

Pronunciation Difficulties of Arab Students- Causes and Remedies

Muneera Al-Ghareeb

Abstract: Our language, the choice of words, our pronunciation, etc., give a clear picture to the hearer about ourselves. The form and choice of words, plus the speakers' intonation which may constitute what is called a dialect. Some people say Kuwaiti Arabic is a dialect of Arabic but that is always controversial and debatable. However, everyone says conclusively that the written language is the same, though the spoken language may vary here and there. Nonetheless where communication is concerned, everyone succeeds in saying what he or she means in spite of these differences. The language used on radio, TV, media, cinema, etc., by and large remains the same. Foreign learners of English like Arab students have a choice. They can adopt either British standard or American standard. Many Arab students acquire American accent easily and some others choose the British standard of accent. It does not make much difference which standard is chosen or used. What matters is one's intelligibility. When a student speaks English, his pronunciation should be understandable to everyone across national and regional boundaries. In other words there should be international intelligibility of the spoken variety of English. Many Arabs who are resident and settled in the US and Britain don't show much evidence of Arabic flavor when they speak English. Students who study in the US or UK acquire some measure of English accent and they tend to influence the pronunciations of the people around them. Pronunciation varies more than any other aspect of English. After all, the slightest change in the way we move the organs of speech changes the sound that comes out. It is pronunciation which is immediately noticed and that distinguishes one person from another. Spelling, grammar, morphology, syntax, etc. may not change at all. Even in RP no two individuals speak hundred per cent in the same way or have the same accent in every respect. There will be individual differences. Almost everyone's pronunciation is uniquely distinctive and also exhibits regional, national or social qualities of sound.

Keywords: Pronunciation Difficulties, communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Our pronunciation or for that matter our accent betrays our background. It tells the hearer where we come from and tells him or her, in addition, a host of other things about ourselves. It tells the hearer what kind of education we have had, our culture, and our society, in addition to many others. In short, our language, the choice of words, our pronunciation, etc., give a near complete picture to the hearer or listener looking for clues about ourselves.

The Arabic spoken in Kuwait is slightly different from the one spoken in Morocco, Tunisia and other neighboring countries collectively known as the Maghreb in Arabic. For that matter the Greek spoken in Cyprus is a bit different from that spoken in Cyprus. The striking point of difference is the way the language is spoken or the style of speaking it. Besides there could be other features such as the form and choice of words, plus the speakers' intonation which may constitute what is called a dialect. Some people say Kuwaiti Arabic is a dialect of Arabic but that is always controversial and debatable. However, everyone says conclusively that the written language is the same, though the spoken language may vary here and there. Nonetheless where communication is concerned, everyone succeeds in saying what he or she means in spite of these differences. The language used on radio, TV, media, cinema, etc., by and large remains the same.

Therefore the Arabic language used by a newsreader on a Syrian TV channel will be understandable across the Arab world.

Way back in 1912 George Bernard Shaw, an Irish playwright, wrote *Pygmalion*, a play that featured English accents. Godfrey Howard in his *The Good English Guide*, says: 'In 1912 Bernard Shaw wrote *Pygmalion*, which he described as an experiment to demonstrate that applied phonetics could undermine the British class system, partly held together by the way people speak. In 1990 the BBC broadcast a radio programme which showed that the class barrier is still largely a *sound* barrier that it takes no more than a few vowels and consonants to signal the kind of school someone went to and the social background they come from. The signals are not always reliable but much of the time they convey remarkably accurate information.'

The above quotation proves that our accent establishes everything, if not, most things about us .

Foreign learners of English like Arab students have a choice. They can adopt either British standard or American standard. Many Arab students acquire American accent easily and some others choose the British standard of accent. It does not make much difference which standard is chosen or used. What matters is one's intelligibility. When a student speaks English, his pronunciation should be understandable to everyone across national and regional boundaries. In other words there should be international intelligibility of the spoken variety of English. Many Arabs who are resident and settled in the US and Britain don't show much evidence of Arabic flavor when they speak English. Students who study in the US or UK acquire some measure of English accent and they tend to influence the pronunciations of the people around them.

The British standard is known as RP (Received Pronunciation). This accent is widely used and understood in Britain such as in its universities, schools, colleges, films, BBC, and elsewhere. However there are many other accents widely used there. English teachers all over the world use either RP or the American standard. The written forms of these varieties don't make any significant difference but their pronunciations do. RP is widely known as the spoken embodiment of a variety or varieties known as *the King's English*, *the Queen's English*, *BBC English*, *Oxford English* and *Public School English*. In England, it is also often referred to simply as *Standard English*. RP has been described by many of its users and admirers in the UK and elsewhere as the best pronunciation for British English, for the countries influenced by British English or for all users of English everywhere. Americans do not normally subscribe to this view, but many of them admire RP as the representative accent of educated British English while some associate it with the theatre and, in men, with effeminacy.

According to James Aitchison, *York Dictionary of English Grammar*, *Received Pronunciation (RP) is 'A form of British English spoken by a minority of speakers; a middle-class British social accent. The word "received", which is used here in the sense of handed down and accepted as authoritative, is a reminder that RP was once the accent of a privileged social class. RP is still the mostly widely understood British accent, but it has lost some of its authority and prestige'*. In other words British Received Pronunciation is not localized. It is to be heard in all parts of the country from those with the appropriate social or educational background. On the other hand, most people do have some degree of local coloring in their speech.

Tom McArthur in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* says: '*The speakers of American English outnumber all native speakers of English outside the US by about two to one and those of British English by nearly four to one. This advantage, strengthened by US involvement with world affairs, has given American English a global importance in the late 20 century comparable to that of British English in the late 19th century. Because British English and American English spelling can be seen in printed and edited texts, comparing and contrasting them is more or less straightforward, but because of the diversity of speech forms within American English and British English, there is no analogous basis for comparing British English and American pronunciation'*. While British English pronunciation can be called Received Pronunciation, American English pronunciation can be labeled General American.

The chief point of difference between RP and GA is that the former is non-rhotic, while the latter is rhotic. That is, the letter 'r' is pronounced in all positions in words like *rare* and *rarer* in GA but in RP 'r' is not pronounced unless a vowel follows. In RP, therefore, /r/ does not occur finally in *rare* and *rarer* unless followed by a word beginning with a vowel: *a rare article*, *a rarer article*. Generally, /r/ is a retroflex consonant in GA and an alveolar consonant in RP. In addition, there are numerous other phonological features which differentiate GA from RP. Kuwaiti students, who studied at a British school, will speak English with a flavor of RP and students who studied at an American school will proudly flaunt an American accent. While there isn't any relative merit in their accents, the test of their communication in English lies in its intelligibility across all barriers.

There are many adjectival labels for describing accents of English. Some of them are dismissive and some others are pejorative. They include words *adenoidal, barbarous, broad, cute, distinct, educated, flat, foreign, funny, guttural, harsh, heavy, lilting, nasal, posh, provincial, quaint, rough, rustic, sing-song, strong, uneducated*. All these accentual labels have their strong social implications. Students who studied in a British or American school in Kuwait may not reveal harsh or heavy accents. Their accents may approximate to their teachers' British or American accents. Students who haven't had any exposure to native English speech at school may speak English with a heavy and strong accent.

Pronunciation varies more than any other aspect of English. After all, the slightest change in the way we move the organs of speech changes the sound that comes out. It is pronunciation which is immediately noticed and that distinguishes one person from another. Spelling, grammar, morphology, syntax, etc. may not change at all. Even in RP no two individuals speak hundred per cent in the same way or have the same accent in every respect. There will be individual differences. Almost everyone's pronunciation is uniquely distinctive and also exhibits regional, national or social qualities of sound.

In addition to RP or General American, there is another standard variety of English known as Network English. This form of English is spoken by announcers and news readers on national, network, coast-to-coast television programs in the United States. It is a national as distinct from a regional American accent. The term 'Network English' is equally applicable in a British context. Most broadcasters on the national British network use a form of Received Pronunciation that is acceptable and intelligible to a majority of audience. Some people refer to the British English as BBC English. All these terms or labels are used interchangeably by linguists, phoneticians, ELT experts and others concerned with teaching English and its pronunciation.

2. WHICH MODEL OF PRONUNCIATION—AMERICAN OR BRITISH?

It doesn't make any difference which accent is used by students learning English since both American and British accents are broadly intelligible all over the world. There are a few differences here and there and they count much in the overall design to communicate intelligibly to international audiences. Even where commercial, intellectual, social, diplomatic, etc. interactions are concerned, any one of the two accents will do equally well. Kuwaiti students who study at an American school will naturally acquire an American accent and those at British school will normally acquire the British accent (RP). When both these students interact, and socialize, it is the common language (English) which brings and binds them together in mutually rewarding and beneficial communication. There is no mutual dislike amongst them for using either American or British accent and both accents are equally intelligible across all groups of students and people everywhere.

In addition students have a freedom to choose an accent of their choice. Students wanting to go to the United States will naturally prefer to learn American English in most of its aspects whereas students planning education or business in the UK will naturally lean towards RP. However, there is no rule or restriction that one should or should not use American English in the UK and vice versa. Alan Cruttenden in his *Gimson's Pronunciation of English* says: *Whatever abilities the learner may acquire in the later stages of learning English, he will be well advised at the beginning to model his productive performance on one model of spoken English and to restrict himself to a 'careful, colloquial' style. As he gains productive confidence he can for the purposes of widening his receptive competence gradually be exposed to other styles and important regional types. If his introduction to English is via a British spoken form, he might, when this production habit is firmly established, be encouraged to listen to General American.*

An Arab student learning English independently or in the privacy of his or her home need not be baffled by the diversity of English accents common in the world. He or she should be able to understand English spoken by an American or by an Englishman. His or her spoken English too must be comprehensible to these native speakers of English. Alan Cruttenden (297) says: *Faced with the great diversity of English accents, the foreign learner might wish that there existed a neutral, all-purpose, international pronunciation of English. It is claimed by some that, as a result of the great improvement in communications, the present divergences in English as it is spoken throughout the world will gradually be eliminated and there will emerge a universally intelligible pronunciation of English which all can use.*

Students learning English do not have to be scared by either of the standard accents because both of them are equally comprehensible. Where other features of the language are concerned, they are not significant. They don't add to the learning difficulties of students. There are a few differences in spellings between American and British English. However there are a few lexical differences. For example, Americans say *truck*, where Brits say *lorry*. *First floor—ground floor*,

gas—petrol, faucet—tap, etc., etc. Besides, there are few grammatical variations that hold back understanding or communication. Where pronunciation is concerned, Americans' intonation is a bit different and their word stress and sentences stress differ occasionally. But overall, there are no roadblocks to simplicity and communication. No one feels deterred in trying to learn or use one of the standards.

Michael Swan in his *Practical English Usage* says, *American and British English are very similar. There are a few differences of grammar and spelling, and rather more differences of vocabulary and idiom. Modern British English is heavily influenced by American English, so some contrasts are disappearing. Pronunciation is sometimes very different, but most American and British speakers can understand each other easily.* In grammar there isn't much difference and there is no chance that a Brit would misunderstand an American or vice versa because of a different sentence structure. Where the Americans say: 'It's important that he be told' the Brits would say: 'It's important that he should be told'. In America they say: 'He did not arrive yet', while in the UK one would normally say: 'He hasn't arrived yet. The point to note here is that there is no breakdown of communication between speakers of the two varieties of English.

However in vocabulary there is considerable difference and in many cases the American equivalent is understood and sometimes used by British English speakers. Where Americans say: 'airplane, busy, can collect, candy, elevator, eraser', British English speakers would use: 'aero plane, engaged, tin, reverse the charges, sweets, lift' respectively. Like this there are some more lexical differences between American and British English. They are 'first floor instead of ground floor, sidewalk for pavement, store for shop, subway for underground, truck for lorry, vacation for holiday, windshield for windscreen', etc. There is some room for misunderstanding, confusion or being misled. If an American says, 'Go to the first floor and ring the door bell at Flat 4, a Brit may be misled, if he is not aware of the difference between the British ground floor and the American first floor. Both mean the same. There is confusion in the minds of students of English when they see 'organize' and 'organise'. Americans prefer -ize while the Brits use -ise. Etymologically -ize is preferable. While the pronunciation of 'organize' and 'organise' is the same, Americans pronounce the r-letter in the word since American pronunciation is rhotic. The causes for these differences and variation are historical in addition to influences from other European languages brought to America by colonizers and emigrants. French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and other languages influence American language because the American society is a vast melting pot.

