

Escuela: Escuela Normal Superior en Lenguas Vivas
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Nivel: Terciario

Carrera: Profesorado de Inglés para la
Educación Inicial y Nivel Primario

Instancia: Práctica de Laboratorio

Año: 2013

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Introduction

The reason I have chosen these vowels is because I was misunderstood on a few occasions.. Once, in the USA, I was talking to an Englishman about computers and electronic devices and I told him that I had bought a new battery for my laptop which was 'cheap'. He understood I was talking about a 'chip' I had bought, and not that the battery was cheap. Additionally, I have an aunt living in the USA and one day she was talking about Latin people living there, with many years of residence , and she could not understand why, they cannot make an effort to speak properly and make a difference between a short and a long vowel. My aunt is fluent in English, German and Latvian, and we talk a lot about phonetics, one of the most important things is learning to produce English vowels correctly. River Plate Spanish speakers have difficulties with these vowel sounds, both perceiving and producing /i:/ and /ɪ/, making no differences between them.

Part 1

What every teacher should know

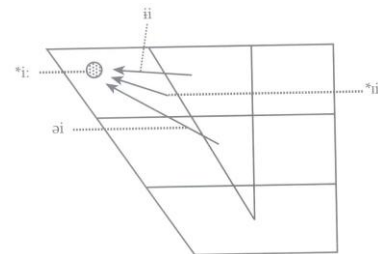
1.-River Plate Spanish Speaker difficulties:

River Plate speakers who start learning English find English pronunciation difficult. Why? Because many typical English sounds do not exist in Spanish. English has twelve vowels plus eight diphthongs whereas in Spanish only five vowels are used. If we do not distinguish between sounds, the result is bad pronunciation, and we can be easily misunderstood..

2.-Description of the selected sound:

Most people wrongly believe that the only difference between vowel /i:/ and /ɪ/ is that one is long and one is short. That is true, but it is not the main difference. The main difference is that the quality of /i:/ is nearer to cardinal vowel [i] (with the glide mentioned below) than to cardinal vowel [e]:

You can feel the difference in quality by feeling the tongue movement with your index finger. When we pronounce this vowel the lips are spread and the tongue is tense. When I say: *please / eat*, you notice that my lips are moving and my tongue is tense back here. If you put your fingers right here (under the jaw), you'll notice that your fingers are moving a little bit.



The lax vowel is /ɪ/. The lips are relaxed, they are in a neutral position when we say: *it* or *if*. Lips are not moving, and if they move there is a very slight movement and the tongue is also lax. The quality is that of a centralized cardinal vowel [e].

To produce /ɪ/ lips are spread loosely and the tongue is more relaxed. When we make this sound lips are loosely spread and our tongues are relaxed in our mouths.

This is the most difficult sound to get for a River Plate Spanish speaker because it is more similar to the Spanish /e/. Unlike /i:/ which looks more difficult to grasp but it is easier to be acquired since it sounds more like Spanish /i/.

When we speak, we don't carry a dictionary all the time. So: How do I perceive or produce the difference between /i:/ or /ɪ/? This may be very simple, we could base our perception on a written word by resorting to spelling of the word. However, being River Plate Spanish speakers, we have difficulties distinguishing the sounds when listening to someone speaking English than reading a text. Anyway, exposure and practice will help to acquire these sounds. We will go around the latter throughout the lessons put into practice in this research.

3.-Complete list of spellings associated with /i:/ and /ɪ/

/i:/

/

ee	tree, cheese
ea	please, sea
ie	believe, piece
e	complete, these
ei	seize
ey	key
i	machine, police
eo	people
ay	quay

/ɪ/

i	sit, rich,
y	city
e	pretty
ie	cities

a	village
ui	build
ay	Sunday, Tuesday
u	business, minute
o	women

4.-Distribution:

/i:/ has full distribution, it means we can find this vowel in initial, medial and final position in accented and unaccented words.

/ɪ/ has restricted distribution. We can find this vowel in initial and medial position of accented and unaccented words, not in final position, where ‘happy i’ is used instead.

5.- An Approach to the teaching of sounds

The approach used for the teaching of these sounds is the *Task Based Learning Approach*. A task is a certain type of activity used in language instruction. It is an activity where the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome.

The task should satisfy the following criteria:

- Meaning is primary (Wide focus on form-less constrained, and narrow focus on form-more constrained)
- There is a goal which needs to be worked towards.
- The activity is outcome-evaluated.
- There is a real-world relationship.

