

Non-Native Pronunciation of English: Problems and Solutions

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing some occurring problems concerning pronunciation of English learners in Jordan. Factors leading to these problems are interference of Jordanian, learners' age, attitude, and their insufficient knowledge of phonology and phonetics systems of the English language. Oral interview is a method for data collection most especially as it involves sound which are the best understood when pronounced. The sample of the study contained of 30 Jordanian students majoring in English language and literature in two private universities. The results show that the sounds, which was existed in Arabic language, were easier to read, while the absent sounds in Arabic and exist in English caused some confusion for the students, what made them tended to pronounce the nearest sound from the Arabic phonemes to the English phonemes. In conclusion the differences between Arabic and English in

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1- Introduction

Phonetics is about describing the sounds of speech and the patterns they make. Among its various practical applications the one that will be uppermost in the minds of most readers is that of teaching and learning the pronunciation of a foreign language. This research is addressed particularly to those concerned with teaching English pronunciation to Jordanian learners. It is worth mentioning that many Jordanians get worried about pronouncing English correctly, especially when some English language students themselves cannot distinguish completely between consonants and vowels of English sounds and Arabic sounds. This means that the more differences in sounds between the two languages the more errors of interference will occur. "When we encounter a foreign language, our natural tendency is to hear it in terms of the sounds of our own language. We actually perceive it rather differently from the way native speakers do. Equally, when we speak a foreign language we tend to attempt to do so using the familiar sounds and sound patterns of our mother tongue. We make it sound, objectively, rather differently from how it sounds when spoken by native speakers. This is the well-documented phenomenon of phonological interference" (Crystal 1987:p. 372). Our L1 (mother tongue) interferes with our attempts to function in the L2 (target language).

1.1) Statement of the Problem

Producing English sounds is not an easy task for the Jordanian students, especially when they are not exposed to the British native speakers in their environment. Moreover some Jordanian teachers are not competent themselves in the proper articulation of English sounds, their students' in this case will form ill pronounced habits, and persist on committing mistakes which might distorts there massages while speaking English.

1.2) Objectives of the Study:

The study aims at:

- 1) Finding the obstacles, that Jordanian student face in pronunciation, as a result of linguistics interference.
- 2) Investigating the factors that cause the phonological interference between Arabic and English, and try to find fundamental solutions for this problem.
- 3) Trying to find fundamental solutions for these obstacles.

1.3) Questions of the Study:

To achieve the mentioned objectives, the researcher tried to answer the following questions:

- 1) What are the obstacles that Jordanian students encounter in English pronunciation?
- 2) What factors cause these obstacles?
- 3) What solutions can be suggested to ease these obstacles?

1.4) Significance of the Study

Due to the variety of errors the students commit in English pronunciation, a lot of attention must be given to overcome such obstacles, especially because these obstacles are concerned with a large number of teachers, students, and curriculum planners. Furthermore these errors may cause misunderstanding, and reflect negatively on the three main language skills i.e. reading, listening, writing, and create a gap between the language of Arabic speakers and the language of the British speakers' of the target language, which makes them not able to achieve a good communication with each other.

2- Review of Literature

In reviewing literature, I will point out to some theoretical and empirical studies that are related to the language interference in the area of pronunciation among Jordanian students and other students around the worlds.

2.1) Theoretical literature related to interference in pronouncing English

Tharpe (2010) investigates the significant challenges for L2 that learners of each language _including Arabic_ may encounter. She offered the following: an overview of features that may cause pronunciation interference, a discussion of best practice for teaching adult language learners, and give specific suggestions for addressing pronunciation and intonation interference. AL-Dilaimy (2012) discusses some Phonetic and Phonological problems as reflected in the perception, identification and production of various English speech sounds. Most of these problems related to the relatively complicated orthographic system of English taught to Arab students at earlier stages of English language learning and to the inconsistent relationship between spelling and pronunciation of English and the differences between the sound system of Arabic and English. They often result in some pronunciation challenges for Arab students of English. Arab regional differences also pose a serious pronunciation difficulty represented by first language interference in the target language.

