FOREIGN ACCENT AND SPEECH INTELLIGIBILITY - WHY AND HOW TO REDUCE

Author(s): **Thanh Phuong Nguyen*** & **Tuan Van Truong****

* PhD Candidate, University of Missouri, USA

** Freelancer, Columbia, Missouri, USA

ABSTRACT

A common problem faced by learners of a foreign language, especially adult learners, is the difficulty of pronunciation. Vietnamese learners of English are likely to encounter this problem. There are discrepancies between the sound systems of Vietnamese and English. Hence, Vietnamese learners pronounce English in the Vietnamese way, which makes their spoken English unintelligible. They substitute the target language's sounds with some of the sounds from their mother tongue. In consequence, other people find it difficult to understand this mother- accented pronunciation of English. In this paper, we examined Vietnamese speakers of English tendency to English sounds that do not exist in Vietnamese /ð/,/ θ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ɜr / and /æ/ with Vietnamese sounds, such as /d/, /th/, /z, /c'/, /z/, /ə/ and /ɛ/, respectively. A discussion of the reasons for this sound replacement was presented, along with a few suggestions for solving this problem.

Key words: Vietnamese-accented English, pronunciation, foreign accent, speakers of English, sounds.

1. INTRODUCTION

In this integration time, English as an integration tool for Vietnam to enter into the international market. It is considered one of the advantages when the labour force is well-equipped with their English capacity (Nguyen, 2013; Nguyen & Do, 2013; Nguyen & Truong, 2014; Nguyen &Vo, 2015). The ability to speak is one of the most crucial skills for learning a foreign language and for interacting with others (Almuslimi, 2020). People who work for or with multinational companies need to be able to communicate effectively in English, which is essential to fulfilling responsibilities and succeeding (Nguyen, 2013). However, Vietnamese students' speaking competence in general is still low, and one of the contributing factors is their unintelligible pronunciation. In fact, encountering difficulties learning pronunciation is a common phenomenon among foreign language learners. Learners of English also often have problems in pronouncing it correctly, especially those whose native languages' phonetic systems are totally different from English's. The fact that Vietnamese speakers of English have a terrible time struggling with English pronunciation is a typical example of this phenomenon.

It is generally considered that writing is often a more effective mode of communication for Vietnamese speakers of English than speaking. In spite of their high proficiency level, they often struggle to get themselves understood when they speak English, despite being able to use advanced vocabulary and complex syntax (Cunningham, 2009). One of the factors that make Vietnamese learners' spoken English unintelligible is that Vietnamese learners pronounce English in a Vietnamese style. That is, they substitute some of their mother tongue's sounds for the target language's sounds. As a result, this mother- accented pronunciation of English is difficulty for other people to understand. This paper will discuss the tendency of replacing Vietnamese sounds such as /d/, /th/, /z, /c'/, /z/, /ə/ and /ɛ/, for English sounds that do not exist in Vietnamese /ð/,/ θ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ɜr / and /æ/ respectively. The reasons of transferring sounds will be discussed and some suggested solutions for this problem will also be provided.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF VIETNAMESE SPEAKERS' TENDENCY TO REPLACE SOUNDS IN ENGLISH

Native speakers or non- native speakers from other countries first talking to Vietnamese speakers of English may not understand or have difficulties comprehending Vietnamese if they hear the following utterances.

(1) [də ˈmʌdər   ɛn də ˈbrʌdər drɑp   dɛr klowdz ˈowvə dɛr]

The mother and the brother dropped their clothes over there.

(2) [də kɛt dɛt sɛt ɑn də bɛd wəz bɛd]

 The cat that sat on the bed was bad.

(3) [dey th ɪnk də th ɪn   ɪn də th ɪn ɑr thɪn]

They think the things in the tin are thin.

(4) [dɛt wə də wərs nərs   dɛt dey hɛd hərd]

That was the worst nurse that they had heard.

(5) [ɪt ɪz hɪz plɛzər tuw miyt hər ɛn dɛt   gərl]

 It is his pleasure to meet her and that girl.

(6) [c'ɛk   c'eynz tuw c'uwz c'iyz   ɑn də wey tuw də c'ərc']

Czech changed to choose cheese on the way to the church.

