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Un proyecto educativo para mejorar la pronunciación
inglesa en la Educación Secundaria

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**‘This is Hollywood: ready, steady and action!’
An educational project to improve the English
pronunciation at Secondary Education’**

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Un proyecto educativo para mejorar la pronunciación inglesa en
la Educación Secundaria

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ABSTRACT

English has become the *lingua franca*, and thus, an important tool of communication which has connected the world in a way we never thought. As important as it is, a well understanding in oral situations is needed, as without it, misunderstanding and awkward situations can take place. Pronunciation plays an important role here, since it enables an effective communication with the native speaker. In Spain, the EFL teaching methods still focus more on written skills rather than on oral skills, and thus, the teaching of pronunciation is often push in the background. Cinema provides a genuine and natural environment to work the communicative approach in a motivating way. The purpose of this paper is to present an innovative educational project proposal based on the author’s previous work (Imbernón, 2016) which serves as a model to improve the English level of pronunciation in secondary school students by means of filmmaking activities.

KEYWORDS

Educational Project, English Pronunciation, Secondary Education, Short films, Oral Expression

RESUMEN

El inglés se ha convertido en la *lingua franca*, y por lo tanto, en una herramienta importante de comunicación que ha conectado el mundo de una manera que nunca imaginamos. Dada su importancia, se hace necesario un buen entendimiento en situaciones orales, pues sin ello, dará lugar a malentendidos y situaciones incómodas. La pronunciación juega aquí un importante papel, puesto que permite una comunicación efectiva con el hablante nativo. En España, los métodos de enseñanza de la LE siguen centrados más en las destrezas escritas que en las orales y, de esta manera, la pronunciación es normalmente relegada a un segundo plano. El cine provee de un entorno auténtico y natural para trabajar el enfoque comunicativo de una manera motivadora. El propósito de este artículo es presentar una propuesta de proyecto educativo innovador basado en el trabajo anterior de la autora (Imbernón,

2016) que pretende servir de modelo para mejorar el nivel de pronunciación del inglés en alumnos de secundaria por medio de actividades cinematográficas.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Proyecto Educativo, Pronunciación Inglés, Educación Secundaria, Cortometrajes, Expresión Oral

INTRODUCTION

Since the author's previous experiences lived in the EFL classrooms, it was observed on the whole there was a lack of English pronunciation in Primary, Secondary, A-levels and Vocational Education students. So far, English teaching methods in the classroom still pay more attention to grammatical aspects, rather than to phonetic aspects for a better diction in the production of English language. The Spanish educational curriculum in Secondary Education prioritises linguistics and syntactic-discursive aspects over the phonetics ones.

However, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2002) emphasizes the teaching of pronunciation as opposed to. This is especially mentioned in sections 4.5. *Communicative language processes*, 5.1.4.2. *General phonetic awareness and skills*, 5.2.1.4. *Phonological competence*, and 6.4.7.9. *Pronunciation*. Therefore, section 4.5., the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (henceforth CEFRL) takes pronunciation skills into consideration as something important to 'articulate the utterance' as well as to 'perceive the utterance (auditory phonetic skills)'. In other words, the CEFRL promotes the teaching of pronunciation for a clear understanding, eradicating errors and bad habits which would prevent from achieving the main aim of languages: communication. It is true that CEFRL is only a guide for EFL teachers, giving total freedom to them to decide the relevance or not of these aspects, such as the phonetical correction and fluency. As a result, it has been observed that the vast majority of occasions in EFL classrooms, the teaching of pronunciation is usually omitted. Since the belief that teaching pronunciation is a difficult process to explain and teach to learners, most EFL teachers in Secondary Education opt to allow them to make an approximately pronunciation of the utterances, without taking into account that learners might not be well understood by a native speakers, and thus, heading to countless uncomfortable situations. Moreover, if this is not taken into account, it could lead to what Selinker (1972) calls 'the interlanguage fossilization', and as Elliot(1997) points out, it would inhibit the FL learner to make any progress in his/her language competence. Hence, as this author suggests, if pronunciation is not adequately taught from the beginning, this will remain stable without any progress.

