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The Importance of Teaching English Pronunciation in Spanish Schools

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Abstract

The teaching of pronunciation is a fundamental and yet, in practice, often a neglected aspect in English classrooms in Spain. An intelligible pronunciation is vital for oral communication, both privately and professionally. Hence, it is an integral component of language skills as it greatly affects the fluency of communication. Although oral language skills are generally considered important, pronunciation is often overshadowed by other aspects of the language in the classrooms thus, playing a secondary role in language teaching. The teaching of pronunciation is influenced by several factors including teachers and their need to follow a strict curriculum in which they have to focus largely on the four main language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), not having enough material available in textbooks to teach pronunciation and teachers feeling that they do not have enough knowledge to teach pronunciation or the time needed to plan it. The aim of this study is to examine the attention that is given to pronunciation in a real educational context. To this end, I have analyzed the responses to a questionnaire administered to an English teacher, the pronunciation exercises included in the textbook used in class and the main pronunciation difficulties of a group of students. I have also sought to design a series of activities that could help these students overcome the perceived difficulties. As an ultimate goal, this study aims to highlight the importance of pronunciation in Spanish schools by encouraging teachers to integrate pronunciation in their classes through several meaningful activities with the objective to enhance students' communicative competence.

Keywords: Pronunciation, intelligibility, difficulties, communicative competence, English classroom

Resumen

La enseñanza de la pronunciación es un aspecto fundamental, si bien, en la práctica muchas veces es un aspecto ignorado en las clases de inglés en España. Una pronunciación inteligible es vital para la comunicación oral, tanto en el ámbito privado como profesional. Por tanto, es un componente integral de las habilidades lingüísticas, ya que afecta en gran medida a la fluidez de la comunicación. Aunque las habilidades comunicativas se consideran generalmente importantes, la pronunciación se ve con frecuencia eclipsada por otros aspectos de la lengua en las clases, desempeñando así un papel secundario en la enseñanza del idioma. La enseñanza de la pronunciación se ve influida por varios factores, entre ellos, los profesores y su necesidad de seguir un currículum estricto en el que han de centrarse principalmente en las cuatro destrezas básicas (*listening, speaking, reading and writing*), el hecho de no disponer de material suficiente en los libros de texto para enseñar la pronunciación y la sensación de los profesores de no tener suficiente conocimiento para enseñarla o el tiempo necesario para planificarla. El propósito de este trabajo es examinar la atención que se le otorga a la pronunciación en un contexto educativo real. Para ello, he analizado las respuestas a un cuestionario administrado a un profesor de inglés, los ejercicios de pronunciación incluidos en el libro de texto utilizado en clase y las principales dificultades de pronunciación de un grupo de estudiantes. También he tratado de diseñar una serie de actividades que puedan ayudar a estos estudiantes a superar las dificultades percibidas. Como objetivo final, este estudio pretende destacar la importancia de la pronunciación en instituciones educativas españolas, animando al profesorado a integrar la pronunciación en sus clases a través de varias actividades significativas con el fin de mejorar la competencia comunicativa de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Pronunciación, inteligibilidad, dificultades, competencia comunicativa, aulas de Inglés

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Introduction

As reported in previous research (see, for example, Marks, 2011; Case, 2012), pronunciation is very much neglected in foreign language teaching in secondary schools and upper high schools, whereas other areas of language such as grammar and lexis are given priority in English classes, despite of the fact that a good and, especially, intelligible pronunciation is an integral part of communicative competence. As Hismanoglu (2006) emphasizes, the teaching of pronunciation is very important for oral communication as well as an essential part of communicative competence. To be able to communicate successfully, a message has to be structured in such a way that your counterpart understands it. This requires not only syntactic but also phonological competence. Pronunciation, however, should not be regarded separately from vocabulary or grammar. Every word and every phrase only acquire meaning through its intonation and pronunciation.

In the language learning process, the importance of an intelligible pronunciation is highlighted continuously. Phonetics, which deals with the formation of human speech sounds, is considered to be a challenging part of language acquisition and has therefore been repeatedly disregarded by teachers in the English classrooms. Besides, research on this topic has indicated that pronunciation is one of the three most important components of linguistic competence, alongside grammar and vocabulary. It is also stressed that all three components are equally significant and despite all this, pronunciation is often given a minor role in foreign language classrooms.

After the appearance of the communicative approach in foreign language teaching in the 70's and 80's, more emphasis has been placed on oral skills in the classroom and since then, the importance of oral communicative competence has grown steadily, partly due to globalisation and the fast development of technology, but pronunciation is still often given too little consideration. Thus, as the situation has started to change over the last years, oral communication skills in foreign language classrooms are now more valued and emphasized. Since pronunciation is a central part of oral communication, the increased role of oral communication should also mean that pronunciation is considered in more detail. In order to better support students in practising pronunciation, more time

and effort should be invested in pronunciation teaching in the classroom and an appropriate methodology should be developed.

One way to face the challenges described above is to integrate pronunciation into the classroom. By integration is meant that pronunciation is not only trained in isolated activities, although these are also of central significance, particularly in the initial phase, but that it is dealt with and embedded in the context of other linguistic areas, such as grammar and vocabulary, in an explicit, systematic and as versatile way as possible, thereby making it an integral part of the lessons. This allows learners to become more aware of the connection between pronunciation, as well as other language skills, and pronunciation activities, to be adapted to the students' level of performance. Moreover, the integration offers a solution to the problem with which many teachers are concerned: there is not enough time for the amount of content that should be covered in class. If pronunciation could be practiced in the contexts of other areas of the language it would not be necessary to find extra time for the pronunciation exercises.

In fact, the main objective of foreign language teaching is to foster the ability to use the target language in real life situations so as to be able to communicate correctly in the foreign language. For this reason, one must master not only grammar, lexis and spelling, but also the phonetic side of the language, namely pronunciation. Thus, the teaching of pronunciation is of vital importance for the successful acquisition of an L2.

The main reason I decided to choose this thematic line is not only because of my great enthusiasm and interest in languages but also because I believe that an appropriate pronunciation is very important not only in foreign language classes but also, especially, in everyday life in order to be able to make yourself understood which is the most important aspect when speaking in another language and, in this regard, I consider that teachers should serve as language models for learners.

This project aims to encourage English teachers to integrate pronunciation into their classes with the purpose of increasing their consciousness regarding the importance of teaching as well as practicing it more in language classes. Therefore, as the title of this study suggests, a further goal is to determine the role that pronunciation currently has in Spanish schools, more specifically in a secondary school where I did my practicum.

In order to carry out this study, the present research project has been structured as follows: The first part provides the relevant theories and reviews of the associated literature to pronunciation and its teaching, serving as a general background to the topic in question. First, it will begin by briefly explaining and clarifying two important disciplines that are distinguished in linguistics when dealing with pronunciation namely, phonetics and phonology. Then, the different methods and approaches to teaching English pronunciation which have been used over the years will be addressed. Afterwards, the so-called Global English term will be discussed, since it is a crucial concept when teaching English pronunciation. Subsequently, the main pronunciation difficulties that native Spanish speakers face when producing the English language will be described. Furthermore, it will be discussed the way in which pronunciation and its teaching can be integrated in the English classroom by explaining the usefulness of phonetic symbols when teaching this area of the language.

The second practical part of this study reports the results of the observation of the online classes I have been able to make during the internship regarding students' pronunciation, as well as the analysis of the data collected from a group of students through a speaking activity, that will be described in detail, with the objective of selecting the main pronunciation problems I have perceived and, among them, the ones I have considered to be more important so as to design several activities that can be useful as well as helpful for students to enhance their pronunciation. In a following section, the responses to a questionnaire I have designed for my school tutor will be analysed to find out how she treats pronunciation and, at the same time, the importance she places on it in her classes. Moreover, an analysis of the pronunciation exercises that are included in the textbooks that are being used in the school will be carried out. Finally, several activity proposals will be presented with the aim of providing different exercises that teachers can use in the English classroom so as to improve and practice students' pronunciation. Additionally, it will be provided as a novel element an adaptation of these activities to a situation such as the one experienced this year in the internship caused by the current pandemic we are facing. Lastly, this project will end with further strategies and proposals for improvement.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1. What is meant by phonetics and phonology?

As far as pronunciation is concerned, it is necessary to start by explaining and describing the terms ‘phonetics’ and ‘phonology’. Both concepts refer to linguistic disciplines and together with morphology, syntax, lexicology, pragmalinguistics, semantics and text linguistics they form the entire basis of linguistics. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two terms – phonetics and phonology. According to Daniel (2011: 1-2), it can be explained this way:

[...] phonetics describes the physical realisation of sounds. It studies the physiological processes involved in sound production. Phonology on the other hand looks at the behavioural patterns of sounds in actual speech, their realisations in different environments, whatsoever these may be. Phonetics is thus concerned with sound production while phonology studies sound behaviour in realisation.

Phonetics is a scientific discipline that deals with the formation of sounds. It mainly studies the organs of speech and classifies and describes the sounds. Phonology explores the differences between the functions of sounds. Phonology can therefore be designated as functional phonetics. Phonetics is often used in connection with foreign language teaching as synonym for pronunciation. Also, phonetic difficulties are characterized as difficulties with pronunciation. Pronunciation exercises are nothing more than phonetic exercises. The typical characteristics of pronunciation include speed, accent, rhythm and intonation. Every language has its own intonation. Sometimes native speakers have difficulties of understanding when foreigners have poor pronunciation, intonation or accent. Hence, great attention should be paid to pronunciation in foreign language teaching.

1.2. Different methods and approaches to teaching ESL pronunciation

Different methods and approaches to teaching ESL pronunciation have developed considerably over the past decades. Thus, the purpose of this section is to provide a brief historical overview of the role of pronunciation in the language classroom and the different methods and approaches that have been used until recent years.

The teaching of English pronunciation has been characterized by insufficient scientific study since linguistic research has mainly focused on the teaching of grammar and vocabulary. As Kelly (1969) states, linguists, philosophers and other theorists have devoted far more attention to grammar and vocabulary than to pronunciation. In fact, pronunciation has only started to be systematically studied since the beginning of the twentieth-century. Indeed, it can even be said that within the teaching of the English language, pronunciation, as Kelly (1969, p. 87) once called it, has been “the Cinderella” of teaching English as a foreign language. For this reason, grammar and vocabulary have traditionally been better understood and used in the classroom than pronunciation.

As Richards & Rodgers (1986) report, there were two main approaches to teaching pronunciation at the beginning of nineteenth-century: the intuitive-imitative method and the analytic-linguistic method. On the one hand, the intuitive-imitative approach, which was the only one used before the nineteenth-century, focuses on the learner’s ability to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the intervention of any explicit information. On the other hand, the analytic-linguistic approach, which was developed to complement the intuitive-imitative method, was based on the principle that using information and tools such as a phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, and charts of the vocal apparatus, contrastive information, and other means would be more than sufficient to allow students to acquire a perfect pronunciation. This method focuses on the sounds and rhythms of the target language.

During the twentieth century there were some approaches that considered the teaching of pronunciation as irrelevant namely, the grammar-translation and the reading-based methods, as pointed out by Celce-Murcia et al. (2010, p.3). In both methods, grammar or text comprehension was taught through the student’s native language, little attention was devoted to the spoken language and frequently no importance was given to

the correct pronunciation. By the end of the nineteenth century, the direct method was a response to the grammar-translation method. Due to the Reform Movement, the natural approach revived. Language is once again considered as a means of communication; therefore, the emphasis is on spoken language and correct pronunciation. Language was imitated intuitively, often without detailed explanation of the grammar rules. Everything the students learn is first presented orally using images and then later in written form. During the lessons the mother tongue and translations should be avoided.

According to Hismanoglu (2006), the audiolingual method emerged in the United States of America in the 1940s. In some respects, it represents a further development of the direct method. The role linguists played in language description and the priority given to spoken language were key features of the process. Pattern drills are characteristics of this method in the practice of teaching. Furthermore, dialogues are learned by heart and the principle of monolingualism applies. Grammar is taught through examples and exercises. The audiolingual method was combined with the use of the language laboratory in foreign language teaching. In the 1960's the Cognitive Approach was introduced with Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar and Neisser's cognitive psychology. This method gave more importance to grammar and vocabulary than pronunciation as acquiring a native speaker-like pronunciation started to be viewed as an unrealistic goal that could never be achieved.

The historically first method that shifts the responsibility for learning on the student (and does so very radically) is the Silent Way method. Caleb Gattegno was the one who developed the method in the 1970's which rejects the drill and the error correction. It emphasizes the personal development of the student and the autonomous development of knowledge. Ideally, the teacher remains silent, which should allow him to have a better observation of the students. The teacher usually gives help as far as necessary, stimulates the students through facial expressions and gestures. The main focus is on the accuracy of production of the sounds and structures of the target language through the use of connections between colours, sounds and charts. The students work independently and correct each other if possible (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Celce-Murcia et al. (1996: 67) also cite the Community Language Learning method by Charles A. Curran (1976) teaching, which is considered a counselling activity.

Curran emphasizes the social character of the language and sees as the main element of language teaching, the interactions between students and interactions between the students and the teacher. The use of the recorder is rescued so that the student can monitor his own sound production, with the guidance of the teacher, who acts as a model in making the sounds. In this case, it is the student who decides which sounds he wants to practice and the level of improvement he wants to reach. This teaching process emphasizes the explicit autonomous role of the student who determines the learning process and decides when the teacher should intervene in the process.

The most recent approach, as reported by Rodríguez & Leiva (n.d.), is the Communicative Approach also known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emerged in the 1980's. Since it stresses fluency and speaking production, the Communicative Approach is based on the principle that students should be exposed to the presentation of real listening and oral communication situations which allow to put into practice the structures and sounds studied and thus, achieve a pronunciation that is intelligible to native speakers. It rescues techniques from previous methods such as listen and imitate, making phonetic transcriptions, reading tongue twisters, etc.

