



The Rendering of the Vowel Cluster ‘ou’ by EFL Learners in the English Department of the University of Doba (2018-2019)

La prononciation du groupe vocalique ‘ou’ par les apprenants d’Anglais en tant que Langue Étrangère du Département d’Anglais de l’Université de Doba-année académique (2018-2019)

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Abstract: This paper investigates the rendition of the vowel cluster ‘ou’ by the First-Year Students in the English Department of the University of Doba, in Chad. The data were collected from 168 informants through a reading text made up of words containing ‘ou’, chosen randomly by the researchers. The reading of the text was recorded by means of a smartphone. The researchers listened to the recording and transcribed the words containing ‘ou’, which enabled them to analyze perceptually the realization of ‘ou’ by the participants.. The results revealed that EFL learners in the English Department of the University of Doba (2018-2019), demonstrate poor performance in the pronunciation of the vowel sequence ‘ou’. As Francophone learners of English, the participants pronounced ‘ou’ /u/ while in RP, that vowel sequence is rendered into seven (7) possible ways. Indeed, 165 students, i.e. (80.35%) of them realized ‘ou’ as /u/ in eight words out of ten in average. This inappropriate pronunciation of ‘ou’ is influenced by French. As solutions, the students are encouraged to get sufficiently exposed to English and to intensively practise that language. Students are also recommended to have and consult relevant dictionaries in order to improve their pronunciation in English. Lecturers are expected to correct students’ mispronunciation during classes. In addition, it is recommended to the administration of the University of Doba to establish and equip a language laboratory in the Department of English. Explicit instruction through organized phonetic lessons should be done along with the practice of focused exercises.

Keywords: Rendition, Vowel cluster, Performance, Language transfer.

Résumé : Cet article étudie la prononciation du groupe vocalique ‘ou’ par les étudiants de première année d’anglais du Département d’anglais de l’Université de Doba au Tchad. Les données ont été recueillies auprès de 168 informateurs au moyen de la lecture d’un texte constitué de mots comportant ‘ou’, choisis au hasard par les chercheurs. La lecture du texte était enregistrée par un téléphone Androïde. Les chercheurs ont écouté et traduit les mots contenant ‘ou’, ce qui leur a permis d’analyser la prononciation de ‘ou’ par les participants. Les résultats ont relevé que les étudiants d’Anglais en tant que Langue Etrangère de l’Université de Doba pour le compte de l’année universitaire 2018-2019, ont de faibles performances dans la prononciation de la séquence vocalique ‘ou’. En tant qu’apprenants francophones, les participants ont prononcé «ou» /u/ alors qu’en RP (Prononciation Reçue) cette séquence vocalique est rendue de 7 manières possibles. En effet, 165 étudiants, soit 83,35% d’entre eux ont réalisé «ou» comme /u/ dans huit mots sur dix en moyenne. Cette prononciation inappropriée de «ou» est influencée par le français. Comme solutions, il est conseillé aux étudiants de s’exposer suffisamment à l’anglais et de pratiquer intensivement cette langue. Il est également recommandé aux étudiants de se procurer et de consulter des dictionnaires pertinents afin d’améliorer leur prononciation en anglais. Les enseignants sont censés corriger les erreurs de prononciation des étudiants pendant les cours. En outre, il est recommandé à l’administration de l’Université de Doba de créer et d’équiper un laboratoire de langues au Département d’Anglais.

Mots-clé : Prononciation, Groupe vocalique, Performance, Transfert linguistique.

Introduction

Good pronunciation represents a main thing to one's ability to speak in any human language. Intelligible speech requires accurate production of many factors, such as ‘phonemes, stress, linking, rhythm, and intonation’. Burkart (1988) paraphrased by Pardede (2018, 143) argues that, in addition to grammar and vocabulary, pronunciation is viewed as the mechanical element of speaking skills. So, for someone to communicate without difficulty, the ability to accurately pronounce sounds is a necessity. According to Pardede (2018, p. 143) « Without appropriate pronunciation, one’s grammatical rule mastery and rich vocabulary possession do not guarantee that he /she is able to speak effectively ». In other respects, correct pronunciation facilitates successful communication, that is why Fraser (2000, p. 7) states « with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite his errors in other speaking sub-skills (vocabulary, grammar, and pragmatics); with poor pronunciation, understanding a speaker will be very difficult, despite accuracy in other areas ».

