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The Impact of L2 Pronunciation Teaching: Improving Students' Pronunciation and their Performance in Phonetic Tasks in Spain's University Entrance Examinations

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Abstract

Pronunciation has often overlooked in the EFL context of Spain. In this respect, it comes to a surprise that we are faced with a phonetic task in the University Entrance Exam of the Balearic Islands, which definitely does not comply with the Communicative Language Teaching approach that the current legislation establishes. Under these circumstances, what can be done then about L2 Pronunciation Teaching and Learning in secondary schools in Spain to ensure not only great academic results but significant and successful pronunciation skills? The first aim of this master's thesis is to design pronunciation sessions for students in a second year of Post-Obligatory Secondary Education (Bachillerato in Spain) course. These sessions will not only be designed to help students improve their L2 pronunciation skills for the obligatory exam task but also for their overall L2 pronunciation proficiency and fluency. The overriding concern of this master's thesis is to prove that with pronunciation instruction students will score higher in these exam tasks while their pronunciation skills also improve.

Key Words: L2 pronunciation teaching, L2 pronunciation assessment, L2 pronunciation acquisition, university entrance examinations.

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1. Introduction

All autonomous communities in Spain share a common educational law: LOMCE (Ley orgánica para la mejora de la calidad educativa[1]). The Royal Decree 1105/2014 establishes a mutual curriculum among the autonomous communities for both ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) and Bachillerato (Post-Obligatory Secondary Education). However, a specific criterion is not shared when designing University Entrance Exams in each of the autonomous communities.

Even if these examinations hold many tasks in common, these activities tend not to carry the same amount of marks, and often, they are not at the same CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) level. Moreover, only two of these autonomous communities, Illes Balears and Castilla-La Mancha include phonetic tasks in their designs. To which extent, then, do these examinations satisfy the needs of the Spanish educational community?

The current educational law in Spain, LOMCE, aims for a communicative language teaching (CLT) of English, and we have knowledge of the fact that "[t]his focus on language as communication brings renewed urgency to the teaching of pronunciation" (Celce Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996, p.7). However, pronunciation has, and is still often overlooked in the EFL context of Spain. As a matter of a fact, many scholars describe the little attention which is paid to it in the classroom, in teaching materials and in the little education offered to teachers during their initial training.

In this respect, it comes to a surprise that we are later faced with two phonetic tasks in University Entrance Examinations (Illes Balears and Castilla-La Mancha) which definitely do not comply with the Communicative Language Teaching approach that the current law LOMCE establishes.

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[1] 8/2013 Organic Law on the Improvement of the Quality of Education

Under these circumstances, what can be done then about L2 Pronunciation Teaching and Learning in secondary schools in Spain to ensure not only great academic results but significant and successful pronunciation skills?

The first aim of this master's thesis is to design pronunciation sessions for students in a second year of Post-Obligatory Secondary Education (Bachillerato in Spain) course. A key point to design these sessions will be the exploration of L2 pronunciation teaching, learning and acquisition research work carried out by different scholars. However, the most compelling evidence to plan these sessions will come from the exhaustive analysis of the phonetic and phonological components of the phonetic task found in the English University Entrance Examination of the autonomous community of the Balearic Islands.

These sessions will not only be designed to help students improve their L2 pronunciation skills for the obligatory exam task but also for their overall L2 pronunciation proficiency and fluency. The overriding concern of this master's thesis is to prove that with pronunciation instruction students will score higher in these exam tasks while their pronunciation skills also improve.

2. Literature Review and State of the Question

2.1. English Phonetics and Phonology

2.1.1. General Considerations

Even though the fields of phonetics and phonology are closely related, they considerably differ in many aspects. Whereas phonetic study is interested in the careful study of human speech sounds as a whole, phonology, which is part of linguistics, specifically focuses on analysing the phonological systems and sound patterns in specific language settings. Mott explains this very clearly stating that "phonology is a kind of functional phonetics which employs this data to study the sound systems of languages. … [that is] studying the linguistic functions of sounds." (2005, p. 28).

However, both fields must be taken into consideration when they are applied to the teaching and learning of second language pronunciation. On the one hand, it is important to know how the specific sounds in English are produced and perceived (i.e. articulatory and auditory phonetics). On the other hand, it is of great importance to consider the crucial role which sounds play linguistically (phonology), that is, distinguishing segmental and suprasegmental features of the English language to facilitate and ensure effective communication.

Henceforth, we will adhere to the view that phonetics and phonology cannot be isolated when it comes to second language pronunciation research. Mott makes the clear distinction that "[f]or the phonetician, sounds are phenomena in the physical world; for the phonologist, sounds are linguistic items whose intrinsic interest is their function, behaviour and organization." (2005, p. 33) It is my belief that the EFL teacher will need to adopt both positions described by Mott to teach second language pronunciation successfully; that is finding balance between a phonetically accurate and communicatively driven methodology.

2.1.2. Phonological History of English

There is no question that the English language has had a splendid history. For the purpose of gaining a better understanding of how English pronunciation works it is essential to appreciate its fascinating phonological history. It is a fact that vowel sounds have undergone a greater number of changes than consonants, and that is why the pronunciation of English vowel sounds today is less phonetic than that of consonants.

English vowel sounds have undergone numerous sound changes throughout history, but the most important ones came along with The Great Vowel Shift, in which the articulation points of all long vowel sounds were raised. All monophthongs became higher in position, and those who were already in the highest positions became subsequently diphthongs.

It is my view that this change is crucial for second language pronunciation acquisition, as it is clear that the Great Vowel Shift affected the relationship between spelling and pronunciation greatly; "[o]ne of the primary reasons that this vowel shift has become as the "Great" Vowel Shift is that it profoundly affected English phonology, […] mismatch[ing] spelling and pronunciation." (Denham and Lobeck 2010, p.89).

2.1.3. Spelling and Pronunciation

As it has been stated above, English vowel graphemes and phonemes do not always relate. That is, a vowel grapheme has more than one likely pronunciation, which can certainly lead to confusion. English has five vowel graphemes, but a total number of twenty vowel sounds in General British (GB)[2]. Twelve of these are monophthongs, from which five are short and seven are long regarding vowel quantity. The remaining eight vowel sounds are diphthongs.

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[2] In the Introduction to the 14th edition (1991) to the *Cambridge English Pronouncing Dictionary* it is stated that "[t]he time has come to abandon the archaic name Received Pronunciation". In the 8th edition of *Gimson's Pronunciation of English*, Alan Cruttenden opts to use GB as a main model.

There is a tendency to focus on sound contrasts when teaching pronunciation, but Joanne Kenworthy believes that pronunciation teaching "… has almost totally ignored the way these sounds are represented in writing and their role in the learners' pronunciation development." (1987, p.94)

Kenworthy also states that "[i]t has often been claimed that English spelling is totally irregular" (1987, p.94); however, she disagrees and states that "[t]his is not the case." (1987, p.94) It is clear that English is not a phonetic language, however, the relationship between spelling and sound can be observed and studied, and therefore guessed. It might not be as automatic as in more phonetic languages such as Spanish or, yet, spelling-sound correspondences can be guessed to a certain extent, as a specific grapheme has a limited number of sound possibilities. It is a fact though that the English phonological system does have several exceptions due to its vast history and borrowings, and this might interfere in such observation. It is my view that it is essential for the teacher to boost the learners' phonological retrieval ability, that is, the ability to remember the phonemes associated with specific graphemes.

2.1.4. Segmental and Suprasegmental Features of the English Phonological System

Phonology can be studied at two different levels; segmental and suprasegmental. On the one hand, the segmental level is interested in phonemes or their allophonic variants, as each of these is considered to be a single segment of speech. Whereas on the other hand, the suprasegmental level is interested in units which are larger than a single sound realization, such as the study of connected speech, rhythm, word and sentence stress and intonation. In my view, attention should be paid to both segmental and suprasegmental features when teaching and learning second language pronunciation.

It has already been mentioned that sounds are represented by phonemes. The International Phonetic Association (IPA) is the major organisation for sound representation in the world. They wrote and keep editing still today the renowned International Phonetic Alphabet which gives graphical representation to all

possible sounds which any speaker can produce in any language of the world. This alphabet is used for both phonemic and allophonic transcription of speech. As regards the relationship between this alphabet and the field of second language pronunciation teaching, Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin comment on the fact that

[t]he phoneticians involved in this international organization, … did much to influence modern language teaching by specifically advocating … [that] the spoken form of a language is primary and should be taught first, [that] the findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching, [that] teachers must have solid training in phonetics [,and that] learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits. (1996, p.3)

As a result of the importance of the graphical representation of sounds for second language pronunciation teaching, a brief description of English vowel and consonant sounds is presented below.

Vowel sounds have been already introduced in the previous section due to the considerable complexity to establish relationships between their spelling and their pronunciation. There are 20 vowel sounds in GB as we have already mentioned; twelve monophthongs and eight diphthongs. It is important to remember that all vowel sounds are voiced, which means that the vocal chords vibrate when a vowel sound is produced.

