
Pronunciation of English Words with /th/ Sounds among Senior High School Learners

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Abstract

ESL learners find pronunciation one of the most challenging aspects in speaking an English language especially if the phonemes of the target language are not present in their mother tongue sound inventory. This study aimed to determine the variation of the pronunciation of English words with dental fricatives or the /th/ sounds among the Chavacano, Tausug, and Visayan senior high school learners. Cross-sectional design and total enumeration was employed in the data collection, and percentage frequency distribution was used for data analysis. Majority of the 32 learner-participants were rated excellent in pronouncing the words with /θ/ sound but poor in pronouncing the words with /ð/ sound. The Tausug and Visayan speakers tend to pronounce the words with voiceless /th/ sound more accurately than the Chavacano speakers, but the latter was better than the other ethnolinguistic counterparts in pronouncing the words with voiced /th/ sound. Mispronunciation of words made by the learner-participants was an affirmation of Richard's (1974) theory of interlanguage error that signals the negative transfer of phonological elements of the mother tongue into the L2. It can be concluded that the learner-participants needed to practice more in pronouncing the words with fricative consonants to make themselves understood and to avoid miscommunication.

second language (Lyons, 2021; Szmigiera, 2022). Among the macroskills of language (along with reading, writing, and listening), speaking seems to attract a lot of English learners' attention. The foundation of speaking constitutes phonetics both in theory and practice that results to good pronunciation, making the communication process more intelligible. Thus, accuracy of pronunciation which is claimed to be the most important element of learning oral skills in a second language should be highly regarded (Pennington, 2019). Nowadays, L2 pronunciation has abruptly evolved as an interdisciplinary field unlike several decades ago when language research and pedagogy related to pronunciation seemed to be insignificant, hence neglected (Derwing & Munro, 2010; Nagle et al., 2019; Tergujeff, 2012). The emergence of research on L2 pronunciation has shed light on issues, theories, and possible solutions on how to effectively improve the pronunciation of learners. In fact, many second language (L2) learners struggle in this aspect especially in making themselves understood or understand others.

Haugen (1972, p. 325) defined language ecology as "the study of relationships between a language and the environment, basically identified by the speakers who learn and use it, and transmit to others". Creese and Martin (2003) supported this ideology by adding that investigation is required to determine the interrelationship of languages in a specific society, the speakers of the language, and the social structures in which the languages are spoken in a society. This means that language learners who have a high exposure to a target language are more likely to have an accurate

1 Introduction

The world's population is now dominated by approximately 1.5 billion speakers of the English language, either as their lingua franca or as their

pronunciation or oral skill than learners who have less exposure.

Some English consonants cause pronunciation problems to L2 speakers. Pronouncing a group of two successive letters that produces a single sound called “digraph” especially in /th/ phonemes is considered one of their difficulties, i.e., the voiced dental fricative /ð/ (as in *this*) and the voiceless dental fricative /θ/ (as in *thing*). Since the two contrastive phonemes are not present in the Filipino language or in any local language of the Philippines, most Filipino ESL speakers tend to mispronounce the English words, eventually changing the meaning of the words completely, e.g., pronouncing “day” /deɪ/ instead of “they” /ðeɪ/.

One thing to consider is the absence of digraphs in the lingua franca sound inventory of the learners which, in contrast, is present and often used in their target language. In fact, Yamaguchi (2014) claims that /th/ sounds are not found in the sound inventory of any local language in Malaysia, that is why L2 learners often mispronounce the words with fricative consonant in the target language. Moreover, Adila and Refnaldi (2019) claimed that there were six kinds of consonant errors in the senior high school students’ speaking performance when they conducted a study in an Indonesian university. One factor was because the pronunciation was generally influenced by the speakers’ mother tongue. Lastly, ineffectiveness of the phonetic teaching process especially in the primary years of language learning is identified to be another reason of pronunciation problem (Almutalabi, 2018). All these claims with regard to pronunciation errors are possibly anchored from the two types of language errors (Richards, 1974). The interlingual error which is primarily caused by the interference of the mother tongue in learning the target language, and the intralingual error which is caused by transferring the L1 language rules into the target language. Keshavarz (1999) claims that interlanguage errors occur at various levels such as the transfer of linguistic elements of the lingua franca into the L2. Meanwhile, intralingual errors happen when language learners over-generalize, ignore the restriction of language rules, incompletely apply the rules, and assume the concepts wrongly.

