



BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA

FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

**“ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS OF ELT STUDENTS
TOWARDS PRONUNCIATION AND ACCENTEDNESS”**

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“Attitudes and perceptions of ELT students towards pronunciation and accentedness”

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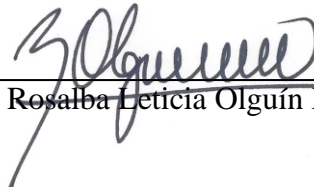
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Dedications

With great satisfaction and hope, I want to dedicate this project to my family for trusting me and accompanying me on this long and valuable journey.

To my mother, Irene, who with love and care forged a firm and smooth path for my clumsy and insecure feet.

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Abstract

Formerly, it was believed that getting a native accent was the goal of practicing pronunciation, later it was stated that learners should focus on more attainable goals that guarantee in first place, understanding. Since it is necessary to communicate and be understood, pronunciation plays a vital role in the process of L2 learning, it contributes to strengthen intelligibility and competence, which in turn can develop confidence, fluency, and communication skills. Although L2 students may agree that the concepts mentioned before are of essential importance, there may not be common perceptions about achieving a native accent. This research aims to explore LEI students experiences and thoughts about pronunciation and accent, and how they have influenced their expectations concerning pronunciation teaching, as well as their opinions about people who have an accent.

The research questions that guide this study are: 1. What are students' beliefs towards pronunciation learning? 2. What strategies do LEI students use to improve their pronunciation? 3. What are participants' opinions towards accented speech?

The present study adopted a qualitative approach that involved 2 participants from the Faculty of Languages of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla in an interview with 27 open ended questions. The interview was conducted online and recorded. Subsequently, participants' answers were transcribed and analysed. Analysis focused on their experiences, assumptions, strategies, and their pronunciation goals. Study findings reveal that participants coincide in two things only: that more speaking activities involving real situations during their LEI program are needed, and that authentic material for pronunciation practice is largely preferred. However, they completely differ in their views, opinions, and beliefs towards imitating an English native-like accent. These disagreements mark evident

differences in their pronunciation goals, strategies and assumptions about accented speech and English native accent, both as language learners and as future English language teachers.

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Chapter I:

Introduction

Learning a new language involves a set of rules and skills that must be developed to understand it and put it into daily and practical use. However, speaking has been considered one of the most difficult and challenging skills due to the pronunciation features that are difficult to follow for non-native speakers, due to the existence of phonemes that are non-existent in other languages, speech rate and accent variations, specifically.

Encountering these pronunciation difficulties, L2 learners try to compensate them by using sounds influenced by their mother tongue, leading their pronunciation to sound different from the standard variation. These variations whether in segmental or suprasegmental features lead to the perception of accentedness. Although the effects of non-native-like pronunciation on intelligibility are far from clear (Munro & Derwing, 1995), there is still a rejection towards non-native accent, which does not only involve accent itself, but the characteristics of the speaker; these include ethnicity, education, and social status, and depending on how native speakers perceive these characteristics, they can react in different ways. For instance, after analysing and discussing the status of Received Pronunciation (RP) in England, Abercrombie (1991, as cited in Collins & Mess, 2013) declares: “People are evaluated, not according to their achievements and abilities, but according to their accent” (p. 248).

Although for some specialists achieving a native accent is not impossible but neither important, some learners try not only to obtain a quality pronunciation; they usually tend to imitate a native accent to prove language proficiency. Kenworthy (1987) proposes that even when a native accent is not essential, learners could try to change their way of speaking when

they notice that their pronunciation is not identical to that of native speakers. Besides, Brown (1990) stated, “it is important to realize that the notion ‘the same sound’ is an abstract notion and not one can be physically demonstrated (p. 66). Nonetheless, James (2010) reflects that for some learners, to achieve a native-like accent is the aim of studying pronunciation.

Without a correct pronunciation, the speaker does not only affect himself but affects the environment in which the speaker is involved. If the construction of meaning through spoken language is altered, there is no comprehension, there is no mutual exchange of construction and interpretation of utterances which may lead the speaker to avoid communicative experiences. Unintelligible speech will make learners’ attempts at conversing frustrating and unpleasant for both them and their listeners (Kenworthy, 1987).

On the other hand, considering the current status of English, non-native speakers of the language tend to interact more frequently with other non-native speakers, speakers who have not necessarily adopted a natively like accent. Considering this scenario, Jenkins (2000) noted that speakers could come to feel a greater pressure to converge phonologically and guarantee the understanding of both, sender, and receiver, thereby explaining that making the appropriate pronunciation adjustments is necessary to converge in communicative situations.

For those reasons, the pronunciation of a language is an essential part of the acquisition process, and it must be taken seriously. Additionally, Hirci (2019) concluded that an excellent pronunciation is, with no doubt, necessary for language professionals. It is relevant to learn the use of individual sounds, vowels, and consonants, as well as their combination and consider the aspects of rhythm, stress, intonation, among other features, since all of them send information about the intentions of the speaker and what type of answer is expected.

Although every language has a phonetic system and there are always common features in pronunciation of sounds, it is very important to reflect about some aspects that lead to sound variation and consider that it is very difficult to produce a sound the same way every time (Brown, 1990). For some people, it could be easier to develop an intelligible pronunciation because they are sensible to sound variation and have the ability to discriminate sounds, that is, they have “the aptitude of oral mimicry” (Kenworthy, 1987). However, this aptitude may be subject to some variables like the environment and time of exposure where the language is spoken.

1.1 Statement of the problem

As future English teachers, LEI students need an intelligible pronunciation to be understood and not just that, the need to be able to transfer that knowledge. Although extensive research has been done about pronunciation teaching and its importance, it has suffered an historical exclusion from the classroom (Isaacs, 2009), or at least it has not received the proper attention.

Many factors are involved in this situation, in which common beliefs and assumptions influenced by misunderstandings, prejudices or resistance to traditional teaching have left a blank space about how to teach pronunciation and why. Some of these assumptions can include the following: intonation is difficult to teach, teaching pronunciation is not appropriate at the beginning of the L2 learning, pronunciation is only developed through practice, and pronunciation instruction is the same as accent reduction, (Grant, 2014). All these beliefs, in addition to the varied methods to teach pronunciation, whether directed to accent reduction or intelligible pronunciation, as well as factors like being in an EFL context, and cultural, physiological, and cognitive factors, have had an effect on teachers and students

who specialize in languages. Depending on how they perceive all these assumptions, together with their own experiences, they have created varied opinions and justifications on how to approach pronunciation teaching and the role of accent in their teaching and learning.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore LEI students experiences and thoughts about pronunciation and accent, and how they have influenced their expectations concerning pronunciation teaching, as well as their opinions about people who have an accent.

1.3 Specific objectives

- To explore some of the students' strategies to improve pronunciation.
- To explore some of the students' problems while working on improving pronunciation.
- To explore the different beliefs towards native accent and people who have an accent.

1.4 Research questions

1. What are students' beliefs towards pronunciation learning?
2. What strategies do LEI students use to improve their pronunciation?
3. What are participants' opinions towards accented speech?

1.5 Methodology

For this study, a qualitative research method was applied to explore different points of view, personal perceptions and experiences which may vary according to the context, as well as participant's personality. Qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning in context and

requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data (Merriam, 2009). In this way, a Google form, and an interview with 27 open-ended questions were applied to two students from the English Language Teaching Bachelor's degree of Faculty of Languages of the *Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla*, who are in the process of getting their official degree but are currently working as teachers.

1.6 Significance of the study

This project tries to visualize how various situations influence the opinions of LEI students towards pronunciation and native accent, such as the context in which their learning takes place, teachers, teaching methods, culture and perhaps some prejudices or stereotypes. It considers not only their goals, what and how they teach or plan to teach, but also investigate the reasons they have for it. Therefore, it offers future undergraduate students an overview of why participants may or not pursue achieving a native English accent, how they perceive non-native speakers of English such as their own teachers, and what attitudes and beliefs they have about accented speech. Additionally, it is hoped that LEI students could find a balance point between their own English language learning expectations and external factors. Finally, this project is relevant because it highlights the complexity of pronunciation and its teaching, as well as its effect on the communication process. This directly addresses the possible challenges and professional development processes that LEI students face when improving their pronunciation, and their own pronunciation teaching approach and techniques.

1.7 Summary of the chapter

This chapter offered a general overview related to the importance of pronunciation, the problems that may arise due to the lack of training, its effect on interaction between speakers, as well as some common perceptions about accent. In addition, the description of the problem, the main objectives and research questions that will guide this research were introduced. The next chapter will present the theory that arises from the components introduced in this chapter, the process of communication, pronunciation, pronunciation teaching, sound perception, the role of native accent and foreign accent, and its linkage with culture and identity. All these components will be discussed to support this research.

Chapter II:

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the theoretical fundamentals that are needed to understand and will support this research are presented, starting from general but essential concepts to interact in speaking situations like competence and performance, concepts involving proficiency; the elements that constitute pronunciation and how its teaching has taken place. Then, perceptions towards accent, and its historical and social conceptions that lead to language identity and language prestige are discussed. Finally, the role of motivation and pronunciation strategies are introduced and described.

2.2 Communicative Competence

Authors have different opinions about what communicative competence involves. The term was originally introduced by Noam Chomsky in 1965 to describe the process by which the speaker internalizes a system of grammar rules of a language and can create and understand many statements. Peterwagner (2005) explains that Chomsky's perception of competence is like a psychological function, where the speaker deals with personal knowledge and use of language, based on grammar rules and how to apply these rules to create syntactically correct sentences.

However, the definition of Chomsky turned out to be narrow. Firstly, it only refers to the form of language, and secondly there is no space for linguistic variations. In fact, this definition relies overly on grammar, on how to produce a correct sentence considering a system of rules which constitute a semantic content. Peterwagner (2005) analysed that this

definition implies a “homogeneous language community [who] have perfect command of their native tongue” (p.10), as well as the situation where the speaker and the hearer interact, so these grammatically correct sentences are unaffected by the environment or conditions that lead to distraction, hesitation, forgetting a word, among others.

Nevertheless, the term *performance* was also introduced by Chomsky to better explain the difference between the knowledge of the grammar rules and being able to participate and interact in situations using these forms; it deals with both, the production and comprehension of language in concrete situations. Although with the insertion of performance, Chomsky tried to add the social dimension of language, authors conclude that it is for him a defective regard, as any variation in *competence* is labelled as mistake as he does not consider hesitations, for example, part of the natural use of language.

On the other hand, Hymes (1972) argued that it was not sufficient to produce correct sentences but to insert these sentences in an acceptable situation. Bonvillain (2011) and Hymes (1972) agree that communicative competence is acquired and developed through social interaction where, rather than being knowledge of linguistic forms, this type of competence adds the pragmatic dimension of ability to use these forms appropriately in context. Moreover, the authors Campbell and Wales (1970) stress that knowing grammar is not enough, and note the value of context in communicative situations, “the degree to which a person’s production or understanding of the language is appropriate to the context in which it takes place is even more important than its grammaticality” (p.249).

Communicative competence has had a significant impact on linguistics and even more the need to specify the components involved in it. In 1980, the linguists Michael Canale

and Merrill Swain developed a model that includes the use, knowledge, and proficiency of the language, they distinguished three main competencies: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Three years later, Canale added the discourse competence.

Communicative competence	
Grammatical competence	The knowledge of grammar, morphological and syntactical rules, semantics and phonetics
Sociolinguistic competence	Ability to insert correct utterances, not only grammatically but relevant, considering the purpose of interaction, people involved, and the norms of conversation
Strategic competence	Verbal or non-verbal strategies applied to compensate any limitations in the process of communication, such as: paraphrasing, hesitation, repetition, body language
Discourse competence	Refers to the way words, grammar and meaning are combined, to use them appropriately and, produce or interpret a message from different styles

Table 2.1: Communicative competence (based on Canale and Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983)

This model sees communication as a complex process where the four competencies interact and arise in the natural use of language. The authors Canale and Swain (1980) do not only consider the actual knowledge and understanding of grammar, syntax, and semantics. They also consider the behaviour and resources the speaker might apply to keep this act of communication, which do not necessarily imply the use of spoken language, but body language too.

