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TEACHING ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TO SPANISH NATIVE LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: ACQUISITION, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTION.

GRADO EN ESTUDIOS INGLESES

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ABSTRACT

This final degree project is centred on the field of teaching and learning English pronunciation in the subject of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). In this sense, this study analyses the main difficulties found while putting into practice the phonetic and phonological rules of the English language. For this purpose, a brief contrastive analysis of both phonological systems –Spanish and English- will be carried out, taking into account the current attitudes, opinions and perception of the English pronunciation by a group of Spanish native speakers of ages between 11 and 26 years old from both public and private schools in Almería. Additionally, this project suggests a series of indications based on a didactic methodology focused on the improvement of the learner's pronunciation skills taking into account the existing materials used in Primary and Secondary Education.

Key words: English pronunciation, Spanish native speakers, Phonological acquisition of EFL, competencies, education, motivation.

RESUMEN

El presente Trabajo de Fin de Grado se centra en el campo de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de la pronunciación del inglés como lengua extranjera. En este sentido, este estudio analiza las principales dificultades que la práctica de las reglas fonéticas y fonológicas presenta a un grupo de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera con edades comprendidas entre los 11 y los 26 años de escuelas públicas y privadas en Almería. Para ello, se realizará un breve análisis contrastivo de ambos sistemas fonológicos, el inglés y el español, explorando asimismo las actitudes, opiniones y percepción de la pronunciación inglesa por parte de los hablantes nativos españoles en la actualidad. Además, este Trabajo de Fin de Grado propone una serie de indicaciones en materia de metodología didáctica orientadas a la mejora de las competencias de pronunciación del alumno tomando como referencia una pequeña muestra de los materiales utilizados en Educación Primaria y Secundaria.

Palabras clave: pronunciación inglesa, hablantes nativos españoles, adquisición fonológica del inglés como lengua extranjera, competencias, educación, motivación.

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1. Introduction.

In the past recent years, the importance of teaching and learning English pronunciation has increased and has become a matter of study for Applied Linguistics and Psycholinguistics. Due to the necessity of developing oral comprehension and expression skills, many studies have been accomplished in order to analyse, prove and evaluate the importance of teaching pronunciation putting a special emphasis on the acquisition and development of oral skills by both young and adult learners in the classroom (Cuenca Villarín, 1993; Hitotuzi, 2007; Rengifo, 2009; Martínez Adrián, 2014; Muñoz Mallén, 2014; Tlazalo Tejeda *et al.*, 2014). Though the results seem quite disparate, almost all the authors try to raise awareness on the subject of implementing an adequate pronunciation teaching method based on an effective communication between teachers and students. According to Osle Ezquerro (2009), this renewed interest is undoubtedly attached to the consideration of teachers as individuals who elaborate and build their own vision of teaching, which has a dynamic character and affects their own educational methods.

However, the current situation in the Spanish classrooms is difficult, especially when talking about the apprehension of the English phonetic and phonological rules in school. Whether the problem exists due to a lack of a comprehensive teaching method or to the inaccuracy of the existing teaching programmes, the truth is that in most Spanish educative centres –especially in the case of Secondary Education high schools– the appropriate pronunciation of the English lexicon isn't thoroughly implemented. Regarding Muñoz Mallén views (2014: 105), “the most relevant problem is to conceive the learning of pronunciation drawing from the writing language, when the actual objective is the oral language control”.

This is the justification to evaluate the current panorama of teaching phonetics in the Spanish educational system and to defeat the necessity of solving the omission of a

qualitative and quantitative implementation of an English pronunciation teaching method, especially for those phonetically naïve speakers who have serious problems when identifying special occurrences of phonemes, like the case of minimal pairs.¹ For all this, the main purpose of this paper is to examine the attitudes and behaviour toward English pronunciation by a small group of seven Spanish learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) of ages between 11 and 26 living in Almería. Members of group A have always received public education. In this section, we will comment on the most representative errors concerning their pronunciation, focusing on segmental and suprasegmental features and morphologically conditioned allomorphs. Then, a teaching proposal will be depicted, explaining the objectives previously set and the specific methodology followed in the lessons, together with the activities proposed in order to improve their pronunciation and considering their previous experience in this subject.

Likewise, we will observe the situation in a class of 21 students of an international private school: their attitudes toward the process of learning, their level of pronunciation and the teaching plan followed by their teacher in class. A set of objectives taken into account to work with this group will be described, and then the main aspects of the methodology implemented in the classroom will be explained. Sequentially, we will conduct an analysis and comparison of the materials used in both public and private centres for the teaching of pronunciation –textbooks, manuals and guides–, commenting on their most important characteristics and the differences and similarities among them.

In subsequent lines, the results of the study carried out with groups A and B will be detailed, discussing the contrasts among public and private education toward teaching pronunciation, the goals achieved through the methodology implemented and the conclusions drawn from all this, taking into account previous research and studies.

Finally, we will comment on the results of a survey about English pronunciation conducted in Almería. The attitudes, personal perceptions and experiences derived from

¹ According to de Ataide Melo's views (1989: 749), minimal pairs exercises "is a purely mechanical activity which, if used frequently, invites boredom. Second, it is a teacher-centred activity, leaving little room for any contribution from students to the process". Despite her views, minimal pairs is a widely-known exercise frequently used by teachers when trying to make their students notice the differences among phonemes in similar words.

their academic lives will be discussed, to sum up with the objectives and conclusions derived from this socio-linguistic study.

2. Overview and current background of the Phonetics and Phonology Teaching Area in Spain.

There's no doubt that learning English pronunciation has become an important matter of study with increasing importance in the past few decades. Scholars and teachers are concerned about the demanding necessity of contributing to the analysis and development of the Phonetics and Phonology area of study. Besides, "phonetics plays an important role in the teaching of foreign languages and is also useful in the acquisition of good diction, in speech therapy for people with speech and hearing impediments, as well as in sound transmission and forensic linguistics" (Gómez González *et al.* 2016: 3).

From an early stage, a vast array of methods was created in relation to this topic, being direct pronunciation teaching the most effective one (Ibarrola, 2011: 50). However, like Muñoz Mallén (2014: 103) comments, with the arrival of the Communicative Approach in the 80s, communication became the main objective in the teaching of languages. From this moment on, all the efforts were driven to teach the foreign language in a communicative way, especially focusing on the suprasegmental features –stress, rhythm and intonation–. This fact brought a renewed attention to the field of teaching pronunciation, since learners were expected to develop a character of intelligibility in oral discourse in order to be able to communicate with other people in a foreign language. Even though, "this method simply subordinated pronunciation to general communicative skills" (Ibarrola 2011: 51), since it was assumed that students would acknowledge the pronunciation patterns while learning to communicate in the language. The subsequent advances accomplished in this area of teaching didn't fulfil pedagogues' expectations at all, since they were specifically concerned about pronunciation, but didn't help students to pronounce correctly.

In the last years, empirical research has proven the beneficial effects of improving the pronunciation in the classroom using a series of exercises and a methodology applied to obtain better results. However, it's also worth saying that in many Spanish educative centres teaching pronunciation is not a relevant issue, since both textbooks and materials created by teachers lack sections focused on pronunciation exercises.

More specifically, in the case of Secondary School Obligatory Education (ESO), students often admit that the English classes are more oriented to formal aspects of language, like grammar and vocabulary, and the correct pronunciation of words is usually consigned to oblivion, and, like Muñoz Mallén (2014) sagely explains, the textbooks used in the last decades to teach English haven't been focused on the study of the acquisition of the phonological system. In fact, the deficiencies found in these textbooks are also a disadvantage for those teachers who are really concerned about the importance of teaching pronunciation.

On the other hand, the learner is also the generator of those factors which will mainly affect the correct learning of pronunciation (Cuenca Villarín, 2001). In this respect, like Cuenca Villarín says taking into account Kenworthy's views (1990: 4-6), it is important to consider his or her native language, the age, the quantity of exposition to the foreign language, his phonetic skills, his attitudes and personal identity, and his motivation and concern on obtaining a qualified pronunciation. Therefore, the learner has to be involved in his own learning to develop a personal interest on acquiring a series of skills that, merged with his particular circumstances, will allow him or her to ease the teachers' efforts to work with phonetics at school.

Nevertheless, the real situation in our days seems to be difficult to deal with, but not impossible. Generally speaking, there's a shocking absence of motivation in this issue, especially by the youngest learners, who aren't completely aware of the compelling necessity of advancing in their oral skills. Few textbooks are really oriented to work the oral skills of the students, focusing on teaching grammar and lexicon. Undoubtedly, these issues play an essential role in the process of learning a language, but they mustn't compromise the possibility of allowing the practice of pronunciation to be completely achieved. All these areas of study are meaningful and crucial, and deserve equal attention by both teachers and students, though this fact hasn't already been assumed by most part of the Spanish educational communities.

2.1. Empirical research, reports and results on the teaching of pronunciation projects by scholars and English teachers.

As commented above, in the last years a growing interest on studying the constraints of teaching pronunciation in the classroom has led many linguists, psycholinguists, phoneticians and English teachers to analyse the situation in detail and

apply a set of methods oriented to observe the development of the communicative skills of groups of students and their advances in the phonetic and phonological area. According to Gómez González *et al.* (2016: 86):

Notwithstanding the difficulties involved in learning English pronunciation, it is nonetheless true that experimental research suggests perceptual processes improve gradually as production capabilities are developed, which underscores the dynamic or changing nature of the learner's interlanguage during L2 acquisition.

It is deduced from this that while the personal ability to produce correct utterances increases, the same does our own perception and auto-evaluation of our own practice. This and many other theories concerning the apprehension of L2 pronunciation have been widely commented and examined in diverse academic spheres. In the following paragraphs, some of the most appealing studies for the purposes of this paper will be commented and briefly discussed.

Firstly, Martínez Adrián (2014) analysed “The efficacy of a reading aloud task in the teaching of pronunciation”, testing the accuracy of this procedure with a component of perception and awareness on the teaching of pronunciation. At the same time, she gathered the opinions of a group of twenty University students from the first year of English Studies in relation to this practice, proving that they considered the reading aloud task an effective tool to develop their oral skills and improve their pronunciation.

Similarly, Arboleda *et al.* (2012) reported the results of a study focused on the importance of having a native accent in a university context for both professors and students. For this purpose, the information and opinions were collected through a questionnaire gathering the results of thirty-eight participants –eight Colombian professors, eight foreign professors, eight Colombian students and eight foreign students–. The data elucidated that though they all assumed the importance of having a native accent, they don't consider it the most relevant aspect to teach a language in full terms.

Equally interesting are Cuervo Ballén *et al.* (2000) views, since they analysed in detail a controversial interrogation for Applied Linguistics and Pedagogy: Can adult students speak English if they are given the opportunities to do it? To give an answer, five students from Fernando Ferrini Institute in Bogotá with ages ranged from seventeen to forty were involved in a project concerning a series of plays and interactive

multimedia tools –songs and videos– using movement and reflection. The objective was to “improve speaking in adult students giving them the opportunity to listen to and practice English from the beginning” (Cuervo Ballén *et al.* 2000: 61), since these students had never learned this foreign language before. The conclusions of the experiment showed that students were able to learn and use English more easily using these interactive methods than with traditional resources like books and self-learning. Additionally, the study proved that adult learners are usually more motivated and aware of their own learning than young students, and that the exercises of listening, reading and writing are especially useful for this specific group of population.

