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A Contrastive Analysis Of English and Indonesian Consonant Clusters And Their Impact On Efl Learners' Pronunciation Errors

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Abstrak

Pelafalan merupakan aspek penting dalam menguasai bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Perbedaan sistem fonologis antara bahasa Inggris dan bahasa Indonesia seringkali menimbulkan kesulitan bagi pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, khususnya dalam melafalkan gugusan konsonan. Studi ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis perbedaan gugusan konsonan dalam bahasa Inggris dan bahasa Indonesia melalui pendekatan analisis kontrastif dan meneliti dampaknya terhadap kesalahan pelafalan pada pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing. Metode yang digunakan adalah kualitatif deskriptif, dengan menggunakan pendekatan tinjauan pustaka dan analisis data fonologis dari berbagai studi sebelumnya. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa jumlah gugusan konsonan yang terbatas dalam bahasa Indonesia menyebabkan pembelajar bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing cenderung menghilangkan konsonan, menambahkan vokal (epentesis), dan mengganti bunyi ketika melafalkan kata-kata bahasa Inggris. Kesalahan-kesalahan ini berdampak pada kejelasan dan kelancaran berbicara. Oleh karena itu, pengajaran pelafalan memerlukan perhatian khusus untuk mengajarkan gugusan konsonan secara eksplisit dan kontekstual.

Kata kunci: *Analisis Kontrastif, Gugusan Konsonan, Pelafalan, EFL, Interferensi Fonologis.*

Abstract

Pronunciation is a crucial aspect in mastering English as a foreign language. Differences in the phonological systems between English and Indonesian often present difficulties for learners of English as a foreign language, particularly in pronouncing consonant clusters. This study aims to analyze the differences in consonant clusters in English and Indonesian through a contrastive analysis approach and examine their impact on pronunciation errors in learners of English as a foreign language. The method used is descriptive qualitative, utilizing a literature review approach and phonological data analysis from various previous studies. The results of the analysis indicate that the limited number of consonant clusters in Indonesian leads learners of English as a foreign language to tend to omit consonants, add vowels (epenthesis), and substitute sounds when pronouncing English words. These errors impact speech clarity and fluency. Therefore, pronunciation instruction requires special attention to explicitly and contextually teaching consonant clusters.

Keywords: *Contrastive Analysis, Consonant Clusters, Pronunciation, EFL, Phonological Interference.*

INTRODUCTION

English, as an international language, plays a crucial role in education, communication, and professional fields. In learning English as a foreign language, speaking ability is often a key indicator of learner success. One factor influencing speaking ability is correct pronunciation. However, differences in the sound systems between the native language and the target language often lead to pronunciation errors (Dardjowidjojo, 2009). In the context of English as an international language, comprehensible pronunciation is a crucial aspect of successful communication. For learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), pronunciation is often a major challenge due to the differences in the sound systems between English and the learner's native language. One prominent phonological difference between English and Indonesian lies in the presence and pattern of consonant clusters (Brown 2008).

Indonesian and English have different phonological systems, particularly in terms of consonant clusters. English allows two or more consonants to appear consecutively without a vowel, either at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. In contrast, Indonesian tends to have a simple syllabic structure and rarely uses consonant clusters in native words. This difference often leads to interference from the first language on the pronunciation of the second language. Acquiring accurate pronunciation in a second language is one of the most persistent challenges in foreign language learning, especially when the target language differs significantly from the learner's first language in phonological structure. For Indonesian-speaking English learners, pronunciation difficulties largely stem from fundamental differences between the phonological systems of Indonesian and English, creating systematic interference patterns that impact the clarity and effectiveness of communication.

The Indonesian phonological system, characterized by a relatively simple syllable structure, limited consonant clusters, and predictable stress patterns, stands in stark contrast to the complexity of English phonology. English has extensive consonant clusters, vowel reduction patterns, a complex stress system, and intricate intonation structures that pose significant challenges for Indonesian language learners. Understanding these systematic differences allows for the development of targeted pedagogical interventions to address specific areas of difficulty while capitalizing on opportunities for positive transfer.

Against this background, this study focuses on a contrastive analysis of English and Indonesian consonant clusters and their impact on pronunciation errors among learners of English as a foreign language.

THEORITICAL REVIEW

Contrastive Analysis

Contrastive Analysis (CA) is a linguistic approach that compares two languages to identify similarities and differences, particularly to predict learning difficulties in second language acquisition (Lado, 1957). According to the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, elements that differ significantly between L1 and L2 are more likely to cause learning problems.

