

Mispronunciation of English Fricative Consonant Sounds by East Nusa Tenggara Students

Marianus Paulino Mada^{1*}

¹*SMAK Syuradikara, Ende-Nusa Tenggara Timur*

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Abstract: This study aims to examine the incorrect pronunciation of specific English fricative consonants (/v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, /z/) by Indonesian students, particularly those from East Nusa Tenggara who are studying English as a foreign language. Five male university students from East Nusa Tenggara province, who were members of the Society of the Divine Word and had attended an English course, were selected to study pronunciation of fricative consonants. The researchers conducted ten-word list, recorded the data, and analyzed the mistakes using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). A native speaker assessed using a scoring rubric from 1-5. The pronunciation was correct if the scores were 4 and 5, while scores 1-3 were incorrect. The findings were then presented in the research. Results indicated typical substitutions of v/ with /f/, /θ/ with /t/, /ð/ with /d/, /ʃ/ with /s/, and /z/ with /s. The study reveals that students in East Nusa Tenggara enhance their pronunciation and confidence by employing contextualized materials, foreign speakers, pronunciation software, audiovisual techniques, and community-based English activities.

Keywords: mispronunciation, fricative consonants, interlingual interference

INTRODUCTION

Language is essential to communicating ideas, thoughts, and information—one way to communicate is through speaking. Brown (2007) stated that speaking is an intuitive process of building meaning that includes creating, accepting, and processing discourse of sounds as the most essential instrument. Besides, people who wish to enhance their English speaking abilities must be able to pronounce words correctly (Desi et al., 2022). Then, people produce good sounds so others can hear and understand. Therefore, correct pronunciation is essential when speaking.

Sudarmaji & Yusuf (2021) said that pronunciation is the first thing native speakers notice during a conversation; they can tell whether someone is lousy at English merely because of their poor pronunciation. According to Yuliansih et al. (2022), pronunciation

*Corresponding author: madaaris15@gmail.com

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produces stress, influencing how the hearer perceives and hears sounds. Richard and Schmidt defined pronunciation as creating certain sounds (Suhil & Romadoni, 2024). Gharawah et al. (2024) insisted that pronunciation entails creating each sound and accurately pronouncing words, phrases, and sentences while paying attention to spelling, stress, and tone. Additionally, "phonetic transcription" is a way of precisely representing word pronunciation. Phonetics studies speech sounds, patterns across languages, and teaches accurate pronunciation (Syafrizal et al., 2022).

Many foreign language learners struggle with pronunciation (Wiratsih, 2019) especially when speaking English because pronunciation determines the meaning of a word (Desi et al., 2022). Mispronunciation of a word can lead to different meanings. Faturrachman and Ulva (2021) insisted that changing pronunciation results in a distinct connotation.

There are three challenges in pronunciation for English as a second language. The first is phonetic differences. Many students struggle with English consonant and vowel sounds that do not exist in their native languages. For instance, sounds like [v], [θ], and [ð] are particularly problematic for learners whose first languages lack these phonemes (Ammar et al., 2022). The second is the impact of the first language. Students frequently make misunderstandings and incorrect pronunciations since they may replace similar sounds from their first language. Students often replace English phonemes they struggle to produce with sounds from their native language that are similar (Antaris & Omolu, 2019; Gulo, 2023). The third is psychological factors. Psychological factors such as low motivation and lack of confidence also contribute to pronunciation difficulties. Learners who are not confident in their speaking abilities may avoid practicing or speaking out loud, which limits their exposure to correct pronunciation models (Antaris & Omolu, 2019).

Fricative consonant sounds are one of the challenges faced by learners for whom English is not a first language. Consonants are sounds made by close or nearly close articulation and are formed by interrupting, restricting, or directing the flow of air in various ways (O'Connor & Trim, 1953). Fromkin et al. (2011) say that consonants are typically generated through a type of constriction or blockage in the vocal tract that hinders the movement of air from the lungs. Then, the fricatives term arises because the airflow is significantly limited but not completely obstructed causing friction. According to Odden (2013), fricative sounds are produced by pushing air through small constrictions, resulting in turbulence. Hence, fricative consonants are made by squeezing air between small gaps as the air exits the body.

