Challenges of Teaching English to Arabic Students

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Abstract:

The study of sounds in a language concentrates on the ways in which sounds are made (articulatory phonetics). That means it is no use learning the written symbols of a language and reciting its grammar rules without being able to communicate. Therefore, pronunciation is the most important and difficult problem that non-native English speakers have to face when studying English. It involves a knowledge and mastery of vocabulary and spelling. English itself is not a phonetic language. The spelling and pronunciation are two different entities in English.It also requires more practicing for mastering the spelling. Though many students try to pronounce the words based on the spellings whilereading, many a time, it doesn't work. Arabic language, being one of the Semitic languages,creates more problems for the students of KSA.That leads to poor pronunciation. So, the present paper tries tothrow the light on difficulties and as teachers of English language find solutions to correct them.The subjects for the study were fifty undergraduate students from University of Majmaah. The instruments used for collecting the data were observation.The data collected were analyzed descriptively. The findings of the study revealed that many students of English whose language background is Arabic, havethe syllabus of English Language, which is completely different when it is compared with the Indian universities that have prescribedEnglish language for the undergraduate students. Based on the findings, the study concluded that factors such as inter-language and mother tongue influence are the principal causes for the differences and difficulties. The authors have mentioned some practices that they have practiced while teaching English language tobenefit the students to overcome the problems in pronunciation

Key words: Language learning of pronunciation, problems, solutions.

Introduction:

Although English pronunciation is one ofthe most important factors of a language, but it is not enough to speak a language to be qualified to teach it. Even the native speakers cannot model the language or guide the students unless they can isolate and demonstrate itsvarious elements. The teachers of the English language struggle hard to teach language to the students who do not even understand English. In KSA, universities, the syllabus of English language is completely different from that of the other universities. The teachers face a tough time to make the students understand what they teach. The students have the passion to speak in English, but they cannot practice. Other than Arabic, some teachers of other subjects don't know the English language. The students expect the English language can be mastered if they are taught English in Arabic. They prefer those teachers who can translate.

Differences between Arabic and English languages:

Arabic is the official language in the middle countries, including Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Saudi Arabia and UAE. Being the language of the Holy book Quran, Muslims of all nationalities are familiar with it. Many Arabic dialects are present, but only one unified version is taught in schools and used by the media across the Arab world.

As mentioned above, the Arabic language is from the Semitic language family. There is a large potential for errors of interference when the Arabic students use English language. Its alphabet, grammar, vocabulary, etc., are very different. As foreign teachers, whose native language is not Arabic, found it strange to teach English as a language. Hence we tried to know the differences in Arabic and English in terms of Alphabet, parts of speech, Vowel sounds, grammatical structures, usage of words, etc. Once we have come to know the differences, we introduced various methods to teach the differences first and made them understand the language and its usage. For example, the Arabic language has the nouns and adjectives and the work of those word families are similar to that of English, but the placement of them in the sentence, differs. We use adjective before the Noun to qualify, but they use first noun and adjective later. For Example, we say "A Red book" but in Arabic the structure comes as "A book Red". It sounds natural in Arabic language but if the students use the same structure while using English, the problem arises.

Alphabet: Arabic has 28 consonants and8 vowels. English, being an Indo-European language has 24 consonant sounds and 20 vowel sounds. Short vowels are unimportant in

Arabic and they are even been ignored while writing and speaking. They read from left to right and they fail to read the cursive writing. No distinction is seen in between the lower case and upper case and the punctuation pointers will often be ignored. These fundamental differences between the Arabic and English cause Arab learners significant problems.

At their primary levels, in the alphabetic method, Arab studentsare taught the names of the English letters. The letters of a language's writing system, confuse with its sounds for example,

(a "ay" , b "bee" , c "see" etc) , and when FL learners come to put these letters together to form a word such as bag /bæg/ they mispronounce as **"bayg"** according to word's spelling letters . Another chief source of difficulty is the areas where English differs from their native language (contrastive areas). In the light of these differences, the present paper tries to concentrate on the problematic areas that make them aware of mispronunciation. The main reason for teaching sounds is to help the students practice using (IPA) **examples** such as: long front vowel **/i:/** spelling areas:

<ee > tree	/tri:/
<e> he	/hi:/
<ei> receive	/ri'si:v/
<ie> believe	/bi'li:v/
<eo> people	/pi:pl/
<oe> amoeba	ə'mi:bə/
<ae>anaemia	ə;ni: miə/
<ea> eat	/i:t/
<ay> quay	/ki:/
<ey> key	/i:/

We followed some rigid restrictions to be followed when they were in the class. We taught them the Phonetic Alphabet. Now-a -days having a smart phone is a fashion. We started using the smartphone to teach pronunciation and spelling. The students downloaded the dictionary, thesaurus and the tasks have been given to use that tool to read, speak and write. Now they are habituated to consult the online dictionary to listen to the pronunciation and usage of the word along with the connotative meanings.

The other biggest pronunciation challenge for the Arabic speakers is to differentiate the sounds /p/ and /b/. They use the sound /b/ whenever they produce /p/ sound. They cannot differentiate the /f/ and /v/. They find it difficult to pronounce the letters **th**as in think and this has two different pronunciations.

