

EXPLORING MISPRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH TERMS IN MULTIPLAYER ONLINE BATTLE ARENA GAMES AMONG INDONESIAN PLAYERS

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ABSTRAK. Penelitian ini menginvestigasi jenis-jenis kesalahan pengucapan yang diproduksi oleh pemain *Multiplayer Online Battle Arena* (MOBA) Indonesia dalam mengucapkan istilah-istilah berbahasa Inggris yang berkaitan dengan permainan serta mengkaji dampak komunikatif dari penyimpangan pengucapan tersebut selama interaksi di dalam permainan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan studi kasus kualitatif yang melibatkan 12 pemain MOBA Indonesia. Data dikumpulkan melalui rekaman suara dalam permainan dan wawancara semi-terstruktur. Pengucapan dianalisis menggunakan teori kesalahan pengucapan dari James (1998) dan didukung oleh klasifikasi fitur segmental dan suprasegmental dari Gilakjani (2016). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan lima kategori penyimpangan pengucapan, yaitu *sound substitution*, *omission*, *addition*, *misordering*, dan *combined mispronunciation*. *Sound substitution* menjadi jenis yang paling dominan dengan 36 data, diikuti *misordering* sebanyak 5 data, *omission* sebanyak 2 data, *addition* sebanyak 2 data, dan *combined mispronunciation* sebanyak 4 data. Temuan penelitian juga menunjukkan bahwa kesalahan pengucapan tidak selalu menyebabkan kegagalan komunikasi selama interaksi di dalam permainan karena pemain mengandalkan *intelligibility*, pemahaman kontekstual, dan familiaritas bersama terhadap kosakata permainan. Secara keseluruhan, komunikasi antar pemain MOBA Indonesia lebih bergantung pada *intelligibility* dan familiaritas kontekstual dibandingkan dengan akurasi pengucapan itu sendiri.

Kata kunci: dampak komunikatif; *intelligibility*; kesalahan pengucapan; pemain MOBA; komunikasi di dalam permainan

EXPLORING MISPRONUNCIATION OF ENGLISH TERMS IN MULTIPLAYER ONLINE BATTLE ARENA GAMES AMONG INDONESIAN PLAYERS

ABSTRACT. This study investigates the types of mispronunciation produced by Indonesian Multiplayer Online Battle Arena (MOBA) players in pronouncing English game-related terms and examines the communicative impact of those pronunciation deviations during gameplay interaction. This research employed a qualitative case study approach involving 12 Indonesian MOBA players. Data were collected through gameplay voice recordings and semi-structured interviews. The pronunciations were analyzed using James' (1998) theory of pronunciation errors and supported by Gilakjani's (2016) classification of segmental and suprasegmental features. The findings revealed five categories of pronunciation deviation, namely sound substitution, omission, addition, misordering, and combined mispronunciation. Sound substitution appeared as the most dominant type with 36 identified data, followed by misordering with 5 data, omission with 2 data, addition with 2 data, and combined mispronunciation with 4 data. The findings also showed that mispronunciation did not always cause communication breakdown during gameplay interaction because players relied on intelligibility, contextual understanding, and shared familiarity with game-related vocabulary. Overall, successful communication among Indonesian MOBA players depended more on intelligibility and contextual familiarity than on pronunciation accuracy itself.

Keywords: *communicative impact; intelligibility; mispronunciation; MOBA players; gameplay communication*

INTRODUCTION

The English currently plays an important role in digital communication, particularly in online interaction spaces where users communicate informally and spontaneously. In digital environments such as online games, English is frequently used not only as a medium of communication but also as a source of vocabulary acquisition among non-native

speakers. Many English terms are learned informally through repeated exposure during gameplay rather than through formal language instruction. As a result, speakers often adapt English terms into the phonological system of their first language, creating various forms of pronunciation variation (Odlin, 1989).

