ERRORS COMMITTED BY SOME OMANI SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PRONOUNCING THE (/ɡ/-/dʒ /-/ʃ /-/tʃ /-/v/-/fl/-/θ /-) SOUNDS

Noor Mohammed Hamed AL-Abri

Abstract

This research paper is an analysis of sounds pronounced by some Omani secondary school students. It aims to detect the errors that the students commit while they pronounce some consonant sounds. Eight sounds have been analysis in this research. These sounds are (/ɡ/-/dʒ /-/ʃ /-/tʃ /-/v/-/fl/-/θ /-). The researcher also discussed the causes of these errors in order to explain why a student made such an error.

This study requested by Dr. Ali.R,AL-Hassnawi the lecturer of the Report Writing course on 16/9/2006.

The main findings were that the majority of errors committed by the students of subjects were a result of the interference of their mother tongue and the educational problems. The recommendations are that students should focus on good pronunciation. Teachers should use audio-visual aids in the class.

1- Introduction and Background

Language is a systematic means of communication by using sounds or conventional symbols and we use language to convey our thoughts and ideas as well. In order to speak a language correctly, learners need to learn the grammar of the language, lexis and its phonology. They should know how to pronounce the word in the correct way. Speech sounds are broadly classified into vowels and consonants. Phonetically, consonants are those segments of speech marked by a complete or partial interruption of the air stream before it escapes into the outer atmosphere.

The phonological system of Arabic and English are very different. English has 22 vowels and diphthongs, and 24 consonants while Arabic has only 8 vowels and diphthongs, and 32 consonants (Smith, 1987:143).

*Len Hobbs (2001) says, “That there are many differences between Arabic and English and the most obvious one is between the written formal language on one hand and the spoken informal language on the other hand. There are different dialects across the Arab world and also within one a country there are a lot of dialects as well. In Oman, students can identify where they come from by the way they speak. Many Omani students pronounce a hard ”ɡ”, a sound that does not occur in classical Arabic. However they have problems transferring the allophone “ dʒ ”, which they use to English, so that ”college” becomes /kolig/”.

* Len Hobbs, the former LC Programmer Coordinator for Education.
Here is brief information about the sounds, which the report examines.

/g/

In the production of /g/, the soft palate is raised and thus the nasal passage of air is blocked completely. The back of the tongue makes a firm contact against the soft palate thereby affecting an oral closure.

The vocal cords are wide apart. When the back of the tongue is suddenly removed from the soft palate, the compressed air escapes and the vocal cords vibrate. /g/ is thus a **voiced velar plosive**. The position of the speech organs for the /g/ sound is shown in Figure 1.

/ʃ/

In the production of /ʃ/, the soft palate is raised, thereby shutting off the nasal passage of air. The tip and blade of the tongue are brought very near the alveolar ridge. At the same time, the front of the tongue is raised in the direction of the hard palate. The lung air escapes through the narrow gap between the tip and blades of the tongue and the alveolar ridge and between the front of the tongue and the hard palate with audible friction. The vocal cords are wide open. /ʃ/ are thus a **voiceless palato-alveolar fricative**. The position of the speech organs for the /ʃ/ sound is shown in Figure 2.
In the production of /tʃ/, the soft palate is raised so as to shut off the nasal cavity of air. The tip and the blade of the tongue make a firm contact with the alveolar ridge, thereby blocking the oral passage of air. At the same time, the front of the tongue is raised in the direction of the hard palate in the readiness for the fricative release. The tip and blade of the tongue are removed slowly from the alveolar ridge and the air escapes with friction between the tip and blade of the tongue and the alveolar-ridge and between the front of the tongue and the hard palate. The vocal cords are wide apart. /tʃ/ is thus **voiceless palato-alveolar affricate**.

/dʒ/ is articulated exactly like /tʃ/ except that the vocal cords vibrate during the articulation of /dʒ/. Thus, /dʒ/ is a **voiced palato-alveolar affricate**.

For both /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ the speech organs are in the position shown in Figure 3.
/f/

In the production of /f/, the soft-palate is raised, thereby shutting off the nasal passage of air. The lower lip is brought very near the upper front teeth in such a way that there is a very narrow gap between them. The lung-air escapes through this narrow gap with audible friction. The vocal cords are wide apart. /f/ is thus a voiceless labio-dental fricative.

