



CHAPTER 7

PROMOTING PRONUNCIATION STRATEGIES FOR REGULAR VERBS IN PAST TENSE

Nora Cruz Castillo

ORCID: 0000 0000 4111 0183

Universidad Veracruzana

ABSTRACT: Learning a second language has been an easy task for some people and difficult for others. Speaking specifically about English, we can say that it is a language that differs greatly from Spanish. Spanish has more variety in its conjugations, while English does not. In terms of vocabulary, there are few similarities since they share Latin roots, but most are different. In terms of pronunciation, we can say that both languages have their peculiarities that make them different. As an English teacher, I have had the opportunity to analyze the way my students face problems when they are learning English. One common problem has been the oral production of regular verbs when they are in situations to use the simple past tense; they show difficulties to produce the suffix *-ed*. I worked with a small group of fourteen students in all whose age went from 18 to 50 years old, men and women. This study was carried out at the Center of Languages at Universidad Veracruzana for people who studied the Basic English second level. I planned several activities which were worked during five weeks. Each activity seemed to have been very useful as it allowed me to see the students' progress in each one. At the beginning of the research, students tended to omit the suffix *-ed* in various activities we carried out; after applying different strategies, I was able to observe the students' progress. By the end of the research, most students recognized the suffix's function and tried to produce each verb correctly, although they occasionally produced more /*Id*/ for all three types of endings. This change was evident throughout the activities.

KEYWORDS: Oral production, pronunciation, regular verbs, strategies, communication

RESUMEN: Aprender un segundo idioma ha sido fácil para algunas personas y difícil para otras. En cuanto al inglés, podemos decir que es un idioma muy diferente del español. El español presenta mayor variedad en sus conjugaciones, mientras que el inglés no. En cuanto al vocabulario, existen pocas similitudes, ya que comparten raíces latinas, pero la mayoría son diferentes. En cuanto a la pronunciación, podemos decir que ambos idiomas tienen peculiaridades que los diferencian. Como profesor de inglés, he tenido la oportunidad de analizar cómo mis alumnos enfrentan problemas al aprender el idioma inglés. Un problema común ha sido la producción oral de verbos regulares cuando se encuentran en situaciones donde deben usar el pasado simple; presentan dificultades para producir el sufijo -ed. Trabajé con un grupo pequeño de catorce estudiantes, hombres y mujeres, cuyas edades oscilaban entre los 18 y los 50 años. Este estudio se llevó a cabo en el Centro de Idiomas de la Universidad Veracruzana para personas que cursaban el segundo nivel de inglés básico. Planifiqué varias actividades que se realizaron durante cinco semanas. Cada actividad me resultó muy útil, ya que me permitió observar el progreso de los estudiantes. Al comenzar la investigación, los alumnos tendían a omitir el sufijo **ed** en las diferentes actividades que realizamos; tras aplicar diferentes estrategias, pude observar el progreso en los estudiantes. Al finalizar la investigación, la mayoría de los estudiantes reconocieron la funcionalidad del sufijo y trataron de producir cada verbo correctamente, aunque en ocasiones producían más /ld/ para los tres tipos de terminaciones. En el transcurso de las actividades se pudo ver el cambio.

PALABRAS CLAVES: producción oral, pronunciación, verbos regulares, estrategias, comunicación

INTRODUCTION

Communication is an important and necessary device in our lives. Through communication, people can get into contact with other people all over the world. It is an interesting process by which people exchange information to convey meaning with others with the idea of creating shared understanding. This process becomes successful when people keep certain control of their own communicative skills; this process will let people participate in everyday situations: at home, at work, at school and in other areas.

As we know, language is the perfect vehicle for interacting with others, for building relationships, and for learning new things. Sometimes, communication becomes difficult when languages are different and people want to exchange knowledge and ideas to keep an active communication. When communication is not effective it becomes a negative factor which causes people to lose interest in learning and keep into contact with others. Most of the time, when people are

learning a second language, they prefer the written information rather than the oral one, due to the lack of development they have on pronunciation and the fear of being wrong.

Oral communication skills are mainly based on speaking and listening; pronunciation is the area where people can improve the way they say a word. All these factors are important in the teaching of English as a Second Language. Teachers need to create different activities and mainly to take into account the students' learning. Teachers must draw their attention to these three components of oral communication as they are considered important to any coherent curriculum design. Nowadays, speaking, listening, and pronunciation are characterized as reciprocally interdependent oral language processes.

The main purpose of this paper is to identify those strategies that can help students acquire the correct pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past tense for language learners' pronunciation in Basic English second Level. After observing the most common pronunciation difficulties, several strategies were selected, which work with students in order to help them improve their pronunciation so that their communication with others can be successful.