One digital environment where this phenomenon can be observed is Multiplayer Online Battle Arena

(MOBA) games, such as Mobile Legends and Dota 2. These games involve team-based interaction in which players commonly use game-related English terms, including “push,” “buff,” “turret,” and “gank,” to coordinate actions during gameplay. In this context, players may produce English terms rapidly while focusing on in-game situations and team coordination. As a result, pronunciation accuracy may receive less attention than message delivery. For Indonesian players, the pronunciation of English game-related terms may be influenced by the phonological system of their first language, resulting in pronunciation variations. Such variations can be understood as a form of first-language influence in second-language pronunciation (Odlin, 1989).

Mispronunciation refers to the inaccurate or nonstandard production of speech sounds that differ from the target pronunciation of a language (Gilakjani, 2016). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, mispronunciation commonly occurs because speakers rely on the phonological system of their first language when producing unfamiliar English sounds. Pronunciation deviations may appear in the form of sound substitution, omission, addition, or stress modification. These pronunciation patterns are particularly noticeable in MOBA gameplay communication because players frequently produce English game-related terms spontaneously during interaction.

Previous studies have investigated English mispronunciation in various EFL contexts. Laila & Leliana (2022) examined English pronunciation among university students and found that learners frequently mispronounced vowels, consonants, diphthongs, and stress patterns. Firdaus & Milal (2021) also identified segmental and suprasegmental mispronunciations among Indonesian EFL learners, particularly involving vowel production and stress placement. In addition, Purnama et al. (2023) analyzed pronunciation errors among Indonesian EFL learners and concluded that pronunciation deviations were strongly influenced by first language interference. These studies demonstrate that English mispronunciation is a common phenomenon among non-native speakers.

Despite the growing number of studies on English mispronunciation, previous research has mainly examined EFL learners in educational contexts. For example, Laila and Leliana (2022) investigated the pronunciation of English Department students, while Firdaus and Milal (2021) examined segmental and suprasegmental mispronunciations among Indonesian EFL learners. Similarly, Purnama et al. (2023) focused on mispronunciations produced by Indonesian postgraduate students of English language education. These studies provide important insights into

pronunciation difficulties among Indonesian EFL learners; however, they mainly focus on learners in formal educational settings rather than on spontaneous communication in online gaming environments. In addition, the previous studies primarily identify types of pronunciation errors and do not specifically examine how pronunciation deviations affect communication during real-time gameplay interaction. Therefore, the role of intelligibility and contextual understanding in maintaining successful communication among gamers remains underexplored.

Communication in online gaming environments differs from communication in formal educational contexts because players often interact spontaneously while simultaneously focusing on gameplay objectives. During MOBA gameplay, players need to exchange information to coordinate strategies, provide warnings, and respond to opponents. In such situations, communication effectiveness is not determined solely by standard pronunciation accuracy, but also by whether the intended message can be understood by other players. This perspective is related to the concept of intelligibility, which refers to the extent to which a speaker’s message can be understood by listeners (Jenkins, 2000; Derwing & Munro, 2009). Therefore, pronunciation deviations may not necessarily prevent successful communication when players share familiarity with game-related vocabulary and understand the gameplay context.

In addition, repeated interaction within gaming communities may contribute to shared familiarity with commonly used game-related terms and their pronunciation variations. When players repeatedly encounter similar terms during gameplay, they may develop mutual understanding even when the pronunciation differs from standard English pronunciation. Thus, in online gaming interaction, contextual understanding and shared familiarity may support communication alongside pronunciation accuracy. This issue is relevant to the present study because it examines whether mispronunciation of English game-related terms affects communication among Indonesian MOBA players during gameplay.

Another important aspect of MOBA gameplay communication is its spontaneous nature. Unlike classroom speaking activities or reading tasks, gameplay interaction in this study occurred without prior preparation or pronunciation monitoring. During the recorded sessions, participants produced English game-related terms while responding to in-game situations, coordinating with teammates, and making strategic decisions. Therefore, the pronunciation data collected in this study reflect the participants’ naturally occurring speech during gameplay

interaction. Examining these pronunciation deviations can provide insight into how Indonesian MOBA players use and adapt English game-related terms in an informal digital communication context. In this context, intelligibility and message delivery may become more relevant than pronunciation accuracy when players communicate during gameplay.

