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Original article

English pronunciation in the oratory of José Martí



La pronunciación en idioma inglés en la oralidad de José Martí

Pronúncia em inglês na língua falada por José Martí

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ABSTRACT

Martí believed that a true orator was one who responded to society. He considered the pronunciation of his speeches in English to be the decisive factor and the central determinant of the speech's effectiveness, since proper pronunciation also allowed the speaker to project themselves, ensuring identity and coherence between what was expressed and what they thought and felt. Therefore, the objective of this article is to explain the work with pronunciation in English, focusing on the oral tradition of José Martí, for third-year students of the Foreign Languages (English) Syllabus in their Integrated English Language Practice lessons. This research implemented theoretical, empirical, and statistical-mathematical methods. The results of the instruments applied in the final phase demonstrate an improvement in pronunciation, resulting from the acquisition of the content for the proposed activities. The students showed independence when working individually and developed other linguistic skills. Martí's oratory made it possible to focus on the relevance of linguistic structures that lend persuasive force to the whole. The proposal links the act of teaching with that of learning, a learning process that takes place through active methods and the use of different techniques and

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approaches, such as activities in which the teacher and students participate to achieve a common goal.

Keywords: English language; orality; pronunciation.

RESUMEN

Martí tenía la concepción de que el verdadero orador era el que respondía a la sociedad. Consideraba la pronunciación de sus discursos en idioma inglés como el valor decisivo y lo que determinaba centralmente la eficacia del discurso, pues de la adecuada pronunciación también dependía que el hablante pudiera proyectarse a sí mismo, que existiera identidad y coherencia entre lo expresado y aquello que pensaba y sentía. Por ello, el objetivo de este artículo es explicar el trabajo con la pronunciación en idioma inglés en la oralidad de José Martí para los estudiantes de 3er año de la carrera Lenguas Extranjeras, Inglés, en las clases de Práctica Integral de la Lengua Inglesa. Para realizar esta investigación se aplicaron métodos del nivel teórico, empírico y estadístico-matemático. Los resultados de los instrumentos aplicados en la fase final demuestran que existió un desarrollo en la pronunciación, dado por la adquisición de los contenidos para la realización de las actividades propuestas. Los estudiantes mostraron independencia a la hora de trabajar de forma individual y desarrollaron otras habilidades lingüísticas. La oratoria martiana posibilitó enfocarse en la relevancia de estructuras lingüísticas que otorgan fuerza persuasiva al conjunto de ellas. En la propuesta se relaciona el acto de enseñar con el de aprender, aprendizaje este que se realiza a través de métodos activos y el uso de diferentes técnicas y vías, como las actividades en las cuales intervienen el profesor y los estudiantes para lograr un fin común.

Palabras clave: idioma inglés; oralidad; pronunciación.

RESUMO

Martí acreditava que um verdadeiro orador era aquele que respondia à sociedade. Ele considerava a pronúncia de seus discursos em inglês o fator decisivo e determinante central da eficácia da fala, uma vez que a pronúncia correta também permitia ao orador projetar-se, garantindo identidade e coerência entre o que era expresso e o que ele pensava e sentia. Portanto, o objetivo deste artigo é explicar o trabalho com a pronúncia em inglês, com foco na tradição oral de José Martí, para alunos

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do terceiro ano do curso de Línguas Estrangeiras (Inglês) em suas aulas de Prática Integrada de Língua Inglesa. Esta pesquisa empregou métodos teóricos, empíricos e estatístico-matemáticos. Os resultados dos instrumentos aplicados na fase final demonstram uma melhora na pronúncia, resultante da aquisição do conteúdo das atividades propostas. Os alunos demonstraram autonomia ao trabalhar individualmente e desenvolveram outras habilidades linguísticas. A oratória de Martí possibilitou focar na relevância das estruturas linguísticas que conferem força persuasiva ao todo. A proposta vincula o ato de ensinar ao de aprender, um processo de aprendizagem que ocorre por meio de métodos ativos e da utilização de diferentes técnicas e abordagens, como atividades em que professor e alunos participam para atingir um objetivo comum.

