

The Effect of Local Arabic Dialects on Learning English Language Pronunciation

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Abstract:

Due to the variety of their local dialects and accents, Arab learners occasionally face some problems when pronouncing English letters and phonemes. These pronunciation errors are caused by the influence of native language interference. Each language in any part of the world has its linguistic characteristics and rules that control their pronunciation and even word-formation process, which distinguishes them from those of other nations. Modern linguists described this phenomenon as verbal behaviors because, by the end of a special stage of a child's growth, it becomes as constant customs. As a consequence, generations inherit these verbal qualities from their ancient without having any choices to make a linguistic formation in particular. As they work to develop their English language fluency, Arabic ESL students, for instance, face several pronunciation difficulties such as adding or replacing new phonemes that do not exist in the target language. The linguistic differences between Arabic and English usually have a crucial impact on how simply a learner can study to form the English letter sounds.

Keywords: Arab learners, articulation, dialects' variation, phonemes, instinctive, inventory, pronunciation

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1. Introduction

When a nation seeks to establish its position on today's changing global, they need the right tools for communication. The language is undoubtedly the most important tool of contact between Nations and civilizations, especially in the present era, in which the world has become not just like a small village as it has been said, but even like a small room. Having the basic tools of communication is the fundamental source through which people can interact with each other and understand the various aspects of culture and lifestyles. Languages, which considered as a bridge of knowledge transfer in the present era, are central parts of today's connected world with especial increasing interest towards mutual understanding and cultural exchange among both groups and individuals. The misunderstanding may sometimes occur, for instance, due to mispronunciation of some English vocabulary when people from various localities are trying to communicate with each other, which to some extent, related to the various dialects they locally speak. These home-grown dialects may affect the way they pronounce some words when learning new languages. Therefore, the way Egyptian people, for example, pronounce some English letters is different from Sudanese people do, and their pronunciation problems differ consequently.

2. Preliminary Considerations

2.1 The Arabic script

Arabic is the language of mutual understanding for about 150 and 200 million people who lived in Arabic countries and the verbal language of worship for many millions of Muslims. It has been considered to be the unique language of the Koran, which in the Muslim faith is exceptionally outstanding, simply because it is the direct expression of Allah (Mclouglin, 2003).

There are 28 letters in the Arabic alphabet demonstrating consonants besides the three vowel symbols, which divided into two types: short and long vowels.

Usually, the 28 letters are written from right to left, contrasting to English (from left to right). According to Chacra (2007) in the Arabic language, the letters are linked (merged) together from both sides when writing words. Most of the letters are written in different forms to some extent, depending on their position in the name whether: initially, medially, finally, or standing alone. There are no capital letters in the Arabic language.

3. Language Acquisition

Multilingualism is one of the most common phenomena that is well-known all over the world, and one of the apparent reasons is that the number of languages spoken all over the place at present (roughly 6000) is more than the number of countries (around 200). (Jordà, 2007.)

As (Corbett, 2013) mentioned, there is strong evidence among linguists that L1 transfer cannot modify the course of L2 acquisition. On the other hand, it can influence the level of learners' improvement along their natural developing pathways. The concept of whether the addition of language is an inherent or a learned behavior was one of the most controversial issues that Arabic scientists have concerned about for decades. Some of them believe that the language is instinctive (*apparently unconscious or automatic*) such as Abu Othman Al-Jahez, Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari, and Ahmad Ibn Faris. The latter mentioned in his book (Al-Sahabi) that language is a natural and intuitive process. The other team, headed by Ibn Jennie, consider that language is a

conventionally behavioral process. In his book (Al-Muqadimah, p. 320), the Arabic sociologist Ibn Khaldun, thinks that the acquisition of communication takes place via a natural transmission of words from generation to another. The Arabic speaker first hears the vocabularies of his age and the methods to express their intentions, and then he/she learns how to form a structure.

In terms of modern human theories, many Intellectual multi-schools have been trying to explain the mechanism of language acquisition. Despite the multiplicity regarding language acquisition and the appropriate age to launch foreign languages, the following are two hypotheses of interest, namely: (Innate Hypothesis) and (behavioral hypothesis).