Where spelling is concerned, there isn't any significant difference between the two varieties. While Americans can write 'aluminum', Englishmen will write 'aluminium'. Americans write: 'analyze, catalog, center, check, color, defense, enroll, liter, meter, organize, program, tire', where their British counterparts would write: 'analyse, catalogue, centre, cheque, colour, defence, enrol, litre, metre, organize, programme, tyre' respectively. American spellings can never mislead one, or cause misunderstanding. Students have a tendency to prefer American spelling owing to the fact that some spellings are based on the way they are pronounced and vice versa. The *Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* by Sylvia Chalker and Edmund Weiner says about spelling pronunciation in this way: *The pronunciation of a word according to its written form. Such pronunciations are considered 'incorrect' by many speakers, but gain wide acceptance through being closer to the spelling and may eventually supersede the traditional pronunciation.* The traditional pronunciations of words 'ate, forehead, often, towards, waistcoat, humour, hotel, hospital and herb have been influenced and replaced by spelling pronunciation. This is evident on both sides of the Atlantic. Americans have gone a step further. Godfrey Howard (376) says regarding spelling: *English spelling is no joke, even for the English. Foreigners tear their hair out. In America they have gone some way towards rationalizing spelling (-or for -our, maneuver for manoeuvre, plow for plough and so on), but even the most modest reforms arouse great hostility in Britain. We are stuck with our difficult spelling and there are enough exceptions to rules to make it hardly worth learning any of them, except one: when in doubt, look it up in a dictionary. Where a dictionary lists alternative spellings, the editors prefer the first one shown. But another dictionary might reverse the order.*

Most students make spelling mistakes knowingly and unknowingly. Most of the time, they go by the way they pronounce the word when they spell it. And the result is always a mistake. Though many people have attempted to reform the spelling, none has materialized. A few historical reasons why the English spelling is so erratic, unpredictable, irregular, chaotic, unphonetic may not be out of place here. In his *York Dictionary of English Grammar*, James Aitchison says: *The adoption of the Roman alphabet by the Germanic-speaking Anglo-Saxons was the first in the long series of accidents that determined the spelling of Modern English.*

Old English writing was phonetic in the sense that every letter of a word was sounded and no letters were silent, but with the arrival of the Normans the phonetic base began to be undermined. When the Normans colonized English, Old French, with a spelling system different from that of Old English became the official language. French was never the majority language but it transformed English and English spelling. Old English 'cwacian, cwen' and 'cwencan', for example, became 'quake, queen' and 'quench'.

English spelling was no longer phonetic, and differences between speech and spelling, between the phonology and the morphology of English, continued to appear in the fifteenth century when the sound of the English language was transformed in the process known as the Great Vowel Shift.

The sound system changed but there was no equivalent change in spelling. There was, however, a development that eventually led to the standardization of spelling. The first printed book in England appeared from William Caxton's Westminster press in 1477, and by the time Caxton died in 1491 he had printed almost a hundred books. Printing gave the written word, and the spelling of the written word, permanence and a wider readership; it also created a new awareness of writing and spelling.

A similar kind of awareness was fostered by the English-to-Latin dictionaries that began to appear from the mid-fifteenth century, and by the English dictionaries from Robert Cawdrey's 'A Tale Alphabetical' in 1604 to Samuel Johnson's Dictionary in 1755, by which time spelling was standardized.

Spelling was stabilized by pronunciation varied from one generation of speakers to another and from one geographical area to another. And it is the diversity of spoken English—along with the limited number, twenty-six, of alphabetical characters to represent hundreds of thousands of words—that makes it impossible to create a strictly phonetic system of English spelling. Even if there were agreement on the sound system—Received Pronunciation, North American network English—to be adopted as the model for a revised spelling system, the system would not represent the speech of the vast majority of speakers.

There are very many differences in pronunciation between American and British English. Pronunciation is one feature where one finds most of the differences and its pronunciation which mostly distinguishes American English. This feature applies to English spoken in part of the world, be it among native English or non-native English speakers. The English spoken in Australia is slightly different from that spoken in American mostly with respect to the accent or pronunciation. Therefore the English spoken across Arab nations is a bit different from the ones spoken in other parts of the world. The differences will always be there and there cannot be a uniform accent or pronunciation throughout the world. What matters is international intelligibility while retaining some of the regional accentual qualities.

There are, of course, many different regional accents in both Britain and America. The most important general differences between American and British speech include the following. In general American pronunciation is perceived as being nasal. Certain vowels are nasal, that is, they are pronounced through the nose and mouth at the same time in some varieties of American English. This nasalization, a common feature of American accent, is not found in most British accents. While British English or RP has 44 distinct phonemes, American English has 43 phonemes. British English has one more vowel than American English. This is the rounded short vowel as in *off, lost* and *dog*. In American English these words are pronounced with a vowel sound as in *father* or in *caught*. Further words like *fast, laugh, pass*, etc. are pronounced with a vowel as in *fat* and *act* in America. This is a notable point of difference or a distinguishing mark.

Another characteristic feature of American accent is that it is rhotic; in other words all r-letters are pronounced in all positions in all words. In RP r-letter is pronounced before vowel sound. In most kinds of American English 'r' is pronounced in all positions where it is written in a word and it changes the quality of a vowel that comes before it. So words like *car, tar, card, offer, worker* sound very different in British and American accents. Yet another distinguishing feature of American accent is what phoneticians and pronouncing dictionaries call T-voicing. They turn /t/ into a voiced sound like /d/. For example 'writer' and 'rider' are pronounced in the same way. The /t/ sound in 'writer' is pronounced as a /d/. When Americans pronounce 'shutter', it sounds like 'shudder'. Another feature of American pronunciation can be found when they pronounce words like 'missile, hostile, fertile, senile', etc. They drop the diphthong in these words. Yet there are some more accentual features that distinguish American English and give it its distinctive flavor and character. But on the whole none of these pronunciation features will be a stumbling block for any student learning English. Pronunciation differences do not hinder communication or understanding between peoples speaking the same language across countries and continents.

An Arab student is free to choose a model that he or she prefers in order to communicate, act, interact, transact business and pursue studies. But his or her choice is determined by the accents used by their teachers at school or college. Most students have a fondness or preference for American English for a variety of reasons. Some say it is easy, others study or learn it for educational or business purposes, for some others it's just a matter of social prestige, and yet for some others they recognize the economic and military power of the United States. There can be many more reasons almost one or more reasons for each individual learner. However it should be understood that any language is a tool for communication and English is no exception.

3. WHY LEARN ENGLISH OR ACQUIRE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION

Today English is not just a world language, it is **the** world language and it is the only most widely used language in the world today. There are no rivals to it as of now and no other language can replace it for the expected future. It has a global reach and there is no nation under the sun where English is not taught or spoken. English serves a variety of functions in the global market. It is the language of international diplomacy. Most speakers in the UN General Assembly and the Security Council choose to speak in English, though they have the freedom to speak their own languages. International communications in the aviation sector exclusively use English. Pilots and others in the cockpits use English to communicate with control towers and to guide the aircraft to land and take off. So do ships the world over. The lives of millions of passengers are in the hands of those crew members who use English while navigating aircraft. International business and conferences are conducted in English. Trade talks, border disputes, peace talks, etc. are all done in English. International tourism also depends on English to advertise holiday destinations, hotel service, flight schedules, etc. through the medium of English.

Besides students proceeding to the US, Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, etc. have to have a certain degree of proficiency in English before they start their education there. Many choose to do business there and settle there eventually. Behind all these actions lies English and only English no matter what accent one uses. No student can remain indifferent or oblivious to these and bury his or her head in the sand. These factors can motivate any student to learn English regardless of the initial difficulties.

Globalization, privatization and liberalization are encouraged, embraced and enforced by people who speak English. English is one of the driving forces of these social changes happening across continents. Most countries have introduced English as a compulsory subject at school level. All countries in the Gulf have made learning English compulsory for students at school. Schools, institutes, colleges and universities teaching English encourage students to learn it and to progress in life. There are crash courses, short-term courses, English pronunciation courses, proficiency courses in addition to courses in ESP (English for Specific Purpose). English is required for all professions and professionals. Doctors, engineers, lawyers, businessmen, diplomats, students, DJs, RJs, PROs, announcers, anchors and host of others need varying degrees of verbal and writing proficiency in English if they want to excel in their fields.

Just as English has borrowed many words from numerous languages so have most of the world's languages from English. I wonder whether there is any equivalent to Internet, computer, etc. in many other languages. These languages have just borrowed these words from English and adopted the technologies associated with them. And these technologies have spawned the growth of businesses, establishment of companies and firms and generated employment, incomes and all round prosperity. No student will ever ignore them simply because they are of English origin. English is breaking the barriers and building bridges across communities, countries and continents. English is an all-enveloping wind which brings changes and progress with it.

Pam Peters in *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage* says: *English is the second language of choice in Russia, China, Japan and parts of EU.*

The volume of international communication in English is enormous. Estimates (guesstimates) have it that 75% of the world's mail, cables and telexes, and 80% of the information on computers is in English. It is the language of science and technology and the official medium of communication for ships and aircraft. International organizations mostly use English, whether associated with the United Nations or with sports management. So do the major financial institutions, media networks and travel organizations. Other domains of English are international law, tertiary education and in interpreting and translating, as a 'relay language'.

Pam Peters goes on to add that *English is the world's most widespread language*.

So in order for a student to catch up with rapid changes, progress and advances happening all around, he or she has to acquire some working knowledge of English together with an intelligible pronunciation of it. If one fails or refuses to learn English, one will miss the bus. While others make progress through English and advance in life, one cannot be left behind. It is like a fast spreading epidemic.

Learning of English can be used for any personal, professional purpose. The sky is the limit. Many companies the world over require a high standard of English for their employees and would-be employees. While those not able to converse freely in English are shown the door. Those candidates with a fair fluency in English and good writing skill will have an edge over all others in any competition for school/college enrollment or job placements and promotions in employment. It is a passport endorsed for all countries. You can enter and exit any country of your choice.

Students and others who need to make a mark or leave a legacy in their field or profession should be able to cultivate an intelligible accent. It could be either American or British accent failing which the accent should be an internationally understandable one. Non-native English speakers who address the Security Council or the UN General Assembly speak with an easily understandable accent of English. Many Arab diplomats speak English and their English is perfectly understandable and they succeed in communicating to their audiences. Arab students should listen to their speeches and draw inspiration, motivation and encouragement from them. English is an ever-widening window on the world; it is the world's lingua franca.

Arab student have to open up and establish contacts with people from other cultures and in order to do that there should be a common link language and only English can serve the purpose. If Arabs want to establish businesses, firms and commercial partnerships with non-Arabs, the only language to communicate in is English. So even if they want to start a small business, draw more customers and earn more profit, they should have some degree of proficiency in English. In fact not knowing or using English is considered a hindrance rather than help.

4. FORTY-FOUR ENGLISH SOUNDS AS IN RP (RECEIVED PRONUNCIATION)

Ask any student learning English how many letters there are in English. He or she will promptly say that there are twenty-six letters in the English alphabet. But that is only part of the story. The story of letters or sounds is much, much greater, deeper and more complex than they seem on the surface. There are many, many characters and varied characterization of these characters. It is unfortunate that English does not have letters to represent all the sounds it uses. In other words, the language does not have as many letters as are the sounds in it. English is short of letters while it has numerous sounds which do not have characters to represent each of them. There is no one-to-one correspondence between sounds and letters in English. Hence English is absolute unphonetic unlike most other languages. Arabic, Greek, Spanish and many other languages have characters to represent the sounds used in these languages. In other words these languages are phonetic, that is there is correspondence between the sound and the letter.

The English alphabet of twenty-six characters consists of the classical Latin alphabet, also known as the Roman alphabet of twenty-three characters, with the addition of j, v and w.

The Latin alphabet replaced the Old English runic, a Germanic system of twenty-four characters, or runes, adapted from Greek and Latin and used in inscriptions on wood and stone. It also replaced the ogham, or ogam, alphabet of the Celtic peoples of Britain. The Latin alphabet was adapted from the Greek alphabet, and Greek from Phoenician, a language from what is now west Lebanon.

