Investigating the Causes behind Pronunciation Problems Facing Sudanese University Students Majoring in English: A Case Study of Khartoum University Faculty of Arts, English Department

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Abstract: *This study aimed at investigating the probable reasons behind English pronunciation problems facing Sudanese university students majoring in English. The researcher assumed that the differences between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels beside inadequate phonology courses are probable causes of this issue .The study pursued descriptive analytical method in the sense that it elaborates and analyzes the cause of the problem via statistical analysis of the gathered data. To obtain the required data for the study, the first tool used was a test presented to 50 students of the third year at Faculty of Arts, Khartoum University .The second tool was a questionnaire introduced to 20 teachers of the field at the same university. The validity and reliability of the study tools were confirmed firstly before being applied apparently by three referees of the field, then measured statistically .The analysis of the collected data revealed that the sound systems differences between English and Arabic causes the problem .In addition,the inadequacy of English syllabus concerning the number of the phonology courses and the consideration of the differences between English and Arabic .*

Keywords: Sudanese university students, Pronunciation problems, the differences between English and Arabic Sound Systems.

1. Introduction

English pronunciation is a salient element of Language learning, It is essential for all English learners to acquire good pronunciation while it is crucial for those who are learning English as a major subject. However ,pronunciation is affected by different factors which make it difficult for the students of English to have a good command of pronunciation.This study intends to investigate the probable causes behind pronunciation problems facing the students.

Study Problem and hypotheses:

Several researches were conducted on pronunciation problems of English language for Sudanese students.The problem was addressed by several Perspectives and resulted in different reasons. This study intends to investigate pronunciation problems facing students majoring in English .It is a case study at Khartoum University.To investigate the problem the researcher set the hypotheses below :

1) The differences between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels is a key cause behind pronunciation problems of the students.
2) 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.

Objectives of the Study

The study aimed to:
1) Investigate whether the differences between English and Arabic sounds systems cause pronunciation problems for the students.
2) Investigate the inadequacy of the English syllabus at university concerning the number of phonology courses and the differences between English and Arabic sound systems.
3) Recommend some suitable solutions based on the findings of the study.

2. Literature Review

Many approaches related the difficulty in foreign languages pronunciation to the differences between the native language and the second language. Lado(1957) states that an adult speaker of a language cannot easily pronounce language sounds of another language even though he/her has no speech impediment.). Krashen(2002) argues that,if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different,high frequency of mistakes could be predicted to occur in L2. The differences in LI sound system and that of L2 system will mutually influence one another Fledge(2002:224). The native language plays significant role in English pronunciation though there may be other factors. Students, whose L1 sound system differs significantly from English sound system, are likely to face greater difficulty when learning English as asecond language. Fries (1945:3) related L2 accuracy in English to the priorities of controlling the sound system of English. Avery & Ehrlich (1992) pointed out that the sound system of the native language can influence the student's pronunciation of English in different ways, mainly when a learner encounters sounds in English that are not part of the sound system of the learner's native language.

Method and instruments
The subjects of the study were 50 students in the third year at Faculty of Arts ,Khartoum University in the Academic

year (2015-2016)and 20 English teachers of the same university. Two tools were used for collecting data; an oral test composed of selected words including the target sounds in addition to a questionnaire presented to the concerned teachers.

Validity and reliability of the research tools:

Both the test and the questionnaire were validated first by three scholars of the field to insure that the questions were formulated correctly for the study purpose. Pre-samples were presented to five of the teachers to check validity and reliability of the questionnaire . The following equation was used:

$$\text{Validity} = \sqrt{\text{Reliability}}$$

The reliability coefficient for the measurement was calculated using (split-half) method. Reliability coefficient was calculated according to Spearman-Brown Equation as the following:

$$\text{Reliability Coefficient} = \frac{2 \times r}{1 + r}$$

r = Pearson correlation coefficient

The table below shows the result:

