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# Undergraduate Dissertation

## Trabajo Fin de Grado

Pronunciation Teaching and Learning of English as a  
Foreign Language: A Case Study of Two Methods for  
Learners of English Pronunciation in a Spanish Secondary  
School

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## **Abstract**

The teaching of phonetics is often neglected in TEFL classrooms, especially with adult learners. Among multiple strategies to tackle pronunciation, there are two main approaches: intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic. This paper aims to analyze and judge which methodology is more effective to teach adult Spanish learners of English focusing on alveolar fricative sounds. Two groups of learners were asked to complete a pre-test to judge their awareness of the difference between voiced and voiceless alveolar fricative sounds. After receiving intuitive-imitative or analytic-linguistic instruction they had to complete a similar test. Results showed that the intuitive-imitative approach was useful for oral perception exercises whereas the analytic-linguistic one helped students to predict the occurrence of voiceless or voiced alveolar fricatives. Thus, the methodologies used were useful for individual purposes but a combination of them would result in a better understanding and production of intelligible sounds. Therefore, TEFL teachers should not dismiss a conscious approach to phonetics with the aim of improving students' pronunciation.

## **Resumen**

A menudo la enseñanza de la fonética del inglés como lengua extranjera es ignorada, especialmente cuando los estudiantes son adultos. Existen múltiples estrategias para enseñar la pronunciación; entre ellas, dos de las más importantes son la intuitiva-imitativa y la analítica-lingüística. Este trabajo pretende analizar y evaluar estas dos metodologías para la enseñanza de la pronunciación de los sonidos fricativos alveolares en lengua inglesa. Dos grupos de estudiantes completaron un *pre-test* para averiguar sus conocimientos previos sobre los sonidos estudiados. A continuación recibieron formación siguiendo una de las dos metodologías y al finalizar completaron un *post-test*. Los resultados mostraron que la estrategia intuitiva-imitativa era efectiva para los ejercicios de percepción oral mientras que el enfoque analítico-lingüístico ayudó a los estudiantes a predecir mejor la ocurrencia de los sonidos fricativos alveolares. Por tanto, parece que una combinación de ambos métodos ayudaría al alumnado a comprender y producir sonidos inteligibles. Estos resultados sugieren que se debería tener en cuenta la enseñanza de la fonética del inglés con el objetivo de mejorar la pronunciación de los estudiantes.

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## **1. Introduction**

Pronunciation constitutes one of the areas of the learning of a foreign language which deals with students' production in that language. It differs with regard to other foreign language skills as it necessarily involves physical skills together with cognitive aspects. This means that the articulatory organs or "articulators" necessarily produce a certain sound or word after the brain has sent this information (Volenc & Reiss, 2017, p.253). Furthermore, this phonetic information is necessarily part of the student's language knowledge (ibid) and therefore pronunciation should be approached as a conscious learning process in TEFL classrooms.

Pronunciation comprises a great number of aspects (stress, rhythm, intonation, etc.) but phonetics (and by extent phonology) should be of great interest for EFL teachers because among other reasons the sound system functions as the basis for the spelling system (Delahunty & Garvey, 2010, p.89). Therefore phonetic knowledge could help TEFL students to improve their spelling in the foreign language by applying spelling-to-sound rules.

However, this is not to say that pronunciation should be taught only focused on sound production because the result of this will be of minimal effect for the mastery of pronunciation (Euler, 2014, p.58). Thus the foreign language teacher should equally draw attention to a more abstract range of pronunciation skills because they take a crucial role in the communicative context. Accordingly, stress is also of crucial importance because it maintains intelligibility (Lewis & Deterding, 2018, p.162) whereas intonation constitutes a "decisive prosodic element in arousing sensations in the listener" (Rodero, 2010, p.25). Yet phonetics can be considered as a starting point

for familiarizing students with foreign language pronunciation because they need to produce intelligible speech in classroom contexts as well as in other environments.

Different approaches can be found with regard to instructing phonetics, including intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic. The former relies on the students' ability to differentiate sounds of the foreign language and "will lead to the development of an acceptable pronunciation without the intervention of any explicit information" (Hashemian & Fadaei, 2011, p.972). On the other hand, the latter method deals with providing rather more detailed information about the sounds so that students can distinguish sounds individually by associating them with a phonetic symbol or other linguistic parameter.

This paper aims to analyse the effectiveness of these methods in relation to the teaching of the sounds *fortis voiceless alveolar fricative /s/* and *lenis voiced alveolar fricative /z/* to intermediate Spanish-speaking students of English. The importance of distinguishing between these sounds coincides with their frequent occurrence in the English language (Gómez-González & Sánchez-Roura, 2016, p.197). Moreover, these sounds correspond not only with the oral realization of the plural morpheme (-s), but also with the Saxon genitive ('s) and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular verbal suffix (-s). Besides, the distinction of these sounds is crucial for the pronunciation of minimal pairs such as 'this/these', 'hiss/'his', 'plays/'place', 'bus/'buzz' among many others. Thus, not being able to differentiate these sounds might result in misunderstandings (ibid). Traditionally, the ideal purpose of pronunciation teaching was to sound "native-like" (Lewis & Deterding, 2018, p.161) but gradually the focus has shifted to a more Communicative Approach purpose which is the one I will follow in this paper.