Palavras-chave: língua inglesa; oralidade; pronúncia.

INTRODUCTION

José Martí mastered five languages perfectly, enabling him to produce remarkable work in the translation of valuable texts. He completed his secondary education at the San Pablo College, where he studied under the renowned Rafael María de Mendive. For two years, he excelled in Latin, and in his third year, he took courses in Latin Analysis and Translation and Rudiments of Greek. He refused to take the latter exam in protest against the school's closure. Martí is not known for literal translation or exact mimesis; he always places a poetic filter within his text. He describes and interprets almost simultaneously (Leyva González, 2024).

At the University of Zaragoza, in the Philosophy and Letters Syllabus, he took courses in Greek Language and Critical Studies of Greek Authors, earning high marks. His thesis defense topic was one of the most complex: Cicero, the highest expression of Roman political and forensic oratory. He learned English from The American Popular Lessons around 1882, in addition to his extended stay in the United States. He learned French from Atanace Fortier, a Martinican living in Havana, later perfected his skills at the home of Leandro Álvarez Torrijo in Madrid. He also taught French Language and Literature at the Central Normal School of Guatemala in 1871 and at the Santa María School in Caracas during the 1880s.

The development of linguistic studies, from structuralist linguistics to generative-transformational linguistics, and from theoretical to applied linguistics, as well as those related to sociolinguistics,

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pragmatics, text linguistics and discourse analysis, have also renewed language teaching (Navarrete Reyes et al., 2022).

The English language predominates in global relations, a consequence of the geopolitical, military, and cultural power of Anglo-Saxon countries. To know English, as a means of oral and written communication, is increasingly necessary and has arguably become a requirement for all professionals and students in the sciences, technology, and humanities.

Communication is a process of transmitting and receiving ideas, information, and messages, integrating knowledge, skills, and attitudes such as speaking, reading, arguing, writing, listening, interacting, and socializing with others. This fosters acceptance and participation in problem-solving, as well as effectiveness in personal, academic, professional, and social performance.

Martí believed that a true orator was one who responded to society. He considered the pronunciation of his speeches in English to be the decisive factor and the central determinant of their effectiveness, since proper pronunciation also allowed the speaker to project himself, ensuring identity and coherence between what he expressed and what he thought and felt.

The ideals of justice are part of patriotism; this, together with the consolidation of the best accumulated values, the knowledge and respect for national symbols, the history of the homeland, the life and thought of José Martí and other heroes of the wars of independence, and the defense of the ideology of the Cuban Revolution, constitute an essential part of the educational project in Higher Education (Hernández Martín & Reinoso Castillo, 2022).

All people should intensify efforts to strengthen and develop the identity and culture that distinguish them and allow them to assert themselves as such, because in this seemingly freer 21st century, hegemonic centers of power, possessing dazzling and fascinating technology, seek to impose their cultural patterns, supported by the myths of postmodernity, to absorb us, erase us, or subject us to a new and sophisticated process of cultural colonization. It is necessary to develop special skills, knowledge, motivations, and attitudes to communicate effectively with people who have different customs, beliefs, values, traditions, and social norms (Lucena Jiménez & Salvador Jiménez, 2024). Martí foresaw that the coming times would be marked by a fierce struggle to maintain Latin American identity and that it was necessary to influence new generations.

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José Martí's oratory is one of the areas most in need of study within his body of work, which continues to surprise us, since, as is well known, he is one of the greatest orators our language has produced. He conceived his speeches as an essential form of artistic and social communication, and they also constituted his principal weapon in preparing for the war of liberation of Cuba. In this sense, it is worth clarifying that the value of his performance on the podium was recognized as early as the 19th century, but it was only at the beginning of the 20th century that texts began to appear that explored some of its aspects in greater detail. Since then, various approaches have been taken from multiple perspectives (Cheong Sarmiento, 2022).

