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The Effect of Native Language (Arabic Language) on Learning English Language

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Abstract: The major goal of this contrastive analysis study was to describe the impact of the Arabic sound system on learning English pronunciation. To this end, this study analyzed the sound systems of Arabic and English in detail to find out similarities and differences. As the analysis revealed, there are similarities and differences between the Arabic and English sound systems mainly in terms of the number of vowels and consonants, diphthongs, syllable structure, and intonation. In some cases, such as Arabic consonants that are absent in English, it was found that differences helped learners master English pronunciation. However, there were also a few cases in which irregularities could cause problems for learners.

Keywords: Arabic sound system, Communication, Contrastive analysis, English sound system

1. Introduction

As the world is becoming a large multicultural, multilingual community, the importance of speaking more than one language is increasing (Al-Ahdal, 2020**)**. Among the most widely-spoken languages, English is broadly utilized in research, academia, and industry. Therefore, several non-English speaking countries, particularly those in the Arab world, are constantly trying to integrate the teaching of the English language into their educational system with optimal efficiency. English in Arab countries is not only a means of communication but also the language of education; therefore, obtaining proficiency in the English language is of utmost importance in these countries (Chouchane, 2016).

Despite Arab learners' willingness to learn English and sound like native speakers, they encounter several problems, primarily in the pronunciation subskill. Bilingual Arabic speakers are said to be mingling with English and Arabic codes. This process is code-mixing which occurs in non-native English-speaking environments because it serves as a natural communication technique. Some bilingual speakers eventually master a second or foreign language via this strategy of trial and error (Al-Ahdal, 2020, p.7). The practice of "code-mixing" is still widely used in speech patterns. It undoubtedly qualifies as unique in that it serves social and professional purposes.

Arabic is a diglossic language, which means that two widely used dialects of the same language are used for different purposes. The language employed in formal means of communication, such as those found in books, religious texts, and the media, is known as Literary Arabic, also known as Modern Standard Arabic. Studies have shown that monolingual learners did not experience the effects of this intervention and it normally occurs in L2 speakers (Wofford & Tibi, 2018).

Numerous contrastive analysis studies are conducted, which focus on contrasting the characteristics of the first and second languages to identify their similarities and differences. Contrastive analysis as a learning strategy can benefit learners, teachers, and curriculum developers by disambiguating which features of learners' L1 can assist L2 learning and which ones can hinder this process (Abdelhakim et al., 2019). Therefore, when learning L2, two types of transfer can take place. Positive transfer describes the parallels between L1 an L2, which can be seen in phonology, phonetics, morphology, and grammatical structures. Negative transfer, on the other hand, refers to the discrepancies between the morphology and grammatical structures of the L2 and the L1 (Al-Zoubi, 2019).

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In the case of pronunciation, contrastive analysis studies can clarify similarities and differences between the Arabic and English sound systems, which can either help Arab learners master English pronunciation or prevent them from doing so. This study aimed to describe and compare the speech sound systems in Arabic and English to shed light on how the Arabic speech sound can facilitate learning English pronunciation or hinder it. Therefore, the following research questions were pursued:

1. What are the similarities and differences between the Arabic and English sound systems?
2. In what ways does the Arabic sound system help learners master English pronunciation?

The following sections will explain the sound systems of the Arabic and English languages. Afterward, this article will review the differences and similarities between the two sound systems to conclude which aspects lead to positive and negative transfer and whether Arab learners are privileged in learning English pronunciation.

2. The Arabic Sound System

The Arabic sound system has some distinguishing features concerning segmental phonemes (i.e., consonants, vowels, diphthongs, allophones, as well as syllable structure) and prosodic or suprasegmental features (stress, intonation, and juncture/transition). The Arabic language has 6 vowels and 28 consonants, 15 of which share the same sound (Al-Jarf, 2022).

There are three short vowels (/e/, /ʊ/, and /ɪ/), in addition to a stop sound. Sometimes these short vowels are lengthened depending on the consonant they accompany and turn into long vowels. They don't have a morphemic orthographic record and are not articulated independently. They go with a consonant and are set apart by comparing signs to be recognized (Al-Jarf, 2022).

As for phonemes, the Modern Standard Arabic has three short vowel phonemes (/a/, /i/, and /u/), three long vowel phonemes (/a/, /i/, and /u/), and two diphthongs (/au/ and /ay/) (Al-Jarf, 2022). Some Arabic consonant phonemes are unique and absent in other languages, such as English, including /ض ḍ; ص ṣ; ظ ẓ; ط ṭ; ح ħ; ق q; ص χ; خ ɣ; غ ʕ; ع/ ʔ. When Arabic sounds are pronounced, the energy rushes in the vowel and consonant area; however, the bursts are very powerful in the vowel region as compared to the consonant region (Anwar et al., 2006). The schwa /ə/ also does not exist in Arabic (Chouchane, 2016).

