

PRONUNCIATION ERRORS IN ENGLISH SPEAKING CLASS: AN APPLIED LINGUISTICS APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate pronunciation errors made by fourth-semester students of the English Literature Department at Bumigora University during speaking class. A qualitative descriptive method was employed, with data collected from students' oral descriptions of daily activities. Their speech was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for pronunciation errors, focusing on consonants, vowels, and diphthongs. The findings revealed three major categories of errors. First, consonant errors occurred most frequently in the substitution of interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ with alveolar sounds /t/ and /d/. Second, vowel errors were observed in the confusion between long and short vowels, such as /i:/ and /ɪ/, and the mispronunciation of /æ/ and /e/. Third, diphthong errors appeared when students simplified diphthongs into monophthongs, such as [haʊs] pronounced as [hos]. These errors were caused by several factors, including mother tongue interference, lack of exposure to authentic English pronunciation, difficulty in perceiving phonemic contrasts, and psychological factors such as nervousness or hesitation. The study concludes that students' pronunciation errors are not only challenges but also indicators of their interlanguage development. Error analysis, viewed through an applied linguistics approach, provides valuable insights for teachers to design corrective feedback and targeted pronunciation practice. By addressing these errors systematically, lecturers can help students improve their communicative competence and confidence in speaking English. This study contributes by identifying common pronunciation error patterns among Indonesian EFL university students to develop targeted pronunciation instruction and corrective feedback. The findings enrich EFL pronunciation research by highlighting the influence of first language on students' spoken English.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is one of the most crucial aspects of language learning, it directly affects oral communication and intelligibility. (Hornby, 2005). Accurate pronunciation enables learners to be understood by others and fosters confidence in speaking. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), pronunciation mastery is particularly important since learners often need to communicate in global settings where English serves as a lingua franca. Therefore, speaking classes are expected to provide students with sufficient training to produce English sounds correctly and fluently.

Despite its importance, pronunciation often becomes a neglected component of EFL instruction. Learners frequently struggle with sounds that does not exist in their first language, with limited exposure to authentic input further compounding the problem (Gilakjani, 2016). Zuraída (2019) reported learners in Indonesia consistently face difficulties with specific sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/, which are absent in the Indonesian phonological system. Sardiyana (2018); Awololon et al. (2021) also notes that Indonesian learners often mispronounce final consonant clusters and word stress, making their speech less intelligible. These problems

are not random but systematic, arising from both interlingual interference and inadequate classroom emphasis on pronunciation.

Students in speaking classes are expected to achieve a level of oral proficiency where their pronunciation allows smooth and comprehensible communication. Intelligibility and comprehensibility are key goals in pronunciation instruction, rather than achieving native-like accents (Munro, 2005). This expectation aligns with the communicative goals of EFL teaching, where the focus is not only on grammar and vocabulary but also on producing clear and accurate speech. Speaking classes are thus designed to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication.

Many learners still struggle with pronunciation, leading to frequent errors that disrupt communication. Learners often face difficulties due to mother tongue interference, lack of exposure to authentic input, and insufficient focus on pronunciation during classroom activities (Gilakjani, 2016). This study is needed due to the limited empirical studies that specifically examine pronunciation error patterns among Indonesian EFL students at the tertiary level. Without such evidence, pronunciation instruction and corrective feedback tend to remain unsystematic and less responsive to learners' actual phonological difficulties. Moreover, the persistent influence of first language phonology on spoken English underscores the need for focused investigation, as these issues continue to impede students' communicative competence and confidence in speaking.

Several studies highlight common pronunciation difficulties among EFL learners Awololon et al. (2025). Brown (2014) notes that learners from non-English-speaking backgrounds often mispronounce vowels, consonants, and stress patterns due to negative transfer from their first language. Indonesian learners, in particular, face challenges in producing sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/, which does not exist in the Indonesian phonological system. These recurring errors not only reduce speech intelligibility but also cause learners to feel insecure, which in turn hinders their participation in speaking activities. Previous studies on EFL pronunciation have primarily focused on identifying error types or measuring learners' overall pronunciation accuracy, often emphasizing phonetic descriptions without sufficiently considering learners' affective responses during speaking activities. While existing research acknowledges that pronunciation errors may reduce speech intelligibility, relatively little attention has been paid to how recurring pronunciation errors contribute to student's insecurity and reluctance to participate in oral communication, particularly in classroom speaking contexts.

