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# Mother Tongue Interference Toward Students' Ability In Producing English Sounds

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Abstract: This study aimed at investigating how students' mother tongue interferes their pronunciation of English sound and the factors that cause the interference. The research used descriptive qualitative method. The participants of the study were 8th and 9th students of an Islamic junior high school Mataram. Those students are from different families with different local languages comprising Sasak, Sumbawa, and Bima language. The data were collected through pronunciation test, observation sheet and interview guides. The data analysis consisted of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. The findings showed that, two Sasak students struggle to pronounce the consonants voiceless fricative labiodental sound /f/, and the voiced labiodental fricative sound /v/, often substituting them with the voiceless bilabial stop sound /p/. Two Sumbawa students evidently make similar interference to Sasak students, and also struggle to pronounce the vowels open middle central vowel /ə/ and the halfopen middle central-tensed vowel /3:/ as the middle front vowel /e/ and close front vowel /i/. One Bimanese student mispronounces the voiced alveolar plosive sound /d/, the voiceless alveolar plosive sound /t/ as the voiced labiodental plosive sound /D/, the voiceless labiodental plosive sound /T/ and three students are struggle to pronounce the vowel sound, similar interference to Sumbawa students. Further, there are six factors that cause interference in students' pronunciation of English sounds. They are: the use of more than one language, insufficient learning period to train in English sounds, producing English sound using their speaking habits, lack of interest in English, lack of practice, lack of focus in pronunciation during classroom instruction.

Keywords: Interference, Mother tongue, Producing sound.

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menyelidiki bagaimana bahasa ibu siswa mengganggu pengucapan bunyi bahasa Inggris dan faktor-faktor yang menyebabkan gangguan tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif. Peserta penelitian ini adalah siswa kelas 8 dan 9 dari sebuah sekolah menengah pertama Islam di Mataram. Siswa-siswa tersebut berasal dari keluarga yang berbeda dengan bahasa daerah yang berbeda pula, termasuk bahasa Sasak, Sumbawa, dan Bima. Data dikumpulkan melalui tes pengucapan, lembar observasi, dan panduan wawancara. Analisis data terdiri dari reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan atau verifikasi. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa dua siswa Sasak kesulitan mengucapkan konsonan frikatif labiodental tak bersuara /f/ dan frikatif labiodental bersuara /v/, seringkali menggantikannya dengan bunyi letupan bilabial tak bersuara /p/. Dua siswa Sumbawa menunjukkan gangguan serupa dengan siswa Sasak, dan juga kesulitan mengucapkan vokal tengah terbuka /ə/ dan vokal tengah setengah terbuka tegang /3:/ sebagai vokal

depan tengah /e/ dan vokal depan tertutup /i/. Satu siswa Bima salah mengucapkan bunyi letupan alveolar bersuara /d/ dan bunyi letupan alveolar tak bersuara /t/ sebagai bunyi letupan labiodental bersuara /D/ dan bunyi letupan labiodental tak bersuara /T/. Tiga siswa mengalami kesulitan mengucapkan bunyi vokal, gangguan serupa dengan siswa Sumbawa. Selain itu, terdapat enam faktor yang menyebabkan gangguan dalam pengucapan bunyi bahasa Inggris pada siswa. Faktor-faktor tersebut adalah: penggunaan lebih dari satu bahasa, ketidakcukupan penguasaan bunyi bahasa Inggris tertentu, kebiasaan berbicara, kurangnya minat terhadap bahasa Inggris, kurangnya latihan, dan kurangnya fokus pada pengucapan selama pengajaran di kelas.

Kata kunci: Bahasa ibu, Interferensi, Memproduksi suara.

