2004).

Table 3. Height, Frontness of Tongue Position and Muscle Tenseness
(source: Justice, 2004).

Height	Tenseness	Frontness		
		Front	Central	Back
High	Tense	/i:/	-	/u:/
	Lax	/ɪ/	-	/ʊ/
Mid	Tense	/e/	/ə/	/o/
	Lax	/ɛ/	/ə/ /ʌ/	/ɔ/
Low	Tense	-	-	-
	Lax	/æ/	-	/ɑ/

Table 3 above shows that vowels that are based on tongue positions while pronouncing the vowel sounds are divided into two main categories: height and frontness. In addition, vowels are also constructed by muscle tension that requires muscles in the vocal tract to relocate and adjust based on the produced vowels.

Consonant Sounds and Vowel Sounds in Indonesian

Indonesian possesses nineteen native consonants and eight vowels plus there are a few other consonants that are loan sounds from English such as /f/, /v/ and /z/ (Yong, 2001). These sounds were absent from older Indonesian, yet, now exist in modern Indonesian.

Table 4 represents the non-standard (indigenous) consonants of Indonesian (adapted from Moeliono, 1985).

Table 4. Place and Manner of Articulation and Voicing
(source: Moeliono, 1985).

Manner of articulation	Voicing	Place of articulation				
		Labial	Dental Alveolar	Alveo Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop/plosive	Voiceless	/p/	/t/	/tʃ/	/k/	/ʔ/
	Voiced	/b/	/d/	/dʒ/	/g/	

Table 4 continues...

Trill	Voiced		/r/			
Nasal	Voiced	/m/	/n/	/ɲ/		
Fricative	Voiceless		/s/			/h/
	Voiced					
Liquid	Voiced		/l/			
Glide	Voiced	/w/		/j/		

However, there are some borrowed phonemes in Indonesian consonants, which are now partly adjusted into Indonesian words.

Table 5 is a supplementary table for consonant sounds adopted from Yong (2001). The darkened cells indicate that they are not Indonesian genuine consonants as Moeliono (1985) agrees. Hence, it is occasionally difficult for some users to correctly employ these loan sounds.

Table 5. English Consonant Sounds (source: Yong, 2001).

p	b	F	v	θ	ð	t	d
s	z	ʃ	ʒ	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
m	n	ŋ	l	r	j	w	h

Table 6 is the vowel sound descriptions that represent the entire vowels (adopted from Moeliono, 1985).

Table 6. Indonesian Vowel Sounds (source: Moeliono, 1985).

i		u
e	ə	o
ε	A	ɔ

These vowel sounds are present in eight items while with vowels [e] and [ε] it is arguable whether they differ or not in pronunciation. Related arguments also occur with [o] and [ɔ] where some experts believe that those varieties of vowels represent the same or a similar diaphone. In contrast, Zanten (1989) concludes that the allophones are certainly present in Indonesian.

This is another supplementary table for vowels adapted from Yong (2001).

Table 7. English Vowel Sounds (source: Yong, 2001).

i:	ɪ	ε	æ	E	aɪ	ɔɪ
ɑ:	ɒ	ɔ:	ʊ	aʊ	əʊ	ɪə
u:	ʌ	ɜ:	ə	eə	ʊə	

The fine cells are the existing vowels in Indonesian while the shaded cells are the phonemes that cause confusion amongst learners. Some of them are definitely contrastive with Indonesian vowels.

Interference

Littlewood (1984:25) defines interference as "...the learner uses his previous mother-tongue experiences as a means of organizing second language data". Moreover, Gass and Selinker (2001) suggest a similar source for where the interference comes from. They ingenuously consider their L1 as an instrument that can be converted directly into the TL. Richards, Platt, and Weber (1985) simply define it as a negative language transfer that happens when the patterns of the two languages are dissimilar. Chaer and Agustina (2010) prove that the existence of the interference arises due to the user's incompetency in using the TL where it will be influenced by the L1. Although Chaer and Agustina (2010) agree with this negative impact of the interference, they assume that interference would be important as it might be a basic means to accomplish an ideal language when it is implemented.

