Pronunciation Errors in Second-Year University Students' Oral Assignments

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Abstract

Pronunciation error analyses in university students' oral assignments, in particular, are relatively rare. This study explores and investigates EFL learners' pronunciation errors that lead to unnatural accent and miscommunication. Fifty oral assignments of second-year college students in phonology class are selected to be analyzed. The study samples are selected from students in the English department, college of Education at Salahaddin university, in the academic year 2021-2022. Various pronunciation errors are observed in the oral assignments regarding single vowels, consonants, sound clusters, stress and intonation. The findings show that the pronunciation errors are primarily due to the strong influence of students' mother tongue, some deep-rooted learnings from their primary and elementary stage education, and other inaccurate pronunciation models.

Keywords: Pronunciation error , L1 interference, speaking skill

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أخطاء التلفظ في الواجبات الشفهية لطلاب السنة الثانية بالجامعة

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المستخلص

يعد تحليل أخطاء النطق في الواجبات الشفوية لطلاب الجامعات على وجه الخصوص نادرًا نسبيًا. تحاول هذه الدراسة إثبات أن متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية يرتكبون أخطاء في النطق تؤدي إلى لهجة غير طبيعية وسوء فهم في بعض الاحيان. تم اختيار خمسين واجبا شفهيا لطلاب السنة الثانية في الكلية في مادة علم الأصوات ليتم تحليلها. عينات البحث من طلاب قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بكلية التربية بجامعة صلاح الدين في العام الدراسي 2021-2022 ، وضمن الواجبات الشفوية لوحظت أخطاء مختلفة في النطق من حيث حروف العلة الفردية والحروف الساكنة ومجموعات الصوت المتتالية والنبر والنغمة. تظهر النتائج أن أخطاء النطق ترجع في الغالب, إلى التأثير القوي للغة الأم للطلاب جنبًا إلى جنب مع بعض الدروس العميقة الجذور من تعليمهم الأساسي ونماذج النطق الأخرى غير الدقيقة.

الكلمات الدالة: خطأ النطق، تداخل لغة الام ، مهارة التحدث

1.Introduction

Due to the fact that human beings are social creatures, they need language skills, especially speaking, to communicate with each other. According to Kadamovna(2021) " An effective speaker can gain the attention of the audience and hold it till the completion of his message. Speaking skills are important for career success". One of the ultimate aims of the English department students, those who intend to learn English as a second or foreign language, is to be able to speak fluently. The most important factor for this endeavor is finding better job opportunities in future.

For students at college of education who will be teachers in the future, speaking skill is very important because that is one of the skills they need to be considered a successful teacher as they become models for their students. Teachers need to talk well and fluently in front of their students. Being a language teacher is not only based on the pedagogical and content material; fluency in the language they teach is crucial and, in some cases, it could be even more important for obtaining a teaching career. The reason is that teachers need to interact with students, explain learning material and give them instructions.

All the skills are crucial in language, yet learners consider speaking the most desired one. Within speaking, pronunciation as part of it is of great value to keep communication flowing. Knowing how words and phrases are correctly pronounced is vital to effective and acceptable speaking skill otherwise, miscommunication, misunderstanding and negative impressions will arise. Although grammar and

vocabulary are very important, as Kelly(2001) stated, inaccurate phoneme production can cause misunderstandings…which can become a serious communication problem. Similarly, Ababneh(2018) stated that most English second language learners' main difficulty is learning how to pronounce; generally, learners consider pronunciation the main cause of their communication problems.

2. The Objectives of the study:

The current study aims at:

1-Identifying the common pronunciation errors among Kurdish EFL college students in their oral assignments.

2-Finding out the underlying factors that cause these pronunciation errors

3-Presenting practical solutions to Kurdish EFL learners for overcoming these errors.

3.Research Questions:

The study attempts to answer the following questions:

1-What are the prevalent pronunciation errors among second-year EFL university students?

2-What are the primary underlying factors for such pronunciation errors?

3-What are the possible techniques and strategies that need to be adopted in order to overcome these pronunciation errors?

