Phonological Inadequacies in the Pronunciation of Three-Syllable Words by University EFL Learners

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Abstract:

   To communicate with each other, pronunciation is a prerequisite for such a crucial activity to occur. But there is no doubt that pronunciation plays a significant role in the process of communication as far as an efficient and a successful mutual interaction and understanding are concerned. This is largely the case when people of two different language backgrounds communicate. Part of such communication is the pronunciation of words which are usually made up of a sequence of sounds produced together. To fully understand the pronounced words, their pronunciation should be efficient or at least have the minimum requirement of pronunciation acceptance. The current article focuses on identifying the production level of pronunciation by university EFL learners of English words which comprise three- syllables being more challenging and complex. To achieve the purpose of the study, a theoretical survey of syllables is introduced being an essential part of understanding how such words are pronounced. Indeed, syllables in English are one of the most important topics that play a major role in mastering an efficient performance of the way English words are pronounced. A test is prepared to identify the level of pronunciation of such words by the learners. The goal of the test is to investigate whether the three-syllable words are pronounced adequately or inadequately. The test comprises a group of three-syllable words given to learners on printed forms which are later compared to the native pronunciation so as to compare between each. The article explicitly shows that university learners fail to pronounce such words adequately or, at least, they don't phonologically possess the acceptable requirements for the pronunciation of such words. More specifically, the results show that such failure is due to certain phonological attributes including mainly the inadequate stress placement, inadequate vowel reduction and severe lack of phonological knowledge.

Key words: pronunciation, three-syllable words, stress placement, inadequate, phonologically

الملخص:

   لكي يتواصل الاشخاص في ما بينهم ، يُعدّ التلفّظ (النطق) شرطًا أساسيًّا لمثل هذا النشاط الاساسي. لكن ليس هناك من شكّ، في أنّ التلفظ يؤدّي دورًا مُهمًّا في عملية الاتصال، طالما أُخِذ التفاعل المتبادل الناجح، المتمكّن، بنظر الاعتبار. هذه الحالة تبرز، إلى حد كبير، حين يتواصل الاشخاص من خلفيات لغوية مختلفة؛ بعضهم ببعض. جزء من اتصال كهذا يكمن في تلفّظ (نطق) الكلمات التي، عادةً، ما تتكون من سلسلة أصوات تُنتَج معًا. ولفهم كامل للكلمات المتلَفَظة (المنطوقة)، ينبغي أن يكون التلفّظ ذا كفاية، أو، في الأقل، أن ينطوي على أبسط متطلبت المقبولية التلفظيّة. يسلط البحث الحالي الضوء على تحديد مستوى طلبة الجامعة الدارسين اللغة الانجليزيه لغة اجنبية ، في تلفّظ الكلمات الإنجليزية التي تتكون من ثلاثة مقاطع تبدو الأكثر تحديًّا وتعقيدًا. ولإنجاز هدف الدراسة، يبدو المسح النظري للمقاطع المنتَجَة هو الأساس لفهم كيفية تلفُظ مثل هذه الكلمات. وبالتأكيد فالمقاطع في اللغة الإنجليزية تُعدّ مِن أهم الموضوعات التي تُؤدّي دورًا رئيسًا في إدارة أداء متمكن؛ يُماثل تلفظ الكلمات الإنجليزية في لغتها الأم. حُضِّر اختبار لتحديد مستوى التلفظ لهذه الكلمات للمتعلمين. إن هدف هذا الاختبار هو التحقق فيما إذا كانت الكلمات المؤلَّفة من مقاطع ثلاثةُ تنطق بصورة صوتيه ملائمة ام على العكس من ذلك . يتكون الاختبار من مجموعة كلمات ذوات مقاطع ثلاثة؛ تُعطى بأشكال مطبوعة، لتقارن، بعد ذلك، مع التلفاظات الأصلية. يُظهر البحث الحالي بنحو صريح أن طلبة الجامعة يفشلون في تلفظ مثل هذه

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الكلمات بنحو كافٍ، أو، في الأقل، لا يمتلكون، صوتيًّا، المتطلبات المقبولة لتلفظ كلمات كهذهة. بتحديد أكثر تُظهر النتائج أنّ مثل هذا الفشل يُؤدي إلى صفات صوتية مؤكدة، تتضمن، على نحو رئيس، عدم كفاية في تحديد مستوى النبر، وعدم لفظ حرف العلة في المقاطع التي يجب ان يلفظ فيها، مع عوز كبير بمعرفة علم وظائف الأصوات ونطق الاصوات والمقاطع.

پوخته:

گۆکردن مەرجێکی پێشوەختەیه له پرۆسەی پەیوەندیکردنی تاکەکان لەگەڵ یەکتردا. گومان لەوەدا نیه که گۆکردن رۆڵێکی سەرەکی دەبینێت له پرۆسەی پەیوەندیکردنێکی سەرکەوتوو و کاریگەر، و ئەم گرنگیه زیاتر دەردەکەوێت له کاتێکدا دوو کەسی جیاواز له زمان و کەلتوور هەوڵی پەیوەندیکردن لەگەڵ یەکتر دەدەن. بەشێکی ئەم پەیوەندیه بریتیه گۆکردنی ووشەکان، که بریتین له کۆمەڵه دەنگێک که پێکەوه بەر هەم هاتوون. بەمەبەستی تێگەیشتن له ووشەکان، دەبێت شێوازی گۆکردنیان چووست و خوازراو بێت، یاخوود لانی کەم بنەما بنچینەییەکانی شێوازی گۆکردنێکی دروستیان له خۆ گرتبێت. ئامانجی ئەم توێژینەوەیه بریتیه له دەستنیشانکردنی ئاستی بەرهەمهێنانی گۆکردنی کۆمەڵێک ووشەی ئینگلیزی که له سێ برگه پێک هاتوون، شێوازی گۆکردنەکان لەلایەن ئەو فێرخوازانەوه بەرهەم هاتوون که له ناو زانکۆدا ئینگیزی وەک زمانی بیانی دەخوێنن. به شێوازێکی گشتی گۆکردنی ووشەی سێ برگەیی کارێکی ئاڵۆز و سەختە بۆ فێرخوازەمکان. بەمەبەستی بەدیهێنانی ئامانجەمکانی ئەم توێژینەوەیه، کۆمەڵێک زانیاری تیۆری سەبارەت به برگه له زمانی ئینگلیزیدا ئاشنای فێرخوازەمکان دەکرێت. برگەکان له زمانی ئینگلیزیدا بابەتێکی گرنگن و رۆڵێکی سەرەکی دەبینن له بەدەست هێنانی کارامەیی پێویست له شێوازی گۆکردنی ووشەکاندا. له رێگای تاقیکردنەوەوه ئاستی فێرخوازەمکان بۆ گۆکردنی ووشەکان دیاری دەکرێت. ئامانجی تاقیکردنەوەمکه بریتیه له لێکۆڵینەوه له توانستی فێرخوازەمکان که ئایا دەتوانن ووشه سێ برگەییەمکان به دروستی گۆ بکەن یاخوود نا. تاقیکردنەوەمکه کۆمەڵه ووشەمیەکی سێ برگەیی له خۆ دەگرێت که به شێوازی چاپکراو دەدرێت به فێرخوازەمکان، پاشان دەرئەنجامەمکان بەراورد دەکرێن به شێوازی گۆکردنی کەسێک که زمانی دایکی ئینگلیزیه. دەرئەنجامەکانی ئەم توێژینەوەیه به روونی ئەوه دەردەخەن که فێرخوازەمکان ناتوانن ووشه سێ برگەییەمکان به شێوازێکی دروستی گۆ بکەن، یاخوود لانی کەم بنەما فۆنۆلۆژیەکانیان تێدا نیه که پێویستن بۆ گۆکردنی ئەم جۆره ووشانه. بو شێوازێکی ووردتر، دەرئەنجامەمکان هۆکاری شکستی فێرخوازەمکان دەگێرنەوه بۆ کۆمەڵێک تایبەتمەندی فۆنۆلۆژی لەوانه به هەڵه دانانی شوێنی ستریس و کەمی زانیاری سەبارەت به فۆنۆلۆژی.

1. Introduction

When communicating with each other, speakers use language as a main vehicle to convey ideas, thoughts, feelings and so on. To achieve this, communication speakers use sounds together to produce words which are later turned into phrases and finally utterances. Hence, sounds are the basis of any language which should be highly considered. Although pronunciation of sounds might be not that effective or significant aspect when communicating, sometimes an inefficient or awkward pronunciation may result into communication breakdown or improper interaction in various spoken situations. An essential part of a successful pronunciation is an adequate pronunciation of words which are made up of sounds. In English language, words are made mainly of consonants and vowels and the latter are more important due to the fact that an adequate pronunciation of vowels results into adequate pronunciation of the entire words and vice versa. The study of vowels in particular falls within the domain of syllables which essentially important units both in phonetics and in phonology. As far as production is concerned a syllable contains a transition from a silent position to a vowel-like position and then back to silent. Syllables are highly considered the most intrinsic speech unit. In fact, all words of any language must comprise syllables which have a key part in understanding the meaning adequately if they are pronounced appropriately. This article investigates the pronunciation level of words compromising three syllables by University EFL learners. It is supposed that they have specific difficulties when pronouncing such words due to certain phonological inadequacies including mainly the wrong placement of stress, inappropriate pronunciation of certain

vowels which the three-syllable words contain and, in some cases, the possibility of not pronouncing a vowel changing the word from three to two-syllable words. Such phonological inadequacies result into inappropriate pronunciation and thus, learners may fail to communicate efficiently if it happens that they use such words in an occasion or another and most likely it will happen. To confirm the aims of the study, a group of words containing three syllables are given to a number of university EFL learners majoring English as a foreign language so as to identify the possible phonological inappropriateness. The words are chosen from Roach's book 'English Phonetics and Phonology' as the qualitative and quantitative method of analysis. Getting through this area is a little bit thorny; it is very difficult to precisely measure the quality of the produced sounds, yet, this area is of a great interest and benefit for learners if a better performance is the ultimate goal.

2. An Introduction to Syllables

Demonstrating what a syllable represents, Kenworthy (1987) states that it is so useful to point out that a syllable is a speech unit compromising a specific vowel (or more) and consonants both of which have specific phonological indication and behaviour in the syllable which they from. At the broadest sense, it could be specified that a syllable must have a vowel as the centre and adjacent consonant(s), preceding or following. Crystal (2003:447) defines a syllable as ''a unit of pronunciation typically larger than a single sound and smaller than a word. The notion of syllable, in short, is very real to native speakers, and is often used in a quasi – technical sense in everyday conversation''. To analyse any syllable as an entire speech unit, both phonetic and phonological levels of analysis are a prerequisite. From a phonetic view study, syllables "are usually described as consisting of a centre which has little or no obstruction to airflow and which sounds comparatively loud; before and after that centre (…) there will be greater obstruction to airflow and/or less loud sound" (Roach, 2009: 56). In other words, as simple as possible, the basic unit of any syllable is the vowel of which it is made and which can be preceded and followed by a consonant or more or only preceded or only followed. Ladefoged (2006:242) elaborates that a syllable is to be considered as the minimum conceivable unite of speech. A word must definitely contain at least one syllable (which means one vowel of any type). It is expedient to describe any speech unit as comprising basic parts such as vowels and consonants, but such parts can be explicitly noticed only as features of syllable. As such, it is possible to classify syllables in accordance with the number of centres (vowels) which they contain. Laver (1994: 114) defines the phonological syllable as "a multifaceted unit made up of nuclear and peripheral elements". Nuclear elements are the vowels or syllabic segments; marginal elements are the consonants or non-syllabic segments. In the syllable faint /feɪnt/, the diphthong /eɪ/ is the nuclear element, while the first consonant /f/ and the final cluster /nt/ are peripheral elements. According to the prominence theory, for example, which is based mainly on the loudest hearable vowel within the syllable, the number of syllables in a word is determined by the number of highest production level of prominence which is certainly concerned with vowel production.

