

ENGLISH PHONETICS AND ENGLISH TEACHERS

Fahrudin

MA Assulaimaniyah Mojoagung

diglossiafbs@gmail.com

Abstrak

Dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, Inggris fonetik, sebagai bagian dari linguistik, tampaknya telah diabaikan. Ketika siswa ingin belajar bahasa Inggris, mereka harus belajar untuk melafalkannya. Mereka tentu juga harus mencoba untuk berbicara seperti halnya penutur asli bahasa Inggris. Hal ini dapat dicapai dengan meniru dan meniru sampai pengucapan mereka memuaskan dan dapat diterima. Pada kenyataannya, mereka hampir tidak bisa menemukan penutur asli, mereka cenderung meniru pengucapan guru mereka. Elemen yang berbeda ditemukan antara bahasa mereka dan bahasa target diyakini menjadi penyebab kesulitan dalam pengucapan. Oleh karena itu, memahami dan menerapkan fonetik bahasa Inggris dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggris untuk guru bahasa Inggris adalah benar-benar penting dan sangat diperlukan.

Kata kunci: fonetik, guru bahasa Inggris

INTRODUCTION

In a collection of articles on “Isu Linguistik, Pengajaran Bahasa dan Sastra, published by Airlangga University Press (1988), The Late Prof. Dr. Abdul Wahab, M.A, a noted linguist of State University of Malang, writes, “Haruskah Guru Bahasa Asing Mengikuti Perkembangan Teori Linguistik?” Having finished investigating Robert Stockwell and Sol Saporta’s views on the relevance of linguistic theories to the teaching of language, Prof. Wahab finally pointed out that it was important for foreign language teachers to keep abreast with the development of current linguistic theories so that they are able to improve their teaching quality. Unfortunately, however, Prof Wahab did not state explicitly which part of linguistic theories those foreign language teachers should keep abreast with. It seems to the writer that Prof. Wahab wanted to emphasize only on the theory of implicature proposed by Grice. The writer is still in doubt whether or not such a theory has a direct contribution to the teaching and learning of English at senior or even junior high schools. The writer must agree to differ at this point.

In connection with the current linguistic theories and with reference to the teaching and learning of English at junior and senior high schools in Indonesia today, I contend quite

bluntly that English teachers should know and understand English phonetics thoroughly. They must not only understand English phonetics thoroughly but practice it in their daily teaching as well. To the best of my knowledge, there are at least two reasons why English teachers should understand English phonetics. Firstly, English, as we have already known, is not students' mother tongue. Secondly, English teachers are expected to be the speech models for their students.

If English were exactly the same in its sound system and in its grammatical system as the students' own language, there would be no learning problems at all. The difficulty faced by the students in learning English phonetics is thus brought about by the different elements found between their mother tongue and the target language (e.g. English). The degree of difficulty in learning is also determined by the degree of differences between those two languages, Indonesian and English. The greater the similarity between them, the less difficulty it will be for the students to learn the foreign language. It makes sense, therefore, to say that an Indonesian student will find it more difficult to learn English than an Arabic student who learns the same language, because the degree of similarity between Indonesian and English is lower than that found between Arabic and English. To prove how difficult it is for the Indonesian students to pronounce English fricative consonants sounds, the following common mistakes in English pronunciation are worth considering:

Table 1 : English Fricative Consonant /v/¹

Spelling	Correct Pronunciations	Students' Pronunciations
1. Veal	/vi:l/	/fi:l/
2. Vicar	/vikə/	/fikə/
3. Very	/veri/	/feri/
4. Glove	/glɑ:v/	/glɑf/
5. Give	/gi:v/	/gif/
6. Five	/faiv/	/faif/
7. Prove	/pru:v/	/pruf/

We notice clearly that in Table I that the students still could not distinguish between an English fricative consonant sound /v/ and an English fricative consonant sound /f/.

¹ The writer wishes to express his countless thanks to the sixth semester students of the Faculty of Language and Literature of UNIPDU for the data they collected following their phonology class. They collected the data from the the third and second year students of five senior high schools in Jombang. They recorded the students' pronunciations and some of which are displayed in this article.

Phonologically, the principal English phoneme /v/ is formed like the principal English phoneme /f/ except that the vocal cords are made to vibrate so that the voice is produced during the articulation of the sound. The sound of /v/ may be expressed shortly by defining it as a voiced labio-dental fricative consonant (Jones, 1950:166) or voiced labiodental fricative continuant (Kartner, 1960:143). Almost all of the students investigated in the classroom had a tendency to replace /v/ by a breathed labio-dental fricative consonant /f/ which may be described as identical with /v/ except that the vocal folds are not approximated.

The writer believes that those errors in pronunciations are caused by the fact that in Bahasa Indonesia we do not have such a consonant sound /v/. It makes sense therefore that the students always make mistakes when they are asked to pronounce words containing the sound/v/. Only by intensive oral training can the students pronounce the sound /v/ correctly.

