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**SILENT CONSONANTS IN PRESENT-DAY ENGLISH:
ORIGIN AND TEACHING APPROACH**



TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

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ABSTRACT

Some aspects of the pronunciation of English, such as the presence of silent consonants in relatively common words, are not intuitive – and therefore become problematic – for the average Spanish student of English. Even though high school courses do include these aspects in their syllabi, the pronunciation sections of textbooks are often neglected or ignored by teachers in favour of grammar and vocabulary, or they are at best taught quickly, independently, and out of real contexts. This project aims, on the one hand, to point to the fact that the knowledge of the history of the language can help instructors not only to understand the origin of these troublesome pronunciations but also to foresee the difficulties that their students may encounter when dealing with them, and to plan purposeful activities accordingly. On the other hand, this project intends to highlight the current need of a more integrating and less isolating approach to the teaching of English pronunciation. It also suggests, more specifically, that a novel and an audio book could be useful tools for making students deal, simultaneously, with the four traditional linguistic skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in meaningful contexts.

Keywords: English pronunciation, Silent letters, Methodology, Phonetic competence.

Algunos aspectos de la pronunciación del inglés, como la presencia de consonantes mudas en palabras relativamente comunes, no son intuitivos – y, por lo tanto, llegan a ser problemáticos – para un estudiante común de inglés. Aunque los cursos de secundaria no incluyen estos aspectos en sus programas, los profesores suelen ignorar las secciones de pronunciación de los libros de texto a favor de la gramática y el vocabulario, o son, como mucho, enseñadas de manera rápida, independiente y fuera de contextos reales. Este proyecto tiene como objetivo, por un lado, señalar que el conocimiento de la historia de la lengua puede ayudar a los profesores no solo a entender el origen de esas pronunciaciones problemáticas, sino también prever las dificultades que los estudiantes pueden encontrar al tratar con ellas, y planear actividades útiles en consecuencia. Por otro lado, este proyecto pretende destacar la necesidad actual de un enfoque de la enseñanza de la pronunciación del inglés más interesante y menos aislante. También sugiere, más específicamente, que una novela y un audiolibro podrían ser herramientas útiles para

hacer a los estudiantes tratar, simultáneamente, con las cuatro habilidades lingüísticas (escuchar, hablar, leer y escribir) en contextos significativos.

Palabras clave: Pronunciación del inglés, letras mudas, metodología, competencia fonética.

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1. INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

According to Douglas, (1994, p.217), textbooks and curricula usually focus on some of the linguistic skills, and pronunciation is usually given little importance. Due to the little importance attached to this skill nowadays in Secondary School, more specifically in the first year of Baccalaureate, this project proposes a methodological approach for that course that integrates pronunciation with the rest of linguistic skills through the use of the novel *A Murdered Is Announced*, written by Agatha Christie, and its corresponding audiobook. The phonetic point in which this proposal is focused is “silent letters”, which are those letters that are not pronounced in some Present-Day English words due to historical developments. Specially, this work focuses on the silent consonants that appear in the previously mentioned novel.

This project has two main objectives. On the one hand, to present a historical revision of the evolution of sounds, focusing on silent letters, specifically on silent consonants, suggesting that teachers must know the history of language in order to understand why students fail to pronounce some words, and to be able to propose useful activities that can help the students to understand their pronunciation. On the other hand, to propose a methodological approach that integrates all the linguistic competences, which are: writing, speaking, listening and reading, through the use of a novel and an audiobook.

The structure and methodology of this work are planned as follows: first of all, the historical revision covers the reasons for the existence of silent letters in Present-Day English, providing a detailed account of the evolution of the silent letters that appear in the novel. Secondly, the history of pronunciation teaching and the methodology used nowadays are revised. This section includes the evaluation of different surveys so as to learn the importance attached to pronunciation nowadays. Thirdly, the methodological approach is expounded using the often-neglected teaching of the pronunciation of silent letters as an illustrative example.