Figure 1. Illustrates the indirect but often considerable contribution output can make to language acquisition

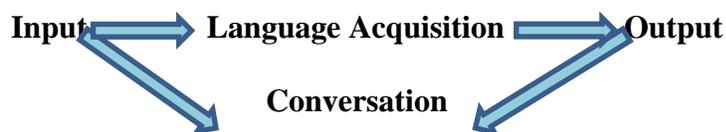


Figure 1. Output contribute to language acquisition

3.1 The Innate Hypothesis of Language Acquisition:

This premise starts with the fact that language is not a behavioral skill, but it is a human mental ability.

Algeo's (2010) study found the following:

Perhaps the most important word in the definition of language is the system. We speak in patterns. A language is not just a collection of words, such as we find in a dictionary. It is also the rules or patterns that relate our words to one another. (p. 2)

It gives a logical explanation of how children can form sentences they have not heard before. This ability, called Linguistic Acquisition Device (LAD), has been widely echoed by linguists, especially by Chomsky (1981), and become one of the critical hypotheses of language acquisition. This theory contains the most common aspects shared by all languages in the world, which found that to acquire and pronounce any words, only children need to expose to samples of that language. Since the Linguistic Acquisition Device (LAD) contains standard international general rules, linguists have tended to name it (UG) Universal Grammar.

4. The Effect of Arabic Phonetic Habits on Learning Foreign Languages:

As reported by Enam (2009), speakers of any language have their linguistic characteristics and rules that control their pronunciation and even word-formation process, which distinguishes them from those of other nations. Modern linguists described this phenomenon as verbal behaviors because, by the end of a particular stage of a child's growth, it becomes as constant customs. As a consequence, generations inherit these verbal qualities from their ancient without having any choices to make a linguistic formation in particular. Although changes that have taken place in Arabic dialects, hundreds of years ago, the same universal rules almost certainly followed as today.

According to Egyptian (Arabic) dialect, for instance, the word format doesn't begin with two consonants or mediate three consecutive sounds and end in such a manner. Thus, the word in the tone of the Arabic language usually starts with one consonant and does not mediate or end with more than two consecutive ones.

If an Egyptian child encounters an English word that begins with two or three consecutive consonants, he will fail to utter such words, because such sounds do not exist in his language. Therefore, he will try to overcome this by adding new English syllables, for example, he/she might use: *shield, bered, grandefather, burnit*

Respectively instead of: *child, bread, grandfather, burnt*

First, when we compare the phonetic habits in Arabic to the practices of English, we find that English contains consonants that have no equivalents in Arabic speech. Pronouncing these consonants is the first difficulty the Arabic children face when learning English. Examples of such sounds are: /P/, /V/, /Th/, /J/, /R/, /L/. The direct and easy way for Arabic learners is to find the closest similar sounds for these consonants. They use /b/, for instance, instead of /p/, /f/ to replace /v/, and /g/ for /j/ and so on. Another unique complication that exists in Arabic is the number of throat sounds that do not occur in English, besides the fact that the vowels in Arabic are pure. However, in English, most of the so-called long vowels are diphthong. Figure 2 shows the shared letters between English and Arabic.

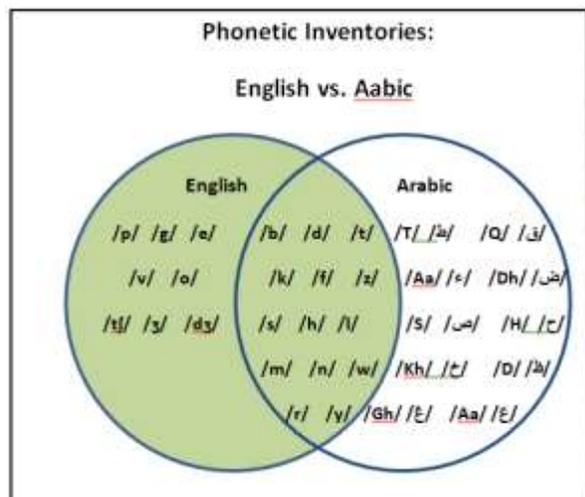


Figure 2: Phonetic inventories

5. English Pronunciation Problems for Arabic ESL Students

5.1 The reasons for making pronunciation errors

In his book 'A Course in Language Teaching,' Penny pointed out that learners' errors of pronunciation derive from several causes:

First, a specific sound may not exist in the mother tongue. Therefore, the learner does not use to create it and hence tends to substitute the nearest equal sound he or she knows.

