

# Considerations on Teaching How to Say English

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*Abstract: Teaching pronunciation might be a bewildering task to do for some teachers as they are lack of experience considering the teaching aspects and techniques. However, it will not be such bewildered task if the teachers recognize some principles of teaching this course. In order to make the teaching process effective, a teacher, then, should bear in mind these considerations, which have been suggested by several experts in English language teaching.*

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**SOME** say language is not only what we say, but also how we say it. The answer of what makes English different from our mother tongue, which is Indonesian, is because not only the content of the English such as grammar, vocabulary, semantics, and syntax, as Indonesian learners have been taught about them for years, but also the way we say the language, or the pronunciation of our language is different from English pronunciation that makes learning English bewildering for some students.<sup>1</sup> In a new paradigm of English language teaching which fluency regarded precedes accuracy, the significance of mastering English pronunciation is considerably important for those who want to enhance their English proficiency. Students may find that it can be frustrating and demotivating if they repeated experiences where communication breaks down due to the problems regarding their English pronunciation. This might be happen even for those who assumed have a good command of English.<sup>2</sup> To say that learning how to say English is not less important than learning the 'content' of the language itself therefore is considerably important. One may understand complex English structures and master wide range of lexical resources, but

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without getting on track on how to say the language in a good manner or having a good pronunciation, he may be lost in a middle of nowhere. His speaking partners, especially native speakers, quite possibly cannot understand what he says, unless he pronounces similarly to what the native speakers say, or at least meets the intelligibility. Therefore, learning 'how to say' is as important as learning 'what we say' or on the other words, learning pronunciation is as important as learning grammar or vocabulary.

### **Intelligibility**

It is unachieved for the vast majority of learners of second or foreign language if the target of their learning is produce something like what the native speakers of English produced, although they have a native speaker of English as their teachers and required him to model the language. This might not be happen although they desire a native like pronunciation as their aim as well.<sup>3</sup> It is very rare to find, then, that non native speakers are able to produce native like pronunciation. Although it may occur, such as in Jennifer Lopez, Lucy Liu, and else, it happens, perhaps, one in one thousand. It is sufficient then to say that a *'more appropriate goal is understandable is international communication, but retains unobtrusive features of a non English accent'*.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the learners should think that a native like pronunciation is virtually impossible to achieve and it is un-

desirable as well.<sup>5</sup>

A terminology for defining a situation where utterances are being understood both by speaker and listener has been introduced by Joanne Kenworthy, as she mentioned intelligibility, which is *'being understood by a listener in a given time in a given situation'*. Since it is highly unlikely to reach a native like pronunciation for most students, intelligibility is the most reasonable goal to achieve. On the other words, although a foreign speaker does not precisely produce the same sounds or use the exact feature of linkage or stress with that used by the native speakers, the listener possibly matches the sound heard or a feature uttered by the foreign speaker and understood the meaning without too much difficulties. To make it simple, as long as the utterance is understandable by the listener, then the utterance is intelligible.

A comparison to describe this is by looking at the situation where a child of three or four may have problems pronouncing the /r/ sound as they say, *'I see a wabbit'*. Instead of saying, *'I see a rabbit'*. Here, the parents would easily understand that the child meant to tell them than he had seen a small animal with short tail and long ears.<sup>6</sup> Robin Walker has added that there are several factors need to be focused on pronunciation teaching, such as good vowel length, good pronunciation for most consonants, good handling of clusters, the avoidance of incorrect deletions, prominence and good tonic stress.<sup>7</sup> As can be derived from

Kenworthy, intelligibility is the most reasonable goal of teaching and therefore a teacher should notice those several things which introduced by Walker.

In the context of learning and teaching English in Indonesia, it is quite rare to find learners who are fluent in pronouncing English words and sentences. For instance, Indonesian are tend to be influenced by their local dialects, so that varieties of English spoken by Javanese, Bataks, Ambonese, Makassar, as well as Sundanese appear when they speak English. Maybe this condition is recognized in countries where English is not the second language, so that for some people, it is impossible to be fluent like native speakers of English or produce what Jones called as a 'native-like pronunciation'.<sup>8</sup>

### **British or American?**

Similar to any other languages all over the world, there are a plethora of ways of pronouncing English as there are English speakers. People do not have exactly the same way to pronounce English sounds as there are no two individuals within a region pronounce in the same way and therefore we have many varieties of English, such as 'British', 'American', 'Australian', 'Indian', 'Singaporean', and 'Malaysian'.<sup>9</sup>

In somewhere between understanding phonological background and using various and interesting techniques, a question may come up: what model of pronunciation should we apply? The British? The American?