In most languages, there is a clear correspondence between sounds and symbols. In other words, some letters or combinations of letters are realized in certain ways, and if there are variations, these are governed by consistent rules. Languages that fall in that category do not pose pronunciation problems to learners. On the other hand, « there are languages where there are many exceptions for such rules, many words whose pronunciation could not be logically predicted from their spelling and vice-versa, English being an example » Ur (1996, p. 56). Indeed, English is a language where there is no correspondence between sounds and symbols. Examples are ‘oo’ in words like *flood*, *food*, etc. and ‘ou’ in words such as *ought* and *polygamous* where those symbols are pronounced differently, i.e. /ʌ/, /ʊ/, /ɔ/ and /ə/ respectively. The lack of correspondence between symbols and sounds, and the inconsistency in the realization of symbols in English make it difficult for foreign learners to master English pronunciation.

The current work sheds light on the pronunciation of a vowel sequence by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba in Chad. In fact, this investigation aims at examining the pronunciation of the vowel cluster ‘ou’ by EFL learners in the English Department of the University of Doba. We selected ‘ou’ as in Chad this vowel cluster has not drawn much attention of researchers. In detail, in this work, the researchers first investigated the realization of ‘ou’ by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba, (academic year 2018-2019). Then, they compared the pronunciation of ‘ou’ by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba with Received Pronunciation (RP). They also determined the factors that are responsible for the wrong pronunciation of ‘ou’. Finally, the researchers suggested some solutions for the pronunciation infelicities encountered by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba.

In Chad, EFL learners have difficulties making themselves understood because they do not make use of appropriate pronunciation of the English language. They may unintentionally confuse their listeners because of mispronunciation. This phenomenon is observed, not only in secondary school but in higher education as well. This investigation uncovers errors made by the First Year-Students of the English Department of the University of Doba - academic year 2018-2019 and it attempts to suggest solutions to the problems encountered by those learners.

A number of questions have been formulated to guide the collection of data. The first question is: What is the rendering of ‘ou’ by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba (academic year 2018-2019)? The next question is: to what extent is the pronunciation of ‘ou’ by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba similar to RP? An additional research question that guided this investigation is: What are the factors that can be held responsible for the mispronunciation of the vowel cluster ‘ou’? The last question is: What pedagogical solutions can be proposed?

For the ease of understanding the data and in order to avoid the reduplication of previous works, the researchers have used a theoretical approach and reviewed previous works that have bearing with the on-going investigation.

The theoretical approach adopted in this research work is Language Transfer (LT) which could be defined, according to (Ellis, 1965) paraphrased by Ngaidandi (2001, p. 91), as hypotheses that the learning of task A (L1 for example) will affect the subsequent learning of task ‘B’ (L2). For Ellis (2008, p. 351) cited in Ngaidandi (2021, p. 91) « Language transfer refers to any instance of learner data where a statistically significant correlation (or probably-based relation) is shown to exist between some features of the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired ». In other words, language transfer takes place whenever there is some wrong similarity between the language learned previously and the one being learnt; this may be in terms of phoneme. Language learners transfer what they already know about performing one task to performing another similar one. Most of the time, they make use of old rules where new ones are needed and this brings about mistakes, which is sometimes called negative transfer or interference (Ogah and Amos, 2009, p.140). Where transfer has positive consequence, it is known as ‘facilitation’ (Corder 1973, p. 132).

Language transfer is used because that theory is relevant to our topic, which deals with learning of English as a Foreign Language in a francophone milieu.

In Literature review, a number of works that are related to our investigation have been revised.

Walter (1987, p. 44) observes that the difference between the French and English system of word stress and rhythm and that of French makes it difficult for French learners of English in understanding and in producing spoken English. She made mention of a number of features of French which lead to ‘French accent’ in English. These features are presented as follows:

(i) All French words of two or more syllables are stressed in a regular way, unlike the English system where the stress pattern of each word or word-type must be stressed. This situation may lead to problems of comprehension or comprehensibility.

(ii) Unstressing a syllable in French does not involve reducing the time given to its pronunciation, as it does in English. In addition, there is little of the vowel reduction that occurs in unstressed English syllables. These two factors make it seem to French speakers that English speakers ‘swallow’ their words, and can make the English spoken by French speakers sound monotonous.

(iii) French uses tenser, more rounded lips and more frequent jaw opening; the tip of the tongue is not used, and there is more use of the blade of the tongue, giving ‘softer’ sounds to some consonants.

