

Forming intelligible ELF speakers

Exploring pronunciation teaching with L1 Catalan/Spanish learners of English

Treball de Final de Màster Universitari en Formació del Professorat d'Educació
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d'Idiomes (especialitat d'anglès)

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Academic Year: 2021- 2022

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Date: Vic, 3rd June, 2022

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Abstract

It is widely acknowledged that pronunciation teaching has fallen between the cracks of both English teacher training programs and English language classes. This paper aims to analyse whether explicit pronunciation training makes a significant difference in a speaker's intelligibility and whether English proficiency plays a role in this process. The participants are 11 Catalan and Spanish native speakers, who range from 15 to 17 years old. A placement test was administered to determine the English proficiency of the participants. A pre-test and a post-test eliciting free speech samples from the participants were recorded before and after an 8-week pronunciation training course, and later assessed by the English language teacher raters. The improvement exhibited by the participants was not significant, although there was an inverse correlation between the participants' improvement and their performance in the placement test. Therefore, those participants with lower proficiency, showed a higher improvement value.

Keywords: ELF, intelligibility, pronunciation instruction, pronunciation models, English proficiency

Està àmpliament reconegut que l'ensenyament de la pronunciació ha sigut desatès tant en els programes de formació de professors d'anglès com de les classes d'anglès. Aquest article pretén analitzar si ensenyar pronunciació explícitament reporta una diferència significativa en la intel·ligibilitat del parlant i si el domini de l'anglès juga un paper en aquest procés. Els participants són 11 parlants nadius de català i castellà. Per una banda, es va realitzar una prova de nivell per determinar el domini de l'anglès dels participants. Per altra banda, es va gravar una prova prèvia i una de posterior incloent mostres d'expressió lliure després d'un curs de pronunciació de 8 setmanes i posteriorment aquestes van ser avaluades pels jutges. La millora que presenten els participants no és significativa, tot i que hi ha una correlació inversa entre la millora dels participants i el seu rendiment a la prova de nivell. Per tant, aquells participants amb menor competència, van mostrar un valor de millora més alt.

Paraules clau: ELF, intel·ligibilitat, ensenyar pronunciació, models de pronunciació, domini de l'anglès

1. Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that an important gap exists between research and the classroom in language teaching. In recent years efforts have been made to introduce new methodologies supported by research results in the classroom. However, research on theoretical and applied linguistics on pronunciation does not translate into well-established, consistent classroom methodologies (Derwing & Munro, 2005; Müller, 2013; Murphy, 2013; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Levis, 2020). As Mendoza and Cantero (2003) argue, research on language didactics is crucial to bridge the gap between linguistics research and the classroom. According to some studies (Derwing and Munro, 2005; Saito, 2012; Müller, 2013; Murphy, 2013), the aforementioned situation, together with the lack of teacher training in this regard, dismiss the teaching of pronunciation in a TEFL context as residual.

The research of this paper employs English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) as its theoretical framework. ELF distances itself from the theories and practices in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). ELF, EFL, and ESL conceptualise the use of English, and therefore its teaching, quite differently. Both ESL and EFL share a common goal in terms of pronunciation, despite their varying contexts, which is native-like production regardless of the speakers' L1 (Jenkins, 2002; Dauer, 2005; Jenkins, 2015; Mauranen, 2018). This paper understands that ELF should be the context of English teaching in Catalan Compulsory Secondary Education (Educació Secundària Obligatòria, ESO). Catalonia is an autonomous region within Spain, where Catalan is the co-official language together with Spanish (Gencat, n.d.). Catalan and Spanish are two Romance languages that, despite sharing similarities, present a distinct phonetic system. Moreover, there is an increasing cultural variety which has introduced other L1. Because of this particular linguistic context, English might be acquired differently by the learners of a same classroom, as the L1 of a learner influences the language acquisition process (Flege, 1995).

The reality of the English language has long shifted since there are now more NNES (Non-Native English Speakers) than NES (Native English Speakers) (Murphy, 2013; Jenkins, 2015), which prompted a discussion on which models should be used in an English classroom. NNES are now more likely to interact with other NNES than NES. Thus, including a variety of NNES models is imperative in today's classrooms, aside from the traditional NES models employed in ESL and EFL. It can be argued, then, that an ESL approach is, at best, unproductive in the current multicultural context in Catalonia. Pronunciation teaching within ELF focuses on intelligibility, as its main goal is to form intelligible communicators in English in a multicultural context.

There is ample discussion on which aspects of pronunciation affect a speaker's intelligibility the most, and both segmental and suprasegmental features are considered crucial. Müller (2013)

argues that pronunciation training should include key aspects of both segmentals and suprasegmentals. Segmental features refer to 'individual units of speech, such as phonemes (Cambridge University Press, n.d.) (/p/, /h/, or /i:/), whereas suprasegmentals are described by Ladefoged & Johnson (2010, p. 23) as features imposed on the syllables, which include variations in stress, length, or pitch. This paper will focus on those segmental features established by the Lingua Franca Core proposed by Jenkins (2002), which establishes those crucial features that impact intelligibility.

The main goal of this study is to test whether explicit training of segmental features makes a difference in a student's pronunciation abilities and analyse whether the results of this training are affected by the student's proficiency in English. The research questions are as follows:

- (1) Does explicit pronunciation training make a significant difference to a student's intelligibility?
- (2) Does a student's proficiency in English play a role in the effectiveness of the training?

2. Literature review

2.1. Pronunciation training

Müller (2013) serves as a starting point for this research paper. Müller (2013) bases her dissertation on the report published by the Modern Language Association (MLA) in 2007, which called for a restructuring of language teaching to form "educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence" (MLA, 2007, p. 3; cited in Müller, 2013, p. 214). Concerning this report, the author argues that, while it triggered some changes, pronunciation teaching has not been the focus of them.

Müller claims that pronunciation "still appears to be conceptualised, taught, and learned as a separate phenomenon of speech, with little interconnection to the more global competencies needed to interact successfully in intercultural encounters" (Müller, 2011; cited in Müller, 2013, p. 214). Müller (2013) also disapproves of the use of native-speaker norms as the sole model for pronunciation teaching as it hinders teachers' understanding of the contexts of their students and their learning process (p. 215). Finally, the author states that pronunciation should be an integral part of the Communicative Approach competence of forming international speakers who can successfully interact in intercultural contexts, and research should focus on how to approach this.

In his dissertation, Saito (2012) analyses fifteen intervention studies to determine how research studies reflect the effectiveness of instruction when it comes to pronunciation (Saito, 2012, p. 843). The author recalls previous studies which argue that those methods which are relevant to the learners' needs and learning and sociocultural contexts are more successful than those that are not. However, pronunciation teaching tends to be quite decontextualised. Saito (2012) is the basis for the design of the study of the present paper.

The studies Saito (2012) analyses in their research "aim to set teaching and learning priorities and design optimal syllabi for teaching intelligible pronunciation" by investigating "the effects of instruction on L2 pronunciation development with a pre- and post-test design" (p. 843). The author codes the 15 elected studies considering three independent variables: focus of instruction (segmentals vs. suprasegmentals), type of instruction (focus-on-form vs. focus-on-formS), and type of outcome measure (controlled constructed response vs. free constructed response). FonF consists of drawing attention in both controlled and communicative contexts, while FonFS only provides controlled activities (mechanical drills, coral repetition) (Saito, 2012, p. 845).

