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Teaching the Vowels of English to Spanish Students: Some Suggestions

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A mi padre, por su admirable capacidad de trabajo y adaptación

FOREWORD

This essay is my final assignment for the Masters in Secondary School Teaching, Vocational Training and Language Teaching Training (Foreign Language Teaching – English) at the University of Valladolid.

This paper will discuss the main psychological features affecting the teaching and learning of pronunciation. It will then go on to present a complete description of the vocalic system of English so that it can be compared to the Spanish equivalent. Finally, it will suggest a number of activities to teach English vowels in the Spanish Secondary school system. In this essay, I will provide an analysis on how language learners may benefit from the study of English pronunciation for communication purposes.

Since I soon will be a teacher myself, I would like to take the opportunity to thank all of the teachers that I ever had. Their help has been invaluable for me. Special thanks to those that were part of this Masters for their support and encouragement.

I am grateful to the supervisor of this essay, Rosalía Martínez de Miguel, for her guidance. Thanks to Patricia San José Rico for her help as well.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. Enrique Cámara Arenas, my English Phonetics professor at the University of Valladolid. His extensive knowledge and enthusiasm about the field of pronunciation made me who I am as a student. Enrique has always been willing to help throughout the last six years and his confidence in my abilities has had a huge influence on me.

I am thankful to my parents for showing me the importance of effort and hard work and particularly for their support during an especially difficult year. Thank you to my friends for their patience and moral support.

Despite all the help that I have received, I am entirely responsible for the errors or inadequacies which may remain in this work.

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TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION: AN INTRODUCTION

Aspects such as the native language of the student, age, personality, motivation and attitude play an important role in the teaching-learning process of English pronunciation. It has been argued that these "abilities and limitations of learners" have an influence on "the priorities and schedule of events in any teaching program" (Kenworthy, 1990:1)

The contents of this chapter are based mainly on Joanne Kenworthy's *Teaching English Pronunciation* (1990), Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich's *Teaching American English Pronunciation* (1998), Jesús Fernández González's *Reflections of Foreign Accent* (1998), Susan House's *Didáctica del Inglés* (2011) and Edith Aurrecoechea Montenegro's *La Pronunciación y su Tratamiento en el Aula de E/LE* (2002).

NATIVE LANGUAGE

One of the main factors that affect pronunciation learning is the mother tongue of the student. It is normally the case that "a foreign accent has some of the sound characteristics of the learner's native language" (Kenworthy, 1990:4). The first language of the learner has an influence not only on their production but also on their ability to perceive sounds. As a result, "learners hear the second language through a filter, the filter being the sound system of the native language" (Avery and Ehrlich, 1998:15). However, the native language is not a determinant factor in the teaching and learning of pronunciation because "people from many

different language backgrounds can and do acquire a near-native pronunciation of English" (Kenworthy, 1990:4).

AGE

The Critical Period Hypothesis states that "adults lose or diminish the ability for acquiring second languages to a certain extent" (Fernández González, 1998:137). Selingson suggests that the limit to acquire patterns and sounds is placed in eleven years of age (2011). Consequently, it could be argued that age plays an important role in learning the pronunciation of a foreign language. Fernández González, however, states that "children learning a foreign language in an academic setting but not in the country where the language is spoken present the same traces of foreign accent as adults, no matter if they are exposed to native input as tapes, videos or even a native teacher" (Fernández González, 1998:137). As a result, Kenworthy argues that "we do not yet have evidence for a simple and straightforward link between age and the ability to pronounce a new language." (Kenworthy, 1990:6). Despite their age, "some adult speakers attain perfect mastery and are taken for native speakers of the language" (Fernández González, 1998:138).

FACTORS RELATED TO PERSONALITY

Apart from instruction, there are strong grounds for suggesting that the personality of students is also significant in learning the pronunciation of a foreign language. Avery and Ehrlich claim that "learners who are out-going, confident and willing to take risks probably have more opportunity to practice their pronunciation of the second language". On the contrary, the

authors consider that "learners who are introverted, inhibited and unwilling to take risks lack opportunities for practice". As a result, Avery and Ehrlich recommend creating a "non-threatening atmosphere" during class sessions so that "student participation is encouraged" (Avery and Ehrlich, 1998:14)

MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDE

A number of motivated students would seem to be eager to improve their pronunciation because they regard their progress as an "achievement motivation". Unconcerned learners, on the other hand, remain unaware that "the way they speak is resulting in difficulty, irritation or misunderstanding for the listener" (Kenworthy, 1990:8). Nonetheless, some "students may wish to improve their pronunciation in order to make themselves more comprehensible" (Avery and Ehrlich, 1998:14) even though they may not aim to sound as native speakers of English. As Selingson notes, "accents are closely aligned with culture". For that reason, a number of learners regard their foreign accent as "part of their culture." (Selingson, 2011:113). Some authors claim that the attitude and identity towards the foreign language and culture has an influence on the pronunciation of the student as well. Kenworthy, for example, is right to observe that "those learners who show positive feelings towards the speakers of the new language tend to develop more accurate, native-like accents." (Kenworthy, 1990:4) The author considers that this type of language students is not only enthusiastic about being integrated into the new speech community but also is attracted to its culture. Even though "an emphatic attitude does not guarantee a command of the phonic system," (Fernández González, 1998), "the more strongly second language learners identify

with the members of the second language culture, the more likely they are to sound like members of that culture" (Avery and Ehrlich, 1998:14).

Chapter Two
THE VOCALIC SYSTEM OF ENGLISH

This chapter intends to provide a complete description of the English vocalic system. Hence, it will first examine the definition for the term 'vowel'. It will then go on to consider two possible classifications for the vowels of any language. It will also provide an analysis of both pure vowels and diphthongs in English. Finally, a number of processes affecting English vocalic sounds will be explained. The vowels, diphthongs and their corresponding phonetic transcriptions are those related to the variety of English known as General American (GAm). This rhotic dialect of English "is spoken by the majority of Americans, namely those who do not have a noticeable eastern or southern accent" (Wells, 2005).

DEFINING VOWELS

Vowels are defined as a category of speech sounds whose production does not imply any obstruction to the outgoing flow of air. Even though the production of a number of vowels requires a contact between the rims of the tongue and the upper molars, the central part of the tongue, composed by the apex, dorsum and root, is always separated from the palate. As a result, a voiced eggressive air-stream flows out without any closure or narrowing and the escape of air is typically completed in an unimpeded way over the middle of the tongue (Gimson, 1994). A vowel is, therefore, "a glottal tone modified by the action of the upper resonators of the mouth, pharyngeal and nasal cavities" and "the movable organs mainly responsible for shaping these resonators are the soft palate, lips and tongue" (Gimson,

1989:37). Consequently, vowels "can be made different from each other (…) by raising a certain part of the tongue to different levels, by modifying the shape of the lips and by raising and lowering the velum" (Finch and Ortiz Lira, 1988:11).

The term vowel has traditionally designated a sound produced with open approximation of the articulators. This definition could be applied to the pronunciation of English semi-vowels as well because English /j/, /w/ and /r/ share the articulatory characteristics of English vowels. However, vowel sounds are also syllabic due to the fact that they are almost always found at the centre of a syllable. That is to say, they function as the central or nuclear elements of syllables whereas semi-vowels or consonants perform marginal functions within syllables.

CLASSIFYING VOWELS

This section provides an account of two possible descriptions for vowels. First, Daniel Jones' Cardinal Vowel System is described. Roach claims that the Cardinal Vowel System is a standard reference system useful to describe, classify and compare the vowels of any language (Roach, 1991). Furthermore, an articulatory description for vowels is also included. This description deals with a number of factors, such as the height of the dorsum, the part of the dorsum which is highest, length, tension, lip position and stability.

As it was previously mentioned, Daniel Jones devised a visual system of vowel representation and description known as the Cardinal Vowel System. This scheme is based on symbols and diacritic signs which represent the area of action of the dorsum. Gimson considers Jones' Cardinal Vowel System to be useful due to the fact that it is a "standard and invariable scale" which is not language-specific (Gimson, 1989: 36).

