



Phonological Interference as a Challenge in English Speaking Class at Islamic Boarding School Raudlatul Ulum 2

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ABSTRACT

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This study aims to examine the phonological interference of the Madurese language on the English pronunciation of students at Islamic Boarding School Raudlatul Ulum 2. The research uses a descriptive qualitative approach focusing on identifying forms of phonological interference that appear in students' speaking skills, both in segmental and suprasegmental aspects. Data were obtained through audio recordings of students' speaking practice, classroom observations, and brief interviews. A total of 1,071 phonetic transcriptions were analyzed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The results showed 441 pronunciation errors, or 41.18%. The most dominant type of error was sound substitution (18.49%), followed by addition (11.77%), omission (6.72%), and combination (4.20%). Additionally, suprasegmental disturbances were found in the form of incorrect word stress placement, flat intonation, and unnatural speech rhythm. These findings indicate that the phonological system of the Madurese language exerts a strong influence on students' English pronunciation. Therefore, phonological interference becomes a major challenge in teaching English speaking within the Islamic boarding school environment

Keywords: *Phonological Interference, Madurese Language, English Pronunciation, Speaking Skills, Islamic Boarding School.*

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INTRODUCTION

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, particularly in speaking area challenges, can be difficult for students whose first language differs from English. One of the main issues they face is mother tongue interference in second language learning. Learners tend to transfer linguistic patterns from their familiar daily language (BAĞIROVA, 2021). Mother tongue, or first language (L1), is the language acquired naturally from birth and used in daily communication, while interference refers to the influence of this first language on the production of a second or foreign language (Widiantari, Aunurrahman and Sahrawi, 2021). At Islamic Boarding School Raudlatul Ulum 2, most students use Madurese in their daily conversations. The Madurese language, with its unique characteristics (Faizal, Farisi and Rahman, 2025), can affect the way they pronounce words in English, construct sentences, and even interpret meanings in conversation. One of the significant speaking challenges they encounter is phonological interference, where students' pronunciation is strongly influenced by features of their mother tongue.

Phonological interference has been widely discussed by scholars in the field of second language acquisition. According to (Weinreich, 1953), interference occurs when speakers apply

the sound system of their first language to the target language, resulting in deviations from the standard pronunciation. (Lott, 1983) defines interference as the errors that appear in the learner's speech because of the influence of the mother tongue, including phonological transfer. Similarly, (Ellis, 1994) explains that phonological interference is the negative transfer of sound patterns from the first language to the second language, which makes learners struggle to articulate certain phonemes correctly. From these definitions, it can be concluded that phonological interference refers to the influence of the first language's sound system that leads to pronunciation errors in the target language. The types of phonological interference generally include substitution (replacing unfamiliar sounds with those existing in the first language), addition (inserting extra sounds into pronunciation), omission (dropping certain sounds), and misplacement of stress or intonation patterns, all of which can significantly hinder learners' speaking performance (Mahendra and Marantika, 2020). Those four forms directly affect pronunciation accuracy and fluency, thus hindering effective speaking skills. Therefore, understanding these types of interference is essential for designing learning strategies that can minimize phonological errors and improve students' speaking performance.

Looking at these challenges, research on phonological interference in students with a Madurese language background is very important to conduct. If this problem is not noticed, students will continue to experience difficulties in speaking English effectively, thus reducing their speaking ability and self-confidence (Asnaini, Tohamba and Rusli, 2025). Speaking skill itself is the main skill in English because it is related to academic achievement, international communication, and also future career opportunities (Fadhil *et al.*, 2025). In addition, several studies also show that local languages can have a great influence on the process of learning a second language (Rasmin and Samsudin, 2024). In the context of Islamic Boarding School Raudlatul Ulum 2, where Madurese language is used in daily life, the analysis of phonological interference is not only useful in theory but can also help teachers design learning strategies that are appropriate to the students' culture. Therefore, this research is important to find out the forms and impacts of phonological interference as well as to improve students' speaking ability in English

