

## Difficulties in Learning Pronunciation of English- Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University



Phan Thi Minh Uyen<sup>1</sup>, Nguyen Thi Hong Diem<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Tay Do University

**ABSTRACT:** This survey research presents the process of the study more spacing: “Difficulties in learning pronunciation of English- majored freshmen at Tay Do University”. This research is conducted to figure out common problems in learning pronunciation of the students majoring in English. In the research, the participants in this study are 30 students in class 16A English majored freshmen at Tay Do University. The two main instruments of the research are questionnaire and interview. The results of this research will point out the students’ difficulties in attitude, motivation, word stress, intonation and accent, etc. Therefore, this research also helps students recognize problems and they can easily find solutions to improve their pronunciation skills.

### CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Rationale

Nowadays, the development of science and technology has generated a great demand for intercommunication. To meet this demand, English is an international language and an important and compulsory subject at schools. *Nation (2009)* stated, “When some teachers and students complain about difficulties in speaking, they are often talking about pronunciation”.

Pronunciation also plays a very essential role in learning a language, as *Derwing & Munro (2005)* claimed that, “having good pronunciation of the language can help in normal communication, particularly intelligibility”. For these reasons, English is very important to everyone who wants to integrate into the world. They have difficulties in learning English in the high school and junior high school. This difficulty stems from the fact that students do not focus on pronunciation, but instead, focus on learning grammar or vocabulary. In many Vietnamese Universities and colleges, teaching specialized subjects in English, as well as setting English requirements for graduates, conquering English is not easy for many students, especially students studying at Tay Do University. However, almost all freshmen of English face to problems in their pronunciation. They tend to make a great number of pronunciation mistakes relating to accent, word stress, intonation, etc. The fact is that pronunciation makes up efficient conversations and confident to native speaker. It is important at this point in time to make a distinction between speaking and pronunciation as it is sometimes wrongly applied interchangeably. Pronunciation is viewed as a sub-skill of speaking. Besides, learning pronunciation of English-majored freshmen at Tay Do University will use English as the main tool in their occupations. Enhancing their English skills is extremely important for them as they would have better career opportunities.

For the above reasons, the research titled “Difficulties in learning pronunciation of English- majored freshmen at Tay Do University” will be conducted to explore these issues deeply and find ways to solve difficulties so that students can improve their pronunciation skills.

#### 1.2 The significance of the research

The research is to discover the problematic area of pronunciation and identifies the exact sounds that majored freshmen learners mispronounce and find the most useful solutions for it.

#### 1.3 The organization of the study

This thesis is divided into five main chapters:

- Chapter 1: *Introduction* provides the rationale, research aims, and research questions. Besides, the significance and organization of the research are also listed here.
- Chapter 2: *Literature review* includes a definition of pronunciation and their importance, difficulties of pronunciation and previous studies.
- Chapter 3: Research methodology which indicates the study's method employed in this thesis including such features as research aim, research question, and research hypothesis of the research to figure out difficulties in pronunciation.
- Chapter 4: *Results and Discussion* part report the findings of the research to figure out difficulties in pronunciation in speaking.

## Difficulties in Learning Pronunciation of English- Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

- Chapter 5: *Conclusion, Limitations, Implications and Recommendation*. This chapter indicates the conclusion, implication, reflect on the limitations of the study, and put forward recommendations or suggestions for further research.

### CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.1 Definitions of Pronunciation

Pronunciation plays a very important role in communicative English nowadays, consequently, it is very necessary for English learners to know more about the definitions of pronunciation in the modern life with the use of language to communicate with each other. When learning English, we usually focus on the four skills Listening - Speaking - Reading - Writing but forgetting the equally important skill is pronunciation. Cook (1996 as cited in Pourhosein Gilakjani, 2016) defined pronunciation as the production of English sounds. Pronunciation is how to read a word or a language, the way someone uttered a word. Wikipedia defined pronunciation is “the way a word or a language is spoken, or the manner in which someone utters a word. If one is said to have “correct pronunciation”, then it refers to both within a particular dialect”. A word can be spoken in different ways by various individuals or groups, depending on many factors, such as: the area in which they grew up, the area in which they now live, if they have a speech or voice disorder, their ethnic group, their social class, or their education.

