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Unklab Economics and Business Students' Mispronunciation of English Words with Silent Letters

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| Abstract | The goal of this research was to find the types of mispronunciation made by the economics and business students of Universitas Klabat in Pre Intermediate 2 class of 2025/2026 academic year. It used the quantitative research method by taking 14 students from the total population of 28. The test of pronunciation skill and interview were implemented as the instruments of this research. The researcher used 10 sentences for the students to read one by one in a slow pace. Each of them contains particular English word with silent letter to identify if the student could read them well. The students were not allowed to repeat their pronunciations. Every silent letter will just appear once in every sentence. The results of the research showed that the students would always make two types of errors, which are pre-systematic errors and systematic errors. The number of occurrences of pre-systematic error is more than the other one. The highest error made by the students were the words with silent letters "b" (e.g. plumber) and "p" (e.g. psychology) where total numbers of errors for both letters were 56 (40%). The conclusion of this research was the students faced pronunciation issues with words that contain silent letters that were used in different ways in their mother tongue language. |

| Keywords | Economics and Business, Mispronunciation, Silent Letter |

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is one of the most obvious ways for a speaker to say any word in a manner that is acceptable and understandable by the listener in any particular community with specific language. Pronunciation has been considered as the most essential skill that underlies the level of English mastery. Gilakjani (2012) stated that "pronunciation is an integral part of foreign language acquisition as it directly

impacts a learner's ability to communicate effectively".[1] The fact showed that people have clear tendency to judge the English competence of others by only considering the aspect of individual's pronunciation skills rather than considering other linguistic capabilities. As a consequent, pronunciation skill with higher accuracy or close to native speaker level is viewed as a successful language mastery.

Mastering English is extremely crucial during the current era of high growth in information technology where communication devices are widely used everywhere, and where language plays significant role for the worldwide communication and interaction. When people from various cultural, social, and originality backgrounds around the world come together, English language becomes one of the medias of communication for the international community and having good pronunciation of English will take the speaker to another higher level of prestigious. According to Kenworthy (1987), "the traditional goal of pronunciation learning is to achieve a native-like accent". This definition motivates many English learners to try speaking like a native, even though many of them still face clear challenges. Some of the issues they faced are the inability to understand the native speakers speaking at natural speeds with multiple individual accents, along with other issue related to phonetics and phonology. What generally happened was the learners tend to pronounce English in accordance with the phonetical laws of their first language. [2]

The Indonesian learners of English, when delivering English, will commonly use the phonetical laws of their native language, which is Bahasa Indonesia. Since the phonological systems of English and Bahasa Indonesia are excessively different

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[1] Gilakjani, A. P. (2012). "*A match or mismatch between learning styles of the learners and teaching styles of the teachers*". *Modern Education and Computer Science*. 11: 51-60.

[2] Kenworthy, J. (1987). *Teaching English pronunciation*. New York: Longman Inc.

in many respects, their English speaking is often disrupted by the patterns in their first language. "Indonesians experience difficulties in pronouncing English words because many English phonological rules do not exist in Bahasa Indonesia.[3] Kridalaksana (2001: 98) stated that "A word is the smallest unit of language that can stand alone, as a single morpheme, or a combination of morphemes).[4] For instance, English words that end with the consonant clusters [l] and [p], such as bulb, or [l] and [p], such as pulp, are different from the Indonesian word structures, where similar clusters are divided into separate syllables, like al-bum, and pul-pen. As a result, Indonesian speakers often find it difficult to pronounce these clusters in correct ways and are likely to put in a schwa [ə] sound between [l] and [p]. This clearly shows that there is clear problems for the Indonesian learners to speak English, particularly when pronouncing specific English words.

Another obvious problem for the Indonesian learners when studying English is when they have to say the English words with the presence of silent letters. These letters do appear in the spelling of the words but are not pronounced. According to Podhaizer (1998) "silent letters as letters that are written but not sounded".[5] The clear consequence is that learners are often experience issues and suffer confusion when dealing with this kind of words while speaking or reading. Those who have been familiar with silent letter laws are still mistakenly mispronounce some words, either by misunderstanding or inconsistent when applicating the laws. "An error refers to a noticeable deviation from the grammar or phonological norms of native speakers, reflecting learners' interlanguage competence".[6]

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[3] Pallawa, B, A. (2013). *A comparative analysis between English and Indonesian phonological system*. *International Journal of English Language Education. 1(3), 103-129.*
[4] Kridalaksana, H. (2001). Kamus Linguistik. Jakarta. PT. Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
[5] Podhaizer, M. (2001). *Painless spelling*. New York: Baron's Educational Series.
[6] Ayumi, P. (2018). *The pronunciation of English words containing silent letter "G" by the elementary and*

The above-mentioned issue is also seen among the students in the Faculty of Economics and Business of Unversitas Klabat. Pronunciation is extremely important for them because they are expected to establish communication with their counterparts in a clear and effective way, particularly after finishing their study and start working in both local and international companies, or when they start doing their own business with foreign partners.

