
PRONUNCIATIONS OF THE PAST TENSE INFLECTIONAL MORPHEME -ED SOUNDS AMONG NORTH BORDER UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: DIAGNOSIS AND REMEDY

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ABSTRACT: *The aim of this study is to identify university students' -ed endings pronunciation problems in English language and to suggest ways of solving those problems. The study was conducted in the College of Sciences and Arts, Turaif, Northern Border University, KSA. The paper follows the descriptive research method. A sample of 20 English language students were selected using a simple random sampling procedure. They were instructed to complete a stem-inflectional task by listening to 15 regular past tense verbs ending with inflectional 'ed'. The findings reveal that those university students have various pronunciation problems: cognitive problems about -ed morpheme endings, they think that every single regular past tense verb ending in 'ed' is pronounced as 'd' sound. In the light of these findings a number of recommendations have been made: teachers should always tell learners why there are different pronunciations of the -ed morpheme.*

KEYWORDS: pronunciation, inflectional morpheme, regularity, irregularity, semiregularity, allomorphs.

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is one of the key components of any language; it is widely regarded by phoneticians and linguists all alike as a massive pillar of any spoken language. Yule (2010) labels the technical study of language sounds pronunciation as phonetics and refers to the possible combination of sounds as phonology. According to Pinker (1999), the regular past tense verb conjugated in 'ed' ending constitutes 86% of the verbs in English language. Past tense verb in English for regular verbs is made with the addition of the fixed inflectional morpheme 'ed' to the stem and it takes different shapes for other irregular verbs. The pronunciation of this inflectional morpheme 'ed' has got three variant pronunciations, a verb like 'fined' is pronounced dissimilarly to the pronunciation of 'walked' and unlike the pronunciation of the verb 'needed'.

Statement of the Problem

It has been reported that, learners show constant care to learn new lexes along with their meanings, grammar and neglect their proper pronunciation. Learners have nebulous concept about the standard pronunciation of the regular past tense verbs ending, learners' teachers reported that students mispronounced it because of their commonly held belief that every single regular past tense verb ending in 'ed' is pronounced as 'd' sound and remained utterly unaware of the other

two scenarios. Mispronunciation of the regular past tense ending inflectional morpheme 'ed' causes serious problems with fluency and leads to ineffective communication. Many teachers have expressed their dissatisfaction of the learners' poor pronunciation. Therefore, this paper is an attempt to suggest some remedies.

Question

1. To what extent are students good in pronouncing regular past participle tense inflectional morpheme 'ed'?

Hypothesis

Students who are unable to identify the voiced and voiceless sounds are more likely to mispronounce 'ed' inflectional morpheme.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims at:

1. Identifying learners' difficulties in pronouncing ed morpheme.
2. Helping learners to overcome these pronunciation difficulties.
3. Assisting learners to speak more fluently.

Delimitation

Due to practical constraints, this paper provides a broad review of the various pronunciations of the regular past participle inflectional morpheme 'ed'. It is carried out at NBU, college of science and arts. The sample of the study consists of 70 English language learners of second year students of the year 2020-2021.

Methodology

This paper follows the qualitative and descriptive methods, inflectional test is adopted, and subjects complete a stem-inflectional task by pronouncing 30 regular past tense verbs ending with inflectional 'ed'. These 30 verbs are distributed according to the three different possible pronunciations of the inflectional morpheme 'ed', the first 10 verbs represent 't' sound, the second 10 verbs represent 'd' sound, while the last 10 verbs represent the 'id' sound. The subjects' answers are recorded and analyzed qualitatively.

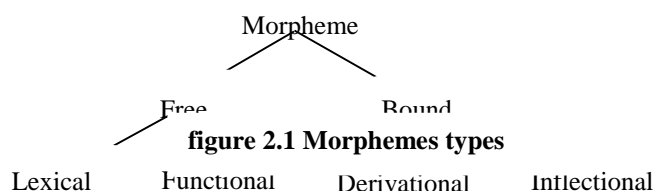
LITERATURE REVIEW

The major inflectional morpheme -ed theories and concepts on the problems of the mispronunciation of the inflectional morpheme -ed are discussed in this section.

