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The Educational Use of Poetry: introducing and practising English sounds in the EFL class

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Resumen

La Drière dijo en 1956 que todo sonido en un idioma tiene su propio significado. Si se analiza cada verso de un poema teniendo en cuenta la distribución de los sonidos, la posición y prominencia de estos son tan importantes como lo es el análisis semántico (Johnson, 1987; Murphy, 1988; Talmy, 1996; Ungerer and Schmid, 1996). La poesía puede ayudar al profesor de lenguas en su práctica de fonética en el aula. Fresch y Harrison sostuvieron en 2013 que los poemas pueden considerarse como esenciales para practicar fonemas. Invitando al alumno a entrar en el poema, leyéndolos activamente en clase en parejas o en grupos, y creando y aportando ideas conjuntamente, la poesía puede formar parte de una clase de inglés, ayudando a los alumnos a practicar sonidos, y a expresar sus ideas, opiniones y, emociones (Finch, 2003).

Abstract

La Drière (1956) said that every sound of any language system has a meaning. Analysing a line of poetry in terms of sound distribution, prominence and attention allocation seems as important to meaning as that first phase of semantic meaning we need to understand the poem (Johnson, 1987; Murphy, 1988; Talmy, 1996; Ungerer and Schmid, 1996). Poetry may come to the teacher's aid in order to give the students the phonetic practice they need. According to Fresch & Harrison (2013), poems are the most appropriate form of language to practise phonemes. By inviting students to be "in the poem" (Moore, 2002), actively reading poems in pairs or other small groupings, and creating ideas together, poetry can take part in the EFL lesson, helping students to practise English sounds, and express their ideas, opinions and emotions (Finch, 2003).

Keywords

Poetry; EFL; phonetics; sound practice; creativity

Introduction

The sounds of language together with their meanings are the final product of any social action. Once these sounds have been adopted, the human being tends to rearrange them in order to create that particular meaning which is needed at a certain occasion, out of our own idiolect as if we were always reinventing language. This means that no sound in language lacks some kind of meaning while meaning is at the heart of sound.

In some way, this gets into what vocal communication involves. According to Quast (2001), two different communication channels exist, a verbal and a non-verbal, that work together whenever we get into any kind of communicative activity. The verbal part of speech is represented by words and the non-verbal channel is made of all the stress and intonation patterns of the utterance which, together with the phonetic part, give way to all the emotions and attitudes on the side of the speaker or the writer. All these features could be integrated in what is called *prosody*, a term that could be considered quite open, ready to accept all the different approaches that have come from a variety of speech communities.

As regards foreign language learning, pronunciation practice could be used to avoid fossilization and introduce phonics to EFL students in a different way. Selinker (1972) defined interlanguage fossilization and divided it into two categories: individual fossilization and group fossilization. The former is the persistence of individual learner's IL development, and this is the one that pronunciation practice should attack mostly. This individual fossilization consists of two types: error reappearance, and language competence fossilization. Error reappearance refers to the inappropriate interlanguage structures that have not been fully corrected and reappear regularly as, for example, mispronunciations. It can be found in IL of beginners, that is precisely why

it is necessary to attack it when there is still time for self-correction. The second, language competence fossilization, deals with the learners' phonological, grammatical, lexical and pragmatic competence (cf. Selinker, 1972: 209-31) According to Selinker, it is found in L2 learners who have been exposed to the second language for a long period of time and arrived at a relatively high level. The idea of attacking error appearance on time is to avoid language competence fossilization at the level of phonetics when the learners start developing towards higher grades of language competence, something that may take place at secondary school. These repeated errors related to mispronunciation of words are often examples of lately tackled competence fossilization. If students are given enough pronunciation practice in class, the internalization of sounds and sounds patterns can help them learn and correct any mistake that could have been fossilized along their initial L2 instruction.

