

A BRIEF VIEW OF BARRIERS FACED BY COLLEGE STUDENTS IN SPEAKING SUBJECT: ENGLISH VOWEL PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract— This study shows some inconsistencies of English vowels' sounds which made Indonesian college students in English Speaking class made some errors in pronouncing the words which have such vowels. This paper will show some words' group related to the inconsistencies of letter A, E, I, O, and U sounds. The explanation about such inconsistencies is hoped to bring an additional material to discuss in any English class especially in Speaking subject to the students who still have difficulty in pronouncing English words. The research collected the data from the students of Speaking Subject in Universitas Kristen Indonesia. The instruments used for collecting the data were observation, recordings and a library research. The data collected were analyzed descriptively. The findings of the study revealed from the groupings of English vowel letter, it is found that 1) letter "U" has 5 different sounds; 2) letter "O" has 6 different sounds; 3) letter "I" has 3 different sounds; 4) letter "E" has 4 different sounds; and 5) letter "A" has 5 different sounds Related the inconsistencies of English vowel letter sounds. Based on the findings, the study concluded that one of barriers in developing English Speaking skill is the inconsistencies sounds of English vowels which make English learners confused to pronounce some English words. This research finding is hoped to be useful for English learners to develop their English speaking skill as well as for English instructors to bring this finding as a material for discussion in their English class.

Key Words: *Inconsistency; English Vowel Sounds; Speaking; Pronunciation*

INTRODUCTION

Research Background

In Speaking class, many students mispronounced some English words containing some vowels which made the students were confused because one vowel has different sounds in different words. The inconsistencies of English letter sounds become a problem to English learners especially in their communication skills because it is common known that communication has a big important role in human daily life. Without a communication, it will be difficult to adapt and even to get to know each other in this life. Through communication, we can convey our ideas to others for specific purposes. By communication we can also manifest expressions of feelings or thoughts for others. It will help us as a human being to avoid miscommunications while giving messages, orders, or judgments to others. In addition, communication is a medium in the process of fulfilling the needs of each individual.

Megawati and Mandarani (2017) stated that the students have problems in conducting English communication, namely lack of vocabulary mastery, low Grammar mastery, and nervousness. She suggested some efforts to overcome the English learners' problem in speaking English by doing Grammar practice; by reading some English books in order to get plenty of vocabulary items, and by building confidence in their daily life communication. Related to some problems faced by English learners in speaking English, Gan (2012) mentioned in his research that "Insufficient opportunities to speak English in lectures and tutorials, lack of a focus on language improvement in the curriculum, and the input-poor environment for spoken communication in English outside class apparently contributed to a range of

problems that closely related to the sociocultural, institutional and interpersonal contexts in which individual ESL students found themselves.”

Research Problem

There is only one problem that will be answered in the discussion; it is what kinds of inconsistencies of vowel sounds that usually make the students in speaking class have barriers in their speaking skills?

Research Significance

Due to the problem mentioned above, it is hoped that this research will be used for both the English students and English teachers as their additional material to study in order to develop and enhance the students' speaking skill.

Research Method

The researcher uses a Library research. Data were taken by listing some words which were mispronounced by the student while delivering their speaking content in front of the class. After listings all the mispronounced words, the researcher then grouped the words based on the kinds of vowel within the words. Then, the researcher looked up Oxford Dictionary to find out the correct pronunciation of those mispronounced words based on their phonetic symbols. After grouping the words into their vowel's classification, then the researcher analyzed some words which have the same vowel but have different sounds. The writer uses the transcription system of the International Phonetic Association commonly known as IPA. “This system used in Britain, derives from one developed in the 1920's by Daniel Jones and his colleagues at London University, one of whose aims was to provide writing system for the unwritten language of Africa and elsewhere”, (Radford, 2009).

3 LITERARY REVIEW

Pronunciation

Pronunciation plays a significant part in our personal and social lives because the way we speak reflects our identities, and indicates our association to particular communities (Seidlhofer, 2001). Bachman (1990) stated that there are two main competences in mastering a language. He stated that “Pronunciation or phonology is a part of grammatical competence”. Kelly (2000) stated that pronunciation has two main features called *phonemes* and *suprasegmental*. As Goodwin wrote which was cited in Celce-Murcia (2006) that “Pronunciation is the language feature that most readily identifies speakers as nonnative”, while Seidlhofer (1995) said “Pronunciation is never an end in itself but a means of negotiating meaning in discourse, embedded in specific sociocultural and interpersonal contexts.”