We use this approach because students can use language freely and it is motivating and fun. When we use this approach for teaching pronunciation to children, we concentrate on tasks such as games, poems, songs, tongue twisters. Students are exposed to lexical phrases, collocations and spend a lot of time communicating. The context is developed from the students experiences. Some tasks are meant to assimilate the sounds. These are restrictive assimilation tasks because they focus on one segmental feature. There are two processes involved in assimilation tasks. The first one is reception and the second one is production.

When students notice the sound, they are trying to assimilate the sound through their ears, whereas when students try to produce that sound in particular, they are producing the sound for the first time. The main feature teachers need to focus on, when planning an assimilation receptive task, is to make children notice the sound, in this way they can assimilate it. When they are assimilating, and for the first time, they are producing the sound, we talk about assimilation productive tasks (e.g. tongue twisters). Once students can notice the sound, and unconsciously produce it, they have accommodated the new phoneme into their phonemic schemata. (Walter 2010).

Part 2

The Phonetic Project in Action

1. Group description

I selected two private students for this project. They are sisters. Sofia is nine and Agustina is eleven. They attend a private double shift school in the Belgrano area (Spanish subjects in the morning, and English in the afternoon). They have been studying English since pre-school, and have a good level of English and a quite good pronunciation.

According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Sofia is A1 because:

- She can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type.
- She can introduce herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where she lives, people she knows and things she has.
- She can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

Agustina is A2 because:

- She can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography).
- She can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters.

-She can describe in simple terms aspects of her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.

2. Diagnosis

These girls have a very good level of English. However, they present some problems in suprasegmental areas. Sofia has difficulties with chunking and stress, but has a natural ability to perceive tones and apply them. I think that the fact that she likes music and sings, helps her in the production of tones. Agustina cannot identify stress and has a tendency to apply rises in all her speech. They are very young and these problems with suprasegmental elements will disappear with time and with the continued English language immersion.

As for the segmental elements, the most common spelling mistakes on them are in the production of the following vowel sounds and consonants: / æ / ʌ /, / ɪ / i: /, / ʊ / ɔ: /, / θ / ð /, / b / v /, / dʒ / ʃ / ʒ /.

One of the main problems of River Plate Spanish speakers is the production of English vowels' sounds. Meaning is compromised if we are not aware of the differences between these lax/ tense sounds.

Therefore, I have focused this project on the vowel sounds/i: /and /ɪ//.

First, I have concentrated on constrained tasks, suitable for segmental elements so the students produce and recognize the individual sounds.

Students lack noticing the nucleus and one of them cannot produce intonation, so I also included an unconstrained task at the end of the lesson, so as to encourage them to work on rhythm, tones, fluency (suprasegmental elements).

3. The experience

The girls paid a special attention to the teaching of the sound, as the stories and characters were something new for them. They were familiar with the symbols, as they had in their text book a glossary of words and the phonetic transcription.

The first lesson was the presentation of the story. They liked the sound characters because they look like two speaking pencils. The youngest particularly felt immediately identified with one of the characters of the story (Eeny Eady). They mimed Inga sounds by being

serious while pronouncing it, and smiling when producing Eeny Eady's. They also passed a long time touching their jaws and tongues to feel the difference between the sounds, and they even looked themselves in the mirror to observe the movements.

During the second lesson, Sofia immediately chose to work with the /i:/. She was very competitive and bossy with her sister. Unfortunately it was her sister Agustina who won the game, so she was quite upset about this. They enjoyed the task and did it quite fast. They were able to recognize the words they had in their boxes when I re-read the story.

The third lesson was about a poem they had to read and mark the targeted sounds in different colours. They could recognize and distinguish immediately both sounds. In order not to get them confused about the spellings, my idea was to concentrate on the most frequent spellings of these sounds, and the poem was prepared with the most common ones. But during the task, questions arose about some other words: key, people, police, the days of the week, so it was the opportunity to show them the complete spelling chart. They were eager to know everything about it. So I left them my copy of the complete spelling chart. I didn't want them to be overcharged with too much information, but to my surprise they could assimilate it quite well.

The fourth lesson was about tongue twisters. They both enjoyed it very much. First, they had to rearrange the words to form the tongue twister sentence. But it took sometime to get the words rearranged. It was a little bit difficult for them to form the sentences, but eventually they did it.

A fifth activity, was left to them as homework, it is about a poem "England" and they have to recognize the targeted sounds and colour them.

