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How Is a Foreign Language Pronounced? A Case Study of Indonesian as a Foreign Language Among Speakers of Other Languages

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Abstract—Numerous studies have been conducted to ascertain the relationship between the first language (L1) and the second/foreign language (L2). However, it is unclear how vowels and consonants affect how a foreign language speaker pronounces Indonesian. Thus, the objective of this study was to ascertain the vowels and consonants of the Indonesian language that were incorrectly and correctly pronounced by Lao men and Japanese women. This study is descriptive qualitative in nature. Following data collection via audio recording, the collected data were analysed using a contrastive analysis. The study's findings indicate that certain speech sounds are both mispronounced and well-pronounced. The speech sounds /i/, /u/, /e/, /ə/, /a/, /p/, /b/, /m/, /d/, /n/, /r/, /l/, /t/, /h/, and /k/ were mispronounced by the Japanese participants; however, the speech sounds /i/, /u/, /ə/, /a/, /dʒ/, /n/, /t/, /g/, /p/, /k/, /r/, and /h/ were not pronounced correctly by the Lao participants.

Index Terms—consonants, Indonesia, Indonesian language, speakers of other language, vowels

I. INTRODUCTION

According to a large body of scholarly research, correct pronunciation is one of the most challenging aspects of learning a foreign language (Alzinaidi & Latif, 2019; Mohammed, 2018; Upor & Olomy, 2022). There is a peculiarity in pronunciation that is impacted by learners' native language (Grolman et al., 2021). Certain sorts of sounds may not exist in the learners' native language; therefore, they opt to use the nearest recognisable sounds instead. However, they do not perceive this as a distinct sound with meaning implications. In other words, they have learned the actual sounds but not how to consider these words as a set. In other words, they use an incorrect intonation from their mother tongue in the target language. Consequently, they will have a foreign accent and may be misunderstood. In addition to the first linguistic background, learners' lack of confidence, attitude (Islami et al., 2021) and language learning motivation (Adeline, 2020) can affect how well they pronounce a foreign language. This is affected by the linguistic and cultural distance between two languages (Bekeyeva et al., 2021; Istanti et al., 2020).

Although teaching pronunciation is one of the most contentious issues in language education, current pedagogical theories and research on pronunciation point to the importance of intelligible pronunciation as a prerequisite for developing communicative competence (Ilkhomovna, 2019). When speakers of other languages learn Indonesian as a foreign language, for instance, one of the difficulties they have is figuring out how to pronounce words in Indonesian (Adeline, 2020; Istanti et al., 2020; Lutfiana, 2021). Foreign students encounter obstacles such as memorization, pronunciation, and comprehension of Indonesian prefix and suffix usage (Lutfiana, 2021). In terms of the cultural divide between Indonesian and other languages, local politeness cues also influence foreign language learners' ability to acquire Indonesian (Gusnawaty & Nurwati, 2019).

In addition to the findings stated in the literature above, during our 19-month observation of teaching Indonesian as a foreign language to speakers of other languages who were foreign students at a public university on the Indonesian island of Sumatra, we found out that they had difficulty pronouncing Indonesian words correctly. In other words, they frequently mispronounced Indonesian words. Consonants such as /r/, for instance, are extremely difficult for Japanese women to correctly articulate. They would always use the pronunciation /r/ instead of /r/. Regarding the Lao people, the consonant /r/ would always be heard as /l/. Mispronunciations of these sounds are common among learners of Indonesian, as they are learners of other languages, including English as a foreign language (Grolman et al., 2021).

Furthermore, from a communication standpoint, proper pronunciation is necessary for the speaker to transmit an

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accurate message to the listener (Ali, 2018; Nurullayevna, 2020). Therefore, the accent must be clear, as speaking with an exaggerated or distorted accent nearly invariably ends in miscommunication, bewilderment, and rage (Abercrombie, 2019; Anggoro, 2020). In addition to pronunciation, the true issue rests in the language's grammar and lexicon. Occasionally, learners use poor grammar and few words when communicating in Indonesian. However, they are more likely to communicate effectively if their intonation is accurate (Levis, 1999; Skantze, 2021). At this point, proper pronunciation is essential.