Concerning the aforementioned variables, Saito (2012) did not find clear patterns in terms of focus of instruction as students improved independently of whether they were taught segmentals or suprasegmentals. Type of instruction did prove to be a crucial variable in terms of the student's performance at different processing levels. Saito (2012) claims that FonFS (focus-on-formS) results in improvement only in controlled speech, whereas FonF (focus-on-form) provides learners with the tools to improve in both controlled and spontaneous contexts (p. 850). Following this analysis, the author concludes that "instruction is effective not only for improving specific segmental and suprasegmental aspects of L2 sounds [...] but for enhancing listener's overall judgement of comprehensibility" (p. 849). However, two studies did not show significant improvement. Firstly, in Macdonald et al. (1994), participants were only exposed to a total of 15 to 30 minutes of instruction. In Saalfeld (2011), students received almost perfect scores at the pre-test, providing little room for improvement.

Roccamo (2015) conducted an intervention on L1 English learners of German to analyse whether low proficiency students would benefit from pronunciation training. 25 participants were divided into two groups. The experimental group received explicit pronunciation training whereas the control group did not. The author conducted identical pre- and post- test, which consisted of a perception task and 3 production tasks (word-reading, paragraph-reading, and answering open-ended questions). Participants were also asked to complete a language background questionnaire. The samples were randomised and mixed with two L1 German speakers' samples to test the ability of the raters, who were 5 L1 German speakers living in Germany. The raters did not receive any training prior to the assessment task, which lasted 3 days. They were asked to score the samples on a 7-point Likert scale.

The author concluded that "the experimental group significantly improved their comprehensibility ratings in three conditions on both the word-reading and paragraph-reading tasks, whereas the participants in the control group only showed significant improvement on two conditions in the word-reading task" (p. 73). Roccamo (2015) adds that, despite the results not being statistically significant, individual results provide information on the effects of the training. Overall, "students in the experimental group were still able to improve their comprehensibility despite increasingly

complicated task demands” while “control group, on the other hand, declined in comprehensibility on this task, and equal numbers of students received better and worse comprehensibility ratings at post-test” (Roccamo, 2015, p. 73).

2.2. English pronunciation and intelligibility

The notion of intelligibility has been encouraged throughout this paper as the best approach to employ when teaching pronunciation in any context, but more so in an ELF one. It must be highlighted that intelligibility does not depend entirely and solely on pronunciation, despite their close correlation (McNamara, 1996; cited in Levis, 2006, p. 252). Levis (2020) revisits “two conflicting approaches to pronunciation teaching” (p. 310), the Nativeness Principle and the Intelligibility Principle, introduced in *Reconceptualising Pronunciation in TESOL: Intelligibility, Identity, and World Englishes* (Levis, 2005, cited in Levis, 2020).

The author argues that the approach chosen –based on beliefs and ideology– has direct consequences on how pronunciation is taught and learnt. There is not any evidence that supports the Nativeness principle and the privilege monolingual NES enjoy, which “shows that pronunciation teaching has often been out of touch with the wider concerns of L2 teaching and learning” (p. 313), as it is still the standard. Regarding pronunciation models, Dauer (2005) claims that both ESL and EFL approaches “promote unnecessary and unrealistic pronunciation targets for learners” (p. 544) as it is widely agreed that L2 production is strongly influenced by the speaker's L1 phonetic categories and processes, and that L1 transfer of phonological processes is inevitable (Flege, 1995; Best et al., 2001; Flege 2002; Dauer, 2005), among other issues concerning L2 production. Levis (2020) argues, agreeing with prior authors (see Derwing & Munro, 2005; Müller, 2013; Murphy, 2013), that this issue stems from the fact that “pronunciation teaching and learning have been neglected since the advent of the communicative era” (Levis & Sonsaat, 2017, cited in Levis, 2020). Consequently, pronunciation has not developed together with other TESOL disciplines.

Levis (2020) continues to support the Intelligibility Principle as it correlates with the findings regarding second and foreign language acquisition. It also supports the idea that NNES do not need to behave as NES, as successful communication can still occur without following native conventions (Derwing & Munro, 2005, cited in Levis, 2020). The Intelligibility Principle is more pertinent in the present multicultural reality.

Jenkins (2000; 2002; 2015) proposed ELF to account for the current multicultural environment in which English exists. Jenkins (2002) claimed that while this “paradigm change” –that is, from ESL/EFL to ELF– has gained acceptance within theoretical linguistics, “it has had little impact on applied linguistics research design and even less on English language teaching or teaching materials” (p. 83) as the standard models, namely Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA), remain undeterred. In Jenkins (2020), the author claims that not much has changed

since the beginnings of ELF. Jenkins (2002) argues that the “greatest phonological obstacles to mutual intelligibility appear to be deviant core sounds in combination with misplaced and/or misproduced nuclear stress” (p. 155). From these findings, the author developed the Lingua Franca Core (LFC), a list of segmental features (see Table 1) which fall into two requisites: (1) they are found to be the source of miscommunication and (2) are “teachable and learnable” (Jenkins, 2002).

Table 1. ESL/EFL and ELF pronunciation targets (Jenkins, 2002, p. 99).

	<i>EFL target</i>	<i>ELF target</i>
<i>The consonantal inventory</i>	- All sounds	- All sounds except /θ/, /ð/, and /t/
	- RP non-rhotic /r/ - GA rhotic /r/	- Rhotic /r/ only
	- RP intervocalic [t] - GA intervocalic [ɹ]	- Intervocalic [t] only
<i>Phonetic requirements</i>	- Rarely specified	- Aspiration after /p/, /t/, /k/
<i>Consonant clusters</i>	- All word positions	- Word initially, word medially
<i>Vowel quantity</i>	- Long-short contrast	- Long-short contrast
<i>Vowel quality</i>	- Close to RP or GA	- L2 (consistent) regional qualities
<i>Weak forms</i>	- All	- Inconsequential/unhelpful
<i>Stress-timed rhythm</i>	- Important	- Does not exist
<i>Word stress</i>	- Critical	- Unteachable/can reduce flexibility
<i>Pitch movement</i>	- Essential for indicating attitudes and grammar	- Unteachable/incorrectly linked to native speakers' attitude and grammar
<i>Nuclear (tonic) stress</i>	- Important	- Critical

2.3. Difficulties L1 Catalan and Spanish speakers encounter with English pronunciation

Much research has been conducted to account for the acquisition of the phonetic system of a second or foreign language. Flege (1995, 2002) proposed the Speech Learning Model (SLM), which aims to account for the aspects of L1 which hinder the acquisition of L2 sounds. The SLM postulates that “the mechanism and processes used in learning the L1 sound system, including category formation, remain intact over the life span, and can be applied to L2 learning” (Flege, 1995: 239). It posits that the phonic elements of both L1 and L2 exist in a “common phonological space” (Flege, 2002: 224) and, therefore, influence one another. According to this model, if an L2 phonetic

category is perceived as a previously established L1 category, the former is said to have been “equated with the L1 speech sound” (Flege, 2002: 224). Therefore, the ability to form new categories is not lost but learners fail to form new categories for those L2 sounds that are phonetically closer to the L1 sound. For instance, both /i:/, as in sheep, and /ɪ/, as in ship, are perceived as /i/ for both L1 Catalan and Spanish speakers, since vowel length is not a distinctive feature in either language. Therefore, miscommunication might occur due to a failure to make such distinction.

