
Difficulties Faced by Iraqi Second Year Students in Learning Weak Forms

Instructor : Tamara Adil Mekki
College of Education for Human Sciences
Ibn Rushd –University of Baghdad

taraadil78@gmail.com

Asst. Instructor :Sammerah Mohsin Rawdhan
The Open Educational College –Baghdad

sm003308@gmail.com

Abstract

The current study aims at investigating difficulties encountered by Iraqi second year students in learning weak forms .Thus, the descriptive analytical approach has been adopted as well as three tools have been used for gathering data relating to the study, particularly a questionnaire production and recognition tests to second Year students of English at university of Baghdad-college of languages, department of English. The Iraqi second year students have difficulty in Learn weak forms due to the fact of intelligibility, syllables, and stress .Besides, the undergraduates students are unable to determine the number of syllables and they are unable to distinguish between the various words classes. Finally ,they lack stress placement and vowels reduction.

Keywords: weak forms ,descriptive analytic approach, production and recognition tests

1. Introduction

The current section is concerned with presentation of statement of the problem, aims of the study, questions of the study, hypotheses of the study, significance of the study, and limits of the study.

2. Statement of the Problem

The present study investigates the difficulties that faced second year students of English in learning weak forms because Iraqi second year students suffer a lot in term of using and transcribing weak forms in sentences .

3. Aims of the Study

- 1- Investigate Iraqi second year student performance in the area of English weak forms .
- 2- Try to find solutions to help students gain much more knowledge about syllables , stress so that they can improve their pronunciation
- 3- Help students to be able to recognize when and how to use weak forms

4. Questions of the Study

The study tries to answer the following questions :-

- 1- To what extents are second year students of English get confused in using and transcribing weak forms
- 2- To what extents are second year students of English exposed to drill and exercise on using and transcribing weak forms .

5. Hypotheses

The study tries to test the following hypotheses :-

- 1- Second year students of English get confused when they count syllables mark stress and transcribe weak forms
- 2- Second year students of English are exposed to drill and exercise on syllables , stress and weak forms

6. Significance

The main significance of the study is its attempt to investigate the main difficulties that Iraqi second year students of English face in learning weak forms . moreover , the study will help second year students to avoid the difficulties that ----- student , learning of weak forms

7. Limits of the Study

The study is limited to investigate the difficulties that encounter second year student of English in learning weak forms . the main problems include the lack of using and showing stress marking syllables and transcribing weak forms . the sample was selected from second year students of English at university of Baghdad -College of Education for Human Sciences –Ibn Rushd. The ages of students range from (18 – 47) for the academic year (2018-2019) .Three tools were used to fulfill the aim of the study , one questionnaire production and recognition tests .

8. Procedures

On conducting the study the following procedures will be followed:

- 1- Reviewing literature related to weak forms learning.
- 2- Designing the tools of the study.
- 3-Applying a descriptive analytical approach in collecting and analyzing the data.
- 4-using tables and diagrams to show frequencies and percentages .

9. Related Literature

9.1 The Fields of Phonetics and Phonology

At first , the study of pronunciation consists of two fields ,namely phonetics and phonology . on the one hand , phonetics refers to the study of speech sounds that deals with the anatomical , neurological and physiological bases of speech as well as the movements of the speech organs in producing sounds . Moreover, it focuses on the nature and acoustics of the sounds waves which

transmit speech together with how speech is received by the ears and brain (Ladefoged ,2000,320). On the other hand , phonology is concerned with how people interpret and systematize sounds .It also deals with the system and pattern of the sounds which are found within particular language (Kelly .2000. 11) .

9.2 The Field of English Phonetics : An Overview

According to Crystal (2003:349) phonetics is that science which deals with the features of human sounds together with their description, classification and transcription .Besides, phonetics comprises three major branches ,namely , articulatory phonetics that is concerned with the study of human sounds in terms of the mechanisms of their production by the human organs .The second branch is acoustic phonetics that attempts to describe the physical properties of the stream of sounds that the speaker produces in his speech .Moreover, it studies the physical sound waves which are produced when people talk .Furthermore, the main characteristics of such waves are frequency , amplitude and intensity .The third branch is auditory phonetics which deals with sound perception that refers to the hearing of sounds by listeners .To sum up , phonetics is the study of speech sounds that tries to give a purely acoustic or physiological delineation of sounds as well as it tells us how sounds are made , transmitted and perceived by people.

Phonetic categories are generally defined using terms which have their origins in other subjects, such as anatomy, physiology and acoustics, consonant sounds, for example, are described with reference to anatomical place of articulation (as in dental, palatal, etc.), or to their physical structure (the frequency and amplitude characteristics of the sound waves). Because these methods of analysis are equally valid for all human speech sounds, regardless of the language or speaker, the subject is often referred to as general phonetics. This term also reflects the aim of the phonetician to discover universal principles governing the nature and use of speech sounds. Experimental phonetics is another term which reflects the general nature of this ‘pure’ scientific endeavour(*ibid.*).