In connection with new technologies and the last advances in the educational field, Grazia (2010) from the University of Padua, Italy, studied the role of multimodal resources to teach oral communication strategies, especially focusing on lexicon, language structures in use, pronunciation and intonation, body language and cultural awareness. Like in Cuervo Ballén’s experiment (2000), audiovisual materials were used once again, but considering this time the ten years of advance on the technological field. Hence, students had the opportunity to perform a series of oral speeches and be recorded while doing so, receiving “feedback on their oral and communicative skills” (Grazia, 2010: 51). At the same time, some videos featured by famous people like Bill Clinton and Barack Obama were displayed in order to serve as good examples of public speeches and to control of oral, gestural and diction abilities.

Meanwhile, Tlazalo Tejeda *et al.* (2014) research project –“Pronunciation Instruction and Student’s Practice to Develop Their Confidence in EFL Oral Skills”– explored the procedures implemented to teach English pronunciation to a group of students of EFL of elementary level at the Language School of Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico. In this qualitative study, class observations, a written text and a series of interviews served as data collection mechanisms, proving that both teacher pronunciation instruction and students’ practice are essential to make progresses and comprise a satisfactory acknowledgement of English pronunciation teaching. Therefore, we incur again into the belief that the process of pronunciation instruction comprehends double efforts and mutual awareness.

In the case of Spanish educational system, we have been assisting in the last ten years to the upcoming of CLIL programme (Content and Language Integrated Learning), which implements the use of the English language in all the materials used in the classroom –textbooks, exercises...–. In this respect, Gallardo del Puerto *et al.*

(2008) tested its effectiveness on a group of secondary school learners of EFL. The results obtained showed that through a daily exposure to this intentionally bilingual programme, students became more fluent in lexis and grammar, though no high improvement was registered on the field of pronunciation. Nevertheless, these students happened to be more reliant on their mother tongue –L1–, being “more independent and efficient speakers of the foreign language” (Gallardo del Puerto *et al.* 2008: 43). Furthermore, it seems that CLIL methods are primarily developed in the Spanish educational centres. Although the students became proficient narrators and accomplished a wide variety of lexico-grammatical skills, the truth is that pronunciation is once again relegated to a second stage.

Despite the fact that oral skills haven't still obtained a rising popularity in Spanish schools, some other studies have helped to build a better image of this meaningful area. This is the case of Lázaro Ibarrola (2011) from Universidad de Navarra, who also developed a methodological intervention oriented to improve the pronunciation of a group of fifteen Spanish students of English. The procedure chosen was to imitate English recordings from TV and series. After fourteen weeks, the researcher noticed minor improvement on the pronunciation, and the oral skills acquired during the process didn't transfer to the student's free speeches. Although the participants found the practice of imitating quite attractive and motivating, the results obtained didn't fulfil the previous expectations.

Both curious and appealing is Rengifo's project (2009) –“Improving Pronunciation through the Use of Karaoke in an Adult English Class”– from the National University of Columbia, focused on the use of karaoke activities in the classroom in order to improve the student's pronunciation. In words of Rengifo (2009: 93), “most pronunciation challenges come from the fear of speaking with an accent different from those of native English speakers”. In this situation, teachers have to deal with the necessary task of educating the students on the importance of losing the fear of pronouncing the English language with the natural features of their mother tongue accents. When the student assumes his active role as an individual speaker, he or she encourages the pronunciation with a different perspective and progressively work to make his accent more standardized, more similar to an RP English pronunciation. Maybe karaoke would be both a funny and attractive way to make novel students feel more comfortable with the practice of pronunciation and, proven its efficacy in Japan, it might also contribute to perceive task of focusing on the rhythm and intonation of

words more affordable than with traditional listening and speaking activities. By this way, learners concentrate their efforts on pronouncing English words and have fun at the same time. Songs like “Bohemian Rhapsody”, by “Queen”, were displayed in the classroom. The students had to notice the differences between “thank” and “tank”, “bath and bat”, and “thin” and “sin”, among other words. The results of the study proved that the dual practice of using traditional textbooks combined with the enjoyable sessions of karaoke were highly satisfactory for all the students, who felt more motivated toward the subject and experienced a qualitative advancement in their pronunciation.

The two most engaging researches for the purposes of this paper have been reserved for the end of this section. It is the case of “On the Teaching and Acquisition of Pronunciation within a Communicative Approach” (Raymond Elliot, 2016) and “A Model for a Successful Organization of a University-Level English Phonetics Course” (Barrera Pardo, 2004). Raymond Elliot, from the University of Texas at Arlington, used the widespread methodology of the Communicative Approach in order to improve the pronunciation of a group of adult learners of English employing a multimodal methodology able to recognize individual progress on pronunciation accuracy. The results obtained from the analysis confirm the impelling necessity of formal phonological instruction at the intermediate level and supports the general belief that students don’t often speak English in public because they often feel ashamed of their own accents. In this sense, those students who aspire to have a native-like accent usually have a better pronunciation. In words of Raymond Elliot (2016: 104)

More contact with native speakers translates to greater amounts of target language input and negotiation of meaning, which in turn, will serve to enhance our students’ ultimate degree of acquisition, thus complying with the principal goal of communicatively-oriented curricula.

Therefore, the exposure to native contact will provide the students the opportunity of assimilating the target language most salient features of pronunciation and develop a wide range of communicative abilities more adopted and adapted to the foreign language, eventually dispersing the segmental and suprasegmental characteristic features of their mother tongue.

As previously said, Barrera Pardo’s project (2004) –“A Model for a Successful Organization of a University-Level English Phonetics Course”– is also worth

mentioning for his involvement on teaching English pronunciation at the University level. A teaching experience developed at the University of Seville during three academic years allowed the professor to implement an English Phonetics course taught in the first course of the English Philology BA. By making traditional lectures more interactional and establishing a system of continuous assessment and feedback ease the process of teaching at University levels of education. This pedagogical approach is based on a systematic control on the students' progresses and, in the end, the results were highly satisfactory for both the professor and the students. Hence, we can deduce that interaction and the preference over continuous evaluation rather than a single exam benefits the instruction of Phonetics and approaches a commonly difficult subject to the learners, who feel more motivated and obtain excellent results.

All the things said, there's no doubt that comprehensive study and experiments on the subject of teaching and learning English pronunciation have been done especially in the last fifteen years. The results gathered from the analyses mentioned above are acceptable in general terms, though almost all the authors have the mutual opinion on the extreme, impelling necessity of improving pronunciation teaching in these particular aspects:

- a. Raising awareness on the importance of teaching and learning pronunciation by both teachers and learners of EFL.
- b. Making the lectures more interactive, dynamic and attractive to the students in order to increase their motivation and participation.
- c. Implementing the use of new technologies and resources like audio-visual content –videos, songs, podcasts, etc.– not only to work the pronunciation, but also to improve the communicative skills in order to perform public speeches.
- d. Applying the Communicative Approach method through an intensive exposure to English native accents; this will make the students more self-reliant.

3. Common Pronunciation problems in the EFL classroom: a study case.

In this section, we will analyse the overall set of difficulties, attitudes and perception on the pronunciation of English by two different groups of students. The first group (A) is composed by four girls of ages between 14 and 26 years old who have always been receiving public education in Almería, more specifically at 'Sagrada Familia' (SAFA) and 'Nicolás Salmerón' high schools, and at the University of

Almería. During a period of six months I was their English support teacher. The second group (B) is formed by 21 students from 6th course of Primary Education from the International School 'SEK Alborán', placed in Almerimar, El Ejido, Almería, with who I was in contact during my traineeship. The methodology used to collect data on their behaviour toward pronunciation differed in both cases, since the circumstances were quite different.

3.1. Group A: Public School.

Group A had a very specific purpose in mind: to pass their English exams and obtain a B1 level of English. I used to meet each student for nearly 3 hours a week. While Aurora and Ana received individual lessons, Marina and Belén attended the classes in pairs. In the following lines, I will thoroughly describe the implemented methods with each of them regarding their personal skills, necessities and attitudes toward pronunciation.

Aurora² is a 14-year-old student of 3^o ESO (Obligatory Secondary Education). She attends a public high school in Almería. From the beginning, she admitted that along her academic life her teachers have put a special emphasis on pronunciation, qualifying their practice with nine points over ten. Nevertheless, her accent was that of a native Spanish speaker and used to commit serious errors.

The second student, Marina, is a 15-year-old student who also studies 3^o ESO in a public high school in Almería. Her cousin, Belén, also attends this high school. They are in the same class of English and receive the same lessons. Belen is also 15 years old and has a better knowledge of grammar and lexicon than Marina, though the pronunciation is quite inaccurate in both girls.

Finally, Ana is 26 years old and attended the English lessons in order to obtain the B1 level of English. She has been receiving public education throughout her life and now she's finishing her University degree on Social Work at the University of Almería.

² The personal information provided about the students who participated in this research project has been given and authorized by them. These data cannot be used for any other external purpose.

Her starting level of English was quite low; she didn't know the basic rules of grammar and presented considerable lacks of vocabulary. Besides, her pronunciation was completely imprecise and defective.

I started to work with Aurora in October of 2015. Marina and Belén joined the classes in February 2016, and Ana did so in March. All they left the classes in June 2016. Therefore, I could observe, analyse and work with their pronunciation during a period of eight, four and three months, respectively.

In the following section, I will list the most common pronunciation errors.

3.1.1. Segmental features' errors.

- a. Confusing the phoneme /ɪ/ with /e/. *E.g.*: *³/ˈfrendz/ instead of /ˈfrendz/.
- b. Pronouncing the phoneme /h/ placed at the beginning of words like “hand” as a Spanish /j/. *E.g.*: */ˈjɪt/ instead of /ˈhɪt/. The Spanish language has a voiced palatal fricative word-initially, “while in ‘age’ it can be perceived as /tʃ/ owing to the devoicing of word-final voiced sounds that takes place in English” (Gómez González *et al.* 2016: 85).
- c. Ignoring the existence of certain phonemes, like /æ/, which was usually pronounced as a Spanish open /a/. *E.g.*: */ˈjænd/ instead of /ˈhænd/.
- d. Pronouncing the /ð/ and /θ/ phonemes as a Spanish /t/. *E.g.*: */ˈsmu:t/ instead of /ˈsmu:ð/ and /tɪn/ instead of /ˈθɪn/.
- e. Omitting the ending consonants in pronunciation, especially the /s/ in the Present Simple third person singular. *E.g.*: */ˈsɪŋ/ instead of /ˈsɪŋz/ and */ˈɜ:n/ instead of /ˈɜ:nz/.

³ This symbol (*) will be placed before incorrect words of phonological transcriptions which serve as example of errors committed by the students during the process.

f. Having problems in pronouncing /ŋ/, like in ‘slang’ /'slæŋ/, which was pronounced like */'slæn/. According to Sapir (1925), “No native speaker of English could be made to feel in his bones that ŋ formed part of a series with m and n”. In fact, this is a specially difficult phoneme to be adopted by speakers of Spanish, since in most cases they tend to avoid pronouncing it and it is replaced by an ending consonant, like n.

g. Presenting difficulty in pronouncing the final consonants. As Gómez González *et al.* (2016: 43) remark, “Final consonant clusters are particularly difficult for Spanish speakers, especially those ending in a plosive”. The following are the phonological transcription of some words that presented difficulties in pronunciation for my student:

/ˈsɒft/ (soft), /dɪˈdʌkt/ (deduct), /ˈbɪlt/ (built), /ˈkəʊld/ (cold), /ˈwɜːld/ (world), /ˈsent/ (sent), /ˈwɪnd/ (wind), /ˈfaʊnd/ (found).

h. Having problems with the pronunciation of the past tense of regular and irregular verbs.

