

THE SECOND SEMESTER STUDENTS' ERRORS IN PRONOUNCING THE WORDS CONTAINING SILENT LETTERS

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Abstract

This study was conducted to analyze of students' pronunciation error toward English silent letters. The problems which should be answered in this study were silent letter errors which were made by students, and the factors that caused the errors. The objectives of this study were to find out silent letter errors made by the students and to know the factors that caused the error. The subject of this study was thirty two students of the second semester of Universitas PGRI Palembang. The technique of choosing the subjects was using purposive sampling. The method of this study was qualitative method. The data source of this study was student's video recorder. The result of this study showed that there were eight silent letter errors made by students such as 'B', 'C', 'H', 'L', 'P', 'T', 'U', 'W'. The dominant silent letters error made by the students were the letter 'W' and 'P' with the highest percentage 100%. There were two factors that caused the error. Firstly, the students were lack of knowledge toward silent letters and phonetic transcription. Secondly, the students were accustomed to pronounce the wrong sound of the word.

Kata kunci: pronunciation, error, silent letters

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Introduction

The learners of English as a second language find difficulties in their learning. Learning English sometimes is affected by their mother tongue (Indonesian language). It causes error for the learners in learning and using English. Muriungi (2011) states that "learners make many errors in the process of acquiring English as a second language" (p.88). The learners do not realize language rules. They use second language rules (English rules) as they use their first language rules (Indonesian language rules). It is essential to know that English and Indonesian language have many diversifications such as in structure, spelling, pronunciation, etc. The learners should be concerned about language rules in order to avoid language interference.

Pronunciation is the main aspect of learning a second language. It influences the learners' communicative competence in using the target language. According to Pourhosein (2012), "pronunciation is an

integral part of foreign language learning since it directly affects learners' communicative competence as pronunciation properly in order to be understandable" (p.119). Pronunciation in language learning cannot be belittled because pronunciation is how a word or a language be spoken. Pronunciation is the significant sound production of words that are used to communicate with others in an effort to implement a meaning. Correct pronunciation will give the advantages not only in production but also the understanding of spoken language. Furthermore, pronunciation is production of speech sound for communication, but in order to make the communication run well, those sounds should be comprehended by another person. It is noticed that pronunciation is the main thing a person acknowledge in conversation. Grammar and vocabulary are avowed as the important aspect of language, but it is useless if the speaker cannot utter it

properly. Furthermore, the listeners more likely to comprehend the speaker if the speaker uses proper pronunciation, even though the grammar is error. Hereby, pronunciation becomes an important thing in the communication process. Learning English pronunciation becomes a challenge for the learners. The learners are difficult to comprehend English pronunciation because the words that they hear are often different from the written form. It causes the errors in their learning process and using English.

One of the common errors pronunciation that learners make is in silent letters. Silent letter is the condition where a letter exists in spelling but it does not exist in pronunciation. According to Carney (2012), “the term ‘silent letter’ is an extension of a metaphor commonly used in the teaching of reading, where letters are often supposed to ‘speak’ to the reader” (p.40). For instance, letter “b” in Climb, letter “c” in Scene, letter “d” in handkerchief, letter “h” in choir, letter “i” in business, letter “k” in knee, letter “t” in soft, letter “g/gh” in alright, letter “a” in musically and etc. The silent letters above are unpronounced in English rule.

Silent letters do not exist in Indonesian language. In Indonesian language rule, all letters in a word are pronounced while in English rule, there are some silent letters which should not be pronounced. The learners do not realize this rule. They interfere Indonesian language rules to English. Muriungi (2011) states that “the first language has rules that the learners have learnt and understood and they therefore tend to use the rules of the first language on the second language and end up creating errors” (p.90). Fanani and Fitri (2014) affirms that “it is clear that learners use L1 sound system for help them pronounce the words in L2, which indicates the presence of direct interference from L1 on L2” (p.36). The learners pronounce all the letters in

English words as they pronounce that of in Indonesian language, and it creates the error.

