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Research Article

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Abstract

Diphthongs are double vowel sounds made by combining two vowels in the same syllable. During their articulation in the oral cavity, the first vowel sound glides onto the next vowel from one position of the mouth to another within the same syllable. That's why they are heard as single-vowel phonemes by listeners. Because of a gliding movement in their articulation, most learners find them difficult to articulate and understand them at first. Hence, they can be tricky sounds to master for non-native speakers. The aim of this research is to explore the perceptibility of North American English diphthongs (NAE), which are /aʊ, oʊ, eɪ, ɔɪ, aɪ/ by Turkish English language teachers. A pre-test will be used to measure the perception of them in vocabulary items, which will be given to 30 Turkish English language teachers in a five scale multiple choice tests. The participants will be asked to choose the correct option. Then, a three-hour implicit and explicit teaching will be conducted by doing practices in a variety of exercises in the classroom. After the elapse of two weeks, the same pre-test will be administrated to the participants as a post-test. A comparison and contrast of the two tests results will be made to find out the existence and degrees of the perceptibility of the diphthongs in vocabulary items by Turkish English language teachers.

Keywords: diphthong, monophthong, long vowel, vowel length, perception

1. Introduction

The aim of this study is to make an inquiry about the perception of diphthongs by Turkish English teachers. The written and auditory perception of diphthongs is the primary concern of this study. American English diphthongs will be focused on thorough the study. They are /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /oʊ/, /aʊ/. In British English, there are three more diphthongs ending with (ə) schwa: They are /ɪə/, /eə/ and /ʊə/. These are not in the scope of this research.

Pronunciation is the prerequisite of an intelligent communication. It is a significant item of language that makes our speech comprehensible and clear to native speakers (Varol, 2012, p.1). It has always been a crucial topic for non-native learners. Accent of a speaker gives clues about

his/ her communication abilities. If one likes to speak near native like, proficiency in pronunciation is crucial in addition to other disciplines like fluency, rhythm and intonation. One of the subtitles of pronunciation is diphthong. Diphthongs are very tricky long vowels for non-natives. There are lots of variables for the difficulty of them for learners. Since they are language specific and unique sounds, learners generally have difficulty in their perception and production.

Similar to language learners, non-native English teachers in Turkey have difficulty in these sounds even if they have taken phonology classes in undergraduate. Pronunciation and speaking functions are underestimated. Instead; Grammar rules and formulas take the primary role in the education system. Language teaching is conducted disregarding the communication abilities just by taking into consideration language rules, structures and forms not the functions of language. It could be shown one of the reasons of misunderstanding of diphthongs. In addition to education policy, there are some other reasons why diphthongs are challenging for Turks: While Turkish words are written as they are pronounced and pronounced as they are written (Balpınar, 2006, p.7), the pronunciation of English words aren't related to their orthography at times. This is another reason of difficulty. Turkish learners first perceive the written forms of language in their minds. Orthography has a significant effect on Turks since Turkish is an orthographic while English is not. Another cause is the diphthongs' language specific features. In Turkish sound system there isn't diphthong while they appear in English. They are language specific long vowels that don't appear in Turkish. Turkish language learners aren't acquainted with these sounds. They aren't enough familiar with auditory and written inputs of diphthongs. The reasons above prevent Turks from becoming near native like speakers.

1.1. Literature Review

Some other linguists conducted studies about diphthongs from different point of views in Turkey. Demirezen (2005, p.72) examined the /ou/ diphthong vowel and /ɔ:/ long vowel. He said that mispronunciation of these sounds gives harm to communicative competence of teacher trainees and their students but it is possible to remedy errors by means of exercise. He arranged different kinds of activities like corpus presentations, minimal pairs, tongue twisters, recognition exercises, reading aloud, dialogues, idioms, songs etc. to cure the fossilized diphthong /ou/. The activities provide learners with a native-like accent.

