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The Phonological Interference of Sasak Meno-Mene Dialect on English Pronunciation

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examines the phonological interference of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect (L1) on English (L2) pronunciation among 75 eleventh-grade students. The study utilized minimal-pair tests, observation, and semi-structured interviews to identify the phonological divergences and recurrent error patterns. Analysis revealed that the simpler L1 system lacks crucial English phonemes, specifically interdental fricatives (/θ/, /ð/) and distinct vowel length contrasts. The dominant error pattern is consistent negative transfer, primarily the substitution of interdental fricatives with alveolar stops (/θ/ to /t/). Furthermore, the substitution of /f/ to /p/ suggested that labiodental fricatives, though present in loanwords, remain unstable. Non-linguistic factors, such as high language anxiety and fear of ridicule, were found to intensify these difficulties by limiting the speaking practice necessary for self-correction. This research confirms the predictive power of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) in a localized context and provides a detailed phonological error matrix as a foundation for developing targeted, structurally-informed instructional modules that simultaneously address both linguistic errors and affective barriers in L2 acquisition.

Keywords: Phonological Interference, Sasak Meno-Mene Dialect, Negative Transfer, Affective Barriers.

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Introduction

Achieving competence in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) requires balanced mastery of all language skills, with pronunciation being one of the most essential aspects for clear and effective communication. Proper pronunciation depends on the accurate use of sounds (phonemes) and suprasegmental features, such as stress, rhythm, and intonation (Roach, 2009). Knowledge of phonetics helps us understand the sound system of a language because, fundamentally, phonemes are categories of sound that are based on how they are produced and perceived (Ladefoged, 2001). However, learning a second language (L2) is not always smooth. Learners often transfer the sound patterns of their first language (L1) into the target language, a process known as linguistic interference or cross-linguistic influence (CLI). When this transfer causes errors, it is referred to as negative interference.

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) suggests that the degree of difficulty in learning an L2 can be predicted by how different the L1 and L2 structures are (Lado, 1957). Meanwhile, Error Analysis helps describe how learners build their interlanguage system (Corder, 1967). The Speech Learning Model (SLM) further explains that when L2 sounds are too similar to L1 sounds, learners may merge them, causing persistent pronunciation errors (Flege, 1995).

Indonesia's linguistic diversity makes it an ideal setting for studying language interference. The Sasak language, spoken across Lombok Island, has several dialects, one of which is Meno-Mene—the focus of this study. The Meno-Mene dialect has a simpler sound system compared to English. Previous studies in West Nusa Tenggara show that local dialects strongly influence English pronunciation. For example, Arafiq and Yusra (2019) found that Sasak speakers often replace the English sounds /f/ and /v/ with /p/, since these fricatives do not exist in their native phonological system. Similarly, Nirwana Langkawi and Arafiq (2020) noted that Sasak's limited vowel inventory often leads to vowel neutralization, such as pronouncing ship and sheep the same way. Earlier research on the Meno-Mene dialect also found patterns related to final consonants and syllable structures that contribute to pronunciation errors (Syarifaturrahman, Darma, & Sujana, 2017).

The interference problem is not only linguistic but also influenced by psychological and pedagogical factors. As Qoonitah Faradila et al. (2024) point out, affective elements such as anxiety and fear of being mocked for mispronunciation can reduce students' motivation to practice speaking English. This creates a "high affective filter," which limits learning opportunities. Pedagogical challenges also play a role. Arafiq et al. (2021) emphasized the need for teaching pronunciation that considers the learners' local phonological background. Traditional curricula focusing only on English phonology are insufficient. Teachers must design lessons that address specific difficulties faced by Sasak-speaking students. Moreover, online learning situations, as noted by Yani, Yusra, and Khotimah (2021), make it even harder for teachers to provide direct pronunciation feedback.

