Journal of Faslo el-khitab مجلة فصل الخطاب
ISSN:1071-2335/ E-ISSN:2602-5922/ Legal Deposit N°: 2012-1759
Vol 11, N° 03, September2022, pp 345 - 362
تاريخ الاستلام (2022/07/04) تاريخ القبول (2022/09/18) تاريخ النشر (2022/09/30)

University English Graduates' Gender Differences in Displaying Phonetic Abilities within Pronunciation Classes in Mostaganem, Algeria

BAHRAOUI Sofia[1], **BENABED Ammar**[2]

[1] University of Mostaganem, (Algeria), sofia_univmosta@yahoo.com
[2] University of Tiaret, (Algeria), ammar.benabed@univ-tiaret.dz

Abstract:

Revealing gender differences in various disciplines is a growing phenomenon. Attention is gradually drawn towards gender differences in acquiring English pronunciation by non-natives within pronunciation classes. However, one gender's superiority in phonetic coding is rarely investigated. This study aims at exposing which factors distinguish male/female learners' oral capacities and features that may/may not assist learners in developing their articulation, as phonetic capacities could enhance either gender's speech. This research attempts to elucidate gender dissimilarities in pronunciation. A mixed-method approach was selected to analyse collected data quantitatively and qualitatively through phonemic tasks and recordings. Third year English students were selected as a specimen. Findings confirm some superiority in phonetic coding fluctuating between male and female EFL graduates. Males were better decoders, made fewer misspellings, displayed confidence, but committed more errors while transcribing. Conversely, females were moderately attentive transcribers; but made countless mispronunciations and misspellings due to non-phonetic English spelling and hastiness.

Keywords: Gender Differences, Pronunciation, Phonetic Coding Ability, Misspellings, Affective Factors

Corresponding author: BAHRAOUI Sofia, **e-mail:** sofia_univmosta@yahoo.com

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of gender studies has emerged in response to inequality against and marginalisation of women in various arenas. Moreover, gender research conducted thereafter has demonstrated the sexist treatment which has affected females for decades. Gender has brought revolutionary claims both in public and academic domains around the 1960s. It has permitted researching numerous aspects in different fields from a gender perspective including socio-phonetics; as well as segmental and supra-segmental phonology. Although such studies are considered scarce, they still act as a stepping stone towards further research.

Males and females were born with different anatomical structures, and they tend to grow up picking up signals from their surroundings differently, adopting different habits, constructing different personalities, and expressing different behaviours and thoughts. Therefore, they both see and look at the world from different perspectives due to gender being a complex socio-cultural construct that includes role differences, behaviours, mental and emotional stereotypes and attitudes. Characteristics between men and women are constructed by society as feminine or masculine, as the process of acquiring femininity or masculinity takes place at the age of three (Ann Rosamund Oakley, 1972; as cited in Biemans, 2000, p. 05 and Sigmund Freud, 1927; as cited in Burke et al., 1988, p. 04). Still, societal bounds and men's dominating positions and views have limited women's accessibility to numerous rights, which drove the former to revolutionise with Feminism Movement.

Moreover, additional research is carried out to discern, evaluate and analyse gender differences with relation to language. Most cases refer to female's speech which is regarded inferior to that of men. Such stereotypes are culturally and socially-bound due to the patriarchal system of societies. Men's speech is portrayed as assertive, innovative, and authoritarian; whereas women's speech is attractive, decorative, sensitive, reluctant and fixed (Otto Jepersen, 1922; as cited in Vandeputte, 2016, p. 12; M. Cederschiöld, 1900 and Cherish Kramer, 1977; as cited in Karlsson, 2007, p. 06). Other socio-linguists direct attention towards the fact that male and female's speech rather than being superior or right is simply different (Marjorie Swaker, 1975; as cited in Vandeputte, 2016, p. 12; Deborah Cameron, 1985 and Coates, 1985; as cited in Weatherall, 2002, p. 133). Several aspects and components are involved when investigating gender as a variable which include affective factors within EFL classrooms.

Affective aspect in FLL contexts is found in almost every research that deals with FL learners' education and academic performance. Language Learning

is a field that involves the manifestation of numerous personality traits that might influence the income as much as the outcome. Therefore, emotional factors, such as motivation and attitudes, anxiety, inhibition, extroversion/introversion, risk-taking and self-esteem may serve learners as means of success or failure in their academic achievement. The fact of being a male or a female demonstrates that they do not exhibit the same performance and skills in class as action field experiments and findings have previously denoted (Papamihiel, 2001; Cheng, 2002 and Alkhafaifi, 2005; as cited in Wilson, 2006, p. 303; Karp & Yeols, 1976; Eakins & Eakins, 1978; Edelsky, 1981; Spender, 1982; West & Zimmerman, 1983; French & French, 1984; M. Sadker & Sadker, 1985; Latour, 1987; Swan and Graddol, 1988; Kramarae & Treichler, 1990; as cited in Wolfe, 2000, p. 492).