4.The Data and Scope of the study:

The current study is devoted to analyzing 50 oral assignments of second-year college students in the English departments , Salahaddin university, in the phonology module for the academic year 2021-2022.The study focuses on pronunciation errors at the word and sentence levels only.

5.The procedures:

To conduct this study ,the following procedure has been adopted:

-Second-year students are given oral assignments throughout the 2021-2022.

- Using a purposive sampling strategy , fifty of these oral assignments are selected to be transcribed

-Pronunciation errors are identified

-The errors are categorized and grouped under sound errors (vowels and consonants), sound cluster, and stress errors.

-The underlying factors of the errors are explained.

-Possible solutions are presented to overcome these errors.

6.Literature Review:

There have been several studies concerning pronunciation errors in second and foreign language context. Some of them are presented below to have a clearer picture and show how the current study differs from the rest.

Purba (2018) has done a research entitled ' The pronunciation problems of English department students in the university of HKPB in Nommensen' in Indonesia to explore and synthesize the difficulties and challenges in producing the consonants encountered by the students. The data of the study has been collected from students who took the speaking module in the second semester via the qualitative descriptive method. All data collection session was recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The results of the analysis were grouped into two parts, namely total production of dental fricatives that were spoken by students, then systematically categorized based on IPA. The results showed some student were fail to pronounce dental fricatives /ʃ/, /ð/. /θ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ /, /v/ and /f/. The students used the closest sound to replace those sounds were /s/, /d/, /j/, /p/. It was caused the Indonesian phonological systems were not found. The process of inter-lingual is the factor behind this error. This attempt, however, merely showcases a phenomenon observed in a group of Indonesian students in producing dental fricative in addition to the factors that affect the process.

Yusriati & Selamat. (2019) conducted a study to discuss the errors committed by students of the English education department of FKIP UMSU in producing English lexical words.The aims of the research were 1) describing the views of English education students on their English pronunciation skills so far; 2). Analyzing the pronunciation errors in terms of their form; 3) exploring the techniques and endeavours exerted by students to improve their pronunciation skill; 4) identifying the obstacles encountered by the students in English pronunciation. This study adopts a descriptive qualitative design. Interviewing and asking students to pronounce some selected English words on a certain topic were the source and tools of data collection. This research revealed that students had various opinions about their ability in English pronunciation. Some participants believed that they possessed good pronunciation skills, others believed that they had improved in this respect, whereas others did not believe their pronunciation skill to be good. Depending on the data analysis, the students committed errors in pronouncing the words continuously. The results also showed that the students resorted to using and watching YouTube in English and using the google voice application in order to improve their pronunciation.

Fazee (2020) conducted a research to analyze the most common pronunciation errors made by EFL fourth-level learners in the Department of English, Faculty of Education-Sana'a, Sana'a University, in the academic year 2019-2020; and to explore underlying factors of these mispronounced segments among college-level students; then to present potential remedies that could support Yemeni learners to solve pronunciation difficulties. The study sample was 30 randomly selected students and ten teachers who were given a close-ended questionnaire.The study adopted a descriptive method. A test and a close-ended questionnaire were utilized as tools for data collection. The results show that EFL learners mispronounce specific phonemes that do not match with the orthography and consonant cluster of the learners' mother tongue.In some cases , vowels were also misarticultaed. As for the factors, mother-tongue interference and limited language exposure were among the most effective ones. Based on the findings, it is recommended that teachers concentrate more on preparing more suitable teaching material that contains pronunciation issues.

The current study differs from the previous ones in several ways. The first difference is in the Kurdistan region of Iraq where Kurdish is spoken and the mother tongue of most participants . Kurdish and English descend from the same Indo-European family of

language. Second , the data are all taken from authentic material of students' oral assignments

7. Identification of errors

All the student oral assignments were listened to more than once , and then the main errors in terms of vowel production , consonant production , sound clusters both initial and final , word stress and stress in sentence were identified. The errors were then categorized to mispronunciation of vowels, mixing short and long vowels , mispronunciation of consonants , mispronunciation of consonant clusters , misplacement of stress within words and misplacement of stress on the wrong word with a sentence.

