

OBAMA AND NATASHA: HOW THE LAST LETTERS OF THEIR NAMES ARE PRONOUNCED

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ABSTRACT

This is a study about English pronunciation, particularly dealing with the pronunciation of the letter **-a** in final position of English words. The aim is to find a certainty of how to pronounce this letter, whether to be pronounced as [ə], [ʌ] or any other sound. The data under observation are an exhausted list of words ending in **-a** letter collected from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (OALD). The result of the observation indicates that there are 847 words ending in **-a**. Those words consist of 683 general words, 75 names of persons, 74 names of countries, and 17 names of states in the United States. Out of the 847 words, 30 (0.03%) words have a deviating pronunciation pattern in their final **-a** letter. The majority of the words, 817 (96.45%) words demonstrate the sound [ə] in their final **-a** letters. The final **-a** letter in most of the 30 words is pronounced as long [a:], and not as short [ʌ] as often heard in the pronunciation of quite a few people. Since all of these 30 words are words of very low frequency of occurrence, they are not significant in contributing something of value to English pronunciation, so they can be neglected. Based on the result above, it can be concluded that all of the final **-a** letters in English words should be pronounced as [ə]; thus representing other English words, **Obama** is pronounced as [oʊ bɑ:mə] and **Natasha** as [nətɑ:ə]. A suggestion coming out of the above finding is that we should, beyond doubt, pronounce the final letter **-a** in English words as [ə]. This suggestion will bear a teaching-learning consequence in the classroom.

Key words: pronunciation, Obama, Natasha, letter, **-a** letters, [ə]

INTRODUCTION

This introductory section deals with a number of issues relevant to the topic of my research report. The issues to be discussed are as follows:

On numerous numbers of occasions, as an English lecturer handling English Phonetic course as well as English Pronunciation Practice course at the English Department, I often hear English pronunciation not only from the conversations of students but also from

those of my teaching colleagues at the department. On other occasions, intentionally I observe the pronunciation of other people to make sure whether their English pronunciation is in conformity with the appropriate English pronunciation concepts (as recommended by a reliable dictionary) which I have so far studied and taught to my students, secondary school English teachers following a training course and whoever I happen to teach.

The focus of my observation whenever I am listening to someone's conversation in English is on his/her pronunciation, especially in the pronunciation of segmental and supra-segmental speech sounds. During my observations, there is the pronunciation of certain letters in the context of English words which is not in consonance with the pronunciation analogy I have got, studied and concluded from the pronunciation study originated from an English dictionary which displays pronunciation guide; for example, Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (Hornby, 2005). As an English teacher, specifically teaching English Pronunciation Practice course, I pay a great and keen interest on the appropriateness and preciseness of pronunciation. Therefore, a slight inaccuracy of English pronunciation which I happen to hear and observe will become the focus of my attention. The result of my observation will give a very valuable input to me in improving my own pronunciation as part of my personal and professional development and in delivering the teaching materials which always involve the use of English pronunciation.

Quite recently, my attention has been concentrated not on the pronunciation of English words or sentences as a whole, but on the pronunciation of a certain letter in the alphabet which is sometimes present in English words. The thing confiscating my attention is the letter '-a' which is

distributed in the final position of a word, for example, in the last name of the president of the USA, **OBAMA**, and his daughter, **NATASHA** (which become the title of the research and they represent the other English words ending in '-a', i. e., *visa*, *data*, *schema*, etc.). The problem arising from my observation is that there is often inaccuracy in the pronunciation of that letter in the context of English words. Quite many students, SMP/SMA teachers, applicants for English lecturers at the English Department of UNNES with S2 qualification, pronounce this 'a' letter occurring in the final position of a word as [Λ], instead of [ə]. Probably, this is a kind of interference of Indonesian pronunciation into English. The reason is that in Indonesian, letter 'a' regardless of its distribution is always pronounced as [Λ]. Therefore, it is quite natural when a lot of English lecturer candidates in the 2009 period and in the previous periods, pronounced the 'schema' as [skimΛ], and *data* as [dΛtΛ]. Based on this pronunciation pattern, it can be expected that **OBAMA** will be pronounced as **OBAM[Λ]**, and similarly **NATASHA** will be pronounced as **NATASH[Λ]**.

