Errors in English Pronunciation among Arabic Speakers
Errors in English Pronunciation among Arabic Speakers:

Analysis and Remedies

By
Mohamed Fathy Khalifa
I dedicate this book to my father, Fathy Khalifa, my mother Amina Ilshabrawy, my wife Dr Eman Abdelwahed and children Yasmin, Khalid, Maryam, Ammar and Reem.
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ABSTRACT

This study is a contrastive analysis of Arabs’ errors in English pronunciation regarding segmentals-consonants, consonant clusters and vowels-and suprasegmentals-main word stress. It also explains the main interlingual reasons behind these errors and presents some teaching suggestions for surmounting them. This research has two hypotheses. First, the subjects substitute their own Arabic sounds (i.e. L1 negative transfer) for the unfamiliar English ones, producing incorrect English sounds. Second, the subjects apply Arabic main word stress rules (i.e. L1 negative transfer) instead of English ones, producing incorrect English stress patterns. These hypotheses were confirmed, albeit to different degrees due to sounds and stress patterns (word class), as shown in the results.

Forty five Arab subjects, all of whom speak English as a foreign language, took part in this study: fifteen Saudi Arabians, fifteen Egyptians and fifteen Libyans. The educational setting for this research was the Saudi School in Sheffield, England where I worked as a teacher of English to Arab students.

This research was based on analysing recorded data collected through elicitation: ‘reading aloud’ and ‘guided composition’. The subjects were asked to record their reading of lists of English words and description of a picture. All the recordings were transcribed and tables showing correct and incorrect pronunciation were drawn up.

The subjects found difficulty in pronouncing some English consonants such as /p/, /v/, /ŋ/, dark /ɻ/, syllabic consonants and consonant doubling. They also had trouble with two-element clusters beginning with /p/, /s/, /g/, /o/, consonant + /j/, /dw/ and all three-element clusters. In addition, they inserted a vowel between the elements of medial and final clusters. Regarding vowels, the subjects confused most of the English vowels and diphthongs with each other or substituted Arabic vowels for English ones. Finally, they stressed the last syllable of English words ending in V:, V:C and VCC and the first syllable of words having the syllabic pattern CVCCVCV("C).
It is hoped that this study will be of interest and help to Arabs who are interested in learning and teaching English as a foreign language.
MAIN ABBREVIATIONS AND SYMBOLS USED
IN THIS STUDY

C  Consonant
CA  Contrastive Analysis
Cd  Coda
CLA Classical Arabic
EA  Error Analysis
H  Heavy Syllable
IPA International Phonetic Alphabet
IRAL International Review of Applied Linguistics
L  Light Syllable
L1 First Language
L2 Second Language
MSA Modern Standard Arabic
MT Mother Tongue
N  Nucleus
O  Onset
R  Rime
RP Received Pronunciation
SL Second Language / Source Language
SLA Second Language Acquisition
SPE The Sound Pattern of English
TEFL Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TL Target Language
V  Vowel
V: Long vowel
v.ed Voiced sound
v.less Voiceless sound
vd. Voiced sound
vl. Voiceless sound

σ Syllable
* Erroneous form follows
[?] Glottal Stop
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Research Area and Definition of Terminology

I take it you already know
Of tough and bough and cough and dough?
Others may stumble but not you
On hiccuphough, thorough, lough and through.
Well done! And now you wish, perhaps,
To learn of less familiar traps?
Beware of heard, a dreadful word,
That looks like beard and sounds like bird.
And dead: it’s said like bed, not bead –
For goodness sake don’t call it ‘deed’
Watch out for meat and great and threat
(They rhyme with suite and straight and debt)

(T.S.W. 1970)

Correct pronunciation is a means of achieving a confident grasp of the spoken language, as suggested by Jones (1967), O’Connor (1973), Roach (1983) and Kenworthy (1987). This study is an error analysis of English pronunciation errors among Arabs. It is an attempt to pinpoint the phonological problems that may be encountered by Arabs as non-native speakers of English regarding segmentals (consonants and vowels) and suprasegmentals (main word stress). It also studies the main reasons behind these errors and presents some teaching suggestions for surmounting them. This study does not deal with other suprasegmentals: secondary stress, sentence stress, intonation or rhythm.