There are other authors who also defend the teaching of pronunciation in EFL classrooms (Barrera, 2009; Bartolí, 2005; Munro & Derwing, 2006; Sanz González, 1999) and focus on methods that include activities which use resources such as videos, songs, rhymes, realia, drills, etc. All these resources help and motivate students, an element which should not be forgotten during EFL teaching-learning

process. As such, Dörnyei (1994) distinguishes three main motivational specific components in L2 motivation that influence during the learning process: course-specific, teacher-specific and group-specific. All of them play an important role in L2 acquisition, especially teacher-specific, where modelling, task presentation, feedback and relationships with students determine the success of the L2/FL acquisition process. Cenoz Iragui (1993) admits the power of the FL teacher to change attitudes in their students as well. Therefore, the TEFL will rely on the approach and method teachers choose in their lessons.

For this reason, it is important to foster this approach in EFL classroom, without forgetting the importance of motivation in these difficult ages, looking for something that really motivates them at the same time that it is close and familiar, and thus, turning out in a meaningful learning. Films are very valuable resources to fulfill this objective as they provide the perfect environment, since the use of language is real and natural, surrounded by its culture.

Many researchers support the use of films when teaching languages (Carracedo, 2009; Chan & Herrero, 2010; Csajbok-Twerefou, 2010; Suh-ching Li, 2008; Tatsuki, 2000) but we can distinguish two different approaches in the way films are treated in EFL: the traditional and innovative approach. The traditional approach is where films are directly use as a projection to only work the listening comprehension in students, being these ones mere spectators. Conversely, the innovative approach is where films are used like vehicles for creativity, where learners are the main characters and interact with films. That is they create cinema at the same time they learn a FL. This is the approach this paper seeks to implement. An example of this can be found in Chan & Herrero's (2010) project experience to teach Arabic, Mandarin, Italian and Urdu, in which they introduced creative workshops to experiment with films, use of the ITCs and the learning of filmmaking techniques. The results were really positive and even two of the animated films created entered in the category 'A World of Languages' at the Languages and Film Talent Awards (LAFTA).

Concerning to film genres that mostly attract young FL learners attention, Canning-Wilson (2000) points out that action and entertainment films are the preferred ones. Thereby, Imbernón's project (2016) also bets by the use of this genre type, as she also believes that action and adventure movies are the best choice to learn and acquire the new utterances (vocabulary and expressions) and pronunciation skills in EFL. Since the action they involve, dialogues are easy and intuitively understood by students (Canning-Wilson, 2000). Hence, as it happens in their L1, action works here like an aid for them to understand the story.

Needless to say that inside the use of cinema, dramatizations and role-plays are elements closely linked. They are both indirectly used in films; they use a script and keep countless advantages when they are used as resources to enhance the oral skills in EFL, 'since they favour the creation of contexts in which words flows naturally and in a meaningful way' (Imbernón, 2016). Poorman (2002) states that role-plays can increase the interest for the subject and enhance the comprehension of new contents. Needlands (2002) indicates that it is important to include dramatizations in education as they help learners to be more self-confident to use their previous knowledge. This

is directly linked to what Krashen (1982) claims about the affective filter hypothesis in his input hypothesis, in which he says that the lower anxiety the students have, the higher motivation, self-confidence and attitude they get, and thus, the better they let input through. As it can be seen, dramatizations are very positive activities to make use of them in TEFL. By the same token, Tömösváryová (2009, p. 61) indicates that ‘the use of a video for dramatization assists learners not only with their vocabulary, grammar, exposure to real English phrases but mainly helped to improve their pronunciation and self-confidence’. Likewise, she states that, apart from working intonation and the sentence stress in EFL, dramatizations help to build up a team spirit among students. Regarding the use of scripts, necessary for the development of films and dramatizations, Ryan (1998) suggests their use as an activity to develop creativity at the same time written skills are enhanced.

