

**University of Holguín**

**Campus: José de la Luz y Caballero**

**Foreign Languages Department**

*Diploma Paper*

**Title:** Exercises to improve oral expression through the pronunciation of consonants in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at the University of Holguin.

**Author:** Karina Hernández Pérez

**2016**

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**2016**

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## **Acknowledgements**

To my family, specially my mother who many times took care of the home chores in order to let me work on this paper. To my husband, who didn't have to, even though spent long hours downloading information for this research and helping me to draft it. To those people such as professor Rogelio who always answered all of my questions without expecting anything but a *thank you*. To every teacher I disturbed in the halls like Professor Miguel (Maikel), Professor Maricela and professor Daryanis. To my tutor, who lent me a hand when I needed it. And to all those who aided in the elaboration of this paper.

## **Abstract**

This paper deals with a key aspect of language learning which is still overlooked by many teachers of English: the teaching of pronunciation which is as basic as any other aspect of language.

Usually the main obstacle students face when learning a foreign language is neither vocabulary nor grammar but precisely pronunciation. This phenomenon is such complicate that even when students know how to read and write, sometimes they can barely understand or being understood when communicating with natives.

After applying different empirical methods at the University of Holguin, the author noticed that pronunciation is not given the correct attention and students present some difficulties regarding the production of certain consonant sounds. The author decided to investigate about the topic and to elaborate exercises to improve oral expression through pronunciation. The theoretical and empirical methods applied helped to detect such difficulties in the English teaching - learning process. The information acquired aided to define the regularities in fourth year students, so as to elaborate the exercises to ameliorate their pronunciation.

## **Introduction**

Currently, English has reached a great position all over the world, due to its extensive use as the core language in every circle of society. English is the third most spoken language in the world as a mother tongue, after Mandarin and Spanish. Nearly 200000 people speak English as a second language which transforms it into the *lingua franca* of these days. That is the reason why it is quite necessary to develop the English teaching – learning process in all the educational systems and to do it fruitfully.

The mastering of foreign languages gives access to other cultures, traditions and idiosyncrasies and at the same time it boosts interpersonal relationships. It also favors a full training to the individual, provoking the respect for other people and the way they live. It permits as well the accumulation of new experiences to his/her background.

English is a language that is involved in the most important activities that are carried out worldwide. Among those are found: industrial, scientific, biological, chemical projects, as well as cultural interchanges.

The teaching of English has gone through different transformations in the Cuban National System of Education. Foreign language teaching is part of the general comprehensive culture of the new generation, and English is a subject of the curriculum. The subject English has been integrated in all educational levels such as primary, high schools and polytechnic schools.

The English teaching-learning process has the goal of focusing on the students for them to be able to use English for communication and as a tool for further studies. In the process of teaching and learning, the four language skills (listening comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension, and writing) are simultaneously performed.

Beginning by stating that any language is essentially oral, then, oral communication is vital for assuring a better understanding of the language taught. In foreign language teaching, the ability to speak is the most essential one since it is the basis for oral communication. The acquisition of an adequate oral communication in the foreign language constitutes one of the Cuban educational system's main challenges, thus many authors in our country and abroad have investigated on oral expression in foreign language teaching .Researchers such as

Brown and Jules (1983), Faedo (1988), Byrne (1989), Borges (1998), Medina (2000) and Mojibur (2010) have proposed interesting definitions on this category. Among their main assertions are found that through oral communication, logical thinking develops and makes possible critical thinking, reasoning, self-direction, and also invention.

As well as oral communication, pronunciation is largely an oral phenomenon. Unlike Spanish, English is not a phonetic language which is the principal reason why it is difficult to write and pronounce English words. Although there are 26 letters in the English alphabet, the sounds that may be produced almost double that number.

Within the teaching practice, it was perceived there are regularities when students communicate orally. As potentialities that may support the development of this research, it can be asserted that students have a sound basic knowledge in this subject, on account of positive experiences with their previous English teachers. They show a high level of development of oral communicative skills in their mother tongue which helps when comparing their native language and the foreign one and they are motivated towards the subject. Nevertheless, with the use of empirical methods such as classes observation, an interview to teachers of the English staff, a survey to students, and a pre experiment (see appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4) it were noticed some limitations too.

- There are sounds which are complicated for them while communicating orally.
- It still remains some mother tongue interference.
- There are not enough hours in the students' schedule for the practice of English.

In the teaching learning process developed in Integrated English Practice lessons and with the help of the application of empirical methods, it was also discovered that the pronunciation of English consonants, specifically /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ are the most difficult ones for the students to pronounce. These consonant sounds do not exist in their mother tongue and they are similar to other consonants that belong to the English alphabet such as /d/, /s/, /b/, /f/ and /tʃ/ so students tend to produce these consonant sounds instead of the correct ones because they are more alike to the Spanish consonants.



Taking into consideration these elements the following **Research Problem** has been determined: How to improve English oral expression through the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin?

It can be determined as the **Research Object**: The teaching – learning process of oral expression in Integrated English Practice in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin

In order to solve the problems found **The Research Objective** formulated is: The elaboration of exercises to improve the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin.

As **Scope of Action** was defined oral expression through pronunciation in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin.

For the development of this work, the following **Research Questions** were formulated:

1. Which are the theoretical foundations that support the teaching of pronunciation of the consonant sounds to improve oral expression?
2. What is the current state of the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin?
3. How to elaborate exercises to improve oral expression through the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin?
4. How to corroborate the effectiveness of the exercises to improve oral expression through the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/?

In order to accomplish the research process the following **Research Tasks** were planned:

1. To systematize the theoretical foundations that support the importance of pronunciation in oral expression with emphasis on the consonant sounds.

2. To diagnose the current state of oral expression in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin with emphasis on the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/.

3. To elaborate exercises to improve oral expression through the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at the University of Holguin.

4. To corroborate the effectiveness of the exercises to improve oral expression through pronunciation.

In order to carry out the research tasks and accomplish the research objective, the following methods were used:

**Theoretical methods:**

**Analysis – synthesis:** To analyze and summarize the literature concerning the different theoretical aspects related to oral expression and pronunciation in foreign language teaching.

**Inductive – deductive:** To get to judgments on the elements under analysis.

**Empirical methods:**

**Classes observation:** It was used to obtain information about the students' and teachers' performance during Integrated English Practice lessons, focusing on their pronunciation and the treatment teachers give to the students' mistakes.

**Interview to teachers:** It was used to know the teachers' opinion about the role of pronunciation and the nature of possible students' mistakes when communicating orally.

**Survey to students:** It was used to know the students' opinion about the role of pronunciation and the nature of their possible mistakes and difficulties when communicating orally.

**Pre experiment:** It was used to diagnose the initial state of the problem in the students.

The population and sample of this investigation are as follow:

**Population:** 37 fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin

**Sample:** 37 fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin

**Expected results:** An intelligible oral expression in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin

**Novelty:** Exercises with a professional approach to improve the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in fourth year students. It responds to the results of the methods applied for characterizing fourth year students who manifested low levels of motivation towards the profession selected.

The Paper is divided into three chapters. Chapter One embraces the examination of the main theoretical elements concerning oral expression and pronunciation and the analysis of the current situation of oral expression and pronunciation of fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin. Chapter Two presents the fundamental part of the research: the pronunciation exercises aimed at improving oral expression of fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin. Chapter Three is aimed at the analyzing the main results obtained with the application of the pedagogical experience and the specialist's criteria to check the suitability of the proposal designed.

**Chapter one:** Theoretical and empirical foundations on oral expression and the role of pronunciation in foreign language teaching.

This chapter focuses on the analysis of some elements concerning the teaching-learning process of pronunciation within oral expression. It comprises central theoretical elements regarding pronunciation seen within oral expression in foreign language teaching and the study of the current state of oral expression and pronunciation of fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin.

## **1.1 Theoretical foundations that support the importance of pronunciation**

### **Oral expression as a basic skill**

No one can talk about oral expression without looking at communicative competence. The term communicative competence is usually tied to the preparation and performance of teachers since for them it is not enough to communicate in the foreign language they are going to teach but they will also do it in the appropriate way with the correct use of all the linguistic and sociolinguistic elements present in the act of communication.

Competence cannot be reduced neither to knowledge nor to the mastering of what to do. Owning abilities does not mean to be competent, thus to be competent does not lie in owning abilities but in their application. To be competent it is crucial to activate abilities and to be aware that knowledge does not rest on knowing but doing.

The term **communicative competence** is widely used nowadays and it has become the goal of language education. It is a term used in linguistics to refer to a person who has wide knowledge about grammar, syntax, morphology and phonology, and who also recognizes the precise moment to use different expressions. Communicative competence makes reference to a speaker's ability to use the language successfully as a tool aimed at communicating with other speakers.

Canale and Swain (1980) define communicative competence as the ability to interpret and enact appropriate social behaviors, and it requires the active involvement of the student in the production of the target language.

McCroskey (1982) attempts to clarify the importance of competence when he writes, "The domain of communicative competence includes learning what are the available means

(available strategies), how they have been employed in various situations in the past, and being able to determine which ones have the highest probability of success in a given situation”.

