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Sounds Dramatic: Pronunciation Learning through Drama at the Teachers' Training Course

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Abstract

Foreign language pronunciation is one of the most challenging language aspects to acquire. Indeed, pronunciation learning directly affects the learner's identity, for the latter is partly expressed through oral performance. Even though FL pronunciation teaching may be approached through various methods and strategies, the 'listen and repeat' method has prevailed as a traditional learning strategy. At the teachers' training course, in the subject *Phonetics and Phonology I*, most students learn English as a FL pronunciation through recognition and repetition-based mechanical drills. However, with the emergence of the Communicative Language Approach, the need to find other approaches to teach pronunciation that foster learners' motivation arises. In this study, by means of dramatic situations, participants were provided a meaningful, communicative context to learn actively and practise their FL pronunciation purposefully. Participants, future EFL teachers, engaged in a series of drama activities, such as improvisations and readers theatre. These activities were designed to provide a context for practising and developing their idiolect and their FL identity holistically. Participants' performance was analysed focusing on their improvement in English rhythm and plosive consonants. Strategies to improve these segmental and suprasegmental features have been outlined. All participants performed better when practising their EFL pronunciation through drama. The results have shown that drama can serve as a teaching tool for FL pronunciation learning. The advantages and disadvantages to a drama approach in pronunciation teaching are discussed.

Keywords: pronunciation learning and teaching, phonology, phonetics, English as a Foreign Language, drama, teachers' training college

Resumen

La pronunciación de una lengua extranjera es uno de los aspectos lingüísticos más difíciles de adquirir. De hecho, el aprendizaje de la pronunciación afecta directamente a la identidad del estudiante, ya que ésta se expresa en parte a través de la oralidad. Aunque la enseñanza de la pronunciación de lenguas extranjeras puede abordarse a través de varios métodos y estrategias, el método de "escuchar y repetir" ha prevalecido como estrategia tradicional de aprendizaje. En el marco de los profesorado de lenguas extranjeras, en la asignatura *Fonética y Fonología I*, la mayoría de los estudiantes aprenden la pronunciación del inglés como lengua extranjera a través de ejercicios mecánicos basados en el reconocimiento y la repetición. Sin embargo, con el surgimiento del enfoque comunicativo de aprendizaje de lenguas, se considera crucial la necesidad de encontrar otros enfoques para enseñar la pronunciación que fomenten la motivación de los estudiantes. En este estudio, por medio de situaciones dramáticas, a los participantes se les proporcionó un contexto comunicativo significativo para aprender activamente y practicar la pronunciación del inglés como lengua extranjera. Los participantes, futuros profesores de inglés como lengua extranjera, realizaron una serie de actividades teatrales, como improvisaciones y teatro de lectores. Estas actividades fueron diseñadas para proporcionar un contexto para practicar y desarrollar su idiolecto y su identidad en la lengua extranjera de manera integral. Se analizó el desempeño de los participantes centrándose en su mejora en el ritmo del inglés y las consonantes oclusivas. A través de esta investigación se han esbozado estrategias para mejorar estas características segmentarias y suprasegmentarias. Todos los participantes tuvieron un mejor desempeño cuando practicaron su pronunciación del inglés a través del teatro. Los resultados han demostrado que el teatro puede servir como una herramienta de enseñanza para el aprendizaje de la pronunciación de la lengua extranjera. Se discuten las ventajas y desventajas de un enfoque dramático en la enseñanza de la pronunciación.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje y enseñanza de la pronunciación, fonología, fonética, inglés como lengua extranjera, teatro, profesorado

All the world's a stage.

- *William Shakespeare*

If a person does not feel the soul of a letter, he won't feel the soul of a word, won't sense the sound of a phrase or a thought.

Sin la dicción no puede haber un auténtico arte de la palabra.

- *Constantin Stanislavski*

I. Introduction

Shakespeare once proclaimed; “all the world’s a stage; And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts (...)” (1623/2009, 2.7. 139-142). According to Shakespeare, drama is ubiquitous. It is found in the world around us. It is ingrained in human nature. Given that drama is a universal, multi-purposed discipline, it can also serve as a learning tool. Indeed, the performing arts can even be applied to a language class, or more specifically, to a pronunciation class.

Pronunciation is usually deemed an oral act where only sound and speech organs come into play. However, Underhill (2014) argues that pronunciation is a multi-layered discipline, for it can be visual, aural, spatial, affective, as well as intellectual. Pronunciation, then, entails more than just physically using the speech organs to produce sound, for it involves many other aspects related to culture and identity. Moreover, pronunciation “remains the entree to the linguistic system of a new language” (Bowen, 1972: p. 84). As a consequence, it plays a key role in communication and language learning.

In terms of Foreign Language Learning (FLL), English pronunciation is one of the most difficult language aspects to acquire. According to Benzies (2013), this may be due to a number of factors such as the “irregular correspondence between spelling and pronunciation and the impact on the learning process of factors such as age, motivation, and amount of exposure to the L2” (p. 41). Due to the fact that it is such a complex language feature to acquire, English pronunciation requires a meticulous teaching approach.

Pronunciation classes have usually been taught through a ‘listen and repeat’ method. At the teachers’ training college, where language learners train to become EFL teachers, pronunciation learning and practice

consist mostly in listening to a master and repeating after it, aiming at furthering learners' EFL pronunciation by imitation of, in most cases, a General British (GB) accent. This is the most common pronunciation teaching and learning method. In contrast, learning pronunciation through drama suggests an alternative to this traditional approach.

Learning a FL implies building a new identity. Levis (2015) suggests that language learners' root identity is expressed through their pronunciation. Yet, Jenkins (2005) argues that by asking students to change their pronunciation, we are asking them to unfairly change their root identity. Alternatively, pronunciation teaching through drama can contribute to the development of a FL identity and accent, not by changing learners' identity, but as Stanislavski (1981) suggests in actors' training, by constructing a character; constructing a new identity in the more lax and creative way, without challenging learners' identity.

According to Via (1987), "actors and language learners alike need an atmosphere that is non-threatening during the learning and rehearsal stages - a place where mistakes are considered normal and where they receive support from all around them" (p. 111). Indeed, there is an emotional endorsement required to acquire a FL pronunciation, which if disregarded, may lead to raising the affective filter (Krashen, 1982) and consequently, making the pronunciation learning process more challenging. Performing arts can benefit language learners as they suggest approaching identity building through play. Via (1987) also argues that in real life most learning is acquired through experience and drama fulfills this experiential need in the language class.

When it comes to teaching, there is an even bigger correlation between acting and the former. FL teachers, like actors, should have a proficient command of their own sounds, for they are communicating to an audience (Stanislavski, 2008). Both in acting and in teaching, interlocutors must use their voices as their main tool in their workplace, and therefore, as Stanislavski suggests, they must verify their vocal and respiratory apparatus with great attention. Self-awareness of their vocal performance is relevant in both acting and teaching. Besides, to carry out either of them, both actors and teachers must have a clear diction and an excellent pronunciation, as Stanislavski argues every artist should. Therefore, acting and teaching entail similar requirements, tools and procedures.

At the teachers' training college in Argentina, *Phonetics and Phonology I* is the very first encounter with a theoretical and practical approach to pronunciation learning. Most learners have little to no knowledge of phonetics at the beginning of the course. In these phonology classes, learners are expected to expand their oral production skills as well as develop their listening skills. They need to be able to understand, perceive and predict phonetic and phonological phenomena, with the aim of furthering their own pronunciation skills. Even though, for learners, some contents are more easily acquired than others, English rhythm and plosive consonants seem to pose difficulty most of the time, due to their contrast with Spanish features.

The contents and dynamics suggested in *Phonetics and Phonology I* can be very challenging for first-year students. The standards are very high because they are to become EFL teachers. Consequently, they will need to help future generations of students improve their pronunciation and become intelligible in the FL. It is believed that drama in the phonology class may help future EFL teachers to approach the pronunciation learning process in a lax and interactive way, by engaging in improvisations and physical and vocal warm-ups, performing scenes, etc.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to understand to what extent drama can contribute to EFL pronunciation acquisition. The activities and strategies carried out in this study focused mainly on learners' performance of English rhythm and plosive consonants, as well as their attitude and behaviour towards learning in a drama-driven pronunciation class. In addition, this research will attempt to outline a construct which can serve as a basis for the teaching and learning of English phonetics and phonology through a drama approach at the teachers' training college in Argentina.

This study is organised in five sections. Firstly, literature on the matter is reviewed profoundly. This part includes a brief review of the history of phonology methodology. Furthermore, two more topics are explored in this section; the role of drama in FLL and in pronunciation teaching and finally, the segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation the research will focus on. Secondly, the method followed for this research is discussed. In this part, instruments, participants and methodology are introduced. Thirdly, the results of the experience are examined. In the discussion section, advantages and disadvantages to a drama approach are explored, as well as a core of drama activities that enhances an EFL pronunciation class. Lastly, a conclusion is drawn where, based on the results of this experience, the research question is answered.