Albağlar (2015) conducted a study with twenty all preparatory school students at the Middle East Technical University in Ankara/ Turkey to analyze Turkish university level EFL learners' pronunciation of the diphthongs and triphthongs in English. He divided learners into two groups: First pre-intermediate and the second is advanced level of English learners. Target diphthong and triphthong sounds were selected as stimuli. Authentic sample sentences in which target sounds were embedded were given to the learners. They were asked to read these sentences. The utterances were recorded for 3 times one week apart from each other. In the stimuli different kinds of activities were used like 'read aloud, blank filling, word pronunciation'. The collected data was scored by two native speakers according to a likert-scale prepared beforehand. At the end of the study it was seen that there was a strong relation between pre-intermediate group's, advanced group's proficiency level and pronunciation of diphthongs-triphthongs. There is a correlation between proficiency level and right articulation of target sounds. The orthographic feature was another variable in the study. It was clear that orthography doesn't play a role in correct articulation of diphthongs and triphthongs.

Demircioğlu (2013) studied on the pronunciation problems for Turkish learners in articulating of the diphthongs in English learning. It was a descriptive study that gives the reasons of inaccurate articulations. It was like a leading lesson for the learners who would like to improve their pronunciation skills of diphthongs. He developed a new technique. By putting your forefinger on your closed rounded lips, one can practice the diphthongs and see lip's movements with the help of tongue. He explained it with an example: Try to make /aʊ/ sound your tongue, forefinger and lips on the mentioned position. You will see that on the gliding sound /ʊ/, your tongue will push your lips thorough your finger. It means that if it happens, you articulate the diphthong correctly. He said that thanks to pronunciation practices, it is possible to improve articulation skills.

2. The analysis of diphthongs

2.1. Views on diphthongs

There are many descriptions of diphthongs made by different researchers. Diphthong is a combination of two vowels which is considered as the same syllable. (Dardjowidjojo, 2009, p. 33). To construct a diphthong, a vowel plus another vowel need to be in the same syllable at once. It is formed with two different vowels. Ogden made another definition: Diphthongs are monosyllabic vowels which have two obviously different points, one at the start and one at the end (2009, p. 64). It starts with a vowel giving the stress on the first sound and ends with another vowel that is less stressed when compared to the first part. Diphthongs are the sounds in which tongue glides from one position to another to form diphthongs (Fromkin, V., et al 2001, p. 693). Tongue and mouth aren't stable in the oral cavity but they are dynamic. There are two types of diphthongs: The ones ending with /ɪ/ and the ones ending with /ʊ/. Turkish learners are more familiar with the eɪ /, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/ diphthongs than /oʊ/ since they have auditory similarities. Demirezen (2019) made another definition. He said that a diphthong is made of two components. By definition and sound structure, diphthongs are a combination of two separate vowel sounds that, when uttered, the first vowel glide through the second vowel forming a single syllable. He placed emphasis on passing from one to another but in the same syllable.

2.2. The lengths of diphthongs

Diphthongs are considered as long vowels because of their length similarities. When compared to long vowels they are longer and generally more stressed. In addition, they are more complex and harder to articulate than short vowels for learners. Figure 1 shows the lengths of diphthongs in oral cavity.

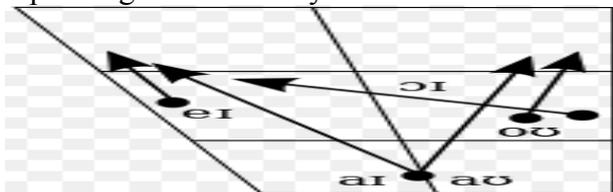


Figure 1: NAE diphthong chart: Adapted from <https://www.google.com.tr/search?q=The+chart+of+North+American+english+diphthongs&>

As seen in the figure, each diphthong has a starting and an ending point. It is the combination of two different vowels in the same syllable. While the journey from one vowel to another is long in diphthong /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /aʊ/, it is shorter in some of them like /eɪ/ and /oʊ/. The shorter slide may be less visible since the glide from one vowel to another is not as obvious as the longer ones.

Non-native English teachers have errors in common. They generally omit or disregard the second part of the diphthongs since the second vowel is less stressed than the first part. It causes the mispronunciation of diphthongs. They try to find non-native solutions to this matter like totally omitting the second vowel and making the first vowel more stressed and longer. The examples below have been drawn from the four hours training course with the teachers who have taken part in this study.