Furthermore, Saville-Troike (2006) identifies 5 domains that are all related to communicate appropriately: language knowledge or linguistic competence (like grammar, vocabulary, syntax, etc.), cultural knowledge, content, context, and language use. The author explains that what is written or spoken should fulfil a purpose established by the context,

culture and people, so that the message transmitted takes on relevance and significant value. (Saville-Troike, 2006). In this way, like Hymes, (1972) and Bonvillain (2011), the importance of context is recognized and highlighted.

In teaching, communicative competence has been applied in small classes based on the interaction between learners trying to focus on specific methodological proposals such as content-based instruction, in which students focus their attention to develop knowledge of an interesting topic using only their target language. Through content-based instruction, students also develop their listening and speaking abilities in a more natural environment, parting from the principle that language is better acquired and developed through meaningful situations. Canale and Swain (1980) explain that “exposure to realistic communication situations is crucial if communicative competence is leading to communicative confidence (p. 28).

To effectively apply the communicative competence in teaching, the authors Canale & Swain (1980) postulate five principles. First, it must contemplate at least, 3 competencies: grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic. In this way the authors emphasize “there is no strong theoretical or empirical motivation for the view that grammatical competence is any more or less crucial to successful communication” (p. 27) than the rest of the competencies involved in learning a language. Second, a communicative approach “must be based on and respond to learners’ communication needs” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 27). It is important to teach learners through real situations, and develop useful phrases of how to respond, all this by considering the level of proficiency and the variation of language the learner would be mostly in contact with.

Third, challenge students with communicative situations in which they apply new vocabulary and respond in different ways increasing complexity. These situations give them the opportunity to interact with highly competent speakers, and it would help students not only to assess their proficiency, but particularly their competence and performance. The fourth principle relates to the use of language from the application of grammar rules, the authors explain how certain features of the grammatical code can be presented in the context of more universal aspects. Finally, the fifth principle explains that learners should be taught about culture and social aspects belonging to a language, so they can make inferences about social conventions and reconsider the values which differ from the L1.

2.2.1 Oral communication

Oral communication refers to the listening and speaking skills needed to keep a verbal conversation between two or more people through one language. Its purpose is to exchange ideas, feelings, thoughts, and opinions in contexts such as social, political, or scientific, among others. To reach this purpose, there are some factors involved, for example, the quality of pronunciation which vary from the time of exposure to the ability of imitating sounds and how an individual perceives sounds and how they are produced. There are learners who do not pay attention to pronunciation, but also, they are not aware that the way they speak results in difficulty, irritation, or misunderstanding for the listener (Kenworthy, 1987) and so, affecting the process of communication by confusing words and creating wrong meanings.

Therefore, after having an unpleasant experience with speaking and pronunciation, this may produce reluctance to speak, affecting motivation. Even when “success depends not only on learners possessing motivation from within” (Allen, 2013, p. 47), Kenworthy

(1987) explains, “in many studies of attitude and motivation in language learning, it has been shown that those learners who show positive feelings towards the speakers of the new language tend to develop more accurate, native-like accents” (p. 8).

Knowing that English is a lingua franca and its importance at work or at academic places, “linguistic oral competence plays a vital role in attaining effective communication” (Rico, 2016, p.3533). For that reason, students should be encouraged and be given the opportunities to speak during their classes as much as possible, particularly when teaching a foreign language, where the input of the target language is almost absent outside classrooms. Avoiding speaking interactions keeps learners in a comfortable zone, accumulating time after time more difficulties to develop pronunciation and confidence.

Morley (1994) stated, “the development of competence in oral communication figures importantly in the global dynamic of L2 proficiency “(p. 73), as well as multi-sensory activity like eye contact, facial expressions, body language, tempo pauses, voice quality changes and pitch variation. They all play a significant role in effective communication, particularly when communicating in a second language. Improving all these aspects of oral communication will impact on literacy and so, in the perception and sense of the world.

The comprehension of a message starts with the recognition of phonetic sounds, then the morphological structure and recognition of singular or plural, the same happens with the next word until you get a whole sentence and by applying semantics and pragmatics, one can decipher a message. However, a problem for the foreign language learner remains at the phonetic level. Smith (2005) concludes that most English language

learners have problems with the pronunciation of English after analysing the non-existing phonemes of English in other languages like German or Japanese, as well as the consonant clusters like *ngths* or *spl* whose pronunciation can be challenging. Though Brown (1990), declared, “you do need to be able to use all the phonetic cues that a native speaker takes for granted” (p. 54), this could point out that native speakers are not aware of the difficulty of the pronunciation of their own language, and how certain phonemes can be mispronounced.

From the moment someone starts speaking, it is natural for human to seek for meaning which is possible to reach out through all that it is not being said but that sends a lot of information, like the context, background, age, among others, to achieve an interpretation. Even then, you still need to be able to monitor the incoming acoustic signal so that you know which of your predictions is being confirmed and which is not, (Brown, 1990).

2.3 Overview of English as a Lingua Franca

The development and expansion of globalization lead to “growing needs of sharing and disseminating knowledge in the twentieth century, a language for communication to take place” (Björkman, 2013, p. 3). Due to the dominance of the British Empire, the rise of the USA (United States of America) economy, its inclusion and influence in media, cinema, music, technology, science, etc., English has been positioned as the language for global communication and it makes clear its importance in education. English programs have been designed and implemented as part of scholar education, such as *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB)* in Mexico and the implementation of a specific methodology to improve listening and speaking skills. For example, the *Communicative Language*

Teaching implemented in Japan looked for the development of 'practical communication abilities' and pronunciation of the students to achieve fruitful conversations.

Students in Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany agree on the global status of English in concordance with countries like Turkey, Egypt, Vietnam and Japan who showed almost unanimous agreement on the importance of learning English (Smith, 2005). Nonetheless, this panorama has led to some disadvantages specially in the USA; while students in the European Union are learning more than two languages, and English must be taught by law in most of Latin America, The USA has a foreign language education defect, if English is the language of global communication, there is no need to learn a foreign language (Koyfman, 2018). Although the dominance of English did not start in the USA, its economic status and power in the world reinforce the idea of a superior country holding a superior language. Smith (2005) observes how humanity has exercised and justified their dominance through language:

During the colonisation of large parts of the world by European Powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries it was commonplace for the spin doctors of the time to advocate the supremacy of their language to help to justify the pillage of the colonised territories and the subjugation of their inhabitants. (p. 57)

Historical events such as the *Year of the Revolutions* or the end of the *II World War* have helped to position the United States as a country of power, stability, and freedom, even to develop the ideal of life that could only be achieved in the USA, under the American Dream name. At present, “a sector of American society takes the view that what

is good for America is good for the rest of the world, including the English language” (Smith, 2005, p. 56). This thought could be supported due to the dominion of the United States, its economy, and its position, but according to Goldman Sachs the GDP (Gross domestic product) in China will increase and will outpace the US (United States) economy becoming the new centre of the worldwide economy. The doubt is if English will be still the dominant language or if it will be replaced by Chinese.

2.4 English teaching

With the spread of English language as a lingua franca, countries like Mexico, have developed English programs to be in the curriculum for basic education. According to the *Programa Nacional de Inglés en Educación Básica (PNIEB)*, students from the 3rd grade of kindergarten to 3rd grade of secondary education will take the subject of English to obtain the knowledge to participate in oral and written language practices subjected to national and international parameters through specific competences (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2012).

Despite the plan and strategies to teach English, research carried out in 2017 by Cronquist and Fiszbein about learning English in Latin America, in most of these countries, teachers do not have the required level of proficiency to teach, and there are some whose level is below that of students. Besides, even when teachers must submit a language competence evaluation according to government policies, most of them do not have access to standardized international evaluations.

Traditionally, English is taught as a foreign language but outside the classroom students are surrounded by their mother tongue. This offers few opportunities to practice the

language and make progress, especially if there is not enough speaking practice and feedback due to the lack of time or materials to challenge students, as well as a work plan that adjusts to the level, needs and resources of students and teachers. Besides, in English programs there is specified the content for each grade, including, topic, grammar, vocabulary. However, they do not specify the pronunciation style or accent to be taught, this may create confusion among learners whose materials include content of the USA or The Great Britain, and although there could be a wide perception of accents that students might fit into, these are usually compared to those mentioned above. Despite of the challenges mentioned, there is still a struggle from the government to introduce English language teaching successfully.

2.4.1 English Pronunciation Teaching

Although teaching pronunciation has been analysed to offer a variety of techniques, assessment, tools and a syllabus design, its practice and efficiency inside the classroom still need more exploration and study. According to Foote, Holbty & Derwin, (2011) the challenges of teaching pronunciation rely on the fact that there is not enough training of L2 teachers to teach pronunciation, leading to a lack of confidence. Burri & Baker (2020) concluded that these are some factors that explain why pronunciation is less taught than other skills, like grammar and vocabulary.

On the other hand, Waniek-Klimczak (2018) observes that another problem related to pronunciation teaching is that there is not a clear direction of what to teach and for what purpose. The author explains that when grammar explanation takes place, there is a system of procedures which is accepted and it used as a reference, it usually starts with teaching simple sentences and gradually new elements are introduced to create more complex structures. However, when the space to teach pronunciation opens, it begins by showing the

sound system in English and from there, how to continue becomes diffuse. In addition to the persistence of the native-speaker model, which, although it may offer a goal it brings into question once more whether any variant should be considered incorrect.

Morley (1994) mentions that students and teachers generally assume that pronunciation can be improved only through disciplined practice of individual sounds, but this method does not seem to work very well and may be a factor by which pronunciation has a poor and short relationship in the process of learning a new language. “In normal English conversation, words are run together, and many kinds of contextual processes apply to change the pronunciation of words which would be pronounced in a different way in isolation” (Pennington, 1996, p.27). This statement could represent a great disadvantage to foreign learners who are usually taught pronunciation through isolated sounds and realize that pronunciation variations are closely linked to the context in which it occurs.

Schleppegrell and Bowman (1986) suggest that learners are likely to assimilate some features of native spoken language through listening activities because they get the interpretation of complex sentences rather than repeating isolated sounds, which is not ideal for teaching speaking. The authors observe that students may not be repeating correctly and instead of helping correct errors, repetition may only be reinforcing their mistakes.

This does not mean that isolated sounds should be neglected from formal teaching, because teaching pronunciation through isolated sounds has its advantages. For some specialists, teaching pronunciation should include, if not the whole English phonetic alphabet, at least the different sounds of the 5 vowels, just to increase awareness in students about the existence of more sounds for each vowel and not just relate one letter to one sound.

This might decrease the confusion considering, for example, that in Spanish there are only 5 vowel sounds or in Italian there are 7, contrary to English which has 12 vowel sounds.

2.4.1.1 Phonetic Transcription

Phonetic transcription (PT) is understood as the graphic representation of speech sounds of a language. There are different transcription systems and depending on the purpose one system can be more appropriate than other, as well as the type of transcription: impressionistic or systematic (Wells, 2006). Phonetic transcription could be very beneficial to recognize and practice the sounds of a language, particularly from languages that differ from the L1. For example, Irawan and Tampubolon (2020), acknowledge the need to put into practice PT to help students improve pronunciation and understand that English pronunciation is difficult since its spelling and pronunciation are not straightforward. Besides, Lintunen (2005), explains that learners who are accustomed to a ‘shallow orthography’ language like Spanish, Italian or Finnish are likely to benefit from Phonetic transcription when learning deep orthography languages like English, French or Chinese.

Traditionally, phonetic transcription is included in advanced foreign language teaching, and even when Wells (1996) reflects that those students who are aware of phonetic variations of a language can in turn improve their pronunciation, “its implementation depends on how effective teachers find this method” (Lintunen, 2005, p.1).

On the other hand, Jones (1998) analyses that even though phonetic transcriptions are advantageous, there are still some issues concerning its application. First, the need to engage in a world dominated by English as a lingua franca, or simply the historical development of the language has given way to a vast variety of ‘Englishes’, and not all of them can be

represented in the same way. The variation in pronunciation is likely to affect the representation of sounds, so here it is the importance to establish which English is intended to practice. A standard English could be the best option, but there is not such English labelled as standard, not worldwide, and symbols receive different values. Finally, the author postulates two principles for PT that must be explained by the transcriber to make an intelligible transcription: “(i) what sounds are meant by his symbols and (ii) what conventions are to be understood when he uses symbols in different phonetic contexts” (Jones, 1998, p. 29).

