Phonetic acquisition of Spanish as a Second Language: Some games and activities

Adquisición de la fonética en Español como Segunda Lengua: algunos juegos y actividades

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Resumen

La enseñanza de la pronunciación constituye una parcela fundamental en la adquisición de una segunda lengua. Sin embargo, su desarrollo en el aula, así como el nivel de corrección fonética perseguido, presentan una frecuencia e intensidad bajas como consecuencia, en buena medida, pero no solo, de la importancia y el alcance del Enfoque Comunicativo. Aunque se lo considera una parte esencial de la competencia lingüística y, por lo tanto, de la propia comunicación, este enfoque hace que el concepto de inteligibilidad prevalezca sobre el de corrección. En este sentido, el Marco Común Europeo de Referencia para las Lenguas le dedica un breve apartado a esta última, aunque, todo hay que decirlo, el contenido que muestra con respecto a la corrección resulta mayor de lo que cabría esperar para su punto de vista particular.

Ante este contexto, posiblemente muy reconocible para muchos docentes en la actualidad, el presente artículo reúne algunas breves reflexiones sobre aspectos de la propia actividad de enseñanza de la pronunciación mediante corrección fonética, incluyendo algunos factores internos que se ven condicionados por el adiestramiento, corrección y consolidación de los hábitos articulatorios de la lengua meta, prestando particular atención a la afectividad.
En consideración con estos factores, el encaje del juego durante el proceso de desarrollo de las destrezas orales y, en concreto, de la competencia fonética, parece plenamente justificado. A través de las actividades lúdicas se crea un ambiente distendido y motivacional que favorece el aprendizaje, la progresión y el afianzamiento de la comprensión y expresión orales. Por ello, esta colaboración ofrece, con un propósito práctico, algunos juegos y actividades orientados a la percepción y producción de contenidos fonéticos segmentales y suprasegmentales del español.

**Palabras Clave:** entonación, prosodia, ELE, juegos y actividades, corrección fonética.

**Abstract**

Teaching pronunciation is an essential part of second language acquisition. However, its development in the classroom, as well as the level of phonetic correction sought, has a low frequency and intensity, as a consequence, largely but not only, of the relevance and extent of the Communicative Approach. In spite of being an essential part of linguistic competence and, therefore, of communication itself, this approach makes the concept of intelligibility prevail against correction. In the same vein, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages devotes a brief paragraph to it, although, it must be said, it shows more contents with regard to correction than would be expected from their particular perspective.

Given this context, possibly very recognizable to many teachers today, this paper brings together some brief reflections on aspects of the task of teaching pronunciation through phonetic correction, including some internal factors that are conditioned by training, setting and consolidation of articulation habits of the target language, with particular attention to affectivity.

Taking these factors into consideration, the development of oral skills and, specifically, of phonetic competence seems to fully justify the implementation of an entertaining approach. Through enjoyable activities, a relaxed and motivational environment promotes the learning, progress and strengthening of oral comprehension and expression skills. Therefore, with a practical purpose, this study displays some games and activities aimed at the perception and production of segmental and suprasegmental phonetic contents in the Spanish language.

**Keywords:** intonation, prosody, SSL, games and activities, phonetic correction.
It is obvious that natural languages are essentially oral. However, when we learn a second language, even today, oral skills are not always taken as a priority in our learning, for various reasons. Phonetic correction has been seen, according to the methodologies, either as an unnecessary aim or as a desirable achievement. The perspective in the present article supports the latter and the following pages are devoted to provide evidence in favour of this claim.

**Introduction: The role of phonetic acquisition in the Communicative Approach**

More than three decades after the introduction of the Communicative Approach in language teaching, which had such a high degree of acceptance in Europe and America, we must insist on the well-argued criticism of several specialists in Phonetics and Teaching of pronunciation reflected in numerous studies (Počh 1999; Llisterrí 2003a; Bartolí 2005; Giralt 2006; Gil 2007, among others). Indeed, phonetic acquisition, as a competence of language, has been pushed to the background as a result, largely, but not exclusively, of the methodological assumptions of the Approach. As is well known, the communicative perspective is oriented towards the use –often called instrumental– of language, through which we are able to put together what we, speakers of the same language, think. It meaningfully moves away from the study of the language itself, as the traditional grammar did, arguing that the priority of learners –now called users– is to use the language rather than to describe it. Somehow, this approach focuses on skills shown in a language, as native speakers of that language do, since they generally lack the strictly linguistic knowledge to explain their communicative performances. But, what is more important, from this instrumental view of language, the content of statements is more significant than the form, even though some formal perfection is desired. Another characteristic of the approach is functional: the aim is teaching to produce and understand messages that usually converge in a given situation, based on the idea that language is a resource to meet a specific purpose and that it often manifests itself in certain linguistic or paralinguistic uses.