In terms of syllable structure and consonant clusters, Arabic allows for the following consonant clusters: CV, CVV, CVC, CCV, CVVC, CVCC, and CVVCC. However, these clusters can only appear at the end or the beginning of a syllable if it starts with a conjunctive hamzah. Regarding stress and intonation, Arabic has three stress levels: penultimate, antepenultimate, and final stress. The intonation is rising in statements, commands, wh-questions (information questions), confirmatory question tags, and exclamations. On the other hand, yes/no questions and question tags that are real questions receive falling intonation in Arabic (Al-Jarf, 2022).

3. The English Sound System

The English sound system has similarities and differences with the Arabic sound system. It has more vowel phonemes (12) and diphthongs (8), compared to Arabic, and some of its consonants, such as /p/, /v/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /ŋ/, are absent in the Arabic sound system. English has 20 phonemes, while Arabic, in similar locales, has just 19. Then again, in the post velar locales, Arabic has eight consonants yet English has just three. This velarization was depicted as a lidding. The tongue fills the cavity above like a lid. The English language has 24 consonants, while Arabic has 28. English consonants are arranged by the spot and way of their enunciation.

In opposition to vowels in which air flows out openly from the lungs through the mouth, consonants are delivered by driving the airstream out and can be voiced or devoiced, (Cruttenden, 2008). Richards et al. (1985) add that the air can be totally or to some degree obstructed or permitted to go with a tight contact or through the nose. Consonants can likewise be recognized by the energy applied to create voiced or devoiced consonants, making greater the voiced and voiceless parts of the sets of consonants (Collins & Mees, 2003).

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As for the type of syllables, English syllables have many types and the following consonant clusters are allowed in English: V, VC, VCC, VCCC, CV, CCV, CCV, CVC, CVCC, CVCCC, CVCCCC, CCV, CCVC, CCVCC, CCVCCC, CCCV, CCCVC, CCCVCC, CCCVCCC, and CCCVCCCC. Therefore, the maximum number of consonants allowed in a cluster is more in the English sound system than in the Arabic system. English words can receive four stress levels (primary, secondary, tertiary, and weak). English is a stress-timed language, and its pattern of rising and falling intonation is exactly the opposite of that of Arabic.

4. Positive Transfer

According to the findings, the Arabic equivalents of the English sounds /b/, /d/, /f/, /h/, /k/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /r/, /t/, /w/, /z/, and /j/ do not sound any different in pre, mid, or post word distribution. For instance, the long and short vowels in Arabic are /a/ for "Fat'hah," /i/ for "Kasrah," and /d/ for "Dhammah." the long vowel "long" (/u:/), /u/ (Al-Manie et al., 2010, p.4).

In Arabic, the taunt is very much stronger and more sibilant than in English for these Arabic speakers have no difficulty with the English language, especially in countries that pronounce these letters in the correct way, such as Iraq, Arabia Saudi, and Syria. In this way, face muscles become more flexible and can easily adapt themselves to the sound system of L2 to pronounce target language sounds (Al-Zoubi, 2019).

Some Arabic consonant phonemes such as ح . ط; . ظ; . ص; q ع . ; غ . ; خ . ; ص . ; ق / do not exist in English (Al-Jarf, 2022); however, this has helped Arabic learners to strengthen their pronunciation devices and thus pronounce even letters that are not in the Arabic language, such as /p/, /v/, and /t/. In contrast, there are speech sounds in the English language that are not found in the Arabic language. Despite that, Arabs can easily pronounce these letters, especially after getting used to hearing them. For instance p / (pen / pen, people / pi:pl /) / / (writing /rait /, (sing /si /) / / / (pleasure / pl /), (erosion / r:n /) /v / (van / vaen, leave / li:v (Al-Zoubi, 2019, p.23).

Although the schwa vowel doesn't exist in Arabic, it is not difficult for speakers to pronounce it. However, sometimes its pronunciation might be tricky because in English, it is represented by various vowels and Arab learners are unaware when each vowel is addressing a schwa vowel (Avery & Ehrlich, 1992). The reason is that in Arabic, each letter only has one sound (Kenworthy, 1987). Consequently, Arab students' difficulty in articulating the schwa is because their L1 sound system is quite different from that of the English language. However, after enough practice, they manage to approximate the sound.

