

Identifying Pronunciation Errors among Iraqi EFL University learners

By

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Abstract

A test is an essential device for teachers as it helps to evaluate the performance of their students in English language, and for learners because it assists them to discover the weakness and strength areas of their performances. Teachers want to measure different language skills of their students like pronunciation tests that have showed their ability in, like spelling listening and comprehension.

The test is a set of words (about 20 words) reads to the students once only by the teacher .The students' task is to read them carefully in normal speed, while the researchers record the voice of each student when he reads.

The present study aims to identify errors of learners at the university stage in pronunciation.

The sample of the study is 50 students (girls and boys) chose from the second year at Technical Instructor Training Institute / Middle Technical University for the academic year 2023-2024. The implement of the study is a test prepared by the research himself consists of 20 words. These words are intended to test students' pronunciation. The results of the test reveal that a lot of errors in pronunciation and spelling created the largest percentage of the total number of errors by the samples subjects.

Through the attained results a number of conclusions are drawn. Several recommendations are presented and some suggestions for further research are made.

Chapter one

Introduction:

(1.1)The significance of the study and its problem:-

Learners of foreign language have difficult to speak like native speakers despite of have studied grammar for many years due to their failure to pronounce the sounds of word correctly. Successful communication is achieved by reducing the learner's pronunciation errors as well as how to deal with pronunciation in the classroom. It can be very difficult and frustrating for a learner who constantly mispronounce a variety of phonemes and a learner that have a Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but struggle to be understood and being understood by a native speaker (Kelly, 2000:11).

Pronunciation ranks first in the studies of linguistic, particularly in teaching and learning materials of English as a foreign language (EFL). Pronouncing a word represented the word itself where it symbolized the current spelling.

The above discussion reveals the necessity of the learners (especially at the universities) to master a proper pronunciation of sounds.

Through the teaching process, the researchers noticed the learners commit many errors in pronunciation. These errors are in a need of analyzing and identifying, such identification may helps the teacher to assist their learners to avoid the identified errors and put the remedial work.

(1.2) Aims:

The study is aimed to identify pronunciation errors Among the University learners.

(1.3) The Limits:

The study is limited to (50) students (girls and boys) of The second year at Technical Instructor Training Institute / Middle Technical University, for the academic year 2023-2024.

(1.4) Basic terms Definitions:

(1.4.1) Identifying:

Identify -recognize as being; establish the identify of someone or something give the name or identify characteristics of; refer to by name or some other characteristics properly.

(EnterNet, 2003: 165)

(1.4.2) An error :

Cunningsworth (1984: 84) defined an error as "systematic deviation from the norms of the language being learned. They are usually caused by false generalizations about the language by the learner"

(1.4.3) Pronunciation:

According to (Harmer, 2007: 61) "the way we pronounce the Sentence will also determine precisely what it means.

Chapter Two

2. Theoretical Background:

(2.1) The importance of pronunciation:

Kelly,(2000:11) clarified that Successful communication is achieved by reducing the learner's pronunciation errors as well as how to deal with pronunciation in the classroom. It can be very difficult and frustrating for a learner who constantly mispronounce a variety of phonemes and a learner that have Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but struggle to be understood and being understood by a native speaker.

Kenworthy (1990: 4) adds that in learning English pronunciation a mother tongue is an essential aspect, and there is a fact that a learner who speak in his native language links to the foreign accent with some of the phonological characteristics.

Learners' lexical knowledge becomes useless by due to their failure to make themselves understood when talking. moreover, they state that “learner failed to understand words in connected speech as he unfamiliar to correct pronunciation, while he understands clearly the written English ” on the other hand, correct the error of learners in pronunciation is an important things to focus on because successful communication is achieved by preventing errors (**Gairns, and Redman, 1986: 50**).

(2.2) Problems in pronunciation:

Harmer (2001: 185) states two kind of problems occur when teaching pronunciation:

1. **What students can hear :** there is a great difficulty among learners to hear what we want them reproduce from the features of pronunciation.

Speakers frequently have difficulty with different sounds; they will find it almost impossible to produce. Through diagrams, demonstration, or explanation we can show learners how sounds are made. But we can also draw their attention to the sounds every time they show on a tape or in our conversation. In this manner student's ears will train gradually. When they know how to hear correctly they are on the way to being able to speak correctly.

2. **The problem of intonation:** Intonation is the most problematic area of pronunciation for many teachers. Many of our students and some of us discover it extremely difficult to hear 'tunes' or to recognize the different patterns of rising and falling tones.

