

## **INDONESIAN STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN PRONOUNCING ENGLISH DIPHTONGS**

**Andri Donal**

*andriando1101@gmail.com*

University of Pasir Pengaraian

### **ABSTRACT**

One of Indonesian students' difficulties in learning English is pronouncing English sounds correctly. Indonesian language as mother tongue influences significantly to the way of Indonesian students in pronouncing English sounds. Compared to English, Indonesian language generally does not have differences between spelling the letter and pronouncing the sounds. Among all English sounds, diphthongs are assumed as one of the most difficulties pronounced by Indonesian students. This study was conducted to thirty five students of University of Pasir Pengaraian, Riau Province by using mix method where the researcher gave test to find out students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs and observation to describe the factors influencing students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs. The result of study showed that the most difficult of English diphthong was [av] sound. Factors influencing students have difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs were mother language interfere, lack of knowledge in English sound systems and unsuccessful in using borrowed English words. This study is expected can give contribution in improving Indonesian students pronunciation especially diphthong sounds.

Keywords: Pronouncing, Difficulty, English diphthong.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Having a good speaking like native speakers is one dream of foreign language students including for Indonesian students who learn English as foreign language. However, to realize it is not easy. One of Indonesian difficulties in learning English speaking is how to pronounce English sounds correctly. Cruthers (1987:191) explains the reasons why learning another language pronunciation are difficult; first, some sounds of the new or target

language do not exist in the learner's native language. The second is in the difference of distribution between native language and the target language. In addition, Nation and Newton (2009:78) mention there are five factors affect on learning of another sound system. They are, the age of the learner, the learner's first language, the learner's current stage of proficiency development, the experience and attitudes of the learner, and the

condition for teaching and learning. It means that the differences between learner native language and target language will impact to sounds produced by foreign language learner.

Moreover, Derwin and Murno (2005) argue that having a good pronunciation of the language can help in normal communication, particularly intelligibility. In other words, learning how to pronounce another language sounds is very important in interaction and wrong in pronunciation can make misunderstanding in conversation. So, introducing the correct English pronunciation to the English students can reduce the error produced in pronouncing English pronunciation. Pennington and Richards (1986) divided pronunciation into articulation of individual sounds and the distinctive features of sounds like voicing and aspiration, voice-setting features, and stress and intonation. Dalton and Seidlhover (2005) distribute speech sounds belong to one or other of the four main classes known as vowels, consonants, diphthong and triphthongs. According to Jones (1975:23) a vowel (in normal speech) is defined as a voiced sounds in forming which the air issues in continuous stream through the pharynx and mouth, there being no obstruction and no narrowing such as would cause audible friction. Roach (2009) defines consonant as a sound, voiced and voiceless, in which the airstream an obstructed through a narrowing or complete closure of the mouth passage. While diphtongs sounds occur when there is a deliberate glide made from one vowel position to another vowel position, and which is produced in one syllable (Ramelan 1999). According to Roach (2009:30) triphthongs is a glide from one vowel to another and then to a third, all produce rapidly and without interruption.

These classes of speech sounds have different difficulties for foreign language learners especially for Indonesian. There are some studies conducted to find out related to how English sound learned by Indonesian students. Prananingrum and Kwary (2006:1) proved that Indonesian learners also faced difficulties in producing English sounds since English and Indonesian have different sounds distribution. Tiono and Yostanto (2008) conducted a study about English Phonological Errors Produced by English Department Students where the result shows that the students produced thirty-four kinds of phonological errors and that the deviations occurred most frequently before, after, or in between vowels. However, this study focuses on students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs. The phenomena during teaching in English department where students have difficulties in pronouncing English sounds especially in pronouncing English diphthongs has triggered researcher to conduct this study.

