Exploring Mother Tongue Interference Issues in Saudi University Students' Pronunciation of English Consonant Sounds Introduction

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Abstract

The study aimed to classify the most substantial pronunciation errors in spoken English among Saudi students, discover the reasons behind pronunciation errors in regard to mother tongue interference in reference to consonant sounds and suggest possible solutions that might help students overcome their problems of English pronunciation. 30 random Saudi students from different universities at preparatory year programme answered a test orally in different word classes. The findings indicated that students' levels in English language pronunciation were very weak, the place of articulations of the sounds /b/ and /p/ caused difficulties for the students to distinguish the manner of the sounds production. Also, it was difficult for the students to pronounce the sounds /g/, /ʒ/, /s/ and /d/ ending sounds/s/, /z/ and /iz/, /t/, /d/ or /id/ after consonant and even vowel sounds. In addition to that students were not able to distinguish between pronunciation of verbs and nouns in English. There should be orientation for instructors to regard pronunciation teaching and pay attention to the effects of mother tongue interferences complications among learners.

Keywords: Mother tongue interference problems, consonant sounds, pronunciation errors.

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1. Introduction

Language is an important means of communication. Therefore, speaking a language is very essential. Zhang and Yin (2016) mention that language is the channel of communication. Ur (2010) says the idea of pronunciation can be described as a combination of the sounds of the language as well as stress, rhythm and intonation. The pronunciation of English vowels and consonants are becoming very important nowadays. Ali (2015) states the pronunciation of English vowels has lately got more consideration from the instructors of English and scholars who are involved in teaching and learning English as (ESL/EFL).

According to Elmahdi and Khan (2015) the very important element of English learning as a second language lies on pronunciation.

Dhillon, (2016) also, asserts that pronunciation is documented as an ultimate aptitude that learners must acquire, principally for it affects accurateness and understanding. So, many of English learners as a second language encounter chief complications with pronunciation. Roach (2009) in reference to varieties of English pronunciation which he thinks are referred to age, social and class differences and style.

Zimmermann (2004) mentions that pronunciation is crucially important, as it is usually the first thing people notice about a language learner of English. Considerations are to be done to deal with pronunciation because it participates in the transmission of right message of uttered discourse. The pronunciation may occasionally delay the message conveyed if it is not correctly articulated. The (EFL) learners use English to communicate successfully. Some of the reasons that produce ineffective communication is the incapability to express the language as RP (received pronunciation) as possible. Mispronunciation leads to misunderstandings.) According to Luo, (2014) the college students usually unintentionally transferred this confused pronunciation of their hometown dialects to English pronunciation and made pronunciation confusion when they spoke

and read aloud English, which is called mother tongue interference. It is widely noticed that the pronunciation teaching is largely abandoned. Therefore, the present study will focus on the errors of pronouncing consonants which are made by university students. The study aims to classify the most substantial pronunciation errors in spoken English among Saudi students, discover the reasons behind pronunciation errors in regard to mother tongue interference in reference to consonants sounds. The present study will be of great help to curricula designers. It will also be of use to English language instructors and experts in the field of applied linguistics. The study endeavours to answer the questions below.

- What are the consonants errors of pronunciation made by Saudi EFL students of university preparatory year programme while they are speaking English?
- What are the reasons of errors due to the area of pronunciation?
- What do the difficulties of pronunciation refer to?

2. Literature Review and Previous Studies

A lot of students are not able to pronounce many segments; divided some words and combined words in a sentence. Other students unable to use stress at word level and used intonation improperly. A lot of pronunciation errors are due to the effects of the mother tongue interference and some are related to other factors. Brown (1994) states the aspects that generates problems are phonological variances among mother tongue language (L1), second or foreign language (L2). He recommends six factors which involve the pronunciation of learners; the mother tongue language, age, experience, innate phonetic ability, identity and language ego, motivation and the anxiety for good aptitude of pronunciation. According to O'Connor (1998) there are some difficulties face Arab speakers for pronouncing these English consonants such as /f/ /v/, /θ/ /ð/, /s/ /z/, /b//p/, /t/ /d/, /tʃ/ /dʒ/ and /ŋ/.