Towell and Hawkins (1994) supply a few pronunciation samples that the learners of English made which are identified as the transfer from their first languages, Spanish and French. Hence, they judge the pronunciation by stating that the occurrence happens because of the transfer of phonological elements of English into French or Spanish and vice versa. As a result, they arrive at this finale conclusion "transfer seems to affect all linguistics levels..." (p. 7). Omaggio further (1986) asserts that interference appears at most in the field of grammar and phonology rather than others since they are principally complicated in their own patterns.

Whitman and Jackson (1972, as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2001:117) state that "interference plays such a small role in language learning performance". Brown (2008) claims that transfer interlingual is a source of huge mistakes in student learning, and Matthew (2005:30) agrees that it appears as an essential source or errors. Schachter (1994) states that many people consider interference as a process that happens in language learning. Unlike others, she believes that interference is completely not a process, but merely an incident that results from language behaviorism.

Odlin (1989, as cited in Nunan, 1995) also says that the L1 will strongly affect the sounds of the TL. Thus, he recommends more attention to phonetic and phonemic differences since that sound system

may change one to another. This actuality is supported by Matthew (2005:30) who confirms that the transfer will obviously be observed at the level of sound systems than at other levels in the language. As the TL learners possibly transfer their L1 patterns, it is acceptable when they transfer the similar patterns into the TL and it will not cause many mistakes. Gass and Selinker (2001) suggest that they should notice the similarities and differences in phonological elements before they transfer them.

Tiono and Yostanto (2008) undertook observations into interference issues and found that the interference may occur when there are some English sounds that do not occur in Indonesian like [p^h], [t^h], [θ], [ð], [i:], [ʊ], [u:], [æ], and [e]. Therefore, the students will pronounce these with sounds that exist in Indonesian which are closest to them. This reasoning is also supported by Mathew (2005) who did a research on errors in pronunciation of consonants made by learners of English as a foreign language. In brief, acquiring phonological elements of a TL is a complex process. Learners and teachers should pay special attention to recognize the similar and distinct aspects of a TL and be competent to implement them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology applied in this research used a process that examined internal structural usage of a language that is appropriate with the research process and the TL. The steps in the research were collecting the data from the students in Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School in Aceh. They are considered as Acehnese Indonesian since Indonesia consist of may ethnics in which each has its own mother tongue that may affect their own Indonesian pronunciation. After the data were extracted, they were further classified and compared with the correct pronunciation patterns. The data was analyzed by using Contrastive Analysis Theory, and further offered suggestions for correcting the interlingual errors in pronunciation. In collecting the data, the writer used a hearing instrument, a recorder and a checklist.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

Here are several samples of Indonesian interference into English in consonant and vowel sounds that were found randomly in the

observations. The comparisons refer to the Received Pronunciation and International Phonetic Alphabet Transcription described in Longmans Pronunciation Dictionary by Wells (2000) with slight adjustments.

Table 8. Samples of Interference.

No	Sounds	Samples	RP	Students' pronunciation
1	[p ^h]	<u>P</u> en	[p ^h ɛn]	[pɛn]
2	[t ^h]	<u>T</u> ea	[t ^h i:]	[ti:]
3	[k ^h]	<u>C</u> an	[k ^h æn]	[kæn]
4	[f] for "ph"	<u>Ph</u> oto	[fəʊtəʊ]	[p ^h əʊtəʊ]
5	[v]	<u>S</u> even	[sevən]	[sefən]
6	[θ]	<u>Any</u> thing	[ɛnθɪŋ]	[ɛnt ^h ɪŋ]
7	[ð]	<u>With</u> out	[wɪðaʊt]	[wɪt ^h aʊt]
8	[z] for "s"	<u>D</u> oes	[dʌz]	[dʌs]
9	[ʃ]	<u>Sh</u> oes	[ʃu:s]	[su:s]
10	[ks] for "x"	<u>B</u> ox	[bɒks]	[bɒk]
11	[i:]	<u>Shee</u> p	[ʃi:p]	[ʃɪp]
12	[u:]	<u>Coo</u> ler	[k ^h u:lə]	[k ^h ʊlə]
13	[æ]	<u>M</u> ad	[mæd]	[mɛd]
14	[e]	<u>M</u> ake	[mek]	[mek]

The sound [p^h] as in "pen" is pronounced as [pɛn] instead of [p^hɛn] by the students. The place and manner of articulation of [p^h] and [p] are identical, yet [p^h] needs aspiration when pronouncing it. A similar case also happens in allophones [t^h] and [k^h]. The students pronounce them without any aspiration as they think they are equivalent with the released non-aspirated ones. This case occurs because in Indonesian, the phonemes /p/, /t/, /k/ are never aspirated. This influences the students who are not familiar with aspirated sounds who then pronounce the phonemes as they would in Indonesian, with no aspiration.

