The Difficulties of Learning English for the Beginner English Learners

by Wiwiek Sundari

Article

The Difficulties of Learning English for the Basic English Learners

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Abstract

English as an international language is used and learned by people not only from English speaking countries but also from non-English speaking countries. In Indonesia, English is a foreign language that has different pronunciation system with Indonesian language. Because of these differences, many Basic English learners meet with difficulties in learning English. In this research, the researcher uses some techniques and references that carefully reviewed to gather data related to the information required for completing this article. It is found that Basic English learners usually face several obstacles in learning English, such as the difficulties in determining the word class of the same vocabulary, the difficulties in pronouncing due to different elements between English and Indonesian language, and also the difficulties because of the different distribution of phonetic characteristics between English and Indonesian.

Keywords: pronunciation; learners; obstacles; characteristcs.

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1. Introduction

Language is a sound signal system used by the users to communicate with others. Without language, it is hard to imagine how people can cooperate and get along with one another. The signals used to convey massage in language are speech sounds. Almost all languages in the world use sound as a mean of delivering thoughts and feelings.

There are two kinds of languages, namely written and spoken languages. The main element of written language is the writing which is the result of cultural development. On the other hand, in spoken language, a sound is the main element. Thus, language can be represented into two kinds, sound and writing.

Language learners who want to get the best results in learning language need to study the sound signal system and its usage. The learners will not get perfect or satisfactory results without mastering the sound signal system of that language. It also happens to people in Indonesia who want to learn English language.

Some obstacles are usually faced by Indonesians who want to learn English. These

constraints include the difficulties in inconsistency of the word class, in pronouncing a new sound system, in encountering new vocabulary items and in arranging foreign words into sentences because Indonesian language system is different from English. This paper deals only with word class changes without the addition of prefix or suffix to the basic word, discusses some consonant sounds that are often pronounced wrongly by the English learners, explains the lack of correlation between spelling and pronunciation in English vocabulary, as well as describes the word stress. Stress on the first and the second syllable can distinguish the word classes or categories and meanings.

2. Methods

Data of this research derive from the basic learners, the sixth year students of Pindrikan Utara 03, north Semarang. There are 30 students in the class. The techniques used in this article are observing, recording, and note-taking. This article is literature research since it discusses in detail the issues studied through a literature study. There are some references that are carefully reviewed to gather data related to the information required for completing this article. Some of the selected literature is then organized as needed.

3. Results

English as an international language is used and studied not only by the native but also used and studied by the foreigners. Thus, the basic learners will meet difficulties in learning English. These difficulties are usually because of the inconsistency of word class or word category in English. A word that has a noun class can also function as a verb such as in word 'book'. As a noun, it has the meaning of 'a paperback', but it can also serve as a verb meaning 'to reserve'. The word 'empty' as an adjective class means 'containing nothing'. It can also function as a verb means 'to discharge'. The word 'Water' that serves as a noun means 'liquid', it can also function as a verb, which means 'to drench'. The word 'tidy' also has two-word classes, as an adjective and as a verb. If this word function as an adjective means 'neat' but it has the meaning of 'to make tidy or neat' when standing as a verb. This word class changing is somehow difficult for Basic English learners. Besides, they also have difficulties in the pronunciation.

4. Discussion

In morphology, the process of changing word classes without adding prefix or suffix to its basic word is called conversion (O'Grady & Guzman, 1996:157)[1]. Actually, the word class changes in this type can be known from the context of the sentence, as in the examples below:

- My friend <u>waters</u> the carrot plants every morning.
- My friend drinks two bottles of <u>water</u> every morning.

In the first sentence, the word 'water' means 'to sprinkle' but in the second sentence the word 'water' means 'liquid'. The English learners will meet with difficulties in determining the exact meaning of 'water' if they only see the word without seeing the context of the sentence. Other examples such as:

- The children <u>dirty</u> the shirt.
- The shirt is <u>dirty</u>.

