Iraqi EFL University Learners' Performance in using the sound \r\

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أداء طلبة الجامعة العراقيين الدارسين اللغة الانكليزية لغة ثانية في استخدام الصوت / ر/

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الملخص

تتحرى هذه الدراسة في مشكلة طلاب الجامعات العراقيين الدارسين اللغة الانكليزية لغة أجنبية في استخدام الصوت /ر/ كما يلفظ من قبل اللهجات الأمريكية والبريطانية. تهدف الدراسة الحالية إلى توضيح استخدام الصوت /ر/، خلق جو مناسب للتلفظ جيد داخل الصف وتمكين المتعلمين من التمييز بين الناطقين بها عن اللهجات أخرى. من أجل تحقيق أهداف الدراسة، تم افتراض الفرضيات التالية: (1) في بعض الأحيان يختار متعلمي للغة الانكليزية لغة ثانية الكتابة الصوتية الخطاء للصوت /ر/ في الكلمات التي أعطيت لهم، (2) التلفظ الخاطئ الصوت /ر/ و(3) لا يميز المتعلمين الصوت /ر/ في اللهجات الأمريكية والبريطانية.

اعتمد الباحثان الإجراءات التالية: (1) تقديم خلفية نظرية للصوت /ر/، (2) تحديد نوع الصوت /ر/ في كل من لهجات أمريكية وبريطانية، (3) إخضاع الطلاب لاختبار و(4) تحليل نتائج الاختبار. اظهر تحليل البيانات أن مستوى انجاز المتعلمين EFL العراقيين اقل بكثير من تلك في مستوى التمييز. تعزى الأخطاء التي ارتكبها هذا الموضوع إلى العوامل التالية: 1- عدم القرة علة الكتابة الصوتي للصوت /ر/ والتي كانت نسبتها (22.7%)، 2- عدم القدرة على إعطاء الكتابة الصوتية الدقيقة للحروف المعتلة الإنكليزية وكانت النسبة (15.9%)، 3- عدم القدرة على إعطاء الكتابة الصوتية الدقيقة للحروف المعتلة الإنكليزية الطويلة تحت تأثير الصوت /ر/ كانت (13.6%) و4- عمد إعطاء أي إجابة كانت (9.5%).

Abstract

This study investigates the problem of Iraqi EFL university learners in using the sound /r/ as it is pronounced by American and British accents The present study aims at clarifying the sound /r/ in use, creating a good suitable atmosphere for good pronunciation inside class, and enabling the learners to distinguish between native speakers from those from other accents. In order to achieve the aims of the present study, the following hypotheses have been postulated: (1) Iraqi EFL learners often choose the wrong transcription of letter /r/ in words that given to them.(2) The mispronounce of the sound /r/. (3) Those learners do not distinguish sound /r /in American and British pronunciation.

The researchers adopt the following procedures (1) Presenting a theoretical background of sound /r/. (2) Identifying the kind of sound /r/ in both American and British Accents.(3) Submitting the students to a test and (4) Analyzing the results of the test.

Data analysis has revealed that Iraqi EFL University learners tend to be at the production level are considerably less than those in recognition level.

The errors committed by the subjects are attributed to the following factors:

1. Failure to transcribe sound /r/ (22.7%).
2. Inability to give the accurate transcription of English vowels (15.9 %).
3. Inability to give the accurate transcription of long vowels under the influence of sound /r/ (13.6 %).
4. Giving no response (9.5 %).

Section One
1. Introduction
1.1The problem

The ability of speaking English embodies the correctness of pronunciation and intonation and directly affects the appropriate communication in conversation. The sound /r/ is the most frequent sound in English consonants. So most of learners in EFL nowadays mislead the use of British accent for the sound /r/. The pronunciation of sound /r/ is difficult for some EFL learners specially in the Arab countries. The sound /r/ is important in English pronunciation because if is it not pronounced in a proper way, the word will be misunderstood. The pronunciation of sound /r/ is a problematic area for learners of English as a foreign language.One of the common observations in this respect is that most of university learners in Iraq lack knowledge about how to use or pronounce the sound /r/ in an acceptable way. It is observed that most of the students are not aware of the pronunciation rules which determine the pronunciation of individual words having the phoneme /r/ in certain positions. They pronounce it wherever it occurs in a word:

<u>**Word British Learners' Pronunciation**</u>

- Teacher /tiː tʃ≅/ /tiː tʃ≅r/
- Bearer /beːr≅/ /biːr≅r/
- Reader /riːd≅/ /riːd≅r/
- Sailor /seil≅/ /sɜː≅r/
- Paper /peip≅/ /pɜːper/
- Heart /haːt/ /hɜːrt/

One of the problems that languages learners of English face is the (r) which is very week in its pronunciation in English (Gimson & Cruttenden, 1994; Ladefoged, 2001:43) noted that in most forms of British English (r) can occur only before a vowel e.g. in words like *red, ruler, ride*, but the foreign learner should notice that it is very weak and it is not pronounced like the Arabic one. All the above notes show that in many cases the spelling of English words lead the learners to guess the wrong pronunciation from the spelling of the words unless they have good knowledge of English sounds and letters relationships and the way they are pronounced. Also (Gimson &Cruttenden, 1994) reported that RP (r) occurs only before a vowel and the air stream is allowed to escape freely, without friction, over the center part of the tongue, that means it is not pronounced strongly as many Arab do, so they pronounce (r) as they pronounce it in their language because they think each letter in a word should be pronounced as it happens in their native language; so words like *car /kaː(r)/, arm /aːm/, horse /hɔːs/, hurt /hɜːt/* if we ask the learners to pronounce them they just look at the spelling of each word and try to pronounce them e.g. /kaːr/, /aːrm/, /hɔːrs/, /hɜːrt/, so learners should not be misled by the spelling in the pronunciation of such words.

Moreover, in Arabic, each letter represents only one sound, so it's easy to read any word from a written text. Also there is no sound which is not pronounced (silent), as it happens a lot in English. When there is a difference in the sound system of the LI and L2 showed that errors are expected to be committed because the learners transfer their mother tongue sound system into the target language (Carter & Nunan, 2001).

1.2 Aims of the study
This field aims at:
1- clarifying the use of sound /r/
2- making the learners think of an atmosphere for a good pronunciation.
3- enabling the learners to distinguish between native speakers from those from other accents.
1.3 Hypothesis

In order to achieve the aims of the present study, the following hypotheses have been postulated:
1- Learners of the second language often choose the wrong transcription of letter /r/in words that given to them.

2- The mispronounce of the sound /r/.

3-The learners do not distinguish sound /r /in American and British pronunciation.

1.4 Procedures

    The researchers adopt the following procedures.

1- Presenting a theoretical back ground of sound /r/.

2- Identify the kind of sound /r/in both American and British Accents.

3- Submitting the students to a test.

4- Analyzing the results of the test.

1.5 Limits

    This study limits itself to evaluate the pronunciation of the sound /r/ by Iraq EFL learners. The sample of the test are chosen randomly. They are (50) Second year students at English department / College of Education / University of kufa during the academic year 2014 - 2015.

Section Two

 2. Introduction

    The sound /r/ is the consonant that occurs in a considerable frequency in English. The pronunciation of sound /r/ is so difficult for some EFl learners specially in the middle of words like "murder". The wrong pronunciation of sound /r/ will change the meaning of some words. So to choose between British and American pronunciation you should firstly know which is easier to you? and which is helpful to you?

2.1 The Importance of the Pronunciation

    Many people learning English language often do not pay any attention to their pronunciation. Even worse, some of them underestimate it. They think that pronunciation is less important than grammar and vocabulary. Many cases of misunderstanding in communication were caused by the mispronouncing of words or the improper intonation. Let's take a few examples: if someone pronounces the words fog and fox, sea and she, sick and six with relatively no differences, in some cases this can lead to a misunderstanding. In addition, good pronunciation can also give a plus value to those who master it. People may get amazed of your English language when they hear you speaking in English. Moreover, good pronunciation skill can give you more self-confidence when you speak in front of many people. So, it has become more and more obvious that pronunciation can not be underestimated. The sound /r/ is important because it is a high frequency sound, meaning that it occurs more often in the English language than other sounds. (Shriberg & Kwiakoski, 1983:2)

2.2 British (r) vs. American (r)

    It was around the time of American revolution that non- rohtic speech came to be used among the higher class of southern England,in and round London. In British English and some southern US dialects, the /r/ sound is dropped when it is in the middle or at the end of a word. In standard American English, no / r/ sounds are dropped. They pronounce all /r/ sounds, whether the /r/ is the first letter, a letter in the middle or the last letter.