According to Pulido (2004), the communicative competence it is the ability of that person who learns the language in order to express, interpret and negotiate socio-cultural meanings in the interaction between two or more persons, or between a person and an oral or written text, so that an efficient process of communication is achieved.

Medina (2012) states that communicative competence is a configuration of linguistic and paralinguistic capacities, knowledge, and skills which are manifested during the realization of a communicative act in the foreign language through the appropriate use of it in order to satisfy individual and collective communicative needs.

In foreign language teaching the speaking skills is the most essential one and at the same time the most difficult one for students. The result from students' lack of exposure to authentic English language environments prevents them from using their English for communicating and expressing themselves.

### **What is oral communication?**

Communication is a dynamic interactive process that involves the effective transmission of facts, ideas, thoughts, feelings and values. It is not passive and does not just happen; we actively and consciously engage in communication in order to develop information and understanding required for effective group functioning. It is dynamic because it involves a variety of forces and activities interacting over time. The word process suggests that communication exists as a flow through a sequence or series of steps. The term process also indicates a condition of change. The relationships of people engaged in communication continuously grow and develop.

In order to function successfully academically and professionally, one needs to learn effective oral communication skills. For many, conversational speech comes naturally. However, in more formal speech, effective communication skills are essential. A poorly conducted interview, sales presentation, or legal argument could have ramifications that affect many more

people than the speaker. By becoming an effective communicator one will be able to conduct oneself in a variety of personal, professional, and academic environments with confidence.

Oral expression is the key to communication. By considering what oral expression exercises can be used in class, and what specific needs students report, teachers can help students to improve their oral expression and overall oral competence.

Brown and Jules (1983) state that the development of oral expression serves a variety of purposes, for example, two different kinds of interaction can be distinguished by listeners that focus on the exchange of information (the transactional function of conversation) Those in which the primary purpose is to establish and maintain social relations (the interactional function of conversation). In transactional, the primary focus is on the message, while in interactional use of conversation; the main focus is on the social needs of the participants. The action of speaking occurs in a series of turns: at any moment, this means that a speaker becomes the listener.

Faedo, (1988) states that oral expression is an audio-oral activity. It happens because at the same time, the sender becomes a receiver and the other way around in a dialectical process of exchange.

Byrne, (1989) states that oral expression is a productive skill involved in a two-way process of oral communication. The speaker has to encode the message he wishes to convey in appropriate language while the listener decodes it. A good speaker synthesizes this array of skills and knowledge to succeed in a given speech act.

Borges, (1998) considers oral expression as the way in which people express what they think, what they feel and express it clearly.

Medina, A. (2000), affirms that oral expression is a process through which the student who speaks in the active interaction with one or more persons, performs the communicative needs in the foreign language". This same author in (2006) asserts

"The oral expression is the process through which the student – speaker, in interaction with one or more persons and in an active position, carries out the double role of receiving and coding the message, with the aim of satisfying his communicative needs in the foreign language. The development of this skill covers a wide spectrum, from the approach based on

language and which emphasizes accuracy, up to the one based on the message and which emphasizes meaning and fluency; and its highest aim is that the student should be able to develop communicative acts with the necessary competence. This is mainly the ruling skill in the teaching-learning process of foreign languages and its effectiveness depends on the integration with the rest of the verbal skills and the strong entailment between affective-motivational and cognitive elements."

Although there are recent views on this area, the author feels identified by the concept given by Brown (1989). The definition in question is easy to understand and though it is short in comparison to others, it embraces all the elements required to explain its meaning.

**When students express themselves orally there are some hurdles they have to face:**

- They cannot sustain spoken interaction beyond short segments.
- The frequent communication breakdowns and there are misunderstandings.
- There is usually lack of vocabulary needed to talk about common utterances.
- There is lack of communication strategies.
- They speak slowly and take too long to compose utterances.
- Students cannot participate actively in conversation.
- Their spoken English doesn't sound natural.
- They have a poor grammar and poor pronunciation.

The oral expression can assume the form of a dialogue or monologue in which the first one precedes the second. One moreover the coherence of the monologue language begins in the dialogue that is the first school of the development of oral expression and in general of the language activity. Since this point of view the student learns first to answer questions, to establish an oral communication, to converse and later to express his thought to relate, to narrate and to say experiences in logic way and with an appropriate grammar.

Clearly one of the aspects of oral expression and maybe the most difficult one for students is pronunciation, that is why teachers must pay attention to it and find new ways to correct

students' pronunciation for them to develop a good oral expression and consequently a proper communicative competence.

### **An approach to pronunciation**

Views on teaching pronunciation changed dramatically over the past half of the twentieth century. By the mid-1980s with greater attention to grammatical structures as important elements to discourse, to a balance between fluency and accuracy and to the explicit specification of pedagogical tasks that a student should accomplish, it became clear that pronunciation was a key to gaining full communicative competence.

Rather than attempting only to build the student's articulatory competence from the bottom up, and simply as the mastery of a list of phonemes and allophones, a top-down approach is taken in which the most relevant features of pronunciation are given high priority. Instead of teaching only the role of articulation within words, or at best, phrases, teachers teach its role in a whole stream of discourse.

The goal of teachers of English when teaching pronunciation should therefore be more realistically focus on clear comprehensible pronunciation. At the early levels, teachers want students to surpass that edge beneath which pronunciation retracts from their ability to communicate. At the advanced levels, pronunciation goals can focus on elements that enhance communication: intonation features that go beyond basic patterns, voice quality, phonetic distinctions between registers and other refinements that are far more important in the overall stream of clear communication than rolling the English /r/ to perfectly imitate a native speaker.

What are the factors within students that affect pronunciation and how can be dealt with each of them?

**1. Native language:** Clearly the native language is the most influential factor affecting a student's pronunciation. If a teacher is familiar to the sound system of a student's native language, they would be better able to diagnose students' difficulties

**2. Age:** Generally speaking children under the age of puberty stand an excellent chance of "sounding like a native" if they have continued exposure in authentic contexts. Beyond the age of puberty while adults will almost surely maintain a foreign accent, there is no particular



advantage attributed to age. A fifty-year-old can be as successful as an eighteen-year-old if all other factors are equal. It is good to remind the students, especially if they are older, that “the younger, the better” is a myth.

**3. Exposure:** It is difficult to define exposure. One can actually live in a foreign country for some time but not take advantage of being with “the people” .Research seems to support the notion that the quality and intensity of exposure are more important than mere length of time. If class time spent focusing on pronunciation demands the full attention and interest of the students, then they stand a good chance of reaching their goals.

**4. Innate phonetic ability:** Often referred as having an “ear” for language, some people manifest a phonetic coding abilities that others do not. In many cases if a person has had exposure as a foreign language as a child, this “knack” is present whether the early language is remembered or not. Others are simply not attuned to phonetic discriminations. Some people would have to believe that the student either have such a knack or not. Strategies based instruction, however, has proven that some elements of learning are a matter of awareness of own limitations combined with a conscious focus on doing something to compensate those limitations. Therefore, if pronunciation seems to be naturally for some students, they should not despair, with some effort and concentration, they can improve their competence.

**5. Identity and language ego:** Yet another influence is one’s attitude toward speakers of the target language and the extent to which the language ego identifies with those speakers. Students need to be reminded of the importance of positive attitudes toward the people who speak the language, but more important students need to become aware of -and not afraid of- the second identity that may be emerging within them.

**6. Motivation and concern for good pronunciation:** Some students are not particularly concerned about their pronunciation, while others are. The extent to which students’ intrinsic motivation propels them toward improvement may be perhaps the stronger influence of all six factors in this list. If that motivation and concern are high, then the necessary effort will be expended in pursuit of goals. Teachers can help students to perceive or develop that motivation by showing, among other things, clarity of speech is significant in shaping their self-image and ultimately in reaching some of their higher goals.

The general strategies of teaching pronunciation may be separate into two: on the one hand, pronunciation has to be isolated for the practice of specific items and problems. On the other hand, pronunciation has to be integrated with the other aspects of language (grammar, vocabulary, style, function and discourse) and the language skills (listening comprehension, oral expression, reading comprehension and writing)

The role of phonetics in language teaching is not to tell the teacher what to teach, the teacher of language is as much a specialist in his field as the phonetician in his. But he is teaching something which is the object of study of phonetics and it is described by phonetic methods. It is obviously desirable that the underlying description should be as good as possible, and this means that it should be based on sound phonetic principles. This is the first contribution that Phonetics can make to the teaching of languages: To provide good description. Any description of a language implies linguistics; it implies, that is, a definite attitude toward language, a definite stand on how language works and how it is to be accounted for. As soon as the teacher says "open your mouth wider" he is applying phonetics.

The teaching and learning of an acceptable pronunciation of a foreign language is another important application of phonetics which can be widely effective and successful, if the theoretical basis is sound. The teaching of pronunciation requires on the part of the teacher several examinations and analysis. First, pronunciation cannot be learned by mere imitation by everyone. There are exceptional talented students who can acquire a good pronunciation by nothing more than listening to the sounds of English. But not all are that gifted. The majority of students need additional aid. They must be taught how the sounds are produced. In this way, to the checking power of the ear, is added the constructive power of placing the vocal organs in certain positions, so as to produce certain sounds.

