



Universidad de Valladolid

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras – Educación y Trabajo Social

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TRABAJO FIN DE MÁSTER

LOW PHONOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND CONTROL, AND CONSEQUENT LOW PHONETIC COMPETENCE IN ADVANCED-LEVEL STUDENTS OF ENGLISH: AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT

Alumno: Pedro Alberto Kelly de Iranzo

Tutora: Carmen Guillén Díaz
Vº Bº LA TUTORA,

Fdo: Carmen Guillén Díaz

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To my father, who first fired my enthusiasm.

Abstract

This paper describes an action research study in the field of teaching English as a Foreign Language (L2) in a Spanish EOI. The students' overall pronunciation was found very deficient in relation to the Advanced Level they had officially attained, with persistent and fossilized errors. The causes for the present problem-situation can be cogently surmised to be patent and multiple, but, since all have to do with events in the past for which there is no help, rather than further dissecting present conditions, the researcher thought it ultimately more useful to intervene, with a prompt action that would immediately boost students' phonetic competence in English, and which took the form of a "Mini-Crash-Course" in English Phonetics and Phonology. (The nature of the problem, eminently practical, dictated the practical form of the research). After a review of the theory in search of justification and guidance for the action, the author narrates his own experience of the action, which took place along three days, 10-17th May, 2012, simultaneously reflecting on the whole process. All the participants involved (students, teacher in charge of the group, student-researcher-teacher) provide triangulated feedback, data and opinions amenable to further investigation. There is no firm conclusion, as of this moment.

Key words Action research, phonological awareness, acquisition/learning, "critical period", phonemes, supra-segmental features, spelling.

Resumen

Este trabajo describe un estudio de investigación-acción en el campo de la enseñanza del Inglés como Idioma Extranjero en una Escuela Oficial de Idiomas española. Se halló que la pronunciación inglesa de los alumnos del Nivel Avanzado era muy deficiente, con errores persistentes y fosilizados, en relación al nivel oficialmente reconocido. Se establece como hipótesis fuertemente fundamentada que las causas de la presente situación-problema son patentes y múltiples, pero, dado que todas ellas hacen referencia a acontecimientos pasados irremediables, en lugar de profundizar en éstas, el investigador creyó finalmente más útil intervenir, con una acción puntual que impulsaría de inmediato la competencia fonética en inglés de los alumnos, acción que formalmente consistió en un "Mini-cursillo acelerado de Fonética y Fonología inglesas." (La naturaleza del problema, eminentemente práctico, dictó la forma práctica de la investigación). Tras revisar la teoría pertinente en pos de justificación y orientación para la acción, el autor narra su propia experiencia, que transcurrió a lo largo de tres sesiones, desde el 10 al 17 de mayo de 2012. Todos los participantes involucrados (alumnos, profesora encargada del grupo, alumno-profesor-investigador) aportan información, datos y opiniones por partida triple, todo ello susceptible de nueva investigación. No se ha alcanzado conclusión en firme, a la hora de cerrar este documento.

Palabras clave Investigación-acción, concienciación/sensibilidad fonológica, adquisición/aprendizaje, "período crítico", fonemas, rasgos suprasegmentales, ortografía.

INTRODUCTION

“Being a classroom teacher means being alive to what goes on in the classroom, alive to the problems of sorting what matters, moment by moment, from what does not.”

Dick Allwright and Kathleen M. Bailey (1991):
Focus on the Language Classroom, Preface, p. xvi.

I became cognisant of the problem here studied during the observation period of the teaching practice that I carried out at the Official Language School of Valladolid, a centre which teaches only Modern Languages, and holds examinations leading to a Diploma of European recognition, to mostly adult learners who pay for their tuition and examination rights¹. The problem became all the more interesting to me as I had been informed (at very short notice) that the theme of the final paper, or *Trabajo Fin de Máster* for the obtaining of the Official Master’s Degree I am currently pursuing, should necessarily bear some relationship to an aspect, preferably problematic, of the teaching-learning scenario as observed by myself during my practice period.

I was greatly surprised to discover in class fully-grown students who could understand the most difficult texts on... *“the Asian takeover of the global market in the twenty-first century”* (for example) and yet be almost unintelligible when it came their turn to speak in any real conversation, save for the briefest speech. The problem is, inherently as well, worthy of study, because it occurs not only at this level, in the school where the study was carried out: in the majority of schools, teachers of English in Spain at the level of Secondary Education, or higher, are confronted by the same obstacle.

Why does this happen? Most didactic programmes do not devote space nor allow time to the specific teaching-learning of phonological/phonetic notions and their practice. Many teachers, too, often waive these basic linguistic aspects, in favour of fluid interaction with their students in the classroom. This is as if surgeons’ formation precluded the study of cells and their function in the body. Phonological mastery is perhaps presupposed to have been acquired independently, and/or is supposed to be learnable, only early in life, through a sort of phonetic imprinting. Yet basic phonetic notions as to the physical sounds, including the how-to of their production, basic

¹ These students’ situation is thus somewhat different from that of younger, still school-age students who may study the language in different circumstances, not involving choice or volition.

knowledge of supra-segmental features of speech and how they enrich utterances with meaning, and some elementary working knowledge of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) lead to phonetic skill itself, good pronunciation, and to one of the ideals of education, learner autonomy.

That Phonetics/Phonology is as valid an area of teaching, thus of teaching research, as any other linguistic area is naturally validated by all linguists and language teachers. It signifies an explicit focus on linguistic form, but a form which is very rich, per se, in “added” content. Sounds and supra-segmental features (stress, rhythm, prosodic patterns) are the primary vehicles for language, which is ultimately contextualized meaning, of which sounds partake. Even without a meaningful context, the mere phonetic sound-string by itself conveys some information, to the discerning ear, as to what language these sounds belong to, and perhaps, to the very discerning ear, some sociological information, of more or less importance as the case may be². And supra-segmental features (not to mention paralinguistic ones, which might also be an area lacking research) add important, even vital, information to the utterance³. The functional value of the sound system should be one very good reason, or part of the overall communicative purpose, to include its special study in any teaching-learning syllabus for the English language.

1. IDENTIFICATION OF THE PROBLEM-SITUATION

The researcher detected low general phonological awareness and control, with consequently low phonetic competence, in the Advanced-Level (B1 CEFR) students of English at the Official Language School of Valladolid, Laguna de Duero section. The students showed poor perception/discrimination of English phonemes, and the quality of their oral expression was consequently poor, to the point of often making the

² In *My Fair Lady* (film version of George Bernard Shaw’s 1912 play *Pygmalion*), to Eliza Doolittle the importance of “good pronunciation” was such that it meant all the difference between being a lowly Covent-Garden flower-seller to being an Ascot-frequenter, coroneted lady.

³ Stress, by signalling the new or contrasted information (perhaps contrasted to the known information); intonation, by, firstly, giving grammatical information, by parsing the sentence into distinct words, phrases, clauses, main and subordinate sentences; secondly, by supporting or reinforcing the “new-information” stress-signal in the utterance; thirdly, by indicating the function of the utterance in discourse, as its being a request for information, or an order; and finally, by giving attitudinal information on the speaker’s state of mind, emotions and intentions, the “hidden agenda” in the discourse.

students' speech incomprehensible, thus making effective face-to-face communication difficult, when not impossible. This situation is at odds with the presupposed level of the students in English by actual CEFR parameters. These parameters shall be more fully explained in the next point, as being crucial to understanding the context of the study and its cornerstone.

The teacher in charge of the course at the EOI directed the student-teacher's attention to this problem, qualifying the student teacher's condition of being a native speaker as an extraordinarily felicitous circumstance ("*un lujo*" in her words), a bargain opportunity to do specific practice on phonetic/phonological aspects while he was there: which he did, from the second day directly observing and taking charge of all the specifically phonetic activities during his practice period⁴.

[According to Nunan (1992), research must start with a question. The questions this study frames are: *Will an intensive "Mini-Crash-Course" in English Phonetics/Phonology raise phonological awareness and control in EOI Advanced-Level students? Will this course augment students' motivation to increase their efforts towards improving their phonological competence?*

]

1.1. Framework and context of the study

The Official Language School in Valladolid is a semi-official Modern Language Teaching entity, dependent, for its organization and regulations, on the official legislation for Special-Régime (non-compulsory) Language Teaching, and is economically self-supporting, the students paying fees for lesson-attendance and/or examination rights. The course-levels in each of the languages taught, and the certifications of the levels attained by the students, are based on the Global Scale within the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), developed by the Council of Europe, Language Policy Division, Strasbourg 2001. This system is distinct and independent from the official Spanish (or the Autonomous Communities') curricular programme of education.

These European-referenced levels are three: Basic, Intermediate and Advanced, each level divided into two courses, and each level contemplated as having taken a

⁴ See the students' "Seating Chart" and observations on the students, Appendix 1.

given number of hours to complete. They are defined by a series of descriptors detailing progressive mastery of the basic linguistic competences: oral and reading comprehension, and oral and written expression or production, all manifested through progressively more complex communicative situations and interaction. Since these descriptors are sufficiently well-known to be repeated here – the Council of Europe document referenced contains them in full – there shall only be detailed here a general extract or précis for the Advanced Level, the level at which the problem was detected:

- *Advanced*: → Learners are able to use the resources of the language (excluding those too idiomatic) with spontaneity, fluency and control, on general or specialized topics, in a very wide scope of situations that range from the familiar to the formal. This level lays special stress on discourse skills such as coherence and cohesion, and communicative strategies such as argumentation, negotiation, and cooperation. (Council of Europe, 2001, *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, pages 21-196 *passim*).

This general description does not explicitly include phonological mastery. But phonological competence is part of the linguistic competences, and the CEFR does specify the phonological features and structures in English which the student must be familiar with.

Phonological competence is defined, by the same CEFR document (Ch. 5.2.1.4), as “supposing a knowledge of, and skill in the perception and production of...”⁵,

- the sound-units (*phonemes*) of the language and their realisation in particular contexts (*allophones*);
- the phonetic features which distinguish phonemes (*distinctive features*, e.g. voicing, rounding, nasality, plosion);
- the phonetic composition of words (*syllable structure*, the sequence of phonemes, word stress, word tones);

⁵ The French version of this document phrases it – perhaps in more exact sequence - slightly differently: “une connaissance de la perception et de la production et une aptitude à percevoir et à produire” (5.2.1.4., p. 91) – not that it makes a real difference.

- sentence phonetics (*prosody*);
 - sentence stress and rhythm,
 - intonation;
 - phonetic reduction: vowel reduction, strong and weak forms, assimilation, elision.
- (Council of Europe, 2001, *Common European Framework of Reference*, Ch. 5, pp. 116-117).

The EOI *Programación Didáctica* published by the English Department proposes a quite complete and even more detailed description of the phonological and phonetic features of the English language that students at the Advanced Level should be familiar with and use. (EOI Valladolid, Departamento de Inglés, *Programación Didáctica* 2011-2012, pp. 137-139).

The CEFR document later proceeds to describe the degree of phonological control for each of the levels contemplated and graded within the Global Scale. Thus, for B1, the Advanced Level, the descriptor is the following: *Pronunciation is clearly intelligible even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur.* (Council of Europe, 2001, *Common European framework of Reference*, Ch. 5, p. 117).

Which is not exactly the case, in our Advanced-level students: what they say is often unintelligible, notable mispronunciations are very frequent, and all this, we might add, without the students being aware that this is so, nor of its seriousness as hindering communication with a native speaker⁶. The existence of these programmes in printed form does not really signify to our research, except by giving it wings. It is a truth that, even if these Advanced-Level students should in theory have been familiar with English phonological/phonetic characteristics, this was not reflected in their oral production.

⁶ The CEFR document adds some points that its users (schools, textbook writers, etc.) might consider:

- *what new phonological skills are required of the learner;*
- *what is the relative importance of sounds and prosody;*
- *whether phonetic accuracy and fluency are an early learning objective or developed as a longer term objective.*

(Council of Europe, 2001, *Common European framework of Reference*, Ch. 5, p. 117).

Points which are all taken into account when designing the action.

1.2. The learners

The school where the action research took place in was not the main Valladolid EOI, but a subsection in Laguna de Duero, a nearby township which fringes on the outskirts of Valladolid itself and in the last few years has become almost a suburb of the city, with a young, mostly professional, population, who commute to work or University. EOI lessons were held only in the afternoons and class-size was reduced, to about 14-16 students on average, instead of the usual 30+. Most of the students were adults (the youngest was 16, the minimum age of admission to the school – the rest ranged from about late twenties to late forties); most had a Degree in Higher or Superior Education⁷; most were employed. All of them were very anxious to obtain the official Diploma certifying the level of English achieved, because this would facilitate professional consideration and/or promotion, over any communicative considerations.

The students were well-behaved, cooperative, motivated and hard-working, a “teacher’s dream.” However, they were adults, well past the “critical period” for the automatic acquisition of language skills such as phonological discrimination and competence. Their awareness of English phonological phenomena had been blunted by many years of receiving only input in Spanish, whose features in this area, both phonic and supra-segmental, are much simpler.

They can confidently be predicted to find special obstacles in the area of English phonology, although it is our belief that they can still improve on these skills by opening wider their “doors of perception”⁸ to the English sound system in a variety of ways.

1.3. Roots of the problem

The roots of this problem-situation may be strongly hypothesized to be found, *a priori*:

- In the students themselves: Being adults, their overall linguistic skills and, very particularly, phonological skills, take more conscious effort to develop. The students are well past the “critical period”, a temporal threshold beyond which it is believed adult

⁷ (University Degrees included Engineering and Architecture).

⁸ Phrase first coined by Aldous Huxley.

language learners will never achieve native-like competence. In some cases, they are in the process of resuming the study of English, after an interval of some years without having had contact with the language. Their perception is attuned to Spanish sounds (their L1) and their expression of English sounds suffers from old phonetic fossilizations. They are more used to reading in English than to live interaction with native speakers, so their orthography of words is, proportionately, more correct than their pronunciation. With exceptions, the motivation of these students for studying the English language is not the more or less remote possibility of communicative interaction with native speakers, but the near-at-hand examinations at the EOI leading to the obtaining of a Diploma, officially recognized at European level, which will aid them towards professional consideration and promotion. They are quite seriously-minded, intent students, valuing grammatical correction over real communication (in one instance, a student had memorized by heart a long oral discourse, which none of his co-students bothered to ask questions on). Achieving correct pronunciation is perhaps not evidently desirable, thus not an immediate goal for them; and phonetic practice, *per se*, may bore them.

- In the English language itself: English phonology and phonetics are much more complex than the more limited (as to the number of phonemes, anyway) Spanish sound system. There are twelve pure vowel sounds, without counting eight diphthongs (and two triphthongs, according to which source is consulted) just in the vocalic range alone, which are graphically expressed by only five letters for vowel sounds in the alphabet. The number of consonants is comparable to that in Spanish, but all in all, that makes about 40+ phonemes, depending on the regional variety. To that must be added the complications of syllabic juncture, weak and strong forms, elision, assimilation, etc.; also, very specially, the difficulties of correct word-stressing, not always apparent, and correct and rhythmical sentence-stressing (the most difficult to achieve by Spanish learners, because of the syllable-crunching involved). The main intonation patterns must also be learnt, as they differ from Spanish ones, and convey important information not explicit in the written representation of an utterance. To this must be added the complication of spelling, which, due to its mind-boggling irregularity (the

causes of which will be reviewed later), must be learnt by English natives as a wholly independent system which does not predict the pronunciation of a word.⁹

Whereas Spanish learners do not find too many obstacles on other English grammatical areas (Spanish grammatical structures are, relatively speaking, more complex than the English ones), almost all Spanish learners encounter problems in the area of pronunciation. One thing I know from experience is that speech in English isn't that easy to understand: in the best of cases, English listeners often have to guess much of what's being said from context. When I watch a film in English with my British family, very often one of us will ask, "What did s/he say?" and s/he will often be given the answer, "Sorry, I didn't catch it."¹⁰

- In the teaching agent: The teacher in charge of the class being observed, a most friendly woman who evidently had her students' confidence, trust and respect, gained the observer's admiration by her skilful, direct, lively and witty class-management. Her formation was excellent, and her experience was ample, in this school and with similar-level students. She was great; but she was not a native: her accent, though excellent, was perceptibly (to my ears) very faintly foreign-sounding in English.¹¹ However, these students' pronunciation mistakes were no way attributable to their teacher's not being native: it was her first year with the students. (There was, also, a native conversation assistant, R. B., who attended the class once a week and who, when in class, took charge of half the students for speaking practice. She gave more importance to the fluid flow of communication than to formal phonetic aspects, as long as she and the students more-or-less understood each other). However, I myself (who, in this context,

⁹ To the ridiculous extent that the written word "hegemony", for example, may be pronounced in up to nine different ways. (Bryson, 1991:79).

¹⁰ This doesn't happen (or not nearly as often) when watching a Spanish film in the company of Spanish people. Fact which may prove, either that Spanish people are generally less attentive to whatever is going on around them (which I find hard to believe), or that the Spanish sound-system in itself, being simpler than the English one, naturally begets fewer problems of comprehension for the listeners. Something that never ceases to astonish me is the rapid speed at which English or American natives, newly arrived in Spain (of whom I meet many, for professional reasons), acquire the Spanish sound-system well enough to meet all their communicative needs. (Other grammatical areas are, naturally, quite a different story).

¹¹ Which by no means implies that she was in any way unfitted for the teaching of English! Non-native teachers, whose L1 is the same as their students', obviously have a lot going for them. For starters, they have had to surmount the same obstacles as the learners, and can share useful experience and strategies for overcoming problems common to same-language speakers. Being a speaker of *Spanish*, too, confers other advantages for the teaching of English (etymological knowledge...), but which find no room in this paper.

must be considered yet another teaching agent) often found it difficult to understand the students' speech in English, and our interpersonal repartee was often, if not absolutely void of meaning, full of important *lacunae* which imperilled communication. (It may be that the other teachers were habituated to the students' pronunciation mistakes, or personally knew the students better and could imagine what they were talking about; or, simply, that the other teachers, for deontological reasons, were in more of a hurry to complete the official didactic programme on time, for which they were being paid, while I was independent from considerations of this sort).

- As to the teaching agency of the didactic material: The course used at this level, *Speak Out Upper Intermediate*, is published by the prestigious (and truly excellent) publishing house Pearson/Longman; it is BBC endorsed, and CEFR-guided. (The alternative course offered long-distance-modality students is *That's English!*, which bears the copyright M.E.C. 1995). Minor flaws may be that the order of the phonetic exercises (in the audio tapes, and in the corresponding space in the manual) is predictable in each unit, phonetic practice always coming wedged in between other formal grammar exercises, and giving isolated examples for the feature studied. A systematic teaching-learning sequence, from less to more difficult, does not always seem to be followed (in the level observed anyway). Perhaps most importantly: however good the actors' speaking voices are, the recorded material is necessarily limited by the cold filter of the machine (ultimately the lack of interactive context). The students could not see pronunciation cues as to the position of the mouth (or other paralinguistic, non-verbal cues)¹². This resulted in phonetic practice becoming a monotonous activity, not very motivating for the students, and led to their not realizing just how important this aspect of English is.

1.4. Diagnosis

¹² Mirror-neurons play a very important role in language learning. To imitate well, we need to *watch* how native speakers speak: how they move their mouth to pronounce the sounds, and how they support what they say with body language, with hand and arm movements, when stressing something (or not). And para-linguistic events have at least as much content as the spoken words, and are richer with emotional overtones, when they don't outright contradict the words said.

These students commit fossilized pronunciation mistakes in English, dating back to many years in some cases, without realizing they commit them, and without giving importance to sounds and supra-segmental features as the primary vehicles for language, ultimately meaning. The causes of these problems are varied and have to be accepted as givens falling outside the participants' responsibility: the only remedial action possible being to implement a completely new, fresh approach to the problem, as it has to do with students' incompetent perception.

1.5. Prognosis (action plan)

The relevance, seriousness and urgency of the problem (which interferes with communication at the most basic levels) warrant immediate reaction, in the shape of an active intervention. The student-teacher proposes to hold an emergency "Mini-Crash-Course" (a sort of combined immersion/refresher-course) in English Phonetics and Phonology, in which students shall be exposed to English sounds and prosody by means of a review [(via formal presentation, examination of physical processes, contrast with Spanish phonemes, modelling by native and imitation by the students)] of the range of phonemes in English and how they combine into strings of sounds conveying information; they will also learn how this information, in turn, may be signalled or qualified by stress and tone.

The student-researcher-teacher, an expert English native, will provide phonetic input and guide the practice, interaction and feedback activities.

All this will be carried out in a relaxed, play-like context which will metaphorically re-create conditions in the "critical period" (the young learners' early exposure to these "primary" linguistic elements in a very controlled, non-threatening environment), with typically repetitive, ludic activities incorporated, although, naturally, with the logical adaptations to the adult mind. This scenario will help the students relax, momentarily forget about their forthcoming exams, shed speaking inhibitions that may add to their pronunciation problems, and discard (or de-activate) their old, fossilized pronunciation errors¹³.

¹³ In brief: the students will imaginarily "suspend belief" (as Coleridge termed the operation of mental change of context), imaginarily regress to a time and a space before they had acquired their fossilised

2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE INCIDENTAL ON THE PROBLEM, WITH A VIEW TO PLANNING AND JUSTIFYING THE ACTION

2.1. Some formal considerations

The first and most important consideration stems directly from the nature of the problem and its causes: that the roots of the problem-situation are to be found where they have been, with almost complete confidence, hypothesized to be situated, and that these roots are precisely those mentioned, would not be difficult to prove with sufficient certainty; but this would be a complicated and lengthy business, which simply does not fit, temporally or otherwise, into the given conditions for this practical research. This is the main reason why the form of this study opts for *action* research, which offers at least the possibility of reacting to the problem. Action research permits the teacher to provide, however minimally, what the problem most cries out for: some kind of instant remedy, a “working solution,” not more, in this case, fruitless research.¹⁴

This student-teacher feels he would like to do something that will be finally useful, and that action research best fills the need.

Moreover, this particular study is directly concerned with one very fundamental teaching-learning area/arena in which little pioneering teaching-research has been carried out, the area of (English) Phonology and Phonetics, which however all linguists/teachers¹⁵ will agree that, however arbitrarily complex, is a perfectly acceptable area to observe and act on, as it is to teach and learn. Good pronunciation

errors, and will become more knowledgeable and more aware of the phonetic stimuli which they will immediately be called upon to reproduce.