In order to determine the students' ability to perceive these sounds I created a pre-test to judge whether they were able to differentiate between the voiceless and voiced alveolar fricative sounds. To do so I included some examples from *English Phonetics and Pronunciation Practice* (Carley, Mess & Collins, 2017, p.67), a book designed for the specific goal of teaching pronunciation based on sound distinction. The examples used for the purpose of the pre-test combine voiced and voiceless fricative sounds in distinct word positions, i.e. initial, medium and final positions. A number of students from a Secondary School in Zaragoza (see details below) were asked to write down the sound to which it corresponded, writing either 'voiceless' or 'voiced' below the underlined consonant (See Appendix 1). Besides, I included a second exercise which dealt with the students' active production. Reading out loud the word, they had to follow the same criterion of the previous exercise. Both exercises aimed to test the student's awareness and knowledge of the existence of these sounds (See Appendix 2).

Accordingly, this paper aims to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of the two phonetic teaching approaches (intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic) dealing with the distinction between the alveolar fricative sounds. Similarly, it aims to judge which method could be considered to the more effective one for Spanish students of English as a foreign language with a focus on the teaching of alveolar fricatives.

## **2. Methods**

There exist many different methods to tackle pronunciation in classroom contexts. This experiment is concerned with two main approaches in the field: intuitive-imitative and linguistic-analytic methods. As Mompeán-Guillamón (2015) explains, the former implies that "the phonological system of the foreign language will be acquired through exposure and imitation" (247). Thus, this method can be described as a

perceptive approach and deals with students' production. In other words, students are aware of the traits of these sounds at an articulatory level because articulatory-based measures aim to enhance phoneme recognition (Wang, Green, Samal & Yunusova, 2013, p.1539) on the basis of students' production. It is important to acknowledge that in this study the intuitive-imitative approach was combined with acoustic-based strategies in order to assimilate the sounds by listening to other examples and imitating the sounds proposed, drawing learners' attention to vocal cord vibration.

Conversely, the latter method is concerned with form, which means that it makes use of other means "to complement the tasks of listening and imitating" by using certain resources such as the phonetic alphabet and/or vocal charts (Mompeán-Guillamón, 2015, p.247). This implies that students in my study were required to differentiate the sounds on the basis of their corresponding phonetic symbols /s/ and /z/. While the intuitive-imitative approach generally assumes that the learning of pronunciation of a foreign language can be acquired "implicitly" (ibid), the analytic-linguistic approach is more concerned with "explicit information on pronunciation" through different resources such as the phonetic alphabet, vocal charts, and so on (Hashemian & Fadaei, 2011, p.969). Therefore this experiment makes use of explicit information in order to tackle pronunciation of the sounds proposed. This is done because it was assumed that students would not be aware of the distinction between these sounds.

## **2.1. Population under study**

Regarding the population under study in this experiment, it is formed by students who have an intermediate English level. The results show that their English competence corresponds with A2 and B1 levels regarding listening exercises and following a Cambridge ESOL criterion. The participants in this study are secondary



students in a Spanish public high school whose average age is 17 years old. Age is a crucial factor to take into account with regard to teaching a foreign language. Traditionally, Second Language Acquisition research is focused on the existence of a critical age (CPH) in the process of second language learning.

Initially, the critical age hypothesis provides a “causal explanation for the differential success in acquisition of a second language by younger and older learners” (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1999, p.163). Following this approach, younger learners are presumably more able to pronounce sounds which are not part of their mother tongue’s repertoire. The case of phonetics is a notorious example of this notion since it is believed that the critical age determines whether students are able to pronounce a certain unfamiliar and/or new sound since “every child learns to produce and perceive ambient language sounds resembling adult performance in that language” (Escudero-Neyra, 2005, p.1). For example, the weak vowel *schwa* is not part of the Spanish phonetic repertoire. According to this theory, if Spanish-speaking EFL students are not exposed to how to pronounce this vowel effectively before they reach the critical age they will encounter more difficulties to do so.

Thus, SLA experts seem to agree that “language development is underpinned by special bioprogramming” (Singleton & Ryan, 2004, p.31), which necessarily means that “younger L2 beginners have an advantage over older beginners” (ibid.). However, other authors are often very critical with the CPH hypothesis existence and/or how it has been used in the field. For instance, Flege (1987) explains that this theory has frequently been used to explain “performance differences between adult and child L2 learners” (164). Other authors, such as Bialystok and Hakuta (1999) equally challenged the ultimate validity of CPH:

“There may well be a correlation between age of initial learning and ultimate achievement, but it does not necessarily follow that age is a causal factor in that relation” (163).

It can be thus concluded that researchers in this field do not seem to reach clear conclusions on the issue (Riyahifar, 2016, p.32).

Thus, this idea has prompted TEFL to consider the learners’ age in order to design pronunciation activities. Nevertheless, there are other factors which must necessarily be taken into account to achieve an intelligible pronunciation. On the one hand, general features relating to “similarity between first and second languages” and on the other hand, individual differences such as “motivation” and “time spent in the language environment” (Morgan, 2014, p.117).

Regarding the population under study which I chose to carry out this experiment, it is formed by students who are in the final year of Compulsory Secondary Education (Group 2) and in the first year of *Bachillerato* (Group 1). In general terms they have acquired an intermediate English level with regard to listening comprehension. The results showed that their English competence corresponds with A2-B1 levels following a Cambridge ESOL model (See Figure 1). Regarding the age group, most participants are between 16 and 17 years old.