The difference between what is expected and what actually occurs creates a gap that needs to be addressed. While students are expected to speak with clear pronunciation, the reality is that many continue to produce errors that impede communication. Analyzing learner errors provides insights into the learning process and helps identify areas that require targeted instruction (Corder, 1967). Applying this approach to pronunciation can reveal systematic patterns of errors and guide teachers in designing more effective pedagogical interventions.

An applied linguistics approach offers valuable tools for understanding pronunciation errors and their implications for language learning. Applied linguistics bridges theoretical knowledge and practical language teaching by addressing real-world language problems (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). Through applied linguistics, this study will analyze pronunciation errors systematically, explore their sources, and provide recommendations for improving pronunciation instruction in speaking classes. By doing so, the study contributes to narrowing the gap between expectation and reality in English language learning.

2. METHODS

This study aimed to investigate and describe pronunciation errors made by students in a speaking class. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed to explore the phenomenon, since qualitative research allows for in-depth understanding of linguistic behaviors in their natural context (Creswell, 2018). The participants consisted of 25 fourth-semester students from the English Literature Department at Bumigora University. They were purposively selected because they had completed basic pronunciation and speaking courses and were actively engaged in intermediate-level speaking classes, making them suitable for examining persistent pronunciation errors in spontaneous oral production. The speaking task involved students describing their daily activities in front of the class, which provided natural data for observing pronunciation performance.

The primary instrument for data collection was a voice recorder, supported by field notes. Roach (2009) mentioned the procedure, it consisted of three stages: (1) students' oral performances were recorded during class presentations, (2) recordings were carefully transcribed and examined to identify pronunciation errors, and (3) errors were categorized into vowel, consonant, and diphthong mispronunciations following standard phonological classifications.

The data were analyzed qualitatively using descriptive analysis. Each error was examined and explained narratively without statistical treatment, focusing instead on the linguistic patterns underlying the errors. To

ensure validity, this study applied theory triangulation by cross-checking findings with established theories in phonology and error analysis. The results are presented narratively to provide clear and accessible insights into the nature of students' pronunciation errors.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Pronunciation Errors of English Consonants

Some students made errors in pronouncing consonant sounds, particularly the interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/. They tended to substitute them with alveolar sounds /t/ and /d/.

Table 1. The results of phonological errors of English consonants

Word	Correct Pronunciation	Student's Pronunciation	Error Type
Think	[θɪŋk]	[tɪŋk]	/θ/ → /t/
With	[wɪð]	[wɪt]	/ð/ → /t/
Together	[tə'geðər]	[tə'gedər]	/ð/ → /d/
that	[ðæt]	/dæt/	/ð/ → /d/

From the table above, it can be seen that the most frequent consonant errors occurred in the interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/, which were replaced by alveolar /t/ and /d/.

B. Pronunciation Errors of English Vowels

Students also faced difficulties in distinguishing long and short vowel sounds. The most common errors were confusing /i:/ and /ɪ/, as well as /æ/ and /e/.

Table 2. The results of phonological errors of English vowels

Word	Correct Pronunciation	Student's Pronunciation	Error Type
Sleep	[sli:p]	[slɪp]	/i:/ → /ɪ/
Eat	[i:t]	[ɪt]	/i:/ → /ɪ/
Breakfast	[ˈbrɛkfəst]	[ˈbrækfəst]	/e/ → /æ/
Class	[klæs]	[klɛs]	/æ/ → /e/

The table shows that students struggled with long-short vowel distinctions and vowel quality differences, which affected their ability to clearly express daily activities.

C. Pronunciation Errors of English Diphthongs

Errors in diphthongs were also observed. Students often simplified diphthongs into single vowel sounds, which made their speech less natural.

Table 3. The results of phonological errors of English diphthongs

Word	Correct Pronunciation	Student's Pronunciation	Error Type
Sleep	[sli:p]	[slɪp]	/i:/ → /ɪ/
Eat	[i:t]	[ɪt]	/i:/ → /ɪ/

Breakfast	['brɛkfəst]	['brækfəst]	/e/ → /æ/
Class	[klæs]	[klɛs]	/æ/ → /e/

D. Factors Causing Students' Pronunciation Errors

Several factors contributed to the pronunciation errors made by the students in speaking class. The first factor is mother tongue interference. Since Indonesian does not contain certain sounds such as the interdental consonants /θ/ and /ð/, students naturally replaced them with the closest sounds from their native language, namely /t/ and /d/. The interference errors, which occur when learners transfer elements of their first language into the second language (Richards & Schmidt, 2013).