Additionally, as Kenworthy (1987) proposes, English intonation is not difficult for Arabic speakers although, unlike English intonation which has changing pitches, Arabic has a sustained pitch with steady syllables, which jumps up or down for the following syllable. Moreover, the intonation patterns of English directly oppose those of Arabic; however, Arab learners master English intonation easily.

5. Negative Transfer/Problems

Some differences between the Arabic and English sound systems have been shown to cause pronunciation problems for Arabic learners of English. Firstly, the vowel /æ/ in Arabic always accompanies only one consonant letter. Arabic speakers are sometimes confused between /æ/ and /ʌ/ because in Arabic these sounds are allophones representing the same vowel letter (Chouchane, 2016).

Additionally, Arab learners sometimes insert /ɪ/ in long clusters pronunciation due to consonant cluster differences between English and Arabic (Kenworthy, 1987; O'Connor, 1980). As previously mentioned, more consonants can cluster together in English than in Arabic; therefore, when learners pronounce long clusters, they find them unusually long, and to make up for that, they try to break them short by inserting the /ɪ/ vowel (Chouchane, 2016).

The next area of difficulty is that diphthongs are not discrete vowels in Arabic, and they can cause minor pronunciation difficulties for learners. The main reason is that every diphthong symbol can have different diphthong articulations; therefore, learners might mispronounce them (Chouchane,

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2016). Many Arab learners find it hard to pronounce /dʒ/ and /g/ since /dʒ/ sound is considered a cluster of /d/ sound and /ʒ/ which are never pronounced together. However, in English, /dʒ/ is a diphthong.

Finally, Arabic has rigid rules for stress patterns in that usually either the final syllable or the one with a long vowel is stressed (Aziz, 1974; Rogerson-Revell, 2011). Consequently, Arabic learners tend to stress the same syllables in English while stress rules vary from word to word in English.

6. Useful Strategies for Arab Learners

Considering the importance of learning English for Arabs and the difficulties they encounter in this process, there are some strategies they can find helpful. Since in the case of Arabic and English, L1 directly influences L2, home literacy activities are crucial for the growth of L1 literacy and the bilingual development of young learners' L1. A population at risk for socioemotional problems needs communicative partners who are rich language role models in the family and community (Wofford & Tibi, 2018).

There is a plethora of material on the subject of using technology to teach English. These articles unambiguously acknowledge that technology is the most important component of instruction. For this reason, it's critical for language instructors to be informed about the newest and greatest tools available and to be fully conversant with their options. The guiding idea in education should be to value new technologies in fields and roles where they offer a distinctly valuable innovation. These available tools can be effectively used to remedy Arab speakers' pronunciation problems (Shyamlee & Phil, 2012).

Pedagogical advancements continue to outpace technological progress. Practitioners (instructional designers and instructors), for example, should be aware of how to effectively employ and integrate new mobile technologies into their teaching and instructional materials. A mobile game framework based on persuasive technology concepts has been built. The interfaces of the created game comply with 17 criteria that were included in them. The groundwork has been done (Elaish et al, 2019). Students can watch English-language television, movies, news outlets, and YouTube videos to boost their exposure to native speakers' pronunciation (Al-Jarf, 2022).

Another useful strategy would be reading different texts aloud which will assist them in detecting their pronunciation problems and practicing to improve them. They can for example chorally repeat a text or do it individually (Al-Zoubi, 2019).

Language acquisition is a social process (El-Omari & Bataineh, 2018), and considering L2 learning, which mostly happens in the L1 society, the society's enthusiasm plays a key role in promoting this process. There is a strong urge to immediately acquaint non-English speaking pupils with speaking, reading, and writing in English (Wofford & Tibi, 2018).

7. Conclusion

The use of English in the global academic community who come from various cultural backgrounds is more widespread these days. People who are not native English speakers face unique challenges as a result of the multicultural academic community's dominating use of English. This study compared and contrasted the sound system in Arabic and English aiming to detect whether similarities and differences between the two sound systems facilitate learning English pronunciation for Arab learners.

As the analysis revealed, the Arabic sound system differs from that in the English language in terms of the number of vowels and consonants (and their orthographic realization), syllable structures and the length of consonant clusters, as well as intonation patterns. It was also found that each sound system has distinctive features, such as some consonants which only exist either in Arabic or English.

Despite differences that are considered obstacles to mastering English pronunciation, this study found that overall, these differences are beneficial for Arab learners and even in some cases help them learn English pronunciation better. It is undeniable that Arab learners find English

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pronunciation challenging and might sometimes fail to master it well; however, the analysis has shown the difficulties are minor. Numerous strategies were also introduced which can help Arab learners in this process.

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