

4.2. The Importance and Some Problems of English Language Learning

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The Importance and Some Problems of English Language Learning

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ABSTACT

1 As one of the International languages, English is becoming more and more important in this globalization era. In Indonesia, this language is taught and learnt from Elementary school up to University level. This means that the learners (students) have studied it for more than 10 (ten) years but in fact most of them are not capable of producing the two language skills (speaking and writing) very well. This might happen to the two other skills, listening and reading. Based on the writer's experience during his teaching, especially to non-English department students, he found that more than 90% of them, their English competence were very poor. This might be caused by some aspects, such as the inconsistency between the spelling and its pronunciation and many other patterns of grammatical structures that were much different from those of Indonesian language and even more complex and sophisticated as well. As a teacher, s/he has to know how to make those two problems simpler and easier to understand. Besides giving them many chances to practice the language being learnt more and more. Finally, it is expected that this method could make the students capable of catching the idea from the teacher easier to understand and make use of it very well in their real practice.

Introduction

There might be more than one thousand languages in the world. They are classified into three types, local languages, national, and international ones. Our country, Indonesia itself has hundreds of local languages, such as Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Balinese, and many others. Meanwhile, our national language is Indonesian. Those belong to International languages are such as English, French, German, Arabic, Dutch, Spanish, Chinese, and Japan. Among them, it seems that English is the most prominent one, due to the fact that this language is learnt and used by almost all of the countries or nations in the world. This might be caused that before the World War II, the English people used to colonize and could dominate their authority in many parts of the countries in the world. This of course could influence much especially to the colonized countries or nations to learn and use that language effectively and intensively. The very familiar name for the colonized countries is called 'the British Commonwealth'. Some countries that had ever been colonized are such as Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei

Darussalam, Hong Kong, Australia, and many others. One important thing to know is that those belong to the British Commonwealth are usually becoming more modern and richer countries. Even, it was reported that Hong Kong would rather belong to the British Commonwealth than join back with China Government.

Discussion

The Importance of English to Learn

As it is stated in introduction above that English is becoming one of the most important language in this globalization era. Therefore, as an International language, English is very important to learn. It is not only used among nations of different countries in the world, but also is used as official communications as well. This fact makes many professionals feel that they are demanded to learn and master English well both spoken and written if they do not want to be left behind.

The other importance of English to learn is that up to now, the modern sciences and technology are still dominated by the Western countries, such as Europe and America. As we know that most of the people from those two giant countries use English as a means of communication both spoken and written. Therefore, if we want to get to know many things about modern sciences and technology, as well as other information system of course we must be able to understand well what and how about their products of technology are.

The next is related to subject matters of science and technology. This is very important especially for University students, teachers, and professionals. Almost all of their activities that include studying, teaching, or conducting the research, they need so many books and other references to support their researches and other scientific relations. In this case, English mastery is absolutely required because most of the scientific books and technology, journals, and many other technological information are still written in English.

Then, especially the students who plan to continue studying or working in overseas countries, English is also required very badly, both spoken and written. One of the most important requirements for them is measured by some kind of English competence test, such as TOEFL, IELTS, and TOEC. Which test to take is depended on what university and country they want to go and study. Before IELTS was introduced, the only one test for the students was TOEFL. TOEFL that stands for Test Of English as a Foreign Language was previously used for all of the countries, such as America, Europe, and Australia. This test measures the learner's English competence of the written form that only includes Listening and Reading skills. The materials tested are:

listening, structure, vocabulary, and reading. So, if one university wants to know the student's English competence or performance in speaking, he or she has to join the other test called TOEC, that stands for Test Of English as a Communication purposes. However, those whose TOEFL scores are quite high do not guarantee that their two other skills, speaking and writing must be good also. This is true because Listening and Reading are such an English competence that are only some kinds of *Receptive Skills*. In these two language skills, the learners only receive the materials and get theoretical knowledge from the teacher without implementing or producing any utterances and other real expressions, either spoken or written. Meanwhile, Speaking and Writing are called *Productive Skills* because in these two skills there is some kind of product or real performance that the learners are able to produce and perform: they are Speaking and Writing skills.

