Teaching and Learning Phonetics Obstacles in EFL Classrooms: Cihan University-Erbil

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Abstract—This study aims at finding out the main obstacles lecturers face in teaching pronunciation. It also sheds light on the stumbling blocks in pronunciation faced by English as a Foreign Language freshmen students at the departments of English and Translation, faculty of Arts and Letters, Cihan University-Erbil. The students at both departments study Phonetics at first stage over two semesters, so they have encountered different problems. Besides, this study tries to shed light on the main reasons that lead to cause mispronunciation of some sounds. The instruments used to accomplish this study are mainly two; observation and distributing an unstructured open questionnaire for examining students on the transcription of monosyllabic and multisyllabic words. The freshmen are examined verbally and non-verbally on the consonants, short and long vowels, diphthongs, and triphthongs. Their answers have been analyzed following IMB-SPSS. The outcomes of this study reveal that some sounds are difficult to be taught due to their absence in the native language and the difficulty to deliver them to students. Moreover, it figures out that diphthongs, triphthongs, and two-symbol consonants are difficult for students to learn. Therefore, they commit a lot of mistakes in their pronunciation. Besides, some other factors contribute to the mispronunciation as mother tongue interference, demotivation, decontextualization, less-trained lecturers, and others.

Keywords: Diphthongs, English as a Foreign Language, IBM-SPSS, Obstacles, Pronunciation

I. Introduction

English is an international language and the number of its learners is increasing. Some people learn it as a second language (ESL) while others as a foreign language (EFL). Learning English as a second language refers to studying English in English-speaking countries while learning English as a foreign language refers to studying English in non-speaking–English countries. English learners in Kurdistan Region-Iraq are considered as EFL learners since they never use English neither in official places nor on streets. Therefore, they face a lot of obstacles since they do not have enough opportunities to practice English. Besides, they might find it hard pronouncing words like native speakers. Lecturers, accordingly, have to exert efforts to make things at ease.

Teaching phonetics to non-native speakers is not an easy task since students might have come from a background where they were not exposed enough to English language. Naser and Hamzah (2018) mentioned that "mastering intelligible communication is the main goal for learners while learning the target language and this requires correct conversation and intelligible pronunciation" (p. 85). Albiladi says "one of the most effulgent stumbling blocks English language learners come across through their language learning trip is pronunciation" (2019, p. 42). This was evident and the researcher herself experienced that with freshmen. Phonetics for them is like a nightmare although the material is explained using modern teaching methods and facilities.

Dost (2017) suggested that "hurdles are raised by two main causes: (1) The comprehensive articulation of English sounds by following the right articulatory organs, and (2) the relationship between the non-verbal state of statements and their counterparts in English learners' speeches are presented to English orthography" (p. 77). The reason behind such difficulties is not only linked with students but also with lecturers. If a student used to study English in secondary and high schools with wrong pronunciation, he\she woulVd insist on this false pronunciation even after being taught the correct one for two or four semesters at the university. On the other hand, sometimes lecturers are not competent enough to teach such a subject. The journey will end up with graduates having unqualified pronunciation. Besides, due to the mismatch between spelling and transcription, students will be trapped and might mispronounce words.

Therefore, the precise articulation of English sounds is a real obstacle to both EFL learners and lecturers (Abugohar and Yunus, 2018, p. 94). According to Yates and Zielinski (2009), "pronunciation is the way of producing the sounds that are used to make meaning when speakers speak. It involves consonants and vowels of a language (segments) and features of speech beyond the level of the individual segments, such as stress, timing, rhythm, and intonation" (cited by Gilakjani and Sabouri, 2016, p. 967). To make long story short, lecturers allocated to teaching Phonetics have not only to master the basic principles of pronunciation, but also to go further regarding the articulation of sounds and some other suprasegmental features.

Piyamat and Deekawong (2021) mention that "Pronunciation teaching has its focus on the goal of achieving a near or native-like pronunciation" (p. 72). To achieve such a goal, lecturers should first pinpoint the essential obstacles that hinder right pronunciation and the main methodologies to address them. Regarding the experience of some Phonetics lecturers teaching English to Kurdish students, the main hindrance that they have faced is the interference of the mother tongue (negative transfer). For example, due to the lack of a three-consonant coda in Kurdish language, students tend to insert a vowel which is a schwa or a short vowel like /ɪ/ before the final consonant to make it match their mother tongue. Moreover, the other stumbling blocks include lack of practice, perceived importance associated with pronunciation (lack of priority), confidence, knowledge and training.