Gilakjani (2012) states that although the demonstration of precise pronunciation is unlikely, the pronunciation should fall within reasonable standards to match the communication learners' needs. However, many second language learners strive to produce intelligible and comprehensible pronunciation of English. The elements, which

can influence English learning of pronunciation, including the attitudes of learners, contact to the target language, and the instruction of teaching.

Vitanova & Miller (2012) explain English language is regarded as a source of primary communication. The learning environment is also altering as all learners are fluctuating to international students. Liu (2011) EFL instructors have a huge concern to certify helping EFL learners' competence development in English pronunciation. English language is not as other languages in regard to letter sound relation either in vowels or consonant sounds. For that reasons it becomes a substantial encounter to Arabic speakers to utter appropriate pronunciation of English words.

Perry, Ziegler and Coltheart (2002) assert there is no direct relation between letter and sounds of English. Phoneme-grapheme association in English is highly unrestrained.

Hassan (2012) confirms that there is a connection between errors of pronunciation and aspects such as MT sounds interference differences especially Arabic and English. He also, states that pronunciation problems, such as mispronouncing /b/, /p/, /s/, /θ/ are connected to aspects, such as mother tongue interference on the second language. Also, variances in the sound systems of Arabic in general and Sudanese Spoken Arabic in particular are the reasons for many errors in pronunciation. In addition, the spelling of some English words lead many Sudanese learners to incorrectly speculate the pronunciation simply by looking at the word and its letters and produce unfitting pronunciation. Finally, the inconsistency of some English consonants which make the learners unable to decide what the precise sound they should pronounce is. Also, there are some sounds that signify a combination of more than one letter e.g., "gh" which is sometimes pronounced /f/ and "ch" which is pronounced /t/ and /k/. The records revealed were considered to be the most known factors of difficulties in pronunciation. Khan, (2011) claimed that many learners of English Language regularly made linguistic mistakes in both pronunciation and syntax as a result of the interference of mother tongue language.

Alsaidat (2010) found some English syllables which are difficult to Arab learners and this led to problems in pronunciation.

Ahmad (2011) found that the participants faced main complications in uttering specific sounds of consonants for example /p/, /d/, /v/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/, and /ŋ/. The study indicated that when the students spoke L1 or EFL language, they would incline to produce the sounds, that are closest

Al Taha (1995) revealed that the most public uttering mistakes were phonemes of English which were being substituted by the phonemes of Arabic language. He further asserted that errors could in part be ascribed to L1 interference some sounds of English language are not existed in Arabic language.

Na'ama, (2011) found some errors committed by Arab learners which were happened in the pronunciation of English words of three and four final consonant cluster.

These two types were usually not found in Arabic segmental features. This was a chief reason of phonological interlingual errors for the Arab speakers of English.

Malah and Rashid (2015) found the Hausa learners of second language faced difficulty/in pronunciation of the consonants /f/, /θ/, /p/, /ʒ/ and /v/. Hausa's speakers were probably utter /f/ and /p/ as /θ/ example; pen was /θen/ and friend was /θren/. They also pronounced /v/ as /b/, /θ/ as /t/, /ð/ as /d/, and /ʒ/ as /dʒ/. Since the vowels of English /æ/ and /ʌ/ were probably be overheard as /a/, whereas /ə/ and /iə/ as /ai/, /eə/ as /ea/ /uə/, and /əu/ as /ɒ/ correspondingly. They would permanently try to use native phonemes instead of English.