Gilakjani (2011) posits the following reasons why L2 learners commit mistakes in

pronouncing words in their target language. First, learners have and show no interest. Second, learners have less exposure in their target language. Lastly, language teachers do not emphasize the importance of teaching pronunciation nor they have the sufficient materials in teaching pronunciation effectively. Apparently, it is important for language teachers to draw attention to the importance of teaching pronunciation correctly and apply the contextualized strategies in the language classroom to motivate the language learners in practicing their oral skills accurately.

Enerdino C. Coronel – Baluno National High School is a small secondary school located in the rural hills of the western part of Zamboanga City, Philippines. From 2016 to 2022, its total student population across junior high school and senior high school levels has gradually increased from 250 to 370 learners. The Senior High School Department has an average of 30 to 45 learners per level. Majority of them come from the ethnolinguistic groups of Chavacano and Tausug, and only few learners speak the Cebuano/Visayan language.

In their language subjects (English and Filipino), it was observed that most of the learners mispronounce the words and letters presented and used in their target language. This gave an interest to the researcher to investigate the senior high school learners’ pronunciation of words with /ð/ and /θ/ sounds in the English language according to their ethnolinguistic groups.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

This study sought to find the variation on the pronunciation of English words with /th/ sounds particularly the /ð/ (voiced dental fricative) and the /θ/ (voiceless dental fricative) among the Grade 11 senior high school learners of Enerdino C. Coronel - Baluno National High School. Specifically, the study aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What was the overall result of the pronunciation of English words with dental fricatives or the /th/ sounds?
 2. What were the variations on the pronunciation of English words with voiced and voiceless /th/ sounds among the senior high school learners in terms of their ethnolinguistic groups?
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1.2 Significance of the Study

This study will benefit the ESL instructors especially the language teachers assigned in rural schools. Public schools in far-flung areas usually house diverse ethnolinguistic groups of learners and have less exposure to their L2. Language teachers need to give extra attention to teaching correct pronunciation to their learners during actual classes, interventions, or anytime when L2 is used as this will impact their oral communication process inside the classroom and in other context.

This study will benefit the ESL learners to be aware of the possible problems with regard to their pronunciation of English words with phonemes that are not present in their lingua franca. Language learners should know that pronunciation is an essential aspect of oral skill that gives lasting impression to their listeners.

Lastly, this study will benefit the Education Program Supervisors for the language subjects under the Department of Education (DepEd), the language practitioners, and other related positions in the education sector. The results of this study will help them suggest appropriate interventions, activities, and programs that will enable and hone the pronunciation accuracy of the language learners regardless of their ethnolinguistic background.

2 Methods

2.1 Design

The researcher used cross-sectional design as the primary aim was to collect the data from the senior high school learners at a specific point in time. Thomas (2020) states that this type of research design is appropriate if the purpose was to observe the chosen participants without influencing them. There is no need for follow-ups or interventions after the data has been collected, thus cost-effective. Nevertheless, cross-sectional design can only employ a relatively passive approach to making causal inferences based on the actual findings.

Total population or complete enumeration was the technique for data collection. It is a type of purposive sampling technique in which the researcher chose to examine the entire population that has a particular set of characteristics such as specific attributes or traits, experience, knowledge, skills, exposure to an event, etc. In this research, the

characteristics referred to the ethnolinguistic groups of the learner-participants which influenced the researcher's choice of total population sampling based on the following reasons:

- a. **The population size was relatively small.** Unlike the other public senior high schools that usually have more than one section per grade level and offered more than one strand, Enerdino C. Coronel – Baluno National High School which is a small rural school only opens one section per grade level in the upper secondary level. Because of its small population, ECC-BNHS only offers the Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS) strand ever since the K to 12 curriculum of Department of Education was implemented in the Philippines.
- b. **The population had diverse ethnolinguistic groups.** Despite the small population of the school, there were three ethnolinguistic groups among the senior high school learners and these were Chavacano, Tausug, and Bisaya.

