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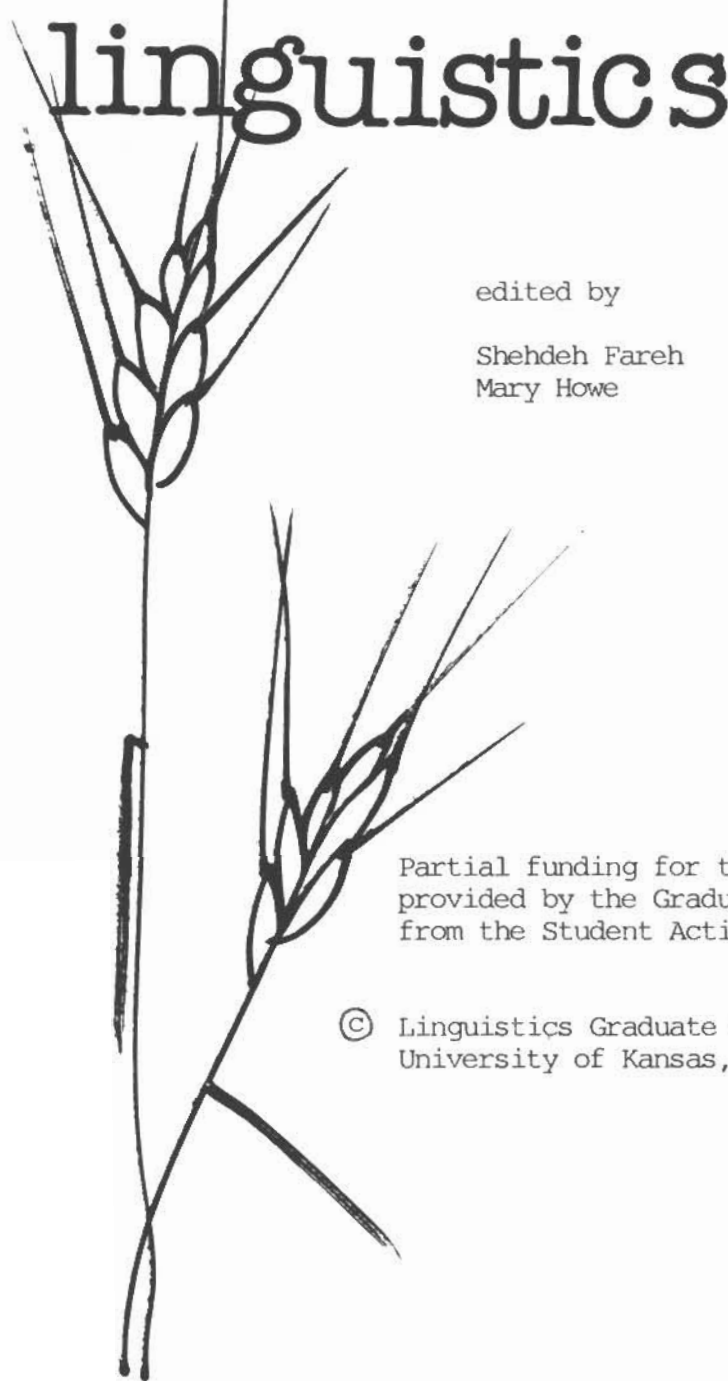
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HOW FAR DOES THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS' PRONUNCIATION
AFFECT THAT OF THEIR STUDENTS IN JORDANIAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

Shehdeh Fareh

Abstract: This paper summarizes a study I conducted for my Master's degree, in which an attempt was made to shed some light on the influence of the pronunciation of English language teachers on that of their students in the areas of vowel phonemes, word stress and intonation. A sample of ten teachers and twelve students from each teacher's class was drawn from ten public secondary schools in Amman. The major concern of the study was to determine how far the pronunciation of the English language teachers, among many other interrelated factors, shapes that of their students.

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the influence of the pronunciation of English language teachers on that of their students in the areas of segmental vowel phonemes, word stress, and intonation. The teachers' and their students' errors will be identified, described, classified, and analyzed for the purpose of finding whether or not English language teachers are providing an adequate model of pronunciation for their students; and thus, whether any problems subsequently identified can be attributed more to difficulties in the learning process or to aspects of teachers' training and preparation.

