

**An Analysis of Errors Made by Kurdish University Students in the English
Consonant Clusters System**

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to indicate problems of a number of learners in transcribing consonant clusters. The input is collected out of classroom perceptions and transcribing test and words were detected in their written achievements. The participants are second year students at university of Salahaddin college of Education department of English. This research tries to specify the phonological errors in English and basically tries to focus on errors happen in final consonant clusters. Unlike Kurdish (which is the researchers' mother tongue), English allows up the combination of three consonants in initial position as well as four consonants in final position. For this reason, Kurdish learners of English face difficulty when they try to transcribe English syllables which contain such combinations of consonants. Thus, they try to insert a short vowel /i/ or schwa / / between the last two consonants, which may cause errors and it affects the number of syllabus as well. It is known that the number of the word cuts determined by the number of vowel sounds. Subsequently (20) students willingly have been chosen to transcribe (10) words, which contain final consonant clusters randomly, and data analysis showed that the participants don not have any problem in transcribing words containing initial and middle consonant cluster, while final clusters are problematic because the influence of the first tongue phonetics system, namely in case of two different languages have their patterns are distinct. As Kurdish, language does not allow certain consonant combinations in final position. While English permits the clusters of four consonants in final position. In addition lack of practicing is considered as another more issue. Being so, the purpose of the paper is to find out the difficulties which occurred in transcribing final consonant clusters.

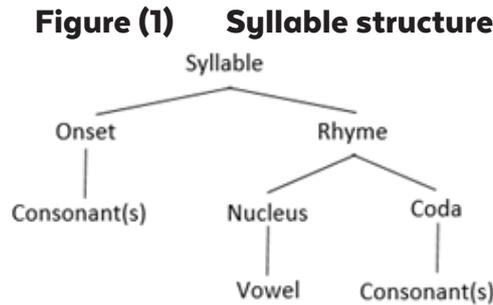
Keywords: consonants. Final consonant clusters. Vowel insertion.

1. INTRODUCTION

This research came about as a result of observing the way that language learners speak in English. The research dealt with the academic learners in department of English, who study English as a foreign language. There is no doubt all have a mother tongue which functions as a filter and help to distinguish sounds. When foreign language is learnt, it is clear different set of sounds and different rules are required to combine them. Therefore, foreign language learners try to approximate or fit the sounds and rules in the other languages to those which are familiar with in their mother tongue. This research tries to specify the phonological errors in English and mostly tries to focus on errors happen in final clusters.

1.1. The Syllables

The syllable is “a unit of pronunciation typically larger than a single sound and smaller than a word”. (Crystal, 2003). A syllable in which stated by (Steriade, 2002) must contain a vowel or vowel-like sound, including diphthongs. The most common type of syllable in language also has a consonant (C) before the vowel (V) and it is represented as CV. The essential elements of the syllable are onset (one or more consonant), followed by rhyme. Moreover, (Iverson, 1994) defines a syllable as “a complex unit made up of nucleus and marginal elements”.



(Yule, 2009: p.45)

The syllable in English can begin with a vowel, with one, two or three consonants. No word in English begins with more than three consonants (Roach, 2002: 71). Thus, the maximum number of segments in the word-initial consonant cluster is three. At the beginning of English words (syllables), in many cases, the first element is /s/ and the second consonant is approximant /l, r, w, j/ (Duanmu, 2009).

1.2. English Syllabic Structure

The common type of syllable in English is CV the word (to) for instance. A syllable consists of onset and the rime in which itself consists of the vowel followed by consonants. English can have as many as three consonants before and four consonants after the vowel. The following is the possibility of the occurrence of an English syllable as: (C)(C)(C)V(C)(C)(C)(C). Syllable-initial consonant clusters and syllable-final consonant clusters are possible (Salmani-Nodoushan, 2006). Table (1). Consonant clusters possibilities.