Another aspect worth noting is the role of loanwords. Although sounds like /f/, /v/, and /z/ do not originally exist in Sasak Meno-Mene, they have entered daily use through Indonesian loanwords (e.g., fanatik, vaksin, zebra). However, their presence in vocabulary does not necessarily mean that these sounds are fully internalized as part of the speaker's native sound system. When speaking English, learners may revert to substituting /f/ with /p/ or /v/ with /b/, suggesting that these new sounds remain unstable in their phonological inventory.

Despite several studies on Sasak dialects, there is still a lack of detailed analysis specifically focusing on the Meno-Mene dialect, especially in the context of high school students. This research seeks to address that gap by investigating the phonological interference from the Meno-Mene dialect on the English pronunciation of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Janapria. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights for teachers in designing pronunciation materials that are locally relevant and linguistically informed.

Research Questions

1. What are the phonological similarities and differences between English and the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect?
2. What types of phonological interference occur in the English pronunciation of eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Janapria?

Research Objectives

1. To identify the phonological similarities and differences between English and the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect.
2. To classify and analyze the types of phonological interference from the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect that appear in students' English pronunciation.

Methods

This study will employ a qualitative case study design to examine the interference patterns of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect on students' English pronunciation. The research will focus on one clearly defined group: eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Janapria. Data will be collected through multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Observations will capture students' natural pronunciation during classroom activities, the minimal pair pronunciation test will elicit specific phoneme contrasts affected by dialectal interference, and semi-structured interviews will explore students' perceptions, challenges, and strategies in managing their pronunciation difficulties. By combining these data collection methods, the study aims to provide detailed, contextual insights into the types of pronunciation errors and the underlying linguistic factors, enabling a deeper understanding of how the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect influences English pronunciation in a high school context.

Research Subject

The population for this research will consist of the 295 eleventh-grade students at SMA Negeri 1 Janapria. This group will be selected as they will possess a certain level of English proficiency and will be fluent users of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect, making them the group of interest for studying linguistic transfer. From this population, a sample of 75 students will be selected using purposive sampling. This non-probability technique will be utilized to ensure that the chosen participants will actively use the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect in their daily lives and will hold basic English-speaking ability. In qualitative inquiry, purposive sampling will secure individuals who will provide rich, relevant, and in-depth information pertinent to the research objectives, rather than focusing on statistical generalization.

Research Intrument

Consistent with the principles of qualitative research, the researcher functioned as the primary instrument for both data collection and subsequent analysis, directly observing participant interactions and interpreting the resulting information. This primary role was supported by a set of supplementary tools designed for triangulation. These tools included:

1. Observation Sheets, which were employed to systematically document instances of English pronunciation errors and phonological interference as they emerged organically during authentic classroom activities, such as discussions or oral presentations.
2. Minimal Pair Pronunciation Test

A specialized minimal pair test was developed to elicit contrasts between English sounds that are commonly influenced by the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect. The test targeted specific sound pairs such as /f/ vs. /p/, /θ/ vs. /t/, and /ð/ vs. /d/, which frequently exhibit substitution patterns among Sasak-speaking learners. To make the test more contextually relevant, several word pairs were selected to represent phonemic contrasts between English and Sasak. For instance, the English word *Three* /θriː/ was compared with the Sasak word *Telu* (three) /tə.lu/ to examine /θ/–/t/ substitution, *Fan* /fæn/ was compared with *Panas* (hot) /pa.nas/ to examine /f/–/p/ substitution, and This /ðɪs/ was compared with *Daye* (north) /dajɛ/ to explore the substitution of /ð/ with /d/. These comparisons provided focused and

systematic data on how Sasak Meno-Mene phonological structures influence English pronunciation.

3. Interview Sheets

The interview sheets were designed to guide semi-structured interviews that explored students' perceptions of their pronunciation difficulties. The questions aimed to uncover learners' awareness of dialectal influence, their emotional responses toward pronunciation errors, and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges. Example questions included: "How do you feel when you have to speak English in front of the class?" and "Which English sounds do you find the most difficult to pronounce? Can you give an example?"