/v/

/v/ is articulated exactly like /f/ except that during the production of /v/ the vocal cords vibrate producing voice. /v/ is thus a voiced labio-dental fricative.

For both /f/ and /v/ the speech organs are in the position shown in Figure 4.

Fig4. /f/ and /v/

/θ/

In the production of /θ/, the soft-palate is raised, thereby shutting off the nasal passage of air. The tip of the tongue makes a light contact with the upper front teeth. The lung-air escapes through the narrow friction. The vocal cords are wide apart. /θ/ is thus a voiceless dental fricative.

/ð/

/ð/ is articulated exactly like /θ/ except that during the articulation of /ð/ the vocal cords vibrate, producing voice. /ð/ is thus a voiced dental fricative.

For both /θ/ and /ð/ the speech organs are in the position shown in Figure 5.
This research appears as a response for some pronunciation errors that some Omani Secondary School students have in their speaking. When a learner says, for example, bark in a situation where he or she should have said, park, the inaccurate production of a phoneme can lead to misunderstanding. A learner who consistently mispronounces a range of phonemes can face some difficulties to communicate with native English people.

The objectives of this report are to highlight the kind of errors that some Omani Secondary School students commit in pronouncing some consonant sounds and to know the important reasons, which lead to these problems. In addition, the report suggests some proper solutions to get rid of these errors.

2- Methodology

The participants of this study were some Omani Secondary School Students. Ten students were selected for this study. They were asked to read some words from a list. This list was divided in 8 parts; each part contains one sound and 6 words related to each sound. Dr. Galip AL-Matlaby(The head of department of Arabic Language an Literature at Iibri College) was invited for an interview.

In order to achieve the objectives of the research, the researcher read the words which are in the list for the students before they start reading them themselves. The researcher recorded the student's voice for confirmation. Then, a word count was made and errors in pronunciation were counted for each sound.

3- Results and Discussion

In this part of the researcher presents and discusses the result of the study in terms of its objectives. 3.1 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /g/ sound

Chart (1) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /g/
Chart (1), above, shows about 50-70% of the students pronounced this sound correctly. 30% of them committed errors while they pronounced it. They can not differentiate between the /g/ and the /dʒ/ sound. They know that these two sounds are confusing, so some of them pronounced all the words with the /g/ sound; others pronounced them with the /dʒ/ sound. They thought that they can solve the problem by doing so while they are, unconsciously, committing a horrible mistake in pronunciation.

Chart(1): number of the students who pronounced the /g/ sound correctly

![Chart(1)](chart1.png)

3.2 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /dʒ/ sound

Chart (2) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /dʒ/ sound correctly. Chart (2), above, shows between 40-70% of the students pronounced the /dʒ/ sound correctly. Surprisingly, no one, from those ten students, pronounced the word language correctly.

"Dr. Galip AL-Matlaby comments on this result he says" In the Omani dialect, the morphemes /g/ and /dʒ/ are just allophones for on phoneme, but in English they are different phoneme and that might cause problems for some Omani students because they consider these two morphemes as allophones. This proves that, there is a difference between the phonetics and the pronunciation in the language of the native and second language learners".

From this we can say that the most important reason of committing errors in pronouncing these two sounds (/g/ and /dʒ/ sounds) is simply because the /dʒ/ sound does not occur in the Omani dialect.

3.3 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /ʃ/ sound

Chart(2): number of the students who pronounced the /dʒ/ sound correctly

![Chart(2)](chart2.png)
Chart (3) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /ʃ/ sound correctly.

Chart (3), above, shows about 90-100% of the students pronounced this sound correctly.

3.4 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /ʃ/ sound

Chart (4) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /ʃ/ sound correctly.

Chart (4), above, shows about 60-90% of the students pronounced the /ʃ/ sound correctly.

From [chart (3) and chart (4)] the researcher finds that most of the students committed errors in pronouncing these two words *machine* and *future*.

Dr. Galip AL-Matlaby mentions three reasons explaining why some Omani students are committing such errors. He says” In my point of view, the problem with the morpheme (TU) is an educational problem .that the students learn the alpha as only letters without using pictures in order to know them correctly and they can distinguish between them easily. In addition, the Omani student does not use to have two different words with the phoneme (CH) and (TU). The last reason is that these morphemes don’t exist in some Omani students dialect”.