Australian? Irish? If, say, British pronunciation is the target and students are required to achieve it, then fine. However, is it valued than the American pronunciation, for example? Even if we hear songs sang by American actress and, of course, using American accent or films starred by American actors and actresses, it does not mean American accent is superior than others, does it? American accent is a phenomenon and the other accents are phenomena as well and therefore there is no single accent regarded as the best model to teach pronunciation. Furthermore, teaching one single accent may access students to the unawareness of different kinds of English accent, so that it may ignored as trying to bring out the fact that diversity is normal in all languages and that no one variety is superior to or more correct than any other<sup>10</sup> is considerably important.

Considering the model to teach pronunciation for the students, a teacher should bear in mind in what purpose and in what learning background are the students exposed to learn the language. For example, if they intend to study in the United States (US), since they are the awardees of Fulbright Scholarship, the best model to teach them, then, is American pronunciation. The same thing will happen for Indonesian teenagers who have the same background as their motivation to learn English is to understand American movies and American songs. For the latter condition, it is inevitable.

ble if they are exposed to learn American pronunciation, within their English classroom.<sup>11</sup> However, in a situation where this condition does not apply, it is necessary to ask the students to choose which accent to be taught within the classroom, it is, which accent they like and dislike, which accent that might fulfill their requirement in learning language, and which accent that they want to be a standard accent.<sup>12</sup>

Here, it might be possible to use recording materials as a model of pronunciation, but it is important to notice the use as a target or as a point of reference. If the model is for the target, then students are intended to reach it as a goal, while if it is for a point of reference, then they are required to comprehend that variety of differences in accents of that model are acceptable. Furthermore, the accent of the teacher himself may have significant impact as well as the using of the model as stated above, since it will be something that heard by the students in every occasion they attend the classroom.<sup>13</sup>

As a teacher should consider intelligibility and the model of accent to teach the students, there are some other considerations, and Kenworthy has mentioned six different aspects affect pronunciation, namely; native language, the age factors, phonetic ability, amount of exposure, attitude and identity, and motivation and concern for good pronunciation. These factors regarded to overbearing the condition

of learning pronunciation so that learners often find difficulties in producing English words, phrases, or sentences. There is a suggestion derived from this idea that before teaching English phonology or pronunciation, a teacher should bear in mind these factors as they may give big impact on how the teacher develops techniques in the teaching process itself.

### **The Native Language**

That the native language of the learners is different from English not only semantically and syntactically, but also morphologically and phonologically, is obvious. In terms of the latter aspect, a teacher should aware that particular sound in English does not exist in the mother tongue like / θ /, / α /, and / Λ /, etc., and understand clearly that even the sound exist, learners may face difficult to employ the sound in order to distinguish meaning, such as 'ship' = / i / and 'sheep' = / I /.<sup>14</sup> so that employing contrastive analysis focusing on pronunciation to differ the difference between the native language and English as the target language might be useful.

Since differences lie between English and Indonesian are prominent and enormous, the focus on them should be properly paid. Not only difference between individual sounds but also combination of sounds and features such as rhythm and intonation. To sum up, as what Kenworthy said *'the more differences there are, the more difficulties the learner will have in*

*pronouncing English?*

A teacher then should show the differences and lead the class to perceive them since the first time he taught the class. Here, it is impossible to allow learners endeavor their own learning pronunciation process and get know how the knowledge by themselves, without a particular discourse analysis of English phonology. It is obliged therefore to involve pronunciation in designing a course. On the other word, even in a small English course where learners learn English for the first time, it is suggested that phonology -and pronunciation of course- embedded in the syllabus as well as structure and semantics, which may be included as part of English language teaching curriculum as well as an independent course, which is separated from the other features. If it is separated from the other class, then in the pronunciation class, the teacher can introduce the phonology of English as well as getting in the students to the phonetics charts or pronunciation drills. One way of doing it is by providing pronunciation games, which can be useful to expand the lesson or by introducing the phonemic charts in a fun activity.

**Age**

Several researches found that young learners advantage the ability to pronounce foreign language than their counterparts, the adolescence. On the other words, producing a native like pronunciation seems very difficult to achieve for everyone ex-

cept for the very young learners.