It is worth mentioning that such affective factors' effectiveness is linked to one main aspect of research that may serve the present study which is pronunciation accuracy. Yet, gender variable is not well-researched with regard to pronunciation with relation to the previously mentioned affective factors. In Algeria, English is a second foreign language after French, which is the first foreign language taught since elementary school; yet, popularity of English is growing larger presently even among primary schoolers. Research findings with regard to gender differences in EFL learning showcase support in favour of both genders. Nevertheless, some findings have shown that female learners tend to outperform boys in language expression, memory, visual, verbal and listening skills; as well as understanding which consequently affect their scores and achievement (Asher & Garcia, 1969; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Bailey, 1993; as cited in Badran, 2001, p. 09).

For the present research, more focus is placed upon articulatory phonetics and pronunciation accuracy. Accordingly, pronunciation attainment as a main concept in and a main pillar of the present study has been regarded as an orphan in ELT contexts for decades. This conclusion came as a result of various research studies and action works that proved the lack of attention given to pronunciation teaching and learners' speaking skills. In this respect, pronunciation has been in a fluctuating status that rose back in the past with the audio-lingual approach (1950s), and then retreated back to the state of being overshadowed by language building skills that left no room for pronunciation to claim its credit. Another major reason for its decline in EFL classrooms is teachers prioritising grammar and vocabulary attainment, in addition to their reluctance to teach phonetic symbols

and complicated phonological instructions and patterns (Pr. Bouhadiba Farouk, 2004).

It is worth pointing at the importance of phonetic code teaching and practice as they determine learners' success in acquiring the right pronunciation, and it is related mostly to the learners' Phonetic Coding Ability (PCA) (Carroll, 1962; as cited in Hu et al., 2012, p. 01); as well as Phonological Working Memory (PWM) that guarantees retention of phonological information through sub-vocal rehearsals and drills. Moreover, teaching pronunciation remained in the background due to personal and professional factors pointed out by Fraser (2002) including students' un-readiness, lack of teachers' know-how and their lack of confidence to teach it (as cited in Nair et al., 2006, pp. 30-32).

Additional difficulties and lacking components in EFL learners' training include phonological awareness whose absence develops slower learning rates if not complete impediment in phonological development or abilities. Phonological awareness is a basic step in the FLL process, which needs be acquired and sharpened afterwards in order to avoid future complications in achieving correct pronunciation (Stanovich, 1993; as cited in Al-Shaboul et al., 2014, p. 201). Moreover, this aspect calls attention to learners' phonetic ability to perceive and retain L2 sounds properly in order to be able to discern L1 sounds from the target language's (Daniel Jones, 1952; as cited in Senel, 2006, p. 116).

Therefore, EFL students possess various degrees of phonetic capacity which may enable some of them to succeed in achieving near native-like pronunciation, while others may achieve less or none. Additionally, several practitioners draw attention to affective factors that may hinder pronunciation attainment which can only be promoted by adopting self-improvement and self-accomplishment and believe in one's success (Morley, 1991; as cited in Eckstein, 2007, p. 18). Thus, it is recommended to distance oneself from poor confidence, frustration and depression. That is, learners' success in pronunciation classes is not entirely dependent on teachers alone who can only guide and set the mood.

Robert Gardner (2007) highlights the major role of motivation, attitudes and culture in the language acquisition process. He argues whether male or female learners excel in foreign language performance in terms of positive attitudes towards and interests in L2 learning; thanks to their interest and cerebral capacities that make learning language a flexible process to achieve. Still, further investigations are required in the field of gender with relation to other fields including Foreign Language Learning (Susan M. Bacon & Michael D. Finnemann, 1990; Wagemaker; 1996, Rosen, 2001; Amel Shoaib & Zoltan Dornyei,

2005; Lietz, 2006; D. Fakeye, 2010; as cited in Zainol Abidin, 2012, pp. 122-124; Kamsaku & Shigeru Kitazawa, 2001; as cited in Hawkar, 2016, p. 76).

With regard to gender variable, very little research is covered in this whole area of pronunciation attainment difficulties. Yet, with regard to affective factors, female learners tend to display more self-confidence in their speaking skills and work on their self-improvement while male learners tend to acknowledge speech mistakes. This difference stems from females' motivation to speak better and more correctly (Asher & Garcia, 1969 and Elliot, 1995 as cited in Eckstein, 2007, p. 20 and Aymen Sabry Daif Allah, 2012, p. 30). Speaking of which, in order to establish sound and continuous communication, speakers must attain a certain degree of intelligibility with the learners.

2. Methodology

In order to proceed in a systematic manner, the present research work is built upon a mixed-method approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative analyses. The study's research questions attempt to reveal some gender differences that contribute in either gender's superiority with regard to phonetic coding and accurate word articulation skills; as well as the main affective features portrayed in their demeanour whilst speaking. Two main research questions are raised for scrutiny and are listed as follows,

1. Can male or female EFL graduates be more superior to one another in phonetic coding?
2. Do affective factors influence male/female learners' production of English?

The following hypotheses are put forward in order to be confirmed or disconfirmed by the end of the present research study.

1. Yes, one gender may project superiority in at least some phonetic coding skill aspects while producing phonetic information.
2. Yes, it is probable that some affective factors may interfere in the process of pronunciation attainment and performance. It is more apparent within classes where they speak the target language during oral tasks or presentations, but it can be projected in the way they speak in and reply to oral and phonetic tasks. Such features may include desire to improve, self-confidence, anxiety, shyness, risk-taking, readiness and motivation.