In a study describing the characteristic features of the segmental part of English of Francophone Cameroonians, Kouega (2008, p.118) revealed that the variety of English spoken by those users is characterised by two chief phenomena, i.e. interference from French and spelling pronunciation.

Safotso (2012, p. 2471) focused his study on the realization of plural forms / 3rd person singular markers ‘-s, -es, -ies, -oes’ and the simple past and past participle morpheme ‘-ed’, consonant clusters, word stress, and the French like- reading of some English words.

In terms of the rendering of the simple past tense and past participle morpheme –ed, he discovered that in CamFE (English used by Francophone Cameroonians), the ‘-ed’ affix of the simple past tense and past participle of regular verbs is articulated in two ways. It is either silenced or pronounced /ɛt/ in words like *finished* [finiʃ], *walked* [wɔlk], and *separated* [separet /separetɛt].

As regards the plural and the third (3rd) person singular markers ‘-s, -es, -ies, -oes, -os’, Atechi (2015, p.23) observes that French-speaking Cameroon users/ learners generally silence them, or sometimes realize them the voiceless fricative /s/. This observation can be illustrated by such words as *rings* [rin/rins], *writes* [rait], *bellies* [beli/belis], *mangoes* [mango], and *photos* [foto] (cf. Safotso, 2012, p. 2).

More importantly, he looked at the French-like pronunciation that he himself called ‘Frenchified pronunciation’ of some words. In this regard, he observes that Francophone Cameroonian learners of English pronounce certain English words as if they were the French ones. He argued that the rule applied here is the French reading rule, where except in very rare cases, the letters of the alphabet are rendered in the same way, no matter the environment in which they appear. In general, the francophone users of English in Cameroon apply this rule when words are common to both, English and French, or when an English word is close to a French one. An illustration can be words like *quality* [kaliti], *piece* [pies], etc. This ‘frenchified’ pronunciation of English by Francophone Cameroonian learners of English was also noted Kouega (2008, p.118).

Luo (2014, p. 1702) observes that the interference of Chinese in English language learning happens because learners use what they already know to organize the second language phone. In other words, Chinese English learners have difficulty learning English sounds because of the similar Chinese sounds they already know (Zhang & Yin, 2009, p.141).

Kouega (2017, p. 264) studied the renderings of the sequence –UI– by Cameroonian, Gabonese, and native French users learning English with the view to finding out whether French users speaking different L1s pronounce this sequence of sounds in different or similar ways. He observes that this sequence of vowels is rendered in English in at least nine (9) different ways, which may be grouped into four (4) categories: monophthongs, diphthongs, and triphthongs, sequences of consonant + vowel or vowel + vowel, and lastly Yod insertion.

He also discovered that these Francophone learners of English rendered the sequence of letters –UI– by /ʉi/, /i/, and /kwajet/ or /kiɛt/ in such words as ‘bruise’, ‘fruit’, ‘guilty’, ‘guitar’ and ‘quiet’. From these renderings, one can claim that native French learners of English have a tendency to copy from their first language (L1), i.e. French, when they use English orally. In the same way, non-native French learners of English tend to draw from their second language (L2), which is French, when they speak English. This language transfer that results in wrong pronunciation of English is viewed as an instance of negative transfer.

Investigating the factors that account for the difficulties of English pronunciation faced by Chadian students of some high schools in Ndjamena, Goni (2017, p. 57) found that in English the same letter can be pronounced in different ways, English is scarcely practiced in class, and English words are not always pronounced as they are spelt. He also observes that Arabic, French and local languages negatively affect English learners’ pronunciation. Inappropriate teaching of phonology in class also contributes to mispronunciation.

The works that have been revised here, have examined the pronunciation of English by EFL learners in general whereas our work investigates precisely the rendering of ‘ou’ by the students in the English Department of the University of Doba in comparison of RP.

The overall structure of the current piece of work includes introduction displaying the context, the statement of the problem, the objectives of this study, and the research questions.

It provides also information about the approach used and previous works that are connected to the current work. The second section of this work is methods. It is subdivided into two parts, i.e., setting and population on the one hand, and instruments and procedures of data collection on the other hand. After the methods, a section was devoted to the results of our investigation. This section is the domain of the presentation and interpretation of the results which are presented in tables for the ease of good understanding. Then, the discussion appears. In this section, the researchers discussed the results of their investigation in connection with the findings of previous scholars. Finally, there is conclusion that outlines the major findings of this study.