#### Introduction

Language is a system of arbitrary, vocal symbols that permit all people in a given culture, or other people who have learned the system of that culture, to communicate or to interact (Ramelan, 1984). Humans and language are inseparable, and they are integrated (Everett, 2017). Therefore, no society lives without a language. Usually, they use more than one language. Especially Indonesia, a country well known as the country with a bilingual society where people use more than one language (Bulan, 2019). One of the reason because Indonesia has a huge area and consists of various tribes, with each tribe having a different language according to Mansyur, et al., (2023). Each region in Indonesia has a different local language depending on the environment of origin (Coleman, 2018), for example, on the island of Java there are several local languages, namely Javanese, Sundanese, Betawi, Madura and many more. In Kalimantan there are Dayak, Banjar, Kutai, Bahau and many more. Meanwhile in West Nusa Tenggara there are Sasak, Sumbawa and Bima languages. Ardhyantama, et al. (2021) stated that, the mother tongue is the in-born language, which a baby has already been familiarized with, even during the mother's gestation before it was born. Arafiq, et al., (2021) stated that "Students who speak three regional languages in West Nusa Tenggara, namely Sasak, Samawa, and Bima, also face difficulties in producing certain sounds in English". This is due to the variance in sound between English and the sounds of the three regional languages, which serve as the mother tongue for the students.

The English language is an international language that students learn since entering junior high school (Alfarisy, 2021). English has become necessary because it has been used as a unifier language in various fields such as economics, technology, entertainment and even tourism (Ananda, 2023). In that case, language interference occurs when a language learner uses or is influenced by another language while speaking in the target language (Rattanadilok & Bidin, 2016). A language learner may tend to use grammatical structures, vocabulary, or phrases from their native language that do not match the target language if they do not have extensive knowledge of the target language (Mulyanti & Febriani, 2024). According to Setiyadi (2020), "They will use their knowledge of their mother tongue and based on the knowledge they may produce utterances which do not exist in the target language". Interference does not occur without a cause. There is always an underlying factor that triggers language (1985) stated that interference. As Alwasilah Interference is a mistake caused by a tendency to familiarize the pronunciation (utterance) of one language with another, including the pronunciation of sound units, grammar, and vocabulary. When individuals engage with multiple languages, especially in bilingual or multilingual contexts, the boundaries between these languages can sometimes become blurred (Mariani, 2021).

Students of this islamic junior high school Mataram come from various tribes in West Nusatenggara. According to preliminary research conducted at this shool, the researchers found possible assumptions of mother tongue interference in the student's ability to produce English sounds. This phenomenon arises due to the fact that English is learned as a foreign language in an educational setting, while students tend to retain their linguistic habits and pronunciation patterns from their native language or mother tongue. This study aimed to investigate how the native language interfers with students' pronunciation of English and what factors cause this interference.

### Method

This research used a descriptive qualitative design. Casterlé (2012) defines qualitative research as "organizing data logically and systematically and carried out from the beginning when researchers entered the location research field until the end of the data collection research. The researchers recruited a sample from the population of interest to include in this research (Majid, 2018), the population and sample in this research are 8th and 9th grade students of an Islamic junior high school in Mataram who were using West Nusa Tenggara local language as their mother tongue and using it to communicate at home and in their neighborhood. The 8th class had 13 students, while 9th class consists 28 students. The data sources were pronunciation tests to find where interference might take place, observation, to directly see contexts of students' language production, and interviews, to find the factors that cause interference during the production of English sounds. Data collection procedure and instrument through tests, observations, and interviews. This research uses Miles and Huberman's (1994) theory to analyse the data, which includes: data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing or verification.

#### **Result and Discussion**

# The English sounds which are interfered by the Mother Tongue

The following are English sounds where students' mother tongue shows some kinds of interference.

1. English sounds interfered by Sasak language

After finishing the pronunciation test and observing it, the researchers found that 2 out of the 12 Lombok students experienced interference with consonant sounds caused by the Sasak language. Below is a table illustrating word interference by students with the Sasak language and the explanation. See table 1 below:

Table 1:	English	sounds	interfered	by	Sasak	language

No.	Words	English	Student	Type of
		pronunciation	pronunciation	1 segmental
				sound
1.	Cellphone	/sɛłfoʊn /	/sɛłpoʊn /	Consonant
2.	Father	/fʌðər/	/pлðər/	Consonant
3.	Forget	/fəɪˈgɛt/	/pəɪˈgɛt/	Consonant
4.	Expensive	/ik'spensiv/	/ik'spensip/	'Consonant
5.	Active	/aktıv/	/aktıp/	Consonant
6.	Valentine	/væłən_taın/	/pæłən taın/	Consonant
7.	Forward	/fôrwərd/	/pôrwərd/	Consonant
8.	Everybody	/evrē bädē/	/eprē bädē/	Consonant

