

Exploring Pronunciation Errors of primary pupils' school in Misrata Libya

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Abstract:

This paper aimed to explore the pronunciation errors made by the pupils of primary schools in Misrata; and found out the reason that the pupils pronouncing the words in such a way. It also tried to help teachers and learners of English as a foreign language (FL) to overcoming the English pronunciation errors. In addition, the current paper is an attempt to raise the issue understanding the importance of error correction in the process of acquiring a second language (L2).

To achieve these aims a group of fourth and fifth grade pupils were interviewed and asked to pronounce a number of English words, to explore their correct, and incorrect pronunciation. To find out the reasons of the participants' pronunciation errors, data was analyzed based on the phonemic transcription of the Cambridge English Pronunciation Dictionary.

The results reveal that 27% of the errors are related to monophthongs. Whereas 34% of the errors are related to vowels. In addition, errors which are related to diphthongs make 39%. The pupils made these pronunciation errors due to the unfamiliarity with the words, lack of practicing English words or understanding the pronunciation rules, and their first language (L1) influence. Productive and interesting methods of teaching pronunciation in a natural context were suggested, that was by presenting the English alphabet letters side by side with their sounds (name and sound) through full words' graphemes.

Keywords: contrastive analysis (CA), primary school, second language (L2), first language (L1).

الملخص:

هدفت هذه الورقة إلى تسليط الضوء على الاسباب الأساسية لبعض أخطاء النطق في اللغة الانجليزية، واستكشاف أخطاء النطق لدى تلاميذ المدرسة الابتدائية في مصراتة، من حيث الاصوات الساكنة والمتحركة ومعرفة سبب نطق الطلاب للكلمات بهذه الطريقة. كما أنها تحاول مساعدة مدرسي ومتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، للتعرف على الأخطاء الأكثر شيوعاً التي يقع فيها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL)، بالإضافة لفهم أهمية تصحيح الخطأ عند اكتساب اللغة الثانية (L2) وبعض المفاهيم مثل: مقدار الأخطاء التي يجب تصحيحها، وفي أي مراحل يجب على المعلم تصحيح الخطأ وكيف يمكن للمدرس تصحيح خطأ المتعلم دون إحباط.

ولتحقيق هذه العناصر، تم اجراء مقابلات لتلاميذ الصف الرابع والخامس، وتم إعطاؤهم عدداً من الكلمات الإنجليزية لاستكشاف النطق الصحيح وغير الصحيح، وتم تحليل أخطائهم.

أظهرت النتائج أن الأخطاء في نطق الحروف الساكنة كانت 27٪، والحروف المتحركة 34٪ ونسبة الحروف المتحركة المدغمة 39٪. نطق الطلاب بالأخطاء بهذه الطريقة بسبب عدم معرفة الكلمات وقلة التدريب على الكلمات الإنجليزية وعدم فهم مادة الصوتيات. كما اظهرت أهمية أهمية تصحيح الاخطاء، للطلاب والمعلم، في نفس الوقت. اشارت الدراسة الى بعض الطرق التي يمكن استخدامها في تصحيح اخطاء النطق. وتأثير لغتهم الأولى (L1). تم اقتراح طرق إبداعية ومثيرة للاهتمام لتدريس النطق في سياق طبيعي، وذلك من خلال تقديم حروف الأبجدية الإنجليزية جنباً إلى جنب مع أصواتها (الاسم والصوت) من خلال حروف الكلمات الكاملة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التحليل التقابلي، تحليل الأخطاء، اللغة الأولى، اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

1. Introduction

Errors as a phenomenon are very common in classrooms, and they can be a good facility to create an educational situation, which can be used by teachers in the teaching field. No doubt that teachers can benefit from knowing the probable errors that learners make (Ellis,2008), and all teachers should help their students in the correction process because, as Long (1996) stated, feedback provided through verbal interaction can facilitate second language (L2) learning by connecting form to meaning; however, it should be noted that correction of errors can be done based on learners' preferences; But the crucial point is what type of errors that should be used; How and when such errors should be corrected. Teachers of English can't deny that correcting errors, which made by students while speaking or writing English is one of the difficult tasks.