2.2) Empirical studies related to interference pronouncing English sound

Al-Saidat (2010) studied the English phonotactics of Arab learners of English as a foreign language to determine the types of pronunciation difficulties they encountered. The sample comprised twenty forth-year Arab Jordanian students majoring in English language and literature at two public universities. The students were asked to read a list of words designed by the researcher. The participants' pronunciations were recorded on a computer provided with a sensitive microphone. Using IPA symbols, utterances were phonemically transcribed and then compared with the target language norm in order to decide what is correct and what is not. For such accurate decision, two native speakers of English (Paul and Caroline) were asked to evaluate the pronunciation of the participants. The incorrect ones were classified according to the type of error took place whereas; the correct ones were regarded as irrelevant to the scope of this study. The results indicate that Arab learners of English unintentionally insert an anaptyctic vowel in the onset as well as in the coda of certain English syllables. Results also showed that the major reason for declusterization processes is the mother tongue influence. Baloch (2013) investigated the spelling mistakes, which were committed by undergraduate students while using letter b, p, e. for analyzing how the spelling was affected by the phonetic language interference. A list of more than 50 misspelled words was collected from students' written exams. It was observed that 'b' is replaced with 'p' in monosyllabic words if it appears in the beginning before 'o'. If 'p' is in the beginning of the words before consonant 'r' in polysyllabic words, it is replaced with 'b'. In another situation when 'p' is placed after 'm' in the middle of words, it is replaced by 'b'. The case of substitution of 'p' with 'b' and vice versa is observed mostly in nouns. Omission and addition of 'e' in the final position occur because students may not find such examples in their mother tongue and also they do not find spelling rules for 'e' at the final position of words in English. (Students tried to substitute the letters with the English alphabet which is closer in pronunciation in Arabic). Alfallaj (2013) investigated most of the teacher's problem with their students in pronunciation. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire to investigated accent, pronunciation, speed of speech, insufficient vocabulary. Hree languages institute in Buraydah, Saudi Arabia were involved in this study. Sixty-seven students were asked through a questionnaire.

The findings indicated that teachers with background knowledge of linguistics would help their students overcome most of their pronunciation problem. Along with the students' answers 'the results also showed that sounds' whether vowels or consonants 'which do not exist in Arabic are difficult for Saudi students. Tajeldin Ali (2013) provided experimental evidence for certain linguistics causes of production errors of English spoken with Sudanese Arabic accent. The study was expected to have problems with pronunciation of English vowels in both individual words and real communication. Participants were Ten Sudanese University learners of English who primarily speak Arabic. English vowel data was the materials of the native speakers of English. Based on acoustical analysis of the English vowel tokens are spoken by both Sudanese and native speakers of (RP) English. The acoustical differences that would provide insights into the issue under concern were sought. The results indicated that most of the differences appeared in the area of central and back vowels of English. However, some English tense – lax vowels showed no serious problems probably because there is correspondence between English and Arabic long/short vowels. Moreover, the production errors detected in this study followed different directions that suggest that the Sudanese learners of English had difficulty learning the English vowels. The main linguistic causes of these production errors were mother-tongue interference and lack of English knowledge.

3- Methods

3.1) Research Methodology

Oral interview is a method for data collection most especially as it involves sound which are the best understood when pronounced. That is the reason why this study is relying on this method. This involves the active participation of the interviewer (researcher) and the Interviewees' (respondent)

3.2) Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the present study is the English students who were under graduated in two private universities in Jordan, who speak Arabic as a mother tongue. The sample of the study contained of 30 Jordanian students majoring in English language and literature. The participants of each university belong to different areas. The demographic background about the respondents' general background included data such as gender, age, marital status, and where they acquired their English. The demographic characteristics of the students' samples are shown in Tables (1).

Table (1): Students' Demographic Background

Male	8	30%
Female	21	70%
18-20	9	30%
20-22	18	60%
More than 20	3	10%
Single	28	93%
Married	2	9%
Public	16	53%
Private	12	40%
International	2	7%
School & university	15	50%
English movies	8	27%
Native speakers	4	13%
English courses	3	10%
Philadelphia University	15	50%
Al Petra university	15	50%

3.3) Instrument of the Study Pronunciation test

In this study, the researcher used a pronunciation test to collect data from the participants about consonants clusters, (short and long) vowels and diphthongs, stress, clusters, syllable and nouns. The researcher gave them a pronunciation test and a production test.

