
Pronunciation challenges faced by Brazilian EFL learners

Desafios de pronúncia enfrentados por aprendentes brasileiros de inglês como língua estrangeira

Gabriela Nascimento Leite

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0861-7886>

Universidade Federal do Pará, Brasil

E-mail: gabrielanl.elt@gmail.com

Rosana Assef Faciola

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0987-4527>

Universidade Federal do Pará, Brasil

E-mail: rosanassef@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The present study aims to identify the most prominent pronunciation challenges faced by Brazilian learners in a language course affiliated with Universidade Federal do Pará, and discuss which errors seemed to pose the greatest issues for communication. This study proposes to describe the articulation features of English sounds in association with pronunciation, as well as present the importance of teaching the speaking skill with an attention to pronunciation. In order to reach its main objective, it was necessary to gather sufficient data by observing these students during their classes. Furthermore, the study goes on to confirm that the errors presented by the authors Mascherpe (1970), Lessa (1985), Lieff (1993), Nunes (1993) and Baptista (2001), also occur in the group of learners who were the object of this investigation, and the results suggest that the most prominent issues were caused by errors related to stress placement, vowel insertion and consonants. However, the errors which caused the most problems for communication happened on the suprasegmental features of language, which in this case is represented by the category of stress placement.

Keywords: Pronunciation; EFL learners; Errors

RESUMO

O presente trabalho tem como objetivo identificar os erros de pronúncia mais proeminentes em estudantes brasileiros de inglês como uma língua estrangeira, alunos do Curso de Línguas da Universidade Federal do Pará. Algumas de suas propostas são a descrição da articulação de sons da língua inglesa em associação com a pronúncia, bem como apresentar a importância de ensinar a habilidade de fala com atenção a pronúncia dos alunos. Sendo assim, para atingir seus objetivos, foi necessário coletar dados por meio de observações de turmas de inglês de nível intermediário. A coleta de dados confirmou que os erros descritos por Mascherpe (1970), Lessa (1985), Lieff (1993), Nunes (1993) and Baptista (2001) também ocorrem neste grupo de alunos e a reflexão trazida é a de que os problemas mais proeminentes foram causados por erros relacionados a sílabas tônicas, inserção de vogais e consoantes. No entanto, as observações sugerem que os maiores problemas para a comunicação se encontram em características suprasegmentais da língua, que nesse caso são representadas pelas sílabas tônicas posicionadas erroneamente.

Palavras-chave: Pronúncia; Aprendentes de inglês como língua estrangeira; Erros

INTRODUCTION

English is a widely used medium of communication and it is present in the curriculum of many schools around the world. Many learners struggle with various aspects of learning this language, but there is no doubt that pronunciation is one of the most challenging parts of this process.

According to Barry (2021), pronunciation is a critical component of oral communication, and without understandable pronunciation, this communication can be severely impaired. Lately, there has been an interest in researching pronunciation and how to deal with it in classrooms. The latest research suggests that teachers should focus on intelligibility and communicative effectiveness rather than trying to get students to sound as native as possible (PENNINGTON, 2021).

This paper makes a point of describing English sounds in detail, for it provides a useful guide when one is trying to get students to achieve intelligible pronunciation. The study of articulatory phonetics provides a basis for teachers to understand how sounds come about. From that, it is possible to be more aware of the roots of the pronunciation issues faced by students, because one can hypothesize that part of the difficulty is caused due to a lack of awareness of the articulation of specific sounds that occur in the English language. Having knowledge of the articulation of English sounds can help teachers guide learners in their pursuit of intelligible pronunciation.

Moreover, the present study deals with a descriptive look into the main pronunciation challenges faced by Brazilian EFL learners in the context of a language course affiliated with the Federal University of Pará. In that sense, this project aims to identify the most common pronunciation problems faced by Brazilian EFL learners, and point out which errors posed a more significant problem for their communication.

In order to achieve its main objective, this study proposes to describe the articulation of English sounds and its impacts on pronunciation, as well as discuss the inarguable importance of teaching the speaking skill integrated with the teaching of pronunciation. Lastly, the author also discusses correction during oral production, and the best ways to deal with it in classrooms.

THE ARTICULATION OF ENGLISH SOUNDS AND PRONUNCIATION

Phonetics is the branch of linguistics which studies speech sounds. Moreover, there is an established framework for the description of speech segments that is known as The International Phonetic Alphabet or IPA (YULE,2017). The IPA provides symbols that represent the sounds which are produced during speech. It is important to note that they must not be confused with letters. These symbols are used to form phonetic transcriptions which provide the reader with the correct realization of sounds, or in other words, the correct pronunciation of a word which can be a useful tool for teachers to come up with the best solution to aid learners with the most challenging sounds that interfere with communication if not done properly.

In that sense, it is important to be familiar with the IPA and with the organs of speech, for the articulatory description of each sound involves having awareness of the placement of these organs. Such organs are: the vocal folds, the larynx, the pharynx, the tongue, the alveolar ridge, the palate, the velum, the uvula and the teeth.

Consonants

As previously mentioned, the IPA is composed of symbols which represent the sounds that are produced during speech. These sounds, however, are primordially divided into two categories which are the vowels and the consonants. Each of these categories are then described according to their articulation particularities.

According to Yule (2017), we are not generally aware of how sounds are produced when we speak and for that reason, it takes some concentration on what our mouths are doing in order to become capable of describing each sound that is produced. In that sense, when talking about consonants, there are three main areas of focus: the voiced/voiceless distinction, the place of articulation and the manner of articulation.

Consonant sounds are produced by pushing air out of the lungs and up through the trachea to the larynx. Inside the larynx lies the vocal folds which can spread apart, letting air pass between them without any obstruction, thus producing voiceless sounds. The vocal folds can also be drawn together, causing the air to pass through with a certain resistance which causes the vibration effect that characterizes voiced sounds.