2.2 Respondents

The respondents for this study were the Grade 11 senior high school learners of Enerdino C. Coronel – Baluno National High School (ECC-BNHS), Baluno, Zamboanga City. They were enrolled in Humanities and Social Sciences strand. Their class was composed of 32 learners; 14 males and 18 females.

Among the 14 males, five of them spoke Chavacano, six spoke Tausug, and three spoke the Visayan language. On the other hand, 18 females were comprised of eight Chavacano speakers; seven Tausug speakers, and three Visayan speakers. Overall, there were thirteen (13) Chavacano speakers, thirteen (13) Tausug speakers, and six (6) Visayan speakers.

2.3 Instruments

Three research instruments were utilized in this study: a) a modified form that contained the information of the senior high school learner-participants; b) a pronunciation practice sheet that contained words with voiced and voiceless fricative consonants; and c) the actual pronunciation test tool to determine the pronunciation accuracy of the senior high school learners on English words with

both voiced and unvoiced /th/ sounds. The language teacher used a scoring rubric to evaluate the accuracy of the /th/ sound pronunciation of the learner-participants, and a mobile phone audio recorder to recheck the pronounced words with /th/ sounds before the data were analyzed.

Modified School Form 1

The modified form was designed to collect the personal information of the senior high school learner-participants, adapted from the School Form 1 (SF1) also known as the School Register. Unlike the original School Form 1 that collected information such as their complete name; sex; birth date; age (as of first Friday of June in the school year enrolled); mother tongue; ethnic group; religion; home address; parents' names; guardian's name and relationship; and the contact number of the parent or guardian, the form modified by the researcher collected only the learner-participants' necessary information relevant to the study such as their age, sex, home address, language spoken at home (L1) and other languages they speak.

Pronunciation Practice Sheet

This instrument contained English words with voiced and voiceless dental fricatives adapted from an American English-based textbook titled *Phoenix Language Package: Skill Builders for English Proficiency* for secondary level. It was stated in the first paragraph of the textbook's Foreword that the textbook aimed to improve the listening, speaking, and writing skills (including grammar) of its readers.

The pronunciation practice tool used by the learner-participants to practice the English words with voiceless and voiced /th/ sounds was divided into three columns: 10 words with initial and medial voiceless /th/ sound in the first column, 10 words with voiceless and voiced /th/ sound in the second column, and 10 words with medial and final voiced /th/ sound in the third column. Overall, there were 30 English words with fricative consonants in the pronunciation practice sheet.

Actual Pronunciation Test Tool

This instrument was a minimal-pair reading aloud test on both voiced and voiceless /th/ sounds taken from the same textbook titled *Phoenix Language Package: Skill Builders for English*

Proficiency. Since the textbook contained the pronunciation of English words in minimal pairs with dental fricative sounds, the researcher proposed that the selected material was relevant to achieve the objective of this study. Hence, the third instrument which was based from the textbook with American English content was a valid research tool to measure the overall result of the senior high school learner-participants' pronunciation of words with dental fricatives or the /th/ sounds used in the English language.

The actual pronunciation test tool was split into two sets: Set A that comprised 10 English words with voiceless dental fricative /θ/ and 10 words with /t/ sound; and Set B that comprised 10 English words with voiced dental fricative /ð/ and 10 words with /d/ sound. Overall, there were 40 English words in the pronunciation test tool, but only the list of words under /θ/ column and /ð/ column were evaluated by the language teacher since that was the primary scope of the study.

