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Common Pronunciation Mistakes in Iraqi Speakers of English on Social Media

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

﴿وَأَخِرُ دَعْوَاهُمْ أَنِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ﴾

صدق الله العلي العظيم
سورة يونس الآية ١٠

In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful

**(And the last of their call will be, "Praise to Allah, Lord of the
worlds")**

God Almighty has spoken the truth

Dedication

With all my love, I dedicate the fruits of my success and graduation to those who supported me without limits: my first support in my career, my strength, and my refuge after God—my father, my dignity, and to my mother, who placed Paradise under her feet and made adversity easy for me with her prayers. Finally, I acknowledge that I would not have achieved this without God's grace.

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Abstract

This study explores the pronunciation errors commonly made by Iraqi English speakers on TikTok, highlighting how such mistakes can hinder communication despite the growing use of social media to demonstrate language proficiency. By analyzing user-generated content, the research identifies frequent mispronunciations, particularly in vowels, consonants, stress, and intonation, offering insights for educators and learners to improve English pronunciation. The study involved compiling spoken English data from Iraqi social media users and conducting a phonetic analysis to pinpoint these errors, with a systematic approach to data collection from platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, resulting in a diverse corpus of several samples reflecting the pronunciation challenges faced by this demographic.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 The Problem of the Study

Social media platforms have become a global village where language plays a pivotal role in communication. However, for Iraqi speakers of English, pronunciation poses a unique challenge, often leading to misunderstandings and barriers in effective communication. This study investigates the common pronunciation mistakes made by Iraqi speakers when using English on social media. It examines the phonetic deviations from Standard English pronunciation and seeks to understand the factors contributing to these errors. By exploring the linguistic landscape of Iraqi English speakers on social media, this research aims to shed light on the patterns of pronunciation mistakes and their implications for cross-cultural communication. This study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What are the most common pronunciation mistakes made by Iraqi speakers of English on social media platforms?
2. Which phonological elements (such as vowels, consonants, stress, intonation) are most frequently mispronounced by Iraqi speakers of English, and what are the patterns of these mistakes?
3. How do the phonetic characteristics of the Arabic language influence the English pronunciation of Iraqi speakers on social media?

1.2 The Aims of the Study

This research is designed with the following objectives:

1. Cataloging the frequent pronunciation mistakes made by Iraqi speakers of English on social media.
2. Analyzing the phonological patterns that characterize these pronunciation errors.
3. Identifying the external and internal factors influencing these pronunciation mistakes.

1.3 The Hypotheses of the Study

The study posits the following hypotheses:

1. Iraqi speakers of English will exhibit consistent pronunciation mistakes across different social media platforms.

2. These errors will primarily involve the mispronunciation of vowels and consonants that do not exist in the Arabic phonetic inventory.
3. External factors such as the influence of the Arabic language and internal factors like the lack of phonetic training will contribute to these mistakes.
4. Pronunciation errors will significantly affect the clarity of communication and may lead to frequent misunderstandings.

1.4 The Procedures of the Study

The methodology of this study includes:

1. Compiling a corpus of spoken English data from various Iraqi social media users.
2. Conducting a phonetic analysis of the collected data to identify common pronunciation errors.
3. Investigating the linguistic background of the participants to determine contributing factors.
4. Evaluating the communicative effectiveness of the participants' English pronunciation.

1.5 The Limits of the Study

This study is limited to examining the pronunciation of Iraqi speakers of English on social media and does not extend to other forms of spoken or written English.

1.6 The Value of the Study

The findings of this research will be beneficial for educators, linguists, and social media users interested in the intersection of language learning and digital communication. It aims to contribute to the development of targeted pronunciation training that can enhance the English proficiency of Iraqi speakers on social media.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Phonetics

According to Richards (2010, p.434), phonetics is the study of speech sounds. It can be divided into three main areas. The first area, known as articulatory phonetics, focuses on how speech sounds are created. This involves classifying sounds based on factors such as lip and tongue position, the degree of mouth opening, and whether the vocal cords vibrate or not. The second area, acoustic phonetics, explores the transmission of speech sounds through the air. It involves using instruments to measure the characteristics of sound waves produced during speech. The third area, auditory phonetics, examines how speech sounds are perceived by the listener.

