

IMPROVING INDONESIAN EFL LEARNERS' PRONUNCIATION THROUGH AUDIOLINGUAL METHOD PRINCIPLES

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Abstract: This paper puts forward the way to improve Indonesian EFL learners' pronunciation through Audiolingual Method principles. It will look at the critical period hypothesis, where the notion of 'native-like accent can be achieved' refers to. The Audiolingual Method, which emphasizes the teaching of spoken language and sees the language as a matter of habit will be used as a basis to teaching EFL learners' pronunciation. Both Indonesian and English segmental features will be discussed and compared in which the pronunciation teaching can be effectively delivered by identifying the difference between the two languages. In addition, the technology-assisted pronunciation teaching is presented as tools for helping EFL teachers in conveying a pronunciation course.

Keywords: Indonesian EFL learners, Pronunciation, Audiolingual Method.

Pronunciation is a part of language learning that is rather hard to master, especially when the language is learnt later in life as a second or foreign language. The critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) suggests that native like pronunciation can only be attained by those who learn the language before puberty. This hypothesis sometimes makes adult learners unmotivated to further learn pronunciation since what they are expected is something unreachable. Being absent from learning pronunciation will be more likely to lead language learners to unintelligible communication. The messages are likely to be interpreted differently when the speakers badly pronounce certain sounds of language. The importance of teaching pronunciation in ELT, especially to adult learners, is emphasized in a number of studies (e.g. Fraser, 2000; Gilakjani, 2012; Schaetzel & Low, 2009; Thompson & Gaddes, 2005). This essay will firstly present an overview of CPH. It then discusses the Audiolingual Method principles and how the teaching of pronunciation can be based on them to improve Indonesian EFL learners' pronunciation. Finally, the technology-assisted pronunciation teaching will be put forward as helpful tools for EFL teachers in delivering a pronunciation course.

THE CRITICAL PERIOD HYPOTHESIS

The Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) postulates that after a particular period of time our language learning abilities decrease significantly. The ability to learn a language, as it suggests, is limited to the years before puberty (Lenneberg, 1967). It is said that as the learners get older and their brains begin to mature, lateralization occurs as certain functions are assigned to either the

left or right side of the brain. Children's brains, which have not lateralized yet, are able to use both hemispheres for language learning. Research reveals that when lateralization is complete, learners rely solely on their left hemisphere for language skills. In this regard, Brown (2007) maintains that we have a critical period of time before we lose this ability to use both hemispheres simultaneously for language learning.

When the adult learners of English hold their belief in the CPH, it can make them lose heart to learn English pronunciation. They will think that learning English pronunciation is useless since they have lost the ability to learn the language well. However, it does not mean that adult learners cannot improve their pronunciation. The hypothesis only emphasizes more on the closeness to native accent when the language is learnt before puberty. As the CPH implies, the adults are not able to acquire a perfect accent and pronunciation while acquiring a language. While that may be true, there is still a great deal that they can learn and work to improve their English pronunciation in order to maintain the intelligible communication. Many linguists agree that native like pronunciation is no longer the main goal of language learning, however the intelligibility and a good pronunciation is still needed (see. Crystal, 2003; Harmer, 2007; Jenkins, 2007; Kachru & Nelson, 2006; Kachru & Smith, 2008; Kirkpatrick, 2007; McKay, 2002; Yates & Zielinski, 2009). One that may be helpful is through practicing the spoken language regularly as portrayed in the Audiolingual Method principle, which will be elaborated in the following section.

THE AUDIOLINGUAL METHOD PRINCIPLES

Audiolingual Method was a popular method of teaching a foreign language in the United States in the 1950s. This teaching method emerged after Grammar Translation Method and Direct Method, which are considered to be unsuccessful in making language learners competent in the target language. The language teaching, in that era, was based on the view of the nature of language which is mainly speech, a set of habits, and what its native speakers say (Lado, 1964). Several characteristics of Audiolingual Method, as Richards & Rodgers (2001) mention, include memorizing dialogues and performing pattern drills, producing mistakes are minimized, spoken form of language is more prioritized than the written one, the explanation of grammar is not given until the learners have acquired a pattern in a variety of contexts through practice, and the teaching of word meaning is integrated in a linguistic and cultural context.