2.1. Participants

Algerian university classes are targeted from which the University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis in Mostaganem is selected to be investigated in particular.

In this case, the study targets Algerian EFL graduates at Abdelhamid Ibn Badis in Mostaganem; department of English precisely. Therefore, participants selected for the present study that investigates various gender dissimilarities in pronunciation acquisition at the University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis in Mostaganem are EFL third year LMD students during the academic year 2020-2021.

2.2. Instruments

Research instruments utilised are worksheets for phonemic and articulation activities. The first worksheet's content revolves around phonetic coding skills. That is, the activities provided involve phonemic/phonetic transcription of words; as well as stress placement in a reversed transcription activity. The second worksheet includes isolated words that require clear articulation for pronunciation accuracy in terms of phonemic production and the right stressed syllables, as well as accent consistency and consideration of non-phonetic spelling of English and silent letters.

2.2.1. Instruments' Description

Phonetic coding worksheet consists of two activities besides the indication of participants' gender (as the main variable in this study and analysis of collected data afterwards). In the first activity, participants are provided with twenty-eight transcribed words plus stress marking. Most of these words are commonly and frequently used among EFL learners and most of English phonemes are included in them. In the first activity (See Appendix n° 01), participants are required to write down the spelling; henceforth, decoding phonetic symbols. The aim of this activity is to test and evaluate their phonetic coding abilities, and find out if they are able to re-identify and read sounds' symbols and provide correct spelling for each word. These words contain diagraphs and silent letters as well.

Throughout my experience in teaching Phonetics, most students come across difficulties in memorising vowels' symbols and not consonants. This is shown precisely in the second activity (See Appendix n° 01) which requires students to transcribe sixteen words also commonly and frequently used among EFL students. These selected words vary in function, type and word syllable type. Phonemic transcription does not include diacritic details except for marking the stress. Participants are required to transcribe phonemically rather than phonetically, because it is assumed that they cannot either identify or recall diacritic details; such as, aspiration and syllabicity.

Pronunciation worksheet for aural recording consists of three activities besides mentioning participants' accent of choice. This is important as another variable equal to gender in order to compare it with their pronunciation recordings; if they are consistent in the system they chose, either RP or GA, and if they are still aware of the differences between official accents of English. Eventually, LMD students of English are taught the main differences between these two model accents in pronunciation and in phonemic transcription.

The first activity (See Appendix n° 02) requires the participants to articulate and pronounce words in isolation by including pauses between each word. There are thirty-six words and most of them are minimal pairs. The list has been adapted from Madhav Kafle, Jinya Xia & Fran Durbin portfolio (n.d, p. 31) and was slightly modified. These modifications include alphabetical order and extra minimal pairs.

The second activity (See Appendix n° 02) consists of three lists of four words that belong to the same family, but with different word formation and function including verbs, adjectives, and nouns. This activity precisely focuses on stress placement and shift in syllables from one word to another in accordance with their shift in function; as well as accent as the final word in each list has got the suffix –isation- which is pronounced differently in American and British accents. Gender differences to be targeted here are male and female superiority in the mastery of the accent they speak and mastery in stress placement and shift in words with different formats and functions.

The third activity (See Appendix n° 02) targets pronunciation of silent letters and words that are pronounced differently in RP and in GA as well. The list contains seventy-three entries, and it was designed personally. The exercise's entries were selected on purpose to be both familiar in frequent use and also containing silent letters. It is important to mention how speaking an accent must be consistent and accurate, and to find out which gender gives these details more attention.

3. Results and Discussion

The present research attempts to uncover and expose third year EFL graduates' major dissimilarities of gender in pronunciation at the University of Abdelhamid Ibn Badis in Mostaganem. Collected data is described and illustrated through tables in the following section. The following table illustrates statistics of

male and female participants' correct and wrong replies in addition to no replies provided.