Hence, on the following pages, an educational program is presented by means of a list of activities. These activities combined with a meaningful learning and an eclectic approach, allow to face the teaching-learning process in a participative and motivating way, both for the learner and educator. Therefore, the present work can be used by EFL teachers as a proposal to be introduced in their lessons, either partially or completely.

AIMS

The main aim of this project is to improve the English pronunciation in secondary school students by means of contemporary films or series and the production of a short film. Bearing in mind this, the specific aims are:

- to recognize the basic features of the Received Pronunciation, the standard accent
- to know and put into practice the prosody as well as the phenomenon of strong and weak forms, linking vowels, assimilation and elision
- to comprehend and transcribe any sort of simple text to make easier the recognition of the sounds and pronunciation of the words
- to make up a script in groups for the production of a short film
- to make a short film in which the students will perform applying the rules taught of the standard accent

The general stage aims from the ESO curriculum must be taken into account as well, either the ones associated with the English subject (pronunciation and grammar correction) or the contents related with the basic competences, such as working in teams, respect opinions and use ITCs.

METHOD

The methodology employed in this project is the indirect method, in other words, it goes from basic to complex activities. As such, following this method will provide a base to the learners in which they will be able to settle their new knowledge, as Ausubel (1963) refers to his theory of Meaningful Learning and Bruner (1978) to the

concept of ‘scaffolding’ (Discovery Learning). Hence, this project is also based on the task-based approach, which according to Norris (2009), it can be basically reduced into three main stages: task input, pedagogic task work and task performance, and eventually, task follow-up.

PARTICIPANTS

This project is intended for secondary school students from first to fourth year (ESO in Spain) and, whilst this project can be carried out in a standard group with the appropriate adaptations, it has been specifically adapted for bilingual modality.

DESIGN OF THE EXPERIENCE

The name chosen for this project is *This is Hollywood: Ready, Steady and Action!* This project consists on a sort of dubbing-diction actor training and movie making, which will be developed by means of a series of ‘sub-tasking’ activities and will finished with a short film. These activities vary from transcription and reading aloud exercises to others such as dramatization, role-play, performing songs and dubbing tasks. All of them pursue the improvement of the English pronunciation as well as the increasing of self-esteem and motivation of the learners, through appealing contents like the use of cinema elements, English culture and ICTs.

Furthermore, a close coordination among the departments of English and Visual Arts should exists. Bearing in mind this, the activities related with pronunciation explanation, training, songs, role-plays, dubbing and making a script are meant to be carried out by the English teacher. Conversely, those activities related to the software (e.g. *Audacity 1.3.*) and technical devices to create and edit the videos (*Pinnacle Studio*) as well as the types of shots should be guided by the Visual Arts teacher.

During the implementation of this project, some guiding worksheets should be provided to the learners. Those worksheets, which will be part of the individual students’ portfolio, will be preserved for future help and guide through the process. Moreover, the teacher will use a Wiki to upload all the resources that students need. With reference to the evaluation process of this project as well as the materials created, they can be found explained in more details in Imbernón (2016).

PROCEDURES AND ACTIVITIES

The activities will be distributed in three main phases (Figure 1.).

