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Linguistics and Semantics Difficulties in Arabic Language Among Senior Secondary Schools in Ekiti, Nigeria

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A B S T R A C T

The difficulties that face most Nigeria Learners of Arabic, especially at the senior secondary school levels, is their ability to pronounce some of the Arabic sounds correctly. This difficulty has been observed among senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State without any research backing. This study was therefore conducted to practically examine the Linguistics and Semantics difficulties in the Arabic language among senior secondary schools. The experimental research design type was adopted for this study. Statement of problems, Purpose of the study, Research questions, Research hypothesis, Research design, Population Sample and Sampling Techniques, Instrumentation, Procedure for data collection, Data analysis techniques, Analysis and Result, Discussion, and Conclusion were discussed while Recommendations and References were also drawn.

A R T I C L E   I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic is a semantic language and the first language of more than 200 million individuals in the world (Beseiso *et al.*, 2010; Mahmoud & Zrigui, 2019; Mohamed & Shokry, 2022). As with any other language, it has its grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules, its slang and idioms, and its pronunciation system (Tamara *et al.*, 2021). A few characteristics beyond the normal differences between the languages make Arabic distinctive. Arabic is written and read from right to left. The Arabic alphabet comprises 28 letters; these letters are consonants together with short and long vowels (Ahmad & El Awady, 2011; Javed, 2013). Each letter has a basic form, but this form often changes depending on whether the letter is pleased with the beginning, middle, or end of the written word.

Short vowels are not included in most of the writings. Arabic spellings might be considered easier than that of many languages, including English Meanwhile, Arabic is one of the diglossic views langs this content diglossic refers to the fact that Arabic has two "varieties" The first is standard Arabic, which is the language variety in writing and formal speech; the second is colloquial Arabic, which is issued in everyday speech. In Arabic-speaking countries, children speak colloquial Arabic as their first language; they study modern Arabic almost in the way one would study a second language.

Both modern and colloquial are descendants of classical Arabic, the language of the Quran. Colloquial Arabic has many different forms, unlike modern Arabic, which is standardized across the Arab-speaking world. These forms are called dialects, and they vary between countries and regions. Common Arabic dialect includes Levantine, Moroccan, Najdi, and Iraqi. While all of these dialects are technically the same language, most dialects are so different that speakers of one dialect cannot understand the dialect of the other speakers. Modern Arabic is standardized, it can be used for communication between speakers who cannot understand each other's dialect.

Furthermore, the main obstacle that faces non-native speakers in the study Arabic language. These problems emerge in different aspects depending on the age and the environment of the learner. However, some are due to the nature of the language in terms of similarities and differences. These two factors are among the aspect of difficulty or easiness. The learner who studies a foreign language makes many errors unconsciously, due to interference of the languages or the transfer of his linguistics habits, his knowledge, and his language syntax whether in collection with sounds or words and sentences from the mother tongue to the target language (Mariyandi *et al.*, 2021).

In this study, the scientific explanation of these obstacles can be caused either by slips of the tongue as supplementation, repetitions, or copying or by the factors of learning and lack of knowledge. Teaching a language is an important field of applied linguistics. The method a learner acquires a second language is what most interests' scientists and researchers. In the last century, linguistics started searching for different issues related to the learning and teaching process of a second language (Tiong & Bakar, 2022), especially in the absence of Applied Education within Applied linguistics. That caused deception and disappointment for inspectors and teachers. They lack such Studies that would help them overcome difficulties in their work.

(i) There are several different kinds of linguistical whereby Spelling Difficulties: A non-native learner finds real difficulties in using letters and cannot distinguish between similar ones.

(ii) Lexical Difficulties: In Arabic, there is more than one synonym or explanation for one single lexical item which can create a problem for learners of Arabic even if they have a good level.

(iii)   Syntactical Difficulties: This refers to the purpose of written expunges for non-native learners of Arabic to recognize syntactic errors.

(iv)   Phonological Difficulties: It refers to a situation whereby a learner is replacing the sound (fa) with the sound (P) and this is due to the absence of this sound in the learner's language.

(v)   Morphological Difficulties: This refers to when learners use light consonants instead of heavy ones.

(vi)   Semantics Difficulties: This refers to when foreigners learn Arabic and come across words that are similar in meaning but different in form and vice versa.