1.3. “Global English” and the implications on teaching English pronunciation

1.3.1. Global English

As is well-known, English is a global language; English is nowadays probably the world language par excellence. This is not only known to us in theory, but we also experience it quite practically. When travelling especially outside Europe we expect to be able to communicate in English. Furthermore, the language of communication in many international companies is English. In this regard, a very important question arises that needs to be answered before going into further detail - What makes a language a global language? A first obvious characteristic of a global language is the number of speakers worldwide. On a list compiled by *Ethnologue* (2019), a language reference which offers statistics and other useful information on the world's languages, of the most widely spoken languages, of which the first 10 has been selected, English is the third most spoken

language in the world with 379 million native speakers, but taking into consideration those who speak it as a second language, English is ranked as the most widely spoken language in the world. The following table illustrates the classification of the most widely spoken languages and the number of speakers in millions who use them as a first language as a means to provide an explicit and broad picture of what the most commonly spoken languages are:

Most widely spoken languages		
Rank	Language	Native speakers (millions)
1	Mandarin Chinese	918
2	Spanish	480
3	English	379
4	Hindi	341
5	Bengali	228
6	Portuguese	221
7	Russian	154
8	Japanese	128
9	Western Punjabi	92.7
10	Marathi	83.1

Table 1: Most widely spoken languages (Ethnologue 2019)

Taking a closer look at the first ten languages on the list shows that they can be divided into two groups: Among the world’s most frequently spoken languages are those that are spoken in very densely populated, geographically contiguous states or regions (Chinese in China, Hindi and Bengali in India). On the other hand, the leading group also includes languages that owe their spread at least in part to colonialism (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian). Such languages have a wider geographical spread and can therefore be considered world languages rather than those in the first group. As it has been seen before, the term “speakers” in the previous list refers to mother-tongue speakers or native speakers that is, people who learn the language as children and use it in everyday life.

However, there are many countries in the world where a so called second language plays an important role. A practical example is India as in India one usually learns one of the many indigenous languages of India like Hindi or Bengali as a first language, but English, the language of the former colonial power, plays a very important role as a second language. English is the second official language of the country besides Hindi and

a considerable part of public life (high schools, universities, administration and courts) is conducted in English. There are a large number of Indians who do not speak English, but many grow up with English as a second language or learn it as part of their education. In short, educated Indians are usually fluent in their first language and their second language English. In daily life they need both, even if in different contexts. Second languages are a phenomenon that can be observed especially in former colonies. The language of the former colonial power has often retained a very important role in this respect. This applies to the languages of most colonial powers.

To take into consideration the difference between first and second languages, the Indian linguist Braj Kachru (1985) has proposed a model for English that can be generalized: The inner circle comprises the countries in which English is spoken as a first language; in the outer circle are the countries with English as a second language; in the third circle, the outermost circle, he finally localizes English as a foreign language. The numbers given (320-380 million first language speakers, 300-500 million second language speakers) should be treated with caution, as they are often based on rough estimates, especially regarding the number of second language speakers. However, it is clear that the function of a language as a second language contributes greatly to its role as a world language. Regarding English, the numbers of second language speakers already exceeds the number of first language speakers. English is the most widely spoken second language worldwide.

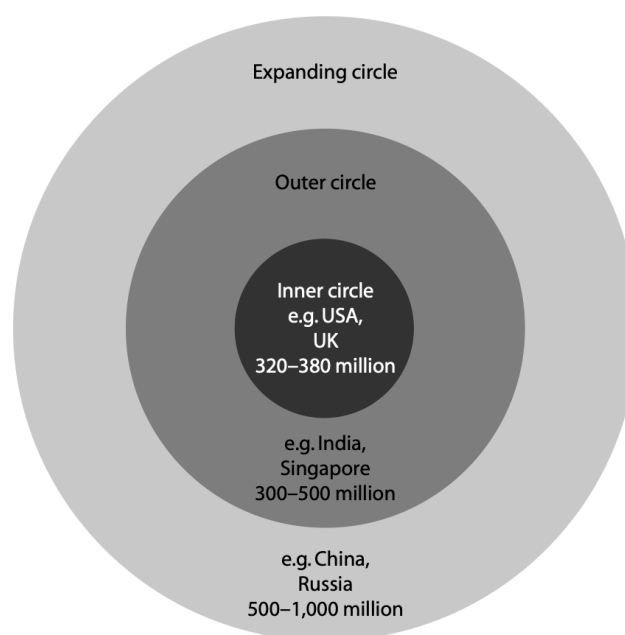


Figure 1: The three circles of English (Crystal 2003)

Colonialism has not only ensured that certain languages are now spoken by many people, but it is also responsible for their geographical spread: English, French, Portuguese and Dutch are spoken in Africa; Spanish and Portuguese are the dominant languages in South America; English as perhaps the only colonial language is even represented on all five continents of the world: It is the first language in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand and second language widely spoken in Africa and Asia. Moreover, a language has the potential to become a world language if it is also a *lingua franca*, a language of communication. English is today the geographically completely unbound *lingua franca* of business, science tourism and popular culture. In this function, it is often called International English.

The concept of “Global English” has become widely used in recent years. This term is also known under other similar terminologies especially *English as an International Language* (EIL) and *English as a Lingua Franca* (ELF). These terminologies are being used to refer to English used in international communication thus, showing it is spoken worldwide both among speakers within a particular country who share a first language, and across speakers from different countries or first languages, as it has been mentioned before. Thus, when dealing with Global English, it is important to mention Kachru’s “Three Circles model of World Englishes” (1985) in which he illustrates the spread of English into three concentric circles: the inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. The inner circle consists of the nations that use English as their mother tongue and these nations comprise the USA, the UK, Ireland, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The outer circle includes the countries where English has a second language status and were formerly colonised such as Singapore, India, Malaysia and many other nations. The expanding circle refers to the nations that speak English as a foreign language such as Russia, China, Greece, Germany etc. Therefore, English is not only spoken by its native speakers in the UK, North America, Australia and New Zealand and by those who learn English as a means to communicate with native speakers but also spoken among non-native speakers within countries as India, the Philippines and Singapore as well as internationally among non-native speakers from a wide range of countries across the world. Hence, English fulfils the aim of global communication.

Getting back to the question – What makes a language a global language? – As David Crystal (2003: 3) puts it, “a language achieves a genuinely global status when it

develops a special role that is recognized in every country”. According to Crystal (2003), there are two main ways to gain such recognition, either by being appointed the official language or by being made the leading foreign language to be taught in schools. Also, the British linguist Jennifer Jenkins had dealt with the term “Global English” in her article of 2002, by emphasizing the fact that nowadays English is spoken by millions of people worldwide to the point that second language speakers of English outnumber its native ones. Given this situation, Jenkins questions the issue regarding teaching and practicing English pronunciation by raising the question whether second language (L2) students should seek the acquisition of a native-like English speaker or if they should just be intelligible to native speakers and other second language speakers. In this sense, Jenkins intervenes with her perspectives and research concerning the intelligibility of English as an International Language (EIL) and proposes the notion of the so-called Lingua Franca Core (LFC) which will be explained in the following sub-section.

1.3.2. The Lingua Franca Core (LFC)

A much more far-reaching approach has been made known for several years: the so-called Lingua Franca Core (LFC), which, based on the English language, is intended to represent an international standard to simplify communication between non-native speakers (NNS). However, this idea of an artificially created core for English as an international language (EIL) is viewed as problematic among experts. A well-known representative of the LFC, whose argumentation will be briefly presented and critically examined below, is Jennifer Jenkins of King's College, London University.

Jenkins argues that statistically, there are more NNS than native speakers (NS) nowadays, and consequently, communication between NNS is more important than communication between NNS and NS. From this she concludes that NS English pronunciation has no relevance for English as lingua franca (ELF), but that studies of L2 speakers of English from all over the world must be taken as a standard. In this way, she collected data on the basis of which she has created a LFC.

Based on this, Jenkins (2014) identifies those phonetic-phonological features of the standard language which are necessary for a pronunciation that is intelligible to non-native speakers and should therefore be learned:

- All consonants except for 'th' sounds as in '*thin*' and '*this*'.
- Aspiration of plosives /p/, /t/, /k/ in initial positions
- Consonant clusters are important at the beginning and in the middle of words. For instance, the cluster in the word 'string' cannot be simplified to '*sting*' or '*tring*' and remain intelligible.
- The contrast between short and long vowels for instance the difference between the vowel sounds '*sit*' and '*seat*'

According to Jenkins (2014) the phonetic-phonological characteristics whose mispronunciation does not affect the intelligibility belongs to the non-core features which are the following ones:

- The '*th*' sounds.
- Vowel quality, that is, the difference between vowel sounds where length is not involved, e.g. a German speaker may pronounce the 'e' in the word '*chess*' more like an 'a' as in the word '*cat*'.
- Weak forms such as the words '*to*', '*of*' and '*from*' whose vowels are often pronounced as *schwa* instead of with their full quality.
- Other features of connected speech such as assimilation (where the final sound of a word alters to make it more like the first sound of the next word, so that, e.g. '*red paint*' becomes '*reb paint*').
- Word stress.
- Pitch movement.
- Stress timing.

Nevertheless, Jenkins' theory has brought controversy in the area of pronunciation. For instance, Walker (2001) believes that the LFC reduces the burden on students and that the goal of sounding like a native speaker is not achievable anyway. However, Trudgill (2005) on the contrary argues that the LFC overloaded the students and that non-native speaker not only want to communicate with other non-native

speakers, but also with native-speakers and that the LFC focuses on phonetics and is therefore not complete.

1.4. Main difficulties in English pronunciation of native Spanish speakers

Learning a foreign language is more than just speaking, writing and understanding it. It implies a process in which the rules of the target language system must be known, internalized and used, and the differences between the foreign language and the mother tongue understood. Such is the case of Spanish and English, languages that differ in their morphology, phonology and syntax.

A good and intelligible pronunciation is an integral part of communicative competence. In order to communicate successfully, a message must be designed in such a way that the recipient can understand it. This requires not only syntactic but also phonological competence. Pronunciation should not be considered separately from vocabulary or grammar. Every word and every phrase only acquire meaning through its intonation and pronunciation.

Furthermore, learning a foreign language does not only mean that the learner has to learn new words, but also to interpret them correctly and use them in the right way. These are factors that occur in a learning process at a later stage. The learner must first be able to pronounce the sounds of these words correctly in order to be able to articulate a complete sentence in the foreign language so that no comprehension difficulties arise. Therefore, teachers should have a good knowledge of the phonological features of the foreign language, in this case English, so that they can teach and train their students at the beginning stages of the learning process, the differences that exist between their mother tongue (L1) and their second language (L2). Hence, students can better understand native speakers as well as make themselves understood which is the most important aspect when learning a second language, to be able to communicate efficiently so as to avoid misunderstandings.

Spanish speaking learners of English face a great number of difficulties when it comes to the pronunciation of the English language. As Spanish and English have plenty

of differences concerning phonology, Spanish speakers of English find it very complicated to articulate specific sounds which do not occur in their phonetic system. Besides, Spanish is a phonetic language, i.e. the written form resembles the spoken form and vice versa. This is one of the main issues when they are learning English, that they try to pronounce all letters of a word, but in English this is not the case.

The fact that Spanish has only five vowels and they are each only pronounced one way, as opposed to the 12 English vowels, is the major problem they are confronted with in the pronunciation of vowel sounds. Moreover, sentence stress is different in both languages so, it is also challenging for Spanish speakers. Regarding all the above mentioned factors, this section will present a detailed description of the main problems Spanish speakers face when speaking in English by starting with the segmental features and ending with the suprasegmental features.

1.4.1. Segmentals

This section explores suprasegmental features by reviewing the difficulties Spanish speakers have regarding vowels and consonants from a theoretical point of view.

1.4.1.1. Vowels¹

When comparing the vowels of both languages certain differences can be observed which attracts immediate attention. While Spanish has five pure vowels that are pronounced as five vowel sounds, English has the same number of vowels but these vowels have twelve different sounds, most of which do not occur in the Spanish language. For this reason, one of the main pronunciation problems for Spanish speakers is that they do not make a distinction between short and long vowels as this distinction does not exist in their language.

¹ Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Brunori, R. (n.d.)

- /æ/, /ʌ/ and /ɑ:/ correspond to Spanish /a/ so Spanish native speakers find it hard to make a distinction between these similar sounds as in words such as *bad*, *but* and *bar* which tend to be confused.
- /e/ and /ɜ:/ as in words *bed* and *bird*. In general, the English phoneme /e/ does not cause difficulties for Spanish learners as it is similar to the Spanish sound /e/. However, the problem lies in the phoneme /ɜ:/, a very common sound in English which is often mispronounced as it does not exist in the Spanish language.
- The vowel /ə/ also known as “**schwa**”, constitutes one of the distinctive features of the English language. As this vowel sound does not exist in the Spanish language, the pronunciation of it is hard for Spanish learners of English. The pronunciation errors of this vowel include the substitution of this vowel by another one or its omission. One example of its substitution is the incorrect pronunciation of the word *parrot* which would be pronounced as [ˈpærɒt] instead of [ˈpærət].

As stated by Brunori (2016), it is exactly the same as /ɜ:/ except for two key differences: 1. It is short (very short). 2. It is never stressed (while /ɜ:/ is almost always stressed). Almost every vowel or combination of vowels can produce the /ə/ sound. Actually, vowel sounds tend to turn into /ə/ when they are not stressed: a (about), e (weather), i (pencil), o (doctor), u (surprise), ai (certain), io (cushion), ou (famous), ea (noticeable), etc.

- /i:/ and /ɪ/ correspond to Spanish /i/, without establishing a clear difference between a close and an opener vowel, so words such as *fill* and *feel*, *will* or *wheel* etc. are confused. Thus, *feel* may sound too much like *fill* and the same with *wheel* which will sound like *will* making such pairs homophones.
- /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/ correspond to Spanish /o/ so words such as *caught* and *cot* are confused. Once again, Spanish students find it difficult to differentiate between a close and an opener vowel.

- /u:/ and /ʊ/ correspond to Spanish /u/ so words such as *food* and *foot* are confused. This is a similar case to the ones previously reported.
- Regarding diphthongs, it can be said that English has less diphthongs than Spanish since Spanish has fourteen diphthongs and English has only eight which are /ɪə/, /ʊə/, /eɪ/, /əʊ/, /ɔɪ/, /eə/, /aɪ/ and /aʊ/. The first vowel of English diphthongs is much longer and stronger than the second one, unlike Spanish where the second element tends to be stronger. Therefore, in English in the second part of the diphthongs the volume of the sound is lowered. Hence, Spanish speakers need to remember that the second part of the English diphthongs cannot be pronounced with considerable force.