The movement of the tongue cannot be seen, it is almost all the time hidden from sight. The complex and difficult utterances that make up speech sounds can be properly reproduced by listening, imitation and specially by giving descriptions as to their formation. Laborious theoretical explanations should not be extensively used. Instead, short practical advice for the position of the lips, tongue, the opening between the jaws etc. should be given.

Finochiaro (1983) believes sometimes it may be necessary to isolate certain items of pronunciation or any other linguistic or cultural items from a dialogue or a text both in order to

ensure that students understand how and when these items are used so as to provide students with additional practice. Later on students may for example be asked to reinsert them into the original dialogues or into real world utterances or written texts.

Clearly teachers must devote a high proportion of class time to developing oral productive skills. However understanding or listening simply cannot be left to care of itself. Consider what will happen when the students try to use the language for themselves outside the classroom, where they no longer have any control over what is said to them. Understanding breaks down almost immediately. Furthermore poor understanding often results in nervousness which will probably in turn further inhibit the ability to speak.

For language researchers such as (Brown, 1992; Encina, 1995; Dieling and Hirschfeld, 2000) pronunciation is not only the production but the discernment of the speech sounds. Some authors such as Seidlhofer expand on this definition and state that pronunciation is the production and discernment of the sounds, accent and intonation.

Cantero (1998) expresses pronunciation is the materialization of oral language and consequently the discrimination and production of speech sounds, that why it is so important for a successful communication. This author enlarges the previous concept by affirming that sounds are not chained together but divided into phonic sections. He believes people learn to pronounce automatically through oral communication.

Pronunciation is the presentation card of the speaker. Knowing the pronunciation of a language is essential for speaking and understanding natives of that language. If there is an adequate pronunciation there will not be any obstacles when communicating fluently. The listener would not have to pay constant attention to the speaker or asking for repetitions or explanations .Bartolí (2005)

Richards (2010) states “pronunciation is the way a certain sound or sounds are produced”. Unlike articulation, which refers to the actual production of speech sounds in the mouth, pronunciation stresses more the way sounds are perceived by the hearer.

Although there are a few definitions on pronunciation the author stays with the one provided by Cantero in 1898 because it comprises all the necessary elements to define the term and the author believes is the most complete definition within the ones consulted.

Forming good pronunciation habits and skills requires listening and discriminating sounds, intonation and rhythm patterns, articulating speech sounds in connected speech with proper intonation and rhythm. In genuine communicative practice, all these elements are integrated; they are only isolated for individual analysis of particular linguistic phenomena.

Despite the progress produced in the foreign language teaching, it is believed pronunciation is still disregarded or at least does not receive the necessary attention. This partly occurs because teachers do not know how to incorporate the teaching of pronunciation in the communicative approach.

It is very common to believe that a good pronunciation will bring about natives' greater approval (Dieling and Hirschfeld 2000), (Cortés 2002), standing as a presentation card to the society since a good pronunciation is worthy of admiration and compliment, whereas a faulty pronunciation will demand bigger attention which may cause the listener get exhausted or upset. Only a creditable pronunciation can guarantee a productive communication among the speakers (Iruela, 1997). Besides, generally for foreign language students the acquisition of a good pronunciation is very important because it will not only provoke a good impression but also self-satisfaction which boosts student's self-confidence (Laroy, 1995).

Currently authors like Kenworthy and Dieling and Hirschfeld consider that pronunciation is important to understand and to be understood and state that that minimal level of comprehension or make oneself clear is called intelligibility. Smith and Nelson (1985) express that the concept of intelligibility is usually too comprehensive so they state intelligibility is the recognition (oral/auditory) of words, expressions and specially meaning. Kenworthy(1989) states that intelligibility is when the listener understands the speaker in a given moment and a given context.

#### *Pronunciation seen within oral expression*

Oral expression is a very complex activity made of several processes and strategies and pronunciation appears as another component of it. Pronunciation is the support of the transmission of oral information and consequently the element that provides intelligibility to the message. Pronunciation conveys the oral message, so it can facilitate or make the discernment of words difficult. Thus, pronunciation must stay within oral skills and more

specific within oral expression but also in oral comprehension. There is no fluent expression without a fluent comprehension and oral comprehension involves the identification of word, grammatical structures, and sounds, phonic and rhythmical units.

Sometimes when teaching a foreign language to adults, there are prejudices when teaching pronunciation. Poch (1992) points out that Spanish is a phonetic language. This means that words are spelled as they are pronounced while in English the phoneme-grapheme correspondence is not always so simple. Spanish is basically an easy language to pronounce correctly because nearly all the sounds found in Spanish are roughly similar to sounds already found in English.

When referring to pronunciation it is also alleged that phonetic correction can only be done by phoneticians. Many researchers think that a good grammatical basis would later allow the student to develop proficiently the oral language when he/she decides to spend a while abroad, consequently pushing the teaching of pronunciation and phonetic correction into the background. And in case the visit is delayed, the student would take a long time to develop the oral competence.

Clearly students have to speak to develop their language, to make mistakes for using them to learn, to reach fluency and to be a competent speaker and all these things cannot be done by only communicating in writing. If the speaker has no idea, for instance, that there is an important difference in English between "s" and "sh" (phonetically written [s] and [ʃ] and furthermore he can't distinguish between the two, he won't know how to react if someone asks him to "bring the seat"- or was it the sheet? This situation doesn't seem very serious, but it could be.

There are hundreds of stories about misunderstandings caused by mispronunciation. Sometimes there is laughter, sometimes people walk out in anger. Suppose there were two or three "mistakes" when pronouncing. The consequences could be to offend the listener, to be misunderstood by the listener or if the listener is too exhausted by the effort of trying to interpret what the speaker is trying to say then he gives up and goes and talks to someone else.

## **English alphabet**

In the year 1011, a monk named Byrthfero recorded the traditional order of Old English alphabet. He listed 24 letters of the Latin alphabet. It looked like the following: A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z & τ Ϸ Ϣ ϣ Latin borrowings introduced homographs into Middle English and Early Modern English, though they are not considered to be the same letters but rather ligatures, and in any case are somewhat old-fashioned. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century were introduced the *y* and *w* assumed the status of an independent letter, so that the English alphabet is now considered to consist of 26 letters A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z (21 consonants and 5 vowels)

### **Consonant sounds**

Consonantal segments occur when the air-stream that flows from the lungs after passing the larynx with or without vibration of the vocal cords, suffers, as it issues through the supraglottal cavities, some obstruction, whether occlusion, constriction, or deviation. An occlusion or complete closure will produce a plosive; a constriction or partial closure will yield a fricative; and a deviation will determine a nasal, a liquid or a semi consonant.

The outstanding contribution of acoustic phonetics research in the last two decades has been to show that consonants, unlike vowels, are largely perceived by rapid frequency changes in the formants, which reflect rapid changes in the shape and volume of the vocal tract cavities, which in turn are produced by articulatory movements of the tongue, lips, jaw etc.

In the case of consonantal articulations, a description must provide the following questions:

- a) Is the air-stream set in motion by the lungs or by some other means? (**pulmonic** or **non-pulmonic**)
- b) Is the air-stream forced outwards or sucked inwards? (**egressive** or **ingressive**)
- c) Do the vocal cords vibrate or not? (**voiced** or **voiceless**)
- d) Is the soft palate raised, directing the air stream through the mouth, or lowered, allowing the passage of air through the nose? (oral or nasal or nasalized)
- e) At what point or points and between what organs does the closure or narrowing take place? (place of articulation)
- f) The way consonants can be classified according to the place of articulation are the following:

**Bilabial.** The two lips are the primary articulators, e.g. [p, b, m].

**Labiodental.** The lower lip articulates with the upper teeth, e.g. [f, v]

**Dental.** The tongue tip and rims articulate with the upper teeth, e.g. [θ, ð].

**Alveolar.** The blade, or tip and blade of the tongue articulates with the alveolar ridge [, d, l, n, s, z]

**Postalveolar.** The tip (and rims) of the tongue Articulate with the rear part of the alveolar ridge.

**Retroflex.** The tip of the tongue is curled back to articulate with the part of the hard palate immediately behind the alveolar ridge.

**Palato-alveolar.** The blade, or the tip and blade, of the tongue articulates with the alveolar ridge and there is at the same time a rising of the front of the tongue toward the hard palate, e.g. /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/

**Velar.** The back of the tongue articulates with the soft palate, e.g. [k, g, ŋ]

**Uvular** The back of the tongue articulates with the uvula, e.g. [R]

**Glottal** An obstruction, or a narrowing causing friction but not vibration between the vocal cords e.g. [h]

The way consonants can be classified according to the manner of articulation are the following ones:

Complete closure:

**Plosive.** A complete closure at some point in the vocal tract, behind which the air pressure builds up, and can be released explosively, e.g. [p, b, t, d, k, g,]

**Affricate.** A complete closure at some point in the mouth, behind which the air pressure builds up, the separation of the organs is slow compared with that of a plosive, so that friction is a characteristic second element of the sound e.g. [tʃ, dʒ].