2.4.1.2 Elision

The *Oxford Dictionary of English* defines Elision as “the suppression of a vowel or syllable in pronouncing”, and they “also do show some correlation with the rate of delivery” (Cuttrenden, 2014, p. 320). Elisions seek to ease the pronunciation and so, create a smooth articulation of sounds, but it occurs under certain circumstances. For instance, Roach (2009) offers four situations for Elision: i) loss of weak vowel after p, t, k, like in *potato or tomato*, ii) weak vowel + n, l, r, *tonight and police*, iii) to avoid complex consonant clusters like in *scripts*, and iv) loss of final v in ‘of’ before consonants, *like lots of them* (p. 114). It can also happen when sounds from the same phonetic group are run together like *t* and *d*, both alveolar.

Historically, Elision was found in old English speech, particularly applied in weak vowels, also poems of that age have demonstrated Elision as a tool to ease pronunciation of words and so, keep the rhythm of verses (Minkova, 1991). Its application became more frequent after the tenth century with the acceleration of the speech tempo. Elision is found in all types of speech, but it is constantly found in colloquial casual conversations. The

simplification of words or phrases make native speakers' speech production been perceived as more rapid, particularly in longer utterances. Cuttenden (2014) states, “elision become more frequent as the rate of utterances increases” (p. 320). This could be confusing for non-natives whose ear is not accustomed to elision; Roach (2009) warns:

Producing elisions is something which foreign learners do not need to do, but it is important for them to be aware that when native speakers of English talk to each other, quite a number of phonemes that the foreigner might expect to hear are not actually pronounced” (p.113).

2.4.1.3 Assimilation

It is a process by which two neighbouring sounds become more alike in speech. The process could be explained when one sound is influenced by a close sound which helps to anticipate a distinctive characteristic, so the amount of effort to pronounce that following sound is reduced. McColl and Trask (2015) declare that “moving the speech organs all over the place requires an effort and making nearby sounds more similar reduces the amount of movement required” (p. 49). As well as elision, assimilation is used to make pronunciation easier, simple, rapid, to maintain the rhythm, and is commonly found in informal situations. Campbell (2013) declares, “assimilatory changes are very common, the most frequent and the most important category of sound changes” (p. 24).

Types of Assimilation (Campbell, 2013)	
Total	A sound is completely influenced by another, becoming identical to it
Partial	A sound is partially influenced by another; at least one sound remains original
Regressive	The sound affected by assimilation comes earlier than the conditioning sound
Progressive	The sound affected by assimilation comes later than the conditioning sound

Table 2.2: Types of assimilation (based on Campbell, 2013)

When assimilation occurs, sounds blend in and the position of the organs involved in the articulation of words change, so it is normal that the sounds produced during assimilation do not really match the spelling. It happens in all languages, and it is a process carried out unconsciously, but depending on the direction in which phonemes influence each other, the manner of articulation, among others, different types of assimilation emerge. Authors differ in the number of categorizations for assimilation, for instance, Skandera & Burleigh (2011), distinguish 4 main categorizations: *a)* contact-assimilation and distant assimilation, *b)* progressive assimilation, regressive assimilation and mutual assimilation, *c)* assimilation of manner, intensity and place, and *d)* partial assimilation, and total assimilation; while Campbell (2020), identifies 4 categories and delineates three intersecting dichotomies; total-partial, contact-distant and regressive-progressive. Even though, these authors differ in the number of categorizations, some of their principles remain the same.

2.4.1.4 Rhythm, Intonation, and Melody

The process of pronunciation is extraordinarily complex, different sounds are used to differentiate the words and their context; it includes several elements that are necessary to communicate effectively like rhythm, intonation, and melody. English, like other languages, has a specific intonation and "melody" that characterizes it due to the use of air and the organs involved to articulate consonants and vowels.

Rhythm and intonation are explained by Kenworthy (1987) as music of the language. In English, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs tend to carry the strong beat due to their value in a sentence, and words with grammatical functions get the weak beats. Each sentence shows a

rhythm with strong and weak patterns. The intonation is the melody of the speech; basically, speaker' intentions are represented through the intonation that he/she applies, the reaction that the speaker is looking for depends on the melody of his/her voice.

2.4.2 The stress-timed language and the syllable-timed language

Earlier, it was stated that for some L2 learners, getting a native-like accent is the aim of studying pronunciation, but they might face some challenges. As native speakers of any language there are certain characteristics applied unconsciously, which are stressed due to the daily use of a language in a natural environment, these characteristics might go unnoticed but are equally important to try to understand why their pronunciation is not identical or how sounds cannot be completely perceived by L2 learners.

First, it could be helpful to identify the type of language one is trying to learn, particularly in terms of pronunciation, and how it differs from the mother tongue, as well as the possible reactions these differences might evoke. Especially, because according to Anderson-Hsieh, Johnson, and Koehler (1992), suprasegmental or prosodic features in speech are the ones with a stronger effect by native speakers than segmental errors. Munro and Derwing (1999) reflect that segmental errors are perceived in the form of accent strength, while suprasegmental errors suppose a greater perception on intelligibility. This happens because by emphasizing the wrong syllable, not making a good linkage between words, making long pauses or bad intonation, understanding is affected negatively, and communication is interfered (Yurtbasi, 2017).

This phenomenon might be better visualized through *junctions*, for example, Ip and Cutler (2022) propose the following sentence: *He gave her dog biscuits*. Depending on the

place and length pause and intonation at least two versions or meanings of the same sentence can be obtained.

He gave her dog --- biscuits

(someone (the man) gave the dog (woman's dog) biscuits)

He gave her --- dog biscuits

(The man gave the woman dog biscuits)

This variation may depend on the context or precisely on the intonation system belonging to each language, which might be transferred from the L1 to the L2. As it can be seen, this characteristic takes on great relevance when trying to communicate the correct meaning of the sentence according to the context.

Going back to how languages can be classified in terms of pronunciation, it is possible to differentiate two main characteristics regarding the perceived sounds of languages (considering that the target language and the mother tongue belong to each category) the stress-timed language and the syllable-timed language. Chun (2002) explains this as it follows:

“Languages in which stressed syllables tend to occur at approximately equal intervals; unstressed syllables that occur between two stressed syllables tend to vary in length, depending on how many unstressed syllables there are. In syllable-timed languages, on the other hand, syllables are roughly equal, so that the more syllables a sentence has, the longer it will be in duration” (p.171)

Usually, learners whose mother tongue belong to the syllable-timed languages like Spanish, Italian or Chinese tend to transfer this principle to the L2, that means, they would try to give equal stress to the unstressed sounds in the stress-timed languages like English, Danish or Portuguese. Wells (1996) explains that phonetically untrained learners are likely to process the incoming data through the known phonetic categories of their first language, but the learner should establish the independence of a language.

Furthermore, Bassetti, Mairano, Masterson and Cerni, (2020) report that L2 learners produce non-existent sounds in the target language because of the relationship they make between the representation of some letters that might exist in their L1 and L2 but do not have the same pronunciation. For instance, L1 English beginner learners of L2 Spanish may produce a [v], which does not exist in Spanish, instead of a [b] that is represented with the letter [v] (Zampini, 1994; in Bassetti, Mairano & Cerni, 2020). This is called the inter orthographic effect, which as it has been noted, can affect speech production; it occurs when L2 learners apply L1 rules, tending to add, delete and substitute target sounds. Sokolovic, Bassetti, and Dillon (2020) explored the reasons to explain why this effect happens and concluded that the cause is the incongruences between languages, the representation of different phonemes in different languages with just one grapheme.

Although, every aspect of pronunciation should find a balance in teaching practice, it is also noted that certain aspects of pronunciation might be of greater importance depending on the level of proficiency. For example, teaching stress patterns is a good starting point and intonation might be better for advanced levels (Rusadze & Kipiani, 2018). In any case, the teaching and practice of pronunciation should be constant and gradual.

2.5 Factors in Acquiring a Good Pronunciation or Native Like Accent

Changing or trying to change the accent is not easy to master. From the moment a little child begins to speak or babble, he or she can produce a wide range of sounds including those which do not belong to what will become his or her mother tongue. “In fact, children seem to play with all sorts of segments at this stage, and frequently produce consonants that are found in other languages, not just the language by which they are surrounded” (Scovel, 1998, p. 10), this state changes as the time goes by and the time of exposure to the mother language increases.

As a person grows up and gets accustomed to listening to one language and accent variation, this will unconsciously shape the way a person speaks. Even when this aspect goes unnoticed, throughout years mouth muscles are trained to fit the way of speaking. Trying to modify pronunciation or accent to sound more like a native, requires more than motivation and willingness. It concerns the knowledge of the phonetic rules and prosody of a language and how it is applied by its native speakers, which is linked to the geographical space and so to one pronunciation variation. Reed (2015) explains that not knowing the nature of language objectively (like phonological awareness) might be affecting any attempt to adopt rhythm, intonation, and accent (as cited in Sardegna & Jarosz, 2023), so the author also explores how metalinguistic features are set aside from teaching practice, which can cause students to ignore the importance and its influence in a conversation. Additionally, Wardana, Astuti and Sukanadi (2022), suggest that phonological awareness should be integrated in pronunciation teaching after demonstrating its benefits on articulation, stress, and intonation

On the other hand, research made by Arvizu (2014), and Li & Zhang (2016) have yielded evidence of the preferences of English learners for native teachers to be their

pronunciation teacher, though they cannot really explain why. Their opinions are regularly based on mere assumptions, since although they prefer a native English teacher, they do not find any troubles taking lessons with non-natives.

One of the most common assumptions/comments is that native speakers have been surrounded by the language, they have lived in an English-speaking country, so they can offer a pure and valuable representation of the language in a classroom, despite their teaching abilities or style. Karakas (2017) reflects on this assumption and how it leads learners to think that “authentic English, correct English and good English are spoken by NESs and thus native English is the most favourable model for NNEs in language learning” (p. 490). The results from research made by Li and Zhang (2016), pointed out that “participants seemed to think that they could “catch” the native accent by being taught by an NST” (p. 95), curiously in the same study participants received more significant input with the non-native English teacher than with the English native teacher.

Additionally, learners in the studies from Arvizu (2014) and Li and Zhang (2016) reported feeling more comfortable with the non-native English teacher or a teacher from the same country, whether because they know their culture or are more familiarized with their learning style, besides, it could be easier to convey a meaning when they do not know how to pronounce a word or how to express it in the target language.

Even though, in both studies learners showed up their preferences towards native teachers, they still seek the guidance of the non-native teachers, they believe native teachers are better to teach pronunciation and culture, but non-native teachers are not completely neglected from their learning process. Li and Zhang (2016) suggest that learners’ assumption

about native teachers rely on their distorted perceptions about pronunciation teaching and learning.

For Karakas (2017), the idea of getting a native-like English performance is linked to the perception of *good English*, which in turn is spoken by native speakers. Good English can be assimilated as another term for *standard English*, and under this ideology learners construct their standards and goals. For that reason, the author proposes that “it is vital for ELT practitioners to take some initiatives. For example, they can raise students’ awareness of alternative models for spoken and written English” (p. 503), instead of reinforcing the idea of just one accepted use of the language which to a great extent is strengthened by the traditional materials used in teaching.

2.5.1 Critical Period: Language Acquisition

Although it is considered that there is an age limit to learn or improve pronunciation, no study has been found that supports this information in such a way. The critical period was introduced in 1967 by Eric Lenneberg in the *Biological Foundations of Language*, here he hypothesized that the process of language acquisition occurs between early childhood and late puberty (2 – 12 years) while the brain reaches a maturational stage. Birdsong (1999) supports, during this period is possible to achieve a native like performance of a language. After the critical period, language acquisition could be less successful or less proficient, “the claim is that people actually lose certain abilities after this age” (Kenworthy, 1987, p. 6). Besides, phonology unlike other aspect of language, involves more than analytical skills. And it is that, “the motor-skill basis of our speech apparatus appears subject to flexibility limits as early as 4-6 years of age” (Moyer, 2013, p. 12). Although the learning process of the L2 could take place at early childhood, the brain has already absorbed and adopted the

phonology of the mother tongue, and it will interfere in the acquisition of a new system of sounds.