Phonetics is the scientific study that examines the characteristics of human sound production, particularly those used in speech. It provides methods for describing, classifying, and transcribing these sounds. The field of phonetics is divided into three branches: articulatory phonetics investigates how speech sounds are physically produced by the vocal organs; acoustic phonetics focuses on the physical properties of speech sounds as they are transmitted from the mouth to the ear; and auditory phonetics examines the perceptual response to speech sounds as processed by the ear, auditory nerve, and brain. When physical apparatus is used in studying any of these aspects, it is called instrumental phonetics. Researchers in the field are known as phoneticians. Sounds are categorized using terms from anatomy, physiology, and acoustics, such as describing consonant sounds based on their anatomical place of articulation and physical structure. These methods of analysis apply to all human speech sounds, making the field referred to as general phonetics (Crystal, 2008, p.363).

2.2 Phonology

Richards (2010, p.434) Phonology, or phonological, which is another term for phonemics, encompasses several aspects. It can be seen as a cover term for both phonetics and phonemics, according to some linguists. It involves establishing and describing the distinct sound units, known as phonemes, within a language using distinctive features. Each phoneme consists of a group of these features and differs from other phonemes by at least one feature. For example, /ip/ and /up/ differ in features such as high/low, back/front, and roundedness of the lips. Additionally, phonology is concerned with the study of how sound patterns change when words are combined in sentences. For instance, the combination of "give" and "him" may result in "givim" ("give him"). Furthermore, phonology includes the investigation of intonation patterns.

Phonology is a branch of linguistics that focuses on studying the sound systems of languages. While phonetics examines the broad range of sounds that can be produced by the human vocal apparatus, phonology looks at the smaller set of distinct sounds that are used in a particular language. These sounds are organized into a system of contrasts and analyzed in terms of phonemes, distinctive features, or other phonological units, depending on the theoretical framework used. The goal of phonology is to uncover the patterns of distinctive sounds in a language and make general statements about sound systems in languages worldwide. In other words, phonology explores the range and function of sounds in specific languages, often referred to as "functional phonetics," and the rules that govern the relationships and differences between words and other linguistic units. A student of phonology is called a phonologist. Additionally, the term phonology has also been used to study analogous patterns of contrast in sign languages (Crystal, 2008, p.365).

2.3 Consonants

A consonant is one of the two general categories used to classify speech sounds, the other being vowels. Consonants can be defined both in terms of phonetics and phonology. Phonetically, they are sounds created by a closure or narrowing in the vocal tract that either completely blocks airflow or restricts it enough to produce audible friction. Consonant articulations are easily felt and are commonly described in terms of their place and manner of articulation. Describing consonants phonetically would also involve information about the vibration of the vocal folds (voicing), the duration of the sound, the type of airstream mechanism involved, and the direction of airflow (egressive or ingressive). From a phonological perspective, consonants are units that function at the edges of syllables, either individually or in clusters (Yule, 2020, p.45).

2.4 Vowels

A vowel is one of the two general categories used to classify speech sounds, along with consonants. Vowels can be defined both in terms of phonetics and phonology. Phonetically, vowels are sounds produced without a complete closure or significant narrowing in the mouth that would produce audible friction. Instead, the air escapes evenly over the center of the tongue. If the air only escapes through the mouth, the vowels are called oral; if some air is simultaneously released through the nose, the vowels are nasal. In a phonetic classification of vowels, two variables are generally referenced: (a) the position of the lips, whether they are rounded, spread, or neutral; and (b) the part of the tongue that is raised and the height to which it is raised. The first variable, lip position, can be easily described, while the second variable, tongue position, is more challenging to describe in precise terms (Crystal, 2008, p.517).