Many theories and schools performed in linguistics and language learning, that aimed to explore learners' errors and to decode their foundations. Among those schools was the behaviouristic school. In the field of foreign and second language learning, error analysis (EA) and contrastive analysis (CA) have been considered as the two main bases for language acquisition. Generally, as Keshavarz (1999, p. 11) stated, "...there have been two major approaches to the study of learners' errors, namely Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis." The CA hypothesis tries to study the students' errors by comparing the similarities and differences between first language(L1) and second language (L2).

In the case of the students of Bushra private primary school, it is often noticed that they fail to pronounce many English words correctly; and CA seems, to be not enough to explain some unusual errors which are produced by these students. Therefore, this paper will describe briefly, the theoretical and practical principles of the CA Hypothesis, and to what extent it contributes to the analyses of the pronunciation errors.

The researchers' main concern here is the way CA analyzes the pronunciation errors (i.e., unusual pronunciation errors). Finally, a more productive and interesting way of teaching pronunciation in a natural context will be suggested, that is by presenting the English alphabet letters side by side with their sounds (name and sound) through full words' graphemes.

The paper started, with a brief description of CA Hypothesis, followed by the importance of pronunciation teaching. and tried to conclude by a critical discussion of some students' errors and gave some techniques to correct and teach pronunciation.

Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses (CA)

The contrastive methodology was explicitly formulated after the Second World War, when the importance of foreign language learning was recognized in the US, and when research on immigrant bilingualism emerged (Weinreich 1953, Haugen 1956). CA was widely used in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of target language were more difficult to acquire than others.

According to the behaviorist theories prevailing at the time, language learning was a matter of habit formation, and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depends on the difference between the learners' first language (L1) and the language they are trying to learn. The most interesting criticism of the contrastive analysis hypothesis for the researchers was the 'subtle differences' version of the contrastive analysis hypothesis proposed by Oller and Ziachosseiny (Brown 2007 p253). They claimed that more interference between the L1 and target language may occur not when there is a large difference between a structure in the two languages but when learners are required to make more subtle distinctions between the languages. In our own experience, there are very few cognates between English and Arabic.

Another interesting criticism of the contrastive analysis hypothesis is the case of interlingual errors. Those types of errors, came from within the target language. For example, overgeneralizing a rule such as the plural 's' and saying 'mans' instead of 'men' What is interesting to us about this type of error is that it shows how the regularity of the target language is used by the learner. This will lead to some errors, but overall, the regularity of the target language will facilitate learning. Most of the time applying the rule of adding an "s" to form the plural will work.

2. The importance of teaching pronunciation

Pronunciation as a productive skill is very important because the mispronunciation of word might lead to misunderstanding. In this sense, whether to correct pronunciation errors or not and how to correct these errors, have always been important issues for teachers in the field of language teaching (ELT). If the sound is not properly articulated, pronunciation might sometimes hinder communication or convey the wrong message of what is said. Zimmermann (2004, p. 29) stated that “Pronunciation is crucially important, as it is usually the first thing people notice about the language of English learners”. It is a piece of common knowledge, that many learners ignore pronunciation in language learning. Unfortunately, a large number of teachers also ignore it. However, the reasons for this negligence vary greatly. According to Szynalski and Wójcik (www.antimoon.com), almost all learners of English claim that they do not need to study pronunciation. Many of them are convinced that it is simply a waste of time. Subconsciously, listeners make quick (and often, unfair) judgments about a speaker’s English ability based on his pronunciation. No matter how accurate a learner’s grammar is, and no matter how rich and expressive his/her vocabulary is; If his/her pronunciation is poor, then this immediately gives a negative impression of his/her overall language level. Poor pronunciation can be difficult to listen to, as it demands greater effort and concentration on the part of the listener.