Although some researchers supported the theory of age as a determining factor, Kenworthy (1986) reflects that some studies, although having analysed the same issue (pronunciation), have applied different methods and it is in fact really challenging to control and monitor other factors involved in the process like motivation, attitude, among others, as well as the environment and the presence of the second language (Piske, 2008), so the author concludes that there is not enough evidence to consider age being a determinant and controlling factor over pronunciation. Besides this, Moyer (2004) explains that late students are also capable of having an almost native-like accent.

2.5.2 Fluency, Comprehensibility, Intelligibility in L2

Fluency is commonly applied to express the mastery with which an individual can use the language. The *Cambridge dictionary* defines fluency as the ability to speak or write a language easily, well, and quickly. For L2 learners, fluency can be improved through the use of language, practice and, ideally spending time in a country where the language is spoken. Moreover, fluency is very often included in the rating of L2 speaking (Lintunen, Mutta & Peltonen, 2019). Nevertheless, researchers have noticed the need to re consider what does fluency imply, “L2 speech fluency is often seen as acquiring the kind of smooth, automatic processes used by native speakers in conceptualizing, formulating and articulating speech” (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020, p. 22). However, in such definition the terms of grammar structure or syntax are not mentioned.

Taking this into account, while fluency is normally linked to proficiency, it does not imply producing grammatically correct sentences, in other words *accuracy*. So, it is likely to say that although having a good rate in speech production, the appearance of grammar mistakes is possible, probably unnoticed especially by people who are not trained in the use of language. At some point it could be a disadvantage for learners who pay more attention to fluency, since as Lintunen, Matti and Peltonen (2019) review, professionals tend to give extra points to accuracy in oral proficiency assessments rather than in fluency.

On the other hand, in a study carried out by Rico (2016) to assess the linguistic competence in areas of pronunciation, intonation, and stress at the Ramon Magsaysay Technological University, showed that students, although having a fair pronunciation, had a limited vocabulary, intonation and fluency, taking long pauses to express one short idea. About this is likely to conclude that a good pronunciation does not guarantee effective communication and the possibility to express oneself clearly.

Nonetheless, to effectively communicate, fluency is not enough. During the act of communication, two factors emerge; comprehensibility and intelligibility are commonly related, but it is important to understand how they function in isolation. Intelligibility refers to the acoustic content, it directly involves the speaker and what it is said. Nelson (1982) defines it as “the apprehension of the message in the sense intended by the speaker” (p. 63), while Munro and Derwing (1995) define it as “the extent to which a speaker’s message is actually understood” (p. 76). Both definitions focus on the importance of getting the correct message through the decoding of all the acoustic signals produced by the speaker. On the other side, there is the hearer who will reveal the amount of speech understood, referring to the term of comprehensibility. These terms gained more interest with the increasing of

English as a lingua franca, an interest linked to possible disadvantages in the understanding of different accents, which is not a valid argument since there is no evidence that non-native accent affects comprehension, and more elements are involved in the intelligibility process than accent.

2.6 Native and non -native accent

As it has been early observed, some specialists do not consider impossible but neither important to get a native accent since, for some of them, there is not a clear definition of what it is called non-native accent. Nonetheless, Lippi-Green (1997) explains, “accents are loose bundles of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographical and/or social space” (p. 42). In this way, the sounds of the vowels and consonants (segmental), as well as intonation and stress (prosodic, also called suprasegmental), contribute to the perception of accent.

The perception of a non-native accent is marked by the influence of the phonetic features of usually the L1, into another, made by the speakers themselves, which makes it sound different from the standard language and might sound wrong to native speakers. In addition, considering the variety of geographical spaces in the world, everyone has an accent, and it is shared with people from the same region and can be distinguished if compared to other speakers’ features from a different geographical space.

Taking this into account, the presence of non-native accent cannot be sustained systematically or theoretically. In fact, it only exists and becomes relevant when it comes into contact in a conversation where at least two types of pronunciation meet. Scovel (1969) rationalizes, “the existence of foreign accents is dependent upon the ability of native speakers

to recognize them” (p. 248), while Tergujeff (2021) supports this idea and concludes “accentedness refers to the listener’s perception of a speaker’s strength of foreign accent” (p.2), so any phonetic variation detected by native speakers will be labelled as accentedness.

Accent variation does not only occur between users of, at least, two different languages, but equally between users of the same language. Looking at those countries whose first language is English like England or the United States, it is possible to find two different accents, so here the question arises of how a native speaker of each country or geographical zone will judge the other native speaker. Pennington (1996) considers that “native speakers judges would not be able to distinguish reliably those varieties labelled as “native” and “non-native” (p. 7), even when there is an evident difference of sound.

Unconsciously, native speakers label as foreign accent those sound variants, but discriminate and classify them as “foreign” is not that easy since there is not a systematic procedure to do it, especially when there are not grammar mistakes in speaking, and it is an unfamiliar accent. Despite the varied perceptions towards accent and the possible reactions of native speakers Kenworthy (1987), explains that having a foreign accent might have some advantages, for example, a foreign accent automatically sends information that a person is not a native speaker, in this way their listeners will be aware of possible misunderstanding and perhaps adjust the way they listen, this with the intention of having a fluid conversation.

On the other hand, native speakers can also accommodate their speaking giving rise to foreign talk. Arthur et al. (1980, as cited in Jenkins, 2000), reflect about *Foreigner talk* as arising from language users’ unconscious ability to make several coordinated adjustments in their language that have the net result of simplifying and facilitating communication. Among

those adjustments it is possible to find repetitions, long pauses, fewer idioms, fewer contractions, etc.

2.6.1 Accent variation

The actual status of English language has been built throughout the centuries and became a standardized language, probably since Latin language lost number of speakers and power; since then, English was spread around the world. Historically, "standard languages often begin as a variety used in a certain locale by a particular group of people who are recognized as having power, prestige, and social advantage" (Pennington, 1996, p.10). Due to the expansion and the power they represent, standard languages influence education, society, culture, media, and government. In turn, non-native speakers and countries try to get some of the benefits and prestige that the standard language represents and an advantage over less favoured countries.

The power of English language around the world has reach a point where it is a means for academic and professional development. In countries like India, men who speak fluent English receive hourly wages that are 34% higher on average than non-English speakers, the same happens in Mexico where people who speak English earn 28% more on average, than those who do not speak it (Azam, Chim, Prakash, 2011; Hellester, 2013 as cited in Cronquist & Fiszbein, 2017). In addition, continuing the influence that English has achieved, Trugdill and Hannah (1985, as cited in Pennington, 1996) note:

In many parts of the world, particularly in Africa, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong and the Indian subcontinent, English is widely used as an

official language, as the language of education and as a means of wider communication by people who are native speakers of some other language” (p. 10)

However, it seems that knowing English is not enough, considering that inside English native speakers there is also a discrimination of accent regarding not only language differences; the standardized American English in the United States is mainly related to the middle and lower classes for Great Britain (Jenkins, 2000). Different speech styles are mostly in a disadvantage; the use of non-standard English may affect the ways speakers participate in society, while speech styles associated with members of upper classes obtain and retain prestige because of the status of their speakers (Bonvillain, 2011).

In 1990, there was an increase of African American population in the United States and that increased the number of AAVE (African American Vernacular English) speakers. Although there are different opinions towards “black English”, some studies showed that parents prefer the use of Standard English in formal situations and in grammatical features. In school and educational practices, problems arise because there is not a clear plan of the speech style that it is supposed to be taught. Children who speak AAVE usually face problems related to race and status, also the negative attitudes of teachers toward nonstandard language led them to reject children who use this style and perceive it as incorrect (Bonvillain, 2011).

Nevertheless Lippi-Green (1997) explains that the problem with AAVE does not lay in the verbal aspect system. The stigma of AAVE is the reflection of the historical and constant racial gap in the USA, and despite the debates about whether AAVE is a legitimate

or even “civilized” language, its permanence and distribution declare the existence of an African American society participating actively in the development of that nation.

2.6.2 Accent prestige

The intolerance for non-standard accents has led to accent reduction programs. Munro and Derwing (1995) explain that these programs seek the reduction or elimination of foreign accent, inherently suggesting “that accent is in itself a bad thing and is subject to treatment, intervention or even eradication” (p. 74). Notwithstanding the interest to eradicate a foreign accent seems not to be equally applied to all languages. A study carried out by Levy and Crowley (2011) showed that “students with accents in English were asked more often to undergo accent modification than those with accents in Spanish or other languages” (p. 11), a case that can be explained through the actual social and economic status of, in this case, English language. However, the same study suggested some advantages of accentedness where people are grateful to find someone who speaks a language other than English, mainly their mother tongue, and appreciate that there is someone with whom they can communicate, so they are not demanding in criticizing accentedness.

Non-native accent perceptions do not merely refer to language itself, but it is used to categorize a person into social class, education, ethnicity, trustworthy, success, etc. Anderson et al. (2007), explain that just because a social group uses the standard accent of a language will be automatically rated higher in all these categorizations. This leads us to the *accent prestige theory*; it explains, those speakers of standard language of the dominant group will classify higher in all the concepts mentioned above in comparison with a foreign accent, not only influencing native speakers’ opinion but been perceived as true for foreign accent

speakers. Following that, as Anderson et.al. (2007) declare, “Latin-American accented individuals would rate standard-American accents higher because America is perceived as a politically stronger nation” (p. 6).

For some authors, like Pennycook (1994) the seek for the hegemony of one accent is in fact linked with nationalism, which in turns is related to reinforce the supremacy of a nation and clearly criticizes the tendency of institutions to spread one type of accent. While Sewell (2016) reflects about the possibility of teaching accent without reinforcing the norms of what is standard and approved, and it is that although it has been taught in this way, it does not mean it is the only way it can be done.

Despite the conception of language as a social and cultural construction, Kramsch (2021) explores how language does not work arbitrarily, what it is taught and how, satisfies the needs and values of a system, obeys to the control of the middle and upper classes starting with educational institutions and reaching the labour market. In this way, the values of a group are imposed over another group which helps to keep the status, and the subordinated are then forced to follow and obtain some of the benefits mentioned above.

2.7 Language and identity

The way people speak defines them as part of a specific social group which is constructed historically through years to finally become part of a culture, as well as part of identity. Around the globe we do not only find a variety of accents, but a determined code of expression and vocabulary that everyone involved in that society is able to understand and follow.

Through language people represent the world and the way they perceive it. Although cultural models are expressed in several ways, language is key to their transmission (Bonvillain, 2011). That is why, the world is immersed in a wide range of legends, myths, historical events, and religions that influence population. Bonvillain (2011) points out that “such accounts guide human thought and action by providing moral lesson for individual behaviour” (p. 41), which are in constant development through daily communicative interaction.

The language and the ethical moral norms, and attitudes of a group are closely bound, this is probably one of the reasons why despite of the challenges associated with racism and classism, and the possible benefits not all people want to indistinctly adopt what it might be the standard English. Fanon (2008) states how, above all, the mere act of speaking is linked to culture, where people assume the weight of civilization; even when the economic and social rewards of the “standard way” are well known, NNSs prefer to maintain their accent, since it is in turn a bound with the mother tongue and its users, so even when speakers do not use their mother tongue, accent is a constant reminder of belonging to a group.

“Learners who in all other respects achieve a very high degree of proficiency in English, frequently retain a number of L1 phonological features. Although motor control is likely to be an element in this process, identity is probably the more salient issue” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 16).

On the other hand, Jenkins (2000) mentions that students who want to become language teachers, or those immigrants who want to develop a deeper understanding of a

culture and their speakers, are at least two examples of the reasons that students might have to improve their pronunciation to sound as close to a native speaker as possible.