Although alphabets are essentially phonetic systems, few alphabets are wholly phonetic. The English alphabet cannot exactly represent all the sounds of all the words in the constantly changing English language (James Aitchison, 17, 18).

Received Pronunciation (RP) recognizes forty-four distinctive sounds that are used in modern English. There are individual characters to represent all these forty-four sounds. That is, one character for one sound and one sound for one character. Thereby there is one-to-one correspondence between the character and the sound. (American English has one sound short, that is, they recognize only forty-three sounds in all). In phonetics these forty-four sounds are called phonemes. That is English has forty-four phonemes including consonants and vowels. There are twenty-four consonant phonemes and twenty vowel phones in English. Together they add up to a total of forty-four distinctive phonemes or sounds. These sounds can be phonemically represented with characters devised by International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).

These forty-four sounds and the phonemic characters representing them have overcome the innumerable problems arising from a deficient alphabet consisting of twenty-six letters. However English has not ceased to be unphonetic. Linguists and phoneticians have devised a system to account for the number of sounds and a system to write them accurately and scientifically.

Anyone learning English, in all probability, will be able to articulate almost all the sounds in English, give or take a few sounds. However, there are a few incorrect, inaccurate ways of articulating some English sounds depending on a student's geographic, social, cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

In the systematic teaching or learning of English pronunciation, the teacher, in all probability, begin with English phonemes. A phoneme is the smallest unit of sound in a language which can distinguish two words. Thus a phoneme is an irreducible, basic, first, simplest, contrastive, distinctive sound a learner is exposed to. A phoneme can be likened to a brick. A group of bricks can be put together to form a wall. In the same way, a phoneme or a group of phonemes can be put together to form a word. There are very few single-phonemes that constitute a word. They are 'I', 'a', etc. All other words have at least two or more phonemes. But English spelling introduces a new dimension to the study of phonemes. For example, there are digraphs like 'ck', 'ch', 'sh' and trigraphs like 'tch' etc. which cause a bit of difficulty while studying phonemes. Digraphs and trigraphs use two or more letters to represent one sound or one phoneme. Take for instance 'ck'. It stands for only one sound or phoneme, even though there are two letters. Take the word 'check' or 'kick'. 'Ck' stands for one sound in both these words. Again, take 'sh' as in 'shoot' or 'shut'. There is only one sound or phoneme represented by two letters. Take the trigraphs 'tch' as in 'catch' or 'watch'. Phonemically there is only one sound, not three as there are three letters in 'tch'. Coming to vowel digraphs there are many which dot English spelling. Take the word 'wool' in which 'oo' represents only one vowel phoneme in English, though there are two letters in it. Again take the word 'manoeuvre' in which the vowel letters 'oeu' represent only one vowel phoneme. This vowel phoneme is phonetically represented as /u:/ . Likewise there are many more instances of digraphs and trigraphs in English. Digraphs and trigraphs are due to the chaotic and unpredictable and unphonetic nature of English spelling. Attempts at standardizing English spelling have not yielded the desired result, nor will it. In this connection (spelling), Robert Burchfield, *Fowler's Modern English Usage*, says: *All such attempts have so far failed for three main reasons. First, the absence of a single competent linguistic authority empowered to make such fundamental changes; secondly, reform, if radical, would automatically place millions of books, newspapers, etc. out of the reach of the general public until they were reprinted in the new spelling system; and thirdly, the insuperable difficulty for the existence of divergent pronunciation throughout the English-speaking world. Whose standard English would qualify as the model for the respelling of the whole language: that of England, the USA, or (as a compromise) Canada or Australia?*

There are numerous other difficulties. For example, spelling reform, if carried out at any more than a superficial level, would conceal the connectedness of word families that are divided only by the positioning of the stress.

Teachers of English or English pronunciation have to point out the nature of English spelling occasionally in class so that learners can learn how to spell and pronounce certain digraphs, trigraphs and spelling in general. Regarding correspondence between spelling and pronunciation Robert Burchfield (1972) says: *Some notes on the relationship of English spelling and pronunciation. In general terms, written English has remained relatively static since the invention of printing in the 15c., but spoken English, in its received form, has changed repeatedly since then. Loanwords have also been adopted from languages which have different spelling systems. As a result the sound /f/, for example, can be represented by a number of spellings, e.g. f (firm), gh (rough, draught), ff (bluff, offer), and ph (philosophy). The letter h can be silent (honour) or fully pronounced (hand).*

There are numerous other such examples which a teacher has to point out occasionally to warn the learners against pitfalls.

After phoneme, the next in the order of importance is the syllable. In the words of *Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (1987), a syllable is *a unit of pronunciation forming the whole or part of a word, and having one vowel (or syllabic consonant) phoneme, often with one or more consonants before or after. Definition of the syllable is universally valid phonetic terms has proved difficult, whether based on the auditory feature of prominence or on the articulatory feature of 'pulse'.* In simple terms, a syllable is a unit in speech which is often longer than one sound and smaller than a whole word. In phonology the syllable is defined by the way in which vowels and consonants combine to form various sequences. Vowels can form a syllable on their own or they can be the centre of a syllable. Consonants are at the

beginning or the end of syllables and, with a few exceptions, do not usually form syllables on their own. Syllables may be classified according to whether they end in a vowel (open syllable) or in a consonant (closed syllables). For example, in English, 'to, try, show' are open syllables and 'bet, ask, snap' are closed syllables. Furthermore, a syllable can be divided into three parts: a. the beginning, called the onset, b. the central part, called the nucleus or peak and c. the end, called the coda. In the English word 'bed' /bed/ /b/ would be the onset, /e/ the nucleus and /d/ the coda. Speech sounds which can be in the nucleus of a syllable are sometimes called syllabic or [+syllabic]. Speech sounds which cannot be in the nucleus are called asyllabic or [-syllabic]. Words can contain one syllable, which is then called a monosyllable, they can contain two syllables, which is then called disyllable, they can contain three syllables, which is then called trisyllabic and words can contain multiple syllables, which is then called polysyllable.

In addition to syllables, there is another type of syllable known as syllabic consonant. Syllabic consonants occur in the second syllables of words like 'middle' and 'muddle' etc., replacing a sequence of schwa plus consonant; here the time needed to pronounce the schwa is transferred to the following consonant. For example are given the pronunciations of /midl/ for 'middle' and /midn/ for midden. As the examples show, a syllabic consonant can be and is usually marked phonetically with a subscript vertical dash placed under /l/ and /n/. The subscript is a diacritic used to indicate a syllabic consonant at the end of the word. There are some more words in which syllabic consonants occur. For instance, the consonant phoneme /m/ can also function syllabically in some words such as 'rhythm' and 'chasm'. It is said that the /r/ in 'acre' and 'metre' is also syllabic in rhotic accents, according to Tom McArthur (760).

In the description of English speech there are main features of pronunciation such as the physiology of pronunciation, the articulation of phonemes, phonemic transcription and phonetics and phonology. The features of pronunciation can be broadly categorized into two main features, namely phonemes and suprasegmental features. Under phonemes can be grouped consonants, vowels. Consonants can be voiced and unvoiced. Vowels can be classified into single vowels which can be short and long and then into, diphthongs and triphthongs. Under the broad category of suprasegmental features, we can place intonation and stress. Stress can be subdivided into word stress and sentence stress.

English sounds can be broadly divided into consonants and vowels including semi-consonants or semi-vowels. In articulatory phonetics, two types of articulators are recognized for their role in producing consonants. The first one is the active articulator. Active articulators are the movable parts of the vocal apparatus, such as the lips, tongue and lower jaw. Passive articulators are those parts of the vocal tract which cannot move, but which provide the active articulators with points of reference. Meanwhile consonants can be classified according to the manner of articulation and the place of articulation. Accordingly, based on their manner of articulation, consonants can be subdivided into plosives, fricatives, affricates, nasals, lateral and frictionless continuant. There are six plosives, nine fricatives, two affricates, three nasals, two semi-vowels, one lateral, and a frictionless continuant. These labels do not tell us in which part of the mouth these consonant sounds are articulated, in other words which articulators are involved in the production of these consonants. There are four bilabial consonants in the production of which both lips are activated. There are two labiodental consonant sounds and another two dental sounds. In the production of the former the lips and the teeth are involved while in the case of the latter only the teeth are used. Most number of consonant sounds are produced in the alveolar ridge and they are six in number. Then come palato-alveolar consonants which are five in number, while there is only one sound which is classified as palatal because the palate is used in its production. There are three sounds produced in the velum and they are called velar sounds. Lastly comes the sole sound called the glottal and that is the h-sound.

The next set of consonant sounds which can be paired like fricatives are plosives also known as stop consonants. Plosives are paired as /p, b/, /t, d/, /k, g/, and the initial sounds in 'check' and 'judge'. In all these paired plosive sounds the first one is voiceless and the second voiced. In the articulation of plosives the breath is completely stopped at some point in the mouth, by the lips or tongue-tip, tongue-back and then released with a slight explosion. The first sound in all these pairs is a strong sound whereas the voiced second sound is weak. These plosives can occur initially, medially and finally in many words. Some of these plosives are silent in some words. For example, /b/ is silent in 'debt', /t/ in 'mortgage', etc. They can come in stressed and unstressed syllables.

There is only one pair of affricates and they are to be found in the words 'check' and 'jam'. The initial consonants are affricates. These are produced by stopping the airstream from the lungs and then slowly releasing it with friction. The first part of an affricate is similar to a plosive and the second part is similar to a fricative. That explains why there are two phonemic characters representing one phonemic sound.

Then come nasals which are /m, n, **ing**/. There are only three nasal phonemes in RP. In all nasal consonants the soft palate is lowered and at the same time the mouth passage is blocked at some point, so that all the air is pushed out of the nose. All the three nasal phonemes are voiced and /m/ and /n/ can occur initially, medially and finally in words. But 'ing' can come only at the end of words. It does not begin a word.

There is only one lateral consonant phoneme in RP and that is /l/. This consonant is formed laterally, that is, instead of the breath passing down the centre of the mouth, it passes round the sides of an obstruction set up in the centre. The lateral phoneme is voiced and has two allophones: the light /l/ and the dark /l/. The sound can occur word- initially, medially and finally.

Having spelled out the place and the manner of articulation of consonants, there is another more important term used in the phonetic classification of speech sounds. The term is voicing and it is the auditory result of the vibration of the vocal cords. Sounds produced while the vocal cords are vibrating are voiced sounds and those sounds produced with no vibration are voiceless or unvoiced. Of the twenty-four consonants, nine are voiceless and the rest are voiced. All vowels are normally voiced. Apart from these there are numerous other parameters for describing consonant sounds.

The nine fricative consonants mentioned above are also called friction consonants because their main sounds all have friction as their most important feature. They are **f, v, thin, then, s, z, she, ʒ, h**. In the articulation of all these nine fricatives, the lungs push air through a narrow opening where it causes friction of various kinds. Of these nine consonant sounds, four are unvoiced and five are voiced. In the study of phonetics these are paired to show that one of them is voiced and the other is voiceless. The first pair of fricative sound is /f, v/, the second as in **thin, then**, third pair is /s z/, the fourth is 'she' and 'rouge' and the last unpaired sound is /h/. In all these pairs, the first sound is voiceless and the second is voiced. All these fricative consonant sounds occur in various positions, that is initially, medially and finally. They can come in stressed and unstressed syllables. There are different ways of articulating each of them even though they are all classified as fricatives.

