

Simplifying The Difficulties of Pronouncing The Vowels and Diphthongs For the Students of Second Stages of Iraqi Intermediate Schools

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Abstract:

Many serious difficulties of pronunciation happen for the students of second stage of intermediate level/ A'I Al-Beit intermediate school/ The first Karkh/ Ministry of Education. These could be existed in transcribing the phonetics in accordance with many reasons. Firstly, The targeted language (which is English specifically) has many occurrences of differences between the written form of letter and the pronouncing symbol. Secondly, the actual meddling of the mother language (the Arabic mother tongue). And thirdly, the phonemes' poor teaching that is happening in the primary and intermediate schools. The problems are identified and many solutions are presented as well within the study.

Key words: (Karkh, tongue, solutions, meddling, targeted, phoneme).

تسهيل الصعوبات اللفظية لأصوات العلة والمركبة لطلاب الصف الثاني متوسط في المدارس
المتوسطة العراقية

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الملخص:

الكثير من الصعوبات النطقية تواجه طلاب الصف الثاني متوسط/ متوسطة ال البيت المختلطة/ مديرية التربية الكرخ الأولى/ وزارة التربية. حيث ان هذه الصعوبات تتواجد في رسم الأصوات ونطقها ولعدة مسببات. اولها هي اللغة المستهدفة (اللغة الإنجليزية) تحتوي على الكثير من الفوارق التي تحصل بين الحروف المكتوبة والرموز المنطوقة. وثانيها التداخل اللغوي الحاصل ما بين اللغة الأم (اللغة العربية) واللغة المستهدفة. وثالثها هو التعليم الفقير للطلبة في الصفوف الأولية والمتوسطة على حد سواء. هذا البحث سيحدد كل المشكلات والكثير من الحلول سوف يعرضها على خلال التعليم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (كرخ ، حلول، تداخل، مستهدفة، الصوت).

1. Introduction

The Iraqi learners of English language have been facing lots of phonetics sophistications for a long time. It either could be as a cause of the great correspondence between the phonetic symbols and the letters in their mother tongue (the Arabic language), or because of the discrepancies between pronouncing the sounds and the English spelling, or the changing of phonetics could affect the syntactic, semantic and morphological indications of the word (or a sentence as well).

1.1 The Goals of Study

1. Attributing to help the students how to distinguishing readily the various speech sounds and to remembering the acoustic features for each ones.
2. Helping the learners to identify the actual relationship between the conventional orthography of the letters and their pronunciations.

1.2 The Aims of Study:

1. Identifying the mistakes of Iraqi learners and analyzing them as a challenging area.
2. Finding out how to recognizing and understanding the phonemic transcription and presenting many suggested solutions as well.

1.3 The Scope of Study

This study is targeting the second stage of intermediate schools to simplifying the transcription of all kinds of vowels.

1.4 The Procedures of Study

The procedures are divided into two classroom activities:

1. A Question of twenty words with a twenty sounds (vowels and diphthongs and each word carries a specific vowel with no repetitions).
2. The students are submitted to transcribe the words before and after pronouncing them by the researcher.

1.5 The Objectives of Study

1. Shedding light on the pronouncing errors of the students.
2. Finding out a specific teaching technique of advancing the use of written test in order to develop the oral pronunciation of the students.
3. Identifying the pure vowels (12 sounds) and diphthongs (8) to the students.
4. Eliminating the errors of pronunciation when reading long sentences.

2. The Theoretical Framework/ The Difficulties of Learning English Language

Harmer (1986) states "English spelling is extremely complex for other languages speakers". So this complexity shows how difficult for foreigners to pronounce the English words. Jones (1967) says "conventional English writing is far from being phonetic, it does not give the accurate information as to sound-order required by English spoken student".

The English writing has both consistencies and inconsistencies. The influence of spelling inconsistencies (orthographical spelling) is so obvious in the foreign language learning. The learning problems arise when the spelling system of the language becomes more inconsistent.