The pronunciation of English letters of Indonesian native speakers differs from that of English native speakers, which is represented by the pronunciation of the Secretary of State of the USA, Hilary Clinton, who visited Indonesia in February 2009. On a number of occasions, she

mentioned the name of OBAMA by pronouncing it OBAM[ə], and not OBAM[ʌ].

For other people or English teachers/lecturers who are not teaching pronunciation, this slight mispronunciation will certainly escape attention. However, the mispronunciation above, though very small and trivial, for me constitutes an important problem because a model of precise and accurate pronunciation will be a warrantee of English pronunciation which is accountable in the teaching of pronunciation.

Based on the principle that hesitation, let alone, consistent error in pronunciation is a disaster for the teaching of English, because a wrong model of pronunciation will always be copied by our students. Related to the above background information, the pronunciation of the final ‘-a’ in English words, whether to be pronounced as [ʌ] or as [ə] becomes an interesting problem to be solved in this research.

In keeping with the discussion presented in the introduction, the problems attempted to be solved in this research are as follows:

- (1). How many English words ending in ‘-a’ are there in an English dictionary?
- (2). Do we have to pronounce this letter ‘-a’ as [ʌ] or [ə]?

- (3). If one type of the pronunciation can be used as a pronunciation pattern, is there any deviation in the pronunciation of the letter ‘-a’ occurring in the final position of English words?

Related to the above statement of the problem, this research is aimed at:

- (1). finding out the number of English words ending in ‘-a’ available in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Hornby, 2005),
- (2). seeking accuracy in the pronunciation of the letter ‘-a’ occurring in the final position of any English word, and
- (3). offering a deviation of pronunciation pattern if it really exists.

Hopefully, the result of this study will be useful for several parties involved in the teaching and learning of English pronunciation.

First, this study will give a considerable input, especially in the accuracy of the pronunciation of English words in general and that of English words ending in the letter ‘-a’ in particular. With this input, anyone, including us, English teachers, can teach the pronunciation of the letter ‘-a’ with absolute confidence, because accurate pronunciation can be determined and modeled to the students.

Second, whenever the result of this study is disseminated to as many teachers and lecturers of English as possible, those

teachers and lecturers can have a proper and accurate pronunciation model which has been empirically examined.

Third, the target of teaching of English pronunciation, i.e. English students, can have a good and accurate pronunciation model which can be concretely applied in their daily conversation.

REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

This study originates from casual and intentional observation outside of a classroom: they are things present beyond teaching-learning activities in the classroom. Therefore, this activity is in harmony with the article of Bendazzoli and Escalante (1992) entitled 'From "Real Life" Problems to Research.' According to Bendazzoli and Escalante, out there or outside of the classroom, there is 'environment space' where inside it there is a 'problem space'. Within the environment space, problems either light or heavy are scattered around; they are either light or rather heavy, or even very heavy ones, which can be used as a material source for researches (researchable phenomena). These problems await our professional action (Bendazzoli and Escalante, 1992) to be picked up as our research problems.

As has been mentioned somewhere in the introduction, the problem of this research does not pop up from an empty space, but it appears from an 'environment

space' (Paez-Urdaneta's Model of Professional Competence in Action adapted by Bendazzoli and Escalante, 1992). For teachers of English, this environment space of course exists within the environment domain of our real and daily life which is heavily engaged in the educational world and in the teaching of English. From the conversation among friends, interviews with candidates of new students, interviews with new recruits of teaching staff, unintentionally I came across problems which are worth paying attention to. These problems, according to Bendazzoli and Escalante, wait for our professional competence in order to be handled by developing them into research problems. In this research, the problem appearing from the environment space is concerned with English pronunciation.

Regarding the problem of English pronunciation, there are two contradictory opinions (Goodwin, 2001). On the one hand, quite a few opinions or research results demonstrate that there has been no proper attention paid to the teaching of pronunciation. This is proved by Bobda (1993) who stated that pronunciation evaluation found no place in the classroom in Cameroon. To confirm this fact, Purcell and Suter (1980: 286) concluded that pronunciation exercise in class did not affect the pronunciation skill of the students. Furthermore, they went on adding that 'the attainment of accurate pronunciation in a second language is a

matter substantially beyond the control of educators' (Purcell and Suter, 1980: 286). In keeping with this fact, Pennington and Richards (1986) supported by Stern (1992: 112), also reported the absence of proof confirming the practice of pronunciation training.