For the reason above, the researcher realized that conducting research of pronunciation specially about silent letters was very crucial. As known, in English there are many words contain silent letters. According to Ursula Dubosarsky, “roughly 60 percent of words in English have silent letter in them” (The Word Snoop, 2009). Where if it is pronounced, it will bother listener's comprehension. By knowing the errors in pronouncing silent letters, English teachers could notice which silent letters are errors and which is the dominant so they are able to map them in order to give more exercises in English teaching and learning.

The researcher decided to choose the research entitled “The Second Semester Students’ Errors in Pronouncing The Words Containing Silent Letters”.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher utilized qualitative research. This type of research is a kind of research method study without any statistic procedure. Robert (2016) affirms that “qualitative research is an approach to social science research that emphasizes collecting descriptive data in natural setting uses inductive thinking and emphasizes understanding the subject point of view” (p.274). Creswell (2012) states that “qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional methods” (p.45). Hereby, qualitative research focuses on describing, understanding and clarifying a human experience.

The participants in this study were 32 students of second semester of English education study program at Universitas

PGRI Palembang. The researcher used purposive sampling in choosing the sample. According to Nugraha (2015) “purposive sampling is samples which are chosen based on the certain considerations” (p.111). The reason of choosing the participants was based on the data from questionnaire which was given to the English lecturer at PGRI Palembang. From the questionnaire, it suggested that the second semester students were the students who have problem in their pronunciation especially toward silent letter. The English lecturer mentioned in questionnaire, there are 30% of second semester students produced error in pronouncing silent letter.

In collecting the data, the researcher used a documentation technique. Tavakoli (2012) states that “document analysis can be of written or text-based artifacts (textbooks, novels, journals, meeting minutes, logs, announcements, policy statements, newspapers, transcripts, birth certificates, marriage records, budgets, letters, e-mail messages, etc.) or of nonwritten records (photographs, audiotapes, videotapes, computer images, websites, musical performance, televised political speeches, virtual world settings, etc)” (p.180). According to Nugrahani (2014), “there are various kinds of data sources which can be used for finding information in qualitative research. They are document/archives, informant, event/activity, place/location, thing/image/recording” (p.109).

In this research, the writer collected the data from students’ recording in pronouncing words containing silent letters. The researcher prepared a list of sentences and phrases containing words which have silent letters “b”, “c”, “h”, “l”, “p”, “t”, “u”, “w”. Then the researcher asked the students to pronounce list of those sentences and phrases. Besides that, the

researcher set up a video recorder to record when the students pronounced those sentences and phrases. This video was the data which was analyzed by the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher gave questionnaire which containing open-ended question to the students in order to have data for knowing the cause of errors. As be known, error occurs when the students get incorrect repeatedly. The researcher attempted to find out students made error or not by making every word appeared more than once on the test.

The techniques for analyzing the data were based on the following steps:

1. Transcript

Transcript data was the process of transcribe students’ pronunciation in the form of phonetic transcription. This step was helped by the rater

2. Coding

Coding was the process of labeling sentence, phrase, word and a letter in transcript. This was labeling which silent letter was pronounced by the students in order to get easy in studying the data

3. Tabulating

The researcher tabulated the collected data based on their frequency of completion. This process was to compose the data and to know the dominant of silent letter error. The data was put into certain table and counted the percentage.

4. Data analysis

The collected and processed data were analyzed through descriptive qualitative analysis. The writer identified the errors, described the errors, explained the errors and evaluated the errors.

Result and Discussion

Based on the method of the research, the researcher prepared list of sentences and phrases containing words which have silent letters. Then, the researcher asked the students to read some sentences and phrases. The researcher set up a video recorder to record the students when the students read those sentences and phrases.

After conducting the research and analyzing the data, the researcher would like to conclude all result of the research in order to answer the problem statement which aimed to know about silent letter errors made by students and to know the factors that caused the errors. Questionnaire was used in this research to know the factors that caused the error.

1. Silent letter errors were made by students

In this research, the researcher found that there were eight silent letters errors made by the students. They are ‘b’, ‘c’, ‘h’, ‘l’, ‘p’, ‘t’, ‘u’ and ‘w’. The dominant error were silent letter ‘w’ and ‘p’.

