'EL WHATSAPPAZO DE LA ESPAÑOLETA' LUDIC AND DIDACTIC SEQUENCE

AIMED TO DETERMINE AND ENHANCE THE PRONUNCIATION OF CONSONANTIC

SOUNDS ABSENT IN SPANISH, APPLIED WITH STUDENTS OF NINTH GRADE FROM

A RURAL PUBLIC SCHOOL (YUMBO, VALLE)

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UNIVERSIDAD ICESI

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By

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DEDICATION

To my fiancée, my great support in times of storm, my lighthouse.

To my parents for sharing with me the noble art of teaching.

To my family and friends, for having always supported and encouraged me.

To my students, from who I learn new things every day.

ABSTRACT

After detecting that the most common pronunciation mistakes among my students are derived from the interference of Spanish –their mother language- upon the pronunciation of seven English sounds (six phonemes and one consonant cluster) that don't exist in their L1; I propose a didactic sequence, which departing from English as a Lingua Franca and based on intelligibility as a comprehensive communicative trait, intends to promote the students' validity as legitimate NNS, enhance their recognition and pronunciation of such segments; also it intends to subjectively observe and discuss whether curiosity of language is developed into my students.

The discussion of results –which assessment was performed by an external evaluator- illustrates the extent to which the intelligibility averages fluctuated, attempts to explain such variations and suggests how the application of other variables related to methodology might modify the results. Finally, in the conclusions I reflect on how a similar didactic sequence might be more effective and formulate suggestions for further research in such studies.

INTRODUCTION

The present study, developed at José Antonio Galán School has two interlinked aims. First, to explore the impact of a didactical sequence on how students improve their pronunciation of some segments which do not exist in Spanish; and second, to ascertain if the sequence manages to do so in a way that engages the students' curiosity about the Target Language (henceforth TL) to a point that they start reflecting upon the correct ways to utter the words they are intending to produce, seeking for intelligibility.

According to this aim, I find great robustness in the previous contributions by Jenkins and her team (2000), which synthesize an alternative model different from the Native Speaker (NS) and lead to the Lingua Franca Core (LFC). These contributions are valuable by themselves as they intend to provide reliable pronunciation patterns of pronunciation to bridge the gaps of communication in English between NNS-NNS and facilitate ELF. However comprehensive, I consider that the LFC framework might be biased by her condition as a NS and what she considers intelligible from her observation of people who already speak ESL and results coming from one community.

For the above-mentioned reason, I adapt some parts of Jenkins's LFC in this study and measure the intelligibility of pronunciation among young school students who are in the middle of their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning process. As a way to facilitate the students' appropriacy and for them to discover the points and forces of articulation of every phoneme, I gave funny names to each phoneme relating them to some onomatopoeias in Spanish (e.g. /ð/ is 'El WhatsAppazo', /θ/ is 'La Españoleta'); in fact I, named the didactical sequence *'El WhatsAppazo de la Españoleta'* (The WhatsApp message from the Spanish lady) after the combination of the names of the first two phonemes, emulating the etymology of the word

'alphabet' (alpha and beta). After this process took place and without comparing the results from the present study to Jenkins's (2000 –which of course remains to be a powerful approach,) I formulate a list of commentaries upon the probable reasons for which the difficulty –or familiarity- at each phoneme arose.

I consider compulsory to undertake a more affective reflection in which I demonstrate my students that they can become legitimate English speakers in their own right (Jenkins (2000) in Jenkins, 2011) and be able to maintain high quality interactions in English in the middle of NNS-NNS and NNS-NS exchanges. I consider that by demonstrating maximum respect for our linguistic and non-linguistic traits and therefore being conscious of how to canalize them into the pronunciation in English rather than suppress them, students may perceive the process as less invasive and more attractive to them.

Taking into account the beliefs I desire to nurture towards English among my students and in order to help my students in this learning process, in the present project I address the following factors within my control:

(a) Demystify English as a difficult language to learn by sharing with them some testimonies of famous Latin-American people speaking English with varying degrees of proficiency.

(b) Rectify the concept of *strange sounds* into *sounds that are non-existent in Spanish* and classify these sounds by distilling the English sounds that do not exist in the Colombian variety of Spanish. I consider this change of perspective as a pivotal step for students to modify their mindset towards English pronunciation, because as they notice that English shares the majority of the sounds with Spanish, the narrower focus on the new sounds might give better results to students in further stages of their language learning process.

(c) Finally, taking into account that my students come from a methodology which is firmly attached to writing, I believe that a mixture of explicit and focused instruction on pronunciation of the aforementioned sounds linked to some pronunciation patterns of letters that they will find in written language might heighten their awareness of language. By the nurturing of phonological loops they might be able to pronounce correctly according to the required sounds in order to produce more intelligible utterances when needed.

Considering the lines of action to be undertaken, I find the significance of this work rests on the fact that children from public educational scenarios in the affective facet of learning still need to (a) gain the necessary confidence in order to interact with people in English and become an active participant in the globalized world by becoming bilingual; (b) modify their prejudgment that English is a strange and difficult language spoken in far places by people who are very distant from them; and (c) feel that even though not being native English speakers, their competence and the intelligibility of their English performance gives them a fully legitimate place as English speakers (Seidlhofer, 2013).

It is time for a change in the students' point of view towards life and language learning, and to sow in them the mindset of being able to speak English, in a way that engages them in their own learning process so they hopefully enjoy making their progress along their way. This change of perspective combined with the potential breakthrough of their learning process may generate cognitive benefits as well as new opportunities might appear for them in a future.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

José Antonio Galan School, is a public school which provides its services in the North rural sector of Yumbo, Valle del Cauca. The population that this school serves is mostly people who work in the agriculture and livestock sector, the second job source in which people perform is in a nearby cement factory, and the third is informal economy. Given the predominant economical activities, many people from this sector do not feel the necessity to learn English for any specific purpose; therefore, the exposure to English (outside school) to which many students have access is very little.

Another powerful and more subjective factor that might contribute to the low appropriacy of this language may be the perception of high difficulty that learning English implies, which is revealed in pessimistic expressions such as 'English is fast-paced,' 'English is a very difficult language to pronounce,' 'English has many strange sounds' and that they do not know how to pronounce the English letters' (that I sometimes hear from some of my students.) Specifically, this last clamor may give us a glimpse of how overwhelming some students consider learning English pronunciation to be and the lack of resources they have previously applied to approach their own learning process.

Regarding pronunciation, I consider oral communication as the motivational vehicle and primal ability for language learning as I believe that ongoing communication –independently of people's fluency- in target language fuels the sense of appropriacy, enhancing the intellectual mechanisms involved in language learning. Given the importance that I confer to oral interactions and addressing the above mentioned reasons I am always in a relentless quest for ways to optimize and facilitate my students' learning with new techniques and cues which might hopefully boost their intake of language instruction.

RATIONALE

The goal of the communication in ELF (matching the goal I set myself for this study) is that of an understandable set of utterances which –at least partly- grant fluid conversation. For that reason, the present study will treat intelligibility as pronunciation of English words with a minimum amount of intrusive [consonant] sounds for utterances to be understood (e.g. epenthetic E, mispronunciation of /z/, etc.).

As I have had my students make oral productions in my English classes, I have detected that during such activities some students from ninth grade pronounce some consonantal sounds as they would sound in their L1 –in the best cases- and in some other cases they tend to omit the pronunciation of clusters with potential foreign pronunciation, producing non-intelligible utterances and subsequently distorting the messages. Although these pronunciation mistakes are totally understandable because L1 interfe

rence plays a major role in learning –Selinker (1972 in Jenkins & Leung, 2019) states that the convergence of differences between L1 and L2 will hinder the acquisition- what is to be done is to create an atmosphere of awareness and respect to the differences that the many varieties of English can offer and stress the concept of intelligibility instead of the native-like pronunciation, fostering self-confidence and peer-confidence and student-teacher confidence.

In addition to that, making the students familiar to some of the most frequent pronunciation patterns of English which do not exist in Spanish may only be achieved by means of focalized didactical processes which should be applied in order to help them improve their performance and as a result, increase their confidence as English speakers. The application of such didactical processes might be the starting point of an instrument for raising pronunciation awareness into students for them to gain independence as ELF speakers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Keeping in mind the nature of the mistakes that students are making and the varied wrong beliefs towards English, I formulated the following research questions:

1. How effective can explicit –yet ludic- exposure of students to pronunciation patterns be in order for them to gain phoneme awareness?

2. To what extent can the present didactical sequence help them to actually reproduce sounds more intelligibly?

3. To what extent can students change their perception of English –including the sounds absent in Spanish- as a difficult language to pronounce by means of such a didactical approach?

OBJECTIVES

General Objective

To observe how explicit pronunciation instruction upon Spanish (L1) speakers impacts their awareness towards English phonemes non-existent in Spanish, their pronunciation of words containing such phonemes; and the promotion of their self-image as valid English speakers in their own right.

Specific Objectives

To identify students' awareness of their potential intelligibility of speech in English by demonstrating they are legitimate English language users despite being non-native speakers.

To observe students' recognition of pronunciation patterns in English which could be used for possible future oral exchanges.

To help students improve their ability to produce intelligible utterances in English by properly identifying, producing and integrating the English consonant sounds non-existent in Spanish.

To measure the extent to which the explicit pronunciation instruction may help students' pronunciation and production of more intelligible utterances.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purposes behind this study are the observation of how explicit pronunciation instruction upon of Spanish (L1) speakers impacts their awareness towards English phonemes non-existent in Spanish, their pronunciation of words containing of such phonemes; and the promotion of their self-image as valid English speakers in their own right. To achieve these purposes, I shall explore the approach to pronunciation formulated by the Colombian authorities as well as the concepts of Language awareness (LA) as it is the competence I intend to nurture among them; English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as the linguistic framework in which their competences will be developed alongside with the concept of intelligibility –based on the academic definition I selected for this purpose- and its measure as the yardstick for evaluation. To illustrate the operative part of the project, this study relies on explicit drilling as the medium of practice and the gamification as a tool for engaging the affective component of learning among the students.

Colombian Basic Standards for English Teaching

Pronunciation teaching for Colombian public high schools must be based on the Guía No. 22 (Ministerio de Educación Nacional de Colombia, 2006)**.** This document contains all the competences needed for the students according the level in which they are. In order to help learners to enhance the spoken performance within a monologue, the following are the competences for 8° a 9° Básica Secundaria Pre-intermedio that the Ministerio de Educación de Colombia (2006) states:

- *Hago* presentaciones cortas y ensayadas sobre temas cotidianos y personales.
- Expreso mi opinión sobre asuntos de interés general para mí y mis compañeros.
- Hago descripciones sencillas sobre diversos asuntos cotidianos de mi entorno

• Expreso mis opiniones, gustos y preferencias sobre temas que he trabajado en clase, utilizando estrategias para monitorear mi pronunciación.

Conversación

• Converso con mis compañeros y mi profesor sobre experiencias pasadas y planes futuros.

• Me arriesgo a participar en una conversación con mis compañeros y mi profesor.

• Uso lenguaje formal o informal en juegos de rol improvisados, según el contexto (p. 25).

I assume the aforementioned document that the Ministerio de Educación de Colombia issued as I must depart from the suggestions for public education in the corresponding grade. I find that, among the standards for eight and ninth grades there is not any reference to a desired quality in the production of sounds nor elicits any strict outcome of pronunciation. This gives teachers the autonomy to foster diverse pronunciation varieties among the students and focus on the content of their oral message; I find that curricular flexibility is positive as it allows me to implement an English as a Lingua Franca framework as it may facilitate their future interactions –and the corresponding tolerance to the- diverse varieties of English they might come across.

Language Awareness

In English as in any other language, it can be said that the oral interaction as a way of communication is the core of the language itself; traditionally, linguistics as a science has focused on speech, rather than writing, as being the primary form of language (Crystal, 2003: 178-9). It is also the natural aspect of the language that has been present in communicational exchanges, and subsequently has facilitated trade, integration and the construction of life within

each community. The role of communication has always been extremely influential to the point that when miscellaneous transactional situations took place between people from different communities and proper linguistic understanding was needed, the necessity to learn other communities' languages to ensure felicitous exchanges arose.

The increasing number of people learning a second or foreign language –according to the countries- and the subsequently intrinsic necessity of every learner to enhance their learning (or acquisition) was the motor for cognitive strategies to be developed –whether they are conscious or not- in a way that the optimization of learning might even involve shorter times or deeper learning outcomes, among other achievements. This series of –self generated- cognitive strategies for enhancing one's own learning is perhaps best understood as an aspect or sub-field of the area known as Language Awareness (LA) (see e.g. Andrews 2006, 2009); research on it has been ongoing ever since the early 1990's. This view has been historically considered as more of a social and communicative phenomenon within the realm of multilingualism than merely a linguistic-linked-only approach; although later helped by linguistic input (Svalberg, 2007) as a way to systematize it.