Furthermore, in order to reach the final objective, which is to produce speech, other speech organs get involved in the process. All consonants are produced by obstructing, either partially or entirely, the airstream that comes from the lungs.

Conversely, this is possible by constricting the tongue and other areas of the mouth to assume positions which lead to the production of a specific sound. In that sense, the description of such sounds is done by using terms that denote the place of articulation of that sound, or in other words, the part of the mouth in which the constriction occurs. According to their place of articulation, consonants can be classified as: Bilabial, Labiodental, Alveolar, Dental, Palatal, Velar and Glottal.

Bilabial consonants are produced when upper and lower lips are brought together. These consonant sounds are represented by the symbols [b] and [m], which are voiced, and [p], which is voiceless. Some examples of words that carry such sounds are respectively: *baby, map and pipe. Moreover, the [w] sound can also be described as bilabial when it occurs at the beginning of words such as: wood, way and water (YULE,2017).*

When the upper teeth and lower lip are brought together during an articulation, the sounds produced are classified as labiodentals. These sounds are represented by the symbols [f], which is voiceless and [v], which is voiced. Some examples of such sounds can be found in words such as: *fruit, vow, cough and save (YULE,2020).*

Alveolar sounds are formed when the front part of the tongue, commonly known as the tip, is placed on the alveolar ridge, which is a rough, bony ridge that resides immediately behind the upper front teeth. The symbols for these sounds are: [t], [z], [d], [n], [s]. Out of these five sounds,[d], [z] and [n] are voiced, whereas [t] and [s] are voiceless. The voiced alveolars can be found in words such as: *dance, raise and note, whereas their voiceless counterparts are seen in words such as: *tea, bus and sand. Some other alveolars are represented by the symbols [l] and [r], however these are only alveolars when they occur in the beginning of words such as: *lamp and wrong (YULE,2020).***

To achieve the production of dental sounds, one must place the tip of the tongue behind the upper front teeth. The symbols which represent this sound are: [θ], [ð], the latter is voiced, whereas the former is voiceless. Such sounds can be found in words such as: *teeth, thumb, breathe, feather. Sometimes, these sounds are referred to as interdental when they are produced with the tip of the tongue placed in between upper and lower front teeth (YULE,2020).*

Palatal sounds involve raising the body of the tongue up against the palate. The initial sounds in the words *sugar* and *children* are examples of voiceless palatals represented by the symbols [ç] and [j], respectively. The voiced palatals are typically

represented by the symbols [ʒ], [dʒ], [j]. The first voiced sound can be found as the middle consonant in the words *leisure* and *pleasure*, the second one is found as the initial consonant in words such as *juice* and *jam*, and lastly, the voiced sound represented by [j] can be found in words such as *yet*, *uniform* and *music* (YULE,2020).

The sounds produced with the back of the tongue against the velum, also known as the soft palate, are classified as velars. There is one voiceless velar sound which is represented by [k], and can be found both in initial and final position in the words: *look*, *kite*, *leek* and *kind*. The voiced velar sounds are represented by [g] and [ŋ], the former is found in the words *luggage*, *mug*, and *dig*. The latter is found at the end of the words *sing*, *bang*, and *rang*, and in the middle of the word *tongue* (YULE,2020).

Lastly, there are glottal sounds, which are produced without active use of the tongue and other areas of the mouth because the airflow is obstructed in the glottis. This voiceless sound is represented by [h] and is found at the beginning of *house* and *hat*.

The description of consonants according to their place of articulation shines a light upon what organs are involved in the production of these sounds, in other words, it highlights where in the mouth should the focus lie while one is trying to produce a specific sound (YULE,2020)

Consonants can still be classified according to their manner of articulation, that is, according to the way in which they are pronounced. Taking the sounds [s] and [t] as examples, it is noticeable that they are very similar in that they are both voiceless alveolars. However, they differ in their manner of articulation, for [s] is a fricative and [t] is a stop. According to their manner of articulation, consonants are classified as: Stops, Fricatives, Affricates, Nasals, Liquids and Glides (YULE, 2017).

Out of the sounds that have already been mentioned, the set [p],[t],[k],[b],[d] and [g] are all classified as stops according to their manner of articulation. In order to be classified as such, the sounds need to be produced by some form of brief blockage of the airstream followed by an abrupt release of the air (YULE,2020). These sounds can be seen in words such as: *tend*, *walk*, *dine*.

Fricatives are the sounds which are produced with a slight blockage of the airstream which is then released through a small opening causing a friction. The set [f], [θ], [s], [ʃ], [h] [v], [ð], [z], [ʒ], are all fricatives (YULE, 2020). Some examples of such manner of articulation can be found in *shed*, *breath*, *thus*, and *vanish*.

Sounds which are classified as affricate are basically a combination of a brief stop and a fricative. Their production involves a brief stopping of the airstream with an obstructed release that causes some friction. The sounds [tʃ] and [dʒ] are both affricates that can be found in words such as church and jngle, respectively (YULE,2020).

The [m], [n], and [ŋ] sounds are produced when the velum is lowered and the airstream is allowed to flow through the nose. These are known as nasal sounds which can be seen in the words *morning*, *knitting*, and *name* which begin and end with nasal sounds (YULE,2020).

The beginning sounds in words such as *lamb* [l] and *raven* [r], are classified as liquids. This manner of articulation is achieved through the raising and curling of the tongue combined with the escape of air round the sides (YULE, 2017).

The sounds [w] and [j] are classified as glides. These sounds are typically produced with the movement of the tongue to or from the position of a vowel. Some examples of this are seen in the words *year* and *white* (YULE, 2017).