2.5 Comparison between English and Arabic Phonemes

Racoma (2019) writes that Arabic and English languages have different phonetic systems and therefore consist of different sets of phonemes. Here are some key differences between Arabic and English phonemes:

1. Vowels:

- Arabic has a relatively small vowel inventory compared to English. It has three short vowels /a/, /i/, and /u/, and three long vowels /a:/, /i:/, and /u:/. Additionally, it has two diphthongs /aw/ and /aj/. English, on the other hand, has a larger vowel inventory with more vowel sounds.

2. Consonants:

- Arabic has some consonant sounds that do not exist in English, such as the pharyngeal sounds /ħ/ and /ʕ/.
- English has consonant sounds that are not present in Arabic, like the voiced and voiceless th sounds /ð/ and /θ/. It also has sounds like /v/ and /z/ which are absent in Arabic.

3. Consonant Clusters:

- Arabic has a limited number of consonant clusters compared to English. In Arabic, most consonant combinations occur within roots (consonants that form the core of a word) rather than across different morphemes. English, on the other hand, has more complex consonant clusters, such as in words like "strength" or "twelve".

4. Foreign Phonemes:

- Due to the influence of loanwords and borrowed terms, both Arabic and English may contain phonemes that do not belong to their native inventory. For example, Arabic has adopted the /p/ sound from borrowed words, and English has borrowed words with Arabic phonemes like /q/ and /kh/.

2.6 Social Media Discourse

Social media discourse refers to the communication and exchange of statements, opinions, and interpretations that take place within the realm of social networks. In contrast to traditional forms of discourse, the essence of social media discourse is dynamic and ever-changing due to the diverse ways in which users interact with content, such as through liking, sharing, commenting, and sending private messages. It highlights the significance of considering the network of relationships and symbols in which the discourse exists, as this framework influences the interpretation and comprehension of the statements made on social media platforms.

As a result, a comprehensive analysis or understanding of social media discourse is only possible within its specific socio-digital environment (Opera, 2019, p.316).

The definition of social media discourse can be inferred from the provided text. Social media discourse refers to the communicative interactions and discussions that take place on social media platforms. It involves the sharing of opinions, ideas, and information by various individuals, including official online news media, organizations, and regular users. Social media discourse is characterized by the creation, shaping, and consumption of opinions and ideas, which can influence public perception and generate relational expectations. To understand social media discourse, research focuses on mechanisms that explain its impact on public opinion and relational outcomes, as well as factors that shape discourses and influence public perceptions. A bottom-up approach, focusing on communication and network structure, is suggested for future research on social media discourse (cf. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012).

2.7 Related Works

1. Pronunciation Problems: A Case Study of English Language Students at Sudan

University of Science and Technology

The study focused on the mispronunciation of English words by students, particularly in relation to certain consonant sounds. While some argue that these mispronunciations may not lead to misunderstandings, the researcher believes that they are significant for those aiming for correct pronunciation or pursuing a career in English. The study revealed that students struggle with monophthongs that have multiple pronunciations, with mispronunciations of vowels considered a serious error. Confusion between consonant sounds such as /s/ and /θ/ or /z/ and /ð/ leads to potential misunderstandings. The mispronunciations stem from the lack of problematic phonemes in Arabic. Specific difficulties were found with sounds like /p/ and /b/, /θ/ and /s/, /d/ and /z/, /f/ and /v/, and /ʃ/ and /tʃ/. Additionally, students faced challenges with the sounds of 'C', 'g', and inconsistent sounds represented by combinations of letters. These pronunciation errors are influenced by factors like interference from the mother tongue and the spelling of English words. The study concludes that if English sounds had consistent pronunciations, it would be easier for students to achieve accurate pronunciation (Hassan, 2014).

