English Spoken Utterances of Iraqi Students on Technical Terms

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Abstract
The study examines the pronunciation of English technical terminology related to furniture and household objects by Iraqi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students. The study seeks to assess pronunciation accuracy and identify prevalent phonological difficulties among learners, acknowledging the growing significance of technical terminology in global communication. The present study used a random sampling method to select 50 students aged between 10 and 12 to participate in the investigation. Participants were instructed to pronounce 40 technical phrases, and their pronunciations were evaluated against standard models provided by Google Translate, supported by the pronunciation norms of the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary. Quantitative and qualitative approaches were utilized to evaluate the incidence and categorization of pronunciation errors, such as stress misplacement, syllable omission, and vowel substitution. The findings indicated significant variability in pronunciation skills, with simpler and more familiar phrases achieving higher accuracy rates. The findings illustrate the difficulties faced by Iraqi students in comprehending the phonology of technical terminology and underscore the significance of employing audio-visual pronunciation aids in EFL instruction. This research advances the field of language education by offering insights into effective methodologies for enhancing oral proficiency within technical environments.

***Keywords*: Pronunciation Accuracy, Technical Terms, Iraqi EFL Learners, Spoken Utterances, Phonological Errors**

Introduction

The need to acquire a strong technical vocabulary has grown in recent years as English has become the official language of business, engineering, and academia around the world. Technical expressions can be quite challenging for non-native speakers to grasp, especially for Iraqi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students, because of phonetic differences between Arabic and English, they have little exposure to real spoken models (Graddol, 2006). Grammar and reading comprehension are usually given more weight in Iraqi classrooms than pronunciation and fluency in spoken English. Students' inability to understand academic material and communicate effectively in the workplace may result from their adoption of improper forms of technical jargon. This study aims to examine the spoken utterances of Iraqi students as they pronounce technical phrases in English. It will focus on their pronunciation accuracy, common patterns of mispronunciation, and the linguistic elements that impact their spoken performance. Incorporating audio aids, like Google Translate, to enhance oral proficiency in technical contexts is relevant, and this study intends to inform pronouncing training approaches concerning it.

Literature Review

Pronunciation in EFL Contexts

An important part of learning English is perfecting your pronunciation. Especially when it comes to public speaking, it is an essential component. If they want their words to be understood, people should speak English correctly. Students from Iraq have a hard time pronouncing English words because they have been speaking their mother tongue since they were little (Al-Jumaily, 2015). According to Demirezen (2008), a large percentage of people's pronunciation mistakes stem from their natural tendency to use their native tongue when speaking the target language. Because so many things influence it, it is difficult for EFL students to learn perfect English pronunciation. It appears that international students have a hard time with sound production in English, which is related to conveying meaning.

Arabic–English Phonological Differences

Arabic and English use very different grammatical systems. The Germanic branch of Indo-European language family is the linguistic ancestor of English. The Arabic language has its roots in the Semitic peoples. This section will mostly concentrate on phonetics; however, morphology, syntax, and semantics are all areas where Arabic and English differ. Arabic uses twenty-eight letters of the alphabet, whereas English uses twenty-six. Speech sounds are represented by the alphabet. The sound system, however, is a key distinction between Arabic and English (Bite, 2013). The sound /đ/ is distinctive in Arabic and serves as an emphatic consonant. The Arabic language was so dubbed by Arabs after this peculiar sound because of the letter used to represent it: dad. It is common practice to examine segments of speech using phonological criteria, such as location of articulation (Chomsky & Halle, 1968; Jakobson, Fant, & Halle, 1951).

Spoken Utterance

A spoken utterance is anything that is said during a conversation. It is a part of speech that uses words or sounds to convey meaning, usually in a specific context. Spoken utterances can be short or long, simple or complex. They can be as short as one word or phrase or as long as a speech action. The concept of a spoken utterance is particularly significant in the study of spoken language as it underscores the dynamic and contextual nature of verbal communication. Unlike written language, spoken language often has subtleties like tone, intonation, and pauses that change the meaning a lot. For example, the same words can mean different things depending on the situation, the speaker's mood, or their goal.