(7) [də bɔy   ɪnˈzɔy wɔc' ɪn də kɔk   ˈwɛgɪn teylz ɪn də zuw]

The boys enjoy watching the cocks wagging tails in the zoo.

(8) [fliyz fley fʊtbɔl   wid   biytə ɛn bab]

Please play football with Peter and Bob.

Certain types of mistakes in pronunciation of Vietnamese speakers of English can be found in the above utterances, such as dropping ending sounds, forgetting aspiration, but the most noticeable is the mispronunciation of certain sounds. Specifically, there are replacements of one sound with another, like / θ/ with /th/, /ð/with /d/, /ʒ/ with /z/, /tʃ/ with /c'/, /dʒ/ with /z/, /p/with /f/ and /b/, /ɜr / with /ə/, and /æ/ with /ɛ/. This is the common trend of Vietnamese speakers of English when they produce English in the spoken form. And this causes much unintelligibility for non-Vietnamese people who are not used to this phenomenon because some of these sounds are contrastive sounds and some of them do not exist in English. There are

many factors contributing to this negative transfer, but the main factor is the discrepancy between the two sound systems of Vietnamese and English.

3. VIETNAMESE VERSUS ENGLISH SOUNDS

To know more about the differences between the two languages, let's observe the systems of consonant sounds and vowel sounds in Vietnamese and in English.

3.1. Vietnamese Sound System

Vietnamese Consonants

In Vietnamese, there are 23 initial consonant phonemes, including /p/ and /r/ which only occur in some words borrowed from European languages in the Hanoi dialect. The sound /r/ is also found in some other dialects of Vietnamese. Most of the sounds have the same symbols as the letters they represent. They are /b/, /f/ (ph), /v/, /m/, /t/, /d/ (đ), /th / (th), /s/ (x), /z/ (d), /n/, /l/, / ʈ / (tr), /ʃ/ (s), / ʐ / (gi, r), /c'/ (ch), / ɲ / (nh), /k/ (c, k, q), /ɣ/ (g), /χ/ (kh), / ŋ / (ng), /h/, /p/, /r/ (Ngo, 2001, p. 8). They are classified according to the manners and places of articulation. The following table shows the Vietnamese consonant system excerpted from Ngo (2001, p. 8).

Table 1: Vietnamese consonants

Manner of Articulation		Place of Articulation					
		Labial	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	Voiceless	/p/	/t/	/ʈ/	/c'/	/k/	
Stop	Voiced	/b/	/d/				
Stop	Voiceless Aspirated		/tʰ/				
Fricative	Voiceless	/f/	/s/	/ʃ/		/χ/	/h/
Fricative	Voiced	/v/	/z/	/ʐ/		/ɣ/	
Nasal	Voiced	/m/	/n/		/ɲ/	/ŋ/	
Lateral	Voiced		/l/				
Rolled	Voiced		/r/				

Vietnamese vowels

There are eleven nuclear monophthong vowels: /i/, /e/ (ê), /ɛ/ (e), /ɷ/ (ư), /ə:/ (ơ), /ə/ (â), /a:/ (a), /a/ (ă), /u/, /o/ (ô), /ɔ/ (o) and three nuclear diphthongs: /ie/ (iê/ia), /ɷə/ (ươ/ưa), /uo/ (uô/ua) (Ngo, 2001, p. 9). The term nuclear vowels or nuclear diphthongs refer to constituents that are compulsory in the structure of the Vietnamese syllable.

Table 2: Vietnamese vowels

Place Manner	Front	Central	Back
High	/i/	/ɷ/	/u/
Mid	/e/	/ə:/, /ə/	/o/
Low	/ɛ/		/ɔ/
		/a:/, /a/	

Vietnamese Final Consonants

The Vietnamese phonetic system has six final consonants: /p/, /t/, /k/ (c/ch), /m/, /n/, / ŋ / (ng/nh) and two final semivowels: /i/ (i/y), /u/ (o/u) (Ngo, 2001, p. 9).