This research tends to spot light on the main obstacles faced by Phonetics lecturers at the university of Cihan-Erbil. Besides, it tackles teaching phonetics obstacles. This study is based on both lecturer's observation and the students' answers in the questionnaire.

A. Significance of the Study

Teaching Phonetics includes teaching sounds, articulation of sounds, syllables, division of syllables, and some suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation, but in this study, the focus is on consonants, short and long vowels, diphthongs, and triphthongs. It will also discuss pronunciation problems from students' viewpoints. It is taught at Cihan University-Erbil over two semesters. Lecturers face many obstacles in teaching this subject since students are not acquainted enough with these types of sound-related points. These hindrances are triggered by various causes such as negative transfer, lack of confidence, lack of training, and some other causes. This study will tackle all these reasons and suggest propose suitable solutions.

B. Statement of the Problem

This study aims to answer the following research objectives:
1. What are the challenges faced by EFL lecturers in teaching Phonetics?
2. Why is the subject of "pronunciation" difficult for freshmen students?

II. Literature Review

Literature is rich in studies investigating the obstacles inhibiting learners' speaking proficiency (Abugohar and Yunus, 2018, p. 94). A parcel of analysts tackles this subject, but these challenges still exist. Mohammed and Idris and Mohammed (2020), in their paper, entitled "*Challenges of Elocution to EFL Learners in Talked English*" examined the rhetoric issues in spoken English. They shed light on the noteworthiness of elocution in instructing as well as learning any instructive institution which embraces English within the educational module. They claimed that examining the causes of rhetoric issues for EFL learners is an amazingly critical matter. They assumed that addressing elocution botches ought to be on everyday premise and educating articulation ought to be managed carefully by considering it significantly vital. This takes place by raising the mindfulness of both instructors and learners.

These obstacles are not attributed to university students but to schools' pupils as well. Ahmad (2017) investigated problems faced by high school pupils. In his paper entitled "Difficulties Encountered by EFL Students in Learning Pronunciation: A Case Study of Sudanese Higher Secondary Schools," he spit light on the difficulties that face students in learning pronunciation in Northern Kordofan state, in Elobeid higher secondary school. He found out that there are many obstacles that students overcome in acquiring English sounds articulation such as the stress and intonation, the mother tongue influence, and the syllabus that may need many changes to suit pronunciation.

To overcome these deterrents, Al-Zayed (2017) tended to focus on this issue in her paper entitled "*Non-Native Articulation of English: Issues and Solutions.*" She suggested the following solutions for having some articulation problems. These include: (1) Students should be given many exercises focusing on the English pronunciation. They should also be given a lot of voicing-related exercises as park, bark, fell, fill, wash, and watch. (2) Students should have a self-motivation for improving their English language pronunciation. They themselves ought to search for some sources to acquire the English language from the native speakers. (3) Curriculum planners should introduce many exercises focusing on pronunciation and listening. (4) English teachers should be more serious when they teach their students English, and give their attention to the phonological language interference for the students during their speaking or reading. In addition, they need to test them periodically, to check their pronunciation development.

Other researchers, however, assign these pronunciation problems to some confusing sounds as monophthongs. Hassan (2014), in his paper, entitled "Pronunciation Problems: A Case Study of English Language Students at Sudan University of Science and Technology" suggested that students have problems with the pronunciation of monophthongs that have more than one way of pronunciation.

Confounding /s/ and /θ/, /z/ and /ð/, /p/ and /b/, /v/ and /f/, /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ ordinarily lead a few understudies to a kind of error and they may lead the audience to misconception

as well. The error of the SSEs is due to the availability of the tricky phonemes in Arabic. The phoneme contrasts influence numerous common English words, so destitute generation of these sounds will be exceptionally discernible. Subsequently, he concluded that a few understudies have issues within the elocution of the voiceless bilabial /p/ and the voiced bilabial /b/. Agreeing to the comes about, numerous understudies substitute /p/ with /b/ in words such as "pen" "map," "happy" and once in a while supplant /b/ with /p/. Other consonant sound contrasts, in which SSEs mispronounce is the dental fricative /θ/ and the alveolar fricative /s/, so in words such as "think," "math," and "mathematics" the SSEs supplant /θ/ with /s/.

