THE PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES OF VIETNAMESE YOUNG ADULT ENGLISH LEARNERS AND THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF THESE DIFFICULTIES

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ABSTRACT

From the researcher’s observation, Vietnamese learners experience a number of difficulties when learning English pronunciation and these problems to an extent impede their communication with English-speaking foreigners. The current study was executed with the aim of making an addition to the research literature on mispronunciation of English sounds by Vietnamese adult learners, their perception of these, as well as investigating which Vietnamese local accent can cause them the most trouble. A sample of 32 Vietnamese learners of English was recruited using convenience sampling. They came from different parts of the country, had different accents of their mother language, and had varying experiences of learning English. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were made use of. The participants were guided through the research procedure, starting with the completion of a 14-item questionnaire and ending with having their voice recorded in the reading-out-loud tasks and a semi-structured interview. The self-reported data and the recorded speech were collected, coded, and collated to address the three research questions.

Missing final consonant sounds was the most widespread difficulty across the sample, registering at 100%. Other errors were found with high proportions as well, which reflects the area of contrasts between the two languages. In most of the cases, the learners’ awareness of the errors was lower than the rate of actual occurrences. Most of the participants had been learning for over 7 years but pronunciation, as they reported, had never been the focus of the English courses at their schools/universities. Pronunciation errors could be even found with words taught to low-proficiency learners. The implications of the study are that pronunciation
should be given more emphasis in the English curriculum and teaching methods of this linguistic area should be improved.
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Author

Nguyen Thi Ngoc Anh
DECLARATION

I, Nguyen Thi Ngoc Anh, hereby declare that this thesis entitled “The pronunciation difficulties of Vietnamese young adult English learners and their perceptions of these difficulties” submitted to Benedictine University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Linguistics (TESOL Concentration) is entirely my own work. It has not been previously published, as a whole or in part, or submitted to any other institution for any other degree, diploma, or professional qualification.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I am going to demonstrate evidence of the global status of the English language, highlight the importance of English pronunciation in communication, and examine the teaching methods of English pronunciation across curricula.

1.1. English and its global reach

It is of the greatest importance to realize how global English language has been growing and how crucial English pronunciation is in communication. First, it is nearly undeniable that English language has gained tremendous popularity for the past few decades on the global scale. In fact, according to Ayusa (n.d.), 75% of the world’s letters are written in English; moreover, English is used in “more than half of the world’s technical and scientific periodicals” (p.1) and English has become a means to store the vast majority of information, i.e. “80 per cent of the world’s electronically stored information is currently in English” (Crystal, 2003, p.115). He further confirmed the continued status of English as “the chief lingua franca of the Internet” in the time of media (p.117). It has been used in an array of fields, such as economics, trading, tourism, education, aviation. Northrup (2013) made a list of areas in which English language is used, “newspaper publishing, book publishing, international telecommunications, scientific publishing, international trade, mass entertainment, and diplomacy”, to name but a few. English language is now widely used as an unofficial international language. To quote Dewi (2012), it has become “global in its status either by being made an official language or [...]” in a wide range of countries, even beyond its native border (p.3). English has been seen as “a global and international language for a few decades now” or “the lingua franca of the world” (Crystal, 1997, as cited in Aliakbari & Monfared, 2014, p.200). Sharing similar views, Jenkins (2014),
referred to British/American English as “the world’s most extensive contemporary use of English” (p.2). Situations from different nations can further illustrate the widespread use of English. In Hong Kong, in addition to being an international language, English played an important role for career path, as evaluated by Li (2009, as cited in Chan, 2018). There were as many as 918 B.A and M.A degree programs instructed in English run by German universities in 2017 (DAAD, n.d., as cited in Hendriks et al., 2018) and more than 1,000 such programs available in the Netherlands (EPnffic, n.d., as cited in Hendriks et al, 2018).

1.2. **English pronunciation and its role in effective communication**

In terms of the role of spoken communication in human interaction, Sriudomkij & Sopirak (2013) recognized oral skill as the key to effective communication. More specifically, pronunciation was viewed as a critical part of the oral skills in the process of L2 acquisition, pointed out by Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2010). Similarly, pronunciation was the most prominent feature of language learning (Guiora, Beit-Hallahmi, Brannon, Dull, & Scovel, 1972, as cited in Kralova, 2017). As such, the demand for comprehensible speech when communicating in English has grown higher. In fact, pronouncing a new language clearly is the target that most L2 learners desire to achieve (Munro & Derwing, 2006). In Thailand contexts, a study from the ministry of higher education (1999) found that a quarter of the surveyed Thai university students were unable to communicate in English, and another a third of these could communicate only a little, according to Chavangklang (2013). He suggested the reason be the inadequate time and attention given to pronunciation teaching in schools. In other words, pronunciation, as he believed, played an important role in effective communication. Gooch, Saito, & Lyster (2016) concurred that phonology was of importance for L2 learners (Thomson &
Derwing, 2015) and had an influence on effective communication. As part of pronunciation, accent should not be ignored. According to Jenkins (2007), “accents are highly salient to ELF speaker-hearers, possibly even more so than in communication among native speakers of English” (p. 78).

1.3. **English as a school subject**

English, as a school subject, has then become part of teaching curricula of schools across the globe. It is worth noticing though that the time and attention devoted to teaching English pronunciation have varied greatly over time and countries, in strong association with the evolution of English teaching methods. For instance, in the grammar translation teaching approach, teaching pronunciation was not pivotal whereas it played an integral part in communicative approach.

To start with, pronunciation training has been given limited time in the classroom, suggested by Chavanklang (2013) when discussing the findings obtained from the study conducted by the Thai Ministry of Higher Education in 1999 on Thai students, who may have learned English for years. Earlier, Munro & Derwing (2006) realized the fact that pronunciation accounted for a minimal proportion in a speaking class; even worse, no separate time for pronunciation training at all was available. As a consequence, there was not enough time to deal with different difficulties with phonology that learners faced in their classroom. Offerman & Olson (2009) noted insignificant attention paid to pronunciation in classroom. Fortunately, as time went by, the teaching methods of pronunciation have evolved. Conventional techniques, such as “transcription practice, diagnostic passages, detailed description of the articulatory systems, recognition/discrimination tasks, developmental approximation drills, focused production tasks
(e.g., minimal pair drills, contextualized sentence practice, reading of short passages or dialogues, reading aloud/recitation), tongue twisters, and games (e.g., Pronunciation Bingo)\textsuperscript{\textdagger}, are no longer dominant (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p.985). In other words, as the two authors pointed out, pronunciation is not treated as an isolated skill any longer; it is instead integrated with meaningful task-based activities in the current teaching approach. Second, the availability of technology has contributed to these changes as well. They further noted the shift in pronunciation training focus, for more attention is paid to suprasegmentals, like stress, rhythm, and intonation, enabling learners to stretch the word level. Munro & Derwing (2006) reported similar trends as they noted that the importance of suprasegmentals had been highlighted in recent research. Citing Hahn (2004), the two authors believed that such errors can affect the listeners’ comprehension. In terms of technology, Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu (2010) listed out quite a few devices that have been utilized in pronunciation classes, for instance, computers, digital cameras, scanners, LCD panels and/or projectors, distance education/video conferencing systems.