As a process of cultural philosophy, each language works according to its speakers' vision of life, which at the same time is defined and modified by the usage of the language itself. Given the differences between the ways each language works according to each culture, it is useful for learners to try and understand the functioning of the languages for themselves as a way to enhance language learning (Bolitho et al. 2003). This functionality as a learner may be facilitated by LA; which in other words may be described as a growing knowledge of language which is cultivated by the attention that learners pay to target language and by the subsequent insights grasped and modified in their minds by means of this proceeding (Bolitho et al., 2003).

According to Svalberg (2007), it has been observed upon LA importance that it may be applied not only for language requiring situations or tasks, LA is self-sufficient to be considered as an important source of help for language learning as students are prompted to enrich their usage of language outside school, making it a permanent (or at least long-lasting) learning trait. It is therefore of great utility for us as teachers to set scenarios in which students will develop curiosity about the target language and prompt them to discover how their incipient use of LA and the reflection upon it may influence this language's own evolution and learning (Andrews, 2009).

The suggestion for teachers to create such scenarios appears as a result of the assumption that a deeper knowledge of language will likely lead students to an increasing effectiveness in the use of language (Andrews, 2009). Complementing the previous idea, it is also necessary to provide learners with tools that may ease the application of deductions about language and rectification of concepts and beliefs regarding language in a way that it becomes dynamic and intuitive to mold by learners according to Tomlinson's (1994) view on LA.

Since LA is a very individual competence, it will be developed when every learner is affectively, cognitively and operatively ready (Masuhara in Bolitho, 2003). As it has been said, affect is a major component of how open are learners towards learning languages and it is partly a teacher task to help bridging the confusions, demystify paradigms which might be harmful for the purpose of learning and nurturing a more positive view onto the target language as this approach might be of definitive help for struggling learners. This affective support might indirectly enhance their cognition of target language as new strategies might arise within each student (Bolitho (2003).

From the perspective of language awareness, teaching methods become eclectic because of the many learning styles learners may have; and as this happens, pre-established syllabuses do not serve the purpose of following-up language awareness (Masuhara in Bolitho, 2003). According to Bolitho (2003), there may be varied strategies which teachers may apply such as using the mother tongue for discussing difficulties in the target language or fostering interactions based on messages containing the segments being taught. Hence voluntary exploration of language is undertaken by learners which might even create reflections upon the mother tongue and the way it works.

 From the perspective of teaching, it is suggested by Bolitho (2003) that possessing traditional traits required for teachers such as proficiency or mastery of the target language itself are not the only guarantee of being apt for teaching LA. It requires more reflective abilities to be applied on the materials and activities done, certain ability to predict and conduct students' reflection upon language according with their analysis.

For LA to be sowed into students, this process therefore needs teachers who have the ability to reflect and pivot according with their findings in the classroom as many of the techniques may not work in the purpose of developing LA among students. Subsequently, they might benefit from their teachers' reflection on what worked for them to learn that specific aspect of language as the self-developed skillset is crucial in the transmission or nurturing of learning towards learners. As learners begin to ask questions about language (Hawkins, 1984); they will find themselves immersed in the continuous process of discovering language (Bolitho et al., 2003); this ongoing process, will shed light on how language makes meaning, facilitating an in-classroom convergence of the views of language that learners and teachers have internally built up (Bolitho & Tomlinson, 1995 in Bolitho et al, 2003).

Considering the previous idea, the question arises: is this mindset and state of preparation of learners' which will allow them to be better at learning and using language? (Svalberg, 2007). According to Tomlinson (in Bolitho et. al 2003) the readiness to learn will lead students into increasingly-advanced abilities to connect the dots and self-formulate hypothesis on how languages work, furtherly gaining learning independence; which will help them progress even in off-class settings.

To sum up, Language Awareness is a trait I try to foster in my students to enable their cognition to operate even in off-class settings; if my initiative is fruitful, the reflection my students develop upon language might ease my task of conveying the desired contents to them as it might allow them to connect and systematize all the TL information they can find (e.g. words, loanwords, sounds and pronunciation variations). The main way this study could benefit from LA is that students would apply it into recognizing the pronunciation of certain words and by means of making such association and detecting patterns, their hearing and pronunciation will be better equipped to produce more intelligible utterances.

English as a Lingua Franca (ELF)

Nowadays, English is an international language which through time has gained such status that it is used worldwide for educational, working, entertainment and interactional purposes among people who speak different mother languages as a contact language (Mauranen, 2003, p. 513). Therefore, the great majority of these international interactions –which are presumably mediated by English- happen in countries that according to Kachru (1985) belong to the expanding circle, in which English is not the mother tongue but is spoken by their inhabitants for whom English is not their L1 nor an official language within the countries.

The felicitous communication existing between people involved in these interactions, who may not share any linguistic feature between their first languages is the connecting role of English as a Lingua Franca and these expanding-circle-interaction scenarios are the ones in which ELF is best portrayed (Seidlhofer, 2004, p. 211). In fact, going beyond the mere NNS-NNS interactions; ELF should advocate for the NS to be communicatively generous and grow a neutral regard towards the forms used in countries with NNS population as they are a show of their individual identity both in the Outer Circle and Expanding Circle (Kilickaya, 2009).

The main goal which ELF aims at is not to produce native-like models of English in a pursuit of perfection (which actually doesn't exist) or purity, but intelligible models of speech in which the spoken expression is free of intrusive sounds and the message is clear to whoever the interlocutor may be. This intention has led researchers to look for an agreement which is based on sounds present in a vast quantity of languages for NNS to be able to communicate with each other. In order to achieve this, Kilickaya (2009) suggests that learners should be nurtured within an intelligibility and tolerance approach for interactions beyond national borders, fostering more integration among people from different countries.

Jenkins's (2000) Lingua Franca Core posited a pronunciation model which however narrow in the possibilities that speakers had to pronounce, was a powerful attempt to set an agreement on pronunciation of English phonemes; in short, it was a serious attempt to fix a pronunciation formula which could unify the speech of NNS. Nevertheless, its own static view of pronunciation has since prompted Jenkins herself and other researchers on ELF to move towards more dynamic approaches.

Authors portray ELF as a scenario for speaking English between people from diverse backgrounds who use English as a contact language; the majority of such interactions will not

include NS and –probably- any shared linguistic elements neither. As this study is conducted in an Expanding Circle country, it is necessary to seek for a rather comprehensive pronunciation model that may be familiar to Spanish for students to adopt it easier, but also be comprehensible for people from other Expanding Circle countries.

Intelligibility in Pronunciation of English

For NNS-NNS interactions to be possible, there must be a shared agreement between the parties of the communication regarding the phonology of English, this agreement will set the extent to which speakers' utterances are understandable to ensure a proper communication. The extent to which speech can be understood is known as intelligibility, concept that according to Munro (2011) has gained support by empirical evidence on how it facilitates communication to take place and its achievement enjoys major importance, to the point that it has inspired many pronunciation models.

The importance of the concept of intelligibility has led many researchers to seek for names which better reflect it; in fact, there is a multiplicity of names by which this concept may be referred to as its synonyms; for instance, Becker & Kluge (2014) illustrate a short list of the names given to this concept in the field of linguistics:

> Cruz (2007) points out up to ten names for the construct, from intelligibility itself to accessibility, acceptability, communicativity and even comprehensibility and interpretability, the last two being considered different dimensions by most researchers (p. 53).

Becker & Kluge (2014) also clarify the matter whether a word is intelligible and acceptable at the same time by establishing these qualities as equals; therefore, if certain word uttered by a

person is understood by their interlocutors, then it is acceptable as valid speech and vice versa: the set of utterances accepted by the members of a determinate community will be intelligible for all of them. The convergence of the meanings of the words mentioned above will lead to the fact of the utterance being effectively communicative, therefore intelligibility is the most commonly used term establishing to what extent an utterance is understood (Munro & Derwin, 1995).

As Isaacs (2008) points out, despite the consensus upon the appropriateness of intelligibility as a goal for English Language Teaching (ELT) the great variety of meanings that the involved authors have given to it and their valid arguments for supporting their statements makes it difficult to establish a universal way to define and measure it. Other fact that impedes the tailoring of a global English pronunciation model for teachers to implement is the lack of empirical evidence about the most important pronunciation features that would ensure intelligibility (Isaacs, 2008).

Condensing what intelligibility has been known as in the broad linguistics field, I consider that intelligible pronunciation is one that gives place to very little misunderstanding between interlocutors although it might be slightly troubled when interacting with interlocutors who are used to varieties with different pronunciation traits. I consider that an ideal strategy for helping learners to achieve intelligible pronunciation departs from illustrating in a ludic way the sounds the learners are unfamiliar with and reinforcing the L1 sounds that converge with English.

Concepts Related to Didactic Strategies

The following two concepts mentioned in this section are connected to the specifics of the didactical sequence and are implemented, they represent (a) the starting point for the cognitive processes which seeks for automation of the recognition of sounds and will support language

awareness; and (b) the pursue of the enthusiastic (or at least positive) affective response to the didactical sequence that implemented in the present study:

Drilling as Initiator of the Sound Recognition Process

In order to automatize good pronunciation of segments, teachers must provide models of good performance for learners, nurturing the formation of correct habits of pronunciation by means of regular practice (Scheffler, 1965; Schofield, 1972 in Kani & Sa'ad, 2015),
Ideally, this modelling will be straightforward so students know what models to rely on. This can be achieved by means of sequences of pronunciation drilling, which is the systematic repetition of patterns of pronunciation for determinate segments in a way that students can fixate articulations or voicing of sounds for posterior use during speech. As pointed out by Sa'ad, 2009; Lewis, 2013; Mohammed, 2015 in Kani and Sa'ad's (2015), research also indicates that drilling enables learners' metacognition by fostering reflection and making cognitive structures that lead to a more intelligible way of producing language and thus perfection of the speaking skills.

I consider that the modelling of pronunciation must directed learners towards the desired pronunciation outcomes and that teachers must absolutely avoid showing learners which mistakes they do not want them to make. Stressing on the poor pronunciation and providing students with the mispronunciation traits might still lead the students into poor articulation or emission of sounds that they do not want the students to make, this kind of instruction might be troublesome for students as the pronunciation models may become ambiguous.

Gamification as a Generator of Learner Openness

It is also important for the teacher to make any didactical sequence enriching, well planned and make sure it counts on appropriate resources and suitable content that may assist the learners to accomplish learning. These sequences must also be interesting in order to foster a more pleasing class setting so learners enjoy their activities. One is these traits is the game, which can develop concentration, motivation and action-taking which according to Shernoff (2013 in Jamaludin, Ahmad, Mohammad and Mohammed, 2016) are indicators of engagement with the current activity.

Addressing learning engagement, it will not be achieved if the activity is only playful but it presents a very low difficulty because it might as well lose the learners' interest; it must combine previous knowledge for students to consider to be adding their part to its development. The activity must also be accomplishable in a way that students feel it is appropriate for their expertise and challenge the learners' skills for them to increase (Csikszentmihalyi, 2004 in Fryer, 2005). A didactical sequence fulfilling these traits will be regarded as a meaningful learning and educational entertainment source. There must be a balance between difficulty and the current skills of the learners for an activity to be engaging.

Going further, Bolitho (2003) mentions that emotional responses encountered through instruction will influence the success or failure of the learning process. For this reason, teachers should always maintain a positive and respectful attitude towards the target language and/or any other language existing and work explicitly on the negative responses that may appear during classes.

Undoubtedly, student engagement is a vital part of the didactics, I believe it can be facilitated by gamification as it may generate varied cognitive responses that add up to the intentional

application of newly gained knowledge. In the educational sector it is possible to lead learners to comply with the activities by means of rewards and it will get good in-task responses; but what is more difficult and –more importantly- fruitful is to generate the emotions that will move the learners towards the self-improvement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

Generalities:

Absence of a control group

The present study was conducted with sixteen young Colombian learners between the ages of 14 and 17 who study at José Antonio Galán School, a public rural school in the municipality of Yumbo, Valle del Cauca, Colombia. These sixteen students out of a total of twenty-one, participated voluntarily in this intervention that started while they were in ninth grade and finished during their tenth –it was at the beginning of tenth grade when they recorded the final audio samples.