The motive that stands behind conducting this study is the feeling that adequate pronunciation is indispensable if we want to meet the minimum requirement of teaching English as a foreign language in Jordan. Competence in intonation and stress patterns, among many other aspects of the sound system of English, is essential for practicing teachers and trainee teachers who need to develop their proficiency in English so as to be as good a model as possible for their students. Mispronunciation might render the message the speaker intends to convey unintelligible or with a different meaning. D.B. Fry (1979, pp. 1-4) considers speech perception as, a decoding process of spoken messages. Errors in the pronunciation of foreign language learners are the outcome of a number of interrelated factors (Tarone 1978, Richards 1974), chief among which are negative transfer from the mother tongue sound system into the foreign language sound system, intralingual errors, and incomplete learning of the foreign language phonological rules. Svartvik (1973) added another factor which is faulty teaching that is related to the teacher's competence in the language he teaches or to the methodology he uses in teaching that language.

As far as the segmental features are concerned, they form the building blocks from which utterances are composed. The lack

of distinction between the segmental vowel phonemes, on the part of the learner, may lead to misunderstanding of the message. Students often use Arabic / 0: / in place of English vowel / ɔ: / and the diphthong / əu /, thus, they do not distinguish between minimal pairs such as (court, coat, brought, boat), they pronounce these words as (ko:t / and bo:t). The segmental features do not work alone to convey meaning, but they are a part of the whole system of the English language, which includes other components such as the suprasegmental features, grammar and semantics. These components complement each other in carrying meaning. Consequently any distortion or misuse of any of these interrelated components is liable to cause misunderstanding.

The suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation are the most subtle features affecting the perception of speech. It is possible to produce the segments semi-natively, but the meaning will be misunderstood if the suprasegmental features are wrongly used. Borden (1980: 129) states that the suprasegmental features are a direct bridge to meaning. They reveal the feelings and attitudes of the speaker in a way that the segmental information can never do. Halliday (1970: 21-22) stresses the importance of intonation not only because it is a means of making oneself understood or of sounding less foreign to native speakers, but because it is a means of saying different meanings. Halliday considers the distinctions in meaning made by intonation as a part of English grammar. Tense and mood cause difference in meaning, and so do intonation patterns. He adds "intonation is one of the many kinds of resources that are available in the language for making meaningful distinctions." Brazil (1980: 97) emphasizes the importance of intonation in the English as a foreign language classrooms, saying that it contributes to the communicative value of speech and it can assist the development of receptive skills such as reading and listening.

Intonation cannot be disconnected from stress which plays an important role in conveying meaning. It is difficult, sometimes, to interpret an utterance in which stress is wrongly used. i.e. (import, impórt, éxport, expórt, cóntent, contént). "Stress, as Mackay (1978: 141) states is to a great extent responsible for carrying meaning, and abnormal stress placement will render otherwise good speech unintelligible." A sentence may have more than one meaning according to the intonation pattern it has.

Examples:

She is pretty[↘] (falling tone) - This is a statement which means "I believe that she is pretty."

She is pretty^{↘↗} (falling-rising tone) - This sentence means that she is pretty but...something else is reserved.

Brown (1977:88) states that "tone groups mark off the major constituents of certain sentences." i.e.:

The boys, who are ill, cannot come. (All the boys are ill).

The boys who are ill cannot come. (Not all the boys are ill).

It has become obvious that having an adequate command of English phonetic system at the segmental and suprasegmental levels on the part of English language teachers is indispensable if we aim at teaching spoken English appropriately. The well-trained teacher can overcome many difficulties and as Boris Jordan (1979: 72) states, the qualified teacher can make up for inappropriate instructional material.

Method:

Subjects: Ten English language teachers and twelve students from each teacher's class, chosen randomly, were the subjects of this study.

Hypothesis: It is hypothesized that the English language teachers' pronunciation, in spite of all other factors affecting pronunciation, will have a positive influence on that of their students. The hypothesis is based on a number of assumptions. The teacher is the main model of pronunciation for his students at schools. Students tend to imitate their teachers' pronunciation, not only in pronunciation lessons, but also in all their teachers' verbal behavior. Students are not usually exposed to English spoken by native speakers. Most of them have very limited opportunities to speak English in class and are under the supervision of their teachers.

Instruments for collecting data: Data will be collected from both the students and their teachers of English. The elicitation technique consists of three parts as can be seen in appendices A, B and C.

A. Ten sentences are chosen for the purpose of eliciting data about the following vowel phonemes and diphthongs (/ i: , i , e , æ , a , ɔ: , ɒ , u , ʊ: , ʌ , ə: , ə , eɪ , əʊ , aɪ , əʊ , ɔɪ , iə , eə , uə) Each sound appears in at least three words, that is, it has three occurrences. With regard to these sounds, students and perhaps their teachers are expected to make different types of errors; they may use the sound / i: / for / iə /, they may substitute Arabic / O: / for the English / o: / and əʊ /. Most of the words are familiar to the students and their teachers. (see appendix A)

B. Ten sentences are set up for the purpose of eliciting

information about the different intonation patterns such as falling, falling rising, rising and rising falling. Each pattern has three occurrences. Subjects are expected to substitute one intonation pattern for another; they may produce an utterance with falling intonation instead of rising or rising falling intonation and whenever this takes place the function of the utterance might be changed. (see appendix B)

C. A list of fifty words for eliciting information about the subjects' use of word stress. The list includes verbs, adverbs, nouns and adjectives. Most of these words are familiar to the subjects as most of the words are chosen from their textbooks. Some of the test words have the stress on the first syllable such as (title, noble, friday), others have the stress on the second syllable (ago, enough) and others are stressed on the third syllable. (see appendix C).