As I mentioned above, because of being an international language, English has caused people to decide to learn it for different goals; some people learn English to obtain a better job; others to travel and communicate easily and others just to speak it. Most of the students face problems on pronunciation and this has been one of the factors that have made students stop learning English. As Brown (2007:340) states "At the beginning levels, we want learners to surpass that threshold through which pronunciation detracts them from their ability to communicate"; Brown (ibid) states that one of the most common problems that students face is the oral production. It is necessary to work deeply on this problem and give suitable solutions that make students learn the correct pronunciation for this type of verbs easily through adequate strategies that can be at the same time motivational activities.

I think that teachers should focus on pronunciation and analyze the importance of teaching pronunciation within the ELT (English Language Teaching) curriculum. Sometimes teachers think that pronunciation comes along, that is, that students will learn it through isolated repetition or the times they listen to their teachers. Actually, the teacher must create meaningful activities where students can link pronunciation with what they are learning.

CONTEXT AND FOCUS

Pronunciation is an important area that teachers should include in their daily classes. I think that students should know the most common symbols in phonology and the sounds they produce to start becoming familiar with them. As we know, good pronunciation would help them maintain efficient communication without confusion or misunderstandings. Unfortunately, very few students appreciate the importance of good pronunciation and others think that learning a second language is just based on knowing lists of vocabulary and knowing grammatical rules.

Jones (2008) points out that learning to pronounce a language is a very complex task, and the learning process can become easy or not depending on the learner's "attitude". He also adds that we, as teachers, must help our students by dividing the language into its components, such as sounds and other aspects.

During several semesters, I have had the opportunity to teach in Basic English second level at the Language Center of the University of Veracruz in Orizaba. According to the syllabus, the student must know how to express situations in the simple past tense; the students work on this tense constantly; they learn the grammar structures and interact with other classmates to practice this tense and at the same time to acquire more fluency. Unfortunately, some students fail because of several factors such as lack of study, bad pronunciation for verbs in the simple past tense and confusion to order their ideas. When I teach Basic English second level students, I frequently work with them on the four skills mainly to reinforce the pronunciation for verbs in the simple past tense either regular or irregular. Most of my students have mentioned that pronunciation makes their lives more difficult because it implies to learn symbols that they find difficult to be learnt.

When I hear my students saying that pronunciation is not necessary to learn English, I always tell them that pronunciation is an important aspect to acquire a second language since it helps them to distinguish words, improve their spelling and recognize patterns of pronunciation so that they can maintain a clear conversation with other people. This is the reason that inspires me to research in this common problem in my classes in Basic English second level learners. The main goal of this action research is to identify and apply those pronunciation strategies that can help them improve their pronunciation in the oral production of regular verbs in simple past tense. I worked with a group of twenty students approximately; my students' ages vary from 16 to 50 years old.

RATIONALE

This research was applied for Basic English Second level learners who want to study at the Language Center of the Universidad Veracruzana. People who want to learn English have to study 9 levels in all and to take 5 hours a week, 75 hours approximately per level, where they can choose the days to study. This school has a specific book for each level. The books contain a great diversity of activities where students can put in practice the four skills: writing, reading, listening, and speaking, pronunciation considered a sub skill of this last skill. During several semesters I have observed that students face problems when speaking. Several students are good at writing and reading skills but they often have problems with the speaking skill, especially on pronunciation. Most of the students think that pronunciation is difficult and sometimes not necessary.

A big real problem here is that the pronunciation abilities of our students are not equal; a few students have good pronunciation whereas most of them have a poor pronunciation. For this reason, I intended to identify my students' obstacles when they pronounce incorrectly, as well as to implement those activities that can help them improve their pronunciation and make them recognize that pronunciation is as important as speaking, writing, listening and reading skills. This action research aims at

- Identifying the obstacles of pronouncing regular verbs in the simple past tense correctly.
- Identifying strategies to improve their pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past tense.

The purpose of my research was to implement those activities that help my students pronounce the regular verbs in the simple past correctly. I wanted my students to have the correct pronunciation of this kind of verbs, which could improve their communication with other people.

For me it was interesting and motivating to find those activities that let my students use this tense correctly and share my research with other coworkers. I think that if all the teachers found solutions to the common teaching and learning problems in our classrooms, our classes would be better and our students would also learn successfully. I wanted to find a solution to those pronunciation problems that I commonly have in classes.

OBJECTIVE

The main objective for this research is the following:

- I To identify and apply pronunciation strategies that can improve students' pronunciation; and also, the effectiveness of the planned focused on improving pronunciation of the simple past forms of the verbs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The importance of teaching pronunciation

As we know, pronunciation is an important part of foreign language learning which should be taught in our daily classes; although students might consider it difficult, we, as teachers, should promote it considering that it is an integral part and it can affect learners' communicative competence as well as performance. Brown (2007:340) states that "Our goal as teachers of English pronunciation should therefore be more realistically focused on clear, comprehensible pronunciation." I have worked with many students and most of them have shown difficulties to pronounce correctly regular verbs in the simple past tense. A major issue is that they do not recognize the importance of learning pronunciation since they consider it difficult to distinguish the different sounds which are not similar to the ones that exist in Spanish, and, also, to assimilate it immediately as an important part of language; this situation can cause students to feel unmotivated and unwilling to interact with other classmates during the activities related to these issues.

