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Analysis of English Diphthongs Pronunciation Errors of Senior High School EFL Students

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Abstrak

Bagi banyak siswa, terutama mereka yang belajar Bahasa Inggris sebagai bahasa asing, pelafalan muncul sebagai salah satu tantangan yang mereka hadapi. Biasanya, masalah ini muncul dari aksen bahasa pertama mereka, karena bahasa-bahasa tertentu menunjukkan variasi dibandingkan dengan Bahasa Inggris, termasuk konsonan, vokal, tekanan kata, atau intonasi. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah untuk mengetahui kesalahan pengucapan diftong bahasa Inggris yang diucapkan oleh siswa kelas dua Sekolah Menengah Atas (SMA). Penelitian ini merupakan penelitian deskriptif kualitatif. Responden penelitian ini terdiri dari 26 siswa. Instrumen penelitian ini adalah tes pelafalan 16 Bata bahasa Inggris yang mengandung 8 diftong Bahasa Inggris. Data dikumpulkan dengan merekam secara langsung setiap pengucapan diftong dari para siswa. Penelitian ini menemukan bahwa diftong /aʊ/ merupakan diftong yang paling sulit diucapkan oleh siswa Indonesia, sedangkan diftong /ɔɪ/ lebih mudah diucapkan oleh siswa Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: *Pronunciation, Diphthong, EFL, English Learning*

Abstract

For many students, particularly those learning English as a foreign language, pronunciation emerges as one of the challenges they encounter. Typically, the issue arises from the accent of their first language, as certain languages exhibit variations in comparison to English, including consonants, vowels, word stress, or intonation. The objective of this study was to find out the pronunciation errors in English diphthongs spoken by second-year Senior High School EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. This is a descriptive qualitative research. The respondents of this research consist of 26 students. The instrument of the research was a pronunciation test of 16 English words containing 8 English diphthongs. The data were collected by directly recording each diphthong pronunciation of the students. This study found that the diphthong /aʊ/ presented the most difficulties for Indonesian students, while diphthong /ɔɪ/ was easier for them to articulate.

Keywords: Pronunciation, Diphthong, EFL, English Learning

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalisation, speaking English is vital to individuals' lives. Due to globalisation, the use of English is increasing. Speaking in English is a form of active skill. Speaking encompasses various components, such as grammar, strategy, sociolinguistics, and discourse (Chastain, 1998; Hossain, 2015).

Speaking involves more than simply making the correct sounds, employing the right words, or utilising the relevant structures. It is the key instrument for addressing communication issues. In other words, mastering speaking is essential as it allows individuals to transition between being the speaker and the listener while effectively utilising both verbal and nonverbal communication. (Br-Bangun & Simanjuntak, 2022; Putri, 2022).

However, many students still find it difficult to speak due to their pronunciation. For many students, particularly those learning English as a foreign language, pronunciation poses a significant challenge. Typically, the issue arises from the accent of their first or native language, as certain languages differ from English in aspects like consonants, vowels, word stress, or intonation. (Menon, 2007).

Pronunciation is a crucial aspect of speaking. Pronunciation refers to how a language, specific word, or sound is articulated. Pronunciation helps the speaker in communicating with greater fluency and clarity. Sometimes, evaluating individuals' English speaking abilities is assessed based on their pronunciation and fluency. Fluency can be considered as the capability to continue speaking effortlessly in a spontaneous manner. We need to learn pronunciation in order to master English effectively.

In contrast to English, the Indonesian language typically does not exhibit differences between the spelling of letters and the pronunciation of the words. Among all English

sounds, diphthongs are regarded as one of the most challenging to pronounce for Indonesian students. As cited in Susanto, E, et al (2021), Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005:410) states that a diphthong is defined as "the merging of two vowel sounds or vowel letters, such as the sound /aɪ/ in pipe /paɪp/ or the combination 'ou' in doubt". A diphthong is a type of vowel sound that has a unique characteristic.

The objective of this study is to examine the pronunciation mistakes in English diphthongs articulated by Senior High School EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners. By recognising the particular pronunciation difficulties faced by these students, the study sought to offer insights that could guide tailored teaching methods and interventions to improve their pronunciation abilities. The primary goal was to enhance the students' overall proficiency in the English language and their communication skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate the main troublesome English diphthongs for students, through data collection, analysis, and conclusion drawing from the data analysis. Nevertheless, numeric data was added to illustrate the comparison of students' errors in pronunciation. Moleong (2000) asserts that qualitative research often involves the use of quantitative data, although simultaneous quantitative analysis is not usually done.

Data Sources

This study involved second-year students from SMAN 7 Medan as participants. There were 26 students in total in the class. These students participated in this study from the beginning to the end.