Vowels:

In the English language, vowel sounds are ordinarily represented by the letters < a, e, i, o, u>. However, one must not confuse letters with phonetic symbols. In that sense, the English language has twelve simple vowel sounds: [i] [ɪ] [u] [ʊ] [ɛ] [æ] [e] [ə] [ʌ] [o] [ɔ] [ɑ], plus eight diphthongs: [aɪ] [aʊ] [eɪ] [eə] [əʊ] [ɪə] [ɔɪ] [ʊə]. As previously stated, the articulation of consonants usually occurs through airflow obstruction in the vocal tract, vowels on the other hand are articulated with a free airflow and the sounds produced are all voiced. While describing vowel sounds, it is important to think of the mouth as a space composed of a front versus a back and a high versus a low area (YULE,2017). An articulatory description of a vowel looks mainly into tongue height, tongue frontness or backness and lip rounding.

According to tongue height, vowels can be classified as either low, mid or high. This description refers to the position of the tongue in relation to the palate while one produces vowel sounds. Taking the words *eat* and *at* as examples, it is possible to notice that as one shifts from the vowel of *eat* to the vowel of *at* the mouth opens and the tongue is further away from the palate. Now, if the word *ate* is added into the comparison, it is possible to notice that the degree of mouth openness of its vowels falls between those of *eat* and *at*. In short, the vowel of the word *eat* [i] is classified as a high vowel, whereas

the one in the word *ate* [e] is a mid vowel, and lastly, the vowel found in the word *at* [æ] is a low vowel. In short, low vowels are [a] and [æ]; mid vowels are [e], [ə], [ʌ], [ɛ], [o], [ɔ]; and high vowels are [i], [I],[u] and [ʊ] (YULE,2017). Furthermore, as mentioned by Yule (2017), the mouth also has a front and a back area, and to describe vowels according to whether they are articulated in the front or the back of the mouth, we look at the parameters of tongue frontness or backness. This description refers to the position of the tongue inside the mouth from back to front. As an example, when one produces the [i] in the word *beak*, it is possible to notice that the front of the tongue is raised toward the palate, however, if one shifts from [i] to [u], the vowel in the word *boot*, the back of the tongue is raised towards the palate. In summary, [i] is classified as a front vowel while [u] is a back vowel. According to backness/frontness, vowel sounds are divided into three groups: front, central and back.

When it comes to front vowels, this group is made up of the sound [I], [i], [ɛ] [æ] and [e]. In order to exemplify this group, one may think of words such as *bid*, *meek*, *leg*, and *ask*. On the other hand, there is the central vowel group comprised of sounds such as [ə] and [ʌ], which can be exemplified through words like *allow* and *utter*. Lastly, there is the group of back vowels, comprised of the sounds [a], [u], [ʊ], [o], and [ɔ], which can be seen in words like *cot*, *loom*, *took*, *boy* (YULE,2017).

Lastly, vowels can also be described according to lip rounding. This description refers to the configuration of the lips while one produces a vowel sound. When one compares the vowel [i] to the vowel [u], it is clear that during their realization the lips change shapes as one shifts from the front vowel to the back one, take the words *beak* and *book*, for instance, the lips took a rounded shape as the production of [u] occurred in *book*, whereas they took an unrounded shape as the [i] in *beak* was produced. Rounded vowels are: [u] [ʊ] [o] [ɔ] and Unrounded vowels are: [i] [I] [e] [ɛ] [ə] [ʌ] [æ] [a] (YULE,2017).

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHING THE SPEAKING SKILL

There is no news in the fact that, in modern days, English has become an impressively useful tool for communicating with the world. It is natural that many individuals are interested in learning it, for it is widely used in the fields of technology, science, education, entertainment, and so on.

According to Rao (2019), the process of learning a language entails achieving mastery over the four major language skills, namely: listening, speaking, writing, and reading. Besides being divided into written and oral skills, these are also classified as receptive skills, in the case of reading and listening, and productive skills, in the case of speaking and writing (RAO,2019). As this paper's main purpose is to touch upon the main pronunciation challenges faced by a group of EFL learners, it is necessary to take a deeper look into the importance of speaking skills.

A learner's success in learning a language can be measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the target language (NUNAN, 1991). That being said, it is easy to suggest that the speaking skill is one of the most important skills in language learning and thus must be dealt with hands-on, not left out of lessons in hopes that learners pick it up eventually, for it is said that language needs to be noticed in order to be acquired, and doing so without guidance can be quite challenging for learners (SCHMIDT, 1995).

A common reality in foreign language learning contexts is that learners get less opportunity to use the target language in the classroom since they rely a lot more on their first language and because many teachers still focus on reading and writing practice, even though spoken communication is much more relevant in real life (BAHRANI;SOLTANI, 2012). However, if the aim of the course is to enable learners to communicate in English or any other target language, the teaching and practice of speaking skills is extremely necessary, and Brown and Yule (1983) highlight this importance in saying that speaking is the skill which students will be judged the most in real life scenarios. Rao (2019) supports this same idea when he states that these skills can be decisive in situations in which the learner is aiming for professional development, for instance.

Moreover, many language learners regard speaking skills as a measure of knowledge of the target language. In their point of view, fluency as the ability to converse with others, is defined as much more important than reading, writing or comprehending oral language. Speaking skills are regarded as the most important skill they can acquire, and thus these learners assess their progress by focusing on their accomplishments in spoken communication. For this reason, teachers are required to guide their students in the development of this body of knowledge, and this can be done by providing opportunities for the learners to engage in authentic practice that prepare them for real life situations. The role of the teacher in this is to help students develop their ability to

produce language that is grammatically correct, logically connected and appropriate to diverse social situations. It is at this moment when pronunciation will also be tackled, as the aim is to have learners produce the language in a comprehensible manner (BAHRANI;SOLTANI, 2012).