However, another research shows other findings. A group of researcher investigating Dutch people learning English in Holland found that there is no age advantage in terms of learning English, since older people are likely to be in front than they who are young learners. They tend to get better result for short-term exam, whereas their counterparts excel after a longer period.<sup>15</sup> These different findings quite possibly indicate that there is no logical relationship between age and ability to pronounce foreign language, and therefore should not be a kind of justification that a group is better pronouncing than others.

Related to this, a teacher should bear in mind that teaching adolescence is different from teaching teenagers. Teaching teenagers is different from teaching children as well. Each different age level needs special considerations, so that it is necessary for a teacher to be aware of the age range of his/her students. Whereas children are related to the period of intellectual development, teenagers are related to transition period. For teenagers, a transition period is the time when teenagers move from being totally dependant as children to be teenagers who always want to do something fun and new. Then they would gain maturity and '*superior cognitive ability*' when they are adults.<sup>16</sup>

Because of the difference characters and emotional intention, a teacher should give different special attention for each

different level. He/she has to be adaptable with the characters and emotional intention of his/her students so that she could do the right thing in the right time. The techniques and supporting materials used to teach them, of course, will also be different. For further explanation on this part, look at Brown's *Teaching by Principles: A Pedagogical Approach in English Language Teaching*.

### **Innate Phonetic Ability**

Since human beings have different characteristics of physical appearance, some people do not manifest a phonetic coding ability that others do. The ability to receive language distinct learners so that some may have good pronunciation and some may not. Here, one ear's ability maybe different from the others as *'one study has indicated that those with good phonetic abilities benefit from pronunciation drills, tasks in which particular sounds are heard and the learner has to imitate again and again'*.<sup>17</sup>

However, instead of being despaired, learners should be motivated that they can improve their competence outside their classroom by listening to music or watching films, for example. By listening to music or watching movies more and more, learners are encouraged to practice their skills which can enhance their phonetic ability. For instance, one sound does not exist in Indonesian /ʃ/ and therefore learners may learn how the sound is produced by paying at-

tention to the movies or the songs as they notice that the sound exist in words such as *shine, shore, facial* or a sentence like *'Is there any shampoo left in the bathroom'?*

On the one hand, allowing the learners learn the language from songs or movies can be a good technique because learning process cannot be restricted only in a 4x6 meters classroom, a place where a teacher explains everything, but also has to allow learners to get in touch with the language naturally. There, they can extend their language awareness as they can learn new phrases, idioms, and vocabulary items. On the other hand, this kind of technique also brings the learners into the real context of language itself, which might be useful for them to perceive the language as they are the native speaker of the language.

A teacher, then, better designs tasks which might be useful to enhance the innate phonetic ability by providing other various activities such as comparing sounds from audio tape recorder and finding the sounds of particular phonemes, or even by practicing through phonemic charts. For instance, learners may listen to tape recorder as the notice the difference between /ou/ and /æ/ in the words /so/ and /apple/. As a teacher provides as many activities as possible to their classroom, these might be a means of improving the students innate phonetic ability.

### **Exposure**

Because the terminology is

hard to defined, perhaps one example below may vividly explain it. An Indonesian immigrant works in the US, for example, may live in an English speaking country but cannot take advantage of it at all, because even he lives in such country, he rare uses it for his main purposes, since he uses Indonesian at home and rare to use English at the office. Moreover, he has no strong intention to adapt his language with the new language environment he meets, which causes him bad intelligibility for someone who lives in an English speaking country. On the other hand, one may live in a non English speaking country but he uses the language in many occasions such as in the office, school, university, or even in his house. As a result, the second person achieves better pronunciation than the first one. Hence, the amount of using the language is a means to determine how better one's pronunciation is.

As research supports the notion that the mere length of time is less important than the quality of learning English focusing on pronunciation, students can be convinced that they are on track to produce a native like pronunciation. If so, the goals of the learning process will be easily achieved. Internal desire may be a suggested terminology to substitute the word since it is important to learn foreign language.

