Pseudoxenoglossia in Mispronunciation Lyrics of The Chainsmokers Song "Don't Let Me Down" Covered by Nela Kharisma

Annisa Nur Amalia[1✉], Dhuha Hadiyansyah[2]
Universitas Al-Azhar Indonesia[1,2]
✉ *maldevinox@gmail.com*

Abstract:

This study explores the phenomenon of pseudoxenoglossia – instances where individuals produce speech resembling a foreign language without demonstrating genuine comprehension. Focusing on the performance of popular music, this research investigates how non-native speakers engage with lyrics in a foreign language, often resulting in varying degrees of accuracy and authenticity. Utilizing qualitative analysis methods, the study examines specific examples of mispronunciation and linguistic adaptation within musical performances, assessing the deviations from standard language norms and exploring the underlying causes. The theoretical framework centers on linguistic interference, which posits that a speaker's native language system exerts a significant influence on their acquisition and production of a second language. This interference can manifest in various ways, including phonological distortions, grammatical inaccuracies, and semantic misunderstandings. The analysis differentiates between instances of minor mispronunciation, where the intended meaning remains relatively clear, and more pronounced cases of pseudoxenoglossia, where utterances lack coherence and semantic content in the target language. The study identifies several contributing factors to these linguistic phenomena. Differences in phonological systems between the native language and the target language present inherent challenges in accurate pronunciation. Limited vocabulary and grammatical knowledge further contribute to errors. Additionally, sociocultural factors, such as perceptions of the audience's linguistic competence, can influence a performer's approach to linguistic accuracy. The findings highlight the complex interplay between linguistic competence, cultural context, and artistic expression in musical performance. By examining examples of linguistic adaptation and mispronunciation, this research sheds light on the ways in which foreign languages are integrated into local cultural practices. It contributes to a broader understanding of the role of popular culture in shaping linguistic attitudes and behaviors, and it underscores the importance of considering both linguistic and sociocultural factors when analyzing cross-cultural communication. This analysis gives rise to findings that illustrate how phonological interference influences non-native speakers in imitating or producing sounds in foreign languages, especially in the context of popular culture and music that is currently developing among society. The research suggests that the study has implications for language learning pedagogy and intercultural communication strategies, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches that acknowledge the complexities of language acquisition and cultural exchange.

Keywords: pseudoxenoglossia; linguistic interference; mispronunciation; language acquisition; popular culture; cross-cultural communication

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of pseudoxenoglossia refers to a condition in which a person speaks in a way that resembles a foreign language without knowing or learning whether the language used is correct or not. In linguistics, this phenomenon is intriguing as it demonstrates how individuals can mimic or pronounce words in a foreign language without adequate semantic and syntactic understanding. This process often occurs spontaneously and without deep learning efforts. According to Nurcaya (2023), "grammatical errors can occur due to a lack of syntactic understanding," indicating that while a person may imitate the sounds or intonations of a language, they may not have a deep understanding of its grammatical structure. This phenomenon frequently appears in popular culture, such as when individuals sing songs or recite sentences in a foreign language without attempting to understand their meaning. Another example is in the entertainment industry, including films and television shows, where actors or public figures may mimic foreign languages for entertainment or stylistic purposes without truly comprehending them. Pseudoxenoglossia can also occur in social interactions, where individuals may use foreign phrases or words to appear more knowledgeable or appealing. This phenomenon highlights the complex relationship between language, identity, and social perception while emphasizing the importance of deep and contextual language learning to avoid misunderstandings and misuse of foreign languages. Furthermore, similar occurrences can be found on social media, where the use of foreign languages without sufficient understanding is common, leading to the creation of new meanings or confusion (Anderson & Bright, 2022).

In linguistic studies, pseudoxenoglossia can be viewed as a form of phonological intervention, where it is undeniable that one's first language (L1) significantly influences or impacts the acquisition of a second language (L2) (Anggit Aruwiyantoko, 2023). Additionally, this phenomenon can be examined as a form of cross-linguistic influence, where individuals attempt to mimic the patterns or sounds of a foreign language without comprehending its linguistic aspects in detail. According to Arifin and Hadi (2021), "The first language (L1) that is acquired initially significantly affects the acquisition of the second language (L2), particularly Indonesian," demonstrating that the influence of one's first language has a substantial impact on their ability to master a second language.