The present study addresses this gap by investigating the mispronunciation of English game-related terms produced by Indonesian MOBA players during gameplay interaction. This study adopts James (1998) error analysis framework to classify types of mispronunciation, including substitution, omission, addition, and misordering. In addition, the concept of intelligibility proposed by Jenkins (2000) and Derwing & Munro (2009) is used to examine how communication remains effective despite pronunciation deviations.

This study focuses on two main research problems: identifying the types of mispronunciation produced by Indonesian MOBA players and examining how those pronunciation deviations influence communication during gameplay. Therefore, the objectives of this study are to analyze the forms of mispronunciation found in English game-related terms and to examine the communicative impact of those pronunciation deviations during gameplay interaction. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to pronunciation studies by providing insights into how English pronunciation is adapted in informal digital communication contexts, particularly in online gaming environments.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to investigate the mispronunciation of English game-related terms produced by Indonesian MOBA players during gameplay interaction (Creswell, 2014). The subjects of this study were 12 Indonesian MOBA players who actively used voice communication during gameplay, while the object of the study focused on the pronunciation of English game-related terms and their communicative impact during interaction. The research was conducted in Surabaya, Indonesia, from January to March 2026 through natural gameplay sessions involving the researcher and participants. The data were collected using audio recordings and semi-structured interviews as the primary research instruments. The participants were selected using purposive sampling because they met specific criteria relevant to the objectives of the study. Documentation and interviews were employed as data collection techniques to obtain pronunciation data and participants' perspectives regarding

communication during gameplay. The collected data were analyzed using James' (1998) error analysis framework to classify types of mispronunciation, while the communicative impact of pronunciation deviations was interpreted using the concept of intelligibility proposed by Jenkins (2000) and Derwing and Munro (2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed five categories of pronunciation deviations produced by Indonesian MOBA players during gameplay interaction, namely sound substitution, omission, addition, misordering, and combined mispronunciation. Among these categories, sound substitution appeared as the most dominant type.

Table 1. Types of Mispronunciation Found in MOBA

Types of Mispronunciation	Frequency
Substitution	36
Misordering (Stress Misplacement)	5
Omission	2
Addition	2
Combined Mispronunciation	4

Source: Research Data, 2026

The findings presented in Table 1 show that sound substitution was the most frequently identified pronunciation deviation among Indonesian MOBA players during gameplay interaction. This result indicates that participants often replaced English sounds with sounds that were more familiar to them. Such a pattern is consistent with first-language influence in EFL pronunciation, in which speakers may substitute unfamiliar target-language sounds with sounds that are more familiar in their first-language phonological system (Odlin, 1989; Gilakjani, 2016). The lower frequency of omission and addition suggests that participants generally retained most of the sound structure of the English game-related terms, although some sounds were modified during pronunciation. In addition, the occurrence of combined mispronunciation indicates that pronunciation deviations in spontaneous gameplay communication could involve both segmental and suprasegmental features at the same time. These findings suggest that Indonesian MOBA players adapted English game-related terms during gameplay interaction while still attempting to deliver messages that could be understood by their teammates.

1. Substitution

Substitution became the most dominant pronunciation deviation identified in this study. Participants frequently replaced unfamiliar English vowels, consonants, and diphthongs with sounds that are more familiar within Indonesian phonology. The findings indicate that Indonesian phonological patterns strongly influenced the pronunciation of English game-related terms during gameplay interaction.

Table 2. Examples of Substitution

English Term	Standard Pronunciation	Participant Pronunciation
Buff	/bʌf/	/bof/
Lane	/leɪn/	/len/
Shop	/ʃɒp/	/sop/

Source: Research Data, 2026

The examples presented in Table 2 show that substitution occurred in vowels, consonants, and diphthongs in the pronunciation of English game-related terms. For example, the pronunciation of “lane” as /len/ shows a reduction of the diphthong /eɪ/ into the vowel /e/. Similarly, the pronunciation of “shop” as /sop/ shows the substitution of the English consonant /ʃ/ with /s/. These patterns may reflect the influence of the participants’ first-language phonological system when producing English sounds that are not commonly used in Indonesian. According to Odlin (1989), first-language influence may occur when learners use familiar sound patterns from their first language while producing a second language. Gilakjani (2016) also explains that EFL learners may experience pronunciation difficulties when the target language contains sounds that differ from those in their first language. In this study, the substitution patterns indicate that participants adapted certain English sounds into forms that were easier for them to produce during gameplay interaction. Nevertheless, the intended meanings of the terms remained understandable within the recorded gameplay context because the terms were familiar to the participants and their teammates.

