

Pronunciation problems in egypt essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Pronunciation Problems in Egypt I have been teaching English for almost eight years for Egyptian university students at the English Department. Out of my experience of teaching Phonetics and Phonology for those students, I can conclude that the Egyptian learners of English encounter many pronunciation problems because of two main reasons: the English spelling as a poor reflection of the English pronunciation as well as the differences between the Arabic phonetic alphabet and that of English. Examples of such problems are to be classified and highlighted under each of the above reasons.

To start with, as for the English orthography, there are twenty-six letters to represent almost twenty vowels and twenty-four consonants, which is not the case in Arabic where each letter represents one sound only and each sound can only be represented by one letter. Also, in Arabic, there only three vowels and the rest of the phonemes are consonants. Accordingly, when it comes to English, the Egyptian learner is surprised to find, for example, letter pairs used instead of single letters to represent a single phoneme such as “ sh” and “ oa”, which gives rise to confusion when they are not taken as a pair as in bishop and moan.

Another inconsistency is that the same letter or group of letters does not always represent the same sound in English. Some letters can stand for as many as four different sounds. For instance, the letter “ c” has no sound equivalent as /c/; it is realized as /k/ as in cup and /s/ as in cellular. The learner cannot predict in which word “ c” is pronounced as /k/ or /s/. In contrast, the same sound is not always represented by the same letter or group of letters.

Such examples are the /f/ sound which is spelt as “ f” as in fit, “ ff” as in offer, “ gh” as in tough and “ ph” as in photo as well as the /e/ sound which is realized in various spellings like “ a” as in many, “ al” as in said, “ e” as in let, “ ea” as in dead, “ eo” as in leopard, “ ie” as in friend and “ ue” as in guess. All these different spellings make it difficult for the learner to predict which sound is represented by them. One of the most problematic English orthographic inconsistencies for the Egyptian learners is silent letters.

A lot of English words contain letters which are not pronounced at all although they are written. Writing such words as one hears them uttered may produce erroneous spellings. In Arabic, such a phenomenon is totally absent. Examples of such letters are the silent “ b” as in limb, “ d” as in Wednesday, “ g” as in sign, “ k” as in knife, “ n” as in autumn, “ p” as in receipt, and “ t” as in often. As far as the differences between the Arabic and English phonetic alphabets are concerned, they stand as pronunciation obstacles that need hard work on the learners’ part to overcome all.

First, some phonemes exist in English but completely absent from the learners’ mother tongue (Arabic). For instance, the /v/ sound is not there in Arabic, so some learners replace it with the /f/ sound which exists in both languages. Accordingly, they pronounce a word like video as fideo. Another example is the /p/ sound which is absent from Arabic; as a result, some learners pronounce a word like people as beoble, using the /b/ sound instead because it is there in Arabic.

Second, some phonemes exist in English and Arabic, but they are pronounced only in modern standard Arabic (MSA) not in the Egyptian

vernacular. Because the learners are not used to pronouncing them in their vernacular, they do not pronounce them in English too. To illustrate, /ʔ / and /ʕ / are present in MSA but not in the Egyptian vernacular; therefore, the Egyptians use the following sounds instead in their everyday language: /s/ and /z/, and consequently they do the same when pronouncing English words containing the /ʔ / and /ʕ / phonemes like think pronounced as sink and this as zis. This could result in misunderstanding when the learners speak to their teacher or native speakers of English; this is obvious in the example word think above. Hence, they have to exert much effort to overcome such a pronunciation problem. Last but not least, there are no consonant clusters in Arabic; a consonant is immediately followed by a vowel or vice versa, whereas in English a syllable can start with a consonant cluster up to three phonemes as in the word spring.

Therefore, many learners tend to insert a vowel between each two consonants to make it easy for them to pronounce the word as follows: sipiring or espiring. To sum up, Egyptian learners of English as a second or foreign language face a number of pronunciation problems that result from the gap between the English orthography and pronunciation as well as the differences between the Arabic and English phonetic alphabets. In order for the learners to get over such problems, they need to be aware of such discrepancies in the first place and this is the teacher's role, and they have to take a constant English pronunciation practice.