Common Silent Consonant Letters Pronounced Incorrectly by Freshmen of English Education Program

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Abstract

Pronunciation teaching does not demand learners to be native-like. They are expected to pronounce proper words to communicate clearly and prevent misunderstanding. To know learners' progress in their way to learn a foreign language, error analysis is required. This study focuses on errors made by students in terms of pronouncing silent consonant letters. These silent letters are often ignored by EFL teachers to teach in the classroom. Silent letters are ambiguous; therefore, materials related to silent letters should be integrated in language learning. This research uses descriptive quantitative method. To collect the data, this study oral test as a tool to investigate errors made by students. Learners are instructed to pronounce 17 words containing different silent consonant letters. There are 62 Freshman as population in this study. Samples are taken by using Slovin's formula with 5% margin error; therefore, total number of samples is 54 Freshman. The data are collected through recording learners' voices. Then, the researchers identify efforts and calculate them by using percentage technique. The result shows that mostly students are illiterate about silent consonant letters. From 17 words, only two words in the test is pronounced correctly more than 50% freshman; other 12 words are pronounced incorrectly more than 50% Freshman. The three top ranks of silent consonant letters which are pronounced incorrectly are /w/ in "write", /z/ in "rendezvous", and /ch/ in "yacht". Pronunciation has to be integrated in EFL. It should get attention like other language components and skills.

Keywords: errors, mistakes, silent letters, pronunciation

Introduction

Communication can be the cause of misunderstanding. People often deny the importance of communication role, whereas ineffective communication can cause problems for the relationship of two or more people. Speaker are sometimes fail to deliver a message because of inappropriate pronunciation (Jolanta Szpyra, 2015). When listeners cannot catch the message of what speakers say, it means that ineffective communication occurs. Pronouncing words incorrectly confuses listeners(John Eisenson, 1964), therefore pronunciation plays vital role in language learning.

In the history of teaching pronunciation, Kelly argues that pronunciation is like Cinderella in the area of foreign language teaching (Gerald, 1969). He illustrates the teaching of pronunciation to the tale of

Cinderella in which her stepsisters hide her from public. It is a satire for teachers who mostly neglect pronunciation in their teaching. The main goal of teaching pronunciation in language learning does not mean to make students speak like native speakers' accent. It aims to teach the students to pronounce the words correctly so that they can deliver the meaning properly.

Kelly states that there are many problems can be created by learners who always pronounce a series of phoneme incorrectly. One of them is the understanding of meaning (Gerald, 2002). Incorrect pronunciation may lead to misunderstanding or non-understanding. Kaur distinguishes between them. Misunderstanding happens when listeners assume that they know what speaker means, but the way he/she pronounces the words irritate them. Non-understanding happens when listeners have no any idea about what the speaker says (Kaur. J, 2009). Both of them are not expected to happen in communication because the goal of communication is building understanding to both speakers and listeners.

Communicative competences demands clear pronunciation. Understandable pronunciation contributes to successful oral communication. Ones who have good pronunciation are able to improve their language skills better than who do not. Although the fact that the importance of pronunciation in language learning is already apparent, the teacher still ignores it in language learning. Gilakjani and Sabouri found some factors affecting teachers neglect pronunciation rather than other language components. They are resources, lack of time, materials, motivation, and facilities (Sabouri, 2016). Some factors above should not be obstacles since nowadays products of technology offer a bunch of teaching materials like what provided in *Youtube*.

EFL classrooms mostly deny pronunciation. Mostly language teachers are good at English grammar rather than pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, 2010). Teachers must transfer only what they know to their students; therefore it is not a surprise to see the fact that learners also are more competent in grammar and lexis than pronunciation as well. Over the years, the presence of communicative language teaching or communicative approach in language teaching brings new spirit for pronunciation teaching. Communicative approach emphasizes that a language is learnt to communicate. In oral communication, teachers cannot deny the crucial role of pronunciation.