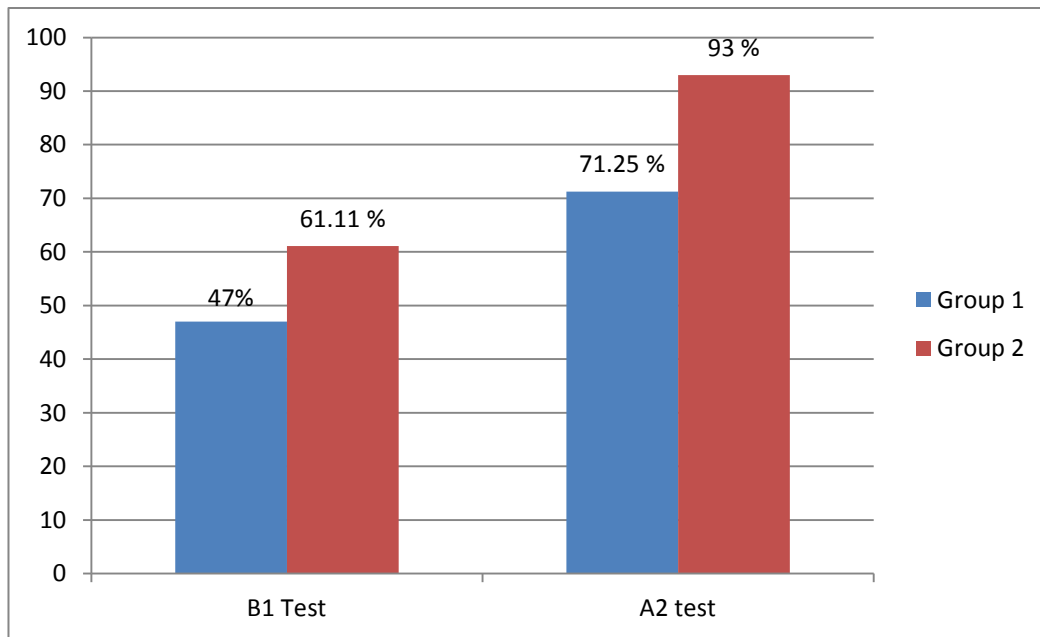


Figure 1: Average results in B1 test and A2 test in Group 1 and Group 2

The experiment I carried out is concerned with the alveolar fricatives, also called grooved fricatives (Gómez-González & Sanchez-Roura, 2016, p.192). Both sounds can occur “in all word positions” (ibid), i.e. initial, medium or final position. Moreover, these sounds associate with very similar spelling-to-sound correspondence. Thus, the spellings <s>, <'s>, <s'>, <se>, and <ss> can be pronounced with either the voiced or the voiceless alveolar fricative (ibid). This makes it very challenging for students to learn a predictable pattern to learn how to pronounce them accurately (with the exception of <-ese>, which is frequently pronounced with the /z/ counterpart). For this reason, a conscious approach towards the pronunciation of these sounds is required.

Furthermore, the distinction of these sounds is crucial for many different reasons. As it was mentioned before, it can lead to misunderstandings because these sounds make up minimal pairs, words which are different in respect of one single sound. In initial position, it distinguishes between said/Z, sink/zinc, sown/zone, sue/zoo, sack/Zack (Carley et al., 2017, p.103). Similarly, it differentiates a number of

homographs such as abuse(n)/abuse(z), close(adj.)/close(v), and so on. Finally, in word-medial position we can find similar examples such as *looser/loser*. Moreover, following a practical approach this distinction is included in the *Aragonese Curriculum of Secondary Education and Bachillerato* (Boletín Oficial de Aragón, 2014) and therefore comprises one of the learning objectives of English courses.

Furthermore, it is important to take into account that the students in my experiment took the tests anonymously and therefore the results obtained in the three tests did not influence their course mark in any way. This made the students more confident and facing less *fear of negative evaluation* (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p.128, in Tran, 2011, p.69) although a minor part of the students expressed a concern that they might fail the tests. In spite of the fact that it was anonymous, students were asked to write an invented nickname on top of the page in order to facilitate of the results obtained in the three tests individually.

## **2.2. Nature of the groups**

**Group 1** is formed by a total of seventeen students who were in their first year of optional Secondary Education. Results obtained in the level test show that their level corresponds with A2-B1 following the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Accordingly, at this stage of learning English as a second language students are able to “maintain a conversation or discussion but may sometimes be difficult to follow when trying to say exactly what he/she would like to” (CEFR, 2001, p.34). This coincides with the results in the initial questionnaire, where they expressed that they encountered problems to follow a conversation. The results obtained vary relatively with regard to the second group, who proved to have a higher level. Thus, group 1 obtained 47% in B1 test and 71.25% in A2 test whereas group 2 obtained 61.11% and 93% respectively. In the present study this group 1 will be identified with

the analytic-linguistic approach and it can be mentioned as such hereafter. This approach consisted in drawing the attention to the words set (/set/) and letter z (/zet/). Thanks to this particular example, they were introduced to the two different phonetic symbols.

**Group 2** is formed by a total of twenty four students who are in their last year of ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education). Students belonging to this group were asked to perceive the articulatory nature of the alveolar fricatives and therefore they were exposed to an intuitive-imitative approach. This consisted in making the students aware of the vibration that the vocal cords produce when the voiced alveolar fricative sound is uttered. For this group the same example of minimal pairs mentioned above was used.