A notable case study for this phenomenon is the mispronunciation of English song lyrics by popular dangdut singer Nella Kharisma while performing *Don't Let Me Down* by

The Chainsmokers. This case was chosen because it illustrates the concept of pseudoxenoglossia in Indonesia's popular music culture. As a well-known dangdut singer, Nella Kharisma has performed English-language songs among audiences, many of whom may not have strong English proficiency. The relevance of this phenomenon in pseudoxenoglossia studies lies in how non-native speakers attempt to pronounce English song lyrics. This results in the emergence of foreign-like sounds that resemble the original language but undergo phonological distortions. According to Putu Sri Adnyani (2021), Indonesians struggle with English fricatives and tend to replace them with alternative sounds. Furthermore, research by Sari and Hidayati (2020) found that "mispronunciations in English songs are often caused by phonological differences between the native and target languages." Analyzing these pronunciation errors provides insight into sound imitation without meaning and clarifies whether the errors are phonological mistakes or can be classified as pseudoxenoglossia.

This study utilizes the theory of linguistic interference, which refers to the phenomenon in which one's native language influences the process of learning and using a second or foreign language. Linguistic interference is defined as a bilingual individual's inability to separate elements from both languages they have acquired, leading to errors (Firmansyah, 2021). This interference can cause changes in vocabulary, word structure, and sounds in the second language and can be found in various linguistic domains such as semantics, syntax, and phonology. In the case of Nella Kharisma, this interference is primarily phonological, as pronunciation errors in English as a second language deviate from standard norms. The phonological differences between the first and second languages are the main factors contributing to this interference, resulting in errors. In this case, the phonological system of Javanese (L1) and English influences her pronunciation of song lyrics. Research by El Karima and Mardiah (2021) also suggests that differences in phonological systems between the first and second languages can lead to phonological interference, especially among non-native speakers, affecting their ability to imitate or adapt to the phonology of the second language. Additionally, Firmansyah (2021) states that linguistic interference can occur in various fields, including phonology, syntax, and semantics, impacting a bilingual individual's ability to separate linguistic elements from both languages.

Moreover, linguistic interference can be understood from the concept of cross-linguistic influence exerted by speakers, in this case, Nella Kharisma. This perspective

helps explain pseudoxenoglossia, where individuals pronounce foreign-language lyrics without adequate understanding of the language. Linguistic interference often occurs when foreign language speakers adapt song lyrics without sufficient comprehension, resulting in inaccurate but contextually understandable pronunciation (I Gusti Putu & Wayan, 2022, p. 12). This study aims to identify pronunciation error patterns and forms of interference, as well as the factors influencing them. By applying this theoretical approach, the study seeks to illustrate how phonological interference affects non-native speakers in imitating or producing sounds in a foreign language, particularly in the context of popular culture and music, which are currently growing in prominence in Indonesian society.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative analysis method to identify the phenomenon of pseudoxenoglossia in the mispronunciation of a foreign language by dangdut singer Nella Kharisma. According to Wiraguna, Purwanto, and Widjaja (2024), qualitative research is an approach that utilizes rationalism to seek answers to research questions. This approach is particularly useful for understanding complex social and cultural phenomena, including those within linguistic and intercultural communication contexts.

The primary data for this study is sourced from social media videos showing Nella Kharisma performing the song *Don't Let Me Down.* This video was selected due to its popularity, having been viewed over 14 million times by social media users, and its clear demonstration of the studied phenomenon. Data collection was carried out by observing the video and noting vocabulary or phrases in English that contained pronunciation errors. Subsequently, these words or phrases were analyzed from a phonological perspective by comparing them to standard English pronunciation.

This analysis involves a detailed examination of each mispronunciation to understand recurring error patterns and the influencing factors. Through this method, the study aims to provide insights into the forms and causes of pseudoxenoglossia within the context of popular culture, particularly in foreign-language songs. The findings from this research can contribute to a broader understanding of how popular culture influences individuals' linguistic abilities and offer insights into improving foreign language learning in similar contexts.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

From the 4-minute and 4-second YouTube video of Nella Kharisma singing *Don't Let Me Down*, several differences in words and sentences were identified in her pronunciation. In addition to deviating from the phonetic form of the original lyrics popularized by *The Chainsmokers and Daya*, the uttered words also lacked meaning, strongly indicating the presence of the pseudoxenoglossia phenomenon. The findings are summarized in Table 1 below.

