The Teaching of Problematic English Sounds to the Indonesian Beginners Through Contrastive Analysis on Distinctive phonological Features

1. Background

Second or foreign language teaching consists of any activity on the part of one person intended to facilitate the learning by another person of a language which is not his or her native one (H.B. Altman 1981:5). The term **facilitate** clearly implies that teaching orientation now must be transaction model for some reason that transferring knowledge from teacher to students nowadays has been regarded rather out of date as well as inflexible there by being less democratic viewed from the point of view of students or learning participants.

Teaching **English sounds** to the Indonesian students poses a lot of problems, one of which is the constant interference of the native language systems of the students on that of the target language. However, the motto "As A teacher, I am unique and powerful" is oneo f the answers that deserves to be credited.

Howard B. Altman of University of Louisville (1981) set an eighty five skills of second language teachers, one of which is becoming a master of error analysis, another is a master of pronunciation teachnique. This paper deals with these two problems which are so ubiquitous in my country, Indonesia.

Constrastive analysis in the phonological features is predicted to assist the Indonesian learners, particularly the beginners. This is the method of linguistic analysis which shows the similarities and differences between two or more language or dialects with the aim of finding principles which can be applied to practical problems in language teaching and translation, with special emphasis on transfer, interference and equivalents. (Hartmann & F.C. Stork 1973:53)

Here the writer wishes to find out the major differences between the phonological features of English and those of Indonesian in the hope that he will be able to solve the handicaps that create troubles or difficulties which the Indonesian students are faced leading him and his students to a success in teaching the English sounds.

Mastering English sounds and the Indonesian ones is crucial so long as the goal of second or foreign language teaching is to achieve the teacher's and students communicative competence.

It is for this reason paulston and Bruder (1976:55-56) comments: "Generally communicative competence is taken to be the objective of language teaching: the production of speakers competent to communicate in the target language."

Communicative competence must include not only the linguistic forms of a language but also a knowledge of **when**, **how** and to **whom** it is appropriate to use these forms (Dell Hymes in Paulston & bruder 1976:57). The term competence has been refered to by N. Chomsky as "the ability all native speakers have of being able to understand and produce sentences which they have never heard before; it refers in this sense to the code which underlies all untterances in a given language." (Chomsky in Hartmann and Stork 1973:44).

The competence here in this paper, however, is confined to the phonological features of both English and Indonesian which the writer engaged along with Professor Kenneth Miner of the Linguistic Department of Kansas University, Lawrence Kansas, USA. He took three semesters attending the Phonology class during his study here.

Phonology, which is one of the biggest elements of language, is the science of speech sounds and sound patterns. Phonological features of the source language and those of the target language should be thoroughtly mastered by teachers and students if they wish to be called "near native accent" in the language sound mastery. This article is just highlight of the distinctive features of both English and Indonesian to assist those being involved in the teaching of English and Indonesian in this country, Indonesia.

An English teacher must be competent in the subject matter he teaches and be pedagogic in transferring this content to his students. To be competent in his subject, a teacher must do his best to improve the science of the target language and that of the students native language. In other words, he should study a great deal about language. In a linguistics or English departement a teacher also should focus on the ways of teaching or methods that will enable him to easily motivate his students to become involved in teaching and learning processes. In other words, a language teacher has to spend some time in studying "process" as well as "content".

Teachers with a basic knowledge of linguistics will be able to conduct a contractive analysis to help them focus on the differences between aspects of the two languages. This will allow them to achieve their objectives without wasting much time. The knowledge of pedagogy, on the other hand, gives the teachers insight about how to facilitate the classroom techniques to make their teaching more effective and interesting to the students. It is realized that, particularly for young students, there will not be any good learning process unless the materials and teaching techniques are attractive and appropriate for them.

2. Distinctive Features

To obtain an accurate comparison between the sounds of the students native language and the target language, one should look at the sound systems another way. Sloat, Taylor, and Hoard said:

Instead of treating sound segments as indivisible or atomatic entities (as the symbols of the phonetic alphabet would suggest they are), linguists often describe sounds as complexes of properties of features. (Sloat, 1978:82).