Research Procedure

The data collection process will employ a triangulated approach, utilizing three distinct methods to ensure comprehensive and well-rounded coverage of the interference phenomenon. First, Observations will be systematically carried out within the classroom setting during both oral tasks and general discussions; here, the researcher will meticulously document instances of phonological interference as they will manifest in authentic spoken performance. Second, a Minimal Pair Test will be administered as a focused measure to specifically evaluate the participants' ability to accurately differentiate and produce English sounds that will be highly susceptible to L1 transfer. Third, semi-structured Interviews will be conducted with the selected sample; this qualitative method will aim to gather rich data regarding the students' self-reported experiences, their perceptions of pronunciation difficulty, and their conscious awareness of mother-tongue influence, thereby complementing the performance data that will be obtained from the test and observations.

Data Analysis

Data analysis will be conducted qualitatively utilizing the Thematic Analysis approach, a flexible methodology selected for its utility in systematically identifying, analyzing, and reporting the dominant patterns (themes) that will emerge across the dataset. The analysis will incorporate all information collected from the three principal instruments: the observation sheets, the minimal pair test, and the interview transcripts. The process will unfold through several systematic stages: initially, all collected data will undergo Transcription and Organization, whereby it will be compiled into a usable format and categorized by its source (e.g., error matrix, interview transcript) to streamline subsequent steps. Next, the transcribed material will be subjected to Coding to assign labels representing specific features pertinent to the research questions, such as instances of interference and contrasts between the two phonological systems. These codes will then be developed into Categorizations and Themes, grouping related patterns into meaningful thematic interpretations (e.g., "Vowel Neutralization" or "Affective Barriers"). Following this, Data Interpretation will involve an in-depth explanation of the derived themes to describe the comparative phonology and precisely classify the specific types of negative phonological transfer that will be observed in the students' pronunciation. The final critical stage of this study involves validation and triangulation to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings. This will be conducted through a systematic comparison of data obtained from three independent sources: the minimal

pair pronunciation test, classroom observation notes, and semi-structured interview responses. Technically, validation will be applied as follows:

1. Cross-checking Observations and Test Results: Instances of pronunciation errors recorded during observations will be compared with patterns identified in the minimal pair test to verify consistency in the types of phonological interference.
2. Comparing Interviews with Observed Data: Students' responses in the interviews regarding their pronunciation difficulties will be aligned with both observation notes and test results to confirm that reported challenges correspond to actual performance.
3. Identifying Consistent Patterns: Only errors or interference patterns that are consistently observed across at least two of the three data sources will be considered reliable findings, ensuring that conclusions are not based on isolated or anecdotal evidence.
4. Peer Review: Selected data samples and interpretations will be reviewed by colleagues or supervisors to further check for accuracy and minimize subjective bias.

Through these procedures, the study aims to produce robust and credible findings that accurately reflect the influence of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect on students' English pronunciation.

Findings and Discussion

Phoneme Inventory

1. Vowel System

The English vowel system is significantly more complex than the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect, particularly regarding the number of phonemes and vowel length contrast.

Table 1. Vowel System

Vowel Aspect	English system	Sasak Meno-Mene Dialect	Primary Difference
Number of Phonemes	Approximately 20 vowels (7 short, 5 long, 8 diphthongs)	Approximately 7 monophthongs (/i, e, ɛ, a, u, o, ə/)	Sasak has a smaller inventory and lacks diphthongs.
Short vowels	/ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ɒ/, /ʊ/, /ə/	/i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/, /u/, /o/, /ə/	Sasak has /ɛ/ but lacks /æ/, /ʌ/, and /ɒ/.
Long vowels	/iː/, /uː/, /ɜː/, /ɔː/, /ɑː/	(No long-short contrast)	English distinguishes vowels phonemically by length; Sasak does not.
Dipthongs	/eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/	(None)	Sasak lacks diphthongs.