Chronology of the didactical sequence

This didactical sequence was conceived in April 2019 and developed inside the school along six weekly sessions which took place on Tuesdays between June 2019 and July 2019. Each session had a duration of approximately two hours after the regular class time. For the reasons I address later in this section, the final samples were recorded in February 2020 during a regular English class.

A methodologic mistake

During the first recording session, I asked the students to identify themselves using their real first-names before reading the words; but as piece of advice from my thesis advisor I should look for a way to anonymize them in a way that there would not be any bias for any external evaluator

who could get to listen to both the initial and final audio recordings. This mistake served for me as a way to reflect on how such small details need to be paid attention to and how being careful can lead a similar studies to success.

Following this piece of advice I asked the students to identify themselves by using letters from A to N, this anonymization, added to the three week delay, should have distorted the external evaluator's memory of the students' names.

Assessment

Initial assessment by external evaluator

As a way to test intelligibility and in order to avoid biases nurtured by myself doing the assessment, I received assistance from a Colombian outsider English teacher with high proficiency –she possesses a B.A. in Modern Languages at Universidad Santiago de Cali and has participated in au-pair exchanges in United States. She listened to the audio samples of each student, wrote down the words she understood and also labelled as "non-intelligible" the utterances that she could not relate to any word she knew. It is valid to remind that as a way to grant more transparency, the external evaluator never had access to the original worksheet used during the initial and final recordings and therefore she did not know which the intended words were.

Final assessment by external evaluator

After the intervention, a seven-month delay, students were to be recorded reading out loud the same words they read at the diagnosis session and the pronunciation needed to be tested again by the same outsider English teacher, who –after the previously mentioned one month-long delay

from the listening of the initial samples was asked to listen to the second audio samples, write down the words she understood this time and rate the intelligibility of the corresponding sounds.

Data analysis

Based on the above-mentioned input, I was supposed to make the intelligibility statistics for the initial and final sampling by using the three intelligibility measures I will mention later in this section and contrast them to provide a statistical glimpse on the improvement [or its absence] of these learners' intelligibility.

Variables Assessed in This Study

Number of intelligible utterances/total number of words per student

This variable is related to all the utterances understood and transcribed as valid words by the external evaluator (matching the intended word) for each student. Utterances not matching the intended words were not taken into account as they would distort the message in the middle of a real communicative setting.

Number of intelligible utterances per phoneme/total number of words per phoneme per student

This variable is one-phoneme-focused and related to the utterances understood and transcribed as valid words by the external evaluator (matching the intended words) for each student. Utterances not matching the intended words were not taken into account as they would distort the message in the middle of a real communicative setting.

Average intelligibility of the group

As the quantitative measure for the diagnostic stage, it provided both an absolute and relative numeric datum of intelligible words (only utterances matching the intended words). Utterances not matching the intended words were not taken into account as they would distort the message in the middle of a real communicative setting.

Number of non-intelligible utterances per group and per phoneme.

Utterances which the external evaluator was not able to distinguish and subsequently transcribe due to poor pronunciation.

Didactic Sequence Design

Teaching Approach

General approach for intervention

The didactical approach I used for this pronunciation instruction was that of explicit and isolated teaching. I needed it to help me enhance the students' pronunciation in order for them to be able to meet the proficiency criteria contained in the Guía 22 for English teaching in Colombian Public Sector.

The way I oriented it was aiming exclusively to enhance the pronunciation of six definite English phonemes and a consonant cluster which will be introduced later in this section. My focus was to make my students to recognize and be familiar with such phonemes to a point that they would progressively produce more intelligible utterances

Specific techniques implemented during the intervention

I developed a six-session-long didactical sequence, from which the second, third and fourth session included explicit pronunciation instruction in order to establish common patterns for varied pronunciation cases which would require the sounds related to the phonemes seen. This process which shall lead students to the recognition of patterns would be facilitated by means of a ludic approach and memorizing techniques by means of funny key-names for the phonemes – relating them to onomatopoeias in Spanish- in order to avoid the use of phonology's technical terms in a way that evoke a more familiar phonetic response in them and subsequently, by provoking such response among the students, it might be easier to model and orient the sound the way I desired rather than simply referring to points of articulation in the mouth and correcting over them.

Games and contests were considered as a way to break the ice and add a little competitive touch to encourage them to participate as they would be recommended to practice at home, but the only occasions in which explicit instruction on such pronunciation tips was intended to take place was during the in-class sessions. My expectation was to –hopefully- create curiosity among my students in a way that they would search pronunciation of new sounds in advance.

Outline of the Didactical Sequence

The didactical sequence I applied had six sessions with a duration of approximately 2 hours (from 12:40 pm to 2:40 pm) each, students participated voluntarily in these sessions that were after-classes as a way to improve their competences in English. In the next paragraph I will mention the contents seen in the sessions:

In the first session, we spoke about factors that hinder the students' confidence; then, I conducted a sensitization of how they may become English speakers in their own right. After that, I recorded their pronunciation –without any prompt- of the 57 words from the worksheet contained in Appendix A. It was during this phase in which I was recording my students that I discovered that the nature of the mistakes was the unawareness the sound of such phonemes and that I needed to teach them first as isolated sounds by creating awareness of how and when to articulate them and later integrating them into words, making their combination with vowels

During session 2, I provided explicit instruction upon the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/ and reinforced it by means of drills, games and contests in which I managed to engage the kids by stimulating their competitive spirit. This same structure was repeated in session 3 with /z/, /ʃ/, and /ŋ/, later in session 4 with /r/ and S+consonant cluster (henceforth s+C-).

After the instructional stage was completed, I recorded the final samples of my students' pronunciation during the fifth session. Finally, I conducted a series of reflections upon non-nativeness and their right to be ELF rightful speakers during session 6.

Factors Which Might Influence the Final Performance and Averages

Delay between initial and final sessions

The initial sampling took place in June, 2019 and the didactical sequence itself was implemented from June to July, 2019. Unluckily, between the final instruction session and the final recording there was an eight-month delay –days after finishing the application of the didactical sequence and before the final audio samples could be recorded- due to a massive teacher union strike and the schoolyear final activities scheduled.

Due to this situation, the final recordings took place in early February, 2020 –when the students were starting tenth grade- and after the samples tagged, they were sent to the external evaluator for her to provide the assessment. The external evaluator finished the assessment in late February 21st, hence I started the statistics of the study.

Number of students.

In that long time lapse, I had two students who dropped out this study: one did not continue while in ninth grade because he dropped out from the school and the other dropped out because he failed ninth grade and could not continue with the group. Having this students' dropout into account and in order to maintain the stability of the statistics of this didactical sequence, I only considered working on the recordings of the fourteen remaining students both for initial and final stage.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Results Obtained From the Initial Session

In this section I will provide an overview of the results of how accurately the utterances were pronounced by the students and some of the probable causes which prompted such results. This measure will be based on a) which words the external evaluator considered were intelligible enough for her to be able to identify and transcribe b) whether these words match the ones I assigned to be read and how many do match; c) whether the words were comprehensible to be counted as actual English words and d) if the evaluator could not recognize some utterances as words.

From the initial sampling of students –who were recorded reading fifty-seven unrelated words out loud with no previous clue of their pronunciation given by me as researcher- and the comparison between the transcription of utterances (or their labeling as non-intelligible) by the external evaluator and the actual words due for students; we can observe a low average of overall intelligibility of 30.5%, which equals to 17 out of 57 words.

Breaking this average between the six (and a consonant cluster) phonemes assessed and analyzing each phoneme as a whole, we can find that the students' performance varied with each phoneme as follows:

Phoneme /θ/

This phoneme appears to be one of the most troublesome since it is a sound that we do not use in the Latin American Spanish variety and –however heard sporadically in class during listening or audiovisual exercises- students were not related to it in their daily life. When facing words

which contain the cluster TH and they notice that if the pronunciation is not /ð/, they opt to utter /t/ or in other cases /tʃ/ as it is what L1 will dictate them to do.

Given the unfamiliarity of students to this phoneme, the initial stage had an overall average of intelligibility of 15,9%, the second lowest average. In order to help the students to improve the pronunciation of this phoneme, it was precise to adopt the model of pronunciation for the letter "Z" in Spain for students (better known for them) to find the points and force of articulation.

Phoneme /ð/

This phoneme has an allophone in Spanish, the sound of letter "D" which a lot of my students use in common words containing the TH cluster (e.g. this, they) that they already know; this phoneme has a relevant proximity to them, therefore it was expected to be one of the best pronounced. Despite statistically it was the third best pronounced, the advantages formerly mentioned made the average of 32,1% to be actually lower than anticipated.

Phoneme /z/

Despite not having this phoneme in Spanish as a voiced one and according to the guidelines given to the external evaluator for transcribing the utterances she could understand; statistically, this was the second best pronounced group of words from this study, this phoneme in use gathered an intelligibility average of 34,1% as it is a similar sound to the Spanish "S" and students could recreate it appropriately; nevertheless, it was pronounced more as a voiceless sound /s/ than a voiced one /z/.

Phoneme /ʃ/

This is a sound which however present in our language for many years due to some crucial loanwords in our variety of Spanish –such as *shampoo*, *flash* or the name *Shakira*; its difficulty to be pronounced in its full extent may be related to its powerful allophone within the Spanish language /tʃ/, which demands a greater force of articulation that might lower the students' sensitivity to the softer /ʃ/.

According to the phonetic transcription provided by the outsider teacher, when this phoneme was not ignored at syllable endings, it was apparently pronounced more like a /s/ possibly in an effort to separate it from the Spanish /tʃ/ sound –which was predominantly present at the beginning of words or syllables.

The mispronunciation of the phoneme /ʃ/ for /tʃ/ in some contexts might cause misunderstandings as in some English varieties there is a strong /tʃ/ pronunciation for the letter "T" at syllable beginnings.

Phoneme /ŋ/

I particularly find this phoneme to be controversial: Despite being present in Spanish in many common words such as ángulo or cinco (angle and five respectively), its depiction in English as an independent phoneme may have confused the students enough to make them look for a special way to pronounce it when they faced the words to be read out loud.

In a situation which may configure a strange case, this phoneme had the lowest intelligibility average of all with only 13,1% as it was mostly ignored and mispronounced in some other cases, during the recording stage, students were noticed to struggle and finally mispronouncing it.

As a fact that could hinder communication, if this phoneme continues to be treated as an independent phoneme for learners whose mother language contains it, it might lead to confusions and misunderstandings because as I detected, students tended to pronounce utterances different than the intended words.

Phoneme /r/

Not surprisingly, this phoneme had the highest intelligibility average as this is the most English-cliché sound for us as Latin American Spanish speakers and possibly the most reinforced sound during pronunciation drills. It is also important to remark that in this study, this phoneme is the one with the most (five) cognates in the whole word list and this might have helped the students to correctly identify the ways of pronouncing or allowed the outsider teacher to more successfully grasp what they tried to utter.

It is also worth to mention that the flexibility of pronunciation of this phoneme across the World English varieties (from rhotic and non-rhotic to the ones that accept the vibrant /r/ as it is pronounced by Latin American and Italian people) may have promoted the intelligibility of these utterances, which average was 65,9%.

/sC-/ (cluster)

Although this cluster may be found in Spanish in words like *escudo* and *susto* ("shield" and "fright", respectively) this consonant cluster sound is never present in Spanish language in the beginning of any syllable –neither a word- without the support of a vowel as shown in the previous instances. The usual response from Spanish speakers it is to add a /e/ sound right before

the cluster when it appears (e.g. /es'prai/ for "spray"), evoking the phenomenon known as epenthetic E right before the cluster appears.

Traditionally, it has always has been the case that students struggle with syllable-initial and specially word-initial /sC-/ but the present study actually suggests that they struggle with or /sC-/ in any position in the word. For instance, this cluster was also tested for word-endings /-sC/ and it was found that in some cases there was (a) omission of the consonant following the /s/, (b) omission of the entire cluster or (c) uttering of a different phoneme.

In many of the recordings it is seen that many students opted for distorting, ignoring and/or removing the cluster from their pronunciation in various positions within the words. Unfortunately, as most of the words were monosyllabic and disyllabic, the lack of other supporting sounds has made many of the utterances to be unintelligible, making it the phoneme which group of words had perhaps the highest number of unintelligible utterances (meaning by this, it was impossible for the outsider teacher to relate them to any word she has listened to before), the intelligibility of this group of words was 27,8%.