2.1 Syllable Structure

What is significant to state and in relation to the latitude of the article is the fact that words comprising more than one syllable (more than one centre; more than one vowel specifically) should be both phonetically and phonologically described in both transcription and pronunciation for a more comprehensive view of how to pronounce the syllables adequately (Giegrich ,1992).

As far as possible, syllables should not be described in a way that violates the permissible sequence of sounds usually found within the syllable structure. The 'Maximal Onsets Principle', which is extensively identified in modern phonology, is followed as far as possible for a better classification, description and analysis. This means that, where possible, syllables should be described in such a way that as many consonants as possible are assigned to the beginning of the syllable to the right (if one thinks in terms of how they are written in transcription), rather than to the end of the syllable to the left (Jones, 1997). Thus, in a word such as 'develop', the syllables structure is described as phonologically transcribed as /dɪˈveləp/ having three centres (three vowels) (ibid). The other noteworthy concern falling within the scope of this article is stress placement within words containing more than one syllable (monosyllable, disyllable and so on). This is entirely related to the fact that in English, stress placement is a major factor for identifying which syllable is stressed (in case of two and three-word syllables) and which is not and on what basis. The precise placement of stress within words of more than one syllable definitely results into an adequate pronunciation of the words and**,** hence**,** the communication will be mutually smooth, informative and beneficial to the speakers regardless of the different language backgrounds in various communicative situations and interactions. Relatedly, O'Connor (1980) illustrates that words in English containing more than one syllable have certain places of stress which must not be altered whatsoever being part of the language system. Certainly, if one of the syllables is stressed, the other is not stressed as in the word 'father' where the first syllable /fæ/ is stressed and the second /ðə/ is not. So, words having more than one syllable are stressed on certain syllables according to certain phonological rules.

2.2 Three-Syllable Words

Since the current article focuses on the pronunciation of three-syllable words, this section is entirely devoted to describe such words so as to have a better and comprehensive view of their adequate pronunciation. According to Crystal, (2003) three-syllable words are words which are described phonetically and phonologically as having three main centres 'vowel' this unit which normally forms a word is in contrast with monosyllable or disyllable. It is usually referred to as trisyllabic word as happily and consequence. As mentioned earlier, one of the syllables should be stressed and the others may be unstressed or receive the secondary stress. The rules of placing stress within three-syllable words differ according to the type of the word which will have a different phonological rule. In simple verbs, if the final syllable is strong, then it will be stressed which means that it is pronounced loudly than the other syllables as in entertain /ɪntəˈteɪn/ where the phonetic symbol ''' refers to a stressed syllable (Roach, 2009).

Certainly the quality of the vowel (whether simple, diphthong or triphthong and son) has a great role in determining the stressed syllable where sometimes if the last syllable of the verb is weak, the penultimate (one before the last) syllable will be stressed. This means that the first and the last are

unstressed and the second is stressed as in 'determine' /dɪˈtɜːmɪn/ (Chomsky et, al. 1968). This latter rule is also discussed by Roach (2009:78) who demonstrates that ''if the last syllable is weak, then it will be unstressed, and stress will be placed on the preceding (penultimate) syllable if that syllable is strong as with 'encounter' /ɪŋˈkaʊtə/''. In some instances, the second and the third syllables of the three-syllable words are unstressed; they are weak due to the occurrence of weak vowels or syllabic consonants (as it is considered a weak syllable). In this case, the initial syllable (the first) is stressed as in parody /ˈpærədi/ (ibid). Other forms of words also have their own phonological rules of stress placement within such words as, for instance, nouns require stress to be placed within the first syllable unless this syllable is weak as in 'emperor' /empərə/. Other rules demonstrate that if the first syllable is not stressed, then the second will be as in the words: 'disaster', 'potato' and so on. As far as adjectives are concerned, they seem to have the same rules of stress placement as those of nouns as in the words: 'insolent', 'derelict' and so on (ibid). It is very important to be familiar with such rules as they inherently reflect the efficient pronunciation and thus considered important in communication so as to adequately understand and to be understood. This clearly shows that concerning the stress placement within three-syllable words is not an option that one can manipulate. English speakers use word stress to communicate rapidly and accurately and this point is necessary for learners so as to get a better pronunciation and, hence, a better process of communication will be granted to a large extent. In fact, stress placement is a very significant are since English syllables are adequately pronounced relying on where to exactly place stress. Roach (2009:79) states that "…., incorrect stress placement is a major cause of intelligibility problems for foreign learners and is therefore a subject that needs to be treated very seriously". English is highly classified as a 'stress-based' language, which means that the meanings of words can be changed meaningfully by a change in word stress, particularly, multisyllabic words. This is why it is important to get efficient phonological knowledge on identifying the proper stress placement within English words.

3. Methodology

This section is devoted to illustrate in detail the procedures followed in this article to verify the aims of the study; identifying the inadequate pronunciation of the three-syllable words giving phonological attributes for such inadequacy.

