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RFC: ATI120618V12

Revista Dilemas Contemporáneos: Educación, Política y Valores.

<http://www.dilemascontemporaneoseduccionpoliticayvalores.com/>

Año: IX

Número: Edición Especial.

Artículo no.:28

Período: Octubre, 2021

TÍTULO: Diagnóstico fonético de estudiantes de fonética y fonológica de la Licenciatura en Idiomas.

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RESUMEN: Este estudio se llevó a cabo con estudiantes universitarios de la materia de fonética y fonología de la Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, ciclo escolar 2019-2020. El objetivo fue demostrar los fonemas con los cuales los alumnos han progresado con dificultad y enfatizar los que han adquirido correctamente. La muestra fue tomada con tres ejercicios prácticos; escuchar fonemas, asociar el fonema correspondiente a una letra, y leer extractos de una conversación. Los resultados demuestran que las vocales y diptongos no fueron bien pronunciados al igual que algunas consonantes. Otro hallazgo importante fue que los maestros utilizan significativamente en el aula libros, hojas de trabajo y ejercicios gramaticales para brindar a los alumnos una exposición auténtica al idioma.

PALABRAS CLAVES: fonética, fonología, fonemas, homófonos, diptongos.

TITLE: Phonetic diagnostic of phonetic and phonology students in the BA in languages at Universidad Juárez.

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ABSTRACT: This study was carried out with university students in the subject of phonetics and phonology at the Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco, school year 2019-2020. The objective was to demonstrate the phonemes with which the students have progressed with difficulty and to emphasize those that they have acquired correctly. The sample was taken with three practical exercises; listen to phonemes, associate the phoneme corresponding to a letter, and read excerpts from a conversation. The results show that the vowels and diphthongs were not pronounced as well as some consonants. Another important finding was that teachers use books, worksheets, and grammar exercises significantly in the classroom to provide students with authentic exposure to the language.

KEY WORDS: phonetics, phonology, phonemes, homophones, diphthongs.

INTRODUCTION.

English has become the most spoken language in the world. It is considered a *lingua franca*, where two speakers with different mother tongues use English as the language of communication. It is the language of business, technology, education, entertainment and health; for that reason, the number of speakers is increasing. “English is the dominant language of three G7 nations (USA, UK and Canada), and British legacy has given it a global footprint” (Chan 2016).

Having said that, a need of learning English has emerged among early childhood and adulthood learners, causing English become their second language learnt at school.

Learning a language requires the development of different abilities, such as oral and written comprehension, and written and oral production. Still, this last is the one that remains the underemphasized in the classroom. It is an ability that only in the phonetics and phonology subject is seen. The low exposure to the inquiry and development of phonemes and phonology, turns into an obstacle to students when using the language, making them feel unconfident with their pronunciation.

Indeed, a good pronunciation makes people understand the message and communicate better, without it, the message we want to transmit would be different to the receptor.

Knowing the pronunciation of a SL is basic to speak in that language and to understand native people of it. If the pronunciation is correct, there won't be obstacles in communication and this will be fluent. The native won't pay a constant attention to understand what the interlocutor tries to communicate nor he won't have to ask repetitions or explanations of the message (Bartolí 2005 p.4) *Translation from the author.*

Pronunciation demonstrates how knowledgeable we are about the language. It involves aspects like record, intonation, grammar, listening and pronunciation. "Phonology cannot be dissociated from the rest of language and that it is as important as a contributor to the four skills as vocabulary and structure" (Darcy 2018 p.1). To add more, there is a phonetic alphabet which shows the symbols of sounds in English this help students to pronounce the words better.

Nevertheless, if there is not a constant exposure, learners would internalize pronunciation as their mother tongue. There are still some students that cannot differentiate the symbols /θ/, /t/, /ð/, pronouncing them as their mother tongue Spanish /t/. Besides, another problem students face are vowels. In Spanish, students learnt five different vowel sounds whereas English has gotten 12 different vowel sounds including diphthongs.

This research aimed to analyze the phonetics symbols that students find more difficult to produce orally and written and comprehension.

DEVELOPMENT.

Methodology.

This analysis was done in a mixed method research with emphasis on qualitative data. It is a non-experimental research where 27 students participated and were picked out taking into consideration

that they were enrolled in the 5th semester and were taking pre-intermediate English subject in BA in Languages at Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco in the school year 2019-2020.

The data was taken using a test made by the author divided in two parts; open questions to have a general idea about the content they have learnt in class, the topics they find more difficult to learn, to know if their pronunciation has improved, which are the phonological components for a good pronunciation and what are the strategies to improve the pronunciation.