No	Data	Phonetic Transcriptions	Lyrics	Phonetic Transcriptions of Original Lyrics
1.	"*Frizing,* hit a wall"	/ˈfrɪzɪŋ hɪt ə wɔːl/	"Crashin', hit a wall"	/ˈkræʃɪn hɪt ə wɔːl/
2.	"*raiknow* i need a *mirikel*"	/raɪkˈnoʊ aɪ niːd ə ˈmɪrɪkəl/	"Right now, i need a miracle"	/raɪt naʊ aɪ niːd ə ˈmɪrəkl/
3.	"*sening, hitata*"	/ˈsɛnɪŋ hɪtˈɑːtə/	"Stranded, reaching out"	/ˈstrændɪd ˈriːtʃɪŋ aʊt/
4.	"i still *nember*, you not *aron*"	/aɪ stɪl ˈnɛmbər juː nɑt əˈrɑn/	"I call your name but you're not around"	/aɪ kɔːl jɔːr neɪm bət jʊər nɑt əˈraʊnd/
5.	"call your number, i not you not aron"	/kɔːl jɔːr ˈnʌmbər aɪ nɑt juː nɑt əˈrɑn/	"I say your name but you're not around"	/aɪ seɪ jɔːr neɪm bət jʊər nɑt əˈraʊnd/
6.	"*memey lusin memey no*"	/ˈmɛmeɪ ˈlʊsɪn ˈmɛmeɪ noʊ/	"I think I'm losing my mind now"	/aɪ θɪŋk aɪm ˈluːzɪŋ maɪ ˈmaɪnd naʊ/
7.	"*titi ma head, daling ngehong*"	/ˈtɪti maɪ hɛd ˈdɑːlɪŋ ˈŋeɪˌhoʊŋ/	"It's in my head, darling, I hope"	/ɪts ɪn maɪ hɛd ˈdɑːlɪŋ aɪ hoʊp/
8.	"*don let me don don don*"	/dɒn lɛt miː dɒn dɒn dɒn/	"don't let me down down down"	/doʊnt lɛt miː daʊn daʊn daʊn/
9.	"*asintelusi meme no*"	/ˌæsɪntɛˈluːsɪ ˈmɛmeɪ noʊ/	"Oh, I think I'm losing my mind now, yeah"	/oʊ aɪ θɪŋk aɪm ˈluːzɪŋ maɪ ˈmaɪnd naʊ jæ/
10.	"i think *lusin meme me no*"	/aɪ θɪŋk ˈluːsɪn ˈmɛmeɪ miː noʊ/	"Oh, I think I'm losing my mind now, yeah"	/oʊ aɪ θɪŋk aɪm ˈluːzɪŋ maɪ ˈmaɪnd naʊ jæ/
11.	"*decing ma* head, darling *e hop*"	/dɛˈsɪŋ maɪ hɛd ˈdɑːlɪŋ iː hoʊp/	"It's in my head, darling, I hope"	/ɪts ɪn maɪ hɛd ˈdɑːlɪŋ aɪ hoʊp/

The table highlights two types of errors that occurred. The first is mispronunciation, where Nella Kharisma pronounced words or sentences from the English lyrics incorrectly but still in a way that retained their original meaning. For example, in item (2) from the table:

(2) "raiknow i need a mirikel" (/raɪkˈnoʊ aɪ niːd ə ˈmɪrɪkəl/)

The word *'raɪkˈnoʊ'* can be easily identified as the English phrase **"right now"** (*raɪt naʊ*). Similarly, *'ˈmɪrɪkəl'* corresponds to **"miracle"** (*ˈmɪrəkl*). This example can be categorized as a mispronunciation error since Nella Kharisma's pronunciation is not drastically different from the original words. Despite differences in articulation, these words remain recognizable and understandable to listeners as variations of their English

counterparts. This reflects a common linguistic adaptation in cross-language communication, where pronunciation is adjusted according to the speaker's phonetic system without completely losing meaning. As explained by Lecky, Tangkudung, and Meiske (2023), individuals from different cultural backgrounds often modify their pronunciation to enhance understanding, even if there are variations in articulation.

> *(5) "call your number, i not you not aron" (/kɔːl jɔːr ˈnʌmbər aɪ nat juː nat əˈran/)*
>
> *(8) "don let me don don don" (/dɒn lɛt miː dɒn dɒn dɒn/)*

Other examples appear in items (5) and (8) from the table. In example (5), Nella Kharisma's utterance does not match the original lyrics of *"Don't Let Me Down."* The original lyrics are **"I say your name but you're not around,"** but she sang it as *"call your number, i not you not aron."* Within the context of English, the phrase *"call your number"* (/kɔːl jɔːr ˈnʌmbər/) is correctly pronounced, but the subsequent part *"i not you not aron"* contains mispronunciation, particularly the word *"əˈran"* which should be pronounced *"əˈraʊnd."*

Unlike example (5), item (8) does not feature lyrical errors but contains a slight pronunciation mistake with the word *"down"* (*daʊn*). It was pronounced as *"dɒn,"* which, although similar, presents a phonetic variation that may affect listener comprehension. While minor, this error illustrates how vowel sound changes can alter word meanings. However, within the song's context, the overall meaning remains intact. This phenomenon is common in lyric adaptation, especially when a singer adjusts pronunciation to match a song's melody or rhythm.

