

Whitman’s Procedures: Comparing English & Arabic

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Abstract

Using Randal Whitman’s four procedures for contrastive analysis, one can make obvious predictions about difficulties Arabs, who learn English, will encounter. In this short paper, I will focus on the domain of consonants.

At the beginning, it is necessary to draw two “charts”; one for English and the other for Arabic.

English Consonants:

		Bi-labial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	vls	p			t		k	
	vd	b			d		g	
Fricatives	vls		f	θ	s	ʃ		h
	vd		v	ð	z	ʒ		
Affricates	vls					tʃ		
	vd					dʒ		
Nasals		m			n		ŋ	
Laterals					l			
Glides		w			r	y		

Arabic Consonants:

		Bi-labial	Labio-dental	Dental	Dental velarized	Alveolar velarized	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Phary- ngeal	Laryngeal (Glottal)
Stops	vls			t ت		ط			K ك	(q) ق		ء
	vd	b ب		d د		ض			(g) ق			ء
Fricatives	vls		f ف	ث ث		ص	s س	ش	X خ		ح ح	هـ هـ
	vd			ظ	ظ	ز	ز	ج	غ		ع ع	
Affricates	vls							ج				
	vd											
Nasals		m م		n ن								
Laterals				ل ل								
Glides		w و						y ي				
Tap				r ر								

By superimposing one “chart” onto the other, we get the process of contrasting the two systems. The following statements will suffice for a general contrast which may be helpful for a native-Arabic speaker learning English:

--English has the voiceless bi-labial stop /p/, the voiced labio-dental fricative /v/, the voiced palatal fricative /ʒ/, the voiceless palatal affricate /tʃ/¹, and the velar nasal /ŋ/, but in Arabic we have no equivalents.

--English /t d n l r/ are alveolar; the corresponding consonants in Arabic are dental.

--From an articulatory viewpoint, English /r/ and Arabic /r/ are of quite different nature; /r/ in English is “glide” Where as in Arabic it is “tap”.

Next, the “prediction” procedure can be accomplished by subjecting the above contrastive description to a hierarchy of difficulty as follows:

0-LEVEL: A native-Arabic speaker, learning English, can transfer positively certain phonemes /b k s z ʃ θ ð dʒ m w y/ from Arabic to English. Besides, s/he can transfer phonemically /t d n l r/. Speakers of certain Arabic dialects can transfer /g/ and /tʃ/.

1-LEVEL: No apparent instance of “coalescence”.

2-LEVEL: Many instances of absence; Arabic /ʔ ɖ z ʂ q ɣ X ʕ ɣ ʔ/ don't exist in English.

3-LEVEL: English consonants /t d n l/ are alveolar, and the Arabic speaker will have to reshape these consonants to be like his/her native language-dental.

4-LEVEL: English consonants /p g v ʒ tʃ ŋ/² are new to the Arabic speaker.

5-LEVEL: No apparent instance of a “split”.

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¹ /tʃ/ is a phoneme in English, but it is an allophone of /k/ in some dialects of Arabic; it does not exist in standard Arabic.

² English /g ʒ tʃ/ are found in some dialects of Arabic.