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Investigating the Difficulties Facing Sudanese Students in Pronouncing Weak and Strong Syllables Al-Neelain University

تقصي الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلاب السودانيين في نطق مقاطع الأصوات

الضعيفة و القوية - جامعة النيلين

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Degree in (Applied Linguistics)**

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Dedication

This work would not have been completed without the precious support and care of many people whose contributions have been equally priceless, and to whom I am deeply indebted. I dedicate this work: To my mother and father for their love and support. To my uncle Yousif Abdalla for his support and encouragement all the time ,and to all my relatives, and to the soul and memory of my grandmothers; Kasba Ahmed and Zainab Jar-Alnabi .

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Abstract

This research tries to shed the light on the Difficulties that Face Sudanese Students regarding the Pronunciation of Weak and Strong Syllables. The data collection took place at English department, faculty of arts, Al-neelain University. The problem of the research is projected by Sudanese students who are learning English as a foreign language who face difficulties in learning how to pronounce weak and strong syllables and where these syllables occur in English. The research adopted the descriptive method. The study aimed to investigate student's awareness of English syllables structure. And to identify the problematic areas in learning English syllables by Sudanese students. The research hypothesized that students are not able to identify English syllables structure, students are not able to differentiate between short , long and diphthongs while pronouncing words. And students can not differentiate between strong and weak syllables while speaking English. The main results show that the majority of students have shown poor performance as to the basics of pronouncing functional words (the weak and strong forms). The main recommendations are that teachers of English language at the universities should raise students' awareness about the use of strong and weak forms, also they should devote more of their time for training students in producing strong and weak syllables by giving them exercises on pronunciation practice.

مستخلص البحث

تناول البحث الصعوبات التي تواجه الطلاب السودانيين في نطق المقاطع القوية و الضعيفة في مفردات اللغة الانجليزية وتم تطبيق الدراسة على طلاب جامعة النيلين كلية الاداب قسم اللغة الانجليزية. وهدف البحث إلى تقصي مدى فهم الطلاب لتركيبية الكلمات الانجليزية و تحديد المشكلات التي تواجه الطلاب في نطق مقاطع اللغة الانجليزية. وأتبع البحث المنهج الوصفي.

وتمثلت مشكلة البحث في أن الطلاب السودانيين الذين يدرسون اللغة الانجليزية كلغة ثانية يواجهون صعوبات في تعلم نطق المقاطع القوية و الضعيفة . وافترض البحث أن الطلاب السودانيين غير قادرين على تمييز تركيبية مقاطع الأصوات و التفريق بين الأصوات اللينة أثناء نطق الكلمات، كما أنهم غير قادرين على تمييز مقاطع الأصوات الضعيفة و القوية أثناء التحدث .

ومن أهم النتائج التي توصل إليها البحث أن الغالبية العظمى من الطلاب أظهروا أداءً ضعيفاً في نطق المقاطع الضعيفة و القوية للكلمات النحوية في اللغة الانجليزية .

ومن أهم التوصيات : أن علي معلمي اللغة الانجليزية على مستوى الجامعات رفع وعي الطلاب في ما يتعلق باستخدام الصيغ الضعيفة و القوية للكلمات النحوية في اللغة الانجليزية و أن يمنحوا جزءاً من وقتهم لتعليم الطلاب كيفية نطق الصيغ الضعيفة و القوية للكلمات النحوية في اللغة الانجليزية عن طريق منحهم تمارين في النطق الصحيح.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1Background:

As English increasingly becomes the language used for international communication , it is vital that speakers of English , whether they are native or non-native speakers are able to exchange meaning effectively .In order to communicate effectively students need to master the correct pronunciation of the language . In addition pronunciation is very important in both teaching and learning process , it plays a crucial role in making students comprehend the spoken language. Teachers of English Phonetics have always been concerned about their students' pronunciation and how to improve it . They have always wondered what they might do to help them achieve a high level of performance . All those who are concerned with language teaching know that language is spoken before it is being written, when they talk about speaking, they mean also pronunciation, because it is an integral part of communication. Students need to master English sound system so that they can understand the stream of speech, to distinguish the different sounds and to produce them correctly. English has 19 vowel sounds and 25 consonant sounds. It is the vowel sounds that cover the entire range of mouth positions- front, centre, back, open, close, spread, relaxed and rounded. Some vowels are long , others are short , but all vowels change length depending on the level of stress on them . Arabic vocalic system is based on three pairs of phonemes :the short / I, a, u/ and there counterparts /i: , a: , u: / Anrdzej and Rouag (1993:183) . That is why many students

speak English language with fewer vowels. On the other hand , consonant sounds are also problematic. Students need to pay attention to accurate consonant production : voicing and placement need to be mastered . It is noticeable that most of English features are weak syllables which need a special attention from students of English in order to be careful in whether to use strong or weak syllables in the appropriate placement.

1.2 Statement of the Problem:

Sudanese students who are learning English as a foreign language face problems in learning how to pronounce weak and strong syllables and where these syllables occur in English .These problems arise because pronunciation is considered one of the areas of teaching English which has been either ignored or dealt with insufficiently. Therefore, this study attempts to shed light on problematic areas of pronunciation of weak and strong syllables and to identify the exact reasons behind them and try to discover remedies for such problems and suggest solutions.

1.3 Research Questions:

In this study, the difficulties that Face Sudanese students regarding the pronunciation of weak and strong syllables are addressed. In addition, the following questions are addressed:

1-To what extent are students able to differentiate between English syllables structure ?

2-To what extent are students able to differentiate between short , long and diphthongs while pronouncing words?

3-To what extent can students differentiate between strong and weak syllables while speaking English?

1.4 Research Hypotheses:

The study has the following as its hypotheses:-

- 1-Students are not able to differentiate between English syllables structure.
- 2-Students are not able to differentiate between short , long and diphthongs while pronouncing words.
- 3-Students can not differentiate between strong and weak syllables while speaking English.

1.5 Significance of the Study:

The study is considered significant for the following:-

Firstly, it helps teachers in Sudanese universities to be aware of the kinds of difficulties that their students may face when learning syllables.

Secondly, it helps teachers in diagnosing the point of weakness in their students' learning of syllables.

Thirdly, it considers a reference that students can use when learning syllables.

Fourthly, it helps students to avoid the difficulties that hinder their learning of English syllables.

Finally ,it encourages decision makers to provide universities with the needed language labs. And other facilities that facilitate syllables learning.

1.6 Objectives of the Study:

study tries to realize the following objectives:-

1- Investigating Sudanese students' performance in the area of English syllables at production levels, so as to know the difficulties faced by them in this area.

2-To identify the problematic areas in learning English syllables by Sudanese students.

1.7 Methodology:

The researcher adopts the descriptive method. The technique of data collection is written and recorded samples. The sample of students is chosen randomly from third year English language students of English department. And the analysis of statistical method of excel is used.

1.8 Limitation of the Study:

The study is limited according to the following:

The study is limited to investigate the problems that face Sudanese students in weak and strong syllables pronunciation of English language .The study subjects are limited to third year students in the department of English language at Al-Neelain University.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review and Previous Studies

2.1 Introduction:

Native speakers of English from different parts of the world have different accents, but the differences of accents are mainly the result of differences in the sound of vowels and consonants. The actual use of all these sounds in combination leads the speaker to produce a number of segments which only appear on the production level. The structure of the English syllable is influenced by the appearance of certain allophones especially aspiration and glottalization which change the form of CV in English pronunciation. This study tries to investigate the Difficulties that Face Sudanese Students regarding the Pronunciation of Weak and Strong Syllable. The literature review of this study will be reviewed and summarized in this chapter.