This system devises eight primary cardinal vowels, which are referred to as follows 1 [i]; 2 [e]; 3 [ɛ]; 4 [a]; 5 [ɑ]; 6 [ɔ]; 7 [o] and 8 [u]. The front series, composed by cardinal vowels 1 [i]; 2 [e]; 3 [ɛ]; 4
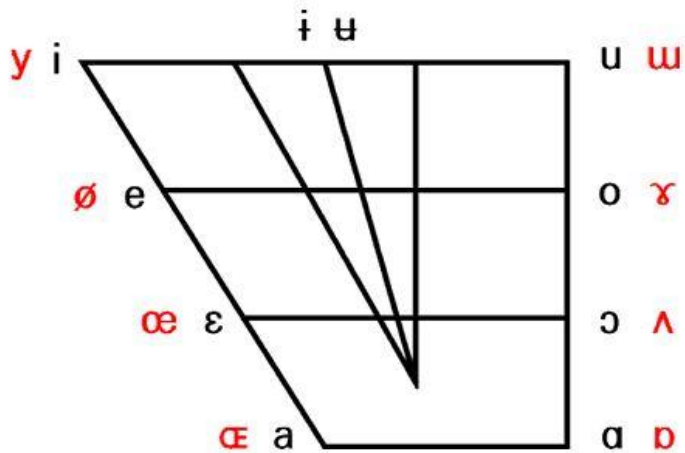
[a] and 5 [ɑ], from the back series, are pronounced with spread lips, while the three remaining members of the back series, 6 [ɔ]; 7 [o] and 8 [u], have varying degrees of lip-rounding (39). A secondary series can also be obtained by reversing the lip-position. Those vowels are named as 9 [y]; 10 [ǿ]; 11 [œ]; 12 [Œ]; 13 [ɒ]; 14 [ʌ]; 15 [ɣ] and 16 [ɯ]. Furthermore, another two cardinal vowels can be represented. Those are 17 (unrounded) [ɨ] and 18 (rounded) [ʉ]. These symbols represent sounds articulated when the centre of the tongue reaches its highest point in the vocal tract. According to their corresponding tongue positions, cardinal vowels may also be classified into two lip shape categories, such as (a) unrounded [i, e, ɛ, a, ɑ, ʌ, ɣ, ɯ, ɨ] and (b) rounded [y, ǿ, œ, Œ, ɒ, ɔ, o, u, ʉ]. Diacritics correspond to modifications of cardinal vowels. For instance, raised dots [¨] mean centralized (39-40), [⊥] implies that the vowel is slightly above the level of the Cardinal Vowel and [⊤] indicates that is slightly below.

The area of action of the dorsum can be visually represented by means of a quadrilateral figure (see figure above[1]). This diagram is usually divided into four different sections corresponding to the four cardinal degrees of raising. As a consequence, the [i – u] level is referred to as the close area. It represents the level beyond which the dorsum would contact the palate or approximate enough to produce friction. The region between [e – o] is known as the half-close area whereas the [ɛ – ɔ] level is the half-open area. Finally, the [a – ɑ] is the open area (43). In this area, the dorsum and the jaw is totally lowered. Circular symbols within any of the mentioned areas indicate that the corresponding part of the dorsum, namely front, front-centralized, central, back-centralized or back, is placed in the highest position during resonance. Circular symbols within the central triangle designate that the tongue is flat at a certain distance from the palate.

Apart from the Cardinal Vowel description explained above, vowels are also defined depending on their timbre. That is to say, the different vowels of any language are described according to the position, shape and height of the tongue during the process of resonance because the process of resonance involved in their production generates a number of specific perceptual properties for each of them.

Vowels are classified as close, half-close, mid, half-open or open depending on the distance between the highest point of the dorsum of the tongue and the palate during the process of resonance. When producing close vowels such as English /uː/ and Spanish /u/, the highest point of the dorsum is at a minimum distance to the palate. Open vowels, however, are

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[1] Daniel Jones Cardinal Vowels – Speech Internet Dictionary

produced when the highest point of the dorsum is at maximum distance to the palate. Both

English /ɑ:/ and Spanish /a/ are open vowels. Those vowels pronounced when the highest

point of the dorsum is at a medium distance to the palate are named mid vowels, as it is usually

the case of English /ə/. Therefore, vowels whose articulation imply that the highest point of

the dorsum is between the mid and the close position are referred to as half-close whereas

half-open vowels are produced when the highest point of the dorsum is between the mid and

the open position. For instance, English /ɪ/ and Spanish /e/ are classified as half-close vowels

while English /æ/ and /ʌ/ are as half-open vowels.

Moreover, according to the part of the dorsum which is kept at the minimum distance

from the palate, vowels may be front, back, central, front-centralized or back-centralized. If

producing front vowels such as English /æ/ and Spanish /e/, the part that occupies the highest

position within the mouth during resonance is the dorsum. Conversely, back vowels imply that

the part which is placed at the highest position is the back dorsum. For example, English /ɔ:/

and Spanish /u/ are back vowels. Finally, central vowels are those produced when the tongue

remains flat regardless its height. That is the case of English /ə/ and /ɜ:/. The articulatory

difference between two vowels can also be related to the area of the front or back dorsum that

is highest. As a result, vowels may be front-centralized and back-centralized. English /i:/, for

example, is a front vowel, while /ɪ/ is front-centralized. In American pronunciation, English

/ɔ:/ is back whereas /ʌ/ is back-centralized. The concept of retracted refers to front vowels

which are not yet centralized, as it is the case of English /iː/ in relation to Cardinal Vowel 1. Similarly, advanced vowels are back although not yet back-centralized. For instance, English /uː/ is said to be advanced compared to Cardinal Vowel 8.

Regarding their duration, vowels may be long or short. English /iː/ or /uː/ are long vowels. Nevertheless, they are shorter when closed by voiceless consonants than in open syllables or closed by voiced consonants. The vowel /iː/ has full-length in *bead* /biːd/ and half-length in *beat* /biˑt/.

Concerning the position of the lips implied in their articulation, vowels are usually classified into rounded and unrounded. The former are produced when the lips protrude and form a circular shape, adding specific perceptual features to the vowel. Different degrees of lip rounding may be formed. Consequently, tightly rounded vowels as English /uː/ or slightly rounded vowels as English /ʊ/ can be pronounced. In unrounded vowels, lips may either remain neutral, as it is the case of English /ʌ/ and Spanish /a/, or spread, as in English /iː/ and Spanish /i/. Both rounded and unrounded vowels can be produced with different degrees of lip separation as well.

Depending on the amount of muscle tension implied in their production, vowels may be divided in lax or tense. Lax vowels do not require a great amount of tension in the tongue and lips compared to that used in the production of tense vowels. As a result, English /iː/ is tense

with respect to English /ɪ/ and that English /uː/ is unlike English /ʊ/ in that the former is tense and the latter is lax.

In order to produce pure vowels or monophthongs, the speech organs involved in their production remain stable. As a result, monophthongs are "vowels whose quality remains constant". Nevertheless, the pronunciation of diphthongs, or "sequences of two vowel qualities within a single syllable" (Wells, 2005:223), implies that the dorsum, jaws and lips move gradually from one initial position towards another during the process of resonance. According to Gimson, diphthongs contain a first element or starting point and a second element, which is the point in the direction of which the glide is made. English diphthong /aʊ/, for example, involves a movement of the tongue from a starting point [a] towards an endpoint /ʊ/. To be more specific, the starting point is open and front-centralized, and the tongue performs a glide towards a half-close back-centralized position. The lips move gradually from neutrally open to slightly rounded; and the jaw is lowered before the initiation of the vowel and moves up accompanying the raising of the back-centralized dorsum. In English, diphthongs can be falling or rising. As opposed to rising diphthongs, the length associated with the glide of falling diphthongs is concentrated on the first element whereas the second one is only slightly sounded.

ENGLISH PURE VOWELS

In standard American English pronunciation (GAm), eleven monophthongs or pure vowels can be identified. Those are /iː/, /ɪ/, /e/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /ə/, /ɑː/, /ɔː/, /ʊ/, /uː/ and /ɜː/ and are described in detail below.

English /iː/ - [ï̞ː] can be defined as a front and close vowel which is nearer to Cardinal Vowel [i] than to Cardinal Vowel [e]. During the process of resonance, the front of the tongue is raised to a height slightly below and behind the front close position. The velum is up, the lips are spread and the tongue is tense. The rims contact firmly with the upper molars. /iː/ is a tense vowel.
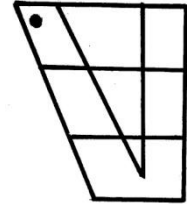
English /ɪ/ - [ë̞] is a front, half-close, centralized vowel. The centralized part of the

dorsum is above the half-close position. English /ɪ/ is more open compared with Cardinal Vowel no. 1 [i]. During the process of resonance, the velum is up and the lips are slightly spread. Besides, /ɪ/ is a very lax vowel compared to /iː/. The rims contact lightly with the upper molars.
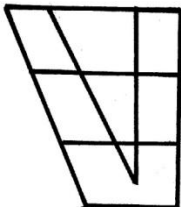
English /e/ - [ɛ̝] is a front and mid vowel. In other words, the front

dorsum is in a position between half-open and mid. The lips are slightly spread and the rims contact lightly with the upper molars during its production. /e/ is tenser than /ɪ/. However, it is considered lax when compared to the diphthong /eɪ/.
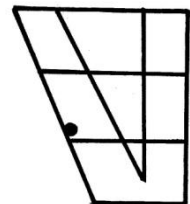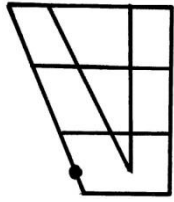
English /æ/ – [ɛ̞] – [a̠] – [æ] is a front vowel which is articulated between the half-open and open position. The velum is up, the lips are neutrally open and the side rims produce a light contact with the back upper molars. In American English (GAm), /æ/ is a lax vowel. Furthermore, /æ/ has been traditionally considered a short vowel.