Others refer pronunciation problems to negative transfer. In other words, they believe that mother tongue interference affects students' pronunciation negatively as confirmed by Abayazeed and Abdalla (2015). They claimed in their paper entitled "*Investigating the Causes behind Articulation Issues Confronting Sudanese College Understudies Majoring in English: A Case Think about of Khartoum College Staff of Expressions, English Department*" that the contrasts between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels cause elocution issues for Sudanese College undergraduates. Instructors thought that the English dialect syllabus as a major subject at the college is not adequate concerning putting into consideration the contrasts between English and Arabic sound frameworks. They thought that the English dialect syllabus as a major subject at the college is not adequate concerning putting into consideration the contrasts between English and Arabic sound frameworks. Their study showed that the students have significant problems with (11) of the English sounds out of (21) of the target sounds. This is a considerable number that indicates that the differences between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels cause pronunciation problems for the respective subjects. This satisfied the first hypothesis of the study which states that "The differences between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels cause pronunciation problems for Sudanese University students," whereas it figured out that the teachers Questionnaire demonstrates that (14) of the teachers think that the syllabus at university does not enhance pronunciation and does not consider the differences between the students' first language and the target one which support the second study hypothesis "The English language syllabus as a major subject at the university is not adequate concerning putting into account the differences between English and Arabic sound systems."

Negative transfer is also confirmed by a study conducted by Haji and Mohammed (2019). They investigated in their paper entitled "An Examination of the Articulating of English Monophthongs by Kurdish EFL College undergraduates (Northern Kurmanji Speakers)." After careful scrutinizing, they discovered that the central vowels were the most difficult sounds for Kurdish EFL students regarding the articulation followed by high back vowels. Ostensibly, subscribers were supposed to have issues with central vowels of English, particularly since they do not exist in their mother language, but the outcomes showed that high back vowels are rather

obviously hard for them to accurately articulate. Although these are already available in their mother language, NK Kurdish. They recapitulated that the utmost causes that Kurdish EFL students do not articulate one-symbol English sounds properly are that some of them do not exist in their first language and learners do not train on pronunciation of these monophthongs a lot as well.

Another study conducted by Mohammadi (2014). He demonstrated in his paper entitled "A Survey of Kurdish Students' Sound Segment and Syllabic Pattern Errors in the Course of Learning EFL" that there were likenesses between the sound frameworks of Kurdish and English concerning the vowels, consonants, and their clusters. A few sound portions in English had no partners in Kurdish and bad habit versa. The English phonemes with no partners in Kurdish were anticipated to result in articulation blunders, which were tentatively bolstered. He too pointed out that the combination of the sound fragments appeared a few similitudes as well; in any case, a few sound section combinations in English had no partners in Kurdish, for example, "VV" combinations in all positions and introductory "CCC" combinations in monosyllabic words. Most of these truant sound clusters were tentatively bolstered to be risky and result in articulation mistakes.

The outcomes of the mistake examination showed a recurrence of the sound section and syllabic design mistakes due to the obstructions of Kurdish in their learning of English. Another vital conclusion is that Kurdish understudies attempt to reproduce the missing sound clusters by embeddings a vowel some time recently or between the missing clusters. For occurrence, they tend to articulate the word "strict" as /setrict/ or /estrict/. Moreover, at last, it was tentatively affirmed that there are four major sorts of phonological mistakes as follows:

1. Blunders due to the obstructions of mother tongue sound portions. These happen when the subjects' mother tongue needs certain target dialect phonemes for case, articulating "then" as /sanctum/ and /zen/ by most of the Kurdish students.
2. Blunders due to the obstructions of mother tongue syllable structures within the target dialect. They happen when a few sound clusters are not allowed within the mother tongue whereas they are accessible within the target dialect, for example, they tend to articulate the word "strict" as /setrict/ or /estrict/.
3. Mistakes due to the spelling elocution of words. Kurdish understudies in some cases tend to articulate words as they are spelled, for example, "blood" is articulated as /blu:d/.
4. Mistakes due to certain letters spelled out but not articulated (noiseless letters). This caused a parcel of issues for Kurdish learners. For occasion, they tend to articulate "lamb" as /læmb/.