To state briefly, English is now a universal phenomenon. It is a language of global communication that facilitates most of human activities in many fields. It is also a compulsory school subject in many countries all around the world. Speaking English, especially pronouncing correct English is worth well our concern. The following chapter will shed light on how much researchers have worked on this language.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is going to examine the existing literature on the topic, and from there identify a gap for the current study.

2.1. English pronunciation components and their roles

There have been several attempts to define “pronunciation”. Otlowski (1998, as cited in Gilakjani, 2016) defined pronunciation as “the way of uttering a word in an accepted manner”. Richard and Schmidt (2002, as cited in Gilakjani, 2016) stated that pronunciation is a way “producing certain sounds”. However, it could be observed that not all human sounds are “pronunciation”, e.g. the coughing or sneezing sounds, which do not make sense at all. According to Yates & Zielinski (2009), pronunciation is “how we produce the sounds that we use to make meaning when we speak” (p.11). This can be the most useful definition.

English pronunciation has various components and they are categorized into two layers of including segmental features (consonants, vowels, and diphthongs) and suprasegmental features (stress, intonation, rhythm, and connected speech) of the target language. In fact, pronunciation includes the particular consonants and vowels of a language (segments), aspects of speech beyond the level of the individual segments, such as “stress, timing, rhythm, intonation, phrasing, (suprasegmental aspects), and how the voice is projected (voice quality)” (Yates & Zielinski, 2009, p.11).

As an attempt to define “stress”, Yangklang (2013) stated that “stress is used to describe the point in a word or phrase where pitch changes, vowels is lengthened and volume is increased.” According to Spencer (1998), “stress and rhythm together with intonation are often called prosody.”
More specifically, Kucukoglu (2012) emphasized the role of stress and sentence stress, making up the key component of English intonation. Further on, he argued intonation was able to add emotions to our speech. Drawing conclusions from his study, Kucukoglu affirmed that the meaning that speech can convey is dependent on stress, rhythm, and intonation. Sharing similar views, Morley (1999, as cited in Yangklang, 2013) argued that the use of the suprasegmental features is “not just to complete meaning, but to create meaning”. Yangklang (2013) also quoted Zhang & Yin (2009), who believed that correct stress and intonation can improve English communication capacity.

In addition to stress, the role of intonation is recognized as well. Harmer (2007) believed that intonation does matter in verbal communication as it indicates the end of an utterance, a turn, and a sign of agreement or disagreement.

2.2. The role of pronunciation in communication

Being understood in a conversation does matter more than having good vocabulary and grammar (Yates & Zielinski, 2009). In other words, these two authors believe that “learners with good pronunciation will be understood even if they make errors in other areas, while those with unintelligible pronunciation will remain unintelligible, even if they have expressed themselves using an extensive vocabulary and perfect grammar” (p.11). Good pronunciation is considered “the foundation of effective spoken communication”, according to Garrigues (1999, cited in Yangklang, 2013). To illustrate, results obtained from a study on North American undergraduate students as participants suggested that they were able to recall more content when listening to speech with correct primary stress (Hahn, 2012). Hahn even argued that these findings have provided a close look into how using primary stress affects
intelligibility. The influence that speech performance factors, such as intonation, stress, rhythm, rate, and volume can have on intelligibility was also recognized by Derwing & Rossiter (2002). Non-standard pronunciation, on the other hand, can hinder intelligibility, according to Demirezen (2009). In the context of communication between language teachers, Demirezen further demonstrated the disruption in fluency due to mispronunciations, particularly, the fossilized ones.

Still, as the two layers of segmental and suprasegmental features are intertwined and telling the distinct border between them can hardly be feasible. In fact, difficulties in one area may impact on another, according to Yates & Zielinski (2009, p.11).

2.3. **Specific problems encountered by speakers of various L1 backgrounds:**

English is now spoken widely and problems with English pronunciation have become universal. People all over the world are learning English, and speakers across continents have different difficulties with English pronunciation. This is not an attempt to categorize speakers based on their L1 origins. Instead, the main goal is to demonstrate how widespread the problems are.

2.3.1. **European countries:**

Norwegian learners struggle with both vowels and consonants in English, according to Nilsen (1989). When it comes to vowels, it is found from his experiment that 122 out of 172 Norwegian test-takers produce the short /i/ with too narrow quality. Also, these Norwegian learners of English mistakenly associate /u/ and /u:/ with native front quality /u/ and /u:/ and /u:/ with native front quality /u/ and /u:/. In addition, it is worth noticing there is a complete lack of central vowels in Norwegian (Nilsen, 1989). As a result, these learners tend to replace the English central vowels with their native
ones, which are mostly front vowels. It was found by this researcher that the schwa sound /a/ is the greatest problem.

Learners of English from Spain also encounter some trouble. Martinez & Valladolid (2011) attempt to explain the source of difficulties that Spanish learners of English have with English pronunciation. They argue that it is the existence of different syllabic patterns in both languages that caused such negative transfer.

Wester, Gilbers, & Lowie (2007) conduct an investigation with Dutch learners of English to figure out with what sounds they substituted the two problematic sounds of English, including /θ/ and /ð/. Results obtained were as follows. When these two sounds are at initial positions, they are substituted with /t/ and /d/, respectively, which were segmentally the least marked sounds. When these two sounds were at final positions, they were produced as /s/ and /z/, which were most similar phonologically.

The sounds /θ/ and /ð/ could pose challenges to Turkish learners of English as well (Hismanoglu, 2009). In particular, Turkish trainee teachers were found to be struggling with the sound /ŋ/, according to Demirezen (2009).

Substitution was a strategy employed by Albanian learners of English as well when they were unable to produce correct sounds of plosive consonants, such as /p/, /t/, and they replaced them with unaspirated stops, which sounded non-English (Nuhiu, 2012).

Demirezen (2016) took a look at another aspect of pronunciation, that is, co-articulation, which is defined as “a common feature of connected speech”, and examined whether Turkish majors of English had any difficulties recognizing assimilated sounds created by co-articulation. It was found from the study that their ability of perceiving assimilation is quite low, suggesting that
assimilated sounds created by co-articulation did cause some challenges to these Turkish learners of English.

2.3.2. Asian countries:

Asian students of English do experience problems with English pronunciation distinction and production as well.

For example, Chinese students have particular difficulties with fricative sounds in English (Zhang & Xiao, 2014). To be specific, they found it hard to distinguish sounds in each of these pairs: /θ-ς/, /v-w/, and /θ-s/. In terms of production, they tended to replace the English fricative sounds, especially /θ/, /j/, /v/, /ʒ/, with other sounds. Earlier, Ma (1994) found from his study that among the five American English front vowels /ei/ and /æ/ are the easiest, /i/ and /ɛ/ are the most difficult for Mandarin Chinese speakers.

Japanese learners of English, according to Evans & Alshangiti (2018), are known “to have difficulty acquiring the English r and l contrast” (p.15).