2. Proper Noun Pronunciation Inaccuracies in English by Educated Arabic Speakers (Saudi Arabia).

Based on the data, it is evident that Arabic speakers struggle with English pronunciation due to interference from their native language. They often transfer the Arabic phonological system to English words, causing changes in vowel quality, vowel length, and substitution of certain vowels. Additionally, pronunciation errors in Proper Nouns arise from a lack of mastery of English pronunciation rules, insufficient practice in listening and speaking skills, limited exposure to the English language, and unfamiliarity with foreign words borrowed in English. These errors can also be attributed to a lack of instruction in phonics and phoneme-grapheme correspondences, as well as a reliance on familiar segments from their native language when encountering unfamiliar words. Overall, Arabic speakers encounter difficulties in pronouncing English Proper Nouns due to various factors including interference from their native language, limited exposure to English, and insufficient instruction and practice in pronunciation skills (Al-Jarf, 2022).

3. PRONUNCIATION ERRORS IN EGYPTIANS' ENGLISH

The research aimed to identify common pronunciation errors among Egyptian English speakers and explore strategies to improve their pronunciation. Through analysis of videos and comparison with Received Pronunciation (RP), the study revealed that participants struggled with correctly pronouncing various English consonant and vowel sounds. Examples from the videos showcased mistakes such as pronouncing "sings" instead of "things", "sis" instead of "this", "faze" instead of "face", and "sree" instead of "three". Additionally, errors like "za" instead of "the", "Brazerz" instead of "Brothers", "pleaze" instead of "please", and "stoob" instead of "stoop" were identified. The analysis also highlighted mistakes like pronouncing "shildren" instead of "children", "za" instead of "the", "ships" instead of "chips", and "zem" instead of "them". Moreover, the research found errors such as "wiz" instead of "with", "co" instead of "go", "azar" instead of "other", and "zes" instead of "this". Additionally, participants struggled with saying "bronunkation" instead of "pronunciation" and "eatching" instead of "eating" (Huwari, 2019).

4. The Pronunciation of English Low Vowels by Iraqi EFL Learners: An Intralingual Analysis

Iraqi EFL learners of English are reported to exhibit accented pronunciation at the segmental level, which may affect their speech intelligibility. This study aimed to identify the problems encountered by Iraqi EFL learners in the production of English low vowels and explain them from an intralingual perspective. Additionally, the study aimed to determine the effect of Iraqi learners' English language proficiency level on their pronunciation of English low vowels. To achieve this, learners were

divided into beginner and advanced groups based on their English proficiency levels. A production test was conducted to identify error patterns among twenty Iraqi EFL learners in producing low vowels. The learners' recordings were acoustically analyzed to validate the difficulties identified through the production test. Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to identify any significant differences in performance between the two groups. The results revealed that learners encountered difficulties in the production of low vowels, especially /ɒ/, /æ/, and /ʌ/. The study concluded that these difficulties are likely attributed to the complexities of the L2 vowel space, where vowels are closely positioned, making them challenging to produce. Significant differences were identified between the two groups in terms of error means. However, a comparison between the vowel chart obtained in this study and those offered in previous studies revealed that Iraqi EFL learners are still far from achieving approximate pronunciation. This suggests the need to reconsider current teaching texts, methodologies, and techniques used in teaching English pronunciation to give more attention to spectral differences among vowels (Al Abdely, 2021).

5. A Descriptive study between Iraqi EFL Learners and English Native Speakers in Pronouncing English Vowels: A Contrastive Study

Iraqi speakers of English encounter phonetic and phonological difficulties, particularly in producing various speech sounds, especially English vowel sounds. These difficulties stem from several factors. Firstly, the complex orthographic system of English poses a challenge. Secondly, there is an inconsistent relationship between spelling and pronunciation. Thirdly, differences between the Arabic and English sound systems contribute to the challenge. Additionally, regional variations and the influence of the native language on the second language pose significant pronunciation problems (Altaie, 2021).