Yule (1996) says that a spoken utterance is "any stretch of speech, regardless of whether it is grammatically complete or not." This shows how flexible spoken language is, since meaning comes from how words are used in conversation rather than just how they are spelled. People can use spoken words to say how they feel, give directions, and ask for things. The focus is on the context and how speakers use language to communicate effectively.

Searle (1969) also says that spoken words are more than just strings of words; they also do things like making requests, promises, or expressing regret. For instance, when someone says "Can you help me?" in a conversation, they are both asking for help and asking a question. Searle asserts that spoken utterances are intrinsically connected to the social context and the speaker's intentions, making them crucial for understanding the pragmatic functioning of language in everyday situations.

Types of Spoken Utterances

Expressive Utterance

An expressive utterance is a way of speaking that shows how the speaker feels, thinks, or has experienced something. The fundamental purpose of an expressive speech is to share the speaker's feelings about a certain topic, not to give information, ask for something, or give an order. People usually say these things when they are feeling happy, sad, surprised, annoyed, or excited. They can help people express how they feel about a situation and often show how the speaker is feeling within.

Examples of Expressive Utterances

"Wow, that's amazing!" (expressing surprise or admiration) "I'm so sorry!" (expressing regret or apology)

"I can't believe this is happening!" (expressing disbelief)

"I feel so proud of you!" (expressing pride)

Referential Utterance

Referential utterances are speech acts that are mostly employed to talk about, refer to, or give knowledge about things, events, or the world as a whole (Searle, 1969). This type of speech is essential to pragmatics since it underscores the conveyance of genuine or factual information. Austin (1962) says that referential utterances are a type of constative speech act that focuses on making statements that may be judged as true or false. These remarks are generally meant to be educational, not emotional or inspiring.

People use statements that refer to other things or events in the universe, whether they are real or not, to explain or teach something about the universe. "The book is on the table" tells you exactly where something is, while "The Earth orbits the Sun" sums up a scientific fact. These claims effectively avoid objective reality because they are often well-informed, complete, and based on facts. (Grice, 1975).

People often use referential expressions to talk about or describe the universe, big events, physical things, or abstract ideas. (Grice 1975).

For instance, "The book is on the table" tells you exactly where something is, while "The Earth orbits the Sun" refers to a well-known scientific fact. Because these phrases are factual, thorough, and educational, they are great at conveying objective truth.

Examples:

The Earth orbits the sun (Providing a fact about the solar system)

My birthday is in March (Providing information about the speaker)

Performative Utterance

A performative utterance is a kind of speech act in which the act of saying something is the act itself. The speaker is doing what the sentence says by speaking. These words change reality or make a new situation just by being spoken. They don't just describe or convey facts (Austin, 1962). The phrases "I apologize" and "I promise" convey the actions of apologizing and promising, respectively. Austin (1962) says that constative utterances, which are meant to describe or give information about the world and can be judged as true or false, are different from performative utterances. Performative utterances, on the other hand, don't have a truth value in the usual sense because their purpose is to do something rather than to give information or show reality. Austin divided performatives into three groups: declaratory (where the speaker creates a new state of affairs, like a marriage or a bet), commissive (where the speaker promises to do something in the future), and excitative (where the speaker has power or authority) (Austin, 1962).

Furthermore, performative claims must meet certain criteria in order to be considered valid. Felicity criteria include the suitability of the context, the speaker's entitlement to perform the action, and the proper application of linguistic forms (Searle,1975). Only a judge or priest who is allowed to perform a marriage ceremony can say, "I hereby declare you married."

Examples:

"I apologize." (performing the act of apologizing)

"I promise to return your book tomorrow." (committing to an action)

Directive Utterance

A directed utterance is when someone speaks in order to get the listener to do something. Referential or expressive statements explain facts or feelings, while directive statements try to change the listener's behavior or get them to do something. Directives can include questions, rules, orders, and suggestions. A directive statement's main purpose is to guide the listener's actions toward a specific result (Searle, 1975).

The way you classify directive comments as formal or polite may change how the listener sees them. "Close the door" is a clear order, but "Could you please close the door?" is a less direct request that softens the order and makes it more polite (Brown and Levinson, 1987). The social context and the relationship between the speaker and listener can have a big impact on how directed remarks are made.