It is extremely difficult to pronounce diphthongs containing the vowel /ə/ as /əʊ/ in *go* or /ʊə/ in *tour*. Other mistakes involve the substitution of an English diphthong for a Spanish diphthong like in the word *aid* instead of pronouncing it as [eɪd], a lot of Spanish speakers pronounce it as [aid], employing the Spanish diphthong *ai*; or the pronunciation of a diphthong rather than a vowel like *foreign* ['fɔreɪn] instead of ['fɔrɪn].

- As for triphthongs, in other word combinations of three vowels, English has five which are the following /aʊə/, /aɪə/, /eɪə/, /əʊə/ and /ɔɪə/. So, English triphthongs are quite difficult to pronounce, once again because of the presence of the vowel /ə/ in all of them and sometimes they are difficult to recognize as well. Considering the word *hour* ['aʊə], the greatest problem Spanish speakers face is that English triphthongs are not clearly pronounced. Due to their unclear pronunciation, the central element of the triphthongs can barely be heard and thus, the resulting sound is hard to distinguish from other diphthongs and long vowels.

1.4.1.2. Consonants²

² Phonological contrast extracted and adapted from Brunori, R. (n.d.) and from Swan, M. & Smith, B., (2001)

p	b	f	v	θ	ð	t	d
s	z	ʃ	ʒ	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
m	n	ŋ	l	r	j	w	h

Figure 2: Consonant phonemes (Swan, M. & Smith, B., 2001, p.92).

As far as consonants are concerned, Spanish speakers of English encounter quite a lot of difficulties in articulating certain consonants and consonant combinations. First of all, by paying attention to figure 2, the shaded phonemes have equivalents or near equivalents in Spanish, and are perceived and articulated without major difficulty although there are some complications. Unshaded phonemes are the ones that cause problems. The English phonetic alphabet consists of twenty-four consonants which can be classified by the manner of articulation, the place of articulation and if they are voiced or voiceless.

➤ **Plosives:**

/p/ and **/b/** share manner and place of articulation but their voicing is different (**/p/** is voiceless and **/b/** is voiced). By producing a **/b/** the vocal folds vibrate but when it is a **/p/** they do not. Even though they are different, they are produced in a very similar way. The problem is that when a **/p/** is produced it is being aspirated which is a key feature of English voiceless plosives (**/p/**, **/t/** and **/k/**) when they appear at the beginning of a stressed syllable, whereas in Spanish they are never aspirated as this characteristic does not exist. Besides, the **/b/** sound is a voiced sound but in English if it appears in initial position it is devoiced which is another difference between the English and Spanish sounds.

/t/ and **/d/** share also manner and place of articulation but their voicing is different (**/t/** is voiceless and **/d/** is voiced). By producing a **/d/** the vocal folds vibrate but when it is a **/d/** they do not. The problem by articulating these sounds is that the place where the sound is generated is different from Spanish. Whereas in English **/t/** and **/d/** are alveolar in Spanish they are dental. If the English **/t/** appears at the beginning of a stressed syllable it is also aspirated, which is not the case in Spanish as aspiration does not exist. The **/d/** sound is also devoiced if it appears in initial position, as in the previous case.

With /k/ and /g/ almost the same can be applied here as these plosive pairs act in the same way. So, they also share manner and place of articulation but their voicing is different (/k/ is voiceless and /g/ is voiced). By producing a /g/ the vocal folds vibrate but when it is a /k/ they do not. The difficulty is that when a /k/ is produced as it is being aspirated when it appears at the beginning of a stressed syllable. The /g/ sound is devoiced if it appears in initial position.

Therefore, it is complex for Spanish learners to get used to the English aspiration so it is a very common error among Spanish speakers to not aspirate them. Furthermore, the mispronunciation of all these pairs cause intelligibility problems as they often sound like /b/, /d/, /g/ to English native speakers.

➤ **Affricates:**

/tʃ/ and /dʒ/ share manner and place of articulation but their voicing is different (/tʃ/ is voiceless and /dʒ/ is voiced). As the phoneme /tʃ/ exists in Spanish being the equivalent the Spanish *ch* in words such as *chaqueta*, *chocolate* etc., it does not cause any problems for Spanish speakers. However, the problem arises with its voiced counterpart i.e. the /dʒ/ sound, which is not an existing phoneme in Spanish. Therefore, the main pronunciation error is the confusion between the sounds /dʒ/ and /j/ since Spanish speakers mispronounce words such as *major* and *mayor* as they are complicated sounds to distinguish for them.

➤ **Nasals:**

/m/, /n/ and /ŋ/ Both languages contain the nasal phonemes /m/ and /n/ so, there is no problem for Spanish learners to pronounce them, as it is exactly the same sound in both languages and only the English phoneme /ŋ/ is not known in Spanish. Hence, the English phoneme /ŋ/ causes significant problems for Spanish speakers since it is difficult for them to distinguish between words containing /n/ or /ŋ/. They do not pronounce it correctly which is why they often apply the /n/ consonant in words containing the velar nasal consonant sound /ŋ/. Nevertheless, this is not convenient as the /ŋ/ phoneme is quite common in English because the “ing” suffix is part of many words. Moreover, they mispronounce the ending *ng* as a /g/ sound or even as /k/. For instance, the word *singing*

which in English is pronounced as [ˈsɪŋɪŋ] Spanish speakers tend to pronounce it either as [sɪŋɪŋg] or [sɪŋɪŋm] with an *n* without the velar component of the sound. Also, the word *sing* would sound much like *sink*.

➤ **Fricatives:**

/f/ and /v/ share manner and place of articulation but their voicing is different (**/f/** is voiceless and **/v/** is voiced). By producing a **/v/** sound, the vocal folds vibrate but with **/f/** it is not the case. The **/f/** sound does not cause any difficulty but the challenge lies in producing the **/v/** sound as it is a labiodental sound, nonexistent in Spanish. In Spanish **v** and **b** sound the same. Thus, the major difficulty for Spanish learners is to pronounce words containing the **/v/** sound as they use the Spanish **/b/** which leads to confusion as, for instance, *vote* will sound like *boat*.

/θ/ and /ð/ share manner and place of articulation but their voicing is different (**/θ/** is voiceless and **/ð/** is voiced). By producing the **/ð/** sound the vocal folds vibrate whereas in **/θ/** they do not. As it can be appreciated, English has two different ways of articulating the “th” sound, it can be either a voiceless dental fricative **/θ/** or a voiced dental fricative **/ð/**. The phoneme **/θ/** does exist but only for speakers of Peninsular Spanish in words like *azul* or *zapato* so it is easy for them to articulate the sound. In the Spanish spoken in Latin America and on the Canary Islands it is absent. Spanish learners tend to pronounce the phoneme **/θ/** as an **/s/**. However, the voiced dental fricative **/ð/** is the one that causes major problems as it does not exist in Spanish as a phoneme and because of this they make use of the sound **/d/** for *this*. In general, the problem they encounter is not knowing when to pronounce each one as both are always spelt with *th*.

/s/ and /z/ are one of the most challenging pairs of consonant sounds for Spanish learners as **/z/** does not exist in Spanish which makes it complicated for them to distinguish between **/s/** and **/z/** and produce them as separate sounds. Thus, a very common mistake is that Spanish speakers tend to use **/s/** for **/z/**, so *lacy* for both *lacy* and *lazy* which leads to confusion.

/ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are two phonemes that do not exist in Spanish so a very common mistake made by Spanish speakers of English is that they pronounce all sounds of this type as voiceless **/ʃ/** as well as they confuse **/ʃ/** with **/tʃ/**. Furthermore, they tend to

pronounce both sounds even as /s/. So, words like *vision* and *mission* are pronounced as [vɪʒən] and [mɪʃən] instead of ['vɪzən] and ['mɪʃən]. Also, words like *show* are pronounced as [tʃəʊ] instead of [ʃəʊ].

/h/ is another phoneme that does not occur in Peninsular Spanish so, for this reason Spanish learners find it very hard to pronounce English words starting with /h/. In Spanish the letter h is always mute, whether it appears at the beginning or in the middle of words, it always remains the same whilst in English it is a voiced glottal fricative. This causes them to mispronounce words as they use the Spanish sound j which is very similar to the German sound *ch* in *Schach* but even harsher. For example, the word *holidays* is pronounced as [xɒlədeɪz] rather than ['hɒlədeɪz], although the sound /h/ is present in the Canarian variety of Spanish when pronouncing the letter j, therefore it does not really represent a problem for Canarian speakers.

➤ **Lateral:**

English has two different ways of pronouncing the phoneme /l/ known as “clear l” and “dark l” depending on the sound that proceeds. If it is followed by a vowel it is called “clear l” but, if it is followed by a consonant or pause it is called “dark l”. There is no problem for Spanish speakers to pronounce the “clear l” as it is exactly the same sound in both languages. However, the problem arises with the “dark l” [ɫ] as it does not exist in Spanish thus, they tend to pronounce words such as *milk* and *full* with “clear l”. So, in all cases they use the “clear l” but this error does not cause any intelligibility problem.

➤ **Approximants:**

/j/, /w/ /r/ are challenging for Spanish speakers. The phoneme /j/ is often mispronounced by Spanish learners as they pronounce it with the /dʒ/ so, words such as *you* and *yes* are pronounced as [dʒu:] and [dʒes]. Regarding the phoneme /w/, a common mistake made by Spanish speakers is to pronounce it as a /g/ when it is preceded by either /v/ or /u:/ so, no distinction can be appreciated when they try to say *would*, *wood* or *good* as they pronounce all these words as [gʊd].

Another phonetic error is the pronunciation of the phoneme /r/ which differs from the r-variants in Spanish. In Spanish there are two variants “the single r” or “the double r” and both are rolled with the tip of the tongue. Depending on its position within a word, the tongue may vibrate once or twice as for instance in words like *pero* or *perro*. As a consequence, Spanish speakers roll the “r” when talking in English. Therefore, they need to get accustomed to the English /r/ which is an approximant sound, that is, the tongue approximates the roof of the mouth but there is no actual contact, as it is the case in Spanish. Additionally, in English the /r/ sound is not pronounced in some varieties of English (non-rhotic accents) which leads to confusion.

➤ Consonant clusters

Consonant clusters are a major problem for Spanish speakers as they are more common in English than in Spanish. Spanish has no word initial consonant clusters such as /sp-/, /st-/, /sm-/, /sn-/ etc. Thus, Spanish words that are similar to English, which start with /s/ have an initial /es/ sound e.g. *España/Spain*. Hence, a common mistake made by Spanish people is the addition of the schwa or /e/ sound before words beginning with /s/ plus another consonant. A clear example would be the word *stone* or *stop* which in English are pronounced as [stəʊn] or [stɒp] but by Spanish people as [əstəʊn] or [əstɒp]. Depending on the word, they do not only add a vowel sound before consonant clusters starting with an /s/ but also omit consonants in certain compound words. For example, in words such as *breakfast* they exclude the /a/, /k/ and the final /t/ sound thus, pronouncing it as *brefas* or *express* as *espres*.

1.4.2. Influence of spelling on pronunciation ³

- Spelling and pronunciation are very closely related in Spanish, so beginning learners tend to pronounce English words letter by letter. Some examples are:
 - *asked*: pronounced ‘asket’
 - *break*: *e* and *a* pronounced separately
 - *answer*: *w* and *r* pronounced

³ Information extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

- *friend*: *i* and *e* pronounced separately (but *d* dropped)
 - *chocolate*: second *o* and final *e* pronounced
- Flapped /ɾ/ is generally pronounced where written, so it intrudes before consonants (as in *learn*, *farm*) and for Spanish speakers also at the end of words (as in *four*, *bar*). Moreover, in Spanish double *r* is rolled and this habit carries over into English.
 - As seen before /ə/ does not exist in Spanish, so unstressed syllables are pronounced with the written vowel:
 - *teacher* → /ˈtɪtʃer/
 - *photograph* → /fotograf/
 - *interested* → /interestet/
 - *photography* → /fotografi/
 - In European Spanish double *l* is generally pronounced rather like the “*lli*” in ‘million’; Latin American pronunciations include /j/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/. Beginners may carry these pronunciations over into English.
 - In Spanish, the letter *j* corresponds to a voiceless velar fricative. This sometimes leads speaker to pronounce, e.g. *jam* in a way that sounds more like *ham* to English ears.

1.4.3. Suprasegmentals

This last section explores suprasegmentals by reviewing the difficulties Spanish speakers have according to stress, rhythm and intonation in the English language.

1.4.3.1. Rhythm and stress⁴

⁴ Information extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

English is a stressed-timed language implying that, the intervals between the stressed syllables have the same length unlike Spanish, which is a syllable-timed language and where all syllables are pronounced with the same length. Hence, Spanish speakers tend to carry it over to English, which causes intelligibility problems as they speak monotonously without making distinctions between stressed and unstressed syllables. As Swan & Smith (2001: 95) state “the stress and rhythm of an English sentence give a lot of acoustic clues to structure and meaning. When Spanish speakers pronounce an English sentence with even stress and rhythm, these clues are missing, and English listeners find it difficult to understand because they cannot so easily decode the structure”. These authors provide the example of *Ann is older than Joe*, where *is* and *than* may be as prominent as *old*.

Spanish learners find variable stress intractable, and they cannot usually either recognize or produce the difference in English expressions like:

the black bird → *the blackbird*

the green house → *the greenhouse*

Contrastive stress is also a problem. It is a problem for recognition, and in production one gets:

- *With sugar or without **sugar**?*
- *Mary didn't come but John, **yes**.*

i.e. the last word is more heavily stressed than the contrasting word.

1.4.3.2. Intonation⁵

European Spanish tends to use a narrower pitch range than English, emphatic stress is expressed in extra length rather than in extra pitch variation. Thus, some speakers may sound unenthusiastic or bored to English ears. In English the intonation nucleus can fall on any stressed syllable in the sentence, depending on what is being emphasized. By contrast, in Spanish the nucleus falls on the last stressed syllable in the sentence. (If an

⁵ Information extracted and adapted from Swan, M. & Smith, B. (2001)

element is to be stressed, the freer word order allows it to move to the end). Thus, learners can approximate to *John painted the walls* (as an answer to the question *What did John do?*). However, they find great difficulty in producing (and even recognizing) the pattern *John painted the walls* (as an answer to the question *Who painted the walls?*).

