THE WHISPERING GAME — AN INTRODUCTION TO ENGLISH PHONETICS

1. Introduction

The present report is based on the workshop *The Whispering Game*, offered during the CAP[1] Languages Week *2019*, and applied with the groups LE90 (9th grade) and LE80 (8th grade) of Colégio de Aplicação of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul. The Languages Week is an event held by the teachers of languages classes at CAP and is an opportunity for undergraduate or graduate students of the languages course at UFRGS to create projects, workshops or any other activity in which any of the languages offered at CAP (English, French, German, Italian or Spanish) can be used. One of our professors in the English Department mentioned it to us and we, as undergraduate students, thought that would be a good opportunity to practice our teaching skills inside a classroom.

The workshop had the duration of fifty minutes, approximately, and the required materials for it were a projector, audio equipment — adapted, on the day, to a cell phone —, earphones, and internet.

2. The workshop *The Whispering Game*

The workshop was constructed around the objective of offering students an interesting and fun way to learn one of the required English contents. To do so, we first brainstormed which themes were the most fun for students, and we ended up with the idea of working with music. Following that thought, we easily arrived at the concept of working with phonetics, having in consideration that we could offer authentic and relatable examples of how the phonetics of the English language works. Our next

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[1] CAP means "colégio de aplicação", a school linked to a higher education institution, where undergraduates have the opportunity for in-service teacher training (Brazilian Federal Decree no. 9053, 12/03/1946).

challenge was *how* we were going to do that, taking into account the content itself and how to include music in the process in a meaningful way.

We searched for activities and games involving music, and one of the first ideas that came up was *The Whispering Challenge*, a game that we saw during *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon,* an American late-night talk show presented by Jimmy Fallon on NBC. It is very famous for having a variety of celebrity interviews, comedy sketches, games and also music parodies. The game was played between two people: one of them wore a headphone playing very loud music, and the other sat in front of the first one and had to pronounce a chosen word. The player with earphones had some time to guess which word was being pronounced, which was really fun for the audience, due to the completely wrong guesses. We thought the game would be useful for our purpose because it directly involved the process of articulation of words, which is explored by phonetics, and it's a subject that can be confusing. In order to combine fun and knowledge about the subject, we believed that this particular game could be a good use as a bridge between them. We also decided to adapt the words, since the words used in the original game were very hard to guess, considering the players were native speakers. Before the implementation of the workshop, we talked to the teacher in charge and gathered a few words they were studying at the time so the game could be entertaining and at the same time helpful for their studies.

Our next step was to write good instructions before the game which helped students identify and understand the main aspects of English phonetics. We did some research on the internet and on articles and books that we had previously read and tried to summarize them in the most simple and useful way, using examples and resources, such as the website of the International Phonetic Alphabet, which has sound effects illustrating each sound of the tables. We also prepared a general introduction about the subject of phonetics, its importance and fields of study. Some of the references we used

are texts about the use of games in teaching, such as Deterding (2012), and Nicholson (2012), and texts about the teaching of phonetics, such as Kissling (2013), and Wrembel (2001). The content of the presentation was mostly based on the articles "Vogais e fonética do inglês" and "Os ditongos em inglês", referenced at the end. Lastly, the chapter about phonetics by Battisti (2017) helped us to prepare our introduction about the subject.

All of the content was organized in slides, and we tried to organize it in an inviting and clean way, using images and visual resources. The order in which we organized our presentation was: an explanation of what phonetics is, its fields and objects; how the vowels sound in English, with examples; and how the combination of vowels functioned in English, with examples. The last part of the presentation — which took around 20 minutes — was a brief explanation of how *The Whispering Game* would work.