II. Literature Review

II.i. Pronunciation Teaching and Learning: A Brief History of Methodology

In the late 1800s and early 1900's, the Direct Method was the main FLL method that influenced pronunciation teaching (Celce-Murcia, Brinton & Goodwin, 1996). Pronunciation learning was approached through an intuitive-imitative way, with no explicit instruction whatsoever. The Direct Method suggested that learners could acquire a FL in the same manner they acquire their L1 (Ketabi & Saeb, 2015). It was believed that learners would 'pick up' the language and consequently, its phonological system in an intuitive manner by means of exposure.

In the 1940s/1950s, in alignment with the Direct Method, the Audio-lingual method suggested a 'listen and repeat' method. The pronunciation lessons consisted of imitation drills and reading aloud (Jones, 1997). Arguably, not all learners profited from this approach, as the benefits of imitation drills may depend on the learners' aptitude for oral mimicry. Research has revealed that learners who show accuracy in controlled pronunciation practice may still struggle in spontaneous communicative contexts where language is used (Cohen in Jones, 1997). Moreover, this method placed little relevance on paramount features of FL pronunciation learning, such as rhythm and intonation, contextual language, or the practice of real-life conversations (Fraser in Nair, Krishnasamy & De Mello, 2017). Some of the strategies suggested by the Audio-lingual method are still employed till today.

In the 1980s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as an alternative to the Audio-lingual method. The paradigm changed, causing the focus to turn from accuracy to fluency, as pronunciation was addressed within the context of real communication. CLT paved the way for new language teaching approaches, such as the Silent Way (Ketabi & Saeb, 2015). Through this approach, which materialised in the 1980s, the teacher guides students on how to pronounce words through gestures. There is less speaking activity on the teacher's part and more on the students'. Jones (1997) argues that pronunciation learning in a communicative context can contribute to increasing learners' motivation, by redefining pronunciation as a tool for making language not only more comprehensible, but also more effective.

Jenkins (2000) has readdressed the English language as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF), redefining nonnative English speakers as members of an international English-speaking community. This new concept

of ELF helped rethink pronunciation teaching goals. While former approaches of pronunciation learning aimed at accuracy, ELF strives for intelligibility. Intelligibility refers to “the extent to which a listener actually understands an utterance” (Derwing & Munro, 2005: p. 385). When intelligibility is sought in the pronunciation class, goals are led by communicative purposes that aim for a comprehensible pronunciation.

The emergence of ELF has brought about new learning strategies. According to Hişmanoğlu (2006), there is a current wave that encourages reflective pronunciation teaching and learning. Students listen to their co-learners' performance and give and receive feedback from them. Thus, there is larger room for self-monitoring, reaction and reflection upon pronunciation acquisition in class. Unlike former times, there is a recent teaching wave that advocates for a more constructivist view of pronunciation learning and encourages more self-awareness and critical thinking in class.

There is little information on how pronunciation was taught at teachers' training colleges across Argentina in the past. At present, English phonology is generally taught by integrating various techniques and strategies from different teaching methods. However, more often than not, new sounds and phonemic and allophonic processes are still regularly introduced in a lecture-like manner, as in a traditional phonology class. Subsequently, students are exposed to a sample or master to practise such target sounds or phonemic processes orally. The Audio-lingual method is the main method in phonetics classes, as students are asked to listen to audio masters, practise by imitating them and then record their own performance repeating after them. Afterwards, they may receive either written or oral feedback from their teacher.

Still, as mentioned above, some teachers have incorporated other strategies and/or activities, such as playing games or delivering presentations, etc., which follow a more communicative teaching approach and thus suggest a more active role on the student's part. Indeed, there are classes where teachers use authentic materials, such as audiobooks, extracts from TV series, etc., for students to practise their pronunciation skills by imitating them, but simultaneously, providing a more authentic context. While a ‘listen and repeat’ method is still in use, reflective learning and critical thinking seem to be more actively fostered. In conclusion, there is a tendency to follow various methods for learners to reach their highest potential in the English phonology class.

II. ii. Drama in the FL Class

According to Andersen (2004), drama in education refers to “the use of drama techniques to support learning in the classroom” (p. 282). Lately, there has been a wider place for the study of the integration of artistic techniques within the field of FLL. Therefore, nowadays, these new holistic approaches are more recurrent in FL lessons, in all levels and contexts (Kalidas, 2013). Learning a FL through arts, and in particular through drama, can be a motivational approach. As a pedagogical tool, drama can be a human-centred, method-based educational resource which concentrates on emotion and thought and contributes to a more expressive and thoughtful information exchange, while still accentuating the individuals’ singularity (Celik, 2019). In other words, this approach provides a solid foundation for students to further both their linguistic and non-linguistic competences. Regardless of level or age, all students can benefit from the integration of drama techniques in the FL lessons (Davies, 1990).

Therefore, drama can work in the field of education as a research tool. Norris (2000) suggests that the arts can be employed for the collection and analysis of data. Studies have shown that learning becomes unconscious or ‘tacit’ when linked to an art form (Bolton, 1985). Drama in learning does not come to create new knowledge. It provides a reframing of learners’ knowledge, where the already-known concepts can be adjusted and reconstructed or even modified through an alternative approach. According to Via (1987), drama can also be a viable answer to fostering interactive language learning and enhancing communicative competences, bringing life and vitality to the classroom.

II.iii. Drama in the Pronunciation Class

As mentioned above, pronunciation teaching has usually been approached from traditional methods, such as the Audio-lingual method or the Direct Method. Pronunciation classes were conceived teacher-centred, lecture-like, where repetition of words and phrases reigned as the sole pronunciation acquisition or practice means. However, after new holistic, communicative language teaching methods emerged, pronunciation teaching had to be addressed “within the context of real communication” (Nair, Krishnasamy & De Mello, 2017: p. 29). As a teaching alternative, drama offers a more student-centred approach, by redefining the role of the teacher as a ‘director’, who plays a supportive role rather than a leading one (Andersen, 2004).

According to Tyers (2017), drama and voice activities can be useful for language learners when mastering FL pronunciation. They can enhance articulation, word stress, intonation and most importantly, help to convey emotions and ideas accurately. In tandem, Hişmanoğlu (2006) suggests that drama techniques invite language learners to become more expressive and more willing to explore sounds and intonation patterns.

Underhill (1994) argues that pronunciation goes beyond speaking and listening skills; it is a physical activity too. Pronunciation can be visual, aural, spatial, affective, as well as intellectual. Not only is pronunciation learning a cognitive process, but it is also related to motor skills. As such, it requires an abundance of conscious corporeal and mental effort from the learner's part. Hernández (2016) also deems pronunciation acquisition as a physical act, which implies both vocal and bodily processes. Beyond academic instruction, pronunciation learning through drama can help students acquire the sounds of English and can contribute to the development of their own use of the FL, in other words, their idiolect (Hernández, 2016).

From a psychological perspective, pronunciation learning touches upon the learner's identity most immediately (Jenkins, 2005, Levis, 2005, Smit & Dalton, 2000). According to Pullen (2012), "the use of language is an essential component in the way an individual presents and views him or herself" (p. 66). A learner's mother tongue is a crucial part of who they are, which may be a reason for difficulty in FL pronunciation acquisition. Levis (2005) suggests that the role of identity in accent is as powerful as the biological constraints. In the process of building their own idiolect, FL learners are developing a new FL identity, as if they were creating a new character (Hernández, 2016). In order to detach themselves as much as possible from their mother tongue, learners may resort to plays, games and drama activities that may contribute to the building of their FL identity and idiolect in a playful, creative way.

As regards identity, Bowen (1972) argues that adult learners appear to be culturally determined, as their background identification is firmly implanted, and as a result, so is their language. According to Hernández (2016), this quandary can be tackled through drama, as a level of self-awareness is achieved with this technique. When performing, actors no longer fully draw their attention to their diction, but they also focus on their character's aims and emotions, as well as placing awareness on their physicality, which is key in pronunciation acquisition. Consequently, drama provides tools and resources for learners to conceive the act of speaking in a FL as part of what Stanislavski calls character building (1981). The actors' own body

language and articulatory features come into play to create a new persona. Pronunciation learning resembles character building, as learners use their body and thoughts to build a new identity and adopt novel speech habits.

Namely, a new identity is in the works as pronunciation acquisition occurs. By explicating this from the beginning of the learning process, students become aware of pronunciation learning as identity building too. Furthermore, it is conceived as a play. As a result, drama fosters an amiable learning atmosphere and aims at a lower affective filter (Krashen, 1982). Andersen (2004) agrees that “when new knowledge arises from within an authentic context, this skepticism is reduced and learning is perceived as more meaningful” (p. 283), generating a less tense learning ambiance.