1.5. Integrating pronunciation into the classroom

I would like to start this part with a few words Bartolí (2005) said about the teaching of pronunciation in EFL classes:

[...] la pronunciación es un contenido dentro de la expresión y la comprensión oral que no debe desatenderse en favor de los otros contenidos de la clase. Es necesario tratar la pronunciación desde el principio a fin de que los alumnos tengan menos dificultades para entender a los nativos y al mismo tiempo, para que ellos mismos sean comprendidos. (Bartolí, 2005, p.4)

However, the reality is a different one as, although the teaching of English pronunciation is an important part of language learning as well as for oral communication and communicative competence it is very often neglected. This is especially noticeable in foreign language teaching. As evidenced by Derwin et al. (2012, p. 23), “for several years, researchers and practitioners have argued for more attention to pronunciation in second-language (L2) classroom. There is also evidence that many English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students would like more opportunities to improve their pronunciation”. In textbooks, however, pronunciation plays only a minor role as there will be either very small sections dedicated to pronunciation activities or no pronunciation activity at all. The learner often has a very naive perception of phonetics yet correct pronunciation is the basis of all successful communication.

According to Bartolí (2005, pp.3-4), the teaching of pronunciation is neglected by teachers due to the lack of materials or materials that only focus on phonetic correction. To enhance communication, however, it is necessary to promote the teaching of sounds, phonemes, rhythm and intonation. Pronunciation is the prerequisite for communicating with and understanding native speakers. In this manner, native speakers would not have any difficulty in grasping the message that his interlocutor wants to convey. Hence, to achieve this aim Bartolí (2005) considers the following to be essential:

[...] necesitamos desarrollar nuevas actividades de aprendizaje que puedan integrarse fácilmente en la enseñanza comunicativa. Es indispensable crear nuevos materiales didácticos ya que los actuales están destinados a la práctica de la lectura en voz alta y por tanto, tienen escasa relación con la pronunciación de la lengua oral. Las actividades o materiales de pronunciación deberían tener como objetivo fomentar el proceso de adquisición fónica con el fin de capacitar a los alumnos a usar la lengua de forma eficaz en la comunicación. Desde esta perspectiva, no se busca la “perfección” en la pronunciación sino la eficacia en la comunicación y por tanto, el error adquiere un significado diferente al tradicional dentro del proceso de adquisición. (Bartolí, 2005, p.23)

Apart from the lack of material, the attention given to pronunciation in class differs greatly, although it is an essential element of oral skills. The willingness to invest time in it and the commitment of the teachers varies greatly. This leads to the conclusion that pronunciation exercises do not take place regularly (Purwanto, 2019).

For the purpose of improving in this respect, Field (2008, as cited in Marks, 2011, p. 66) proposes how pronunciation teaching should be ideally conducted:

It would be useful if teachers were able to:

- Integrate a concern for pronunciation into every lesson, whether the main focus is on vocabulary, grammar or whatever;
- Intervene during fluency-oriented activities to give help when a mispronunciation is causing persistent misunderstanding, or seems to be becoming established among the members of a class;
- Provide specific guidance and practice in aspects of pronunciation that are causing systematic difficulty for a class;
- Provide practice in listening to a wide variety of native and non-native accents of English, with exercises to facilitate noticing of regional differences and of the characteristics of words and phrases when they occur in the stream of speech rather than as citation forms.

Working regularly on pronunciation improves several skills at once as can be seen in the following statement made by Purwanto:

The process of learning English is interconnected. This means that each area of the language that is being taught helps improve other aspects of the language. Pronunciation and listening comprehension are linked together by a unified system within which individual sounds are systematically related. Students need this sense of a system in order to make sense of the separate pieces (Gilbert, 1984). If the students' English pronunciation skills are improved, clearly their listening skills and

speaking skills become more refined. Spelling skills are also improved when the knowledge of English pronunciation has been increased. (Purwanto, 2019, p. 84)

In relation to communication in L2, Marks (2002) claims that although effective communication requires accuracy, students should try to communicate regardless of their level of English, as most students take a very long time to acquire a certain level of accuracy, even after many years of study. Moreover, he states that another equally important factor which influences communication, even if it is not spoken well, is fluency.

Moreover, when talking about fluency, Marks (2002) highlights that it does not only refer to grammatical accuracy but also to lexical and pragmatic accuracy and that is, where the difficulty lies as a non-native speaker, due to physiological reasons since, it is hard to articulate sounds that we are not accustomed to. The lack of precision can be an obstacle in communication because, even if you have a certain level of English, if the interlocutor does not understand you, you cannot communicate with him. The less it is understood that the pronunciation is worked on so poorly in class and this even though the students give great importance to the pronunciation.

Furthermore, Marks (2011, p. 65) has argued that pronunciation teaching has something in common with speech therapy as the speaker has to change his physiological habits and teachers often feel unprepared to deal with this type of task and therefore teachers often avoid it. In this regard, Underhill (2010, p. 43) argues that the physical aspect is often not considered in pronunciation concerning the need to train the mouth and throat. The muscles are only used to the sounds of the mother tongue, so it is very difficult to pronounce an unfamiliar sound. Moreover, he continues to mention that:

In the case of pronunciation, we must help students to reconnect with the muscles that make the difference. So, my first task with my new learners is to help them to (re-) discover the main muscles that make the pronunciation difference, to locate the internal buttons that trigger the muscle movements. At the beginning I find it enough to help them identify four such buttons which enable them to get around the mouth and consciously find new positions of articulation. These are:

1. Tongue (forward and back)

2. Lips (spread/back and rounded/forward)
3. Jaw + tongue (up and down)
4. Voice (on or off)

To conclude this section, it can be said that in order to encourage learners to communicate orally, it is often stressed that it is not relevant whether, for instance, pronunciation errors occur but that the main point is to be understood and to be able to deal with communication situation in the target language. On the one hand, this is comprehensible and also reasonable, because understanding and being understood does not require an error-free pronunciation or completely correct grammar. On the other hand, this tendency often results in neglecting the pronunciation, although pronunciation is actually largely the basis for oral communication and can influence the intelligibility.

1.6. Phonetic symbols and their use in English lessons

Phonetic transcription is of particular importance in teaching. The discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation in English, which makes it very difficult for the student to deduce the phonetic form of a word from the written form, and the fact that students know and have internalized completely different phoneme-grapheme relationships from their mother tongue, makes it necessary to provide students with a visual aid with phonetic transcription that clearly reflects the pronunciation of the words.

The most important parts of learning a language are speaking and listening, because only then communication is possible in the target language. For this reason, it is important to know how a word is pronounced especially in languages like English, where the pronunciation of a word is not necessarily recognizable by its spelling. For instance, the English words *though* [ðəʊ] and *through* [θru:] differ by only one letter, but have a completely different intonation and pronunciation. This part will focus on a compilation of the utilities of phonetic symbols as well as potential activities that can be implemented in the classroom by reflecting the proposals of various authors with the aim of integrating pronunciation (practice) more consistently.

Stanton (2002) makes clear that it is necessary for students to learn the phonetic symbols for the simple fact that a letter can represent many sounds since it is not the same

how words are written and how they are said. Whilst the English alphabet consists of 26 letters, the English phonetic chart contains 44 sounds. Hence, the letters of the alphabet are not an accurate guide for students to follow but rather what would help them is to learn the phonetic chart. The main reasons he lists in his article are the following:

- Some letters have more than one sound
- Sometimes letters are not pronounced at all
- The same sound may be represented by different letters
- Sometimes syllables indicated by the spelling are not pronounced at all

This author further proceeds with the purpose of learning the phonetic symbols in the classroom by giving five good reasons why students should be familiar with them:

1. Students can profit from the dictionaries by making use of the phonetic transcriptions behind each word and thus, learning how to pronounce them by reading the transcriptions.
2. It enables students to become more autonomous learners as they are not only able to check the pronunciation of a word on their own without asking the teacher but also write down the correct pronunciation of a words they hear.
3. The phonetic symbols serve as a visual support for the students as they can see that two words that are written differently are pronounced the same. As for instance, in words such as *son* and *sun*.
4. Students would be provided with reference material on pronunciation, just as they have for grammar or vocabulary.
5. Even though speaking a language is a performance skill, understanding the way it functions is crucial, even if students do not control all the sounds, they will be aware of what the goal is as well as identify the challenges.

Moreover, he considers that phonetic symbols are not as difficult to learn as they seem to be at the beginning and adds that they can be learned in a short time compared to learning grammar and vocabulary. Thus, his final thoughts about it are that phonetic symbols “may seem challenging at first but it is like learning to swim or ride a bicycle. Once you can do it, it is easy and you never forget” (Stanton, 2002, par. 67).

Additionally, in order to facilitate the acquisition of the phonetic symbols, Adrian Underhill (2010) an ELT consultant, pronunciation expert and trainer as well as the author of *Sound Foundations: Learning and Teaching Pronunciation*, suggests using them as

mental maps in the classroom. Underhill designed his own phonemic chart which is special in many ways and makes it different from other ones:

ɪ	I	ʊ	u:	Iə	eɪ	ɪ	ɔ
e	ə	ɜ:	ɔ:	ʊə	ɔɪ	əʊ	ʊ
æ	ʌ	ɑ:	ɒ	eə	aɪ	aʊ	
P	b	t	d	tʃ	dʒ	k	g
f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
m	n	ŋ	h	l	r	w	j

Figure 3: Phonemic chart as a mental map (Underhill, 2010)

His chart is established in relation to where all forty-four existing sounds are produced in the mouth. As Underhill explains:

[...] you can see the twelve vowels in the vowel box in the top left quadrant. The left side of that box represents the front of the mouth. The right side represents the back. The top of the mouth is the top of that quadrant and the bottom is the bottom. So straight away you can see the high and low vowels, and the back and front ones, and the central pair. And the neighbours in the chart are more or less neighbours in the mouth too. Now look at the first two rows of consonants just below, and again the front consonants are at the left, and the back ones are at the right. And generally speaking front sounds are the ones that are more visible! (Underhill, 2010, par. 45)

Furthermore, Nicola Meldrum (2004), proposes in her article several activities that can be included in the classroom with the aim of learning the phonetic symbols in a more entertaining and effective way. These activities which will be detailed below were originally created for young students but most of them are also suitable for elderly students:

1. *The phoneme race*

The teacher writes down some phonetic symbols on the board which in turn will be pronounced by him. He will also write words on cards and the students from each team have to run to him to get a card. Then each team has to identify the phoneme of the word, write it down on the back of the card and then run back to the teacher. If they are correct, they are given another card. The winning team is the one that has accumulated the most cards.

2. *Wall charts*

The teacher writes down some symbols on the board and pronounces them. Then the students have to pair picture cards with each symbol. Then they have to draw the symbol and the picture on a poster that will be stuck on the wall for the next class. In the next session, each team should stick 10 words on the posters. Finally, the teacher will check the hits and the winning team will be the one with the most hits.

3. *Chinese whispers*

The students sit in a circle and the teacher shows one of the students a symbol and whispers that symbol to them. Then the sound goes around the circle and if at the end the sound corresponds with the one said at the beginning the student gets a point.

4. *Using dictionaries*

This activity is aimed at teenagers and adults with advanced level of English and a good command of the phonetic alphabet. Five words are chosen by the teacher and at the same time phonetically transcribed. In pairs they are requested to write the corresponding word. Then students exchange papers with another group and are asked to check if they have done it well. The winner would be the group that got it right. The winner would be the group that has the most hits.

5. *Going shopping*

The students form two groups of sellers and buyers with a fixed budget. The buyers receive a shopping list and in a limited time they have to buy all the items on that list with the purpose of practicing the dialogue and the sounds. The sellers receive cards with food items and their price.

1.6.1. Controversy

The usefulness of teaching the phonetic symbols is a debated issue in the English classroom. Bartolí (2005) does not see the need to learn sounds as pronunciation requires oral skills and should be done exclusively through oral support. I personally disagree with Bartolí, since pronunciation integrates not only suprasegmental features (accent, rhythm and intonation) but also segmental features (isolated sounds). Moreover, the knowledge of phonetic symbols also influences the intelligibility in communication.

I believe that using phonetic charts in the classroom will benefit the students because the spelling is different from its pronunciation and, as seen previously, there are more sounds than letters. In order not to overtax students, I would integrate the phonetic symbols gradually. A large phonetic chart in the classroom, each with an associated word as an example, would certainly be of great help. If the teacher includes the chart in the lessons when adding new vocabulary by pointing out the corresponding sound, there is no need to learn the symbols by heart. Thus, doing it this way it is not time consuming and by using the dictionary when learning autonomously the student will be able to pronounce correctly any word.

2. Methodological framework

2.1. Introduction

As a master's student of *Formación del Profesorado de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria, Bachillerato, Formación Profesional y Enseñanza de Idiomas* at the University of La Laguna (Tenerife) and the teaching internship being an integral part of the degree, I had the opportunity to be an English trainee teacher at the CPEIP La Milagrosa in the north of Tenerife for six weeks, specifically, from the 11th of May to the 19th of June. However, this year due to the current circumstances generated by the coronavirus crisis, that has affected the entire population worldwide, the internship has been carried out in a completely different way since it has been conducted in a non-presential way rather than presentially as it would normally have been the case.

This current situation that we are undergoing has revealed several problems regarding the sudden shift from classrooms to online learning, since it mainly consisted of improvising immediately and abruptly the programming teachers had planned for this course, which implied a major change as they had to convert, in just a few days, a classroom-based teaching system into a digital one, i.e. online learning. The teachers had to get used to this work system with the resources and means available to each one, in other words, including the quality of their internet connection, how well they perform with technological tools or with technology in general, etc. which certainly makes the teaching task more difficult and, in turn, especially the teaching and learning process with respect to the students who have also been quite affected by it.

For this reason, and as the *Consejería de Educación* has provided instructions on how to finish the school year by stating that teachers should not teach new content but rather review the content already taught, unfortunately I did not have the chance to teach and consequently, could not implement my own teaching unit. As a result, this year the internship was centred on creating or designing activities to review the content which had previously been agreed with the respective school tutor. Nevertheless, in the school where I did the internship they agreed to carry out at least twice a week some online tutoring to conduct review activities, to clear up doubts that may arise in the students in relation to

those review contents, to discuss their concerns, etc. and depending on the tutor you had been assigned, you could have more online sessions with the students, almost none or none at all.