2.7.1 Integrative and Instrumental Motivation

Motivation plays quite a significant role in the process of language learning, an element by which it is possible to determine the goals and objectives in language acquisition, Souders (2019) analyses that motivation is closely related to needs which in turn will affect persistence and decisiveness. Besides, Wu (2022) explains that in second language acquisition, motivation stands out much more since it will direct the goal and objectives of a L2 learner, when the opportunities of practicing are limited due to the environment. Although the importance of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation is recognized, the following explanation will focus on integrative and instrumental motivation.

Integrative motivation refers to a general interest and liking for the community that the learner's target language represents. This interest or desire to learn a language goes beyond developing a level of competence and performance, it corresponds to a desire to learn about the culture, customs, and daily life of a specific group, sometimes aimed at just interacting with its speakers, other times to try to insert oneself into the group, to be part of it. Giles and Byrne (1982) propose that those students who have a greater affinity or interest for the group that speaks the target language have a greater advantage in learning and communicating in the language. Curtis (2000) agrees that this type of motivation is linked to positive attitudes towards native speakers and their culture, in addition to being commonly and largely linked to the success of language acquisition. This success might include a pronunciation very similar to that of a native speaker, if not the same.

Conversely, instrumental motivation refers to a practical interest in learning a language. Said interest is linked to the desire to meet professional achievements and/or work rewards, like passing a test or earning more money. Since it is focused on a specific purpose, interaction with native speakers and the desire to learn about the culture of the target language is limited (Gardner, 1988). Besides, Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) reflect, the influence of instrumental motivation “would tend to be maintained only until the goal is achieved” (p.70), however they also consider that if the goal is continuous, the effect of motivation can be maintained.

Although students may lean towards one type of motivation, there is no evidence that one is more relevant or important than the other, actually both must work in balance, since both bring advantages, and both should be found in the learning process. Oyshajon, (2020) concludes that in case whether one of these concepts stands out more than the other, it will depend on the context in which is taking place.

2.7.2 Convergence and divergence

Earlier, it has been stated that speakers of different languages may adjust the way they speak to guarantee their mutual understanding in certain social interactions and sometimes depending on the influence of motivation, these adjustments can reach a level where someone wants to integrate into a community where the target language is spoken. These adjustments could be revealed through vocabulary, speech rate and accent, among others, including non-verbal language. It has been also said that some L2 speakers embrace their own foreign accent since it is a bound with their mother tongue, culture, and identity, which although it can be criticized, it remains. Both situations were considered and classified by Professor Howard Giles into his Communication Accommodation theory, developed in 1971.

The theory explains that although these adjustments can be measured in different ways, they can be mainly described as a case of divergence and convergence, basically it refers to the increase or decrease of social differences through language. Speakers who want to become more similar to their conversational partners will be using alike linguistic characteristics like “accent, choice of words and phrases, morpho-syntax, features of regional or social dialect” (Braunmüller & House, 2014, p.3), trying to gain social approval or to show they belong to the same social group, resorting to the convergence strategy. Speakers who, on the other hand, want to emphasize their differences from their interlocutors will be highlighting the same linguistic characteristics, but those belonging from their L1 that identify them as part of a different social group, resorting to the divergence strategy. Giles and Ogay (2007) explain that this attitude is motivated by a desire to reinforce personal identity from a relevant outgroup, in addition to showing an existing linguistic variation.

2.8 Pronunciation Learning Strategies

Pronunciation Learning Strategies are used to improve the oral proficiency of a language, thus the ability to identify specific features and how to apply them in oral production. It is essential that L2 students recognize the most suitable strategies to help them to create a specific plan to achieve a good pronunciation, responding to their personal pronunciation goals. Szyszka (2017) explains that L2 learners whose main goal is to learn a language to communicate more than reading or writing for example, would be more motivated to perfect this part of language and it will also lead them to explore and apply different strategies.

The adoption and adaptation of learning strategies require deep reflection on the part of the learner because they will assist their own learning based on their own weaknesses and

strengths, in other words learners seek to control their own learning. Once learners have identified their problems in learning, then it is easier to select the material and content necessary to improve. O'Malley and Uhl (1990) consider that “differences between older and younger students between more and less proficient are due in large part to differences in prior knowledge and learning strategy use” (p. 188).

Initially learning strategies are divided into 6 groups according to a general approach as seen in Table 2.3. Peterson (2000) defines strategies as “steps taken by students to enhance their own pronunciation learning”. However, the author makes a distinction between strategies and tactics, where the former refers to “general approaches to pronunciation” and the later refers to specific actions that support strategies.

No.	Peterson's Pronunciation Learning Strategies (and number of pronunciation tactics)	Oxford's Learning Strategies
1	Representing sounds in memory (2)	Memory
2	Practicing naturalistically (15)	Cognitive
3	Formally practicing with sounds (11)	
4	Analysing the sound system (3)	
5	Using proximal articulations (0)	Compensation
6	Finding out about a target language pronunciation (2)	Metacognitive
7	Setting goals and objectives (3)	
8	Planning for a language task (1)	
9	Self-evaluating (1)	
10	Using humour to lower anxiety (1)	Affective
11	Asking for help (2)	Social
12	Cooperating with peers (2)	

Table 2.3: Pronunciation Learning Strategies (taken from Peterson, 2000).

According to the study carried out by Peterson (2000), the tactics applied by L2 learners are varied and mixed. The most popular tactics applied belong to the cognitive and

metacognitive group. Listening to music, watching movies and TV are among the preferences of students to practice, besides imitating their teachers; this one evidences the influence and value of teachers, since students not only limited themselves to imitating the sounds but to analyse their mouth movements to practice. These tactics also imply their preference to listen to the language in a context or in complex sentences. Nevertheless, students reported to practice isolated sounds, memorize them and to record their own pronunciation and evaluate themselves. Sardegna (2022), reinforces the idea that metalinguistic awareness should be present in learners' pronunciation practice rules, skills, and strategies, demonstrating the complexity of this process where none of them can be applied in isolation.

Although much of the use of learning strategies depends on the learner, Sardegna (2022) stresses the significance of teaching students appropriate Pronunciation Learning Strategies before going on an autonomous practice, so they have the chance to choose between a large amount of them, instead of practicing and reinforcing strategies which do not work, avoiding bad habits of mispronunciation. Likewise, it is essential to consider that L2 instructors have already adopted their own strategies, and the way they are applied in the classroom might affect the ones adopted by the L2 learner.

2.9 Summary of the chapter

This chapter presented the concepts related to communication, teaching, pronunciation, and accent, trying to show their connection in L2 speaking interactions. The information was organized starting from the linguistic characteristics involved in the process of communication and interaction; followed by why these characteristics are socially important in world dominated by English. Thus, reaching a cultural aspect, it was explained how issues such as identity and accent variations are perceived and how they have managed

to affect the world to position English as a lingua franca. Finally, it was discussed how this panorama has affected the teaching of pronunciation of a second language and its students

Chapter III: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter the methodology adopted to conduct this research is described. First, the approach and motivations that guided the study are offered, followed by the characteristics of setting and participants involved. Finally, the instruments that were applied, as well as the data collection procedure and data analysis are described below.

3.2 Research design

In this study a qualitative approach will be conducted since it attempts to explore experiences and opinions which in turn can throw to many components which are unpredictable and, are mainly based on personal thought and in contextual situations. Johnson & Christensen (2017) state that “in qualitative research, different groups are said to construct their different realities or perspectives...it influences how they see or understand their worlds” (p.111). Therefore, the researcher wanted the participants to express freely in their own words, and present as many variables as possible to their answers, without generalizing but trying to understand how their opinions are shaped parting from their experiences.

According to (Johnson & Christensen, 2017) it is important to understand that human thought and behaviour as analysed in qualitative method, are dynamic, fluid and are in constant change, which is why instead of gathering information form standardized instruments, is better to go for interviews or other qualitative instruments and offer wider points of view and interpretations.

3.3 Setting

The study was carried out at the Faculty of Languages of the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, a public university located in Mexico, during a hybrid model instruction derived from the COVID-19 pandemic. This university is located in an EFL context which means that real L2 practice is limited due to the use of Spanish as the official language to communicate in the country. The Faculty of Languages offers two bachelor's degrees focused on language teaching, one in French and one in English. The English Language Teaching bachelor's degree groups its subjects into 9 fields of study among which are language teaching, culture, and linguistics, for example. In these areas it is possible to find the subjects of language teaching methodology, cultural studies and phonetics and phonology, all of them taught in English.

3.4 Participants

Participants are a male and a female student from the English Language Teaching bachelor's degree, referred here as Poul and Lou, pseudonyms to keep them anonymous. Both participants work as novice teachers, but are “pasantes”, which means that they have finished all their credit courses and are in the process of getting their official degree. Poul 24, works as a teacher for young adults and has never traveled abroad. Lou, 26, works as a teacher for children and has traveled abroad two times. At the time this interview was conducted neither had an English certification, however they both mentioned that they would do it soon. After they take their certification, they will be able to do paperwork for their official degree.

3.5 Instruments

3.5.1 Pre-interview Google form

A Google form about oral communication activities was given to participants before the interview. This Google form was used as a warm-up stage where participants could start reflecting about the importance of some speaking activities for their work/studies and their current ability. For this reason, the data collected with this Google form is preserved but was not analysed. This Google form consists of 9 close ended questions about their speaking ability to give presentations, instructions, participate in informal conversations, speak confidently, and use appropriate rhythm and stress patterns; followed by 3 open-ended questions about their easiest and most difficult speaking situation and why, as well as the area where they think they need improvement.

3.5.2 Structured Interview

An interview with 27 open-ended questions was designed to collect participants' opinions regarding to the phenomena studied. The interview was originally designed in Spanish (L1) so that participants did not feel insecure or reluctant to express their ideas freely. The first 9 questions refer to the importance of pronunciation, followed by 6 questions to get participants' perspectives about accentedness and 9 questions concerning accentedness of LEI teachers. The last 3 questions are related to the first 1:30 of a 2:49 minutes long video ([see appendix D](#)) where participants could see the cast of Modern Family, a popular series in the USA, on The Ellen Show. Interview questions for participants focused on a comment and question made by the hostess to the Colombian actress Sofia Vergara, and how the actress answered. The comment and question are shown below:

Ellen DeGeneres: I mean, literally you've been on the show for ten years, and your accent has gotten worse. How is that possible?

Sofia Vergara: Well, it is a talent. I made a commitment with myself that I am going to be Gloria, very thick Latin spoken woman.

Ellen DeGeneres: Yes, you sure have. It's gotten worse and worse over the years. I can barely understand you. (The Ellen Show, 2018).

3.6 Data collection procedure

An interview protocol was prepared and reviewed by teachers before the day of the interview with participants. After revision, an appointment was made with each of the participants to conduct the interview, according to their availability and after they signed the informed consent. Before the interview, participants were asked to answer the Google form which covers a general overview of the topics included in the interview, with no other intention than to prepare both participants so they could start reflecting about the topics, moments before the interview.

The interviews were carried out through an online interview, considering all the restrictions due to the current COVID-19 pandemic. They took between 20 and 60 minutes and were recorded for later transcription. The participants answered each one of the questions only with little interventions of the researcher to give continuity to the interview. At the end of each interview, the researcher thanked the participants.

3.7 Data analysis procedure

The interviews answers/responses were transcribed, and after a first reading, both interviews were paired in a table with two extra columns, one on each side. The extra columns served to make notes, comments and thoughts about the information gathered.

Simultaneously, different colours were used to highlight key information were participants clearly agreed or disagreed, to see their points of view either as LEI students or as novice teachers about pronunciation teaching and accent, as well as motivations and beliefs. After that, the information was divided in 5 data categories: shared opinions, pronunciation goals and motivations, strategies, experiences, and assumptions and beliefs. In each category both points of view, students/novice teachers, of the participants are included, which were mentioned directly or indirectly throughout the interview.

Chapter IV: Results

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings of this research are presented and explained. Participants' answers were paired up and analyzed into 5 data categories. The first category corresponds to their common opinions, followed by their pronunciation goals and motivations. The third category describes the strategies used to practice their pronunciation. The fourth category explains their experiences as L2 learners and how they have faced experiences related to mispronunciation, as well as their opinion about criticism based on accent. Finally, the fifth category shows their assumptions and beliefs about teaching pronunciation and their perception of native accent. These 5 categories help to answer the RQs that guide this study, which are:

1. What are students' beliefs towards pronunciation learning?
2. What strategies do LEI students use to improve their pronunciation?
3. What are participants' opinions towards accented speech?