This was one of the most troublesome aspects for the four learners, since they had difficulty in understanding and differentiating the variety of realizations of the past morpheme. In fact, the tendency for these students was to employ the /ɪd/ phonemic realization at the end of almost all regular verbs. *E.g.*: */ˈlʊkɪd/ instead of /ˈlʊ(k)t/ (looked) and */ˈfɪnɪʃɪd/ instead of /ˈfɪnɪʃt/ (finished). However, /əd/ or /ɪd/ are only used in verbs whose stem ends with the alveolar stops /t/ or /d/.

Similarly, those verbs ending in a /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /s/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/ sound were also pronounced as /ɪd/ instead of /t/. *E.g.*: */ˈstɒpɪd/ instead of /ˈstɒ(p)t/ (stopped), */ˈwɒʃɪd/ instead of /ˈwɒʃt/ (washed), */ˈθæŋkɪd/ instead of /ˈθæŋ(k)t/ (thanked) and */ˈtʌtʃɪd/ instead of /ˈtʌtʃt/ (touched).

On the other hand, they didn't have big difficulty in pronouncing the verbs ending in a vowel sound /ed/, /b/, /g/, /ð/, /v/, /z/, /dʒ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/ and /l/ as /d/, like /ˈemptɪd/ (emptied), /ˈwʌrɪd/ (worried), /ˈrʌbd/ (rubbed), /ˈlʌvd/ (loved) and /bɪˈlɒŋd/ (belonged).

- i. Having difficulties with phonologically conditioned allomorphs, like /s/, /z/ and /ɪz/ in the third person plural of verbs in the present tense. Learners used to pronounce all the variations of the phoneme /s/ in the same way, making no distinction among the different occurrences. *E.g.:* /'kɪsɪs/ (*kisses*) instead of /'kɪsɪz/; /'mɪsɪs/ (*misses*) instead of /'mɪsɪz/ and /'kɔːls/ (*calls*) instead of /'kɔːlɪz/. Similarly, the saxon genitive ('s) was pronounced in all cases as /s/, without considering the surrounding phonemes. *E.g.:* /'pɪ(:)təs/ (*Peter's*) instead of /'pɪ(:)təz/ and /'gɜːls/ (*girl's*) instead of /'gɜːlɪz/.

- j. Avoiding the difference between /v/ and /b/ phonemes. Students used to make no distinction between these phonemes and pronounced them equally. For instance, “virgin” /'vɜːdʒɪn/ was pronounced like */'bɜːdʒɪn/ and ‘variety’ /və'reɪətɪ/ like /bə'reɪətɪ/.

- k. Mispronouncing schwa /ə/, especially when placed in final position, like in ‘doctor’ (*/'dɒktɔr/ instead of /'dɒktə/). According to Roach (1998: 76):

Learners of English need to learn where ə is appropriate and where it is not. (...) The question to ask is: if the speaker were to pronounce a particular weak syllable as strong instead, which word would it be most likely to have, according to the usual rules of English spelling? (...) This will give us a rough guide to the correct pronunciation of weak syllables.

Making the students being familiar with the acquisition of ə is a hard task, especially when they are accustomed to pronounce all the vowels and consonants present in a word, as it happens in Spanish. However, the phonetics of English does not allow the speaker to pronounce literally, as the word is written, and this creates confusion and disagreement at the same time.

- l. Confusing the pronunciation of RP /əʊ/. This is a problematic issue for Spanish learners, since /əʊ/ does not form part of the Spanish vocalic system. “Spanish speakers tend to produce this diphthong with an initial /o/, thereby resembling the pronunciation of the Spanish diphthong /ou/ found in the word *bou* /bou/” Gómez González *et al.* (2016: 133). According to this, Spanish should try to

start this diphthong with an /ə/-sound, with a slight opening of the mouth. In fact, “the closest Spanish diphthong to RP is /eu/ (e.g. /'neutro/ 'neutral') but the first element of the RP glide is more central and the second more relaxed” Gómez González *et al.* (2016: 133).

- m. Making no distinction between clear and dark *l*. It should be taken into account that while English has only one lateral approximant phoneme with two main allophones (clear and dark *l*), “Spanish has two lateral phonemes: the alveolar one [l] (la, el) and the palatal one [ʎ] (calle [ˈkaʎe] ‘street’), although the latter is increasingly delateralised resulting in a merger with the central palatal approximant [j] ([ˈkaje])” (Gómez González *et al.* 2016: 221). For this reason, when speaking in English learners should be careful to pronounce this sound only in syllable-initial positions before vowels or /j/, producing the dark variant elsewhere.
- n. Causing a strong foreign accent towards the tendency to produce a voiced bilabial fricative [β] in intervocalic position as in ‘carbón’. For this reason, they normally had difficulty in pronouncing /'rʌbə/ –‘rubber’–. In order to solve this problem, “Spanish learners are advised to produced English intervocalic [b] as the initial sound of the word ‘bola’ (ball)” (Gómez González *et al.* 2016: 169).

3.1.2. Suprasegmental features’ errors.

According to Gómez González *et al.* (2016: 310) views, “English is a stress-timed language whereas Spanish is syllable-timed. (...) Spanish speakers will tend to treat English as a syllable-timed language instead of giving it the stress-timed rhythmic distribution which is natural in native speech”. Therefore, Spanish speakers’ productions usually sound unnatural, forced and even plain, lacking illocutionary force and strength, as I could observe with group A in class.

Alternatively, English and Spanish offer similarities and differences. The similarities focus on the role of the nucleus and the typology of the syllables. Thus, in both languages the nucleus is essential and the coda and the onset are optional. (...) Secondly, they contain similar syllable types. (Gómez González *et al.* 2016: 4). For this reason, some words in Spanish and in English contain similar syllable types. *E.g.* “me-

sa” (consonant and vowel), “co-lic” (consonant and vowel). In fact, “although learning is in general facilitated where there are equivalent features between L1 and L2, (...) the equivalences that exist between the sound systems and the suprasegmental features of English and Spanish are rarely exact but mostly similar” (Gómez González *et al.*, 2016: 85).

At the same time, we mustn’t forget that “the nucleus is the essential component in the syllable structure which constitutes the peak of sonority. In Spanish, the nucleus is always constituted by a vowel, and its number can vary from one, to two – diphthongs-, or three –triphthongs-“ (Gómez Martínez, 2011: 4). The Spanish language only accepts vowels as nucleus of syllables. However, other languages like English which allow consonants such as l, r, or a nasal to stand at the centre of the syllable, and are called syllabic consonants. This is the case of ‘tunnel’ /'tʌnəl/ and ‘brother’ /'brʌðə/.

From the repeated practice by my students, I noticed that the pronunciation of this type of syllables is difficult for native speakers as it breaks up the basic syllabic structure, and at the same time, it is very difficult for Spanish speakers as the Spanish language exclusively has vowels as nucleus. In order to solve this problem, “Spanish speakers tend to add a vowel to this syllabic consonant by analogy to their L1 pronunciation, therefore transforming it to the basic syllabic structure” (Gómez Martínez, 2011: 4). For this reason, students tend to add the /e/ phoneme in words such as ‘couple’ */'kʌpəl/ and ‘petal’ */'petal/.

Additionally, it is very common for Spanish learners to have problems with the stress and intonation of long words, especially those ending in “-able”. Considering Solé Sabater’s views, depicted in “Stress and Rhythm in English” (1991: 149), “There are a number of morphological alternations that affect stress and, consequently, the pronunciation of the whole word. Morphological derivation might involve a change in stress since many of the suffixes which are added to derive words have an effect on stress”. In the case of Aurora, words like “comfortable” were pronounced like */kʌmf'teɪbəl/ instead of /'kʌmfətəbəl/ and */ʌnsɪŋ'keɪbəl/ instead of /'ʌn'sɪŋkəbəl/. Some other words like ‘police’, ‘political’ and ‘politician’ caused difficulty in placing the stress. In fact, both Marina and Belén used to say */'pəli:s/ instead of /pə'li:s/ –‘police’– and */pə'litɪʃn/ instead of /,pɒli'tɪʃn/ –‘politician’–. Strangely enough, they had no difficulty in saying /pə'litɪkəl/ –‘political’– and placing the stress in the correct position.

Furthermore, it is important to remark that the shifting of the nucleus of intonation –the prominent syllable– will result in the highlighting of the information the speaker wishes to focus on. As Gómez González *et al.* (2016: 290) say, “The nucleus of the intonation group may be used to signal a narrow focus on a piece of new information when everything else is given, or treated as given or implied”.

Despite the importance of remarking the intonation of a word to give it the necessary importance according to the context, in most cases the students presented a complete lack of attitudinal function or intonation in their speeches. As Mennen (2006: 1) says, “Intonation not only conveys linguistic information, but also plays a key role in regulating discourse and as an important indicator of speaker identity, reflecting factors such as physical state and sociolinguist membership. Intonation is also important for intelligibility”. Because of this, I considered that making the students be aware of the compelling demand to work their speech’s intonation and I stimulated them through exercises like the one depicted below.

E.g. Considering the following statements, focus the emphasis of information by shifting the nucleus:

Sarah and Mike only broke their grandma’s vase.

*Sarah and Mike only broke their **grandma**’s vase.*

*Sarah and Mike only broke **their** grandma’s vase.*

*Sarah and Mike only **broke** their grandma’s vase.*

*Sarah and Mike **only** broke their grandma’s vase.*

***Sarah and Mike** only broke their grandma’s vase.*

The students repeated the same sentence six times, placing the emphasis on the elements in bold. At the beginning it was difficult for them to understand and deal with the mechanics of the exercise, because they did not use to pay any attention to intonation nor word stress. However, this exercise helped them to practice and be more conscientious about the necessity of working the suprasegmental features of English pronunciation in order to perform successful acts of communication.

3.1.3. Morphologically conditioned allomorphs.

a. Difficulties with lexically conditioned allomorphs.

In this case, the choice of the allomorph is unpredictable, thus memorised on a word-by-word basis. Therefore, the learner used to say /'maʊsɪs/ *(*mouses*) instead of /'maɪs/ and /'ʃi:ps/ *(*sheeps*) instead of /'ʃi:p/ (*sheep*).

b. Lexically conditioned allomorphs.

In the case of morphologically conditioned allomorphs, the choice of the allomorph is determined by particular morphemes, not just by their pronunciation. Thus, the alternation is not predictable from the phonological laws of English. Despite this, given the verb “assume”, the learners would say */əsʊ'meɪʃən/ *(*assumption*) instead of /ə'sʌmpʃən/ (*assumption*).

3.1.4. Teaching Proposal.

A) Objectives.

Once I noticed the most common pronunciation errors of my students, I decided to put into practice several exercises and techniques in order to help them to correct the inaccuracies of their accents and achieve a number of goals:

1. Improve their pronunciation working the segmental and suprasegmental⁴ levels.

⁴ In words of Mennen (2006: 1) “Language teachers have lately (...) shifted the focus of their pronunciation teaching more towards the inclusion of suprasegmental alongside segmentals with a view of improving general comprehensibility”.