Although there have been numerous studies on pronunciation in foreign language learning, they have primarily focused on English as a foreign language pronunciation (see, for example, Abugohar & Yunus, 2018; Afzal, 2019; Alzinaidi & Latif, 2019; Djurayeva, 2021; Edo-Marzá, 2014; Islami et al., 2021; Mompean, 1997; Vančová, 2019; Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). In other words, to the best of our knowledge, studies examining how words of Indonesian as a foreign language are pronounced by speakers of other languages are uncommon. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to analyse how Indonesian vowels and consonants are pronounced by foreign speakers who attended an Indonesian public university.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

It is widely stated in the literature that more than 200 million people speak Indonesian, showing that this is a language with a large number of native speakers. In addition, the Indonesian language has been studied in a number of countries, including China (Setiawan, 2020). Due to the vast number of native speakers, the Indonesian language has the potential to become one of the world's languages.

Learning a language begins with pronouncing its words, beginning with the most basic (Chela-Flores, 2001; Sicola & Darcy, 2015). Pronunciation is the foundation of language acquisition and use; it is the language itself. Furthermore, it affects the other aspects of language acquisition. Thus, studying pronunciation is not only the first but also the most difficult and crucial step in learning a foreign language (Ivanović, 2019; Lleó & Ulloa, 2019).

In addition, it should be noted that the relationship between learners' first language (L1) and target language (TL) as well as any linguistic information they possess should be considered. Foreign language learners have a tendency to search for parallels between the target language and their past linguistic expertise. Due to the limits of the TL, their L1 is the primary source for perceiving linguistic similarities in the early stages of language acquisition. However, if they achieve a high level of skill in another language, it will have a significant impact on their TL learning. Therefore, foreign students learning Indonesian will be influenced by their L1 as well as other linguistic expertise, such as English, which is an international language.

Moreover, it is widely known that there are variances in the way words are spoken in each language, as well as between languages. This discrepancy can naturally result in mispronunciation when learning a foreign language. This occurs for several reasons, including: 1) the learner may not be familiar with some sounds since they are absent from his or her mother tongue, thus they tend to be replaced with the closest equivalent that they are aware of; 2) sounds emerge in the mother tongue, but not as distinct phonology, such that a learner does not genuinely perceive them as distinct sounds with meaning implications; 3) a learner has learnt the actual sound but not the pattern of word stress or letter grouping; in other words, he or she is likely to apply intonation from his or her native language that is inconsistent with the foreign language being studied.

Previous studies have demonstrated that it is challenging for research participants to pronounce English as a foreign language, particularly the consonants /p/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /r/, /tʃ/, /t/, /h/, /v/, /k/, /l/, and /d/, because they are not in the participants' native tongue (Elmahdi & Khan, 2015). As a result, they tend to replace difficult consonants with the closest, most familiar sound from their own language. For instance, Malayalam learners of English substitute the missing sounds with the closest equivalents, such as /ɔ:/ changed into /j/ to /o:/, /ɔ:/ and /j/ into /o:j/, /e/ replaced by /e:/, /e/ replaced by /ej/, /ə/ substituted for /o:/, /ɪə/ replaced by /ij/ and /ijə/, and /əə/ replaced by /əjə/ (Bishara, 2015). Additionally, due to orthographic interference in the Turkish context, native Turkish speakers find it challenging to memorize and pronounce English as a foreign language. There are differences between the rules for pronouncing Turkish and English, including the fact that: 1) there are no silent letters in Turkish while there are in English, such as the letters /k/ and /b/; 2) one letter has one sound; and 3) in Turkish, consonants do not mix to produce other sounds, such as in the words "club" pronounced /kulüp/, "sport" pronounced /sıpor/, "studio" pronounced /sutudiyo/, and "crisis" pronounced /kırız/ (Khalizadeh, 2014).