Fortunately, in my case I have had more virtual sessions during the six weeks of my practicum, therefore I have been able to observe the students and their pronunciation difficulties which could interfere with oral communication as well as contemplate the importance my tutor gives to pronunciation throughout these sessions. Moreover, as throughout my internship I have designed a speaking activity in which they had to record themselves talking about a certain topic in order to practice their speaking skills, these audio recordings will be used in order to gather the data for the analysis which will be explained in further detail later on. Thus, one of the main goals was to observe and analyse the teaching of English pronunciation, the way they dealt with during these online sessions as well as focus on the main pronunciation errors made by the Spanish students in the English classroom.

The procedure I have followed in my research with the aim of obtaining relevant results is as follows:

First of all, it will be detailed what I have been able to abstract from the observations made during that period as well as the teaching method employed by the teacher in these classes.

Secondly, the most significant problems will be identified through the observation and analysis of audio recordings of an activity that I had assigned to the students during my online practicum. These findings will then be used for the elaboration of my own proposals.

Thirdly, I proceeded to design and implement a questionnaire addressed to my tutor to further investigate the importance given to pronunciation in the classroom, to find out how this matter is being addressed as well as the tutors' perception of it.

Subsequently, to see to what extent emphasis is placed on pronunciation, I conducted an analysis of the pronunciation exercises that appear in the English textbook they use during their lessons.

Afterwards, the penultimate stage of my research consisted of designing and creating several pronunciation activities aimed at helping to enhance Spanish students' pronunciation based on the mistakes that have been gathered and detailed previously through observation as well as the audio recordings.

Lastly, as a novelty this year, I thought it would be very interesting to explain and show how these activities could be adapted to an online learning situation such as the one I have experienced and observed during my entire practicum.

2.2. Online class observation

First of all, I consider it important to clarify that, due to the circumstances in which the practicum was carried out this year, this section will focus on a description of the observations made during the online classes so it will obviously be a more limited evaluation as compared to that of a regular classroom observation i.e. face-to-face, since there were no usual classes.

However, this extraordinary practicum period has also made it possible to see if importance is really given to pronunciation during the online English sessions as I could contemplate my tutor's online classes, her performance and attitude regarding pronunciation i.e. whether she really places value on it in the virtual classroom or, if this area of foreign language acquisition is almost neglected and, on the contrary, to explain the methodology or manner in which she carries it out during her lessons.

In terms of the implementation of the classes, as already stated, these have been conducted online and via Google Meet application, a videoconferencing service developed by Google that allows not only a considerable amount of people to join the same virtual meeting but also speak, share videos, presentations, etc. with the rest of the

group so, this has been a completely novel situation for all those involved as it has never been the case before and it has caught us all by surprise.

I began the internship being a little skeptical about the present situation because I wondered if really this new teaching method would work with adolescents, since the adolescence is a complex and difficult stage and therefore, they are at an age where any instability causes them to lose concentration and motivation as it could be perfectly in this scenario. At the same time, *La Consejería de Educación* publicly announced that all students would pass to the next grade. Thus, I thought that they would take advantage of the situation and would not connect to the virtual meetings preestablished by my tutor. Nevertheless, in the end it turned out better than expected.

During my Master's practicum, I was assigned two school levels: 3rd E.S.O and 4th E.S.O as my tutor taught English at these two different levels. Thus, I had the chance to observe two different age groups of Spanish students. During these online sessions, I was able to perceive the various difficulties that students had when it came to producing the English language. The results of the observation will be detailed in the next chapter.

2.3. Selection of the most frequent pronunciation difficulties

As I have been able to perceive several pronunciation errors committed by 4th ESO students, these mistakes will be reported in the next chapter to show with real examples the specific pronunciation mistakes that frequently occur among Spanish learners of English. In order to do so, the study was conducted with the aid of the observations made during the internship weeks as well as audio-recordings to gather the necessary and reliable data for this analysis. On the basis of the analysed data, the most frequent pronunciation problems of Spanish native speakers in English should be determined. The reason why I decided to collect the data from 4th E.S.O students is simply because most of the time I was assigned to this group since my tutor was also the tutor of them.

Originally, during my practicum I was supposed to choose one of her groups, as she also taught 3rd E.S.O students, to later teach actual English classes and implement my

own teaching unit but, unfortunately, this was not possible due to the reasons that have already been mentioned in the introduction to the methodology of this project.

Before starting with the analysis, it is important to clarify a few matters about one of the research materials. Therefore, as it has been stated earlier two research materials were employed with the aim to collect the required data which are (i) online class observation and (ii) the audio-recording.

Regarding the audio recording, the activity I designed and that will be explained in more detail below and which at the end I used to extract the analysis of the main pronunciation difficulties committed by the Spanish students, was focused to practice one of the basic skills which is speaking and at the same time, grammar but more specifically the future verb tenses.

ii. audio recording – “Future plans”

One of the activities I had created during my internship consisted in assigning 4th E.S.O students an activity as homework with the aim of giving them the chance to practice their speaking skills as it is an essential skill for communicating effectively in the target language. This activity was based on reviewing all the future verb tenses but obviously in an oral form hence, its name “Future plans”.

To this end, I asked them to record themselves while simultaneously telling me their plans for the future by means of certain questions I asked them to answer. Although, I first requested them to introduce themselves by clarifying who they are, how old they are, what their hobbies are, etc.

Moreover, in the document that I provided with the instructions for this activity I told them not to answer the stated questions but rather, imagine they were talking to someone with whom they would share their plans and/or goals for the future so that it would be as natural as possible to avoid it being choppy and sounding robotic. The maximum length of the entire video recording should be one or two minutes long considering my tutor’s guidelines.

The questions they had to answer while they were talking about their plans for the future were the following:

- *Introduce yourself*
- *What are your goals for the future and/or what are your career goals? Why are they important to you?*
- *What do you need to do to reach your goals?*
- *What do you hope to have achieved by the time you are 26?*
- *Would you like to live in another country? Why?*
- *What is something you never learned to do but wish you had?*

The collected data was gathered from 13 students of 4th E.S.O as they were the only ones who had submitted their work to me. The evaluation of the recordings was carried out by means of an auditory analysis.

From these 13 sound recordings of free speaking, sample words or sentences were noted of each student with the objective to obtain a clear overview of the errors Spanish learners committed and subsequently, to be able to select the most frequent ones that would allow to proceed to an in-depth analysis so as to categorize the most common mistakes. Thus, the identified mistakes have been classified into two categories: mistakes at the segmental and suprasegmental level.

2.4. Design and implementation of a questionnaire

Given the current pandemic situation detailed at the beginning of this part of the study, I was unfortunately unable to implement a questionnaire among the secondary English teaching staff as I have only been in contact with my school tutor during the entire internship. Furthermore, the scenario was not suitable to conduct the questionnaire as all teachers were overloaded with this new situation they suddenly had to face. However, I had the opportunity to design and implement a questionnaire so that it could be answered by my tutor.

Having contemplated my tutor's online English sessions and the very little attention she gave to pronunciation during the sessions, I wanted to investigate the issue further, by creating an online questionnaire to actually see her vision of this area of the language, how she deals with it in her regular classes and at the same time, if her little consideration might be due to the special circumstances. This questionnaire was designed with *Google Forms* and comprised a total of fifteen questions (see questionnaire in the Appendix section 9.1). The results will be shown in the next chapter.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Online class observation results

With respect to the number of students existing in each level, 3rd E.S.O has a total of 60 students while 4th E.S.O 54 students. However, since the remaining part of the school year was carried out telematically, not everyone connected to the virtual sessions. As a consequence, the number of students attending the online meetings varied continuously, indeed some connected sporadically.

Moreover, from the students who were connected, it was possible to perceive in both levels the good interpersonal relations, not only among the students but also in student-teacher relations. Furthermore, not only have they shown respect to the teacher but also towards me on the days I have had the opportunity to virtually join them and intervene. In general, they have demonstrated a very participative attitude during the virtual meetings, both during the tutorials with the teacher and the sessions with me which was very positive. However, there were also students who did not participate much during the online sessions because they were shy or had low self-esteem when speaking English out of fear they would make mistakes in front of their classmates and being laughed at.

The observation during the online English sessions in both levels clearly confirmed the very little attention paid to pronunciation in the classroom as it was evident from the pronunciation errors that students were continuously making. Hence, it can be said that a high percentage of the class has considerable problems with English pronunciation although both levels also had students with a high level of pronunciation. Besides, I even often noticed how the teacher did not correct the pronunciation mistakes of the learners sufficiently or even at all. As a result, the English pronunciation of Spanish learners of English is often unintelligible. Furthermore, this lack of error correction or no pronunciation correction at all leads to students not being aware of it and making the same mistakes over and over again which hinders adequate progression.

Another aspect to highlight, regarding the correction of the mistakes made by the students when speaking in English during the sessions, is that the teacher only focused

on correcting aspects at a segmental level placing a strong emphasis on correcting sounds of individual words thus, completely excluding the suprasegmental features of the language, for instance, ignoring intonation and rhythm which explains why their speech often sounds robotic and unnatural. Indeed, if attention were paid to suprasegmental aspects, it would contribute not only to a more pleasant speech, which makes the listener want to keep listening, but it also constitutes a key element in revealing the communicative intention of the speaker.

Additionally, another matter that caught my attention negatively was the fact that these online sessions, that were supposed to be held in English, were partly conducted in Spanish or they made use of both languages but were rarely spoken only in English. As an example, at the end of the sessions when either the teacher assigned the tasks to the students or when they were given explanations concerning the activities, these were performed entirely in Spanish, which I do not consider appropriate. As according to my own experience, during my first six years of English, I was lucky to have a native English speaker who only spoke the target language without any exceptions. She obliged us to talk to her in English either for any doubt that might arise in the classroom or for any matter in another context even though she could speak Spanish. Although it was very tough for me, especially at the beginning, this method turned out to be very successful. If I had not experienced it myself, I would not have believed it to be possible, because after my assumption, I considered it impossible to teach lessons only using English.

Apart from the aforementioned observations, I also noticed that the teacher gave importance and, therefore, centred her online sessions mainly on the four basic language skills – Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing – and within these skills there seems to be a clear dominance for focusing mainly on written skills putting special emphasis on grammar and vocabulary both being treated and evaluated mainly through writing activities such as essays, letters, diary entry, etc. Although this year's activities and assignments were aimed at reviewing all the content that had been covered up to that point in the course. The fact that she especially values these four basic language skills reflects the teacher's requirement to adhere to a strict curriculum in which they have to focus on these skills. I was able to deduce this information from my tutors' explanations at the very beginning of the practicum when she explained to me what she had done before during the months of quarantine.

3.2. Analysis and results of the most frequent pronunciation difficulties

To start with the analysis, the main results obtained in both research materials used for this study will be outlined in the following subsections. The main errors will be classified according to the incorrect pronunciation at a segmental level and then, the pronunciation errors encountered at the suprasegmental level by means of showing several real examples of phrases and/or words produced by these 4th E.S.O students. Besides, each example offers a comparison by first providing an incorrect transcription of the words/phrases, reflecting the pronunciation errors made by those students and subsequently, the correct transcription will be provided as well. The students' pronunciation is compared with the pronunciation of standard English, the so called Received pronunciation. In addition, a summary of the results obtained in the recordings will be provided at the end of this chapter by displaying three bar charts showing the number of students who have mispronounced the phonemes at a segmental level.

3.2.1. Difficulties at the segmental level

This subsection will be organized as follows: firstly, the mistakes encountered in the vowels will be reflected, followed by those found in diphthongs to finish with consonants and, all of them, supported by several real examples of the recordings. To begin with, the main pronunciation errors that all 4th E.S.O students committed are the following:

VOWELS

1. The substitution of the vowel /æ/ for the vowel /a/. Examples:

- *I have loved the animals* [animals] instead of ['æniməlz]
- *All of my family* [famili] instead of ['fæməli]
- *My future plan* [plan] instead of [plæn]

- *I am sixteen years old and I live in La Orotava* [ai am] instead of [ai æm]
- *to find a job that* [dat] instead of [ðæt]
- *I hope I have travelled the world* [traveled] instead of ['trævld]

2. Mispronunciation of the vowel /ʌ/ by replacing it with other vowels.

Examples:

- *In another country* [anoder] ['kountri] or ['kauntri] instead of [ə'nʌðə] ['kʌntri]
- *studied* [ə'stʊdiəd] instead of ['stʌdɪd]
- *money* [money] instead of ['mʌni]
- *I love nature* [lof] instead of [lʌv]
- *My little cousin* [kousin] instead of ['kʌzn]
- *I have always wondered* [wondered] instead of ['wʌndəd]
- *young age* [youn] instead of [jʌŋ]
- *to become a criminologist* [bi'kom] instead of [bi'kʌm]

3. Substitution of the vowel /ə/ for another vowel. Examples:

- *In another country* [anoder] instead of [ə'nʌðə]
- *I haven't the necessary concentration* ['nesesari] [ˌkɒnsən'treɪʃən] instead of ['nesəsəri] [ˌkɒnsən'treɪʃən]
- *assistant cycle* [a'sɪstənt] instead of [ə'sɪstənt]
- *it could be better* [beter] instead of ['betə]
- *primary school teacher* [praɪməri] ['ti:tʃer] instead of ['praɪməri] ['ti:tʃə]

4. Confusion between the vowels /i:/ and /ɪ/. Examples:

- *I live in La Orotava* [li:f] instead of [lɪv]
- *I don't leave anything half way* [lɪf] instead of [li:v]
- *meet new people* [mɪt] instead of [mi:t]
- *I wish I reach my goals* [rɪʃ] instead of [ri:tʃ]
- *and this year* [di:s] instead of [ðɪs]
- *I will go* [wi:ll] instead of [wɪl]

5. The insertion of a vowel rather than reducing it. Examples:

- *to be able to teach* ['eɪbəl] instead of ['eɪbl]
- *I wasn't that interested* ['ɪnterɪstɪd] instead of ['ɪntɹəstɪd]

6. Confusion between the vowels /u:/, /ʊ/ and /ʊ/. Examples:

- *I would love* [wʊd] instead of [wɔd]
- *Milagrosa School* [skʊl] instead of [sku:l]
- *to do* [du:] instead of [du:]

