



THE AMERICAN ENGLISH ACCENT: PHONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This research aims at identifying the American English accents produced by the Americans. The American phonation was taken from Thomas' book, An Introduction to the Phonetics of American English. This qualitative research took the data from the English speeches spoken by the famous Americans on YouTube. This research applied the observational method to collect the data, and a phonological approach, identity method, and articulatory phonetic identification to analyze the data. It is identified that the Americans have true [t], flap [t]. held [t], and vanishing [t]. The dark [ɫ] and the light [l] are also articulated. The Americans pronounce the bunched [ɹ] and R-colored vowels, and they drop the final [r]. The article a is pronounced as /e/, /o/ is pronounced as /ɑ:/, and /a:/ is pronounced as /æ/. The letter <o> is pronounced as [oʊ].

Keywords: accent, Americans, American English, pronunciation

1. INTRODUCTION

"How about my work, sir?" one EFL student asked his lecturer about his work. "You didn't ask me. How do I know? I'm not a God." responded his lecturer. The student showed his blank face. The EFL lecturer talked fast by dropping and changing a few sounds. As shown in the text phonetically, the reduction is seen completely,

"You didn't ask me."

/ju.dɪ.næsk.mi/

"How do I know?"

/ha.du.waɪ.noʊ/,

"I'm not a God."

/am.nɑ.də.gɑd/.

First, he connected the speech by linking the final consonant sounds of one

word to the beginning vowel sound of the next word. Second, he reduced by shortening, changing, and removing particular sounds. Finally, he did not use the standard English or Received Pronunciation (RP). However, he demonstrated an American English accent.

He did not pronounce [t] in the word didn't but he omitted it by linking the sound /n/ in [dɪn] and /æ/ in [æsk] as [dɪ.næsk]. The /t/ sound was articulated as /d/ in /nɒt.ə/ as /nɑ.də/. The sound /ɑ/ was articulated as /æ/, and the sound /ɒ/ was articulated as /ɑ/. Finally, he pronounced the diphthong sound /əʊ/ as /oʊ/.

An accent can be defined as a unique way of speaking in a particular language that is specific to a country, region, or social class (Stockwell, 2007). Accents are a natural part of language variation and can be observed in all languages. The accent is the way in which a person pronounces words and phrases, which can be influenced by their regional, cultural, or linguistic background. Everyone has its own characteristic while speaking English. especially those who come from English speaking countries, they will use their accent where they are from.

There is a show where the interviewee demonstrates her accent. Adele, a female singer from London, showed her Cockney accent clearly when she involved in an interview. She pronounced glottal [t] such as [wɒʔ] for what, [kəm.'pju:.ʔ] for computer, [do.wɪʔ] for do it, and [tɔ:.kə.'bʌʔ] for talk about. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iabAuKv9KPg>)

The English natives who live in United Kingdom demonstrate some accents such as Southern English, Cockney, East London, Posh, West Country, Northern English, The Scouser, Welsh, Scottish, and

Brimmie (Ambalegin & Handayani, 2023). The English natives who live in America demonstrate some accents such as New York, Boston, Southern Drawl, Southern Twang, Minnesota, and California (valley) (Thomas, 1958).

Undeniably, English speakers from ESL countries will speak English with their region accent such as the Filipinos, Indians, Singaporeans, Canadians, or South Africans because the accents can be influenced by several factors, such as a person's first language, their geographic region, and their social or cultural background.

There are some countries where English is a foreign language using Standard English for speaking English. However, while speaking English, they use American English accent. They size up English pronunciation as what they listen to on English films, English songs, or social media. Indonesians mostly use American English accent. The English used by them is influenced by the accent of American English. it is known when they pronounced the flap [t], [ɑ:] instead of [ɒ], or [e] instead of [ɑ:]. Unquestionably, the programs on TV mostly use American English such as English films, English songs, or reality shows. American English is more familiar than British English or Received Pronunciation.

