Mistake or Vietnamese English

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Abstract. It is undeniable that English has become the most popular foreign language in Vietnam nowadays. Nevertheless, among the millions of people speaking English in Vietnam, there are many people who make mistakes in pronunciation. This creates some typical features of so-called "Vietnamese English". This paper focuses on the mistakes made by Vietnamese users of English when pronouncing the four English sounds /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. Reasons for the mistakes and some tentative suggestions to mitigate the problem are then discussed. The mistakes are identified in terms of both wrong manner of articulation and wrong place of articulation of the sounds. It is argued that the mistakes can be explained in terms of inadequate knowledge of the articulation of the sounds and, more importantly, the interference of the mother tongue. Suggestions for effective ways to overcome the difficulty include: careful instruction in how to pronounce the sounds, comparative and contrastive analysis of the phonetic features of the sounds in English and those of the similar sounds in Vietnamese, and more emphasis on drills and practice..

1. Rationale

The English language has become the international language for communication, and is used widely in many countries in the world. In Vietnam, English is the most popular foreign language to be used as a means of communication. English is spoken by many Vietnamese and is considered a necessity for those who are studying or doing research and for those who are working in places like foreign companies, holiday resorts, banks (such as ANZ Bank and Commonwealth Bank), hotels, souvenir shops, universities, colleges, schools and other public places.

Despite the widespread emphasis on the acquisition and use of English, 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. 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. Pronunciation mistakes are often considered less important and even ignored. For example, it seems that there is no perceived problem when someone pronounces '*essential*' as /isensl/ instead of /isenʃl/. In fact, mispronunciation such as this may make it difficult for the listener hard to understand what the speaker is saying, and this sometimes leads to failure in comprehension.

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Over many years of teaching English to Vietnamese learners, the writer of this paper has observed that there are quite a number of Vietnamese learners and users of English who make such pronunciation mistakes. Being fully aware of the necessity of correcting mistakes for Vietnamese learners of English, the writer of this paper has presented in this paper findings concerning the reasons for those mistakes and how they might be avoided. Among the common pronunciation mistakes of Vietnamese learners are the mistakes of pronouncing two English fricatives /ʃ/, /ʒ/ and two English affricatives /dʒ/ and /tʃ/. These sounds are very confusing for many Vietnamese learners of English. A brief description of some features of consonants in English and in Vietnamese with restriction to the Hanoi dialect and discussion of the mistakes are presented in the next sections of the paper.

2. Consonants in English and Vietnamese

2.1. English consonants

There are 24 consonants in the English consonant system (Table 1), among which /s/ and /z/ are alveolar fricative sounds, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are post alveolar or alveo-palatal or palatal alveolar fricatives, /dʒ/ and /tʃ/ are palato-alveolar or alveo-palatal affricatives. Most of these consonants in English can be used as the initial, middle and final consonants, e.g. *cheap* /tʃi:p/, *measure* /meʒə/, *teach* /ti:tʃ/. These sounds are often confused by Vietnamese learners of English, so they are highlighted here in Table 1 and their different features of production are described in table 2.

Table 1. English consonants

Manner of articulation	Voice	Place of articulation						
		Labial	Labio-dental	Inter-dental	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	voiceless	p			t		k	ʔ
	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	
Approximant	voiced	w			r	j		
Lateral	voiced				l			

● Production of alveolar fricative /s/ and /z/

As can be seen in Table 1, /s/ is a fortis or voiceless, alveolar fricative, articulated with the soft palate being raised and the nasal resonator shut off, the tip and the blade of the tongue making a slight contact with the upper alveolar ridge, and the side rims of the tongue making a close contact with the upper side teeth. The air stream escapes through the narrow groove in the center of the tongue and the alveolar ridge. The sound produced is comparatively tense [1].

The difference between /S/ and /z/ lies in the fact that, while /s/ is a fortis (or voiceless), e.g. *sip, rice* and *facing*, /z/ is a lenis (or voiced) with voice from the throat, e.g. *zip, rise* and *phrasing*. Both /s/ and /z/ can be found in initial, medial and final positions.

