

## **The Ability of the Iraqi Undergraduate Students at the University Level to Recognize Homographic Noun –Verb Pairs in English**

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### **Abstract**

This research investigates the problem of recognizing homographic noun-verb pairs (HN-VPs) . HN-VPs are words in which each pair has the same letter writing but with different phonetic transcription , stress position and word class. They are also different in meaning but this matter is not of importance in the present study.

In the present study , three hypotheses are put forward : Firstly , that Iraqi third – Year students at the Department of English/ College of Education/ University of Thi-Qar are more able to recognize HN-VPs grammatically than recognizing them phonetically. Secondly , those students do not recognize that changing the phonetic transcriptions and stress positions on these pairs means changing the word class. Thirdly , they do not make proper progress as they reach the third stage concerning HN-VPs and they have no enough knowledge about their phonetic transcriptions and stress changing on them. Two tests of the recognition type are designed in order to prove the three hypotheses mentioned above . The first test aims at assessing the students' ability to recognize HN-VPs grammatically . The test consists of (20) items and at the end of each sentence , a pair of HN-VPs with their parts of speech are assigned beneath each word , for example [ desert<sub>(n.)</sub> , desert<sub>(v.)</sub> ] . The second test aims at assessing the students' ability to recognize the phonetic transcriptions of HN-VPs and that stress mark changing leads to word class changing . In this test , the (20) items of the first test are given, but the difference lies in the HN-VPs . They are given with only their phonetic transcriptions , for example, [ desert / 'dezət / , desert / de 'z3:t / ] . This research proves That students are more able to recognize HN-VPs grammatically because grammar for those students is rule governed, particularly concerning sentence structures, and the repetition of these rules makes students able to distinguish the correct word class of HN-VPs. It is also proven that it is difficult for those students to recognize the class of HN-VPs phonetically . Knowledge they supposed to have of HN-VPs during their study is not enough to recognize the correct word class of HN-VPs and that stress changes the class of them .

## الملخص

يعالج البحث مشكلة تمييز الالفاظ المتجانسة بالشكل والمختلفة صوتياً . وهي عبارة عن زوج من الكلمات متشابهة من حيث كتابة الحروف ولكنها مختلفة باللفظ ، وموقع النبر ، والتصريف النحوي . وهي مختلفة بالمعنى ولكن هذا ليس ضمن إطار الدراسة الحالية .

هذه الدراسة تتضمن ثلاث فرضيات : اولاً ان الطلبة العراقيين في المرحلة الثالثة قسم اللغة الانكليزية / جامعة ذي قار اكثر قدرة على تمييز الافعال – الاسماء المتجانسة بالشكل والمختلفة بالصوت والتصريف النحوي اكثر منها صوتياً . ثانياً ان هؤلاء الطلبة لا يميزون ان تغيير الكتابة الصوتية وموقع النبر المقطعي على كل زوج يعني تغييراً للتصريف النحوي لها . ثالثاً ان هؤلاء الطلبة لا يحققون التقدم المطلوب عندما يصلون الى المرحلة الثالثة فيما يتعلق بهذه الالفاظ ولا يمتلكون المعرفة اللازمة عن كتابتها الصوتية وتغيير موقع النبر المقطعي عليها . ومن اجل تحقيق الفرضيات الثلاث ، تم تصميم اختبارين . يهدف الاختبار الاول الى تقييم قدرة الطلبة على تمييز الالفاظ المتجانسة بالشكل والمختلفة بالصوت والتصريف النحوي . حيث يتكون الاختبار من ( ٢٠ ) فقرة وفي نهاية كل جملة منها زوج من هذه الالفاظ مع التصريف النحوي لكل كلمة مثل : (n., desert) [desert (n.)] . اما الاختبار الثاني فيهدف الى تقييم قدرة الطلبة على تمييز الكتابة الصوتية للالفاظ المتجانسة وبان تغيير موقع النبر على هذه الالفاظ يؤدي الى تغيير التصريف النحوي لها . في هذا الاختبار ، قدمت فقرات الاختبار الاول نفسها ولكن مع تغيير في زوج الالفاظ المتجانسة الموجودة في اخر كل فقرة . هذا التغيير يتضمن اضافة الكتابة الصوتية من دون التصريف النحوي مثل : desert / 'dezət/ , desert / dɪ'z:t/ . وقد اثبت من خلال هذا البحث ان الطلبة اكثر قدرة على تمييز هذه الالفاظ نحوياً لان علم النحو والتصريف بالنسبة لهؤلاء الطلبة تحكمه قوانين محددة خصوصاً فيما يتعلق ببناء الجمل وبان تكرار هذه القوانين يجعل الطلبة قادرين على تمييز التصريف النحوي الصحيح لهذه الالفاظ . وكذلك اثبت بانه من الصعب على هؤلاء الطلبة تمييز التصريف النحوي الصحيح لهذه الالفاظ صوتياً . ان المعرفة التي يفترض ان يكتسبها الطلبة خلال فترة دراستهم ليست كافية لجعلهم قادرين على تمييز هذه الالفاظ وبان النبر المقطعي يغير التصريف النحوي لها .