To prove it, Oka Antara is an actor from Indonesia. He was interviewed for Raid 2 premiere. His English has some characteristic pronunciation patterns to vary the speech. His speech is as follows, "Killers was premiered last night."

/kɪ.lərs wəs prɛ.'mier læs naɪt/

"Well actually I mm... this is my first time to in Sundance but as for... for film, this actually my third because last year I worked with Gareth for VHS 2 ya."

/wɛl 'ʌk.fə.li dɪ.sɪs maɪ fɜrs taɪm tu ɪn 'sʌn.dens bʌt es fɔr fɔr fɪlm dɪs ʌk.fə.li maɪ

θɜd bi.'kɔz læs jier aɪ wɜrk wɪt ge.rəd fɔr
'vi.ɛf.es tu jɑ/

“I was screened also last year, but we could make it because me and Gareth was shooting the Raid 2, so it’s very exciting here.”

/aɪ wəs skrin 'ɔlso læs jier bʌʃ wi kʊd me.kɪt
bi.'kɔs mi en'ge.rəd wəs 'ju.ʃɪŋ də reɪd tu so
ɪts 'vɛ.ri 'ek.sai.ʃɪŋ hier/

“I mean Sundance is big for people back home, so very proud.”

/aɪ mɪn 'sʌn,dens ɪs bɪg fɔr 'pi.pəl bek hoʊm
so 'vɛ.ri praʊd/

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Djirpb ugE78>).

He spoke English with the American English accent as it is identified from the flap /t/ or [ɾ], vowel [æ], and diphthong [oʊ].

People may learn English accent because accent is also a combination of four main components: voice quality, intonation (speech music), liaisons (word connections), and pronunciation (the spoken sounds of vowels, consonants, and combination) (Cook, 2000).

The use of English with any kind of accents is not a problem if it is consistent. Due to the unknown information about the accents, sometimes EFL learners mix the accent such as the use of glottal /t/, flap /t/, aspirated /t/ or normal /t/ at the same time. Thus, the EFL learners must know that there is a variety of English accents. The use of different English accent may not interfere the mutual intelligibility. Mutual intelligibility refers to whether speakers of one language can understand speakers of another language. This understanding can be in one spoken or written communication. Mutual intelligibility also occurs in a wide variety of degrees, ranging from none, to partial, to full mutual intelligibility.

This research identified the patterns of American English accent spoken by some

famous Americans. There are some sounds pronounced differently from standard English or RP. The accent produced by the Americans is shown in term of phonetic transcription. Accent is technically described by phonemes and intonation pattern (Llamas et al., 2007). One data shows the American English accent pronounced by Glen Powell. Glen Powell is an actor from America. He pronounced I got as /aɪ gɑ:t/ and peanut butter as /pi.nʌt bʌ.ʃə/. He pronounced [ɔ] as [ɑ:], flap [t], and R-colored vowel [ə].

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H2a4 ddq3BLM>)

There are some articles discussing the American and British English accents applied in the EFL classes. Pradana, (2019) found that the EFL learners mixed their English accents, and these English accents helped them study English. Obos et al., (2022) revealed that the EFL learners used American English in conversation. Utami & Suprayogi, (2022) distinguished the Vietnamese and American English. Fitria, (2023) discussed the way to learn American and British English. And Ilahiy & Kirana, (2023) investigated that learning American and British English accents could help EFL learners learn English Listening.

2. American English Phonemes

The good visual representation of speech sound is that each symbol represents one phoneme, and each phoneme is represented by one symbol (Thomas, 1958). There are American English phonemes proposed by Thomas, (1958).

2.1 The sounds of [p, b, m, f, p, t, d, n, l]

[p] is a voiceless bilabial stop. It is voiceless because the vocal bands do not vibrate in its formation. It is bilabial because both the upper and lower lips come together to form the obstruction to the

passage of the breath. It is a stop because the obstruction to the passage of the breath is momentarily complete; while the lips are closed the velum is also closed, so that no breath can escape through the nose.