In relation to students' attitude on learning pronunciation, Jenkins (2001:67) points out how important it is to make students learn pronunciation since "limited pronunciation skills can decrease learners' self-confidence, restrict social interactions, and affect estimations of students' credibility and abilities." As English is one of the most spoken languages all over the world, it is important and necessary that people can be competent and interact with native or non-native speakers in a natural and effective way. The importance of learning a second language is to be able to communicate with others, either orally or in writing. As we know, each skill has certain advantages and disadvantages: the first one may make communication easier and faster, while the latter requires more time and it cannot be as fast as the oral; however, both can be used in formal and informal situations.

MOTIVATION TO LEARN PRONUNCIATION IN THE CLASSROOM

Jenkins (2001:70) also portrays the common problems identified in the classroom and how to plan strategies that can help teachers solve those problems. For these reasons, we have to identify the problem and start working from there. Also, the author claims that it is important and motivating that either listeners or speakers can keep a good communication so that they can exchange information that should be comprehensible instead of providing an opposite effect for both actors in the transaction. About it, Brown (2007: 341) points out that “The extent to which learners’ intrinsic motivation propels them toward improvement will be perhaps the strongest influence of all six of the factors in this list.” So, we can determine the importance of motivation in the development of pronunciation.

Clear pronunciation is essential in spoken communication. I have observed in my classes that sometimes when learners produce minor mistakes in vocabulary and grammar, they can communicate effectively when they have a good command of pronunciation and intonation. I consider that these points might make learners more self-confident; I also agree that if we analyze the most common pronunciation problems and plan activities related to them, we can help them work on their weaknesses. Nowadays most English books have a great variety of activities which can be useful according to our students’ necessities. Bowler and Cunningham (1992) emphasize the importance on pronunciation aspects to be taught in our classrooms; as the previous authors claim, it is important to detect our key problems in the classrooms and select the most appropriate activities to help them learn in an appropriate way.

The authors I chose to develop this action research mention to make students practice their pronunciation through meaningful activities which may help them improve their pronunciation and at the same time to reinforce the other skills. It is important that students do not practice pronunciation in an isolated way but in a context and in different situations in order to make them useful and communicative for the learners. The suggested activities can be practiced either in the classroom or at home. I have been able to observe that these textbooks contain all of the main pronunciation problems that foreign learners can have and other aspects considered important when trying to master these areas. To this matter, Hewings (2004:186) states that “the activities can be used to test students’ ability to say different features of pronunciation, i.e., to test their productive skills.”

RAISING AWARENESS

After analyzing information on how to increase pronunciation, I thought about including games in this project which would help students improve their pronunciation in an attractive, entertaining way. Hancock (2003) points out the importance of including games in a class since they can be a good opportunity to interact with others, learn socially, and be entertained. Also, the author states the importance of using games, since they can be a good opportunity to have more entertaining, interesting and effective sessions. He also provides information on the importance of pronunciation in classes and offers a variety of activities that facilitate teachers with ways to teach pronunciation and involve students in this area of spoken language in an appealing way. The aim of including games is to avoid oral repetition drills which tend to become boring and insignificant. Harmer (2006) claims that students can learn grammar rules and pronunciation patterns differently pointing out that 'awareness-raising' is an important factor when teaching. If we change the way we are used to doing it and we include either songs or games, there will be greater changes in their learning; students will raise their awareness and become more independent; they will also be able to predict sounds and will not need the teacher's help all the time. In this way, students may overcome their weaknesses and acquire the knowledge they need through this type of activities.

Games are intended for different goals; there is a concise explanation for each game detailing what the teacher has to do, that is, the previous preparations before the lesson. It is important to mention that we can make adjustments or adaptations, depending on the characteristics of each group or the topic that will be worked on in class; the goal is to make the game productive. Regarding this, Nunan (1999:118) states that "activities can be graded according to the cognitive and performance demands made upon the learner."

STRATEGIES TO IMPROVE PRONUNCIATION

Seidlhofer (2012:56) suggests important issues on pronunciation. She points out that pronunciation has a central role in our lives: "...as individuals, we project our identity through the way we speak, and also indicate our membership of particular communities. At the same time, and sometimes also in conflict with this identity function, our pronunciation is responsible for intelligibility." As we can observe, it is necessary to help students keep a clear pronunciation to make understandable what they want to say, conveying 'their meaning'. Most of the times the problem lies at the teacher's responsibility, when she/he is unaware of the importance of teaching phonetics considering it difficult even though they recognize its relevance. The issue is how to teach it, and how to make students use the correct pronunciation.

