LLT Journal, e-ISSN 2579-9533, p-ISSN 1410-7201, Vol. 25, No. 1, April 2022, pp. 350-358

LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching
http://e-journal.usd.ac.id/index.php/LLT
Sanata Dharma University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

AN ANALYSIS OF SILENT CONSONANTS IN THE 2ND SEMESTER STUDENTS' PRONUNCIATION

Brigitta Rosemarie[1] and Yohana Veniranda[2]
Sanata Dharma University, Indonesia[1,2]
brigitta.rosemarie98@gmail.com[1] and veniranda@usd.ac.id[2]
correspondence: veniranda@usd.ac.id
https://doi.org/10.24071/llt.v25i1.4249
received 21 January 2022 ; accepted 10 May 2022

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the mispronounced words with silent consonants in the 2nd semester students' pronunciation and to analyze the difficulties that the students face in pronouncing words with a silent consonant. This is a survey research. The researcher used tests and interviews as the instruments in gathering data. The respondents are the 2nd semester students of PBI Sanata Dharma University of the academic year 2020/2021.The results showed that there are 3 silent consonants that are not supposed to be pronounced but were pronounced by the 2nd semester students. Those are silent /l/, /s/ and /b/. The reasons are because of the different language accents, the comprehension of vocabularies, and the inconsistency in English pronunciation. The researcher also collected some additional information about the students' awareness of pronunciation, their familiarity with silent consonants, and their understanding of phonetic transcription. The implication and suggestions are for English language learners, teachers and lecturers, and future researchers to develop the teaching-learning method of pronunciation.

Keywords**:** English language learners, phonotactics, pronunciation, silent consonants

Introduction

English pronunciation is inconsistent. It proves in words with silent /gh/, The word *brought* pronounced /brɔːt/, however, the word *drought* pronounced /drɑːft/. The reason why English words are inconsistent because English words have been adopted from many languages tat preserve the original words. English words are also hard to predict which makes the second language learner are challenged to learn pronunciation. This research would like to see the second semester students of PBI students after they took Pronunciation II subject and see their awareness of pronunciation.

According to Umera-Okeke (2008), "At the early stage of writing, say as early as the eighteenth century, people did not concern themselves with rules or accepted practices. The general feeling then was as long as the writer's meaning was

understood, spelling did not matter." (p. 65). From that background, English language learners have a problem in predicting the pronunciation of words, especially for unfamiliar words. Inconsistency might also be influenced by the origin of words and phonotactics as the English language was influenced by some other languages from different countries through history (Tambunsaribu & Simatupang, 2021). This research uses phonotactics as the basic theory to prove the impact of silent consonant in English Pronunciation.

This research has two research questions; what words with a silent consonant are mispronounced in the 2nd semester students' pronunciation? And, what difficulties do the students face in pronouncing words with a silent consonant? Those research questions are related to the 3 foundation theories, Phonotactics, Silent consonants, and Pronunciation.

Literature Review

Linguistics and Phonology

Linguistics is the basic theory to learn a language. According to Edward Finegan (2012),

> "Linguistics can be defined as the systematic inquiry into human language—into its structures and uses and the relationship between them, as well as into its development through history and its acquisition by children and adults. The scope of linguistics includes is language structure and language use." (p.22).

To understand and produce the words correctly, learners should be aware of linguistics in language. As a second language learner, learning L2 is quite challenging because the L1 and L2 sometimes are different. For example, Indonesian-English language is very different. It is also the challenge for teachers and learner to learn English with very contrasting background. Linguistics has branches from the smallest system to the biggest, such as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. This research focuses on the phonology system to understand deeper the phonotactics and the silent consonants.

According to (Roach, 2000), "Phonology describes the way sounds function within a given language or across languages, whilst, phonology is about the physical production and perception of the speech sounds" (p. 104). Phonology tells that combination of sounds could be an actual word and what combination of sounds could not be an actual word. The position of the sound in the word and the sounds that nearby affect the contrastive consonant and vowels in language and how the pronunciation.