Good pronunciation is significantly important when start learning any new language as it influences how words are delivered and heard. Mispronunciation will surely cause misunderstanding and misinterpretation between the speakers and hearers, no message successfully sent, which sets the importance of building good pronunciation skills.

Researches that have been successfully carried out by many researchers showed that pronunciation problems are still occurred among students, even though they have learned English for years and reached intermediate or advanced levels. A study conducted by Utama (2018) described many kinds of errors connected to silent letters that were mostly influenced by the students' native language. A study done by Salwa (2017) showed that students frequently commit mispronunciation of certain specific sounds, and the most commonly mispronounced was the [θ] sound.[7] In the same situation, Alqunayeer (2016) discovered that the most frequently appeared mispronunciation was the words with the letter "g.".[8] Research carried out by Ayumi (2018) showed that there are

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advanced level students of English made easy (EME) English course. Undergraduate Thesis. Yogyakarta: Universitas Sanata Dharma.

[7] Salwa, S. (2017). *An Analysis of interlingual errors in English pronunciation made by the fifth semester students of English education study program At Uin Raden Fatah Palembang. Undergraduate thesis.* Islamic State Palembang: University Raden Fatah.

[8] Utama, T. T. (2018). *Error analysis of silent letters "H" and "W" in English words by non-English department students*". Undergraduate Thesis. Yogyakarta : Sanata Dharma University

comparatively many students who are able to pronounce words with silent letters in correct ways than those who mispronounced them.[9]

Based on the aforementioned previous studies, the researchers considered the importance to study the types of errors in pronouncing silent letters made by the Economics and Business students in Universitas Klabat. The research question was: what types of pronunciation errors do the Economics and Business students in the Pre Elementary 2 Class committed when dealing with English silent letters? This study aimed at providing valuable view for students when learning English and become the basis for the English lecturers to improve the way they teach English, especially one related to the English silent letters.

Research Methodology

This is a descriptive quantitative method. It is considered as a quantitative method because "is uses numbers as the main data with statistical analysis to obtain the final result" (Sugiyono, 2009). The research was carried out in the English Class of Pre Intermediate 2 where some students are from the Economic and Business Faculty of Universitas Klabat. The research samples were students from the Economics and Business Faculty in semester 3 and 5. In total, there were 28 students in the class, and 14 students were used as the research sample. According to Arikunto (2010), "population consists of all elements that share certain characteristics of interest", and Sanjaya, W. (2013) stated that "populations is the group of interest to the researcher, the group to whom the researcher would like to generalize the result of the study".[10]

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[9] Ayumi, P. (2018). *The pronunciation of English words containing silent letter "G" by the elementary and advanced level students of English made easy (EME) English course*. Undergraduate Thesis. Yogyakarta: Universitas Sanata Dharma.

[10] Sanjaya, W. (2013). Penelitian Pendidikan: Jenis, Metode dan Prosedur". Rawamangun, Jakarta. Prenada Media Grup.

To identify and classify the types of mispronunciation conducted by the students when pronouncing words with silent letters, the researchers have applied a pronunciation test and interviews as instruments. "An instrument as a tool used by researchers to gather data".[11] According to Kesuma (2007), "an interview can be divided into three types: feedback strategy, face-to-face strategy, and an indirect strategy". The pronunciation test covered some English words containing silent letters. The words with English silent letters used in this pronunciation test are as followed:[12]

1. Align

2. Hour

3. Knee

4. Plumber

5. Castle

6. Wrap

7. Listen

8. Psychology

9. Answer

10. Guilty

The above words are put into sentences to see if the students could correctly pronounce. According to Kesuma (2007), "A sentence is a unit of language, both written or unwritten, that contains a complete specific idea". "The students were

[11] Arikunto, S (2010). Peosedur Penelitia: Suatu Pendekatan Praktik. Jakarta: RINEKA CIPTA.
[12] Kesuma, T. M. J. (2007). Pengantar Metode Penelitian Bahasa. Sleman, Yogyakarta. Carasvatibooks.

asked to pronounce the words by reading some short sentences containing the English words in target, as follows:

1. The children **align** their toys according to the colors group from the darkest to the lightest.

2. One **hour** equals to sixty minutes.

3. All old aged athletes must use **knee** protector even when they are practicing light exercises.

4. Every experienced **plumber** is invited to join the wood cutting competition to celebrate the Independence Day.

5. The black painted **castle** up on the hill is where the old witch spends her days to scare children who speak high voice to their parents.