SET A		SET B	
Words with /θ/ and /t/		Words with /ð/ and /d/	
/θ/	/t/	/ð/	/d/
think	tink	than	Dan
thank	tank	then	den
through	true	lather	ladder
three	tree	thine	dine
thick	tick	thy	die
thrust	trust	though	dough
thyme	time	those	dose
thought	taught	they	day
thread	tread	these	dizzy

Table 2: Instrument used to determine the pronunciation errors of the learner-participants in both voiced and voiceless /th/ sounds

Rubric and Audio Recorder

Like any other evaluation tool, rubrics are useful to assess performances. In this case, a rubric is used to determine the pronunciation accuracy of the senior high school learner-participants specifically on the sets of English words with voiced and voiceless /th/ sounds. The resulting judgment of quality based on this tool contains within it a description of the actual performance that can be used for feedback. The rubric used in this study has

two major aspects: coherent sets of criteria and descriptions of levels of performance for these criteria. The criteria and performance-level descriptions help the senior high school learner-participants understand their actual pronunciation of the English words with /th/ sounds and how these words were supposed to pronounce.

To assess the oral reading pronunciation of the learner-participants, holistic rubric was used. It consisted of a single scale with all criteria to be included in the evaluation being considered together.

When a senior high school learner-participant pronounced all the words with dental fricative correctly in each set, or made minimal errors with at least one to three mispronounced English words with /th/ sounds out of 10 per set, he or she would be rated “Excellent”. When he or she mispronounced the English words four to six times out of 10 per set, he or she would be rated “Average”. Lastly, when he or she mispronounced the English words with /th/ sounds seven to nine times per set, or mispronounced all words with /th/ sounds per set, he or she would be rated “Poor”.

To recheck the pronunciation of words made by the senior high school learner-participants, the English language teacher recorded their utterances via Oppo A37 built-in audio recorder during the conduct of the data gathering process. The device would identify the possible pronunciation errors on the dental fricative sounds whenever the language teacher misheard the utterance of the learner-participant during the actual pronunciation test.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to the conduct of the study, the researcher sent a letter of permission to the school principal. The data collection was conducted during the first period class of the Grade 11 senior high school learners. It took one hour and thirty minutes to accommodate the 32 senior high school learner-participants who were all present during the data gathering schedule.

At the beginning of the data collection, the senior high school learner-participants were asked to accomplish the SF1 modified form. After the form was completely accomplished, each learner-participant was given a pronunciation practice sheet then they read aloud the English words with

voiceless and voiced /th/ sounds together with their English language teacher.

After the pronunciation drill, the learner-participants were given a copy of the actual pronunciation test tool. The language teacher informed them that only the English words with both voiced and voiceless dental fricative sounds would be evaluated, disregarding the words with /t/ sound in Set A and the words with /d/ sound in Set B. Individually, they proceeded to the actual pronunciation test on minimal pairs of English words with voiced and voiceless dental fricative sounds along with the English words with /t/ and /d/ sounds. The process was facilitated and evaluated by the language teacher who was an English major.

The actual oral reading test was audio-recorded to identify the misheard pronunciation of the senior high school learner-participants. The language teacher required them to read orally the English words with voiced /th/ and /t/ sounds twice in set A and read the English words with voiceless /th/ and /d/ sounds twice in set B.

The language teacher ticked on the empty spaces before the English words found on the actual pronunciation test sheet when the learner-participants pronounced the words with /th/ sounds correctly. The spaces were left unmarked when the English words with /th/ sounds were mispronounced.

After the data collection, each senior high school learner-participant’s audio recording was carefully listened by the language teacher to recheck the pronunciation of the English words with dental fricatives. No bearing was given to any mispronounced words with /t/ sound in Set A and /d/ sound in Set B as these two sounds were not the focus of the study. The pronunciation test results in both voiced and voiceless /th/ sounds were then statistically treated according to the ethnolinguistic groups of the senior high school learner-participants.