Indonesian learners encounter barriers in pronouncing English since the pronunciation is totally different from Indonesia pronunciation. For instance, Indonesians pronounce word "Kite" /k/ with no aspiration as Indonesians pronounce the word "Kita" in which /k/ is not aspirated. Letter "i" in English and Indonesia also has different sounds. Different from Indonesia, some English letters pronounced also inconsistently. For example, letter "i" sometimes sounds /I/ as in "ring", and sometimes sounds /ai/ as in

"kite". The inconsistency of English drives Indonesian learners difficult to pronounce English word correctly.

Indonesia also has a lot of local languages. Each language has their unique character of pronunciation. For instance, Bataknese and Mandarnese tend to sound /e/ rather than /Ə/. Buginese tend to add sound /g/ after words ended by /n/. For Indonesian, their mother tongue is mostly local language. Their second language is national language, Indonesia. Then, they learn several foreign languages at school, such as English. Learners' difficulties in pronouncing English words are inseparable from the influence of mother tongue.

In addition, Ambalegin and Holu found factors influencing mispronunciation phenomena. They are native language interference, the educational background, the environmental background, and the distinctions of sound system between Indonesia and English (Ambalegin, 2019). One of the differences of sound system is silent consonant letter. In Indonesia, each letter in words is pronounced. Different from Indonesia, there are several letters in English which is not pronounced when they are in words. For examples, we have to silent sound /k/ in word "Know". This becomes problematic since it does not occur in every sound /k/. there is no permanent formula to pronounce the silent consonant letters in English. One way to master the way to pronounce the words containing silent consonant letters is through habituation.

Some previous researchers have discussed some issue in relation to error pronunciation in English. Shak, Lee, and Stephen found that low oral proficiency Malaysian students mispronounce several sounds. The common mispronounced sounds were vowels (pure short vowels, pure long vowels and diphthongs), consonants (plosives, fricatives and affricates), silent letters, and the '-ed' form (Shak, Lee, & Stephen, 2016). Alqunayeer found that there were 68% respondent pronounce "g" before nasals incorrectly. He also found that the reasons why the respondent mostly pronounced "g" incorrectly. It occurred because non-standard spelling, reading difficulties, letters which follow "g", loan words, and orthography (Alqunayeer, 2016).

The research conducted by Shak et al showed that silent letters was one of common mispronounced problems faced by low proficient students in Malaysia. The research does not mention specifically what silent letters are commonlyerror-pronounced, while this research did it. The research conducted by Alqunayeer only concerned to one consonant sound. Different from previous research, this paper aims to investigate English education students' ability to pronounce silent consonant letters and find the common silent consonant letters which are pronounced incorrectly by students.

ErrorAnalysis

During the learning process, all learners cannot avoid making mistakes and committing errors. Errors and mistakes are two different things. In *Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, Richard, J.C. et al explains that mistakes made by the students in speaking or writing are caused by fatigue, lack of attention, carelessness, and several other factors of performance. A mistake mostly happens when someone is not fully concentrating. When one's concentration begins to recover, they will be able to correct their own mistakes. In other side, an error is a judgment given by native speakers to learners because of their repeated faults in linguistic usage. It shows an incomplete learning from the learners. In other words, an error is consistent mistakes. It happens since learners do not know what the correct one is; therefore learners who commit errors cannot correct themselves even they are in a good concentration (Richard, 1992). It is necessary to know the distinction between them to judge what language learners encounter.

The classification of errors assists teachers to diagnose barriers faced by language learners. Corder categorizes errors into four kinds, namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (Corder, 1973). Firstly, omission is identified by unavailability of some necessary component. An item should appear, but not. For example: the word "question" is pronounced /'kwes_n/. Sound [tʃ] is absence. It has to be pronounced /'kwestʃƏn/. Secondly, addition is identified by adding some not required or incorrect component. Some unnecessary components are present in utterance. For example: the word "money" is pronounced /;mΛnei/. Sound [e] should not appear. It has to be pronounced /'mΛni/. Thirdly, misformation is characterized by the use of wrong form of morpheme. There is an incorrect component. For instance: the word "Death" is pronounced /det/. Sound [t] should be [ɵ]; therefore it have to be pronounced /deɵ/. The last, misordering is characterized by placing a component in wrong order. For instance: the word "ask" is pronounced /a:ks/. Sound /k/ comes earlier than sound /s/. It has to be changed. Sound /s/ is followed by sound /k/; therefore the correct pronunciation is /a:sk/.

