

THE TYPOLOGY OF THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATIONS AT FKIP-UNIVERSITAS HKBP NOMMENSEN PEMATANGSIANTAR ON ENGLISH VOICELESS PLOSIVE CONSONANTS

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ABSTRACT

This article is regarded as a descriptive qualitative research dealing with the first year students' skill in pronouncing the English voiceless plosive consonants. The subjects of the research are all considered homogenous consisting of 35 students who factually use Toba Batak language and Indonesian as their native languages. Based on the data analysis it was found out that those who had more phonological awareness could pronounce the English voiceless consonants better than those who had less. These speech sounds could be pronounced well when they particularly occurred either at medial or final position, but they were sometimes not properly pronounced or aspirated when they occurred in initial position and followed by stressed vowel. Phonetic errors or faulty pronunciations were more frequently done when these consonants occurred in initial position or uttered in connection with other words in a sentence.

Keywords: English, pronunciation, typology, voiceless plosive consonant

ABSTRAK

Artikel ini dikenal sebagai penelitian kualitatif deskriptif yang berkaitan dengan keterampilan siswa tahun pertama dalam mengucapkan konsonan letup tak bersuara bahasa Inggris. Subjek penelitian semuanya dianggap homogen yang terdiri dari 35 siswa yang secara faktual menggunakan bahasa Batak Toba dan bahasa Indonesia dalam komunikasi sehari-hari. Berdasarkan analisis data diketahui bahwa mereka yang memiliki kesadaran fonologis yang lebih tinggi dapat mengucapkan konsonan tersebut lebih baik daripada mereka yang memiliki kesadaran fonologis yang lebih rendah. Konsonan ini dapat diucapkan dengan benar bila berada pada posisi tengah atau akhir, namun kesalahan kadang-kadang terjadi (tidak diaspirasikan) bila konsonan tersebut terdapat pada posisi awal dan diikuti oleh vokal yang mendapat tekanan suara. Kesalahan pelafalan yang bersifat fonetis lebih sering terjadi bila konsonan tersebut muncul pada posisi awal atau bila dirangkaikan dengan kata-kata lain dalam sebuah kalimat.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Inggris, pengucapan, tipologi, konsonan plosive tak bersuara

INTRODUCTION

This research is epistemologically regarded as an empirical psycholinguistic inquiry, and the data are all derived from the students' factual utterances and focused on the speech production of the English voiceless plosive consonants that occur in initial, medial and final positions. The students' utterances were all recorded by using mobile phone, and

their utterances were all transcribed by using the IPA phonetic symbols. Based on the theory proposed by Bogdan and Taylor (1975) and Setiyadi (2006), this research is categorized as a descriptive-qualitative research since the data used and analyzed in this research are all referred to the typology of the English voiceless plosive consonants pronounced by the first year students at FKIP-Universitas HKBP Nommensen (UHN)

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Pematangsiantar. In other words, this research is particularly designed to find out the characteristics of the students' skill in pronouncing the English voiceless plosive consonants, which will provide a qualitative description on the pronunciations of the English voiceless plosive consonants. The data are all gathered in a naturalistic way with a descriptive analysis, which is based on the regular patterns of how these consonants are pronounced in both isolated words and a sentence.

Based on the preliminary observation conducted during the learning and teaching process in the classroom, it was found out that some of the students produced no aspiration while pronouncing the English voiceless consonants /p, t, k/ especially when it occurs in initial position and followed by stressed vowel. It is theoretically explained that the first language dominantly affect the speaker's pronunciation in learning a foreign language (Lucas, 1992). Based on the research conducted by Sinurat (2018), it was found out that the most frequently-used language gives more influence on the pronunciation of English as a foreign language. Therefore, this research also explicates the skill as well as the obstacles encountered by the subjects who learn English as a foreign language.

The first year students of FKIP-Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar, as a matter of fact, have already learned English since they studied at Junior High School. Furthermore, after having studied English phonology during the first semester at this university, it is believed that they have already learned adequate theoretical explanation about the phonetic features and phonotactic structures of the English voiceless plosive consonants. So, in line with their learning experience, all the subjects presumably have a good command in pronouncing these consonants as well. As the speech sounds of Toba Batak language and Indonesian are different from those of English, further investigation needs to be conducted in order to find out the level of subjects' skill in pronouncing the English voiceless plosive consonants after learning the English

phonology in the previous semester. In other words, the effect of phonological explanation on the subjects' skill in pronouncing the English voiceless plosive consonants can be comprehensively explicated.