The primary structural difference between the English vowel system and the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect lies in the complexity of their phonemic inventories and contrastive features. English possesses a considerably more intricate vowel system, comprising approximately twenty vowel phonemes, including short monophthongs, long monophthongs, and eight diphthongs. English relies heavily on vowel length contrasts (e.g., /iː/ vs. /ɪ/) as phonemic distinctions that serve to differentiate lexical meaning. In contrast, the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect operates with a far more limited inventory, consisting of roughly seven monophthongs (/i, e, ɛ, a, u, o, ə/), and does not utilize vowel length as a phonemic marker. Additionally, the dialect lacks diphthongs and does not contain several characteristic short vowels found in English, such as /æ/, /ʌ/, and /ɒ/.

This structural divergence explains why Sasak Meno-Mene speakers often encounter difficulties distinguishing English vowel minimal pairs and tend to neutralize or merge vowel contrasts during speech production.

2. Consonant System

The main differences lie in the inventory of fricatives and the presence of the Glottal Stop in Sasak.

Table 2. Consonant System

Category	English Consonants (IPA)	Sasak Meno-Mene Consonants (IPA)	Primary Difference (Source of Interference)
Plosives	/p, b, t, d, k, g/	/p, b, t, d, k, g/	Identical.
Fricatives	/f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h/	/s, h/ (Native)	English has fricatives absent from Native Sasak: /f, v, θ, ð, z, ʃ, ʒ/. Note: /f/, /v/, and /z/ appear in loanwords, but are unstable.
Affricates	/tʃ, dʒ/	/tʃ, dʒ/	Identical.
Nasals	/m, n, ŋ/	/m, n, ɲ, ŋ/	Sasak includes the additional palatal nasal /ɲ/.
Glottal Stop	(None)	/ʔ/ (or /q/)	Sasak features the Glottal Stop /ʔ/, which is absent in English.

A comparison of the consonant inventories demonstrates that although both languages share significant similarities in stop (plosive), affricate, and liquid consonants (such as /p, b, t, d, k, g/ and /tʃ, dʒ/), the primary source of interference arises from differences in fricative inventories. The native consonant system of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect is structurally simpler and lacks several key fricatives present in English, namely interdental fricatives (/θ/ and /ð/), labiodental fricatives (/f/ and /v/), and palato-alveolar fricatives (/ʃ/). The absence of these phonemes leads to systematic substitution by learners. Furthermore, although /f/, /v/, and /z/

occur in borrowed vocabulary within Sasak, they are not fully internalized as stable phonemic units, which explains why students continue to substitute them with bilabial stops such as /p/ or /b/. Notably, the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect also features a glottal stop /ʔ/ as a phoneme—a segment that does not exist in English—adding an additional layer of phonotactic complexity for Sasak speakers learning English.

Types of Phonological Interference Observed Among Eleventh-Grade Sasak Meno-Mene Dialect Speakers in English Pronunciation

The findings of this study reveal that the phonological interference demonstrated by eleventh-grade students who are native speakers of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect occurs systematically and can be categorized into several major patterns as follows:

Table 3. The findings of this study reveal that the phonological interference

Phoneme Category	Target Phoneme (L2)	Dominant Substitute (L1)	Percentage of Students in Error	Primary Error Pattern
1. Interdental Fricative	/θ/ (Voiceless, *think*)	/t/ (Alveolar Stop)	74.7% (56/75)	/θ/ to /t/ (Substitution)
1. Interdental Fricative	/ð/ (Voiced, *they*)	/d/ (Alveolar Stop)	56.0% (42/75)	/ð/ to /d/ (Substitution)
2. Labiodental Fricative	/f/ (Voiceless, *fan*)	/p/ (Bilabial Stop)	13.3% (10/75)	/f/ to /p/ (Unstable Transfer)
3. Vowel Contrast	/ɪ/ vs. /iː/ (*ship* vs. *sheep*)	Various /a/, /e/, /u/	*(Complex: No single dominant substitution)*	Vowel Neutralization
4. Affricate	/tʃ/ (*chair*)	/k/ (Velar Stop)	29.3% (22/75)	/tʃ/ to /k/ (Simplification)
5. Palato-alveolar Fricative	/ʃ/ (*ship*)	/s/ (Alveolar Fricative)	34.7% (26/75)	/ʃ/ to /s/ (Simplification)