The second issue is that a sound does exist in the first language, but not as a single phoneme; that is to say, the learner does not recognize it as the individual sound that makes a difference to meaning. In Hebrew, for instance, both the / ɪ / and / i : / (ship/sheep) sounds occur, but which to use depends only on where the sound comes in the word or phrase, not what the word means; and if one is replacing for the other, the meaning will not change. Finally, the learners have the real sounds right but have not learned the stress forms of the word or group of words, besides they use their mother tongue intonation rules and apply them to the second language they are learning (Ur, 1991).

5.2 Teaching Pronunciation

Scrivener (2005) remarks that the discussion about pronunciation is based mainly on the following preliminary points: firstly, students should know that they need to learn pronunciation to understand the contexts which they are most likely using in the language. Secondly, it is frequently applicable and authentic to draw the students' attention to local distinctions and focus on the differences in accents in languages all over the place.

Most English language teachers encourage students to practice well-designed dialogues, take part in productive skill activities, study vocabulary, grammar and become proficient in listening and reading. However, some of these same teachers make a slight effort to teach pronunciation in any specific technique because they are worried about dealing with sounds and intonation; possibly, they think that teaching pronunciation will only make things worse. They may claim that many students look like being able to acquire pronunciation skills during their studies even without having a systematic pronunciation program of education, and without particular pronunciation teaching. It is worth mentioning that Pronunciation teaching not only makes learners aware of various sounds and sound structures but can also increase their speaking significantly. Harmer (2001) puts forward the idea that, in some specific circumstances, pronunciation help lets students get over serious intelligibility difficulties. Besides, teaching pronunciation will decrease the trouble with intonation or stress patterns in phrases and sentences. It will clarify many individual sounds, which cause problems for different first language speakers.

As they work to develop their English language fluency, Arabic ESL students face several pronunciation difficulties. The linguistic differences between Arabic and English usually have a crucial impact on how simply a learner can study to form the English letter sounds. In his book, *Linguistic Phonology*, (Anees 2007) noted that correct pronunciation is one of the problematic areas students sometimes face when they depend on their native Arabic language rules for guidance. Therefore, pronouncing English letters involves learning new sounds and new rules as well.

5.3 Stress

Linguists generally divide stress rules into two classifications: stress-timed languages such as English, Swedish, Russian, Arabic, European Portuguese, and syllable-timed languages as Spanish, French, Italian, Japanese, Finnish, Brazilian Portuguese. Languages, on the other hand, often have different rules and places of stress in words. Some of which have specific places where to pronounce the stressed syllables such as Arabic and French language, whereas others do not e.g., the English language. Hence, the right pronunciation of words conclusively does not take

place unless the speakers use the stress correctly. The French, for instance, usually pressure the final syllable of words; consequently, they try to apply the same rule when pronouncing English vocabularies. This misuse frequently produces unfamiliar sounds which seem to be strange to the English and consequently lead to misunderstanding between these two nations. In most cases, English words have different meanings according to the place of stress, for instance, the word: **insult** 'verb' /ɪn'sʌlt/. (The first syllable is stressed). **insult** 'noun' /'ɪnsʌlt/. (The stress is in the second syllable). Another example which shows that stressing a word incorrectly can change the meaning or type of the word:

"They will **desert** /dɪ'zɜ:t/ the **desert** /'dez.ət/ by tomorrow." **deSERT** /dɪ'zɜ:t/ (The stress is in the second syllable) means to leave behind. **DEsert** /'dez.ət/ (The first syllable is stressed) means a space, regularly concealed with rocks or sand.

Leslie (2003) observed that Arabic stress rules are relatively different comparing to the English language ones. According to the author, the most fundamental characteristics of Arabic stress rules are:

- (a) Usually, short syllables have short vowels;
- (b) The first syllabus never stressed in Arabic;
- (c) If a word contains two syllables, then the stress tends to occur on the second syllable;
- (d) The stress falls on the nearest long syllable to the end of the word in words with long and short syllables;
- (e) Otherwise, the burden is on the first syllable in words with only one syllable. (Mclouglin, 2003).