Besides, Higgs *Graph of Learner Needs* (2011) stated that “pronunciation is something that is very important to beginners”. It allows them to feel more comfortable when speaking. Obviously, no one can deny the importance of pronunciation. It is considered as one of the most significant factors in English speaking. Therefore, students should take pronunciation into account in order to have good speaking English.

There are so many different definitions of pronunciation, this one from Oxford *Dictionary* (2005) seems to be easier to understanding: “pronunciation is the way in which the word is pronounced”. Furthermore, pronunciation has been described as the “Cinderella” of language teaching (CelceMurcia, Brinton & Goodwin (1996); Seidlhofer (2001), students are still difficult to deal with English pronunciation although they have studied English for many years. According to James (2010), acceptable pronunciation can be understood based on the following basic levels. In level 1, what the speaker is saying is not understandable to people. In level 2, 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. In level 3, people understand the speaker and the speaker’s English is acceptable to listen to.

All in all, the above definitions show that pronunciation is an indispensable factor in communication and helps learners with clarity, providing optimal solutions to improve their English proficiency effectively.

#### 2.2 The importance of pronunciation

Many people are learning English to communicate with foreigners or native speakers. To communicate well, the first point they need to be concerned about is pronunciation. Therefore, pronunciation is one of the most important things that learners have to master to uncrate appropriately states and fluently. Suwartono (2006:41) stated that “pronunciation is an essential part of a language, for the nature of language is spoken”.

Pronunciation is the most important and difficult problem that non-native English speakers have to face when studying English. A common mistake often made by many international students who study English is not paying attention to English pronunciation well. Most students underestimate the importance of pronunciation because they consider that pronunciation is less important than other English aspects such as grammar, lexicology, and vocabulary. Thus, good, pronunciation skills and communication ability are closely linked. Standard pronunciation that is language, learners know how words are pronounced. Therefore, Pronunciation is very helpful for listening comprehension. According to Anil (2008) “pronunciation reinforces listening you’ve recently learnt through repeated exposure”. Specifically, hearing someone say the word the first time after you learnt its pronunciation can be very reassuring.

In short, no one can deny that pronunciation is very important in learning to communicate. Because it’s the first step of communication is to pronounce correctly, which helps listeners to correctly understand the message being conveyed. Moreover, English learners want to communicate like a native speaker, then pronunciation is an aspect that must be mastered. From the above points of view, the research will show that correct pronunciation brings many benefits and consequences of mispronouncing.

#### 2.3 Difficulties in Pronunciation

##### 2.3.1 Attitude

Researchers and studies indicate that the student with positive attitudes towards learning English learn faster and students who are genuinely open minded and interested in improving their pronunciation. According to Elliot (1995) students who were more concerned about their pronunciation had better pronunciation of English as a Second Language. They state that students with motivation to learn with positive attitudes towards the target language and its speakers were more successful than were students with less positive attitudes. According to Gardner and Lambert students with integrative motivation would be expected to work harder to develop communication skills in the second language because they are more likely than their less interested counterparts to seek out native speakers of the language. Dornyei as cited in Despagne (2003) stated that “attitudes are created, and can be

## Difficulties in Learning Pronunciation of English- Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

changed, through family, teachers, peers and school". For example: "I am scared of spiders". Behavioral (or conative) component: the way the attitude we have influences on how we act or behave. For example: "I will avoid spiders and scream if I see one". Besides, the attitude of the students is strongest barrier found by them, it affects their concentration on bad pronunciation because they do not feel that learn English is important and most of them do not have perspectives to future.