Fromkin et al. (2011) classify nine fricative phonemes in English. They are /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, and /h/. The /f/ and /v/ sounds fall into the labiodental fricatives, a sound produced through the contact of the lower lip with the upper front teeth similar to the final sounds in the words leaf and leave. The friction occurs as air moves between the lower lip and the front upper teeth, through which a narrow channel allows the air to flow out. The sounds /θ/ and /ð/ fall into the dental fricatives, which is the sound produced through the position of the tip of the tongue behind the upper front teeth. For certain speakers, the tongue is positioned between the teeth, producing sounds more appropriately referred to as interdental. The /s/ and /z/ sounds are alveolar fricatives produced with friction at the alveolar ridge and tongue. Then, the sounds /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are palatoalveolar fricatives which are

generated through the friction when air flows between the tongue and the postalveolar region. The /h/ sound is a glottal fricative. Its comparatively faint sound results from air flowing through the constricted glottis.

Of these nine fricative consonant sounds, the researcher selected five fricative consonant sounds, namely /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /f/, and /z/ because they are often a challenge in second language learning. Some research has been done on how students experience challenges in the pronunciation of fricative consonant sounds. One research was conducted by Situmeang and Lubis (2020). They identified students' challenges in pronouncing fricative consonants and the factors causing them. The method used was descriptive qualitative, involving nine fourth-semester students from the TBI-2 program Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teaching Sciences of IAIN Padangsidempuan in the 2018/2019 academic year. The data showed that the students' main difficulty lies in the elemental differences between the mother tongue and the target language, especially in the sounds /θ/, /ð/, and /f/. In addition, some sounds have the same phonetic features but have different distributions, such as /v/, /f/, /z/, /z/, /s/, and /h/. The most prominent difficulties occurred in the sounds /ð/ (voiced dental fricative) and /θ/ (voiceless dental fricative), where all students (9 out of 9) mispronounced both sounds. Some influencing factors were the influence of the mother tongue, lack of knowledge of English sounds, and lack of pronunciation practice.

The research article titled "An Analysis of Students' Error in Pronouncing Dental Fricative Consonant [ð/, θ/]" by Eldika and Zainil (2022). They investigated the pronunciation errors of second-year English education students at Universitas Negeri Padang. The study used a descriptive quantitative method, focusing on 30 students who had previously taken phonetics and phonology classes. The findings were the overall ability of students to pronounce dental fricative consonants was rated as fair, with a 60% accuracy rate. The predominant type of error observed was misformation, accounting for 89.21% of the total errors, while omission and misordering were less frequent. Interviews revealed that the leading cause of pronunciation errors was the ineffectiveness of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, followed by a lack of practice, unfamiliarity with new vocabulary, and the influence of their mother tongue.

In a study on students' pronunciation, Gustina et al. (2023) emphasized two fricative consonant sounds: [ð] and [z]. The study indicated students' errors in articulating the two sounds, replacing them with [d], [t], or [s]. In addition, the study found several elements, including students' mother tongue, age, experience with English, phonetic features, and motivation, that influence pronunciation difficulties.

Based on the previous studies, the researcher concluded that Indonesian students face problems in pronunciation, especially in fricative consonant sound words, due to phonetic differences in their mother tongue and psychological factors such as lack of confidence and learning motivation. Therefore, learning to pronounce fricative consonant sounds is important in English in order to reduce the influence of the mother tongue in speaking English and increase confidence in speaking English. The purpose of the study is to analyze the mispronunciation of certain fricative consonant sounds (/v/, /θ/, /ð/, /f/, /z/) by Indonesian students, specifically East Nusa Tenggara students learning English as a foreign language.