● Production of alveo-palatal fricative /ʃ/ and /ʒ/

When producing /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, their articulation is partly palatal and partly alveolar. The tongue is in contact with an area slightly further back than that for /s/ and /z/. In addition,

the escape of air is diffuse compared with /s/ and /z/. The friction occurs between a more extensive area of the tongue and the roof of the mouth. /ʃ/ is voiceless, e.g. *ship, Russia*, whereas /ʒ/ is voiced with voice from the throat, e.g. *measure, garage*. /ʃ/ is common and widely-distributed but /ʒ/ is not. The distribution of /ʒ/ is more limited as "very few English words begin with /ʒ/ (most of them have come into the language comparatively recently from French) and not many end with this consonant. More typically /ʒ/ is found to occur medially, in words such as "*measure*", and "*usual*" [1].

● Production of alveo-palatal affricate /tʃ/and/dʒ/

These are the only two alveo-palatal affricate phonemes in English [1]. In the articulation of /tʃ/and/dʒ/, the soft palate is raised, the nasal resonator is shut off, obstacle to the air stream is formed by a closure made between the tip, blade, and rims of the tongue and the upper alveolar ridge and side teeth. At the same time, the front of the tongue is raised towards the hard palate in readiness for the fricative release. The closure is released slowly, the air escaping in a diffuse manner over the whole of the central surface of the tongue with friction occurring between the blade/ front region of the tongue and the alveolar/ front palatal section of the roof of the mouth. During both stop and fricative stages, the vocal cords are wide apart for /ʃ/, but may be vibrating for all or part of /ʒ/ according to the situation of utterance. /tʃ/is voiceless but /dʒ/ is voiced with voice from the throat.

The similarities and differences of one sound in comparison with other sounds can be interpreted from Table 2 as follows.

Table 2. Similarity and Difference of English consonants

Sound		Voice		Manner of articulation		Place of articulation	
		Same	Different	Same	Different	Same	Different
/s/	- /z/		✓	✓		✓	
	- /ʃ/	✓		✓			✓
	- /ʒ/		✓	✓			✓
	- /tʃ/		✓		✓		✓
	- /dʒ/		✓		✓		✓
/z/	- /ʃ/		✓	✓			✓
	- /ʒ/	✓		✓			✓
	- /tʃ/		✓		✓		✓
	- /dʒ/		✓		✓		✓
				✓			
/ʃ/	- /ʒ/		✓	✓		✓	
	- /tʃ/	✓			✓		✓
	- /dʒ/		✓		✓		✓
/ʒ/	- /tʃ/		✓		✓		✓
	- /dʒ/	✓			✓		✓
/tʃ/	- /dʒ/		✓	✓		✓	

2.2. Vietnamese consonants

In Vietnamese, consonants are classified into 22 initial consonants and 6 final consonants according to the positions of the consonant in a word (see Table 3 and Table 4). Vietnamese /s/ and /z/ are alveolar fricatives, and /ʂ/ and /ʐ/ are alveo-palatal fricatives. In the initial consonant system, most sounds are not much different from English sounds in terms of pronunciation. However, it is necessary to mention some differences here. First of all, unlike the English consonant system, there is no affricate in Vietnamese. The Vietnamese /tʰ/ is

aspirated and sounds as if both /t/ and /h/ are involved and connected respectively but immediately, and found only in the initial position. /ć/ and /ɲ/ are typical Vietnamese sounds as they are produced by the contact between the surface palate of the tongue and the hard palate (front of the palate for /ć/ and the middle of the palate for /ɲ/). These features of Vietnamese consonants should be taken into consideration when teaching pronunciation for Vietnamese learners of English as they may tend to affect the pronunciation of English sounds.

