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**THE STUDY OF THE PRONUNCIATION OF FUNCTION WORDS ‘and’, ‘of’ AND
‘the’ IN SPEECHES DELIVERED IN ENGLISH BY GITANAS NAUSĖDA, THE
PRESIDENT OF LITHUANIA**

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INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, the age of globalization, English has established itself as the main language of international communication among individuals from diverse backgrounds – politicians, businessmen, citizens of different countries. According to statistics provided by Statista in 2022, English is the most widely spoken language in the world with 1.5 billion speakers. The language has many variations of spelling and pronunciation that are widely accepted, but sometimes a listener may hear a speaker pronouncing something in a different way than the listener does which sometimes leads them to judge the speaker for their accent (Gluszek and Dovidio, 2010). Pronunciation of function words is one of the aspects that help to determine the fluency of the speaker’s pronunciation. Stressing them unnecessarily may indicate that the language is foreign to the speaker, it does not sound natural (Roach, 2009, p. 89), and it may cause the listener to perceive the speaker as inexperienced and unable to express themselves correctly or comprehensibly enough.

Nowadays, as the eyes of the world are turned towards the war started by Russia, lots of politicians address this issue, urging their citizens to act and react, they travel to international conferences, meet with representatives from other countries and discuss how they can help, what they can do, what sanctions they can impose on the aggressor. Most of the communication is done in English. The politicians are in the position where intelligible communication is a crucial part of their occupation. Just as they have supporters, they also have opponents and critics, who may seek ways to undermine them. Politicians' self-expression becomes a prime target for unfavourable articles. Everything can be targeted – from the choice of certain words to the way they are pronounced – to discredit the politicians based on their language skills. When caught in such situation, they may be judged as unfit communicators and leaders. While a worst-case scenario, such discussions begin to circulate among the public, particularly when sensitive subjects are being debated.

Reporters of an article on a Czech news site expats.cz (2022) claim that “public demonstrations of language ineptitude have led to growing concerns about the Czech Republic's suitability for the EU presidency.” Ministers have been heard either strongly avoiding interviews in English or using other languages instead of English. A case has been mentioned where a Minister of Environment Anna Hubáčková incorrectly referred to a European climate change program “fit for 55” as “fifty for five”. A case from Lithuania would be the speech (15min.lt, 2014) delivered by Algirdas Butkevičius, a former prime minister of Lithuania, where, when addressing the congress of European socialist party, he demonstrated poor English pronunciation skills that led him to being critiqued by the media for being “a disgrace to Lithuania”. Today, Lithuania is a country that has been getting more attention internationally

due to its strong and undying support for Ukraine during the war, with the president Gitanas Nausėda releasing more statements encouraging the Lithuanian citizens and foreigners to react to the war crimes committed by Russia. He is an important figure in Lithuania's political and social life and therefore must have good communication skills, as well as the linguistic ones, in Lithuanian and in English.

Studies by Frauenfelder and Kartushina (2014), Gorba, (2019) show, that English as a second language (L2) speakers tend to have the pronunciation with an accent of their mother tongue, which is due to them already possessing the phonological system of their first language (L1). Learning proper pronunciation should not be overlooked. A rhyme from a short task from one of the contributors to the teaching of pronunciation says “But you're going to sound funny, it's going to go wrong / If you make your weak sounds much too strong” (Vaughan-Ress, 2010, p. 69), which highlights the importance of giving enough attention to learning the pronunciation of a foreign language.

This research is directed at exploring the pronunciation of function words ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ of Gitanas Nausėda. Although according to his profile on LinkedIn.com the president speaks English with full professional proficiency, the **hypothesis** of the author is that the speaker will pronounce strong forms more, because regardless of his skill, the language is not his mother tongue, and he may pronounce the words with the influence of his native language, Lithuanian.

The **subject** of this research is strong and weak forms or pronunciation of function words ‘and’, ‘of’ and ‘the’ in the four selected speeches delivered in English by Gitanas Nausėda, the president of Lithuania.

The **aim** of the research is to analyse the differences of president's pronunciation of the chosen function words and the forms that would be suggested in accordance with the context in which the words appear.

To achieve the aim, the following **objectives** have been set:

1. To review scientific literature regarding the concept and usage of strong and weak forms, and the influence of learning orientation, L1, and attitude on learning pronunciation of a foreign language;
2. To discuss the suggested pronunciation forms for ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ according to the written context;
3. To discuss the comparison of the president's factual pronunciation of ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ and their suggested pronunciation forms.

The thesis is divided into three main parts – literature review, methodology, and the empirical part. The first section discusses two topics. The first one explains strong and weak forms, their

formation, use, and factors that influence them. The next topic is dedicated to the topic of foreign language acquisition and encompasses discussions on diverse orientations of learning a foreign language, the effect of the native language on target language pronunciation, and attitudes towards L1-influenced L2 speech. The methodology part of the thesis outlines the research tools and data used in the study. It encompasses a generalization of the scientific literature and a presentation of the research tools, along with a description of the collected data. The third part provides the findings of the analysis of pronunciation of the chosen instances of 'and', 'of', and 'the' in their written context and spoken forms. It includes assigning pronunciation forms for specific cases of 'and', 'of', and 'the', as well as an examination of audio recordings of the speeches. The part then moves on to discussion where the assigned pronunciation is compared to the way Gitanas Nausėda pronounces the chosen words during the delivery of the speeches. After conducting the analysis, the conclusions are presented.

I. THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF THE STRONG AND WEAK FORMS AND ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE PRONUNCIATION

In this chapter, the theoretical background of pronunciation of strong and weak forms of the function words is presented, as well as some existing studies on learning the pronunciation of a foreign language. The chapter is divided into two halves. The 1st subchapter deals with the linguistic phenomenon itself, which is the pronunciation of strong and weak forms and is divided into four subchapters. 1.1.1 provides the general background of strong and weak forms, 1.1.2 focuses on factors that may influence changes of sounds, 1.1.3 offers deeper insights into strong forms specifically, provides a set of guidelines for when pronunciation of a strong form is more advised, and 1.1.4 gives information on weak forms, how they are formed and what kind of processes they undergo. The 2nd subchapter presents the influence of orientation, speaker's L1 on pronunciation of L2, as well as the attitudes that may be encountered if a speaker produces L1-accented L2 speech and is divided into three subchapters. 1.2.1 provides introduction to different orientations for learning the English pronunciation and how it may influence the outcome, how 'native' or 'foreign' the speaker sounds 1.2.2 deals with the influence of L1 to the pronunciation L2, and 1.2.3 gives insight into the attitudes that people may often have towards accents that are not native.

1.1 The concept of strong and weak forms

This subchapter focuses on the background of pronunciation, introduces the strong and weak forms and factors that influence the changes of a sound.

1.1.1 General background of strong and weak forms

'Strong form' and 'weak form' are the most common terms, and they are used throughout this thesis, but because of their features, sometimes they may be referred to as accented or unaccented forms (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 273), weak forms may be called reduced forms (Balčytytė-Kurtinienė, 2014, p. 65; Roach, 2009, p. 64). As mentioned by Roach (2009, p. 89), about forty words in the English language have two or more variants of pronunciation and almost all of them are function words like conjunctions, articles, pronouns, i.e., not content words like nouns, verbs (except for auxiliary verbs), or adjectives. Though there are recommendations for which pronunciation form is more suitable in certain contexts, in some cases using different forms would not always limit the intelligibility of a speaker. Roach (2009, p. 89) gives two reasons on why it is important to familiarise oneself with them. First, pronouncing either only strong or weak forms would sound unnatural to native speakers. The second reason is that "speakers who are not familiar with the use of weak forms are likely to

have difficulty understanding speakers who do use weak forms” (Roach, 2009, p. 89). Though a non-native English speaker may worry about being understood, they may forget to think about understanding their interlocutor. Learners of a foreign language tend to notice that the native speakers seem to speak fast, so in case of an unfamiliar weak form being pronounced, the learner might miss it or misunderstand the speaker. For example, the author of this thesis provides a phrase “oranges and apples”. If a speaker said it slowly and carefully to clearly pronounce each word, it would sound something like /'ɒrændʒɪz ænd 'æplz/. However, if a native speaker used this phrase in a sentence while telling a story, they would likely pronounce a weak form of ‘and’ and the phrase would sound like /'ɒrændʒɪz ənd 'æplz/. Chances are that a listener who is still a learner of English may not hear the /d/ in /ænd/ and would hear /'ɒrændʒɪz ən 'æplz/. In this case the listener might think that the speaker said “oranges an apples” or “orange is an apples” and so they could get flustered because if the only variant of pronunciation for ‘and’ with which they are familiar was /ænd/, they would not fully understand the speaker.

To provide a summary, function words tend to have two forms of pronunciation – strong and weak. The weak forms are more common, but in some cases the strong form is the appropriate option. Both forms of pronunciation should be learned by foreign speakers to avoid confusion and misunderstanding, or to simply improve their fluency. Dictionaries may not always provide the learner with all the correct forms and therefore it is important to learn how words should be pronounced in certain contexts.

1.1.2 Strong forms

Although it is acknowledged that weak forms are the frequent ones (Collins and Mees, 2009, p. 20), it is still crucial for people to recognize that some circumstances call specifically for strong forms to be used to be coherent speakers (Roach, 2009, p. 89). These forms can also be called stressed because they usually have every factor of a stressed syllable, which are vowels that are more intense, higher pitched, peripheral, and longer (Collins and Mees, 2009, p. 124).

An example for comparison between a strong and a weak form could be the determiner ‘the’. The strong form is /ði:/, while the weak forms are /ðɪ/ and /ðə/. The common difference between the strong form and the variant of the weak form /ðə/ is the length of the vowel. /i:/ is longer and more peripheral than /ə/.