Wei & Zhou (2002) categorized pronunciation mistakes made by Thai students as follows. First, Thai learners of English had problems with words with consonant ending sounds. Second, they particularly struggled with consonant clusters, like /sts/, /sp/, etc. Also, they tended to replace /r/ with /l/, /v/ with /f/, or /z/ with /s/. In terms of vowels, Thai learners tended to replace /ei/ with /e/.

More recently, Keshavarz (2017) conducted research into English mispronunciation made by Kurdish learners when it comes to consonant clusters. According to the study, initial consonant clusters hardly posed any challenges to Kurdish learners whereas final consonant clusters do. In
response to such difficulties, these learners employed the technique known as “syllabification” or “vocalic epenthesis”, i.e. one extra syllable is added.

In the context of Thai learners of English, stress placement could be problematic for them, as pointed out by Bourgan (2003, as cited in Yangklang, 2013). In a study with first year students at Nakhon Ratchasima Rajabhat university, it was found that most of the participants struggled with stress and intonation.

2.3.3. Vietnamese learners:

Ha (2006) executed an investigation to see what pronunciation errors that English majors in their final year at a Vietnamese university make. The findings were: (1) mispronounced sounds, including /θ/, /s/, /tr/, /t/, /ʃ/, /ʤ/, /ʧ/, /t/, /v/, and /ʒ/, (2) mispronounced words, including: appreciate, center, country, good, interpreter, person, teacher, try, translate, try, tradition, train, (3) sounds omitted, including /s/, /z/, /ʤ/, /t/, /l/, /k/, /ks/, and /v/ in all positions, and (4) redundant sounds, that is, /s/ or /z/ is added to the end of words.

The research conducted by Nguyen (2007) provided some in-depth data on Vietnamese adult learners’ problems with English final sounds. The five participants in the study came from five different places in Vietnam, spoke Vietnamese language as L1 with different regional accents, and had different English studies experiences. The findings were (1) the omission of ending sounds that are “too foreign or difficult” (p.29) for the participants, (2) the reduction or deletion of “the final consonants and clusters towards their first language like /s, z, l, v, f, d, D, -nd, -Nk, -st, -ld, -ldz/ to single unaspirated /p, t, k/ or nasals /n, N/ or semi-vowels” (p.29), and (3) the addition of the schwa sound to the final clusters.
There is a list of errors with consonants and vowels that Vietnamese learners usually make, according to Yates & Zielinski (2009). The list includes the deletion or avoidance of the final consonants or clusters, the reduction of these, substitution of these with other consonants easier to pronounce, even vowel insertion after the consonants/consonant clusters. As of vowels, the minimal pairs “/i:/ (as in sheep) and /ɪ/ (as in ship), /ɜ:/ (as in work) and /ɔ:/ (as in walk), and /æ/ (as in pan) and /e/ (as in pen)” can be a challenge (p.124). These two authors pointed out a number of challenging consonants to Vietnamese learners, for example /θ/ and /ð/, or /p/, /t/, /k/ at the beginning at words, /l/ at the middle and ending position, and /ʃ/. They added stress to the list as well.

More recently, taking a specific look at the two sounds /θ/ and /ð/, Bui (2016) studied a sample of Vietnamese adult EFL learners and noticed the substitution of the two fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ with other sounds existing in Vietnamese language among the subjects. In details, /θ/ was replaced by Vietnamese /t’, or produced like /t/, /z/ and /ð/. He noted the tendency to pronounce /dʒ/ instead of /ð/. The self-reported information from the questionnaire in this study shed some light on the causes of the errors, including the influence of Vietnamese language on their English pronunciation quality, insufficient exposure to native English pronunciation, irregular use of English, and incomprehensive instructions on English sounds.

2.4. Methods employed to determine the sources of difficulties:

2.4.1. Contrastive analysis/ Error Analysis / Negative transfer

Speakers of other languages have difficulties with English pronunciation. Martinez & Valladolid (2011) attempted to explain the source of difficulties that Spanish learners of English have with English pronunciation by highlighting the similarities and differences between Spanish and
English syllable structures. They argued that it is the existence of different syllabic patterns in both languages that caused such negative transfer.

Similar attempts were made by Nilsen (1989) to shed light on the differences between Standard Easter Norwegian (SEN) and Received Pronunciation (RP) in terms of vowels and consonants. Likewise, Ma (1994) believed that there exist several phonological differences between Mandarin Chinese and English, and as a result Chinese learners of English did experience difficulties in pronouncing English words. Bian (2013) agreed with his previous counterpart, used contrastive analysis and identified the transfer of Chinese language as L1 as the major source of English pronunciation difficulties, especially misplaced stress marks. The common type of mistake, according to him, was the misplaced stress mark. Taking a focused look at the differences between English and Mandarin Chinese fricative sounds, Zhang & Xiao (2014) concluded that Chinese learners of English did not perceive and produce these sounds as satisfactorily as expected and tended to replace some of these with other sounds. The two researchers argued that such errors were attributed to L1 negative transfer.

Comparing Thai and English pronunciation, Richards (1969) highlighted the differences between the pronunciations of these two languages, which, as he argued, were responsible for causing mispronunciations. To be specific, according to Richards, there were 9 vowels in Thai language whereas there are 11 in “New Zealand English”. Thus, Thai learners of English had a tendency to replace some English vowels with the others. The same tendency of substitution could also be found in English consonants spoken by Thai learners. Intonation is another distinctive feature that could tell ‘Thai-English’ from other English variations. Thai speakers of English “gave their English the characteristics of a syllable-timed, rather than a stress-timed, rhythm” (Richards,
More recently, Yangklang (2013) identified the negative transfer in the English language spoken by Thai learners. To be specific, Yangklang pointed out the root of the problem was the fact that quite a few Thai words were loaned from English, but they were pronounced in Thai intonation.

In Turkish context, as mentioned earlier, the /ŋ/ sound in English could pose a challenge to Turkish learners, according to Demirezen (2009). He also states that the m and n cause none to the Turkish students of English as these two sounds exist in the Turkish consonant inventory, but the /ŋ/ does as it does not exist. In other words, he uses Contrastive Analysis to identify a particular area of problem for Turkish learners. He recognizes that negative transfer between the two languages did occur, as the /ŋ/ in final position is devoiced as /ŋk/ by Turkish learners, for Turkish consonant rule allowed no word-final voiced consonants.

Using Contrastive Analysis, Hismanoglu (2009) pinpoints the non-existence of the /θ/ and /ð/ in the Turkish system of phonemes was the cause of the trouble encountered by Turkish learners.

In a very recent study conducted by Evans and Alshagiti (2018), Arabic participants were told to do a task of English vowel identification, and their task performance was at the poorest level when it came to vowels that did not have “a direct counterpart in Arabic” (p.29), such as /æ/ (head), /ɜː/ (heard), /eə/ (haired), /ɒ/ (hod), /ʌ/ (hud), /əʊ/ (hoed), /uː/ (who’d), /ʊ/ (hood). Again, comparing and contrasting a certain language with English was employed as a method to trace back the root of the pronunciation difficulties.

