



## An Analysis of Batu Bara Malay Students' Pronunciation in English Consonant Cluster and Word Stress

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### Abstract

Pronunciation has many great important roles in one speaking performance. The inappropriate pronounced words cause the negative impact of misunderstanding. Therefore, this study aims to find out how the pronunciation of Batu Bara Malay students, particularly the English consonant clusters and the word stress, and to identify the factors affecting Batu Bara Malay students' difficulties in pronouncing English consonant clusters and the word stress. The qualitative method was applied in this study. There were 25 students of seventh-grade students of SMP Negeri 1 Datuk Tanah Datar as the study subjects who speak the Malay Language as their mother tongue. The data were collected by recording students' voice and interviewing. The researchers applied the Miles and Huberman model to analyze the data. The results are Batu Bara Malay students' ability to pronounce English consonant clusters around 29%. Most of the students inaccurately utter the English consonant cluster word at the final position. The students' ability in pronouncing English word by correct word stress rules around 30%. As the students' achievement under 50%, it means their ability in pronouncing consonant cluster and word stress is very low. These problems are caused by the existence of the mother tongue intervening in their process of learning another language and the distinction between English characteristics and nature compared with Indonesia Language (similar to the Malay language), particularly consonant clusters. English has more types of consonant. Besides that, the lack of both knowledge and pronunciation exercises on how to pronounce English word accurately for beginner learners so the students are unable to pronounce English consonant clusters and emphasize appropriate word stress.

**Key words:** Batu Bara Malay students; Consonant cluster; Pronunciation; Word stress

### Introduction

Pronunciation has many great important roles in one speaking performance. The inappropriate pronounced words cause the negative impact of misunderstanding in understanding the meaning. It is because wrong pronunciation changes the real word meaning. Hewings (2014) stated pronunciation can be defined as how individual sound formed from rising to falling tones which function to convey the real message. It means that pronunciation may have to make someone understand the speakers meaning accurately. Yates & Zielinski (2009) said that "Pronunciation refers to how we produce the sounds that we use to make meaning when we speak." In general, it is realized that pronunciation is the first and most important thing which native speakers notice

during a conversation. It is very important in mastering grammar and vocabulary, however useless if the speaker is unable to produce those structures or words appropriately. Native speakers are more likely to understand someone if they speak correct pronunciation, even the speakers make some grammatical errors. Mispronounced simple words may obstruct effective communication between speaker and listener. Therefore, one of the main goals of foreign language learners in studying English is to achieving good and understandable students' pronunciation.

The pronunciation features consist of two parts, phonemes (segmental) and supra-segmental features (Kelly, 2000). Phonemes or segmental features mean different sounds within a language. Two categories of phonemes set consists as follow vowel sound and consonant sound. While another one is supra-segmental features. The vital features of supra-segmental in English include stress, intonation, and how sounds change in connected speech. In this study, the researcher focus on consonant clusters and word stress.

Most Indonesian learners (especially the seventh grade) could not pronounce English words correctly. They get confused when pronouncing English words. There are many Batu Bara Malay students doing mistakes in pronouncing English consonant clusters. It is caused in Indonesian or Malay has 30 phonemes, namely six vowels, two semivowels, and 22 consonants (four of which occur primarily in foreign words f, v, x, and z and are often systematically replaced in practice by more familiar phonemes). Consonant clusters are mostly found in foreign (Kaplan & Jr., 2003). While in English pronunciation there are 44 phonemes, namely twelve vowels, eight semivowels, and 24 consonants (Kelly, 2000). The distinction of their mother tongue sound caused they are unable to pronounce English consonant correctly. For example, a lot of students still pronounce the word 'self" as [slep], 'introduce' [intəroduk], and 'born' as [bron].