Although there are no strict rules for the use of strong forms specifically, in some contexts only the strong form is acceptable, or where it may appear naturally. Table 1 lists a set of the scholars’ advisory guidelines for the usage of strong forms and the examples of phrases, as well as their transcriptions.

Table 1. The advisory guidelines for the usage of strong forms and their examples¹ (adapted from Roach (2009, p. 89), Collins and Mees (2009, p. 20), Lecumberri and Maidment (2014, p. 21), Yavaş (2011, p. 95).

(1) When a word occurs at the end of a sentence or a phrase	‘Chips are what I’m fond of’ /tʃɪps ə wɒt aɪm fɒnd ɒv/
(2) When a word is contrasted to another	‘The letter’s from him, not to him’ /ðə letəz frɒm ɪm nɒt tu: ɪm/
(3) When a word is stressed for emphasis	‘You must give me more money’ /ju mʌst gɪv mi mɔ: mʌni/
(4) When a word is being “quoted”	‘You shouldn’t put “ and ” at the end of a sentence’ /ju ʃʊdnt pʊt ænd ət ði end əv ə sentəns/
(5) ‘That’ when used as a demonstrative will always keep the strong form, regardless if it is stressed or not	‘ That ’s the best approach’ /ðæts ðə best əprəʊtʃ/
(6) ‘Have’ and ‘has’ as main verbs usually retain the strong form	‘I have news’ /aɪ hæv nju:z/
(7) When they occur with the negative particle not	‘The game hasn ’t started’ /ðə geɪm hæznt stɑ:təd/.
(8) When the auxiliary verb appears in the final position of a sentence or a phrase	“Has she returned?” “She has.” /ʃi: hæz/.
(9) When an auxiliary or a preposition is ‘stranded’, meaning that they are not necessarily in the final position of a sentence or a phrase, but the word that is supposed to follow them is either deleted or moved to another position	‘You were later than I was this morning’ /ju wə leɪtə ðən aɪ wɒz ðɪs mɔ:nɪŋ/
(10) Just with the meaning of ‘exactly’ or ‘precisely’ is usually pronounced in its strong form	I arrived just in time /aɪ araɪvd dʒʌst ɪn taɪm/

¹ The transcriptions of the examples that were provided by the linguists have been edited for consistency by the author of this thesis.

(11) For some the strong form is used when it is followed by singular countable nouns and means ‘a certain’

‘Some animal was shot’ /sʌm ænɪməl wɒz ʃɒt/.

The guidelines may not apply to all the function words in the same manner. Pronouns would be an exception. Collins and Mees (2009, p. 20) observe an exception to the guideline (1). They point out that pronouns retain the weak form even in the final position of a sentence or intonation group. What concerns guideline (9), Lecumberri and Maidment (2014, p. 22) mention that stranding does not apply for other function words like pronouns, conjunctions, etc.

To explain guideline (11), although ‘has’ and ‘not’ are contracted into one unit, they are still perceived as separate words to pronounce. In this case ‘has’ is in its strong form, while ‘not’ is contracted and in such case will always be weak. When it comes to contracted forms, it is important to recognise that some researchers, like Roach (2009, p. 89), keep the distinction between the weak forms and contracted forms and see them as a separate phenomenon, so the decision whether the speakers should consider guideline (11) should be left for the speakers themselves to make.

In summary, though strong forms are less frequent, they still do appear in certain cases. The strong forms have the features of a stressed syllable and therefore can also be referred to as stressed forms. Scholars provide advisory rules that may help the speaker remember the better suited usage of the pronunciation. The cases in which strong form may be used include instances when the word is emphasized, isolated, quoted, and sometimes the usage of strong forms is appropriate only when the word carries a specific meaning in the phrase or when it is, in a way, ‘stranded’.

1.1.3 Weak forms

According to Balčytytė-Kurtinienė (2014, p. 65) and Roach (2009, p. 64), the weak form may also be called the reduced form since it distinguishes from the strong form and undergoes reduction, thereby becoming weak. The author explains that reduction touches the quality and quantity of a sound, the vowel in this case, and mentions three kinds of reduction – quantitative, qualitative, and zero. Quantitative reduction deals with the length of the sound, for example, me /mi:/ changes to /mɪ/. Qualitative reduction happens when the vowel changes its quality, usually when it centralizes, for example, can /kæn/ becomes /kən/.

Lecumberri and Maidment (2014, p. 19) also provide explanations of the changes the words undergo when the weak form is used. According to them, all vowels change their quality

towards the nearest central vowel to their state, i.e., they centralise. Table 2 provides the examples from of how the vowels change when they weaken.

Table 2. Vowel changes – strong to weak (adapted from Lecumberri and Maidment, 2014, p. 19).

Strong vowel	Weak vowel
/i:/	/ɪ/ /ɪ/
/u:/	/ʊ/ /ʊ/
/e/	/ə/
/æ/	/ə/
/ʌ/	/ə/
/ɑ:/	/ə/
/ɒ/	/ə/
/ɔ:/	/ə/
/ɜ:/	/ə/

Lecumberri and Maidment (2014, p. 19) note, that some words may already have a ‘weak’ vowel in their strong form, so in this case the vowel remains unchanged, or gets further weakened to /ə/, so /kʊd/ becomes /kəd/ for the word could.

Roach (2009, p. 113) mentions that the function words in their weak form also undergo the process of elision, or **zero realisation**, meaning that some sounds, usually consonants, are no longer included in pronunciation. Though Lecumberri and Maidment (2014, p. 20) claim, that it is not a necessary process of the formation of the weak forms, but it sometimes happens, depending on the speech register that the form is being used in. For example, ‘and’ /ænd/ becomes /ən/. As for specific sounds that are common with elision in weak forms, Lecumberri and Maidment (2014, p. 20) offer two examples:

- (1) /h/ elision when the sound does not appear in the very beginning of an utterance: ‘tell **him**’ /tel **hɪm**/ becomes /tel **ɪm**/.
- (2) /d/ and /t/ being elided when they appear at the end of a word and precede another consonant: ‘and’ /ænd/ becomes /ən/.

According to Cruttenden (2014, p. 276), the faster the speaker talks, the more frequent the weak forms appear in the speech. Cruttenden (2014, p. 276) seconds the idea that if an

English language learner wants to sound as native as possible, they must learn the weak forms and “regard them as regular pronunciations”.

Table 3 shows some of the function words in their strong and weak forms of pronunciation (adapted from Collins and Mees (2009, p. 18), Cruttenden (2014, p. 273), and Roach, (2009, p. 90):

Table 3. Strong and weak forms.

Function word	Strong / accented form	Weak / unaccented form
Determiners		
a	/eɪ/	/ə/
an	/æn/	/ən/ or /ŋ/
the	/ði:/	/ði/ or /ðə/
Conjunctions		
and	/ænd/	/ənd/ or /ən/ or /ŋ/ or /ŋd/
but	/bʌt/	/bət/
or	/ɔ:/	/ə/
than	/ðæn/	/ðən/ or /ðŋ/
that	/ðæt/	/ðət/
Prepositions, particles		
at	/æt/	/ət/
as	/æz/	/əz/
into	/'ɪntu:/	/'ɪntə/ or /'ɪntu/
of	/ɒv/	/əv/ or /ə/
for	/fɔ:/	/fə/
Pronouns		
her	/hɜ:/	/(h)ə/ or /ə/
his	/hɪz/	/(h)ɪz/
he	/hi:/	/(h)i/
your	/jɔ:/	/jə/
us	/ʌs/	/əs/

Some words have two or more weak forms. Their usage depends on the words that follow the function word.

Summing it up, the weak forms of function words may undergo processes of either qualitative or quantitative reduction (or both) and elision, meaning that the quality and length of the vowels is reduced, certain sounds are omitted, in some cases the form may be left without a vowel at all, which can be replaced by a syllabic consonant. Some words may have more than one possible weak form, depending on what word-initial sound follows the word-final sound of the function word.

1.1.4 Factors influencing the pronunciation of the forms

Stress has a direct influence on change in certain features of a sound. Pike (1967) suggests that sounds appearing at the peak of a stressed syllable, i.e., vowels, tend to be more defined, longer than those that appear in an unstressed syllable. Collins and Mees (2009, p. 124) offer four main features of a stressed sound, which include **intensity**, or loudness, and **pitch variation**, saying that higher pitch usually indicates stronger stress. **Vowel quality** is the third feature, for which Collins and Mees (2009, p. 124) provide an example of comparison of the first vowel in the word 'present' in a form of a noun and a verb: present /'prezənt/, (to) present /prə'zent/. It is claimed that central vowels like /ə/ appear in unstressed syllables, while peripheral vowels like /e/ tend to appear in stressed syllables. The fourth feature of a stressed syllable is the **duration of vowels**, and it is explained that vowels appear longer in stressed syllables. Given these features, one may say that unstressed syllables are reduced, or weak (Roach, 2009, p. 64). Sometimes in an unstressed syllable a vowel may be lost and instead of the vowel, a syllabic consonant may be used, for example, in a word bottle /bɒtəl/ (Roach, 2009, p. 64). Therefore, unstressed syllables may have more quiet, lower pitched, more central, and shorter vowels, or not have vowels at all.

Intonation is another subject that influences the change of sounds. Three functions of intonation that relate to the subject of this study are grammatical, attitudinal, and discourse. Explaining the grammatical function Chun (2002, p. 52) remarks that in the English language, wh-questions, statements, and commands tend to have a falling tone, meanwhile yes-no questions employ the rising tone more often. As for attitudinal function of intonation, Bolinger (1989, cited in Chun, 2002) states that the rising tone gives the feeling of incompleteness or excitement, anger, etc. The discourse function is performed by the higher pitch when new information is presented, as stated by Brown (1983, cited in Chun, 2002). Pitch variation is what connects stress and intonation – if the pitch rises, the word appears stressed.