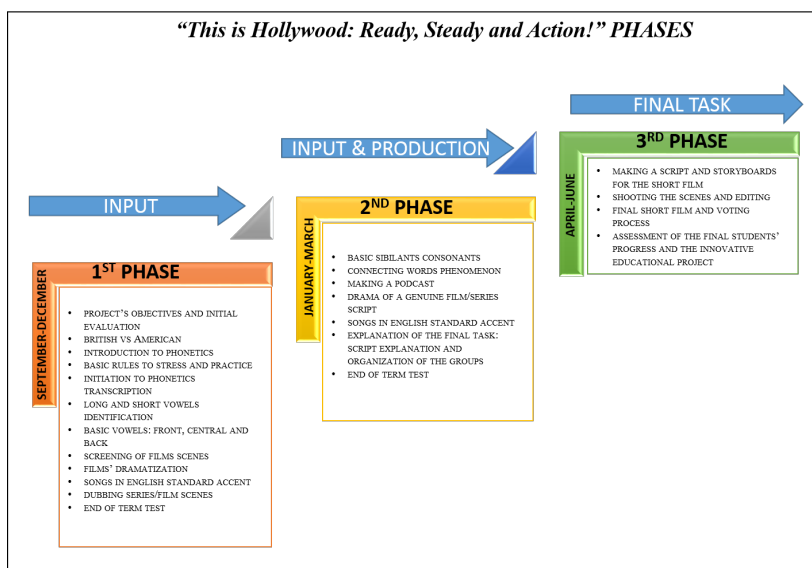


Figure 1. “This is Hollywood: Ready, Steady and Action!” Phases

The first phase introduces the most part of input related with phonetics in the standard accent, Received Pronunciation (henceforth RP). The second phase finishes the theoretical input introduction associated with the basic pronunciation contents and also initiates the students’ work. Finally, in the third phase the students starts to produce the short film, applying the contents they have learned.

A. PROJECT’S OBJECTIVES AND INITIAL EVALUATION

It starts with an outline of the project’s aims to make the students be aware of the learning objectives. Regarding the running time of the short films, in 1st-2nd ESO they should be about 15 minutes, whereas in 3rd-4th ESO they should be about 30 minutes. Concerning the texts used for the pronunciation activities, they are extracted from the books *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. With this procedure, the students are introduced to the classic British literature and to cultural contents in a closest way.

Hence, in this phase, the teacher will prepare an initial evaluation (pre-test), which will consist in reading aloud a film dialogue fragment from the original script (the film script *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* is suggested in this project). Each student will be assigned a role from a scene selected by the teacher and they will read it. Meanwhile, they will be recorded with the help of a microphone and the free voice record software *Audacity 1.3*. The recordings will be used as a guide by the teacher to detect the main difficulties the students have.

B. BRITISH VS AMERICAN

The main objective of this activity is to make aware the students that in English, as any other language, exists (at first sight) two main different types of accent: British and American, the latter used mostly in the movies since the largest cinema industry

is located in the USA. For this activity, the teacher shows a poster with the map of the British Isles and the USA (Figure 2.) to compare both countries¹.

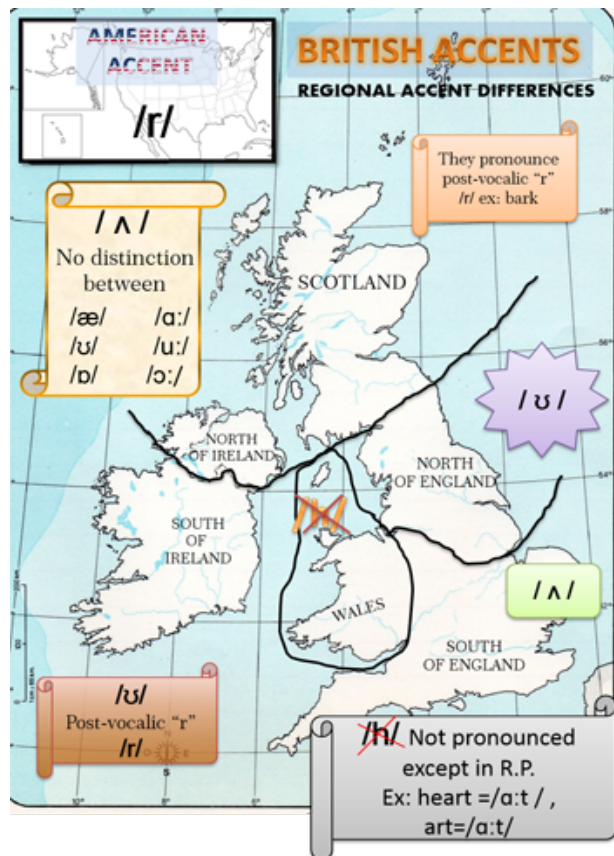


Figure 2. British and American Accents Map

This activity should be combined with others like brainstorming to stimulate the previous knowledge of the students; for example, asking them whether they know American words or homonymous words.