Table 3. Vietnamese initial consonants

Place of articulation/Manner of articulation			Labial	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	Aspirated			tʰ				
	Un-aspirated	voiceless		t	ʈ	ć	k	ʔ
		voiced	b	d				
	Nasal		m	n		ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative	Voiceless		f	s	ʂ		x	h
	Voiced		v	z	ʐ		ɣ	
	Nasal			I				

Table 4. Vietnamese final consonants

Place of articulation/Manner of articulation	Labial	Alveolar	Velar
Stop	p	t	k
Nasal	m	n	ŋ

Although there are final consonants in Vietnamese, they are never pronounced or heard. That is the reason why Vietnamese learners of English often omit final consonants of words in English.

Theoretically, there are alveo-palatal in Vietnamese, but in practice, /ʈ/, /ʂ/, /ʐ/ are not

used by people of Hanoi and in its neighbouring areas. /ʈ/, /ʂ/ are more often used in the central and southern regions of Vietnam. The following table (Table 5) presents the consonants of the Hanoi dialect, in which there are fricatives.

Table 5. Vietnamese initial consonants of the Hanoi[*] dialect
(*Hanoi is the capital of Vietnam, located in the North of Vietnam)*

Place of articulation/Manner of articulation		Labial	Alveolar	Alveo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop	Aspirated			tʼ			
	Un-aspirated voiceless		t		ć	k	ʔ
	voiced	b	d				
	Nasal	m	n		ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative	Voiceless	f	**s**			x	h
	Voiced	v	**z**			ɣ	
	Nasal		I				

2.3. Some distinctive similarities and differences

The distinctive similarities and differences between English and Vietnamese consonants under study are as follows:

- Both consonant systems have fricatives /s/. /z/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ (equivalent to Vietnamese /z/).

- Unlike English, Vietnamese consonant system does not include any affricates.

- Vietnamese consonants are found in the initial or final positions of a word, but the final consonants are never heard. The English consonants under investigation are often heard and pronounced in three positions: initial, medial and final, except /ʒ/, which is rarely found in the initial position.

3. Some common mistakes

Many Vietnamese learners and users of English make mistakes in pronouncing the above mentioned consonants. They often confuse these sounds with other sounds. Here, the confusing sounds are classified into 4 pairs:

1- /ʃ/-/s/

2- /ʒ/-/z/

3- /dʒ/-/z/ or /s/

4- /tʃ/- Vietnamese/ć/.

The confusion of these sounds is due to four main reasons:

(1) Failure in distinguishing the differences

(2) Influence of the mother tongue

(3) Perceptions of mistakes

(4) Inadequate drills and practice and is discussed by comparing the 4 above-mentioned sound pairs.

Sound pair /ʃ/ - /s/

For the first pair, /ʃ/ is often pronounced as /s/ due to:

- Failure in distinguishing the difference between the two sounds.

- Negative influence of the mother tongue: the learners are too much affected by the way they pronounce the Vietnamese /ʂ/ in their Hanoi dialect /s/, thus do not attempt to pronounce these two sounds differently although they are well aware of the difference.

Examples:

She /ʃi:/ is often pronounced incorrectly as /si:/ in *sea*. The same mistakes occur with *nation, intonation, should, shut, push, share, finish, astonish*, etc. It is really funny if /ʃ/ is pronounced as /s/ in the following sentence: *She sells sea shells on the sea shore*.

Learners fail to distinguish between a voiceless alveo-palatal fricative /ʃ/ and a voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. The similarities and differences between these sounds can be described as follows.

Sound	Voice	Manner of articulation	Place of articulation
/ʃ/	voiceless	fricative	alveo-palatal
/s/	voiceless	fricative	alveolar

These two sounds are both voiceless fricatives and alveolar. When learners make a mistake, they fail to make /ʃ/ palatal. The feature that makes /ʃ/different from /s/ is that while /s/ is alveolar with the tongue touching the inside of the lower front teeth, the blade touching the inside of the upper teeth and the air escapes through a narrow passage along the centre of the tongue, and the sound is produced comparatively tense, /ʃ/ is alveo-palatal, the place of articulation is partially palatal and partially alveolar. The tongue is in contact with an area slightly further back than that for /s/ and the air escapes through a passage along the centre of the tongue as in /s/, but the passage is a little wider [1]. Most RP speakers have rounded lips for /ʃ/, but in reality the roundness of the lips depends on the surrounding sounds [2].