1. **Substitution of Interdental Fricatives: Strongest Evidence for Negative Transfer**

This interference pattern represents the most dominant and systematic negative transfer, providing the strongest evidence for the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). Since the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect completely lacks both the voiced (/ð/) and voiceless (/θ/) interdental fricatives in its phonemic inventory, CAH accurately predicts that this maximal structural difference would result in maximal learning difficulty. Consistent with this prediction, learners replaced the English sounds with the nearest available L1 phonemes in terms of articulation place (alveolar stops): 74.7% of students substituted /θ/ with /t/, and 56.0% substituted /ð/ with /d/. This substitution is a direct manifestation of negative transfer where the simpler, available L1 phonemes are projected onto the L2 system to fill a phonological gap resulting from the L1-L2 divergence.

2. Substitution of Labiodental Fricatives: Unstable Phoneme Status

Although this error occurred at a lower frequency (13.3% for /f/ to /p/), the substitution pattern of labiodental fricatives (/f/) highlights how CAH interacts with phoneme stability within the L1 system. Theoretically, while /f/ is present in Indonesian loanwords used by the students, these phonemes are not stably

internalized within the operative phonological system of Sasak Meno-Mene. Following the logic of CAH, unstable L1 phonemes are treated as "absent" from the strong system, causing learners to revert to the most primitive and stable L1 sound (the bilabial stop /p/). The persistence of the / f / to / p / substitution proves that labiodental fricatives remain vulnerable to negative transfer during L2 production due to this instability..

3. Vowel Neutralization: Failure to Perceive Phonemic Contrast

The observed vowel neutralization is fully explained by CAH based on the lack of a distinctive feature in the L1. The Sasak Meno-Mene dialect is a vowel system that does not use duration (long or short) as a phonemic differentiator of meaning. CAH predicts that features that are non-phonemic in the L1 will be disregarded in the L2. This was confirmed when students failed to distinguish key English vowel length contrasts, often producing the short vowel /ɪ/ (ship) and the long vowel /iː/ (sheep) similarly. This pattern signifies negative transfer through merger, where students used various Sasak vowels (/a/, /e/, /u/) to replace several absent English vowels, failing to acquire the necessary L2 contrast.

4. Simplification of Complex Consonants: Dominance of the L1 System

Other substitution patterns, such as the palato-alveolar fricative and the affricate errors, also serve as examples of negative transfer resulting in simplification. The strong tendency of learners to operate the L2 phonological system through the lens of the established L1 system is evident in these cases. 34.7% of students substituted /ʃ/ with /s/ (ship becoming /sip/), and 29.3% substituted the affricate /tʃ/ with the velar stop /k/ (chair becoming /kair/). Both patterns reflect the substitution of difficult L2 sounds with more readily available and articulatorily simpler L1 phonemes.

Non-Linguistic Implications: Affective Barriers Among Students

Qualitative data obtained through interviews revealed that students' difficulties in English pronunciation were not solely rooted in linguistic structural limitations, but were also significantly intensified by psychological and emotional factors, commonly categorized as a high Affective Filter. These factors influence students' willingness to participate and practice their speaking skills.

1. Anxiety and Social Fear

Many students reported experiencing nervousness, embarrassment, and fear of making mistakes when speaking in front of the class. Their greatest concern was being laughed at or ridiculed due to mispronunciation. As one student expressed: "*I feel very nervous, afraid of mispronouncing and being laughed at*". This fear often triggered avoidance behavior, where students preferred to remain silent and rarely volunteered to speak individually. Several students explicitly stated feeling "*reluctant when asked to speak in front of others*" or "*I stay quiet because I feel embarrassed*" when corrected by the teacher.

