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The Influence of Native Language (Arabic) on Learning English Language

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Abstract: The primary aim of this contrastive analysis study was to explore how the Arabic sound system influences the acquisition of English pronunciation. To achieve this, the study conducted a detailed examination of the phonetic systems of both Arabic and English, identifying key similarities and differences. The findings highlighted notable distinctions in the number of vowels and consonants, the presence of diphthongs, syllable structure, and intonation patterns. In certain instances, the absence of specific Arabic consonants in English proved beneficial, aiding learners in mastering English pronunciation. Conversely, some irregularities in pronunciation posed challenges for learners, illustrating the complexities of transitioning between the two languages.

1. Introduction

As the world is becoming a large, multicultural, multilingual community, the importance of speaking more than one language is increasing (Al-Ahdal, 2020). As one of the most widely spoken languages in the world, English serves as a key facilitator in various domains, including research, academia, and industry. Its global prevalence means that proficiency in English often opens doors to international collaboration, access to cutting-edge research, and participation in the global economy. This significance has prompted many non-English speaking countries, particularly in the Arab world, to prioritize English language education within their curricula.

In these Arab nations, the push for effective English language instruction reflects a recognition of its importance not only as a tool for communication but also as a crucial component of higher education and professional development. English is increasingly being adopted as the medium of instruction in universities, especially in fields such as science, technology, engineering, and medicine. This shift is aimed at equipping students with the skills they need to engage in a globalized world, where English often serves as the lingua franca.

Moreover, the integration of English into the educational system is seen as a way to enhance students' employability and competitiveness in the job market. Employers in many industries now seek candidates who are proficient in English, as it facilitates collaboration with international partners and clients. Thus, educational institutions are investing in teacher training, curriculum development, and resource allocation to

RESEARCH ARTICLE

ensure that English is taught effectively.

This emphasis on English education also reflects broader socio-economic trends as countries in the Arab world seek to diversify their economies and foster innovation. By prioritizing English language skills, these nations aim to prepare their citizens for the demands of a rapidly changing global landscape, thereby contributing to their overall development and prosperity. In this context, English transcends its role as merely a subject of study; it becomes an essential pathway to personal and professional advancement.; therefore, obtaining proficiency in the English language is of utmost importance in these countries (Chouchane, 2016).

Despite the strong motivation among Arab learners to master English and sound like native speakers, they face several challenges, particularly in the area of pronunciation. This difficulty can often be attributed to the phonetic differences between Arabic and English, which can lead to interference and errors in speech. For instance, certain sounds that are present in English may not exist in Arabic, making them difficult for learners to produce accurately.

Additionally, many bilingual Arabic speakers engage in code-mixing, a phenomenon where elements of both Arabic and English are blended in conversation. This often occurs in non-native English-speaking environments where speakers are navigating both languages fluidly. Code-mixing serves as a practical communication strategy, allowing speakers to express themselves more comfortably and effectively in contexts where they might lack the vocabulary or fluency in one language. For instance, a bilingual speaker might use an English term for a concept that doesn't have an equivalent in Arabic or vice versa, thereby facilitating smoother communication.

While code-mixing can sometimes lead to an informal and less precise use of language, it can also be a valuable learning tool. Many bilingual speakers find that through trial and error—experimenting with various combinations of English and Arabic—they gradually improve their proficiency in English. This strategy allows them to practice and reinforce their language skills in real-life situations, helping them to develop their speaking abilities in a less pressured environment. Over time, as they become more confident and proficient, some may even achieve a high level of fluency in English, resembling native speakers more closely.

However, this approach is not without its drawbacks. Relying heavily on code-mixing can lead to the development of a hybrid linguistic style that may not align with standard English pronunciation or grammar. As a result, while some learners may find temporary success through this method, they may ultimately face challenges in formal contexts where adherence to standard language norms is expected. This underscores the need for targeted pronunciation instruction that helps learners navigate the complexities of English while acknowledging their linguistic backgrounds. The practice of "code-mixing" is still widely used in speech patterns. It undoubtedly qualifies as unique in that it serves social and professional purposes. Arabic is a diglossic language, which means that two widely used dialects of the same language are used for different purposes. The language employed in formal means of communication, such as those found in books, religious texts, and the media, is known as Literary Arabic, also known as Modern Standard Arabic. Studies have shown that monolingual learners do not experience the effects of this intervention, and it normally occurs in L2 speakers (Wofford & Tibi, 2018).

Numerous contrastive analysis studies are conducted, which focus on contrasting the characteristics of the first and second languages to identify their similarities and differences. Contrastive analysis as a learning strategy can benefit learners, teachers, and curriculum developers by disambiguating which features of learners' L1 can assist L2 learning and which ones can hinder this process (Abdelhakim et al., 2019).