An error plays essential role in the study of language learning(Ian Done D. Ramos, 2015). It becomes useful information or sources for persons in charge to follow it up.Error is a tool that learners and teachers use to a development. It presents level of language learner in learning target language. Error analysis is a branch of applied linguistics. It focuses on errors produced by learners as the result of language transfer in learning a new language. It compares errors made in target language with the rules of the target language itself. In other words, It investigates consistent faults made by second or foreign language learners. Error analysis allows teachers to find out the sources of errors. From the findings, teachers can take pedagogical anticipations (An, 2014). Complaints experienced by teachers while teaching only become complaints if not

followed by error analysis and giving feedback to the errors.Error analysis is very effective to improve quality of learning.

Corder in Sompong mentions that errors have advantages. The first, errors inform teachers how far the progress of learners including what they have mastered and what have not. The second, errors provide evidences for researchers about how they acquire and learn a language, and what strategies and procedures learners apply in discovering a language. The third, errors are learners' necessity because they become learning materials for students. The last, making error is a strategy applied by children in acquiring their native language and by those who learns a second or foreign language(Sompong, 2014). Those advantages become strong foundation to conduct error analysis in developing language learning.

Richard classifies two sources of errors, namely interlingual errors and Intralingual and developmental errors(An, 2014).Interlingual errors (mother-tongue influence) occur because of negative transfer from the learners' mother tongue. Interlingual errors may happen in various levels, such as transfer elements of phonology, grammar, morphology, and lexica-semantics of mother tongue into target language. For example: in phonological level, there are several sounds which are not exist in Turkish, so that Turki learners often mispronounce English words containing sound /ө/ and /ð/. When they want to pronounce "think", they pronounce sound /t/ for "tie" rather than / ө/; therefore the word "think" sounds /tiŋk/. Is is similar when they want to pronounce "mother". They tend to pronounce sound /d/ rather than sound /ð/; therefore they "mother" as /'mʌdƏr/, not /'mʌðƏr/. Their mother tongue influences target language learning (Zhao, 2017), including the way they pronounce the words. Unfortunately, it is not a positive transfer, but negative transfer.

Interlingual and developmental errors are results of complex features in target language. It is made by second language learners because of incomplete learning of the target language rather than language transfer. Ellis states that several errors appears in general, indicating efforts of language learner to make the task of learning and trying to make the target language simpler in its usage (Rod, 1997). In other words, intralingual and developmental errors occur when language learners simplify and generalize target language in its usage. For instance: When language learners generalize that every time they pronounce letter "u", they pronounce sound /ʌ/as in "cut" /kʌt/ and "shut" /ʃʌt/. As a result, they pronounce "put" as /pʌt/ instead of /pʊt/. It is not negative transfer from their native language. It is pure affected by learners' attempt to use target language with their limitation.

Effective teaching of pronunciation is influenced by several factors. They are the effect of age; the number and kind of prior pronunciation instruction, exposure to the target language, aptitude, attitude, and motivation, and the role of the learners' first language on the phonological acquisition of a second language

(Celce-Murcia, 2010). First, age influences learners' ability to learn pronunciation. Many claims say that adult is unable to gain perfect or target-like pronunciation in a second or foreign language. Interlingual errors potentially occur to adults. The younger second language learners, the easier they learn pronunciation of a new language. Second, the type of prior instruction control learners' pronunciation ability in EFL settings. Teacher may do positive transfer from learners' mother tongue. Third, learners' exposure to the target language deciding their success in mastering second language. Input is relevant to output. If learners learn correct pronunciation, they will produce correct pronunciation. Forth, aptitude, attitude and motivation affect success in learning. The last, similarity and diversity of native language and target language contribute to the learners' ease and difficulties in learning.

