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Teaching Phonetics and Phonology

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Analysis of EFL Learner`s Pronunciation

The Sudanese Learner`s Analysis

A case study

Master of Arts / English Language Teaching

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1.1 Introduction

Phonetics and phonology are phenomenal terms used in the articulation, perception, attainment as well as memory of human speech and language. The terms phonetics is used in the formal study of salient features that controls articulation, acoustic transmission plus auditory perception for spoken language (Thornbury, 1994). Phonology is commonly aimed at a sub-lexical level of language processing as psycho-social system in necessitating expressing, perceiving and communicating via a controlled speech (Collins & Mees, 2003). In essence, phonology is established on the psycho-linguistic control of phonetic abilities that comprise of articulation, listening and perception. The 21st teaching and learning of phonetics and phonology has experienced remarkable changes that emphasize on aspects of English language and pronunciation (Cruttenden, 2008). Teachers have used diverse methods and techniques to teach students on phonetics, phonology and second language in their classrooms. This assignment will endeavour to illustrate the significance of phonetics and phonology of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learner's pronunciation. The paper will focus on some pronunciation problems for Sudanese EFL learners and give recommendations and activities on how to improve. Well-known to many that Sudan is Arabic speaking nation that shares a lot of pronunciation features with Arab world. In this assignment L1 refers to Arabic language and L2 refers to English Language.

PART 1

1.2 *Theoretical Background*

According to Abayazeed and Abdlla (2017) states that, a case study carried out by university of Khartoum in Sudan, investigations showed that the main reasons of pronunciation problems, refer to two hypotheses,

1. Differences between Arabic and English in both consonants and vowels is a key and main reason of pronunciation problems of the learners.

2. The differences between Arabic and English sound systems and the English language syllables it is a key issue at the university is not suitable concern setting into account. Moreover, there are several features to the problem to be surveyed.

Ali (2013) has provided evidence that, pronouncing English vowels is one of the main puzzling works for the Sudanese ELF learners.

Questionably, such students have difficulties in distinguishing between English vowels like /ɜ:/ in, in term and /eɪ/ in word gale, in addition to the way a language is educated has some effect on the learning of English in Sudan where English is educated as a second language and pronunciation skills have a very small room. It is confirmed that" learning problems and errors in English vowels /æ/ different from Arabic often realized as /a:/, /ɜ:/ absent from Arabic. It expected to be replaced by English sounds like /e / or /ɔɪ/ (Ali, 2011, p, 19"). It is likely that, Arab learners pronunciation difficulties in English consonants /p, v, s, θ, ð, z, ʒ, ɲ/, more problems noticeable themselves when Arab-speaking students are exposed to English onset clusters as in special, flow, please, or coda clusters as in next, film Carlisle (2001) as cited by Ali (2011). Especially, examination of the phonemic

variances between languages is important, as these alterations have native effects on the learning of second language speech.

English Pronunciation can be a great difficult for some of ESL learners and more problematic for some students than others, a learner`s first language determines, for most part, the degree of difficulty and types of difficulties learners will have (Pesce, 2007). A close scrutiny reveals in a vowel, is part of sound made by narrowing some part of vocal tract positioned above the larynx. Sudanese English learners producing English vowels real challenging task. In most cases, vowels form a free airflow that originates from the lungs to the lips and makes lips and tongue to change position when pronouncing words.

First language (L1) is the language acquired in early childhood and sometimes is famously known as native language, mother tongue or primary language. Second language (L2) is acquired for education or employment purpose and primarily considered as official language, for example English is considered by many countries as societal or official language (Cruttenden, 2008).

1.3 Differences in Phonetics and Phonology

Phonetics is about the creation of speech sounds by individuals. Whereas phonetics deals with patterns of sounds, particularly special patterns of sounds or diverse languages found in every language and their different positions in words (Kennworthy, 1987). Phonology is about the physical aspect of a certain language that focuses of perception and production of sounds, known as phones, while phonology regards abstract part of sounds whose study entails the phonemes.

