

THE BELIEFS ABOUT AND ATTITUDES TOWARD THE TEACHING OF PRONUNCIATION: FUTURE ENGLISH TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

The application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been popular in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT). However, there are some pros and cons related to the teaching of pronunciation within the CLT approach. This study, therefore, was conducted in order to reveal the beliefs about and attitudes toward the teaching of pronunciation from the perspectives of future English teachers in State University of Malang. An opinionnaire was adapted to collect the data from 45 participants. The result of the small survey shows that future English teachers in State University of Malang have positive attitudes toward the teaching of pronunciation. A large percentage of them believe that pronunciation can be taught to all levels of learners and that non-native speaking teachers are also able to teach pronunciation.

Keywords: *beliefs, attitude, pronunciation teaching, future English teachers*

BACKGROUND

English language teaching (ELT) has experienced several changes of approach in order to fit and reach the existing beliefs at that time. Consequently, there are some different treatments of either language skills or language components in each of the approaches, especially pronunciation.

Brown (2007) mentioned several approaches to ELT over the years. The early one is Grammar-Translation Method which focuses on the grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, translations of texts, and written exercises. Classes are taught in the mother tongue with a lot of exercises in translating disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother tongue and little or even no attention is given to pronunciation. Then, it is shifted by Direct Method of which the basic premise is that second language learning should be more like the first language learning; a lot of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation between first and second languages, and little or no analysis of grammatical rules. Therefore, classroom instruction is conducted exclusively in the target language, grammar is taught inductively, speech and listening comprehension are taught, and correct pronunciation and grammar are emphasized. After that, Audio-lingual Method emerges. Its characteristics are: new material is presented in dialogue form, structural patterns are taught using repetitive

drills, grammar is taught inductively, and great importance is attached to pronunciation.

Having experienced those changing and shifting, then, the approach of ELT comes to a brand-new approach widely known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). It suggests a focus on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence, on students' fluency and accuracy, and on real-world contexts (Brown, 2007). The role of a teacher is as a facilitator and guide while students are as active participants in the learning process. CLT has been very popular in the field of teaching since then.

Apart from the glory of CLT, there have been some critiques of its application. One of them is about the existence of pronunciation in CLT. It was Isaacs (2009, cited in Foote et. al, 2011: 2) who stated that pronunciation had fallen from favor in the era of communicative language teaching. It was, according to Breitzkreutz et. al (in Isaacs, 2009, cited in Foote et. al 2011: 2), because CLT suggested the beliefs that learners could improve their pronunciation through input alone. In addition, a study conducted by Purcell & Suter (1980, cited in Foote et. al 2011: 2) concluded that teaching pronunciation was ineffective.

However, some other researchers stood on different statements toward the teaching of pronunciation. As an example, Morley (1991 in

Otlowski, 1998) states the need for the integration of pronunciation with oral communication. Students can be expected to do well in the pronunciation of English if the pronunciation class is taken out of isolation and becomes an integral part of oral communication. Morley (1991) also proposes that the goal of pronunciation should be changed from the attainment of 'perfect' pronunciation to the more realistic goals of developing functional intelligibility, communicability, increased self-confidence, the development of speech monitoring abilities and speech modification strategies for use beyond classroom.

Foote et. al (2011), therefore, conducted a survey on the teaching of pronunciation in ESL classes across Canada, entitled *Survey of the Teaching of Pronunciation in adult ESL Programs in Canada, 2010*. It is actually a follow-up study of another survey entitled *Pronunciation Teaching Practices in Canada* conducted ten years before it by Breitreutz et. al (2001) which asked teachers about resources, approaches, and beliefs about teaching pronunciation. Foote et. al (2011) set two main aims of the survey, i.e., to gain a snapshot of current practices and to compare this with the picture of ten years ago. 159 participants from eight provinces were involved in the survey, 85% of them were instructors and the rest were either program coordinators or both. The breakdown of participants was done based on the provinces.

The results and discussion of the survey conducted by Foote et. al can be simplified as follows:

1. The percentage of the respondents who could access college or university course on teaching pronunciation was higher than the previous survey, which was from 12% to 51%. However, only six universities offer pronunciation-specific courses. It seemed that the instructors were still not receiving the professional development they needed to feel completely comfortable teaching pronunciation. Therefore, most of the respondents indicated that they would like more pronunciation training (Foote et. al, 2011: 16).
2. The instructors indicated that they regularly included pronunciation instruction in their regular classes and regularly corrected pronunciation errors, although there was not any exact information about the frequency of it. The researchers also informed that the way

the instructors inserted pronunciation instruction varied. Mostly, the focus of the pronunciation instruction was on segmental problems such as minimal pairs. It was contrary to the result of the previous study which showed that teaching segmentals were the most difficulty the participants faced. In addition, the most popular strategy selected in the current study was repetition; while in the previous study it was troublesome sounds. Another interesting difference was that the participants of the previous study chose speaking more slowly as a recommended strategy, while those of the current study only chose that with caution.

3. Pronunciation assessment in Canada has not changed radically in the past 10 years (Foote et. al, 2011: 16) and the attitudes toward pronunciation instruction were not much different from the previous study. The difference is that the respondents in the study were slightly more pessimistic about the ability of pronunciation instruction to create permanent changes.