Several previous studies have shown that a person's first language affects English speaking skills. (Fadillah, 2020) conducted a descriptive qualitative study using phonological error analysis to find out how the mother tongue affects students' pronunciation of English vowels and consonants. The study found that students often replaced some English consonant sounds with sounds from their first language, which made their pronunciation incorrect. This shows that the influence of the mother tongue strongly affects how students produce English sounds. (Syafutri and Saputra, 2021) continued this topic by studying language interference in phonology, grammar, and vocabulary through oral tests and recorded conversations. Using a descriptive qualitative method, they found that phonological interference was the most common compared to grammar and vocabulary errors. This means that pronunciation is the most difficult part of learning English because of the strong influence of the students' first language. (Darwis and Nur, 2021) focused on suprasegmental features such as intonation and word stress by observing students in class. Their study showed that students often kept the intonation and stress patterns from their mother tongue when speaking English. As a result, their speech sounded flat and unnatural, showing that suprasegmental interference has a big effect on English speaking performance. Likewise, (Irma, Wisma and Syafryadin, 2019) studied the effect of first language interference on students' ability to pronounce English vowels using a qualitative descriptive approach. The study found that students had difficulty distinguishing short and long vowels in English because their native language does not have that difference. This finding shows that the structure of the first language directly influences students' accuracy in English pronunciation.

From another regional perspective, (Noviyenty and Putri, 2021) conducted a case study on Rejang-speaking students using interviews and recorded speech. The study found that students often replaced English vowels with Rejang vowels, especially in diphthongs. This pattern showed that the Rejang vowel system strongly affected their English pronunciation and caused consistent phonological interference. Similarly, (Astuty, 2022) used acoustic phonetic analysis to study Bugis students' pronunciation of English vowels. The study found that English back vowels were often changed to Bugis front vowels, showing that the way Bugis people pronounce sounds affects their

English pronunciation. This result shows that the articulation habits of Bugis speakers have a strong influence on how they pronounce English words.

Meanwhile, (Yatmikasari, Hidayati and Sulaeman, 2023) studied Indonesian L1 university students using pronunciation tests and recording analysis. The study found that English interdental and fricative sounds were often replaced with Indonesian plosive sounds, such as /θ/ becoming /t/ or /ð/ becoming /d/. These substitutions made pronunciation less accurate and showed that students still depended on their native phonological patterns. Focusing on Madurese students, (Hidayati, 2020) carried out a descriptive phonological analysis among Madurese high school learners. The study found that they had difficulty pronouncing English interdental consonants and mid vowels because these sounds do not exist in the Madurese sound system. This shows that the absence of certain English sounds in Madurese directly affects pronunciation problems.

In the same line, (Muhassin, Ansar and Putri, 2018) used interviews and classroom observations to study phonological interference among Madurese-speaking students. The study found that students often replaced the sound /f/ with /p/ and had trouble producing diphthongs. These results show that students' pronunciation is influenced by their habit of using sounds from their first language. Supporting these results, (Razaq, 2022) used an experimental method to study how Madurese students pronounce English fricatives. The study confirmed that students often failed to produce sounds such as /v/ and /θ/, showing that they find it hard to pronounce sounds that do not exist in Madurese. In a related study, (Wahyuningrum, 2019) conducted oral pronunciation tests to measure students' pronunciation accuracy. The study found that the students' pronunciation accuracy was generally low, showing that strong mother tongue interference made it difficult for them to pronounce English sounds correctly. Further support comes from (Fizriyani *et al.*, 2023) who compared the vowel systems of Madurese and English using phonetic analysis. The study found that students had problems producing English back vowels because these sounds do not exist in Madurese. As a result, they often mispronounced vowels and sounded unnatural when speaking English.