Monophthongs tend to be classified in two groups; short and long sounds. This being said however; Peter Roach reminds us that "vowels can have quite different lengths in different contexts." (2000, p.15) He refers to the five common short vowel sounds as only 'relatively short'. The remaining 7 long monophthongs are represented by a phonetic symbol plus a length mark which is represented by two dots (:). It is important to bear in mind that the quality (articulation) of both short and long vowel sounds in English does not correspond, which means that the sound is produced in a different position in the oral cavity. These 12 monophthongs are often represented in a trapezium diagram which resembles the oral cavity. It is my belief that by using and understanding this representation, the position of the tongue when producing vowels might be more accurate.
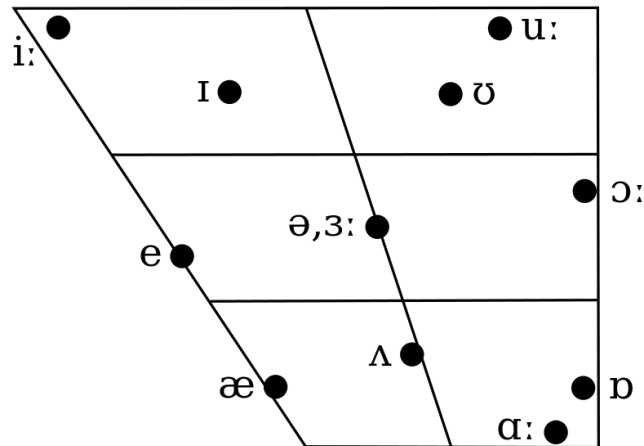
Fig.1 Monophthong Diagram

< https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RP_English_monophthongs_chart.svg>

Unlike pure vowels, diphthongs, glide from one vowel to another, which means that there is an initial vowel sound which moves towards a different one. Roach stresses that "one of the most common pronunciation mistakes that result in a learner of English having a "foreign" accent is the production of pure vowels where a diphthong should be pronounced" (2000, p.21) . So, therefore it must be assumed that producing diphthongs accurately will be beneficial for learners. As in monophthongs, the articulation of diphthongs can also be observed in a trapezium chart which resembles the oral cavity.

Fig 2. Diphthong Diagram

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:RP_English_diphthongs_chart.svg>

It must not be forgotten that triphthongs do also exist in English. According to Roach these are "[t]he most complex English sounds of the vowel type" (2000, p.24). He supports this by stating that "[t]hey can be rather difficult to pronounce, and very difficult to recognise". (2000, p.24). As regards their production, they are produced likewise, yet with an extra glide towards another vowel sound. They can also be represented in a trapezium which resembles the movements in the oral cavity.
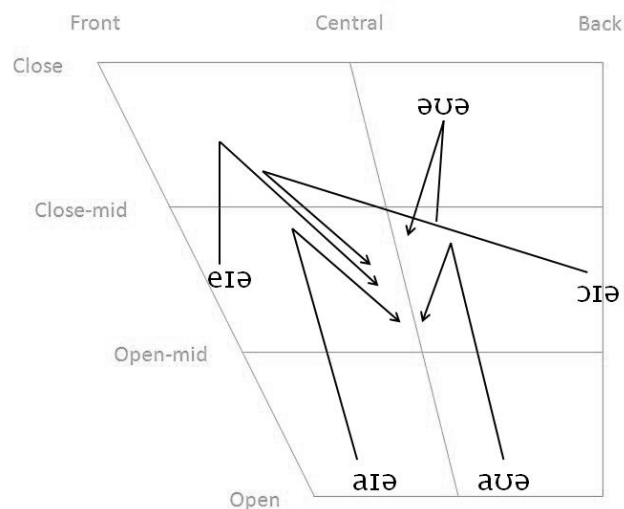
Fig 3. Triphthong Trapezium
< https://old.liu.se/ikk/english/course-webpages/ling1/phonetics?l=en>

In the same fashion, let us next discuss consonant sounds. There are twenty-four consonant phonemes in GB. A consonant can be classified by the presence or absence of voicing and by its place and manner of articulation. For example, /p/ is a voiceless bilabial plosive consonant. This means that when we produce it the vocal chords do not vibrate, we bring the lips together and then the air which was blocked by the lips closure is released. In contrast /b/ is produced identically with the only difference that it is voiced, that is the vocal chords vibrate.

There are seven places of articulation for English consonants; bilabial (lips brought together), labio-dental (top teeth / lower lip), interdental (tongue/teeth), alveolar (tongue / alveolar ridge behind the upper teeth), palatal (tongue / palate), velar (tongue / velum) and glottal (glottis is closed).

There are five different manners of articulation for English consonant sounds: plosives, also known as stops, (air blocked then released 'explosion'), fricatives (air passage is narrowed, released through friction), affricates (air completely blocked, release through friction), nasals (air through the nose) and approximants (articulators not together enough, friction). There are two types of approximants; liquids and glides.

	MANNER		VOICING	PLACE						
				Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Obstruent	Stop		Voiceless	p			t		k	ʔ
			Voiced	b			d		g	
	Fricative		Voiceless		f	θ	s	ʃ		h
			Voiced		v	ð	z	ʒ		
	Affricate		Voiceless					tʃ		
			Voiced					dʒ		
Sonorant		Nasal	Voiced	m			n		ŋ	
	Liquid	Lateral	Voiced				l			
		Rhotic	Voiced					r (ɹ)		
		Glide	Voiced	w				j	(w)	

Fig. 4 English Consonant Chart

<https://msu.edu/course/asc/232/Charts/ConsonantChartFilledIn.html>

This dissertation is very much interested in sound contrast identification. It is clear that segmental phonology is essential for identifying sound contrasts. However, Roach states that "[m]any significant sound contrasts are not the result of differences between phonemes" (2000, p.45), so attention must also be paid to suprasegmental features of English phonology. Due to the fact that the research exposed in this dissertation is not so closely connected to suprasegmental features of English phonology, a much briefer account of its details will be provided.

For example, word stress plays an important role when contrasting homographs which act as different parts of speech, and are besides pronounced differently. An example of this is the word *record*.[3] In this specific case word stress is firmly linked to sound contrast, but that is not always the case. In this

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[3] /ˈrek·ɔːd/ (noun) /rɪˈkɔːd/ (verb)

dissertation, the great depth of suprasegmentals (sentence stress, intonation, connected speech phenomena and rhythm) will not be thoroughly considered given its little bearing to the study.

2.2. The Teaching, Learning and Acquisition of Pronunciation

2.2.1. Overview

Is pronunciation being taught in classrooms in Spain? Aliaga-Garcia makes the firm statement that pronunciation has been and is still often forgotten in the EFL context of Spain "... spending many years in a FL classroom will not guarantee itself successful L2 pronunciation ... when pronunciation still receives little attention in most FL classrooms in Spain" (2007). Cruttenden corroborates the latter by stating that "with the increasingly wider use of English as an international language there has been a tendency to place less and less importance on the teaching of pronunciation." (2014: 325)

Even though Second Language Pronunciation might not be the most researched area within Second Language Teaching and Acquisition today, a fair amount of solid research has been conducted in the field throughout the past decades.

That is why, in the first place, this section aims to make an account of the past, current and future status of second language pronunciation. Attention will be paid to its teaching and learning, its acquisition and its assessment. Later in the text, the focus will be on what role second language pronunciation plays in the current legal framework of Spain and last, the nature of English university entrance exams in Spain will be examined.

2.2.2. English Pronunciation Teaching: Past, Present and Future

According to Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, there are two general approaches to pronunciation teaching at present. These are an intuitive-imitative approach and an analytic-linguistic approach. The first one is of a totally implicit

nature whereas the second one aims to use explicit information to teach pronunciation. With this in mind, what was pronunciation teaching like earlier in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? How is it being practised today? And most importantly, what does the future hold with regard to second language pronunciation teaching?

History of English Pronunciation Teaching

Between the late 1800s and the early 1900s naturalistic methods, such as the direct method, were very popular. This is a model based on listening and repeating, which wants to reproduce the acquisition of first language phonology. This approach might be in conflict with a widely discussed hypothesis in the field of language acquisition; the Critical Period Hypothesis. This hypothesis puts forward that after the critical period, which is the period in which the biological condition for acquiring language is at its absolute maximum. This has been researched in depth and opinions are quite diverse. Many believe that acquiring native-like pronunciation is impossible after a certain age. Nevertheless, it has been demonstrated that adults can actually manage to achieve native-like pronunciation; Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin state that "the importance of the critical period is somewhat downplayed today, and the claim that adults cannot achieve nativelike pronunciation in a second language is not infrequently countered with anecdotes about successful adult second language learners who have 'beaten the odds'." (1996, p. 15)

Earlier in the dissertation we have introduced the International Phonetic Association, which was created in 1886 by a group of well-known phoneticians. They created the aforementioned International Phonetic Alphabet thanks to the emergence of phonetics as a science. This was a fundamental change which in my opinion, still has an impact today in second pronunciation teaching.

Similar to the direct method is the audiolingual method. It emerged in the 1940s and 1950s, and it is similar to the direct method in the way that students repeat after a model. What makes it different though is that in this method pronunciation is taught explicitly right from the very beginning. This is done with

the use and support of phonetic materials, which may or may not be based on the International Phonetic Alphabet. The use of the IPA Alphabet in explicit pronunciation instruction is common, but one might come up with their own way of representing and explaining the articulation of sounds, as they did in the 1970s with the Silent Way, which didn't use explicit representation of the sound system but did study sound systems.

Later, in the 1960s, it was time for Noam Chomsky and other scholars to put forward a more cognitive approach to language teaching, which reduced the importance of pronunciation learning and acquisition to the minimum giving more importance to other areas of language. In the abstract to his 1969 article, Scovel believes that it is impossible for an adult to learn pronunciation without an "impinging accent". This was not the only language methodology to ignore pronunciation; for example, the grammar translation method did not even take into consideration the phonology of the language.

In the 1970s, we come across the above-mentioned Silent Way and Community Language Learning (CLL); "[CLL] is intuitive and imitative …, but its exact content and the extent to which practice takes place are controlled by the learner/client rather than the teacher or textbook" (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996, p. 7). In CLL students say a sentence in their first language, and the instructor provides them with the translation in chunks while the class is recorded.

The Communicative Approach came along in the 1980s and is still at present leading the field of second language teaching. Communicative Language Teaching "… holds that since the primary purpose of language is communication, using language to communicate should be central to language instruction." (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996, p.7). With this in mind we can assume that the objective in second language pronunciation teaching is not achieving the sound of a native speaker, but communicating effectively through pronunciation. In my opinion, imitating a particular accent is not useful if other areas of phonology have not been acquired. It is my belief that distinguishing sounds,

using the right word stress, and the right sentence stress is more important than mimicking an accent.