Phonotactics

Phonotactics is the study of how phonemes are allowed to combine in a particular language. According to (Kivisto-De Souza, 2015),

> "Phonotactic awareness in the L2 can be defined as L2 phonological knowledge at the phonotactic domain, including knowledge about the L2 syllable structure, the permissible and impermissible sound combinations, as well as knowledge about their distribution" (p.104).

Through pronunciation, English language learners could analyze the pattern of words and how to pronounce the words, however, English has inconsistency in it. Phonotactics also answer the reason why the speakers slip while they pronounce some words sometimes. That is because the pattern of the consonants is not common.

Silent Consonant

A silent consonant is a consonant in a particular word that does not correspond to pronounce. The researcher found the historical background of silent consonants which explained by Groom (1957) as follows:

> "Attempts to refashion our spelling, to bring certain words into visible relation with the classical tongues, were made under the influence of the Renaissance, *rime* was refashioned in *rhyme,* to reveal its connection with *rhythmus*. The form of *scissors* and *scythe* is a perversion of the Middle English *sisours* and *sithe,* due to the erroneous notion that they are connected with the Latin *scindo.* And the spelling *island* is an equally mistaken alternation of the native *iland,* due to its imaginary relation with *isle* and *insula*" (p. 156-157).

So, the expert assumed that silent consonants have been the result to produce the refashion of English spelling. Nosiroval and O'ktamove (2021) stated that silent consonants are found in English as well as many French words..Strausser and Paniza. (2007) says, "There are no rules that we can apply to words with empty letters [;] you just have to use them and remember their spelling." The researcher collected the list of silent consonants words that have been taken from many sources which were mentioned in *LLT Journal* edition, Veniranda, (2004, p. 108-110). The researcher also adds a list of silent consonant words and the table of silent /d/ and /ph/ which doesn't mention yet, and the words have been taken from the internet.

The researcher does not mention the silent /r/. It is because silent /r/ is tricky to discuss in the analysis. In certain accents, /r/ is still pronounced, and in the historical non-rhotic consonant, the /r/ is deleted in certain positions. According to Giegerich (1992), "A non-rhotic accent is one which does not accept /r/ to occur in syllable rhymes." (p. 301).

The experts found there was some "loss of consonants" which have been rechecked in Hornby's and Jones' dictionaries. Wyld (1927) found that many of words are not described as having lost the consonants. For example, *friendly, husband, blind,* and *diamond* are listed under "loss of /d/". other examples, *attempts*, *honest, prospect, wristband,* and *text* are put under "loss of /t/". However, the researcher still mentioned the words of silent /t/ and /d/, because those are some words that still silent in /t/ and /d/. For example, *castle, whistle, ballet, listen*, and *gourmet*, in silent /t/, and *Wednesday, sandwich, edge, bridge*, and *gadget*, in silent /d/ (p. 211-217).

Brook (1963) says silent consonants also appeared when there is a double consonant in a word.

> "A consonant may be omitted from a group. The middle consonant of a group of three often disappeared in Old English, as in *el(n)boga* 'elbow'. The loss of consonant was especially common when the group of three consonants included a double consonant, as *sende* (earlier **sendde*), the original word is *sendan* means to send; *cyste* (earlier **cysste*), the original word is *cyssan* means to kiss. A similar loss of middle consonant of a group has often taken place in pronunciation in Modern English, although the lost consonant has generally remained in spelling, as in *Christmas, postman, often"* (p. 82).

Silent consonants become more challenging to be pronounced for English language learners, as also mentioned by Dhea (2021), Djurayeva (2021) and Indrayadi & Irawan (2021). According to Sedanand et al. (2004), "Silent consonant letters constitute one of the problem areas for the pronunciation of English words.

To solve some of the problems of the learners, a few spelling sequences containing silent letters are discussed below:

a. *b* is always silent in the spelling sequences *mb* and *bt* occurring in the word-final position: *comb, numb, bomb, limb, debt ….*
b. *d* is always silent in the spelling sequence *dj*: *adjective, adjunct, adjacent ….*
c. *g* is silent in the spelling sequence *gm* or *gn: phlegm, gnarl, champagne, sign, gnat, gnaw ….*
d. *h* is silent in the spelling sequence *gh* in the word-final position: *ghost, ghetto, aghast, ghastly, ah, eh, oh*.
e. *k* is always silent in the word-initial spelling sequence *kn: kneel, knee, knob, knight, knave, knowledge, knife, knock.*" (Sedanand & Jindal, 2004).