In the realm of English language learning among Sasak students, two specific consonant sounds

have emerged as common challenges. These particular sounds, namely the fricative labiodental voiceless /f/ and fricative labiodental voiced /v/, faced difficulties for 2 out of 12 Sasak students due to the influence of their mother tongue. Summarily for Sasak students, English words that contain the consonants sound /f/ and /v/ mispronunciations with an additional encounter of bilabial plosive voiced /p/ as in /'selfoon/, /fʌðər/,/fəi'get/, /ik'spensiv/, /'aktɪv/, /'valən\_taɪn/, /forwərd/ and /evrē\_bädē/.

2. English sounds interfered by Sumbawa language

Two out of the 5 Sumbawa students experienced interference. One student experienced interference of consonants and one other student experienced interference vowel sound caused by the Sumbawa language. Below is a table illustrating word interference by students with the Sumbawa language and the explanation. Table 2 as shown below:

Table 2: English	sounds	interfered	by	Sumbawa
	-			

language					
No.	Words	English	Student	Type of	
		pronunciation	npronunciatior	n segmental	
				sound	
1.	Expensive	/ik'spensiv/	/ik'spensip/	Consonant	
2.	Wifi	/waifai/	/waipai/	Consonant	
3.	Everybody	/ˈevrēˌbädē/	/'eprē bädē/	Consonant	
4.	Variation	/verēˈāSHən/	/ /parieisən/	Consonant	
5.	Identify	/aidentifai/	/identipai/	Consonant	
6.	People	/'pipəł/	/'pipeł/	Vowel	
7.	Around	/əˈround/	/eˈround/	Vowel	
8.	Shirt	/ˈʃɜːt/	/'∫irt/	Vowel	
9.	Birth	/b3:0/	/birθ/,/berθ	Vowel	
10.	Girl	/g3:rl/	/girl/,/gerl/	Vowel	

Two Sumbawa students share mispronunciations similar to those of Sasak and Bima students. One student faced challenges in correctly articulating labiodental fricative voiceless /f/ and labiodental fricative voiced /v/, same as Sasak students, with an additional encounter of bilabial plosive voiced /p/ as in /ik'spensiv/, /waifai/, /'evrē,bädē/, /verē'āSHən/, /aidentifai/, etc. The other student faced challenges in correctly pronouncing specific vowel sounds. In the case of the open middle 420 central vowel /ə/ and half-open middle central-tensed vowel /3:/, Sumbawan learners tend to substitute them with the open middle front vowel /e/ and or close front vowel /i/ as in /'pipəł/, /ə'round/, /'ʃэt/,  $/b_3:\theta/$ , and  $/g_3:rl/$ . In summary, for Sumbawa students, English words that contain the consonants sound /f/ and /v/, and vowels /ə/ and /3:/ cause interference by their mother tongue. This mispronunciation pattern is noteworthy as it indicates a common phonetic challenge shared among learners from these language backgrounds.

### 3. English sounds interfered by Bima language

For Bima students, there are 4 out of the 13 students experienced interference. Two students experienced interference of consonant and two other students experienced interference vowel sound caused by the Bima language. Below is a table illustrating word interference by students with the Sumbawa language and the explanation. The following is table 3:

Table 3: English sounds	interfered by	<sup>7</sup> Bima	language

No.	Words	English	Student	Type of
		pronunciation	pronunciation	Ų
				sound
1.	Talk	/tôk/	/Tôk/	Consonant
2.	Time	/ˈtaɪm/	/'Taım/	Consonant
3.	True	/troo/	/Troō/	Consonant
4.	Dare	/der/	/Der/	Consonant
5.	Idol	/ˈīdl/	/'īDl/	Consonant
6.	Dry	/ drī/	/ Drī/	Consonant
7.	People	/ˈpipəł/	/'pipeł/	Vowel
8.	Around	/əˈround/	/e'round/	Vowel
9.	Shirt	/ˈʃɜːt/	/ˈʃirt/	Vowel
10.	Birth	/b3:θ/	/birθ/,/berθ/	Vowel
11.	Girl	/g3:rl/	/girl/,/gerl/	Vowel