By using these features not only can one formule phonological rules and obtain simplicity (natural classes) but he can also obtain an idea of what features or properties of the same phoneme are found in one language but not in another. This knowledge is necessary for a good teacher in regard, for instance, to the difference between the English sound /p/ and the Indonesian /p/, as mentioned among the teachers of English.

The features that are employed here are as follows:

Distinctive features and their abbreviations

consonantal	[cons]	strident	[str]	
sonorant	[son]	distributed	[dist]	
syllabic	[syl]	nasal	[nas]	
high	[hi]	lateral	[lat]	
low	[lo]	voiced	[vd]	
back	[ba]	tense	[tns]	
rounded	[rnd]	coronal	[cor]	12
interrupted	[int]	anterior	[ant]	

An explanation of the above terms follows:

a. The [+cons] sounds identify those sounds other than vowels, glides, and diphtongs.

b. In the (+son) sounds the airstream passes essentially unimpeded through either the oral or nasal cavity.

   Vowels, glides, nasals, laterals, and the /r/ sound are plus sonorant.

c. [+syllabic] sounds characterize those that have prominence in the syllables and thus apply only to vowels. The nasals /n/, /m/ and the liquids /l/ and /r/ in English may also be syllable.

d. The [+high, low, or back] feature applies not only to vowels but also to consonants and glides.

   The /k/ sound is, for instance, plus high and back.

e. The [+rounded] sounds apply mainly, to some vowels and the glide /w/.

f. The [+interrupted] sound include /p/. /k/. /ě/ and /j/, in which the air flow is interrupted.

g. The [+strident] covers the sounds of some fricatives and affricates in the production of which the airstream passes only through a narrowing in the centre of the vocal tract, e.g. /s/, /š/, /f/, and /ě/.

h. The [+distributed] sounds identify the consonants with a constriction that is relatively long from front to back. Sounds such as /θ/, /δ/, the palatal fricative /ç/, and the bilabials /p, b, o, ß/ are plus distributed.

i. The [+nasal] sounds comprise /n/, /m/, /ŋ/, and /ň/ and nasal vowels (e.g. in French).

j. The [+tense] sounds apply to consonants. The voiceless consonants are considered plus tense but not the voiced counterparts.

k. The [+voiced] sounds characterize those in which the vocal cords vibrate.

l. The [+coronal includes interdentals, alveolars, and palatals but excludes the labials, velars, uvulars, any laryngeals. To be more specific, the coronal feature identifies sounds made by, raising the apex or front of the tongue to form a partial or total obstruction.

m. The [+anterior] includes the sounds of labials, dentals, and alveolars only but excludes palatals, velars, uvulars, or pharyngeals.

A special case should be noted. On [+interrupted] there is a controversy as to whether the nasals are /+interrupted/. Some linguists agree that nasals are plus interrupted: others do not.

All sound features can be simplified according to larger class features as follows:

1. The major class features comprise the [consonantal], [sonorant] and [syllabic] features.
2. The tongue body features comprise the [high, low, and back].
3. The manner features include the features of [strident], [interrupted], [distributed], [nasal], and [lateral].
4. The features of [voiced] and [tense].
5. The place of articulation features comprise [coronal] and [anterior].
6. Other suggested features are [labial], [front], [glottalized], [HSP] or heightened subglottal pressure and delayed release. Not all of these features necessarily appear among features mentioned earlier.

In using features, one has to avoid redundancy. The nasal sounds, for instance, are not necessarily [+voiced] as no voiceless nasals are found in either English or Indonesian. The English consonant sounds with their distinctive features are shown in T

TABEL 1

Distinctive Features

English Consonant	p	b	f	v	m	t	d	θ	ð	n	s	z	é	ĵ	š	ž	k	g	ŋ	h	y	w	r	l
Syllabic	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Consonantal	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	+	+
Sonorant	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+
Continuant	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	-	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
Nasal	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Strident	-	-	+	+	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
Anterior	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coronal	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
Voiced	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
High	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	+
Low	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	-	-
Back	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	+	-	-
Round	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-
Tense	+	-	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	-	-	-	-