2. Omission

Omission occurred when participants deleted particular sounds from English words, especially final consonants. The findings suggest that participants tended to simplify pronunciation by omitting consonant sounds that are less common in Indonesian phonology.

Table 3. Examples of Omission

English Term	Standard Pronunciation	Participant Pronunciation
Tank	/tæŋk/	/tæŋ/
End	/end/	/en/

Source: Research Data, 2026

The omission patterns shown in Table 3 indicate that some participants deleted final consonants when pronouncing English game-related terms. For example, “tank” was pronounced as /tæŋ/ and “end” was pronounced as /en/. This pattern can be interpreted as a simplification of the original English pronunciation. According to Odlin (1989), first-language influence may occur when speakers rely on familiar phonological patterns while producing a second language. In this study, the omission of final consonants suggests that participants adapted some English terms into pronunciation forms that were easier for them to produce during gameplay interaction. The recorded data also show that these omissions occurred when participants used game-related terms in communication with their teammates. In the recorded interactions, the intended meaning could still be understood from the gameplay context and the participants’ shared familiarity with the terms.

3. Addition

Addition occurred when participants inserted extra sounds into English words to simplify pronunciation. The insertion of vowels was mainly used to reduce consonant cluster complexity and produce pronunciation patterns that were easier for participants to articulate.

Table 4. Examples of Addition

English Term	Standard Pronunciation	Participant Pronunciation
Sprint	/sprint/	/səprint/
Brawl	/brɔ:l/	/brʌwel/

Source: Research Data, 2026

The addition patterns identified in Table 4 show that some participants inserted extra vowel sounds when pronouncing English game-related terms. For example, the pronunciation of “sprint” as /səprint/ shows the insertion of the schwa vowel /ə/ between /s/ and /p/. This insertion changed the consonant cluster /spr/ into a pronunciation form that was easier for the participant to produce. According to Odlin (1989), first-language influence may occur when speakers apply familiar phonological patterns while producing a second language. In this study, vowel insertion can be interpreted as an adaptation strategy used by participants when pronouncing English terms containing consonant clusters. The data show that these pronunciation variations occurred during spontaneous gameplay interaction, when participants used game-related terms to communicate with their teammates. In the recorded interaction, the intended meaning of the term could still be interpreted through

the gameplay context and the participants' shared familiarity with the term.

4. Misordering

In this study, misordering was identified in the form of stress misplacement. Rather than involving a change in the sequence of sounds, the data showed changes in the placement of lexical stress within English game-related terms. Therefore, misordering in this study refers to cases in which the expected English lexical stress was shifted to another syllable. This category was used to describe the pronunciation data because the participants did not show changes in the order of individual sounds, but they showed variations in stress placement during gameplay interaction. The findings indicate that participants did not always maintain standard English lexical stress patterns when pronouncing game-related terms.

Table 5. Examples of Misordering

English Term	Standard Pronunciation	Participant Pronunciation
Flicker	/ˈflɪk.ər/	/flɪˈker/
Missing	/ˈmɪs.ɪŋ/	/ˈmɪs.ˈɪŋ/

Source: Research Data, 2026

The findings presented in Table 5 show that misordering in this study appeared in the form of stress misplacement. For example, the standard pronunciation of “flicker” is /ˈflɪk.ər/, while one participant pronounced it as /flɪˈker/, with the stress shifted from the first syllable to the second syllable. Similarly, the word “missing,” which is normally pronounced as /ˈmɪs.ɪŋ/, was pronounced as /ˈmɪs.ˈɪŋ/, indicating an additional stress on the second syllable. These examples show that participants did not always maintain the expected English lexical stress patterns when producing game-related terms during gameplay interaction. This pattern may be related to differences between English and Indonesian stress patterns, as English lexical stress plays a more important role in word pronunciation than Indonesian stress. During spontaneous gameplay interaction, participants may have focused more on delivering the intended message than on maintaining standard English stress placement. The data show that stress placement varied when participants produced English game-related terms during spontaneous gameplay interaction.