Word order may also have an indirect influence on the change in sounds. Two main processes that relate word order to changes in pronunciation are assimilation and elision. Assimilation of consonants happens when, for instance, a voiced consonant in a word-final

position is followed by a voiceless consonant in word-initial position and the voicing of the former sound is lost (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 310). The word ‘of’ could be taken as an example. The pronunciation of the weak form would be /əv/, but if it is followed by a word with a voiceless word-initial consonant like ‘people’, the /v/ in ‘of’ could lose its voicing and be pronounced as /f/. Elision may happen in consonant clusters. If ‘and’ is followed by a word which has a word-initial consonant, the sound that is in the middle may be removed. For example, when saying ‘and people’, /d/ may be lost (Cruttenden, 2014, p. 257). Losing /d/ in this case would not influence the intelligibility because the weak form of ‘and’ should not be confused with an indefinite article ‘an’ because this article never precedes nouns with a word-initial consonant.

To sum up, stress and intonation are direct factors for a change in features of a sound. Longer, higher pitched, less centred vowels appear in stressed syllables. In some cases, the vowel may not be pronounced at all and the peak of the syllable may consist only of the syllabic consonant. In addition, the role of intonation is significant, since rising or falling tone can indicate questions, statements, instructions, certain emotions, new information being introduced by the speaker and thus the words said appear stressed or unstressed. The arrangement of words in a sentence, or rather the words that follow the function word in question, may also have influence on changes of pronunciation. Some sounds may be changed or elided depending on what other sounds surround them and in which position the sound or word appears.

1.2 Influence of learning orientation, speaker’s L1 on pronunciation of L2 and attitudes towards L1 accents in L2 speech

This subchapter focuses on factors that may influence a person’s pronunciation of a foreign language. Learning orientation, influence of the native language on the pronunciation of the target language are discussed, as well as attitudes that foreign language speakers may encounter if their pronunciation of a foreign language has an accent of their native language.

1.2.1 Learning orientations and their influence on learner’s pronunciation

It is known that the attitude towards learning often has influence on the outcome. In the field of learning the pronunciation of the English language, Sifakis (2014) distinguishes two contexts in which the attitudes towards acquiring language skills differ – EFL context (or EFL orientation) and “post-EFL” context (or ELF (English as Lingua Franca) orientation). The two contexts focus on different goals. The orientation that the student is determined to follow will influence the outcome of learning and certain variations of pronunciation may sometimes be explained by the learning process. Of course, sometimes it may be hard to decide if it is the

exact reason because the learning approach may be unknown to the researcher, but it can still be kept in mind as one of the possible explanations.

It is known that some features of pronunciation, like production of strong and weak forms, are important for a speaker to learn to achieve the native-like fluency not only to satisfy the goal of sounding like a native speaker, but also for intelligibility. Since for the EFL context the aim is the native-like accuracy, meaning that the learners are motivated towards losing as much of their L1 accent as they possibly can, one could assume that the student would consider the recommendations by scholars to pronounce certain things in a certain way, for example, following the guidelines for the pronunciation of strong or weak forms.

The “post-EFL” context differs from EFL context by having the aim of international intelligibility, rather than native-like pronunciation. Sifakis (2014) mentions that the main goal of the speakers is successful communication among other non-native speakers. Jarosz (2019, p. 53) claims that children acquire pronunciation skills of a language with little to no effort, given that they have almost constant exposure to it. However, adult learners tend to struggle and keep constantly making conscious efforts, which is what may keep them from sounding more native-like. The teaching of pronunciation in the classroom is given significantly less attention than aspects like vocabulary (Gorba, 2019). Jennifer A. Foote et al. (2011, as cited in Gorba, 2019) point out that “many teachers spent less than five percent of their class time on pronunciation” and it may be due to their lack of knowledge of the sound systems of a language. This thesis investigates the pronunciation of Gitanas Nausėda, who is a native speaker of the Lithuanian language and who was born and grew up during the time when Lithuania was part of the Soviet Union, when Russian language was spoken more widely than English. Therefore, it is safe to think that the president’s pronunciation in English may be influenced by the lack of constant exposure to the language.

To summarise the points presented, the learning process of the pronunciation of a foreign language may be influenced by the goal towards which the learner is oriented. EFL context focuses on learning the language for the purpose of passing tests, gaining knowledge of a language and native-like proficiency. The “post-EFL” or English as a Lingua Franca context is for the learners who focus on international communication and intelligibility. The pronunciation that the learner has may be influenced by the orientation that the learner chooses to follow, the exposure to the target and surrounding languages, and the attention given to teaching pronunciation by teachers and by the learners themselves.

1.2.2 The influence of L1 on L2 pronunciation

Studies have shown that the native language (L1) of the foreign language (L2) learners has an influence on pronunciation. According to Gorba (2019), L2 user “has an existing phonological system, namely that of the L1”, which results in L2 learners producing L1-accented L2 speech. In their article *On the effects of L2 perception and of individual differences in L1 production on L2 pronunciation*, Frauenfelder and Kartushina (2014, p. 1) state that (late) learners of L2 usually produce an accent in their target language, saying that “[The] results point to existence of surface transfer of individual L1 phonetic realizations to L2 space and demonstrate that pre-existing features of the native space in production partly determine how new sounds can be accommodated in that space”. This observation relates to what was presented by Gorba (2019). Therefore, when studying pronunciation of a language that is foreign to the speaker it is important to consider the speaker’s native language.

Hansen (2008) reviews several experiments, that were conducted to determine how L1 of a speaker influences their L2 pronunciation. Study by Flege, Frieda and Nozawa (1997, cited in Hansen 2008) found that the Italian L1 speakers in Canada had a detectable accent, regardless of the amount of use of their L1, however the accent of those who spoke Italian less often was less detectable. This conclusion relates to this study of the president’s pronunciation, because Gitanas Nausėda’s communication is done mainly in Lithuanian, and English is used only during visits abroad. Therefore, his English pronunciation may be influenced by the lack of the pronunciation practice of the target language.

In her bachelor’s thesis Kozáková (2021) investigated the production of weak forms of prepositions by non-native speakers of English. The analysis was done on the short recordings taken from the L2-ARCTIC speech corpus, and the samples chosen were recorded by the native speakers of Arabic, Hindi, Korean, Mandarin, Spanish and Vietnamese. Kozakova (2021, p. 21) remarks that Hindi is the only language from the chosen speakers’ backgrounds that has schwa in its vowel system. The results showed that none of the weak forms investigated contained /ə/. According to Kozáková (2021, p. 22) full vowel quality was not kept either in most cases. An example of the preposition ‘at’ can be considered. The weak form of at is /ət/ and out of all times that it was analysed the pronunciation remained the one containing /æ/, which is the full vowel quality and therefore a strong form of the word. For, on the other hand, had three different realisations, most of which was either strong form containing /ɔ:/ or /ɒ/, sometimes /ɜ:/, but never /ə/ (Kozáková, 2021, p. 23).

There are a few things about the Lithuanian language, which is the native language to Gitanas Nausėda, that could have direct influence on the president’s pronunciation. First, Lithuanian is a language that has phonological orthography, it is written the way it is

pronounced (Kazlauskienė, 2018, p. 17). If the word ‘and’ was pronounced the way it is written, the vowel produced would be similar to /ʌ/. Second, a schwa does not exist in the phonological system of the Lithuanian language (ibid, p. 40). This relates to Kozáková’s study, and therefore, it is safe to assume that the president’s pronunciation of ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ may lack the usage of /ə/ or contain other sounds that would not normally be produced by the native speakers.

To summarise, the native language of a speaker can influence them produce speech in their target language with an accent of their mother tongue. That is because people have existing phonological system from their L1 which manifests itself in the L2 speech. The notability of the accent depends on the amount of L1 usage in everyday life. The less the native language of a speaker is used, the less noticeable is the accent in the produced in speech of their target language. Remembering the analysis conducted by Kozáková (2021), and the fact that Hindi is a language with the /ə/ in its vowel system and not even the native speakers of Hindi pronounced it in any of the samples, one could assume that it is not enough to just be familiar with the sound, but it is important to also familiarize oneself with the pronunciation patterns of the target language.

1.2.3 Attitudes towards accents

As it was mentioned in the introduction, speakers of a foreign language tend to receive negative attitude towards themselves as soon as the listener realises that they are not a native speaker, or that their speech is somehow different from their own. Such claim is supported by research presented by Gluszek and Dovidio (2010), and evidence of the public’s dissatisfaction with the pronunciation or bad language skills in general was seen in articles of news media Expats.cz staff (2022) and 15min.lt (2014). An experiment is presented where people listened to a proficient bilingual pronouncing samples with and without L1-accented L2 speech and the results show that the speaker with the accent was seen to be less intelligent or competent than the same person without the accent. Receiving negative attitude towards one’s accented pronunciation could influence the speaker to alter their pronunciation to avoid such attitudes.

Even among the researchers there has been an ongoing debate for decades on whether accented L2 speech should be normalised or not. Derwing and Munro (2015, p. 133) cite Abercrombie (1949), who claimed that not native-like L2 speech should be intelligible. Griffen (1980, cited in Derwing and Munro, 2015), insists that accents should be eradicated. However, Rajagopalan (2010, p. 467) encourages readers to stop idealising the native-like pronunciation proficiency as the only acceptable form of pronunciation and insists that “it has become fashionable to speak in terms of Englishes, in the plural”. Considering the points presented, if a speaker produces less L1-accented L2 speech, the chances are higher that the attitude towards

the speaker would be less negative, but it by no means does it dictate that a learner of a language must be completely oriented towards the native-like accentuation.

To summarise, speakers of foreign languages tend to receive negative attitudes towards themselves when they are heard speaking L2 with an accent from their L1. They may be seen as lazy, less intelligent, or competent. In the works of the previous century, it is seen that it was disagreed upon whether the accent of a speaker's native language should be acceptable or not. Nowadays, however, it is encouraged that the native-like proficiency should not be idealised since the variants of English are being more and more widely appreciated.

