

Mohamed Fathy Khalifa: Errors in English Pronunciation among Arabic Speakers: Analysis and Remedies

(Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020. 270p.)

This study is a contrastive analysis of errors in English pronunciation by speakers of Arabic as a first language concerning segmentals – consonants, consonant clusters, and vowels – and suprasegmentals – primary word stress. It also describes the most frequent interlingual reasons for these errors and offers several instructional suggestions for overcoming them. The target audience of the book is Arab students who desire to surmount the errors which stand in the way of their linguistic proficiency, Arab English teachers who are interested in finding solutions to the English pronunciation errors made by their students, and academics who seek to explore the core issues of the field more thoroughly.

The book is divided into five chapters: the first being an introduction covering a brief definition of terms, aims and justifications for the study, the linguistic background, and methodology. In chapter two, a detailed explanation of theories of second language acquisition followed in the study is provided. Then a contrastive analysis of English and Arabic sounds and word stress is introduced in chapter three, followed by the results and discussion part in chapter four, and finally, chapter five with teaching suggestions.

This research has two main hypotheses: first, the participants substitute their own Arabic sounds, trying to fill in the gap of missing and unfamiliar English sounds (L1 negative transfer), leading to incorrect English pronunciations. Secondly, instead of just using English stress patterns, the participants apply Arabic main word stress rules (i.e., L1 negative transfer), resulting in incorrect English stress patterns. As illustrated in the results, both hypotheses are confirmed, although to varying levels due to sounds and stress patterns depending on word class.

This analysis includes 45 Arab participants whom all use English as a second language, selected as the following: fifteen Saudi Arabians, fifteen Egyptians, and fifteen Libyans. The Saudi School in Sheffield, England, where the researcher works as an English teacher to Arab students, is selected as the educational setting for this study.

The book analyzes data obtained through elicitation, such as reading aloud and guided composition. The participants were requested to record their reading of English word lists and a picture description. Each of the recordings was transcribed with IPA symbols, and tables with correct and incorrect pronunciations were prepared in a way that would make both locating the pronunciation errors and finding the reasons and remedies easier.

The results demonstrate that the participants tend to substitute their own Arabic sounds for unknown English sounds leading to incorrect English pronunciation. They also use Arabic main word stress rules instead of the English ones resulting in incorrect English stress patterns as well. The book also indicates that the participants' learning difficulties increase primarily due to English sounds and stress patterns that are both different and more marked than the corresponding Arabic ones.

Based on the abovementioned content, this book can certainly be considered fundamental and very valuable, especially for research in Arabic phonology and phonetics. Furthermore, it can be described as being easily accessible and convenient as the internal design of the chapters is very easy to follow for information extraction throughout the book. The author starts by presenting the topic, then focuses on providing historical and theoretical overviews and subsequently introduces new questions and observations, to be followed by several conclusions and recommendations for further study. In addition, there is also a very useful set of teaching suggestions that could help Arab teachers to overcome the pronunciation errors made by their Arab ESL students. The book is an essential, solid reference for those investigating Arabic phonetics and phonology issues.

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