Barriers in Pronunciation

Shak and friends (2016) found out that “...the sounds that were commonly mispronounced by the students were vowels (pure short vowels, pure long vowels and diphthongs), consonants (plosives, fricatives and affricates), silent letters, and the ‘-ed’ form.” These researchers recommended the English learners to use common mispronounced sounds as the content in producing an instructional pronunciation video for helping them to overcome their pronunciation problems.

There many factors which affect someone's pronunciation as stated by Kenworthy (1987) cited in (Brown: 2001). The factors are *native language, age, exposure, innate phonetic ability, identity and language ego, motivation and concern for good pronunciation*. Native language mostly influences a learner to study a new foreign language. Kelly (2000) mentioned that there are some factors which affect to pronunciation, they are 1) student's mother language; 2) different sound-spelling between English and his first language; 3) non-equivalence sounds between English and his mother language; 4) the difference in stress and intonation between English and his first language. To tackle the pronunciation problems

1 faced by English learners, Levis (2005) emphasized two primary principles, namely: (1) to achieve native-like pronunciation, and/or (2) to produce intelligible pronunciation.

1 English Speaking Problems

Jenkins (2000) pointed out that phonological problems often are reasons for unsuccessful communications. The subsequent discussion his study focused on pronunciation errors that affected intelligibility; and in other words, they may affect the actual meaning of the words. The mispronunciation of a word could make it sound like another word altogether or lead to a non-recognizable word.

Radford (2009) says in his book that “A Major problem is that the spelling system of English (its orthography) is irregular and doesn’t represent sounds in a completely consistent way. Sometime one sound can be spelled in several ways as with the first sound of Kathy (or is it Cathy?)”. He mentioned also that some sounds just aren’t given their own symbol at all.

Gan²eva (2020) informed in his research that she used Jigsaw Activities to teach speaking in his class that each partner has one or few pieces of puzzle and the partners must cooperate to fit all the pieces into a whole picture. She also mentioned that the most common types communicative output activity is role plays and discussion. To succeed with role plays, there are many activities done namely careful preparation, goal’s setting, role card’s usage, brainstorming, doing topical follow-up and doing linguistic follow up. To succeed with discussion, the teacher can do some activities such as preparing the students, offering choices, setting a goal/outcome, keeping it short, allowing students to participate in their own way, doing topical follow-up and doing linguistic follow up. Both types mentioned above have the same activities to be done namely doing linguistic follow up in order to develop the student’s speaking skills follow up namely linguistics.

Basir and his friends (2011) mentioned that a language learner is supposed to recognize that in developing speaking skills there are three areas of knowledge that someone has to be learned, they are 1) Speech Mechanics such as pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary; 2) Language Functions such as transaction and interaction; and 3) Social and cultural rules and norms such as turn-taking, rate of speech, length of pauses between speakers, relative roles of participants.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

1. The Inconsistency Sound of Vowel A. → Letter “A” has 5 different sounds

a. Vowel ‘a’ sounds /æ/ as in the following words: can, mat, bad, nap, gap.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Bad	Bæd
Can	Kæn
Gap	Gæp
Mat	Mæt
Nap	Næp

The sound of vowel “a” above is usually called long vowel sound. It is different from the vowel sound [ɛ] as we find in the word ‘dress [dres]’ or in the word ‘carry [kæri].

b. Vowel ‘a’ sounds /ɑ:/ as in the following words: calm, palm, father, bar, jar.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Bar	ba:

Calm	kɑ:m
Father	fɑ:ðər
Jar	ʃɑ:
Palm	pɑ:m

The sound of vowel “a” above is also called long vowel sound. It is different from the vowel sound [ʌ] as we can find in the word ‘cup [kʌp]’ or in the word ‘but [bʌt].

c. Vowel ‘a’ sounds /eɪ/ as in the following words: chase, mate, gate, rate, hate.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Chase	tʃeɪs
Gate	geɪt
Hate	heɪt
Mate	meɪt
Rate	reɪt

The sound of vowel “a” above is usually called diphthongs. It is different from the pure or single vowel sound as we can find in the word ‘mat [mæt]’ or in the word ‘bar [bɑ:r].

d. Vowel ‘a’ sounds /ɔ:/ as in the following words: talk, all, call, install, hall

Words	Phonetic Symbols
All	ɔ:l
Call	kɔ:l
Hall	hɔ:l
Install	ɪn'stɔ:l
Talk	tɔ:k

The sound of vowel “a” above is grouped into long vowel sounds. It is different short vowel sound as we can find in the word ‘of [ɒf]’.

e. Vowel ‘a’ sounds /ə/ as in the following words: a, banana, ago, vitamin, again, comma, afraid. (It is called the *Schwa*.)