TEACHING PRONUNCIATION

When teaching speaking skills, it is almost certain that pronunciation will need to be addressed. Learners do not come to class with complete awareness of the phonological system of the target language, and most will need guidance with specific phonemes and the articulation of such. Although this is something that might sound quite obvious, according to Pennington & Richards (1986) pronunciation was once sidelined in response to the Communicative Language Teaching movement, which prioritizes meaning over form. However, the attention to pronunciation has been revived in recent years, and a greater emphasis on intelligibility and communicative effectiveness have been the focus of some of the latest research on the matter (PENNINGTON,2021).

If the place of pronunciation in language curriculums was once questioned, nowadays it is safe to say that most teachers recognize that it plays a vital role in language learning (PENNINGTON, 2021). However, it must be noted that in order to teach pronunciation, it is important to select a target. In a sense, it is important to answer the question: “what pronunciation is the learner aiming to acquire?”. Teachers and learners will not be able to determine whether they have been successful, unless some thought is put into the target one is seeking to achieve (BROWN,2014).

According to Brown (2014), there are three main targets that learners might aim to achieve, namely: Intelligibility, Image and Identity.

Intelligibility is vital for a learner to obtain the ability to speak a certain language. If one cannot be understood while trying to communicate in a certain language, then it cannot be said they speak that language. Language teachers should aim to help learners achieve what is known to be comfortable intelligibility (ABERCROMBIE,1956), which is a pronunciation that can be understood by the listener with little to no conscious effort. These pronunciations may carry some local features from the speaker’s native language, but not those which may hinder international intelligibility.

On the other hand, there may be learners who strive to achieve more than the minimal level of comfortable intelligibility. Thus, their target is Image, these individuals

aim to be recognized as good confident speakers. This desire might be a personal attitude toward learning that language, or it might relate to a need to appear more qualified for certain jobs such as hotel receptionists, bank tellers, flight attendants, and so on. In professions such as the ones previously mentioned, having poor language skills might reflect negatively on the professional image of the company for whom these professionals work for, therefore these companies are usually prepared to invest in staff training towards this target (BROWN, 2014).

Lastly, there is the target of Identity. Certain speakers might be proud of their nationality and want to speak English with a recognizable accent from a certain country and language. These learners might resist acquiring native-like accents, feeling that this would taint their personality or identity (BROWN,2014). This particular reality might be the reason why recent research in pronunciation teaching reinforces that the focus of teaching pronunciation must be on intelligibility and communicative effectiveness rather than on accuracy or correctness. Nowadays, the number of speakers of English as a second or foreign language has surpassed that of native English speakers, and this has raised the need of rethinking what goals are more appropriate for pronunciation curriculums aiming to prepare learners for international communication. This shift of focus embraces varieties in pronunciation, and moves away from native-speaker pronunciation models (PENNINGTON, 2021).

The takeaway from Pennington's (2021) reflections is that a certain pronunciation is considered acceptable when it supports communication, when the language being produced is intelligible. What this means for the classroom is that there is no need to interfere if communication is taking place, even if the language being produced is not too close to native-like pronunciation (PENNINGTON, 2021).

ERROR CORRECTION DURING ORAL PRODUCTION

As previously mentioned, once a teacher starts incorporating the teaching of speaking skills in their lesson, issues might surface. These issues will need to be addressed through a set of corrective movements. However, it is extremely important to be sensible when applying this in language classrooms, because as we have seen so far, recent studies have shown that teachers must prioritize communication over accuracy or correctness in pronunciation.

First and foremost, it is important to define error. According to Allwright & Bailey (1991), defining error is no easy task. However, a typical definition is that an error is the production of a linguistic form which derails from the correct form. But what is the correct form? In order to reflect upon this, it is necessary to take into consideration the immense linguistic variability of the English language, which is spoken in different countries, different continents and it is permanently in contact with other local languages (CAVALARI,2008).

Once this variability is recognized, it is possible to note that in each community there is a descriptive norm which is accepted and utilized by that group of people. This is a type of agreement established by speakers in the same community, that validates diverse linguistic behaviors. Thus, in this context, an error can be defined as a linguistic form that is not desired by a teacher based on the norm established in the community in which they are inserted (CAVALARI,2008).

According to Allwright & Bailey (1991), providing corrective feedback is a way of having students be aware of an error, and it provides an opportunity for learners to modify their production. Ellis et al. (2006), points out that corrective feedback is a response to learners erroneous utterances, and should be carried out by: a) indicating where the error has occurred, b) providing the correct structure; or even c) providing metalinguistic information describing the nature of error.

The moments of oral production in class are usually very delicate and anxiety-inducing (NEER, 1982; YOUNG,1992). To add to this fact, Neer (1982) also noted that immediate oral feedback contributes to anxiety in moments of oral production. According to Ayres (1986), speech anxiety is caused by learners' perception of their own abilities regarding their speech in the language they are learning. Thus, how the teacher deals with correction is directly tied to this fact, and in order not to make learners excessively self-conscious about their errors, it is advisable to provide delayed feedback (RAHIMI; DASTJERDI, 2012).

A teacher who stops to correct a pronunciation that was not negatively impacting communication, may damage learners' confidence in speaking out loud in class. Thus, it is necessary to focus on providing feedback that does not break the flow of communication among learners, and that targets the correction of pronunciation problems

that interfere with intelligibility and that may hinder communication. Some forms of corrective feedback that foster communication and self-repair are: elicitation, asking for clarification, and metalinguistic feedback (LYSTER; RANTA, 1997).

RESEARCH METHOD

The present study can be classified as a field research, for the collection of data took place in the context in which the phenomenon being studied usually occurs (OLIVEIRA,2008). The data collected was analyzed through a qualitative approach since it aimed to describe as well as interpret it in its natural context.

