

AN ANALYSIS OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

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Abstract

This research aimed to investigate the interference of the Malay language in Pronouncing English voiceless stops by EFL students in Pontianak. The design of this research was a descriptive study. The total participants were 15 EFL students whose mother tongue is Malay. This research used a pronunciation test to collect pronunciation data through an audio recorder as the main tool. Pronunciation test sheet consisted 21 English words contains English voiceless stops phoneme /p/, /t/, and /k/. Based on the research findings, after conducting a pronunciation test the data showed that from 315 English words that had been tested there were 129 words in total found mispronounced by the students. Mostly, mispronunciation happened when pronouncing phoneme /p/ that was 56 times from 105 chances, followed by phoneme /t/ that was 42 times from 105 chances and phoneme /k/ which 31 errors from 105 chances. Based on the research findings, mother tongue indicated interfere students' pronunciation in pronouncing English words at Pontianak.

Keywords: *Mother tongue, Interference, English pronunciation.*

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki pengaruh bahasa ibu terhadap pelafalan kosakata Bahasa Inggris terhadap EFL di kota Pontianak. Jenis penelitian yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Deskriptif. 15 mahasiswa pendidikan Bahasa Inggris yang menggunakan bahasa melayu sebagai bahasa ibu berpartisipasi sebagai Subjek penelitian dalam penelitian ini. Untuk memperoleh data, pronunciation test dilakukan dengan memasukkan 21 kosakata bahasa Inggris yang memiliki fonem /p/, /t/, dan /k/. Berdasarkan hasil penelitian setelah test dilakukan ditemukan kesalahan pelafalan. Dari 315 kosakata bahasa Inggris yang di ujikan 129 kosakata tidak dilafalkan dengan benar oleh mahasiswa. Sebagian besar, kesalahan pelafalan terjadi ketika melafalkan fonem /p/ sebanyak 56 kata dari 105 kata, disusul fonem /t/ sebanyak 42 kata dari 105 kata dan fonem /k/ sebanyak 31 kata dari 105 kata. Berdasarkan data hasil penelitian tersebut, bahasa ibu teridentifikasi mempengaruhi mahasiswa dalam melafalkan kosakata Bahasa Inggris di Pontianak.

Kata kunci : *Bahasa ibu, interferensi, pelafalan bahasa Inggris*

INTRODUCTION

Every school in the world, including Indonesia, teaches English. In both the junior and senior high school final exams, English is tested. It means that English teachers must be able to instruct their students completely so that they can recognize any obstacles they may face in understanding the subject matter. Due to the differences in language structures between English and the students' first language or mother tongue, students may find it challenging to learn English

as a foreign language in a classroom context, particularly when pronouncing English words. In addition, Hassan (2014) confirmed that the systematic differences between the two languages could be used to predict a learner's difficulties in learning a foreign language, and that learners from different first language backgrounds would encounter various levels of difficulty when attempting to learn a foreign language or a second language.

The target language's and the students' first languages' different sound systems may interfere with or negatively transfer to the target language in studies on second language acquisition. Interference is the divergence of the target language as a result of their acquaintance with more than one language. Interference is the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language (Dulay et. al. cited in Samingan, 2016: 3). Thus, this research more likely investigated the interference of the mother tongue in pronouncing English words.

The mother tongue in this research was identified as a vernacular or local language that is spoken by a certain group of students. Dardjowidjojo (2014) explains the differences between mother tongue and mother's language. He asserted that the mother tongue, whether it be English, Indonesian, or even a vernacular language, is the first language that a child learns, but the mother's language is the language used by adults or parents to connect with their children who are trying to learn the mother tongue. The target language in this study was determined to be English, while the mother tongue that was explored as the source language was determined to be the Malay language. Malay pronunciation does not use aspiration, unlike English. Thus, this distinction may hinder with pronunciation or negatively transfer.

Students who speak Malay may pronounce words incorrectly because that language does not have aspirated phonemes. It is important to pay close attention to the aspiration of the phonemes /p, t, and k/ when they first appear in accented syllables, according to Cruttenden (2011: 154). The risk is that an English listener would hear *bin* if a word like *pin* is pronounced [pin] rather than [p^hin]. Their meanings are different despite the variation in pronunciation. Negative transfer is the term for this type of inaccuracy (interference).

