

ERRORS IN LONG VOWEL PRONUNCIATION: A CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to investigate the errors in the long vowel realizations committed by students of English Language Education Department. It is a case study of the English Language Education Department students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. The study employed qualitative method. The data were the recorded pronunciation of twenty students from the Speaking for Informal Interaction class at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. The data were collected when the students performed a storytelling for three to five minutes. In the data analysis, all of the recordings were carefully listened and the mispronunciation of words containing the targeted long vowels was identified. Upon the long vowel error identification, the students' long vowel production was phonologically transcribed and assigned into the table of long vowels. The table was set according to the classification of the five types of English long vowels, namely [:], [:], [i:], [:], [u:]. Further, the phonological transcription analysis referred to Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) as the accepted pronunciation standards. The result shows that the English long vowels [i:], [:], [:], [u:], and [:] are replaced with the short vowels [], [i], [], [u], and [] respectively. The replacement is implemented due to the absence of the targeted sounds in the students native language (Bahasa). This phenomenon is the result of phonological transfer.

Keywords: error analysis, long vowel, pronunciation

INTRODUCTION

It has been generally accepted that speaking skill is a paramount subject matter for EFL learners as it serves the aim of communication in which people using English can share their ideas and communicate with other people (Namaziandost & Mehdi, 2019). Therefore, a great deal of studies have been conducted to implement various learning approaches, methods, and techniques for the improvement of EFL students' speaking skill (Afrizal, 2015; Albino, 2017; Altun, 2015; Derakhshan et al., 2016; Dewi et al., 2016; Mart, 2012; Marzuki et al., 2016). However, In spite of its crucial prominence, speaking skill is also deemed complicated and challenging aspect for many EFL learners (Malmir, 2012; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Many EFL learners often find it problematic to express their thoughts in English spoken forms as they have problems in speaking components, such as fluency and accuracy (Al Nakhlah, 2014; Wang, 2016). In terms of fluency, several aspects have served as integral parts contributing students' fluency, one of these contributing factors is pronunciation. Derwing (2009) and Frijuniarsi (2018) suggest that the main goal of teaching pronunciation is not merely achieve the accentedness of native speakers; instead, it focuses on how well a person's pronunciation is understandable (comprehensibility) and how far a listener can comprehend a speaker's meaning (intelligibility). Therefore, pronunciation is an undeniably imperative matter (Bai & Yuan, 2019; Gilakjani, 2016; Macdonald, 2002). However, English pronunciation is deemed as one of the most tedious skills that acquire students' more efforts, perseverance, and extra time to improve (Gilakjani,

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2016).

In line with the aforementioned statement by Gilakjani (2016), many EFL students in Indonesia find pronunciation a problematic and challenging matter (Frijuniarsi 2018; Gusdian & Lestiono, 2018; Gusdian, 2019). These students often make some errors in pronouncing English words. Some types of pronunciation errors frequently made by the students are consonant errors. For instance, Gusdian & Lestiono (2018) and Fauzi (2014) revealed that many Indonesian students found difficulties to pronounce some fricative sounds, like the interdental [θ] and [ð], as well as alveolar and post-alveolar fricatives [z.] and [ʃ]. Besides, Mathew (2005) found errors in final stop, final sibilant, and final interdental consonants sounds made by Indonesian EFL students in Aceh. Another type of pronunciation errors is found in the level of vowel sounds. Several studies have investigated Indonesian EFL students' errors in articulating English vowel sounds. Frijuniarsi (2018); Visoni & Marlina (2020); and Putri & Rosa (2020), for instance, have revealed that many of EFL students often make errors in pronouncing English vowels, such as [æ], [ə], [əʊ], and [ei]. Further, these studies also suggest that pronunciation errors are typically influenced by the phonological transfer of Bahasa as their native language. The notion of phonological transfer itself is elaborated in Jarvis & Pavlenko (2015) as implementing the phonological knowledge of the native speakers' language (in this case is Bahasa Indonesia) to the use of another language (English). It is also commonly called as a cross-linguistic phonological transfer.

However, in terms of the vowel errors, all of the previous studies merely focus on the general aspects of vowels produced by EFL students. Meanwhile, the current study is to investigate the pronunciation errors occurring at a specific vowel aspect, namely long vowels. Besides, in collecting the data, most of the previous studies ask their research subjects to read aloud texts (reading text or speech text) or check the students' pronunciation of each separate individual sound. This current study, on the other hand, uses natural speaking activity setting, that is storytelling, to gather the data. Therefore, the mispronunciation is expected to emerge more naturally as the students produce these individual sounds in their actual speaking performance. Eventually, it is the purpose of the study to identify long vowel errors articulated by English department students of Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang.

