

# AN ANALYSIS OF INDONESIAN PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES FACED BY THAI SPEAKERS IN BENGKULU UNIVERSITY

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## Abstract

*This study aimed to investigate: (1) Indonesian vowel pronunciation difficulties faced by Thai speakers, (2) Indonesian consonant pronunciation difficulties faced by Thai speakers, and (3) Causes of Indonesian pronunciation difficulties faced by Thai speakers. This study used a descriptive method. The data were taken from recorded Indonesian pronunciation by four Thai exchange students at the University of Bengkulu. The data were analyzed through the transcription of the recorded pronunciation in the form of International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), the data were reduced to pronunciation difficulties by Thai speakers by drawing a conclusion and verification of data. The results of this study revealed that: (1) Thai speakers found it difficult in pronouncing some Indonesian vowel sounds (such as /a/, /u/, /e/, and /ə/) and diphthongs (/au/ and /oi/), (2) Thai speakers found it difficult in pronouncing some consonant sounds (such as /g/, /v/, /ŋ/, /r/, and /ñj/) and clusters (double and triple consonants), (3) The difficulties in pronouncing Indonesian vowel and consonant are likely to occur due to the language transfer (interference), simplification, reduction, overgeneralization, and addition. These are developmental errors which may reduce as they study Indonesian further by practicing intensively and interacting with the native speakers of Indonesia.*

*Keywords: Pronunciation, foreign speakers, language transfer, interference, simplification, reduction, overgeneralization, addition, developmental errors.*

## Introduction

Indonesian is the official language and the language used by the unity of the whole territory of the Republic of Indonesia (Law Decree number. 24 of 2009). Indonesia has the diverse ethnic, cultural and language, therefore Indonesian language has become crucial as a meeting point of a wide variety of languages that exist in Indonesia in order to create a medium of communication that can expedite communications in national and state life.

Indonesian, which acts as the national language and the official language in the territory of the Republic of Indonesia has begun to demand by foreign speakers to learn due to it is a standard language in Indonesia as a key to learn the languages and cultures of other regions for other states that are unique. It is rare in other countries that have hundreds of regional languages in a country. In addition, the strategic location of Indonesia and also Indonesia's natural wealth which is profitable to invest in Indonesia. In fact there are many reasons for someone to learn languages other than their mother tongue, for example, by reason of the needs of the study, to be able to understand other cultures and get involved in it, and also to enter the international world (Johnson, 2001: 35).

The increasing of world interest in learning Indonesian has become a background of Indonesian teaching program for Foreign Speakers, called Bahasa Indonesia Penutur Asing (BIPA), both in the various countries, as well as domestically. The program is called Darma siswa program, which is a scholarship program for people in many of the world to learn the language and culture in Indonesia for six up to one year.

“Darma siswa is a scholarship program offered to all foreign students from countries which have diplomatic relationship with Indonesia to study Indonesian, arts, music and crafts. Participants can choose one of 45 different universities located in different cities in Indonesia. This program is organized by the Ministry of National Education (MoNE) in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), (Head, Bureau of Planning and International Cooperation Ministry of National Education (MoNE)”; [darmasiswa\\_pkln@diknas.go.id](mailto:darmasiswa_pkln@diknas.go.id)).

Ifaliani (2012) mentioned that so far there are 45 universities, both public and private organizing Darma siswa Program. Darma siswa Program has been running since 2005 with 110 participant countries from five continents (Asia, America, Australia, Europe, and Africa). Even in 2013 provided the Scholarship for foreign students who are interested in the master and doctoral study of the language and culture of Indonesia.

This number continues to grow in line with the government's efforts to continue to promote Indonesia in the world. In addition, various institutions of BIPA in Indonesia, including those organized by various universities also continue to show a high specialization by learning Indonesian language and culture from around the world.

The purpose of learning provision BIPA is to equip foreign speakers such as language skills both oral and written fluently. Thus, the foreign speaker as well as Indonesian learners are expected to use the Indonesian language both orally and in writing smoothly and simultaneously to understand the language used by the native speakers of Indonesia. However, it is not easily be achieved because obviously the learning process encounter obstacles or problems. One of the huge problems is an error in the linguistic coverage especially in phonology. In general, phonology is a science that examines the sounds of language. The discussion about pronunciation or the pronunciation of sounds included in the field of phonology. Errors that occur in the field of phonology that if not addressed will result in not achieving the goal of learning the language as a whole.