English /ʌ/ - [ʌ̈] is a back-centralized, half-open vowel. That is to say, the centralized part of the back dorsum is in a position between half-open and open during the process of resonance. In addition, the velum is up, the lips are

neutrally open and the rims do not contact the upper molars. English /ʌ/ is a short and lax vowel.
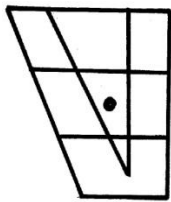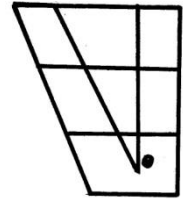
The production of English /ə/ implies that the tongue is flat and situated in the mid position. The velum is up, the lips are in a neutral position and the rims lightly contact the molars. This central, mid vowel is completely lax. Before velar consonants /k/, /g/ and /ŋ/, a half-close /ə/ may be produced. In the phrase *long ago*, /ˌlɑːŋ əˈgoʊ/, /ə/ is pronounced [ə̝] as in [ˌlɑːŋ ə̝ˈgoʊ]. When closed by /r/, Americans would seem to produce a retroflex /ə/ → [ɚ], as in *teacher* /ˈtiːʧər/ → [ˈtiːʧɚ]. This process is known as r-colouring. /ə/ can be elided when preceded by a consonant and followed by a continuant (fricative, approximant and nasal) and another vowel.

For instance, in the words *factory* /ˈfæktərɪ/ → [ˈfæktrɪ] or *fatalist* /ˈfeɪtəlɪst/ →

[ˈfeɪtlɪst], the sound /ə/ can be elided.

English /ɑ:/ - [ä:] is an open, back, centralized vowel. The centralized part of the back dorsum is on the fully open position. During its production, the front dorsum is quite lowered and the jaws are noticeably separated. In addition, the velum is up, the rims do not seem to contact the molars and the lips are neutrally open.
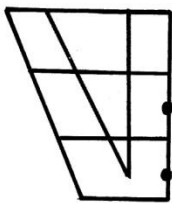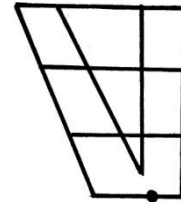
 English /ɔ:/ - [ɒ:] - [ǫ] can be pronounced in two different ways. On the one hand, the production of /ɔ:/ may imply that the back part of the dorsum is in a position slightly above the fully open position. In other words, it can be a back, half-open vowel when it is opened or closed by a consonant other than /r/.

That is the case of words such as *saw* /ˈsɔ:/, *caught* /ˈkɔ:t/ or *ball* /ˈbɔ:l/. On the other hand, in rhotic dialects of English, as it the case of General American (GAm), /ɔ:/ can be pronounced as a shorter vowel when followed by /r/. In other words, it can be a back, mid vowel when closed by /r/. Therefore, the back part of the dorsum is in the mid position during the production of *door* /ˈdɔ:r/, *court* /ˈkɔ:rt/, *lord* /ˈlɔ:rd/ or *war* /ˈwɔ:r/. Both versions share the medium rounding of the lips and the absence of contact between the rims and the molars.

During the process of resonance of /ʊ/ - [ö̞], the centralized part of the dorsum is slightly above the half-close position. In addition, the lips are loosely rounded and the rims contact lightly with the upper molars. This back, half-close vowel is considered to be lax. As it has been mentioned before, /ʊ/ is usually produced with closely but loosely rounded lips.
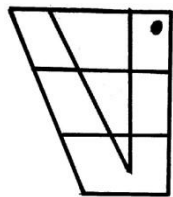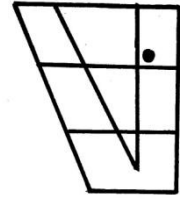
English /u:/ - [ü] is a back, close vowel. The back part of the dorsum is slightly below the fully close position. The articulation of /u:/ is centralized and advanced. During the process of articulation, the lips are closely rounded and might protrude noticeably. The rims produce a light contact with the molars. /u:/ is a tense vowel compared to /ʊ/.

Vowel /ɜ:/ is mid and central. The central part of the dorsum is slightly above the mid position. The tip of the tongue points to the hard palate. For its production, the lips remain neutral and the rims do not seem to contact the molars. /ɜ:/ is a lax vowel.
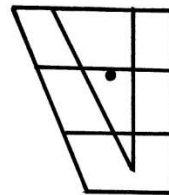
ENGLISH DIPHTHONGS

Concerning diphthongs, that is to say, "glides from one vowel quality to another" (Roach, 2009), standard American English (GAm) /eɪ/, /oʊ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/ and /aʊ/ are described in this section.
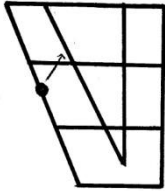
The starting point in the articulation of the English /eɪ/ is mid [e̞]. A glide is produced towards /ɪ/. That is to say, the tongue performs a narrow glide from a position slightly below the half-close front position towards a front centralized vowel, which is slightly above the half-close position. The lips are spread during production. Diphthong /eɪ/ is considered tense compared to /e/.

The starting point for the diphthong /oʊ/ is centralized-back and half-close [o]. Finally, a glide towards /ʊ/ → [ö] is performed. The lips are slightly rounded at the beginning of the glide. However, they become more rounded as the glide proceeds. The centralized part of the back dorsum is slightly below the half-close position and then moves in the direction of a vowel even more centralized, above the half-close position. /oʊ/ is a tense diphthong.
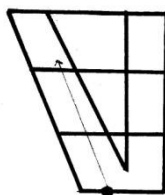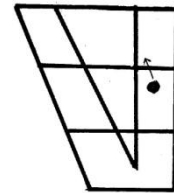
The starting point for /aɪ/ is open [ä], centralized front with spread lips. The glide closes towards /ɪ/, where the lips are slightly spread. This glide would not seem to go beyond [ë] and it is much more extensive than that of

/eɪ/. In other words, the glide begins at the front-centralized open position and moves towards the front-centralized half-close position. As it has been previously mentioned, the lips remain neutrally open at the beginning while they are slightly spread at the end. This diphthong is tense.

In the production of the tense diphthong /ɔɪ/, a glide begins slightly above the half-open back position and moves towards the centralized front half-close position. The starting point for /ɔɪ/ is situated in the back area, between half-open and open [ɔ̞]. The glide is then performed towards [ë]. During the first part of the articulation, the lips are open rounded whereas they are slightly spread by the end of the glide.
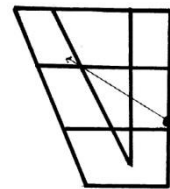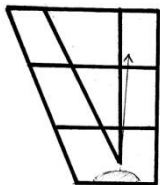
During the process of resonance of /aʊ/, the glide begins at the front-centralized open position, and moves towards a back centralized half-close position. The starting point for /aʊ/ is open, centralized-open, where the lips are neutrally open. The glide moves towards /ʊ/ [ö]. The lips are weakly rounded then. /aʊ/ is a tense diphthong.

PROCESSES AND VARIANTS CONCERNING ENGLISH PURE VOWELS AND DIPHTHONGS

Vocalic sounds in English are affected by a number of processes during their process of resonance. The main ones such as diphthongization, monophthongisation, nasalization, lengthening, shortening, l-coloring and unrounding are explained below.

Diphthongization is the process by which a vowel that is usually produced as a pure vowel is pronounced as a diphthong. /iː/ and /uː/, for instance, may be produced as diphthongs when pronounced in open syllables as in *sea* or *too* . Moreover, words such as *tea* /ˈtiː/ → [tɪɪ] and *bead* /ˈbiːd/ → [ˈbɪɪd] undergo a process of diphthongization because /iː/ is closed by a voiced consonant. In American pronunciation (GAm), diphthongization can be particularly noticeable in vowels that are the nucleus of a syllable closed by voiced nasal consonants. For example, that is the case of the word *man* /ˈmæn/ → [ˈmɛən]. In contrast, Monophthongization is the process by which a diphthong is pronounced as a pure vowel. American diphthongs /eɪ/ and /oʊ/ may be often produced as a monophthong if they are situated at the core of a syllable closed by a voiceless consonant. For example, in standard American pronunciation (GAm) the word *wet* /ˈwet/ and *wait* /ˈweɪt/ may resemble considerably when the latter is pronounced [ˈwe̞ːt].