Regarding the variable of interest to this study, these include the specific Arabic consonant and vowel sounds as well as specific syllabic structures which constitute perceived linguistics and semantics difficulties between the male and female senior secondary students of Arabic Studies as a target language. Different theories talked about the psychological aspect of acquiring foreign languages.

Despite their divergence, they have greatly benefited researchers in pedagogy. They have also paved the way for them to elaborate learning methods and making better for a learner to acquire his language. The theories are as follows:

(i)   Agreement Theory: It is among the theories which focus on acquiring L1 and L2 languages. Such theories claim congruency between the acquisition of a good mother tongue.

(ii)   Differentiation Theory: This theory also called the Contrastive analysis Approach is based on the hypothesis that "the learner's native language constitutes a strong element in learning a second language, and thus it cannot be ignored or excluded from the learning process"

(iii)   Accuracy Theory: Under this theory, learning takes place in two ways; consciously and unconsciously.

Consciously refers to when the learner seeks to master the structures and rules of the language by attending regular tutorial classes (Oloweye & Aladesusi, 2022). Unconsciously refers to the use of language for communication purposes related to life. It doesn't matter what the foreign language's rules are.

The main concern is only to communicate with other people when exposed to the real situation through "exchanging knowledge and experiences". Factors that can cause difficulties for non-native learners of Arabic, and the nature of the language they acquired need to be considered. Generally, they acquired it from their mother language by using strategies like copying, changing, omitting, and overgeneralizing (Haristiani & Rifa'I, 2020). The factors could be linked to Language's main causes: Language Causes. These difficulties can be caused by the nature of the Arabic rules and are related directly to the bilingual interface.

For the statement of the problem, Linguistics and Semantics difficulties have been observed among senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State without any research backing. most of the previous research on Arabic had focused on the study of Arabic words loaned into; Arabic sounds as pronounced by Yoruba learners of classical Arabic; and pronunciation problems among pupils of traditional Quranic schools in Yorubaland. In specific terms, the above review showed that no study had been conducted, particularly in identifying Arabic sounds which constitute pronunciation difficulties among Senior Secondary School Students of Arabic in Ekiti State. Hence, this constituted a gap in knowledge, some of which the study attempted to bridge

The purpose of this study was to identify the linguistics and semantics difficulties among senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State. Specifically, the study identified as follows:

(i)   Arabic consonant sounds that are difficult to pronounce for senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State.

(ii)   Arabic vowel sounds that are difficult to pronounce for senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State.

(iii)   Arabic syllabic patterns that are difficult to pronounce for senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State.

The following research questions were answered in the course of this study:

(i)   Which of the Arabic consonant sounds are difficult to pronounce for senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State.?

(ii)   Which of the Arabic vowel sounds are difficult to pronounce for senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State?

(iii)   Which of the Arabic syllabic patterns are difficult to pronounce for senior secondary Arabic students in Ekiti State.?

The following hypotheses were tested:

(i)   HO1: There is no significant difference in the Arabic consonant sounds that male and female senior secondary Arabic students find difficult to pronounce.

(ii)   HO2: There is no significant difference in the Arabic vowel sounds which male and female senior secondary Arabic students find difficult to pronounce.

(iii)   HO3: There is no significant difference in the syllabic patterns which male and female senior secondary Arabic students find difficult to pronounce.

2. METHOD

The experimental research design type was adopted for this study. The experimental research was conducted with a scientific approach using two sets of variables. The first set acts as a consultant, which you use to measure the differences between the second set. It also enables the researcher to obtain relevant information from a respectful sample to generalize the findings to the entire population. Thus, the research type is considered appropriate for the present study which describes the linguistics and semantics difficulties among senior secondary school Arabic students in Ekiti State. All the senior secondary school Arabic students in Ekiti State constituted the population for this study. Purposive Random sampling was used to select all the Arabic Students in senior secondary schools 1-3 from a State government college, Muslim Missionary secondary schools, and Community secondary schools in SS one.

The three categories of schools were chosen for comparative study of the linguistics and semantics difficulty among students of the schools. The researcher developed the Arabic Pronunciation Test (APT) was used as an instrument for data collection. The test was made up of 28 Arabic consonant sounds, vowel sounds, and syllabic patterns. Each of the consonants with vowel sounds at the beginning was purposively selected to trigger the pronunciation of the sounds.