Having the Speech Learning Model in mind, it might be unproductive to teach the entirety of the segmental features proposed in Jenkins’s (2000, 2002) LFC, given that “Spanish (and Catalan) and English consonant systems show many similarities” (Coe, 2002, p. 90). Despite this, there are some differences that might trigger miscommunication and are accounted for in the LFC. According to Jenkins (2000, 2002), aspiration is a core feature to be taught. However, aspiration does not occur in Catalan nor Spanish voiceless plosives as it does in English, where /p/, /t/ and /k/ are aspirated in word-initial position and syllable-initial position if this syllable carries the stress. Unaspirated plosives in such positions tend to be mistaken for their voiced counterparts (/b/, /d/, /g/) (Coe, 2002, p. 92; Walker & Zogbor, 2015, p. 438). For instance, ‘pill’ ([pɪl]) could be mistaken for ‘bill’ ([bɪl]).

Coe (2002) also lists Final Obstruent Devoicing (FOD) as a phenomenon that occurs in Catalan and Spanish but not in English, where voiced obstruents are realised as voiceless when produced in final position. For instance, the final consonant in solitude (‘loneliness’) is produced as [t]. This could cause issues distinguishing words that form minimal pairs, such as ‘bat’ and ‘bad’ (/t/ vs /d/), ‘dock’ and ‘dog’ (/k/ vs /g/), ‘think’ and ‘thing’ (/ŋk/ vs. /ŋ/), ‘rich’ and ‘ridge’ (/tʃ/ vs. /dʒ/), or ‘ice’ and ‘eyes’ (/s/ vs. /z/). Concerning the latter sound, /z/ does not exist in Spanish. Therefore, L1 Spanish speakers use /s/ for both /s/ and /z/ (Coe, 2002, p. 93). This sound, however, does exist in Catalan and its native speakers should be successful in transferring /z/ to English.

Other noted issues are the perception and production of /b/ and /v/ as /b/, hence ‘bowels’ and ‘vowels’ being pronounced both as [ˈbauəlz], the production of English /h/ as a velar fricative /ɣ/, and the lack of the English phonemes /ʃ/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/ in the consonant inventory of Spanish (Coe, 2002, p. 93). “Consonant clusters are in general less frequent in Spanish and Catalan than in English, so that learners have difficulty perceiving and producing English clusters” (Coe, 2002, p. 93), such as -xp- (‘expression’), -nst- (‘unstable’), -rts-/rds- (‘darts’, ‘regards’), to name a few. Jenkins (2000, 2002) argues that only word-initial and word-medial clusters should be trained as those are believed to be teachable and at risk of triggering miscommunication.

The vowel system, on the other hand, greatly differs from one another (Coe, 2002, p. 90-91) (see Table 2). As a result of these differences, L1 Catalan and Spanish speakers fail to distinguish most English vowel sounds, and therefore the closest existent category in their L1 is employed instead. According to Coe (2002), this applies to (1) /a/, /ɑ:/ (or /æ/) and /ʌ/ being produced as /a/; (4) /i:/ and /ɪ/, merged into /i/; (5) /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/ being produced as /o/; and (6) /u:/ and /ʊ/, as /u/ (See

Table 2). /ɜ:/ has no equivalent neither in Catalan nor Spanish and the written letter tends to be pronounced instead. For instance, nurse (/nɜ:s/) would probably be pronounced as */nurs/. The same phenomenon is observed in L1 Spanish speakers in dealing with the /ə/. Eastern, Central and Balearic Catalan speakers do have /ə/ in their inventory, thus being able to perceive and produce it, although it only occurs when *a* and *e* are in an unstressed position. Having this in mind, in a word such as 'commitment' (/kə'mɪtmənt/), L1 Catalan speakers would be expected to correctly produce the last shwa, but not the first. Given their wider vocalic range, Coe (2002, p. 91) argues, L1 Catalan speakers tend to have fewer difficulties in terms of vowel production than L1 Spanish speakers.

Table 2. A comparison of the vowel systems in Catalan (Herrick, 2007; Cebrian, 2010), Spanish (Cebrian, 2010; Salcedo, 2010) and English (Upton, 2015).

	Catalan	Spanish	English (RP)	English (GAm)
Pure Vowels	(1) /a/ <i>casa</i> 'house'	/a/ <i>mano</i> 'hand'	/a/ 'trap' /ɑ:/ 'bath'	/æ/ 'bath'
	(2) /e/ <i>després</i> 'after' /ɛ/ <i>pes</i> 'weight'	/e/ <i>mesa</i> 'table'	/ɛ/ 'dress'	
	(3) /ə/ <i>casa, després</i>		/ə/ 'away'	
	(4) /i/ <i>fill</i> 'son'	/i/ <i>pisó</i> 'flat'	/ɪ/ 'kit' /i:/ 'fleece'	
	(5) /o/ <i>ós</i> 'bear' /ɔ/ <i>òs</i> 'bone'	/o/ <i>perro</i> 'dog'	/ɒ/ 'lot' /ɔ:/ 'thought'	/ɔ/ 'cloth'
	(6) /u/ <i>ajuda</i> 'help'; <i>foto</i> 'photo'	/u/ <i>ayuda</i> 'help'	/ʊ/ 'foot' /u:/ 'goose'	
	(7)		/ɜ:/ 'nurse'	/ɜr/
	(8)		/ʌ/ strut	
Diphthongs	(9) /ai/ <i>xai</i> 'lamb' /ɛi/ <i>mainada</i> 'children'	/ai/ <i>hay</i> 'there is'	/aɪ/ 'light', 'lied'	
	(10) /ei/ <i>rei</i> 'king' /ɛi/ <i>feina</i> 'work'	/ei/ <i>ley</i> 'law'	/eɪ/ 'face'	
	(11) /ɔi/ <i>noi</i> 'boy'	/oi/ <i>voy</i> I go	/ɔɪ/ 'choice'	
	(12) /au/ <i>dau</i> 'dice'	/au/ <i>automovil</i> 'car'	/aʊ/ 'mouth'	
	(13) /ɔu/ <i>nou</i> 'new' /ou/ <i>pou</i> 'well'	/ou/ <i>monstruo</i> 'monster'	/əʊ/ 'goat'	/oʊ/
	(14) /iə/ <i>àvia</i> 'grandmother'	/ia/ <i>vacía</i> 'empty' /ie/ <i>bien</i> 'good'	/ɪə/ 'near'	/ɪr/

Coe (2002) analyses further issues that L1 Catalan and Spanish speakers encounter, concerning both consonants and vowels. However, they are not accounted for in the Lingua Franca Core, and therefore, have not been considered relevant for the present study.

3. Methodology

The present paper has based its research on an intervention study, and it employs a quantitative methodology to analyse the data. The intervention study is necessary as the aim is to “examine whether a given method or technique is effective in bringing about changes in pronunciation” (Derwing & Munro, 2015, p. 385) in an ELF classroom environment, as the goal is to learn English to be able to communicate and be intelligible, without striving for native-like production. The data collection was accomplished through a placement test, a background questionnaire, and the assessment of a pre- and post-test of free speech samples.

3.1. Participants

The intervention was carried out with 14 participants from Mt Idiomes Ripollet, a private English language school in Ripollet, Vallès Occidental. The groups were comprised of 5 (Group 1), 6 (Group 2), and 3 (Group 3) students each, and they were all studying the same level (B2.1) with the same teacher and textbook. The participants were between 15 and 18 years old, and they all attended a public high school, where students were exposed to both Catalan and Spanish, independently of their domestic linguistic background for a maximum of four hours a week, as well as the additional hours at the language school. However, there were three participants, one in the control group and two in the experimental groups, who were not exposed to English in high school as they studied other foreign languages. The experimental groups (Groups 2 and 3) were explicitly taught pronunciation following the guidelines provided in the LFC throughout eight weeks, three hours each week. Group 1 carried out the same activities without being explicitly taught pronunciation. By the end of the intervention, it was decided to discard the data of three participants, one from Group 2 and two from Group 1, as they missed three or more trainings.