Nasalization is the process by which a vowel that is usually pronounced as oral is partially or completely produced when the velum is lowered. As a result, the flow of air is expelled through the nasal cavity, adding nasal resonance to the vowel. All of the English pure vowels and diphthongs can be nasalized when placed in syllables opened and/or closed by nasal consonants /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/. The word *morning* /ˈmɔːrnɪŋ/ → [ˈmɔ̃ːrnɪ̃ŋ] , for instance,

contains "partially nasalised vowels throughout the whole word, since the soft palate must be lowered for each of the consonants" (Roach, 2009). The vocalic sounds in *men* /ˈmen/ → [ˈmẽn], marble /ˈmɑːrbl/ → [ˈmɑ̃ːrbl], *bun* /ˈbʌn/ → [ˈbʌ̃n], *main* /ˈmeɪn/ → [ˈmẽɪ̃n], *moan* /ˈmoʊn/ → [ˈmõʊ̃n], *shine* /ˈʃaɪn/ → [ˈʃãɪ̃n], *point* /ˈpɔɪnt/ → [ˈpɔ̃ɪ̃nt] and *pound* /ˈpaʊnd/ → [ˈpãʊ̃nd] are nasalized as well.

Concerning duration, English vowels may be lengthened or shortened. Lengthening is defined as the process by which a short vowel is pronounced slightly longer than it usually is. Vowels can differ in length depending on the phonetic environment in which they are produced. As a result, English short vowels are always lengthened when they are at the core of a syllable closed by voiced consonant or consonantal cluster whose last constituent is voiced. Thus, the vowel in /æ/ in *bad* /ˈbæd/ → [ˈbæˑd] is longer than in *bat* /ˈbæt/ → [ˈbæt]. English /ɪ/, /e/, /ʌ/ and /ʊ/ can also be lengthened in *rim* /ˈrɪm/ → [ˈrɪˑm], *thread* /ˈθred/ → [ˈθreˑd], *bud* /ˈbʌd/ → [ˈbʌˑd] and *good* /ˈgʊd/ → [ˈgʊˑd]. The process of lengthening can have an effect on meaning. For instance, the noun *land* can be pronounced [ˈlænd] whereas the verb would seem to be produced as [ˈlæːnd]. Conversely, Shortening is the process by which a long vowel is pronounced slightly shorter than it usually is. English /iː/, /ɑː/, /ɔː/, /uː/, /ɜː/, /eɪ/, /oʊ/, /aʊ/, /ɔɪ/ and /aɪ/ are always shortened if they are situated at the core of a syllable closed by voiceless consonant or consonantal cluster whose last element is voiceless. For example, the vocalic elements in *seat* /ˈsiːt/ → [ˈsɪˑt], *cart*

/ˈkɑːrt/ → [ˈkɑˑrt], *port* /ˈpɔːrt/ → [ˈpɔˑrt], *Luke* /ˈluːk/ → [ˈluˑk], *first* /ˈfɜːrst/ →

[ˈfɜˑrst], *plate* /ˈpleɪt/ → [ˈpleɪt], *load* /ˈloʊd/ → [loʊd], *found* /ˈfaʊnd/ → [ˈfaʊnd],

voice /ˈvɔɪs/ → [ˈvɔɪs], and *height* /ˈhaɪt/ → [ˈhaɪt].

On the other hand, L-Coloring is the process by which the final part of the vowel articulation is retracted and lowered due to the fact that it is at the core of a syllable closed by lateral approximant /l/. When the vowel is front, the transition from the vowel to the final velarized /ɫ/ involves the pronunciation of a mid-central vowel, which is often a transition /ə/. English /iː/, /e/, /uː/, /ɜː/, /eɪ/ and /ɔɪ/ can undergo a process of L-Coloring in words such as *feel* /ˈfiːl/ → [ˈfiːɫ], *tell* /ˈtel/ → [ˈteɫ], *fool* /ˈfuːl/ → [ˈfuːɫ], *girl* /ˈgɜːrl/ → [ˈgɜːrɫ], *male* /ˈmeɪl/ → [ˈmeɪɫ] and /ˈsɔɪl/ → [sɔˑɪɫ].

Vowel /ʊ/ can undergo a process of unrounding, that is, it is often pronounced as unrounded despite /ʊ/ is rounded, as it the case of *good* /ˈgʊd/ → [ˈgöˑd].

Chapter Three
COMPARING ENGLISH AND SPANISH VOWELS

THE SPANISH VOCALIC SYSTEM

In this section, a summary of the main properties of the peninsular Spanish vocalic system is presented. The following ideas have been taken from Hidalgo Navarro and Quilis Merín's *Fonética y Fonología Españolas* (2002) and *Nueva Gramática de la Lengua Española – Fonética y Fonología* (2011) by Real Academia Española.

The Spanish vocalic system is formed by five units, which are /i/, /e/, /a/, /o/ and /u/. Even though they present a number of allophones, the vocalic systems of the different varieties of the Spanish language are considered as stable and regular. Consequently, it can be argued that no important differences can be made concerning their articulation, duration or perceptibly.

Spanish vowels[2] can be classified depending on the articulatory activity required for their production and also on the place where they are articulated. In articulatory terms, Spanish vowels are classified as close, mid or open. Spanish /i/ and /u/ are close vowels because the tongue is placed at a minimum distance to the palate during their process
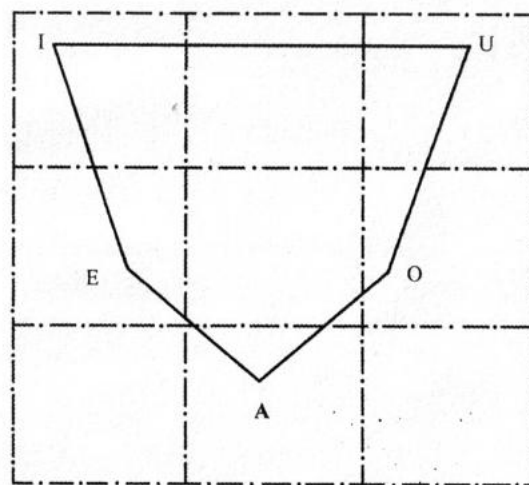
[2] Figure representing Spanish vowels adapted from Gutiérrez Araus et al. (2006:56)

of resonance. Mid vowels, such as /e/ and /o/, are articulated when the tongue is placed in a mid position within the vocal tract. Finally, Spanish /a/ is an open vowel due to the fact that the tongue is situated at the lowest position during pronunciation. When taking into account the place of articulation, Spanish vowels are labeled as front, central or back. When the dorsum of the tongue is placed near the hard palate, front vowels such as /i/ or /e/ are produced. In contrast, back vowels are pronounced if the dorsum of the tongue is situated near the soft palate. That is the case of Spanish /o/ and /u/. Unlike front vowels, Spanish back vowels /o/ and /u/ involve a process of rounding. Finally, when the dorsum of the tongue is placed in the central area of the vocal tract, central vowel /a/ is produced. As a direct consequence, Spanish /i/ is a close, front vowel, /e/ is a mid, front vowel, /a/ is described as an open, central vowel, /o/ is a mid, back vowel and /u/ is a close, back vowel.

Most of the processes concerning vowel variation in Spanish are related to the articulation of vowels within the oral resonator. Consequently, vowels can be (a) opener or closer, (b) advanced or retracted, (c) centralized or (d) rounded or unrounded. Firstly, mid vowels such as /e/ and /o/ are subject to be produced in opener or closer positions. Syllable structure plays an important role in this process. As a result, when /e/ and /o/ are pronounced within a syllable ending in consonant, they are opener than in a vowel-ending syllable, except for the cases where /e/ is followed by consonants like /m/, /n/, /s/, /d/ and /θ/. The production of opener vocalic segments differs with respect to their position in

words. In mid-word position, for instance, opener vowels are barely produced whereas they are common in final-word position. On the other hand, mid vowels /e/ and /o/ can also be articulated in closer positions. Therefore, in unstressed, final-word position [e] becomes [i] in *este* ['esti] and [o] is produced as [u] in *poco* ['poku].

As it has been previously mentioned, the articulation of vowels is modified depending on their surrounding sounds. Consequently, the word *llama* [ʎáma], for example, /a/ is pronounced in a slightly advanced position [æ] because it contacts a palatal consonant. In the word *casa* [kása], however, velar sound /k/ causes /a/ to be pronounced as a retracted [ɑ].

Spanish vowels can also be centralized. Centralization is the process by which any vocalic segment is pronounced in the central area of the vocal tract due to articulatory relaxation. For example, [e] can be produced as [ə] both in unstressed syllables and in casual speech. In addition, Spanish back vowels /o/ and /u/ undergo a process of rounding. Rounding takes place in the oral cavity when the lips protrude and form a circular shape, adding specific perceptual features to the vowel. Finally, Navarro Tomás (1980) claims that all Spanish vowels undergo a process of nasalization when surrounded by nasal consonants /m/, /n/ or /ɲ/, as it can be seen in *mano* [mãno]. Similarly, they are also nasalized when placed in initial position, after pause and before any nasal consonant. That is the case of words such as *ánfora* [ãɱfora] and *amnistía* [ãmnistía].