In addition, poor pronunciation can lead to misunderstandings. On the other hand, if a speaker has a clear pronunciation, this has immediate benefits: listeners judge the speaker’s overall language ability much more favorably to the point of tolerating grammatical and other errors. Moreover, good pronunciation is an asset to the speaker himself, as it provides him with a valuable confidence boost. It is important to note here that ‘good’ pronunciation does not mean ‘native-like’ pronunciation. In fact, if an English learner aims to sound like a native English speaker, he will soon be disappointed, as this is neither a realistic goal nor a necessary one. Instead, the aim should be to acquire a ‘listener- friendly’ pronunciation – one which listener can understand without effort and which can be used to make meaningful conversation possible. If the listening task is too effortful, listeners will simply stop listening.

The way we speak immediately conveys something about ourselves to the people around us. Learners with good pronunciation in English are more likely to be understood despite they make errors in other areas of the language. Whereas learners whose pronunciation is difficult to understand will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect. We also often judge people by the way they speak, and so learners with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking knowledge, even though listeners are only reacting to their pronunciation. Yet, many adult learners find pronunciation one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire and need explicit help from the teacher (Morley 1994; Fraser 2000). Surveys of student needs show that our learners feel the need for pronunciation work in class (eg Willing 1993). Thus, some sort of pronunciation work in class is essential.

3. Research Design

Since this research deals with error analysis. To find the answer for the research questions, what errors of pronunciation do the students make? what are the reasons behind these errors? A qualitative method was applied through the analysis of pronunciation errors made by the pupils. The sample, was 100 pupils of third and fourth grade of primary school in Misrata. The data was analyzed by showing the dictionary transcription, and the participants pronounce in a specific table; then they were described in words, phrases or sentences to obtain a general conclusion.

In this research, the data was collected by interviewed the pupils, and using a tape recorder, (records of the candidates' pronunciation of the words list). List of words represent the 44 British English sounds according to the Received Pronunciation (RP) consisting of 24 consonants, 12 vowels, and 8 diphthongs was given to the pupils to pronounce.

4.1 Analysis

The following table presents the pronunciation errors made by the 100 students of the Languages and Translation Faculty at Misrata University:

Pronunciation Errors Analysis				
Words		Transcription		Description/Cause/Origin of the Error
		Dictionary Transcription	Participants Transcription	
1	theory	/θiəri/	*/ti:ɾri/	-Substitution of /θ/ with /t/. Influence of Libyan local accent. -Substitution /iə/ with /i:/, and adding /ɾ/
2	both	/bəuθ/	/bəut/	-Substitution of /θ/ with /t/ - No knowledge how to pronounce “th” as / θ/
3	next	/nekst/	*/nekɪst/	-Add /ɪ/ after /k/. - Influence of Arabic. -Break the consonant sequence
4	talk	/tɔ:k/	*/tɔ:lk/	-Pronounce the silent /l/ -No knowledge about silent letters.
5	work	/wɜ:k/	*/wɔ:k/	Substitution of / ɜ: /with /ɔ:/ - Influence of Arabic
6	young	/Jʌŋ/	*/Ju:ʌŋ/	-Add /u:/before /ʌ/ . -the letters (y, o, u) pronounced as the pronoun ‘you’.
7	under	/ʌndə/	*/ Ju:ndə/	-Substitution of / ʌ / with / Ju:/ - Using the letter name as learnt in Alphabet. - The letters are taught separate.
8	pencil	/pensəl /	*/pensel/	-Substitution of / ə / with / e/, of the second syllable, and dark/ ɫ /with clear/ l / Influence of Arabic.