### 2.3.2 Teachers

Pronunciation issues related to teachers are an important aspect of pedagogy in teaching language. *Morley (1991)* expressed that teachers do not teach but facilitate learners' learning pronunciation. The role of teachers is like a coach, a speech coach, and a pronunciation coach. When teaching pronunciation *Harmer (2007, p.248)* argues that most teachers concentrate on teaching other aspects of language such as vocabulary and grammar more than pronunciation. He says: "Almost all English language teachers get students to study grammar and vocabulary, practice functional dialogues take part in productive skill activities and try to become competent in listening and reading. Yet some of these same teachers make little attempt to teach pronunciation in any overt way and only give attention to it in passing". This means that teachers make a little attempt in teaching pronunciation because their accents are not like native speakers.

Besides, the influences of English teachers' pronunciation may cause some problems in the ways their students pronounce English sounds. For pronunciation teaching, *Hammer (2007)* proposes a number of ways such as differentiating similar and confusing words using word pairs, introducing stress, and practicing intonation. It can be inferred from these ideas that knowing pronunciation aspects is crucial for English language teachers and the teaching of other aspects so far has been neglected compared to the teaching pronunciation.

Perhaps, the most important outcome of recognizing the complexity in the setting of goals in teaching pronunciation is to find out what our students know about pronunciation, what they want to learn about it and what they would like to achieve in their English pronunciation. They can also be encouraged to consider who they want to sound like when they speak English and what pronunciation model(s) they prefer.

### 2.3.3 Motivation

*Marinova-Todd et al. (2000)* in the research on learners' acquisition of English concluded that learners can become highly proficient, even native-like speakers of second languages, if they are motivated to do so. *Bernaus et al. (2004)* found that having a personal or professional goal for learning English can influence the need and desire for native-like pronunciation. Besides, *Moyer (2007)* found that experience with and positive orientation is an important factor in developing native-like pronunciation. Student motivation can affect current learning as well as the skills and strategies learnt previously *Schunk et al. (2008)*. Motivation is the length that pushes the person to achieve a goal; if the learners do not have motivation the learning process is harder. It cannot be denied that motivation is an important factor that determines the people's participation in every activity especially in language learning. *Brophy (2010)* describes students' motivation as the extent to which students will invest time, energy and attention towards various tasks, goals or activities.

### 2.3.4 Word stress

Word stress is a significant feature of English pronunciation. A part of the meaning of a word depends on stress. English pronunciation depends on stress to a great deal in order to become a good speaker pronunciation of English language. Word stress is your magic key to understanding spoken English. Native speakers of English use word stress naturally. Word stress is so natural for them that they do not even know they use it. Non-native speakers who speak English to native speakers without using word stress, encounter two problems: they find it difficult to understand native speakers, especially those speaking fast and the native speakers may find it difficult to understand them. *Stress Avery and Ehrlich (1992)* found that stress plays a significant role in identifying the "shape" (profile) of a word or a phrase. Therefore, wrong stress may make the conversation become confusing (*Hahn, 2004*). In a study by *Field (2005)* on the role of stress, when comparing the variables such as accented words, the shift of accent in a word (left or right) and the vowel change (quality vowel change), he also made a similar conclusion as both natives and the English learners encountered communication problems when the syllables in words were not stressed by any rules.

### 2.3.5 Intonation and Accent

#### • Intonation

Intonation is the forms or waves of language acquires while the speaking is produced, that means the melody or music of language, the voices rises and falls as we speak. There are six (6) tones in the Vietnamese language with five (5) tone marks that we will have you covered today: mid-level tone: doesn't have a tone mark, low falling tone: the tone mark for the low falling tone is "\", high rising tone: the tone mark for this tone is "/", low rising tone: the low rising tone has the tone mark looks like a question mark without a dot, high broken tone: the tone mark for the high broken tone is "~", heavy tone: the heavy tone has the tone mark as a dot "." we add it under the vowels. These ones are lexical; they change the meaning of words, just as changing one of the segmental phonemes (consonants and vowels) in English can change the meaning of a word. In English, on the other hand, intonation plays a much greater part. A statement can be made into question by using intonation without changing the word order, which is not possible in Vietnamese. That is the reason why Vietnamese learners, while studying English, do not pay much attention to learning English intonation, as they are not aware of the importance of using correct intonation. In conclusion, Vietnamese and English sound systems

## Difficulties in Learning Pronunciation of English- Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

are different. A teacher of English should take all these differences into consideration in order to make the learning and the teaching process more effective.