3.2. English Sound System

English consonants

There are 25 consonant sounds in English. They are also categorized according to manners and places of articulation (Celce- Murcia, Briton and Goodwin, 1996, p. 47)

Table 3: English consonants

Manner of articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop							
Voiceless	/p/			/t/		/k/	
Voiced	/b/			/d/		/g/	
Fricative							
Voiceless		/f/	/ θ/	/s/	/ ʃ/		/h/
Voiced		/v/	/ð/	/z/	/ ʒ/		
Affricate							
Voiceless					/tʃ/		
Voiced					/dʒ/		
Nasal							
Voiced	/m/			/n/		/ ŋ /	

Liquid				/ɫ/
Voiced			/l/ (/r/)	/r/
Glide				
Voiceless	/hw/			/y/
Voiced	/w/			

English vowels

There are 15 stressed vowels in English. Twelve of these are simple vowels (/iy/, /ɪ/, /ey/, /ɛ/, /æ/, /ɜʳ /, /ʌ/, /ɑ/, /uw/, /ʊ/, /ow/, and /ɔ/) and three are diphthongs (/ay/, /aw/, and /ɔy/). These simple vowels can be classified as in the following chart (Celce- Murcia et al., 1996, p. 94), which can be seen in the table below.

Table 4: English vowels

Manner \ Place	Front	Central	Back
High	/iy/		/uw/
	/ɪ/		/ʊ/
Mid	/ey/	/ɜʳ /	/ow/
	/ɛ/	/ʌ/	
Low	/æ/	/ɑ/	/ɔ/

From the tables above, we can see there are some sounds in English that do not exist in Vietnamese. They are/ð/, /θ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ɜr / and /æ/. However, there are some sounds in Vietnamese /d/, /th/, /z, /c'/, /z/, /ə/ and /ɛ/ that have somehow similar ways of pronunciations. More details about places and manners of articulation for these sounds in English and in substituted sounds in Vietnamese will be provided below so that readers can have some ideas about why Vietnamese learners of English have the tendency of using those sounds instead of English sounds.

4. THE MECHANISMS OF THE VIETNAMESE SOUNDS VERSUS THE ENGLISH SOUNDS THAT ARE MISPRONOUNCED

4.1. /th/ versus / θ/

The Vietnamese alveolar stop /th/ is pronounced nearly the same as the allophone /t/ in word initial position or at the beginning of a stressed syllable in English. It is "aspirated and sounds as if both /t/ and /h/ are involved and connected respectively but immediately" (Duong, 2009, p. 44).

The voiceless dental fricative / θ/ is pronounced with the tip of the tongue in between teeth. The soft palate being raised and the nasal resonator shut off, the tip and rims of the tongue contact lightly with the upper incisors' edge and inner surface and more firmly with the upper teeth, and the air stream escapes between the forward surface of the tongue and the incisors, causing friction (Ha, 2005).

4.2. /d/ versus /ð/

The Vietnamese alveolar stop sound /d/ is produced like /d/ in English. The soft palate is raised and the nasal resonator is shut off. The tip and the rims of the tongue and the upper alveolar ridge and side teeth make a closure forming the primary obstacle to the air stream, and the air from the lungs is compressed behind this closure. During this stage, the vocal cords may vibrate for all or part of the compression stage according to its situation in the utterance. The air escapes with noise when the tongue is suddenly separated from the alveolar ridge (Ha, 2005).

The voiced dental fricative /ð/ is pronounced in the same manner and place of articulation as the voiceless dental fricative / θ/, but with the vocal cords vibrating.

4.3. /ʒ/ versus /z/

The alveolar fricative /z/ exists in both Vietnamese and English sound system. It is produced with the soft palate raised and the nasal resonator shut off. The tongue tip and the tongue blade slightly touch the upper alveolar ridge while the side tongue rims closely contact with the upper side teeth. Air is forced through the narrow groove in the center of the tongue, causing friction between the tongue and the alveolar ridge (Ha, 2005).

The palatal fricative /ʒ/ is produced with the tongue in a position slightly further back than that for /z/. The air is also forced through a narrow passage along the centre of the tongue as in /z/, but the passage is a little wider, and friction between the tongue and the alveolar ridge occurs (Ha, 2005).

4.4. /c'/ versus /tʃ/

The Vietnamese voiceless palatal stop /c'/ is produced with surface blade of the tongue against the front hard palate while the soft palate is raised and the nasal resonator is shut off. The flow of air is stopped in the mouth prior to release.