3.1 Test Sample

To verify the aims of the article, a test is designated to elicit the pronunciation of three-syllable words so as to identify, explain and analyse the inadequate pronunciation of such words by the participants (the university EFL learners). The test sample contained 15 words printed on papers so as to be distributed later for each participant. All three-syllable words comprised three lexical categories: verbs, nouns and adjectives which are grouped into items (a, b, c, d, e) (Appendix 1). It is felt necessary to provide their full transcription for authentication and for having a complete theoretical and practical (Appendix 2). Those words are given to the participants so as to pronounce them a word by word. The test sample items (the words) are chosen from Roach's book 'English Phonetics and Phonology' (2009). The purpose of choosing such words from this particular book is that learners have already practiced dealing with such words theoretically and practically; they are already provided with stress placement phonological rules concerning three-syllable verbs, nouns and adjectives for two semesters. Hence, they are supposed to be familiar with such words which may not

constitute any sort of phonological confusion or articulatory hesitation. In addition, it might have been so significant to check the competence of those participants concerning the sample items. In other words, the test sample might be considered an effective tool to check whether they are still competent of previous knowledge that they already received or incompetent either due to short memory retrieval or improper knowledge input.

3.2 Test Administration

The test was conducted in Cihan University/Slemani in the laboratory of the department of English. The whole test process was based on individuality; each learner was asked to get into the laboratory alone. Each one is given enough time to look each word so as they may retrieve or think well and each was given twenty-four minutes for reading; nearly two minutes for each word. To get an efficient and a reliable analysis, learners' readings were recorded and carefully heard by the researcher for a later analysis. The main purpose was to efficiently identify the phonological deviation or failure specifying the phonological attributes. So as to enhance objective and a reliable analysis and results, all the words which are heard carefully by the researcher (for many times) were transcribed. The transcriptions undertaken by the researcher were objectively and efficiently, as much as possible, a version of the participants' pronunciations.

3.3 Test Population

The test population comprised 30 university participants majoring English as a foreign language from the department of English/ Cihan University/ Sulaimanyia for the academic year 2020-2021. The population comprises third year students chosen randomly, the purpose of which is to have various levels and, hence variety of readings. Choosing third year students, as mentioned earlier, was definitely the most appropriate sample as they already practiced pronouncing such words (at the second stage) in addition to the fact the phonological retrieval was supposed to be at the minimum acceptable level.

4. Data Analysis and Results

This section is devoted to data analysis of the test items (the given words) along with the obtained results based on the analysis. The results show that there is a severe inadequate pronunciation of the three-syllable words by the university EFL learners. The results which are the practical and objective outcome of the data analysis reflect in an adequate way the incompetent level of the learners' phonological knowledge concerning how to appropriately pronounce three-syllable words due to specific phonological attributes. The data analysis is based on the qualitative and quantitative methods. Mainly, the data analysis shows that the phonological inadequacy, when pronouncing such words, is the result of an awkward and total lack of knowledge of the adequate stress placement within three-syllable words, though they were exposed to such phonological practice previously. Indeed, inadequate stress placement, as the pronunciations show, results into no-native three syllable words and not even close to the minimum acceptable pronunciation. What can be noticed from the data analysis is that such inadequate placement resulting from specific phonological inadequacies which were mainly concerned with vowel articulation. In many cases, learners pronounced a certain syllable with the incorrect vowel production. In other cases, although the stress placement is adequate, there is similar stress placement within the same word resulting into inadequate pronunciation. The other

phonological inadequacy resulting into inappropriate pronunciation of three-syllable words was what can be called inadequate vowel reduction. This is mainly due to a total omitting to one of the vowels and hence the omitting of one of the syllable so the final pronunciation was two-syllable words and not three. This is, in fact, so confusing as it either implies that they were not aware of the fact that the word comprises three syllables or, seemingly, the falsified strategy of ease of articulation as they might have thought that that was the proper way to pronounce the word. In a very few instances, few learners showed extremely severe lack of phonological competence as far as the production of these words is concerned.

4.1 Inadequate Stress Placement

The most significant thing at this level of analysis is the fact that the three-syllable words must have one stressed syllable. For the time being, this syllable is to be pronounced with prominence (to recall the phonetic and phonological theories); one syllable must be louder than the others. Some participants were entirely confused as where to properly place stress within these words (as their recorded pronunciation reveals). On the other hand, some participants misplaced stress because of the incorrect pronunciation of the vowel of a syllable which also resulted into an inadequate pronunciation.

4.1.1 Repetition Strategy to Identify the Exact Stressed Syllable

Some participants were highly confused as where to place stress (which syllable is stressed). Though, they were phonologically competent as they knew that one must be louder (stressed), they were confused to identify which one is stressed. This can be clearly noticed by repeating the pronunciation of the word more than one time and, in some cases. They ended with 'well…..I am not sure which one is stressed', 'I don't know where stress', 'there is one louder ….but I am not sure' and so on. Such sentences reveal the fact that they realize that the words comprise more than one syllable but couldn't exactly identify the proper stress placement. In few instances, they pronounced the words with the proper stress placement but they immediately changed them to the improper ones. For instance, as the recorded pronunciation reveals, item a. within the verb group is 'resurrect' /rezəˈrekt/ where the stressed syllable (the one to be pronounced louder) is the third as the vertical marker (ˈ) suggests according to verb stress placement rule. Some participants were highly confused as they once placed stress on the first but then on the second and some on the third then on the first and so on:

'/ˈrezəreket/…… no .. it is /rezəˈrekt/…. not sure'

'/ˈrezˈerekt/…… or let me say '/ˈrezərekt/…. right'

'/ˈrezˈeɪrekt/…… sounds not right……I think '/rəˈzerekt/….''