In relation to methodology, Korkut and Çelik (2015) discuss that pronunciation teaching is usually approached by means of repetition and conscious focus-on-form to master phonology, following more traditional teaching methods. As a result, pronunciation teaching may arguably not be compatible with CLT approaches. When learnt only through repetition drills, pronunciation learning has little place for self-awareness, interaction or situated learning.

According to Krashen (1982), the over-use of drills and repetition “may also add to anxiety” (p. 131). These language teaching techniques hinder students’ possibilities to construct their own knowledge of the language. Alternatively, drama suggests a way of making pronunciation learning a communicative process, as it provides a meaningful interactive context and assigns students a communicative purpose. It redefines the role of the learner as an active interlocutor who conveys meaning and emotions as actors do (Andersen, 2004). Through drama, pronunciation learning becomes a contextualised practice, supported by an immersive situation where a need for communication and interaction arises (Bowen, 1972). When being assigned a character, learners get involved in dramatic situations that provide a frame of imaginary circumstances where they must seek for meaning whilst practising and developing their EFL pronunciation skills. Especially in improvisation, students’ role as players results in their search for meaning, through experience-connection and imaginary thinking (Wagner, 2002), paving the way for situated learning to occur.

Via (1987) suggests that listening is key and yet “in many oral classes most attention is given to speaking” (p. 116). Through drama, not only is oral production improved, but also listening skills can be enhanced. Though effective and necessary in pronunciation learning, repetition drills give little space for

listening skills development. If the sole method, it can be counterproductive, as learners may repeat without self-awareness or self-reflection of their own performance. Contextual situations assign a place for attentive listening to occur, as learners are inevitably set to interact with other learners in dramatical scenes. Thus, conscious listening is fostered.

Finally, Jones (1997) argues that linking pronunciation with communication has a direct impact on learners' motivation. As discussed above, pronunciation learning can be a daunting experience, one that requires a lot of mental and physical effort from the learners' part. Indeed, the process may be frustrating and discouraging. Smit and Dalton (2000) suggest that intrinsic motivation is propelled by the joy of performing a certain activity. Drama fulfills the need for learners' activeness and motivation. Likewise, when drama techniques are applied, contextual learning takes place and according to Jones (1997), students are encouraged to develop self-awareness of their pronunciation potential.

II.iii.1. Previous Experiences

II. iii. 1. A. Talk and Listen

Via (1987) suggests using drama techniques in the language class to further learners' linguistic and non-linguistic skills. In his view, in FL oral lessons, there is very little room to enhance listening skills. Thus, he has adapted the *Talk and Listen* technique for the language class, in order for learners to further their communicative skills. *Talk and Listen* is a common technique used by professional actors which consists of "reply[ing] appropriately to what is said to them and talk[ing] to each other rather than reciting" (p. 116). Although Via did not conceive this technique for a phonology class, it can be both adapted and adopted.

Through *Talk and Listen*, lines are not learnt through hours of drilling, with little conscious learning taking place and rote memorization of dialogues. On the contrary, *Talk and Listen* implies learning a dialogue together with another person. Instead of 'memorising' and 'reciting' lines, the *Talk and Listen* technique means 'learning' and 'communicating'. Learners work with cards where their lines are. They take turns to speak. Before they say their lines aloud, they are supposed to read them to themselves, look at their fellow partner and say the line while making eye contact. Once the dialogue is fully uttered, the teacher can help with any pronunciation problems.

According to Via, this *Listen and Talk* process is clearly much slower than reading or memorising, but the final results are much more meaningful and effective. It encourages learners to listen to each other. Via suggests that this technique be used with beginners, as advanced FL learners have already learnt to “keep the flow” (p. 117). At the teachers’ training college, the *Talk and Listen* technique could easily be implemented and fostered in the phonology class, especially in first-year courses.

II. iii. 1. B. Say Drama

Korkut and Çelik (2018) published their research work on pronunciation learning through drama. A series of drama experiments were held out within EFL pronunciation instruction lessons in Turkey. The project was called ‘Say Drama’ and volunteers were guided by certified creative drama leaders in some drama sessions that focused on segmental and suprasegmental elements. Participants consisted of regular EFL students.

Within the first two lessons of the project, participants were introduced to the speech organs and basic phonetics terminology such as phoneme, vowel, consonant, stress, intonation, etc. Moreover, reflection upon first language interference was fostered. Drama activities, such as ‘Secret Service’, contributed to participants dealing with silent letters in English, which poses considerable difficulty for Turkish learners. According to the authors, the activities gave students a reason to focus on form through the context, where they had to play intelligence service agents, spies and moles within a frame of message decoding. Students were asked to send and receive secret codes, and repeat them many times in a communicative, meaning-based situation, where the goal was to identify a mole. Unfortunately, there is not much information about how the activity was carried out.

Data collection consisted of two moments. Firstly, students took a pretest, where no drama was involved. Secondly, they took a post-test, after having been immersed in drama instruction. Once students’ performance was recorded, participants seemed to have done a better production in the pretest, in terms of segmental features. The authors attribute this either to Turkish interference or learners’ lack of awareness. Furthermore, some transfer errors occurred in the post-test, which they claim is due to fossilisation. Nevertheless, some students were able to show progress albeit little. Results showed that the target words chosen to test participants’ ability were pronounced correctly by more of them in the post-test than in the pr-test.

In conclusion, authors argue that drama provides authentic, communicative and fun activities to direct pronunciation, as it provides an effective alternative to traditional ways of pronunciation teaching. Drama instruction is asserted as a tool that contributes to pronunciation acquisition of new vocabulary items. All in all, it helps students to further their fluency and pronunciation skills, by providing them with a communicative purpose. On a final note, Korkut and Çelik suggest that drama acts as a means of identity formation, helping students find ways of integrating pronunciation and accent in their own FL identity.

III. Focus of Analysis

In this particular research, pronunciation analysis will be focused on a segmental and a suprasegmental feature of English: rhythm and plosive consonants. These will be analysed due to their complexity and challenging nature for Spanish speakers.

At the teachers' training course, the subject *Phonetics and Phonology I* focuses mainly on segmental features of pronunciation. That is to say that at this stage of the course, learners deal with sounds, for the most part. Suprasegmental features, such as intonation, are taught in detail in *Phonetics and Phonology II*. However, there is a suprasegmental feature that must be inevitably taught in the first-year course and that is rhythm. Learning and understanding English rhythm is relevant from the beginning of the pronunciation acquisition process, for strong and weak forms and syllables are taught in this subject and they directly affect English rhythm. Consequently, it is key to include rhythm in the first-year Phonology curriculum, despite it being a suprasegmental feature of English.

Furthermore, learners struggle with a particular group of consonants when beginning the teachers' training course. English plosives, or stops, pose a significant difficulty for students, as they vary distinguishably from Spanish plosives. In English, some of them are aspirated, while in Spanish they never are. In Spanish, their manner of articulation may change depending on the distribution, while in English, the release stage varies according to the context. Because of this, and further reasons suggested below, plosives can be challenging for native Spanish speakers who are acquiring an English pronunciation.

III. i. Spanish vs. English Rhythm

Lack of rhythm in speech, which makes a phrase start off slowly, spurt suddenly in the middle and just as abruptly slide in a gateway, reminds me of the way a drunkard walks and the rapid fire speech of someone with St. Vitus' dance.

- Constantin Stanislavski

Cruttenden (2014) refers to stressed syllables as prominences, which are produced with loudness and carried by voiced sounds. When prominences occur, there is greater amplitude of vibration of the vocal folds, causing stronger resonance in the oral cavity and consequently, resulting in relatively greater intensity. At the same time, Conlen (2016) argues that stressed syllables are given a longer duration and they always carry a strong vowel as its centre. Thus, these peaks of prominence require more muscular energy and breath effort in order to be accurately produced.

English is deemed a stress-timed language (Goodwin in Celce-Murcia, 2001). That is to say that, in English, stressed syllables, or peaks of prominence, occur at approximately regular intervals and unstressed syllables are shortened to fit rhythm. Unstressed syllables usually carry short vowels as their centre, mainly the short vowel schwa /ə/, although other vowels can also occur in unstressed syllables. Indeed, unstressed syllables tend to be so weak that sometimes, the nucleus of a syllable can be a consonant on its own. For instance, the second syllables in the following words feature a consonant as a nucleus: /'bɒtl/ (bottle) or /'bʌtn/ (button). In Spanish, however, the nucleus of a syllable can only be a vowel, which according to Hualde (2014), makes syllable-boundaries much easier and clearer for learners to understand.

Owing to such difference in language rhythm, speakers of syllable-timed languages, such as Spanish, French or Portuguese, might struggle when learning English pronunciation. Unlike stressed-timed languages, in Spanish, French or Portuguese, both stressed and unstressed syllables take an equal amount of time to produce, each syllable receiving the same timing and length (Goodwin in Celce-Murcia, 2001).

