

# The Ability of Students in Understanding Minimal Pair

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**Abstract**— The main objective of this study was to describe how the student's ability in understanding minimal pair and what the factors that influenced the students' ability in understanding minimal pair at the all semester students of English Department at Universitas Baturaja. The descriptive method was used in this research. The sample was taken by using proportional random sampling. The population of this study was the all semester students of English Department at Universitas Baturaja in academic year 2018/2019. The sample was 51 students and try out was 20 students from non-sample. In collecting the data, this study used test consists of listening and pronunciation test and also questionnaire. The results of listening test was average. There were ten minimal pairs which were focused on initial consonant sound. Then, the results of pronunciation test was average. There were eleven minimal pairs which were focused on initial consonant sound. So, the total average of students test score was 68.26. It was concluded that the students were able or have an ability in understanding minimal pair.

**Keywords:** *ability, understanding, minimal pair*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is the most important aspect in learning English. Pronunciation is the way in which a language or particular words pronounced or viewed how people utter a word or words that created a good speech, so it be clearly and can be understood by people [12]. When people communicate with other people they should not only have a good vocabulary but also have good pronunciation. It means that, when speaking a foreign language, say English, pronunciation is of great important.

The students are expected to be able to communicate in English using correct pronunciation. It is one of the basic components of language which must be learnt by students. Pronunciation Practice studies is one of these courses in English Department of Baturaja University for second semester. It is very important for the students of English study program at Baturaja University because they have to master it

so that they will not wrongly teach the students about how to pronounce English words and sentences. Pronunciation (also known as phonology) is one of subject which in the syllabus learned about the emphasis should be placed on the students' ability to distinguish and produce the similar sounds. For example sound /p/ and /b/ as in words pat and bat. Those two words are described as a minimal pair.

According to [1] viewed pronunciation is a terminology that correlated among speech and language. He noted "speech is an activity which is carried on in numerous events; language is knowledge, a code which is known and shared by people who use their knowledge for transmitting and interpreting messages in the events". It means when someone delivers the messages to the hearer by his or her voice, then its messages could be received by the hearer clearly and understandable, but the hearer sometimes does not understand that or even seems confusing about the speaker said.

On the other hand, [2] assumed pronunciation is to say the sound right, to use the words to express the appropriate meanings, or construct their sentences in a way that sound acceptable. The aim of pronunciation is to ease the speaker and hearer in receiving message on communication. The message will be easy to receive, if it delivers clearly and can be understood, so what the speaker wanted from the hearer can be received as its purposes.

## II. REVIEW OF THEORIES

### A. *Sound of Language or Phonology*

[3], state that sound of language or phonology, which is the symbol of language that is produced by the organ of speech. According to [4], English language has the number of sounds which produced by organs of speech. Those sounds are classified in two categories, vowel and consonants. They noted; "Consonants involve a narrowing in the mouth which in turn causes some obstruction of the airstreams. With vowels, air passes rather freely through the mouth because there is very little narrowing". It seems when people producing consonants

are signed by the activity of the mouth narrows there is pressing on the throat or mouth when the word produced. On the other side vowel is produced freely, there is no obstruction when it is produced, even it is produced smoothly without any hard effort to produce it.

Based on the International Phonetics Alphabet (IPA), the formally phonemic symbols using in English language as follow [5]

TABLE I. THE IPA (INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET) SYMBOLS FOR THE COMMON SOUNDS OF ENGLISH ©2006

Vowel	
IPA Symbol	Example
i:	Three
i	Bin
æ	Fat
ɑ:	Far
ɔ:	Sort
ʊ	Put
u:	Boot
ʌ	Up
ɜ:	Her
ə	Until
e	Bed
ɒ	Rock
Diphthongs	
IPA Symbol	Example
ei	Stay
ai	Try
ɔi	Toy
iə	Fear
eə	There
ʊə	Sure
Aʊ	Mouth
əʊ	Nose

TABLE II. THE IPA (INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET) SYMBOLS FOR THE COMMON SOUNDS OF ENGLISH ©2006

Consonants	
IPA Symbol	Example
p	Plan
b	Boy
t	Test
d	Desk
k	Kiss
g	Go
tʃ	Chest
dʒ	Joke
f	Find
v	Visitor
θ	Thick
ð	This
s	Sad
z	Zoo
ʃ	Shoe
ʒ	Television
h	Heavy
m	Many
Consonants	
IPA Symbol	Example
n	
ŋ	Ring
l	Love

r	Run
j	Yesterday
w	Wet

From the table, based on IPA (International Phonetic Association), there were 44 sounds of English consist of 12 vowels, 8 diphthongs, and 24 consonants.