2. HISTORICAL REVISION: SILENT LETTERS IN THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH

The irregularities of the English spelling system are the result of a development that has taken place over one thousand years. As Crystal (1986) points out, the difficulty of this modern system comes from the major linguistic and social events that have taken place over this period. (p. 274). However, this author also mentions that language is not only affected in the long term, but also in the short term. On the one hand, the long term focuses on the change of language through the different periods, where the most important periods concerning the English language are considered to be Old English, Middle English and Elizabethan English. On the other hand, the short term focuses on the changes produced by a single person through time. (Crystal, 1986, p. 3) The important linguistic term for this project is “long term”, since silent letters have undergone different processes in order to become silent through the history of the language. Specifically, each letter or group of letters underwent a specific process by which they lost their sounds. Therefore, the origin of these words is different depending on the letter that we are dealing with. These processes are expounded below in this project. With respect of the reasons why Present-Day English has an important number of silent consonants, they are mainly two. First of all, because when the introduction of printing took place, many printers brought their own spelling norms from the continent to England, and the consonants or clusters introduced by those printers ceased to be pronounced after the printing conventions had been established. The other important reason for the existence of silent consonants comes from the 16th century. Due to the fact that scholars aimed at showing the history of words in their spelling, many words were added a new letter that indicated their origin. For instance, “the letter *b* in *debt*, was added by people who felt it was important for everyone to know that the word comes from *debitum* in Latin. Similarly, a *b* was added to *doubt* (from *dubitare*), a *g* to *reign* (from *regno*) and (a famous error) an *s* to *island*.” (Crystal, 1986 p.275). These two phenomena constitute the two main general groups in which silent letters can be divided in PDE: a first group that would include those words whose pronunciation have lost a sound through time, as the *gh* sound in the word *knight*; and a second group including those words that have added a letter through time due to etymological reasons, as the *b* in *doubt*. The consonants of the words concerning the second group have never been pronounced. Some of the words from the first group are

half or *walk* and another word from the second group is *often*, although the silent letter of the last word is pronounced in other varieties of English.

On the one hand, the word *half* had two different forms in Old English: *half* and *healf*. In Middle English, it turned into *alf*, *halue*, *halfe*, *halfis*, *halfes* and *halfs*. As can be observed, the form that survived was that of OE: *half*, but the pronunciation of the consonant <l> became vocalized, giving way to the PDE pronunciation of the word: /hɑ:f/. Moreover, in this first group the word *walk* is found, which was spelt *walc* in Old English. It evolved into *walc* in early Middle English. In that period it had some forms: *walk*, *walck*, *whalke*, *wake* and *waalk*. As can be seen, the letter <l> has been always present in the word. One of the forms found in ME was the one that survived in time, whereas the pronunciation of the consonant <l> was lost due to a process of vocalization, by which the word became pronounced /wɔ:k/.

On the other hand, some other words like *often* did not contain the silent consonant in their spelling in Old English period: in this case, the <t> was added due to etymological reasons in Middle English, a period in which this word had many different forms: *offen*, *offtyn*, *oftin*, *ofon*, *oftun*, *oftyn*, *oftyne*, *ouften*, *often*, *hofen*, *hofen*, *often*, *affin*, *afen*, *ofen*, *afen*, *affen*. Finally, all those forms evolved into *often*, which is the PDE word, in which we can observe that the silent <t> survived in the spelling, but it lost its pronunciation, being assimilated into its surroundings and becoming silent. In the standard variant the letter /t/ is maintained, which was present in Old English spelling, but it is not pronounced in RP English. However, it is important to mention that there are alternative pronunciations even in the standard RP, in which /t/ is not a silent consonant.

The silent consonants that appear in the novel can be organised into eight different groups: <n>, <t>, , <gh>, <k>, <g>, <w> and <l>. With respect to silent <n>, it undergoes a process of *assimilation* by which the alveolar nasal /n/ assimilates to its following sound: the bilabial nasal /m/. The example from the novel can be <column>; this would be a case of progressive assimilation, by which “the sound that undergoes the change is after in the word”. (Campbell and Mixco, p.157, 2007) Regarding silent <t>, it appears before a nasal (vocalic or consonantal) and when it is preceded by a fricative consonant [s/f] so that it assimilates to the following sounds, and the /t/ sound disappears. It can be seen in words like <listen> and <often>. Considering the consonant , it is silent in the words <doubt> and <debt>. In this case, both words were borrowed from French in Middle English: <debt> for <dette> and <doubt> for <doute>. They were

respelled, and the pronunciation of the letter was not adapted. In relation to the cluster <gh>, it is important to point out that it is not pronounced in onsets and codas. And this loss in codas “is attested earliest before /t/, e.g. *douter* ‘daughter’, *broute* ‘brought’”. (Blake, p.63, 1992). The examples of this loss of final /x/ from the novel can be: <slightly>, <frighten>, <right>, <through>, <thought>, <fortnight>, <night>, <caught>, <although>, <eighteen>, <slight>, <fight>, <straight>, <sighed>. Moreover, this spelling also serves us as a representation of the so-called ‘inverse spelling’:

Here a graph which (historically) represents one of a pair of merged categories is extended to spell the other as well, since the two have become phonetically identical. Thus, when /x/ (spelled <gh>) ceases to be pronounced in words like *night*, the sequence <igh> appears in words with no etymological /x/, like *delight*, which ended in ME /-i:t/. (Lass, 1999, p.66).

