Does Mother Tongue Affect the English Pronunciation?

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ABSTRACT

This study is conducted to find out whether mother tongue affects the English Pronunciation. The problems of this research are formatted in the form of questions, as follows: "What problems do the students have in pronouncing English words?" and "What are the causes of their mispronunciation?". To solve the problems, the researcher uses some theories such as: Roach (2000), Jones (1979), Gimson (1962), and Skandera & Burleigh (2005). The main theory in this research is about English pronunciation which is aimed to English vowels, diphthongs, and consonants. This research is a qualitative study. The subjects are the second semester students at Teacher Training and Education Faculty Pematangsiantar. The data are analyzed by first transcribing the students' voice into phonetic transcription, and then comparing them to the Standard English Pronunciation, after that identifying the students' problems. The researcher finds out that the interference of students' mother tongue, namely: Batak Toba language, makes the students difficult to pronounce some English phonemes, such as (1) vowels /ə/, and /ɜː/; (2) diphthongs /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/, and /ʊə/; (3) consonants /ð/, /θ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /f/, /v/, and /z/; and (4) suffix –s /z/ or /s/, and suffix–ed /d/ or /t/ or /id/. In conclusion, this study shows the cause of the interference of mother tongue in the students' pronunciation is the absence of such phonemes in Aksara Batak (Batak's Script). The researcher suggests English teachers to introduce English phonemes (consonants, vowels, and diphthongs) and stress to class of beginner, and to be a good model in teaching pronunciation.

Keywords: Pronunciation, mispronunciation, vowels, diphthongs, consonants

Introduction

Research Background

Pronunciation is recognized as a fundamental ability which students should acquire, primarily because it can affect accuracy and comprehension. Many learners of English as a second language have major difficulties with pronunciation. Therefore, the emphasis on teaching correct pronunciation i.e. recognizing errors in pronunciation and correcting them is necessary for an improvement of students' pronunciation ability.

In general, it is found that English as Foreign Language (EFL) students encounter some common difficulties when learning foreign language pronunciation. According to Brown (1994: 284), the factors that cause these difficulties are phonological differences between their native language (L1) and their second language/foreign language (L2). He proposes six factors that affect learner's pronunciation, i.e., native language, age, experience, innate phonetic ability, identity and language ego, and motivation and concern for good pronunciation ability.

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Clearly, the native language is the most influential factor affecting a learner's pronunciation. If the teacher is familiar with the sound system of the learners' native language, he will be better able to diagnose the students' difficulties. Since the learners freely bring their different accents from their native language in the English classroom, then their English pronunciations sound awkward. This makes a big problem to learning English pronunciation.

There are two key problems with pronunciation teaching: "Firstly it tends to be neglected. And secondly when it is not neglected, it tends to be reactive to a particular problem that has arisen in the classroom rather than being strategically planned" (Kelly, 2000:13). Thus, teachers of pronunciation need:

a. A good grounding in theoretical knowledge
b. Practical classroom skills
c. Access to good ideas for classroom activities.

The fact that pronunciation tends to suffer from neglect may not be due to teacher's lacking interest in the subject but rather to a feeling of doubts as to how to teach it (Kelly, 2004). Many experienced teachers would admit to a lack of knowledge of the theory of pronunciation and they may therefore feel the need to improve their practical skills in pronunciation teaching. In spite of the fact that trainee and less experienced teachers may be very interested in pronunciation, their concern with grammar and vocabulary tends to be the second matters. Language learners, on the other hand, often show considerable enthusiasm for pronunciation. They feel it is something that would help them to communicate better. So, even though both teachers and learners are keeping in on the subject, it is often neglected.

Based on the researcher's experience in teaching Phonology for semester two students at Teacher Training and Education Faculty Pematangsiantar, whose students were dominantly from Batak society, most of the students have problems in pronouncing English words. For example:

Words	Students' Pronunciation	Standard English Pronunciation
High	/haik/	/hai/
English	/eŋlis/	/ɪŋ.glɪʃ/
Think	/tiŋ/	/θɪŋk/
Ask	/aks/	/æsk /
Flood	/flud/	/flʌd /

Figure 1.

Identification and recognition of the speech sounds will certainly help the foreign learners understand continuous stream of speech sounds used in real communication. In other words, the ability to identify and recognize the quality of the speech sounds will certainly help the students to know how the speech sounds are to be uttered.