Unlike English stress rules, Arabic stress usually occurs in the final syllable if it contains double vowels, for example, mub**hóot** (مبهورت); bayr**óot** (بيروت).

Therefore, Arabic learners will apply the same rule when pronouncing English words such as contrib**ute** and constitu**te**, trying to put the stress in the final syllable

Arabic intonation likewise uses falling and rising pitch forms. On the other hand, pitch in Arabic does not drop the same low level as in English. This similar pitch patterns serve-various roles in the two languages, creating a major problem area for the Arabic student learning English.

In English, when the vocal sound modifies pitch levels, the change may affect either a single vowel or a series of vowels; whereas, in Arabic, a move possibly will occur on only one vowel at a time.

In the Arabic language, Word stress goes on entirely different rules than in English. The place where to put the pressure in Arabic words is determined by the structure of the word and the arrangement of consonants and vowels in that word. The following Arabic rules show this clearly:

- 1) The final syllable of the Arabic word is never stressed.

2) If the syllable before last is heavy, which means it contains either a long vowel or a short vowel plus two consonants, then that syllable is stressed.

3) If the last but one syllable is not heavy, the stress, in this case, falls on, the third tip-last syllable.

4) Any suffixes may change the structure when added to a word. When this occurs, stress then will relocate to meet the above-mentioned cases. The following examples of Arabic stress rules will show this clearly:

If the final syllable is super-heavy (CVVC or CVCC), then it bears stress.

darast درست 'I studied' - raseen راسين 'two heads'

Otherwise, if the penultimate syllable is heavy (CVV or CVC), it bears the stress.

maktabha مكتبها 'her desk/office' - binsaameh بنسامح - we forgive.

Under other conditions, stress goes on the syllable before the final one.

fabarada فبردا - he got cold.

One of the methods in which dialects vary is what occurs when the syllable before the final one is massive. The antepenultimate is then stressed, in most dialects as shown above, but in Cairene Arabic, the stress is on the light penultimate instead:

madrasa (Cairene) - madrase (Beirut/Damascene)

6. The Varieties of Arabic Dialects When Pronouncing English Consonants

Vowel and consonant are terms that by themselves spread over morally to talking sounds. Vowels have cleaned smooth ongoing airflow through the mouth, while with consonants, there is a particular kind of distinct compression that modifies talking sounds. Speaking about vowel symbols and consonant symbols, connected directly to symbols demonstrating vowel sounds and symbols indicating consonant sounds. (Pullum, 2007)

Besides the division of consonants into voiced and unvoiced, linguists have another category fundamentally:

- (a) relating to the manner of their articulation,
- (b) referring to the organs by which the utterance is affected (Gairdner, 1925; Mclouglin, 2003). Based on the assumption that there are stable differences between English Language and Classic Standard Arabic, it is typically expected some Arabic learners encounter the same difficulties when learning English pronunciation as a result of the varieties of Arabic dialects. One of these differences is clearly distinguished when pronouncing consonants in both two languages. Another unique complication that exists in Arabic is the number of throat sounds that do not occur in English, besides the fact that the vowels in Arabic are pure. However, in English, most of the so-called long vowels are diphthong.

Table.1 shows the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) of different Arabic letters.

Table 1: *The IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet)*

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	pharyngeal	glottal
Stop	b		t d				kg	q		ʔ
Nasal	m		n							
Thrill			r							
Tap or flap			r							
Fricative		f	θ ð	s z	ʃ	ʒ		χ	ħ ʕ	h
Lateral Fricative					dʒ					
approximate	w					j				
Lateral approximate			l ɭ							

The next patterns and examples explain the idea clearly:

Egyptian Speakers, for instance, often have these teething troubles with /dʒ/ and /ð/. In such case, spoken variations of Egyptian Arabic, /dʒ/ substitutes for /z/, as in "job" and "jam" would correspondingly sound like [zab] and [zæm]. Another tricky area exists with the consonant sound /ð/, which often replaces by its plosive equivalent /d/. Therefore, some English vocabulary such as 'though,' 'they,' 'then,' and 'there,' would respectively sound like 'dough' 'day,' 'den,' and 'dare.' Barros, 2003 in Hago & Khan (2015).