¹⁴ This student-teacher has read many reports on research carried out by teachers that often seem a total waste of time, often querying the obvious, with foregone conclusions, or passing off value judgements as quantitative data; i.e., “*If, instead of just reading the textbook, I play a game with my students, will they raise their hands more often in class?*” (Well naturally. But that doesn’t necessarily mean that the students are paying more attention to learning English). And not only in teaching can seemingly meaningless research occur. The prestigious magazine *Scientific American* publishes (June 2012) a study by Dr. Ivan Chase of the “commonalities” between hermit crabs’ habits of continually updating their parasitic snail-shell housing, and Manhattan dwellers’ constant re-occupation of vacant apartments. The concluding paragraph is worth at least a read: “Not long ago I returned for inspiration to the beach where I first began my observations. I walked down to the tide pool and watched the hermit crabs slowly crawling along the sand below the water. I looked at them with what I can only call gratitude. What began as a fun pursuit to satisfy my curiosity ultimately revealed insights and connections that I could never have anticipated that first day on Long Island. *Most of all, I have been delighted to learn that some patterns of our social life are so fundamental that we share them even with rather primitive creatures.*” (P. 63) (My italics: not that I disagree with the conclusion).

¹⁵ Pothier, Allwright and Bailey... is it really that necessary to defend teaching the sounds of a language?

in English depends on so many personal variables (acuity of hearing, good motor control for production, memory...), and on the knowledge of so many other attendant disciplines (morphology, spelling...), that it is not easy to formulate one unique objective for the research. Action research allows us to propose the fusion of many, both general and specific, objectives.

Besides, action research, involving an initial observation period (together with participation in this case), and some posterior intervention (with a strict degree of control over classroom events, but low degree of control over ultimate results) is the approach best-fitted to all concomitant conditions of the study, both internal and external: the urgent nature of the problem, the brief interval of time allotted for the study to be carried out in (a fortnight's observation and three sessions for intervention), and this researcher's particular circumstances (he is working full-time at the *Colegio Internacional de Valladolid*, and cannot spare too much time on the formal requirements of another kind of study). This approach, giving room not only to inclusion of data of several kinds together with passive observation and reflection, but also to active participation and cooperation towards the greater good of all, is at the same time the best suited to the student-teacher's particular inclinations¹⁶.

"Although it can take many forms, action research in classrooms basically involves taking an action and systematically observing what follows." (Allwright and Bailey, 1991:42). The protocol usually follows a clear sequence: identification of the issue, search for related information, plan of the action, implementation of the action, observation of the action and reflection on its results, which may lead to new developments including revision and possible rejection or reinforcement of the original plan¹⁷. This process may be prolonged in time: in this case, obviously, only one cycle of the process can take place within the deadline, though the teacher in charge is of course very welcome to carry it further, as we have dared to suggest to her. All the

¹⁶ As a matter of fact, this student-teacher thinks that action-research will always prove to be the approach best fitted to solving *any* problem encountered in the context of the classroom: isn't it what any teacher actually does, from day to day? Self-searching and fearlessness to act must be necessary parts of the quest for teaching-learning success. And hasn't action research, called by its more mundane name (*trial-and-error*) always been at the core of any human progress? Ask Benjamin Franklin - or Louis Pasteur, for serendipitous results.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 44.

steps will be taken in that order, save that of reflection, which will be simultaneous to the whole process (as if this needed saying). (The student-researcher-teacher-observer – every book read adds a new epithet to the title - will of course be monitoring the whole process).

To quote Sanz (2010), quoting Schön:

“L’observation permet, en effet, de réperer des informations, des données, des observables; cependant, pour qu’une transformation de la pratique ait lieu, elle doit agir en parallèle avec une réflexion sur la pratique, ou avec une “pratique enseignante...” (P. 59).

And Ferrero (2010):

“Dans ce type de recherche, le chercheur s’inscrit dans l’action et prétend transformer une réalité déterminée, résoudre un problème posé par le contexte à travers son intervention... Les bénéficiaires de la recherche sont les participants eux-mêmes. Les questions de recherche découlent du processus et le chercheur, lui-même, apprend avec la recherche. Généralement l’enseignant étudie un cas, par exemple les effets provoqués par une innovation qu’il introduit dans ses cours pour améliorer ses propres résultats ou en articulation avec les collègues du même établissement.” (P. 37).

[Which mention to “colleagues” reminds me of the constant practical help and cooperation extended the student-researcher-teacher by the official “practitioner” (or “cooperating teacher”) in charge of the class, M. C. H, all along the process.]

For the reasons of time quoted above, the investigation, in spite of taking umbrage under the category of “action research”, cannot wholly be a “process-oriented-study”, because the process is not what *mainly* interests us, but rather, a positive outcome; nor can it be a purely “product-oriented-study”, as there will be few (if any) opportunities to notice (at least, on the observer’s part) this hoped-for positive outcome, students’ improved pronunciation standards, in the long run posterior to the action. The study will have to stand on its own merits, as they may be. We hope it will probably suffice to remember that “Action research is often a viable alternative, and one which offers immediate rewards to teachers and learners.” (Allwright and Bailey, 2002: 45).

As to the concerns for validity that must guide all research, in the first place reliability: the study will be based on testimony from all of the participant witnesses.

(The observer himself will have to be relied on, too, as a hard-working student-researcher-teacher, with the good of his students foremost in his mind). As to the second validation, the concern for truth: the researcher has tried to carefully define the constructs mentioned as involved, and has planned the intervention to the best of his knowledge and skills; as to the third concern, the wish for applicability and possibility of generalisation - well, that must be inferred: as to the first instance, because, just as the problem is common, perhaps the solution will fit many of those affected; as to the second, from the interest and effort invested in researching this particular problem, whose first motive was that of being ultimately useful, both for all the participants in the classroom action and for whomsoever may come to hear of it¹⁸.

Language teaching-learning is a humanistic endeavour, whose ultimate objectives overreach linguistic goals and cannot be contained in mere (though computer-friendly) grids and matrices.

The overall formal account of the action research includes a retrospective narrative record, admitting all categories of thought, including the main moments of the research: the observation, the (as-observed-by-the-actor) action, and the triangulated participants' posterior reflection on the action. Which is the last reason we shall adduce for the choice of action research for this study: that action research admits the spontaneous flowering of the researcher's subjectivity, and (hopefully) his original insights and creativity.

2.2. Foundational theory

There is not a tremendous amount of theory on the teaching-learning of English phonology/phonetics. To start with, English phonology is a "closed-state system", quite thoroughly studied, once and for all, as far as the stage in its evolutionary development it had arrived at, in the past century. And this system is the object of study here, but only in a very limited and biased sense: only insofar as our students seem to have rather a feeble hold on this important component of the English language. We have

¹⁸ Although, in action research, "results are not *necessarily* generalisable" (Woodward, 1991:225) (My italics). Cf.: "There are no real action replays in life. Nor could you assemble an identical group... Patterns for general human behaviour must be distinguished from expectations and predictions about particular individuals." (Sanger, 1996:40).

really seen few teaching advances in this area (except, possibly, in the Infant and Primary stages of education). The only positive novelty is that today there are many (mostly self-help, or for study under teaching guidance) texts and manuals on English pronunciation, some of them written specifically for speakers of Spanish as their mother tongue or first language (L1).

Some of the remoter reasons for the neglect of phonology in the English language-learning classroom may be found in foundational theory. Chomsky himself had to recognize that sounds, phonemes, are the building blocks of language, although their essential meaninglessness, except insofar as they contribute to distinguish the word they conform from other words, and the arbitrariness of their dispersion throughout the languages of the planet, rendered them unfit objects of study for a universal grammar. Although the physical laws of the production of sounds are universal (e.g. as regards the constant phonetic phenomena of contiguous assimilation, etc.), there exists too much variation (regional, individual...) to establish this as a viable science. The acquisition of phonology was seen as belonging to the domain of behaviourist rule-forming (due to a sort of automatic imprinting process, not deriving from the higher realm of cognitive processes), so, not from want of trying, it was discarded from study¹⁹. An irrefutable argument was that the human vocal apparatus isn't an indispensable support for language. Helen Keller perceived the word "water" as a tickle in the palm of her hand; Washoe, the famous chimpanzee taught Ameslan, as a gestural, visual sign²⁰. The point is further proved by the many languages in which the written language is disassociated with the spoken one (totally, in Chinese and other languages which use pictograms/ideograms to represent the spoken words; partially, to varying degrees, in languages which use the Roman alphabet, etc.).

One might say, in a nutshell, that what really interested Chomsky was not so much the holistic concept of language *per se*, but the way in which human thought and human cognitive processes are manifested through language. The phonological area

¹⁹ Actually, N. Chomsky and M. Halle did write a book on the generative phonology of English, *The Sound Patterns of English* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), which "most people find very difficult" (Roach, 2009:220).

²⁰ Helen Keller wrote (in Braille) *The Story of my Life* in 1917. The story of Washoe, and many "conversations" with her, have been commented on by Bickerton, Diamond, Pinker, etc.

was rather neglected consequently by linguistic theorists after Chomsky, perhaps we might even say shunned – at least until a few years ago²¹.

“Unfortunately, much of the language teaching nowadays still stems from this philosophy where native-like pronunciation is seen as an unrealistic goal and much of the effort in language learning is devoted to the acquisition of syntactic and lexical structures. One of the reasons for the success of the Chomskyan perspective in the L2 classroom is the readability of materials that facilitate the teaching of the passive skills (both listening and reading) more than the learning of active skills (writing and, in our case, speaking). Learning to speak and improve the student’s pronunciation demands the creation of a more naturalistic environment and the provision of real material²²...” (Íñigo Mora, 2005:26).

Of late, there have appeared many studies on both general and specifically English phonetics and phonology, on English regional varieties and accents, and more on the teaching of the pronunciation of English. Roach (2009) gives a good selection of these specialist studies and courses, starting at University-Level, and warning he does not include books which consist mainly of classroom material, on pages 119-121 of his course.

In *The Language Instinct* (1994), Pinker, exceptionally, devotes an entire chapter to “The Sounds of Silence”, where he studies the complicated physical processes of speech-production, of universal application, which however result in speech so apparently seamless that it is difficult for machines (and even native speakers) to sometimes recognize/understand human speech²³, briefly zooms in on the complex

²¹ Lately there is a renewed interest in the broad area of the physical aspects of human speech, and there are exciting discoveries almost daily. The latest interesting piece of news I read on the subject – I could kick myself for not having noted the reference, I think it was *Time* magazine – was on “Click” sounds, long thought to be indigenous only to some Kalahari “bushman” languages: however, detailed analyses of the sound-string in the connected speech of many modern Western languages (e.g., English) have revealed that speakers of English very frequently use “click” sounds in their discourse; to express reticence or doubt, to delay one’s answer in a dialogue, to convey disapproval... And, on reflection, I find that indeed it so happens, in my own speech.

²² Both of which conditions we shall try to offer in our intervention.

²³ This is patent, for example, in strings of sound whose syllabic junctures can be split in different ways: “The stuff he knows can lead to problems” vs. “The stuffy nose can lead to problems”, “It’s a dog-eat-dog world”/“It’s a doggy-dog world”, and the famous song “I scream, You scream, We all scream, for ice-cream.” (Pinker, 1994:160).

English phonetic system, with over 40 phonemes, and ends with a defence of English spelling, which, being morphemic, facilitates written comprehension of texts²⁴.

Pinker returns to the theme of English spelling in two entire chapters of his (1999) *Words and Rules*, pointing out with positive relish the many oddities of English word-formation, pronunciation, and spelling, although “only” about 500 words in the English language have a really irregular form, whether in their pronunciation or their spelling (fortunately, they are usually short and frequent words). This last focus (that of spelling) also calls our attention. The frequently misleading spelling (orthography) of many English words, not being phonetic, is an important cause of our students’ pronunciation errors – but we shall come back to this point later.

In *The Stuff Of Thought* (2007), Pinker returns to speech, but to a very limited variety of it, though naturally of linguistic and psychological import: the form and functional usage of expletives (“4-letter words” or swear words), whose motor use doesn’t seem to be cortically located (as Broca’s or Wernicke’s areas): patients with aphasia due to damage to Wernicke’s area can still curse very eloquently. This interesting fact shall be later expostulated on.

Why is there so little attention, in foundational theory, paid to the *physical* aspect of language? This would surely be the first thing to catch an alien life-form’s ear and attention (and perhaps, also, the rather limited period of human life-time in which language develops). These might be aspects not to forget when teaching phonological features, perhaps especially to *adult* students. The perceptual relationship a new human being establishes with the sounds of his/her mother-tongue-to-be starts very early on, even from seven months *in utero* (foetuses’ hearts beat faster when listening to previously-unheard sounds, babies fidget more if the people around them are speaking in an unfamiliar language).

But the learning of sounds is seen to belong to the realm of behaviourist, stimulus-response, mechanistic acquisition of conduct, automatically happening once the sufficient amount of stimuli (or input) has been delivered. Which to a great extent is

²⁴ We agree with that: English spelling gives valuable lexical, etymological information about words, which would be lost if English spelling were ever made phonetic.

true, at least for first-language learning. (But we can give adult learners other, more cognitively-oriented stimuli).

The one place in pure linguistic theory where we can find the sounds of English playing a really prominent role (apart from the specialized teaching-learning manuals) is in histories of the English language. Brook (1958) devotes two whole chapters of his history to “The Sounds of Speech” and “Phonology”, but naturally, from a diachronic perspective, and thus very interesting only to very interested scholars. Bryson (1991, *passim*) also cites many historical causes that contributed to English phonological complexity and wide geographical variety, as well as delving into (synchronic) quirks of English pronunciation and spelling. Fowler (1996) reviews the influence of American English in British English pronunciation and spelling. All these studies are really interesting in that they show us precisely how much the pronunciation of spoken English has changed, in relation to the inherent conservativeness of English written texts (which is why English children really have to learn as if it were two independent systems, when they are learning to read, the spoken word and its orthographical correlate, its spelling - on which more later). On the other hand, the very “frangibility” of the English spoken word, its instability, the fact that it is said one way “here, today, gone away tomorrow” – and its regional variability – have weighed in against its inclusion in diachronic linguistic studies.

The really, really inquisitive mind might like to travel even further back in time, say to the time when monkeys’ repertoire of about 24 calls performed the digital transformation of double articulation and became a repertoire of 24 phonemes (on average) for any human language, enabling the first sentences to be formed (and what wouldn’t we give to know how that much-extended repertoire took the even more astounding leap into the syntactic organization of a narrative, with its past, present, and probable future?).²⁵ For the moment, all we can do is amuse ourselves with idle speculations on early “phonology”: that the very first word in human language was *tik*, “finger, one”, as is more or less attested (or in a cognate form) in all the languages of

²⁵ But that’s probably best left to neurolinguists. Interestingly, Jared Diamond tells us that very young vervet monkeys have “pronunciation” problems, and that not until they are nearly two can the adults “understand” them, recognize their offspring’s cries for what they really mean. (Diamond, 1991, Ch. 8 *passim*). And if monkeys have only 24 calls –really, only about 15 for vervet monkeys – how much more problematic will this area be for humans?

the planet, from Indo-European to Afro-Asiatic to Amerind (Rühlen, 1994:115); far-fetched imaginings that the formation of phonemes in any given language has to do with the climate of the area of extension of that language – people in colder Northern climates will naturally open their mouths less, so the cold won't get in (Brook, 1972:70), or that vowel-sounds produced high in the mouth add the semantic component of the idea of "smallness" (the "Twee" theory); Roman Jakobson²⁶ noticed that, in many languages, vowels said near the front of the mouth were often used for the stem forms of nouns and verbs, suggesting the present, whereas sounds said at the back of the mouth, near the throat, tended to be specially marked forms suggesting the remoter past; or the many "Onomatopoeia" theories that link the origin of sounds in language to imitation of natural sounds, the "HmMMM", the "Pooh-Pooh", the "Bow-Wow", the "Goody-hoo" theories (Bryson, 1990:15)²⁷.

[All these may of course be just imagination, but perhaps inspired imagination is what we need most in this area. The student-researcher-teacher now happens to think that one good way to practice English pronunciation, in the context of onomatopoeic words/phrases, could be with the help of Don Martin's *MAD* cartoons in *MAD* magazine – for younger learners, of course, we have the never-failing, invaluable Theodore Geisel (or T. S. Siegel – or his most famous and beloved heteronym, "Dr. Seuss") and his wonderful books, too innumerable to cite here.]

The latest investigations in this area point to a very strong link, at least originally, between music and language. Funnily enough, Darwin was the first proponent of this idea: he wrote that human language may have evolved from imitation of animals' singing in sexual courtship, such as gibbons do (Darwin, 1882/2007:138-139)²⁸. Nearer our days, Steve Mithen (2005) thinks that modern humans may have copied speech from Neanderthals, who had bigger brains than us and probably, according to Mithen, "invented" language: Neanderthal remains point to symbolic thought. Neanderthals, however, couldn't really "speak", or could say only a few sounds, because their larynx

²⁶ Cited in Pinker, 1999:81.

²⁷ But "even the most obviously onomatopoeic words – those for animal sounds – are notoriously unpredictable, with pigs oinking *boo boo* in Japan and dogs barking *dong dong* in Indonesia. (Pinker, 1999:2). Saussure called this unpredictability the *arbitrariness* of the sign. But I can't help but pity poor Korean dogs, so often lunch, with such an undignified name, and can't help but wonder...

²⁸ Only yesterday (29/05/2012) I was watching a documentary on evolution (*Darwin's Dangerous Idea*, TVE-2, 21.00) which showed some footage of howling gibbons. Their cries in love were eerily reminiscent of the stereotypical "wolf-whistle" of a human male when a lovely lady goes by.

hadn't descended yet. (We know this from fossil records). But Neanderthals could sing. It is as if they had composed the music, and we set the lyrics to it... Who knows? Life abounds in strange symbioses, of all kinds.

There may be more intrinsic or solid reasons for the connection. To start with, a continuous string of sounds is really difficult to remember in the first place, before mentally scanning it and carving it into words and sentences. This is where prosody (melody, in music) comes in, according to Altmann (1997). Many mothers sing songs or lullabies to their babies, songs that contain lyrics made of words, words that are often signalled by a change of note in the melody. If we listened to a song in an unknown language, Altmann suggests, we would probably be able to tell where a new word, or at least a new syllable began, because the melody would change at that point, whereas if we listened to a string of sounds recited in an unvarying monotonous pitch, it would be very difficult to remember the sequence or tell when one syllable started or ended. Of course, another signalling agent in this case is the *silences*, the pauses between notes... (In modern linguistic terms, we would say that this is the grammatical function of prosody, and we shall try thus to explain it to our students in our intervention)²⁹.

In any case, it might be well to remember that the first things a baby learns about its mother tongue, starting from when it is seven months old and still in the womb, are its rhythm and its melody (intonation). Words will come much later. Phonological discrimination, perhaps even later, if/when the child learns to read. It might not be such a bad idea to start teaching-learning pronunciation in a "top-down" order, starting with the "musical", supra-segmental features (as Parker & Graham do in their 2002 course). There is still the need for much research in this area.³⁰

²⁹ One "true anecdote" we might tell our students to make them realize just how important tone can be, linguistically: the Chinese language (or rather, the collection of all the dialects that make up Chinese) is monosyllabic, which naturally rather restricts its phonetic range; and the most influential dialect, Pekingese, further demands that all syllables end in either "-n" or "-ng". "As a result, there are so few phonetic possibilities in Pekingese that each sound must represent on average seventy words. Just one word, "yi", can stand for 215 separate words." (Bryson, 1991:79) How do Chinese people distinguish the different meanings of a sound? Through four basic tones, and combinations of them.

³⁰ "Most people are familiar with the idea of "motherese", the special, very markedly stressed and highly tonal sing-song mothers use with their infants (a version of which rhesus monkey adults also employ in their interactions with their babies). Some linguists believe that the interest shown by human babies towards motherese could aid language development; the extended vowels and exaggerated tones of motherese would teach infants basic grammar. Others contend that the melodic sounds might have the simpler purpose of facilitating comprehension. A study supports this idea. South American Indian women understood 75% of the speech of North American women if the latter spoke as if they were addressing an infant. This cross-cultural comprehension of motherese suggests that its basic characteristics appeared

2.3. Descriptive, notional-functional models

The term “notional-functional” is usually applied to a number of formal, structuralist grammars which try to define linguistic elements, not in themselves, but according to their notional relationship with other elements in the same system (“structure”). The term “notion” is often used as a synonym of “mental concept”, or “lexical item”: people, things, events, states, feelings...; the term “function” here makes reference to communicative situations, or contexts in which communication of any kind may take place, i.e., “shopping”, “giving excuses”, “asking for permission”... Whereas “notions” are supposed to be, more-or-less, “universal” (point whose discussion would merit separate discussion, and for philosopher-linguists to develop), “functions” are held as inseparable from the particular social context, that is, from the particular culture they originate in. These grammars are often known as “Grammars of Usage”.

2.3.1. General grammars

As a direct consequence of phonology’s being “out of bounds” as an area for universal theoretical enquiry, many, if not most descriptive/prescriptive grammars do not give room to the teaching-learning of phonological/phonetic notions and signification and their practice. Quirk’s seminal Transformational Grammar of the English language, *A University Grammar of English* (1973), only speaks of the prosodic features in English speech (stress, rhythm, and intonation) in one out of three appendices. Zandvoort’s grammar of usage does not explicitly explain phonological features of English, but presupposes that readers of his book are familiar with the standard IPA phonetic notation system, e.g., giving a possible phonetic realization of “what does it matter?” as /wɒts ɪt/ (p. 80). Most grammars of use set as standards to University students (Thomson and Martinet, Bolton and Goodey...) pass over this area as a matter of fact. Some intermediate-level grammars (Bald, Cobb and Schwarz, Eastwood and Mackin, ...) deign to print on one page the phonetic symbols for the English phonemes and basic notation of stress, rhythm and intonation, but most don’t

early in human history – and that it may have originated for the same socially beneficial reasons that led our monkey relatives to develop their own form of baby talk.” (Karen Leitzell, 2008, “Understanding Baby Talk”, in *Scientific American Mind*, December 2007/January 2008).

even bother (Sinclair...). Why do all these influential grammars not include the mention, not to say the study, of English phonology and phonetics? Because not only are sounds, by themselves, devoid of functional meaning – which we shall try to argue later is patently not true – or, perhaps as well, because pronunciation has no place in a grammar, as it must be acquired at an early stage, not studiously learnt, and the grammarian or teacher cannot hope to teach it?

Perhaps, simply, because these grammars' final purpose is not a communicative outlook; they are only intended for consultation. But the need remains.

2.3.2. Authors and courses on the specific area of English phonetics and phonology

Thankfully, there is no lack of descriptive models of the English phonological system, many of which have been adapted to the specific purpose of helping the foreign student of English become familiar with its phonic/sonic features, and can thus be studied as courses. All of them include exercises and activities towards this end. The relation here given is from more in-depth (or advanced) to more elementary.