Work in phonetics can, accordingly, be classified into two broad types:

a-general studies of the articulation, acoustics or perception of speech, and

b-studies of the phonetic properties of specific language. In this latter sense , it is evident that a further dimension will be required, in order to study how the sounds are used within the pronunciation system of a language. This ‘functional’ approach to phonetics is usually carried on under the heading of phonology. However, in so far as phoneticians have a specific interest in the study of individual

(groups of) languages or dialects, it might then be argued that phonetics is a branch of linguistics (*ibid.*).

10. Weak forms of the English Word

The Weak form of a word , as against to strong ones, is one of two possible pronunciations for a word, in the context of connected speech, the other being strong. The weak form is that which is the result of a word being unstressed, as in the normal pronunciation of of in cup of tea, and in most other grammatical words. Several words in English have more than one weak form, e.g. and [send] can be [and], [ən], [n], etc. The notion is also applied to syntactically conditioned forms, such as my (weak) v. mine (strong) (Richards and Schmidt , 2002 : 518).

11. The Syllables : Definition and Structure

The syllables is defined as the smallest possible unit of speech . every utterance consists of at least one syllable . it is important to identify speech as being composed of vowels and consonants and these segments can be observed by aspect of syllables . (Bull,2002,134) .Roach (2002:76)states that the syllable is important unit both in phonetics and phonology. phonetically speaking the air pressure is noticeable in the nucleus, the hearer may distinguish the central part of a syllables because it has more prominence than the surrounding sounds. phonologically speaking a syllable is defined as the way in which vowels and consonants combine to form various sequences. similarly ,Crystal (2003:164)defines the syllable as ((an element that act as consonant combination)). additionally Laver(2001 : 50) states that a syllable is described as a group of one or more sounds with a peak or nucleus .

11.1 The structure of English syllables

Syllables can be divided into onset and Rhyme within the rhyme there is the nucleus peak and coda (Roachy 2002:123) Ladefogged (2000:340)defines an onset as the beginning sound of a syllable .onset are always consonants in English.the nucleus is always vowel.the onset may consist of two consonant this constitute what is called a consonant cluster

12. Stress

Stress is the relative force that is placed on strong syllables. According to Trask (1996:122) ,stress is a certain type of prominence which is present upon certain syllables .Kenworthy (2000:51),on the other hand ,holds that stress is the perceived prominence of one more syllables elements over other in a word .thus ,stressed syllables can be described as having loudness, high pitch ,and vowel quality.

12.1 Types of stress

English stress consists of two major types : word stress and sentence stress . on other hand word stress is the term given to the

accent or emphasis placed on a specific syllable of a word if this word is spoken or written on isolation . consider the following examples ,Apply/ a: pl ai / Beautiful /b'ju:tif'ʌl/ (Crystal ,2003:213)

The other type of stress is sentence stress which refers to the emphasis placed on certain words within a sentence . thus , sentence stress is generally determined by whether a word is morphologically simple , compound or complex as well as it is determined by the grammatical category of a word whether the word is noun ,verb , adjective or adverb . moreover , it is determined by the number of syllables each word by the number of syllables each word has and the phonological structure of those syllables (Kelly , 2002: 131) consider the following examples

What do you think / w'ɒt dəju ə': ŋk/

13. Weak Forms of the English Syllable

Weak forms are syllables sounds that become unstressed in connected speech and are often pronounced as a schwa . Functional words such as articles , pronouns , auxiliaries prepositions and conjunctions are pronounced in their weak forms since they do not carry the main content (Finch,2004:23).

Collins and Mees (2003:139) on the other hand , state that weak forms belong to the closed class category of words that are called ((functional words)) which do not have a dictionary meaning the way content words have phonologically speaking ,functional words undergo a set of modifications in natural speech . nearly all functional words have two pronunciation forms a weak form and a strong one . Consider the following examples :

Where are you from / from/ I am from Iraq /frəm/

Table (1)

Words included in the study (adopted from Kelly ,2000 : 223)

Word class	Functional forms	Weak forms	Examples
Articles	The	ðə	Please , shut the door !
Pronouns	You	j ə	How do you do ?
	we	wi	How did we get there
	He	hɪ	Where does he work
Auxiliaries	Must	M əS M əST	You must try harder He must eat more
	Are	ə ər	Why am I here ? Here are the plates
	do	d ə du	Why do they like it ? Why do all the cars stop
Conjunctions	And	ən n·	You can come and see he eats fish and chips
	but	b ət	It is good but expensive
	That	ðət	I think that it is good to play football

14. Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to test 2nd year students' abilities to recognize weak and strong forms. the study is made up of three parts .the first part is questionnaire designed to find out the students information about the basic of using weak forms. the second part is a recognition test designed to measure students perception knowledge and their cognitive abilities in recognizing weak forms . The third part is production test designed measure students' performance in producing information about the basic of using weak forms .