2.2 Definitions:

The term “syllable” in its broadest sense, is studied from the phonetic and phonological point of view since it represents one of the basic components in phonetics and phonology. However, the syllable theories are based on evidence taken from different fields of knowledge such as psycholinguistics which involves the study of child language acquisition and language universals (Fallows, 1980:76). Each syllable has a vowel at its centre and the consonants ‘surround’ the vowel, preceding it and cutting it off... it is possible to have a syllable with just a vowel. Kenworthy (1987:9) Also the syllable is a fundamentally important unit in both phonetics and phonology. Roach (2002:66)

The syllable is an element of speech that acts as a unit of rhythm, consisting of a vowel, a syllabic consonant or vowel / + consonant combination Crystal (1989: 164). Phonetically speaking, the air pressure is most noticeable in the nucleus. The hearer may distinguish the central part of a syllable because it has more prominence than the surrounding sounds, but people often have difficulty in hearing when one syllable ends and another begins, for example, the word "bitter"[b'ɪtə] may be heard as (bi-tter, bit-ter or bitt-er).

Phonologically speaking, a syllable is defined as the way in which vowels and consonants combine to form various sequences (the study of the location of sounds in sequence is called phonotactics). Vowels can form a syllable on their own or they can be the "centre or nucleus" of a syllable, e.g. [e] in bed [b |ed], I[aɪ].

In addition, some consonants like / m, n, ŋ, l / are called syllabic consonants since they function as syllables in final position and also we have what is called "minimum syllable", as in [|m] to show agreement and [|ʃ] to keep someone quiet and these are consonant sounds, but they have meaning. (Roach, 2002: 76).

Roach (ibid: 66) divides a syllable into two parts onset plus rhyme (hence nucleus & coda). For example, sit consists onset[s]+nucleus[ɪ]+coda[ʔt]]; therefore [ɪ] + [ʔt] represent the rhyme part of the syllable. The proposed definitions of the term "syllable" can be divided into three types: phonetic, phonological and phonotactic. Phonetically, a syllable is usually described as consisting of a centre which has little or no obstruction to the flow of air out of the mouth and which sounds comparatively loud and before and after this centre. (Abrecrombie, 1989:39; Roach, 2002:67). Phonologically speaking, a syllable is defined by Laver (1994:39) as "a complex unit made

up of nucleus and marginal elements”. Nucleus elements are the vowels or syllabic consonants. In the „one word syllable“ try [tr|aɪ] the diphthong /aɪ/ is the nucleus element; while the initial consonant cluster which consists of [t] and [r] are the marginal elements.

A number of scholars suggest that the term "syllable" should not be used in either a phonetic or a phonological sense, but it should refer to a linguistic unit composed of phonemes that are arranged according to certain phonotactic criteria. McCarthy (1978:107)

2.3 Significance of the Syllable:

“The syllable is important in phonology in relation to prosody, and cross-linguistic studies of rhythm. In the distinctive features theory of phonology “syllable” is used to replace the syllabic nucleus”. Crystal (2003:447) Likewise, Bolinger (1975:56) emphasizes that the syllable obtains much of its obviousness because of the role it plays in rhythm, i.e., when people segment the stream of speech and give it a rhythm of strong and weak beats, as in music. In addition, the best justification for ending the structure of sound–units at the level of the syllable is that anything higher is almost necessarily related to the meaning and the structure of the language.

It is necessary to mention that the significance of syllable has increased especially in models of non–linear phonology in relation to derivation. In addition, a syllable plays a role in prosodic morphology as being “a level above the „mora“ and below the “foot”- the unit of rhythm in languages” (ibid.). Finch (2000:68); and the Free Encyclopedia (2005:Int.) state that syllables serve in carrying the stressed patterns of English which are essential to the way in which speech is organized.

O’Connor (1973:201) explains the importance of the syllable when he affirms that “the syllable is useful as the largest unit one needs to consider in

explaining how phonemes are permitted to combine together in a language”. Moreover, Smith and Wilson (1980:141) also refer to the importance of the syllable in the need for something larger than a phoneme and smaller than a word.

2.4.0 English Syllable: Nature of Structure of Patterns:

O’Connor, (1973:201) states that the nature of a syllable structure varies from one language to another since there is no universal phonological syllable. The phonological view of the syllable requires a separate definition for each language. There are two types of English syllable structures which can be classified into two types: a phonetic syllable structure and a phonological one.

2.4.1 Phonetic Syllable Structure:

The phonetic syllable structure consists of three phonetic parts: the onset, the peak and the coda (Hyman, 1975:188). Sequences of segments within a phonetic syllable depend upon an inherent hierarchical scale of sonority. The most sonorous segment occupies the nucleus and farther from the nucleus on either margin the least sonorous, the sounds will be optional consonants (Hawkins, 1984:66). On the other hand, the phonological syllable structure displays the following pattern of arrangements: 0, 1, 2, 3 consonants +V + 0, 1, 2, 3, 4 consonants. This pattern means that a syllable consists of a vowel(V) which is preceded by zero, one, two, three, consonants and followed by zero, one, two, three, four consonants as in[|aI] [th |i:],[tr |aI],[str |i:t],[|n],[|i:ʔt],[g |a:dn]etc. (O’Connor, 1973:229).

2.4.2 Phonological Syllable Structure:

Moreover, as for phonological theories of syllable, they are mostly concerned with the internal structure of syllables. In this respect, phonologists have adduced every possible configuration for the internal structure of syllables. For instance, the main concern of CVC syllables is whether the vowel is grouped with the prior consonant (called the onset) or with the posterior consonant (called the Coda) or with neither.

More recently, some phonologists have claimed that the components of the syllable are units of weight called „Moras“ (Hyman, 1982:9).

Two parts can be found in the internal structure of the syllable. These parts are onset and rhyme; with the rhyme, nucleus and coda are found. It is important to point out that not all syllables have these parts; the smallest possible syllable contains a nucleus only. Simply, onset means the beginning sound(s) of the syllable which precede the nucleus and coda means the sounds at the end of the syllable which follow the nucleus. These are always consonants in English (Roca and Johnson, 2000:239). Vowels and consonants do not act alone, but there are very few words-like which consist of only one sound, for instance, (I, eye, oh, m (to show agreement), or, are....etc.)(ibid.)

Accordingly, there are four patterns of syllables. They are: ($\emptyset V \emptyset$), ($CV \emptyset$), ($\emptyset VC$) and (CVC). In this case, a syllable may be a vowel only, viz. the pattern ($\emptyset V \emptyset$), as in or ['ɔ:], this kind of syllable is known as a „minimum syllable“. The syllable which is not closed by consonant, viz. the pattern ($CV \emptyset$) as in be [b'i:] is called an “open syllable”.

Phonetically speaking, syllables consist of a centre, which has little or no obstruction to air flow and before and after this centre, there may be greater obstruction as in eye ['aɪ], in ['Iɪn]. more [m'ɔ:]. But phonologically,

consonants always occupy the margins of the syllable structure, and it happens that a consonant occupies the nucleus of the syllable as in syllabic consonant” (Gimson, 1989: 54).

2.5.0 English Syllables: Major Types

2.5.1 Simple Vs Complex Syllables:

English syllables are classified into simple and complex according to their structure. The simple syllable consists of a nucleus only or a nucleus with one consonant preceding it and /or another consonant following it. Consequently, the simple syllable has the structures: V, CV, VC and CVC as in “I” [’aɪ] , „knee” [n’i:] , „if” [’ɪf] and dog [d’ɒg]. Other types of syllables are complex, i.e., they have cluster(s) of consonants before and /or after the vowel (ibid.). Concerning the longest complex monosyllable English words, the following is a list of some of the nine- letter English words which have (7) sounds that each consists of a single complex syllable:

Table:2.1

Nine – letter Monosyllabic words in English:

The word narrow Trans.

syllable structure		
CCCVCCC	Scratched	[skr’æʔf t]
CCCVCCC	Straights	[str’eɪʔts]
CCCVCCC	Stretched	[str’eʔft]
CCCVCCC	Scrounged	[skr’aʊndʒd]
CCCVCCC	Scrunched	[skr’ʌn ft]
CCCVCCC	Strengths	[str’eŋθs]

2.5.2 Open vs. Closed Syllables:

Syllables are divided into open and closed according to the ending of the syllable. Open (free) syllables are those that end with a vowel or diphthong, i.e., they end with „nuclei“. Closed syllables (also called complete or blocked) are those that have at least one consonant following the vowel, i.e., they end with 'coda'. (Hartman and Stork, 1976:228)

Thus, closed syllables are those that have a branching rhyme while open syllables have a non-branching rhyme (Roach et al., 2004:Int.). The most common closed syllable has the structure CVC as in „died“ [d'aɪd]. This type of syllables, that has the CVC structure, is thought to be a subsequent innovation of the open syllable CV (Brosnahan and Malmberg, 1970:210). On the other hand, the most common open syllable has the structure CV, as in „we“ [w'i:], the CV (a consonant followed by a vowel) structure, which is not closed by another consonant, is regarded as a basic phonological unit in all languages since relatively all languages have it in their structures and may be the first systematic utterances of children are expected to be of this form (Hogg and McCully, 1989:36).