Another key issue related to the practice of sounds in class is related to what has been called "synthetic phonics". This approach, also known as "systematic phonics", is based on the learning of correspondences between sounds and letters or clusters of letters independently to blend them later in order to produce a certain word. This isolation of sounds may be beneficial when trying to correct a recurrent mistake in the L2 classroom. The use of rhymed poems could be an advantage in this case. The words that create the rhyme could be dissociated into their particular phonemes and then built back when practicing the poem making special stress on the words that finish each line. It is interesting to notice that one particular piece of criticism that "synthetic phonics" has given way to could be infinitely useful for pronunciation practice in foreign language learning. In *Phonics instruction and early reading: professional views from the classroom*, which analyses the use of this new method in the United Kingdom, the authors express that 'the drive to establish "synthetic phonics" as the primary method of reading instruction in the first year of school has not been widely welcomed by teachers and academics. The phonics check has attracted particular criticism, much of it focused on the inclusion of pseudo-words without referential meaning: the purpose of these is to test children's ability to apply the grapheme-phoneme correspondences that they have learned.' (Hogson et al., 2014). In L2 pronunciation practice, this correspondence could be utterly useful when trying to isolate a sound that needs extra effort to be pronounced correctly, let alone to eradicate any recurrent mistake in words of everyday use. The introduction of meaningless poems may help to reach this goal. This kind of poems allows the teacher to concentrate on sound since it should not be necessary for the student to understand what the poem is about.

Thus, this paper aims at looking into how sound can carry meaning, how this meaning can be grasped analysing sound, how poetry can be understood through a detailed analysis of sound patterns, and how these patterns can be used in the FL class to teach phonetics to the students, make them practise and improve sound production, and find in literature, especially in poetry, an incredible source of creative in-class activities. Along the analysis of sounds and meaning, we propose different activities for distinct levels of FL learning, depending on their complexity (not only linguistic complexity, but also developmental, which may engage from primary to secondary students) and on the specific features of the activity, for example, Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher, 1969) activities which are more appropriate for preschool and early primary children.

What lies around sound production: beyond the spoken or written word

There have been numerous experiments which suggest that active feelings, such as anger, are associated with the use of a high pitch, and, in some cases, deafening sounds. More passive feelings, like depression, go together with a low pitch and muffled sounds. Stress is also recognizable by the intensity of the voice and pitch movement. Vocal cues are closely related to the expression of emotion and the verbal and nonverbal component of communication has always been stressed as fundamental. Mehrabian and Ferris (1967) say that the listeners' perception of the attitude of a speaker is influenced 7% by the verbal message and 38% by the vocal tones which are used.

In the broadest sense, the term nonverbal communication is commonly used to describe all human communication events that transcend spoken or written words (Knapp and Hall, 2006). Specifically, nonverbal communication behaviours are those bodily actions and vocal qualities that typically accompany a verbal message. The behaviours are usually interpreted as intentional and have agreed-upon interpretations in a particular culture or speech community (Burgoon and Hoobler, 2002). Those vocal cues that accompany speech (paralanguage) include intonation, voice quality and vocal emphasis, and together can enhance verbal meaning. These cues are often connected to emotional state, attitudes towards others, social class, and origin, and are deeply embedded in writing. This paralanguage goes together with any kind of human expression, whether it is oral or written, while the force of sound goes beyond the limits of the written word since it generally reinforces what human beings want to express (Lewis, 1998).

Cognitive linguistics and sound production

As far as sound recognition is concerned for the sake of composition and comprehension, we may find a total cooperation which comes from various interconnected fields. For example, Morton (1979, 1980), investigated the 'logogen model' based on a central issue in word recognition which is precisely 'context', buffer included. This concept helps us to work on visual-word recognition and auditory recognition: 'there is a two-way connection between the logogen system and the cognitive system: what is happening in the logogen at any moment forms part of the output to the cognitive system' (Garman, 1996: 279). Morton's *Logogen* Model is activated though the logogens 'are not like dictionary entries' (Morton, 1979: 112) but rather 'constitute the tuned perceptual devices that respond to sensory and semantic input' (Garman, 1996: 279).

Visual analysis and auditory analysis, together with the visual and auditory evidences, make the logogen system work, activating the buffer where the words and sounds are stored. The students dive into their storage, and bring to the surface the words they need, taking into account spelling and sound, thus making up another way to deal with phonetics, mingling it with vocabulary practice.

