

Language Transfer in Arabic-speaking ELLs



Arabic-speaking ELLs may struggle to hear and produce certain sounds in English. These struggles will carry over to reading and writing. The difficulties and information presented here is highly dependent on the variety of Arabic that the student speaks and will vary from student to student.

ARABIC

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Consonant Sounds

ENGLISH

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Consonant Sounds

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES

p

The 'p' sound does not exist in native Arabic words. 'p' is therefore often replaced with 'b' in loanwords. There is some variation on pronunciation though is written as 'b' in most contexts.

pet → **bet**

pit → **bit**

v

The 'v' sound does not exist in native Arabic words. 'v' is therefore often replaced with 'f' in loanwords. There is some variation on pronunciation though is written as 'f' in most contexts.

vast → **fast**

vine → **fine**

ch

The 'ch' sound does not exist in native Arabic words. 'ch' is therefore often pronounced as 'sh'.

watch → **wash**

chew → **shoe**

th

The "th" sounds (the two different sounds in 'bath' and 'bathe') are the least frequent sounds in Standard Arabic. Many dialects replace them with a 't', 'd', 's', or 'z'.

they → **day**
zay

thin → **tin**
sin

ng

The 'ng' sound does not exist in native Arabic words. Students may pronounce this sound as 'n' or as 'n' followed by 'g'. Students may write words with 'ng' as they pronounce them.

sing → **sin**
sin-g

singer → **sin-ger**

cc

Arabic speakers pronouncing English blends (consonant clusters) with 3 consonants may "break it up" by inserting a short vowel between the consonants.

sprite → **sibrite**

asked → **askid**

r

The English 'r' sound does not exist in Arabic. Arabic uses the rolled (trilled) 'r'. The English 'r' may be difficult to pronounce and students may therefore use the trilled 'r' in its place.