### **2.3. Initial questionnaire**

In the first place, participants were requested to complete a questionnaire in which they had to choose out of ten possible answers (See Appendix 1). Firstly, they had to state if their level of English was adequate to establish a conversation with another English speaker (either native or non-native). The majority of students expressed that they were able to do so but with certain difficulties (7.50 out of 10 on average).

Secondly, they were asked to quantify their pronunciation level and, significantly, they remarked that they encountered difficulties to pronounce but that were interested in listening to other examples which they could use as a model (6.00 out of 10 on average). It was interesting to acknowledge that the majority of them admitted that the phonetic alphabet was part of their course but that they were not familiarized with it at all since they could not recognize the symbols. Thus, this could partly explain why they might not succeed in pronouncing correctly. Moreover, 39 out of 41 students

agreed that they should practice pronunciation more in their English course, which shows a preoccupation on the matter.

Finally, they were asked to identify the main goal of pronunciation learning and they reflected that it was communicative competence, in other words, that it might serve to communicate efficiently without repeating themselves. Thus, only few students (7 out of the total) identified the main goal with sounding native-like. This shows that students are more concerned with a use of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) in which there is a wider acceptance that “achieving intelligibility is crucial, while mimicking native-speaker pronunciation is not important” (Lewis & Detering, 2018, p.161).

#### **2.4. Pre-test**

Before explaining the differences between the pair of alveolar fricatives, students had to complete a pre-test to check if they were familiarised with this distinction. The pre-test consisted of two exercises concerned with listening skills and students’ production (See Appendix 2). The first exercise comprised seven sentences with a total of 44 realizations of either /s/ or /z/. The spelling of these sounds was underlined so that students could write either “voiced” or “voiceless”. The sentences provided for this exercise can be found in a book designed for these types of activities, English Phonetics and Pronunciation Practice (Carley et al., 2017, p.67). The sentences were produced by a native speaker in a non-natural environment, i.e. they were read out loud.

The results obtained showed that students were relatively familiar with these distinctions (6.5/10) on average with major variations across different groups. However, these sentences were included purposefully in which one sound was predominant. Thus, it was relatively easier for students to identify the sounds than in the final text (See

Appendix 3). The second exercise consisted of a list of a total of sixteen words which students should be familiarised with: *cousin, grace, six, loose, prize, loser, face, zip, voice, zone, city, zoo, cheese, muscle, nose* and *mice*. It was interesting to see that the majority were able to predict the sound in certain words: *face, zoo* and *voice*. However, they were not able to predict the sounds found in basic words belonging to general semantic fields such as *cousin* or *nose*. This shows that they may not be fully aware of the occurrence of the sounds. Furthermore, this exercise equally aimed to draw the attention to other spellings for these sounds other than <s> (<z> and <c>). Besides, it relied on realizations of /s/ and /z/ in a range of positions: initial, medium and final.

## **2.5. Differences across the groups**

Although Group 2 performed more successfully in the level test, their results in the first exercise of the pre-test were significantly poorer (18 out of 44 on average). This shows that they could not clearly distinguish the difference between these sounds orally. However, the results obtained in the second exercise show that they were able to predict the alveolar fricative sounds in the reading out loud exercise (11.5 out of 16 on average). On the other hand, Group 1 students were evidentially capable of distinguishing the sounds orally (32.5 out of 44 on average). Nevertheless, they obtained similar results with regard to the second exercise (10 out of 16). This altogether means that Group 1 unquestionably encountered more difficulties in oral perception skills, which should be taken into account to draw further conclusions (see Figure 2).