In 1956, Daniel Jones published the definitive version of *An Outline of English Phonetics*, which most linguists consider the “state of the art” descriptive work on English phonology and phonetics, and which is still the manual of reference for any student of the topic. In it, he extensively studied the nature of the main English sounds, their allophonic realizations, their geographical variation and their norms of usage, also noting the phenomena of strong and weak forms, assimilation, elision, etc., as well as reviewing the supra-segmental features of the language. This work was illustrated with photographs of the position of the mouth, palatograms, X-rays, and section drawings of the organs of speech. It also established, more or less once for all with some disputation, the symbols for the English sounds which, with slight variations (due partly to Gimson's review), have come down to us in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).³¹

³¹ Most creditable dictionaries carry the IPA system to indicate the pronunciation of words, so it is vastly important that students of English learn the correspondence between sounds and their IPA notations, so that they will be able to read the pronunciation of a word when they look it up in a dictionary, thereby increasing their autonomy and overall learning competence.

V. J. Cook, J. D. O'Connor and G. F. Arnold studied the main intonation patterns in English and published books on the subject accompanied by tape recordings. Since then, all texts on this area have always included complementary audio material. (From O'Connor (*Intonation of Colloquial English*, 1973) we have taken material for the third session of the intervention, on English intonation patterns).

Of late, the broad area of phonetics and phonology seem to have acquired new general interest, both in theoretical research and in practical teaching. Most of the British-origin texts follow, almost to the letter, Jones' (with Gimson's later revisions) descriptive model of English phonology and phonetics, their departure point being the complex English phonological system, slightly updated as to its recent tendencies, and the terms "BBC pronunciation" sometimes, especially of late, replacing the construct "RP" ("Received Pronunciation"). All of them naturally include aural material, some audiovisual as well. But there are also new developments.

We have personally learned much that we didn't know about English phonetics and phonology in Peter Roach's (1996) *English Phonetics and Phonology*, an excellent, very exhaustive University-Level study. (Roach is a follower and continuator of the multi-faceted linguist David Crystal). The course provides fresh outlooks and challenging points for reflection and study for the serious investigator. In spite of the course's having been continually updated since first publication, Roach recognizes that much is still to be done, and that many phonological features still lack sufficient research. (We have consulted Roach for preparation of the session on intonation).

Íñigo Mora's 2005 *A Course in Phonetics and Phonology for Spanish and English Speakers* is exactly what its title indicates, a University-Level comparative study of Spanish/English Phonetics and Phonology, for specialized linguists who are already familiar with phonetic transcription in both systems. It could be of interest to an English speaker learning Spanish, but s/he would have to be an expert phonetician. As to its potential benefit for Spanish learners or teachers of English... there may be some to be found, if they speak some regional variety of Spanish, as the book (no audio material) especially studies particular difficulties (Andalusian, Argentinian, etc.) speakers might find pronouncing some English sounds (Íñigo Mora is always careful to note the geographical provenance of the examples given). The analyses of frequent errors

committed by the natives of the different places (usually due to loan phonology or interlanguage) are possibly the components of the book most useful for teachers of English.

Ray Parker's & Tim Graham's (2009) *The Phonology of English* is also aimed at actual or future teachers of English as a second language (TESOL), and contains many practical classroom applications and ideas. We like this manual because it offers a "top-down" approach to matters phonic: it starts with stress and intonation, *before* moving on to review the individual sounds (phonemes). This seems to us a very logical way to go about it, if we believe (personally, I do) that second-language learners usually learn new items in the same "natural order" they have acquired their closest equivalents in the first language. Let's not forget that the first things babies learn about their mother tongue are its rhythm and its melody (prosody), much before they learn to distinguish the individual sounds that go into the composition of words.

We also like that the course gives berth to street talk. And we think it original and appropriate that spelling, "the mismatch between sounds and spellings in English" (Parker & Graham, 2009:91) is studied as transition, placed between prosody and phonetics. (We have however not used any of the material in the book as being too in-depth and specialized for the scope of our action).

Half-way between theory and application lies Sánchez-Reyes's & Durán Martínez's (2006) *Nuevas perspectivas en la didáctica de la fonética inglesa*. This is again a teacher-training course. Its value perhaps lies in the multiplicity of practical ideas and immediately applicable activities (tongue-twisters, limericks, word-searches...). (We have by mere chance coincided with the authors on some activities). It also offers a chapter on Internet websites to obtain general resources in this area. It is written by Spanish people, and includes a summary of specific problem areas in English pronunciation for Spanish speakers (pp. 67-68).

In the same book, Rodríguez de Vega has, independently, compiled an additional list of difficult English phonemes for Canary-Islands-dwellers speakers of Spanish, together with the mistaken renditions these learners tend to offer (the interested reader can find the list on pp. 124-125).

By far the best guide to teaching pronunciation we know is Gerald Kelly's³² (2000) *How to Teach Pronunciation*: it is again, as its title indicates, a teacher training course. It strongly urges the planning of explicit pronunciation teaching in the curriculum, instead of just doing reactive (corrective) teaching on punctual errors encountered in the classroom. The levels for the suggested activities, games, and sample lessons included range from Elementary to Advanced, and the course, starting from the physiology of pronunciation, progresses from vowels, consonants, word and sentence stress, intonation, and other aspects of connected speech (assimilation, elision, linking and intrusion, juncture, contractions). There is a Task File for each of the chapters, and a list of difficulties for particular speakers of a language (Spanish included), and useful pronunciation and spelling tables for the learners' quick review. There are ideas on how to adapt traditional games for pronunciation practice ("Hangman"), how to use jokes, verse, and drama techniques... The book merits careful reading and detailed posterior application, which alas we have not the time for during the intervention.

We have been much amused to read Kelly's suggestions for teaching the isolated sounds, which we think may owe somewhat, perhaps, to the (Suggestopedia/TPR-derived) "Phonics" methods developed (1995, in England; earlier in America) for very young children just learning to read, commented on in the next page (2.3.3.).

Cf., for the sound-contrast /u/ - /u:/:

Kelly: /u/: "One way into this sound is to ask students what sound a gorilla makes!"

/u:/: ""Use a `rising then falling´ intonation, as if you've heard something surprising, or some interesting gossip (uuUUuu)."

Phonics: "Move head back and forth as if it is the cuckoo, saying u oo, u oo."

Ann Baker's *Tree or Three?* (1982/2006, Elementary) and *Ship or Sheep* (1997/2006, Intermediate) have been the standard reference manuals in teaching this area at the level of Secondary Education in Spain, since they were first published in 1977. They have it all: physical descriptions of the sounds, including pictures, practice contrasting minimal pairs, witty example sentences and dialogues containing the sounds, spelling

³² No relation that we know of.

rules and practice, IPA symbols, even games (although, basically, auto-competitive); the prosodic elements are seen within the larger context; the larger context may include practice in other grammatical areas; and there is of course support audio material. We'd love to use these wonderfully integrated texts in our intervention, but each complete lesson is beyond the scope we can give it in the research classroom, and the method cannot be fragmented without losing the original intention.

Most of the above, as said, are encyclopaedic-minded at heart; they all need adaptation to the teacher's/students' needs, meaning it is necessary to select from their contents, with a view to remedy specific pronunciation problems. Above all, they all need, to fully complete their study, a specific didactic phonetics programme of long duration, which we do not have time for. But in them we shall always find concrete answers to concrete (in this case, individual) problems.

From all of the above authors' pointers, but also from our experience, we would abstract the following problem areas for Spanish learners of English:

- The pronunciation of all vowels except /e/;
- The pronunciation of most consonants (but here, approximations are often "acceptable");
- The difference between voiced and unvoiced sounds;
- The difference between "short" and "long" vowels (often not a real question of length, but of tension: e.g., the "short" vowel in "fizz", /fɪz/, is considerably longer in time than the "long" vowel in "fees", /fi:z/);
- Non-acquisition of English phonemes (/v/, /h/);
- Any syllable ending in a consonant which isn't /s/z/, /l/, /n/;
- Negative transfer from L1 ("dog" produced as /dɒʒ/, not /dɒg/);
- Consonant clusters, /sl/, /sk/, /skr/, /spl/, /spr/, /str/...), especially at the beginning or end of a word;
- Spelling-induced confusion as to the pronunciation of a word;
- The location of the stress in the word (often, due to above reason);
- The pronunciation of weak forms following a stressed syllable;
- The compression of syllables after the sentence-driving stress;

- Different intonation patterns in questions, for emphasis, and in “updated talk” (as in, “I went □ shopping yesterday. I went to Marks and □ Spencers.”).

2.3.3. The question of spelling

A great many of the manuals on the English phonological system also include the term *Spelling* in their title. This is so because in English there is often no transparency, no evident correspondence, between the sounds, phonemes, and the graphemes which go into the word’s orthographical representation. This will become obvious if we remember that there are only 26 letters for about 49 discrete sounds (the exact number varies regionally). There are not enough letters to go round for each sound, especially vowels, of which there are 20 phonemes (counting diphthongs) for only 5 alphabet letters. (Consonants offer fewer problems, as the ratio is more balanced, “only” 24 consonant sounds for 21 consonant letters).

The problem may be said to have its remote roots in history: the English language started out as Anglo-Saxon, a Germanic offspring of Indo-European, but this basic, spoken form has been sculpted by different events, some linguistic (such as the many waves of vowel and consonant shifts), some historical (such as the successive Viking, Roman, Norman invasions, the influence of the Church and the classical texts, the colonial convulsions), whereas the written form has tended to remain static and conservative (Bryson, 1990). The practical spin-off is that English children find many more obstacles when learning to read than do their Spanish counterparts, and both the natives themselves, and foreign learners of the language, in many cases do not know how to pronounce a word they have encountered in writing.

Naturally many people have been unhappy about this situation, and there have been many attempts at reform, starting from the eighteenth century: Dr. Johnson, Noah Webster (in America, but many of his proposals, usually towards simplification, have stuck and can be found in any American dictionary, sometimes even in a British English text), George Bernard Shaw, James Pitman...

Except for Webster's, and, indirectly, Shaw's³³, none of these attempts has prospered. The reason, as Pinker (1994) convincingly argues, is that English spelling, although it does not (usually) give phonetic information about the word, does give very valuable information of other kinds: morphological, lexical, etymological and semantic. (Spanish speakers are given all this information "for free" with each word. Which could make a case for learning to read in Spanish before learning to read in English – this order of acquisition was certainly helpful for this student-researcher-teacher, and his greatest wonder is how English children can ever become fully fluent readers)³⁴.

Penny Ur urges teaching spelling together with pronunciation, even if only as part of lexical work: "In most cases the learners will encounter a form before they know its meaning, not vice versa... You may stress either pronunciation or spelling when teaching a particular item, depending on where it was found: ultimately, students will need to know both". (Ur, 1996/2012:61).

As to the nature of the pronunciation/spelling problems themselves in the English language (with specific Spanish learners in mind), following and expanding on Sánchez-Reyes (2006) we could offer the following categorization:

- The sonic value of a letter often depends not only on the letter itself, but on the whole syllable: "cut", but "cute".
- The same sound can be represented by different letters: "slow", but "though".
- The same letters can render different sounds: "about", "fall", "fame", "far", "fat", "ah"; "who", but "when"; "heard" and "beard"; "hour", but "house".
- Some letters may be silent: "ought", "Worcester", "psalm", "island", "crumb".
- Some sounds may crop up unexpectedly: "Asia[r]and Africa", "lieu[f]tenant".
- Some graphemes may be redundant: "c", "k", "q", "x" for /k/.

³³ Shaw left all his money to the Spelling Reform movement, which eventually (not in Shaw's time) agreed on an International Phonetic Alphabet, a version of which was later institutionalized as the IPA transcription system all creditable dictionaries now carry, to show the pronunciation of a word.

³⁴ There are now some excellent methods, lumped under the generic term "Phonics", used in both Great Britain and America to try to facilitate children's learning of the correspondences between sounds and letters (or the exceptions). They utilize Suggestopedia methods (music, non-linguistic symbols...) and Total Physical Response (physical actions) as help. One such method known to the author is the British Lloyd's and Wernham's 1995 *Jolly Phonics*. There are also excellent courses and readers, following the simpler American version of Phonics, available at Scholastic Education. [Curious (but true) fact is that English teachers' most urgent priority is getting English children to learn to read, with syllabic procedures; but these Spanish students have to unlearn the syllabic reading technique, when they are reading aloud, if they want to be intelligible to the listeners.]

- Digraphs ("ph", "sh", "th", "mm") or polygraphs ("tion").

However, in 84% of the cases (points out Penny Ur, 2012, citing Pinker, 1994), English spelling does follow (rather) predictable patterns from which "spelling rules" may be inferred: these quasi-rules must be learnt in the first place, and the exceptions, as students come to them. Pinker points out that most exceptions, anyway, correspond to high-frequency words such as "the", "a", "some", "to", verbal forms of the verb *be*, etc., which are so common that they eventually stick.

Ur offers what she considers to be a basic list of spelling rules that must be mechanically taught/learnt. (Ur, 2012:163-164). We do not copy it here, as perhaps we may wish to go about this teaching-learning of rules in a different way, more inductively.

One idea we do like (taken from Traditional Teaching methods) is learning spelling rules in the form of the short, easy mnemonic rhymes traditionally taught English children:

- *"I before e, except after c."*
- *"When two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking."*

Etc.

(In the intervention, we include an activity in which students must infer the spelling rules for a given sound, by underlining the spellings given in examples. We know from experience that students "get a thrill" out of discovering a rule by themselves, and that this is one of the best facilitators of long-term memorisation of items. We shall also give students mnemonic rules, such as those detailed above).

2.4. Methods and teaching currents

We now turn our attention towards a quick, chronological-of-sorts, review of the authors and/or general methodological teaching trends from which have been borrowed immediately practical hints and/or teaching techniques for the students' "Hey-presto' pronunciation fix", during the necessarily brief period of the teaching action. Many of these ideas have been interwoven in the intervention, in the attempt to integrate all the methods into one grand "unified theory". This has been possible because we find that, at heart, the majority of these methods do not contradict each

other, when they do not overlap. (Of course there are exceptions). But most do hit on something of value for future teachers and students, and on their synthesis hangs our intervention.³⁵

All of the following methods/schools, often developed for the specific teaching-learning of the English language, have been studied by the student-researcher-teacher along his formative period. (For quick reference here we have used Lightbown's and Spada's 1993 brief, adding to it where the need was found):

- Traditional (Grammar Translation) methods, concerned only with translation of the *written* form of the language (usually, as preserved in classical texts) do not find a place in the intervention. But the form of the drills in the intervention, with the choral repetition, may be reminiscent of this kind of "early" (up to the last century) teaching.
- The Direct Method, which tries to replicate, by "immersion" techniques, the conditions in which the mother tongue is originally acquired by the learner, that is to say by intuition and imitation, was the original inspiration for the intervention, which has borrowed from it these techniques: the oral input, before exposure to the printed word; the illustrations given for the examples practised, instead of translations; the teaching pantomime involved (in the mimicry and the demonstration of the "tongue-puppet"); the banning of L1 for the duration of the lessons; and, above all, the repetition. (One component of this method, the use of recordings, will not be utilized).

Repetition is important because, in achieving correct pronunciation, there must necessarily be a period of physical training. Young children do this in their "babbling" stage, when they are in the process of acquiring their mother tongue, in which they constantly readjust their oral production to the L1 repertoire; we must provide conditions remotely resembling this informal, "experimental" scenario, so that there is room for ample, "fearless" practising of sounds. Adults, particularly, are in need of this physical exercise, because the articulator muscles in their jaw and speech organs are rigidly adjusted to the L1 movements, and must form new, unfamiliar motor habits.

³⁵ Global research to prove the superiority of one method over another has proved inconclusive, perhaps because of the great variability of conditions in education, or because "a considerable amount of overlap could be expected in the behaviour of the teachers" (Allwright, 1988:48).

- The Reform Movement, originating in philological studies by Henry Sweet, Sir Isaac Pitman and others (in several countries, on both sides of the Atlantic), analytically dissected the sounds of speech and proposed the very first phonetic alphabets, out of a synthesis of which was born the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in 1938. This had no immediately evident consequence for the teaching of English (if we discount Pitman's Schools, who insisted on pronunciation being taught before anything else, and who used their own idiosyncratic version of the IPA in their teaching of English well into the 1960s). But the IPA made it into all dictionaries of English, the British version of English anyway (American dictionaries sometimes use Webster's notation for pronunciation - in which "possibly" is transcribed "pos'-i-blee" – and many Spanish dictionaries carried no transcription at all until only a few years ago).

It is a good idea for students to be familiar with the IPA because it is a powerful tool towards achieving learning autonomy. If the students know what sounds the phonetic symbols stand for, they will be able to find out the pronunciation of unknown words in a dictionary, without recurring to the teacher. Students must be encouraged to buy and use a good dictionary (Longman's, Collins, Oxford...), or the school should provide a number of these for each classroom. We ourselves, being native, could not do without Jones's/Gimson's Pronouncing Dictionary. (During the intervention, students will review the IPA as illustrated by Trim and Kneebone, and will be given a Personalised Phonemic Chart with IPA symbols which they must complete with their own examples of words carrying the sound notated).

- The Audio-Lingual approach, originally developed to teach American soldiers the language of the country they were sent to during World War II, is based on the behaviourist theory of learning, in which learning (of any kind) depends on the formation of habits. Language learners receive linguistic stimuli (input) and positive reinforcement for a correct response (output). Linguistic habits formed in the learner's L1 may interfere with the acquisition of linguistic habits in L2, thus giving way to errors, so intensive practice, memorization, and, above all, numerous drills (repetition of structures in isolation from context) are required to counteract the interference of the L1. As this approach is ideally suited to the acquisition of aural-

oral habits (phonetic skills), and it was designed with adult learners in mind, it has been a great influence on the overall design of the activities carried out in the intervention.

Mary Finocchiaro³⁶ (1964) gives great importance to the study of phonology and phonetics as being prior to any communicative act, and studies practical ways in which teachers can help develop Audio-Oral skills. She recommends the teacher to start by giving a physical description of the sounds and/or contrasting them with other sounds, and placing the sounds on a diagram of the mouth cavity with the organs of speech, and urges the students' practice in listening, identifying and producing the sounds. She makes no bones about it that acquiring the phonetic system is, essentially, a matter of practice:

"You may have to reteach the same sound or remind the students of the pronunciation of the same sound a hundred times or more. With older students particularly, habits of using the speech organs in one's native tongue are strong. Of the three major areas of language, the sound system is the most difficult to acquire." (P. 56).

Finocchiaro even identifies the very same problem we have detected: "*The students have trouble making the sound... even after we've taught it*", and gives these basic hints to meet it:

- a. *Reteach it and practice it whenever you can do so. Use diagrams, description of vocal organs, phonetic symbols, reminders of other sounds they know in their native tongue or in English to help them hear and produce the sound.*
- b. *Reintroduce it whenever possible. Don't expect mastery too soon!*
- c. *Make sure it appears frequently in some of the pattern practice exercises and conversations.* (P. 125).

(Precisely to better help our adult students better understand how to produce the more difficult English sounds, from the above source we are taking the idea of a cardboard

³⁶ Finocchiaro was one of the earliest teacher-researcher contributors to the development of the CEFR Global Scale (and before that, a New York University/U. S. Department of State consultant specialist for Language and Linguistics), one of a group who worked with and incorporated the concepts of *notions* (communicative contexts or situations of interaction) and *functions* (communicative purposes of speech) into modern linguistic teaching syllabuses.

figure with a head/mouth cavity cut-out, and a “tongue-puppet” to demonstrate its position in some sounds). (See final Addenda).

In *English Pronunciation Illustrated* (1975), John Trim reviews the English phonetic system phoneme by phoneme, before contrasting each sound with similar sounds or in minimal pairs. He also studies the catenation or juncture of syllables within a word, and of words within a sentence, and provides additional practice (supported on tape-recording, which we’ll do without as being second-best to our competence) in the stress-driven rhythmical structure of English sentences. Trim suggests practising all the examples first chorally, or in small groups, to reduce individual anxiety and notice major pronunciation trends, which can later be corrected individually. Achieving an acceptable group-pronunciation is a feasible goal for isolated phonetic practice sessions (such as our punctual action), whereas individual mistakes need particular attention over a longer period of time.

The phonetic examples are witty, and amusingly illustrated with simple line drawings by an excellent artist, Peter Kneebone. Some of this book (specifically the pages giving examples for the simple English vowels, to be used for the phonetic drills in the first session in the intervention) will be utilized in the action, not only for its sheer motivating value, for its funny drawings and apt, witty, captions, but also for its tongue-in-cheek humorous take on British stereotypes. (Although the book is adaptable for its use at any level, the author thinks that the visual humour will perhaps best be appreciated by Advanced-Level students, and in fact it sometimes clearly verges on adult humour).

- Cognitive-Creative or Construction Theories, in which superior thought processes lead to progressively more meaningful learning, are also represented in the intervention, as in the giving of explanations as to the physical production of sounds, which we saw above, and also, when the students infer the spelling rules from the examples practiced. (But we must remember that there is no escaping the purely physical aspects of phonetic practice, which is largely a matter for mechanical drilling exercise).

The foremost proponent of Cognitive-Creative Construction Theory, Stephen Krashen (1982), formulated five strong hypotheses, which convince us and we apply in

the action: *the "acquisition vs. learning" and the "natural-order" hypotheses*: because the students are adults, *learning*, not acquisition, is to take place through the physical demonstrations and rational explanations included in the activities, but there is some pretension of following the natural order of acquisition of linguistic items by first-time speakers of a language; *the monitor hypothesis*: the students' learning system's "monitor", in this case, helped by knowledge about the physical processes involved, working to correct acquired and fossilized pronunciation errors; *the input hypothesis*: because we're trying to give input, sound-forms and patterns, slightly beyond the learners' current level of competence; *the affective filter hypothesis*: the choral repetition encourages shy or withdrawn students to participate, and the funny drawings and jokes create a climate of confidence, so the students are relaxed and motivated, and the affective barrier is lowered, effectively enhancing attention to input.

Krashen's theories were all incorporated into the (somewhat loosely) named Humanistic Teaching schools. Theories of human cognition/learning processes, dating back to Piaget (and, indeed, to Chomsky himself) had reversed the polarity of education, which now began to be learner-centred, not teacher-centred. All these schools took elements from each other, and had no absolutely clear programmes, but they injected a trove of fresh, enthusiastic and contagious new ideas into teaching-learning, with more emphasis on the latter, as the teacher from this perspective is also partly a learner, and personally involved in the overall, holistic learning process. It meant a period of carefree teaching experimentation, always seeking to spark and improve the learners'/teachers' motivation.

- Suggestopedia is really only an extreme offshoot of Krashen's "affective filter" theory, and also owes much to Howard Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences* Theory: different people have different abilities, and the musician, or sportsman, or builder, are as much to be praised for their special skill as the doctor or the mathematician. But for the quirky name, we rather like its integration of drama, music, and so on, into the classroom³⁷. (The second session, on rhythm in language, borrowed the "drumming" example from musicology).

³⁷ (We very much like, and have taken a course on, drama techniques for the classroom).