Before starting with the analysis, it is appropriate to make a clarification. Some questions asked participants to respond from a specific role, either as teacher or student and in other questions participants decided from which role to respond, in this way the answers of both participants are intertwined in three concepts. Throughout the interview, participants referred to the concepts of teaching, learning and instruction to explain their experiences and observations as L2 learners, which in turn shaped their opinions as L2 teachers. The diagram

below represents the interconnection between these terms and attempts to give a better standpoint regarding the first research question in this study.

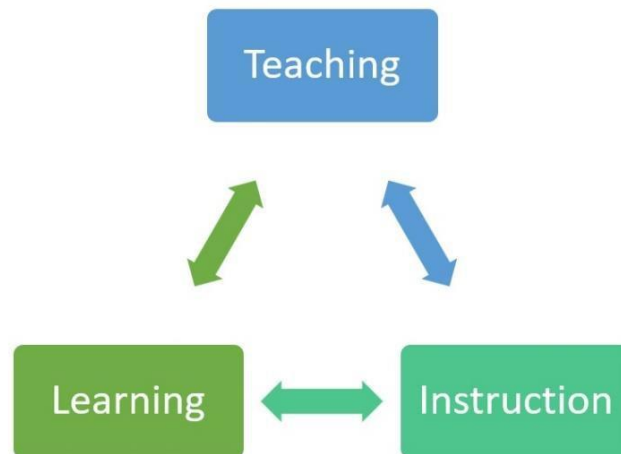


Figure 1. Participants' views of teaching, learning and instruction

This interconnection is important because it can help the analysis to determine if participants are explaining their opinions from a LEI student's point of view, or from a novice teacher's point of view. If they see themselves as LEI students, their opinion would be conducted in terms of the impact of teaching in their learning process, or if they see themselves as novice teachers, their opinions would be conducted in terms of their teaching goals and the impact they could have on their students.

Munna & Calam (2021) describe teaching and learning as a transformation process of knowledge inclined to develop objectives and goals. Sequeira (2012) specifies that teaching is a teacher-centered process that involves the design and development of resources to guide students and facilitate their understanding. Moreover, Sequeira (2012) explains that learning implies a change whether intentional or unintentional, through instruction or experience, but remarks that memory and understanding are key components in learning, so that one is able to process and apply that information.

In this way, instruction can be understood as systematic actions or steps that are needed to follow and will eventually guide to the process of learning. In general, the process evokes an interaction between teacher and learner and, ideally these terms are in constant change, so each one takes place to meet a goal based on the needs and purposes of both parts. The information contained in each category will be supported with the most relevant quotes from both participants.

4.2 Common opinions about pronunciation and accent

At first glance, it was evident that the opinions of each participant stem from very different ideas, which was very satisfactory for this research since it gave the opportunity to investigate many issues related to pronunciation and accent. However, as explained above, this chapter will begin by offering the opinions that both participants share about pronunciation and accent. When asked about the role of pronunciation, both participants were very determined in their opinion, pronunciation is very important since it is a necessary characteristic to communicate clearly and objectively, which in turn is an objective of their professional preparation. Poul added that with a good pronunciation one is also able to measure fluency and highlights that a flawless pronunciation leads to effective communication.

“The pronunciation of the target language is quite important, since it is a key point in communication”- Poul

“...it is important because it is my study objective, I think it is the main study objective of the degree, mastering and knowing how to communicate or speak in the language that is English”- Lou

Since pronunciation is an essential skill, Poul and Lou agree that pronunciation practice in the classroom is not enough, so they claim more speaking activities, even speaking workshops, which has probably led them to develop their own strategies to practice their pronunciation through authentic materials and evaluate themselves.

“I would like more speaking workshops. I feel that sometimes we focus too much on learning the grammar rules” – Lou

“...the greater use of activities that require the oral use of the language, either with presentations, role plays, dialogues, even call simulations”- Poul

Additionally, both recognized that sounds that do not belong to their mother tongue, like consonant clusters and diphthongs, are difficult to pronounce. When asked about accent, they admitted that it is possible to get a native accent but only through a lot of effort and dedication. However, according to Lou, being able to communicate and being understood is the most important thing so, accent does not determine the efficiency of communication.

The information gathered in this category gives a first impression about participants' beliefs towards pronunciation learning, the first research question in this project, starting with that it needs more time and space in the classroom to practice and recommending some activities that would help to improve this process.

4.3 Pronunciation goals and motivation

Even when both participants share opinions about the importance of pronunciation, and that it is a skill that needs more time and attention in a classroom, they clearly part ways about why that importance makes sense to each one, or the reasons that support their goals and motivation for pronunciation practice.

For Poul, the goal of practicing pronunciation is to acquire if not a native accent, something very close. From the beginning of the interview, words like flawless and perfect were attributed by Poul to describe his ideal of pronunciation, a native accent. For him, speaking activities in the classroom would help to develop fluency and try to reach a native accent.

“Definitely the greater use of activities that require the oral use of the language...we get used to using it to the degree that at a certain level we already have an almost perfect pronunciation very similar to that of a native speaker”

Poul describes a native accent as a sign of purity and quality; these are in turn, some of the advantages he assigns to teachers who have a native accent and can be used to explain his later opinion.

“The native accent speaks very well about a person's fluency and professional preparation”

“From my perspective, that gives a higher quality to the level of the language, in general”

According to his opinion, a native accent is a way to offer a purer representation of the language to students. Here, Poul puts himself in the role of teacher and explains why this characteristic is so important in his academic training. The emphatic reason he gives is that students learn everything from their teachers, so he wants to take care of the little details that would improve his pronunciation and then, give an impression as close to a native accent as possible.

“We are preparing ourselves for teaching and for this reason we must take care of the small details, since the students learn everything from us”

On the other hand, for Lou, the goal of practicing pronunciation is to understand and be understood in the language. She talks about mastering the language focusing on knowing how to express herself. For her, speaking activities in the classroom would help to improve public speaking and confidence.

“I would like more speaking workshops... I believe that it would even help to eradicate problems of insecurity and shame when speaking in public”

For Lou, getting a native accent is not a goal, but remarks the possibility of knowing different cultures, specific speaking groups through accent. Although she finds advantages in using a native accent, she is more concerned with the variety of accents that may exist, from people from other countries who speak English but not as their mother tongue what would be a foreign accent. Specially, Lou manifests that this is necessary to look beyond a British or American accent. It is important to say that Lou’s perspective is apparently from a learner, not a teacher.

Her perspective can be explained this way; it represents an advantage because one can be in touch with another culture and increase students’ curiosity and develop empathy between speakers of different languages. As a student, Lou wants to know about native accents not to imitate them, but to know about this diversity and its influence in language, as well as being aware of their existence.

“I think it would have a good impact on students, meeting a native teacher, they would have that curiosity to know where the teacher comes from, what is done in their country, that would be a very cool and motivating aspect”

“It is equally very beneficial for teachers and students, how to create these bridges of communication, empathy, information, knowledge”

Imitating a native accent seems to be somewhat more complicated for Lou, since she considers aspects that are more related to culture and identity, and so one of the main problems for her is actually trying to imitate a native English accent because as she expressed, it can be a way to lose part of your identity and so she questions herself what would be a balance point.

“...So, I don't know what the equilibrium point is, where it is not imitation and where you also do not lose your identity”

Instead, she talks about a neutral accent. Although this term seems to vary in meaning at certain points in the interview, here, when she refers to improving her pronunciation in order to get a neutral accent, apparently, she means that she is looking for something standard, or what most English speakers could understand, whether they are native or not.

“Yes, it would be nice if I worked a little more on... not improving my accent, I don't know what to call it, how to neutralize it, that's what I would like”

Accent neutralization, it is not easy to explain since there is not an actual definition. However, this idea is pointed out by Sewell (2016), who presents the term ‘accent neutrality’ as “an indication of how well we have been able to adopt the norms of the groups we wish to identify with” (p. 41), also to converge phonologically with non-native speakers. Therefore, Lou’s goal seems to be related to speaking with a standard, intelligible for many L1 and cultural backgrounds, English accent.

Participants’ opinions and perspectives offered in this second category help open a window into their motivations for pronunciation goals. Their motivations and goals can be perceived as contrary and it is possible to see that Poul's efforts are aimed at getting a native accent, so that his pronunciation is considered a model for his students, while Lou's are aimed

at getting a neutral accent, kind of a middle point where she can improve her pronunciation without losing her identity. The strategies they use to improve their pronunciation, therefore, go in opposite directions as explained below.

4.4 Strategies

In this third category, the answer to the second research question is explained, which is concerned with the strategies that participants use to practice and improve their pronunciation. Through the strategies they use, it is also possible to see an insight of what they consider to be helpful, that is, we can reveal a bit of their beliefs about pronunciation practice.

When asked about the strategies used to practice their pronunciation, both participants showed their preference for authentic materials with native speakers like sitcoms, tv series or watch videos on social media. In addition, both recognized that speaking out loud was a technique that helped them a lot to improve their fluency. Moreover, Lou explained that tongue twisters were very helpful to calm her nerves as she used to stutter when doing presentations. However, she also admitted not to pay too much attention to the way she speaks because it is a process that requires time and considers she will gradually improve. So, the time she dedicates to practice may vary depending on her daily activities, in general it might be 1 ½ hour, but the process she applies seems more like an unconscious process or maybe not so focused, since she practices through the songs she listens to in her free time or through the words she manages to capture from different media to pronounce it better the next time.

Besides, she recognizes that the programs she watches are mostly American, so she has noticed her speaking is mostly influenced by that country. Although she would like there

to be more variety and availability, she acknowledges that it is the learner's responsibility to look for that variety.

“I love watching series, sitcoms, so I feel that because of that I kind of adapted my vocabulary to a more American English”.

On the other hand, Poul expressed that he is constantly paying attention to his pronunciation and intonation. He mentions that being careful of little details is what leads to sound better and develop fluency. Contrary to Lou, Poul dedicates 30 min. to 1 hour to practice exclusively his pronunciation every day, which admits is not enough since before the COVID-19 pandemic he used to be exposed to English language at least 4 hours every day.

Besides asking for help from his peers, he also found a way to evaluate himself; he considers Google translator as a reliable source for practicing and self-evaluating. According to Poul, if he pronounces correctly, the algorithm will understand it, and apparently it will be the same with people.

“There are tools like Google translator in which you can record your voice in your target language and later if you pronounced it correctly the word will appear”.

Clearly, both participants describe their strategies from a learner's point of view and the instruction they receive or do not receive. There is no indication that these are strategies they will teach their own students.

4.5 Experiences

In their experiences as Foreign Language learners, participants agree that grammar plays the biggest role inside a LEI classroom, and speaking is usually set aside. Although they evaluated the pronunciation instruction they received from regular to good, they recognize that it is a skill that needs more attention in the classroom, ideally the four main skills should be given equal importance.

“...in the subjects I was in, pronunciation and oral production in general were not given much value” - Poul

Lou observes that books also do not have much content to practice pronunciation and it will also depend a lot on the LEI teachers how these exercises are developed in class or at least if they are seen in class, so this is one of the reasons why she recommends that LEI students should seek methods that help them improve on their own.

“At LEI we were looking at the book, it had 1, 2 or 3 exercises per lesson to reinforce listening or pronunciation skills, but they are exercises, for example, for pronunciation, what are phonemes and so on, it seems to be very small and well, they already think that with that it is enough and well, no”

When asked if at any time during their undergraduate degree they tried to imitate a native English accent, their responses were to the contrary: Poul admitted to trying a British accent once in his advanced target language courses, but it is not mentioned if he succeeded, his response implies that he did not continue to imitate said accent.

On the other hand, Lou denies having tried it, and mentions that she has focused on a neutral pronunciation, and although previously the term “neutral” was introduced in this paper, this time the neutral concept is paired with something basic. However, it is difficult to say what she really meant or wanted to express, because when she refers to that neutral-basic

concept is to describe the point where she is, and when she talks about improving or polishing her accent, she refers to precisely reaching a neutral accent.