### **Attitude and Identity**

In a case when an English native speaker, a British person

for example, residences in the US and has no plan to return to his country, is there any guarantee he will change his accent in saying 'but = /but/' in the way the American say 'but' = /bĀt/, while both of the accents are received? Since English accents are manifolds, it does not related if we compare between one accent to another. For both cases of American who lives in Britain or Australian who lives in the US, there is no guarantee that they will change their accent and there is no obligation to do so as well. As people who use American accent use the accent everyday and tend to use it all the time and anywhere they go, it is virtually impossible that they will change the accent into northern British accent for example, if they visit Liverpool or London. The American people use American accent because it shows their identity, which distinguishes them from other people.

In terms of English language teaching in Indonesia, it is obviously that Indonesian have a plethora of accents of regional language (*bahasa daerah*), which exists from Sabang to Merauke. This causes uniqueness on producing the language when they learn or use it. A sound in English may exist or similar to one of the sound exists in Javanese, but may not exist in Sundanese. A Javanese who speaks Javanese language might be different than a Sundanese who speaks the same language. As well as Indonesian as the lingua franca of Indonesian people, the regional language has significant role that in-

fluence the quality of learning English, so that it has to be taken into account to consider by an English teacher. Thus, the technique to teach English to Javanese might be different than that of used to teach English to Sundanese.

One important thing to remember in pronunciation classes is that those who are non-native English speakers understand that language shows the identity of its speakers. The way one speaks values his identity, in term of distinguishing learners into those who are beginners, intermediates, and advances. Instead of experiencing humiliation or embarrassing situation because of lack of knowledge of pronunciation, students can upgrade their educational prestige whilst learning English by having good pronunciation as it also increase their self confident. By knowing this, students who have trouble with pronunciation but likely to achieve better results maybe encouraged. Thus, here we are close to the word 'motivation'.

### **Motivation and Concern for Good Pronunciation**

Whereas some learners are driven for good pronunciation, some are highly unlikely to learn it and put concern on it more than other aspects of language like structure and vocabulary. To be honest, prominently the last two factors stated before have close relationship with this factor so that motivation tends be more dominant than any other factors. In this case, Brown has pointed out that *'the extent to which their*

*intrinsic motivation propels them toward improvement will be perhaps the strongest influence of all six of the factors'*.<sup>18</sup> By far, it is highly re-commended that a teacher should encourage his/her students how significant pronunciation is in order to increase their level of self-image and finally, reaching their goals in learning English. In every session of his/ her teaching process, a teacher should able to motivate their students.

Motivating the learners is very important and here a teacher should be able to motivate them to improve their language skills. Paul Bress has defined a good teacher as someone who has excellent emotional maturity to cope with the learners and has found interests and motivates the students as the second major characteristics of a good teacher. More than 25% of the students who have been surveyed by Bress argued than a good teacher is a good motivator,<sup>19</sup> someone who can motivate the students to develop their skills, their intelligence, as well as their personality. However, many English classrooms in Indonesia have been described as something which is demotivating, rather than motivating. Many students do not like learning English. They afraid to make mistakes and they do not have self confident to express themselves in English because they find their teachers are unmotivated. The personality of the teachers does not reflect motivation as they do not able to motivate their students. Unless they are able to



motivate themselves, how they will be able to motivate their students?<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it is necessary that learners are encouraged to become involved in the process of discovering patterns for themselves and applying them to new language as the role of the teachers is to promote a healthy concern amongst learners within the classroom.<sup>21</sup>

### **Integrating Pronunciation in ELT Syllabus**

Many English classrooms have paid lower attention on pronunciation than other aspects of language such as vocabulary and grammar, and a ridiculous thing about it is that it is used only for 5 minutes activity filler. Whether it is used at the beginning or at the end of the lesson, there is no strong intention to entangle pronunciation in the classroom, unless there is 'free' time to do it.<sup>22</sup>

Not because of this reason which makes scholars have asserted that phonology, especially pronunciation, should be employed in ELT syllabus. It is merely because pronunciation is a part of language as well as grammar and vocabulary and therefore it should be integrated with other aspects of the language themselves. Although it is still debatable to reveal pronunciation in ELT as a course, which is separated from other courses or to integrate it as part of the teaching process itself, it is prominently acceptable that pronunciation has to be taught since the early beginning. Students have to be aware the difference between their mother

tongue and English and they will understand this only after learning English pronunciation.