With respect to the consonantal sound <k>, it is silent when it appears in initial position, in the combination with the nasal alveolar /n/: <kn>. This cluster suffered a process of reduction that began in the seventeenth century, and affected some other groups, like: /wr, wl, xn, xr and xl/. Thus, /kn/ developed into a premodified nasal, and the first element finally dropped in pronunciation, giving merger with /n/. The words <knelt> and <know> can serve as examples. The same happened with silent <g>, which suffered a cluster reduction in the combination with the nasal alveolar sound /n/, as in the word <reign>. (Lass, 1999, p.122-123). With respect to the consonant <w>, it becomes silent in the word <answer>, in which it suffers a process of vocalization when it is placed between the alveolar fricative /s/ and the vowel /e/, giving way to a schwa: /'ɑ:nsə/. The same happens to the consonant <l>. Examples of this silent consonant can be: <would(n't)>, <should>, <calm>, <half>, <walk>.

It is important to take into account that these rules are focused on the words that appear in the novel, not on all the words with silent consonants in English. On the other hand, it is also important to point out that these are silent consonants in the Received Pronunciation variety of *British English*, which is considered the Standard variety of English. However, there are many varieties in the English language, and many of the letters that have been expounded here are not silent in some dialects of English, and vice versa. For example, in h-dropping dialects, like Southern English, the letter <h> is silent in some contexts, giving way to homophones like ‘heat’ and ‘eat’. Furthermore, in non-

rhotic accents, which are Southern English and some regions of Northern English and Welsh English, <r> is silent in words such as *storm* or *hard*.

3. HISTORICAL REVISION OF THE METHODOLOGY USED TO TEACH PRONUNCIATION

The importance of teaching pronunciation has changed depending on the different methods used throughout time. In the years existing between 1840s and 1940s, the method used to teach a second language was *The Grammar Translation Method*. This method gave little attention to pronunciation. However, in the second half of the 19th century, opposition to the Grammar Translation Method grew in Europe with the *Reform Movement*. In those years, the *Direct Method*, which became the main method used to teach a second language in that century, stressed the importance of correct pronunciation. (Richards and Rodgers, 1986) There follows the *Audiolingual Method*, which also heightened the need to become orally proficient, thus giving more importance to pronunciation than to any other skill. “Correct pronunciation, stress rhythm, and intonation are emphasized” (Richards et al, 1986, p.53).

Fortunately, pronunciation continued having importance in the 1970s with the *Silent Way Method*, which considered pronunciation as fundamental, encouraging students to cooperate with each other. In the late 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, a number of approaches have appeared in the teaching of language. Among these we have the *Total Physical Response Approach* and *The Natural Approach*. The *Total Physical Response* (1977) and *The Natural Approach* (1983) gave importance to phonetics and the use of language in actual communication. (Richards et al, 1986) However, nowadays there is little importance given to the teaching of pronunciation in classroom practice in Andalusian High Schools.

According to the *Boletín Oficial de la Junta de Andalucía* (29th July, 2016), the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has a main objective in High School: the development of the communicative competence. The BOJA states that teachers must provide tools and the necessary knowledge so that the students can manage any communicative situation of familiar, academic, social or professional life¹. Furthermore,

¹ “La primera lengua extranjera es una materia global del bloque de asignaturas troncales, que se cursa en 1º y 2º de Bachillerato y tiene como principal objetivo el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa

it indicates that teachers must use new technologies. With respect to phonetics, the regulation points out the following aspects: first of all, students need to listen and understand oral texts in the foreign language. These texts must be about different matters, genres and registers and have to be played either by a human voice or by sound recordings. Secondly, this regulation states that students must be conscious about the function of the elements taking part in the production of the vocal sound in order to imitate the native pronunciation of any standard variety of the foreign language. The regulation stresses the importance of listening to music, singing, watching movies, playing and enjoying the active or passive use of the foreign language. Finally, with respect to the content, the aspect related to phonetics is the following: sound, accent, rhythmic and intonation patterns.

