CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the intelligibility of Arabic-accented English for Malay speakers of English. In order to eliminate variables, the speakers participated in the current study were recruited from only one of the Arabic countries. This chapter begins with a summary of the findings presented in Chapter 4, followed by implications and recommendations, and finally, concluding remarks based on the perception performance of Omani English by the Malay respondents.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The data analysis of all the three experiments conducted revealed the problems of Arabic-accented English in terms of production. In this section, findings of this study will be organized in order to answer each of the three research questions constructed in the first chapter.

5.1.1 Research Question 1: To what extent are the vowels of Arabic-accented English intelligible to Malay speakers of English?

From the analysis in the last chapter, it can be seen that the Arabic-accented English evaluated in the current study is generally understandable or intelligible to Malay speakers of English (cf. 4.4) since the overall correct perception rate of the vowel

monophthongs in the three experiments is 73%, which indicates the majority of the Omani production is intelligible. Even the less perceived vowels gained correct rates of 54% for /ɜː/ and 59% /ɒ/, where it can be asserted that over half of the population of the listeners was able to perceive these two vowels. Among all the monophthongs examined, /ɪ/ obtained the highest perception score (96%) following with /ɑː/ at a rate of 85%, /æ/ at 80%; starting from /e/ and /ɔː/ (77% and 72% respectively), the perception scores descend a bit faster, where those among the less-well perceived items, /iː/, /ʌ/, /uː/, /ʊ/, /ɒ/ and /ɜː/, bear a rate of 69%, 67%, 65%, 62%, 59% and 54% respectively. And there is no obvious gender difference observed.

5.1.2 Research Question 2: Which vowels are correctly perceived by native Malay speakers and which vowels are not?

The data obtained also revealed which English vowels did Arabic speakers of English find difficult to pronounce. As the figures of correct percentage of perception towards each monophthong reported above, it can be observed that there were no vowels that were correctly perceived by all Malay respondents. Moreover, it can also be seen that Arabic speaker's productions of English vowel monophthongs that have Arabic analogs were not necessarily more intelligible than those that lack Arabic counterparts. The acoustically deviant Arabic-accented vowels, like the vowels /e/, /æ/, /ɔː/ (cf. 4.1)pair /ɒ/ and /ɔː/ (cf. 4.4.3), had low intelligibility scores due to an interference of the L1 vowel system. Thus, a discrepancy can be observed between the findings of this research and the predictions of the traditional Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), which declared that difficulties in learning the segments of an L2 can be predicted by

comparing the sound inventories of the L1 and L2 system, indicating those segments that have L1 counterparts are easily to be learnt properly (cf. 4.1). However, this study does agree with the statement of Flege and Port (1981, p. 133), that "phonetic differences between L1 and L2 will lead to non-L2 phonetic characteristics in the L2 produced by the learners of the L2 language". For example, the difficulties the Malay listeners met in perceiving the vowel pair /ɒ/ and /ɔː/ produced by the Omani speaker (cf. 4.4.3).

There are two major factors that may lead to the failure for the Malay listeners' misperception of Arabic-accented English vowel monophthongs. The first is L1 interference of Arabic vowel system. For example, Hubais (2009) reported that Omani English speakers tend to produce the English vowel /iː/ close to Arabic /iː/ and /ɪ/. This may lead to problems in the perception of other speakers of English towards the vowel /iː/ produced by Omani speakers. The other factor is the deviance between Malaysian English and Arabic-accented English. The lack of vowel contrasts in Malaysian English may also contribute to a breakdown in the intelligibility of evaluated Arabic-accented English vowel monophthongs of the Malay speakers of English. For example, the Malay speakers of English tend to replace the vowel /ʌ/ with its counterpart /ɑː/ (cf. Figure 4.7) at a rate of 50%, though the Omani speakers maintain the contrast between the vowel pair /ʌ/ and /ɑː/ (Hubais, 2009); and the phenomenon of mistaking /e/ as /iː/ as discussed in chapter 4.4.3. Some minor factors, like listeners' English training and education background, and the individual perspective towards the importance of

learning basic pronunciation of English may also play a role in the Malay perception towards Arabic-accented English vowel monophthongs (cf. 4.4.1).

5.2 Implications

The findings of this research provide useful insights and practical implications for the teaching of English pronunciation to Arabic speakers of English. Materials should be developed to help students improve their pronunciation of vowels that are difficult to pronounce and affect intelligibility.

5.3 Recommendations

As discussed in chapter one, until now there have been limited studies on English speakers' perception of Arabic-accented English, though a number of researchers have conducted acoustic analysis on different varieties of English manipulated by Arabic speakers from various countries in the Arabic Peninsula. Ignoring this factor would distort the whole validity of findings of the research, since speakers' dialects vary from country to country. However, few studies have controlled the dialectal factors with sufficient care.

It is reported by Blankenship (1991) that only limited numbers of vowels have been examined in most of the previous cross-language vowel studies. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies comprise a larger number of vowels. Moreover, an investigation on the relationship between the degree of intelligibility and the phonetic, acoustic, and articulatory properties of a specific variety of speech should be conducted.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

The findings of this study have shown to what extent Arabic-accented English is intelligible to the selected Malay speakers of English. Since more and more Arabs are pursuing their higher education in Malaysia, the question of whether their speech is intelligible to the locals becomes a critical issue. This study provides preliminary data and findings to conduct further research, which can also inform the teaching and learning of pronunciation of English as a second language, an area that is much neglected in teaching English in the countries of the Arabic Peninsula. The findings also suggest that if a second-language speaker wants to improve the intelligibility of his/her speech, it is advised that he/she study the actual phonemic contrasts along the respective acoustic and articulatory dimensions in the target language in specific. This may also indicate progress will be achieved in both perception and production.