Observations upon the Findings from the Initial Recordings

Apart from the low average of intelligibility found (30,5%) in the diagnosis, there were two interesting situations that have been outstanding examples of phonemes with non-perfectly accurate –influenced by L1- but intelligible pronunciation of the whole words that have finally influenced the comprehensibility of the phoneme, this is the case of /r/ (65,9%) and /z/ (34,1%) this kind of findings is what intelligibility refers to. It was also surprising that the only independent phoneme that exists in Spanish (/ŋ/) presented the lowest intelligibility average (13,1%). Unfortunately, the rest of the phonemes that have allophones in Spanish, were not

pronounced in a very intelligible way as the numbers indicate: /ð/ (32,1%), /ʃ/ (19%). The most distant sounds from Spanish (/s+C/ cluster and /θ/) were pronounced (27,8% and 15,9% respectively).

Final Recording Findings

After the six week in-class intervention with mnemotechnic cues, graphic and kinesthetic demonstration of articulation of the phonemes mentioned above with their corresponding drills, games and contests –perhaps some students memorized words from this list and were better prepared to pronounce them more accurately- I took a final recording in the same conditions as the initial (they read out loud the entire list of words individually with no pronunciation cues) and the results show that I was able to help the students to get the following achievements per phoneme:

**Statistical Measures of Intelligibility**

Group's Overall Average of Well Pronounced Words

This chart shows the average number of well pronounced words in the final recordings in which it is visible that the whole group achieved 36,5 out of a total of 57 words per student, meaning by this the overall average slightly increased from 17 to 21 words. This measure takes into account all the utterances understood by the external evaluator and that matched the intended words.

GROUP'S AVERAGE INTELLIGIBILITY
(Number of well-pronounced words)
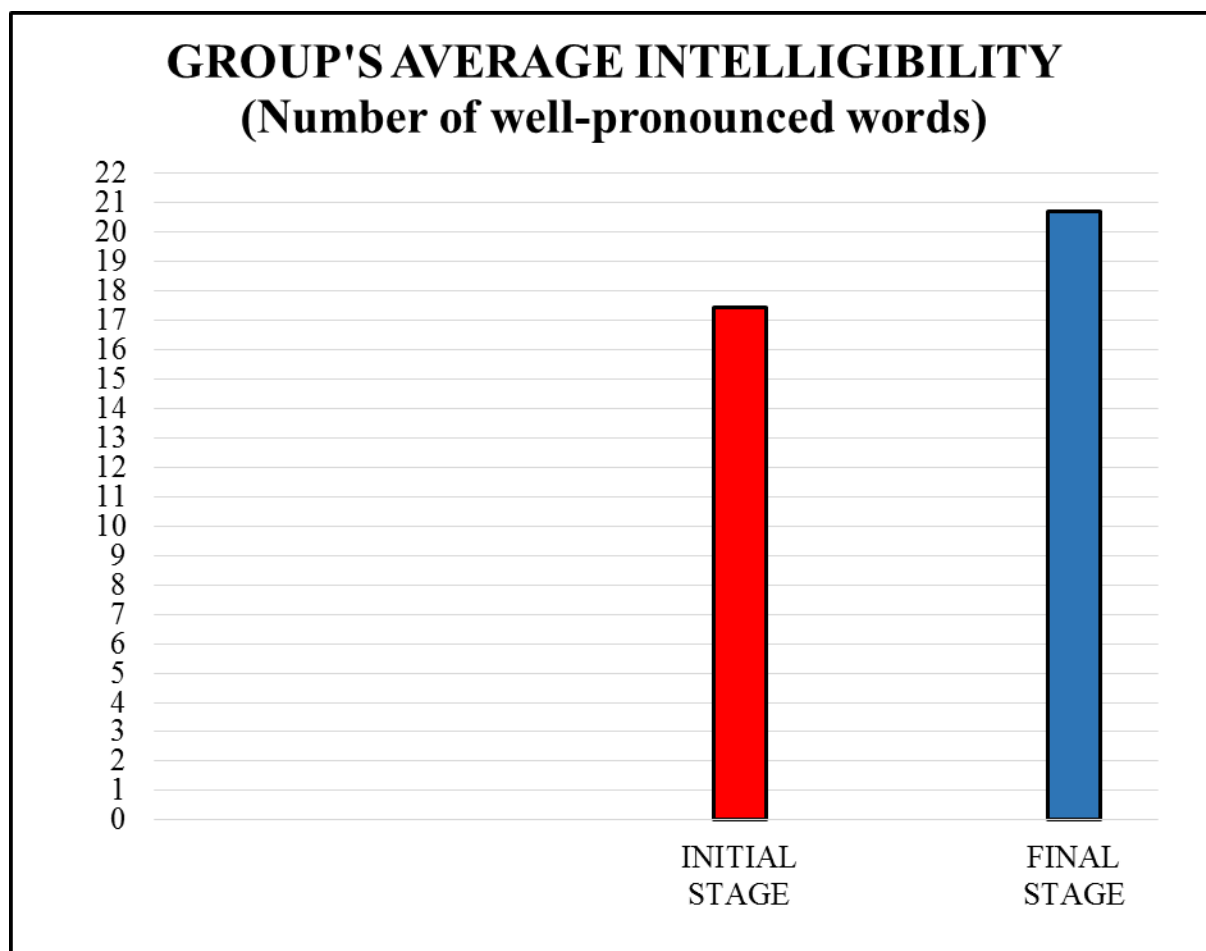
Group's Average of Highest Intelligibility

This section illustrates the comparison of the percentage of accurate utterances during the initial stage versus final stage. This may serve as the measure of intelligibility among the entire group which increased from 30,5% to 36,3%.
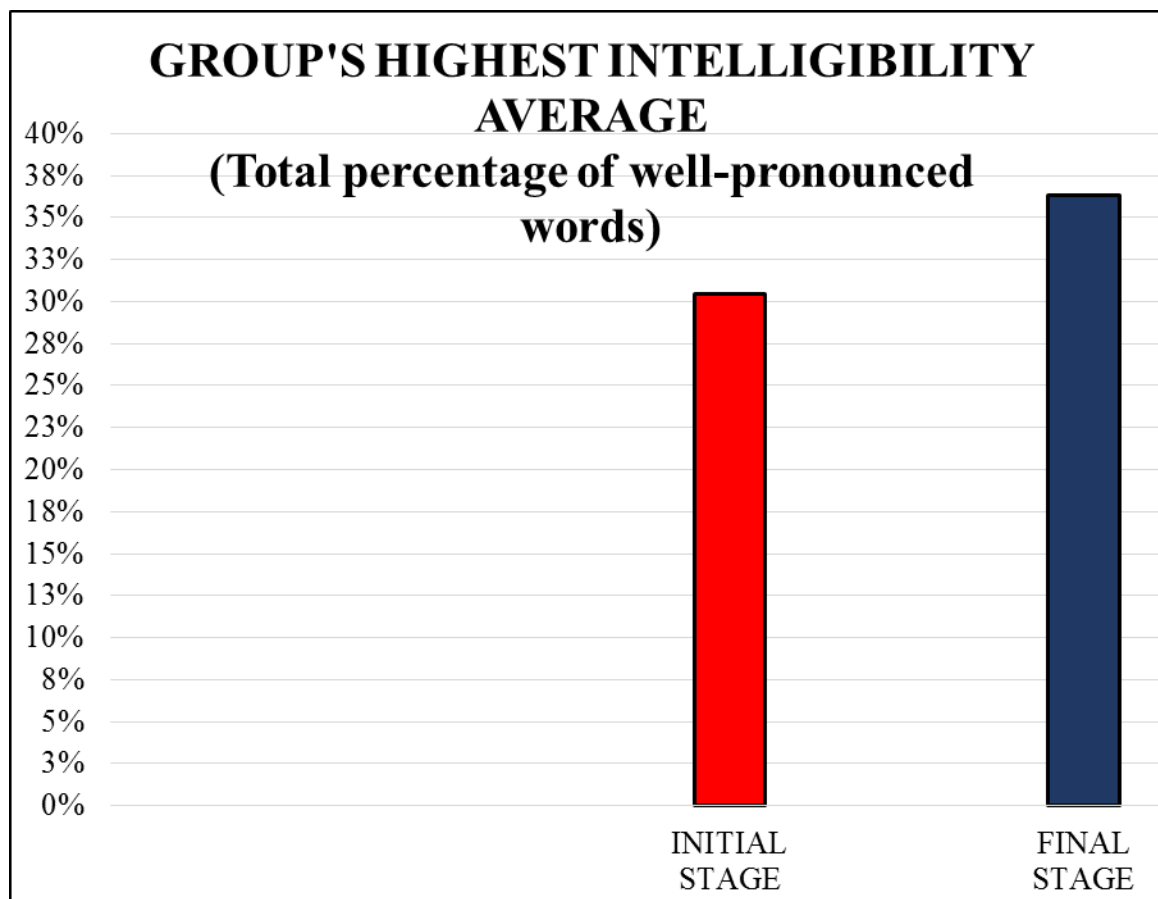
GROUP'S HIGHEST INTELLIGIBILITY AVERAGE (Total percentage of well-pronounced words)

Highest Intelligibility Percentage (Initial Stage vs. Final Stage)

This chart presents the contrast between the highest percentage of intelligible words per phoneme in the initial stage and the final stage of the pronunciation of each phoneme.

HIGHEST INTELLIGIBILITY PER PHONEME (initial stage vs final stage)
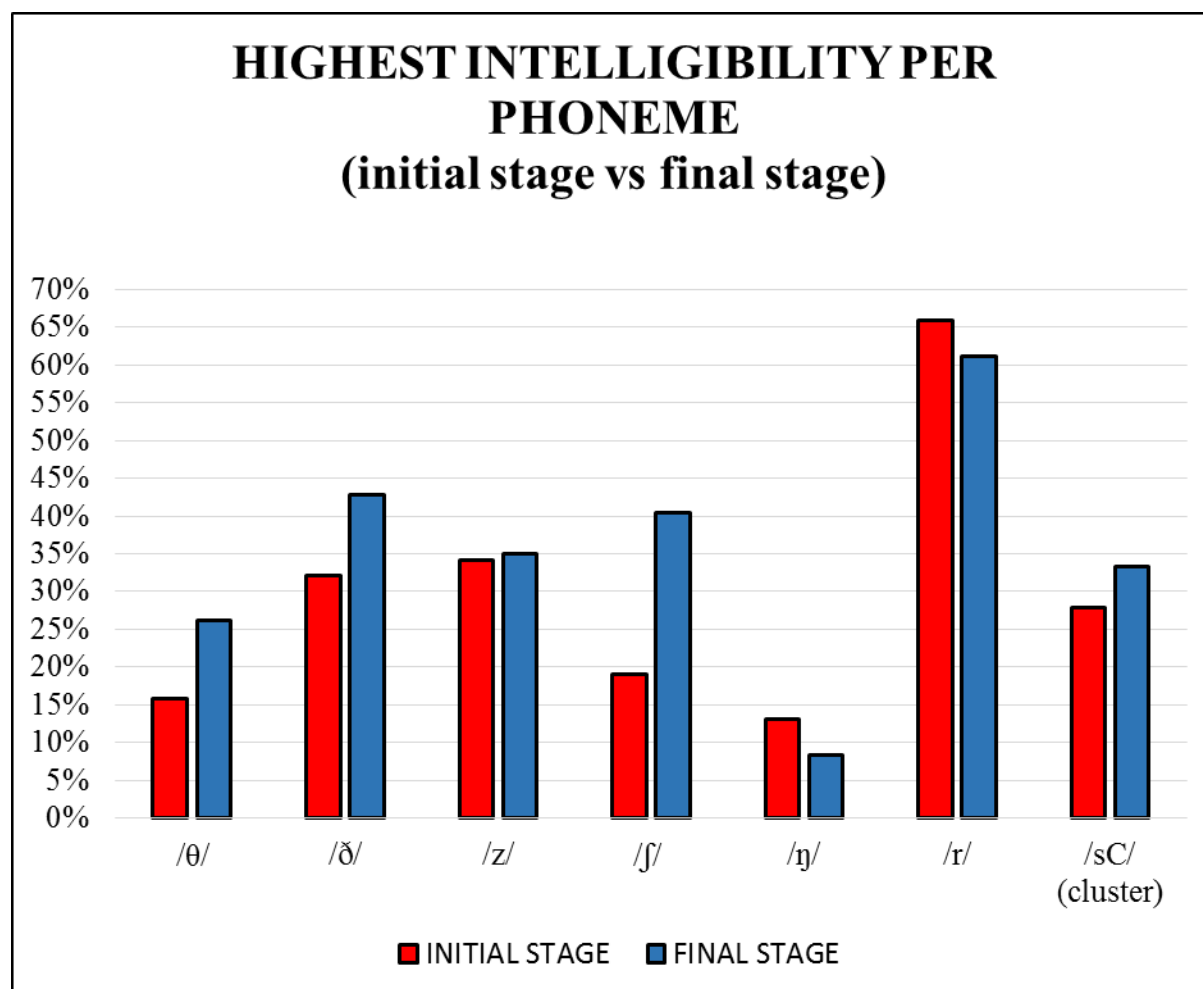
Evolution of the Intelligibility per Phoneme

The following chart shows the directly proportional statistical measure of improvement or worsening regarding students' pronunciation of each phoneme:

- /θ/ presented a 10,3% improvement.