2.2.3 Trilled (r) **vs. American** (r)

    To make the trilled (r), your tongue is relaxed and the tip of the tongue taps the roof of the mouth one or several times (depending on your language). To make the American (r), you need to avoid having your tongue touch the roof (the top) of your mouth. Tensing the tongue should do this. Concentrate on tensing the back of the tongue--this should cause the front of the tongue to be tense also. Make your throat a little tight. This will help with tensing the tongue as well. Then you need to practice a lot--you are using muscles in your tongue which need to become stronger.

2.2.4 The Differences between American and British:
2.2.4.1 Settings

One of the most noticeable differences between American and British settings is that "American vowels are almost influenced by /r/ affecting consonants as well as vowels "for example, not only vowels are affected, but also /t/ and /n/. The body of the tongue is bunched up to a prevelar position and the root of the tongue in drawn back to the pharynx. Also American English as compared with British, appears more colored by semi-continuous nasalization rounding throughout the speech (Collins and Inger, 2008: 156)

2.2.4.2 Intonation

The most noticeable difference between British and American intonation is that American intonation tends to have a fewer rapid pitch which changes the characteristics of NRP. Also rises and falls are more spread out over the whole tune, for example, this rising tune for question.

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. -. .~.
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Did you hear him?

Because this difference American English is sometimes claimed to British ear as "monotonous " while British intonation is said to sound "exagerated" for affecting American English. (Ladefoged, 2006: 41)

2.2.4.3 Rhythm

Another difference concerning rhythm, American English has a great tendency to lengthen stressed vowels, and apparently a slower rate of delivering, seems to strike many American English as "Clipped" (Collins and Inger, 2008: 157)

2.2.4.4 Rhoticity

It simply means the case of pronouncing the sound /r/ in final position (before a pause) and before consonants in some accents. This pronunciation has been used for a very long time. English language was already established in north American colonies before the decline in rhoticity, which is why it has been preserved in the US and Canada.The exception of the new England might have been down to the fashion of the early state of 20th century of affecting a mid Atlantic accent for that why British is non-rhotic accent (Lass, 1998: 71). **2. 2. 4. 5 Intrusive**

1- Many of southern people in American insert /r/ when words spelt with final (a) are followed by words beginning with vowels. They pronounce it for instance:

- Soda and milk as /Səudər milk /
- China and Japan as / t∫ainər ənd d3əpæn/
- Vanilla ice as /vənilər ais/   (Jones,1973:33)

2- Vulavism

It refers to the name of intrusive /r/ which was mentioned in the late eighteenth century writers. They also mentioned that this kind of pronunciation was used by the most speakers of south England using it during their rapid speed.(Ibid. 133)

2. 2. 4. 6 The use of intrusive /r/

The use of intrusive /r/ is a result of analogy.Since words like /erə/ and /t∫a:ftə/ in southern pronunciation have a variation,forms with /r/ it is normal to treat words like /səudə/ and /t∫ainə/ in the same way. Many people,instead of looking for intrusive / r/ as an interesting illustration of analogy,they were looking for it as a bad pronunciation because it does not correspond to spelling.There has been a great tendency after /a:/ and /ɔ:/ and the efforts to avoid it where done successfully. The result of that where the case of intrusive /r/ is natural they must,therefore ; be treated in the followed two ways: Either the terminal /ə/ or /a:/or /ɔ:/ is run on the following vowel without break or total stop is inserted.

So we have now very common pronunciation like:

- /səudə ən milk/ or /səudə? ən milk/
- /vənilə ais/ or /vənilə?ais/

Section Three
3.The Test
3.1 An introductory note

In this section the researchers describe the way in which the test is designed. This test aims to investigate the difficulties faced by Iraq EFL College of Education,University of Kufa in using the sound /r/.

3.2 Material Selection

All the items of the test have been taken from different books of phonetics and most of them are mentioned in section two. The items of the test and its questions have been submitted to twenty students from second year English.

3.3 Test Design

The test consists of two questions.The first question is designed to measure the students ' ability to choose the correct transcription of a given word that has sound /r/. The second question is designed to determine their ability to transcribe some words. Each question consists of ten items.

3. 5 Subjects' Performance of the First Question

In an attempt to improve the validity of the first hypothesis which is mentioned in section (1). The results of this question are presented in the following table:

Table (1)
Subjects' Performance at the Recognition Level in Question (1)

NO. OF ITEMS	NO-OF CORRECT CHOICES	%	NO-OF WRONG CHOICES	%
1	22	44	28	56
2	16	32	34	68
3	27	54	23	46
4	15	30	35	70
5	19	38	31	62
6	22	44	28	56
7	26	52	24	48
8	23	46	27	54
9	11	22	39	78
10	13	26	37	74
Total	**194**	**38.8**	**306**	**61.2**

3. 5 Subjects' Performance of the Second Question.