Four out of thirteen of Bima's students experienced interference in pronunciation. One Bimanese student had difficulty pronouncing alveolar plosive voiceless /t/ as in /tôk/, /'taım/, /tro $\overline{o}$ / and alveolar plosive voiced /d/ as in /der/, /' $\overline{Idl}$ /, /dr $\overline{I}$ /, These sounds were mispronounced as labiodental plosive voiced /D/ and labiodental plosive voiceless /T/. The substitution of labiodental plosive voiced /D/ and labiodental plosive voiceless /T/ for alveolar plosive voiceless /t/ and alveolar plosive voiced /d/ respectively is consistent with the phonology of the Bima Language and also the most probable substitutions given their similar points of articulation.

Additionally, three students mispronounced the same sounds as Sumbawa students, that is, the halfopen middle central vowel /ə/ and the half-open middle central-tensed vowel /ɔ:/ as in /'pipəł/, /ə'round/, /'ʃэt/, /bɔ: $\theta$ /, and /gɔ:rl/ by substituting them with open middle front vowel /e/ and close front vowel /i/. These mispronunciations were made depending on the letters used to represent the sounds. Specifically, the half open-middle central vowel /ə/ was often mispronounced as open middle front vowel /e/. In contrast, the middle central-tensed vowel /ɔ:/ was sometimes mispronounced as both open middle front vowel /e/ and close front vowel /i/. The choice of substitution is influenced by letters that represent sounds that do not exist in the Bima language vowels.

# Factors that causing the interference of the mother tongue

The interview session was semi-structured but still emphasized the critical points needed to answer the research questions dan sesi tanya-jawab selama interview disimpulkan dalam lembar observasi. The interview was recorded using a mobile phone recording. Data from interviews show that the students have similar answers despite using different ways to respond. It can be understood that the interference factors experienced by students originate from themselves, their living environment or friends, and the school or learning process. The following is a presentation of the results of interviews with students, which are divided into several points:

## 1. The use of more than one language

This statement is based on student's answers to question "What language do you use daily with your family and neighbours?" All students interviewed admitted that the first language they used was the local language where they came from, but when they started school they started using Indonesian, also in formal situations. For example, a student with initial NACW admitted "Since I was a child, I used the Sasak language. However, when I started studying in school, I often used Indonesian because many of my friends couldn't speak Sasak. Teachers at school also encouraged us to use Indonesian in the environment. But I still school often use Sasak when I'm at home." The interfering students use Sasak, Sumbawa, and Bima languages as their mother tongues, which they use daily, mainly with their 421

families, and sometimes mixed with Indonesian with friends and in the school environment, causing difficulties when producing English sounds. Based on these reasons, language interference occurs when speech participants can use multiple languages in their communication. According to Lekova (2010) "From the point of view of psycholinguistics, it is a negative transfer of language habits and skills from the mother tongue or from a foreign language to another foreign language".

# 2. Insufficient learning period to train in English sounds

According to the answer of the question "When do you start learning English?" Some of the interfering students only started learning English in elementary school, and even then, they only learned basic materials such as general vocabulary. As a student with initial BQA answered "I started learning English in elementary school, but it was only for learning the alphabet, numbers, names of animals, and vehicles. When entering grades 5 and 6, we were taught grammar". Another interfering factor students just started learning English junior high school, as a student with initial YIH admitted "I started learning English in junior high school. However, I took several English lessons in elementary school several times". Maduwun (2016:4) stated that "In foreign language learning, the application of the language being studied is the most crucial aspect that students should engage in". A limited learning period can influence English language learning ability due to insufficient time for absorbing materials and practicing language skills. In language learning, consistency and sufficient time for practice are crucial for making significant progress. With a limited learning period, students may not have enough opportunities to deeply understand the taught concepts or to practice. As a result, they may encounter difficulties in developing strong comprehension and fluent skills in the language.

