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RAISING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS OF PROSPECTIVE INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS

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Abstract: Pronunciation has been somewhat neglected in L2 pedagogy compared to grammar and vocabulary. Communicative Language Teaching has deemphasized the importance of pronunciation and relatively excluded pronunciation in many language teaching circles, including that in the EFL context. The role and function of pronunciation are belittled and, oftentimes, teachers are lenient with pronunciation problems. Notwithstanding, pronunciation plays a vital role for successful global communication, which is ineluctable with the growing use of English in the world. Such situations require English teachers to emphasize pronunciation in their classes, although it may be an arduous task. This calls for good pronunciation mastery on the teachers' part. EFL prospective teachers are inevitably affected by the demand to become good models for their future students. Unfortunately, their oral competence has sometimes been found to be inadequate, which may indicate their low pronunciation awareness. This paper attempts to address the issue of prospective Indonesian EFL teachers' pronunciation awareness by discussing their pronunciation problems and to suggest possible ways to raise their phonological awareness, which is the key to pronunciation improvement.

Keywords: *phonological awareness, awareness raising, prospective Indonesian EFL teachers*

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation has been somewhat neglected in second language pedagogy compared to its sisters, grammar and vocabulary (Reid, 2016). It is seemingly treated as the Cinderella of language teaching, i.e. it is deemed trivial and not as important as grammar and vocabulary. Communicative Language Teaching, the current paradigm of second language teaching, has deemphasized the importance of pronunciation and relatively excluded it in many language teaching circles (Baker, 2013; Reid, 2016), including that in the EFL context. In light of the approach, teachers are more interested in the result of an interaction rather than in the manner of the interaction. The role and function of pronunciation are belittled and, oftentimes, teachers neglect it or show too much tolerance towards pronunciation problems. Such situations open a door to the emergence of classroom dialect which is only understood by classroom members. The unexpected result may impede the real communication outside language classrooms.

The negligence is encouraged by the misconception about World Englishes and the goal of second language pronunciation learning. Developing native or near native accent is no longer relevant. Rather, fostering intelligibility should be the aim. Unfortunately, the idea of intelligibility has been misleadingly perceived as freedom to speak in whatever ways one likes. Accordingly, there is no need to conform to any standards prescribed by the mainstream accents, American English and British English. This misconception has lessened the need to pay attention to precision. Besides, some teachers and researchers have also mistakenly assumed that pronunciation can take care of itself as one's proficiency develops.

Notwithstanding what happens, pronunciation is truly important, particularly among global speakers, because mispronunciation may trigger communication breakdown. Yates and Zielinski (2009: 11) claim that, "Good pronunciation will be understood even if they make errors in other areas, while those with unintelligible pronunciation will remain unintelligible, even if they have expressed themselves using an extensive vocabulary and grammar." With the mushrooming use of English in countries beyond the inner circle and the enactment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), people from around the world will very probably come and interact with each other in various life domains, such as economy, education, technology, health, and many more. This implies that global communication is ineluctable nowadays since the chances to run into foreigners and to use English are getting bigger. Pronunciation obviously plays a vital role for successful oral communication among global speakers (Baker & Burri, 2016; Reid,

2016; Shah, Othman & Senom, 2017). Thus, English language teachers need to emphasize pronunciation teaching in their classes (Hariri as cited in Benzies, 2013), even though it may be an onerous task.

The neglect over pronunciation skill has greatly contributed to the quality of EFL learners' oral competence, especially with the minimum exposure to English outside language classroom. Shah, Othman and Senom (2017: 194) assert, "The neglect over pronunciation skills is obviously a great contribution to the lack of competency in the English language among the learners." Unexpectedly, this affects prospective EFL teachers as well. There is a pressing need, in fact, that they become good models for their future students. In addition to that, having good pronunciation promotes one's confidence and reveals good image of the speaker (Fraser, 1999; Shah, Othman & Senom, 2017). The inadequate oral competence of prospective EFL teachers may be an indication of their low pronunciation awareness. Since pronunciation is a skill which is improvable, raising phonological awareness is key to its improvement. Hence, it calls for changes in the mind of teachers and researchers to reappraise the significance of pronunciation instruction as it has been somewhat underrepresented in SLA pedagogy (Alghazo, 2015; Baker, 2014; Shah, Othman & Senom, 2017). For these reasons, this paper attempts to address the issue of prospective Indonesian EFL teachers' phonological awareness by discussing their pronunciation problems and suggest possible solutions. The discussion on their pronunciation problems is intended to demonstrate that their phonological awareness needs raising.

PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS OF PROSPECTIVE INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS

The pronunciation problems to be discussed concern segmental and suprasegmental levels. The former deals with problems in sound accuracy, whereas the latter only addresses stress placement as one of the representatives of suprasegmental features. The data for discussion were obtained from our observations on the pronunciation learning of prospective Indonesian EFL teachers. The examined words are confined to those that frequently appear in daily life and in their academic realm, especially the field of English education.

From our observations, pronunciation problems that can be detected among these prospective EFL teachers are as follows. On the segmental level, they make faulty sound production in the following contexts. When the sounds do not exist in Indonesian, they tend to replace them with the nearest equivalence they know. The root cause of the problem is the different sound inventories that English and Indonesian have. This is in line with what Ur (1999), and Paulston and Bruder (1976) say that problems appear when a particular sound is inexistent in L1 sound system, or when the sound does exist in L1 language system but it does not behave as a distinct phoneme. The former is usually resolved by substituting the sound with the nearest sound equivalence. For example, measure [ˈmeʒə(r)] is mispronounced as *[ˈmezə(r)] where /ʒ/ is replaced by /z/ and author [ˈɔːθə(r)] is mispronounced as *[ˈaʊtə(r)] or *[ˈɒtə(r)] whereby /θ/ is replaced by /t/. A similar case also happens to the word method [ˈmeθəd], which is mispronounced as *[mɪˈtɒd]. The mispronunciation of author also illustrates the prospective EFL teachers' problem in pronouncing vowels. Since Indonesian does not recognize long-short vowel distinction, they tend to replace the long vowel /ɔː/ with its short counterpart or with diphthong /aʊ/. The same problem also happens to diphthongs. For the word focus, *[ˈfɒkəs] or focus *[fɒˈkjʊs] are more often heard than focus [ˈfəʊkəs].

Next, when the sounds are allophonic in Indonesian but distinct sounds in English, the prospective EFL teachers tend to use the allophones interchangeably without realizing that they are different phonemes and hence may make a difference to meaning. This is illustrated in develop [dɪˈveləp] and present [ˈprezənt] which are wrongly pronounced as *[ˈdefələp] and *[prɪˈsent] whereby the /f/-/v/ and /s/-/z/ are allophonic in Indonesian but separate phonemes in English. Another example can be found in paper [ˈpeɪpə(r)] which is sometimes confused with paper *[ˈpepə(r)]; as a matter of fact, the latter pronunciation refers to a different word pepper. Neutral vowel schwa /ə/ also appears to be problematic for them in that they tend to replace it with other vowel sounds, such as with /ʌ/ in suggest *[sʌˈdʒes(t)], with /e/ in material *[ˈmetəriəl] and competence *[ˈkɒmpɪten(s)], with /ʊ/ in curriculum *[kʊˈrɪkələm], and with /ɒ/ in effort *[ɪˈfɒt], occur *[ɒˈkjuː(r)], and procedure *[prɒˈsiːdʒə(r)].

Another problem is related to unusual/unfamiliar sound combinations, such as consonant clusters. When such combinations in English are not permissible in Indonesian, the prospective teachers tend to employ the pattern of sound combinations in Indonesian language. This problem originates from phonotactics, i.e. "the freedoms and restrictions that languages allow in terms of syllable structure" (ANU, 2012). Thus, phonemes that are strung in unfamiliar combinations will surely be problematic. The

examples are found in language and linguistics. Phonemes /g/ and /s/ tend to be omitted as in Indonesian /gw/ and /ks/ are not permissible sequences. Therefore, the resulting pronunciations are language *[ˈlæŋwɪdʒ] and linguistics *[ˈlɪŋwɪstɪk] respectively. In a like manner, /(r)tm/ cluster is impossible in Indonesian phonotactics. Therefore, instead of department [dɪˈpɑːtmənt], they pronounce it as *[dɪˈpɑː(r)təmen] or *[dɪˈpɑː(r)təmən], whereby they insert schwa vowel to ease the pronunciation.