According to J.D.O'Conner a diphthong is a glide from one vowel to another, and the whole glide acts like one of the long simple vowels. While "pure" vowels, or monophthongs, are said to have one target tongue position, diphthongs have two target tongue positions. *Diphthongs* are represented by two symbols, for example English word "same" as [seim], where the two vowel symbols are intended to represent approximately the beginning and ending tongue positions [J.D.O'Conner 1980, 84]. Although a diphthong is normally represented in phonetic writing by two vowel symbols, this does not follow that both vowel sounds are equally syllabic. Ramelan (1999) writes that "a diphthong is pronounced in one syllable, or produced with one single

impulse of breath. Therefore, when the sequence of two vowels is produced with two impulses of breath, it is not a diphthong, but it is said to be dissyllabic or just an ordinary sequence of two vowel sounds”.

Gerald Kelly groups the 8 diphthongs of English language in the following way (Kelly 2000, 34):

**a) Centering diphthongs** which end with a glide towards central vowel [ə]. The examples are as follows:

1. Diphthong [ɪə]. The glide of /ɪə/ begins with a tongue position approximately that used for /ɪ/, centralized front half-close, and moves in the direction of the more open variety of /ə/ when /ɪə/ is final in the word; in non-final positions. Example: ear, era, here, fear, beer, dear and career.
2. Diphthong [ʊə]. This diphthong glides from a tongue position similar to that used for /ʊ/ towards the more open type of /ə/ which forms the end-point of all three centering diphthong with, again, a somewhat closer variety of /ə/ when the diphthong occurs in a closed syllable. Example: tour, moor, poor, sure, pure, and cure.
3. Diphthong [ɛə]. The glide of /ɛə/ begins in the half-open front position, approximately [ɛ], and move in the direction of the more open variety of /ə/, especially when the diphthong is final; where /ɛə/ occurs in a syllable closed by a consonant the /ə/ element tends to be a mid /ə/ type, the lips are neutrally open though-out. Example: heir, care, bare, where and chair.

**b) Closing diphthongs** which end with a glide towards [ɪ] or towards

[ʊ]. The glide is towards a higher position in the mouth. Examples:

4. Diphthong [eɪ]. The glide begins from slightly below the half-close front position and moves in the direction of /ɪ/, there being a slight closing movement of the lower jaw; the lips are spread. Examples: eight, veil, weigh, rein, they, prey, and grey.
5. Diphthong [ɔɪ]. For /ɔɪ/ the tongue glide begins at a point between the back half-open and open positions and moves in the direction of /ɪ/. The tongue movement extends from back to centralized front, but the range of closing in the glide is not as great as for /aɪ/; the jaw movement, though considerable, may not therefore, be as marked as in the case of /aɪ/. Examples: boy, toy, noise, voice, boil, ointment, and point.
6. Diphthong [aɪ]. The glide of /aɪ/ begins at a point slightly behind the front open position, and moves in the direction of position associated with /ɪ/, although the tongue is not usually raised to a level closer than C [ē]; the glide is much more extensive than that of [eɪ], the closing movement of the lower jaw being obvious. Example: time, write, bite, climb, cry, dry, by, and try.
7. Diphthong [əʊ]. The glide of /əʊ/ begins at a central position, between half-close and half-open, and moves in the direction of /ʊ/, there being a slight closing movement of the lower jaw; the lips are neutral for the 1<sup>st</sup> element, but have a tendency to round on the 2<sup>nd</sup> element. Example: ocean, over, open,

cold, both, omen, only and those.

8. Diphthong [av]. The glide of /av/ begins at a point between the back and front open positions, slightly more fronted than the position for /a:/, and moves in the direction of /o/, though the tongue may not be raised higher than the half-close level. Example: owl, ounce, down, brown, sound, our and towel.

In learning English diphthongs, students often got difficulties. Harmer (2007:250) mentions problems faced by English foreign language learner in learning diphthongs. They are as follows:

- 1) What students can hear.  
Some students have great difficulty hearing pronunciation features which we want them to reproduce. Frequently, speakers of different first languages have problems with different sounds
- 2) What students can say.  
Learning a foreign language often presents us with the problem of physical unfamiliarity (i.e. it is actually physically difficult to make

the sound using particular parts of the mouth, uvula or nasal cavity).