Applying the Audiolingual Method principle in the teaching of English pronunciation, especially to adult learners, is something feasible to overcome pronunciation problems. I often heard that when giving presentation my university students pronounced 'care /keə(r)ʹ for the word 'car /kɑ:(r)ʹ as in ' I came here by car' or ' my mother missed the car (taxi) this morning'. When the word 'car /kɑ:(r)ʹ is pronounced as 'care /keə(r)ʹ, misinterpretation will occur since in the first sentence I thought the student means to say s/he came to campus with care or with careful attention to avoid something unexpected happens on the way to campus. The second sentence may give meaning that the student's mother did not get enough affection or love from family members or the

family members may leave her unsupervised. I also guessed the students, in the second sentence, may actually want to say ‘everyone in my family does not care for my mother’ but they expressed it wrongly. Some other pronunciation problems frequently occur in the class as I notice during the class session. Misunderstanding, therefore, can surely be minimized by improving their pronunciation. Even though the native like accent is impossible to achieve since they have passed their critical period phase, at least the intelligibility can be maintained if their speech improved.

Identifying English sounds which are quite similar and practicing to pronounce them repeatedly will make the students see the difference. Minimal pairs or a minimal set of sounds need to be regularly introduced to them. By taking the norm of Audiolingual Method this pronunciation teaching activity can be carried out. Bloomfield (1933: 78) contends that “in order to recognize the distinctive features of forms in our own language, we need only determine which features of sound are different for purposes of communication”. Recognizing the features of forms that are different or knowing that the two sounds are dissimilar will help the students to clearly and appropriately use particular utterances. It is very difficult for students to see the difference of certain English sounds by only listening to English teachers, English music, or to English broadcasting without explicitly exposing them to students. Knowing the meaning of which the sounds are similar will also help the students identify the difference. Again, Bloomfield (1933) reminds us that we cannot identify the distinctive features merely based on the pure phonetics without knowing the meaning.

The teaching of pronunciation, in general, is made up of teaching segmental (consonants and vowels) and suprasegmental (e.g. stress and intonation) features/phonemes. Both segmental and suprasegmental features have recently become the focus of studies on pronunciation teaching after the shift from contrastive analysis technique which was popular in the 20th century (Jenkins, 2004). As Indonesian EFL learners may possess different mother tongues before starting learning Indonesian, the factors that may facilitate or interfere them in learning English vowel, for instance, is different. Crother (1978) as cited in Zanten & Heuven (1983) makes distinctions of the vowel amongst the three local languages and Indonesian (Malay). It is said that Indonesian (Malay) has 6 vowels; Toba Batak has 5 vowels; Sundanese has 7 vowels; Javanese has 8 vowel phonemes. Some other scholars, however, say that there are 6 vowels in Javanese including the allophonic pairs [e] – [ɛ] and [o] – [ɔ].

front	central	back
i		u
		o
ɛ		
	a	

FIG. 1a: Toba Batak

front	central	back
i		u
e		o
	ə	
ɛ		ɔ
	a	

FIG. 1b: Javanese

front	central	back
i	ɨ	u
		o
	ə	
ɛ		
	a	

FIG. 1c: Sundanese

front	central	back
i		u
e		o
	ə	
	a	

FIG. 1d: Indonesian(Malay)

Figure 1. The positions of the vowels of Indonesian, Toba Batak, Javanese and Sundanese according to Crothers (1978) in Zanten & Heuven (1983).