Our first group was LE90. There were around 15 students on this classroom, with ages from 13 to 14 years old. Firstly, we did our presentation, and the students seemed very interested, asking some questions about the content and the examples, and also repeating with us the sounds of the vowels and consonants highlighted in the words. For the second part of the workshop, after we presented the main instructions of the game, we did ourselves a demonstration of how the game would work, and asked if the students had any doubts. The next step was to present the rules of the game for them. Two students would be seated in front of each other, one facing the whiteboard and the other with his/her back facing the whiteboard — this student would be wearing earphones. The student facing the whiteboard would read a random word that their teacher chose, very slowly so his/her classmate could try to guess it by only reading his/her lips. After a few trials and some errors, if the students were struggling too much or wanted to give up, we would reveal the word and the duo would be changed for

another. We did a experimental round with their teacher as the one wearing the earphones and one of us trying to say the word.

The students were excited to join the game; because of that, we had to form a queue while writing their names on the whiteboard, in order to organize everything. Most of them did not have any preferences about being the one with the headphone or being the one pronouncing the word. They really liked the game and played it extremely well — the students were having a lot of fun while playing. They laughed a lot and seemed to really enjoy the game, winning or not — they found extremely funny the process of guessing, and so did the crowd, that already knew the words. The students also liked the songs that were playing on the headphones, which they commented to us. There was also a big audience around the two players, cheering for them. They seemed really connected as a group, and it showed while they played and encouraged each other.

Each round of the game would take 5 minutes at the most. When someone guessed correctly, the round was over, so sometimes it would take less than that. The activity occurred in both classrooms and all the students engaged in it, without exceptions. Some of them would prefer to guess instead of saying the word or the opposite, but the majority of them played in both positions.

The second group, LE80, was actually a surprise for us. In this classroom, we had a few more students, around 20 and their ages were appropriate with their school year (12 to 13 years old). Their English teacher — the same one who was in LE90 — approached us and said that she believed her other class would also love the game and asked if we could repeat the workshop with them. We gladly accepted and the result was as great as the first time. Their participation was exactly the same as the students from LE90.

3. Final considerations

Designing and implementing this workshop at Colégio de Aplicação was an amazing and enriching experience. It was a great opportunity to be inside a classroom without the pressure of being "the teachers", which helped us to be confident when explaining such an important and sometimes challenging content. Besides, having their teacher asking us to reapply the workshop in her other class was also tremendously precious to us, showing that we can make learning and teaching a fun experience.

4. References

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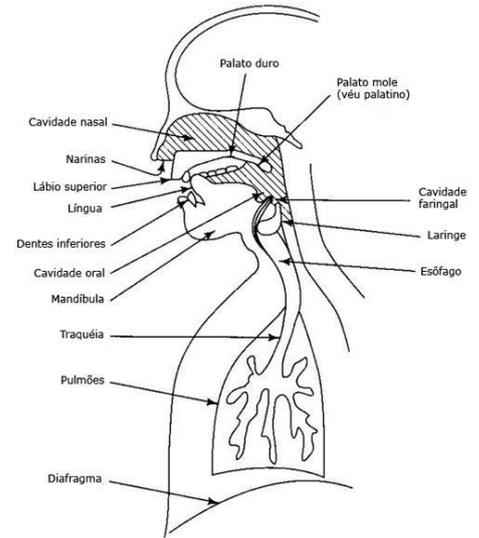NICHOLSON, Scott. *A user-centered theoretical framework for meaningful gamification*. Paper Presented at Games+Learning+Society 8.0, 2012. Retrieved at: http://scottnicholson.com/pubs/meaningfulframework.pdf. Access in May 27, 2020.

