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Investigating Iraqi EFL University Students' Performance in Using Weak Forms

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جامعة بابل

تدني أداء طلبة الجامعة العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية في استعمال الصيغ الضعيفة

رسالة

تقدم بها

أحمد محمد علي عبد الأمير

إلى مجلس كلية التربية الأساسية في جامعة بابل

وهي جزء من متطلبات نيل درجة ماجستير تربية في

طرائق تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية

بأشراف

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جمادى الآخرة   تموز

١٤٢٧ه   ٢٠٠٦م

بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمنِ الرَّحِيمِ

(وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ خَلْقُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافُ أَلْسِنَتِكُمْ وَأَلْوَانِكُمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِلْعَالِمِينَ) .

صدق الله العلي العظيم

سورة الروم
الآية (٢٢)

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة الصيغ الضعيفة في اللغة الإنجليزية وهي احدى الخواص الرئيسة للإنجليزية المنطوقة من ناحية، ومن الصيغ التي يواجه الطلبة صعوبة في تعلمها من ناحية أخرى. وتوجد هذه الصيغ في الكلام المترابط فضلاً عن كونها نتيجة الكلمة غير المنبرَ ة.

فالمشكلة هي أن غالبية طلبة الجامعة العراقيين لا يستعملون هذه الصيغ في كلامهم، ولذلك هم لا يفهمون كلام المتحدثين الأصليين باللغة الإنجليزية. وعليه فان الدراسة الحالية تهدف إلى تقويم إنجاز الطلبة العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية (لغة أجنبية) على مستويي التمييز والإنتاج و تقويم أدائهم الكتابي والمنطوقة للصيغ الضعيفة.و توضح الدراسة المشاكل التي يواجهها طلبة الجامعة العراقيون ووضع الحلول المناسبة للتغلب عليها.

وضع الباحث أربع فرضيات لتحقيق أهداف هذه الدراسة:

١- معظم طلبة الجامعة العراقيين لا يستعملون الصيغ الضعيفة في كلامهم.

٢- يتوقع أن يكون أنجاز الطلبة في الأداء المكتوب أفضل من إنجازهم في الأداء المحكي.

٣- يتوقع أن يكون إنجاز الطلبة على مستوى التمييز أفضل من إنجازهم على مستوى الإنتاج.

٤-يعتقد بعض طلبة الجامعة العراقيين بان كلا نوعي الكلمات (أي الكلمات المعجمية والكلمات النحوية) تلفظ بالصيغ الضعيفة.

صمم اختبار تشخيصي على أساس هذه الفرضيات ونفذ على عينة مكونة من سبعين طالبا من طلبة الجامعة العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية في المرحلة الرابعة من قسم اللغة الإنجليزية كلية التربية جامعة بابل للعام الدراسي ٢٠٠٥-٢٠٠٦ .فأعطى التحليل اللغوي لإجابات الطلبة على فقرات الاختبار النتائج الآتية:

١- يواجـه طلبـة الجامعـة العراقيـون دارسـو اللغة الإنجليزية لغـة أجنبيـة صـعوبات فـي استعمال الصيغ الضعيفة، وهذه الصعوبات قد أثُبتت من خلال النسبة الأدنى لإجاباتهم الصحيحة (٣٠,٩٣ %) مقارنـة مـع إجاباتهم الخطأ (٦٩,٠٧ %).

٢- يواجـه هؤلاء الطلبـة صـعوبات أكبر فـي الأداء المحكي ولهذا السبب ظهرت إجاباتهم الصـحيحة فـي الأداء الكتـابي (٣٢,٠٨ %) أعلى مـن إجابـاتهم الصـحيحة فـي الأداء المحكي (٢٩,٣٩ %) للصيغ الضعيفة.

٣- يواجـه هؤلاء الطلبـة صـعوبات أكبر على مستوى الانتـاج ولهذا السبب ظهرت إجاباتهم الخطأ فـي مستوى الإنتاج (٨٠,١٩ %) أعلى من إجاباتهم الخطأ في مستوى التمييز (٥٧,٩٥ %).

٤- معظم طلبـة الجامعة العراقيين الدارسين للغة الإنجليزية لغـة أجنبيـة لا يستعملون الصيغ الضعيفة فـي كلامهم. إذ إن إجاباتهم الصحيحة (٣٠,٦٧ %) أقل من إجاباتهم الخطأ (٦٩,٣٣ %).