Table 1: Validity and Reliability of Research Tools

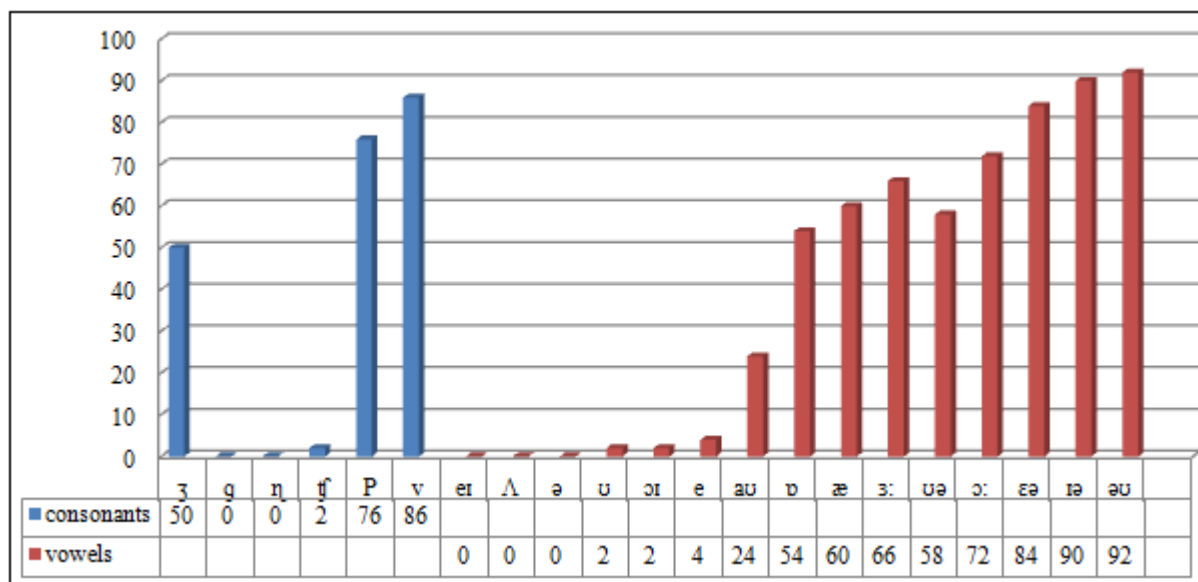| Validity	Reliability	Result
0.85	0.72	First
0.88	0.77	Second
0.89	0.80	Third
0.93	0.86	Overall

Source: Researcher from applied study 2016

The table No(1) revealed that the overall Reliability and Validity coefficients for the questionnaire are greater than (50%), and some of them are nearest to one. This indicates to the high validity and reliability of the answers, so, the study questionnaire is valid and reliable.

Statistical Analysis of the Data

Students' Oral Test
The test targets the English consonants and vowels that are different from Arabic sounds. The results have been statistically analyzed .The followings tables and figures show the results. The findings are explained and discussed accordingly.

Figure 1: The percentage of mispronounced Consonants and Vowels

|	ʒ	q	ŋ	ʧ	P	v	eɪ	ʌ	ə	ʊ	ɔɪ	e	aʊ	ɒ	æ	ɜː	ʊə	ɔː	ɛə	ɪə	əʊ	
■ consonants	50	0	0	2	76	86																
■ vowels							0	0	0	2	2	4	24	54	60	66	58	72	84	90	92	