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Ago	ə'gəʊ
Again	ə'geɪn
Comma	'kɑ:mə
Banana	bə'nænə
Vitamin	'vɪtəˌmɪn

The sound of vowel “a” is usually known as *Schwa* sound. The *Schwa* sound is usually characterized by an apostrophe (') after the symbol [ə] sound.

2. The Inconsistency Sound of Vowel E → Letter “E” has 4 different sounds.

a. Vowel ‘e’ sounds /e/ as in the following words: bet, men, pen, met, hen.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Bet	Bet
Hen	Hen
Men	Men
Met	Met

Pen	Pen
-----	-----

It is easy to know this sound because the between letter and the sound symbol is the same. Base of the examples on the tabel above, we can include that the letter 'e' has the same sound symbol if the letter 'e' is followed direct by a consonant at the end of the word.

b. Vowel 'e' sounds / ɜ:/ as in the following words: stern, her, person, service, herbal.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Germ	dʒɜ:rm
Her	hɜ:r
Person	'pɜ:rsn
Service	'sɜ:rvis
Stern	stɜ:m

The sound of vowel "a" is usually known as long vowel sound. The sound of [ɜ:] is usually derived from letter 'e' is followed directly by letter 'r' in a word.

c. Vowel 'e' sounds /i:/ as in the following words: ego, he, she.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Ego	'i:gəʊ
He	hi:
She	ʃi:

The sound of vowel "e" above is called also as a long vowel sound. The sound of [i:] is different from the pure or single vowel sound as we can find in the word 'knit [nɪt]' or in the word 'Sir [səɹ]'.

d. Vowel 'e' is soundless (silent 'e') as in the following words: late, gate, rate, make, tale.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Gate	gæt
Late	leɪt
Male	meɪl
Rate	reɪt
Tale	teɪl

The sound of vowel "e" above is called as silent 'e' letter. The letter 'e' has no sound if a word ended by letter 'e', but before letter 'e' is preceded a vowel and also a consonant.

3. The Inconsistency Sound of Vowel I → Letter "I" has 3 different sounds

a. Vowel 'i' sounds / aɪ / as in the following words: bite, site, right, bright, light.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Bite	baɪt
Bright	braɪt
Light	laɪt
Right	raɪt
Site	saɪt

The sound of vowel "i" above is grouped into diphthong sound. It is different from pure vowel sound (single vowel sound) as we can find in the word 'cup' [kʌp]' or in the word 'kit' [kɪt]'.

b. Vowel 'i' sounds /ɪ/ as in the following words: fit, stick, bit, sit, rip.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Bit	bɪt
Fit	fɪt
Rip	rɪp
Sit	sɪt
Stick	stɪk

The sound of vowel "i" above is grouped into short vowel sound. It is different long vowel sound as we can find in the word 'feet' [fi:t] or in the word 'price' [praɪs].

c. Vowel 'i' sounds /ɜ:/ as in the following words: Sir, flirt, bird, birth, dirty.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Bird	bɜ:rd
Birth	bɜ:rθ
Dirty	'dɜ:rti
Flirt	flɜ:r
Sir!	sɜ:r

The sound of vowel "i" above is grouped into long vowel sound. It is different from short vowel sound as we can find in the word 'bit' [bɪt] or in the word 'dress' [dres].

4. The Inconsistency Sound of Vowel O. → Letter "O" has 6 different sounds

a. Vowel 'o' sounds /ɒ/ as in the following words: not, lot, lock, stop.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Hot	hɒt
Lock	lɒk
Mock	mɒk
Not	nɒt
stop!	stɒp

The sound of vowel "o" above is grouped into short vowel sounds. It is different from long vowel sound as we can find in the word 'hawk' [hɔ:k] or in the word 'norm' [nɔ:(r)m].

b. Vowel 'o' sounds /ɔ:/ as in the following words: more, fore, fork, North.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Bored	bɔ:d
For	fɔ:
Fork	fɔ:rk
More	mɔ:
North	nɔ:rθ

The sound of vowel "o" above is grouped into long vowel sounds. It is different from the sounds of the word 'of' [ɒf] or in the word 'stop' [stɒp].

c. Vowel 'o' sounds /əʊ/ as in the following words: both, ghost, rope, robe, phone, go.