Textbooks present the pronunciation part in an isolated way, and it is not integrated with all the linguistic skills. Despite the fact that the teaching of a second language (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) must be focused on the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing –, many textbooks (*Stand Out 1*, Longman; *Bridges for Bachillerato 1*, Burlington Books; and *Trends*, Burlington Books) tend to focus not on all the skills, but on two or three of them, which are writing and reading.

According to Gilakjani (2016), English pronunciation is one of the least favourite areas for teachers to teach in their classes. The same author pinpoints that many teachers do not incorporate pronunciation into their curriculum (p.3). Therefore, the problem concerning the little importance attached to pronunciation is not only present in Spain. Moreover, H. Douglas Brown (1994) states in his book *Teaching by Principles. An interactive approach to language pedagogy* that “in textbooks and curricula in widely varying contexts, ESL classes around the world tend to focus on one or two of the four skills, sometimes to the exclusion of the others.” (p.217) By analysing different textbooks of English as a foreign language in Spain, it can be observed that they present phonetics in an isolated way. For example, if we focus on a particular book for students of the first year of Baccalaureate in Andalusia: *Trends* (Burlington Books), we can note that the index of the textbook always follows the same order in the eight units: vocabulary, reading, grammar, listening, speaking and writing. The pronunciation part belongs to the

del alumnado. Como materia instrumental, debe también aportar las herramientas y los conocimientos necesarios para desenvolverse satisfactoriamente en cualquier situación comunicativa de la vida familiar, académica, social y profesional.” (pag.383)

speaking section. The index contains a considerable amount of pronunciation points to be taught. According to it, students are taught how to pronounce /s/, verb endings; /u:/ and /au/ in the first unit. In the second unit, they learn the pronunciation of /æ/ and /ɑ:/ and intonation. In the third lesson, students work on /i:/, /ɪ/, /æ/, /ʌ/, /s/ and /z/. In the following unit, it can be seen that students are taught contracted forms, /u:/ and /ʊ/. In the fifth lesson, students learn weak forms and word stress. In the next unit, they learn to pronounce compound noun word stress and /ʃ/, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. Next to this, at the end of the seventh lesson, students are supposed to be able to pronounce /əʊ/ and /ɔ:/ correctly, and to recognize silent letters. And, in the last unit of the course, they learn the pronunciation of other different sounds: /ju:/, /k/, /s/ and /ʌ/. However, the pronunciation part is presented in a small secluded table at the end of each unit. The part concerning silent letters consists of only one exercise, which includes eight words containing silent letters: weight, should, half-price, knee, design, exhausted, thoughtful and eight. The exercises proposed in this textbook aim at the students to identify the so-called silent letters only by listening to the pronunciation of those words.

The fact that textbooks do not give much attention to pronunciation can be the reason why teachers do not devote enough time to it in class and do not integrate it with the other linguistic skills. In order to cope with it, this essay suggests that teachers present pronunciation rules by means of a series of guided activities in real communicative contexts and that they give feedback to the learners for them to learn how to pronounce effectively. Regulations, textbooks and instructors should devote more time and effort to the meaningful teaching of pronunciation.

Spanish students of English have many problems concerning pronunciation, since Spanish has a transparent orthographic system and English pronunciation is quite irregular. Although English pronunciation is so difficult to acquire, it is given the least importance in many ESL/EFL classrooms. There are several surveys concerning the importance given to pronunciation in EFL classes, and three of them are analysed below. The first one (EPTiES) examined teachers' views, and the second and third ones examines students of EFL's views.