Due to the fact that the high score of TOEFL can not absolutely measure the test taker's competence in Speaking and Writing skill, during the last decade some of the European countries and Australia too, they tend not use TOEFL anymore. They cooperate together to substitute TOEFL into their own model of test called IELTS, which is right now becoming more popular than TOEFL. This might be caused TOEFL does not test all language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing) but only two of them. Those two skills are Listening and reading. Meanwhile, IELTS that stands for International English Language Testing System covers all of the four (4) skills: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. According to the information from the IELTS website, the two institutions that have acknowledged and recommended IELTS are Academic Institutions and Professional Memberships. The Academic Institutions that have already used IELTS as one of the requirements to follow their programs are the countries such as England, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and The United States of America, a country that had previously acknowledged TOEFL, and become the pioneer of it as their testing system. However, since several years ago TOEFL foundation has also presented the newest model of testing system, the IELTS like, called '*The New TOEFL Generation*'.

Moreover, recently within the last decade, many big companies (especially foreign companies) and offices in Indonesia offer higher salaries than others to whoever will apply for their jobs. One of the requirements to fulfill the positions offered is seen from their English competence and performance. More often those companies do not only require those whose TOEFL or IELTS score is quite high but also their English competence and performance, both spoken and written.

Finally, realizing that English is becoming more and more important in this globalization era, as a developing country, Indonesia and many other parts of the world too, English is also considered as one of the most important foreign languages to learn. With this prominent position of English language, then it seems natural that Indonesian

nation is also demanded for the English mastery. To achieve this target, Indonesian government has implemented that English language has formally been introduced and taught as one of the compulsory subjects in schools of all levels started from Elementary to University level. Even, in big cities, English has already been introduced since Kindergarten school. However, we have to acknowledge that it seems the result of English teaching and learning in Indonesia has not been satisfying yet as what we expect. This is true because many students of University graduates can neither speak nor write English well although they have learnt English for more than 10 years. This actually seems to be ironical. Then, who has to be blamed, the teachers, the learners themselves, teaching methods, or the system? This is our homework to solve!

How to Start Your English Language Learning

In general, all languages in the world exist due to the fact that human being needs to interact one another. They can neither interact nor communicate well without mastering good language skill. Therefore, a language which functions as a means of communication, as any other science theoretically must be able to be learnt by anybody of the learners, no matter what nation and ethnic groups they come from.

Of course everything that we want to achieve needs some certain processes. English Language Learning is one of the examples. In this case, all linguists agree that there are some processes or steps required in foreign language learning which are often called 'The four Language Skills'. Those four (4) language skills are Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing' (Fries, Charles: 1973). Furthermore, these four skills are classified into Receptive Skills (Listening & Reading), and Productive Skills (Speaking & Writing).

Listening

The first step of any language learning starts from Listening. As we know that human being wherever they live with no particular what nation they are from, will never be able to communicate verbally one another without listening capability or skill. That's why, those who have a trouble with their ears especially the permanent deaf people since they were born (babies) or very small kids, they will not be able to communicate properly. Even many of them can neither communicate nor speak at all, and they are finally called :mute. In other words, without listening skill the hearer or listener as a learner will not be able to catch the idea or message from any other speaker or person around him. The incapability of catching the idea from other people, or with no Listening skill, will not enable the learners to produce and perform any utterances verbally or orally at all. If this happens to them, then they will become permanent mute.

Speaking

Based on the explanation above, theoretically everybody whose listening skill or capability of listening is quite good, he or she will automatically be able to speak or communicate with other people properly. Therefore, it is a wrong opinion if a group of people would rather say that learning some certain language is more difficult than other languages, or even it is considered to be the most difficult language to learn. However, one thing that we have to acknowledge is that every language has its own peculiarity and intricacy which is of course different between one language and another.

In this learning stage, the learners are expected that they have already been capable of producing some words or utterances that they have ever heard or listened in Listening process from other people, radio, television, and other medias whether it is consciously or unconsciously. Having heard or listened the same words or utterances once, twice, three times or more, the learners are then trying to repeat and repeat them frequently. While listening, there is some kind of implied process, such as trying to catch the idea or message delivered by the speaker. To achieve this target, the learners (especially the beginners) need to repeat and repeat, identify, and or differentiate every utterance (more frequently if necessary) produced by the speaker. The utterances can be in the forms of loose words, phrases, sentences, or even text. While they are listening, at the same time they are trying to catch the idea or message from the speaker either it is stated explicitly or implicitly. Some other sources that might be useful and helpful in language learning are from radio, t v, and some other audio visual appliances. After repeating or trying to catch both the explicit and implicit messages or ideas which are often heard from the speaker and other sources either consciously or unconsciously, the learners will comprehend and be able to identify and classify them very well. Finally, later on they are capable of producing their own words and utterances orally in accordance with what they have ever heard, listened, and experienced before.