The results of the study conducted by Foote et. al (2011) have inspired the present research. It seemed to be fruitful to explore pronunciation in the field of English language teaching in Indonesia. The researcher was interested in investigating beliefs about and attitudes toward the teaching of pronunciation.

This study, therefore, aims at investigating the beliefs about and attitudes toward pronunciation instruction among future English teachers of State University of Malang's perspective. The main reasons why future teachers were chosen as the subjects of this study were: (1) they have had exposures on the new paradigms of teaching English in the university, (2) it is they who will conduct the teaching of English in Indonesia in the coming future, so it is important to know the underlying concepts of pronunciation in English language teaching they have.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants

The participants involved in this study were future English teachers in State University of Malang. Future English teachers of State University of Malang were addressed to the students of undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs in the university.

They could be named as either pre-service teachers, for those who were not teaching yet; or in-service teachers, for those who had already been teaching while studying. The participants were 45 future English teachers chosen randomly from undergraduate program, graduate program, and postgraduate program.

Procedures

The opinionnaire from Foote et. al (2011) about beliefs about and attitudes toward the teaching of pronunciation was adapted in order to take the data for this study. Fourteen statements were designed to find out the beliefs about and attitudes toward the teaching of pronunciation among the future students of State University of Malang. The statements are as follows:

1. Teaching pronunciation does not usually result in permanent changes.
2. Drilling minimal pairs is the best way to teach pronunciation.
3. Communicative practice is the best way to teach pronunciation.
4. A heavy accent is a cause of discrimination against ESL speakers.
5. Teaching pronunciation is boring.
6. You can't teach pronunciation to lower levels.
7. Only native speakers should teach pronunciation.
8. There is an age-related limitation on the acquisition of native-like pronunciation.
9. Pronunciation instruction is only effective for highly motivated learners.
10. Some individuals resist changing their pronunciation in order to maintain their L1 identity.
11. Pronunciation teaching should help make learners comfortably intelligible to their listeners.
12. I'm completely comfortable teaching segmentals.
13. I'm completely comfortable teaching supra-segmentals.
14. I wish I had more training in teaching pronunciation.

The purpose and the terms in the opinionnaires were explained before the participants filled in it. They did not get direct specifications that their beliefs and attitudes toward the teaching of pronunciation were being investigated. The researcher was present while the participants

were completing the opinionnaires to monitor and to help them in the process.

RESULTS

The data obtained from the participants were converted into percentage to ease the researcher in interpreting them.

DISCUSSION

Teaching Pronunciation Does Not Usually Result in Permanent Changes

This statement was used in the opinionnaire in order to discover the participants' general belief in the teaching of pronunciation. It could reveal their underlying belief in whether or not the teaching of pronunciation is fruitful for students' improvement in learning English.

The result of the current study infers that most of the participants, 40%, believe that there is little contribution of pronunciation in students' permanent changes in English skills. However, a number of the participants, 33% do not have the same belief about it. They tend to think that teaching pronunciation usually will give some effects on students' progress. Being neutral, the rest of them still cannot decide their position toward the statement. It was different from the one conducted by Foote et. al which showed that 62% of the participants disagreed with the statement. It means that they believe in the role of pronunciation in students' pronunciation skill development.

The teaching of pronunciation in ELT has been a debatable topic for a long time. Many studies concluded that there was only little relationship between teaching pronunciation in classroom and students' attained proficiency in pronunciation. The examples are the studies conducted by Suter (1976) and Purcell and Suter (1980) which concluded that the attainment of accurate pronunciation in second language is a matter substantially beyond the control of educators' (Otlowski, 1998). Other studies showed positive attitude toward the teaching of pronunciation. As an example Morley (1991, in Otlowski, 1998) states that intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence, so pronunciation needs to be integrated with communicative practices.

Apart from the different arguments on the teaching of pronunciation, teachers should be able to decide themselves whether or not they need to insert pronunciation in their teaching. It can be done by doing needs assessment so that

teachers can decide based on their students' needs.

Drilling Minimal Pairs / Communicative Practice is the Best Way to Teach Pronunciation

In the previous study, 60% of the participants disagreed with the statement 'drilling minimal pairs is the best way to teach pronunciation'. 55% of them tended to choose communicative practice instead. It seems that the participants have realized that the teaching of pronunciation would be best benefit students if it is conducted in communicative practice.

The result of the current study, however, shows that the participants agree with both statements, 58% of whom chose drilling minimal pairs and 75% chose communicative practice.

The drilling is not unreasonable for students. Unfortunately, it has been out of favor in language classes for some time. Yet, drilling of real, useful phrases which can be used outside the classroom is actually highly fruitful for them (Fraser, 2001).

A Heavy Accent is a Cause of Discrimination against ESL Speakers

In the previous study, the result shows that 70% of the participants agreed with the above statement. It might be because they have known various ESL speakers from different countries since they lived in an English-speaking country.

However, the result of this current study for the above statement is different. Most of the participants of this current study chose to be neutral in responding to it. It might be caused by the condition of Indonesia which does not have English as the second language, so they do not have any direct exposure to such discrimination.