Table 1: Male and Female Participants' Results of Phonetic Coding Activity

		Correct Replies		Wrong Replies		No Replies	
Transcription	Spelling	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
['stju:dn̩t]	Student	(82%)	(80%)	(01%)	(00%)	(17%)	(20%)
[wʊlvz]	Wolves	(52%)	(60%)	(24%)	(15%)	(24%)	(25%)
[nəʊm]	Gnome	(00%)	(00%)	(50%)	(20%)	(50%)	(80%)
['flaʊə]	Flower/Flour	(55%)	(65%)	(21%)	(05%)	(24%)	(30%)
[ʃʊə]/[ʃɔ:]	Sure	(08%)	(30%)	(55%)	(40%)	(37%)	(30%)
[hɑ:f]	Half	(76%)	(75%)	(04%)	(00%)	(20%)	(25%)
[naɪt]	Night/Knight	(53%)	(65%)	(14%)	(05%)	(33%)	(30%)
['sepərət]	Separate	(30%)	(35%)	(43%)	(30%)	(27%)	(35%)
[nʌm]	Numb	(03%)	(25%)	(50%)	(25%)	(47%)	(50%)
[tʃeɪnd]	Chained	(10%)	(35%)	(28%)	(15%)	(62%)	(50%)
['dʌmi]	Dummy	(06%)	(25%)	(29%)	(10%)	(65%)	(65%)
['nekləs]	Necklace	(10%)	(35%)	(50%)	(35%)	(40%)	(30%)
['rɪŋkl̩]	Wrinkle	(03%)	(15%)	(38%)	(25%)	(59%)	(55%)
['steəz]	Stairs	(06%)	(20%)	(38%)	(30%)	(56%)	(50%)
['sɜ:vɪs]	Service	(28%)	(30%)	(22%)	(15%)	(50%)	(55%)
['letəz]	Letters	(21%)	(30%)	(19%)	(10%)	(60%)	(60%)
[di:p]	Deep	(75%)	(80%)	(02%)	(00%)	(23%)	(20%)
[breθ]	Breath	(46%)	(55%)	(22%)	(15%)	(32%)	(30%)
['hæŋkətʃɪf]	Handkerchief	(01%)	(15%)	(28%)	(15%)	(71%)	(70%)
[ɪmɪ'greɪʃn̩]	Immigration	(21%)	(40%)	(41%)	(30%)	(38%)	(30%)
['ræpɪŋ]	Rapping	(14%)	(25%)	(36%)	(20%)	(50%)	(55%)
[kləʊn]	Clone	(00%)	(05%)	(62%)	(65%)	(38%)	(30%)
['rekɪdʒ]	Wreckage	(02%)	(15%)	(27%)	(10%)	(71%)	(75%)
['rɪðm̩]	Rhythm	(02%)	(05%)	(40%)	(35%)	(58%)	(60%)
[tɔɪz]	Toys	(32%)	(50%)	(19%)	(05%)	(49%)	(45%)
['ɔ:də]	Order	(23%)	(30%)	(19%)	(15%)	(58%)	(55%)
[klɪə]	Clear	(40%)	(50%)	(17%)	(00%)	(43%)	(50%)
['bɒtm̩]	Bottom	(06%)	(40%)	(37%)	(20%)	(57%)	(40%)

Looking at the table and taking into consideration the reading of numbers; as well as analysis of the participants' misspellings, it is concluded that when female participants answered correctly, they were in line with male participants; looking at combined success in decoding transcription of entries such as

"student", "wolves", "flour/flower", "half", "night/knight", and "deep". Nevertheless, the majority of males succeeded in decoding more transcription including: "breath", "toys", "clear" and "immigration". Furthermore, on several occasions, female participants scored lower than males where the minority (below 10%) answered correctly in instances; such as "sure", "numb", "dummy", "wrinkle", "stairs", "handkerchief", "wreckage", "rhythm" and "bottom". They even reached (00%) in "clone" and "gnome" as well.

As for wrong answers, male participants reached above the majority only once to decode the entry "clone". By contrast, females were noticed to be risk-takers and their wrong answers were spotted above their half of the batch in various entries including "gnome", "sure", "numb", and "clone", even reaching half of the batch in entries like "separate", "wrinkle", "stairs", "immigration" and "rhythm". Moreover, looking at the entries that mostly challenged the participants not to take a risk; "gnome", "numb", "wrinkle", "stairs", "service", "letters", "handkerchief", "rapping", "wreckage", "rhythm", "order" and "clear"; despite that these words contained multiple or single silent letters distributed in different positions. Yet, what hindered them most are: silent "r" (either in middle or final positions as a diphthong or a schwa) and silent "w" in initial position.

In the second activity, the words were ordered by the number of syllables starting from mono-syllabic, di-syllabic, tri-syllabic, tetra-syllabic, penta-syllabic and ending with poly-syllabic words. This activity's instructions were the opposite of the previous one, where the participants were required to transcribe words in order to test their ability to differentiate mono-phthongs from diphthongs and from consonants that change their roman form as symbols; for instance, [θ], [ð] and [dʒ]. Moreover, Female participants who answered were sixty out of ninety-five (63%) and (32%) with no replies. By contrast, male participants who answered were fifteen out of twenty (75%) and (25%) with no replies.

After description and analysis of participants' replies to the second activity that attempted to test their phonetic coding ability, level of efficiency in phonemic transcription and their pronunciation of words with different syllable types and to expose their fossilised mispronunciations, there are several criteria that are explained on the table below for each gender opposite to the other and they include, vowels and consonants' transcription, syllables, phonemes' in lowercase form, stress placement and stress mark (') and RP vs. GA differences in transcription.