Reading

In this step, the learners should have already been familiar with some certain words, specific terms, statements, or even texts that they have ever learnt from hearing or listening and speaking practices directly or indirectly from and with any other speakers and any other sources, such as radio, t v, video, and some other audio visual appliances orally. Moreover, in achieving the Reading skill, the learners have to be familiar with the words, phrases, statements, and texts in the written form. Besides, pronouncing the words is also much more important than just comprehending them. Therefore, the learners are demanded to practice pronouncing each of the new words or phrases more frequently in accordance with the English language rules. The words or phrases that they pronounce have to be adjusted with the pronunciation that they just used to hear or listen when the learners learnt to listen and speak in the previous step. This pronunciation practice by adjusting with its spelling is very important in English language learning, due to the fact that there are some language rules that

sometimes making the learners difficult and confused. The difficulties are such as: a) The first is two words or phrases that are pronounced similarly, or even exactly the same but have different meaning. This often makes many learners, especially the beginners tend to pronounce one word for another, not able to distinguish one between, and some other learning problems. Of course the wrong pronunciation may cause a different interpretation or meaning. b) The two different words are pronounced exactly the same but they have different meaning. c) The other difficulty of pronouncing the words in English properly and correctly is that there is neither consistency nor specific rules in pronouncing the same letter of words. d) Different grammatical rules.

Here are some examples of words or pair-words which are frequently not pronounced properly and sometimes make the learners find it difficult to distinguish:

The Two Words, phrases, or Statements Pronounced Similarly

- 'Walk for work'; This means that the learners tend to pronounce [wɔk] instead of [wɒk] for the word 'work'.
- 'Sick for six'; This means that the learners tend to pronounce [sɪk] instead of [sɪks] for the word 'six'.
- 'back' for 'bag'; 'impotent' for 'important'; 'brick' for 'break'; 'sing for sink'; 'thing for think'; etc.
- 'I scream' and 'ice cream';
- 'she sells' and 'sea shells'; etc.

The Two Different Words Pronounced Exactly the Same

- Cell and sell;
- flower and flour;
- sea and see;
- red and read (past form / V2).
- Celery and salary;
- Here and hear; there and their
- Whole and hole; buy and by
- Sun and son;
- Meat and meet;
- Send and sand;
- And many others.

Those pair of words have the same pronunciation, although their meanings are totally different. However, the learners tend to pronounce them differently because they think that different words with different meaning should have different pronunciation.

No Consistency in Pronouncing the Words of the Same Letter

The same letter pronounced differently according to its position

- a) Letter [c] in the words 'cook, camera, campus, and cake' is pronounced [k]. But it is pronounced [s] in the words such as 'cell, ceiling, celebration, and ceremony' although the position of [c] is at the beginning of word. Meanwhile the words such as 'economic, academic, logical, and practical, the letter [c] is also pronounced [k] even though its position is in the middle or at the end. But it will become [s] in the words such as 'city, cell, peace, choice, and practice'. Then letter [c] is pronounced [ky] in the words like: 'curious, security, cute, and cucumber'. Furthermore, in the words such as: 'scenery, scissors, scenario, and scientist', the letter [c] is not pronounced at all. But in the words such as: 'scale, scandal, scarf, and scarcity', the letter [c] is still pronounced [k] clearly like in the words 'cook, academic, and economy' although the position of [c] is after letter [s] like in the words 'scenery, scissors, and scientist'.
- b) Letter [ch] in the words like 'choose, chicken, beach, coach, and merchandise', is pronounced [tʃ]. But in the words such as 'chef, cheroot, chiffon, and machine', it is pronounced into [ʃ]. Meanwhile, it will be pronounced [kʰ] in the words such as 'mechanics, chemistry, and character'.
- c) Letter [r] in the words: 'road, rings, bright, breakfast, creation, and character' is pronounced very clearly. But it will be pronounced differently from that of in the words such as in: 'very, carry, marry, and sorry'. In these words, letter [r] is pronounced indistinctly. Meanwhile, the words such as: 'door, clear, color, and floor', letter [r] is almost unvoiced at all.
- d) Letter [t] in the words 'take, try, telephone, tall, and ten' is pronounced [t] clearly, but it will become [tʃ] in the words such as 'picture, natural, culture, capture, and maturity'. Then [t] is pronounced [sɪ] in the words such as 'radiation, patient, national, potential, and solution'. Meanwhile, the words like 'catalogue, material, captain, wanted, and continue', the sound [t] is still in existence although the position of letter [t] is in the middle of word like 'potential and radiation'.
- e) The same word is pronounced differently. For example, the 'read' in the first verb (present) is pronounced [riːd], but in the second verb (past form) and third one (past participle) it is pronounced [red].
- f) And many others.

