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## Phonological Accent Preferences and Learning Patterns among EFL Learners

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### Abstrak

Penelitian ini mengkaji pola pembelajaran bahasa Inggris dan preferensi pelafalan siswa EFL terhadap aksen British dan American. Penelitian ini menganalisis preferensi fonologis siswa melalui aktivitas pembelajaran formal dan informal dengan tujuan akhir untuk meningkatkan metode pengajaran bahasa Inggris. Data dikumpulkan melalui kuesioner dan rekaman audio. Pertanyaan tertutup dan terbuka diajukan kepada peserta penelitian, yang terdiri dari 10 siswa SMA dari berbagai sekolah di Pematangsiantar, Sumatera Utara, yang dipilih melalui sampling purposif. Pertanyaan tertutup dan terbuka mencakup latar belakang pembelajaran bahasa Inggris siswa, penggunaan media berbahasa Inggris, dan pendapat mereka tentang aksen. Rekaman audio siswa membaca teks naratif "A Surprising Morning" digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data pelafalan. Teks tersebut mencakup 15 kata paling umum dalam aksen Inggris dan Amerika. Dalam penelitian fonologi terhadap 150 pengucapan (10 siswa × 15 kata), 80 (53,3%) lebih memilih aksen Amerika, sementara 70 (46,6%) lebih memilih aksen Inggris. Siswa lebih cenderung mengucapkan dengan aksen Amerika, meskipun perbedaan tersebut tidak signifikan. Menurut kuesioner, lebih banyak siswa menonton film, lagu, dan media sosial berbahasa Inggris Amerika daripada media berbahasa Inggris Britania. Penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pola belajar yang dipengaruhi media meningkatkan preferensi fonologis siswa terhadap aksen Amerika. Untuk meningkatkan kesadaran fonologis siswa, guru sebaiknya menjelaskan perbedaan aksen secara jelas di kelas dan menggunakan sumber belajar yang beragam.

Kata Kunci: *Fonologi, Pengucapan, Aksen, EFL, Bahasa Inggris Britania, Bahasa Inggris Amerika*

## Abstract

This research examines English language learning patterns and EFL students' pronunciation preferences for British and American accents. This research analyzes students' phonological preferences through formal and informal learning activities with the ultimate goal of improving English teaching methods. Data were collected through questionnaires and audio recordings. Closed-ended and The participants of this research consisted of 10 high school students from various schools in Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra, were selected through purposive sampling. open-ended questions were asked about students' English learning backgrounds, use of English-language media, and their opinions on accents. Audio recordings of students reading the narrative text "A Surprising Morning" were used to collect pronunciation data. The text included 15 of the most common words in British and American accents. In the phonological research of 150 pronunciations (10 students × 15 words), 80 (53.3%) preferred the American accent, while 70 (46.6%) preferred the British accent. Students were more likely to pronounce with an American accent, although the difference was not significant. According to the questionnaire, more students watched American English films, songs, and social media than British media. This research shows that media-influenced learning patterns increase students' phonological preference for the American accent. To improve students' phonological awareness, teachers should clearly explain accent differences in class and use diverse learning resources.

*Keywords: Phonology, Pronunciation, Accent, EFL, British English, American English*

## INTRODUCTION

English, as a global lingua franca, plays a central role in international communication, education, and access to digital information. In the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), especially in Indonesia, English language proficiency is not only assessed in terms of grammar and vocabulary, but also in terms of pronunciation, which is often used as a measure of fluency and authenticity in language use. Variations in English accents, particularly between British English (BrE) and American English (AmE), constitute an important dimension of phonology learning that cannot be ignored.

Accents are not merely phonetic differences but also carry social, cultural, and identity dimensions. In the realm of foreign language learning, preferences for certain accents often reflect external factors that influence students, such as media exposure, teacher models, or previous learning experiences. In Indonesia, the dominance of two main accents, British and American, is evident in various learning platforms, such as school curricula, textbooks, and online media such as YouTube, TikTok, and podcasts. However, the extent to which preferences for one accent over another influence students' learning patterns, as well as

how exposure to digital media plays a role in the formation of phonological tendencies, remains a question that has not been adequately addressed scientifically in the local context.