The consonant and vowel sounds were thus used as stimuli to trigger the required pronunciation responses from each of the sample students. These responses were used to determine perceived difficulties in terms of their pronunciation of Arabic consonant sounds, short and long vowel sounds, and syllabic structures.

Details of how the consonant and vowel sounds were used to collect the relevant data were discussed under the procedure for data collection. The assumption was based on the fact that the consonant and vowel sounds were extracted from SSS Arabic language

curriculum and that students were already familiar with Arabic consonant and vowel sounds. Notwithstanding this assumption, the instrument was given to teachers of Arabic in the 5 senior secondary schools that were involved in the study to establish its face and content validity.

The reliability of the instrument was test-retest reliability method and was administered on some 20 SSS students who did not participate in the study properly. After 2 weeks, the test was re-administered on the same set of students. Their scores on the first and second administration of the test were validated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation technique. Research questions 1-3 were answered using the percentage while Hypotheses 1-3 were tested using chi-square statistics. All the hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

The Arabic Pronunciation Test was personally administered by the researcher in each school. The researcher sought the permission of the principals and the Arabic language teachers in the sample schools. It was assumed that any pronunciation behavior displayed by the subjects in these contexts were representative of their pronunciation behavior in other contexts in any of the picture reading test that was given.

Moreover, the same passage was administered in all the schools to ensure uniformity across the subjects. The respondents were instructed to pronounce the name of the object depicted by the pictures at their normal and natural pace. This helped the researcher to assess the correctness or otherwise of the pronunciation of specific sounds. The respondents' pronunciation was recorded on a diskette which made room for objective analysis and possible cross-checking by an external assessor.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
3.1. Findings

The analyses and results of the data collected for this study. Data were collected from 50 students. The data collected were analyzed using percentages to describe the demographic data of the respondents and answer research questions while the hypotheses were tested using chi-square statistics at a 0.05 level of significance.

It shows the demographic data of the respondents based on gender, out of 50 (100%) students that were sampled, 25 (50%) of them were males and 25 (50%) of them were females. This shows that the same proportion of male and female students was sampled for this study.

It is revealed items 1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21 and 27 were the Arabic consonants that were difficult for the majority of students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State; Items 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 12, 13, 19, 20, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 28 were not difficult for the majority of students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State. This implies that;

أَ أ آ ,ثَ ث ثُ ,حَ ح حُ ,خَ خ خُ ,ذَ ذ ذُ ,زَ ز زُ ,عَ ع عُ ,قَ ق قُ ,صَ ص صُ ,ضَ ض ضُ ,طَ ط طُ ,ظَ ظ ظُ ,هَ ه هُ.

were difficult for Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

بَ ب بُ ,تَ ت تُ ,جَ ج جُ ,دَ د دُ ,رَ ر رُ ,سَ س سُ ,شَ ش شُ ,فَ ف فُ ,كَ ك كُ ,لَ ل لُ ,مَ م مُ ,نَ ن نُ ,وَ و وُ ,يَ ي يُ, غَ غ غُ

were not difficult for Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State.

It showed items 1-15 were the Arabic vowels that were not difficult for the majority of the students of Arabic to pronounce. This indicates that;

قَال ,طَاعَ ,مَال ,طَال ,صَارَ ,قُو ,طَو ,مُو ,صُو ,بُو ,قِ ,طِى ,مِى ,صِى ,بِى.

were not difficult for Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State.

It revealed items 1, 3, and 4 were the Arabic syllabic patterns that were not difficult while items 2, 5, and 6 were difficult for the majority of the students of Arabic to pronounce. This indicates that;

<div dir="rtl">

لَ, لَا, گَانَ

</div>

were not difficult for Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

<div dir="rtl">

گَم, بَحِرُ, رَادَ

</div>

Were difficult for Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

3.2. Hypotheses Testing

Hypotheses postulated for this study were tested with the use of inferential statistics of chi-square at 0.05 level of significance.