Source : L. Ben Crane, Edward Yeager, and Randal L. Whitman, an Introduction to Linguistics. Boston: Little Brown Co. (Crane, 1981:68)

In this table there are some redundancies. First, the nasals do not necessarily have to be marked with /voiced/. Second, it is more convenient if the sounds with redundant features are left blank as the feature system is usually binary, either plus or minus; therefore, whe nunmarked spaces are left blank, they are still understood. Third, there is also a controversy about the table in this system regarding the /h/ sound with the system proposed by Sloat, Taylor, and Hoard. Instead of being continuant, tense and low, the latter claims that the sound /h/ is the only consonantal with minus for all other features except plus tense. In other words, this sound is the consonant that has no feature except /+cons/ and /+tense/. For a clear illustration, see.

Table 2. SOME VOICELESS OBSTRUENTS

	p	ţ	t	ṭ	ķ	k	q		f	Є	e	Φ	f	0	s	ŝ	š	ç	x	x	h
int	+	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
str	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	+	+	+	-	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	-
dist	+	+	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
cor	-	+	+	+	-	-	-		-	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
Int	+	+	+	-	-	-	-		-	+	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-
hi	-	-	-	-	+	+	-		-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	-
bk	-	-	-	+	-	+	+		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	-
lat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

All the [+cons, -son, -rnd, -nas, +tns, -lo, -vd].

Features of the English vowel counterpats are shown in Table 3.

Tabel 3

English Vowels	i	l	e	ε	æ	ʌ	a	ɑ	ɔ	ʊ	u
Syllabic	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Consonantal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sonorant	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
High	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+
Low	-	-	-	-	+	-	+	+	-	-	-
Back	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+	+	+
Round	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
Tense	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+

In the vowel features, a controversy still appears. Crane, Yeager, and Whitman claim that the vowel /   / is tense; this idea is rjected by Sloat, Taylor, and Hoard. The former system on vowel features also still reveals some mistakes. They put sonorant feature on all vowels, which is, of course, redundant as they have inserted the syllabic feature. In English all vowels are sonorant, therefore, Sloat system is more aceptable.

Tabel 4 illustrates the distinctive features of some common vowels

TABEL 4

	i	l	e	ɛ	æ	u	ʊ	o	ɔ
High	+	+				+	+		
Low					+				+
Back						+	+	+	+
Rounded						+	+	+	+
Tense	+					+			

	a	e	u	ü	ö	œ	щ	ɤ	ʌ	*a*
High										
Low	+									+
Back	+	+					+	+	+	+
Rounded			+	+	+	+				+
Tense	+		+		+			+	+	

Source : Clarence Sloat, Sharon Henderson Taylor, and James E. Hoard, *Introduction to Phonology*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; Prentice Hall, 1978, p.88.

Now compare the distinctive features of English sounds with those of Indonesian! The features for consonants and vowels are put together in table 5 to show that the Indonesian ones are smaller in number than those in English.