Learners' errors are really useful for many parties such as teachers, syllabus designer, and test developers. Errors have positive pedagogical implications. Once teachers ignore error analysis, they cannot design and implement a good learning since errors also reflect students' achievement. Collaboration between researchers and teachers in error analysis assist learners to free from the problems they face. This research conducts error analysis of pronunciation of silent consonant letters.

Silent Consonant Letters

Consonant is each speech sounds which are produced by blocking breath flow. There are 25 distinct consonant phonemes in NAE. Few of the consonants are not sounded when they are in words. They have no sound, however they are spelled (Richard Norquist, 2020). These consonants are called silent consonant letters. These letters do not have paten patterns; therefore it is ambiguous for learners. For example: the word "know"; when it is pronounced, letter 'k' is not sounded. It is pronounced /nƏʊ/. Nevertheless, when word "know" is spelled, letter 'k' is exist. Carney classifies types of silent letters into three. They are auxiliary letter, inert letter, and empty letter(Carney, 2012).

Auxiliary letters are additional letters which assist to create complex graphic unit. It is required to maintain unit distinct from other units. The existence of auxiliary letters is to show the difference between two words which have similar pronunciation yet have different spelling. For instance: the word "hour" and "our". Both of the words have similar pronunciation namely /aʊƏ/, but they have different spelling. The word "hour" consists of silent consonant letter "h" which emphasizes the distinction from the word "our" event those words have similar pronunciation.

Inert letters are types of letters in which the letters are pronounced and spelled in the certain forms, but not pronounced in other forms because they have no a phonetic counterpart. For example: Letter 'g' is consistent in all spelling of word "sign", and makes the agreement sound /g/in word "signatory" which is

pronounced /;signƏtƏri/ and "signature" which is pronounced /'signƏtʃƏ/. In contrast, in words "sign" which is pronounced /saIn/ and "signing" which is pronounced /'saInIŋ/, there is no phonetic counterpart. In this case, letter 'g' is considered 'inert' or not active.

Empty letters are well-known as dummy letters. These letters do not have real distinctive function like auxiliary letters. They also have no a hidden distinctive function like inert letters. The silent consonant letters can be classified through consonant clusters. They appear in onset and coda of a syllable. Here is the example of empty letters in onset: letter 'h' in "honest" and "ghost". Here is the example of empty letters in coda: letter h in "rhythm".

The following table lists the silent consonant letters. The italic letters in the second column are pronounced silently.

Table 1. List of Silent Consonant Letters (SCL)

Silent Consonant Letters	Examples	Transcriptions
b	Clim*b*	/klaɪm/
c	Dis*c*ipline	/ˈdɪsɪplɪn/
ch	Ya*ch*t	/jɒt/
d	We*d*nesday	/ˈwenzdeɪ/
g	Assi*g*nment	/əˈsaɪnmənt/
gh	Nei*gh*bor	/ˈneɪbər/
h	*H*onorable	/ˈɒnərəbəl/
k	*K*nock	/nɒk/
l	Shou*l*d	/ʃʊd/
m	*M*nemonic	/nɪˈmɒnɪk/
n	Autum*n*	/ˈɔːtəm/
p	*P*sychiatry	/saɪˈkaɪətri/
s	I*s*land	/ˈaɪlənd/
t	Lis*t*en	/ˈlɪsən/
th	Mon*th*s	/mʌns/
w	Ans*w*er	/ˈɑːnsə/
z	Rende*z*vou*s*	/ˈrɒndəvu/

Source: (Liskinasih, 2012)

Methods

This research uses descriptive quantitative method. The population of this research is Freshman of State Islamic College of Majene, West Sulawesi. Total number of population is 62 Freshman which spread in two classes, namely TBI.1 and TBI.2. To draw representative samples, the samples are taken by using Slovin's formula with margin errors only 5%; so the total number of sample is 54 Freshman. This research is conducted in the early of odd semester of academic year 2019/2010, when the freshmen are newly at college. Data collection is taken from an oral test in which the Freshman are asked to pronounce seventeen words containing silent consonant letters. Every word contains different silent consonant letters, *namely b, c, ch, d, g, gh, h, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, th, w,* and *z.*

Students are only allowed to read the words once. They have no second chance to repeat what they read. The researchers record Freshman's voices to analyze. The researchers identify Freshman's errors by listening the recording, scoring the correct and incorrect pronunciations, and calculating the number of errors. The data are analyzed by using percentage technique. Each word containing silent consonant letters is calculated its frequency and its percentage. After that, from seventeen words, the researchers categorize the common errors of silent consonant letter pronunciation based on the largest number of incorrect pronunciation.