Contrary to the above reports, several research results indicate the presence of attempt to teach pronunciation in the teaching of English. Robertson (2002) reported in a laboratory observation that Korean children and adults experienced a significant improvement after obtaining a 6-hour pronunciation training. Therefore, Goodwin (2001: 117) said that '... the teaching of pronunciation is so crucial to our students.' In line with Goodwin's opinion, the English Department of the State University of Semarang (UNNES), feels mandated to give its students a provision of appropriate English pronunciation. For this, the English Department of UNNES (Kurikulum Bahasa Inggris 2008) explicitly includes Pronunciation Practice course in its curriculum. The aim is to give an adequate training and exercise for one semester to the students of English Literature and Education programmes. In this way, the English Department hopes that its graduates will have an adequate competence in their speaking skill which is supported by appropriate English pronunciation which refers to Standard

Pronunciation or 'Received Pronunciation' (info@angloscene.com).

In harmony with the mission of the English Department of UNNES to produce qualified graduates adequately skilled in speaking, this pronunciation research will to some extent engender a teaching model for English pronunciation. This model of teaching pronunciation will be reliable and valid since it is acquired from an empirical study which bases itself on the pronunciation model recommended by a reliable English Dictionary (Hornby, 2005).

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

This study is to a slight degree quantitative in nature. This is due to the fact that it involves the counting of a number of a certain group of English words together with their percentage. The rest of the research is to make an attempt of describing the pronunciation of the letter '-a' occurring in the final position of English words.

The object of this study is all English words ending in '-a' which are available in an English dictionary. The dictionary which becomes the source of the data is entitled 'Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary' (Hornby, 2005).

The data were derived by means of inventorising all English words which end in '-a' available in the above-mentioned dictionary, from the letter A up to Z.

The data analysis was conducted by transcribing the collected words into

phonetic transcription by paying a special attention to the pronunciation of the final ‘-a’ letter. From the result of this transcription effort, the pronunciation of the words ending in ‘-a’ was identified and documented.

In order to gain a more accurate result, the pronunciation appearing in phonetic transcription (offered by OALD, Hornby, 2005) of the inventorised words were compared with the phonetic transcription recommended by another dictionary. The way on comparing the pronunciation was by choosing in a random manner a certain number of the inventorised words and then comparing them with the pronunciation of the randomly selected words offered by another dictionary which is equally reliable and representative. For this purpose, the dictionary used as a pronunciation comparison was The Macquarie Dictionary (1990). The result of comparing the

Lexical Item in the Form of Nouns

LETTER A	34. antenna	66. barista
1. acacia	35. Arabia	67. barracouta
2. academia	36. Arabica	68. barracuda
3. abracadabra	37. Arcadia	69. basilica
4. Africa	38. arcana	70. bazooka
5. agenda	39. area	71. begonia
6. agora	40. arena	72. begorra
7. agoraphobia	41. areola	73. belladonna
8. agraphia	42. aria	74. beluga
9. aha*	43. armada	75. beta
10. aka	44. arnica	76. bhangra
11. a la	45. aroma	77. bilhaizia
	46. arugula	78. biretta

pronunciation of the inventorised words between two dictionaries would demonstrate accuracy and consistency of the pronunciation of the observed English words so that the result of the study can be determined to be the pronunciation pattern which should be taught to the students.

The result of the word inventory serving as the data of this study and its subsequent analysis and comparison produce the findings of the present study. They will be available in the next section.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the analysis of the inventories and the observed English words ending in ‘-a’ found in Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (Hornby, 2005), there are several findings. Each of the findings will be discussed as follows:

12. alfalfa 13. algebra 14. Alaska 15. alleluia 16. alpaca 17. alpha 18. alumna 19. America 20. ammonia 21. amnesia 22. amoeba 23. Anna 24. anaconda 25. anaemia 26. anesthesia 27. analgesia 28. anathema 29. angelica 30. angina 31. angora 32. angostura 33. anorexia	47. asphyxia 48. aspidistra 49. asthma 50. ataxia 51. aura 52. azalea LETTER B 53. baa* 54. baba* 55. bacteria 56. baklava 57. balaclava 58. balalaika 59. ballerina 60. balsa 61. banana 62. bandanna 63. Bangla 64. bania 65. baraza	79. Black Maria 80. Bodhisatva 81. bologna 82. boma 83. bombora 84. bonanza 85. bonsella 86. bravura 87. brouhaha 88. Buddha 89. bulimia 90. burkha 91. bursa 92. burnt sienna 93. bwana LETTER C 94. cadenza 95. caesura 96. cafeteria 97. camellia 98. camera
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99. Canada 100. canasta 101. candela 102. candelabra 103. candida 104. cannula 105. cantata 106. capoeira 107. capybara 108. carbonara 109. carcinoma 110. Casanova 111. Cassandra 112. cassava	144. concertina 145. conga 146. contra 147. copra 148. copula 149. cornea 150. cornupia 151. corolla 152. corona 153. corpora*** 154. cowpea* 155. cupola 156. cuppa	184. dysphoria 185. dyspraxia 186. dystopia LETTER E 187. echidna 188. Echinacea 189. eclampsia 190. eczema 191. edema 192. egomania 193. Eid ul Adha 194. enchilada 195. encyclopedia
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113. cataphora 114. catatonia 115. cava 116. cedilla 117. celesta 118. chacha* 119. charisma 120. chi hua hua 121. chikungunya 122. chimenea 123. chimera 124. china 125. chin-chilla 126. chipolata 127. Chlamydia 128. cholera 129. chorea 130. chroma 131. chukka 132. ciabata 133. cicada 134. Cinderella 135. cinema 136. citronella 137. coca 138. Coca-Cola 139. cochlea 140. cocoa* 141. coda 142. coma 143. comma	LETTER D 157. Dada* 158. dagga 159. data 160. deca- 161. delta 162. dementia 163. dhania 164. dharma 165. dharna 166. diarrhea 167. diglossia 168. dilemma 169. diploma 170. docudrama 171. donga 172. Donna 173. dopiaza 174. dosa 175. doula 176. drachma 177. Dracula 178. drama 179. dupatta 180. dyslexia 181. dysmorphia 182. dyspepsia 183. dysphasia	196. enema 197. enigma 198. ephemera 199. era 200. erotica 201. errata 202. etcetera 203. euphoria 204. eureka 205. euthanasia 206. exa 207. excreta 208. exgratia 209. exotica 210. extra 211. extravaganza LETTER F 212. fantasia 213. fashionista 214. fauna 215. favela 216. fedora 217. fella 218. fermata 219. fibroma 220. fibula 221. fiesta 222. fistula
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223. floribunda	261. haka	LETTER J
224. flotilla	262. Hakka	302. jacaranda
225. formula	263. halma	303. jaffa
226. forsythia	264. halwa*	304. jambalaya
227. fuchsia	265. Hare Krishna	305. japonica
LETTER G	266. harissa	306. jeboa
228. gaga*	267. harmonica	307. jibba
229. Gaia	268. hernia	308. jojoba
230. gala	269. hexa	309. junta
231. gamma	270. hiragana	310. juvenilia
232. gangsta	271. hiya	A. LETTER K
233. Garda	272. honoris causa	311. Kaaba
234. gardenia	273. hoopla*	312. kahuna
235. geisha	274. hosanna	313. Kannada
236. Geneva	275. hydra	314. kappa
237. ghagra*	276. hydrangea	315. karma
238. gharara	277. hyena	316. katakana
239. gondola	278. hyperbola	317. Kejja
240. Gondwana	279. hypermedia	318. kiaora
241. gonna	280. hypnopaedia	319. khanga
242. gonorrhoea	281. hypothermia	320. kinesthesia
243. gora	282. hypoxaemia	321. kippa*
244. gorgonzola	283. hypoxia	322. kleptomania
245. gorilla	284. hysteria	323. koala
246. gotcha	LETTER I	324. kofta
247. grandma	285. idea	325. kookaburra
248. grandpa	286. ikebana	326. kora
249. granita	287. iguana	327. korma
250. granola	288. impala	328. krona
251. grappa	289. in absentia	329. Kurta
252. guava	290. inamorata	330. Kwanzaa
253. guerrilla	291. indaba	331. Kwela
254. guinea	292. inertia	LETTER L
255. gurdwara	293. influenza	332. labia
256. Gurkha	294. insignia	333. lacuna
257. gutta percha	295. insomnia	