There are a total of 20 raters, who were sent a link with a questionnaire including the two speech samples of each participant followed by the question on section 3.4 (*how intelligible is this speaker?*). The speech samples were placed in a random order to avoid two samples of the same speaker to be consecutive. The online questionnaire platform JotForm was used to share the link. 18 of the raters are non-native English language teachers working in Catalonia, and 2 have studied English Studies although they do not have teaching experience. Of these raters, 7 have Catalan as their L1, 5 have Spanish as their L1, and 8 consider both Catalan and Spanish their L1s. 11 of these participants have taught English between 6 to 10 years, 3 of them have taught English between 2 and 5 years, 3 have taught English more than 10 years, 2 participants have never taught English, and 1 has taught English for less than a year. They all claim to be very familiar with Catalan/Spanish-accented English.

3.3. Data collection

To establish the correlation between the effectiveness of explicit pronunciation teaching and English proficiency, the participants of all three groups were administered a placement test designed by Cambridge Assessment English (2021) (see [Appendix I](#)) to verify their proficiency level, which was administered at the beginning of the training. Students were provided with the link which directed them to the Cambridge English Placement Test for Schools. Also, the test was carried out in the classroom to avoid cheating. Given the course they are currently studying, a B1 level was expected. However, there could be struggling learners and/or learners with high capacities.

Given the multicultural reality of the Catalan Education System, a short linguistic background questionnaire was provided to both the control group and the experimental groups. In the Language Use Questionnaire, participants were asked about their L1 and their Habitual Language (HL). As stated in section 2.4 of this paper, Spanish and Catalan have common phonetic features. However, there is enough variation within both languages to affect the outcome of the experiment if participants are predominantly speakers of one or the other language. Despite the experiment being based in Catalunya, and Catalan being the vehicular language in the public educational system, Spanish is widely spread as well in every facet of the Catalan life. Therefore, there might be participants with Spanish as their L1 or participants who have both languages as their L1. Moreover, not all the students might have Catalan and/or Spanish as their L1. Participants were also asked about their Habitual Language, as there might be discrepancies between their L1. This questionnaire was intended to shed light on the possible variation in the results across participants. Also, it was written in Catalan, and not in English, to avoid possible misunderstandings. The questions were as follows:

- (1) Which is your first language (the language that you have been exposed to since birth)?
 You may have more than one.
- (2) Which is your habitual language (the language you use the most)?

The design of the data collection tools and analysis relies heavily on those studies reviewed by Saito (2012). To determine whether explicit pronunciation teaching makes a significant difference in the learner's level of intelligibility, a pre- and post-test were conducted where students were recorded answering the questions in Figure 1. The questions of the test were extracted from the topics dealt with in the textbook the students were studying at the time of the intervention. A MacBook Air 2017 was employed to record the participants.

Figure 1. Pre- and post-test material.

1. Answer one of the following questions:

1. Do you think studying English is useful? Why (not)?
2. What do you do when you want to relax?

The intervention lasted 8 weeks and consisted of presenting students, through a FonF approach, the segmental features present in the LFC (Jenkins, 2002, 2020). That is, students' attention was drawn to both controlled contexts, drills, for instance, and communicative contexts. The objective was to, first, raise the participants' awareness on the differences between the Catalan and Spanish sounds with the those of English. The control group performed the same controlled and communicative tasks, but they were not explicitly drawn attention to nor trained in phonetics.

The raters were in charge of determining the intelligibility rate of the participants in the study. Understanding that other factors may play a role in the intelligibility rate of the speakers (McNamara, 1996; cited in Levis, 2006, p. 252), raters were explicitly asked to refrain from judging the participants' performance on discourse management, communicative achievement, grammar, and vocabulary. According to Levis (2006), "listener factors are particularly important in the qualification of raters" (p. 260). Having this in mind, raters were only allowed to listen to each recording once. Two test samples, that is, not belonging to any participant, were used at the beginning as a means to practice and standardise the process. A quantitative questionnaire was distributed to the raters. The questionnaire included the following question for each speech sample with a numerical rating scale (Dörnyei & Csizér, 2012):

How intelligible is this speaker?			
1	2	3	4
Not intelligible at all	Somewhat intelligible	Quite intelligible	Completely intelligible

Table 3. Example question.

3.4. Data analysis

3.4.1. Preliminary analysis of the raters

An average mark was obtained from the 20 raters for each participant. The 4 raters who had an intra-rater average of 3.86 (R2 and R4), 3.95 (R1), and 4.0 (R7) (see Figure 2). Raters 1, 2, and 4 had an English teaching experience of 6 to 10 years, whereas R7 did not have any teaching experience. There was only one judge, R16, whose intra-rater average was below 2.5 –considering the overall performance of the participants as 'somewhat intelligible'–.

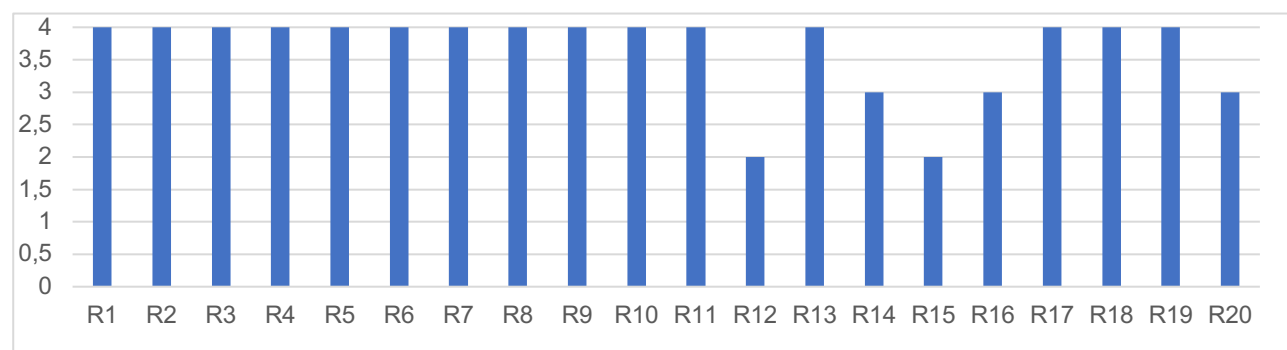


Figure 2. Intra-rater means across raters. Raters' pseudonyms in the x-axis, intra-rater means in the y-axis.

Given this disparity of results and to compare the data sets more effectively, a standard deviation test was conducted to compare the variability within raters, which resulted in $s=0.494$. In favour of standardisation, the Upper Control Limit (UCL) and the Lower Control Limit (LCL) were calculated (UCL=3,88; LCL=2,89) to account for those raters who performed outside the normal deviation, that is, they performed differently enough to doubt their understanding of the task. Consequently, the data provided to the study by these raters would not be useful and, in fact, detrimental to the possible results. Through this process, seven raters do not meet the desired values (See Figure 3).