METHOD

This study used a phonological approach. Phonological process according to Burquest (2006) includes a variety of phenomena that occur in the processing of sounds in language. For example, assimilation: The process by which one sound becomes more similar to neighboring sounds. This often occurs in morphological contexts and can affect the way a word is pronounced.

The participants were five male university students from East Nusa Tenggara province who studied at various universities in Jogjakarta. The researcher chose these participants because they were brothers of the Society of the Divine Word preparing to work abroad and had attended an English course that focused on speaking and lasted for one and a half months. Besides, the researcher observed that each participant experienced challenges pronouncing fricative consonants.

The researcher did tests to collect data, namely word list reading. This list of words contained affricative consonant sounds. In a quiet room, the researcher asked the participants to read the words in a clear voice one by one. Before the participants read, the researcher explained the meaning of each word so that the participants understood the meaning of the word being read. Then, the researcher recorded the word list reading session using a high-quality recording device on the camera to support the researchers' analysis. After the data was provided, the researcher listened to the audio intentionally to analyze the mistakes carefully and accurately by transcribing the pronunciation of each word spoken by the participants and comparing it with the audio on the Online Oxford English Dictionary. Then, the researcher identified the mispronunciation of words, referred to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). After that, the researcher made sure a native speaker heard the sound to provide an assessment accompanied by an assessment rubric. The scoring rubric was scale-based to rate the accuracy of the participants' pronunciation from 1-5. 1= Inaccurate, 2= less accurate, 3 = moderately accurate, 4 = accurate, 5 very accurate. If the scores given are 4 and 5, it is regarded as correct pronunciations. If the value given is 1-3, it is considered incorrect pronunciations. Then, the researcher noted and presented it into research findings.

RESULTS

From the study, the researcher got the following results:

1. Pronunciation by The Participants of Fricative Consonant /v/

The table shows an analysis of participants' pronunciation of the fricative consonant /v/, focusing on two specific words: "Vine" and "Alive."

Table 1. Students' Pronunciation of Fricative Consonant /v/

Consonant	Words	Phonetic Transcription	Results		Mispronunciation
			Correct	Incorrect	
/v/	Vine	/vaɪn/	2	3	/faɪn/
	Alive	/ə'laɪv/	1	4	/ə'laɪf/

The results show that the participants had particular difficulty with the fricative consonant /v/. Overall manage to mispronounce it 60% of the time at least 2 out of 5 attempts at the word, both incorrectly for the word ‘Vine’. With the example word ‘Alive,’ only 1 out of 5 attempts was successful correctly, so 80% were mispronounced. For example, the phonetic transcriptions given for ‘Vine’ (/vaɪn/) and ‘Alive’ (/əˈlaɪv/) are what we would expect. Nonetheless, the phonetic representations of the observed mispronunciations (/vam/ for ‘Vine’, /əˈlaɪf/ for ‘Alive’) indicate that the participants replaced the phoneme /v/ with its labiodental fricative counterpart, /f/, which is a known phonological error for languages lacking a voiced variant.

2. Pronunciation by The Participants of Fricative Consonant /θ/

The table analyzes participants’ pronunciation of the fricative consonant /θ/ by participants, focusing on two specific words: "Think" and "Thank."

Table 2. Students’ Pronunciation of Fricative Consonant /θ/

Consonant	Words	Phonetic Transcription	Results		Mispronunciation
			Correct	Incorrect	
/θ/	Think	/θɪŋk/	0	5	/tɪŋk/
	Thank	/θæŋk/	0	5	/tæŋk/

The results indicate that participants could not pronounce the fricative consonant /θ/ correctly for both words, with a total of 0 correct pronunciations out of 5 attempts for each word. This reflects a complete lack of success in producing the voiceless dental fricative sound, leading to a 100% mispronunciation rate.

The phonetic transcriptions provided (/θɪŋk/ for "Think" and /θæŋk/ for "Thank") accurately represent the expected pronunciations. However, the mispronunciations noted (/tɪŋk/ for "Think" and /tæŋk/ for "Thank") indicate that participants substituted the dental fricative /θ/ with the alveolar /t/. Fromkin et al. (2011) say that alveolar sounds are created by raising the tongue in different manners to the alveolar ridge.