For instance, let us take the word *catholic;* an L1 Spanish learner will be likely to place the stress on the second syllable, which is incorrect. Now, imagine this student pronounces this word with a great British accent. The following question arises, what is more important having a particular accent or knowing what syllable is stressed?

Another example to consider could be the following utterance: *'I thought it was going to snow'.* Depending on where the learner places the sentence stress the situation will be completely different. One possibility is that you thought it was going to snow, but it did not, and the other possibility is that you thought it was going to snow, and it did; totally opposite. The following question emerges as a result, what is more important; to say this sentence with a fantastic native-like accent, or placing the stress in the sentence correctly to say what you mean?

Considering these two examples, is then accent a communicative element of language, or are segmental or suprasegmental features of phonology of much greater importance? Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin support this by stating that "[material developers and teachers] decided that directing most of their energy to teaching suprasegmental features of language … in a discourse context was the optimal way to organize a short-term pronunciation course for non-native speakers" (1996, p.10)

This does not mean that segmental features of pronunciation are not important. What's more, "today's pronunciation curriculum thus seeks to identify the most important aspects of both the segmentals and the suprasegmentals, and integrate them appropriately in courses that meet the needs of any given group of learners." (Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin 1996, p.10). It is important then to now consider what teachers need to do to ensure an up-to-standard teaching of second language pronunciation.

Teaching and Learning Second Language Pronunciation

Kenworthy discusses the role which teachers should play in second language pronunciation teaching in her 1987 book *Teaching English Pronunciation.* First, she comments on the importance of helping learners hear as students will likely hear the target sounds in terms of their native sound system; "[t]eachers need to check that their learners are hearing sounds according to the appropriate categories and hep them to develop new categories if necessary". (p.1). Subsequently, Kenworthy mentions the importance of helping learners make sounds. Provision of feedback is an important part of the teacher's role according to her too as "[o]ften learners themselves can't tell if they've got it right; the teacher must provide them with information about their performance." (p2.)

Since speaking is in its most part unconsciously constructed, teachers have to help "[l]earners … to know what to pay attention to and work on" (Kenworthy 1987 p.2). But, can everything be included in one syllabus? Pronunciation is a vast area of language, and teachers must establish priorities. Kenworthy makes a great point by stating that "[l]earners need the help of the teacher in establishing a plan for acting, in deciding, what to concentrate on and when to leave well enough alone." (1987, p.2).

Is the effort of the teacher all which is needed for the learners' possible success? It is quite evident that "ultimately success in pronunciation will depend on how much effort the learner puts into it" (Kenworthy 1987, p,2). However, apart from the obvious effort which the learner must make, there are other factors which may affect pronunciation learning. For example, the influence of the first language is one of the factors which cannot be overlooked, as "the more differences there are [between the first and the second language(s)], the more difficulties the learner will have in pronouncing English." (Kenworthy 1987, p.4). A subsequent section in this dissertation is dedicated to first language transfer from both Spanish and Catalan.

Another factor affecting pronunciation learning is age. If one meets a person who pronounces a second language like a native, this person is usually

thought to have started learning English at a very young age; this tends to be the common view in society. However, many studies have been conducted to understand to which extent age plays a significant role in second language pronunciation learning, but "evidence is contradictory and the various interpretations and possibilities are intriguing, but one thing seems clear – we do not yet have evidence for a simple and straightforward link between age and the ability to pronounce a new language" (Kenworthy 1987, p.6)

Supporting my thesis statement that pronunciation instruction is indeed essential with young adults onwards, Jette G. Hansen states in his recently published article that "explicit pronunciation teaching may be key to pronunciation attainment in the L2 and able to mitigate age effects. (2017 in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary English Pronunciation*, p.385).

Another factor might be connected to the amount of exposure to the target language. Kenworthy claims that even if the amount of exposure is beneficial it is not a necessary factor for the development of pronunciation skills. Many people believe that for example people who live in an English-speaking country are better at pronunciation, but that is not always the case. Not because a learner is constantly surrounded by the English language does it necessarily mean that their pronunciation skills will be better. According to Kenworthy, "it is not merely exposure that matters, but how the learner responds to the opportunities to listen and use English." (1987, p.6)

Other factors which Kenworthy 1987 considers are individual phonetic ability, attitude, motivation, and concern for good pronunciation. Hansen 2017 also takes other factors into evaluation; ethnic/peer/social group identifications, different language learning contexts, language learning strategies and the length of residence/extent of L1-L2 use/L2 experience.

It is obvious that many factors can interfere in the process of learning pronunciation, so teachers should come up with varied and diverse activities to suit all individual differences so as to let everyone reach their maximum second language pronunciation potential. Teachers should also stress the importance of

good pronunciation for clearer communication and focus on intelligibility as the main goal.

There is no doubt that intelligibility is essential for successful communication, as Munro states "intelligibility is the single most important aspect of all communication" (2011, p. 13) What's more, intelligibility is essential for the globalised world, "… developing in learners the ability to accommodate their pronunciation towards their interlocutor is key to intelligible communication in global contexts." (Kaur 2017 in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary English Pronunciation* p.552)

What should the learners' goals be then? Of course, this is a question which will vary from learner to learner. However, there has been a tendency in past years to detach from the idea that native-like pronunciation is the objective, and there has been a shift towards the opinion that intelligibility is what learners should aim at. A speaker is being intelligible when he or she is easy to understand.

Intelligibility takes into consideration the context the speaker's intention for effective communication. Kenworthy gives an extreme, yet useful, example for better understanding:

> Imagine this situation: you are in a room full of seated people – let's say a cinema; suddenly someone stands up and shouts a word or words that no one understands, the person is obviously very agitated, and is pointing towards an open door; smoke and the smell of something burning waft through the door; everyone immediately makes for the fire exits. (1987, p.16)

Now, let's re-imagine a similar situation in a pronunciation environment. Imagine that you are the same situation yet instead of saying *fire,* the speaker says *tire*. In the given context, would one not understand? Of course, this is a very extreme example and situation, what takes us to the concept of 'comfortable intelligibility' (Kenworthy 1987), which means that intelligibility has to be efficient, if a speaker is constantly making mistakes, communication between both parties might end up failing.

Intelligibility is not so interested in perfect accuracy of segmentals and suprasegmentals, but in a good balance between all features of pronunciation which the context complements, so that other speakers of the language can understand us. This was discussed earlier in this paper, having a great command of segments will not guarantee communication, it is my belief that it is finding balance towards understandable speech what matters the most.

How important is it that teachers and learners have knowledge of the English sound system? Pamela Rogerson-Revell gives an answer to this important concern:

it is particularly useful for languages like English … which have inconsistent spellings … the pronunciation of words in isolation is very different from how they appear in connected speech. Using phonemic transcription enables us to show these features must more precisely … once learnt, it provides a useful 'shorthand' and shared reference point for teacher and learners … it is impossible to refer to sounds such as the schwa without it … (2011, p.243)

Rogerson-Revell further discusses what makes a good pronunciation teacher. According to her, they will need both practical and theoretical skills. As regards practical skills, teachers must hold both perceptual and productive skills; "perhaps the most fundamental skill the teacher needs is the ability to perceive and produce sounds both in isolation and in connected speech." (2011, p. 244). It is evident that by theoretical skills, she is referring to knowledge of phonetics and phonology; "this knowledge includes an awareness of significant differences between L1 and L2 phonological systems … [and] the ability to identify … the nature of a pronunciation problem.

When do we teach pronunciation in the English class then? Many researchers defend the idea that pronunciation should be integrated in all lessons. (Bainbridge and O'Shea 2010, Rogerson-Revell 2011, Kenworthy 1987, For example, when students learn new words, it is a good opportunity to learn about sounds too. For example, instead of teaching ten vocabulary items related to a specific context, these can instead be taught around a specific sound.

Pronunciation can also be integrated to grammar lessons, for example if students are learning the past simple, there is a great opportunity to learn about the pronunciation of the -ed allomorphic alternations; same would apply to the -es suffix. Perhaps if English language teaching materials included more pronunciation practice this could be done much more simply.

As regards L2 pronunciation materials in Spain, we know that little attention is paid to it in materials for Secondary Obligatory Education; "pronunciation is the area that receives less attention in these textbooks, evidenced by there being fewer activities, sections, activities per unit, types of activities and theoretical explanations." (Calvo Benzies 2014, p.320). Do teachers subsequently fill this textbook gap in their ESO and Bachillerato classes? In her doctoral thesis, Calvo Benzies, examines the role of secondary and post-secondary teachers in this sphere. Calvo Benzies explains that teachers think that pronunciation is an important skill, but yet, a difficult one (2016, p.350). As regards what students believe about L2 pronunciation teaching, Calvo-Benzies undertakes some research with students who had different levels of proficiency. From her subjects' responses she concludes that "[d]espite acknowledging that pronunciation is relevant, it seems that [they] are not happy with the amount of time devoted to the teaching of this area of language in their EFL classes at high-school" (2016, p.253).

Durán-Martínez introduces us to valuable online resources which can be very useful to fill the aforementioned textbook gap (2006 in *Nuevas Perspectivas en la Didáctica de la Fonética Inglesa* p.159-168). He gives the reference for different websites which can come in handy when teaching pronunciation.

We have now discussed the nature of the teaching and learning of pronunciation, next, the nature of the assessment of second language pronunciation will be discussed.