٥- يفتقر معظم طلبـة الجامعة العراقيين الى معرفة مواضـع حدوث الصيغ الضعيفة، ويرون أنَّها تحدث مع أي كلمة في الجملة (الصيغ الضعيفة تحدث مع الكلمات النحوية أو الكلمات المعجمية).

٦- تُعزى أخطاء الطلبة إلى العوامل الاتية:

أ- تأثير اللغة الام حيث إن الطلبة يلجؤن إلى قواعد لغتهم الأصلية و نسبة هذا النوع من الخطأ (٣,٥٨ %).

ب- استعمال الطلبة لاستيراتجيات تعليم قواعد اللغـة الإنجليزية فـي إنتاج الصيغ الضعيفة و نسبة هذا النوع من الخطأ (٤٢,٦١%).

ت- سياق التعليم حيث تنال مثل هذه الصيغ قليلا□ من الاهتمام في كتب تعليم علم الصوت والفونولوجيا و نسبة هذا النوع من الخطأ (١٩,٤٤%) .

ث- استراتيجيات الاتصال المنتقاة من الطلبة لملء فجوة معرفتهم و نسبة هذا النوع من الخطأ (٣٤,٣٧ %).

تقع هـذه الدراسـة فـي خمسـة فصـول تضـمن الفصـل الأول منهـا مناقشـة مشـكلة الدراسـة والأهداف والفرضيات والإجراءات المتبعة وحدود البحث والفائدة من هذه الدراسة وتعريف المصطلحات الاساسية.

أما الفصل الثاني ففيه عرضٌ للصيغ الضعيفة مع موضوعات لها علاقة بموضوع الدراسة كالنبر، ونبر الكلمات، ونبر الجمل، والحذف، والإيقاع، والادغام، والاختصار و دراسات سابقة.

وأما الفصل الثالث فقد تناول وصف الاختبار بينما تناول الفصل الرابع تحليل أخطاء الطلبة و ذكر أسبابها.

وأما الفصل الأخير فيلخص النتائج التي تم التوصل إليها في هذه الدراسة والتي تم في ضوئها وضع بعض المقترحات والمضامين التي لها علاقة بالجانب التعليمي.

Abstract

This study deals with English weak forms as one of the main features of spoken English. Such forms occur in connected speech. The weak form is the result of a word being unstressed.

The problem of the study is that the majority of Iraqi EFL university students do not use weak forms in their speech, so they do not understand native speakers of English. The present study aims at assessing Iraqi EFL university students' achievement at the recognition and production levels as well as the written and spoken performance of weak forms. This study clarifies the problems which Iraqi EFL learners encounter and tries to put the suitable solutions to overcome these problems. It is hypothesized that:

١- Most Iraqi EFL university students do not use weak forms in their speech.

٢- The total achievement of Iraqi EFL university students of the written performance is thought to be better than their achievement of the spoken one.

٣- The achievement of Iraqi EFL university students at the recognition level is anticipated to be better than their achievement at the production one.

٤- Both sorts of words (i.e. lexical and function) are pronounced with weak forms.

On the foundation of these hypotheses, a diagnostic test has been constructed and applied to a sample of seventy Iraqi EFL university students at their fourth year at the Department of English, College of Education, University of Babylon during the academic year ٢٠٠٥-٢٠٠٦. The linguistic analysis of the subjects' responses has given the following conclusions:

١. The majority of Iraqi EFL university students face difficulties in using weak forms. This can be confirmed by the low rate of their correct responses (٣٠.٩٣%) in comparison with the total number of their incorrect ones (٦٩.٠٧%).

٢. They encounter more difficulty at the spoken performance. Thus, the total number of their correct responses of the written performance (٣٢.٠٨%) is more than that of the spoken one (٢٩.٣٩%).

٣. They encounter more difficulty at the production level than that at the recognition one. For this reason, the total number of their incorrect responses at the production level (٨٠.١٩%) is higher than that of the recognition one (٥٧.٩٥%).

٤. The majority of Iraqi EFL university students do not use weak forms in their speech. The total number of their correct replies (٣٠.٦٧%) is lower than that of the incorrect ones (٦٩.٣٣%).

٥. Some of them think that weak forms can occur in any word of a sentence (i.e. weak forms can occur in a grammatical or a content word).