2.5 Data Analysis

The researcher employed percentage frequency distribution on the data gathered to further analyze the results of the pronunciation accuracy of the senior high school learner-participants of Enerdino C. Coronel – Baluno National High School. Percentage frequency distribution is defined as a display of data that

signifies the percentage of observations that exist for each data point or grouping of data points (Lavrakas, 2008). This method is useful to express the relative frequency of the accurately pronounced English words with voiced and voiceless dental fricatives. After the results on the pronunciation of English words on voiced and voiceless dental fricatives were analyzed, the researcher interpreted the data based on the adjectival descriptions of the rubric for the actual pronunciation test.

3 Results

To determine the results of the study, the actual oral reading test in two sets of minimal pairs was the basis for assessing the pronunciation accuracy on the English words with voiced dental fricative and unvoiced dental fricative uttered by the senior high school learner-participants.

Among the five male Chavacano speakers, three (3) were rated excellent while two (2) were poor in pronunciation of English words with voiceless dental fricative /θ/ sound in minimal pairs. No male Chavacano speaker was rated average in the given oral reading test. Meanwhile, among the six male Tausug speakers, three of them were rated excellent and the other three were rated poor in the pronunciation of the words with voiceless /θ/ sound. Like the male Chavacano speakers, no male Tausug speaker was rated average. Lastly, among the male Visayan speakers, one (1) of them was rated excellent, the other one was average, and the last one was poor in the pronunciation test.

On the other hand, among the eight (8) female Chavacano speakers, four (4) were rated excellent, 1 was average, and 3 were poor in the pronunciation of the English words with voiceless dental fricative sound in Set A minimal pair. Among the seven (7) female Tausug speakers, five (5) were rated excellent and two (2) were poor in the reading aloud test. No female Tausug speaker had an average rating in the pronunciation of the English words with unvoiced dental fricative sound. Lastly, all of the three Visayan speakers were rated excellent in the minimal pair assessment.

To answer the research question 1 which seeks to determine the overall result of the pronunciation of the English words with voiceless fricative consonant, 19 out of 32 senior high school learner-participants were rated excellent in

pronouncing the unvoiced dental fricative or the /θ/ sound. This means that more than half of the total sample size pronounced the 10 English words with unvoiced dental fricative sound correctly, or at least committed minimal errors with at least one to three mispronounced English words in unvoiced /θ/ sounds. Meanwhile, only two (2) out of 32 senior high school learner-participants were average in the pronunciation of 10 English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds. These two speakers (regardless of their ethnolinguistic background) committed at least four to six pronunciation errors in the English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds in Set A minimal pairs. Lastly, 11 out of 32 senior high school learner-participants were poor in pronouncing the 10 English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds. These speakers mispronounced 7 to 9 English words with voiceless /θ/ sounds in Set A minimal pairs, or possibly pronounced almost all the English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds incorrectly.

SHS Learners	Excellent /θ/ sound	Average /θ/ sound	Poor /θ/ sound	Total
MALE				
Chavacano	3	0	2	5
Tausug	3	0	3	6
Visayan	1	1	1	3
FEMALE				
Chavacano	4	1	3	8
Tausug	5	0	2	7
Visayan	3	0	0	3
TOTAL	19	2	11	32

Table 3: Results of the senior high school learners' assessment on pronunciation of the English words with voiceless /θ/ sound

To answer the research question number 2 that seeks to determine the variation of the pronunciation of the English words with unvoiced fricative consonant or the /θ/ sound according to the ethnolinguistic groups, 21.9% of the total sample size were the Chavacano senior high school learner-participants who were rated excellent in pronouncing the 10 English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds. This means that more than half of the Chavacano speakers pronounced all the English words with voiceless dental fricative sound correctly, or committed minimal errors with one to three mispronounced words in Set A minimal pairs.

Moreover, 25.0% of the total sample size were the Tausug senior high school learner-participants who were excellent in the pronunciation of the English words with unvoiced dental fricative sounds. This implies that most Tausug speakers were likely to have accurate pronunciation of English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds.