4.Reflection

I enjoyed the experience of teaching phonetics, and I felt at ease during the class. It was an enriching experience, not only for me, but for the students too. As teachers we can't dedicate a lot of time to phonetics, we just teach the basics of it. In consequence, students don't go deep into the study of sounds in the English classroom. This is a very important part of the English learning process, most of the time overlooked by English coordinators, they say it's a time consuming activity. But we should try to include a few activities as part

of the daily lessons. It's important not to underestimate the students. I didn't want them to be too much confused about the spellings (I concentrated on spellings ee, ea, i, for the activities) but they showed me that they could manage much more information quite well and fast. I had to create the story of Eeny Eady, and also one poem. I am now even thinking about writing stories and poems to publish them, bearing in mind the vowel sounds and consonants to help River Plate speakers studying English. And I also think that teaching phonetics help us to improve our own pronunciation.

This was a new experience for me, as I had never taught in this way. Teaching children vowel and consonant sounds is a crucial first step in learning to read because it enables good progress in phonics (linking phonemes to written language) and help them to deal with words that are unfamiliar. With pronunciation lessons we also break down language so children can play with the sounds and learn to distinguish them.

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Appendix

The Tree of Sounds

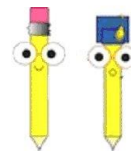
Once upon a time, there was a big tree in the playground of a school in Palermo. It had lots of green leaves and on top of these leaves, near the sky, there lived some letters. The letters saw everything from up above, but they couldn't get down from the leaves. Every day they saw the children play on the playground during break. They saw them playing hide and seek, scotch hop and tag. And they really wanted to join the children in the fun, but they did not know how.

One day, the children were having a break, practising for their English lesson. The letters were watching from above and saw how the students struggled to pronounce English sounds, because they were River Plate speakers. The letters wanted to help them. Since they were part of the tree of sounds, they knew that they could help children to speak any language! But although they tried, they could not get down from the leaves in order to go and help the kids.

One night, there was a storm, and lightning struck on the tree! The letters felt an energy flash run through their bodies and suddenly they realized that they had magically popped out of the tree alive and free to move around! They knew what to do next! They were going to help the children pronounce all the English sounds.

From that day on, they have been out and about helping River Plate speakers learn English sounds! The twin sisters teach children to say "Cheese!" and "Chip" for pictures. Happy Horse teaches the students his special laughter "hahaha". Zoe the Zebra teaches kids to dance in a zigzag way. And the Joker helps them jump joyfully like a jelly!

Have fun with them!

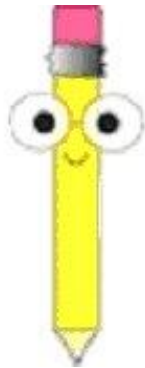


These are the twin sisters!

This is Inga...



and this is Eeny Eady



and they come from the Tree of Sounds to help children pronounce "Cheese" and Chips"!

Lesson 1

Objective

The teacher will introduce the targeted sounds /i:/ and /ɪ/.

Material

Flashcards

Story ‘‘Inga and Eeny Eady’’

Inga and Eeny Eady are twin sisters. They love each other very much. They are very much alike, but not the same.

Inga is quite serious, she doesn't smile very often. She's thin. She likes to make trips by ship, even though she's not so rich. She swims in the river with other kids. Then, she picks up tulips, lilies and daffodils.

Every morning, she drinks milk, and for lunch she has chicken, chips or fish. Eeny Eady is hilarious, and she smiles all the time. She likes to drive her jeep. She's always on four wheels. When she goes to the sea, she weaves knee socks at the beach. Every day at five, she has tea with toast and cheese. For dinner, she prefers to eat meat, with peas and green beans. Inga and Eeny Eady are twins, they're alike, but different in many ways.

Pre-task: The teacher will introduce the two characters of the story, read it aloud, and explain the difference between the two sounds.

Task: Students will mime Inga sounds by being serious when they listen to it, and smiling when they listen to Eeny Eady's.

Follow-up: Students will mime and pronounce each character's sounds. Then, they read the story aloud.

Lesson 2

Objective

To recognise the vowel sounds.

Material

Flashcards with drawings and two boxes.

Sea Sheep Peach Bee Wheel Beans Tree

|si: | ʃi:p | pi:tʃ | bi: | wi:l | bi:nz | tri: |

Pig Ship Bins Milk Lips Chips Ring

| pɪg | ʃɪp | bɪnz | mɪlk | lɪps | tʃɪps | rɪŋ |

Pre-task: The teacher gives a box with the target sound to each student and explains that they will have to help the twins to find their missing words and join them to the corresponding box. (one box for the / i: /sound, and the other for the / ɪ /). The flashcards will be upside down, and the girls will have to take turns and pick up one card, and if the word corresponds to the basket they have, they put it in it. Otherwise they will have to leave the card and wait for the next turn. The one who collects first their words, wins the game.