DIPHTHONGS

1. Substitution of the diphthong /əʊ/ for Spanish /o/ or /ou/. Examples:

- *I hope* [jəʊp] instead of [həʊp]
- *is something associated with* [ə'sosɪətɪd] instead of [ə'səʊʃɪətɪd]
- *homework* ['jɒm,wɜ:k] instead of ['həʊmwɜ:k]
- *I don't ...* [dɒnt] instead of [dəʊnt]
- *My goals for the future* [gɔls] or [gɔuls] instead [gəʊlz]
- *and I also hope* [ɔlsəʊ] or [ɔlsou] instead of ['ɔ:ləʊ]

2. Mispronunciation of the vowel /aɪ/ with Spanish /i/. Examples:

- *driving licence* ['drɪvɪn] [lɪsɛns] instead of ['draɪvɪŋ 'laɪsɛns]
- *and try to go to college* [trɪ] instead of [traɪ]
- *assistant cycle* ['sɪkl] instead of ['saɪkl]

CONSONANTS

1. The substitution of the English apico-postalveolar approximant /r/ for the Spanish simple vibrant consonant /r/ or the addition of it. Examples:

- *it is very important* ['veri] [important] instead of ['veri] [ɪm'pɔ:tənt]
- *requires a lot of effort* [rɪ'kwaɪərs] and ['ɛfɔ:t] instead of [rɪ'kwaɪəz] and ['ɛfət]
- *I want to learn German* [lɜ:rɪn] [german] instead of [lɜ:rɪn] ['dʒɜ:mən]
- *music producer* [prɔdiuser] instead of [prə'dju:sə]
- *for me* [fɔ:] instead of [fɔ:]
- *I'm sixteen years old* [jɪəz] instead of [jɪəz]
- *My personal goals* [pɜ:snəl] instead of ['pɜ:sənəl]
- *I hate recording myself* [rɪ'kɔ:dɪŋ] instead of [rɪ'kɔ:dɪŋ]

2. The substitution of the consonant /z/ for the consonant /s/. Examples:

- *my name is* [ɪz] rather than [ɪz]
- *are not easy* [ɪzɪ] rather than ['i:zi]
- *my presentation* [ˌprezn'teɪʃn] rather than [ˌprezn'teɪʃn]
- *it is confusing* [kɒn'fju:zɪŋ] rather than [kən'fju:zɪŋ]
- *I have always wondered* [ɔlweɪz] rather than ['ɔ:lweɪz]

3. The substitution of the consonant /h/ for the Spanish /j/ (jota). Examples:

- *As a hobby* [hɒbi] instead of ['hɒbi]
- *hard work* [hɑ:d] instead of [hɑ:d]
- *fifth year of high school* [faɪ skul]. instead of [haɪ sku:l]
- *I hate recording myself* [heɪt] instead of [heɪt]
- *I hope* [həʊp] instead of [həʊp]
- *I have to study* [hæv] instead of [hæv]

4. The substitution of the consonant /v/ for the consonant /f/. Example:

- *I have to study* [jaf] instead of [hæv]
- *To achieve this* [atʃɪf] instead of [ə'tʃi:v]
- *I would love to live* [lof] and [lɪf] instead of [lʌv] and [lɪv]

5. The substitution of the ‘th’ sound /θ/ for the sound /s/. Examples:

- I think that ... [sɪŋk] instead of [θɪŋk]
- something I would like to learn ['sɒmsɪŋ] instead of ['sʌmθɪŋ]

6. The substitution of the ‘th’ sound /ð/ for the sound /d/. Examples:

- live in another country [a'nɒðə] instead of [ə'nʌðə]
- the university [di:] instead of [ðə]
- I think that [dat] instead of [ðæt]

Other errors at a segmental level

1. The pronunciation of the past tense – ed with Spanish – ed. Examples:

- *I wasn't that interested* ['ɪnterɪstɪd] rather than ['ɪntɪrəstɪd]
- *I hope I have achieved it* [a'tʃi:vɪd] rather than [ə'tʃi:vd]
- *finished studies* ['fɪnɪʃɪd] rather than ['fɪnɪʃt]

3.2.2. Difficulties at the suprasegmental level

1. Word stress errors. Examples:

- *to play an instrument* rather than instrument
- *a lot of effort* rather than effort
- *veterinaryary* rather than veterinary

2. Sentence stress mistakes. Examples:

- I didn't do my homework – Function words were stressed
- It is MY turn – No emphasis on tonic stress

3. Intonation mistakes. Examples:

- *What activities shall we do?* – No falling intonation
- *Do you like it?* – No rising intonation
- *Show me your photo.* – No falling intonation

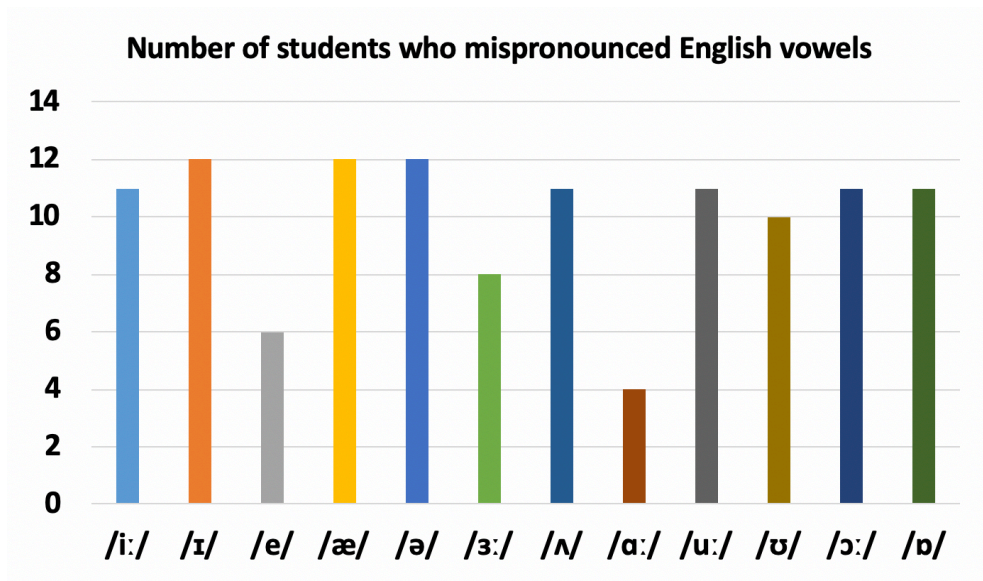
3.3. Summary of the findings

A comparison of the results of all the sounds examined in the recordings will be illustrated in this subsection by the bar charts (Graphic 1, Graphic 2 and Graphic 3) with the aim of obtaining an overview of the most common mistakes made at the segmental level.

However, first it needs to be clarified that out of the 13 students who sent me their recordings there was one student among them who had gone abroad for a few months to an English-speaking country and, as a result, he pronounced everything perfectly. In fact, he sounded like a English native speaker, which was very surprising. For this reason, the errors that will be shown in all the charts never exceed the number of 12 students.

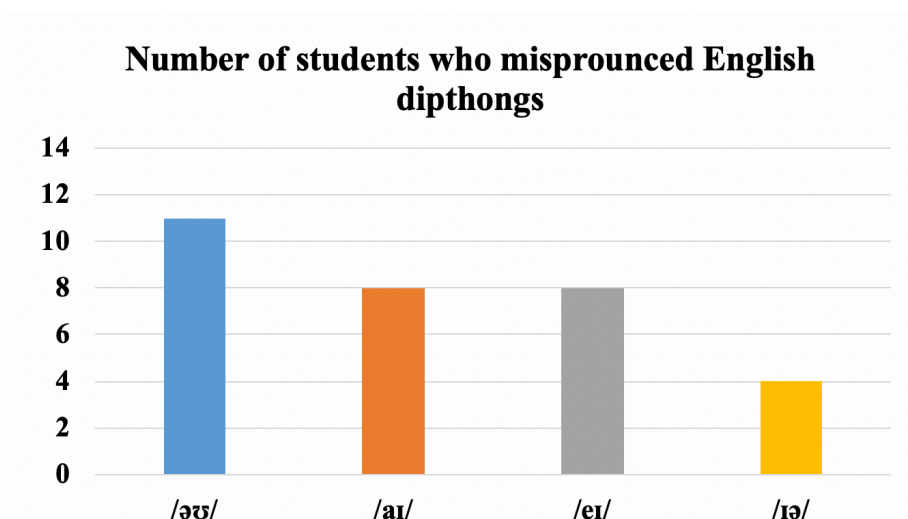
Secondly, for this purpose a selection of the sounds that have appeared in each of the student's recordings has been made. Subsequently, both the sounds that have been correctly pronounced by the students and those that have not appeared on each of the recordings were excluded in order to be able to make a reliable comparison of the collected data, as they were recordings in which the students spoke freely. Lastly, these graphs have been designed in such a way that the horizontal axis shows each of the sounds that have been analysed and the vertical axis shows the number of students who have participated in this speaking activity.

The results obtained in the recordings regarding the number of students who mispronounced the English vowels will be illustrated below by means of a bar chart:



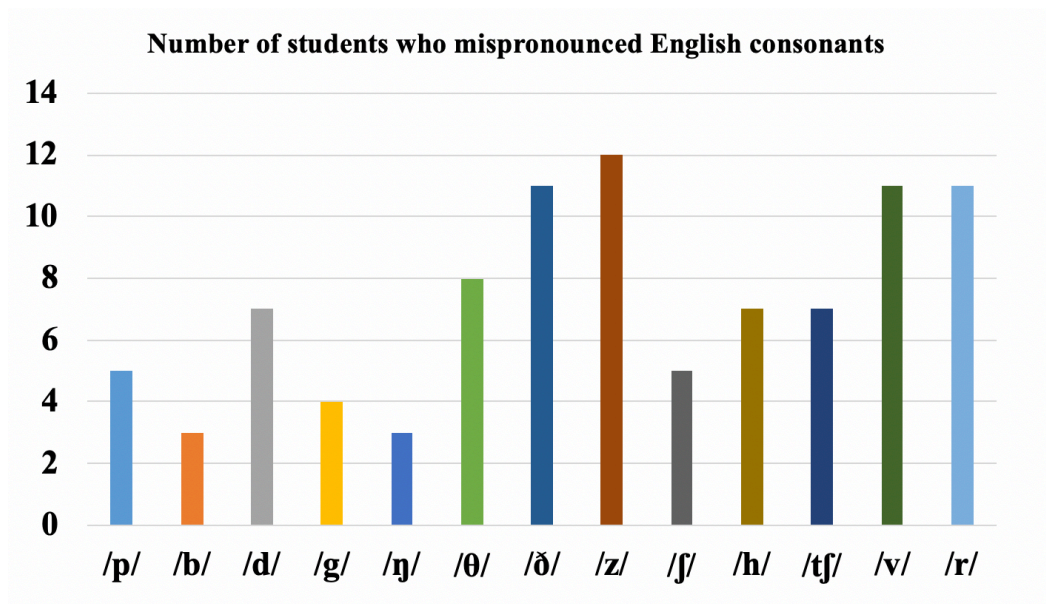
Graphic 1. Results of the recordings of 4th E.S.O students (vowels)

As it can be seen in graph 1, all existing English vowels appeared in each of the recordings and almost all the students had problems in pronouncing most of the 12 vowels being /ɪ/, /æ/, /ə/ the most difficult ones whereas very good results were achieved in /e/ and /ɑ:/.



Graphic 2. Results of the recordings of 4th E.S.O students (diphthongs)

As illustrated in graph 2, from 8 existing diphthongs only 4 appeared in all of the recordings and almost all the students had difficulties with /əʊ/, whereas very good results were achieved in /ɪə/. Regarding the other 4 diphthongs, they have not been included as either they did not appear in each of the recordings or they did not appear at all.



Graphic 3. Results of the recordings of 4th E.S.O students (consonants)

Graphic 3 reveals that most of the students have problems with the consonants /z/, /ð/, /v/ and /r/ and they had least problems with /b/ and surprisingly with /ŋ/. Concerning the consonants that have not been included in the graphic, this is due to two reasons:

- The affricate consonant sound /dʒ/ and the fricative sound /ʒ/ did not appear in each of the recordings
- All other consonant sounds appeared but were pronounced well

To conclude, as it can be seen from these charts, students encounter quite a lot of difficulties when producing English sounds which clearly indicates that more importance should be given to pronunciation in schools.

3.4. Results of the questionnaire to an English teacher

Firstly, as mentioned earlier, my tutor was teaching at two secondary school levels: third- and fourth-year E.S.O. It is also important to highlight the fact that she has been an English teacher for thirty years. These data are significant when analysing her answers. The results of this survey are as follows:

Starting with her responses, surprisingly, my tutor quite agrees that the teaching of pronunciation is important. Besides, she almost completely agrees in the following question, that almost all Spanish learners of English tend to have problems with English pronunciation which has clearly been confirmed after the observations I made during the online sessions as well as the exhaustive analysis of the recordings that have been outlined in detail.

The answer to the following question is quite interesting to pay special attention to, since she almost completely agrees that these pronunciation problems that arise should be dealt with in the classroom. Nevertheless, in the online sessions that I have been able to witness this was not the case, or at least, it was not enough and done in a consistent way. Thus, considering her answer I would like to think that in a regular classroom she will pay more attention to the difficulties her students have when producing the English language. Furthermore, the next two questions which are in some way similar are also interesting, as my tutor answered that she feels quite confident when teaching pronunciation in the classroom and therefore, obviously, combined with the previous one, considers that she knows how to deal with her students' pronunciation issues.

As to whether she actually carries out pronunciation activities in her classes, it is here where it becomes clear that pronunciation is not her focal point by answering that she sometimes does them, which shows once again how pronunciation is the neglected area in English language teaching. Additionally, in order to practice pronunciation, she answered that sometimes students are asked to listen and repeat words or small sentences which is very poor. She also teaches pronunciation integrated with other skills being speaking the main skill she uses when dealing with pronunciation.

Concerning the correction of her students' pronunciation mistakes, she often makes them listen to and repeat the correct pronunciation, sometimes she writes the phonetic transcription on the blackboard and finally occasionally she tells her students to make lists with the words they pronounce incorrectly. What caught my attention was the fact that she said she always corrects her students' pronunciation mistakes as this did not happen during the online sessions.

I personally believe that it is very important for the teachers to correct their students' pronunciation errors and be consistent with it throughout the entire language learning process particularly when students' errors cause intelligibility problems in their speech. Moreover, correcting student's pronunciation errors consistently prevents them from internalizing mispronunciation, otherwise they will be so accustomed to mispronouncing that it will be more difficult to correct those errors later on. It should be noted that error corrections should always be at the end of any oral production otherwise students' confidence is lowered and their fluidity is hindered.