II. DATA AND METHODS

This BA paper focused on Gitanas Nausėda's pronunciation of strong and weak forms of function words 'and', 'of' and 'the', and discussed the pronunciation forms that the president produced and how different or similar they were to those that were suggested with regard to the context in which they appear and were in accordance with the recommendations from the scholars. To achieve the aim, the research was conducted in three steps:

1. Generalisation of scientific literature;
2. Designing a research tool and data collection;
3. Data analysis.

The first step was completed in the literature review section and is divided into two parts, first of which offered an introduction to the concept of strong and weak forms of pronunciation, what factors may affect the sound changes, what guidelines the speaker should consider in their usage. The second part gave insights into why the pronunciation of a foreign language may vary among the non-native speakers, provided some background for how the orientation followed during the learning process may influence the outcome, how the phonological system may affect the pronunciation of the L2 and what sort of attitudes may people have towards the speakers of, for example, English, who have an accent. Previous research by Flege, Frieda and Nozawa (1997, cited in Hansen, 2008) introduced the idea for this analysis of investigating English pronunciation of non-native speakers with the author deciding to focus on function words.

The data was collected from the four speeches delivered by Gitanas Nausėda during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) General debate in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. The transcripts of the speeches were retrieved online through database of UNGA and the website of Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations. The speeches were then put together into a database, accessible through AntConc [4.1.4] software. Through the software, three most frequently used function words were determined, with 'and' appearing 253 times, 'of' appearing 234, and 'the' appearing 411 times in all four speeches. For this research, a total of 45 examples were analysed, by using 15 randomly selected examples for each word. Figures 1, 2, and 3 (found in the Appendix) display the KWIC view of 'and', 'of', and 'the' appearing in the speeches.

The pronunciation forms were suggested by relying on the context in which the words 'and', 'of', and 'the' appear in the speeches and compared to the transcriptions of Nausėda's actual pronunciation of the same words, which were obtained with the help of Praat [6.3.09] software. Audio recordings were retrieved from the United Nations channel on a video streaming platform YouTube. The transcriptions of the president's pronunciation were acquired

with the use of spectrograms. The spectrograms were analysed in Praat software, where values of the first and second formants (F1 and F2) were determined, which provided information on how front or back, open or close the vowels produced by the president were. Figures 4, 5, and 5 (found in the Appendix) display spectrograms of one instance of 'and', 'of', and 'the', as seen on Praat. The vowels were found by following formant numbers from Pennock-Speck and Gea Valor, 2015 (p. 32). In some cases, the formant values did not indicate the exact features vowel, therefore a sound closest to the indicated vowel was chosen.

The methods chosen for this research were mixed. Qualitative method was utilised to obtain the transcriptions of the function words from the speeches in written format and quantitative analysis of the formant values, as well as auditory analysis of the recordings provided the transcriptions of the chosen function words being pronounced in the recordings of the speeches. Comparative method was applied when comparing the pronunciation suggestions from the written context and transcriptions from audio recordings. The data was then further discussed to explain why a certain form of pronunciation might have been chosen for certain cases. In other words, the difference of the forms of pronunciation is discussed. It is important to note that throughout the following chapters Gitanas Nausėda, the president of Lithuania, is referred to as **the president**.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this part the findings of this study are presented and further discussed. First, the findings of the qualitative analysis of the chosen instances of ‘and’, ‘of’ and ‘the’ appearing in the speeches is presented by providing assigned pronunciation forms for each instance of the said words, with regard to the set of suggestions for their usage and proposed guidelines from Collins and Mees (2009), Cruttenden (2014), Lecumberri and Maidment (2014), Roach (2009), Yavaş (2011) mentioned in the theoretical part of the thesis. Further, the results of the quantitative analysis of the formant values and analysis of the acoustic speech signals and are presented. Finally, the data obtained is compared and discussed.

3.1 The findings

This subchapter offers insight into the results that were obtained during the analysis of the written context and the analysis of the audio recordings.

3.1.1 Assigned pronunciation forms

Having retrieved the 15 random instances of each word (‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’) appearing in the four collected speeches, Table 4 has been compiled for the word ‘and’, Table 5 shows the instances and the assigned pronunciation for ‘of’, and finally Table 6 provides the suggestions for pronunciation of ‘the’. The word that is being investigated in each case marked in **bold**.

Table 4. The assigned pronunciation and written context for cases of ‘and’.

Case marking	Context	Assigned pronunciation
AND_1	“We should consolidate and advance our legal efforts.”	/ənd/
AND_2	“...the rights of persons with disabilities, freedoms of expression, assembly and association.”	/ənd/
AND_3	“It must also stop irresponsible and dangerous nuclear rhetoric and behavior.”	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_4	“We will continue defending the rights of women and girls, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of religion and belief...”	/ən/
AND_5	“They must bring new major opportunities and benefits of innovative green growth...”	/ŋ/ or /ən/
AND_6	“Yemen, as well as parts of Syria, rebel held areas and camps for the displaced face a versed humanitarian disaster.”	/ŋ/ or /ən/

AND_7	“We have seen authoritarian states continuing their military buildups and intensifying violent crackdowns on political opposition, free media, and civil society.”	/ən/, /ŋ/ or /ænd/
AND_8	“In the face of accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss, driven in large part by unsustainable production and consumption, urgent action is needed.”	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_9	“The number of political prisoners in Belarus has exceeded one thousand two hundred – and continues to grow.”	/ænd/, /ən/, or /ŋ/
AND_10	“It too causes much suffering and contributes to many untimely deaths.”	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_11	“We all need to actively fight human trafficking, break the business model of smugglers, and discourage migrants from endangering their lives.”	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_12	“My country has already assisted the countries most affected by the Coronavirus pandemic in Africa, central and east Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.”	/ænd/ or /ŋd/
AND_13	“We must show respect to the international law, effectively protect human rights and fundamental freedoms...”	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_14	“Ladies and Gentlemen, Since the first days of this terrible war, Lithuania has been supporting Ukraine.”	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_15	“Dear President of the General Assembly, Dear Secretary General, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen...”	/ən/ or /ŋ/

As observed from the Table 7, in most cases only the pronunciation of a weak form for ‘and’ would be suggested to use, except for AND_7 and AND_9. The vowel assigned for the most cases is usually schwa, as it is neutral and easy to produce. The suggested use of consonants varies.

The use of the voiced dental consonant /d/ depends on the sound that follows ‘and’. If the following word begins with a vowel, it would be convenient for the speaker to produce the /d/ sound to distinguish ‘and’ from an indefinite article ‘an’. However, when a three-consonant cluster appears, the consonant in the middle would be elided, which means /d/ would not be produced.

The syllabic consonant /ŋ/ may sometimes be used instead of /ən/ because there is almost no difference between them, so their choice would most likely be subconscious. This is why

both variants, /ən/ and /n/, are suggested for each case where the pronunciation of a strong form is not required.

The examples of AND_7 and AND_9 require looking into the message of the speaker. For AND_7, the use of the weak forms would serve purpose of connecting the elements that are being named one after another, creating a flow of ideas. The pronunciation of the strong form /ænd/ may be suggested since the president is naming multiple things that are experiencing something negative. With the emphasis on ‘and’ the multitude of those things may be highlighted, thus making sure that the listeners know that the list of subjects under said crackdowns is not yet over, creating a sense of importance of the spoken context in general.

As for the case of AND_9, the situation is similar. In the speech, the president mentions a high number of political prisoners in Belarus, and with the pronunciation of a strong form of ‘and’ in this context the president would show that the horrible situation has not ended yet.

Table 5. The assigned pronunciation and written context for cases of ‘of’.

Case marking	Context	Assigned pronunciation
OF_1	“In the face of accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss...”	/əv/
OF_2	“...and nuclear safety standards, as well as neglect of climate change, should be considered a...”	/əv/
OF_3	“Today I remain a strong believer in the transformative power of collective action.”	/əv/
OF_4	“For how can we tolerate a member of the international community in a war of conquest and annihilation ?”	/əv/
OF_5	“We must reinforce the policy of non - recognition of the occupation and annexation of Crimea .”	/əv/
OF_6	“...with advances in modern information and communication infrastructure jumpstarting a fast growth of digital economy .”	/əv/
OF_7	“The input of each and every nation counts .”	/əv/

OF_8	“...to call for a complete withdrawal of foreign military forces...”	/ə/, /əv/
OF_9	“...and security situation in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia .”	/əv/
OF_10	“Allowing it to go unnoticed and without response would only foster a climate of impunity...”	/əv/
OF_11	“Every instance of inaction by the Security Council encourages aggression and threatens the multilateral system .”	/əv/
OF_12	“Both times it all ended in a bloodshed of innocent people .”	/əv/
OF_13	“...the powerful can divide the world into spheres of interests .”	/əv/
OF_14	“...to ensure adherence to the principles of international law and human rights...”	/əv/
OF_15	“...we have established a Ukrainian center in Vilnius – the first of its kind outside Ukraine.”	/əv/

As it is seen from the Table 5, none of the cases have the pronunciation of a strong form of the word ‘of’ suggested. A distinct case is OF_8, which, along with the weak form /əv/, suggests the simple pronunciation only of the short central vowel /ə/ because in this context ‘of’ is followed by a word that starts with /f/. /v/ and /f/ are both labiodental consonants, different only in the matter of voicing. The content word in this case has the voiceless one, so the weaker word, or rather pronunciation form may lose the consonant /v/ for the phrase to be more easily pronounced.

Table 6. The assigned pronunciation and written context for cases of ‘the’.

