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## **The Employment of Accents at the Training Interpreting Sessions: Perspectives of Iraqi Translation Students**

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### **Abstract**

In the field of interpreting and teaching translation, learning British English or American English accents are essential issues for the students of translation.

This study aims to highlight the perspectives of translation students at two Iraqi Universities (a state university: Mustansiriyah and a private one: Al-Ma'moon) towards the value of the British or American accents during leaning and translating processes. Therefore, 174 students who listened to the same texts in the two accents and from different topics such as tourism and hotel management, business management, agriculture and forest, etc... heard the auditable texts totally. They were asked to give their conceptions to 12 statements depending on the scale of Likert "Five-point" that aims to know their perspectives from the weakest (never or almost never) to the strongest (always or almost always). The results of the answers were described and analyzed according to the SPSS 16 program. The students' given answers to the questions in the questionnaire are intended to highlight their perspectives towards the role of the accent, which proves that accent has an essential role in translating into English, and it requires to be heavily focused by the translation trainers throughout the interpreting pedagogy.

**KEYWORDS: ACCENTS; PERSPECTIVES; TRANSLATION STUDENTS;  
TRANSLATION PEDAGOGY**

## توظيف اللهجات في دورات الترجمة الشفوية من منظور طلبة الترجمة العراقيين

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### المستخلص

يعد تعلم اللهجات الانكليزية (سواء البريطانية ام الامريكية) في حقل تدريس الترجمة الفورية من المسائل الشائكة والاساسية لتعلمي وطلبة اقسام الترجمة في الجامعات العراقية ، حيث تهدف هذه الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على منظور طلبة اقسام الترجمة في جامعتين هما (الجامعة المستنصرية الحكومية ، وكلية المأمون الجامعة الاهلية) نحو اللهجات الامريكية والبريطانية اثناء تعلمهم للترجمة واثناء ممارستهم لها . لذا فكان 174 من الطالبة ممن استمعوا لنفس النصوص وباللهجتين، وكانت مواضيع النصوص الصوتية متنوعة وشاملة لجميع الحقول التطبيقية للترجمة كالسياحة والفندقة والادارة والزراعة والغابات ... إلخ .. فقد استمعوا للنصوص كاملة صوتيا بعدها سألوا لاعطاء اجاباتهم لاثنتي عشرة عبارة بالاعتماد على مقياس ليكرت الخماسي المستوى .

واكدت نتائج اجابات الطلبة على الأسئلة الواردة في الاستبيان على منظورهم تجاه تأثير اللهجة، والتي تثبت أن لها تأثير أساسي في الترجمة إلى الإنكليزية مما تتطلب تركيزًا كبيرًا من قبل مدربي الترجمة اثناء تدريسهم للترجمة الفورية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية : اللهجات ، منظور الطلبة ، تدريس الترجمة**

### 1. Introduction

Learning accents is a field in translation pedagogy (henceforth TP) that has been studied less than other because of many difficult factors that may interfere during conducting researches such as incentive, field independent/dependent and gender (van Heugten & Johnson 2014).

Owing to the negative transfer of the Arabic mother tongue (henceforth L1), Iraqi translation students may find some difficulties to acquire British or American accents (Ridha, 2012; Thyab, 2016; Sabbah, 2015; Crompton, 2011). The main problem for not being able to imitate accents is ascribed to the absence



of some particular sounds in the Arabic sound system such as /V/, /P/ and /G/ (Alghamdi et al., 2007).

In addition to the absence of some vowel and consonant sounds, the admitted students at these two universities are at least 18 years old. Age has a very influential aspect of acquiring native accents accurately. In this aspect, Nikolov (2009) argues that age is the most essential factor in "acquiring a foreign language accent." At late ages, Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) explains that translation students do not have the advantages of learning a language with an accurate accent and pronunciation (Birdsong, 1999).

Teachers of phonetics and phonology course do not cover this subject appropriately, as they may not master or may not be confident with their own acquired accent. Consequently, either they do not want to adopt a good accent or they are unable to imitate one during their teaching translation, which automatically reflects on the perspectives of the students.

### *1.1. Review of literature*

During the process of interpreting into a foreign language, translation students usually find the target language accent problematic, as there is no correspondence in the target language to their own mother tongue language. While some people claim that it is necessary to have a good accent explicitly, many translation instructors, and students find it a hard issue to tackle.

Teaching in a good accent, to some people, may help the learners overcome the embarrassment in oral communication that is mostly attributed to the lack of the correct practice and correct pronunciation. Nakazawa (2012) argues that students at university level feel anxious and afraid of making mistakes during their oral interpreting and mostly confess that they get anxious when interpreting because of their mother tongue effect on the pronouncing of the target words.