2.4.2. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) issues

However widely Contrastive Analysis has been used, the method can hardly offer logical explanations in all cases. Then other methods can come in.
One aspect of SLA is length of residence (LOR). Surprisingly, there was a negative correlation between the LOR of the Japanese learners of English in the US and their scores in the pronunciation tests (Larson-Hall, 2006). In other words, long-term residency, associated with age may be a contributing factor to the accentedness of English pronunciation. On the other hand, with two years of immersing in the target-language environment, the participants were able to attain native-like pronunciation of words that begin with /ɹ/ and /l/ and the whole sentences as well.

The exposure to L2 was another area of research attention. Early exposure to L1 could have an impact on the way L2 was perceived and produced (Best, 1994; Flege, 1995; Iverson et al, 2003; as cited in Evans & Alshangiti, 2018).

Another aspect of SLA that is worth noticing is the Critical Period Hypothesis, which is defined as “the view that there is a critical period favoring language acquisition, after which native-speaker-like ability cannot be attained” (Hummel, 2014, p.170). Such period starts at around two years of age and finishes at around 13, argued Lenneberge (1967) (as cited in Hummel, 2014). Hummel further argues that in terms of CPH, phonology, to put simply pronunciation draws a great deal of attention. In fact, the case in which an L2 learner started learning L2 after puberty and was able to surpass native speakers in the area of pronunciation would be an extremely rare occurrence.

Speakers coming from non-native English speaking countries are normally exposed to the language in formal classroom settings, so it is possible that the training or teaching methods could have an impact somehow. To illustrate, Japanese students were found to tend to be more
familiar with the typical Japanese accent of English by Japanese teachers, which to an extent affect their English pronunciation (Tominaga, 2011).

Parts of conventional teaching methods, such as repetition, sentence drills, minimal pairs, are proved to be unable to make significant improvements for Turkish young learners with a few problematic English consonants; instead, songs, games, or story-telling activities could (Saricoban & Kuc, 2010).

2.5. Research gap and research questions of this thesis project

Problems with English pronunciation still linger despite the fact that numerous research efforts have been done to investigate, with the participation of learners from various L1 backgrounds. In fact, English pronunciation errors are quite global, and can be found in learners across continents.

The foregoing findings described in the literature review show that despite numerous studies carried out in different L1 contexts, few take a specific look at Vietnamese learners in the age group of 18 to 30. As such, the aim of the current study was to conduct an investigation on Vietnamese adult learners of English, aged 18 to 30, with the aim of exploring the problems they have encountered with English pronunciation. It is expected that the findings obtained can be of significance and offer some insightful information to English teachers in Vietnamese schools.

There are three Research Questions (RQs) as follows:

RQ1: What types of errors do Vietnamese young adult learners make with English pronunciation?
RQ2: What are their perceptions of their difficulties of pronouncing English?
RQ3: Which demographic characteristics have the most influence on their pronunciation quality?

There were hypotheses stated to RQ2 and RQ3 as follows:

H2: The students are not fully aware of their pronunciation errors.

H3: Vietnamese learners who came from the North and Center make more mistakes because of their Vietnamese local accent.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

As specified in the previous chapter, there is insufficient literature on the English phonology difficulties that Vietnamese learners aged 18 to 30, frequently makes, their awareness level of these errors, and which demographic characteristics should be attributed to them. These RQs were designed in order to fill the gap and provide a deeper look into these problems. It is supposed that the findings obtained can be of significance and offer some useful implications to English teachers in Vietnamese contexts.

3.1. Research design and research Instruments

For RQ1, it would seem the best way to recognize the participants’ pronunciation errors is by listening to them speaking English. It is worth noticing that the majority of the human daily conversations happen spontaneously, so intelligible pronunciation in uncontrolled, spontaneous circumstances does matter. As a consequence, the participants were recorded in uncontrolled contexts. Still, they were recorded in a controlled circumstance as well, just an attempt to see how consciousness and preparedness can help them with the control over their pronunciation. To create a context as the former, the participants were allowed one to two minutes to take a quick look at the texts before reading them out loud. Earlier, the two texts had been printed out in size 14 with the double line spacing on two sides of an A4-sized piece of paper, and then all of the participants had the exactly the same texts to read. Both texts can be found in Appendix 2. In terms of content, one text was at elementary level, 179 words in length, covering the topic “My working day”, a familiar topic among elementary learners. It was adapted from esl-lounge.com. The other was slightly longer, containing 191 words in length. It
was about the characteristics of dolphins and adapted from Wikipedia. The text sounded more scientific, and as a result largely contained less common vocabulary than the elementary one. Meanwhile, the second time of recording was a semi-structured interview in which the participants were completely unaware of the questions and the questions varied among them, an attempt to replicate the nature of a typical conversation. In fact, semi-structured format is the preferred choice of most qualitative interviews, according to Friedman (2012). Within the context of the study, more focus was paid to the pronunciation errors during the interview, which was unlike a typical one, in which the content was the focus of attention. A recorder then became a necessary device for this purpose.

To address RQ2 and RQ3, a brief English-written questionnaire was designed to gain some understanding of how much the participants were aware of their pronunciation errors and difficulties as well as their background. According to Dornyei & Csizer (2012, p.74), it is possible to recognize the “characteristic, opinions, and intended behaviors of a large population” by eliciting information from a sample of the population.

I carefully consulted Chapter 5 in Research Methods in Second Language Acquisition (Mackey & Gass, 2012) to gain some understanding of questionnaire design. I even piloted the questionnaire to some of my fellow teachers at my workplace before the actual administration, and their feedback did help. There were two fellow teachers at my workplace getting involved in the pilot. After their completion of the questionnaire, they gave me some comments on how comprehensible the questions appeared to them as a respondent. With some consideration, I modified the wording used in the questionnaire. There were 14 questions altogether, all of which were multiple-choice ones. For the majority of the questionnaire, only one response was
required for each question. There was an extra note to inform the participants if more than one response could be chosen.

Regarding the content, there were four demographic questions that elicited the participants’ gender, place of birth, and the accent they speak in Vietnamese language. Question 5 through question 9 elicited information about the participants’ English studies. The remaining questions, from question 10 to question 14, aimed to discover how much they perceive about their difficulties and errors with English pronunciation. It was hypothesized that Vietnamese learners who came from the North and Center would make more mistakes because of their Vietnamese local accent. From the researcher’s classroom observation and teaching experience, Vietnamese learners with the Northern accent and Central accent seem to struggle with English pronunciation than their Southern-accent counterparts do. The former seems to suffer from the L1 negative consequence quite obviously, e.g. learners with Northern accent said ‘year’ as [zia(r)] instead of /jia(r)/.

Finally, the recorded speech and the answers to the questionnaire were all collected and collated for analysis. The analysis largely involved working out the error frequency, error patterns, error consciousness, and the link, if any, between the errors with the demographic characteristics.

3.2. **Participants:**

The sampling procedure was convenience sampling. My participants were Vietnamese young adult learners, within the age range 18 to 30 at the moment of joining the survey. There was an unequal representation of both genders in the sample (15 females and 17 males). In fact, I did not aim for an equal proportion of both genders. They came from different parts of the country.
Most of them were students, who all learned English at high school and/or university as a compulsory subject of the curriculum.