As teachers, we have the responsibility to help them improve their pronunciation and make their oral production successfully through strategies that can be adequate to their needs. About that Cohen (2011:17) points out that "...strategies are viewed in terms of their role in operationalizing both the receptive skills of listening and reading, and the productive skills of speaking, and writing."

Seidlhofer (2012) identifies clear areas about pronunciation; she states that pronunciation is not a set of symbols to be taught, pronunciation requires a deep knowledge about itself to be taught by the teacher and learners can understand the importance of conveying 'their meaning' in discourse. Otherwise, when learners feel they have not exchanged information successfully and their communication becomes difficult and little understood, they decide either to become passive in their learning or to quit studying.

When Seidlhofer (2012) talks about pronunciation in *pedagogy*, she refers to the things a teacher should be able to do to teach pronunciation. A teacher should consider that not all students learn in the same way and that is the reason to prepare enough material and consider all possible situations. In class, I have observed that a variety of options can draw their attention; they like to be challenged and prove themselves how much they can do. Sometimes teachers think that games are only for children, but a game can be an interesting way to obtain what we pretend to. As in teaching, the teacher can make students learn something better than make them repeat things that will vanish with time. To teach effectively, it is required to make use of communicative tasks which will help students interact with the language in a real way. This author recommends several useful strategies to be implemented such as: listening and repeating, discrimination practice, cognitive analysis and others.

Jones (2008) makes interesting suggestions about how to teach pronunciation. For him pronunciation should not be taught in an isolated way, it should be practiced in linguistic contexts where students can understand the communicative dimensions, that is, in this part, teachers should design communicative tasks and activities where students can understand the purpose of the activity better and interact more easily. 'Listen and repeat' is a good strategy to teach pronunciation because it implies several activities which can be adapted according to the students' needs, that is, the teacher can design other forms of drilling where students can have the opportunity to interact with the activity so that they can put into practice what the teacher consider necessary to be reinforced. He considers that the use of 'songs' is more productive and meaningful when students are practicing rhythm and sound in a more natural way. When students are making repetitive practice of songs, the activity becomes more interesting since they are trying to 'reproduce' what they are hearing. There are other activities derived from 'listening and repeating', for example, students can practice dialogue readings such as poems, paragraphs, and

others; there are other activities related to discrimination or repetition drills where students can use decontextualised words, sentences or just phrases. He proposes another interesting activity which consists on making students interact with certain information which is transferred by using other words or sentences, where the students practice several activities: reading, listening and speaking.

Jones (2008) points out another interesting strategy which consists on teaching through rules; that is, as we know most of the textbooks gives a variety of 'rules' which invite the student to use them and put them into practice. This type of activity seems to make students just mechanize certain information which can be forgotten in a short time. Jones's proposal is to make students reflect on rules through an 'inductive way' where students can articulate the rules governing. This kind of activity can become more meaningful and as Jones (2008:183) states "It can make rules more memorable to learners in that they are formulated by themselves; it can increase awareness of the communicative aspects of pronunciation: and it can provide an opportunity for communicative practice as learners interact with their peers."

I consider that each author provides relevant ideas; the goal is to select which one suits students' needs. Bucks (2001:64) points out that "the basic idea underlying communicative teaching in that language is used for the purpose of communication, in a particular situation and for a particular purpose, and the important thing is (...) they can actually use it to communicate in (...) the real-world situation in which the language will be used." As we can see, pronunciation is helpful because it is an area of language use that will allow students reinforce other important aspects that at the same time will help them master the language they are learning.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the methodology used in this research allowed me to assess the strategies applied in the different activities which helped the students improve their pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past tense and at the same time analyze which ones were functional and which ones were not. The instruments used are described and the description of the implementation.

It is important to highlight the methods that allowed me to achieve the results obtained. The central idea was to find a method that would let me identify activities that were most meaningful to their learning and avoid isolated, context-free exercises. There are a variety of methods, but the ones I used were the Analytic-Linguistic Approach and the Communicative Approach. Based on the characteristics of each method, they allowed me to address the central point of this research, which is the mastery of the **ed** suffix for the production of regular verbs in students at the *Basic English Second level*. The first method was very helpful as it permitted to focus on

the movements required for producing the **ed** suffix, such as the position of the tongue, teeth, palate, air flow, and being able to produce the three sounds required for regular verbs. The second approach focuses on communicative competence; through real-life situations, it was possible to create spaces that reflect everyday life and make learning more meaningful and active. The analytical linguistic approach allowed us to analyze the phonological composition of this language; This greatly helped the students understand the sounds both singly and in combination. This was reinforced with support material and activities carried out by the teacher.

ANALYTIC-LINGUISTIC APPROACH

This method systematically studies language, that is, it allows us to analyze its grammatical, semantic, and even pragmatic structures. It lets us to observe the composition of language in detail and understand patterns and trends in language use, which is essential for better natural language processing (2011).