<p>LETTER H</p> <p>258. ha*</p> <p>259. hacienda</p> <p>260. haematoma</p>	<p>296. intarsia</p> <p>297. intelligentsia</p> <p>298. intra</p> <p>299. inyanga</p> <p>300. iota</p> <p>301. ischaemia</p>	<p>334. ladida*</p> <p>335. ladolcevita</p> <p>336. Lahnda</p> <p>337. laksa</p>
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<p>338. lama</p> <p>339. lambada</p> <p>340. La Nina</p> <p>341. lapa</p> <p>342. larva</p> <p>343. Latina</p> <p>344. Laurasia</p> <p>345. lava</p> <p>346. leukemia</p> <p>347. Libra</p> <p>348. limba</p> <p>349. listeria</p> <p>350. llama</p> <p>351. lobelia</p> <p>352. loggia</p> <p>353. Lolita</p> <p>354. Lycra</p> <p>355. lymphoma</p> <p>LETTER M</p> <p>356. macademia</p> <p>357. Madonna</p> <p>358. madrasa</p> <p>359. mafia</p> <p>360. magenta</p> <p>361. magma</p> <p>362. Magna Charta</p> <p>363. magnesia</p> <p>364. magnolia</p> <p>365. maharaja</p>	<p>381. marina</p> <p>382. Marsala</p> <p>383. masala</p> <p>384. mascara</p> <p>385. Matilda</p> <p>386. maxilla</p> <p>387. mazurka</p> <p>388. meaculpa</p> <p>389. Mecca</p> <p>390. media</p> <p>391. mega</p> <p>392. melanoma</p> <p>393. meladica</p> <p>394. melodrama</p> <p>395. Menza</p> <p>396. mestiza</p> <p>397. meta</p> <p>398. miasma</p> <p>399. mica</p> <p>400. militia</p> <p>401. mimosa</p> <p>402. miraa*</p> <p>403. Miranda</p> <p>404. miscellanea</p> <p>405. mocha</p> <p>406. momma</p> <p>407. mompara</p> <p>408. monomania</p> <p>409. moussaka</p> <p>410. mozzarella</p>	<p>423. neuralgia</p> <p>424. neurasthenia</p> <p>425. ninja</p> <p>426. nirvana</p> <p>427. nostalgia</p> <p>428. novella</p> <p>429. nova</p> <p>LETTER O</p> <p>430. obscura</p> <p>431. ocarina</p> <p>432. Oceania</p> <p>433. oedema</p> <p>434. Ojibia</p> <p>435. okra</p> <p>436. Olestra</p> <p>437. omega</p> <p>438. onomatopoeia</p> <p>439. opera</p> <p>440. operetta</p> <p>441. orca</p> <p>442. orchestra</p> <p>443. organza</p> <p>444. Oriya</p> <p>LETTER P</p> <p>445. Paedophilia</p> <p>446. paella</p> <p>447. pagoda</p> <p>448. paisa**</p>
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366. mahatma 367. Mahayana 368. malaria 369. mama 370. mamba 371. manana 372. mandala 373. manga 374. mania 375. manila 376. manna 377. mantra 378. margarita 379. marginalia 380. marijuana	411. multimedia 412. mwethya 413. myalgia 414. myeloma 415. myopia LETTER N 416. negana 417. nana 418. nappa 419. nausea 420. nebula 421. necrophilia 422. neplus ultra*	449. Pakeha* 450. pakora 451. panacea 452. panama 453. panatela 454. panda 455. Pandora 456. panga 457. Pangaea 458. panorama 459. pantsula 460. papa**
461. papaya 462. papilloma 463. paprika 464. para 465. parabola 466. paranoia 467. paraphernalia 468. paraplegia 469. paratha 470. parka 471. pashmina 472. pasta 473. patella 474. patina 475. pavlova 476. payola 477. pea* 478. peach Melba 479. pelota 480. peninsula 481. Pennsylvania 482. penta	508. poppa 509. porphyria 510. prana 511. presbyopia 512. prima ballerina 513. primadonna 514. primula 515. proforma 516. propaganda 517. samba 518. samoa 519. sangoma 520. sangria 521. sapodilla 522. prorata 523. psychedelia 524. pudenda 525. puja* 526. pukka 527. puma 528. pupa 529. putonghua*	547. rota 548. rotunda 549. rubella 550. r(h)umba 551. rutabaga LETTER S 552. saga 553. saliva 554. salmonella 555. salsa 556. sarcoma 557. sarsaparilla 558. Satsuma 559. Saturnalia 560. sauna 561. savanna 562. Scandinavia 563. scapula 564. schema 565. schemata 566. schizophrenia