As a final activity proposal, the scene from the beginning of the movie Lara Croft: Tomb Raider (2001) could be shown where characters Lara Croft (Angelina Jolie) and Alex Wex (Daniel Craig) are having a conversation. The students should identify which actor uses the American or British accent and give reasons.

C. INTRODUCTION TO PHONETICS

The teacher shows the IPA chart and explains the differences between Spanish and English phonemes. The teacher distributes a worksheet with the IPA chart and asks the students to identify the phonetic groups and underline each square (with different colours) depending on whether they are vowels, consonants or diphthongs.

¹ The created resource can be visited in the following link:
<https://www.slideshare.net/Virgblueredgreen/british-english-vs-american-pronunciation>

It is important that the teacher insists on their students practicing every day at home the reading-aloud activities, as well as recording themselves and comparing the audios with the original ones.

D. BASIC RULES TO STRESS AND PRACTICE

The teacher hands out explanatory worksheets to help the learners to keep following the activity. From these worksheets extracted sample sentences will be later transcribed by the students with the teacher's help. Furthermore, an explanation about the strong and weak forms of some basics words will be provided by the teacher.

E. INITIATION TO PHONETICS TRANSCRIPTION

A sample of a paragraph transcription is shown at the IWB, while the students are requested to do a similar one at home. The teacher recommends to use from now onwards the online *Cambridge Free English Dictionary and Thesaurus* and *PhoTransEdit* sites (henceforth, CFEDT & PTE sites, respectively). The transcriptions will be always checked by the teacher in the next session. For the practice of strong and weak forms, the teacher will introduced a transcription task of some sentences by pronouncing aloud every sentence, inviting the learners to repeat them as many times as necessary. This technique can be alternated with another in which the teacher asks to each student to pronounce a sentence, helping them when necessary by correcting the words that were mispronounced.

F. LONG AND SHORT VOWELS IDENTIFICATION

This activity consists in the identification of the short and long vowels by means of a worksheet with the phonetic chart. The students have to use a different colour for each group of vowels. Then, the teacher gives a brief explanation about the pronunciation of the vowels with the help of the *BBC* videos, which can be found and downloaded from the *BBC Learning English* site. As the teacher is explaining this, there will be exercises of repetition of different words that include these vowels.

G. BASIC VOWELS: FRONT, CENTRAL AND BACK

With the help of Jones' vowel trapezium and combined with the Hickey's diagram (Figure 3.), the teacher explains the tongue positions of each group of vowels. This will help the students to differentiate the peculiarities of each vowel. In hindsight, front – central-back vowels will be explained and done sequentially in different sessions. This should be combined with transcription's tasks of words and sentences that will be later orally read and practice.