Muslich (2008: 1) argued that language is a sound system in which the main object of the study is spoken language, the language in the form of sound said. Had encountered in practice a variety of written language, it is considered as a secondary language which is a recording of spoken language. It can be concluded that the material of language is speech sound which is instrumental in determining the meaning.

Learning Indonesian for foreign speakers has been enthused by researchers in the world. For examples some of the studies that had been conducted about the teaching methods in the classroom of BIPA, analysis of BIPA teaching syllabus, learning model, strategy approach, evaluation of learning and so on. However,

analysis of the Indonesian pronunciation of BIPA student has not received special attention. Though elements of pronunciation is very necessary to study because every language has specific elements sound and can be very different from the pronunciation of the first speakers of foreign languages because each language has its own articulation (Martinet, 1987: 42).

In his research, Akmajian (2001: 56) stated that one of the difficulties of the student/students in acquiring a second language (second language acquisition) is if the second language or a foreign language that they learn have more phonemes (sounds) that are not owned by their first language or second language. Difficulties arising in general is the difficulties in pronunciation phonemes of the second language or foreign language which is being learned. This difficulty is caused by the differences in phonemes of both languages, both in the way as well as the position of articulation. Those difficulties then lead to errors of pronunciation. It will have an impact that is fatal if not properly taught to the learners.

The University of Bengkulu is one of the universities in Bengkulu which organizes students exchange programs in cooperation within and outside the country spearheaded by the Technical Implementation Unit Cooperation and International Service. Bengkulu University has received students from Japan, Cambodia, Vietnam and Thailand to keep learning and get to know the culture of the language and culture of Indonesian.

In this case, the researcher was interested in studying Indonesian pronunciation difficulties by the foreign speakers from Thailand who annually come to the University of Bengkulu. The intensity of Thai students' arrival is higher than students from other universities in the University of Bengkulu. It is used to investigate the difficulties in Indonesian language, especially at the level of phonology which can be beneficial for Indonesian teachers as well as a vehicle for foreign speakers to learn the elements of the Indonesian pronunciation.

## **Methodology**

This research used a descriptive method that describes a condition that occurs as it is found in the field. The subjects in this study were four students from Thailand in the University of Bengkulu. The data were collected using observation and recording. Since all the subjects in this study had not mastered Indonesian, the data were not obtained through interview, but rather asking them to read out aloud Indonesian vocabularies, namely 200 vocabulary Swadesh and 20 vocabularies contained the elements of diphthongs, and clusters to see the error pronunciation sounds segmental by the speakers of Thailand, While the subjects were reading vocabularies the researcher was listening and recording the sound of their pronunciation. Next, the data were analyzed by the steps; transcribing the data recorded using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), classifying errors pronunciation by each subject, comparing pronunciation errors by one subject to another subject, then verifying and concluding the results. To test the validity of the data, the researcher used triangulation of observers, namely the supervisors and co-supervisors who act as expert judgment, as experts who provide input on data collection and analysis. Besides that the researcher also conducted discussions/peer debriefing with one of Bengkulu University students who attended the student exchange program in Thailand for a year for the discussion of research findings.

## Discussion

From the analysis of the data, it was found there are some Indonesian sounds difficulties faced by the speakers of Thailand. They have trouble to pronounce the sound /ʌ/ which is an open vowel, four subjects tend to pronounce it /ɒ/ or semi-open, especially if the phoneme is located on the last syllable, for example, the word <lima> spoken /limɒ/, the word <bagaimana> to /bʌgʌimʌnɒ/. Then the sound of the phoneme /ʊ/ most spoken /ʌ/, for example, the word <cium> into /tʃiʌm/, <tahun> to /tʌhʌn/, <mulut> to be /mʊlʌt/. The error occurred when the phoneme /u/ is on the second syllable. The phoneme /e/ which is a semi-open vowel largely spoken /ə/, for example, said throwing into /ləmpɔ:/ lebar/ became /ləbɔ:/. But occasionally it was spoken /ɪ/, for example, on the word <ekor> into /ɪkɔr/, zebra became /zɪbʌ/. While vowel /ə/ most spoken /ɪ/, for example, the word <dekat> into /dɪkʌt/, <karena> into /kʌrɪnʌ/, <debu> to /dɪbʊ/ and so on like the pronunciation of a foreign language (English). Thai speakers also experienced an error in pronunciation diphthong /au/ and /oi/.