In addition to these descriptions, most books on phonetics and pronunciation give the consonants a three-term label. These terms will help teachers and learners to articulate and describe them accurately. These terms tell the teachers and learners which articulators are used in the production speech sounds. There are active and passive articulators used in the production. Just by looking at the terms a teacher or learner can immediately identify the part in the mouth and learn to articulate the sound as accurately as possible. They will know the place of articulation and the manner of articulation of the speech sounds. First, the plosives will be taken up and assigned the three-term labels. There are six phoneme consonants which are called plosives and they are /p, b, t, d, k, g/. Plosives are also called stop consonants because the breath is completely stopped at some point in the mouth during the articulation. /p/ is a voiceless bilabial plosive aspirate, whereas /b/ is a voiced bilabial plosive. /t/ is a voiceless alveolar plosive aspirate, while /d/ is a voiced bilabial plosive. /k/ is voiceless velar plosive aspirate, while its equivalent is a voiced velar plosive. Three phonemes are also labeled aspirate because when /p, t, k/ occur in a stressed syllable, they are aspirated, otherwise they are not aspirated in other position in a word. Suppose /s/ precedes 'pit' as in 'spit', /p/ is not aspirated. If /p/ comes at the end of a word, it is not aspirated. The same rule applies to /k/ and /t/. /p, t, k/ are also called fortis plosives because all the three voiceless phonemes are aspirated and are considered strong, while their voiced plosives are weak. These phonemes tend to be made with stronger muscular effort and breath force than their voiced counterparts. The weak plosive phonemes /k, d, g/ are called lenis because they are never aspirated and are considered weak. In English voiced plosives /b, d, g/ tend to be made with less muscular effort and less breath force than their voiceless counterparts. This is the reason why they are categorized as weak consonantal phonemes.

Next comes another set of consonant phonemes known as fricatives. Fricatives, also called friction consonants, are the largest in number, being nine. They are /f, v, **thin, then, s, z, she, ʒ** (as the 's' in 'vision'), h/. There are both voiced and voiceless fricatives. /f/ is a voiceless labiodental fricative. /f/ is a strong and long consonant. /f/ can occur word- initially, medially and finally. Its voiced counterpart is /v/. /v/ is a voiced labiodental fricative. /v/ is a weak consonant, while /f/ is strong. The difference between /f/ and /v/ is mainly one of strength. The two sounds in 'thin' and 'then' are both dental fricatives. The former is voiceless and therefore is a strong sound, while the latter is a voiced sound and is weak. Some of the most common English words which contain the voiceless sound as in 'thin' are: 'think, thick, thin, thing, thirsty, thousand, three, through, throw, Thursday, thought, thirty, healthy, wealthy, something, anything, both, bath, breath, cloth, earth, fourth, faith, health, month, north, south, path, worth, death', etc. Many students don't articulate the sound

properly and that may affect intelligibility to some extent. That counts as a deviation from RP standard. The latter sound as in 'then' occurs in words as common as 'the, this, that, these, those, the re, their, then, they, them, though, than, other, mother, father, brother, either, neither, further, clothes, leather, together, weather, whether, breathe, with, smooth, etc. Teachers should clearly differentiate the two sounds in these words and also in the following words. These two sounds alternate between nouns and verbs. For example, 'mouth' (noun) is differently pronounced from 'mouth' (verb). The spelling is the same for 'mouth' but the parts of speech are different and therefore two different sounds come at the end of the words to show the difference. For the noun 'mouth' the voiceless sound is used and for 'mouth' in the verb form the voiced sound is used at the end of the word. There are some more examples like this in English. They are 'bath' and 'bathe', 'breath' and 'breathe', 'cloth' and 'clothe', 'loath' and 'loathe', 'tooth' and 'teethe'. In all these examples the word-final voiceless sound is the noun and the word-final voiced sound is the verb.

Another set of consonant phonemes is /s, z/. These sounds are also paired like the ones mentioned and described above. They are also called sibilants because they are made with a hissing effect. 'Sibilant' describes an auditory quality, a hissing perceived by the listener. In English there are four fricative phonemes that are sibilants. In addition to /s/ and /z/, there are two other sounds as the initial sounds in 'ship' and 'genre'. /s/ is a voiceless alveolar fricative, while /z/ is a voiced alveolar fricative. The voiceless sound /s/ is produced with a strong friction, while the voiced sound /z/ is a weak one. The voiceless is longer and the voiced is quite short. Both sounds can occur word- initially, medially and finally. Some of the most common words in which /s/ occurs are 'same, sing, sit, Saturday, Sunday, save, see, say, second, seem self, send, six, seven, side, since, sleep, slow, small, so, some, son, sister, soon, , sister, start, stay, stop, still, against, almost, besides(s), least, lost last, listen, message, mister, Mrs, use (noun), face, miss, across, advice, case, cats, takes, pass, less, -ness, nice, piece, perhaps, yes'. In all these words /s/ has come at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of them. Some of the very many common words containing /z/ are 'noisy, busy, reason, easy, lazy, losing, as, his, hers, cause, use (verb), has, is, lose, was, days, dogs, does, moves, noise, please'. There could be some confusion in the minds of most students whether to use /s/ or /z/ at the end of words like 'cats' and 'dogs'. The key to the sound is very simple. Take the words 'cats' and 'dogs'. The letter /s/ is added to both the words as a suffix to make the words plural. The /t/ in 'cat' is a voiceless sound and before a voiceless sound, we use the 's' sound to pronounce. And take the word 'dogs'. /g/ is a voiced sound and before voiced sounds, use the /z/ sound. In brief, it is the voicing which determines /s/ or /z/ at the end of words like these. Take another pair of words 'ladies' and 'gents'. Look at the sounds before /s/. In 'ladies' it is a voiced vowel sound and therefore the pronunciation should end in z-sound, while in 'gents', t-sound is voiceless and the word should end in an s-sound.

Another pair of fricatives is the initial phonemes in 'she' and 'genre'. The former is a voiceless palato-alveolar fricative and is a strong sound. The latter is a voiced palato-alveolar fricative and is a weak sound. The voiceless sound occurs word –initially, medially and finally, while the voiced counterpart doesn't. There are very few words in standard English usage that begins with the voiced phoneme as in 'vision'. The words in which this sound comes at the beginning are of French origin. For example are 'gendarme, genre, Gigi, Giselle, etc. The sound can occur word-medially as in 'vision, measure, provision', etc. and can also occur word-finally as in 'rouge, garage, beige, camouflage, cortege, etc.

The last fricative sound is 'h'. /h/ is a voiceless glottal fricative. /h/ is also an aspirate, that is, there is aspiration when /h/ is in a stressed syllable. /h/ can occur word- initially and medially in many words as in 'heart, hall, heat, hedge, harm', and 'behind, rehearse, anyhow, keyhole, unholy, etc. However in some words such as 'heir, honest, honour' and 'hour' the initial /h/ is dropped and the sound after /h/ is a vowel. Hence it is 'an heir, an honest man, an honour to her, an hour ago' and so on.

Next are three consonant phonemes which are collectively called nasals for the simple reason that air is released through the nostrils (nose) while articulating these sounds. All the three phonemes are voiced because the vocal cords vibrate during their production. /m/ is a voiced bilabial nasal, /n/ a voiced alveolar nasal and the last consonant sound in 'sing' is also a voiced velar nasal. While /m/ and /n/ can occur in all positions in words, the other sound '-ing' cannot. It can come only at the end of words, it cannot start a word. /m/ and /n/ are syllabic in some words as in 'rhythm', and 'button'. Some of the commonest words containing /m/ are 'make, man, many, marry, matter, may, me, mean, middle, money, more, mouth, move, much, must, my, almost, among, common, complete, family, promise, remember, simple, summer, tomorrow, women, am, arm, become, come, farm, form, from, him, home, room, same, seem, some, swim, them, time, warm, and welcome'. Some of the commonest words containing /n/ are 'name, near, nearly, need, neither, never, new, next, nice, night, nine, no, noise, nose, north, notice, now, number, know, knee, and answer, any behind, country, dinner, enough,

finish, funny, general, journey, manner, many, penny, since, un-, went, winter, again, alone, been, begin, between, can, done, down, green, in, join, learn, on, one, rain, run, skin, son, soon, sun, -teen, ten, than, then'.

The nasal phoneme in 'sing' is the third English nasal consonant and the only one likely to cause trouble, because many languages do not have a consonant formed like this. Some learners/speakers of English have difficulty differentiating between /n/ and 'ng-'sound. If the teacher can help them say the following words, they would certainly help.

Singer	long ago
Hang up	wrong again
Singing	hanging
Bring it	among others
Longing	banging
Sin	sing
Son	sung
Ran	rang
Sinner	singer
Tons	tongues

Some of the commonest words containing the 'ng'-sound are 'anger, anxious, drink, finger, hungry, language, sink, thank, think, among(st), bring, during, evening, hang, -ing, long, morning, ring, sing, song, spring, string, strong, thing, wrong, young.

The next pair of consonant phonemes is the affricates as the initial sounds in 'check' and 'judge'. These two consonant sounds are represented by two characters each in phonetics. The reason is there are two sounds in two phonemic characters standing for one consonant sound. Phoneticians say there is a plosive and a fricative in an affricate and hence two characters to represent one affricate sound. The following pairs of words will help students to form the right pronunciation of these two consonant phonemes.

Riches	ridges
Catching	cadging
Fetching	edging
Batches	badges
Watching	lodging
Kitchen	pigeon

Some of the commonest words containing the voiceless phoneme are 'chair, chance, change, cheap, chief, child, choice, choose, church, fortune, kitchen, nature, picture, question, catch, each, March, much, reach, rich, speech, stretch, such, teach, touch, watch, which'. Some of the commonest words containing the voiced phoneme are 'general, gentleman, January, join, joke, journey, joy, judge, July, jump, June, just, danger, imagine, soldier, subject, age, arrange, bridge, edge, language, large, manage, message, page, strange, village'.

There are two semi-vowel consonant phonemes in /w/ and /j/ as in 'yet'. A semi-vowel is a sound which is phonetically vowel-like because it is a glide, but phonologically consonant-like in being marginal to a syllable. In English the phonemes /j/ as in 'you, use, view' and /w/ as in 'way, suave, choir' are semi-vowels. Traditionally they are classified as consonants because they function marginally. It is noticeable on a printed page that, like consonants, they are preceded by 'a', not 'an' (e.g. a year, a window).

The last but one consonant phoneme is the voiced alveolar lateral continuant (/l/). The articulation of /l/ varies with accent and position. There are two allophones in /l/. They are light /l/ and dark /l/. The light /l/ comes word-initially as in 'lick' and the dark /l/ occurs in word-final position as in 'full'. /l/ is also a syllabic consonant as in 'bottle', 'table'. There are many English words where /l/ is silent. Some of such words are 'calf, half, talk, almond, alms, balm, calm, colonel, palm, psalm, salmon, folk, yolk, Holmes'. In the following words /l/ occurs word-finally and it is a useful exercise.

All	full	tool	sell
Bill	feel	tail	mile
Owl	oil	called	pulls
Fools	belt	field	cold
Miles	kill	fool	bold

In the following set of words /l/ is used syllabically, that is /l/ is syllabic in all the words.

Awful	camel
Travel	couple
Whistle	bubble
Beautiful	supple
Dazzle	giggle
Channel	tunnel

A diacritic mark, a vertical stroke, is placed under /l/ in all these words in the phonetic transcription to indicate that /l/ is syllabic in these and a few other words. Some of the most common words containing /l/ are 'lady, land, language, last, late, laugh, lead, learn, leave, left, less, let, like, listen, little, live, long, lot, lack, lose, love, low, allow, along, almost, already, always, cold, colour, difficult, early, eleven, else, fault, -ly, help, o'clock, old, self, yellow, able, all, beautiful, fall, feel, fill, full, girl, meal, mile, parcel, people, possible, real, school, shall, still, table, tell, until, well.

Vowel phonemes don't lend themselves to the kind of labeling as consonants phonemes have done. However all vowels are voiced and there are twenty vowels recognized in RP. Vowels can be classified according to their tongue height and their frontness or backness. There is another important variable of vowel quality and that is lip-rounding. Although the lips can have many different shapes and positions, there are three positions used for articulating the vowels. The first word is **rounded**. The lips are rounded where the corners of the lips are brought towards each other and the lips pushed forwards. This is most clearly seen in the vowel /u/. Another word is **spread**. When the lips are spread, the corners of the lips move away from each other, as for a smile. This is illustrated in articulating /i/ sound. And the last word is **neutral**. When the lips are neutral they are not noticeably rounded or spread. The noise most English people make when they are hesitating (written 'er') has neutral lip position.