The voiceless palatal affricate /tʃ/ is articulated when the soft palate is raised and the nasal resonator is shut off. The tip, blade, and rims of the tongue make a closure with the upper alveolar ridge and side teeth, blocking the air stream. Meanwhile, the front of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate and ready for the fricative release. The closure is slowly released, and the air escapes diffusely over the whole central surface of the tongue with friction. The vocal cords are wide apart for /ʃ/ during both stop and fricative stages (Duong, 2009, p. 43).

4.5. /z/ versus /dʒ/

As described as in *4.3.* above, when the alveolar fricative /z/ is produced, the soft palate is raised, and the nasal resonator is closed. The tongue tip and the tongue blade lightly touch the upper alveolar ridge, while the side tongue rims are in close contact with the upper teeth. There is friction between the tongue and the alveolar ridge due to air being forced through the narrow groove in the center of the tongue.

The voiced palatal affricate /dʒ/ is produced like the voiceless palatal affricate /tʃ/, but the vocal cords are vibrating with voice from the throat (Duong, 2009, p. 43).

4.6. /f/, /b/ and /p/

The Vietnamese voiceless labial fricative /f/ is pronounced the same as the English voiceless labiodental fricative /f/. It is produced with the soft palate raised and the nasal resonator shut off. The lower lip's inner surface contacts with the upper teeth' edge lightly allowing the air to escape with friction (Ha, 2005).

The mechanism of the Vietnamese voiced labial stop /b/is the same as that of the English sound /b/. The sound /b/ is pronounced while the soft palate is being raised, and the nasal resonator is shut off. The lips are closed, causing the primary obstacle of the air-stream. The air from the lungs is compressed behind the lips' closure. Then suddenly this closure is released for the air to escape with explosion and with the vocal cords vibrating (Ha, 2005).

The English voiceless bilabial stop /p/ has the same manner of articulation as that of /b/, but the vocal cords do not vibrate during the stage of articulation.

4.7. /ə/ versus /ɜr /

The way of pronouncing the Vietnamese mid-central vowel /ə/ is the same as the way of pronouncing the English schwa /ə/ which appears in thousands of words in English. The sound /ə/ is produced with the tongue in a relaxed manner and in the central (neutral) position, with the tip of tongue gently touching lower front teeth. The lips and the jaw are relaxed and neutral (English, 2008).

The mid- central vowel sound /ɜr / is the vowel /ʌ/ when it is followed by /r/ and is colored by /r/ (Celce- Murcia et al., 1996, pp. 105). For example, the word hut is pronounced as /hʌt/, but hurt is pronounced as /hɜr t/ as there is /r/ following the vowel /ʌ/.The sound /ɜr /is articulated with the tongue in the central, but in a lower position than the sound /ə/, for /ɜ/ and then the tongue is rolled up and back for /r/.

4.8. /ɛ/ versus /æ/

Like the English mid-front vowel /ɛ/, the Vietnamese mid-front vowel /ɛ/ is lax and pronounced with the tongue in mid- front centered position. The lips are slightly spread, and the jaw opens wider than that of the sound /ey/ (Celce- Murcia et al., 1996, p.103).

The low- front vowel /æ/ is articulated with the tongue in a lower position than /ɛ/. The lips are spread, and the jaw is slightly more open than /ɛ/ and may lower a little during the articulation (Celce- Murcia et al., 1996, p.103). And the most importantly, "the tip of the tongue is against the bottom teeth" (Avery and Ehrlich, 1992, p. 99).

5. REASONS FOR AND SUGGESTIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE SOUND REPLACEMENT PHENOMENON

5.1. Interference of Their Mother Tongue

Problems in learning pronunciation of the foreign sounds always emerge from the differences between the phonemic systems of the mother tongue and the target language, the language one is trying to learn (Ercan, 2018). The sound system of Vietnamese has very little in common with English, which means that there are strange sounds in English for Vietnamese learners of English. Naturally, Vietnamese learners find it hard to pronounce them correctly. Although human beings' vocal apparatus can produce hundreds of different sounds, it is still extremely difficult for us to master a foreign language's sound system because we are not trained to produce and recognize the phonemes and the distinctive sound features of that particular language (Hoang, 1965, p.6).