- /ð/ shows a 10,7% improvement.

- /z/ indicates a slight 0,8% improvement.

- In /ʃ/ it is demonstrated an important 21,4% improvement.

- /ŋ/ presented a decrease of accuracy of 4,8%

- A decrease of 4,8% is visible in /r/

- /sC-/ cluster presents a 5,8% increase of accuracy.
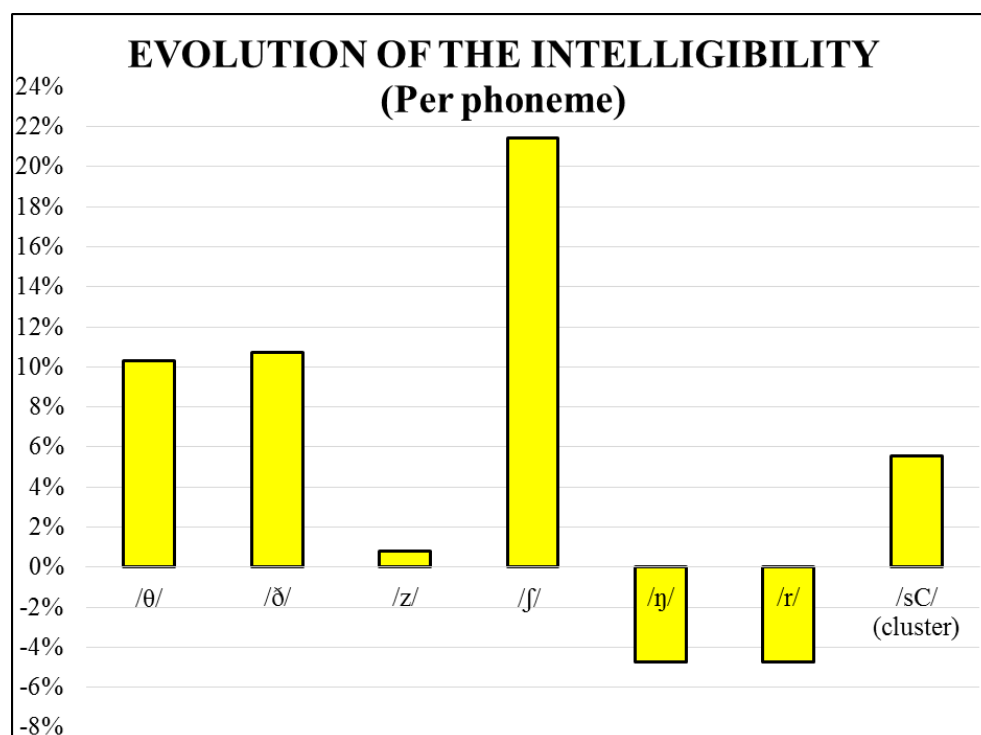
Phoneme /θ/ or 'La españoleta'

Regarding this phoneme, which due to its articulation I consider it as one the most distant from the Latin American Spanish pronunciation system –both for pronouncing "Z" (in Spanish) and "TH" (in English), the students did achieve an overall improvement rate of 10,3% making it to grow from 15,9 to 26,3%.

This improvement in the intelligibility average is an incipient but scalable indicator of improvement which shows the students' emerging awareness of this phoneme in the English language sound system for a more accurate communication.

Apparently, they have already identified the sound as one known for them –the way "Z" is pronounced in Spain; the gap between this stage and a more advanced one is perhaps a matter of

relating it to some cases of the cluster "TH"; which could be developed by means of more consistent and focalized didactical sequences which find steady pronunciation patterns for this phoneme might improve its pronunciation to higher levels of intelligibility.

Phoneme /ð/ or 'el WhatsAppazo'

After the intervention there was a positive fact: this phoneme's intelligibility has increased to an interesting average of 42,9% after presenting a much lower average of 32,1% , showing an increase of 10,7%.

The phoneme /ð/ is apparently the primary option of pronunciation to be adopted when facing a "TH" cluster in a word due to their prior knowledge of some basic English words, it is also probable that a more thorough approach to this phoneme will boost the comprehensibility of such utterances.

Phoneme /z/ or 'El zancudo'

Despite not being a poorly pronounced phoneme around other sounds –having an initial intelligibility average of 34,1%, this phoneme did not have quite an influential increase, which was only 0,8%, making the final average to be 34,9%, showing some type of resistance from the students towards it.

Apparently, this phoneme continues to be a strange one for students at the time to use it in utterances. Possibly, due to a heavy L1 influence, students pronounce the letter "Z" and other clusters which sound /z/ as the voiceless /s/.

I was also able to notice that during the drilling process this was perhaps the most troublesome phoneme for the students as they were struggling to provide it with the voice and

force of articulation; when the time of combining it with the rest of phonemes arrived, many of them had fluency and accuracy issues, pauses and elision of other sounds –which didn't present when they pronounced using the phoneme /s/.

It is very likely that with a more sensitivity raising didactical approach, students may become more aware of the necessity of this particular phoneme and start producing the sound –firstly when encountering a letter "Z" and later using it more widely- whenever it is properly needed.

Phoneme /ʃ/ or 'El chorro'

Despite the initial difficulty related to the pronunciation of this phoneme, its intelligibility average had the highest increase among all (21,4%). This phoneme's intelligibility average growth from 19% to 40,5% serves as a strong mark of progress and gives morale to the students to be confident of their progress over time if they continue to practice pronunciation.

These numbers show a great appropriacy of this phoneme among students. It might continue to improve as there are words which can work as pronunciation cues everywhere (e.g. loan words).

I consider this phoneme as the least effort-requiring one due to several factors: a) It is a phoneme which written conditions are very similar to what they already know when they read the cluster "SH", b) The cases in which the writing does not include this cluster, are very stable (clusters "SS" "Tion") and can easily directed to this pronunciation and, c) it is apparently easier to make a voiced phoneme into a voiceless one. I find little difficulty to help students master this phoneme.

Phoneme /ŋ/ or 'El gangoso'

Besides being the least intelligible phoneme (statistically speaking), it was also reported a negative growth from its initial recording stage: This phoneme's intelligibility average decreased from 13,1% to 8,3% (a rate of 4,8%) in the final session of assessment, it may have been an omission of this phoneme due to the lack of force in the syllables where it appeared.

It is seen that the usual teaching of this phoneme –which although independently, exists in Spanish in common language use- as an independent one has not been beneficial for the improvement of its pronunciation.

I consider that a more thorough study might demonstrate whether it is better to give it for granted or make several adjustments for its independent teaching. According to my experience in this study, the specific teaching of this phoneme should be abandoned for the reasons mentioned before.

Phoneme /r/ or '¿Dónde queda China?'

This was a rather atypical case in which the most intelligible group of utterances per phoneme during the initial phase of the study had a decrease of 4,8%, showing a slight descent of the intelligibility average from 65,9% to 61,1%.

This descent was unexpected for me as the phoneme /r/ is widely recognized as an English cliché sound among Colombian students of EFL. Regarding this I consider that students tried to focus on the rest of phonemes –as they never got to know the results of the initial stage- rather than /r/, causing some of the utterances to be mispronounced.

However the decrease at the final stage, initial stage shows both the high appropriacy of this phoneme among students and the tolerance that the multiple varieties of English have towards

the multiple pronunciations of letter "R" in English as the external evaluator indicated to have understood the utterances by transcribing them as the words I assigned despite some of them were pronounced using a Latin American /r/ sound.

I would not recommend such as a thorough study to enhance this sound's pronunciation because this phoneme is already known and can be switched as students' exposure to English increases. I vow for a rather passive-communicative set of sessions in which the sound if /r/ is used and elicited from students for them to make the switch.

/sC-/ (cluster)

The final assessment reported an interesting increase of 5,6% in the intelligibility average for the utterances containing this consonant cluster despite being an uncommon sound in Spanish sound.

The intervention helped learners to increase this phoneme's intelligibility average from 27,8% to 33,3% as it was not problematic to make them reflect upon the separation of this phoneme from the vowels which generate epenthesis.

I consider that several more consistent didactical sequences might help students achieve even higher intelligibility averages upon the pronunciation of this cluster.

### Utterances Labelled as Non-Intelligible

While there were some positive starting points and important demonstrations of improvement in pronunciation; there were as well many utterances which due to poor pronunciation or elision of determinate key sounds were labelled as non-intelligible by the external evaluator as she could not relate the utterances she heard to any word she already knew.

This antagonistic statistic plays a major role in determining the extent to which the mispronunciation of some words –or some of their segments- hinders their intelligibility, as well as the most troublesome phonemes for these students and the possible causes for such findings.

As expected, the initial and final number of non-intelligible words were compared to assess the progress after the didactical sequence took place, the glimpse I could take to the evolution – and involution in some phonemes- served as the quantitative measure for progress. The perception of progress in this part of the assessment was measured inversely proportional with the numbers, the lower the average of non-intelligibility was in the final recordings, the higher progress had been achieved and vice-versa.

