
English Phonological Errors in Pronouncing Similarly-Spelled Words by Linguistics III Class Students

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Abstract

Phonological errors in pronunciation are common practices not only among beginners who just started to learn English but also among English major students who have been dealing with English study for many years. While speaking in English as a second language in formal situations, they often mispronounce words with similar spellings. This study investigated how the pronunciation of English learners was influenced by words with the same spelling. The participants were the Linguistics III students from the English Department of the Faculty of Education at Klatat University. They were required to pronounce a list of commonly mispronounced words. The results of this research showed that the students frequently mispronounced words with similar orthography. These phonological errors were prevalent among English learners, including those majoring in English.

Keywords

Pronunciation, Errors, Spelling, Words



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INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is the perception and production of significant sounds of any particular language to achieve meaning in contexts of language use" (Devid and Ronald, (2001). It covers the contexts in which a speaker uses pronunciation, and how utterances are likely to have an intended audience. Pronunciation is a tactile skill, and knowledge might enhance its development. According to Lynda and Beth (2009), "Pronunciation refers to how we produce the sounds we use to make meaning when speaking. It includes the particular consonants and vowels of a language (segments), aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual segments, such as stress, timing, rhythm, intonation, phrasing, (suprasegmental aspects), and how the voice is projected (voice quality).¹

¹ Lynda and Beth. 2009. Give It a Go : Teaching Pronunciation to Adults. Australia : AMEP Research Centre

Pronunciation skill is an essential formula of spoken communication, which also includes grammar, vocabulary choice, cultural considerations, and so on. Burns (2003) proposed that “clear pronunciation is essential in spoken communication, even when learners produce minor inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar, they are more likely to communicate effectively when they have good ability of pronunciation and intonation”.² Pronunciation ability refers to how speakers produce the sounds that we use to make meaning when we speak. So, difficulties in one area may impact on another, and it is the combined result that makes someone’s pronunciation easy or difficult to understand.

There are some reasons why pronunciation is important. Increasingly better pronunciation proved that speakers have become more native-sound in their categorical perception of sounds. It means that they tend not only to sound like native when speaking, but also to understand which sounds that in words that native to them. Another important aspect is improved English pronunciation inclines to highlight and add value to an individual.

Based on the aforementioned definitions, it is clear that pronunciation refers to the means of producing language sounds at the level of intelligibility so that a spoken communication can ideally occur in the sense that meaning making and interpretation can take place as expected by both speakers and listeners. In connection to this research, pronunciation is designed as the means of producing spoken English sentences or utterances that can be easily understood when a communication is developed and maintained during class activities when the words pronounced by one student are easily understood by other.

The English language with its various spellings influences how the speakers pronounce the words. One of the obvious causes of this issues is because the teachers are likely to teach more about grammar than focus in teaching pronunciation. According to Harmer. J (2001) “almost all English teachers get students to learn grammar and vocabulary, practice functional dialogue, listen and also read, but only a small number of teachers teach students pronunciation ability”.³ When learning the English language, we are not only need to understand the point of the speakers while they are speaking, but it is also crucially significant for us to make our pronunciation discerned by our listeners. There are many exchanges, as we could see today, between native English speakers

² Burns. A 2003. Clearly speaking: Pronunciation in Action for Teachers. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282332684_Clearly_speaking_Pronunciation_in_action_for_teachers

³ Harmer, J. The Practice of English Language Teaching. Longman Third Edition

and the foreign ones, as well as among the non-native English speakers of different language backgrounds. In the context of spoken language, specifically for those who are non-native English speakers, the above-mentioned exchanges do require proper ability in pronouncing English so that a well understanding intelligibility in communication can be achieved. However, in the context of English learning, most of non-native English students are still confronted with some obstacles such as mistakenly pronouncing English words, mistakenly making syllable and word stresses, and mistakenly using the intonation patterns of English sentences.