Phonetic transcriptions is done using square brackets, [] while phonemic transcriptions always embrace the slash //. Looking at phonology as grammar of phonetic patterns, the consonant cluster /str/ is perceived to be OK in the start, middle or end of English words (Collins & Mees, 2003). While /str/ is correct in the start of English word, /ftr/ or /ʃtr/ is seen to be OK at the middle of a word, for example in word "astray".

A particular sound may have a unique function in the sound patterns of different languages, for instance, in the glottal stop [ʔ] is used both in English and Arabic. In English it is not at the start of a word, like start of vowels and not with consonants (Stahl & Murray, 1994). The fricatives and stops of English may be classified into related pairs that could differ in voicing and aspiration. The voiceless (aspirated) and voiced (or unaspirated) may be illustrated as shown below:

Voiceless	p ^h	k ^h	s	h	t ^h
Voiced	g	b	z	d	v

1.4 Lexical Stress

In phonetics and phonology, more specifically in phonology, lexical stress also called accent focuses more on importance provided to a particular syllable in English word, phrase or sentence. The stress is often caused by enhanced loudness along with vowel length because of full pronunciation of the vowel and likely modifications in the pitch. Lexical stress also known as word stress is the emphasis positioned on syllables Words. In Arabic word stress is irregular and expectable.

The position of lexical stress in English language is less predictable and mostly believed to have variable stress (Kennworthy, 1987). For example the word laboratory in English is stressed on the second syllable, *labóratry* often pronounced "labóratry" the second /o/ being silent.

1.5 Consonant Clusters

A constant cluster refers to a group of consonants that appear as one in a syllable without a vowel within them. This process often occurs where a consonant in a group or sequence is dropped or sometimes elided in speech, for example the sentence /best boy/ may be pronounced as "bes' boy" as /bɛst bɔɪ/ similarly "first time" could be pronounced as "firs' time" as /fɜːst taɪm/ (Collins & Mees, 2003). Onset consonant clusters could occur in three or two initial consonants while coda consonant clusters may occur in four or two consonant sequence. Example of three item initial consonant clusters could be shown in words below:

spl/split, spj/spume, stew/skl, spr/sprig, str/strip, skr/screen, skj/skua, skw/squad, where each word should begin with letter "s" and followed by voiceless stop such as "t" or "p" and glide like "w" or "l".

1.6 Intonation

Intonation refers to variation of voice during speaking, the rise and fall of the voice while speaking. Intonation has a number of features such as phrases, pitch moves, tone unit and variation in pitch variation (Stahl & Murray, 1994). The phrases are commonly referred to as "tone-units", while pitch moves up and down in a pitch range. Each person has his or her own pitch range in the same way each language has its own pitch range. In linguistics, English is considered to have broad pitch

range (Gimson, 1970). During a tone unit, the pitch moves take place across vital syllable called the "tone-syllable". The universal rise and fall in intonation is marked using diagonal arrow where rises are illustrated from left-side to right-side [\nearrow], while fall in intonation is shown by opposite arrow [\searrow]. Examples in syllables can be illustrated as shown below:

He found it on the street?

[hi: 'faʊndɪt | ɒn ðə \nearrow 'stri:t ||]

The rise in pitch on *street* shows that the question pivots on that word, regarding where he found it, but not whether he found it.

Yes, he found it on the street.

[\searrow 'jɛs || hi: 'faʊndɪt | ɒn ðə \searrow 'stri:t ||]

How did you ever escape?

[\nearrow 'haʊ dɪdju: | 'ɛvə | ə \searrow 'skeɪp ||]

In some transcription, an intonation approach is usually integrated into the line of word. A typical illustration could be:

We \nearrow looked at the \nearrow sky | and 'saw the \searrow clouds

In this illustration, the | symbol shows a separation between intonation units.