English form /Turkish form	English form/ Turkish form
home /həʊm/ /həm/	doubt/daʊt/ /dabt/
go /gəʊ/ /gə/	clown/claʊn/ /clavn/
break /breɪk/ /bre:k/	boy /bɔɪ/ /bo:j/
toast /təʊst/ /təst/	found/faʊnd/ /fand/
brown /braʊn/ /bravn/	bow/bəʊ/ /bav/
promote /prəməʊt/ /prəmə:t/	waste/weɪst/ /west/

When the examples are examined, it is seen that instead of uttering the second part of diphthong, participants have omitted the second vowel and they sometimes make the first vowel more stressed and longer.

2.3. Research Questions

The starting point of this study is to show whether diphthongs are difficult for teachers in Turkey or not and if they are challenging, which ones are harder than the others. Based on these unanswered questions, the research questions that will guide this study have been formed as follows:

- 1-Is it difficult to perceive American English diphthongs by non-native Ministry of Education English teachers?
- 2-Which diphthongs are difficult for teachers than the other ones in auditory activities?
- 3-Is there a need for treatment teaching after post-test?
- 4-Is there a significant difference between overall pre-test and post-test results?

3.Method

3.1. Setting and participants

This study includes 30 non-native English teacher participants who are working at the schools of Ministry of Education (MoNE) at secondary school and high school levels. The experience of them differs from each other from one year to twenty-four years.

Table 1. *The school type of participants*

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Secondary School Testees	22	73.3	72.3	73.3
High School Testees	8	26.7	26.7	26.7
Total	30	100	100	100

Pre-test and post-test design were adopted to conduct the study since it is appropriate for such kind of a study. As a pre-test, a beforehand prepared written-auditory test was applied to see the auditory perception of diphthong by teachers. After the collected data was analyzed, 4 hours training course was conducted by focusing the most challenging diphthongs according to pre-test results. Audio articulation model (Demirezen, 2010) was used as a method since it is used to rehabilitate the pronunciation mistakes and fossilizations. It is based on repetition activities. The procedure is as follows:

1. Identifying the pronunciation-problem causing phoneme,
2. Giving a general information and arranging a corpus of words about 50-100 vocabulary items and minimal pairs,
3. Tongue twisters, idioms, proverbs, mechanical drills, listening activities, songs,
4. Assignment (phonetic transcription activities, online tests, finding words with diphthongs in authentic works etc.).

Two weeks break was taken not to interfere with the participants' pre-test answers with the post-test. Their familiarity with the questions was attempted to be minimized. This time pre-test was applied as a post-test without making any change. A comparison was made to see the difference between the pre and post-test.

3.2. Instruments

Two types of instruments were used to collect data from the participants. An auditory test and demographic information form were used to get data.

3.2.1. Written-auditory test

To observe auditory perception of diphthongs, 25 multiple choice auditory test questions with 5 options were prepared. A committee of three experts examined the test items and made the required modifications. The target vocabulary items were determined after a survey of English course books of MoNE that were used in secondary school and high school level. They all were retrieved from the course books like 'Moonlight, Upswing, Silver Lining and Count me in' etc.'. The most frequent words were preferred as stimulus. In addition, the frequency of the words was checked on 'Coca' that is an American English Corpus to find the commonly used words in English. After these stages, the test items were picked as follows.

/eɪ/	/ɔɪ/	/aʊ/
Vocation	Boiler	Founder
Waste	Spoil	Outer

Unable	Joiner	Ground
Break	Avoid	Rounded
Participation	Noisy	Clown
/aɪ/	/oo/	https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/
Identical	Globe	https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/
Exercise	Evoke	
Fighter	Slow	
Reply	Promote	
Guidance	Approach	

3.2.2. Demographic information form

Since it is just a part of an ongoing M.A. thesis study, demographic information form consists of items like gender, educational background, the types of school participants are working now, their interest in diphthongs and their experience etc.