The researcher finds that most of the students pronounced the phoneme (CH) which is in the word machine as the /k/ sound and this is, as Dr. Galip AL-Matlaby says, an educational problem. It is obvious that the Students cannot differentiate between the (c) when it
becomes /k/ and when it becomes /ʃ/. This is because they did not do any practice to help them to distinguish between these two sounds easily.

At the same time, the researcher finds the same reason apply to the errors committed by those students in pronouncing the word future. The students pronounced this word as its written letter by letter. They do not know that the phoneme (TU) in this word must pronounced with /ʃ/ sound.

3.5 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /f/ sound

Chart (5) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /f/ sound correctly.

Chart (5), above, shows about 80-100% of the students pronounced the /f/ sound correctly. From this chart the researcher finds that most of the student can pronounce this sound correctly and just 20% of them committing mistake when they pronounce the /f/ sound.

Chart(5): number of the students who pronounced the /f/ sound correctly

3.6 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /v/ sound

Chart (6) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /v/ sound correctly.

Chart (6), above, shows about 60-100% of the students pronounced the /v/ sound correctly. 40% of the students committed errors in pronouncing this sound.

Dr. Galip AL-Matlayb comments on both (/f/ and /v/) sounds he says” In the case of the letters (F) and
(V), the problems in Omani learners that, Omani students do not have phoneme in their speech system for the letter (V). So when they hear the letter F, they hear it as allophone including the phoneme F, also Arabs find it difficult to distinguish between the voiceless letters and voiced Letters. Therefore, because the letter V is voiced and F is voiceless, some Omani students find it difficult to distinguish between these two and they consider them as allophones for one phoneme”.

Some Omani students use the /f/ sound for both /f/ and /v/ sound because we cannot find the /v/ sound in the Omani dialect.

3.7 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /θ/ sound

Chart (7) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /θ/ sound correctly.

Chart (7), above, shows about 50-100% of the students pronounced the /θ/ sound correctly. The researcher finds that half of the students committed errors in pronouncing the word tenths because this sound is dental fricative and it is commonly very difficult for foreign language to pronounce.

3.8 Errors committed by some Omani students in pronouncing the /ð/ sound

Chart(7): number of the students who pronounced the /θ/ sound correctly

Chart (8) below shows number of the Omani students who pronounced the /ð/ sound correctly.

Chart(8): number of the students who pronounced the /ð/ sound correctly
Chart (8), above, shows about 80-100% of the students pronounced the /ð/ sound correctly. Unexpectedly, just half of the students pronounced the word *though* correctly and no one pronounced the word *smooth* in the right way. The researcher finds that the students are confusing between the /ð/ and /θ/ sounds. They could not distinguish between them. Dr. Galip AL-Matlaby says “the problem with the /ð/ sound is an educational problem. Students do not practice in order to know them correctly and they can distinguish between them easily”.

4- Conclusions

The intention behind writing this research paper was to highlight the kind of errors that some Omani Secondary School students commit in pronouncing some consonant sounds. Truthfully, the researcher highlighted these errors and discussed them in terms of their sources. The findings achieved in this report suggest that the majority of errors committed by those ten students of subjects are a result of the interference of their mother tongue. The educational problems were found obviously.

5- Recommendations

In the light of these conclusions, the researcher suggests that students should forget their native language's sound as best as they can. They should focus on good pronunciation by watching movies and TV programs in the foreign language for example. They should get cassette tapes and rescored their voices while reading some sentences and they should focus on the confusing and similar sounds and keep using their tape recorder and listening to the tape.

Teachers on the other hand should focus on pronunciation during their teaching. Such as computer, CD and video because, teaching pronunciation by looking at the spelling of words will be time consuming and students will not benefit from this.

The researcher suggests that people who work in the Ministry of Education should focus on pronunciation in the schoolbooks. They should offer schools with modern techniques for sounds to help students overcome problematic sounds.

However, this report has its own limitations. First, it has been carried out over one semester period. Second, only ten students were tested in this report. A suggestion for future research is to have a longitudinal study using a large number of students.
6- Bibliography

| - thing | - these |
| - three | - though |
| - mouths | - father |
| - tenths | - rather |
| - south  | - smooth |
| - health | - with  |

| - fan    | - van  |
| - fish   | - visit|
| - coffee | - seven|
| - before | - never |
| - life   | - move |
| - half   | - have |