Finally, 12.6% of the total sample size or four (4) out of six (6) Visayan senior high school learner-participants were excellent in the pronunciation of English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds. This also signifies that almost all of the Visayan speakers were more likely to pronounce all the English words with unvoiced /θ/ sounds correctly rather than committing pronunciation errors.

Overall, 59.5% of the Grade 11 senior high school learner-participants were excellent, 6.2% were average, and 34.3% were poor in the pronunciation of the English words with voiceless dental fricative sound. This means that more than half of the senior high school learner-participants pronounced the English words with /θ/ sound with at least one to three errors, or possibly pronounced all the 10 English words with /θ/ sound correctly. Also, more than half of each ethnolinguistic group only committed minimal errors in the pronunciation of the English words with /θ/ sound or never mispronounced the 10 English words with /θ/ sound at all. Conversely, more than a third of the senior high school learner-participants needed to improve their pronunciation of English words with /θ/ sound as they mispronounced the words seven to nine times in Set A minimal pairs, or possibly pronounced all the 10 English words with voiceless /θ/ sounds incorrectly.

SHS Learners	Excellent /θ/ sound	Average /θ/ sound	Poor /θ/ sound	Total
Chavacano	7 (21.9%)	1 (3.1%)	5 (15.6%)	13 (40.6%)
Tausug	8 (25.0%)	0	5 (15.6%)	13 (40.6%)
Visayan	4 (12.6%)	1 (3.1%)	1 (3.1%)	6 (18.8%)
Total	19 (59.5%)	2 (6.2%)	11 (34.3%)	32 (100%)

Table 4: Consolidated results of the senior high school learners' assessment on pronunciation of the English words with voiceless /θ/ sound

For the pronunciation of the English words with voiced /θ/ sound, among the five (5) male Chavacano speakers, two (2) of them were rated excellent; one (1) was rated average; and the other 2 were rated poor. Three (3) were average and 3 were poor in the oral reading test among the six male Tausug speakers. No male Tausug speaker was rated excellent in pronouncing the English words with voiced /θ/ sound. Lastly, among the 3 male Visayan speakers, each of them were excellent, average, and poor respectively.

On the other hand, among the eight (8) female Chavacano speakers, four (4) were rated excellent, one was average, and 3 were poor in pronouncing the English words with voiced dental fricative sound. 2 were excellent, 3 were average, and 2 were poor among the seven (7) female Tausug speakers in their pronunciation of English words with voiced dental fricative sounds. Lastly, among the 3 female Visayan speakers, 1 was excellent and the remaining 2 were poor in the oral reading test. No female Visayan speaker was rated average in the Set B minimal pair reading aloud assessment.

To answer the research question number 1 that seeks to determine the overall result of the pronunciation of the English words with voiced fricative consonant, ten (10) out of 32 senior high school learner-participants were rated excellent, nine (9) were average, and thirteen (13) were poor in the pronunciation of English words in Set B minimal pairs. This implies that more than a third of the total sample size need to improve their pronunciation of the English words with the voiced /θ/ sounds in Set B minimal pairs. Apparently, they mispronounced the set of English words with voiced /θ/ sound seven to nine times, or mispronounced almost all the English words with voiced dental fricative sounds.

SHS Learners	Excellent /ð/ sound	Average /ð/ sound	Poor /ð/ sound	Total
MALE				
Chavacano	2	1	2	5
Tausug	0	3	3	6
Visayan	1	1	1	3
FEMALE				
Chavacano	4	1	3	8
Tausug	2	3	2	7
Visayan	1	0	2	3
TOTAL	10	9	13	32

Table 5: Results of the senior high school learners' assessment on pronunciation of the English words with voiced /th/ sound

To answer the research question number 2 that seeks to determine the pronunciation of the English words with voiced fricative consonant according to the ethnolinguistic groups, 18.8% (six speakers) were rated excellent, 6.25% (two speakers) were average, and 15.6% (five speakers) were poor among the 13 Chavacano senior high school learner-participants in pronouncing the English words with voiced /th/ sound. This implies that almost half of the male and female Chavacano senior high school learner-participants pronounced the English words with voiced dental fricative sounds with at least one to three pronunciation errors, or almost half of the Chavacano speakers pronounced the English words with voiced /th/ sounds almost perfectly. Meanwhile, five speakers out of 13 male and female Chavacano senior high school learner-participants committed seven to nine pronunciation errors in the 10 English words with voiced dental fricative sounds, or five out of 13 Chavacano speakers mispronounced almost all the 10 English words with voiced /th/ sounds in Set B minimal pairs.