٦. The subjects' errors have been attributed to the following factors:

I. Interlingual transfer, whereby the subjects resort to the rules of their native language to produce weak forms. This type of error constitutes (٣.٥٨٪).

II. Intralingual transfer, whereby the subjects use their prior knowledge of the target language. This type of error constitutes (٤٢.٦١٪).

III. Context of learning as little attention has been paid to such forms in the textbooks of phonetics and phonology. This type of error constitutes (١٩.٤٤٪).

IV. Communication strategies which are selected by the subjects to fill the gap of their knowledge. This type of error constitutes (٣٤.٣٧٪).

This study consists of five chapters. The First Chapter consists of the problem, aims, hypotheses, procedures, limits, value of the study, and definitions of basic terms. Chapter Two is a theoretical survey of weak forms and other related subjects such as stress, word stress, sentence stress, elision, rhythm, assimilation, contraction, clitic, vowel reduction, and previous studies. Chapter Three deals with the test's description, whereas Chapter Four deals with the analysis of subjects' errors and their causes. Finally, Chapter Five boils down the conclusions arrived at in this study.

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Abbreviations

Symbol	Description
CW(s)	Content Word(s)
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FW(s)	Function Word(s)
Q.١	The First Question
Q.٢	The Second Question
Q.٣	The Third Question
Q.٤	The Fourth Question
SF(s)	Strong Form(s)
WF(s)	Weak Form(s)

LIST OF PHONETIC SYMBOLS

Vowels and Diphthongs	
i: **bean** / biːn /	ɜ: **burn** / bɜːn /
ɪ **pit** / pɪt /	ə **another**/ əˈnʌðə/
e **pet** / pet /	eɪ **bay** / beɪ /
æ **pat** / pæt /	əʊ **no** /nəʊ/
ɑ: **barn** / bɑːn/	aɪ **buy** / baɪ /
ɒ **pot** / pɒt /	aʊ **now** / naʊ /
ɔ: **born** / bɔːn /	ɔɪ **boy** /bɔɪ /
ʊ **put** / pʊt /	ɪə **peer** / pɪə /
u: **boon** / buːn /	eə **pair** / peə /
ʌ **putt** / pʌt /	ʊə **poor** / pʊə /

Consonants	
p *pin* / pɪn /	s *seal* / si:l /
b *bin* / bɪn /	z *zeal* / zi:l /
t *tin* / tɪn/	ʃ *sheep* /ʃi:p /
d *din* / dɪn/	ʒ *measure* / meʒə /
k *kin* / kɪn /	h *how* / haʊ /
g *gum*/ gʌm/	m *sum* / sʌm /
tʃ *chain* / tʃeɪn /	n *sun* / sʌn /
dʒ *July* / dʒuːlaɪ /	ŋ *sung* / sʌŋ /
f *fine*/ faɪn /	l *light* / laɪt /
v *vine* / vaɪn /	r *right* / raɪt /
θ *think* / θɪŋk /	j *yet* / jet /
ð *this* / ðɪs /	w *wet* / wet /

(After Roach, ٢٠٠٢: ٢)

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Chapter One

Introduction

١.١ The Problem

The goal of instructing phonetics and phonology is to aid EFL learners to enunciate correctly and to understand the spoken language of the native speakers at the same time. In this respect, when Iraqi EFL university students listen to the speech of English native speakers, they have difficulty to understand it.

This is related to many reasons. One of these reasons is that native speakers of English use weak forms and they find that strong forms are unnatural (Roach, ٢٠٠٠:١١٢). The problem is that the majority of Iraqi EFL university students do not use weak forms in their speech because such forms are not found in their native language. Instead, they tend to use strong forms so their speech is stilted, over-emphasized, and foreign sounding.

Wenxia (٢٠٠٣: ٣٣) states that whatever reason, the failure to use weak forms makes it difficult for EFL learners to speak like native speakers and they have difficulty to comprehend them. He (ibid. ٣٢) mentions that weak forms are common features of English speech.