The relations between the poem, the sounds that have been included in it and the logical consequences these sounds may have in the reader's mind at the time the poem is being read, could be regarded as a sort of 'image schema', i.e. a simple and basic cognitive structure which derives from the reader's interaction with the world and that is now transferred from the buffer to the poem and its meaning. The structure of the distribution of sounds can be assimilated to the cognitive ideas of *trajector* and *landmark*, being the first the prototype and the contributors, and the second all the other sounds that are needed to give the previous ones the prominence they need to be outranked. The important thing here is that trajector and landmark always work together to provide a description of the meaning of the utterance or text apart from signalling those sounds the poem is built around, thus giving us the possibility of picking them out and project them (see Brugman, 1981; Lakoff, 1980; Lindner, 1982). There is a foregrounding of certain parts of the poem which contain the sounds that could be considered to be prominent. This foregrounding is called 'windowing of attention' (Talmy, 1996). When we discover the leader sound or sounds, with their repetition or their combination with other satellite ones, language teachers can use those poems to teach sound and meaning, to introduce phonetics and practise phonemes and their combinations.

Poetry in class: how to engage students in pronunciation practice using poems and creativity

Vocalics is the interpretation of a verbal message based on paralinguistic features, being these pitch, volume, rate, quality, intonation, and vocalized pauses. In fact, all of them take an important role when trying to understand either the written or the spoken word. Infant judgments of others' emotions depend on the consistency of others' behaviour, such as consistent facial and *vocal behaviour* (Kahana-Kalman and Walker-Andrews, 2001; Walker-Andrews, 1997, 2008). Even after people reach adulthood, behavioural coherence remains important: adult judgments of facial emotion are strongly disrupted by inconsistent emotional information from other channels of communication (Aviezer et al., 2008; Ethofer et al., 2006; Massaro and Egan, 1996; Van den Stock et al., 2008; Vroomen and De Gelder, 2000; Weisbuch et al., 2010).

Thus, in the arduous path of learning a foreign language, the importance of being alert to the nuances of diction could be considered to be essential. One way of discovering these nuances is by working on poems. Poems are by far made of pure sound and poets create complex combinations in order to give the piece the rhythm, sonority, and intonation required to express overt feeling and be understood.

Hence, the creation of phonemic awareness in the foreign language class is a must if the teacher really wants to see any kind of development in their students' phonic abilities. So, may poetry come to the teacher's aid in order to give the students the phonetic practice they need?

According to Brindley (1980:1), poetry 'has little to offer the EFL classroom, especially at middle school or high school level' due to the very linguistic features of poems, as metaphors, ellipsis or a highly allusive language. Rather disheartening, indeed. Fresch and Harrison (2013: 10), though, have a more positive approach to poetry in the language class: 'No other form of English expression provides as many opportunities to see, read, hear, and practice phonemes.' Longenecker (2014) also fosters a positive view of poetry as a means of learning a language. He says that poetry stretches the student's imagination, something which is closely related to creativity, a main ingredient of motivation in class. Thus, stretching one's imagination gives way to a widening-out of the perception

of reality. Things turn into something bigger, not seen before, one's world changes and preconceptions begin to shake, what could precisely be considered as the basis of everyone's education (cf. Longnecker, 2014). In short, education needs emotion, linguistic abilities, and, above all, imagination: the three of them found in poetry.

Beside all this, some poems help teachers to make up their minds when looking for practice in rhythm, sound, intonation or any other vocalic feature. These features can be practised in many ways. The examples that follow dig into just a few of these ways, existing many more which any teacher can discover and develop on their own in order to build up the students' interest in poetry and phonetics.

Minimalism helps

Minimalist poems could be considered to be *EFL poems*, i.e. teachable poems, since its shortness, concentration of meaning, choice of words, and, particularly, choice of sounds, allow teachers to practise vocabulary, pronunciation, and rhythm without engaging the students into quests towards difficult understanding and comprehension.