The phenomenon of pronouncing consonant clusters become issues often faced by many Indonesian speakers (Yuliati, 2014). That research showed that Indonesian learners who study English are hard to perform and utter final consonant clusters. These problems mostly due to the distinction between English characteristics and nature compared with the Indonesia Language, particularly the consonant structures. Khanbeiki & Abdolmanafi-Rokni (2015) research whether the phonological system of the Persian students' mother tongue has any effects to pronounce either initial or final consonant clusters. Furthermore, Yaslam, Baagbah, Jaganathan, & Mohamad (2019) stated that pronouncing English initial and final consonant clusters issues was a challenge for Arab Yemeni learners. One of the difficulties faced by Yemeni learners in learning English is pronouncing the English consonant clusters. The length of the clusters, the differences in the articulation place of some English words and the non-existence of some English consonants as well cause them hard to pronounce the English consonant clusters. Moreover, Ati Mau, Mujiyanto, & Suwandi (2019) research are to review the influence of Kemak Sanirin dialect on students' English pronunciation. The significances of this study are to find out vowels, consonants, diphthongs, and consonant clusters by Kemak Sanirin students and to explain how teachers play their roles to improve the students' pronunciation.

Other research related to word stress was conducted by Lasut (2015). The problems discussed were about how the Indonesian learners utter English words using accurate stress in their communication and what better ways that can be used by English learners to study English word using stress appropriately. Before the research, Don, Knowles, & Yong (2008) also identify the citation pattern of 111 Malay words produced by two Malay female native speakers. This preliminary study aimed to prove stress at the final position. It became clear that there is no word stress at all in Malay prosody. Thus, Widagsa, Wiyanah, & Wahyuni (2019) researched how the English word stress produced by Indonesian Learners of English (ILE). Besides that, the goal of Pareza & Ratmanida (2019) research was to identify and analyze the type of English word stress errors made by students commonly. The subject of this study was the English Department students in the final year at Universitas Negeri Padang. She explained that students make mistakes in English word stress is categorized as a low error level.

Research of Lewis & Deterding (2018) considered teaching pronunciation in ELF (English as a Lingua Franca) contexts. This gives reference to a corpus of interactions recorded in Brunei, especially focus on stress patterns, to make sure that intelligibility depends on stress. The findings prove that word stress may influence misunderstandings occurring in ELF interactions. Similar research was conducted by Syarifah, Warsono, & Fitriati (2020). This research was to analyze how the Madurese male and female students produce two, three, four, five, and six-syllable words so it can also explain the possible factors influencing the students in pronouncing English words. Then this was to explain the influence of gender on students' pronunciation. The result of this study showed that there is a significant positive influence of the Madurese dialect in uttering two-syllable word stress on the first syllable. It is due to the Madurese dialect sound system, the stress in two-syllable words often produced in the first position.

Considering all the above previous issues about consonant clusters and word stress, Sahril & Deliana (2019) also explained the interference of Batu Bara Malay Language as mother tongue towards Indonesia Language. The high school students' speaking ability in Kabupaten Batubara is more dominant influenced by the native language than Indonesia Language. The result concluded was phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic interference found. Therefore, based on the background of the study, the researchers are inspired to analyze Batu Bara Malay Students' Pronunciation in English Consonant Clusters and Word Stress. However, this current study analyzes beginner learners in Kabupaten Batu Bara.

The researchers formulated two questions in this study. The first one is how the Batu Bara Malay students pronounce the English consonant clusters and the word stress. The second is what factors affecting difficulties faced by the Batu Bara Malay students in pronouncing consonant clusters and the word stress. Afterwards, there are some research objectives. Firstly, finding out how the Batu Bara Malay students pronounce English consonant clusters and the word stress. The second objective is to identify the factors affecting difficulties faced by the Batu Bara Malay students in pronouncing consonant clusters and the word stress.

## **Method**

A qualitative approach was applied in conducting this study because it focused on the analysis or interpretation of a group of student's problems in learning English. As Creswell (2009) wrote that qualitative research can be a device for exploring and understanding the meaning of individuals or groups regarding a social or human problem. This research process includes questions and procedures. The participants required were students who speak the Malay language as their mother tongue. There were 25 students from grade seventh in SMPN 1 Datuk Tanah Datar as the subject of this study. They were male and female at the ages of 12-13.

In collecting data, the researchers used several techniques to collect the data, namely observation, documentation, and interview. For collecting data, it was provided two tables. In table A, there were 50 words having consonant clusters both in the beginning and final position. The words have 1 – 3 syllable(s). In table B, there were 50 words as well. The words have 2 – 4 syllable(s). The function of words is noun, verb and adjective. The students were asked to pronounce 50 words with consonant clusters. Besides that, the students were asked to pronounce 50 words based on the word class to analyze how the students pronounce the word using appropriate stress. Then, the researchers interviewed students face to face to ask some questions about the participants' background.

