Phonological Interference Of Arabic In Learning English As Second/Foreign Language

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Abstract

Mother Tongue Interference is a remarkable aspect of second/foreign language learning. This interference is more in speaking skill than writing skill. This is due to the different sound and their articulating systems in different languages. This is the same with Arabic and English. The number of sounds in Arabic language is about 34 while in English it is 44. In Arabic there is just 6 or 8 vowel sounds and in English 20. So, a learner who becomes habituated to articulate mother tongue sounds has difficulty in mastering second/foreign language sounds. The present Research Paper deals with some of those difficulties in Arabic background learners of English. their phonological reasons and the ways that may be helpful in removing those difficulties. . In this regard we have given much emphasis on listening and speaking practices. We are fortunate that we have radio, TV, Internet and other devices where we can easily find native speakers speaking well or news readers making correct pronunciation. The learners are strictly advised to read newspapers, journals, and other books to facilitate themselves more and more exposure to English that may reduce the interference to a greater extent if not completely.

Keywords: phonological, interference, Arabic, English, pronunciation, stress, cluster

The Significance of the Subject

Undoubtedly, English has attained increasing importance throughout the world in general and in Arabic countries in particular. In this context the purpose of this paper is very simple and hopefully useful to help the student and the reader the English language better. "Millions of foreign students want to learn English as well as they can … many students want to be able to speak English well, with a pronunciation which can be easily understood both by their fellow-students and by English people" (O'Connor, 2009). One of the big obstacles in this way is the mother tongue interference. Not only phonetically but grammatically and in translation also we

witness the problems regarding mother tongue. Arab parents and educators have begun to be concerned about a correct pronunciation of English but the learners find no help. In this perspective this research paper will highlight the points to be marked and solutions that will certainly help remove the obstacles.

The Statement and the Research Questions
There are some differences between two distinct languages. The person doesn't feel any problem in acquiring mother tongue or native language. This language creates some indistinct habits of speaking writing etc. These habits make difficulties in learning some other language. The Arabic background learners of English also face difficulties due to the habits and systems of their mother tongue (Arabic). The research paper deals with this subject keeping in mind a few research questions:

1. What are the instances where the phonological and syntactical structures of L1 (Arabic) is used in L2 (English), causing an error?
2. What will be the effective solutions of the above problems?

Aims of the Study
The aim of the study is to facilitate those learners of English as a second/foreign language whose mother tongue has been Arabic by pointing out a few differences in the systems of these two languages. The research paper will analyze the aspects that create difficulties in learning the target language (English). Then suggestions will be presented to come over the difficulties by linguistic methods and applications.

Methodology
The problem of our subject has been observed in the learners regarding English in their daily and academic activities. Therefore, first of all some of them will be interviewed and data will be collected to find out the specific problems. Then the relevant books and some research papers related to the subject will be studied. Some audio and visual materials along with other will be collected from the Internet. After the study of the research papers, investigation of the audio video materials, and analysis of the data the project will be completed.

Hypotheses
There are similarities and differences between the systems of both the languages. The learner of a foreign/second language has to suffer from the conflict between the habits of native language and systems of target language. The Arabic background students have difficulty in pronunciation of English sounds and words in company. However, if the learners identify the difficulties as well as their reasons and follow the instructions suggested by the research, to a greater extent obstacle will be removed.

Phonological Interference

Phonology can be defined as the study of the sound system of a language. Arabic language is considered as one of the famous Semitic languages. Most Arabic sounds are shared with English sounds, with some differences. Arabic consists of three vowels [i], [a], and [u], that can be found in English as "ya" as in Yankee, a as in Canada, and "wa" as in Washington, but these vowels have short and long forms in Arabic. Moreover, Arabic language lacks the two English vowels [e] and [o]; so what we pronounce in English as Cairo, would be pronounced in Arabic as Qahirah / qæhɪræ/ or Kahirah (Abushihab, 2010). As noted earlier, most Arabic consonants are similar to those in English. The Arabic language lacks some consonants, such as p /p/, v /v/, g /g/ and /ŋ/. There are also some sounds in Arabic that are not found in English, such as Ayn (ع), ðˤaa (ظ), and dˤaad (ض). These sounds are very problematic for non native Arabic speakers. Additionally, some sounds in Arabic are pronounced at the back of the mouth (Abushihab, 2010).