This research is conducted at the second semester during the academic year of 2018/2019. A class consisting of 35 students was purposely selected as the subjects of this research, and the object of study is referred to the subjects' pronunciations in which the English voiceless plosive consonants occurred either in a number of isolated words, or those used in a sentence; and each of them evidently occurred in initial, medial, and final positions. Then the findings in this research can be used to find out the typology, phonological errors or the obstacles encountered by the students especially in pronouncing the English voiceless plosive consonants.

It is obviously known that pronunciation is one of the components of speaking skill that distinctively identifies the quality of a speaker. Moreover, mispronunciation may affect the intelligibility of an utterance to a native speaker, but some nonstandard pronunciations are possibly acceptable to some audiences as long as they are intelligible (Rivers, 1971, p. 115). Mispronunciation, to some extent, is caused by a failure in manipulating certain speech organs in the production of certain speech sounds clearly and precisely, or the influence of the speaker's native languages (Lucas, 1992, p. 245). Besides, a faulty pronunciation or sloppy articulation is also regarded as something that may cause listeners to make negative judgments about the speaker's personality, intelligence, competence, and integrity.

Plosive consonants are found in English, and so are in Toba Batak language and Indonesian. Although they apparently have different phonotactic structures, as a matter of fact, they have common characteristics in nature. Voiceless plosive consonants in English are usually aspirated when they occur in initial position and followed by stressed vowels, where as in Toba Batak language and Indonesian are not. A theoretical explanation about the phonological

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features and phonotactic structures of each voiceless plosive consonant is also discussed further below.

Voiceless bilabial plosive /p/ is articulated by the upper lip and lower lip. This consonant is produced by blocking the air stream by means of the upper lip and the lower lip; then the two lips are suddenly opened, and the air stream is released out through the mouth and produces an explosive sound. During the production of this sound, the vocal cords are not made to vibrate. This speech sound is aspirated when it occurs initially and followed by a stressed vowel in English, but not in Toba Batak language and Indonesian. The aspiration is a noticeable puff of breath like [h] sound that is produced especially when it is followed by stressed vowel, e.g. *pie* [p^haI]. But the aspiration is less strong when it is preceded by [s] sound, or followed by a short or unstressed vowel, or when it occurs in medial or final position, e.g. *spider* [spaldə]; *upper* ['ʌpə]; *stop* [stɒp]. Theoretically, the aspiration is not necessarily indicated by means of a distinctive phonetic symbol since it is regarded as the submember of the same phoneme (Jones, 1979, p.138). This consonant is found in both Toba Batak language and Indonesian, and it occurs either in initial, medial, or final position. This consonant is either followed or preceded by vowel in Toba Batak, e.g. *padan* [padan] 'vow', *ampang* [appan] 'rattan basket', *alap* [alap] 'pick up'; and so is in Indonesian, e.g. *para* [para] 'rubber', *apnormal* [apnormal] 'abnormal', *spekulan* [spekulan] 'speculator', *praktek* [praktek] 'practice', *atap* [atap] 'roof'. This consonant, as a matter of fact, is not aspirated in both Toba Batak language and Indonesian even when it occurs in initial position and followed by stressed vowel.

Voiceless alveolar plosive /t/ is articulated by the tongue tip and the teeth ridge. The air stream is firstly blocked in such a way, and the blockage is then suddenly opened and the air stream is released out through the mouth and produces an explosive sound. The vocal cords are factually not made to vibrate during the production of this sound. This sound is aspirated in English especially

when it occurs initially and followed by a stressed vowel, e.g. *time* [t^haIm], but it is less strong when it is preceded by [s] sound or followed by a short or unstressed vowel, e.g. *stop* [stɒp], *utter* ['ʌtə], *let* [let]. The plosion during the production of /t/ in final position is even very weak and often not audible (Jones, 1979, p. 141). This consonant is also found in Batak Toba Language and Indonesian, and it occurs either in initial, medial, or final position. This consonant is either followed or preceded by vowel in Batak Toba language, e.g. *tano* [tanɔ] 'soil', *antan* [attan] 'figure out', and so is in Indonesian, e.g. *tari* [tarI] 'dance', *atok* [atɔk] 'grand father', *status* [status] 'status', *tragedi* [tragedI] 'tragedy'. This consonant, as a matter of fact, is not aspirated in both Toba Batak language and Indonesian even when it occurs in initial position and followed by stressed vowel.