How aware a teacher about those considerations would not important if the curriculum of English itself cannot be enacted to support the new paradigm. For this reason, I could not agree more with Hebert in Richards as she suggested that '*phonology should be part of any ESL syllabus*'.<sup>23</sup> This must be taken into account since to communicate effectively learners have to become proficient in using semantic, lexical, syntactic, as well as morphological and phonological elements, thus it is vague if an ESL or EFL, which embedded in ELT syllabus, based on only some parts of the language mentioned above. Ideally, an ELT syllabus should be balance in term of employing each part of language appropriately, thus cover pronunciation within it. The decision makers in administering ELT syllabus then should concern about this because becoming not aware of it may erode the value of the syllabus.

### **Testing Pronunciation**

As a means of measuring the students performance and competence of using English and demonstrating what they have learned in a term or period of study, test is a method which is used for those purposes. By testing the students, a teacher will be able to determine the condition of his students, he will be able to check the progress of the learning, and will be able to measure the effectiveness of the

teaching process. Most language tests measure someone's ability to perform language, which might be in terms of speaking, listening, reading, and writing.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst testing grammar and vocabulary is common in ELT, perhaps testing pronunciation is new as there is rare literature talking about this. Hewings has mentioned 2 ways of testing pronunciation, which are testing particular feature of pronunciation and the overall ability. Whereas in the former a teacher may test the students' performance dealt with vowels, consonants, consonants clusters, stress, rhythm, and intonation, in the latter a teacher may test the students' performance through the wide use of overall ability while speaking. Moreover, there are testing receptive skills and productive skills. When a teacher intends to test the receptive skills of the students then he should employ a test, which can demonstrate the students' ability to discriminate between sounds and minimal pairs. This might be done either by giving a multiple choice or fill in the blank test as such test are easily administered. However, testing productive skills, which exposes he student to use the language, cannot be as easy as testing receptive skills, since administering this kind of test is quite difficult. Sometimes a teacher should be able to listen to every individual's pronunciation, which means he has to listen to them one by one. Obviously, this might be a time consuming activity, or even impracticable if there are a huge number of students

within the classroom. Particularly in testing productive skills, there are two techniques of doing it. One is by reading a text aloud and two is by a spontaneous speech through a dialogue or interview. For both methods, the teacher is possible to measure certain features of the language pronunciation, although both have advantages and drawbacks. If testing by reading aloud can be tightly controlled and can compare between the students' relative strengths and weaknesses, testing through spontaneous speech can be a means of avoiding the text-to-sound problems.<sup>25</sup> For further explanation on testing pronunciation, look at Martin Hewings' *Pronunciation Practice Activities: A Resource Book for Teaching English Pronunciation*.

### Conclusion

It is impossible to change the age of the learners, but it does make sense to increase exposure and motivation into certain degree so that the learners are eager to learn pronunciation and produce a good pronunciation as well. Hence, a good teacher not only has to be creative with various teaching techniques, but also has to be a good motivator. Thus, several important safety considerations must be taken into account when a teacher should come up with ideas based on the six factors above as well as considering the intelligibility and the model to teach pronunciation and issuing an ELT syllabus design containing pronunciation as one part

of its contents.

**Endnotes:**

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3. *Ibid*, p. 13.
4. *Ibid*, p. 14.
5. *Ibid*
6. Joanne Kenworthy, *Teaching English Pronunciation*, Longman: 1994), p. 13-14.
7. Robin Walker, *Universal Intelligibility*, English Teaching Professional, Issue 21 October 2001.
8. Jones in Richards, *op. cit.*, p. 180.
9. Hewings, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
10. Frank Fitzpatrick, *A Teacher's Guide to Practical Pronunciation*, Prentice Hall : 1995, p. 7.
11. Hewings, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
12. Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
13. Hewings, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
14. Penny Ur, *A Course in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press: 2003, p. 52.
15. Kenworthy, *op. cit.*, p. 4-5.
16. H. Douglas Brown, *Teaching by Principles: A Pedagogical Approach in English Language Teaching*, Prentice Hall Regents: 1994, p. 23.
17. Kenworthy, *op. cit.*, p. 7-9.
18. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
19. Paul Bress, *What Makes a Teacher Special*, (English Teaching Professional: Issue 14 2005, p. 1.
20. *Ibid*, p. 2.
21. Fitzpatrick, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

22. Hewings, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
23. Richards, *op. cit.*, p.
24. H. Douglas Brown, *Language Assessment*, Longman: 2004, p. 3.
25. Hewings, *op. cit.*, p. 18-19.

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