The phonetic features of Indonesian contrast with the generally less phonemic pronunciation of words from (an)other language, such as English words. In contrast to English words, which have a total of 36 phonemes represented by 26 letters, the Indonesian language system has 26 phonemes that are represented by 26 letters, leading to frequent misunderstandings when, for instance, speakers of other languages learn Indonesian (Karlina et al., 2020). Contrastive analysis studies frequently highlight the fact that learners will experience more issues the more unlike two systems (languages) are from one another (Khalizadeh, 2014). Therefore, it is challenging for learners to pronounce phonetically proper words when learning a foreign language, Indonesian as a foreign language in particular.

The issue is further complicated by the fact that learning pronunciation should be experiential rather than theoretical, similar to learning to drive, swim, or sing. Therefore, plenty of opportunities to practice various pronunciation exercises are necessary for effective pronunciation learning. Because the curriculum is what drives how a foreign language is

taught, it must also be considered in order to resolve this issue (Karlina et al., 2020). Additionally, the limited time and resources allotted for pronunciation instruction demand real-world innovations that can actually aid learners with their pronunciation. Simply put, practical instruction for teaching Indonesian and pronunciation techniques should take precedence over linguistic theory (Karlina et al., 2020; Muljono et al., 2016).

III. METHODOLOGY

In order to investigate a thorough, precise, impartial, thorough, and systematic description of an object, this study adopted a qualitative descriptive methodology (Miles et al., 2014). The current study included seven international students who were learning Indonesian as a foreign language. They were from Japan and Laos and divided into two groups, the first of which included three female speakers from Japan and the second included four Laotian men. They were between the ages of 23 and 28. They had had no prior knowledge of learning Indonesian. They had been learning Indonesian for eight months when this study was being conducted.

An audio recorder was utilized to collect data on pronunciation. The participants had to present a monologue at the beginning stage that would be videotaped. The research participants would be free to develop creative speech using this monologue technique, which was chosen because of its potential for this. They were provided a list of topics so they could choose what to say more easily. Additionally, while the monologue was being recorded, a vacant area was also provided for them so that they could express their feelings in a secure environment. They believed that what they said was private, which was why this happened. In this instance, only the researchers were aware of what they were conveying. Following the recording of the participants' monologues, the audio files were converted into written text and phonetic symbols. Then, their accents were contrasted with a specific focus on segmental features as vowels and consonants. In addition, as seen in Figure 1 below, the Indonesian vowels are composed of the letters a, i, u, e, and o.

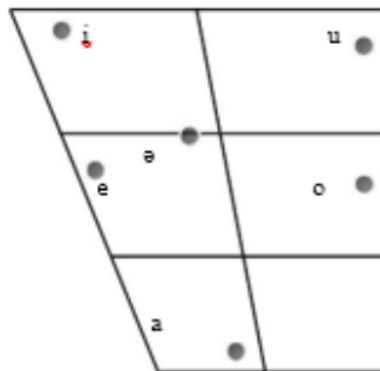


Figure 1 Indonesian Vowels
Source: (Soderberg & Olson, 2008)

TABLE 1
INDONESIAN CONSONANTS

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive & affricate	p b		t	d	tʃ dʒ		k g	(ʔ)
Nasal	m			n		ɲ	ŋ	
Flap/trill				r				
Fricative		(f)		s	(ʃ)			h
Approximant	w			(z)		j		
Lateral approximant				l				

Moreover, we used a list of consonants as described in the literature (Lew, 2014) in order to compare the segmental features of the research participants from Laos as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
LAO CONSONANTS

	Labial	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Post palatal
Oral stop	p ^h p b	t ^h t d	c	k ^h k
Nasal stop	m	n	ɲ	ŋ
Fricatives	f	s		h
Approximants	w	l	j	

Regarding the vowels, we also adopted segmental characteristics of vowels proposed by Lew (Lew, 2014) as presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
LAO VOWELS

	Front	Central	Back
Close	i i:	u u:	u u:
Mid	e e:	ɤ ɤ:	o o:
Open	ɛ ɛ:	a a:	ɔ ɔ:

The lists of consonants and vowels found in earlier work (Ohata, 2004) were used to compare the segmental properties of consonants and vowels among research participants from Japan. The following is the list of the consonants (Table 4) followed by the list of vowels (Table 5).