Creating a "stress-free environment" and "lowering learners' anxiety" is a key factor in teaching translation (Krashen, 1982). Moreover, it is advocated that if translation student is too stressed, s/he cannot acquire the accent as s/he cannot recognize the correct input because of the anxiety, which is described as "affective filter" (Ibid).

In the context of oral interpreting, fearing of committing mistakes in front of others is regarded as a sort of an affective filter that deprives students of producing and correcting their target language accent. Not too much attention



has been paid adequately to the issue of learning accent, although it has an important role to play in teaching translation and oral interpreting.

Derwing et al., (2005) state that learning a good accent does not have an academic aspect. The study shows that the set of the researches conducted to uncover the perspectives of the students is very limited (Marx, 2002; Ladegaard et al, 2006; Moyer, 2007; Munro, 2008).

Marx (2002) conducted a study about the perspectives of translation instructors in the United Kingdom. The research proves that instructors found accent difficult to teach and showed that foreign translation students in the UK had a problem concerning the absence of some sounds in their first language.

In his study, Ladegaard et al. (2006) found that 53% of the students believe that the people of Canada would respect them if they have a good and accurate accent. Therefore, the study proves that producing an oral translation with a good accent in the target language may reflect the social status of the people or the educational background; do not have a desire to be different from the rest of the society. Students of translation, in other words, like to translate in a "native-like way" as much as possible.

The study of Munro (2008) shows that 75% of translation trainers wished they could train students on American or British accents and said "Too many instructors feel afraid of teaching English with a good accent because they do not have enough confidence in their ability to achieve this goal".

During learning the English accents, motivation should be taken into consideration. Dörnyei (1998) emphasizes the importance of the motivation in teaching translation stating, "without sufficient incentive, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long term goals." (p. 117). In other words, it seems extremely difficult to teach when translation students are without a desire to learn an accent or they may, by doing so, use their mental blocks.

Li (2002) argues that translation students who are concerned with their RP (Received Pronunciation) or GA (General American) pronunciation had better skills in imitating American and British accents. Another finding is shown by Suter's (1976) study, it is true to say that communication is the main aim for the translation students who should care for pronouncing in particular English accent; pay utmost attention to the good accent with an attempt to improving the overall target accent skills.



Motivation has been defined by Brown (2006) as "a concept consisting of two opposing poles. One of these focuses on the value of reinforcement and rewards, and the other gives priority to the cognition in its deeper sense." In this vein, Masgoret & Gardner (2003) argue that motivated translation students will acquire the accent of the target language faster and to a greater degree.

Besides motivation, "age" is an influential factor in the learning of TL accent; it is regarded as a predicator of learning TL accents through translation (Nikolov & Djigunović ,2006) .Writing in the same context, Chiswick & Miller (2008) argue that in the life of human beings, there is what is so-called " a critical period" - which is suggested by Lenneberg (1967)-; a period during which translation process and language learning can be learnt very easily , but after that it becomes difficult to learn.

Translation students learning translation into English context, Abid (2012) states that some sounds are difficult for Arab Iraqi students to pronounce as these sounds are not available in the Arabic sound inventory. In addition, the language transfer from L1 can affect the communication negatively. Whereas this negative transfer becomes higher when talking to the English native speakers, talking to Iraqi non-native English speakers seems less problematic- as in many classrooms in Iraq- because all translation novices go through the same learning stages. Iraqi translation trainers whose L1 is Arabic should be aware of English accents so as to be a good instructor model.

Abid (2012) notes that translation trainers' inability to teach accent causes the failure for their trainees' competence. An accent refers to the person's background if s/he speaks with a foreign accent. Some translation theorists prefer having a foreign accent as they regard it as a part of their linguistic identity, while others theorists do not; emphasizing the fact that negative foreign accent makes interpreters in an anxious position (Gile & Hansen, 2010).

### *1.2. Purpose of the study*

This study aims to highlight the perspectives of translation students studying at translation departments towards their tendency to British or American accent. The subject groups were asked to identify their preference on the importance of accent tendency in oral communication. Therefore, randomly selected 174 students were asked to answer a questionnaire of 12 items.



## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

This study was conducted at two Iraqi universities (A state university of Mustansiriyah and a private one Al-Mamon University College). The two universities teach the admitted students at translation department an obligatory English pronunciation course for a year. Since the study is conducted at a university first level, the age of the students ranges from 18 to 21. The types of the audible texts are shown in detail in Table 1.

Table 1 . Types of texts

The type	Male Translation Students	Female Translation Students	Total
Religious Text	-	3	3
Forest and Agricultural	3	-	3
Psychological Text	-	3	3
Education	-	6	6
Business administration	21	24	45
Tourism and Hotel Management	54	60	114
Total	78	96	174

The table above shows that most participants (n114) out of 174 students have listened to "*Tourism and Hotel Management*" text in the two accents (American and British) as they professionally need the accurate use of an effective accent in this field of translation work as being a tourist guide. 45 of the participants - who are in need of such prestigious accents of L2 in their future careers-, have listened to "*Business administration*" audible text. Accordingly, the number of the participants who listened to these two texts is higher than others. The gender of the participants has been randomly selected – as it is shown in the following table.

