The Perceptual Assimilation of American-English Monophthongs by Palestinian-Arabic EFL learners

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Abstract:
This research examines American English vowel perception by Palestinian-Arabic (PA) high-school learners of English in a formal classroom setting (i.e., they learned English as a foreign language for 12 years in school while living Palestine) in order to identify (and predict) areas of difficulty in the perception of the American English (AE) vowel sounds so that teaching (materials) can address such issues rather than spending time on sounds that do not constitute a problem. According to the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM), learning problems are predicted when two L2 phonemes are perceived as good tokens of a Single Category in the L1 (SC scenario) (Best, 1995).

In this research, 40 participants (20 male) PA high-school listeners performed a perceptual assimilation task for the AE pure vowels. In a glottal-alveolar /hVd/ carrier monosyllable uttered by two male native speakers of American English (four tokens per vowel), PA participants examined how the 11 AE vowels /æ, ɑ, e, ɛ, i, ɪ, o, ɔ, u, ʊ, ʌ/ (Yavaş, 2011) set against the 6 PA (3 long-short pairs of vowels distinguished by duration) /i, i:, a, a:, u, u:/ (Thelwall 1990) and (Versteegh, et al., 2006) and then rated their goodness on a 5-point scale. Stimulus presentation and data collection were done by a Praat MFC script (Boersma & Weenink, 2020).

The results revealed that the non-native listeners focused on the duration of the vowel to distinguish their perception of the AE vowels, i.e. the assimilation of L2 vowels to their L1 categories was temporally associated. Seven SC contrasts were identified i.e., heed-hayed /i:-e:/, hid-head /i:-e/, hud-hood /ʌ-ʊ/, hod-hawed /ɑ:-ɔ:/, hawed-who’d /ɔ:-u:/, and hoed-who’d /o:-u:/.

Moreover, a Category Goodness (CG, intermediate learning difficulty predicted) problem was identified for the had-hod /æ:-ɑ:/ contrast. Therefore, we can conclude that contrasting (pairs of) vowels related to duration distinctions was easier than contrasting vowels that involve height and tongue advancement distinctions. Generally, the perception of English vowels by PA high-school learners of English conformed PAM's predictions knowing that participants studied EFL for 12 academic years but focusing on listening and speaking is scarce (Amara,2003) and (Yamchi, 2006).

Keywords: Palestinian Arabic, EFL, Vowel Perception, PAM-test.
References


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Arabic and English have different phonetic and phonological vowel systems in terms of the number of vowels and their acoustic realizations. In this study, stimuli of Modern Standard Arabic elicited from subjects of Palestinian descent whereas English stimuli is collected from speakers of Midwestern American English. In general, Arabic is a 6-vowel system consisting of /iː uː aː/ whereas English is a 12-vowel system consisting of /iː Eː Eʊ oʊ Eʃ ðæ/ of course, excluding diphthongs in both systems. The theoretical framework of the Perceptual Assimilation Model (PAM) (Best et al. 1988; 2001) is another attempt to account for the acquisition of non-native speech sounds. This model incorporates the principles of phonological theory (Best et al. The research aims at investigating Errors Committed by Palestinian University English Language Students in Pronouncing English Vowels (monophthongs and diphthongs). 85 4.4.4 Palestinian EFL learners make pronunciation errors due to intra lingual difficulties. Arabic and English vary in their linguistic systems for they belong to two different families the thing that leads each language to use different language components: phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics (Na'ama, 2011). Auditory Phonetics is that part of phonetics which investigates the perceptual reaction to speech sounds, as received by ear, auditory nerve and brain. Australian English (AuE) is a non-rhotic variety of English spoken by most native-born Australians. Phonologically, it is one of the most regionally homogeneous language varieties in the world. As with most dialects of English, it is distinguished primarily by its vowel phonology. The Australian English vowels /ɪ/, /e/ and /e/ are noticeably closer (pronounced with a higher tongue position) than their contemporary Received Pronunciation equivalents. English Vowel Discrimination and Assimilation. by Chinese-Speaking Learners of English Yi-hsiu Lai National University of Kaohsiung The tense-lax vowel contrast, which is present in English but not in Mandarin, has been extensively studied in the interlanguage phonology for Chinese-speaking learners of English. Much research has been dedicated to this language production, but few studies focus on L2 learners discriminatory and assimilatory patterns of English vowels. Besides, PAM has been empirically supported in several studies on the perceptual assimilation of L2 segments by Japanese speakers (Aoyama 2003, Best, McRoberts, and Goodell 2001, Guion, Flege, Akahane-Yamada, 161. 36.2 (July 2010). Even to non-native speakers of the English language it is in most cases an easy task to differentiate between British and American native speakers by listening to their pronunciation. In this term paper the most characteristic phonological features of American English will be named and explained and an overview of the variety of dialects within the United States will be provided. This can be done best by using British Standard English â€” also known as Received Pronunciation (RP) â€” as reference accent and pointing out the differences to American English. 2. General American. However, it is hard to work with the term American English when doing a phonological analysis of American speech since it covers a broad spectrum of different dialects.