A student at school or college will learn that there are only five vowels (a, e, i, o, u) in English. But actually there are twenty vowel sounds in English (RP). They are called monophthongs, diphthongs (including triphthongs). Amongst these are short, long and weak vowels. The vowel system of English RP is usually analyzed in terms of twelve pure vowels (or monophthongs), which may be short or long and eight diphthongs. Because all vowels are voiced, they are sometimes contrasted with consonants. A vowel is a speech sound made with the vocal cords vibrating but without any closure or stricture. The vowel sound is central to a syllable and therefore syllabic. A vowel sound is essential for or central to a syllable. In other words, a vowel sound forms the nucleus of a syllable. There cannot be a syllable without a vowel.

Furthermore, the type of vowel sound which is produced depends largely on the position of the tongue. While articulating vowel sounds the front, the middle or the back of the tongue is raised and how far it is raised. A division of the vowels can be made into front, central and back vowels according to which part of the tongue is raised and close half-close, half-open and open vowels according to how far the tongue is raised. Sometimes instead of the four-way division for tongue height, a three-way division is made: high, mid and low vowels. Vowel sounds also depend on the shape of the lips. The lips are rounded for rounded vowels and the lips are spread for unrounded vowels. The height of the tongue during the articulation of a vowel is crucial to give the right vowel quality. The height is the degree of elevation of the tongue towards the roof of the mouth, as one of several features determining the articulation of vowels. When part of the tongue is raised as near to the roof of the mouth as possible without friction which would make the sound a consonant it is in a high or close position with resulting high or close vowels. When the whole tongue is lowered, low or open vowels are produced. Between these two extremes are tongue heights called half-close and half-open.

A pure vowel or a monophthong is produced without any noticeable change in vowel quality. That is to say the vowel quality is relatively constant. The vowels in 'see, sit, set, hat, arm, got, saw, pull, pool, cup, fur', and the first syllable of 'ago'. There are twelve pure vowels including long and short ones. Besides, there are eight diphthongs in RP. A

diphthong is also central to a syllable and is the nucleus of it. A diphthong is a vowel that changes its quality within the same single syllable. It is also called a gliding vowel. The combination of two vowels is often described as a sequence of two vowels. There are several varieties of diphthong: wide and narrow; closing and opening; centering; falling and rising. A wide diphthong has a marked change in quality: in RP, the vowels in 'high, how' which move from open to close. A narrow diphthong has less movement: in RP, the vowel of 'day' which moves from half-close to close. The vowels of 'weave, groove' are narrow diphthongs, because they move slightly within the close vowel area, but this movement is usually disregarded and they are treated as monophthongs. A closing diphthong ends closer than it begins, while an opening diphthong ends more open than it begins. The diphthongs of English tend to be of the closing type: in RP, 'say, sigh, soy, so, sow. A centering diphthong moves towards schwa: in RP, 'here, there. In rhotic varieties, this schwa is followed by an r-sound but not in a non-rhotic variety like RP. A falling diphthong is stressed on the first element, and a rising diphthong is stressed on the second. The diphthongs of English tend to be of the falling type, with the exception of the vowel sound in 'view', which can be interpreted as rising. The English diphthongs in modern standard RP are three that glide towards an /I/ sound from different starting points as in 'day, late, rain, weigh, they, great, time cry, high, height, die, dye, aisle, elder, boy, voice'. In addition, there are two diphthongs that glide towards the u-sound as in 'so, road, toe, soul, know, house, now'. Lastly, there are three diphthongs that glide towards the weak vowel sound as in the first vowel in 'about'. These diphthongs can be found in 'care, air, wear, their, there, pure, during, tourist, deer, dear, here, weird, idea'.

Coming to triphthongs, a triphthong is a vowel that starts with one quality, moves through another, and ends in a third. That is, a triphthong is a sequence of three vowel sounds together such as those of 'fire, flower'. In rhotic varieties of English, these three vowel sounds are always followed by an r-sound as in 'fairer' and 'flower'. There are many more words in which there are triphthongs. Examples are 'power, tower, liar, iron, ours, riot, buyer, coward, tire'. Triphthongs are also central to a syllable and are essential for a syllable.

A parameter to describe vowels is vowel quality. Vowel quality stands for features other than length which distinguish one vowel from another. Vowel quality is determined by the shape of the mouth when the particular vowel is produced. The shape of the mouth varies according to the position of the tongue and the degree of lip rounding. In the words of Tom McArthur (1005, 1006), vowel quality is *a term in phonetics for the property that makes one vowel sound different from another: for example /i:/ as in 'sheep' from /I/ as in 'ship'. The quality of a vowel is determined by the position of the tongue, lips, and lower jaw and the resulting size and shape of the mouth and pharynx. Vowels are classed as close or open (in British terminology) and high and low (in American terminology) according to whether the body of the tongue is pushed forward or pulled back. They are classed as rounded or spread according to the shape of the lips: for example, the /i:/ in sheep is a close front spread vowel, the /I/ in ship a semi-high front unrounded vowel.*

Yet another parameter to describe the vowels is vowel quantity. According to Tom McArthur (1006) Vowel quantity is *a term in phonetics and poetics for the length of a vowel, usually indicated in phonetic transcription by a length mark [:] after a vowel, as in /a:/. Vowels so marked have in general greater duration than the same vowels with no such mark. Vowels so marked are described as long and unmarked vowels are short, a distinction known as vowel length. However, the measurable duration of vowels depends also on at least two other factors: (1) Vowel height, in terms of the position of the tongue. Open vowels as in ban /ban/ or balm /ba:m/ are longer than close vowels as in bin /bIn/ or beam /bi:m/. (2) Environment, in terms of preceding and following sounds. Vowels are shortened before some consonants and lengthened before others, for example /u:/ is long in move /mu:v/ than in boot /bu:t/. These factors have different weightings in different varieties of English and contribute to the variety of rhythms in English.*

Among connected speech there are certain aspects which matter so that the English spoken sounds natural, easy and understandable. They are aspects such as word stress, sentence stress, intonation patterns, assimilation, elision, contractions, etc. The most important feature of spoken English which makes English intelligible to everyone is the word stress. This is an integral part of English and word stress cannot be left out and word stress cannot be shifted arbitrarily. Students learning English have to listen to spoken English and learn the word stress, that is, understand and learn on which part of the word the stress should be placed. Stress is placed on a syllable in a given word and that word should have more than one syllable. In other words, the words to be stressed should be disyllabic, trisyllabic or polysyllabic. English is predominantly stress-timed unlike French which is syllable-timed. If students learning English give a wrong stress to a word, it would be difficult for the listener to understand them. Therefore stress is the pronunciation of a word or syllable with more force than the surrounding words or syllables. A stressed word or syllable is produced by using more

air from the lungs. A listener often hears a stressed word or syllable as being louder than the surrounding words or syllables. The speaker places more vocal emphasis on certain syllables in a word. A stressed word or syllable is often on a high pitch and/or it has a longer duration, i.e. the vowel appears to be longer. In writing or printing, stress may be shown by a small raised line in front of the stressed syllable, e.g. 'ˈsyllable'.

In a word, the basic difference is between stressed and unstressed syllables. A distinction used to be made in long words between stressed syllables of varying degree, i.e. it was said that the syllable with the greatest prominence had the primary stress and the next stressed syllable the secondary stress. Now it is felt that such distinctions are often only relevant when words are used in isolation. In an utterance, the overall intonation tends to neutralize the degree of stress within the individual word.

Stress is not a single phonetic feature and stressed syllables have different kinds of phonetic prominence. (1) **Prominence of pitch:** A syllable is made prominent by a pitch movement on the syllable or by a pitch discontinuity involving a jump from the immediately preceding pitch. (2) **Prominence of duration.** Stressed syllables have full duration and may be prolonged, whereas unstressed syllables are likely to be shortened. (3) **Prominence of vowel quality.** Stressed syllables retain full vowel quality, whereas unstressed syllables may have weak vowels. (4) **Prominence of loudness.** Stressed syllables are generally said to be loud though this is the least important kind of prominence for the recognition of stress in English. Stressed syllables with pitch prominence are said to be accented and a pitch contour or tone is associated with each accent.

Longer words having more than one syllable may have two or more stresses. The main stress is referred to as primary stress and others are secondary stress. The word 'photograph' has two stresses on it. The primary stress is on the first syllable and the secondary stress on the third. The place of primary and secondary stress is not uniform in all words in English.

Plosive phonemes /p, t, k/ are aspirated when they occur in a stressed syllable or even when the word is monosyllabic. Examples are 'pack, take, kick', etc. The aspiration that accompanies these and such other words may sound like stress on them. However, if these plosives are preceded by another sound, then they are not aspirated. For example /p/ in 'apt', /t/ in 'stake' and 'k' in 'sketch' are not aspirated. Monosyllabic words in English are not stressed. Words like 'wish, so, go, etc. have only one syllable each and are not stressed. In general certain words receive stress and certain other words don't. Lexical words in English are normally stressed. By lexical words are meant nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. There are many exceptions to this general rule. Words that are unstressed are function words like determiners, auxiliary verbs, personal pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, etc. The simple logic is that the main message of a sentence lies in the noun and verb of a sentence, not the function words which join the sentence harmoniously. Nouns perform or receive verbal or verb's action and therefore the focal point of a sentence is the noun and the verb. This does not mean that other content words like adjectives and adverbs can be ignored. They too add to the meaning of the sentence in the overall picture of the meaning or message. All these words, namely nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are also known as content words. They contain the content of the sentence's message or meaning and therefore they are rightly and legitimately stressed in connected speech so that the speaker's message gets noticed and understood.

However, there are exceptions to these general rules. Every rule in English has an exception. There are function words that are stressed in some sentences and there are some content words that don't receive the stress in a sentence. Function words are also classified as closed systems or closed classes. They are called closed systems because no new words are added to the system or this group of words. This is contrasted with open system in which there are nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. An infinite number of new nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs can be added to the open class or content words. Every year hundreds, if not, thousands of new content words enter usage, dictionaries, etc. Function words are also called empty word, grammatical word, structural word or structure word.

Most of the function words have a strong form and a weak form. The strong form is used in isolation or when the context demands. In normal circumstances, function words function as weak words and only their weak pronunciation is used in speech. They are not stressed and they are said in a weak manner. Examples of the use of function words in sentences are: 'Where is he from?' In this interrogative sentence 'is' is a function word. Another form of the sentence is 'Where's he from?' Here 'is' is contracted and joined to another word. In the sentence 'The baby has swallowed a stone' 'has' is a function word and it can be pronounced in five different ways depending on the speaker and the context. Another example

is 'Well, what would you have done?' In this sentence 'would' is a form word and it can be pronounced in three different ways.

There are over 35 weak form words used in English including articles, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, conjunctions, etc. Take the sentence 'It was too expensive for them to buy'. There are four form words in it, namely 'was, for, them, to', not only because all of them have the weak vowel schwa or also called the banana vowel but they are form words per se in the sentence. There are three content words, namely 'too, expensive, buy'. The content words are meaningfully and grammatically arranged in the sentence with the help of the function words. Some function words have more than one weak form or pronunciation of it and the sentence or the speaker will decide which form to use.

Another feature of spoken English is sentence stress. Certain words in a sentence are stressed and certain others are unstressed. This sentence stress is an integral part of spoken English and conversation in English. Gerald Kelly, *How to Teach Pronunciation* says: *Sentence stress is an integral feature of language which provides listeners with vital clues as to the salient points of the speaker's message. Other features are the grammar of the utterance, the lexical content, the particular phonemes which make up the utterance, and the intonation contour used to deliver the message. Although identifying stressed syllable is not something that is uppermost in our minds when speaking or listening, it is something which we are extremely sensitive to at an unconscious level. We are aware of how variations in stress affect the message being put across, but we seldom need to declare what we mean, or elucidate and elaborate on how our stresses have contributed to communication.*

Sentence stress and intonation patterns have meanings associated with them. Each intonation pattern has its own meaning depending on the tone levels used for the sentence. In a sentence 'Could I possibly borrow your newspaper?' the intonation pattern here seeks to ask permission. In another style of intonation, instructions and questions are intended. For example the sentence 'Nasser and Mona are in the kitchen' gives information about these two people. Another intonation pattern indicates attitude and views on the part of the speaker. In addition there is another intonation pattern which makes deductions and asks questions.