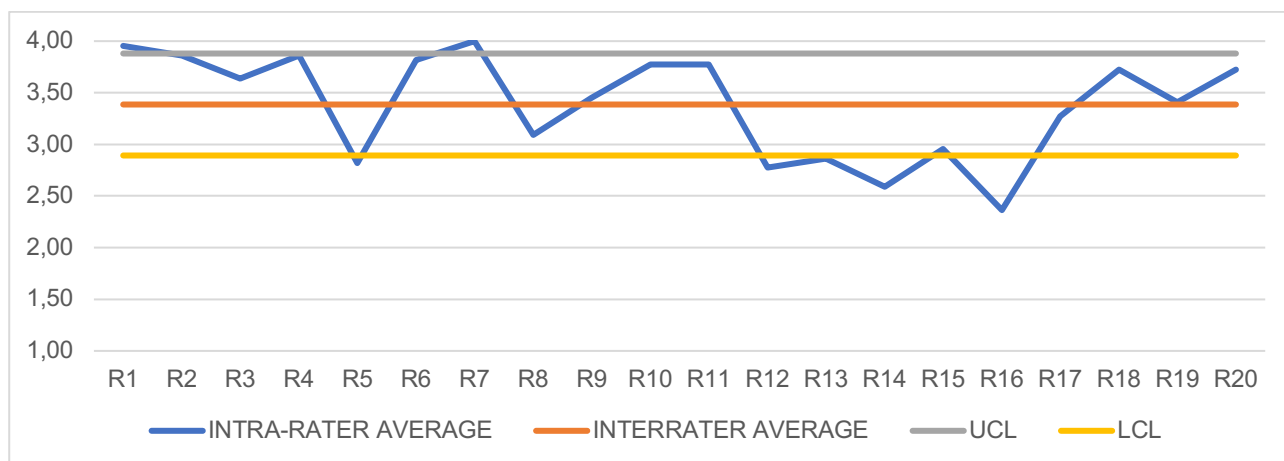


Figure 3. Rater's control chart.

For the purpose of knowing the degree of deviation from the norm, the intra-rater average -that is, the average of the marks provided by a given judge- was deducted from the UCL for those raters who performed higher than the norm, and from the LCL for those who performed below the norm (see Table 4). Having these results in mind, the data of R16 was discarded as it could potentially alter the results of the study. Continuing now, the results presented do not include the data from R16. The data from raters 1 to

JUDGE	INTRA-RATER AVERAGE	RESULTS
R1	3.95	UCL + 0.07
R5	2.82	LCL - 0.07
R7	4.00	UCL + 0.12
R12	2.77	LCL - 0.12
R13	2.86	LCL - 0.02
R16	2.36	LCL - 0.5

Table 4. Raters performing outside the normal deviation

13 (Table 4) was not discarded as the deviation was considered not significant.

A correlation test was conducted to analyse the impact of their teaching experience on their assessment performance, as it could have been a confounding factor. With a correlation value of -0.04, there does not appear to be a correlation between their assessment and their teaching experience. For instance, R16, whose data was discarded, has a teaching experience of between 6 to 10 years. However, so do R1, R2, and R4, who produced the highest scores (3.95, 3.86, and 3.86

respectively). Furthermore, the fact that all raters reported being very or extremely familiar with Catalan/Spanish-accented English might be the reason for such high average marks.

3.4.2. Data analysis of the groups' performance

The goal of this study was to determine whether explicit pronunciation training makes a significant difference in the intelligibility of learners of English in Catalan Secondary Education. To accomplish this, an average mark was extracted from the experimental and the control groups for the Free Speech Task (FST) of both tests. This resulted in four different average marks:

- (1) pre-test control group FST (CG-FST1)
- (2) pre-test experimental groups FST (EG-FST1)
- (3) post-test control group FST (CG-FST2)
- (4) post-test experimental groups FST (EX-FST2)

Given three different groups are being studied and compared, one control group and two experimental groups, an Independent Samples T-test was run to determine whether the difference in grades between them was significant in the pre-test, in order to account for our 'starting point' (Test 1). A second Independent Samples T-test was conducted using the results of the post-test (Tests 2) for the FST. The results of these tests were aimed to answer my first research question: does explicit pronunciation training make a significant difference in free speech tasks?

The second goal of this experiment is to determine whether language proficiency plays a role in the effectiveness of the training. On one hand, two average marks from each participant of the experimental group will be extracted from the raters' ratings: (1) pre-test FST (FST1), and (2) post-test FST (FST2). On the other hand, the placement tests were graded, and each participant assigned the pertinent CEFR English level. The improvement, or lack of thereof, was measured in points. For instance, if the results of Participant 1 were 3.6 for the FST1 and 3.9 for the FST2, there is an improvement of +0.3. If the results of Participant 2 are 3 for the FST1 and 2 for the FST 2, there is an improvement of -1. The results will be correlated with their placement test results. The results of these tests should answer my second research question: does the proficiency level in English play a role in the effectiveness of pronunciation training in terms of free speech?

4. Results

4.1. Language Use questionnaire

With the aim of analysing whether their L1 or HL (Habitual Language) played a role in their performance, students answered a questionnaire about their language background. On one hand, 3 participants have Catalan as their L1, 5 have Spanish as their L1, 2 have both Catalan and Spanish as their L1, and 1 has Catalan and Hungarian as their L1. On the other hand, only 1 participant has Catalan as their HL, while 7 participants have Spanish as their HL; 2 participants have both Catalan and Spanish, and one participant has Hungarian and Spanish as their HL (see Figure 4). Overall, 7 participants use Catalan as their L1 and/or HL, while 5 reported not using Catalan at all.

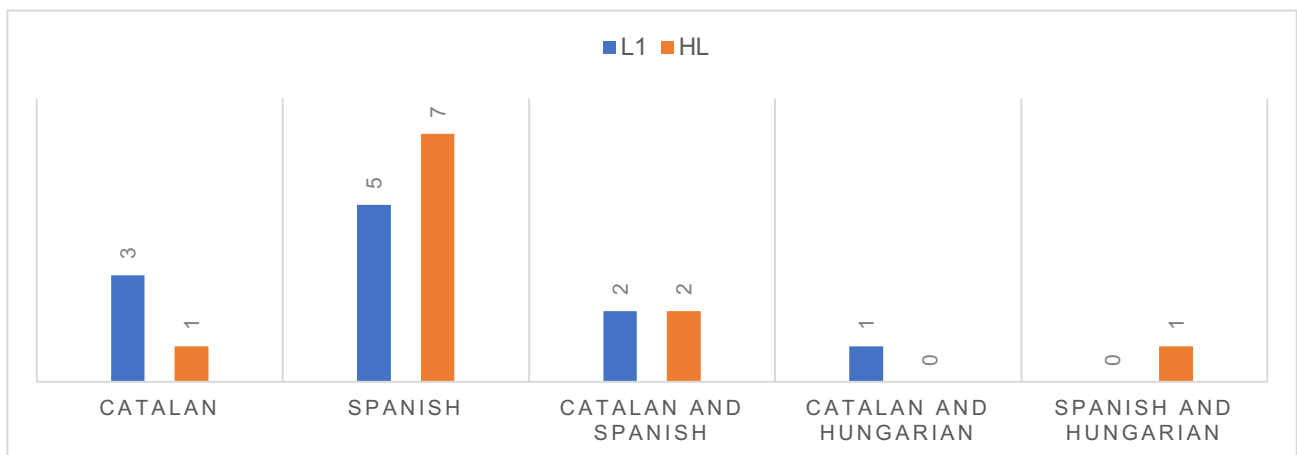
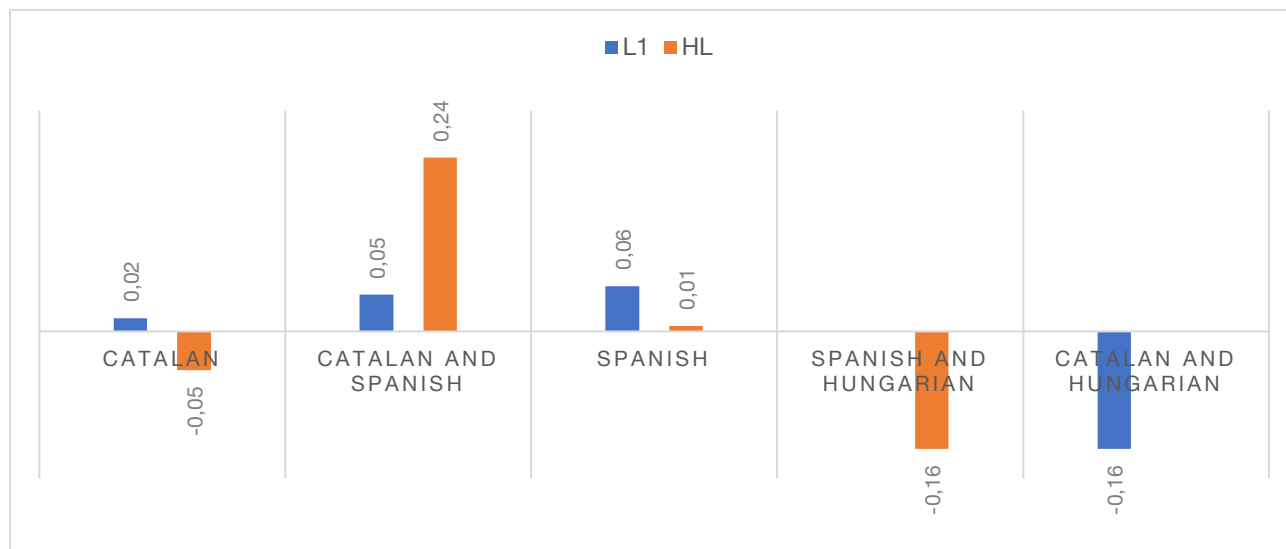