In the case of foreign language learning, pronunciation is a crucial linguistic factor in communication. It has been observed that lower listening skills are associated with less vocabulary acquisition and less intuitive grammatical reasoning. This demonstrates that second language (L2) learning is significantly influenced by pronunciation. If a student's pronunciation is incorrect, it will require constant attention from the listener, who may become frustrated or even ridicule the speaker's efforts to be understood. Achieving an acceptable level of pronunciation is not only necessary for understanding the message but also for avoiding potential negative reactions to the speaker's errors, as certain intonation mistakes can lead to social misunderstandings.

One of the issues that has sparked the authors' interest is the well-known fact that the audiences attending Martí's speeches were characterized by their great heterogeneity. Martí was able to bring together Cuban emigrants, from the wealthy in New York to tobacco workers, laborers, doctors, and lawyers. His speeches were also delivered in Tampa, Key West, and Philadelphia. The Apostle even secured financial support from Spanish and American tobacco factory owners. On numerous occasions, he spoke first in Spanish and then in English. All of this has led us to investigate the linguistic mechanisms that underpin the effectiveness of his persuasive work before such a diverse audience (Cheong Sarmiento, 2022).

With this first form of knowledge, the subject can form an immediate image that later progresses to a higher stage, reflecting the properties of the object, as well as their relationships. Concepts, judgments, and reasoning then develop, as knowledge becomes rational.

Therefore, pronunciation is considered an essential component of oral expression and comprehension that should not be minimized compared to other aspects of communication in general and the teaching-learning process in particular. Throughout the history of language teaching, pronunciation

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has often been confused with phonetics due to the close relationship between the two and a lack of understanding of their differences. However, they are distinct subjects, and it is crucial to distinguish between them.

The broad and profound cultural platform, supported by the strong and fertile roots briefly outlined above, makes Martí's actions an essentially unique and relevant model, and so far as culture itself becomes a means of interpretation and action. It is not about turning language class into a cultural feast, but about learning it by adhering to the meaning it expresses in its use within specific cultural and social contexts. Today, language teaching is still often reduced to the analysis of the system rather than its relationship with society (Pérez Ramírez et al., 2023). This is explained by its integral constitution, which gives it great value in the interpretation of reality.

Therefore, one cannot disregard the place of history, politics, science, technology, art, and literature, among other dimensions and profiles that grant it vastness and singularity in its time and in ours. In its reflections, one can appreciate the profound cultural concepts that nuance the critical sense of its engagement with the best that the world produced in its time. This granted solidity to the developed vision of political, scientific, technical, artistic, and literary trends in short, the most valuable aspects of universal culture as accumulation and creation, as an expression of realized human potential (Torres Guerra, 2016).

Therefore, correct pronunciation is key to avoiding mistakes, meeting communication needs, or simply enjoying a good conversation. It follows that there is a close relationship between pronunciation and communication (Fundora Ramírez, 2024). In communication, there is usually a sender or encoder who transmits the message and a receiver or decoder who interprets it. Without good pronunciation, there is no effective communication, as this can lead to misinterpretations and, therefore, a loss of clarity in the message. Pronunciation is an important part of the process of transmitting and exchanging information and constitutes one of the fundamental challenges in English language learning for students.

Consequently, pronunciation remains the unfinished business of L2 teaching (Bartolí Rigol, 2005). It is evident that numerous factors continue to hinder pronunciation instruction within an approach that, paradoxically, promotes oral competence. This competence cannot be fully achieved if the L2 learner does not reach a level of pronunciation that allows them to use phonetic competence effectively in real-life communication situations. This constitutes a challenge that guarantees quality

education, and to achieve it, clarity is needed on how to direct the educational process. Teacher preparation is vital, taking into account the dynamics that characterize the knowledge society, which inherently involves the transition from teaching to learning (Reiné Herrera & Fundora Ramírez, 2022).

Within pronunciation instruction, the shift from repetitive and decontextualized audiolingual exercises for practicing phonemes has led to approaches where pronunciation instruction consists solely of meaning-centered activities used to communicate information or convey attitudes. Today, the theory has been enriched by the work of Jones (2021) in discourse analysis and interactional sociolinguistics, who points out that many language features are not conclusive. This means they are not easy to identify and, therefore, require study and preparation, as is the case with pronunciation mastery.