Table 1. Summarized Result of The Student’s Error

Silent Letters	Frequency of incorrect pronunciation	Percentage (%)
W	64	100%
P	64	100%
B	60	93%
T	49	76%
U	46	71%
C	74	77%
H	67	69%
L	44	68%

Table 1 showed the overall summary of the student’s errors in pronouncing silent letter. The dominant silent letter errors made by the students were the letter ‘w’ and ‘p’ with the highest percentage 100%. The letter ‘b’ is 93%. The letter ‘t’ is 76%. The letter ‘u’

is 71%. The letter ‘c’ is 77%. The letter ‘h’ is 69%. The letter ‘l’ is 68%. Each part will be elaborated in the following explanation.

a. Error in the silent letter ‘w’

There were two selected words which contained silent letter ‘w’. They were “awry” and “sword”. The result of the research showed that 100% of the students made error in silent letter ‘w’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘w’ in the word ‘awry’ and ‘sword’.

Table 2. Error in Letter ‘w’

Word	Frequency of Incorrect Pronunciation	Percentage (%)
Awry /ə'raɪ/	32	100%
Sword /sɔ:d/	32	100%
Total	64	100%

Table 2. showed 100% of the students were incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘awry’. The students made error in silent letter ‘w’ by pronouncing silent letter ‘w’ in the word ‘awry’. The letter ‘w’ in ‘awry’ should be unpronounced. There were two ways of the student’s pronunciation on the word ‘awry’. The students pronounced it with (əw'raɪ) and (Λw'ri:). The correct pronunciation was (ə'raɪ) without sounding the letter ‘w’.

Furthermore, 100% of students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘sword’. The students made error in silent letter ‘w’ by pronouncing silent letter ‘w’ in the word ‘sword’. The students pronounced it with (swɔ:d). The correct pronunciation was (sɔ:d) without pronouncing the letter ‘w’.

b. Error in the silent letter ‘p’

There were two selected word containing silent letter ‘p’. They were ‘pneumonia’ and ‘receipt’. The result of the research showed that 100% of the

students made error in the silent letter 'p'. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter 'p' in the word 'pneumonia' and 'receipt'.

Tabel 3. Error in Letter 'p'

Word	Frequency of Incorrect	Percentage (%)
	Pronunciation	
Pneumonia /nju:'mæʊniə/	32	100%
Receipt /ri'si:t/	32	100%
Total	64	100%

Table 3 showed that the students obtained 100% of incorrect pronunciation in the word 'pneumonia'. It was incorrect because the students sounded the silent letter 'p' in the beginning of word 'pneumonia'. The students pronounced 'pneumonia' with (pnju:'mæʊniə), The correct pronunciation was (nju:'mæʊniə) without pronouncing the silent letter 'p'.

After that, 100% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word 'receipt'. The students pronounced the word 'receipt' by (ri'si:pt). The students made error by sounding the letter "p". The correct pronunciation was (ri'si:t) without sounding the letter 'p'.

c. Error in the silent letter 'b'

There were two selected words contained the silent letter 'b'. They were 'debt' and 'bomber'. The result of the research showed that 93% of the students made error in the silent letter 'b'. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter 'b' in the word 'debt' and 'bomber'.

Tabel 4. Error in Letter 'b'

Word	Frequency of Incorrect	Percentage (%)
	Pronunciation	
Debt /det/	30	93%
Bomber /bɒmər/	30	93%
Total	60	93%

Table 4 showed 93% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word 'debt'. It was incorrect because the students pronounced the word 'debt' with

(dɛbt). The students pronounced the silent letter 'b'. The correct pronunciation was (dɛt) without pronouncing the letter 'b'. Then, 93% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word 'bomber'. The students pronounced it with (bɒmbər). The correct pronunciation was (bɒmər) without pronouncing the silent letter 'b'.

d. Error in the silent letter 't'

There were two selected word containing silent letter 't'. They were 'fasten' and 'listen'. 76 % of the students made error in the silent letter 't'. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter 't' in the word 'listen' and 'fasten'.