14.1 Participants

Our informants in this study include (40) Iraqi undergraduate students of the departments of English college of languages university of Baghdad. the participants range from 18 to 47 years old. they are selected randomly from both morning and evening study for the academic year (2018-2019).

14.2 Tools

The major tools have been used in the current study, a questionnaire, a recognition and production test .the students have been given the questionnaire- have been required to answer in the classroom in a pointed of 20 minutes . Then they have given a recognition and a production test .

14.3 Data Analysis and Discussion

The data will be analyzed focusing on the responses received for each test administered to the participants .

15. Analysis of Recognition test

The following section consist of five multiple choice questions arranged from the most general to the more specific ones . these questions deals with use manner and the frequency of the use of the weak forms . each question will be analyzed separately

Question 1 : *The weak forms of functional words are found in :*

a-informal speech :

.b-Formal speech .

c-in both (a)and (b)situation.

d-in none of them .

Results show that (50)percent of the students answer that weak forms are found in both informal and formal speech and 27 percent of them believe that weak forms are used only in informal speech as shown table (2) below :

Table (2)

Answers	a	b	c	d
Numbers	8	6	22	4
Percentage	27.78%	11.11%	50%	5.56%

while 11 percent of them believe that weak forms are found in formal style the correct answers is C .

Question2 : *The weak form of a functional word is used when :*

- a-the functional word is quoted**
- b- the functional word is found in isolation.**
- c-in both (a) and (b) situation.**
- d- in none of them .**

Results reveal that the only five students (11,11) have found the correct answer and all others answers are incorrect as revealed in table (3):

Table (3)

Answers	a	b	c	d
Numbers	9	8	20	5
Percentage	22,22	16.22	50%	11.11%

Question 3 : *Function words are usually pronounced strongly if :*

- a- They do not receive sentence stress .**
- b- They occur in sentence final position .**
- c- In both (a)and (b) situation .**
- d- In none of them .**

The answers show that only 44.44%of the students have answered correctly and other answers are incorrect as described in table (4) :

Table (4)

Answers	a	b	c	d
Numbers	8	16	12	04
Percentage	16.67%	44.44%	33.33%	6.56%

Question 4 : *In which situation the word ((that)) pronounced strongly :*

- a-when it is used in relative clause**
- b-when it is used in demonstrative pronouns.**
- c-in both (a) and(b)**
- d-in none of them**

Only 33.33%of the students found the correct answer and others answers are incorrect as shown in table (5) below :

Table (5)

Answers	a	b	c	d
Numbers	6	12	10	12
Percentage	5.65%	33.33%	27.78%	33.33%

Question 5 : *Which of the following functional words is regularly stressed :*

- a. because .
- b. when .
- c. for .
- d. any .

Only 8 students out of 40 have answered correctly 22.22% while others have not found the correct answer as revealed in table (6) below :

Table (5)

Answers	a	b	c	d
Numbers	16	9	6	9
Percentage	44.00%	22.22%	12.8%	22.22%

16. Analysis of the Production Test.

The following section consists of two sub-sections .the first one students are required to give a brief summary of the significance of learning weak forms .in the second ,students are required to transcribe five different sentences by using the rules of weak forms.

what is the significance of learning weak forms?

- Transcribe the following sentences using weak forms of the functional words.

1- the student eat fish and chips.

2-you must do it .

3- he is but a fool .

4-that is my car .

5-we are going to study English

In the first sentence sub-section, the results show that the students answers reveal that they give a broad information about the concept of weak forms .thus ,27%of students have given different information and 27%of them have been given little information about the importance of weak forms.11%have given unrelated information and finally 13%have given something related to the subject.

In the second –subsection , results show that student find no difficulty in transcribing articles (the ,a) nearly 61% of them have transcribed then correctly . 61% have transcribed pronouns correctly (you ,he ,it) . however student find difficulty and transcribing auxiliary verbs (must ,are) in which 17% only have transcribed them correctly . 28% only have transcribed conjunctions correctly . according the main difficulty students face while transcribing weak forms lies in the functional words (auxiliary and conjunction) as shown in table 1:

Table (7)

Functional words		he	nd	ou	ust	t	e	s		hat	y	e	re	o
Correct answers	Number	10	5	15	3	11	5	11	11	5	6	6	4	3
	percentage	56	28	56	17	61	28	61	61	28	33	33	22	17
Wrong answers	Number	8	13	8	15	7	13	7	7	13	12	1	14	15
	percentage	44	73	44	83	39	72	39	39	72	66	66	78	83
		23	Students total answers for each functional word											

Table 7 shows that the majority of students have shown poor performance in transcribing functional words . The analysis of the students Papers reveal that they have a serine lack of information about transcribing weak forms in addition to the use of phonemic symbols.