<p>483. penumbra 484. Peoria 485. per capita 486. pergola 487. persona 488. persona non grata 489. peseta 490. peta 491. petunia 492. phobia 493. pianola 494. piazza 495. pica 496. Pima 497. pinta 498. pinacolada 499. piranha 500. pizza 501. pizzeria 502. plasma 503. plaza 504. plea* 505. plethora 506. pleura 507. poinsettia</p>	<p>LETTER O 530. qibla 531. qua* 532. quagga 533. quanta</p> <p>LETTER R 534. raga 535. ragga 536. raita 537. realia 538. recta 539. regalia 540. regatta 541. Regina 542. replica 543. retina 544. retsina 545. ria 546. Roma</p>	<p>567. schwa* 568. sciatica 569. scintilla 570. seborrhea 571. semolina 572. Seneca 573. sepia 574. septicaena 575. sequoia 576. sevika 577. shamba 578. Shangri-la* 579. sharia 580. Sheila 581. Sherpa 582. siena 583. sierra 584. siesta 585. sigma 586. silica 587. ska* 588. skua 589. soca</p>
<p>590. soda 591. sofa 592. solfa*** 593. soya 594. spa* 595. spatula 596. spaza 597. spectra 598. spermatozoa 599. stamina 600. stanza</p>	<p>628. tessitura 629. tiara 630. tibia 631. tikka 632. toccata 633. tombola 634. tortilla 635. tosa 636. trattoria 637. trauma 638. trivvia</p>	<p>664. vicuna 665. villa 666. viola 667. visa 668. Visakha 669. viscera 670. vista 671. vita 672. viva 673. Viyella 674. vodka</p>

601. stigma	639. troika	675. vulva
602. stigmata	640. tsarina	
603. stoma	641. tuba	
604. strata	642. tuna	LETTER W
605. subpoena	643. tundra	676. wanna
606. suburbia	644. tympana	677. Wicca
607. sufuria		678. wisteria
608. suggestopaedia	LETTER U	
609. sultana	645. ujamaa*	LETTER X
610. sutra	646. ulna	679. xenophobia
611. swastika	647. ultra	680. Xhosa
612. syntagma	648. umbra	
	649. urea	LETTER Y
LETTER T	650. urethra	681. yada
613. tabla	651. urticaria	682. yakka
614. tabularasa	652. utopia	683. yoga
615. tafetta	653. uvula	684. Yoruba
616. taiga		685. yotta
617. tala	LETTER V	
618. tanga	654. vagina	
619. tantra	655. Valhalla	
620. tapioca	656. vanilla	
621. taramasalata	657. Veda	
622. tarantula	658. vendetta	
623. tata*	659. verbena	
624. tempera	660. verruca	
625. tempura	661. vertebra	
626. tequila	662. via	
627. terra-cotta	663. Viagra	

The table above demonstrates that 685 English words ending in ‘-a’ managed to be inventorized from OALD. These words can be categorized as follows;

Words normally printed (not bolded or not given asterisk)

The words with no asterisk are English words whose final ‘-a’ letter is always pronounced as [ə]. Let’s take two random examples:

marijuana diucapkan [ma:rl'hʊa:nə]]
 vendetta diucapkan [vɛn'dɛtə]]

The rest of the words belonging to this group receive a certainty in the pronunciation of their '-a' ending; that is, the '-a' letter must be pronounced as [-ə]. At this stage of analysis, this word group covers 95.62% (685 of the entire words managed to be collected, subtracted by 28 ending in '-a' which have a deviating pronunciation patterns plus 2 omitted

words). These 30 words will be discussed later in sub-sections 4.3 and 4.5.

Whenever the above group of words (obtained from OALD) are randomly compared with the same words which are listed in another dictionary, that is The Macquarie Dictionary (TMD), the pronunciation of these randomly chosen words will read as follows:

OALD		TMD	
data	['deltə]	['deltə]	
marijuana	[ma:rl'hʊa:nə]]	[mæɹə'wanə]	
vendetta	[vɛn'dɛtə]	[vɛn'dɛtə]	
schema	['ski:mə]	['skimə]	
tapioca	[tæpl'oʊkə]	[tæpi'oʊkə]	
uvula	['ju:vyələ]	['ju:vyələ]	

The above random comparison demonstrates that both OALD and TMD present precisely the same pattern of pronunciation for the letter '-a'; that is, both dictionaries pronounce the final letter '-a' as [ə]. If this pattern is applied to a wider population covering the whole population available in OALD, the result will certainly be the same, except for the 28 words with a deviating pronunciation pattern.