The inconsistent spelling-sound correspondence in English also creates problems. Such inconsistency results in wrong analogy since the prospective teachers transfer the pronunciation of the words that they have known to a new context where a word contains similar parts. To illustrate, they transfer mine [ˈmaɪn] to examine and determine, while in fact those words should be respectively pronounced [ɪgˈzæmɪn] and [dɪˈtɜːmɪn]. The same case also happens to opposite, which is often confused with site [ˈsaɪt], and purpose [ˈpɜːpəs], which is confused with pose [ˈpəʊs] and hence mispronounced as *[pɜːˈpəʊs]. Some other examples are found in infinite *[ɪnˈfaɪnaɪt] instead of [ˈɪnfɪnət], preface *[ˈprɪfeɪs] instead of [ˈprefɪs], and resignation *[rɪzaɪˈneɪʃən] instead of [rezɪgˈneɪʃən]. Besides, there are instances when some consonants are 'silent', meaning that they should not be pronounced, such as <b> in climbing and combing and <t> in castle and listen. Lack of pronunciation knowledge will result in pronouncing them instead.

Concerning suprasegmental errors, the prospective EFL teachers often employ wrong stress assignment. This happens because they transfer the suprasegmental patterns of L1 to L2 (Reid, 2016), e.g. component *[kompoˈnen] and interpret *[ɪntɜːˈpret]. Also, they may be unaware of the possible stress shifting which occurs as a result of derivational process, such as prefer [prɪˈfɜː(r)] to become preferable [ˈprefərəbl] and not *[ˈprɪfərəbl]. Here, the word does not only call for stress shift but also sound change, in which /ɪ/ becomes /e/. Another example is found in academic [ækəˈdemɪk], which is often mispronounced as *[əˈkædəmɪk]. In other cases, it may be just random misplacement, e.g. signature *[sɪgˈneɪtʃə(r)], literature *[lɪtəˈreɪtʃə(r)], mountain *[mɒnˈteɪn] and italic *[ˈɪtəlɪk]. They seemingly lack suprasegmental knowledge in that they have not acquired the English stress patterns. Additionally, the problem is also caused by the different nature of the two languages, i.e. English being stress-timed language and Indonesian being syllable-timed language. According to Schaetzel and Low (2009), stress-timed languages assume equal time between stressed syllables. As a result, vowel reduction occurs because unstressed syllables are pronounced more quickly. By contrast, vowel reduction does not occur in syllable-timed languages because they distribute equal stress to all syllables, which causes each of them to take the same amount of time to pronounce. Oftentimes, the prospective EFL teachers are not aware that there should be parts which are weakly stressed and strongly stressed. Making them aware of this distinction and particularly of the stress-timed factor of English will make them sound more natural and fluid, and hence improving their intelligibility (Hussain & Sajid, 2015).

Since pronunciation learning is now aimed at developing intelligibility, errors on the suprasegmental level are regarded more crucial than those on the segmental level (Hussain & Sajid, 2015; Schaetzel & Low, 2009). It does not say that sound accuracy is unimportant. Rather, it emphasizes that when the degrees of errors are compared, the suprasegmental errors contribute more to intelligibility failure. It is strengthened by Arslan (2013: 371), who states that "applying the correct stress patterns becomes vital in producing English words and sentences intelligibly as lack of stress marker or incorrect stress pattern is likely to cause either lack of communication or misunderstanding on the part of interlocutors (Murphy, 2006; Harmer, 2001)." This is especially true to native speakers because they pay attention to stressed syllables in communicating with others as one of the elements that facilitates comprehension (Arslan, 2013).