As a consequence of the implementation of the Communicative Approach, as far as phonetic acquisition is concerned, the fact that students are able to communicate in a second language with a specific purpose is given greater importance than the fact that they do that with phonetic correction. There is a considerable degree of laxity in this sense, provided
that the message is understood, even with some difficulty, by the interlocutor. Therefore, this prioritization reflects a communicative overall criterion of correction, which will be elucidated later.

The obvious result of a lower attention to phonetic competence rather than other linguistic or extralinguistic competence is its poor attention, sometimes non-existent, in manuals or textbooks (see, e.g., Pastor 2004, pág. 210), especially when they are addressed to intermediate and advanced levels, and also the occasional use shown by the teachers in the classroom. This is a surprising fact when it comes to studying, if only superficially, the elements of phonetic competence, in relation to its relevance in communication. Thus, based on the assumptions of the Communicative Approach, which takes the message—or discourse—as an object of oral interaction, certainly the most frequent skill in our communicative exchanges, the phonological system—segmental units—is the physical basis without meaning to acoustically represent our linguistic conventions. Therefore, it is simply imperative for students to correctly discriminate the phonemes of the target language and be able to articulate them without ambiguities or unrecognizable sounds resulting from production. In other words, it has to satisfy the distinctive function of the phonemes; otherwise, communication might be threatened.

Furthermore, also based on the message—or discourse—as an object of communication, suprasegmental features applied to the segments are equally relevant to the understanding and production of sentences. Thus, the accent, which combines the alteration of pitch with duration or intensity (Llisterri 2003b), is responsible for the distinction between stressed and unstressed words with identical phonemes. At the same time, intonation plays a grammatical function, which makes the distinction between declarative sentences and yes/no questions possible. Moreover, intonation has a demarcative function, which fosters—through the breaks—the delimitation of the various phonetic groups of the message, which cover with meaning and structure the respective syntactic components of the speech; it has an informative function too, which allows the distinction between the topic—theme, which is a reference known by both the sender and the receiver, and the comment—rheme, which refers to the new content, in a statement; it also plays an illocutive function, also discursive, which is crucial, for instance, when interpreting the perlocutive effects of a speech act. In summary, the suitability of the suprasegmental features becomes essential for an effective communication.
The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages\(^1\), strongly influenced by the Communicative Approach, but with a specific orientation toward action—speakers are social agents as well as language users—, gives relative importance to aspects of phonological competence, judging by the space devoted to it in the document in relation to other competences, or the skills themselves. There is only one table pointing out the descriptors on the pronunciation knowledge, in which through certainly vague terms, the following criteria characterizing the degree of phonetic acquisition are reflected:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level group</th>
<th>Foreign accent</th>
<th>Absence of significant prosodic nuances</th>
<th>Unchanged intonation</th>
<th>Phonetic mistakes</th>
<th>Rehearsed speech (unnatural)</th>
<th>Listener’s effort</th>
<th>Confusing pronunciation (Not clear or intelligible)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic user</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent user</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>±</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proficient user</td>
<td>±</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Criteria of phonetic acquisition. Source: CEFR (García 2014, pág. 315)

Despite all this, the implementation of the Communicative Approach is not the only cause of the striking distance of the contents of phonetic competence in the foreign language classroom. Other factors, to a greater or lesser extent, contribute to this marginalization: to name a few, a poor knowledge of phonetics by teachers, some beliefs maintaining that phonetic acquisition cannot be taught, and even less in the classroom; or, in the case of Spanish, the idea that spelling faithfully represents pronunciation, and therefore it is not worth considering that aspect; or simply that Spanish is easy to pronounce (cf. Clarke 1982, pág. 1: “Spanish is basically an easy language to pronounce correctly because nearly all the sounds found in Spanish are roughly similar to sounds already found in English, each word is pronounced in the same way every time it occurs and the written form of words is very close to the spoken form”).

