

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

The English language is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, boasting a rich historical background and a significant global presence. English is classified as a member of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family. English is frequently designated as a global lingua franca, signifying its role as a common language facilitating communication among individuals who do not share a common native language. David Crystal (2003) posited that the English language's global predominance is not due to its superiority, but rather, it is a consequence of a confluence of political, military, and economic factors. English has emerged as the world's lingua franca due to a confluence of historical, political, and financial factors, rather than being perceived as linguistically superior. This phenomenon establishes global connections, promotes intercultural interaction, and prompts inquiries into issues such as language equity and cultural preservation.

The English language possesses certain distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other languages. According to David Crystal (2003), the English vocabulary is unusually extensive due to language contact and borrowing. The English vocabulary is notably extensive and diverse, having been significantly influenced by Latin, French, Greek, and numerous other languages. Otto Jespersen (1949) characterized English grammar as relatively uncomplicated due to the loss of numerous inflections following the transition from Old English. In essence, English utilizes a less intricate morphology system and places greater emphasis on word order in comparison to complex endings. David Crystal (2010) elucidated that the discrepancy between English spelling and phonetic pronunciation stems from historical sound changes that were not reflected in written language, resulting in highly irregular and challenging pronunciation for learners.

English, a language that has gained global popularity, has developed into a multitude of different varieties across the world. According to Braj B Kachru

(1985), English can be categorized into three concentric circles based on its usage. The inner circle comprises native English-speaking countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. The second tier consists of countries where English functions as a second or official language, including India, Nigeria, and Singapore. The expanding circle includes countries such as Indonesia, China, and Japan, where English is used as a foreign language. According to Kachru, B. B., Kachru, Y., & Nelson (2006), the evolution of English has led to the emergence of what are now referred to as World Englishes, each of which is influenced by local culture, identity, and sociolinguistic factors.

The study of English pronunciation encompasses the articulation of sounds, the placement of stress, and the modulation of intonation. One of the challenges associated with English spelling is the fact that it does not always correspond directly to pronunciation. The study of pronunciation falls under the umbrella of phonetics, the scientific examination of how sounds are produced, transmitted, and perceived. It is also closely related to phonology, the branch of linguistics that investigates the role of sounds in language structure and function. Joanne Kenworthy (1987) advanced the notion that the primary objective of pronunciation is to ensure intelligibility, rather than emulating a native accent. Jennifer Jenkins (2000) further proposed that only certain pronunciation features are essential for effective international communication. The English language comprises approximately 44 phonemes, encompassing both vowels and consonants. Additionally, it is influenced by suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation.

The pronunciation system of English differs significantly from that of Indonesian, particularly with regard to sound inventory, stress patterns, and phonological rules Yulianti, Marhum, and Kamaruddin (2025). Indonesian is regarded as a phonetic language, characterized by its close correspondence between spelling and pronunciation. In contrast, English boasts an irregular orthographic system, which is characterized by the absence of consistent rules for spelling words. This discrepancy frequently leads to confusion among learners when attempting to pronounce English words based on their spelling.

Consequently, Indonesian learners often rely on their native phonological rules when speaking English. This phenomenon results in systematic pronunciation errors, particularly in unfamiliar sounds. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding of these variations is imperative for the effective analysis of pronunciation difficulties.

Furthermore, regional languages such as Sundanese play a significant role in shaping learners' pronunciation Mutiana Nurmalasari Boediman (2023). The Sundanese language possesses its own distinct phonological system, exhibiting significant differences from both Indonesian and English. These variations in phonological perception and production are influenced by the individual learner's linguistic background and cognitive abilities. To illustrate, specific consonant and vowel patterns inherent in Sundanese can exert an influence on pronunciation habits in English. Consequently, learners with a Sundanese background may exhibit distinct pronunciation patterns. This underscores the necessity of incorporating regional linguistic backgrounds into the study of pronunciation.

One of the most challenging sounds for Indonesian learners is the fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ Dyani, Romadhoni, and Rohmana (2025). These sounds are not present in the Indonesian or Sundanese phonological systems. Consequently, learners often substitute them with more familiar sounds, such as /t/, /d/, or /s/. This substitution is indicative of the influence of the first language on second language production. Such errors are systemic and frequently observed among EFL learners. Consequently, these sounds have become a primary focus in the field of pronunciation research.

The difficulty in producing /θ/ and /ð/ is also related to their articulatory complexity Nafiah (2016). The production of these sounds necessitates the placement of the tongue between the teeth, a practice that is not commonly observed in Indonesian or Sundanese speech. It has been observed that learners frequently encounter this articulation as unnatural and uncomfortable. Consequently, they are unable to produce the correct sound. Instead, they replace it with sounds that are easier to produce. This phenomenon often results in the perpetuation of erroneous pronunciation patterns. Another salient factor

influencing pronunciation is the discrepancy between spelling and sound in English Merrita (2021). Learners frequently depend on written forms when pronouncing words. However, it is important to note that English spelling does not always reflect actual pronunciation. To illustrate, the grapheme "th" can represent both /θ/ and /ð/. This phenomenon engenders confusion among learners who are not acquainted with phonological rules. Consequently, spelling becomes a source of pronunciation errors.