- Total Physical Response (TPR) also tries to create an emotionally discharged atmosphere in the classroom by linking whatever content to be learnt to a physical action (standing up, raising one's arm), which fixes students' conscious attention on performing it, while linguistic input flows in painlessly and without conscious notice. (We have used TPR in the limericks-reading, in the second session). These sorts of methods are sometimes now dismissed as passing teaching "fads", but we like the general idea of creating "tension-relieving outlets" to establish a relaxed atmosphere of confidence and trust: we think this caters for important psychological/affective needs that were perhaps not sufficiently recognized prior to these methods. (Some elements from these methods have been included in the action, especially in the second session).
- Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) is another such holistic method, aiming at giving the students' creativity a free range in every way. More or less it says that the inroads to cognition are those of perception, so teachers should provide input that can be perceived by the different senses: auditory, visual, olfactory and gustatory, and tactile. It aims at developing both sides of the brain. NLP interests us because our concern is precisely the students' phonological awareness, their sensitivity and receptivity to the holistic perception of phonological manifestations in their totality (aural, but also visual, and physiologically tactile). This is in line with recent neurological research, which claims that awareness emerges when information travels back and forth between many different brain areas, rather than arising only from one linear chain of command. "Awareness requires a neural dialogue rather than one key area... consciousness is a conversation rather than a revelation, with no single brain structure leading the dialogue."³⁸ Our students have been used to being presented English sounds as merely acoustic events; our intervention will try to provide different kinds of phonetically-related input, with the aim to expand students' awareness and help them construct a fresh new configuration of English sounds³⁹.

³⁸ Morgen E. Peck (2011), "A Conversation in the Brain", *Scientific American Mind*, November/December 2011.

³⁹ To be more exact, our action will try to help students interiorize English phonological features through unconscious processes, such as took place in L1-acquisition, while reinforcing these acquisitions with technical phonological "know-how", consciously and cognitively learned.

- We are a bit unsure of our enchantment with "The Silent Way", an offshoot of NLP: the teacher remaining silent throughout the learning process seems a rather paradoxical way of getting the students to speak (coloured sound-charts and coloured Cuisenaire rods - e.g. red for consonants, white for vowels, or long rods for stressed syllables, short for unstressed - are the only kinds of stimuli used to elicit the sounds from the students). And if they do speak, but with mistakes? Many "Silent Way" teachers propose eliciting the correct forms from the students through non-verbal strategies, themselves remaining silent until the student "hits on it". An odd way of teaching a language. Perhaps this method might work best with children. Perhaps we do not know enough about this method.

Suggestopedia, TPR and NLP are interested in what neurology has to offer by way of the latest research, how learning may come about by lateral (left brain/right brain) ways of thinking, and how cognition is linked to memory and its multiple sensorial pathways. They are also much indebted to theories of learning psychology like Daniel Goleman's *Emotional Intelligence* and Howard Gardner's *Multiple Intelligences*, and both these two derive directly from Martin Seligman's *Positive Psychology*, which stresses the value of the individual and of the individual's affective interaction with others. We very much like the idea, common to all, that the concept of "intelligence" may be construed in many different ways, that intuition and creativity are to be accepted as manifestations of cognitive construction too, and that, in the long run, what really matters (for development and progress) is not the natural aptitudes we are born with, but how much effort we invest on their development. (Judith Rich Harris is another important reference here). Teachers should best cater for the growth of all these different "intelligences", or aspects of their students' personality, *not* by praising their natural *abilities*, something that would leave them "defenceless" against really difficult tasks (which they won't attempt, in case they fail), but by praising their *willingness to work* against odds (these situations will then be considered as challenges, not tests), and by teaching students to *learn from their mistakes*, as mistakes are a sign of progress. Our intervention will be fundamentally based on these ideas.

Adrian Underhill's (1994) *Sound Patterns: Learning and Teaching Pronunciation*, is the most outstanding referential adherent to the Cognitive-Creative, the "learning revolution" initiated by Krashen, in the area of pronunciation. Underhill acknowledges his roots in the Humanistic Teaching movement and has founded his own Learning School in Hastings, where it is expected that teachers demonstrate in their teaching the learning qualities they are asking of the students, in a spirit of Action Inquiry, and seeking personal and professional transformation. He became interested in pronunciation when he saw that his students enjoyed it, and that it led to their becoming interested in further linguistic developments. His course is for both teachers and learners, and it aims at teaching-learning about sounds in a humanistic and experiential, hands-on way, with learners discovering, from experience, facts for themselves. He believes in multiple cognitive pathways, in integrating physicality into classroom activities, and in motivation as prime mover of learning, taking elements from all the above "minority methods." He surveys English phonological features at three levels (the pure sounds, the "energy profile" or influence of stress in words, the tone units in connected speech), reviewing their physical features (where in the mouth they are produced, with how much energy...) and their functional value in speech, and including, after each feature reviewed, a series of "Discovery activities" through which the learners can physically experience for themselves the qualities of the sounds (e.g., experimenting with sounds, putting their hand under their chin to feel the jaw-muscles tensing when pronouncing tense sounds, reading aloud phrases to see how sounds elide, assimilate, etc.). The pronunciation course relies heavily on the correct use of a Phonemic Chart, with symbols for the English phonemes and indications as to stress and tone. The teacher must be prepared to be a good actor/mime, and use gesture and other non-verbal resources expressively. (There are sections on the use of gesture and mime for the teacher, on how to use a pointer effectively, on optimal interaction patterns...). Underhill is one of our personal favourites, although his course is meaningless unless it is followed sequentially, and was thus discarded for our action. (But the idea of the "Personalised Phonemic Chart" given to the students in the intervention is obviously inspired by this method).

- Community Language Learning methods, which also owe much to the above-commented psychological schools, insist on learner-centred teaching, and on learners' autonomy and control over the contents of the curriculum. We have followed these methods insofar as students' learning about the IPA symbols for phonemes, and about phonetic transcription entries in dictionaries, fosters students' oral-skills-learning autonomy: in the future, whenever learners wish to know the pronunciation of a word, they will be able to look it up in a dictionary. We like the idea of making emotion/affection/motivation necessary components of language teaching-learning: all these are necessary for spontaneous speech. Some other ideas of these schools we discard: the teacher's sitting at the back of the classroom and leaving the students to do what they will does not seem to promote either communication, or learning of any kind.
- Content-and-Language-Integrated Instruction (CLIL), said of a variety of L2 programmes (usually, in bilingual-teaching centres) in which lessons are organized around topics, themes, or a subject matter (Science, History...), rather than on language points, seems a very attractive current to follow, all the more especially because in formal L2 teaching, the medium is itself the content, which is then left "empty" of context, or extrinsic content⁴⁰. For this reason, in the intervention, we include cultural content: in this case, British and international stereotypes viewed under a humorous prism, and literary content, the popular verse-form "limerick".

We welcome the opportunity to include this kind of cultural-literary-content in the action, and not only because we love poetry and usually try to make use of it one way or another in our classes, but because in this specific area of oral skill, the chanting of poetry (or "poetic verse" in its broadest sense) out loud can play a leading role. Carolyn Graham's *Jazz Chants* have become standard classroom practice for pronunciation and other grammatical points. (Unfortunately we have thought of these too late to include any of Graham's "chants" in the intervention. Perhaps, because their ostensible aim isn't specifically phonetic practice). "A kinesic alternative is to have everyone stand up, the

⁴⁰ Personally, it would thrill me to be able to teach Science (or History) - in English!

teacher orchestrating with the students a gestural rendition of the poem with broad movements of the arms and hands.” (Kramersch, 1994: 159)⁴¹. This we can do.

Having more time, we might also obtain many ideas for phonetic/orthographic practice with cultural, literary or humorous content (jokes, anecdotes, etc.) out of the linguist David Crystal’s (1998) *Language Play*.

- The Communicative approach, much to our regret, can only be adhered to within limits in the intervention. Not that we don’t believe that interaction is a crucial element in the language teaching-learning process, but solving the problem that we are trying to at least mitigate, poor recognition and production of sounds, must be prior to any face-to-face communicative action: whatever information we wish to convey must be, in the first place, clear enough so that the interlocutor won’t confuse it with another. (In the third session we will momentarily imagine that this clarity has been achieved sufficiently well to allow for playing a communicative game).

In “Situations-problème relatives à l’enseignement du Français Langue Étrangère”⁴², Jean Supiot reviews the general nature of phonetic problems in younger students’ oral expression (although Supiot has in mind the French language, on this area the rough typology of the problems is the same in English, as we have already seen in our students): he cites youthful timidity on the students’ part (which, on the whole, we may discount, or make less allowance for); the evident obstacles of a more complex phonological system versus the more relaxed Spanish one (also found in English), with the frequent added difficulty of acquired fossilized errors (which we too find in our students); and ends up with the rather discouraging statement: “*La plus grosse difficulté n’est pas la manière de travailler les aptitudes orales en interaction et en continu, mais comment s’y prendre pour travailler la prononciation.*” As to that, there

⁴¹ “In the early stages of language learning, when the foreign words are still like freshly minted coins, full of the strangeness of their sounds, shapes, and meanings, it is easy to appreciate new combinations of sounds, new metaphors, new values given to silence... in poetry sound plays a leading role, operates in full partnership with meaning, and even helps to create meaning. “Celebrating” a poem means drawing conscious pleasure from its visual and prosodic features, without at first analyzing their nature or their impact.” (Kramersch, 1994: 157).

⁴² In Guillén, C. (coord.) (2010): *Francés: Investigación, innovación y buenas prácticas*. Barcelona: Graó. MEC.

Ur thinks that, apart from the confusion-inducing (as to comprehension and production) minimal pairs, English stress-timing (with its consequent compression of syllables into weak forms, etc.) may cause comprehension problems to students of English, "though students' tendency towards syllable-timing (often, because of the misleading, morphemic spelling) does not constitute a serious problem, per se, to the international listener."

As to intonation, "very few English textbooks, or teachers, attempt to provide rules or practice in these." (Ur, 1996:129). We take our cue from her.

Barreiro, Esteban-Vilaplana and Soto (2006) examined the degree of perceived foreign accent in four students of English when speaking spontaneously in English, when reciting, and when singing. Twenty native English speakers judged the three samples and concluded that the students sounded less foreign when reciting or singing, although "An acoustic analysis of the segmental string (vowels and consonants) in the three samples of speech for all speakers showed the same phonemic errors in the three voice conditions." The study concludes that "the perception of a better accent in singing and reciting is not due to segmental differences but to the well-established rhythmic patterns of the song and verse conditions", and states that those findings strengthen the importance of the study of suprasegmentals. (Esteban-Vilaplana, 2006: 80).

My first interest being teaching, my practical instinct would certainly be to try to apply all these ideas when teaching phonology: phonetic practice, in the form of songs. I know from testimonial witness that stutterers and people with speech difficulties easily forget and lose these impediments when they are singing. A "*meaningful task contextualizing pronunciation items*", as Ur proposes above, might consist of learning a favourite pop song (in groups perhaps) and performing it in front of the other students (tapes with music void of lyrics can be rented from any karaoke, or downloaded from Internet). Or that idea might be developed by the teacher in collaboration with a musician. Unfortunately there is no time for that during the intervention, and these older students might be a bit beyond karaoke performances. (But at least one activity involving music shall be included in the intervention).

Mark Hancock has compiled a collection of communicative games (*Pronunciation Games*, 1995). Most of these are for fairly advanced students. In my opinion he is not absolutely successful in the attempt. To be able to play many of the games, the students must already have a fairly good idea of how (sometimes, quite difficult) words are pronounced in English. Most of the games are inter-individually competitive, although the author indicates where they might be adapted to teams. Some are game-templates for the teacher to insert the sounds being practised. The greatest value of the book really lies in its creative potential: it can give many ideas, to a thoughtful teacher, on how to adapt/convert existing games for purely phonemic practice: a phonemic Bingo, a phonemic Scrabble, phonemic Hangman, "Phonopoly", Snakes and Ladders, crosswords... (Although many of the activities are probably too drawn-out for the intervention, taking about 45-60 minutes to establish and complete, we are adapting his "Intonation Directions" game from the book).

Communicative elements will be present all along the intervention: although it may be objected that the action externally presents few communicative features, or is a bit unbalanced or one-sided (the flow of new information is mostly teacher → students, except when the student-teacher elicits phonological or other rules, and sustained speech will range from ultraminimal to minimal) yet the students will provide the teacher with valuable feedback as to the progressive quality of their production, the whole class will enjoy a menu of activities not habitual in class, with added spice from the illustrations/rhythm poems, the choral chanting will provide a good outlet for any affective filters or discomfort, and the mere sharing of enjoyment is by itself interaction in its purest form. And going over to the students' side: they'll know that their efforts are important to the teacher, he is taking the trouble to record them and manifesting the patience to correct them until they succeed, which they are trying their best to do. "Interaction is obviously not something you just do *to* people, but something people do together, collectively." (Allwright and Bailey 1991:19).

An unexpected idea for phonetic practice may come from scientific research. The article "Why the #\$\$%! Do We Swear?" (*Scientific American Mind*, November/December 2009) reports on an experiment on the function of swear words. Richard Keele, the psychologist in charge, wondered why swearing is such a common response to pain

and hypothesized it might confer the benefit of pain reduction. Volunteer students were asked to keep their hands submerged in icy water for as long as they could stand it. During the exercise, they were told to repeat an expletive of their choice or chant a neutral word. The volunteers who cursed reported less pain and endured the iciness for about 40 seconds longer on average. By itself, this might not be surprising: saying “bad” 4-letters words is a kind of “magic behaviour” that will counteract the taboo badness of the pain, and distracts our attention from the pain besides.

But swearing might be more than conscious language. In 1965, to eradicate a growing brain tumour in a 48 year old man, doctors removed the entire left hemisphere of his brain, on which language largely relies (Broca’s/Wernicke’s speech areas). When the patient woke up, not surprisingly, he couldn’t speak – but he could swear, and did abundantly. Other findings confirm that people with left-hemisphere injuries which ruin speech may nevertheless maintain a first-rate arsenal of profanities. Scientists think that bad language might hinge on evolutionarily ancient brain circuitry with intimate ties to structures that process emotions, i.e., the hippocampus and the amygdala.

In *The Stuff of Thought* (2008) Pinker devotes a whole chapter, “The Seven Words You Can’t Say on Television”, to cuss-words⁴⁴. Swear words, he says, link us to yowls and yelps. Pinker likens swearing to what happens in the brain of a cat when you sit on it: “swearing taps into a defensive reflex in which an animal that is suddenly injured or confined erupts in a furious struggle, accompanied by an angry vocalization, to startle and intimidate an attacker.” This defensive reaction, Pinker says, is lodged deep within the right hemisphere, in the basal ganglia, in the “reptile” or primitive part of the brain that governs emotional behaviour (which is much older, in evolutionary time, than our prominent frontal lobes, associated with decision-making, planning, and reasoning).

This knowledge might be put to use in a phonetics practice activity. I know from experience that my students, perhaps not by chance, are able to utter English 4-letter words with precision, clarity and self-assurance, and with a rather unexpected lexical range. Could we not have them practice these words, which contain many of the important sounds in English, until they have “interiorized” that sound and can use it fluently in polite, “normal” speech? Of course we can’t have a class of 30 teenagers

⁴⁴ Odd but true that English linguists have some sort of fixation on this category of words: Brook (1972) talks about “Taboo” words, and Bryson (1990) devotes one whole chapter to “Swearing”.

chanting out “the f- word” at the top of their voices. But Pinker (1998: 337) thoughtfully provides a convenient list of euphemisms for each of the standard oaths, of which we’ll only provide a couple of examples (there are plenty to choose from, practising all the English sounds, and particularly, for whatever reason, those combinations of sounds that are difficult for Spanish speakers):

“For *f---*, *f---ing*: fiddlesticks, fiddledeedee, foo, fudge, fug, fuzz, eff, effing, flaming, flipping, freaking, frigging...

For *sh--*: shame, sheesh, shivers, shoot, shucks, squat, sugar...”

We might perhaps teach the students one “acceptable alternative” of a swear word per week, (naturally, we’d have to explain what the impolite alternative really was, else the game would be no fun, apart from useless) and during that week allow them to use the “polite” alternative (which every native speaker knows for what it is) *ad lib* - of course, if it was *ad hoc*, appropriate in context. Perhaps, that way, the remembrance of English sounds could be somehow “incorporated” into the deep emotional neuronal circuits, which would collaborate towards their instant production when necessary. I am sure that this idea is not absolutely worthless.

2.4.1. The students’ learning styles

Students and their learning styles are also considered. The students we are working with are well past the “critical period” or threshold which most linguists and teachers recognize for second language *acquisition* (up to about 15 years of age). The “critical period” (Krashen’s turn of phrase) is a developmental phase in which some habits of behaviour (such as speech in the first language) appear spontaneously, in response to exposure to a stimulus (in this case, verbal input from human interlocutors). According to this theory, children must learn their first language before puberty, or they will never learn it at all, just as songbirds never learn to sing unless they are exposed to adult birds’ singing in their infancy. “Language development could be on a maturational timetable, like teeth... Holding every other factor constant, a key factor [in language development] stands out: sheer age.” (Pinker, 1994:289-290).⁴⁵

⁴⁵ It makes sense that perceptive awareness, memory, etc., should dull with age. The declining number of neurons, alone, can account for this. Elderly blind people, for example, “have a tough time reading

Personally, I am convinced of the truth of this theory. The young children at the school where I hold my bread-winning job are able to mimic/repeat any sound after very little exposure to it, however abstruse and chock-full of consonants the sound or word is. It is as if the children had an instant “gift of speech” (for the phonetic features), quite the opposite of adults’ stiff and stilted vocal performance. (This was what first gave me the idea of “time-machine-transporting” my adult students back to an imaginary “early stage” in their learning of English pronunciation, before their English had fossilized into L1 sound patterns). What is more (and I cannot believe that I am the first person to think this), I am sure that if human beings weren’t born slightly premature, as all human babies are, for reasons of the mother’s birth-canal being able to accommodate them, and humans-to-be spent a considerably greater amount of time in their mother’s womb, like elephants and whales (whose gestation-period is of two years), presupposing that their mothers and the people around them weren’t deaf and had provided enough spoken input to the unborn foetus, babies would be born talking, or at least, having mastered the phonological system of their mother tongue⁴⁶.

The “critical period” hypothesis is well substantiated in historical record, with the many cases of “wild children” recuperated by civilization too late in their lives to learn to speak, or who learned to do so very slowly and imperfectly: Victor d’Aveyron in 1800, Kaspar Hauser c. 1826, “Genie” in the XXth century, and many, many others that, even today, keep turning up from time to time⁴⁷.

Kipling always maintained that his “Mowgli” was based on a real case, and the appearance in 1920 of two twin girls in India, Amala and Kamala, who had been brought up by wolves, lent credibility to his story. Interesting that all the “wild children” rescued into civilization had another thing in common, apart from their inability to

Braille.” (Frederick Joelving, “Evolving Mental Maps”, *Scientific American Mind*, November/December 2009).

⁴⁶ Obviously, the main ingredient in the recipe for language (a social context) would still be missing.

⁴⁷ Victor learned to say a few words, but interestingly he apparently had “pronunciation problems” that made it impossible for anyone to understand him - apart from his famous doctor, Dr. Itard, whose methods made a great impression on Maria Montessori, and who also, by the way, went on to invent one of the first sign languages for the deaf. (Also see François Truffaut’s *L’Enfant Sauvage*, 1970). Kaspar Hauser’s story has been turned into a play, Peter Händke’s *Hippus*, and a film by Werner Herzog. The story of “Genie” has been told by many linguists; our choice would be Derek Bickerton’s (1990) *Language and Species*, Chapter 5, “Language Fossils”. Chicago: University of Chicago. In it he ventures forth the theory of a hypothetical “Protolanguage” that would have emerged before full language.

learn to speak: not one of them ever manifested any interest in sex or money. (Two “adult” things that start becoming interesting at puberty).

Pinker even gives an evolutionary reason for this: when a child is young, it is urgent she learns to speak, for reasons of survival: language is the most important item in our “basic emergency kit”. Once puberty is reached, and with it the possibility of genetic reproduction, the (expensive) mental “language-learning-window” has no further reason to exist, and shuts. Romantic explanation that somehow oddly rings of truth, and connects us yet again to songbirds, as Sebastian Haesler reports in “Programmed for Speech?” (*Scientific American Mind*, June/July 2007). “Although most animals have vocalizations that seem to be innate, a few species – among them songbirds, parrots, some marine mammals (dolphins, whales) and bats – learn vocal patterns by imitating their parents. To some extent, this process is similar to that of a human infant making his or her first efforts at learning speech... Through intensive practice, young songbirds increasingly come to sound like their role models, mastering the repertoire by the onset of sexual maturity. As is the case with humans, songbirds are dependent on what they hear to develop normal vocalization. If songbirds are subjected to loud noises, if they become deaf or if the feedback from their “teacher” is interrupted, they never learn to sing properly... Both humans and songbirds have developed neuronal structures that specialize in the perception and production of sounds.” (Haesler, 2007:67-71).⁴⁸

This hypothesis predicts that adult learners will learn an impoverished version of the L2, and with much more difficulty. “For the first few months of learning a language, [adults] will generally be faster learners, but in six months (and thereon) the situation will be reversed”. (Pinker, 1994:37-38). This fact awaits absolutely firm confirmation, although there is much more research in its favour than against it. What is known for

⁴⁸ Personally, I believe that such a complex behaviour as language has not just suddenly developed in the evolution of mankind alone. My dogs understand much of my speech, and I understand many of their communication techniques. They share games and interesting finds. They tend to be suspicious of the same people. A few songbirds never sing the same song twice, which might not be said of much human speech. Evolution does not occur in leaps: new traits are modifications of old ones. “The region of the macaque’s brain that controls jaw movements is a direct homologue of Broca’s area... The finding contradicts the theory that speech evolved from novel neural structures specific to humans.” (*Nature*, June 30th 2005, reported in a *Scientific American* short, September 2005). I am sure animals speak/communicate, at whatever level. But it makes evolutionary sense for no species’ being able to understand any other species’ “language”: predators would have a field day.

certain is that the new-born's brain has a plasticity, linked to the number of active neurons, that the adult brain starts losing, reinforcing the familiar neuronal pathways but pruning down gradually those not often used⁴⁹.

Adults have other advantages, naturally, especially initially. They may be short-changed in their "acquisitive power" in comparison to young children, who absorb everything seemingly effortlessly, like sponges, but adults' *learning* skills are much more developed. They have cognitive and meta-cognitive advantages, already having acquired the "inner construct" of L1 (fact which can both accelerate the process of linguistic transfer, if the L1 structures can act as scaffolding to build up the L2 system, or hinder it, as in the case of solid interference from the L1 – the case of our students). What we need is to re-open those de-activated, or presently fossilized, perceptive-neural pathways in our students.