2. Perform a Communicative Approach which would reinforce the learner's oral skills.
3. Correct the most typical errors when pronouncing specific phonemes and allomorphs.
4. Help the student to ignore pre-existing prejudices about pronunciation, making them feel more motivated, participative and comfortable.
5. Raise awareness on the importance of having a good pronunciation as the main objective.

B) Methodology.

After having analysed the most common errors and have defined the specific objectives of my study, I consulted several references in order to established an adequate methodology adapted to each student's needs, level and skills. First, I took as a point of departure Cuenca Villarín's (1993) research project, called "Consideraciones para la pronunciación inglesa a hablantes nativos de español". In this paper, she proposes various orientative guidelines which might help to develop an effective teaching plan:

1. Progressively introduce a phonetic alphabet in order to make the student more autonomous in the process of learning new words by using dictionaries.
2. Begin the teaching by assuring the control of suprasegmental features –rhythm above all–, since these are even more important than the segmental features when acquiring a semi-native accent.
3. Make a contrastive phonological analysis⁵ English/Spanish with the purpose of predicting our apprentices' difficulties in the phonological system of the target language.

⁵ As Gómez González *et al.* (2016: 84) explain, "The contrastive approach has been adopted for three main reasons. Firstly, it allows us to take into account the interlanguage phonological system of learners, considering both the L1 and the (perception of the) L2 sound systems, as well as additional factors at work such as markedness and other universal phonetic principles".

4. Work on the self-knowledge and auto-implication from the learner in the process of learning are essential for the consecution of our objectives as instructors.
5. Reinforce new articulatory habits through exercises like /ssss ʃʃʃʃ ssss ʃʃʃʃ/, followed by minimal pairs exercises with words and sentences.

3.1.5. Activities proposed to improve the pronunciation in the classroom.

Considering the recommendations previously listed, I established a scheduled plan which consisted of the following activities:

A) Interactive and Multimedia Exercises.

In the age of new technologies⁶, these mean a very useful tool to practice the contents learned and to reinforce the traditional teaching. The students felt increasingly excited toward the idea of using videos, famous songs and multimedia content in general to work in the classroom, since they know these materials quite well and use them in their everyday lives.

They usually found these exercises quite attractive and unusual and felt motivated towards the idea of using materials that they knew well for academic purposes. The objective was to make use of the broad range of resources available in the World Wide Web and apply them to the acquisition of new phonological realizations. In this sense, videos, recordings, songs, online dictionaries and podcasts were extremely useful to support the traditional teaching method and reinforce the contents learnt at high school.

⁶ In connection with new technologies, it is worth mentioning Computer-Assisted Pronunciation Teaching (CAPT), which is based on the use of technology for learning and teaching the segmental and suprasegmental features of the sound system. In words of Gambari *et al.* (2014: 14), “Computers are used in teaching pronunciation to achieve two purposes: a) diagnosing the student’s deviation in pronunciation; and b) assisting students in correcting such deviations”. The CAPT method was not used in this study, but as many scholars as Gambari comment, its implementation has been quite beneficial while following a dual interest: to promote the use of new technologies in teaching and use it to improve the students’ pronunciation.

1. Listening exercises.

These exercises comprised the practice with listening audios obtained from the internet. The recordings were played three times, and the students had to choose the correct answers according to what they heard. In fact, as O'Connolly *et al.* (1989: 6) say:

A baby who is born deaf cannot hear the speech of others and may, in the worst case, remain completely mute. Similarly, students who cannot hear a particular English contrast have no chance of reproducing it. Until Japanese students can hear the contrast between 'light' and 'right', or Spanish students between 'boat' and 'vote', they have no chance of making the difference.

For this reason, it is of extreme importance for Spanish students of EFL to become familiar with the peculiarities and difficulties present in the English pronunciation. I continuously insisted on the impelling necessity of hearing a record in English every day during 20 minutes at least. They were free to choose songs, interviews, TV shows or whatever they liked, but this task was compulsory in order to improve their marks in the listening tests and, especially, to become more confident when talking in the foreign language.

2. Videos.

Apart from this, I also displayed some videos in which a pair of students was taking a speaking exam. I usually stopped the video in the most interesting parts and we commented on the accents of the interlocutors, their mistakes in pronunciation and some recommendations to improve the communication between them and with the examiner. By this way, the students were involved in the process of improving their communicative abilities and their pronunciation at the same time, especially when hearing native accents.

3. Songs' lyrics.

Alternatively, I used to play different songs. They were *Disney* songs, characterized by having easy lyrics and clear understanding. I gave the students a paper with the lyrics in which some interesting words were omitted. The song was played three times; the first time, they just had to listen and follow the written lyrics. The second time, they had to fill the gaps, and the third time they checked their answers.

The songs⁷ used were “Colours of the Wind” –from *Pocahontas*’ Original Sound Track (OST)–, “Son of Man” –from *Tarzan*’s OST–, “Let it go” –from *Frozen* OST– “A Whole New World” –from *Aladdin* OST–, and “Part of your world” –from *The Little Mermaid* OST–.

The hidden words which presented more difficulties to be recognized were “hand”, “wise”, “be” –especially when placed at the end of a sentence–, “grow”, “visions”, “pride”, “footprint”, “isolation”, “conceal”, “back”, “through”, “free”, “wind”, “ground”, “crystallizes”, “storm”, “around”, “dawn”, “shimmering”, “sideways”, “indescribable”, “freewheeling”, “shooting”, “neat”, “girl”, “everything”, “treasures”, “feet”, “could”, “questions”, “turn” and “world”.

After the third hearing, we corrected the confused words and I pronounced them correctly. Then, they had to repeat them and listen to the audio once again in order to notice the difference between the word they had written in the paper and the correct one. *E.g.* “was” instead of the correct one, “wise”, “down” instead of “dawn”, “meat” instead of “neat”, *”tresars” instead of “treasures”, *”slimmering” instead of “shimmering”, “unbelievable” instead of “indescribable”, *”saidway” instead of “sideways” and “from” instead of “storm”.

⁷ The exercises and the stencil with the lyrics and the gaps in certain words are in Appendix A.

4. Online search of new words on dictionaries and data bases.

Online dictionaries are very useful tools for students of English, since a phonological transcription normally appears beside the word searched together with an audio display in which a native person pronounces it correctly. When the students were doubtful about the correct pronunciation of a word at home, they used these dictionaries and audio resources. Their favourite one was Word Reference.

5. Podcasts.

Podcasts from the Broadcast British Channel (BBC) were also helpful in order to improve the students' hearing and understanding of foreign word while noticing the most significant features of the Received Pronunciation (RP)⁸. They consisted of podcasts oriented to children with a low level of lexicon and clear understanding, like "Just Think", a programme which, as described in the BBC web:

... It offers funny and thought-provoking stories to help children get to grips with big ideas and build their capacity to ask high-level questions for themselves. Each story is framed around one of life's big questions, such as 'what does it mean to be brave?' or 'is it ever ok to lie?'

[*Just Think* podcast, obtained on June the 11th from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01wrj7q/episodes/downloads>].

⁸ In words of Gómez González (2016: 35), Received Pronunciation (RP) is "also known as BBC English, Oxford English, or the Queen's English (...). RP originated in the Southeast, and probably it is associated with this area by people from the Northern, Central, and Western England. There are two main reasons to choose RP as the model accent: (1) It is a neutral accent that is universally understood by both native and foreign speakers alike; and (2) it is the accent of reference that is described in most books and materials of EFL, especially in Europe, and so it should also be familiar to Spanish learners of English".

These podcasts allowed the learners to hear a RP pronunciation from native children, to compare it with their own pronunciation and to discuss several interesting topics which permitted them to raise their creativity in oral speech and be more fluent and spontaneous.

B. Traditional Teaching Method.

Not only new technologies were used in this approximation to a teaching programme; traditional exercises like reading aloud and speaking activities were also extremely useful to study the learners' pronunciation, correct their errors and ease the acknowledgement of new phonological realizations.

1. Reading aloud tasks.

Since the students didn't have phonological instruction, the most typical method used to improve the pronunciation was reading short texts aloud. In fact, this type of tasks are productive exercises which, according to Tost (2013) in "Bettering Pronunciation through Reading Aloud and Peer Appraisal" help the student to be more cooperative and fluent, since he or she is reading for somebody else and is responsible of the good understanding of the information given:

The reading aloud activity shows that self-repair is exercised in both activities: reading out loud and speaking. This also suggests that both skills are closely interconnected, and therefore learning to read aloud efficiently in a cooperative way should reflect in the students speaking level of fluency; since students, while reading aloud, explore and analyse their language production and experience self-repair.

[Tost, 2013: 49]

To begin with practical exercises, the students were given different texts to read in class. In these texts difficult words with troublesome phonemes were strategically included. They had turns of reading, and every time they committed an error, I pronounced the word correctly and they had to repeat as many times as needed until they apprehended the correct pronunciation.

In some occasions, I also recorded their readings and they could hear themselves to notice the errors they had committed. This exercise was one of the most effective to correct their mistakes and make them to be aware of the extent of their failures. For this purpose, Aurora was asked to read an excerpt from Oxford International English (2015: 89)⁹ describing an old farm. First, I read the text so she could hear the correct pronunciation of the words. Secondly, she read the text by herself while I was recording her voice. Then, she heard the recording and noticed the errors she had committed. She pronounced the mispronounced words in isolation and read the text again. The second hearing of the text revealed that she had improved her pronunciation and intonation, being more fluent and accurate.

2. Board Transcriptions.

A board transcription “is a form of phonetic wiring which uses the smallest number of letters and marks which will represent a given form of a language without ambiguity, and uses for this purpose familiar letter shapes as far as possible” (Jones, 1975: 28). These simple, elemental transcriptions lacking phonetic symbols approached the actual pronunciation of a word to the students and eased the understanding of the phonemes implied. For instance, ‘scarlet’ was transcribed */skalet/ instead of its correct form /'ska:lət/. The same occurred with ‘ballon’ (*balun/ instead of /bə'lu:n/).

3. Speaking lessons.

Additionally, speaking exercises were beneficial to work the oral communication skills of the students and reinforce their pronunciation. While talking with their classmates, they corrected each other and commented on the

⁹ This text can be found in Appendix B.

errors that they had committed. This practice helped them to lose the fear to fail in public and to avoid hiding their natural accent, but being concerned at the same time about the importance of polish the Andalusian dialect most characteristic features and driving their attention toward a native-like pronunciation. Therefore, speaking lessons consisted of the following parts:

- General questions about the students' lives and personalities.

These questions were useful to make the students feel calm and relaxed before doing the whole speaking exercise. They had to answer a series of questions and provide information about themselves in order to *break the ice* and face the situation of talking in public in a freer, more comfortable way.

E.g.:

Where are you from?

Do you study or work?

What do you want to be in the future?

Have you got any brothers or sisters?

If you had the opportunity of travelling to a foreign country, where would you go?

What's your favourite kind of music?

- Conversation in pairs.

The students had to discuss about topic proposed by me. In some occasions, I showed them an image about a specific problem or conflicting situation, like people arguing or polluted landscapes. They were asked to comment about the situation in turns, to propose different solutions and decide the most convenient way to solve the problem.