PART 2

- ***Analysis of the student`s performance***

1.7 Speaker's Profile

Interviewed student is Sudanese, his first language is Arabic. Intermediate level. He lives in the United Kingdom for three years, currently studying Master degree in business and administration management (MAC) at De Montfort University. So the student`s pronunciation used in this assignment analysis. Some pronunciation problems for Sudanese EFL learners will be established and recommendations on how to improve will be suggested. Well-known Sudan is Arabic speaking country so sharing a lot of pronunciation problems with Arab countries. In Sudan, Arabic is first language and English is a second Language. Student starts learning English as a second language at intermediate level in school, around thirteen years of age. English is studied three years of intermediate school and another three years at high secondary school. English is a compulsory subject in Sudan. Furthermore, the learner have taught English, but pronunciation was not taught.

1.8 General analysis and activities

Listening to the Sudanese student speech recorded on audio clearly shows that the learner is non-native speaker obviously familiar with Arabic accent, but he is able to distinguish between /b/ and /p/ phoneme in both parts, free speech and reading passage. The diphthongs created by Sudanese EFL learner is linked with some errors in terms of pronunciation, intonation and consonant cluster as well as lexical stress, hence pronunciation errors seem to be irregular.

i) Vowels (vowel schwa)

the learner in free speech mispronounced word "Ireland" as /airland/ because of /ɪ/ phoneme sound transfer to /aɪ/ which doesn't match with Arabic short vowel, the learner in both part (free speech and reading passage) is not able to express himself confidently as pronounce word "Oxford" /ixford/ as the learner mispronounced in free speech, because of missed place of articulation /b/ vowel mother tongue interference. Likewise when the learner mentioned youganda /yougand/ mispronounced /ju:/ at the beginning of vowel /U/ might be because vowels produced with unconstructed vocal tracks (degree of openness) .The three short vowels in Arabic include /e/ /ʊ/ and /ɪ/.

As such, they do not hold morphemic orthographic transcript and thus may not be pronounced unconnectedly and always go with a consonant, and then marked with corresponding signs, hence pronunciation errors occurs. When used in L1, for example Arabic language, the consonant (d) is pronounced as /de/ /dʊ/ /dɪ/. This makes the three vowels change to long vowels in case they are lengthened /de:/ /dʊ:/ /dɪ:/.. Conversely, English comprises of 20 vowels, short and long vowels are 12 and 8 diphthongs. Due to avoid these mistakes, the learner would recommend that visit British council website attached in appendix (1.15-1) and practice pronunciation chart enhanced with voice it would be beneficial.

"The most frequently occurring vowel in English is /ə/ which is always associated with weak syllables (Roach, 2009, p82)". Sudanese EFL learners fail to use the schwa /ə/ this was one of the confusing problems for the Sudanese students. However, the learner in free speech part pronounced word international

/,ɪntə(:)'næʃənl/ correctly and supporter / sə'pɔ:tə/. Moreover, in reading passage also pronounce word corner /'kɔ:nə/ correct /ə/, so observed this is the learner's strength in this part/. Despite of Pesce (2007) states that "the schwa /ə/ is a sound that is typical in unstressed syllables, for instance in long words like mem (o) ry, choc (o) late or other shorter ones like th (e) or t (o). The usual mistakes is for learners to pronounce the word syllable by syllable; me-mo-ry").

On the other hand, the learner had difficulties when met vowel in the mid of words as in terms mispronounced in tairm /ɪn tairm/ and mark, pronounced as marik /marik/ and learning pronounced as lairning /lairning/ all in free speech, the problems occurs in /ɜ:/, /ɑ:

Lexical Stress

English does not encompass fixed stress mechanisms and therefore stress may vary from word to word. Arabic language as exhibited by EFL learner in influence of L2 shows that it has irregular lexical stress that was slightly experienced on final syllables and on syllables that encompassed long vowel (Gimson, 1970). This is the reason Sudanese student stressed more on final syllable in some of the words. In free speech section, it would be witnessed that the student knows some awareness of lexical stress and relates it with force, pitch variation in addition to concentrating on vowel class sometimes stressing, stressed with correct syllable and no force or volume e.g. playground as /'pleɪgraʊnd/ with no difficulties relating to initial pronunciation or primary stress or even final consonant clusters. In reading passage word /pə'hæps/ primary stress was correct. Moreover, in reading part, the

student is not stress correct function words at all times and pitch variation was witnessed in terms of loudness.