The same letter with the same position but pronounced differently

- a) Letter [h] in the words 'house, help, holiday, and hotel' is pronounced [h] clearly; In the words 'hour, honest, and honor' it will be pronounced [a]; While

in the words 'humidity, human being, humiliate, and humorous', it will change [hy].

- b) Letter [u] in the words 'ugly, unknown, ultimate, utterance, and umbrella', is pronounced [ʌ]; But in the words such as 'university, utility, uniform, UK, and useful', it is pronounced [y]; While in the words 'upon, and urgent', it is pronounced [ə];
- c) And many others.

Different Grammatical Rules

- a) Tense with Different Forms of Verb

As we know that as a basic of grammatical structure, in English there are 16 (sixteen) tenses must be mastered by the learners. This grammatical structure is distinguished by the different use or forms of verbs which are much influenced by the time the doer does the activity. Therefore, different tense requires the different pattern with different grammatical structure. These differences of tenses can frequently make the learners (especially beginners) difficult to distinguish which is the most appropriate tense to use. Here are the examples of those sixteen tenses:

- (1) Simple Present Tense: I *write* some letters every week.
- (2) Present Progressive Tense: I *am writing* some letters now.
- (3) Present Perfect Tense: I *have written* some letters already.
- (4) Present Perfect Progressive Tense: I *have been writing* some letters all morning.
- (5) Simple Past Tense: I *wrote* some letters yesterday.
- (6) Past Progressive Tense: I *was writing* some letters when you called me.
- (7) Past Perfect Tense: I *had written* some letters before you came to see me.
- (8) Past Perfect Progressive Tense: I *had been writing* some letters for an hour when
You came to my house.
- (9) Simple Future: I *will write* some letters tomorrow morning.
- (10) Future Progressive: I *will be writing* some letters by this time tomorrow.
- (11) Future Perfect Tense: I *will have written* some letters when you come to
my house tomorrow morning.
- (12) Future Perfect Progressive: I *will have been writing* some letters (*)
- (13) Past Future: I *would write* some letters if you did not come so early.
- (14) Past Future Progressive: I *would be writing* some letters (*)
- (15) Past Future Perfect Tense: I *would have written* some letters if you had
not come so early.
- (16) Past Future Perfect Progressive Tense: I *would have been writing* some

Letters (*)

Note: (*) Those 3 (three) tenses are rarely used or even illogical.

To avoid the complexity of those tenses for example, the teacher should simplify or classify those 16 (sixteen) tenses into 3 (three) groups: 1) Present, that covers simple present tense; present continuous tens; present perfect and present perfect continuous tense 2) Past, that consists of simple past tense, past continuous, past perfect, and past perfect continuous tense. and 3) Future, that includes simple future, future continuous, future perfect, future perfect continuous, past future, past future continuous, past future perfect, and past future perfect continuous tense. Moreover, among those 16 (sixteen) tenses, the writer thinks that there are 3 (three) tenses which are rarely used or even not logical especially in Indonesian structure and context. Those 3 (three) tenses are past future continuous, future perfect continuous, and past future perfect continuous tense. Besides, the teacher can also explain to his students that there are only several (four) tenses that that must be mastered very well: Simple Present Tense, Present Continuous, Simple Past Tense and Simple Future Tense. These are the four tenses are frequently used. Finally, the teacher has to make the students get more and more practice to make use of what they are learning and doing.

b) Different forms of Verbs.

In English, Verb can be classified into 2 (two) kinds, regular and irregular verbs. Regular verb is a verb which is usually formed by adding 'ed' for the second (past form) and third verb (past participle). Meanwhile, irregular verb is a verb which has a specific form that has already been established as a linguistic rules. Therefore there is no special rule like in regular verb. Here are some examples of those two kinds:

Regular Verbs:

VERB I	VERB II / III
Walk – stay – want	Walked – stayed – wanted
Live – love – wave	Lived- loved-waved
Study – cry – carry	Studied-cried-carried
Stop – drop – slip; etc.	Stopped – dropped – slipped

Irregular Verbs:

VERB I	VERB II	VERB III
Cut – let – read	Cut – let – read	Cut – let – read
Run – come – become	Ran – came – became	Run – come – become
Buy – think – teach	Bought– thought - taught	Bought– thought - taught
Do – go – speak; etc.	Did – went – spoke	Done – gone – spoken

Another difficulty of grammatical structure is that the negative sentence which is often translated into 'tidak' and interrogative form 'apakah' in Indonesian has many variations or forms in English when it is used in different tense.