The results of this study can be a profitable source of data for those instructors who are concerned with teaching English as a foreign language in general and those included in educating English to Kurdish undergraduates in specific. This paper figures out that on the phonological level, the oracular rightness of contrastive analysis in finding Kurdish learners'

articulation mistakes is inevitable and instructors can depend on the results of contrastive investigation of the mother tongue and the target language in planning articulation works out for Kurdish learners. It allows them to anticipate certain elocution blunders since they know the major sources of these mistakes and act, give instructive materials, and educate in like manner. The same methods may be connected for the local speakers of other dialects (Persian, Arabic, Turkish, etc.) by differentiating the sound fragments and phonological highlights of these dialects and English.

The aforementioned study is supported by the one done by Aljaroosh and Bunmustafa (2020). They suggested in their paper entitled "Exploring Pronunciation Errors of primary pupils' school in Misrata Libya" that the most noticeable errors with the pupils are with vowels and diphthongs, so a word as "young" is pronounced* /jəuŋg/ instead of /jʌŋ/. This happened because students are taught the letter as single "o" and as its name /əu/, and they use the same letter when existing in "word" as */wəurd/ instead of /wɜːrd/. The same is true for words as "uncle" and "umbrella." They are pronounced as */juːnkl/ instead of /ʌŋkl/ and */juːumbrella/ instead of /ʌmbrelə/. This happens because students use the sounds of the name of the letters since they are taught these sounds in a single form, not in chunks. Moreover, they assigned mispronunciation to the lack of trained teachers. They said that occurs due to the lack of trained teachers, and authentic and modern facilities. Mispronunciation also takes place because pupils are encouraged to repeat, memorize and recite the letters individually, for a while at the beginning, without integrating or using them in complete words. Such kind of teaching ends up with having students using the name of the letter, not the sound wherever they meet.

III. Methodology

The instruments used in this research were the observation of 2 years during teaching Phonetics in the university of Cihan-Erbil at the faculty of Arts and Letters, departments of English and Translation. The majority of students are Kurds and the minority are Arabs. In each department, phonetics is taught over two semesters for first-stage students. The experience of the researcher in teaching phonetics and conversation is more than 10 years. This experience enables her to observe the exact pronunciation and conversation levels that students have. Besides, she has recently examined students verbally and non-verbally on consonants, short vowels, long vowels, diphthongs, and triphthongs to have bold data and get them analyzed quantitatively. This type of observation is known as a process of gathering data through observing places and people. It is a direct observation that refers to when the observer remains physically present and personally monitors what takes place. Besides, 20 students from each department were chosen to take part in the questionnaires. Three questionnaires are formed; one on short and long vowels, one on diphthongs, and one on triphthongs. These questionnaires were open unstructured ones consisting of predetermined questions that students answer openly. The first one is composed of ten words including short and long vowels. The second one is composed of ten words having diphthongs. Moreover, the third one consists of ten words having triphthongs. The consonants in the three questionnaires have been scrutinized.

After that, the statistics of the three questionnaires has been analyzed following IBM SPSS.

The other instrument implemented to gather information is teachers' discussion. Being a member of the department of English staff gives the researcher the opportunity to have a chat with lecturers regarding students' pronunciation problems. The group discussion instrument is common for finding data in every academic field and professional area (Naser and Hamzah, 2018).

IV. Findings and Discussion

A. The Main Obstacles Faced by Pronunciation Lecturers

Teaching short vowels

This Table I shows the easiness and the difficulty of teaching the short vowels. The second, third, and fourth ones are difficult to teach due to students' lack of comprehension. Students often mingle /ɒ/ and /ʊ/. They cannot recognize the difference between them. The second one is difficult for students since they do not differentiate between it and the long vowel /ɑː/. The lecturer exerts a lot of efforts to show the difference between long and short vowels. He uses a lot of videos to show the quality of the vocal folds regarding the pronunciation of these sounds. Besides, he might act a lot and uses his body language to make things clearer.

Teaching long vowels

It is difficult for teachers to teach the second one to Kurdish students since they are not accustomed to such a sound in their native language. In this case, the teacher should show students a lot of examples and videos to clarify it. Regarding the fourth one, the teacher finds it difficult to explain. He needs to show extent of the length of the vocal folds, and the quality of voicing. For the fifth one, the teacher might face the same problem (Table II).

Teaching diphthongs

Diphthongs are generally hard for both native and non-native speakers. That's why, they might perceive them as long vowels. Regarding Kurdish context, they seem intricate since they do not have such sounds in their native language. Lecturers face difficulty in illustrating them and show the movement of the tongue from front close or back to the center since /ə/ is a central vowel (Table III).