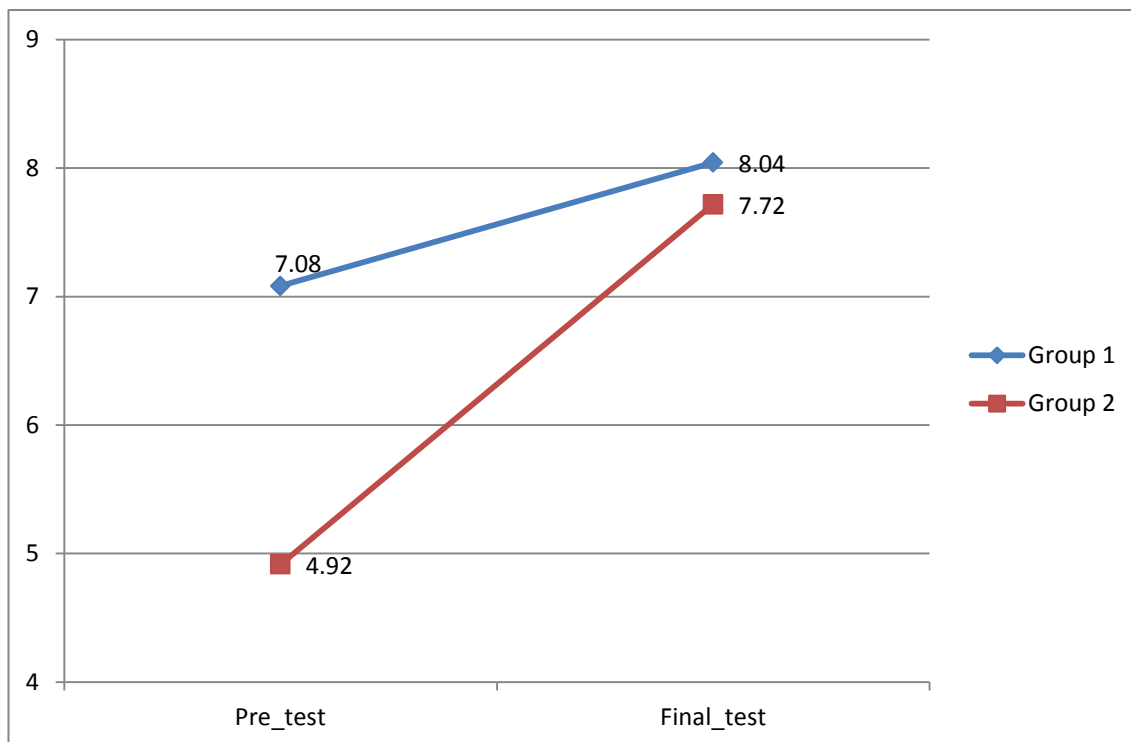


Figure 2: Average mark in Pretest and Final Test in Group 1 and Group 2 (out of 10)

## 2.6. Final test

Final test results demonstrate that students were more capable of accurately distinguish between these sounds (76% on average). On the one hand, the linguistic-analytic approach (Group 1) performed significantly better in the perceptive exercise whose average rose from 10 out of 16 in the pre-test to 14 out of 16 in the second test (See Figure 3). On the other hand, the intuitive-imitative approach (Group 2) had similar results in both tests (11.5 in both tests on average). This shows that teaching the phonetic alphabet might help the students to predict the sounds. As Diaz-Plaza (1995) indicates, the English language is a predominantly phonetic language and therefore “it may be simpler and, therefore, preferred to teach English with phonics, i.e., the use of sound or the phoneme-grapheme relationships in teaching reading” (2). Thus, it would be preferable to teach the correlation between the phonemes and the sound for reading out-loud exercises.



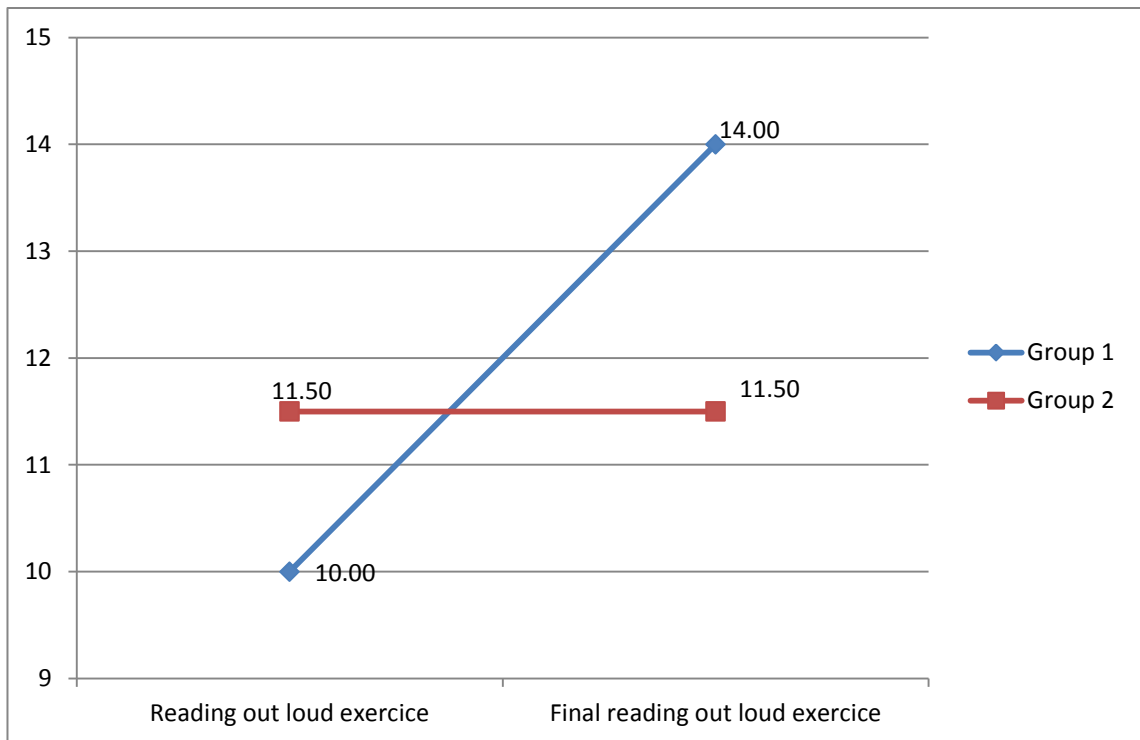


Figure 3: Average mark in Reading out loud exercise and Final Reading out loud exercise in Group 1 and Group 2 (out of 16)

Nevertheless, regarding the listening exercise intuitive-imitative practice was more successful in terms of student's performance. In fact, this group doubled the number of correct answers from 40.9% to 80%. This might reflect a great understanding of the differences between the sounds. On the contrary, the analytic-linguistic group only performed 3% better from the pre-test to the final text. (See Figure 4)