The second question is constructed to measure the subjects' performance at the production level through instructing them to transcribe few phrases carrying the letter (r) in the spelling:

Table (2)
Subjects' Performance at the Production Level in Question(2)

NO - OF ITEMS	NO-OF CORRECT TRANSCRIPTION	%	NO-OF WRONG TRANSCRIPTION	%
1	16	32	34	68
2	21	42	29	58
3	15	30	35	70
4	25	50	25	50
5	16	32	34	68
6	17	34	33	66
7	20	40	30	60
8	24	48	26	52
9	17	34	33	66
10	18	36	32	64
Total	**189**	**37.8**	**311**	**62.2**

3.6 Subjects' Performance of The Whole Test

The following table shows the performance of the subjects in the whole test:

Table (3)

Subjects' Performance in Q.1 and Q.2

NO. OF QUESTION	NO. OF CORRECT RESPONSES	%	NO. OF INCORRECT RESPONSES	%
Q.1	194	38.8	306	61.2
Q.2	189	37.8	311	62.2
Total	**383**	**38.3**	**617**	**61.7**

3.7 Types of Errors

To support the results of the test, the researchers diagnose the types of errors the subjects made in responding to the questions of the test and classifies them as in the following table:

Table (5)

Types of Errors made in Question (1) and (2) .

TYPES OF ERRORS	FREQUENCY OF ERRORS	%
1- Failure to transcribe sound /r/.	227	22.7
2-Inability to give the accurate transcription of English vowels.	159	15.9
3- Inability to give the transcription of long vowels under the influence of sound /r/.	136	13.6
4-Giving no response.	95	9.5
Total	**617**	**61.7**

Section Four
4. Errors Analysis

Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors that the learners make. It involves a comparison between the errors made in the target language and that target language itself (Taylor,1975,74). Nickel (1971:6),on the other hand,defines error analysis as "a means of finding a shorter way to diagnose the learners' difficulties in foreign language learning."

4.1 Sources of Errors

It is seen that "Systematically analyzing errors made by language learners make it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching". Errors are studied in order to find out something about the learning process and about the strategies employed by human beings learning another language (Lungu, 2003:323).These errors can be of great help to the learners in order to specify the points of weaknesses since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn (Corder, 1974:120). Zhang (2009: 3) notices that "there are several factors influencing the pronunciation of the L2 learners. That is, the first language interference by interference of mother language, learner's age, learner's attitude and psychological, prior pronunciation instruction, and the insufficient language knowledge of English phonology and phonetics".

There are two main areas of difficulty that face Iraqi EFL learners, or as a matter of fact, any foreign students attempting to master the orthographic system of English: the first of these is the interference of the first language (i.e. Arabic) and its spelling rules. Secondly, the orthographic system of English itself. Al- Jumaily (1990:17) calls the first kind of errors as "transform errors" and the second type as "analogical errors".

It is obvious that Arabic orthography differs completely from that of English; therefore, interference errors take place when the patterns of the first language differ from those of the second language. The learner fails to recognize the sound and select the wrong symbol to represent it and also omits sounds that are normally not represented orthographically in his

own language. Some of the subjects' errors in items (3, 5, 6, and 9) in Q.2 can be attributed to this strategy:

Q.2

Item (3) */vire/

Item (5) */adai/

Item (6) */di:r/

Item (9) * /pim/

Iraqi EFL learners also have many difficulties with English vowels because Arabic and English have two different vowel systems. They are unable to give the transcription of long vowels under the influence of sound /r/.Thus, they have difficulty in producing /i/ as a different vowel from /e/. Items (1, 2,3, and 6) in Q.1 and items (5, 8, and 10) in Q.2 reflect this strategy:

Q.1

Item (1) */ sirtṇ /

Item (2) * /bitər of/

Item (3) */viri/

Item (6) */di:r/

Q.2

Item (5) * /wir iz ʃi:/

Item (8) * /ko:nirs/

Item (10) * /recur:t/

On the other hand, the incorrect spelling shows the negative interlingual transfer. Some of the subjects' responses to items (5, 8, and 9) in Q. 2 show this kind of errors:

Q.2

Item (5) * /idei/

Item (8) * /konir/

Item (9) * /preim/

Finally, many other reasons of making errors, which are made by students, are attributed to social, psychological, and educational factors. According to social and psychological factors, the students do not use the English language widely outside the area of college.