Research in Islamic boarding school settings is still rare but very important. (Hakimah, 2023) studied Madurese students at MA Nurulhuda Boarding School using observation and pronunciation recordings. The study found that students often made substitutions, omissions, and additions of sounds because they used Madurese too much in daily communication. This shows that the language environment in Islamic boarding school can strengthen phonological interference. Similarly, (Ficayuma, 2024) studied bilingual students in a multilingual Islamic boarding school using phonological tests and interviews. The study found that the use of several languages in the Islamic boarding school increased both segmental and suprasegmental interference, which made pronunciation problems more complex. Lastly, (Farisi, 2024) studied suprasegmental interference in non-Madurese students at a Islamic boarding school using recorded conversations. The study found that students still used their native language stress patterns when speaking English, which made their pronunciation sound unnatural and reduced fluency. Even though many studies have examined phonological interference in learning English, there are still several gaps, especially for students in Islamic boarding school settings. Most previous research focused on formal schools or general EFL classes and did not pay much attention to the special social and language environment of Islamic boarding school, where students use their mother tongue, especially Madurese, in daily life.

In addition, while many studies looked at segmental features like vowels and consonants or suprasegmental features like intonation and word stress, very few studies have examined both types of interference together in Islamic boarding school settings. Research on the influence of non-Madurese regional languages in Islamic boarding school is also limited, which makes it hard to compare how different mother tongues affect English pronunciation in this environment. Because of these gaps, this study aims to explore phonological interference among Madurese-speaking students at Islamic boarding school Raudlatul Ulum 2, looking at both segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English pronunciation. The study specifically wants to find out the forms of interference, such as substitution, omission, addition, and misplacement of stress or

intonation, and how these affect students' fluency and accuracy in speaking. By doing this, the research hopes to provide practical information for teachers to create teaching strategies that match students' culture and language background, helping them overcome pronunciation difficulties and improve their overall speaking skills in the Islamic boarding school context.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to describe the phonological interference of the Madurese language on students' English pronunciation. This approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to understand pronunciation errors as part of the natural process of second language acquisition (Creswell, 2014). The research was conducted at Islamic boarding school Raudlatul Ulum 2, involving nine students who have Madurese as their first language. The subjects were chosen purposively because they are relevant to the objectives of the study. The primary data consists of audio recordings of students' pronunciation while practicing English texts. These recordings serve as the main source for phonetic analysis. Supporting data were obtained through classroom observations and brief interviews to understand the learning context and students' awareness of the influence of their mother tongue. The audio recordings were transcribed using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and analyzed word by word by comparing students' pronunciation with standard English pronunciation. Errors were classified into substitution, addition, omission, and combination, then the total number and percentages were calculated. The results of the analysis were interpreted based on the theories of interference and second language acquisition (Lado, 1957; Ellis, 1997).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research results show that Madurese as a first language (L1) has a strong influence on the English (L2) pronunciation of students at Pondok Pesantren Raudlatul Ulum 2. This phonological interference happens consistently and repeatedly, both in segmental aspects (letter sounds) and suprasegmental aspects, such as word stress, rhythm, and intonation. Data were collected through the analysis of students' speaking practice recordings, classroom observations, and interviews. Even though most students realize that their Madurese dialect affects their English pronunciation, this awareness is not enough to help them fix errors on their own. Out of 1,071 phonetic transcriptions analyzed, 441 pronunciation errors were found, meaning the students' error rate reached 41.18%. The distribution of pronunciation error types is presented in the following table.

TYPE OF ERROR	TOTAL	PERCENTAGE (%)
Substitution	198	18,49%
Addition	126	11,77%
Omission	72	6,72%
Combination	45	4,20%
TOTAL	441	41,18%

From the total phonetic transcription data, the students' pronunciation error rate reached 41.18%. Looking at the types of errors, substitution was the most dominant error with a percentage of 18.49% of all data, followed by addition at 11.77%, omission at 6.72%, and combination at 4.20%. These findings show that replacing sounds is the strongest form of phonological interference in the English pronunciation of students with a Madurese background. Interferensi segmental

Segmental Interference

Segmental interference refers to pronunciation errors that happen when students carry the sound system of their mother tongue (Madurese) into the target language (English). This interference usually appears in three main forms: substitution (replacing sounds), omission (removing sounds), and addition (adding sounds). However, based on the results of this study, the researcher found one extra phenomenon called "combination," which is a pronunciation error involving more than one type of interference at the same time in one word.