The variables in mother tongue that hinder effective communication in English are caused by differences in phonetics. Most languages, for instance, do not use, or pronounce, the combination in the same way as it is pronounced in the English language.

Research Problems

In line with the research background, the researcher formulates the problems of this research, as follows:

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    a) What problems do the semester two students at Teacher Training and Education Faculty have in pronouncing English words?
    b) What are the causes of the students' mispronunciation?

Research Purposes

The purposes of this research are to find out:
    a) The semester two students' problems in pronouncing English words.
    b) The causes of the students' mispronunciation.

Research Scope and Limitation

The researcher makes a scope in this research. The concentration of the research here refers to the English vowels, diphthongs, and consonants. The Standard English pronunciation used in this research is British style based on Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary 3rd Edition.

Research Significances

Theoretically, this research may give valuable contribution to the development of phonology, especially in applied linguistics field where phonology is applied in the language classroom reality.

Practically, this research is expected to be valuable for English teachers. It may give good ideas for classroom activities in pronunciation. So that teachers know how to treat students of different accents from different ethnics. Besides, this researcher can be valuable to the English learners for their ability to identify and recognize the quality of the speech sounds and know how the speech sounds to be uttered.

Review of Related Literature

English Phonology

Skandera and Burleigh (2005: 5) stated that phonology deals with the speaker's knowledge of the sound system of a language. It is therefore exclusively concerned with competence. It can be divided into two branches: segmental phonology and suprasegmental phonology.

Segmental phonology is based on the segmentation of language into individual speech sounds provided by phonetics. Unlike phonetics, however, segmental phonology is not interested in the production, the physical properties, or the perception of sounds, but in the function and possible combination of sounds within the sound system. While suprasegmental phonology (also called as prosody) is connected with those features of pronunciation that cannot be segmented because they extend over more than one segment, or sound. Such features include stress, rhythm, and intonation (also called as pitch contour or pitch movement).

The English Consonants

Consonants are sounds that are produced by an obstruction of an air-stream either in the pharynx or in the vocal tract. There are 24 consonant phonemes in Received Pronunciation (RP) and in most other accents of English (Skandera & Burleigh, 2005: 20). Consonant is regarded as a typical speech sound that is articulated either with complete or partial closure of the air stream in the mouth cavity by means of certain speech organ. The features of consonants can be determined by three main aspects they are: place of articulation, manner of articulation and vibration of the vocal cords.

A place of articulation deals with the speech organ involved in the production of the consonant. Based on this category, the consonants can be classified into bilabial (articulated

by the lower and the upper lips), <u>labiodental</u> (articulated by the lower lip and the upper teeth), <u>alveolar</u> (articulated by the tip of the tongue and the teeth ridge), <u>post alveolar</u> (articulated by the tip of the tongue and the back part of the teeth ridge), <u>palato alveolar</u> (articulated by the blade of the tongue and the teeth ridge), <u>palatal</u> (articulated by the front of the tongue and the hard palate), <u>velar</u> (articulated by the back of the tongue and the soft palate), and <u>glottal</u> (articulated in the glottis).

Manner of the articulation deals with the way how the speech organs are moved in the production of the consonants. Based on the movement of the speech organs or how the air streams is blocked by the speech organs, the consonant can be classified into: <u>plosive</u> (the air stream completely blocked and suddenly released and produces a plosion), <u>affricative</u> (the air stream is completely blocked and slowly released, and produces a hissing sounds), <u>nasal</u> (the air stream in the mouth cavity is completely blocked and released through the nose), <u>lateral</u> (the air stream is released through either both side of the tongue). <u>Fricative</u> (the air stream is released through narrow passage formed by the articulators and produced a hissing sound), and <u>semi vowel</u> (the speech organ are moved or glided from a weakly articulated vowel position to the other position).

The vocal cord may be held wide apart or closed completely. Besides, they may be held loosely together so that they vibrate when the air passes between them. During the production of the consonants, there might be more or less vibration of the vocal cords. When a stronger vibration is made during its production, the consonant is then classified as a voiced consonant (vd), but if the vocal cord make less vibration, the sound produced is classified as voiceless consonant (vl). When the vocal cord are tightly closed so that no air can escape at all, and they are then suddenly opened, a glottal stop [?] will be heard.