Due to these linguistic events, it was intriguing to look at the possibility that Malay might interfere with the pronunciation of the English voiceless stops (/p/, /t/, and /k/). In this study, the phonological interference of Malay, the target language, into English, the source language, was

examined when these phonemes were pronounced. By administering a pronunciation test, the direct technique was used to gather pronunciation data.

Additionally, there are earlier research that concentrate on the issues with pronunciation and are mostly concerned with mother tongue interference. For Javanese students in Bengkulu, Hakim (2012) looks at how to pronounce the phonetic sounds /b/, /d/, /g/, /j/, and / in English words. Then, Hago and Khan (2015) look into the pronunciation issues Saudi secondary school students have, particularly with consonant pronunciation. Next, Hassan (2014) studied the difficulties Sudanese speakers of spoken Arabic have while pronouncing English. Additionally, Izon speakers' phonological interference in spoken English is examined by Apeli and Ugwu (2013).

The research mentioned above that came before this one concentrate on the issues with incorrectly pronouncing English speech sounds that result from the influence of the first language. The influence of mother tongue interference on English pronunciation, particularly when pronouncing English voiceless stops, was examined in this study, whereas it had not been in the experiments mentioned above. The study also examines mother tongue by using the same principle of contrastive analysis theory to see general things which are shared in causing the problem and promoting the English pronunciation. The previous studies had been done on subjects who came from one single language background or speech community.

Therefore, since the English students come from various cultural ethnicities and share different languages as their mother tongue, in this research Malay language was identified as the mother tongue that may promote problems related to the ability in pronouncing English as a foreign language. However, Malay-English students in English Education Study Program, especially in the Eighth semester, mostly coming from the Ketapang regency, which was the reason why this research was involved 15 Malay English students who were coming from the Ketapang regency.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The research design employed in this research is descriptive qualitative. According to Denzin *et al* (2012: 4), qualitative research is the research where the focus is not only in one

method, interpretive, and naturalistic in approaching to its subject. Moreover, this study focused on investigating the mother tongue interference in pronouncing English words.

Participants

The participant of this research were EFL students at the college level at Pontianak. The homogenous sampling was implemented to select the participants. Homogeneous sampling is defined as one of a purposive technique sampling in order to achieve a sample in homogeneously (Lund, 2012). Furthermore, 15 Malay-English students whose mother tongue is Malay selected to be the subjects in this research.

Data Collection

The primary data for this study must be gathered from the students via an indirect manner. Anguera et al. (2018) highlighted that the indirect observation approach typically uses an analysis of textual material, either transcriptions directly from narratives or indirect transcriptions from audio recordings of behavior in verbal natural situations (e.g., conversation, group debates) (e.g., letters of complaint, tweets, forum posts).

Besides, to make sure the judgments in deciding student's correct and incorrect pronunciation the researcher was helping by an inter-rater. The inter-rater in this research was Mr. Dedi Irwan, Ph.D. who is reliable in deciding whether or not the transcription from the researcher was correct since he had studied abroad and interacted with an English native speaker. Since there are numerous standards for English pronunciation, American English was used in this study.

The pronunciation data collected through a test using pronunciation test sheet that consists of 21 English words to observe the students' ability in pronouncing English words. The students should read every word while the researcher was recording. Each word contains English voiceless stops phonemes / p, t, k / that should be pronounced aspirated by the students. Since in Malay language aspiration in voiceless stops do not exist then every mispronounced word was identified as mother tongue interference.

In order to ensure that the entire context is captured, including the voice tone, hand gestures, etc., audio and video recorders allow the raw data to be preserved for later review (Baconshone, 2015: 53). In order to gather information on pronunciation and to respond to the first and

second research questions, recorders are predominantly used in this study. The recording device was a smartphone with a built-in headset microphone. A pronunciation guide was supplied to the subject before the spoken utterance is recorded, and the researcher then gave the subject some time to look at the guide before recording began to ensure that the subject recognized the guide first.

Dictionary was required in order to satisfy the intelligibility requirement in order to determine whether or not the subject matter spoken in the recording is recognized as an English word. The subject's recorded utterance was also converted to a typical phonetic symbol for English transcription using the dictionary. The Merriam-Webster digital dictionary was utilized because it stood out for providing examples of native English speaker pronunciation sounds and phonetic transcription from words in the American version.

