A Study of the Perceptual Identification of the English Diphthongs by the Advanced Iraqi Student Teachers: Problems and Possible Solutions*

Haifa Adnan Salman Al-Kan'aan
Asst. Lect., Nineveh Teachers' Training Institute for Girls

Abstract

The perceptual identification of sounds is one of the most important areas in foreign-language learning. It often sets a precedent for sound discrimination, which should be practiced thoroughly in the earlier stages of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Nevertheless, teaching experience has shown that misidentifying the sounds perceptually can be predicted in the performance of the Iraqi student teachers (AIST) majoring in English. This is mostly applied to the identification of vowels, in general, and that of diphthongs, in particular.

The purpose of this paper is to find whether or not the AIST have some difficulties identifying the English diphthongs perceptually mostly because of the vowel system operating in their L1 which prevents them have an accent-free L2 and the lack of the appropriate exposure to a natively spoken L2, with the teacher as the only available model. The paper comes up with some possible solutions that can easily be adopted by the teachers of English in both earlier and advanced stages.

The database for this study consists of the subjects' responses to the oral stimuli provided by the researcher, and the samples are taken from 12 students of the 5th year/ Dept. of English of the Teacher Training Institute/ Nineveh.

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دراسة في التمييز السماعي لأصوات العلة المركبة من قبل طالبات المرحلة المتقدمة لإعداد المعلمين: المشكلة والتوصيات

هيفاء عدنان سلمان الكنعان

مدرس مساعد، معهد إعداد المعلمات/ نينوى

المستخلص

لطالما كان تشخيص الأصوات سماعياً أحد الجوانب اللغوية المهمة في تعلم اللغة الأجنبية، وقد يفوق في أهميته نطق الأصوات نفسها، وعلى الرغم من أن تشخيص الأصوات يسبق نطقها في عملية التعلم، إلا أن الممارسة الفعلية للتعليم قد أظهرت أن طالبات الاختصاص في المراحل المتقدمة لمعهد اعداد المعلمات لازلن يعانين من بعض الصعوبات المترتبة من التمييز بين الأصوات المعتلة (Vowels) بصورة عامة، والمركبة (Diphthongs)، بصورة خاصة.

وعليه، كان الغرض من هذا البحث التحقق من فرضية عدم قدرة الطالبات على تمييز الأصوات المركبة سماعيا بسبب التأثير الصوتي لأصوات العلة في اللغة العربية من جهة، وندرة سماعهن للفظ الانكليزي الأصيل من جهة أخرى، وتنتهي الدراسة بتقديم بعض الحلول التي يمكن أن يحققها المدرسون في المراحل المبكرة والمتقدمة من تعليم اللغة الإنكليزية.

تعتمد قاعدة المعلومات على البيانات المتحصلة من أجوبة (١٢) طالبة من طالبات المرحلة الخامسة في قسم اللغة الانكليزية من معهد اعداد المعلمات/ نينوى.

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Abbreviations

1	**AIST**	Advanced Iraqi Student Teachers
2	**CA**	Contrastive Analysis
3	**CP**	Critical Period
4	**EFL**	English as a Foreign Language
5	**IA**	Iraqi Arabic
6	**ILE**	Iraqi Learners of English
7	**L1**	The First Language
8	**L2**	The Second Language
9	**RP**	Received Pronunciation
10	**SA**	Standard Arabic
11	**TEFL**	Teaching English as a Foreign Language

1- Factors Affecting Developing Good Pronunciation Habits

1.1 Undervaluing the Critical Period in L2 Acquisition

It is beyond dispute that children of ten years old or even less can acquire a perfect pronunciation of the foreign language they are taught if they are surrounded well by that language. This is simply achieved by pure imitation. It follows that after this age, the child's ability to imitate becomes less and less until it disappears in later life. As such, the habits of the adult's L1 become so strong that they are very difficult to break, (O'Connor, 1980: 1-2).

Such an argument has come up with what has been termed as the Critical Period (CP) hypothesis which supports the popular belief that "the earlier an individual begins to learn a foreign language…the better will be his or her pronunciation," (Patkowski, 1990: 74). This is further sustained by Tahta et al (1981:

265) who concede that if L2 acquisition starts by the age of 6 then there are no possibilities of transfer of accent. If, on the other hand, it starts after 12 or 13, there will be very marked accent transfer.

This argument finds support in the fact that past the ages of 9 to 12 the plasticity of brain function and the imitation capacity are gradually lost. As such, it has been confirmed strongly that for acquiring L2 effectively, learning process should take place before the hemispheric linguistic specialization occurs, (Tahta et al. ibid; Patkowski, ibid). This suggests that after this CP any acquisition of L2 phonology will relatively be difficult or even unlikely.

Unfortunately, this CP in L2 acquisition has not been taken seriously by the book writers in Iraq until recently when English is being dealt with in the earlier years of the primary stage. It also seems that there is a general agreement among teachers that younger learners are better in acquiring much of the sound characteristics that have been missed by the advanced ones. This is mostly due to the young's flexible ability of receiving the recorded data accompanying this new series of textbooks (see, for example, the Iraq Opportunities series: 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th primary, 2008 and on).

1.2 L1 Interference

It has been approved that a significant proportion of the theory of language learning is based upon the evidence of the L1 interference. It is one of the most essential notions in language teaching. Sometimes the very term is used to refer to the negative influence of one language on another, (Wilkins, 1973: 179). As such, learning problems are said to vary according to both type and degree of the L1 interference. Eventually, two kinds of interference problems have been diagnosed:

1- Positive interference problems which refer to the formal features existing in L1 but are said to be missing in L2.
2- Negative interference problems which refer to the formal features existing in L2, but are missing in L1, (Shani, 1978: 31).