For the pronunciation of consonants, they had difficulties in pronouncing the velar fricative sound /g/ spoken /k/ which both constitute velar sound. Then four subjects experienced constraints in pronouncing the sound /v/ and it was pronounced /w/. For example the word <visi> into /wɪsɪ/, <voting> into /wɔ:tiŋ/. Next almost all subjects could not pronounce the trill phoneme /r/, located at the end of the word, eg <bakar> into /bʌkʌ:/, <telur> into /təlɒh/. They tend not to sound the phoneme /r/ at the end of the word. For the pronunciation of consonant clusters /ŋ/ and /ng/ in the middle of a word that is considered as two separate phonemes. For example: the word <bunga> into /bʊŋkʌ/, <dingin> became /dɪŋkiŋ/, <banyak> spoken /bʌnɔ:ŋʌk/, <nyanyi> spoken /dʒjʌdʒɪ/ or /niŋʌŋjɪ/. For the pronunciation of clusters, the four speakers of Thailand tend to slip phonemes particular between clusters of two and three kontoid, for example: the word <dwi> spoken /dəwɪ/, /dewɪ/ or /dɪwɪ/, <swadaya> spoken /səwʌdʌjʌ/, <strata> spoken /sətrʌtʌ/, and <extra> spoken /eksetrʌ/.

From the type of pronunciation difficulties faced by speakers of Thailand it is likely the difficulties occur due to the internal factors, such as the limited knowledge of Thai speakers against Indonesian pronunciation system. This causes the transfer of the language, a process of adopting a system of pronunciation of the first language sound or another language into the target language (interference), such as the interference of English who first learned the pronunciation of vowel /e/, /ə/ and /u/ spoken /i/ and /a/, eliminating the sound of a phoneme unpronounceable by speakers (reduction), such as removal of noise /r/ at the end of the word, simplifying the pronunciation with a certain sound that approaches (simplification), for example, the sound /v/ that is spoken /w/, the sound /g/ spoken /k/ and difficulty pronouncing sounds of diphthongs, implementing the same system of pronunciation on different rules (generalization), for example, considering and sounding the consonant cluster /ng/ and /ny/ into two phonemes separately, and the addition of phonemes when it is difficult to say a sound that occurs when experiencing difficulty in pronouncing clusters of two and three kontoid by slipping a certain phoneme among the double or triple phonemes.

The fourth subject had the same pronunciation errors consonant sounds, vowels, diphthongs, and clusters. Errors are considered "not appropriate" and "not appropriate". Muslich (2008; 18) confirmed that until today Indonesian does not have

the "Guidelines Pronunciation Standard". Slamet (2012; 54) confirmed the statement by adding that if the terms of the standardization, can be taken from the two attitudes, the first pronunciation is considered "appropriate" for do not disturb the flow of the nexus of language between speakers (acceptable), the second namely, that pronunciation mannered absolutely necessary. An error on a phonetic level does not interfere with communication because it does not distinguish meaning. This is in line with the opinion of Marsono (1986: 1), which stated that the phonetic sound science does not distinguish sound functioning of meaning in a language. Thus, the researcher concluded that as long as the pronunciation is understandable and acceptable although not perfect, it can be categorized "inaccurate" pronunciation because an error occurred at the level of phonetics. However, if the pronunciation has changed the meaning (phonemic level), it can be categorized as "improper" pronunciation.

Thai language is a tonal language in which the phoneme /a/ is sounded long and short (Prapartson; 2005). This is a result of the interference of their first language. But the problem is when they pronounce the phoneme /u/ be /ʌ/, equating how reading vocabulary in English (interference English) which tend to change the grapheme <u> into /ʌ/ or open vowel, for example, <hidung> became /hidʌŋ/. It is not appropriate because of errors occur at the level of phonemic (changing of meaning). Interference is a form of negative transfers that can disrupt the communications (Pateda, 1989: 75).

Thai language has vowel phonemes such as Indonesian, but when phonemes are located in the vocabulary words they do not understand that they are trying to "improvise", ie by equating the pronunciation in a foreign language (English) that they have previously learned. While the difficulties in pronouncing Indonesian diphthongs occur when the diphthongs do not exist in Thai language therefore they simplify the sounds that most closely. McLead, S (2012) explained that Thai language has 15-18 diphthongs and 3 triftong which are different from Indonesian diphthongs.