The successful key in teaching pronunciation is not to have students to make the correct sounds, but to have them listen and observe how English is spoken either the teacher themselves or on audio or video tape.

(2. 3) How to teach pronunciation:

Pronunciation is the way we pronounce the Sentence will also determine precisely what it means (Harmer,2007: 61). Pronunciation was completely disregarded at the beginning of the twentieth century and everything was subordinated to teaching grammar and lexis. Since that time many things have distorted, but teachers don't have enough technical knowledge to assist students properly or may feel more vague about pronunciation than about lexis and grammar, there are still some teachers who do not pay enough attention to pronunciation (Scrivener,2005: 284).

It is hard to correct bad pronunciation habits so acquiring good pronunciation is necessary (Kelly , 2002: 11).

For example, " we may have heard the speaker's voice drop on the word 'warm'. "Though, if we change the speaker's intonation (the way the voice rises or falls while speaking) so that the voice rises on the word 'warm' our speech becomes a question", e.g. "It's warm in here?".

Sometimes intonation explained as the music of speech. "The word 'yes' for example can be said with a falling voice, arising voice or a mixture of the two". "If we change the direction of the voice we can make (yes) means (I agree) or perhaps it's true or you can't be serious or any number of other things" (Harmer,2007:61).

(2. 4) Techniques and activities:

(2. 4.1) Drilling:

Drilling is the most important way in which pronunciation is practiced in the classroom. It merely comprises the teacher saying a word or structure, and asking the class to say it again. The aim of drilling is to make students remember new items as well as to achieve better pronunciation of language items. It encourages learners to discuss an earlier studied word, structure or phrase. In drilling the main role of the teacher being in providing a model of the word, structure or phrase for the students to copy (Kelly, 2000: 15).

(2.4.2) Chaining:

Kelly (2000: 16) argues that If students have difficult to pronounce sentences, chaining can be used to help them, either they comprise difficult sounds and words, or they are long. The following examples explain how the teacher isolated definite parts of the sentence, modeling them one by one for student to say again.

.... told him.

.... Would have...

...would have told....

I would have told him.

If I'd see him...

If I'd see him, I would have told him.

(2. 4.3) Substitution drilling:

Substitution drilling involves a structure but replace items of vocabulary by another sentence, as follows:

T: the ball is in the garden.

S 1: the ball is in the garden.

T: the ball is on the table.

S 2: the ball is on the table.

etc.

(Ibid: 19)

(2.5) Pronunciation and spelling activities:

Al-Ka'abi (2005: 1) argued that the difference between English spelling and English pronunciation for the reason that “English is one of the languages that lacks an exact one to one correspondence between phonemes and graphemes”.

It makes sense to link pronunciation work intimately with spelling work, so as to investigate the other ways in which sounds can be symbolized. For examples Homophones and Homographs can present useful opportunities for such work. Homographs are words that have different pronunciation but with the same spelling, "Why don't you read this book? and I've already read it". Homophones are words that have different spellings but have the same pronunciation (right and write, their, there, fare and fair). When students listen to the sentence the word with the correct spelling is the one they must choose from a printed list of words in front of them.

(2.6) Pronunciation Tests:

Tests of pronunciation became completely rare today and much less common than tests of grammar and vocabulary. While in a phonetic class a pronunciation exam might properly be used.

(2.6.1) Limited Response:

(2.6.1.1) Individual Testing: "Oral repetition"

This kind of test is easy to prepare. Student who cannot write or read English can simply listen to what their teacher says to them and they say it again. In addition, it can be test every pronunciation feature. We can use dialogs, exercises, and reading in preparing material to read aloud to our students. At normal or near normal speed read the materials aloud, do so and the rhythm of the sentence should keep normal. This of course includes keeping function words unstressed as well as joining the words in your phrases. Saying the sentence only once is good. When scoring this type of test, listen only for the items marked on the key e.g. (" He said he could come") other errors must be Ignored (Madsen, 1983:59) .

(2.6.1.2) Group testing: Hearing Identification:

This type of test is simply sufficient for adult beginners and young children. Beginners are using visuals in a test that can highlight the difference in meaning between words that sound similar. In this way, teaching could be reinforced by testing (Ibid: 61)

(2.6.1.3) Limited response items and their alternate forms:

1. Substitution Exercise: the main word can be written and spoken to your student.

Dates aren't cheap now. /gz/

He doesn't want to leave yet.

2. Phrase items. Into the car. Writing a note /u/

3. Complete the sentence. (This can be given with pictures). Pencils use lead, but pen use.....// [ink]. The Iraqi flag is red, white,..... and black [green].