Based on the above explanation, the English consonants can be drawn as in the following chart:

PLACE OF ARTICULATION											
			Bilabial	Labio dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post alveolar	Palato alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
MANNER OF ARTICULATION	Plosive	vl	**p**			**t**				**k**	**?**
		vd	**b**			**d**				**g**	
	Affricate	vl						**tʃ**			
		vd						**dʒ**			
	Nasal	vl									
		vd	**m**			**n**				**ŋ**	
	Lateral	vl									
		vd				**l**					
	Fricative	vl		**f**	**θ**	**s**		**ʃ**			**h**
		vd		**v**	**ð**	**z**	**r**	**ʒ**			
	Semi Vowel	vl									
		vd	**w**						**j**		

Figure 2. The English Consonants Chart

The English Vowels

This category or sounds is normally made with a voiced agressive airstream, without any closure or narrowing such as would result in the noise component characteristic of many consonant sounds; moreover, the escape of the air is caracteristically accomplished in an unimpeded way over the middle line of the tounge (Gimson, 2001:33)

Vowels are made by voiced air passing through different mouth-shapes; the differences in the shape of the mouth are caused by different position of the tongue and the lips (Connor, 1980:79)
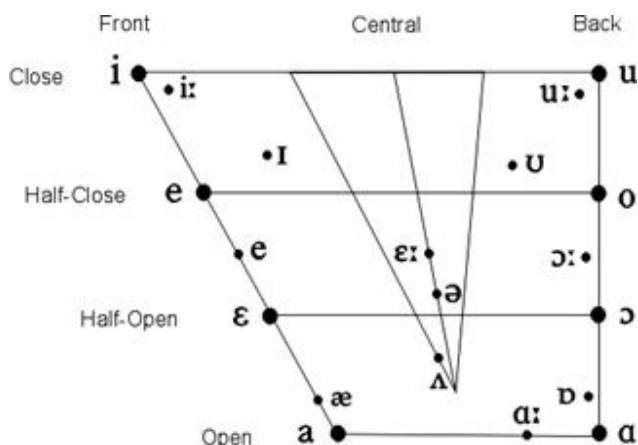

Figure 3.

The English Diphthongs

A diphthong is a glide from one vowel to another, and the whole glide acts like one of the long, simple vowel (Connor, 1980: 84). Diphthongs can be divided into two groups, namely: rising and centering diphthongs.

Rising diphthongs. The rising diphthongs are those ending in high vowels such as /ɪ/ and /ʊ/. The English rising diphthongs are: /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, and /oʊ/ (for strong form) or /əʊ/ (for weak form).
Examples:

Graphemes	British	American
Came	/ˈ keɪm /	/ˈkem/
Great	/ˈ greɪt /	/ˈgret/
Gold	/ˈ gəʊld /	/ˈgold/

Centering diphthongs. The English centering diphthongs are those ending in /ə/ such as: /eə/, /ɪə/, and /ʊə/. For examples:

Graphemes	British	American
Hair	/ˈheə/	/ˈher/
Weird	/ˈ wɪəd /	/ˈ wɪrd /
Sure	/ˈʃʊə/	/ˈʃʊr /

Factors that Affect Pronunciation Learning

According to Kenworthy (1987: 4) there are at least six factors that affect pronunciation learning, they are:

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1. The native language. The more differences of sounds characteristics of the native language and English, the more difficulties the learner will have in pronouncing English.
2. The age factor. This factor is contradictory. Some researchers found that age determines the accuracy of a learner's pronunciation; other researchers argued that age confers no immediate advantage in learning to pronounce foreign sounds.
3. Amount of exposure. It is tempting to view this simply as a matter of whether the learner is living in an English-speaking country or not. If this is the case, then the learner is 'surrounded' by English and this constant exposure should affect pronunciation skills.
4. Phonetic ability. This skill has been variously termed 'aptitude for oral mimicry', 'phonetic coding ability' or 'auditory discrimination ability'. Researchers have designed tests which measure this ability and have demonstrated that some people are able to discriminate between two sounds better than others, and/or are able to mimic sounds more accurately.
5. Attitude and identity. It has been claimed that factors such as a person's 'sense of identity' and feelings of 'group affiliation' are strong determiners of the acquisition of accurate pronunciation of a foreign language.
6. Motivation and concern for good pronunciation. Some learners seem to be more concerned about their pronunciation than others. This concern is often expressed in statements about how bad their pronunciation is and in request for correction. When we talk in terms of 'strength of concern' for pronunciation we are really pinpointing a type of motivation. The desire to well is a kind of 'achievement motivation'. Learners may be unconcerned because they simply are not aware that the way they speak is resulting in difficulty, irritation or misunderstanding for the listener.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This research is a qualitative study and conducts descriptive analysis. A qualitative research is concerned primarily with process, meaning, and understanding, rather than outcomes or procedures (Creswell 1994: 145). Therefore a qualitative researcher needs to report faithfully the realities and to rely on voices and interpretations of informants. Descriptive research is designed to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena. They are directed toward determining the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study. The aim of descriptive study is to describe what exist with respect to variables or conditions in a situation.