Task: Students take turns to pick up a card, recognize the sound and add it to their boxes.

Follow-up: Teacher will read the story aloud again. This time children will interact by miming (smiling or being serious) the sounds they have in their boxes every time they listen to them while the teacher reads the story.

Lesson 3

Objective

To recognise the targeted sounds in a poem.

Materials

A poem:

*We dream of a meal by the seaside
A basket with milk, chips and cheese
We dream of a meal by the sea
After swimming.*

*To sit on the beach
with the sea within reach,
with chicken, meatballs, shrimps
And peaches and cream for the tea.
Yes, please!*

Pre-task: Teacher will read the poem aloud. Then, each child receives one copy of it. One girl will have to recognise and mark the words with the /i:/ and the other the words with the /ɪ/ sound.

Task: Children will colour the targeted sounds in the poem.

Follow-up: Teacher reads the poem again and checks the task. Then, children read aloud the poem.

Lesson 4

Objective

To recognize the targeted sounds and say them aloud.

Material

Four envelopes with a set of cards with words: /ɪ// I had tea at the sea on a seat. | aɪ hæd
ti: ət ðə si: vən ə sit |

/i:/Did Mick quick kick sick Rick? | dɪd mɪk kwɪk kɪk sɪk rɪk |

/i:/ and /ɪ/

The sheep on the ship slipped on the sleet.

| ðə ʃi:p vən ðə ʃɪp slɪpt vən ðə sli:t |

The keen king kissed the quick queen on her green ring.

| ðə ki:n kɪŋ kɪst ðə kwɪk kwi:n vən hə gri:n rɪŋ |

Pre-task: Each child receives an envelope with cards. They will have to rearrange the cards to find the sentence hidden, and say which one correspond to Inga, and which one to Eeny Eady.

Task: Children arrange the cards to form the sentence.

Follow-up: Teacher checks the task and reads aloud the tongue twisters. Then, children take turns to read them aloud.

Lesson 5

Objective

To recognize the targeted sounds in a poem.

Material

A poem: ‘‘England’’

England is a green country, of fields and wooded hills;

And England is a black country, of factories and mills.

In its big and busy cities of concrete, brick, and steel,

It is hard to know the people, and what they think and feel.

Its language is a mixture of Celtic, Saxon, Greek;

With German, French and Latin, so it’s difficult to speak.

It is famous for its cricket, and for its love of tea;

Thatched cottages in villages, small harbours by the sea.

It’s proud of its long history, and many books are written

On the fondness of the British for clinging to tradition.

And visitors still marvel at a ceremonial scene

Like the Trooping the Colour in the presence of the Queen.

Pre-task Each child receives one copy of the poem and other words with /i:/ and /ɪ/. The girls will have to colour the words with the /i:/ and /ɪ/ sounds.

Task Children read and act out the poem with the movement the sound characters have taught them to play with them.

Follow-up : children read the poem but replace the words with other words

Transcriptions

Lesson 1

| ˈɪŋɡə ənd i:ni \ i:di |

| ˈɪŋɡə ənd i:ni / i:di | ə twɪn \ sɪstəz | ðei ˈlʌv i:tʃ ˈʌðə veri \ mʌtʃ | ðei ə veri mʌtʃ əv/laɪk

| bət ˈnɒt ðə \ seɪm |

| ˈɪŋɡər ɪz kwɑɪt \ sɪərɪəs |ʃi ˈdʌznt smɑɪl veri \ɒftən | ʃi:z \ θɪn | ʃi ˈlaɪks tə meɪk
ˈtrɪps baɪ \ ʃɪp | ˈi:vən ðəʊ ʃi:z nɒt səʊ \ rɪtʃ | ʃi ˈswɪmz ɪn ðə ˈrɪvə wɪð \ʌðə kɪdz /ðen |

ʃi ˈprɪks ʌp /tju:lɪps | /lɪlɪz | ən \ dæfədɪlz | evri \ mɔ:nɪŋ | ʃi drɪŋks \ mɪlk | ən fə

\ lʌntʃ | ʃi hæz /tʃɪkən | /tʃɪps | ɔ: \ fɪʃ |

ˈi:ni i:di ɪz hɪ \ leərɪəs | ən ʃi ˈsmɑɪlz ɔ:l ðə \ taɪm | ʃi ˈlaɪks tə ˈdraɪv hə \ dʒɪ:p | ʃi:z