About this kind of beliefs, and others, Antonio Orta (2009) shows, through a study with respondent teachers, that phonetics is a practically unknown subject for Spanish instructors, who do not usually prepare

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\(^1\) From now on, CEFR.
pronunciation teaching in advance, neither are they able to integrate this competence in the classroom, even though they seem to be willing to learn how.

Phonetic correction

The concept of correction is identified, on the one hand, with quality, and unavoidably presupposes an ideal or model that serves as a reference. In other words, it represents the *straightness*. Hence, taking this model as *straight*, anything not conforming to it shall be considered a *deviation*. However, it should not be inferred from these words that there is only one interpretation of *straightness* —standard—. As is well known (cf. Mangado 2007), a standard use can be understood in two different ways: first, from a prescriptive perspective, which advocates the criterion of authority and preservation, and second, from another perspective, which considers the majority use as a guideline for correction. The first one does not hide its aims: the unity of language in its formal variety, the preservation of a linguistic heritage, etc., and, as for Spanish, its main stronghold is the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE); the second one does not pursue an objective nor needs a defense, because languages are organized at speakers discretion, and linguistic change is its nature.

On the other hand, the term correction also refers to an action, an amendment that consciously seeks to refine a diverted fact. Problems of phonetic correction —understood in the latter sense— that arise from a prescriptive and a descriptive approach, are logically different, as different are the areas of linguistics studying them. Thus, orthoepy fixes the pronunciation rules of a language, for example, the Spanish numeral *veintiséis*, with a first decreasing diphthong —*ei*—, and it censures other pronunciations as *ventiséis*. In the case of this language, if setting words and expressions in writing becomes a complex activity, it results even more complex in speech, because phonetic changes over the Pan-Hispanic world are even more marked. From the other point of view, the descriptive perspective, phonetics and phonology describe the sounds of human languages according to their geographical, temporal, social features, etc. For instance, it is interesting to note, that northern Spain keeps the final -s of *veintiséis*, while in Andalusian dialect its aspiration is the standard.

Which of these criteria should be applied to language teaching? What model or models should be taught in the classroom? The answer is not simple. Obviously, in practice, the orthoepic correctness corresponds to the
deviant uses of the standard characterizing the native speakers. In general, problems of this discipline presume an articulatory and perceptual domain of the concrete phonological system. Then, it seems logical that the vast majority of learners of a foreign language need other kind of adjustments. That is, they require a different model that phonologically, but also phonetically, coincide with the major uses. And this is where the issue becomes more diffuse. Is it possible to think of an oral –formal or colloquial– Pan-Hispanic standard? In light of the diversity of standards throughout the mentioned territory, it seems difficult to maintain that conception (Saralegui, 1998). Only those who –wrongly– believe in the unambiguous identification of sounds and spellings could come close to such an approach, but even in this utopia prosodic features would distance them from thinking of any unity.

However, perhaps due to lack of reflection, many teachers would correct their students’ acceptable pronunciation, which could even be, in some cases, the majority throughout the Pan-Hispanic territory but not familiar to the teachers’ environment (e.g., the fricative /s/ instead of the interdental /ʃ/: /sa.pa.to/ vs. /ʃa.pa.to/). It seems a fairly common attitude to take the particular standard we use in our mother tongue.

Therefore, there are two external (from students’ view) criteria, prescriptive and descriptive, which are respectively imposed by the competent authority and the major use. But there are at least two other internal criteria, i.e. linked to the students themselves: first, the intelligibility, which closely connects with the purpose of the Communicative Approach, considering admissible any kind of pronunciation understandable by an interlocutor, although it could be understood with some difficulty. The second criterion is the internal degree of proficiency in the acquisition of a native speaker’s skills. In this case, the ideal pronunciation corresponds to that in which a pupil is regarded as a native, or does not show any foreign accent. Consequently, this is the most demanding criterion.