Pronunciation

Pronunciation is an act of producing speech sounds. According to Cook (1996 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016), "pronunciation as the production of English sounds". Pronunciation is more than listening and repeating sounds. James (2010) cited in the journal English pronunciation Instruction: A Literature Review, states that some basic levels can be understood by an acceptable pronunciation.

> "The first level is what the speaker saying is not understandable to people. Second, what the speaker is saying can be understandable to people but the speaker's pronunciation is not acceptable to listen to because he/she has a strange and heavy accent. The last level is people understand the speaker and the speaker's English is acceptable to listen." (p. 2).

Thus, the goal of pronunciation is not to pronounce like natives, but intelligible pronunciation should be the real purpose of oral communication (LaScotte, Meyers & Tarone, 2021). For example, the English language learners should know how to pronounce some similar words (e.g. *word* and *world*, *correct* and *collect*, *right* and *light*) to make sure that the listener could get the message clearer. Galante (2021) and Pennington (2021 mentioned the purpose of teaching pronunciation is intelligibility and comprehensibility. Nikam (2021) mentioned the importance of selecting

different vocabulary for different groups of learners when teachers decide to teach pronunciation.

Research Method

This research focused on the students' pronunciation in the consonants that have not to be pronounced but were pronounced by them. In collecting the data, the researcher used survey research through pronunciation test and interview as an instrument. The test and interview were conducted by Zoom (teleconference). The researcher tested 42 words from 14 consonant syllables. The respondents were the 2nd semester students of PBI Sanata Dharma University of academic year 2020/2021. The researcher assumed that the respondents have learned Silent Letters in Pronunciation II subject.

In analyzing the data, the researcher used qualitative research as a method. In pronunciation test, the researcher tested 30 list of words and 5 sentences that consist of 12 hidden silent consonant words. The researcher calculated the total number of respondents divided by the number of total respondents and times 100% to find the percentage results.

In the interview, the researcher used qualitative research as a method for processing the data. The researcher asked 5 open ended questions which are related into the second research question. The questions are the difficulties of pronouncing words with silent consonants, the respondents' confidence in pronouncing words with silent consonant, the importance of pronunciation for English learners, the respondents' familiarity in silent consonants, and the respondents' understanding of phonetic transcription.

Findings and Discussion

The researcher collected the findings through pronunciation test and interview. The researcher wants to discuss about the words with silent consonants are mispronounced by the 2nd semester students. Form the pronunciation test results, there were 1134 recorded words which counted from 42 chosen words which pronounced by 27 respondents.

Table 1. Silent consonant

Silent consonant	Accumulation			
	Correct		Incorrect	
	Total	%	Total	%
/gh/	59	73%	22	27%
/b/	45	56%	36	44%
/l/	42	52%	39	48%
/g/	65	80%	16	20%
/t/	54	67%	27	33%
/h/	79	98%	2	2%
/ph/	53	65%	28	35%
/s/	47	58%	37	46%
/k/	79	98%	2	2%
/n/	79	98%	2	2%
/w/	63	78%	18	22%
/d/	70	86%	11	14%

/p/	56	69%	25	31%
/c/	80	99%	1	1%
Average	62	77%	19	23%

The table shows that there were 27% of respondents mispronounced the words in silent /gh/, 44% of respondents mispronounced words with silent /b/, 48% of students mispronounced the words with silent /l/, 20% respondents were mispronounced words with silent /g/, 33% respondents mispronounced words with silent /t/, 2% of respondents mispronounced words with silent /h/, 35% students mispronounced words with silent /ph/, 46% students mispronounced words with silent /s/, 2% of respondents mispronounced words with silent /k/ and /n/, 22% of students mispronounced words with silent /w/, 14% of students were mispronounced the words with silent /d/, 31% of respondents were mispronounced words with silent /p/, and only 1% of respondents were mispronounce words with silent /c/. So, the total is, there were 23% of students mispronounced the words with silent consonants. Meanwhile there were 77% students were correctly pronounced the words with silent consonant.