Teaching Pronunciation is Boring

A great number of participants in the previous study did not agree with the statement. Their self-experience as English instructors may have brought them enough exposure on various pronunciation teaching and learning activities.

In this current study, 47% of the participants chose to be neutral in responding to this statement. However, there was only a slight difference between those who chose to be neutral and those who disagreed with it. Approximately 44% of the participants did not think that pronunciation teaching is boring.

You Can't Teach Pronunciation to Lower Levels

The result of this current study is in line with the one of the previous study. Most of the participants disagree with this statement. In the current study, those who disagreed were 71% of the total, while in the previous study the number of the participants who disagreed was reaching 94%.

Both results infer that pronunciation can be taught to all levels of learners depending on their needs. The materials, therefore, should be suitable for the levels of the learners so that they can get the aim of the pronunciation targeted.

Only Native Speakers Should Teach Pronunciation

The previous and the current studies have the same results as the response to this statement. The participants of both studies disagreed with it. However, the percentage increases from the previous study to the current study. In the previous study, 57% of the participants disagreed; while in the current study, 89% of the participants disagreed.

It indicates that the future teachers who became the participants of this current study have shown courage in the teaching of pronunciation since they disagreed if only native speakers should teach pronunciation.

There is an Age-Related Limitation on the Acquisition of Native-Like Pronunciation

55% of the participants in the previous study agreed with this statement. However, the result of this current study is different from that. In this current study, 42% of the participants disagreed with the statement. It is contrary to the previous one.

Some age-related studies have claimed that the process of acquiring a second language grammar (morpho-syntax) is not substantially affected by age, but that of acquiring pronunciation (phonology) may be. Some others argue that older learners no longer have access to their innate language acquisition device, consisting of the principles of universal grammar proposed by Chomsky and language-specific learning procedures.

Therefore, it may be there are certain ages in which learners can develop their pronunciation maximally reaching the native-like pronunciation. However, adult learners still can improve their

pronunciation skills optimally by thorough practice.

Pronunciation is only effective for Highly Motivated Learners

Most of the participants in the previous study agreed with it, reaching 39%. Interestingly, the percentage of those who disagreed was slightly different, 38%. In the current study, the result is the other way around. Most of the participants, approximately 40%, disagreed with the statement.

Motivation, indeed, play an important role in the success of learning. Ghenghesh (2010, cited in Emaliana, 2011: 191) states that without sufficient motivation, it would be difficult to ensure students' achievement. However, teachers can also make a great effort by designing interesting activities in teaching pronunciation in order to make the students' arouse their interest and motivation in learning pronunciation.

Some Individuals Resist Changing Their Pronunciation in Order to Maintain Their L1 Identity

A number of the participants in the previous study disagreed with it, reaching the highest percentage among the other answers. In line with it, the current study shows the same result. 36% of the participants disagreed with the statement. Therefore, it can be said that maintaining the L1 identity is not the main reason why some individuals resist changing their pronunciation.

Pronunciation Teaching Should Help Make Learners Comfortably Intelligible to Their Listeners

The current study covers that most of the participants agreed with the statement above. There were only 24% of them who were neutral and none disagreed. This matches the result of the previous study in which even 89% of the participants agreed.

It means that teachers should be able to make pronunciation teaching should be focused on communication rather than as classroom exercises. Teachers should also make learners bear in mind that they should focus on the listener's perception rather than on their own production.

I am Completely Comfortable Teaching Segmentals / Suprasegmentals

More than a half of the participants agreed with the statements that they are completely
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comfortable in teaching either segmentals or suprasegmentals. However, more than a half of the participants in the current study were neutral toward the statements.

According to Fraser (2001) the teaching of pronunciation would be much better if it focuses on larger chunks of speech (suprasegmentals) than on individual sounds or syllables (segmentals). It does not mean that segmentals should be neglected in the teaching of pronunciation. Individual sounds and syllables become the basis of pronunciation, and then the main goal should be focused more on the words, phrases, and sentences.

I Wish I Had More Training in Teaching Pronunciation

A great number of the participants in the previous study, around 75%, wished to have more training in teaching pronunciation. More than a half of the participants in the current study also had the same opinion. It was 69% of them who agreed with the above statement.

It shows that the participants from both studies feel that the pronunciation trainings or courses they got are not enough yet to build their beliefs about and attitudes toward pronunciation teaching. The pronunciation trainings or courses should have made them completely comfortable inserting pronunciation in the English teaching activities they do today or are going to do in the future.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study have shown that the future English teachers in State University of Malang, basically, have positive attitudes toward the teaching of pronunciation. A large percentage of them believe that pronunciation can be taught to all levels of learners and that non-native speaking teachers are also able to teach pronunciation.

In general, there are few differences in teachers' responses to the opinionnaire in this current study with the previous one conducted in Canada. It is due to the fact that the participants and the setting of each study are different. Therefore, it may contribute to different results of study.

All in all, the teaching of pronunciation should not be neglected from the teaching of English as a secondary or foreign language since it can bring such benefits for learners as make the learners mutually intelligible.

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