The first of these surveys is *The English Pronunciation Teaching in Europe Survey* (EPTiES). This survey consists of fifty-seven questions and was carried out in seven European countries: Spain, France, Germany, Finland, Macedonia, Poland and

Switzerland. The majority of the participants were university students training to become teachers of English. It was an on-line survey, which was open from 2010 to 2011, and there were a total of 635 number of respondents. Concerning Spain, there were 31 respondents and 20 records completed. Taking into account their native language, non-native speakers of English were the 74.1%. They taught predominantly in the public sector. These informants gave importance to pronunciation: the 23 participants declared that it was very important for them (4.2/5) in relation to other language skills. However, they recognised that they did not devote so much time to pronunciation in class. The reasons given were, on the one hand, the difficulty that it constitutes for both students and teachers; and, on the other hand, that teachers had to obey the curriculum and the impositions of the school: *“Spanish students need help with their pronunciation but in the end we have to be realistic...unfortunately the truth is that students must pass a written exam at the end of the year – there is no oral test. So I’m sorry to say oral skills are not the priority”*. Some teachers admitted that they had been taught pronunciation but not how to teach it. The majority of the respondents (85%) indicated that they taught their learners to recognise symbols. However, only the 41% taught their students to write symbols. In addition, the 74% of the respondents stated that they used ear training, and only the 31% of the respondents affirmed that their students were exposed to English outside the classroom via TV programs in English with subtitles.

Another survey that has been studied is *Questionnaire-Based Pronunciation Studies: Italian, Spanish and Polish Students’ Views on their English Pronunciation*. This study was carried out by Nowacka (2012). She examined 157 students from Poland, Spain and Italy. The Spanish students constituted the 18% of the respondents. With respect to the Spanish participants, this questionnaire was conducted with 28 second year students of the University of Vigo. For the majority of them (98%), it was important to have good English pronunciation. They agreed that what had contributed to improve their English pronunciation most was listening to authentic English, and what had not contributed to improve their English pronunciation were the Descriptive Grammar Classes.

The third and last survey used for this project is: *Spanish EFL University Students’ Views on the Teaching of Pronunciation: A Survey-Based Study*. This survey was conducted by Yolanda Joy Calvo Benzies (2013) in Santiago de Compostela, Spain. All of the participants (222) were Spanish students of the degree course *English Language*

and Literature. The 72% of the participants agreed that learning how to pronounce correctly in English was very important, and the 89% stated that they would like to speak fluent English. They also agreed that there is not enough time devoted to pronunciation, pointing out that oral skills are given less importance than reading, writing, grammar or vocabulary. The majority of them also agreed that the frequency of pronunciation activities is not high, and they hardly ever have pronunciation exams. With respect to the pronunciation activities preferred by the students, the majority selected: listening to or singing songs, listening to and repeating words or sentences; and reading aloud. With respect to the textbooks, many of the students affirmed that, from their point of view, their textbooks had scant pronunciation activities. They also agreed that they would like to have “Other types of pronunciation activities” in their textbooks. The students also pointed out their main difficulties concerning English, like the lack of correspondence between English spelling and pronunciation, consonantal clusters, intonation, rhythm, and diphthongs among others. In addition, the 49% admitted that the teacher never writes the phonetic transcription on the blackboard. With regard to English outside the classroom, the 45% of students pointed out that they only practiced English outside the classroom sometimes, and the 21% stated that they hardly ever do that.

After having studied the results of the surveys given above, it has become clear that Spanish learners of English as a foreign language are interested in pronunciation, but, unfortunately, it has been also proved that the time devoted to pronunciation in the classrooms is scarce. Teachers affirm that they have to follow the curriculum, which does not focus on pronunciation, stating that oral skills are not given importance, since students do not have oral tests. Moreover, they also admit that they have received limited training in pronunciation. It is also important to point out that, although students admit that listening to authentic English is what had helped them in order to improve their pronunciation skills, there is a lack of exposure to English outside the classroom: they have few opportunities to practise the language.

4. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

As has been just demonstrated, little importance is given to phonetics both in regulations and in books. Consequently, teachers do not devote in class the same time to phonetics than to grammar, reading or writing. However, students are really interested in

pronunciation, and they admit that textbooks do not explain phonetic points; do not contextualize phonetics, and have little pronunciation activities. Therefore, it is necessary to change that methodology, creating a new one focused on the integration of all the linguistic skills, developing all the activities within the same context. By doing that, students will be able not only to read or write, but also to pronounce correctly, and, therefore, to communicate effectively in the second language, which is the main objective of students of a second or foreign language.