Answering the first research question, what words with a silent consonant are mispronounced in the 2nd semester students' pronunciation? The researcher formulated the research problem and the result which produced that there were 3 most silent consonants that highly mispronounced. There are silent /l/, /s/, and /b/. Mahapatra (2017) said, "Silent letter is an informal term for a letter of the alphabet (or a letter combination) that is usually left unpronounced." (p.3032). The researcher found some words are not similar between the letters and the pronunciation. It proved when the researcher found that there were some respondents find difficulties in guessing the unfamiliar words or got slip in some words.

The interview results, the researcher formulated 5 questions which are related to the research problem, what difficulties do the students face in pronouncing words with a silent consonant? That research problem would be answered from the interview questions: the difficulties of pronouncing words with silent consonants, the respondents' confidence in pronouncing words with silent consonant, the importance of pronunciation for English learners, the respondents' familiarity in silent consonants, and the respondents' understanding of phonetic transcription.

The researcher highlighted the respondents' reasons into 3 big points. First, the difference of first and second language. In the Indonesian language, the pronunciation of words is similar to the letters. Meanwhile, in English, some words have different letters and pronunciations. That showed the discrepancy from the one to other words. Phonotactics theory answered the reason why the respondents slipped which made the speech errors when they pronounce some words. It is also connected to the habit of reading the pattern of the Indonesian letters which made them hard to adapt to the English letters' patterns. Furthermore, English seems to have borrowed some words from other languages and the pronunciation might more or less follow the origin of words which shows that English has inconsistency in pronouncing words.

Second was the respondents' comprehension of vocabularies. In the interview, the respondents admitted that they found difficulties in words which are rarely to use. In other factors, the researcher belief that there are some words which are inconsistent

to be pronounced which make them confused. According to Strausser and Paniza (2007) on the website *Silent Letters in English*, "There are no rules that we can apply to words with empty letters [;] you just to use them and remember their spelling". That theory and the data collection showed that the 2nd semester students of PBI Sanata Dharma University were less practicing and exploring vocabularies.

Last, the researcher summarized the questions of pronunciation, silent consonants, and phonetic transcription in one point. Rahmania and Mandasari (2021) stated that learning pronunciation needs process and steps to be fluent and understandable. It was a good start that the 2nd semester students of PBI Sanata Dharma realized that pronunciation was so important. Almost all of the respondents were familiar with silent consonants. It was proven when the respondents could mention the words by adding the silent consonants. The respondents who were familiar with silent consonants affirmed that the lecturers taught in semester 1 and 2, and asked them to practice a lot about silent consonants. The researcher also found several students who had motivated to develop their comprehension about pronunciation and silent consonants by themselves. They learned from the textbook, applications of silent consonants, and joining courses outside the class. Meanwhile, the other respondents who were unfamiliar with silent consonants admitted that they rarely used some vocabularies and had less practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the 77% of the students in PBI Sanata Dharma University could pronounce silent consonant words correctly. Meanwhile, the rest of students found difficulties in language and vocabulary while they pronounced silent consonants. The researcher also found the benefits of understanding pronunciation focusing in silent consonant. For students, pronunciation is an important feature to shape their English skills. For teachers and employers, pronunciation is the main weapon of communication especially in the working world.

The researcher recommends the 2nd semester students of PBI Sanata Dharma to be more aware in pronunciation especially in silent letters. English teachers and lecturers can facilitate students with learning media to improve the student's speaking skill and they should be the best role model for their students. For the future researchers who are interested in this topic, they might take the topic about silent vowel in pupil's pronunciation.

References

Dhea, A. (2021). An error analysis of students' pronunciation silent letter at the second semester of English education Raden Intan State Islaamic University of Lampung in academic year of 2019/2020 (A Doctoral dissertation, Universitas Islam Negeri Raden Intan Lampung).

Djurayeva, Y. A. (2021). Enhancing English pronunciation in learning process. *Academic research in educational sciences, 2* (CSPI conference 2), 302-306.