Pronunciation Errors Analysis				
Words		Transcription		Description/Cause/Origin of the Error
		Dictionary Transcription	Participants Transcription	
9	dog	/dɒg/	*/dɔ:g/	Substitution of / ɒ /with / ɔ: /. - Influence of American English.
10	which	/wɪtʃ/	*/wɪʃ/	Substitution of / tʃ / with / f /. - Influence of Arabic.
11	foot	/fʊt/	*/fu:t/	Substitution of / u / with / u: /. - No knowledge of the rule how to pronounce ‘ oo ’
12	toe	/təʊ/	*/tu:/	Substitution of / əʊ /with / u: /.
13	of	/ɒv/	*/ɒf/	-Substitution of / v / with / f /. - Influence of Arabic.
14	love	/lʌv/	*/lɔ:f/	-Substitution of / ʌ / with / ɔ: /. -Substitution of / v / with / f /. - Influence of Arabic.
15	blouse	/blaʊz/	*/blɔ:zi/ */blaus/	-Substitution of / au / with / ɔ: / in the first syllable. -adding / ɪ / -Substitution of / z /with / s /. American English.
16	foreign	/fɔrɪn/	*/fɔrɪzn/	-Substitution of / ɒ / with / ɔ: / in the first syllable. - Influence of American English. - adding / z / in the second syllable. No knowledge of silent “ g ”
17	news	/nju:z/	*/nju:s/	-Substitution of / z / with / s /. no knowledge how to pronounce “ s ” after voiced consonant at the end.
18	teeth	/ti:θ/	*/ti:t/	Confusion between / θ /and / t /. - No knowledge how to pronounce “ th ” as / θ /
19	jump	/dʒʌmp/	*/zʌmp/	Substitution of / dʒ / with / z /. - they learnt “ J ” as / z / in separate not in context.

Pronunciation Errors Analysis				
Words	Transcription		Description/Cause/Origin of the Error	
	Dictionary Transcription	Participants Transcription		
20	vase	/va:z/	*/feɪz/	Substitution of /a:/with /eɪ /. - Influence of American English. -Substitution of /v/ with / f /. - Influence of Arabic.
21	leisure	/lezəʔ/	*/lezəʔ/	Confuse between /z/and /z/.
22	fit	/fit/	*/fet/	Substitution of /ɪ / with / e /.
23	thin	/ θɪn /	*/ tɪn /	-Substitution of /θ/ with / t/.
24	cat	/kæt/	*/kæt/	
25	hot	/hɒt/	*/hɔ:t/	Substitution of /ɒ/with / ɔ: /. - because the place of articulation are nearer.
26	law	/lɔ: /	*/hau /	-Substitution of /ɔ:/ with / au /. - confused between a long pure vowel with a diphthong.
27	put	/put/	*/bɒt/	-Substitution of /u/ with /ɒ/. - confused between the words put and but .
28	cut	/kʌt/	*/kut/	Substitution of /ʌ/ with / u /. -no knowledge how to pronounce /ʌ /.
29	ago	/əɡəʊ/	*/əɡɔ:/	-Substitution of /au/ with /ɔ:/.
30	girl	/gɜ:rl/	*/geɪrl/	Substitution of /ɜ:/with /eɪ /.
31	heat	/hi:t/	*/heit/	Substitution of /ɪ:/with / eɪ /.
32	wall	/wɔ:l/	*/wɒl/	Substitution of /ɔ:/with / ɒ /.
33	soild	/sɒlɪd/	*/sɔɪlɪd /	Substitution of /ɒ/with / ɔɪ /.
34	may	/meɪ/	*/maɪ/	-Substitution of / eɪ / with / aɪ /.
35	high	/haɪ/	*/haɪ/	Substitution of /aɪ/with /eɪ /.
36	now	/naʊ /	*/nəʊ /	-Substitution of /au/ with /əʊ /.
37	here	/hɪə /	*/heə /	Substitution of /ɪə/with /eə /.
38	nose	/nəʊz /	*/nɔɪz /	Substitution of /əʊ/with/ɔɪ /.
39	shower	/ʃaʊə /	*/ʃaʊr /	Substitution of /aʊə/ with / aʊr /.
40	share	/ʃeə /	*/ʃeɪ /	Substitution of /eə/with /eɪ /.

