

Phonotactic Interference Between English and Arabic Among Arab Learners of English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT: The main objective of this article is to find out why Arab Learners of English (ALE) pronounce: first, the verb past suffix “ed” /t/ as /id/ as in the word asked /ɑːskt/ and advanced /ədˈvɑːnst/; second, they pronounce the plural form “s” /z/ as /s/ after a voiced sound as in codes /kəʊdz/ and beds /bedz/. The sample of this study was Sudanese Secondary Schools students in Omdurman Locality. The researcher uses a descriptive analytic method to describe the nature of phonotactics difficulties besides a simple comparison between the problematic sounds in both languages, English and Arabic, to arrive at the study’s hypotheses. To verify the study hypotheses, the study sample took a pronunciation test to assess difficulties that the study sample encountered. The test includes a list of words the students may find difficult to pronounce, the verb past suffix “ed” /t/ and the plural form as s /z/ after a voiced sound. The most important result is that the absence of English allophones /t/ and /z/ from Arabic motivates ALE to use substituted sounds from Arabic to pronounce English allophones /t/ and /z/ as in the words asked and codes.

KEYWORDS: Phonotactics Allophone-Contrastive Analyses Hypothesis Interference Suffix

I. INTRODUCTION

Many pieces of literature present the phonological interference as a well-known phenomenon, and explain how the second language (L2) speaker uses a sound from his own language to pronounce a sound of L2 as a substituted sound because of the absence of the sound of L2 from his native language. Mahmud M. (2017) stated that phonological interference occurs when learners replace their first language (L1) phonemes with L2 phonemes. It's because some sounds in the target language are absent from the mother tongue. The phonological interference occurs at different phonological levels, from segmental to suprasegmental. The phonological interference in the suprasegmental level includes stress, phonotactics, and intonation. Any differences between 2 sound systems lead a listener to expect that the L2 speaker may use their own sound system to pronounce a sound of L2. One of the most phonotactic interference committed by ALE of English is that most of them pronounce the past simple suffix ed /t/ as /id/ after a voiceless as in the word asked /ɑːskt/ and the plural form s /z/ after a voiced sound as /s/ as in codes /kəʊdz/.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To find the exact reasons why ALE of English mispronounce the syllables ed/t/ and s/s/, it is important for the researcher to make a phonological comparison between the target sounds of the two languages, English and Arabic, as it was claimed by Lado (1957). The importance of using the Contrastive Linguistics Hypotheses (CLH) reflects the differences between the sound systems of two languages, which helps researchers, investigate how L2 sounds may lead to phonological errors. Such errors may hinder an English speaker from understanding the exact meaning of the words, which include the past tense suffix -ed/t/ after a voiceless sound and the plural s as /z/ after a voiced sound.

Sounds /d/ and /z/ have the same phonetic distinctive features in English and Arabic. Peter Roach describes /t/ as an alveolar, voiceless stop, and /z/ as an alveolar, fricative, voiceless. The question is why ALE of English mispronounces the two sounds /t/ and /z/ in the past plural suffix, while in fact /t/ and /z/ are found in Arabic and English. The sounds /t/ and /s/ are Arabic phonemes and have no allophones. Conversely, the English sounds /d/ and /s/ have allophones. In English, the sound /d/ has two allophones /t/ and /id/, and the sound /s/ has two allophones /z/ and /iz/. Therefore, these allophones are absent from the Arabic sound system. The absence of these allophones /t/, /id/, /z/ and /iz/ from the Arabic sound system may motivate ALE of English to use substituted sounds from Arabic to pronounce English past tense suffix /d/ and plural form /z/.

The absence of the consonant clusters st /st/ and dz/ in Arabic has been speculated as one phonological reason that enforces ALE of English to orthographically pronounce the English allophones as Arabic phonemes. Additionally, ALE of English insert the sound /i/ between two consonant clusters /s/ and /d/ as in a word asked /ɑːskid/. This is because there are no two consonant clusters

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in Arabic. Moreover, a phonological rule states that when we find two consonant clusters, we have to insert an Arabic vowel sound: either /i/, /o/ or /a/.

To summarise the hypotheses, the reason why ALE of English find difficulties in the pronunciation of past verb suffix ed /d/ after voiceless consonants and the plural syllable form /s/ after voiced consonants is the absence of English allophones /t/ and /z/ in the Arabic language. The nature of these phonological absences motivates ALE of English to insert the vowel sound /i/ between two English consonant clusters. These phonological phenomena enforce ALE to orthographically pronounce the two English allophones as separate English phonemes /d/ and /s/.

research methodology and data discussions:

III RESEARCH METODOLOGY AND DATA DUSCUSION

To investigate the authenticity of these hypotheses, a researcher designed a test. This test lists many representative words, including English allophones /t/ and /z/. The study sample consisted of 100 Arabic Speakers of English from different educational stages and graduates. The following table (1-1) shows the test items and a simple statistical analysis, representing the correct and incorrect pronunciations of the test items.

Table (1-1)

	Words	/t/	/z/	/id/	/s/	Insertion of /i/ between consonant clusters
1	Asked /ɑ:st/	11	12	89	88	88,5%
2	Advanced /əd'vɑ:nst/	11	12	89	88	88.5%
3	Codes /kəʊdz/	10	11	90	89	89.5
4	Heads /hedz/	14	12	88	87	88.5

The above table shows about 88.5% of the speakers who use Arabic phonemes to pronounce English allophones /t/ and /z/ in the past tense suffix ed /t/ as in the words 'asked' /ɑ:st/ and 'advanced' /əd'vɑ:nst/. About 88.5% of the study samples use Arabic phoneme/s/ to pronounce plural suffix /z/ as in Codes /kəʊdz/ and Heads /hedz/. The correct pronunciation percentage of the test items were between 11-12%, and this is attributed to that fact that ALE of English may expose learners to doses of listening that contain the correct pronunciation of allophones /t/ and /z/ in the past tense suffix ed /t/ as in the words Asked /ɑ:st/ and plural suffix /z/. The feedback of the test confirms the hypotheses of the study. These results are supported by the findings of the study by Amal M. (2021), who claims L1 negatively impacts the acquisition of EFL. Norma N. A. (2017) examined 30 students from a Jordanian university and claimed that English sounds, which are not found in the Arabic language, caused some confusion for the students owing to negative phonological interference. Kawther M. (2024) aligns with Amal M. (2021) by showing that EFL learners mispronounce many English vowels and consonant clusters, and the mispronunciations are attributed to interference of native language and limited language exposure.

IV CONCLUSION

It is to claim that phonotactic interference between English and Arabic is due to the absence of the allophone's /t/ and /z/ in Arabic that motivates Arabic Speakers of English to use Arabic phoneme /d/ and /s/ to pronounce English allophones, /d/ in past tense suffix ed and the plural s /z/, and to insert a vowel /i/ to pronounce two consonant clusters /st/. In addition to that, the nature of Arabic pronunciation is orthographic

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