Accordingly, a whole field of interest, called contrastive analysis (CA) has grown up and become the primary preoccupation of many applied linguists. In fact, for many linguists, Applied Linguistics is CA, (Wilkins, 1973: 179).

2- Contrastive Analysis (CA)

During the 1940's, the American structuralist Fries, emphasized the relevance of CA to the field of language learning when he stated that learning a foreign language effectively depends on a scientific description of the target language, carefully compared with that of the mother tongue of the learner, (Lado, 1957: 1).

However, the stimulus for this whole activity has been provided by the Spanish scholar Lado in 1957 when he published his interesting book Linguistics Across Cultures. In this book, Lado attempted a detailed CA for English and Spanish, and thus he was able to anticipate areas of difficulty for the Spanish learner of English in every aspect of the language learned depending on the results of CA. It was ever since been confirmed that the difficulty or facility of learning foreign languages is determined by the structural difference or similarity between L1 and L2. With respect to the process of comparing two sound systems, Lado (1964: 76) points out:

> By contrasting a description of the sound system of the target language with that of the first language, we anticipate the problems that need to be taught and the particular features that are difficult.

The following is a contrastive study of the English diphthongs and their equivalents – if any – in Arabic to help the reader keep pace with the relevant easiness or difficulty of certain diphthongs for the Iraqi learners of English (ILE). This is so

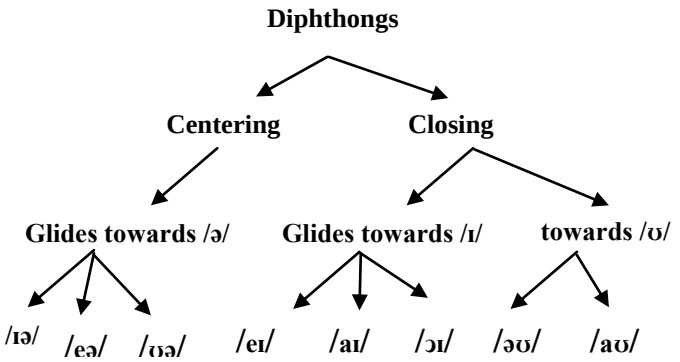
because the contrastive study throws light upon the similarities and differences between the two sound systems regarding these diphthongs. Eventually, such similarities and differences render them easy or difficult to acquire or identify. This is further sustained by Marouf (1973: 56) who states that learning sounds that are physically similar and similarly distributed in both L1 and L2 "occurs by simple transfer without difficulty." Conversely, learning sounds that are differently distributed and physically different from those in L1 "occurs more slowly and difficulty with them is more persistent." Of course that does not mean that Marouf's statement is totally true. Actually, it can be questioned sometimes. For example, sounds like /ɜ/ and /ɔɪ/ pose no big difficulty for the ILE although they are not found, as separate phonemes, in the Arabic sound system. Nevertheless, the contrastive study is carried on to reach a compromise between the languages compared as regards these glides.

2.0 The English Diphthongs and the Anticipated Difficulties

It is well established that RP has a large number of diphthongs which are defined as sounds consisting of a glide from one vowel to another. It starts at one vowel and glides to another with no break in between, and with the first element of the glide to be always given the main prominence, and the second being only slightly sounded, (Roach, 2000: 21; Hassan and El-Shayib, 2003: 96).

English diphthongs are eight and they can be divided into two groups, as in the following diagram:

The following is a description of each one with an illumination of the difficulties that may be encountered by the AIST of EFL. Figures 1, 2 and 3 illustrate the most recent starting and ending points of the English glides of these diphthongs following Roach, (pp. 22-23).



2.0.1 The Centering Diphthongs

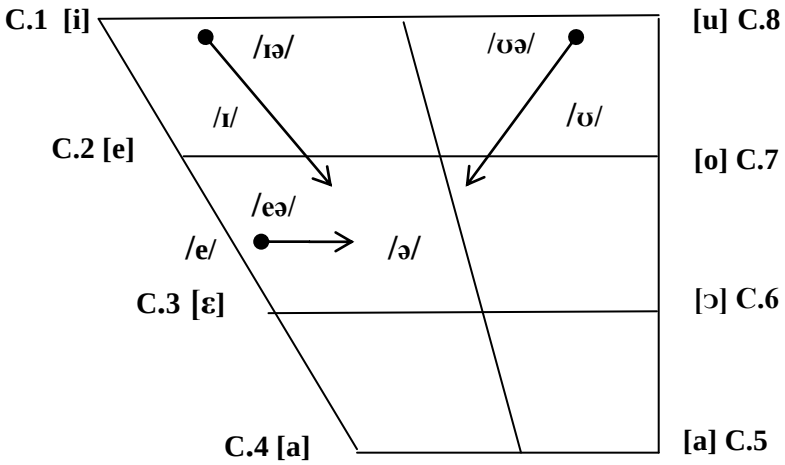


Fig.1: Diagram illustrating the tongue positions of the starting and the ending points of the RP centering diphthongs

1- /ɪə/

As illustrated in the above figure, the glide for this diphthong starts at a point a little closer than /ɪ/ in *ill*, *fit*, then it moves towards a central position in the direction of /ə/. This diphthong

is found in *ears* /ɪəz/, *fierce* /fɪəs/, *clear* /klɪə/. On the productive level, /ɪə/ is found to be one of the problematic diphthongs for the ILE although it has equivalence – of some kind – with the ones in /hija/ *she*,/ saadija/ (a female name), /naasirija/ (an Iraqi city). What makes the problem even more complicated is the frequent occurrence of this diphthong before a silent (r). Personal experience has shown that:

a- Most of the ILE replace this diphthong by the pure vowel /i:/ plus /r/ quality.
b- /ɪə/ and /eə/ are often confused because they are spelt similarly in some words.
c- Sometimes the quality /ɜ:/ is used for both.