Furthermore, the learner shows pronunciation problems with plosive alveolar /t/ sound. This would be notice that, when learner uses words like start /stɑ:t^h / in free speech as well as word middle east /'mɪdl i:st/ and in subject as subjekit /subjekit/.

v) Intonation

Listening to EFL learner, there was much difficulty in intonation, contrary to English intonation whose pitch changed and wavers on syllables. This confirms that Arabic speakers have sometimes sustained pitch that makes voice remain steady in many syllables, as the pitch moves up and down on pronunciation of syllable (Collins & Mees, 2003). There are several instances from the free speech that EFL learner missed the intonation of native language, like in the free speech saying very very tough, //its 'vɛri 'vɛri tʌf 'sɪstɪm// emphasizing that it's very very tough system, which is not true. The intonation in the line was supposed take a rise //its 'vɛri 'vɛri tɒf'sɪstɪm// "very very ↗ tɒf" to denote that the system is not simple, but manageable. Also when learner pronounced people /pɪple/ in free speech syllabic consonant /i:/ articulated as short vowel /i/. This confirms that Sudanese learner the tri-consonant origins which are the base of most Arab words, but vary in the way vowels are placed within this consonant framework, thus **Katabhe** wrote, **yiktibhe** writers, **kaatib** clerk, **kitaab** book, **maktab** office, **maktaba** library (Ali, 2016). These variation create difficulties for learners because of diverse structure rules.

The learner`s intonation in free speech and reading passage perform difficulties with monotone no clear rise or down patterns, and he has repetition during talking e.g. emm eem eh eh eh eh that obviously visible at all times even mother tongue, so it is natural for the learner. He tries to use chunks intonation when pronounced historical place /historical pleis/in free speech and "New Guinea" /nju: Ginga/ in reading passage, but the latter is mispronounced.

1.9 Recommendations and activities

The learner`s pronunciation implications may need to pay attention to the recommendations and activities in appendix (1.15-2) there`s two very important books and one tax book, in addition one website and two youtube pages recommended.

1.

Underhill (2012) sound foundation 1st ed, this activity will ease the teaching and learning for both the teacher and learner respectively (Thornbury, 2005).

2. in addition to recommended, a book called Hancock (2003) *English pronunciation in use pack 1st ed*, it would be very pragmatic if learner read and practice activities on it in different pages, after examining Sudanese EFL learner foud out Learner`s pronunciation Improvements might need to recommend these two books.

3. It recommend a tax book for Collins, B. and Mees, I. (2003). *Practical phonetics and Phonology*. 1st ed. For extra activities. The Learner should visit appendix (1.15-2) for the details of the recommended books, it is very useful and interesting books. Extra features, one website and two youtubes webs recommended activities, such as word stress teaching English, British council website, especially word stress

mistakes and why causes of that, in this website the learner can practice, stress syllables in words and sentences, as mentioned in the web these examples, e.g. in sentence e.g.

"I carried the b'tell to the hottle."

In word

o O O o

b'tellhottle

Above all, the learner recommend practice of these activities word stress differently, because of change the meaning or type of the word for example,

"They will desert the desert** by tomorrow."*

o O O o

desert* desert**

The learner would recommend to visit above website and youtubes, then find out more for practice due to learn more and minimize pronunciation mistakes. The factors that contribute to this activities include youtube English pronunciation training and practice, this website recommended because different activities available for EFL learners pronunciation to improve. Variety of examples enhanced by voice e.g. sound /i/ as in it, is, miss, six, listen, if, think and etc., so the learner easy to follow lessons by visiting it. Another page in youtbe recommended as well,

it is talking about how to improve pronunciation and states that (15 ways to improve your pronunciation) very pragmatic and helpful, so the learners visit this youtube page in appendix (1.15-2) for activities. There is absolutely no doubt that this is the most valid recommendation and activity, would draw attention to EFL learners to improve pronunciation mistakes and errors.