In this respect, teachers of Spanish as a foreign language provide for the admissibility of this criterion, according to a study by Lidia Usó (2008). It reflects the majority identification of what excellence is in the field of pronunciation with, in Usó’s words, “la perfección fonética”, even above of those teachers who think of that as “native level”, and quite far from those thinking of a “near-native level”. Additionally, most respondents believe that excellence is achievable, and only one-third of these consider that this is a secondary objective, subjected to intelligibility.
What kind of student is behind every internal criterion? To answer this question, we should approach the affective factors influencing pronunciation learning. According to Verdía (2010), the attitude towards the language and the degree of acculturation are crucially important during the phonetic acquisition. Thus, when it comes to pronouncing sounds of the second language some students may feel uncomfortable afraid of losing their identity, since while they speak a foreign language, in a way, they build a new social self. Therefore, only those students who are motivated enough to be part of a new culture and language community will pursue pronouncing according to the phonetic perfection. However, the rest, whose motivation is purely instrumental, will prefer or be satisfied with the criterion of intelligibility.

In conclusion, we think that teachers should take into account the phonetic acquisition objectives of students when planning and designing activities with phonetic contents, since the Communicative Approach does not do it as a consequence of its methodological assumptions. There will be, then, self-motivated students claiming more attention to these aspects, while others consciously do not consider them so important. Anyway, following Elena Verdía, teachers should try to encourage their students in a process of acculturation to the new language, as it will always help them at all levels, including the phonetic.

By way of reflection, it would be possible to raise one more criterion to keep in mind in phonetic acquisition, which was postulated by Johansson (1973) in the seventies: the criterion of irritation by the native receptor. Given the fact that the interlocutor is an essential part of any communication, and that communication is the main objective in language learning, the phonetic criterion of perfection should not be banished from teaching, since in order to normalize a communicative act with success and satisfaction of its protagonists it is very important not only to be understood, but also to be naturally understood without difficulties.

In addition, some questions can be posed: when we face errors that do not impede intelligibility, although they may make it difficult, are we Spanish teachers equally tolerant of grammatical or phonetic mistakes? Do we likewise admit the intelligible ungrammaticality of a noun group as “una trauma” and the understandable phonetic incorrectness of a pronunciation “un [tʰɾɔːma]”? And also, to what extent are we not correcting pronunciation because of ignorance of this subject, contrasting with corrections we perform according to a grammatical knowledge basis?
Some games and activities for phonetic acquisition

Despite what has been said in the first paragraph about the consequences of teaching pronunciation according to the Communicative Approach, it should be noted that there are a few specialists, such as Pica (1984), Celce-Murcia (1987) and Terrell (1989), who managed to find ways to integrate teaching of phonetic competence within such theoretical approach. Therefore, it is essential for activities to be meaningful to students, and not to become simple exercises of imitation and repetition, as occurred with the Audio-lingual method. When developing phonetic acquisition, they proposed the following steps: 1) identification of phonetic problems; 2) selection of lexical and grammatical contexts in which these problems appear; and 3) design of communicative tasks that incorporate these contexts. Thus, pronunciation becomes another phase within the core class assignments, and stops being a marginal element to rarely work with.

Given these observations, I will try to give shape to some teaching activities and games to practice phonetic acquisition of Spanish. I will not stop, as they are well known, in the many strengths of games as a resource for language teaching, although I will mention that, among their benefits, they help create a relaxing atmosphere, suitable for motivation and self-confidence, which are decisive aspects when it comes to improving phonetic competence.

All the games and activities included in the following subsections are meant for teenagers and/or adults, and especially for university students.

A treasure in the city

Introduction: this activity presents a treasure hunt game, with a clear communicative purpose: asking for and giving information of a place, with the help of a map. This is a meaningful and practical task, because students can then transfer this communicative routine to real life. As part of this task, the knowledge to correctly perceive and pronounce vibrant consonants /ɾ/ and /r/ will be a prerequisite, which will be tested by naming the streets, avenues, etc. of a map, showing minimal pairs such as: “Travesía del Coral / Travesía del Corral”, etc. The teacher can modify the minimal pairs (i.e., the street names, etc.) depending on the needs of the class. If an adequate level of perception of /ɾ/ and /r/ is not achieved, it is preferable to work with other pairs of phonemes that may be less problematic to students (e.g., /l/ and /ɾ/).
Participants: CEFR level B1 students.

Objectives: to strengthen pronunciation of Spanish vibrant consonants, both in perception as in production; to get used to common expressions to ask for and give information about the address of a particular location.