Morphemes

Words in English are made up of a number of elements, such as -ed, -er, s and -ing these elements are called morphemes. Morphemes are described as the minimal unit of meaning or grammatical function. Morphemes fall out into two categories free and bound morphemes. The former encompasses different parts of speech such as nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs, pronouns, etc. They perform lexical and functional functions, and this type of morphemes can stand on their own,

whereas the latter includes prefixes and suffixes, just to name few -re, -est, -ed and -s. This type of morphemes play key role in changing the grammatical category of words (inflectional function), and create new words (derivational function), but they cannot stand on their own as independent forms. Figure (2.1) shows the different types of morphemes:



Inflectional Morpheme –ed

The -ed morpheme is classified as a bound and inflectional morpheme, the primary function of it is to indicate the time reference of the verb. The -ed morpheme represents 86% of the most common 1000 verbs in English according to Pinker (1999). The -ed morpheme is used with all English pronouns. But however, it is worth saying that, the formation of the past simple verb is considered as inconsistent because the verb could take three different forms, firstly the regular verb form (regularity; show-showed, fast-fasted), secondly form is the irregular verbs (irregularity; go-went, do-did) and the last one is the semi-irregular verbs (semi-irregularity; sweep-swept, keep-kept).

According to a research conducted by Catford (2001) that 4,240 out of 4,400 verbs in English are regular verbs, which means regular verbs make up about 96.4% of all verbs. On the other hand, 160 out of 4,400 verbs in English are irregular verbs; this is to say that 160 irregular verbs account for about 3.6% of all verbs. Below chart (2.1) compares the percentage of regular versus irregular verbs.

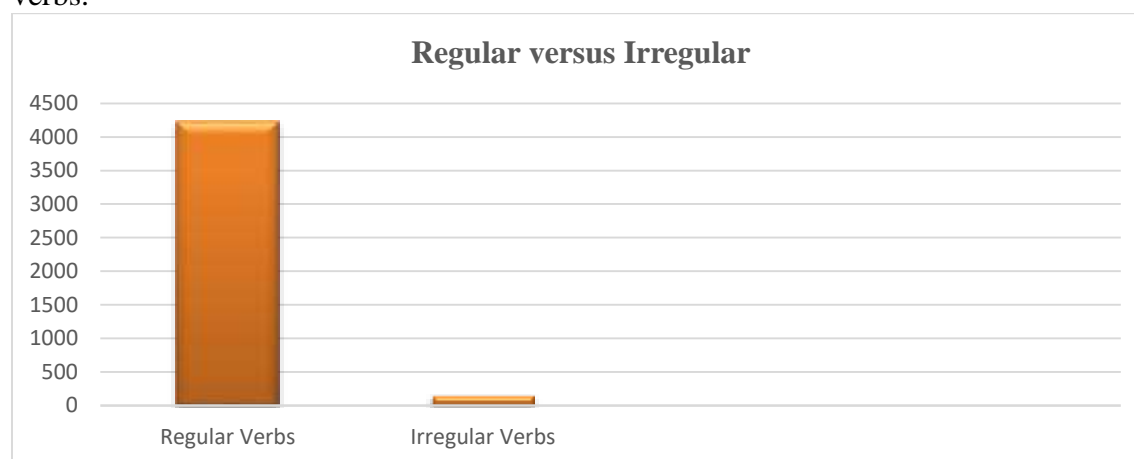


Chart (2.1) compares the percentage of regular versus irregular verbs.

Chart.1 reveals that the number of regular verbs are much bigger than the number of irregular verbs, which confirms and gives credence to the importance of learning the pronunciation of the –ed morpheme.

The-ed Morpheme Past Simple

The past tense of a verb is formed by adding the –ed morpheme to the infinitive form of the verb. There is a consistency in verb conjugation of the past simple with all personal pronouns, i.e. it is used to shape the past simple with all subjects as shown below:

1. I **looked** for her.
2. You **looked** for the truth.
3. Peter **looked** at the picture.
4. We **looked** at the picture.

The-ed Morpheme Past Perfect

Similar to the formation of the simple past, the past participle is formed by adding the –ed morpheme to the base verb. The –ed morpheme is used after the auxiliary verb ‘be’ i.e. By the time I returned home, he had already left.

The-ed Morpheme Present Perfect

Like past simple and perfect, the present perfect is formed by adding the –ed morpheme to the base verb. The –ed morpheme is used after the auxiliary verb ‘have’ i.e. Tom Madison have visited Melbourne recently.

The-ed Morpheme Passive Voice

The passive voice is made with the help of the –ed morpheme, it is added to the infinitive form of the verb and it is used after the passive helping verb ‘be’; as shown in the following sentence the movie was directed by him.