Table 2. A statistic description of the participants by gender

The Gender	%	f
Male	44.8	78
Female	55.2	96
Total	100	174



## 2.2. Data collection and procedures

A designed questionnaire has been adopted in this study consisting of 12 items about learning English accents. The questionnaire has been distributed to 174 translation trainees. It has been designed according to the scale of Likert's five-point from (*never or almost never true to me*) to (*always or always true of me*). The final version of this questionnaire has been verified after asking three experts in translation pedagogy to review it. The questionnaire was distributed to translation students after displaying an audible text of 10 minutes duration to be listed in the two accents.

## 2.3. Data analysis

The study has used SPSS-16 statistics to analyze the given answers from the despondences of the participating translation students. This program gives accurate statistical descriptions and frequencies. Each item in this designed questionnaire has been analyzed and discussed in terms of (mean, SD, and Max. and Min. Value).

## 3. Results and discussion

The statistical results of each item are shown in table 3 below without missing any value. Translation students have responded on all the questionnaire 12 statements.

Table 3. Statistic description

Item	Mean	Max.	Min.	S.D.
1	4.22	5	1	1.044
2	4.17	5	1	.976
3	2.28	5	1	1.073
4	4.07	5	1	.856
5	4.16	5	2	1.005
6	4.02	5	1	1.084
7	3.62	5	1	1.152
8	4.21	5	1	.969
9	2.59	5	1	1.463
10	4.33	5	1	.825
11	3.88	5	2	.880
12	3.90	5	1	1.087

As for Max value, it is noticed that all the statements have (5) Max value meaning "*always or almost true of me.*" Considering the Min value, it is noticed



that 10 items have (1) Min. value meaning, "never or almost never true of me," and only two items have (2) Min. Value meaning, "usually not true of me". The statements that represent these values are "I believe I can improve my accent during practicing oral interpretation." and "I'm concerned with my progress in learning a specific English accent" meaning that most of the translation students think positively about these two statements; translation trainees are careful about their TL accent and have a desire to develop it.

The value in the column "mean" of the item 9 says "I will never be able to speak English with a good accent." has the lowest value 2.28. The highest value 4.33 is associated with item 10 that says, "I want to improve my accent when speaking English." In item 10, it is inferred that translation students have a clear perspective towards the necessity of learning American or British accent. This predicates that students have a clear incentive to enhance their oral communication skills. Item no.3 shows how students regard acquiring TL accent very important. In other words, translation students think that they can speak English with a good accent. They do not disregard the value of accent in their L2 interpreting; on the contrary, they give a high priority to it.

The given responses of the translation students, which are designed to show their perspectives, clarify that learning TL accent is very important and plays a vital role during simultaneous and consecutive interpretation. Statements 1, 2, 6, 10, and 12 intended to clarify students' perspectives on learning English accents. These statements also aimed to display to what extent translation students have a desire to develop their accent during learning L2.

Table 4. Numbers and responses to the statements 1.2.6.10 and 12

Item	Statements	SD						Total
1	When speaking and interpreting into English, I want to have an accent as native as possible	f			4	5	3	74
		%	.4	.4	3.8	5.9	3.4	00
2	Acquiring British and American accent is important and necessary during practicing oral translation	f			4	7	1	74
		%	.7	.2	3.8	2.8	6.6	00
6	I have my own personal goal that I learn a good English accent preferably and be able to translate as near- native speaker of English	f		5	8	6	9	74
		%	.4	.6	0.3	7.9	9.7	00



10	I want to improve my British and American accent when practicing oral translation into English	f			2	2	4	74
		%	.7	.7	.9	1.4	8.3	100
12	Interpreting and speaking like a native American or British English is very important to me	f			9	0	0	74
		%	.2	.4	2.4	4.5	4.5	100

It is shown in table 4 that translation students would like – to a great extent – to acquire TL accent and use it fluently and smoothly in their oral translations and in a near-native like accent. Item no. 1 is designed to depict the importance of good accent for translation students , and this table indicates that 53.4% and 25.9% of translation students like to have an accent as native as possible while interpreting into English. This is proved by the answers given to item 10 (41.4% and 48.3%). Moreover, the responses to statements no.2 and no.6 show that (138) of translation students want to learn an accurate prestigious English accent and it is very important for them and with an intention to use TL in a precise way (37.9% and 39.7%). Item no.2 "like a native speaker" is an expectation that translation students would like to have the accent during their practice of oral translation into English.

Though expecting of translation trainees from TL accent seems ideal for trainee novices, it is true to confirm that achieving this goal is possible because of the availability of motivation, age, and curricula within translation pedagogy.