Sound pair /ʒ/-/z/

With Hanoi dialect, many of Vietnamese learners of English fail to pronounce /ʒ/ as a fricative sound. Instead they pronounce it as /z/. This is due to the fact that in Vietnamese, the fricatives are not used (Table 5) although formal Vietnamese consonants include fricative consonants (Table 3). Thus, all these fricative consonants in English are pronounced as Vietnamese /z/. For examples: *measure, pleasure.*

Sound	Voice	Manner of articulation	Place of articulation
/ʒ/	voiced	fricative	alveo-palatal
/z/	voiced	fricative	alveolar

These two sounds are both voiced fricatives and alveolar. When learners make a mistake, they fail to make /ʒ / palatal. The feature that makes /ʒ/different from /z/ is that while /z/ is alveolar with the tongue touching the inside of

the lower front teeth, the blade touching the inside of the upper teeth and the air escapes through a narrow passage along the centre of the tongue, and the sound is produced comparatively tense, /ʒ/ is alveo-palatal, the place of articulation is partially palatal and partially alveolar. The tongue is in contact with an area slightly further back than that for /z/ and the air escapes through a passage along the centre of the tongue as in /z/, but the passage is a little wider [1]. Most RP speakers have rounded lips for /ʒ/, but in reality the roundness of the lips depends on the surrounding sounds [2].

Sound pair /ʤ/-/z/ (or /s/)

As mentioned above, there are no affricates in the Vietnamese consonant system so many Vietnamese learners of English find it hard to pronounce /ʤ/, 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 /ʤ/into /z/ or /s/. Thus, *judge* /ʤʌʤ/is pronounced /zʌz/ or /zʌs/. Mistakes can also be found in the pronunciation of *job, general, danger, object, age, village,* etc.

Sound	Voice	Manner of articulation	Place of articulation
/ʤ/	voiced	fricative	alveo-palatal
/z/	voiced	fricative	alveolar
/s/	voiceless	fricative	alveolar

When learners make a mistake, they fail to make /ʤ/ palatal and voiced. As discussed above, /s/ and /z/ are pronounced differently from /ʤ/, whose production starts with a plosive stop sound and finishes with a fricative sound. First the tongue touches the ridge of the upper front teeth for /d/, but instead of releasing quickly for a plosive sound like /d/, the tip of the tongue moves (further back than that for /z/) to the place for the fricative /ʒ/. Most RP speakers have rounded lips for /ʤ/, but in

reality the roundness of the lips depends on the surrounding sounds [2].

Sound pair /ʧ/- Vietnamese/ć/

As described in table 4 and 5, Vietnamese /ć/ is produced by the contact of the blade of the tongue against the front part of hard palate, voiceless and aspirated, whilst the English /ʧ/ is produced as a palato-alveolar consonant and voiceless with the tongue rolls a little bit. What causes the confusion is indicated in the table below.

Sound	Voice	Manner of articulation	Place of articulation
/ʧ/	voiceless	affricate	alveo-palatal
/ć/	voiceless	stop	palatal

When learners make a mistake, they fail to make /ʧ/ alveolar and affricate, but instead, they make it plosive stop. Like /ʤ/, /ʧ/ is produced beginning with a plosive stop sound and finishing with a fricative sound. First the tongue touches the ridge of the upper front teeth for /t/, then instead of releasing quickly for a plosive sound like /t/, the tip of the tongue moves (further back than that for /s/) to the place for the fricative /ʃ/. Most RP speakers have rounded lips for /ʧ/, but in reality the roundness of the lips depends on the surrounding sounds. Vietnamese learners of English mispronounce /ʧ/ like Vietnamese /ć/, which is a voiceless palatal stop and which is produced with the blade of the tongue touching the hard palate. This sound can be found both in initial and final positions, e.g. *cho* (meaning *give*), *chết* (meaning *die*), *sách* (meaning *book*). Therefore, English /ʧ/ in *chair* is incorrectly pronounced like Vietnamese /ć/ in Vietnamese *che chở*. Mistakes can also be found in the pronunciation of *cheese, chicken, future, question, which, March,* etc.