Table 2: Final Results of the Second Activity Analysis

Female Participants	Male Participants
1. A most conspicuous confusion between [e] and [ə] as in "memory" or "help". - Some female participants transcribed using the American symbol [ɛ] which is the equivalent to the front mid unrounded lax short mono-phthong [e] although they do not learn it in class as they are concerned with only British phonemes. - They came up with phonemes' symbols that do not exist in RP's IPA; such as, [a] and [əɪ]. - Another transcription error of the voiceless fortis velar oral central plosive [k] and the voiceless fortis alveolar oral central fricative [s] as /c/. - Female participants disregarded the case of silent "r" in final position most often and added the retroflex phoneme after the schwa; for example in "father" and "container". 2. Despite that the syllables' nuclei were maintained, there was the recurrent case of the removal of central mid lax unrounded short [ə] without replacing it with the right syllabic consonant. If they did remove the schwa, they tended to overlook the syllabicity diacritic. - As long as syllable number increased, it was unlikely to transcribe correctly; starting from tri-syllabic words and onwards. 3. At times, they wrote phonemes in uppercase form instead of lowercase symbols in initial position. 4. Most of female participants (88%) overlooked marking the stressed syllable. - (27%) of females stressed mono-syllabic words whose stressed syllable should not be marked. 5. In their transcription, females were more GA-oriented. - They transcribed silent "r" more often; as well as back open tense unrounded long mono-phthong [ɑː] instead of back open-mid lax rounded short mono-phthong [ɒ].	1. Similar confusion between [e] and [ə], [ʌ] and [æ], [əʊ]-[ɪə] and [eɪ]. - As females did, they came up with unusual symbols which did not exist in RP's IPA including: /a/, /əɪ/ and /əː/. - Another transcription error of the voiceless fortis velar oral central plosive [k] and the voiceless fortis alveolar oral central fricative [s] as /c/. 2. Syllables' nuclei were maintained. Nevertheless, no attempt of syllabic consonants' use was recorded. - As long as syllable number increased, it is unlikely to transcribe correctly starting from tri-syllabic words and on. 3. Male participants also wrote in uppercase instead of the usual lowercase phonetic symbols more often than female participants; especially in the initial position. 4. (33%) of participants overlooked marking the stress in transcription. Still, the rest of males who did mark the stress did not necessarily place the stress mark on the right syllable. - Only (03%) of participants marked the stress in mono-syllabic words. 5. Male participants were more conscious of RP pronunciation in their transcription. - No American transcription to be recorded.

The table summarises the whole results of the participants' answers in an activity that requires phonetic coding ability from spelling form into phonemic transcription form. Such a skill allows students to be capable cognitively to decode any phonemic/phonetic transcription of words or texts and also transcribe as efficiently as possible. Although female participants were better transcribers in

terms of the closest pronunciation to the correct one, males did not commit any errors in transcribing some consonants unlike females who did. The latter attempted to devise new symbols that did not exist in RP's IPA. Furthermore, female participants' answers demonstrate that they are more GA-directed unlike male participants who exhibited their flexibility in maintaining RP transcription even while speaking GA. Such flexibility was more apparent in considering silent "r" in inter- and post-consonantal positions; as well as suffix "isation". Females also tended to mark the stress in mono-syllabic words and overlook stress mark in poly-syllabic words more often than did the opposite gender. As for males, their transcription displayed the wrong use of capitalised phonemes, mainly in initial position. Getting to the second worksheet, the first activity required the participants to pronounce a list of separated words slowly, clearly and loudly. For more orderly results, the evaluation took the form "A to F" levels that distinguish participants' level from "Excellent" to "Very Poor". The following tables demonstrate final results and statistics of the second worksheet's first activity for both genders, and they are followed by their description and results' analysis as well.

Table 3: Females' Results of Minimal Pairs' Reading and Production Activity

"A" Excellent	"B" Very Good	"C" Average	"D" Poor	"F" Very poor
(00%)	(14%)	(57%)	(29%)	(00%)

Table 4: Males' Results of Minimal Pairs' Reading and Production Activity

"A" Excellent	"B" Very Good	"C" Average	"D" Poor	"F" Very poor
(00%)	(67%)	(25%)	(08%)	(00%)

On one hand, for female participants, looking at the statistics above, no one was able to achieve (100%) correct pronunciation. It appears that the highest score was achieved in the "C" category (57%), which denotes average pronunciation, where the females made more than ten mistakes in minimal pairs and various examples are demonstrated below. The lowest score was achieved in category "B" (14%) which shows that LMD3 female graduates need more practice to discern vowels and their corresponding letters in spelling. Moreover, they need more attentive and constant practice to overcome their fossilised mispronunciations. Fortunately, no participant reached level "F". Still, (29%) of

them fall under level "D" category which indicates how they still need to improve the right pronunciation of basic and commonly-used words before graduation.

On the other hand, for male participants, better achievement is noted as demonstrated on the second table. Despite that no male participant achieved level "A" (00%), the majority reached the best score (67%) in level "B" making less than five mispronunciations; mainly, the ones exposed in the next part. (25%) of male participants obtained "Average"; whereas the lowest score was recorded in level "D" unlike female participants who had a higher percentage. Similarly, no participants had reached the lowest category "F".

During articulation of the provided words made up of minimal pairs mostly, a few notes; with regard to recurrent mispronunciations and model accent inconsistencies; are reported in order to explain the acquired results displayed above all together in parallel.