- 3) The intonation problem  
Some of us (and many of our students) find it extremely difficult to hear tunes or to identify the different patterns of rising and falling tones.

To help students in facing pronunciation difficulties, Kelly (2000:16) suggests two strategies in pronunciation teaching: drilling and chaining. Basic form of drilling involves teacher saying a word or structure, and getting students to repeat it. Aim of drilling is to help students achieve better pronunciation of language items, and help them remember new item. It is assumed can encourage students to bring up a word, phrase or structure as they study before. Teachers generally use prompts, pictures, mimes etc, to help learning process along. Here, the role of teacher is as a model of the word, phrase or structure for students to copy. Different with drilling, chaining is used to drill long sentences involving difficult words and sounds. Teachers separate certain words from sentence, and model them separately for students to repeat, and gradually build the sentence up until they become complete sentences.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study was conducted through mix method where the researcher gave test to find out students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs and observation to describe the factors influencing students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs. There were thirty five students of English Study Program, University of Pasir Pengaraian participating in this research. They have different mother languages: Malay, Bataknese, Javanese,

Sundanese, and Minangnese. The data of research were collected by recording students' pronunciation while reading English text and observation during teaching learning process. After identifying the words containing diphthong sounds, researcher categorized them based on the kinds of English diphthongs. There were eight kinds of diphthongs with the total diphthongs was thirty five diphthong sounds. The next steps were describing

and analyzing the data. The data were analyzed quantitatively to find out students' ability in pronouncing English

and qualitatively to describe students' difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs.

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are eight English diphthongs that are analyzed in this research. They are English centering diphthong consist of [ɪə], [ɛə], [ʊə]. The English closing diphthong consists of

[aɪ], [eɪ], [ɔɪ], [aʊ], and [əʊ]. The raters identified students pronounce and the researcher analyzed was categorized into following table.

**Table 1. Students' Ability in pronouncing English Diphthongs**

No	Diphthongs	Average Score
1	[ɪə]	68,0
2	[ʊə]	54,5
3	[ɛə]	51,4
4	[eɪ]	75,0
5	[ɔɪ]	82,0
6	[aɪ]	61,5
7	[əʊ]	60,2
8	[aʊ]	48,2

From the table 1, it can be seen that students' tent to have difficulties in pronouncing diphthongs [aʊ] and rather easier in pronouncing diphthong [ɔɪ]. Based on the test given to students, there were some students had difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs.

1. Diphthong [ɪə].

In diphthong [ɪə] some students pronounce the word “deer” [dɪər] wrongly. Some of them pronounce it as [der] and [di:r]. Here there are two wrong ways in pronouncing diphthong [ɪə] in word “deer” and changed it into short vowel [e] and long vowel [i:]. Another example was in the word “year” [jɪər] that pronounced wrongly as [yɪr] and [yer].

2. Diphthong [ʊə].

Among some examples of English words that have diphthong sound, the word “during” mostly pronounced wrongly by students. They should have pronounced it as [dʒʊəriŋ] rather than [dariŋ] or [du:riŋ].

3. Diphthong [ɛə].

From thirty five students as sample, thirty two students pronounced the word “there” /ðɛər/wrongly. Some students pronounced it such as [ðɪer], [ðeɪr] and [ðer].

4. Diphthong [eɪ]

From the test, it can be known that some difficulties in pronouncing diphthong [eɪ] were the word “day” [deɪ] which pronounced as [dai]. It can be difficult for students because

of the influence of Indonesian language where the letter “y” usually pronounced become [i]. Another pronunciation mistake made by students was the word “lake” [leik] that pronounced became [laik].

5. Diphthong [ɔɪ].

Diphthong [ɔɪ] seems not too difficult for Indonesian students, because there is similarity in the way of pronouncing the [ɔɪ] sound between Indonesian language and English. For example in the word “boy”, most students can pronounce it well. However, there were some students pronounced the word “ointment” [ɔɪntmənt] wrongly and changed into [aɪntmənt].