Among the 13 Tausug senior high school learner-participants, 6.25% (two speakers) were excellent, 18.8% (six speakers) were average, and 15.6% (five speakers) were poor in the oral reading test. This means that only two out of 13 Tausug speakers pronounced the 10 English words with voiced /th/ sounds almost perfectly, or only two out of 13 Tausug speakers committed minimal errors in the pronunciation of 10 English words with voiced /th/ sounds in Set B minimal pairs. Meanwhile, almost half of the male and female Tausug speakers committed at least four to six errors in the pronunciation, thus rated average. Five out of 13 Tausug speakers committed seven to nine pronunciation errors on the 10 English words with voiced /th/ sounds, or five out of 13 Tausug speakers mispronounced almost all the 10 English words with voiced /th/ sounds in Set B minimal pairs.

Finally, among the six Visayan senior high school learner-participants, 6.25% (two speakers) were excellent, 3.12% (one speaker) was average, and 9.37% (three speakers) were poor in the pronunciation of English words with voiced dental fricative sounds in Set B minimal pairs. This implies

that half of the Visayan senior high school learner-participants needed to improve their pronunciation of English words with voiced dental fricatives as they committed seven to nine pronunciation errors on the 10 English words in Set B minimal pairs, or half of the Visayan speakers mispronounced almost all the 10 English words with voiced dental fricative sounds.

Overall, 40.6% of the Grade 11 senior high school learner-participants need to improve their pronunciation on the English words with voiced /th/ sounds in Set B minimal pairs. More than a third of the total sample size mispronounced almost all the 10 English words with voiced dental fricative sounds, committed at least seven to nine pronunciation errors, or possibly no correct pronunciation at all.

SHS Learners	Excellent /ð/ sound	Average /ð/ sound	Poor /ð/ sound	Total
Chavacano	6 (18.8%)	2 (6.25%)	5 (15.6%)	13 (40.6%)
Tausug	2 (6.25%)	6 (18.8%)	5 (15.6%)	13 (40.6%)
Visayan	2 (6.25%)	1 (3.12%)	3 (9.37%)	6 (18.7%)
Total	10 (31.3%)	9 (28.1%)	13 (40.6%)	32 (100%)

Table 6: Consolidated results of the senior high school learners' assessment on pronunciation of the English words with voiced /th/ sound

4 Discussion

From the data presented, it was found out that 19 out of 32 or 59.5% of the Grade 11 senior high school learner-participants of Enerdino C. Coronel – Baluno National High School were excellent in the pronunciation of the English words with unvoiced fricative consonant or the /θ/ sound. This means that majority of them pronounced the words with unvoiced /th/ sound almost perfectly, or at least committed at least one to three errors in the pronunciation of the English words in Set A minimal pairs reading aloud assessment. However, 11 out of 32 or 34.3% of the Grade 11 learner-participants were poor in pronouncing the English words with voiceless /th/ sounds. This means that they needed to exert more effort or practice more in

the pronunciation of the words with /θ/ sound in their target language. Apparently, these 11 senior high school learner-participants committed seven to nine pronunciation errors, or possibly mispronounced all the English words with voiceless /θ/ sounds in Set B minimal pair reading aloud test.