E.g: *Saya tidak belajar bahasa Inggris sekarang/ setiap hari/ kemarin/ ketika kamu datang ngkerumah* (Indonesian). In this sentence the word 'tidak' does not change at all. But in English the word 'tidak' in that context becomes : [I am not studying; I do not study; I did not study; I was not studying], it depends on the tense (the time the doer does the activity). This also happens in Interrogative sentence. Ex: *Apakah and belajar bahasa Inggris sekarang/ setiap hari/ kemarin/ ketika sayadatang kerumahmu?* (Indonesian). In English it becomes : [Are you – Do you – Did you – Were you]?

Different position of modifier (modification) In Indonesian the position of modifier comes after the noun which is modified. Meanwhile in English It is the reverse. E.g: Murid cerdas (Ind) Smart student (Eng)
Pekerjaan rumah (Ind) House work (Eng); etc.

c) Different Plural Forms.

In Indonesian language, to tell the plural form, the object is stated twice except there is some quantifier form, like: *banyak, beberapa, dua, sembilan*, etc. E.g : *buku-buku, rumah-rumah, banyakbuku, beberaparumah, lima anak*, etc. But in English there is a special rule which is different from that of Indonesian. In English plural form is classified into two kinds, regular and irregular plural forms. In regular, the plural form is mostly added by morpheme 's' while the irregular form has a specific rule which has already been established in specific linguistic rules. Here are some examples of those two kinds:

Regular Plural Form

Singular	Plural
Cat – book – table – suitcase	Cats – books – tables – suitcases
Watch – dish – bus – box	Watches – dishes – buses – boxes
Key – radio – boy – monkey	Keys – radios – boys – monkeys
Potato – mango – tomato	Potatoes – mangoes – tomatoes
Baby – lady – butterfly	Babies – ladies – butterflies
Knife – leaf – thief – wife; etc.	Knives – leaves – thieves – wives

Irregular Plural Form

Singular	Plural
Man – woman - spaceman	Men – women – spacemen
Foot – tooth – mouse	Feet – teeth – mice
Child – ox – person	Children – oxen – people
Sheep – fish – deer; etc	Sheep – fish – deer

d) And many other linguistic difficulties.

Writing

This step of writing is considered to be the highest level of the four skills in foreign language learning. In this last step, the writer or the learner is not only demanded his broadmastery of vocabulary and grammatical structure, but is also a kind of certain skill in writing. As we know that writing activity is not such an easy work to do. Not all people have such this kind of skill and capability of writing. Besides mastering enough vocabulary and good grammatical structure, the writer is also demanded to have a certain skill or capability of writing. Some linguists said that writing is the most difficult skill among the three others, listening, speaking, and reading, because writing activity includes some other language aspects. *'Writing is a complex subject that it is sometimes difficult to teach and learn, as it requires the mastery not only of grammatical and rhetorical devices, but also of conceptual and judgmental elements'* (Heaton J.B, 1989: 135) and supported by Gebhard (1996: 221).

Therefore, to achieve the mastery of writing skill, the learners should be skillful in implementing the language structure and vocabulary in the form of good composition. Moreover, the writing skill includes such as: how to express his ideas by exposing a series of words or vocabularies that he has mastered to be arranged together with the appropriate structures to form sentences which are then interconnected and adjusted one another, and finally they are formed in one text as a whole.

One composition is considered to be as a good work of writing when the readers feel that the text they are reading is not boring, and easy to understand. Furthermore, by reading the text, they can really enjoy it.

Conclusion

English is one of the most important international languages in this globalization era. Therefore, it is widely accepted and officially acknowledged not only in formal educational institutions, but also in some other fields of international relations, such as diplomacy, trades, industries, sciences and technology. As a developing country, it is natural that Indonesian nation is also demanded for the English mastery.

There are four (4) main skills in foreign language learning that the learners have to master: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing. These four skills are related one another. Therefore, to make the students capable of speaking and writing English well (productive skills), the key is that the teacher must be a very smart person. Besides, the learners themselves must be well motivated and encouraged to

learn and practice those four skills regularly at once if they want to be successful in achieving their language learning target. Otherwise, they can neither produce nor perform the language being learnt properly.

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