# 3. Producing English sound using their speaking habits

The students pronounce English sounds spontaneously mother using their tongue pronunciation if they don't know how to pronounce it. When asked to repeat, they need help pronouncing them correctly because they are unfamiliar with the pronunciation. According to the question "Why do you think you have difficulty pronouncing the interfered words?" one of the students with initial AK answered "Because I don't know the correct pronunciation in English, I just say that word like my daily language". Insufficient vocabulary knowledge in the language being learned or used can lead students to revert to their native language to express specific ideas or concepts, resulting in interference. Lekova (2010) stated that "Intralanguage interference occurs when learners make mistakes under the influence of the already acquired language knowledge and established habits in the foreign language".

## 4. Lack of interest in English

Some students admitted that they really didn't like English lessons, so they pay little attention to their English pronunciation and tend to forget. This statement based on the answer to the question "Do you like learning English? Why?" and student with initial RS answered "Not really. Because in my opinion, English is complex, and it takes confidence to be proficient in it" and other students had almost similar answers. When students fail to master English speaking skills because they feel they cannot do it, they appear impatient and lack of interest and motivation to face the obstacles encountered in learning. As a result, they may experience interference because they have yet to study those things. As Mukhayar (1993:3-4) stated that "students' attitude towards a second or foreign language greatly influences their success in mastering a new language. Students who have a high interest and motivation towards the language and culture of a particular language will have a positive attitude towards learning it."

## 5. Lack of practice

In the question "Have you ever set aside specific time to improve your English pronunciation?" student with initial FS answered "No, I have never done it because it has never crossed my mind" and other students also had almost similar answers. The students rarely try to hone their English pronunciation skills on their own, causing them to struggle and become unfamiliar with English pronunciation features that are absent in their mother tongue. Based on previous research by Maduwun (2016) "In Indonesia, English is only taught in schools but not used in daily life". Although English is a subject taught in schools, it is not commonly used in everyday life outside of the classroom setting. This suggests a gap between the academic learning of English and its practical application in real-world situations for most Indonesians.

# 6. Lack of focus in pronunciation during classroom instruction

According to the question "How did your English teacher teach your English pronunciation in the class?" one of student with initial SP explained "Our teacher rarely teaches pronunciation. Usually, the teacher explains more in class". The teacher only 422 explains and rarely provide practice to their students, making them less fluent in pronouncing English sounds. They should be capable of creating a friendly learning and teaching atmosphere that instills students' confidence. If teachers fail to fulfil their roles earnestly, it will have a detrimental impact on the student's progress in learning English, especially pronunciation. According to Zulfitri and Nurlaili (2019) "The teacher must be a class leader and motivator who can create a friendly learning and teaching atmosphere to give students a constructive sense of self-confidence."

#### Conclusion

The pronunciation of certain English sounds poses difficulties for all West Nusa Tenggara Province speakers. This issue is mainly due to the absence of these sounds in their native languages. Specifically, two Sasak students struggle to pronounce the consonants voiceless fricative labiodental sound /f/, and the sound /v/, voiced labiodental fricative often substituting them with the voiceless bilabial stop sound /p/. Two Sumbawa students evidently make similar interference as Sasak students. They also mispronounce the labiodental fricative voiceless /f/ and labiodental fricative voiced /v/ as the voiced bilabial plosive /p/, and struggle to pronounce the vowels open middle central vowel /ə/ and the half-open middle centraltensed vowel /3:/ as the middle front vowel /e/ and close front vowel /i/. Similarly, a Bimanese student mispronounce the consonant voiced alveolar plosive sound /d/, the voiceless alveolar plosive sound /t/ as the voiced labiodental plosive sound /D/, the voiceless labiodental plosive sound /T/ and three students make similar error, they struggle to pronounce the vowel open middle central vowel sound /ə/, and half-open middle central-tensed vowel /3:/, the middle front vowel sound /e/, and close front vowel /i/ respectively.

Regarding the cause interference six factors were identified: the use of more than one language, insufficient learning period to train in English sounds, producing English sound using their speaking habits, lack of interest in English, lack of practice, lack of focus in pronunciation during classroom instruction.

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