At the beginning of the *Phonetics and Phonology I* classes at the teachers' training course, native Spanish students seem to struggle to tackle English rhythm, as they cannot achieve the pronunciation of proper weak forms and syllables, due to the full quality of Spanish vowels. Goodwin (2001) suggests that a

way for learners to predict stress is by looking at content words (words that carry more meaning, such as nouns, main verbs, adjectives, etc.) and functional words (structure words, such as articles, pronouns, auxiliary verbs and prepositions). In English, the former are stressed, while the latter are not. Raising awareness of weak and strong vowels and their differences between Spanish and English rhythm is crucial to learners' improvement of their English oral performance.

In Roach's view (2009), non-native speakers of English who are not acquainted with the use of weak forms are likely to have difficulty understanding speakers who do use them. Furthermore, rhythm can hinder intelligibility, too: "most native speakers of English find an 'all-strong form' pronunciation unnatural and foreign-sounding" (2009, p. 89). Thus, it is paramount that future English teachers identify and use weak forms because they will be model speakers for their future students.

III. ii. Spanish vs. English Plosives

In addition there are, as you know, the explosive consonants P, T, K. They drop abruptly, like the blows of a hammer.

- *Constantin Stanislavski*

Both English and Spanish share six plosive consonants or stops: /p/, /t/, /k/, /b/, /d/ and /g/. However, they are not articulated in the same way, nor do they have the same distribution. English stops are articulated in three phases:

1. full closure - two articulators move against each other,
2. compression of air - as it is stopped from escaping,
3. release with plosion (Roach, 2009).

Altogether, plosives are divided into voiced (/b/ /d/ /g/) and voiceless (/p/ /t/ /k/) plosives. On the one hand, when the former are pronounced, voice is heard. The vocal folds come in slight contact against one another. As a consequence, they vibrate and produce voice. On the other hand, when voiceless plosives are articulated, the vocal folds are held apart from each other, letting the air pass through them without voicing.

Hualde (2014) argues that voiced stops in Spanish are released as approximants in most cases. There exist two allophonic variations in complementary distribution to /b/, /d/ and /g/ in Spanish. In other words, they are only produced as plosives after pauses and nasals, and in case of /d/, sometimes after lateral approximants. In all other cases, voiced plosives are produced in allophonic variation as approximants [β], [ð] and [ɣ] (Hualde, 2014). Words that exemplify this are *desván* /des'βan/, *arde* /'arðe/ y *algo* ['alɣo]. Consequently, this can cause some struggle for native Spanish speakers when learning English pronunciation. Because of transfer, Spanish speakers tend to be unaware of the plosive features of these consonants especially in intervocalic position in English and thus, they pronounce them as approximants, where two organs of speech approach each other, but do not come into contact at any time.

Another difference between Spanish and English plosives is aspiration. In English, /p/, /t/ and /k/ are aspirated at the beginning of a stressed syllable, as in *appeal* [ə'pʰi:l], *teacher* ['tʰi:tʃə] or *cat* [kʰæt]. After the release of the voiceless plosive, there is a period “during which the air escapes through the vocal folds, making a sound like [h]” (Roach, 2009: p. 27). Aspiration may affect the following sound if it happens to be any of these consonants: /l/, /r/, /w/ or /j/ (Lindsey, 2019). In words such as ‘play’ [pʰleɪ], ‘try’ [tʰraɪ], ‘quick’ [kwɪk] and ‘pupil’ [ˈpju:p(ə)l], the consonants following /p/, /t/ and /k/ are devoiced, which means that they have lost their voice due to aspiration. This process is called devoicing of approximants and like aspiration, it is non-present in Spanish.

When native Spanish speakers learn English, they tend to pronounce /p/, /t/ or /k/ without aspiration owing to the lack of this feature in Spanish voiceless stops (Hualde, 2014). As a result, native speakers of English may understand /b/, /d/ or /g/ instead of /p/, /t/ or /k/, as in *bay* /'beɪ/ instead of *pay* [ˈpʰeɪ], for example. It is paramount to raise awareness about aspiration in the English phonology class, for if neglected, it may hinder intelligibility.

According to Lindsey (2019), aspiration is more frequent in today’s English, as it seems to be no longer restricted to stress syllables only, but present in unstressed syllables too. Moreover, the recent changes in the English language have also caused the alveolar plosive /t/ to be “released into a period of /s/-like friction” (p. 56). This process, called ‘affrication’, is very frequent in contemporary English speech. Yet, this is still challenging for Spanish speakers who are acquiring an English pronunciation, due to the lack of this process in their native language.

IV. Research Questions

To what extent can drama activities and techniques contribute to the acquisition of EFL pronunciation in the teachers' training college? How can drama techniques help learners improve their English rhythm and production of plosive consonants? Learners' performance of English rhythm and plosive consonants will be analysed, as well as their overall pronunciation learning experience in a drama-learning context.

V. Method

V.i. Participants

All participants who took part in this research were students of *Phonetics and Phonology I* at the teachers' training college. This is a first-year subject within the course's curriculum. Consequently, at the beginning of the study, students had no or little knowledge of phonetics and phonology per se. As classes went by, students became more knowledgeable and proficient in the matter. The final group study consisted of twelve (12) participants.

Before proceeding with the practical experience, participants took part in an introductory survey. It consisted of a seven-part questionnaire, where participants' background on English phonology and drama was delved into. When asked whether they had received any explicit phonology or phonetics instruction in the past, 41% of participants answered that they had had no previous experience yet, 35% of participants claimed they had had explicit instruction, while the remaining 23% argued they had occasional pronunciation training in the past. This group study was heterogeneous in the sense that some students were knowledgeable in English phonology, while others were not.

As for participants' background in drama, 77% of them had never taken a drama lesson before. The remaining 23% had, but the lessons they had taken part in had been held in Spanish, rather than in English. Moreover, it was paramount to explore participants' expectations on the matter. Therefore, they were asked how comfortable they felt about taking part in drama activities within the phonology class. Results have shown that 47% of participants felt comfortable, 29% of them were not pleased, while 23% were uncertain. As emotions play a crucial part in language acquisition (Krashen, 1982), participants' expectations and feelings towards the subject matter were taken into consideration, for emotion can either hinder or enhance

learning. Therefore, students were asked openly about their expectations about the tests ahead. On the one hand, some participants expressed their discomfort with the proposal, whereas others were uncertain as to how drama would be involved in the English phonology class. On the other hand, some participants argued that drama would contribute to boost their confidence whilst learning pronunciation. Others suggested that drama would help them in English spontaneous speech by enhancing their expressive and communicative skills. At the same time, it was suggested that drama in the phonology class could help further their fluency and ‘loosen up’.

V.ii. Instruments

As mentioned above, participants took part in a seven-part introductory survey, where they discussed their background in drama. What is more, as this is a qualitative study, the tools for collecting data, which would answer the research question above, were two performance tests.

In test 1, participants were divided into a control group and a treatment group. The former approached pronunciation practice as in a traditional English phonology class, while the latter engaged in drama activities, using a dialogue from the pronunciation practice book *Ship or Sheep?* (2006). Data was analysed by observation and mainly by listening to the participants' oral performance during the lesson. Special attention was drawn to the treatment group, as it practised their English pronunciation in a drama-driven learning context. Later, both groups' performances were compared and contrasted focusing on sounds in general, and on their English rhythm and production of plosives in particular. Test 1 was carried out in September and it took three (3) classes to complete.

The second test was divided into two stages: a pretest and a post-test. The pretest was carried out early in the year, in March, when learners had not had any explicit pronunciation instruction thus far. For this pretest, students were asked to record themselves reading a scene from Danny Boyle's British film *Yesterday* (2019). In the post-test, which was held in October of that same year, participants were asked to perform the scene, adding theatricality, gestures, emotions and bearing in mind the motives behind the characters that were involved in the dramatic piece of writing. Here, also, participants' performance in English rhythm and plosives was analysed, as well as the way drama had affected their EFL pronunciation in general.

V.iii. Methodology

Both pronunciation tests followed the steps suggested by the LIAR(S) technique:

1. **LISTEN:** Students are introduced to the material (scene/monologue) with the teacher's guidance. Together, they discuss possible difficulties the material poses, in terms of phonetics and phonology. Students listen and practise repeating after the material in an individual work dynamic or in pairs or groups, as in a traditional pronunciation class.
2. **IMPROV:** Students are asked to improvise a scene based on the content of the material, paying attention to both their acting (intention of the character, mood, gestures, bodily posture, etc.) and their pronunciation, in a group work dynamic, as in spontaneous speech.
3. **ACTING:** Students then practise reading the material in phonetic script or acting it out without reading, paying attention to both their acting (intention of the character, mood, gestures, etc.) and their pronunciation, in a group work dynamic - like in a readers theatre manner. This is "a form of drama that emphasizes the dramatic portrayal of various roles and characters through reading" (McKay, 2008: p. 133). This process can be repeated several times, where the teacher may ask students to read faster, more slowly, using different voice pitch qualities, resorting to different visual images, etc., and provide feedback on their pronunciation performance.
4. **RECORDING:** Students record their performance individually or in groups, as in a traditional phonetics class. Recording is key as it allows learners to listen to their own performance and develop self-regulatory skills.
5. **SHOWCASE (extra!):** As a final task, students may be asked to showcase the scene/monologue, using props, costumes, makeup etc., having previously rehearsed it in groups and thus, knowing their lines by heart. This instance can count as assessment, as a recording would.