E.g. In this image, you can see two different groups of people arguing. In the first one, you can see a boy and his father contending before the school's headmaster. In the second one, there's a group of people shouting in the middle of a crowded street, in front of a traffic jam. You have six minutes to describe the

photos individually, comment on the different situations in pairs and propose an adequate solution to solve each problem.

- Questions about the topics previously discussed.

Once the students had talked about the proposed topics and had found a solution, they had to answer some questions about the results:

E.g. How would you have solved the problem if you had been involved in a situation like this?

Do you think that these people had enough reasons to argue?

Do you think that arguing in a pacific, non-violent way is possible or not?

In your opinion, what's the best attitude toward a fighting?

- Analysis of the errors committed in both pronunciation and oral communication.

In this part, the students had to comment on the errors they committed during the speaking exercises; not only their own errors, but also the errors of their classmates. In some occasions, they were also asked to take note of these errors while the others were speaking. After the exercises, they recounted the mistaken phonemes and gave advice to their mates in order to improve their speeches.

E.g. AURORA: "Your intonation wasn't good this time; you have to place the emphasis on the part in which you explain your opinions about the argument's topic"

*BELÉN: "I think that you did quite well, but you have to improve you pronunciation. You said */,endʒɪ'nɪer/ instead of /,endʒɪ'nɪə/ –engineer–.*

MARINA: "Your pronunciation was good, but I think that you have to be more fluent and connect your speech; it was a bit confusing".

ANA: "You haven't pronounced 'armchair' well, because you have pronounced the last /r/".

*AURORA: "You said */'sains/ instead of /'sɪns/ –since–.*

According to Tost (2013: 45), by following this procedure “individuals interchange opinions and viewpoints but also, and very importantly, assert their knowledge or understandings, question their own reasoning and ask for help when they do not know about something”. For this reason, and having in mind my students’ experience, I might say that shared assessment is an effective strategy to motivate them and introduce pronunciation exercises in the classroom in a more spontaneous, relaxed way, since it is not the teacher who evaluates the student, but another peer student in the same conditions as him or her.

3.2. Group B: Private School.

Group B was formed by 21 students of 6th grade of elementary education from ‘SEK Alborán’ International School, placed in Almerimar (Almería). The conditions for their assessment were quite different, since I spent two months as an assistant teacher in their classroom. During this period of time, I had the opportunity to attend their lessons in terms of assistant teacher and observer.

The circumstances of this group were quite different, and mine were so. In this case, I took part in their education as an observer and as an occasional helper who stayed with them two days a week during two months. Not only could I attend their lessons, but also to communicate with them in out-of-school activities and daily routines –especially in the dining room and in the playground–. Provided with a notebook and a pen, I took notes about their advances in learning the English language, their pronunciation level and the academic activities proposed by the teacher.

3.2.1. Observations.

During my traineeship at ‘SEK Alborán’, I carefully analysed my notes and drew the following conclusions:

- 1) In general terms, the 21 students were motivated toward learning EFL and looked enthusiastic and participative during the lessons.

- 2) The students' knowledge of English grammar was acceptable for their age (11-12 years old). However, they had a very good knowledge of vocabulary and used a wide variety of different words in their everyday communicative acts.
- 3) Their pronunciation was satisfactory and didn't use to commit serious errors.
- 4) Ms Michele, their American native teacher, put an emphasis on repeating the words that they didn't pronounce correctly. She paid a special attention to pronunciation and was extremely concerned about this.
- 5) Most of the activities proposed by the teacher consisted of vocabulary and grammar exercised that I corrected in some occasions. Speaking activities were also developed in the classroom, together with exercises to reinforce and improve the pronunciation, like the ones which appeared in the textbook.
- 6) Students continuously made use of the new technologies –digital whiteboards, iPads, laptops, etc.– in order to display videos, search information and perform exhibitions in front of their classmates. While being involved in the use of these electronic devices and have unlimited access to Internet contents, they also had the opportunity to control their pronunciation, rhythm and intonation during their oral presentations.
- 7) The English textbook used in class was “Oxford International English”, by Izabella Hearn *et al* (2015). In this book I could find five pages of exercises exclusively focused on English pronunciation. Thus, I noticed that, in contrast with other materials that I had previously consulted, this one paid important attention to pronunciation and proposed a series of dynamic exercises. In further sections I will briefly describe, compare and examine the pronunciation exercises found in the materials and resources consulted.

3.2.2. Objectives.

The main objectives that I set in relation with this group of children were:

- 1) Observe and analyse the students' interactions and their pronunciation.
- 2) Collect the most common pronunciation errors committed by these students.
- 3) Compare the private school teaching methodology with that of the public school –exercises, textbooks–.

3.3.3. Methodology.

The actions that I undertook with these students were the ones described above:

a. Repetition.

Taking into account the tutor's methodology, every time that a student didn't pronounce a word correctly I gave him the correct pronunciation. He just had to repeat the word until they pronounced it correctly. The process was repeated as many times as needed to apprehend all the phonemes involved in the utterance of that particular word.

b. Speaking.

During my traineeship period, I tried to communicate with the children as much as possible, paying special attention to pronounce the words correctly. My objective was to serve as a model for them in both pronunciation and communication skills.

3.3. Analysis and comparison of the materials used in public and private educational centres for the teaching of pronunciation: textbooks, manuals and guides.

Alternatively, a small-scale sample of materials –textbooks and manuals used by the two groups of students, above all– were observed, consulted and taken into account in order to comment on the similitudes, differences, failures and successes found among their pages. As a kind of preliminary action, I considered Muñoz Mallén's views (2014) on the attention paid to pronunciation in textbooks of B1/B1+ level in the European framework. Regarding her observations, there is an impelling “necessity to improve the aspects of pronunciation in EFL teaching materials, which must presumably count with more pronunciation activities focused on both the segmental and suprasegmental levels” (Muñoz Mallén, 2014: 103). In fact, most of the materials consulted are specialized in teaching English grammar and vocabulary to primary and high school students, but usually avoid the inclusion of sections oriented to work on the improvement of pronunciation and communication skills.

Nonetheless, it is fair to say that, at the same time, there also exist manuals which drive their efforts to propose pronunciation-correcting exercises and dynamic practical activities. In fact, as Muñoz Mallén (2014) says, “in the last two decades a significant change has been produced towards a new pronunciation teaching focused on the communicative competence through meaningful activities”. However, although the advances in this field are increasingly growing,

...the different textbooks used during this period of time for the teaching of English in both Europe and in the whole of the American continent haven't devoted much time to study the acquisition of the phonological system and, in consequence, satisfactory solutions applied to its teaching haven't been found.

[Muñoz Mallén, 2014: 103]

Therefore, a big deal of work has to be done in order to elaborate and distribute adequate materials in educational centres which implement new challenges, new perspectives and a reinforced motivation in the process of ameliorating the learners' pronunciation, especially when they are young and have a strong capacity of acquisition and adaptation to the characteristic features of the foreign language.

3.3.1. 'Oxford English Plus. Student's Book 3'.

The first textbook that I consulted was “Oxford English Plus. Student's Book 3”, by Ben Wetz *et al.* (2011). This was the material used by Aurora, from Group A –public education–, at high school. Although Marina and Belén studied in a different educational centre, they precisely used this same textbook, but with some differences. In the case of Aurora, her teacher at high school systematically followed the manual and all the activities proposed. Occasionally, she would provide the students extra practice sheets to reinforce the difficult contents of the subject. As her methodology was extremely connected to that of the book, I decided to complement this material with the exercises listed in previous sections. Although I preferred not to ascribe my teaching methodology to that of the canon, I also had to carefully follow the textbook used in the classroom in order to avoid interference in teaching. By this way, I could take a careful approach to this manual and conclude that this textbook has a set of vocabulary, grammar, writing, reading and speaking exercises, which provide useful key phrases to

be included in any speech and tips to improve the oral communication. However, sections devoted to pronunciation practice are absent.

3.3.2. ‘Oxford International English 6° Educación Primaria’.

The second textbook that I observed was the manual used in ‘SEK Alborán’ International School –Group B, private education–: “Oxford International English 6° Educación Primaria”, by Izabella Hearn *et al* (2015). This was a comprehensive but accessible manual for students of 6th course of Primary Education with sections focused not only in vocabulary, reading, writing and grammar, but also in phonetics and phonology. In fact, four pages exclusively devoted to English pronunciation can be found in this guidebook, dealing with the issues listed below:

A. Difficult words and homophones.

The learning objective of this section is “continue to learn words, apply patterns and improve accuracy in spelling” (Hearn *et al.* 2015: 119). Two exercises are proposed:

1. Choose ten words with “tricky” spelling –accommodation, actually, argument, beautiful, beginning, believe, caught, definite, disappear, disappoint, embarrass, happened, height, necessary, queue, remember, shoulder, strength–, write the word several times and highlight the letters that are difficult to remember. Then, break the word into affixes, syllables, phonemes, and find a word within a word.
2. Provided the definition of “homophones”, the student has to work out strategies for remembering pairs of words like “board/bored” and “currant/current”.

B. Spelling patterns.

This section derives its attention to a specific objective: “continue to learn words, apply patterns and improve accuracy in spelling” (Hearn *et al.* 2015: 100). These are the exercises proposed in this section:

1. Say these words aloud, then sort them into the correct groups, according to the ‘ou’ sound: about, bought, boulder, could, colourful, shoulder, shout, tough, your. The divisions are ‘or’ sound, ‘ow’ sound, ‘o’ sound, and ‘uh’ sound.
2. In the second exercise, students are asked to answer the following question: “Which four words with ‘au’ letters do not have the same sound as the other words?: applause, daughter, naughty, aunt, draught, pause, because, fault, saucepan, caught, laugh, cause, laundry”.

An additional tip is given in this section: “Writing rhyming verse can help you to remember how words with similar spellings can have different sounds” (Hearn *et al.* 2015: 100).

C. Spellings and descriptions.

Following spelling patterns, this part is connected with “further investigate spelling rules and exceptions, including representing unstressed vowels, and explore definitions and shades of meaning and use new words in context” (Hearn *et al.* 2015: 89).

The instructions for the students to work on this topic are described above:

1. In the first one, a list of words with unstressed vowels is provided: business, offering, familiar, different, easily, family, Wednesday, interest, frightening separate, generous, marvellous, miserable and generally. The students are asked to:
 - a. Say the words aloud several times, stressing the underlined vowel.
 - b. Write the words with the underlined vowels enlarged or highlighted in order to remember the vowel.
 - c. Write sentences using each of these words, spelling them correctly.

2. In the second exercise, students can find a small text in which they have to choose the adjectives which complement each noun in order to think carefully about their meanings.