According to pragmatics, directive utterances are important parts of cooperative communication activities between people who speak the same

language. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle asserts that when both parties comprehend the context and the speaker's intentions, speakers typically anticipate compliance with their directive statements. Searle (1975) asserts that directives are regulated by felicity conditions, which include the listener's capacity or willingness to perform the requested action and the speaker's authority to issue the command.

"Please pass the salt." (requesting the listener to do something)

"Shut the window." (giving a command)

"Could you open the door for me?" (polite request).

Speech Acts

Speech acts are an important part of how people use language to communicate. A speech act is a linguistic unit that can figure out the meaning of a sentence. It is the result of saying a sentence in a certain situation. Austin asserts that speech acts underscore the relationship between language and action in Bayat (2013: 214). In this case, using language means doing something and making a separate string of sentences. In other words, they either do something themselves or use their words to get other people to do something. So, when someone is talking, their speech acts might affect the other person.

Speech acts are very important for communication exercises. The act of speaking that is used to make a statement gives the sentence its meaning. The meaning of a phrase is always based on the possibility of accurately conveying the speaker's intent, not just the action of the words. Consequently, a speaker may employ a distinct sentence in each speech act to adapt the utterance to the context. In this case, the study of speech acts and the study of phrase meaning are two related but different topics. Consequently, speech act theory prioritizes the comprehension of sentence meaning over the analysis of phrase structure in communication.

According to Sbisa (2002: 422), speech acts are social behaviors that can change the context of communication. To put it another way, when someone does a speech act, the movements and attitudes of their limbs must back up what they are saying in order to support what they mean. This way, the listener will know what it means and do what it says. The comments made show that some things really did happen during the conversation. So, the listener or person talking to you can accept and understand what you mean by using speech actions that are clear and have a clear purpose.

Method and Materials

The present study utilized a mixed-methods approach for data analysis, as it was intended to examine both qualitative and quantitative aspects of students' understanding and usage of technical terms. The data collection process involved verbal responses from students, enabling the researcher to gather insights into their comprehension and articulation of specific terms. To facilitate this, the researcher developed a list of 40 technical terms, which were related to sold goods and furniture, designed to align with the school-level curriculum. These terms were selected based on their relevance to students' everyday learning and their potential challenges in both understanding and pronunciation.

To assess the accuracy and appropriateness of the terms, the researcher instructed students to use Google Translate to determine whether the translations of these technical terms were correct. Additionally, students were asked to identify any difficulties they encountered while using the translation tool, which helped uncover potential issues in their language proficiency, understanding of the terms, and the challenges associated with translating specific vocabulary from their native language to English. This method provided both a measure of translation accuracy and an opportunity to explore the learners' perspectives on common language barriers. The current study utilized General American English as the pronunciation standard, as Google Translate offers pronunciation models based on this variant, corroborated by the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary (Oxford University Press, online), which includes IPA transcriptions and audio models in General American English.

Source: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/?utm_source=chatgpt.com

The sample for the present study comprised 50 students, aged between 10 and 12 years, who were selected through random sampling. This age group was chosen to reflect the typical language learning stage in school education, where students are often introduced to more specialized vocabulary related to various subjects, including economics, business, and household terminology. The use of random sampling ensured that the sample was representative of the broader student population, reducing potential biases and enhancing the generalizability of the findings.

The researcher asked participants to pronounce forty technical terms that are frequently used in contexts involving electronics, furniture, and home appliances. The chosen terms were separated into two groups: terms pertaining to furniture (e.g., bookshelf, desk, mirror) and home items (e.g., microwave, refrigerator, camera). Google Translate, which included both IPA transcriptions and audio samples for every word, served as the main tool for confirming pronunciation accuracy. To evaluate accuracy, participant pronunciations were compared to the standard provided by Google Translate. A data collection sheet documented the frequency of both accurate and incorrect pronunciations for each phrase. A linguistic pronunciation analysis was also developed to examine mispronunciations, classifying mistakes including consonant simplification, vowel replacement, syllable omission, and stress errors. Participants were asked to pronounce each word, and the Google Translate model was then compared to their utterances. Words were classified as correct or incorrect according to stress patterns, syllable structure, and phoneme accuracy. Error categories were thoroughly examined for mispronounced words, and recurrent trends were identified. Quantitative analysis of the data was then performed by determining the frequency and percentage of accurate versus erroneous pronunciations, and qualitative analysis was carried out by classifying mispronunciations and looking for patterns or similarities among participants. Both the pronunciation accuracy and the categories of linguistic faults discovered were summarized in the tables that were created from the data. The study is clearly limited to Iraqi EFL learners and focuses specifically on the pronunciation of English technical vocabulary.