1. Methods

This section focuses on the setting and the population, from which the data for the completion of this paper were collected on the one hand, and the instruments and procedures of data collection on the other hand.

1.1. Setting and population

This research took place at the University of Doba. Doba is the Headquarters of Logone Oriental Province. It is located 100 km from the southern part of Moundou, the Headquarters of Logone Occidental Province and 95km from Koumra, the Headquarters of Moundoul Province in the east (Ngaidandi, 2025, p. 319).

The people from whom the data were collected for the completion of this research are the students of English Department of the University of Doba, i.e. those of the academic year 2018-2019. In fact, the First Year- Students represent the target population, who are two hundred (200) in number. Out of two hundred (200) students, one hundred and sixty-eight (168) have effectively participated in this investigation. This means that 32 student respondents were disregarded, which can be explained by three reasons. First, students who had lived in an English-speaking country were disregarded; second, students from Level Two who have carry-over in Level-One were excluded. The objective of the exclusion of those categories of students is the need to get reliable data. Finally, part-time students were also avoided because of their unavailability. Being 18-23 years old, the population of this investigation is made up of 128 male and 40 female students. Before meeting the respondents, the researchers got the university approval and students received and signed the informed consent, a copy of which is attached in the appendix of this paper.

The gender distribution and age range of the participants are presented in the table below:

Participants' gender	Participants' number	Percentage	Age range
Male	128	79.19%	19-23 years
Female	40	20.81	18-22 years
Total	168	100%	

Table 1: gender distribution and age range of the participants

The data presented in Table 1 give information about the gender, the number and the age range of the First Year - Students in the English Department of the University of Doba who participated in the reading task. The table shows that 128 students, i.e., (79.19%) are male with the age range that is 19 to 23 years old. As regards the female students, they are 40 in number (40) with the age range that moves from 18 to 22 years old. This number shows that female people are not interested in English studies in particular and in schooling in general. The age range of both sides indicates that some students reached the tertiary too late; this might be due to the fact that those students failed some levels in primary school or in secondary school, or they were sent to school too late by their parents.

1.2. Instruments and procedures of data collection

There is no data collection without the use of instruments in a research work. In this regard, we used the reading activity as a data- eliciting instrument. Actually, a text containing lexical items carrying the vowel cluster ‘ou’ was composed by the researchers themselves. The text was made up of words that are judged familiar to the respondents and this is a strategy which is assumed to attract students to the reading. A smartphone of Techno Brand was used to record the reading activity.

For the benefit of natural data about the rendering of ‘ou’, the researchers told respondents that the recording did not aim at testing their pronunciation of English sounds but it rather looks for assessing how fast they are, when reading a text. Students were individually asked to read freely the text composed for the purpose of data collection about their pronunciation of the vowel cluster ‘ou’. One hundred and sixty-eight (168) students read the text and their productions were recorded by a Smart phone – Techno Y 8 during the reading activity. And each student was assigned a label which is a number given chronologically, i.e. following the order in which students have performed the activity. Numbers were given to students who have taken part into the reading exercise for the ease of distinguishing one student from another. In other words, this has been done to avoid the risk of confusion. The reading and recording of students that took twenty – one (21) days took place in two different places, i.e. the University of Doba and the public high school Lycée Pascal Yoadimnadjji of Doba. Actually, the reading activity should have been done within the University of Doba, the setting of the informants of this research, but this was not possible because of the unavailability of venues. Therefore, students were asked to meet the researchers in Lycée Pascal Yoadimnadjji of Doba where venues were available as pupils of this institution were already in vacation in the period of reading activity. At the end of the reading activity, the researchers sat down and listened again and again to the productions of each student involved in the task. Furthermore, the productions of each informant were transcribed on the basis of the 10L system of transcription used in Simo Bobda and Mbangwana (2011, p. xii). Then, informants’ realization of ‘ou’ was compared to Received Pronunciation (RP), which enabled the researchers to rate the English pronunciation of those learners, at the same time allowing them to determine the factors of the perceived rendering of the vowel group being investigated. The researchers transcribed all the words containing the vowel cluster of focus. The reading activity was used because it is practical and permits a massive involvement of participants. With regard to spontaneous speech, the researchers did not use that tool for the reason that in Level I, students do not have enough vocabulary to communicate in English. In other words, the chance to get Level-One Students talking in English is very limited in the University of Doba, where the dominant languages of communication are French and local languages. For ethical convenience, the researchers informed respondents that their voices will not be divulged to a third person.