Isaacs and Trofimovich comment on the general status of second language pronunciation assessment; "[a]fter a period of relative neglect, second language (L2) pronunciation has experienced a resurgence of interest among

applied linguistics researchers and L2 practitioners, with several indicators signalling growing momentum." (2017, p.3). In their book *Second Language Pronunciation Assessment: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* they later connect different perspectives with pronunciation assessment. These include psycholinguistics, speech sciences, sociolinguistic, cross-cultural and lingua franca perspectives. One of the problems they discuss throughout the book is that it is difficult to manage the objective and subjective criteria for second language pronunciation assessment. When you think of it, pronunciation is not only about sounds and accuracy but about identity and emotion which can be very subjective.

The status of the native speaker model for successful L2 pronunciation assessment is also questioned. Contrary to the native-speaker model is Kang and Kermad, who states that "the utmost goal of pronunciation assessment is to ensure that listeners' ratings of pronunciation performance are valid and a true reflection of NNSs' English proficiency level." (2017 in *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary English Pronunciation,* p.522)

Pronunciation Assessment should not only focus on the production, but also on the reception. As we have already seen above, "in the case of production, an assessment of efficiency is more difficult." (Cruttenden 2014, p. 350); however, reception and comprehension are much easier to assess. Take the phonetic task which will be later presented, it is easily assessed. Take the understanding of a phonetic perception task, it can also be systematically assessed. Receptive pronunciation skills are much more simply assessed. It is my opinion, as a teacher, that it is easy to fall onto the fallacy that in-class ongoing feedback on pronunciation is enough. This dissertation will aim to provide students with the most detailed feedback possible.

First Language Pronunciation Transfer: Spanish and Catalan

In the introduction to the 1984 article "An Investigation of Transfer in Second Language Phonology", Broselow states that "[o]ne of the crucial questions in

second language acquisition research concerns the role played by interference from native language rules and patterns in accounting for learners' errors in the target language." (p. 253) In this section, we will focus on describing the phonological systems of Spanish and Catalan and discuss likely interferences in L2 pronunciation.

The first thing we must consider, again, is that unlike Spanish and Catalan, English is not phonetic. We will concentrate first on vowel sounds as these are perhaps the most complex at the segmental level.

English has a more complicated vowel system than Spanish. The five vowel phonemes of Spanish are arranged symmetrically, very different from the twelve-vowel trapezium we observed earlier in this dissertation. Central Catalan has a number of eight vowel sounds. It comes as no surprise then, that speakers of Spanish and Catalan find difficulties in getting the hang of how the English vowel system works. Yet, that is not the only problems with vowels; English vowels are not only tense as the Spanish and Catalan ones. Vowels in English differ in quantity (duration).

Spanish, Catalan and English do not share the same consonant system either. On the one hand, the Spanish sound system does not have the English: voiced labiodental fricative, voiced interdental fricative, voiced alveolar fricative, voiced and unvoiced palatal fricatives, voiced palatal affricate, voiceless glottal fricative, voiced velar nasal nor voiced palatal liquid. On the other hand, the Catalan sound system does not have the English: voiced labiodental fricative, voiced and unvoiced interdental fricatives, voiceless glottal fricative nor voiced palatal liquid.

It is important, I believe, for the English teacher to be familiar with the phonology and phonotactics of their learners' first language. Kenworthy drafted brilliant guidelines in her 1987 book. These guidelines list specific and common pronunciation errors due to L1 Transfer. These lists are available for the following sound systems: Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Greek, Italian, Japanese, Spanish and Turkish. The problems are classified in two different ways. First,

either segmental or suprasegmental; and then, of high or low priority. I found the use of this list very useful when I was teaching second language pronunciation in the past.

There are of course many other possible interferences both at the segmental and suprasegmental level. Those at the segmental level will be more allophonic than the ones described above, for instance aspiration in initial /p/. Those at the suprasegmental level are vast and will not be discussed in this research project as the task in question is based around segmental phonology at the phonemic level.

2.3 Communication Skills and Pronunciation in the Current Educational Legislation of Spain

We have introduced this dissertation by stating that the current educational law in Spain aims for a communicative approach when teaching foreign languages. In this section, we will describe the treatment of pronunciation in the current legislation of Secondary and Post-Secondary education in Spain. All of the quotes are my own translation from the LOMCE legislation published in the BOE (Boletín Oficial del Estado) on the 3rd of January 2015.

Pronunciation is indeed observed in the legislation in its most communicative scope; "pronouncing clearly and intelligibly, even if sometimes a foreign accent might be evident or sporadic errors which do not impede communication". (Number 3 Section I, p. 425). Then the following question arises, if such thing is stated, why is not intelligibility the protagonist of second language pronunciation in Spain?

2.4 University Entrance Exams in Spain

When post-secondary obligatory education (*Bachillerato* in Spain) comes to an end, future undergraduates must take university entrance exams in their respective autonomous communities prior to starting their university studies.

These exams are not regulated nationally; every autonomous community in Spain regulates university entrance exams autonomously. However, no matter in which autonomous community the student takes the examination, he or she is allowed to apply to any national university.

Even if the examinations are designed autonomously, there are some shared criteria which all must adhere to. There are two phases in the examination, the access and the admission phase.

The access phase is obligatory for all and includes Spanish, Catalan, Foreign Language (typically English), History of Spain and one subject from the specialization coursed during *Bachillerato* (Mathematics, Latin, Applied Mathematics or Arts). The access phase provides the student with a mark out of 10, where 5 is pass. A 60% of this mark is their student record, and a 40% the examination itself.

The admission phase is optional, and students can take up to three exams whose contents are connected to those of their desired undergraduate studies. If these subjects are passed, the result will be pondered depending on which degree the prospective student wants to take up to a maximum of 4 points, that is the maximum admission mark is 14.

As part of the methodology of this research project, an in-depth analysis of all English exams in Spain was made to discuss to which extent the syllabi is shared within all autonomous communities, and to which extent, if any, intelligibility in oral production is tested.

3   Methodology

3.1 Analysis of University Entrance Exams in Spain

The first thing I considered before establishing my research questions and purpose was making an exhaustive analysis of the organisation and contents of

English university entrance exams in all Spain. Detailed information about the organisation and marking criteria for these exams can be checked at each of the websites of all organising universities.

My first concern was to examine whether all exams shared the same type of question, which was not the case. For instance, even if all of them include a text in the exam, the nature of questions and the percentage of marks awarded for reading questions vary from exam to exam. The same happens with writing questions, even if all autonomous communities design an exam which includes a written production item, the nature and percentage for this part also differs widely.

Some of the exams are more linguistically accuracy-based; including several questions on grammar and vocabulary and others, such as the Catalan design, only include skill-based tasks (reading, listening and writing). Catalonia is the only autonomous community where the listening skill is tested.

The level of all exams is not the same. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages establishes clear can-dos for learners of any foreign language. Some autonomous communities demand the student to write an e-mail or a short note, whereas other autonomous communities ask the student to write an essay. These two are clearly at different CEFR levels.

What surprised me the most was that pronunciation is being tested in two autonomous communities; Castilla-La-Mancha and Illes Balears. I found this quite strange, as we have previously seen that pronunciation has been one of the most overlooked areas of foreign language instruction and foreign language materials in Spain. Therefore, is it not surprising that two national universities decide to test it when little attention has been and is being paid to it during their studies?

Regarding the presence of pronunciation in these two examinations, a decision was made that the focus of dissertation would be the phonetic task found in the Balearic English University Entrance Exam (PBAU Anglès II). Next is an in-depth analysis of what the task entails, what trends have been followed since

it was first implemented and bring to discussion to which extent such task provides the learner with better second language pronunciation skills.

3.2 Phonetic Task in the Balearic English University Entrance Exam (PBAU Anglès II)

The earliest account of the existence of phonetic-based questions in the Balearic English is June 2003; however, the current phonetic task in the exam was first established in June 2009.

As exposed in the University of the Balearic Islands (UIB) website, "this is an odd-one-out type of task of auditive discrimination in which the phonetic knowledge of sounds, and the ability to discriminate sounds (vowels, consonants, diphthongs) are tested. The total mark of the question is 1 point" (my own translation); that is a 10% of the total mark. The task has four sets of four words each. Each of the words in the set has an underlined part of the spelling which matches one of the English phonemes. Out of the four, three words share a common sound while the remaining one is in contrast, and therefore is the odd-one-out.

It is my belief that such a description is not accurate enough. The task asks students to discriminate sounds indeed, but there is no auditive component to the task. It has been mentioned earlier in this dissertation that the relationship between spelling and sound in the English language can be conflicting. Given the little attention paid to it in the classroom and materials, and the added difficulty that English is not phonetic; I found surprising that such a task is prioritised before other tasks which might match the current curriculum of Bachillerato.

If what is being defended and done in classrooms is communicative language teaching, then this task, in my view, is not ambitious enough. For instance, no exam in Spain has an oral production task, perhaps because the resources in education are scarce, or maybe because logistics could be difficult to manage. Besides the potential difficulties, an oral production task would fit much better as far as communicative language teaching and intelligibility are concerned.

With this, it is not meant that this task is useless. It is my belief that with the right focus, this task could have an impact on the learner's second language pronunciation skills.

After gaining a better understanding of how this task functions, a decision was made to carry out a thorough analysis of which segmental features of phonology were being tested in this question. There was no point in tackling all plausible pairs of phonemes in my research without first considering the nature and trends of previous task.

Since the task as we know it today was established in June 2009, the analysis comprises items from that date up to July 2017. There are two sittings of the English university entrance exam each year; one in June and another in July (in September in earlier years). Each sitting offers potential undergraduates two exam options (A or B), which means that there are eight phonetic sets per sitting, four in each option. This makes a total number of one hundred and forty-four analysable items.

These one hundred and forty-four items were carefully analysed. The following steps were followed: first, both sounds in each set were recognised and labelled with their respective IPA symbol. Once all sets had been considered as regards the segmental features tested the analysis continued.

