

## **Pronunciation Error on English Diphthongs Made by EFL Students**

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### **Abstract**

This research addresses pronunciation errors of English diphthongs made by EFL students. The data were collected from pronunciation recordings of 9 post-graduate students who were studying linguistics in the second year. Three of the respondents were male and 6 female students. Studies show that different backgrounds and cultures affect sounds and sound styles as they are related to pronunciation or language styles. The purpose of this research was to analyze and describe the pronunciation errors of English diphthongs made by EFL students. Diphthong is divided into two types, namely GA (General American) and SSBE (Standard Southern British English) or commonly referred to as British accent. To collect the data, the researchers recorded students' pronunciations using a smartphone. The data collected were then analyzed by employing qualitative and quantitative descriptive methods. The results show that 4 students used SSBE diphthong accent and 5 used GA diphthong accents. In this analysis, there were also 4 students who made pronunciation errors in pronouncing [eɪ], [ɛə], [ʊə] and [aɪ] diphthongs, 3 students had problems about [aʊ] and 2 students mispronounced [oʊ] diphthong.

**Keywords:** Diphthongs, phonetics, pronunciation, vowels

### **Introduction**

Language is often used as means of communication. The function of language is to convey messages in the form of sound or written form. It can be said that language is the source of all human sound systems, words and expressions. Phonology is the study of sound, how sound is regulated and used in natural languages, while phonetics is the study of all human voices to produce sounds, the focus is on human speech rather than focusing on a particular language. According to Hakim (2012) good pronunciation is a crucial thing. In learning English language, there are four skills that should be learned: reading, writing, listening and speaking. Through this analysis, the writer aims to analyze the pronunciation errors of English diphthongs in order to avoid the errors in the future.

In this analysis, the writers conducted a study about pronunciation errors of diphthongs by EFL students in the third semester. Diphthongs are divided into two types, these are GA (General American) and SSBE (Standard Southern British English) which can be referred to as British accents. To collect the data, the writers asked the students to read a list of words and record their pronunciations by using a smartphone. The writers then transcribed the sounds produced by the students by note-taking methods. After the analysis is completed, the diphthongs produced by the students seem pronounced correctly. However, if they are analyzed more deeply, there will be differences.

By conducting this study, the writers expect that the result of this study will provide knowledge in phonetics and phonology, particularly related to the production of diphthongs. The main reason of conducting the study is because there are still pronunciation errors made by the students in producing diphthongs. However, there are a few people who are concerned about this issue. The writers think that this problem need to be fixed because the

pronunciation errors will cause misunderstanding in communication or probably shift and create new meaning. Thus, the writers are going to elaborate the causes of pronunciation errors in the production of diphthongs.

According to Novarita (2017) pronunciation is the way of language to say certain words or sounds, pronunciation is the most important thing from learning languages including language skills, differences in pronunciation will affect to the result of meaning, therefore pronunciation becomes important things to be considered. In line with the above opinion, Riyani (2013) argues that a variety of different pronunciations will result in shift in meaning, pronunciation without considering errors will interfere and cause misunderstanding in meaning. In line with that opinion, Stefani and Roba'i (2019) states, the problem that occur in mispronunciation caused by the speaker, that's why to mastering pronunciation is the important thing, because the different pronunciation will give the result that have different meaning.

The errors in the use of language can occur due to incorrect pronunciation which will create a shift in meaning. In this regard, the accuracy of pronunciation becomes important so that the purpose of the conversation is understood correctly by the listener. The influence of regional languages can change the form of human intonation and pronunciation. As is known to all, there are many types of regional languages in this country which create various accents and pronunciation among people. In this regard, the pronunciation errors produced by Indonesian speakers who learn English are considered reasonable and acceptable. It is reasonable and acceptable due to the status of English language in Indonesia is as foreign language, neither the first nor the second language. Therefore, when Indonesian people speak English, the regional accent or pronunciation are still attached to them.

Diphthongs are presented in the inventory of various languages, one of which is English which will be the topic of analysis in this study. Diphthongs are also known as "gliding vowels" because they will be successfully pronounced when a vowel glides quickly to another vowel, which are two combinations of two adjacent vowel sounds in the same syllable. Besides, the characteristics of diphthongs also refers two types of vowels that are spoken in one breath. Technically, a diphthong is a vowel with two different targets: the tongue moves during the pronunciation of diphthongs.

## **Theory and Method**

### **Theory**

The study of language system is called phonology (Crystal, 2011). While the study of pronunciation is called phonetic. To describe the sound of speech it is necessary to know what the individual's voice is like and how each sound is different in form with the other sounds. Phonetics has an objective way to describe and analyze something that is used by humans in their language conversation. The function of phonetics is to identify human speech organs and muscles that produce different sounds from different languages. The voice is transmitted by the speaker to the listener. Aarts and McMahan (2008) state that the difference of phonology and phonetics is that phonetics focuses on the mechanics of sound production and transmission, irrespective of how the sounds may operate as a part of language system while phonology focuses on the function, organization or patterning of the sounds.

