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The Influence of Spelling on the Pronunciation of English as a Foreign Language as Made by Iraqi EFL Learners at the University Level : A Descriptive Study

ABSTRACT

The main problem of this research paper is to explore the influence of spelling on pronunciation . Students of English find difficulties in pronouncing certain words from written text . In Arabic, students can easily pronounce words by just looking at them . In English, there are some words which are spelt with different ways , but they have the same pronunciation. For example, the words (rain) , (rein) and (reign) , they pronounce in the same way / rein/ for the learners who do not mastery pronunciation in the right way , it is difficult to pronounce and they pronounce each word by looking at its spelling . This means that they mispronounced them , because they do not know the exact relationship between sound and spelling .

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تأثير التهجئة على نطق اللغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية كما يلفظها المتعلمون
العراقيون للغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية في الجامعة: دراسة وصفية

المستخلص

يهدف البحث الى القاء الضوء على مشكلة تأثير الهجاء على النطق. يجد طلاب اللغة الانجليزية صعوبات في نطق كلمات معينة من نص مكتوب . في اللغة العربية ، يمكن للطلاب نطق الكلمات بسهولة بمجرد النظر اليها. في اللغة الانجليزية ، توجد بعض الكلمات التي يتم تهجئتها بطرق مختلفة ، ولكن لها نفس النطق . على سبيل المثال ، الكلمات (مطر) و (لجام) و (عهد) ، يتم نطقها بنفس الطريقة
rein // للمتعلمين الذين لا يتقنون النطق بالطريقة الصحيحة ، من الصعب نطقهم وينطقون كل كلمة بواسطة النظر الى هجاءها. هذا يعني أنهم أخطأوا في نطقها ، لأنهم لا يعرفون العلاقة بين التلفظ والهجاء بالضبط .
الكلمات المفتاحية: التهجئة ، النطق ، العراقيون المتعلمون للغة الانجليزية كلغة اجنبية

1.Introduction

When learning a language , it is important to see the relationship between the written and spoken forms of the language. Spelling system is composed of twenty six letters . However , spoken English consists of forty four sounds . The number of sounds is more than the number of letters because there are some English letters represent more than one sound . For example , the letter ‘a’ is pronounced as a short sound / æ / as in (cat) / kæt / , (hand) / hænd/ and (man) / mæn / . The letter ‘a’ is pronounced as a long sound in (cart) /ka:t / , (park) /pa:k / , and (far) / fa: / . Dictionaries and pronunciation textbooks are symbols or signs to represent the different sounds of English(Boyer , 2003 :2) .

2.The Concept of Pronunciation

Pronunciation refers to the way the mouth is shaped during the production of speech sounds (consonants and vowels) . Good pronunciation is supported by the whole body and mind. It is an important feature of language learning . It discriminates learners on the basis of skills other than the education . Second language pronunciation involves imitating both the pronunciation and minuscule communicative habits of real speakers . The concept ‘ pronunciation’ refers to a system of stress , intonation , and to general articulation habits (Smakman , 2002: Viii) .

Roach (2009 :3) illustrates that pronunciation is the method in which a word is spoken . This can refer to groups of sounds or sequences of sounds used in speaking a given word in the correct pronunciation . Each word can be pronounced or spoken in different ways by many individuals depending on several features such as geographical places , different social classes , different ages and different educational backgrounds . A good distinction between dialect and accent is that the word ‘ dialect ’ refers to a variety of language which is different from others in vocabulary , grammar , pronunciation , and word order . Accent , on the other hand , is a variety of language which deals with the differences of pronunciation only .

3.Received Pronunciation (RP)

English is spoken with several accents . The number of phonemes and the exact sounds of many of them differ across accents . In order to list phonemes , this needs to choose an accent . The chosen accent is the British accent which is known as Received pronunciation (RP) . Some linguists have given a new name ‘Southern British Standard ’ (SBS) or ‘ Standard Southern British’ or even ‘General British ’ (Brooks , 2015 :13) . O’Connor (1980 :150) defines RP as a kind of pronunciation which is used by many educated people , or people belong to high class , especially in South-east England . It is also called B.B.C English .

4.The Phonemes of English

Phonemes can be defined as distinctive speech sounds that differentiate between the meanings of words . For example , the difference between / b / and / p / makes the difference in meaning between (bad) and (pad) . In RP , there are 44 phonemes , 24 consonant phonemes and 20 vowel phonemes . The main difference between consonant and vowel phonemes is that consonants require some closure of the air-stream between lungs and lips ,

whereas vowels do not (Brooks , 2015 : 4) . Skandera and Burleigh (2011:32) give a clear definition for consonant phonemes as sounds which are produced by a closure to air flow either in the larynx or in the vocal tract . Vowels phonemes are sounds that are produced by no obstruction to airflow when it passes through the larynx . The following tables show the consonant and vowel phonemes .