**Nasal** A complete closure at some point in the mouth but, the soft palate being lowered, the air escapes through the nose. These sounds are continuants and, in the voiced form, have no noise component; they are, to this extent, vowel –like e.g. [n, ŋ]

Intermittent closure:

**Roll** A series of rapid intermittent closures or taps made by a flexible organ on a firmer surface e.g. [r], where the tongue tip taps against the alveolar ridge.

**Flap.** A single tap made by a flexible organ on a firmer surface e.g. [ɾ] where the tongue tip taps against the teeth ridge

Partial closure:

**Lateral** A partial closure is made at some point in the mouth, the air stream being allowed to escape on one or both sides of the contact. These sounds may be continuants and non-fricative and therefore vowel-like.

Narrowing:

**Fricative.** Two organs approximate to such an extent-that the air-stream passes through them with friction e.g. /f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, h/. In the bilabial region, a distinction is to be made between those purely bilabial. such as [p, b, m] where the friction occurs between spread lips, and a labio-velar sound where the friction occurs between rounded lips and is accompanied by a characteristic modification of the mouth cavity brought about by the raising of the back of the tongue towards the velum.

Semi-vowels and frictionless continuants

**Semi-vowels** such as [w, j] are usually included in the consonantal category on functional grounds, but from the point of view of phonetic description they are more properly treated as vowel glides.

**Frictionless continuants**, such as the common variety of Southern British [ɹ], have neither the closure nor the noise component characteristic of consonantal articulations; they are, however, frequently variants of co consonantal types, as well as having the functional status of consonants and may therefore be included under this heading.

The following consonant sounds are described in order to offer a full depiction of the troublesome sounds.

## CONSONANT / ɔ /

**Phoneme- grapheme correspondance**



th — then, breathing, clothes

### **Classification**

It is a fricative, dental, voiced, lenis, oral consonant.

### **Articulatory description.**

Sound /ð/ is formed substantially like /θ/, but there may be some vocal cord vibration according to its situation and with slightly less breath force than /θ/.

### **Most common mistakes of Spanish speakers and techniques of phonetic correction**

Sound /ð/ is formed substantially like /θ/, but there may be some vocal cord vibration according to its situation and with slightly less breath force than /θ/.

The students produce /d/ which is very tense in all positions except in intervocalic position. The objective is to obtain less tension and to emphasize the fricative aspect in respect to /d/.

Sound /ð/ is formed substantially like /θ/, but there may be some vocal cord vibration according to its situation and with slightly less breath force than /θ/.

### **Most common mistakes of Spanish speakers and techniques of phonetic correction**

The students produce /d/ which is very tense in all positions except in intervocalic position. The objective is to obtain less tension and to emphasize the fricative aspect in respect to /d/ Sound /ð/ occurs in initial position, which increases its tenseness, e.g. this..., there is...; and in intervocalic position, which decreases its tenseness, e.g. No, they aren't To favor the audition of its lax aspect, the teacher should make the students repeat segments in which /ð/ is prolonged and at the same time is placed in intervocalic position. The teacher must show his own articulation of the sound to the students e.g. Go there /gou ðer/

## **CONSONANT /θ/**

### **Phoneme-grapheme correspondence**

th — think, moth, cloth

## **Classification**

It is a fricative, dental, voiceless, fortis, oral consonant

## **Articulatory description**

The soft palate being raised and the nasal resonator shut off, the tip and rims of the tongue make a light contact with the edge and inner surface of the upper incisors and a firmer contact with the upper side teeth, so that the air escaping between the forward surface of the tongue and the incisors causes friction.

With some speakers, the tongue tip may protrude through the teeth. For /θ/ the friction is voiceless. The lip position will depend upon the adjacent vowel, e.g. being spread for thief, health and somewhat rounded for though, truth

## **Most common mistakes of Spanish speakers and techniques of phonetic correction**

This sound does not exist in the phonological sound system of Cuban speakers. The students tend to produce /s/ since they have only perceived the high frequencies of /θ/. The objective is to emphasize the low frequencies of /θ/ when the mistake produced is /s/ and to obtain less tension when the mistake is /t/.

Sound /θ/ occurs in initial position, which favors its tenseness; e.g. thank, three; and in final position, which favors its less tense aspect. North, South

To favor the audition of the low frequencies of /θ/ the teacher should make the students repeat segments in which /f/ substitutes /θ/; e.g. come with me. /kʌmwiθmi/, Thank you / fænk ju/

To guide the articulation of /θ/, the teacher will do well to insist on his pronunciation of /θ/ by inserting the tongue between the teeth. This will emphasize the articulatory difference with respect to /s/ the resulting exaggeration of the actual English sound will eventually disappear as the new point of articulation becomes habitual to the student. It is also advisable to prolong the sound in final position, e.g. head north/ hɛd nɔrθθ /

## **CONSONANT /v/**

### **Phoneme-grapheme correspondance**

v---vine

f---of

## **Classification**

It is a fricative, labio-dental. voiced, lenis, oral consonant.

## **Articulatory description**

Sound /v/ is formed substantially like /f/, but may have some vocal vibrations according to its situation, and with slightly less breath force than /f/

## **Most common mistakes of Spanish speakers and techniques of phonetic correction**

Spanish speakers have the tendency to produce /b/ in initial position, /b/ in medial position and /f/ in final position or else they drop the sound. Since the articulation of this sound /v/ is performed by the lower lip and the upper teeth, the teacher can show the articulation either on a facial diagram or with his own organs of speech. At the same time the articulation of /v/ can be elongated as well as the articulation of the previous vowel to ensure the proper voicing of /v/

## **CONSONANT /dʒ/**

### **Phoneme-grapheme correspondance**

j -jam

g -gem

dg- midget

gg - suggest

dj -adjacent

de- grandeur

di - soldier

ch - Norwich

## **Classification**

It is an affricate, palato-alveolar, voiced, lenis, oral consonant.

## **Articulatory description**

Sound /dʒ/ is essentially like /tʃ/ in its formation except that the vocal bands vibrate according to the situation in the utterance. /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ differ from plosives in that they never lose their fricative release stage. It should be noted that the lenis /dʒ/ when final in a syllable, has the same effect of lengthening the pre preceding sounds as noted for /b, d, g/. This effect must be taken as a primary distinctive feature of the /tʃ/ — /dʒ/ opposition in final positions.

## **Most common mistakes of Spanish speakers and techniques of phonetic correction**

When sound /dʒ/ occurs in initial position, which favors its tenseness, e.g. Jane, Jim, Jack; and in tile intervocalic and final positions, which do not favor its tenseness e.g. what's your job? Norwegian, large, change.

To favor the tenseness of /dʒ/, the teacher should make the students repeat segments in which the sound appears in initial position; e.g. Jack jump (with emotional intonation) The tenseness of the sound and the production of the affricative element can also be favored if / dʒ / is substituted by//or placing /tʃ/ after /d/; e example: What's your job? /hwats jʊrtʃɒb / I'm Norwegian. /aɪm nɔːwiɪtʃən /And Jim? /anddʒɪm/

## **1.2 Most common techniques for correcting pronunciation**

Students' mistakes correction is a delicate process that must follow certain rules to affect positively on the students' attitude and boost student confidence. A good teacher shall know when and how to correct those mistakes, otherwise the students can feel embarrassed and stop participating in class or they may lose interest in learning the language. When correcting mistakes in class, there are three ways it can happen. These should include teacher correction, self- correction and student to student correction.

### *Teacher correction*

The advantages of teacher correction are:

- Correction will, or should be, quicker, more efficient, and 'accurate';
- Boosts student confidence – 'It is the teacher's job', 'The teacher is always right!';

- The teacher can make sure that correction is done sensitively and fairly;
- The teacher can use proper and varied techniques of correction.

### *Self-correction*

This technique has some important advantages, such as:

- The students are involved in the process-this renews confidence if they can correct themselves
- Self-corrected mistakes are more memorable and less likely to occur;
- It encourages learner independence;
- It gives the teacher feedback on the student's knowledge, ability and awareness.

### Student-to-student correction

The advantages of this type of correction are:

- Some students might find it easier being corrected by a peer;
- It involves other students, which may give them self-confidence;
- It encourages other students to stay involved in the lesson;
- It encourages an atmosphere of cooperation;
- It helps the teacher 'assess' awareness of other students.

### **The following tips must be taken into consideration when correcting students**

- The students are involved in the process-this renews confidence if they can correct themselves
- In general, teachers should avoid correcting students during free speaking activities. This disrupts the flow of their fluency practice. Teachers can correct them afterwards-
- As with all correction, the teacher must consider the student who made the mistake. If it is a shy student, they should be careful about correcting him/her
- Teacher must remember they do not have to correct every mistake.They should focus especially on those mistake which they think it may cause misunderstandings
- Although it's not always possible, teachers should consider their individual students'goals when correcting
- Ideally, the mistake should be treated as an opportunity for students to learn something more in depth

Here are the most used techniques for fixing learners' pronunciation

### **Repetition**

It supports brain development. Every time information is repeated, the pathways thicken. The brain recognizes and keep the thicker neural pathways containing repeated information. The more often information is repeated. The more likely it is to be retained.

