

Pronunciation Problems Arab Speakers Encounter While Learning English

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Abstract— The paper talk about difficulties Arab speakers encounter while learning English in the matter of pronunciation.

1 INTRODUCTION

Arabic is an official spoken and written language in 23 countries. Arabic is the most important language for 1.5 billion Muslims around the world because it is the language of The Quran, which is the book of Islam and the different are ways of using the language. Pronunciation in Arab countries varies due to the distances and cultural differences. In Morocco, Arab speakers use a certain pronunciation and accent that cannot be understood by Arab speakers in the Middle East, such as people from Saudi Arabia and Egypt. (Wahba, Taha, and England. 2006. Page 3). These differences might affect learners' speaking and pronunciation such as using the plural s and stress. "The Arabic and English phonological system are very different, not only in the range of sounds used, but in the emphasis placed on vowels and consonant in expressing meaning (& Smith, 2001, page 195-196). These variations mean Arab speakers might encounter different problems pronouncing some vocabulary, but usually they encounter similar difficulties. In Arabic there are 28 letter which are easy to comprehend and be heard as sounds.

2 PROBLEMS AND EXPLANATION

Problem /p/ vs. /b/

One of the most common problems for Arab speakers is differentiating between the sound /p/ and /b/, which are voiced and voiceless sounds. Indeed, they can pronounce /b/ successfully since it exists in Arabic, but the aspirated /p/ does not exist in Arabic. In English, pronouncing the sound /b/ instead of /p/ changes the meaning such as the difference between /bæt/ and /pæt/ (Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010, 51) /b/ sound is a **voiced** manner and has **Bilabial** stop and produced by lips. Even though /P/ sound is a voiceless and a **Bilabial**. Arab learners have difficulties pronouncing /p/ correctly

because they are not aware of the way how to produce it. /p/ is a **voiceless** and produced by lips and speaker should push the air stronger outside the mouth). Example, *beat* has another meaning from *peat*. Learners should be more aware of the difference in meaning first and then try to pronounce them together and compare.

Problem /v/ vs. /f/

Another problem That Arab speakers have when they learn English is differentiating between the /v/ /f/ sounds. "Arabic doesn't have a contrastive /v/ sound, although the sound does occur as a positional variant of /f/ before voiced stops and affricatives" (Avery & Ebrlich, 1992, P 111). /f/ sound is a **voiceless** manner and has **Labiodental** place. Even though /v/ sound has a **labiodental**, Arab learners have difficulties pronouncing /v/ correctly because they are not aware of the way how to produce it. /v/ is a **voiced** produced between **lips** and **teeth**, and speaker should vibrate the sound between the lips and the teeth. Example, *fan* has another meaning from *van*. Students should be more aware of the difference in meaning first and then try to pronounce them together and compare. Arab speakers can pronounce /f/ easily because it is part of Arabic language. Even though they know that the two sounds are different, they still find difficulties pronouncing the /v/ sound.

Problem /θ/ and /ð / Egypt th + the

Both /θ/ and /ð / are **dental fricative** and; /ð / is voiced and /θ/ is voiceless manner. "Speakers of some dialects in Arabic may substitute /t/ and /d/ for /θ/ and /ð / respectively, while speakers of other dialects may substitute /s/ and /z/" (Avery & Ebrlich, 1992, Page 111). According to Wise (1975), Egyptian speakers has special needs because their dialect is different from other dialects in the same

language (page 18-26). In Egypt, people usually replace the sound /θ/

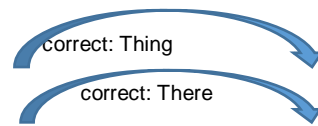
and /ð / with the sound /z/ even though both sounds are part of Arabic.

This case related to the Egyptian culture and their accent has old roots. Egypt has more than 98% Muslims in its population, which means they are reading the holy book (Quran). Reading Quran requires an accurate pronunciation, including the sounds /θ/ and /ð /. Nevertheless, for reasons that are not clear, Egyptian still struggle with pronouncing it correctly because of the Egyptian culture. This indicates how this problem is serious for them and hard it is to solve.

For Example:

Wrong pronunciation: Sing

Wrong pronunciation: zair



Problem /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ ch + j

In Arabic there are no /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ sounds, /tʃ/ is voiceless and /dʒ/ is voiced; both have affricate manner and take the palatal place of articulation. The problem is that Arabic does not have affricate sound. This problem carries over into reading English. They might encounter different problem with different sound such as /k/ when it is written in form of Ch as in *Christin*. Students at the beginning might overgeneralize the use of ch as it pronounced /tʃ/. For example, if Arab speakers read the word *Characters*, the first sound should take /k/. However, Because Arabic has a good sound -to- symbol correspondence, beginning learners might not identify the correct way of saying it.

Problem /r/

"The English /r/ maybe pronounced as a trill" (Avery & Ebrlich, 1992, Page 112). There are number of ways to produce /r/, and Arab speakers usually have difficulties pronouncing the dark /r/. Dark /r/ is a voiced palatal liquid. This sound for Arab speakers is one of the hardest sounds to adjust by the mouth to. In English, there are two ways to pronounce the r. One of them is used by English native speakers which is voiced palatal liquid like the /r/ in 'Peter'. The second way is voiced alveolar liquid like 'rain'. These differentiation might confused the learner in the beginning.

Problem Flap /ɾ/

The flap sound is common in English. "it is produced like /d/, except the tongue touches or flaps against the alveolar ridge only very briefly" (Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 2010, page 80). Arab speakers are not able to pronounce the flap easily because this sound is not popular in their native language. Learners might confused when they think the flap is a /d/ sound. Another possibility is that they might produce it as a /t/ sound. For example, *latter*, *Seattle* take the flap in the middle but instead students try to stress the written **tt** and produce the sound /t/. In addition, learners who speak British English might encounter some differences because in some dialects of British English a glottal stop occurs where in American English there is a flap.

3 CONCLUSION

All in all, Arabic and English has similarities in pronunciation which enable Arab speakers to improve their speaking faster than other languages' speaker start to speak and develop their speaking and pronunciation early. Arab speakers should be aware of these common problem to avoid making confusion and for better pronunciation.

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