There are some phonetic problems standing in the way of Arabs as non-native speakers of English (Heliel, 1972). First, English spelling is not phonetic due to the mismatch between orthography and pronunciation in many words. Second, many English sounds and stress rules do not occur in learner’s first language (Lado, 1957; Smith, 1987). The main difficulties in learning to speak a second or foreign language correctly are expressed by Jones (1967, 2), as follows:
Difficulty No. 1. He must learn to recognise readily and with certainty the various speech sounds occurring in the language, when he hears them pronounced; he must moreover learn to remember the acoustic qualities of those sounds.

Difficulty No. 2. He must learn to make the foreign sounds with his own organs of speech.

Difficulty No. 3. He must learn to use those sounds in their proper places in connected speech.

Difficulty No. 4. He must learn the proper usage in the matter of the ‘sound attributes’ or ‘prosodies’ as they are often called (especially length, stress and voice-pitch).

Difficulty No. 5. He must learn to catenate sounds, i.e. to join each sound of a sequence on to the next, and to pronounce the complete sequence rapidly and without stumbling.

The student, who wishes to become proficient in the written as well as the spoken language, has an additional difficulty, which we may call Difficulty No. 6. He has to learn the shapes of the conventional letters and the relations between the conventional orthography and the pronunciation.

The present study tries to test the above six difficulties mentioned by Jones in general and nos. 2 and 4 in particular. Difficulty nos. 2, 4, 5 and 6 are tested directly through asking the subjects to pronounce some lists of words and sentences. The aim is to check their production of English sounds, stress placement, pronunciation of consonant clusters and recognition of the relationship between orthography and pronunciation. In addition, difficulty nos. 1 and 3 are tested indirectly through reading lists of words and describing a picture. This is to check the Arab learners’ recognition of English sounds and their proper use of these sounds in connected speech.

Word stress location differs greatly from one language to another (Hayes, 1995). Some languages have ‘fixed’ stress, for example, in Finnish stress falls on the first syllable of the word, in Polish on the next to the last syllable and in French on the last (Ladefoged, 1993). Others, such as English, have ‘free’, or ‘movable’ stress, so that when a speaker of any of the aforementioned languages or Arabic learns English, mastering the position of stress in the word is a matter of some difficulty (Weinreich, 1953; James, 1980; Smith, 1987).
Introduction

When Arabs speak a foreign language in general and English in particular, they tend to pronounce the sounds and place the stress according to the rules of their own language, Arabic (Heliel, 1972; Broselow, 1983, 1984). Arabs learning English as a foreign language have not normally had early acquisition of the sounds and stress system of this language. The learning starts after the person has already developed a set of linguistic habits of his own native language. These linguistic habits may come into conflict with the habits of the new language. The Arab learners, therefore, have to acquire the new habits and at the same time try to avoid interference from the old habits. In particular, they need to learn how to stress the English words, since knowing the correct stress placement is part and parcel of what we mean when we say that a person has command of English (Kingdon, 1958).

The stress rules of English are more complicated than those of many other languages (Halle and Vergnaud, 1987; Hayes, 1995; Kager, 1995 and many others). Indeed, the English and Arabic stress patterns are sufficiently different to create difficulty for Arab learners, due to the seemingly unpredictable nature of English in comparison with the relatively straightforward Arabic stress placement rules. The Arab learners, therefore, have to learn the stress pattern of each English word, in the face of a lot of Arabic interference.