It is our hope that the choral repetition-chanting, the childish drill-form, will make the adult students momentarily regress to an "early schooldays", "pre-critical period"-like scenario, and the intervention will go some way towards counteracting the "aural-phonetic incompetence" associated with adulthood.

As to other factors to consider, regarding students' learning styles, we already spoke earlier of how our intervention had taken some ideas from Suggestopedia, TPR, and NLP, which all aim to provide the linguistic input through as many portals of perception and memory as possible: visual, auditory, kinetic... and, very specially, not forgetting humour. Leaving questions of age aside, motivation and attitude towards the L2 are the strongest predictors of success in language learning.

There is also the working style and mode of interaction of the students to consider. These Advanced students, during the habitual English lessons at the EOI, are mostly used to working in pairs in the classroom. (They habitually sit next to the same

⁴⁹ However, the phonetic structures of any language do remain in the memory long after the language has been forgotten. "English-speaking adults [adoptees or emigrants] who had spoken Hindi or Zulu as children were able to relearn subtle sound contrasts in these languages, but *adults who had never spoken the languages could not* – even though the childhood speakers had no explicit memory of the languages". (Karen Schrock: "Once Learned, Never Forgotten", in *Scientific American Mind*, May/June 2010). (My italics). All this of course refers to remembering the sounds whose production was learnt in one's first language, but it tells us something about the nature of that sound-learning process itself, at least tells the optimal moment of development when things are stored forever in our memory. This paints a bleak picture for our students, which is the reason why we will insist so much on the *physical mechanisms* of sound-production, in terms adults can understand, even if "instant mimicry" of the sounds eludes them.

partner). Occasionally, there is group-work amongst four or five of the students in the same row. It is rather rare for individual work to be set in class, although the students get their share of this kind of work at home. They are expected to prepare at home all of the writing tasks, for which they often have to do private research, and many of the purely grammatical exercises. The "Mini-Crash-Course" in English phonetics, with the whole-group choral chanting included, will purposefully provide a break from these routines, and rev up the students into an open, attentive frame of mind and senses, predisposing them to the pronunciation work.

2.4.2. Correction, evaluation and assessment

Few authors speak about the correction of errors in students' pronunciation, leaving it up to the teacher to correct the students' individual errors. To start with, as with any other point of practice (this kind of problem does not only pertain to pronunciation), it seems a shame, for the teacher, to stop any fluid flow of communication that may be occurring to give feedback on mistakes... But for communication purposes, urges Penny Ur, "[students'] speech does need to be clear. "Some learners consistently get particular sounds wrong, and as a result their speech is less 'comfortable' to listen to, and occasionally incomprehensible. In that case, [the teacher] may wish to spend some lesson time improving the students' pronunciation." (Ur, 1996:128). (This authority we think would be sufficient to hereby rest the case for the action).

Whereas error, in any other grammatical area, is considered as evidence that some learning has taken place (i.e., a student who says "fishes" has learnt that plural names add an "-s", although, not yet, that "fish" is the exception to the rule), in the area of phonology (in which items are acquired as physical habits, through practice and more practice), errors mean just that, mispronunciations calling for correction. Krashen's recommended "reformulation of input/feedback" (indirect correction of mistakes, by reformulating original problem in slightly different terms) is not much good here. Only simple repetitive correction would seem to answer. Yet even this sometimes seems useless, because the adult student simply cannot "hear" the difference between correct and incorrect pronunciation, his/her "inner phonological system" has fossilized into that

of the L1. And it is useless telling students about the nature of the sound (i.e., “in English, /d/ is alveolar, not dental”) because the mouth motor movements are fossilized as well (although it does help to explain, and especially, to these adult students). How to optimize the necessary practice? Perhaps, after the physiological explanation, through *collective* error correction, through choral production of the sounds, until an acceptable collective approximation is produced. (This is one of the activities planned for the action).

It would, in any case, probably seem important to insist on those sounds that are particularly difficult for our students, especially if they occur frequently in English and if their mispronunciation can cause problems of communication. Experienced teachers often recommend starting with the consonants, whose system in English offers less variation, as compared with Spanish, and can often be transferred directly into the learner’s representation of L2. Vowels are a different matter, although, as Pinker (1994) proves, thanks to the redundancy of language, “eet es pesseble te speek peerfectlee well weth enle ene vewel.”⁵⁰ The practice of minimal pairs is especially important with vowel sounds.⁵¹

Íñigo Mora (2005:33) suggests giving the students an initial, learner-centred, diagnostic evaluation test, which would first establish the students’ *level of competence* (from Novice, through Intermediate and Advanced, to Proficient); the *objectives of the course* (basic communication, spontaneous speech, native-like pronunciation, losing foreign accent, etc.); the *background of the learners* (previous knowledge of phonetics, etc.); and the “environment”, scenario or status of the Target Language (English as an L2 or as a Foreign Language). She suggests testing both the students’ perception and their production, in both controlled and spontaneous speech, using a grid containing the following items:

- Consonant discrimination
- Consonant clusters
- Vowel discrimination

⁵⁰ Cf.: “Yxx cxn xndxrstxnd whxt x xm wrxtxng xvxn xf x rxplxcx xll thx vxwxls wxth xn `x’ (t gts lttl hrdr f y dn’t vn kn whr th vwls r).” (Pinker, 1995:181).

⁵¹ For a list of the typology of frequent pronunciation errors Spanish students tend to commit, see pages 21-22 in this paper.

- Word stress
- Rhythm
- Prominence (sentence stress)
- Intonation
- Reduced speech
- Role-play.

As to the reactive treatment of error, Underhill distinguishes between the broad category of "*mistakes*" (anything at the moment not acceptable), "*slips*" (when the learner has the inner criteria for self-correction but isn't applying it at the moment, through inattention or momentary forgetfulness), and "*errors*" (if the learner does not have the criteria yet and cannot self-correct). He suggests that the teacher *elicit* from students the right criteria, for slips (although if eliciting becomes too prolonged, it is a sign to pass on to the next technique), or *tell* students anew how to make the sound, for treating error.

When helping the learner with a "not-quite-right" sound, Underhill counsels the teacher to first find the target sound in his/her own throat and mouth, either in silence or aloud, and then to highlight the difference between both sounds, plotting a "correction route" for the learner. Different errors may be corrected in different ways. When learners have got a bit tied up with the sounds themselves and need a different starting point, Underhill urges the teacher to experiment with gesture and mime, conveying such ideas as jaw position, degree of opening of mouth, tongue position, lip rounding and spread, voiced/unvoiced sounds, more or less energy in articulation, glide in diphthongs, elision or intrusion of sounds, and adjustments to stress, rhythm and intonation.

When helping learners get rid of the grip of their mother tongue, an effective strategy can be to appeal to multi-sensory pathways, thus helping to make pronunciation as vivid and engaging as possible. We like these techniques because, appealing to different senses, they must forcibly raise (especially adult) learners' general phonological awareness. I quote (Underhill, 1994:135-136):

- Appealing to the *tactile* sense:

Sounds can be treated as plastic, tactile, malleable and can be moulded and shaped. Instructions could include exhortations such as "Make it longer!" "Stretch it!" "Make it shorter!" "Smoother!" "More sudden!"

- Appealing to the *visual* sense:

The term "clarity" of speech already denotes a visual quality. We can also "see" sounds, like lip-readers do when watching the muscular movements of a mouth in speech. Instructions could include "Watch my lips", "Move the tongue like this", "Shape your lips like this", "Try to look relaxed when you say it"...

- Appealing to the *aural/musical* sense:

Sounds can be harmonious. When we try to modify a phoneme we are modifying some of the harmonics. Instructions could include "What is the song of this sound?" "Say it with more music." "Make it sing!"

- Appealing to the sense of *taste*:

The teacher may ask learners to "taste" the pronunciation of a word or phrase. It is just an invitation to attend to the muscular sensation in the mouth. Instructions could include "say it slowly as if it tastes very good!" "Taste that sound!" "Compare the flavour of these two words!" "Which tastes better?"

- *Internal sensation*:

Learners can feel their own speech by touching their throats at the front. Instructions could include "Put your hand on your throat!" "Where in your mouth does that sound vibrate?"

- Appealing to *feeling*:

"Feel it!" "Say it as if you enjoy it!" "Say it with sadness!" "Say it with boredom!" "Which sound do you prefer?"

- *Awareness and attention*:

Instructions can include "Notice exactly what you do!" "Now do it differently!" "Now make that sound in your own language!" "And now in English!" "Notice the difference!" "Notice how you can change it!"

I also like Underhill's final tips on correction:

"Throughout a correction sequence it is important to involve everyone, even if only one person is overtly active. You can involve other learners not by asking them to demonstrate or give help, but by inviting them to upgrade their own pronunciation of the sound. Thus all participants are investigating the sound/word at their own level of proficiency. From this variety the learner in question may well "catch on" what to do." (Underhill, 1994:137).

As to possible assessment of phonological competence: returning to Supiot (2010:110), that author, in a general section on assessment (*évaluation*) of linguistic competences, proposes the following model grid or matrix for the evaluation of phonetic skill, with three parameters for the stages of success:

DIFFÉRENCIER À L'ÉCOUTE	NON ACQUIS 0	EN VOIE D'ACQUISITION 1	ACQUIS 2
Les sons [y] – [u]			

This grid seems useful: how else to assess phonetic skills, which are basically a matter for habit-forming, “you got it, or you ain’t got it”?

(A comparable solution might be the “Personalised Phonemic Chart” that the researcher proposes to hand out to the students on day 1 of the intervention. It details all the English phonemes and gives two examples of words including that phoneme, which the students must eventually complete, as each phoneme is reviewed, with “personalised” - personal - examples. An example is appended).

We’ll let modern scientific research have the last word, as usual. One piece of news read recently⁵², on scientific research in the area of human phonological awareness, came to say that, although children cannot monitor their speech (children fail to recognize their own voices in a recording, which is the reason adults use so much repetitive, corrective feedback when speaking with them, to compensate for their aural error), adults can. Perhaps a valuable tool for adult students, especially these which concern us here, might be self-recording their own voices and contrasting their expression with a good model’s.

(Unfortunately, that kind of study is beyond this study’s scope and allotted time).

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTION (“Mini-Crash-Course in English Phonetics and Phonology”)

⁵² *Scientific American Mind*, May/June 2012.

3.1. Objectives and purposes of the action

At the risk of being redundant, these are:

To raise Advanced-Level English students' degree of phonological awareness, including reinforcing existing knowledge of the IPA system of phonetic transcription, and to improve the quality of their pronunciation. To help these students realize the fundamental importance of correct pronunciation in the processes of communication, and the amount of new information, emotional affects, and many other meanings prosody can add to oral utterances. To raise students' motivation towards phonetic practice, because of all of the above reasons and because of the fact that it is a feasible, fun activity in itself. Perhaps also to alert the teacher in charge of the course towards this problem which, perhaps through habituation, she did not give the prominence it merits, and propose to her that she continue with similar systematic phonetic practice, as carried out during the intervention.

3.2. Timing and layout of the intervention

Due to the brevity of time (one week) allotted the student-researcher-teacher for intervention, the action has to be compressed into three micro-sessions, of about 30+ minutes each one. Only the simple vowels will be reviewed (as to phonemes) in the first session; the second will be devoted to stress, in the word and in the sentence; and basic intonation patterns will be reviewed in the third session, thus giving a restricted but overall view of English phonetic features.

3.3. Diagnostic tools used and data gathered along the process of the action research

Tools used along the action research included:

- Direct observation of the class for a fortnight, four months previous to the intervention (From 01/17/2012 to 02/02/2012, and 05/03/2012).
- Interviews with the teacher, face-to-face or via e-mail, to receive information on academic matters (the teacher's plans for the course, etc.) and on the larger context and on the microcosm of the actual classroom and the participants.

- Questionnaires on the teaching-learning of phonetic skills, to the students and to the teacher, on a voluntary basis.
- Participants' "Seating Charts", instead of observation matrices, so that punctual happenings could be annotated in the space for each student.
- Initial tests on the students' mastery of phonetics and on their memory (and their personality), on a voluntary basis.
- All the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, for guidance on the intervention.
- All the materials utilized for the implementation of the action, as detailed after the account of each session.
- Audio recordings of the sessions were discarded since the vast majority of the phonetic/phonological practice took the form of choral repetition, which would not have been terribly informative, and would have been impossible to encrypt/code in the transcription.
- Feedback from the students after the pronunciation sessions (spoken and via e-mail); feedback from the teacher in charge of the course (spoken and via e-mail); diary of the student-researcher-teacher along the process.

3.4. Interpretation of the collected data.

This experience being inscribed within the framework of action research, all of its components contributed to the whole and were equally considered, either having simultaneous existence in time, or directly following from each other: the observation period, the collection of data and their interpretation, the review of the literature relevant to the action, the action itself... which was one of the reasons this loosely-structured form of research was chosen (precisely what characterizes action research is its holistic nature, considerate of qualitative aspects and humanistic concerns). Many of the data (those culled from the initial period of observation) have already been interpreted. (See 1.3., "Roots of the problem", p. 13). Others will be interpreted, along the paper, in the due moment of their collection, as they were influential, in decision-taking, at all stages of the process of intervention. Some data are last-minute news, and shall be dissected as (if and when) they come in. This space will only briefly recapitulate the *status quo* of the intervention. I must anticipate regretfully that this action-research

mini-project leads to no very clear “successful” conclusions. Some of these non-results, hating to blame ourselves and our good faith, we must ascribe to the haste in which the project was necessarily assembled. (No time was allowed, for example, for observation of the effect of the action on its termination). However, as is common currency in science, “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence”. Lack of tangible, positive results does not mean none followed. (All the more so, as we were interested in non-too-tangible aspects: students’ awareness of phonological matters, their motivation towards putting in effort in these areas...) We shall expand on the results in the conclusion (Chapter 4, p. 92).

- *Direct observation* in the classroom (for a fortnight) was the main indicator leading to the detection of the problem, together with informal interviews with the teacher in charge, who first directed my attention to this problem and guided my intervention towards solving it, suggesting the student-teacher, that is myself, be in charge of all the phonetic activities from the beginning (even during the period of “pure” observation).
- *Information* as to the possible causes of the problem-situation was garnered from direct observation and participation in the classroom, prior to the action, and from interviews and correspondence with the teacher.
- *The “Seating Chart”* of the students in the classroom included in Appendix 1 (also drawn during the observation period), gives additional information on the students’ problems of pronunciation. The seating charts included in Appendices 2 and 3 were drawn by the teacher, during the researcher’s intervention, and do not add relevant information, except insofar as that from all three charts, taken together, can also be inferred some banal sociological information, as to the students’ seating preferences etc.
- *The Questionnaires* on the teaching-learning of phonetic skills, to the students and to the teacher, are what is meant by last-minute data. Not a single Questionnaire (not even the teacher’s) has been returned completed. The probable cause of this was that (as I now think) I did not personally hand out to the students this document on the very first session, which would have been a good way to

introduce the special "Mini-Crash-Course" on pronunciation which the intervention consisted of, taking time out from class for its completion and collection, but instead, I had the questionnaires trusted to e-mail. We all know how easy it is for a document to go unheeded when sent in this inconspicuous way, in a compressed form and mixed in with a lot of spam and other irrelevant postings. Most students have probably not even bothered to open the document, de-compress it, and take the (longish) time needed to answer the questions, however briefly: the Questionnaire was open-ended, not simply a matter of choosing one out of five pre-established options or ciphers. (I think now, too, I should have framed my questions differently). Most of the questions included were related to the students' past experiences, whether communicative or academic, and the answers might not have been seen as immediately relevant, even if they were only to be taken as a manifestation of the students' interest. Most important, even in the best of circumstances, we have to remember that the students' final examination in the subject was only four days away. Who has time to idly open mundane e-mail up against an important deadline? By the time these students have the leisure to read it (that is if they haven't cleaned out their P.C. screen by then), it will be too late and they won't bother. I put myself in their place, and I can perfectly understand them. But I have posted a final plea to the head teacher and she says she will ensure the students get a copy of the questionnaire after their exam. So not all hope is lost yet. Any answers received (which may still come in before the deadline for this paper) won't, at this advanced stage, add any (useful as diagnostic) information on the initial problem, but they will certainly be indicative of the fact that the students' motivation/interest in the topic-area has been sufficiently augmented (even aroused, in some cases) for them to take the trouble answering a (rather dull, from their point of view) questionnaire leading nowhere, from a man they will never see again in their lives. The questionnaires were on a voluntary basis, too, which is naturally, if not exactly a dissuading factor, yes one that detracts from their perceived importance. Samples of these questionnaires are included in Appendices 4 and 5 of this paper, as they took some time to design, and they may yet be useful for another like-minded action.

- *The initial tests* on the students' mastery of phonetics (the "transcription" test) and the one on their memory and their personality (the "memory" test, actually testing students' general control/mastery of written English discourse, as well as holistic aspects) were also on a voluntary basis: thus their information value was, also, naturally limited. But some interesting facts did transpire. I corrected the mistakes using the "Correction Code" the head teacher habitually uses, graded them (privately) and handed them back to the students to self-correct as per the code. What did I find out about the students? Both tests being corrected by the same teacher, the apparent discrepancies between the scores must not be taken in isolation, but correlative to the general standard in each of the tests, and therefore indicative of major general trends. Scores for the tests give students a slight advantage, as corrected on a base of ten items, while the students were given eleven exercises to choose from, in both tests. The score in the second, or "memory" test, was multiplied by two, as the exercises were five. These last exercises were corrected holistically – they were, really, "mini-compositions" -, giving points for humour, originality, depth of thought, conciseness, etc., as well as for correct English form.

If I had only had these written exercises to go on, I would have assumed the students' overall mastery of English to be much more powerful than as it is actually reflected in their speech. An (odd?) correlation I found here was that, in general, it was the quieter students, those who least spoke and participated in class, who generally showed the greater depth of thought and originality (*and* good expression in English, to go with these). Another inconsistency: only 8 students (out of 13: which is to say, 61.5%) had handed in the "transcription" exercise (with "passable" results, comparatively speaking, in only 2 cases), but 11 students, that is, fully 84.6%, handed in the "memory" test - or test on their written English - all, with such excellent results, in general, that it's a good thing I only saw this work in the very last moments of the intervention, because I might have been too daunted by the students' intelligence - and memory for the slightest detail, with a sharp wit to boot - to have dared to move a finger in class from that moment on!

Student	“Transcription” Test (“good ear”, Phonetics)	“Memory” Test (written English test)
“Bart”	-	9.8
“Carrie”	-	8.15
“Dave”	3	8.6
“Dan”	2	8.25
“Greta”	1	-
“Fred”	2	9.1
“Ricky”	1	7
“Joseph”	-	9.9
“Frank”	-	9.8
“Lily”	-	9.7
“Tina”	-	10.1
“Ben”	4	8
(no name)?	4	-

It will immediately be obvious, remembering the scores are not to be taken at face value, that:

1. Most of the students who had dared hand in the “memory” test (on which they had to write mini-compositions in English) obtained very high scores. Most of these students had not handed in the “phonetic” test.
2. The students who obtained higher marks in the “phonetic” test did not coincide with those who obtained the highest in the written “memory” test.

These results, indicating a peculiar disassociation between the spoken and the written English language in the students’ inwardly constructed “interlanguage” (a fact perhaps subconsciously assumed by the students), are simply the corroboration of our initial hypotheses as to the roots of the problem, and, clearly, further demonstrate the urgent need for the action-research intervention.

- Many aspects of our intervention will be recognized, as directly inspired by much of the relevant literature earlier reviewed; or, directly and punctually, lifted from some

methods and courses, also reviewed above, as needed. After each session of the intervention there is a detail of the actual materials used or prepared for the action.

- The triangulated feedback: from the students, after the pronunciation sessions (spoken and via e-mail); from the teacher in charge of the course (spoken and via e-mail); and from the diary of the student-researcher-teacher, is narrated, as it flowed in, along the process. There may be last-minute feedback not yet received at the moment we are writing this, such as the Questionnaires, or further e-mail postings. The final exam which the students were so worried about took place on Monday, 06/11/2012, so we are still hopeful that they may take a breather in which to find some time for writing to us before our own deadline closes (on Friday, 06/15/2012).

3.5. Narrative of the development of the “Mini-Crash-Course in English Phonetics and Phonology”

To better clarify the scope of what the action tried to accomplish and the means whereby used, we shall simply draw from the development of the initial plan for each session, as reflected in our field journal.

3.5.1. Session One, 10th May 2012: “The English Vowel System”

In this session we tried to raise the students’ phonological awareness by giving physical explanations and demonstrations of how the English vowels were produced by the organs of speech. The IPA symbols for the phonetic transcription of sounds were reviewed, as were notions of stress (word-stress only) and how it is notated. We tried to create a faintly “kindergarten-ish” atmosphere, with the help of a puppet theatre and non-challenging activities like the choral repetition, so that the students would feel like first-time learners of the language and hear the English sounds with a “fresh ear”, momentarily laying aside acquired fossilized errors. On the other hand, it was hoped that the students would not “lose face” as adults: some jokes would be told (i.e., challenging them to pronounce Shaw’s “ghoti”), and the wry adult humour of the illustrated examples for the sounds, poking fun at British and human stereotypes of conduct, would enhance the atmosphere of fun and reinforce the practical contents of the lesson.

3.5.1.1. Detailed account of the session, as reflected in the student-teacher's journal

First I introduced myself to the students, announcing: "Today we're going to have fun! And learn a little bit of phonetics!" I tried to create a friendly, relaxed atmosphere – I smiled, used body language, spoke slowly and expressively throughout, moved around the class making sure everybody could see me at all times and the way I moved my mouth.

I introduced the topic by explaining that *sounds* (which I translated into Spanish, as this point was essential for them to understand: "sonidos o fonemas"), *stress* ("acentuación"), *rhythm* ("ritmo"), and *intonation* ("entonación") are very important, they are the seeds, *semillas*, of language, and that today we would just be reviewing some of the *sounds* in English, the simple vowel sounds (diphthongs and triphthongs are just combinations of these).

I spoke for a minute on the difficulties of English pronunciation and spelling and told the students that everybody, English natives included, sometimes encountered difficulties in these areas. I challenged the students with a couple of "vowel-twisters":

- THE CAT CUT THE CAT SCAN
- THE HEAT HIT THE MEAT

... ascertaining that, invariably, the students gave the vowels in each of the main words in the examples the same voice-quality. To downplay the students' discouragement, I told them George Bernard Shaw's joke on the pronunciation of "*ghoti*", writing it on the board, and challenging the students to pronounce it correctly; none knew the joke, of course, and I ended by giving them the "correct solution": "*fish*":

- "f", /f/ as in "enough"
- "i", /ɪ/ as in "women"
- "sh", (/ʃ/) as in "national".

The students seemed to really appreciate the joke, and openly laughed at the absurdity of English spelling.