Table 1
Teaching Easy and Difficult Short Vowels

Departments	/ɪ/	/æ/	/ɒ/	/ə/	/ʊ/	/e/	/ʌ/
English and Translation	Easy	Difficult	Difficult	Easy	Difficult	Easy	Easy

Table II
Teaching Easy and Difficult Long Vowels

Departments	/ɑː/	/ɜː/	/iː/	/ɔː/	/uː/
English and Translation	Difficult	Difficult	Easy	Difficult	difficult

Teaching triphthongs

Triphthongs are hard not only for non-native speakers but also for native speakers since the middle sound is hardly heard, so it is heard as a long vowel or a diphthong. In addition, the movement from one phoneme to another is not slow. These all happen rapidly. Moreover, there are not enough examples on triphthongs. Illustrating them to students requires a lot of videos and explanations to help students comprehend them well (Table IV).

B. Main Problems Faced by Students in:

Short vowels

Regarding the above Table V, the highest problematic vowel for students of the departments of English and Translation is /ɒ/. They keep using it incorrectly, and they use /ɔː/ instead. For example, they transcribe "fond" as /fɔ;nd/ instead of /fɒnd/. The second problematic vowel is /æ/. They confuse it with /ɑː/, so they transcribe "hand" as /hɑːnd/ instead of /hænd/. The least problematic one is /e/, because Kurdish students have a similar sound in their native language.

Long vowels

Regarding the Table VI, the problematic long vowel for both-department students is /ɜː/ since it does not exist either in Arabic or in Kurdish. Hence, they transcribed a word "purse" as /pers/ instead of /pɜːs/. The second problematic long vowel is /ɔː/. They usually confuse it with /ɑː/, so they transcribe "fall" as /fɑː/ instead of /fɔːl/. The least problematic long vowel is /iː/since they have a similar sound in their native language.

Diphthongs

As Table VII shows, the biggest obstacle for both-department students is with /əʊ/. They confuse it with /ɒ/. They transcribe "sofa" as /sɒfə/ instead of /səʊfə/. They next one is /ʊə/. They substitute it with /uː/, so they transcribe

"tour" as /tuː/ instead of /tʊə/. The next one is /ɪə/. Students tend to replace it with /eə/, so they transcribe the word "fierce" as /feə/ instead of /fɪəs/. These three diphthongs are very puzzling for students since they are not accustomed to diphthongs that consist of two phonemes but constitute one sound. They do not have them in their native languages either.

Triphthongs

Concerning Table VIII, it is clear that the stumbling block for both-department students is /ɔɪə/. They usually replace it with /aʊə/, so they transcribe the word/lawyer" as /laʊə/ instead of /lɔɪə/. The second one is /əʊə/. They tend to substitute it with /aʊə/, so they transcribe the word "slower" as /slaʊə/ instead of /sləʊə/. The least problematic one is /eɪə/ since they have similar sounds in their native languages.

Consonants

Both-department students have problems with these consonants that consist of two phonemes such /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. They do not differ between /tʃ/ and /ʃ/, /dʒ/, and /ʒ/, so they transcribe the word "jazz" as /ʒæz/ instead of /dʒæz/. Besides, they transcribe "chips" as /ʃɪps/ instead of /tʃɪps/. The other problem students have is with /ŋ/. They keep switching it with /g/, so they transcribe "long" as /lɒng/ instead of /lɒŋ/. They also have a problem with /k/ sound. For example, the word "class" is transcribed as /clæs/ instead of /klæs/. Moreover, they confuse /Ɵ/ with /ð/, so they transcribe the word "thin" as /ðɪn/ instead of /Ɵɪn/.

To sum up, students have problems with the sounds that consist of two phonemes or those that are not available in their native languages.