Data Analysis

This research implemented qualitative data in form of pronunciation data. To analyze the data acquired as well as answering the research question the researcher preferred to choose transcribing technique since the pronunciation data was recorded. The pronunciation data in form of recorded audio transcribed in written form in order to compare the native pronunciation from the dictionary and the pronunciation from the students.

Transcription can be either narrow transcription or broad transcription. "Broad transcription is a term to allocate very simple symbols to indicate the phonetic pronunciation of a given word, Narrow transcription, on the other hand, refers to more phonetic details in showing the pronunciation of words Ladefoged" (as cited in Ebrahimi, 2010). Thus, in this research, the researcher applied narrow transcription to transcribe the pronunciation data since the focus of this research was to indicate the appearance of aspiration in every spoken word.

Data Presentation and Discussion

This research analyzed the mother tongue interference, in this case, the mother tongue was the Malay language in pronouncing English consonant stops /p/, /t/, /k/. These phonemes are spoken with aspiration, which is not present in Malay. One of the things that prevents students from speaking English like a native speaker is the difference. In order to determine whether Malay

mother tongue had any influence on how these phonemes were pronounced, contrastive analysis was used in this study. These conclusions are listed below.

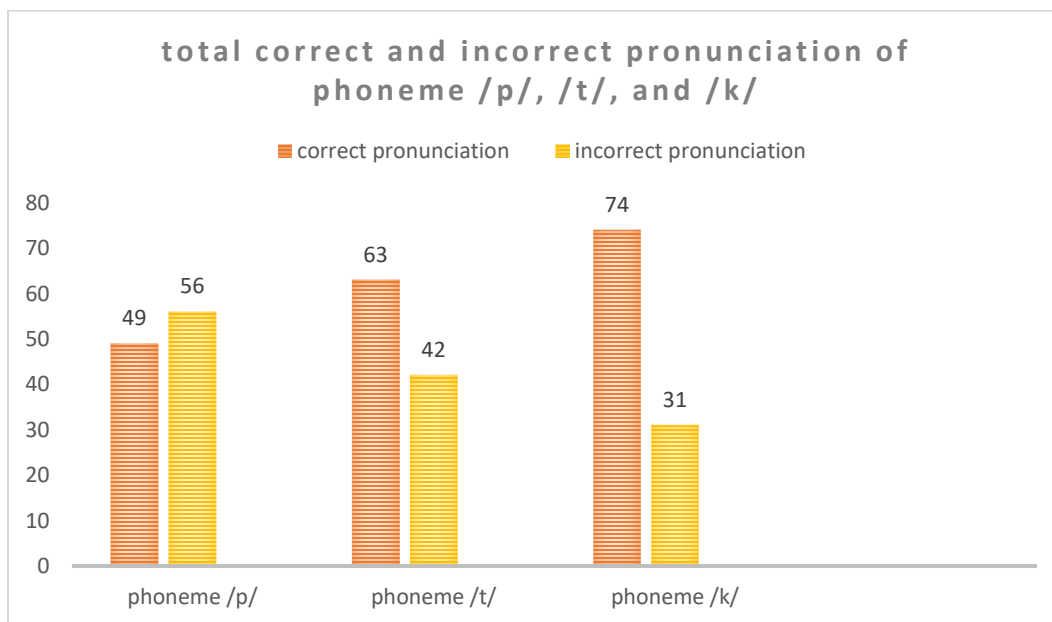


Chart 1. The Frequency of mispronunciation Made By The Students

As shown in the chart above, the researcher found that mispronunciation happened in almost all of the participants who are 13 participants. The rest two participants did not find mispronunciation in pronouncing the words. Most mispronunciation happened when pronouncing phoneme /p/ that was 56 times from 105 chances, followed by phoneme /t/ that was 42 times and phoneme /k/ was the least, which 31 times from 105 chances.

Nearly all participants had trouble pronouncing the sound [p] at the beginning. They spoke it without aspirating since the Malay letter [p] sounds the same whether it is in the initial or final position. While this was going on, all participants had no trouble pronouncing the sound [p] in the word "apple" because it was unaspirated in that word. After completing all pronunciation tests, the researcher questioned the students if they were familiar with the English vowels for /p/, /t/, and /k/. The outcome is displayed in the table below.