As demonstrated by the preceding explanations, it is evident that pronunciation difficulties are influenced by a multitude of factors. These include differences in phonological systems, articulatory challenges, and orthographic inconsistencies. Furthermore, learners' linguistic backgrounds, including Indonesian and Sundanese, have been shown to exert a substantial influence on the development of pronunciation patterns. The interaction of these factors gives rise to systematic errors in the production of /θ/ and /ð/. Consequently, a comparative analysis of students with different mother tongues is imperative. The present study aims to provide a more profound understanding of how linguistic background influences pronunciation in EFL contexts.

Although numerous studies have investigated English pronunciation among Indonesian EFL learners, most previous research has focused on identifying pronunciation errors or examining the influence of learners' first language without comparing learners from different regional accent backgrounds. Existing studies generally analyze Indonesian learners as a single group, overlooking the phonological diversity that exists among regional accents in Indonesia. Consequently, limited attention has been given to whether learners with different regional accents, such as Indonesian and Sundanese, demonstrate similar or different pronunciation patterns when producing English dental fricative sounds. This gap indicates the need for comparative research that examines how regional accent backgrounds may influence the production of English /θ/ and /ð/ among Indonesian EFL learners.

Unlike previous studies that primarily examined pronunciation errors among Indonesian EFL learners as a single population, this study compares the production of English dental fricative sounds by students with Indonesian and

Sundanese accents. In addition to identifying pronunciation patterns, the study explores the factors influencing the production of /θ/ and /ð/ through pronunciation tasks, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. By integrating phonetic analysis with learners' perceptions and comparing two regional accent backgrounds, this study provides a more comprehensive understanding of pronunciation variation among Indonesian EFL learners.

B. Research Questions

The present study aims to provide a clear focus on the investigation of students' pronunciation of English fricative sounds by posing the following research questions. The objective of these inquiries is twofold: firstly, to ascertain how learners with disparate linguistic backgrounds, notably Indonesian and Sundanese, articulate the sounds /θ/ and /ð/, and secondly, to discern the patterns of substitution that emerge in their pronunciation. The research questions guiding this study are as follows:

1. How do students with Indonesian and Sundanese mother tongues pronounce the English fricative sound /θ/ and /ð/?
2. What are the dominant substitute sounds produced by the students who have Indonesian accent?
3. What are the dominant substitute sounds produced by the students who speak Sundanese accent?

C. Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to achieve several specific objectives related to the analysis of pronunciation among EFL learners, as formulated in the research questions above. These objectives are designed to facilitate a more profound comprehension of how students with varying mother tongues produce English fricative sounds and to identify the patterns of pronunciation errors that emerge. By addressing these objectives, the study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the field of English language teaching and learning. The research objectives are as follows:

1. To analyze how students with Indonesian and Sundanese mother tongues pronounce the English fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ in English words.

2. To identify the dominant substitution sounds produced by students with Indonesian as their mother tongue when pronouncing /θ/ and /ð/.
3. To identify the dominant substitution sounds produced by students with Sundanese as their mother tongue when pronouncing /θ/ and /ð/.

D. Significance of the Study

1. Theoretical Significance

This research endeavors to contribute to the development of knowledge in the domain of phonetics and phonology, with a particular focus on the pronunciation of English fricative sounds /θ/ and /ð/ among English as a Foreign Language learners. Furthermore, it contributes to the existing discourse on first language interference and its effect on second language pronunciation. Moreover, this study offers supplementary empirical evidence concerning pronunciation patterns influenced by disparate linguistic backgrounds, particularly Indonesian and Sundanese.

2. Practical Significance

a. For English Teacher

The findings of this study can serve as a reference for English teachers in designing more effective pronunciation teaching strategies. Teachers can focus on problematic sounds and provide more targeted instruction and feedback.

b. For Students

This study can help students become more aware of their pronunciation errors, especially in producing /θ/ and /ð/. By understanding their common mistakes, students are expected to improve their pronunciation accuracy and overall speaking ability.

c. For Curriculum Developers

The findings can be used as a reference in developing instructional materials that emphasize pronunciation, particularly problematic sounds for EFL learners.

d. For Future Research

This study can be used as a reference for future research related to pronunciation, especially studies involving fricative sounds, phonological

interference, and comparative linguistic analysis between different mother tongues.

e. For Educational Institution

This research may provide insights for curriculum developers to emphasize pronunciation training, particularly for problematic sounds that frequently occur among EFL learners.