Eventually, this diphthong may pose a problem on the perceptual level.

2- /eə/

This is a glide from the vowel /e/ in *ate* /et/, *get* /get/ towards a central position, i.e. /ə/. It is found in *heirs* /eəz/, *bears* /beəz/, *swear* /sweə/. Again, ILE may have difficulty identifying this diphthong due to the following two reasons:

a- The absence of the equivalent in Iraqi Arabic (IA).
b- The frequent occurrence of the diphthong before a silent (r).

As with /ɪə/, most of the learners replace this diphthong by a long quality of /e/ plus an Iraqi type of /r/, producing such pronunciations for the above words: [e:rz], [be:rz], [swe:r]. Hence, it is expected that these learners may have difficulty identifying this diphthong perceptually.

3- /ʊə/

As Figure 1 shows, the starting point of this diphthong begins at a point slightly closer than /ʊ/ in *book* /bʊk/, *put* /pʊt/, and then it moves towards a central area in the direction of /ə/. In

the production of this glide, the lips change from rounded for the first element to neutrally open for the second.

/ʊə/ may have equivalents of some kind in both standard and IA. For example, some kind of /ʊə/ can be heard in /hʊwa/ *he*, /şʊwar/ *pictures*, /qʊwa/ *forces*. Of course, it cannot be said that the glide in these words resembles the RP one perfectly, for the same strength is given to the second element of the Arabic glide. A case which does not go in accordance with the nature of the English diphthongs as stated by Roach (p. 21):

> Perhaps the most important thing to remember about all the diphthongs is that the first part is much longer and stronger than the second part.

However, personal experience in teaching the pronunciation of English as a discipline has shown that the AIST often replace /ʊə/ by the long vowel /uː/ plus /r/ quality in words where the glide precedes an (r) as part of their influence by spelling conventions.

It should be also mentioned that /ʊə/ is becoming very rare in RP; there is a progressive decline in its use and /ɔː/ is increasingly replacing it, (Gimson, 1981(a): 66; Jones, 1997: ix; Roach, p. 21). In this connection, Gimson (1981(b): 255) confirms:

> Sometimes, a phoneme is obviously in danger of disappearing, e.g. RP /ʊə/ commonly being replaced by /ɔː/ in such words as *sure, poor, tour, moor*, etc.

The reason behind such a merging is phonetic for the most part; that is, as diphthongs are long, they have a tendency to monophthongize to long vowels, (Ball, 1984: 41).

Unfortunately, ILE are kept in ignorance of this merging, and /ʊə/ is kept distinct from /ɔ:/ when dealing with this diphthong in their textbook. The following is cited from Hassan and El-Shayib's *English Pronunciation for student teachers* (2003: 112) in which words with /ʊə/ are kept distinct from words with /ɔ:/, though /ɔ:/ is acceptable for both groups.

/ɔ:/	/ʊə/
your /jɔ:/	you're /jʊə/
tore /tɔ:/	tour /tʊə/
door /dɔ:/	doer /dʊə/

2.0.2 The Closing Diphthongs

2.0.2.1 Glides towards /ɪ/

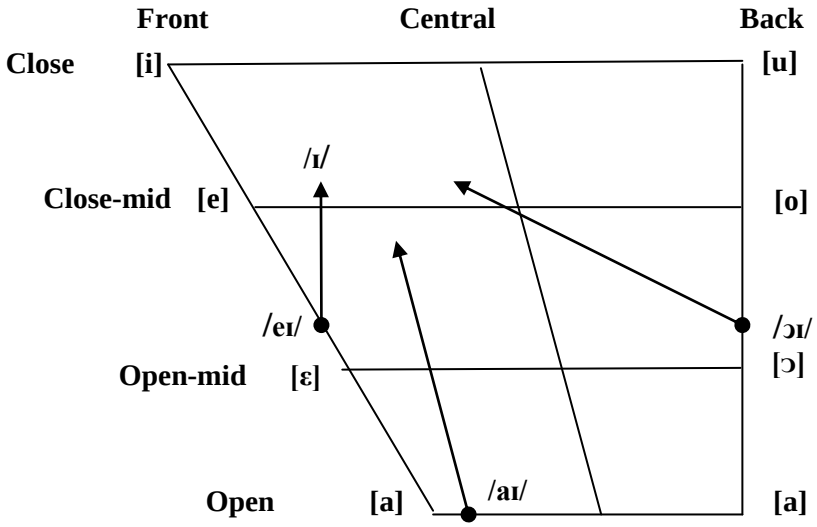


Fig. 2: The RP glides towards

1- /eɪ/

The glide of this diphthong starts at a point similar to /e/ in *set, bed*, and then it moves towards a closer area in the direction of /ɪ/. It is found in *aim* /eɪm/, *face* /feɪs/, *clay* /kleɪ/.

/eɪ/ has an equivalent sound in Standard Arabic (SA), which is a combination of /a/ and /j/, in /şajd/ *hunting*, /lajl/ *night*, /sajf/ *sword*, /ʕajn/ *eye*, /bajt/ *house*. But the Iraqi speakers tend to replace this glide by the long vowel /e:/, hence, these words are pronounced as /şe:d/, /le:l/, /se:f/, /ʕe:n/,/be:t/, respectively in IA, (Aziz, 1974:69). Such a replacement of a long vowel for this glide is thought to be the reason behind the production of /e:/ where /eɪ/ should be produced. Nevertheless, it has been noticed by experience that /eɪ/ is one of the few diphthongs that do not pose many problems for the advanced ILE on the perceptual level.