Table 5: Notes of Female and Male Participants' Reading and Production of Minimal Pairs

Female Participants	Male Participants
• Some female participants pronounced the words: "Lick", "Hit", and "Bid" as [laɪk], [haɪt] and [baɪd].	• A male participant pronounced "bait" [beɪt] as "bite" [baɪt].
• Numerous females mistook [æ] for [e].	• Males made a better distinction here.
• Very few females succeeded in distinguishing "Leak" and "Bead", as well as vowel phonemes [i:] from [e].	• No similar mispronunciations were recorded.
• Most of females mispronounced "Pete" [pi:t] as ['pi:ti], "Puke" [pju:k] as [pu:k], "Mud" [mʌd] as [mu:d], "Lug" [lʌg] as [lu:g], "Fur" [fɜ:] as [fu:r], "Lag" [læg] as [lɑ:g], "Pack" [pæk] as [pɑ:k], and "Mad" [mæd] as [mɑ:d].	• No similar mispronunciations were recorded.
• Only one female participant pronounced "Herb" as [ɜ:rb] in GA., whereas the rest of females pronounced it as [hɜ:rb].	• The majority of male participants pronounced "Herb" as [hɜ:b] with silent "r".
• Females tended to mix both accents in their speech.	• Some male participants committed the same error.
• A few female participants pronounced [tʃ] as [ʃ].	• One male participant did the same.
• None	• One male participant pronounced [dʒ] as [ʒ].
• Some females mistook [əʊ] for [ɒ] in the words "Roll" [rəʊl] and "Toll" [təʊl].	• Very few males mistook [əʊ] for [ɒ] as well in the words "Mall" [mɑ:l] and "Mole" [məʊl].
• All females pronounced "Room" as [ru:m] in GA despite that not all of them respected the	• All males pronounced "Room" as [ru:m] in GA despite that

model accent they spoke. • One female participant mistook [p] for [b] in "Puck" [pʌk] and "Peck" [pek].	their majority respected the model accent they spoke. • None

The second activity comprised a set of four-word lists that needed be articulated clearly, loudly and slowly with the possibility of repetition if necessary. Participants, moreover, had been given ten seconds in advance to skim the words silently before loud articulation took place. Therefore, the following tables represent results of their oral production of stressed syllables; each gender illustrated separately.

Table 6: Females' Results of Stress Shift Pronunciation Activity

"A" Excellent	"B" Very Good	"C" Average	"D" Poor	"F" Very Poor
(00%)	(00%)	(09%)	(71%)	(20%)

Table 7: Males' Results of Stress Shift Pronunciation Activity

"A" Excellent	"B" Very Good	"C" Average	"D" Poor	"F" Very Poor
(00%)	(00%)	(00%)	(92%)	(08%)

After data categorisation and analysis, with regard to female participants' performance, it has been noticed that the majority scored (71%) level "D" which corresponds to "Poor". Thus, the percentage demonstrates the students' inability to use stress in their speech clearly and almost pronounce syllables with the same rhythm; except for the last word in each list that contained the suffix "isation". Still, the table shows that (09%); as a minority; got the stress right in some of the provided words; whereas, (20%) failed to mark the stress in their speech at all. Even their pronunciation was not accurate.

As for male participants, results were approximately similar to the females' when the majority (92%) had a poor ability to detect stress or use it nonetheless. No male participant managed to achieve "A", "B" or "C" levels which is a fact that indicates their inefficient and lacking English pronunciation in terms of word stress. (08%) got level "F" that signifies the minority of male graduates who did not produce word stress at all. Both gender results may be compatible to their phonetic coding worksheet's second activity, where they scored the lowest in marking the stress.

In the third activity, participants received another list with seventy-three random words to be articulated slowly and clearly. Most of the provided entries contained silent letters. The objective of such an activity is to figure out if LMD3 graduates are able to recognise and discern silent letters in most commonly-used English words, and if they are familiar with as many words as possible both spellings and their pronunciation in accordance with the accent they speak.

Table 8: Females' Results of the Silent Letters Challenge Activity

"A" Excellent	"B" Very Good	"C" Average	"D" Poor	"F" Very Poor
(00%)	(08%)	(49%)	(43%)	(00%)

Table 9: Males' Results of the Silent Letters Challenge Activity

"A" Excellent	"B" Very Good	"C" Average	"D" Poor	"F" Very Poor
(00%)	(42%)	(50%)	(08%)	(00%)

First, for female participants, the majority (49%) obtained level "C" which corresponds to "Average"; still, not far from it (43%) obtained level "D" which may indicate only that females' reading and pronunciation of words need more awareness, practice and improvement. This is due to the fact that no female participant was able to achieve level "A", and only a minority (08%) obtained the "Very Good" category.

As for male participants, their results are approximately similar to the females'. (50%) represent the majority that achieved level "C" as well, and (42%) unlike females, obtained level "B". Still, the minority (08%) attained level "D". Therefore, the different percentages between both genders highlighted show that male participants were able to correctly pronounce numerous entries with silent letters than did their female counterparts.

During enunciation of the third activity's seventy-three entries, it has been noticed that female participants were struggling with the articulation of some words, because of the silent letters of which they were not aware. Thus, they either skipped them or mispronounced them by articulating the silent letters along with the rest. It is only fair to say that even a few male participants did skip some of them as well but without looking reluctant. Entries that were more difficult to articulate are the following, Almond – Aisle – Champagne – Comb – Dilemma – Dimension – Fasten – Folk – Feign – Genre – Genes – Half - Herb –

Issue – Mayor – Pneumonia – Psychiatrist – Salmon – Sandwich – Status – Talk – Thistle – Tissue – Yolk.