In Spanish, vowel variation can also be related to stress, duration and syllable structure. Stress can be defined as the prominence that one specific syllable presents in relation to the surrounding ones. In other words, the different degrees of articulatory energy involved in their process of resonance result in the production of stressed and unstressed syllables. Stressed syllables contrast unstressed ones with respect to a number of properties. Vowels in unstressed syllables, for example, are affected by a great amount of modifications as they have a less defined timber. Vowels placed in stressed syllables, however, are longer and contain higher pitch prominence. Despite of the fact that vowels in unstressed syllables are less stable and less audible than those in stressed syllables, these modifications do not affect meaning in Spanish. Moreover, vowels in unstressed syllables are often devoiced. That is especially the case of mid vowels [e] and [o], although this process can also occur in [i]. In casual speech, both stressed and unstressed vowels can be elided. The elision of unstressed vowels, however, is more common. This process can be illustrated in words such as *chocolate → chocolate* and *espiritualidad → espritualidad* or in specific verb forms which are frequently used like *habíamos → bíamos*. In addition, syntactic contact between vowels leads to the elision of the first one, as in *¿qué has visto?* → [ˈkazˈβisto]. In prepositions, articles and other grammatical particles, elision is a widespread process. Finally, a number of phonetic processes affect vowel duration. The duration of stressed syllables in Spanish depends on two main factors which are timbre and word structure. Firstly, timbre is significant regarding duration because vowels can be organized from the longest to the shortest as follows /a/, /o/, /e/, /u/ and /i/. Secondly, the duration of initial unstressed vowels decreases depending on their distance from the stressed syllable.

What is more, unstressed vowels placed before stressed syllables are slightly shorter than those unstressed vowels situated after the stressed syllable. Final vowels are also the longest of the unstressed vowels of words. Nonetheless, duration does not affect meaning in Spanish.

Similarly to the English ones, Spanish vowels can either be isolated or form groups. Spanish diphthongs, therefore, are defined as a combination of two vowel sounds within one syllable. Each of the elements forming a diphthong plays a different role within the syllable. In other words, one of them carries the greatest amount of articulatory energy and perceptibility during production while the other constitutes a transitional sound.

In Spanish, two types of diphthongs can be described. On the one hand, Spanish rising diphthongs are those vowel combinations in which the articulatory organs glide from a close position towards an opener one. They are formed by the combination of a weak vowel /i/ or /u/ with a strong vowel /a/, /e/ or /o/. Consequently, open vowels, which are placed in the second position, constitute the peak of the syllable whereas the onset may be either /i/ or /u/. Hidalgo and Quilis refer to the latter as semiconsonants and are phonetically transcribed as [j] or [w]. Some examples of rising diphthongs in Spanish are *patria* [pátrja], *siete* [sjéte] and *agua* [áɣwa]. On the other hand, Spanish falling diphthongs are those vowel combinations in which the articulatory organs glide from an open position towards a closer one. That is, a strong vowel such as /a/, /e/ or /o/ is combined with a weak one, either /i/ or /u/. Therefore, the vowel that constitutes the syllabic peak appears in the first position whereas the

coda or semivowel is in the second. The latter are phonetically transcribed as [i̯] and [u̯], as it

can be seen in *aire* [ái̯re], *Europa* [eu̯rópa] and *soy* [sói̯].

In addition to diphthongs, combinations of three vowel sounds or triphthongs are also

possible in Spanish, as it can be seen in words such as *buey* [bwéi̯], *sitiais* [sitjái̯s] and

Uruguay [urɣwái̯]. The peak of triphthongs is both the most open vowel and the vowel that

involves more articulatory energy during the process of resonance. The onset of a triphthong is

a semiconsonant while the coda is a semivowel.

In contrast, the contact between mid or close vowels with open vowels in different

syllables constitute a hiatus, as it the case of the words *María* and *país*. Furthermore, a hiatus

can be also formed with two mid vowels or with the combination of a mid vowel and an open

vowel, as it can be seen in *poeta* and *oasis*.

COMPARING THE SPANISH AND ENGLISH PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

	ENGLISH AND SPANISH VOWELS (Adapted from Finch and Ortiz Lira, 1988:26)	
	ENGLISH	SPANISH
PURE VOWELS	1.- /iː/ 2.- /ɪ/ 3.- /e/ 4.- /æ/ 5.- /ʌ/ 6.- /ə/ 7.- /ɑː/ 8.- /ɔː/ 9.- /ʊ/	1.- /a/ 2.- /e/ 3.- /i/ 4.- /o/ 5.- /u/

	10.- /uː/ 11.- /ɜː/	
DIPHTHONGS	12.- /eɪ/ 13.- /oʊ/ 14.- /aɪ/ 15.- /ɔɪ/ 16.- /aʊ/	6.- /ei/ 7.- /ai/ 8.- /oi/ 9.- /ui/ 10.- /iu/ 11.- /eu/ 12.- /au/ 13.- /ia/ 14.- /ua/ 15.- /ie/ 16.- /ue/ 17.- /io/ 18.- /uo/

Spanish and English phonological systems share a number of common features. Vowels in these two languages are similar with respect to their voicing. Even though this is not always the case in other languages such as Portuguese, where unstressed vowels placed in the last syllable of a word are frequently voiceless (Roach, 2009), both English and Spanish sets of vowels are voiced due to the fact that their production implies the vibration of the vocal folds. In addition, both Spanish and English vowels are also oral sounds. In other words, during the production of these vowel sounds, the vibrating column of air previously mentioned escapes through the oral cavity or mouth. Finch and Ortiz Lira (1988:38) also claim that "both English and Spanish vowels undergo length variations depending on phonemic environment and accentuation". English vowel /e/, for instance, is lengthened when closed by a voiced consonant, as it is the case of the word *red* /ˈred/ → [ˈreˑd]. Furthermore, as it has been

previously mentioned, Spanish vowels placed in stressed syllables are longer and contain higher pitch prominence.

Despite of the fact that some vowels might share common features, Finch and Ortiz Lira (1988) affirm that none of the Spanish vowels correspond exactly to any of the English ones. In fact, several distinctions between English and Spanish vowels can be stated. Firstly, Spanish and English phonological systems differ in the number of pure vowel oppositions. While the former includes five, the latter is formed by twelve. Secondly, the English vowel system contains centripetal tendencies (Mott, 1991) because it includes two central vowels, /ə/ and /ɜː/, that Spanish lacks. Despite of the fact that vowels in both languages seem to experiment length variation, Mott (1991) claims that distinctions between long and short vowels are only typically English. Monroy-Casas (2004) also claims that those are not usually made in Spanish. Duration in English influences meaning while that is not the case in Spanish. For example, the words *sheep* /ˈʃiːp/ and *ship* /ˈʃɪp/ only contrast with respect to the length of their stressed vowels. Semantically, however, they refer to different concepts. Finally, Spanish and English vowels differ with respect to the vibration of the vocal cords. As Mott (1991) observes, vocal cord vibration begins abruptly and stops gradually during the articulation of English vowels. Consequently, the author claims that English vowels, particularly those placed at syllable-initial position, are preceded by glottal stop. However, Spanish vowels undergo the opposite process as the vibration of the vocal folds begins smoothly and finishes brusquely.

Concerning diphthongs, peninsular Spanish is formed by thirteen diphthongs whereas the standard variety of American English (GAm) is composed by five. Nevertheless, Finch and Ortiz Lira (1988) argue that the English set is comparable to the Spanish one with respect to the

fact that they both perform a glide towards a closer tongue position. Consequently, they can be referred to as closing. However, the authors explain that English diphthongs are considered centering because they involve a glide towards a central position while Spanish ones move from one peripheral position to another. Those central qualities of the second element result in the narrowing of the English diphthongs. As a consequence, English diphthongs are said to be narrower than Spanish ones. According to Finch and Ortiz Lira (1988), diphthongs in English can be auditorily classified as falling since the first element can be regarded as more prominent than the second. Conversely, Spanish diphthongs are not only falling but they can also be rising. That is to say, the second element is more prominent than the first one. In addition, Spanish falling diphthongs are closing while the rising ones are opening.

MAIN PRONUNCIATION DIFFICULTIES FOR SPANISH SPEAKERS OF ENGLISH

A considerable amount of psychological factors which have been previously mentioned may play an important role in the teaching and learning of pronunciation. In this section, specific pronunciation problems affecting untrained Spanish speakers of English will only be discussed.

Second language students tend to replace the sounds of their new language with those of their mother tongue. This process is known as transferred pronunciation and it can be considered as one of the main problems for Spanish beginner students of English as a foreign language (Cámara Arenas, 2010). Consequently, if "the Spanish learner tends to accommodate, both in perceiving and articulating, the English system to its own parameters" (Fernández

González, 1998:130), five Spanish vocalic sounds may replace English sounds, particularly in pure vowels, as follows:

PURE VOWELS Cámara Arenas (2010) based on Finch&Ortiz, (1982:42)	
SPANISH	ENGLISH
/i/	/iː/, /ɪ/
/e/	/e/, /ɜː/, /ə/
/a/	/ə/, /æ/, /ɑː/, /ʌ/
/o/	/ɔː/, /ɒ/
/uː/	/uː/, /ʊ/

As it was previously mentioned, none of the Spanish vowels correspond exactly to any of the English ones. Consequently, it can be argued, for example, that English /e/ and Spanish /e/ differ with respect to their degree of opening, being the former opener than the latter. Moreover, English reduced vowels /ɪ/, /ʊ/ and /ə/ may be regarded as particularly challenging for Spanish speakers of English, as they lack "equivalents" in their first language.