Firstly, it was necessary to explain the phonetic alphabet to them and analyze the sounds each letter makes. This led to doubts arising from the similarities that exist in their native language.

To better understand them, exercises were performed involving the vocal organs, such as the lips, tongue, larynx, and others. This also allowed them to identify the sound and the vibration each letter produces. Derived from this exercise, it was necessary to explain in detail how to produce the three sounds for the suffix **ed**.

Memory game: this allowed students to relate sounds to images to better clarify the sound of each letter. This game allowed them to identify more the sounds. Another memory game was created to practice the three sounds involved in the pronunciation of the regular verbs in the Simple Past tense.

Minimal Pair Lists: This activity allowed students to specify the three sounds; that is, material was prepared with three columns where the same verb was represented with all three sounds, and one option was correct.

Minimal Pair Drills: Here, oral production was worked on through a list of regular verbs presented in a base format, which had to be recorded in audio via WhatsApp. Each student received feedback and was asked to resubmit it.

THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

This approach was very helpful because its main objective was to help students develop their communication skills through activities, either in groups or in pairs. To achieve this, students worked on various activities designed to put into practice the grammatical structures, vocabulary, and expressions learned through listening,

reading, writing, and speaking activities. It was necessary to work with material based on real-life situations to make it more meaningful to them. They had the opportunity to create similar situations and put them into practice.

It was necessary to use authentic material such as flyers, newspapers, magazines, social media, YouTube, menus, recipes, etc. They also used their English textbooks.

THE STUDY

Action Research is a way to find possible solutions to certain problems given in our daily classes. This action research project was created to solve a problematic situation observed during several years in my daily classes. Most English students show a great difficulty to produce the correct pronunciation for regular verbs in the simple past tense. Some students tend not to pay attention to the pronunciation, ignoring it totally. Others are interested in learning it but sometimes teachers do not increase that knowledge. As a teacher of Basic English second level, I have observed that the production of the suffix **ed** has caused students problems when they speaking because they get confused trying to remember the ending of each verb to produce the correct sound in each one. The main purpose of this action research is to make teachers consider pronunciation an important part when a second language is being learned since otherwise our students will not recognize the importance of learning and considering it important.

THE CONTEXT

This study took place at the Language Center at the Universidad Veracruzana in Orizaba, Veracruz. The English program includes 9 levels divided into three blocks: basic, intermediate and advanced. Each block contains three levels, having 5 hours a week; all these English courses are aimed at people of different ages. The study was applied in the first block, level two. The goal of selecting this level was because most of students face serious difficulties to produce the correct pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past tense. I had enough time to work with the selected group and observe how the students could work and develop their abilities to acquire the correct pronunciation for these verbs. There were a total of 14 students. I carried out action research during a semester, so I had the opportunity to evaluate a course and use different research methods to obtain the information I needed. I analyzed the difficulties my students faced to pronounce correctly the regular verbs in the simple past tense.

DATA COLLECTION

My Action Research had characteristics of qualitative research since there was a case study where it could be observed and analyzed how the students interacted with different material to make them acquire the correct pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past tense; Through it, it was possible to detect what situations affected their progress while learning and what strategies were taken not to interrupt the course of the investigation. Merriam (1998:06) states that “Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting.”

Narrative analysis is an important tool within the field of the qualitative research since it helped me describe step by step what happened during my action research. This method was fundamental because through it I could organize the activities and have a variety of them to analyze better and deeply what happened during the process of this case study. Through this method I could register interesting information taken from the activities done in the classroom. I specified the teaching material worked in the observed classes as well as the instruments used during this research; the way I explained the activities and whether my instructions were clear or not were registered; it was also specified whether the material used was appropriate to be worked in the classroom or whether it was necessary to make some changes to avoid interrupting the process of the activity. The way they were integrated to interact with others either in pairs, small groups or individually was mentioned.

INSTRUMENTS

To facilitate the way to collect data, I used *checklists*. This was an effective way to obtain certain information because they were created according to the necessities of the group. As I needed to observe different things, I created three checklists. The first one was used at the beginning of the course to analyze their attitude in the activities, their interaction with other classmates, and their participation in class; the second one was used while they were playing with some games done to improve their pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past where I also analyzed their attitude, interaction, and improvement on pronunciation.

Group Discussion was another important way to analyze more and observe how much the students improved their pronunciation for Regular verbs in the simple past tense. The students were encouraged to talk and participate, apart from interacting. They practiced the use of this tense as well as the correct pronunciation for regular verbs with topics related to the simple past tense. *Personal interviews/*

pair work were a way to obtain in-depth and comprehensive information. There were activities where these interviews involved one person interviewing another person for personal or detailed information. Personal interviews were used only when subjects were not likely to respond to other survey methods. I considered important to record the students' answers because through them, I was able to explore and analyze what happened about the activities practiced in the classroom. Through this, I was also able to identify how I guided my class and to analyze aspects such as the tone of my voice, the manner of expressing myself, and the way I solved my students' problems. I invited one partner to observe my class and give me feedback about what happened in my class to reinforce and improve my teaching.