Context

The data collection for the study was conducted by observing classrooms of English as a foreign language provided by the language course affiliated with the Federal University of Pará.

Participants

The participants of the research were intermediate-level learners who were in the last level offered by the language course. These learners were all adults of various ages and backgrounds, and they were part of three different groups. The reason for choosing to observe intermediate-level students resides on the fact that, on this level, it is expected that the learners have achieved a certain degree of fluency, which would reflect on the amount of data that could be gathered. In beginning levels, students may not participate as actively during lessons when required to speak, and since this is a study that focuses on pronunciation, it was important to make sure that the students were as participative as possible. The teacher was the same for all groups and he shares the same nationality as that of the students. This proves to be relevant information for further discussions.

Research Instruments

To obtain sufficient data for the discussion of results, this study was conducted mainly through classroom observations, a procedure that allows the researcher to access the phenomenon that is being studied right in the setting that it is most likely to occur (SEVERINO,2017). The classroom observations were held throughout a period of two months, and the researcher observed different lessons in each group.

Procedures

Firstly, an observation of the students was necessary in order to find out what were the learners' greatest challenges pronunciation wise. Later on, the observations provided material for the design of a discussion concerning the collected data. In this discussion the author aimed at associating the errors found in these groups of learners to those suggested in literature by researchers such as Mascherpe (1970), Lessa (1985), Lieff (1993), Nunes (1993) and Baptista (2001). Lastly, the discussion also touched upon the treatment given to the errors as well as pointed out which type of error was the most problematic to the communication between students and teacher.

RESULTS

The pronunciation errors found during the observations are listed below under the category which best describes the nature of each one of them.

Pronunciation errors related to word stress:

Stress placed on the first syllable

The first group of errors related to stress, is characterized by the erroneous placement of the stress on the first syllable of the words. For instance, when a student was asked to read a list about types of television programs, he said the word 'cartoon' with the stress on the first syllable, so the word was pronounced as /'kartun/, when it should have been pronounced as /kar'tun/.

A different case happened when a student was talking about recommendations of television programs, they said: "I recommend Outlander"; here the word /,rɛkə'mɛnd/ was pronounced with the primary stress placed on the first syllable, so the word sounded

closer to /'rekəmənd/. Another student struggled with the words “police” /pə'lis/, which he pronounced as /'pəlis/.

During a discussion about movies, a student said: “The last star wars movie received great reviews from all the critics”, the words “reviews”/ri'vjuz/, was pronounced as /'rɛvjuz/. Lastly, a student said: “The bag which contained the money was yellow”. The word “contained” /kən'teɪnd/, was pronounced as /'kanteɪnd/.

Stress placed on the second syllable

The second group of errors related to stress refer to the misplacement of the stress on the second syllable of words. The first example for this group happened during a discussion about genres of television programs, when a student said: “I like comedy”, but the word ‘comedy’ /'kəmədi/, was pronounced with the stress placed on the second syllable, so the pronunciation was realized as /kə'mɛdi/.

In another moment, some students were asked to read recommendations of television programs that were written by other students. At this moment, the reader stumbled upon the word ‘history’, which was pronounced with a misplaced stress syllable. So the word which should be pronounced as /'hɪstəri/, was pronounced as /hɪst'əri/. Another student who was asked to read, had problems with the word “characters” /'kærɪktərz/. The word was pronounced as /kæ'ɪktərz/.

Lastly, while talking about a popular television show, a student said: “ Everyone is commenting about it”, the pronunciation of the word /'kəmentɪŋ/, was realized as /kəm'entɪŋ/.

Stress placed near the end of words

The last group of stress errors deals with the errors that happened due to a placement of the stress on the last syllable, or near the last syllable. For instance, a student who was asked to read, had problems with the words “corporate” /'kɔrpəreɪt/. It was pronounced as /kɔrpə'reɪt/., and also with the word “unfortunately”/ən'fɔrtʃənətli/, which he pronounced as /ənfɔrtʃə'neɪtli/.

Another student had issues while discussing genres of television programs. This student said: “I like documentaries” . However, the word ‘documentaries’ /,dɒkjə'mentərɪz/ was pronounced as /,dɒkjəmə'n'tærɪz/.

Pronunciation errors related to vowels

When the teacher asked if any students knew examples of game shows, one of the students volunteered to answer and said: “I know a game show called super genius”, the word “genius” /dʒɪnjəs/ was pronounced as /dʒɪnjoʊs/.

While talking about which streaming services he subscribed to, a student mispronounced the word “subscription”/ səb'skrɪpʃən/. The word was pronounced as /səb'skrɪpʃon/ instead.

A student was talking about elements of television shows when he pronounced the word ‘season’ /'sizən/, as /'sizon/. This student also stumbled upon the word ‘cowardice’ /kəʊərdəs/, which he pronounced as /kəʊərdəs/.

Lastly, when the learners were being introduced to the use of relative pronouns, the teacher asked one of them to read the example sentence: “cheese is food which mice like eating”. In this case, the word ‘which’ /wɪtʃ/, was pronounced as /wɪf/.

Pronunciation errors related to consonants

Errors related to the interdental consonants [θ] and [ð]:

When the teacher asked a student if she liked any comedy television shows, this student said: “Maybe some programs with Will Smith”. However, the word ‘with’ /wɪð/ was pronounced as /wɪf/.

When reading a movie recommendation, a different student mispronounced the word ‘through’ /θru/. In this case, the word ended up sounding like /fru/.

When another student was asked to read a different recommendation, he had issues with the word ‘path’/pæθ/, and pronounced it as /pæt/.

In one of the lessons, the students were introduced to the use of relative pronouns. As a form of example, a student was asked to read the sentence: “the Thames is a river which flows through London”, this student struggled with the pronunciation of the word ‘through’ /θru/, and ended up pronouncing it as /trou/. It’s important to notice that in this case the error was not only related to the initial consonant, but to the vowel sound too.