Table 5. Error in Letter 't'

Word	Frequency of Incorrect	Percentage (%)
	Pronunciation	
Fasten /fɑ:sn/	32	100%
Listen /lɪsən/	17	53%
Total	49	76%

Table 5 showed 100% of the students got incorrect in pronouncing the word 'fasten'. The students pronounced the word 'fasten' by (fɑ:stən). The students still pronounced the silent letter 't'. The correct pronunciation was (fɑ:sn).The letter 't' should be unpronounced.

After that, 53% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word 'listen'. The students pronounced it with '(lɪstən)'. The letter 't' on the word 'listen' was silent letter, so it was unpronounced. The correct pronunciation was '(lɪsən)'.

e. Error in the silent letter 'u'

There were three selected words containing silent letter 'u'. They were 'guitar' and 'build'. From the result of the research, 71% of the students made error in the silent letter 'u'. The students made

error by pronouncing silent letter ‘u’ in the word ‘guitar’ and ‘build’.

Table 6. Error in Silent Letter ‘u’

Word	Frequency of Incorrect Pronunciation	Percentage (%)
Guitar /gi'tɑ:/	27	84%
Build /bild/	19	60%
Total	46	71%

Table 6 showed 84% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘guitar’. The students pronounced it by ‘(gu'ɪ:tɑ:)’. The students still pronounced the letter ‘u’. The letter ‘u’ in the word ‘guitar’ was silent letter. The correct pronunciation was ‘(gi'tɑ:)' without pronouncing the letter ‘u’.

After that, 60% of the students were incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘build’. The students pronounced it by ‘(bild)’. The letter ‘u’ in the word ‘build’ was silent letter. The correct pronunciation is ‘(bild)’ without pronouncing the letter ‘u’.

f. Error in the silent letter ‘c’

There were three selected words containing silent letter ‘c’. They were ‘muscle’, ‘disciple’ and ‘scenario’. The result of the research showed that 77% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘c’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘c’ in the word ‘muscle’ ‘disciple’ and ‘scenario’.

Table 7. Error in Silent Letter ‘c’

Word	Frequency of Incorrect Pronunciation	Percentage (%)
Muscle /mʌsəl/.	29	90%
Disciple /di'saɪpl/	14	43%
Scenario /sɪ'nɑ:riəʊ/	31	96%
Total	74	77%

Table 4.7 showed that 90% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘muscle’. The students pronounced it by (mʌskəl) and

(mʌsɔl). The letter ‘c’ in the word ‘muscle’ was silent letter. It meant that the letter ‘c’ should be unpronounced. The correct pronunciation was (mʌsəl). Without pronouncing the letter ‘c’.

After that, 43% of the students were incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘disciple’. The students pronounced it with (di'skaɪpl) and (di'saɪpl). The letter ‘c’ in disciple was silent letter. The correct pronunciation was (di'saɪpl) without pronouncing the letter ‘c’. Then, 96% of the student were incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘scenario’. The students were incorrect because the students pronounced the silent letter ‘c’ in the word ‘scenario’ The students pronounced it with (skɪ'nɑ:riəʊ). The correct pronunciation was (sɪ'nɑ:riəʊ) without pronouncing the letter ‘c’.

g. Error in the silent letter ‘h’

There were three selected words containing silent letter ‘h’. They were ‘vehicle’, ‘heir’ and ‘whiten’. The result of the research showed that 69% of the student obtained error in the silent letter ‘h’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘h’ in the word ‘vehicle’, ‘heir’ and ‘whiten’.

Table 8. Error in Silent Letter ‘h’

Word	Frequency of Incorrect Pronunciation	Percentage (%)
Vehicle /vi:kl/	25	78%
Whiten /waɪtn/	19	31%
Heir /eə(r)/	32	100%
Total	67	69%

Table 8 showed 78% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word ‘vehicle’. it was incorrect because the students sounded the silent letter ‘h’ in the word ‘vehicle’. They pronounced it with (vi:hɪkl), (vɪhkl). The correct pronunciation was (vi:kl) without pronouncing the letter ‘h’.