2- /aɪ/

The glide of the RP /aɪ/ begins with an open vowel which is slightly similar to /ʌ/ in *up , cut,* then it moves towards a closer area in the direction of /ɪ/. This is a glide from an open vowel towards a relatively close one, (Roach, 2000:22). It is found in *idea* /aɪdɪə/, *kite* /kaɪt/, *tie* /taɪ/.

Teaching experience has shown that the AIST do not have much difficulty producing this diphthong as it is most often produced in word-final positions in IA. But, in Arabic, it is a combination of /a:/ and /j/ . It can be found in words such as /ma:j/ *water*, /ʧa:j/ *tea*, /maʕa:j/ *with me*, /ha:j/ *this.*

/aɪ/ can be a little difficult to produce in word-medial positions when students of earlier stages split the diphthong in words like *knife, line,* etc. producing such pronunciations as /na:-jif//, /la:-jin/.

3- /ɔɪ/

The first part of the RP /ɔɪ/ has the same quality as /ɔ:/ in *all*, *door*, then it glides towards a closer front area in the direction of /ɪ/. The lips change from rounded for the first element to neutrally spread for the second. It is found in *oil* /ɔɪl/, *point* /pɔɪnt/, *coy* /kɔɪ/.

Except for the interjection /ʔo:j/, /ɔɪ/ has no many equivalents in Arabic. Nevertheless, it is found to pose no much difficulty for ILE, and personal experience has shown that it is easy to produce and identify by most of the Iraqi learners in early and advanced stages. However, a more decisive answer can be provided by experiment.

2.0.2.2 Glides towards /ʊ/

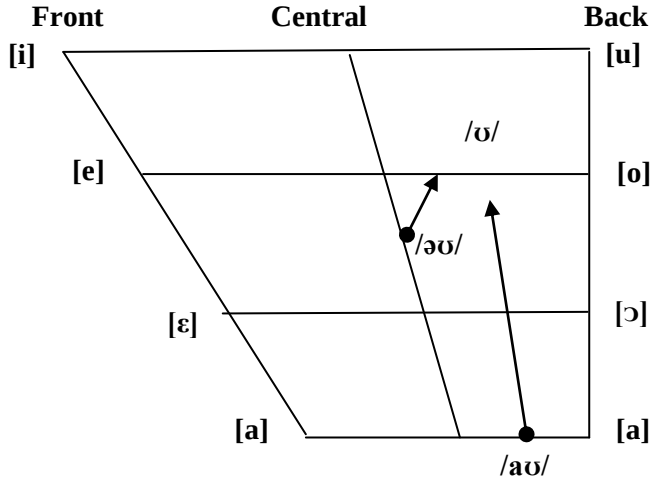


Fig.3: The RP glides towards /ʊ/

1- /əʊ/

The starting point for this glide is the same as for /ə/ in *ago* /ə'gəʊ/, *apart* /ə'pa:t/, then it moves towards a closer area in the direction of /ʊ/. The lips are slightly rounded for the second

element "in anticipation of the glide towards /ʊ/, for which there is quite noticeable lip-rounding," (Roach, 2000: 23). It is found in *own* /əʊn/, *tone* /təʊn/, *snow* /snəʊ/.

/əʊ/ represents one of the problematic diphthongs for the advanced ILE. This is so because of the absence of the equivalence in IA. SA, on the other hand, has a combination of /a/ and /w/, in which the first element is more open and more front, in words like /aw/ *or*, /kawn/ *universe*, /law/ *if*, /lawn/ *colour*, /şawm/ *fasting*, /şawb/ *direction*, /mawz/ *banana*s. But the problem lies in the fact that this glide is always replaced in colloquial IA by the long vowel /o:/ producing such pronunciations as /ko:n/, /lo:/, /lo:n/, /şo:m/, /şo:b/, /mo:z/, (Aziz, 1974:69; O'Connor, 1980: 139). This explains why most of the advanced ILE produce /ɔ:/ where /əʊ/ is the correct pronunciation. As such, it is expected that the learners may have difficulty identifying this diphthong perceptually.

2- /aʊ/

The starting point for this glide begins at a vowel similar to the open back /*a*:/ in *art*, *star*, then it moves towards a closer area in the direction of /ʊ/. Since the glide begins from an open vowel and ends in the direction of a close one, it necessitates a large movement. The lips change from open for the first element to round for the second. It is found in *owl* /aʊl/, *mouse* /maʊs/, *cow* /kaʊ/.

Teaching experience has shown that /aʊ/ does not pose much difficulty for ILE on the productive level. This is so because there is an equivalent of some kind to this glide in words like /xa:wli/ *towel*, /za:wija/ *angle*, /ma:w-wi/ *light blue*, /fa:w/ *Fao* (an Iraqi city), /mara:-wid/ *ear-rings*, /sa:wa/ *Sawa* (an Iraqi lake).

3- The Experiment

The experiment takes the form of a multiple-choice item test consisting of 24 items with each having four options, representing four sounds among which each subject has to pick the correct choice.

When writing the test material, the three demands, suggested by Davies (1977: 56) and that must be met by a valid educational test have been considered:

1- The simplicity of the test. The chosen material is a composite of familiar words that are frequently used by the AIST when expressing themselves in English.
2- The teach ability of the syllabus. The material chosen for testing has been covered thoroughly during the testees' study of the pronunciation of English as a subject in earlier years and as a discipline in more specialized stages.
3- The validity of the results. The results obtained are thought to be of a beneficent influence on the teaching process since they throw light upon serious problems encountered by the learners.