1.10 Conclusion

The speech though shows some similarity between English and Arabic language because of replication of some words. Syllabification of consonant clusters in English showed that the EFL learner syllabified the syllable-initial clusters when using epenthesis instead of their removal. Similarly, on syllable appeared to be syllabified again in more than two times, which entailed two-consonant clusters, and extended to three or four syllables. In some instance, the Sudanese EFL learner added a vowel before the cluster to ease pronunciation. This is because primary consonant are less familiar by Arabic language.

Total words count 3, 018

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• **Part 3**

1.12 Appendices

1.13 Free speech Transcription of EFL Learner Pronunciation

- 1.** I have been living here in the United Kingdom for three years
 - /aɪ hæv bi:n 'lɪvɪŋ hɪə ɪn ðə ju'naitɪd 'kɪŋdəm fɔ: θri: jɪəz/

- 2** I am doing MAS International business and management
 - /aɪ æm 'du(:)ɪŋ mə:z ,ɪntə(:)'næʃənl 'bɪznɪs ænd 'mænɪdʒmənt/

- 3** I have visited France, Germany, Italy and Ireland
 - /aɪ hæv 'vɪzɪtɪd 'frɑ:ns, 'dʒɜ:məni, 'ɪtəli ænd 'aɪələnd/

- 4** In Africa I visited Kenya, Uganda, and Chad
 - /ɪn 'eɪfrɪkə aɪ 'vɪzɪtɪd 'kɛnjə, ,ju:ɡənd, ænd tʃæd/

- 5** in Middle East I visited Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Dubai
 - /ɪn 'mɪdl i:st aɪ 'vɪzɪtɪd 'sə:di ə'reɪbiə, kætɑ:r ænd du:'baɪ/

- 6** Most of my free time I watch football, I am Arsenal supporter
 - /məʊst ɒv maɪ fri: taim aɪ wɒtʃ 'fʊtbɔ:l, aɪ æm 'ɑ:sɪnl sə'pɔ:tə/

- 7** some of them I watch match of the day
 - /sʌm ɒv ðeɪm aɪ wɒtʃ mætʃ ɒv ðə deɪ/

- 8** sometimes take my children to the playground I leave with my family here
 - /sʌmtaɪmz teɪk maɪ 'tʃɪldrən tu: ðə 'pleɪgraʊnd aɪ li:v wɪð maɪ 'fæmɪli hɪə/

- 9** we start studied English as a second language since intermediate school
 - /wi: stɑ:t 'stʌdɪd 'ɪŋɡlɪʃ əz ə 'sekənd 'læŋɡwɪdʒ sɪns ,ɪntə'mi:diət sku:l/

- 10** In my country hardly ever someone go to the holiday just for social,
- /ɪn maɪ 'kʌntri 'hɑ:dli 'evə 'sʌmwʌn gəʊ tu: ðə 'hɒlədeɪ dʒʌst fɔ: 'səʊʃəl/
- 11** We study English as a compulsory subjeKIT.
- /wi: 'stʌdi 'ɪŋɡlɪʃ æz ə kəm'pʌlsəri subjeKIT /
- 12** Oh! This is very interesting question
- /əʊ! ðɪs ɪz 'vɛri 'ɪntrɪstɪŋ 'kwɛstʃən/
- 13** Universities in my own country are focus on exam and attendance only
- /ju:nɪ'vɜ:sɪtiz ɪn maɪ əʊn 'kʌntri ɑ: 'fəʊkəs ɒn ɪg'zæm ænd ə'tendəns 'əʊnli/
- 14** in the UK all universities doing system called Harvard system in tairms of assignment
- /ɪn ðə ju:keɪ ɔ:l ju:nɪ'vɜ:sɪtiz 'du:(:ɪ)ŋ 'sɪstɪm kɔ:ld 'hɑ:vəd 'sɪstɪm ɪn tairms ɒv ə'saɪnmən/
- 15** which we don't have In Africa or in Sudan, we don't have Harvard system
- /wɪtʃ wi: dəʊnt hæv ɪn 'æfrɪkə ɔ:r ɪn su:'dɑ:n, wi: dəʊnt hæv 'hɑ:vəd 'sɪstɪm
- 16** I spent a lot of time to go through Harvard system and lairining
- /aɪ spɛnt ə lɒt ɒv taɪm tu: gəʊ θru: 'hɑ:vəd 'sɪstɪm ænd lairɪnɪŋ/
- 17** just write assignment and take it to lecturer and marik it immediately
- /dʒʌst raɪt ə'saɪnmənt ænd teɪk ɪt tu: 'lɛktʃərər ænd marɪk ɪt ɪ'mi:diətli/
- 18** you need to do a lot of things in order to avoid plagiarism
- /ju: ni:d tu: du: ə lɒt ɒv θɪŋz ɪn 'ɔ:də tu: ə'vɔɪd 'plɛɪdʒərɪz(ə)m/
- 19** it's very very tough system,