### • Accent

An accent is “the cumulative auditory effect of those features of pronunciation that identify where a person is from, regionally or socially” (Crystal, 2003, p. 3). Accentedness, a “normal consequence of second language learning” (Derwing & Munro, 2005, p. 383). Many adult learners of English have foreign accents that identify them as nonnative speakers. Some linguists support the idea, known as the Critical Period Hypothesis, that a learner needs to begin learning the language before age 7 to develop native-like pronunciation (Lenneberg, 1967). However, more recent research suggests that accent and intonation may be more important factors in developing native-like pronunciation than the age at acquisition (Marinova-Todd, Marshall, & Snow, 2000). An understanding of the features of learner accents and their impact on intelligibility can help teachers identify and address characteristics of learner pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 1997). The primary aim is that students be understood. Good pronunciation is needed for this, but a “perfect accent” is not (Harmer, 1991). For example: An American might pronounce the word, “hello” by speaking the “h” sound. A Brit might pronounce the word, “hello” without speaking the “h” sound. This is still the same word, just spoken with a different accent.

### 2.4 The advantages of having pronunciation better

Good pronunciation has many advantages in personal and social life. It gives advantages when applying for jobs, Seidlhofer (2001) states that for “university graduates, clear pronunciation during job interviews, proposal presentations, negotiations and other professional instructions is vital to ensure their successful transition into the professional realm”. Shak (2016) also states that to “university graduates, obviously pronunciation is an important thing to make sure of their success in finding a job during interviews”. Employers will have a bad impression and right away refuse to accept their employment applications unless they make a good impression on the employers by showing their professional language.

Furthermore, correct pronunciation can help with the process of acquiring new vocabulary and knowing the pronunciation can help us distinguish words that sound similar or have the same spelling. Pronouncing words is often a part of memorizing vocabulary in second-language learning, so getting a strong, basic foundation in correct pronunciation early on will equate to more effective learning overall. Practice reading and pronouncing a new word many times to help you remember it longer.

Besides, having good pronunciation is the foundation for improving speaking skills. According to Omniglot Education page “If you speak a foreign language with a strong foreign accent, people may have difficulty understanding you, even if you use the grammar of the language well and have an extensive knowledge of the vocabulary. The better your pronunciation, the easier it will be for others to understand you and for you to understand them.” In listening comprehension, good pronunciation listening skills will be improved. Perfect listening requires many aspects, such as vocabulary, grammar, fluency, etc. However, good pronunciation will help learners become familiar with the sounds and rhythms of the language.

In summary, learning pronunciation will help acquire new vocabulary, learning more effectively, create a better impression through. Thus, good pronunciation has supported them to develop more in many other skills and fields.

### 2.5 Summary of literature review

In this study, the researcher states some main points related to pronunciation problems of the previous studies. As a results, some factors effecting to pronunciation results were found in the literature review such as attitude, teachers, motivation as well as some difficulties in stress, intonations and accents.

### 2.6 Related studies

This part provides an overview of the previous studies that are related to this study. The first study entitled: The effect of sound system on learning pronunciation was conducted by (Alkhuli, 1983) who indicated that the major problem in teaching and learning English pronunciation results from the differences in the sound system of English and the native language, so a speaker of Sudanese Spoken Arabic is not familiar to produce for example /θ/ sound and /ð/ sound, because they do not exist in his first language accent. This means that the organs of speech of the learner are not rehearsed to pronounce such sound systems because they are uncommon to him; that is the reason he uses the nearest sounds such as /s/ and /z/. The second study, as Yates and Zielinski (2009), pay much attention to English pronunciation emphasizes that pronunciation has an impact role in learning English. If teachers do not present the general rules and principles toward comprehensible pronunciation to their learners, nobody will certainly do it. This is the responsibility of teachers to do this by teaching the new sounds, words, sentences, and phrases and creating appropriate materials for understandable pronunciation in their classes. Teachers should discover methods of indicating, practicing, and giving feedback on English pronunciation that are appropriate for learners to learn English pronunciation effectively and smoothly. The third study. James (2010) conducted and stated that “different types of models can be found for teaching and learning English pronunciation”. One can turn on his/her TV and find channels such as CNN International, BBC, VOA Learning English channel, or Sky News. These channels help one hear many different people from Germany, France, and the other non- English speaking countries. All of these channels have acceptable pronunciation and this will facilitate the process of learners' understanding.