The figure of José Martí Pérez has been extensively and profoundly studied. His talents as a politician, a revolutionary with deep anti-imperialist roots, a poet, journalist, writer, orator, and literary critic have been highlighted. His work reflects the boundless scope of his creativity and his oral communication skills in English, a skill he employed in the organizational work of the independence struggle in his beloved Cuba.

It is a difficult thing for third-year students of English as a Foreign Language to identify the differences between similar sounds that occur in stressed and unstressed syllables, where the phonemes in question, for example, are [ə], [a:], and [æ]. Additionally, phonemes such as [θ] and [ð] are considered the most frequent sources of error for English learners; these sounds are often initially substituted with [t] or [d], which have similar distinctive features to the ear of Spanish speakers. Students also tend to confuse words containing these sounds by substituting them for one another. The phoneme /ɔ:/ is particularly difficult for non-native speakers, as it does not correspond to any existing sound in Spanish. Finally, /z/ is often replaced by /s/, especially in final position -for example, friends ['frɛns] instead of ['frɛndz]- because Spanish does not distinguish them as phonemes.

The didactic and methodological approach to pronunciation in English language teaching has been insufficient, despite its essential role in language acquisition and, consequently, in communication. Furthermore, students have not achieved positive results in relation to José Martí's study of the subject. This is precisely the problem this work addresses. Given that every phenomenon has its own history, and that its characteristic properties and governing laws are the result of its historical development, it is vital to understand the evolution and development of pronunciation according to Martí's perspective, in order to subsequently comprehend and apply it naturally within his system.

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Therefore, the objective of this work is to explain the work with pronunciation in English in the oral tradition of José Martí for 3rd year students of the Foreign Languages, English career, in the Comprehensive Practice of the English Language lessons.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

For this research, the study group consisted of 25 third-year students majoring in Foreign Languages (English) at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of the University of Artemisa, as well as three English teachers. The sample was purposive, selected to meet the research objectives, and the study was conducted within the Integrated English Language Practice (PILI) course, which is taught in the first and second semesters. Therefore, the implementation period for the proposal was one academic year.

Materialist dialectics was adopted as the general method of science, and methods from both the theoretical and empirical levels were also employed, as well as mathematical and statistical methods. Among the theoretical methods were: historical-logical, analytical-synthetic, inductive-deductive, and systemic-structural. Empirical methods included classroom observation, surveys, interviews, and document analysis.

The following instruments were used: an observation guide for PILI lessons in the 3rd year, a survey questionnaire for students and teachers of the PILI subject in the 3rd year, and a pedagogical test questionnaire. These instruments allowed the collection of the necessary data to diagnose the real state of the development of pronunciation teaching in the oral tradition of José Martí.

Among the statistical methods, percentage analysis allowed for the quantification and comparison of the results obtained from the applied instruments. According with these instruments, the specific indicators to be considered for the operationalization of the variable were determined. These indicators were: mastery of phonetic and phonological levels, and comprehension and interpretation of main and secondary ideas. The development of pronunciation in English, as expressed orally in the works of José Martí, was considered the variable for third-year students of the Foreign Languages (English) syllabus.

A scale was used that included the values of Good, Fair, and Poor, where the minimum value corresponded to the inadequate category and the maximum to adequate. The study involved several tasks: systematization of the theoretical and methodological frameworks that underpin linguistic

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skills; mastery of the phonological, lexical-semantic, and morphosyntactic levels of the language and the system of activities; diagnosis of the initial state of third-year students in the Foreign Languages (English) syllabus, specifically regarding the development of pronunciation of José Martí's words in the PILI course; development of a system of activities; and evaluation of the results obtained from its implementation.