3.1 The Multiple-Choice Item Test

The test conducted in this study makes full use of:

a- the results and expectations arrived at in the previous CA made between the English diphthongs and their equivalents – if any – in Arabic,
b- The areas where these glides are found to pose problems for the learners.

By so doing, the researcher follows Lado's statement (1964: 165):

> We begin by considering the native and the foreign language systems to obtain a list of

> the learning problems which will be tested. The comparison produces lists of problems of pronunciation … We then prepare tests that measure degree of these problems.

3.1.1 The Test Description

The tested material takes the form of a list of eight items with each representing the glide to be tested (see Appendix 1). Each item consists of three words. Each word represents one of the word-occurrences of the glide (i.e. initially, medially and finally). It should be mentioned here that /ʊə/ has no initial occurrence in words; nevertheless, three words have been provided under this item for reasons of calculation conveniences.

By providing three words in each item, the researcher follows Lado's statement (1961: 36) that as a testee is expected to identify a sound satisfactorily in a word but not in another, it is more accurate to talk about the overall percentage of the testee's performance in one item. This makes the whole tested material 24 words in number.

a- The Teacher's Sheet

As shown in Appendix 1, the eight items contain words having the diphthongs to be tested. The 24 words have been re-arranged in the teacher's sheet (as illustrated in Appendix 2). The selected test material consists of familiar and frequently used words that comprise the following basic syllable patterns:

VC, CV, CVC, CCV, CCVC

b- The Subject's Sheet

Each one of the 12 subjects receives a test paper consisting of 24 items (see Appendix 3), with each item consisting of four options. Four sounds are provided in each item and the subjects are asked to circle the option which, they believe, matches the given sound.

3.1.2 Subjects

The test was administered to a total of 12 female subjects from the fifth stage of the department of English, Teacher Training Institute/ Nineveh of the academic year (2011-2012).

3.1.3 Test Administration

As the institute lacked the equipment required for a group test, like a sound-treated room, the test was administered inside an isolated classroom during lecturing times. The subjects were asked to identify the vowel sound in each word they listened to by circling the sound which was believed to match the given one. The researcher began by reading aloud each word twice, while the subjects circled the options which represented their choices after each reading.

3.1.4 Handling Consultation

In order to prevent consultation, care was taken to keep a certain distance between the subjects. In fact, the subjects' small number helped to facilitate this process further, and each one was seated alone.

3.1.5 Scoring

The identification of each diphthong equaled one mark. Thus, for each investigated item (with three words) a subject had a mark of 3. Eventually, there would be a mark of 24 for each subject.

4- Discussing the Results

In this section, the subjects' answers in each item are investigated. The reader is always referred to Appendix 4 for scores and percentages.

4.1 Centering Diphthongs

4.1.1 /ɪə/

a. The subjects were able to score 19 out of 36 for the diphthong in *ears*, *fierce* and *mere*.
b. /ɪə/ was realized as /eə/ in 11 out of 36 scores of the subjects' overall performance.
c. The diphthong was identified as /iː/ in 4 and as /ɜː/ in 2 out of 36 scores.

Eventually, the percentages obtained in this category were as follows:

option	**/ɪə/**	**/eə/**	**/iː/**	**/ɜː/**
percentage	52.77	30.55	11.11	5.5

4.1.2 /eə/

a. 17 out of 36 scores were categorized under /eə/ in *aired*, *pair* and *stairs*.
b. /eə/ was categorized as /əː/ in 10 of the twelve subjects' scores.
c. /eə/ was realized as /ɪə/ in 9 out of 36.

The percentages obtained in this category were as follows:

option	**/eə/**	**/ɜː/**	**/ɪə/**	**/e/**
percentage	47.22	27.77	25.00	00.00

4.1.3 /ʊə/

a. 22 out of 36 scores were categorized under /ʊə/ in *jewel*, *pure* and *fuel*.
b. 5 out of the subjects' overall performance in this item was scored under /ʊ/ and /uː/.
c. Eventually, 4 scores of the subjects' performance were categorized under /əʊ/.

Thus, the percentages of the subjects' identification of /ʊə/ in *jewel*, *pure* and *fuel* were as follows:

option	/ʊə/	/ʊ/	/u:/	/əʊ/
percentage	61.11	13.88	13.88	11.11

4.2 Closing Diphthongs

4.2.1 /eɪ/

a. The subjects scored 33 out of 36 in this item. This shows that most of the subjects could identify the diphthong in *pay*, *eight* and *game*.
b. One score went under each of the three distractors /eə/, /ɜ:/, /e/.

This makes the percentages of the subjects' performance in this item as follows:

option	/eɪ/	/eə/	/ɜ:/	/e/
percentage	91.66	2.77	2.77	2.77

4.2.2 /aɪ/

In this item, the subjects' performance was as follows:

a. The diphthong in *die*, *height* and *eyes* was identified as /aɪ/ by the majority of the subjects, and they could score 28 out of 36 in this item.
b. /aɪ/ was realized as /eɪ/ in 4 out of 36, as /*a*:/ in 3 and as /æ/ in 1.

The percentages of the subjects' performance in this category were as follows:

option	/aɪ/	/eɪ/	/*a*:/	/æ/
percentage	77.77	11.11	8.33	2.77

4.2.3 /ɔɪ/

a. The subjects were able to score 31 out of 36 while identifying the diphthong in *coin*, *toy* and *oil*.
b. 2 scores of their whole performance went under each of the distractors /ɔ:/ and /əʊ/. Eventually, one of their scores was put under the distractor /ɒ/.