Table of Arabic Sounds:

Vowels:

Arabic	English	Phonetic Symbol (Arabic)	Phonetic Symbol (English)
a	cat	/a/	/æ/
i	meet	/i/	/i:/
u	boot	/u/	/u:/
aa	father	/a:/	/ɑ:/
ee	see	/i:/	/i:/
oo	soon	/u:/	/u:/

Consonants:

Arabic (English)	English	Phonetic Symbol (Arabic)	Phonetic Symbol
b	bat	/b/	/b/
t	top	/t/	/t/
th	thin	/θ/	/θ/
j	job	/dʒ/	/dʒ/
k	cat	/k/	/k/
d	dog	/d/	/d/
dh	these	/ð/	/ð/
z	zoo	/z/	/z/
r	red	/r/	/r/
s	sit	/s/	/s/
sh	ship	/ʃ/	/ʃ/
gh	go	/ɣ/	/g/
f	fat	/f/	/f/
q	quick	/q/	/k/
l	let	/l/	/l/
m	man	/m/	/m/
n	not	/n/	/n/
h	hat	/h/	/h/

w	wet	/w/	/w/
y	yes	/j/	/j/

Based on the statistics, it can be observed that English and Arabic share a significant number of vowel and consonant sounds. There are 6 vowel sounds that are similar in both languages, allowing for some degree of similarity in pronunciation. Additionally, there are 14 consonant sounds that are shared between English and Arabic. This suggests that speakers of both languages may find it easier to learn and pronounce certain words due to the overlap in sound inventory. This shared phonetic foundation could potentially facilitate language learning and communication between English and Arabic speakers.

The comparison between Arabic and English sounds reveals some unique characteristics of each language. Arabic possesses vowel sounds like "aa," "ee," and "oo" that are not found in English. These distinct vowel sounds contribute to the rich phonetic diversity of Arabic. In terms of consonants, Arabic has sounds such as "h," "t," "z," and "g" that do not exist in English. These consonants add complexity and uniqueness to the Arabic language. Conversely, English includes consonant sounds like "t," "g," and "z" that are absent from Arabic. These phonetic variations highlight the distinct nature of the English language. Additionally, understanding the place and manner of articulation for certain Arabic sounds, such as the voiceless pharyngeal fricative "h" or the voiced palatal fricative "g," helps to accurately pronounce and distinguish these sounds within the Arabic language.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Pronunciation plays a crucial role in effective communication in English. However, Iraqi speakers often encounter difficulties in mastering English pronunciation, leading to communication barriers. This study aims to identify common pronunciation mistakes made by Iraqi speakers on social media platforms and propose effective strategies for improvement.

3.2 Data Collection

The data collection process involved systematically gathering user-generated content from social media platforms. Keywords related to English pronunciation were used to search for relevant posts, comments, and audiovisual materials. The selected samples were then analyzed to identify common pronunciation mistakes made by Iraqi speakers of English.

3.3 Data Selection

The data for this study were collected from various social media platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. A total of 500 samples were selected, comprising user-generated content such as comments, posts, and audiovisual materials. The samples were chosen to represent a diverse range of English pronunciation challenges faced by Iraqi speakers on social media.

Table (1)

No	Sample Name	Tik Tok Account	Link
1	Mohammed	mohamadenglish	https://www.tiktok.com/@mohamadenglish?_t=8lzFOKPNUJU&_r=1
2	Mohammed	mohamadenglish	https://www.tiktok.com/@mohamadenglish?_t=8lzG1m3b4qY&_r=1
3	Doaa	doaaammar80	https://www.tiktok.com/@doaaammar80?_t=8lzG8RcIvys&_r=1
4	Gabriel	im_gaby_20	https://www.tiktok.com/@im_gaby_20?_t=8lzGi19n8X2&_r=1
5	EMad	emadanwer	https://www.tiktok.com/@emadanwer?_t=8lzGr4UgyaF&_r=1
6	Mohammed	mohamadenglish	https://www.tiktok.com/@mohamadenglish?_t=8lzGzOmENSK&_r=1
7	Zaianb	zainab_aljouher	https://www.tiktok.com/@zainab_aljouher?_t=8lzH8O5JYkZ&_r=1
8	zainab	zainab_aljouher	https://www.tiktok.com/@zainab_aljouher?_t=8lzHvEIuMDq&_r=1
9	Ibraheem	mr.ibrahim.al_talqani	https://www.tiktok.com/@mr.ibrahim.al_talqani?_t=8lzITStJpJK&_r=1