Pronunciation of Phonemes

Millions of foreign students want to learn English as well as they can; for some it is only a matter of reading and writing it, and they will find no help here. But many students want to be able to speak English well, with a pronunciation which can be easily understood both by their fellow-students and by English people (O'Connor, 2009). Written English and spoken English are obviously very different things. Writing consists of marks on paper which make no noise and are taken in by the eye, whilst speaking is organized sound, taken in by the ear (O'Connor, 2009).

Problem

In our own language we have a fairly small number of sound-units which we put together in many different combinations to form the words and sentences we use every day. And as we get older we are dominated by this small number of units. It is as if we had in our heads a certain fixed number of boxes for sounds ; when we listen to our own language we hear the sounds and we put each into the right box, and when we speak we go to the boxes and take out the sounds we want in the order we want them. And as we do this over the years the boxes get stronger and stronger until every-thing we hear, whether it is our own language or another, has to be put into one of these boxes, and everything we say comes out of one of them. But every language has a different number of boxes, and the boxes are arranged differently. For example, there of our English boxes contain the sounds at the beginning of the words fin, thin and sin, that is, f, th (this is one sound, of course) and s. like this:

f	th	s

Now, many other languages have boxes which are similar to the English ones for f and s, but they do not have a special box for the th-sound. And we can picture this in the following way:

F	th	s
f	S	

When the foreign listener hears the English th-sound he has no special th box, so he put it into either the f box or the s box

In other words, he 'hears' the th-sound as either f or s; a funny f or a funny s, no doubt, but he has nowhere else to put it. And in speaking the same thing happens : if he has to say thin, he has no th box to go to so he goes to the nearest box available to him, either f orthe s, and he says either fin or sin (or it may be tin, if he has a t box in his language).

The main problem of English pronunciation is to build a new set of boxes corresponding to the sounds of English, and to break down the arrangement of boxes which the habits of our native language have so strongly built up. We do this by establishing new ways of hearing, new ways of using our speech organs, new speech habits (O'Connor, 2009).

Solution
Careful listening is the most important thing; and careful matching of performance with listening will bring you nearer to the ideal of a perfect English pronunciation (O'Connor, 2009).

Individual Sounds
The Arabic vowels are six in number. No glides are included in these vowels. Three of them however, are geminates (clusters) of the same vowel. Gemination here indicates the relative length of the vowels. In addition to the six vowels, there are two diphthongs (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

The Arabic Vowels with Examples

i.   i /min/ "from"
ii.   ii /fiil/ "elephant"
iii. aa /baab/ "door"
iv.   uu /huut/ " whale"
v.   ay /kay/ "in order to"

vi.   aw /aw/ "or" (Raja T.Nasr,1967).

Accent / Stress

Arabic stress

Short syllable:

a)   If a word consists of one short syllable, it takes a primary stress.
Example: [min] "from"(Raja T.Nasr, 1967).

Long syllables:

b)   If a word contains one long syllable, it takes a primary stress.
 Example: [TææR] "he flew" (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

c)   If a word contains two or three long syllable, the last syllable takes a primary stress and the rest take secondary stresses.
Example: two syllables: [TaawUUS] "peacock"

Three syllables: [SiZZaadaat] "carpets" (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

Combination of Long and Short Syllable

1.   If a word contains two or three syllable, the last long syllable takes a secondary stress and all short syllables take weak stresses.
Example: [kæætib] "writer"; [hæwælæ] "he tried" (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

2.   If a word contains four syllables, the primary stress falls on the second syllable, unless the third or fourth syllable is long. Any other long syllable in the word takes secondary stress, and any other short syllable takes a weak stress.
Example: [mædræsætun] "school" [jækæluuhæ] "they eat it" (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