J. Vernick and J. Nesgoda (1980) supported this proposal by saying that “language learners often struggle to speak English proficiently because multiple spellings can represent a single sound”.⁴ However, native speakers naturally pronounce even unfamiliar words correctly with minimal effort. This contrasts with non-English speakers, especially Indonesians, who view English as a foreign language. They do not use English in formal settings such as schools, colleges, and other formal occasions. Nevertheless, as second language users, advanced learners of English are expected to use it in formal contexts, particularly in classrooms and other educational activities. Consequently, they are anticipated to have a deeper understanding of the language, even though their opportunities to use it may be limited. Hence, their exposure to an English-speaking environment, particularly regarding the pronunciation of similarly spelled words, is limited due to their lack of experience. For advanced learners, mastering pronunciation may seem straightforward as they already possess a fundamental understanding. However, when confronted with irregularities in spelling-to-sound correspondence, they encounter challenges.

There are some factors that influence students’ English pronunciation. As the focus of this research, the researcher would like to look at the internal ones that influence students’ English pronunciation ability. According to Celce-Murcia. M (1991) “factors that influence students’ pronunciation are: first, ear perception of each individual is different.⁵ Some people have better ear capacity to learn languages, and not a few students who have poor ear capacity in learning languages. Those with good ear capacity can easily distinguish between two sounds more accurately and can imitate different sounds better than others and produce pronunciation that approaches native speakers; Second, different aptitude, attitude, and motivation. Some people may

⁴ Vernick, J., & Nesgoda, J. 1980. *American English Sounds and Spellings for Beginning ESL students*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press. <https://catalogue.nla.gov.au/catalog/5400136>

⁵ Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.) 1991. *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (2nd). Boston: Heinle & Heinle.

have a “talent” for pronunciation, and the people who are more adaptable may have more success in pronunciation.

METHODS

Participants

This study involved 1 male and 1 female students from the Linguistics III Class who were randomly selected from the English Department of Klabat University. John Creswell (2014) proposed that “random sampling is utilized to collect data that will represent the population accurately”.

Materials

The materials are several word lists prepared to be pronounced by students. These word lists were chosen to define phonological errors made by Linguistics III Class students when pronouncing similarly spelled words.

Procedures

The research consisted of two main stages: selecting the word lists and choosing the participants. The word lists are selected to represent the phonological errors of Linguistics III Class students in pronouncing similarly spelled words. Participants are asked to read the prepared words loudly and clearly while being recorded in a quiet room to ensure high-quality recordings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As previously mentioned, the primary goal of this study is to examine the impact of phonological distribution on phonological errors made by Linguistics III Class students. After distributing the list of words to the students, they are allowed to view the words for a while before started reading them. The words have been selected to represent all various sounds that are potential to be mistakenly pronounced by the students. Table 1.1 presents the list of words and the findings from the analysis of phonological errors in pronouncing similarly spelled words by the first participant.

Table 1.1. Pronunciation Results by The First Participant

Words	Correct Pronunciation	Participants' Pronunciation	Affecting Words	Percentage
Recipe	/ˈresɪpi/	/ˈresɪpa/	Pie	100
Colonel	/ˈkɜrnəl/	/ˈkɔlənəl/	Colon	50
Choir	/ˈʃɔɪər/	/kwaɪər/	Character	50
Answer	/ˈænsə/	/ˈænswər/	Swallow	100
Wednesday	/ˈwenzdeɪ/	/ˈwɛd,nɛzdeɪ/	Day	100
Honest	/ˈɒnɪst/	/ˈhɒnɪst/	Honest	75

Sword	/sɔrd/	/swoʊrd/	Word	100
Hour	/'aʊər/	/'hoʊr/	Hornet	100
Debt	/dɛt/	/dɛbt/	Debt	100
Tomb	/tu:m/	/tɑ:m/	Bomb	50

Table 1.2 presents the list of words and the findings from the analysis of phonological errors in pronouncing similarly spelled words by the second participant.