The purpose of this study is to analyse interlingual errors (due to L1 interference) in English sounds and main word stress that may be encountered by Arabs as non-native speakers of English. Furthermore, it sheds light on the interlingual reasons behind these errors and suggests some remedial work in the form of teaching. This will hopefully help Arabs to overcome the errors which stand in the way to their linguistic proficiency. This study begins with a brief definition of terms, followed by aims and justification of the study, linguistic background, methodology, theories of second language (L2) acquisition and comparison of English and Arabic sounds and main word stress rules. The results are discussed, the interlingual reasons behind the errors are explained and finally some teaching suggestions are presented.

1.1.1 Mistake and Error

Corder (1967) makes a distinction between mistake and error. A mistake is a random performance slip caused by fatigue, excitement, etc., and therefore can be readily self-corrected. An error is a systematic deviation made by learners who have not yet mastered the rules of the second
language (L2). Richards (1971) notices two types of error: interlingual and intralingual errors, as follows.

- **Interlingual** errors are those which second language (L2) learners may commit due to first language interference.
- **Intralingual** errors are those committed by L2 learners, regardless of their first language.

### 1.1.2 Contrastive Analysis (CA)

Crystal (1997, 90) defines contrastive analysis (CA), as follows.

(2) The phrase contrastive analysis (CA) identifies a general approach to the investigation of language, particularly as carried out in certain areas of APPLIED LINGUISTICS, such as foreign-language teaching and translation. In a contrastive analysis of two languages, the points of STRUCTURAL difference are identified, and these are then studied as areas of potential difficulty (INTERFERENCE or ‘negative transfer’) in foreign-language learning.

Here the following two points can be noticed:

- The present contrastive analysis is between British English (Received Pronunciation, RP) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). RP is the accent chosen for contrast for its richness in teaching materials in the Arab countries.
- Mother tongue interference is not the only cause of error. Faulty initial teaching, misconceptions, simplification, hypercorrection, false concepts and overgeneralisations also cause errors (James, 1980).

### 1.1.3 Error Analysis (EA)

Crystal (1997, 139) defines error analysis (EA), as follows.

(3) In language learning and teaching, error analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics.

Following Crystal’s definition, the present study includes the three stages of EA identification, classification, and interpretation of the learners’ errors. It also provides some teaching suggestions for surmounting them.
Error analysis is a complex matter, and not all errors are internal to the language system (Broselow, 1984). They may be due to external factors such as inadequate teaching or poorly prepared materials (Selinker, 1972). Some errors may even be tolerated by teachers in pursuit of greater fluency on the part of learners.

1.1.4 Interference and Interlanguage

Interference, also called negative transfer, refers to the errors a speaker introduces into one language as a result of contact with another (Trask, 1996). Most commonly these errors arise as a result of native tongue interference. Broselow (1984, 254) points out that ‘it is clear that interference is one factor in accounting for learners’ errors’.

The language system that the learner constructs out of the linguistic input to which he has been exposed has been referred to as an ‘idiosyncratic dialect’ (Corder, 1971), ‘an approximative system’ (Nemser, 1971) and an ‘interlanguage’ (Selinker, 1972). While these three terms differ somewhat in their emphases, it is actually ‘interlanguage’ that has entered common parlance.

1.1.5 Stress

Phonetic stress refers to the extra degree of force used in pronouncing a particular word or syllable (Crystal, 1997). Stressed syllables are more prominent than unstressed ones (Archibald, 1998, Hammond, 1999), e.g. the first syllable in ‘PHOtograph’, the second in ‘phoTOgrapher’ and the third in ‘photoGRAphic’ are more prominent than the others. This prominence is usually achieved by an increase in the LOUDNESS of the stressed syllable, but can also be due to an increase in LENGTH or PITCH or a combination of all the three (Trask, 1996, Archibald, 1998). O’Connor (1973, 194) defines stress, as follows.

(4) Stress is the name given to the stronger muscular effort, both respiratory and articulatory, which we feel in connection with some syllables as opposed to others in English and other languages. For instance, August has more effort on the first than the second syllable, we hit it harder; but august has the greater effort on the second syllable.