[b] is a voiced bilabial stop, formed with essentially the same adjustment of lips and velum as those for [p] but with the vocal bands vibrating and adding tone to the consonantal quality of the stop.

[m] is a bilabial nasal semivowel, formed with the lips closed and the vocal bands vibrating, as for [b], but with the velum lowered, so that a continuous stream of voiced breath passes out through the nose. [m] is thus like [b] in its voicing and bilabial articulation, but different in its manner of formation, because of the velar valve's remaining open. This difference is adequate to account for the phonemic contrast between [b] and [m], as in **bill** and **mill**, and **hub** and **hum**.

[f] is a voiceless labiodental fricative, formed by placing the lower lip highly against the upper teeth, closing the velum, and forcing breath under moderate pressure out through the spaces between the teeth, or between the upper teeth and the lower lip called [f] labiodental because of the contact between the lip and the teeth; a fricative, because the most characteristic feature of the sound is the audible friction of the breath being forced past the teeth.

[v] is a voiced labiodental fricative, formed essentially like [f], except that the vocal bands vibrate.

[t] is a voiceless alveolar stop, formed by placing the tip of the tongue on the upper gums, or alveolar ridge, closing the velum, compressing the breath, and then releasing the voiceless breath as the tongue moves to the position of the next phoneme.

[d] is a voiced alveolar stop, essentially like [t] in its formation except that the vocal bands vibrate, and the energy level is lower.

[n] is an alveolar nasal semivowel, formed with the tip of the tongue on the upper gum ridge, and with the velum lowered to permit a continuous flow of sound through the nose.

[l] is a lateral alveolar semivowel, formed by placing the tip of the tongue lightly against the upper gums, but with one side, or both sides, of the tongue lowered to permit the escape of the voiced breath at the side.

2.2 The sounds of [s, z, k, g, i, ɪ, ə]

[s] is a voiceless alveolar fricative which requires a delicate adjustment of the speech mechanism. First, the sides of the tongue must be raised enough to force the air through a narrow groove along the mid-line of the tongue. Then, the air must be directed against the cutting edges of the lower teeth. The velar valve must be closed, and the jaw must be high enough to bring the teeth together or almost together. The tip of the tongue must not come in contact with either the upper teeth or the upper gums.

[z] is a voiced alveolar fricative, formed with substantially the same tongue positions as [s], but with the vocal bands vibrating, and with slightly less breath force.

[k] is a voiceless velar stop, formed by bringing the back of the tongue into firm contact with the velum, closing the velar valve, compressing the breath, and suddenly releasing the pressure by lowering the tongue. The vocal bands do not vibrate.

[g] is a voiced velar stop, formed substantially like [k], but with the vocal bands vibrating, and with slightly less breath force.

[i] is a high front tense vowel. The tongue is bunched in the front part of the mouth and raised nearly to the level of the hard palate. The upper surface of the tongue becomes more and more convex from side to side as the sound continues.

[ɪ] is high front lax vowel, similar in formation to [i], but with the tongue muscles relaxed, the upper surface of the tongue less convex, and no muscular bulge under the chin.

[ə] is a mid-central lax vowel. The tongue is neither forward nor back, but central; neither high nor low, but mid.

2.3 The sounds of [w, j, e, ɛ]

[w] is a bilabial velar semivowel, formed by rounding the lips, closing the velum, raising the back of the tongue part way toward the velum, and expelling the voiced breath as the speech agents move away from the position just described toward whatever vowel follows.

[j] is a palatal semi vowel, formed by raising the front of the tongue toward the hard palate, closing the velum, and expelling the voiced breath as the speech agents move away from the position just described toward the position of whatever vowel follows. Remember that the front of the tongue is the part which lies directly under the hard palate; do not confuse it with the tip.