The data, was analyzed, and the findings of this paper were specified as follow: The errors made by pupils at the pronunciation (orally) were “48” errors in consonants’ pronunciation with a percentage of 17%, “81” errors in vowels’ pronunciation with a percentage of 41%, and “46” in diphthongs’ pronunciation with 42% percentage.

The error regarding /v/ was not randomly made. The voiced labio-dental fricative /v/ does not exist in Arabic. As a result, Arab speakers could treat /v/ as a voiceless labio-dental fricative /f/. For example, most of the pupils pronounced ‘vase’ /va:z/ as [fa:z], or [felz], when /v/ is substituted with /f/ which could be due to the absence of /v/ in their native language. The error that the participants made with the consonant /θ/ sound in the word /bəθ/ was because of their lack of understanding in the way how to pronounce

“th” the correct phonetic sound and lack of drill to pronounce the words correctly. The most error in pronouncing the diphthongs was in the /au/ sound of the word blouse /blauz/. Anyhow, the pupils pronounce the words into /blɔ:zi/ and /blaus/. This happened because they were accustomed to hear the word pronounce in such a way. The last sound system is monophthongs or pure vowels. The most error in pronouncing the monophthongs was in the /ɜ:/ sound of the word girl /gɜ:l/. The pupils pronounce this word by saying /geil/. This happened because they pronounced the /ɜ:/ longer.

5- Conclusion

Most Libyan pupils do the same errors of other Arab learners, as they pronounce /f/ instead /v/, /θ/ replaced by /t/ and so on; for the preposition 'of' /ɒv/ even though there is a specific rule (the voiceless consonant is transferred into voiced consonant if it is preceded by a vowel), the pupils pronounce it */ɒf/ instead frequently, and when they are given feedback, they can recognize and repeat the correct pronunciation, then they back and do the same mistake, when they pronounce it later; the same happens with the performing "it's" as*/itz/ instead of /its/ on the other hand if the pupils, those who pronounce such patterns correctly or incorrectly are asked about the reason, they don't have any answers or they don't know the rule for.

On parallel whereas each written letter in any word can be read in Arabic, some words in English have silent letters, words such as "half" /hɑ:f/ which pronounced

(by some students) as */hɑ:lɪf/.or the word "right" as */rɪɡɪt/ instead of /raɪt/also the word "wrestle" which pronounced as ' */wɹɛstlɪ/ instead of/resəl/.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis claimed that the difficulty of second language acquisition could be predicted by the degree of differences between the learners first and second language. One of the problems with the hypothesis is that it could not predict many of the unusual errors that learners make. The most noticeable errors with our pupils are with vowels and diphthongs, word as “young” is pronounced*/jəʊŋg/ instead of /jʌŋ/, this happened because the students are taught the letter as single “o” as its name /əʊ/, the same letter when existing in “word” as */wəʊrd/ instead /wɜ:rɪd/, words as “uncle” and “umbrella” is pronounced */ju:nkl/ instead /ʌŋkl/ and */ju:ʌmbrella/ instead /ʌmbrelə/ the students use the sounds of the name of the letters, because they are taught in a single forms of each, not in chunks.

To conclude, because the lack of teachers training, authentic facilities, and using the modern facilities, the pupils are encouraged to repeat, memorize and recite the letters individually, for a while at the beginning, without integrating or using them in complete words which results, the students use the name of the letter, not the sound where ever they meet.

6- Suggestion

In order to make sure pupils produce accurate pronunciation, it was suggested, that it would be more beneficial to introduce the English letters' sounds in chunks instead of reciting them individually. Pupils should learn to recognize, write the letters of the alphabet and associate them with sounds. Taking care to capture the difference between similar words like “full” and “fool”. It helps to getting better and better at pronouncing English vowels like /æ/ (the vowel in cat) and /ə/ (the first sound in away, also known as schwa). Teachers take an active role in promoting children' knowledge of letters and words through meaningful reading and writing experiences. Similar research would be beneficial and helpful for both teachers and learners to be successful in teaching and learning pronunciation.

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