Massofa (2008) explains that contrastive analysis is a component of error analysis. While error analysis looks at errors in general, contrastive analysis looks at errors specifically. This is because contrastive analysis examines errors by comparing the 11 and 22 languages. Brown (1973) explains that the contrastive analysis hypothesis emphasizes the influence (interference) of the 11 languages on the 22 languages being learned.

Teachers often experience difficulties in teaching 2 languages to their students. Therefore, teachers should be familiar with contrastive analysis. This analysis can help

language teachers assist and correct student errors. This way, students can quickly master the target language (22). Contrastive analysis, as a language teaching approach, sees 22 as influencing students when learning the 22. Students are often influenced by L1 constructions when speaking or writing L2. Even certain words or L1 constructions influence them, both consciously and unconsciously.(Kamsinah Kamsinah and Nurasia Natsir 2025)

Massofa (2008) states that contrastive analysis, as an approach to language teaching, uses a comparative method, namely comparing different elements with similar elements. However, the emphasis of contrastive analysis is on different linguistic elements.

Given the description mentioned above, it is necessary for teachers to conduct contrastive analysis, an approach to language teaching that uses a comparison technique between L1 (the mother tongue) and L2 (the target language, i.e., the language being studied) so that teachers can predict student errors and students can quickly master the language being studied (Pateda, 1989:18 in Massofa).

Consonant Clusters

Consonant clusters are a series of two or more consonant sounds that appear sequentially in a single word without any vowel sounds in between. These consonant sounds are still pronounced individually, but within a single syllable or at syllable boundaries. Consonant clusters are common in English and are one of the phonological characteristics that distinguish it from Indonesian.

Based on their position within a word, consonant clusters can appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a word. Initial consonant clusters occur when two or more consonants appear at the beginning of a syllable. In English, common examples are the words play /pleɪ/, which has the cluster /pl/, street /stri:t/ with the cluster /str/, and clean /kli:n/ with the cluster /kl/. In this position, English learners often encounter difficulties because in Indonesian there are almost no consonant clusters at the beginning of words, so speakers tend to insert vowels, for example, pronouncing play as pelay.(Yule.n.d)

Mid consonant clusters appear between vowels in a word. Examples include the word basket /'bɑ:skɪt/ with the consonant /sk/, doctor /'dɒktər/ with the consonant /kt/, and pumpkin /'pʌmpkɪn/ with the consonant /mpk/. In these positions, pronunciation errors usually involve the omission of one of the consonants, for example, basket is pronounced as baset.

Final consonant clusters are a series of consonants that appear at the end of a word and are one of the most difficult for learners of English as a foreign language. Examples include the words "help" (/help/) with the /lp/ cluster, "next" (/nekst/) with the /kst/ cluster, and "asked" (/æskt/) with the /skt/ cluster. In Indonesian, the syllable structure generally does not allow for complex final consonant clusters, so learners often omit the final consonant, for example, "help" is pronounced "hep" or "next" becomes "nek."

Compared to Indonesian, consonant clusters are very limited. Indonesian generally has a simple syllable pattern (CV or CVC). Consonant clusters typically only appear in loanwords, such as "struktur," "transaksi," or "program," and their pronunciation is often simplified. This difference makes consonant clusters a major source of pronunciation errors for English learners in Indonesia (Alwi et al., 2014).

By understanding the concept of consonant clusters and examples, learners and educators can be more aware of potential pronunciation difficulties and design exercises that focus on progressive pronunciation, for example, from single consonant sounds to more complex consonant clusters. If you wish, I can also adapt this explanation into an academic version for journals or a simplified version for school students.

Phonological Interference

Phonological interference is a phenomenon where the sound system of a first language influences the pronunciation of a second or foreign language being learned. This influence occurs because speakers are accustomed to the phonological patterns of their native language, such as the types of sounds present, pronunciation, syllable structure, stress, and intonation. When learning a new language, speakers tend to use these familiar sound patterns to produce the sounds of the target language, resulting in deviations from the expected pronunciation.