Next, I handed out to each student a “Personalised Phonemic Chart”, containing a table of all the English phonemes with spaces next to each phoneme, for the students to fill in with their own examples of words with that sound, as they came to it. [(Naturally this would not be completed in this session, but if the teacher in charge decides to continue with this kind of systematic phonetic work, the students could finish the chart on their own and keep it as quick pronunciation reference. Alternatively or as well, one correctly completed phonemic chart could be blown up and placed in a visible place in the classroom).] I explained that it is important to understand the IPA phonetic symbols because they will be able to use this knowledge to discover the pronunciation of a word when they look it up in a dictionary, plus they will be more attentive to sounds and spellings: all this will be of much help improving their pronunciation – as it will broaden the range of sounds they know - and it will help the teacher in his task of helping them learn. I also established some basic transcription notions (how the colon indicates a long vowel sound, how stresses are marked in transcription). The students were very attentive and appreciated the chart.

I had compiled a series of 11 colour posters with short captions which I read aloud, asking the students to write down the sounds they heard, in IPA if they knew the symbol, or in their own “approximate code” using the Roman alphabet or any personalized code. The students seemed to enjoy carrying out the challenge of the “transcription” of the titles. (These tests were collected). I also asked of the students that, to “test” their long-term memory for details, they should write down at home everything they could remember about only five of the pictures. (This latter objective was not entirely truthful; I wanted to learn not only how good the students’ memory was – memory obviously being connected to faithful sound reproduction – but also a little bit about the students’ character, personality, the details they chose to remember or could not help remembering about the pictures)⁵³. The students had to remember

⁵³ I realize this “test” has no scientific validity at all, and I wouldn’t have contemplated it, if I were the habitual teacher in that class; as things were, I felt I lacked fundamental information about these students and that this was a safe, non-threatening way to obtain some inkling of what these people, momentarily my students, were like - let’s not forget that, with perhaps one or two exceptions, all the students were older than this student-teacher, by quite a few years in some cases.

The “test” would also allow me to discover, “thrown in for free”, a little about the students’ general level of control of the TL, at least, of the written variety. This information might seem gratuitous too, but anything that increases our knowledge about the students is never irrelevant.

and describe only five of the pictures (out of the 11) so the task wouldn't be too challenging. (From three to five items, seven tops, is the average quantity we human beings can store in our short-term memory)⁵⁴.

Next I drew a diagram on the board, schematically representing the mouth-cavity, and "placed" the simple English vowels in the diagram according to their point of articulation, explaining that the tip of the tongue was to be found at that position. (Each new sound would be subsequently introduced with an explanation of the physical process of its production, with the help of the photographs on the mask and a hand-made "puppet-theatre")⁵⁵.

Tongue positions	<i>Front</i> (near the teeth)	<i>Central</i> (mid)	<i>Back</i> (near the back of the throat)
<i>High</i>	i: ɪ		u: ʊ
<i>Mid</i>	e æ	ʌ ə ɔ: (or ə:)	ɔ:
<i>Low</i>	ɑ:		ɔ:

I also gave a handout to the students with this diagram and including photographs "of myself"⁵⁶ pronouncing each vowel, so students could see the roundness of the lips for each sound. (This handout would later be used as combined "mask"/"crib" for the phonetic practice). The students seemed to appreciate all this information, and asked many questions on the placement of the different vowels in the diagram representing the mouth.

The following handout consisted of a "booklet" formed by pages 14-33 of Trim's and Kneebone's (1979) *English Pronunciation Illustrated*⁵⁷, in which the simple vowels are reviewed, the "pure" sound in the first place, then in example words, later in whole phrases. For each "pure" sound I first used "internal imaging", that is, the students masked the written text and closely watched the model's physical production (and puppet theatre demonstration), which was followed by their silent listening for the

⁵⁴ Joshua Foer (2011), *Moonwalking with Einstein (passim)*.

⁵⁵ See photograph in final Addenda.

⁵⁶ Actually the mouth was Daniel Jones's. But Jones & the student-teacher both wear the same moustache (for the time being anyway) and the opportunity seemed too good to give it a miss. See sample in Appendix 7.

⁵⁷ See sample in Appendix 8.

after-echo of a sound with their inner ear, before proceeding to their imitation. After that, with the mask covering the photocopy, but still watching the model,⁵⁸ students chorally repeated the sound in example words (which were picked at random, so that even if students “cheated” by looking at the photocopy, they would be obliged to pay attention to the model). Students were told to feel how their muscles worked to produce the sound.

Once a more-or-less acceptable “group accent” had developed, the students were allowed to read the examples. They underlined the IPA symbols which were used to represent each sound, and how this was reflected by/in the graphemes and different spelling patterns, e.g.,

- / i: / → “ee” (bee)
- “ea” (tea)
- “e” (Stephen, and Peter!)
- “ie” (pieces)

Word-stress was previewed as an energy unit, necessary in any word of two syllables or more, just like in Spanish. (The graphic representation of primary and secondary stresses was checked in a dictionary).

After the sounds in isolation and in words, students were presented with whole phrases, then sentences, containing the sound. These were broken up, to make for rhythm and easier catenation, in the following way:

- Noun phrase
- Noun phrase + Verb phrase
- Noun phrase + Verb phrase + adjuncts

e.g.: “□Stephen” / “□Stephen □meets □Eve” / “□Stephen □meets □Eve one □evening for a □meal.” / etc.

All the vowel sounds were reviewed in this same way, with choral repetition until major pronunciation trends were discovered, when some individual students were asked to perform and corrected as needed. But I didn’t really linger on individual correction, believing that this is best taken care of in the daily classroom. (For example:

⁵⁸ This becomes even more important when we think that, out of 12 vowel sounds in English, only four (/i:/, /e/, /o:/, /u:/) are said with any very perceptible spreading / rounding of the lips, the rest are “neutral”. To understand English, a listener, native or not, must be aware of a multiplicity of simultaneous auditory and visual signals.

after much practice in the lesson, “J” still can’t tell the vowel is different in “car” and “dog”. Finally, I told him to use the alternative - sometimes, American - notation for short o, /ɑ:/, instead of /ɒ/ - many Americans, especially from the Southern states, say “dawg”. But this was not really the time nor place to fix “J’s” many pronunciation problems).

I also didn’t want to break the mood of relaxation, as this would have been counteractive to the purpose of the action. Plus, we were short on time, and I really wanted to go through all the simple vowels during this mini-session. (And we had more activities programmed for later the same day, on other different topics).

[“Emergency kit” activity: I should have liked to end with a communicative game, “Read My Lips”, in which (not to make it too difficult) a selection of words containing sounds wished to be practised is written on the board: in pairs, students have to guess what their partner is silently saying, using one of the words written up on the board (it works better if the words are memorable). This exercise is recommended by Ur and by Underhill, as it is very good to stretch the muscles round the mouth (to be understood, the “speakers” must “mouth” the words in a very exaggerated way)⁵⁹. But, as said, there was no time for that, and it is up to the teacher in charge to play this game with her students in the future.]

3.5.1.2. Materials used in the session

- “Personalised Phonemic Chart”, from Frances Hotinsky’s “See What You Say”, in *English Teaching Professional* issue 8, July 1998 (pp. 8-9).
- Handout with a diagram showing the tongue-position, and photographs showing the position of the lips, for all the simple English vowels. (Self-made material, with photographs taken from Daniel Jones’s 1956 *An Outline of English Phonetics*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, *passim*).

⁵⁹ People understand each other better if they are familiar with the way their interlocutors move their mouth, to the point that, once they are familiar with one person’s both kinds of input, they can understand what a person is saying merely by watching how their lips move on a silent video; the mere fact of reading lips helps us familiarize ourselves with others’ voices. “Although scientists have long known that visual signals play a key role in speech recognition, how the brain blends the two stimuli is still a mystery. Some imaging studies suggest that the auditory cortex is involved in the processing not only of audio but also of visual speech information.” (Nicole Branat: “See What I Say”, in *Scientific American Mind*, August/September 2007).

- Photocopies (of pages 14-33) from Trim and Kneebone's (1965) *English Pronunciation Illustrated*, Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Puppet theatre of the mouth cavity + "tongue-puppet". (Self-made material, developed from an idea in Finocchiaro's 1964 *English as a Second Language*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1967, p. 54).
- Blackboard and chalk.
- (Prepared as "Emergency kit", but not used in the session) Communicative game: "Read My Lips". From Ur and Wright (1993), *Five Minute Activities*, p. 76.

3.5.1.3. Reflection on the session

The students seemed to follow the explanations, found the examples funny, and laughed at the jokes. At first, they seemed a little taken aback at the kind of activities and the fast tempo of the session, but they listened attentively to the instructions given, and willingly participated in the choral chanting (which isn't a frequent activity in their daily English-class routine). But after reviewing the first two or three of the vowels, I thought they seemed to get a bit restless. Worrying that the practice might be dragging on boringly, I decided to cut down on the number of examples to be repeated for each sound to only three words, two examples of the sound in connected speech and one sentence, and to concentrate more instead on the distinctions between the minimal pairs. I think I should have foreseen this, and should have allocated each vowel a fairer amount of time, according to their difficulty for Spanish speakers, from the beginning.

Some students came up to me at the end of class, however, to say how much they had enjoyed the phonetic work and how much they had learnt. They had never had Phonetics explained to them this way. So the session had, at the very least, the value of *novelty* for the participants (always a motivating factor in itself).

The teacher in charge of the course also congratulated me on the success of the session. Her first words after class were: "Wow, and I thought that I was energetic!" (I wonder what she would have said if she'd known I had come from 8 hours' straight teaching English to young children at school). The teacher also said that she had never heard the English vowel-system explained so clearly, and that she had never really

understood the difference between short and long vowels in English until that moment. She commented on the excellent book used and asked where I had found it, questions which I had foreseen, and which I had had the prescience to be able to respond to, by making a copy of the book for her (so that, if she so wished, she could finish this course on Phonetics, with the students, in her and their own time).

I myself came out with a good feeling on the session. A top worry/priority in this initial session had been to create a warm, confident atmosphere in class (especially important when meeting a new teacher). I felt that, whatever else they had learned, a good rapport *had* been established, and that the atmosphere was conducive to meaningful learning. The students had understood what specific areas of the English language we would be focussing on during my teaching time there, and had “got in the mood” to learn a little more about phonetics. Motivating the students had also been an important objective, and we had certainly had fun. The main aims of the session had been achieved.

- Unexpected food-for-thought: A serendipitous development was that, whereas the students had hung on every word with utmost attention when I was giving purely theoretical explanations (which was somehow unsettling to this teacher, used to boisterous behaviour in younger students if you ask them to sit quietly for five minutes), these students seemed to grow a bit impatient about the practical repetition activities, which comparatively seemed more tedious. Why? Perhaps because they were “mature” students, and felt that repeating was “below their dignity”? Or because, deep down, they felt that pronunciation work was “a waste of time”, and that they should, instead, be preparing other questions for their decisive final exams, which would be taking place in less than a month’s time, and which do not include specific assessment of pronunciation?⁶⁰ Perhaps, even, because they felt insecure about their own phonological awareness and production, while understanding rational explanations was no problem, being mature adults? It was somehow unsettling.

⁶⁰ The EOI final test on oral expression at this level only involves the students’ preparing a speech on a given topic, for which preparation they are given three minutes, and then talking about it with a peer, not the teacher. Although a teacher is present, s/he attests to the quality of the student-student interaction. But that doesn’t presuppose quality of pronunciation. The students are used to often hearing each other speak with mispronunciations, easily understand each other and can apparently interact without major problems, in spite of their errors.

In any case, I decided to prepare the theoretical explanation part of the next session more thoroughly, and spend about equal time on explanations and on practice. [On later reviewing the initial “transcription” tests, there was also noticeable, in a significant number of cases, an odd correlation: those students who had done best in the “transcriptions” exercise weren’t always the ones that committed the least pronunciation errors in their spontaneous speech - quite the opposite. It seems as if identifying the sounds, and correctly producing them, were, all else being equal, disassociated skills. Another question for future research. In any case, formal knowledge of the IPA system won’t hurt students’ pronunciation, and will always be a very useful tool in teaching-learning the English language.]

3.5.2. Session Two, 15th May 2012: “Stress and Rhythm in English Speech.”

In this (briefer) session the aim was to raise and expand the students’ phonological awareness, specifically of stress and how it affects other words in connected speech (stress-driven rhythm in English speech), by helping them understand how the flow of sounds must steadily be punctuated by the bursts of energy contained in the stressed syllables, and how English tends towards a steady rhythm, whatever the context, and allowing for each speaker’s natural speaking speed. The students counted the main beats in some utterances, and practised pronouncing utterances to a rhythmical beat marked by a metronome. After that, rhythm was seen “at work” on some limericks, which were repeated, chorally and in pairs.

3.5.2.1. Detailed account of the session, as reflected in the student-teacher’s journal

To begin with, I reviewed with the students some of the notions (sounds and their phonetic symbols, short and long vowels...) seen on the previous session. Then, I reminded the students about *word*-stress, how all English words (of 2+ syllables) carry a stressed syllable – but the stress is not marked graphically; then, the students were asked to find the stress in some words (written on the board):

- ‘Spain (monosyllable) - England (2 syllables) - Italy, Germany (3 syllables)
- photograph – pho tographer - □photo graphic

The students were reminded about Primary/Secondary stresses, and how they're marked in the citation form (their transcription in a dictionary): in the word "photographic", for example. (Students looked up other words to confirm this).

We also reviewed the "law" that any unstressed vowel can only be phonetically realised in one of three ways in English:

- /ə/ ⇒ "a house", / ə haʊz/
- /ɪ/ ⇒ "started", /'stɑ:tɪd/
- /u/ ⇒ in unstressed realizations of *could*, *would*, *should*.

(This "law" was news to most of them; at first they only half-believed it, until more examples were seen).

It was established that all English *sentences*, too, have at least one or two stresses, and that these usually go on the *verb*, the subject (if it's a *noun*), on *adjectives* and *adverbs* (noun phrase and verb phrase elements) – but not always. I explained that the stress in English discourse can be used for *CONTRAST*, as in "It's all right, I *do* like black coffee!" or "That's not my sister. My sister's the one with the *long* hair"; for *EMPHASIS*, as in "That moustache has to *go!*" as my girlfriend told me the other day!" and... (I wrote on board, and challenged pairs of students to read the following dialogue, stressing it correctly): →

- Mr. A: "I went to Brighton last summer."
- Mr. B: "Oh? I went to Brighton last summer."

When they didn't succeed, I asked a student to read Mr. A, and I read Mr. B ("I went to ↓Brighton last year" / "Oh? ↓I went to Brighton last year").

Then, I asked for the rule governing this use of stress.

Students didn't hit on the rule right away. (They usually don't, this must be a unique feature in English speech). After some attempts ("because it's the subject", etc.) they gave up. I downplayed this "failure" on their part with a joke ("Right, you're *thinking* of the correct rule, but daren't say it!") and then gave the correct rule: *it's the NEW INFORMATION that's stressed* (new information, or new in contrast to something already given).

We also practised the following mini-dialogue (as heard on the TV show C.S.I.):

- *Warwick*. "What about *her*?"
- *Grissom*: What about *her*?

[That fundamental rule accounts for both the other two functions before mentioned, *Contrast* – because whatever element brought to contrast is always *new* information; and also for *Emphasis*, in which sentences, the *new* information is the *emotional content*, the state of mind and affect of the speaker. It's a really economic rule, and like in a telegraphic Morse code, the speaker makes sure the listener understands.] The students seemed to understand these points. They understood, anyway, that stress can drive the entire statement, to mark out the new or important information, or for reasons of contrast or emphasis, so that the English flow of speech always manages to transmit, in spite of redundancy or noise, the most relevant ideas in discourse.

Rhythm was then analyzed. I established that the *sentence-stress* in English marks the *beat* of the discourse, which tends to be equal in time in English, that is, rhythmical, with a steady beat, no matter how many syllables/words there are in the sentence (the reverse of what happens in Spanish, where all syllables are given the same prominence, and a sentence with 10 syllables takes twice as long to say as one with 5 syllables). But English tends to have a steady beat, just like music. The number of beats in an utterance marks its timing, so a sentence with two beats always takes the same amount of time to say, however many words (syllables, really) it contains.

The students were asked to repeat after me, keeping track of the beats with their toes, or rapping on the table with their knuckles, the following (four-beat) drumming sequence:

- □ **BOOM** □ **BOOM** □ **BOOM** □ **BOOM** (repeat) /
- □ **BOOM** ta, □ **BOOM** ta, □ **BOOM** ta, □ **BOOM** /
- □ **BOOM**, (ta ta) □ **BOOM**, (ta ta) □ **BOOM**, (ta ta) □ **BOOM** /
- □ **BOOM** (ta-ta-ta) □ **BOOM** (ta-ta-ta) □ **BOOM** (ta-ta-ta) □ **BOOM**.

It took the same time to say "Boom" (x 4) as "Boom ta-ta-ta" (x 4), because there were only four beats, every time (all the "ta-ta-ta"s are unstressed). This "drumming" sequence was timed on a metronome.

The “drumming” sequence was repeated, this time with two-beat phrases in English:

- □ Lay the 'table!
- He's 'laying the 'table!
- He's going to 'lay the 'table!
- He would have 'laid the 'table!

... all take the same time.

- The students did the same with “'wash the 'dishes!”

It's easy to notice stress. Yet working with unstress is crucial to working with stress.

The students then played a game in which they were challenged to answer questions with different, shorter or longer answers, but always with the same rhythm and the same time-lapse, starting with the question I put up for answer:

- “*Who's running the 'music club 'this year?*”

I was really surprised when they spontaneously, in chorus, provided the first answer - *that* was really unexpected! ⇨

- “Peter.” /

Then we elaborated on it, with longer and longer answers, but still driven by the initial (and only) stress, so taking the same amount of time to say all the different answers:

- “Peter is.” /
- “Peter's going to. /
- “Peter's going to run it.” /
- “Peter's going to try and run it.” /
- “Peter's going to try and have a shot at running it.” /

etc.

(Each answer was also measured with a metronome).

The students really seemed to enjoy this activity and begged for more time on it, but I decided that the last activity I had prepared would fill the slot and would provide a smooth, seamless transition to the end of the session.

I gave the students a handout with a collection of some modern limericks, a popular satirical verse-form which is always stressed 3-3-2-2-3 beats (stresses), and rhymed a-a-b-b-a. (The content of the limericks was cultural and humorous, poking fun at international stereotypes). The students read these chorally and individually, trying to keep a steady beat in their declamation. They seemed to enjoy this activity too; perhaps, also, because the limericks were funny and aptly chosen (and not too cruel, as they come).

To end up, I collected the students' written recollections on five of the pictures which we had seen on the first day.

["Emergency kit" activity: An alternative activity I had prepared "just in case", whatever contingency, was a compilation of "Tongue-Twisters" in English (which I did not finally use), taken from Ur and Wright (1992). The authors suggest writing each phrase on the board and reading it with the students, slowly at first, then faster, making sure students' pronunciation is acceptable. Then, individual volunteers try to say it quickly five times:

She sells seashells on the seashore.

Mixed biscuits, mixed biscuits.

Red leather, yellow leather, red leather, yellow leather.

A proper copper coffee pot.

Three grey geese in a green field grazing.

Swan swam over the pond, swim swan swim; swan swam back again – well swum swan!

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper.

Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled pepper?

If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled pepper,

Where's the peck of pickled pepper Peter Piper picked?]

3.5.2.2. Materials used in the session

- A metronome.
- Collection of modern limericks (various sources).
- Blackboard and chalk.

- (Prepared as “Emergency kit”, but not used in the session) Game: “Read My Lips”. From Ur and Wright (1993), *Five Minute Activities*, p. 84.

3.5.2.3. Reflection on the session

The students seemed to really enjoy the rhythmical practice, as well as the theoretical explanations. I didn't notice anybody getting “restless”, as on the first day, in which much of the material seen had already been fairly familiar to the students, whereas most of what we did today was a novelty for them. There were also a larger number of students present in class, this day, than on the previous session (who knows, maybe word had got round that these sessions were worth attending?). This contributed to the fun. Everybody participated with gusto, and we certainly made a noise. If the first day students seemed to be happy to go back to familiar work with the textbook at the end of the session on phonetics, today students seemed to return to it with some reluctance.

The teacher also congratulated me at the end of the session, saying it had been great fun as well as interesting.

I had been worried that today's work would be less motivating, due to the lack of graphic material support and the amount of theory to be put across. Yet I came out of the session feeling happy on all fronts: as to the classroom-rapport established, the objectives achieved, and the students' participation. We all knew each other already (most of us) and there were fewer “first-time” nerves. I thought timing had been better managed on my part, with about half of the time dedicated to explanations, and half, to practical work. However, the session still took up rather longer than expected, and encroached into “normal” class-time. (I could tell that the teacher was nervous about wasting precious time on things that wouldn't come up in the students' forthcoming final exams, but it seemed a shame to interrupt the session just when students were “throwing themselves into it”).

- Final thoughts: I think I still need to work on my timing, especially when working with students at this age and level. I suppose it is mostly a matter of mutual adjustment. With younger students, it is easier to prepare and organise the activities to be carried out in a lesson. With these older students, I find it much more difficult to predict what

will work and what won't. It also worries me that perhaps I may not be getting across to them fully: there is really no way of knowing how much we actually connect. Young students manifest their enjoyment of anything very demonstratively, laughing, clapping, etc., but if they don't understand or don't enjoy an activity, they are equally disposed to show it loud and clear: they will snap the book shut, hide their head in their arms, ask for permission to go out. With these educated adults the thought is always lurking that perhaps, when they contribute to keeping the ball rolling, they might be merely being polite or deferential...

3.5.3. Session Three, 17th May 2012: "Functions of Intonation in English"

In this third and final session in the "Mini-Crash-Course" in English phonetics/phonology we tried to help the students obtain some insight, or intuitive knowledge, on the functions of intonation in English. (I use the word "intuitive", as opposed to "formal", because this is one area whose importance has only recently begun to be studied. To start with, intonation patterns vary greatly according to geographical location and context; and most linguists agree that intonation patterns are interiorized very early on, in the acquisition of the mother-tongue, by an unconscious process not yet fully understood). Today's session being the last, and not wanting to leave any loose knots in the Mini-Crash-Course in pronunciation, the student-teacher had to monopolize longer stretches of theoretical discourse than he would have wished; on the other hand, he knows from past experience in the last two sessions that this does not go against these students' preferences and cognitive learning style. It won't hurt them, phonologically speaking, to hear longer stretches of English discourse. After all, young babies spend an inordinately great amount of time just *listening* to adults' speech.