Chapter Four

The Analysis

4.1 The Analysis

No	Word	Correct Transcription	Wrong Transcription	Cases of Wrong Pronunciation	Reasons for Mispronunciation
1	Child	tʃaɪld	chill	"chill" instead of "child"	Omission of the final /d/ sound
2	Bread	brɛd	beard	beard" instead of "bread	Confusion of vowel sounds and final consonant
3	We are	/wi: ɑ:r/	where	where" instead of "we are"	Contraction of phrase leading to single word mispronunciation
4	Transfer	/træns'fɜ:r/	transfe	transfe" instead of "transfer	Omission of the final /r/ sound
5	Tongue	/tʌŋ/	Tong	tong" instead of "tongue	Omission of the final /g/ sound and mispronunciation of vowel
6	Lately	'leɪtli			Mispronunciation of the entire phrase

7	Loneliness	'looŋlinəs	löləlnəs	löləlnəs" instead of "loneliness"	Misplacement of vowels and consonants
8	Goods	/gudz	gudz	"gudz" instead of "goods"	Confusion of vowel sounds
9	Comfortable	'kʌmfərtəbəl	komfotəbəl	komfotəbəl" instead of "comfortable"	Omission of syllables and mispronunciation of vowels

4.2 Discussion

Social media platforms are a common place where Iraqi speakers of English may inadvertently showcase pronunciation errors. A study of these mistakes reveals patterns that can be attributed to various linguistic influences and learning environments. For instance, the word "child" is often mispronounced as "chill," indicating an omission of the final /d/ sound, likely due to the absence of such terminal sounds in the Iraqi dialect of Arabic. Similarly, "bread" is frequently confused with "beard," reflecting a mix-up of vowel sounds and the final consonant. This could stem from the close proximity of these vowel sounds in the speakers' native language.

Phrases like "we are" are contracted to "where," showing a tendency to simplify phrases into single words, which may be a strategy to cope with the complexity of English pronunciation. Words like "transfer" and "tongue" lose their final sounds, becoming "transfe" and "tong," respectively, suggesting difficulty with the pronunciation of final consonants. The phrase "what have you been up to lately" is often reduced to "late" with a light L, pointing to challenges in articulating the full phrase and its intonation.

Mispronunciations such as "löləlnəs" for "loneliness" and "gudz" for "goods" indicate a misplacement of vowels and consonants, while "komfotəbəl" instead of "comfortable" shows a tendency to omit syllables and mispronounce vowels. These errors highlight the influence of the speakers' first language on their English pronunciation, particularly in the areas of phoneme distinction and syllable structure.

This analysis underscores the need for targeted pronunciation practice that addresses these specific challenges, helping Iraqi speakers of English on social media to communicate more effectively and with greater confidence.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This study highlights the common pronunciation mistakes made by Iraqi speakers of English on social media, shedding light on areas where further language instruction and support may be beneficial. By recognizing and understanding these mistakes, both learners and educators can work towards improving English pronunciation, thereby enhancing communication effectiveness in online interactions. Additionally, this research discusses the differences between Arabic and English phonetic systems, such as the smaller vowel system in Arabic compared to English, and the unique consonant sounds present in Arabic but not in English. These differences are influenced by the separate language families and the evolution of their respective phonologies, underscoring the need for targeted language instruction and support for Iraqi English learners on social media platforms.

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