1) *Stress*

Stress is part of the pronunciation which influences the expression of meaning of words pronounced. According to [6], that stress is the term we use to describe the point in a word or phrase where pitch changes vowels lengthen and volume increases. It is regarded that stress helps speaker to control the speech production related to meaning. Stress is classified into word stress and sentence stress. [7] stated word stress refers to which syllable(s) in word carriers more emphasis, while sentence stress refers to words in a sentence that carry more emphasis.

2) *Intonation*

One of prominent parts in pronunciation to express the meaning of word or sentence more clearly is intonation. According to [6] intonation is a way of modifying the strength or intention of what we are saying. In English there two main intonation patterns, when the tones rise at the end of a sentence is called rising and when the tones fall at the end of the sentence is called falling. In addition [2] stated rising intonation is used in yes/no question and falling intonation is used in all other types of sentences, from direct statements to wh- questions, and finally command. The writer assumes intonation also shows the meaning of the speaker's utterance, although the sentence structurally equals, but if the speaker pronounce it in different intonation, it indicates changing in meaning.

From the explanation above, the writer concludes about the concept of pronunciation, there 3 components in concept of pronunciation. Firstly, sounds of language defined as the symbol of language which are produced by the organs of speech. Secondly, stress is focused on the speaker's way in sounding the certain word that has the main meaning in language. Thirdly, intonation is a sound wave to pronounce the words/ sentence to make the sense meaning.

B. *Concept of Minimal Pair*

According to [8], stated that a minimal pair consists of two words that almost sound the same, differing only by a single phoneme. It means minimal pair is learned to prove that the single phonetic sound in a pair of words is contrasted. An example for English is the pair ship and sheep [9] stated that minimal pairs are words where changing one sound lead to a change in the meaning. There are some minimal pairs of vowel and consonant, it can be seen these table below.

TABLE III. VOWEL SOUND MINIMAL PAIRS

<i>/i:/ and /ɪ/</i>	<i>/e/ and /æ/</i>	<i>/ɛ:/ and /ə/</i>	<i>/ɔ:/ and /o/</i>	<i>/u:/ and /ʊ/</i>
Beat bit	Bed bad	Cap cop	Stock stalk	Full fool
Heal hill	Beg bag	Fat pot	Cot caught	Pull pool
Feet fit	Pen pan	Map mop	Nod gnawed	Hood who'd
Reach rich	Send sand	Black block	Odd awed	Soot suit
Sleep slip	Men man	Hat hot	Knot naught	Wood wooed
<i>/a:/ and /ʌ/</i>	<i>/ɛ:/ and /æ/</i>	<i>/ɑ:/ and /ʊ/</i>	<i>/ɛ:/ and /eɪ/</i>	<i>/ɔ:/ and /oʊ/</i>
Colour collar	bag bug	luck look	Get gate	Ball bowl
Dull doll	fan fun	tuck took	Edge age	Bought boat
Rub rob	hat hut	buck book	let late	Law low
Nut not	bat but	stud stood	Men main	Raw row
Hut hot	sack suck	cud could	Pepper paper	Caught coat

<i>/ɜ:/ and /ɔ:/</i>	<i>/ʌ/ and /ɜ:/</i>	<i>/ɜ:/ and /ɔ:/</i>
Burn barn	Cub curb	Burn born
Heard hard	Hut hurt	Bird board
Firm farm	Bud bird	Shirt short
Stir star	Shut shirt	Turn torn
Fur far	Thud third	Firm form

TABLE IV. CONSONANT SOUND MINIMAL PAIRS

<i>/p/ and /b/</i>	<i>/t/ and /d/</i>	<i>/k/ and /g/</i>	<i>/f/ and /v/</i>
Simple Symbol	Tile Dial	Frock Frog	Fairy Very
Peach Beach	Bright Bride	Duck Dug	Refuse Reviews
Staple Stable	Coat Code	Cane Gain	Surface Service
Palate Ballot	Time Dime	Class Glass	Half Hare
Rope Robe	Tore Door	Leak League	Fault Vault
Pie Buy	Write Ride	Card Guard	Rifle Rival
Pack Back	Neat Need	Coast Ghost	Life Live
Mop Mob	Tie Die	Cold Gold	Few View
<i>/θ/ and /ð/</i>	<i>/s/ and /z/</i>	<i>/tʃ/ and /dʒ/</i>	<i>/l/ and /r/</i>
Bath Bathe	Deceased Diseased	Chain Jane	Lead Red
Cloth Clothe	Racing Raising	Chocking Joking	Lock Rock
Teeth Teethe	Ice Eyes	Rich Ridge	Daily Dairy
Thin Then	Price Prize	Batch Badge	Collected Corrected
Mouth Mouth	Seal Zeal	Etching Edging	Pilot Pirate
(n) (v)	Sink Sink	Chin Gin	Alive Arrive
Breath breathe	Spice Spies	Chills Jill's	Flight Fright
	Niece Knees	March Marge	Climb Crime
<i>/ʃ/ and /ʒ/</i>	<i>/t/ and /θ/</i>	<i>/ð/ and /d/</i>	
Aleutian Illusion	Tree Three	Then Dan	
Dilution Delusion	Tin Thin	They Day	
Asher Azure	Bat Bath	There Dare	
Hatians Asians	Ten Tent	Those Doze	
Pressure pleasure			