Lastly, when a student talked about the release date of a movie, he said: “it was released in two thousand and thirteen”. What happened here is that the student pronounced the word ‘thirteen’ /θɪr'tin/, as /tɪr'tin/.

Errors related to the alveolar consonant [t]:

In one of the lessons, a student was asked to read a sentence which served as an example of the use of relative pronouns, the student read: “a racket is something you use to hit a ball”. As the student pronounced the word ‘to’ /tu/, he switched the /t/ sound for a /tʃ/, so the word sounded more like /tʃu/.

Another student had a similar mistake when pronouncing the word ‘too’ /tu/ in the sentence: “I think many people do that too”. The student pronounced the word as /tʃu/.

During a conversation about content creators, a student said: “if you create great content, you can make money”. In this case, when pronouncing the word ‘content’ /kɒntent/, the student replaced the last consonant /t/ for a /tʃ/, so the word sounded like /kɒntentʃ/.

Errors related to the nasal consonants [m] and [n]:

Some students seemed not to grasp the difference between the articulation of these two consonant sounds. This might be due to the fact that in Portuguese we rarely see words ending with the /n/ sound. That being said, two students presented similar errors in regards to these consonants.

The first case happened when a student read the sentence: “the woman who gave him the money was young”. Here, the word ‘him’ /hɪm/, was pronounced as /hɪn/.

The other case took place when, during the reading of an example, a student said: “strikers are soccer players who try to score for their team”. In this case, the word ‘team’ /ti:m/, was pronounced as /tin/.

Pronunciation errors related to vowel insertion

Vowel insertion after nasals:

The first group of errors related to vowel insertion deals with those cases which added a vowel after a nasal consonant. An example of this happened when a student was asked to read a list about types of television programs. When the student read “game show”, the word /geɪm/, was pronounced as /gemi/. It is important to note that the word “game”, caused problems multiple times and it always resulted in the addition of an extra /i/ after the last consonant sound. Lastly, one of the students said: “I am traveling”, and the pronunciation of the word /æm/, was realized as /æmi/.

Vowel insertion after stops:

The second group of errors related to vowel insertion, are those which happened after a consonant classified as a stop. For instance, a student read: “music programs”, and in this case, the word /mjʊsɪk/, was pronounced as /mjʊsɪki/. This word also caused issues on different occasions. In a different class, a student said: “I like music”, and the word /mjʊsɪk/ was also realized as /mjʊsɪki/.

While talking about types of television programs, another student said: “I like wildlife programs”, here, the error occurred on the word ‘like’ /laɪk/, which was pronounced as /laɪki/. When a student said: “I think it’s an interview”, the word think /θɪŋk/ was pronounced as /θɪŋki/. On another occasion, a student said: “if you create great content, you can make money”, the word ‘make’ /meɪk/, was pronounced as /meɪki/.

On multiple occasions, while greeting the teacher and other students, the word /ɡʊd/, in the expressions “good morning” and “good afternoon”, was pronounced as /ɡʊdi/.

While discussing the plot of a certain television series, a student said: “In the first episode they find a girl”. Here the word /'ɛpə,soʊd/ was pronounced as /'ɛpə,soʊdi/. In another moment, a student said: “not every day”, and the pronunciation of the word /næt/, was realized as /næti/.

Pronunciation errors regarding spelling pronunciation

Errors related to the velar consonant [ŋ]:

When talking about the genre medical drama, the majority of students mispronounced the word “medical” /'mɛdɪkəl/ as /'mɛdɪkəʊ/.

Moreover, when a student said: “it’s part of the modern world”, she pronounced the word ‘world’ /wɜːrld/ as /wɜːrʊd/.

. Errors related to < s > endings:

During a conversation about the students’ favorite things to watch, some of them said: “I prefer movies” , but the word “movies” / muvɪz/, was pronounced as /muvz/. It is important to note that many other students had the same problem with this word.

Errors related to < ed > endings:

When talking about television programs that they were addicted to, some students mispronounced the word “addicted” /əˈdɪktəd/, so it sounded as /əˈdɪkted/.

A student said: “the last Star Wars movie received great reviews from all the critics”. The word “received” /rəˈsɪvd/, was pronounced as /rəˈsɪvɪd/.

The teacher asked what we call movies that are spoken in the viewer’s native language, and one student said: “Dubbed”. However, the word “dubbed” /dʌbd/, was pronounced as /dʌbɪd/.

DISCUSSION

According to Cruz (2012), variability in language may occur at different levels such as grammar, morphology and pronunciation. The variations of pronunciation are commonly referred to as accents which can be foreign when it is produced by those who are non-native speakers of the language in question. Brazilian speakers of English, for example, are known to have a prototypically Brazilian accent. Features of pronunciation variability have been studied for decades which leads to a predictability of certain aspects that might be challenging for these learners and may be a source of unintelligibility.

Studies conducted by Mascherpe (1970), Lessa (1985), Lieff and Nunes (1993), Rebelo (1997) and Baptista (2001), draw attention to the phonemes and other features of English which pose the greatest challenge for Brazilians to pronounce, and they also describe which sounds are produced by these learners due to this difficulty. According to the researchers, the difficulties presented by the learners were divided into five categories:

word stress and intonation; vowels; consonants; vowel insertion; and spelling pronunciation.

Stress:

English stress patterns are known to be a source of difficulty for some Brazilian learners, and the collected data proves that many students do have an issue with word stress. To depict this issue, let's look into the word 'comfortable'. A typical realization of this word is with the primary stress on the syllable '-ta' (LIEFF; NUNES, 1993). It can be argued that this happens because in Portuguese, the word 'confortável' is a cognate and its primary stress is on the syllable '-tá'. The fact that the words are cognates makes the habit of putting the primary stress on that syllable easily transferable to English.