The list included minimal pairs, which ask the student to read them and say whether they are pronounced similarly or not. This test includes words to be pronounced in minimal pairs and words in isolation (productive test).

4- Findings and Discussions

The purpose of this study is to find the obstacles, that Jordanian student face in pronunciation, as a result of linguistics interference, investigating the factors that cause the phonological interference between Arabic and English, and try to find fundamental solutions for these obstacles. Findings of the study also may add something new to the scientific research.

Findings and Discussions related to Question One:

1) What are the obstacles that Jordanian students encounter in English pronunciation?

Table (2) shows the results of the oral pronunciation test for each university:

Table 2: participants' answers on the test the students were asked to pronounce the following words:

		participant at Philadelphia University		participant at Al-Petra University					
		True T	%	False F	%	True T	%	False F	%
	(short & long) Vowels and Diphthongs								
1	Fill Fell	3	20%	12	80%	1	7%	14	93%
2	Wash Watch	14	93%	1	7%	14	93%	1	7%
3	Bag Badge	13	87%	2	13%	9	60%	6	40%
4	Leisure Ledger	9	60%	6	40%	8	53%	7	57%
5	Lunch Launch	9	60%	6	40%	7	53%	8	57%
6	Rival Rifle	3	20%	12	80%	5	24%	10	76%
7	Dot Doubt	9	60%	6	40%	6	40%	9	60%
8	Hit Heat	11	73%	4	37%	13	83%	2	17%
	Consonant clusters								
9	Spring	13	83%	2	17%	11	73%	4	37%
10	Street	14	93%	1	7%	14	93%	1	7%
11	Strength	14	93%	1	7%	14	93%	1	7%
	Words with syllables								
12	Character	10	76%	5	24%	13	83%	2	17%
13	Wonderful	10	76%	5	24%	13	83%	2	17%
14	Probability	6	40%	9	60%	7	53%	8	57%
15	Exactly	14	93%	1	7%	13	83%	2	17%
16	Vitamin	4	37%	11	73%	8	53%	7	57%
17	Comfortable	5	24%	10	76%	4	37%	11	73%
18	Excuse me	12	80%	3	20%	13	87%	2	13%
	Stress								
19	Desert Dessert	4	37%	11	73%	4	37%	11	73%
20	Correct Connect	13	83%	2	13%	12	80%	3	20%
21	record(N)record(V)	0	0%	15	100%	0	0%	15	100%
	Nouns								
22	Thomas	10	76%	5	24%	7	57%	8	53%
23	John	13	83%	2	7%	12	80%	3	20%
24	Bill	8	53%	7	47%	5	24%	10	76%
25	Joseph	11	73%	4	37%	6	40%	9	60%

The results of the pronunciation test, which presented in table "2" indicated that the English Jordanian students in both universities committed different kinds of errors in: vowels, diphthongs, consonants, stress, and consonant cluster. Most of these errors related to language interference. The participants in both universities faced a big challenge when they try to pronounce some minimal pairs like "fill, fell" and "rival, rifle", while they required less effort when they try to pronounce the other minimal pairs like "wash, watch", "bag, badge", "leisure, ledger", "dot, doubt", and "hit, heat". What reflected the difficulties of distinguish between the vowels comparing to the consonants in the area of the phonetic language interference, except the consonant "p" and "b" in the word "probability" where the students confused a lot when they try to pronounce it.

Another important challenge the Jordanian students encountered in the pronunciation test is “the consonant cluster”, because the consonant cluster in Arabic was different than it in English the Jordanian students tended to split the word into two clusters by inserting a short vowel within the cluster. So the participants pronounced the word spring as /sɪprɪŋ/, strength as /sɪtrɪŋθ/, and street as /sɪtri:t/. In the other hand most of the participants of the two universities did not put the stress in the right place when they read some words or minimal pairs like “desert, dessert”, “record (N), record (V)”, and comfortable. Their lack of knowledge of rules of stress led them to apply the Arabic pattern of stress for the English words.

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