LITERATURE REVIEW

English Vowel System

Crystal (1994) stated that there are twenty vowel sounds in English. Further, they are categorized into twelve monophthongs and eight diphthongs. These twelve monophthongs consist of five long vowels and seven short vowels. Jones (1997) illustrates the chart of human's vowel production as can be seen in the figure 1.

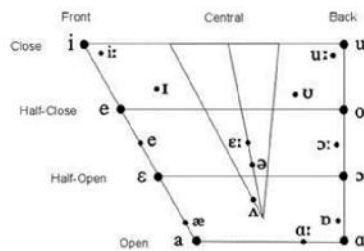


Figure 1

Chart of English Vowel Sounds

From the figure above, the English vowels are [], [:], [æ], [e], [ə], [ɛ:], [ɪ], [i:], [ʊ], [ɔ:], [o], [u:].

Long Vowels and Short Vowels

The idea of long and short vowels implies the duration of vowels when they are pronounced. A long vowel is articulated similarly to the name of the letter. A long vowel is articulated similarly to the name of the letter. For instance, the long /i:/ sound is pronounced like "ii," like in "sheep" and "sheet. The length of each produced vowel can distinguish the meaning— as seen in the case of the pair words 'sheep' (long [i:]) and 'sit' (short [ɪ]). From the example, we can see that different vowel length may result in two completely different meanings. English long vowels are [:], [:], [i:], [:], [u:].

Meanwhile, As seen in the vowel chart (Jones, 1997), seven English short vowels are among the twelve English vowels. These are [], [æ], [e], [ə], [ɪ], [ʊ], [o].

Pronunciation Errors

According to Moulton (1962), is pronunciation error is one form of 'contrastive linguistics'. The contrastive linguistics approach attempts to explain the distinction as well as the likeliness between a pair (or even more) of languages. Further, it also described that many language learners often make a 'phonemic error'. A phonemic error itself refers to the event when students carries over their native phonemic habits when pronouncing words in the targeted language. For example, Indonesian EFL students carry over the alveolar sound [t] to pronounce English words with the interdental [] (like when they pronounce 'thumb' as [t m] as the substitution of [m]). This happens due to the absence of the consonant [] in their native tongue.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study was a qualitative research (case study) as it aimed at identifying and analyzing students' long vowel errors specifically at the case of the errors articulated by English education department students. The study was conducted in November 2020. The data of this study were the recorded pronunciation of twenty students from the Speaking for Informal Interaction class at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. The students had intermediate level of English skills as seen from their TOEFL scores ranging from 400 to 480. To obtain the data, initially, the students were asked prepare a script of a short story about the most memorable event in their life. After that, the students performed the story telling in front of the class. Each of the performance took around three to five minutes. Besides, to maintain the naturalness of the students' performance, they did not need to read the script during the performance (even if they did, they had a mere quick look at the script to guide them with the flow of the story). All of the students' performances were recorded.

For analyzing the recorded data, all of the recordings were carefully listened. In this stage, the mispronunciation of words containing the targeted long vowels was identified. Upon the long vowel error identification, the students' long vowel production was phonologically transcribed and assigned into the table of long vowels. The table was set according to the classification of the five types of English long vowels, namely [:], [:], [i:], [:], [u:]. Further, the phonological transcription analysis referred to Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) as the accepted pronunciation standard.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Vowel Errors

No	Vowels	Total Errors	Percentage
1.	[ɪ]	40	21,5%
2.	[i:]	36	19,3%
3.	[i:]	43	23,1%
4.	[ɪ]	32	17,2%
5.	[u:]	35	18,8%
Total		181	100%

As can be seen from the table, 181 vowel errors are found in the vowel transcription from the recordings of twenty students in the Speaking for Informal Interaction class at Universitas Muhammadiyah Malang. In details, the vowel sound that occurs to be the most problematic is [i:] with 43 errors or as many as 23,1%. The second frequent mistakes are found when the students make 40 mistakes (21,5%) in pronouncing [ɪ]. The next, with a slightly fewer number, the students are found to make 36 errors or as many as 19,3% when articulating [i:]. It is followed with [u:] with 35 errors, which contributes 18,8% of the total errors. The vowel with the fewest errors found is [ɪ] with 32 errors.