According to Carr (2012), diphthongs are a sequence of two kinds vowel sounds with "squash" together, diphthongs present phonetic commentaries in many languages, one of them in English language. According to him, there are two types of diphthongs in RP

(Receive Pronunciation) or can be called British accents, and GA (General American), diphthongs are quality vowels that change in syllables.

According to Ramelan (1999), diphthongs are part of a type of vocal that has special features, in which there is an intentional slide made from the initial vocal position to another vocal position. The vowels we have studied so far are simple or pure vowels called monophthong, consisting of only one vowel that is spoken and does not require a change in position when pronouncing.

Ramelan argues that diphthong in English is divided into two types, English closing diphthong [eɪ], [oʊ], [aɪ], [aʊ], and [ɪ] and 2) English centering diphthongs of [ɪə], [eə], [ə], and [ə]. Also the centering diphthong sounds like [ʊə], [eə], [ɪə] is hard to be pronounced (Saadah & Ardi, 2020). The two vowels that resulted from diphthong pronunciation have a loud center when pronounced the first vowel glides to the second vowel sound. According to Cahya (2018), diphthongs are made with a vocal sound, moving one vocal position to another vocal position. In phonetics the diphthong letters are represented by the first two letters indicating the initial position the second indicates the position of the movement. Diphthong is a combination of two types of vowels that produce one sound which is glided from one vowel to another vowel like combining two positions. In line opinion with Roach 1998 in Dosia and Rido (2017) states, sound of diphthongs consist of the movement or glide from one vowel to another.

Diphthong can change its quality in its production and can be transcribed with very different starting and ending points. Diphthong is usually in the form of long vowel. English diphthongs have the first element that is longer than the last element, usually referred to as diphthongs falling. Three diphthongs found very commonly in English are: diphthongs (i) prince: aɪ (SSBE) aɪ (GA) mouth: aʊ (SSBE) aʊ (GA), diphthongs (ii) face: eɪ (SSBE) eɪ (GA), goat: oʊ (SSBE) o: (GA), central diphthong: near: ɪə (SSBE) ɪr (GA), square: eə (SSBE) er (GA) (McMahon, 2002).

According to Giegerich (1992:55), the diphthong [aɪ] and [aʊ] of SSE are higher than the RP's central points, it means that the pronunciation will change. In the production of diphthongs, the form of pronunciations is different. If you hear it once, it is like having the same sound, but when you listen carefully, they are completely different. In addition to word pronunciation, listening sensitivity is also considered as influential factor in learning the diphthongs. Lack of attention in listening can hold up the sound to be understood and thus can shift the meaning. The duration such as short or long level needs to be considered when pronouncing the words.

## Method

This study aims to raise awareness of pronouncing English diphthongs. The method used in this study is qualitative descriptive method. Descriptive method is used to see the phenomenon of errors that are viewed objectively or naturally. According to Creswell (2009) qualitative research is very dependent on the object of research or participants. The data selection was taken from the EFL learners i.e. the third semester students in English linguistics study programs in the form of voices which are recorded by using smartphone.

The technique of data collection is started by using a sampling technique of nine students. The writers then asked the students to read a list of words and recorded them using smartphone. The words given contain diphthongs. Thus, the instrument of this study is in the form of test. After all the data were collected, the writers analyzed the data according to diphthongs theory. The method used in this analysis focuses on the data source (voices) that becomes important part of data analysis. The whole analysis relied on the recordings of the pronunciations produced by the students.

## Findings and Discussion

The data of this analysis were taken from English linguistics students, faculty of cultural sciences. Based on the analysis, it is found that most of them have the same tone and pronunciation. This happened due to the same language background and the same educational background. They have better understanding of accent and diphthong pronunciation because they are post-graduate students who are learning phonetics and phonology. However, a few errors still occur. The cause is their lack of awareness when pronouncing diphthong. The detailed analysis regarding the pronunciation errors of English diphthongs by EFL learners are as follow:

### Data 1

[eɪ]: *say, pay, hay, day*

In diphthongs [eɪ], there are three students who made pronunciation errors, /seɪ/, /peɪ/, /heɪ/, /deɪ/ and six students pronounce the diphthongs correctly. The students who made pronunciation errors on diphthongs mostly do not say [eɪ] but [aɪ] instead. The students who still have errors in pronouncing the first data is because when they say the words, the position of the tongue and their native language accent affects their way of pronouncing the words. The pronunciation errors of [eɪ] and [aɪ] are often found to occur.

### Data 2

[aɪ]: *I, eye, sight, fight, pie, buy*

In pronouncing diphthongs [aɪ], there are still four students who made pronunciation errors, the correct pronunciation are /aɪ/, /aɪ/, /saɪt/, /faɪt/, /paɪ/, /baɪ/. While the rest of the students pronounce the diphthong correctly. When diphthongs [eɪ] are pronounced, none of them pronounced [aɪ] to be [eɪ]. The students should pronounce diphthongs in a half-front position closing half diphthongs and the position of the tongue starts from the vocal position instead of full diphthongs in the lid.