This research is an error analysis of Arabs’ interlingual errors in English main word stress and sounds and the reasons behind these errors. It also
presents some teaching suggestions for overcoming them. In addition, it does not deal with English secondary word stress.

1.2 Aims and Justification of the Study

This section explains the main aim of this research. It also points out the importance of studying the errors made by Arabs in English sounds and main word stress and the reasons behind them.

1.2.1 Aims of the Study

Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;
He who would search for pearls must dive below.
(John Dryden)

The main aim of this study is to analyse the specific areas and types of errors in English pronunciation among Arabic speakers in the light of a short contrastive study of English and Arabic sound systems and stress placement rules. It also sheds light on the main reasons for these errors and suggests some teaching recommendations for overcoming them. It includes three groups of Arab subjects: Egyptians, Saudi Arabians and Libyans.

Two groups of features of pronunciation are involved: segmentals and suprasegmentals. Segmentals refer to the basic inventory of distinctive sounds (consonants and vowels) and the way they combine to form a spoken language. Suprasegmentals are concerned with features above the level of the segment and include stress, rhythm and intonation. Only sounds and main word stress are analysed in this study.

1.2.2 Justification of the Study

The study of errors that L2 learners make can certainly provide vital clues as to their competence in the TL. (Harley, 1980, 4)

The primary aim of this CA is to focus on analysing Arabs’ errors in English pronunciation. Learners’ errors are invaluable to the study of the language-learning process. Errors are studied to enable us to infer the nature of the learner’s knowledge at that point in his learning career and discover what he still has to learn. By describing and classifying his errors, we build up a picture of the features of the language which are causing him learning problems. Error analysis thus provides a check on the predictions of bilingual comparisons and the strategies employed by
students learning another language. Corder (1981, 13) mentions that by studying a learner’s errors:

(5) We may be able to allow the learner’s innate strategies to dictate our practice and determine our syllabus; we may learn to adapt ourselves to his needs rather than impose upon him our preconceptions of how he ought to learn, what he ought to learn and when he ought to learn it.

Contrastive studies of the native language and the target language have been widely accepted by linguists as a sound basis for teaching a foreign language. Fries and Lado are among the advocates of these studies. Fries (1945, 5) expresses the importance of basing teaching material on a contrastive basis:

(6) …only with sound materials based upon an adequate descriptive analysis of both the language to be studied and the native language of the student (or with continued expert guidance of a trained linguist) can an adult make the maximum progress toward the satisfactory mastery of a foreign language.

The significance of this contrastive study is assessed in pinpointing the different types of pronunciation errors encountered by Arabs as non-native speakers of English.

### 1.2.3 Stakeholder Analysis

![Figure 1: Visual Representation of Stakeholder Analysis](image-url)
Chapter One

TEACHERS

Errors provide feedback and tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of teaching materials and his teaching techniques and show him what parts of the syllabus have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention.

ARAB LEARNERS

The findings of this research are clearly of interest to Arab learners because the making of errors can be regarded as a device used to learn. They can also reflect to them how far they have progressed and what remains to be learnt. Moreover, with careful preparation and avoidance of these errors, pronunciation can play an important role in supporting Arab learners’ overall communicative power.

LINGUISTS

Learners’ errors can be invaluable to both applied linguists and psycholinguists. For the applied linguist errors can shed light on how language is learnt or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. The psycholinguist predicts that the nature of the mother tongue will facilitate or make difficult the learning of certain aspects of an L2.

WRITERS AND PUBLISHERS

Analysing errors can provide writers and publishers with the necessary information for designing a remedial syllabus or programme of re-teaching dealing with the specific problems of Arabs in English pronunciation.