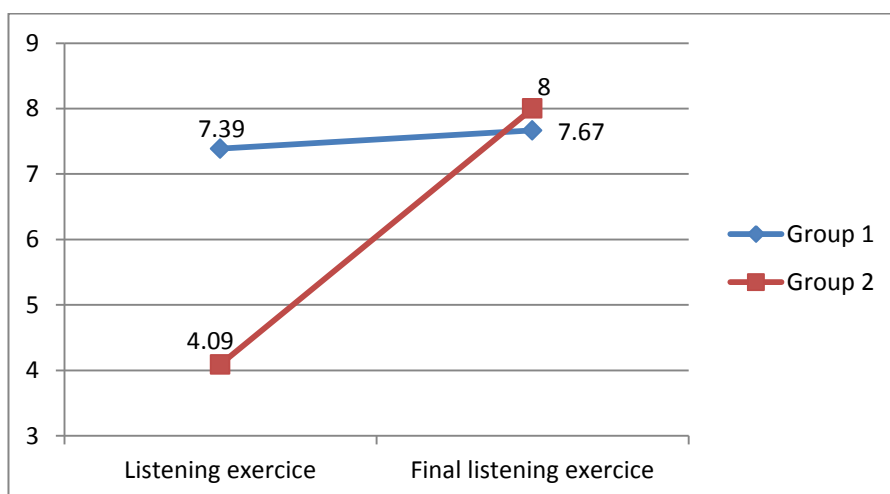


Figure 4: Average mark in Listening exercise and Final Listening exercise in Group 1 and Group 2 (out of 10)

### 3. Discussion

Despite the fact that the results in the final text show that students that participated in the present study were not extremely proficient, they demonstrate that the students became more aware of the distinction between the sounds proposed. It can thus be said that the methods used are partly effective for the groups in the study, but that a methodology which would be the result of the combination of the intuitive-imitative and the linguistic-analytic approaches would considerably ameliorate students' phonology knowledge. Therefore, a method based on teaching the phonetic symbols which correspond to sounds individually and the acoustic properties of the respective sounds might improve students' results significantly. On the basis of this combined approach, sounds could be paired according to their properties such as alveolar fricative sounds or bilabial plosive sounds. Focusing on a sound at each time enables the teacher not only to demonstrate how it is articulated but also show different possible spellings (Harmer, 2001, p.187).

For instance, the voiced palate-alveolar fricative sound could be incorporated into a session of suffixation with the following examples: *informa-tion*, *combina-tion* or *matura-tion*. The case of the sounds concerning my research is very challenging because of the irregularities. I would suggest including the study of the alveolar fricative pair as part of the teaching and learning of the pronunciation of the plural morpheme, the Saxon genitive and nouns including the suffix *-ism*. Furthermore, it would be equally compelling to cover minimal homographs such as *house*, *abuse*, *advice*, and so on.

The activities discussed above aimed to make students capable of distinguishing major features of pronunciation. This is crucial to students' foreign language formation because they can undergo a process of fossilization if they are not exposed to English phonetics, phonology, intonation, and so on. It can also happen that students are taught

incorrectly how to pronounce familiar words and as a consequence they “inevitably became fossilized” (Cakir, 2016, p.1810). As Yoshida (2016) points out, fossilization is “a process that occurs when a language learner progresses to a certain point but then has a hard time making further progress” (6). It could thus be concluded that participants in this piece of research (and other adult learners by extension) need to receive rather explicit pronunciation teaching because they did not effectively identify the distinction between the sounds in question. This inability to recognize different sounds might result in problems to produce the sounds’ oral realizations, which might result in misunderstandings and cases of miscommunication.

As a consequence, students can experience certain feelings of unease and difficulty to express themselves, a phenomenon known as language anxiety. Language anxiety (LA) has been defined as “a distinct complex construct of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of language learning process” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.128, in Tran, 2011, p.69). This potentially has a detrimental effect on student’s performance because they experience simultaneous negative feelings when communicating to other students, i.e. communicative apprehension and fears to be evaluated negatively on the part of the teachers, which is called *fear of negative evaluation* by the same author (Horwitz et al., 1986, p.127, in Al-Shboul, Ahmad, Nordin and Rahman, 2013, p.33). This may prevent students from speaking in the target language both inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, these types of exercises enable students to put their pronunciation into order to become more comfortable speaking in the target language. In this sense, it was surprisingly positive that after the experiment students (particularly members of the second group) were curious about the pronunciation of other words such as *science*, *system* and *television* and they were repeating these words out loud without asking them

to do so. In addition, students in both groups asked about the meaning of *dizzy* because apparently they had not come across this word before.

This interestingly shows that phonetic exercises might easily encourage students to participate in the class actively. Besides, these exercises should also be accompanied by others that include other aspects of pronunciation such as stress patterns, rhythm and so on. For instance, students could read the sentences provided out loud to notice which words are stressed and which are unstressed and by doing so they should identify certain stress patterns. By including pronunciation-goal oriented activities such as those mentioned above, students will probably not only feel the necessity to understand the phonetic system and/or other aspects of pronunciation but also they will also feel encouraged to participate in the class to pronounce better.

This dissertation intends to show that teaching English as a foreign language requires materials that are carefully planned for the classroom, depending on the necessities of the students and many other factors. This is especially important for pronunciation teaching because the English phonological system is “idiosyncratic” (Dziubalska-Kořaczyk and Przedlacka, 2005, p.103), which means that it has a rather different system from other phonological systems. This includes a “large and elaborate vowel system” that can show a clear contrast in relation to Spanish because the latter only has five vowels whereas the former relies on twelve different pure vowels. According to the same authors, English has a consonant system that includes dental fricatives and voiced sibilants and these sounds might be a problematic source for learners. Besides, word stress placement does not occur in regular patterns and therefore cannot be predicted (ibid). Finally, the intonation system appears to have “much higher functional load than that of most other languages” (ibid).