3.   If a word contains five syllables, the primary stress falls on the third syllable, unless the fourth or fifth syllable is long. Any other long syllable in the word takes secondary stress, and any other short syllable takes a weak stress.
Examples: [jihtimææmuhu] "his interest"

[mædræsætunæ] "our school" (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

4.   If a word contains six or more syllables, the primary stress falls on the last long syllable. Any other long syllable takes secondary stress and any other short syllable takes a weak stress (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).
Example: [jihtimææmuhunnae] "their interest"

[Jistiqbæælæætuhunnæ] "their receptions" (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

The sentence stress is movable according to the meaning or meanings the speaker wishes to elicit.

Example: [sææmiwæzdæmunæ] "sami found mona" (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

Clusters
No initial or final consonant clusters are found in literary Arabic. Only two-segment medial consonant clusters exist. Theoretically, each one of the consonant phonemes can exist in a cluster with any one of the other consonants (Raja T. Nasr, 1967).
A few examples follow:
bs   /habsun/   حبس

xz   /maxzan/   مخزن

dx   /madxal/   مدخل

rs   /fursa/   فرصه

ft   /miftaah/   مفتاح

hm   /mahmuum/   مهموم

rd   /qirdun/   قرد

qb   /maqbuul/   مقبول

(Raja T. Nasr, 1967).

English consonant clusters are two, three, or more consonants.

Consonant clusters may occur at the beginning of a word (an initial consonant cluster), at the end of a word (a final consonant cluster). For example, in English: initial cluster/spl-/in/splɑʃ/ "splash"; final cluster /-st/ in /test/. English permits consonant clusters at the beginning and end of syllables (Richards et al, 1992:79; Verma and Krishnaswamy, 1996:39; Balasubaramian, 2000, Celce-Maria, 2003, and Roach, 2004). However, in Arabic, consonant clusters can occur only at the end of syllables and that Arabic does not permit consonant clusters at the beginning of syllables.

 Hence, Arabic has three consonant clusters while English has ten. But Balasurbarmain, (2000) stressed that initial consonant cluster in English can be made up of either two or three consonants (as in"spleen" and "steam") and final consonant clusters can be made up of either two, three , or four consonants (as in"texts"). Generally speaking, Arab learners of English encounter problems in both speaking and writing. This fact has been clearly stated by many researchers, e.g. Abdulhaq

(1982). To shed light on the problems of Arab learners of English, the following are examples taken from different countries. In Jordan, for example, studies have been conducted to investigate lexical, syntactical, and phonological errors made by Jordanian learners of English, e.g. Abdulhaq, (1982) Zughaul and Taminian (1984). Abdulhaq (1982:1) states, "There are general outcries about the continuous deteriorations of the standards of English.

Conclusion

The above study shows that Arabic background learners face some problems in all language skills, particularly speaking and correct pronunciation. The great number of erroneous utterances that Arab learners of English produce in oral performance and their recourse to communication strategies is an indication of how serious the problem is. But apart from using knowledge of our students and our ears in order to be aware of their pronunciation problems, it is advisable to have some prior knowledge of what elements of English phonetics and phonology are likely to cause problems. We have identified so many difficulties the Arabic background learners face. Actually these difficulties are mainly due to mother tongue interference and lack of exposure to English speaking. The main problem, as we have found, of English pronunciation is to build a new set of boxes corresponding to the sounds of English, and to break down the arrangement of boxes which the habits of our native language have so strongly built up.

Identifying the problems we have suggested many solutions that will certainly help the Arabic background learner of English. In this regard we have given much emphasis on listening and speaking practices. We are fortunate that we have radio, TV, Internet and other devices where we can easily find native speakers speaking well or news readers making correct pronunciation. The learners are strictly advised to read newspapers, journals, and other books to facilitate themselves more and more exposure to English that may reduce the interference to a greater extent if not completely. I am sure the present study will help improve English phonetic problems of Arabic speakers and make it as near-perfect.

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