1.3 Background to the Study

This section provides the linguistic and theoretical background for this study. The linguistic background covers some information about the Arabic language and Arabic speakers of L2 English. The theoretical background section sheds light on the three theories of L2 acquisition which are used to analyse Arabic speakers’ errors in English sounds and main word stress. These theories are: Contrastive Analysis (CA) (Fries, 1945), Error Analysis (EA) (Corder, 1967) and Markedness Theory (Eckman, 1977).
1.3.1 Linguistic Background

The linguistic background covers the Arabic Language and dialect of the Study. There is, then, a section about the Arab learners of English and TEFL in the Arab schools which shows the obstacles that have led to the low standard of Arabs’ spoken English. Finally, it has two sections on English pronunciation problems faced by Arab learners, English stress patterns and effective communication.

1.3.1.1 The Arabic Language

Arabic is one of the world’s major languages, spoken in a broad belt extending from the Arabian Peninsula across the Fertile Crescent and on to the Atlantic Ocean. It is the mother tongue of some 280 million people (Watson, 2002). In addition, many millions of Muslims in other countries have some knowledge of Arabic because of its position as the language of Islam and of the Holy Qur’an (Mitchell, 1962). Arabic is the chief member of the Semitic family of languages (Tritton, 1943; Watson, 2011), which also includes Hebrew and Amharic, the main language of Ethiopia. In 1974, Arabic was made the sixth official language of the United Nations. The largest numbers of Arabic speakers are found in Egypt, Iraq, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Yemen and Algeria.

Great languages spring from great Empires, and Arabic is no exception. Until the seventh century AD, its use was confined to the Arabian Peninsula. But the language was carried far beyond its original borders through the spectacular Islamic conquests, and almost supplanted all the previous languages of Iraq, Syria, Egypt and North Africa. Further conquests in succeeding centuries temporarily spread the presence of Arabic as far as Afghanistan in the east and Spain in the west. Like the other Semitic languages, Arabic is written from right to left and its alphabet consists of twenty eight consonant letters, with vowel signs being optionally indicated by marks above or below the letters (Tritton, 1943; Mitchell, 1962). The Arabic alphabet is second only to the Roman alphabet in its use world-wide. Socio-linguistically, Arabic is noted for its diglossic situation (Mitchell, 1962), and phonetically for the use of sounds which involve the pharynx (notably the pharyngeal consonants). According to Watson (2002), apart from its great intrinsic interest, the importance of the Arabic language for phonological and morphological theory lies in its rich root-and-pattern morphology and its large set of guttural consonants.
There are three main types of Arabic – Classical Arabic (ClA), Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and local dialects (Mitchell, 1962). Classical Arabic was originally the dialect of Mecca, in what is now Saudi Arabia. MSA is an adapted form of ClA and is taught in schools throughout the Arab countries. It is the language of contemporary literature, journalism, broadcasting, public address (Mitchell, 1962), and in conversation between educated Arabs from different countries – it is the language of government and formal affairs. It differs very little from ClA in phonology, morphology or syntax. The main difference lies in the realm of lexicon. Spoken Arabic naturally varies from one country to another (Mitchell, 1962), but Classical Arabic has hardly changed since the seventh century. ClA has played a prominent role as a great unifying force in the development and standardisation of the language. Local dialects vary, and a Moroccan may have difficulty understanding an Iraqi, although they speak the same language.

1.3.1.2 Dialect of the Study

The dialect of this study is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) which is the standardised and literary variety of Arabic across the Middle East, North Africa and Horn of Africa. It is used in writing and in most formal speech throughout the Arab world to facilitate communication. Most Arabic speakers consider the two varieties to be two registers of one language, although the two registers can be referred to in Arabic. MSA is chosen to be the dialect of this study, since it is a standardized language and its spoken form is used as a lingua franca across the Arab world. British English (Received Pronunciation, RP) is the accent chosen for contrast for its richness in teaching materials in the Arab countries.