Similar repeated pronunciations are also found with other verbs as in:

'/ˈdɪtəmɪn/ …. not really sure or /ˈdetəmɪn/'

'/ˈdɪtəmɪn/ …. I think I remember…… /ˈdetɪmɪn/'

'/ˈdɪtəmɪn/ …. I know for sure…… /detˈemɪn/…sounds right'

'/dɪˈtɜː.mɪn/……… or because vowel it is /dɪtemˈaɪn/…don't rmember'

It is entirely worth mentioning that the above transcription represents the way the participants pronounced the words; the researcher, as efficient as possible, heard the pronunciation of each participant as careful as possible then transcribed them with the exact way of pronunciation as much as possible for efficient and objective analysis. For the three-syllable verbs, it is obvious that they couldn't assign the syllable to be stressed due to lack of stress placement lexical rules in addition to the fact that they mispronounced some vowels and, therefore; they were hesitant in their pronunciation. The hesitation is reflected by the repetition strategy which they followed so as to arrive at the adequate pronunciation, yet, such repetition was unsuccessful since the final word pronunciation was incorrect. Moreover, repeating pronouncing the words more than one time may also reflect that they were phonologically aware of the inadequate pronunciation but at the same time were unable to pronounce adequately. Mostly, this confusion was highly observed with the noun and adjective groups with all the included items. For instance, the word 'photograph' /ˈfəʊtəgrɑːf/ has stress on the first syllable, yet many learners were confused with the three syllables; once they stressed the second, in an another occasion, the third and so on as in the following:

'/fəʊtəgrˈɑːf/….. can I have chance…..it is /ˈfuːtəgrɑːf/… seems the first or second'

'/fuˈtægrɑːf/…..no no wait…. sure final /futəgrˈɑːf/ why not the last one…..'

'/ˈfətægrˈɑːf …. One part is louder…. I still remember… like…. /ˈfəʊtəgrˈɑːf/ am I good?

Similar pronunciations are also found with other nouns. Within the adjective group, the word opportune /ˈɒpətjuːn/ had the most various confused pronunciation:

'/əpəˈtjuːn/… not really, in the middle…. /ɒˈpɒtjuːn/…really difficult'

'one is higher… but one is not… two….. it is /ˈɒpətjuːn/ or better to pronounce /əʊpəˈtuːn/…… not the two I think….'

What can be explicitly noticed is that participants, while attempting to pronounce the words, were highly confused as which syllable that is to be stressed. This confusion which was the result of the inability to identify which syllable is to be stressed was seemingly caused by the inadequate phonological recognition of the precise vowels of the words. What distinguishes this inability or confusion is the awareness of the participants of the fact that one syllable is stressed since they pronounced the words more than one time so as to arrive at the appropriate one. Another important phonological indication is that the repetition of the words by the participants reflects what can be called retrieval strategy of how to pronounce the words adequately. This means that they tried to phonetically retrieve information concerned with the pronunciation of those words knowing that the distance gap between having knowledge of those words and the date of the test was not that long (nearly 7 months). After more than one pronunciation, some managed to pronounce the words adequately.

However, many couldn't manage to pronounce them adequately because after repeating more than one time the last version was inadequate because of the improper stress placement. Most of the participants who used the repetition strategy, repeated the words two times while few of them repeated them three times. More specifically, it can be stated that not being able to phonological recognize that, for instance, a three-syllable verb receives the stress on the third even if the first is also stressed; that is, the third is produced louder, participants repeated more than one time. This is

also applied to other phonological rules of the other two lexical categories; the nouns and the verbs. Here, it is significant to mention that the same participants, who used repetition strategy, did not use it with all the words. Sometimes they repeated pronouncing some words and sometimes they did not. However, the retrieve strategy may not always be the case, as participants repeated the pronunciation of the words just to pronounce properly being part of the participant's own educational behaviour, the way he follows in pronunciation and so on. For the purpose of signifying the adequate pronunciation of the three-syllable words, it might be useful to set a hypothetical context in which such words are to be used for a specific communicative purpose. Just to postulate; how will the entire communicative interaction be if participants, in the presumed hypothetical context, hesitated to pronounce them via repeating them or hesitantly pronouncing them? Certainly, it will definitely lead to communication difficulty to a certain extent especially if the speakers are natives or are efficiently competent. Pronouncing such words more than one time or being hesitant when communicating with such speakers is a feature of an inefficient language performance that negatively influences the entire process of communication. The following table shows the results of failure for each test group (inadequate repetition strategy)

Table (1) Repetition due to Lack of Stress Placement Rules

(A) Verb Group					(B) Noun Group					(C) Adjective Group				
a	b	c	d	E	a	b	c	d	e	a	b	c	d	e
6	5	4	5	12	9	5		4	6	4	11	8	5	6	4
Total		32			Total	28				Total		34		
Percentage		34%			Percentage	29%				Percentage		36%		
Total Groups		94												
Total Percentage		21%												

☐   The number of the inadequately repeated words

4.1.2 Inadequate Diphthong Replacement

In most cases, stress misplacement was the result of inadequate vowel replacement; participants replaced the vowels of some syllables with the improper vowel (in particular, diphthongs) and this led to the inadequate stress placement. This is mainly due to the fact that participants were phonologically incompetent as far as how the vowels of the syllables were to be precisely pronounced. So when, for instance, the stressed is on the first syllable; participants wrongly pronounced the second or the third and, hence, stress was on the second or the third. The phonological illustration for such incorrect pronunciation is demonstrated when participants replaced a certain simple vowel with a certain diphthong. Where simple vowels (especially the short) are to be pronounced within the syllables (whether the first, second or third), participants replaced them with diphthongs and, hence, the entire stress placement was shifted to the wrong position within the three-syllable words. This might be phonologically attributed to the fact that participants were entirely unaware of the precise pronunciation of some vowels and replaced them with other improper vowels. The most important