Yule (2010), states that phonological aspects are one of the main components of language competence, which not only indicate a person's level of fluency but also serve as a marker of linguistic identity. In line with this, Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), emphasize that phonological awareness and accent preference play an important role in shaping students' perceptions of what is considered "correct pronunciation." In practice, EFL students often associate certain accents with ideal pronunciation standards, which ultimately influences the language internalization strategies they develop.

In today's digital age, students' exposure to English is extensive and diverse. Social media platforms and digital entertainment offer content featuring various forms of native speaker accents, exposing students to different pronunciation variations without their awareness. This is supported by the findings of Derwing and Munro (2005), which indicate that the intensity of exposure to authentic phonological input can enhance students' prosodic awareness—including aspects such as intonation, word stress, and sound segmentation. Meanwhile, research by Gilakjani and Ahmadi (2011), reveals that factors such as learning experience, personal motivation, and awareness of language sounds are crucial in the formation of accents assimilated by foreign language learners.

Although phonology is an important component in language mastery, local research at the high school level linking phonological preferences (British vs. American) with student learning patterns remains limited. However, understanding this phenomenon could significantly contribute to the design of phonological curriculum, pronunciation teaching strategies, and the development of teaching materials more relevant to the learning tendencies of the digital generation. Additionally, a phonological awareness-based learning approach could enhance the effectiveness of pronunciation instruction and support the achievement of comprehensive oral proficiency.

This research stems from the need to understand phonological dynamics in English language learning in the modern era, particularly those related to accent preferences and their influence on students' learning patterns. Using a mixed-method approach, this research combines quantitative data in the form of pronunciation frequency analysis from a narrative text with qualitative data through open-ended questionnaires to explore students' perceptions and learning strategies in greater depth. This research aims to identify: (1) how students learn English and how this affects their accent choices, and (2) the

pronunciation tendencies between British and American accents that can be observed through voice analysis and the vocabulary used by students in pronunciation practice.

Thus, the results of this research are expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the field of EFL phonology and serve as a basis for the development of adaptive pronunciation learning strategies tailored to students' accent preferences and needs in the digital age. Additionally, these findings can serve as an initial reference for further research in local and regional contexts, particularly in efforts to continuously improve the oral proficiency of EFL students.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Type of Research

This research uses a convergent mixed-method approach that combines quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more holistic picture of students' accent preferences and learning patterns. The quantitative research design is used to analyze the frequency of British and American accent pronunciation, while the qualitative approach is used to explore students' perceptions of pronunciation and their English language learning.

### Research Subjects

The participants of this research consisted of 10 high school students from various schools in Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra, were selected through purposive sampling. The sample selection was based on specific criteria, such as students' openness to participating in the questionnaire and willingness to participate in voice recordings. The respondents consisted of 3 males and 5 females with an average age of 16-18 years.

### Research Instruments

This research used three main instruments to collect data:

- Questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions were used to identify students' accent preferences (British or American) based on their exposure to English-language media, such as films, songs, or classroom learning. Open-ended questions were used to explore students' perceptions of the importance of pronunciation and how they learn English pronunciation.

- Narrative text  
To collect data on pronunciation, students were asked to read a narrative text "*A Surprising Morning*" containing 15 words with high phonological differences (differences in pronunciation between British and American).
- Vocapture digital dictionary  
Used as the primary reference for identifying the pronunciation of each word. Vocapture was chosen because it provides audio pronunciations in two accents (British and American) as well as phonetic symbols that adhere to the standards of the Oxford and Cambridge Dictionaries.

#### Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process was conducted in two stages:

- Stage 1: Questionnaire Administration  
Students were given a questionnaire to collect data on their English learning patterns, exposure to English-language media, and their perceptions of pronunciation and accent. The time allotted for completing the questionnaire was 15–20 minutes.
- Stage 2: Voice Recording  
Students are asked to read a narrative text individually. The voice recordings are analyzed to identify the type of pronunciation in 15 key words. Accent classification is done by referring to the standard pronunciation of *Vocapture*, to determine students' tendency toward British or American accents. According to Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), voice recordings are an effective method for assessing pronunciation skills and identifying accents objectively.