1.3.1.3 The Arab Learner of English

English is the lingua franca in many countries and it plays a prominent role in developing the world’s education and business. This global significance makes English receive special attention in the Arab countries. Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in many Arab countries is gaining increased importance due to the importance of English for business, transport, science and technology. Over the last few decades, the Arab learners have shown a keen interest in recognising the English language as a language of common usage in business and education. The preparation of the Arab learner varies from one Arab country to another. However, the learner spends six to eight years learning English. This should enable him to communicate fluently and efficiently. But, this is not
the case. Guided by my experience in teaching English to Arab students for twenty years, I noticed that there are many errors in their English pronunciation. This is due to many reasons such as:

(a) Most Arab countries consider English as a ‘school subject’ rather than a means of communication. In addition, English is taught through Arabic.
(b) Pronunciation is completely neglected as most teachers are neither phonetically trained nor in possession of the skill to teach spoken English. Thus, learners are eye-minded rather than ear-minded.
(c) Examinations test the student’s knowledge of facts about the language and his ability to memorise but not his ability to use and understand English.
(d) The lack of discussing pronunciation errors related to interference between Arabic and English.
(e) Arabic and English have different sound and orthography systems, syllable structures, stress patterns and different cultural background.

The obstacles depicted above, have led to a deterioration of the standard of Arabs’ spoken English. All Arab learners, therefore, should receive enough oral practice, as it is the key feature of mastering pronunciation.

1.3.1.4 TEFL in the Arab Schools

English is used as a foreign language in the Arab countries and is not spoken as a second language. Therefore, teaching English to Arab EFL learners has always been an exacting task. In early English teaching in the Arab schools, teachers used various classroom techniques: grammar-translation, reading methods and direct methods. Then most countries adopted the lingual approach, which proved to be desirable. Later on, the communicative approach was partially adopted by some Arab countries. However, many Arab EFL learners’ proficiency in English remains inadequate and below expectation. This is due to inadequate preparation of teachers, lack of motivation on the part of the learners, teacher centred methods and inadequate assessment techniques.

Some of the problems the EFL Arab teachers face are absence of listening and speaking tests, teaching method not being communicative, students’ attitude towards speaking and lack of necessary facilities. Arab EFL students also face main problems such as lack of linguistic knowledge, lack of motivation and confidence and excessive use of Arabic language.
1.3.1.5 English Pronunciation Problems and Arab Learners

A basic knowledge of phonetics is essential for any person who works with language. Language teachers, particularly, require both theoretical and practical phonetic knowledge to analyse their students’ pronunciation errors and to prepare suitable remedial measures. Similarly, language students need the same knowledge to monitor their own pronunciation. The following quotation throws more light on the importance of phonetics in the teaching of foreign languages. Malmberg (1963, 109) states that ‘the teaching of foreign languages is also a field in which phonetics has a very great practical importance. Anyone wishing to learn to pronounce a foreign language properly will first have to acquire the mastery of a large number of new articulatory habits. He must accustom himself to articulate the foreign sounds exactly as native speakers do in the language in question, and not to continue using habits particular to his native tongue’.

In his influential book ‘An Outline of English Phonetics’, Jones (1967) mentions that a person learning a foreign language does not normally have the opportunity of the early acquisition of the segmental and suprasegmental features of that language. As a result, an Arab person learning English will encounter some vowels and consonants which are unknown to him such as [p], [ŋ] and [ǝ] and some word stress rules which are different from Arabic ones. Parker and Graham (1994, 6) confirm this view by stating that ‘however, learners do not, of course, acquire the whole phonology of a foreign language evenly or, indeed, identically. Particular learners will demonstrate particular difficulties with particular sounds or features of pronunciation’.

Although there are not many teaching materials designed specifically for Arab learners, some researchers have carried out contrastive studies of English and Arabic. The weakness of these studies lies in the importance they give to the segmentals and the little attention given to the suprasegmentals. These analyses reinforce the tendency of both teacher and student to neglect the other equally important suprasegmental features. As a result, the students fail to understand and be understood by English people in spite of making English sounds quite well.