The second part were practical exercises that measured oral, written and listening phonetic and phonological skills. It had three practical exercises. The first exercise was listening comprehension. Students listened seven pair of sentences, both containing homophones then, they were asked to write them in a chart. In the second exercise, students were given 32 words which had one or two letters in bold, they were asked to associate those letters into the correct phonetic symbol in a chart. The last exercise, was a conversation which ten students read it individually.

The first exercise was taken from the book “English pronunciation in Use book elementary” page 137 exercise E8. The second exercise was made by the author focusing on the phonemes students have had more difficulties to produce. The third exercise was also taken from the same book exercise D28.

In the first question, students were asked what were the topics they have worked during the semester. 70% mentioned consonants, 74% said vowels, 22% answered place of articulation and a 14% said diphthongs. Therefore, students might have known most of the consonants and vowels provided in the second part of the test.

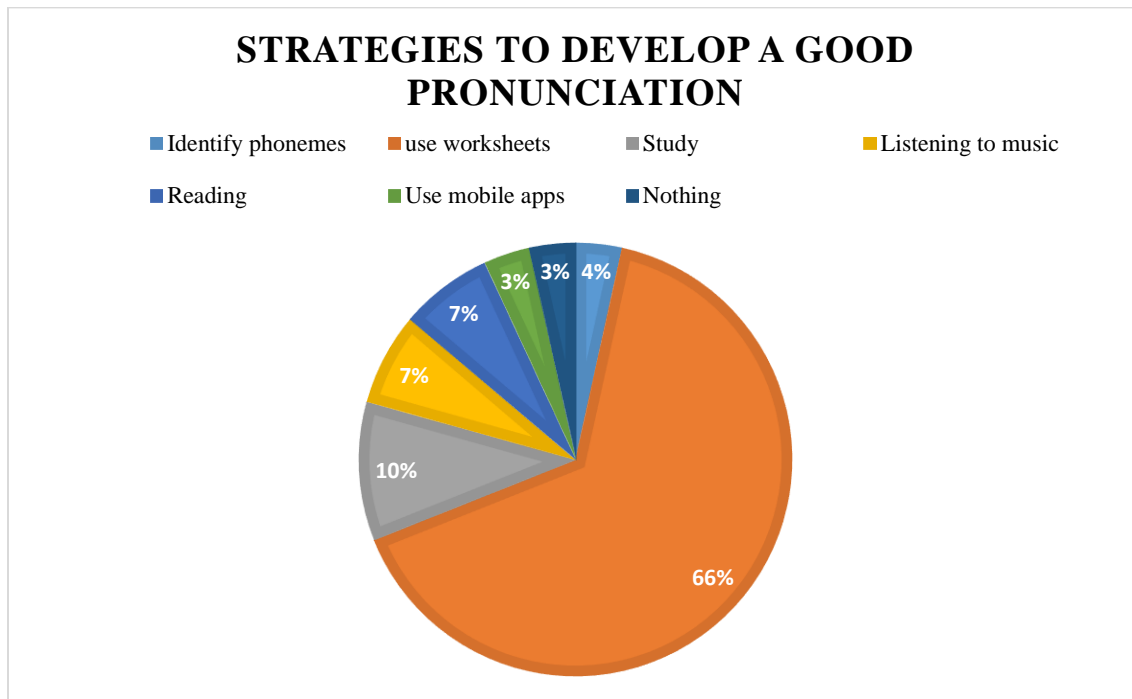
To sustain that, in the second question, students wrote the topics in a scale of which were found as the most difficult to learn to the easiest one. The results were that vowels and phonetic transcriptions were the most difficult topics in the class. However, for students the easiest topics to learnt were consonants and vowels.

In question number three, the question asked was if their pronunciation has improved during the course; significantly, moderately, almost nothing or nothing. 47% of students said that their pronunciation has improved significantly, whereas a 53% said almost nothing.

After that, in question number four, students described the correct components they need for a good pronunciation. Some of them mentioned; consonants, vowels, diphthongs, and to know the place of articulation of those phonemes.

In the last question, students were asked the strategies they consider will help to improve their pronunciation; 66% of the answers correspond to do more practical exercises such as worksheets or book exercises, followed by a 10% that suggest study more by their own, the 7% said that they must read more as well as listening to music, a 3% answered that using mobile apps can help. The results are shown in figure 1.

Figure 1. Strategies students suggest can improve their pronunciation.