Through this technique, as opposed to just reciting lines or drilling and repeating after a master as in a traditional pronunciation class, participants incorporate drama into their pronunciation practice rituals.

VI. Results

VI.i. TEST 1: ‘She Doesn’t Love him’

For the first performance test, participants worked with ‘She Doesn’t Love him’ from the pronunciation practice book *Ship or Sheep?* (2006), which was compulsory bibliography of the chair. This test consisted of three classes which were all carried out around September, around the beginning of the second term.

In the first class, participants were introduced to the dialogue, or in this case, scene. This was done in a lecture-like manner, as it is regularly done in a phonology class and as the LIAR(S) technique first step suggests. The recorded master was played once, then participants orally analysed difficulties the material poses for Spanish speakers along with the teachers’ guidance. The target sound in this dialogue happened to be the English vowel N° 10 or STRUT. Thus, attention was drawn mainly to its main qualities and complexities. However, there are several words in the dialogue that purposely contain both STRUT and TRAP, which may cause difficulty for Spanish speakers, such as ‘unhappy’ /ʌn'hæpi/ or ‘unattractive’ /ʌnə'træktiv/. Indeed, a series of STRUT, TRAP and BATH words occur in a phrase: ‘just once last month I had lunch with Hunter’ | 'dʒʌst 'wʌns 'lɑ:st 'mʌnθ aɪ 'hæd 'lʌnʃ wɪð 'hʌntə |. This posed a real challenge, as in Spanish there is only one /a/ sound, and thus causing all three English vowels to sound similarly as one. Moreover, several words, such as ‘Jasmine’ /'dʒæzmɪn/ or ‘jealous’ /'dʒeləs/ contained the voiced palato-alveolar affricate /dʒ/, which due to its absence in Spanish, is difficult for some learners to pronounce. By default, they use the voiceless counterpart /tʃ/, instead. After a profound oral analysis, participants were asked to practise the scene as they normally would, listening and repeating after the master at home.

In the second class, participants were divided into two groups. The control group practised the dialogue as in a conventional English phonology class, listening and repeating to a master and receiving oral or written feedback from the teacher. In tandem, the treatment group engaged in drama activities.

The LIAR(S) technique was employed to approach oral practice with the treatment group. To begin with, two participants were asked to read the scene aloud for the rest of the class. At this stage, participants focused on the scene’s content, which in this case, deals with a couple who are having trust issues. One of the characters believes the other is cheating on them. With the teacher’s guidance, participants shortly discussed

character traits and the attitudes of each character involved in the scene. They came up with possible physical attributes, and how they imagined these characters would act and/or react.

Afterwards, participants engaged in improvisation exercises, step 2 of the LIAR(S) technique. Based on the scene's content, they improvised a two-minute scene in front of the class. Participants could invent any line and/or action, as long as they tried to keep some of the scene's storyline and character traits. They were given oral feedback on their pronunciation after their performance. Then, they were asked to read the scene and act it out, as in a readers theatre dynamic, focusing both on their acting and their pronunciation simultaneously (LIAR(S) technique, step 3). Participants were given oral feedback on their pronunciation after this instance, too. Finally, they were asked to record themselves following the dialogue's master, act out the scene at home and turn the recording in for its evaluation.

Results have shown that most participants had better pronunciation and oral fluency when improvising, rather than when reading the scene. The researcher and another teacher specialising in Phonetics who was present at the time, both agreed that learners' performance excelled while improvising, due to participants' theatrical availability. In other words, participants were more attentive and prepared to react according to the scene and therefore, their accent sounded more natural and fluent. Indeed, they respected English rhythm more when improvising. When asked to do readers theatre, participants were so focused on the structure of the text that they made more pronunciation mistakes, which led to a more 'robotic' sound quality that affected weak forms and syllables and therefore, rhythm. However, on a positive note, readers theatre contributed to participants having better body disposition and presence. After the experience, they were advised to record themselves at home standing up.

On the one hand, as expected, the main difficulties for the target sounds in this dialogue arose in the practice. A TRAP and STRUT contrast was not accurately distributed in words such as 'unhappy' /ʌn'hæpi/ or 'unattractive' /ʌnə'træktɪv/. On the other hand, the content of the scene contributed to participants' plosives production. This scene consisted of a couple engaging in a quarrel about trust issues. Due to the emotions involved in the scene, plosives came more naturally as participants expressed anger or rage. When improvising, participants would make a strong plosive sound in phrases such as 'you don't love me' | ju dəʊnt lʌv mi | or 'you're boring' | ju ə 'bɔ:riŋ |. This element of anger suggested in the dialogue has benefited the production of plosive consonants.

Some participants who had a drama background were looser and physically available when performing. For less confident participants, an acting direction was provided, a specific character trait for their acting to stem from. For example, two participants were asked to perform the scene as though they were an elderly couple. They were asked to pretend to be the King and Queen of England having a quarrel about trust issues, too. Other two participants performed the same scene but as teenagers. These types of acting directions led students to change their voice range or project a different identity. Such acting directions can provide a starting point to help learners build their own English accent or their idiolect (Hernández, 2016). The activity received positive spoken feedback from participants. Some participants argued that it was engaging, while others discussed that improvising first had helped them loosen up before reading the dialogue.

Finally, for the third class, participants were asked to record their oral performance of ‘She Doesn't Love him’ at home (LIAR(S) technique, step 4). Whilst both groups had to record their performance repeating to a master, the treatment group had to act the scene out as well.

The treatment group had a better performance in their plosives sounds. In words such as ‘cousin’ /'kʌzn/ or ‘company’ /'kʌmpəni/, participants clearly produced aspiration for /k/ in the stressed syllables. They performed just as well for words like ‘Duncan’ /'dʌŋkən/, ‘better’ /'betə/ or ‘Dudley’ /'dʌdli/, where plosives occur at the beginning of stressed syllables and for words such as ‘unhappy’ /ʌn'hæpi/, ‘understand’ /,ʌndə'stænd/ or ‘utter’ /'ʌtə/, where plosives occur at the beginning of unstressed syllables or in intervocalic position. However, both groups struggled with intervocalic /b/ in the word ‘rubbish’ /'rʌbɪʃ/. As expected for Spanish native speakers, there were participants in both groups who pronounced /b/ as approximant /β/ as they would in an intervocalic position in their native language.

The control group had more inconsistencies in their plosives performance. There were some problems with aspiration in words like ‘cousin’ /'kʌzn/ or ‘company’ /'kʌmpəni/. Some participants dentalized /d/ in words like ‘Duncan’ /'dʌŋkən/ or ‘don't’ /dʌnt/, due to Spanish transfer. Unexpectedly, this group made more mistakes in vowel quality, generally speaking. TRAP, STRUT and BATH were not clearly delimited in the recordings, pronouncing them within the quality of their Spanish counterpart /a/.

The treatment group showed more expression in their recorded performance. There was a major tendency to change their voice pitch when alternating and repeating after the master, using a higher pitched

voice for Jasmine and a lower one for Duncan. In other words, they played more freely when interpreting each character, as this group mimicked characters' voices. Participants in the treatment group also mimicked sighs and other features that go beyond language, which contribute to communication.

Finally, the treatment group did a better performance at imitating intonation patterns of the master, even though they were not acquainted with the theory yet. Indeed, this group had better English rhythm, as they respected peaks of prominence very clearly and showed significant improvement in oral fluency, too.

VI.ii. TEST 2: Scene from *Yesterday* (2019)

The purpose of using a scene from the film *Yesterday* (2019) was for participants to approach pronunciation learning through drama by means of authentic materials. The scene has been adapted for the purpose of this research. Since there were too many characters in the original scene, the number was downsized from five to three, so that participants would have more lines to practise their pronunciation in the scene.

VI.ii.1. PRETEST

In the first class of the year, in March, participants were asked to individually record themselves reading a scene from the British film *Yesterday* (2019) by Danny Boyle. At this point in their learning process, participants had not had any previous explicit phonology instruction. Therefore, except for some participants, most of them had very little knowledge of any phonological process, as they mentioned in the introductory survey. When asked to record themselves, they were supposed to just use their 'regular' voice, without any aim for acting whatsoever. Recordings were analysed and recurrent mistakes were identified to find common ground between all participants' oral performance.