This is believed to be caused by the participants being unfamiliar with the words as a whole, unfamiliar with spelling of the words or due to hastiness and the lack of concentration. It has also been noticed that some females pronounced silent letters in words; such as "Castle – Knew – Knife – Dumb – Calm – Muscle", and they have changed the pronunciation of other words including: "Fought" [fɔːt] as [faʊt], "Knickers" ['nɪkəz] as ['naɪkərz], "Weigh" [weɪ] as "Weight" [weɪt], "Through" [θruː] as "Thought" [θɔːt], and "Status" ['steɪtəs] as "Statue" ['stætʃuː]. Some of the female respondents had no affrication in entry "Strife". They have; moreover, mispronounced "Dimension" [daɪ'menʃn̩] as [daɪ'menzn̩] or [daɪ'menʒn̩], and "Genes" [dʒiːnz] as [dʒiːnɪz]. With regard to males; by contrast, it has been noticed that they possessed more poised and straight focus during enunciation. As a result, they were able to produce more vocabulary correctly than females, not only because they were familiar with them and females were not.

Both genders mixed accents and their speech was not consistent. They realised such a fact, as they admitted their inability to systematically and firmly follow one accent. Such a combination was more apparent in the case of silent "r" which was pronounced at times and not at other times; even for the rest of vocabulary that required RP enunciation rather than GA. For instance, Capitalisation – Castle – Civilisation – Direction – Fasten - Fragile – Herb – Issue – Tissue – or vice-versa in words; such as Attitude - Altitude - Data – Dimension – Mayor – Status. Very few participants from both genders mispronounced "sh" as "ch" or the other way around. No participant from either gender was able to pronounce "Comb", 'Pneumonia" and "Genre" correctly.

4. CONCLUSION

Concerning phonetic information, knowledge and coding, females made a large amount of misspellings when decoding phonetic transcription, and they even provided awkward spelling that was meaningless; whereas males proved to be better at phonetic coding and they read phonemic symbols more properly. Females were better transcribers and succeeded in being as close to the right answer as possible; still, they confused more vowels such as diphthongs and more symbols including [ʃ] as [f], [n] as [h] and [tʃ] as [dr], which could be due to hastiness and lack of concentration. Moreover, males were better at discerning

silent letters and mispronounced less transcribed words and other entries' spelling. It has also been noticed that both genders have got a major hindrance in correct pronunciation which was fossilised mispronunciations.

With regard to phonemes' distinction, results so far have shown that females had a difficulty in distinguishing closing diphthongs from centring diphthongs in phonetic transcription. Their confusion between and mixing up of long and short mono-phthongs was more conspicuous in their oral production than males who performed well and more confidently. Another hindrance to point out is the case of the phoneme schwa which was tricky to pronounce and to detect its equivalent grapheme in isolated words. When it came to prosodic patterns and degree of accentedness, although word stress was rarely heard, females stressed more often than males did, but tended to place it on the wrong syllable at times. Males who did stress English words were few and because their speech tended to be quick, stressed syllables also were not properly heard. In terms of accent, both genders could not be consistent in their production of the model accent which they spoke. They rather implemented elements from both accents; for instance, [ɑː] vs. [æ], [ɔː] vs. [ɒ], [ə] vs. [ər], retroflex [r], rhotic [r] and final suffix "isation" to name a few.

Nonetheless, males were more self-aware of their articulation of isolated words and read transcription better with respect to silent "r" in RP. They also projected more self-confidence and poise while answering. For other aspects, females risked by providing answers that were mostly wrong, although such a fact may show their readiness to be involved in the situation and their interest in displaying their abilities. Whereas, males; when unsure; left blank space and were more attentive and confident in their replies. It has been noticed that they were not risk-takers on various occasions, as well as not being initiative as females were.

5. References

1. Theses

Biemans, M. A. (2000). *Gender Variation in Voice Quality* (Thesis). LOT, The Netherlands. LotPublications.

Eckstein, G. T. (2007, August). *A Correlation of Pronunciation Learning Strategies with Spontaneous English Pronunciation of Adult ESL Learners Spontaneous English Pronunciation of Adult ESL Learners* (Thesis). Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, the United States. ScholarArchives.

Karlsson, S. (2007). *Gender-related Differences in Language Use* (Thesis). LTU - DUPP, Sweden.

Vandeputte, D. (2016). *Variation and Gender throughout the 20th Century: A Historio-graphical Study* (Thesis). Ghent University, Belgium. LibStore.

Wilson, J. T. S. (2006). *Anxiety in Learning English as a Foreign Language: its Associations with Student Variables, with Overall Proficiency, and with Performance on an Oral Test* (Thesis). University of Granada, Spain. DigiBug.

2. Journal Articles

Al-Shaboul, Y. M., Asassfeh, S. M., Alshboul, S. S., & Al-Tamimi, Y. A. (2014). Arabic Phonemic Awareness (PA): The Need for an Assessment Tool. *Asian Social Science*, *10*(1), 200–208. SemanticsScholar.

Badran, H. A. (2001). Extraversion/Introversion and Gender in Relation to the English Pronunciation Accuracy of Arabic Speaking College Students, 1-34. *ERIC*.