When learning English as a foreign language, phonological interference is often experienced by Indonesian speakers due to the significant differences in the sound systems between the two languages. Indonesian has a relatively simple phonological system, with few consonant sounds and almost no complex consonant clusters. In contrast, English has many consonant and vowel sounds, including sounds not found in Indonesian, such as /θ/ and /ð/, as well as consonant clusters at the beginning, middle, and end of words. As a result, learners often replace difficult sounds with the closest Indonesian equivalent, for example, "think" is pronounced "ting" or "this" is pronounced "dis". (Ellis, 1997)

In addition to sound substitution, phonological interference can also take the form of sound omission or addition. For example, in pronouncing English consonant clusters, learners often omit one of the consonants or insert a vowel to conform to Indonesian syllable patterns, such as "school" being pronounced "sekolah" or "stop" being pronounced "setop." This phonological interference not only affects pronunciation clarity but can also lead to misunderstandings in communication.

Thus, phonological interference is a natural process in second language acquisition, especially in the early stages of learning. However, through targeted pronunciation practice, increased phonological awareness, and intensive exposure to the target language, the impact of phonological interference can be gradually reduced.

METHOD

This research used a descriptive qualitative method with a literature review approach. Data were collected from various scientific journals, phonology books, and previous research on English pronunciation by Indonesian-speaking EFL learners. The analysis was conducted by comparing the consonant cluster systems of both languages and identifying common pronunciation error patterns (Moleong, 2007).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Differences between English and Indonesian Consonant Clusters

The differences between English and Indonesian consonant clusters lie in the complexity of their sound structure, the position of the clusters, and the phonotactic rules governing them. A consonant cluster is a series of two or more consonants that appear sequentially within a syllable without any intervening vowels.

In English, consonant clusters are very diverse and complex. This language allows two to four consonants to appear sequentially within a syllable. Consonant clusters can appear at the beginning, medial, or end of a word. In initial position, English has consonant clusters such as *pl* in *play*, *tr* in *tree*, *spl* in *splash*, and *str* in *street*. In final word positions, consonant clusters can be even more complex, such as *-sts* in *tests*, *-mps* in *lamps*, or *-ndz* in *hands*. This complexity is related to the English phonological system, which does not require a simple syllable structure and allows for overlapping final consonants (Muslich, 2012).

In contrast, Indonesian has a much more limited consonant cluster system. In general, Indonesian does not allow complex consonant clusters within a single syllable, especially in final position. Indonesian syllable structure tends to be simple, with a dominant consonant-

vowel (CV) or consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) pattern. Consonant clusters in Indonesian usually appear in word-initial position and are limited in number, such as pr in practice, tr in tradition, kl in class, or gr in free. These clusters are largely derived from loanwords, particularly from Sanskrit, Arabic, Dutch, and English. In word-final positions, consonant clusters are almost non-existent in native Indonesian vocabulary. (Richard, 2010)

Another striking difference is in pronunciation. English speakers are accustomed to pronouncing consonant clusters without inserting additional vowels. In contrast, Indonesian speakers tend to insert a vowel, usually /ə/ or /e/, when encountering English consonant clusters. For example, the word "school" is often pronounced "sekul," or "street" as "setrit." This phenomenon occurs due to the influence of the Indonesian phonological system, which is not accustomed to complex consonant clusters, especially at the beginning and end of words.

Thus, the differences in consonant clusters between English and Indonesian lie not only in the number and sequential position of consonants, but also in the underlying phonological system. English is more flexible and complex in forming consonant clusters, while Indonesian tends to be simpler and restricts the occurrence of consonant clusters, especially in native vocabulary. This difference often presents difficulties for learners of English as a foreign language, particularly in pronunciation.

Types of Pronunciation Errors in EFL Learners

Pronunciation errors in EFL learners generally arise due to differences in the phonological systems between their mother tongue (B1) and English (B2), limited exposure to authentic sounds, and the influence of spelling on pronunciation. These errors can be classified into several main types.

1. Sound Substitution Errors.

These errors occur when learners replace English sounds with other sounds they perceive as closest in their mother tongue. For example, the interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ in the words "think" and "this" are often pronounced as /t/ or /d/ by Indonesian-speaking EFL learners because these sounds do not exist in the Indonesian phonological system. As a result, "think" is pronounced as "tink" and "this" as "dis."

2. Sound Omission Errors.

These errors occur when learners omit one or more sounds, especially at the end of a word or in a consonant cluster. For example, the word "tests" is often pronounced as "test" or "tes." This is related to the limitations of the native language's syllable structure, which does not allow for complex consonant clusters, so learners tend to simplify the sound forms.