In the areas of teaching consonant sounds : example/ʃ/ although there is no problem of pronouncing the sound , because it is found in Arabic but the problems occur from the spelling areas of English the sound, when they pronounce the words according to their spellings. <sh> spellings

<sh> she	/ʃiː/
<ti> nation	/neiʃn/
< ci> magician	/məˈ ʤiʃən/
<ch> machine	/məˈʃiːn/
<s> sugar	/ʃugə/
<sch> schwa	/ʃwaː/
< e> ocean	/əuʃən/
<ss> mission	/miʃən/
<tu> nature	/neitʃə/
<x> anxious	/æŋkʃəs/

In Arabic word stress is regular. It is common, therefore, for Arab learners to have difficulties with the seemingly random nature of English stress patterns. For example, the word **yes**_terday_ is stressed on the first syllable and_to**morr**ow_ on the second.

The elision (or swallowing) of sounds that is so common in spoken English is problematic for Arab speakers, and they will often resist it. This aversion to elision and the use of glottal stops before initial vowels are the primary reasons for the typical _staccato_ quality of the spoken English of Arab learners.

The present paper tries to concentrate on these problems of pronunciation .That the teachers usually face regarding confusions of spellings or mother- tongueinterference. And as an important problem, the researchers seek to suggest solutions for theseproblems.

Observations:

The results of the present study help us to reach the following conclusions:

English Language learners have problems of pronunciation caused by:

1) Lack of using dictionaries

2) Lack of Englishcommunication practice

3) Lack of student's interest

- Lack of looking up into dictionaries:

Many of the students didn't use anydictionary to check sounds or spellings, with the cause of not having a time tocheck. So, they are depending on the word's spelling when reading. To solve these problem we have to follow Jane Yates (2005)suggestions : " The spelling of the vowel sounds , in particular , is unreliable guide to their pronunciation . Also , many vowel and consonant letters are silent: they are simply not pronounced at all .Each sound is considered separately , by sound rather than by spelling , automatically , students will learn them by practicing symbols of sounds in all possible positions in a word spellings

- Lack of English communication practice

Although a language teaching involves pronunciation, but the use of the pronunciation system of a language is a matter of habit or a system of habits. Huang (2007) points out: "the fact that children learn the pronunciation of language around them without being taught that pronunciation."

Each English sound has many different areas of spelling. So, it is observed that many student who are missed lectures, depends on spellings to pronouncewords. e.g. /k/ sound because it occurs in Arabic language, it is easy for learners to produce, but it has different areas of spellings, such as: < k> key ,<x> mix , <ch> character , <q> queen , <c>> cat etc. the same letters have another sound such as <ch> in (school or schwa or chair) or <c>circle are another areas of confusion . Taking into account that, consonants /p/ , /ʧ/ , ʒ , ŋ/ which are not found in Arabic .

On the other hand, the Arabic sounds which are not found in English like: /ظ – ط -خ- ح -غ-ع الخ -ص -.>.

There are several other reasons for not differentiating the differences in between the languages . The following reasons may also be considered:

1. In the schools of Arabic world Bilingual Education is not introduced.

2. Absenteeism is very common due to various reasons.

3. A graduate is appointed to teach English to the school going students and they are given the teaching assistants jobs in the Intermediate colleges. They are not trained properly

4. Qualified and experienced teachers are not appointed by the school administrators.

5. Lack of motivation because, the graduates do not have a challenge to do a job

The qualifications of English teaching teachers at Arab schools can be classified into the following groups:

➢ B A degree in English Language and Literature

➢ Diploma in English: Major in Education and Minor in English

➢ B A degree in Translation

Most of them did not take any course in teaching English as foreign language. Hence, they adopt Grammar –Translation Method. Hence, much of the class time is run in Arabic. Such a practice minimizes the time of exposure to English and thus the learning outcomes will not be adequately accomplished.

Conclusion:

Because of its Global recognition, learning English has become an absolute necessity for the Arab world. Being the teachers, we introduced the drilling exercises to practice the correct pronunciation. The computer aided language learning made it easy for us.

Race (1998:47-57points out that teachers can be active agents in making their students want to learn (intrinsic motivation) and need to learn (extrinsic motivation). He said that teaching is a process that involves "creating a thirst for learning." In his article titled "Teaching: Creating a Thirst for Learning", Race proposed a number of strategies that teachers can utilize to motivate their learners. We followed his strategies by

1. Creating a link between teaching, learning and assessment

2. Clarifying the learning objectives of the lesson

3. Introducing various sources of learning and

4. Involving the students in learning process

Exercises have been given to differentiate the sounds. By recording the voices and allowing them to listen to and correct their mispronunciation help us to avoid many pronunciation difficulties.

Activities like Role-plays, word games like: What's the Good word" help them to find out the right word in the right place. Role-plays help them to improve the intonation, writing the dialogue has improved their spelling and grammar. Group activities have been introduced to teach a lesson in English help the students to realize the mistakes and understand the difficulties of their language.

Learning Pronunciation Practice is very important for beginners. The teachers of the college introduced the "train the Trainer' program, in which the teachers share their difficulties and find the solutions from others. Experienced teachers have organized the training sessions for the teachers.

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