Teachers were requested to record the three parts of the test after being given enough time to read the test items for themselves. Each teacher's performance was recorded in the quietest place available in the school. Students were given some time to read the test items for themselves. Then each subject was asked to record the test individually. The second step was that each teacher was requested to teach the test to his students over a period of time and not less than six periods. Students practiced reading the three parts of the elicitation technique in class and under the supervision of their teachers who tried to do their best in correcting the students errors and providing them with as good a model as they could. Afterwards, each subject was asked to record the test again. Each reading for the teachers or their students was then transcribed and errors were identified, described and classified.

Data were collected from the subjects' speaking from a written script. This is done so as to control the influence of other variables affecting the subjects' pronunciation rather than the influence of the pronunciation of the English language teachers.

Deviant forms were judged against the standard British model of pronunciation (R.P.). This model was used because it is the model used in educational television and radio lessons. It is also used and described in the English language textbooks in the three stages of schooling in Jordan.

Statistical design: The influence of the teacher's pronunciation, be it negative or positive, on that of his students was determined by the following procedures:

1. Calculating the number of correct utterances for each student in each tested area, before he is taught, trained, or

corrected by his teacher.

2. Calculating the mean of correct utterances and the standard deviation for each group of students.

3. Calculating the mean of correct utterances; for each student and in each tested area after he is taught, trained and corrected by his English language teacher.

4. Calculating the mean of correct utterances and the standard deviation for each group of subjects in each tested area.

5. Calculating the difference between the number of correct utterances in the first and the second reading for each subject, and in each tested area (vowels, diphthongs, word stress and intonation).

6. Applying the sign test formula to find out whether or not the difference between the two readings is significant.

The following chart will clarify the statistical procedures:

Numbers of correct utterances in the first and the second readings for the sound

No. of student	No. of correct utterances in the first reading	No. of correct utterances in the second reading	Difference between the two readings	Sign. (+,-)
----------------	--	---	-------------------------------------	-------------

1
2
:
:

Results and Discussion: It has to be borne in mind that the present study tried to test the hypothesis that the pronunciation of the English language teachers, among many other interrelated factors, plays a major role in shaping that of their students in the areas of segmental vowel phonemes, word stress and intonation. It may be true that the correct pronunciation of the teachers has a positive effect on that of their students, and by effective teaching, the teacher is very likely to overcome certain difficulties related to the powerful factors including negative transfer from the mother tongue. The study shed some light on those difficulties that were aggravated by the incorrect pronunciation of the teachers as models for their students, that is, errors related to teaching transfer.

The results of this study revealed an acceptance of the hypothesis in teaching certain vowels, intonation patterns and word stress and a rejection of the hypothesis in some other aspects of

pronunciation. It also showed the degree of similarity between the pronunciation of the teachers and that of their students in certain areas where both of them are influenced by their common L1.

The influence of most of the teachers' pronunciation has been found significant in teaching certain sounds such as (e, ɜ, iə, ei) which tended to be replaced by Arabic (i, o, i:, e:) respectively and the influence of very few teachers was positive in teaching some other more difficult sounds such as (ɛɜ, ʌ, ə:). And this adds to the criticism of CA since it fails to decide the degree of difficulty in learning L2 sounds especially those which do not exist in L1. It also emphasizes the possibility of minimizing or avoiding negative transfer from L1 provided that students are given proper training by qualified teachers.

The improvement in the student's pronunciation of the sounds (əu, ʌ, ə:, uə, ə, ɪ) was insignificant since these sounds were common errors among the teachers and their students, and here the students resort to their L1 as a strategy they use wherever their knowledge of L2 is inadequate. It has been found that students and their teachers replaced some sounds with their nearest Arabic counterparts, thus, most of the students' errors remained uncorrected as was the case with (ʌ, ɔ:, ə:, əu, ɛ. ə, ai, ɔi, au) being replaced by Arabic (a, o:, e:, o:, (a: or a:), a:j, o:j, a:w) respectively. The students pronounced some sounds which have Arabic counterparts correctly in the first reading, so the teachers had no role in that case and what they had to do was to accept and so to reinforce their students' pronunciation as was the case with (i:, i, u:, u, ɛ) taking into consideration that they sound more Arabic than English. It has also been found that most of the teachers are untrained properly to teach English pronunciation. A basic requirement of an English language teacher of Arab students is a basic knowledge of the phonetics of L1 and L2. Unfortunately, many of the English language teachers in Jordan, though they are B.A. holders in English, lack this very basic knowledge, that is, their pronunciation is still subject to the same factors which affect that of their students.