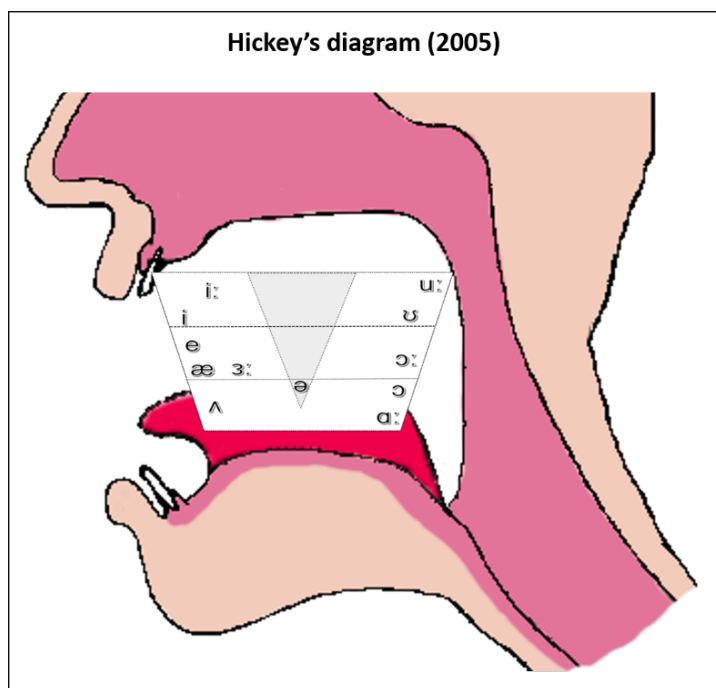


Figure 3. Vowels Diagram

H. SCREENING OF FILMS SCENES

In Imbernón's work (2016) is suggested a full list of films which can be showed during the lessons, according to the age of the learners. These films could be played with English subtitles to make the follow-up of the activity easier for students. The first time the film is played, the teacher can ask the students to pay attention to the scene context and the actors' pronunciation. The second time, the teacher could reproduce again the scene and stop in each spoken sentence, selecting each time a different student to repeat them. The teacher will correct their pronunciation when necessary.

I. FILMS' DRAMATIZATION

The students perform one of the scenes from the movies/series suggested by the teacher. These selected films/series have to use the standard accent. All films and series should be available for students at the school's English film library.

Therefore, the students grouped in pairs select a 60-second scene to perform. They will first copy the dialogues and then transcribe it with the help of the previous suggested sites. Then, the teacher checks the transcriptions and gives them back to students, who will start to practice the dialogues and play them. During the performances, the teacher will be taking notes about the words or sentences the students have difficulties with pronouncing them.

The main aim is to encourage the students to practice diction in Standard English Accent through a motivational and fun method as well as to serve as a training exercise for the final task.

J. SONGS IN STANDARD ENGLISH ACCENT

According to Imbernón (2016) ‘songs are good teaching resources as they have the ability to be easily remembered, at the same time the students are learning pronunciation, new words and English expressions’(p.47). Hence, for a better practice and acquisition of RP, it is strongly recommended for teachers to select songs that use the standard accent. Some possible activities to work with can be to make up verses from any song, the creation of a video clip or a karaoke.

K. DUBBING SERIES/FILM SCENES

The students are in pairs and the teacher asks them to choose their favourite American film/series. Once chosen the movie, the students select a 60-second scene and copy the dialogue of the characters, transcribing them later. Then, they practice their dialogues and record their voices by playing their roles in the RP accent. With the help of the movie editing software *Pinnacle Studio*, will allowed students to change the original audio file for the new one, and uploaded it on the Class *Wiki*. The teacher will be assessing the pronunciation of the students bearing in mind the use of the accent, rhythm and intonation.

L. END OF TERM TEST

At the end of the first and second terms, a test will be performed to check the contents that students have learned and to identify if a reinforcement is needed. The test consist in: transcribing and reading aloud some basic words, and reading aloud a small text. The teacher can provide the students with small wordlist of the most frequent ones.

M. BASIC SIBILANTS CONSONANTS

The teacher starts to work with the students the basic pair /s/-/z/, then the group /ʃ/-/ʒ/, and eventually the pair /tʃ/-/dʒ/. This activity should be worked as a drill, repeating the words that include these sounds, giving examples to apply the new rules and practicing them with exercises.

N. CONNECTING WORDS PHENOMENON

In this activity the teacher explains the different phenomena (linking, elision and assimilation) with the help of a diagram (Figure 4.). Later, some fragments extracted from the classical works that the students have been working with are handed out. Therefore, the students are asked to identify the distinct phenomena and to read them aloud applying the rules.