6. Diphthong [aɪ]

Looking at the pattern of words, the sounds of diphthong [aɪ] usually occur in the following pattern; consonant letter followed by vowel “i” such as “time, write, bite, climb” or consonant followed by letter “y” such as “cry, dry, by, and try”., students should be easier in pronouncing diphthong [aɪ]. However, in this study, some students still have difficulties in pronouncing diphthong [aɪ]. For example, they pronounced the word “why” [wai] to [wei]. The habitual of pronouncing English word that has been used/borrowed by Indonesia language also affected to pronunciation error of diphthongs such the word “horizon” [hə:raɪzn] that pronounced as [horizon].

7. Diphthong [əʊ].

The sound of diphthong [əʊ] mostly is produced in letter “o” such as words “ocean, over, open, cold, both, and those. For Indonesia

students it is rather difficult because they used to pronounce letter “o” with [o] sound. In this study, most students pronounced the word “home” [həʊm] became [hom]. It can be caused there is Indonesian word has the sound [əʊ]. It is clearer in word “no” [nəʊ] that was pronounced [no]. It means the habitual of Indonesian students in pronouncing “o” letter affected to error they produced.

8. Diphthong [aʊ]

The sound [aʊ] is produced when the word constructed by “ou” letters such as “mountain, found, wounded, and out”. Some student in this study made error in pronouncing diphthong [aʊ], for example in word “mountain” [maʊntən] that pronounced into [mountein]. The same case also occurred in words “out”, “found”, and “wounded”, where students did not pronounced letter “ou” into sound [aʊ] but same with the letter.

From the explanation above, it can be summed that some students still have difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs. There are some factors influencing students have difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs. First is the influence of students’ mother language. Dulay (1982:97) stated that the first language has been considered the villain in second language learning as the major cause of a learner’s problem in mastery the new language. Most of Indonesian students can speak more than one language. This will affect to them when learning English especially in pronouncing English sounds. Second is the lack of students’ knowledge about English sound system. The sound system between Indonesian language and English is different. In Indonesia, the letter or word tends to

have similarity with its sound. So it makes Indonesian students made error or difficulties in pronouncing English word. For example, “go”, mango, do, does, and etc. It was related with data from AGPS (1986) there are three diphthongs in Indonesian [ɔɪ], [eɪ] and [əʊ]. The third factor is unsuccessful in using borrowed English words. In digital era where there is no border among countries, the spread of language cannot be stopped. One language can easily take from other languages. It also happens to Indonesian language that borrows some words from other languages to enrich its vocabulary especially from English. However, when Indonesian students use these words, they pronounce them with Indonesian pronunciation. For example in word “horizon” [hə:raɪzn], Because in Indonesia, the word horizon is also used and modified as *horison*,

Indonesian students pronounced it based on Indonesian language version [horizon]. The other examples are words “domain”, “voucher”, “July” and etc.

In addition, Nesgoda (1980) states that language learners may find difficulties in learning to speak English well because several spelling may be represented by a single sound. In addition, Lanteigne (2006) confirms that difficulties in learning English occur due to the fact that some of English sounds do not exist in the mother tongue of the learners. In this study it also occurs in diphthong [əʊ] for letter “o”. As a consequence of all the difficulties provided by the English pronunciation, many English language learners as well as the Indonesian learners tend to generate errors in the articulation of the sounds (Tiono and Yostanto, 2008).

## CONCLUSIONS

Among eight English diphthongs, Indonesian students tend to have difficulties in pronouncing diphthongs [aʊ] and rather easier in pronouncing diphthong [ɔɪ]. There are some factors influencing students have difficulties in pronouncing English diphthongs. First is the influence of students' mother language. Second is the lack of

knowledge in English sound system. Third is unsuccessful in using borrowed English words. For example in word “horizon” [hə:raɪzn]. Because in Indonesia, the word horizon is also used and modified as *horison*, Indonesian students pronounced it based on Indonesian language version.

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