I planned to recruit them in two ways: word of mouth and social networking (Facebook, mostly). On my Facebook page, I posted a status presenting my research purpose and looking forward to their voluntary involvement. It was unfortunate that none of my Facebook friends responded to my request for their participation into my research project. All of my participants were recruited “off-line”. In other words, they were approached after the class time while taking a break around the school campus. Originally, I planned to gain access to 35 participants, but 3 of them withdrew at the last minute for their own personal reasons. As such, the actual number of participants was 32, which was slightly over the minimum requirements of quantitative research.

3.3. Procedure

Before actually getting started, the participants were given thorough instructions of the process of the study; also very importantly they were informed of its anonymous nature, that is, their identity was not required and their recorded speech was not disclosed. They were numbered according to their order of joining. Their participation was on a voluntary basis.

At the first step, they were told to complete a brief questionnaire. On completion, they were then offered two short texts, one elementary level and the other intermediate level. They took a quick look and started to read. As they read out loud the texts, they were recorded.

At the third step, they were recorded the second time in a short semi-structured interview in which they were asked some questions in English, with an increasing level of difficulties. There
were no identifying questions in the recorded conversations. Unlike the first recording, they did not know the interview questions in advance in the second recording.

The entire procedure took each participant approximately 15 minutes. During the process, the researcher was at their side in case they had any difficulties understanding the questions.

3.4. Data collection and analysis

To collect data for RQ1, the recordings were renamed and saved into a separate folder in my computer. For each participant, the recordings, including texts and interviews, were listened to. The scripts were noted down, using the standard orthography, with the inclusion of imperfect speech features, such as hesitations, pauses, repetition, silence, fillers, etc., all the natural occurrences of a typical conversation. The pronunciation errors of all kinds were transcribed and coded. The frequency of these errors was calculated so that a list of the most common errors could be yielded. An “error” is defined as “a deviation in learner language which results from lack of knowledge of the correct rule” (Corder, 1967, as cited in Ellis, 1994, p.700).

Along with these, the information that he/she self-reported in the questionnaire was noted as well for the triangulation task, then RQ2 would be answered.

I compared the error frequency among the participants with different regional accents in Vietnamese language, which was an attempt to see whether the hypothesis would be confirmed or rejected.

3.5. Limitations of the research methods

The researcher identified a few limitations during the process.

First, I noticed the shyness of the participants when knowing that their English speech would be recorded. Second, they were concerned the confidentiality of the information. They were afraid
that their identity would be revealed. Third, they were somewhat unwilling to spend time with the research while gaining no benefits, as they believed. In fact, the whole process took around 15 minutes, which might sound relatively time-consuming to some of the participants. For all three factors, it is then very likely that their performance in the tasks could come below average, and possibly make more mistakes than they normally do, which could to an extent affect the validity and reliability of the results.

Furthermore, there is possibly some concern about the inter-rater reliability as there was only one rater (the researcher) who was in charge of coding and analyzing the data. In fact, I was unable to have assistance as it had been prescribed by the IRB that I had no research associates.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of this study are demonstrated verbally and graphically and associated with the previous ones as an attempt to address the three RQs of pronunciation errors types, the participants’ level of perception of these errors, and the influence, if any, of demographic features on their English pronunciation quality.

4.1. Analysis tools and procedures

The tools used for data analysis include both quantitative and qualitative ones. First, the recorded speeches were listened to and analyzed for pronunciation errors. The errors were noted down and coded. Then these error frequencies were converted into percentages for comparison purposes.

The responses of the participants in the questionnaire about their awareness of these mispronunciations were converted into percentages as well, and then compared to the actual frequencies to figure out their level of perception.

The respondents’ self-reported information about their genders and regional accents were compared to their error frequency, and chi-square tests were run, using SPSS version 20 to see if there was any correlation between these factors.

4.2. Data description

Table 1 displays Top 9 most frequently made errors recorded from the surveyed Vietnamese learners, represented in percentages.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of errors</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*The most frequent pronunciation errors (N = 32)*
It can be seen that the feature of ending sounds (consonant ending sounds) of English language is truly problematic as all the subjects were prone to it. To put it another way, 100% surveyed made during the recorded tasks. Strictly following was the error of mispronounced vowels, which accounted for 93.7%. In fact, there were only 2 participants who were recorded with no mistakes with English vowels. Three quarters of the participants were found with consonant mispronunciation, and these errors involved the confusion between /s/ and /ʃ/, /p/ and /f/, and the mispronunciation of consonants not found in Vietnamese language, including /ʒ/, /θ/, and /dʒ/. Consonant clusters, which demonstrated another difference between English and Vietnamese language, could cause trouble to over a third of the respondents. Multi-syllable
words in English, i.e. words that contain three syllables and more, might be confusing to these Vietnamese learners. In fact, they pronounced the words with incorrect stress marks (62.5%), even with no syllable stress at all, accounting for nearly a half. A similar type of errors was flat intonation. With not much surprise the researcher found that almost 60% of the participants read the texts or spoke English with flat-sounding monotonous speech. The number of syllables in a word, according to the survey, confused this survey’s participants as well. They either missed or added an unnecessary syllable. A very frequent instance was the cluster “ed” and “es”. The word “places” was pronounced with only one syllable while there should be two. Alternatively, “adapted” has three syllables while quite a few participants said it without /ɪd/ for the “ed”. Meanwhile some of them pronounced “arrives” and “developed” with 3 and 4 syllables respectively, probably believing that “ed” and “es” ending is always another syllable of the words.

Figure 1 summarizes the information obtained from question 14 of the questionnaire in which the participants identified their own pronunciation errors.
It was quite obvious that only 22 of 32 participants realized they missed ending sounds when speaking English, accounting for 68.8%. Anyway, it was the error type that most participants identified. Syllables, as recorded, did cause trouble to a significant number of these participants whereas only 18 of them (i.e. 56.3%, slightly over a half) reported this mistake. Intonation is another feature that most participants reported, i.e. 14 out of 32, representing almost a half, 43.8%. Next, mispronunciation of sounds not existing in Vietnamese language was recognized by only a quarter of the participants. This error percentage is somewhat lower than found in previous studies by Nguyen (2007) and Yates & Zielinski (2009). Observed from Table 1, stress mark was one of the frequently made errors whereas it was identified by only 9% which was a negligible proportion. Suprasegmentals feature, e.g. intonation, is a relatively new finding compared to the existing literature.

Table 2 lists six words that were most frequently mispronounced in this study. This could be considered an addition to the list of mispronounced words found by Ha (2006), including...
“appreciate, center, country, good, interpreter, person, teacher, try, translate, try, tradition, train”.