Data showed participants' difficulties in aspiration. In words such as 'Paul McCartney' | pɔ:l mə'kɑ:tni |, 'car' /kɑ:/, 'Coldplay' /'kəʊldpleɪ/, 'cartoon character' | kɑ:'tu:n 'kæriktə |, 'case' /keɪs/ or 'cocky' /'kɒki/, participants did not produce an 'extra puff of air' when pronouncing /p/, /t/ or /k/ at the beginning of stressed syllables. As expected, though voicing and place of articulation sounded acceptable in most cases, they struggled to master the aspiration of voiceless plosives at the beginning of stressed syllables.

Some participants struggled with the articulation of some consonants. In most cases, /d/ was dentalized (/d̪/). In the scene, there is a phrase that contains a series of words that carry /d/: 'don't do yourself

down' | 'dəʊnt 'du: jɔ: 'self daʊn |. Due to a Spanish transfer, they placed the tip of their tongue behind their upper front teeth when pronouncing it, instead of placing it at the alveolar ridge. A similar conflict with transfer occurred with /b/. In words such as “Beatles”, students would pronounce English /b/ as the Spanish approximant /β/. In the former language, this sound is a plosive, whereas in the latter, Spanish voiced stops are often realised as approximant, especially in intervocalic contexts (Hualde, 2014). Accordingly, though they may appear similar to Spanish speakers, they have different manners of articulation.

Some inconsistencies were found with vowel qualities. Sporadically, participants pronounced /i:/ in ‘sweet’ /swi:t/ or ‘beetle’ /'bi:tl/ with more or less tension, sounding almost like a Spanish /i/. As expected, before having explicit pronunciation instruction, participants are not necessarily aware of the existence of KIT and FLEECE as two separate sounds. Same inconsistencies were recognised for LOT, too. In words such as ‘cocky’ /'kɒki/ or ‘sloppy’ /'slɒpi/, participants would sometimes pronounce a clear open back vowel. On other occasions, their Spanish knowledge interfered and they pronounced a Spanish /o/ instead, which is less open and less retracted.

Data showed participants mispronouncing words altogether. Some words were wrongly stressed, such as ‘car`toon’ /kɑ:'tu:n/, pronounced by participants as ‘`cartoon’ /'kɑ:tu:n/ while others were pronounced with incorrect vowels, such as ‘cocky’ /'kɒki/, which some participants pronounced as the word ‘cookie’ /'kʊki/. Some specific words caused difficulty; ‘encyclopaedic’ /ɪn,sækləʊ'pi:dɪk/, for instance. Although it is a word of Latin origin, due to its complexity, participants still struggled to pronounce it accurately.

A final feature participants struggled to master was English rhythm. Peaks of prominence were neglected in the pretest. Students rushed when reading or had a faltering pronunciation. This does not necessarily mean that they were not fluent, but their Spanish articulatory habits interfered with an accurate execution of English rhythm, especially in the production of weak and strong forms.

VI.ii.2. POST-TEST

The post-test took place in October and took around three classes. For it, participants recorded their oral performance of the same scene from *Yesterday* (2019). The task involved recording their voices as they acted the scene out at home. The two recordings, pretest and post-test, were compared and contrasted in

order to understand to what extent drama activities had contributed to determining participants' pronunciation improvement.

Before such a task, the LIAR(S) technique was held out in class. As in test 1, students first LISTENED to the master (class 1), IMPROVISED a scene and then ACTED-OUT the dialogue in a readers theatre dynamic (class 2). In this test, students' improvisation excelled compared to the readers theatre performance, as it happened in test 1. For class 3, the whole class was asked to record their oral performance while they acted out as well.

In the recordings, compared to the pretest, participants delivered a much better performance as regards rhythm and fluency. English rhythm was much more improved than in the pretest, as participants very much respected English peaks of prominence and weak forms. However, there were still some problems with word stress in words such as 'cartoon' /kɑ:'tu:n/ or 'complicated' /'kɒmplikeɪtɪd/. In some cases, if the word stress is not pronounced correctly, it may alter rhythm and possibly, intelligibility, too.

As for the production of plosive consonants, most participants managed to pronounce /d/ as a voiced alveolar plosive in the phrase 'don't do yourself down' | 'dəʊnt 'du: jɔ:'self daʊn |, with very few cases of dentalized /d̪/ in the recordings. The three stages for plosive consonants were accurately produced, in words such as 'problem' /'prɒbləm/, 'beautiful' /'bju:təfl/, 'beetle' /'bi:tl/, 'band' /bænd/ or 'greatest' /'greɪtɪst/. Yet, in contrast, participants' performance with respect to plosives was better in 'She Doesn't Love Him' than in this test, for the quality of their plosives was not as unstable as it was for this recording. The lack of development in the segmental area can be explained by transfer. As in Korkut and Çelik's research on drama in the pronunciation class (2018), the participants' mother tongue could have interfered in the pronunciation of the foreign one. A possible explanation for this could be that the characters in "She Doesn't Love him" were actually angry at each other, while in this dialogue, they were more relaxed and easy-going, using a mocking tone to address each other. Regarding the allophonic variation of plosives, most participants, if not all, struggled with aspiration in word such as 'pop' /'pɒp/, 'Coldplay' /'kəʊldpleɪ/ or 'Paul McCartney' | pɔ:l mə'ka:tni |, as they disregarded that 'extra puff of air' that follows fortis plosives at the beginning of stressed syllables.

Some vowel qualities were not accurate in words such as 'cocky' /'kɒki/, 'sloppy' /'slɒpi/ or 'pop' /pɒp/, mainly words that carry vowel N° 6 or LOT. It was difficult for participants to achieve good openness

for this vowel, as their pronunciation oscillated between BATH, THOUGHT and Spanish /o/. At the same time, there was very little LOT and THOUGHT contrast in phrases like ‘John, Paul, George and Ringo’ | dʒɒn pɔ:l dʒɔ:dʒ ənd 'rɪŋgəʊ | or ‘obscure pop’ | əb'skjʊ: pɒp |. These phrases posed a challenge for participants. In Spanish there is only one sound for LOT and THOUGHT, thus, they require lots of pronunciation awareness and practice in order to tackle them and make a clear distinction between them. Therefore, some participants struggled to produce the contrast between them.

VII. Discussion

VII.i. Advantages and Disadvantages of this Approach

The purpose of this research study was to determine to what extent drama activities can contribute to FL pronunciation acquisition at the teachers’ training college. The main advantage to this approach is the fact that it creates a friendly learning ambiance. Via (1987) argues the following: “actors and language learners alike need an atmosphere that is non-threatening during the learning and rehearsal stages - a place where mistakes are considered normal and where they receive support from all around them” (p. 111). Whilst taking acting roles, pronunciation learners showed enthusiasm and motivation. Adopting this approach in the phonology class has fostered a low anxiety environment and as Krashen (1982) suggests, it has lowered learners’ affective filter.

Notably, participants showed a better performance in improvisation than in readers theatre. In the latter, participants were too attached to their lines and consequently, English rhythm was lost. In contrast, when improvising, participants were more fluent; they took acting directions better and were fully involved in the scene. A possible explanation is that in an improvisation context, participants aimed mainly at communicating and conveying meaning, making the scene much more purposeful than in readers theatre. Moreover, what Hernández (2016) refers to as learners’ own idiolect clearly emerged in this step of the LIARS(S) technique, as participants performed effectively with their new English articulatory habits, whilst adding their own self to the performance. Therefore, it can be argued that, even though using a master is crucial to acquire a FL pronunciation, improvising could be key in learners’ accent development, as it helps them explore and build their identity in the FL in a non-threatening, interactive context.

Unlike an only 'listen and repeat' practice, this approach is more time-consuming. Drama practice could take longer than a traditional approach practice for all students to have a chance at performing in front of a class and receiving feedback afterwards. Although some steps in the LIAR(S) technique could be omitted or skipped, doing drama still implies a much longer process. For this reason, this cannot be the only approach in the phonology class. An alternation between drama activities and traditional pronunciation practice is recommended.

Participants would fully profit from this approach if standing in front of a class, either when improvising or when performing a scene. However, as mentioned above, this is quite time-consuming and there is usually more theoretical content to deal with in the phonology class than just oral practice. As a result, in order to save some time, steps two and three of the LIAR(S) technique could be done in group work dynamic, with students practising (improvising or acting out) all together simultaneously, with the teacher walking around the room to guide them and give them feedback.

It is important to highlight that the LIAR(S) technique itself cannot be carried out from the beginning of the learning process. Before embarking on such a task, students should have had previous traditional pronunciation practice, by listening and repeating after a master. At the same time, they should be acquainted with the English sounds and theory of English pronunciation. Their speech organs should already be fairly trained, as students should have some conscious control over them and the way they behave. Without previous training and knowledge on some theoretical content, students may be unaware of their pronunciation whilst performing, which can be detrimental to the learning process.