Furthermore, 31% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word 'whiten'. The letter 'h' in word 'whiten' was silent letter, but the students pronounced it. The students pronounced it with (whaitn). The correct pronunciation was (waitn) without pronouncing the letter 'h'. Then, 100% of the students had incorrect pronunciation in pronouncing the word 'heir'. The students pronounced it with (heə(r)). The letter 'h' in the word 'heir' was silent letter, but the students pronounced it. The correct pronunciation was (eə(r)) without pronouncing the letter 'h'.

h. Error in the silent letter 'l'

There were two selected words containing silent letter 'l'. They were 'almond' and 'calm'. The result of the research showed that 68% of the students made error in the silent letter 'l'. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter 'l' in the word 'almond' and 'calm'.

Table 9. Error in Silent Letter 'l'

Word	Frequency of Incorrect Pronunciation	Percentage (%)
Almond /ɑ:mənd/	32	100%
Calm /kɑ:m/	12	37%
Total	44	68%

Table 9 showed 100% of the students obtain incorrect in pronouncing the word 'almond'. The letter 'l' in the word 'almond' was silent letter, but the students pronounced it with (ɑ:lmənd). The students sounded the silent letter 'l'. The correct pronunciation was (ɑ:mənd) without pronouncing the letter 'l'.

Then, 37% of the students obtained incorrect in pronouncing the word 'calm'. The students pronounced it with (kɑ:lm). The letter 'l' in the word 'calm' was silent letter, but the students still pronounced it. The correct pronunciation was (kɑ:m) without pronouncing the letter 'l'.

2. The factors that cause the errors

The researcher had finished the research procedure through questionnaire. The 32 students were asked to fill the available question. The questionnaire was carried out to find out the factors that caused the error in pronouncing silent letters. The result of the research showed the factors as follow:

a. Lack of knowledge

There were two lacks of knowledge found in this research. The first was lack of knowledge toward phonetic transcription. The students did not understand how to read phonetic transcription of the word. It could be seen from student's answer in questionnaire. The students mentioned "I do not really understand about phonetic transcription". Another student said that "I just know about phonetic transcription". From their statement, it was indicated that they have lack of knowledge about phonetic transcription, so they made error in pronouncing the English words.

The second was lack of knowledge about silent letter. The students did not understand about silent letter. It could be seen from student's answer in questionnaire. The students mentioned "I do not quite understand what silent letter is". Other students said "I do not know about silent letter because rarely hear it. Some students said "I less understand about silent letter. From their pronouncement, it could be concluded that the students have lack of knowledge toward silent letter, so they sounded the silent letter in a word.

b. Habit to produce wrong sound of word

The result of the research showed that the students had habit to produce wrong way in sounding the word. It could be seen from student's answer in questionnaire. Some students mentioned "they will pronounce the word which they

do not know the phonetic transcription by guess the sound, and spell every letter in the word”. Other students affirm “they will estimate the pronunciation of the word which they do not know its phonetic transcription”. This was the habit of the students in produce the sound of the word.

Conclusion

Based on the data in finding, it could be concluded that the researcher found eight silent letters error made by the students. The first was silent letter ‘b’. 93% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘b’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘b’ in the selected words ‘debt’ and ‘bomber’. The second was silent letter ‘c’. 77% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘c’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘c’ in the selected words ‘muscle’, ‘disciple’ and ‘scenario’.

The third was silent letter ‘h’. 69% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘h’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘h’ in the selected words ‘vehicle’, ‘heir’ and ‘whiten’. The fourth was silent letter ‘l’. 68% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘l’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘l’ in the selected words ‘almond’ and ‘calm’.

The fifth was silent letter ‘p’. 100% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘p’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘p’ in the selected words ‘pneumonia’ and ‘receipt’. The sixth was silent letter ‘t’. 76% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘t’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘t’ in the word ‘fasten’ and ‘listen’. The seventh was silent letter ‘u’. 71% of the students made error in the silent letter ‘u’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘u’ in the selected words ‘guitar’ and ‘build’. The last was silent letter ‘w’. 100% of the students made

error in the silent letter ‘w’. The students made error by pronouncing silent letter ‘w’ in the selected words ‘awry’ and ‘sword’. Then, the dominant silent letters error were the letter ‘w’ and ‘p’.

After that, there were two factors that cause the error. The first was lack of knowledge toward silent letter and phonetic transcription. The second was habit to produce the wrong sound of the word.

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