C. Reasons of Students' Pronunciation Problems

Negative Transfer

After implementing the aforementioned instruments, the researcher found out that mother tongue interference was quite clear. Regarding Kurdish language, students tended to substitute /Ɵ/ with /s/ since it is not available in the Kurdish language. Hence, they pronounce the following words (think, thank, faith, and bath) as follows:/sɪŋk/, /sæŋk/, /feɪs/, and /bæs/. Besides, there is no three or four consonant coda in Kurdish language, they tend to break this cluster by adding a schwa before the final consonant instead. For example, the following words (students, texts, guests, and thanks) should be pronounced as follows

TABLE III
TEACHING EASY AND DIFFICULT DIPHTHONGS

Departments	/eɪ/	/aɪ/	/eə/	/ɔɪ/	/ʊə/	/aʊ/	/əʊ/	/ɪə/
English and Translation	Plain	Plain	Hard	Plain	Hard	Plain	Plain	Hard

TABLE IV
TEACHING EASY AND DIFFICULT TRIPHTHONGS

Departments	/aʊə/	/əʊə/	/eɪə/	/aɪə/	/ɔɪə/
English and Translation	Easy	Difficult	Difficult	Easy	Easy

TABLE V
LEARNING DIFFICULTIES REGARDING SHORT VOWELS

Department	/ɪ/	/ʊ/	/ə/	/e/	/ɒ/	/ʌ/	/æ/
English	12	20	10	8	61	14	32
Translation	35	18	11	7	60	20	59

TABLE VI
LEARNING DIFFICULTIES REGARDING LONG VOWELS

Department	/ɑː/	/ɔː/	/iː/	/uː/	/ɜː/
English	20	33	11	17	36
Translation	30	36	10	20	40

TABLE VII
LEARNING DIFFICULTIES REGARDING DIPHTHONGS

Departments	/eɪ/	/aɪ/	/eə/	/ɔɪ/	/ʊə/	/aʊ/	/əʊ/	/ɪə/
English	20	25	30	17	36	22	40	35
Translation	23	12	32	20	34	21	42	33

TABLE VIII
LEARNING DIFFICULTIES REGARDING TRIPHTHONGS

Departments	/aʊə/	/əʊə/	/eɪə/	/aɪə/	/ɔɪə/
English	35	40	13	22	49
Translation	30	32	10	20	45

/stju:dənts/, /teksts/, /gests/, and Θæŋks/, but by Kurds they are pronounced this way /stju:dəntəs/, /tekstəs/, /gestəs/, and /Θæŋkəs/ instead.

Regarding the Arabic language, due to the absence of /p/ and /v/ in Arabic, students tend to pronounce it as /b/ and /f/, respectively. Hence, they pronounce the following words (park, program, popular, and pain) as /ba:k/, /brəʊgræm/, /bʊbjʊlər/, and /beɪn/ and the following ones (seven, vendor, and thrive) as /sefen/, /fendə/, and /Θraɪf/.

Lack of knowledge-related problems

Another type of intelligible mispronunciation is related to students' lack of information resulting in many pronunciation problems. One of them is the pronunciation of silent letters as in the following words (exhibition, listen, know, foreign, edge, and honest) which are pronounced as /eksɪhbɪʃn/, /lɪstən/, /knəʊ/, /fʊrɪdʒn/, /eddʒ/, and /hʊnɪst/. The other one related to pronouncing the letter "c" as /s/ even if it is not followed by (i, e, and y), so they pronounce the following words (cylinder, criticize, facility, and currency) as /kɪlɪndə/, krɪtɪkaɪz/, fəkɪləti/, and /kʌrənki/. Another problem is related to the lack of differentiation between long and short vowels. This results in pronouncing the following words (meaning, lead, appeal, and lesions) as /mɪnɪŋ/, /led/, /əpɪl/, and /lɪʒn/.

One more problem, they cannot notice the difference between voiced and voiceless pronunciation of sounds in suffixes. For example, the third person singular morpheme "s" could be pronounced as /s/ if it is preceded by a voiceless sound as in "speaks"/ spi:ks/ and as /z/ if it is preceded by a voiced sound as in "sounds" /saʊndz/. Students, however, tend to pronounce these two sounds the same. The same goes with the past tense morpheme (ed). They tend to pronounce as /d/ no matter the morpheme comes after voiced or voiceless sound as the following words (talked, washed, and passed) as /tɔ:kd/, wʊʃd/. /pɑ:sd/.

Mismatching spelling and pronunciation forms problems

Another factor ends up in mispronunciation is the difference between the written and the spoken forms. Words include the letters "ch," which are mostly pronounced as /tʃ/ no matter whether it is correct or not as in the following ones (chemistry, psychology, chaos, and characteristic) as /tʃemɪstri/, /saɪtʃʊlədʒi/, /tʃeɪʊs/, and /tʃærɪktərɪstɪk/). Another type of mismatching results in pronouncing the letter "g" not always as /g/ but sometimes as /dʒ/ as in the following words (language, gang, garage, binge, stingy forgive, and bling) pronounced as /læŋgwɪg/, dʒæŋ/, /gæra:g/, /bɪŋ/, /stɪngi/, /fədʒɪv/, and /blɪndʒ/). In addition, some students do not have an idea about germination so they pronounce the following words (add, assume, and happiness) as /ædd/, /əssju:m/, and /hæppinəs/.