FINDINGS

The purpose of this section is to present findings obtained during several weeks of work where different activities were used to improve students' pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past tense. Each strategy developed in each activity provides the results obtained. The new data found in this study are presented in tables, and other data are described.

Problems with pronunciation

The activities worked on in this study provided good results. The first activity was very important because I needed to know how the students read in simple past. They showed little knowledge on the pronunciation for the regular verbs in simple past tense. The majority of the students did not pronounce the suffix 'ed,' they just reached the base word, skipping the suffix. After this activity I could confirm their difficulties when pronouncing the regular verbs in the simple past tense.

Deducing information

After making the students exchange information about past events, I could observe the way they interacted with their peers, that is, if they showed either a positive or negative attitude and at the same time to analyze the way they pronounced the past of regular verbs in the simple past tense. Through a checklist I could register their pronunciation and attitude when working the activity. The results show that most of them had a positive attitude and as regards pronunciation most of them had several mistakes when speaking, just four could stand for an appropriate pronunciation.

ATTITUDE	PRONUNCIATION
P= 11	C=4
N=3	I=10

P= Positive attitude

C= correct pronunciation

N= Negative attitude

I= incorrect pronunciation

It was interesting to work on Jones's (2008) suggestion which consists of making students 'discover' the information through inductive activities. I observed it was successful to make them deduce the three pronunciation rules for the regular verbs. I observed that they strived to identify and classify the verbs by using the technique of putting their fingers on their throat and they could feel the vibration each one causes. I noticed that it was more useful and meaningful to have them discover by themselves than to explain them in explicit presentations of rules; I observed they worked very well and were very enthusiastic about the activity.

Listening and Repeating

Another useful activity included in this research was the use of a *song*. When I worked the song with my students, I observed that they did not like the activity so much. It was useful and convenient to make them questions about the song since it let them express what they were feeling; some answers were given in Spanish and others in English. They showed some difficulties to catch the information and fill in the gaps, even though the song was repeated more than twice, four times in all. There was another problem when I asked them to sing, they simply did not want to do it, possibly they felt ashamed of singing in the class. I asked them if the song was boring and they answered that it was not. The main purpose might have not been reached in class because the idea was that they listened and repeated the song. However, just a few students and I sang the song. Nevertheless, the surprise came the next day when most of the students handed in the 'extra activity' the results became more positive on doing the extra activity at home. They identified the total of regular verbs; they mentioned their favorite part of the song and the place described in the song. The most interesting was that they accepted to have sung at home, some mentioned two times and others three times.

Games

The games I used to practice the pronunciation for the regular verbs in simple past tense was not so easy to be worked since it required their attention and the knowledge acquired in the previous activities. I can say that the game gave positive results and these were the more relevant aspects: Some students had problems with the activities since they had missed classes so they could not participate as they should. When the students started playing, they were checking their notebook to verify their answers. Other students asked me solve their doubts. I could also observe some students solving their doubts by putting their index and middle fingers on their throat and verifying the correct sound. Others asked me but I helped them reflect on the sound. The answers were given at the end of the activities so that they could check what they have done.

Post-reading

At the beginning of this action research, I included a pre-reading (see appendix one) where each student read a short paragraph in the simple past tense. The data reflected that most of them had serious problems to produce the simple past tense. To compare the beginning results I considered important to include another reading with the aim to know how much they had improved their pronunciation. In this activity it was necessary to record them and use a checklist which let me register the information carefully. I could observe two situations: the first one happened when I asked them to read a short paragraph in the simple past tense. There were positive changes in their pronunciation since they no longer omitted the suffix 'ed'. They got confused with the sounds corresponding to /t/ and /d/; they most used /d/ for most verbs; although they forgot to pronounce each ending correctly, at least they did not ignore the suffix 'ed'. They seemed to be more aware of it. I consider that the problem of not pronouncing the suffix correctly may have been caused by the fact that in Spanish we are not used to linking and omitting sounds as it is done in English and they seemed to avoid doing this; or maybe they did not try hard to produce it correctly. The second situation happened when I gave them some extra minutes to 'prepare' it; in this second option, students showed noticeable in the simple past tense. I can consider that there were a few mistakes; the checklist shown in Appendix 5 reflects that they did not have problems in pronouncing /d/ (2 of 14 students). A few mistakes (4 of 14) were made with the sound /t/ and there were more mistakes to produce /d/ (5 of 14). I want to emphasize that they are more aware that the simple past tense does not just imply to know how to write them but also to know how to read them progress on pronouncing regular verbs.