Table 5. Numbers and responses to the statements 3.4 and 5

tem	Statements	SD						Total
	I will never be able to interpret and speak English with a good accent	f	4	2	7	8	3	174
		%	1.0	4.1	2.8	0.3	.7	100
	I think I have the motivation and the ability to improve my accent during practicing oral translation	f		2	1	4	7	174
		%	0	.9	2.1	8.2	2.8	100
	I believe that translation trainers should emphasis on the role of accent in class	f			8	0	0	174
		%	.7	.7	7.6	7.3	1.7	100



Statements no.3 and 4 were dedicated to making translation students specify their perspectives towards the possibility of having a good American and British accent during practicing their oral translation.

Their intention is being shown by refuting the statement “*I will never be able to interpret and speak English with a good accent*” that has a lowest mean score (2.28) referring to translation students' perspectives that they believe of their ability to have a good American or British accent (see table 3).

Responses to statement no.4 show that translation students have the ambition and being optimist towards acquiring TL accent (48.2 % and 32.8 %). For this purpose, 17.3%, and 51, 7 % of the translation students hope that translation trainers specify a certain time to be devoted to teaching English accents in each lesson.

Table 6. Numbers and responses to the statements 7.8.9 and 11

Items	Statements	SD						Total
7	I will disregard American and British speakers of English		5		2	9	9	174
			.6	.2	4.1	9.7	2.4	100
8	Focusing on the correctness of the content and communication accuracy is much more important than having a good accent				1	7	4	174
			.7	.2	2.1	2.8	8.3	100
9	Having an American or British accent when speaking English is important like knowing vocabulary and grammar.		0	0	0	0	4	174
			4.5	7.2	7.2	7.2	3.8	100
10	I'm concerned with my progress in learning a good English accent.			2	2	5	5	174
				.9	4.1	3.1	5.9	100

Statement no. 7 says "*I will disregard American and British speakers of English*", it has the highest mean score referring that translation students disagree with this item. In other words, they are motivated enough to enhance their imitation of English speakers. Responses to statement no.8 show that students are aware enough 141 (81.1%) that the communication and the



correctness of the content should have priority in their oral communication because it is the real function of any translation act.

Students' given answers to statement no.9 show that they give importance to having a good accent as same as the importance of knowing TL vocabulary and grammar. 60 (34.5 %) of the translation students participating in this study believe that having an American or British accent during interpreting orally is as important as syntactic knowledge and lexical repertoire. This perspective is proved by the given responses to statement no.11 in that translation students are concerned with the development of learning good English accent.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study tried to investigate the perspectives of the Iraqi translation students towards the employment of accents at the training sessions of the interpretation course. The results obtained from the questionnaire show that translation students have a great desire to have a good accent (US or UK accent); to use it fluently in their oral interpretation from Arabic into English. To achieve this goal, translation students have a keen desire to study English accents and to know how to speak and interpret with a good accent during oral translation into English. Needless to say, correct pronunciation and clear accent play a vital role in the communication of translation without which intelligibility problems may occur. For that reason, foreign language learners and translation trainees must have an access to the TL orally besides its written form in order to learn an English accent. Thus, translation instructor with a bad pronunciation and poor accent may cause miscommunication among the translation trainees.

Writing in the same context, Thyab (2016) states that translation trainers with a strong Arabic accent may impair translation students' potential abilities of interpreting with a good accent. Translation trainers and instructors' awareness of the importance of good English accent should be raised; they should realize the fact that having an accent is not only a skill that translation students can acquire by themselves, it is rather an effort of looking for a long-term practice and training to be spent on this purpose.

In spite of CPH (Chiswick et al., 2008) strongly advocates the argument that adult learners would impossibly acquire a native-like accent in TL, it is preferable that translation training sessions should give an importance to teaching accents during translation pedagogy; certain duration of time (10 minutes for each session) should be dedicated to teaching English accent.



It has been mentioned before that having a good accent is an important aspect of oral translation. Considering the fact that this aspect has been neglected for a long period of translation history, this study aimed to shed light on the perspectives of translation students' towards American or English accent. The results prove that translation students have enough desire and hope to acquire a good English accent during their oral translating. Moreover, they also trust in their abilities to improve such a good foreign accent by imitating the Native American and British speakers of the English language.

Another finding of this study shows that translation students believe that having a good accent may help establishing a mutual understanding in translation, which is a crucial aspect of communication competence. What is meant by "mutual understanding" is the degree of the intelligibility between the interpreter's words and the listener. Therefore, it is true to say that translation instructors should include accent in their training courses and translation practices, and should expect from their trainees to do so (Li, 2002). In this vein, translation pedagogues should focus on the mutual understanding during teaching that should be fostered by teaching translation students' the value of the good accent in the art of translation.

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