Results and Discussion

The data which presented in this section are taken from results of learners' pronunciation in the recording. Each learner pronounces seventeen English words. Those words contain different silent consonant letters. The pronunciation test covers all kinds of silent consonant letters which presented by Liskinasih in her paper. It aims to investigate learners' ability in pronouncing the words containing them, and to investigate which silent consonant letters is mostly pronounced incorrectly by the learners. The learners' pronunciation errors are identified by analyzing sounds that should not be pronounced in those words. The frequency and percentage of learners' pronunciation errors are presented in the following table to ease readers understand the data.

Table 2. Calculation of the test results

NO	SCL	English words	Frequency		Total	Percentage		Total
			Correct	Incorrect		Correct	Incorrect	
1	*b*	Thumb	6	48	54	11.11	88.89	100

2	*c*	Muscle	9	45	54	16.67	83.33	100
3	*ch*	Yacht	5	49	54	9.259	90.74	100
4	*d*	Handbook	14	40	54	25.93	74.07	100
5	*g*	Campaign	19	35	54	35.19	64.81	100
6	*gh*	Tight	7	47	54	12.96	87.04	100
7	*h*	Heiress	6	48	54	11.11	88.89	100
8	*k*	Knuckle	29	25	54	53.7	46.3	100
9	*l*	Chalk	27	27	54	50	50	100
10	*m*	Mnemonic	16	38	54	29.63	70.37	100
11	*n*	Damn	26	28	54	48.15	51.85	100
12	*p*	Pneumonia	15	39	54	27.78	72.22	100
13	*s*	Aisle	34	20	54	62.96	37.04	100
14	*t*	Castle	14	40	54	25.93	74.07	100
15	*th*	Months	7	47	54	12.96	87.04	100
16	*w*	Write	4	50	54	7.407	92.59	100
17	*z*	Rendezvous	5	49	54	9.259	90.74	100

Table shows learners' ability in pronouncing English words containing silent consonant letters. From 54 samples, there 88, 89% samples who make errors in pronouncing the word "thumb". They pronounce sound /b/ which should be silent. There are 83.33% samples who pronounce the silent /c/ in "muscle"; there are 90.74% samples who pronounce the silent /ch/ in "yacht"; there are 74.07% samples who pronounce the silent /d/ in "handbook"; there are 64.81% samples who pronounce the silent /g/ in "campaign"; there are 64.81% samples who pronounce the silent /g/ in "campaign"; there are 88.89% samples who pronounce the silent /h/ in "heiress"; there are 43.06% samples who pronounce the silent /k/ in "knuckle"; there are 50% samples who pronounce the silent /l/ in "chalk"; there are 70.37% samples who pronounce the silent /m/ in "mnemonic"; there are 51.85% samples who pronounce the silent /n/ in "damn"; there are 72.22% samples who pronounce the silent /p/ in "pneumonia"; there are 37.04% samples who pronounce the silent /s/ in "aisle"; there are 74.04% samples who pronounce the silent /t/ in "castle"; there are 87.04% samples who pronounce the silent /th/ in "months"; there are 92.59% samples who pronounce the silent /w/ in "write"; there are 90.74% samples who pronounce the silent /z/ in "rendezvous".