Owing to the reasons mentioned above, pronunciation might require a conscious approach in which the content of the lesson should be carefully planned. The lesson plan should include not only accuracy-building activities (for example, repetition of sounds) but also fluency-building activities (for instance conversational practice) that can ensure students' understanding and ability to produce intelligible speech. Besides, it should be noted that the task of teaching has become easier since today there is a wide variety of "current technology equipment and applications" available for second language education (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p.986). The existence of these technologies enables the foreign language teacher to provide authentic materials, i.e. materials that are naturally produced or not specifically designed for the language classroom.

Thus, the materials used for this experiment are non-authentic in the sense that they were produced for the sake of teaching pronunciation. However, it was a native speaker who read out loud the sentences provided. In this case the participant was asked to read the sentence naturally, without placing any emphasis on the alveolar fricative sounds. As a result, it could thus be said that non-authentic materials can also be helpful for teaching pronunciation, especially at an initial stage.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Since English is problematic for many students because of its special sound and spelling correspondence, Harmer (2001) suggests that it is be reasonable to make students familiar with the different phonemes that characterize the English language. He points out that the clearest way to do so is to introduce the various phonetic symbols (185). Furthermore, phonetic symbols are remarkably useful to know the pronunciation of words included in the dictionary (ibid). However, this is not to say that following an

intuitive-imitative approach is not effective for students to understand the different sound realizations. However, as learners are native speakers of other language(s), the already existing phonetic repertoire inevitably affects the way they perceive the repertoire of the target language. In this sense, L1 phonetic repertoire can be a source of constraints for EFL learners (Olmstead, Viswanathan, Aviar & Manuel, 2013) because they might assimilate non-native sounds with native sounds. This process would result in inaccuracy in terms of phoneme perception and production because even if languages can have phonemically equivalent sounds “difficulties may still arise because instances of such sounds may differ in narrow phonetic detail” (Escudero-Neyra, 2005, p.18). Jenkins (2000) acknowledges that the phonological transfer from L1 can have a detrimental effect of learners in that they will “threaten the intelligibility of their pronunciation” and these cases should be “replaced by target-like production” (115). Thus, this author suggests that the focus should be placed on intelligibility:

While it is not necessary for EIL intelligibility that learners distinguish all English sounds according to the English phonemic system, it is crucial that they do acquire certain target-like phonetic features (ibid)

Therefore pronunciation teaching should be centred on the production of intelligible speech which is characterized by “the ability to produce discernible distinctions between sounds” (Wang et al., 2013, p.1539). As the experiment showed, direct pronunciation teaching following an analytic-linguistic and/or an intuitive-imitative approach results in a better comprehension of distinctive sound properties and in turn students will be able to produce the sounds proposed correctly. Thus, TEFL teachers should not ignore the effect that the avoidance of explicit pronunciation teaching can have on learners’ development. Moreover, working on pronunciation can have a great impact on other language skills such as “listening comprehensions,

grammar in both perception and production, and many aspects of pragmatic or functional competence in spoken English” (Pennington, 2015, p.164).

However, this is not to say that pronunciation acquisition is purely a pedagogical process. As Jenkins (2000) points out, some pronunciation features are “unteachable” and therefore they should be acquired “through extensive (non-pedagogic) exposure to the second language” (107). Thus, students equally need to be in contact with foreign language contexts in order to achieve a good level in pronunciation. In this case, teachers should introduce authentic materials to work with either in the classroom context or in extracurricular contexts.

To conclude, this experiment aimed to find out which methodology is more effective for the foreign language learners’ pronunciation of English alveolar fricatives. Both methods were shown to be practical for this purpose since students’ awareness increased considerably after addressing the pronunciation of the particular sounds consciously. While the intuitive-imitative approach was remarkably useful for the oral perception exercise, the analytic-linguistic method was more helpful to predict the pronunciation of different words. In addition, the methodologies proposed can be complementary, i.e. they can be used simultaneously when approaching pronunciation. This will probably result in a better understanding and therefore production of pronunciation. It can thus be concluded that the methodologies should rely on each other for the mastery of EFL learner’s pronunciation. Accordingly, using a combination of methods, also called “multimodal methodologies” contributes to the improvement in learners’ pronunciation (Mompeán-Guillamón, 2015, p.247).

Nevertheless, this does not mean that intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic methodologies (or a combination resulting from these methods) are to be

considered the most effective approaches. Mompeán-Guillamón (2015) suggests that one of the most effective ways to approach pronunciation is to present “the object of learning by means of different senses, normally vision and audition” (248). In addition, there are a great number of pedagogical means to include pronunciation teaching in the classroom contexts apart from the ones used for this experiment, such as phonemic charts, rhythmic chants, articulatory descriptions, etc. (Carey, 2002, p.9). Besides, foreign language teachers can rely on new equipment and applications to tackle pronunciation such as podcasts, radio programs, film clips, speeches, press releases available online.