### **Word – association drill**

In this type of drilling, the teacher pronounces some vocabulary and the students repeat it or students are asked to practice. Then, the teacher writes down more vocabulary and pronounces English phonemes. Later, the teacher pronounces one of the phonemes, the students are asked to predict on what word the phoneme is present. Furthermore, we can see on the example:

1. In which of the following words, do we have sound /æ/?

a. Bed      b. bad      c. but      d. bear      e. beer

2. In which of the following words, do we have / e /?

a. bag      b. mail      c. get      d. lake      e. feet

### **Articulatory description:**

This technique consists of making a full depiction of the organs that intervene in the articulation of sounds, this way the students will know how sounds are produced. For example:

Sound /z/ is formed substantially like /s/, but for /z/ there may be some vocal cord vibration, according to its situation. The lips position will depend upon the adjacent vowel, e.g. spread for zeal, bees, and somewhat rounded for zoo, lose. Word final /z/ exhibits a readiness to assimilate before /j/

### **Saturation**

This type of drilling is suitable for all positions of the problematic sound, for example sound /S/. It can be posited in:

<i>Initial</i>	<i>Medial</i>	<i>Final</i>
See	Leasing	Peace
Seep	Pistol	Niece
Seed	Classic	Purse
Sip	Paucity	Less

### **Mobility Drill**

The mobility drill is a very important aspect in pronunciation teaching. In this type, teacher asks students to find out some words beginning with the same letter he previously wrote on the board and then asks students to pronounce them. Example:

Bat	Boat	Bike	ball	boy
See	She	Sees	sea	shut
Think	Thick	Take	tack	Thing

### **Comparative Drill**

This type is almost the same as mobility drill but in this drill one of the elements that we pronounce are placed in different positions. In these types of drilling, it may be confusing to distinguish the sounds, students need a good listening. For example:

In drilling /f /, /v / and / p/, / f/, sounds

Fee- bee      feat- peat      freeze- breeze      visa- pizza      pig –fig

Another example/ æ / and / e /

Sat- set      band- bend      sand- send      bad-bed      pan-pen

## **Substitution Drill**

This type of drilling may be applied by substituting any sound instead of the other sound. Example: /t/ instead of /θ / or /d/ in place of /ð / and many more. Here are some exercises:

- a. This is thin/ tin
- b. Did you see her lung/ lunch?

## **Minimal pairs**

A minimal pair is a pair of forms that are identical except for a minimal difference, which is relevant for meaning contrast. For example:

Contrasting /b/ and /v/

Bat – Vat

## **Tongue twisters**

A tongue-twister is a phrase that is designed to be difficult to articulate properly, and can be used as a type of spoken (or sung) word game. Tongue-twisters may rely on rapid alternation between similar but distinct phonemes (e.g., s [s] and sh [ʃ]), They can be used for contrasting individual sounds or drilling intonation.

For example:

Plymouth sleuths thwart Luther's slithering.

## **Techniques used for correcting individual aspects of pronunciation**

Individual sounds:

- exaggerate your mouth position
- show/draw a picture of a mouth diagram
- explain if a consonant is voiced or unvoiced
- follow up with a tongue twister
- write an 'S' on the board, and point to it when students don't say it



- drill the word

Consonant clusters:

- write the word in phonemic transcription
- drill the word backwards, sound by sound, and build up the word
- drill the whole word

Word stress:

- write the word with the stress over it
- divide the word into syllables
- write the word in phonemic transcription
- ask the class for other words with the same stress pattern
- clap the stress pattern with the class
- drill the word

Sentence stress:

- mark the stressed words
- elicit different meanings for contrastive stress
- explain that content words are usually stressed more than function words
- drill the sentence

Intonation:

- write the intonation pattern on the board
- explain the rising and falling tendencies of intonation in WH- and Yes/No questions, statements, and tag questions
- 'draw' the pattern in the air with your hands
- demonstrate the difference with and without intonation, e.g., if sounding friendly or polite
- drill the sentences

The analysis done on the theoretical foundations of oral expression and pronunciation and the application of empirical methods helped the author to establish the current state of these elements in the population selected.

## **1.2 Current state of English oral expression with emphasis on the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in 4<sup>th</sup> year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at The University of Holguin**

This epigraph includes the results obtained with the application of empirical methods for the later characterization of the current state of the sample chosen. Classes observation, an interview to teachers of the English staff, a survey to students and a pre experiment. (See appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4) applied to fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major at the University of Holguin through the 2015-2016 course, and the systematic evaluations showed frequent limitations in the development of the students' oral expression within the subject Integrated English Practice VII and VIII, especially regarding pronunciation.

Fourth year students have been chosen as the population to investigate because this year is the penultimate one of the English Major, so it is when students have to improve their foreign language in every sense. This is the first occasion fourth year students spend full time teaching in their schools, so they need a good pronunciation to be a model to their own students. Besides, in fourth year the subject Phonetics and Phonology is not included anymore in their curriculum so they do not have a special space devoted to treat pronunciation issues. The author develops her teaching practice in this year as assistant student of History of English Speaking Cultures, so she knows this group better than any other. She has attended to every lesson and specifically here she noticed their limitations concerning pronunciation and decided to develop her research on pronunciation precisely with that population. However, Integrated English Practice was the subject chosen to insert the exercises because in these lessons there is more time devoted to the practice of the foreign language and the development of skills.

The consonants were selected on account of the results obtained from the methods applied. First, the teachers revealed in the interview that some consonants like the ones designated, were usually troublesome for their students and that even when they used techniques to fix them, the students kept mispronouncing them. That was the starting point. Then, a survey was applied to some students from the population selected. It exposed that the difficult sounds the students consider are more or less the same consonants mentioned by the teachers in the interview. Thirdly, with the application of the pre experiment, the author corroborated those were the sounds more frequently difficult for the population chosen.

The empirical methods applied during the course proved that pronunciation is not appropriately treated in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major, and that pronunciation is not consciously and systematically exploited to improve oral expression.

Different Integrated English Practice lessons were observed in order to know how the teaching-learning process is carried out in 4<sup>th</sup> year mainly concerning pronunciation. Six lessons were visited in the 2015-2016 course.

Here are the indicators that illustrate the fundamental concerns of the class observation:

1. Students' participation.
2. The treatment given to the students' pronunciation mistakes.
3. The use of pronunciation exercises during the lessons.
4. Most frequently mispronounced sounds for students.

After tabulating the results of the observations and analyzing them it was concluded that students' participation is not as active as it should be at this level (only 50% of them participate in class and 10% of them does it in their mother tongue). The teachers try to get the words out of students for helping them to express ideas they probably already know and this happens in a cyclical way. If the students do not express themselves orally, therefore they store large amounts of vocabulary and communicative functions that later they will not be able to produce. Consequently they lose their self-confidence and this obviously affects the development of their oral expression in the foreign language.

The teachers correct students' pronunciation through repetition and by writing on the board the phonetic transcription of the mispronounced words. Only the student who made the mistake repeats altogether with the teacher, the rest does not, consequently they usually make the same mistake over and over again. Sometimes the teachers notice some mistakes their students make but do not correct them because the students are supposed to self-correct when listening to their mates or the teacher himself. Some other times teachers do not correct certain mistakes because they focus on the worst ones or they are really careful with the amount of corrections, so that students do not feel embarrassed about it.

There are no pronunciation exercises but clarifications in the lessons. Teachers assume students will not keep mispronouncing because of their self-preparation and also because of

the common belief that a speaker with a so-so pronunciation can communicate with a native anyway, without noticing that the students in question are teachers to be, not mere foreign language speakers. At this point of their bachelor the students need to brush up their foreign language so, if teachers perceive pronunciation difficulties he must choose a part of a lesson to work on this sounds. Even for the most advanced students, it will be really profitable.

As a common denominator in the students' oral expression, it was found that the most frequently mispronounced sounds for these students are mainly consonants ,although vowels offer some difficulties as well, but most of the time teachers give more importance to the treatment of vowels, disregarding consonants. Within classes observation, surveys and interviews applied many troublesome sounds were detected as hurdles in the students' oral expression. But with the pre experiment carried out (see appendix 1) the author established four common sounds among the students' answers /ð/, /θ/, /v/ and /dʒ/ .That is why the exercises proposed are aimed at improving these consonant sounds.

Secondly, an interview was applied to seven teachers of Integrated English Practice from the English staff: (see appendix 2). The objective was to know the teachers' opinions about the role of pronunciation and the nature of possible students' mistakes when communicating orally. The results obtained showed that teachers know the most difficult sounds for their students and how preventing them. This totally proves that teachers are prepared to fix or at least ameliorate students' mispronunciation. They also master the correction techniques for dealing with students' pronunciation even so fourth year students do not have a good command of the sounds the author is working on.

Thirdly, a survey was applied to a sample of fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major to know their opinions about the role of pronunciation and later deduce if they are interested in their improvement or not (30% of the students does not worry about pronunciation, they are more interested in grammar issues). The nature of the students' mistakes was as well a matter to inquiry, so as to know if the whole issue rested on the teachers' performance or if otherwise, they were also responsible for it. The application of this instrument revealed that students recognize the nature of their mistakes, which is the lack of oral practice and self-preparation .They feel satisfied with what they learn in class so they do not study more than they are demanded by their teachers. The students identify as one of the

causes of their mispronunciation, the fact that some of the troublesome sounds do not exist in Spanish, so they are harder to produce. It was also corroborated what had been previously stated with classes observation and the application of the pre experiment, that the consonant sounds the author is working on are the most difficult for them. The students admit nevertheless that the subject Phonetics and Phonology is significant and profitable for their development as teachers to be and English speakers in general.