English syllable Structure	Word	Transcription
V	Eye	/ai/
VC	an	/æn/
VCC	ant	/ænt/
VCCC	ants	/ænts/
CV	key	/ki:/
CVC	beg	/beg/
CVCC	nest	/nest/
CCV	clue	/klu:/
CCVC	steep	/sti:p/
CCVCC	flask	/flæsk/
CCVCCC	flasks	/flæskz/
CCVCCCC	trampled	/træmpld/
CCCV	scree	/skri:/
CCVCV	screen	/skri:n/
CCVCVC	straddle	/strædl/
CCVCVCC	strangle	/stræŋgl/
CCVCVCCC	strengths	/strenθz/

Table(1) cited from (www.sciedu.ca/wjel World Journal of English Language Vol. 2, No. 4;

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1.3 Consonant Cluster

A consonant cluster is defined as a group or sequence of consonants that appear together in a syllable without a vowel between them. Both onset and coda can consist of more than one consonant. (Yule, 2009)

1.4 Initial Clusters

According to (Duanmu,2009) initial consonant clusters are divided into two types in English: One type is composed of /s/ followed by one of a small set of consonants (/p,t,k,f,m,l,n,w /). Table (2/A). two initial consonant clusters

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		initial	Pre-initial
sting	st	s	t
sway	sw	s	w
smoke	sm	s	m
slang	sl	s	l

The sounds in these clusters are categorized as pre-initial consonant followed by initial consonant (Laver,1994; & Roch,2000). It seems that Kurdish learners of English have no problems in producing initial consonant clusters as their phonetic rules allows them to use more than one consonant at initial position. For instance, (Frya- help),(gran- heavy or expensive). On the contrary in several other Kurdish words especially with two initial consonant clusters a random hidden vowel (/i/) is inserted for the ease of writing, but not speaking specifically when the second consonant is either liquid (r) or (l) for instance: (pi - full), (xi - round), (ki - silent), (dil- heart), (si - anesthesia), (di - savage). Another possible cluster in syllable initial position argued by (Yoshida) in which consists of three consonants and they can be labelled as pre- initial , initial and post- initial. For instance, /sp, sk, st / followed by /r,j,l/ as in spray /spre /, spume /spju m/ , spleen /spli n/ ,screen /skri n/, square /skwe r/ , skew /skju / strong /str / .

Table (2/B). Three initial consonant clusters

Table (2/B). Three initial consonant clusters

		Pre-initial	initial	Post-initial
Splash	spl	s	p	l
Spurious	spi	s	p	j
Screen	skr	s	k	r

As a matter of fact this credited to the similarity between the two languages Kurdish and English which is a positive transfer according to Lado's theory which two languages are the same in the structures and forms, no difficulty would be anticipated (Lado, 1957).

1.5. Medial Clusters

Roach (2000) provides a quite number of examples concerning middle consonants clusters such as, camping ; / kɑmp / -extra; / kstr /, -reply ; /r pl / -windy ; / w ndi/ movement ; / mu vm()nt/ -description ; /d skr p ()n/ -import ; / mp t/ -blackboard; / blakb d/. That is applicable on Kurdish sound system for instance: ruxsar (appearance), dilbar (loved), dastar (motar), Kurdistan, rizgar,(savior) dastmal (scarf) .

1.6. Final Clusters

Any consonant may be a final consonant except (h,w,j). And they are divided into three sets. One begins with a final consonant preceded by a pre-final consonant and the other a final consonant followed by a post-final consonant. The pre-final consonants form a small set such as /m,n, ,l,s/. The post-final consonants also form a small set: s, z, t, d, ; example words are: 'bets' /betz/, 'beds' /bedz/. (Diouf Lo, 2002) Duanmu states that all the words are syllabified and many of them exceed CVC. For instance, English example (texts). And consonants beyond CVCC are licensed only a consonant suffixes as in (help-helps) is added. Therefore, words final consonants can be elaborated in terms of morphology and no need to count phonology. (2009) Table (3/A). Three final consonant clusters which consist of pre-final, final and post final.

		Pre-final	Final	Post-final
Helped	He	L	P	T
Banks	ɛg	ŋ	K	S
Bonds	ɒŋ	N	D	Z

Cited from www.uababylon.edu.iq/prints/pudoc-2-27900-748.docx

Table (3/B). a cluster of one post-final.

		Pre-final	final	Post-final 1	Post-final 2
Fifths	Fi	-	F	θ	s
Next	Ne	-	K	S	t
Lapsed	Læ	-	P	S	t

Cited from www.uababylon.edu.iq/prints/pudoc-2-27900-748.docx

Table (3/C). a final consonant preceded by a pre-final and followed by post-final one and post-final two.