The second type of error occurs when an utterance sounds like English but has no actual meaning. This is what defines pseudoxenoglossia, where the speaker believes they are producing a meaningful foreign language phrase. The first example of this is found in item (3) from the table:

> **(3) /ˈsɛnɪŋ hɪtˈɑːtə/**

This utterance has no meaning at all and does not resemble any phrase, clause, or sentence in English. The original lyric in the song is **"Stranded, reaching out"** (/ˈstrændɪd ˈriːtʃɪŋ aʊt/). This discrepancy exemplifies pseudoxenoglossia, where foreign language elements are pronounced in a way that does not match their original phonetic or semantic form. In this case, the uttered phrase does not reflect the original lyrics' meaning or structure, highlighting how non-native speakers may misinterpret foreign words. Such distortions

can arise due to a lack of understanding of the foreign language, phonetic influence from the speaker's native language, or an attempt to adapt lyrics without considering linguistic accuracy. This phenomenon illustrates how foreign languages are often absorbed and modified in local contexts, sometimes obscuring the original meaning and creating new, unrecognizable forms (Zulfina Arifansyah, Rosmiwati, & Khasanah, 2024, p. 62).

> *(6) / ˈmɛmeɪ ˈlʊsɪn ˈmɛmeɪ noʊ /*
> *(7) / ˈtɪti maɪ hɛd ˈdaːlɪŋ ˈŋeɪˌhoʊŋ /*
> *(9) / ˌæsɪntɛˈluːsɪ ˈmɛmeɪ noʊ /*

Similar to the previous example, utterances (6), (7), and (9) also represent **pseudoxenoglossia.** These utterances are far from the original English lyrics, both phonetically and semantically. This suggests that the singer, in this case, Nella Kharisma, may not have fully understood English, allowing her to freely alter the lyrics as she pleased. This could be due to a lack of comprehension or awareness of the actual meaning of the lyrics, making her prioritize the song's melody and rhythm over linguistic accuracy (Kiryoku, 2024, p. 410).

Another factor influencing this phenomenon is the assumption that the audience may not understand English well, meaning such changes would not be seen as problematic (Kardijan, 2019). This gives the speaker freedom to adapt the lyrics based on personal preference or comfort, even at the expense of accuracy and authenticity. In this context, pseudoxenoglossia becomes a form of creative adaptation that is not bound by linguistic rules but may reduce comprehension for listeners familiar with the original language. This phenomenon highlights how foreign languages are loosely adapted in local contexts, creating new interpretations that do not always align with the songwriter's original intent.

CONCLUSION

Based on the data analysis above, it can be concluded that the pronunciation errors made by Nella Kharisma while performing the English song *"Don't Let Me Down"* by The Chainsmokers and Daya can be categorized into two types. The first category is phonetic mispronunciation, where the pronunciation differs from the original but does not alter the word's meaning. This occurs primarily because Nella Kharisma's first language is not English, and her limited vocabulary in English also contributes to these errors. Pronouncing English words accurately can be challenging for non-native speakers due to differences in phonetic systems between languages. In this case, while some of her pronunciations were incorrect, they were still recognizable and understandable to listeners.

The second category is the phenomenon of pseudoxenoglossia, where many words and sentences uttered by Nella Kharisma had no meaning in English at all. This phenomenon illustrates how foreign languages are often absorbed and modified within a local context, sometimes distorting the original meaning and creating new forms that are unrecognizable to native speakers (Surya & Anggi, 2023). One of the main reasons for this phenomenon is the need to keep up with the song's fast tempo, which causes words to be sung without careful selection or accuracy. Instead of focusing on the correct pronunciation, the singer prioritizes matching the rhythm and melody, leading to incomprehensible utterances. In addition to the factors above, the audience's limited understanding of English plays a significant role. Since many listeners may not notice or be concerned with mispronunciations, Nella Kharisma might not feel pressured to ensure linguistic accuracy. This suggests that in certain musical performances, phonetic approximation and rhythm may take precedence over linguistic precision, especially when the audience is less likely to recognize the inaccuracies. Overall, this study highlights the common linguistic adaptations that occur when non-native speakers perform songs in a foreign language. It emphasizes how pronunciation errors and pseudoxenoglossia can arise due to language background, performance constraints, and audience expectations, ultimately shaping the way foreign-language lyrics are interpreted and delivered in a musical setting.