Finally a pre experiment was carried out to know the current state of pronunciation in fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major. It proved that they have troubles when establishing grapheme phoneme correspondence, so the 40% of the sample can not discern between a consonant like /ð/ which is more proper of the English language and consonant /d/ which is common in Spanish. Most of them do not know the phonetics symbols, thus they cannot transcribe (75% of them). Consequently when the teacher writes a transcription on the board to correct a given mistake, and they cannot articulate the sound properly. They have problems when discerning consonant sounds such as /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ which are the ones this research is working on (60% of them).

In general, the students' oral communication in English is not sufficient taking into consideration the stage they are going through in their bachelor. The amount of oral practice is short compared to what they need to reinforce their fluency and accuracy. There is not enough time devoted to pronunciation, in fact there is not even a stage of a lesson dedicated to rehearse or improve the troublesome sounds, taking into account the persistent difficulties in the students. There are common mispronounced sounds among the students oral expression. These sounds coincide with the hard to produce ones the author established. Their lack of oral practice, not only inside the classroom, but outside of it, implies ongoing mistakes related to pronunciation.(95%) of the students do not self-prepare in their free time so they face some problems when uttering oral information.

#### *Regularities in the triangulation of the methods applied*

Although the students have some difficulties concerning pronunciation and consequently oral expression, they have some potentialities that may help to develop this research:

- ♣ They received an elective course on Phonetics and Phonology in the second semester of second year and the subject was included in their curriculum in third year.
- ♣ The students have a sound basic knowledge in Integrated English Practice
- ♣ They show a high level of development of oral communicative skills in their mother tongue.
- ♣ The students recognize the importance of pronunciation in their formation as teachers to be.

Nevertheless the students have some limitations when communicating orally:

- ♣ It still remains some mother tongue interference.
- ♣ Students´ participation is not as active as it should be at this level.
- ♣ There are no pronunciation exercises but clarifications in the lessons.
- ♣ They still have problems when discerning consonant sounds such as /ð//θ//v//dʒ/.
- ♣ Students recognize their lack of oral practice and self-preparation.

### **Partial conclusions**

Having analyzed the theoretical foundations concerning oral expression and more specifically pronunciation, it was noticed that the definitions provided even 15 years ago by authors like Brown, Cantero or Bartoli are still in effect. There are plenty of correction techniques to solve pronunciation issues and they are highly effective. So if there is such amount of information and proved techniques for dealing with pronunciation matters, that gives the teachers the necessary tools to eradicate pronunciation mistakes or at least to make them softer.

On the other hand the methods applied to the sample chosen showed the urgency in treating these students´ pronunciation mistakes so that they can improve this aspect and consequently their oral expression as teachers to be.

**Chapter two:** Exercises to improve oral expression through the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in 4<sup>th</sup> year students of bachelor in education English major at the University of Holguin.

This chapter comprises the requisites followed to elaborate exercises and also presents the proposal of exercises to improve the students' oral expression through pronunciation, which is the practical contribution of the research.

### 2.1 Methodological considerations for the elaboration of the exercises to improve oral expression through the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/

The following chart was designed for a better illustration of the previously explained.

Method	Troublesome sounds selected in each case
Interview to teachers	/tʃ/, /z/, /j/, /ə/, /ʃ/, /æ/, /v/, /dʒ/, /ŋ/, /ð/.
Survey to students	/w/, /ð/, /ə/, /z/, /dʒ/, /tʃ/, /v/, /e/.
Pre experiment	/j/, /dʒ/, /æ/, /v/, /z/, /ð/, /e/, /ə/.

From the results obtained, it was established a pattern among the sounds stated in the methods and later highlighted in yellow. So the common sounds among everybody's answers were /v/, /dʒ/, /ð/ and /ə/.

#### Some views on exercises

Rhalmi M. (2010) states that “an exercise usually focuses on one element of the language and has a linguistic result, it is guided and controlled by the teacher and the correction must be done immediately”

IES “ALBALAT” -Portafolio de Actividades (Extremadura) (2013) establishes that “ exercises are didactic propositions used to consolidate what the students learn, they are more mechanic”

Richards J. (2010) sustains that an exercise is an activity that is designed to practice a learning item.

Medina (2012) states that an **exercise** is a task designed to bring about learning through practice of reasonably high quality. Exercises are a concrete embodiment (realization) of the

content and aims of teaching. They are structural units which organize not only language material but also the learner's actions and operations.

The term exercise is often intermingled with tasks, activities or techniques. According to David Nunan (1991), a **task** is a special kind of technique, and may actually include more than one technique. This term is closely allied to communicative curricula. The common thread running through half a dozen definitions of task is its focus on the authentic use of language for communicative purposes beyond the language classroom. Medina (2006) A **technique** is the lowest level on the hierarchy (approach and method). It is used to implement a method and accomplish immediate objectives. Jack Richards (2010) expresses that an **activity** in language teaching is a general term for any classroom procedure that requires students to use and practice their available language resources.

### **Methodological considerations to apply the proposal**

From the exercises proposed, the teacher may select two or three to work in a certain section of the lesson in any place of the unit. The entire vocabulary present in the exercises belongs to the second unit of the syllabus entitled Journalism; nevertheless they are suitable for any lesson throughout the course because the vocabulary is very common and familiar to the students.

The proposal includes 5 exercises for improving the pronunciation of the sounds under analysis. The author selected the second unit of the syllabus entitled "Journalism" due to the potentialities of the vocabulary found in the texts specifically two of them entitled "Journalism in Cuba" and "Good teachers". The exercises are aimed at discerning and contrasting sounds and establishing phoneme –grapheme correspondence. They are suggested for practicing the sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ within the Integrated English Practice lessons and at encouraging the cognitive independence through independent work.

All of the exercises have a professional approach to help the students correct their own students' pronunciation mistakes, besides it was taken into consideration the students' needs at this level, which are to brush up their foreign language in general and to manage useful techniques to improve their pronunciation that is a good part of the oral communicative competence. The level of complexity increases from one exercise to other. They favor group



work, pair work and individual work. The exercises are well oriented for the students know what they have to do in every moment. They are not only a tool for Integrated Practice teachers, but for the students who just begin to teach in their schools and who by doing them will learn to create similar ones for their own students.

## 2.2 Exercises to improve oral expression through the pronunciation of the consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ in 4<sup>th</sup> year students at the University of Holguin

### Exercise #1.

Underline the word that matches with the appropriate transcription

Procedure: The teacher will write the words on the board. He will pronounce each phonetic transcription for the students to notice the difference between the contrasting sounds. The students have to underline the word that matches with the phonetic transcription. Finally the students will repeat after the teacher ,then they will be commanded to do item a) and b).

1. ɔðə	odder	Other
2. /'veri /	Berry	Very
3. / edʒ /	Edge	Etch
4./ der /	There	Dare
5./məʊtɪv /	Motif	Motive
6. /'brɪdʒəz /	Bridges	Britches
7./ θɔt /	Sought	Thought
8./'ənɪsən /	any sin	Anything
9. / lɒv /	Loaf	Love
10./'retʃəd /	Wretched	Rigid

11./ sænk /	Thank	Sank
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- Read the text “Good teachers” from the Google mosaic provided by your Integrated English Practice teacher. Get ready to prepare an oral report about it.
- Select a sound that you consider one of the most difficult sounds for your students and suggest a correction technique to fix it.

**Exercise # 2 Look at the following words and select the words that belongs to the symbol in brackets**

Procedure: The teacher will write the columns on the board and then pronounce each word. The students will choose the words that contain the sounds represented in brackets. Finally the students will be commanded to answer item a) and b).

**/dʒ/**

\_Intelligent

\_Invasion

\_Journalist

\_Pledged

\_Youth

\_Agency

\_Pleasure

**/v/**

\_Deprive

\_Combine

\_Of

\_By

\_Combat

\_Achievable

\_Movement

**/ð/**

\_With

\_Truth

\_South

**/θ/**

\_Path

\_Buzz

\_Weather

\_Odd

\_Fourth

\_Ethnic

\_Though

\_Filthy

\_Cough

\_Birthday

\_Then

- a) Work in groups and design a similar exercise with just a few words in which you work with the sounds that are more difficult for your students.
- b) Get ready to present it and support your choice to the rest of your classmates.

**Exercise # 3** Analyse each item and complete the blank spaces with the right phonetic symbol.

Procedure: The teacher will provide the students with phonetic transcriptions which have a missing sound for them to complete. The teacher will pronounce each word. Finally the students will be commanded to do item a) and b).

- a) /'mei\_ə/
- b) /grʊ\_/
- c) /sə'\_ɪr/
- d) /'ræ\_ər/
- e) /'kʌ\_ərɪdʒ/
- f) /\_ret/
- g) /\_ie'græfɪkli/
- h) /nevər\_ə'les/
- i) /'fei\_fəl/
- j) /rɪ'si\_/
- k) /'gæ\_ərɪŋ/
- l) /'pei\_d/

- a) Read the text “Journalism in Cuba” from the google mosaic provided by your Integrated English Practice teacher. Get ready to interview a famous Cuban journalist taking into consideration the technical vocabulary present in the text.