Although TEFL teachers can use a great number of already existing pedagogical strategies and materials, they should take into account that each group of learners and learners individually have different needs and therefore require specific materials, either authentic or non-authentic materials. In spite of the existence of this variety of materials, some teachers are reluctant to include pronunciation exercises in the course. However, this avoidance of “phonetic or phonological knowledge regarding segmental and suprasegmental aspects of English pronunciation” has tremendously negative effects because it “leads to students’ not being able to remove the fossilized pronunciation mistakes” (Hismanoglu & Hismanoglu, 2010, p.984).



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## Appendix 1

### Initial questionnaire

#### 1) Considero que mi nivel de inglés es:

- 1: Pésimo. No puedo comunicarme en absoluto.
- 2: No soy capaz de establecer una conversación con sentido.
- 3: Puedo hacerme entender con la ayuda de otros recursos como gestos y señas.
- 4: Soy capaz de expresar ideas muy sencillas
- 5: Puedo mantener una conversación aunque con bastante dificultad
- 6: Puedo mantener una conversación con alguna dificultad
- 7: Puedo mantener una conversación con relativa dificultad
- 8: Puedo mantener una conversación con sentido sin dificultad
- 9: Puedo argumentar ideas complejas en este idioma
- 10: Nivel experto. Lo hablo como mi lengua materna

#### 2) Mi pronunciación en inglés es:

- 1: Pésima
- 2: Pronuncio las palabras igual que se escriben
- 3: No sé cómo pronunciar la mayoría de palabras
- 4: Considero que mi pronunciación es entendible y no la quiero modificar
- 5: Puedo pronunciar las palabras o expresiones cuyo significado conozco
- 6: Intento pronunciar mejor cada vez mejor a través de escuchar otros ejemplos
- 7: Puedo predecir la pronunciación de algunas palabras
- 8: Puedo predecir la pronunciación de la mayoría de palabras
- 9: Conozco algunas reglas de pronunciación que puedo poner en práctica
- 10: Soy capaz de pronunciar palabras que no había escuchado antes deduciendo por otras que ya conozco

### **3) Conozco el alfabeto fonético**

- 1: Nunca he oído hablar sobre él
- 2: Creo haber escuchado algo sobre él
- 3: No estoy demasiado familiarizadx con él
- 4: Lo hemos visto alguna vez en clase
- 5: Ha sido una parte breve de cursos anteriores
- 6: Conozco algunos símbolos fonéticos
- 7: Conozco más de la mitad de los símbolos fonéticos
- 8: Conozco la mayoría de los símbolos fonéticos y sus respectivos sonidos
- 9: Puedo escribir la mayoría de los símbolos fonéticos y sus sonidos correspondientes
- 10: Lo conozco a la perfección

### **4) La pronunciación debería ser una parte importante en la enseñanza del inglés**

- 1: No, la pronunciación no es nada importante
- 2: No, ya se le da demasiada importancia por encima de otras cosas
- 3: No considero que sea lo más importante del inglés
- 4: Prefiero ver más ejercicios de gramática, vocabulario o redacción
- 5: Prefiero ver más ejercicios de pronunciación
- 6: Debería tener más importancia y visibilidad más allá del libro de texto
- 7: Deberíamos además practicar la pronunciación una vez a menudo
- 8: Deberíamos practicar la pronunciación una vez por semana
- 9: Deberíamos hacer ejercicios de pronunciación a diario
- 10: Debería ser lo más importante de la asignatura

### **5) La finalidad de estudiar la pronunciación se identifica con:**

- 1: No modificar en absoluto la pronunciación del español
- 2: Mantener una pronunciación similar a la del español

- 3: Aprender la pronunciación de palabras sueltas
- 4: Aprender la pronunciación de frases o expresiones concretas
- 5: Que sea entendible aunque tenga que repetir alguna vez
- 6: Que se entienda a la primera
- 7: Ser capaz de comunicarme eficientemente sin repetir
- 8: Ser capaz de transmitir emociones e intenciones a través de la pronunciación
- 9: Intentar sonar igual que un nativo

## Appendix 2

### Pre-test (differentiate between voiceless and voiced consonant)

#### (Diferencia entre la consonante sorda y la consonante sonora)

#### Listening (examples taken from *English Phonetics and Pronunciation Practice: 65-67*)

Please excuse my clumsy words.

The house faces south-west and overlooks the surrounding countryside.

He has master's degrees in tourism and businessstudies.

The police arrested suspects during the house-to-house search.

Liz knows loads of phrases in Brazilian Portuguese.

It's sometimes impossible to escape one's destiny.

He loves visiting the zoo and observing animals like zebras and chimpanzees.

#### Reading out loud exercise

Cousin                  Grace                  Six                  Loose

Prize                  Loser                  Face                  Zip

Voice                  Zone                  City                  Zoo

Cheese                  Muscle                  Nose                  Mice



## Appendix 3

### Final test

#### Listening exercise:

I live in a very small house with six more people.

I am very sad because he made all sorts of excuses.

The boy likes cats very much.

They deserved to win the contest.

I always play chess with my son.

I started to feel dizzy after I had a soda.

She would like to go to a quiz game.

She always likes to hear the news.

He is a very wise man because he has read lots of books.

They enjoy visiting interesting museums.

They are very lazy so they don't deserve to win the prize.

#### Reading out loud exercise

Scissors      Twice      Dress

Address      Serious      Pause

User      Zoom      Rules

Base      Museum      Reasons