The following step was to label the 'phonetic' nature of the question. Different phonetic tags and sub-tags were available to be assigned to the sets. Each set could have more than one tag appointed to it. The proposed main tags were: *vowels, consonants, -s/-es allomorphic alternations and -ed allomorphic alternations.* These tags were chosen because all focuses of the sets were on at least one of them; comparing consonants, comparing vowels, and on the different possible pronunciation of the -s/-es/-es suffixes.

However, in my view, this was not enough to establish research priorities and sub-tags were created. Sub-tags in this analysis are meant to give more

information on the nature of the set. For example, sub-tags for *vowels* were: *monophthongs, diphthongs, quantity* and *quality*. Some questions contained only monophthongs or diphthongs, but some sets included both, others were focused on the articulation and others were interested in the duration of vowels. It was important to study this information to gain better understanding of what exam designers were doing. Sub-tags for *consonants* were based on their place and manner of articulation. The possible sub-tags were: *bilabial, labiodental, interdental, alveolar, palatal, velar, glottal, plosive, fricative, affricate, nasal, liquid, glide, place, manner* and *voicing.* The last three to establish a narrower focus of the question. No sub-tags were made available for the two remaining main tags of allomorphic alternations. Below is an example of in which fashion this was done.

Item	Model	Sitting	Shared Sound	vs.	Odd Sound	Vowels	Mono	Dip	Place	Duration	Consonants	Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal	Plosive	Fricative	Affricate	Nasal	Liquid	Glide	Place	Manner	Voicing	-s/-es allomorph	-ed allomorph
1	A	J09	ɪəʳ	vs.	eəʳ	1			1																				
2	A	J09	ð	vs.	θ						1			1						1							1		
3	A	J09	aʊ	vs.	əʊ	1			1																				
4	A	J09	t	vs.	ɪd																								1
5	A	S09	eəʳ	vs.	ɪəʳ	1			1																				
6	A	S09	eɪ	vs.	e	1	1	1																					
7	A	S09	ʌ	vs.	ɜːʳ	1	1			1																			
8	A	S09	s	vs.	z						1				1					1							1		

Fig. 5 Extract. Analysis of phonemes in PBAU phonetic sets. 2009 sittings. Option A.

This analysis helped this research understand much better the nature of sets included in this task. Let us now discuss which conclusions were drawn from this breakdown.

There is a clear preference to include vowel sounds in the sets. More than half of the sets are focused on vowel sounds. This is something which makes sense as we have previously discussed in this dissertation that vowel sounds are more complex to learn for the student whose first language is Spanish or Catalan, so it is logical that these are tested. Less attention is paid to consonant sounds, perhaps this is because spelling is a bit more phonetic in this case; however, a fair number of sets include consonant sounds as focus. The two tags which receive the least attention is allomorphic alternations, perhaps because these can be much more easily identified through their spelling forms. A clear preference is shown for the past simple suffix, which tends to be a common mistake for EFL learners. Below is a breakdown of the focus of the tasks in question.

Task Focus 2009-2017

● Vowels   ● Consonants   ● -s / -es allomorph   ● -ed allomorph
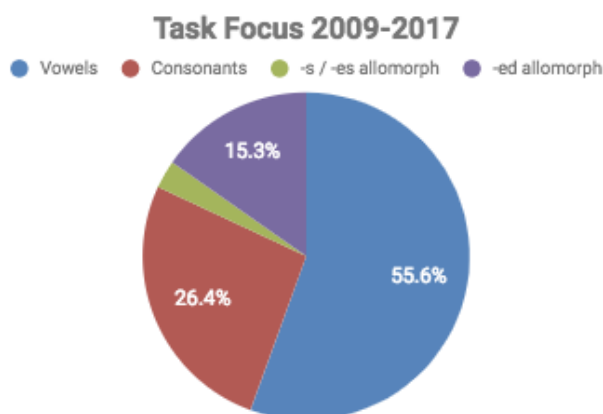
15.3%

55.6%

26.4%

Fig 6. PBAU Phonetic Task Focus 2009-2017 (main tags)

Given the fact that vowel sounds are the protagonists in almost 56% of instances, they are worth taking a closer look at. First, monophthongs are preferred over diphthongs. There are more monophthongs than diphthongs in the English sound system, so this is a logical trend too. Second is whether the focus is on the place or on the duration. A preference is shown to test vowel duration rather than the different articulations.
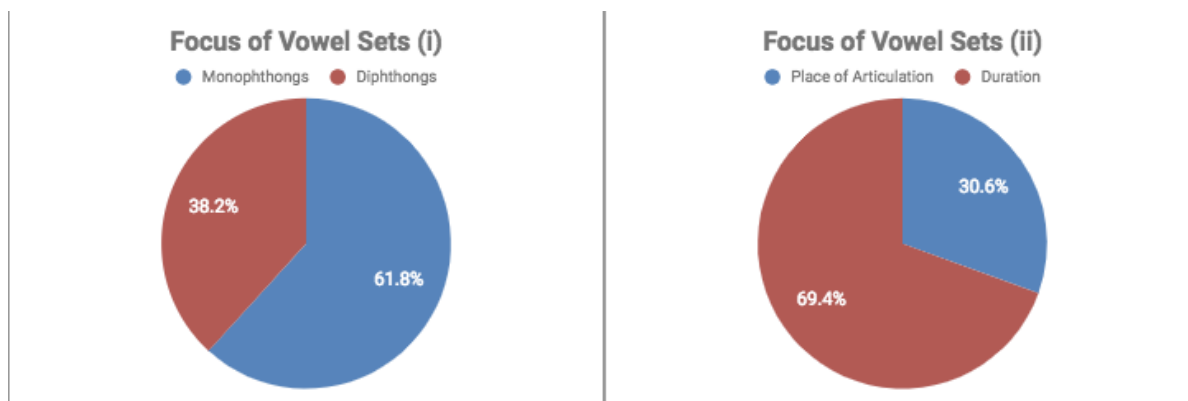
Fig 7. Focus of Vowel Sets in PBAU Phonetic Task 2009-2017 (sub-tags)

Even if vowels are the most popular items in this task, consonants play also a significant role. Most consonant sets focus on the manner of articulation rather than on the place of articulation. Little attention is paid to the place of articulation in the sets. Distinguishing between voiced and voiceless sounds is not prioritised either.
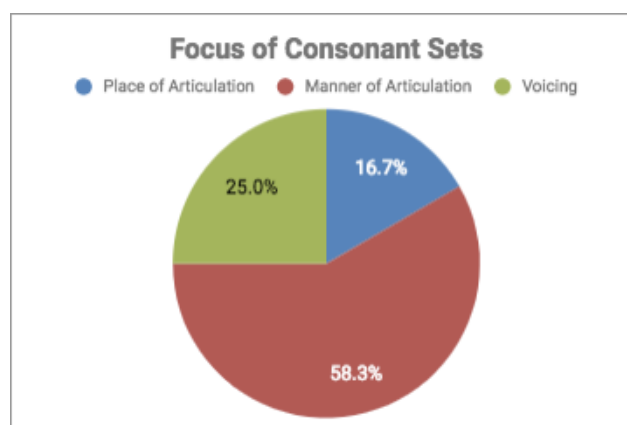
Fig 8. Focus of Consonant Sets in PBAU Phonetic Task 2009-2017 (sub-tags)

Not all places and manners of articulation for consonant sounds are included in the studied sets. Nasals and liquids are not the focus of any of the tasks; most likely because they are very much phonetic. English labiodental consonant sounds are not included either due to the very same reason. The most preferred manners of articulation are affricates and fricatives. By far, palatal is the most common place of articulation tested. I believe that it is obvious why; English palatal fricatives and affricates (ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ) are often difficult to distinguish.

Fig. 9 Most Common Manners and Places of Articulation in PBAU Phonetic Tasks 2009-2017 (sub-tags)
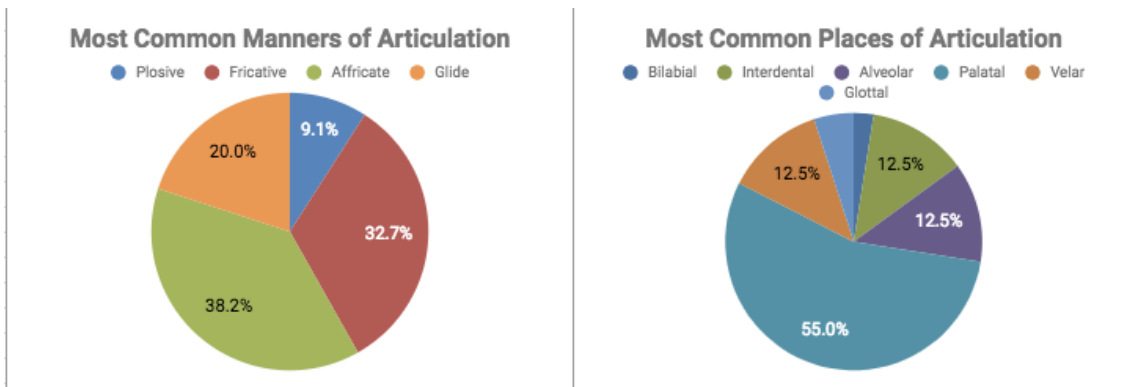
Taking all information drawn from this analysis, it is quite clear that with this information better and more detailed help can be offered to students in order to successfully complete this task.

The information obtained through this breakdown benefited this research project greatly. It did not only help in designing accurate diagnostic tests which are faithful to the official examination but also in drafting and teaching a didactic unit which aims for students to improve their second language pronunciation while improving the performance of this task.

3.3 Research Questions and Purpose

We have so far explained in detail the context of second language pronunciation teaching and the nature of this task. We shall now proceed to both state what questions arose at this point of the research project, and to examine the prime purpose of this dissertation.