- b) The consonant /θ/ is a difficult sound for Spanish speakers. Elaborate a minimal pair to contrast this sound with a similar one.

#### **Exercise # 4**

Procedure: The students will be given pieces of paper that contain the text below. The teacher will read it aloud. Finally, they will be commanded to answer the items a, b, c and d.

**George and Vivian lived together in Plymouth. They were both teachers. Vivian taught Geography and George taught Maths. Though they loved their professions, they retired that November because of their evident age. George and Vivian never had the chance of traveling before. They took advantage of their retirement and bought two tickets to the Netherlands with the help of their savings. They took a plane as first class passengers and sat together on smooth leather seats. When they arrived, they envisioned a huge hotel called South Valley. The manager waved at them to go inside. They thought it was strange but they did. When George got closer he perceived a familiar face. When Vivian realized who the manager was she just opened her arms and said "Ethan, my beloved". Ethan was the cleverest student in both George's and Vivian's classes. They all chatted jubilantly. Ethan told them they could order whatever they craved for. Ethan made them understand that without George's prodigious Maths lessons or Vivian's brilliant ones, he would not have gotten there. They felt overwhelmed. George and Vivian enjoyed three more days and then returned to England. They talked and made a big decision together. They resolved to go back to teach, this time only twice a week so they would live healthy but happily ever after.**

#### **From the text above:**

- a) Find in the text words that contain the following consonant sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/.
- b) Read aloud each of the words you found. Then compare them to the ones your partner found.
- c) Summarize orally the content of the text in your own words.
- d) Elaborate a small text appropriate for your students. It shall contain the consonant sounds you have noticed are the most difficult for them to pronounce. Make your students take the words out of the text and then repeat them.

#### **Exercise# 5 Transcribe phonetically the following sentences.**

Procedure: The teacher will write the sentences on the board. The teacher will read each of the sentences. The students will transcribe them phonetically. In item a) the students will organize in small groups. Eight groups should be formed. The teacher will assign one of the assertions on the board and they will prepare for debate it in the classroom. Finally the students will be commanded to answer item b).

1. To learn another language students just need motivation.
  2. A good teacher: An authoritarian dictator or a pushover?
  3. Creative agendas go further go further than what is planned to do.
  4. An effective method provides valuable knowledge.
- a) Work in small groups. Debate on the topic assigned by your teacher.
- b) Elaborate a text containing words used in the previous debate. Dictate it to the rest of your classmates. Correct their mistakes.

## **Chapter three:** Corroboration of the effectiveness of the proposal

This part of the research is devoted to corroborate the effectiveness of the exercises proposed to improve the production of sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/. First, a specialist' criteria was implemented. The proposal and the indicators declared to evaluate it were presented to 7 teachers from the English staff. The aim was to obtain a critical point of view and some suggestions from experienced teachers' perspectives before applying the proposal to the sample chosen. In second place, a pedagogical experience was developed to test the students' performance during the whole process. The exercises were applied with the purpose of corroborating their suitability in the classroom. Students' positive and negative reactions were also described in order to modify or approve the exercises proposed to improve English oral expression by working with the mispronunciation of the troublesome sounds selected.

### **3.1 Specialists' criteria**

Before applying the exercises, the author submitted it to 7 teachers from the English staff for them to evaluate it and also to make suggestions to improve it. This way when the students faced the exercises they would be better, pedagogically speaking. The selected specialists are teacher trainers of Integrated English Practice with 25 years of experience on average.

Their academic and scientific levels are summarized as follows:

3 associate professors - specialists

1 Ph. D - assistant

1 associate - master

1 Ph. D – associate

1 Ph. D – full professor

The specialists were asked to answer by ticking from a series of indicator the most appropriate one. It reads as follows:

- a) The exercises respond to the students' language level.
- b) They are organized according to their level of complexity.
- c) They are closely related to the methodological considerations taken.
- d) They contribute to the students' training as future teachers.

- e) They favour the development of the students English oral expression.
- f) The exercises are skill integrating.

The categories given included totally agree, agree, partially agree and disagree. In item a 100% of the teachers ticked totally agree. In item b 50% of them ticked agree and the other half selected totally agree. In item c 75% of the teachers chose totally agree, the other 25% chose agree. In items d and e the teachers selected totally agree. In the case of the last one 75% of the teachers ticked totally agree and the resting 25% selected agree.

The results obtained from the specialists' criteria showed that the exercises proposed are appropriate for ameliorating the pronunciation of fourth year students. The specialists stated that the exercises are suitable not only for these students but for third year students since in that year they have the subject Phonetics and Phonology, so these exercises could be inserted in given lessons for reinforcement.

### **Main suggestions given by the specialists**

Among the suggestions stated by the teachers were for instance

- ♣ To change the order of two of the exercises because they were not organized regarding their level of complexity.
- ♣ To reformulate the headings of the exercises for them to be better understood by the students.

### **3.2 Description of the pedagogical experience:**

The population of this research as stated before is fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major. From a total roll of 32 students, 22 of them were selected to apply the proposal and later describe the results. For the selection of this group it was taken into consideration a fair amount of advanced, average and slow students so the complexity level of the proposal is within everybody's reach. The pedagogical experience took two months to be implemented because the students chosen have classes only once a month due to their teaching practice.

In the first contact students had with the exercises they showed a positive reaction towards it because they are familiarized with that kind of exercises from the subject Phonetics and Phonology that they previously received in third year. The exercises are graded in increasing

complexity to make the students go through the four levels of assimilation. When they began working with them, they faced some difficulties to discern some consonant sounds due to their similarities with the ones the author selected to contrast with. But at the end, the 87% of them reached the productive level that is evident more specifically in the fifth exercise, which is also the last one because of its complexity.

In the first exercise the students were given papers containing exercise 1 and 2, which were created up to recognition and reproduction levels, for they are the first ones. For exercise #1, the students needed more than 3 repetitions of each word so it offered some difficulty for some of them. Nevertheless, most of the students took advantage of the phonetic transcription provided for there are some symbols that clearly differ from the rest, like consonant **/v/** from consonant **/b/** and consonant **/ð/** from consonant **/d/**. In these cases they rapidly detected the correct choice. So, the trouble when discerning these sounds is obviously in the oral aspect, not in the written one. The hardest contrast to distinguish was the one between the sounds **/dʒ/** and **/ʃ/** in middle and final word position.

Item a) was very profitable for students because they offered a critical point of view on the material assigned which was the source from where the teacher got the vocabulary used in the exercise. They exchanged ideas on the same topic but the perspectives were really varied.

Item b) took the students some time because they had to remember the techniques they had previously studied. Some of them knew the procedure but did not recall the name of the technique. Some others chose the easiest way, to recommend repetition for the sound selected. Apart from distinguishing similar sounds the exercise intends to make the students aware of the real difference between the sounds compared, so that they advance to the next one having that in mind.

In the second exercise the students were given more than two choices to check if they had established the correct articulation of the sounds selected to work on. This exercise was created up to a reproductive level, for it is still an early stage of the set. The teacher read exercise two, taking into consideration the pronunciation similarities present in some words. Particularly in the first column containing sound **/dʒ/**, the students had absolutely no trouble with words such as *agency* and *intelligent* because they visualize a connection between the sound **/dʒ/** and the grapheme **/g/**. Some students mistook it for sound **/ʒ/** for instance, in the



word *pleasure*. Some others confounded it with the sound /j/ as in the word *youth*, what makes evident that even when they hear a different sound, the mother tongue interference is yet a hurdle difficult to beat.

In the column containing sound /v/ the students found it really easy to separate it from the sound /b/, mainly because of the clear difference between the two graphemes. Although they had certain doubts on the word *of* because the sound /v/ in final position is very alike to the sound /f/. In fact the only difference between these two sounds, phonetically speaking is the voice. Apart from that, the selection in this column was quite effortless for the students.

In the column containing the sound /ð/ they did a good performance. It turned out to be very easy to choose the words that included this sound, except from the word *birthday*, in which they hesitated a bit because of the middle position of the sound within the word. In all the other words presented the students showed to be really sure of their answers.

In the column containing sound /θ/ the students did it almost perfectly. The teacher stopped by some seats, noticing some students had selected the word *cough* as having the sound in final word position. So she decided to pronounce the whole column a second time. Immediately the students recognized the sound when they saw the position of the mouth of the teacher. The teacher pronounced the sound /θ/ and then sound /f/. There is no chance of mistaking when observing the articulation of the two sounds. In the case of item a), the students did two, at top three columns with sounds like /θ/, /z/, /tʃ/, /w/ and /v/. This item was pretty simple because they already had a model.

Item b) took the students about 10 min because they needed some time to prepare their explanation to expose their exercises in front of the rest. The students felt the protagonists of the classroom because they had to behave like a teacher.

Exercise number three was applied the following month. In this exercise the students had to complete the spaces with the correct sound, having only the teacher's pronunciation, so it took more than three repetitions per word. This exercise was created up to a partial productive level, so it is a bit more complex with the aim of making the students move a step forward.