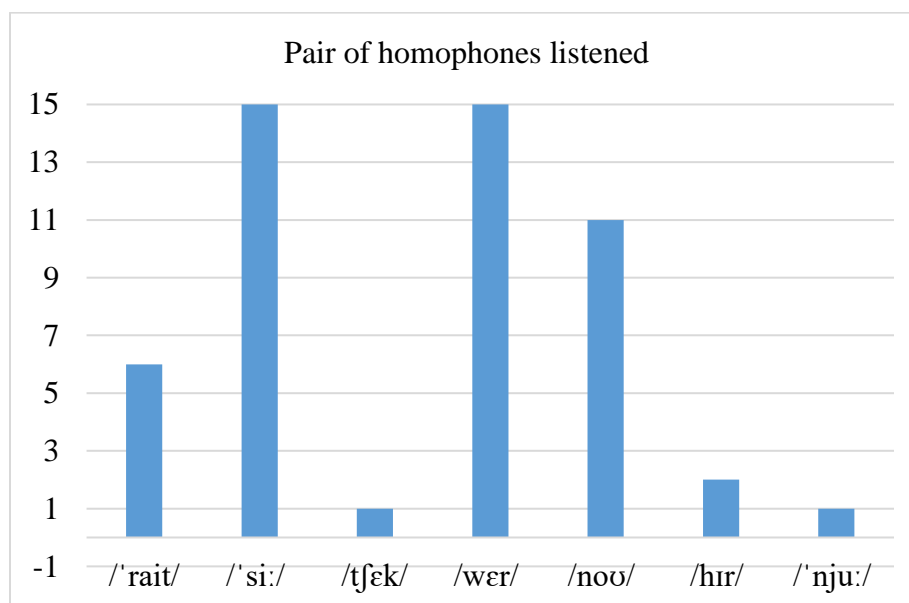
Source: by the author.

Second part of the test: practical exercises.

The second part of the test was to detect the phonemes students are producing orally and written as well as those which they trouble with. This part was made of three practical exercises; identify homophones, identify a phonetic symbol in a word and reading sentences.

The first exercise was associated with oral comprehension where students differentiated homophones. Students listened to two phrases that contain a homophone, they wrote the pair of homophones into a chart. A total of seven pairs of homophones were listened which means, 14 words in total. Correct answers were taken into consideration if students could distinguish both words. Figure 2 shows the phonetic transcription of the homophones students listened to.

Figure 2. Pair of homophones listened.



Source: by the author.

The pair of homophones most identified by 15 students were *where* and *wear* with the phonetic transcription /wɛr/ also, 15 students could write both words; *see* and *sea* with the phonetic transcription /'si:/, 11 students identified the words *know* and *no* represented by /nou/. In contrast, two students

recognized the words with the homophones *hear* and *here*. The pair of homophones that were just once identified *check* and *cheque* /tʃɛk/ and /noʊ/ in *new* and *knew*.

Despite the pair of homophones considered, individual words were also counted. The findings showed a big difference between recognizing one word and the two of them. Six students were able to write the pair of the phoneme /aɪ/ versus 12 students that could write at least one word. Another large number of students differentiated the phoneme /tʃ/ where 20 of them wrote one of the two words.

In the second exercise, students aimed to recognize the phonetic transcription of a letter. They were given 32 words with one or two letters in bold, that letter must be associated to a phonetic symbol, the symbols were written in a column of a chart, 11 symbols were taken into account; seven diphthongs and four consonants. In total each symbol must have three words written down. It was expected that the 27 students associated the three words with the correct symbol. Chart 1 refers to the exercise students answered and figure 3 shows the phonetic symbols and the number of words out of 81 that students wrote correctly.

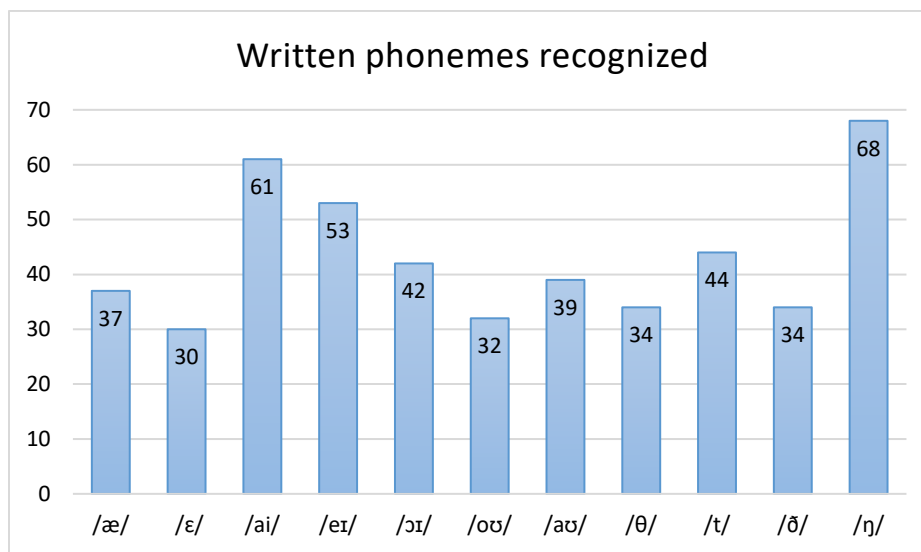
Chart 1. From the words provided, you are given 33 words that contain one letter in bold, place them in the correct phonetic symbol that represent that letter.