Table (1.1) presents the IPA symbols for consonants

Speech sounds (Fricatives)	Examples
/ f /	Fast / fa:st /
/ v /	Vast / va:st /
/ θ /	Thin / θɪn /
/ ð /	Then / ðen /
/ s /	Sink / sɪŋk /
/ z /	Zink / zɪŋk /
/ ʃ /	Shirt / ʃɜ:t /
/ ʒ /	Measure / meʒə /
/ h /	Hot / hɒt /
(plosives)	examples
/ p /	Peak / pi:k /
/ b /	Back / bæk /
/ t /	Two / tu: /
/ d /	Do /du: /
/ k /	Cave / keɪv /
/ g /	Gave / geɪv /
(Affricates)	Examples
/ tʃ /	Chin / tʃɪn /
/ dʒ /	Gin / dʒɪn /
(Nasals)	Examples
/ m /	My / maɪ /
/ n /	Nine / naɪn /
/ ŋ /	Sang / sæŋ /
Lateral sound	Examples
/ l /	Leaf / ki:f /
Glidings	Examples
/ j /	Yard / ja:d /
/ w /	Watch / wɒtʃ /
/ r /	Read / ri:d /

Table (1.2) presents the IPA symbols for vowels

English short vowels	Examples
/ ɪ /	Ink / ɪŋk /
/ e /	End / end /
/ æ /	Ant / ænt /
/ ʌ /	Up / ʌp /
/ ɒ /	Ox / ɒks /
/ ʊ /	pull / pʊl /
/ ə /	About / əbaʊt /
Long vowels	Examples
/ i: /	Eel / i:l /
/ a: /	Lark / la:k /
/ ɔ: /	Awe / ɔ: /
/ u: /	Ooze / u:z /
/ ɜ: /	Earl / ɜ:rl /
Diphthongs	Examples
/ əʊ /	Low / ləʊ /
/ aʊ /	Loud / laʊd /
/ eɪ /	Late / leɪt /
/ aɪ /	Rice / raɪs /
/ ɔɪ /	Boy / bɔɪ /

5. English Spelling System

English orthography is the alphabetic spelling system which uses certain rules that manages how speech is represented in writing (Rollings , 2004: 33). Spellings is the choice and arrangement of letters that form words . Cook (1997:474) explains that “correct spelling is a sign of education ; a spelling error is a solecism that betrays carelessness or plebeian origins ” . Spelling consists of letters , which have several shapes and styles . It also has the orthographic and pronunciation rules by which letters can be combined together to represent the phonetic and morphophonemic , morphemic , syntactic , and pragmatic systems of language .

English spelling is difficult and complex to learn . This is because of the multiple origins of English . English has absorbed words from different languages such as French , Latin and Greek into its Germanic base , and taken over spellings of those words without acquiring them to the original system (Trask , 2002 :13) .Baugh and cable (1996 : 52) point out that English alphabet comprises 26 letters including 24 separate consonant phonemes and 20 vowels . Spelling can be defined as a process of representing the spoken language into a written forms that consists of a set of letters composed to form words in an acceptable usage (Brooks , 2015 :14).

6.Graphemes

The term ‘ graphemes ’ is defined as a single letter or letter combinations that represents phonemes . Graphemes have different sizes , from one to four letters . For example , (ough) can represent single phoneme as in (through) (Brooks , 2015 : 15) . Cook and Ryan (1994 : 84) display that a grapheme is any minimal letter string used in correspondences .

7. Methodology

The test consists of ten words . These words were written on paper and were given to the students in order to pronounce them by writing the phonemic transcription by using IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols . All the students were given an answer paper in order to write the IPA symbols for the written letters . The sample of the research paper is the first year students / Department of English / college of Education / University of Misan of the academic year 2021 . The total number of the students is 25 .

8. Statistical Analysis

The T-test is the statistical test used in analyzing the results of the experiment (the test) . The T-test is used in order to see whether the results are significant or not . The researcher used SPSS program to find the Mean , Standard deviation , and the t-value . The researcher is used to find the mistakes of the students in writing the IPA symbols for the underlined letter or combination of letters .The researcher is divided the total mark for each correct answer . The total mark of the test is out of 10 .

9. Finding

The results of the analysis are shown in the following tables and a figure .

Table (1)

One –sample statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std . Error Mean
Scores	25	2.44	1.342	.102

Table (2)