\ ɔ:l wɪz ɒn fə: /wɪ:lz | wen ʃi ˈgəʊz tə ðə \ si: | ʃi ˈwi:vz \ ni: sɒks | et ðə /bi:tʃ | ˈevri deɪ

et \ faɪv | ʃi hæz ˈti: wɪð ˈtəʊst ən \ tʃi:z | fə \ dɪnə | ʃi prɪ ˈfɜ:z tu i:t \ mi:t | wɪð / pi:z |

ən grɪ:n \ bi:nz |

ˈɪŋɡə ənd i:ni i:di ə \ twɪnz | ðeər əv/laɪk | bət \ dɪfərənt | ɪn ˈmeni \ weɪz |

Lesson 3

| ə \ pəʊɪm |

wɪ ˈdri:m əv ə ˈmi:l baɪ ðə \ si:sɑɪd |

ə ˈbɑ:skɪt wɪð /mɪlk | /tʃɪps | ən \ tʃi:z |

wɪ ˈdri:m əv ə ˈmi:l baɪ ðə / si: |

ˈɑ:ftə \swɪmɪŋ |

tə ˈsɪt ɒn ðə / bi:tʃ |

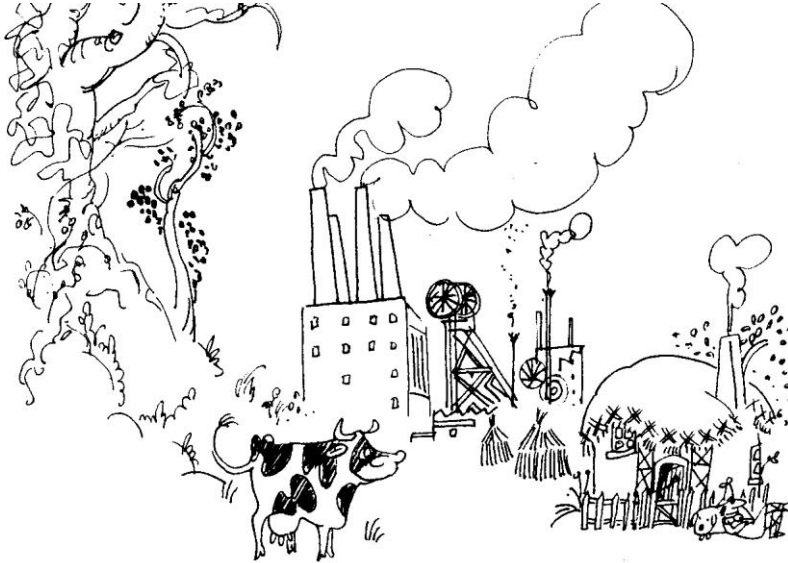
wɪð ðə ˈsi: wɪðɪn \ ri:tʃ |

wɪð /tʃɪkən | / mi:tbɔ:lz | \frɪmps |

ən ˈpi:tʃɪz ən ˈkri:m fə ðə \ti: |

\jes | \pli:z |

Lesson 5



/i:/

'iŋglənd

'iŋglənd iz ə 'gri:n kʌntri əv 'fi:ldz ən wudid 'hilz
 ənd 'iŋglənd iz ə 'blak kʌntri əv 'faktəri:z ən 'milz
 in its 'big ən 'bizi 'sitiz əv 'kɒnkri:t 'bri:k ən 'sti:l
 it iz 'ha:d tə nou ðə 'pi:pl ən 'wɒt ðei 'θiŋk ən 'fi:l

its 'lɒŋwidʒ iz ə 'mikstʃə əv 'keltik 'saksən 'gri:k
 wið dʒə:mən 'frentʃ ən 'lætiŋ sou its 'difikəlt tə 'spi:k
 it iz 'feiməs fər its 'kriki:t ən fər its 'lʌv əv 'ti:
 θæt't 'kɒtidʒiz in 'vilidʒiz smo:l 'hɑ:bəz bai ðə 'si:

its 'praʊd ən its lɒŋ 'histəri ən 'meni buks a: 'ritən
 ən ðə 'fɒndnis ən ðə 'britiʃ fə 'kliŋiŋ tə trə'diʃən
 ən 'vizi:təz stil 'mɑ:vəl ət ə seri'maʊnjəl 'si:n
 laik ðə 'tru:piŋ ən ðə 'kɒlə in ðə 'prezns ən ðə 'kwi:n

Flashcards



Tongue Twisters