As formerly stated, the orthography "ph" and "th" seem to illustrate that the pronunciation is sounded as [p^h] and [t^h]. When the students notice a word written in "ph" or "th" as in "photo" or "anything", they will pronounce the words with aspiration. For them, grapheme "h" indicates aspiration and they will pronounce words containing "ph" or "th" with aspiration.

The absence of phoneme /v/ in Indonesian makes it hard for learners to pronounce it correctly. Since the students hear [v] and [f] as identical, they pronounce the [v] sound similar to [f]. It is common that

the students pronounce “seven” as [sefən] instead of [sevən]. Actually, the learners need to vibrate their vocal cords to produce the correct sound.

Although phoneme /z/ is occasionally present in grapheme “s”, the students hardly consider that it exists in “s” and is pronounced as [z]. Consequently, the word “does” will simply be pronounced as [dʌs] instead of [dʌz].

Phoneme /ʃ/ is not available in Indonesian. The grapheme “sh” that slightly resembles [s] causes the students to pronounce it as [s] instead of [ʃ]. Thus, they will pronounce the word “shoes” as [su:s] instead of [ʃu:s]. In addition, phoneme [ks] is also not present in Indonesian. Hence, it is quite difficult for most students to pronounce the sound [s] following the [k] when they pronounce a word with the consonant “x” as in “box”. Instead of correctly saying [bɒks], they are more likely to say [bɒk].

For the students, phonemes /i:/ and /u:/ that have longer sounds than the shorter ones seem to be identical. Although Indonesian possesses the long and short vowels, the length of long vowels compared to short vowels does not have a significant difference. As a result, they pronounce the long vowel /i:/ as in “sheep” like the short vowel [ʃi:p] and /u:/ as in “cooler” into [kʰʊlə].

Additionally, the absence of vowel phonemes /æ/ and /e/ affects the learners in pronouncing them. Both phonemes are pronounced as [ɛ] that sometimes carries misinterpretation among the students and native speakers of English. The word “date”, “dad” and “dead” can be pronounced equally with the presence of phoneme /ɛ/ for all these vowel sounds.

The Interference of L1 into English

Phonetic elements in all of the languages in this world vary in the quantity, pronunciation, and length of vowel and consonant sounds. It is normal for beginners or intermediate learners to transfer their L1 sound patterns into English especially when some of the English sounds do not exist in their L1. This mispronunciation could produce errors and misunderstanding in their communications and they could possibly fossilize these errors and then face great difficulties trying to remedy these mispronunciations. Unless a learner recognizes them and is able to identify the correct sounds, a serious issue may occur when the learner is unable to stop and exclude customary pronunciation from his L1. Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011) assert that adults do not easily

acquire other pronunciation forms since they maintain their previous paradigms for pronunciation of words. Therefore, the younger a learner, the better his pronunciation will be.

Language interference exists in the pronunciation of segmental sounds in the speech of DU students. This condition mainly occurs because of major differences between the English and the Indonesian pronunciation systems. Particularly, the written form of some sounds influences the learners to pronounce them as they appear in Indonesian. For this reason, reciting passages without giving priority to listening first is not always effective since the students will transfer their sound patterns from Indonesian into the TL. This will then cause them to make similar mistakes in reading as they do in speaking. The absence of some particular sounds in Indonesian forces the learners to pronounce them with the closest sound that they are familiar with, for instances, [p^h] becomes [p], [θ] becomes [t^h], [ʃ] becomes [s], long vowel [i:] becomes [ɪ], and [æ] becomes [ɛ] etc.

