

Chapter Four

Findings and Discussion

In this chapter, the researcher shows the various findings of the research, directly addressing the research questions and grouping the answers in their appropriate categories. In terms of this research regarding the perception of English Education Department Students of a Private University in Yogyakarta on the various accents of the English Language, the researcher grouped the interview data according to the responses they have given during the interview.

RQ1: The students of a private university in Yogyakarta's perceptions regarding the various accents of English

The data to answer this question was gathered using an in-depth interview, where the researcher interviewed five English Education Department students of a private university in Yogyakarta as participants. The researcher inquired their perceptions regarding the various accents of English, as well as their reasons for having said perceptions. The researcher has divided the responses into several findings, as seen below:

Finding 1: Positive perceptions. When asked about their perceptions, all five respondents claimed that they perceived these different accents in a positive manner. However, the respondents had several different reasons for saying so. One reason, cited by three different participants, is how several accents were easier than others. One participant under the pseudonym Della said, "I think American is simpler because I have an easier time using American accent, when I use British it's still a little...difficult,

and in American it's easier to pick up.” (P2.9). Another participant under the pseudonym Sara also preferred the American accent, saying “Because it's easier”. (P4.2). The other participant that mentioned this goes by the pseudonym Amo, who said that the British accent is “easier and enjoyable”. (P1.6) It is worth mentioning that the participants who claimed this all referred to an L1 accent. A study conducted by Mulkeen (2016) for Communicaid.com found that mimicking a foreign accent is an excellent way to help a non-native English speaker to be understood when speaking English. When mimicking the speakers of this accent, non-native students copy more than just their accent, but also their body language, although it could not replace the more traditional learning activities. This explains why the students perceived the easier accents as positive: it indirectly helps them with familiarization of the English language, as the points below will explain.

The three other points of the finding are connected to the first point: comfortability, familiarity, and clarity. Participant Amo felt that the British accent, being her preferred accent was more comfortable to use by saying “Feeling, well, more comfortable, it is more comfortable to use the British accent compared to others.” (P1.6). Another key point, familiarity, was pointed out by Participant Della, who claims that her Javanese accent helps her learn English. She is quoted to have said “Maybe it's easier to see a sort of Javanese accent, so when I say something, I don't have to think before it.” (P2.11). The more familiar a learner is with an accent, the more comfortable they become with it, and the clearer they communicate with it. Another point, clarity, was pointed out by Participant Ilya. The participant said to the researcher that she “felt clearer when I speak with (British or American) accent.” (P3.5). In the private

university where this research was conducted, the students are taught by lecturers who speak in L1 accents. Participant Ilya mentioned this in the interview, saying “I’m more familiar when the lecturer explains with...British and American accent because it is clearer, compared to other languages.” (P3.4) A study cited by Hough (2010) shows that humans tend to subconsciously mimic accents they are exposed to, familiarizing themselves with the accents. Because they are used to these accents, they are more comfortable with it, and it helps them learn English better.

Finding 2: Negative Perceptions. Despite the participants’ positive perceptions regarding the various English accents of the world, some participants also had negative perceptions of them. Generally, they tend to find some accents more difficult than others. Among the participants, two of them had difficulties telling one accent from another, while two other participants find difficulty when learning English using a particular accent. Participants Ilya and Sue mentioned their difficulty in differentiating accents, with participant Ilya saying that she “has difficulty separating words that are usually in British and American” (P3.8), while participant Sue would sometimes confuse UK and US accents, as she says, “I sometimes uh...confuse UK and US accents.” (P5.4). Regarding the general difficulty of accents, participant Amo and Sara clarified this when Amo said that “Some people think that British is difficult to pronounce” (P1.5) and Sara mentioned being afraid of speaking something wrong in a British accent, by saying “If British I’m afraid of being wrong.” (P4.3). A study conducted by the Acoustical Society of America in 2015 tested their participants’ ability to remember simple phrases in different accents, one they are familiar with and one they are not. Their study reveals that learners devote an extra modicum of

brainpower when trying to remember things in an unfamiliar language, which may explain the students' difficulty in learning using an unfamiliar language. This results in a phenomenon called Lathophobic Aphasia, a condition where a language learner becomes afraid to speak because they are afraid of being wrong (Rinvoluceri, 2005).

A journal authored by Yan and Vaseghi (2003) and discussed in the IEEE International Conference in Hong Kong compared the three accents of the main L1 countries: American, British, and Australian accents. The journal revealed multiple differences between the three L1 accents, particularly in pronunciation. This is evident that despite those accents being from L1 countries, they can still confuse learners of the English accent.

Finding 3: Neutral Perceptions. Several of the participants' responses cannot necessarily be translated into either positive or negative perceptions. Therefore, the researcher created another, neutral field to categorize said responses. These responses do not condemn or praise the different accents, but they are still notable enough to be included in the research such as difference in pronunciation, predictability, and indifference.