It is shown the χ^2-value of 0.14 is obtained with a p-value of 0.93 when computed at a 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value of 0.93 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, the null Hypothesis is not rejected. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference in the pronunciation difficulty levels of Arabic consonant sounds by male and female Senior Secondary Students of Arabic in Ekiti State ($\chi^2(2) = 0.14$; $P>0.05$).

It is shown the χ^2-value of 2.67 is obtained with a p-value of 0.26 when computed at a 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value of 0.26 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, null hypothesis two is not rejected. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference in the pronunciation difficulty levels of Arabic vowel sounds by male and female Senior Secondary students of Arabic in Ekiti State ($\chi^2(2) = 2.67$; $P>0.05$).

It is shown the χ^2-value of 0.57 is obtained with a p-value of 0.73 when computed at a 0.05 level of significance. Since the p-value of 0.73 is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, null hypothesis three is not rejected. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference in the pronunciation difficulty levels of Arabic syllabic patterns by male and female Senior Secondary Students of Arabic in Ekiti State ($\chi^2(2) = 0.57$; $P>0.05$).

4. CONCLUSION

The findings obtained from this study are summarized below:
(i) The following Arabic consonant sounds, indicated by the relevant alphabets were difficult for the Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

<div dir="rtl">

اَ أ أ ,ثَ ث ثُ ,حَ ح حُ ,خَ خ خُ ,ذَ ذ ذُ ,زَ ز زُ ,عَ ع عُ ,قَ ق قُ ,صَ ص صُ ,ضَ ض ضُ ,ظَ ط طُ ,ظَ ظ ظُ هَ ه هُ

</div>

The following Arabic consonant sounds, indicated by the relevant alphabets were not difficult for the Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

<div dir="rtl">

بَ ب بُ ,تَ ت تُ ,جَ ج جُ ,دَ د دُ ,رَ ر رُ ,سَ س سُ ,شَ ش شُ ,فَ ف فُ ,كَ ك كُ ,لَ ل لُ ,مَ م مُ ,نَ ن نُ ,وَ و وُ ,غَ غ غُ ,يَ ي يُ

</div>

(ii) The following Arabic short and long vowel sounds were not difficult for the Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

<div dir="rtl">

قَالَ ,طَاعَ ,مَالَ ,ظَالَ ,صَارَ ,قُو ,ظَو ,مُو ,صُو ,بُو ,قِى ,طِى ,مِى ,صِى ,بِى.

</div>

(iii) The following Arabic syllabic patterns were not difficult for the Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

<div dir="rtl">

لَ, لَا, گَانَ

</div>

The following Arabic syllabic patterns were difficult for the Students of Arabic to pronounce in Ekiti State

<div dir="rtl">

گَم, بَحِرُ, رَادَ

</div>

(iv)   There was no statistically significant difference in the pronunciation difficulty levels of Arabic consonant sounds by male and female Senior Secondary Students of Arabic in Ekiti State ($\chi^2_{(2)}$ = 0.14; P>0.05).

(v)   There was no statistically significant difference in the pronunciation difficulty levels of Arabic vowel sounds by male and female Senior Secondary Students of Arabic in Ekiti

(vi)   State ($\chi^2_{(2)}$ = 2.67; P>0.05). There was no statistically significant difference in the pronunciation difficulty levels of Arabic syllabic patterns by male and female Senior Secondary Students of Arabic in Ekiti State ($\chi^2_{(2)}$ = 0.57; P>0.05).

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

(i)   Students of Arabic particularly in Ekiti State should be sensitized on the Arabic long and short vowels because of their phonemic significance and value.

(ii)   The students of Arabic should also be made to be aware of the two Arabic syllabic patterns which tend to constitute pronunciation problems for them.

(iii)   Arabic language teachers should take cognizance of the Arabic consonant sounds, Arabic vowel sounds as well as Arabic syllable patterns which constitute pronunciation problems for students and employ appropriate teaching strategies to facilitate effective teaching and learning of the identified problems to the students.

(iv)   Future researchers should also take note of the findings of this study and ascertain the area of Arabic sounds which are relatively easy and those that are relatively difficult to pronounce for the categories of learners involved in this study.

(v)   More studies which investigate the pronunciation difficulties of speakers of various Nigerian languages vis-à-vis the Arabic language should be conducted to facilitate the learning of the Arabic language in Nigeria.

5. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. Authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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