The basic problem arises not only because of the difficulties in the features of the target language but also because of the first language habits. The way English speakers pronounce their native sounds is totally different from the deep-seated way Vietnamese speakers do, making it more difficult for Vietnamese learners to achieve appropriate English pronunciation. This is to say, the mechanisms for some English sounds are different from those for Vietnamese sounds. And because Vietnamese mechanisms are used to make these sounds, Vietnamese find it hard to adjust their cavity mechanisms to pronounce these foreign sounds. Hoang (1965) says that "we are so imprisoned in our speech habits that we cannot learn a foreign language with ease" and that "these muscular habits are so marvelously formed that the speaker can hardly produce any other sounds than his own tongue" (Hoang 1965, pp. 6-7). Therefore, they have the tendency of using the available sounds which are similar or nearly similar to replace foreign sounds. This happens even to people who have good knowledge of English sounds. They know clearly about the rules of pronouncing, but there is interference from the mother tongue habits when speaking English. The analysis and explanations below will provide more information about that tendency

5.1.1. /tʰ/ versus / θ/

Because there is not the sound / θ/ in Vietnamese, Vietnamese learners are not used to this dental sound, and failure to put the tongue between the teeth, but just on the inner surface of the teeth, will make them produce /th/ rather than / θ/. The words thick and tick are pronounced almost the same /thik /, and thin and tin, / th in/ by Vietnamese learners of English.

5.1.2. /d/ versus /ð/

From *4.2.*, we can see that failure to put the tongue tip on the inner surface of the upper front teeth, but on the tooth ridge, will cause learners to pronounce /d/ rather than /ð/. Vietnamese learners will pronounce the words than and Dan (a person's name) with the same sound form /dæn/, and *they* /ðey/ and *then* /ðɛn/ would be produced like *day* /dey/ and *den* /dɛn/ respectively.

5.1.3. /ʒ/ versus /z/

As we can see, the descriptions of manners of articulation between these two sounds above, they are both fricatives. The difference here is the slightly backward position of the tongue. If the learners fail to pull the tongue a little bit backward, they will pronounce /z/ not /ʒ/. Therefore, the words beige and bays will be pronounced the same as /beyz/ by a Vietnamese learner of English.

5.1.4. /c'/ versus /tʃ/

As described above, the manner of articulation for /tʃ/ begins with a plosive stop sound and finishes with a fricative sound. First the tongue touches the ridge of the upper front teeth for the stop /t/, and then the tongue tip moves to the palate for the fricative /ʃ/ to release. Learners mispronounce these two sounds because they fail to make /tʃ/ palatal and affricate, but instead, they make it plosive stop because they are influenced by the stop /t/. As a result, they pronounce /tʃ/ like the palatal stop /c'/ in Vietnamese. The verb *cheat* in English is pronounced the same as the Vietnamese noun *chít* (onomatopoeia for the noise that a mouse makes) /c'it/.

5.1.5. /z/ versus /dʒ/

Vietnamese learners of English find it hard to pronounce / dʒ/, for which they have to make great effort to place their tongue at the point to make a plosive /d/ then quickly move their

tongue a little back to make a fricative /ʒ/. They often change /dʒ /into /z/" (Duong, 2009, p. 46). Therefore, the word Jap will be pronounced /zæp/ (zap), not /dʒæp/, not counting the mispronunciation of the vowel sound /æ/, by Vietnamese learners.

5.1.6. /f/, /b/ and /p /

As discussed above, /p/ is one of the final consonants in Vietnamese and just appears at the beginning of a word in some borrowed words like *đèn pin* 'flashlight'. Normally, the Vietnamese /p/ does not occur in word- initial position. Although /p/ is not a foreign sound to Vietnamese speakers, it is hard for them to pronounce /p/ when it is at the initial position of a word or a stressed syllable.

If learners try to aspirate the sound /p/, they often tend to use the Vietnamese sound /f/ to replace. The difference between the ways of articulating the sounds /p/ and /f/ is the contact of the lips or that of the upper teeth and the inner surface of the lower lip. Failure to put the lips together will make the /p/ sound like /f/. Vietnamese students may pronounce *plan* and *flan* the same as /flæn/.