2. Results

This section is devoted to the presentation and analysis of data collected from the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba. The data are statistically presented in tables for an easier comprehension of the paper.

2.1. Pronunciation of ‘ou’ by the respondents and the recapitulation of its rendition

Indeed, the current sub-section displays the information about the rendering of ‘ou’ by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba, the academic year 2018-2019. The data are presented in Table 2 below:

Ou	Words	Students’ rendering
	Could	/kuld/
	Doubt	/dut/
	Ought	/ut/
	Polygamous	/pɔligamus/
	Pour	/pur/
	Bought	/but/
	Courageous	/kuradʒus/
	Righteous	/raitus/
	South	/sut/
	Cousin	/kusin/

Table2. rendering of ‘ou’ by students (personal elaboration).

As it can be observed from Table 2, the vowel cluster ‘ou’, which is found in ten lexical items contained in the text composed for the purpose of data elicitation, is rendered /u/ by the First Year-Students of the English Department of the University of Doba. This is an incorrect pronunciation of the sound sequence ‘ou’. It is the influence of French (Safotso, 2012, p. 2471 and Atechi, 2015, p.23) and French is one of the official languages and one of the languages of education in Chad. The sound sequence ‘ou’ is available in French and it is pronounced /u/. When learners come across with the same group of phonemes in the target language, i.e., English, they systematically transfer what they have learned in L1 or L2, i.e. the local language and the official language of the learners. In the current case, it is French that negatively affects the pronunciation of students in the English Department of the University of Doba. In fact, language learners make use of old rules where new ones are needed and this brings about mistakes, (Ogah and Amos, 2009, p.140). Another characteristic of the rendition of the sound sequence ‘ou’ is the spelling pronunciation. In other words, students pronounce ‘ou’ as it appears. This takes us to Kouega (2008, p. 119) who observes that « when on the other hand, spelling pronunciation underlies a rendering; this rendering tends to be common in both FrancoE and CamE ». FrancoE and CamE stand for « Francophone English and Cameroon L2 English of Anglophone speakers », respectively. The poor performance of EFL learners may also be explained by the fact that « pronunciation instruction had often been neglected in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes » (Pardede, 2018, p.143). Similarly, the problem of pronunciation faced by EFL learners may be explained by the fact that pronunciation is often not addressed systematically in instruction (Levis, 2005, p.369). In addition, some teachers do not have training in teaching pronunciation (Derwing & Munro, 2005, p.379). And the consequence of this is the lack of self-confidence in the learners.

In other respects, the statistics of the rendition of ‘ou’ by students per word is presented and it is displayed in Table 3.

Ou	Word number	Learners’ rendition	Learners’ number	Percentage
	10	/u/	4	2.38%
	9	/u/	20	11.90%
	8	/u/	65	38.69%
	7	/u/	50	29.76%
	6	/u/	11	6.54%
	5	/u/	3	1.78%
	4	/u/	3	1.78%

	3	/u/	5	2.97%
	2	/u/	3	1.78%
	1	/u/	1	0.59%
	0	/u/	3	1.78%
Total			168	100%

Table 3: Recapitulation of the rendition of ‘ou’ by students (personal elaboration).

The data in Table 3 indicate that one hundred and thirty-five (135) students, i.e. twenty plus sixty-five plus fifty, representing 80.35 % of students out of one hundred and sixty-eight (168) realized ‘ou’ as /u/ in most of the lexical items proposed for reading. Indeed, twenty students (20), i.e. (2.38 %) rendered it by /u/ in nine words out of ten. Sixty-five (65), representing (38.69 %) of them pronounced it the same way in eight (8) words out of ten (10); fifty (50), i.e. (29.76 %) realized ‘ou’ by /u/ in seven (7) words also out of ten.

On the other hand, twenty-nine students (29), that is to say (17.26 %), are wrongly inconsistent in the realization of the vowel sequence ‘ou’. Actually, eleven (11) students, representing 6.54 %, rendered it by /u/ in six (6) words out of ten; five (5), i.e. (2.97 %), pronounced it the same way in three words. Three (3) students (1.78 %) pronounced ‘ou’ as /u/ in five words out of ten. The same realization of the focused vowel cluster was also heard from three participants in four words. In addition, three students uttered ‘ou’ as /u/ in two lexical items out of ten. It was noticed that one student pronounced also /u/ in only one word. Finally three participants did not articulate ‘ou’ as /u/, which means those students pronounced it either correctly or in another incorrect way. The various ways in which, students rendered ‘ou’ include /aʊ/, /ɔ:/, and /a/. The majority of students inappropriately used those renditions. Very few students pronounced ‘ou’ correctly, and this is in a very few words. For instance, student 1, student 9, student 11, student 30, student 33, student 34 student 43, student 48, student 70, student 86, student 107, student 118, student 119, student 136, and student 152 rendered it by /ɔ:/ in word *ought*. In the same way, very few students rendered ‘ou’ by /aʊ/ only in *doubt*.