The most basic intonation choice is between what are known as referring tones (r) and proclaiming tones (p). The two most frequently used tones in English are the fall and fall-rise. A falling tone is called a proclaiming tone (p) and the fall-rise is a referring tone (r). We can think of the choice between these tones as indicating two alternatives. One alternative is that the speaker is expressing information that is presumed to be new, or is adding something to the discussion. In this case a proclaiming tone is used. We also use the proclaiming tone to give facts, express opinions we believe to be true, or to ask for new information. The other alternative is that the speaker is referring to information that he presumes to be shared between speakers. In this case a referring tone is used. In questions, we use a referring tone to make sure what we are saying is correct or to check information.

Another important, if not, optional feature of connected speech is assimilation. Assimilation is a common feature in rapid, casual and colloquial speech of native speakers including many non-native speakers of English. Many speakers of English, whether native or non-native, are not aware of the presence of assimilation in their speech. Even Arab speakers of English automatically use assimilation in their speech. They tend to use it quite naturally, spontaneously or even unawares. The presence of certain sounds in close proximity to one another, ease of speech, economy of time and speech sounds and the sound system of the language are also responsible for assimilation. In more careful speech such as when giving a talk, assimilation is used less. Or on certain social occasions less assimilation is evident in speech. Certain features may also be more or less common in different accents and varieties of English and personal habits and preferences also have an influence

Assimilation in phonetics is *a process of connected speech in which one sound becomes similar to another, neighboring sound. In the commonest type of assimilation in English an alveolar consonant anticipates the place of articulation of a following sound: for example, in 'good boy' the /d/ anticipates the labial articulation of /b/. When the process is complete, alveolar contact is lost altogether and the /d/ can be said to have changed into /b/. The same process exhibited orthographically: for example, in the Latin-derived word 'aggression' (originally 'adgressio'), the 'd' of the prefix 'ad-' has been assimilated to the 'g' of the base '-gress'; in the informal English word 'wanna' ('want to') the 't' of both 'want' and 'to' have been assimilated to the preceding 'n' (Tom McArthur, 86).*

There are three or four types of assimilation and there are numerous examples of assimilation. Some of the common examples of assimilation are: 1. The phonemes /t/, /d/ and /n/ often become bilabial consonants /p/, /b/ and /m/: Example sentences are: He's a rather fat boy (/t/ assimilates to /p/), She's got an apartment in Dubai (/t/ assimilates to /p/), He's a very good boy (/d/ assimilates to /b/), There are ten men in the class and two women (/n/ assimilates to /m/). 2. /t/ assimilates to /k/ before /k/ or /g/, /d/ assimilates to /g/ before /k/ or /g/: Where has that cat been all night? (/t/ assimilates to /k/), Can you see that girl over there? (/t/ assimilates to /k/), It was a very good concert (/d/ assimilates to /g/), She's a very good girl (/d/ assimilates to /g/). 3. /n/ can assimilate to 'ing' sound before /g/ or /k/: I've been going out too much lately. He's bringing his own car. 4. /s/ can assimilate to sh-sound before sh-sound: I really love this shiny one over there. 5. /z/ can assimilate to /ʒ/ before sh-sound: We found this lovely little cheese shop in Sharjah.

The above examples are cases of anticipatory assimilation, where one sound changes to another because of the sound which follows. Here are some cases of coalescent assimilation, where two sounds combine to form a different one: 6. /t/ and /j/ coalesce to form /tʃ/: You went to Athens last year, didn't you? 7. /d/ and /j/ coalesce to form /dʒ/: Would you like a cup of coffee? There is another type of assimilation known as progressive assimilation. This type of assimilation is found when a sound is changed by the influence of a previous one. This is an established and regular feature of the ending -s of verbs and nouns, which usually has a voiced /z/ sound (or /ɪz/ after all sibilants) but after voiceless sounds other than sibilants is /s/ (e.g. taps, heats, dock's grieves, Keith's; compare 'tabs, heeds, dog's grieves, youths, eyes, seems, runs, dolls, pieces, daisies'.) Similarly the past tense -ed ending /d/ or /ɪd/ is devoiced to a /t/ sound after a voiceless consonant other than -t itself ('roped, lacked, bussed, roofed, pushed versus robed, lagged, buzzed, grooved, rouged, hated, headed').

Another feature of spoken English or connected speech is elision. The word 'elision' comes from the verb 'elide'. Elision is a term used in phonetics and phonology to refer to the omission of a sound, sounds or syllables in connected speech. Both consonants and vowels may be elided and sometimes whole syllables may be elided. Unstressed grammatical words, such as 'and' and 'of' are particularly prone to be elided as when the 'f' is dropped in 'cup of tea' or the 'a' and 'ad' are dropped in boys 'n' girls. Within polysyllabic words, the vowels and consonants in unstressed syllables regularly elide in conversational speech of normal speed, as in 'camera, probably, February'. Complex consonant clusters are also often reduced as in 'twelfths' and 'hundredths'. The question whether these elisions are used by Arab speakers is a matter of proficiency of the speaker concerned. Beginners may not elide any letter; in fact they may pronounce all the letters in a word or in a sentence. But a teacher of English should point out elisions where there is a chance for it or where there is a need for it in spoken English. Elisions make for natural spoken English. For example in a sentence 'He leaves next week', speakers would normally elide the /t/ in 'next' saying /neks wi:k/. Again here, the reason is an economy of effort and in some instances the difficulty of putting certain consonant sounds together while maintaining a regular speech rhythm and speed.

Some of the common instances of elision are as follows:

1. The most common elisions in English are /t/ and /d/, when they appear within a consonant cluster.
 - a. We arrived the next day (/t/ elided between /ks/ and /d/).
 - b. When we reached Paris, we stopped for lunch (/t/ elided between /tʃ/ and /p/, and between /p/ and /f/).
 - c. We bought a lovely carved statuette (/d/ elided between /v/ and /st/).
2. Complex consonant clusters are simplified.
 - a. She acts like she owns the place (/t/ in 'acts' is elided)
 - b. Teachers use authentic texts to teach from (/teksts/ can be simplified to /teks/)
 - c. George the Sixth's throne (the 'th-sound' in 'Sixth' is elided).
3. The weak vowel as in 'ago' at the beginning can disappear in unstressed syllables.
 - a. I think we should call the police (the weak vowel can disappear in the first syllable of police).
 - b. I'll love you forever, promise. Well, perhaps (the weak vowel can disappear)
 - c. It's a question of collective responsibility (the weak vowel can be elided).

- d. Are you coming out tonight? (the weak vowel can disappear in speech).
- e. That's an interesting idea (the weak vowel is not sounded by many speakers, reducing the number of syllables in the word).
- f. Have we got any vegetables? (the weak vowel is not pronounced by most speakers, reducing the number of syllables in the word).
4. /v/ can disappear in 'of' before consonants.
- a. My birthday's on the 11th of November
- b. It's a complete waste of time!
- c. That's the least of my worries!

In addition to these features of connected speech as enumerated and described above, there are some more features which are not as important as the former. They are linking /r/, intrusive /r/, juncture, etc. All these features are part of connected speech and make the sound natural when spoken and heard. Most of these features do appear in many other languages no matter how phonetic or unphonetic the language is. These features come on their own, not that they are imposed by phoneticians or linguists to make the study or the learning of the language difficult. Learners of English, whether Arab or non-Arab, will do well to cultivate a critical and discerning ear to listen to, learn and imitate these features as naturally as possible.

5. SURVEY OF ENGLISH EQUIVALENTS AND THEIR ABSENCE IN ARABIC:

No two languages have a hundred per cent identical alphabet or sound system. The languages may belong to the same family or may be a cognate language. But there is no way the two languages have the same script and sound. A language is a reflection of the native speakers of it. It is the repository of the speakers' culture, civilization and their strengths. All languages are a medium or tool for communication; it cannot be an ornament or a showpiece to be displayed in a showcase. The utility of a language lies in its applications in all the human fields of activity, thinking, speaking and acting. No language can be superior to another language. Every language is capable of expressing any simple or complex thought or idea. Because English has gained worldwide acceptance as the lingua franca of the world, people have started learning it in order to accomplish their individual goals, be it personal, professional, commercial, educational, conversational, research, etc.

There is no chance that all Arabic sounds are the same as English sounds. There's no way that the number of letters in these languages is the same. The sounds are expressed or written in different characters and they represent the sounds of the language. No two languages will have the same number of letters. A student learning a new language, that is a second language, should be able to acquire the sounds in the second language in order to learn it and to communicate in it. The human vocal apparatus is capable of producing any speech sound in any language. It should not be difficult for an Englishman to articulate the Arabic sounds; at the same time it should not be difficult for an Arab student to imitate English sounds reasonably well, given some exposure and practice. There are Englishmen and women who have mastered Arabic and can speak better than native Arabs. There are Arabs who have mastered English and speak English fluently and accurately. So it's not a question of difficulty of learning a second language but the sincerity and the perseverance of the student to learn and acquire it. The kind, amount and duration of exposure to English are what matters if one wants to learn it.

As far as learning or acquiring English sounds or spoken English is concerned, it would be convenient to point out the similarities and differences of English and Arabic sounds. Many books on pronunciation or phonetics point out the difficulties of foreign students like Arabic, Chinese, Japanese, etc. Though some of the English sounds are non-existent in Arabic, it's not impossible or difficult for an Arab student to articulate and cultivate the sounds. For instance the English consonant phoneme sound /p/ does not exist in Arabic. However there are countless Arab English-speakers who use the /p/ sound quite naturally and effortlessly in their speech. Some Arabs, owing to lack of adequate exposure, substitute /b/ for /p/.

English consonant equivalents in Arabic are as follows, that is, most Arabs will not have difficulty pronouncing words containing these equivalents:

English Consonant Equivalents in Arabic

/f, s, z, sh-sound, h, t, k, b, d, g, tʃ, m, n, l, j (as in you), w, r/.

Even though all these sounds exist in Arabic, some of them are not properly articulated in certain words. Because most English consonantal sounds exist in Arabic, there isn't much difficulty for Arab learners to pick up English sounds and articulate them in the right way. However there are difficulties for some Arab learners of English to articulate them. Some of the difficulties experienced by them are as follows:

6. ERRORS AND HOWLERS GALORE—SPELLING, PRONUNCIATION, WORD STRESS, SENTENCE STRESS, INTONATION, ETC.:

Foreign learners or speakers of English or for that matter second language learners of English cannot be expected to speak English with hundred per cent perfection. Perfection eludes even native speakers. Bad spellers are there even amongst native speakers of English. The English spelling is grossly unphonetic and there aren't enough letters to represent all the sounds used in English. Hence it is quite normal for anyone to misspell a few words here and there. However, given constant exposure and reading, some of these difficulties can be overcome. Students learning English will always make mistakes; they will just as some of their teachers do. English spelling is irregular, unpredictable, erratic, unphonetic, and chaotic. There are many reasons why the state of English spelling is what it is today. Many people tried to reform the spelling but all reforms have failed. So the best bet is to read English and become familiar with spelling.

Where pronunciation is concerned there are a few mispronunciations resulting from faulty articulation of English phonemes. Even when an equivalent sound exists in Arabic, some learners still mispronounce some words. Where there is /p/ as in 'pen', some Arab speakers tend to pronounce it as 'ben'. Wherever there is the /p/ sound, word-initially, medially or finally, some Arabs have a tendency to pronounce the word with a /b/ sound instead. This is a common howler in certain parts of the Arab world. A dedicated teacher can correct such students and with some practice, every student can learn the articulation of /p/ according to the RP way. After having learnt to articulate the /p/ sound correctly, there is a reverse tendency on the part of some Arab students. When there is a word beginning with /b/ as in 'bun', some pronounce it as 'pun'. Some Arab students have to be careful when they articulate /p/ and /b/. These two consonants are distinctive phonemes in English, in other words they cannot be used interchangeably. They are two different consonants and they are contrastive. Most books on phonetics and pronunciation take the minimal pair 'pin' and 'bin' in order to show the contrastive and distinctive character of these two consonant phonemes.

Where the consonant phoneme /k/ is concerned, there is an occasional mistake. Some Arab students substitute /g/ for /k/. When the word 'cot' is given, they pronounce it as 'got'. Sometimes the sound /k/ is omitted at the end of words. And the reverse of this is true at times. Some Arab learners/speakers of English tend to use the /k/ sound to pronounce 'got'. So students are interchanging /k/ and /g/ sounds rather unawares. A little bit of practice is enough to remedy this.