3.2.3. Data collection and analysis

The collected data with the help of written-auditory test and demographic information form were analyzed through the SPSS 23 version. Different statistics were conducted like descriptive statistics and paired samples t-test. Descriptive statistics was administered to observe total success percentage of the teachers in auditory test and paired sample t-test was done to see whether there is a meaningful difference between pre-test and post-test results. MONE assessment scale has been adopted to evaluate results. The cut point has been indicated as 85. If the results are 85 and more, it is regarded as excellent and successful.

Table 2. *Assessment scale of MONE in Turkey*

Numerical	Letter grade	100-point system	Description
5	A	(85-100)	Excellent
4	B	(70-84)	Good
3	C	(55-69)	Fair
2	D	(45-54)	Satisfactory
1	E	(25-44)	Unsatisfactory
0	F	(0-24)	Poor

Note. (Retrieved from Education system Turkey, 2010, p.12)

4. Results

This section will emphasize on the results of collected data with the help of written -auditory test instruments in pre-test and post- test. The collected data is a quantitative one which consists of numerical results and percentages. The research questions that guide this study will be answered in tables and the interpretations will take place to illustrate and explain the tables. The following questions will guide this study.

1. Is it difficult to perceive American English diphthongs by non-native Ministry of Education English teachers?
2. Which diphthongs are difficult for teachers than the other ones in auditory test?

3. Is there a need for treatment teaching after post-test?
4. Is there a significant difference between overall pre-test and post-test results?

Research questions which will guide this study have been tried to be answered in Table 4; whether it is challenging to perceive American English diphthongs by non-native MONE English teachers or not, which diphthongs are hard to pronounce for Turkish English teachers, if there is a need for remedial teaching after 4 hours training with the testees.

Table 3. *Auditory pre-test and post-test results*

Variables	Pre-test Mean (5)	Pre-test correct %	Post-test mean (5)	Post-test correct %
/oo/	2.6	52	4.03	80.6
/ai/	3.66	73.2	4.73	94.6
/ei/	4.1	82	4.86	97.2
/oi/	4.36	87.2	4.76	95.2
/ao/	4.5	90	4.93	98.6
Total score	3.84	76.88	4.66	93.24

When the overall correct percentage of diphthongs are examined, the score is 76,88% that is regarded as good according to the MoNE assessment scale while posttest is 93,24% which is evaluated as excellent in MoNE assessment chart. Before the training course, non-native English teachers had difficulty in perceiving diphthongs since the result is less than cut point 85. However, training with the participants worked and post-test score turned into 93,24% with 16,36 points increase.

When the pre-test scores are studied, the sequence of diphthongs from the least scored to the highest ones are as follows: /oo/, /ai/, /ei/, /oi/, /ao/. The scores of /oo/, /ai/, /ei/ are less than 85%. They are 52%, 73,2% and 82% respectively. The least scored diphthong proves to be /oo/ which is constructed with the combination of two round vowel sounds /o/ and /u/. The results are in line with another research. 'The diphthong /oo/ proves to be challenging for Turkish learners no matter what their proficiency level is' (Albağlar,2015, p.86). Regardless of their proficiency level, Turkish learners have difficulty in uttering diphthong /oo/.

When the post-test overall score is examined, the total success is 93,24. It is a valid result according to MONE assessment scale. It can be inferred that there is not a need for treatment since it the score is higher than cut point 85.

4. Is there a significant difference between overall pre-test and post-test results?

A comparison has been done to see whether a significant difference has occurred after training course or not by discussing the pre-test and post-test results. This comparison is evidence of the effect of training between two tests. The results will be discussed according to the generated tables.

Table 4. *The correlation between pre-test and post-test results*

Outcome	Pre-test		Post-test		n	95% CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	M	SD	M	SD				
Pre-test and post-test	19.23	4.80	23.33	2.10	30	-5.89, -2.30	-4.67*	29

* $p < .05$.