According to Harmer (2001), an important term concerning the teaching of a second language is intelligibility. It implies that the learners should be able to pronounce words in a proper way in order to be perfectly understood by others. If teachers are concerned with giving students those clues as the stress of words and the features of each sound, then they will have extra information and will be able to achieve intelligibility; they will be understood by others, and they will be able to comprehend others in a perfectly way. The teacher must give the students pieces of real speech. It is, teachers themselves speaking or playing an audiobook to work on it in class, for example. These are good examples of how to introduce in demonstration and practice the different realization of sounds, intonation and stress of words within a context. They should devote five or ten minutes of each class to pronunciation, integrating it with grammar, reading or speaking. It is important to point out that pronunciation is necessary to communicate successfully in a second or foreign language. If students have an excellent vocabulary and grammar but they still do not have intelligible pronunciation, they will be unable to communicate in a proper way. Therefore, students whose learning depends on the instruction they receive, in this case, in the first year of Baccalaureate, end their secondary education with a poor acquisition of this skill. (p.183-197)

As has already been mentioned, my proposal involves the use of a novel and an audiobook in order to integrate phonetics with other linguistic skills, devoting the same time to all of them. This proposal can be applied to a class of the first year of Baccalaureate, which usually consists of around 20 students, the normal average of students in that course. This methodological approach is carried out through a set of different yet related exercises that are focused on the previously mentioned novel *A Murder is Announced*. This novel is used in order to propose a way to explain the silent letters to the students, since I have prepared exercises to make them identify easily those everyday words containing silent consonants; to test their listening, because they are

going to listen to the audiobook from the novel in order to recognize the words containing silent letters from it; to improve their vocabulary, because they learn new words; to test their writing, since they write summaries; to teach them grammar using different extracts from the novel; and, finally, to make the students speak, since they will have to prepare role-plays based on the dialogs of the novel in order to present it to their classmates. Therefore, pronunciation is combined with the teaching of vocabulary and grammar, listening, reading, writing and speaking. This is an innovative proposal that can help motivate the students, since they are giving the opportunity to practice and improve different skills at the same time. The students' implications are going to be promoted through the use of manageable and dynamic exercises.

First of all, it is important to point out that this methodological approach could be applied to any other phonetic point or any other linguistic competence: the focus could also be placed, for instance, on the pronunciation of final -ed of regular verbs, or on any other grammatical point such as question tags or conditionals, which also appear throughout the whole novel and could be explained and developed through the same exercises that are going to be exposed below. The activities can be changed depending on the linguistic competence that needs to be emphasized. Moreover, they could be adapted to any other linguistic level. The aim would be to integrate all the linguistic competences.

The proposed novel to accomplish this methodological approach is an adaptation to the B1 level of the work *A Murdered Is Announced*, *Penguin Readers*. This is the level that the students of the first year of Baccalaureate in Spain are acquiring. The novel consists of twelve chapters, and it should be used during the whole year. It is important to point out that, by using the novel, one of the requirements of the *Boletín Oficial of Junta de Andalucía* (BOJA) would be accomplished. It states that students of this course must become familiar with literary works in the foreign language².

In order for the students to work on pronunciation by using the novel, they can receive a list of words with silent consonants that are going to appear in the novel in order for the teacher to learn if they know the pronunciation of those words. In this case, the list will be made up of twelve words with silent consonants, one word from each chapter. The students must know beforehand that they are going to focus on the learning of silent

² "Conocer obras literarias representativas de la lengua extranjera y leerlas en el nivel adaptado a sus posibilidades de comprensión para disfrutarlas y aprender aspectos socioculturales de los autores y hechos que intervinieron en su producción." (BOJA, 2016, p.385)

consonants, but that there exist silent vowels that will be learnt in another moment of the course. The group of words can be the following: *column, calm, listening, know, might, light, walk, night, fight, tight, would and doubt*. Then, the list is going to be divided into two groups by the teacher. One of the groups is going to be made up of the words with Romance origin, and the other group is going to be completed with words of Germanic origin. The division of words into the two groups will be the task of the students later in the following classes. Germanic origin: *listening, know, might, walk, fight, tight, would, light, night*. Romance origin: *column, calm, doubt*. It is worth mentioning that this division of the words depending on their origin implies a cultural aspect, another condition of the BOJA that requires the study of cultural aspects of the language³.

After this warm-up activity, in order to have a first contact with the novel and its story, the students must read the first chapter of the novel twice in class with the task of underlining the words that contain silent consonants. The words that students will find in this chapter are: *column, listen, doubtfully, wouldn't, would, lights, neighbour, slightly, frighten and should*. Some of them are repeated. After having read the first chapter, the students, guided by the teacher, are going to put all the words in common. Then, in pairs, the students divide those words into two different groups again, depending on the origin of the word. In this case, the division would be as follows: Germanic origin: *listen, wouldn't, lights, neighbour, would, slightly, frighten, should*; and Romance origin: *column and doubtfully*.