And when not aspirating or failing to aspirate the sound /p/, Vietnamese learners have the tendency of substituting the available sound /b/ for /p/. These sounds are produced differently just in that the vocal cords vibrate for /b/, but not for /p/. If learners do not pay attention to the non-vibration of the vocal cords, they will pronounce /b/ instead of /p/. Therefore, the word *pet* and *bet* may be pronounced as /bɛt/.

5.1.7. /ə/ versus /ɜʳ /

We can see in *4.7.* that /ɜʳ /is articulated with the tongue at a lower position than that of the sound /ə/ as the result of the coloring effect created by the following sound /r/. It means that while pronouncing /ɜʳ /, we start by putting the tongue at the position of /ʌ/and then lower it down a little bit while pulling it back for the sound /r/. If learners fail to curl the tongue back for /r/, the sound would be like /ə/, and this causes difficulty for the listeners to know what word is being said. For example, the word *bird* is pronounced as /bəd/, not /bɜʳ d/, which makes it hard for listeners to understand.

5.1.8. /ɛ/ versus /æ/

In the description of mechanisms of these two sounds above, we can see some similarities between them. However, the differences in the position of the jaw and in the amount of lip spreading are noticeable. "To produce /ɛ/, the jaw remains relatively stationary in its mid-position and the lips are slightly spread, whereas to produce /æ/, the tongue and jaw are lower or drop slightly during articulation, and there may be more pronounced lip spreading" (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996, p. 99). Vietnamese learners usually pronounce these sounds in almost the same way because most commonly, they "fail to lower their tongue and jaw far enough in attempting to produce the /æ/ sound" (Avery and Ehrlich, 1992, p. 99). These words sad /sæd/, bad /bæd/, and bat/bæt/ are usually pronounced the same as the words said /sɛd/, *bed* /bɛd/, and *bet* /bɛt/ respectively.

5.2. An insufficient understanding of the pronunciation mechanisms of target language sounds

Another reason for the replacement of foreign sounds with native language sounds is that learners are not well-equipped with the knowledge of the pronunciation mechanism of the target language sounds. Therefore, they fail to distinguish the differences between the foreign sounds and their counterparts. Sound mispronunciation may be the results of the learners' misperception of difficult sounds. To learn a language is to learn how to control the speech organs to produce the new language's peculiar sounds. The learning process are more challenging with some sounds pronounced with speech organs invisible in the pharyngeal cavity the movements of which are far back there and hard to see, and thus more difficult to control (Ha, 2005). If teachers are not aware of this matter and do not use correct ways to help students practice these sounds, or the teachers ignore the accuracy of their students' pronunciation, learners will easily transfer these sounds to Vietnamese sounds as a matter of convenience. Of course, it is not easy to speak like a native speaker. However, they at least speak intelligible English to others.

5.3. Late Age of Learning and Less Exposure to Native Speakers

The age of Vietnamese learners and the lack of opportunities to be exposed to native speakers of English also contribute to their incorrect pronunciation of English. As people age, it becomes

increasingly difficult to acquire intelligible pronunciation of a target foreign language (Gilakjani & Ahmadi, 2011). Research has shown that if the learners of a foreign language start to study it at an early age, they are likely to have native like pronunciation. In contrast, if the learners are older, they will have the tendency of using their first language sounds for foreign sounds because they are deeply influenced by their mother tongue. Most Vietnamese people, due to the inconvenient conditions, usually start to study English when they are grown up, i.e. not until sixteen- when they are in the first year at high school. There are a small number of people who have enough good conditions to begin learning English at an early age. This means that most of them do not have the opportunities to study English at the right time. In recent years, Vietnamese students have been given early teaching of English. Hopefully, English pronunciation of Vietnamese learners will be much better.

In addition, pronunciation difficulties are directly linked to lack of contact with native speakers and little exposure to English speaking environment (Ercan, 2018). Also as cited in Schaetzel (2009), Moyer (2007) found that a combination of experience and positive orientation to the language appear to be important factors in developing native-like pronunciation. However, Vietnamese learners of English do not have such important factors. Although there have been more and more foreigners coming to Vietnam nowadays thanks to the open policy, Vietnamese learners rarely have opportunities to interact with native speakers in real communication or have no chance to speak to a foreigner, especially learners in rural areas and small cities. As a result, the chances for them to get familiar and then imitate the sounds are deprived, and their pronunciations are mother tongue oriented as a matter of lack of true models.