In the group of learners that was observed, the errors related to stress seemed to happen in three different circumstances. Learners tended to misplace the stressed syllable in the first, second and near the last syllable of words. For example, one of the students pronounced the word 'cartoon' with the stress on the first syllable, so the word was pronounced as /'kɑrtun/, when it should have been pronounced as /kɑr'tun/.

Secondly, among all the errors related to stress that occurred because a student misplaced the stress in the second syllable, the one that stood out the most was found in the word 'comedy' /'kɑmədi/. The student pronounced this word as /kɑ'mɛdi/, and just like the word 'comfortable', it can be argued that the source of this interference is the influence of the learner's first language in his English pronunciation. The word 'comedy' in Portuguese is 'comédia'. The second syllable receives the stress here, thus when pronouncing the word in English, the student utilized the stress pattern found in the Portuguese word. An example of misplaced stress on the first syllable could be found in the word 'cartoon'.

Lastly, an example of misplaced stress near the end of a word was found when a student pronounced the word 'documentaries'. The word should have been pronounced as /,dɑkjə'mentərɪz/, but the student pronounced it as /,dɑkjəmən'tærɪz/, once again mimicking the stress pattern found in the equivalent word in Portuguese. It is important to note that this suprasegmental category of errors was the one which caused the most problems for communication between learners and teacher. Therefore, it received the most attention correction-wise.

Vowels:

Researchers suggest that the pronunciation of vowel sounds can also be a source of difficulty for Brazilian learners. For example, the front vowels /i/ and /I/ are both produced as /i/ (MASCHERPE, 1970; LIEFF; NUNES, 1993; BAPTISTA, 2001), so a word like *ship* /ʃɪp/ would likely be pronounced as /ʃip/, which configures the phonetic transcription of the word *sheep*. Furthermore, Brazilians often struggle with the production of sounds like /e/ and /ɛ/ (MASCHERPE, 1970; LIEFF; NUNES, 1993; BAPTISTA, 2001), thus producing these sounds as /æ/ like in *map* /mæp/. The back vowels /ɑ/ and /ɔ/, tend to be realized as /ɔ/, and /u/ and /ʊ/ are likely to be produced as /ʊ/ (MASCHERPE, 1970; LIEFF; NUNES, 1993; BAPTISTA, 2001). That is, there is no distinction in the sounds of words such as *boy* /bɔɪ/ and *cot* /kɒt/ or *book* /bʊk/ and *move* /muv/, for the vowels in these words are pronounced as /ɔ/ or /ʊ/. Lastly, according to Lieff (1993) and Nunes (1993), there is likely to be a certain difficulty in producing the vowel /ə/, especially during connected speech.

During the collection of data, it was noticed that some of the difficulties suggested by these researchers also appeared in this specific group of learners. That being said, examples such as /dʒɪnjɔʊs/, for the pronunciation of the word ‘genius’ /dʒɪnjəs/, and /səb'skrɪpʃən/ for the word ‘subscription’ /səb'skrɪpʃən/, highlight Brazilian learners’ difficulty in producing the /ə/ sound. Moreover, there is an example such as when a student pronounced the word ‘cowardice’ /kəʊərdəs/ as /kɔʊərdəs/, which proves their difficulty in differentiating between the sounds /ɑ/ and /ɔ/ at times. Lastly, the group of learners also demonstrated difficulty in differentiating the sounds /i/ and /ɪ/, and this could be seen when they would pronounce words such as ‘which’ /wɪtʃ/, and it ended up sounding like /witʃ/.

Consonants:

When dealing with consonant sounds, Brazilians are likely to pronounce /t/ and /d/ with dental articulation (MASCHERPE, 1970). This means that the position of the tongue is altered, thus leaving the pronunciation of the word *tea* /ti/, for instance, sounding more like /tʃi/. Another issue that these students might encounter is to do with the articulation of sounds such as /θ/ and /ð/. The former tends to be pronounced as /t/, /s/ or /f/ (MASCHERPE, 1970; LIEFF; NUNES, 1993; BAPTISTA, 2001), so the word *think* /θɪŋk/, sounds more like /tɪŋk/, /sɪŋk/ or /fɪŋk/. The latter is likely to be pronounced as /d/, /z/ or /v/ (MASCHERPE, 1970; LIEFF; NUNES, 1993; BAPTISTA, 2001), therefore a

common pronunciation of a word such as feather /fɛðər/ is/ fɛdər/. Lastly, The nasals /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/ are usually omitted in syllable and in word-final positions which results in the nasalization of the preceding vowels (MASCHERPE, 1970; BAPTISTA, 2001).

The most prominent errors found in the group of learners regarding consonants were the errors related to the interdentalals [ð] and [θ]. In these cases, it was possible to see that the learners often pronounced these interdentalals sounds as [f] and [t]. Examples of this occurred when students would pronounce the word ‘with’ /wɪð/, and it sounded like/wɪf/, and also when learners pronounced the word ‘through’ /θru/ as /fru/ or /tru/.

The second most common consonant error among the learners were those related to the alveolar consonant [t]. For instance, the first consonant of the words ‘to’ and ‘too’ were replaced by [tʃ], so the words sounded like /tʃu/ instead of /tu/. Thus, it was possible to confirm that this group of Brazilian learners also have issues to distinguish between /t/ and /tʃ/. It is likely that these learners pronounce /tʃ/ in the place of /t/ as an result of the interference caused by their regional accent. The learners are from the north region of Brazil, and this region is known for pronouncing their /t/ sounds as /tʃ/.