[e] is a mid-front tense vowel. The tongue is bunched in the front part of the mouth and is raised mid high. The tongue muscles are tense, the upper surface of the tongue is slightly convex, and the tension of the muscles can be felt in the bulge under the chin, as for [i].

[ɛ] or long [i] is a mid-front lax vowel. The position of the speech agents is similar to that for [e], but the muscles are relaxed, the upper surface of the tongue is

less convex, and no bulge can be felt in the muscles under the chin.

2.4 The sounds of [θ, ð, ɱ]

Both [θ] and [ð] are formed by placing the tip of the tongue against either the cutting edges or the back of the upper teeth and forcing the breath out through the remaining space.

[ŋ] may be described as a velar nasal semivowel. It is formed by lowering the velum, raising the back of the tongue until it establishes firm contact with the velum, and expelling the voiced breath through the nose.

2.5 The sounds of [ɹ, æ, ɑ]

As the historical process of weakening the [ɹ] continued, there developed first a frictional type formed with the tongue close to the roof of the mouth, and later a semivowel without audible friction, and with the tongue somewhat lower. In America a slight amount of friction is sometimes audible after tongue-tip consonants. The more usual American type lacks audible friction. It is formed by closing the velum, vibrating the vocal bands, and either by pointing the tip of the tongue toward the roof of the mouth, or lowering the tip and raising the central section of the tongue toward the line between the hard palate and the velum.

[æ] is low and front, and usually lax, though a tense allophone occurs in some phonetic contexts, and in the speech of some individuals. And [ɑ] is low, back, and lax.

2.6 The sounds of [ɹ] and the central vowels [ə, ə, ɜ, ɝ]

Some words ended by the <r> will be articulated as schwa. The words **murmur** [mɜ.mə], **stir** [stɜ], **aroma** [ə.roʊ.mə], **further** [fɜ.ðə], or **glamour** [glæ.mə] are the words use central vowel schwa. This combination is known as R-coloured vowels.

The schwa [ə] will be pronounced as [ə] which is placed in a closed syllable [ɹ] such as in **her** [hə] or **were** [wə]. Meanwhile [ɜ] is a long schwa and will be pronounced as [ɜ] in the word **fur** [fɜ] or **turtle** [tɜ.tl].

2.7 The sounds of [ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ, ɔ, o]

[ʃ] is a voiceless wide fricative articulated with the blade of the tongue and the back part of the gum ridge. The voiced counterpart of [ʃ] is [ʒ].

A closely blended combination of the stop [t] with the fricative [ʃ] is known as an affricate [tʃ]. The voiced counterpart of [tʃ] is the affricate [dʒ].

The vowel [ɔ] is formed with the tongue low, though usually not quite so low as for [ɑ]. The tongue is bunched in the back part of the mouth, the lips are usually slightly rounded, and the muscles of both tongue and lips are slightly tense. The vowel [o] is mid back tense and accompanied by lip rounding.

2.8 The sounds of [u, ʊ, ʌ]

[u] is a high back tense vowel with strong lip rounding. [ʊ] is a high back lax vowel with less lip rounding than [u].

[ʌ] is a lax unrounded vowel phoneme. [ʌ] is spelled <u> in **under** [ʌn.də], <o> in **come** [kʌm], <oo> in **flood** [flʌd], and <ou> in **rough** [rʌf].

2.9 The sounds of [h, aɪ, ɔɪ, əʊ]

[h] is a glottal fricative, or aspirate, formed by exhaling the breath in a slight puff, with the vocal bands close enough together to produce audible friction.

[aɪ, ɔɪ, əʊ] are diphthongs such as in **ice** [aɪs], **mine** [maɪn], **fly** [flaɪ], **oil** [ɔɪl], **boil** [bɔɪl], **boy** [bɔɪ], **out** [aʊt], **round** [raʊnd], and **now** [naʊ]. diphthong is a vocalic glide within the limits of a single syllable.