Table 1. Question asking after pronunciation test

No	Question: Have you ever learned about the aspiration of English voiceless stops phonemes /p/, /t/, and /k/ before?
S1	No, I Have not
S2	Yes, I Have
S3	Yes, I Have
S4	Yes, I Have
S5	Yes, I Have
S6	No, I Have not
S7	No, I Have not
S8	Yes, I Have
S9	No, I Have not
S10	Yes, I Have
S11	No, I Have not
S12	No, I Have not
S13	No, I Have not
S14	No, I Have not
S15	Yes, I Have

The researcher discovered from the above table that out of 15 students, 7 claimed to have prior experience studying the English voiceless stops (/p/, /t/, and /k/), whereas the remaining 8 students claimed to have no prior experience learning aspiration. Thus, the 8 students who had no experience in learning aspiration identified making competence errors and the rest who had experience in learning aspiration were assumed made performance errors. Meanwhile, in this research students who were counted as the case of mother tongue interference were eight students who made competence error. They were students number 1, 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, and 14.

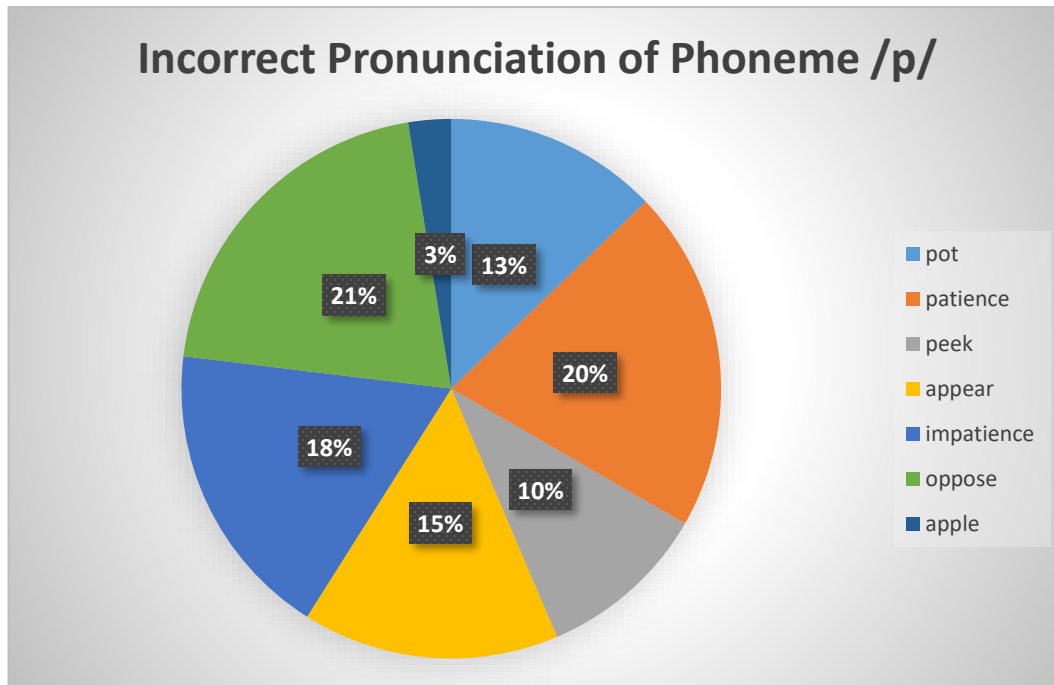


Chart 2. The Interference of phoneme /p/

The majority of participants, as seen in the chart above, were unable to correctly pronounce the sound [p] in both its starting and medial positions as it appears in words (patience, impatience and oppose). Due to the Malay sound [p] being comparable whether it appears in the initial or medial position, they pronouncing it with an unaspirated sound. While this was going on, almost all participants had no trouble pronouncing the sound [p] in the word "apple" because it is unaspirated in Malay, unlike the sound [p] in the word "api".