The fourth subject in this study pronounced the phoneme /g/ with /k/ which is also a velar affricate. For example, the word <garam> was said /karam/. In this case there is a process simplification, where the speakers cannot pronounce the target language and say it with another sound in the same phonetic lane. The words are different in meaning, so that the error occurs in the phonemic level. The subsequent similarity between the four subjects in pronouncing the phoneme /v/. Phoneme /v/ spoken /w/, for example, the word "visi" pronounced /wisɪ/ indicating a process of simplification. These findings support the results of previous studies, the results of Wei's research (2002) who investigated the problem of pronunciation of English faced by the learners of Thailand. In the study it was found that the learners of Thailand had difficulty with words that use the letter "v". in this research, the four subjects experienced difficulty in pronouncing the phoneme /ŋ/ which is a nasal sound that is located in the middle of the word, eg the word "dingin" spoken /dɪŋkɪn/, the word "dengar" spoken /dɛŋk ɑː/. Seen here that they are trying to read a phoneme by separating the phoneme /n/ and /g/. In Thai language nasal /ŋ/ only at the beginning or end of a word (Kasuriya: 2003).



Next, the four subjects had difficulties in pronouncing trill consonant /r/, especially when the phoneme is located at the end of words (final consonant). Thai language has the phoneme /r/, but the pronunciation is similar to the sound /r/ in Spanish and only placed at the beginning of the word (initial consonant) (Kasuriya; 2003). In this case the sound /r/ reduced (eliminated) when located at the end of words and tend to be pronounced as /l/ when it is in the middle of a word. Removal event is one of the symptoms of pronunciation errors (Setyawati, 2012: 25-47) which include: the removal of vowel phonemes and consonant, vowel phonemes removal of the double into a single vowel, vowel removal sequence into a single vowel and consonant cluster removal.

They were also difficult sounding the consonant cluster /ny/ which was spoken /ndʒ/, for example the word “banyak” was said /bʌndʒʌk/. This happens because in Thai language there is no consonant cluster "ny" so they do overgeneralization to ring it into two phonemes. Tarin and Tarin (1988: 85) mentioned that one of the factors causing this error is an intralanguage error speaking, one of which is leveling redundant (over-generalization), the speakers create structures that deviate based on his experience regarding the structure of the target language. The four subjects from Thailand had difficulties in pronouncing the sound clusters. They tend to insert vowel phonemes among kontoid, both in two and three consonants. For example, the inserting of a phoneme in /sawʌdʌjʌ/ or /səwʌdʌjʌ/. This does not only happen to foreign speakers, but also likely in native speakers, because the cluster is a result of the influence of foreign languages (English and Dutch) (Chaer, 2009; 51). Kasuriya (2003) and McLead (2012) also mentioned that Thai language has 12 clusters which are different from the clusters in Indonesian.

Pronunciation mistakes made by the speakers of Thailand is a form of fault development (developmental errors) which is an error that occurs because of lack of knowledge of the target language during the learning process (Ellis, 1994: 58). This means that such errors will be corrected if there are further learning how to practice intensively and if they interact with the speakers of Indonesia intensively.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that Thai speakers had difficulties in pronouncing vowels / e /, / ə / and / u /, diphthongs / au / and / oi /. Furthermore, they experienced the problems in the pronunciation of consonants <g >, < v >, < r >, < ng > and < ny >. They also had difficulties in pronouncing the sound clusters of two and three consonants which were tricked by inserting a certain phoneme among the double consonants. From the number of difficulties encountered seem that the difficulties are dominated by the pronunciation of consonant sounds. The pronunciation difficulties caused by the lack of knowledge of Thai speakers about Indonesian pronunciation system that resulted into a variety of strategies, such as interfering the first language or another language, reducing, simplifying, over-generalization, and the addition of phonemes.

This study is expected to provide an input for other researchers associated with the pronunciation of Indonesian foreign speakers. This research limited the study on Indonesian segmental elements in Thai language speakers who have not mastered the language of Indonesia yet. Thus, it is expected for the further research

to investigate the suprasegmental elements of Indonesian spoken by foreign speakers (especially from Thailand).

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