5. Combined Mispronunciation

The findings also revealed several cases of combined mispronunciation, where more than one pronunciation deviation occurred simultaneously in a single word. These combinations mainly involved sound substitution and stress misplacement occurring together during gameplay interaction.

Table 6. Examples of Combined Mispronunciation

English Term	Standard Pronunciation	Participant Pronunciation
Request	/rɪˈkwest/	/ˈrekwest/
Support	/səˈpɔ:t/	/ˈsuport/

Source: Research Data, 2026

The combined mispronunciation patterns shown in Table 6 indicate that more than one pronunciation deviation could occur in a single English game-related term during gameplay interaction. For example, the pronunciation of “request” as /ˈrekwest/ involved a change in the vowel sound and a shift in lexical stress. Similarly, the pronunciation of “support” as /ˈsuport/ involved vowel substitution and stress misplacement. These findings show that the participants' pronunciation deviations were not always limited to one phonological feature. In some cases, segmental features, such as vowel sounds, and suprasegmental features, such as lexical stress, occurred together in one pronunciation token.

Combined mispronunciation was used as an analytical category in this study because several data involved more than one pronunciation deviation simultaneously. Although James' (1998) error analysis framework was used to identify substitution, omission, addition, and misordering, the framework does not specifically classify cases in which two or more pronunciation deviations occur together in a single word. Therefore, combined mispronunciation is presented as a category that emerged from the data in this study, particularly in cases involving sound substitution and stress misplacement.

Regarding the communicative impact, the interview findings showed that the communicative impact of mispronunciation depended on the participants' familiarity with game-related vocabulary and the gameplay context. The interview findings showed that the communicative impact of mispronunciation depended on the participants' familiarity with game-related vocabulary and the gameplay context. Several participants stated that mispronunciation did not create major difficulty because they had become accustomed to the pronunciation variations used by their teammates. For example, Participant 2 explained that he did not find it difficult to understand the intended meaning because he had become familiar with the terms after playing MOBA games for several years. Similarly, Participant 9 stated that mispronunciation did not have much influence because players could still understand the intended message from the gameplay situation. These responses suggest that shared familiarity with game-related vocabulary and contextual cues could support intelligibility during gameplay interaction.

However, the interview data also showed that mispronunciation could cause temporary difficulty in certain situations. Participant 10 stated that he sometimes needed a few seconds to understand a term when its pronunciation was very different from the form he usually heard. Participant 6 also explained that a response could be slightly delayed when players needed time to understand the intended meaning. Therefore, the findings indicate that mispronunciation did not always cause communication breakdown, but it could create hesitation or delay when players were less familiar with the term or when the pronunciation differed substantially from the expected form. This finding is related to intelligibility, which concerns whether listeners can understand the speaker's intended message even when pronunciation differs from the standard form (Jenkins, 2000; Derwing & Munro, 2009)

CONCLUSION

This study identified five categories of mispronunciation produced by Indonesian MOBA players when using English game-related terms during gameplay interaction: sound substitution, omission, addition, stress misplacement, and combined mispronunciation. Sound substitution was the most frequent category, indicating that participants often modified English sounds into pronunciation forms that were more familiar to them.

The findings also showed that the communicative impact of mispronunciation depended on the players' familiarity with game-related vocabulary, their shared understanding of pronunciation variations, and the gameplay context. For participants who were familiar with commonly used game terms and their teammates' speaking patterns, pronunciation deviations did not always prevent them from understanding the intended message. However, when a term was pronounced very differently from the expected form or when players were less familiar with the term, mispronunciation could cause temporary confusion and delay the team's response. Therefore, successful communication during MOBA gameplay was supported not only by pronunciation accuracy but also by intelligibility, contextual understanding, and shared familiarity among players.

Future research may involve a larger number of participants from different gaming communities and compare pronunciation variations across different online games. Further studies may also examine how game developers or English educators can use game-related vocabulary as material for pronunciation learning.

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