Data Analysis Procedures

The present study utilized a hybrid analytical framework that incorporated three essential components to assess and interpret the spoken expressions of Iraqi EFL students, focusing on their pronunciation of technical English vocabulary. Student utterances were initially analyzed for their communicative intent, according to Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1975). We looked at the phonetics of all 40 technical phrases based on how the students articulated them. The statements were analyzed via Google Translation IPA and audio pronunciation to determine particular sorts of errors. Errors were categorized into the below classifications:

1. Phonological Errors

Stress Errors (incorrect emphasis on syllables) Vowel Substitution (e.g., /æ/ replaced by /ɑ/) Syllable Omission (e.g., reducing “refrigerator” to “fridge”)

Consonant Substitution (e.g., /ʒ/ pronounced as /z/)

Cluster Simplification (e.g., omitting consonants in clusters like /ks/ or /sw/)

R-Vocalization or Intrusion (e.g., inserting extra /r/ sounds)

Schwa Deletion (e.g., dropping weak syllables)

2. Technology-Enhanced Comparison

Using Google Translate as the standard model; the students’ pronunciations were assessed based on:

Match/Mismatch with IPA transcription Correct vs. Incorrect Pronunciation Judgments

Frequency and Percentage of correct/incorrect responses for each term

Table 1 Application of the Analytical Model in the Study

Model Component	Purpose	Method of Application	Result
Phonological Error Classification	To identify and categorize types of mispronunciations	Compared student utterances to Google Translate IPA; classified errors into stress, vowel, syllable, etc.	Detailed error taxonomy and patterns of common phonological issues
Technology-Assisted Benchmarking	To evaluate pronunciation accuracy objectively	Used Google Translate audio and IPA as standard; marked pronunciations as correct or incorrect	Generated frequency data (e.g., % correct/incorrect); visualized in tables and graphs
Quantitative Analysis	To measure overall performance and frequency of errors	Counted correct vs. incorrect responses for each word; calculated percentages	Statistical summaries (e.g., 48.1% correct, 51.9% incorrect pronunciation overall)
Qualitative Analysis	To explore phonetic trends and interpret linguistic patterns	Analyzed mispronounced terms for error types and recurring trends across participants	Insights into learner difficulties, such as syllable complexity and unfamiliar phonemes

Objective of The Study

To examine the pronunciation accuracy of Iraqi EFL students when articulating English technical terms.

To identify and classify the common types of mispronunciations and phonological errors in students' spoken utterances of technical vocabulary.

Research Questions

How accurately do Iraqi EFL students pronounce English technical terms commonly used in furniture and household contexts?

What are the most frequent types of pronunciation errors made by Iraqi students, and what phonological patterns can be identified in their mispronunciation

Data Analysis

Table 2 Evaluation Technical Terms Based on Responses

Technical terms	Correct		Wrong	
	Freq	%	Freq	%
Washing Machine	30	60%	20	40%
Agitator	9	18%	41	82%
Fan	40	80%	10	20%
Car	34	68%	16	32%
Engine	25	50%	25	50%
Brake	42	84%	8	16%
Refrigerator	6	12%	44	88%
Compressor	16	32%	34	68%
Television	8	16%	42	84%
Remote	10	20%	40	80%
Microwave	30	60%	20	40%
Camera	46	92%	4	8%
Computer	32	64%	18	36%
Battery	35	70%	15	30%
Keyboard	25	50%	25	50%
Air Conditioner	22	44%	28	56%
Vacuum Cleaner	11	22%	39	78%
Hair Dryer	13	26%	37	74%
Pump	29	58%	21	42%
Electric Shaver	9	18%	41	82%
Oven	27	54%	23	46%
Laptop	35	70%	15	30%
Radio	19	38%	31	62%
Dishwasher	21	42%	29	58%
Screen	45	90%	5	10%
Table	48	96%	2	4%
Sofa	43	86%	7	14%
Couch	26	52%	24	48%
Desk	24	48%	26	52%
Bookshelf	6	12%	44	88%
Hutch	3	6%	47	94%
Mirror	17	34%	33	66%
Buffet	9	18%	41	82%
Swivel	8	16%	42	84%