Case marking	Context	Suggested pronunciation
THE_1	“...a worsening human rights and security situation in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia .”	/ði/
THE_2	“...and punish the perpetrators by all the available means .”	/ði/

THE_3	“...if an unsuitable location is chosen or the basic construction and operational requirements are not followed .”	/ðə/
THE_4	“Therefore , Lithuania fully supports the calls to uphold human rights in all countries .”	/ðə/
THE_5	“...I would like to turn now to the challenge of our time – climate change .”	/ði:/ or /ðə/
THE_6	“...Russia ’s irresponsible rhetoric on the possible use of nuclear weapons directly contradicts its role as a P5 state and the commitment it has made...”	/ðə/
THE_7	“The released detainees report inhumane conditions in the detention facilities .”	/ðə/
THE_8	“...our readiness to defend its core principles , including the firm faith in fundamental human rights .”	/ðə/
THE_9	“I call on the global community to establish the Special Tribunal to address war crimes.”	/ðə/
THE_10	“That is why I launched the idea of Welfare State in Lithuania...”	/ði/
THE_11	“Just a month ago, we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the infamous Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact .”	/ði/
THE_12	“Inspired by their heroic struggle, the international community should take an even more active role...”	/ði/
THE_13	“It is also extremely important to protect the rights and freedoms of the local civilian population .”	/ðə/
THE_14	“We hold that the implementation of the Minsk agreements is an absolute precondition for normalizing relations with Russia .”	/ðə/
THE_15	“We need an active global vaccine sharing mechanism that would help to protect everyone, including those who are the most vulnerable .”	/ðə/

As seen in Table 6, here are two variants of weak forms for the word ‘the’. Option /ði/ would be produced when ‘the’ is followed by a vowel as a word-initial sound, meanwhile /ðə/ is suggested for cases where the word-initial sound is a consonant that appears right after ‘the’.

Most of the suggested pronunciation forms are weak, except for THE_5, which has a weak form of pronunciation assigned, but the strong form may be used for emphasis too. THE_5 appears when the president talks of climate change being our “greatest challenge”. The world’s leaders have many challenges on their own, which are sometimes common among a few. Climate change is an issue that concerns the entire world, for which the people are responsible. The emphasis on the determiner in this case might show the urgency of the challenge, the importance of discussing the issue, capturing the attention of the listeners of the president’s speech.

To sum up, most of the proposed pronunciation forms for the words ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ are weak, some of them have more than one variant. As for suggestions for ‘and’, the use of the consonant /d/ depended on the word-initial sound of the following word. Some cases have a strong form suggested for the purpose of delivering a specific message. None of the assigned pronunciation forms for ‘of’ are strong because the context of the speech does not require any emphasis.

3.1.2 The results of the analysis of the audio recordings

Tables 7, 8, and 9 show the formant values and transcriptions of the chosen instances of the words ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ as they were pronounced by the president.

Table 7. Formant values and transcriptions of the president’s pronunciation of ‘and’.

AND			
Sample	F1	F2	The president's pronunciation
AND_1	754	1660	/ænd/
AND_2	N/A		
AND_3	666	1533	/en/
AND_4	687	1575	/æɪn/
AND_5	664	1445	/ʌn/
AND_6	643	1596	/end/
AND_7	708	1554	/ænd/
AND_8	748	1364	/æɪn/
AND_9	750	1723	/æɪn/

AND_10	729	1656	/end/
AND_11	727	1660	/æɪn/
AND_12	623	1719	/en/
AND_13	771	1533	/ænd/
AND_14	391	1491	/əɪn/
AND_15	305	1424	/əɪn/

The president pronounces only two vowels /ə/, and two strong forms of the word ‘and’. In other cases, the vowels produced are more peripheral and it is seen that in five cases the consonant /d/ was pronounced.

Table 8. Formant values and transcriptions of the president’s pronunciation of ‘of’.

OF			
Sample	F1	F2	The president's pronunciation
OF_1	537	959	/ɒf/
OF_2	474	980	/ɒf/
OF_3	579	917	/ɒf/
OF_4	453	938	/ɒf/
OF_5	579	1086	/ɒf/
OF_6	474	959	/ɔ:f/
OF_7	N/A		
OF_8	453	812	/ɔ:f/
OF_9	432	896	/ɒv/
OF_10	411	875	/ɔ:f/
OF_11	411	896	/ɔ:f/
OF_12	516	938	/ɒf/
OF_13	495	896	/ɔ:f/
OF_14	453	959	/ɔ:f/
OF_15	474	854	/ɔ:f/

When producing the word ‘of’, the president did not pronounce schwa at all. All the consonants that he produced are voiceless labiodental fricatives, except for one case where the voiced consonant was produced.

Table 9. Formant values and transcriptions of the president's pronunciation of 'the'.

THE			
Sample	F1	F2	The president's pronunciation
THE_1	601	1593	/ðe/
THE_2	558	1571	/ðe/
THE_3	537	1508	/ðe/
THE_4	579	1508	/ðə/
THE_5	516	1501	/ðe/
THE_6	558	1487	/ðe/
THE_7	516	1656	/ðe/
THE_8	N/A		
THE_9	579	1529	/ðə/
THE_10	579	1508	/ðə/
THE_11	537	1635	/ðe/
THE_12	558	1677	/ðe/
THE_13	618	1522	/ðe/
THE_14	516	1445	/ðe/
THE_15	558	1480	/ðe/

The weak form /ðə/ was produced twice out of 14 investigated appearances. The rest of the forms pronounced by the president had a less central vowel /e/.

The president's pronunciation has more variations, more production of the strong forms, which were not assigned during the qualitative analysis of the selected cases in their written formats. It is important to remember that although some forms do not match the assigned forms that were presented in the previous part of this chapter, it does not mean that they are not valid forms of pronunciation.

During this analysis it was found that cases AND_2, OF_7, and THE_8 are not valid for further research due to them not appearing in the same context in which they were found during the process of assigning pronunciation forms according to their written context. This can happen when the speaker decides to make impromptu alterations to their speeches after already having submitted them, or the changes may not be registered in writing after the speech is delivered. The three cases are marked as not applicable and therefore are not investigated further.

To summarise, the forms from the president’s pronunciation have more variations than the assigned forms. One case of each word was not detected in the recordings and is therefore not discussed further. The reason for this might be the impromptu changes of the speeches during the delivery, with the changes not being registered in the database where the speeches were retrieved from.

3.2 Discussion of the president’s pronunciation and the assigned forms

This subchapter is divided into three parts. Each part deals with the pronunciation forms of the chosen function words. 3.2.1 compares the president’s pronunciation of ‘and’ to the previously presented assigned forms of pronunciation for the word. 3.2.2 investigates the president’s pronunciation of ‘of’ and its contrasts to the assigned forms. Finally, 3.2.3 presents the comparison of the president’s pronunciation of ‘the’ and the assigned forms of pronunciation for the determiner.

3.2.1 The comparison of the president’s pronunciation of ‘and’ to the assigned pronunciation forms

The cases where the spoken form matches at least one form of assigned pronunciation are marked in bold and will not be discussed further, since the possible explanations for the use of specific forms have already been presented in the first part of the analysis.

Table 11. The president’s pronunciation and assigned forms for ‘and’.

Case marking	The president’s pronunciation	Assigned pronunciation
AND_1	/ænd/	/ænd/
AND_2	N/A	/ænd/
AND_3	/en/	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_4	/æŋ/	/ən/
AND_5	/ʌŋ/	/ŋ/ or /ən/
AND_6	/end/	/ŋ/ or /ən/
AND_7	/ænd/	/ən/, /ŋ/ or /ænd/
AND_8	/æŋ/	/ən/ or /ŋ/
AND_9	/æŋ/	/ænd/
AND_10	/end/	/ən/ or /ŋ/

AND_11	/æɪn/	/əɪn/ or /ŋ/
AND_12	/eɪn/	/ænd/ or /ŋd/
AND_13	/æɪnd/	/əɪn/ or /ŋ/
AND_14	/əɪn/	/əɪn/ or /ŋ/
AND_15	/əɪn/	/əɪn/ or /ŋ/

In the president's pronunciation of the chosen cases of 'and' there is more vowel variation, than there are the assigned forms. All the vowels produced by the president, except for cases AND_14 and AND_15, are more peripheral, less central. Out of the 14 investigated spoken forms (the case AND_2 being excluded), three forms of 'and' are strong, four cases are almost strong, as they only lack the final consonant /d/. The rest of the spoken forms are not classified into being strong or weak, but the forms containing vowels /e/ and /ʌ/ have been observed by Cauldwell (2013, p. 108) to be produced in spontaneous speech.

(1) AND_1: "We should consolidate **and** advance our legal efforts."

In the case AND_1 the practical use of the coordinating conjunction is the opposite of the one that is recommended. The president clearly pronounces the strong form /ænd/ in the speech, where the weak form /ənd/ is suggested. In this sentence the words that are connected by the conjunction are quite synonymous, therefore the strategic pronunciation of a strong form would not be necessary. The additional emphasis when the connected words themselves add any missing piece to each other is not needed. What might have been the case here is that the president wanted to emphasize the entire phrase by highlighting every word in the sentence. Seeing as he talks about the "legal efforts" that need advancing and consolidating, and hearing him use those specific synonyms, the production of a strong form of 'and' could be interpreted as him trying to underline every single word and not wanting any missing piece of his plea to be left unheard.

(2) AND_3: "It must also stop irresponsible and dangerous nuclear rhetoric **and** behavior."

Here the president's pronunciation of 'and' is the form /eɪn/, while the assigned pronunciation for this case is /əɪn/ or /ŋ/. As mentioned previously, this variant of a weak form can appear in spontaneous speech, despite not being acknowledged by some scholars. 'and' is followed by a word with a consonant in the word-initial position, so naturally the consonant /d/ is elided from the consonant cluster.

(3) AND_12: “My country has already assisted the countries most affected by the Coronavirus pandemic in Africa, central **and** east Asia, Europe, and the Middle East.” For this case the assigned pronunciation form is the weak /ən/ or /ŋ/, but the form produced by the president is /en/. Here ‘and’ is followed by an adjective that starts with a vowel, so pronouncing /d/ this case would have been useful for the clearer distinction between words and between ‘and’ and ‘an’.