According to Fromkin et. Al (1982), "Alphabetic spelling represents the pronunciation of words, but it is often the case that the sounds of the words in a language are rather systematically represented by orthography-that is by spelling".

The Iraqi learners of English language do not find any troubles in transcribing and pronouncing consonants, in contrast with vowels (transcribing the vowels are so hard for them). Part of the complexity in vowels transcription is that there's lack of precise barriers between the spelling and the vowel symbol Ladefoged (1982) sheds light on this fact by saying "a sound may be a stop or a fricative, but it cannot be halfway between the two. But it's possible to make a vowel that is halfway between a high and mid ones".

Shatha and Amira (2005) present six possibilities of the spelling inconsistencies as shown below:

1. One individual vowel could be heard by many neighboring letters such as /u:/ in tool /tu:h/, shoe /ju:/, (two, too, to are all pronounced /tu:/).
2. Many different sounds could be pronounced as a single orthographic symbol like: book /bʊk/ and soon /su:n/, head /əhed/ and seal /si:l/ and rat /ræt/ and craft /kræft/.
3. Phonemically, many letters do not have any value in specific occurrences like /aɪ/ in sight /saɪt/ /l/ in calm /ka:m/ and /k/ in knight /naɪt/.
4. Several combinations of letters could be considered as a one sound such as /tʃ/ in choose /tʃu:z/, /f/ in rough /rʌf/ and photo /fɒtə/ and /j/ in sure /ʃʊə/.
5. Some sounds do not represent any spelling such as /u/ could be heard like /j/ followed by /u/ like mute /mju:t/ and universe /junivers/.
6. One letter could be pronounced differently in two position within a word like (z) in Xerox /zeroks/.

Laver (1994) illustrates that the most sophisticated transcriptional language, for the foreign learners, is English. Previously, Jones (1967) mentions six complexions for the learners of English as presented below:

1. The learners must learn how to recognizing readily the various sounds of speech. in addition, it's essential to remember the acoustic features for each ones.
2. They must know how to pronounce the sounds of the native language by their own speech organs.
3. In the connected speech, the learners should know precisely how use the speech sounds in the accurate positions.
4. Acquiring the self-confidence to pronouncing the speech sounds rapidly without hesitation is one of the needs.
5. The learners must know the suprasegmental features of the speech sounds.
6. It's important for the learners to know the actual relationship between the conventional orthography of the letters and their pronunciations.

3. The Practical Framework/ The Exam

The top priority of learning a foreign language is to developing the pronunciation orally. On the other hand, the written exam is so essential to test the pronouncing development by reading and transcribing. Accordingly, Al-Hamash (1981) puts down many reason behind preferring the written exam more than the oral ones such as:

1. The Oral test is time- consumed.
2. It's so hard to administering the oral exam in different places.
3. It's also too hard to standardizing the oral exam
4. No one can maintain the complete silence of the oral ones.
5. Each examinee has a limited number of responses so it's so hard to controlling the adequacy of the test.

This type of diagnostic test is performed to show the points and strength and weakness of the students. Rivers (1981)

The test is required for all the students of second intermediate stage (40 students). Ten students are excluded because they failed in the previous year 2021-2022 and they are repeaters (so they took the exam twice before). The students are submitted to transcribe the actual words that have the vowels and diphthongs before and after uttering them by the teacher (or the researcher) to acquire a knowledge feedback for their pronouncing abilities.

3.1 The Test Administration:

Thirty students are submitted to answer the test. The researcher checked the answers of them. The test items are corrected out of 20. Each ones are corrected either correct or not (one mark for each point). The examined words are :

Crown, Arch, girl, boss, ran, put, bid, fell, night, frost, clay, fared, root, raw, ease, buzz, foil, ago, near, pool.