Rosyidah (2014) discovered four types of phonetics interference as the ways of Japanese segmental features interference in pronunciation of students. The development of interference happened by altering one consonant sound to others that had near feature of even similar feature cope with case of the place, manner of articulations and vocal cord. The variations were replacement of consonant /v/ by consonant /f/, consonant replacement /ð/ by consonant /d/, consonant replacement /θ/ by consonant /t/, consonant replacement /tʃ/ by the consonant /c/, consonant replacement /z/ by consonant /s/, and consonant replacement /dʒ/ by consonant /j/.

Nevertheless, persons currently didn't have difficulty to pronounce /ʃ/ and /r/ properly.

Shamat (2018) found the problems of speaking is mother tongue interference, absence of many English and Arabic sounds in both languages and the sound systems differences between the two languages.

3. The Research Design

This study was limited to Saudi university students at preparatory year programme. The methodology of the study was experimental. The samples of the study were chosen randomly from the population of Saudi students. An oral test was answered by the students to reflect the interference of mother tongue in mispronouncing consonants sounds. The oral test investigated and reflected their real practices and attitudes about the problems of mother tongue interference in relevancy to consonant sounds.
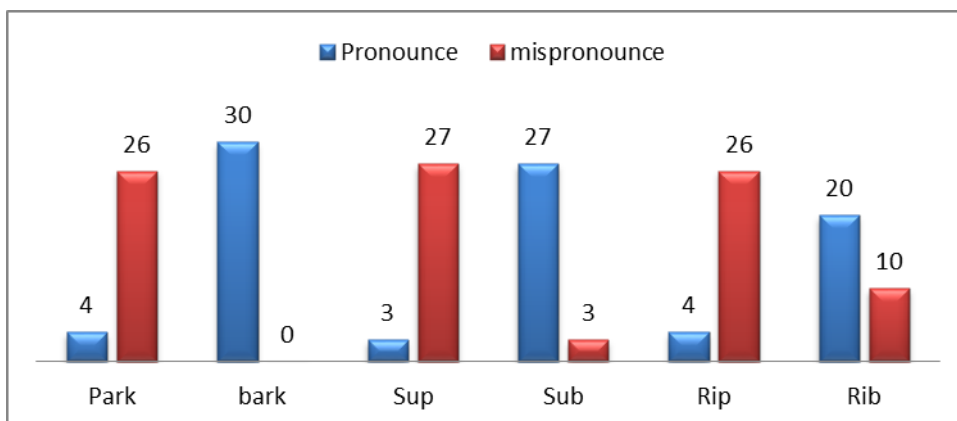
4. The Results and Discussion

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
٠.٦٢	23

1. The students are asked to pronounce the words below.

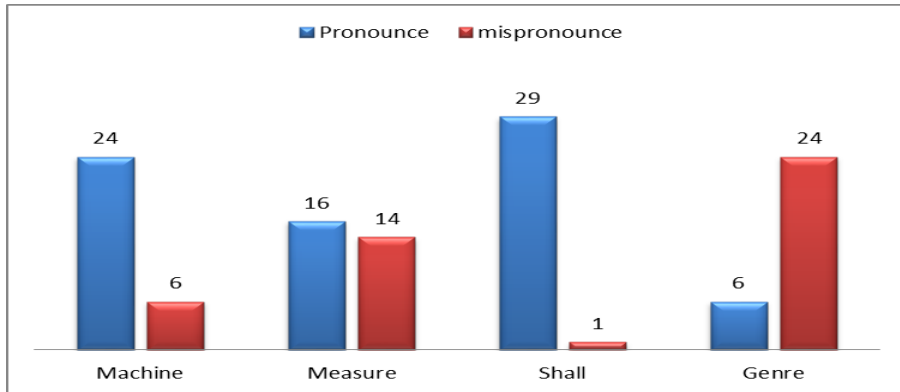|	Pronounce		Mispronounce	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Park	4	13.3	26	86.7
Bark	30	100.0	0	0
Sup	3	10.0	27	90.0
Sub	27	90.0	3	10.0
Rip	4	13.3	26	86.7
Rib	20	66.7	10	33.3