The LIAR(S) technique should be incorporated into the class gradually and these activities should be carefully planned. During the beginning of the first term, drama activities could be introduced sporadically, while students are getting acquainted with their speech apparatus and the theory of English phonology. By the end of the first term, the LIAR(S) technique could be put into practice with one dialogue of choice. In order to optimise time, the improvisation step could be omitted as students feel more comfortable with the technique and with their 'acting-self.' Students could practise and later, receive feedback on their act-out performance.

As drama positively suggests more activeness from the learner's part, it requires significant commitment and stage presence. Some participants showed some emotional restraints in acting because of

the level of exposure it entails. Indeed, as drama involves exposure, it also allows for students to work on their self-awareness. While acting, participants inevitably had to listen to themselves and to each other when asked to improvise or act out in front of a class. Therefore, this approach aims at raising phonological awareness and attentive listening as well as self-awareness (Via, 1987). This can be both challenging and daunting for some students, but it is key to learning in general, as well as building their own English phonological system and adopting new articulatory habits. Moreover, since in this case participants were future teachers, it was paramount for them to experience standing in front of a class and to undergo such exposure, for they are expected to lead a class and deliver their own lessons in the future.

The reactions to this type of activities were mixed. In some cases, participants showed reluctance to the approach at the beginning. They seemed shy and unwilling to participate. Yet, as lessons went by, some participants seemed to have changed their mind and showed more willingness to join the drama practice. Indeed, this experience brought about a new side to them that had not been shown before. They were more expressive, outspoken and showed more confidence.

Just as rehearsing is crucial in theatre, so is oral practice in a pronunciation class. People who had seemingly practised their pronunciation little or nothing at all at home struggled both in pronouncing and in acting. They could not detach themselves from the scene when improvising and seemed as if their creative side was impaired. Therefore, for EFL students to profit from the approach, they should listen and practise the lines just as they do for a regular phonology class. Stanislavski (1981) suggests that pronunciation practice for actors is key because just like singing, it requires virtuous practice and technique. Even though students' home practice is beyond the teacher's control, it is important to insist in class on the relevance of oral practice for pronunciation advancement.

As this is a holistic approach, it is essential to understand that its effects and results in learning and teaching may vary according to students' and teachers' needs and interests. Due to its connection with a more emotional side of learning, this approach may be beneficial for many students, while others might deem it distressing. In fact, some participants in this study seemed diffident to the tests and thus were reluctant to perform in front of the class or it took some effort to convince them to do so. Yet, drama can be a paramount tool in the phonology class within the teachers' training college. As mentioned above, being a teacher

requires some level of 'stage presence' in order to make classes as engaging as possible. Thus, drama can contribute to developing this side of the future teacher.

On a positive note, after the experience was carried out, students started interpreting and acting the dialogues out without being requested to. Once the drama practice was finished, they used some of the techniques and resources they learned during this experience. Although they were not asked to do so, students voluntarily started practising their English pronunciation using drama techniques and/or acting out, proving the experience had had a positive impact on their learning process.

Notwithstanding the obstacles, the experience seems to have been profitable for students, as they showed enthusiasm and willingness. It is recommended to engage students in drama activities from the beginning of the pronunciation learning process. That is to say, starting with drama warm-ups and games during the very first phonology classes would be suggested. Then, students would comprehend the dynamics of this approach and consequently, when time comes to introduce the LIAR(S) technique, they would probably feel more confident and their inhibitions would be fewer.

VII.ii. Teachers' Feedback

The biggest challenge of a drama approach in pronunciation teaching would definitely be on the part of the teacher. Pronunciation teachers tend to interrupt students when they are making a mistake and give feedback in the moment, for students to repeat after the teacher. However, when students perform, the only interruption may be there when giving directions to the actors 'on stage'. In consequence, the question of when and how to give pronunciation feedback arises.

Interrupting students' performance to correct their pronunciation can alter the scene flow and may be detrimental to the purposes of the activity. Despite being a matter that could still be researched, based on this particular experience, it is advised to listen to students' performance as they act and give feedback once the scene is over. It is of prime importance to be aware of when to provide feedback, so that learners can profit from it to develop their pronunciation skills. There are instances when feedback is necessary right after the pronunciation mistake and other occasions when it is important not to interrupt the learner. In the case of a drama approach, feedback should be delivered once learners finish their oral performance.

VII.iii. A Pronunciation Course through Drama

Here is a recollection of pronunciation activities and games which have been adapted to a drama teaching approach. Based on the results of this particular experience and given that this approach may be more time-consuming than a traditional one, these activities have been designed to contribute to a fair time management in the phonology class. Although these activities are aimed to be performed at an English phonology class within the teachers' training course, they can also be adapted to a General English class.

VII.iii.1. Warm-ups

Just like going to the gym, students need to do some warm-up before exercising their speech muscles. The following activities can contribute to furthering students' self-awareness and warm up their speech organs and muscles to practise their English pronunciation.

VII.iii.1.A. Vocal and Physical Warm-ups

Students do vocal and physical warm-ups as singers do. The teacher can play a song and students can move around the class, doing whatever they think is necessary to warm-up for the pronunciation practice to come (e.g.: relax their face muscles, jump around, etc.) Students can produce a continuous 'mmm' sound or any other vocal exercise to warm-up their vocal folds. The teacher may suggest some instructions or as in a drama class, he/she could ask students to explore whatever they need to warm-up and relax at the moment.

VII.iii.1.B. Short Meditation

Students take time to calm down, close their eyes and try to think of how they are feeling before the class starts. Students may carry some emotional baggage before coming to class. It is paramount to take some minutes to relax and change their mindset, as students will be speaking and listening to a FL for the rest of the class and this requires a lot of mental and muscular effort. During this activity, the teacher may play some music, too.

VII.iii.1.C. Read my Lips

Stemming from the Silent Way and Underhill's approach (1994), students can come up front and articulate words without voice and the rest of the group has to guess what word is being gesticulated. Alternatively, one

student says words aloud, while another one wears headphones and listens to music and has to guess the words, too. For this activity, students have to be aware of both their own articulatory habits and be observant of how articulators work. This may cause some miscommunication between some students, which may allow for some post-game oral reflection on what caused such misunderstanding.

VII.iii.1.D. Tongue Twisters

Students say tongue twisters with the target sound they are practising in class. To make it more entertaining, students say the tongue twisters faster, then slower, then whispering, then shouting, etc. Playing lowers the affective filter (Krashen, 1982) and creates a friendlier learning ambiance.

VII.iii.1.E. Repeat After me

Students can copy or follow a classmate's moves and sayings. The teacher asks students to make a circle and guides the activity by saying "Now follow X". Students have to copy both the phases and the movements/gestures of that classmate. This requires a lot of observation and listening skills from the learner's part and it is a positive way for them to work in a group dynamic, as well as practise their pronunciation with a communicative purpose in mind. This activity is recommended for advanced students, as they should have control of an intelligible pronunciation for other learners to copy them. For beginners, students could follow the teacher's sayings and gestures, as they work as a model. Rather than just 'listen and repeat' the words the teacher says as in a traditional pronunciation class, students must imitate gestures and body movements, too.

VII.iii.1.F. Sharing Anecdotes

Students tell a funny story of their own. In this activity, they can practise spontaneous speech in a meaningful, interesting way by sharing life experiences with the class. This activity is a good ice-breaker at the beginning of any lesson. Indeed, anecdotes can be turned into scenes. After the speaker tells their anecdote aloud to the rest of the class, a group of students can come to the front of the class and recreate the anecdote by acting it out in an improvised scene. This activity would be great later in the learning process, once students have good command of their speech habits.

VII.iii.2. Performing Minimal Pairs

Minimal pairs are usually introduced at the beginning of the *Phonetics and Phonology I* course. To practise them in a more entertaining way, students pronounce minimal pairs with an emotion, e.g.: Say 'leg' happily and 'beg' sadly, then happily. Students will still be practising their pronunciation of minimal pairs, but adding a more interesting aspect to the practice.

VII.iii.3. Associating Consonants with Emotions

Based on evidence collected in this research, certain sounds of English could be associated with emotions or ways of speaking.

- For plosives or affricates, students could work on a scene where anger is involved. These consonantal groups imply a closure in some area of the speech apparatus. When anger bursts, people tend to speak in a more abrupt manner. Just as in 'She Doesn't Love Him' for this research, when practising their plosives, participants profited from the fact that the scene was an argument between a couple. Phrases such as 'shut up, Jasmine' or 'you don't love me' pronounced while summoning anger have helped participants to achieve the closure stage of affricates and plosives and to release them successfully and clearly.
- For fricatives, which imply friction, students could perform scenes where characters are elated or in love. There could be phrases such as 'thank you', 'I love you', 'I'm very happy', etc.
- For nasals, just like when kids cry, students could be asked to perform as if throwing a tantrum. Although they usually do not cause much difficulty in production for native Spanish speakers, whining can contribute to producing a nasal sound. Students could practise the scene making a 'squealing', baby voice.
- For some fricatives, like /s/ or /z/ which are hissing sounds, students could whisper the scene, as if telling a secret.