Concerning diphthongs, Finch and Ortiz Lira (1988) affirm that achieving intelligibility can be more difficult with pure vowels that with diphthongs due to the fact that Spanish diphthongal system provides the sufficient amount of phonological contrastive units that English requires. Nonetheless, untrained Spanish speakers of English may give unnecessary prominence to the last element of the diphthongs such as /aɪ/ or /eɪ/, as they do in their mother tongue.

Another difficult aspect for Spanish students of English as a Second Language is to understand of the complex relationships between sounds and letters (Finch and Ortiz Lira,

1988). As Cámara Arenas (2008) explains, English phonemes are not equally distributed within the Latin alphabet. Letter <o>, for example, might represent more than 50% of English monophthongs. Besides, one single spelling can represent a number of vocalic phonemes (Finch and Ortiz Lira, 1988), as it is the case of <a>, which can be pronounced as /æ/ in *lamp*, /ɔ:/ in *call* or *war*, /ɑ:/ in *calm*, /eɪ/ in *name*, or /e/ in *stare* (Cámara Arenas, 2010). In the word *field*, letters <ie> represent only one vowel sound, as *field* is pronounced /ˈfiːld/. Conversely, *friend* is pronounced /ˈfrend/ despite of the fact that it contains the same vocalic structure <ie>. In Spanish, however, vocalic graphemes usually correspond one-to-one to vocalic phonemes, especially in stressed syllables (Monroy-Casas, 2004). As a result, Spanish students may consider the relationship between sounds and spellings in English more difficult than those learners whose mother tongue is not phonetic, as it is the case of French speakers (Kenworthy, 1990). Moreover, the author notes that one of the main causes of spelling and pronunciation problems is the "confusion between the sound value of a particular letter in the native language and its value in English" (Kenworthy, 1990:98). Vocalic sounds in English can represent a number of different spellings which are barely subject to normalization. Even though Cámara Arenas (2010) claim that the systematization of English spelling and pronunciation does exist, the study of Graphemics can be regarded as a relatively difficult task both for teachers and students.

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO TEACH ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TO SPANISH STUDENTS

CREATING AWARENESS AND CONCERN FOR PRONUNCIATION

Pronunciation is regarded as an "essential role in aural and oral communication [which] allows [speakers] to understand and convey meaning" (Selingson, 2011:110). Álvarez Baz y Herrero Hernández point out that students of English as a Foreign Language who master grammatical or lexical aspects but lack pronunciation skills cannot be considered as "excellent learners" (quoted in Gallardo del Puerto y Gómez Lacabex[3], 2008). The defective form of their speech can mislead the listener, who can even misinterpret their message as "funny, infantile or meaningless" (Gallardo del Puerto y Gómez Lacabex, 2008:2).

Selingson claims that a number of teachers "transmit negative values about pronunciation" partially because they "feel insecure about [their] own pronunciation." As the author observes, "this as an excuse to deny students access to pronunciation activities." (Selingson, 2011:130). As Kenworthy suggests, learners should develop a "concern for pronunciation", otherwise their "poor, unintelligible speech will make their attempts at conversing frustrating and unpleasant both for themselves and for their listeners" (1990:27). As a direct consequence, the author affirms that "the teacher must approach pronunciation in

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[3] All of the quotations taken from Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex (2004) have been translated into English by the author of this essay.

such a way that it encourages appropriate attitudes in learners and helps them to give the necessary time and effort to it" (114).

Apart from stressing the importance of Phonetics regularly in class, "time spent discussing the issue of pronunciation in a general way can help to stimulate interest, increase motivation" as well as to "help prepare students by making them think about the task of making sounds before them" (Kenworthy, 1990:54)

THE CONCEPT OF INTELIGIBILITY

Giving an accurate definition for the concept of intelligibility is complex because intelligible pronunciation depends on the listener. However, it can be argued that intelligibility is related to notions such as the degree of accent variation, the amount of information which the hearer can understand and the level of difficulty they have in doing so. That is to say, "the more words a listener is able to identify accurately when said by a particular speaker, the more intelligible that speaker is". Therefore, intelligibility implies the fact that "it is possible for the listener to match the sound heard with the sound (…) a native speaker would use without too much difficulty" (Kenworthy, 1990:13), despite "comfortably intelligible" (3) foreign speakers may not produce native-like sounds.

Although effective communication relies on the context to guess the speaker's intentions, "foreign speakers need to be intelligible so that they can communicate." (Kenworthy, 1990:15). According to Kenworthy (1990:14-15), the intelligibility of a speaker is not only related to their "idiosyncratic speech habits" but also to the speed of their speech. Other factors such as continuous hesitations or self-corrections can determine the degree of

intelligibility as well. Furthermore, the author claims that intelligibility is dependent on the "listener's familiarity with the foreign accent" and their "ability to use contextual clues when listening". Words pronounced within a context full of meaning clues are easier to understand than those articulated in isolation. Besides, listeners consider that understanding oral texts in a foreign language produced by a speaker of the same linguistic background to be the "easiest".

When using a foreign language, the sources of intelligibility problems are determined by the native language. A Spanish speaker of English, therefore, may substitute the English sound /e/ for /æ/ in the word *tan* resulting in the production of *ten* (Firth, 1998). Furthermore, Spanish speakers tend to insert vocalic sounds in English words beginning with /s/, as it the case of *Spain* or *student*. Moreover, Kenworthy claims that "the stress pattern of a word is an important part of its identity for the native speaker". There is evidence to suggest that native speakers misunderstand words because of wrong stress placements (Kenworthy, 1990:18-20; McNerney at al, 1998). Thus, the word *written* can be understood as *retain* if the foreign speaker fails to give more prominence to the first syllable than to the second.

Concerning English pronunciation teaching during the Compulsory Secondary Education period, it can be argued that the goal of foreign language learners should be set in reaching "comfortably comprehensible pronunciation" so that their students become "easily and globally intelligible to others" (Selingson, 2011:112). Even though intelligibility is usually the most sensitive goal during this educational period, teachers should never "actively discourage learners from settling themselves high goals" (Kenworthy, 1990:3).

DESIGNING A PROGRAM TO TEACH VOWEL SOUNDS

Most authors agree that previous to the actual teaching of pronunciation, it is necessary to design a pronunciation syllabus. Nonetheless, a diagnosis of students' difficulties is to be made beforehand. As a result, practice of challenging sounds will be directed. Besides, the information related to individual variables help teachers "gauge the relative importance of accurate pronunciation to particular students." (Firth, 1998:174)

Selingson (2011) recommends to establish different pronunciation objectives termly or annually. As Llisterri states, teachers should establish priorities according to criteria such as available time, the specific objectives of the academic year, error analysis and degree of intelligibility (quoted in Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008)

In order to design a pronunciation program to teach vowel sounds, stress placement and vowel reduction are to be firstly covered. Learners have to be able to produce /ə/ in unstressed syllables. Secondly, the pronunciation of diphthongs should be introduced. The concept of glide may need to be insisted upon. Lastly, the focus must be placed on pure vowels. As Selingson states, "priority would be given to vowel length and the sounds which do not exist in Spanish" (2011:118). Finally, "all work on vowels should be reinforced by referring to sound-spelling relationships" (Firth, 1998:180).

Students should also be progressively introduced to the use of the phonetic script. The phonetic alphabet "provides a standard from which to teach and learn". Besides, "students who can recognize phonetic symbols can check words in a dictionary, (…) be more autonomous (…) and [that is] an effective way to identify and correct errors". Apart from using and teaching "the (…) vowel symbols that are different from letters of the alphabet" (Selingson, 2011:113-114), the use of phonetic representation of /ə/ is essential because "there is no letter in the

alphabet that represents this sound and (...) every vowel letter in English can represent schwa" (Kenworthy, 1990:51).

Concerning accents, "teachers can only really teach and model the accents they have themselves" (Selingson, 2011:112). The standard British accent or Received Pronunciation (RP) is usually taken as a reference in Europe. However, the standard American accent or General American (GAm) would seem to be less problematic for Spanish speakers than Received Pronunciation as the latter includes a larger number of diphthongs and pure vowel oppositions than the former.

Different approaches to pronunciation work "help different types of students to engage with English in different ways" (Selingson, 2011:121) due to the fact that "certain activities suit the learning styles and approaches better than others". Therefore, teachers should consistently offer "opportunities for practice, experimentation and exploration" (Kenworthy, 1990:2)

TEACHING TO PERCEIVE SOUNDS

Regardless their linguistic background, "all learners expect English to have new and different sounds" (Kenworthy, 1990:45). Nevertheless, foreign language students usually hear the sounds of their target language in terms of those of their mother tongue. Therefore, English teachers need to create sound awareness in their students so that they can start to perceive those "sounds not available to them before" (49). Apart from exposure to the foreign language, the amount of necessary perceptual work relates to aspects concerning the individual learner. Motivated students with a positive attitude benefit from perceptual training. "Inbuilt ability or

aptitude" (49) may also be significant in the process. This ability, however, "can disappear or deteriorate through lack of use" (49).