1. Four of the 13.3% students pronounced a correct (park) word and twenty-six of the 86.7% students mispronounced a correct word.
2. Thirty of the 100.0% students pronounced a correct (bark) word.
3. Three of the 10.0% students pronounced a correct (sup) word and twenty-seven of the 90.0% students mispronounced a correct word.
4. Twenty-seven of the 90.0% students pronounced a correct (sub) word and three of the 10.0% students mispronounced a correct word.
5. Four of the 13.3% students pronounced a correct (rip) word and twenty-six of the 86.7% students mispronounced a correct word.
6. Twenty of the 66.7% students pronounced a correct (rib) word and ten of the 33.3% students mispronounced a correct word.

2. The students are asked to pronounce the words below.

	Pronounce		Mispronounce	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Machine	24	80.0	6	20.0
Measure	16	53.3	14	46.7
Shall	29	96.7	1	3.3
Genre	6	20.0	24	80.0

1. Twenty-four of the 80.0% students pronounced a correct (machine) word and six of the 20.0% students mispronounced a correct word.
2. Sixteen of the 53.3% students pronounced a correct (measure) word and fourteen of the 46.7% students mispronounced a correct word.
3. Twenty-nine of the 96.7% students pronounced a correct (shall) word and one of the 3.3% students mispronounced a correct word.
4. Six of the 20.0% students pronounced a correct (genre) word and twenty-four of the 80.0% students mispronounced a correct word.

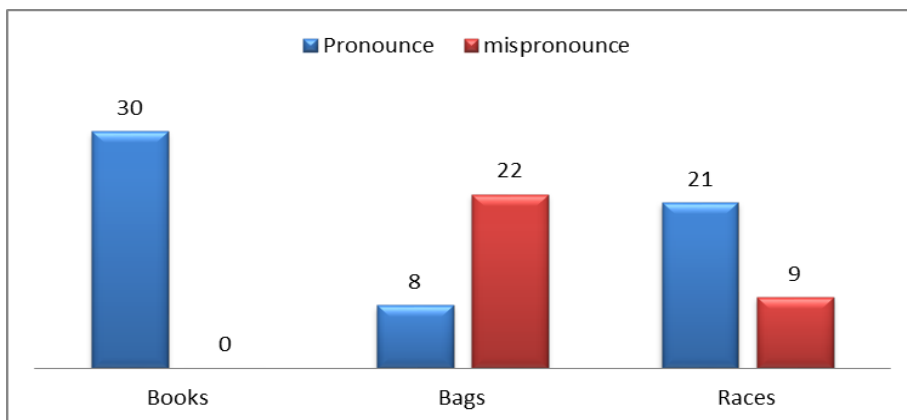**3. The students are asked to pronounce the words below.**

	Pronounce		Mispronounce	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Ink	27	90.0	3	10.0
Bank	24	80.0	6	20.0
Single	15	50.0	15	50.0
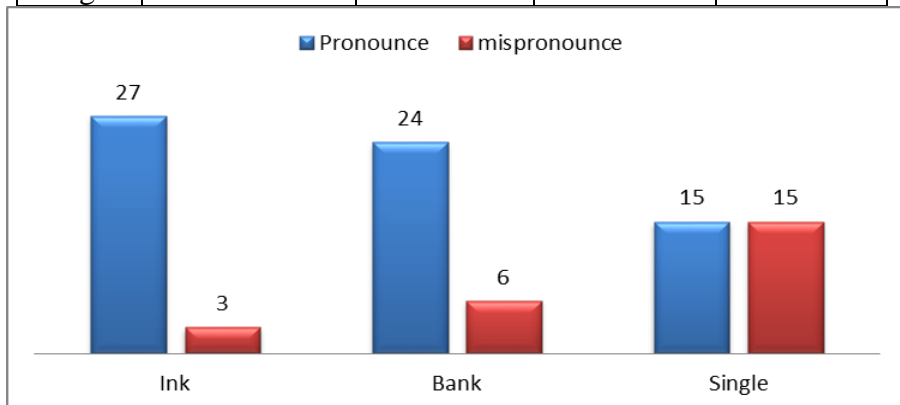
1. Twenty-seven of the 90.0% students pronounced a correct (ink) word and three of the 10.0% students mispronounced a correct word.
2. Twenty-four of the 80.0% students pronounced a correct (bank) word and six of the 20.0% students mispronounced a correct word.
3. Fifteen of the 50.0% students pronounced a correct (single) word and fifteen of the 50.0% students mispronounced a correct word.