Figure 4. Language Use Questionnaire results. Present languages on the study on the x-axis and number of participants on the y-axis.

A correlation test was conducted to be able to determine whether the participants' L1 and/or HL affected their performance. The participants were grouped by L1 and HL, and the average mark of their improvement was calculated. A correlation test was conducted, with resulting correlation factors of 0.35 and 0.67, respectively. Those participants who speak Catalan as their L1 have an average improvement of +0.2, whereas those who have it as their HL have an improvement of -0.05. The participants who have both Catalan and Spanish as their L1 have an improvement of -0.05, whereas those who use both languages as their habitual languages have an average improvement of +0.24. Those participants who speak Spanish as their L1 have an average improvement of +0.06, whereas those who have Spanish as their HL have an improvement of 0.01. The participant who has Catalan and Hungarian as their L1, and Spanish and Hungarian as their HLs, has an average improvement of -0.16 (see Figure 5 on page 17).

Figure 5. Comparative of the participants' L1, HL and improvement values expressed as the difference between pre and post-test means.



4.2. Pronunciation training performance

The analysis of the results of the Pronunciation Training will delve first into the control group, followed by the two experimental groups. The control group (Group 1) is comprised of 3 students (AM, AN, AG) as seen in Table 4. Their improvement between pre- and post- tests is of -0.05, +0.11, and +0.47. Their pre-test performance averages at 3.18 and their post-test averages at 3.35, thus their average improvement is of +0.18 (see Table 5).

Table 5. Control group - individual and group pre and post test means and improvement (difference between means). Negative improvement marked in red.

PARTICIPANT	FST1	FST2	IMPROV.	CG-FST1	CG-FST2	CG-IMPROV.
AM	3.05	3,00	-0.05			
AN	3.32	3.42	0.11	3.18	3.35	0.18
AG	3.1	3.63	0.47			

Both experimental groups (Group 2 and Group 3) amount to 8 students (LG, ZP, CB, MT, PA, IA, MTO, AT). Their results in the pre-test range from 3.21 to 3.79, while their post-test range from 3.26 to 3.74 (see Table 6 on page 18). Their improvement ranges from -0.21 to +0.37. Their EG-FST1 performance averages at 3.52, and their EG-FST2 averages at 3.49, thus their average improvement is of -0.03 (see Table 6). Group 2, despite having the highest pre-test means, is the worst performing group, as it is the only group with a negative improvement.

GROUP	Ps	FST1	FST2	IMPROV.	EG-FST1	EG-FST2	EG-IMPROV.
G2	LG	3.68	3.47	-0.21	3.61	3.53	-0.1
	ZP	3.37	3.53	0.16			
	CB	3.79	3.63	-0.16			
	MT	3.58	3.32	-0.26			
	AT	3.63	3.68	0.05			
G3	PA	3.37	3.74	0.37	3.37	3.44	0.07
	IA	3.53	3.32	-0.21			
	MTO	3.21	3.26	0.05			
					3.52	3.49	-0.03

Table 6. Treatment groups - individual and group pre and post test means and improvement (difference between means). Negative improvement marked in red.

Regarding the results abstracted from the 22 speech samples, a standard deviation formula was applied to analyse how much deviation there was within the value given to each sample by the raters. The results of the standard deviation test range from 0.4 (Sample 77) to 0.99 (Sample 35), the majority ranging from 0.51 and 0.9 (see Figure 6). There are three speech samples, however, which present a deviation coefficient >0.8, which means that there are great discrepancies in the assessment of such samples.

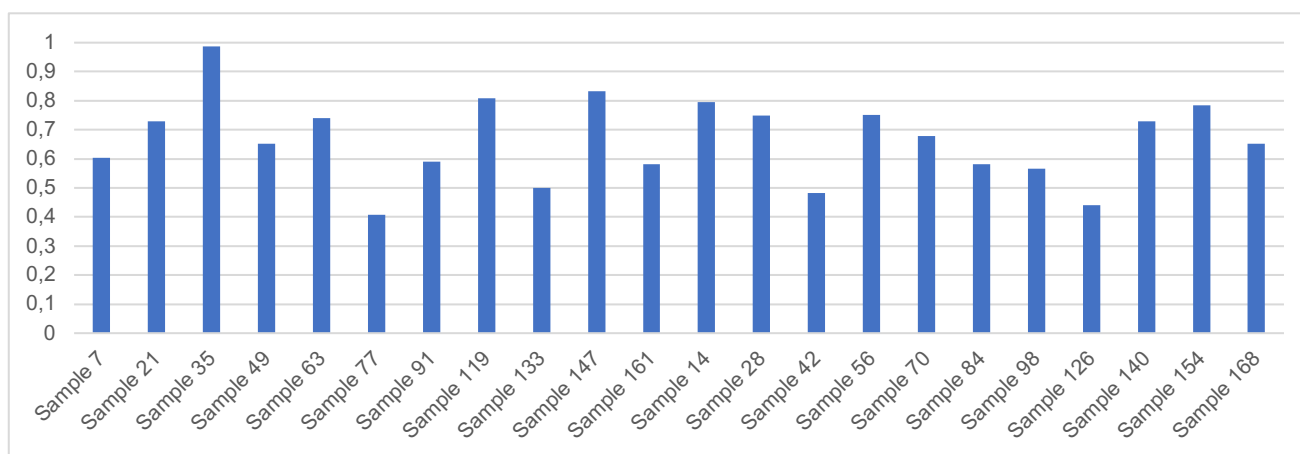


Figure 6. Average mark of each speech sample.

Sample 35 shows the highest coefficient with 0.99. It belongs to participant AG's FST1, of Group 1 (control group). It obtained an average of 3.16. R3 assessed the participant with a 1 (not intelligible at all); R5, R14, R15 and R17 assess the sample with a 2 (somewhat intelligible); R9, R12 and R13 with a 3 (quite intelligible), while the remaining raters assessed the participant's performance as completely intelligible.