3. Pronunciation by The Participants of Fricative Consonant /ð/

The table analyzes participants’ pronunciation of the fricative consonant /ð/ by participants, focusing on two specific words: "Those" and "They."

Table 3. Students’ Pronunciation of Fricative Consonant / ð /

Consonant	Words	Phonetic Transcription	Results		Mispronunciation
			Correct	Incorrect	
/ð/	Those	/ðoʊz/	0	5	/dəʊs/
	They	/ðeɪ/	0	5	/deɪ/

From the table, the participants could not correctly pronounce the fricative consonant /ð/for both words, with 0 correct pronunciations out of 5 attempts for each word.



This reflects a complete lack of success in producing the voiced dental fricative sound, leading to a 100% mispronunciation rate. The phonetic transcriptions provided (/ðoʊz/ for "Those" and /ðeɪ/ for "They") accurately represent the expected pronunciations. However, the mispronunciations noted (/dəʊs/ for "Those" and /deɪ/ for "They") indicate that participants substituted the dental fricative /ð/ with the alveolar /d/.

4. Pronunciation by The Participants of Fricative Consonant /ʃ/

The table shows an analysis of participants' pronunciation of the fricative consonant /ʃ/, focusing on two specific words: "Shoulder" and "Shoe."

Table 4. Students' Pronunciation of Fricative Consonant /ʃ/

Consonant	Words	Phonetic Transcription	Results		Mispronunciation
			Correct	Incorrect	
/ʃ/	Shoulder	/'ʃoʊldər/	0	5	/'səʊldər/
	Shoe	/ʃu/	0	5	/su:/

The results show that participants could not pronounce the fricative consonant /ʃ/ correctly for both words, with 0 correct pronunciations out of 5 attempts for each word. This reflects a complete lack of success in producing the voiceless postalveolar fricative sound, leading to a 100% mispronunciation rate.

The phonetic transcriptions provided (/'ʃoʊldər/ for "Shoulder" and /ʃu/ for "Shoe") accurately represent the expected pronunciations. However, the mispronunciations noted ('səʊldər/ for "Shoulder" and /su:/ for "Shoe") indicate that participants substituted the postalveolar fricative /ʃ/ with the alveolar fricative /s/.

5. Pronunciation by The Participants of Fricative Consonant /ʒ/

The table displays an analysis of the pronunciation of the fricative consonant /ʒ/ by participants, focusing on two specific words: "Measure" and "Treasure."

Table 5. Students' Pronunciation of Fricative Consonant /ʒ/

Consonant	Words	Phonetic Transcription	Results		Mispronunciation
			Correct	Incorrect	
/ʒ/	Measure	/meʒər/	1	4	/mesər/
	Treasure	/treʒər/	1	4	/tresər/

From the table, it shows that participants struggled significantly with pronouncing the fricative consonant /ʒ/. For both words, only 1 out of 5 attempts was correct, resulting in an 80% mispronunciation rate. This suggests considerable difficulty in producing the voiced postalveolar fricative sound. The phonetic transcriptions provided (/meʒər/ for "Measure" and /treʒər/ for "Treasure") accurately represent the expected pronunciations. However, the mispronunciations noted (/mesər/ for "Measure" and /tresər/ for "Treasure") indicate that participants substituted the postalveolar fricative /ʒ/ with an alveolar fricative /s/.

DISCUSSION

This research examined the mispronunciation of fricative sounds made by East Nusa Tenggara students in Yogyakarta. From the word list given to the participants, the participants tended to simplify consonants /v/ into /f/, /θ/ into /t/, /ð/ into /d/, /ʃ/ into /s/, and /ʒ/ into /s/.

