

## **The pronunciation of TH sounds in misunderstandings in Brunei English**

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In standard British English (RP) and American English (GA), the TH sounds are pronounced with the dental fricatives [θ, ð] (Wells, 1982) but previous studies have shown that they are commonly realised as plosives [t, d] in many varieties of English, including native speaker varieties. Kirkpatrick (2010) reports that the realisation of the TH sounds as plosives is a common phonological feature of speakers throughout Southeast Asia, and indeed this has been found in Singapore English (Deterding, 2007) and Brunei English (Deterding & Salbrina, 2013). It seems that the use of dental fricatives for the TH sounds is marginal and they are in fact excluded from Jenkins' lingua franca core. This leads to the implication that alternative pronunciation of the TH sounds is not important in maintaining mutual intelligibility in ELF communication. The current study investigates the intelligibility of Brunei English in ELF communication, and it seeks to determine how many misunderstandings arose because of the pronunciation of the TH sounds. Ten recordings with a total duration of 3 hours and 39 minutes were collected, with each recording consisting of conversations between two people: a Bruneian speaker and a non-Bruneian speaker. Out of 153 tokens of misunderstandings found in the ten recordings, it is found that the pronunciation of the TH sounds in 9 tokens (6%) may be a factor in causing the misunderstanding. Although this study shows that there are other features in most of these tokens that also contribute to the loss of intelligibility, such as pronunciation of vowels, syntax and fast speech, it concludes that the pronunciation of the TH sounds in Brunei English can sometimes cause misunderstandings to occur in ELF interactions. This is however only found in 6% of the misunderstanding tokens and it therefore suggests that pronunciation of the TH sounds is not a key factor in maintaining intelligibility in ELF communication.