Two of these studies are related to this book:

(1) Raja Nasr’s ‘The Teaching of English to Arab Students’ (1963), is a contrastive study of Classical Arabic and English. Classical Arabic is not in everyday use and so this study is less useful than one based on Colloquial or Modern Standard Arabic.
(2) W.F. Stirling’s ‘An Introduction to English Phonetics for Arabic-speaking Students’ (1960) is a good guide for Arab learners to the pronunciation of English consonants and vowels. But stress is only mentioned briefly and consonant clusters and English rhythm are not mentioned at all.

To my mind, however useful the phoneme-oriented studies are, we must not think that teaching all the segmental sounds is equal to teaching the pronunciation of a language. The ability to use these sounds in connected speech is as important as the ability to make them in isolation.

Regarding Arabs’ pronunciation errors, three books are also related to this book:


This book identifies specific difficulties experienced by Arab students and explains them in sound linguistic terms. Based on actual students’ work, it explores and explains problems with pronunciation and sentence structure. In addition, it includes some practical teaching suggestions and examples which can help Arab learners to surmount these difficulties.

This book explains Arabs’ errors in English pronunciation in Part Two: The Sound System. It classifies these errors into two types: (a) sounds in isolation and (b) sounds in connected speech. Although the authors discuss the above errors and their causes, they do not explain clearly the effect of L1 interference.

(2) Swan and Smith (1987) ‘Learner English: a teacher’s guide to interference and other problems’

In this book, the authors discuss briefly Arabs’ problems in English pronunciation regarding vowels, consonants, consonant clusters, rhythm, stress and intonation. In addition, they study some grammatical errors that Arabic speakers may make in English.

Regarding English vowels, I do not agree with Smith (1987, 143) that ‘…virtually all vowels may cause problems’. But I agree with him that:

(7)…the following are the most common confusions:
   1. /ɪ/ and /e/ are often confused: bit for bet.
   2. /ɒ/ and /ɔː/ are often confused: cot for caught.
Similarly, regarding English consonants, I agree with Smith that most of them can be articulated by Arabs without great difficulty and the main problems are related to the following phonemes: /p/, /v/, /ŋ/, /ʒ/ and /r/. But I do not agree with him that some Arabs tend to pronounce English /ð/ as /d/. From my teaching experience, I noticed that they replace English /ð/ with /z/. For example, ‘zat’ for ‘that’. In addition, I agree with him that ‘the range of consonant clusters occurring in English is much wider than in Arabic’. As a result, Arabic speakers of L2 English tend to insert short vowels to assist pronunciation as in ‘?ispring’ or ‘sipring’ for ‘spring’ and ‘monthiz’ for ‘months’.

Concerning stress, I agree with Smith (1987, 145) that ‘Arabic word stress in particular is predictable and regular. Arabic speakers, therefore, have problems grasping the unpredictable nature of English word stress’.


In this book, Baker mentions some of the Arabs’ errors in English pronunciation. Regarding consonants, I agree with most of the errors in her list such as:

(8) p sounds close to b
  r strongly trilled
  pronounced where normally silent
  (Baker, 1982, 138)

But I do not agree with her that Arabs pronounce /v/ as /f/ or /b/ and /w/ as /v/. First, Arabs sometimes replace /v/ by /f/ but not by /b/: their pronunciation of the words ‘van’ and ‘fan’ will be the same, /fæn/. Second, Arabic speakers have no problems with /w/ as it is common in many Arabic words such as ‘wahid’ (one) and ‘walad’ (boy).

Although the three books mentioned above discuss briefly the specific English pronunciation errors made by Arabs, they work as a catalyst for this book. But this book differs in the following points:

(1) It studies, in more detail, only errors in English consonants, vowels and word stress

(2) It explains more fully the interlingual reasons for these errors.