## SECTION ONE

### 1.1. Introduction :

Stress for most students is a problematic phenomenon since they are not native speakers of English language . Throughout the researcher's previous experience in teaching university level students, it is noticed that those students find difficulty in pronouncing stressed syllables and recognizing them from unstressed syllables . This problem exceeds if students are asked to recognize two words that are orthographically homonymous, or as they are used in this research , the homographic noun – verb pairs HN-VPs. These pairs have one entry in the dictionary but with different phonetic transcriptions and different word classes. This comes as a result of changing stress mark from nouns to verbs and this cause vowel reduction or lengthening in the syllables of each word pair .

This study aims at knowing the degree of recognition knowledge of the third – year students / Department of English / College of Education / University of Thi – Qar concerning HN-VPs on the grammatical and the phonological levels since they are supposed to be familiar with the basic grammatical rules of nouns and verbs and also they have studied phonetics and phonology at the first and second years . To prove this , three hypotheses are presented :

- 1- Those Iraqi third – year students are more able to recognize HN-VPs grammatically than recognizing them phonologically.

- 2- Those students do not recognize that changing the phonetic transcriptions and stress positions on each pair of HN-VPs means changing the word classes of them .
- 3- Finally, third – year students make no enough progress in grammatical and phonological knowledge of HN-VPs as they reach the third stage .

Two tests are presented . Both are of the recognition type . In the first one (See : Appendix 2) , students are asked to select one word class of the pair , a noun or a verb , that suits the blank position in each sentence . In the second test (See : Appendix 3) , students are asked to choose one word of each pair with its full phonetic transcription . Forty students have made the first grammatical recognition test of HN-VPs and another forty have done the second phonological recognition test of HN-VPs . The total number of students are eighty . The items of the tests have been approved by a jury member <sup>1</sup>.

## **1.2. Homographic Noun – Verb Pairs :**

In this research , the problem of HN-VPs is not only related to phonology , but also to grammar in that the patterns of these pairs establish not only a contrastive relationship between them because of changing stress position from nouns to verbs or vise versa which causes changes in their phonetic transcriptions , but also they establish a contrast in their parts of speech . Gimson (1989 :235-6 ) classifies such a relationship as a "word opposition" . Guierre (1979 : 96) shows that such relationships can be either " v. ~ n. " ( e.g. export ) or by " n. ~ v. " ( e.g. accent ) .

Katamba (1989 : 324 ) and Liberman and Prince ( 1977 : 249-336 ) agree that a theory of stress must take on board the fact that stress is a "relational concept " because a stressed syllable is " more salient than its unstressed one " . They add that stress in HN-VPs shows " a considerable degree of mobility ".

These word pairs are part of disyllabic words . Fudge ( 1984 : 32 ) treats " stress – shift " in HN-VPs as " idiosyncratic " . It is obvious that stress changing affects the "vowel quality ... . Often , the qualitative change takes the form of a reduction of the unstressed vowel" . The other point to be noticed is that some of HN-VPs do not undergo a vowel reduction . However , unstressed syllables as in / 'p3:mit / , / 's3:vei / , / 'ekspo:t / and / 'kondAkt / do not undergo vowel reduction although they lose stress . Finally , these HN-VPs have stress on the first syllable in the cases of verbs .

On the other hand , there are other linguists who look at stress location on HN-VPs as not being a phonological matter only . Chomsky and Halle (1968 : 94 ) point that "stress placement must assign primary stress to the final formative of ... complex verbs ... regardless of whether it contains a string or weak cluster " . Lehman ( 1972 : 252 ) , Lapalomenon ( 1976 : 150-6 ) and Allerton ( 1979 :221) describe stress phenomenon in cases of HN-VPs as being a "superfix" because the contrast in the pronunciations of these pairs is a matter of whether it is a noun or a verb .

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<sup>1</sup>The jury member are :Dr.Wuria Azzaddin Ali (Assistant Professor) , M.A.Zainab Kadhum( Lecturer) and Dr. Raad Al-Nawas ( Assistant Professor).