Characteristics of the –ed Inflectional Morpheme

One of the –ed morpheme characteristics is that it does not change the part of speech, for example both need and needed are verbs with slight distinction in terms of the time reference.

The –ed Inflectional Morpheme and its Allomorphs

It is believed that, every single morpheme has variant ways of pronunciation. These different pronunciations of a morpheme are called allomorphs. The –ed morpheme like the –s morpheme, it has three allomorphs: /t/, /d/ and /id/ as in talked, fined and invited respectively. The three allomorphs of the –ed morpheme are presented in table (2.1)

Table 2.1 allomorphs of the –ed morpheme

Morpheme	Allomorphs	Examples
The –ed morpheme	/t/	Helped
	/d/	Lived
	/id/	Waited

The choice and decision of which allomorph to be used depends largely on the sound that comes before the –ed sound as illustrated below:

1. /id/ allomorph after /t/ and /d/ sounds, examples are: waited, invited and needed.

2. /t/ allomorph after voiceless sounds /p,- k,- f,- s,- ch,- sh,- x/ sounds, examples are: missed, asked and helped.
3. /d/ allomorph after voiced sounds /b,- g,- j,- m,- n,- l,- r,- th,- v,- z,- w/ sounds, examples are: moved, lived and showed.

Learners' Pronunciation Problems

Bell (1995) found significant differences in the sound systems between Arabic (first language L1) and English (second language L2), these problems pose serious problems for the pronunciation learning for Arab learners. By drawing an analogy between English and Arabic sounds, it is quite apparent that English has 24 consonant sounds and 20 vowel sounds, whereas Arabic has 28 consonant sounds and 8 vowel sounds. Twenty years ago, Majeed (1999) reported that Arabic words are mostly formed by consonants while English words are heavily formed by consonant clusters.

In addition to the differences in the sound systems between L1 and L2, Hewings (2007) identified exposure as one of the key problems faced by learners, being exposed to real-life aspects of L1 is particularly vital. Therefore, these are the most likely causes of learners' pronunciation problems.

Voicing Problems

Roach (2012) describes English sounds on the basis of a. the place of articulation: refers to the organs of speech, which are responsible of the production of sounds, b. manner of articulation: describes how air passes out, c. voicing: means whether there is vibration of the vocal cords or not. English sounds in terms of voicing are grouped into two broad categories: voiced and voiceless sounds. If the air passes freely through the vocal folds without making vibration then it is described as voiceless, and if it is making vibration in the vocal cords, it is designated as voiced sound.

Problems of voiced sounds

Studies revealed that learners' disability to distinguish between voiced and voiceless sounds at the end of verbs affects meaning negatively. Saudi Arab learners at NBU are most likely to pronounce the last voiced sound /v/ in "move" as /f/ sound, which causes considerable misunderstanding. The proper pronunciation of the -ed morpheme depend entirely on the last sound that appears at the end of English verb.

Problems of voiceless sounds

Similarly, inability to identify voiceless sound at the end of English verb leads to ineffective communication. Scholars attribute this problem to language interference; native speakers of Arabic in NBU will mispronounce difficult English consonant sounds by replacing them with consonants that are more common in Arabic. When the "p" sound appears at the end of an English word, for instance, an Arab learner may instead say "tab" instead of "tap". Carr (2013) concludes learners are unable to differentiate between voiceless and voiced sounds because they are not aware of how these sounds produced. Roach (2000) writes with poor pronunciation, a speaker can be very difficult to understand, despite accuracy in other areas of the language.

Causes of Learners' Problems in Pronouncing –ed Morpheme

To better understand the causes of the –ed morpheme mispronunciation, topics related to lack of learners' motivation, lack of practice and lack of teachers' feedback are discussed below.

a. Lack of Learners' Motivation

For Norris and Holt (2005), motivation in learning refers to the learners' orientation with regard to the goal of learning a second language. In fact, there are two types of motivation: integrative and instrumental, the former one refers to the learner's genuine interest of being an integral part of the target language and its culture, in contrast, the latter one focuses on gaining a prestigious and social position or getting a job. Underhill (2005) outlines that learners with integrative motivation are more likely to learn pronunciation faster than those whose goal is to secure a job. The majority of students at NBU have the instrumental motivation. Nevertheless, students should be encouraged by teachers to learn the phonetic aspects of English for better fluency.