4. The students are asked to pronounce the words below.

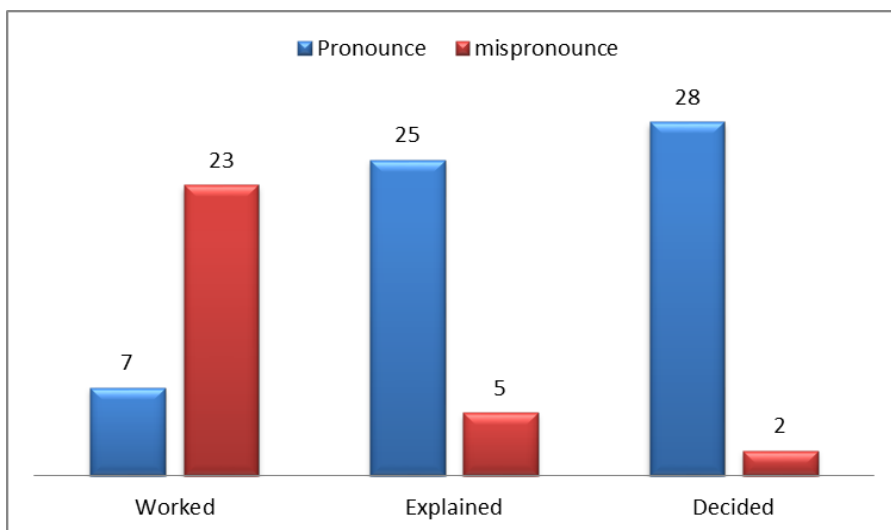|	Pronounce		Mispronounce	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Books	30	100.0	0	00.0
Bags	8	26.7	22	73.3
Races	21	70.0	9	30.0

1. Thirty of the 100.0% students pronounced a correct (books) word.
2. Eight of the 26.7% students pronounced a correct (bags) word and twenty-two of the 73.3% students mispronounced a correct word.
3. Twenty-one of the 70.0% students pronounced a correct (races) word and nine of the 30.0% students mispronounced a correct word.

5. The students are asked to pronounce the words below.

	Pronounce		Mispronounce	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Worked	7	23.3	23	76.7
Explained	25	83.3	5	16.7
Decided	28	93.3	2	6.7

1. Seven of the 23.3% students pronounced a correct (worked) word and twenty-three of the 76.7% students mispronounced a correct word.

2. Twenty-five of the 83.3% students pronounced a correct (explained) word and five of the 16.7% students mispronounced a correct word.

3. Twenty-eight of the 93.3% students pronounced a correct (decided) word and two of the 6.7% students mispronounced a correct word.