As such, the percentages of the subjects' overall scores in this item were as follows:

option	/ɔɪ/	/ɔ:/	/əʊ/	/ɒ/
percentage	86.11	5.55	5.55	2.77

4.2.4 /əʊ/

In this item, the subjects' performance was as follows:

a- The subjects scored 26 out of 36 identifying the diphthong in *both*, *toe* and *own*,
b- 7 of their scores went under the centering diphthong /ʊə/, and 2 under the long vowel /ɔ:/.
c- The diphthong was not identified as /ɔɪ/in any of the subjects' performance.

As such, the percentages of the subjects' overall performance in this item will be:

option	/əʊ/	/ʊə/	/ɔ:/	/ɔɪ/
percentage	72.22	19.44	5.55	00.00

It should be made clear that one score is missing as a subject missed one of the items.

4.2.5 /aʊ/

a. The subjects were able to score 28 identifying the diphthong in *plough*, *owl* and *shout*.

b. Thus, 4, 3 and 1 of their overall scores went under /*a*ː/, /əʊ/ and /ɔː/, respectively.

As such, the percentages of the subjects' overall performance are as follows:

option	**/aʊ/**	**/*a*ː/**	**/əʊ/**	**/ɔː/**
percentage	77.77	11.11	8.33	2.77

5- Conclusion

1. In view of the data at disposal, it can be said that there are adequate grounds to argue for the researcher's statement that the AIST still have some difficulties identifying the English diphthongs in the citation form of words.

   Part of the argument has been supported by means of the CA made between the English diphthongs on the one hand and their Arabic counterparts, if there are any, on the other. The results have shown that the English diphthongs that show some similarity to the Arabic ones are much easier for the subjects to identify than those which do not. Accordingly, the study corroborates Lado's statement (1957: 2) that elements which are similar to the learners' native language are relatively simpler for him than those which are different.

2. The study has shown that the subjects have difficulty identifying perceptually most of the English diphthongs, and the percentages scored under /ɪə,eə,ʊə,aɪ,əʊ,aʊ/ were not that promising (see Appendix 4 for the percentages scored under each item). These diphthongs were identified as follows by most of the subjects:
   a. /ɪə/ was identified as /eə/ and /iː/ in (30.33%) and (11.11%), respectively, of the subjects' overall performance in this item. This diphthong was

misidentified mostly in an initial position (i.e. in *ears*), for only 5 out of 12 were scored in this item.

b. /eə/ was identified as /ə:/ and /ɪə/ in 52% of the subjects' performance. /eə/ was identified mostly in a final position, for 8 out of 12 were scored in identifying the diphthong in *pair*.

c. /ʊə/ was identified as /ʊ/, /u:/ and /ʊə/ in as much as (38.88%) of the subjects' overall performance. /ʊə/ was identified by as much as 11 subjects in a final position in the word *pure.*

It can be said, as such, that these findings refute Tiffen's observations (1976: 26, 31-32) that /eə,ɪə,ʊə/ do not present much difficulty for Arab EFL learners.

d. /aɪ/ was surprisingly identified as /eɪ/ in a considerable amount of the subjects' performance (i.e. 11%), and what was even more surprising was their identification of the closing diphthong as the pure vowels /*a*:/ and /æ/, for over 19% of their performance in this item was categorized under these sounds.

e. /əʊ/ was identified perceptually as the centring diphthong /ʊə/, for 19.44% of the subjects' overall performance went under /ʊə/. It is believed that the reason behind such an inconsistency is possibly literal, in that the subjects might have been under the misapprehension that /əʊ/ is /ʊə/ for the first sight.

In the CA made between the English diphthongs and their Arabic counterparts (see 2.1.2.2), it has been indicated that the diphthong in /lawn/ *colour*, /mawt/ *death* is often replaced by the long vowel /ɔ:/ in IA to produce /lo:n/ and /mo:t/ for the above two words. This is as far as the production is concerned. But it seems that the subjects have the same problem perceptually, for more than (5%) of the subjects' performance went under /ɔ:/.

f- /aʊ/ was identified perceptually in as much as (77.77%) of the subjects' overall performance. Eventually, (22.22%) of their whole performance went under /*a*ː/, /əʊ/, and /ɔː/ options. This shows that the IA equivalents of this vowel did not have much effect on some subjects' identification of the glide, and that was a real challenge.

3. The analysis of the data has shown that the AIST have failed to apply much of their theoretical knowledge – regarding the English diphthongs – perceptually. It has been observed that their identification of the material in question was satisfactory in only two items out of eight which represented the eight English diphthongs (i.e. /eɪ/ and /ɔɪ/). The subjects' performance in other items can still be underestimated.

4. It can be figured out that L1 has some influence on the subjects' identification of some diphthongs in that:
   a. /ɪə/ was identified as /iː/ in as much as 11.11% of their whole performance.
   b. /eə/ was identified as /ɜː/ in more than 27% of their performance.
   c. /əʊ/ was identified as /oː/ in more than 5% of their performance.

5. Confusion resulting from the diphthong shape has also been diagnosed as:
   a. /ɪə/ was identified as /eə/ in more than 30% of the subjects' performance, and /eə/ was identified as /ɪə/ in 25% of their performance.
   b. /ʊə/ was identified as /əʊ/ in more than 11% of the subjects' performance, and /əʊ/ was identified as /ʊə/ in more than 19% of their performance.