The results prove that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test results since the 2-tailed value is less than 0,05. When both of the results are studied, it is clear that there is an increase in the pre-test score. When it was 76, 92% in pre-test, it turned 93,24% after training. The overall success of the participants increased after the training. It can be said that the training between the tests worked and non-native English teachers improved in the auditory perception of diphthongs.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary aim of this study is to reveal the auditory perception level of non-native English teachers in Turkey and the challenging diphthongs for them. There are a number of reasons causing this difficulty like linguistic differences and teachers' awareness of diphthongs etc. This research study reveals the importance of mastering diphthongs in successful L2 oral communication. It stresses that Turkish EFL teachers fall short in articulating English diphthongs by being under the heavy influence of their mother tongue, Turkish. In this study, the comparison between tests was made to see the efficiency of training.

This study revealed that not all but some of the diphthongs are troublesome for teachers like /oo/. This diphthong is a bit different from the other ones since tongue has a slight upward movement in oral cavity. It is a hard to recognize this slight glide from /o/ through/ʊ/ vowel. Since both of them are rounded ones, it is hard to notice the transition because of the similarity. In addition, /oo/ diphthong doesn't appear in Turkish. Lack of diphthongs in Turkish vowel inventory is another reason of difficulty (Yavuz & Balci, 2011, p. 39). Since the first vowel is generally more stressed than the second part in English, participants may not be aware of the second part. Turkish learners sometimes disregard the second vowel by omitting and making it slightly or hardly audible by not stressing the second part. English language teachers in Turkey generally do not stress on the second vowel. Participants tend to stress the first vowel and omit the second part since it causes a neurological fatigue to pronounce another vowel after the first vowel. As a result, it causes non-native like communication and an interaction far from an intelligible one. Edwards and Zampini (2008, p.72) stated that language specific sounds that just appear in foreign language different from mother tongue prove to be easier for the learners since they are more obvious and different from the other sounds. However, this study has proved the opposite of this hypothesis since Turkish sound system is lack of /ʊ/ and this deficiency makes perception and production of diphthongs difficult. The interference of L1 on foreign language is another reason. While learning a new language, learners construct target language with L1 structures (Selinker, 1972). They are inclined to adopt and go on L1 habits. Non-native English teachers can pronounce similar diphthongs correctly, while they can't produce the ones that are totally different from L1. Turkish sound system lacks /oo/ and this deficiency makes the perception and production of diphthongs difficult for the participants. Another effect is orthography. Orthographic reasons hinder learners from pronouncing

diphthongs accurately (Albağlar, 2015). /ɔʊ/ diphthong is a sample for this error. Participants would like to see two vowels in the same syllable side by side. The reason of failure in /ɔʊ/ diphthong is learners' previous habits in L1 and their intent to see two vowels in written form. If one insists on making pronunciation mistakes, then mistakes turn into errors, errors turn into fossilizations. Even if it is hard to rehabilitate fossilization in speech, it is possible to cure it with repetition activities. Audio articulation method played an important role while curing them. When one emphasizes on correct pronunciation, he/she can improve her pronunciation skills. The importance of accurate and meaningful input is undeniable. Pronunciation is not for the sake of it. It is for the sake of an intelligible and clear communication.

It is surprising that even if /aʊ/ diphthong doesn't appear in Turkish sound system, teachers are good at discriminating it via written and vocal inputs since /a/ and /ʊ/ vowel sounds are clearer and more obvious than when compared to /ɔʊ/ diphthongs. The glide from /a/ to /ʊ/ is firm and visible.

Acoustically similar but not totally the same sounds in Turkish and English like /aɪ/, /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/ are high scored according to the results of the tables. The similarity causes success in these diphthongs since they are all more than 85% cut point.

Based on the findings, it is not wrong to assert that if one wants to be a near native like and good at communication skills, he/she needs to pay attention to subheads of pronunciation like diphthongs and language specific sounds.

6. Comments and Further Suggestions

The questionnaire used in this study was the written-auditory test. This test had two types of input: Visual and auditory. It provided teachers with a better understanding of the diphthongs since they had the chance of both seeing and hearing the input simultaneously. The total success of the participants in auditory pre-test is 76, 88. On the other hand, it turned into 93, 24% after training course. It is claimed as good and excellent respectively according to assessment scale. There is a significant difference between the tests. The easiest one in perception is /aʊ/ since it is easy to hear the glide from /a/ into /ʊ/ vowel in auditory input. The transition is clear and visible to hear. Since the gliding is very audible and perceptible, it is easy to find the right option.