In the preceding paragraphs , linguists have analyzed HN-VPs from two different angles . These two angles can be considered as two complementary views to describe HN-VPs phonologically and grammatically . Both views are important to give a clear picture of HN-VPs .

Students' ability to recognize HN-VPs grammatically depends largely as Melville (2007 : 1 ) points on their " cognitive processing" or their " neurobiological process ... . Rule – governed knowledge involves the procedural memory system that depends on frontal area in the brain ". Smith (2002 : 1-2) shows in his research that students throughout their study start to recognize that knowledge of their language is rule – governed ,then they formalize the rules concerned to make the right predictions . He also emphasizes the importance of constituents of sentences .

### **1.3. Basic Points Concerning the Test**

Chomsky (1985 :88-91) discusses the problem of "determining" or defining the correct word if it is "identical" in its " physical properties " which distinguish such words . Each of HN-VPs has a " phonemic distinctness " and that what the students have distinguished in the second test but this distinction does not help him to recognize the correct word of each pair because it is difficult for him to know if that phonemic transcription is of a noun or of a verb . In the first test , the case is much easier . The student is more able to recognize the correct word of each pair depending on the grammatical properties of the blank in the sentence and , may be , what precedes or follow that blank . When a student is practicing the second test , there are basic benefits that he can make use of . In the second test , a new practical cognitive process is introduced to the student . There is a mixing between linguistic levels i.e. phonology (HN-VPs are introduced phonetically ) and the syntactic properties that govern the choice of the word ( the phonetic transcription is a part of grammar ) . The student is already familiar with the grammatical rules consequently , the phonetic transcriptions of HN-VPs are rule governed . The second test is an attempt to motivate creativeness of the "analytic thinking " as Goody (1977 : 11 ) and Goody and Watt ( 1963 : 304-45 ) point out.

When a student becomes able to analyze words and finds relations among the language he is studying , he becomes able to create what are called small systems and these are part of larger systems . The student will be able to summarize different details specifically that the phonetic transcriptions of HN-VPs consist of different simple or complex details ( i.e. sounds , stress , syllable or syllables , phonological and morphological changes that the transcribed words contain ) .

The student in the second test is making use of the function of the written language suggested by Goody (Ibid : 78 ) which is " shifting language from the oral to the visual domain " . Phonetic transcriptions of HN-VPs in the second test are dominated not only by pronouncing words but also by the grammatical rules and choosing one of the pairs presented in each item is governed by two dimensions , phonological and syntactic .

## **SECTION TWO**

## 2.1. The Procedure :

### 2.1.1. The Test

1- A sample of ( 80 ) third – year students /English Department/ College of Education / University of Thi –Qar are taken to be tested. They are chosen because they have studied phonetics and phonology and also they are supposed to know the basic grammatical rules related to nouns and noun phrases in addition to verbs and verb phrases ,their types and constituents . They are supposed to be familiar with the phonetic transcriptions of nouns and verbs and with the is suprasegmental mark that distinguishes those pairs which is stress.

2- Two tests are presented . Both are of the recognition type . Each test consists of ( 20 ) items . The first test assesses the students' ability to recognize noun –verb pairs grammatically only . They are asked to select the correct word of each pair . The second test mainly assesses the students' ability to recognize the correct word phonologically .

3- The two tests are used to measure third – year students' knowledge and the progress they have made in their study during the first two years in their college concerning the grammatical or syntactic functions and the phonological properties of nouns and verbs and which of these sides they have made progress in.

4- The examples in the present study and their phonetic transcriptions are taken from the Oxford English Dictionary ( 2005 , [http :/ www. Oup . com .](http://www.Oup.com) ).

5- Verbs in test (1) and (2) are selected in their bare forms and nouns in their singular forms .

### 2.1.2. Discussion and Results :

Below are table (1) and table (2) . They show the students' responses to the two tests :

**Table (1): The Students' Grammatical Recognition of HN–VPs**

Item	Co.	%	Inco.	%
1	30	75	10	25
2	22	55	18	45
3	32	80	8	20
4	18	45	22	55
5	26	65	14	35
6	17	42.5	23	57.5
7	20	50	20	50
8	28	70	12	30
9	19	47.5	21	52.5
10	33	82.5	7	17.5
11	16	40	24	60
12	20	50	20	50
13	22	55	18	45
14	21	52.5	19	47.5
15	25	62.5	15	37.5
16	14	35	26	65