Since this and case AND_3 have the vowel /e/ instead of /ə/, it is worth remembering that schwa does not exist in the Lithuanian phonological system. Therefore, the production of the vowel /e/ may be justified with an argument that it may be the closest a native Lithuanian language speaker, who does not use the spoken English language as much, could sometimes get to the pronunciation of /ə/. The schwa is central, /e/ is front, but both are mid vowels, both are short.

(4) AND_4: “We will continue defending the rights of women and girls, freedom of peaceful assembly and association, freedom of religion **and** belief, and stand up for ensuring access to information and the safety of journalists.”

The president’s pronunciation of ‘and’ in this case is /æɪn/, which is almost the full strong form, only without the /d/ sound, while the assigned pronunciation is the weak form /ən/. The form containing a vowel is suggested because the preceding word ends with the /n/ consonant and producing /ŋ/ in this case would be difficult, since the words need to be distinguished and for that one would have to produce a vowel. The vowel used by the president is /æ/, which may imply that usage of strong form or simply emphasis could have been intended. Here two almost synonymous words with subtle differences were being connected, like in AND_1. Regardless of if it was done with intention or subconsciously, the emphasis on ‘and’ here would highlight the inclusion of things that are being fought for.

(5) AND_8: “In the face of accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss, driven in large part by unsustainable production **and** consumption, urgent action is needed.”

While the assigned pronunciation is that of the weak forms /ən/ or /ŋ/, in this example one can find the president pronouncing the form /æɪn/. However, the pronunciation in the recording is very short and the emphasis of any kind was possibly not intended. From the perspective of the context, the specific use of ‘and’ in the sentence does not appear in a position where it would necessarily have to perform another function besides connecting the two words.

(6) AND_11: “We all need to actively fight human trafficking, break the business model of smugglers, **and** discourage migrants from endangering their lives.”

In this case the form /æɪn/ is produced in the president's speech, however the assigned pronunciation here is the weak forms /ən/ or /n/. Here the president might have intended to use the pronunciation of a full strong form /ænd/, but the /d/ consonant most likely elided in with the following word, which also starts with /d/. In this case the president talks about the time of Belarussian direction of migration of its citizens. At the time many of them tried to cross the Lithuanian-Belarussian border illegally and thus really endangering their life and creating a lot more problems to themselves. The president seemingly named the three top priority things that need to be "actively fought" and with the strong form in use to connect the final problem the "last but not least" attitude can be detected.

(7) AND_13: "We must show respect to the international law, effectively protect human rights **and** fundamental freedoms, and promote economic and social cohesion on the global scale."

The president pronounces the strong form /ænd/ here, while the assigned pronunciation would call for the weak forms /ən/ or /n/. In this part he talks about things that must be protected by naming every one of them. Again, the emphasis on the conjunction is not necessary here if its purpose was connection of elements in the phrase. The conjunction connects "human rights" and "fundamental freedoms", the two elements that are similar. With the emphasis the speaker might want to ensure that both elements are heard loud and clear, that it is not a matter of protecting "this or that" but of the morally good things and the ability to practice them freely as a whole.

In short, out of 14 investigated cases of 'and' appearing in the president's speeches, three pronunciation forms produced by the president matched the assigned pronunciation forms. The president produced vowels that were less central. In some cases, the form pronounced was closer to being strong than weak, and it might have been either done subconsciously or it may have been a strategic action to create certain effects on the listeners.

3.2.2 The comparison of the president's pronunciation of 'of' to the assigned pronunciation forms

When it comes to investigation of the pronunciation of 'of', two things can be observed – the lack of voiced labiodental consonant, and the absence of the schwa. The first thing could be explained by the fact that the president's native language is Lithuanian, which is initially a phonologically driven language, meaning that it is read the way it is written. It might be why the forms of 'of' in the president's pronunciation in English /f/ in almost all the investigated cases, except for OF_9, seen in Table 8. As previously mentioned, Lithuanian phonological

system does not have a central mid vowel /ə/, so primarily the native Lithuanian speaker might replace the /ə/ with a sound that is closer to how a written vowel would be pronounced in their native language. In the case of ‘of’, it would be vowels /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/. It does not, however, mean that a native Lithuanian speaker would be incapable of ever pronouncing the vowel /ə/.

Table 12. The spoken forms and assigned pronunciation for ‘of’.

Case marking	The president’s pronunciation	Assigned pronunciation
OF_1	/ɒf/	/əv/
OF_2	/ɒf/	/əv/
OF_3	/ɒf/	/əv/
OF_4	/ɒf/	/əv/
OF_5	/ɒf/	/əv/
OF_6	/ɔ:f/	/əv/
OF_7	N/A	/əv/
OF_8	/ɔ:f/	/ə/ or /əv/
OF_9	/ɒv/	/əv/
OF_10	/ɔ:f/	/əv/
OF_11	/ɔ:f/	/əv/
OF_12	/ɒf/	/əv/
OF_13	/ɔ:f/	/əv/
OF_14	/ɔ:f/	/əv/
OF_15	/ɔ:f/	/əv/

Another observation about the president’s pronunciation of ‘of’ is that in almost all the cases he tends to separate the word from the others instead of smoothly connecting it to the other elements, like he usually does with ‘and’. The separation may be the reason why the central vowel /ə/ does not appear in the investigated cases naturally and the pronunciation appears to be strong in all the cases, instead of weak.

- (8) OF_1: “In the face **of** accelerating climate change and biodiversity loss , driven in large part by unsustainable production and consumption , urgent action is needed .”

The president’s pronunciation of ‘of’ here is /ɒf/, and the suggested pronunciation form is the weak /əv/. Since the vowel produced by the speaker in this case is short, the pitch is not

raised, the consonant is not voiced, the pronunciation /ɒf/ could be taken for a weaker form, even though the scholars acknowledge /ɒv/ as a strong one. The strong form of pronunciation in this case is not needed. Normally ‘of’ is rarely pronounced in its strong form, and here it is not contrasted or quoted and does not appear at the end of a phrase. The following word of ‘of’ begins with a vowel, so it would have been convenient to produce /v/, but since the president does not connect ‘of’ with the other words, the voicing appears to be left under the influence of the phonological system of the president’s native language.

- (9) OF_5: “We must reinforce the policy of non - recognition of the occupation and annexation **of** Crimea .”

The form that appears to be produced by the president for ‘of’ in this case is /ɒf/, while the pronunciation that is suggested is that of the weak forms /əv/. The president’s vowel is short, the consonant is voiceless, the pitch is not raised, it may be safe to label the spoken form weak. In this phrase the speech sounds connected, ‘of’ is not as separated from the other words. The word ‘of’ here precedes a noun that begins with a consonant /k/, which is voiceless, so the assimilation helps to connect ‘of’ with the following word and make his speech appear much smoother.

- (10) OF_9: “...and security situation in the Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions **of** Georgia .”

The president pronounces ‘of’ in this case as /ɒv/, and the suggested pronunciation for this example is /əv/. In the recording the president separates ‘of’ from its preceding word, but smoothly connects it with the following. The vowel is more open, back, but still short. The consonant, however, this time is voiced. The form pronounced by the president would be considered a strong form, but apart from the vowel quality, there are no other features of a stressed syllable present, so it could still be seen as weak.

- (11) OF_10: “Allowing it to go unnoticed and without response would only foster a climate **of** impunity and undermine the rule of law on a global scale .”

Although the assigned pronunciation for ‘of’ is the weak form /əv/, the president pronounces the form /ɔ:f/. This is not a variant of pronunciation that would be recommended by the scholars. However, the pronunciation should not be considered incorrect. Although the vowel produced by the president is rounded, in reality it is about the same length as /ɒ/ and the pitch is not raised, it is not stressed. The separation of ‘of’ from the preceding and following words is clearly heard and this exclusion might contribute to the pronunciation being strong.

That separation might be a factor for the unusual vowel quality for the word, as well as the lack of voicing of the consonant.

- (12) OF_15: “...we have established a Ukrainian center in Vilnius – the first **of** its kind outside Ukraine.”

This example has been chosen for investigation due to how it is realised in the recording. The impromptu change in the speech made by the president was the final part of the phrase – he ended up saying “the first center **of** its kind...”. The president’s pronunciation of ‘of’ in this recording is /ɔ:f/, while the assigned pronunciation is the weak form /əv/. The vowel produced by the president is rounded, more defined, the consonant is voiceless. The difference from OF_10 is that in this instance the president separates every word, making it sound like each word is highlighted, in need of attention as a phrase, to mark the importance of the subject that is being talked about, which is the opening of the first Ukrainian centre in Lithuania. The pronunciation of ‘of’ sounds strong because this word, as well as other words in that short phrase are slightly emphasized.

In conclusion, in production of ‘of’ the president does not use the central vowel /ə/. The vowels produced are back and sometimes rounded. When it comes to consonants, the voiced labiodental consonant is detected in one out of the 14 analysed instances of ‘of’, other 13 cases have the voiceless consonant. The forms produced by the president could be considered strong, however in practice they appear weak due to low pitch and the lack of emphasis. In most cases, the word ‘of’ being pronounced appears separated from the rest of the phrase, meaning that short pauses are made between words.

3.2.3 The comparison of the president’s pronunciation of ‘the’ to the assigned pronunciation forms

The cases where the spoken form matches at least one form of assigned pronunciation are marked in **bold** and will not be discussed further, since the possible explanations for the use of specific forms have already been presented in the first part of the chapter.

Table 13. The spoken forms and assigned pronunciation for ‘the’.