Voiceless plosive consonant /k/ is articulated by the back of the tongue against the fore part of the soft palate, and it is defined as a voiceless velar plosive consonant. This consonant is produced by blocking the air stream by means of the back of the tongue and the fore part of the soft palate. The blockage is then suddenly opened, and the air stream is released out through the mouth and produces an aspiration. The vocal cords are not made to vibrate during the production of this sound. This consonant, in English, is evidently aspirated when it occurs initially and followed by a stressed vowel, e.g. *come* [k^hʌm], but the aspiration is less strong when it is preceded by [s] sound or followed by unstressed vowel, e.g. *sky* [skaI]; *baker* ['beIkə]. Besides, it is also less strong when it occurs in final position, or when it is followed by other plosives, e.g., *fact* [fækt]. The plosion during the production of /k/ in final position is even very weak and often not audible (Roach, 2002, p. 35). This consonant is not aspirated in both Toba Batak language and Indonesian even when it occurs in initial position and followed by stressed vowel. This consonant is either followed or preceded by vowel in Toba Batak language, and it is formally pronounced as [h] or [k] sound in the temporarily Batak Toba language, e.g. *halapa* [halapa or kalapa] 'coconut',

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hassang [hassan or kassan] ‘peanut’, *angkang* [akkan] ‘older sister’. This consonant, as a matter of fact, is usually not aspirated even when it occurs in initial position and followed by stressed vowel in both Batak Toba language and Indonesian.

Based on the research conducted by Mathew (1997), the voiceless plosive consonants, just like those in Toba Batak language and Indonesian, were mostly unreleased by Gayo and Achenese English learners. These consonants, as a matter of fact, are usually not aspirated by most of the English foreign learners in Indonesia, but the voiced plosives are evidently aspirated in Javanese language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Theoretically, the source of data in qualitative research can be a human being, event, place, objects, pictures, records, or documents (Sutopo, 2002, p. 50-54). The data used in this research are all referred to the speech productions of English voiceless plosive consonants by the first year students of the English Department of FKIP-Universitas HKBP Nommensen Pematangsiantar. As matter of fact, there are 35 students purposely selected as subjects in this research, and this research is conducted in Academic Year of 2018/2019. The subjects selected in this research are all considered homogenous as they have the same major and use the same native languages. All subjects, as a matter of fact, speak both Toba Batak language and Indonesian in their daily communications. Based on the research conducted by Sinurat (2018), it was found out that the most frequently-used language actually resulted in more phonological interferences on the speech production of English as a foreign language. When the English learners use Toba Batak language more frequently than the Indonesian in their daily communication, they tend to pronounce the English voiced and voiceless labiodental fricatives /f/ and /v/ into voiceless bilabial plosive, e.g. *fine* [paIn], *van* [pæn]. While the English learners use Indonesian

more frequently than Toba Batak language in their daily communications, they generally have no obstacle in pronouncing the English voiceless labiodental fricatives /f/, but the English voiced labiodentals fricative /v/ is frequently pronounced as voiceless labiodental fricative /f/, e.g. *vine* [faIn].

As determined previously, this research is specifically designed to find out the typology or skill of the first year students in pronouncing English voiceless plosive consonants, especially when they occur in initial position and followed by stressed vowel, or which at the same time used in both isolated words and a sentence. Since the phonetic features of the English voiceless plosive consonants are quite similar to those in Toba Batak language and Indonesian especially when they occur in medial and final positions, so this research focuses the analysis on the speech productions of the English voiceless plosive consonants occurred in initial position and followed by stressed vowel. Three words containing aspirated plosive consonants used in a sentence, and nine isolated words containing voiceless plosive consonants occurred in initial, medial, and final positions were purposely selected as the instrument of data collection in this research. Each of the subjects was asked to read all words, and their pronunciations were all recorded by using a mobile phone and used as data in this research. Pronunciation of the voiceless plosive consonants in both isolated words and the sentence were all carefully analyzed in order to find out the patterns of the students’ skill and the problems encountered by the students in pronouncing each of the English voiceless plosive consonants. A descriptive explanation about the patterns of how the English voiceless plosive consonants were pronounced in both isolated words and the sentence was explicated comprehensively by identifying the obstacles encountered by the subjects. Words used as the instrument of data collection in this research were all carefully selected and comprehensively identifiable by the students. It was believed that the subjects have already recognized and pronounced these words frequently, and therefore their

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pronunciations could be used as valid and reliable data. The instrument of data collection

was arranged in such a way as in the following table:

Occurrence	Plosive	Initial Position	Medial Position	Final position
Isolated	[p]	pie	spy	sip
	[t]	tie	stay	sit
	[k]	come	sky	sick
Sentence	The time is automatically controlled when you park the car .			