Sample 147 shows a deviation of 0.83 in the raters' assessment. It belongs to participant MTO's FST1 (Group 3). MTO has an average mark in their FST1 of 3.15. R5, R12, R13, R14 and R17 considered this participant only 'somewhat intelligible'; R2, R8, R9, R15 and R20 considered them 'quite intelligible', while the others deemed them as 'completely intelligible'.

Sample 119 shows a deviation of 0.8 in the raters' assessment. It belongs to participant PA's FST1 (Group 3). PA has an average mark in their FST1 of 3.3. It was regarded as 'not intelligible at all' by R19. R5, R8, R9, R12, R13, R15 and R17 consider this participant 'quite intelligible', and deemed 'completely intelligible' by the remaining raters.

4.3. Placement test

The Placement Test was carried out in class and students reported the results obtained to the teacher. There is minor variability within the results of the test, as 9 of the 11 participants achieved an A2 level, while 1 student achieved an A1 and another a B1 (see Table 6). Therefore, the experimental and control groups could be considered equal in terms of their English proficiency.

	GROUP 1			GROUP 2					GROUP 3		
	AM	AN	AG	LC	ZP	CB	MT	AT	PA	IA	MTO
RESULTS	13	15	11	17	12	14	18	15	9	13	14
LEVEL	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2	A2	B1	A2	A1	A2	A2

Table 6. Test results and level of each participant.

A correlation test was conducted with the improvement scores and the results of the placement test to be able to answer question number 2 (does the proficiency level in English plays a role in the effectiveness of pronunciation training in terms of free speech?), and the resulting correlation coefficient is -0.85. Therefore, a negative correlation exists between the Placement Test's results and the improvement value of the participants (see Figure 7).

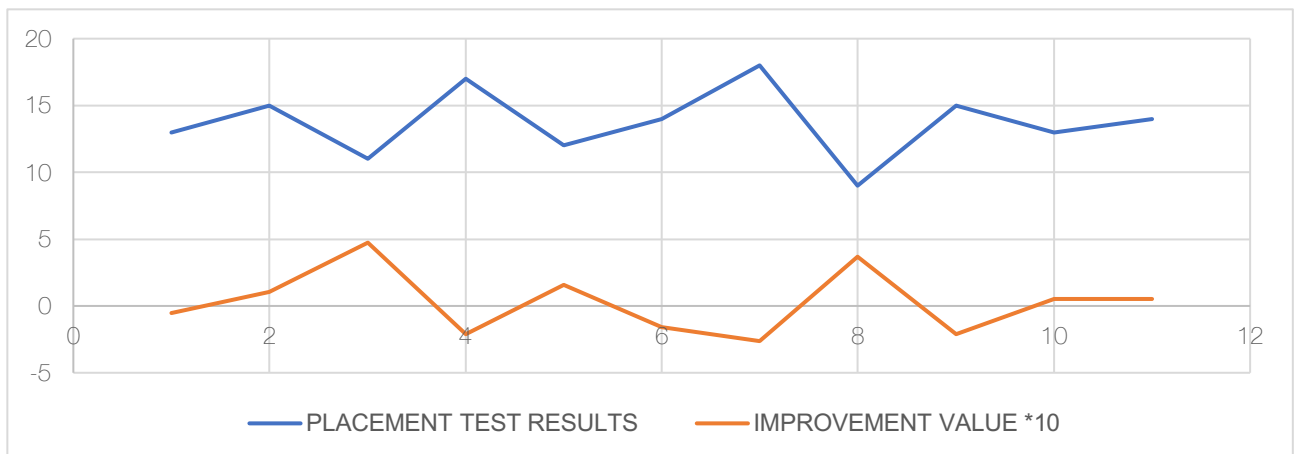


Figure 7. Correlation chart between test results and improvement value.

5. Discussion

Regarding the research questions, the first objective was to determine whether explicit pronunciation training makes a significant difference. According to the results obtained, it cannot be claimed that explicit pronunciation training makes a difference in the level of intelligibility of NNES, as there is no significant difference between the improvement obtained by the control group and the experimental groups, as opposed to what Roccamo (2015) reported. The second objective was to analyse whether the students' proficiency in English plays a role in the effectiveness of the training. As reported in the Results section, there seems to be an inverse correlation between the participants' improvement and their proficiency level. That is, there is a general tendency for those who obtained the lowest scores on the PT, improved the most on the training.

Regarding the participants' performance, the results show that there is not a significant difference between the control group and the experimental group, nor between the pre- (FST1) and post- (FST2) tests. In fact, overall, the experimental group performed worse than the control group. In the control group, AM is the only participant who obtained a lower FST2 mark (3.00) than their FST1 mark (3.05). AG, mentioned previously due to their performance on Sample 35 (FST1=3.16), scored 3.63 in the FST2 (FST1 +0.47). Analysing the FST2 sample, AG continues to produce the same pronunciation mistakes, albeit their discourse is much more fluent and coherent. Given the fact that it was the same task, the participant might have felt less anxious due to being able to anticipate the procedure. AN, the remaining participant of the control group, has obtained an improvement value of 0.11, and 17 out of the 20 raters consider AN 'quite intelligible' in both FST1 and FST2. Regarding their performance on the Placement Test, the three participants obtained an A2 level, although AG obtained the second-lowest mark in the study.

Concerning the experimental groups, it is interesting to analyse them separately. Experimental Group 2, with five participants, is the only group which shows an overall negative improvement (-0.03). However, the participants of this group are the best performing individuals in the study, as 4 participants have an overall FST1 mark higher than 3.5, and 3 in the FST2. The other marks are higher than 3. Therefore, there was a consensus on them being quite or completely intelligible. Their overall performance in the FST2, despite being in some cases lower than their FST1, is still higher than both FST1 and FST2 of Group 1 (CG) and Group 3. Group 2 is also the best performing group in the Placement Test, as 4 out of 5 participants have the highest marks across the three groups. ZP obtained the lowest score with 12 points. Coincidentally, ZP was the lowest-performing participant in the FST1 (3.37) and has the highest improvement value of the group (0.16). Moreover, the best performing student in the Placement Test of this group, MT (18 points, B1 level), has the lowest improvement value across the three groups at -0.26. The fact that their overall improvement is negative could be due to different factors. One plausible explanation would be that students might

have been anxious to perform according to what they have been practising, as it is known that anxiety has a negative effect on fluency.

Group 3 (PA, IA, MTO) have an improvement value of 0.07, which cannot be considered significant. However, there is great divergence within the group. On one hand, PA has an improvement of +0.37, which makes it the second-best improvement value in the study. On the other hand, IA shows a regression of 0.21. Analysing the raters' assessment, 50% of the answers deemed this participant 'completely intelligible' while the other 50% considered IA 'quite intelligible' on their FST1. On their FST2, IA is still considered 'completely intelligible' by 45% of the raters, but only 35% deemed their performance as 'quite intelligible'. The remaining 20% considered IA's FST2 'somewhat intelligible'. MTO's performance has been discussed previously. Participants AG and PA, then, have the most notable improvement across groups, independently of the type of intervention (implicit vs. explicit). Coincidentally, they are the participants with the lowest scores on the Placement Test (11 and 9 respectively).

For those who obtained negative improvement values, it is difficult to accept that their abilities have worsened throughout the training. Without a more thorough exploration of the raters' point of view on their assessment, one can only speculate. One of the possible reasons that could explain a poorer performance in a post-test (FST2) would be the anxiety of performing a task with the purpose of others assessing it. As a matter of fact, it is known that anxiety stifles fluency and accuracy (Hewitt, Stephenson, 2012, p. 171). In future research, conducting a short attitude questionnaire would shed a light on this issue.