For this exercise the teacher pronounced each word more than three times because some students had difficulties to complete the blanks. In the case of the words *coverage*, *faithful* and

*major* the students completed the blanks without hesitation but there was a serious mistake regarding the sound /θ/ in initial position. 40% of the students wrote sound /f/ instead. For this reason the teacher had to pronounce it once more for them to fix their mistake. (90%) of the students who mistook the sound fixed it when they realized of their mistake. The remaining ones (10%) didn't write anything.

Item a) was really profitable for the students. They were quite creative while interviewing their partners. The students had a lot of fun and all of the exercises were motivating to the rest of the group.

Item b) was quite simple for they did not have to think of a technique but they were assigned a specific one. This technique is frequently used in Phonetics and Phonology so they already knew it. Most of the students chose to compare the given sound which was /θ/ to sound /s/ because they said their students at school pronounce the latter instead of /θ/. Some others selected /f/ precisely because of the clarification made by the teacher on item f). At top they did three couples but it took them some time because they had to look for couples to compare with the words they had selected containing the sound oriented.

After 10 minutes the teacher perceived there were students yet thinking of the couples, she explained that those words did not necessarily have to be identical but just similar as regards the position of the sound compared and the stress of the word. They seemed relieved and quickly found three couples; almost all of the students compared the sounds in initial position.

In the fourth exercise the teacher provided a text laden with words that had the sounds chosen by the author. Like the preceding exercise, this one was created at a partial productive level to back up what the students had learned in exercise number three. Despite it is the third exercise of the proposal, it was applied a month after the first two ones, so it would be like the first exercise this time. The sounds the author is working on are highlighted in the text, but *just for the readers*. In case of the students, the text was printed without alterations. The teacher read the whole text for the students and then they had to answer the items included.

Item a) demanded the recognition of the sounds /ð//θ//v//dʒ/ present in the text. The heading does not specify a given number of words, so the students may write as many words as they find in the text for each sound. Here the students wrote two words per sound and two of them wrote more than three words. As a difficulty the teacher noticed that some students selected

the word *smooth* as containing the sound /θ/ instead of /ð/ and when they were enquired the reasons of their selection, they said that in that position the final *th* sounded a bit distorted, so they would have needed a second reading of the word to do it appropriately.

When they finished writing, they were commanded to do item b) and reading aloud the words they had selected. A collective mistake was the pronunciation of the word *George*, which they produced as /ˈdʒɔːrʒ/. Then, they compared each other's sounds and realized all of them had chosen a common word *geography*, since it is pretty similar to geographically, a word treated in the previous exercise.

In the case of item c) this time the students had to integrate accuracy with fluency by summarizing the content of the text in their own words. This item was really successful because they did it truly great. Their pronunciation was quite good and even the slowest ones did a good performance.

Item d) was as well at everyone's reach because they just had to follow the model already given by the teacher. This part of the exercise took them some time for they had to be very careful with the words they chose and the length of the text, having in mind they work with high school students. Only 10% of the students asked for advice to the teacher, the rest did it relatively quick by themselves.

In the fifth and last exercise it was the first time the students had to transcribe whole sentences, so it was a bit challenging for them. This exercise was created up to a productive level that is why it was set as the last one. The teacher had to repeat each sentence three times, slower than ever and at the end once again for them to check if they were right. In general the students made little mistakes, for some of the words present in the sentences were worked in prior exercises and all of them were picked from the second unit of the syllabus which they were studied in February. A word difficult to transcribe to everyone was *authoritarian*, so that one needed an extra help from the teacher.

Item a) It was really good for the students to practice their English because they got involved in a very intense debate. There were two teams working on the same topic but it did not matter because the debates were completely different.

Item b) was really easy because they did not have to look for words in their minds. They just picked up some of the most used words in the debate to prepare the dictation. They selected not only usual words but long ones too because of the level of their students. After selecting the proper words they did a sort of practice in the classroom for the rest of their partners to see how it would be in a real situation. Some of the students not only read the words but actually acted as if they were teaching in their classrooms and asked to their partners to ask for repetitions like in a real high school classroom. In this part of exercise number five, there were no difficulties at all.

In general the results of the application of the proposal are as follows:

- ♣ The students were capable of creating their own exercises as predicted
- ♣ All of the students reached the productive level in the end
- ♣ It was verified that sound /v/ is only difficult to pronounce, not to distinguish it from other sounds
- ♣ The recognition of sounds such as /ə/ and /dʒ/ is still difficult for them

## **Conclusions**

Oral expression is essential for the development of an appropriate culture and the exchange among human beings and it is the basic skill for learning every foreign language. Oral expression, but more specifically pronunciation which is the presentation card of the speaker, was scientifically detected as a problem in fourth year students of English Major at The University of Holguin and corroborated by different empirical methods. In order to improve both, oral expression and pronunciation a proposal of exercises was offered.

The different phases of the Paper allowed characterizing the teaching-learning process, object of the investigation, confirming the research problem by detecting and describing the situation of fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English major at The University of Holguin and proposing exercises as a tool for Integrated English Practice teachers to improve the students' pronunciation.

The diploma paper exposed shows how important is to devote the necessary time to this aspect of language, many times disregarded by teachers and students as well. Pronunciation demands more attention, especially if the students who learn the language are future teachers who will educate students year after year. Teachers cannot overlook students' pronunciation just because they are at the final stage of their major. It is vital to insist on the ongoing improvement of this aspect for students of English Major to be communicatively competent in every way.

## **Recommendations**

- The author suggests to Integrated English Practice teachers that dedicate a moment of the lesson (it could be at the beginning or at the end) to work with those consonant sounds that students keep mispronouncing.
  - Integrated English Practice teachers to make a similar analysis of the resting units for predicting possible students' pronunciation mistakes.
  - The teachers should use a variety of techniques for the students not to get bored.

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## **Appendix #1 Classes observation**

Objective: To value the way teachers of Integrated English Practice develop their English lessons paying special attention to the students' pronunciation within their oral participation

### **Indicators for class observation**

**1.** Students' participation orally:

a)\_Systematic                      b)\_Not so systematic                      c)\_Do not participate at all

**2.** The treatment given to students' mistakes:

a)\_Satisfactory                      b)\_Acceptable                      c)\_Unsatisfactory

**3.** The use of pronunciation exercises during the lesson

a)\_Always                      b)\_Sometimes                      c)\_Almost never

**4.** The most complicated sounds

a)\_Consonant sounds                      b)\_Vowel sounds                      c)\_Semivowels

## **Appendix #2** Interview to teachers from the English staff

Objective: to know the teachers' opinion about the role of pronunciation in foreign language teaching and the nature of students' pronunciation mistakes

- 1.** Is pronunciation something you have to apply in a certain lesson or integrate it in each lesson?
- 2.** How do you prevent students' mistakes?
- 3.** Which correction technique do you use in your classroom?
- 4.** Why do you think teachers need to include pronunciation in their lessons?
- 5.** Which sounds do you consider are the most difficult for them to pronounce?
- 6.** Which might be the possible reasons for mispronouncing these sounds?

### **Appendix #3** Survey to fourth year students of Bachelor in Education English Major

Objective: To know the students' opinion about the role of pronunciation in the foreign language teaching and the nature of their pronunciation mistakes

1. Which correction technique do your teachers of Integrated English Practice use in the classroom?

Minimal pairs       Repetition       Articulatory description       Others

2. Which do you think are the reasons why you make pronunciation mistakes?

Lack of self-preparation       Lack of oral practice       English sounds are too difficult

Some of the English sounds do not exist in Spanish

3. From the following sounds, which are the most difficult ones for you?

tʃ       dʒ       v       j       ð       θ       z       ʃ  
 w       m

4. Do you think the subject Phonetics and Phonology should be restored to the fourth year curriculum?

Yes       No

## **Appendix #4 Pre experiment**

**Listen to the following sentences and circle the words you hear.**

1. I was joking/choking.
2. We saw two cabs/calves on the road.
3. When day/they came everything was okay.
4. Do you need another batch/badge?
5. We use our fan/van in the summer.
6. I could not avoid to notice the ladder/lather was pretty white.
7. These teeth/teas are cold.
8. Thinking/sinking feels really good.

**Transcribe phonetically the following words**

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| 1. Rather     | 11. Urgency |
| 2. Enthusiasm | 12. Further |
| 3. Believe    |             |
| 4. Earth      |             |
| 5. Passenger  |             |
| 6. Smooth     |             |
| 7. Boat       |             |
| 8. Either     |             |
| 9. Youth      |             |
| 10. Previous  |             |

## Appendix#5 Specialist's criteria

Dear professor, we wish to get your cooperation on this proposal that is aimed at improving pronunciation. Please answer as honestly as possible. Thank you so much for your time

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Category: \_\_\_\_\_ Years of experience: \_\_\_\_\_

	<b>The exercises designed</b>	<b>Totally agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Partially agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
1	Respond to the students' language level				
2	Are organized according to their level of complexity				
3	are closely related to the methodological considerations taken				
4	Contribute to the students' training as future teachers				
5	Favor the development of the students English oral expression				
6	Are skill integrating				

Some general suggestions related to the proposal:

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