Interference may occur for any of the reasons stated below:

1. English and Indonesian use similar orthography (the Latin alphabet) indicating that almost all vowels and consonants of both languages are pronounced similarly so that learners generalize all of them to sound the same.
2. Some English users have zero awareness that several phonemes in English have completely different sounds from those in Indonesian and that English has certain special sounds that are not produced in Indonesian.
3. Many English dictionaries produced in Indonesia are not written with proper pronunciation methods or standard transcriptions for some words.
4. Habitual behavior in correlation with the place and manner of articulation in sounding an L1 may affect the production of sounds in English.
5. EFL learners imitate the pronunciation used by their mentors such as senior students and teachers then pronounce sounds the same way they do. This is acceptable as long as the pronunciation is correct but it will be in error if their mentors do not use correct pronunciation.

The Solutions to Avoid Interference

James (1998, as cited in Fang & Xue-mei, 2007:12) proposes three principles to use to correct students' errors: (i) use techniques (and practice) to improve students' accuracy, (ii) the implementation of

affective factors of the students' needs to be taken into account, and (iii) the manner of correction should not be face-threatening to the learners. Several solutions are presented here to overcome and prevent the students from applying L1 interference in their speech. The teachers may select the most suitable ones depending on their aims and the characteristics of the students. Overall, it is recommended to use a teacher-centered approach.

First, teachers may apply the Audio-lingual Method that emphasizes correct pronunciation of the TL words (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Djunaidi, 1987). In applying the Audio-lingual Method, they can effectively teach the most accurate sounds for English. They should also be required to use a "minimal pair's exercise" which has students to closely differentiate between two different phonemes in order that the students become familiar with the different phonemes and avoid the errors.

Second, the Phonetic Method is another appropriate method that focuses on detailed pronunciation of every sound. Unlike others, this method suggests that teachers employ phonetic transcription as their writing system (Djunaidi, 1987). Matthew (2005:38) also recommends that the learners use narrow phonetic transcriptions to avoid errors in pronunciation.

Another expert, Stevick (1982, cited in Nunan, 1995) proposes mastering segmental features through pronunciation drills. In this way, the learners will notice the distinction between L1 learners and the pronunciation of native speakers.

In addition, Sound Imitating is another suitable method to acquire a (target) language. In his research, Davutoglu (2011:220) suggests the Behaviorist Learning Theory that demands learners to imitate with their best accuracy and practice reinforcement to construct sentences with correct pronunciation. Matthew (2005:31) strongly recommends using aural and oral practice to improve the accuracy of English pronunciation of students.

Lastly, Justice (2004) suggests that professional educators use the Phonic-based Approach, which is also employed by native speakers, to teach pronunciation to beginners to pronounce the sounds correctly since English has no precise correspondence between its spellings and its sounds.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn. Firstly, interference from the L1 occurs in the pronunciation of English segmental sounds produced by the Acehese Indonesian students at Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School. They are [p^h], [t^h], [k^h], [f] for grapheme “ph”, [v], [θ], [ð], [z] for grapheme “s”, [ʃ], [ks] for grapheme “x”, [i:], [u:], [æ], and [e]. Such interference can cause phonological errors in the spoken English of the students. In countries where a TL or SL is a foreign language, the L1 of the users will negatively influence the pronunciation of their TL.

Secondly, if the interference of the L1 into the TL of the students is persistent and they apply such pronunciation in their communications, they can mispronounce words which can then become fossilized. Solutions to this problem that can be implemented by teachers, including by the use of Audio-lingual Method, Phonetic Method, pronunciation drills, Behaviorist Learning Theories (sound imitating), and Phonic-based Approach either together or separately. Through these solutions, the students can become more competent to pronounce the segmental sounds/phonemes correctly and, thus, avoid the interlingual errors, which will enable others, especially native speakers, to understand their English speech without difficulty.

SUGGESTIONS

English teachers should know all aspects of English including accurate pronunciation. They are expected to continue learning to increase their capacity particularly in the crucial skills that the students need. Further study of English phonology is highly recommended for both elementary and secondary school teachers. Besides, the teachers should learn to recognize interference and interlingual errors in the TL from the L1 of the students, and be able to analyze the issue(s), and be competent to correct the errors and provide solutions for their students as to how to pronounce English words and phrases correctly.

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