Legs	29	58%	21	42%
Frame	38	76%	12	24%
Hinge	20	40%	30	60%
Shelf	22	44%	28	56%
Drawer	26	52%	24	48%
Total	48.1%	48.1%	51.9%	51.9%

Table 3 Linguistics Errors of Technical Terms based on Google Translate

Term	Google Translate IPA	Match / Mismatch	Mispronunciation Type	Observational Notes
Washing Machine	/ˈwɒʃ.ɪŋ məˈʃiːn/	Mismatch	Stress Error	Stress often incorrectly placed on "washing"
Agitator	/ˈædʒ.ɪ.teɪ.tər/	Mismatch	Vowel Substitution	Learners replace "æ" with "ɑ" or reduce middle syllables
Fan	/fæn/	Match	–	Correctly pronounced by most learners
Car	/kɑːr/	Match	–	Clear pronunciation; minor vowel variation
Engine	/ˈɛn.dʒɪn/	Match	–	Occasionally over-articulated
Brake	/breɪk/	Match	–	Accurate for most learners
Refrigerator	/rɪˈfrɪdʒ.ə.reɪ.tər/	Mismatch	Syllable Omission / Stress	Commonly reduced to "fridge" or stressed incorrectly
Compressor	/kəmˈpres.ər/	Mismatch	Schwa Deletion	First schwa often dropped
Television	/ˈtel.ə.vɪʒ.ən/	Mismatch	Consonant Substitution	"ʒ" mispronounced as "z" or "s"
Remote	/rɪˈməʊt/	Mismatch	Stress Error	Incorrect stress on "re"
Microwave	/ˈmaɪ.krə.weɪv/	Match	–	Some reduce "krə" to one syllable
Camera	/ˈkæm.rə/	Mismatch	Extra Syllable	Often pronounced as "ka-me-ra"
Computer	/kəmˈpjuː.tər/	Match	–	Mostly accurate, some stress variation
Battery	/ˈbæt.ər.i/	Mismatch	Vowel Reduction / Flapping	Final syllable dropped or flapped
Keyboard	/ˈkiː.bɔːd/	Match	–	Accurately spoken
Air Conditioner	/ˈeə kənˌdɪʃ.ən.ər/	Mismatch	Syllable Reduction	"Conditioner" often rushed or incomplete
Vacuum Cleaner	/ˈvæk.juːm ˈkliː.nər/	Mismatch	Cluster Simplification	"Vacuum" often lacks "k" or "m" sounds
Hair Dryer	/ˈheəˌdraɪ.ər/	Mismatch	Vowel Simplification	"Dryer" pronounced as "dry"
Pump	/pʌmp/	Match	–	Clear articulation
Electric Shaver	/ɪˈlek.trɪk ˈʃeɪ.vər/	Mismatch	Stress Shift	Stress on "electric" not always preserved
Oven	/ˈʌv.ən/	Mismatch	Vowel Substitution	"ʌ" often mispronounced as "o"
Laptop	/ˈlæp.tɒp/	Match	–	Occasionally "t" softened too much
Radio	/ˈreɪ.di.əʊ/	Match	–	Clearly spoken
Dishwasher	/ˈdɪʃˌwɒʃ.ər/	Mismatch	Consonant Simplification	"ʃ" often reduced to "s"
Screen	/skriːn/	Match	–	Consistently correct
Table	/ˈteɪ.bəl/	Match	–	Rare mispronunciation