Group's Overall Average Of Poorly-Pronounced Words

This chart shows the increase of the average number of non-intelligible words

GROUP'S AVERAGE OF NON-INTELLIGIBILITY
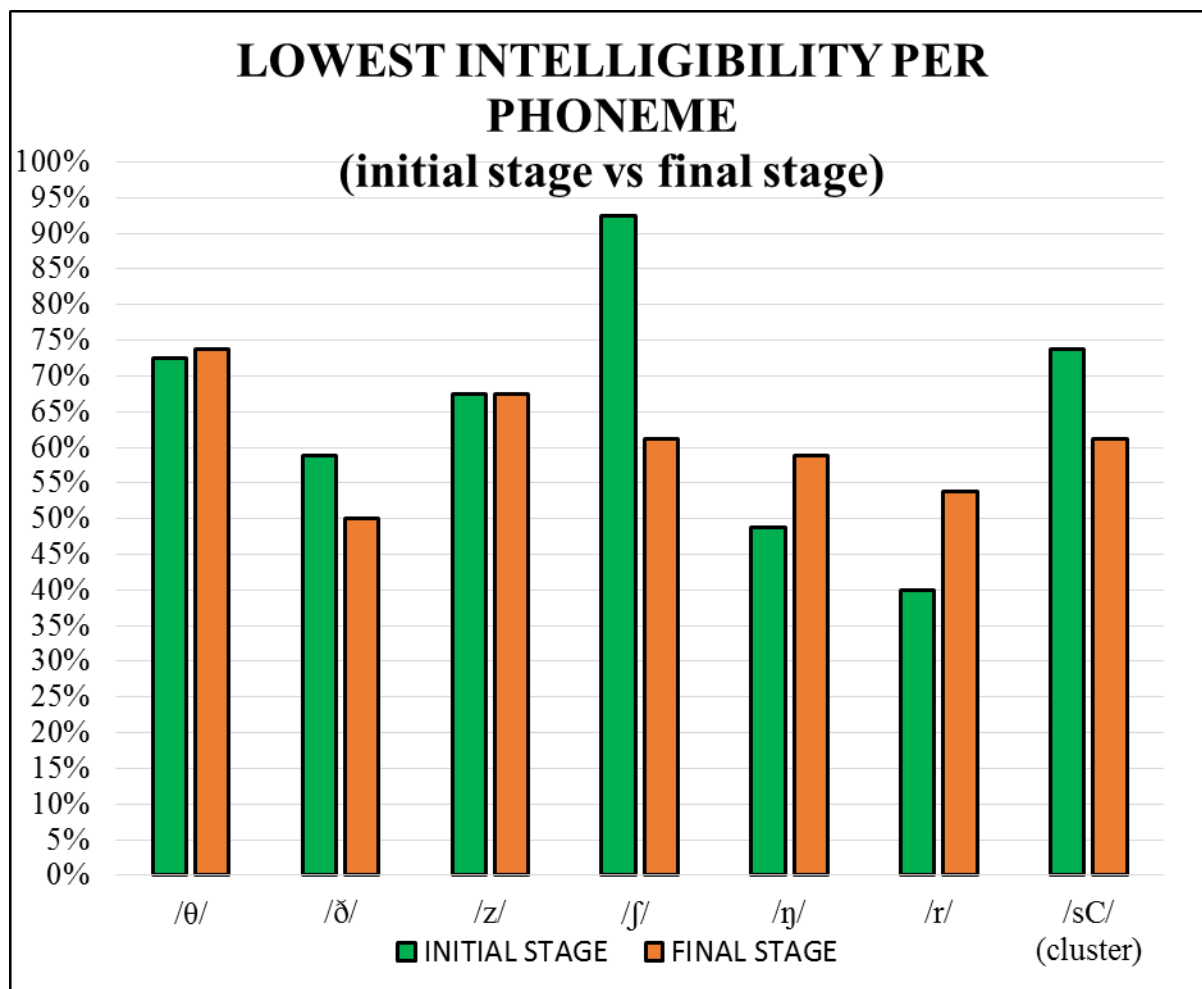**(Number of poorly-pronounced words)**
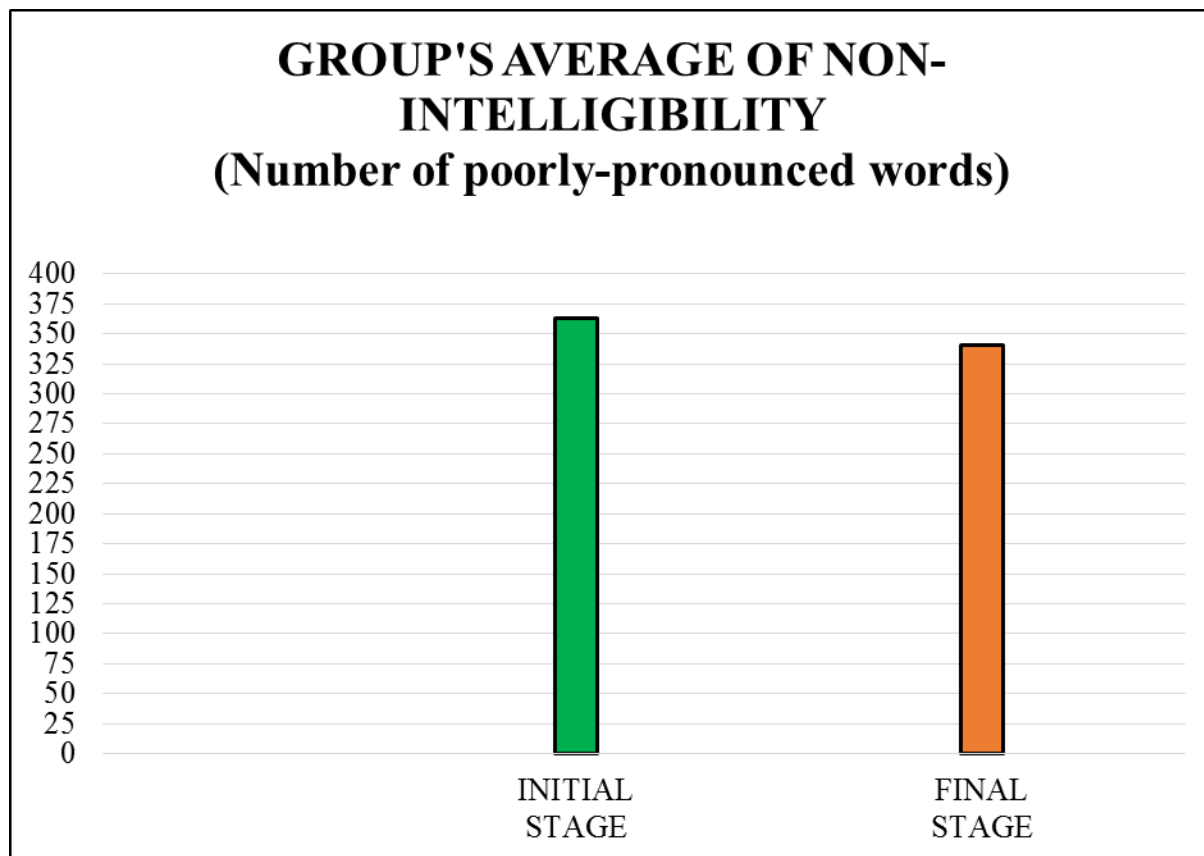
Group Non-Intelligibility Average Percentage

In this chart the rate of non-intelligible utterances displays a high number during the initial stage and a slight improvement after the final stage:
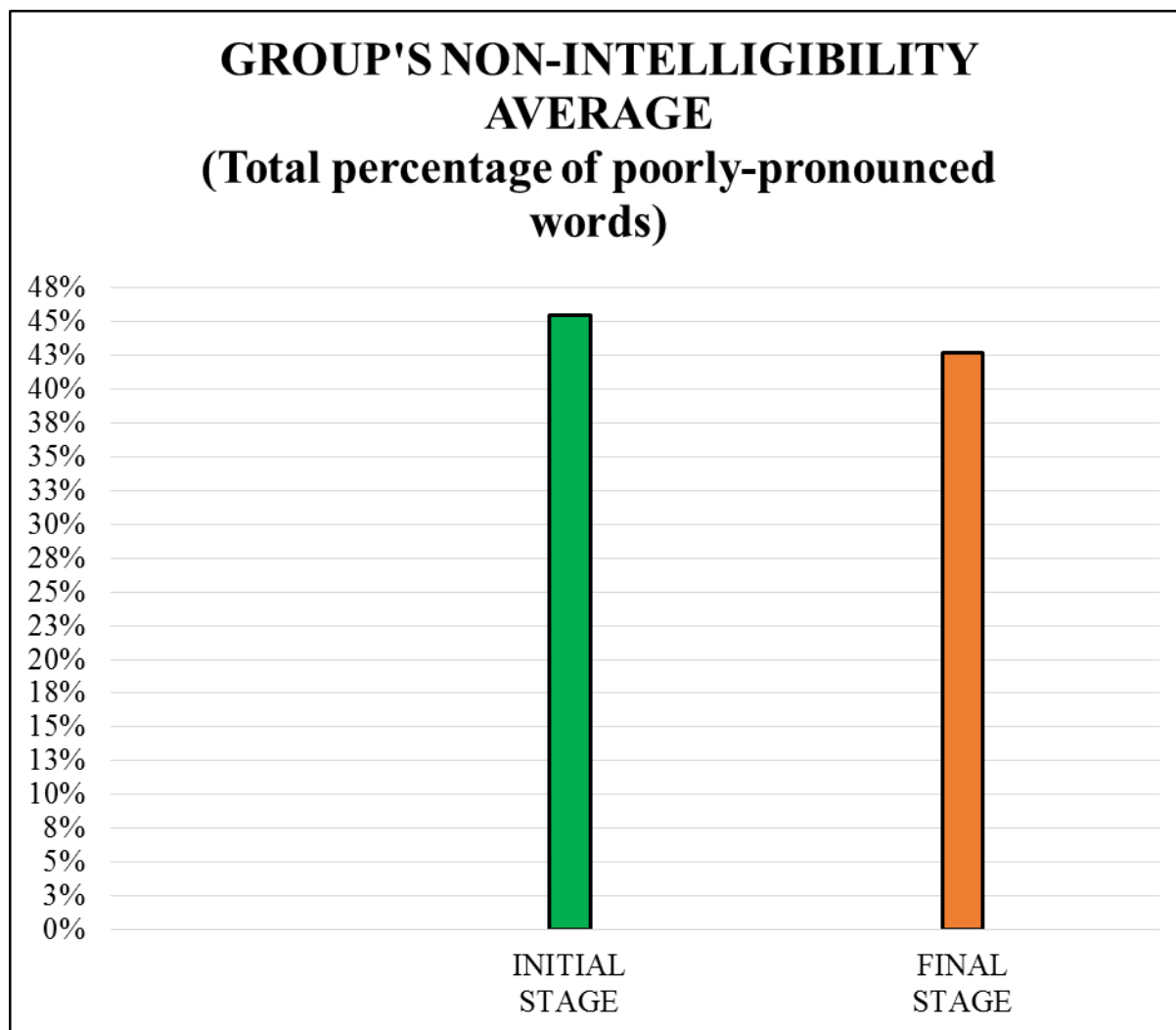
GROUP'S NON-INTELLIGIBILITY AVERAGE
(Total percentage of poorly-pronounced words)

Lowest Intelligibility Percentage (Initial Stage vs. Final Stage)

This chart presents the contrast between the lowest percentage of intelligible words in the initial stage and the final stage of the pronunciation of each phoneme, wherever the final stages show reduction of this percentage, it means the improvement of students' pronunciation as the utterances are no longer labelled as non-intelligible:

LOWEST INTELLIGIBILITY PER PHONEME
(initial stage vs final stage)

Evolution of The Non-Intelligibility Per Phoneme

The impact of the intervention on the poorly pronounced words is displayed in the following chart, the utterances included in this category are the ones that the external evaluator labelled as non-intelligible.

The negative movements represent the increased amount of poorly pronounced words; on the other hand, the positive increases show the lessening of the poor pronunciation.

• /θ/ presented a -0,8% worsening of the pronunciation.

• /ð/ shows a 8,3% pronunciation improvement.

- As /z/ reached 0,0% it indicates no variation in the accuracy.

- /ʃ/ displayed an important 19,8% improvement.

- /ŋ/ presented a diminishment of accuracy of -9,5%.

- A decrease of -8,7% is visible in /r/.

- /sC-/ cluster presents a 7,9% increase.
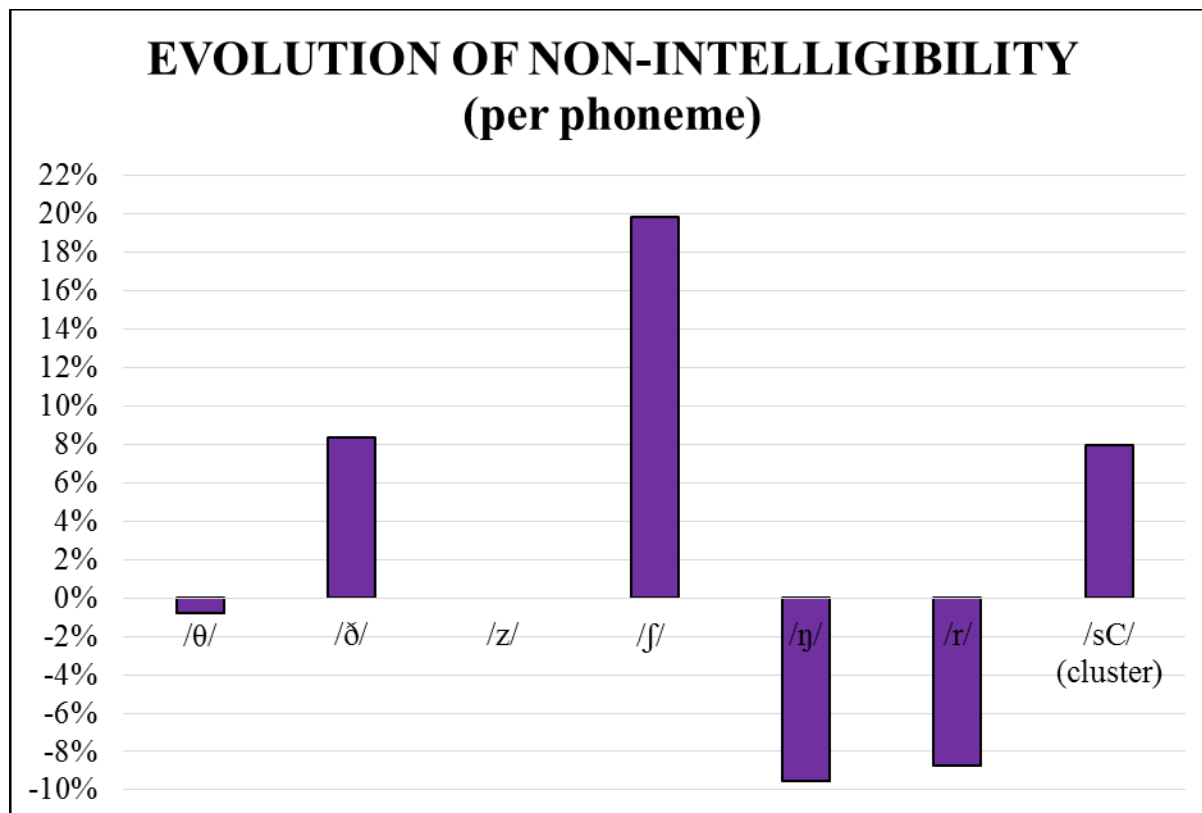
Observations

Phoneme /θ/ or 'La españoleta'

The average of non-intelligible words in the initial diagnosis was 46,0%. After the intervention, the evolution of its pronunciation according to the measure in the final recording was slightly negative as it reached a 0,8%, increasing it up to 46,8%.