As described in Bahasa Indonesia (2009), there are 6 diphthongs and 24 consonants in Indonesian. Indonesian diphthongs include /ai/ as in *pantai*, /au/ as in *pulau*, /iu/ as in *cium*, /io/ as in *biola*, /ia/ as in *siang*, and /ua/ as in *luar*. Consonants in Indonesian are mostly pronounced roughly as in English. Yet there are some exceptions as the following consonants: /c/ as in *cari*, /g/ as in *guna*, /h/ as in *hidup*, /kh/ as in *akhir*, /ng/ as in *tangan*, /ngg/ as in *panggil*, /ny/ as in *tanya*, /r/ as in *baru*, and /k/ as in *kata*. Regarding the articulatory apparatus, the consonant inventory of Indonesian can be seen below.

	labial		alveolar		palatal		velar		glottal
stop	p	b	t	d	c	ɟ	k	g	ʔ
fricative			s						h
liquid				l r					
nasal		m		n		ɲ		ŋ	
glide				y				w	

Figure 2. Indonesian consonants. Grey columns are voiceless sounds (Ruijgrok, 2008).

In comparison with English, Indonesian has fewer number of vowel sounds. It is noted that there are about 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonants in most English accents (Crystal, 1995). This means that the vowel sounds that do not exist in Indonesian must become the focus of the pronunciation teaching and drilling in the classroom activity. If the students receive no exposure to those differences, there will be a tendency for them to transfer their first language vowel sounds in uttering English sounds. This situation often occurs to myriads of EFL/ESL students around the globe. Thus, through contrastive analysis, Lado (1957) discovers that this problem commonly happens when the EFL/ESL students try to use the target language. Such anticipation can be made before the students get accustomed to transferring their first language to their second/foreign language. Sufficient exposures to speech sound of English and making the learning of pronunciation a habit of them may help Indonesian EFL learners, especially the adult ones, improve their pronunciation.

THE TECHNOLOGY-ASSISTED PRONUNCIATION TEACHING

Many non-native English teachers might not be confident in modeling the students how particular English sounds should be pronounced as their mother tongue may give trace on their pronunciation. Likewise, the students might consider that the model of pronunciation given by the non-native English teacher is inaccurate. These negative attitudes can cause the teaching of pronunciation unlikely to occur. However, the presence of technology can indeed help this barrier. The technology, as Newhouse (2002) states, is created and adopted in educational territory to address the teaching and learning problems. Technological products that can be employed in the teaching of pronunciation are many such as digital audio or video, podcast, computer software, CD-ROM, etc. By using CD-ROM, for instance, the students can listen to a word or short sentence and then record themselves while repeating the word or sentence. The students' output is then compared to a model of correct pronunciation and the results displayed to the students in the form of a graph (Dudeney & Hockly,

2007). The popularly known ‘voice recognition software’ is used in this type of pronunciation activity.

In addition, when internet is readily available in the school or university, the teachers can incorporate useful websites related to pronunciation into their teaching or probably encourage the students to access them. Interesting and useful websites that provide English language learners with pronunciation activities and resources, for example, are as follows:

- BBC Website (www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/grammar/pron/)
- British Council Website (www.teachingenglish.org.uk/teaching-resources)
- Online Program for developing listening and pronunciation skills (www.speechinaction.org/cool-speechhot-listening-fluent-pronunciation/)
- Various English accents website (accent.gmu.edu/)
- Lists of rhyming words that contrast different consonants and vowels (myweb.tiscali.co.uk/wordscope/wordlist/)
- Interactive version of Adrian Underhill’s phonemic chart (www.onestopenglish.com/skills/pronunciation/phonemic-chart-and-app/)

CONCLUSION

To conclude, Indonesian EFL learners can improve their pronunciation even though they did not start learning English since childhood. The CPH is better seen as the period where EFL learners aim to attain native like pronunciation. However, it is not a major purpose of the current English language learning. Audiolingual Method principles offer an effective approach to teaching pronunciation. Exposing adequate models of English sounds, contrasting them with learners’ language and making pronunciation exercise a habit, especially the English sounds that are quite difficult for Indonesian to imitate, will enhance ELF learners’ pronunciation. For most EFL teachers the presence of technology is considerably helpful in assisting deliver a pronunciation course. Online programs and applications can also be incorporated in the pronunciation teaching when the internet has become a part of school or university facility.

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