This research is a descriptive qualitative study because it concerns with the natural context of students' pronunciation. The aim of this research is to describe the students' problems in pronouncing English words regarding to the using Standard English vowels, diphthongs, and consonants.

Subject of Research

The subject of this research is semester two students at Teacher Training and Education Faculty Pematangsiantar..
The researcher will take 4 students randomly. Specifically, the researcher will take 1 student from 4 classes. These students are supposed to represent the other students to know their problems in pronouncing English words.

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Objects of Research

The objects of this research are the students' problems in pronouncing English words regarding to the using Standard English vowels, diphthongs, and consonants, and the cause of their mispronunciation.

Technique of Collecting Data

The researcher uses audio method in collecting the data. The steps are:
1. Preparing 10 (ten) sentences that include all the English vowels, diphthongs, consonants and stress to test their English pronunciation.
2. Asking the students to pronounce all those sentences in turn-taking.
3. Recording the students' voice.

Technique of Data Analysis

The data will be analyzed based on some techniques, they are:
1. Repeatedly listening to the recorded data.
2. Transcribing the students' pronunciation by using the IPA phonetic symbol.
3. Finding out the students' problems in pronouncing English vowels, diphthongs, and consonants.
4. Classifying the students' problems.
5. Drawing conclusion pertaining to their problems.

Data Validity

In qualitative research, validity is, like integrity, character and quality, to be assessed relative to purposes and circumstances (Brinberg and McGrath 1985: 13). It is an approach to research that uses a combination of more than one research strategy in a single investigation. Denzin (1989) described three types of data triangulation: (1) time, (2) space, and (3) person.

Time triangulation means researchers collect data about a phenomenon at different time. Space triangulation consists of collecting data at more than one site. By collecting data at different time and spaces, the researcher gains a clearer and more complete description of decision making and is able to differentiate characteristics that span time periods and spaces from characteristics specific to certain times and spaces. By using person triangulation, the researcher collects the data from more than one level of persons, that is, a set of individuals, groups, or collectives.

Data Analysis And Research Findings

Data Analysis

There are 3 data in this research. The data are in the form of recorded voices, and then the researcher transcribes the students' voices into English phonetic transcription. The researcher gives the students 3 (three) sentences. Here, the researcher analyzes their pronunciation per word.

Analysis of sentence 1.

Sentence 1 : He says that he wants us to take it away
Phonetic Transcription : /hi ˈseɪz ðæt hi ˈwɒnts ʌs ˈtuː ˈteɪk ɪt əˈweɪ/

No	Word	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4	Explanation
1	he / hi/	/hi/	/hi/	/hi/	/hi/	Correct
2	says /seɪz/	/ses/	/ses/	/ses/	/ses/	- Diphthong /eɪ/ was mispronounced as

No	Word	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4	Explanation
						monophthong /e/ - Suffix –s was pronounced /s/ instead of /z/
3	that /ðæt/	/dæt/	/dæt/	/dæt/	/dæt/	Consonant /ð/ was mispronounced as /d/
4	wants /wɒnts/	/wɒnts/	/wɒnts/	/wɒnts/	/wɒnts/	Correct
5	us /ʌs/	/ʌs/	/ʌs/	/ʌs/	/ʌs/	Correct
6	to /tu/	/tu/	/tu/	/tu/	/tu/	Correct
7	take /teɪk/	/tek/	/tek/	/tek/	/tek/	Diphthong /eɪ/ was mispronounced as monophthong /e/
8	it /ɪt/	/ɪt/	/ɪt/	/ɪt/	/ɪt/	Correct
9	away /ə'weɪ/	/e'weɪ/	/ɜ'weɪ	/e'weɪ/	/ɜ'weɪ	Vowel /ə/ was mispronounced as /e/ or /ɜ/

Figure 1. Analysis of sentence 1.