Another contributing factor is the lack of exposure to native pronunciation. Many students learn English primarily through textbooks or classroom instruction without sufficient listening practice to authentic English input such as movies, podcasts, or direct interaction with native speakers. The limited exposure can restrict learners' ability to internalize correct pronunciation patterns, leading to repeated errors in both vowels and diphthongs (Ur, 2014).

A further factor is difficulty in perceiving phonemic contrasts, particularly between long and short vowels (e.g., /i:/ vs /ɪ/ in *sleep* and *slip*). Since such contrasts do not exist in Indonesian, students often fail to recognize the difference, which then affects their production. This reflects intra-lingual errors, where incorrect generalizations about rules result in systematic mispronunciations.

Psychological factors such as nervousness, hesitation, and lack of confidence also contributed to mistakes. Students sometimes produced slips of the tongue or inconsistent pronunciation due to anxiety when speaking in front of the class. Performance mistakes differ from systematic errors, as they are caused by external factors like memory lapses or pressure rather than lack of competence (Brown, 2014).

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that students frequently made errors in pronouncing English consonant sounds, particularly the interdental consonants /θ/ and /ð/. These were often substituted with alveolar sounds /t/ and /d/, as seen in words such as *think* [tɪŋk], *with* [wɪt], *together* [tə'gedər], and *that* [dæt]. Such errors are consistent with interference errors described by Richards & Schmidt (2013), in which learners rely on their first language system when producing sounds that do not exist in their mother tongue. Since the interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are absent in Indonesian, students tend to replace them with the closest available sounds /t/ and /d/. This reflects the role of interlanguage (Corder, 1967), where learners construct their own system based on both the target language and their native language.

Errors were also found in the production of English vowel sounds, particularly in distinguishing between long and short vowels. For instance, students pronounced *sleep* as [slɪp] instead of [sli:p] and *eat* as [ɪt] instead of [i:t]. They also confused the vowels /æ/ and /e/, producing *class* as [klɛs] instead of [klæs]. Richards (1974) categorized these as intra-lingual errors, where learners fail to fully apply the rules of the target language, in this case, the length and quality of vowels. Since Indonesian vowels do not make length distinctions, students naturally struggle to perceive and produce such contrasts. This difficulty supports that errors often arise from incomplete competence and the learner's limited exposure to the target sound system.

In terms of diphthongs, students often simplified diphthongs into monophthongs, producing words like *house* [hos] instead of [haʊs], *go* [go] instead of [gəʊ], and *play* [ple] instead of [pleɪ]. These reductions avoided complex sound combinations by substituting them with simpler vowel sounds, a phenomenon explained as developmental errors. In their effort to construct hypotheses about English phonology, students generalized that a diphthong could be realized as a single vowel. Such simplifications indicate that students are still in the process of developing their transitional competence, where errors are systematic and reflect the learner's stage of acquisition.

These errors highlight the strong influence of mother tongue interference and the structural differences between English and Indonesian phonological systems. Students' mispronunciations in consonants, vowels, and diphthongs directly impacted their ability to clearly communicate daily activities, such as saying *I sleep at nine o'clock* or *I play outside*. These pronunciation errors can lead to misunderstandings and hinder effective communication. However, errors should be seen as a natural part of language learning, providing evidence of

learners' progress. With proper feedback and correction from lecturers, students can gradually adjust their pronunciation and improve their spoken English (Corder, 1967).

4. CONCLUSION

This study found that fourth-semester students at Bumigora University made pronunciation errors in consonants, vowels, and diphthongs, mainly replacing interdental sounds with alveolar ones, confusing long and short vowels, and simplifying diphthongs into monophthongs. These errors were influenced by mother tongue interference, limited exposure to authentic English input, difficulty perceiving phonemic contrasts, and psychological factors such as nervousness. In line with interlanguage and error analysis theories, such errors should be seen not only as challenges but also as part of the learning process, providing valuable insights for teachers to give corrective feedback and help students improve their English pronunciation and communicative competence.

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