Table 2

Frequently mispronounced words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>Types of errors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>limbs</td>
<td>Mispronounced vowel</td>
<td>62.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developed</td>
<td>Misplaced stress/ Redundant syllables</td>
<td>59.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>though</td>
<td>Pronounced as ‘thought’ or ‘through’</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>large</td>
<td>Missing ending sound</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>places</td>
<td>Missing syllable</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>interesting</td>
<td>Redundant syllables</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“Limbs” was pronounced with /ai/ instead of /i/ by 62.5%, which was the highest figure. Nearly 60% of the participants either said the word “developed” with 4 syllables or placed stress mark on its 1st or 3rd syllable instead of its 2nd one. The third most common mistakes included mispronunciation of “though”, “large”, “places”, and “interesting”, found in a half of the participants. To be specific, “though” was mispronounced as “thought” or “through”, which were similar in form; “large” was said with the ending sound /d3/ missing. Also the participants pronounced “places” with only 1 syllable whereas they said “interesting” with up to 4 syllables. Figure 2 describes the factors that the participants believe make English pronunciation difficult.
Apart from the factor of their own teacher’s pronunciation which accounted for a minimal percentage 9.3%, the other factors were selected by more or less a half of the participants, which was more significant. To be detailed, slightly under a half of the participants believed that the inadequate emphasis placed on pronunciation in the English courses and the insufficient practice on their part contributed to the problem. Another internal factor was identified by exactly 50% of them, and that was their Vietnamese local accent. The most frequently selected factor was the fact that many English sounds do not exist in Vietnamese language.

The two pie charts below illustrate how the participants rate the importance of pronunciation in communicating in English.
While only 3.1% of the participants denied their trouble in communicating in English, the vast majority did not. In fact, exactly a half of them admitted they sometimes had trouble in communicating with foreigners in English and a similar proportion (i.e. 46.9%) found themselves having difficulties in doing so more frequently.

More importantly, the source of such difficulties was recognized as pronunciation errors by a considerable quantity of participants. More than a third confirmed their communication problems resulted from their pronunciation errors whereas approximately a half identified the
same source with more hesitation. It is worth noticing under a quarter dismissed
mispronunciations as the source of their problem.

As only one participant with Northern accent was recruited, it was unable to compare all three
accents. Instead, Table 3a compares the participants with Southern and Central accent and
examines their mistakes frequency, and a chi-square test was run to check the correlation, if
any.

Table 3a

The participants‘ demographic characteristics and their pronunciation mistakes \((N = 32)\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The number of participants with their regional accents</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 5 mispronunciations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large number of mispronunciation (over 5)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Tests

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Asymp. Sig. ( (2\text{-sided}) )</th>
<th>Exact Sig. ( (2\text{-sided}) )</th>
<th>Exact Sig. ( (1\text{-sided}) )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fisher’s Exact Test</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.642</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As seen from the table above, the p value is .642, which is greater than .05, indicating that the two variables are independent of each other. It could be concluded that the regional accents of the participants and their error frequency have no association.

The 32 participants were categorized into genders and their error frequencies, as seen in Table 3b below. A Chi-Square Test was then run to test the correlation between the two variables.

Table 3b

*The participants’ demographic characteristics and their pronunciation mistakes (N = 32)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The number of participants in genders</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fewer than 5 mispronunciations</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large number of mispronunciation (over 5)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-Square Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fisher’s Exact Test</th>
<th>.678</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N of valid cases</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As observed from the tables above, the p value is .678, larger than .05, suggesting the two variables are independent of each other. The correlation between genders and their error frequencies are then rejected.
All in all, both demographic characteristics, including regional accents and genders, of the participants were found not to have any correlations with their error frequency.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The results presented descriptively in the previous chapter are discussed further in the following chapter; also, a few implications and recommendations are made as a consequence.

5.1. Research questions, purposes, and hypotheses

The study was designed to answer the following three Research Questions (RQs):

RQ1: What types of errors do Vietnamese young adult learners have with English pronunciation?

RQ2: What are their perceptions of their difficulties of pronouncing English?

RQ3: Which demographic characteristics have the most influence on their pronunciation quality?

There were hypotheses stated to RQ2 and RQ3 as follows:

H2: The students are not fully aware of their pronunciation errors.

H3: Vietnamese learners who came from the North and Center make more mistakes because of their Vietnamese local accent.

5.2. Research methods and data analysis methods

Each participant was instructed to go through the process, including questionnaire completion and having their reading and interviewing recorded.

For the questionnaire, there were 14 questions altogether, all of which were multiple-choice ones. Only one response was required in most of the questions whereas other questions were checklist questions in which more than one response could be chosen. The questionnaire was aimed to discover a range of information, including demographic questions, the participants’
English studies, and their perceptions about their difficulties and errors with English pronunciation.

Afterwards, the participants read out loud two texts of elementary and intermediate levels, and then they were interviewed. In both tasks, they were recorded.

The recorded speech and the answers to the questionnaire were all collected and triangulated for analysis.

5.3. Discussions of the results

5.3.1. Discussions of the results of RQ1

Contrastive Analysis (CA) has been widely used to shed light on the factors that cause mistakes for learners from L2 background. CA is defined as “Comparison of the linguistic structures of two or more languages to determine their similarities and differences” (Hummel, 2014, p.61). It is certain that CA is a useful tool in “the retrospective explanation of errors” (Rustipa, 2011, p.18). Therefore, within the scale of this RQ, Contrastive Analysis was employed to provide an insight into these errors, which could be categorized into two groups: segmental and suprasegmental features.

Table 1 (Chapter 4: Results) makes it clear the most frequent pronunciation error was missing final consonants, recorded at 100%. In other words, all of the surveyed learners made this mistake. This finding is not new actually, as it is quite consistent with the findings by Ha (2006), Nguyen (2007), and Yates & Zielinski (2009). Final consonants are one of the obvious areas of disparity between the two languages although they do share a few final ending sounds, for instance, /p/, /t/, /m/, /ŋ/, /k/, and /ŋ/. Still, even with or /k/ ending sounds, English have them open whereas Vietnamese have them closed. In other words, the /ŋ/ or /k/ in Vietnamese
tends to be bilabial, pronounced with two lips closed. The other ending sounds which were missed by the participants included /s/, /ʃ/, /t/, /d/, /l/, /v/, /θ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, which were definitely non-existent in the Vietnamese language. According to CA, these final consonant sounds are certainly an area of difficulties for Vietnamese students.

The second most frequent error was mispronounced vowels, to be specific, the confusion between /e/ and /i/, or /i/ and /ai/, or short /i/ and long /i/. The finding can be supplementary to the finding by Yates & Zielinski (2009), i.e. “/i:/ (as in sheep) and /ɪ/ (as in ship), /ɜː:/ (as in work) and /ɔː/(as in walk), and /æ/ (as in pan) and /e/ (as in pen)” pose a challenge to Vietnamese learners. “Limbs”, spelled with an “i” was mispronounced by most participants as /ai/, probably assuming that the “i” is always pronounced that way. In fact, “i” could be either the representation of the sound /ai/ or /ɪ/ depending on the word it appears. The mistake with this vowel registered at 62.5%, which was the greatest figure. Similarly, it could be noticed from the recording that “threat” was mistakenly pronounced as /θrɪt/ instead of /θret/, “great” as /grɪt/ instead of /grep/, or widespread as /waɪdspred/ instead of /waɪdspred/. What could explain such confusion is very likely to be the obvious mismatch between orthography and phonetic sounds in the English language. The cluster “ea”, for example, can be /e/ in “spread” or /i:/ in heat. It is therefore impossible to figure out how an English word sounds when looking at its spelling. Meanwhile, there is a consistence between orthography and pronunciation in Vietnamese. To put it simply, how a Vietnamese word is pronounced could be easily figured out from its spelling.