Analysis of sentence 2.

Sentence 2   : My friend has just sold a very fine old painting
Phonetic Transcription   : / maɪ 'frend həz ' dʒʌst 'səʊld ə 'veri ' faɪn 'əʊld ' peɪn.tɪŋ /

No	Word	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4	Explanation
1	my / maɪ /	/ maɪ /	/ maɪ /	/ maɪ /	/ maɪ /	Correct
2	friend /frend/	/prend/	/prend/	/frend/	/prend/	Consonant /f/ was mispronounced as /p/
3	has /həz/	/hes/	/hes/	/hes/	/hes/	- Vowel /ə/ was mispronounced as /e/, or - Voiced fricative /z/ was mispronounced as voiceless /s/
4	just /dʒʌst /	/ dʒʌst /	/ dʒʌst/	/ dʒʌst /	/ dʒʌst /	Correct
5	sold / səʊld /,	/sold/	/sold/	/sold/	/sold/	Diphthong /əʊ/ was mispronounced as monophthong /o/
6	a /ə/	/e/	/e/	/e/	/e/	Weak vowel /ə/ was mispronounced as /e/
7	very /veri/	/feri/	/peri/	/feri/	/peri/	Voiced fricative /v/ was mispronounced as voiceless fricative /f/ or voiceless plosive /p/
8	fine / faɪn /	/faɪn/	/faɪn/	/faɪn/	/faɪn/	Correct
9	old /əʊld /	/old/	/old/	/old/	/old/	Diphthong /əʊ/ was mispronounced as monophthong /o/
10	painting /peɪn.tɪŋ /	/pentɪŋ/	/pentɪŋ/	/pentɪŋ/	/pentɪŋ/	Diphthong /eɪ/ was mispronounced as monophthong /e/

Figure 2. Analysis of sentence 2.

Analysis of Sentence 3

Sentence 3   : I drank a cup of coffee this morning
Phonetic Transcription   : / aɪ dræŋk ə kʌp əv ˈ kɒf.i ðɪs ˈ mɔː.nɪŋ /

No	Word	Data 1	Data 2	Data 3	Data 4	Explanation
1	I / aɪ /	/ aɪ /	/ aɪ /	/ aɪ /	/aɪ /	Correct
2	drank /dræŋk/	/dræŋk/	/dræŋk/	/dræŋk/	/dræŋk/	Correct
3	a /ə/	/e/	/e/	/ e /	/ e /	Weak vowel /ə/ was mispronounced as /e/
4	cup / kʌp /	/ kʌp /	/ kʌp /	/ kʌp /	/ kʌp /	Correct
5	of /əv/	/ ep/	/ e f/	/ e f/	/of/	Consonant /v/ was mispronounced as /p/ or /f/
6	coffee /kɒf.i /	/kopi/	/kofi/	/kopi/	/kofi/	- Vowel /ɒ/ was mispronounced as /o/ - Consonant /f/ was mispronounced as /p/
7	this / ðɪs /	/dɪs/	/dɪs/	/dɪs/	/dɪs/	Voiced fricative /ð/ was mispronounced as voiced plosive /d/
8	morning /mɔː.nɪŋ /	/mornɪŋ/	/mornɪŋ/	/mornɪŋ/	/mornɪŋ/	Long vowel /ɔː./ was mispronounced as /or/

Figure 3. Analysis of sentence 3.

Research Findings

After analyzing the data, the researcher found that the interference of students' mother tongue, in this case Batak Toba language, made them difficult to pronounce some English phonemes. The students have problems in:

1. Pronouncing vowels, such as: /ə/, and /əʊ/

   They are accustomed to pronounce /e/ instead of /ə/, and /əʊ/. For instance, they pronounce article 'the' with /de/, where the correct pronunciation is /ðə/ (when the preceding noun begins with a consonant sound) or /ði/ (when the preceding noun begins with a vowel sound). The comparison of English vowels and students' vowels can be seen below:

English Vowels	Students' Vowels
/ə/	/e/
/ ðə /	/ de /
/ əʊ /	/ o /

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Figure 1.