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

The figure No (1)displays the percentages of mispronounced target consonants and vowels by the students. It appears that the consonants/q/,/ŋ/, / ʧ /have zero percentage of mispronunciation while the sounds /ʒ/,/v/ and/p/ were pronounced incorrectly with50%,, 76%,86 respectively. The vowels /eɪ/ ,/ʌ/,/ə/ have been pronounced correctly by all the subjects with 0% of mispronunciation. The sounds /ʊ/and/ɔɪ/ have been mispronounced with the same occurrence 2%.While the vowel/e/ has been uttered incorrectly with 4%. And the sound /aʊ/ was mispronounced with 24%. The table also revealed that students mispronounced the vowels/ ɒ / ,/æ/, /ɜː//ʊə/ with 50%,54%/60/%,/66%,/58/% respectively. Whereas the vowels /ɔ:/ was pronounced inaccurately with 72.% while the vowels /ɛə/ ,/ɪə/and / əʊ/ were mispronounced with high average 84% 90% , / 92% respectively.The findings can be summarized that there are(11)out of(21)sounds which are different from Arabic sounds were difficult to pronounce by the prospective learners with different degrees of difficulty .

Result from the teachers' Questionnaire:

Question No.(1): To what extend do you think the sound systems differences between English and Arabic cause pronunciation problem for the students.

Figure No.(2) shows the frequency distribution for the study's respondents about question No.(1).
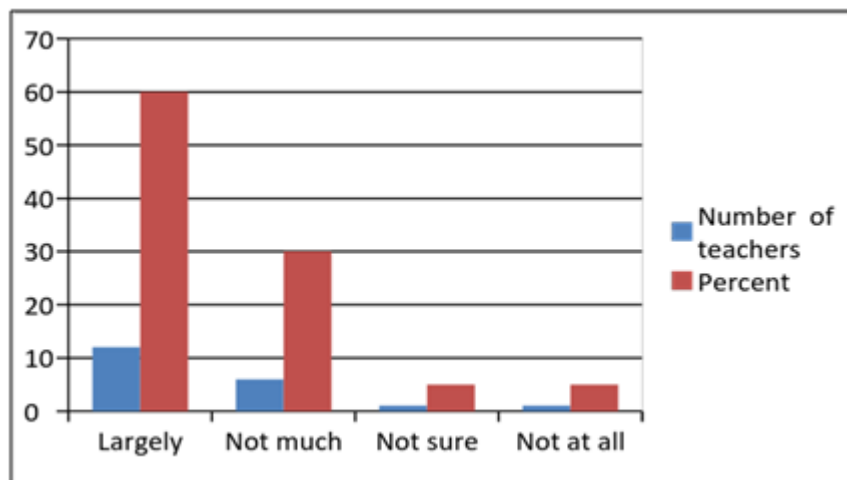
Figure 2: The frequency distribution of the study's respondents answers about question No.(1)

Resource: The researcher from applied study, 2016

It is clear from the figure No.(2) there are (12) teachers with percentage (60.0%) have largely agreed on "To what extend do you think sound systems different between English and Arabic cause pronunciation problem for the students ", while (6) of the teachers in the study's sample with percentage (35.0%) have answered (Not much) to the question and only one with percentage (5.0%) was not sure about the answer, and one of the subject, with same percentage (5.0%) chose the answer (Not all) .

Question No.(2):
To what extend does the English curriculum at Sudanese university put in account the differences between English and Arabic sound systems .Table No. (2) shows the frequency distribution of the study's respondents about question No.(2).

Table 2: The frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about Question No.(2)

Answer	Number of teachers	Percentage
Largely	2	10.0
Not much	14	70.0
Not at all	2	10.0
Not sure	2	10.0
Total	20	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

It is clear from table No.(4) that two of the subjects with percentage (10.0%) chose the answer(largely)to what extend does the English curriculum at Sudanese university put in account the differences between English and Arabic sound systems". Whereas (14) of them with percentage (70.0%) their answers were (Not much) and (Not all) has been chosen by two of the respondents with the same percentage (10.0%).There are (2) of the teachers with percentage (10.0%) were not sure about the answer.

Question No.(3):To what extend does the English syllabus as a major language at university include comparative linguistics concerning the students' first language phonology .Table No. (3 reveals the frequency distribution for the study's respondents about the question No.(4).