Cox et al., (2004:Int.) show the different structures of each type in English monosyllabic words as illustrated below:

Table:2.2
Open and closed Syllables

(A). Closed syllables		
VC	Is	['iz]
VCC	End	['end]
VCCC	Ants	['ænts]
CCVCCCC	Prompts	[prompts]
CVC	Moon	[m'u:n]
CVCC	Jump	[dʒ ʌ mp]
CVCCC	Hands	[h'ændz]
CVCCCC	Sixths	[s'iksθs]
CCVCCC	Plants	[pl'ænts]
CCVCCCC	Twelfths	[twelf θs]
CCCVC	Strong	[str'ɒŋ]
CCCVCC	Springs	[spr'ɪŋz]
CCCVCCC	Splints	[spl'ɪnts]
(B.) Open syllables		
V	Or	['ɔ:]
CV	Sea	[s'i:]
CCV	Through	[θr'u:]
CCCV	Screw	[skr'u:]

2.5.3.0 Strong Vs Weak Syllables:

Phoneticians have found that it is useful to make a distinction between syllables that have more prominent nucleus and less prominent nucleus. In this respect they divided syllables into strong and weak syllables. Smith (1982:10) refers to strong syllables using the terms “heavy” and “long”, and to weak syllables using the terms “light” and „short”. These two types of syllables can be described in part in terms of stress since they are closely associated with this aspect. Also, in a polysyllabic word there is always a syllable with primary stress; this syllable is called a “strong syllable”. Syllables that have no stress are known as “weak syllables” (Singh and Singh 1979:170). Syllables can be metrically “heavy” or “light”:- a light syllable is one whose rhyme comprises a short vowel nucleus alone or followed by a coda of no more than one short consonant, thus it has the structure CV or CVC. Crystal (2003:493) In fact, English puts certain restrictions on the structures of strong syllables. They can be open only if they contain a long vowel or a diphthong and only a closed strong syllable may have a short vowel. In other words, long vowels and diphthongs can occur in both open as in „sue“ [s'u:], „bay“ [b'eI] and closed as in „bean“ [b'i:n] and „eight“ [eI?t] which constitute strong syllables, whereas short vowels occur only in closed ones as in „cat“ [kh'æ?t] and „ill“ [I]/(Roach et al., 2004:Int). Generally, strong syllables can have in its centre any long vowel, like the first syllable of the word „father“ [f'a:ðə] or diphthong as the first syllable of the word „daily“ [d'eIII] except the vowel [ə], whereas weak syllables can only have the following types of nucleus (Roach, 1999:76):

2.5.3.1 Short Schwa:

Schwa is symbolized as /ə/, which is the most common unstressed vowel in English. This vowel occurs initially e.g. „alive“ [ə'l'aɪv], medially e.g. „forget“ [fəg'e?t] and finally as in „cinema“ [s'ɪnəmə]. Many English words have one stressed vowel and a schwa in their unstressed syllables as in „purpose [p'ə:pəs], „elephant“ [elɪfənt] and „tremendous“ [trəm'endəs] (Kreidler, 2003:80). Actually in English, there are words that have two forms in pronunciation: one with short schwa (the weak form) and the other with some other vowels like /ɪ/, /æ/ and /ʊ/ instead of this schwa. For example, „of“ has the weak form [əv] and the strong form [ʊv] (Wells and Colson, 1981:24).

2.5.3.2 The [i, u] vowels:

The weak syllable can have one of two other vowels as its centre. The first is a vowel that occurs in the general area between /i:/ and /ɪ/ while the second one lies in the region between /u:/ and /ʊ/. Roach (1999: 77-8) Here, unlike the case with strong syllables, there is no clear borderline between the long and short forms of each vowel in weak syllables, i.e., no one can tell which vowel one realizes in words like „easy“ or „busy“. Roach (1999: 77-8) Wells and Colson (1981:22) argue that these vowels are more like the long forms when they come before another vowel and they tend to be shorter when they precede a consonant or pause. Thus, a different (or a third) vowel is introduced symbolized as [i] in the first example and [u] in the second one. As a result, the words „busy“, „easy“ and influence are transcribed as [b'ɪzi], [i:zi] and [ɪnfluəns] respectively. Some other

examples are the [i] in „happy“ /hæpi/; „valley“ [væli] and [u] thank you [θæŋkju] and „coffee“ [kɒfi] (ibid.).

2.5.3.3 Syllabic Consonants:

Laver,(1994:114) pointed out that “the syllable must have a compulsory constituent in its structure, i.e., the nucleus, which consists of a vowel (pure or diphthong”). The exception to this rule is syllabic consonants. Those are the lateral sound [| l] and the nasals [| m], [| n], [| ŋ] in which each consonant can form a syllable. The English syllabic consonants in RP symbolized by vertical dash [l], written under the sound as in „bottle“ [b'ɒt | l]; „bottom“ [b'ɒt | m]; „garden“ /g'a:d | n/ and „thicken', [θ'ɪkŋ] but /θ'ɪk | n /, is also possible) (Jones,1984:55) .

2.6 The Prominence of Syllables:

Every utterance consists of at least one tone unit, and every tone unit consists of at least one syllable. If this tone unit consists of more than one syllable, one of them is more prominent than the others. Take the following utterance as an example:

I read nine books.

Here, the word .books. seems to be more prominent than the other words in the utterance. Usually, this prominence is called accent of the tone unit. Accent emerges from a change of pitch. (Mohammad 2010:29) . A long with the change of pitch, there is typically a greater intensity, more force with which air is pushed up from the lungs, and greater length or duration, in the vowel and other sonorant elements of the accented syllable . Kreidler (2004:70). If the accented word is disyllabic, one of these syllables is more

prominence than the others. This phenomena is associated with stress. In other words, the syllable that has a stress in the accented word is described to be more prominent than the other syllables in that word. For example, if we change the word 'book' in the previous utterance with the disyllable word 'reviews', this word is accented on the second syllable because the second syllable is stressed. In general, as previously mentioned, stressed syllable is stronger and longer than the unstressed ones. .(Mohammad 2010: pp 29-30). It is important to mention that Kreidler (2004: 70) drew reader attention that when a syllable is stressed but not accented, it does not have a change of pitch. But relatively, it may be spoken at a higher pitch than the unstressed syllable and with greater length and intensity.

2.7 Weak and Strong Forms within the Sentence:

Richard et. al (1992:63) believe that “Educated native speakers of a language normally use colloquial speech in informal situations with friends, fellow workers, and members of the family”. And they go to say that “It is often difficult for language learners to realize that in certain situations colloquial speech is more appropriate than extremely formal speech”.

Roach (1999: 102) explains that "Almost all the words which have both a strong and weak form belong to a category that may be called *function words*; words that do not have a dictionary meaning in the way that we normally expect nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs to have."These function words are words such as auxiliary verbs, prepositions, conjunctions etc., all of which are in certain circumstances pronounced in their strong forms but which are more frequently pronounced in their weak forms." It is important to remember that there are certain contexts where only the strong form is acceptable and others where the weak form is the normal pronunciation" (ibid.).