This study shows that the pronunciation of consonant fricatives in English is a significant challenge for learners, especially for those from language backgrounds that do not share the same phonemes. One of the key findings was that many students had difficulty in producing certain fricative consonant sounds, such as /v/, /θ/, and /ð/, which do not exist in their native language, which could be due to a lack of exposure to these sounds in everyday contexts (Antaris & Omolu, 2019). For example, results showed that all participants could not correctly pronounce the consonants /θ/ and /ð/, resulting in a 100% error rate. Many participants replaced the sound /v/ with /f/, and the sound /θ/ with /t/.

In Fauzi's study, he examined the variability in phonology between Indonesian languages specifically the fricative marks in English namely /θ/, /ð/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/. The result is that learners' ability to sign fricative sounds is strongly influenced by their mother tongue phonology. The learners often replace voiceless dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/, with more familiar Indonesian sounds such as /t/ and /d/, replace palato-alveolar fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ with /s/ and /z/. In addition, individual factors such as competence level, learning experience, and exposure to English also contribute to variation, in addition to phonological constraints (Fauzi, 2021).

Kamhar (2021) insisted it in an article that discusses the learning of Indonesian phonetics among students from East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) at Tribhuvan Tungadewi University Malang (UNITRI). The study aims to identify pronunciation difficulties and provide students with an understanding of phonetic symbols so that they can pronounce Indonesian words correctly. The results showed that students had difficulty pronouncing fricative sounds and some other sounds due to the influence of their regional dialect. Some factors affecting students' pronunciation difficulties include Mother Tongue Influence. Regional dialects greatly influence the pattern of phonetic errors when speaking Indonesian.

Dialects in East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) are diverse and reflect the region's rich culture and history. Each island and district have distinctive features in pronunciation and vocabulary, which can affect how people speak such as the Lio language Spoken in the districts of Sikka and Ende. The Lio language features multiple dialects that demonstrate variations in pronunciation, including distinctions in the articulation of vowels and consonants, which may influence intonation when spoken in English, like the change in sound from short to long vowels (Eka et al., 2023). This is in line with what Richard, (1971) and Astuty, (2022) said: phonetic differences between student's mother tongue and English can cause pronunciation problems.

Overall, this study highlights the difficulties of East Nusa Tenggara students in pronouncing English fricative consonants. Therefore, educators can design teaching and learning strategies in the classroom to effectively correct pronunciation errors due to phonetic factors and first language consequences. Effective learning strategies help students improve their pronunciation and, as a result, their overall speaking ability.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that students from East Nusa Tenggara experience significant difficulties pronouncing fricative consonants in English. Through analysis of the pronunciation of 10 words containing fricative consonants, it was found that the participants often made sound substitutions, such as replacing /v/ with /f/ because these two sounds belong to labiodental fricatives; dental fricative /θ/ with alveolar /t/ and /ð/ with /d/; palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ with alveolar fricative /s/. These errors were caused by several factors, including: phonetic differences between the participants' mother tongue and English, mother tongue influence, where participants tend to replace difficult English phonemes with similar phonemes in their mother tongue, psychological factors, such as lack of confidence and motivation in speaking English.

The implications of this study are: firstly, Indonesian teachers and students should realize the importance of pronunciation in English language learning, and phonetics and phonology should be the main components of English language teaching. Secondly, this study emphasizes the impact of students' first language on pronunciation, hence the need for efficient teacher training to implement strategies focusing on fricative consonant sounds. Thirdly, East Nusa Tenggara students have difficulty pronouncing fricative consonant sounds due to the phonological variation between the local language and English. The absence of fricative consonant sounds in NTT local languages necessitates using contextualized educational materials such as phonetic transcription and native speaker assistance. Furthermore, educational institutions in East Nusa Tenggara can improve English teacher development programs by bringing in native speakers and using pronunciation software to help students practice independently. However, since some areas in East Nusa Tenggara mostly do not have access to technology, teachers can use audiovisual approaches such as voice recordings and educational films that can help students in pronunciation training. Fourthly, East Nusa Tenggara is a region with a collective culture. Community-based English activities boost students' confidence, where students can be motivated to learn from each other.

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