Sofa	/ˈsəʊ.fə/	Match	–	Accurate
Couch	/kaʊtʃ/	Match	–	Some vowel rounding issues
Desk	/desk/	Match	–	Occasional final consonant loss
Bookshelf	/ˈbʊk.ʃɛlf/	Mismatch	Cluster Reduction	"ks" cluster often simplified
Hutch	/hʌtʃ/	Mismatch	Vowel Substitution	"ʌ" often shifted to "ɑ" or "u"
Mirror	/ˈmɪr.ər/	Mismatch	R-vocalization / Insertion	Overuse of syllables or "r" over-emphasis
Buffet	/ˈbʊf.eɪ/ (UK) / buːˈfeɪ/ (US)	Mismatch	Foreign Word Transfer	Misread spelling; often "buffet" with "t" pronounced
Swivel	/ˈswɪv.əl/	Mismatch	Cluster Reduction	"sw" simplified to "s"
Legs	/lɛgz/	Match	–	No major issues
Frame	/freɪm/	Match	–	Vowel mostly accurate
Hinge	/hɪndʒ/	Match	–	Clear pronunciation
Shelf	/ʃɛlf/	Match	–	Sometimes "f" becomes "p" or "v"
Drawer	/drɔː.ər/	Mismatch	R-vocalization / Stress Error	Mispronounced as "draw" or "droar"

Interpretation

The study demonstrated significant variability in the pronunciation accuracy of the 50 ESL students across the 40 technical terms. More common and easier-to-say words like table, camera, and screen were pronounced correctly more often than more complex or less familiar words like refrigerator, bookshelf, buffet, and swivel. This means that phonological transparency, syllable complexity, and familiarity all have a big impact on how well students pronounce words. The high number of mistakes, like leaving out syllables, changing vowels, and putting stress on the wrong word, shows that English phonology is still hard, especially for words with more than one syllable or words that are made up of more than one word. These results show how important it is to help people improve their pronunciation by teaching them how to pronounce words correctly and using tools like Google Translate, especially for words with strange phonetic patterns or stress placement that isn't always clear.

Results and Discussion

Overall Pronunciation Accuracy

Across the 40 technical terms, students produced:

48.1% correct pronunciations

51.9% incorrect pronunciations

This indicates that learners struggled with over half of the technical vocabulary items.

2. Words with High Accuracy

High-accuracy terms were short, familiar, or phonetically transparent:

table (96%)

screen (90%)

sofa (86%)

camera (92%)

These words contain simple syllable structures and familiar vowel patterns, reducing the cognitive load during articulation.

3. Words with Low Accuracy

Low-accuracy terms involved complex structures, unfamiliar clusters, or unstressed syllables:

refrigerator (12%)

bookshelf (12%)

hutch (6%)

swivel (16%)

These findings align with research showing that Arabic speakers struggle with consonant clusters and multisyllabic words.

4. Common Phonological Errors

The most frequent errors included:

Syllable omission (*refrigerator* → *fridge*, *camera* → *ka-me-ra*)

Vowel substitution (/ʌ/ → /o/ or /u/ in *oven, hutch*)

Cluster reduction (*swivel* → *sivel*, *bookshelf* →

buk-shelf)

Stress misplacement (*remote* → *RE-mote*, *washing machine* → *WASHING machine*)

Consonant substitution (/ʒ/ → /z/ in *television*)

Conclusion

The study revealed that Iraqi EFL learners accurately pronounced only 48.1% of the English technical terms examined, while 51.9% were mispronounced. Pronunciation accuracy was higher for familiar technical vocabulary such as *table*, *camera*, and *screen*, whereas more complex technical terms like *refrigerator*, *bookshelf*, and *swivel* showed the lowest accuracy. The main phonological errors identified included stress misplacement, vowel substitution, syllable omission, and consonant-cluster reduction. These findings demonstrate that Iraqi EFL learners experience considerable difficulty with multisyllabic technical terminology and unfamiliar phonemes, largely due to differences between Arabic and English phonology and limited exposure to authentic English pronunciation. The use of audio-visual pronunciation aids, specifically Google Translate audio, IPA transcriptions, and the pronunciation norms of the Oxford Advanced American Dictionary, enabled accurate identification of pronunciation errors and provided a consistent General American English pronunciation benchmark for evaluating learners' spoken performance.

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