Regarding the audio samples, I could observe that in the most of these utterances, students used a strong /t/ sound instead of the intended phoneme; however this, the evaluator did not label non-intelligible words for the sole "TH" clusters pronounced as "Ts", but she did so in the cases in which the rest of segments did not help this pronunciation to be complete intelligible ones. I was not able to track a consistent pattern of words which could have caused a difference

Unfortunately, besides this phoneme presented a very high average of non-intelligible utterances (making it the third highest); the changes in the non-intelligibility average were not significant enough to shed major lights on the final perception of this phoneme.

Phoneme /ð/ or 'el WhatsAppazo'

This phoneme had an 8,3% of improvement as the non-intelligibility started to be 56% and was mitigated to 47,6%. Despite this improvement, this phoneme continued to be have second highest average of non-intelligibility.

I consider that however useful the awareness gained during the instruction was, it was not apparently sufficient to counterweight the high rate obtained during the initial assessment as it was unexpectedly very high –above fifty percent.

Another consideration is that in the great majority of utterances labelled as non-intelligible in this phoneme, the students used the sound /t/ or a strong /d/ instead, making it more difficult for the evaluator to distinguish the words they intended to say if the rest of segments did not assist the pronunciation.

Phoneme /z/ or 'El zancudo'

With a variation of zero percent between initial and final recordings, this datum shows that apparently there was no change in the new way in which students interpreted the pronunciation of this phoneme.

In this set of words, the vast majority of students pronounced the words using a strong /s/ sound which could have been understood by this external evaluator –taking into account her L1 is Spanish- but the pronunciation of vowels and diphthongs was not accurate and deviated the utterances from the desired words, making many of them unintelligible.

This phoneme appears to continue being a troublesome for the students and it appears to be necessary to address it in a more exhaustive way.

Phoneme /ʃ/ or 'El chorro'

The non-intelligibility average of this phoneme was by far the one with the highest rate of improvement, it went down from 58,7% to 38,9%.

This improvement of 19,8% may have been caused by the realization of the differences, softening of the force of articulation and the stress relief provided from the adoption of this phoneme to be applied on the indicated cases.

According to the audio samples, the overall pronunciation this sole phoneme was the best uttered and with the one with the fastest evolution as the great majority of students were able to pronounce it consistently when it corresponded to an "SH" cluster.

Despite this observable progress of the pronunciation of this phoneme itself –that in the case in which only assessing criteria was its realization, it would have a one-digit average of

unintelligibility- the poor pronunciation of some other segments (more often vowels) impeded the external evaluator to properly understand what was intended.

Phoneme /ŋ/ or 'El gangoso'

This set of words, despite containing a phoneme also present in Spanish in many common words, had a notable increase in its non-intelligibility rate as it escalated from 46,4% to 56,0%. It grew from being the second least intelligible phoneme to be the least intelligible sound, this was clearly a negative evolution.

Upon the sight that this 9,5% increase of non-intelligibility made this set of utterances to be the highest non-intelligible phoneme in the final recordings. I consider that the confusion of how clusters that are also present in Spanish could have a different way to be pronounced caused this mispronunciation and therefore these results.

I consider that the teaching of this phoneme as an independent one was fruitless –even harmful- for this study and although it is important for my students to be able to pronounce it well (e.g. at the word endings), an only segmental approach to this instruction is not the best option.

I would suggest rather sets of activities within a communicative approach such as converting nouns into adjectives ended in ing (eg. Interest – interesting) and or looking for loanwords or cognates which contain it and specify on the whole utterance pronunciation as a way to sensitivize my students upon this segment.

Phoneme /r/ or '¿Dónde queda China?'

During the initial recordings this phoneme had the lowest amount of non-intelligible words – which may be expected because of the repetitive use of cognates and the well-known visibility of /r/ as a phonemic cliché in English.

I constantly used many cognates as a way to bridge the knowledge gap and prompt the students to only focus on the segment itself, but these words' proximity to mother tongue actually mislead the pronunciation to the point that despite their knowledge of /r/ -as a lingo-palatal approximant consonant in English, the students at some point started to pronounce the Spanish version of /r/ as a vibrant one.

Taking this into account, the external evaluator was still able to understand many of those utterances as existing words only when the rest of segments allowed her to do so (and many of them matched the intended words); otherwise, she marked them as non-intelligible.

One of the explanations for the low non-intelligibility average may depart from the following point of view: Despite some students sometimes did not use the English pronunciation for letter "R", this understanding was probably facilitated perhaps by the external evaluator's mother tongue –which is Spanish- and a correct pronunciation of the other segments by the students; it is a demonstration of how this factors can influence the comprehensibility of words in target language.

Quantitatively speaking, initial diagnosis shows a non-intelligibility average of 25,4% whereas the final recording shows a 34,1% of non-intelligibility. Curiously, despite an improvement on the pronunciation of the English variation of the phoneme /r/; this phoneme had an unexpectedly important increase of 8,7% of non-intelligibility average possibly generated by

the students' poor pronunciation of the rest of segments, which hindered the external evaluator's understanding of such utterances.

/sC-/ cluster

Reaching 46,8%, this consonant cluster had the second highest average of non-intelligibility, which probably was nurtured by the epenthetic "E" to which Spanish leads the students and its effects on loan words containing this consonant cluster. Besides this, another explanation is that the stress that students not apply on the pronunciation of the /sC-/ cluster may have originated certain disregard for the rest of the phonemes, giving the aforementioned results from the initial recordings as some of these utterances could not be understood.

However, despite this initial performance, the pronunciation of utterances containing this cluster had a remarkable improvement of 7,9%, lowering the non-intelligibility average to 38,9% in the final recording session. I consider accurate that this improvement should be conferred value due to the amount of effort that students applied to it given the fact that this is a consonant cluster which doesn't exist in Spanish at the beginning of syllables and it propels students to do unusual articulations for this pronunciation.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

I consider this study to be fruitful regarding the findings upon pronunciation English consonants not present in Spanish, in this section you will find the considerations I propose for the upcoming instruction in such phonemes, from the very methodologic features to the phonemes themselves.

In general, the data gathered in this study may be utilized in further didactical sequences for establishing the phonemes that demand a more specific assessment by the evaluators and/or the thoroughness with which they should be conducted.

Use of Previously Known Words as Prompt for Pronunciation

During this study, I could detect that in many cases, when there were input words that we previously saw in class and/or students were likely to know their meaning, the outcome pronunciation was more accurate than in those cases of lessen known words. Perhaps their prior knowledge was a key for their phonological loop to appear and aid the pronunciation of such utterances or at least give them the tools to self-correct when speaking. Further research might explore whether the previous knowledge of a word by meaning will enhance its pronunciation and to what extent.

Use of Cognates as Readable Input for Pronunciation

Linked to the previous conclusion, of despite the pronunciation was closer to Spanish in some cases of cognates as input words (e.g. /romanse/ for "romance" with vibrant /r/ and final /e/) the external evaluator was able to mark some of them as the intended words in English. It is known

that cognates and L1 interference may have biased the pronunciation of certain words in English and due to her mother tongue, the external evaluator may have been led to understand them.

Hence two powerful questions arise which further research might explore and approach:

- (a) To which extent will the L1 influenced pronunciation of cognates be comprehensible enough to be taken as valid words?

- (b) To what extent will native speakers of English (of any variety) or non-native speakers from a different mother tongue properly understand such biased utterances?

Exposure to Diverse English Varieties to Improve Pronunciation

So far, these students had only been exposed to the American and Latin-American varieties of English by means of music, videos of interviews among other communication media. However, they have been told that as English is simultaneously taught all around the world, each region develops a certain variety of English –to which they have not been exposed in any way in class.

If a wider span of pronunciation choices and contrasts opens for them as they receive exposure to such English varieties, it might be suitable for them to find convergence points among varieties and perhaps synthesize their own pronunciation of certain words. By doing this, students may become able to produce more intelligible utterances according to the English variety that their interlocutors speak. Considering this point of view, I reflect that further research might explore whether the continuous exposure to English varieties' –different than American and Brittish- may enhance the discernment of the degree of intelligibility of the spoken English they hear.

More Immediate Recording Sessions (After Each Phoneme)

In this study, I did only two recording sessions –one as a diagnosis and the other at the end of the intervention- which showed the results I previously analyzed. These results provided me with a panorama of how their pronunciation changed with the intervention in an overall setting.

Nevertheless, it would have been interesting to have the possibility of measuring the improvement of each phoneme as soon as it is reviewed in class by means of several recording sessions.

Further research should be able to explore whether one recording session after each phoneme shows different results as the instruction is more recent, making it is more phoneme focused and to what extent the utterances are more intelligible. It would also interesting to measure the accumulative effect of pronunciation instruction over time and add to each new recording session the previous phonemes plus the current one.

Shorter Time between the Intervention and the Final Recording Session

Different from frequency of recording, referring to time, further research should explore whether intelligibility figures may be documented as higher if a quicker measure schedule is applied by taking shorter time in weeks in a way that instruction is fresher in students' minds and it can even be replicated in periodic intervals of time.

About the Phonemes

The focalized instruction in each phoneme demanded different and specific didactical cues for a better appropriacy of the pronunciation as the articulation features for each consonant were

different, the existence of phonemes not existing in Spanish and the reassignment of phonemes to letters different from which they are applied in Spanish.

For some phonemes, the didactical sequence was very substantial as there appeared to be positive changes and progress by paying attention to the averages –and their evolution- of intelligibility and non-intelligibility

/θ/

The instruction upon this phoneme has proved to be fruitful as seen from the improvement shown in the final recording session which was above ten percent. Apparently, its proximity to Spanish made it more feasible for the students to grasp it. We can still notice excesses in the force of articulation and its pronunciation as /t/ but students seem more aware of the different pronunciation of a TH cluster.

/ð/

I consider the instruction in this phoneme was useful as there was a ten percent improvement in its average of intelligibility, the familiarity of students with it was highly helpful. As seen in the non-intelligibility chart, the respective average for this phoneme was 56%, which clearly would distort the communication in English; therefore I suggest the didactical approach to this phoneme to be continued.

I consider that the subsequent approaches to this phoneme may be reaffirmed by the inclusion of more examples and drills. I also suggest the creation of –partial- written patterns in which "TH" clusters are pronounced /ð/. Besides this, further research should explore to which extent

the implementation of an initially-indulgent approach –which allows students to pronounce /d/- would help students bridge this pronunciation gap.

/z/

Because of its absence in Spanish, this phoneme was adapted by the students like the Spanish /s/, which facilitated them to produce their respective utterances during the initial diagnosis. Their use of this phoneme was apparently well received by the external evaluator and transcribed into words in a way that it had the second highest average of word accuracy. On the other hand, there were factors which may have hindered the comprehensibility of their utterances enough for the external evaluators to determine that more than forty percent of the utterances were unintelligible.

Although the didactical sequence aimed to sensitivize the students about this phoneme, its non-intelligibility average remained static after the final recordings, this fact leads me to speculate that the lack of mastery upon some surrounding segments included in the input words made it difficult for the students to produce the intended words.

Apart from this, I consider that the students felt that adding vibration to this segment was forceful and preferred to stay using /s/, which again was well understood by the external evaluator to the point that she transcribed nearly the same number of utterances. This result lead the intelligibility average to have a very little improvement –less than one percent- perceived in the final recording.

Based on the above-mentioned evidence, I would suggest not to continue teaching /z/ as an independent phoneme –at least at initial stages or beginner levels- but using the /s/ until students

have enough experience and sensitivity to differentiate and implement /z/. It might be rather more effective to focus on other segments which can create more difficulty.

/ʃ/

We can observe from the data analysis that this phoneme's average of non-intelligibility was the highest one in the initial stage. The application of this didactical sequence was helpful to the point that it helped students overcome this situation and the average of non-intelligibility went down from 58,7% to 38,9%, it is a major improvement which demonstrates the valuable that the instruction in this phoneme can be.

On the other hand, the average of intelligibility of this phoneme increased from 19% -in the initial stage- to 40,5%, a number that shows how their accuracy became more than twice as high, making it the biggest evolution in this study as the pronunciation of this phoneme was properly acknowledged. I highly recommend the work upon this phoneme as it is easy to gain awareness of, presents funny scenarios for students, is relatable to multiple loanwords they know in Spanish and appears to be effective. However partial, further research should synthesize written patterns for the cases in which this phoneme may appear.

