

Pronunciation Problems: A Case Study of English Language Students at Sudan University of Science and Technology

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Abstract

This study investigates the problems in English pronunciation experienced by learners whose first language is Sudanese Spoken Arabic. In other words to find the problematic sounds and the factors that cause these problems. Then find some techniques that help the Sudanese Students of English improve their pronunciation. The subjects for the study were fifty students from University of Sudan of Science and Technology (SUST), and thirty university teachers of English language from the same university.

The instruments used for collecting the data were observation, recordings and a structured questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed both statistically and descriptively. The findings of the study revealed that Sudanese Students of English whose language background is Sudanese Spoken Arabic, had problems with the pronunciation of English vowels that have more than one way of pronunciation in addition to the consonant sound contrasts e.g. /r/ and /ʁ/, /s/ and /ʃ/, /b/ and /p/, /j/ and /ʃ/. Based on the findings, the study concluded that factors such as Interference, the differences in the sound system in the two languages, inconsistency of English sounds and spelling militate against Sudanese Students of English (SSEs) competence in pronunciation.

Keywords: English pronunciation, problematic sound, Sudanese university student, mother tongue

1. Introduction

All around the world, there are a lot of people with strong desire to learn and speak English with correct pronunciation. In Sudan, there is a large number of interested groups in the subject; among them are the students of English language at Sudan University of Science and Technology. However, there are many barriers that hinder them to speak with good English pronunciation.

Many studies have demonstrated that the errors made by the speakers of other languages, who speak English, are something systematic rather than random. Moosa (1972) and Hornetlan (1984) demonstrated that Arab students face problems in the pronunciation of sounds which the students are not familiar with

e.g. /v/, /p/, /j/ (Ronald Carter and David Nunan, 2001) (O'Connor, 2003) noted that the errors of pronunciation that learners of English from different language backgrounds make are systematic and not accidental. So they concluded that the main problem of the speakers of other languages who speak English, is substitution of sounds i.e. they substitute the sounds that they don't have in their native language, with other sounds which are close to them in the place of articulation e.g. they replace /p/ with /b/, /θ/ with /s/ etc.

Although the same problem exists in the pronunciation of most of the Sudanese Students of English (SSEs), all the studies above were done outside Sudan e.g. for speakers of German, Italian, Spanish, ...etc. On the other hand, some studies have been conducted as mentioned above, but on the Arab student's e.g. for the students of English in Saudi Arabia. So that is why this research was intended to fill a certain gap. Thus, perhaps mispronunciation of sounds and replacements of problematic sounds is explored. The research is seeking to study such problems of pronunciation e.g. the mispronunciation of some sounds and the shifting of particular sounds with others and to try to find what are the exact reasons for such errors i.e. are these errors related to the mother tongue interference, sound system differences between the native and the foreign language, moreover to study the influence of spelling on the pronunciation. Then see to what extent the inconsistency of some English sounds affects on the pronunciation. So this study is an attempt to study such problems in a Sudanese context because substitution of sounds such as /θ/, /θ/, /p/ is expected in the pronunciation of many Sudanese students of English, this is because the students don't have

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