#### Data Analysis Techniques

- Quantitative Analysis  
Data from the questionnaire is analyzed descriptively using frequencies and percentages to identify the dominant accent used by students. The results of the voice recording analysis are calculated as percentages of British and American pronunciation.
- Qualitative Analysis  
Open-ended responses from the questionnaire were analyzed using a thematic categorization approach to explore students' perceptions of accents and English pronunciation in greater depth. This technique was used to identify common themes regarding learning resources and the reasons behind accent preferences. According

to Creswell (2014), thematic analysis techniques are very useful in qualitative research to identify patterns, themes, and categories in unstructured data.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This research was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative analysis of voice recordings and qualitative responses from questionnaires. The voice recording task involved students reading a controlled narrative text containing 15 phonologically distinctive words, allowing the researcher to classify each respondent's accent usage as British or American. The digital dictionary "Vocapture" served as the primary reference for accent classification. Meanwhile, the questionnaire revealed student preferences, exposure, and learning strategies related to pronunciation. The following section presents the research findings based on both pronunciation practice and personal learning tendencies.

### Voice Recording Results: Dominant Pronunciation Patterns

This section presents the results of the analysis of voice recording data from 10 respondents who read the narrative text "*A Surprising Morning*." The text contains 15 keywords that are frequently used in everyday life and have significant phonological differences between British and American accents:

No.	Word	British (BrE)	American (AmE)
1.	Teacher	/ˈtiː.tʃər/	/ˈtiː.tʃə/
2.	Class	/klɑːs/	/klæs/
3.	Shower	/ˈʃaʊər/	/ˈʃaʊ.ə/
4.	Schedule	/ˈʃedʒ.uːl/	/ˈskedʒ.uːl/
5.	Water	/ˈwɔː.tər/	/ˈwɑː.tə/
6.	Tomato	/təˈmɑː.təʊ	/təˈmeɪ.təʊ/
7.	Car	/kɑː/	/kɑːr/
8.	Garage	/ˈgær.ɑːʒ/	/gəˈrɑːʒ/
9.	Advertisement	/ədˈvɜː.tɪs.mənt/	/əd.vɜːˈtaɪz.mənt/
10.	Party	/ˈpɑː.ti/	/ˈpɑːr.ti/
11.	Offer	/ˈɒf.ər/	/ˈɑː.fə/
12.	Route	/ruːt/	/ruːt/
13.	Corner	/ˈkɔː.nər/	/ˈkɔːr.nə/
14.	Zebra	/ˈzeb.rə/	/ˈziː.brə/
15.	Better	/ˈbet.ər/	/ˈbeɪ.tə/

Each respondent's pronunciation was classified using the Vocapture digital dictionary, which provides British and American accent pronunciation references from Oxford and Cambridge. The results are shown in the following table:

No.	Respondents	British (BrE)	American (AmE)	Total	Dominant Accent
1.	R1	6	9	15	American (60%)
2.	R2	8	7	15	British (53.3%)
3.	R3	4	11	15	American (73.3%)
4.	R4	7	8	15	American (53.3%)
5.	R5	10	5	15	British (66.7%)
6.	R6	3	12	15	American (80%)
7.	R7	6	9	15	American (60%)
8.	R8	12	3	15	British (80%)
9.	R9	9	6	15	British (60%)
10.	R10	5	10	15	Merican (66.7%)

Cumulative average of all respondents:

- British (BrE) pronunciation: 70 words out of a total of 150 (46.6%)
- American (AmE) pronunciation: 80 words out of a total of 150 (53.3%)

From the above data, it can be concluded that American pronunciation is slightly more dominant than British pronunciation in students' pronunciation practice.