There is another way of reading features that is much simpler than reading tables. It is called the tree diagram. English consonants and glide features, for instance, can be represented as show in Figure 1.
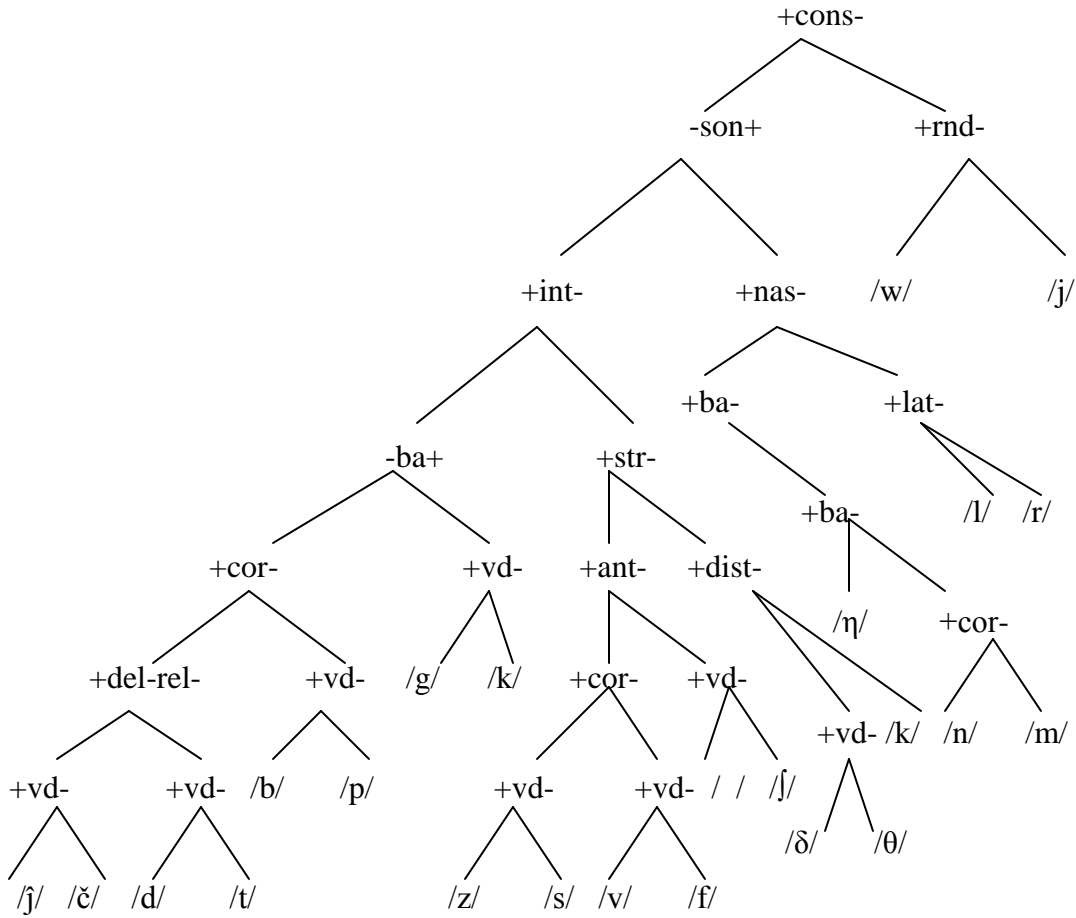

FIGURE I

ENGLISHCONSONANT AND GLIDE TREE FEATURES

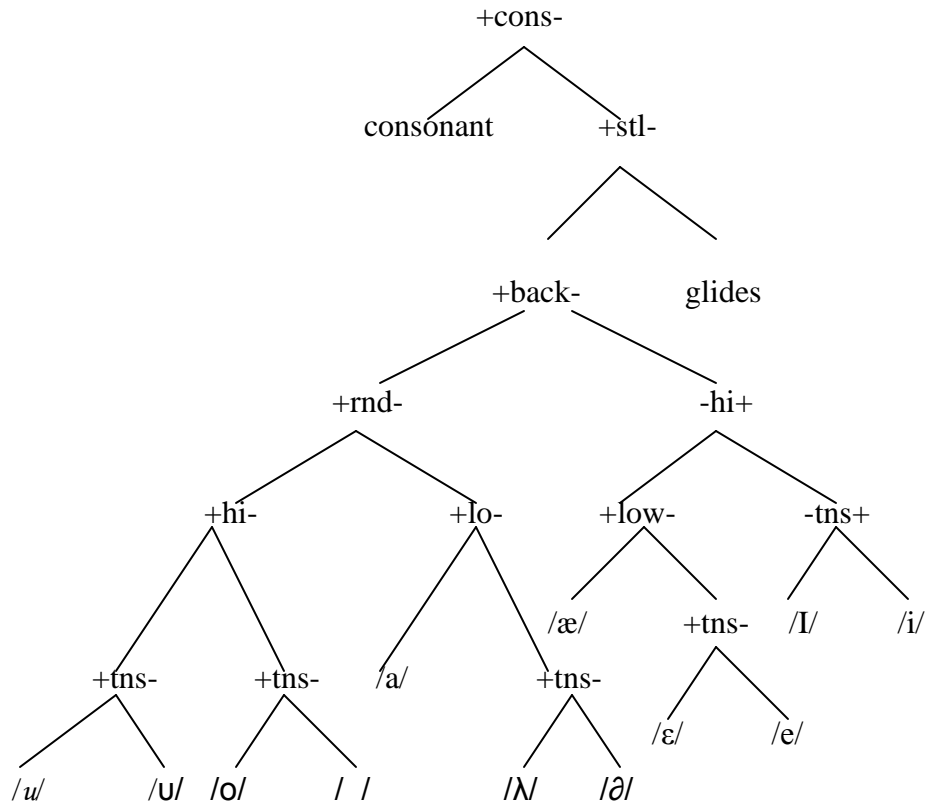The tree for the English vowel features is shown in Figure 2.

```
                              +cons-
                             /      \
                    consonant        +stl-
                                    /     \
                          +back-           glides
                         /      \
                  +rnd-            -hi+
                 /     \          /     \
            +hi-        +lo-  +low-       -tns+
           /    \      /     /    \      /     \
      +tns-   +tns-  /a/  /æ/  +tns-  /I/    /i/
     /  \    /   \        +tns-  /  \
   /u/  /ʊ/ /o/  / /     /  \   /ɛ/  /e/
                        /ʌ/  /ə/
```