Finegan, E. (2012). *Language: Its structure and use* (6th Edition ed.). Wadsworth: Wadsworth Publishing.

Galante, A., Piccardo., E. (2021). Teaching pronunciation: toward intelligibility and comprehensibility, *ELT Journal*. ccab060, https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab060

Giegerich, H. J. (1992). *English phonology: An introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gilakjani, A. P. (2016). What factors influence the english pronunciation of efl learners? *Modern Journal of Language Teaching Methods (MJLTM)*, *6*(2), 314-326.

Groom, B. (1957). *A short history of english words.* London: Macmillan.

Hornby, A. S. (1974). *Oxford advanced learner's dictionary of current english.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Indrayadi, T., & Irawan, Y. (2021). Indonesian EFL Students' Difficulties in Recognizing English Letters. *Qualitative Report*, *26*(11).

James, R. B. (2010). *Teaching pronunciation gets a bad R.A.P: A framework for teaching pronunciation.* Hankuk: University of Foreign Students.

Jones, D. (1974). *English pronouncing dictionary*. London: The English Languge Book Society (ELBS) and J.M. Dent and Sons Ltd.

Kivisto-De Souza, H. (2015). Phonological awareness and pronunciation in a second language. *Dissertation (Ph.D in Applied Linguistics)*, 505p.

LaScotte, D., Meyers, C., & Tarone, E. (2021). Voice and mirroring in SLA: Top-down pedagogy for L2 pronunciation instruction. *RELC Journal*, *52*(1), 144-154.

Mahapatra, D. P. (2017). The problem of silent letters in ESL teaching and learning. *5*(4). Retrieved from www.ijcrt.org

Nikam, S. J. (2021). Teaching Pronunciation to Undergraduate Students: An Application of Questionnaires in Phonetic Studies. *Ilkogretim Online*, *20*(5).

Nosiroval, D., O'ktamove, M. (2021). How to pronounce silent letters in English and French. *Общество и инновации*, *2*(4/S), 712-716. Journal home page: https://inscience.uz/index.php/socinov/index

Pennington, M. C. (2021). Teaching Pronunciation: The State of the Art 2021. *RELC Journal*, *52*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1177/00336882211002283

Rahmania, A. H., & Mandasari, B. (2021). STUDENTS'PERCEPTION TOWARDS THE USE OF JOOX APPLICATION TO IMPROVE STUDENTS'PRONUNCIATION. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, *2*(1), 39-44.

Roach, P. (2000). *English phonetics and phonology.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Sedanand, K., & Jindal, D. V. (2004). *A practical course in english pronunciation.* PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd. Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/silent-letter-pronunciation-1692097

Silent Letters in English: A to Z Rules, published on Sep 7, 2019 by the channel English with Max https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wtEfaEUTZhI (retrieved 21 January 2022)

Silent Letters in English from A-Z | List of Words with Silent Letters | English Pronunciation,published on Apr 25, 2018, by the channel 7ESL Learning English https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCiOTBcha-o&t=115s (retrieved 21 January 2022)

Silent Letters - Learn the Rules and Improve Your English Pronunciation!, published on Mar 9, 2018, by the channel Oxford Online English https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpo6sVBOaLk (retrieved 21 January 2022)

Silent letters: Useful list of words with silent letters. (2018). Retrieved from 7ESL: https://7esl.com/silent-letters/

Strausser, J., & Paniza, J. (2007). *Painless english for speakers of other languages.* Barron's. Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/silent-letter-pronunciation-1692097

Tambunsaribu, G., & Simatupang, M. S. (2021). Pronunciation problems faced by Indonesian college students who learn to speak English. *European Journal of Molecular & Clinical Medicine*, *8*(2), 759-766.

Umera-Okeke, N. (2008). Spelling and phonetic inconsistencies in English: a problem for learners of english as a foreign/second language. 64-83.

Veniranda, Y., & Gunawan, J. (2004). Silent consonants in english. *LLT Journal, Vol. 7 No. 2, 7*(2), 103-121.

Wyld, H. C. (1927). *A short history of english.* London: J. Murray.