concern at this point of analysis is that diphthongs are a peculiarity of English pronunciation that might have largely influenced the phonological competency of the participants and in particular, as the pronunciations reveal, some of them were largely used by the participants while pronouncing the three-syllable words. The most interesting point to be considered is the fact that two main particular diphthongs were used by the participants, mostly, systematically and in rare cases the inadequate replacement of diphthongs was not systematic. In other words, many participants used similar diphthongs instead of the appropriate vowels in similar syllables within the words. What distinguishes this inadequate pronunciation from the previous one is that participants pronounced the words only for one time without any repetition. The main inadequate diphthongs used by the participants were /aɪ/ and /ɔɪ/. Though there were other diphthongs, they were very rare where very few participants used other diphthongs in very limited cases which the article did not in fact focused on. For the inadequate replacement of the diphthong /aɪ/, most participants used this type of vowel on the third syllable with all the three lexical categories; the verbs, the nouns and the adjectives. It means that such inappropriate replacement occurred with similar specific words within the same syllables. Starting with the first group of the test items, participants replaced the third syllable of the verb 'entertain' with /aɪ/; they shifted /eɪ/ into /aɪ/. The possible phonetic justification is that this word included the letters 'ai' at the end of the word so they probably though that the exact pronunciation was /aɪ/. Although, stress within this word is on the third syllable and the replaced inadequate diphthong was also on the third, it is impossible at all to ignore improper pronunciation just because the stress was properly placed.

The resulted word is entirely inadequate since the pronunciation was entirely violated having a word with the pronunciation /entəˈtaɪn/. Within the same test group, the verb 'determine' transcribed as /dɪˈtɜːmɪn/ with the stress on the second syllable, many participants, once again, stressed the third instead of the second using the same diphthong /aɪ/ instead of the correct vowel /ɪ/ which the third syllable of the word has. What can be phonologically noticed about this inadequate replacement is the fact that the correct vowels of the first and second syllables, /I/ and /ɜː/ respectively were shifted to /ə/+ /ə/. This inadequate pronunciation shifting of the first and second syllables might have been the result of the diphthong influence as the first two syllables had to be pronounced with less loud sound since the third inadequately received the stress. The resulting inadequate pronunciation was /dətəmˈaɪn/ with the third syllable being inadequately stressed. The final systematic inadequate stress placement within the verb group test was with the verb parody transcribed as /ˈpærədi/. The same exact replacement of the inadequate diphthong was also observed, and the vowels in the first and the second syllables were also shifted into /ə/ just like the previous verb. The resulted inadequate pronunciation was /pərəˈdaɪ/. With the second item, the noun group, the same systematic inadequate replacement of the diphthong was observed but, unlike the verbs, the inadequate replacement was on the second syllable. The noun 'emperor' transcribed /ˈempərə/ with the stress on the first, participants replaced the vowel /ə/ with /aɪ/, thus, shifting the stress from the first to the second as the resulted inadequate pronunciation seemed like /emˈpaɪrə/ retaining the same proper vowels in the first and third syllables. The other noun which participants inadequately pronounced following the same phonological inadequacy was enmity /enˈmaɪti/ where the second syllable, /ə/, is shifted to /aɪ/. To account for such inadequate placement, it might be plausible to state the fact that, just like other phonological inadequacies, participants were phonologically unaware of the appropriate vowel

pronunciation of the second syllable. The interesting point to consider is that the second syllable comprised the vowel /ə/ was inadequately pronounced /aɪ/ by many participants; there might be an incompetent systematic phonological tendency to shift the pronunciation of /ə/in the second syllable of a three-syllable noun to the incorrect diphthong /aɪ/. As far as the last item is concerned, participants also replaced the correct vowel with the diphthong /aɪ/. In fact, with the adjective group, very few participants misplaced stress. It was only with the adjective 'intimate' where they replaced the vowel of the third syllable, /ə/, with /aɪ/ resulting in a pronunciation like /ɪntɪˈmaɪt/. As far as the other diphthong is concerned, the participants inadequately replaced certain vowels in specific syllables with the diphthong /ɔɪ/. Pronouncing such diphthong was also observed with the three test groups with specific words. As for verbs, the only one which underwent such an inadequate phonological replacement was the verb 'parody' in which the second syllable was inadequately replaced with /ɔɪ/ shifting the stress from the first to the second.

The influence of such inadequate replacement on the pronunciation of the other vowels within the word varied from a participant to another but all participants who shifted the stress by pronouncing the inconvenient diphthong also mispronounced the vowel in the first syllable. So the resulting pronunciation comprised words like /pærˈɔɪdi/, /perˈɔɪdi/, /pɪrˈɔɪdi/. As for the second group, the noun 'tolerance' witnessed such inadequate replacement of the diphthong but the other vowels were pronounced to a certain extent efficiently keeping the pronunciations of the other syllables efficient and the resulting word was like /tɔɪlərəns/. What can be phonologically noticed about the inadequate pronunciation is the fact that participants pronounced the letter 'o' as/ɔɪ/. No plausible objective phonological justification or interpretation can be provided as the letter 'o' has various pronunciations within English words one of which is/ɔɪ/ like the words 'toy'. A possible hypothetical interpretation is that participants own phonological competency was directed to pronounce the letter 'o' as /ɔɪ/ since the words comprised three syllables and one of them, as they phonologically anticipated, should be a diphthong. So the diphthong/ɔɪ/ was the closest to be pronounced since one of the possible pronunciation of the letter 'o' is this diphthong. For the last group, two adjectives underwent such phonological inadequacy, namely; 'insolent' and 'anthropoid'. With those two adjectives, the second syllable, /ə/, was shifted to /ɔɪ/ resulting into /ɪnˈsɔɪlənt/ and /ænθˈrɔɪped/. With the first adjective, many participants were efficient as far as the first and the second syllable are concerned but were totally inadequate with the second and thus failed to assign the appropriate stress placement. For the second adjective, participants inadequately shifted the second syllable to /ɔɪ/ and they also mispronounced the vowel in the last syllable as, for instance, it was repeatedly pronounced /e/ but sometimes with other inconvenient vowels like /æ/, /ɪ/ but they were very limited. The same possible interpretation can be provided as that of the first two groups. In all cases, the incompetent phonological knowledge including unaware of the stress rules in addition and efficient vowel pronunciation can be considered the main attribute behind violating the efficient pronunciation of the three syllable words. Hence, violating the proper pronunciation of three-syllable words was the result of improper stress placement which was, in turn, the result of being incompetent of the appropriate pronunciation of certain vowels and more significantly, unaware of the stress rules of the lexical items of the test. The following table shows the results of failure for each test group due to the incorrect diphthong replacement considering only the items of each group which were phonologically violated due to such improper replacement:

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Table (2) Inadequate Diphthong Replacement

(A) Verb Group				(B) Noun Group			(C) Adjective Group		
b	D	E	e	a	c	e	b	c	e
14	16	12	15	15	14	14	16	15	15
Total			57	Total		45	Total		43
Percentage			39 %	Percentage		31%	Percentage		30%
Total Group			145						
Total Percentage			32%						

▭ The number of inadequate replacement of /aɪ/

▭ The number of inadequate replacement of /ɔɪ/

4.2 Inadequate Vowel Reduction

Violating the pronunciation of the three-syllable words was also the result of not pronouncing specific vowels within specific syllables. This is a kind of reduction; some words were reduced to two syllables when some participants did not pronounce some vowels within those words. In other words, some participants entirely missed pronouncing some vowels and the result is two-syllable words and, definitely, it is considered an entire violation of the proper pronunciation of the three-syllable words. This phonological inadequacy is the result of being unable to recognize that those words comprise three syllables. But this incapability must have also been the result of a specific phonological incompetency which probably comprises unawareness of how to pronounce certain vowels and thus, participants did not pronounce or ignored pronouncing them. While pronouncing the words, it seems that they were focusing on the syllables which they were familiar with or which they were competently aware of. Another point to be considered is ease of articulation where shifting a three-syllable word to two might have been a strategy followed by those learners so as to pronounce smoothly. Nevertheless, such reduction was entirely inadequate since the pronunciation of the resulted reduced words was entirely inappropriate. The entire process of inadequate vowel reduction was found to be totally systematic; the vowel that was not pronounced at all was in the second syllable of the three groups of the words.

But such an adequacy was less than the previous one; limited number of the participants inadequately reduced the words. As with the previous analysis, specific words from each group underwent such phonological inadequacy. Starting with the verbs, 'resurrect' and 'monitor' were reduced to two-syllable words as the second syllable (represented by the centre; the vowel) was not pronounced at all by some participants.

As far as the two vowels in the first and the third syllables, participants were efficient to a certain degree but that was not significant at all since the adequate pronunciation of those three-syllable verbs was completely violated resulting into new, strange non-English words, so as to speak. The pronunciations after vowel reduction were /rezrekt/ and '/mɒntə/. There is no doubt that when hearing such words with such entirely inadequate pronunciation, one might feel that those words are to a certain extent not English or might reflect awkward pronunciation that will definitely result into communication difficulties of various kinds. Next, with the two remaining groups the words

'emperor' and 'intimate' were pronounced with vowel reduction which can likely be transcribed as /emprə/ and /ɪntmət/. Vowel reduction with such words may significantly reflect that participants are phonologically much influenced by the fact that most many English words are one and two-syllable words. Although, they had a previous knowledge of three-syllable words, they reduced them as, seemingly, their phonological competence is directed to the pronunciation of one and two syllable words while performing language for various communicative purposes. In other words, while using language, the majority of words which they use are mostly one and two-syllable words and even if it happens to use three-syllable words, they may reduce them being part of their incompetent phonological knowledge. Such incompetency might be attributed to the poor or improper knowledge input concerning the adequate pronunciation of three-syllable words or, more significantly, lack of practicing using such words in various communicative situations so they gradually start to have an inadequate competent as they rarely or never use them. The following table shows the results of failure due to inadequate vowel reduction:

Table (3) Inadequate Vowel Reduction

(A) Verb Group		(B) Noun Group		(C) Adjective Group	
A	c	A		b	
8	8	7		7	
Total	16	Total	7	Total	7
Percentage	53%	Percentage	23%	Percentage	23%
Total Group		30			
Total Percentage		7%			

☐ The number of inadequate vowel reduction

4.3 Total Inadequate Word Pronunciation

To account for the phonological inadequacies of pronouncing three-syllable words, all the related inadequacies should be stated so as to have a comprehensive, elaborative and plausible view. As the pronunciations reveal, some participants violated the pronunciation of such words in an extremely severe way. This clearly reflects that they have total inadequate pronunciation which may comprise all the previous mentioned phonological inadequacies. What can be added is that such participants entirely ignored the appropriate pronunciation of words, in general, during their educational progress. Such total inadequacy was reflected by various phonological inadequacies the most important of which is a severe deviation of vowel pronunciation. In some cases, even the consonants were articulated entirely inadequately. In fact, tackling such deviation is very difficult and complex to be systematically accounted for due to the various inadequacies; no two deviations or inadequacies were similar. Indeed, this occurred very limitedly with very few words by few participants. The resulting words were totally inappropriate on a large scale. In some cases, the pronounced words sounded like those which belong to somehow another language or may be described as jargon words; mere haphazard combinations of sounds. In general, the total inadequate pronunciation comprised inadequate diphthong and simple vowel replacement and/or reduction. This means that the same word underwent two or more phonological violations. Those phonological attributes reflect extremely poor

phonological competency which might be the direct influence of poor input knowledge and total ignorance of the proper pronunciations of specific consonants and vowels by the participants. During the progress of the educational process, those participants might have largely ignored the pronunciation level and might not have been directed to the significance of appropriate pronunciation. The violation of three syllable words comprised specific words of the three test groups. The following examples can be considered:

/reɪsrekt/; where the short simple vowel of the first syllable was shifted to /eɪ/, the /z/ sound was shifted to /s/. As if the word means a kind of 'race' which is totally obscure compared to the proper meaning. /entaɪten/; where the diphthong of the second syllable was shifted to /aɪ/ and the third to /e/. Hearing this word with such extremely improper pronunciation would definitely results into meaning ambiguity.

/mɔɪntə/; where there was an improper replacement of the vowel in the first syllable and a reduction of the vowel in the second syllable; the vowel /ɪ/ was not pronounced. Such violations were also observed with the other verbs following the same phonological inadequacies mentioned earlier but with various other inadequate vowel replacement and/or reduction, in addition to violating the articulations of some consonants within the same words.

As for nouns, the most problematic word was 'synopsis' /sɪnɒpsɪs/, in addition to other nouns having the same previous violations but with various inadequate replacements of both simple vowels and diphthongs. This word, in particular was pronounced like /saɪnps/, /seɪnpsez/ and /sɪnpəʊzɪs/ where it can be clearly seen that the vowels were inadequately replaced, reduced and consonants were also inadequately articulated. As for the last group, the pronunciation of adjectives were violated and in particular, the two adjectives 'opportune' and 'fanatic' /ɒpətjuːn/, /fənætɪk/. The resulted pronunciations due to such inappropriateness were severely inadequate comprising vowel replacement, reduction and consonant inadequate articulation; /əpertuːn/, /ɒptuːn/, /fæntɪs/, /feɪntɪk/, /fæntek/. Indeed, such inappropriateness is an authentic reflection of the total incompetent phonological knowledge. The following table shows the results of failure due to the total inadequate word pronunciation:

Table (4) Total Inadequate Word Pronunciation

(A) Verb Group					(B) Noun Group					(C) Adjective Group				
a	b	c	d	e	a	b	c	d	e	a	b	c	d	e
3	3	2	1	1	1		1	1	3	1	3	1	1	3	1
2									2					2	
Total		12			Total		9			Total		11		
Percentage		38%			Percentage		28%			Percentage		34%		
Total Groups		32												
Total Percentage		7%												

🟩 The number of inadequate vowel replacements and reduction.

🟧 The number of inadequate vowel replacement, reduction and consonant inadequate articulation.

The total occurrences of the entire phonological inadequacies were 301 out of the 450 pronunciations and the total percentage of the inadequacy was precisely 66.8%. This is in fact, a very disappointed percentage that should be seriously considered since it reflects a great amount of phonological incompetency concerning various pronunciation difficulties, awkwardness and inappropriateness. Such high percentage should be taken into consideration; a comprehensive and purposive review of pronunciation in general and multisyllabic words in particular should be made in correspondence with educational level progress.

Conclusion

Although three-syllable words are not very common, they do exist in English language and are used in various communicative situations for various informative purposes. Having an adequate pronunciation of such words is very significant in the entire process of communication process. Such an adequacy is mainly reflected by identifying proper use of syllables; how various vowels are adequately produced, and proper stress patterns placement according to the lexical category. However, Iraqi university EFL learners experience various phonological inadequacies including lack of stress placement rules, inadequate vowel replacement (in particular, diphthongs), inadequate vowel reduction and production and severe phonological incompetency. Those inadequacies are the outcome of poor or defective phonological input process or, to a certain extent, acquiring knowledge of phonology in general is weakened with the progress of the educational process as the emphasis is shifted later to other linguistic fields. Indeed, efficient knowledge of how three-syllable words are pronounced is an essential part if the ultimate purpose is to improve the performance of English language. If a learner pronounces a word differently from the usually approved norm, it can be stiff for a native speaker to understand. Although a phrase or a sentence might be structurally efficient, if learners, in particular university EFL learners, have used the wrong (or an unexpected) stress pattern or the wrong stressed syllables, it would be entirely unintelligible to natives or other competent speakers. Great effort and focus should be directed to the practice of multi-syllable words so that learners will master performing language in an adequate and acceptable manner.

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Appendix 1
The Test
Read the following words carefully (20 Minutes)
resurrect
entertain
determine
monitor
parody
emperor
photograph
enmity
synopsis
tolerance
opportune
intimate
insolent
fanatic
anthropoid

Appendix 2
Test Items

(A) Verb Group			(B) Noun Group			(C) Adjective Group		
Item	**word**	**transcription**	**item**	**word**	**transcription**	**item**	**word**	**transcription**
a.	resurrect	/ˌrezərˈekt/	**a.**	emperor	/ˈempərər/	**a.**	opportune	/ˈɒp.ə.tjuːn/
b.	entertain	/entəˈteɪn/	**b.**	photograph	/ˈfəʊtəgrɑːf/	**b.**	intimate	/ˈɪntɪmət/
c.	determine	/dɪˈtɜːmɪn/	**c.**	enmity	/ˈenməti/	**c.**	insolent	/ˈɪnsələnt/
d.	monitor	/ˈmɒnɪtər/	**d.**	synopsis	/sɪˈnɒpsɪs/	**d.**	fanatic	/fəˈnætɪk/
e.	parody	/ˈpærədi/	**e.**	tolerance	/ˈtɒlərəns/	**e.**	anthropoid	/ˈænθrəpɔɪd/