A. Substitution

Substitution is a form of phonological interference that happens when students replace an English sound with another sound that is better known in the Madurese phonology system. This replacement is usually caused by certain sounds not being found in the Madurese phoneme inventory or because of different ways of speaking between the two languages.

1. Replacement of Sounds /θ/ and /ð/

The interdental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ do not exist in the Madurese phonology system. As a result, students tend to replace both sounds with the alveolar plosive sounds /t/ and /d/, which have a similar place of articulation. To illustrate this pattern of sound substitution, several examples of students' pronunciation are presented in the following table.

Target Word	Target IPA	Student IPA	Substitution Patterns
Think	/θɪŋk/	/tɪŋk/	/θ/ → /t/
Thank	/θæŋk/	/tæŋk/	/θ/ → /t/
This	/ðɪs/	/dɪs/	/ð/ → /d/
They	/ðeɪ/	/deɪ/	/ð/ → /d/

As shown in the table above, the interdental fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are consistently substituted with alveolar plosive sounds /t/ and /d/. This replacement shows the students' tendency to avoid interdental sounds by using alveolar sounds that are more familiar in Madurese. This phenomenon happened consistently across most students.

2. Replacement of Sound /v/

The voiced labiodental fricative sound /v/ is also not found in Madurese. Therefore, students replace it with the /f/ or /b/ sounds, which are more commonly used in their mother tongue. Replacing /v/ with /f/ shows the instability of the contrast between voiced and unvoiced sounds in students' pronunciation. Several examples of this substitution pattern can be seen in the following table.

Target Word	Target IPA	Student IPA	Substitution Patterns
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Very	/ˈveri/	/ˈferi/	/v/ → /f/
Have	/hæv/	/hæf/	/v/ → /f/
Give	/gɪv/	/gɪf/	/v/ → /f/

As shown in the table above, the students consistently substituted the voiced labiodental fricative /v/ with the voiceless labiodental fricative /f/. This reflects the direct influence of the Madurese phonology system, which does not recognize the /v/ sound.

3. Replacement of Diphthongs

Besides consonants, substitution interference also happens with English diphthongs. Students tend to simplify diphthongs into monophthongs or change one of the vowel elements to match Madurese vowel patterns. The examples of diphthong substitution found in students' pronunciation are presented in the following table

Target Word	Target IPA	Student IPA	Substitution Patterns
They	/ðei/	/de/	/ei/ → /e/
Go	/gou/	/go/	/ou/ → /o/
Day	/dei/	/de/	/ei/ → /e/

As illustrated in the table above, students consistently simplified English diphthongs into monophthongs in their pronunciation. This simplification of diphthongs happens because Madurese has a simpler vowel system and does not use diphthongs as productively as English does.

B. Addition

Addition is a pronunciation error that happens when students add a certain sound into an English word. The added sound is usually an epenthetic vowel like /ə/ to make pronunciation easier, especially in words that start with or contain consonant clusters. In this study, 126 cases of addition were found, or 11.77% of the total pronunciation errors. Adding the /ə/ sound happens as a phonological strategy to break up consonant clusters that are hard to say. Several examples of addition errors found in students' pronunciation are presented in the following table.

Target Word	Target IPA	Student IPA	Added Sound
School	/sku:l/	/səku:l/	/ə/
Snacks	/snæks/	/sənæks/	/ə/

Street	/stri:t/	/sətri:t/	/ə/
Class	/kla:s/	/kəla:s/	/ə/

As shown in the table above, students inserted the schwa /ə/ to simplify the pronunciation of English consonant clusters. This phenomenon is known as epenthesis and is strongly influenced by Madurese syllable patterns, which tend to be simple.