- /ɪts 'vɛri 'vɛri tof'sɪstɪm/

20 I am doing family business and helping my people and my family as well

- /aɪ æm 'du(:)ɪŋ 'fæmɪli 'bɪznɪs ænd 'hɛlpɪŋ maɪ 'pi:pl ænd maɪ 'fæmɪli æz wɛl /

21 I had Aseeda and Keseera, you know, you knows, we had beautiful night

- /aɪ hæd Aseeda ænd Keseera, ju: nəʊ, ju: nəʊz, wi: hæd 'bju:təfʊl naɪt/

22 in Sudan we have Oxford University as historical place

- /ɪn su:'dɑ:n wi: hæv ɒksfɔrd ,ju:nɪ'vɜ:sɪti æz hɪs'tɔrɪkəl/

23 I also visited big ben in London

- /aɪ 'ɔ:lsəʊ 'vɪzɪtɪd bɪg bɛn ɪn 'lɒndən/

24 which I love it to visit and I visited

- /wɪtʃ aɪ lʌv ɪt tu: 'vɪzɪt ænd aɪ 'vɪzɪtɪd/

25 I haven't heard about Alton towers, just I am hearing now.

- /aɪ hævnt hɜ:d ə'baʊt Alton 'taʊəz, dʒʌst aɪ æm 'hɪəriŋ naʊ/

1.14 Reading passage Transcript

Passage (1)

It is still just possible that in some remote corner of the globe,

/It Iz sti:l dʒʌst 'pɒs·ə·bl ðæt in sʌm ri'məʊt 'kɔ:·nə əv ðə gləʊb/

Perhaps in the jungles of Brazil or the mountains of New Guinea,

/ pə'hæps in ðə 'dʒæŋglz əv brə`zl ɔ: ðə 'maʊn·tɪnz əv nju: Giŋgə /

There is a community of humans as yet unknown to civilized men/

/ðeər Iz ə kə'mju:·nə·ti əv hju:mənz əz jet ʌn'nəʊn tu `svlɪzɪd mæn/

Passage (2)

The most obvious characteristic of classroom talk is that there is so much of it.

/ðə məʊst 'ɒb·vi·əs `kærktərɪstɪk əv 'klɑ:s·ru:m `tɔ:k Iz ðæt ðeər Iz səʊ mʌtʃ əv It/

Whatever else he does, the teacher will be talking for most of his working day.

/ wɒt'ev·ə els h dz ðə 'ti:tʃə wɪl bi `tɔ:kɪŋ fə məst əv hz 'wɜ:kɪŋ dei/

1.15...1- Websites:

<https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/phonemic-chart>

<http://hancockmcdonald.com/materials/67>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bf6PdM6NUFA>

1.15.....2- recommended word stress activities

Activities

- Underhill, A. (2012). Sound foundations. 1st ed. Oxford: Macmillan.
- Hancock, M. (2003). English pronunciation in use pack. 1st ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

Tax book

- Collins, B. and Mees, I. (2003). Practical phonetics and Phonology. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

Website and youtube activities

- <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/word-stress>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xm2RlcGEVPw>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmoJ-YpvxqQ>