FIGURE 2

TREE DIAGRAM OF ENGLISH VOWEL FEATURES

TABEL 5

FEATURES OF INDONESIAN CONSONANTS AND VOWELS

	b	p	d	t	v	f	n	ň	ŋ	g	k	l	r	s	z	h	s	x	č	ĵ	m	w	y	l	e	ë	a	o	U
cons	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+									
son							+	+	+			+	+								+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
syl																								+	+	+	+	+	+
high							+	+	+	+							+	+	+	+									+
low																+											+		
rnd																						+						+	+
int	+	+	+	+					+	+							+	+											
str																													
dist	+	+		+				+												+									
nas							+	+	+												+								
lat												+																	
vd	+		+		+					+			+		+					+	+	+							
tns																								+	+		+	+	+
cor			+	+			+	+				+	+	+	+		+		+	+									
ant	+	+	+	+	+	+						+		+	+						+								
labial	(+)	+			+	+															+								
del-rel																			+	+									
back									+	+	+							+				+					+	+	+

+cons-

-son+   +syl-

+int-   -nas+   -back+   +back-

+ant-   +ant- +lat- +back-   -hi+   -ind+ /w/ /y/

+dis-   -del-rel+   /I/ /r/ /ŋ/   +cor- /e/ /i/ -lo+   -hi+

+vd- /d/ +vcc- +vd-   +hi-   /m/   /ë/ /a/ /o/ /u/

/b/ +lab- /g/ /k/ /ĵ/ /ĕ/   /ñ/ /n/

+bar-   +back-

+vd-   +vd-   /x/   +hi-

/z/   /s/ /v/   /f/   /s/   /h/
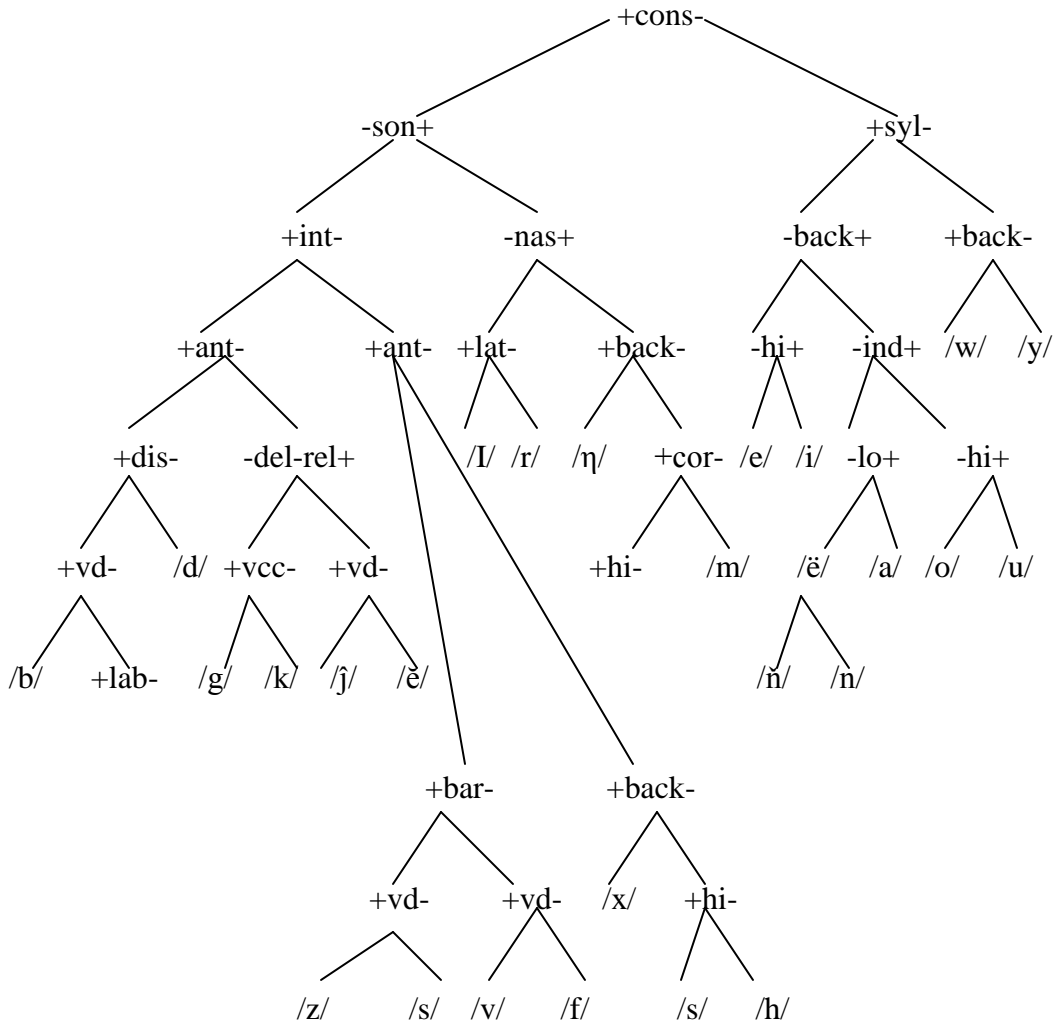
FIGURE 3

INDONESIAN TREE FEATURES

Reading the features of each phoneme is simple. Start from the bottom (the sound symbol) and go up to the top or the tree.

For instance, take the /u/: this sound is plus: tense, high, round, back, and syllabic. Putting this another way /u/ has the features of

+ syl

+ ba

+ rnd

+ hi

+ tns

and thus is consistent with features of this sound in the table.

The same is true for reading the features of a consonant. Take, for iinstance, the consonant /ĵ/, it has the following features:

+ cons

+ son

+ int

+ ba

+ cor

+ del-rel

+ vd

and thus also consistent with its features on the table.

Compare the features of the English consonants and vowels with those of Indonesian counterparts on the basis of the tree diagram. (See Figure 4).

3. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Teaching problematic English sound segements to Indonesian beginners is difficult because, in addition to learning more languages simultaneously, English is regarded as a foreign language (L3) rather than as a second language (L2) for them; therefore, it is harder to teach English to Indonesian beginners than to Spanish or Arabic beginners.

Another major problem of teaching English sounds is that there are many regional English accents and dialects spoken throughout the United States and Britain, not to mention Australia and New Zealand or other English-speaking countries. The English being taught so far to Indonesian beginners, however, is, in general, British English. The writer's next assignment is to introduce American English along with other major dialects of English.

The powerful aspect of phonological study that enables the language teachers to have an accurate description of the language sound systems is the study of distinctive features. This study needs to be developed and introduced to prospective English teachers as a new study of language.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for English teachers as well as those who are concerned with teaching English in Indonesia:

1. An English teacher should always try to improve his knowledge of both his subject matter and teaching methodology so as to become a good model as well as an expert in his teaching area.