2.10 The sounds of [ɪə, eə, ʊə]

The loss of final and preconsonantal [ɹ] gives rise to a set of glides which have some features in common with the true

diphthongs such as in **fear** [fiə], **pair** [peə], and **insured** [in.ʃʊəd].

3. Research Method

This research analyzes the sounds which are articulated phonologically to complete the objectives. Thus, this research applies the phonological approach (Burquest, 2006).

The data were taken from 20 famous Americans who were involved in interviews, short conversation, and monologue on YouTube. Their pronunciation was identified to get their American English accent. And they are from different states in America.

The same data found where reduced to have only one data by using the technique of data reduction (Sugiyono, 2013).

This is qualitative research as the data, the way to analyze, and the research result were shown in term of words, phrases, and sentences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research applied an observational method to collect the data and articulatory phonetic identification as a technique to analyze the data (Sudaryanto, 2015). The result of this research was described narratively (Merriam, 2009).

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Result

1. There are four [t] sounds.
 - a. True [t]
 - b. Flap [ɾ]
 - c. Held [t̬]
 - d. Vanishing [t̚]
2. There are two [l] sounds.
 - a. Light [l]
 - b. Dark [ɫ] or [ɫ̚]
3. Bunched [ɹ]
4. Final [r] dropping

5. R-colored vowels
 - a. long schwa [ɜ] + [ɹ] = [ɜ̃]
 - b. schwa [ə] + [ɹ] = [ɜ̃]
6. [ə] becomes [e]
7. [ɒ] becomes [ɑ:]
8. [ɑ:] becomes [æ]
9. [əʊ] becomes [oʊ]

4.2 Discussion

1. The American [t]

It was found that there are four different ways to pronounce the [t] sound; true [t] or [t^h], flap [t̬] or [t̪], held [t̚], and vanishing [t̚].

a. True [t]

It occurs in the initial or beginning of the words such as in **tell** [t^hel], **to** [t^hu], **tie** [t^haɪ], or **tongue** [t^hʌŋ]. True [t] occurs in the beginning of the stress to emphasize the syllable such as in **hotel** [hoʊ.t^hel], **return** [ɹɪ.t^hɜ̃], or **until** [ən.t^hɪl]. True [t] occurs in consonant cluster such as in **stop** [st^hɒp], **tree** [t^hri], **street** [st^hri:t], **fact** [fækt^h], **left** [left^h], **melt** [melt^h], **best** [best^h], or **kept** [kept^h].

b. Flap [t̬]

Flap [t̬] or [t̪] is like [d] sound. Flap [t̬] occurs in the middle of the words between two vowel sounds or unstressed syllabled such as in **water** [ˈwɑ.t̬ɜ̃], **city** [ˈsɪ.t̬i], **later** [ˈleɪ.t̬ɜ̃], **better** [ˈbe.t̬ɜ̃], **British** [ˈbrɪ.t̬ɪʃ], or **letter** [ˈle.t̬ɜ̃]. Flap [t̬] occurs between words when one word in vowel sound and [t] in a next word such as in **what is** [wʌ.t̬ɪz] or **but I** [bʌ.t̬aɪ]

c. Held [t̚]

The air comes up through the lungs into the mouth. The tongue tip raises up into the ridge behind top front teeth and stops the air and the puff of the air is held in and not released. It appears at the end of the words such as in **but** [bʌ^{t̚}], **can't** [kæ^{n̩}t̚], or **hat** [hæ^{t̚}]. It occurs at the end of the syllable when the next syllable

starts with the consonant sound such as in **outside** [aʊ.sɑɪd], **about that** [ə.baʊt̚ ðæt], or **it was** [ɪ^{t̚} wəs].

d. Vanishing [t̚]

When the speaker drops the [t] when pronouncing, it is known as vanishing [t̚] such as in **internet** [ɪ.nə.t̚.net], **twenty** [twe.ni]. **enterprise** [e.nə.praɪz] **international** [ɪ.nə.t̚.næʃ.nl].

