A STUDY ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH VOWELS
BY THE ENGLISH DEPARTMENT STUDENTS,
FKIP MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA

Research Paper
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by:
DIAH AYU YUNIARTI
A.320050079

SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION
MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

In Indonesia, English has been formally taught from Junior High School to university level. Even, English becomes a compulsory subject in many universities. It can be seen that English has function as a means of transferring knowledge which is mostly used in many education institutions. This is due to the status of English as the first foreign language learned in Indonesia, besides Mandarin, Japanese and German.

It is understandable that Indonesian people find difficulties in learning English sounds because the sound system is different from that of Indonesian. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Indonesian people cannot speak English well.

The general aim of teaching English to the students of English Department of School of Teacher Training and Education is to make them master all skills of language (listening, speaking, reading and writing). Besides, it is master the content courses such as linguistics (phonology, morphology, syntax) and literature. When they are graduated from the University, they are expected to be proficient in English as well as professional in teaching it. To meet the goals, several different linguistics factors such as pronunciation, grammar, lexicon (vocabulary and idiom), style (appropriate to the situation), function and discourse have become the learners’ aim and the teachers’ task (Syafei, 1988: I).

For some students, English is the first foreign language to learn and they just learn simple English pattern. As the beginning of English learners, the students have a very limited knowledge of English which sometimes create
problem in learning process, especially pronunciation. First, a genuine pronunciation problem exists when the learners have difficulties in making the required sounds to imitate. As the writer has observed, who tends to have problems in pronouncing the sound [ʃ] as in “sheep”, [tʃ] as in “teacher” [ð] as in “than”, [θ] as in “three" in which these do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia. Secondly, a pronunciation problem occurs when the sound is not really difficult as such, but the learners are misled by the spelling. For example, the words “up” [ʌ], “wool” [ʊ], “three” [iː], “black” [æ], “sky” [ai], and “how” [aʊ] are not pronounced as they are written, so learning pronunciation is not easy for students.

According to Richard (in Mahadina, 2005), pronunciation is the way a certain speech sounds in the mouth, pronunciation stresses more on the way of sounds are produced by the hearer. Pronunciation is important in English because mispronunciations will make hearer misunderstand about the meaning of utterance. Pronunciation is clearly a central factor in people’s success in making themselves understood. Pronunciation is one of the three components of languages, together with grammar and vocabulary. It plays an important part in listening, and speaking skill, so developing students pronunciation is one of the most important tasks for English teachers.

Training students to be a good English speaker who should communicate and speak directly to their friends in English is not easy. Learning words, phrase and grammatical features of language is not enough. The students are expected be able to speak English accurately and fluently. In order to be understood by others, the students pay attention to their pronunciation.
In pronunciation we can learn phonemes. The phonemes are divided into two parts: consonant and vowel. In this chapter the writer wants to analyze the vowel sounds in English words. In phonetics, a vowel is a sound in spoken language, such as English ah! [ɔ:] or oh! [əʊ], pronounced within open vocal tract so that there is no built-up of air pressure at any point above the glottis. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vowel). Vowels are produced without radical constriction. The word vowel comes from Latin word vocalist, meaning "speaking", because in most languages words and thus speech are not possible without vowels. Vowel is commonly used to mean both vowel sounds and the written symbols that represent them.

According to Wolfram and Johnson (1981: 27), vowels take on their peculiar characteristics from changes in size and shape of the oral cavity as a whole. The vowel height dimension refers to the relative location of the highest point of the body of the tongue on a vertical scale. The vowel backness dimension refers to the relative location of the highest part of the body of the tongue on a horizontal scale. The area of the mouth in which vowels may be produced is divided into a grid, formed by three arbitrary divisions along the height and backness dimension. Certain vowel symbols are associated with the sounds corresponding to each section of the grid. Vowel height is generally divided into high, mid, and low; backness is generally divided into front, central, and back.

In English, there are five letters which always represent a vowel when written: a, e, i, o, and u. These five letters represent more than five vowel sounds, however, depending on the word, or if they are combined with other vowels. For example, the letter a in the words hat and make, which have different sound representation:
hat [hæt]    make [meˈk]

The word ‘hat’ [hæt] and ‘make’ [meˈk] are different sound. The shift of
the word ‘hat’ is pronounced as [æ] in the vowel sound. So, the phonetic
transcription of ‘hat’ is [hæt]. While the word ‘make’ is pronounced as [eɪ] in the
vowel sound. So the phonetic transcription of ‘make’ is [meˈk].