2. An English teacher together with linguists should carry out an analysis in terms of phonology, especially on the basis of features in order that they can easily identify which sounds are easy for students and which ones are difficult and need additional attention.

3. An English teacher teaching sounds should give a good model to his students in a very simple way. When he is teaching the aspirated /p/. for example, the teacher can demonstrate the proper quality of that sound by holding a piece of paper at his mouth and than pronounce some words containing the /p/. He does not have to get them to learn English with familiar sounds in terms of features. It is not effective to introduce to the students that the English sound /p/ is "plus heightened subglottal pressure."

4. An English teacher should read books on various techniques of language teaching, but it is also the government's responsibility always to introduce books currently, used in the international language forum so hat the teachers can benefit from them.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alatis, James E., Howard B. Altman, and Penelope M. Alatis, *The Second Language Classroom*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1981.

Brown, H. Douglas, *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Englewod Cliffs, New Jersey, 1980

Crane, L. Ben, Edward Yeager, and Randal Whitman, *An Introduction to Linguistics. Little*, Brown and Company, Boston, 1981

Keraf, Gorys, *Tatabahasa Indonesia*. Nusa Indah, Jakarta, 1980.

Kwee, B. John, *Indonesia.* David McKay Company, New York, 1965.

Langacker, Ronald W., Language and its Structure, Some Fundamental Concepts. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., New York, 1973.

MacDonald, R.Ross, *Indonesian Reference Grammar*. Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.D., 1976.

Murcia, Marianne Celce and Lois McIntosh, Eds., *Teaching English as a second Language*. Newbury House Publisher, Rawley, Massachusetts, 1979.

Paulston, Christina Bratt and Man, Newton Bruder, *Teaching English as a Second Language*: Technique and Procedures, Little, Brown and Company, Boston, 1976.

Rivers, Wilga M. *Teaching Foreign Language Skills*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1981.

Sloat, Clarence, Sharon Henderson Taylor, and James E. Hoard, *Introduction to Phonology*. Prentice-Hall, Inc., Cliffs, New Jersey, 1978.

Sutawijaya, *Alam, Morfologi Kata Bahasa Sunda*, Proyek Penelitian Bahasa dan Sastra Indonesia dari Darcab Jawa Barat, Departemen P & K, Jakarta, Indonesia, 1981.

Teeuw, AA, *Critical Survey of Studies on Malay and Bahasa Indonesia*, S. Gravenhage-Martinus Niffloff, Nethelands, 1961.

Erazmus, Edward, A Model of Lesson *Plan for Teaching English Basic, Sounds, Linguistics 717*, University of Kansas, Spring, 1983.

International Phonetic Association. University College, London, 1981.
Miner, Kenneth, *Linguistics*. 712, University of Kansas, Spring, 1983.

Miner, Kenneth, *Linguistics.* 706, University of Kansas, Fall, 1982.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Odo Fadloeli was born in Bandung Jawa Barat on august 4, 1954. He obtained her SMA Lab Bandung, BA and S-1 degree at the Institute of Teachers Training and Education (IKIP) Bandung 1977 and 1979. he examed her S-2 degree for the English as a Second Language (ESL) at Kansas University USA. He has finished S-3 degree in Curriculum Development of the Graduate School at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung in 2004.

He started teaching in 1977 and he has been a lecturer at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Bandung since. He was Secretary in English Department at the Institute of Teachers Training and Education (IKIP) Bandung in 1990-1992. Now, he is a Chief Lector with IV/c rank.

She is active in joining workshops on Language Teaching, Language and Literature held by TEFLIN, TESOL, and PELBA.

THE TEACHING OF PROBLEMATIC ENGLISH SOUNDS TO THE INDONESIAN BEGINNERS THROUGH A CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS ON DISTINCTIVE PHONOLOGICAL FEATURES

By:
Odo Fadloeli
UPI-Bandung
STBA Yapari-ABA Bandung

S I N G A P O R E
2008