

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1. 1 Background of the Study

The influence of native language (L1) to second language (L2) has been demonstrated variously by linguistic researchers in their studies. According to Ueyama (2000, p. 1) when adult speakers learn to speak a foreign or second language, their pronunciation will sound as foreign accent. Therefore, many studies show that native speakers tend to downgrade non-native speakers simply because of their foreign accent (Lee, 2004, p. 1). Lee argues that the phenomenon of negative view of the foreign accent has also been reflected in English Language Teaching (ELT) practices that a native-like accent is emphasized to be the most important and desirable goal of pronunciation teaching and it has been common practice for native speakers to act as the judge of the intelligibility of non-native speakers. However, Lee believes that nowadays the focus of intelligibility has transformed in which the intelligibility also exists between non-native speakers instead of between non-native speakers and native speakers. This, according to some linguists (Brown, 1989; Jenkins, 2000) is because today English is used for international communication and it is spoken by more non-native speakers than the native themselves.

The term intelligibility is defined by the linguists as follows; 'Intelligibility is being understood by a listener at a given time in a given situation' (Voegelin and Harris, 1951, in Lee, 2004, p. 7). Several studies related

to speech intelligibility of non-native speakers have conducted by language researchers; however, there has been very little empirical research on the intelligibility between non-native speakers of English. In fact, Jenkins (2000) claims that the research on intelligibility of L2 accents has been approached mainly or entirely from the perspective of native speakers. Therefore, there are still many issues which are also important related to speech intelligibility such as how various L1 backgrounds influence the intelligibility to listeners of the same or different L1 backgrounds.

Regarding the phenomena above, Nelson (1982, p. 59) conducted a study about speech intelligibility and found that the extent to which they share characteristics of cultural background, as well as the extent to which their languages share phonological and grammatical features, will determine the degree to which they find one another “intelligible”. This result is supported by other studies on the intelligibility of non-native speakers. For instance, Smith and Rafiqzad (1979, in Lee, 2004, p. 2) argue in their study between foreign accented talkers from various L1 backgrounds that intelligibility was higher between non-native speakers with shared L1 than different L1s.

Lee conducted a study which investigates how native language background influence the speech intelligibility of non-native Korean and Saudi Arabian accented speakers, and native speakers to various listeners with the same or different L1. He gave a word recognition test using keywords embedded in carrier sentences with the recordings of five talkers (2 Korean, 2 Saudi Arabian, 1 Native English) to four groups of listeners with different native language each

group; Korean, Saudi Arabian, Native English and mixed native language. The result showed that the degree of intelligibility was greater where speaker and listener shared the same L1 than where they did not. The high-proficiency non-native talkers were more intelligible than the low-proficiency non-native talker to all listeners and these high-proficiency non-native talkers' intelligibility was even greater than that of the native speakers when the native language are matched between talker and listener.

The case of Lee's study interests the writer to carry out a similar study. The writer notices that there is significant difference in vowel system between English and Indonesian. According to Alwi et al. (1998/2003, p. 56) there are ten different vowels in Indonesian vowel system, comprising six monophthongs: [a], [i], [u], [e], [ə], and [o]; and four diphthongs [ai], [au], [oi], and [ei]. On the other hand, O'Grady and Dobrovolsky (1996, p. 42) state that English has twenty-one different vowels including twelve monophthongs: [i:], [u:], [ɑ:], [ɜ:], [ɔ:], [ɪ], [e], [æ], [ɒ], [ʊ], [ʌ], and [ə]; and nine diphthongs [eɪ], [aɪ], [ɔɪ], [əʊ], [aʊ], [ɪə], [eə], [ʊə], and [ɔə]. Thus, the writer would like to know whether the difference of vowel system in Indonesian and English influence the intelligibility of English vowel sounds produced by native speaker of English and Indonesian as the non-native speaker.

Indonesian language tends to be the second language use in the most of the Indonesian region and it is due to the local languages that the people prefer to use rather than the Indonesian language itself. However, nowadays through the

development of information technology and the big influence of modernization toward Indonesian people especially among teenagers, Indonesian language has become the first language for some Indonesians.

The study is carried out by analyzing the result of words which listened by the students of D3 in English language of Airlangga University who speak Indonesian as their L1. The writer chooses them because D3 students focus more on English language skills in their study program; therefore, the writer considers that they should have good ability to comprehend English vowel sounds that are associated to the study. In addition, the writer also considers that D3 students represent teenagers in Indonesia that learn English as their second language.

1.2 Statement of the Problems

In relation of the findings of Lee's study that the degree of intelligibility was greater in the case where speaker and listener shared the same L1 than where they share different L1, the writer states the problems as follows:

- 1. Is there any significant difference of intelligibility of the students of D3 in English language of Airlangga University toward native speaker and non-native speaker of English?**
- 2. What English vowel sounds produced by native speaker and non-native speaker of English are less intelligible to the students of D3 in English language of Airlangga University?**

From the first question above, the writer states the hypotheses of this study as follows:

Ho: There is no significant difference of intelligibility of D3 students in English language of Airlangga University toward native speaker and non-native speaker of English.

H₁: There is a significant difference of intelligibility of D3 students in English language of Airlangga University toward native speaker and non-native speaker of English.

1.3 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to find out whether there is a difference of intelligibility of the students of D3 in English Language of Airlangga University toward native speaker and non-native speaker of English. In addition, the study tries to determine the English vowel sounds produced by native speaker and non-native speaker of English which are less intelligible to the students of D3 in English language of Airlangga University. The writer obtained the data by giving D3 students recorded English words which consist of English vowel sounds produced by a native speaker of English and an Indonesian speaker. Meanwhile, the D3 students were also asked to write the words after hearing the recorded English words. The data was collected in the Faculty of Letters of Airlangga University and conducted under relatively similar conditions for all of the respondents in the study.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The writer expects the result of this study can give valuable contribution to linguistic study on the role of speech intelligibility especially in analyzing the influence of native language on intelligibility of English vowel sounds both between the language which shares the same L1 or different L1. In addition, the writer hopes that the result can provide advantages for lecturers at Faculty of letters of Airlangga University especially for teaching auditory comprehension and also to be a source to find the students' weaknesses in intelligibility of vowel sounds. For the students of English Department, the writer hopes this study can help them toward a good intelligibility to English vowel sounds, as a result, the students of English Department of Airlangga University, either D3 or S1 will have a good intelligibility towards the English vowel sounds.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

- **Diphthong:** A vowel that shows a noticeable change in quality during its production. (O'Grady, Dobrovolsky & Katamba, 1996)
- **Intelligibility:** Being understood by a listener at a given time in a given situation. (Voegelin and Harris, 1951, in Lee, 2004, p. 7)
- **Native speaker:** One who has acquired a language as a child in a natural settings (O'Grady, Dobrovolsky & Katamba, 1996)
- **Speech Intelligibility:** The intelligibility of speech (usually measured in the presence of noise or distortion). (<http://wordnet.princeton.edu>, accessed on September 6th, 2007)

- **Vowels:** Sounds that are produced with little obstruction in the vocal tract and that are generally voiced. (O'Grady, Dobrovolsky and Katamba, 1996)