All the various mispronunciations of ‘ou’ show that students of English in the University of Doba have poor performance in terms of English pronunciation. This poor pronunciation might be attributed to lack of permanent practice of English and limited opportunity of exposure to English as a Foreign Language. To improve learners’ pronunciation, some ideas have been proposed:

imitation of teacher or recorded model of sounds, words and sentences; recording of learner speech, contrasted with native model; systematic explanation and instruction (including details of the structure and movement of parts of the mouth); imitation drills: repetition of sounds, words and sentences; choral repetition of drills; varied repetition of drills (varied speed, volume, mood); learning and performing dialogues (as with drills, using choral work, and varied speed, volume, mood); learning by heart of sentences, rhymes, jingles; jazz chants; tongue twisters, and self-correction through listening to recordings of own speech. Ur (1996, p. 54)

2.2. Pronunciation of ‘ou’ on the basis of the 10L system of transcription and Students’ pronunciation of ‘ou’ contrasted with RP

This section presents the pronunciation of ‘ou’ in conformity with Received Pronunciation on the one hand, and students’ pronunciation of ‘ou’ contrasted with RP on the other hand.

Ou	Words	RP
	Could	/kʊd/
	Doubt	/daʊt/
	Ought	/ˈɔ:t/
	Polygamous	/pəˈlɪgəməs/
	Pour	/ˈpɔ:/
	Bought	/bɔ:t/
	Courageous	/kəˈreɪdʒəs/
	Righteous	/ˈraɪfəs/
	South	/saʊθ/
	Cousin	/ˈkʌsn/

Table 4: pronunciation of ‘ou’ in conformity with Received Pronunciation (personal elaboration).

Based on RP Model, the data shown in Table 4 demonstrate that the vowel sequence ‘ou’ has several possibilities of rendition. An attentive look at the table shows that out of 10 words, ‘ou’ is rendered into five (5) different ways, i.e., /ʊ/, /aʊ/, /əs/, and /ɔ:/. According to Ngaidandi (2021, p. 222), the sound sequence ‘ou’ is rendered into seven (7) possible ways. These include /ɔ:/, /aʊ/, /ʊ/, /ə/, /ʌ/, /u:/, and /əʊ/. These various renditions of ‘ou’ can be found in the words below as examples:

- /ɔ:/: bought, sought, ought, pour, course, etc.
- /aʊ/: doubt, boundary, council, outside, count, etc.
- /ʊ/: could, should, would, moustache, etc.
- /ə/: parlour, polygamous, porous, ridiculous, righteous
- /ʌ/: country, couple, courage, rough, tough, etc.
- /u:/: coup, pouf, through, mousse, etc.
- /əʊ/: poultry, poultice, etc.

As mentioned above, the rendition of ‘ou’ by the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba is presented together in the same table with RP- based pronunciation for the ease of comparison.

Ou	Words	Students’ pronunciation	Received Pronunciation
	Could	/kuld/	/kʊd/
	Doubt	/kut/	/daʊt/
	Ought	/ut/	/ˈɔ:t/
	Polygamous	/pəlɪgamus/	/pəˈlɪgəməs/
	Pour	/pur/	/ˈpɔ:/
	Bought	/but/	/bɔ:t/
	Courageous	/kuradʒus/	/kəˈreɪdʒəs/
	Righteous	/raitus/	/ˈraɪfəs/
	South	/sut/	/saʊθ/
	Cousin	/kusin/	/ˈkʌsn/

Table 5: Students’ pronunciation of ‘ou’ contrasted with RP (personal elaboration).