## CHAPTER III. RESEARCH AIM- RESEARCH QUESTIONS- HYPOTHESIS

## Difficulties in Learning Pronunciation of English- Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

### 3.1 Research aim

The purpose of this study is to investigate the difficulties that the English majored freshmen at Tay Do university encounter in learning pronunciation. Furthermore, it is hoped that students could easily reduce their difficulties and improve their learning pronunciation.

### 3.2 Research questions

This study is undertaken to investigate the problems in learning pronunciation of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University. The thesis is carried out to deal with the following questions:

1. Do the freshmen majoring in English at Tay Do University meet when they learning English pronunciation?
2. What are the causes of the difficulties met by the freshmen majoring in English at Tay Do University in their pronunciation learning process?

### 3.3 Hypothesis

According to the literature review, the researchers hypothesized that English majored freshmen would encounter many difficulties in learning pronunciation.

## CHAPTER IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Research design

This is a descriptive study. The elements to determine the reliability and validity of the research are the target population and the research instruments. Questionnaire will be use to collect quantitate data to investigate the participants' problems in learning pronunciation. Moreover, the interview will be use with selected participants to provide the qualitative data for further understanding of their ideas.

### 4.2 Research participants

The participants of this study will be about 30 students from the English majored course 16 at Tay Do University. In fact, they are selected randomly, including both males and females. Their English level is the immediate and they study in the different classes. In particular, all students have completed three modules in pronunciation at Tay Do University. The main material of majored English in speaking subject is the Interaction 1, teaching by foreign teachers. In addition, the participants practice some extensive topics give by their teachers in class.

### 4.3 Instrument

In this study, the researcher investigates some problems in learning pronunciation of English majored freshmen. To answer the research questions and hypotheses as well as to obtain more insights about the results of students' consisting of a questionnaire and an interview.

#### 4.3.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire is administered to the participants at the beginning of the class because the participants are very comfortable at this time. The question consists of 24 items in order to survey the problems in learning pronunciation of English majored freshmen at Tay Do University. They are asked to rate each item by level of agreement. Such items are on the scale ranging from 1 to 5 corresponding strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), no idea (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5). These items are divided into three categories as following table:

Items		Problem in learning Pronunciation in English
Part 1	1,2,3,4,5	Student's personal information
Part 2	6,7,8,9,10	Difficulties related to attitude
	11,12,13,14	Difficulties related to teachers
	15,16,17	Difficulties related to motivation
	18,19,20	Difficulties related to word stress
	21,22,23,24	Difficulties related to intonation and accent

#### 4.3.2 Interview

The interview for students is designed to get the specific information from the freshmen about pronunciation skill. It consists of 4 questions. The first question, the researcher wants to be aware of participants' opinions about pronunciation skill. The second

## Difficulties in Learning Pronunciation of English- Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

question is to find out ways the students thoughts of improving pronunciation sounds. The third question is to find out the problems in pronunciation. The last question is to know the students' habit of practicing pronunciation.