2. Pronouncing diphthongs, such as: /eɪ/, / əʊ /, /eə/, /ʊə/, and /ɪə/

The students omit one of the vowels from the diphthong in a word. For instance, they pronounce /sĕs/ for verb 'says' where it should be pronounced with /seɪz/, or in pronouncing noun 'engineer' with /endˈʒɪnĕr/ instead of /endʒɪˈnɪə̱r/. The comparison of English diphthongs and students' vowels can be seen as follow:

English Diphthongs	Students' Diphthongs
/ eɪ /	/e/
/ əʊ /	/o/
/eə/	/er/, /e/
/ɪə/	/ir/

Figure 2.

3. Pronouncing consonants, such as: /ð/, /θ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ /, /ʒ/, /f/, /v/, and /z/

The students find it hard to distinguish phoneme /ð/ to /d/, /θ/ to /t/, /z/ to /s/, pronouncing consonants, such as: /ð/, /θ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ / to /j/ or /s/, /ʒ/ to /s/, /f/ to /p/, /v/ to /p/, and /z/ to /s/. For instance, instead of pronouncing /ð̱eɪ/ for pronoun 'they', the students change the voiced fricative consonant /ð/ to voiced plosive /d/ becomes /ḏei/. Another example is /θ̱ɪŋs/ for word 'things' has been pronounced by the students with /ṯings/. The comparison of English consonants and students' consonants

English Consonants	Students' Consonants
/ð/	/d/
/θ/	/t/
/z/	/s/
/ tʃ /	/c/, /s/
/f/	/p/
/v/	/p/, /f/

Figure 3.

3. Pronouncing suffix –s and –ed.

The students cannot pronounce suffix –s correctly, and often do not pronounce suffix –ed. For instance in pronouncing word 'says', they mispronounce suffix –s /z/ becomes /s/. They also do not pronounce suffix -ed /d/ in word 'happened'

Interpretation of Research Findings

The students' problems in pronouncing English words, which have been formulated above, are caused by the interference of the students' mother tongue, namely: Batak Toba language. In Batak Toba phoneme (Aksara Batak), there are no phonemes such as vowels /ə/, and /ɜː/; and consonants /ð/, /θ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /f/, /v/, and /z/. Since the research subjects are the students who are used to speak Batak Toba language in their daily life, so it is obvious that they find it difficult to pronounce such phonemes by themselves.

But, there is always solution for every problem. It is the great responsibility of an English teacher to teach and train better English pronunciation to his/her students. Teacher should speak and read at a normal speed so that the students will not get used to a pace different to that which they hear outside the classroom. When speaking or reading, it is important to the teacher to read or speak with more expression so making the

pronunciation deliberately more audible. Moreover, it is easier for an EFL (English as foreign language) student to copy and remember an excited expression.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusions

The conclusions of this research can be drawn as follow:

1) The interference of students' mother tongue, in this case Batak Toba language, made the students difficult to pronounce some English phonemes.
2) The students have problems in pronouncing:
   a. vowels, such as: /ə/, and /ɜ:/
   b. diphthongs, such as: /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /eə/, /ɪə/, and /ʊə/
   c. consonants, such as: /ð/, /θ/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, /f/, /v/, and /z/
   d. suffix –s, and –ed.
3) All of those phonemes are not available in Batak Toba language.

Suggestions

The researcher suggests the following points to be considered:

1. For Teacher
a. Teacher should introduce English phonemes (consonants, vowels, and diphthongs) and stress to class of beginner. He/she decides where the stress is to be placed in a word or sentence, it must be correct in its context, and he/she should be able to repeat the sentence several times correctly stressed, in order that the students may learn it from him/her.
b. Teacher simply repeats the reading or speaking material and maintains the pronunciation. In order to avoid the students use unusual or strange pronunciation, the teacher prompts and helps them to read and understand what they are reading or speaking, making sure that they have tune distinction in reading the material or speaking.

2. For Other Researchers
The researcher expects other researchers to investigate the students' problems in pronouncing English words, especially for students who have different cultural background. Comparing two or more accents and dialects based on the pronunciation is essential as well. The finding may give contribution to linguistics and applied linguistics, such as to give information how different culture affect the students' pronunciation. In another chance, it may let the world knows how rich our country is, surely in cultural perspective.

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