3.5.3.1. Detailed account of the session, as reflected in the student-teacher's journal

I first reviewed with the students some concepts seen during the previous session, such as "Beat" and "Rhythm" (both, terms used in music: *Compás – Ritmo*). I then told the students that on this session we were going to speak about another component of

spoken English, intonation (what in music is called “melody”). Intonation means the fluctuations in tone, in pitch, of the speakers. I explained that *pitch* is everyone’s natural tone of voice. Some people - naturally - speak in a lower or higher tone. We all recognize this unconsciously, and know when the person is deviating from his “natural pitch”, when the intonation is rising or falling. *Stress, rhythm* and *intonation* are called *the prosodic elements* of speech because they are “near music”, as the name says (prosody < próś, “near”, “ode” < o□dŋ, “song”).

I pointed out that it is very important to recognize the melody, the intonation-pattern of English speech, because this music, this intonation, gives a lot of information to the listener, of various kinds, that only the words by themselves don’t. I was in a chatty mood that day, my last with the students, and gave the students the following “mini-lecture” (or lengthy-ish discourse) I had prepared on the many important functions of intonation:

(Mr. P. A. Kelly’s discourse): *“Music can say so many things, that some scientists have even thought that music was the origin of language.*

Darwin thought that language evolved by imitating animal songs of courtship. There is a theory that Neanderthals, who had bigger brains than us, invented the first human language. But Neanderthals couldn’t speak (or they could say only a very few sounds) because their larynx hadn’t fully descended. But they could sing. Perhaps we took the music from them, and added the lyrics... (The students were attentive and seemed to be very interested in this bit of “pseudo-historical” information or speculation; I saw smiles and heard some audible comments on Neanderthals).

... And some scientists have noticed that the first thing mothers do with babies is sing lullabies to them. What the mothers are really doing is teaching the babies about language, because usually, *a change of note, or a silence in the melody, signals a new syllable, or a new word*, and babies start to learn about how language is made up of words and phrases, by hearing them already “separated into parts” in the song. The first things babies learn about their mother-tongue are its rhythm and its melody. Words come much later.”

I explained that what we see in lullabies is the “*grammatical*” function of intonation, probably a universal function (at least, Spanish intonation fulfils it too), and

added: “Imagine you heard a string of sounds all said in the same monotonous voice, without changes of tone, without pauses; you wouldn’t be able to break it down into meaningful components. (I tried to demonstrate this point with some reciting in German, with what success I am not sure). Intonation, together with pauses, gives *grammatical information* as to which are the boundaries between words and phrases, where one sentence stops, whether the sentence is the main one or a subordinate... Intonation shows what goes with what: for example, when making a list, each item or group of items is marked by a slight rise in tone and followed by a pause:

- I bought □pasta, □rice, and ‘bread.
- I went □shopping, and □then I went to the ‘cinema.

I said that, in written English, this kind of information is provided by punctuation. It would also be difficult to *read* a text without punctuation! Try saying/punctuating these two sentences:

- four plus six divided by two equals five
- four plus six divided by two equals seven

(Both can be correct, according to how the tone groups are divided, or how the sentence is punctuated).

I told the anecdote of how Gutenberg, so highly placed in the history of human progress, really held only a very poor second place next to the unknown genius who had invented punctuation: the very first printed Bibles carried no punctuation, and Bible scholars had a really tough time interpreting the texts. This too the students seemed to appreciate.⁶¹

I proceeded with another function of intonation in English (also present in Spanish, albeit with slightly different usage): Intonation also indicates the general function of the “*discourse*”: whether it’s a declarative sentence, or an order, or a question, and if it is a question, whether it is a real question or a rhetorical one, whether the speaker badly needs an answer or not... if an answer is really wanted, intonation goes up; for a flat statement or a rhetorical question, it usually falls. Traditionally, it used to be said (and I know this is what you’ve been taught) that all “wh- questions” have falling intonation, and all “yes/no questions”, a rising intonation:

⁶¹ One must remember that most of these students held a degree in Higher Education (many, in Humanities such as Law) and were accustomed to this kind of “magisterial” discourse.

- 'Where did 'you 'park the ↓'car? (We take it for granted that the car has been parked).
- 'Did you 'park the ↑'car? (We don't know if the car was properly parked or left in the street).

But it's not obligatory to end "wh- questions" with a fall, and "yes/no questions" often *don't* end in a rise in intonation. In general, rising intonation means the speaker wants additional information, he wants his interlocutor to intervene.

This is something teachers sometimes say:

"You've made a mistake." And a student might answer, "No, I haven't." But he might say it in either of two ways:

- with *rising* intonation (No, I ↑'haven't), it would mean "Sorry? Teacher, please show me where I've made the mistake!" – he's not sure that his work is correct.
- If s/he says it with *falling* intonation ('No, I ↓'haven't), the student is assertive, sure of his/her work, and s/he is going to prove it.

I next spoke to the students of a very important function of intonation in English, the "*accentual*" function of intonation, which, I reminded them, we had already pre-viewed the day before (although, on that session, we had called it the "stress-driven rhythm" of discourse⁶²). People signal the really important *new* points of what they say, the really *relevant* information, by putting a special stress on that word or words. At the same time, to carry the rhythm – the beat - the unstressed syllables (anything between the stressed syllables) is compressed or "crunched", said very quickly, using weak forms or even altogether omitting entire syllables. That's why spoken English is difficult to understand – even for native speakers!

At that point, I told the students the following (true) anecdote: "*Sometimes I'm watching a film with my British family, and very often somebody will ask, "What did she say?" – and the person asked will answer, "sorry, I didn't catch it". Understanding English is guessing half of the time!*" I explained that this stress system is also the reason that

⁶² There is some confusion in phonological studies of English speech as to where to include this feature. Some include it as a function of stress; others, as a function of intonation. The problem arises because it is not very clear exactly how stress is, even physically, marked. Stress can be attributed to many variable components: saying words louder (not usual, so it is something we have to steer the students away from); or in a (usually) higher, but also (sometimes) in a lower tone of voice; or lengthening the stressed vowel; or using exaggerated facial gestures; or by means of slow and clear enunciation (or by a combination of these).

one never gets totally “lost”, one always understands the gist of the speech or conversation in English, because the stressed words, the important words for information, are like a telegraphic Morse code, tapping out only the essential information.

This *accentual*⁶³ function can be best understood, seen at work, if we translate especially stressed (accentuated) English sentences into Spanish. In Spanish, we often have to change the order of the words, or add words, to make the meaning clear (I wrote on board the English sentence, and helped students to give the correct translation in Spanish):

'What do you 'want to 'do this 'evening? (neutral) *¿Qué quieres hacer esta noche?*

'What ↓'do you 'want to do this evening? *Decídate de una vez, ¿qué quieres hacer esta noche?*

'What do ↓'you want to do this evening? *Ya te he dicho lo que quiero hacer yo, ahora di tú lo que quieres hacer esta noche.*

'What do you 'want to do ↓'this evening? *Ya sé lo que quieres hacer mañana por la noche, pero ¿esta noche?*

'What do you 'want to 'do this ↓'evening? *Ya hemos quedado para esta tarde, pero ¿qué te apetece hacer esta noche?*⁶⁴

I next asked the students: Have you ever watched a film in a totally foreign language... German or French or whichever language you don't understand... and after about 5-10 minutes you more or less “understood” what was going on, you knew what kinds of things the people were feeling?

That's because, even if you don't know what *words* the sounds you are hearing correspond to, you are perceiving the “*attitudinal*” information, signalled by the fluctuations in intonation within the speaker's natural pitch, the “music” that the spoken language is set to.

Intonation gives a lot of information on the *emotions*, the feelings of the interlocutor, how he feels about the information he is giving you, how he feels about you, his own intentions for the future and what he expects from you... It's more important to understand these sorts of things, than to understand the *ostensible*

⁶³ Or “syntactic”, according to some authors.

⁶⁴ In Spanish, this function also exists, evidently. Teaching this function to students, while saying it's typical of English speech, might elicit the answer, “*Yo ya sé montar en bici!*” (as one student once told me). Right. Anybody can ride a bike. But, maybe, it'll take some specific teaching and practice to learn how to drive on the left-hand side of the road.

information contained in the message. This function of intonation is called the attitudinal (or “mood”) function. In general, a higher pitch, or fluctuations in pitch, mean more emotion, more involvement, or requesting more information; lower tones mean detachment, authority, finality, end of conversation⁶⁵.

The phrase “That is wonderful” can be said with excitement, with gloom, with disappointment, with anger, with happiness, with carelessness or boredom, with surprise, with irony... and, wonderfully, with wonder. You try it!

- “That is wonderful.” (Students experimented with different intonations).

At this point, the students were given a handout (adapted from V. J. Cook, O’Connor and Arnold) containing the main intonation patterns in English. I read them and the students repeated chorally. I pointed out that all of these example sentences might, however, be said with several other different intonations, each involving subtle changes in meaning. I explained that *intonation is difficult to give rules for, because it depends so much on the context and the speaker*.

(I just had to say this!): Intonation is also very closely linked to paralinguistic, non-verbal behaviour, “*body language*”: eye contact, facial expressions, body posture, gestures with hands... in general, these are international, but in European parliament it may be of worth to know that Greek people move their head up and down when they disagree, and sideways if they agree with you!

I recapped: In Spanish, supra-segmental features like stress and tone, although they can add much expressiveness to the utterance, are not the primordial conveyors of functional meaning. I think Spanish people tend to attend more to the actual, literal words said in the utterance, perhaps because of the equal weight given all the syllables in any one utterance in Spanish.

But in English, because English speech is stress-driven, the only really intelligible words are the prominent, *stressed* words; and most important, *intonation* adds the most vitally important aspect of that new, stressed information, which is the speaker’s stand

⁶⁵ I forget where I read that some musicologists have analyzed different pieces of music and found that “happy” music, such as Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy*, contain a much higher variability of tone than “sad” music, which is much more monotonous in comparison. (This, independently from other features such as tempo). I can’t help remembering this, music is another of my interests (in fact, my “lucrative hobby”, every weekend).

on it, and his intentions. Perhaps that is why English actors/actresses are so good. They have to be, if they want to be understood!

I concluded by recommending the students some good models to study and imitate for their excellent English speech, both as to overall pronunciation and specifically, as to the intonation patterns they tended to use: the actors Anthony Hopkins, Michael Caine, Jeremy Irons, the Scottish help "Daphne" in the American TV series "Frasier" ("Niles" is very good too), the characters "Stewie" and the dog "Brian" in the cartoon *Family Guy*...

As closure for the lesson, the students played, in pairs, a communicative game to practise accentual intonation, "Intonation Directions" (taken from Mark Hancock's 1995 *Pronunciation Games*. (I started by demonstrating how to play with one of the students, and taught them "the trick" of attending rather to the end than to the beginning of each sentence). When their turn came, I made the students read aloud the example-sentences to be "played" in the game, to check on the sentences being said with proper intonation. The students really enjoyed this game - it was the sort of activity they habitually carry out in class – and this took us to the end of the intervention.

[As "Emergency Kit", I had prepared a short unpunctuated text in English, to practice the grammatical function of intonation. But as it was, we were well overdue the session-time allotted. Here it is anyway:

lewis carroll the english writer loved making friends with children he would always try to think of an original or funny way to start a conversation with them one day carroll was writing a letter on the beach when a little girl ran past him who had been swimming in the sea she was soaking wet from head to toe and was dripping water everywhere she walked carroll saw the little girl quietly picked up his piece of blotting paper and tore off a very small corner which he held out to her asking her if she would like to dry herself with it

It is easy to prepare a similar text, for whatever level of English, from an unlimited range of sources. This one was copied from an activity in Granger's and Plumb's (1984) *Play Games with English 2*.]

As final closure to the “Mini-Crash-Course in English Phonetics and Phonology”, I gave the students my e-mail address for further feedback on it (on a voluntary basis).

3.5.3.2. Materials used in the session

- Handout: photocopy containing the major intonation patterns in English, adapted from J. D. O’Connor’s and G. F. Arnold’s (1973) *Intonation of Colloquial English*, p. 3.
- Game: “Intonation Directions”, from Mark Hancock’s (1995) *Pronunciation Games*, pp. 104-107.
- Blackboard and chalk.
- (Prepared as “Emergency kit”, but not used in the session) Pronunciation activity: “Story telling”, from Granger’s and Plumb’s (1984) *Play Games with English 2*, p. 47.

3.5.3.3. Reflection on the session

The students asked many questions along the formal part of the session, especially the bits about Neanderthals, lullaby-singing, etc.; I think this turned out to be the most interesting part for them, perhaps the part which offered them the most totally new information. They seemed more blasé about the work on intonation, both theory and practice in itself. But the playing of a communicative pair-work game in the final part of the session, such as the students were used to, and with familiar procedures, helped to put them at ease towards the end. After class, some students came up to me with a very friendly disposition, saying how much they had overall enjoyed this mini-course on English pronunciation and related matters, and how useful it had turned out to be. The best compliment came from one of those students who had been noticed during the observation period as committing a lot of pronunciation errors, who said that only now was he beginning to understand why it made sense to learn a little about English phonetics and phonology, and that not only was he now beginning to understand it, he was also enjoying the learning process and practice in this area.

The head teacher complimented me on my use of humour and my “acting skills”, which I personally consider a huge compliment⁶⁶, and also commented that “the

⁶⁶ The teacher as “entertainer” or “clown” turns up as a frequent metaphor in many studies of successful management of learner/teacher roles. I have personally taken a course on the use of drama techniques in

students were engaged and very motivated". A less positive point (with which I have to agree) was, in her opinion, that I could have been more aware of timing, and the lesson, in spite of its ambitious scope, might have been better managed, and more points covered. She also gave me the useful general tip that students appreciate being offered more room for participation, and that even boring stuff won't be perceived as such by students if they can imply themselves in the material presented, for example by reading any instructions themselves. But we have to remember that the students only had four days of class left to complete the pre-established didactic programme for that course, before they were up to take their decisive, final examination in the subject; it is understandable that the teacher was naturally anxious about the little time left before that event. I sympathize with her, and certainly think that this "Mini-Course in English Phonetics and Phonology" would have been more purposeful, from the teaching point of view, and more meaningful, from the students' outlook, if it had been implemented at the beginning of the school year, and followed-though, a little at a time, along the course.

This last session was perhaps the one that left me feeling the least satisfied. I think I would have included even more "theatrical activities" if I had known the students better from the start, and we might have bonded even more. After all, intonation, *per se*, isn't such a novelty, it is a universal feature of all human language, familiar to students since their early "motherese"-filled days. Dramatic techniques are, probably, those best suited for its acquisition: one can't really "teach" the supra-segmental features.

4. CONCLUSION: CRITICAL APPRAISAL OF THE ACTION AND FINAL THOUGHTS

I myself am quite satisfied with the way the mini-course turned out. I am certainly sure of having given it my all, having invested a lot of time and effort in its preparation, and thrown myself into its implementation. Looking back now, at some distance (three weeks) from the intervention, I am personally convinced that, on the whole, it can be

the classroom, apart from much independent study/practice on the subject. (I know for a fact that English-speaking actors/actresses, knowing better than anybody the importance of clear enunciation in that language, also study the purely phonological features of English, naturally as well as other para-linguistic aspects involved in communication). My father, an excellent English teacher, was also a most entertaining clown, and made his lessons absolutely unforgettable for his students.

considered as a positive experience for all the parts involved (although perhaps not absolutely meriting the qualification of “complete and riotous success” which I had hoped for, and confidently expected). The initial problem-situation involved several peculiar extenuating circumstances, not too often met with in the usual teaching-learning scenarios, which made any kind of remedial action extremely difficult to fruitfully achieve, especially with certain and immediately perceptible effects.

4.1. Weak points

Perhaps the most conspicuous of the factors weighing in against immediate and perceptible improvements in the students’ overall phonological awareness and consequent improved pronunciation skills was the adult age of the learners. This had already been foreseen as especially likely to present obstacles, because, apart from the general stumbling-blocks adults tend to encounter in any learning situation, it was combined with a very complex area of learning *per se*, the phonological system of the English language, which natives acquire effortlessly in their infancy, but whose very complex peculiarities adult learners can no longer either perceive as distinct from those of their L1 nor, indeed, reproduce with the sufficient skill to lead to a favourable communicative issue, their senses being attuned only to the much narrower range of sounds heard in the L1, and their organs of speech, locked into or “fossilized” into the L1 phonic formulation, lacking the necessary motor flexibility to produce the phonic subtleties of the English language.

Another major handicap was the students’ poor motivation to engage in effort towards the phonetic and phonological excellency necessary to interact successfully with real native speakers of English. They were used to pair-work interaction only amongst themselves, were familiar enough with each another’s quirks and errors of pronunciation in the TL so as for these not to constitute an obstacle for fluid communication amongst themselves, and believed that this was sufficient for what was asked of them in class. What *really* worried these students was whether or not they would successfully pass the final examination for the Advanced Level at the EOI, a positive result meaning their promoting to B2-Level (as referenced by the Council of Europe), and taking them one stage further towards earning a creditable and highly-

reputed Diploma, certified by the same authority. This certification would, in its turn, be of value enriching the students' personal C. V., in the majority of cases with a view towards their professional promotion. These students did not (in the majority of cases) *need* to speak English well; just well enough to pass the exam (in which there is not a specific pronunciation test, nor one in which their oral skills are assessed in communicative situations involving native speakers; there is only a general test for oral skills, consisting of the presentation of a topic which the students are given three minutes to prepare, followed by a Q. & A. micro-session amongst the students themselves). Nothing of what was done in class during the mini-crash-course was immediately useful to the students (from their point of view), and it detracted from more formal, and more "useful" (to them) study of other grammatical points in English which *would* indeed be asked of them in the examination. activities in preparation for their final examination.

Closely related to the question of the final official examination was the particular predicament that the exam itself was only a couple of weeks distant, exactly after only four more days of English lessons had taken place. The wonder is that these very worried students had the patience not only, in the first place, to put up with the Phonetics/Phonology "Crash-Course" at all, but also to participate, whole-heartedly and even with enthusiasm (which most did), in the activities, during my intervention. Personally, I would perhaps not have behaved so well in their situation, but instead have loudly claimed "my money back" (let's remember these students *pay* for their tuition), instead of complying with the "waste of time" (to their eyes) of the sessions devoted to pronunciation.

Finally, the total amount of time devoted to the "Mini-Crash-Course" in Phonetics and Phonology was itself too short. Too many ideas had to be compressed into three micro-sessions of short duration. Ideally, this kind of (often, quasi-physical) exercise should only take up about 5-10 minutes of each lesson, spread out along the school year. It can always be utilized as a transitional activity between lessons, or even for closure, when the students are fatigued from more consciously cognitive work. Logically, that was out of our hands.

Why this sombre tone, what are all these rather negative comments leading to? Well, it is a sad fact that I can present few tangible results proving that my intervention had the hoped-for success, a notable improvement in students' pronunciation, accompanied by a higher degree of motivation and implication in these matters (or the other way around). The question of timing, all things considered, just as it was probably the most important hindering factor to the remedial action, also prevents us from verifying actual beneficial effects of the intervention on the students' pronunciation. We hope it has been so, is all we can say (and the head teacher coincides with us). But any profit will have to be reaped next year. By the time I write this, lessons are long over at the EOI. This situation would very likely have been quite different, had the mini-course started at the beginning of the academic year.

4.2. Favourable aspects

As to post-facto feedback: I gave the students my e-mail address, and personally stated in class that I would be grateful for any feedback sent to me on the sessions. Although, here again, the outcome was not as unanimously voiced as expected, I received five postings, which I consider a fair number of favourable opinions, given that allowances must be made for the trouble, and time-consuming aspects, of a written missive, very specially for these busy adults. All were encouraging. All said they had enjoyed the mini-course as a different kind of English lesson, fun in itself. The students also alluded to the sessions being interesting, in their own right, for their content, and said they had learned new aspects of English which they had not previously thought of paying attention to. One student I am afraid had not really got the point at all, as he asked me if all this new information on the English language would help him to pass two different examinations he had signed up for, the PET and the FCE. A couple of students hoped to strike up a friendship with myself, saying they would like to keep in touch with me in the future, a fact which I must take, all else considered, as indicative of a huge success, considering their rather pressed-for-time circumstances.

I am sure, notwithstanding some students' silence on the point, that all of them learned much about the English language which will be useful to them in the future, whether they appreciate it either now, or in the long run. Apart from the motivational

aspects (which were also part of the objectives of the action), and which were evidently reached (see head teacher's e-mailed final comment, 10/06/2012, on the next page), the students *must* have improved their competence in English: it was a novel situation for communication, with a different native speaker, with a different local accent, the topic-area and its presentation was unusual...

Having worked so hard, I must defend my mini-project, in spite of the students' poor response, which given their circumstances is justifiable. Formally, and as to the amount of research carried out, I think this paper is correct. And I believe that the mini-project, the intervention itself, must have done some good. How can it not have been so? Personally, I myself learnt *a lot* that I didn't know while preparing the intervention and reviewing the theory. At least *some* of it must have gone down the line. What I cannot believe is that the action did more harm than good, or that it left the students indifferent. As long as the outcome is at all positive, the action must be defensible. And any kind of study is valid if it adds information, for teachers, on what is actually going on in the classroom, which I think this paper does.

Whether *post hoc* there will take place any actual, noticeable long-term improvement in students' phonological awareness and pronunciation skills, will naturally have to remain outside the student-teacher's scope. We know at least that their *attitude* towards this area, the phonological aspects of English, has changed. A favourable attitude is very likely to lead to increased attention and improved awareness.

As to the head teacher's take, I quote literally from a missive she sent me afterwards: "As for your presentation of phonetics, I personally thought it very illustrative and enlightening. You covered the basics of phonetics in a very short time and the way it was organized was really good... You are a very enthusiastic teacher who cares about students, and that shows. You took all the time needed to make sure that everybody was following you. You were careful to create a nice atmosphere in class (which is essential to establish a good rapport between students and teacher).

Overall, I've really liked your intervention. Hope you have enjoyed yourself as well."

Last-minute e-mail, sent by head teacher on June 10th 2012, in answer to a plea on my part for final positive support on the intervention: "As for any improvement regarding pronunciation, that is really ambitious for just three sessions. Although what did change was their attitude towards phonetics, which is saying a lot."

I'll leave the report on this note.

5. ENVOI

I have titled this section of the paper, with such a curious, old-fashioned and learned word, advisedly. One of the first documents cited in this report was the Council of Europe's "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (commonly known as CEFR), Strasbourg 2001. It is perhaps fitting that we start and end this paper with a reference to the same authority. That same organism endorses and publishes Newby *et al's* (2007) "European Portfolio for the Language Teacher", a self-assessment tool for teachers which gives a series of guidelines on what is expected of these professionals, listing a series of descriptors whereby the teachers themselves may evaluate their progress. I have selected those which I think my intervention, during all the three sessions it took up, demonstrates having sufficiently (if not amply) covered (or, as the document suggests, "coloured in", somewhat like this):

⇒	[05/10/2012]	⇒	[05/15/2012]	⇒	[05/17/2012]	⇒
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Under *Self-assessment*:

- 10. I can evaluate and select a variety of techniques to make learners aware of, discriminate and help them to pronounce sounds in the TL. (P. 22).
- 11. I can evaluate and select a variety of techniques to make learners aware of, discriminate and help them to use stress, rhythm and intonation. (P. 22).