The researchers applied the Miles & Huberman (1994) model to analyze the data. The researchers transcribed the recorded utterances by listening to the students' recording and write them down one by one into International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The transcribed utterances pronounced by the participants and the intended pronunciations presented in the appendices. There were 25 participants whose each enunciation was converted into phonetic transcriptions and written down in the tables. The tables showed which consonant clusters and words stress successfully spoken and which were not. This table was also followed by the phonetic transcription based on the American English dictionary. In analyzing the data, the researchers prepared a table displaying the frequency of both correct and incorrect pronunciations along with their percentages as the summary of students' pronunciation result. In finding the error of pronouncing factors, the researchers analyzed the interview forms the error of pronouncing factors, the researchers analyzed the interview forms.

## **Result**

The researchers got the data by interviewing students' background to know some factors affecting their difficulties in sounding consonant clusters and sound the words with appropriate stress. The researchers gave five questions to make sure their background concerning their ability to pronounce English well. Then, the researchers visited the class and recorded the students' voice. After doing the research, finally, the researchers summarized the result seen in the following table.

*Table 1. Students' Pronunciation Result*

No	Participant	Consonant Cluster	Word Stress
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		Correct	Incorrect	% Correct	Correct	Incorrect	% Correct
1	HS	14	36	28%	15	35	30%
2	MR	17	33	34%	15	35	30%
3	IA	15	35	30%	15	35	30%
4	HF	15	35	30%	12	38	24%
5	QA	10	40	20%	8	42	16%
6	RF	19	31	38%	14	36	28%
7	NA	14	36	28%	14	36	28%
8	ZR	19	31	38%	14	36	28%
9	IK	14	36	28%	14	36	28%
10	FY	10	40	20%	12	38	24%
11	SA	14	36	28%	18	32	36%
12	MA	4	46	8%	18	32	36%
13	HA	12	38	24%	19	31	38%
14	LA	10	40	20%	19	31	38%
15	AS	10	40	20%	17	33	34%
16	SD	20	30	40%	15	35	30%
17	SN	20	30	40%	13	37	26%
18	TS	12	38	24%	15	35	30%
19	AA	19	31	38%	14	36	28%
20	DW	14	36	28%	13	37	26%
21	DA	16	34	32%	12	38	24%
22	MH	15	35	30%	17	33	34%
23	WI	19	31	38%	17	33	34%
24	SB	18	32	36%	17	33	34%
25	SR	18	32	36%	14	36	28%
	Total	368	882	29%	371	879	30%
	Average	15	35		16	34	

It can be seen clearly from the above table showed the overall result of the students' pronunciation in words bearing consonant cluster and word stress. There are 25 seventh-grade students as participants observed. The number in the correct column explained the sum of words pronounced correctly. Then, these results are converted in percentages in the column of correct percentages. The average students' ability in pronouncing English consonant cluster around 29% of the 100% target. Each student can pronounce 15 words correctly from fifty words. Moreover, The average of students' ability in pronouncing English word by the word stress rules around 30%. It was obtained from 50 words which students had to read in good word stress. Each student can pronounce 16 words correctly, while 34 errors on average.

### Discussion

#### *The Pronunciation of Consonant Cluster*

Consonant clusters can be interpreted as joining two or more consonant sounds together without any vowel or diphthong in the middle. They can be found at the beginning (i.g. students), middle (i.g. introduce), or at the end of a word (i.g. task) (Smith, 2015). In this study of English consonant clusters, it is noted the incorrect average of students' pronunciation is 35 words from each participant which each of them has to pronounce 50 words. The incorrect result is higher than the correct one. The average of their ability in pronouncing English consonant cluster around 29%. Moreover, the researchers have found that for Indonesian or Malay learner in this research, consonant clusters are hard to pronounce especially final consonant clusters. These results are under the previous research done by Yuliati (2014). According to her, the distinction of characteristics and nature between English and the Indonesia Language can cause difficulties for English learners, particularly in pronouncing consonant clusters. English has more types of consonant clusters than the Indonesia Language. There are merely limit consonant clusters in Indonesia Language. The Indonesia Language (similar to the Malay language) have an easy syllable composition pattern, that is Consonant Vowel (CV). Besides that, it has no consonant clusters at the final or ultimate position of a word. Meanwhile, English has a more complicated syllable composition because of the final consonant clusters. Final consonant clusters are often found in English words, for example as follows: CC (lamp, learn), CCC (first, world).