4. Perceptions of mistakes

It is mentioned in the introduction that pronunciation mistakes are not treated as seriously as grammar mistakes by many Vietnamese learners of English. It is undeniable that sentence "She don't like coffee" is grammatically incorrect although its meaning is understandable. This mistake is immediately recognized (and sometimes corrected at once). But such a pronunciation mistake as /ʃ/ in "She should shut the door" is often ignored. The reasons for this ignorance are partially because the mistake is believed not to cause any communication breakdown, and partially it can be culturally accepted by Vietnamese users of English and more importantly, native speakers of English can understand what the speaker wants to say.

Furthermore, many people only pay attention to "the what", i.e. what is conveyed, not "the how" i.e. the way words are said, nor the stress and intonation of the sentence. Regardless of the distortion of some fricatives and affricates in pronunciation, in many English classes in Vietnam, teaching focuses on ideas (what), but very little or almost no attention is paid to the way (how) the ideas are expressed orally. This negative attitude towards pronunciation mistakes more or less indulges people with pronunciation mistakes, thus degrades the standard of English in Vietnam.

Nevertheless, recently, there has been some improvement in learning English with a little bit more focus on pronunciation, stress and intonation in some English training institutions in Vietnam, ranging from secondary schools and evening English centers to tertiary educational institutions such as colleges and universities of foreign languages. As a result, a bit more phonetic drills and practice are included in English teaching programs as well as in examinations now. Thus, more teachers and students of English must pay more attention to pronunciation than ever before.

5. Recommendations and conclusions

This part of the paper covers a summary of the reasons for the common mistakes, and some recommendations to mitigate the problems.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that Vietnamese learners and users of English make pronunciation mistakes for the following reasons:

- Lack of knowledge of the manner and the place of articulation of two English fricative consonants /ʃ/, /ʒ/ and two English affricatives /dʒ/, /tʃ/.

- The negative interference of the mother tongue, i.e. the English sounds are pronounced in the Vietnamese way.

- Lack of consciousness of being standard: learners are taught about how these sounds are produced. They only pronounce them correctly in their pronunciation lessons in the classroom and in examinations, but not in real communication.

- Insufficient drills and practice: Despite having some knowledge about pronunciation of these sounds, many Vietnamese learners do not have enough opportunity to use them in communication. For them, their only language environment is the classrooms, and they speak Vietnamese outside the classroom.

- Making mistakes is, therefore, unavoidable for Vietnamese learners who are learning English as a foreign language in a difficult environment where Vietnamese is used as the official language.

To overcome the difficulties it may take the learners a long time to learn more about the way these sounds are produced, to become better aware of the mistakes they make, to have enough drills and practice so that they become more automatic and natural in using the sounds, to do away with the interference of Vietnamese - the language they were born with.

Among the simplest things that can possibly be done for better pronunciation of our learners are some practical suggestions for further practice of these particular sounds.

First of all, it is essential that learners should be introduced to the presentation of the human head, seen from the side, displayed as though it had been cut in half or they may be required to look at the inside of their mouth in a mirror. Once they can recognize different places of articulation of sounds, they are taught to make sounds taking into account voice, manner and place of articulation.

Secondly, learners should be given enough practice both inside and outside classroom. This may help them become more fluent and automatic in pronouncing the sounds. Practice makes perfect and can be done in the forms of a variety of exercises and games.