Data contained in Table 5 clearly reveal that the First Year-Students in the English Department of the University of Doba have a unique way of rendering the vowel cluster ‘ou’, i.e. /u/ and it is an incorrect pronunciation. This rendition of ‘ou’ can be traced back to the

influence of French, which is one of the official languages of Chad, the country of the population involved in this research work. The fourth column of the table presents the RP-based rendition of ‘ou’ in various words. Indeed, it is pronounced /ʊ/ in *could*, /aʊ/ in *doubt* and *south*, /ɔ:/ in *ought* and *bought* and *pour*, /ə/, in *polygamous*, *righteous* and in the final syllable of *courageous*, and /ʌ / in *cousin*. In ten words, there are five possible realizations of ‘ou’ in RP while in the students’ pronunciation of the same vowel sequence, there is only one pronunciation, i.e. /u/ regardless of the environment in which ‘ou’ falls. In the light of the data presented in Table 5, there is a plurality of the realization of ‘ou’ in RP. The inconsistency in the pronunciation of English sound is a factor responsible for the poor performance of learners of English as a Foreign Language.

To my knowledge, in RP, ‘ou’ is pronounced /ʊ/ in monosyllabic words when it is followed by ‘ld’ as in *could*, *should*, and *would*.

This vowel cluster is realized /aʊ/ in monosyllabic words in which it represents a strong vowel sound like in *house*, *out*, *found*, *mouth*, *shout*, *proud*, *bounce*. This realization of ‘ou’ also occurs in the first syllable of disyllabic words like *outside*, *boundless*, *lousy*, *proudly*, *mousy*, *council*, *pounder*, *pounding*, *mountain*.

In RP, ‘ou’ is pronounced /ɔ:/ in mono-syllabic words ended either by the consonant cluster /ght/ as in *sought*, *fought*, *ought*, *nought* or in monosyllabic words carrying the liquid /r/ as in *pour* and *course*.

It is realized /ə/ when it is followed by /r/ or /s/ in the last syllable of disyllabic or tri-syllabic words like *parlour*, *righteous*, *nauseous*, *various*, *fabulous*, *vapour*, etc. Other realizations of ‘ou’ that do not obey any precise rule include /ʌ/, /u:/ and /əʊ/. And finally, it can be pronounced /aʊ/ in miscellaneous words like *outsider*, *profound*, *turnabout*, *turnaround*, *doubtfully*, *loudhailer*, *foundation*, *bountiful*, etc.

3. Discussion

Data sourced from the First-Year Students in the English Department of the University of Doba revealed that those Francophone learners of English have poor performance in the realization of the vowel sequence ‘ou’. In fact, 80.35 % of students out of one hundred and sixty-eight (168) uttered ‘ou’ as /u/ in most of the lexical items proposed for reading. This pronunciation is ‘French- induced’ and characterized by spelling pronunciation phenomenon (Safotso 2012, p. 2471 and Kouega 2008, p.119). The poor performance of those students in pronunciation makes them reluctant to speak in English and makes it difficult for them to understand their lecturers’ utterances and other users of the English language and vice-versa. These difficulties reinforce Setter and Jenkins’ (2005, p. 2) opinion according to which pronunciation « plays a vital role in successful communication both productively and receptively ». Similarly Language proficiency is a major determinant of academic success for students (Luzio-Lockett, 1998, p.209; Selvadurai, 1991, p.27). Abdirahman, Fleming & Jacobsen (2013, p. 227).

The rendering of ‘ou’ by learners of the English Department of the University of Doba is very far from RP Model where that vowel sequence is pronounced in seven (7) possible ways. Although only a small proportion, some learners successfully pronounced the sound sequence of focus in some words. Despite the poor performance of those learners in English pronunciation, there is a positive attitude in those students towards English pronunciation improvement. This was explained by the fact that the latter have a remarkable interest in Phonetics lectures. This positive attitude towards Phonetics lectures means that the students were ready to do their best if they were given opportunity to improve their pronunciation. Dörnyei, (1998, p.117) recognized that motivation influences the rate of success of language learning. In the same vein, Yousofi and Naderfarjad’ (2015, p. 249) showed that motivation correlated significantly with EFL learners' pronunciation skill.

