

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

The present study set out to investigate the production of English monophthongs and diphthong) by a group of Persian speakers. In this investigation, the aim was to assess the description of these sounds in terms of their vowel quality and also to find out if vowel contrast is maintained between typical vowel pairs. Data derived from this study were compared with Standard English vowels as well as discussed in relation to other L2 and foreign language varieties of English where relevant. Returning to the research questions posed at the beginning of this study, a summary of the main findings that address these questions are as follows.

5.1.1 Research question 1: What are the characteristics of English vowels produced by Persian speakers?

The results of this study showed that the Persian subjects in this study contrasted vowel length more than vowel quality among the monophthong vowel pairs /ɪ/-/i:/, /ʌ/-/ɑ:/ and /ʊ/-/u:/. In terms of quality contrast, the vowel pairs were produced close to each other with overlaps between them except for /e/-/æ/. Another major finding was the realisation of /ɑ:/, /ɒ/, /ʌ/ similar to another resulting in words with any of the three vowels being perceived as homophones. As a result, it is possible that there is a smaller vowel inventory in Persian English due to the merger of the vowel pair /ɪ/-/i:/ and the vowels /ʌ/, /ɑ:/, and /ɒ/.

The results for English diphthongs showed that Persian speakers of English tended to produce centring diphthongs /ɪə/, /ʊə/, and /eə/ more with less diphthongal movement, essentially producing them as long monophthongs. However, the results for closing diphthongs showed more diphthongal movements for Persian speakers of English but in general compared to Standard British English, the movement from the onset to offset of the vowels were less diphthongal.

5.1.2 Research question 2: To what extent are there differences in the realisation of English vowels produced by female and male Persian speakers?

In general, both female and male Persian speakers of English produced vowel pairs similar to each other but there were some differences in terms of quality and length. The most salient finding is that in terms of quality, male subjects produced all vowels more fronted and closer than the ones produced by the female subjects. However, these differences were mostly found to be insignificant. In terms of vowel length, the subjects of the present study maintained length contrast but as the difference between long and short vowels were not statistically significant; it is possible that the short/long distinction may not be obvious. In relation to diphthongs, the findings also show that both female and male subjects produced the centring diphthongs more like monophthongs while for the closing diphthongs the result show more diphthongal movements.

5.1.3 Research question 3: To what extent do the English vowels produced by Persian speakers differ from British and American English?

The English monophthong vowels produced by Persian speakers occupied a smaller vowel space than Standard British English. In general, Persian English monophthongs were produced more fronted than British English. Male Persian subjects produced more fronted vowels than British English with the exception of /ʌ/, /ɑ:/, /ʊ/ and /u:/. For the

female Persian subjects, the findings reveal more fronted vowels for /ɑ:/, /ɒ/, /ɔ:/ and /ʊ/ than those produced by female British speakers. Another comparison was done on the vowel /ɜ:/ which appears to be produced differently from British English. It was produced more front and close among Persian subjects than the central position by the British speakers. As mentioned earlier, Iranian young students may be becoming more influenced by American English, and thus the vowel /ɜ:/ is produced more closely to American English than British English which could be attributed to the realization of the following *r* in the target words by the speakers. The realization of pre-vocalic /r/ unrounding of the back vowel /ɒ/, causing it to sound similar to the vowels /ʌ/ and /ɑ:/, by the subjects result in their pronunciation being perceived as being more American than British. However, these features were not consistently used by the subjects. Thus, although their pronunciation may be influenced by American English given the influence of American media among young people, there is no clear indication that their pronunciation is more American rather than British. For diphthongs, the realization of monothongisation of the centring diphthongs /eə/ and /ʊə/ reflect a similar trend in British English although the quality of the vowel produced in place of the diphthong is not exactly the same. Furthermore, the results indicate that the pronunciation of centring English diphthongs might be difficult for Persian learners of English as these three diphthongs are non-existent in Persian language and do not have any counterparts. In general the diphthongs produced by Persian subjects showed less diphthongal movement than standard British English.

5.2 Implications

The present study provides a description of Persian English vowels based on an instrumental analysis showing the characteristics of Persian English vowels and how close it is to British English which is the teaching model in Iran. These findings add to the currently scarce information pool on the way Iranians pronounce English sounds. The findings from this study indicate the potential areas of concern for the teaching and learning of English pronunciation among Iranian learners. Such areas include the lack of quality contrast among some vowel pairs. There is also some influence of American English pronunciation, and this needs to be taken into account in the teaching and learning of English in Iran, given that British English is a teaching model. The relative quality of the vowels produced also does not mimic Standard British English vowels, but this is to be expected in an EFL setting. In any case, whether the reason for this is a lack of similar phonetic categories (for example lack of length contrast in Persian) or the existence of similar categories (for instance, three similar closing diphthongs in Persian) needs to be explored further.

5.3 Recommendations for Further Research

It is recommended that further research is undertaken in the following areas:

Firstly, to obtain a more detailed description on the production of English vowels by Persian speakers, future research should comprise a bigger sample and a wider range of subjects. Secondly, the phonetic environment has to be extended to counter for co-articulatory effects on the target vowels which are placed in token words, such as the realization of post-vocalic *r* after the target vowels. In addition, the extent to which the non-native like production of monophthong and diphthongs affect the intelligibility of the speakers' production of English also needs to be ascertained to gauge the extent to which the non-native like production of vowels needs to be dealt with in the classroom.

Perception tests can also be carried out to examine the extent to which similarities and difference in phonetic categories are related to the production of non-native sounds.

5.4 Concluding Remarks

Based on an acoustic analysis, this study showed particular characteristics and trends in the way that a group of Iranian students produced English monophthongs and diphthongs. The findings from this study can inform the teaching and learning of English pronunciation in Iran that is often neglected and also provide a platform for future research on other aspects of English pronunciation among Persian speakers in Iran.