There have been quite a number of pronunciation exercises given in phonetics books like *Pronunciation Tasks, English Pronunciation in Use, Understanding English pronunciation, Three or Tree, Ship or Sheep*, etc. The exercises range from repetition, recognition and substitution exercises to more complicated ones, and from controlled exercises to more productive and creative ones. Here are some examples:

1. Repeat fricative and affricates pairs.

2. Say A if you hear the word on the left. Say B if you hear the word on the right.

3. Listen and repeat.

4. Write these nationality words in the correct column.

5. Complete the conversation using words from the box.

6. Write the correct words.

7. Circle the correct word you hear.

8. Transcribe the underlined part of the word.

9. Match questions on the right with answers on the left.

10. Tick the correct box.

(Sources: [3-6]).

Learners may also be asked to do some simple research on the use of sounds from a listening or reading passage. For example:

1. Listen to a talk recorded on CD or tape and count the number of times a certain sound is heard.

2. Underline all words that begin/ end with a sound [6].

3. Listen to a student in class reading a short passage and spot the mistakes.

4. Carry out a survey to find out how many students in the class mispronounce a sound.

5. Suggest some possible ways to correct certain mistakes.

6. Discuss some reasons why students make mistakes and solutions.

7. Students write journals/diary about their learning of pronunciation.

8. Students are required to make a comparison or contrastive analysis of the phonetic features of the confusing sounds in English and also with those of the Vietnamese /ć/.

Thirdly, 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.

Fourthly, in order to make the classroom atmosphere more relaxing and pronunciation learning more interactive and communicative, it is advisable that students should be given pronunciation games so that they find learning more enjoyable. The games can be taken from books on pronunciation games or generated by the teacher or by the students [3].

Finally, it is essential that students should have an opportunity to communicate with a native speaker or speakers so that they feel more confident that they are actually learning from authentic sources.

In conclusion, some Vietnamese learners and users of English make pronunciation mistakes due to lack of knowledge about the way the sounds are produced. It is also due to the influence of their mother tongue, which does not strictly require distinction between alveo-palatal consonants and alveolar consonants. Vietnamese people, especially those coming from Hanoi, tend to simplify their pronunciation of their fricative consonants in terms of theory. Moreover, in Vietnamese language there are no /ʤ/ and /ʧ/ so they often pronounce them as /z/ and /ć/. For Vietnamese teachers of English, mispronunciation is considered mistake that need to be corrected and improved by giving the learners more practice, mistake correction and teaching - learning procedures in which more attention should be paid to English pronunciation at the initial learning stage. For some others, it might be considered a variation of English which builds up world Englishes.

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Lỗi hay tiếng Anh Việt Nam

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Không ai có thể phủ nhận được rằng hiện nay tiếng Anh đã trở thành một ngoại ngữ phổ biến nhất ở Việt Nam. Tuy nhiên, trong hàng triệu người nói tiếng Anh ở Việt Nam còn có nhiều người mắc lỗi phát âm. Điều này tạo ra những đặc điểm đặc thù của cái có thể được gọi là "tiếng Anh Việt Nam". Bài viết này sẽ chỉ đề cập đến các lỗi phát âm do người Việt Nam nói tiếng Anh thường mắc phải khi phát âm 4 âm tiếng Anh, đó là: /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/ và /dʒ/. Bài viết này sẽ thảo luận một số nguyên nhân mắc lỗi và một số gợi ý về việc sửa chữa lỗi. Các lỗi phát âm sẽ được đề cập đến về cả phương thức cấu âm và vị trí cấu âm. Các nguyên nhân dẫn đến việc mắc lỗi có thể được hiểu là do thiếu kiến thức về cách phát âm, và quan trọng hơn nữa là do ảnh hưởng của tiếng mẹ đẻ. Tác giả của bài viết xin đưa ra một số gợi ý về việc chữa lỗi như: cần có sự hướng dẫn cặn kẽ về cách phát âm các âm tiếng Anh, so sánh và đối chiếu các đặc trưng ngữ âm của các âm tiếng Anh và tiếng Việt, và chú ý tăng cường cho người học luyện tập và thực hành phát âm.