The American poet William Carlos Williams created his own sound structure to reach a perfect distribution of sound and measure. He did not like 'free verse' as other writers accepted it. His free verse has the structure of an ordered freedom. Williams constructed his poems in a specific way. Take 'The Red Wheelbarrow' for instance:

so much depends
upon
a red wheel
barrow
glazed with rain
water
beside the white
chickens.
(Williams, 1976:57)

This poem constitutes an idea turned into a thing. 'No ideas but things', said Williams. In 'The Red Wheelbarrow', the distribution of stress shows the regularity of monotony. The use of special caesura to give the idea of normal common speech is evident in Williams' poem. How he works with successions of stresses is evident. Williams separates on purpose the word 'wheelbarrow' to be able to turn a secondary stress into a principal one, thus achieving the required rhythm to imitate the object making its way through the field.

Also, Williams cleverly combines stops and affricates to achieve sonorous meaning. He opts for a regularity of stress, probably describing the pushing of the wheelbarrow across the field, the /p/ and /ʧ/ sounds denoting constant activity. The action needs short strong sounds. That is why Williams breaks 'Wheelbarrow' to stress 'barrow'. All the stops are connected: /ʧ/ in 'much' to the same sound in 'chickens', /p/ in 'depends' to the /p/ in 'upon', this /p/ connects with /b/ in 'barrow' and 'beside', /t/ in 'water' is related to /t/ in 'white' and to the last word 'chickens' where the affricate contains the same /t/ sound. The use of these stops and voiceless affricate is not free, it is perfectly structured, confirming Williams's idea that measure resists any revolutionary movement and, at the same time, bringing him nearer to classical structure.

Williams himself said about 'The Red Wheelbarrow': 'The rhythm though no more than a fragment, denotes a certain unquenchable exaltation' (Williams, 1976: 17). In some way, the exaltation also belongs to the readers when they discover that a simple, short poem like this one can be cradle of extraordinary experiences, experiences which come from the ordinary but that, masterly worked, expand onto an infinite universe of recreated reality.

Bringing reality to class is one of the goals of language teaching: the pupils can push the wheelbarrow around the classroom while reciting and repeating the poem over and over again, making special stress on the production of the stops and affricates which give its particular rhythm to the poem. Poetry and TPR are connected in one activity practising one of the key characteristics of English pronunciation: the force when producing consonantal sounds. The movement will help to make emphasis on the plosives and affricates. The Centre for Literacy in Primary Education remarks that 'children need opportunities to read poetry aloud, perform, dramatize … If poetry is not given a voice, if it just stays on the page as a printed object, then it is not going to come alive for most children' Turning the poem into a TPR is precisely one of the best ways to make poems come alive.

'The Great Figure', one of the most famous poems by Williams Carlos Williams, together with 'The Red Wheelbarrow', makes the perfect example of compact sound-rhythm poem.

among the rain
and lights
I saw the figure 5
in gold
on a red
firetruck
moving
tense
unheeded
to gong clangs
siren howls
and wheels rumbling
through the dark city.
(Williams, 1976: 42)

The poem title shows a perfect balance for the two sounds, /g/ and /f/, which will be included later and these dominate the poem sound pattern. The voiced velar stop anticipates a series of similar sounds that will define the sonorous content of the poem while the voiceless labio-dental fricative depicts the 'visual' unit, that is to say, what is really 'seen' through sound. It is really remarkable to witness how Williams links the two units using the velar stops while the labio-dental fricative is left to the first unit, it is never repeated again, it finishes with 'firetruck' to enhance the idea of a virtual border: he uses /fɪgəʳ/, /faɪv/ and /faɪəʳtrʌk/ to connect the envisaged first unit. 'Great' is linked to 'gold', Williams does not use 'yellow' or 'ochre' to describe the colour: the same sound /g/ creates a bridge between the title, the first unit and the word 'gong' which finally establishes the connection between the movement and the audible part.