From a philosophical perspective, activity is understood as a set of activities or tasks performed by a person or entity, conditioned by their personal interests and purposes. It is the most complex form of human action and is considered a mode of interaction between humans and their environment, through which they consciously strive to achieve an end, depending on their interests and motivations. This allows for rational change and transformation. A system is a whole, a configuration of elements that are mutually integrated across time and space to achieve a common purpose, goal, or result.

That is, under the teacher's direction, students carry out certain activities that enable them to appropriate the content offered to them, while at the same time developing skills and ways of acting based on the historical events studied.

RESULTS

As part of the initial diagnosis, a study of normative documents was carried out, such as the Syllabus of the discipline Comprehensive Practice of the English Language and the subjects PILI V and PILI VI. For this purpose, an observation guide was designed and applied with the objective of verifying the work being done for the development of pronunciation in the oral presentation of José Martí.

During the initial diagnostic assessment, 12 lessons were observed, yielding the following results: A lack of pre-reading activities to actively promote reading development was evident. This was confirmed in 11 observed lessons, representing 91.7%; only in one class (8.3%) were these activities carried out systematically. The use of phonetic dictionaries was not observed, which affects the identification of differences between similar sounds occurring in stressed and unstressed syllables.

In this regard, weaknesses were found in the curriculum and in the PILI subjects regarding pronunciation and its connection to the work of José Martí. The curricula dedicate little attention to pronunciation, prioritizing other components such as comprehension, grammar, and writing.

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Difficulties were identified in distinguishing between similar sounds occurring in stressed and unstressed syllables, such as the phonemes [ə], [a:], and [æ]. Additionally, [θ] and [ð] are considered phonemes that most frequently lead to errors among English learners, commonly being substituted by [t] or [d], which have similar distinctive features to the ear of Spanish speakers. The phoneme /ð/ is extremely difficult for non-native learners, as there is no equivalent sound in Spanish. Finally, /z/ is often replaced by /s/, especially in final position.

Independent activities are guided, but not adequately explained, based on the sounds that students tend to substitute with [t] or [d]. This affects knowledge acquisition, negatively impacting 8 lessons (66.7%).

Regarding comprehension, 5 of the respondents (16%) stated that they understand the readings they hear and read in English; 18 (60%) reported having difficulty understanding the /ð/ sound, as it does not exist in Spanish; and 7 (23%) stated that they only understand it sometimes. These results corroborate the existing difficulty in developing pronunciation.

A total of 15 students (73%) acknowledged that they do not identify the /z/ sound and replace it with /s/, especially in final position; 6 (20%) responded positively, as they have mastered the functional components of the language (comprehension, analysis, and construction); and 1 (6%) stated that they answer and formulate questions based on materials related to José Martí's oral tradition and English linguistics. This questionnaire, conducted conversationally, confirmed the existence of the problem and revealed the students' needs, interests, preferences, and opinions. The students recognize the importance of mastering English for communication and, even more importantly, for their overall cultural development.

The results show that 1 teacher (33%) reported knowing how to develop pronunciation, while 2 teachers (66%) reported having difficulty enhancing and developing it. This knowledge is essential, as its absence negatively impacts the teaching and learning process.

Regarding current Syllabus, it is considered that they contribute less to the development of pronunciation through the study of José Martí, a view shared by two teachers (66%). However, all three teachers (100%) acknowledge that, although they occasionally carry out novelty, motivating, and creative activities, they do not systematize the techniques used, which limits the full development of this skill.

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The pedagogical assessment questionnaire was used to determine if students had mastered the content, skills, and prior experience. The results showed that, regarding the application of the phonological system, of the 25 students tested, 17 failed (73%) and 8 passed (26%). In the development of oral expression skills, 21 students passed (80%) and 4 failed (20%).

When these instruments were applied, it was found that the students had marked difficulties in developing pronunciation, so it was necessary to look for a solution that would help to reverse the diagnosed situation.

The system of activities was implemented during the application phase, and subsequently, during the monitoring phase, it was evaluated through the application of the instruments and the analysis of the results. A pedagogical test was conducted to identify the system's strengths. The final pedagogical test questionnaire was administered to verify whether the students could develop pronunciation after consulting materials by José Martí on the subject.