One particularly perceptive participant identified how easy it was to see how different words are pronounced in different accents. Amo stated that "The British accent is like, turning color into colour, the L is not pronounced, but in American it's more pronounced" (P1.2). Said participant used two different accents, one for learning purposes and one for non-learning activities. She said that "Like an Asian accent, Indonesian is more well-known, so it is more predictable." (P1.3). This is in line with the findings of Yan and Vaseghi (2003) which shows the pronunciations of differing

L1 accents, showing how relatively identifiable these words are to someone perceptive. A study conducted by Hough (2010) regarding language mimicry for the sake of familiarity may explain this phenomenon. The participant, being Indonesian, is familiar with if someone speak English with an Indonesian accent. To her, the accent can easily identify the speaker as an Indonesian.

Among the five participants, two of them claim that they did not pay much attention to accents. They say that they tend to focus more on the meaning of a sentence rather than their accent or grammar. Participant Della mentioned her indifference on the interview by saying that she's "pretty indifferent," (P2.3), while participant Ilya explained that she tends to focus more on the meaning of the words by saying "When I use the English accent I tend to focus on meaning than thinking about other things" (P3.9) and "When I speak I don't think...Most importantly people know what I'm talking about" (P3.11). These are the characteristics of a Monitor under-user (Krashen, 1987), who tends to focus on the meaning of communication rather over any other attributes such as grammatical accuracy. Because they prioritize meaning over accuracy, they tend to disregard what accent they are speaking in, as long as the meaning of what they are speaking can be successfully communicated.

RQ2: Participants' version of English accents used

For the second research question, the researcher inquired about which accent the participants commonly used in different contexts. Some of the participants use the same accent inside and outside class activities, while others use multiple accents. The

researcher categorized the participants' responses according to what accents they use regardless of condition.

Finding 1: L1 accents. The results of the data gathering process found that all participants used L1 accents to some degree. Some participants clarify that they use American accent during class activities and British accent when speaking to their friends, while others say they use the American accent or British accent exclusively. Participant Amo, Della, Sara, and Sue all mention that they used the American accent, with Amo saying that her use of an American accent was “spontaneous” (P1.9). On the other hand, participant Della mentioned that she prefers to use British English because it is “easier on the ears” (P2.4). However, but she only uses it to play and kid with friends, citing it as “To play and kid with friends, I usually try out the British accent” (P2.6). This point is clarified by Hough (2010) who claims that learners of a language tend to mimic the closest speaker of said language which, in the case of English Education students from a private university in Yogyakarta, their lecturers. Because the lecturers in this university generally speak in L1 accents, the students subconsciously mimic the aforementioned accent.

Finding 2: Mixed accents. Although all participants used an L1 language to some degree, three participants used an accent that mixes an L1 accent with another accent, more predominantly their native accent. Participant Della, who has Javanese traces, mentioned that she tends to be more comfortable with the American accent but “because I have some Javanese tendencies, it still carries over when I’m talking” (P2.2). Participant Ilya, who said that she prioritizes meaning over everything else, said that she mixes her accent when she studies. Regarding this, she said “Mixed accent, when

I study English I mix my accents” (P3.7) These two participants were identified as monitor under users, who prioritize meaning over accuracy of any sort (Krashen, 1987). Participant Della clarified to the researcher that she uses a mixture of American and Javanese accent, a byproduct of the globalization of the English language which mixes with the local language (Rajagopalan, 2012).

RQ3: Participants’ responses regarding the effect of having a preferred accent on their English learning process.

When the researcher asked to what extent having a preferred accent has helped them learn the English language, all participants answered positively. To specify it further, the researcher has written some clarifications on the explanation below.

Having a preferred accent has helped the participants learn English. As the researcher have mentioned, all participants felt that they were helped by their preferred accents. The reasons of the participants feeling this way are largely similar to their perceptions regarding the various accents: their preferred accents make the learning process easier, they are familiar with their preferred accent, and certain sentences become clearer when spoken in said familiar accent. To understand this, one must look at the findings of the aforementioned ASA study in 2015, which states that users of a certain accent must devote extra brainpower to process information spoken in an accent they are not familiar with. The participants, being familiar with the accents of speakers closest to them, mimic said speakers’ accent (Hough, 2010), familiarize themselves with said accent, which in turn helps them study other, non-verbal ways of

communicating such as body language (Mulkeen, 2016). Because they are familiar with the accents that they use, they feel like they are helped with their learning process.

Effects on related studies

The result of this research proves that having an accent actually helps English language learners with the language learning process. By having a familiar accent, the learner becomes more comfortable when learning English with that accent. The findings of this research confirm Derwing's findings that English language learners do have pronunciation problems. However, while Derwing's participants reported no lasting effects of the pronunciation problems from a social standpoint, the participants of this research reported that pronunciation problems do have a negative effect on their learning process.

As for this research's effect on Norman's research, its findings regarding the Swedish students' indifference on accents does correlate to several participants' opinion that it is the meaning of the communication that matters, and that they feel indifferent about accents as a whole. However, Norman's research did not inquire further about the effects that the accents may have on their learning process.