International Council of English and Literature Journal (ICELJ)

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Therefore, when learning L2, two types of transfer can take place. Positive transfer describes the parallels between L1 and L2, which can be seen in phonology, phonetics, morphology, and grammatical structures. Negative transfer, on the other hand, refers to the discrepancies between the morphology and grammatical structures of the L2 and the L1 (Al-Zoubi, 2019). In the context of pronunciation, contrastive analysis studies serve as a valuable tool for elucidating the similarities and differences between the Arabic and English sound systems. These differences can significantly impact Arab learners' ability to master English pronunciation. By identifying specific phonetic characteristics unique to each language, such studies can highlight areas where Arabic speakers may excel as well as those where they may struggle.

This study aimed to provide a comprehensive description and comparison of the speech sound systems in both Arabic and English. Through this analysis, we seek to illuminate how certain features of the Arabic phonetic system can facilitate the learning of English pronunciation, while others may pose challenges. For example, certain Arabic sounds may be phonetically similar to their English counterparts, potentially making it easier for learners to grasp their pronunciation. Conversely, sounds that are distinct in one language but not the other can lead to interference and errors, such as the mispronunciation of English vowels or consonants that do not exist in Arabic.

Furthermore, understanding these phonetic contrasts is essential for developing targeted instructional strategies. By focusing on the specific pronunciation challenges faced by Arab learners, educators can create tailored curricula that address these issues head-on. This might include targeted exercises to practice problematic sounds, as well as exposure to native speaker models to help learners refine their pronunciation skills.

Ultimately, the goal of this study is to provide insights that will not only enhance our understanding of the phonetic relationship between Arabic and English but also inform effective teaching practices. By bridging the gap between the two languages, we can better support Arab learners in their journey toward achieving fluency and confidence in English pronunciation. The following research questions were pursued:
1.What are the similarities and differences between the Arabic and English sound systems?
2.In what ways does the Arabic sound system help learners master English pronunciation?
The following sections will explain the sound systems of the Arabic and English languages.
Afterward, this article will review the differences and similarities between the two sound systems to conclude which aspects lead to positive and negative transfer and whether Arab learners are privileged in learning English pronunciation.

2.The Arabic Sound System

The Arabic sound system is marked by a range of distinctive characteristics that set it apart from many other languages. In terms of segmental phonemes, Arabic boasts a rich inventory of consonants, vowels, diphthongs, and allophones. For instance, Arabic contains a variety of consonantal sounds, including emphatic consonants that are not found in English. This unique set of phonemes creates a phonetic environment that can pose challenges for learners who are not accustomed to producing such sounds.

Vowel sounds in Arabic also exhibit notable features. The language typically has a system of short and long vowels, which can alter the meaning of words significantly. This length distinction is crucial for pronunciation and understanding, as it affects both word formation and grammatical structures. **Diphthong**s, which are combinations of two vowel sounds within the same syllable, further enrich the sound system, providing a depth that is essential for conveying nuances in meaning.

Syllable structure in Arabic is another area of complexity. Arabic typically follows a consonant-

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

vowel (CV) pattern, but it also allows for more complex syllable constructions. Understanding these structures is vital for learners, as it impacts their ability to pronounce words accurately and fluently.

In addition to segmental features, **the prosodic or suprasegmental aspects of the Arabic sound** system play a significant role in how the language is spoken and understood. **Stress patterns,** which determine the emphasis placed on certain syllables within words, can influence meaning and comprehension. **Intonation**, or the variation in pitch during speech, adds an additional layer of meaning, conveying emotions or attitudes that may not be evident from the words alone. Finally, junctures or transitions between sounds can affect the flow of speech and clarity, highlighting the importance of mastering these elements for effective communication.

Together, these features contribute to the richness and complexity of the Arabic phonetic landscape, making it essential for learners and educators to grasp these characteristics. A thorough understanding of the Arabic sound system not only aids in mastering pronunciation but also enhances overall communicative competence. For educators, this knowledge is critical in developing targeted instructional strategies that can help students navigate the intricacies of the language, ultimately leading to greater fluency and confidence in their Arabic-speaking abilities. The Arabic language has six vowels and 28 consonants, 15 of which share the same sound (Al-Jarf, 2022).

There are three short vowels (/e/, /ʊ/, and /ɪ/), in addition to a stop sound. Sometimes, these short vowels are lengthened depending on the consonant they accompany and turn into long vowels. They don't have a morphemic orthographic record and are not articulated independently. They go with a consonant and are set apart by comparing signs to be recognized (Al-Jarf, 2022). As for phonemes, Modern Standard Arabic has three short vowel phonemes (/a/, /i/, and /u/), three long vowel phonemes (/a/, /i/, and /u/), and two diphthongs (/au/ and /ay/) (Al-Jarf, 2022). **Some Arabic consonant phonemes** are unique and absent in other languages, such as English, including /d; ض ;ṣ; ص ;ẓ خ ; ẖ ; q; ح ; ṭ ط ; ق ; ṣ ; ص ; χ ; ẖ ; غ ؛ /ع. When Arabic sounds are pronounced, the energy rushes in the vowel and consonant area; however, the bursts are very powerful in the vowel region as compared to the consonant region (Anwar et al., 2006). The schwa /ə/ also does not exist in Arabic (Chouchane, 2016).