The following Table also gives a clear description on how the students generally pronounce the English voiced palato-alveolar fricative consonant /ʒ/

Table 2 : English Voiced Palato-Alveolar Fricative /ʒ/

Spelling	Correct Pronunciations	Students' Pronunciations
1. Measure	/meʒə/	/mesə/
2. Pleasure	/pleʒə/	/plesə/
3. Occasion	/əkeiʒən/	/əkeisən/
4. Treasure	/treʒə/	/tresə/
5. Massage	/mesaʒ/	/mesaj/
6. Television	/teləviʒən/	/teləfisən/
7. Usually	/yuzuəli/	/yusuəli/

In Table 2 above we observe that the students also had difficulty in pronouncing the English consonant sound /ʒ/; they pronounce /s/. They do not voice /ʒ/ properly. They tended to replace it by a voiceless consonant sound /s/ and sometimes /z/. As it has already been known that the principal English /ʒ/ is formed like /s/ except that the air-pressure is weaker and the vocal cords are made to vibrate so that the voice is produced during the articulation of the sound. It may be described as a voiced palato-alveolar fricative consonant (Jones, 1950:178). Hardly do the students hear such a consonant in their Bahasa Indonesia. It is therefore understandable that they have difficulty in voicing that sound.

In addition to the above mentioned errors in pronouncing English fricative consonant sound /v/ and English voiced palato-alveolar fricative sound /ʒ/, the following table shows how the students pronounced a breathed palato-alveolar fricative consonant

Table 3 : Breathed Palato-Alveolar Fricative Consonant /ʃ/

Speling	Correct Pronunciations	Students' Pronunciations
1. Sheef	/ʃi:f/	si:f/
2. Ship	/ʃip/	/sip/
3. Sharp	/ʃa:p/	/sa:p/
4. Bush	/buʃ/	/bus/
5. Sure	/ʃuə/	/suə/
6. Fish	/fiʃ/	/fis/
7. Social	/souʃəl/	/sousəl/
8. Musician	/mju:ziʃən/	/mju:sisən/
9. Nation	/neiʃən/	/neisən/
10. Examination	/igzamineiʃən/	/igsamineisən/

In Table 3 we notice how the students pronounced words consisting of the sound /ʃ/. The English sound /ʃ/ is the voiceless analogue of /ʒ/. Like all the voiceless continuet fricative, the friction noises are accentuated by the increase volume of air entering oral cavity as a result of the fact that the vocal folds are not closed (Kartner, 1960:153; Jones, 1950:175). Most studens had difficulty in pronouncing the English fricative /ʃ/ since the sound in question is not found in neither Bahasa Indonesia nor Javanese. They tended to replace /s/ for /ʃ/. It is true that in Bahasa Indonesia they have words such as masyarakat, isyarat, musyawarah, insyaf, syaraf, etc. All of these words have the sound /ʃ/. Instead of pronouncing /ʃ/, they usually pronounce /s/.

This phenomena is interesting to note. The majority of Madrasah Aliyah students (Note that some of the students whose pronuciations were recorded are Madrasah Aliyah students) have already been familiar with Arabic since they were at their Madrasah Tsanawiyah. When they were asked to pronounce Arabic words containing the sound /ʃ/, they could do so correctly. They did not seem to have any difficulties. When they were asked to pronounce the English words with the sound /ʃ/, they could not pronounce those words correctly. The writer does not exactly when this interesting phenomena happenes. He believes that this should not have occurred if their teacher had trained them to make a sharp distinction between those two sounds. The students, therefore, should be made aware of the distinctive feature of /s/ and /ʃ/, and taught the right way of pronouncing the English /ʃ/.

We have already known that in the teaching and learning of English using the so-called communicative approach, meaningfulness plays an important role. The focus of the teaching of English is not directed towards grammatical rules any more. Unfortunately, in the students' text books available today. Hardly could we find enough exercises on English pronunciations, stresses, and intonations. As a result, students of junior high schools know nothing about them. Poor pronunciation habit has been fossilized.

Helping the students to develop good English pronunciation is an extremely important part of the teachers' work. Often the teachers will find it necessary to prepare drills on a particular contrast that the students, because of the interference from their native languages, Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese, find difficult to make correctly or consistently. Drills on minimal pairs (pairs of words in which the only difference is the sound contrast being studied) and drills concentrating on a particular sound are most often used. Visual aids can help the teachers make these contrasts clear and meaningful to the students. This can be done, of course, only if the teachers have a good knowledge on English phonetics or phonology.

Ideally teachers of English should have already mastered English phonetics well because they have to give correct examples in pronouncing individual English words in sentences to their students during the teaching and learning process. As models they are expected to be able to correct their students' errors in pronouncing certain words, and to show their students how to produce certain difficult sounds in English. If the teachers themselves have already possessed good English pronunciation, the writer strongly believes that their students will gradually and automatically imitate their teachers' correct pronunciations. Here the philosophy of *digugu lan ditiru (being followed and imitated)* applies. What can be expected from the English teachers who have no knowledge and ability in English phonetics then? The writer thinks that only through imitation from the teachers will the students ultimately succeed in producing the English sounds correctly in the same way as the native speakers.

It is clear from the above explanations and examples that English teachers by necessity should have a good knowledge on English phonetics. The language they teach is completely different. The differences may be found between the students' language and the target language. The differences may be differences in the individual sounds, differences in the phonetic features of similar sounds, and so on.

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