Sudanese students, on the other hand, have some inaccuracies with respect to some consonants that do not exist in Sudanese Spoken Arabic e.g. /θ/ /ð/ /p/ /v/ therefore they switch them with /s/ /z/ /b/ /f/ respectively. They don't distinguish between (s-sound and θ -sound); thus, they usually use /s/ as an alternative to /θ/. For example, they will pronounce words such as (bath, math, theatre) as (bas, mas, seatre) by replacing the dental /θ/ with the alveolar /s/. Furthermore, their mistakes with other fricatives (z and ð) they often substitute the dental /ð/ with the alveolar /z/, for this reason, words like (the weather, then) probably pronounce as /z/ instead of /ð/ as (za, weazer, zen). Likewise, other Arabs, Sudanese learners frequently replace bilabials (b and p) with each other. Consequently, they use /b/ instead of /p/ for instance words like (pupil, paper, apple) are pronounced as /bju:bl/, /beibə/, /æbl/.

The following table shows the place and method of articulation when pronouncing different Arabic letters.

Table 2. *The place and method of pronouncing various Arabic letters*

	manner	voicing	place						
			Bilabial	Labiodental	interdental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	glottal
Obstruent	Stop	Voiceless	p			t		k	ʔ
		Voiced	b			d		g	
	Fricative	Voiceless		f	θ	s	ʃ		h
		Voiced		v	ð	z	ʒ		
	Affricative	Voiceless					tʃ		
		Voiced					dʒ		
	Nasal	Voiced	m			n		ŋ	
	Liquid	Later al	Voiced				l		
		Rhotic	Voiced					r(ɹ)	
	Glide	Voiced	w				j	(w)	

7. The Varieties of Arabic Dialects when Pronouncing English Vowels

Regarding the articulatory phonemics, (Yule 2010) investigates how speech sounds are formed using the properly multipart verbal tools we have. The air pressed out by the lungs up through the windpipe to the larynx to produce sounds. Then the air goes through the vocal cords or (vocal folds), which placed inside the larynx.

The consonants' system contains significant lexical contrasts in the Arabic language. Consequently, the Arabic language has a prosperous consonant system and quite poor vocalic structure. Grammarians have divided vowels in Arabic into two main types:

7.1 Short Vowels:

According to classical Arabic, there are three short vowel phonemes; two close vowels, palatal (i) and labio-velar (u), and one open vowel, guttural (a).

7.2 Long Vowels:

Unlike short vowels, the opposition between /i/ and /u/ occurs in all dialects in the long vowels. All modern dialects of the Arabic language have at least three long vowels, /ā/, /ū/, and /ī/. /ī/ and /ū/ have an articulation which is closer than that of their short counterparts, and /f/ has a front articulation. (Watson, 2002)

The second type of vowel in Arabic, which does not exist in English, called al-harakātu. They can be both short and long.

Arabic speakers normally write all these vowels as diacritic signs below or above the consonant letter to which they belong. The following are the three types of these vowels:

(a) Fathah: — /a/ is a small diagonal stroke written above the consonant:

e.g., kataba, means: to write. (كَتَبَ)

(b) Kasrah: /i,ɪ/ is a minor sloping stroke under the consonant

/bi/, e.g. qabila, means: to accept. (قَبِلَ)

(c) Dammah: /u/ is a symbol like a comma written above the consonant: ُ

/bu/, e.g. hasuna, to be handsome. (حَسُنَ) (Chacra, 2007)

8. Conclusion:

One of the most challenges that Arabic learners face when learning English is their attempts to implement the same pronunciation rules of their mother tongue to replace the English ones. Utilizing these rules in the wrong places will cause mispronunciation of some vocabulary, which leads in return to misunderstanding occurs when people from various localities are trying to communicate with each other. Generally speaking, to acquire an accurate pronunciation of any foreign language involves a complete change in the innate traditional conducts of articulation. Arabic learners, in particular, should be aware of all these changes when learning a new language like English, as well as all other West European languages, in which the pronunciation differs completely from their local language. Besides, learners must recognize evidently from the outset that this change in pronouncing customs must cover the basics of articulation and impact consonants, vowels, and intonation.

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