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Both	bəʊθ
Ghost	gəʊst
Go	gəʊ

Phone	fəʊn
Rope	rəʊp

The sound of vowel “o” above is grouped into diphthong sound. It is different from pure vowel sound (single vowel sound) as we can find in the word ‘bottom’ [bɒtəm]’ or in the word ‘gone’ [gɒn].

d. Vowel ‘o’ sounds /u:/ as in the following words: move,

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Move	mu:v

The sound of vowel “o” above is grouped into long vowel sound. It is different from short vowel and diphthong sound as we can find in the word ‘mod’ [mɒd]’ or in the word ‘mode’ [məʊd].

e. Vowel ‘o’ sounds /ʌ/ as in the following words: love, dove, month, Monday

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Dove	dʌv
Love	lʌv
Monday	mʌndeɪ
Month	mʌnθ
Honey	ˈhʌni

The sound of vowel “o” above is grouped into short vowel sound. It is different from long vowel sound or diphthong as we can find in the word ‘born’ [bɔ:(r)n]’ or in the word ‘drove’ [drəʊv].

f. Vowel ‘o’ sounds /ə/ as in the following words: of,

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Of	əv → weak sound

The sound of vowel “o” above is grouped into short vowel sound. It is different from strong sound of it as we can hear ‘of [ɒv].

5. The Inconsistency Sound of Vowel U. → Letter “U” has 5 different sounds.

a. Vowel ‘u’ sounds /ʊ/ as in the following words: put, tube,

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Put	pʊt

The sound of vowel “u” above is grouped into short vowel sound. It is different from long vowel or triphthong sound as we can find in the word ‘burn’ [bɜ:(r)n]’ or in the word ‘pure’ [pjʊə(r)].

b. Vowel ‘u’ sounds /ɜ:/ as in the following words: fur, blur, turn, burn, hurt

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Burn	bɜ:(r)n
Blur	blɜ:(r)
Fur	fɜ:(r)
Hurt	hɜ:(r)t
Turn	tɜ:(r)n

The sound of vowel “u” above is grouped into long vowel sound. It is different from short vowel sound as we can find in the word ‘blush [blʌʃ]’ or in the word ‘bug’ [bʌg].

c. Vowel ‘u’ sounds /ʌ/ as in the following words: nut, but, cup, up, us,

Words	Phonetic Symbols
But	bʌt
Cup	kʌp
Nut	nʌt
Up	ʌp
Us	ʌs

The sound of vowel “u” above is grouped into short vowel sound. It is different from long vowel sound as we can find in the word ‘tribute [tribju:t]’.

d. Vowel ‘u’ sounds /ju:/ as in the following words: cute, mute, tube,

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Cute	kju:t
Mute	mju:t
Pure	pyʊr
Tribute	ˈtribju:t
Tube	tju:b

The sound of vowel “u” above is grouped into long vowel sound. It is different from short vowel sound as we can find in the word ‘must’ [mʌst].

e. Vowel ‘u’ sounds /u:/ as in the following words: dude, nude, rude, truth

Words	Phonetic Symbols
Dude	du:d
Nude	nu:d
Rude	ru:d
Ruth	ru:θ
Truth	tru:θ

The sound of vowel “u” above is grouped into long vowel sound. It is different from short vowel sound as we can find in the word ‘bus’ [bʌs].

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

The inconsistency sounds of English vowel letters have made some Indonesian college students confused to pronounce some English words in their speaking subject. Many Indonesian students find out that there are also some English sounds which Bahasa Indonesian does not have such as have silent letters (silent ‘e’, silent ‘g’, silent ‘k’, and etc.). From the research findings, each vowel letters have different sounds while they are in different words. Letter “A” for example, it has 5 different sounds. The research finding revealed that learning English sounds especially for the vowel letters is very useful to enhance English learner’s ability in communicating using English with a fluent pronunciation. The groups of some English words which have the same sounds may be useful for language teaching-learning process.

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It is hoped that the findings of this research will be helpful as a material to study especially for English Speaking lesson. This research finding is also hoped to be an additional material for teaching English Pronunciation as well as English Speaking subject as a basic knowledge for English learners in developing their Speaking skill. This research may be useful as data for the incoming researchers who

will conduct any researches related the inconsistencies of English consonant sounds which have not been discussed yet in this study.

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