Case marking	The president’s pronunciation	Assigned pronunciation
THE_1	/ðe/	/ði/
THE_2	/ðe/	/ði/
THE_3	/ðe/	/ðə/

THE_4	/ðə/	/ðə/
THE_5	/ðe/	/ði:/ or /ðə/
THE_6	/ðə/	/ðə/
THE_7	/ðe/	/ðə/
THE_8	N/A	/ðə/
THE_9	/ðə/	/ðə/
THE_10	/ðə/	/ði/
THE_11	/ðe/	/ði/
THE_12	/ðe/	/ði/
THE_13	/ðe/	/ðə/
THE_14	/ðe/	/ðə/
THE_15	/ðe/	/ðə/

As seen in Table 9, the president's pronunciation of 'the' has only two different variants of pronunciation. When it comes to 'the', in almost all the investigated cases the president produces the pronunciation form /ðe/, and in four cases the weak form /ðə/ is produced.

- (13) THE_1: "...we are also witnessing a worsening human rights and security situation in **the** Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions of Georgia ."

In the first analysed case of 'the', it is pronounced in the form of /ðe/. The weak form that has been suggested is /ði/. Due to the Lithuanian having a phonological writing system, for the cases of 'the' the influence of the speaker's native language manifests itself through the frequent use of /e/, which can be justified with the fact that <e> in 'the' was pronounced the way it is written. An observation about the recording of this case is that the president seems to make a slight pause between the determiner and the following word "Abkhazia", marking the separation of the two intonation groups which prevents the vowels /e/ and /ʌ/ from merging with each other. The determiner is not emphasised in and therefore the form pronounced by the president is weak.

- (14) THE_2: "...and punish the perpetrators by all **the** available means ."

The president's pronunciation of 'the' in this case is /ðe/, and the assigned pronunciation is a weak form /ði/. Although the determiner is followed by a word that begins with a vowel, the merging does not happen. The president makes short pauses when saying "all the available means" which makes the phrase sound firm. Although the determiner does not perform any role other than referring to the noun, the pronunciation of 'the' is very clear and straightforward.

- (15) THE_5: "...I would like to turn now to **the** challenge of our time – climate change .”

Two forms of pronunciation can be found assigned for this case of ‘the’ in a sentence – a strong form /ði:/, and a weak form /ðə/. The strong form of the determiner for this specific case would emphasise the greatness of the “greatest challenge” that the president is talking about. The speaker, however, does not produce the strong form of ‘the’ and instead pronounces it as /ðe/. The determiner is followed by a word that begins with a consonant /tʃ/, so the vowel of ‘the’ should not be /i/, because there is no other vowel to merge with.

- (16) THE_10: “That is why I launched **the** idea of Welfare State in Lithuania...”

In this case the president pronounces a weak form /ðə/. The assigned pronunciation is a weak form as well but with a different vowel, which is /ði/. The reason why a form with the vowel /i/ is proposed is because the determiner is followed by a word that begins with a vowel, specifically /ʌ/. When the president said the words “the idea”, the vowel /ə/ blended with /ʌ/ and the result of that was /ðə aɪdɪə/, which almost sounds like /ðə aɪdɪə/.

- (17) THE_12: “Inspired by their heroic struggle, **the** international community should take an even more active role...”

The assigned pronunciation for this case of ‘the’ is /ði/. Although the following word begins with a vowel /ɪ/, some may argue that /ɪ/ and /i/ will merge even more than /ə/ and /ʌ/, but /ɪ/ and /i/ are slightly more different – /i/ is more front and close, while /ɪ/ is more central and slightly more open. The president, however, uses the form /ðe/, which appears to not be emphasised in the phrase and the vowel slightly merges with /ɪ/ from the following word, but it is still possible to hear both, the determiner, and the word.

Overall, the president’s usage of ‘the’ has the least variety. Three cases out of 14 are weak, in one case the president produces a weak form /ðə/, when the form /ði/ is suggested, and for the rest of the cases a form with a vowel /e/ was detected in the President’s pronunciation. Not a single strong form of ‘the’ was detected in the president’s pronunciation.

CONCLUSIONS

1.1 Function words may have more than one form of pronunciation – strong or weak. Weak forms are more common, but a strong form may appear if a word is emphasised, quoted, participates in contrasting, or appears at the end of a phrase (Collins and Mees, 2009, Lecumberri and Maidment, 2014, Roach, 2009, Yavaş, 2011). There are four factors in which weak forms differ from strong forms – intensity, pitch variation, vowel quality and vowel duration. Weak forms usually have less intense vowels, lower pitch, more central and short vowels. Sometimes the vowel of the weak form may be omitted completely and replaced with a syllabic consonant. Moreover, there may be more than one variant of a weak form and its usage will depend on the words that follow or precede the function word. If the speaker wants to achieve the level of fluency that is close to that of a native speaker, learning to differentiate between strong and weak forms and when to use which should be thought of.

1.2 The process of learning a foreign language may have different orientations, one of which is acquisition of the native-like proficiency (Sifakis, 2014). Factors that may influence the pronunciation of a target language include the phonological system of the speaker's native language (Gorba, 2019) and the amount of time the learner spends acquiring the pronunciation skills of their target language (Frauenfelder and Kartushina, 2014). Research by Kozáková (2021) who investigated the usage of English weak forms showed that the speakers whose native language does not have /ə/ in its phonological system would not produce that vowel during the experiment.

2. Most of the pronunciation forms assigned for the 45 chosen instances of 'and', 'of', and 'the' are weak. For some cases multiple pronunciation forms were assigned due to different effects the forms may deliver or the possibility of elision.

3.1 When conducting the comparative analysis on the president's pronunciation of 'and' to the assigned pronunciation forms relying on the written context, it was found that three out of 14 cases that were analysed had matching forms of spoken and assigned pronunciation, one of which was the strong form and the other two were weak forms. Most of the vowels that the president produced in the investigated cases of 'When the president had strong or nearly strong forms of 'and' he was connecting words that are synonymous, thus making sure that the listeners pay attention to both words being connected. Other cases where a strong form without /d/ is being used appear when the president shows the listeners that the list of prioritised steps that should be taken towards a goal is not yet over.

3.2 Having conducted the analysis of the chosen examples of 'of' in the president's speeches it was found that the president did not produce a single weak form that has been proposed. Three observations were made. First, not one /ə/ appeared in the forms produced by

the president, while all the assigned pronunciation forms included /ə/. The comparative analysis then focused on the pitch and stress heard in the recordings to determine whether 'of' was highlighted or not and then compared it to the assigned forms. Second, the president did not produce /v/ where it was assigned, except for one case. Third, the president makes short pauses before and after pronouncing 'of', thus creating separation between words instead of producing connected speech. This separation may be the reason why the vowel /ə/ is never pronounced, but instead a more front vowel was produced.

3.3 The analysis of the president's pronunciation of 'the' has shown that the vowel /ə/ is not used the most and was produced four out of 14 times. The other 10 cases had a vowel /e/. Some forms that were suggested during the analysis of the written context included the weak form /ði/, but it was never produced by the president. The reason for /i/ vowel was to prevent vowels of 'the' and the word-initial vowel from the following word from merging. If the /ə/ vowel was followed immediately by another vowel, for example /ʌ/, the schwa would merge with the following vowel, and the determiner would not be heard if the consonant was not present. This happened with the president's pronunciation, but in one of the investigated cases of 'the' the pauses made before and after pronouncing the determiner prevented the merge from happening.

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SUMMARY IN LITHUANIAN

Bakalauro rašto darbe analizuojamas stipriųjų ir silpnųjų funkcinių žodžių „and“, „of“, ir „the“ tarimas Lietuvos prezidento Gitano Nausėdos anglų kalba sakytose kalbose. Tyrimo tikslas – nustatyti, ar Gitano Nausėdos vartojamų funkcinių žodžių „and“, „of“, ir „the“ tarimo formos atitinka tas, kurias galima būtų pasiūlyti pagal šių žodžių vartojimo kontekstą.

Siekiant šio tikslo, iškelti šie uždaviniai:

1. Apžvelgti mokslinę literatūrą, susijusią su stipriųjų ir silpnųjų formų samprata ir vartojimu bei tikslo, gimtosios kalbos ir požiūrio įtaka užsienio kalbos tarimo mokymuisi;
2. Remiantis rašytiniu kontekstu paskirti tarimo formas žodžiams „and“, „of“, ir „the“;
3. Palyginus aptarti žodžių „and“, „of“, ir „the“ tarimą Gitano Nausėdos kalboje ir siūlomas formas pagal kontekstus, kuriuose šie žodžiai yra.

Duomenys surinkti iš keturių prezidento Gitano Nausėdos kalbų, pasakytų per Jungtinių Tautų Generalinės Asamblėjos visuotinius debatus 2019, 2020, 2021 ir 2022 metais. Kalbų stenogramos buvo gautos iš Jungtinių Tautų Organizacijos ir Lietuvos Respublikos nuolatinės misijos Jungtinėse Tautose interneto puslapių. Tyrimui buvo naudojamos AntConc [4.1.4] ir Praat [6.3.09] programos. AntConc buvo naudojama dažniausiai prezidento kalbose pasikartojančių funkcinių žodžių nustatymui, kiekvieno žodžio 15 pavyzdžių išrinkimui atsitiktine tvarka bei pavyzdžių rašytinio konteksto nustatymui, pagal kurį buvo paskirtos tarimo formos. Praat buvo naudojama Gitano Nausėdos faktiniam tarimui nustatyti.

Atlikus analizę buvo prieita prie išvadų, kad funkciniai žodžiai gali turėti daugiau, nei vieną tarimo formą – stipriąją ir silpnąją. Dažniau pasitaiko silpnosios formos, tačiau yra atvejų, kai reikėtų vartoti stipriąją formą. Keletas veiksnių, galinčių turėti įtakos užsienio kalbos tarimui, yra kalbėtojo tikslas, gimtosios kalbos fonologinė sistema ir laikas, kurį besimokantysis praleidžia mokydamasis tikslinės kalbos tarimo įgūdžių. Taip pat neigiamas požiūris į akcentą gali turėti įtakos sąmoningam kalbėtojo tarimo formavimui.