17	17	42.5	23	57.5
18	26	65	14	35
19	30	75	10	25
20	32	80	8	20

**Table (2) :Third – Year Students' Phonological Recognition of HN-VPs**

Item	Co.	%	Inco.	%
1	18	45	22	55
2	11	27.5	29	72.5
3	11	27.5	29	72.5
4	9	22.5	31	77.5
5	14	35	26	65
6	4	10	36	90
7	11	27.5	29	72.5
8	9	22.5	31	77.5
9	6	15	34	85
10	10	25	30	75
11	3	7.5	37	92.5
12	12	30	28	70
13	10	25	30	75
14	14	35	26	65
15	12	30	28	70
16	6	15	34	85
17	13	32.5	27	67.5
18	8	20	32	80
19	16	40	24	60
20	11	27.5	29	72.5

According to the results of the two tests , the following points are noticed :

1- Third – year students/ English Department / College of Education / University of Thi-Qar are more able to recognize the HN-VPs grammatically because of two reasons : First , grammar to most students is related to rules which are easy to be memorized than the phonetic transcriptions of each word in English . Second, which is a consequence to the first reason , is that if we consider words as concepts , then knowledge accumulation to these concepts helps students to distinguish the grammatical rules more than the phonetic transcriptions of those words . This accumulation with the rule application and repetitions leads to strengthen knowledge in the students' minds and this affects their responses in test (1) .

2- The students' responses in test (1) show that they are more able to recognize the correct responses depending on certain grammatical rules such as the blank positions and what precede or follow them . Nouns , for example , are chosen because there are articles , adjectives or prepositions that occur before the blank as in items ( 3, 13,4,8,16,17,10) or the blanks are followed directly by the

main verbs as in (4,8,13) . Verbs , on the other hand ,are preceded by subjective pronouns , (to infinitive) , adverbs as in (7,15,18,20) or they are the main verbs of ( if –clauses) as in (7,9).

3- In test (2) , the students' responses show that they are less able to recognize the correct phonetic transcriptions of the HN-VPs. It also shows that these students have no enough knowledge to recognize that changing stress mark on each pair means changing the word class .

The following are table (3) and table (4) . Table (3) shows the sum of the correct responses (SC.) of the students' grammatical recognition of the HN-VPs and the sum of the incorrect responses (SIC.) and the mean values (M.V.) to each:

**Table (3) :Mean Values of the Third- Year Students' Recognition of the HN-VPs**

SC.	M.V.	SIC.	M.V.
468	23.5	332	16.6

Table (4) below shows (SC.) of the students' phonological recognition of the HN-VPs and the (SIC.) and the (M.V.) to each .

**Table (4) : Mean Values of the Third –Year Students' Recognition of HN-VPs**

SC.	M.V.	SIC.	M.V.
208	10.4	592	29.6

## **SECTION THREE**

### **3.1.Conclusions and Recommendations:**

#### **3.1.1. Conclusions :**

On the basis of the results of the present study , the following conclusions are achieved :

1. Students at the third year are more able to recognize HN-VPs grammatically than recognizing them phonologically although they have studied phonetics and phonology curriculums for two years .
2. Stress phenomenon is a suprasegmental feature .It affects greatly the pronunciation of words and there must be a great emphasis on it . It is part of phonological knowledge that students gain during their study but they do not make proper progress concerning this point .
3. Cognitive ability of the students at the third year of grammatical knowledge of nouns and noun phrases , verbs and verb phrases are more developed than phonological knowledge of HN-VPs .

#### **3.1.2. Recommendations :**

The following points are recommended :

1. The present study proves that phonetics and phonology curriculums do not help in the students' progress to cover all the possible phonological knowledge .

2. There must be a focus on laboratories equipping them with the most developed equipment in the English Departments .

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### **Appendix (1) : A list of Abbreviations .**

HN-VPs Homographic Noun-Verb Pairs

CO. Correct

ICO. Incorrect

SC. Sum of Correct Responses

SIC. Sum of Incorrect Responses

M.V. Mean Values .