D. Same sounds but different spelling.

This part is oriented to “confirm correct choices when representing consonants /ck/ /k/ /ke/ /que/” (Hearn *et al.* 2015: 85). The challenge proposed in this section consists of keeping a list of words ending in a /k/ sound and sort them into different spelling columns to help the students remember them. Additionally, three exercises can be found in this page:

1. A list of words ending in /k/ sound is provided. Students have to sort them into different groups based on the spelling at the end of each word: crack, earthquake, streak, quick, take, mask, shook, pluck, black, shook, and sack.
2. Another list of words ending in /k/ sound is provided: shake, sick, unique, walk, smirk, antique, stick, thank, lack, junk, hook, track, sleek, stark, shriek, beak, stroke, quake, rock, spike, block, trunk, weak, park, and wreck. According to Hearn *et al.* (2015: 85), “at the end of a word, the letters ‘l’, ‘r’, ‘n’, and ‘c’ are generally followed by /k/. Some of these words can be found in lists A and B above”.
3. Finally, a small text is depicted for the students to correct the incorrect spellings, finding at least six errors. *E.g. *’clinike’ instead of ‘clinique’ and *’panick’ instead of ‘panic’.*

To sum up, the most important characteristics of this textbook toward pronunciation are listed below:

- a. Only segmental features are worked. Although any attention is paid to the distribution of suprasegmental features, the special interest in learning new words containing troublesome phonemes is quite remarkable.

- b. Oral comprehension activities are in connection with the specific phonological problems presented in each chapter and promote their better understanding.
- c. Phonological transcriptions are not included in this book. They don't even appear at the end of each unit. However, useful tips and exercises to work difficult phonemes can be found.
- d. Pronunciation practice objectives and activities are specifically remarked in the table of contents placed in the index, which is quite infrequent in any English book used in the Spanish educational system.
- e. The special interest in pronunciation aspects is also mentioned in the teacher's guidebook.

For the reasons explained above, "Oxford International English", far from being the most accurate option to teach English and work the pronunciation, would be a perfect first step to promote the implementation of specific pronunciation activities in all Spanish classrooms.

3.3.3. 'Cambridge Speaking Course'.

The third guidebook that I consulted was "Cambridge Speaking Course", by Escario Connolly *et al.* (2015). This book belongs to a series of guides created by Cambridge University Press in order to help students "talk and pronounce with fluency and confidence". The book gives advice in the process of improving the oral communication skills of the learners through a series of exercises containing useful resources, tips and key phrases which might be used in any conversation. Apart from this, the book also includes common expressions, idioms, real life conversation simulations and a wide range of adjectives which can be included in any dialogue. At the end of each unit, there is extra space to be filled by the learner answering the following questions and requirements:

- a. *Note the words that you have learned.*
- b. *Note the words that you have difficulty in pronouncing.*
- c. *Note the useful grammatical structures for you.*
- d. *Make a list on your favourite expressions.*

(Escario Connolly *et al.* 2015: 42)

Despite the attention that this guidebook pays to the level of comprehension acquired by the student toward pronunciation, any phonological transcription can be found in this manual. However, it is worth saying that there are pages focused on working with pronunciation and useful expressions. The objectives of these pages are to connect sounds, work with words ending in –ed, and to connect ‘must have’ and ‘might have’ in oral speech. These sections recommend an intensive listening practice and provide several tips to approach the Spanish pronunciation to that of an English native speaker. In conclusion, segmental and suprasegmental features of pronunciation are slightly treated in this manual. However, the oral comprehension activities don’t pay any attention to these features, but are instead devoted to the use of common expressions and key phrases. Besides, phonological transcriptions are absent throughout the book and there isn’t any indication on how to pronounce any word.

3.3.4. Phonetics and Phonology manuals used in University degrees and pronunciation practice textbooks for elementary, intermediate and advanced levels.

Apart from books used in primary and secondary education levels, I also consulted books used in University levels and English academies. For instance, “English Pronunciation for Speakers of Spanish”, by Gómez González *et al.* (2016) is a good example of a comprehensive manual covering the key concepts of English phonetics and phonology for Spanish-speaking learners of English, especially those who study a University degree like English Philology or English Studies. In this manual both theoretical issues and applications to practice merge, adopting a contrastive English-Spanish approach which eases the task of understanding the differences between each phonological system.

Similarly, “Sounds English”, by O’Connor *et al.* (1989) and “English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course” by Roach (1998) are also comprehensive learning guides for the student of English pronunciation, but they would not be easy to be handled and understood by primary and secondary children, since vast knowledge of the English language is needed to acquire to follow the exercises proposed and the explanations given. In this sense, “Ship or Sheep?” (Baker, 2012) would be a good example of a teaching textbook oriented to lower levels of education, since the information is arranged in a clearer, more specific way, being more accessible for younger students

who need decoded definitions and simple exercises to put into practice the contents learned.

In this respect, it is also worth to mention the Cambridge University Press' "English Pronunciation in Use" manuals (Hancock, 2012; Hewings, 2013 and Marks, 2015). There are three volumes –elementary, intermediate and advanced– which satisfy the students' needs in each period of their learning processes. Primary school students would get lost even with the elementary textbook, but at the same time it would serve as an interesting option to practice pronunciation in high schools. The problem is that before implementing this type of books in Secondary education institutions, students should receive an exhaustive pronunciation training which they do not actually have. If their knowledge of this matter was higher, they would be able to work with these manuals and achieve better results in their pronunciation. However, we have a lengthy path ahead of us before this plan becomes a reality in most Spanish educational centres.

3.3.5. Conclusions obtained from the textbooks analysed.

All the things said, it's not difficult to conclude that the three consulted materials oriented to Secondary students and used in classrooms significantly vary their behaviour toward the pronunciation of English. In summary, "Oxford English Plus. Student's Book 3" (Wetz *et al.* 2011) doesn't include any exercise which allows the young learners to work, correct and improve their pronunciation, although key phrases and common expressions are listed in order to practice their speaking performances. On the other hand, "Oxford International English 6º Educación Primaria" (Hearn *et al* 2015) is a comprehensive guidebook which provides a pedagogical approach to English learning and teaching, proposing an interactive methodology and analysing concrete errors in which the students normally incur when pronouncing. For this reason, this could be a good textbook to be implemented not only in Primary Education at International Schools, but also in all educational levels. Both taking into account the student's needs and promote their interest on the matter are essential to make more participative and curious learners.

The differences found between a textbook used in a public high school –'Oxford English Plus– and that used in a private school –Oxford International English– are remarkable, since the second manual is by far more complete and adapted to the students' capacities. However, since the publishing house is exactly the same, it might

be assumed that this is not a matter of private or public education, but of level of consciousness toward the impelling necessity of creating and diffusing an effective methodology with its respective materials to promote, work and improve a satisfactory acquisition of pronunciation skills. Neither troublesome phonemes nor suprasegmental features –stress, rhythm and intonation– are appropriately worked in most educational centres and at best, teachers just correct specific words and focus their attention on grammar and lexicon.

Furthermore, in words of Muñoz Mallén (2014), “the phonological competence decisively intervenes in the apprehension of other competences, both in the general competence (...) and on the different communicative competences, when such are expressed through the external auditory canal”. Due to this fact, extensive attention to the advancement of phonological competences must be paid in order to improve the rest of communicative competences at the same time. Additionally, “finding more suprasegmental than segmental activities is quite positive, since the current methodology which promotes a communicative approach also advocates a growing attention toward suprasegmental features at the expense of the segmental ones” (Muñoz Mallén 2014). However, this increasing interest in suprasegmental features cannot be found in the consulted materials, except in “Cambridge Speaking Course”, which treats this aspect with slight attention.

For all this, it is necessary to increase the presence of professionals in Phonetics and Phonology among the authors of textbooks used in educational centres in order to raise awareness of the importance of pronunciation, evaluating the existing materials, correcting the inaccuracies and preparing adequate and uniform materials which don't contravene other methodologies already implemented. Although more and more pronunciation exercises can be found in recent materials, the truth is that they don't achieve the expectations of many teachers of EFL, since the results obtained aren't satisfactory. In summary, it's important to observe the students' needs, to focus on them and to elaborate and propose effective practical exercises to help them do their best and enjoy while learning. There's a long way to go, but with empathy, constant study and motivation not only textbooks, but also teachers can help the students to reach their potential.

3.4. Results and Discussion.

After having carefully observed the behaviours, attitudes and acknowledgement of two groups of Spanish native learners of EFL from public and private schools, I consulted several references and recognized scholars in order to contrast their views with my notes and draw several conclusions from this work of analysis and contrast. In words of Barreiro Bilbao (2002: 7), “the process of L2 acquisition not only implies speech production but also speech perception, and it seems that there is a complex relationship between these two aspects”. This statement can be considered as the basis to understand the factors to be examined when assessing a student in terms of his or her pronunciation; both production and perception are essential elements in the process of performing a correct utterance. Additionally, I decided to found my views on the Error Analysis (EA) definitions and observations provided by several authors. According to Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (2010: 210):

EA is the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners. It may be carried out in order to (a) identify strategies which learners use in language learning, (b), try to identify the causes of learners' errors and (c) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

Having this definition in mind, I established a list of conclusions which might clarify the observations that I made during the classes. Therefore, the first step was to identify the errors committed by the students. Following Corder's advice in “The Significance of Learners' Errors” (1967), I decided to adopt a positive attitude toward the errors:

A learner's errors provide evidence of the system of the language he is using (i.e. has learned) at a particular point in the course... They are significant in three different ways. First to the teacher, in that they tell him, if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and consequently, what remains for him to learn.

Consequently, I decided to consider errors in pronunciation from then on as effective tools which might help me as a teacher to be aware of the students' lacks and necessities when they uttered a word incorrectly. Secondly, according to Corder (1967: 2), “Errors provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired,

what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in his discovery of the language". For this reason, errors should not be considered as interferences which block the students' struggle to deal with phonetics, but as useful tools which clearly show their progresses and inaccuracies. In this sense, they are beneficial for both teachers and students, and rather than being seriously penalized, they should be patiently corrected. This procedure will stop the student's fear to fail and feel ashamed of his own pronunciation, especially when talking in public. We must not underestimate the motivational factor, since it is essential to increase the speaker's confidence start a pronunciation training strategy.

Comparing the overall state of the errors committed by the students, I assumed that a series of mistakes were common for both the small group of girls who received public education and the 21 students of the international school. In this respect, their Andalusian accent could be considered more a conditioning factor than a default. In my opinion, dialects¹⁰ shouldn't be considered as obstacles which slow down the acquisition of a native-like pronunciation, but as characteristic features added to the student's mother tongue which have to be overlapped by the phonological patterns of the target language through intensive practice. Therefore, the students' tendency to mispronounce /s/ at the end of plural nouns and in the third person of verbs in the present simple tense should never be excused by the dialectal idiosyncrasy of their pronunciation, but as a minor handicap in which both teachers and learners must intensively work. Besides, according to Barreiro Bilbao's views (2002: 8), "A L2 learner will have perceptual difficulties when trying to differentiate speech contrasts that are not functionally distinctive in their first or mother tongue. As an example, Spanish listeners will have problems with the English contrast /s/ vs. /z/ as it is not phonemic in Spanish".

Considering this and many other frequent errors like the ones listed in previous sections, we must also take into account that "there exist two additional factors that may

¹⁰ According to Jones (1975: 4) "A person may speak with sounds very different from those of his hearers and yet be clearly intelligible to all of them, as for instance when a Scotsman or an American addresses an English audience with clear articulation. Their speech cannot be described as other than 'good'. But if a speaker with an accent similar to that of his hearers articulates in a muffled way so that they cannot readily catch what he says, his way of speaking must be considered 'bad'".

affect the way a sound is perceived and produced which therefore should be considered: phonetic context and orthographic pronunciation” (Gómez González *et al.*, 2016: 85). Not only these factors have an effect on the sound perception, but also “A L1 background, L2 experience, age of the learner, attitudes towards L2, culture associated with L2 and motivation to learn L2” (Barreiro Bilbao, 2002: 8). In fact, I might appoint a very specific factor as one of the most important in this process: the student’s obligation to learn contrasts that are different from those learnt in L1. Spanish students –especially the youngest ones and those who are not familiarized with the English language– fear the vast array of existing differences among their natural, mother tongue, and L2. In some cases, they simply forget the necessity of speaking well, of being calmed and declaim utterances in the foreign language with patience and enthusiasm in order to perform a successful communicative act.