Contents: phonological distinction of Spanish vibrant consonants (Plan curricular del Instituto Cervantes\(^2\): Chap. 3: 5.2.6); expressions for asking and giving the address of a place (PCIC: Chap. 5: 1.2 and 1.3); ways to provide assistance (PCIC: Chap. 6: 1.6); vocabulary to specify a location or address (PCIC: Chap. 8: 3.3).

Procedure: first, the teacher groups students in pairs and tells them they will find a valuable object in an unfamiliar city. To find the treasure, they will have to help each other, as each student (A and B) will use information the other does not know, which they will find in different maps. Then the teacher gives student A map A (see Fig. 1) and student B map B (see Fig. 2). Map A contains the street names and letters superposed to some buildings. Map B shows the same street names and people’s names living in the aforementioned buildings. Then the two students must clearly know the goals in the game: a) Student A wants to know where a certain person lives –information known to the student B--; b) Student B wants to know which letter is underneath the building of the person in question – information known to student A--. Then they both should start a conversation like this:

B) ¿Quieres que te ayude? / ¿Te ayudo? / ¿Te echo una mano?

A) Sí, por favor. ¿Dónde vive Raúl? / ¿Por dónde se va a casa de Raúl?

B) Tienes que ir hacia el norte por la Avenida de X, girar a la derecha por la calle X...

A) Gracias. Raúl me ha dado la letra X.

Once both students have collected all the letters, the teacher gives them the key to decoding the hidden message in the letters. The key is the order in which the letters should be read: for example, 1→Rocío (C), 2→Rebeca (O), 3→Ricardo (F), 4→Raúl (R), 5→Ramón (E). The hidden treasure is a “cofre”.

\(^2\) From now on, PCIC.
Phonetic self-correction is essential in this activity, because if students do not pronounce carefully enough, there is a risk of failing to find the treasure. If so, they are allowed to try it again making sure they pronounce more clearly.

Resources: two maps –A and B– for each pair; one piece of paper with the key.
Betting on consonants

Introduction: throughout this activity, students will practise how to express certainty and uncertainty in oral interactions in a significant way. However, this part will be prior to a gambling game, in which they will need to discriminate between plosive and approximant consonants, since some learners, such as English speakers, as is known, do not articulate the phonemes /b/, /d/ and /g/ as approximant allophones in their contexts, but as plosive. It is important that learners carry out this activity without writing.

Participants: CEFR level B1-B2 students.

Objectives: to enhance the discrimination between plosive and approximant consonants; to practise the language to show certainty and uncertainty about something.

Contents: approximant voiced consonants alternating with plosives (PCIC: Chap. 3: 5.2.2); expressing certainty and uncertainty (PCIC: Chap. 5: 2.13 and 2.14); specific vocabulary of games (PCIC: Chap. 9: 8.4).

Procedure: as it has been mentioned before, this activity will be useful to practise how to express certainty of something, and the lack of it. With this aim in mind, the teacher explains some expressions to students to show certainty, followed by indicative mood, and uncertainty, by subjunctive. Then, the teacher proposes some fictitious situations so that students, in pairs, manifest how sure they are about the facts (e.g., si te encontraras un sobre con mucho dinero en su interior y tuvieras delante la comisaría de policia, ¿qué harías? –Estoy seguro de que lo devolvería; No estoy seguro de que lo devolviera). Afterwards, a pre-activity designed to play the game is carried out: the teacher distributes a photocopy (or uses a video projector) showing pairs of images representing words differentiated only by a sound (e.g., peso-beso, pino-vino, bota-boda, cuatro, cuadro; col-gol, comagoma; see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Minimal pairs (/p~/b/, /t~/d/, /k~/g/)
In pairs, students should try to guess the words using the expressions of certainty or uncertainty pointed out above (e.g., es evidente que el primer dibujo es una bota). Finally, they are told that there are activities in life which cannot be under anybody’s control: gambling. This time, students will have the opportunity to place bets with play money. Each learner receives the money and a betting sheet with four “bingo cards” containing three images each (see Figure 4), taken from what previously had been explained.