### **Appendix (2):A copy of the Grammatical Recognition Test:**

Q/ Select the correct answer from the two choices given at the end of each sentence. Choose the word class that suits each blank:

1.Somalia is mostly a-----It is covered by sand. [desert<sub>(n.)</sub>,desert<sub>(v.)</sub>]

2.The local MP will start the race and-----the prizes. [present<sub>(n.)</sub>, present<sub>(v.)</sub>]

3.I have nothing more to say on the----- . [subject<sub>(n.)</sub>, subject<sub>(v.)</sub>]

4.The armed-----advanced towards the capital. [rebel<sub>(v.)</sub>,rebel<sub>(n.)</sub>]

5.She would not-----herself to look at them. [permit<sub>(n.)</sub>,permit<sub>(v.)</sub>]

6.There was a growing criticism of the government's-----of the war. [conduct<sub>(v.)</sub>,conduct<sub>(n.)</sub>]

7.If you-----a gas leak, do not strike a match or even turn on an electric light. [suspect<sub>(n.)</sub>,suspect<sub>(v.)</sub>]

8.A recent-----showed 75% of those questioned were in favor of the plan. [survey<sub>(v.)</sub>,survey<sub>(n.)</sub>]



9. What rate will I get if I-----my dollars into euros? [convert<sub>(v.)</sub> , convert<sub>(n.)</sub> ]
10. This is where the fruit packaged for----- . [export<sub>(n.)</sub> , export<sub>(v.)</sub>]
11. The women-----their eyes with make-up. [accent<sub>(n.)</sub> , accent<sub>(v.)</sub>]
12. Market researchers often-----the population on the basis of age and social class. [segment<sub>(v.)</sub> , segment<sub>(n.)</sub>]
13. Legal questions rarely exist in the-----; they are based on real cases. [abstract<sub>(n.)</sub> , abstract<sub>(v.)</sub>]
14. It says on the label '-----of France'. [produce<sub>(v.)</sub> , produce<sub>(n.)</sub>]
15. They sought advice on how to-----a more positive image of their company. [project<sub>(v.)</sub> , project<sub>(n.)</sub>]
16. She suffered years of mental-----after her son's death. [torment<sub>(n.)</sub> , torment<sub>(v.)</sub>]
17. He was hoping for some lively political-----at the meeting. [discourse<sub>(v.)</sub> , discourse<sub>(n.)</sub>]
18. The course allows students to-----at their own speed. [progress<sub>(v.)</sub> , progress<sub>(n.)</sub>]
19. There is a contrast between lived reality and-----hold in the mind. [construct<sub>(n.)</sub> , construct<sub>(v.)</sub>]
20. How can I-----money from my bank account to his? [transfer<sub>(n.)</sub> , transfer<sub>(v.)</sub>]

**Appendix (3): A copy of the Phonological Recognition Test:**

Q/ Select the correct answer from the two choices given at the end of each sentence. Choose the correct word with its full phonetic transcription. Do not miss stress on each transcription

1. Somalia is mostly a----- . It is covered by sand. [desert/'dezət/ , desert/dIz3:t/]
2. The local MP will start the race and-----the prizes. [present/'preznt/ , present/prI'zent/]
3. I have nothing more to say on the----- . [subject/'sʌbdʒɪkt/ , subject/sɒb'dʒekt/]
4. The armed-----advanced towards the capital. [rebel/rI'bel/ , rebel/'rebl/]
5. She would not-----herself to look at them. [permit/'p3:mɪt/ , permit/pɒ'mɪt/]
6. There was a growing criticism of the government's-----of the war. [conduct/kən'dʌkt/ , conduct/'kɒndʌkt/]
7. If you-----a gas leak, do not strike a match or even turn on an electric light. [suspect/'sʌspekt/ , suspect/sɒ'spekt/]
8. A recent-----showed 75% of those questioned were in favor of the plan. [survey/sə'veɪ/ , survey/'s3:veɪ/]
9. What rate will I get if I-----my dollars into euros? [convert/kən'v3:t/ , convert/'kɒnv3:t/]
10. This is where the fruit packaged for----- . [export/'ekspo:t/ , export/ɪk'spo:t/]
11. The women-----their eyes with make-up. [accent/'æksent/ , accent/æk'sent/]
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13. Legal questions rarely exist in the-----; they are based on real cases. [abstract/'æbstrækt/ , abstract/æb'strækt/]
14. It says on the label '-----of France'. [produce/prɒ'dʒu:s/ , produce/'prɒdʒu:s/]
15. They sought advice on how to-----a more positive image of their company. [project/prɒ'dʒekt/ , project/'prɒdʒekt/]
16. She suffered years of mental-----after her son's death. [torment/'to:ment/ , torment/to:'ment/]
17. He was hoping for some lively political-----at the meeting. [discourse/dɪs'ko:s/ , discourse/'dɪsko:s/]
18. The course allows students to-----at their own speed. [progress/prɒ'gres/ , progress/'prɒʒres/]
19. There is a contrast between lived reality and-----hold in the mind. [construct/'kɒnstrʌkt/ , construct/kən'strʌkt/]
20. How can I-----money from my bank account to his? [transfer/'trænsf3:/ , transfer/trænsf3:/]