The analysis of the phonetic features of each plosive consonant produced by the students were all analyzed based on the researcher's intuitive perception or judgments. In other words, a digital assessment of frequency and amplitude of the subjects' pronunciations was not technically available, but the identification of the quality of the speech sounds produced by the subjects in pronouncing each of the English voiceless plosive consonants, e.g. whether it was pronounced with an aspiration or not, was merely judged and determined by the researcher's perceptive skill. Correct pronunciation is annotated by using symbol (✓), and faulty pronunciation is annotated by using symbol (x). The students' pronunciations were then identified and analyzed so as to answer the above research problems. The data analysis in this research was done in accordance with the following procedures:

1. Identifying the features of the voiceless plosive consonants that occur in initial, medial, and final positions.
2. Finding out the number of correct and faulty pronunciations made by the subjects.
3. Draw a conclusion based on the general patterns and the number of correct and faulty pronunciations produced by the subjects.

As the subjects used in this research were all considered homogenous, and the data were all valid and reliable, so the finding in this research apparently had resulted in both theoretical and practical significances. Theoretically, this finding certainly provides basic information about the typical sort of quality of the English voiceless plosive consonants in both isolated words and a sentence pronounced by the subjects. Practically, the finding of this research is also available for the arrangement of certain aural or oral exercises in developing the pronunciation skill of the English foreign learners who speak both Toba Batak language and Indonesian.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

After analyzing the data, it was found out that the percentage of correct and faulty pronunciations varied from one another, and so did between those occurred in isolated words and those in the sentence. The detail of correct and faulty pronunciations of each English voiceless plosive consonant in both isolated words and the sentence is shown in the following table.

Table 1. Speech Productions of Plosive /p/ in Isolated Words

Subjects' Pronunciations	Initial Position	Medial Position	Final Position
Correct Pronunciations	18 (51%)	35 (100%)	35 (100%)
Faulty Pronunciations	17 (49%)	0	0

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Table 2. Speech Productions of Plosive /t/ in Isolated Words

Subjects' Pronunciations	Initial Position	Medial Position	Final Position
Correct Pronunciations	16 (46%)	35 (100%)	35 (100%)
Faulty Pronunciations	19 (54 %)	0	0

Table 3. Speech Productions of Plosive /k/ in Isolated Words

Subjects' Pronunciations	Initial Position	Medial Position	Final Position
Correct Pronunciations	17 (49%)	35 (100%)	35 (100%)
Faulty Pronunciations	18 (51%)	0	0

Table 4. Speech Productions of Plosive Consonants in a Sentence

Subjects' Pronunciations	/p/	/t/	/k/
Correct Pronunciations	15 (43%)	11 (31%)	17 (49%)
Faulty Pronunciations	20 (57%)	24 (69%)	18 (51%)

Based on the correct and faulty pronunciations produced by the subjects, it was found out that the English voiceless plosive consonants in isolated words were generally pronounced more easily than those in a sentence. Besides, each of them could be pronounced accurately especially when they occurred in medial and final positions; but some faulty pronunciations were made when they occurred in initial position. Referring to the pronunciation of the English plosive /p/ in isolated words, it was found out that the percentage of correct pronunciations was a bit higher than the faulty ones (51%>49%); but the percentage of correct pronunciations was a bit lower than the faulty ones when it occurred in a sentence (43%<57%). Referring to the pronunciation of the English plosive /t/ in isolated words, it was found out that the percentage of correct pronunciations was a bit lower than the faulty ones (46%<54%); and it was even lower when it occurred in the sentence (31%<69%). Referring to the pronunciation of the English plosive /k/ in isolated words, it was found out that the percentage of correct pronunciations was a bit lower than the faulty ones (49%<51%); and so it was found in the sentence (49%<51%). The above restricted synchronic linguistic evident obviously shows that the percentage of correct and faulty pronunciations on each consonant

varies from one another. It seems that English plosive /p/ was aspirated more easily than the English plosives /t/ and /k/, but yet there was no sufficient linguistic evident to prove this conditions except that the pronunciation of each plosive consonant in English is possibly influenced by its phonotactic structures, and so is the pronunciation of the one in Batak Toba language and Indonesian.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In line with the typology or the regular patterns of how the English voiceless plosive consonants are pronounced, it can be concluded that the English foreign learners at FKIP-UHN Pematangsiantar found no obstacle in pronouncing these consonants when they occurred in medial and final positions. But a phonological error is sometimes encountered when these consonants occurred in initial position and followed by stressed vowel. Furthermore, it was also found out that less obstacle was particularly encountered when these speech sounds occurred in isolated words rather than when they occurred in a sentence. So, it can be interpreted that when the subjects paid more phonological awareness, the English voiceless plosive consonants can be pronounced accurately with an aspiration