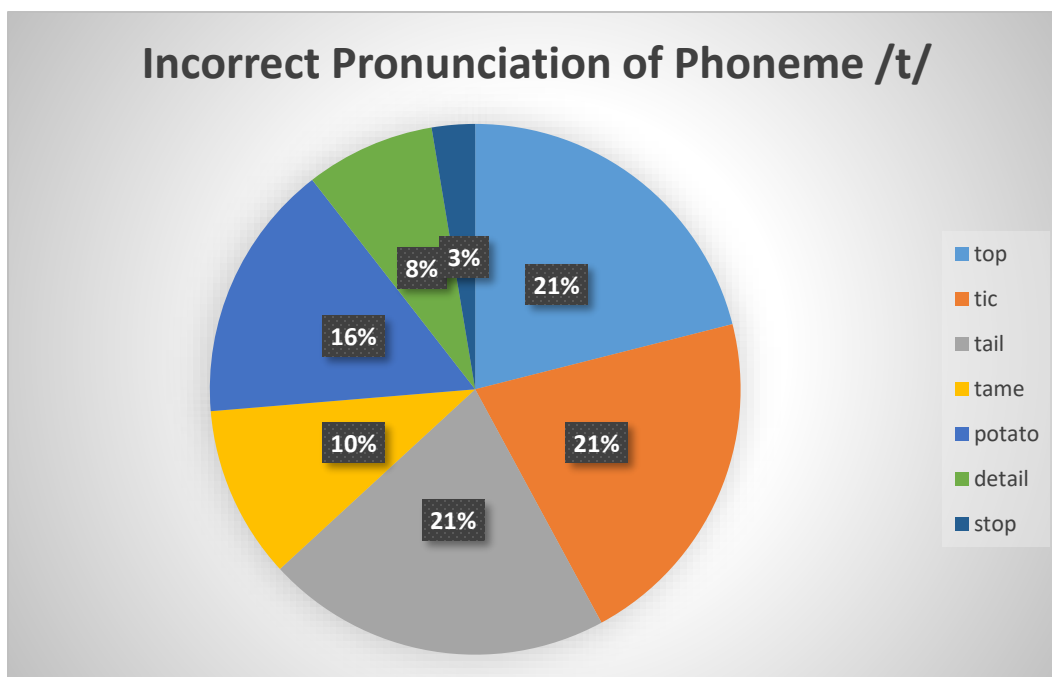


Chart 3. Interference of Phoneme /t/

All participants mispronounced the sound [t] in the term "top, tic, and tail," as can be seen in the graph above. They said it out loud without aspirating. Seven students, however, had no trouble pronouncing the sound [t] in medial position as in the word "stop" since the sound [p] is not aspirated in that word.

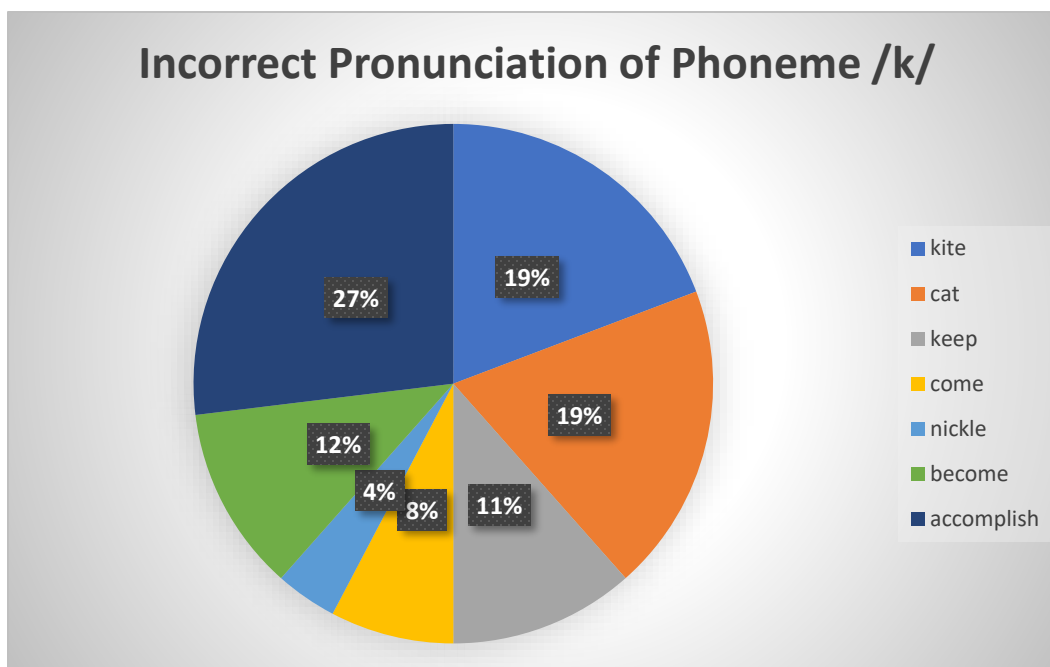


Chart 4. The Interference of Phoneme /k/

The majority of participants, as seen in the aforementioned chart, had trouble pronouncing the sound [k] in the middle position, as it appears in the word "achieve." They said it out loud without aspirating. Three participants gave the right pronunciation for the phrase "kite and cat." Only five of them successfully pronounced the word. Seven participants pronounced the sound [k] in medial position as it appears in the word "Nickle" properly, whereas one participant mispronounced it. Because the consonant [k] in the word "Nickle" is unaspirated, like in the Malay word "naked," the participants correctly pronounced it.