After considering the nature and details around this phonetic task, we know that this is a task based on the relationship between graphemes and phonemes. This relationship is difficult and cannot be tackled in just a simple didactic unit. The fact that pronunciation has been overlooked by curricula, teacher education and textbooks has had an important impact too. The first question that arises then is; is just practice for this task helping students become

better at pronunciation, or do they need to be thoroughly instructed in second language pronunciation to achieve a good performance? If so, how?

Another thing to consider is that not all learners are the same with regard to pronunciation skills. All of them have different pronunciation and linguistic backgrounds; different first languages, different experiences with pronunciation, different aptitudes and diverse motivations… To which extent, then, does this task help students improve their own pronunciation individual difficulties? What can a teacher do to reach and manage individual differences in pronunciation?

Moreover, the key issue questioned in this research is to which extent this task is relevant in the university entrance examination of the Balearic Islands. Are not there any other sustainable ways of assessing pronunciation? Why assess pronunciation at this point in this fashion, when it should perhaps be an oral or audial task? Why not assess all possible segmental features? And last, are not suprasegmental features important too?

These, among others, are the main questions which arose after the research exposed so far. To put it briefly, the ultimate purpose of this research project is to provide insights on second language pronunciation teaching, learning, acquisition and assessment through the analysis of the only official and available assessment in our autonomous community.

3.4 Participants and Setting

The participants in this research project were students of a 2nd year of Post-secondary education (Bachillerato) in a semi-public high school in Palma de Mallorca, Spain. There was a total of 42 subjects in the study. They were separated onto two groups of 21 unsystematically. A decision was made to create an experimental group (EG) and a control group (CG). Both groups would be practising the phonetic task for their university entrance exams, but only the experimental group would undergo formal instruction in second language pronunciation. All subjects were aged between seventeen and twenty-one at the time of the research. None of them had undergone formal pronunciation

instruction in the past. All of them started learning English at the age of 7. All of them had either Spanish or Catalan as first language.

The data for this research project was collected during the stay at my teaching placement for the Master's Programme in Teacher Training at the University of the Balearic Islands. Most of the research was done throughout the duration of the two separate didactic units I planned for each of the groups. Some other research was done before and after the didactic units I taught.

3.5 Research Instruments

Several instruments were used to do the research. They will be presented in this section in a chronological way. Both the CG and the EG underwent the same interviews and tests.

Pre-teaching Individual Interviews

Before starting the research project, I met individually with each student to gain a better understanding of each member of the groups and the groups as a whole. These meetings were of qualitative nature. I took notes after each of the interviews and built a portfolio for each subject. In the subsequent paragraphs, a summary of the questions which were asked to them will be presented.

It was my interest to know what they thought about pronunciation and to which extent they thought it was important. In both groups, I got the feeling that they did not even think pronunciation was something which could be taught. Mainly, because they had never been formally instructed. Some of them stressed that teachers would correct their pronunciation just by repeating what they said, and no explanations were given to them. It seemed as if they believed it was something unteachable. I took the position of the listener at this stage of the research and did not give them my opinion.

Another point which was made by most of them was that of the importance of a 'native-like' accent. Most of them see this as the ultimate goal for managing

to be proficient in the language, and as a result, see this as an impossible mission.

When they were asked about the pronunciation task in the university entrance exam, none of them had any idea of where to start. They affirmed choosing answers randomly as they had not really an idea of where to start choosing.

When talking about their EFL experience, several of them explained that they thought grammar was all that mattered. Their exams were quite grammar based and this made them see grammar as the most important feature of language. It felt as if they were not aware that language is more than that. However, something all of them agreed on was the importance of speaking and how little they felt they practised.

All in all, these conversations brought forward a confirmation of what had been read and examined previously, second language pronunciation is a clearly overlooked area.

Diagnostic Test A (see Appendix 1)

Since this research is interested in individual differences among learners a diagnostic test was created as a pre-test before the teaching phase. This pre-test was labelled as Diagnostic Test A.

This test contained 40 sets of four words which resemble the current pronunciation task in the English university entrance examination of the Balearic Islands. To design this test the following things were taken into consideration.

First, the design of the test. The test had to resemble the real task, so the sets had to be identically designed. The sets were aimed to be straight-forward and user-friendly. The diagnostic test contained ten times the number of sets which are found in the real task. This had to be done so as to cover all possible segmental features at once.

The design consisted of two separate documents. The first one, a question sheet, where instructions and sets were shown in a logical fashion. The second one, an answer sheet, generated by the application *Grade Scanner* for iPad. In this answer sheet, subjects chose the correct answer based on the information shown in the question sheet.

Regarding the contents of the sets, these were entirely based in the previously described analysis of the pronunciation task in the Balearic University Entrance Exam between the years 2009 and 2017. However, no exact items were copied from the real examination. Words were chosen according to the sound contrasts shown in the analysis. This decision was made because of the fact that they might be already familiar with the sets available online to the public. In brief, sound contrasts and statistical appearance of these were the resource of the sets designed for this diagnostic test.

Each of the sets was labelled using the tags and sub-tags that were previously discussed. Each of the questions was introduced to the *Grade Scanner* app and labelled digitally there. This is relevant for the results of this test. After all details of sets and correct answers have been introduced in the app, answer sheets can be scanned for automatic correction. The application provides us with detailed reports for every subject and their performance in each of the tags. That way, we gain insights on their individual pronunciation proficiency. We are also provided with group statistics, to compare subjects to the average performance of the group. The application also provides us with statistics for each of the sets, so as to know which sets were generally more difficult or easy. All in all, the use of *Grade Scanner* for analysing the results of this diagnostic tests were fully detailed.

Apart from the statistics, subjects are awarded 0.25 per correct set, that is a maximum score of 10.00 is possible. Subjects are not penalised for wrong answers due to the fact that they are not penalised either in the official examination.

This diagnostic test leads us to the following stage of the research which are the didactic units for both groups. The results and statistics provided by this test were essential to plan the didactic units, especially that of the EG.

CG and EG Didactic Units

As we have just mentioned two different didactic units were designed for the CG and the EG.

The CG was not going to undergo formal phonetic training, so their didactic unit was not really connected to second language pronunciation. Some of the sessions though were to an extent connected to second language pronunciation due to the fact that they were also being tested and had to take the same university entrance examination. Subjects in this group were later formally instructed in pronunciation, but only after the research study had come to an end.

The pronunciation components of the CG's didactic units were the following:
1. Short explanation of the phonetic task: this was a 5-minute overview of what the task entails. The materials used were the description on the UIB official website and the latest available mock exam; 2017. This was done prior to taking Diagnostic Test A. No IPA symbols were provided at this point of the research and no grapheme-phoneme relationships were discussed.
2. Diagnostic Test A: Students take Diagnostic Test A under a strict 40-minute limit.
3. In-class correction of Diagnostic Test A: After completing the diagnostic test, the 40 sets were corrected as an in-class activity. No explicit teaching of pronunciation was carried out. The only prompt given was the pronunciation of the words by me, their teacher, twice on each set. That is, they had to identify the difference from the pronunciation itself.
4. Practice: Students in the CG also practised for the task as part of their homework, but this was always corrected in the same way shown in the previous point, i.e. no explicit pronunciation teaching.
5. Students take Diagnostic Test B under a strict 40-minute limit.

Things were unalike in the didactic unit proposed for the EG. They did undergo formal pronunciation instruction in the following fashion:

1. Short explanation of the phonetic task: this was a 5-minute overview of what the task entails. The materials used were the description on the UIB official website and the latest available mock exam; 2017. This was done prior to taking Diagnostic Test A. No IPA symbols were provided at this point of the research and no grapheme-phoneme relationships were discussed.

2. Diagnostic Test A: Students take Diagnostic Test A under a strict 40-minute limit.

3. Diagnostic Test A Results: Students in the EG received an individual report describing their performance in the test. (see Appendix 2). A detailed explanatory video on the diagnostic test was made available to them. This video showed and described the reasons why an answer was correct or incorrect.

4. Further explanation of the phonetic task: This took 1 full session. First, an overview of the task was presented again. However, problems which may arise with this task were explained to them. They were introduced to the conflicting relationship between grapheme and phoneme, they were explained the concept of phoneme and told how many there were in the English sound system and completed thoroughly various sample sets in class.

5. Class on the English Sound System (see Appendix 3): In this session, students were introduced to all the IPA symbols in the English sound system. They were explained how these sounds are produced in the oral cavity. Students completed sample sets in this session too, but this time when correcting words were phonetically transcribed and explained.

6. Classes on the conflicting relationship between grapheme and phoneme: This took three sessions to complete. We studied the relationship between all phonemes and graphemes with the help of extensive information in Mott's *English Phonetics and Phonology for Spanish Speakers of English* (2005) and activities found in two books published by The English Linguistics Study Group – Anglodidáctica Publishing; *English*

Pronunciation Practice and *La pronunciación inglesa (fonética y fonología)*.

7. Class on minimal pairs and homophones: Another session was devoted to minimal pairs and homophones. A decision was made to treat minimal pairs in the didactic unit for two reasons; given the recurrence of vowel sounds in the university entrance task and the importance of distinguishing vowel quantity for optimal communication.

8. Class on suprasegmentals: Two last sessions were dedicated to suprasegmentals of English. This was a very interactive class and I used my own resources as well as those listed in Point 5. We briefly discussed word stress, sentence stress, rhythm and intonation drawing from real audial resources. Connected speech phenomena was also introduced. The response I got from subjects in the last interviews was very positive, they found this very interesting and motivated some of them to become more concerned and interested in their pronunciation skills.

9. Students take Diagnostic Test B under a strict 40-minute limit.

Diagnostic Test B

In the same fashion of Diagnostic Test A, students took Diagnostic Test B as a post-test after the teaching phase of this research project. The test was again identically designed both in layout, content and administration. Performance of students throughout the teaching phase was not taken into consideration at all at this point. All areas analysed in 3.3.1.1 were one more time objectively included. No set of words from Diagnostic A was repeated.