Another segmental aspect worth noticing was the consonant clusters in English words. As obtained from the study, clusters that were mostly mispronounced by the participants were cl,
bl, fr dr, pl, and pr, which were definitely not a part of Vietnamese language phonology. Tran (2016) made a full list of Vietnamese consonant clusters, and they are: ch, gi, kh, nh, ng (ngh), ph, qu, th, tr. This error registered at slightly over a third of the sample.

The findings of this study demonstrated that syllables could be problematic as more than a half of the participants admitted their struggle with multi-syllable words. In the production tasks, 46.8% and 28.1% of them were recorded with missing syllables and redundant syllables respectively. In terms of syllables, Vietnamese language is cited as example of a monosyllabic language (Nguyen, Nguyen, Romary, & Vu, 2008). In fact, each Vietnamese word contains one syllable only whereas the counterpart in English can contain one or more than one syllable. Missing or adding redundant syllables to a word is very likely to make it sound like another word and even worse sound unintelligible to the interlocutors.

Suprasegmental features (stress mark, intonation, etc.) richly deserve attention. Morley (1999, as cited in Yangklang, 2013) described the use of the suprasegmental features as a tool “not just to complete meaning, but to create meaning”. Correct stress and intonation can have a direct improvement on English communication capacity (Zhang & Yin, 2009, as cited in Yangklang, 2013). In fact, it was found that well under a half of the study were immune from the error of misplaced stress marks, as well as approximately a half of them pronounced the words with flatness, placing no strength or emphasis on any syllables. Flat intonation was recorded in nearly 60% of the participants. Even very few of them were able to reach native-like intonation.

All in all, Contrastive Analysis can, to an extent and within the scale of the study, provide thorough explanations to the causes of the pronunciation errors.
5.3.2. Speculations of the results of RQ2

The errors identified from the recorded speech and the participants’ self-reported errors were compared and contrasted, presented in Table 4.

Table 4

Errors detected from the recorded speech and the participants’ self-reported errors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Errors types</th>
<th>Errors detected from the recorded speech (%)</th>
<th>The participants’ self-reported errors (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Missing final consonants</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>68.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Misplaced stress marks/No stress marks</td>
<td>62.5/ 46.8</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Intonation</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Missing syllables/Redundant syllables</td>
<td>46.8/ 28.1</td>
<td>56.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Clusters/ consonants</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In all cases mentioned above, except syllables, the perception level about the errors was lower than the frequency they did happen to the participants. For instance, the most frequent pronunciation error was missing final consonants, recording at 100%. In contrast, in terms of perception, only 22 out of 32 participants, that is, nearly 69% recognized their missing of ending sounds, seen from Figure 1. Similar gaps could be observed in the other errors and the greatest disparity was recorded at the area of stress. It can be stated that the participants’ awareness of most of the identified errors was lower than their actual incidences.

Such the mismatch could be attributed to a few factors, one of which is the lack of emphasis on pronunciation training in English courses at universities and high schools. In fact, most of the
participants (62.5%), despite their lengthy English studies of over 7 years were found with pronunciation errors (as seen in Table 5). Even more, their mispronunciations with common words, for example, “interesting” and “places” were widespread and repeated.

Table 5

The participants’ English studies duration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>The number of participants</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 7 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>62.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 to 7 years</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 to 3 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4

The main focus of English courses at high schools

Indeed, self-reported data from the sample demonstrated that pronunciation was by no means the main focus of English courses at high schools. As seen from Figure 4 above, pronunciation
was selected as the main focus of English courses at high schools by only 5 out of 32 participants.

One surprising finding to RQ2 would be the awareness of syllables was higher than their actual occurrence. The issue of syllables is another difference between English and Vietnamese language, still employing CA in this case can hardly work well.

5.4. Implications

With the sample of 32 participants which was slightly over the minimum requirement of quantitative research, the findings could lead to comparatively weak generalizations. Nevertheless, there are a few important implications that can be made from these to the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

First, pronunciation training should be given more emphasis; also it would be even better if there were separate classes for pronunciation classes at universities and especially high schools. Second, the way pronunciation is instructed throughout the curriculum needs to be modified as well. To be specific, the English courses should draw students’ attention not only to segmental but also suprasegmental features of the language. Third, students should be told to be alert to the English phonology features. The input once made noticeable and comprehensible will become “intake”, and that is what learners do learn, according to the Noticing Hypothesis proposed by Schmidt (1995, as cited in Hummel, 2014).

5.5. Limitations

There were a few limitations in both processes, including the data collection and data analysis. Regarding the data collection process, first, the pilot questionnaire was administered to an extremely low number of participants, only 2, to be exact; as such, I might not have received
enough to improve the actual questionnaire, although their feedback did help in some ways. Second, I noticed the shyness of the participants when they knew that their English speech would be recorded. Third, they were concerned about the confidentiality of the information. They were afraid that their identity would be revealed. Fourth, they were somewhat unwilling to spend time with the research while gaining no benefits, as they believed. In fact, the whole process took around 15 minutes, which might sound relatively time-consuming to some of the participants. (Still, I did give each participant two pens as a compensation for the time they spent for my research). These three factors impeded the participants’ task performance somewhat; as such, possibly caused them to make more mistakes than they normally did.

Regarding the data analysis, the research methods involved some qualitative research work as well, which was subjective by nature. First, despite a great deal of carefulness during my work, I was afraid of not being able to classify and code all of the pronunciation errors appropriately. Also, the evaluation could hardly be immune to my subjectivity. Earlier, I decided to carry out research without research partners, which was part of my IRB approval as well. Thus, by no means was I able to ensure the inter-rater reliability. Third, I did not reach the goal of gaining access to participants of all three accents with relatively equal proportions. In fact, only 1 out of 32 participants spoke his/her mother tongue with Northern accent. As a consequence, I was only able to compare participants of Southern accent and Central accent only. Finally, since I gained access to 32 participants, the generalizations made from the findings were possible, but comparatively weak.

5.6. **Recommendations**
The researcher would like to make some recommendations for future research as follows. As an attempt to reduce subjectivity and guarantee the reliability, researchers should have one or two research partners who can listen to the recorded speech and offer support with coding errors from it. Also it would be possible to make stronger generalizations of the results if a larger sample is acquired. A sample twice the sample size of this study is recommended. Furthermore, a sample with equal proportions of participants speaking three different regional accents would be ideal.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

Upon identifying the gap of literature in the area of L2 learner’s perception of their own pronunciation errors in Vietnamese context, this study was conducted with the aim of filling the research gap and providing a closer look at how much Vietnamese young adult learners were aware of their English pronunciation errors, how widespread these errors are across the sample and which demographic features can explain these errors. The recruited sample was 32 Vietnamese learners of English from both genders within the age of 18 to 30 and with varying English studies duration and English competence. The vast majority of the sample spoke Vietnamese with the Southern or Central accent. Only 1 participant had the Northern accent. They were interviewed in English shortly after they were told to read two short texts out loud and complete a 14-item questionnaire. Their speech was recorded and coded for analysis. Their responses to the questionnaire were noted as well. Both sources of data were collected and collated to address the three research purposes.