Concerning errors in stress, the influence of most of the teachers' pronunciation on that of their students has been found significant. Some teachers succeeded in increasing the percentage of correctly stressed words on the part of their students from 39% in the first reading to 50% in the second reading, and in other cases the improvement was bigger. This improvement indicates a positive influence of the teachers' pronunciation on that of their students. The percentages of the teachers' correctly stressed words ranged from 40% to 84%. It was found that the percentages of improvement in the students pronunciation were in direct proportion to that of their teachers, and this suggests a relationship between preparing and training English language teachers adequately and their students proficiency. Most of the difficulty the students

faced in learning English stress patterns can be attributed to a number of factors such as:

1. The students imposed Arabic stress rules on those of English whenever their knowledge of English stress patterns is inadequate or whenever they lack the adequate model. The percentage of errors which can be related to negative transfer from L1 into L2 has been found to range between 30-60%.

2. Most of the teachers do not provide their students with an adequate model of pronunciation.

3. A considerable number of errors can be related to the strategies learners use in learning English stress patterns, since they are in most cases unpredictable and this is aggravated by having inadequate models of pronunciation in class.

With regard to the improvement of the students' pronunciation in intonation, it has been found to be significant in the rising and falling rising patterns, and insignificant in the falling and the rising falling patterns. The insignificant improvement in the second case is due to the facts that the students used falling intonation in most of the sentences, and because the teachers themselves used the falling pattern in place of the rising falling intonation, thus, this pattern has never been taught to students. Some teachers managed to increase the percentage of correct productions from 36% in the first reading to 100% in the second reading as was the case in teaching the rising and the falling rising intonation patterns. This improvement can be ascribed to the fact that students modeled their pronunciation on the correct pronunciation of their teachers.

The inability of most of the English language teachers to teach adequately the different aspects of English pronunciation increased their students' opportunity to resort to their L1 knowledge. The teachers' pronunciation was either adequate and thus it improved significantly that of their students, or inadequate and thus, their students modeled their pronunciation on that of their teachers. This reveals that the difficulty students encounter in learning English pronunciation is mostly classroom based, that is, caused by incorrect models and inappropriate teaching methods.

The vowels that do not exist in Arabic were the most difficult for students. The second difficult area was the rising falling intonation pattern. English stress patterns occupied the third rank in the hierarchy of difficulty facing students in learning English pronunciation.

This study is far from being complete due to a number of difficulties:

1. Some of the teachers were embarrassed to record the test items and other refused.
2. Some students were also reluctant to record their pronunciation of the test items and some felt that their pronunciation was so bad that they absented themselves in the second reading.
3. Some teachers, for one reason or another, did not train their students properly.
4. Not many similar studies have been conducted in this field.
5. The quality of recording was not so good because of the lack of special recording rooms.
6. The lack of a phonetic laboratory made the analysis impressionistic.

Notes

1. Daniel Jones notation was used in this study for English sounds and IPA for Arabic sounds.

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Appendix

A. Read the following sentences:

1. John had usually won all three big races but this time Roy was first.
2. Albert finds her a bottle of cold water.
3. Two old men carried off the prizes at our flower show in August.
4. It shocked Jim that the poor man was condemned to death.
5. Thomas opened the cartons of milk with too much force and spilled one on the chairs.
6. I'd use a better tape measure if you need exact figures.
7. Mary found the whistles wasted on them and made a very serious complaint to Jim.
8. They are sure that wild bears and deer live in that near-by park.
9. He pushed the door open and looked into the room.
10. Would you dare to destroy the third toy?

B. Read the following sentences:

You are John?

I've a nice little cottage in the country.

How many apples did he buy?

It's three feet wide; four feet high; and eighteen inches deep.

Ready?

It would be an excellent idea.

Do you believe in ghosts?

As a matter of fact, I do.

What a terrible story that is?

Where did you go?

C. Read the following words:

title	arrived
stopped	vegetable
classroom	several
necessary	adverb
dictation	enough
isn't	adjective
invent	ago
doesn't	collect
himself	astray
wristwatch	proposition
familiar	catching
complete	contents bill
someone	attention
interest	arrange
repeat	practically
notebook	Friday
asked	communication
expression	women
accurate	atomic
ended	depend
grandfather	historically
remember	table
yesterday	noble
tragically	development
commander	composition