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particularly when they occurred in initial position. In other words, the subjects evidently could pronounce each of these consonants correctly when they consciously aware of the aspiration while pronouncing each of these English plosive consonants. When they were mispronounced for the first time, a correct pronunciation could be produced when they were asked to pronounce it again for the second time. Based on this evidence it can be concluded that either of the English voiceless plosive consonants can be pronounced correctly when the English foreign learners are consciously aware of the aspiration which evidently accompany the pronunciation of each English voiceless plosive consonant especially when they occur in initial position and followed by stressed vowel.

It is obviously known that pronunciation is an integral part of foreign language learning since it directly affects the learners' communicative competence as well as performance; and a low achievement on pronunciation of the foreign language can decrease learners' self-confidence; restrict social interactions, or results in a negative estimations about a speaker's credibility and abilities (Gilakjani, 2012). Besides, it is also explained that insufficient knowledge on phonology and phonetics systems are theoretically believed as one of the main factors that results in the difficulties in pronouncing English (Zhang and Yin, 2009), it is obviously seen that in improving the quality of the pronunciations of the English foreign learners on the English voiceless plosive consonants, sufficient knowledge on phonology and phonetics systems should be provided especially with those whose native languages have no aspirated voiceless plosive consonants. It is also believed, in the context of English language teaching, that pronunciation is an integral aspect of communicative competence that can affect the desire to use the language as well as the quality of the English pronunciation even though it still tends to be neglected, but careful and integrated preparation on pronunciation can play a significant role in supporting the

English foreign learners' overall communicative skill.

A research on the English pronunciation teaching in Europe, according to Tergujeff (2012), has already been conducted collaboratively by researchers from ten countries. The investigation on this field was mainly focused to find out the topics related to teacher training, teaching materials and methods, assessment of pronunciation, status of pronunciation teaching, and the pronunciation model. The English pronunciation teaching in Finland so far is somewhat teacher-centred. Pronunciation practice is mainly focused on the pronunciation of the segmental phonemes rather than the suprasegmental aspects. In line with this explanation, a student-centered learning strategy needs to be designed in order to improve their phonological awareness as well. Besides, the phonetic symbols can be used in teaching English pronunciation, but the pronunciation model in the textbooks can be realized or transcribed by means of both British and American pronunciations.

In line with the explanation given by Strange and Dittmann (1984), in overcoming the adult Japanese English learners' difficulties in perceptually differentiating the liquid consonants /r/ and /l/, the performance of the English foreign learners, e.g. the pronunciation of the English voiceless plosive consonants can also be improved gradually after having 14 up to 18 training sessions. Even though modification or perception of some phonetic contrasts in adulthood is slow and effortful, laboratory training tasks may also be useful in establishing categorical perception and production of the aspiration in the pronunciation of the English voiceless plosive consonants. In line with the explanation given by Nunan (1999), it was found out that phonological system is theoretically viewed somewhat differently from the grammatical and lexical systems, and the first language seems to be more apparent in the case of pronunciation than grammar and vocabulary. Besides, it was also explained that adult students, as a matter of fact, rarely achieve native-like level of fluency. But

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foreign language teachers believe that pronunciation skill can be improved by acquiring both theoretical explanation and continuous exercises. Although adult students rarely achieve native-like level of fluency (Nunan, 1999, p. 105), the speaking competence of the English foreign learners, particularly their pronunciation skills, can be improved through intensive English pronunciation exercises (Strange and Dittmann, 1984). Referring to the pronunciation of the English voiceless plosive consonants, the exercises should be arranged in such a way either in isolated words or sentences, and particularly when they occur in initial position and followed by stressed vowels. The exercises are firstly provided in isolated words of high frequency, and then pronounce them in connection with other words in sentences.

Since the subjects selected in this research consist of a restricted number of students, a research on this field of study is yet required so as to get more evidences on the pronunciation of the English voiceless plosive consonants or other speech sounds in English. Based on the above data analysis it was found out that the English foreign learners mostly found an obstacle in pronouncing the English voiceless plosive consonants particularly when they occur in initial position and followed by stressed vowel. In other words, most of them could not produce correct pronunciations on these consonants without paying much attention to the phonological characteristics of each speech sound. Furthermore, more faulty pronunciations were made especially when the words were used in connection with other words in a sentence. In line with these evidences, the English foreign learners should be given more exercises on the speech productions of these speech sounds particularly when they occur in initial position or sentences.

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