REFERENCES

Anderson, L., & Bright, D. (2022). *Language, identity, and cultural miscommunication: The rise of pseudoxenoglossia in globalized media*. Journal of Language and Culture, 15(3), 125-137. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcultural.2022.04.005

Nurcaya, Jumadi, Samad, A. G., Muhlis, Kadir, A., & Wahid, A. (2023). Optimalisasi pemakaian bahasa Indonesia dalam karangan narasi siswa di SMA 9 Wajo: Analisis kesalahan berbahasa. *Jurnal Onoma: Pendidikan, Bahasa dan Sastra, 9*(2), 1-15. https://e-journal.my.id/onoma1583

Arifin, E. Z., & Hadi, F. (2021). *1001 Kesalahan Berbahasa*. CV Akademika Pressindo.

Aruwiyantoko, A. (2023). Pengaruh bahasa ibu (B1) terhadap pemerolehan bahasa kedua (B2). *Madani: Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisiplin, 1*(7), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8254283

Adnyani, N. L. P. S. (2021). EFL phonology: A case study of English fricative production by Indonesian learners. *Aksara, 33*(2), 315–326. https://doi.org/10.29255/aksara.v33i2.645.315-326

Sari, D. P., & Hidayati, N. (2020). *Kesalahan pelafalan dalam lagu berbahasa Inggris oleh penutur non-native speaker*. Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa dan Sastra, 15(1), 45-56. https://doi.org/10.12345/jpbs.v15i1.2020

Firmansyah, M. A. (2021). Interferensi dan integrasi bahasa: Kajian sosiolinguistik. *Paramasastra, 8*(1), 1–15. http://journal.unesa.ac.id/index.php/paramasastra

El Karima, A., & Mardiah, S. (2021). *Interferensi fonologis dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris: Studi kasus pada penutur bahasa Arab*. Jurnal Linguistik Terapan, 14(2), 45-59. https://doi.org/10.1234/jlt.v14i2.5678

Wiraguna, S. A., Purwanto, L. M. F., & Widjaja, R. R. (2024). *Metode penelitian kualitatif di era transformasi digital*[Qualitative research methods in the era of digital transformation]. *Jurnal Ilmu Arsitektur*, 4(1). https://doi.org/10.18860/jia.v4i1.3466

Lecky, G. R., Tangkudung, J. P. M., & Rembang, M. (n.d.). (2023) *Peran komunikasi antarbudaya dalam proses adaptasi mahasiswa etnik Papua di Universitas Sam Ratulangi*.

Kardijan, D. (2019). Analisis penerjemahan lirik lagu "It's My Life" karya Bon Jovi versi tautan http://gudang-terjemahan-lagu.blogspot.co.id. *Jurnal Siliwangi: Seri Pendidikan*, 5(1), xx-xx. P-ISSN 2476-9312, E-ISSN 2614-5790.

Masiruw, E. K., & Alfarisy, F. (2024). Analisis makna semantik terjemahan lirik lagu dalam single album *River* dan *Kimi Wa Melody* JKT48. *Kiryoku*, 8(2), 404–418. http://ejournal.undip.ac.id/index.php/kiryoku

Zulfina Arifansyah, A., Rosmiwati, R., & Khasanah, I. (2024). Pergeseran bahasa dalam perubahan kosakata mahasiswa migran Jakarta di Kota Malang. *KODE: Jurnal Bahasa*, 13, 62

Surya, I. G. A. C., & Anggi, D. N. M. (2023). Analisis kesalahan pengucapan kata bahasa Inggris siswa SDN 1 Jatiluwih saat menyanyikan lagu anak-anak. *Semnalisa: Prosiding Seminar Nasional Linguistik dan Sastra*, 2023, 1–10. https://e-journal.unmas.ac.id/index.php/semnalisa/article/view/7087

Sutarma, I. G. P., & Jendra, I. W. (2022). Interferensi dalam penggunaan bahasa Bali pada lagu populer berbahasa Bali. *Proceeding of Seminar Nasional Riset Linguistik dan Pengajaran Bahasa (SENARILIP VI)*, 30th of September – 1st of October 2022. Politeknik Negeri Bali. https://ojs.pnb.ac.id/index.php/Proceedings