### 4.4 Procedure

In this part, the process of implementing the research proposal is presented. The research proposal is presented. The research proposal is done within 12 weeks and process is divided into 4 steps in the following table:

Duration (20 weeks)	Activities
The first 4 weeks	- Selecting the research topic, - Finding and reading related information as well as previous study - Writing the Research Aims/ Research questions - Writing chapter one (Introduction)
From the 5 <sup>th</sup> week to the 10 <sup>th</sup> week	- Writing chapter two (Literature review) - Designing the instruments (questionnaire and interview) - Writing chapter three (Research methodology)
From the 11 <sup>th</sup> week to the 16 <sup>th</sup> week	- Delivering questionnaire and interview to the students to collect the data - Writing chapter four (Results and Discussion) - Analyzing the collected data and giving the discussion
The last 4 weeks	- Writing chapter 5 (Conclusions, limitations, implications and recommendations - Completing the thesis

## CHAPTER V. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

This research is expected to find out the difficulties of English- major freshmen at Tay Do University. The major purpose of this research proposal can help improve English pronunciation, problems related to attitude, teachers, motivation, word stress, intonation and accent, etc. The researcher hopes that students which recognize the difficulties which they often face in learning pronunciation English so that they can find out proper resolutions and suitable studying methods to improve their pronunciation skill.

In addition, this research can also bring benefits to the teachers who want to know what problems their students often face. Then, they can offer their students suitable materials for learning and teaching methods that help their students learn pronunciation more effectively.

## REFERENCES

### References from Books:

- 1) Bradley-Bennett, K. (2007). *Teaching Pronunciation: an Independent Course Study for Adult English as a Second Language learners*.
- 2) Celce-Murcia, M., Brinton, D. & Goodwin, J. (1996). *Teaching Pronunciation: A reference for teachers of English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 3) Fraser, H. (2000). *Coordinating Improvements in Pronunciation Teaching for Adult Learners of English as a Second Language*. Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra.
- 4) Oxford Dictionary. (2005). *Definition of pronunciation*. Oxford University Press.
- 5) Hismanoglu, M. (2006). *Current Perspectives on Pronunciation Learning and Teaching*. Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies, 2(1), 101-110.
- 6) Kenworthy, J. (1987). *Teaching English Pronunciation*. Longman, Harlow.
- 7) Nation (2009). *The Pronunciation Component in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(1), 51-74. International Journal of Research in English Education Vol. 1, No. 1; 2016 .
- 8) Pourhosein Gilakjani, A. (2012). *A Study of Factors Affecting EFL Learners' English Pronunciation Learning and the Strategies for Instruction*. International Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 2(3), 119-128.
- 9) Harmer, J. (1991). *The Practice of English Language Teaching: New Edition*. New York: Longman.
- 10) Lenneberg. (1967). *Teaching American English Pronunciation*. Oxford: Oxford UP.
- 11) Derwing & Munro (1997). *The effects of pronunciation instruction on the accuracy, fluency, and complexity of L2 accented speech*. Applied Language Learning, 13 (1), 1-17.
- 12) James, R. B. (2010). *Teaching Pronunciation Gets a Bad R.A.P: A Framework for Teaching Pronunciation*. Hankuk: University of Foreign Studies.

## Difficulties in Learning Pronunciation of English- Majored Freshmen at Tay Do University

### References from Internet:

- 1) Ann Cook. (1996). American Accent Training. Matrix Press. Retrieved from <http://www.americanaccent.com>
- 2) Bernaus et al. (2004) Motivation and attitudes towards learning language in multicultural classrooms. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 1(2), 75-89. doi:10.1080/14790710408668180, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14790710408668180>
- 3) Derwing, T. M., & Munro, M. J. (2005). *Second language accent and pronunciation teaching: A research-based approach*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 379-397. doi:10.2307/3588486, <http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.2307/3588486>
- 4) Despaigne (2003). *Field independence/dependence, hemispheric specialization, and attitude in relation to pronunciation accuracy in Spanish as a foreign language*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(iii), 356-371. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14790710408668180>
- 5) Elliot, A. R. (1995). Foreign Language Phonology: *Field independence, attitude, and the success of formal instruction in Spanish pronunciation*. *The Modern Language Journal*, 79(iv), 530-542. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/330005>
- 6) Field, J. (2005). Intelligibility and the listener: *The role of lexical stress*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(3), 399-423. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/3588487>



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.