### Data 3

[aʊ]: *out, count, bow, owl, cow*

In diphthong [aʊ], there are three students who made pronunciation errors. The correct pronunciation should be /aʊt/, /kaʊnt/, /baʊ/, /aʊl/, /caʊ/ with a front-back closing full diphthong. Starts with front part of the back (central part) of the tongue is slightly raised for the first element of the diphthong [aʊ]. The students who are mispronounced do not do the front-back closing full, but half-half front back closing which makes the pronunciation errors of diphthongs [aʊ].

### Data 4

[oʊ]: *coat, code, tone*

In this diphthong [oʊ], there are only two students who pronounce incorrectly, [oʊ] becomes [ʊə]. The correct pronunciation is /kʊt/, /kʊd/, /tʊn/ with back-back closing half diphthong position. For the beginning, some part of the tongue between the back and the center is raised to a point between half-close and half open position. The students who still mispronounce the words is caused by their tongue position which is not at the back and the center to a point between half-closed and half position, which makes their pronunciation errors.

### Data 5

[ɔɪ]: *oil, coin, voice, boy*

In this diphthong there are no errors in pronunciation, all students pronounce correctly. They all produced correct pronunciation /ɔɪl/, /cɔɪn/, /vɔɪs/, /bɔɪ/ with a full back-front closing diphthong and the first situation is the back of the tongue is raised to a point midway between [ɔ]. This happened because the pronunciation of this type of diphthongs can be pronounced in any position of the tongue.

**Data 6**

[ɪə]: *beer, hear, dear, ear, tear*

In this diphthong pronunciation, all of the students pronounce the words correctly. It is likely to occur because the two types of vowels that are put together are not too difficult to pronounce so that there are no pronunciation errors when saying /bɪər/, /hɪər/, /dɪər/, /ɪər/, /tɪər/ in a high-front-centering diphthong position and the tongue starts from the vowel [ɪ].

**Data 7**

[eə]: *hair, pair, bare, rare, care*

In this diphthong there are similarities as the first diphthong, there are four students who made errors in pronouncing [eə]. They occur because they do not say the words with a low-front centering diphthong and the position of the tongue is not in a closed position but in an open position with a high front-centering diphthong. The students who pronounce correctly are those who pronounce with a low front-centering diphthong /heər/, /peər/, /beər/, /reər/, /ceər/

**Data 8**

[ʊə]: *sure, tour, pure*

In this diphthong, there are four students who made errors in pronouncing /sʊər/, /tʊər/, /pʊər/ caused by the position of the tongue are not in a high position then the tongue starts in English diphthong in the form of [ʊ] position, and not from close [u:]; then, it slides away towards the central vowel [ə].

**Data 9**

[ɔə]: *your, hour*

In this diphthong, the right pronounced [ɔə] is /yɔə/ and /hɔə/ there are one student who made errors pronounce about this data, he is said /yʊə/ and /yʊə/. This error caused by the position of the tongue during pronunciation. According to the related theory in above, diphthongs are a sequence of two kinds vowel sounds with "squash" together. When it "squash" it create sounds that have similar types with any kinds of diphthongs.

From the above analysis, it is found that there are pronunciation errors where the first initial letter has similarities in pronunciation. The pronunciation errors occur more in the first vowel than the last or second vowel. When pronouncing the diphthongs, the position of the tongue affects the pronunciation and sound result. Thus, the position of the tongue is considered important to reduce the errors. Two types of vowels that are put together in one sound is not easy to pronounce. Pronunciation errors can be seen and occur when they are affected by several factors. But if we pronounce them carefully, the pronunciation errors can be minimized. As already mentioned by several previous studies, pronunciation errors can create a shift in meaning, create another word or even a new word. Based on the results above, there are found many errors in pronouncing diphthongs. Therefore, the writers hope the results of this analysis will raise people awareness to pronounce the diphthongs correctly. The writers also hope that the discussion of problem and analysis can help readers to overcome the pronunciation error by reading the factors that cause the problems.

### Conclusion

Pronunciation errors commonly occur among language learners, especially EFL learners, because they do not use English in their daily life. However, pronunciation errors need to take into account because it will create a shift in meaning, create another word or even a new word. When the meaning received is wrong, it will immediately make the pronunciation of the word or sentence not in line with the actual meaning. If we listen carefully, the diphthongs are easy to pronounce. But still, there are still pronunciation errors of diphthongs. When the two vowels meet together, it will lead to different pronunciation. From the data analysis, it can be concluded that the errors found in this study are mostly in the diphthong pronunciation at high and low positions.

In addition, it is found that there are only a few errors made by EFL students in pronouncing the diphthongs. This happens because most of the students know how to pronounce the diphthongs correctly. The writers suggest the readers to pronounce the diphthongs carefully by paying more attention to the initial vocal pressure and the final vowel because these two things can affect the results of pronunciation of diphthong. Moreover, it is expected that the result of this analysis can give new insights and contribution for phonetics study especially in the area of vowels and diphthongs study.

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