Another frequent howler heard on campus and elsewhere in Kuwait is the substitution of the sh-sound as in 'she' for the 'ch'-sound as in 'change'. Where the word is 'choose', they mistakenly pronounce it 'shoose' with the result that there is no pronunciation difference between 'choose' and 'shoes'. Luckily, I could overcome my students' difficulties in articulating these two distinctive sounds. At times 'check' is pronounced as 'sheikh'. Regardless of the position of the sound, it is wrongly pronounced. Another pronunciation error occasionally made by my students and others is using the /ʒ/ sound as 's' in 'vision' instead of the sound at the beginning of 'judge'.

Yet another common mistake in pronunciation common in the Arab world amongst many English learners and speakers is their use of /f/ for /v/, as in 'fan' for 'van'. Many words in which there is the /v/ sound, they substitute /f/ for it. /f/ and /v/ are fricative phonemes, the former is voiceless and the latter voiced. They are two distinctive phonemes which are used for contrastive purposes. They cannot be interchanged and if they are interchanged the meaning and the identity of the words are changed as well. Another phoneme that is wrongly used by some of my students is the first consonant sound in 'thin'. Where the word is 'sing' some pronounce it as 'thing'. Another sound substitution is evident in the initial sound in 'then'. Instead of using this sound they end up using the /z/ sound. For example, instead of saying 'this', they say /zɪs/. This was corrected time and again with some good result.

Other deviations from RP standards are the indiscriminate use of /s/ and /z/ phonemes in different words. Where /z/ sound is appropriate, the /s/ sound is used. They substitute /s/ at the end of the word 'goes', for the /z/ sound. Another deviation

is the use of the sh-sound as in 'she' in place of the /ʒ/-sound as 's' in 'measure'. So some students don't pronounce 'pleasure, measure, vision' properly because the medial s-letter is wrongly articulated. Another noticeable feature of Arab students' pronunciation of English is the guttural use of /h/ sound.

The RP phoneme /r/ is a voiced palato-alveolar frictionless continuant; sometimes it is also labeled post-alveolar. But in Arabic, /r/ is a tongue-tip roll or tap and is often used before consonants and before a pause. In most cases Arabic pronunciation of English is rhotic. Some Arab speakers of English use an epenthetic vowel in words such as 'strong, screen, straight', etc. For example some people say 'secreen' for 'screen'. Vowels also present some difficulty to Arab students. First, /ɪ/ and /e/ are confused, /e/ being used for both. Second, the flat 'a' sound as in 'cat' and that in 'arm' are not entirely independent in Arabic and there is danger of replacing one by the other in some places by students. Third, the vowel in 'cut' and that in 'got' are confused, and an intermediate vowel is used for both. Fourth, in some cases, the vowel in 'arm' is not always made long, and is then confused with the vowel in 'cut'. Fifth, on certain occasions, /a:/ is replaced by a vowel in 'cut' or /e/ type followed by Arabic /r/. Sixth, /eɪ/ is replaced by the usually non-diphthongal vowel in Arabic be:t which means 'house' in Arabic. There are some more diphthongs which are not well articulated in words by Arab students. There are some more vowels that are misused and mispronounced by learners/speakers of English.

Word stress is not always right; however the English spoken by my students is intelligible. An English lecturer could follow the language spoken by my students. Though occasionally the pronunciation and stress of certain new words are pointed out, they tend to forget them. Repetition is a must to make the learning lasting. Sentence stress and intonation are in a sense specialist area for any teacher. Wherever possible, intonation relating to questions, statements, exclamations, denials, commands, etc. is pointed out. But students keep on forgetting and they need to be updated and reminded every now and then. Students, who have studied in a British or American school, will acquire a fair degree of word stress, sentence stress and appropriate intonation patterns for commonly spoken sentences.

In common with many other foreign learners of English or learners of English as a second language, my students too make mistakes when they pronounce certain words. Some of the frequent words that most Arab students of English mispronounce are 'aisle, almond, bona fides, cello, concerto, debt, dementia, extempore, furore, island, mortgage, pronunciation (misspelled and mispronounced) receipt, sub judice, etc., etc.

7. BACKGROUND, CAUSES OF AND REASONS FOR PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES/MISTAKES:

The Arab world is essentially monolingual though English is being taught and learnt at schools and colleges. In all the twenty-two Arab states, Arabic is spoken with some mixture of English and French in some parts of the Arab world. Historically, Englishmen and Americans are seen, in some quarters, as the cause of certain problems in the Arab world. This could be one reason why many Arabs have some degree of unwillingness to learn and speak English. Luckily, there are many others who have overcome these age-old prejudices, learnt English and fly to the English-speaking western world. They study, stay, do business, naturalize, do research and seek employment and emigration there. Every Arab country is willing to buy or embrace western technology. So there can be social, historical, traditional, religious, cultural, political, economic, etc. reasons for learning or for not learning English in the Arab world.

Another reason could be lethargy brought on by weather conditions, food habits, living styles, etc.

Being monolingual in the Arab world isn't a handicap or disqualification. One can go blamelessly from cradle to grave without learning another language, a second language.

Lack of encouragement, incentives, and motivation also play their parts. Those who acquire a good standard of English and an intelligible accent tend to migrate to the western countries. Of course there are some who continue to live in their own countries and get employed using English at work. Encouragingly, there are many Kuwaiti men and women who have learnt English and have become successful English teachers, lecturers and professors. Many non-teaching Kuwaitis do speak Standard English with an intelligible accent and get on with their businesses without being hindered by English in any way. For them English helps them to cross the language barrier and reach out to others who cannot speak their mother tongue Arabic. Such people are genuinely bilingual, instead of monolingual which a vast majority of Arabs is. Their accent of English is intelligible for anyone including the native English speakers, though there will be a mild

sprinkling of accentual lapses. Others use their English proficiency for other professional purposes. Because the predominant or the only language spoken across the Arab world is Arabic, there can be a perceptible tendency on their part to reject another language. Consequently English suffers. But English is the language of progress, change, growth, refinement, enrichment, advancement, and what have you? Most Arab households use Arabic and this imprints on their psyche indelible impressions of the language. That leaves no room for a second or another language. The Arabic sound system is strongly implanted in each child and the result is the child's difficulty to learn or to adapt to another language, English.

All the forty-four English phoneme sounds in RP are egressive while there are some sounds in Arabic which are ingressive. In the case of egressive sounds the air from the lungs is expelled through the mouth or nose or both, during the production of a sound, whereas in the articulation of some Arabic sounds air is sucked into the lungs. Egressive is contrasted with ingressive.

8. VARIOUS REMEDIES

No foreign learner or speaker of English can speak English the way the native speakers do. But there are very many exceptions to it. One of the easiest and simple ways for anyone to learn and speak English is to get exposed to it either through listening or reading. Listening and reading are receptive skills which can do immense benefit to learners. Every child learns a language by listening to its mother or father. The child then tries to imitate the sounds and words spoken by the mother or anyone taking care of the child in the absence of the mother. Here listening is the receptive skill and perhaps one of the best means of learning or acquiring a language. After the child has grown up the child is exposed to the printed or the written word. The child's proficiency of English or the language improves or is upgraded each new year. It is this method which applies to Arab learners and students of English. If they regularly listen to their teachers, good speakers of English (native and non-native) they can certainly improve their proficiency and standard of spoken English. This will give them a motivation to listen and learn and enhance their proficiency. These learners have many other means of getting exposure to the spoken word or spoken English, if they don't have speakers of English around. They can listen to radio and there are round-the-clock radio programmes pandering to different tastes in a society. Next they have numerous TV channels from around the world beaming English-learning programmes day and night. The learners can listen to the native announcers on radio and TV channels and imitate their accent. This is the way the learner learnt his or her mother tongue or English when he or she was a child.

In addition to these two media, there are many other means which can help a motivated learner. There are audio cassettes, video cassettes, CDs, VCDs, and DVDs available which are prepared and marketed by institutes in the business of teaching English to foreign learners of English. Most bookshops deal in these teaching materials and it's up to the student to buy them and use them. They can make use of a CD player or a DVD player to play these disks. Plus, they can use MP3 or MP4 or iPod players to download the contents of these disks onto and play them. There are special CDs and DVDs specifically prepared for Arab learners of English. A few days of exposure is enough to prove the effectiveness of this means or approach to learning or acquiring spoken English.

A language lab at a school or college can go a long way in motivating and helping the learner with the kind of English he or she wants. Pronunciation drills and acquiring spoken English can be done in language labs and in spoken English classes. However much or little is heard, the learners have to practice what they have learnt. Otherwise what is learnt may go to waste. Pronunciation drills can be done individually and chorally in class. It's up to the teacher's competence to use these drills to help students to articulate phonemes, syllables, words, word groups and sentences. If each learner is targeted, he or she will produce better result.

The value of reading aloud cannot be overlooked. Students who want to improve their pronunciation must read a few pages of printed matter aloud with proper word stress, sentence stress and intonation. When students read aloud, the reader will become conscious of his or her sound and will certainly improve the pronunciation, given some sustained practice. However, silent reading cannot be underestimated because it a receptive skill which can be put to a variety of productive use.

Some of the features of connected speech such as elision, contraction, assimilation, linking-r intrusive-r, etc. can be taught individually and chorally in a small class or language lab. These are natural features of spoken English which every learner should be able to imitate and incorporate into his or her speech. Repetition drill is very useful in teaching these.

Making friends with English speakers, native or non-native, will also help. Making pen friends and regularly writing and speaking to them can also contribute to the better spoken and written English.

Students' speech should be marked by correct articulation of sounds, sound groups, stress and intonation. It should be delivered at normal speed, neither too fast nor too slow. There should be proper pauses at full stops. Even a comma will alter the meaning of a sentence. The voice of the speaker should be natural, neither too loud, nor too low. The speaker should always look at the person he is speaking to.

Spoken English is learnt largely by imitation. Students always imitate their teacher. So the teacher's speech should be perfect. He or she should take all possible steps to acquire correct pronunciation, stress and intonation. Since the teacher is the only model for many students, he or she should try to be a good model. He may use a tape recorder, refer to English pronunciation dictionary and listen to good English coming on the radio and TV.

The teacher should know the sound system of his own language for comparing with English.

He should cultivate stress, rhythm and intonation in his speech. His or her speech should not be artificial, pompous or unnatural. Trying to speak like an Englishman will make him or her ridiculous.

To recognize the various speech sounds is a matter of ear-training. Students should be trained to develop a good ear for English. A good ear knows the difference between sounds and recognizes sounds easily and surely. He or she should hear the difference between the foreign sounds and the sounds of the mother tongue (Arabic) and should be able to compare them. The ability is acquired through ear-training exercises. First the teacher makes the sound, preferably in some known words like the i-sound in 'pin, tin, din'. The students will observe the mouth positions of the teacher and they repeat after him or her. These are imitation exercises.

He or she should then present exercises called minimal pair exercises. These are words which differ from each other in one sound only at a time, another sound remains in the same position.

Vowels:	/ɪ/	/e/	/i:/	a-sound as in 'cat'
	Sit	set	beat	bat
	Knit	net	heat	bad
	Wrist	rest	feat	pan

The teacher says each of the pairs above and students repeat after him or her. Then the teacher says one word of each of the pairs and the students say the other word in the pair. He or she should alternate between groups and individual students. He may repeat with other vowels.

Consonants: Many consonant sounds of English are the same as in the mother tongue of the pupils. Some others which are not there will have to be taught with care.

E.g. /v/, /p/, /z/, /ʒ/, etc. The teacher should make these sounds, first isolated, then in known words. He should ask them to watch the mouth position and repeat after him or her. The descriptions of these sounds and many others should be remembered and the sounds made accordingly. Consonant sounds which do not exist in Arabic should be introduced in minimal pairs and drilled. The difference may be pointed out by exaggerating the mouth position, the tongue position, the teeth and the air escaping from the mouth. The following are the minimal pairs:

Minimal Pairs:			
/v/	/f/	/p/	/b/
Van	fan	pat	bat
Vat	fat	pen	ben
Veil	fail	pun	bun
Vanity	profanity	peak	beak
Vary	fairy	pack	back

Sufficient drills must be provided to teach consonant clusters as in skip, street, struggle, masked, disks, frisks, scoop, etc. The difficulty with the organs of the mouth can be met by teaching the students to put their tongue, lips and other parts into definite positions as described for vowels, diphthongs and consonants. The teacher should help the students to use the sounds in their proper places in connected speech. For this the student should learn what appropriate order is in which to place the sounds so as to make intelligible words and sentences. This is made easy through phonetic transcription. To help

students learn stress and intonation, the teacher should say words in connected speech and write them down on the blackboard or white board marking stress marks and intonation symbols. The ability to pronounce sequences of sounds rapidly and without stumbling is acquired by repetition of difficult sound sequences. These can be followed by substitution tables and fluency exercises.