Roach (1999: 103) mentions that "there are some fairly simple rules; we can say that the strong form is used in the following case":

i) For many weak-form words, when they occur at the end of a sentence. For example, the word 'of' has

the weak form [əv] in the following sentence:

'I'm fond of chips' **aɪm 'fɒnd əv 'tʃɪps**

but when it comes at the end of the sentence, as in the following example, it has strong form [ɒv]:

'Chips are what I'm fond of ' **'tʃɪps ə 'wɒt aɪm 'fɒnd ɒv**

ii) When a weak-form word is being contrasted with another word, e.g.:

'The letter's from him, not to him' **ðə 'letəz 'frɒm ɪm nɒt 'tu: ɪm**

A similar case is what we might call a co-ordinated use of prepositions:

'I travel to and from London a lot' **aɪ 'trævl 'tu: ən 'frɒm 'lʌndən ə 'lɒt**

'A work of and about literature' **ə 'wɜ:k 'ɒv ən ə 'baʊt lɪtrətʃə**

iii) When a weak form is given stress for the purpose of emphasis,

e.g.:

'You *must* give me more money' **ju 'mʌst 'gɪv mi 'mɔ: 'mʌni**

iv) When a weak-form word is being "cited" or "quoted", e.g.:

'You shouldn't put "and" at the end of a sentence'

ju 'ʃʊdnt 'pʊt 'ænd ət ði 'end əv ə 'sentəns

Roach (1999:103) points that another point to remember is that when weak-form words whose spelling begins with 'h' (e.g., 'here', 'have') occur at the beginning of a sentence, the pronunciation is with initial **h**, even though this is usually omitted in other contexts.

Words of English in their weak and strong forms, instances of pronunciation and phonological environment.

Table:2.3

(Adapted from Uthman:2016)

Words	Stress and strong forms	Unstressed weak forms	Context of weak variant
Determiner			
'a' (used only before a consonants sound)	/eɪ/	/ə/	All weak contexts
'an' (before vowels)	/æn/	/ə/	Every weak context except before /t/ and /d/
The	“the”	/ðə/ /ði/	Before consonants Before vowels
Some	/sʌm/	/səm/	All weak contexts
Conjunctions			
'and'	/ænd/	/m/ /ŋ/ /ənd , ən /	After labials e.g. /get ʌp ŋ gəʊ / After velars e.g. / bæŋ ŋ bæŋɪdʒ / Other weak contexts
'that'	/ ðæt/	/ ðæt/	All weak contexts
'but'	/bʌt/	/bət/	All weak contexts
'or'	/ ɔ: /	/ɒ/	All weak contexts
Prepositions			
'to'	/tu:/	/tə/ /tu/	Before consonants Before vowels
'for'	/fɔ: /	/fə/ /fər/	Before consonants Before vowels
'from'	/frɒm/	/frəm/	All weak contexts
'of'	/ɒv/	/f/ /əv/	Before voiceless consonants All other weak contexts
'by'	/baɪ/	/bə/	All weak contexts

'at'	/æt/	/ət/	All weak contexts
Pronouns			
'I'	/aɪ/	/ə/	All weak contexts
'me'	/mɪ:/	/mə/	All weak contexts
'my'	/maɪ/	/mə/	All weak contexts
'you'	/jʊ:/	/jʊ/	Before vowels
		/jə/	Before consonants
'he'	/hɪ:/	/ɪ/	All weak contexts except at the beginning of a word group where /hɪ:/ is used .
'his'	/hɪz/	/ɪz/	All weak contexts except at the beginning of a word group where /hɪz/ is used .
'her'	/hɜ:/	/ə/	All weak contexts except at the beginning of a word group where /hɜ:/ is used .
'him'	/hɪm/	/ɪm/	All weak contexts
'their'	/ðeə/	/ðə/	All weak contexts
'them'	/ðem/	/ðəm/	All weak contexts
'us'	/ʌs/	/əs/	All weak contexts
Auxiliary Verbs			
'shall'	/ʃæl/	/ʃəl/, /ʃl/	All weak contexts
'should'	/ʃʊd/	/ʃəd/	All weak contexts
'would'	/wʊd/	/d/	After I, he, she, we, you, they
		/wəd/	Every other weak contexts
'will'	/wɪl/	/əl/	After vowels and /l/
		/l/	After I, he, she , we, you , they.
		/l/	After consonants except /l/
'must'	/mʌst/	/məst/	All weak contexts
'are'	/a:/	/ə/	Before consonants
		/ər/	Before vowels
'were'	/wɜ:/	/wə/	All weak contexts
'was'	/wɒs/	/wəs/	All weak contexts

'is'	/ɪz/	/s/ /z/ /ɪz/	After / p, t, k, f, θ, / After vowels and voiced consonants except /z, ʒ, d/ Used after /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, dʒ, tʃ/
'do'	/dʊ/	/ dʊ/ /də/	Before vowels Before consonants
'does'	/dʊz/	/ də/	All weak contexts
'am'	/æm/	/m/ /mə/	After I All other weak contexts
'has'	/hæz/	/əz/ /s/ /z/	After /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, dʒ, tʃ, / After /p, t, k, f, θ/ All other weak contexts except at the beginning of word group where / hæz/ is used.
'have'	/hæv/	/v/ /əv/	After I , we, you, they All other contexts except at the beginning of a word where / hæv/ is used.
'be'	/bɪ:/	/bɪ/	All weak contexts
'had'	/hæd/	/d/ /əd/	After I, he, she, we, they, you Every other context excepts at the beginning of a word group where / hæd/ is used.
'can'	/kæn/	/kən, kn/	All weak contexts

2.8 Arabic and English Vowels:

The most common view is that vowels are sounds in which there is no obstruction to the flow of air as it passes from the larynx to the lips. Roach, (2009:21). We need to know in what ways vowels differ from each other. The first matter to consider is the shape and position of the tongue. It is usual to simplify the very complex possibilities by describing just two things: firstly, the vertical distance between the upper surface of the tongue

and the palate and, secondly, the part of the tongue, between front and back, which is raised highest. Roach, (2009:22) . Vowels are described in terms of two phonetic parameters: vowel quality and vowel quantity. Quality refers to differences in the place of articulation of the vowel, including the position of the tongue in the vocal tract, the size of the stricture, the shape of lips, and whether the vowel is nasalized or not. Quality differences are seen in the acoustic signal in different spectral patterns for different vowels. On the other hand, vowel quantity refers to the duration of the phonetic segment (i.e., the vowel) which is considered an intrinsic part of its phonemic

identity. Simply put, the vowels are described as short vs. long. (Saadah , 2011:23) . The Arabic system is perfectly proportional in terms of quantity: it consists of three oppositions of long and short vowels, two in the high area and one in the low area , thus / i/ vs./ i:/ as in /si:n /vs. /sinn/letter “s”- “tooth” /u: / vs. /u/ as in /fu:l /vs. /full/ “broad beans” – “flowers” /ɑ: / vs. /ɑ/ as in / 'nama/vs. / na 'm ɑ:/ “to sleep” – “to grow”. Anrdzej and Rouag , (1993:187).

Below are the phonemics inventories of English and Arabic vowels . Anrdzej and Rouag , (1993:187)

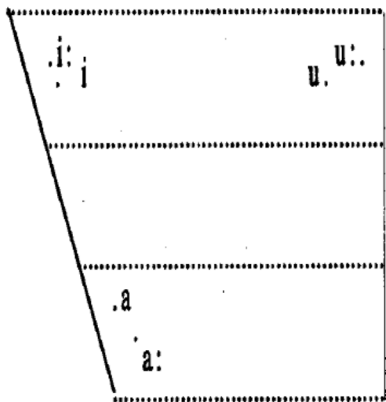


Fig.1 The vowels of Arabic

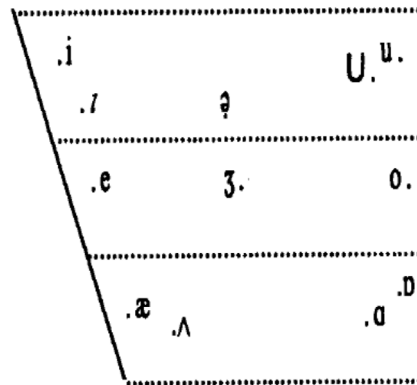


Fig.2 The vowels of English

English has a series of similar , proportional oppositions which we take to be in terms of quality rather than quantity. They can be distinct by relative height.

/i/ vs. /ɪ/ as in sea vs. sit

/u/ vs. /ʊ/ as in fool vs. full

/o/ vs. /ɒ/ as in sword vs. sot

/ɜ/ vs. /ə/ as in fur vs. for (weak form) or frontness vs. backness

/ɑ/ vs. /ʌ/ as in carp vs. cup.