C. Omission

Omission is a type of phonological interference that happens when students remove one or more sounds while pronouncing an English word. This phenomenon generally appears because of differences in syllable structure between Madurese and English, specifically regarding final consonants and consonant clusters which are rarely used in Madurese. Based on the analysis, 72 cases of omission were found, equal to 6.72% of the total pronunciation errors. This error shows the students' tendency to simplify the phonological structure of English words to match their mother tongue patterns.

Target Word	Target IPA	Student IPA	Omitted Sounds
Friends	/frendz/	/fren/	/d/ dan /z/
Thank	/θæŋk/	/tæŋ/	/k/
Snacks	/snæks/	/snæk/	/s/ akhir
Walk	/wɔ:k/	/wɔ:/	/k/

Analysis shows that omissions most frequently occur with consonants at the ends of words, especially /k/, /s/, and /z/. This indicates that students tend to avoid final consonant clusters that are uncommon in Madurese, opting instead for simplified syllable structures.

D. Combination

Combination is the most complex type of phonological interference because it involves more than one type of error in a single word. In this study, combination includes a mix of substitution, omission, and addition happening at the same time. There were 45 cases of combination found, equal to 4.20% of the total pronunciation errors.

Target Word	Target IPA	Student IPA	Types of combination
Thank	/θæŋk/	/tæŋ/	Substitution + Omission
Think	/θɪŋk/	/təŋ/	Substitution + Addition + Omission
snacks	/snæks/	/sənæk/	Addition + Omission

Friends	/frendz/	/fren/	Omission + Substitution
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Combination errors show that students do not only have difficulty with one phonological aspect, but with the entire sound structure of the word. This indicates the strong interference of the mother tongue and the low phonological stability of the target language in students' speech production.

Interferensi Suprasegmental

Besides affecting the pronunciation of segmental sounds, Madurese language interference is also visible in suprasegmental aspects, especially word stress and intonation. English, as a stress-timed language, requires placing stress on specific syllables to distinguish meaning and the clarity of speech. On the other hand, the Madurese language tends to have a stress pattern that is relatively even on every syllable, so the difference in emphasis is not very noticeable. These different systems cause students to experience difficulty in applying English stress and intonation patterns correctly.

A. Misplacement of Stress

Misplacement of stress happens when students do not put stress on the syllable that should be stressed when pronouncing an English word. In many cases, students pronounce every syllable with almost the same amount of pressure, making the word sound flat and less natural. The table below presents examples :

Word	Target Stress	Student Pronunciation	Notes
Morning	/'mɔ:rnɪŋ/	/mɔ:r'nɪŋ/	Stress shifted to the second syllable
About	/ə'baʊt/	/'əbaʊt/	Stress placed on the first syllable
Before	/bɪ'fɔ:r/	/'bɪfɔ:r/	Stress pattern flattened

These examples indicate that students have not yet fully mastered the function of word stress in English. Their pronunciation is still influenced by the stress patterns of Madurese, resulting in words that sound unnatural and evenly stressed.

B. Flat intonation

Flat intonation is a phenomenon where students use a relatively similar pitch throughout their speech, both in declarative and interrogative sentences. In English, changes in intonation are very important to mark the type of sentence, the speaker's attitude, and pragmatic meaning.

Sentence	Target Intonation	Student Intonation
How are you?	Rising at the end	Flat tone

Really?	Sharp rising tone	Level/horizontal tone
Good luck then!	Ekspressive falling tone	Monotonous tone

These examples show that students' speech lacks proper pitch variation, making it sound less expressive and increasing the risk of miscommunication. This suggests that students are still strongly influenced by the intonation patterns of their mother tongue and need explicit practice to develop natural English intonation.

C. Rhythm Interference

Rhythm interference happens when students are unable to follow the stress-timed rhythm pattern of English. Students tend to pronounce every syllable with almost the same duration, making the rhythm of the speech sound stiff and unnatural.