b. Lack of Practice

The importance of practice is quite evident in the saying 'practice makes perfect', based on this saying many linguists believe practice is indispensable in the acquisition of a second language. On the other hand, students in fact are seldom exposed to real-life opportunity to practice the language outside the boundaries of their classrooms. Therefore, face-to-face contact with native speakers is literally impossible. The only way most of these students have with English outside the class is through listening to means of communication: which encompasses television, movies, and music.

c. Lack of Teachers' Feedback

Students' teachers have leading role to be played by them in effectively teach and give learners feedback on their pronunciation performance. Goh & Burns (2012) emphasizes on the importance of teaching pronunciation but they claim that this skill frequently given insufficient attention in many English classrooms. Hattie (2009, p.178) states "one of the most powerful influences on learning, occurs too rarely, and needs to be more fully researched by qualitatively investigating how feedback works in the classroom and learning process". The views of Hattie (2009) are further supported by Lee (2015) who found that corrective feedback on errors facilitates pronunciation improvement of language learners. Some researchers accused teachers for not allocating enough time to give students feedback on their pronunciation.

Overall, students are not exposed to communication with native speakers; therefore, teachers are greatly and positively encouraged to devote some time from the class time to address the pronunciation mistakes made by students.

RESEARCH METHOD

In this section of the study, the research method is described in terms of subjects, data gathering tool, method of analysis and the overall research paradigm.

Subjects

The sample of the study consists of 20 male university students who study English language as their major specialization. The subjects are B.A first and second year students of English at Northern Borders University, College of Arts and Sciences in Turaif. The sample of this research is widely regarded as a purposive convenient sample as it focuses on the first and second year students of English of the year 2020-2021. Their ages range from 18 to 21. All of the subjects

speak Arabic language as their mother tongue, and in view of their English learning backgrounds, they could all be regarded as upper-intermediate learners of English.

Tool

The test was used as a means of data collection.

Procedure

Subjects were asked to complete a stem-inflectional task by listening to 15 regular past tense verbs ending with inflectional 'ed'. These 15 verbs are distributed randomly in the subjects' stem-inflectional task to the three different possible pronunciations of the inflectional morpheme 'ed', the first 5 verbs represent 't' sound, the second 5 verbs represent 'd' sound, while the last 5 verbs represent the 'id' sound. The subjects' answers are recorded and analyzed qualitatively.

Data Analysis

The data consist of the students' work. Initially they were asked to listen to 15 verbs and check the correct -ed endings of the following words. So, the data were 15 answers per each single subject. In order to facilitate the analysis process, the verbs presented in this section are grouped based on the final -ed morpheme sound, but however, in the test which was administered to the subjects verbs were not in order. Therefore, the verbs (1 to 5) tested subjects' knowledge of identifying the 't' sound. These five verbs were converted into numbers and bar graphs to facilitate analysis, discussion and interpretation as follows:

Table No.(4.1): laughed, stopped, helped, danced and mixed

Options		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1. 't'	48	48%	48%
	2. 'd'	33	33%	33%
	3. 'id'	19	19%	19%
Total		100	100%	100%

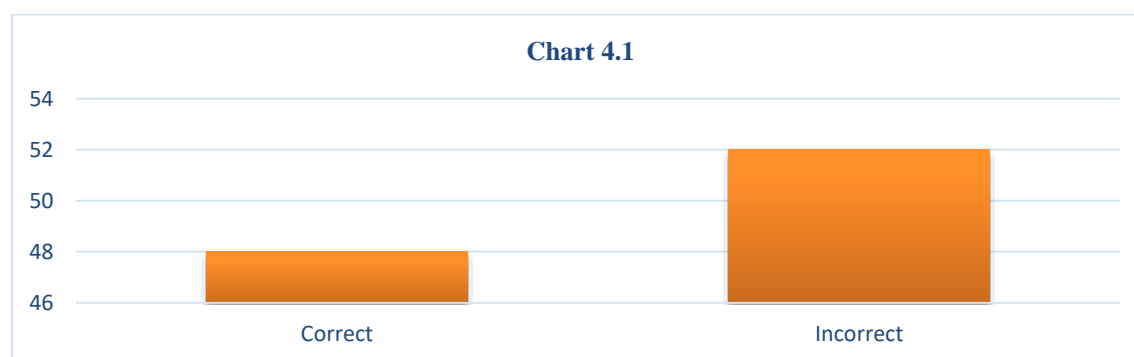


Table (4.1) shows that option number one 't' sound is ticked 48 times and it represents about 48%, while the second option 'd' sound is ticked 33 times and it forms about 33% and the last option 'id' sound is selected 19 times which represents 19% of the total answers. In total about 33% of the answers were correct, while 52% of the answers were incorrect.