As is well known , they also differ in inherent length and tenseness, the first terms being longer and tenser. Anrdzej and Rouag , (1993:188) . It was mentioned that as in English the full sound of consonant is achieved by the application of the vowel, but there are only three vowels in Arabic. One has the value of “a” in “bat”, or “u” in “but” another has the value of “i” in “fit”, and the third has the value of “u” in “put”, they are all short. These vowels are not represented by characters following the consonants; but are represented by signs written above or below the consonants. (Abdul-Rauf, 1977:60) .The basic six Arabic vowels(3 short+ 3long) are said to be corresponding almost exactly to what is believed to be the Proto-Semitic vowel system. In this respect, the fact that Arab grammarians used to postulate short vowels before the long vowels in words forms is interpreted as a mistaken assumption attributable to the late script requirement - for elegance, perhaps of covering all the letters with vowel signs.(Abdulmuneim1996:104). However, these marks are not usually written. This might be confusing for L2 learners o f Arabic. For instance, without the use o f these diacritical marks, it is impossible to tell if the combination of the letters ط and ب , i.e. , ط ب , is meant to represent the word طِب [tʰlb] {*medicine*} طُب [f^ub] (*pile*), or طَب [t^ab] {*treated*}. In this

situation, the only way to eliminate ambiguity is to see the word in a context. Huthaily (2003: 26). Arabic and English Vowels have similarities and differences. They are different in number; Arabic has less vowels than English. They also differ in distribution; Arabic words can only begin with consonants whereas English words can begin with vowels. Contrary to what some linguists claim (Smith: 1987), vowel length in Arabic is phonemic, as illustrated by the following minimal pairs:

/u/ and /u:/

- | | |
|-------------------------|--|
| a) /suq/ [suq] (market) | /suq/ [suq] (drive <i>imperative</i>) |
| b) /kub/ [kub] (cup) | /kub/ [kub] (overturn <i>imperative</i>) |
| c) /ʕud/ [ʕud] (stick) | /ʕud/ [ʕud] (come back <i>imperative</i>) |

/i/ and /i:/

- | | |
|---|--|
| a) /qa.'dim/ [qo.'dim] (old) | /q a'd im / [qa.'dim] (He came.) |
| b) /sa.'ʕid/ [sa.'iːd] (happy) | /sa.'ʕid/ [sa.'ʕid] (He became happy.) |
| c) /ʕa.'lim/ [ʕa.'lim] (Knower: <i>one of God's names</i>) | /ʕa.'lim/ [ʕa.'lim] (He knew.) |

/æ/ and /a:/

- | | |
|--|--|
| a) /sæ.ʕid/ [sæ.iːd] (arm) | /sa.ʕaid/ [sa.'iːd] (He became happy.) |
| b) /ʔæ.lim/ [ʔæ.lim] (scientist) | /ʔa.lim/ [ʔa.lim] (He knew.) |
| c) /s^æ.faH/ [s^a:.faHj] (He shook hands with ...) | |
| /s^a.'fan/ [s^a.'fan] (He forgave ...) | |

Instead of using the *front high unrounded lax vowel* [i], some native speakers of Arabic use the *front mid unrounded lax vowel* [ɛ]. The *front low unrounded lax vowel* /æ/ is realized as (1) a *long back low unrounded lax vowel* [ɑ:] when it is preceded by a velar, uvular or velarized consonant and as (2) a *front low unrounded lax vowel* [æ] in the other phonetic environments. Similarly, the *central low unrounded lax vowel* /a/

is realized as (1) a *short back low unrounded lax vowel* [ɑ] after a velar, uvular or velarized consonant and as (2) a *central low unrounded lax vowel* [a] in the other phonetic environments. Huthaily (2003: 32).

The basic six Arabic vowels(3 short+ 3long) are said to be corresponding almost exactly to what is believed to be the Proto-Semitic vowel system. In this respect, the fact that Arab grammarians used to postulate short vowels before the long vowels in words forms is interpreted as a mistaken assumption attributable to the late script requirement - for elegance, perhaps - of covering all the letters with vowel signs.

A comparison between the Arabic vowels and their corresponding cardinals reveals the fact the Arabic short vowels /i , u / are al-most the same as their equivalent cardinal[ɑ] (i.e. the cardinal [ae], changes into the cardinal [ā] in certain phonological environments . As for the Arabic long vowels /ā, ī, ū/, it is difficult to say that they are twice the duration as their short version. The question of certain dialectical vowels that existed during the early era of CA is carefully discussed to result in confirmation or at least tending to confirm the existence of what could be equivalent to the cardinal vowels: [o] (prolonged into [O], [Ī] prolonged into [ī], [Ū] (prolonged into [Ū] [e], its prolonged version [e], and [ɛ]. This is assessed in terms of Arabic dialects and with comparison other Semitic languages. Although diphthongs were not recognized as such by the early Arab grammarians, the evaluation of the discrete arguments proves that their early presence in CA is undeniable, and some proposals are made as to how a lengthy fruitful investigation in this area could be pursued (Abdulmuneim 1996:pp104.105).

Table:2.4

Arabic Vowel system

(Adapted from Abdulmuneim:1996)

	FRONT				CENTRAL				BACK			
	Round		Spread		Round		Spread		Round		Spread	
	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long	Short	Long
Close			i	ī		ū		ū	U	Ū		
Half-close			e	ē						Ō		
Half-open			ɛ									
Open			a	ā							ɑ	

English and Arabic vowel systems highlight a number of differences:

Firstly, it is found that vowels in English are more than Arabic vowels, that is, English work with phonemic vowel quality. On the other hand, Arabic vowels are more allophonic.

Secondly, there are some English vowels that do not exist in Arabic, like /e, ɔ:, ɒ, ɜ:, ə, ɑ:/.

Thirdly, English vowels are affected by consonants following them, while Arabic vowels are not. By looking at this contrast and how the two languages differ in their phonological systems, it is obvious that students will have difficulty in learning some vowels especially those that are not available in Arabic. Walid, (none: pp13.14).

2.9.0 Review of Previous Studies:

This section is about previous studies which will be structured in this chapter. previous studies will provide information about the methods and techniques used by researchers who worked in the same filed. Also it will provide information concerning the issues of instrumentation, sampling and data analysis.

2.9.1 The First Study:

This study was carried in (2014) by Amro Motasim Mohammed was conducted to Investigate the Knowledge of syllable structure and stress use among Sudanese EFL university learners . The study carried out in Sudan university of science and technology , college of graduate studies.

The main objectives were to investigate Sudanese EFL students' awareness of English syllable structure and also to know to what degree Sudanese EFL students are able to use stress correctly.

The study hypothesized that Firstly, students are not aware of English syllable structure.

Secondly, students are not able to use stress correctly. The researcher selected 50 students, from Sudan university for science and technology , college of languages, department of English, 3rd year, 2013-2014. Only one tool was used to collect the data which is a test .

The findings revealed that Regarding the first hypothesis, which states that , students are not aware of English syllable structure. The results of the study reject hypothesis that more than half of the students are aware of English syllable structure .

As for the second hypothesis, it claims that students cannot use stress correctly . The result shows that this hypothesis is true according to the scores of the students in the test . So the second hypothesis was confirmed and accepted.

2.9.2 The Second Study:

This study was carried in (2010) by Liqaa Habeb, was conducted to find Difficulties Faced by Iraqi EFL College Students in the Area of English Syllables. The study carried out in the College of Education- Diyala.

The study aims at : investigating Iraqi EFL learners' performance in the area of English syllables at recognition and production levels, so as to know the difficulties faced by them in this area and to investigate Iraqi instructors opinions in the area of English syllables in order to limit the difficulties faced by students. The study hypothesized that Iraqi EFL college learners face difficulties in the area of English syllables. The population of this research comprise specialists instructors in English departments in the college of education and college of basic education for the questionnaire and

3rd year students, department of English , college of education at the university of Diyala for the academic year (2009 – 2010). The population comprise (70) Iraqi EFL students.

The choice is intentional in the two samples (the sample of the questionnaire and the sample of the test).