Under *Writing interaction*:

- 11. I can evaluate and select a variety of techniques to make learners aware of and use spelling patterns and irregular spelling. (P. 24).

Under *Listening*:

- I can design and select different activities which help learners to recognise and interpret typical features of spoken language (tone of voice, intonation, style of speaking, etc.) (P. 25).

Under *Culture*:

- I can evaluate and select texts, source materials and activities to make the learners aware of stereotyped views and challenge these. (P. 29).

Under *Learner Autonomy*:

- 5. I can evaluate and select tasks which help learners to reflect on and develop specific learning strategies and study skills. (P. 45).

Under "What to include in the Portfolio", Newby et al. finally indicate the following suggestion: "Evidence in the form of case studies and action research." (P. 60). I think this report can be said to partake a little of both case study and action research.

Later on (p. 69), the document further specifies:

- Case studies of learners (e.g., older/younger, more able/less able, etc.)
- Small-scale case action research projects (for the self-same teacher or to share with others for discussion, reflection, analysis...)

It was said at the beginning of this report that the main motive of the action was to be finally useful: I am absolutely confident that it has, and will be so, for all the participants, and also for any colleague who may read the paper. I've done my best, now God do the rest.

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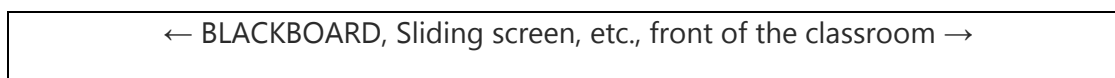
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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Seating Chart of the students and diverse comments noted on the observation session of 31st January 2012

On the 31st January 2012, the student-teacher, as his Tutor had counselled, took the opportunity to draw a "Seating Chart" and take some notes on how the students chose to sit in the classroom and how they interacted with each other and the teachers. Many of the notes taken were on hypothetical "problem areas" in the students' pronunciation of English, as the student-teacher had earlier been told by the Tutor that he would shortly be doing some pronunciation work with them.

The students sat as follows, facing the front of the classroom: →



Projector

TV

← M. C. H. (The teacher moved around the desks as she did correction-work with the students.) →

A		B		C	
1- "Greta"	2- "Ricky"	1- "Dave"	2- "Dan"	1- "Tina"	2- "Dolly"
3- "Joseph"	4- "Fred"	3- "Ben"	4- "James"	3- "Bart"	4- "Annie"
5_	6_	5- "Sally"	6_	5- "Carrie"	6- "Lily"
7- Rey (Conversation assistant)	8_	7_	8- "Frank"	7- "Rosie"	8_

Peter (Observer)



[The chart is a mere diagram: it does not show the corridor between each row (A, B, C), and the names given the students are of course not the real ones.]

The seating arrangement seems on retrospective to be a more-or-less permanent one, with few variations.

Some passing remarks on the students and their interaction that day:

The students in "C" row (6 girls, 1 boy) were rather low-key and quiet, the proverbial "good students": more attentive to the teacher/materials than to each other. They spoke little, and not always in English unless they were called on. They didn't really seem to enjoy speaking English amongst themselves, although "Bart", who was late for class (and whose Spanish accent was a bit on the noticeable side, although that didn't

seem to worry him excessively) did try; he spoke a bit too slowly but correctly, with almost unnoticeable errors, as in the sentence “I don’t trust people who works in Facebook”; he seemed quite confident and sure of himself. “Dolly” was exceptional in that, apart from being the youngest student (16), one of her parents was English; it was evident that she received input in English in a different way from the other students. It’s hard to pinpoint how; perhaps in her attitude, seemingly less involved, more aloof (towards the English language) than the rest of her informal group. The age-gap (as respects the rest) probably had something to do with it as well. And of course her production of English was excellent, when she chose to speak that language instead of Spanish. The girls in this group were all about the same age and seemed to be friends outside the school too. A dictionary circulated around this group, seemingly belonging to someone sitting at the back.

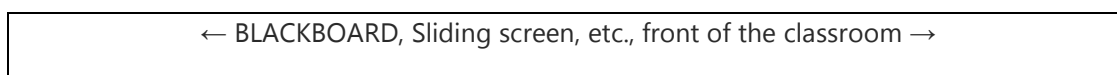
In the “B” row, “Dave” spoke very spontaneously, and had quite a good accent to go with it, and English-sounding intonation too (although he couldn’t manage the phoneme / ʃ /). “Dan” was also a spontaneous speaker (of good English), slightly noticeable Spanish accent notwithstanding. “Ben” was also relatively young, perhaps 25+ish - the other men in class were all definitely (early) middle-aged, 35-40 - and he took part in everything that was done, although in rather an independent way. “James” was not at all ashamed to speak English, which he did fluently – he had no problem improvising his speech - and quite correctly, with minor grammatical mistakes, such as “I can look your data” for “I can look up your data”. His pronunciation showed some “interference” from Spanish: “write”, for example, he pronounced as /grait/, or the phrase “bear in mind” as /’bi:r In main/. “Sally” had some difficulty distinguishing stressed/unstressed sounds, she tended to stress every syllable, for example she pronounced the word “islands” thus: /’ai’lans/, which made it difficult for the interlocutor(s) to understand her sometimes. “Frank” spoke very good English and looked very intent. Average students, on the better side.

The small group in the “A” row seemed to be friends outside the classroom as well as inside. “Greta” spoke English very well indeed, and she was called on to speak it quite often, as she both spoke for herself and acted as spokesman to her partner, “Ricky”, who didn’t open his mouth once in the whole of the two hours. (But “Greta”’s pronunciation left room for improvement: she was overzealous, and sometimes got carried away by her efforts at perfection, as when she pronounced “moreover” as /more’uva/, or “vehicles” as /ve’i:klz/, or “profits” as /’proufits/). “Joseph” was over-spontaneous: he really threw himself into it with a fiendly spirit, and the observer could tell he really enjoyed the class; but he committed some grammatical mistakes (“another persons”), and the student-teacher found it difficult to understand his pronunciation when he spoke (he couldn’t hear nor produce the distinction between /t/ and /tʃ/, nor that between /l/ and /i:/). His rendering of “promised” was /pr□□maɪst/. As to “Fred”, the (very serious-looking) fourth student in the group, well, suffice it to say he had learnt his entire Presentation by heart, every single word of it, and, naturally, reeled it off perfectly. But it was monotonous and cold and didn’t “sell” itself. There were no questions for him at the end. His level of English is correct grammar-wise, but he has a strong Spanish accent.

Appendix 2: Seating Chart of the students during the second intervention session, 15th May 2012

As the student-researcher-teacher was actively carrying out his intervention, the teacher in charge of the course noted down the students' seating arrangements, which differed slightly from those which had been noted by myself during my observation period. We can also see that lesson-attendance was highly irregular, and some of the students were new to me.

The students sat as follows, facing the front of the classroom:



Projector

TV

← P☺ (who moved around the classroom, but always stood in a position where the students could see him and watch how he moved his mouth) →

A		B		C	
1- "Greta"	2- "Dave"	1- "Fred"	2- "Ricky"	1- "Sally"	2- "Annie"
3- "Joseph"	4- "Frank"	3- "Ben"	4- "Dan"	3- "Rosie"	4- "Lisa"
5-	6-		6 -	5- "Carrie"	6- "Tina"
7- Rey (Conversation assistant)	8 -		8 -	7- "Bart"	8 -

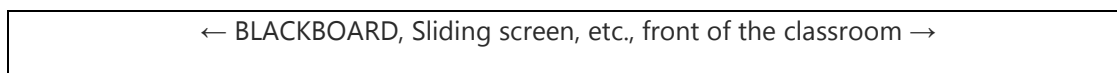


[The chart does not show the corridor between each row (A, B, C), and the names given the students are of course not the real ones.]

**Appendix 3: Seating Chart of the students during the third intervention session,
17th May 2012**

As the student-researcher-teacher was actively carrying out his intervention, the teacher in charge of the course noted down the students’ seating arrangements; the observer will see that they differed slightly from day to day. (Obviously, fixed seating would not be imposed on these more mature students).

The students sat as follows, facing the front of the classroom:

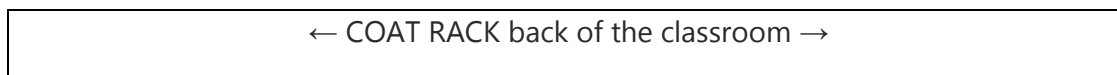


Projector

TV

← P☺ (who moved around the classroom, but always stood in a position where the students could see him and watch how he moved his mouth) →

A		B		C	
1-	2-	1-	2-	1- "Carrie"	2- "Sally"
3- "Joseph"	4- "Dick"	3- "Ricky"	4- "Fred"	3- "Annie"	4- "Tina"
5- "Greta"	6- "Ned"	4- "Ben"	6- "James"	5- "Bart"	6-
7-	8 -	7- "Dave"	8 – "Dan"	7-	8 -



[The chart does not show the corridor between each row (A, B, C), and the names given the students are of course not the real ones.]

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for the students

NAME.....Date of birth.....

1. Why do you want to learn English?
2. How old were you when you started learning English? How long have you been learning English?
3. Have you ever been on a visit to an English-speaking country? For how long? Make a brief comment on your stay there.
4. How important is it for you to have a good pronunciation in English?
5. Do your English teachers sometimes not understand you when you speak? How do they correct your errors of pronunciation? (By asking you for repetition/with phonetic explanations/other.....)
6. Do you ever speak with other native speakers of English? Where, when and how? (Make a brief comment on the fluidity of your communication).
7. Does the recorded material help to improve your pronunciation? How?
8. Do you work with the recorded material on your own, at home?
9. Do you ever listen to recordings of yourself speaking English? Do you compare your speech to a model's? Can you appreciate differences between your speech and the model's?
10. What English sounds (or combinations of sounds) are difficult for you to say?
11. Do you think that good pronunciation only consists of saying the isolated sounds correctly, or are there more factors involved? For example.....
12. Have you ever been taught to recognize patterns between the pronunciation and the spelling of English words?
14. Apart from the phonetic exercises in the course book, what else do you think could help you improve your pronunciation? (TV/films in English, surfing the Web for videos...) Make a list. Does the *EOI* facilitate any of these?
15. Are you a good singer? Do you play any musical instrument? Are you a good dancer, or do you have two left feet?

Appendix 5: Teacher's Questionnaire

1. How old were you when you started learning English? How long have you been learning English? And teaching English? (Sorry for the impertinence, this is standard procedure. All information will be treated confidentially).
2. What drove you to pursue professional English teaching? A visit you made to an English-speaking country, a good teacher at school, books, other.....
3. As a teacher, how much importance do you give to the students' having a good pronunciation in English?
4. How important is it for the students? Do you know what their motivations are, for learning English?
5. Do you do specific pronunciation practice in your lessons, or as it comes up along teaching-learning procedures?
6. What form does it take? Drills (with recorded voices, or not)/phonological explanations/other.....
7. Does the conversation assistant do any of the above? What does she do?
8. What is your opinion on the audiovisual material that comes with the course book? Can you think of any noteworthy points (aiming at phonetic competence)? Or any negative aspects, also with that consideration?
9. Do you use in class, or ever recommend for use at home, any of the other resources available at the *EOI*? Can you give examples?
10. How competent is this class in oral expression as a whole, as compared to other classes in your experience? Give the class a global qualification:
11. Which English sounds do Spanish students find especially difficult to say? Does the course book offer specific practice on these?
12. Same two questions, applied to other features of English speech (stress, word- and syllable-catenation, intonation, body language...):
13. Are the students taught about orthography, the recurrent patterns of sound and spelling that occur in spite of English writing being morphemic, not phonetic, or do the students infer these highly irregular rules on their own?
14. Can/Do the students ever make recordings of their own speech in English, to compare their performance with a model speaker's? Is this done in class, or independently at home?
15. How do you think your students' phonetic competence might be improved?
.....

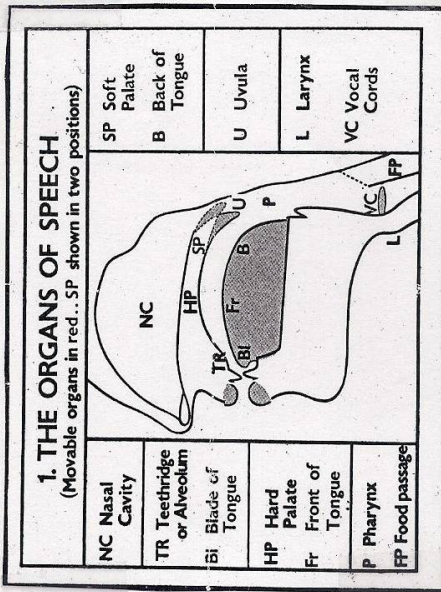
Appendix 6: Personalised Phonemic Chart

PRONUNCIATION

DESIGNED TO PHOTOCOPY

PERSONALISED PHONEMIC CHART									
i:	TREE	CREAM			i	HAPPY	MANY		
I	TIN	BIG			e	HEAD	EGG		
ʌ	LOVE	CUP			æ	CAT	ANIMAL		
ɑ:	BAR	HALF			ɔ:	SHORT	ALL		
ɒ	DOG	SOCK			ə	AGO	MOTHER		
ɜ:	WORD	GIRL			u:	MOON	SHOE		
ʊ	CASUAL	INNOCUOUS			ʊ	BOOK	PULL		
eɪ	RACE	DAY			aɪ	SKY	FIVE		
ɔɪ	JOY	VOICE			ʊə	MANURE	CURE		
eə	WHERE	CHAIR			ɪə	NEAR	BEER		
aʊ	COW	HOUSE			əʊ	OLD	FLOWN		
b	BED	CABBAGE			d	DOOR	LADDER		
t	TOP	BETTER			p	PEN	LEAP		
k	CAKE	CLOCK			g	GAME	BIGGER		
dʒ	JOB	AGE			tʃ	CHEW	TOUCH		
v	VASE	LEAVE			f	FAT	LEAF		
θ	THIN	TEETH			ð	THIS	FATHER		
s	SOAP	MISS			z	ZEBRA	QUIZ		
ʒ	VISION	GARAGE			ʃ	SHIP	WASH		
n	NOSE	KNIFE			ŋ	BANG	SINGER		
m	MEAT	LAMB			h	HOT	HELP		
l	LAMP	YELLOW			r	ROOM	LORRY		
w	WIND	WAIT			j	YOU	EUROPE		

Appendix 7: Physiology of English vowel production



THE ENGLISH VOWELS

Tongue Positions in the palate. The colon (:) after a vowel means its duration is twice as long

	front	central part	back
high	i: ("tree") ɪ ("fish")		u: ("moon") ʊ ("bull")
mid	e ("leg") æ ("cat")	ʌ ("cup") ə ("balloon")	ɒ (or ɔ) ("dog")
low		ɜ: ("thirty")	ɔ: ("dog's paw")

Lip Positions



Fig. 36. Lip-position of English long **i**.



Fig. 38. Lip-position of English short **e**.



Fig. 40. Lip-position of English **ɪ**.



Fig. 42. Lip-position of English **æ**.



Fig. 44. Lip-position of English **u**.



Fig. 49. Lip-position of English long **u**.



Fig. 48. Lip-position of English short **u**.



Fig. 46. Lip-position of English short **ɒ**.



Fig. 47. Lip-position of English long **ɔ**.



Fig. 50. Lip-position of my English **ʌ**.



Fig. 53. Lip-position of the English 'neutral' vowel **ə**.

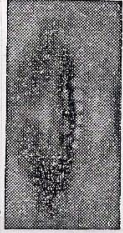
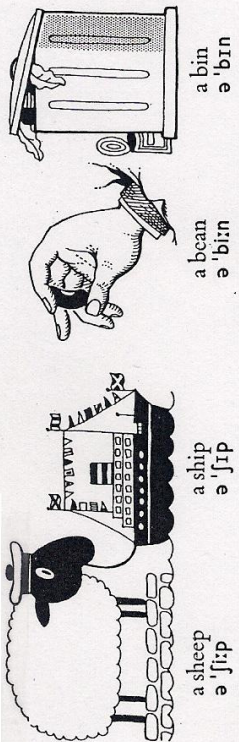


Fig. 51. Lip-position of English long **ɜ**.

Appendix 8: Vowel practice sample

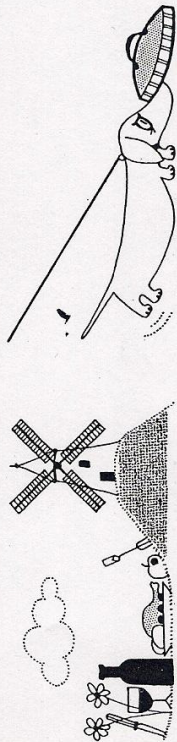
i:/I



a sheep
ə 'ʃi:p

a ship
ə 'ʃi:p

a bin
ə 'bɪn



a meal
ə 'mi:l

a mill
ə 'mi:l

a lid
ə 'li:d

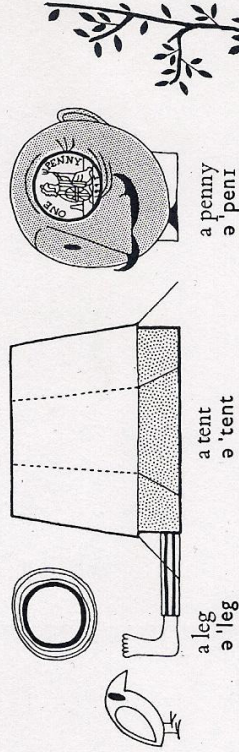


Jean likes gin. . . . but gin doesn't like Jean !
'dʒi:n 'lɑ:k 'dʒɪn | bət 'dʒɪn 'dʌznt 'lɑ:k 'dʒɪn |



Sleepy Freda seeks size six slippers | to fit her feet |
'sli:pɪ 'fri:de | 'sɪks saɪz | 'sɪks 'slɪpəz | tə 'fɪt hɜ: 'fi:t |

Fish and chips are cheap | and easy to eat
'fɪʃ | ən 'tʃɪps | ə 'tʃi:p | and 'ɪzɪ tʊ 'i:t |



a leg
ə 'leg

a tent
ə 'tent

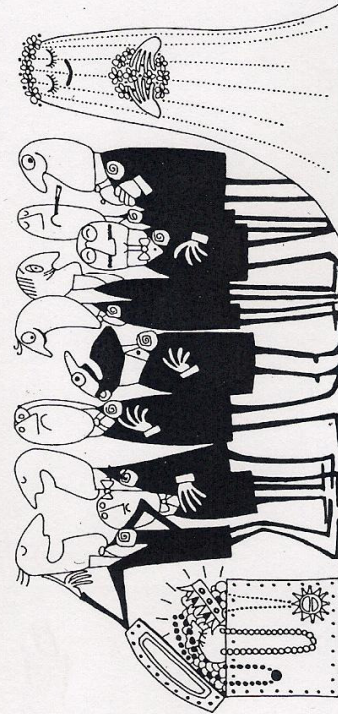
a penny
ə 'penɪ



a letter
ə 'le:tə

a wren's nest
ə 'renz 'nest

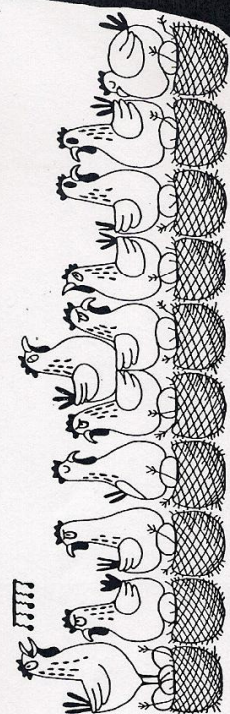
seven pets
'sevn 'pets



a treasure chest
ə 'treʒə tʃest

ten well-dressed men
'ten 'wel 'drest men

a wedding-dress
ə 'wedɪŋ 'dres



eleven hens | with twelve eggs | in ten nests |
ɪ 'levn 'henz | wɪð 'twelv 'egz | ɪn 'ten 'nests |

Appendix 9: Rhythmic Limericks

Limericks

Limericks are five-line humorous poems. They have quite a strong rhythm (3-3-2-2-3 beats always, no matter how many syllables there are in the line) and rhyme A-A-B-B-A. Edward Lear invented them c. 1850, but many others (Lewis Carroll...) have followed suit. They begin by introducing a person and a place. The humour is rather disrespectful, and often based on some kind of stereotype – cultural, sexual, etc. You can try writing one. Think of a person and a place: "There was a ___ in/from/at ___", then go on, keeping the rhythm and the rhyme as in the examples.



There was a young man from Nepal
Who bought a nice bat and a ball
A glove and some pads.
It was one of his fads
For he didn't play baseball at all.



There was a young woman from Spain
Who was terribly sick on a train
Not once but again
And again and again
And again and again and again.



There was a rich widow from China
Who went for a cruise on a liner.
She enjoyed the fine wine
And the chances to dine
With the bachelors there on the liner.



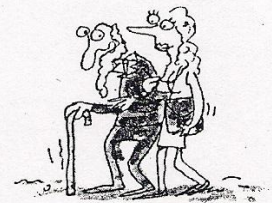
There was a young girl from Australia
Who felt that her life was a failure.
She did badly at school
And she felt such a fool
That silly young girl from Australia



There was a young woman from France
Who went to an exotic dance.
While doing the tango
She slipped on a mango
That fell from a fruit bowl by chance.



There was a young man from Korea
Who loved drinking beer after beer.
He always drank more
Till he fell on the floor
That drunken young man from Korea



There was an old man from America
Who had a young girlfriend called Erica.
People all wondered why
She went out with this guy
But his money appealed to young Erica.



Appendix 10: Intonation directions game

C10 Intonation directions Game 2 Sheet 1

N

I've told you what I want to do; now you tell me.

1
What do you want to do this evening?

I know what you want to do tomorrow evening, but what about today?

We've agreed what we want to do this afternoon, but what about this evening?

I know what you don't want to do!

N

Or has she not? Tell me the truth now.

2
Has Maria finished her homework yet?

Because if not, she shouldn't be spending so much time helping you with your homework!

I know Angela's finished, but what about Maria?

Or is she still doing it?

N

Have you decided yet?

3
Are you going to get him a present for his birthday?

He got you one. Are you going to do the same?

I know you got him a present for Christmas. Are you going to do the same for his birthday?

Or just a card?

N

I know who the man in the black coat is.

4
Who's that man with the black hat?

I know who the other man with the black hat is.

I know who the woman in the black hat is.

I know who the man in the grey hat is.

Appendix 11: Mr. P. A. Kelly with “tongue-puppet”



Mr. P. A. Kelly demonstrating the position of the tongue and the lips in the production of the English simple vowel /e/, with the help of the home-made “tongue-puppet”.