The activity for the students is quite different, though, since the poem exploitation can focus on the sibilants, the voiced and voiceless alveolar fricatives. The short lines of the poem are also an advantage since they can be grouped according to their meaning. Thus, the students will work with six different lines:

1. Among the rain and lights.
2. I saw the figure five in gold.
3. On a red firetruck moving tense.
4. Unheeded to gong clangs.
5. Siren howls and wheels rumbling.
6. Through the dark city.

Each of these 'new' lines carries at least an alveolar fricative: lights, saw, tense, clangs, howls and wheels, city. Lights, saw, tense and city being voiceless and clangs, howls and wheels being voiced, a bit of exaggeration in the pronunciation of the voiced would be welcomed since it is difficult for the students to notice the difference which, nevertheless, is incredibly important when meaning is to be considered.

As Finch (2003: 29) states, 'actively reading poems in pairs or other small groupings, and creating ideas together, […] can become an integral part of the EFL classroom and can be a means of investigating issues relevant to the students' backgrounds, experiences, and attitudes.' So the teacher lets students work in groups and then show others what they have done with the poem. The idea is to make groups of six students giving each of them one of the above lines. The students will practice the reading by themselves, alternating the beginning of the poem so that all six will have the opportunity of practising the sounds over and over again. Once they have had enough time to rehearse, the students will read the poem aloud alternating until all members of the group have read the complete poem. This is not reading the poem as it is, it is a kind of game that has its base in cooperative/ collaborative work. The students realize they have read the complete poem only after the group activity is finished. Concentrating on only one line per turn makes them pronounce the repeated sound better. This does not mean that the teacher has to leave aside the other complementary sounds, these also have to be pronounced correctly. But particular emphasis is to be made on the alveolar fricatives. Reading poems in groups makes the activity lighter for the students.

The sounds of the lord

J.R.R. Tolkien, in his *Lord of the Rings*, included several poems which are interesting to analyse and use as teaching material, especially because of the use of rhyme and alliteration, apart from the fact that it could be engaging for the students to read poems whose source is so well-known among youngsters. Let us take, for example, the following poem:

> Cold be hand and heart and bone,
> and cold be sleep under stone:
> never more to wake on a stony bed
> never, till the Sun fails and the Moon is dead.
> In the black wind the stars shall die,
> and still on gold here let them lie,
> till the dark lord lifts his hand
> over dead sea and withered land.
> (Tolkien, 2003: 138)

In this poem most principal sounds are fricatives, a characteristic which gives the poem a continuity that never pauses in spite of the full stop after the word 'dead'. This full stop is here to emphasize the word 'dead' and connect it to the word 'black' on the next line. To make matters more intricate, the rhyme stresses a number of vowels and diphthongs which go from the front part of the mouth upwards and towards the central zone. This closing of the organ emphasizes the idea of darkness and death that the poem expresses. The mouth closes, it never expands. The alveolar fricative with its force against the alveolar ridge tenses the organs of speech and implies continuity in the gloomy atmosphere the poem is clouded in. The students will be able to practise the alveolar fricative in its initial position whether it stands as bound phoneme or fully integrated in the syllable as its onset. Adams (1994) suggested five levels of phonemic awareness necessary to develop in a child, number one being "hear rhymes". In this poem, the rhyme allows the students to read it in couplets, exaggerating the pronunciation of the main sounds: /sli:p/, /stəʊn/, /stəʊnɪ/, /sʌn feɪlz/, /stɑ:z/, /stɪl/, /lɪfts/, /hɪz/, /si:/, taking care of avoiding the inclusion of a schwa before the bound phoneme. This activity could be done in pairs or in groups, the students who are listening may stop the one that adds the non-existent *schwa*, being penalised because of its presence. The rhyming words allow the students to internalise other sounds, in this case vowels and diphthongs: /@U/ in bone and stone; /e/ in bed and dead (this last one a particular difficult word to pronounce); /aI/ in die and lie; /&/ in hand and land (another sound which may also be problematic to pronounce). In order to isolate the sounds the teacher wants to practise, the students may be given a table to have as a reminder when reading the poem. The table could be similar to the one below where the students are given the pronunciation of the words which carry one of the sounds the teacher wants to practise but also gives the possibility for the students to read the rhyming words separated from the poem and also identify other words bearing the same sounds.