/ŋ/

Since it is contained in the Spanish pronunciation system for that same consonant cluster, this phoneme was a priori the most obvious one and the one for which I expected the highest results. Nevertheless, it was the least intelligible of them all due to several reasons I will mention:

- (a) Perhaps the students' confusion to see that there is a "new" way to pronounce the NG clusters and effort to do something different than Spanish.

- (b) L1 interference probably led some students to pronounce "NG" before vowels "E" and "I" as it is pronounced in Spanish (e.g. /'belonhin/ for belonging) distorting the message.

- (c) In many cases, students uttered this phoneme properly but my choice of words with complicated segmental and suprasegmental factors led students to different pronunciation which sounded strange for the external evaluator (example /'hanhed/ for hanged).

- (d) I did not choose any word with a "NK" cluster (e.g. trunk or blink) for students to anchor any similar sound, therefore the choices of pronunciation were vast.

For these reasons, and for the sake of a more intelligible pronunciation, I do not recommend teaching this phoneme as an independent one, its futility is not only that it already exists in Spanish, but also there are segments and suprasegments which deserve more attention and their good knowledge combined with the underlying pronunciation of this phoneme will serve its purpose.

/r/

Gladly, this phoneme reported to have the highest intelligibility average according to the perception of the external evaluator. This could be due to several reasons:

- (a) The choice of some cognates as input may have helped students to produce the surrounding segments and/or suprasegments in a more accurate way to the extent that it made the utterances comprehensible as seen in the transcription.

There were even cases in which some cognates were pronounced as in Spanish (e.g. /ro'manse/ for romance) nevertheless, they were awarded as intelligible words and subsequently transcribed but labeled as "Spanish"

- (b) It appears that in many cases, the phonetic cliché caught by means of entertainment media upon the English /r/ has made it easier for students to grasp the pronunciation of the sound and there were cases in which some degree of mastery of this sound was detected.

- (c) The shared comprehensibility as the external evaluator also speaks Spanish as her mother tongue may have helped to tell the variation of /r/ sound to be "tolerated" and therefore applied to the letter, conferring it the desired meaning.

Despite the final recordings show a small decrease in the intelligibility average, this sound remained as the most intelligible, which sheds lights on the appropriacy of this English phoneme among English students with Spanish as mother language –and its exchangeability for other variations in the pronunciation of letter "R"-.

On the other hand, this phoneme held the lowest non-intelligibility average, which also increased after the final recordings were analyzed, but yet it stayed as the least unintelligible, still there are other factors which could have provided such results.

As seen in the statistics, the instruction upon this phoneme was not fruitful; but it shed important lights on how to approach this phoneme. Perhaps the "R" is the consonant with more variations and therefore tolerance across languages; therefore it would be more fruitful instead to try and sensitivize students about such differences and differentiate the cases in which for instance it is actually an "R" or the result of the pronunciation of "T" or "D" –as in many American variety of English (e.g. city pronounced /'siri/ or daddy pronounced /'dari/).

Further research should evaluate the effects on production and perception of English after exposure to some of the many different English varieties across the world beyond American and Brittish.

/sC-/ cluster

However complicated it may seem for students to create a new phonological loop for a pronunciation pattern inexistent in Spanish, the instruction results show improvement in the intelligibility as well as in the non-intelligibility average.

I consider it is important to continue fostering this awareness among students and keep it in practice as it is a constant pronunciation feature of English. As it already is present in Spanish supported by the epenthetic E, the use of strategies such as clipping and rearranging syllables – when it comes to disyllabic or polysyllabic words- at the beginner levels and tongue twisters for fluency might help to bridge the difficulty that students may face regarding this phoneme.

CONCLUSION

Pronunciation instruction in ELF needs to be adapted to the context of the group according to the local phonological features as a way to ensure intelligible pronunciation during in-class settings and facilitating peer support as the taught pronunciation is proximal to the one of the L1. The former result would enable students to produce English sounds in a way that is more proximal to the sounds that have surrounded them for a lifetime. As for the latter, it might influence the group's motivation –further studies shall explore this topic and the extent to which this could happen- by assuring students will (a) make students reflect and reinforce what they already learned as a sign of progress or (b) it may be easier for the learners to meet the articulation features, linking them with the ones they master at the moment and affecting their self-perception of progress in a positive way.

The same way this study intended to sensitivize the students that they are able to become English speakers in their own right, it is also compulsory to foster in the learners the same tolerance towards the differences that speakers from other cultures should express to them. I concede this exercise a great deal of importance as it will create the affective conditions for my students to be part of vaster groups of English Speakers

As the present study only focused on the emission of determinate segments within words not liked by any communicative purpose, further studies also shall explore the improvement in interpersonal communication as it requires a more complex set of skills of reception and production. I suggest that before designing specific studies with groups that belong to a certain community in high school ages, teachers and/or researchers must have at least a minimal notion of some shared social norms that should be taken into account to extract idiosyncratic elements

that may ensure –to certain extent- the enthusiastic participation in the activities (e.g.

competitiveness due to the attachment to sports, etc).

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APPENDIX A

Worksheet used for the initial diagnosis of learners pronunciation

"El WhatsAppazo de la españoleta"

Por favor lee estas palabras lo mejor que puedas:

/θ/

BEGINNING - three, therapy, think.

MIDDLE - anything, nothing, author.

ENDING - month, depth, tenth.

/ð/

BEGINNING – this, they, therefore.

MIDDLE - bathing, further, other.

/z/

BEGINNING – zero, zone, zebra.

MIDDLE – puzzle, design, reason.

ENDING - glass, bananas, tease.

/ʃ/

BEGINNING - shower, shake, shine

MIDDLE – washing, wishing, fisher.

ENDING – bash, lash, flesh.

/ŋ/

MIDDLE – belonging, hanged, hungry

ENDING – song, bang, thing

/r/

BEGINNING - result, romance, rule

MIDDLE – enrich, armadillo, Israel

ENDING – bar, door, flair

/sC-/ cluster

BEGINNING - sport, slime, start

MIDDLE – rockstar, foster, atmosphere

ENDING – best, risk, realism

APPENDIX B

Description of the Didactical Sequence

First Learning Session – Sensitization and Diagnosis

a.   Discussion on the nature of fears about oral production in target language and strategies to approach them. Brainstorm upon the reasons that make them feel uncomfortable using English as a mean of expression.

b.   Display videos of Colombian and Latin-American artists (e.g. Shakira, Maluma, Falcao, Daddy Yankee, Natalia Reyes) speaking in English as a way to sensitize the learners that they're also capable of speaking in English with good proficiency and being understood by their native or non-native interlocutors.

This starting point was intended to make students aware of the fact they can be as good L2 speakers as the celebrities mentioned above –discussing and comparing some of their known personal backgrounds and the way they learned new languages- and reminding the students that although they are not native languages, they can achieve high levels of proficiency –including intelligibility.

c.   After the initial display of NNS speaking English, I proceeded to collect data from their pronunciation of six phonemes (/θ/, /ð/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ŋ/, /r/,) and one consonant cluster which is /s+Consonant/ cluster (/sC-/ cluster) using the previously mentioned worksheet (which you will find in the appendix).

In this worksheet, I provided a list of 57 words for students to read out loud individually and those utterances were recorded in order to have an audible reference

of the learners' former pronunciation as a starting point. During this recording

session, the learners did not have any help nor prompt in terms of pronunciation; they

were asked to produce the utterances as best as they could, so their production can be

marked in terms of intelligibility off-session.

d.   Interactive lecture on what English as a Lingua Franca is, where it can be spoken,

and how it can connect people around the world by means of its communicative scope

and goals.

e.   Playfully teaching of concepts: "comprehensibility" as the way of effectively

conveying oneself and the extent to which other people's utterances are

comprehensible for us) and "consonants" as the sounds which connect vowels using

articulate phonetics; place, mode and force of articulation.

Second Learning Session – Phonemes /θ/ and /ð/

a.   Direct pronunciation instruction: Interactive conceptualization of the **voiceless**

dental fricative phoneme /θ/, taking into account the unfamiliarity of the

pronunciation of this phoneme I called it "*la españoleta*" (Spanish for the Spanish

girl), after the Spaniards' pronunciation of consonants C and Z in order to create a

friendlier joyful atmosphere: its place, mode and force of articulation.

b.   Drill-based activity with three sets of words for *La españoleta (*θ*)* containing the

stressed segment at the beginning, middle and ending of the words, the.

c.   The drill also comprehended touching stimuli for enhancing the force of

articulation and making it smoother.

d.   Interactive conceptualization of the **voiced dental fricative phoneme /ð/**, which I called *"el WhatsAppazo"* (Spanish for the WhatsApp message) due to the mobile phones' buzzing onomatopoeia when receiving a text message: Also its place, mode and force of articulation.

e.   Drill-based activity with three sets of words for *el WhatsAppazo* (ð) containing the stressed segment at the beginning, middle and ending of the words.

f.   Contrasts between voiceless and voiced versions of this pair of phonemes were done to make students aware of how such details can create a meaning/sense difference when the phonemes are employed.

g.   Pronunciation contest in small groups consisting on pronouncing two tongue twisters –one per each phoneme (θ and ð). The group representative who makes the fewest mistakes wins the round.

Third Learning Session – Phonemes /z/, /ʃ/ and /ŋ/

a.   Interactive conceptualization of the **voiced alveolar sibilant phoneme /z/**, which I called *"el zancudo"* (Spanish for "the mosquito") relating it to the sound some insects produce when flying near our ears: Its place, mode and force of articulation. Contrasts were also made between /s/ and /z/ for illustrating the differences there are between this sounds which students may find extremely similar.

b.   Drill-based activity with three sets of words for *el Zancudo* /z/ containing the stressed segment at the beginning, middle and ending of the words.

c.   Interactive conceptualization of the **voiceless palato-alveolar sibilant phoneme /ʃ/**, which I called "*el chorro*" (Spanish for "the water stream") as the onomatopoeia of water when running: Its place, mode and force of articulation.

d.   A fun activity took place in which we parodied the people pronouncing foreign words using /tʃ/ instead of /ʃ/ (e.g. sushi sounding /'sutʃi/ or shampoo as /tʃaem'pu/) reflecting on the /ʃ/ sound and how comic it sounds mispronounced**.**

e.   Drill-based activity with three sets of words for *el chorro* (ʃ) containing the stressed segment at the beginning, middle and ending of the words.

f.   Game of minimal pairs contrasting /ʃ/ and /tʃ/ for students to differentiate the sounds.

g.   Pronunciation contest in small groups consisting on pronouncing two tongue-twisters –one per each phoneme (/z/ and / ʃ/). The group representative who makes the fewest mistakes wins the round.

h.   Interactive conceptualization of the **velar nasal phoneme /ŋ/**, which I called "*el gangoso*" (Spanish for "the nasal talker") to make students aware of this sound although it also exists in Spanish: Its place, mode and force of articulation.

i.   Drill-based activity with three sets of words for *el gangoso* /ŋ/ containing the stressed segment at the beginning, middle and ending of the words.

Fourth Learning Session – Phoneme /r/ and the /s+(consonant)/ Cluster

a.   Ludic conceptualization of the **voiced postalveolar approximant phoneme /ɹ/**, which I called "*¿Dónde queda China?*" (Spanish for "Where is China?").

This curious name for the phoneme was chosen to reflect on the fact that in some Asian countries the phoneme /r/ is an allophone of /l/. The goal was to make students aware of this sound and its difference to the Latin American /r/; its place, mode and force of articulation.

b.   Game session: One round of the *Hangman* game to unveil a set of words for practicing. At the end a tongue twister with words stressing the /ɹ/ was revealed for the students to drill.

c.   Drill-based activity with three sets of words for *¿Dónde queda China?* Containing the stressed segment at the beginning, middle and ending of the words.

d.   Interactive conceptualization of the /s+consonant/ cluster, the conditions of its presence in Spanish and examples in words that we know in Spanish.

e.   Presentation of the epenthetic E for learners from Spanish speaking communities when learning English. Funny exercise with loan words (eg. *espray, Espeedy Gonzalez and esteel; corresponding to* spray, Speedy Gonzalez, steel).

f.   Drill-based activity with three sets of words –per each phoneme- containing the stressed segment at the beginning, middle and ending of the words.

Fifth Learning Session – Final Recording

a.   Second audio recording of the same seven sets of words worked during the first session containing the segments: /θ/, /ð/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ŋ/, /ɹ/, /s+(consonant)/

Sixth Learning Session – Final Discussion and Reflection

Discussion on the role of non-nativeness in the understanding of target language and appropriateness of the pronunciation.