Discrimination practice

Discrimination practice was an interesting activity which required the students' attention. When the track was played the students did not understand easily so it was necessary to play it twice. When we were checking the activity, a few students told me not to have understood some of them so I decided to read them and they could identify the correct answer. This type of activities is useful and should be used constantly in class to help them put into practice what they are seeing in class and reinforce it more.

Free activity

The purpose to include this activity was to observe what they could do by themselves without any 'extra- help'. It was satisfactory to see how the students tried to retell the story by producing the simple past tense correctly, that is, producing the most possible each sound. Most of the students had a few mistakes. Sometimes they changed one sound for another. Sometimes they produced /**Id**/ where they must not do it. I consider it was interesting to make them produce information by themselves and they could realize what they could do without the teacher's help.

DISCUSSION AND REFLECTIONS

This action research has allowed me to find interesting results which can contribute for the development of future educational strategies to help students improve their pronunciation for the regular verbs in the simple past tense. When students start learning the production of past situations, they tend not to produce the suffix **ed** when they speak. The activities mentioned above were useful since helped them understand better this tense and produce the correct pronunciation for each ending.

The results obtained in each activity planned for this action research were satisfactory because they helped the students to improve the pronunciation. Some of them were more meaningful than others, according to the notes in my journal the students participated more in this type of activities and they showed more interest. The purpose was that each one helped them foster and improve their pronunciation for these verbs. Thus, it has shown the importance of promoting pronunciation training in a constant way and of giving it the accurate emphasis on each activity worked in class. Each of the activities worked gave positive results. This suggests that teachers should consider all the possible activities, employing relevant strategies in order to help students dominate 'the knowledge' which is being practiced in class and avoid students' poor learning. The activities I made use of in this research were truly useful but I do not want to state that they are the only ones to be used. Each

teacher should analyze their students' needs as a starting point. I consider important to take into account the learning styles and create a variety of activities based on the strategies that make them learn in a more meaningful way.

Another important fact was that the students finally realized the importance of pronouncing the suffix **'ed'** when expressing themselves in past simple. When I started this study, I could observe certain negative attitude to produce the suffix **'ed'**. I could also register interesting comments the students made when working. One of the first activities was to ask them to read a short paragraph in past simple and what they did was skipping the suffix when reading, they ignored it totally. I remember a comment made by a student who told me, when I was explaining to them the importance to produce the correct sound for this ending, "teacher... nobody realizes if we pronounce it or not". When I heard this, I helped them reflect and compare a similar situation in their mother language which, I am sure, made them understand the importance of producing the correct sound when speaking in past. This reflection was very useful, as Seidlhofer (2001) states, we, as teachers, have the responsibility to help them understand and assimilate what we need them to understand; one way to do it is by comparing the mother language sound system with the second language sound system, which in this study, was very useful and functional. When they observed the comparison, they seemed to be more interested in understanding and assimilating the difference in both languages to get the same effectiveness when speaking.

When they understood what ending sound should be added at the end of each regular verb, another problem was *what to do to produce the suffix 'ed' when speaking?* Through the strategies used and recommended by several authors, I started developing different activities which tried to help them produce the three endings. Richard's (2008) suggestion, it was practical to make them think and 'discover' by themselves the three ending rules for the regular verbs in the simple past tense; but when they started practicing the three sounds for those verbs, they insisted on producing the same sound **/ld/** for all the verbs. They showed a great difficulty to produce the **/t/** and **/d/** sounds. I was able to notice that the production for the suffix **'ed'** and for the last two sounds became difficult due to their native language interference and the phonetic references that there are in both languages. Despite the fact I made them work on several activities they continued showing the same problem; they tended to add **/t/** when **/d/** should have been used and vice versa. By taking into account the notes I wrote, I concluded that the game used in the class was useful although it reinforced more the visual area. This part was enjoyable for them, but when it was time to produce the sound for each verb, they seemed to be worried because they were afraid of making mistakes. One student said, "teacher, ... I can't...it's difficult to produce them". I always tried to motivate them to work more enthusiastically.

I considered it would be interesting they could practice their pronunciation by singing. It was not easy to find a song that they liked it since most of them prefer popular songs and to select one where verbs in past were included. I observed that they did not like the activity very much but they did their best to work in class. The idea to include a song was because I did not want to make them repeat words in an isolated way. I also consider that something becomes more meaningful when that person is doing something he/she likes since he/she enjoys it more. It is important to use our creativity and make any activity successful. It would be interesting to have asked the students how they would have liked to work with the song and thus share responsibilities with them. It is also important to plan an alternating activity when it is suspected that one may not be functional because of students' attitude or perhaps because we did not plan it well. The alternating activity I had when I observed that some of them did not show interest in singing was positive. It was a good idea they could evaluate themselves and took responsibility about their own learning.

Among the other activities, the students were asked to read another paragraph in past. I could notice that they became aware of the differences in pronouncing **-ed** and the importance of trying to pronounce it correctly. They continued making mistakes regarding the three sounds but at least they did not avoid pronouncing the suffix **'ed'** or skip it as they did at the beginning of this action research. I could observe that they felt more confident when they had 'extra time' to prepare their reading in past since their pronunciation was adequate and marked the ending sound very well.