Section Five

Conclusions and Recommendations

5. Introduction

This section focuses on the most important findings of the study.It discusses the conclusion (Theoretical and practical). These conclusions are means to serve as basis for the pedagogical recommendations for sound /r/.

5.1-Conclusions

5.1.1 Theoretical conclusion

The theoretical work of the present study has yielded the following conclusion:

1- Sound /r/ is the most frequent study of English consonant sounds and most of learners in EFL nowadays are mislead the use of British accent for the sound /r/.

2-The pronunciation of sound /r/ is difficult for Asian learners specially in the Arab countries.

3- The sound /r/ is important in English pronunciations because if it is pronounced in a wrong way,it will change the meaning of sound words.

4- The difference between American and British accents makes the learner choose between what is easier and what is useful to him.

5.1.2 Practical conclusions

1- Iraqi EFL university learners at the second stage face difficulty in using the sound /r/.This is indicated by their low performance in the main test as the rate of their correct responses(38.3%) is lower significantly than that of their incorrect ones (**61.7%**). This

validates the hypothesis of the study which states that Iraqi EFL university learners face difficulties in using the sound /r/.

2- The following types of errors that are committed by the samples of this study:
   a. Failure to transcribe sound /r/.
   b. Inability to give the accurate transcription of vowels.
   c. Inability to give the transcription of long vowels under the influence of sound /r/.

5.2 Recommendations.

In the light of the conclusions, the researchers recommend the following:

1. EFL instructors are to devise new ways to teach the sounds asking their students to describe things, objects.

2. Practice in an amusing way is the shortest way to make EFL learners master using the sounds in writing and speech.

3. EFL instructors should concentrate on the most difficult sounds to language.

4. More emphasis should be given to the topic under investigation at all levels of education.

5. Teachers and textbook writers should focus on the importance of the pronunciation of the sound /r/ in English language.

6. Due attention should be giving to teaching English sounds as they are problematic areas for Iraqi EFL university learners.

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Appendix I
The Test
Q.1 / Choose the correct transcription for the following words or phrase.
1- Certain.
a- / sɜ:tṇ /
b- /sɜ:rtṇ /
c- /sərtṇ /
2- beter off.
a- /betə of /
b- /betər of /
c- /betər əf /
3- very.
a- /veri: /
b- /verɪ /
C- / veɪi: /
4- here it.
a- /hiə it /
b-/ hiər it /
c- /h ɜ:r it /
5- Idea .
a- /aidiə /
b- /aidiər/
c- /aidir/
6- dear.
a- /di:r /
b- /diə /
c-diər /
7- four or five.
a- /fɔ: ɔ: faiv/
b- /fɔ: ɔ:r faiv /
c- /fɔ:r ɔ: faiv /
8- Corners.
a- /kɔ:nəz /
b- /kɔ:rnərz/
c- /kɔ:rnəz /
9- Pram.
a- /pram /
b- /p a:m/
c- /pra:m/
10- recruit.
a- /recru:t /
b- /rɪku:t /
c- /rəkru:t /
Q.2 / Transcribe the following words or phrases.
1- your old written letter.
2- poor woman.
3- right or wrong .
4- / auδa and reɪtə /
5- where is she.
6- Sir Robert.
7- giver and taker .
8- Iraqi runners.

9- better than her.

10- hear or ear.

Appendix II

Possible Answers of The Test

Q1-

1- Certain.

a- / sɜ:tn̩ /

2- better off.

c-/ betər əv /

3- very .

b-/ veri /

4- here it.

b-/ hiər ət /

5- Idea.

a- / aidiə /

6- dear.

b-/ diə /

7- four or five

c-/ fɔ:r ə faiv /

8- corners.

a-/ kɔ:nəz /

9- pram.

c-/ pra:m /

10- recruit.

a-/ rɪkru:t /

Q2-

1-your old written

/ jər ɔ:ld ritn̩ letə /

2- poor woman.

/ puə wəmən /

3- right or wrong.

/ rait ər ronŋ /

4- author and writer.

/ ɔ:Өər ən raitə /

5- where is she.

/ weər əz ʃi: /

6- Sir Robert.

/ s3: robət /

7- giver and taker.

/ givər ən teikə /

8- Iraqi runners.

/ Ira:ki rʌnəz /

9- better than her.

/ betə ðən hɜ: /

10- hear or ear.

/ hiə ɔ:r iə /