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5. Appendix

The content of the workshop

Content	Slide	Image
O que é a fonética? A fonética articulatória preocupa-se com os aspectos fisiológicos e articulatórios da produção dos sons de uma língua, ou seja, estuda o local em que os sons são produzidos no aparelho fonador.	1	

Content	Slide
As vogais "A" • Se pronuncia /ɑ/, vogal curta. Fonema presente em todas as palavras que têm uma só vogal entre duas consoantes e, em geral, nas vogais tônicas. Exemplos: at (em), can (poder), bad (mau), cat (gato). • /ɔ/, vogal longa, tem um som entre "a" e "o". É encontrado quando o "a" é seguido por um l, ll, lk ou está entre o w e outra consoante. Exemplos: all (todos), fall (queda), law (lei), war (guerra). • /a:/, vogal longa. É encontrado em todas as palavras que terminam com uma consoante ou com uma vogal "muda", ou nos monossílabos nos quais o "a" é seguido de um "r". Exemplos: arm (braço), wasp (vespa), car (carro), farm (fazenda).	2-3
"E" • "E" Se pronuncia /i:/, "e" longa.	4-5

Exemplos: to be (ser), English (inglês), sea (mar), evil (mal). • "e" curta acentuada. Geralmente ocorre em monossílabos. Exemplos: bed (cama), dress (vestido), red (vermelho). • ə:/, Schwa. É um fonema muito comum em inglês e pode ser encontrado em muitas palavras. É uma vogal reduzida que se encontra presente na sílaba final de muitas palavras ou em algumas nas quais está situada entre duas consoantes Exemplos: father (pai), mother (mãe).	
"I" • "I" Se pronuncia /ai/, ditongo nas sílabas tônicas abertas, quando é seguido de ld, nd, gh, gn. Exemplos: mild (suave), night (noite), fight (briga). • /i/, "i" curto nas sílabas tônicas fechadas. Exemplos: kidneys (rins), kit (conjunto), minute (minuto). • Schwa, em uma sílaba fechada átona. Exemplos: president (presidente), experiment (experimento). • /aiə/, seguida de r em uma sílaba aberta. Exemplos: hire (contratar), fire (fego), to require (solicitar).	6-7
"O" • "O" Se pronuncia em sílabas tônicas /ɒ/, "o" curto. Exemplos: hot (quente), on (ligado), off (desligado). • /ɔ:/, "o" longo, se for seguido de um r. Exemplos: north (norte), lord (senhor), more (mais). • /ə:/, Schwa, se for precedido de um /w/ e seguido de um r e em algumas vogais finais. Exemplos: word (palavra), world (mundo), for (para). • /ʌ/, se for precedida de um w ou de um c, e seguida de um n. Exemplos: onion (cebola), wonderful (maravilhoso), money (dinheiro).	8-9
"U" • "U" Se pronuncia /u:/ em sílabas tônicas, se for precedido de l ou r. Exemplos: rude (grosseiro), flu (gripe), spruce (abeto).	10-11

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- • /u/ em sílabas tônicas, quando for seguida de l, ll.
Exemplos: pull (puxar).

- • /ʌ/, já o vimos antes, é pronunciada como um "a" aberto.
Exemplos: up (para cima), cut (corte), luck (sorte).

- • Nesse caso, há muitas exceções, mas essas são as regras principais. /ju:/ ou /ju/ em sílaba aberta e átona.
Exemplos: volume (volume), revenue (receita).

Content	Slide	Image
Comparações (ditongos em inglês)	12	

Content	Slide
http://www.internationalphoneticalphabet.org/ipa-sounds/ipa-chart-with-sounds/	13

	FRONT		NEAR-FRONT		CENTRAL			NEAR-BACK		BACK		
Close	i	·	y		ɨ	·	ʉ			ɯ	·	u
Near-Close			ɪ	ʏ				ʊ				
Close-mid	e	·	ø		ɘ	·	ɵ			ɤ	·	o
Mid						ə						
Open-mid			ɛ	·	œ	ɜ	·	ɞ		ʌ	·	ɔ
Near-Open				æ			ɐ					
Open					a	·	ä			ɑ	·	ɒ

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a rounded vowel.

The vowel chart used during the workshop

(http://www.internationalphoneticalphabet.org/ipa-sounds/ipa-chart-with-sounds/)

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