The word 'dirty' in the two sentences above has different word classes. The word 'dirty' in the first sentence is a verb class, while the second word is an adjective class. The adjective class has 'unclean' meaning, but in the verb class it has the meaning of 'to make or become dirty'. The process of changing the word class without changing the form of the word is abundant in English.

According to O'Grady & Guzman (1996:157)[1] there are some examples of verbs taken from the noun such as:

Finger (a suspect)
Butter (the bread)
Ship (the package)
Nail (the door shut)
Button (the shirt)

Examples of verbs taken from the adjective are:

Dirty (a shirt)
Empty (the box)
Open (a door)
Right (a wrong)
Dry (the clothes)

Examples of nouns taken from the verb are:

(a building) permit
(an exciting) contest
(a new) survey
(a brief) report
(a long) walk

There are 30% of the students who understand the word class, and 70% do not understand.

The language errors usually occur in the second language learners. The pronunciation problems faced by English language learners may be due to different elements between English and Indonesian language. Those difficulties are follows (Baker, 1988:72-84)[2]:

1. English learners will find problems in pronouncing an English sound because their speech tools have never been trained to produce English sounds such as:
   a. $/\theta/$ in word   Smith /smɪθ/   teeth /tiθ/   path /pæθ/

      English learner pronounces with the sound / t /
                       /smɪt/   /tit/   /pat/

b. / ð / in word   they /ðeɪ/   brother /brʌð ər/   other /ʌð ər/
    English learner pronounces with sound / d /
                         /deɪ/   /brod ər/   /od ər/

c. / ʃ / in word   she / ʃɪ /   push / pʊʃ /   show / ʃoʊ /
    English learner pronounces with sound / s /
                         /si/   /pus/   /soʊ/

d. / ʒ / in word   measure /mɛʒ ər/   treasure /trɛʒ ər/ casual /kæʒ uəl/
    English learner pronounces with sound / s /
                         / mɛsər /   / trɛsor /   /kæsuəl/

e. / tʃ / in word   chop / tʃɒp /   cherry / tʃɛri /   cheap / tʃip /
    English learner pronounces with sound /c /
                         /cɒp/   /cɛri/   /cip/

f. / dʒ / in word   jam /dʒæm/   joke /dʒoʊk/   jane /dʒeɪn/
    English learner pronounces with sound / J /
                         /jæm/   /joʊk/   /jeɪn/

English learners will change the sound of English consonants into consonant sounds adjusted to the Indonesian language such as:
    / Ɵ / became / t /
    / ð / became / d /
    / ʃ / became / s /
    / ʒ / became / s /
    / tʃ / became / c /
    / dʒ / became / j /

English learners should be aware of the difference between the English consonant sound and the Indonesian language. They also should always try or train to utter a sound that is not found in the language of the learners. It will lead to different meanings if someone mispronounces the sound in English. There are 40% of the sudents who can pronounce the given consonants, and 60% who can not pronounce them.

2. Another problem is caused by the sound of language which has the same phonetic characteristics between two languages but different in their distribution. As an example, there are sounds / b /, / d /, / g / in Indonesian and English. In English, the

sounds can be found at the initial, medial, and final position of an utterance like in the example of the following words (Ramelan,1985:105)[3]:

Example 1

No	Initial position	Medial position	Final position
1	''*b*ook''	''ca*b*in''	''ro*b*''
2	''*g*ood''	''a*g*o''	''big''
3	''*d*ark''	''da*dd*y''	''foo*d*''

Meanwhile, in Indonesian, they can only be found in the initial and in the medial position of the word, and it never happens to occur at the final of the position of a word, for example the words:

Example 2

No	Initial position	Medial position
1	'' *b*eras ''	'' ka*b*ar ''
2	'' *g*aris ''	'' ga*g*ah ''
3	'' *d*ari ''	'' be*d*a ''

Therefore the English learners have difficulties in saying the word "rob", "bad", and "bag". These words will be pronounced with /rɒp/, /bæt/, and /bæk/. There are 40% of the sudents who can pronounce the given consonants, and 60% who can not pronounce them.