TABLE 4
JAPANESE CONSONANTS

Place of Articulation	Manner of Articulation	Bilabial	Alveolar	Alveopalatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	Voiceless	p	t		k	
	Voiced	b	d		g	
Fricatives	Voiceless	ɸ	s	ç		h
	Voiced		z			
Nasals		m	n			
Liquids			r			

TABLE 5
JAPANESE VOWELS

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		u
Mid	e		o
Low		a	

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the data analysis, the first participant group, which included three Japanese female students, shared the same characteristics. There were 15 incorrectly spoken speech sounds. Five vowels and seven consonants make up the speech sound. The vowels, which can be found in a variety of beginning, middle, and end positions, are /i/, /u/, /e/, /ɔ/, and /a/. Following it, there are the consonants /p/, /b/, /m/, /d/, /n/, /t/, /l/, /ʃ/, /h/, and /k/ that are also incorrectly pronounced. The pronunciation of Japanese participants is shown in Table 6 below.

TABLE 6
JAPANESE FEMALE STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION OF INDONESIAN

No	Sound	Correct Sound			Incorrect Sound			Incorrect Sound Substitution		
		Initial	Medial	Final	Initial	Medial	Final	Initial	Medial	Final
1	i	11	41	25			5			ik
2	u		37	9			8			u:, u:k
3	e		5			1				et
4	ə	1	34	1		16				u, a
5	o	2	9							
6	a	7	153	46	1		19		ad	ak
7	p	7	8	1		3				p ^h
8	b	11	7		1	3		b ^h		b ^h
9	m	9	17	3			1			k
10	w		2							
11	(f)									
12	t	13	13	2	1	3		t ^h		t ^h
13	d	14	21			1				t ^h
14	n	4	12	10			13			ŋ
15	r	1	15	4		13				l, lu, ru
16	s	56	14	5						
17	(z)		2							
18	l	3	9	1	1	24	4	r	r	r
19	ʃ	1	2							
20	dʒ	11	4							
21	(j)									
22	ɲ		3							
23	j	6	37							
24	k	19	14	12	1		2			
25	g		18							
26	ŋ		6	11						
27	(ʔ)									
28	h	6	3	8		1	3		ϕ	d, k

The analysis of the data has generally revealed at least three sorts of issues for the incorrect speech sounds, including differences in language sound, mother tongue interference, and orthographic interference. In cases of orthographic interference, these problems are brought on by differences in how letters are spelled in the writing system; in cases of language sound, the subjects of the Lao group and the Japanese group both experience this error in the same way. In cases of the mother tongue, these issues are brought on by the absence of sounds and variations in how they are pronounced. This shows that people frequently select the closest sound they are familiar with when asked to substitute a speech sound. This behaviour actually confirms the notion put forth by Burns and Claire (2003) and Hassan (2014) that speech in difficult languages is commonly replaced by the closest speech sound from the speaker's native tongue.

The recent findings further confirm Ur's assertion (Ur, 2009) that a variety of factors, such as the following, lead to students pronouncing words incorrectly: 1) a learner may not be accustomed to producing some sounds since they are absent from his or her native tongue; as a result, he or she tends to substitute the closest equivalent he or she is familiar with; 2) a learner may not have learned word stress patterns or letter groups, or he or she may use intonation from their native tongue that is inappropriate for the language being studied when learning actual sounds; 3) sounds appear in the mother tongue but not as distinct phonology; learners do not really experience these as unique sounds that have implications for meaning (Ur, 2009).

Aside from all the speech sounds that are mispronounced due to interference, the similarity between the two languages and exposure to them both improve the successful transfer of foreign language learning. Additionally, it has been found that L2 gain is enhanced by exposure to TL in the natural environment, which helps students deal with fossilization (Wei, 2008). Giving learners time to spend in the target language's environment is one method for exposing them to it. Despite the fact that the majority of L2 students would find this impractical, they should seek out other ways to learn about TL and the TL culture.