On the other hand, practice with students allowed me to observe their phonological perception of English sounds. According to Strange’s beliefs portrayed in “Phonetics of Second Language Acquisition: Past, Present Future” (1995: 79) “perceptual difficulties are not due to a loss of sensory capabilities, but rather reflect *perceptual attunement* to phonetic information that is phonologically relevant in their native language”. In many occasions, I could observe that students literally felt blocked when pronouncing. Although their perceptual abilities were on their splendour, several factors did not allow them to pronounce correctly. In the case of group A, who attended public educational institutions, all the students coincided in the underestimation of pronunciation by their English teachers. Attention was focused on other aspects of the language –grammar and vocabulary above all–, overshadowing pronunciation practice. Group B students, from a private school, admitted that their teachers have always been concerned about teaching pronunciation and, as I could observe, they were continuously correcting their errors and insisting on repeating the most troublesome phonemes.

Although in this particular study there is an evident awareness unbalance among public and private teaching procedures toward pronunciation, the truth is that there always exist exceptions in each case; public school students who feel more motivated and enthusiastic toward this topic and private school learners who lack an intensive work of pronunciation. The truth is that even the textbooks used in each centre are different in contents and approach to improving the students’ oral skills; while “Oxford English Plus” lacks sections dedicated to the apprehension of new phonemes and practical exercises, “Oxford International English” contains five sections exclusively

focused on specific aspects of the English pronunciation. Since both textbooks belong to the same book house, the key question here is not whether the manuals are acceptable or not, but rather which criteria does an educational institution take into account to choose one of them. From my experience I deduct that those centres which are really concerned about the implementation of an appropriate pronunciation teaching method will perform two essential actions: to collect adequate materials which motivate and lessen the acknowledgment of phonological features, like textbooks, multimedia contents and equipment, and make sure that the teaching staff are actually concerned about the necessity of striving into the students the practice of pronunciation.

In relation with the methodology implemented and the activities put into practice with both groups, I conclude that all helped them to improve their oral skills. In general terms, students felt more confident when speaking in front of their classmates and took good care of their pronunciation. The most effective exercises were reading aloud tasks, since this allowed them to be simultaneously corrected while talking by the repetition method and, at the same time, they had the opportunity to hear their own recorded voices and list the errors committed in practice.

Additionally, interaction among learners, reinforcement of their personal progresses and self-evaluation where useful strategies to accomplish the objectives that I had set before the training. I noticed a quantitative improvement of the words that they pronounced correctly –especially verbs in the past tense– and a satisfactory advance in suprasegmental features. The rhythm and intonation of their utterances progressively improved and pauses between words diminished in oral speech, which impelled them to continue working and be more participative in the classroom. Despite their precedence to a public or a private school, they all were Spanish native learners of EFL with personal abilities and disabilities, but the educational centres have the great responsibility of exploring their necessities and making the most of them with regard to their present and future behaviour toward the acquisition of English and other foreign languages, especially emphasizing the importance of effective communication within the context of an increasingly globalized world in which English as a lingua franca is spoken in almost every corner of our planet.

For all this, doing listening activities once a week is not enough. Watching occasional videos for academic purposes is not enough. Correcting certain words when the students read aloud is not definitely enough. There is an impelling necessity of approaching the practice of pronunciation in a natural, spontaneous way.

Accomplishing a native-like pronunciation is not the only goal; the main, absolute goal is to raise awareness on the importance of developing adequate methods to make the students feel more confident and be fluent in their speeches, to consider Phonetics and Phonology as important as grammar, reading and vocabulary, and to give them the capacity to express in an unique, personal way.

4. Learning English Pronunciation: Spanish Native Speakers' Attitudes, Experiences and Perception.

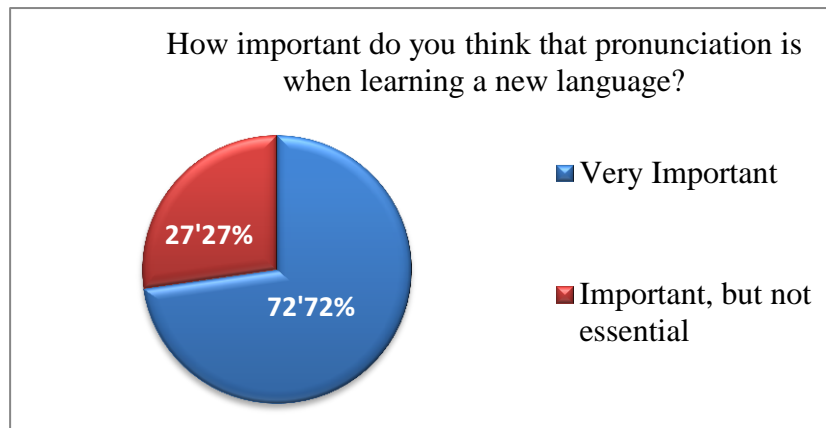
In order to have a global perspective on the attitudes, opinions, experiences and perception on learning English pronunciation, I conducted a survey in which 33 people of different ages, occupations and social classes were asked to answer five questions in relation with this topic. My objective was to assess the overall knowledge of a reduced group of people about this topic. "Are people really aware about the importance of learning how to pronounce well from an early age?", I wondered. To give an answer to this and more essential issues concerning the existence or non-existence of pronunciation in their academic lives they were asked to give their sincere opinions and depict their views toward this subject.

The average age of the 33 people who participated in the survey is 31'21. Primary, Secondary and University students, housewives, workers and clerks are the professions of the members of this group. Their average level of English is B1. Depicted below are the questions, answers and conclusions obtained from this survey.

4.1. The Importance of Pronunciation when Learning a New Language.

In the first place, the students were asked to answer the following question: 'How important do you think that pronunciation is when learning a new language?' They had three options to decide:

- a. Very Important.
- b. Important, but not essential.
- c. I think that other more important aspects exist in this respect.



Graphic 1. [The Importance of Pronunciation when Learning a New Language]

In my opinion, this is the most important question of the whole survey, since it proves whether people are really concerned about learning pronunciation or not. From a total of 33 people, 24 considered that learning pronunciation is “very important”, whereas 9 thought that it is not essential. Nobody opined that there are more important aspects in this respect. Therefore, it is satisfactory to know that most part of the people consulted have positive views about this issue.

4.2. Personal Evaluation on the Importance given to Pronunciation by English Teachers.

The second question is ‘From 1 to 10, which importance did your English teachers give to the English pronunciation, in your personal opinion?’. The average punctuation given to the importance of pronunciation by English teachers was 5’95. It is especially remarkable that the youngest participants rated more positively their teachers than the oldest. In fact, student among 11 and 14 marked their English teachers’ concern on pronunciation with an average punctuation of 8’5, whereas the rest of participants considered that their teachers’ worries about pronouncing English correctly was over 6.

However, there are also people among 42 and 76 years old who punctuated with a 9. Since the group of participants is quite heterogeneous, we might conclude that their teachers’ insistence and motivation toward the practice of teaching pronunciation at school depends not only of the age or the educational system implemented at that specific time, but also on the individual predisposition of each lecturer to influence his or her students about this issue.

4.3. Methods Proposed by EFL Students to Learn and Improve the English Pronunciation.

The third subject is ‘Which methods do you consider as the most effective to learn and improve the English pronunciation? In this section, the participants were asked to propose effective practices and solutions to correct pronunciation errors and ease the student’s ability to pronounce and understand the English language in a communicative situation. This is a compilation of the average proposals suggested:

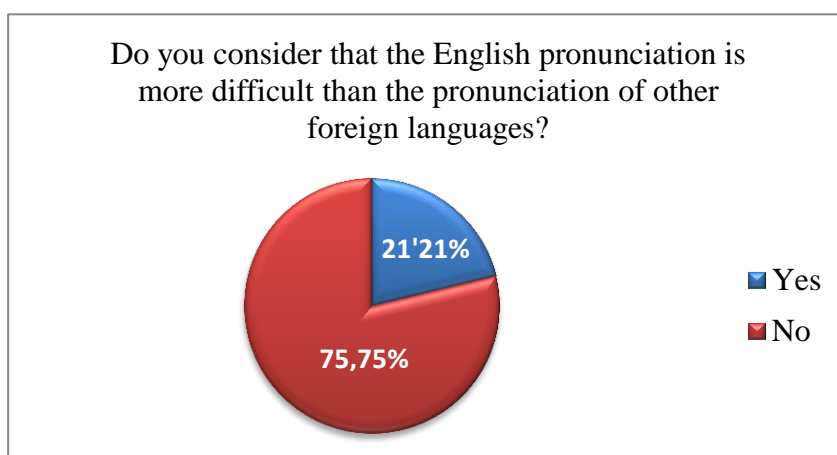
- 1) Speaking practice in pairs or groups.
- 2) Listening practice through watching series, videos, movies, videogames, interviews, international TV channels like the BBC and attractive audio-visual content in general. Some people emphasized the importance of doing this every day in order to get the ear used to the native pronunciation.
- 3) Reading aloud and being corrected by the teacher when an error is committed.
- 4) Oral repetition of the words corrected.
- 5) Looking for the phonological transcriptions of new words on dictionaries and on the internet.
- 6) Using educational songs and games (alphabet soups and crosswords).
- 7) Being helped by a native speaker and practice speaking with him regularly.
- 8) Attending lessons exclusively in English.
- 9) Travelling to English-speaking countries and talk with as much natives as possible.
- 10) Working with Phonetics and Phonology in the classroom through oral and written exercises, audios and multimedia content in original version.

Most of the students coincided in the importance of practicing speaking and listening almost every day and having the support of a native speaker who might help the learner to correct his or her pronunciation mistakes and to be accustomed to listen to proficient English pronunciation.

4.4. The difficulty of English Pronunciation compared with other Foreign Languages.

Hereafter, they had to express their views on the following topic: ‘Do you consider that the English pronunciation is more difficult than the pronunciation of other foreign languages?’.

Only seven participants coincided in the difficulty of the English pronunciation over the pronunciation of other foreign languages, like French or German. On the other hand, most part of the respondents –26– opined that English isn’t more difficult to learn and put into practice. In fact, some of them even added that it is as complex as acknowledging the phonological constraints of other languages.



Graphic 2 [The Difficulty of English Pronunciation Compared with other Foreign Languages]

Although many people usually complain about the difficulty of English pronunciation, in this particular case most part of the respondents had favourable views toward it. English might not be an easy language to pronounce for students whose mother language is Spanish, but early instruction and practice are the most effective tools to approach its phonology and make it more accessible.