The type of pronunciation activities she sometimes uses are listening and repeating words or sentences, listening to the textbook CD, role-plays and dialogues, reading aloud tasks, and oral productions. This result is positive although she does not do it often as it indicates that she does not only focus on listening and repeating words or structures but she also includes some real-life and authentic language use into her classroom with the intention of increasing her students' language proficiency by incorporating role-plays and dialogues as well as oral productions.

The last question centred on the different features of English pronunciation that should be included in the textbooks according to my tutor's point of view. Her response has been that textbooks should have activities devoted to short versus long vowels, inverted "u", intonation and weak versus strong forms.

To conclude, it seems that the lack of attention my tutor paid to pronunciation during the online sessions must have been due to the current circumstances. On the one hand, this is completely understandable given the context in which the classes were held this year towards the end of the school year, as everything was quite complicated for the teachers and especially, at the beginning. Furthermore, if we add the fact that the

adaptation of the course to the non-presential modality can hardly be equalled to the presential one, this also adds another difficulty. However, on the other hand, from my point of view this cannot be an excuse or reason to almost completely ignore pronunciation problems/mistakes since, although it has not been possible to teach classes as such, they are still sessions of the English subject. Hence, I believe she should have corrected those mistakes that cause intelligibility problems.

3.5. Analysis of pronunciation exercises and activities in student's textbook

The purpose of this section, as briefly mentioned in the introductory part of this study, is to examine the student's textbook they use during English lessons at the CPEIP La Milagrosa to see what place pronunciation occupies and to check whether it is on a secondary level or at the same level as the other contents. This will show how much importance is given to pronunciation.

In order to do so, it will be examined whether the table of contents of the book includes any reference to pronunciation, and subsequently, in each of the units. Furthermore, it will also be revised whether a section is devoted to it within each unit or if it appears at the end of the textbook. Moreover, the type of activities that appear throughout the book will be analysed as well and it will be observed if a relationship is made between pronunciation and other contents or if they are isolated and unrelated to the other contents of the unit.

To begin with I decided to analyse the Secondary school book the Milagrosa School uses in the English classroom for the third year of E.S.O as well as the fourth year of E.S.O courses: *Mosaic 3* and *Mosaic 4* from Oxford which will be displayed below:

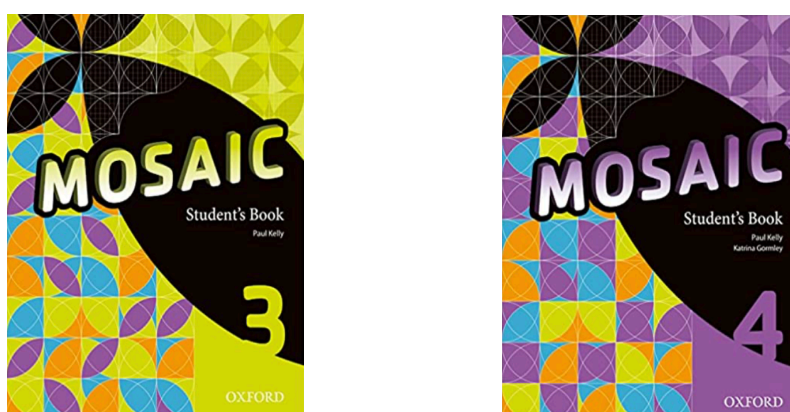


Figure 4. © 2015. ed. Oxford

Generally, by examining both textbooks both of them include very short sections devoted to pronunciation as well as an appendix at the end of the book with several additional exercises. At first sight, both books appear to be equally structured as they are from the same publisher, however, it has been quite the opposite and that is the reason why I chose to analyse both books as it was something that caught my attention. Therefore, both books will be analysed separately as follows.

The *Mosaic 3* textbook, aimed at 3rd E.S.O students, contains nine units in total of which seven have a very small reference of pronunciation exercises. In terms of the extent of the activities as well as the type of activities related to pronunciation it can be said that they are very poor. Most, if not all, of the activities are intended only to listen and repeat the pronunciation of a few words or sentences that appear in a box and some of them ask students to copy these words and to fill in a table in which they have to assign the word to the corresponding sound. An example of each is shown below:

5 1.22 Listen and repeat the words.

Say it!

Sounds /s/ and /ə/

about agree perfect suggest work

4 1.14 Listen and repeat the words. In your notebook, copy and complete the table. Write the words in the correct column.

Say it!

Sounds /s/ and /z/

also dance music song these wasn't

/s/	/z/

Figure 5. ©2015. ed. Oxford

Besides, it is important to highlight that of the few and small references to pronunciation activities that appear throughout the units, almost all the activities address segmental features and only two deal with suprasegmental features which are sentence stress and linking. Again, the same procedure is applied here, these activities are limited only to listen and repeat as can be observed in the following example taken from the book:

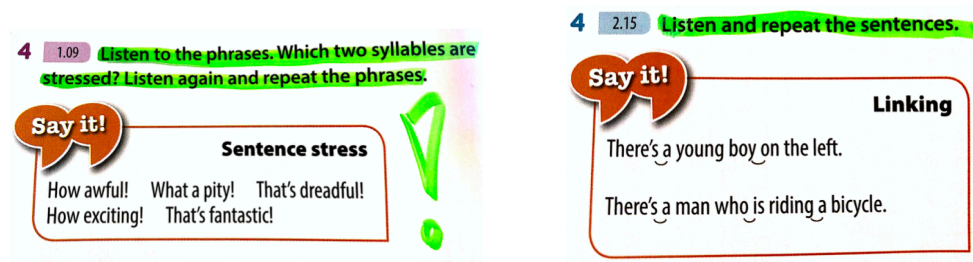


Figure 6. ©2015. ed. Oxford

This type of pronunciation exercises can be useful in some way at a given time, but I believe they should be combined with other exercises that serve as support and the fact that these activities are neither integrated with other skills and decontextualized make them quite improvable. Thus, it is not surprising that these activities tend to be very boring and unmotivating for the students and that it is very difficult or even impossible to arouse their interest in pronunciation.

Moreover, as noted earlier, at the end of the book there is an appendix dealing with several random pronunciation activities which are also quite similar to those already outlined above. The majority of them are based on “listen and repeat” exercises along with writing something in the notebook. Also, once more, this passage provides exercises centred on segmental as well as suprasegmental features although special emphasis is placed on the former. Therefore, it can be clearly perceived how this book attaches great value to sound accuracy while leaving speech intelligibility almost aside. As evidenced, all of these activities are approached in a very superficial way. Additionally, this section of the book includes a phonetic alphabet in which sound and graphic correspondence appears.

Regarding the *Mosaic 4* textbook, which is a higher level than the previous one and from the same publisher, what caught my attention is that it contains even fewer exercises related to pronunciation throughout the nine units. This book is almost the same

as the previous one, the differences, apart from what has already been mentioned, are that at the end of the book, in the appendix devoted to pronunciation activities, are also far less exercises but more importance has been given to suprasegmental features.

The activities in this textbook regarding suprasegmental features involve: word stress, sentence stress and intonation. Hence, the emphasis here lies on speech intelligibility rather than sound accuracy. However, once again they are insufficient and all activities do not go beyond listening, repeating copying and identifying the sounds in question.

After analysing both textbooks, it becomes clear that the main goal of the books is anything but the promotion of pronunciation as they focus primarily on the commonly known language skills - reading, listening, speaking and writing - with particular emphasis on vocabulary and especially grammar. Therefore, it can be said that there are hardly any exercises and those that appear are not worked on in depth. Pronunciation is more than just listen and repeat, it goes beyond that. Sound accuracy is important but there are also other important aspects than saying each sound correctly as students can say each sound correctly but they can still be hard to understand. So, all aspects concerning pronunciation have to be addressed a little deeper. Besides, the activities often appear isolated and unrelated to the other contents.

Furthermore, at first glance the activities seem to be quite simple, but the items that appear bring with them complexities. Indeed, no explanation or additional information is provided anywhere that might help to better understand the elements involved in pronunciation. If it is expected that students should learn on their own, thus in order to promote autonomous learning it would be convenient not only to include more information but also to show, by means of examples and explanations, some of the differences and similarities that exist between English and Spanish pronunciation, which is something that in my opinion has been missing.

To conclude, I am not surprised that teachers omit this area of language in EFL classrooms since the activities that are included in their textbooks are not sufficient, taken out of context and lack of explanations so there is no specific purpose behind these exercises. Also, the fact that most of the exercises are grouped at the end of the books

shows how little importance is given to pronunciation in general which in turn makes it to be quickly forgotten by the teacher. Besides, these pronunciation activities are all of the same type just focusing on imitating, listening and repeating. Therefore, it can be clearly seen how pronunciation is undervalued in textbooks aimed at Spanish learners of English.

4. Activity proposals

As it has been shown throughout this study, pronunciation is not an area that is given much importance either in class or in the textbooks that have been analysed and, for this reason, it is not surprising that pronunciation for Spanish students, as it has also been revealed earlier, is quite complex. In view of all the above, in this section I will proceed to design and propose some activities with the purpose of improving students' learning process by directly addressing and working on some of the problematic areas that have been identified in this research.

First of all, in order to do this my intention is to practice and work the segmental features, more specifically, the vowel sounds which were the main problems identified among Spanish students of La Milagrosa School, the main goal being oral communication. Nevertheless, I will start with an explanatory introduction allowing students to face such content gradually and then some activities will follow. The phonetic symbols I decided to work on are /æ/ and /ə/ since both of them were one of the main difficulties that students had. Afterwards, I will also provide an activity focusing on the suprasegmental features as this was also another problematic area.

To start by introducing the two phonemes I have chosen, I would show them the phonetic symbols on the whiteboard which is a suitable tool for the students as it allows them to visualize both symbols clearly. These symbols will then be accompanied by several examples enabling students to associate the various words with their corresponding sound. Instead of providing an intensive and detailed explanation of each of the phonemes which would end up being tedious and boring, I would ask them to orally associate the symbols with the specific sounds.

The main objective is to get students to practice and learn those two phonemes (/æ/ and /ə/) which do not occur in their language and that are difficult to distinguish and, with it, make them aware of the correct pronunciation of those words containing these sounds. Hence, they can notice and hear the difference between both sounds as they become more aware of the issue. In fact, it is important for students to know the most common sound in the English language, i.e. the schwa /ə/. The existence of this sound

tends to be confusing for students as it has been proven before, and thus, its understanding is essential as it might improve their listening comprehension. For this reason, I decided to work with it.

Once all students have practiced sufficiently and, consequently, understood as well as assimilated both sounds, I would move on to the practical part by implementing a fun activity in which they have to apply the previous acquired knowledge.

Activity 1: The vowel contest

Meldrum's (2004, January 19) idea inspired me to create this activity. Regarding the procedure of the activity, the students would be divided into 4 groups and then each group is assigned a different colour. The representative of each group picks up a card with the corresponding colour from the teacher and, on these cards, they will find 5 words where they have to match the sounds that have been previously practiced and write them down on the card. As soon as one group has finished, the representative of the group runs to the front and gets the next card and returns the other one, and so on. In this way, all members of the group are involved as well as encouraged to pronounce the words and thus, are able to find out the type of sound in question. At the end, the teacher evaluates the cards according to their respective colours and thus announces the winner of the game which would be the group who achieved the best results and, at the same time, the ones who have been the fastest.

This activity will serve as a motivation strategy for the students as they are all engaged in a fun, competitive but educational exercise. By implementing these types of creative activities or games it helps students to deepen and consolidate what has been learned. As a result, the playing process has a positive effect on students as what has been learned is mainly trained, consolidated and practised.

Activity 2: Role-play - Daily conversations at the hotel






Having explained the phonemes and, subsequently, put them into practice with the previous activity, there is a need for another activity in which the main focus is to make use of those sounds in a real-life context by carrying out an oral activity. Hence,

this task deepens the communicative competence of the learners as it contributes to improve their pronunciation. In this sense, the task involves expressing the words correctly, articulating them to prevent unclear everyday situations between people. As far as the activity is concerned, the students have to get into pairs and create a role-play, for instance, related to arriving at a hotel reception in which they have to include words containing the sounds in question (the schwa /ə/ and /æ/) e.g. breakfast, city map, garage etc. Afterwards, they are asked to perform it in front of their classmates and once they have finished performing it, I would provide students with feedback on their pronunciation. This activity, in turn, can be used to carry out another one, which will be presented below, but aimed at practicing suprasegmental features, more specifically, intonation, which was another difficulty that has been identified.

Activity 3: Rising and falling intonation

Transferring intonation patterns from one's own mother tongue to a foreign language, in this case English, is a form of transfer error that can become an obstacle to communication. Therefore, I believe that it is also important to work on suprasegmental features to help students to communicate effectively with the purpose of being able to get their message across so as to avoid misunderstandings.

Having performed the role-plays as well as given them feedback concerning segmental pronunciation errors, now I would select some of the sentences the students have used in the previous activity in order to highlight their mistakes and practice their intonation concerning rising and falling patterns. An example is illustrated below:

Intonation - Sample sentences	
Wh-question	Where is the hotel garage? 
Yes/no question	Do you have a city map? 
Question tag that shows uncertainty and requires an answer	You sell magazines, don't you? 
Statement	Breakfast is from 7 to 10 
Command	Drop your dirty towels on the floor 

These sentences, for instance, will then be written on the whiteboard and the students will be divided into groups. The purpose would be to encourage students to reflect and discuss with their peers whether the sentences include rising or falling patterns which would then be corrected orally by producing those sentences. Additionally, I would mark it on the whiteboard so they can have a visual support.

This activity will serve students as an introduction to the significance of intonation patterns in the English language and to the importance of using their voice effectively to convey their message successfully. Besides, by using the sentences that students previously produced in their role-play performance they will become aware of the importance of variation in the pitch of their voices, as it allows them to compare and see the difference avoiding the transfer of this “flatness” that characterizes the Spanish language into English, a language where the meaning of sentences can change depending on its intonation.

To conclude, my initial plan was to implement these activities that I have proposed, however, due to the pandemic situation I was not able to carry them out and, therefore, unfortunately I could not evaluate the effectiveness of its results. If I had had the chance, my plan was to evaluate the results with a questionnaire to the students and by analyzing via observation their communication skills, in particular, their mastery/improvement of pronunciation and its connection with these activities that I could have performed in class.