5.4. Teachers' Less Focus on Students' Correct Pronunciations and Much Attention to Their Grammatical Accuracy

Another reason is that teachers ignore students' incorrect pronunciations, and they just pay close attention to students' grammatical accuracy. "While it is true to say that Vietnamese people are very good at grammar and seldom make grammar mistakes, their attitude towards pronunciation and pronunciation mistakes is quite different" (Duong, 2009, p. 41). In Vietnam, if a learner speaks a sentence ungrammatically, they will be considered bad at English. And his pronunciation errors will be disregarded if his sentence is grammatically acceptable. There is

a tacit agreement among Vietnamese learners of English about the ways of pronouncing English sounds. "Very few people care about some common pronunciation mistakes that they often make as the result of the mother tongue interference or lack of knowledge of how the sounds are produced" (Duong, 2009, p. 41). This agreement among Vietnamese learners of English has indulged them in their mistakes until it becomes their habit that is difficult to be changed, and this degrades the standard of English in Vietnam. Vietnamese speakers can understand each other when they speak Vietnamese English, but other listeners find it hard to understand. In fact, those attitudes about mistakes in pronunciation and in grammar of Vietnamese contribute a large part to the mispronunciation of English sounds. Besides. lack of chances to speak to native speakers and everyday exposure to Vietnamese speakers of English both make Vietnamese learners think that what they are speaking is acceptable.

Moreover, the assessment of English in Vietnam is only paper based. Except for in university education, students of English are not tested on their speaking ability even on final exams, on the graduation exam or entrance exams. This the reason why pronunciation is ignored by Vietnamese learners and even by teachers.

6. SUGGESTIVE SOLUTIONS TO THE PROBLEM

The reasons of the sound substitution phenomenon are both objective and subjective. While some objective reasons are out of control of teachers, some subjective reasons can be solved by teachers to help students have better pronunciation of English. Below are some suggestions for teachers to refer to when teaching pronunciation.

   a. As cited in Hoang (1965, p. 3), talking about the success of teaching, Gauntlett (1961) said "the teacher should have a complete knowledge of the structure of the language to be taught and of the students' vernacular." Therefore, teachers should master the sound systems and other pronunciation features of both English and Vietnamese, and full phonetic qualities of the new sounds and adequate drill need to be described to students to help them be able to control their speech organs to make sound patterns of the target language to obtain new habits for oral production and aural reception (Hoang, 1965).

   b. Students should be taught by giving them chances to listen to and imitate native speakers' sounds from a cassette player or a video tape.

c. Use motion pictures of mechanisms when the sounds are produced to teach students individual sounds so that they can have profound knowledge of the sounds they learn.

d. In drilling the new sounds, the teacher should help students start from the native sound having the closest place of articulation with the new sound and then glide or change to the position of the new sound (Hoang, 1965, p. 90).

e. Minimal pairs of the contrastive sounds should be given to the students so that they can practice and distinguish the differences between these sounds.

f. In controlled practice, a wide variety of exercises, such as, repetition, replacing sounds, contrasting sounds should be provided to students to help them get familiar with the new sounds.

g. More free practice should be provided to the students, especially via games or fun activities.

h. Mistakes should be identified, explained, and corrected frequently, either directly or indirectly. This can be done mostly by the teacher and sometimes by the students.

7. CONCLUSION

This study talked about the why Vietnamese-accented phenomenon and the reasons of it as well as suggested solutions to help learners reduce it. Vietnamese learners of English produce English sounds in the Vietnamese way because of some objective and subjective reasons. They are the non-existence of these sounds in the mother tongue, the lack of knowledge of the manners and the places of articulation of the foreign sounds, the learners' late age of learning and inadequate opportunities to be exposed to a native English language environment, and the unsatisfactory attention to learners' mistakes of pronunciation as well. The contrastive study of the two languages is needed to help students to distinguish the similarities and differences between the English sounds and their counterparts in Vietnamese so that students can have correct pronunciation of the target language. In addition, appropriate techniques should be employed to help students pronounce English sounds more correctly, and above all, so that they can produce intelligible English when communicating in real life situations. These solutions can be applicable to teaching other English learners whose native language is other than Vietnamese.

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