Table 1 Student Errors

Assignment	Error in vowels	Error in short and long vowels	Error in consonants	Error in consonant cluster	Error in word stress	Error in sentence stress	Total errors
1	8	5	3	11	9	4	40
2	11	7	5	14	11	6	54
3	10	7	4	12	10	6	49
4	7	3	1	7	5	3	26
5	3	1	0	3	4	2	13
6	7	4	7	5	8	4	35
7	4	7	4	6	7	3	31
8	1	1	2	2	3	2	11
9	3	5	3	4	9	6	30
10	6	3	5	5	12	8	39
11	7	6	4	6	11	7	41
12	2	1	2	3	4	2	14
13	9	7	5	7	8	5	41
14	7	5	4	5	9	7	37
15	2	2	3	2	3	1	13
16	8	9	7	6	7	5	42
17	4	6	7	5	9	6	37
18	1	3	2	1	2	1	10
19	5	4	5	6	8	4	32
20	9	8	6	7	11	8	49
21	1	2	2	1	2	2	10
22	4	5	6	7	6	8	36
23	9	8	9	7	11	8	52
24	6	9	7	8	12	9	51
25	3	5	4	4	6	4	26
26	5	7	6	4	8	5	35
27	8	6	8	7	10	8	47
28	2	2	1	2	3	2	12
29	1	2	1	1	2	2	9
30	7	8	6	4	8	6	39

31	9	7	8	9	11	8	52
32	3	2	2	2	4	2	15
33	5	7	8	6	8	6	40
34	2	1	1	2	2	1	9
35	8	6	9	7	8	6	44
36	1	3	2	2	4	3	15
37	6	5	8	7	11	9	46
38	3	2	4	2	3	4	18
39	8	6	8	9	10	8	49
40	11	9	7	10	8	9	54
41	2	4	2	5	6	3	22
42	4	7	3	4	5	7	30
43	1	1	0	2	2	3	9
44	5	8	4	10	12	9	48
45	3	5	3	9	10	11	41
46	9	4	2	6	8	3	32
47	10	8	4	12	10	5	34
48	5	4	3	7	7	5	31
49	5	2	1	7	6	3	24
50	4	2	3	6	8	4	27
TOTAL	264	241	211	286	259	251	

As it can be observed from the table above, the number of errors vary from one sample to another and from one error category to another. A representative sample errors will be highlighted, the first five and the last five samples will be explained and analyzed.

Sample 1 made 40 errors when she did the 50 oral assignments. There were 8 vowel mispronunciations, 5 confusing short to long vowels, 3 consonant pronunciation errors,11 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 9 word stress errors and 4 wrong stress within sentences.

 Sample 2 made 54 errors when he did the 50 oral assignments. There were 11 vowel mispronunciations, 7 confusing short to long vowels, 5 consonant pronunciation errors,14 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 11 word stress errors and 6 wrong stress within sentences.

 Sample 3 made 49 errors when she did the 50 oral assignments. There were 10 vowel mispronunciations, 7 confusing short to long vowels, 4 consonant pronunciation errors,12 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 10 word stress errors and 6 wrong stress within sentences.

 Sample 4 made 26 errors when he did the 50 oral assignments. There were 7 vowel mispronunciations, 3 confusing short to long vowels, 1 consonant pronunciation errors,7 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 5 word stress errors and 3 wrong stress within sentences.

Sample 5 made 13 errors when she did the 50 oral assignments. There were 3 vowel

mispronunciations, 1 confusing short to long vowels, 0 consonant pronunciation errors,3 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 4 word stress errors and 2 wrong stress within sentences.

Sample 46 made 32 errors when she did the 50 oral assignments. There were 9 vowel mispronunciations, 4 confusing short to long vowels, 2 consonant pronunciation errors,6 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 8 word stress errors and 3 wrong stress within sentences.

Sample 47 made 34 errors when he did the 50 oral assignments. There were 10 vowel mispronunciations, 8 confusing short to long vowels, 4 consonant pronunciation errors,12 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 10 word stress errors and 5 wrong stress within sentences.

Sample 48 made 31 errors when he did the 50 oral assignments. There were 5 vowel mispronunciations, 4 confusing short to long vowels, 3 consonant pronunciation errors,7 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 7 word stress errors and 5 wrong stress within sentences.