The words belonging to this group receive varying pronunciation patterns on the '-a' at the end of each word. The words, which are marked -* and arranged in an alphabetical order, amount to 28 words. Below they will be listed together and phonetically transcribed so that the variation of the pronunciation of their final letter '-a' can be clearly seen.

The bolded words in 4.1 with a single asterisk (*)

1. aha [a:ha:]	10. ha [ha:]	20. puja ['pu:dʒa:]
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2. baa [ba:]	11. halwa ['hælwa:]	21. putonghua [pu: 'tɒŋhwa:]
3. baba ['ba:ba:]	12. hoopla ['hu:pla:]	22. qua [kwa:]
4. chacha ['tʃa:tʃa:]	13. kippa ['klpa:]	23. schwa [ʃwa:]
5. cocoa ['koʊ koʊ]	14. ladida [,la: 'dlda:]	24. Shangri-la [ʃæŋgrɪ 'la:]
6. cowpea [kaʊpi:]	15. miraa ['mlra:]	25. ska [ska:]
7. Dada ['da:da:]	16. neplus ultra [,nel plʊs 'ʊltra:]	26. spa [spa:]
8. gaga ['ga:ga:]	17. Pakeha ['pa:kl ha:]	27. tata [tæ 'ta:]
9. ghagra ['gʌgra:]	18. pea [pi:]	28. ujamaa [ʊdʒa: 'ma:]
	19. plea [pli:]	

If we pay more attention, the above listed words are words which are not common, if not very foreign, in the English lexical inventory, except for one or two words, such as cocoa and spa, which are familiar to our ears. Therefore, we can easily anticipate that those words will rarely appear, or even never be encountered by learners of English. As a consequence, the pronunciation of the last letter of those words cannot be used as a pattern or guide in our English pronunciation.

paisa can be either pronounced as [ˈpaɪsa:] or [ˈpaɪsə]

papa can be either pronounced as [pəˈpa:] or [ˈpa:pə]

Therefore, the two words are included into the words which are ended with the sound [ə].

Words Marked with Doubled Asterisks ()**

In the table of sub-chapter 4.1, we can see two (2) words which are printed in bold letters and marked with double asterisks (-**). Those words are **paisa**** and **papa****. Both words receive two kinds of pronunciation.

Words which are Bolded and Given three Asterisks (---*)**

In the table 4.1, we can also see two (2) words which are bolded and marked with triple asterisks (---***). The words are **solfa***** and **corpora*****. In OALD (Hornby, 2005), the two words are not supported with phonetic transcription. Therefore, these words are omitted from the list of the inventorised words. As a result, the total words collected and

analysed becomes 683; that is 685 words subtracted by 2 words.

Words in the Forms of People's Names

Apart from the common words listed in sub-section 4.1, OALD also introduces words which serve as the names of people. The words above can be seen in the following table.

1. Alexandra	26. Glenda	50. Nora
2. Alyssa	27. Hilda	51. Norma
3. Amanda	28. Jessica	52. Olivia
4. Amelia	29. Joanna	53. Pamela
5. Angela	30. Julia	54. Patricia
6. Anita	31. Laura	55. Paula
7. Anna	32. Linda	56. Philippa
8. Antonia	33. Lisa	57. Priscilla
9. Barbara	34. Liza	58. Rebecca
10. Belinda	35. Lorna	59. Samantha
11. Brenda	36. Lucinda	60. Sandra
12. Brianna	37. Lydia	61. Sheila
13. Christina	38. Maria	62. Silvia/Sylvia
14. Clara	39. Martha	63. Sophia
15. Claudia	40. Martina	64. Stella
16. Cynthia	41. Melinda	65. Susanna
17. Delia	42. Melissa	66. T(h)eresa
18. Diana	43. Mia	67. Thelma
19. Edna	44. Miranda	68. Ursula
20. Eliza	45. Moira	69. Vanessa
21. Ella	46. Monica	70. Vera
22. Emma	47. Nadia	71. Veronica
23. Fiona	48. Natasha	72. Victoria
24. Georgia	49. Nicola	73. Virginia
25. Georgina		75. Joshua

The analysis of the above-mentioned names indicates that the final letter **-a** in all of those those names is pronounced as [ə].