6- Possible Solutions

The following are possible solutions for the problem, with some have seriously been attempted at the institute:

1. Much more interest should be given to the perception of English even in advanced stages of learning the language. This can be achieved by using previously recorded (audio-visual) material which may include:
   - The BBC series on TEFL for advanced stages.
   - Traditional/ historical classics, i.e. plays or novels that are basically oriented for academic purposes.
   - Extensive conversational courses.

   Such material can be dealt with at regular intervals in sound-treated rooms with the teacher always ready to play, rewind and replay what is thought to be necessary to develop the learner's listening (perceptual) skill, and later the reading (productive) skill.

2. It has been stated that /ɪə,eə,ʊə,aɪ,əʊ,aʊ/ were characterized amongst the learners' segmental problem areas. One suggested remedy is to attempt a communicative teaching of pronunciation to deal with this difficulty. The following guidelines given by Celce-Murcia (cited in Brown, 1992: 14) can be suggested:
   - Identifying the learners' problem areas.
   - Finding lexical/grammatical contexts containing natural occurrences of the problem sounds.
   - Developing communicative tasks that incorporate the sounds in question.
   - Developing some exercises in which the teacher can recycle the problem and practice the target sounds in new contexts.

   In fact, personal experience has shown that simulation can do much to help achieve this purpose. If the teacher can

incorporate or design a text with many occurrences of the problem sounds, and with some roles to play by the learners, she can solve many of the problems faced in this regard. Later, another text, with the same problem sounds can be designed to be played by other learners, and hence the problem is recycled again and again until it is solved.

Actually, serious steps have been taken in the institute to accomplish this when certain classics are written as plays to be performed by students from different stages in front of a living audience (See Appendix 5 for some extracts).

3. There is scarcely any aspect of TEFL which has not been relevant to CA. Such an analysis can be carried out very easily by the teacher dealing with vowels, in general, and with diphthongs, in particular. For example, in teaching a diphthong like /eɪ/, its description, classification and distribution, the teacher can ask the students to give words in Arabic with, scarcely, the same diphthong, i.e. like the one in /ʔajna/ *where* (qw),/ bajt/ *house*, /maj/ (a female name).

4. As it is too late now to talk about an appropriate age to start a foreign language, it is more apt to exploit every single moment of the pronunciation period to make for this whole inconvenience. The teacher can develop the habit of reading the phonemic transcription – instead of the spelling – of the utterances with the problem sounds. Later, this habit can be exploited in reading periods when individual students are asked to transcribe words with the target sounds. This can be repeated several times during the lesson period.

5. Undoubtedly, the role of the mass media is thoroughly neglected in the TEFL programs in Iraq. The reasons behind such negligence are variable, but the most obvious of which is

the social one. Most of the students are not exposed to any natively spoken English through these media because of the social constraints. As such, the teacher may find it more appropriate to develop in his/her students a sensitive ear to whatever utterance used natively. Thus, the teacher can recommend some aural exercises in EFL-oriented cassettes, EFL radio programs, especially those which broadcast the RP type of English. The BBC EFL programs are mostly recommended because, as a broadcasting corporation, it has adopted an RP type of pronunciation right from its beginning in the twenties of the last century, for "it has recognized a great responsibility towards the problem of spoken English," (as quoted in Bell, 1983:23). Hence, the idea of stressing the place of broadcast to develop perceptual and productive abilities in learners should not be missed by teachers.

6. Part of the responsibility should be undertaken by teachers, for most of the pronunciation characteristics carried by teachers are adopted by learners. As such, extensive in-service courses in phonetics and phonology should be given by phonetics specialists. In addition, teachers of English can be sent out, at intervals, to countries where English is spoken natively to gain more linguistic knowledge in English, in general, and in pronunciation, in particular.

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Appendix 1
The test material before being re-arranged
The Tested Items

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
/ɪə/	**/eə/**	**/ʊə/**	**/eɪ/**	**/aɪ/**	**/ɔɪ/**	**/əʊ/**	**/aʊ/**
ears	aired	fuel	eight	eyes	oil	own	owl
fierce	stairs	jewel	game	height	coin	both	shout
mere	pair	pure	pay	die	toy	toe	plough

Appendix 2
The teacher's sheet of the tested material
(The words after being re-arranged)

1- plough	**7- pay**	**13- pair**	**19- eyes**
2- ears	**8- coin**	**14- height**	**20- shout**
3- die	**9- fierce**	**15- toe**	**21- fuel**
4- jewel	**10- owl**	**16- toy**	**22- stairs**
5- aired	**11- eight**	**17- mere**	**23- oil**
6- both	**12- pure**	**18- own**	**24- game**

Appendix 3

A copy of the students' sheet of the tested material

Dear student,

Listen carefully to the given word in each item and circle the vowel it has.

1. /o:/, /au/, /ou/, /a:/*
2. /i:/, /eə/, /iə/, /ə:/
3. /ai/, /a/, /ei/, /a:/
4. /u:/, /uə/, /ou/, /u/
5. /e/, /iə/, /ə:/, /eə/
6. /oi/, /o:/, /ou/, /uə/
7. /eə/, /ei/, /ə:/, /e/
8. /o:/, /ou/, /oi/, /o/
9. /ə:/, /i:/, /eə/, /iə/
10. /ou/, /a:/, /o:/, /au/
11. /ei/, /ə:/, /e/, /eə/
12. /u/, /ou/, /uə/, /u:/
13. /e/, /eə/, /iə/, /ə:/
14. /ai/, /a:/, /ei/, /a/
15. /uə/, /oi/, /ou/, /o:/
16. /ou/, /oi/, /o:/, /o/
17. /i:/, /eə/, /ə:/, /iə/
18. /ou/, /oi/, /o:/, /uə/
19. /a:/, /ai/, /ei/, /a/
20. /ou/, /o:/, /a:/, /au/
21. /u/, /ou/, /uə/, /u:/
22. /eə/, /ə:/, /iə/, /e/
23. /o:/, /oi/, /o/, /ou/
24. /ei/, /ə:/, /eə/, /e/

(*) It should be made clear that the system of transcription 2L+ has been maintained in the students' sheet as it is the one used in their textbook.