This study was conducted with non-native English teachers who still work in secondary and high schools of MONE. The results of the study are just concerned with them but the scope would be extended to primary school and university levels. The number of the participants is 30 and the quantity is enough for a scientific study but the rise in the number of participants would increase the validity and the reliability of the study evenly so it is possible to expand the number of teachers who participate in the research for the following studies

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Appendix A (QUESTIONNAIRE)

You are going to take an auditory test, in which diphthong vocabulary items are inserted in each of the multiple-choice questions. Please pick the right option after hearing the items.

1. In which of the following words is there an /eɪ/ sound?

- a) volcanic
- b) vocabulary
- c) volleyball
- d) vocation
- e) voiceless

2. In which of the following words is there an /aɪ/ sound?

- a) mathematical
- b) practical
- c) identical
- d) magical
- e) dramatically

3. In which of the following words is there an /ɔɪ/ sound?

- a) boiler
- b) bomber
- c) buyer
- d) border
- e) borrow

4. In which of the following words is there an /oʊ/ sound?

- a) glue
- b) gloomy
- c) glove
- d) glorious
- e) globe

5. In which of the following words is there an /ɔɪ/ sound?

- a) spoken
- b) spoil
- c) spoon
- d) sporty
- e) spotlight

6. In which of the following words is there an /aʊ/ sound?

- a) forty
- b) forward
- c) formulate
- d) former
- e) founder

7. In which of the following words is there an /**oo**/ sound?

- a) evoke
- b) elastic
- c) evolve
- d) election
- e) electrical

8. In which of the following words is there an /**ai**/ sound?

- a) example
- b) exercise
- c) excuse
- d) explanation
- e) exam

9. In which of the following words is there an /**oo**/ sound?

- a) prove
- b) somehow
- c) slow
- d) however
- e) housewife

10. In which of the following words is there an /**au**/ sound?

- a) old-fashioned
- b) outer
- c) opener
- d) operation
- e) opposite

11. In which of the following words is there an /**ei**/ sound?

- a) water
- b) watcher
- c) waste
- d) wardrobe
- e) warrior

12. In which of the following words is there an /**oi**/ sound?

- a) jolly
- b) jobless
- c) journey
- d) journal
- e) joiner

13. In which of the following words is there an /aɪ/ sound?

- a)narrator
- b)later
- c)monitor
- d)fighter
- e)grater

14. In which of the following words is there an /oo/ sound?

- a)promote
- b)promise
- c)prominent
- d)prolong
- e)project

15. In which of the following words is there an /eɪ/ sound?

- a)entitle
- b)unable
- c)inactive
- d)inaccurate
- e)unacceptable

16. In which of the following words is there an /eɪ/ sound?

- a)branch
- b)brand
- c)break
- d)bread
- e)breath

17. In which of the following words is there an /aʊ/ sound?

- a)grocery
- b)green
- c)grow
- d)group
- e)ground

18. In which of the following words is there an /ɔɪ/ sound?

- a)advocate
- b)devote
- c)avoid
- d)remote
- e)awake

19. In which of the following words is there an /aɪ/ sound?

- a)air-play
- b)reply
- c)delay
- d)really
- e)overlay

20. In which of the following words is there an /aʊ/ sound?

- a)rounded
- b)routine
- c)rotation
- d)roller
- e)robbery

21. In which of the following words is there an /eɪ/ sound?

- a)particular
- b)participation
- c)part-time
- d)party
- e)partner

22. In which of the following words is there an /oʊ/ sound?

- a)application
- b)approximately
- c)approach
- d)stomach
- e)headache

23. In which of the following words is there an /aʊ/ sound?

- a)clock
- b)clone
- c)closed
- d)clown
- e)clothe

24. In which of the following words is there an /ɔɪ/ sound?

- a)noisy
- b)bossy
- c)greasy
- d)easy
- e)busy

25. In which of the following words is there an /aɪ/ sound?

a)attendance

b)guidance

c)accordance

d)redundancy

e)abondance