(2.6.1.4) Limited response items' advantages:

1. Oral repetition can test almost all features of pronunciation.

2.It tests students who cannot read and do not confuse reading comprehension with pronunciation.

3. It is very easy to prepare.

4. Hearing identification combines meaning and pronunciation;

5. It tests student with somewhat limited language skills.

(2.6.1.5) limited response items disadvantages:

1. Oral repetition possible for learning English as much as current skill in English pronunciation;

2. It takes a long time when taken individually. It can be given in a language laboratory, but the teacher still has to listen to tapes alone;

3.It requires a native speaker to represent the sentence.

4. Hearing identification is difficult to find suitable pictures or to think of suitable sketchers;

5. It limits the test options.

(2.6.2) Multiple-choice Hearing identification:

Students who are well-read and write in their second language can of course be used hearing identification items as well as with those who are not yet literate. These may be in either paraphrase or appropriate - response form. We can say to our students, "He bought a new cab". They would need to highlight the difference in meaning of these three options, and from what they hear, we would have them choose the best summarize or synonym.

student hear:

"He bought a new cab"

student read:

1. hat
2. car
3. animal

(2.6.2.1) An alternative multiple- choice hearing identification form:

Complete the sentence. (checking the hit / hid / will hit contrast)

student hear:

"She hit the thief....."

student read:

1. tomorrow
2. in the face
3. from the police

(2.6.3) Reading aloud:

It is a kind of test in which students are given a passage containing the words they have studied during the lessons and asked to read them aloud. In fact, it may give dominance to students who are good at reading, even though it is a good way of

testing the pronunciation skills of them. This variable may cause difficulty for the teacher while evaluating the basic pronunciation skills of the student, because the purpose is to test pronunciation not reading. In this kind of test an important point to be considered is to give sometime to the students so as to get familiar with the text they are going to read (Useini, 2019:135).

When preparing reading aloud items, there are three points to keep in mind:

1. Evaluate only one or two point's for each sentence, when using lists of sentences.
2. Avoid indication to the learner which pronunciation point you are testing.
3. Use normal language.

(2.6.3.1) Alternative items for reading aloud:

1. Stress marking: The Student read each item silently and then circle the letter of the word or syllable to be stressed when special emphasis is not needed for a unique context.
2. Sound symbol: For pronounce various combinations of letters there are many rules, check knowledge of the "o" in "short position".

For example:

(Which vowel sound is different?)

- a. got b. smoke c. close d. go

(2.6.3.2) Reading aloud items advantages:

1. They supply good control.
2. They are easy to prepare.
- 3.. How to pronounce spelling combinations can be tested.
4. Almost all pronunciation features can be tested.

Chapter Three

3. Procedures

(3.1) Population and sample

The population is the second stage students of Electronic techniques department in Technical Instructors training Institute / Middle Technical University for the academic year 2023- 2024. The sample consist of (50) students (men and women).

(3.2) The Instrument:

The instrument is a test prepared by the researchers themselves. The researchers have constructed a test of this study after reviewing the sample textbook (New headway plus) Pre-intermediate student's book. The researchers have selected collection of words for about (20) words. The words are chosen randomly from the textbook.

(3.3) Test administration:

After preserve the validity and suitability of the test. It has been administrated to (50) students (men and women) randomly selected from the second-stage students of Techniques Electronic Department in Technical Instructors training Institute / Middle Technical University." To motivate the students toward the test, they were told that the scores of the test would be taken into consideration in the assessment of their class efforts". The researchers read the words once only, and they asked each student to read them carefully in normal speed, while they record the voice of each student when he reads. The test application took about 60 minutes.

(3.4) method of Scoring:

It is states the method of checking the testers' errors in pronunciation i.e. the researchers have counted number of frequencies of the wrong reading for words.

(3.5) The Statistical Means :

The following are statistical means used in the empirical part of this study.

1. Percentage: "It is used to find out the percentage for each number of errors".
2. One sample t-test: this test is suitable to find out the perceptions of the teacher of wash back impact.

$$t = \frac{X - u}{\text{_____}}$$

$$S / \sqrt{n}$$

Where:

\bar{x} = the sample means.

μ = the population means.

S = the sample standard deviation.

N = the number of sample.

(Hinkle, 1971: 173)

Chapter Four

4. Results, Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestions:

This chapter is dedicated to achieve the aim of this study; that is: identifying the pronunciation errors made by the second-stage university learners.

(4.1) Results:

(4.1.1) Errors Identification:

After completing the pronunciation test administration, the responses of the testers were scored and the researchers found that the total number of errors is (115). see (table 1).