OALD also includes names of countries all over the world and their pronunciations are phonetically transcribed. The following table contains the above mentioned words:

Words which are Names of Countries

1. Africa	26. Croatia	51. Moldova
2. Albania	27. Cuba	52. Mongolia
3. Algeria	28. Dominica	53. Namibia
4. America	29. Eritrea	54. Nicaragua
5. Andorra	30. Estonia	55. Nigeria
6. Angola	31. Ethopia	56. Panama['pænəma:]
7. Antarctica	32. Gambia	57. Romania
8. Antigua and Barbuda	33. Georgia	58. Russia
9. Argentina	34. Ghana	59. Rwanda
10. Armenia	35. Grenada	60. Samoa
11. Asia	36. Guatemala	61. Saudi Arabia
12. Australasia	37. Guinea ['glɪni:]	62. Serbia
13. Australia	38. Guyana	63. Slovakia
14. Austria	39. India	64. Slovenia
15. Bolvia	40. Indonesia	65. Somalia
16. Bosnia-Herzegovina	41. Jamaica	66. Sri Lanka
17. Bostwana	42. Kenya	67. St Lucia
18. Bulgaria	43. Korea	68. Syria
19. Burkina	44. Latvia	69. Tanzania
20. Burma	45. Liberia	70. Tonga
21. Cambodia	46. Libya	71. Tunisia
22. Canada	47. Lithuania	72. Uganda
23. China	48. Malaysia	73. Venezuela
24. Columbia	49. Malta	74. Zambia
25. Costa Rica	50. Mauritania	

Of the 74 names of the countries of the world in the table above, all of them are spelled with **'-a'** ending. All of the **'-a'** endings in these words are pronounced

with the sound [ə]: for example, 'Korea [kə'riə], Uganda [yu: 'gændə], etc., except for the states of Guinea ['glɪni:] and Panama ['pænəma:].

Therefore, the above fact also facilitates learners of English in pronouncing English words ending with the letter ‘-a.’

Below are 17 words bearing the names of the states in the United States of America. These words are included in OALD.

Words which are Names of the States in USA

1. Alabama	10. Montana
2. Alaska	11. Nebraska
3. Arizona	12. Nevada
4. California	13. North/South Carolina
5. Florida	14. North/South Dacota
6. Georgia	15. Oklahoma
7. Indiana	16. Pennsylvania
8. Louisiana	17. (West) Virginia
9. Minnesota	

Seventeen (17) out of the 50 names of the states in USA are spelled with final -a. Interestingly enough, the pronunciation of the 17 states ends with [ə]; for example, Oklahoma is pronounced as [ˈoʊkləˈhoʊmə]. This fact confirms the assumption that most of the English words with -a ending are always pronounced with the sound [ə] and not [ʌ].

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the data analysis and the discussion of the research findings presented in the previous section, conclusions and suggestions are offered.

Conclusions

First, as the answer of the first reseach question, there are 847 English words spelled with -a ending. Second, as the

answer of the second research question, 817 (96.45%) inventorised words receive pronunciation in their final letter. It is to be confirmed here that there is no [ʌ] sound in the final -a letter of the collected words as have often been heard so far. Third, the answer of the third research question is that there are 30 English words ending with -a letter whose pronunciation deviates from the general pattern, that is [ə]. However, because the 30 English words have a very low frequency of use, learners of English can ignore those words. The last conclusion of this research is that the last letter of the names of Obama and his daughter Natash**a**, representing the other words with the same final -a spelling, must be pronounced as [ə], that is [oʊˈbɑ:mə] and [nəˈtɑːʃə] instead of [oʊˈbʌmʌ] and [nʌˈtʌʌ]

Suggestions

Based on the above conclusions, I offer two suggestions. First, learners of English should not hesitate to pronounce [ə] for the final letter of the majority of the English ending in -a. Second, teachers or lecturers of English should make use of the result of this research in teaching their students how to learn English pronunciation, especially in teaching the pronunciation of the English words ending in -a.

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