The study concluded that firstly part one of the test which refers to (Identify the onset and the coda in each of the following syllables) constitute the most difficult topic for the students. Secondly, part two of the test which refers to (Recognize between strong and weak syllables in each of the following words) constitute the second difficult topic for the students .Thirdly, part three of the test which refers to (Determine the syllabic consonant in each of the following words) constitute the third difficult topic for the students .

2.9.3 The Third Study:

This study was carried in (2010) by Mr Mohamed Laoubi , was conducted to find the Importance of Learning Strong and Weak Forms in Listening Comprehension. The study carried out in Mentouri University – Constantine Faculty of Letters and Languages Department of Languages.

The aim of the study is to understand the problems that students meet while listening to natural native speech from the point of view of their perception of weak forms of grammatical words i.e. the reflections of any misperception of these forms on their actual comprehension of native speech. The hypothesis indicates that if students are aware of the significance of the weak forms and the rules that govern their use not only in production but also in reception, they will show better listening comprehension abilities. The study subjects are limited to Third Year Students at the Department of English – Constantine University.

The results obtained from the data analysis demonstrate that 3rd year students do have difficulties in listening to connected speech regarding the perception of weak forms of grammatical words. As for their knowledge concerning the basics of using weak forms, the questionnaire results have, surprisingly, shown that almost all of them have a serious lack of competence as their scores are very low. This is despite the fact that they have been given lessons concerning reduced forms.

2.10 Conclusion:

In this chapter, the researcher dealt with some theoretical considerations about weak and strong syllables , English and Arabic vowels and the concept of strong and weak forms. It also reviewed some related previous studies and showed how they relate to present study.

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction:

This chapter discusses the research design and methodology which is used in this study. In addition, it gives thorough description of the participants who took part in the study.

3.2 Research Design and Methodology:

This study basically adopts a quantitative research design. Quantitative methods were used in this research to generate statistics about participants. Statistical methods depended on the test. Quantitative methods give percentage about participants. Moreover, it helps to judge their ability or inability to produce weak and strong forms according to their performance on the test.

3.3 Students Sample:

Fifty students from Al-neelain University, Faculty of Arts , English Department ,third year students are selected randomly, following the simple random sample choosing, to participate in the study. The sample included male and female senior students who studied the course phonetics and phonology in the Academic year (2016-2017). That is to say these students already have the basic knowledge of Human sounds: segmentals and suprasegmentals.

3.4 Participants:

Participants were 50 third year students at English department, faculty of arts, Al-neelain University. The students have received instruction about the weak and strong forms and their nature in the third year , module of phonology.

3.5 Instruments:

A test is used as an instrument for collecting the data for this study. The test was divided into three parts. Part one aims at measuring how many syllables are there in the English words. It consists ten words .Each word is followed by four multiple choices. From these choices only one is correct and students have to encircle the letter referring to it. Part two aims at measuring the ability of students in pronouncing the English words and whether it consist of strong or weak syllables. It contains ten words with an example. Part three aims at measuring the ability of students in pronouncing English functional words. It consists of ten sentences each with underlie function weak or strong forms. Students have to pronounce the underlined functional words correctly .

3.6.0 Validity and Reliability

3.6.1 Face Validity:

The researcher shows the test to five teaching staff at English Department, College of Languages, Sudan University of Science and Technology in order to validate the test.

3.6.2 Reliability:

The researcher carries out a pilot study on 15 participants who are not included in the main sample of the study in order to test the reliability of the test. The period between the two applications is one month and Person correlation test is considered reliable when there is a correspondence between the two applications or there is just a little difference. when Person correlation coefficient is used, it is found that the correlation coefficient is 0.80. This correlation coefficient is considered acceptable . So, the reliability of the test is established.

The following Pearson correlation coefficient formula was used to find out the reliability of the test.

$$R = \frac{N \cdot \Sigma x,y - (\Sigma x) (\Sigma y)}{\sqrt{[N \cdot \Sigma x^2 - (\Sigma x)^2] [N \cdot \Sigma y^2 - (\Sigma y)^2]}}$$

(Glass& Stanley ,1970:114)

3.7 Conclusion:

This chapter gives a detailed description of the method adopted in this study, also, it describes the instrument used to collect the data. In addition, it presents the population and sample of the study. Moreover, it shows the face validity and reliability of the test. Finally, it provides the procedures in collecting and analyzing the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis and Discussions

4.1 Introduction:

This section deals with data analysis techniques , the findings of the analysis of the test and discussion of these findings. This chapter also reflects the results of analysis to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses of the study .The main objectives are to find out whether the students of Al-neelain University who study English as foreign language find any difficulties in English syllables structure and to identify the problematic areas in learning English syllables .

4.2 Procedures:

The Procedures of collecting the data took place in an empty lecture room at English department, faculty of arts, Al-neelain University. The researcher clarified for the participants that the test aims to measure their pronunciation without further details. Participants spend about 2-5 minutes to have a look at the test to become familiar with the test before they ask to write their answers and record their pronunciation. Samsung Galaxy Grand mobile uses to record participants' performance.

4.3 Discussion and Analysis of the Test:

The main goal of this study was to investigate the difficulties that face Sudanese students regarding the pronunciation of weak and strong syllable. For this purpose the descriptive methods is used and the analysis revealed the following:

Students of Al-neelain University performance in question one of the test which attempts to test participants' ability to identify how many syllables are there in English words. Four multiple choice answers were given. Only one was correct the percentage as follows:

Table 4.1

One Syllable Words:

N	Words	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage	Total
1	Game	31	62%	19	38	50
2	Blames	7	14%	43	86	50
3	Bank	37	74%	13	26	50

Table 4.1 reveals students' results in question one of the test which states that how many syllables are there in the following words? The results show the following:

62% of the students identify the first item 'game' correctly. While 86% of the students unable to identify the second item 'blames' correctly . It seems that the addition of the letter [s] at the end of the word "blame" made students confused whether it's one syllable or two. Because only 14% of the students identify it correctly. Apparently, the word "bank" has no suffix or prefix so it becomes easier for the students to identify it as one syllable. Because 74% of students answer it correctly. In addition, the two words "game" and "bank" sound easily because simple syllables which have no consonant clusters "at the beginning of the two words" is more easier for students than complex syllables.

Table 4.2:
Two Syllable Words

N	Words	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage	Total
1	Shames	23	46%	27	54	50
2	Bumping	38	76%	12	24	50

The word “bump” with the suffix –ing , is divided as bump-ing to show its constituent parts. This indicates that the majority of students identify the item ‘bumping’ correctly. So they do not have big problem in the number of syllables. On the other hand, the word “shames” with the suffix –s, is divided into two syllables as sha- mes to indicates the verb. And 46% of the students identify the item ‘shames’ correctly .Again, the suffix (s) made the majority of students unable to decide whether the word is one or two syllables. In addition, the number of vowels in the word may also play a role in making students unable to decide whether it’s one or two syllables. Those students who got the word “shames” as wrong answer , they count it as one syllable word. This clarify that the majority of the students do not follow a specific rule in identifying the number of syllables within the words, they only depend on the spelling in deciding whether the word is monosyllabic, Trisyllabic or polysyllabic.

Table 4.3

Three and Four Syllable Words:

N	Words	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage	Total
1	Vertical	34	68%	16	32	50
2	Beautiful	35	70%	15	30	50
3	Interact	29	58%	21	42	50
4	misunderstood	33	66%	17	34	50
5	environment	27	54%	23	46	50

At this level most of Al-Neelain University students have some sense of “syllableness,” even if they do not know what a syllable is. They can recognize how many syllables there are in a word. The researcher expected most of students are not able to segment and blend three- and four-syllable words, but they have successfully identify words which have three and four syllables with high score correctly . The total average of the correct answers for the first question is 58.8% which indicates that students do not encounter difficulties with the first hypothesis which states that Students are not able to identify English syllables structure .These results seem to suit with Amro Motasim (2014) study. His study rejected the hypothesis which indicates students are not aware of English syllable structure. Because more than half of this students are aware of English syllable structure . Despite students of Al-Neelain have successfully pass in the first question of the test. The researcher notices that they have problems with words which consist of one or two syllables.