The amount of students who had no prior knowledge of how to learn the English sounds [p], [t], and [k] revealed the interference of the mother tongue. The kids typically speak words without aspirating them and instead use a homogeneous sound from their sound system to substitute the original sound. The students mispronounced 34 sounds of 56 words, including the letter [p]. The students mispronounced 32 sounds out of 56 words in sound [t]. The students mispronounced 25 sounds over 56 words in sound [k]. All of the terms should be spoken with an aspirate, yet the majority of students did not.

The results of this study have revealed that Malay voiceless stops interfere with English. Interference is the error-causing negative transfer from the source language into the target language. The difference in sound systems between the first language and the target language is

what makes this transfer possible. Interference, particularly when speaking, could result in mispronunciation. Contrastive analysis, which evaluates the similarities and contrasts between L1 and L2, was utilized as the research approach in order to foretell and clarify any difficulties that learners may experience when learning a foreign language. The similarities and contrasts in the sound output of the two languages can be determined by contrastive analysis.

The learner's first language has been proven to have a significant impact on the acquisition of another sound system. According to Celce-Murcia *et al.* (2010), there may be negative transfer or interference as a result of the phonological variations between the first language and the second language or a foreign language.

Researchers like Lado (quoted in Celce-Murcia *et al.*, 2010; 23) support the notion that interference affects acquisition of foreign accent, distinctive segmental traits like aspiration or voicing, and suprasegmental aspects like intonation and rhythm. According to a prior study, Hakim (2012) discovered that students' mother tongues (Java) interfered with their ability to pronounce certain phonemes, including /b/, /d/, /g/, /j/, and /. The findings also showed that many students unintentionally added a vowel sound to English syllables in order to articulate consonant clusters.

Some Malay students may also pronounce the English aspirated sounds that are absent from Malay. They have previously learnt aspiration, so they can pronounce such sounds. This finding is in line with a previous research was by Puspita (2017) who stated that the proper pronunciation for speaking Aspiration was brought on by prior exposure to aspiration through Qur'anic recitation, which they are still studying today.

In relation to those previous research in the present research, the researcher believes that mother tongue (Malay) interferes with students' pronunciation in pronouncing aspiration phoneme [p], [t], and [k] in a negative way. The negative transfer was found out in mispronunciation mostly all the words tested. In conclusion, despite years of learning English, Malay-speaking students still make pronunciation mistakes like aspiration. These mistakes were brought on by interference (negative transfer), a linguistic characteristic that exists in the target language but not the source language. According to the findings and related research, the students' pronunciation is influenced by the distinctions between L1 and L2 or a foreign language, the importance of prior language learning rather than L1, and prior instruction.

CONCLUSIONS

Referring to the findings and discussions before, the researcher concluded that from all of the participants, the students who were having prior knowledge about aspiration sounds tend to have good pronunciation, and students who had no prior knowledge about aspiration tend to pronounce English aspirated sounds into unaspirated because of the interference of mother tongue. However, students who had no prior knowledge about aspiration sometimes pronounced word correctly because the homogeneous sound that they have in their sound system and the sound that they have learned before they learn English, such as sounds [f], [v], and [] of Arabic tend to replace the consonant sounds and aspirated sounds that are not found in Malay. Additionally, the pronunciation of Malay speaking students is impacted by the phonological gap between their L1 (Malay) and a foreign language (English), the influence of spelling on pronunciation, and their previous language learning, and the contribution of prior English language teaching.

The writer would like to submit the following ideas based on the findings and discussion of the research: (1) The researcher advised lecturers to map the area of challenging English sounds, (2) The researcher advised lectures to model how to pronounce the challenging sounds using audio or video of native speakers, and (3) The researcher advised giving students as much practice as possible imitating and producing sounds.

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