Vowel insertion:

The collected data also shows that the groups of students who were observed also had a tendency to add a vowel sound after the last consonant sound of a word, this phenomenon is known as vowel insertion. In Portuguese, it is extremely rare to find words which end in consonants. Owing to this fact, when Brazilian learners pronounce words that end with consonants such as the voiced and voiceless plosives, the fricatives /f/, /v/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, and the affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, it is likely that the vowel [i] will be inserted after the consonant . Before initial /s/ clusters, either /i/ or /ɛ/ can be inserted (CRUZ,2008). Moreover, voicing assimilation of the fricative /s/ in an initial /s/ cluster with /m/, / n/ and /ŋ/ tends to occur with the insertion of vowels (REBELLO, 1997).

In the group of learners being studied, two different types of this phenomenon could be noticed. The first is associated with vowel insertion after nasal consonants, which can be seen in the examples mentioned in the results section such as in the word ‘game’, pronounced as /geimi/ by many students, and in the word ‘am’, pronounced as /æmi/ by one student.

The second type of vowel insertion happened after stop consonants, more frequently after [k] and [d]. This was seen in the pronunciation of the word ‘music’ many times. The students tend to pronounce this word as /mjusiki/. Another example was in the word ‘good’, which on multiple occasions was pronounced as /godi/.

Spelling pronunciation:

It is common for Brazilian learners to base their pronunciation on spelling, this is a tendency that can be understood once you realize that Portuguese pronunciation is not that different from its spelling and such pronunciation habits can be easily transferable to a second language. In that sense, instead of pronouncing the English velar lateral [l] in word-final or syllable final position, Brazilian learners tend to produce [w] or [u] (MASCERPE, 1970; LESSA, 1985; BAPTISTA, 2001), so the word call /kəl/, tends to sound more like /kəu/. Secondly, /s/ is produced for all the < s > endings, [s], [z], [ɪz] or [əz] of plural, possessive and third person singular. Lastly, the past tense spelling < ed > is pronounced as [ed], [ɪd] or [əd] (LESSA, 1985; LIEFF; NUNES, 1993; BAPTISTA, 2001).

The group of learners struggled the most with the pronunciation of < ed > endings. Words such as ‘addicted’, ‘received’, and ‘dubbed’ were realized with either /ed/ or /ɪd/ as the last syllable. This confirms that these Brazilian learners also had difficulties in distinguishing between the various pronunciations of < ed > endings.

Moreover, the velar consonant [l] at the end of the word “medical” was also a problem for learners, who tend to pronounce the word as /'mɛdəkəu/. Thus confirming that Brazilians tend to produce the sounds [w] or [u] as a replacement for [l] which rarely ends words in Portuguese.

Lastly, some errors related to < s > endings were also found in the group. The learners seemed to not differentiate between all the different pronunciations that can be associated with < s > endings. Therefore, the pronunciation of the word ‘movies’, was often realized as /muvs/. As suggested by Lessa (1985), Lieff (1993), Nunes (1993) and Baptista (2001), this group of learners also tended to interpret all the < s > endings as /s/, excluding the other possibilities such as [z], [ɪz] or [əz].

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

With English being one of the most frequently used mediums of international communication, it is unsurprising that a great number of people show interest in learning it. In that sense, the teaching of this language is present in the curriculums of a plethora of schools around the world. Once that has been established, it could be said that one of the most challenging aspects of learning the language is its pronunciation.

Pronunciation is a critical component of communication, so it is important that it is understandable. However, before achieving a comfortable level of intelligibility, learners stumble upon many pronunciation challenges while learning the language. In that sense, this paper's main goal was to identify the main pronunciation challenges faced by Brazilian learners in a language course associated with the Federal University of Pará and discuss which type of error caused the most issues for communication. In order to achieve its main objective, this study described the articulation of English sounds and its impacts on pronunciation, as well as discussed the inarguable importance of teaching the speaking skill integrated with the teaching of pronunciation. Lastly, the author also discussed correction during oral production, and the best ways to deal with it in classrooms.

According to Mascherpe (1970), Lessa (1985), Lieff (1993), Nunes (1993) and Baptista (2001), it is possible to predict some pronunciation errors produced by some Brazilian learners. These errors can be found in both segmental and suprasegmental features of the language and are divided into the categories of: stress, consonants, vowels, vowel insertion and spelling pronunciation.

Overall it was possible to confirm that the error types suggested by the researchers mentioned above, all occurred in the group of learners which was being investigated. The most frequent errors happened in the categories of stress placement, consonants and vowel insertion.

The errors related to segmental features are those which happen in specific phonemes. In that sense, it was noted that these errors did not seem to cause an interference in the communication of teacher and students, so they were less frequently corrected.

Moreover, it was noted that the teacher gave more attention to suprasegmental features, which are features that affect more than isolated phonemes. The errors related to stress fit into this description, and these were the ones which caused the most problems

for communication between teacher and students. Thus, they were corrected more frequently.

In relation to the treatment of these errors, it was interesting to see that the teacher assumed a gentle approach, avoiding immediate correction, and preferring to use delayed correction that did not target specific students. Because of this, he succeeded in avoiding self-consciousness in students, and encouraged them to participate as much as possible.

It could be said that the errors related to segmental features were less frequently corrected due to the fact that they do not pose a significant problem for the communication between teacher and students. This might be because the teacher shares the same first language as the students, thus he undoubtedly has some knowledge about the predictable errors that Brazilian learners tend to have. In the case of a teacher whose native language differs from that of learners', the outcome could be different and needs to be further investigated.

The latest research in teaching pronunciation suggests that teachers should focus on intelligibility and communicative effectiveness rather than trying to get students to sound as native as possible (PENNINGTON, 2021). Therefore, excessive attention to segmental features of language is not encouraged when trying to teach pronunciation. Thus, it is important to focus on suprasegmental features such as stress and intonation, because these affect more than just a specific phoneme, and can hinder communication in a more aggressive way.

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