3.2 The Validity of Test:

This indicates the degree of test measurement. As put by Shatha and Amira (ibid), there exist two kinds of validity; content validity which measures the topics and behavior measurement. For that, the researcher uses the content type of validity to fulfill the desires of the test. The teacher wrote a list of the vowels and diphthongs to be examined. The list works as a content requirement which reflected to the areas of assessment. And then the test has been showed to the targeted members of students.

3.3 The Reliability of Test:

Gronlund (1971) describes this part as the most essential part of results evaluation because it offers the reliability that makes validity imaginable and it shows the consistency over different cases and examples. Lado (1965)

suggests many ways of reliability estimation splitting half-method that is considered the most reliable type and results a reliability factor. The other way, according to Lado (ibid), is to splitting half measures the test internal consistency by recording two same halves for each student; for instance, unusual and usual items are comparing the scores of the two half-tests. So the reliability factor is determined.

3.4 The Practicality of Test:

This criterion shows the teacher's assessment of the test to be practical, simple, easy, time consumed and easy for scoring. Lindvall (1961)

In this test, the researcher has taken into consideration the time and effort of construction and administration.

3.5 The Findings of Test:

The researcher corrected all the answers, the results exposed and there existed such a problematic issue. The students answered the sounds (vowels and diphthongs) with many variables as seen in Table no.1 (before pronunciation) and Table no.2 (after pronunciation) starting from the highest to the lowest number

The Vowels	The Variables
/ɔɪ/	25
/eə/	22
/ei/	19
/iə/	18

/o:/ and /^/	16
/au/	15
/i:/ and /ə/	12
/ai/	11
/a:/	10
/a/ and /i/	9
/o/, /uə/ and /u:/	8
/ou/	7
/ə/, /u/ and /e/	6

Table (1)

The Vowels	The Variables
/ə/	6
/ei/	5
/o/, uə/ and /au/	4
/e/, /oi/, /eə/, /iə/, /ou/ and /o:/	3
/ai/, /^/, /u:/, /a:/, /a/, /ə:/, /i:/, /i/ and /u/	2

Table (2)

It's obvious from both of table no.1 and 2 that the most variable vowels are /o:/ and /^/ before pronunciation and resulting (2 and 3) after that. Approximately, each variable is reduced into from (2-6). The sound /ɔɪ/ is chosen as the most variable before the researcher's pronunciation and actually reduced after pronunciation to be (3) as well.

The Analysis of Results:

It's worth mentioning that the transcription mistakes of vowels and diphthongs happened because of many reasons. The most important reason behind these mistakes is the ***Interlingua Transformation of Native Speaker*** (The mother tongue of students is Arabic). Accordingly, the students made many mistakes because of the similarity hesitation of many vowels and diphthongs as listed below

- /i/, /i:/ and /e/
- The wrong pronouncing of /ou/ (it was pronounces /oi/ and /o/ in many occasions.
- The false pronunciation of /o:/ (they chose /ow/ and /ou/ instead/.
- /əu/ instead of /au/.

The second reason behind these mistakes is the wrong general thinking to teaching the students in the primary schools that there are 26 English letter; all of them are consonants except seven only (a, i, o, e, w, u, y) which represented as vowels specifically.

Thirdly, the high commitment of English lecturers and professors in the academic colleges to teaching specific curriculum book in each material (somehow sophisticated to the mentality of some students). Without permitting the teacher or the instructor to select the most general books that convey all the materials and fulfill the teaching-learning desires.

Fourthly, the British and American accents of the professors in the Iraqi academic faculties could be a noticeable reason for that mispronouncing (actually some of them are graduated and acquired enough knowledge to pronouncing the sounds from their faculties inside or outside Iraq).