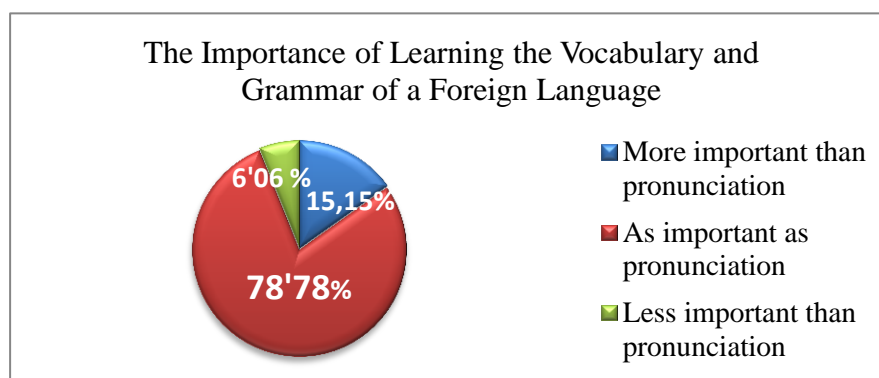
4.5. The Importance of English Pronunciation in Comparison with Grammar and Vocabulary.

In the end, it was necessary that the group chose one option from the listed above and, if possible, commented on the answers provided.

Learning the vocabulary and grammar of a foreign language is:

- a. More important than learning the pronunciation.
- b. As important as learning the pronunciation.
- c. Less important than learning the pronunciation.

This last question gives light to the importance of learning the vocabulary and grammar of a foreign language in relation to learning pronunciation. Most part of the respondents considered that these aspects of language are as important as the pronunciation. It might be due to the extreme importance that is given to the grammar and lexicon of a language in high schools. On the other hand, seven people opined that pronunciation is more important, and only two believed that vocabulary and grammar have less importance than phonetics and phonology.



Graphic 3. [The Importance of Learning the Vocabulary and Grammar of a Foreign Language]

The truth is that neither pronunciation nor any other component of a language is more important than others; the overall set of abilities is equally important and must be reinforced in the classroom with both motivation and interest. Although most of the respondents of this survey are of the same opinion, many teachers and students still today underestimate the existence of pronunciation and consider it as a dispensable issue.

5.- Conclusion.

The aim of this project was to observe, analyse and evaluate the acquisition of English pronunciation by two groups of Spanish native learners of EFL from both public –‘SAFA’ and ‘Nicolás Salmerón’ high schools– and private –‘SEK Alborán’– educational centres. For this purpose, further research developed by scholars like Cuenca Villarín (2001) and Gómez González *et al.* (2016) among others was taken into account, considering the advances made in the field of teaching pronunciation in recent years.

Although the opinions in this respect seem to be quite disparate, the truth is that there is no homogeneity in the consecution of pedagogical goals in all schools. In the case of the students from the province of Almería who participated in this study, those from public high schools lack pronunciation instruction and are not able to develop a satisfactory communicative act. On the other hand, those from a private school have a better accent and are more confident when speaking, although not fluent at all. After subsequent teaching periods being in contact with the two groups, their behaviour and attitude toward the activities and procedures implemented were observed and analysed. For this purpose, the direct method and the communicative approach were considered as the basis to create practical exercises and correct the most typical segmental and suprasegmental errors. With the passing of time and continuous practice, students not only improved their pronunciation, but also became more skilful and self-reliant when speaking in public and forgot pre-existing prejudices about the contrast between their natural accent and that of a native-speaking person.

Alternatively, the results of the survey conducted among 33 Spanish people of different ages concerning their experience with learning pronunciation throughout their academic lives prove that there are also cases in which teachers are devoted to educate their students on the importance of pronunciation. The answers provided show that nearly all of them understand the necessity of assigning lessons to the particular study of pronunciation in equal terms as vocabulary and grammar.

Finally, a conclusion is clearly drawn: not only the students are responsible of their own learning, but also the educational centres they belong to. It is essential that in early ages coinciding with periods of intellectual growth both teaching staff and learners work together in order to be more receptive toward the acquisition of new phonemes

and the oral realization of new words in connected speech. If the whole of the education community synergize their efforts, a big deal of progress will be achieved in the future.

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7.- Appendix.

7.1. Appendix A: Songs' Lyrics.

Depicted below are the lyrics of the songs listened in class with the corresponding gaps in the omitted words which appear in brackets. The students had to complete the lyrics while hearing the songs three times. After doing the exercise, their answers were checked.

7.1.1. 'A Whole New World', from 'Aladdin OST.

I can show you the _____
Shining, shimmering splendid
Tell me, princess, now when did
You last let your _____ decide!

I can open your _____
Take you wonder by wonder
Over sideways and under
On a _____ carpet ride.

A whole new world
A new fantastic point of _____
No one to tell us no
Or where to _____
Or say we're only dreaming.

A whole new world
A dazzling place I _____ [never] knew
But when I'm way up here

It's _____ clear
That now I'm in a whole new world
with you.

Now I'm in a whole new world
with you

_____ sights
Indescribable feeling
Soaring, tumbling, freewheeling
Through an endless diamond _____
A whole new world
(Don't you dare close your eyes)
A hundred thousand things to _____
(Hold your breath it gets better)
I'm like a shooting star
I've come so _____
I can't...

7.1.2. 'Colors of the Wind', from 'Pocahontas' OST.

You think I'm an ignorant _____
And you've been so many places; I
guess it must be so
But still I cannot _____, if the savage
one is _____
How can there be so much that you
don't _____?
You don't know...

You think you own whatever land you
_____ on
The earth is just a _____ thing you
can claim
But I know every rock and tree and

Has a life, has a spirit, has a _____.

You think the only people who are
people
Are the people who look and _____
like you
But if you walk the footsteps of a

You'll _____ things you never knew
you never knew

Have you ever heard the wolf cry to the
blue corn _____
Or _____ the grinning bobcat why
he grinned
Can you sing with all the _____ of the

mountain
Can you paint with all the colors of the
_____?
Can you paint with all the colors of the
wind?

Come run the hidden pine trails of the

Come taste the sun-sweet berries of the

Come roll in all the riches all around
you
And for once _____ wonder what
they're worth

The rainstorm and the _____ are my
brothers
The heron and the otter are my

And we are all _____ to each other
In a circle in a hoop that never

How high will a sycamore _____?
If you cut it _____ then you'll never
know
And you'll never hear the wolf cry to the
_____ corn moon
For whether we are _____ or copper
skinned
We need to sing with all the voices of

the _____
We need to paint with all the
c_____ of the wind

You can own the earth and _____
All you'll own is earth _____
You can _____ with all the colors of
the wind.

7.1.3. 'Part of your World', from 'The Little Mermaid' OST.

ARIEL
(Maybe he's right. Maybe there is
something the matter with me.
I just don't see how a world that makes
such wonderful things could be ____.)

Look at this _____
Isn't it neat?
Wouldn't you think my _____
complete?
Wouldn't you think I'm the girl
The girl who has _____?
Look at this trove
Treasures untold
How many _____ can one cavern
hold?
Looking around here you think
Sure, she's got everything
I've got gadgets and gizmos a-_____
I've got whozits and whatzits galore
You want thingamabobs?
I've got _____!
But who cares?

No big deal
I want _____

I wanna be where the people are
I wanna see, wanna see them _____
Walking around on those - what do you
call 'em?
Oh - _____!

Flippin' your fins, you don't get too

Legs are required for jumping, dancing
Strolling along down a - what's that
word again?

Up where they walk, up where they

Up where they stay all day in the sun
Wanderin' free - wish I could _____
Part of that world

What would I give if I could live out of
these _____?

What would I pay to spend a _____
warm on the sand?

Bet'cha on land they _____
they don't reprimand their _____

Bright young women sick of swimmin'

Ready to stand

And ready to know what the people

Ask 'em my questions and get some
answers

What's a fire and why does it - what's
the word?

_____?

When's it my turn?

Wouldn't I love, love to explore that
shore up above?

Out of the _____

Wish I could be

Part of that _____

7.1.4. 'Let it Go', from 'Frozen' OST.

The snow glows white on the mountain

Not a footprint to be seen.

A kingdom of isolation,
and it looks like I'm the _____

The wind is _____ like this swirling
storm _____

Couldn't keep it in;

Heaven knows I've tried

Don't let them in,
don't let them _____

Be the good girl you always have to be

Conceal, don't _____

don't let them know

Well now they _____

Let it go, let it go
Can't hold it back _____

Let it go, let it go
Turn away and slam the door

I don't _____
what they're going to _____

Let the storm rage on.

The cold never bothered me _____

It's funny how some distance
Makes everything seem _____

And the fears that once controlled me

Can't get to me at _____

It's time to see what I can do

To test the _____ and break _____

No right, no wrong, no rules for me,
I'm free!

Let it go, let it go
I am one with the wind and _____
Let it go, let it go
You'll never see me _____
Here I stand
And here I'll stay
Let the storm rage on

My power flurries through the air into
the _____
My soul is spiraling in frozen fractals
all around

And one thought crystallizes like an icy
blast

I'm never going _____, the past is in
the past

Let it go, let it go
And I'll rise like the break of dawn
Let it go, let it go
That perfect girl is gone
Here I stand
In the light of day
Let the storm rage on

The cold never _____ me anyway!

7.1.5. 'Son of Man', from 'Tarzan' OST.

Oh, the power to be _____
And the wisdom to be _____
All these things will
come to you in _____

On this journey that you're making
There'll be answers that you'll _____
And it's you who'll climb the mountain
It's you who'll reach the _____

Son of Man, look to the _____
Lift your spirit, set it free
Some day you'll walk tall with _____
Son of Man, a man in time you'll be

Though there's no one there to _____
you
No one to take your _____
But with faith and _____
You will journey from boy to man

Son of Man, look to the sky
Lift your _____, set it free
Some day you'll walk tall with pride
Son of Man, a man in time you'll

In learning you will _____
And in _____ you will learn

You'll find your place beside the
ones you _____

Oh, and all the things you dreamed of
The visions that you _____

Well, the time is drawing _____ now

It's yours to claim it all

Son of Man, look to the _____

Lift your spirit, set it _____

Some day you'll walk tall with pride

Son of Man, a man in time you'll be

Son of Man

Son of Man's a man for all to _____

7.2. Appendix B. Text chosen for a reading aloud task.

This excerpt belongs to “Oxford International English 6º Educación Primaria” and was read aloud by Aurora, a member of group A from public school. The student read the text two times and her reading was recorded in order to hear the errors committed in pronunciation as well as the rhythm and the intonation.

No one had lived in the farmhouse for years. There was a pile of dusty clothes on the floor in the corner of the kitchen, and a pair of muddy boots still stood next to the back door that led into the farmyard. The kitchen was the untidiest room I'd ever seen. How had the farmer managed to find things? Magazines were piled in heaps on the table, with packets of cereal and a box of hand tools. Books lay on dusty shelves and the floor was a grimy brown colour. A little light came through the grimy windows, which were covered on the outside with climbing plants.

[Oxford International English 6º Educación Primaria, 2015: 89]

7.3. Appendix C. Speaking activities.

1. Which one do you prefer? Explain your answers using comparative sentences.

Which car would you choose and why?



20000 euros

200000 euros



Which computer is better and why?



450

110 euros



euros

Illustration I [Speaking activity: describe and compare using comparatives]

Source: [Google]

2. Compare and contrast the people in the pictures using the comparatives and superlatives.



Mike (8)



shutterstock IMAGE ID: 94389951

Mrs Addams (76)



James (41)

Illustration II [Speaking activity: comparison and description of people]

Source: [Google]