Conclusion

The present paper has examined the pronunciation of the vowel sequence ‘ou’ by the First-Year Students in the English Department of the University of Doba in comparison with Received Pronunciation (RP), uncovering thus, the performance of the respondents in terms of pronunciation and the factors that are responsible for the pronunciation of English by those respondents. The First-Year Students in the English Department of the University of Doba, in their great majority rendered ‘ou’ by a unique way, i.e. /u/ while in RP, it is realized into seven (7) possible ways. This ‘frenchified’ pronunciation indicates that learners of English of the University of Doba have poor performance in pronunciation and a wrong pronunciation misleads the audience. Thornbury (2006, p. 185) strongly stated that « faulty pronunciation is one of the most common causes of misunderstanding ». In addition to the influence of French, the inappropriate pronunciation of English by those francophone learners might be due to lack of focus on the teaching of pronunciation by the teachers of English in secondary schools. In order to minimise the problem of pronunciation, which is a hindrance to communication, teachers are encouraged to devote time to the teaching of pronunciation in any area of English language teaching. Furthermore, to overcome pronunciation problems faced by learners, an intensive practice via enough exposure to English would be an efficient solution. Thus, this would enable students to perform more effectively in oral communication as well as in academic environment and in other contexts (Levis, 2005, p.369).

Learners are advised to have a look at the transcription of words in dictionaries and to practise English orally and this should be intensive. The establishment of language laboratory in the English Department would also be of great utility for EFL learners. Finally, Clear teaching of English vowel articulation should be done focusing on the comparative realization of ‘ou’ in English and in French. This should be followed by a series of practical exercises, showing students that contrarily to French, in which the vowel cluster ‘ou’ is pronounced in a unique way, in English that vowel sequence is articulated in several ways.

This study was not carried out without difficulties. Indeed, participants were hesitant to participate in the reading activity. In addition, it was difficult for the researchers to transcribe students’ productions as some of them could not clearly articulate certain sounds. A methodological limitation is the restriction of the research population to only one level, which is not really representative.

Though, this work is restricted to only one vowel sequence (ou), there is a hope that it would provide language researchers with information about the way in which ‘ou’ is pronounced by the First Year- Students in the English Department of the University of Doba, contributing thus, to the literature of Francophone English. In addition, this research endeavour would contribute to the improvement of spoken productions of learners of EFL if pedagogical advice and the recommendations made here are taken into account. It is hoped that future studies will focus on other aspects of francophone English, such as the examination of connected or spontaneous speech through structured interviews or group discussions to show whether the patterns observed in reading tasks persist in uncontrolled communication, acoustic studies, etc.

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Appendix: Informed Consent

REPUBLIQUE DU TCHAD

PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

PRIMATURE

MINISTRE DE L'ENSEIGNEMENT SUPERIEUR, DE LA
RECHERCHE SCIENTIFIQUE
ET DE LA FORMATION PROFESSIONNELLE

SECRETARIAT D'ETAT

SECRETARIAT GENERAL

UNIVERSITE DE DOBA

SECRETARIAT GENERAL

FACULTE DES LETTRES, ARTS ET SCIENCES HUMAINES

UNITE – TRAVAIL –
PROGRES
وحدة – عمل – تقدم



جمهورية تشاد

رئاسة الجمهورية

رئاسة الوزراء

وزارة للتعليم العالي والبحث العلمي وتكوين المهني

لمادة الدولة

الأساتذة العامة

جامعة دوبا

الأساتذة العامة

كلية الآداب، الفنون والعلوم الإنسانية

N° _____ /UD/FLASH/2024 ج/د/ك/أ/ب/ع/ق/د/أ

May 2019

Paper Title: *The rendering of the vowel cluster ‘ou’ by EFL learners in the English Department of the University of Doba (2018-2019).*

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INFORMED CONSENT

You are voluntarily making a decision on whether or not to consent your participation in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to consent to participate, having read and understood the information. Your signature also certifies that you have had an adequate opportunity to participate in reading task. You will be given a copy of this consent to keep.

I, ALLADOUM Faustin, class delegate of Level-One Student in the English Department of the University of Doba, consent the participation in this study and give our permission for any results from this study to be used in any report or research paper, or verbal presentation, on the

understanding that confidentiality will be preserved. We understand that we may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice. If so, we are ready to participate in the reading task.

Signature [Signature]..... Date 07/05/2019.....

We have explained the nature and the procedures involved in the study to which students have consented to participate and we have answered all the questions. In our judgment, the students have voluntarily accepted to participate in this research study.

Researchers: Date 07/05/2019

Ndikoua Ngaidandi [Signature]
Issa Djimet [Signature]

My signature as witness certifies that the students signed this content form in my presence as their voluntary act and deed.

MEUSNGAR GEDEON: Vice-Dean of the Faculty of the Letters, Arts and Human Sciences, University of Doba, Chad.

Signature of witness [Signature]
Date 07 mai 2019



Thank for considering taking part in this study.