In terms o**f syllable structur**e and c**onsonant clusters,** Arabic allows for the following consonant clusters: CV, CVV, CVC, CCV, CVVC, CVCC, and CVVCC. However, these clusters can only appear at the end or the beginning of a syllable if it starts with a conjunctive hamzah. Regarding stress and intonation, Arabic has three stress levels: penultimate, antepenultimate, and finalstress. **The intonation** is rising in statements, commands, wh-questions (information questions), confirmatory question tags, and exclamations. On the other hand, yes/no questions and question tags that are real questions receive falling intonation in Arabic (Al-Jarf, 2022).

3. **The English Sound System** The English and Arabic sound systems have both similarities and differences, reflecting their unique linguistic characteristics. Here's an overview:
Similarities

Vowel and Consonant Systems: Both languages use a combination of vowels and consonants to form syllables and words.

Syllable Structure: Both languages allow for various syllable structures, although they differ in complexity and common patterns.

Phonemic Nature: Both English and Arabic are phonemic, meaning that changes in sounds can lead

RESEARCH ARTICLE

to differences in meaning.

Differences

Vowel Sounds:

English has a larger inventory of vowel sounds, including diphthongs (e.g., "ai" in "rain").

Arabic typically has a simpler vowel system, often represented by three short vowels (a, i, u) and their long counterparts.

Consonant Sounds:

Arabic features emphatic consonants (e.g., ص/sˤ/, ط/tˤ/) that do not exist in English.

English has sounds like /v/ and /ʒ/ (as in "measure") that are absent in many Arabic dialects.

Pharyngeal and Uvular Sounds:

Arabic includes unique sounds produced in the throat (e.g., ع/ʕ/ and غ/ɣ/), which are not present in English.

Stress and Intonation:

English relies heavily on stress patterns to convey meaning and differentiate words (e.g., "record" as a noun vs. verb).

Arabic has its own patterns of stress but often uses a different system of intonation and rhythm.

Syllable Timing:

English is often described as a stress-timed language, meaning the rhythm depends on stressed syllables.

Arabic is more syllable-timed, leading to a more even distribution of syllable length.

Phonological Rules:

Each language has different rules for sound combinations and alterations (e.g., assimilation, elision).

These differences and similarities shape the way speakers of each language perceive and produce sounds, influencing pronunciation, comprehension, and language learning.

In other words, The English sound system has similarities and differences with the Arabic sound system. It has more vowel phonemes (12) and diphthongs (8) compared to Arabic, and some of its consonants, such as /p/, /v/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /ŋ/, are absent in the Arabic sound system. English has 20 phonemes, while Arabic, in similar locales, has just 19. Then again, in the post-velar locales, Arabic has eight consonants, yet English has just three. This velarization was depicted as a lidding. The tongue fills the cavity above like a lid. The English language has 24 consonants, while Arabic has 28. English consonants are arranged by the spot and way of

RESEARCH ARTICLE

their enunciation. In opposition to vowels, in which air flows out openly from the lungs through the mouth, consonants are delivered by driving the airstream out and can be voiced or devoiced (Cruttenden, 2008). Richards et al. (1985) add that the air can be totally or to some degree obstructed or permitted to go with a tight contact or through the nose. Consonants can likewise be recognized by the energy applied to create voiced or devoiced consonants, making greater the voiced and voiceless parts of the sets of consonants (Collins & Mees, 2003). pronunciation challenging and might sometimes fail to master it well; however, the analysis has shown the difficulties are minor. Numerous strategies were also introduced which can help Arab learners in this process.

In conclusion, the influence of Arabic as a native language on learning English is multifaceted and significant. While Arabic speakers may benefit from certain cognitive advantages, such as heightened awareness of language structure, they often encounter specific challenges due to the phonetic, grammatical, and syntactic differences between the two languages.

Phonological differences, such as unique Arabic sounds that lack direct equivalents in English, can affect pronunciation and listening comprehension. Additionally, distinct syntactic structures and vocabulary usage may lead to errors in both spoken and written English.

However, awareness of these challenges can aid in developing targeted teaching strategies that leverage the similarities between the two languages while addressing specific areas of difficulty. Ultimately, fostering a supportive learning environment that acknowledges and builds upon the linguistic background of Arabic speakers can enhance their proficiency in English, facilitating better communication and cultural exchange.

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