Research Instruments

To obtain the data, the researcher used tests as the primary tool. The researcher provided a list of 16 English words containing diphthongs and requested the students to say each word separately. Next, the researcher documented the participants' pronunciation. The researcher then converted the participants' recorded pronunciation into phonetic transcription and analysed the data afterwards.

Data Analysis Procedures

Having acquired the data, the researchers analysed the participants' pronunciation transcriptions compared to the Cambridge Online Dictionary transcriptions. The data was examined using the formula described by Sudjono (1989: 79).

$$P = \frac{Fq}{N} \times 100$$

Where:

P = % of participants' error

Fq = frequency of error or incorrect answers

N = number of participants.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Table 4.1.1 Diphthong /eɪ/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	wave	/weɪv/	20	6	76.9%	23%
2.	sale	/seɪl/	20	6	76.9%	23%

Table 4.1.2 Diphthong /aɪ/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	tide	/taɪd/	23	3	88.5%	11.5%
2.	lime	/laɪm/	23	3	88.5%	11.5%

Table 4.1.3 Diphthong /ɔɪ/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	soil	/sɔɪl/	23	3	88.5%	11.5%
2.	moist	/mɔɪst/	23	3	88.5%	11.5%

Table 4.1.4 Diphthong /əʊ/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	most	/məʊst/	19	7	73%	26.9%
2.	ghost	/gəʊst/	17	9	65.4%	34.6%

Table 4.1.5 Diphthong /aʊ/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	bow	/baʊ/	2	24	7.7%	92.3%
2.	gown	/gaʊn/	2	24	7.7%	92.3%

Table 4.1.6 Diphthong /ɪə/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	beer	/bɪər/	14	11	53.8%	42.3%
2.	weird	/wɪəd/	3	23	11.5%	88.5%

Table 4.1.7 Diphthong /eə/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	fair	/feər/	24	2	92.3%	7.7%
2.	bear	/beər/	9	17	34.6%	65.4%

Table 4.1.8 Diphthong /ʊə/

No.	Words	Pronunciation in Cambridge Dictionary	Frequency		Percentage	
			Correct	Incorrect	Correct	Incorrect
1.	cure	/kjʊər/	11	15	42.3%	57.7%
2.	tour	/tʊər/	6	20	23%	76.9%

Table 4.1.9 Total of Participants' Errors

No.	Diphthong	Errors		Total Errors	Percentage
		1st word	2nd word		
1.	/eɪ/	6	6	12	23%
2.	/aɪ/	3	3	6	11.5%
3.	/ɔɪ/	3	3	6	11.5%
4.	/əʊ/	7	9	16	30.7%
5.	/aʊ/	24	24	48	92.3%
6.	/ɪə/	11	23	34	65.4%
7.	/eə/	2	17	19	36.5%
8.	/ʊə/	15	20	35	67.3%

Discussion

The table above indicates that the diphthong /aʊ/ has the highest error count compared to the other diphthongs pronounced by the students. The majority of the students were unable to pronounce the diphthong accurately. The overall number of mistakes made by students in pronouncing the diphthong /aʊ/ was 48. Most of them pronounced the word "bow" as /bɔ/ and the word "gown" as /gɔn/. Instead of pronouncing the diphthong /aʊ/ correctly in English, the students articulate it as the pure vowel /ɔ/. They replace it with a vowel that is more common in Indonesian.

As opposed to the pronunciation of diphthong /aʊ/, the fewest errors made by the students is the pronunciation of diphthong /aɪ/ and /ɔɪ/. There are only 6 total errors for the pronunciation respectively.

From the results and discussion presented above, it is evident that English diphthong sounds pose challenges for Indonesian students. In a previous study, Susanto, E. K. A *et al.* (2021) found that Indonesian students struggled with the pronunciation of the English diphthong /əʊ/ while finding diphthong /aɪ/ easier to articulate. However, in this study, it was discovered that diphthong /aʊ/ posed the greatest challenges to Indonesian students, and diphthong /ɔɪ/ was easier for them to pronounce.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the research and the topic of discussion, it can be concluded that the students had the most difficulties in pronouncing the diphthong /aʊ/. Table 4.1.9 clearly indicates that the students made errors in pronouncing the diphthong /aʊ/ at a rate of 92.3%, which is categorised as high. The researcher provided two words to identify the challenges in pronouncing the diphthong /aʊ/, which are "bow" and "gown". Both in the word "bow" and "gown", 24 out of 26 students were unable to pronounce those words correctly. The students made a total of 48 errors for the words "bow" and "gown".

As the study concludes, suggestions arise. To master pronunciation, practising is the only effective method. By doing this, being a non-native speaker and having an adverse environment will no longer be significant issues, as they can be minimised through practice. Additionally, teachers and educators must be effective problem solvers, positive role models, and inspiring motivators for their students. Acquiring a language involves mimicking the native speaker, so students will replicate the actions of their teachers or educators. Teachers or educators must continually strive to inspire their students with the correct pronunciation of English words.

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