2. Limited Feedback and Learner Needs

This avoidance of speaking practice has serious implications, as it limits students' opportunities to produce output—an essential process for testing linguistic hypotheses and correcting their own pronunciation errors. Although some students appreciated receiving corrective feedback and noted their errors "*I write down my mistakes so I can practice again at home.*", others felt embarrassed or simply remained silent, suggesting that feedback must be delivered in a manner that does not threaten

students' confidence. Students demonstrated a high degree of self-awareness regarding this issue and proposed several pedagogical solutions:

- Self-Monitoring Tools: Students wished for tools like voice recordings, applications, or video assignments to listen to and evaluate their own pronunciation. One student suggested: "*The teacher could give pronunciation exercises using recordings or applications so that we can listen to our own voices,*" or "*The teacher could assign video tasks so we can hear our own voices.*"
- Preferred Practice Settings: To reduce anxiety, students suggested safer practice formats, such as pair work "*Maybe we can practice in pairs so I won't feel too nervous*" or small-group activities "*It would be better to practice in small groups*".

3. Summary of Affective Barriers

In summary, besides phonological constraints, emotional and psychological factors significantly inhibit the students' learning process. High levels of anxiety, embarrassment, and fear of ridicule limit opportunities for practice, hypothesis testing, and error correction, consistent with the principles of the Output Hypothesis.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the difficulties in English pronunciation among speakers of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect are systematically influenced by a combination of significant linguistic divergence and inhibiting non-linguistic factors.

Linguistic Findings: The results strongly confirm the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). The phonological system of the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect lacks interdental fricatives (/\θ/, /ð/) and vowel length contrasts, leading to maximal negative transfer. This is evidenced by the highest error rate, where 74.7% of students consistently substituted /\θ/ with /t/.

Unique Findings and Theoretical Contributions: Beyond mere confirmation, the study found that the labiodental fricatives /f/ and /v/ hold an unstable status in the students' operative phonological system. Although these sounds are present through Indonesian loanwords, the persistence of the substitution /f/ → /p/ (observed in 13.3% of students) demonstrates that these phonemes remain vulnerable to negative transfer, enriching the understanding of CAH in the context of regional dialects influenced by the national language.

Practical Implications: On the affective side, high levels of anxiety and fear of ridicule ("I feel very nervous, afraid of mispronouncing words and being laughed at") constitute the main non-linguistic barriers, directly limiting essential speaking practice needed for self-correction (Output Hypothesis). The main contribution of this study is the provision of a detailed, localized phonological error matrix for the Sasak Meno-Mene dialect, serving as an empirical basis for designing highly targeted phonetic curricula.

Recommendations

Based on the identified patterns of linguistic interference and students' affective needs, the recommendations are directed toward the creation of structured pedagogical interventions and effective psychological support. Instructors are encouraged to implement a Contrastive Analysis (CAH)-based instructional framework with a focus on absent target phonemes (/\θ/, /ð/, /f/, /v/, and vowel length contrasts). Concretely, this involves developing an L1/L2 Minimal Pair Contrast Module that explicitly compares and contrasts these sounds, such as

practicing the distinction between tin vs. Thin, and using mirrors or diagrams to illustrate the specific tongue positions for interdental phonemes to correct default substitutions of /t/ or /d/. Furthermore, to address high affective filters, teachers should reduce emphasis on individual performance in front of the class, prioritize safe practice formats such as pair work or small-group activities to lower initial anxiety, and support students in using self-monitoring tools like voice recordings or mobile applications to listen to and correct their own pronunciation independently. Finally, it is recommended that intervention-based studies (Action Research) be conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of CAH-informed modules and to extend the focus to suprasegmental features such as word stress and intonation.

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