17. Findings

Based on the results obtained , the researcher comes up with the following results:

- 1-over 50% of students face difficulties of intelligibility.
- 2-over 30% find difficulties in outing syllables and naming stress .3-over 20% of students have difficulties when learning sentences stress.
- 4-over 10% of students have difficulties in learning words stress.
- 5-40% of experts believe that interlinguas factors.
- 6- 30% of experts believed that psychological factors play key role in these difficulties .
- 7- 20% of experts believe that age ,personality and lack of reliable dictionaries are at least remain reasons behind the difficulties

18. Conclusions

Based on the findings the following conclusions point have been come up with.

- 1- Iraqi second year students have difficulties in learning weak and strong forms due to the intelligibility syllables sentences stress and word stress.
- 2- the other difficulty facing Iraqi second year student is that students face difficulty when producing stress in writing.
- 3- student are unable to distinguish between contents words and functional words .
- 4- they are unable to determine the number of syllables.
- 5- they are unable to distinguish between various words class ,nouns , verbs and adverbs .
- 6- they lack stress placement and vowel reductions

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Appendix (A)

Dear participants ,

Thanks you for your time is doing this question . I would like to inform that this is not a test . the results will be used for the purpose of my research and not to evaluate your knowledge of the English language your answers will be completely anonymous please ,read the instructions very well and answer every question before you submit your answers .

Thank you for your cooperation and participant

Participant s name =

Name of the college =

This questionnaire consists of three parts

PART ONE

Demographic information

What is your gender male female

What is your age group 18-26 27-33 34-40 41-47

What is your type of study morning evening

What is your educational level

high school bachelors master D.Ph

Appendix (B)**PART TWO (Recognition test)**

Each of the following questions circle the letter of the correct answer.

1- the weak forms of functional words are used in

- . a-informal speech
- .b-semi -formal speech.
- c-formal speech.d-all of them .

2- the weak form of a functional words is used when

- .a-the functional word is quoted .
- b-the functional word is used in isolation.
- c- in both (a)and (b) situation.
- d- in none of them .

3- Functional words are usually pronounced strongly if :

- a-they don't receive gentle stress.
- b-they occurs in sentence final position.
- c- none of them .
- d- if the preceding word is stressed

4-in which situation the word (that) pronounced weakly.

- a- when it is used in a relative Clause .
- b- when it is used as a demonstrative.
- c- in both (a)and (b) .
- d -in none of them .

5- which of the following functional words is regularly stressed

- .a- because.
- b-when .
- c-for .
- d-any

PART THREE**Production test**

Section One : what is the significance of learning strong and weak forms ?

Section two : transcribe the following sentences using weak forms of the functional words .

1- the students eats fish and chips

2- you must do it .

3- he is but a fool .

4- that is my car

4- we are going to study English

الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلبة الكلية دارسي
اللغة الانجليزية لغة أجنبية في تعلم الصيغ الضعيفة

م. تمارة عادل مكي أ.م. سمارة محسن رضوان

جامعة بغداد/ كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية - ابن رشد

المستخلص

تهدف الدراسة الحالية الى استقصاء الصعوبات التي يواجهها طلبة المرحلة الثانية لطلبة الكلية من العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية عند تعلم الصيغ الصوتية الضعيفة. لذا تم تبني المنهج الوصفي التحليلي واعتماد ثلاثة أدوات من أجل جمع البيانات وعلى وجه الخصوص استبانة واختبارات تمييز وأنتاج لأجل تطبيقها على عينة الدراسة والتي تشمل طلبة قسم اللغة الإنكليزية للمرحلة الثانية في كلية اللغات والبالغة (٨٠) طالب تم تقسيمهم الى (٨٠) طالب كعينة أنتاج و(٤٠) طالب كعينة تمييز. أظهرت النتائج بان لدى طلبة المرحلة الثانية لطلبة الكلية من العراقيين دارسي اللغة الإنكليزية لغة أجنبية صعوبة لتعلم الصيغ الضعيفة والتي يمكن عزوها الى صعوبة في الفهم او الإدراك للمقاطع الصوتية والنبرة. وعلاوة على ذلك ان خريجي اللغة الأتكليزية ليس لهم القدرة على تحديد عدد المقاطع ولا على التمييز ما بين فئات الكلمة المختلفة وينقصهم تحديد موضع النبرة وتخفيف صوت العلة.

الكلمات المفتاحية (الدالة): الصيغ الضعيفة، المنهج الوصفي التحليلي، اختبارات تمييز ونتاج.