TOLKIEN'S POEM	
Cold /k@Uld/ be the hand /h&nd/ and heart and bone,	/b@Un/
and /k@Uld/ be sleep under stone:	/st@Un/
never more to wake on a /st@UnI/ bed	/bed/
never, till the Sun fails and the Moon is dead.	/ded/
In the black /bl&k/ wind the stars shall die,	/daI/
and still on gold /g@Uld/ here let them lie,	/laI/
till the dark lord lifts his hand	/h&nd/
over /ded/ sea and withered land.	/l&nd/

Table 1. Practice table.

Trajectors matter

According to Finch (2003: 34), 'pattern poems can be used with all levels and ages of learners, and are particularly effective in the EFL classroom, since they can be adapted to teaching purposes such as grammar and sentence structure.' The *patterns* could be grammatical items, metrical frameworks, phrases, sentence structures, and other types of patterning. The simplicity of pattern poems may help not only to enhance language skills, but also this kind of poetry may allow the students to express themselves, sharing their inner world. These types of patterning may include something as simple as a sound pattern giving the poem a sense of verticality or horizontality. This sense of verticality is found in Muriel Spark's ***Standing** in the Field:*

> The scarecrow **standing** in the field
> in dress-designed as if **to** move
> all passers-by **to tears**
> of sorrow for his **turnip** face,
> his **battered hat**, his open arms
> flapping in someone else's **shirt**,
> his rigid, **orthopaedic sticks**
> **astride** in someone else's jeans,
> one leg of which is **short**, one long.
> He **stands** alone, he **stands** alone.
> (Spark, 2004: 50)

This is what could be called a vertical poem which shows the position of the scarecrow by using the word 'stand' four times, emphatically the last two. The /t/ included in the word sets the pace and turns into the trajector. The shape of the letter T is also used as a descriptive sign. The /t/ is a short voiceless alveolar stop whose manner of articulation is closely related to the duration of consonants. According to Whissell (2000: 644) this duration 'may also be interpreted on the basis of Rate of Breath Expulsion'; that is to say that stops like /t/ which are pronounced emitting 'short transient bursts are less pleasant than fricatives and affricates'. The verticality starts in the title and is never lost. The *trajector* follows a perpendicular path; it goes straight down to the end.

There is, in this poem, a *gestaltic* effect which constitutes the key to its structure. While we are reading the poem, we cannot help picturing the scarecrow and its vertical figure against a background of sky and field. The perception is that of a whole, unbroken and eye-striking. Descriptive poems, in general, have this characteristic.

The visualization of the scarecrow is the key to the poem and Spark does it by using a collection of sounds which make up the landmark that will contribute to the enhancement of the scarecrow sound, in this case /t/. Thus, the figure constructed by /t/ cannot be interrupted since it is *gestaltically* perceived. Spark creates the scene which invariably generates the one and only mental image required to understand the poem. Here, a complete TPR activity can be constructed around the poem: the students making up the scarecrow, acting it out, adopting the shape of the letter that constitutes the *trajector* while repeating the lines of the poem; flying like birds around the scarecrow while drawing the letter on the board, as they keep on pronouncing it as many times as necessary to internalize the correct sound; to finally creating different scarecrows with objects that also bare the same sound in order to continue repeating it while learning new vocabulary. In short, the poem gives way to a large array of action-oriented tasks which will enable the learners to get in contact with the landmark sound and all those that may be added by the teacher as complementary.

Nonsense also sounds

Few times can teachers work with poems which only concentrate on sound without asking for discovering their hidden meaning, and even fewer times are they able to manipulate and dissect words phonemically leaving aside the poem's sometimes complex understanding, only focussing on how words are related at sound level. Meaningless poems allow teachers as well as students to experience this. As said before, within the five levels of phonemic awareness necessary to develop in a child suggested by Adams (1990), it was possible to find two which could associate with meaningless poetry closely: perform phonemic segmentation such as counting out the number of phonemes in a word, and perform phoneme manipulation tasks such as adding, deleting a particular phoneme and regenerating a word from the remainder. This focusing on word and sound can also foster reading in a way that gives more freedom to readers to use the intonation they want since being meaningless, the poem can be tackled from each reader's different and personal angle.