From the tables above (4-1.4-2. 4-3) the details as follows:

Students have got (58.8%) answered the first question correctly, while (41.2%) is wrong answer. This emphasized that most of them passed successfully in question one. Therefore, the students do not encounter a great problem in the first question which contradicted with the first hypothesis which states that students are not able to identify between English syllables structure.

Average of the First Hypothesis:

Table 4.4 shows the total average of correct and incorrect answers in question one.

Word	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage
Average	29.4	58.8%	20.6	41.2%

The following tables show students’ scores in question two of the test which aims at measuring the ability of the students in pronouncing the correct pronunciation of strong and weak syllables. The results illustrated below:

Table:4.5

Weak Syllables in Final Position with Short and Long Vowels:

N	Words	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage	Total
1	Better	39	78%	11	22%	50
2	Sharpen	24	48%	26	52%	50
3	Father	28	56%	22	44%	50
4	Happy	18	36%	32	64%	50
5	thank you	17	34%	33	66%	50

The results show that a great number of the students 78% pronounced the first item 'better' correctly. And 56% of the students pronounced the second word "father" correctly. It is observed that the majority of students identify /ə/ in final position of the two words "better" and "father" as unstressed vowel. The researcher noticed that word length is associated with good performance. If the word consists of one or two syllables it will be easier for students to pronounce it correctly rather than word which consist more than one syllable. Also this clarifies that students understand words which consist of phonemes with different lengths . The majority of the students understand and pronounced the words better and father correctly . Although, they are not aware about the concept of Syllable . Strong and weak syllables differ in stress and they are the key components of phonological awareness. students whom cannot identify or pronounce syllables and stress are certainly at risk for developing the skills they needs to be successful in using familiar word parts for speaking and spelling. 48% of students identify the final syllable of the word "sharpen" correctly and only 36% identify the word "happy" as weak syllable in the final position of the word. This proves that some students may not understand what a weak syllable is. Understanding the concept of syllable requires the students to know which part of the word is important to be stress and which part is not important to be unstressed. Students who do not have ability to place stress and unstressed in a word. They will often focus on initial or final sounds or word meaning rather than the entire rime. 34% of students are not able to identify the word "thank you" correctly. This indicates that students have more difficulty with words of more than one syllable. In addition, students may initially produce only one set of words that have weak or strong syllable. Difficulty with stress may signal a more generalized problem with phonological awareness. The word "thank you" made students confused whether to replace the stress in the beginning or at the end of the word. Because it consists of two syllables. It seems that Being able to stress orally requires the ability to understand the concept of syllable and stress.

Table:4.6

Strong Syllables with Diphthongs:

N	Words	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage	Total
1	Character	16	32%	34	68%	50
2	Tear	34	68%	16	32%	50
3	Molar	20	40%	30	60%	50
4	Private	31	62%	19	38%	50
5	Eight	31	62%	19	38%	50

students have difficulty in isolating phonemes in words orally especially if the words have more than one syllable, in order to decide the placement of the stress in the word . That is, they focus on the syllables as one entity in the word. 32% of the students were able to produce the word “character” correctly. While, 40% of the students pronounce the word “molar” correctly. It is observed that final position of the words “character” and “molar” with the /ə/ sound made students get confused because this sound is well known for them as unstressed vowel. So, this means that, the phonological structure of the syllable which has either a short / long vowel or a diphthong in those words is a main factor which affects the students’ performance. While words which consist of diphthongs such as tear , private and eight most of students pronounced those words correctly . It seems that the diphthongs vowel is known for the majority of the students as stress vowels. According to the results above, Students who are learning English usually use strong syllable , and they sound very unnatural and students respond to the weight of the syllable, ignoring the stress rules of English language. it could then be said

that the most of the Al-Neelain university students have knowledge about diphthongs as strong vowels and they also have the knowledge of pronunciation which made those words sound stronger and tenser especially pronunciation of diphthong sounds. But they have a problem where to replace the stress in the beginning, middle or at the end of the word. The total average of the correct answers for the second question is 51.6% which show that students do not encounter difficulties with the second hypothesis which states that Students are not able to differentiate between short , long and diphthongs while pronouncing words. These findings contradict or do not correspond with that of Habeb (2010). His students fail to recognize between strong and weak syllables which constitute difficult topic for them. Therefore, they transfer the stress pattern of their language L1 to target language L2 and this transfer leads to wrongly putting stress on the second element instead of the first one.

Average of the Second Hypothesis:

Table 4.7 shows the total average of correct and incorrect answers in question two.

Word	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage
Average	26	51.6%	24	48.4%

Students have been asked to pronounce the sentences which consist functional words taking in their choices among multiple weak-form and strong-form words. For instance, if the student pronounce /fɔ:/where /fə/ is more appropriate, the answer is considered as incorrect. Thus, students are marked by considering their correct/ incorrect answers. The sentences contain 10 functional words which are divided into two part weak and strong forms.

The following questions and table shows the results of the students' answers.

The Questions :

- 1- Thanks for asking.
- 2- Wait for the end.
- 3- We shall need to hurry.
- 4- That is my book.
- 5- As much as possible.

Table:4.8

Weak Forms:

N	Words	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage	Total
1	For	15	30%	35	70%	50
2	The	21	42%	29	58%	50
3	Shall	32	64%	18	36%	50
4	As	21	42%	29	58%	50
5	My	11	22%	39	78%	50

“**For**” was expected to be pronounced as [fər] before vowels , it was pronounced as / fɔr / . According to the results above, it could then be said that most of the students do not have mastery on different pronunciations of weak and strong forms. The results of the test in table 4-8 show that 70% of the subjects failed to pronounce the target sound /ə/correctly in the word “for” and most of the students tend to pronounce it as / ɔ / which is incorrect.

“**the**” is pronounced as /ði / before vowels but it was mispronounced as /ði:/. This clarifies that difference between / i/ and /i:/ tends to cause a lot of problems. The key for students is to produce two completely unique positions of the mouth. Weak forms proved to be one of the most neglected features of English pronunciation teaching. Many students are so accustomed to the strong forms as it is the only variant they have known so far it is extremely difficult for them to incorporate this in their speech.

“**Shall**” the researcher noted that (64%) of the students pronounced the item /ʃəl/ correctly. Students' Arabic background reflects its effect on their performance positively. This brings us to the comparison between the Arabic vowels and their cardinal equivalents in the **IPA** notation. Gairdner seems to be suggesting different tongue positions for both /a/ and /ɑ-/ from their equivalent cardinal ones. The short vowel called ‘fathah’ is not exactly an /a/ sound, though it is an approximation to that. It is generally regarded as a close and retracted variety of cardinal /a/, nearer to the sound represented in the **IPA** notation by /æ/.(Abdalmuneim 1996:85).

“**My**” was expected to be pronounced as //mæ/ , however it was pronounced as /mai/ in its strong form. Only 22% of the whole participants pronounced it correctly . This indicates that the weak form of this word is informal and unusual for the students.

“As” was produced in its strong form instead of weak one. 42% of the students among the whole sample were able to pronounce the target sound /ə/ correctly. According to the results above, it could then be said that, most of the students mispronounce the English vowels that do not exist in Arabic language and other vowels, which are inconsistent. This prove that majority of the students speak English language with fewer vowels as mentioned in chapter one.

Questions:

- 1- What's that for ?
- 2-The price is the thing that annoys me.
- 3-Shut the door.
- 4-I thing we shall.
- 5-That’s what it was sold as.

Table:4.9

Strong Forms:

N	Words	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage	Total
1	Me	10	20%	40	80%	50
2	For	17	34%	33	66%	50
3	The	18	36%	32	64%	50
4	Shall	8	16%	42	84%	50
5	As	5	10%	45	90%	50

“Me” which expected to be pronounced as /mi:/ in its strong position, however it was pronounced /mɪ/. It seems that students get confused in distinguishing between tense and lax vowel sounds in English. Teachers should recognize the pronunciation errors and correct them and teach the students how to pronounce those sounds correctly.

“Shall” Students cannot identify the vowels /e/ and /æ/. They pronounce the strong form of the word shall as /ʃel/. The confusion between /e/ and /æ/ may be considered as a serious problem the students encounter. This shows that students' pronunciation was randomly done. There is no reasonable justification behind their pronunciation.