From the abovementioned results, it is observable that errors are evenly distributed in the all five English long vowels. the disparity among the long vowel errors in each vowel is insignificant. Therefore, it can be determined that all students are prone to make mistakes in articulating English long vowels. One of the examples is seen in the most pronunciation of the long vowel [i:]. The students are deemed to encounter a problem to pronounce words containing [i:], such as 'Pete', 'keen', 'peer', and 'teeth'. These words are supposed to be articulated with the lax [i:] sound, like [pi:t]; [ki:n]; and [pi:r]. However, in the vowel transcription, the students use the short vowel sounds [i]. As a result, the articulated words are [pɪt]; [kɪn]; and [pɪr]. Another case of the errors are indicated in words comprising the long vowels [ɪ]. In the words articulated by the students, for instances, 'star', 'arm', 'argue', and 'partly' many students seem to find it problematic as they try to adopt either RP or GA, but somehow fail to do so. As accepted in the RP and GA respectively, the standard pronunciation of these words are [stɪr]; [stɑ:r], [ɑ:m]/ [ɑ:rm], [ɑ:gju]/ [ɑ:(r)gju], and [pɑ:tɪl]/ [pɑ:(r)tɪl]. In both pronunciation standards, the long vowel of [ɑ:] is present. The students, however, tend to pronounce them using the short vowel [ɪ] that result in [st(r)]; [ɑ:(r)m]; [ɑ:(r)gju]; and [pɑ:(r)tɪl]. Next, the problem of pronouncing the long vowel [ɪ] occurs when the students articulate words like 'bird' and 'birdy'. Instead of producing the long vowel [ɪ:], the students mispronounce them using the short vowel [ɪ]. Thus, the vowel transcriptions of the words become [bɪ:d] and [bɪ:ɛ:d]. In the case of [u:], many of the twenty students pronounce the words 'food', 'noon', and 'June' in the absence of the long vowel [u:]. They, once again, replace the long vowel with the short one [u], making the words sound like [fʊt]; [nʊn]/[nʊn]; and [jʊn]. The last problematic long vowel with the slightly fewest errors, [ɪ], is also treated equally as those of the predecessors. For example, one student, instead of articulating [kɑ:(r)ps] in 'corpse', she mispronounces it [kɪp] making it sounds like 'cop'. The use of the short vowel [ɪ] has caused such a pronunciation problem.

From the analysis, the students tend to make 'phonemic errors' (Moulton, 1962) as they tend to

carry over their native phonemic habit to replace the pronunciation of several targeted English sounds. Besides, it can be seen that all long vowels [i:], [ɛ:], [u:], and [ɔ:] are replaced with the short vowels [ɪ], [e], [ʊ], and [ɒ] respectively. These notable findings are in line with several previous studies (Frijuniarsi, 2018; Putri & Rosa, 2020; Visoni & Marlina, 2020) revealing that the students are prone to mispronounce the long vowels by replacing them with the short vowels. Further, the replacement of the long vowels with the short vowels is due to the absence of long vowels in the students' native language (Bahasa Indonesia). It is similar to Fauzi (2014); Gusdian (2019); Gusdian & Lestiono (2018) who posit that the unavailability of the English sounds may become problematic to Indonesian EFL students to pronounce the targeted sounds. Therefore, they replace the targeted sounds with neighboring sounds that exist in Bahasa. For instance, the short vowel [ɪ] somewhat resembles [i]; it is then employed by the students to replace the respective long vowel.

The phenomenon of replacing the unavailable targeted English sounds in Bahasa is called phonological transfer (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2015). It refers to the notion of applying the phonological knowledge of the native speakers' language to the pronunciation of the targeted foreign language. Phonological transfer is one of the many forms of cross-linguistic interference. Like several previous studies (Fauzi, 2014; Frijuniarsi, 2018; Gusdian, 2019; Gusdian & Lestiono, 2018; Visoni & Marlina, 2020), the results of this study also indicate the phenomenon of phonological transfer of the students' short vowels in the replacement of the targeted English long vowels.

CONCLUSION

It has been concluded that the long vowel errors are found in all five English long vowels. In other words, the all twenty students make mistakes in pronouncing the targeted English long vowels. In pronouncing the long vowels, the students make use of the replacement strategy in which they replace the long vowels that do not exist in Bahasa with the short vowels that they have in Bahasa as their native tongue. Further, the phenomenon of such phonological replacement is referred as phonological transfer.

The limitation of this study lies on its nature that solely focused the errors of the individual vowel sound produced in natural speaking activity. For the future researchers, it is expected that more investigation is conducted to reveal the pronunciation errors made in the context.

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