The researcher considers that when the participant applies the term “basic” is to describe the input she could have received from her classes, or from didactic materials, which would not represent real situations or had very formal language where she could not find the accent variations that would help her to reach that neutral accent that is her goal.

“What I have dedicated myself to the most is learning grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, but very neutral and very basic pronunciation”

“I have dedicated myself more to making myself understood, communicating, giving, and receiving information, expressing ideas, etc.”

The above information helps answer RQs number 1 and 2. Parting from their experiences, participants identified some of the problems when trying to study pronunciation, which in turn provides information about their pronunciation learning and what should be changed. In addition, the ideas previously exposed by Lou about her goals when practicing pronunciation are reinforced, as well as Poul’s who, although he did not say much, revealed that he had already sought an approach to try to achieve a native accent.

Besides, participants shared some experiences where pronunciation affected the correct transmission of a message. In both cases, they told experiences where they were spectators more than protagonists, but showed different reactions, either insecurity, shame, or fun, they consider these experiences as lessons from which they could learn. In her experience, Lou explains that an American friend could not pronounce a word in German, and it was not until the person pointed at the object whose name could not pronounce that she got to know what the person was trying to say. She said it was funny, but she also reflects

that it was something that could also happen to her since she is also learning a second language and concludes that some of these situations help to be more empathic.

Poul mentions a situation that made him feel insecure. He also describes a situation where he was a spectator, of how a girl could not suppress her feelings because a teacher made some derogatory comments about her pronunciation, he concludes it was unfortunate since it was a teacher from the Faculty of Languages. Finding these situations in a school, particularly in a language school, can be quite disturbing, especially because these can decrease students' self-confidence to express themselves, participate, and speak up. James (2018) summarizes, "teachers must put forth an attitude that will help to transform the learners' positively in the three domains of learning i.e., cognitive, affective, and psychomotor areas" (p.2), pointing out the influence that teachers' attitude and behaviour have in a classroom, as well as the effect on students' performance, whether good or bad. Although it seems clear that the positive effects are the expected, like motivation and students' willingness to learn.

Each participant found a situation where people do not react in the same way. Sometimes people can be rude, whether they are at least bilingual or not, and it seems there is not always empathy between people who know the process of learning a second language, and although they both agree that rude comments could lead to insecurity, they also agree that one is able to decide how much they can affect you. These second set of experiences helps answer RQ 3. Although both participants shared experiences where they were not protagonists, their reaction to the situations they narrate reveal their empathy. They understand that it is something that can happen to them, so they would not react in a negative way. They also coincided that, depending on the context, different feelings about these experiences may arise.

4.6 Beliefs and assumptions

For this section, participants sometimes take the role of teachers and sometimes the role of students. Participant's beliefs and assumptions about teaching pronunciation and about achieving a native-like accent would help to understand their motivation, how they remember the pronunciation instruction they received as students, and strategies adopted. In this section their point of view and position towards the video in which the hostess Ellen DeGeneres criticizes the accent of the actress Sofia Vergara in The Ellen DeGeneres Show is also discussed.

Although Poul is completely in favor of the fact that pronunciation should be studied and practiced from the beginning of learning a second language, and that a native accent can also be motivating for students, he also believes that when teaching kindergarten or primary school children, a teacher must take care of the speed and fluency with which he/she speaks.

“In the first levels of learning, which are the ones that most students choose, which are kindergarten and primary, you must have a slower and less rapid accent than a native speaker of the language”

Poul's opinion of getting a native accent is clear, he wants it because from a professional or teacher point of view, it brings quality to the language level and since he also establishes that students adopt the accent of teachers, he wants to give a closer representation of native speakers. However, he also reflects that a native accent is not so important to be a language teacher, as long as teachers have a clear pronunciation, and they are good at teaching. Although he points out that it is a complicated issue, his opinion suggests that it is not an ideal situation since in previous answers he remarks that as future teachers, a native accent speaks very well of a person's technical language preparation.

“After all, despite not having a totally native accent, they have a very good pronunciation and are clear in their ideas”

“I will return to previous answers, and it has to do with professional training since we are going to be teachers and the native accent speaks very well of the fluency and preparation of a person”

Poul admits that getting a native accent is really challenging and requires a lot of effort and dedication. Moreover, he highlights the environment as a determining factor because in addition to dedication, being surrounded by that accent for a long time, a person will learn to understand it and imitate it, one way or another. And points out that without the proper context, getting a native accent is impossible.

“The people I know who dominate a native accent are not because they were trained here, but because they were trained abroad, in an Anglo-Saxon country”

When considering the difficulties of teaching pronunciation, Poul puts in the first place that his representation is not very faithful to that of a native speaker and that this is what worries him the most. In addition, there are phonemes that he finds difficult to produce due to a physiological problem that he has. His main concern can be explained by the fact that he considers a native accent as a means to motivate his students, to help them become familiar with these sounds and have less difficulty to understand it over time. He also hopes that his students will be motivated to imitating it.

Now switching to Lou's opinions, analysis indicates that she mainly talks from a student's viewpoint, but she also moves to a teacher perspective and back to student. Overall, she links identity with accent, and despite considering that obtaining a native English accent is possible through a lot of work, practice, and dedication, she also suggests that this could

not be 100% authentic either. However, she acknowledges that imitating a native accent is a common interest among L2 students,

Furthermore, Lou reflects that a native accent is not necessary, since it will not determine the competence or ability to use the language, nor the level. Her answer is supported by mentioning that the non-native LEI teachers she had, performed very well in their work, but she also mentions that native LEI teachers helped her develop her listening skills and identify the accent they came from more clearly.

In general, meeting people with foreign accents who share a language, is what would be very rewarding. This situation is not only focused on a phonetic aspect, but also as a guide for multiculturalism, which Lou considers necessary, for example, in a work context to communicate, interact with people from other countries, and functioning as a team. In other words, accents are opportunities to connect with different cultures and to the possibility of understanding ways of being, traditions and behavior of people who belong to those cultures, which will help to get closer and relate to each other. Lou mentions this is an aspect that has gained importance with the ascent of English as a lingua franca.

When referring to the time dedicated to pronunciation in the classroom, in addition to concluding that it is not given much attention, Lou also establishes that there are aspects that cannot be acquired at the same time in the learning process. This answer could explain why she earlier considered that pronunciation is something that she will gradually improve over time. On the other hand, she reflects that many times students leave a lot of responsibility to the teachers regarding their learning, but at the same time they must adjust to a curriculum and from there, teachers base themselves to do their class planning, which leaves a reduced space to meet the needs of each student. However, she adds that teachers are resources, so students should not expect to receive everything from their teachers, and it will depend on

each learner to define what level they want to reach, to develop an autonomous learning, establish goals, strategies, and tactics. According to Nunan (2000), when learners move to a fully autonomous learning, they are able to complement the information they receive in a classroom with what is beyond the classroom, becoming learners and teachers at the same time.

“It is in one as a university student to seek and complement, to ask yourself, it depends on where you want to see yourself...it depends on us to work for excellence. In the end it depends a lot on us”

For Lou, the main challenge to teach pronunciation is not having knowledge and preparation of phonetics and phonology and being able to explain how a sound is produced to her students, this is very important for her, because she considers that repetition without context and explanation could demotivate and frustrate students. In turn, she considers that this is one of the reasons why pronunciation has been set aside up to now.

“Since we are not experts in pronunciation, accent, phonetics, more than anything in phonetics, this influences us not to give it the importance it should have”.

“...Yes, give them a context so that they still get motivated and don't say "I can't" or "I find it boring" because they may even find it boring, sometimes it's not just "I can't" it's "what's this for me?"

Reflecting on whether a native accent could motivate students, Lou reintroduces the concept of a neutral accent. She reflects that a neutral accent could challenge students but at the same time they will not see it as impossible. She admits that as a teacher it is a difficult task to measure and acquire, but it is necessary to give a degree of difficulty to students, in addition to a goal in which they could visualize the importance of practicing pronunciation.

Considering her answer, this time a “neutral accent” will be a middle point resulting from the language level of students and the language level of the teacher.

“One as a teacher, must be intelligent or rather a little skilled to put it in a neutral point”.

Generally, it was considered that a neutral accent was an accent without phonetic variation, and since it has been already reviewed why this is impossible, Boucher, Hammock, Georgina, McLaughlin & Henry, (2015) refer to neutral accent, as the accent used by most tv news broadcasters. On the other hand, Aneesh (2015) concludes that a neutral accent is a “strategic construction in global communication”, an accent that could function as a means of communication between cultures. In this research, fully deciphering the term “neutral accent” is difficult, because the term Lou uses in his comments is ambiguous and can take on many different meanings.

Although participants have different opinions about the goals of practicing pronunciation and thoughts about native accents, both seem to contemplate the idea of using a native accent to teach, whether to offer a pure representation or to demonstrate the linguistic variations of one language.

“Maybe when...you are transmitting an idea, a message, that is where I, for example, have applied, but already in another context in which I start to imitate an accent, just because, no” - Lou

However, imitating a native accent outside the classroom or for a different purpose other than teaching, their opinions seem to change. While Lou does not want to imitate a native accent and thinks that a native accent is only necessary or important when it comes to teaching the phonetic variants of a language, Poul stresses out that he has never met someone who did not want to imitate a native accent. Moreover, he argues that people who are trying

to imitate a native accent may not share this experience with others, as they could be judged due to prejudices, reinforce some stereotypes or sound arrogant, so they prefer to be discreet in that regard. The above information helps answer RQ 3, what are participants' opinions towards accented speech? Additionally, it offers new insights about pronunciation learning parting from their beliefs in the following ways: since Poul considers that a native accent motivates students to work on their pronunciation, accented speech is not the ideal situation and although he clarifies that it does not affect intelligibility, accented speech is an aspect that affects his opinion about LEI teachers' professional preparation.

On the other hand, Lou is more empathetic. For her, accents increase empathy and knowing about accents is essential to transmit said value. Accent variation is essential in a world dominated by English language to understand people from different backgrounds. Although she agrees that learners should learn to be independent in their learning process, she also agrees that teachers should be not only competent in phonetics and phonology, but that they should adjust their performance according to students' level. Poul agrees with this last idea.

4.6.1 Comments about the video

Finally, although participants were only told to watch a video and answer a few questions about what happens in it, they were both already familiar with the hostess Ellen DeGeneres, and the actress Sofia Vergara, which influenced their answers, as well as reinforced their previous opinions and added new details.

In the first place, Poul and Lou agree that the hostess' comments were tactless. However, about the reaction of the actress in the video, Poul considers it was not real,

probably just for the purposes of the program, since he has never met someone who in this situation, being surrounded by native speakers, has not developed a native accent. This time, Poul reaffirms how this idea is definitive in him, as he assumes that being exposed to a context where the language is spoken, it will automatically influence pronunciation. This leads him to deduce that the behaviour and reaction of the actress is from the point of view of one of her characters.

On the other hand, Lou considers the reaction of the actress, natural. As someone who is prepared to receive that type of comments where she does not want to discuss and prefer to make fun of it. Lou believes that criticism towards accent arise from ignorance, from people who do not learn a second language and cannot understand the struggle and process of learning. About this Chen & Fang (2022) explored studies that have proved bilinguals are more open minded, so they are more tolerable to foreign elements and changes, explaining that this process begins while one learns a new language, since learning a new language is about interpreting or digest new information.

She adds that she does not know if the hostess speaks another language but if so, if she spoke another language like French, she will also have an accent. From this point of view, she concludes that people who learn another language are brave to risk learning a new language, to try it.

“In this case, the people who speak English as a second language know what it means to be tolerant in this learning process... people who may not learn a second language, who are in their comfort zone, because they cannot understand what we understand”.

When participants were asked about the possible effects of negative comments or critics towards accent, they agree once more that it will affect confidence, particularly for

those who are more sensitive. Poul mentions that it is very common to find that kind of comments on social media, even if they are comments from people that one does not know, it is a situation that he considers equally demotivating.