Sentence	English Rhythm	Student Rhythm
I'm going to school	Stress on <i>going</i> and <i>school</i>	All words pronounced with equal duration
I have an English test today	Reductions on <i>have</i> , <i>an</i> , <i>to</i>	No sound reductions used
See you at school	<i>you</i> and <i>at</i> are reduced	Every word is stressed

These examples show that students' speech does not follow the natural rhythm of English, making it sound mechanical and unnatural. This indicates that students are still strongly influenced by the rhythmic patterns of their mother tongue and need targeted practice to produce fluent, stress-timed English speech.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate that the phonological interference of the Madurese language on the English pronunciation of students at Islamic boarding school Raudlatul Ulum 2 occurs significantly and systematically. From a total of 1,071 phonetic transcriptions, 441 pronunciation errors were found, or 41.18%. This finding shows that the sound system of the mother tongue still strongly influences students' English speech production. This condition is in line with the view of Lado (Lado, 1957), who states that structural differences between the first and second languages have the potential to cause difficulties in the foreign language acquisition process.

The most dominant interference appears in segmental aspects, especially in the form of sound substitution. Students tend to replace English sounds that do not exist in the Madurese phonological system with more familiar sounds, such as replacing the interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/ and /d/, as well as replacing the /v/ sound with /f/. This phenomenon indicates a negative transfer from the mother tongue to the target language. These findings align with the opinion of (Avery and Ehrlich, 1992), who assert that pronunciation difficulties in foreign language learners are generally caused by the absence of certain sounds in the phoneme inventory of the mother tongue.

In addition to substitution, errors of omission and addition were also found as forms of students' phonological adjustment to English structures. Omission often occurs in final consonants and consonant clusters, while addition generally takes the form of adding epenthetic vowels to facilitate pronunciation. These findings show that students attempt to simplify English phonological structures to fit Madurese patterns. In this context, the existence of the combination phenomenon strengthens the idea of "interlanguage" proposed by (Selinker, 1972), which suggests that the learner's language system is dynamic and not yet stable, allowing various types of errors to appear simultaneously in a single utterance.

Madurese language interference also affects suprasegmental aspects, such as word stress, intonation, and speech rhythm. Students tend to use even stress patterns and flat intonation, making English speech sound less natural. This indicates that the difference in prosodic systems between Madurese and English remains a challenge in pronunciation learning. Although students are aware of the influence of their mother tongue dialect, this awareness is not yet sufficient to significantly reduce errors without directed and sustainable phonological practice.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the phonological interference of the Madurese language greatly affects the English pronunciation of students at Islamic Boarding School Raudlatul Ulum 2. The high rate of pronunciation errors, at 41.18%, shows that students still rely heavily on their mother tongue's sound system when producing English speech. The most dominant form of interference is sound substitution, especially regarding English sounds that do not exist in the Madurese phonological system. For example, the interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are often replaced with /t/ and /d/, such as in the word *think* pronounced as /tɪŋk/ and this pronounced as /dis/. Additionally, the sound /v/ tends to be replaced with /f/, such as in the word *very* pronounced as /feri/. This indicates a negative transfer from the mother tongue to the target language. In addition to substitution, addition and omission errors were also frequently found. Addition appears in the form of adding the vowel /ə/ to simplify the pronunciation of consonant clusters, for example, *school* pronounced as /səku:l/. Meanwhile, omission occurs through the removal of final consonants, such as in the word *thank* pronounced as /tæŋ/. Another important finding is the presence of combination errors, which involve more than one type of interference in a single word, such as in the word *think* pronounced as /tæŋ/. This phenomenon shows the complexity of the phonological difficulties experienced by students. Madurese interference also affects suprasegmental aspects, particularly word stress, intonation, and speech rhythm. Students' speech tends to have even stress, flat intonation, and a rhythm that does not match the stress-timed pattern of English, making the pronunciation sound unnatural. Overall, this study confirms that phonological interference is a major challenge in teaching English speaking to students with a Madurese language background in a Islamic boarding school environment. Therefore, English pronunciation instruction needs to be designed more explicitly and contextually, emphasizing practice in sounds, word stress, intonation, and speech rhythm so that students can gradually reduce the influence of their mother tongue in their English pronunciation.

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