Appendix 4

Table showing the subjects' scores and percentages in all stimulus items

The Centering Diphthongs							
1 /ɪə/				2 /eə/			
/ɪə/	/iː/	/eə/	/əː/	/eə/	/eɪ/	/ɪə/	/əː/
19	4	11	2	17	00	9	10
52.77	11.11	30.53	5.55	**47.22**	-	25	27.77

The Centering Diphthongs							
3 /ʊə/				4 /eɪ/			
/ʊə/	/ʊə/	/ʊə/	/ʊə/	/eɪ/	/eə/	/əː/	/e/
22	22	22	22	33	1	1	1
61.11	61.11	61.11	61.11	91.66	2.77	2.77	2.77

The Centering Diphthongs							
5 /aɪ/				6 /ɔɪ/			
/aɪ/	/æ/	/eɪ/	/ɑː/	/ɔɪ/	/ɔː/	/əʊ/	/ɒ/
28	1	4	3	13	2	2	1
77.77	2.77	11.11	8.33	86.11	5.55	5.55	2.77

The Centering Diphthongs							
7 /əʊ/				8 /aʊ/			
/əʊ/	/ɔɪ/	/ɔː/	/ʊə/	/aʊ/	/ɔː/	/əʊ/	/ɑː/
26	00	2	7	28	1	3	4
72.22	-	5.55	19.44	77.77	2.77	8.33	11.11

Appendix 5

Extracts from classics that have been performed by the student teachers of the institute of different levels

(**The letters in bold type represent the sounds under investigation**)

1- An extract from **CINDERELLA**/ Performed by the second-year students- 2010.

Grizilda: Cinderella… m**y** d**ear** sister, Cinderella…I want you to sew me a beautiful dress…you see, a friend has a party, and she inv**i**ted me to it. Please, Cinderella…I want it to be ready b**y** tomorr**ow**.

Cinderella: Tomorr**ow**?!! But **I** can't…**I**…This means that I'll be st**ay**ing up all n**igh**t sewing it.

Grizilda: Please, Cinderella…please, m**y** d**ear** sister.

Narrator: Cinderella took the dress and st**ay**ed all the n**igh**t sewing it putting on the ribbons and l**a**ces. B**y** dawn, th**ere** was a beautiful dress on the ch**air** and the young girl was sleeping as if she were dead.

****

Narrator: At the n**igh**t of the party, Cinderella was sitting al**o**ne in her room, sad; t**ear**s went d**ow**n her cheeks, when she heard a n**oi**se. She r**ai**sed her f**a**ce to see an **o**ld good f**air**y h**o**lding a magical stick.

2- An extract from **SNOW WHITE**/ Performed by the first-year students- 2011.

Narrator: Sn**ow** Wh**i**te ran the whole d**ay** until she bec**a**me very tired. Then, she sat under a tree, and saw a beautiful little h**ou**se…she ran t**o**wards the h**ou**se and knocked at the door…th**ere** was n**o** answer, s**o**, she entered the h**ou**se.

Snow White: **Oh**, what a beautiful little h**ou**se…**Oh**, what a beautiful little ch**air**s…I feel s**o** thirsty…this is a n**i**ce filled glass of water…**Oh**, I feel so hungry…mmm, yummy, what delicious soup…I feel t**i**red…I shall g**o** to sleep.

After a wh**i**le, the seven dwarfs arr**i**ved chanting:

The seven dwarfs: Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
H**ow** I wonder what you are,
Up above the world so h**igh**,
L**i**ke a diamond in the sk**y**.

1st dwarf: Who sat in my ch**air**?

Other dwarfs: Mmm…
2nd dwarf: Who drank m**y** water?
Other dwarfs: Mmm…
3rd dwarf: Who had m**y** soup?
Other dwarfs: Mmm…
4th dwarf: Who's sleeping in m**y** bed?
Other dwarfs: What?!

3- An extract from **THE MERCHANT OF VENICE**- A simplified edition/ Performed by the fourth-year students- 2012.

Narrator: N**ow**, we g**o** back to Belmont. Portia led the Prince of Morocc**o** to the room w**here** the three caskets were kept.
Portia: H**ere** are the caskets. N**ow** m**a**ke your ch**oi**ce.
Prince (looking at the g**o**lden casket): Who chooses me will g**ai**n what many men des**i**re.
Prince (looking at the silver casket): Who chooses me will get as much as he deserves.
Prince (looking at the lead casket): Who chooses me must give and risk all he has.
Prince (thinking): Give and risk-for what? For lead?
Prince: Madam, **I**'ve m**a**de up m**y** m**i**nd. It's the g**o**ld casket.
Portia: Then. **O**pen it.
Prince: All that glitters is not g**o**ld,
Often have you heard that t**o**ld,
Guilded tombs do worms enf**o**ld,
Had you been as w**i**se as b**o**ld?
F**are** you well; your suit is c**o**ld.
Prsince (to Portia): Well, **I** must accept my f**a**te l**i**ke a man…Goodb**ye**, madam. I'm too sad to st**ay** or t**a**ke a long f**are**well.