I consider that having worked with activities, where listening, reading and writing were included, helped them increase their pronunciation for the regular verbs and the most important they became aware of the importance of producing the ending sound for these verbs.

Motivation and patience were helpful to increase their self-confidence and they could continue working with other activities. I considered important and relevant to include a final activity whose strategy focused on making them face a situation which had to be solved with their own knowledge and skills on the language. This one let me see what each student could do to communicate and interact with others. I observed they talked slowly possibly because they tried to pronounce. It was interesting to see how much they could do by themselves; they seemed to be more self-confident although they were afraid to speak. Now they seemed to be aware when they speak since they already know that 'something extra' must be added at the end of the verb.

I consider that it is necessary to include more activities where they could reinforce the three ending sounds. It was not enough to have worked on just these strategies and activities since others could be used as well. It is important to mention that the students could perform better in class but there were other factors such as attitude, time and class absences which did not let them have a better performance. I think it could be a good idea to have created an activity bank where the students could have worked more the pronunciation at home, for the three ending sounds, and practice it to feel more self-confident when speaking.

I think that having done action research on an important issue, helped me understand what I can do to improve my students' learning and what not to do in class. This is an excellent way to balance what we do in class and to change methodology, strategies and activities that can affect our students' learning. The most important thing is to raise awareness in our students when learning. This is also a good opportunity to improve our teaching and grow as teachers.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

During several years of teaching English, pronunciation has called my attention seriously. That is the reason this study was focused on helping students improve their pronunciation for regular verbs in the simple past tense. Most students have a lot of difficulties to produce the three endings for the suffix **'ed'** when speaking. My experience as an English teacher helped me plan some strategies that were useful for this action research project. I want to mention that some activities were more meaningful than others but finally all of them made them work and practice the ending sound.

It is important to analyze the students we have each semester and depending on that we can start planning what strategies carry out. We should remember that all students have different needs and learning styles. We should avoid the traditional teaching in our classrooms and make changes when we teach. There is no doubt that when we make our students 'discover' new things they do it better and with a positive attitude since it becomes more interesting and meaningful for them.

This action research helped me understand that when I want to make a change, I need to define and organize what I intend to change in my teaching. To make changes I need to observe and analyze students' needs, taking into account their preferences, likes, learning styles and all those factors that can help design a list of strategies and activities to be developed in the classroom. It is important to change our methodology and through it we can have new insights on how to teach English in order to improve 'situations' which have not been functional in our classrooms. For example, regarding games, I could include at least other two games and have a variety of games. Possibly the students who showed a negative attitude could have worked better with other games.

This action research can hopefully help other teachers improve their classes when they want to teach the suffix ‘**ed**’. In class, I suggest working on improving pronunciation every day, it is important for teachers to remind students to correct their pronunciation every day and avoid fossilizations in the future. The problem is when teachers avoid explaining pronunciation in class. If the teacher has problems to understand the phonetic symbols, he/she should ask for help to understand used them in class.

Now I have learned that action research is a great opportunity to find solutions to everyday problems. I think a teacher would not work with the same problems; he/she should try hard to find solutions by doing action research constantly. A teacher must do his/her best every day and be concerned about his/ her students’ learning. As it is known doing action requires time and sometimes, we are pressured by different circumstances but we should do it to become more creative in our classes and mainly make our students learn and enjoy their classes.

REFERENCES

- BOWLER, B. and CUNNINGHAM. S. (1992). *Headway-Pronunciation*. Oxford University Press.
- CELCE-MURCIA, M., BRINTON, D. M. & Goodwin, J. M. (1996). *Teaching pronunciation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- BROWN, H.D (2007), *Teaching and Principles an Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. San Francisco State University: Pearson Longman
- COHEN, A.D (2011), *Strategies in Learning and Using a Second Language*. Malaysia: Pearson
- HANCOCK, M. (2003), *Pronunciation games*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- HARMER, J. (2006), *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.
- HASHEMIAN, M., & Fadaei, B. (2011). A Comparative Study of Intuitive-imitative and Analytic-linguistic Approaches towards Teaching English Vowels to L2 Learners. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 2(5). <https://shorturl.at/kM3NK>
- HEWINGS, M. (2004), *Pronunciation Practice Activities*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- JENKINS, J. (2001), *The Phonology of English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

KRASHEN, S.D (2003), *Explorations in Language Acquisition and Use: The Taipei Lectures*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann

JONES, R.H. (2008), "Beyond 'Listen and Repeat': Pronunciation Teaching Materials and Theories of Second Language Acquisition" in W.A Renandya and J.C. Richards (eds.), *Methodology in Language Teaching an Anthology of Current Practice*(178-184). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Merriam, Sharan (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.