No.	Frequencies
Bread	38
Sandwich	41
Enjoy	32
Huge	33
Parent	46

Hide	43
Patient	48
Weather	29
Busy	37
Nurse	30
Angry	22
Decide	36
Wear	33
Hurt	42
Know	42
Climate	47
Daughter	39
Kitchen	10
Watch	3
Believe	23
Total	674

Table (1)

The frequencies of learners' errors in pronunciation test

(4.1.2) Errors Classification:

The result states that the testers have a lot of errors in pronunciation. the researchers categorized learners' errors according to the number of errors in each word. In order to have a clear idea of the significance of errors and in which sound they are mainly focused, It is useful to arrange the words according to their frequencies. These errors are classified according to their spelling errors and are introduce according to their descendent ranks.

(4.1.2.1) Failure to pronounce Diphthongs sounds : -

The total number of diphthongs errors is 302 with a percentage of 46.94:

Enjoy /m'dʒɔɪ/ /m'gɔɪ/
Patient /peɪ·ʃənt/ /pa·tənt/
decide /dɪ'saɪd/ /dɪ'sɪd/
Parent peər·ənt/ pər·ənt/
Hide /haɪd/ /hɪd/
Angry /'æŋ·gri/ /'æn·gri/
Wear /weər/ /wer/
Know /nəʊ/ /nou/

(4.1.2.2) Represent the final 'e' in some words:

These errors appear in 63 out of the total number of errors with a percentage 9.5.

Huge / /hjudʒ/ /hjudʒi/
Nurse /nɜrs/ /nɜrsi/

(4.1.2.3) Failure to pronounce short vowels:

The total number of short vowels errors is 210 with a percentage 35.2:

Bread /bred/ /brid/
Busy /'bɪz·i/ /'buz·i/
Sandwich /sæn·wɪdʒ// sæn·wɪch/
Weather /'weð·ər/ /'weað·ər/
Hurt /hɜrt/ /hort/
Believe /bɪ'li:v/ /bɪ'laiv/

(4.2) Discussion of results:

The investigation showed that university learners of the second year have many errors in pronunciation. The testers have also many errors in reading. Another observable fact attracts the attention of the researchers appeared in pronunciation test is the large number of spelling errors. It has been shown that these errors are due to the following reasons:

A. Testers' unawareness that the letter 'e' at the end of some words is silent like the words (Huge and Nurse)

B. some consonants have two or more forms of pronunciation, so the testers failure to realize that. For example: The letter 'c' can be pronounced as /k/ or/s/like: climate, decide.

C. testers Depend on the rules of mother tongue in pronunciation: they read the words as they are written. This is obvious in reading the silent letters in some words like: sandwich, hide,and know.

Table 2 Statistics of the one sample t-test to find out the second stage students at the university perceptions of wash back impact..

No. of Sample	Mean score		S.D.	df	t-Value		Level Of Sig.
	computed	theoretical			computed	Table	
50			591.6	49			0.05
	10.2	10			10.1	3	

Table 2 shows that the mean score of the total sample of the study (10.2) is higher than the theoretical mean score (10).

Since the computed t-value (10.1) is higher than the table one which is (3) at the level of significance of (0.05), this signifies that the second stage university students are good in their perceptions of wash back impact.

(4.3) The Conclusions:

Through the results, the researchers reached to the following conclusions:

1. It is obvious that the testers fail to pronounce large number of words properly.
2. The errors mentioned above are found to be caused either by interference from the native language or by unfamiliarity of students with rules of pronunciation of English language.

3. The large number of errors committed, the sample gives an indication of ignorance of teacher to correct their students' errors in pronunciation.

4. The finding of the present study high light the significance of analyzing the errors of EFL learners in pronunciation because this process helps teachers to notice the difficult areas in their learners of foreign language.

(4.4) Recommendations:

In order to help EFL learners to keep away from making pronunciation errors: The following points are recommended:

1. When teachers and students cooperate together in the total learning process, students can do well in pronunciation of a foreign language.

2. Pronunciation must be viewed as more than correct production of phonemes that is a crucial part of communication.

3. in phonetic lesson student need to learn about different ways of pronouncing the same letters or a group of letters and given exercises to find out spelling rules.

4. Some letters can produce two sounds, so it is necessary for Students to recognize that.

5 Students need to practice the spelling of words that have problematic sounds.

(4.5) Suggestions for Further Research:

According to the findings of this study, the following are suggested as further studies:

1. A similar study in another stage of university.

2. A similar study in another stage such as the intermediate stage.

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