Stress-related problems

Another point that was discovered among students at the department of English in Cihan University-Erbil is stress-based pronunciation problems. Students insist on pronouncing the following words (Enter, open, envy, and equal) that are supposed to be pronounced as follows: /'entə/, /'əʊpən/, /'envi/, /'i:kwəl/ as follows: (/en'tə/, /əʊ'pən/, /en'vi/, and /i:k'wəl/). Besides, students cannot allocate the stress well since they sometimes do not recognize the part of the speech of the word. For example, they tend to pronounce the following words (Lovely, divine, even, correct, hollow, and alive) that should be pronounced as follows: /'lʌvli/, /dɪ'vaɪn/, /'i: vən/, /kə'rekt/, /'hʊləʊ/, and /ə'laɪv/ as follows /lʌv'li/, /'dɪvaɪn/, /i:'vən/, /'kərekt/, /hʊ'ləʊ/, and /'əlaɪv/. Moreover, they do not have enough knowledge regarding the syllabification of the words which result in assigning stress to the wrong syllable.

D. Reasons Behind Pronunciation Problems

Being taught by less qualified teachers

The basic reason stands behind mispronunciation is caused by the teacher. Students in Kurdistan Region-Iraq start studying English at fifth grad in public schools and at kindergarten in private schools. Hence, generally, they are studying around 10 years. If they are taught by teachers whom themselves have pronunciation problems, they will have such fossilized pronunciation defaults as well. Moreover, this problem will be fixed if they have well-trained lecturers at universities.

Demotivation

Spending 10 years in teaching and meeting many students, the researcher can confirm that some students join the English department due to having a low average not due to their passion. Hence, they might not work enough to develop their pronunciation and they do not take part in classes due to a lack of interest. Besides, they might not have self-esteem encourages them to develop their pronunciation since their main goal behind attending the university is to get a certificate.

Mother tongue interference

Another reason leads to mispronunciation which is the negative transfer from the mother tongue to the target language. Students tend to generalize their mother tongue rules to the target language to feel much more comfortable. Such type of generalization includes the pronunciation of /p/ as /b/, and inserting a vowel in the coda cluster among others.

Others

One of the reasons lie behind mispronunciation includes decontextulization. This means teaching English detached of context. Lecturers tend to teach pronunciation as an isolated entity. These reasons also include lack of exposure to English language. Students tend not to listen to English news or songs, and they do not watch English movies. Besides, they do not contact native speakers to practice the language more. All these causes lead to pronunciation problems.

V. Conclusions

By accomplishing this research and scrutinizing the collected data, it yielded the following conclusions. (1) Pronunciation lecturers have many difficulties in teaching some sounds including short and long vowels, some diphthongs, and tripthongs. (2) Students face obstacles in grasping this subject as well. (3) The reasons behind comprehension hindrances are many including negative transfer from their mother tongue (Arabic and Kurdish) to fill the gap they

encounter in the target language (English). Such negative transfer is apparent in substituting the voiceless consonant /p/ by the voiced one /b/. It also results in breaking up the coda consonant cluster by inserting a schwa before the final one. Besides, it ends up with having the alveolar /s/ instead of the dental /ɵ/, and the voiceless fricative /f/ for the voiced one.

Others include the pronunciation of silent letters, the mispronunciation of the plural and third person singular morphemes, and the letter "c" as well. Another type of mispronunciation is attached to generalize the pronunciation of the letters "ch" as /tʃ/ wherever they occur and the letter "g" as /g/ or /dʒ/ without paying attention to their proper pronunciation. Besides, the most difficult obstacle is stress-related one. A lot of students are trapped by this problem since they are either cannot figure out how many syllables there are or what part of speech the word is.

This study figured out that the main reasons lie behind pronunciation defaults are lack of qualified teachers, decontextualization, and demotivation. Besides, students do not exert any effort upgrade their level, so they do not listen to English news or sons. They also do not watch English movies or programs.

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