Kalbant apie tarimą, daugiausia paskirtų formų „and“, „of“ ir „the“ vartosenai buvo silpnos, išskyrus atvejus, kai žodžio pabrėžimas turėtų įtakos tam tikros žinutės aiškesniam išdėstymui. Dauguma prezidento tartų formų nesutapo su pasiūlytomis. Jis tarė mažiau centrinius balsius, arba balsius, kurie būtų tariami žodį skaitant pagal lietuvių kalbos sistemą. Tardamas „of“ prezidentas naudojo daugiausia duslius priebalsius vietoje pasiūlytų skardžiųjų. Tardamas „the“ prezidentas nė karto neištarė pasiūlytos silpnosios formos /ði/.

SUMMARY IN ENGLISH

This thesis focused on the pronunciation of ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ in speeches delivered in English by Gitanas Nausėda, the president of Lithuania. The **aim** was to analyse the differences of president’s pronunciation of the chosen function words and the forms that would be suggested in accordance with the context in which the words appear.

To achieve the aim, the following **objectives** were set:

1. To review scientific literature regarding the concept and usage of strong and weak forms, and the influence of learning orientation, L1, and attitude on learning pronunciation of a foreign language;
2. To discuss the suggested pronunciation forms for ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ according to the written context;
3. To discuss the comparison of the president’s factual pronunciation of ‘and’, ‘of’, and ‘the’ and their suggested pronunciation forms.

The data was compiled from four speeches delivered by Gitanas Nausėda during the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) General debate in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022. Transcripts of the speeches were obtained from the websites of the United Nations and the Permanent Mission of the Republic of Lithuania to the United Nations. The softwares AntConc [4.1.4] and Praat [6.3.09] were used. AntConc was used to identify the most frequently occurring function words in the president’s speeches, to randomly select 15 examples of each word, and to identify the written context of the examples, which was used to assign pronunciation forms. Praat was used to determine the actual pronunciation of Gitanas Nausėda.

The analysis concluded that function words can have more than one pronunciation form – strong and weak. The weak form is more common, but there are cases where the strong form could be used. Three of the factors that can influence the pronunciation of a foreign language are the speaker's learning orientation, the phonological system of the native language, and the amount of time the learner spends learning the pronunciation skills of the target language. Negative attitudes towards accent can also influence the speaker to consciously alter pronunciation.

In terms of pronunciation, the use of the nominated forms 'and', 'of' and 'the' was weak for the most part, except in cases where stressing a word would have an impact on the clarity of a particular message. Most of the President's pronunciations did not match the suggested forms. He pronounced less central vowels, or vowels that would be pronounced when the word is read according to the English system. The President used mostly vowels instead of the suggested voiced consonants when he pronounced "of". The President never used the proposed weak form /ði/ when pronouncing "the".

APPENDIX

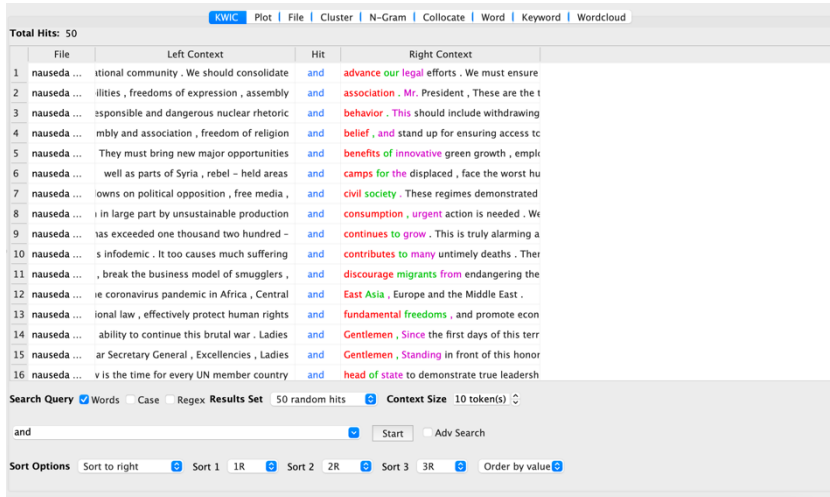


Figure 1. The KWIC view of random hits of ‘and’.



Figure 2. The KWIC view of random hits of ‘of’.



Figure 3. The KWIC view of random hits of ‘the’.

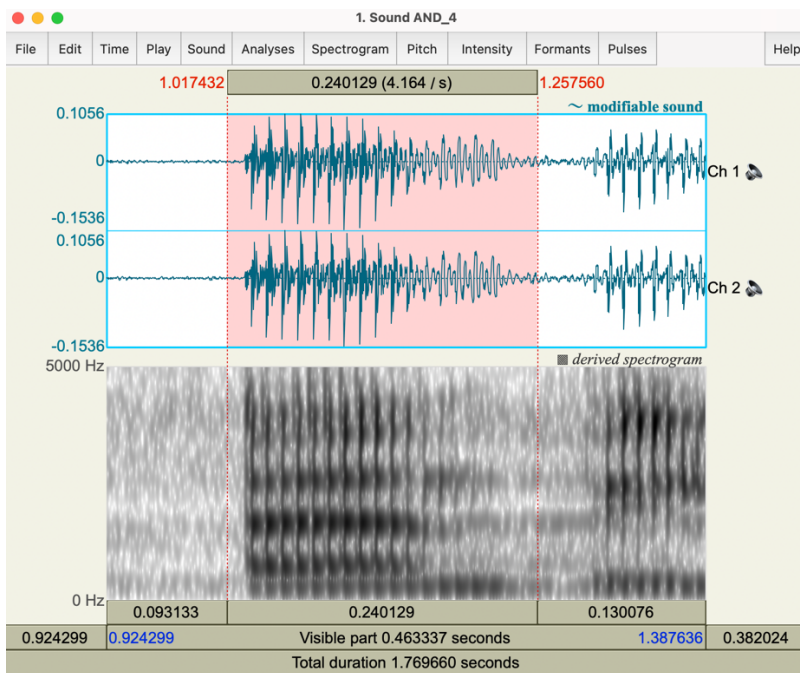


Figure 4. The spectrogram of AND_4.

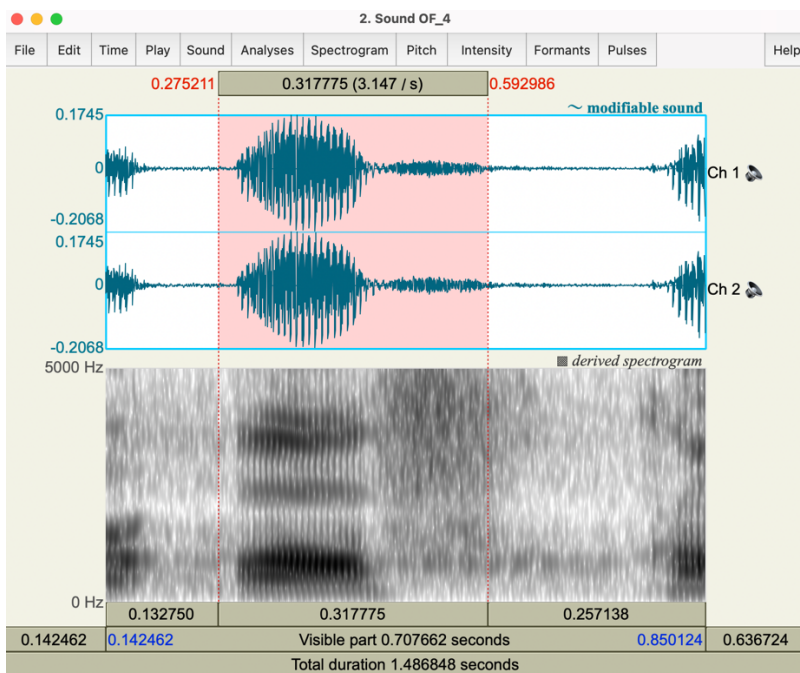


Figure 5. The spectrogram of OF_4.

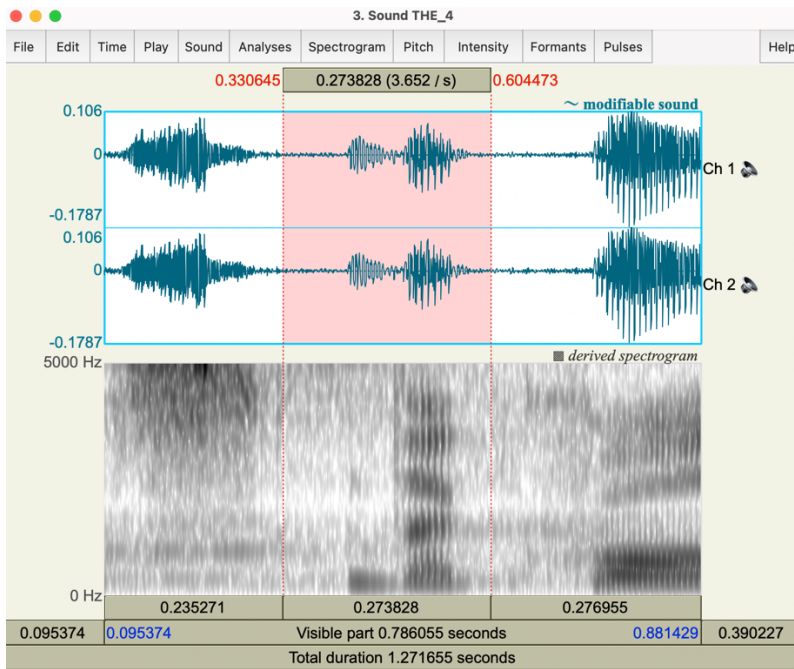


Figure 6. The spectrogram of THE_4.