![Figure 4. “Bingo cards”](image)

The exercise consists in betting on just one combination for each card, setting it down in writing, and using the previous expressions of certainty, or even new ones: (me) apuesto 500 euros a que sale / toca / gana la combinación 1. Then, the teacher reads a small story where key words are pronounced (El 20 de julio, mis amigos bebieron mucho vino, celebrando que era el día de mi boda, jugaron al fútbol con el traje puesto y le metieron un gol al camarero). Learners must listen carefully and circle the pictures that correspond to the words used and see if they have that combination. If so, they will get the bet money and it will be doubled. If not, they will lose the money. Whoever has the highest amount of money saved after four rounds will win the game.

Resources: handouts with pairs of images (minimal pairs of words); handouts with bingo cards for betting.
Hand in hand with syllables

Introduction: in this session there are a number of activities to raise awareness of the suprasegmental aspect of syllabic rhythm\(^3\) in Spanish. Students will have to maintain the same pace along all the syllables of a sentence, whether or not stressed. To achieve this, we will start from the notion of coarticulation in speech production, and then we will move on to the union of words by syllables. Finally, we will conduct a game that combines motor coordination with perception and production of the different syllables of a statement.

Participants: CEFR level B1-B2 students.

Objectives: to practise the characteristic Spanish syllabic rhythm; to teach the values and uses of an intonationally emphatic pronunciation; to interpret ambiguous messages; to raise awareness of the coarticulation in speech production; to get familiar with the phonetic merging of words through two syllables.

Contents: resources to emphasize a statement (PCIC: Chap. 6: 2.1.1); elisions or synalephas (PCIC: Chap. 3: 3.1.2); Spanish syllabic rhythm (PCIC: Chap. 3: 4); the emphatic tone (PCIC: Chap. 3: 2.2.1).

Procedure: the class begins with this sentence: Mi.ma.dres.ta.ba.rrien.do. The teacher asks the students if they can think of two different meanings for that statement. After brainstorming, he or she concludes that there are two interpretations, one with the verb reír and another with barrer. Then the instructor explains that, when we speak, no pauses between words of the same phonic group are done, and that is why sometimes it is necessary to see the context to distinguish the lexical items of the sentence and so be able to understand its meaning. This phenomenon is known under the name ‘pun’. Once the explanation is done, the teacher reads the first in a series of puns (e.g., hay.dos.pa.ra.dos → ‘there are two unemployed’ + ‘there are two [gifts] for two [children]’, see Figure 5), and projects two images that help interpret their two senses.

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\(^3\) Other languages, such as English, Russian, Arabic, etc. are stress-timed.
Aided by the teacher, the students have to guess and spell the two messages. The next step is another phonetic explanation, as a continuation of the previous one: when a word ends in a consonant and the next one begins with a vowel, the syllable is formed from the consonant, thus merging the two words (ca.sa.sa.le.gres → casas alegres), although there is an aitch involved (ca.sa.sher.mo.sas → casas hermosas). Something similar happens when two (or three) words are merged by vowels (ca.sa.her.mo.sa → casa hermosa; mar.chóain.ves.ti.gar → marchó a investigar). When two identical unstressed vowels coincide, these merge into one (la.ca.sa.le.gre → la casa alegre). After the explanation, the teacher says that sometimes we must speak more slowly and stressing the syllables to emphasize the message, as when we react to a surprise (¡No.me.lo.pue.do.cre.er!) or we threaten (¡No.lo.vo.ya.re.pe.tir!). Here there is a list of such expressions:

¡Qué humillación! ¡Qué hu.mil.la.ción!
¡No lo voy a repetir! ¡No lo vo.ya.re.pe.tir!
¡No me lo puedo creer! ¡No me lo.pue.do.cre.er!
¡Pero qué estás haciendo! ¡Pe.ro.qués.ta.sha.cien.do!
¡Que nunca has ido en avión! ¡Que nuna.ca.si.do.e.na.vión!
¡No me digas que no va a venir! ¡No me.di.gas.que.no.va.ve.nir!

The teacher asks the students in what situation they would answer like that. Finally, they will be prepared for the game: the class should be placed in a circle or rectangle, so that everyone can see everyone. Students are asked to cross their arms with their partners’ (see Figure 6), laying their palms on the table.
Figure 6. Positions of the arms during the game

To help create a game environment, one person lifts his or her left hand a few inches and then he or she gets it down hitting the table. The hand located immediately on his/her right should do the same, and so on with the rest of participants. After going a few rounds, learners are explained that the chain of hands they have just formed represents a chain of syllables (i.e., each hand corresponds to one syllable). Now, they must repeat the above sentences and new ones, so that they consecutively call out their syllables and pound the table at the same time. If a student does not correctly pronounce the syllable, the teacher will “cut off” his or her hand, and he or she will have only one to play. Gradually students will be eliminated until there are a few or a single winner.