Reading aloud gives practice to students read with correct pronunciation, stress and intonation. The teacher can correct the pronunciation as the student reads aloud. The matter which is read aloud should have been done orally first. To correct the mistakes, drills may be given. These could be individual and choral drills. Some students tend to read haltingly and stop at the wrong places. Some may not stop even at full stops. This may be checked by the teacher's model reading. In all pronunciation drills, it is better to use meaningful words first and sentences later. After the imitation and reproduction exercises, there can be question and answer exercises, fluent conversation with reference to pictures and other situation.

9. EXERCISES—REMEDIAL TEACHING, REPETITION DRILL, LOUD READING PRACTICE, USE OF GADGETS, ETC.:

Exercises, a variety of them, are essential for the success of any pronunciation teaching programme. Teachers and students have to be put through systematic exercises in order to drive home the RP sounds, syllables, word accent, sentence stress, intonation, etc. In default of this, there should be exposure to native English spoken by native speakers. One should be born in an English-speaking nation, namely America, Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand, etc. However there are a few differences in the accents of speakers of these countries.

Where certain consonant phones are not properly or correctly articulated by Arab learners, adequate exercises should be devised to encourage them to articulate the sounds the RP way. Some Arab learners of English have difficulty articulating /f/ and /v/ in words and in differentiating between them in pronunciation or speech. The following exercises can enable them to articulate these RP phonemes correctly in the standard way: These exercises can be used for introducing, consolidating and remedying the articulation.

/f/	/v/
Suffer	cover
Deafer	never
Sniffing	giving
Proofing	proving
Rougher	lover
Sofa	over
Safer	savior
Offer	hover
Stiff	sieve
Safe	save
Very fast	very vast
I feel fine	I feel vile
Fine furs	fine verse
Four fans	four vans
A good few	a good view

The danger of confusing words with /z/ and /3/ is very small because few pairs of words have only this difference, but to use one of these where the other is usual will make the English of the learner sound wrong, so the two sounds should be kept separate. Try the following exercise: The teacher should articulate and pronounce all the sounds and words accurately according to RP and then expect the students to say them aloud individually and chorally.

/z/	/3/
Risen	vision
Razor	erasure
Raisin	invasion
Rosa	closure
Ruse	rouge
Bays	beige

Another pair of English consonant phonemes is /p/ and /b/. They are occasionally used indiscriminately by some of my students both in and outside class. The following drill can help them to acquire the English sound /p/ correctly.

<u>/p/</u>	<u>/b/</u>
Peak	beak
Pack	back
Park	bark
Pride	bride
Plays	blaze
Happy	shabby
Paper	labor
Rip	rib
Cap	cab
Tap	tab
Rap	grab

/p/ and /b/ occur in all positions in words. They occur word- initially, medially and finally.

The next pair of RP phoneme consonants is /t/ and /d/. In Arabs' spoken English /t/ and /d/ are dental plosives which they are not in RP. They are alveolar plosive phonemes. /t/ is voiceless and /d/ is voiced. The following exercise will help to point out the differences in their articulation and use. The teacher should demonstrate the position of the tongue and where the tongue is placed in the mouth while articulating the sounds.

<u>/t/</u>	<u>/d/</u>
Two	do
Ten	done
Torn	dawn
Town	down
Writer	rider
Wetting	wedding
Putting	pudding
Latter	ladder

Another area where there is some confusion in some of my students is the use of the initial consonants in 'check' and 'judge'. The computer keyboard does not have the characters to represent these sounds in phonemic script. The following drill, which should be initiated by the teacher, will help to show how to articulate and differentiate the two sounds.

Initial Consonant in 'Check'	Initial Consonant in 'judge'
Chin	gin
Choke	joke
Cheer	jeer
Choice	Joyce
Chain	Jane
Chest	jest
Riches	ridges
Watching	lodging
Kitchen	pigeon

The next consonant phoneme as at the end of 'sing' does not occur independently in Arabic and is replaced by Arabic equivalents. My students have to say the following words as accurately as possible, as they say it standard British or American English. The following exercise will be helpful:

The Last Phoneme in 'Sing'	The Last Phoneme in 'Sing'
Singer	long ago
Hang up	wrong again
Longing	banging
Bring it	among others
Tongues	singing

The teacher will demonstrate the articulation and stress first before asking the students to imitate the teacher both individually and chorally. A tape recorder can be used for playing these exercises first, familiarize the students with the sound patterns and expect them to imitate them as accurately as possible.

The RP consonant phoneme /r/ is a tongue-tip roll or tap in Arabic and is often used before consonants and before a pause. The following exercise will help the students.

The /r/ Phoneme in Different Positions			
Read,	red	run	raw
Rude	rest	round	rare
Very	marry	borrow	hurry
Arrive	correct	around	arrest

Where RP vowel phonemes are concerned there are some deviations on the part of my students and others. The following are some of the exercises devised for a variety of classroom purposes. /l/ and /e/ are confused and some students use /e/ for both.

Lead	lid	led
Wheat	wit	wet
Been	bin	Ben
Check	chick	check
Cheek	chick	check
Feel	fill	fell
Reach	rich	wretch

The vowel phones in 'fat' and 'arm' are not entirely independent in Arabic and there is danger of replacing one by the other in some places. The following exercise will show the difference and help the students to pronounce them correctly.

Tan	lark
Bat	barn
Dad	dock
Pan	last

Another deviation from RP is the use of the vowel sound in 'cut' and that in 'got'. An intermediate vowel is used for both. The following exercise can help show the difference between the two vowels:

Luck	lock
Cud	cod
Duck	dock
Lust	lost
Bucks	box
Cup	cop

Another pair of vowel phonemes which are not properly articulated and confused is the ones in 'burn' and 'farm'. The following exercise showing the distinction will be helpful:

Purse	pass
Heard	hard
Perched	patched
Burn	barn
Firm	farm
Lurks	larks

Practicing these exercises aloud, individually and chorally is very helpful and effective. Here the teacher has to set the agenda. There is a weak vowel in English called schwa also known as the banana vowel. It frequently occurs in most English words and it is never found in a stressed syllable. Arab speakers and learners of English pronounce it different ways. The following exercise will show them how to articulate it and its relative position in words. The following exercise will improve the articulation and pronunciation of this vowel.

The Distribution of Weak Vowel, Schwa		
Initial	Medial	Final Position
Obey	pilot	sooner
Again	terrible	sailor
Annoy	dinner	China
Allow	menace	picture
Aside	contain	measure

There are a few diphthongs whose pronunciation and use deviate from RP norms and there is a need for the Kuwaiti students and others to learn how to say them. The teacher can show the students how to articulate these diphthongs. The use of a tape recorder can be very helpful in class. Loud reading of passages containing these and other words in sentences should be practiced alone and in class. The right word stress, sentence stress and intonation should be taken care of during the reading.

10. CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that no language is beyond anyone's capacity to learn or use. There are people who are polyglots and multilingual in varying degrees. What one man can do another man can do equally well, if not, better. The point being underscored here is this: given exposure, learning, practice and use, more languages or skills can be acquired and used efficiently. Students should have the right degree of motivation to learn and acquire a standard accent. Initially, it should be admitted, learning English could be a bit difficult, not as easy as learning Arabic or other languages. The unphonetic character, the inconsistencies between spelling and the pronunciation cause most difficulties to learners and scare them away. In addition, there are unlimited sentence patterns, verb patterns, plurals of nouns and varying forms of adjectives and adverbs which also add to the learner's difficulties. No wonder native English speakers, students or grown-ups too, make spelling mistakes, grammatical errors, etc. If the native speakers make mistakes, how many more foreign learners cannot make. The right types of exposure are necessary: listening and reading. In addition, the teacher's regular or periodic help will make the way easy for students to learn English and acquire an intelligible pronunciation. Peter Roach in his *English Phonetics and Phonology* says *Good speech may be defined as a way of speaking which is clearly intelligible to all ordinary people. 'Bad' speech is a way of talking which is difficult for most people to understand.* If a non-native learner can speak as well as a native English speaker, so much the better. His or her proficiency in pronunciation should be appreciated and much-admired. But Peter Roach quoted Daniel Jones about what constitutes the understandability of one's speech. Daniel Jones said that a learner's speech should be intelligible or understandable to all ordinary people. It is thus an easy task for any learner of English. He or she has to learn English and communicate in it in a way that is easy for anyone to understand. In other words, under 'intelligibility' we can include effective, successful and meaningful communication with others. The learner's job is made easy and simple. However that does not mean the teacher's job is done or finished. He or she has to do regular work in addition to follow-up to achieve the goals of communication and pronunciation.

Students eager of upgrading their skills in comprehension, vocabulary expansion and a standard pronunciation should regularly listen to radio broadcasts, TV chat shows, watch English movies and above all do regular reading, speaking and writing. In this connection, Francis Bacon's concise advice wouldn't be out of place. Bacon was a 17th-century essayist, a contemporary of William Shakespeare. Bacon said: 'Reading makes a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man.' If anyone has to be heard or listened to, he or she should have a fluent tongue and an intelligible accent and a command of the language.

There are numerous web sites dedicated to helping students acquire proficiency in various aspects of English. Some web sites deal with grammar, others with pronunciation, writing, some others with linguistics, ELT and so on. Students can log on to a site of their choice and learn online anything relevant to their area of study. Furthermore, there are online lessons

in all these areas of learning. Plus CDs and DVDs can be accessed to further or supplement one's favorite area of study. There are virtually millions of sites devoted to teaching and learning English. The sky is the limit where the learning opportunities are concerned. Innumerable books are available online and at bookshops. The learner should have the thirst, interest, motivation, aptitude, need and urge to learn what he or she prefers. Pronunciation is just one of the numerous areas or branches under ELT. The Internet has become a worldwide and individual classroom for motivated learners. Almost any subject under the sun can be accessed, studied, debated and written and talked about. The Internet user should call the shots in pursuit of his or her educational goals. Schools and colleges should encourage and enforce e-learning everyday for about an hour or so. This will support and supplement the classroom teaching. The Internet is an enormously useful resource and teaching aid for students and teachers alike. Students can learn pronunciation and do their assignment online and send it across to their teachers for evaluation, correction and feedback. The age-old method of using textbooks and notebooks can be downgraded depending on various factors.

REFERENCES

- [1] Aitchison, James. (1996). *Dictionary of English Grammar*. London: Cassel
- [2] Chalker, Sylvia and Weiner, Edmund. (1998). *Dictionary of English Grammar*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [3] Cruttenden, Alan. (2001). *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*. London: Arnold Publishers
- [4] Crystal, David. (2003). *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics*. Oxford. Blackwell Publishing.
- [5] Hancock, Mark. (2004). *English Pronunciation in Use*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [6] Hewings, Martin. (2007). *English Pronunciation in Use Advanced*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [7] Howard, Godfrey. (1994). *the Good English Guide*. London: Macmillan
- [8] Kelly, Gerald (2000). *How to Teach Pronunciation*. England. Pearson Education Limited
- [9] McArthur, Tom. (1996). *the Oxford Companion to the English Language*. New York, Oxford University Press, Inc.
- [10] Peters, Pam. (2004). *The Cambridge Guide to English Usage*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Richards, Jack C, Platt, John and Platt, Heidi. (1999). *Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics*. England. Longman
- [12] Roach, Peter. (2004). *English Phonetics and Phonology*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- [13] Swan, Michael. (2005). *Practical English Usage*. Oxford. Oxford University Press.
- [14] Trask, R L. (1996). *A Dictionary of Phonetics and Phonology*. London: Routledge.
- [15] Wells, J C. (2000). *Longman Pronunciation Dictionary*. England. Pearson Education Limited.