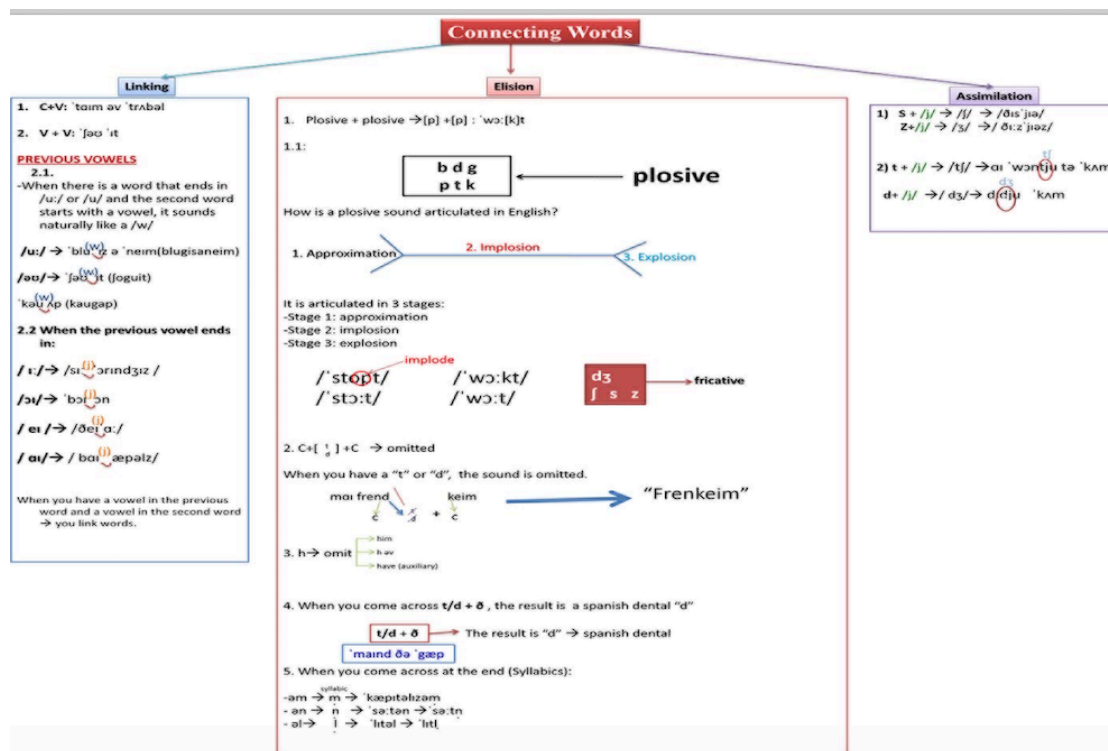


Figure 4. Connecting Words Diagram

O. MAKING A PODCAST

The purpose of this activity is to propose that students (grouped in pairs) invent a piece of news and narrate it as if they were a speaker from the BBC Radio. Therefore, an example of an original radio programme will be presented and analyzed. Then, the students write a scripted dialogue, which could be transcribed with the help of *CFEDT & PTE* sites. After the rehearsals, they record their podcast by using a free voice recording software (e.g. *Audicity 1.3*) and upload it on both *iVoox* site and the *Class Wiki*.

P. DRAMA FROM A GENUINE FILM/SERIES SCRIPT

The teacher chooses an episode from a BBC series and distributes the scenes into each group to perform them. The original scripts can be found on the *Writers Room-BBC* site. This activity facilitates the students to start to work with real scripts by practicing the RP in the same way as actors do in real life. The teacher will act as a guide and help with their pronunciation, by encouraging and motivating them.

Q. EXPLANATION OF THE FINAL TASK: SCRIPT EXPLANATION AND ORGANIZATION OF THE GROUPS

For the production of the final project, the teacher will explain the planning of the forthcoming sessions. Previously, the teacher will have explained how to write a script with the help of a *Prezi* presentation². Then, the teacher will organize heterogeneous groups of six students. These groups will be also established and kept for the elaboration of the storyboards, filming and editing in the Visual Arts subject. Once this point becomes clear, the students will be asked to think of an idea for their short film with the basic structure: beginning, middle and end. The idea will be first informed to the teacher of Visual Arts, so that the students get technical suggestions and guidance. Once the ideas have been approved by the Arts teacher, they will be reported to the English teacher.