Sample 49 made 24 errors when she did the 50 oral assignments. There were 5 vowel mispronunciations, 2 confusing short to long vowels, 1 consonant pronunciation errors,7 consonant cluster mispronunciations, 6 word stress errors and 3 wrong stress within sentences.

Sample 50 made 27 errors when he did the 50 oral assignments. There were 4 vowel mispronunciations, 2 confusing short to long vowels, 3 consonant pronunciation errors,6 consonant cluster mispronunciation, 8 word stress errors and 4 wrong stress within sentences.

It is also observed that the number of errors identified in the students' oral assignments are errors in stress placement within words, errors related to vowels , errors in final clusters , errors in stress within sentences , errors in mixing short and long vowels and finally, errors related to certain consonant sounds.

8.Classification of Error

A look at the table above and an observation of the errors and their nature , clearly shows that errors fall into two main categories based on the factors that might cause the errors, viz. interlingual and intralingual.(Brown 2000)

Interlingual, usually called transfer error, to Corder (1973) refers to the errors due to mother tongue interference such as word stress, consonant clusters and wrong stress within a sentence.

Richard (1974: 6) states that intralingual interference refers to items produced by learner, which reflect not the structure of mother tongue, but generalization based on partial exposure of the target language. Intralingual errors are the ones that are attributed to errors due to the difficulty or the effect of neighboring sounds within the same language such as consonant and vowel mispronunciation, confusing short with long vowels.

As for the samples of this study, one can observe that both interlingual and intralingual errors are found. In terms of numbers, however, the number of interlingual errors outweighs the intralingual ones.

Table 2: Types of Error Based on Factors

Type/factor	Interlingual Errors	Intralingual Errors	Total
Errors in vowels	188	76	264
Errors in mixing short with long vowels	195	46	241
Errors with consonants	193	18	211
Errors with consonant clusters	213	73	286
Errors with word stress	60	199	259
Errors with stress within sentence	42	209	251
Total	891	621	1512

As it can be observed from Table 2 above, the number of errors attributed to interlingual factors 891 is way more than the intralingual ones 621.It can be seen that almost half of the whole pronunciation errors are interlingual. Among the interlingual errors , the majority can be attributed to problems with certain consonants , then short to long vowels and then to vowels. In contrast, the least goes back to the errors related to stress within sentences and then to word stress.

9. Results and findings:

Based on the presentation and explanations above, we found that the main errors that Kurdish EFL students make in pronunciation could categorized as one of the following points. Along with each error category, the researcher suggests some kind of solution or procedure to overcome the error.

1. Incorrect individual words stress

One of the most common and challenging areas for EFL learners' errors is stress placement in individual words and words in sentences. The main cause of miscommunication and misunderstanding, especially when EFL students listen to or speak with a native speaker or native-like speaker is incorrect placement of stress on individual words. Though, speaking with non-native speakers might eliminate this error, fluency is still a goal for any language learner. Based on my personal experience in teaching this subject for more than 10 years , to overcome this error, make students listen actively and cautiously to how people near them articulate their words. If they hear a pronunciation that is different from theirs, search in the dictionary (even if it's a common and frequently used word) to be sure that they are placing the stress in the right place. Increase the exercises that contain common words for their correct stress placement, first individually and then in phrases and sentences.

2. Wrong word stress in sentences

Another very common error of EFL students that usually goes unnoticed is the placement of stress on a wrong word in a sentence. Changing the place of stress within a sentence might completely change the meaning of the whole sentence, as it changes that speaker's focus and emphasis.

For instance, one can utter the following sentence in various ways:

"I didn't say we should drive this way."

It is intuitively known that if one stresses **I**, the emphasis is that taking that route was not one's idea. On the other hand, if the stress is on **drive**, the emphasis is on the mode of transport.

So , if due attention is not given to the words one stresses , one could send a completely different message than originally intended. The researcher's teaching experience in this field confirms that to solve this challenge and avoid the error , practice with sentences and emphasize different words. You can play the role of a model and add emphasis by lengthening the word, saying it slightly louder and/or changing the pitch of your voice slightly. Make students listen to the difference and discuss it further with their classmates.