For Lou, critics are usually related to prejudices, or misconceptions towards culture, lifestyle of a geographical zone and not precisely linked to linguistics. However, she accepts that these end up affecting this field. Although she explains that the actress does have a marked accent, she clarifies that the important thing is to highlight her professional career, her command of the language, thus concluding that one should not get carried away by these types of comments.

Chapter V: Conclusions

5.0 Introduction

In this final chapter the conclusions parting from the findings are discussed, as well as the implications after analysis, followed by the limitations of investigation, concluding with some proposals for further research.

5.1 Conclusions

As stated previously in the results chapter, the three research questions were answered. Participants' responses about their experiences, beliefs, and opinions were revealing and added a new piece to understand the perceptions and aspirations of LEI students when learning and practicing their pronunciation in English. Although participants agreed that having an English native accent it is not essential because the most important thing is to be understood and transmit your ideas clearly, highlighting those teachers who do not have an English native accent can perform just fine in the classroom, they still identified advantages when studying with native English teachers, especially when it comes to culture. Moreover, even when the participants have had good experiences and attitudes towards non- native English teachers, none of them mentioned being comfortable or satisfied with their accent. Poul pursues a native accent, expressing that it offers a closer representation to the target language, and Lou pursues a neutral accent as a resource to improve without affecting her identity. They added that it offers a way to visualize the varied ways of pronouncing in one language. Finally, they also recognize that this implies a big responsibility, since their

own pronunciation can affect how they could be perceived by their future students or how they could be perceived by themselves,

The social constructions and perceptions were present in the answers of both participants, whether because one has a native or a non-native accent, it will be a difference that will be considered into a social construction affecting the user. Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000) report the extent of social constructions, such as stigma and prejudice, where personality can be distorted and sometimes this may lead to devaluation. This may have to do with Lou's decision not to achieve a native English accent despite being aware of its benefits or using it only under specific circumstances, or with Poul's position, when mentioning that being able to imitate a native English accent may be something which one prefers to be discreet about. This could also lead participants to label differently the preparation of some teachers.

Participants agreed that trying to imitate a native accent makes sense inside the classroom because they perceived it relevant only when teaching the language. However, for Poul trying to imitate a native accent outside the classroom is not of great importance, while for Lou is nonsense. Probably, for Poul using a native accent inside the classroom gives him confidence, first because it has a teaching purpose and second, because as a teacher, he feels more in control and the authority to use it. For Lou, imitating a native accent outside the classroom could mean the accent would become more involved in her personal or daily life, and since she clearly indicates that she would only use it to teach, using it outside could increase her fear of getting lost between two identities. Thus, it can be concluded that the social context and the idea of belonging influences individuals to decide on whether or not to look for and use a native accent in English.

Therefore, participants prefer to practice pronunciation, find their own methods, and be evaluated through their own system, not through formal assessment. This idea was confirmed when asked about the methods they use to practice their pronunciation. Both preferred informal contents, like songs, tv series or videos with native speakers. However, this idea could bring up the lack of pronunciation training and content, if the participants have never had formal assessment in pronunciation or if they might prefer formal assessment or both equally, having the resources and circumstances, it is something that was not explored in this research.

5.2 Implications

As the study progressed, it was clear that participants claimed more attention to pronunciation practice, because grammar usually plays the main role inside the LEI classroom and “pronunciation usually plays a marginal role in L2 teaching and is frequently neglected in an L2 classroom” (Szyszka, 2017, p.1). Participants are aware that pronunciation is important and so its implementation in the classroom is necessary because it requires time to perfect it as part of the learning process of a language. Although they have their own methods, and motivations, they still have a lack of confidence as students and future teachers. It can be said that they need formal evidence of their progress and help to fix some deficiencies in pronunciation. This implies that formal assessment in pronunciation needs improvement.

Although it is possible to say that LEI teachers can orient students’ learning, they must be prepared to have students with beliefs that are difficult to change. Participants in this study agreed that perfect pronunciation and accent requires, among other things, being exposed to the language but this might be difficult due to the context of EFL learning. For

that reason, the implementation of pronunciation workshops in the school program would help recreate real contexts where LEI students can develop their confidence in different situations, especially if they are not given enough time to practice their pronunciation during their target language classes.

As stated before, Poul is in favour of a native accent, because for him this is his goal as a teacher, in addition to seeing himself as a model for his students, which would also explain his interest and attention to practice his pronunciation daily. Lou, who is more concerned about identity and in showing the accents that may exist in a language like English, talks about getting a neutral accent. A major difficulty for this research is that, according to her answers, she offers 3 definitions of “neutral accent” to 3 different situations, so the term varies to specify its use in certain contexts or situations, and it is difficult to determine what a neutral accent really means to her.

Another concern that arises especially when working professionally is how to explain sounds to future students. To address this concern, a phonetics and phonology workshop would help LEI students to understand how to train muscles, identify problems and be able to explain them. In addition, its implementation could be something relevant, considering that, except for the only phonetics and phonology compulsory course in the program, there are not courses of this type being offered. Finally, participants are conscious that there are too many accent variations due to the number of non-native English speakers influenced by the increasing of English as a lingua franca. Although participants showed positive attitudes towards native and non-native accents alike, it calls for a kind of conflict, apparently unconscious, about how to perform in a classroom without implying that one is better than the other.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

Sample of participants does not represent most of the students at the Faculty of Languages, so it does not provide enough evidence to assure the opinions of the whole population. That is why to collect more information from a larger group of students is recommended. Although it was a long interview where participants could express freely their opinion and experiences, having more people involved from different backgrounds would help to get more point of views. Some of these opinions could include how pronunciation should take place, as well as what they think about imitating an English native accent in a world dominated by English. Finally, what are the possible factors that influence their opinion and how they perceive both aspects. More opinions could help determine whether LEI students have reasons other than Lou's and Poul's to pursue or not achieving a native accent, as well as beliefs and attitudes towards non-native teachers and accented speech.

Regarding the methodological process, new questions arose after the data collection process, which could have offered wider opinion and information. For this reason, a larger interview or deeper questions are suggested to include in the instrument, especially in topics related to identity which could have helped to better understand the role of accent inside and outside the classroom for LEI students.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

The purpose of including advanced semester students of the English teaching bachelor's degree was to explore their experiences, thoughts, and difficulties they have identified in teaching pronunciation once they have concluded their studies. However, teachers' opinions and their motivation to focus on grammar or any other aspect of language

more than pronunciation or accent variation were not explored. This is something to be considered in the future since participants expressed it during the interview.

Also, the researcher considers interesting to carry out a longitudinal study, starting when students join the bachelors' degree. This study could investigate what their expectations and beliefs are until they conclude their studies and prepare to teach and see if their beliefs were affected or remained the same. Finally, it is suggested to carry out further research involving accent and identity in a world dominated by English, specially how this scenario might affect the learners' decision to imitate or not a native accent. It would also be relevant to investigate if opinions and beliefs are related to the role of a lingua franca, that is, if language learners have the same opinion towards imitating an English native accent or a native accent of any other language which is or is in the process of becoming a lingua franca, such as Chinese, Spanish, or German.

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Appendixes

Appendix A

Consent letter

You have been invited to participate voluntarily in this research project called "Attitudes and perceptions of ELT students towards pronunciation and accentedness" by Carolina Ortega Mejía, student of the Bachelor of English Language Teaching of the Faculty of Languages of Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla. Before deciding to participate in this project, please read this informed consent carefully.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study intends to collect information on the different perceptions and attitudes, as well as experiences of LEI students regarding pronunciation and accent. The participants included in this study are advanced semester students of the Bachelor of English Teaching who have at least one teaching experience. If you decide to participate in this research, you will be interviewed using the video conference platform of your choice (Zoom, Google Meet or Microsoft Teams), in which you will be able to express your views freely. The interview will last between 15 and 20 minutes and will be audio recorded. You do not have to open your camera if you do not want to.

The information collected will be extremely useful to learn about LEI students' attitudes and perceptions towards pronunciation and accentedness, which will surely advance our understanding of such issues.

Your identity will never be revealed or provided to anyone under any circumstances in the development of this research.

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete and sign the consent below by signing and writing your full name and to please send it by email to carolina.ortegame@alumno.buap.mx.

Consent

I, _____ (participant's full name) _____ have read the information provided and have no doubts regarding the data collection of this research project. I will voluntarily participate in this research project through a short google form and an audio recorded interview and I understand that the information anonymously collected will be used exclusively for research purposes.

Appendix B

Oral communication activities

The information given in this form will be used exclusively for the research project called "Attitudes and perceptions of ELT students towards pronunciation and accentedness".
Read the statements carefully and choose the option that best describes your experience. Then answer the questions below.

Correo electrónico *

Correo electrónico válido

Este formulario recopila correos electrónicos. [Cambiar la configuración](#)

1. Participating in informal conversations *

	1 not very	2	3	4	5 very
How important...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
What is your cu...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix C

Interview questions

1. ¿Qué tan importante es para ti la pronunciación de tu lengua meta y por qué?
2. ¿Cuánta atención prestas a la manera en la que pronuncias la lengua meta?
3. ¿Has identificado cuáles son los sonidos que te cuestan más trabajo reproducir?
4. ¿Cuáles consideras podrían ser algunas dificultades para reproducir sonidos, palabras o frases del inglés?
5. Como alumno, ¿qué te gustaría implementar o modificar para mejorar la práctica de pronunciación dentro del aula?
6. ¿De qué manera logras observar el progreso que obtienes de tu pronunciación?
7. ¿Cuáles son algunos de los métodos o técnicas que empleas para mejorar tu pronunciación de la lengua meta?
8. En general, ¿qué prefieres practicar? ¿sonidos aislados, palabras o frases? ¿por qué?
9. ¿Cuál es tu meta u objetivo cuando practicas pronunciación?
10. ¿Cuánto tiempo inviertes para modificar y/o practicar la pronunciación de tu lengua meta?
11. ¿Cuál es tu opinión sobre obtener un acento nativo?
12. ¿Consideras que es posible para cualquier persona que estudia inglés obtener un acento nativo?

¿Qué podría haber influenciado en esa persona para obtener un acento nativo?

(¿crees que hay algunos intereses personales o quizá laborales para intentar imitar un acento nativo?)

13. Alguna vez has intentado imitar un acento nativo del inglés, ¿de qué región o país era?

14. En caso de no haber intentado imitar un acento nativo. ¿por qué no? En tu opinión ¿Porque las personas prefieren no imitar acentos nativos?

15. ¿Consideras que para trabajar o viajar es necesario tener un acento nativo?

16. ¿Consideras necesario que los maestros y alumnos de LEI tengan un acento nativo o parecido? ¿por qué?

17. ¿Alguna vez has escogido a un maestro de la licenciatura únicamente tomando en cuenta su acento?

18. Desempeñándote como maestro(a) ¿qué tan importante podría ser imitar un acento nativo dentro del salón de clase? ¿y fuera del salón de clase?

19. ¿Alguna vez experimentaste una situación donde no se entendió tu mensaje debido a una mala pronunciación? ¿Cómo te hizo sentir?

20. En general, ¿crees que se le da la misma importancia a la pronunciación que a las demás características de un idioma?

21. Consideras que se debe practicar la pronunciación del idioma desde el comienzo del aprendizaje o después ¿por qué?

22. Según tu experiencia como alumno ¿cómo evalúas la manera en que tus maestros te enseñaron pronunciación?

23. Desempeñándote como maestro, ¿Cuáles podrían ser las dificultades de enseñar pronunciación?

24. Como maestro ¿Crees que un acento que se asemeje a uno nativo puede motivar a los alumnos a practicar más pronunciación? ¿O por el contrario podría frustrar a los alumnos que no puedan entender a su maestro?

Finalmente me gustaría que me dieras tu opinión sobre el siguiente video

0 min-1:30 min <https://youtu.be/k3D3grn9XUo>

25. ¿Qué opinas de los comentarios de la entrevistadora?
26. ¿Qué opinas de la manera en que la actriz reacciona y responde a esta situación?
27. ¿Crees que un comentario así pueda afectar de alguna manera a cualquier persona?
28. ¿Has visto una situación similar en cualquier otro lugar?

[Appendix D](#)

Video

<https://youtu.be/k3D3grn9XUo>