Conversely, only 10 out of 32 senior high school learner-participants or 31.3% were rated excellent in the pronunciation of English words with voiced fricative consonant or the /ð/ sound, while nine (9) of them or 28.1% were average, and 13 or 40.6% were poor in the pronunciation test. This signifies that majority of the Grade 11 learner-participants needed to improve their pronunciation of the words with voiced dental fricative sound in their target language. More than a third of the total sample size committed seven to nine pronunciation errors, or possibly mispronounced all the English words with voiced /θ/ sound in Set B minimal pair reading aloud test.

In an ethnolinguistic perspective, majority of the Chavacano, Tausug, and Visayan senior high school learner-participants were excellent in the pronunciation of the words with unvoiced dental fricative or the /θ/ sound in their target language with 21.9% of the 13 speakers, 25.0% of the 13 speakers, and 12.6% of the 6 speakers respectively. This implies that most of the Grade 11 learner-participants did very well in pronouncing the English words with unvoiced /θ/ sound in Set A minimal pair reading aloud test, projecting only minimal pronunciation errors. However, 15.6% of the Chavacano speakers, 15.6% of the Tausug speakers, and 3.1% of the Visayan speakers needed to intensely improve their pronunciation of the English words with unvoiced /θ/ sound as they committed seven to nine pronunciation errors in the reading aloud assessment.

Moreover, although 18.8% of the 13 Chavacano speakers were excellent in the pronunciation of the words with voiced fricative consonant or the /ð/ sound, 15.6% of the Chavacano speakers were poor in the Set B minimal pair reading aloud test. This means that the Chavacano speakers tend to pronounce the English words with voiced fricative consonant more accurately than the other ethnolinguistic groups. Among the 13 Tausug speakers, 18.8% dominated the average level and 15.6% were poor. It implies that this ethnolinguistic group needed to practice more in their pronunciation of English words with voiced /θ/

sound as they committed four to six and seven to nine pronunciation errors in the two levels respectively. There is also a possibility that the five (5) Tausug speakers never pronounced all the English words correctly in the Set B minimal pair reading aloud test. Finally, majority of the Visayan senior high school learner-participants or 9.37% of the 6 Visayan speakers were poor in the pronunciation of words with voiced dental fricative sound in their target language. Only 6.25% of the Visayan speakers were excellent, which means that this ethnolinguistic group tend to mispronounce the words with voiced /θ/ sound more often than pronouncing them accurately.

In summary, most of the learner-participants in this study did very well in pronouncing the English words with /θ/ sound or the unvoiced fricative consonant but needed to improve their pronunciation of the words with /ð/ sound or the voiced fricative consonant. Among the three ethnolinguistic groups, the Tausug and Visayan speakers tend to pronounce the words with voiceless dental fricative more accurately than the Chavacano speakers. However, the Chavacano speakers tend to pronounce the words with voiced /θ/ sound better than the Tausug and Visayan speakers.

Mispronunciation of the English words with fricative consonants made by the learner-participants are seen to be a manifestation of interlanguage error theory (Richards, 1974). This type of language error usually happens when the language learner makes a negative transfer of the linguistic elements of the native language (L1) into the target language (L2). In this case, the negative transfer made by the Chavacano, Tausug, and Visayan speakers was in the phonological aspect of the English language. As stated, the phonemic fricative consonant of /θ/ either voiced or voiceless is not present in the Filipino language or in any local language in the Philippines, thus speakers disregard the pronunciation of words with voiced and voiceless dental fricative sound unless required in an English classroom instruction.

In addition, the geographic location was also a factor in the pronunciation accuracy of the learner-participants. Residents of Barangay Baluno, Zamboanga City only use Chavacano, Tausug, Visayan, or Filipino language in their usual conversations with their family, friends, or anyone they know. They would prefer to speak using the common local language instead of speaking

English, even in the actual English classes. Less exposure to the target language results to more chances of making a mistake in the L2.

Finally, may the findings of this study enlighten the language instructors, the learners, and the English program supervisors to give proper instructions, practice, and interventions to improve the oral skill specifically the pronunciation of the learners. In the end, good pronunciation is a key element to an effective oral communication that gives a lasting impact to the listeners.

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