In addition to the previous problem, there are two problems in learning the articulation of weak forms: (i) their phonetic transcriptions are often at variance with their written forms (***from*** / frəm/and ***her*** /ə/), and (ii) they may

have different phonetic shapes in various positions of the sentence (i.e. weak forms may have one shape at the beginning of a sentence, another at the end, or in the middle of a sentence) and in different situations. For example, the weak form /ɪ/ of the pronoun "***he***"

Chapter Two

Weak Forms and Previous Studies

٢.١ Introduction

When a word is uttered in isolation, it must possess stress (***he /***hi:***/***, ***him /***hɪm***/***). English is a stress-timed language in which stress occurs at regular intervals. In most cases, English sentences encompass content words (henceforth CWs) and function words (henceforth FWs). Sometimes, FWs are not stressed when they occur in connected speech. In other words, such words are weakened when they occur in any sentence (Wells and Colson, ١٩٨٠: ٢١-٢).

Weak forms (henceforth WFs) are the salient features of spoken English. Roach (٢٠٠٥:١) states that the language of the speaker who does not use WFs sounds unnatural or stilted to the English ears and may give the impression that the speaker has foreign accent even if he or she has no mistakes at all.

If a speaker does not use WFs in his speech, he will face difficulty understanding native speakers of English who do use WFs (Roach: ٢٠٠٠:١١٢). Jones(١٩٨٤:١٢٤-٥) points out that WFs are essential for good articulation. Foreign speakers of English have irresistible tendency to use strong forms (henceforth SFs) articulation. Such articulation gives the English ears that all unimportant words and syllables receive equal prominence, and in this way all

important words and syllables lose some of their emphasis which they ought to receive (ibid.). In this chapter, we deal with the nature of WFs and the relationship between this topic and other related subjects such as stress, word stress, sentence stress, elision, contraction, clitic, assimilation, vowel reduction, and rhythm. Additionally, some of the previous studies are presented at the end of this chapter.

Chapter Three

Data Collection

٣.١ Introduction

A test has been designed in order to reveal the difficulties encountered by Iraqi EFL university students in manipulating WFs (see Appendix I). This chapter deals with the objectives of the test, test design, selection of the test material and the subjects to whom the test has been applied. In addition, this chapter is concerned with the validity and reliability of the test. The pilot test and final administration of the test are described along with the scoring scheme adopted.

٣.٢ Objectives of the Test

This diagnostic test is designed to measure Iraqi EFL university students' ability in using WFs. It reveals the problems which they encounter in manipulating these forms as well as tries to identify the causes of their errors so that the suitable remedial recommendations can be proposed on the basis

of the test results. In addition, the test will be helpful to put the suitable solutions to tackle the problems.

The test reveals whether Iraqi EFL university students use naturally WFs in their speech or not. It shows whether Iraqi EFL learners face difficulties at the production level, recognition level, written performance, and spoken performance. The first question (henceforth Q.١) and the third question (henceforth Q.٣) measure the subjects' responses at the recognition level, whereas the second question (henceforth Q.٢) and the fourth question (henceforth Q.٤) measure their responses at the production one. Moreover, Q.١ and Q.٢ measure subjects' written achievement, whereas Q.٣ and Q.٤ measure subjects' spoken achievement.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis

٤.١ Introduction

This chapter deals with the analysis and discussion of the results of the test. The errors that are committed by Iraqi EFL learners in using WFs have become known and shown statistically. In addition, endeavours have been made to point out the plausible sources of these errors so as to get some insights into the nature of the difficulties that Iraqi EFL university students have encountered in this area.

٤.٢ Discussion of Results

This section produces the results of the subjects' performance at each question of the test in particular and at the entire test in general, with regard to the recognition and production levels as well as the written and spoken performance of the WFs. The extent to which the subjects master these forms is determined by their correct answers which are of significance to verify or refute the hypotheses proposed in the outline of the present study.

٤.٢.١ Subjects' Achievement of the First Question

Q.١ is designed to measure the subjects' performance at the recognition level as well as the written performance of the WFs. The following table shows the results obtained after analyzing the subjects' performance at each item in this question.

Chapter Five

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Suggestions

٥.١ Introduction

This chapter deals with conclusions, and recommendations. Additionally, some topics which are related to this study are proposed for further investigation.

٥.٢ Conclusions

٥.٢.١ Theoretical Conclusions

The theoretical part of the present study has come up with the following conclusions:

١. WFs are one of two possible pronunciations for a FW when it occurs in connected speech. These forms are uttered with weak stress. The FWs may have a SF and one or more WFs **and** /ænd/ can be /ənd/, /ən/, /n/. FWs are prepositions, pronouns, determiners, conjunctions, articles, and auxiliary verbs.

٢. WFs are the salient phenomena of English phonetics. Consequently, the use of WFs is necessary for understanding native speakers of English.