One-Sample Test

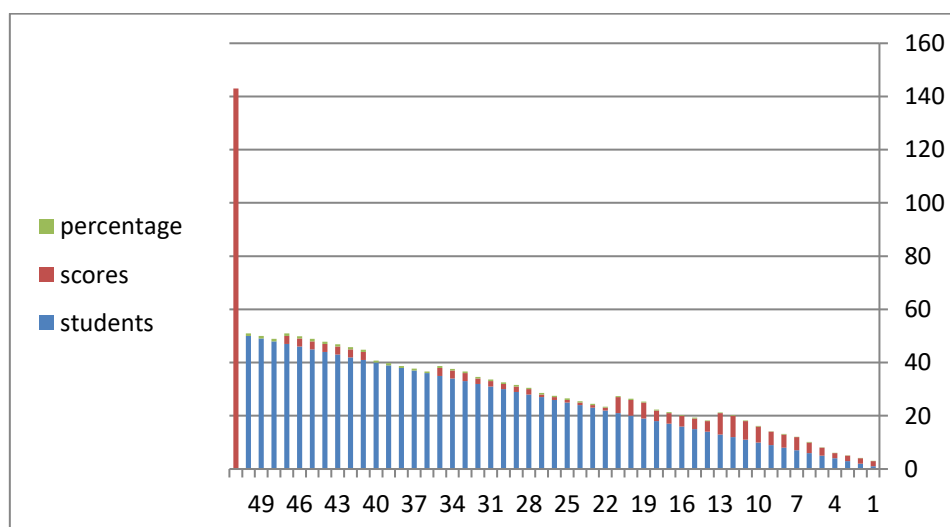
	Test Value = 5					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Score	-4.823-	24	.000	-1.560-	-2.21-	-.91-

The mean of the standard achievement in the test is 2.22 and the calculated t-value is 4.823 which is higher than the tabulated t-value for the test which is 0.02 . This means that the difference is significant and the performance of the students was poor .

Table (3) illustrate the performance and the percentages of the students in the test

students	Scores	Percentage
1	2	4%
2	2	4%
3	2	6%
4	2	8%
5	2	10%
6	3	12%
7	4	15%
8	5	15%
9	5	17%
10	5	19%
11	6	21%
12	7	23%
13	8	25%
14	8	27%
15	4	29%
16	4	31%
17	4	33%
18	4	35%
19	4	37%
20	6	37%
21	6	40%
22	6	42%
23	1	44%
24	1	46%
25	1	48%

Figure (1) : Histogram of The students' performance



10. Discussion

English spelling system is irregular because there is no one to one correspondence between letters and sounds . The letters in English do not always represent speech sounds . One letter can represent several sounds . IPA symbols are important to understand the intelligibility of the pronunciation and the spelling designed . The main difficulty in English spelling is the spelling of vowel sounds . The same letter can give different sound and different combination of letters can give the same sound in English .For example , the letters (ou) in words such as (loud , rough , famous , and through) can give different sounds .In the word **loud** , **ou** is pronounced / aʊ / .

In the word **rough** , **ou** is pronounced / ʌ / . In the word **famous** , **ou** is pronounced / ə / . (ou) is pronounced /u:/ in (through) . This means that there are several pronunciations for the same combination . Another example, the letter (a) in words such as (father , hate , all and anchor) also have different pronunciations / fa:ðə / , / heɪ / , / ɔ:l / and / æŋkə / .

The same problem happens with consonant phonemes . For instance , the / k / sound is represented by these letters (k , c , ck , or ch) depending on where it occurs in the word as in cat , duck , kite , Christmas , etc. Another example is the combination of the letters (gh) which has several pronunciations such as (enough) / f / , (ghost) / g / , etc .

The letter string (gh) sounds as / f / as in (cough) or silent as in **light** . The letters (ng) sound as / ŋ / as in **English** . The letter (g) has two different sounds / g / as in **gate** / geɪ / and / dʒ / as in **age** / eɪdʒ / . The letters (ph) sound as / f / as in **phone** / fəʊn / . The letter string (th) have two different sounds / θ / as in **thin** / θɪn / and / ð / as in **then** / ðen / (Baugh and cable , 1996 : 54) .

In English, words are not spelled as they are pronounced , they are followed by some important rules and these rules are followed by the majority of English users . Spelling rule is a principle which helps the learners to spell words correctly. It makes the person writes in order way . There are combinations of letters that are added to the beginning of the word or to the end of another word to create new words with different meaning. These are prefixed and suffixes . Prefix is the element that is attached to the beginning of a word whether the suffix is the element that is attached to the end of a word .

In addition , there are certain words with silent letters which make problems for the learners for example , the silent / k / does not pronounce in words like (knee) / ni:/ , (know) , / nəʊ / , and (knife) / naɪf / . The learners who do not know the correct pronunciation, they pronounce them with / k/. As a result, English spelling lead the learners to deduce wrong pronunciation from words spelling . English pronunciation is famous by its difficulty and students should be aware about pronunciation rules .

Doubling consonant is a method used to double the letter to create a perfect word. It is the most difficult aspect of English spelling and it is one of the biggest challenges that English learners face . The most errors committed by students are caused by doubling consonant . This case also affects pronunciation .

11. Conclusion

The current research paper has investigated the effect of spelling on the pronunciation of English as a foreign language . English spelling is divorced from its pronunciation and there is no perfect way how to learn the pronunciation of the words . The letters of alphabet are used to represent sounds . Most of the letters of English alphabet have multiple pronunciations . English pronouncing dictionary is needed for better understanding of the pronunciation and spelling .

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