If the teacher needs to work on specific vowel contrasts, they can design an activity similar to "Classifying sounds" (Taylor, 1993:60). In "Classifying sounds" students organize a list of works into frames of grids according to the corresponding vocalic sound.

In "Couple matching" (Hewings, 2004, taken from Gallardo and Gómez Lacabex, 2008:55), learners match those proper names sharing the same vowel sound.

In groups of words, learners can be asked to underline the "Odd one out" (Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008:57), that is to say, the word which is pronounced with a different sound. In writing, it is advisable to use numbers instead of the actual words so that students can only focus on the sound.

"The yes/no game" (adapted from Taylor, 1998:87) implies working with perception skills with different dynamics. In this case, each student has two cards reading *yes* or *no*. Once they hear a series of words pronounced by the teacher, they must stand up and show if they heard the same or different sounds by displaying their cards. *Yes* implies the sounds are the same whereas *No* means that the sounds are different. Correspondingly, in "Same or different" (Selingson, 2011:127), learners have to decide whether two words with similar spellings (i.e. *ear* and *wear*) are produced with the same vowel. "Same or different" is useful to work on sound-spelling correspondences.

The teacher needs to prepare twenty cards to play "Picture-sound matching games" (Taylor, 1993:54). This game has two possible variants. On the one hand, cards need to be paired according to their vowel sound. In other words, one of them will display a picture while

the other one will contain the phoneme corresponding to its stressed syllable. All of the cards are placed face downwards on the table and learners pick up two of them at a time. If the cards match, students continue playing. Otherwise, they replace them in the same places. On the other hand, "Picture-sound matching games" can take the form of traditional dominoes. Cards are shuffled and dealt to each student so that they can form matching sequences taking turns. Small groups of students are to be formed to play both games.

In order to play "Guess my list" (Taylor, 1993:63), students are to be divided in groups of three or four members. Each group is given a set of items which can be bought in a supermarket as well as a vocalic phoneme. The aim of the game is to find object produced with that sound.

Instead of numbers, Phonetic Bingo makes use of vocalic phonemes to practice sound perception in class. The teacher will pronounce words containing those sounds while students will cross the phonemes they hear. Distractors can be added as well. Feedback is easy to provide as mistakes may be reflected when players claim their cards. This game can help students familiarize with sounds typically regarded as difficult. Apart from perception training, Phonetic Bingo is also a helpful and proficient method to diagnose sound problem areas.

Aurrecoechea Montenegro (2002) observes that sound discrimination may be achieved through personal impressions or associations. In her activity "Metaphors" (Aurrecoechea Montenegro[4], 2002:45, adapted from Clement Laroy), students are asked to close their eyes and associate a given sound with an animal, an object, a situation or a person. Learners are

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[4] All of the quotations taken from Aurrecoechea Montenegro (2002) have been translated into English by the author of this essay

then encouraged to write their feelings by using phrases such as *this is…* or *this sounds like a(n)…*

TEACHING WORD-STRESS AND VOWEL REDUCTION

As Kenworthy rightly observes, "correct word stress patterns are essential for the learner's production and perception of English" (Kenworthy, 1990:28). Even though there are not exact rules for stress placement in English, stress does always increase the length and pitch of vocalic sounds. Kenworthy recommends students to make a distinction between stressed and unstressed vowels while they perceive and produce the reduced vowel schwa /ə/. According to Roach (2009), /ə/ is the most frequently occurring vowel in English. Learners must be made aware of /ə/ at an early stage (Kenworthy, 1990) so that their speech becomes more natural. The native language of students plays an important role in vowel reduction as well. Unlike the English ones, Spanish unstressed vowels are neither drastically shortened nor reduced. As a result, Spanish students of English "will have to be taught explicitly to reduce unstressed vowels to schwa" (Mendelsohn Burns et al 1998; taken from Avery and Ehrlich, 1998:65). The articulation of this mid vowel "does not usually present difficulties to the foreign language learner, provided that he remembers that English /ə/ has no lip-rounding and is extremely short". (Gimson, 1994:119). Nonetheless, the lack of correspondences between spelling and pronunciation in English can mislead untrained Spanish students. Consequently, they "may give the reduced, unstressed vowels the sound value that they associate with the vowel letter used in the word they are attempting to pronounce" (Mendelsohn Burns et al.

1998; taken from Avery and Ehrlich, 1998:65). That is the reason why learners should be able to create connections between vowel quality and word-stress placement.

Aurrecoechea Montenegro (2002) suggests providing students with word lists so that they can be classified according to stressed syllables. Similarly, Selingson (2011) recommends to "elicit the stress pattern of (…) words on the board at the end of a lesson" (Selingson, 2011:120). Furthermore, pronunciation activities can involve vocabulary work. Namely, students can classify semantically-related words into groups in relation to strong syllables. Learners will then be asked to find regularities in terms of word-stress. These types of activities intend to "build students confidence by drawing their attention to the tendencies and patterns in word stress that do exist, even if there are exceptions" (Selingson, 2011:121). Word-stress and vowel reduction skills can be enhanced through vocabulary work as well. Kenworthy claims that "learners should be encouraged to keep vocabulary lists with stress marked on the word and the strong vowel circled" (1990:115). Selingson (2011) suggests a similar strategy based in crossing out silent letters in words.

Moreover, Aurecoechea Montenegro (2002) suggests recreational activities to work on word-stress. Teachers, for example, can prepare board games containing a word per square. Once players reach a word with a specific stress pattern on the board, they will need to produce two extra similar words. A number of squares can also be devoted to other purposes such as sending players to prison or help them win by skipping a number of squares.

In order to work vowel reduction, Kelly offers "Stand up and be counted" (taken from Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008). This game is intended to show the high frequency of the reduced vowel /ə/ in unstressed vowels. Learners are provided with cards

that contain vocalic symbols. Afterwards, the teacher pronounces a series of polysyllabic words which are likely to have /ə/ in their unstressed syllables. Any time students hear the sound displayed in their cards, they must stand up. Those having schwa in their cards are more likely to stand up quite often.

TEACHING SOUND-SPELLING RELATIONSHIPS

Spanish pronunciation tends to be consistent with the spelling conventions of the language. In English, however, "differences between the sound-spelling correspondences (…) can be the source of mispronunciations" (Avery et al, 1998). While the pronunciation of consonants is fairly regular in English, sound-spelling relationships become particularly significant when producing vowels.

When compared to other languages, the English spelling system is considered as extremely irregular, particularly regarding vocalic sounds. Nevertheless, Kenworthy (1990) state that English spelling does provide an important amount of information which can help students to "decipher and decode patterns". Thus, "learners need to be equipped with a knowledge of the spelling conventions of English in order to decide how to pronounce them" (Kenworthy, 1990:96-97). According to the author, "mistakes due to spelling should be treated as a matter of interest and discussion." (111). Concerning sound-spelling awareness, learners can benefit from minimal-pair practice (see section *Teaching to Perceive Sounds* above) if they are asked to underline the word that they hear. In the English class, the relationships between sound and spelling have been traditionally covered by means of the following activities.

In "Odd-one out" (Selingson, 2011:127) or "Odd sound out" (Taylor, 1993:67), for example, students are given several groups of four words with similar spellings. Each of these chosen word sets includes a vocalic phonetic symbol as well. Only three of those four words are pronounced with that sound in their stressed syllable. Students need to find the "odd-one out" or the "odd sound out", that is to say, they have to circle the word produced with other phoneme. Conversely, learners can also be asked to identify the common vowel sound (Selingson, 2011). In this activity, sets of several words are also presented along with two different phonemes. All of the words are produced with the same sound and students need to circle the phonetic symbol which represents it. Both activities can either be done individually or in pairs. In both cases, students can compare their answers before whole class correction.

On the other hand, sound-spelling awareness can be also achieved by recreational activities, such as "Sound puzzles" (Taylor, 1993:69), rhymes and "Simple sound maze" (Hancock, 2000, taken from Gallardo del Puerto y Gómez Lacabex, 2008:60). In "Sound puzzles", learners solve "a crossword grid or wordsearch" (Taylor, 1993:69) whose words share the same vowel sound. Kenworthy also claims that "learners can (…) devise their own simple puzzles (…) or a puzzle can be constructed around a particular area of vocabulary" (Kenworthy, 1990:111). Selingson (2011) suggests matching words which rhyme. Therefore, teachers can select grammatically similar words containing two or three different vocalic sounds. These words are independently presented to students, who will need to classify them according to their pronunciation. With the purpose of practice individual sounds, students can play "Simple sound maze". In order to exit the maze, students have to move across squares including the same sound.