6. All luggage should be covered with nice strong **wrap** to avoid from rain water as they are to be put on the truck.

7. Many children pretend not to **listen** to their parents' calling when they are playing with their gadgets.

8. One of the branches of linguistics is **psychology** that is combined with language study, which is later called as psycholinguistics.

9. **Correct** answer is not the only goal to achieve when interviewing the research subjects.

10. The **guilty** defendant confessed to the judges that he did has misuse the money entrusted in his bank account.

The researchers have applied the expert judgement to guarantee the validity of the instruments. In the data collection stage, the Otter Voice Meeting Notes application has been used to record and transcribe students' speech during the interview sessions. Data that have been collected were analyzed by using a specified formula.

Results and Discussion

The analysis of students' mispronunciation showed that the number and types of errors made by them were clear enough. Based on the aforementioned data, the students tend to make pre-systematic and systematic errors in pronunciation, where the pre-systematic errors were comparatively higher. In total, there were 24 pre-systematic errors that have been successfully recorded, compared to just 14 systematic errors. These indicated that the most common type of error was the pre-systematic one.

Based on the total collected data (140 pronunciations), 56 errors were successfully recorded. The most commonly appeared pronunciation cases occurred in words that contain silent letters "b" and "p", where both accounting for 33 errors, or 50% of the total errors found in this research.

Discussion

This study aimed at identifying the types of mispronunciation made by the Economics and Business Student in Pre Intermediate 2 Class of Universitas Klabat, especially ones connected to the English silent letters. As cited by Corder in Ellis (1994), errors are classified into three categories: pre-systematic, systematic, and post-systematic. A pre-systematic error appears when learners cannot explain why they used a certain form; a systematic error occurs when learners understand the

rule but are unable to correct the mistake; while a post-systematic error appears when learners know the rule and can correct the error.

The results of this research showed a comparatively closed relationship with the results from other related studies conducted in this area of research. Almost the entire studies discovered that students were generally created two types of errors: pre-systematic and systematic, and the pre-systematic would be the most prevalent. The results of this research were in line with the suggestion that all the researches' conclusion that since every word that contain silent letters has its distinctive features, they will cause the English learners to pronounce them in different ways, as affected by their phonological background.

The highest mispronunciation level was successfully recorded in the silent letters of "b" and "p," that reached 50% of the total errors. From the 140-research data, 56 errors were recorded. The most commonly found mispronunciation was in the silent letters of "b" and "p," with 56 errors, that equals to 40% of the total errors. An obvious difference between this study and previous one was that the previous ones has also revealed some supporting factors that caused the errors, while this research only focused on error types itself.

By observing the existing data, the researchers discovered that many students tend to practice mispronunciation in many silent letters. When the researchers conducted interview with the students individually just to collect additional information about all these errors, the researchers saw that most of the students did not have any reason why they committed mispronunciation. Besides, they were also lacked of the capability to identify their mispronunciation. The second type of mispronunciation, which was called systematic errors, was seen among students who have good understanding of the English rules and who have

also good knowledge of the phonological symbols. Though their English skills were high enough, they were unable to identify or correct their errors whenever they made one.

In this research, students made various mistakes when pronouncing English words with silent letters. For example, they said "plumber" as /plambər/ instead of the correct /pla:mər/, they also said "psychology" as /psi:ko:loji/, but the correct way is /sai:kə:loji/. All these mistakes were mostly occurred because the students did not have enough knowledge and proper skills in pronunciation, and it is considered as pre systematic error. However, when the students were asked to repeat their pronunciation, they could almost successfully correct their mistakes. But since the test had its specific rule where the students could only say each sentence once, and they could not repeat it, their mistake still remained. Because of this, they could not fix their mistakes during the test. Later, the students were told to use dictionary or online dictionary to help them say the words correctly.

The researcher also found that though many students have clear understanding about the correct pronunciation they will keep doing obvious mistakes. All these happened as they were used to say the words in the wrong way without being corrected by their previous listeners because ones who had also heard them speaking did not know what the correct pronunciations were. The results clearly showed that though the students observed the rules, but sometimes they still committed mispronunciation in many practical ways.

When committing systematic mistakes, some students could identify them and worked seriously hard to make correction. This what we called as a post-systematic error. This situation occurred when students have successfully identified the correct way to pronounce a particular word, but do not have any idea on how to use it. In some occasion they will pause and try to make correction. But since the researchers

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did not allow them to make repetition or correction in this research, the students could not fix their errors during the test. They would only receive proper explanation concerning their mispronunciation just after the test.

In short, just as many other related researches, in this research the students were found to make two types of mistakes, they are pre-systematic and systematic. The most common one was the pre-systematic mistake as it was affected by the preexisting knowledge of their mother togue language. Lack of skill about the English words and their past experience related to the words added another clear reason why they were likely to commit mispronunciation.

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