The vowel [æ] in the word ‘hat’ is called “short” sound of the letter a. The
vowel [eɪ] in the word ‘hut’ is called “short” sound of the letter a. A vowel is a
type of sound for which there is no closure of the throat or mouth at any point
where vocalization occurs. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vowel). Vowels can be
contrasted with consonants, which are sounds for which there are one or more
points where air is stopped. In nearly all languages, words must contain at least
one vowel. While a word can be formed without any consonants, such as the
English words I or way. No word may consist of only consonants, without a
vowel.

Based on this explanation, the writer wants to conduct a research entitled

“A Study on the Pronunciation of English Vowels by the English Department
Students, FKIP Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta”.

B. Previous Study

To provide the originality of the research, the writer would like to present
the previous research conducted by Mahadina (2005) entitled “A Study on English
Pronunciation by the First Semester on English Department of Muhammadiyah
University of Surakarta in 2004/ 2005 Academic years.” Her research concerns
with the student’s pronunciation in producing vowel, consonant, and diphthong
sounds. It focuses on how the first semester students of English Department
produce the English pronunciation. The result of her research indicates that there are shifts in the student’s English pronunciation, that are vowel and consonant but not in diphthong from the standard sounds friction of consonant and three sounds friction of vowel.

The second research was done by Eniex Yuniarti (2006) entitled “A Study on the English Diphthongs Pronounced by the Second Semester Students of Broadcasting Program of Language Center of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.” Her research is the similar research to Mahadina but in different scope in which the subject is the second semester students who were taking broadcasting program in Language Center of UMS. Her research focused on diphthong sounds produced by the students in pronouncing English which is not the same as those in the previous researchers.

And the third previous research was done by Nunik Fauziah Hastuti (2008) entitle “A Study on Articulating English Vowel sound by Speech Defect Community (a case study of impressionistic phonetics of YPAC members in Surakarta)”. Her research focuses on the pronunciation error and the shift of articulatory organs at the vowel sounds produced by speech defect students of YPAC (Yayasan Pembinaan Anak Cacat) in Surakarta that have more detail and more difficult analysis.

In this research, the writer tries to make research entitled “A Study on the Pronunciation of English Vowels by the English Department Students, FKIP Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.” In this paper, the writer focuses on how the English students of English department produce the pronunciation of English vowel. The result of her research focuses on the frequent vowel shift, and reason of the shift vowel sounds by the English students’.
C. Problem Statement

Based on the background above the writer formulates the problems as follows:

1. What are the most frequent vowels shift by the students?
2. What are the reasons of the shift vowel sounds used by the students?

D. Limitation of the Study

To get deep understanding, this research is limited on the length of short and long vowel sounds used the students in pronouncing English vowel sounds. The writer emphasizes the vowel shift, and the reason of the shift vowel sounds used by the students. The writer collects the data from the English Department student’s pronunciation of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

E. Objective of the Study

The writer has some objectives dealing with the problem statements above. They are to:

1. Determine the most frequent vowels shift by the students.
2. Describe the reason of the shift vowel sounds by the students?

F. Benefit of the Study

1. Theoretical benefit

   a. The result can contribute to linguistics, English vowel and phonetic.

   b. The result of this research can be used as input and reference about vowel sound of English pronunciation especially to the university level.
2. Practical benefit

a. For the writer, she can also get larger knowledge about the vowel sound of the English pronunciation especially on the English department students of FKIP Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.

b. The finding of this research will give larger knowledge which is useful to the readers who are interested in analyzing the vowels sound of English pronunciation.

G. Research Paper Organization

This research paper is divided into five chapters as follows:

Chapter I is Introduction. This chapter deals with the Background of the Study, Previous Study, Problem Statement, Limitation of the Study, Objective of the Study, and Benefits of the Study.

Chapter II Underlying Theory. This chapter deals with the Description of the English Vowels Sounds, Pronunciation, English Sound System, The English Vowels Length in Detail, and Error Analysis.

Chapter III deals with the Research Method, which consists of Type of Research, Object of the Research, Data and Data Source, Technique of Collecting Data, Technique of Analyzing Data, and Paper Organization.

Chapter IV deals with analysis and discussion, which consist of data and how the data are describes.

Chapter V deals with conclusion and suggestion.