Regarding the participants' linguistic background, L1 does not seem to have not played an important role in their performance, but it appears that the participants' HL has. According to the data, those who have Catalan and Spanish as their HL reported the highest overall improvement value (+0.24). However, only AN (Group 1, +0.11) and PA (Group 3, +0.37) claimed to use both languages as their HL. Given such difference, it cannot be claimed through the results of this study that the HL has an impact on the learners' pronunciation progress in an ELF context. In further research, a higher sample of participants would be crucial to obtain a more conclusive outcome.

Those speech samples which resulted in the highest deviation coefficients (samples 35, 119 and 147) were analysed to further examine the possible causes of such deviation. By doing so, it is possible to obtain a clearer picture of which factors intervene in analysing intelligibility. There appear to be a series of common traits between the aforementioned samples. AG (Sample 35) fails to produce English vowel sounds, a common issue stated by Coe (2002), as they pronounce *English* as /'inglif/, *because* as /bi'kos/, or *little* as /'litel/, there is a lack of aspiration, and produces a Spanish pronunciation of words existing in both languages, such as /'basik/ instead of /'beisɪk/. AG also fails to produce some final consonant clusters, as they drop final consonants, e.g., /wor/ for *work*. This participant also presents some syntactic inaccuracies that might have made the message unclear.

Although the participant of Sample 119 (PA) fails to produce some diphthongs (*home* as /xom/ instead of /həʊm/, *headphones* as /xedfɔns/ instead of /'hedfəʊnz/), they manage to produce some distinctive vowel length, especially the /ɪ/ - /i:/ distinction. PA also produces consonant clusters correctly, although they produce a velar fricative /x/ instead of /h/, and Final Obstruent Devoicing FOD is present (see previous examples). The main issue in Sample 119 is that the speaker mumbles unintelligibly towards the end of it as they are trying, it seems, to come up with a specific word. This mumbling could be the cause of such deviation, as R19 might have penalised the participant for it, and the other raters might have had the overall performance in mind. Albeit heavily accented and hesitant, the speech in Sample 147 could be considered intelligible. MTO, the participant, fails to produce English vowels, as they only realise Spanish ones. Moreover, consonant clusters seem a struggle. However, MTO's syntax is faulty enough to consider the possibility that the first group of raters penalised the participant for this reason. It could be argued, then, that heavily-accented English can be considered intelligible, although some raters seem to struggle to isolate pronunciation from other features.

This study faced several limitations. Firstly, time constraints forced the training to be solely eight weeks long. A lengthier training would be crucial to obtain more representative results, as it was proven in Saito (2012). Another limitation was the speech sample, as it did not cover the full scope of Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core (2002). It would be interesting to study controlled speech and be able to compare both aspects in further research. The assessment of intelligibility has been designed from a purely quantitative standpoint. To be able to fully examine such an assessment, it would be interesting to elicit further comments from the raters to accompany the scores. Such a data collection design would allow for a clear view of the results. For further research, carrying out a standardisation session to delve into the concept of the Intelligibility Principle proposed by Levis (2020) would prove more successful. Lastly, a minor inconvenience of this research was that only Catalan and Spanish L1 raters were able to be reached to carry out the assessment task. Employing raters of different linguistic backgrounds would offer a more realistic view of the participants' intelligibility in a multicultural context where English functions as a lingua franca.

6. Conclusion

As in two of Saito's (2012) research studies, in this paper there has not been a significant improvement to report in terms of intelligibility. However, this study sheds light on the possible

variables to analyse in future research, as there are noteworthy correlations to English proficiency and linguistic background.

It can be acknowledged, then, that many factors play a role in the effectiveness of pronunciation teaching. It is important that teacher training programs raise awareness on such factors in order to develop an effective pronunciation training according to their students' profile and needs, together with work towards finding strategies to implement the teaching of pronunciation in a meaningful way in the English classroom, as it has been done with other skills. Moreover, as it has been shown in the present study, heavily accented English can be deemed completely intelligible and, thus, does not impede communication. This supports the claims made by Levis (2020) in the Intelligible Principle, and supported by many other linguists, is the path to follow in the ELF classroom of the future.

Having this in mind, accent reduction, the common approach in pronunciation teaching both in ESL and EFL contexts, is unnecessary, in addition to being unrealistic, in the Catalan public education system. As it is a non-English speaking region, English is employed mainly as a lingua franca. Intelligibility offers a more achievable goal and, consequently, boosts the learners' motivation and confidence to become capable communicators in English.

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Appendix I: Placement test

This is a test to know your English level. For the questions below, please choose the best option. If you don't know the right answer, do not select a random option, you can leave it blank.

Questions 1 to 15

1. Could you tell me your surname?
 - a. Would you like me to spell it?
 - b. Do you like my family name?
 - c. How do I say that?
2. This plant looks dead.
 - a. It's in the garden.
 - b. It only needs some water.
 - c. It's sleeping.
3. I hope it doesn't rain.
 - a. Of course not.
 - b. Will it be wet?
 - c. So do I.
4. Are you going to come inside soon?
 - a. For ever.
 - b. Not long.
 - c. In a minute.
5. Who gave you this book, Lucy?
 - a. I bought it.
 - b. For my birthday.
 - a. My uncle was.
6. Shall we go out for pizza tonight?
 - a. I know that.
 - b. It's very good.
 - c. I'm too tired.
7. Do you mind if I come too?
 - a. That's fine!
 - b. I'd like to.
 - c. I don't know if I can.
8. There's someone at the door.
 - a. Can I help you?
 - b. Well, go and answer it then.
 - c. He's busy at the moment.
9. How much butter do I need for this cake?
 - a. I'd like one.
 - b. I'll use some.
 - c. I'm not sure.
10. How long are you here for?
 - a. Since last week.
 - b. Ten days ago.
 - c. Until tomorrow.
11. Have you guys had enough to eat?
 - a. That's all right
 - b. Is there any more rice?
 - c. It's not the right time.
12. That's my coat over there.
 - a. Will you take it off?
 - b. No, you haven't!
 - c. Here you are.
13. Let's go by bus.
 - a. The train was expensive.
 - b. We'll buy a ticket.
 - c. It'll take too long.
14. Do you know my brother Charlie?
 - a. Sorry, he's not here.
 - b. I don't think I do.
 - c. I know.
15. Would you like some ice in your drink or not?
 - a. I hope so.
 - b. Yes, I shall.
 - c. I don't mind.

Questions 16 to 25

16. I hope I haven't you any trouble by changing the arrangements.
 - a. Put
 - b. Caused
 - c. Made
 - d. Done
17. The floor is wet: don't run or you might !
 - a. stoop

- b. spill
c. slip
d. spin
18. When you come to my house, your camera with you.
a. take
b. show
c. fetch
d. bring
19. Paul arrived at the shop as the manager was closing for the day.
a. even
b. just
c. still
d. right
20. I would to stay at home and relax for a change.
a. rather
b. better
c. prefer
d. enjoy
21. Is there of food for everyone?
a. adequate
b. enough
c. sufficient
d. plenty
22. Lily says she's happy at school but she's complaining.
a. Rarely
b. Sometimes
c. Always
d. often
23. the step when you go in.
a. Consider
b. Mind
c. Attend
d. Look
24. stay the night if it's too difficult to get home.
a. At all costs
b. By all means
c. In all
d. On the whole
25. No Hannah is happy when you think how many prizes she has won recently.
a. surprise
b. problem
c. question
d. wonder

Appendix II: Placement test rubric

Results	0-11	12-16	17-19	20-22	23-24	25
CEFR Level	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2