A happy expression is worth waiting for

Introduction: in this session we will be practicing the use of proverbs and sayings in communicative contexts. The aim is letting students know some of these statements, with remarkably sociocultural content and so frequently found in communication. They will learn to use them properly in a situation. Furthermore, given that many of the sayings in Spanish are composed of two phonic groups with similar melodic schemes, students will learn to pronounce them as they bring sense to the message, making the necessary pause between the two groups.

Participants: CEFR level C1 students.

Objectives: to enable the students to start a conversation, asking about the state of things; to make them remember or to train them to use proverbs as a resource to speak in accordance with an event or saying; to make students appreciate this lore; to make them spread their skills of intonation with these statements, characterized by regular melodic patterns.

Contents: starting a conversation about a subject close to the interlocutors (PCIC: Chap. 5: 6.6); Spanish intonation patterns (PCIC: Chap. 3: 4.1.1).
Procedure: the teacher begins by saying that it is advisable to be able to start a conversation when we are with a partner we have contact with. A good way to do that is asking about the state of things (e.g. family, relationship, health, etc.). Then, the students brainstorm some of the most common expressions for this purpose. The teacher is responsible for bringing up some of the following: ¿cómo estamos?, ¿qué es de tu vida?, ¿qué tal se encuentra tu…?, ¿cómo te va por…? All of them can be a way to work the discourse genre of narration, in past, and description, in present. Then, it is time for the first activity: the teacher divides the group in pairs and uses a music player to present a number of musical pieces—not songs—that can easily be identified with feelings—sadness, anxiety, joy, etc.—to inspire some different situations. Thus, student A asks B about the state of things (¡Hombre, Marcos! ¿Qué es de tu vida?), and the first makes up something inspired by the music (No me puedo quejar, la verdad. Después de tanto estudiar, he encontrado un buen trabajo y me he comprado un coche). Finally, student B should make any positive or negative comments about his or her partner’s words (Lo ves, después de tanto esfuerzo, ha merecido la pena). After this activity, the teacher divides the class into two and explains that many of the positive or negative things that come after listening to a story, can be expressed through sayings or proverbs, which tend to have in Spanish a characteristic intonation with two phonic groups, one rising and the other falling, separated by a pause (e.g., El que algo quiere ↑, algo le cuesta ↓). Then, the teacher hands out a sheet with several sayings to the learners, along with an explanation of their meaning. All sayings are read so that students in group A say the first part of one with rising intonation, and students in group B finish it with falling intonation. To practice both melodic patterns, they consecutively exchange the order. Then comes a game in two stages between the two teams: firstly, the teacher presents some images to the whole class. These are drawings or photographs directly related to the aforementioned sayings (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Example of saying (más vale pájaro en mano que cien volando)
The instructor asks the class what proverb represents the first image and each group must make a decision and say it out loud with the correct intonation. The fastest team gets two points (just one if they do not pronounce properly); secondly, the teacher describes a situation to the class (e.g., *He recibido una llamada de una persona interesada en comprar mi móvil de segunda mano y lo quiere ya, pero no sé si esperar un poco más para ver si recibo una oferta mejor*) and when he or she finishes, both groups must weigh up and pronounce the right saying against the situation (*Más vale pájaro en mano que ciento volando*). Again, the fastest wins two points (or just one, as above). The winner is the team with the highest score achieved during the two activities.

Resources: four musical pieces; handouts with sayings or proverbs; handouts with pictures related to sayings; handouts with contexts where it would be appropriate to use a saying.

**Concluding remarks**

As seen through the different descriptions, these activities are some examples for the development of phonetic and phonological competence in which pronunciation (cf. *A treasure in the city, Hand in hand with syllables, and A happy expression is worth waiting for*) and perception (cf. *A treasure in the city, Betting on consonants, and Hand in hand with syllables*) can be corrected in a playful atmosphere, still within the framework of the Communicative Approach. The teacher should do everything possible to encourage an environment where students overcome their fear of failure, but, at the same time, where the effort towards the attainment of mastery is rewarded.

**References**


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