5. Adapting the previous pronunciation activities to a virtual situation

Given the exceptional situation we are confronted with due to the coronavirus pandemic, I thought it would be interesting and novel if I would explain how the aforementioned activities can be adapted to a non-face-to-face teaching such as the one I have been able to observe and experience during my practicum. Before getting started, these activities would be carried out via Google Meet.

Firstly, I would do the introduction of both phonemes by creating a PowerPoint in which I would display /ə/ and /æ/ with 3 examples for each one and, subsequently, I would share my screen with all students which is a quite useful tool offered by Google Meet. After having explained and made them pronounce the examples, I would proceed to an exercise that we would carry out together through the screens. I will ask them to identify various words with their respective phonemes that will appear on the next PowerPoint slide. Once they have assimilated it, I would then move on to the first activity. Since we are online, the first activity which was named “The vowel contest” would be performed differently.

I would divide students into groups in order to save time and ask them to come up with a name for their group so that I can easily identify them later. Having invented their group names I will have created a Google document which would be shared with the whole class through Google Drive by sending them a link via Google Meet’s chat. This document would be designed in such a way that on each of the pages would be a box with several words containing /ə/ and /æ/ sounds. Each box would be different to prevent students from cheating or helping each other and make it as entertaining and interesting as possible for them online. Each group would be assigned a box.

Then, before starting the activity I would tell them to make a video or voice call, what they are more comfortable with, on WhatsApp with their respective group, so that each group could discuss and figure out the correct phoneme of the words in question and write their answers in the document. To avoid disturbances and noise in the virtual session

I would ask them to turn off their microphones but their cameras should be turned on in order to be able to control the development of the activity as best as possible. While they are doing the activity, I can instantly see their results which is quite practical. Once they have finished, I would compare their results to select the winning team which will be the one who achieved the best results. It is important to highlight that, due to the way this task has been carried out, it is obvious that it can only be done with more advanced students, as it has been in this case.

Regarding the second activity “Role-play – daily conversations at the hotel”, it can be carried out the same way as before, they have to get into pairs and then, each pair has to create a role-play related to arriving at a hotel reception in which they have to include words containing the sounds that have been practiced. In order to do this through Google Meet, it would be the same procedure. Each pair will have to make a video or voice call on WhatsApp to invent the role-play and to be able to talk about it. To do so, they will also have to use Google Drive so that both of them can see the text.

While they are working on it, their microphones will be turned off again to avoid any noise and disturbance. When they have finished, they are asked to perform it in front of their classmates and, afterwards, they will also be told that, while one pair is presenting the activity the rest will have to keep their microphones off with the objective that we can all understand them as well as possible. To finish with this task, I will provide students with feedback on their pronunciation. In relation to the suprasegmental activity, it can be done the same way. To finish, in case students have any questions during the activities, they can ask them in the chat and, for more complex questions, they can ask me directly via the online meeting.

6. Strategies and tips to improve students' pronunciation

After some activities have been proposed to improve pronunciation, it is relevant to provide several useful strategies and tips that should be taken into consideration in English Foreign Language (EFL) classes aiming to enhance and practice students' pronunciation.

First and foremost, one of the most important prerequisites for a successful pronunciation lesson is to create a comfortable and fearless atmosphere. In many cases, pronunciation is a source of anxiety and shame for the students, as they feel embarrassed by either pronouncing well or not. Hence, it is essential to make learners feel comfortable and relaxed in the classroom to prevent them from feeling uncomfortable and embarrassed when speaking English. Thus, anxiety levels are also lowered and, as a result, students feel not only safe but also free to speak in the target language, disregarding possible production mistakes, otherwise, their fluidity and spontaneity will be hindered. Indeed, the pronunciation exercises should be more fun than hard work and they should show students that everyone is actively participating without being afraid of articulating the sounds.

Another vital aspect that needs to be taken into consideration, when it comes to either students' oral production as well as communicative interaction, is to make students aware or let them know clearly that making mistakes is completely fine. It is important to let them know that errors are important and part of the learning process. As teachers, we need to help students by encouraging them and taking away their fear of making mistakes with the purpose of giving students a positive feeling so that they can develop a healthy curiosity for challenges.

Furthermore, it is also important to be very careful with error correction. Under no circumstances should teachers correct their students' pronunciation mistakes while they are speaking as it would disturb the flow of speech as well as demotivate them.

Teachers should rather correct their mistakes after they have finished speaking with the aim of giving them more confidence and ease of speech.

Moreover, when dealing with pronunciation correction it is also crucial to mainly focus on correcting those pronunciation mistakes that are unintelligible and cause misunderstandings, as correcting every single error that may occur is impossible. In fact, correcting every single mistake would end up being too exhausting for students as well as it prevents them from making progression in the target language as they would lose interest.

It should also be pointed out that it is crucial for teachers to be able to determine in which levels it is appropriate to teach more complex issues of the language, such as stress or rhythm. As it has been shown throughout this study, there are several differences between both languages that may be considered when teaching English. Thus, a brief introduction to the main features of the English language and its differences to Spanish may also help students to tolerate ambiguity as well as frustration.

Another way of improving English pronunciation is by making use of the media. Anyone who regularly consumes English YouTube videos, watches films in the original English version in the cinema or enjoys their favourite series in English, etc. will soon notice that not only their language comprehension improves but also their pronunciation. Therefore, as teachers we can make use of videos or recordings of English native speakers or proficient non-native English speakers in our classes and use them as a tool to create fun activities where they improve production skills and, at the same time, their pronunciation. In this respect, I believe it is very important to keep students always in touch with native speech and different varieties of English. In this way they also improve their listening skills. Hence, it is relevant as teachers to encourage learners to use their free time to be in contact with the English language also out of the classroom by using the media or any other useful resource.

Making use of songs, both in and out of the class is another good option. The use of songs in class can be perfectly used for various purposes not only for practicing grammar, listening comprehension, vocabulary, etc., as it is usually the case, but it can also be useful for practicing students' pronunciation. Depending on what the teacher

wants to practice based on the mistakes observed in their respective group of class, they can create several activities focused on practicing segmental or suprasegmental features of the English language. Out of class, students can listen to any English song they like and search on the internet for the lyrics of a song and read them whilst listening to it. This way students can listen to the exact pronunciation and, if necessary, they can rewind in case they did not understand a specific part or word of a song and listen to it again.

It can also be helpful to work with technology in general, making them record a video talking, as it has been shown in this project, or a “Draw my life” explaining a topic they like. Another possibility would be to ask students to invent a story that will be performed orally in front of the classroom. Other important aspects to be considered when teaching pronunciation is to put special emphasis on speaking activities since speaking is the most important skill when it comes to communicating and a good number of teachers do not work with it or at least not enough.

Another possibility would be to practice pronunciation with tongue twisters as they are a great way to improve this area of the language, since they are often designed to join together sounds that are difficult to pronounce or sound similar.

Apart from that, the inclusion of games in the classroom is also a good learning strategy as it makes the class more dynamic, awakens the students’ interest and it allows for active learning. It helps them to put into practice their previous acquired knowledge but in a fun and productive way.

Some examples of activities/games would be making use of minimal pairs or cognates in which students have to distinguish between words and learn the difference between cognates. Then, a fun way to work with stress patterns in English would be by playing the so-called Stress Bingo, a game that is played just as the regular bingo but the difference being that the numbers are replaced by words. The teacher says a word out loud and the students have to tick off a word which has the same stress pattern and the first one saying “Bingo!” is the winner.

As it can be seen, there are many strategies and games that teachers can implement in their English classroom. Learning a new language is difficult, therefore, it is the teachers' task to make the learning process as easy and enjoyable as possible.

Finally, from my point of view, it is worth mentioning that in spite of economical and other external factors, the best way to improve pronunciation and overall speaking skills is by spending some time in an English-speaking country as nowhere else will you learn a language faster and more profoundly than in a country where it is spoken. You are listening to the language all the time, reading the language all the time and you will most likely be forced to speak it all the time. Thus, if students have the opportunity to spend some time in an English-speaking country then they should definitely take it.

7. Conclusion

This present study had two main objectives. The first and main one consisted in analysing the significance given to pronunciation in a real educational context and the identification of the main difficulties that Spanish students typically have. The second objective has been to emphasize its importance in Spanish schools by raising teachers' awareness of the value of incorporating pronunciation teaching and practice into their English classes, through meaningful activities with the aim of improving students' communicative competence.

In the first part of this project, the fundamental concepts and theories have been presented and, among them, the different methods and approaches to teaching pronunciation have been studied and explained as well. This was crucial because it showed how the teaching of English pronunciation has been addressed over time. Subsequently, from a theoretical perspective the phonological system of English and Spanish was compared in order to point out its similarities and differences and, as a consequence, the difficulties that Spanish learners have when it comes to English pronunciation. Hence, this helped to establish a set of elements of English pronunciation which cause problems for Spanish students. This chapter was of great importance as it served as the basis for the analysis that was carried out in the practical part.

In the second part, with the aim of being able to investigate the importance given to pronunciation in the English classrooms in Spain, it was necessary to implement a questionnaire to a teacher, to analyse in depth the pronunciation exercises that appear in the textbook used in class as well as the difficulties of a group of students in order to be able to draw conclusions. Moreover, various activities were designed not only to improve the teaching and practice of pronunciation in the classrooms but also to help students to overcome the difficulties they encounter with English pronunciation.

Based on what I have experienced in my online practicum, it can be stated that this research study has revealed the little attention that is given to pronunciation in Spanish EFL classes and in students textbooks. The data which has been collected and analysed throughout this study on the students' main pronunciation problems, the views

of a teacher concerning this issue by means of a questionnaire along with the pronunciation exercises that are included in both of the analysed textbooks, represent important reasons that explain why Spanish students have problems with English pronunciation. Furthermore, the lack of pronunciation activities in the teaching materials also may explain why teachers disregard the teaching of pronunciation.

Throughout this investigation, all the possible pronunciation problems that Spanish students have were discussed in detail. This has also shown the clear influence of the mother tongue as the students tend to transfer the sound system of their own language and apply it to another. Therefore, the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language are relevant factors which have to be considered in the acquisition of a second language. The mispronunciation of words, an incorrect intonation, etc. can have an impact on their communicative skills. It makes difficult for others to decipher their words as they cannot properly speak. Hence, the teaching of pronunciation should be prioritized in EFL classes in Spain. It is important to add that the thorough analysis, that has been carried out with the recordings of the speaking assignment, confirmed most of the statements of the theoretical part in which this issue was dealt with.

Furthermore, this comparative analysis showed how hard it is for Spanish students to approach the pronunciation level of a native speaker, however, as it has been highlighted in several occasions throughout this work, the most important point is to be understood and, thus, to be able to communicate effectively. Teachers should therefore place more importance to pronunciation by practicing it more in class and correct students' mistakes affecting intelligibility in other words, pronunciation errors that cause misunderstanding. Hence, this is another reason why it is relevant for teachers to include pronunciation teaching in their classes and why teaching materials should also provide more exercises and, specifically, provide activities that go beyond listen and repeat. More importantly, they rely primarily on vowel and consonant sounds and almost completely neglect other essential areas for fluent communication, such as rhythm and intonation. Nevertheless, I believe that dealing with pronunciation from the start is always a better solution as it will be challenging to correct/improve these errors in higher class levels.

It is true, however, that this research has been limited for several reasons. One of the main limitations has been the situation we are all still experiencing at the moment caused by the coronavirus pandemic which has led schools, among other aspects, to adapt classroom teaching to online teaching. Teachers had to adapt quickly to remote teaching which caused a lot of chaos as they have been confronted with a completely new situation and, with it, a situation they were not used to at all. For this reason, the data collection has been more limited, particularly with regard to the collected information from teachers as well as the fact that it has not been possible to evaluate the effectiveness of the proposed activities. In view of the situation that has been described, it would be ideal to extend this research in the future to obtain further data and to be able to draw more comprehensive conclusions. Despite all this, it has been possible to demonstrate the role pronunciation has in EFL classes.

As a final conclusion, it can be stated that despite the importance given to the communicative approach, pronunciation still does not find its place in the classroom as priority is given to other areas of the language such as grammar and vocabulary, leaving pronunciation to merely play the role of the “poor relation” of language teaching (Underhill, 2010) or the “Cinderella” (Kelly, 1969; Marks, 2011) in EFL classes.

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9. Appendix

9.1. Questionnaire

The teaching of pronunciation

**Obligatorio*

Courses you are currently teaching *

First year ESO

Second year ESO

Third year ESO

Fourth year ESO

How long have you been teaching English? *

Tu respuesta _____

1. The teaching of English pronunciation is important

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree I completely agree

2. Spanish learners of English tend to have problems with English pronunciation

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree I completely agree

3. These problems should be dealt with in the classroom

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree I completely agree

4. As a teacher, I feel confident when teaching pronunciation

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree I completely agree

5. As a teacher, I know how to deal with the problems my students have with pronunciation

1 2 3 4 5

I completely disagree I completely agree

6. I carry out pronunciation activities in class

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

7. To practice pronunciation, I make my students listen to and repeat words or small sentences

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

8. I teach pronunciation integrated with other skills

- Yes
- No

9. If your answer in the previous question was YES, please mark the skills you integrate pronunciation with

- Speaking
- Writing
- Listening
- Reading
- Grammar
- Vocabulary

10. I correct my students' pronunciation mistakes

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

11. To correct their pronunciation mistakes, I make them listen to and repeat the correct pronunciation

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

12. To correct their pronunciation mistakes, I write the phonetic transcription on the blackboard

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

13. To correct their pronunciation mistakes, I tell my students to make lists with the words they pronounce incorrectly

- Never
- Hardly ever
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

14. Which activities do you carry out in the classroom to teach pronunciation?

- Listening and repeating words or sentences
- Games
- Listening to the textbook CD
- Listening to or singing songs
- Phonetic transcription
- Role-plays and dialogues
- Reading aloud tasks
- Oral productions
- Written productions
- Computer programs and the internet
- others
- NONE

15. Textbooks addressed to my students should include pronunciation activities on:

- Short versus long vowels
- Schwa
- Diphthongs
- Inverted "u" as in cut
- Consonants
- Stress
- Intonation
- Connected Speech processes
- Weak versus strong forms
- Varieties of English
- Other

Enviar