Table 3: The frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about question No.(3)

Answer	Number of teachers	Percentage
Largely	3	15.0
Not much	7	35.0
Not at all	7	35.0
Not sure	3	15.0
Total	20	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

The table No.(3) shows that there are only (3) of the subjects in the study's sample with (15.0%) chose the answer (largely) To ''what extend does the English syllabus as a major language at university include comparative linguistics concerning the student's first language phonology". while(7) of the them with percentage (35.0%) have answered with (Not much) and there are (7) teachers with (35.0%) their responds were (Not all) .and (3)teachers with (15.0%). was not sure about that.

Question No.(4):Emphasizing English sounds which have no Arabic equivalents during teaching and learning English phonology can improve students pronunciation. Table No.(4) shows the frequency distribution for the study's respondents about question No.(4).

Table 4: The frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about question No.(4)

Answer	Number of teachers	Percentage
Strongly Agree	5	25.0
Agree	10	50.0
Neutral	3	15.0
Disagree	2	20.0
Strongly disagree	0	0.0
Total	20	100.0

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

From the table No.(4) it appears that there are (5) of the subjects in the study's sample with (25.0%) have strongly agreed with "Emphasizing English sounds which have no Arabic equivalents during teaching and learning English phonology can improve students pronunciation. ". There are (10) of the teachers with percentage (50.0%) have agreed on that, and (3) respondents with percentage (15.0%) were not sure about that. Two of the teachers with percentage (20.0%)

have disagreed about that. While none of the subjects have strongly disagree about that.

Question No.(5): The differences between Arabic and English in consonants and vowels impact students English pronunciation .

Table No. (5) shows the frequency distribution for the study's respondents about question No.(5).

Table 5: The frequency distribution for the respondents' answers about Question No.(5)

Percent	Number of teachers	Answer
25.0	5	Strongly Agree
40.0	8	Agree
15.0	3	Neutral
5.0	1	Disagree
15.0	3	Strongly disagree
100.0	20	Total

Source: The researcher from applied study, 2016

Table No.(5) shows that(5) of the subjects of the study's sample with (25.0%) have strongly agreed that (the differences between Arabic and English in consonants and vowels impact students English pronunciation)and (8) of the them with percentage (40.0%) have agreed while three of the respondents with (15.0%) were not sure about that.Only one teacher with percentage (5.0%) have disagree about that and (3) of the subjects with percentage (15.0%) strongly disagree.

3. Result and Discussions

The figure No (1)shows that the students have significant problem with (11)of the English sounds out of (21)of the target sounds. This is a considerable number which indicates that the differences between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels cause pronunciation problem for the respective subjects. This result is supported by the findings of the teachers' Questionnaire ;Questions No(1,5) tables No(2,5)) which revealed that (12) of the teachers out of 20 with 60% agreed that the differences between English and Arabic cause pronunciation problems and 65% of them on accord with the impact of the differences on the students' pronunciation with different levels(strongly agree 5%,agree 60%),tables No(3,5)figure No(2)'' .Both of the above results satisfied the first hypothese of the study which states that'' The differences between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels cause pronunciation problems for Sudanese University students .Whereas questions No(2,3),tables No(4,5). 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.

4. Conclusions

The results demonstrate that students pronunciation problems is mainly attributed to the difference between English and Arabic in consonants and vowels However, some of the English sounds which are different from Arabic sounds do not cause any difficulty. This result agrees with some previous related studies. (Al-khier, M . 2007).Whereas the findings of this study revealed additional reason which is the inadequacy of phonology component regarding students first language and the number of phonology courses.

5. Recommendations

Based on the study findings the followings recommendations are suggested:
1) Raising students' awareness of the differences between Arabic and English in consonants and vowels by teaching and learning the sound systems of both languages.
2) Integrating listening in phonology learning and using language labs or the available technological resources.
3) Updating phonology courses and strategies of learning pronunciation.
4) Updating methods of assessing pronunciation.

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