RAISING PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS OF PROSPECTIVE INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS

To raise the phonological awareness of prospective EFL teachers and eventually to improve their pronunciation, we propose two sets of ideas as possible solutions. First, our ideas are addressed to EFL teacher trainers. Research has shown that instruction is effective in fostering pronunciation improvement (Thompson & Gaddes, 2005). Consequently, teachers should regularly incorporate pronunciation learning in their classes from the beginning (Griffiths, 2004; Reid, 2016) so as to have lasting effects on learners. They need to be informed about correct segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation and be given opportunities to practice various elements of pronunciation, particularly to hear and use correct stress patterns (Arslan, 2013). This is especially true because pronunciation, according to Fraser (1999), involves not only cognitive domain of 'knowing-that' but also conative domain of 'knowing-how' and therefore learners should be motivated and given time to practice the skill.

Some techniques can be employed to raise awareness and develop pronunciation (Reid, 2016). They among others are listening and repeating, drilling, minimal pair drills, ear training, phonetic training, and reading aloud. Meanwhile, to practice suprasegmental features, Reid (2016:27) recommends counting syllables, highlighting stressed syllable, recognizing different stress patterns, grouping words according to a stress pattern, recognizing lexical (stressed words) and function words (in their weak form), songs/rhymes, jazz chants, tongue twisters, drama techniques, and simulations. In addition, teachers may record learners' speech and use it as the materials for discussing their problems (Griffiths, 2004) and providing assistance for improvement. To increase awareness on prosody, teachers may start with asking learners to identify the number of syllables in words. It can be done with clapping or underlining drills. Only after they master the basics can they be taught some strategies to study more effectively on their own (Thompson & Gaddes, 2005).

Prospective EFL teachers need to be taught phonetics as a means to enhance awareness of visual representation of sounds. Such knowledge enables them to monitor their own speech. Ashby (2002) claims that as future teachers they need a grasp of articulatory phonetics, a well-trained ear, and knowledge of the phonology of both L1 and L2. The ability to read phonetic transcription is an essential skill to access information in the dictionary, because pronunciation learning must be done parallel with learning the meaning and its use (Thompson & Gaddes, 2005).

Second, our next ideas are intended for prospective EFL teachers as learners of English. They need to identify in which areas they are having problems, and work on them wholeheartedly. The spirit is not for perfection but comprehensibility. Being open to corrections also prevents fossilization to happen. Consulting a dictionary is always a good thing to do to ensure precision (Yulia & Ena, 2004). As EFL speakers, they should not be overly confident with their pronunciation. It is possible that they have been misled by mispronunciation which is commonplace.

They should do self-monitoring (= reflecting on their own speech to find errors) and self-correction (= the process of fixing one's errors after they have occurred by repeating the word or phrase correctly). By doing these two, their learning is made more personal and meaningful (Thompson & Gaddes, 2005). It may also enhance their autonomy so that they can identify, understand, and overcome their weaknesses. In the end, they can help others after they have helped themselves.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Despite its diminutive role and function in foreign language pedagogy, pronunciation plays an important role for the success of oral interaction across nations. However, the neglect over this skill at schools has caused low oral competency among EFL learners. The situation is certainly not expected to occur among prospective EFL teachers who become role models for their future students. To improve the quality of oral competence of prospective EFL teachers, pronunciation instruction should be given sufficient attention in pedagogy in an attempt to take care of their pronunciation development. This will eventually boost the confidence and the good image of the prospective EFL teachers as non-native speakers of English.

This paper hopefully has thrown some light on how prospective EFL teachers and teacher trainers can raise phonological awareness. Despite minimum exposure, pronunciation can be improved as long as they have motivation–be it personal or professional–for learning English, positive attitudes, and openness to the target culture. Furthermore, prospective EFL teachers can be more than just being intelligible. What matters most is by raising awareness, they can help identify and overcome their own weaknesses before they help their future students. To further explore pronunciation learning, research may be conducted to find out factors which affect intelligibility and to discover the effectiveness of those awareness-raising techniques on pronunciation development. On top of that, it would be interesting to explore how EFL learners use those techniques to improve their pronunciation.

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