2. The American [l]

There are two ways to pronounce [l], dark [l̥] and light [l].

a. Dark [l̥] or [ɫ]

Dark [l̥] is pronounced at the end of the words as a closed syllable sound such as in **people** [pi.pɫ] or **hole** [hoʊɫ]. Dark [l̥] is articulated softly as the tip of the tongue does not touch the alveolar ridge by pulling back the tongue.

b. Light [l]

Light [l] is a normal [l] and occurs in the beginning of the words and syllable such as in **light** [laɪt], **look** [lʊk], or **color** [ˈkʌ.lɜ̃].

3. The American [ɹ]

[ɹ] or bunched [ɹ̥] is articulated by hanging the tongue in the middle of the mouth without touching any kind of speech organs such as in **rest** [ɹɛst]. Or the back side of tongue is lifted up to the insides of back teeth. The middle back part of tongue/tongue body is tight and tense. The tongue tip pulls back and may point down a little.

4. American final [r] dropping

[r] is not pronounced after a vowel or at the end of the words such as **Harvard** [ˈhɑ.vəd], **near** [nɪə], **fire** [faɪə], or **stair** [steɪ]. New Yorkers are used to dropping the final [r].

5. American R-colored vowels

R-colored vowel is vowel and letter <r> in the same syllable occurs at the end of the words. /r/ sound merges with a

preceding vowel sound and forms a new R-colored vowel such as in **first** [fɜːst], **fever** [fi.və], **fear** [fɪr], **fare** [fɛr], **far** [fɑr], **for** [fɔr], and **fire** [faɪr]. [ɜ, ə, ɪr, ɛr, ar, ɔr, aɪr] are the R-colored vowels. [ɜ, ə] are monophthongs, [ɪr, ɛr, ar, ɔr] are diphthongs, and [aɪr] is triphthong. However, [ɜ, ə] are more familiar in American English.

6. Vowel [e]

It was found some Americans pronounced article a as /e/ or /ɛ/ instead of /ə/.

7. Vowel [ɑ:]

The Americans pronounced [ɑ] as [ɑ:] such as in **God** [gɑd], **body** [ˈbɑ.di], **got** [gɑt], **hot** [hɑt], or **dot** [dɑt].

8. Vowel [æ]

[æ] is an open vowel sound. The tongue should be very flat, and jaw should be very low such as in **can't** [kænt], **half** [hæf], **laugh** [læf], **last** [læst], **ask** [æsk], or **fast** [fæst]. Tense the tongue, flatten it, and push it forward. The tongue should be positioned very low in the mouth. The tip of the tongue should touch the back of lower front teeth.

9. Diphthong [oʊ]

Mostly the American pronounced the letter <o> as [oʊ] instead of [əʊ] such as in **go** [goʊ], **home** [hoʊm], **show** [ʃoʊ], **no** [noʊ], and **hotel** [hoʊ.ˈtel].

5. Conclusion

Accent is a linguistic phenomenon. It is in every language. One language which is used by the speakers from different backgrounds will be pronounced differently. English is a global language spoken by people from different regions will make profound impact on its pronunciation.

Moreover, the Americans highlight the difference of English spoken from others. The pronunciation of American

English and British English is different. It brings its own accent.

It was found that the Americans have several accents when speaking English. Certainly, this accent also follows the rules. They have four different sounds for /t/. The Americans has bunched [ɹ]. The New Yorkers do not pronounce the final [r]. The Americans merge /r/ sound with vowel sound at the end of the word as in [ə] and [ɜ].

The vowel sound /ə/, /ɒ/, and /ɑ:/ are articulated as /e/, /ɑ:/, and /æ/. Finally, the Americans pronounced the letter <o> as /oʊ/. Nevertheless, the Indonesia EFL learner often hear American English from movies, songs, talk shows, or TV programs, and this partially affects how they speak English.

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