Bouhadiba, F. (2004). A Perceptual Approach to Teaching Pronunciation in English. *Revue Maghrébine Des Langues*, *3*(1), 165–174.

Burke, P. J., & Sets, J. E. (1988). Femininity/Masculinity. *Encyclopedia of Sociology, Revised Edition*, *30*(1), 997–1005.

Daif-Allah, A. S. (2012a). Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning and Their Relationship to Gender. *Canadian Center of Science and Education*, *5*(10), 20–33. ERIC.

Gardner, R. C. (2007). Motivation and Second Language Acquisition. *PORTA LINGUARUM*, *8*, 9–20. DigiBug.

Hawkar, O. A. (2016). Gender Differences in Using Language in the EFL Classes: From Teachers' Views. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND CULTURAL STUDIES*, *2*(4), 73–91. ResearchGate.

Hu, X., Ackermann, H., Martin, J. A., Erb, M., Winkler, S., & Reiterer, S. M. (2012). Language aptitude for pronunciation in advanced second language (L2) Learners: Behavioural Predictors and Neural Substrates. *Brain and Language*, *127*(3), 366–376. ResearchGate.

Kafle, M., Xia, J., & Durbin, F. (n.d.). *Pronunciation Portfolio* (EDUC 647). University of Delaware.Coursehero.

Nair, R., Krishnasamy, R., & de Mello, G. (2006). Rethinking the Teaching of Pronunciation in the ESL Classroom. *The English Teacher Journal*, *35*, 27–40. Academia.

Senel, M. (2006). Suggestions For Beautifying the Pronunciation of EFL Learners in Turkey Turkey. Journal Of Language and Linguistic Studies. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, *2*(1), 111–125. DergiPark.

Wolfe, J. (2000). Gender, Ethnicity, and Classroom Discourse Communication Patterns of Hispanic and White Students in Networked Classrooms. *Gender, Ethnicity, and Classroom Discourse Communication Patterns of Hispanic and White Students in Networked Classrooms*, *17*(4), 491–519. ResearchGate.

6. Appendices

6.1. Appendix 01

- **Activity 1**

 - Write the spelling for the following transcribed words

- /’stju:dn̩t/ …- /’sɜːvɪs/ …- /wʊlvz/ …. - /’letəz/ … - /nəʊm/ … - /di:p/ …- /’flaʊə/ …- /breθ/ …- /ʃʊə/ …- /’hæŋkətʃɪf/ …- /hɑːf/ …- /ɪmɪg’reɪʃn̩/ …- /naɪt/ …- /’ræpɪŋ/ … - /’sepəreɪt/…- /kləʊn/…- /nʌm/ …- /’rekɪdʒ/ …- /tʃeɪnd/ … - /’rɪðm̩/ …- /’dʌmi/…- /tɔɪz/ …- /’nekləs/ …- /’ɔːdə/…- /’rɪŋkl̩/ … - /klɪə/…- /steəz/ ...- /’bɒtm̩/ ...

- **Activity 02**

 - Transcribe the following words phonemically

- Stop ………- Memory ………- Risk …… - Container ……- Dove ……- Hospital ……

 - Help ……- Serious ……- Happy……- American ……-Close-up …… - Motivational ……- Father ……- Impossibility ……- Decide …… - Industrialisation ……

6. 2. Appendix 02

- **Activity 01**

Beat – Bit – Bait – Bet – Bead – Bid – Bad – Bed – Cheek – Chuck – Chick – Choke – Check -- Fur – Far – For – Fire – Log– Leg – Lake – Lack – Lick – Leak – Who’d – Hood – Hoed – Had – Hoot – Hit – Hat – Hot – Joke – Jerk – Junk – Pit – Pat – Pete – Pet – Luke – Luck – Look – Lock – Leap – Lip – Loop – Line – Loan – Lane – Lean – Mad – Mud – Mend – Male – Mall – Mole – Mash – Mush – Mesh –Pack – Pink – Puck – Puke – Peck -- Rail – Rule – Roll – Rip – Rap – Rope – Room – Rome – Ream – Seep – Sheep – Steep —Tail – Tell – Tall –Toll – King -- Bing – Bang – Tong

- **Activity 02**

Civil – Civility – Civilise – Civilisation

Equal – Equality – Equalise – Equalisation

General – Generality – Generalise – Generalisation

- **Activity 03**

Aisle – Almond - Altitude - Attitude - Autumn – Balk – Capitalisation - Calm – Castle - Champagne - Civilisation - Climb - Comb - Could - Crumb – Data- Daughter - Dilemma – Dimension - Direction - Dumb – Folk - Fasten - Feign - Foreign - Fought - Fragile - Genre – Gene - Half - Heir – Herb - Honest - Honour - Hour – Hymn - Island - Issue - Knee - Knife - Knock – Knickers - Know - Knowledge - Light – Listen – Mayor – Might - Muscle - Often - Pneumonia - Psychiatrist - Right – Salmon - Sandwich - Should - Sign – Signature - Status - Strife - Talk – Thistle – Tissue - Thought - Through - Wednesday - Weigh - Whistle - Would – Wrap – Wrong – Wrestle - Yolk