Here is a table to show the students' result to pronounce beginning and final consonant clusters.

*Table 2. Students' Pronunciation of Beginning and Final Consonant Clusters Result*

No	Participant	Consonant Cluster					
		Beginning		Percentage	Final		Percentage
		Correct	Incorrect		Correct	Incorrect	
1	HS	10	15	40%	4	21	16%
2	MR	14	11	56%	3	22	12%
3	IA	12	13	48%	3	22	12%
4	HF	12	13	48%	3	22	12%
5	QA	8	17	32%	2	23	8%
6	RF	12	13	48%	7	18	28%
7	NA	10	15	40%	4	21	16%
8	ZR	18	7	72%	1	24	4%
9	IK	12	13	48%	2	23	8%
10	FY	7	18	28%	3	22	12%
11	SA	12	13	48%	2	23	8%
12	MA	1	24	4%	3	22	12%
13	HA	9	16	36%	3	22	12%
14	LA	6	19	24%	4	21	16%
15	AS	9	16	36%	1	24	4%

16	SD	17	8	68%	3	22	12%
17	SN	17	8	68%	3	22	12%
18	TS	10	15	40%	2	23	8%
19	AA	16	9	64%	3	22	12%
20	DW	9	16	36%	5	20	20%
21	DA	12	13	48%	4	21	16%
22	MH	13	12	52%	2	23	8%
23	WI	15	10	60%	4	21	16%
24	SB	14	11	56%	4	21	16%
25	SR	15	10	60%	3	22	12%
	Total	290	335	46%	78	547	12%
	Average	12	13		3	22	

The table show the students make mistakes pronouncing final consonant cluster higher than pronouncing beginning consonant cluster. The students' ability in pronouncing beginning consonant cluster around 46%, while their ability in pronouncing final consonant cluster merely around 12%.

#### *Word Stress*

Making one syllable more prominent, higher pitch, and greater length than others can be defined as stress. This definition was expressed by Rogers (2013). Then, according to Roach (2009), there are four considerations suggested to place correct stress, the first one is whether the word is a simple word or a a complex that has affixes, prefixes or suffixes or a compound word. The second, depends on the word class category, whether it is noun, verb, or adjective. Then, the number of syllables in a word should be considered. Lastly, the structure of the hyphenation of the word.

After conducting this study of word stress, it was noted that the average of students' ability in pronouncing English word suitable with word stress rules around 30%. It was taken that from 50 words which students had to read in good word stress, each student made 34 errors on average. They made more mistakes in saying the word suitable with appropriate stress because they tend to spell the word. Thus, most of them always put the stress on the first syllable. As having done by previous research by Lasut (2015). She mentioned common problems of word stress encountered by Indonesian learners. One of them is Indonesian learners usually put the stress on the first syllable, rather than on the second one. Another problem that often encountered is they tend to give each syllable almost the same strength, length, and pitch. She predicted this matter was caused the stress placement in each syllable of Indonesian is equally strong, so they uttered English words in the same way. They do not understand how to put the word stress in the proper position. Beside that Widagsa et al. (2019) also stated Indonesian speakers often ignore the English word stress rules because word stress does not exist in Indonesia Language phonological system. Indonesian speakers do not know how to place appropriate word stress in the English phonological system.

**The Factors Affecting Students' Difficulties in Pronouncing Consonant Clusters and Word Stress**

This part illustrates factors caused by language acquired by the participants. They are beginner learners in English, moreover the participants' background influences their pronunciation ability as summarized in the table below.

*Table 3. Data of Students' Background*

Tribe		Mother Tongue		Daily Language of Communication	
Malay	Other	Bahasa Melayu	Other	Bahasa Melayu	Other
22	3	25	0	25	0

As the above table is shown, it can be seen that from 25 participants, three students are not Malayan while others are Malayan; one is Acehnese and the others are Bataknese, but their mother tongue is Bahasa Melayu Batu Bara as shown at the second and the last column. They use their mother tongue for daily communication as well.