We must have in mind that according to a 2010 report by Ofsted (the English schools inspection agency) a sample of 12 primary schools demonstrates that their success is based on 'a very rigorous and sequential approach to developing speaking and listening and teaching reading, and writing and spelling through systematic phonics' (Ofsted 2010:4) which allows teachers to go from the single sound to the combination of them in order to make students learn and internalise sounds correctly. Going from pre and primary schools to secondary education, Cumming (2007: 97) remarks that 10 and 11-year-old students 'are inordinately fond of word-play' and 'that it is part of the normal human condition to spend an appreciable amount of time actively playing with language…or responding with enjoyment to the way others play.'

The use of meaningless poetry in class is, then, necessary if teachers want students to grasp the ins and outs of English pronunciation in order to use that built-up knowledge to make communication easier. Just one example of how these nonsense poems can be used may give a first insight into a fascinating world of possibilities at the level of sound practice in the EFL class. Let us take, for example, the following poem by Rudolph Rinaldi:

ROCK PAPER SCISSORS

Change the game
Make **it hip**
A rock
A paper
A **chip**
A paper covers a rock
A chip replaces paper
A rock smashes a **chip**
Into trillions
Of meaningless **bits**

The poem could be used to work the pure vowel /I/ and centring diphthong /eI/. Being meaningless, the sounds can be isolated and then reunited again. For instance, the word "change" can be worked this way: /tS/ /eI/ /n/ /dZ/, repeating each sound until they have been internalized, and then reunite the sounds in the whole word /tSeIndZ/ stressing the fact that it only bears one syllable. All the words which carry /I/ and diphthong /eI/ can be treated similarly. Once the sounds have been repeated and learnt, as the title of the poem is *Rock paper scissors*, the pupils can put music to it concentrating only in the correct production of sounds without taking into account any kind of meaning. This leads to cooperative-collaborative work which could easily turn into a creative class project where every group is given the possibility to produce their own music and perform the poem publicly giving the sound practice school dimensions. So, whether it is at pre, primary or secondary school level, the use of meaningless poetry can go beyond phonics and class boundaries to have surprising motivating consequences.

Conclusion

This paper tries, apart from finding a way to introduce phonetics to students through poetry, to look into the hidden composing mechanisms, how sounds are not placed at random but following a kind of internal logic which dwells in the writer's mind.

We do not agree with Wellek and Warren (1956: 147) on the fact that 'the psychology of the reader […] will always remain outside the object of literature.' Literature has always been written to be read, so the intention of the writer to reach the reader must constitute an imperative. In order to be successful, the writer drops hints so that the reader can understand the tiniest detail, to be able to enjoy the reading from beginning to end, without leaving anything aside. Those hints are given at the level of both, semantic and phonetic meaning. Sounds show the way to comprehension by means of growing emotions which shoot up image schemas that lead to full understanding and satisfaction or despair. The poet searches for this emotion and works to capture it. This work cannot be done only with combination of words. The poet needs to go further, deeper into the reader's mind. The poet needs sound to accomplish the quest. As well as readers need sounds to finally grip the message wanted to transmit. And students need creativity to go deeper into pronunciation practice. The discovery of the sound and its practice in class can be closely related to its significance in the poem as well as the relations it creates between meaning and expression.

Sounds are perceived and internalised. The brain creates a hoard of sounds to allow the reader to identify a particular combination generated by the author's impulse to scatter cues all over the poem to make its

apprehension easier. All the poets included in the examples above have done it, not only in their poems but also in their prose. Let us make our students discover their complexity as well as the ins and outs of the English sounds. Tsur (1992: 1) says: 'Literary critics and ordinary readers usually have strong intuitions about the expressiveness of sound patterns in poetry'. What about discovering those intuitions together with our students as we give them further practice into one of the most relevant and complex components of the English language? We do believe it could be utterly motivating.

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