3. Incorrect Pronunciation of certain consonant sounds

Each language has its own sound system. One of the errors that Kurdish EFL students make is confusing be due to you confusing 'voiced' and unvoiced' sounds. Students might substitute 'p' for 'b' or 't' for 'd', for example. Due to the fact that, these sounds are only different in one feature which is voicing, they are easily confused. Another area of errors that Kurdish EFL students encounter is the sound / θ /, many students made an error in this sound, for example in the word / think /, the correct pronunciation in this word is / θ ɪŋ k /, but the students pronounced it / t ɪ ŋ k / or / sɪ ŋ k /.

To avoid this error, make students focus on how they use their voice when they speak. Make them able to feel the vibration of their vocal cords when they make voiced sounds (b, d, g, v, z, r, l, m, n, ng, dʒ, ʒ, and voiced θ). You can also make students try to make lists of pairs of words that use the sounds they find challenging and practice repeating those. Let students record themselves so they can hear whether they are making any progress.

4. Mixing up short and long vowel sounds:

In general,, during speaking sounds get confused. Vowels, similar to other sounds, are likely to be confused. The main error or challenge with vowels occurs when one mixes up long and short vowel sounds. For example, the long /i:/ sound in 'seat' with the short /i/ sound in 'sit.' If you confuse these sounds, you end up conveying completely different messages and hence miscommunication is more likely to happen. This can become more confusing in daily communication and oblige people to draw much more from the context of your speech than the speech itself.

For overcoming this error, make practice word lists that consist of consonant sounds and do more practice with the sounds that are challenging for your students. To support this , Gilbert (2008) postulated that distinguishing vowels might be easier learnt through

tasks involving listening , whereas consonants might be more efficiently mastered via speaking tasks. Additionally, Siegel (2018) pointed out that many teachers recommend an eclectic mix of instructional procedures such as reading aloud, repetition, and teacher corrections to make learners avoid EFL students pronunciation difficulties.

5. Word endings/consonant clusters

Most Kurdish EFL students tend to let their word endings disappear. It was observed that students often drop the 'ed' ending off of words in the past tense, for instance. Another point in this regard is related to consonant clusters in general , and final consonant clusters in particular. This is a serious error because not only is the pronunciation wrong, but it also sounds like making other mistakes such as grammatical ones.

To solve this error, do everything you can to articulate your word endings. One exercise that might help is to move the word ending onto the front of the following word. This will only work if the following word begins with a vowel sound.

6.Silent letters:

There are several silent letters found in the spelling of English words, when EFL learners encounter them , they face difficulties and they are more likely to make errors in the pronunciation of such words. The reason might be due to the fact that in most languages , Kurdish language the mother tongue of the subjects of the current study , is an orthographic language , in other words , it is pronounced as it spelled.

The most common silent letters that cause problems for Kurdish EFL students are the letters, h , p and b. The words that have h and p initially cause more problems and the words that have b finally cause more errors. Many students made an error in this word '*receipt*' , the correct pronunciation in this word is / r ɪ. s i : t /, but the students pronounced it / r ɪ. s i : pt /. The error is found in pronouncing the sound / p /, because it should be silent.

To overcome these errors, make lists of words containing silent letters, make students record their reading, and then conduct a peer assessment.Ask students to find mispronunciations in each other's recordings.

10. Conclusions

Throughout this study, it has been concluded that:

1-The pronunciation errors are of two main categories, namely interlingual and intralingual. The underlying factors are L1 interference and lack of sufficient and practical knowledge about the sound system of the target language.

2-Kurdish EFL learners make errors in pronouncing individual vowels, mix short with long vowels, and wrong stress placement within a word and a sentence.

3-Kurdish EFL learners make errors in certain consonants such as / θ/ as it is not found in students' L1.

4-Sometimes, short and long vowels are confused as, in most cases, length is not distinctive such as short and long /i/ in Kurdish.

5-Kurdish EFL learners also make errors in consonant clusters, especially final consonant clusters such as words 'ed' and ' s' endings.

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