The error types that were common among the sample, as suggested by the study, included missing final ending sounds, mispronounced vowels (the sounds e, i, ai), mispronounced consonants and consonant clusters, misplaced stress marks, incorrect number of syllables, and flat intonation. It can be observed that most of these errors demonstrate the area of contrast between English and Vietnamese languages. Contrastive Analysis (CA) can offer thorough explanations to these errors. In terms of learners’ perception, the surveyed individuals had the rate of perception lower than the rate at which they actually made these mistakes in most of the cases, except the area of syllables. Their mistakes, as a consequence, could be to an extent due to the fact that they were not fully alert to their own pronunciation trouble. Statistical
analyses found that there is no association between the participants’ regional accents and their English error mispronunciations, or between the participants’ genders and their English error mispronunciations.

It is worth noting that while the majority of the sample reported their English studies duration of over 7 years mispronunciations were quite common, even mispronunciations of common vocabulary. Despite lengthy studies, mispronunciations have not been yet addressed properly. Also, pronunciation was reported as the main focus of the English courses at their high schools and/or universities by no more than 5 and/or 16 participants respectively. These findings can have some implications to the field of SLA, and more specifically, English teachers in Vietnam. In fact, exposure to standard English pronunciation should be increased and the teaching method of pronunciation should be modified at both high school and university level. At least more emphasis should be drawn to the area of differences between the two languages to enhance learners’ awareness of these and then hopefully they can avoid the mistakes themselves. The correlation between the demographic features, including the regional accents and genders is not confirmed. Vietnamese students, no matter what regional accents they speak Vietnamese with or what genders they are, should hold no sense of inferiority when learning English.

The purpose of confirming whether the Central and the Northern accent could lead to more pronunciation errors than the Southern one has unfortunately not been addressed properly as only 1 out of 32 participants with Northern accent was recruited. Future research, therefore, should be replicated with a larger sample in which there is a relatively equal proportion of participants of various regional accents.
REFERENCES


Dear Participants,

I am Nguyen Thi Ngoc Anh, who are entitled by Benedictine University (The US) and University of Social Sciences and Humanities Hochiminh City (Vietnam) to conduct a research study into English pronunciation errors made by Vietnamese young adult learners and their perceptions about these. Below is the questionnaire I have designed as a research instrument. Please carefully read the instruction and answer the questions.

Thanks for your kind participation.

***
Instruction:

Please **CIRCLE** the response of your choice and choose one only unless instructed otherwise.

1. **What is your gender?**
   a. Male
   b. Female

2. **Which age group do you belong to?**
   a. 18 – 22
   b. 23 – 25
   c. Over 25

3. **Where in Vietnam are you from originally?**
   a. The North
   b. The South
   c. The Center

4. **Which Vietnamese accent do you speak?**
   a. Northern accent
   b. Southern accent
   c. Central accent

5. **How long have you been learning English?**
   a. 1 – 3 years
   b. 4 – 7 years
   c. Over 7 years

6. **Did you learn English at high school?**
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. **Did you learn English at university?**
   a. Yes
   b. No

8. **What is the main focus of the English courses at university?** *(You can choose more than one response)*
   a. Grammar
   b. Vocabulary
   c. Pronunciation
   d. Functions (e.g. greetings, how to make invitations, how to make requests, etc.)
   e. Others: ________________________________.
9. What is the main focus of the English courses at your high school? (*You can choose more than one response*)
   a. Grammar
   b. Vocabulary
   c. Pronunciation
   d. Functions (e.g. greetings, how to make invitations, how to make requests, etc.)
   e. Others: ________________________________

10. Is pronunciation one of your problems in learning English?
   a. Yes
   b. No

11. Have you ever had difficulties in talking with foreigners in English?
   a. Yes, many times
   b. Sometimes
   c. Never

12. Do you believe such difficulties result from your pronunciation errors?
   a. Yes, definitely
   b. Yes, but not always so
   c. Not at all

13. What do you think makes English pronunciation difficult? (*You can choose more than one response*)
   a. Many English sounds do not exist in Vietnamese language.
   b. My Vietnamese local accent hinders me from pronouncing English correctly.
   c. I haven’t practiced English pronunciation enough.
   d. My English teacher’s pronunciation has affected mine.
   e. The English courses at high school give no emphasis on pronunciation.
   f. Others: ________________________________

14. What mistakes do you usually make when pronouncing English? (*You can choose more than one response*)
   a. I forget ending sounds.
b. I have ending sounds for almost every word.
c. I cannot link sounds when speaking.
d. I cannot pronounce some English sounds that do not exist in Vietnamese language.
e. I struggle with multi-syllable words, i.e. words that have three or more syllables.
f. I find it hard to imitate the rhythm and/or intonation when speaking English.
g. Others: ________________________________________________________.

    Thank you for your participation.
**APPENDIX 2**

**TEXTS FOR READING OUT LOUD**

**Short text (elementary level)**

| My working day starts very early. From Monday to Friday I get up at 3.30 and I have a shower and a cup of coffee. I usually leave the house at 4.10 because the car always arrives a few minutes early. I get to the studio at about five o'clock and start work. My program *Good Morning Britain* starts at seven o'clock and finishes at nine o'clock. Then I leave the studio at a quarter past ten. After that, I go shopping and visit some friends. I get home at three o'clock. A woman helps me with the housework and the ironing. I read a newspaper and do some work. Then my husband gets home at half past five in the evening and I cook dinner. We stay at home in the evening. We don't go out because I go to bed very early. We usually watch television and then I go to bed at half past eight, I'm usually asleep by nine o'clock. I think my job is very interesting but I don't like getting up very early. |

Adopted from [http://www.esl-lounge.com/student/reading/1r2-my-working-day.php](http://www.esl-lounge.com/student/reading/1r2-my-working-day.php)
Dolphins range in size from the 1.7 m (5.6 ft) long and 50 kg (110 lb). They have streamlined bodies and two limbs that are modified into flippers. Though not quite as flexible as seals, some dolphins can travel at 55.5 km/h (34.5 mph). Dolphins use their conical shaped teeth to capture fast moving prey. They have well-developed hearing which is adapted for both air and water and is so well developed that some can survive even if they are blind. Some species are well adapted for diving to great depths. They have a layer of fat, or blubber, under the skin to keep warm in the cold water.

Although dolphins are widespread, most species prefer the warmer waters of the tropic zones, but some, like the right whale dolphin, prefer colder climates.

Dolphins feed largely on fish and squid, but a few, like the killer whale, feed on large mammals, like seals. Dolphins are sometimes hunted in places like Japan, in an activity known as dolphin drive hunting. Besides drive hunting, they also face threats from bycatch, habitat loss, and marine pollution. Dolphins have been depicted in various cultures worldwide.
APPENDIX 3

QUESTIONS FOR THE SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

1. Good morning, how are you?
2. What’s your dream job?
3. When’s your birthday?
4. What’s the weather like in your hometown?
5. What do you do for fun?
6. Do you use email regularly?
7. What type of movies do you like?
8. What kind of music do you like?
9. How long have you been learning English?
10. If you were to win the lottery, what would you do with such a large sum of money?
11. What age do you think is best for getting married? Why?
THESIS APPROVAL

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