“As” was produced as /əz/ in its weak form. A possible interpretation to this is that students are not able to identify where to use strong form and where to use weak one. Function words are always stressed at the end of a sentence, as opposed to weak forms at the beginning and in the middle of a sentence. The word “as” is reduced by the replacement of the central sound the schwa /ə/ which is difficult to hear and pronounce due to some of its sound characteristics. Investigating the answers of the production tests reveals a critical problem faced by the students in dealing with the area of weak forms. The answers show surprising results which need a special scrutiny. If pronunciation was given importance from the very beginning of student's learning process the development of what might be called bad habits would be minimized and students could progress further in their speech.

“The” was expected to be pronounced as /ðə/ before consonants and /ði/ before vowels, it was pronounced as /ði:/. This clarifies that most frequently error made by students of English is in placing and correctly producing the schwa/ə/ vowel sound as it is the most frequent and unusual of the vowels. The students reveal their ignorance or rather their unfamiliarity with the sound [ə]. Investigating the students' illustrates that the students might judge and test sounds according to their Arabic background.

“For” was pronounced as /fɔ/ rather than /fɔ:/. This means that connected speech features such as weak forms and sentence stress are largely neglected by the teachers. On the other hand, students do not adapt weak and strong forms in their natural speech or even in their reading. Those function words that have a possibility of weak realization often become weak in connected speech. They are pronounced in their strong forms when the speaker wishes to contrast or emphasize the word, or if the word is pronounced individually. The results of the two parts of the test reflect the students' ignorance in recognizing the pronunciation of both weak and strong forms.

Table:4.10

Average of the Third Hypothesis:

Word	Correct	Percentage	Incorrect	Percentage
Average	15.8	31.6%	34.2	68.4%

As the tables illustrate, the majority of students have shown poor performances as to the basics of pronouncing functional words (the weak and strong forms). Only 31.6% of the students had above average scores.

Some functional words are easier for the student than others. The above tables show the rates of the correct/ incorrect answers for each functional words. It highlights the words which are easier for the students in pronunciation. On the one hand, the weak form of the word “shall” has been pronounced correctly by most of the students. On the other hand, the words ‘as’, ‘for’ ‘me’ and ‘shall’ in their strong forms are difficult for the students. A possible interpretation to this is that most of these words are reduced by the replacement of the central letter the schwa sound /ə/ which is difficult to hear and pronounce. The remaining words have different rates as the tables illustrates. The pronoun ‘me’ is more difficult to pronounce, and the numbers show that the percentage of incorrect for this word is 80%. The remaining elements, however, have been also problematic for the students and the highest percentage of the correct pronunciation of the item ‘my’ has reached 22%. The total average of the incorrect answers for the third question is 68.4% .This shows that the majority of student have shown poor performances as to the basics of pronouncing of functional words .

4.4 Conclusion:

This chapter displaced the procedures , the result of the analysis of the test and the discussion of these results.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results, Conclusions, Recommendations, and Suggestions

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter summarizes the whole study. It presents the findings obtained from the analysis and discussions of the previous chapter, the whole summary of the study, recommendations and suggestions for further studies in the area of phonetics and phonology. In addition, it provides references of the study in alphabetical order .

5.2 Results:

- 1- Students lack the ability to divide the words into their syllables. They do not transcribe the word first before counting the vowels in it. They only depend on the spelling in deciding whether the word is monosyllabic, Trisyllabic or polysyllabic.
- 2- Students have difficulties in "the pronunciation of strong and weak syllables" and "reducing weak vowels to schwa".
- 3- Students who learn to speak clearly and stress everything have difficulty with unstressed syllables and words, especially in reconstructing function words from their fragmentary weak forms.
- 4- Although students may have basic knowledge about syllable, they lack the ability to produce weak and strong syllable in their speech.
- 5- Students who are learning English usually use strong syllable , and they sound very unnatural and students respond to the weight of the syllable, ignoring the stress rules of English language.

5.3 Conclusions:

The aims of this study are to investigate student's awareness of English syllables structure and to identify the problematic areas in learning English syllables by Sudanese students. It is hypothesized that students are not able to identify English syllables structure, students are not able to differentiate between short , long and diphthongs while pronouncing words. Moreover, students can not differentiate between strong and weak syllables while speaking English. To test these hypotheses, primary data was collected using to set of data collection tools namely a written and an oral test. The written test consists of one part of identifying the numbers of syllables in English words. The oral test aimed at testing students ability in producing weak and strong syllables within the words and strong and weak functional words while speaking English. Students were given words and sentences then their speech was recorded.

The data was analyzed using descriptive method. The results of the data analysis reject the first hypothesis which state that students are not able to identify English syllables structure. Also the results of the data analysis contradict with the second hypotheses which state that students are not able to differentiate between short , long and diphthongs while pronouncing words. While , the remains of the result of the data analysis match with the third hypothesis which states that students can not differentiate between strong and weak syllables while speaking English.

On the light of this findings recommendations were made: English weak and strong forms should be given more attentions from teachers and more practice from students.

Teachers should introduce these forms at an early stage in learning English when preparing materials of teaching and they also should use extensive listening which helps students developing their pronunciation.

The researcher suggested an investigation for further studies on the ability to comprehend strong and weak forms in listening and investigating other aspects of connected speech such as assimilation, linking, etc. Moreover, the effects of training in producing strong and weak forms is suggested for other researchers to be checked using tools like experiments.

5.4 Recommendations:

Based on the findings, the study made the following recommendations:

- 1- Teachers of English language at the universities should raise students' awareness about the use of strong and weak forms, also they should devote more of their time for training students in producing strong and weak forms by giving them exercises on pronunciation practice.
- 2- Teachers of English language should teach their students the phonetics transcription in order to utter the words correctly.
- 3- Each time the teacher introduces a new vocabulary item , it is important to consider spelling and pronunciation. With regard to pronunciation, stress and unstressed syllables are equally important.
- 4- EFL students should assume more responsibility to improve their performance in pronunciations.
- 5- Teachers should commit their students to participate in oral activities and advice them to listen more.
- 6- Researchers should make more studies on this area so as to draw students and teachers attentions.

7- Teachers are required to give more concentration on pronouncing functional words with their strong and weak forms inside the classroom.

8- Students and teachers should know the similarities and differences between phonological system of their mother tongue and target language e.g. the vowel system of the two languages.

5.5 Suggestions for Further Studies:

The researcher suggested more further studies on the area of English Phonology as follow:

1- To investigate the performance of Sudanese EFL students on English vowels.

2- Investigating the difficulties that face Sudanese students in understanding spoken English .

3- An Analysis of Errors Made By Sudanese University Students in The English Consonant-Clusters System.

4- Investigating difficulties that Encounter Sudanese Students in the Area of English Stress.

5.6 Conclusion:

Chapter five of this study gave a summary of the whole study , listed the results, recommendations and gave suggestions for further studies.

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Title of the research:

Investigating the Difficulties Facing Sudanese Students in Pronouncing Weak and Strong Syllables.

Answer all the questions:

Part One:

How many syllables are there in the following words?

1. game
a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables
2. blames
a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables
3. shames
a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables
4. vertical
a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables
5. misunderstood
a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables
6. bank.....
a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables
- 7.bumping.....
a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables

8. beautiful.....

- a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables

9. environment.....

- a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables

10. interact.....

- a. one syllable b. two syllables c. three syllables d. four syllables

Part two:

Pronounce the following words then identify whether they are strong or weak syllables:

E.g.: open = the final position with a coda is weak

1. better

2. tear.....

3. father

4. happy.....

5. character

6. sharpen

7. molar

8. private.....

9. thank you

10.eight.....

Part Three:

Pronounce the underlined function words in the following sentences.

- 1- Thanks for asking.
- 2-What's that for?
- 3- Shut the door.
- 4-Wait for the end.
- 5- We shall need to hurry.
- 6- I think we shall.
- 7- The price is the thing that annoys me.....
- 8- That is my book.
- 9- As much as possible.
- 10-That's what it was sold as.

Good luck