3. Sound Addition Errors (Epenthesis).

These errors occur when learners add vowels between or before consonants to simplify pronunciation. For example, "school" is pronounced as "sekul" or "esku:l," and "street" as "setrit." This phenomenon occurs because learners adapt the sound structure of English to the simpler syllable pattern of their native language.

4. Errors In Word Stress Placement

English has a lexical stress pattern that influences meaning, while Indonesian does not. As a result, EFL learners often place stress unevenly or incorrectly. For example, the word "photograph" should be stressed on the first syllable, but is often pronounced with stress on other syllables. This error can cause speech to sound unnatural or difficult to understand.

5. Intonation And Rhythm Errors

EFL learners often use the intonation patterns of their native language when speaking English. English is stress-timed, while Indonesian is syllable-timed. As a result, EFL learners' speech sounds flat, monotonous, or inconsistent with the sentence's communicative function, for example in interrogative sentences or sentences emphasizing emotion. (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin n.d.)

6. Spelling-Based Pronunciation Errors.

These errors occur because learners pronounce words based on their spelling, rather than their correct phonetic form. For example, the word "often" is pronounced with a /t/ sound, or "receipt" is pronounced with all its letters. This is common due to the differences in letter-sound relationships between English and their mother tongue.

The Impact of Pronunciation Errors on EFL Learners

Pronunciation errors in learning English as a foreign language have a significant impact on communication success and the development of learners' language competence. These impacts are not only linguistic but also encompass psychological and social aspects.

1. Impaired Speech Intelligibility.

Pronunciation errors can make learners' speech difficult to understand by both native and non-native English speakers. Errors in segmental sounds, such as phoneme substitutions or omissions in consonant clusters, often obscure the meaning of words. For example, pronouncing "ship" as "sheep" can create ambiguity. Poor intelligibility can hinder fluent communication and lead to misunderstandings.

2. Decreased Fluency.

Learners who experience pronunciation difficulties tend to speak more slowly and hesitantly because they have to think about how to pronounce words correctly. Excessive efforts to correct pronunciation often disrupt the flow of speech, resulting in choppy and unnatural speech.

3. Increased Cognitive Load In Communication.

Pronunciation errors force learners to focus more attention on the mechanics of speaking, rather than on conveying meaning. This increases cognitive load and reduces the learner's ability to respond spontaneously in spoken interactions.

4. Negative Attitudes From Listeners Arise.

Irregular pronunciation often affects listeners' perceptions of the learner's language skills. Listeners may perceive the learner as less competent or confident, even if the learner's mastery of grammar and vocabulary is quite good. This negative perception can impact social and academic interactions. (Odlin, 1989)

5. Decreased Self-Confidence And Motivation To Learn.

Continuous pronunciation errors, especially if they receive excessive correction or negative responses from the environment, can lower learners' self-confidence. This condition often makes learners reluctant to speak English in public, thus hindering the practice and development of speaking skills.

6. Hinders The Achievement Of Language Learning Goals.

Pronunciation is a key component of communicative competence. If pronunciation errors are not addressed appropriately, they can hinder learners from achieving learning goals, such as academic presentation skills, professional communication, or passing oral exams. Therefore, pronunciation plays a crucial role in the overall success of English language learning.

Learning Implications for EFL Learning

Pronunciation errors and differences in the phonological systems between English and learners' native languages have important implications for EFL learning. Teachers need to

explicitly teach pronunciation, especially for sounds and consonant clusters that are not found in learners' native languages, to improve speech comprehension. Furthermore, a contrastive analysis approach helps teachers predict and minimize common pronunciation errors. EFL learning should also focus on communication comprehension, rather than on achieving a native accent, so learners will be more confident and motivated in using English orally. The use of authentic pronunciation models and constructive feedback also supports the development of EFL learners' speaking skills.(Ristati et al. 2021)

CONCLUSION

A contrastive analysis of English and Indonesian consonant clusters shows that differences in the phonological structures of the two languages are a major factor in the emergence of pronunciation errors in EFL learners. English allows for complex consonant clusters in various word positions, while Indonesian has a limited number of consonant clusters and a simpler syllable structure. These differences lead EFL learners to make errors such as consonant omissions, vowel additions, and sound substitutions, which impact speech intelligibility, fluency, and communication confidence. Therefore, contrastive analysis proves essential as a pedagogical foundation in EFL learning, particularly for designing explicit pronunciation instruction oriented toward communication intelligibility, rather than solely toward achieving a native accent.

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