The verbs (6 to 10) tested subjects' ability of identifying the 'd' sound. These five verbs were converted into numbers and bar graphs to facilitate analysis, discussion and interpretation as follows:

Table No.(4.2): described, changed, showed, lived and listened

Options		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1. 't'	21	21	21%
	2. 'd'	47	47	47%
	3. 'id'	32	32	32%
Total		100	100%	100%

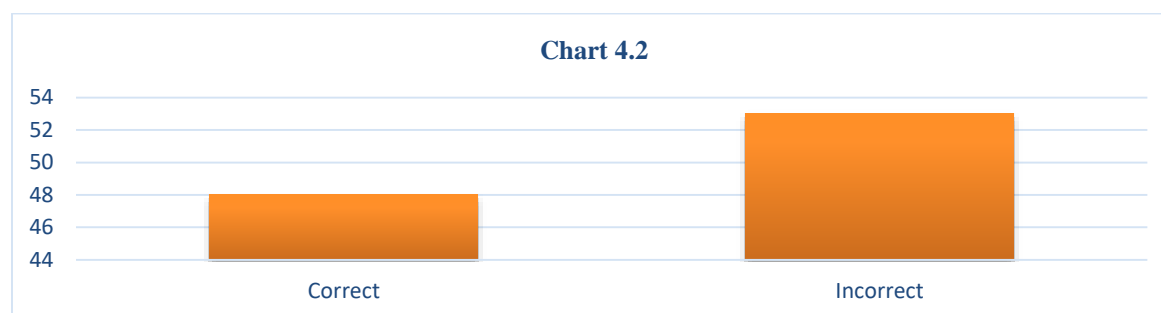


Table (4.2) indicates that option number one 't' sound is ticked 21 times and it represents about 21%, while the second option 'd' sound is ticked 47 times and it forms about 33% and the last option 'id' sound is selected 32 times which represents 32% of the total answers. In total about 53% of the answers were incorrect, while 47% of the answers were correct.

The verbs (11 to 15) tested students' knowledge of identifying the 'id' sound. These five verbs were converted into numbers and bar graphs to facilitate analysis, discussion and interpretation as follows:

Table No.(4.3): rented, recommended, tested, ended and invited

Options		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1. 't'	4	4	4%
	2. 'd'	55	55	55%
	3. 'id'	41	41	41%
Total		100	100%	100%



Table (4.3) reveals that option number one 't' sound is ticked 4 times and it represents about 4%, while the second option 'd' sound is chosen 55 times and it forms about 55% and the last option 'id' sound is selected 41 times which represents 41% of the total answers. In total about 59% of the answers were incorrect, while 41% of the answers were correct.

CONCLUSION

This study is an attempt to identify the mispronunciation of the ed- ending problems of a sample of university students who study English as a foreign language in KSA. The ultimate aim is to pinpoint these problems, and suggest remedial procedures. The sample consists of 20 students. Subjects were asked to complete a stem-inflectional task by listening to 15 regular past tense verbs ending with inflectional 'ed'. Their responses were then analyzed by two teachers of English language. Each response was analyzed twice by two different teachers. The analysis of the results of the test have revealed some significant facts. These can be summarized as follows:

1. Students have some common misconceptions about ed- morpheme endings, they think that every single regular past tense verb ending in 'ed' is pronounced as 'd' sound.
2. Students cannot distinguish between 't' and 'd' sounds at the end of regular verbs.
3. Students confuse 'd' with 'id' sounds.
4. Students are unaware that the decision of which allomorph to be pronounced depends entirely on the final sound that precede the -ed morpheme.

In the light of these findings a number of recommendations can be made:

1. Learners of English language should understand that there are three different -ed sounds, and teachers of English should explain to students why there are different pronunciations of the -ed morpheme.
2. Learners should be advised by their teachers to touch their throats as they say a verb and isolate the last sound before -ed, if the sound before -ed is voiced you will feel your vocal cords vibrate then the-ed sound is /d/ and when the last sound before -ed is voiceless you will not feel your vocal cords vibrate then the -ed sound is /t/. This practice is quite useful and helpful.
3. Learners of English language should practice a lot. Practice will help them extend and broaden their knowledge of how to differentiate between voiced and voiceless sounds.

4. Learners should be encouraged by teachers to tell the reason why a certain verb with -ed ending is pronounced differently from the other one. This will help them be more fluent and natural.

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