		Pre-final	final	Post-final 1	Post-final 2
twelfths	Twe	L	f	θ	s
prompts	ɒp	M	p	t	s

Table (3/D). consisting of a final consonant with no pre-final but three post-final consonants:

final			Post-final 1	Post-final 2	Post-final 3
sixths/sɪkθs/	sɪ	.k	s	θ	s
texts/tekstz	tɛ	.k	s	t	s

Cited from www.uababylon.edu.iq/prints/pudoc-2-27900-748.dox

English allows consonant clusters at the beginning and end of syllables (Roach, 2004: 71.72). Similarly, Kurdish learners of English can produce two final consonant clusters as their phonological system permits that, like: (dost- friend), (merd-brave), (reng- colour), (behe t- paradise), (xu k- sister), (pird- bridge), (sard- cold). Therefore, they transcribed two consonant clusters in English easily . However, in several other Kurdish words which end up with two consonants, a hidden vowel /i/ or as (Yosida) call it extra vowel is inserted such as (xanim- lady), (nerim- soft), (xwêndin-studying, (gerim- hot), and that is for the ease of articulation. Conversely, the problem aggravates with three and four consonants, as Kurdish learners try to facilitate the production of three or four final consonants in English by inserting a short vowel in between the last two ones, and that is due to the limit of the number of consonants which end up words in Kurdish language as they do not exceed more than two consonant clusters and Kurdish language has tendency to open syllable rather than closed syllable. Consequently , Kurdish learners mistranscribed words end up with more than two consonant clusters as short vowels /i/ or / / inserted.(see the appendix). That is asserted by (Yoshida) when he claims that some languages or do not have such a huge numbers of consonant clusters as English language has. Therefore, learners whose languages contain different syllable rules may face problem in achieving certain English words. Being so, learners try to find suitable ways to cope with new pattern by adding unneeded vowels between the last two consonants.

2. Methodology

2.1. The sample

The population is limited to the students of College of Education Department of- English Salahaddin University. The total number of the participants was (20) students. The study sample was randomly selected. In order to conduct the study, the researchers have chosen (10) examples for two tests: pre-test and post-test. These two tests were given to the same random participants with three months apart. Then the percentage of performance of the participants in both tests is showed according to certain statistical procedures of sample percentage in pre- test scores and post-test scores, the mean of each test in each word is displayed. Finally the comparison of both tests is conducted to see if there is any improvement in the post test in transcribing the final consonant clusters correctly. The examples include final consonant clusters, their correct transcription, and the students' mistranscription.

2.2. Reliability of the Test

Reliability refers to the consistency of the results that follows from the use of a test (White & Gunstone .1992:177) a test can be considered reliable if it shows the same results over a given period of time. The test has been administered to the same group of students (sample) after three months. The statistical has been obtained from the two administrations.

3. Results and Discussion

It indicates that there is a statistical significant difference in performance of the participants in transcribing the final consonant clusters in two tests. So the average of the first word in pre-test is (0.8) and the average of the first word in post-test is (0.9). The average of the second word in pre-test is (0.7) and the average of the second word in the post-test is (0.85). The average of the third word in pre-test is (0.7) and the average of the third post-test is (0.95). The average of the fourth word is (0.75) and the average of the fourth word in post-test is (0.8). The average of the fifth word in pre-test is (0.7) and the average of the fifth word in post-test is (0.9). The average of the sixth word is (0.95) and the average of the sixth word in post-test is (0.8). The average of the seventh word in pre-test is (0.85) and the average of the seventh word in post-test is (0.8). The average of the eighth word in pre-test is (0.35) and average of the eighth word in post-test is (0.45). The average of the ninth word in pre-test is (0.75) and the average of the ninth word in post-test is (1). The average of the tenth word in pre-test is (0.75) and the average of the tenth word is (0.9). So it is clear that there is improvement in all the words except the (6 and 7) word.