TEACHING TO PRODUCE SOUNDS

Aurrecoechea Montenegro (2002) states that foreign language students lacking perceptual training will pronounce their target language on the basis of their mother tongue because "we can only learn to pronounce what we have previously learned to discern" (Cámara Arenas, 2010:166-167). Consequently, perceptual work needs to be performed before production is achieved (see *Teaching to Perceive Sounds* above)

In order to produce sounds, learners have traditionally received articulatory indications. Kenworthy (1990:69) considers such approach as very limited claiming that "it may fail completely with some very anxious and self-conscious learners" (Kenworthy, 1990:69). According to the author, however, learners generally benefit from instructions regarding lip position, contact between the tongue and the teeth and contact between the tongue and the roof of the mouth.

As it has been previously mentioned, vocabulary work can be useful to practice pronunciation as well. In "Find the rule" (Hancock, 2000:69, taken from Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008:52), the teacher establishes a lexical category (i.e. *clothing*) which is to be guessed by means of questions (i.e. *I am taking a coat. Can I go with you?*). Once students are familiarized with the dynamics of the exercise, the teacher introduces a phonetic category (i.e. vowel /ɜː/). This sudden change should not be mentioned to students so that they can discover the variation by themselves.

"Two people, two sounds" (Selingson, 2011:119) is an activity to practice vocalic contrasts. Students are provided with a two-column chart. They complete their charts

according to a number of categories. All of their answers in the first column start with one vowel sound while words in the second column begin with an opposing vocalic sound. Likewise, "two people, two sounds" can become an information-gap activity. Learners lack a number of answers in one of the columns of their grids. Working in pairs, they need to complete their charts by asking another student. Taylor (1998:82) suggests a similar activity titled "Information gap shopping list". She advises to arrange the seating or having the students sit back to back so that they cannot see each other's answers. The author suggests a number of variations for this activity, such as asking for "a list of items to be bought or found (…), the list of the ingredients for a recipe [or] an inventory of foodstuffs already in the kitchen cupboards".

Playing "Sound ladders" (Taylor, 1998:75) requires a prior diagnosis of student's problems with pronunciation. Once it has been done, the teacher draws a ten-rug ladder on the board containing one difficult sound per rug. Students try to repeat the sequence from bottom to top as fast as they can.

"Can I come to the party?" (Taylor, 1998:85) uses tongue twisters containing challenging sounds for students. If possible, the teacher should match problematic sounds to individual learners and those target sounds should always be placed at the beginning of the word. The tongue twisters relate to the same topic (i.e. *employment*). All learners have a card with a tongue twister that they have to memorise. Once they finish, cards are returned to the teacher and students are to find partners that would go to a party with them. They can only do so if their tongue twisters (i.e. related to *jobs*) contain identical sounds. A time-limit should be set.

In "Tic-tac-toe" (Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008), learners can change squares if they can produce a word containing the sound represented. All answers are assessed by the members of the group while the teacher can solve their problems.

In "What is Missing?" (Aurrecoechea Montenegro, 2002:45), students are asked to pronounce the words represented by pictures on the blackboard. Once their production has been monitored, the teacher removes a number of pictures and students need to guess which images are missing.

PROVIDING FEEDBACK

It is vital that teachers provide students with opinions, comments and advice on their performance. In language teaching, feedback is crucial to ensure the evolution of students because learners "need to know what they have accomplished and what they still have to do." (Kenworthy, 1990:121).

Firth (1998) argues that constructive feedback is useful to maintain a high degree of motivation among students. Kenworthy also claims that "it is (…) important that learners feel that attention is being paid to their progress and that they are indeed progressing". The teacher's feedback is also a form of attention which students interpret as concern. "If the teacher's concern is obvious, then the learner's own concern and motivation will be positively affected." (Kenworthy, 1990:121-122).

SELF-MONITORING AND SELF-CORRECTION

Despite learners can benefit from teacher and peer feedback, students should also learn to be able to "monitor their own speech and make adjustments without the teacher's interference." (Kenworthy, 1900:71). Exposure to the foreign language and the acquisition of discriminatory skills help students develop "their own internal criteria of what is acceptable and what is not." (118). Firth (1998) observes that teachers need to encourage self-correction once learners can produce correct forms. According to Kenworthy, self-correction can indicate that learners are no longer dependable on feedback to a great extent.

CONCLUSIONS

There are strong grounds for suggesting that the study of pronunciation is a crucial factor in achieving intelligibility in second language learning. In the case of English vowels, for example, this feature is central because its phonological system lacks clear connections between spelling and pronunciation. However, far too little attention has been paid to pronunciation in the teaching and learning of English as a Foreign Language within the Spanish Educational System. English text books and teachers have focused in other grammatical or lexical aspects which were considered as more useful for communication purposes or easier to teach. Furthermore, teaching and learning pronunciation may involve overcoming a number of emotional barriers. "Pronunciation is a unique feature of language performance, one in which, the ego, the self, is involved" (Fernández González, 1998:137; taken from Celce Murcia, 1996:18-19, quoting A. Guiora). When speaking, a great amount of personal information is provided. Aspects such as age, sex, nationality, social status, or psychological features can be inferred from the pronunciation of any speaker. (Aurrecoechea Montenegro, 2002:3).

In second language teaching and learning, however, the field of pronunciation has been neglected, partly because it has been traditionally believed that pronunciation could be acquired through simple exposure to the foreign language. However, Kenworthy (1990:6) claims that "the amount of exposure, [al]though a clearly contributing factor, is not a necessary factor for the development of pronunciation skills". Cámara Arenas (2010:160) rightly maintains that learning a foreign language as native children do is a "myth". In addition to regular instruction during class time, "ultimate success in pronunciation will depend on how much

effort the learner puts into it." (Kenworthy, 1990:2). Nevertheless, language teachers can provide learners with "the best chance of improving, continuously monitoring and so further improving their own pronunciation." (Selingson, 2011:111).

Pronunciation is a linguistic area where the influence of the first language is particularly evident. Cámara Arenas (2010:158) even considers the mother tongue of learners as a "source of trouble". It can be argued, therefore, that the contrastive analysis becomes especially useful to understand many of the difficulties of second language learners (Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008). Consequently, apart from specific training on language teaching, English teachers should be theoretically trained in the sound system of the first and target language of their students. (Dalton and Seidlhofer, 1994; taken from Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008).

According to Finch and Ortiz (1982: xi), "the teacher's English pronunciation must be good enough to serve as a model to students" and they "should be proficient in the diagnosis of pronunciation errors and in the techniques of correction" as well (taken from Cámara Arenas, 2010). Language teachers, therefore, need to "develop an ear for students' pronunciation difficulties" (Selingson, 2011:111) due to the fact that practice and feedback are key factors in learning and teaching pronunciation.

As it has been previously mentioned, school curricula and text books should include specific aims dealing with phonetics due to the fact that pronunciation is a crucial factor in achieving successful communication. By providing a wide range of activities, pronunciation can be incorporated in any teaching level. Teachers can, for instance, "use a pronunciation focus to introduce and practise other aspects such as grammar (…) or vocabulary" (Selingson, 2011:128).

Kenworthy (1989) recommends English teachers to create learning contexts which enable students to work both on the perception and the production of the new sounds (taken from Gallardo del Puerto and Gómez Lacabex, 2008). Sound contrasts between familiar and unfamiliar sounds and extensive practice in a variety of contexts can be useful resources to improve both perception and production of target sounds in English. Learning to perceive sounds according to specific categories is a prior step to successful production. Regarding production, it is important to remember that "perfect imitation does not always correspond with perfect memorization or assimilation; it does not necessarily guarantee a good independent performance" (Cámara Arenas, 2010: 160). When dealing with vowels, perception and production work is to be reinforced by spelling and pronunciation correspondences. These are particularly complex in English due to lack of obvious correspondences between written and spoken forms. Therefore, Spanish students may assign the similar values to vowel-letters and vowel sounds as they do in their native language. Therefore, special and consistent attention should be paid on spelling and pronunciation relationships. Teachers should "highlight key patterns" (Selingson, 2011:129) as well as "present rules that are usable and (...) make sure learners are inferring correctly" (Kenworthy, 1990:97).

Most authors recommend providing students with feedback on their performance. Kenworthy (1990) not only considers that students interpret their teacher's feedback as concern but also that regular feedback leads to motivation. Likewise grammar or vocabulary, pronunciation aspects should be included in students' assessment.

Taking into account the "psychosocial environment" (Fernández González, 1998: 138) of their learners, English teachers should be able to develop concern and motivation about

pronunciation on their students. This linguistic area can then be integrated in the language teaching and learning process. In order to be effective in treating pronunciation, English teachers should have an extensive knowledge on the phonological language of the target language as well as be familiar with the sounds of the mother tongue of their students. This essay has attempted to provide teachers with suggestions on how to deal with the pronunciation of English vowels in their language classes. While in the field of English pronunciation teaching "sensitivity has not been enhanced, practice has been considered boring, results are not immediately seen and complete success happens seldom" (Fernández González, 1998:139), neglecting pronunciation work can have extremely negative effects on ESL students.

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