Suggestions to Improving The Pronunciation of Students

In fact, the lecturers and professors should be more attached with the modern techniques of teaching phonetics and phonology such as the techniques below:

- **The Suggestion of Rebus Technique**

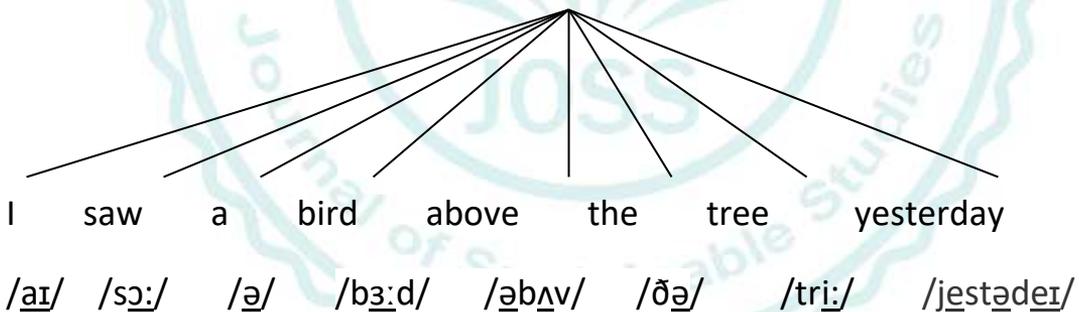
This technique was proposed by Fromkin et. al. (1982) to resembling the transcription of sounds by many daily objects (by using pictures and multimedia) such as resembling the sound /o/ with a small ball, the sound /aɪ/ with the eye (the both share the same pronunciation) and so on.

- **The Tree Diagram Technique**

Drawing a pictures that have many branches and leaves. Each branch represents a specific phoneme. These branches (or phonemes) carry many leaves (each leaf represents a specific example with the transcription beneath).

For Example: when drawing a tree diagram for the underlined transcriptional representation of vowels for the sentence below:

I saw a bird above the tree yesterday



- **Playing Games**

By dividing the classroom into two groups (each ones contains 15 students). then asking each group to think as a team work to making a list of 15 words carrying vowels and diphthongs within (one word with transcription included for each student) and motivating them by adding daily marks for the winner group.

● Singing Songs and Making Rhymes

This technique is fruitful to flourishing the mentality of students. Giving them a specific rhyme or song with many vowels and diphthongs included. Then asking the students to identify the positions of the sounds and transcribing them as well. Also the marks enthusiasm is given as a practical choice to motivating them.

As the earth quakes, /əz ði ɜ:θ kweɪks/

Splatter across dull nears; /splætə əkrəs dʌl niəs/

Everything remains hidden in the crevices of a tragic tableau. /evriθɪŋ ri'meɪnz hɪdn ɪn ðə krevɪs əv ə trædzɪk tæbləʊ/
Darkness dawns /da:kəs dɔ:nz/

as an entity unseen makes its way /əz ən entəti ʌnsi:n meɪks ɪts weɪ/

small indentations in the landscape /smɔ:l ɪndenteɪʃns ɪn ðə lændskeɪp/

It carefully skins the layers of its cage /ɪt keəfəli skɪns ðə leɪəz əv ɪts keɪdʒ/
The absurd, leaking balloons turn solid. /ði əbsɜ:d, li:kɪŋ bælu:n tɜ:n səlɪd/
Nothing transcribes as well as the pools of Lakewater /nʌθɪŋ trænskraɪbs əz wəl əz ðə pu:ls əv leɪk wɔ:tə/

Carved by the blaze /kɑ:vɪd baɪ ðə bleɪz/

worn away /wɔ:n əweɪ/

little /lɪtl/

by /baɪ/

little. /lɪtl/

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- **Using Pictures and Multimedia to show differences**

Basically, according to Iraqi learners of English language, lots of difficulties and confusions occur when transcribing and pronouncing long and short vowels. So this technique is activated by showing portraits, pictures and videos for many pairs of words that carry both of long and short vowels such as the picture of pairs below:



Hat /hæt/



Heart /ha:t/



Pot /pɒt/

Port /pɔ:t/

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