Table (4). the average of both tests

Avr1	Avr2	performance		percent
0.8	0.9	0.1	Positive	10
0.7	0.85	0.15	Positive	15
0.7	0.95	0.25	Positive	25
0.75	0.8	0.05	Positive	5
0.7	0.9	0.2	Positive	20
0.95	0.8	-0.15	Negative	-15
0.85	0.8	-0.15	Negative	-5
0.35	0.45	0.1	Positive	10
0.75	1	0.25	Positive	25
0.75	0.9	0.15	Positive	15

The percentage of both tests calculated and indicated that there is improvement in transcribing the words correctly in the post-test after practicing for a while to avoid inserting short vowel and schwa which the second hypothesis is verified that the mistakes result from the lack of practice in addition to mother tongue reflection. According to Lado's theory (1957) the most errors will occur in phonological aspects when the two languages differ from each other.

4. CONCLUSION

To conclude the result of this paper showed that the participants made many errors in producing final consonant clusters which can be attribute to the impact of mother tongue in which Kurdish language does not allow many consonant clusters in final position and because of in some cases a hidden vowel is added between the consonants especially when the last one is on of the liquids sounds. Therefore, a vowel is inserted between the final consonants that are to make the production of the words easier as the reflection of the Kurdish one. Moreover, the lack of exposure to English language which negatively serve Kurdish university students productions. Another reason which should be acknowledged is the falls performance by some university instructors who have not been trained adequately to teach pronunciation correctly. This will encourage students to poor performance in many English words.

4.1 Pedagogical implication

To the best of our knowledge practicing is the super way to overcome the problem of transcribing, as it is that clear practice makes perfect. Being so, different common ways of practicing are being suggested as solution for the students to improve their pronunciation of the final consonant clusters as follow:

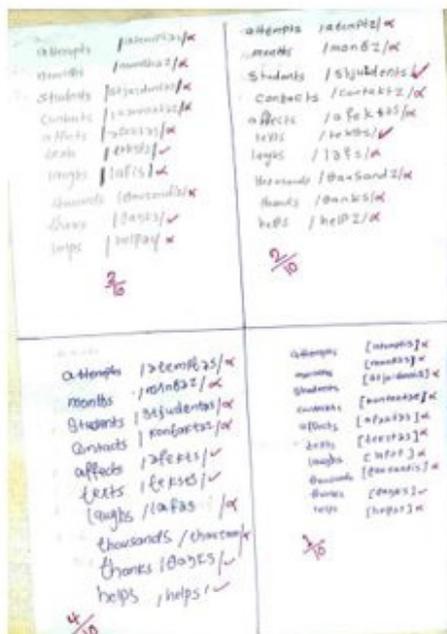
- 1- Imitating the native: students are required to listen to a model then imitate him/her.
- 2- Recording the voice: students are in need of a tape recorder to record their own voices so that they will be able to hear their own voices and notice their own progress and mistakes as well.
- 3- Use mirror: it is very necessary for students to look at the mirror in order to see the movement and changes of the organs of speech, the lip shapes in particular.
- 4- Peer- review: students can collaborate with one another especially the one which has good pronunciation can help others and correct their transcription mistakes. Peer-reviewing could be repeated daily.
- 5- Teaching strategy: a good pronunciation technique and an adequate teaching strategy can be followed in phonetics and phonology courses.

APPENDIX

A/1: the sample of words conducted in pre-test and post-test.

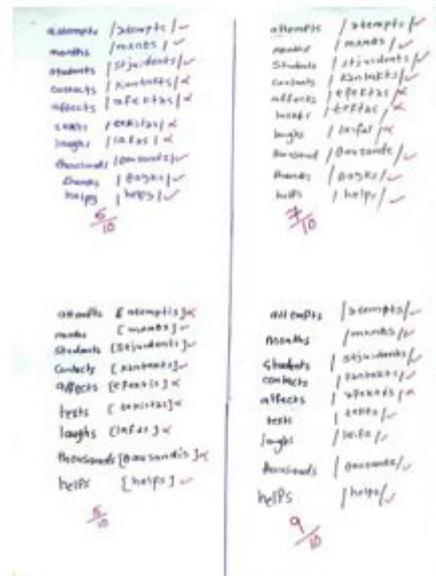
	English words
1	Attempts
2	Months
3	Students
4	Contacts
5	Affects
6	Texts
7	Laughs
8	Thousands
9	Thanks
10	Helps

A/2: Pre-test



A/3:

Post test



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