Consonant sound can be placed on initial, medial, and final position in a word. Sets of minimal pairs show that English /p/ and /b/ contrast in initial, medial and final positions: Initial: pit/bit , Medial: rapid/rabid, and Final: cap/cab(Stromswold)

TABLE V. MINIMAL PAIRS OF CONSONANT SOUND IN INITIAL, MEDIAL, AND FINAL POSITIONS IN A WORD

Sounds	Initial	Medial	Final
/p/ -/f/	pail/fail	copy/coffee	leap/leaf
/s/ -/ʃ/	sell/shell	masses/mashes	lease/leash
/tʃ/ -/dʒ/	chin/gin	etches/edges	rich/ridge
/s/ -/z/	sip/zip	fussy/fuzzy	mace/maze
/k/ -/g/	cold/gold	mucky/muggy	tug/tuck

In sum up, minimal pair is a pair of word which differ in lexical meaning base on a difference in one of the sounds. Minimal pair can be placed on initial. middle and final position in word. Hopefully, learners are familiar with English sounds and practice its sound correctly. In other hand, by learning minimal pair is regarded useful for both the speaker and the hearer in practice speaking English.

*C. Five Factors That Most Affect Student Success*

According to Luckman, there are five factors that most affect student success in learning, as follows:

*a) Motivation*

Motivation is key. The child watching the skilled athlete is drawn to imitate. Watching a craftsman or artist, seeing the magic of drama, hearing a musical instrument or a human voice in song. Motivation can be extrinsic, resulting in spurts of success. But sustained success comes only with intrinsic motivation.

*b) Ability*

Ability is important, but it is a more complex concept than you may realize. All children have abilities, but each child is unique in how those abilities are developed. Learning styles affect the degree to which an ability is enhanced. For example, one child may learn by listening and remembering, another by questioning and interacting, and another by observing and imitating.

*c) Support*

Support is critical. Whatever ability and intrinsic motivation a child possesses will flourish in an environment of encouragement, genuine praise, and positive feedback. Overwhelming evidence shows that the support of parents, teachers, coaches, and others makes a real difference in a child's success.

*d) Clear goals are present*

Student need to clarify and identify goals. Often these are obvious, such a learning to read, mastering math facts, or learning to write. Many goals, however, require intermediate steps, such as learning to add and subtract before multiplying and dividing, or learning letters and sounds before starting to read.

*e) Practice.*

Little is achieved permanently if learning is not reinforced by practice, repetition, and attention to the details that matter; correct spelling, accurate number facts, completed homework assignments, and so forth.

From the explanation above, the researcher developed the questionnaire with the suitable question based on the topic discussed (factors that influence the students' ability in understanding minimal pair).

**III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

*A. Subjects*

The population of this study was taken from the all semester students of English education study program of

Baturaja University in academic year 2018/2019 with the total was 51. Then, the sample was taken by using sampling technique, so the writer took all the students as a sample. The writer gave the valid and reliable test to the sample and asking for questionnaire to know the students factors in understanding minimal pair.

*B. Technique for Collecting Data*

In doing this study, there some ways were applied:

*1) Test*

The students as respondents of the study were given test in pronunciation test and listening test. The test that has given consisted of oral test and listeningtest form. In oral test, the students were asked to pronounce the target words orally, while the students' performance was taped. In the listening test, the writer used speaker to read the sentences and the students were asked to listen and then circled the one of word.

*2) Questionnaire*

According to [10], questionnaire is a technique collect the data that's forming have constant of questions, give the writing way to people in group's people to get the answers, opinion or information who needed by researcher. So, Questionnaire was distributed to got information from the despondence in terms of his or her past or other thing he or she knows.

This questionnaire was made based on five factors that most affect student success in learning (Luckman). In order, the researcher found the factor that influences the students' ability in understanding minimal pair.

**IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

*A. Results of the Listening Test*

TABLE VI. THE STUDENTS' SCORE DISTRIBUTION OF LISTENING TEST

No	Percentage	Grade	Performance weight	Frequency	Qualification	Percentage
1	80-100	A	4	5	Very good	9.80%
2	70-79	B	3	20	Good	39.21%
3	56-69	C	2	18	Enough	35.29%
4	40-55	D	1	8	Poor	15.68%
5	<40	E	0	0	Fail	0
	Total			51		100%

Then, the average percentage of the students score obtained in the listening test in term of ability in understanding minimal

pair was 69.75%. It means that the students' ability in understanding minimal pair was able.

TABLE VII. THE RESULT OF STUDENTS' SCORE IN PRONUNCIATION TEST

No	Percentage	Grade	Performance weight	Frequency	Qualification	Percentage
1	80-100	A	4	3	Very good	5.88%
2	70-79	B	3	15	Good	29.41%
3	56-69	C	2	30	Enough	58.82%
4	40-55	D	1	3	Poor	5.88%
5	<40	E	0	0	Fail	0%
	Total		51			100%

**TABLE VIII. THE STUDENTS' SCORE DISTRIBUTION OF PRONUNCIATION TEST BASED ON MINIMAL PAIR ITEMS**

No	Minimal pair	Total items	Average students' score	Level
1	/p/-/b/	4	70.64	Good
2	/t/-/d/	4	68.06	Enough
3	/k/-/g/	3	70.94	Good
4	/f/-/v/	3	63.7	Enough
5	/θ/-/ð/	1	61.72	Enough
6	/s/-/z/	3	62.3	Enough
7	/tʃ/-/dʒ/	3	61	Enough
8	/l/-/r/	3	70.02	Good
9	/ʃ/-/s/	3	65.02	Enough
10	/t/-/θ/	1	58.64	Enough
11	/ð/-/d/	2	63.88	Enough
		30 items		

The average of test score based on listening and pronunciation's score was 68.26. So, it can be said the students were able or have ability in understanding minimal pair.

### B. Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, the writer interpreted that the third semester English Department students of Baturaja University were relatively able to understand about minimal pair.

The finding of the study showed the percentage of the students' ability in understanding minimal pair through listening and pronunciation test. The data analysis would be interpreted that students' ability was able. It can be said the students have ability in understanding minimal pair.

The result of questionnaire that given respondents that here were some factors that influenced and supported students' ability in understanding minimal pair. That were supporting from the teacher, students' practice, ability and motivation.

Based on the questionnaire result, the writer interpreted the factors that influenced students' ability in understanding minimal pair. There were some students stated that support from the lecturer in the class influence their ability in understanding minimal pair, that were the lecturer explained about sound system and pronounce each sound, correct their pronunciation's error and allowed the class to listen to words or text on CD, tape or film [11]. By using this media, in order supported them to be more able to understand minimal pair through listening. Some students stated that with practice used phonetic transcription in dictionaries, read words and text aloud, check mispronouncing in dictionary directly, and practice to pronounce word with different sound, such as /i/and /i:/ in word slip and sleep in vowel, it can affect their ability in understanding minimal pair. The ability in understanding IPA symbol and familiar with the term minimal pair and also motivation of students in following subject pronunciation were also the factor that influenced students' ability in understanding minimal pair.

### V. CONCLUSION

Based on the result above, the writer concluded that the third semester English students at Baturaja University had able capability in understanding minimal pair. In the total percentage of the third semester English students at Baturaja University by

listening test was 69.75. The average of the students' score in pronunciation test was 66.78. So, the average of score test based on listening and pronunciation's score was 68.26. It was concluded that the students were able or have ability in understanding minimal pair based on listening and pronunciation test.

Based on the questionnaire result, the writer concluded there were some factors that influenced and supported students' ability in understanding minimal pair. Those was the lecturer explained about sound system and pronounces each sound, correct their pronunciation's error and allowed the class to listen to words or text on CD, tape or film. By using this media, in order support them to be more able to understand minimal pair through listening. The students practice to used phonetic transcription in dictionaries, read words and text aloud, check mispronouncing in dictionary directly, and practice to pronounce word with different sound, such as /i/and /i:/ in word slip and sleep in vowel. It could affect their ability in understanding minimal pair. The ability in understanding IPA symbol and familiar with the term minimal pair and also motivation of students in following subject pronunciation were the most important factor in supporting students' ability in understanding minimal pair. So, those factors have an important role to the students successful in learning minimal pair especially initial consonant sound.

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