3. It is possible that sounds in English and Indonesian have the same sound, but different allophone. For example in English sound /p/ has allophone /p/ for example in the word "pen" /pʰɛn/. With these different allophones, learner usually tends to pronounce the word with /pɛn/ without aspiration. There are 40% of the sudents who can pronounce the given consonant that has aspiration, and 60% who can not pronounce it.

Other difficulties are caused by duplicate sounds or series of language sounds. English learners will surely feel the difficulties in pronouncing two or more direct consonants. Examples of words: speak, spring, stand, street, sky, scream, twelfth, worlds, etc. There are 40% of the sudents who can pronounce the given consonants, and 60% who can not pronounce them.

According to Corder (1978:64)[4], there are three main causes of error in learning a second language, namely:

1. Language transfer, i.e. error as a result of first language interference, for example in the word "three". The learners tend to change sound /th/ into sound /t/ because sound /th/ is not present in Indonesian. They replace the sound /th/ with a /t/ sound as it is the existing sound in the original language.
2. Intralingual, is an error that is not interference but as a result of the learning process itself or a developmental error. For example the word "here" and "where". English learners are used to pronounce "here" /hɪə:r/ with /hiər/, and pronounce the word "where" /ʰwɛər/ with /wɛr/, and also in the word "high" /haɪ/ which tend to be pronounced /haɪg/.
3. Teaching technique or materials, i.e. errors due to errors in teaching techniques or materials provided. This error can occur if the teachers, as a model, still often make mistakes in pronouncing the English vocabularies or even the teachers have not mastered the sound system of English well.

In addition to the difficulties of pronouncing the fricative and affricative consonants, the English learners still face some difficulties in pronouncing the English vocabulary which is often less correlation between pronunciation and spelling (Baugh, 1967:15)[5]. The problem also happens on the stress of words. Different syllables can differentiate its meanings ass the examples below (Gilbert, 1987:17)[6].

1. Some examples of English words that lack of correlation between its speech and spelling.
   a. The word has the same spelling but the pronunciation is different.

read	-	read	/rid/	- /rɛd/
live	-	live	/liv/	- /laɪv/

   b. The word has a different spelling but its pronunciation is the same

see	-	sea	/si/	-	/si/
meat	-	meet	/mit/	-	/mit/
right	-	write	/rait/	-	/rait/
here	-	hear	/hɪər/	-	/hɪər/

There are 40% of the sudents who understand the correlation and can pronounce the given vowels, and 60% who can not pronounce them.

2. In English, stress on the first syllable and the second syllable can distinguish the meaning and also distinguish the category or class of words (Gilbert, 1987:18)[6].

   a. **noun** - **verb**

record	-	record
object	-	object
present	-	present
suspect	-	suspect
decrease	-	decrease
rebel	-	rebel

   b. Two-word verbs

stopover	-	stop over

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trade in	-	trade in
handout	-	hand out
makeup	-	make up
dropout	-	drop out

There are 30% of the sudents who understand the stress of the syllable, and 70% who do not understand.

3. There are inconsistent letters in representing language sounds and sometimes one letter may represent more than one sound. As an example below:

a. the letter "u" may represent
/ ʌ / on the word "but" /bʌt/
/ ʊ / on the word "put" /pʊt/
/ ə / on the word "upon" /əˈpɒn/

b. the letter "c" may represent
/ k / on the word "cat" / kæt/
/ s / on the word "race" / reɪs/
/ tj / on the word "chop" / tʃɒp/
or does not represent any sound like on the word "back" / bæk /

In pronouncing the English vocabulary, English learners must know the phonetic transcription of the English words in order to be able to pronounce them clearly and consistently, therefore they can pronounce vocabulary well and correctly. There are 30% of the sudents who can pronounce the given vowelss, and 70% who can not pronounce them.

5. Conclusions

From the explanations above, it can be concluded that 70% of basic learners still have difficulties in pronouncing fricative, and affricative consonants; 60% of the learners also find the difficulties in distinguishing inconsistent sounds; 60% of them can not indentify vocabulary that has the same spelling but different pronunciation or vice versa; and 70% of them can not pronounce the word stress that distinguish the word class or meaning.

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