The table clarifies that all participants' mother tongue is the Malay Language. Mother tongue is the language they learned first, meaning that it has established from the first long-lasting verbal contacts (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2012). Malay Language as the mother tongue is the most possible interference in the English words utterances by the participants. Then, this existence of mother tongue within the speakers ends up intervening their process of learning another language.

As Paramitha (2019) stated the main factor leading up to phonological processes phenomena is the mother tongue of all the participants so that it influences their enunciation. Additionally, it occurs because English and Indonesian have the different phonological system, and their utterances are backgrounded by their familiarity with the language itself. The results of this Ati's research in the same year showed that Kemak Sanirin dialect contributed significant negative transfer on three consonant clusters (str, rld, ght) because there is no three consonant cluster sound in Kemak Sanirin dialect. Widagsa et al. (2019) also illustrated that Indonesia Learners of English often says incorrect word stress in accordance with second language learning. Most of them are unable to emphasize between strong and weak stressed syllables. This is due to native language, prosodic features, such as word stress, do not apply in their native language. Therefore, Malay Language as their mother tongue is the most possible interferences in the English words.

Besides the influence of mother tongue as explained above, they also have a lack of experience in pronouncing English words. The phenomena are explicated in the table below.

*Table 4. Data of Students' Difficulties in English Words*

Learning English Pronunciation		Students' Difficulties in Pronouncing English Word
Yes	No	Students' Response
0	25	1. The written text is different from how to read



- 
- the text.
2. There are many joining consonants without any vowel between, this case is very different from either in Bahasa Melayu or Indonesia Language.
  3. There are many similar words to read indeed, but they are not the same.
  4. The English word is strange.
  5. The students memorize the word meaning more often than pay attention to the correct pronunciation.
  6. The students are unable to understand.
  7. The students think English is very difficult to learn, as well the word to read.
  8. The way to read change from the original word.
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The table illustrates the activities of participants in learning English. The result showed that the seventh-grade Batu Bara Malay students in SMP Negeri 1 Datuk Tanah Datar are beginner English learners who haven't ever learnt how to pronounce English word well. In learning English, the students often translate the text and answer the questions and exercise in the textbooks. The teacher instructs in Indonesia Language and does not ask students to drill English words suitable with good pronunciation. So, the lack of both knowledge and pronunciation exercises on how to pronounce English word accurately is another factor causing the students are unable to pronounce English consonant cluster and word stress appropriately.

### **Conclusion**

After analyzing the data, the researchers revealed that the seventh-grade Batu Bara Malay students' ability to pronounce English consonant cluster merely around 29%. In detail, their ability in pronouncing beginning consonant cluster around 46%, while pronouncing final consonant cluster around 12%. From the data, it can be seen that most of the participants inaccurately utter the final English consonant cluster words. Then, their ability to pronounce English word by correct word stress rules merely around 30%. They made more mistakes in saying the word in good stress because they tend to spell the word. As the students' achievement under 50%, it means their ability in pronouncing consonant cluster and word stress is very low.

These problems are caused by some factors. Malay Language as the mother tongue is the most possible interferences in the English words. This existence of the mother tongue within the speakers ends up intervening in their process of learning another language. Then, the difficulty is mostly caused by the distinction between English characteristics and nature compared with Indonesia Language (similar to the Malay language), in particular to consonant clusters. English has more types of consonant clusters than the Indonesia Language. While there are merely limit consonant clusters in Indonesia Language. Besides that, they are

beginner English learners who never learnt how to pronounce English words accurately. In learning English, they answer questions and do exercises in the textbook more often than to learn how to drill English words in good pronunciation. The lack of both knowledge and pronunciation exercises on how to pronounce English word accurately is another factor causing the students are unable to pronounce English consonant cluster and emphasize appropriate word stress.

There are some suggestions for this problem. First, English teachers need to motivate and find out some methods to teach students pronunciation. Besides that, English teachers have to give pronunciation exercises to increase their ability and experience in learning pronunciation. Second, the students are suggested to increase their knowledge about pronunciation and practice drilling English words more often to pronounce English word accurately. Lastly, for others researcher, this research is expected used as a reference in the next research about the analysis of students' pronunciation.

### **Acknowledgement**

The researchers would like to convey her gratitude to headmaster, teachers and students of SMP Negeri 1 Datuk Tanah Datar for the kind help and cooperation during the research.

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