After completing Diagnostic Test B, individual reports were given to both groups now. From then on, not only the EG but both groups had access to their statistics and information on their progress.

Post-teaching Individual Interviews

Before concluding the research phase I wanted to meet with subjects to go through their reports, assist them with any pronunciation questions they had and

last, get some more qualitative data on their recent experience with pronunciation teaching. My objective was to play a more active role in these meetings than I did in the pre-research ones.

Through the interviews I learnt that some of them discovered something new which motivated them to continue learning pronunciation, and some others felt it was a bit too overwhelming for a 10% of the mark. Perhaps that was the biggest problem, they were too focused on the examination itself and not on their language skills. Some of them were worried about all the names and labels for segmentals, but I let them know that that was not important to remember. It was important to understand how things work, to do them better but not their labels. I also asked them about suprasegmental features; one of the subjects made a great point by stating that "I was talking to my English friend the other day, and I realised I was joining words together and playing with the volume of words, it felt great." So, maybe teaching and assessing suprasegmentals could be very beneficial, especially in today's communicative classrooms.

Final Exam: Phonetic Task

A couple of weeks after my teaching phase, students had to take their final exam of the subject before taking their official university entrance exams. It was agreed with the teacher of both groups that I would design four specific sets for each of the 42 students based on their performance throughout my research.

Reports from both groups were carefully analysed, and four distinctive sets were created for each student. The criteria I followed to do this was choosing the worst areas for every student so that they had the chance to practise what they really needed to consolidate. By doing this, close attention was paid to individual differences, which as we have mentioned before in this dissertation is essential for successful pronunciation learning.

After they had been given their exams, and were on the revision period before the official examination I made myself available to subjects in both groups to send

me an email asking for any questions regarding the specific set I had designed for them.

4 Results and Discussion

In the following section, results for Diagnostic Test A and B will be broken down for both the control and the experimental groups. Subsequently, these results will be brought to discussion and will expectantly provide answers to whether formal instruction of the English sound system has an impact on their ability to discriminate sounds between different written words in the task.

Let us begin by taking a look at the performance of both groups in Diagnostic Test A. In the CG average performance of all areas was that of a 48.44%. The CG excelled in -s/-es allomorphic alternations and consonant sounds with a 75% and 65% of correct answers respectively. In the remaining areas; place of articulation, monophthongs, -ed allomorphic alternations, vowel sounds, diphthongs and vowel duration, they performed below 49% with the minimum performance being vowel duration with a 35%. With a difference of 9,24% in their favour, the EG performed to an average of 57.68% in all areas. The EG excelled in Consonants and Place of Articulation with a 76% and 74% respectively. They did really well with vowels at 61%. This is in great contrast to the results of the CG with a difference in the EG's favour of the 20%. The EG's performance in the remaining areas was between 54% and 40%. Diphthongs and Vowel Duration were a clear problem for both groups.

Let us now consider the results of the post-test; Diagnostic Test B. The CG performed very similarly with an average performance of a 48,89%, which results in an improvement of the 0.44%. The CG showed positive improvement in discriminating vowel-based questions by an increase of the 11% of right answers, especially as regards vowel duration with an increase of the 7%. They did not show any significant improvement in the remaining areas. The EG obtained better results this time with an average performance of a 62.54%, which results in an increase of the 4.85% for the EG's average performance. Subjects in the EG showed significant improvement in both -s/-es and -ed allomorphic

alternations with a 17% and 16% respectively. They did also better in diphthongs. The EG did not show drastic decrease in any of the areas, while the CG did in some.
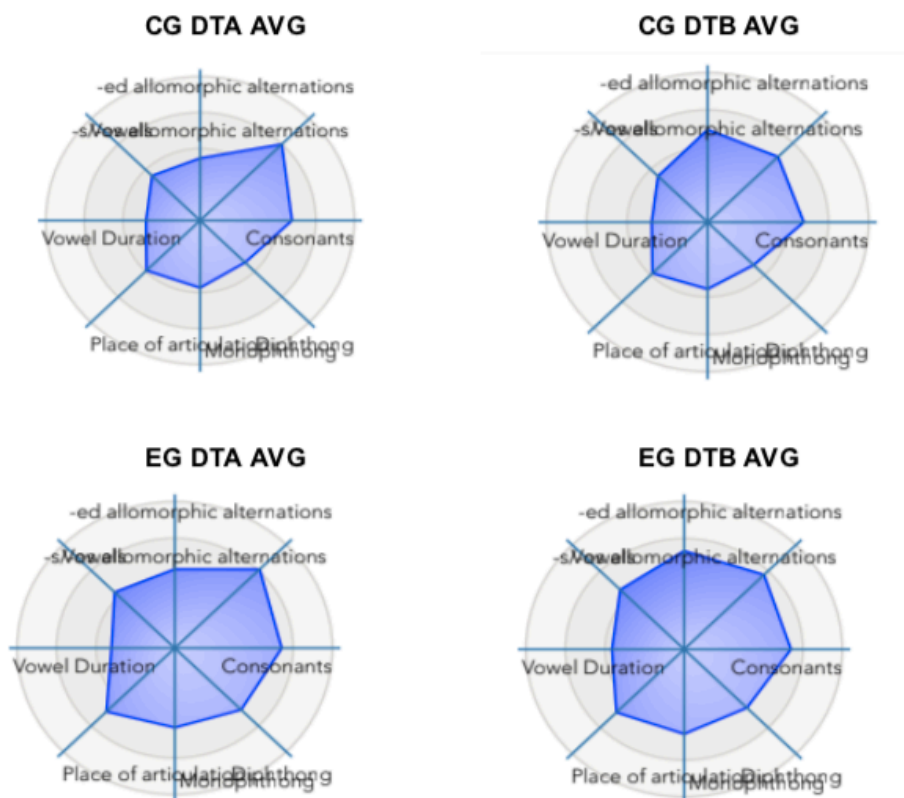

Fig. 10 Diagnostic Tests Average

The results presented above clearly suggest that solely practicing for this task (CG) does not guarantee better results. The CG has shown scarce improvement in the task itself, whereas the EG has increased their performance by a 5%. Therefore, studying pronunciation formally will give students better chances of discriminating sounds, which as we have mentioned throughout this dissertation is quite challenging. (grapheme vs. phoneme).

However, given the little span of time that the research project entails, and the few subjects who have taken part, this research project cannot provide nothing but a starting point for all the remaining questions which were raised at an earlier point in this dissertation.

5   Conclusions

One of the concerns of this dissertation was to analyse to which extent formal pronunciation instruction improved learners' pronunciation performance. There were no time resources to take on such quest quantitively speaking, so all the data available results from my interviews and class observations with the subjects. Even if this qualitative data suggests that subjects in the EG had improved greatly, it is not sufficient to draw any solid conclusions in this domain.

It would also be interesting to see how subjects did in their final exam with their individually designed pronunciation sets as no access was given to the answers by the end of this research. Did students manage to improve in those areas they were weak at? Throughout this dissertation we have discussed the importance of individual differences, and this would have been a great asset when describing the results of this research.

For all the reasons found above, it can be concluded that future research could explore to which extent this type of didactic plan (EG) improves pronunciation proficiency by rating the oral production of students, focusing not only on segmental and suprasegmental features of the language, but also on the pivotal issue of intelligibility; so relevant in today's English language classrooms.

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Diagnostic Test (DTA)
PBAU Anglès II - Pronunciation Task

Student: _____

Group: _____

Date: _____

01. Look at the highlighted part of the words below. Three out of the four the words in each row (A, B, C, D) contain the same sound. Decide which word contains a different sound. Transfer your answers to the separate answer sheet.

	A	B	C	D
1	WORD	BORED	LORD	SWORD
2	DROWNED	OWNED	POUND	ROUND
3	MOOD	RUDE	BLOOD	FOOD
4	LARGE	GOLD	JOKE	GIN
5	DEAR	FEAR	PEAR	HEAR
6	DEPARTED	DIVIDED	LANDED	PLAYED
7	SAID	PAID	MAID	MADE
8	COOKS	STOPS	BLOCKS	CALLS
9	ON	SON	ODD	COST
10	UNIVERSITY	UNION	UMBRELLA	UNIQUE
11	MEAN	DEAL	TEAR	LEAP
12	DANCED	WALKED	WANTED	LAUGHED
13	SNOW	GO	DOUGH	DO
14	JAM	YES	USE	YELLOW
15	WATCH	SURE	OCEAN	PASSION
16	SAVED	LOOKED	FRIED	CALLED
17	BURN	GIRL	TURN	ARE
18	THOUGHT	THAT	ALTHOUGH	THERE
19	TELEVISION	MEASURE	VISION	MISSION
20	RISE	RAISE	LIE	APPLY
21	BEING	BIN	BEAN	BEEN
22	BOMB	CLIMB	ZOOM	DISTURB
23	HUG	DISHONEST	BECOME	BUN