Table 1.2 Pronunciation Results by The Second Participant

Words	Correct Pronunciation	Participants' Pronunciation	Affecting Words	Percentage
Recipe	/'rɛsɪpi/	/'rɛsɪpa/	Pie	100
Colonel	/'kɜrnəl/	/'kɔlənəl/	Colon	50
Choir	/'ʃɔɪər/	/kwaɪər/	Character	50
Answer	/'ænsə/	/'ænswər/	Swallow	100
Wednesday	/'wɛnzdeɪ/	/'wɛd,nɛzdeɪ/	Day	100
Honest	/'ɒnɪst/	/'hɒnɪst/	Honest	100
Sword	/sɔrd/	/swoʊrd/	Word	100
Hour	/'aʊər/	/'hoʊr/	Hornet	100
Debt	/dɛt/	/dɛbt/	Debt	50
Tomb	/tu:m/	/tɑ:m/	Bomb	50

The two tables above show a list of words mispronounced by two participants who are students in the Linguistics III Class at Klabat University. These pronunciation errors reflect common challenges among English learners with similarly-spelled words. These errors arise from confusion with phonetically similar words, leading to consistent mispronunciations. For example, the word "Recipe" was mispronounced by both participants as /rɛsɪpa/ instead of /rɛsɪpi/. The word "Colonel" was mispronounced by 50% of the participants as /kɔlənəl/ instead of /kɜrnəl/, influenced by the word "Colon." "Wednesday" and "Sword" were pronounced correctly by all participants as /wɛnzdeɪ/ and /sɔrd/, despite being influenced by the words "Day" and "Word. The word "Choir" was mispronounced by both participants, with 50% reading it as /kwaɪər/ instead of /'ʃɔɪər/, influenced by the word "Character." The word "Honest" was mispronounced by both participants as /hɒnɪst/ instead of /ɒnɪst/ influenced by its own spelling. Overall, the data shows that words with non-phonetic spellings or those similar to phonetically regular words are prone to

mispronunciation. This pattern highlights the challenges faced by learners in mastering English pronunciation.

The researcher has presented the correct pronunciation to rectify students' mistakes. The students were asked about what factors that influenced their pronunciation performance. The following are their responses:

Student 1 : "I'm very familiar with the words 'Choir' and 'Character'. I thought both have the identical pronunciation." "I'm also familiar with the words 'Tomb' and 'Bomb', and I thought both are the same."

Student 2 : "I never referred to a dictionary for the words 'Sword' and 'Word', and the words 'Colone' and 'Colon'. I thought their pronunciations were the same, so I pronounced them that way."

The above reasons could drive to the conclusion that the first student is overgeneralizing by making speculation on the pronunciation of words that he did not know. A different case can be seen from the second student proposition. It indicated simplification by admitting that he never consults his dictionary to verify the correct pronunciation of those words. The almost the same situation experienced by many students who tend to assume that words are of the same pronunciation. To take care of such simplification, the students need to actively consult their dictionaries to gain better understanding of the meaning and correct pronunciation of the words.

CONCLUSION

There are two participants in this research, one male and one female. Data collection included the use of recorded word lists consisting of words that affect pronunciation of similarly spelled words, along with recordings of the learners' voices. Cultural and social backgrounds of the participants were not considered in the sampling process knowing that they are advanced English learners that should be free from environmental disturbance.

The results of pronunciation performances by the students were collected through recordings and were analyzed by comparing them with the correct phonetic transcriptions to identify their phonological errors. As observed in tables 1.1 (performance of student 1) and 1.2 (performance of student 2), they tended to pronounce words that are similarly spelled just in the way that the influenced words are pronounced. For example, "Choir" was pronounced as /kwaɪər/, "Tomb" as /tɑ:m/, "Honest" as /hɒnist/. It appears logical for students to pronounce similarly spelled words similarly because the words looked identical. If this happened to the beginners, it will be overlooked, but this is not tolerable to students of advanced level. Therefore, students in the English Language Department should be cautious with their pronunciation, especially with similarly spelled words. They should avoid tendencies such as overgeneralization and simplification, and pay serious attention at inconsistencies in English phonology.

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