

An Analysis of Errors Caused by Omani EFL Learners in pronouncing certain consonant Sounds

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ABSTRACT

Omani EFL learners face various problems in learning different skills; reading, writing, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary. In particular, Omani EFL learners are hardly able to pronounce certain consonant sounds correctly. For example, the sound /p/ has no counterpart in the phonemic system of Arabic language, so it is not easily realized by Omani students and it is always replaced by /b/, which has a phonemic value in the Arabic phonemic system. The same case is noticed with the sound /ʃ/, /v/ and /g/, which do not have counterparts in the Arabic consonantal system and are not normally realized by Omani students. Consequently these are often replaced by the sound /s/, /f/ and /dʒ/ respectively. Hence, the purpose of the study is to examine the difficulties experienced by Omani EFL learners in pronouncing certain English consonant sounds. The study also provides a theoretical description of mother tongue interference which affects Omani ESL learners' pronunciation of /p/ and /ʃ/ consonant sounds in words in isolation for three positions – initial, middle and final. The methodology utilized in the study was quantitative in nature. Not only, diagnostic test on students' pronunciation on certain consonant sounds was employed to obtain data for the study; a set of questionnaire was also used to gain information from the teachers pertaining to the students' difficulties in pronouncing certain consonant sounds. Apart from that, the article offers a practical outcome of the study in which upon knowing these difficulties, the teachers will be able use suitable pedagogical approach in handling this problem. It concludes with some pedagogical and teaching and learning procedures to be used in EFL classes.

Keywords: Pronunciation, Affect, Error Analysis, Language Transfer

INTRODUCTION

Having a good pronunciation of a language can help in normal communication, particularly intelligibility. However, that is not the only reason for developing a stable pronunciation of a new language. In fact, there is a very important mechanism involved in working memory called the phonological loop. In essence, the phonological loop is the brain saying a word or phrase over and over to itself in order to keep it in working memory or to help it move into long-term memory. A good example of this is the way we say a telephone number over and over to ourselves in order to keep it in memory while we go about dialling the numbers.

If learners do not have a stable pronunciation for a word, it cannot easily enter long-term memory because it cannot be held in the phonological loop at one time. This amount of information correlates reasonably well, for both for native speakers and non-native speakers, with vocabulary size a few years later (Nation and Newtown, 2009).

In Oman, English is a foreign language which is acquired through formal education in which the learners are supposed to be taught all aspects of the language skills, but in the teaching of English in Oman schools and universities, the practice is to pay more attention to the written component at the expense of the spoken component. As the English language has become the first international communication language in the world. Omani university students are obligated to acquire a good level of English. The Ministry of Education requires a result of band six in IELTS in order for potential employees to work in government sector. It is extremely important that students who search for the best job must be equipped with English language skills.

Furthermore, an Omani EFL learner starts learning English years after he has acquired Arabic, his mother tongue informally and learning it informally. Naturally, this has its bearing on the overall learning of English language. Al Mahrooqi, (2012) stated that Omani EFL learners tend to mispronounce certain consonant sound. For example, the sound /p/ has no counterpart in the phonetic system of Arabic language and it is always replaced by /b/, which has a phonemic value in the Arabic phonemic system. The same case happened with the sound /tʃ/. The sound /tʃ/ does not have found in the Arabic consonantal system and is not normally realized by Omani students. Consequently this is often replaced by the sound /ʃ/, for example, the sound /tʃ/ as in cheap is replaced by sound /ʃ/ as in sheep. The main aim of the study is to examine the difficulties experienced by Omani EFL learners in pronouncing English consonant sounds particularly /p/ and /b/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/, /v/ and /f/ and /dʒ/ and /g/. Apart from that, the study also aims at recommending suitable pedagogical and teaching and learning procedures to be employed in EFL classes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Factors Affecting EFL learners' pronunciation

This section discusses the relevant literature on the topic where the researcher focuses on the factors that affect EFL learners' pronunciation such as mother tongue interference, teachers, curriculum, students, lack of practice outside the classroom and teaching method which is the