   6. The students are asked to pronounce the verbs / nouns below.

	They came		They did not come	
	Frequency	**Percent**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Present (verb)	9	30.0	21	70.0
Present (noun)	21	70.0	9	30.0
Record (verb)	11	36. 7	19	63.3
Record (noun)	21	70.0	9	30.0
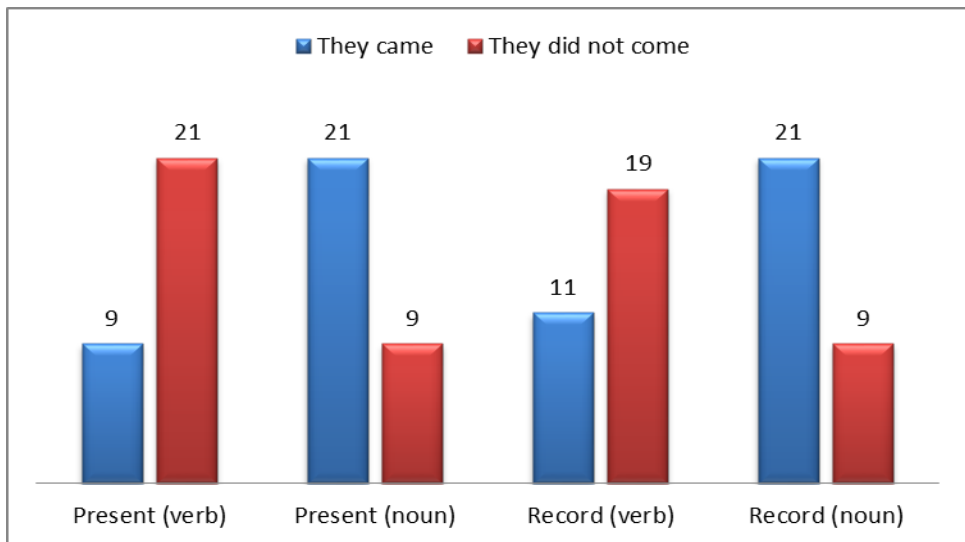
1. Nine of the 30.0% students came with a correct for a present verb and twenty-one of the 70.0% students did not come up with a correct for present verb.
2. Twenty-one of the 70.0% students came with a correct for a present noun and nine of the 30.0% students did not come up with a correct for present noun.
3. Eleven of the 36.7% students came with a correct for a record verb and nineteen of the 63.3.0% students did not come up with a correct for record verb.
4. Twenty-one of the 70.0% students came with a correct for a record noun and nine of the 30.0% students did not come up with a correct for record noun.

     In this study the researcher examined the most substantial pronunciation errors in spoken English among the students, discover the reasons behind pronunciation errors in regard to mother tongue interference in reference to consonants sounds. Alsaidat (2010), Ahmed (2011) and Malah (2015) revealed that some English syllables were difficult to pronounce such as /p/, /d/ and /v/. The present study coincided with the previous studies because the students were not able to pronounce and distinguish between the sounds /p/ and /b/, /g/, /ʒ/, /s/ endings sounds /s/, /z/ and /iz/ and /d/ sounds endings correctly.

Also, AlTaha (1995) discovered that English phonemes were replaced by Arabic phonemes. In addition, Rosyidah (2014) found phonetics interferences in relevance to /v/, by consonant /f/ /dʒ/ by /j/. Moreover, Shmat (2018) showed the mother tongue interferences was due to the absence and differences of many English and Arabic sounds in both languages. So, what was mention was true for the present study because students were not able to distinguish between verbs and nouns sounds in English and that was due to the differences between English and Arabic sounds realization.

5. Conclusion and Suggestions

The findings indicated that students' standards in English language pronunciation were very weak, the place of articulations of the sounds /b/ and /p/ made it difficult for the students to distinguish the manner of the sounds produced. Also, it was difficult for the students to pronounce the sounds /g/, /ʒ/, /s/ endings sounds /s/, /z/ and /iz/ and /d/ ending sounds /t/, /d/ or /id/ after consonant and even vowel sounds. There were many contrastive elements from mother tongue language that hinder learning proper ways of pronunciation. The formation of English language and Arabic language was not the same and that misleads the students to pronounce some words correctly because the realization of sounds in Arabic and English were not the same. It was worth mentioning that the students were not able to distinguish between pronunciation of verbs and nouns in English for the lack of stress knowledge and rules as in the words 'present' and 'record'. That actually was due to the negligence of teaching pronunciation and stress rules. There should be orientation for instructors to regard pronunciation teaching and pay attention to the effects of mother tongue interferences complications among learners.

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