#### Questionnaire Results: Accent Preferences and Exposure

The questionnaire results provided the following information:

##### a) Background of English Language Learning

The majority of students began learning English in elementary school, through formal education and digital media such as films, YouTube, and social media.

##### b) Accent Preferences

The American accent is more easily recognized and understood and is widely used among students, while the British accent is slightly harder to understand and not as commonly used among students. Some others do not have a clear preference. The determining factor is generally the media they frequently access.

##### c) Knowledge of Accent Differences

6 out of 10 students stated that they were aware of the differences in pronunciation between British and American accents, while the other 4 were not aware of this.

d) Views on the Importance of Pronunciation

Almost all students consider pronunciation to be important in learning English, especially to support clear and accurate oral communication.

e) Methods of Learning Pronunciation

The methods used by students to learn pronunciation include: watching films, listening to music, imitating native speakers, and practicing directly. Some students also use digital applications such as Google Translate to support pronunciation.

## Discussion

The results of the research show that American accent pronunciation is more dominant among students than British accent pronunciation. Six out of ten respondents showed a stronger tendency toward American pronunciation, while only four respondents showed a dominance of British pronunciation. This difference is reflected in the total frequency of pronunciation: 80 words (53.3%) were pronounced with an American accent, and 70 words (46.6%) with a British accent.

This phenomenon can be explained by higher media exposure to American-accented content. From the questionnaire, the majority of students admitted to watching Hollywood films, using YouTube, and accessing social media with American accent influence more often. This aligns with Jenkins' (2000), view that the linguistic environment and spoken input from media significantly influence the pronunciation accents of second language learners (L2 learners).

However, not all students consciously have a fixed preference for a particular accent. Some of them even admitted that they were unaware of the fundamental differences between British and American pronunciation. This means that the use of a particular accent in pronunciation is not always recognized as a linguistic choice but can result from the habit of hearing and imitating specific sources.

Interestingly, despite variations in accent preferences, the majority of students recognize the importance of pronunciation in mastering English. They view proper pronunciation as an important factor in communication, especially in academic and professional contexts. This awareness reflects positive motivation in learning, although not all students have systematic pronunciation learning strategies.

The pronunciation learning strategies mentioned by students also show that their approach tends to be based on personal experience and is not pedagogically structured. Most simply imitate native speakers from videos, listen to music, or use digital applications

such as Google Translate, without more intensive guidance. However, according to Celce-Murcia et al. (1996), accurate pronunciation mastery requires a combination of structured input and sustained practice.

From these results, it can be inferred that students' phonological preferences for English accents are greatly influenced by the media they consume, rather than solely by formal instruction. Therefore, English teachers are advised to be aware of these external factors and integrate them into more contextual and reflective pronunciation teaching strategies.

## CONCLUSION

This research examines the phonological accent preferences and pronunciation patterns of English among high school students as EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners in Pematangsiantar, North Sumatra. With a primary focus on the differences between British and American accents. Through a combination of voice recording data and student questionnaires, this research provides a deep understanding of how exposure to digital media, classroom learning practices, and individual learning habits shape students' phonological tendencies.

Audio recording data shows that American pronunciation is slightly more dominant (53.3%) than British pronunciation (46.6%). This finding aligns with questionnaire results indicating that most students are more frequently exposed to American-accented content such as YouTube, Hollywood films, and social media. This exposure appears to be the primary factor influencing accent preferences, although many students are not consciously aware of it.

Although student preferences vary, most of them demonstrate an awareness of the importance of pronunciation in supporting effective oral communication. However, the pronunciation learning strategies used are still unstructured, tending to rely on imitation from digital content without consistent pedagogical guidance. This indicates a gap in the systematic development of pronunciation skills within the formal education context.

Thus, this research emphasizes the need for more explicit and structured pronunciation learning in English classes in Indonesia, one that not only recognizes the existence of accent variations but also wisely utilizes students' digital habits. Teachers are expected to integrate accent awareness into their teaching, provide explicit explanations of phonological variations, and create reflection spaces for students to choose and practice pronunciation. These efforts will help improve phonological competence and

encourage more confident and accurate use of spoken English among students.

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