/æ/	/ɛ/	/aɪ/	/eɪ/	/ɔɪ/	/oʊ/	/aʊ/	/θ/	/t/	/ð/	/ŋ/

now -Hair – May – so – mats – Rang - noise – Wear – day – maths – Thing - why - this – die – Woke – three – tree – Bad – Coat – Air – Hat – both- choice – boat – fowl- My – way – boiler – mouth- other- mother- singer.

Source: by the author.

Figure 3. Written phonemes recognized.



Source: by the author.

The results were that students could identify the phonemes /ŋ/ and /ai/ the most, with 68 and 61 respectively. The /t/ got 44 correct words against /θ/ and /ð/ with 34 each. The most difficult diphthong to identify was /eə/ with 30 correct answers, similar to /aʊ/ with 34 of the totals of words.

In the last exercise, ten students were selected randomly to read pieces of conversations, this last exercise was recorded. The letters in bold are the ones analyzed; emphasizing the representations of the letter *t*, *o*, and *u*. Text 1 shows the conversation students read, and figure 4 the findings.

Text 1. Conversation students read.

Part III (students selected). Read the following pieces of conversation. (You will be recorded).

A: Do **you** **think** there's life on Mars? B: Maybe.

A: **This** **house** is **two** **hundred** years old. B: Is it?

A: Can I **borrow** **your** pen? B: Of **course**!

A: My great-grand**father** was a **famous** artist. B: Really?

A: Do you **think** it's going to rain? B: Definitely.

Source: by the author.

Students showed self-confidence and fluency while reading it, vowels and some diphthongs were well pronounced. For instance, the letter *t* at the beginning of the words; *two* and *this* with the phonetic transcription of /t/ and /ð/ the ten students articulated both symbols correctly. However, in the word *father*, the middle *t* /ð/, 7 students could pronounce /ð/ while the rest pronounced /t/, and *think* using the symbol /θ/ was pronounced by 3 students, whereas the 7 students pronounced /t/.

Following with the letter *o* that has different sounds as in the words *borrow*, *your* and *course*, 7 students pronounced the symbol /ɒ/ in the word *borrow* and 6 students the symbol /ə/ in the word *your*, half of the student pronounce /ɔ:/ in the word *course*, whereas the other students that couldn't articulate /ɒ/, /ə/ and /ɔ:/ pronounced the *o* as their mother tongue Spanish.

Last, the representation of the letter *u* has gotten different sounds as in the words *you*, *house*, *hundred*, and *famous*, the ten students pronounced the word *house* with the correct phoneme represented by the *o*, /ʌʊ/, 7 of the students pronounce the phoneme /ə/ in the word *famous*, whereas a little number of students could pronounce the phonemes of /u:/ represented in the *o* in the word *you* and /ʌ/ in the word *hundred*. The representation of *u* that wasn't pronounced as their phonetic transcription were pronounced as in Spanish.

CONCLUSIONS.

According to the results, the phonemes /θ/ and /ð/ were the lowest recognized in the three exercises; homophones, phonemic transcription and orally, they were pronounced more as their mother tongue /t/ or /r/. Vowels, /ɛ/, /oo/, /ɒ/, /ə/ and /ɔ:/ had a similar pronunciation to the sound /a/ in Spanish as well as the phonemes /ʌ/ and /ɔ:/ that are not found in their mother tongue. In the other hand, the phonemes; /i:/, /ɪ/, /ai/ and /ei/ where the ones that students comprehend better in the three exercises. The fault of exposure to the language is forcing students to look for similarities and producing the words as they find fit. According to the answers from students in question number 6, they strongly believe that written exercises will help them to acquire the pronunciation of some phonemes rather

than oral exposure to it. It is remarkable that, teachers continue working grammar- worksheet- book in the classroom not only in the phonetic and phonology class but in the English class too.

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RECIBIDO: 10 de agosto del 2021.

APROBADO: 12 de septiembre del 2021.