VII.iii.4. Associating Vowels with Emotions

Students could practise a series of words that carry:

- FLEECE and TRAP with smiley faces,

- STRUT and NURSE and KIT with serious faces,
- LOT and THOUGHT with surprise or awe,
- BATH as if they were getting checked at the dentist's.

VII.iii.5. Act-out

Any dialogue or text can be turned into a short play or monologue. Following the LIAR(S) technique, students provide costumes, props, makeup, etc. and showcase the scene. This activity can help students develop their speech abilities and lower their stage fright. Indeed, if students have used the technique for some time and feel confident enough, as the final task and/or exam, learners may showcase one of the scenes they have dealt with during the classes. They have to rehearse together and present it in front of the class, and even invite an audience to watch them.

VII.iii.5.A. How to Give Acting Directions

Here are some possible acting directions to suggest to learners in class. Act out as if...

- AGE: You were an elderly person / a teenager.
- RELATIONSHIPS: You were family members / a couple / friends / employee(s) and employer(s), teacher(s) and student(s), etc.
- WEATHER: It is cold / hot / rainy / sunny, etc.
- PERSONALITY TRAITS or EMOTIONS: You were enthusiastic / arrogant / selfish / moody / elated / bored, etc.
- ACHES: You had a stomach ache / headache, etc.

In order to give stage directions, it is important to watch students and think of what direction could help them perform to the best of their abilities. Each student may need a different acting direction. In this case, observation from the teacher's part is crucial. With time, both the teacher and students will spot certain acting manners and/or behaviours that will be helpful in their practice. This is a journey of discovery, both on the teacher and the learners' part. Once students feel comfortable with the approach, they may suggest acting traits themselves or other learners may provide stage directions for their classmates as well.

VII.iii.5.B. Improv / Act-out Round

Students get in groups to practise their scene. They scatter around the classroom and then, the teacher sets the clock and all groups start improvising based on at the same time the content of the scene. The teacher goes around the classroom listening to students' performance. The teacher might summon one group to improvise on their own while the rest gets silent. This can be done as many times as the teacher prefers. The same dynamic can be used for acting out the scene with the script in hand as in readers theatre or just when acting out.

VII.iii.5.C. Mary-Go-Round

This strategy can be applied when acting out a scene either by reading it or not. Students are divided into groups and assigned characters to read. A group starts acting out the scene and at any point, the teacher asks that group to stop and another group to go on and so on. In this way, all students get a chance to practise at least a bit of the scene and get some feedback from the teacher, in an act-out dynamic.

VII.iii.5.D. Impressions

Students can choose a video clip of an English native speaker and use it to imitate them, both their pronunciation, gestures and reactions (Hernández, 2016). For this activity, students should resort to both their listening and observation skills, which are paramount teaching skills.

VII.iii.5.E. Improv

Students can improvise a scene, to further their spontaneous speech. Via (1987) argues that "all improvisations should be goal-oriented or have a problem to solve" (p. 120). Students should be provided with some acting guidelines, such as a place, a relationship among them and a conflict to build upon, as in a gamification-type activity. Here is a formula for giving acting directions in an improvisation: 'You are X (relationship) in X (place), doing X (conflict)'. For instance, 'you are three friends at the grocery, discussing what flavour of ice-cream you should purchase and why'. The scenes need not be 'clever' or 'Shakespeare-like', but the funnier, the more interesting and motivating it will be for students to perform.

VII.iii.5.F. First-sight ‘Acting’

When dealing with first-sight reading, students can interpret the dialogue, rather than just read it aloud. This is called readers theatre (Cornwell, 2014), where actors read a short script whilst acting it out.

VII.iii.6. Storytelling

Storytelling is a common teaching practice. Students may read a picture book, a short story or even a poem aloud, as they would in their own English class. They have to pay attention to both their pronunciation and their storytelling, to make it as compelling as possible. If students are not future teachers, they may retell a funny anecdote or do a short stand-up comedy routine.

VIII. Conclusion

This study was designed to understand to what extent a drama approach in the English phonology class is feasible in the teachers’ training college. Despite some of the inconveniences mentioned above, all participants performed better through drama than without it. Their performance in both segmental and suprasegmental areas improved. Their English rhythm advanced significantly. Their performance in plosives consonants, though in a more fluctuating way, developed in a positive way.

As of this research, further studies could focus on intonation. Positively, researching whether this approach can contribute to the development of other suprasegmental features of pronunciation could help establish a drama approach as a multilayered pronunciation learning tool, addressing all aspects of phonology.

All in all, drama has proved to be an alternative approach in the phonology class. Indeed, it has certainly claimed its place as a complementary tool for pronunciation learning that may work in harmony with a more traditional pronunciation teaching approach. Because of its time-consuming dynamic, a drama approach can still be perfected to be fully incorporated in the pronunciation class.

In spite of its drawbacks, this study provides a significant outline for the integration of drama activities in the pronunciation class. As a pedagogical tool, drama endorses students’ emotional disposition to acquiring a FL pronunciation by fostering a communicative approach and a motivational context for

pronunciation learning to take place. Moreover, it contributes to learners' promotion of phonological awareness and the construction of their own idiolect and FL identity.

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X. Appendix

X. i. Introductory Survey

1. Have you received explicit phonology/phonetics instruction in the past?
 - a. Yes.
 - b. No.
 - c. Occasionally.
2. If you do have a background, where have you learned phonology?
 - a. At the teachers' training college.
 - b. In my English class in language institutes and/or private lessons.
 - c. In my English class at school.
3. How do you consider your pronunciation competence to be at this moment?
 - a. Proficient.
 - b. Acceptable.
 - c. Sloppy.
4. Have you ever taken a drama lesson before?
 - a. I have.
 - b. I have not.
5. How do you feel about taking part in drama activities (improv, scene, monologues, warm-ups, etc.)?
 - a. I feel comfortable.
 - b. I feel uncomfortable.
 - c. I am not sure.
6. If you have taken drama lessons before, were those held in Spanish or English?
 - a. English.
 - b. Spanish.
7. Write a short passage on your expectations of the course and how you think drama will be involved in the lessons.

X. ii. 'She Doesn't Love Him' [Unit 5] from *Ship or Sheep?* (2006)

Jasmine: Honey, why are you so sad?

(Duncan says nothing)

Jasmine: Honey, why are you so unhappy? I don't understand.

Duncan: You don't love me, Jasmine.

Jasmine: But Duncan, I love you very much!

Duncan: That's untrue, Jasmine. You love my cousin.

Jasmine: Justin?

Duncan: No, his brother.

Jasmine: Dudley?

Duncan: No. Stop being funny, Jasmine. Not that one. The other brother. Hunter. You think he's lovely and I'm unattractive.

Jasmine: Duncan! That's utter rubbish!

Duncan: And Hunter loves you too.

Jasmine: No, he doesn't.

Duncan: Yes, he does.

Jasmine: Duncan, just once last month I had lunch with Hunter. You mustn't worry. I like your company much better than Hunter's. Hunter's...

Duncan: Oh, just shut up, Jasmine!

Jasmine: But honey, I think you're wonderful!

Duncan: Oh, shut up, Jasmine!

Jasmine: Now that's enough! You're just jealous, Duncan. You shut up!

X. iii. Scene from the motion picture *Yesterday* (2019)

[Changes have been made for the purpose of this research]

(Jack, Carol and Nick are sitting by the table. Jack just finished singing the song “Yesterday” by The Beatles.)

Carol: *(whispering)* Oh, my... What? What the hell was that?

Jack: Yesterday.

Carol: *(exhales)* That was one of the most beautiful songs I’ve ever heard.

Nick: Yeah, it was a little bit sloppy, but sweet.

Carol: *(laughs)* When did you write that?

Jack: I didn’t write it. Paul McCartney wrote it. The Beatles...

Carol: Who?

Jack: The Beatles.

Carol: The what?

Jack: John, Paul, George and Ringo, The Beatles.

Carol: Which beetles is it? Is it the insect beetles or the car beetles?

Jack: The pop group Beatles. Nick, help me out here...

Nick: Right, yes. Emm... There is this problem with musicians. They presume everyone else has this encyclopaedic knowledge of obscure pop and make you feel stupid when you haven’t heard of bands, you know, like Neutral Milk Hotel or The Monophonics, or in this case, The Beatles *(laughs)*.

Jack: Wow, this is the most complicated joke I’ve ever heard.

Nick: Nice song, though.

Jack: It’s not a nice song.

Nick: No, it is, mate! Don’t do yourself down just ‘cause you look like a cartoon character. Yes, it’s a very nice song.

Jack: It’s not a very nice song, Nick. It’s one of the greatest songs ever written.

Carol: Well, it’s not Coldplay... It’s not “Fix You”...

Jack: It’s not bloody “Fix You”, Carol. It’s a great, great work of art.

Carol: Wow, somebody suddenly got very cocky...

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