From 14 English words provided in English, most of those words are frequently used vocabulary in daily life, like word "write". Nevertheless, mostly learners cannot pronounce it correctly. From 14 silent

consonant letters which contained in 14 different English words, only two silent letters which are pronounced correctly more than 50% samples, namely sound /k/ in knuckle and sound /s/ in "aisle". The remaining silent letters are mostly pronounced incorrectly by more than 50% samples. Some silent letters, even, reach 90% samples who pronounce them incorrectly. They are /w/ in "write", /z/ in "rendezvous, and /ch/ in "yacht". The three of them became the top rank of silent letters that the students cannot pronounce correctly. Those silent consonant letters must be a concern for the teachers.

Every word that learners pronounce in the test reflects list of sounds in their memory. They pronounce the words as what they have been listen to so far. Teachers play crucial roles in the classroom to be role models. Learners tend to imitate what teachers pronounce in the classroom. Learners' error pronunciation indicates how teachers demonstrate error pronunciation in English classroom and students duplicate those errors. Pronunciation learning is often considered unimportant by some teachers. It is in line with what Celce Murcia said that mostly English teachers master grammar than pronunciation (Celce-Murcia, 2010). As a consequence, the learners also become unskilled in pronouncing English words correctly.

The results above are reflections of the harsh reality of learning English. Pronunciation should be taught in tandem with other English components and skills. Their importance levels are same. It should not be left behind, since it is a part of speaking skill. Integrated learning in EFL classroom is necessary to overcome the number of pronunciation errors made by learners who have studied English for years. The thing that becomes one of the evaluation materials is the provision of correct input to students so that they are able to produce correct pronunciation. In speaking class, teachers must provide time for pronunciation drilling with notes that learning resources used for pronunciation must be authentic so that students imitate the correct sounds. It does not make any sense if the teachers do pronunciation drilling, but they give wrong examples.

Pronunciation cannot be denied. It plays important part in employability. Unclear pronunciation also affect social life (Shak et al., 2016). As learners in college level, they have to prepare themselves to encounter the workforce. Some job applicants do not pass interview session because of the wrong pronunciation. They are not able to convince interviewers with their oral competence. The ways someone speak show their identities, and imply their association to particular communities (Seidlhofer, 2001). This becomes considerations for the job interviewers. It is not expected that alumni of English education program will be fail in interview session just because the way they pronounce English words irritate interviewers. Clear pronunciation is a real demand for English education program, since they will continue teaching in future classrooms.

Conclusion

Regarding the findings and discussion above, it can be concluded that silent consonant letters are not familiar for freshman in State Islamic College of Majene. There are only few words containing silent consonant letters that can pronounce correctly by many freshmen. In addition, most of English words provided in the test are pronounced incorrectly by many freshmen. The top three rank of silent consonant letters which are difficult for learners are /w/, /z/, and /ch/.These three silent letters should become teachers' concern in designing curriculum. Pronunciation errors in college level are worrying. It indicates immature teaching of pronunciation in the level of elementary and secondary schools; so that new students at college level still commit errors in terms of pronouncing silent consonant letters. Correct input for students influences correct output. The result describes output of what students have learnt. It implies the failure of pronunciation teaching at schools. Teachers should not ignore pronunciation in EFL classes. It should not be left behind. Its importance is similar to the importance other language skills. English pronunciation lecturers at college have to work hard to overcome this problem. It is highly recommended that English teachers have to improve their pronunciation before they teach the learners, since mostly learners only imitate the way their teachers pronounce the words. In addition, Lecturers who will handle pronunciation and speaking classes should work together to overcome learners' problems in pronunciation.

Pedagogical Implication

The study of learners' errors in pronunciation is beneficial for teachers and learners itself. Examining learners' output in pronunciation gives learners chance to evaluate themselves. Errors become reflection for learners. They can identify their weakness and strength in pronunciation; so that they are able improve their ability.

Error analysis in pronunciation also brings advantages to the teachers. Errors become input for them to reformulate learning and develop materials for remedial teaching. Learners' errors in pronouncing silent consonant letters allow teachers to think and design strategies to decrease learners' errors. Error analysis of pronunciation allows teachers to diagnose psychological reasons why errors occur. As curriculum developer, a teacher gains beneficial data from error analysis in terms of common errors of silent consonant letter pronunciation. The data can be used to basis for decision making on follow-up plans.

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