After this, there must be a third reading of the chapter, with the purpose of underlining the words that they do not know. In groups of three or four students, they help one another to complete the meaning of those words. If all the members of the group have the same doubt, they would be allowed to search the word in a dictionary. Doing these activities, the students are introduced the phonetic point that they are going to be dealing with the following weeks, they practice reading comprehension and learn new vocabulary. Moreover, students work in pairs and in groups, which, from my point of view, can make students release their fears and emphasize relation with one another. Furthermore, it is positive because students can share their knowledge with their schoolmates and, consequently, learn from them.

³ "Conocer la localización, principales ciudades, accidentes geográficos, unidades de monedas y de otras medidas, hechos y personajes históricos y manifestaciones culturales de los países donde la lengua extranjera es lengua oficial." (BOJA, 20016, p.385)

Then, at home, the students will have the task of listening carefully to the same chapter, focusing on the search of words with silent consonants. In the following class, all the words found by the students are put in common. The teacher must check that all the words of the chapter have been written down. After this, there would be a listening of the chapter in class in order to complete an activity of listening comprehension. After doing these exercises with this chapter, the students would work on listening comprehension and they would review the vocabulary learnt the day before. In the following session, the novel is used in order to introduce a grammatical point: modal verbs. This lesson would be focused on the analysis of different extracts from the chapter that the students have already read. The teacher would use them in order to explain the different modal verbs in English and their forms and functions. The two following sessions are focused again on the first chapter of the novel. First of all, the students are divided into two groups: in this case, the first group would be integrated by six people and the second group would be made up of the rest of the students. The first group would be in charge of preparing a role-play of the previously mentioned chapter that will be performed the following day in class. The students will have a class in order to have time to prepare it. They have to be careful with the pronunciation of words with silent consonants. The second group of students must read the chapter and write a summary that they have to submit to the teacher the following day in class. In the following session, while the students perform the role-play, their schoolmates must write down the words with silent consonants and all the modal verbs that they are listening. Once the role-play has finished, all the students must put the words in common. This is another useful and positive activity, since the students of the first group work on speaking and memorizing (as far as possible) the pronunciation of the words containing silent consonants. On the other hand, the rest of students practice reading comprehension and writing, since they read and make a summary. Moreover, they also practice listening comprehension because they have to listen to their schoolmates and do an exercise with the purpose of recognizing silent letters.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As has been proved along this project, students do always have the same opportunity to learn pronunciation as they have it to learn other linguistic skills. It has been pointed out by many students that they are interested in pronunciation, but that they

do not receive enough training. Moreover, it has also been mentioned that the importance given to pronunciation has changed through history, and that the situation nowadays is negative for the teaching of this skill, since it is not valued in the syllabus.

There are several reasons why teachers do not dedicate time to pronunciation in class during the whole course. Firstly, the regulation concerning the first year of Baccalaureate in Andalusia points out that students must learn to communicate effectively in the second language, but there is no reference to the phonetic topics that must be taught. Secondly, textbooks do not include any explanation of phonetics as they do with grammar or writing. In addition, they do not contain the same number of exercises of pronunciation as of reading or writing, for example. As it has been proved in this project, the reason why silent letters are difficult for students to learn and understand is that all of them have undergone different processes through the history of language.

The methodological approach proposed in this project could imply a change in the way phonetics is taught. It would mean a transformation in the method used nowadays: it would integrate phonetics in each class of the course, becoming a part of the syllabus. It is important to remark that it could be applied to any other adapted novel and to any other phonetic point or even grammar or vocabulary lesson. The fact that students can participate actively in class can motivate them, and make them feel engaged in what they are learning. Furthermore, it is positive for them to work in groups, since they can exchange their knowledge and learn from their classmates.

It is also important to mention that this methodology would meet the criteria required by the BOJA, as has been demonstrated along this project. It should be pointed out that this essay has only focused on silent consonants because the study of silent vowels is out of the scope of my study. Therefore, this project could be extended in the future to another grammatical or phonetic point, like silent vowels. Moreover, it could also test the proposal in a real context and gather the results in order find out whether this it is an effective way of teaching phonetics and integrating all the linguistic skills or not.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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