In actuality, both groups of participants received natural exposure by residing in a setting where they were forced to interact with locals in Indonesian. As they are international students enrolled in the Indonesian for Foreign Speakers Program (BIPA), they converse with one another in Indonesian during all university activities, including lectures, group discussions, and presentations (Inderasari & Agustina, 2017). Moreover, there are listening classes that show real-world instances of native speaker pronunciation, pronunciation and phonology courses that give theoretical knowledge of how to pronounce speech sounds, and so on.

The findings of this study have some significant implications when compared to previous research. First and foremost, as stated in the literature most people have trouble pronouncing the consonants /p/, /ʒ/, /ŋ/, /r/, /tʃ/, /tʃ/, /tʃ/, /v/, /k/, /l/, and /d/. This is due to the fact that the participants incorrectly uttered the consonants, /p/, /ŋ/, /ʒ/, and

/tʃ/, which is influenced by their mother tongue. Thus, the phoneme /p/ was problematic for every study participant. A total of 85 percent of them were able to pronounce it correctly in all circumstances. This is because their first language was interfering. Each participant in the study, however, mispronounced a few sounds that were not part of their native tongue's sound system. For instance, Japanese grammar does not have /ə/, and the Lao language's sound system does not include the letter /l/ (Elmahdi & Khan, 2015).

Second, this study supports previous findings that speakers often replace missing sounds with the closest known sounds when mother tongue interference occurs (Bishara, 2015). According to his research, Malayalam speakers substitute the nearest sound for missing sounds as follows: 1) /ɔɪ/ is replaced with /j/ to /o:ɟ/; 2) /ɔɪ/ is inserted /j/ into /o:ɟɪ/; 3) /eɪ/ is replaced with /e:/:; 4) /eɪ/ is replaced with /eɟ/; 5) /əʊ/ is replaced with /o:/:; 6) // is replaced with /oʊ/ or /oʌ/; 7) /ɪə/ is replaced with /ij/, and /ijʌ/; and 8) /əʌ/ is replaced with /əjʌ/. However, in this study, both groups of participants also exhibited a propensity to substitute the nearest known sound for the missing one. For Lao langu²², /k/ is replaced with /dh/, and for Japanese subjects, /ə/ is substituted with /u/ or /a/.

Third, this study is in line with previous findings that, in the case of orthographic interference, speakers mispronounce words because the writing systems are different (Khalizadeh, 2014). In the basic rules of Turkish pronunciation, for example, there are some differences compared to the English pronunciation as listed here, namely 1) every letter is pronounced in Turkish, there are no silent letters like in English pronunciation such as k and b; 2) each letter has only one sound; and 3) in Tur²⁴, consonants do not mix to make other sounds, although there are some combinations in English. Thus, the differences between Turkish and English lead to mispronunciations. For instances, the expression 'club' is pronounced /kulüp/, 'sport' is pronounced /sıpor/, 'studio' is pronounced /sutudiyo/, and 'crisis' is pronounced /kırız/. Meanwhile, in this study, only Indonesian is purely using Latin in its writing system. Japan has a Romaji writing system so the spelling is different. These differences lead to mispronunciations. On the other hand, Laos uses the Lao script in a writing system that is completely different from Latin. For example, the sounds /l/ and /r/ are often interchangeable, making /nəgara/ pronounced as /n:15/a/ by the Japanese participants.

Based on the findings in the current study, it c²⁷ concluded that there are three factors that cause pronunciation errors in Indonesian by foreign students, namely the sound system of the language, mother tongue interference, and orthographic interference. Native language exposure is mostly needed to improve target language pronunciation. Japanese participants accurately pronounce 25 speech¹³ sounds, while Lao participants pronounce 24 speech sounds correctly. Disturbance may result from the occurrence of sounds in the target language that do not exist in the native tongue and that differ significantly in terms of sound production. As a result, the problem depends on the target language rather than the first language.

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