	A	B	C	D
24	CLOS<u>ES</u>	PICK<u>S</u>	WORK<u>S</u>	TAK<u>ES</u>
25	CONTINU<u>ED</u>	DEPEND<u>ED</u>	MARRI<u>ED</u>	STAY<u>ED</u>
26	T<u>IE</u>	D<u>YE</u>	SK<u>I</u>	SH<u>Y</u>
27	PLANT<u>ED</u>	ADD<u>ED</u>	DEPEND<u>ED</u>	DAN<u>CED</u>
28	EA<u>S</u>Y	QUI<u>Z</u>	FO<u>SS</u>IL	<u>Z</u>OO
29	WH<u>EE</u>L	M<u>EA</u>L	F<u>I</u>LL	SL<u>EE</u>P
30	C<u>O</u>ME	B<u>A</u>N	S<u>U</u>DDEN	L<u>O</u>VE
31	CA<u>SH</u>	<u>CH</u>IPS	LEC<u>T</u>URE	CA<u>TCH</u>
32	CHANC<u>ES</u>	HOUS<u>ES</u>	BAK<u>ES</u>	BUS<u>ES</u>
33	B<u>U</u>T	SH<u>UD</u>DER	R<u>OU</u>GH	B<u>U</u>RN
34	<u>A</u>GO	<u>A</u>GE	BROTH<u>E</u>R	PLUMB<u>E</u>R
35	<u>H</u>ONOR	<u>H</u>ELL	<u>H</u>ILL	<u>H</u>IKING
36	F<u>A</u>LL	C<u>O</u>D	WH<u>A</u>T	F<u>O</u>X
37	G<u>OO</u>D	F<u>OO</u>D	J<u>U</u>NE	M<u>OO</u>N
38	<u>C</u>ASE	<u>C</u>EASE	<u>K</u>EYS	<u>K</u>ISS
39	<u>O</u>NE	<u>W</u>ARM	<u>W</u>ANTED	<u>O</u>N
40	ADD<u>ED</u>	DRESS<u>ED</u>	WATCH<u>ED</u>	PUSH<u>ED</u>

Grade Scanner
Version 1.6 Build 7923

Quick start

Classes

Assessments

Print sheets

Settings

Help

● **Class Average**
● ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

-ed allomorphic alternations

Vowels

-s/-es allomorphic alternations

Vowel Duration

Consonants

Place of articulation

Diphthong

Monophthong
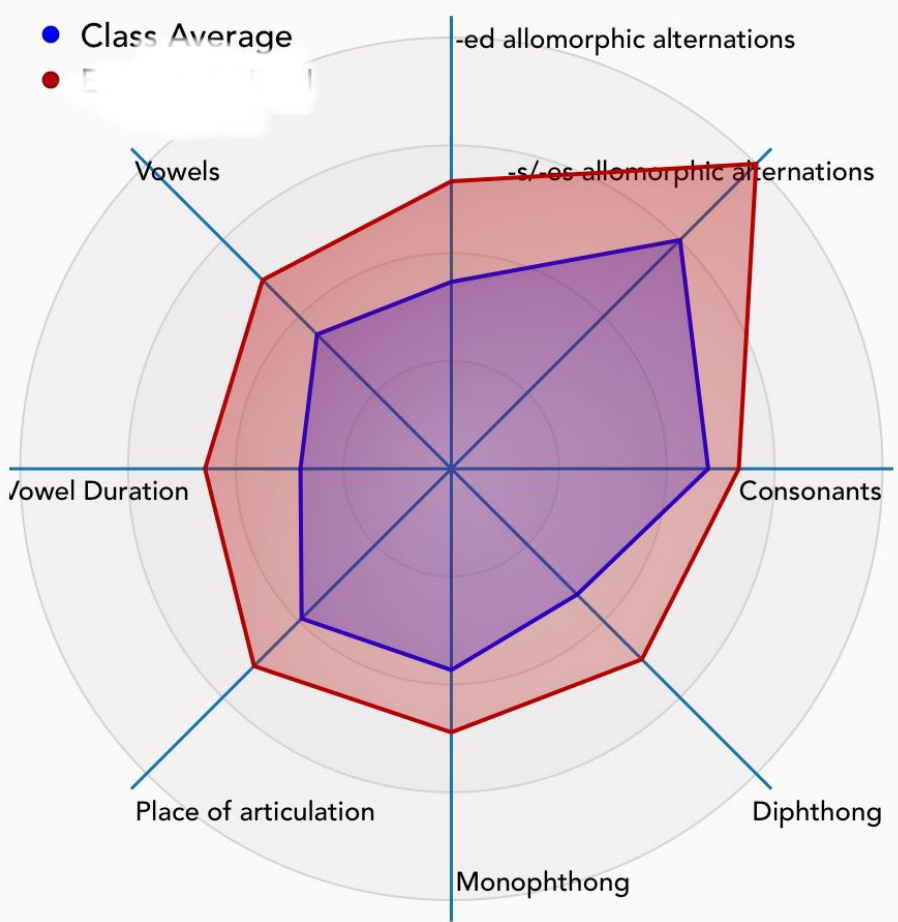
Name	
Student Number	1004
Score Score out of Custom value 10	6.50
Edit/View correction	
Export image	
Erase sheet	

1-C	26-B
2-B	27-D
3-C	28-A
4-B	29-C
5-D	30-B
6-D	31-D
7-A	32-C
8-D	33-C

English Pronunciation
Basic IPA Symbols for Broad Transcription
Sebastián Duran

Consonant Sounds	
p	pen, copy, happen
b	back, baby, job
t	tea, tight, button
d	day, ladder, odd
k	key, clock, school
g	get, giggle, ghost
tʃ	church, match, nature
dʒ	judge, age, soldier
f	fat, coffee, rough, photo
v	view, heavy, move
θ	thing, author, path
ð	this, other, smooth
s	soon, cease, sister
z	zero, music, roses, buzz
ʃ	ship, sure, national
ʒ	pleasure, vision
h	hot, whole, ahead
m	more, hammer, sum
n	nice, know, funny, sun
ŋ	ring, anger, thanks, sung
l	light, valley, feel
r	right, wrong, sorry, arrange
j	yet, use, beauty, few
w	wet, one, when, queen
ʔ	(glottal stop) department, football

Vowel Sounds	
ɪ	kit, bid, hymn, minute
e	dress, bed, head, many
æ	trap, bad
ɒ	lot, odd, wash
ʌ	strut, mud, love, blood
ʊ	foot, good, put
iː	fleece, sea, machine
eɪ	face, day, break
aɪ	price, high, try
ɔɪ	choice, boy
uː	goose, two, blue, group
əʊ	goat, show, no
aʊ	mouth, now
ɪə	near, here, weary
eə	square. fair, various
ɑː	start, father
ɔː	thought, law, north, war
ʊə	poor, jury, cure
ɜː	nurse, stir, learn, refer
ə	about, common, standard
i	happy, radiate. glorious
u	thank you, influence, situation
ṇ	suddenly, cotton
ḷ	middle, metal
ˈ	(stress mark)

English Pronunciation
Basic IPA Symbols for Broad Transcription
Sebastián Duran
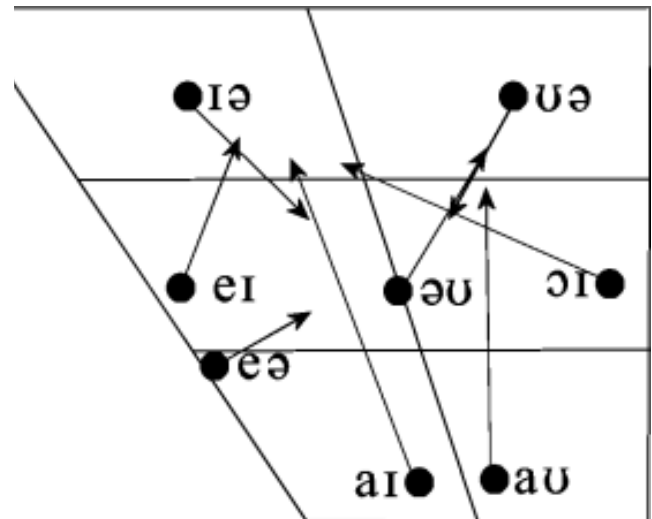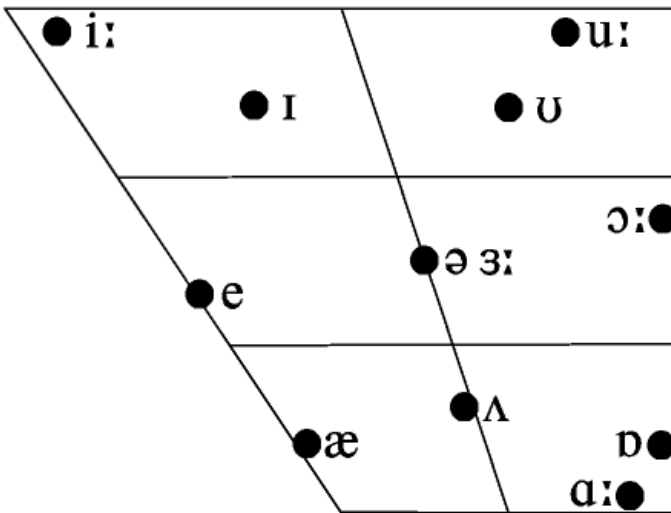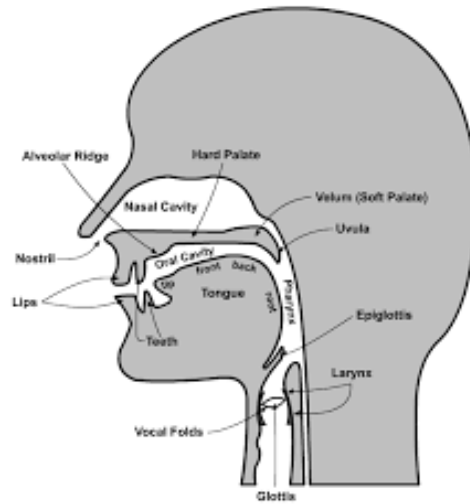
	Place of Articulation														
Manner of Articulation		Bilabial		Labio dental		Inter dental		Alveolar		Alveo-palatal		Palatal		Velar	Glottal
	Stop	p	b					t	d					k	g	ʔ
	Fricative			f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ					h
	Affricate									tʃ	dʒ					
	Nasal		m						n						ŋ	
	Lateral Approximant								l							
	Retroflex Approximant								ɹ							
	Glide	ʍ	w										j			

State of the Glottis

Voiceless	Voiced