The results showed that, regarding text comprehension through questions, all 25 students tested passed (100%). As for recognizing phonetic symbols, 24 passed (97%) and 1 failed (3%). In developing oral expression skills, all 25 students passed (100%), as the errors made did not interfere with communication.

The analysis of the final pedagogical test demonstrates an improvement in pronunciation, resulting from the acquisition of the necessary content for completing the proposed activities. The students showed independence when working individually.

DISCUSSION

According to Jones's studies (2021), discourse analysis and interactional sociolinguistics address language phenomena that are not easy to identify, as they require study and preparation, as is the case with pronunciation. Both phonetic correction and corrective procedures have had a significant influence on the design of activities to improve pronunciation, making it essential for teachers to have a solid psycholinguistic foundation in English language teaching.

Various methods have been used to teach pronunciation, and these must be analyzed considering their historical development. To do so, it is essential to examine the objectivity of each method, its relationship to other processes and phenomena, and its potential for further development. This

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involves assessing its similarities and differences with previous methods, its positive and negative aspects, since each one arises in a specific context: with particular conditions, place, and time that cannot be ignored when studying them.

Hence, on many occasions, work is done with artificial, non-authentic audios, read or recited, which do not allow the student to infer what suprasegmental phenomena are really like in the variety of the language they are learning.

It is necessary to develop skills, knowledge, motivations, and attitudes that enable effective communication with people who have different customs, beliefs, values, traditions, and social norms (Lucena Jiménez & Salvador Jiménez, 2024). In this sense, a student's previous knowledge of English facilitates the comprehension of English phonology, as they encounter sounds that do not exist in their native language or that have distinct allophonic variations. Likewise, internalizing and training listening skills before beginning formal language study broadens the linguistic spectrum and facilitates the learning process.

Currently, language teaching continues to focus on analyzing the system rather than its relationship to society (Pérez Ramírez et al., 2023). Therefore, Martí's teachings on pronunciation should be understood broadly, encompassing both problems related to sounds and those linked to the characteristics of the accentual system and the intonation patterns of English. The system, as a whole, possesses properties superior to those of each of its parts individually (Addine Fernández et al., 2007). Consequently, this research employs a variety of activities, conceived as a system, to achieve a harmonious correspondence that enhances students' development based on Martí's teachings. Therefore, the English teacher's role should be to modify these two essential aspects of language use: pronunciation and intonation.

The life and thought of José Martí, as well as his defense of the ideology of the Cuban Revolution, constitute an essential part of the educational project in Higher Education (Hernández Martín & Reinoso Castillo, 2022). Martí's oratory employs numerous structures of varied semantic and functional nature, ranging from grammatical lessons such as nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs to more internally complex constructions, such as noun phrases or linguistic structures with implicit meaning. In general, Martí appeals to his audience, calling them to the fulfillment of duty (to be/to do), in accordance with the persuasive purpose that characterizes all oratory.

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The teacher who teaches Integrated English Practice must work on pronunciation as an essential theoretical foundation. As their knowledge gradually increases, substantial changes can be made to the quality of the teaching and learning process. From the initial stages, the teacher must develop in students skills that allow them to use the language practically and efficiently.

Martí's oratory reveals the importance of linguistic structures that, while often lacking significant content in the arguments, are essential for lending persuasive power to the discourse. The proposed methodology links teaching with learning, a process carried out through active methods and the use of diverse techniques and approaches, via activities in which both teacher and students participate to achieve a common goal.

After the proposed approach was implemented, the third-year students mentioned the use of strategies such as exaggerating sounds, constant monitoring, paying attention to the pronunciation of native speakers, and visualizing the context of the word to detect allophonic and dialectal variations. They also highlighted sound identification, word transcription, and marking lexical and sentence stress as relevant elements for accurate and natural speech articulation.

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Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

Authors' contribution

The authors participated in the design and writing of the article, in the search and analysis of the information contained in the consulted bibliography.



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