For the groups from 1st-2nd ESO, it will be suggested that they can choose between two options: either the making of a spot or to invent a story. Conversely, in 3rd-4th ESO, the choice between inventing a story and adapting a book into a short film will be proposed.

R. MAKING A SCRIPT AND STORYBOARDS FOR THE SHORT FILM

The students create a script for the short film. To facilitate the teamwork among students, Google Docs will be used. Once the screenplays are concluded, the teacher will revise them. Meanwhile, the students will be preparing the storyboards. Having finished the checking of the script, the students transcribe the dialogues with the help of *CFEDT* & *PTE* sites, with a word limit between 800-1500 words for the transcription.

The main focus here is that the students apply what they have learnt about the basic rules of pronunciation and use the phonetic transcription as a helping resource.

S. SHOOTING THE SCENES AND EDITING

The students film and edit the scenes during the hours of both English and Visual Arts. The runtime of each short film will be adapted to the level of the students—15 minutes for 1st-2nd ESO and 30 minutes for 3rd-4th ESO. During the filming of the short film, the teacher will act as a guide, supervising the work of the students and clearing up any doubts of pronunciation.

T. FINAL SHORT FILM AND VOTING PROCESS

In June, all the final short films will be shown, uploaded on *YouTube* and embedded on the Class *Wiki*. The students will watch their own productions and their peers will vote for the best short film in the class. Thereupon, the teacher will evaluate the pronunciation of the students, both in process and final product—the short films. Having done this, each group will be informed about the strengths (e.g. expressions and vocabulary used, freshness of the short film and so on) and weaknesses (e.g.

² It can be found in the following link: <https://prezi.com/jwwmbdjmbdv/how-to-write-a-script-for-a-short-movie/>

possible pronunciation mistakes, oral spelling, etc.) made. All the pronunciation mistakes made by the students will be globally worked in the classroom.

U. ASSESSMENT OF THE STUDENTS' PROGRESS AND THE INNOVATIVE EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

To check the progress made by students throughout the course, the learners will be required to read the same script fragment that was read in the pre-test, recording their voice again. The teacher will compare the pre-test's audio files with the post-test's. These results will be taken into account in order to continue improving their pronunciation the next year's course and to see if the aims of the project have been achieved.

CONCLUSION

This paper has proposed an educational innovative project for EFL teachers which, in its implementation, will set the basis of pronunciation, rhythm, intonation and accent in secondary learners. By implementing this project, those learners will be able to perfectly communicate and know intuitively the pronunciation of new words never seen before, and eventually, to communicate with native speakers in a confident, intuitive and effective way.

This project is feasible to be implemented, as there would be a strong link of collaboration between two departments (English and Visual Arts). Besides, this project would perfectly accomplish its main aim: to improve the English pronunciation in secondary students, to a certain degree. Likewise, it would achieve one of the objectives from the actual Spanish educational law (LOMCE), which is to foster the use of oral communication. In this case, it will mean the improvement of diction while students are learning new contents (such as new expressions, patterns, or vocabulary). Moreover, the design of the project has been created in a flexible and progressive method, as it has been conceived to be carried out throughout the academic course, without adding stress to students or to teachers and their syllabuses. Thanks to the use of ICT resources (frequently used in students' daily lives) and cinema, it entails the creation of a ludic and enjoyable atmosphere for the learners, where they will develop the oral language in a real and familiar context, which teenagers tend to reproduce.

Some limitations that could be found in this experience might be the time and some technical difficulties that could arise. In any case, the secret for success in this project is to have an open-minded approach and to repeat it year after year, motivating in advanced levels to discover new informal expressions and vocabulary used in English-speaking countries. Needless to say that, as the students are improving their English pronunciation, this project enhances social values, such as team work, cooperation, tolerance towards the diversity of opinions, integration and the development of creativity. Furthermore, the students will foster their critical skills, as they have to select their own information. Hence, towards the future development of this project, it is strongly recommended further research on the data collection and on how to adapt this project to the different educational needs.

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