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Implementing Accuracy and Fluency-Based Tasks for the Training of the English Plosive Consonants

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Abstract

This article reports the investigation of a set of experimental teaching activities that combine accuracy with fluency-based tasks as a part of a pronunciation class. The approach involves segmental training of the English plosive consonants by Spanish speakers. The 15 low-intermediate/intermediate participants in this study were enrolled in an English course at a university in Argentina. Data were elicited using a battery of tasks. Analyses of pre- and post-test scores revealed that although there was improvement in controlled settings, the participants showed the least advancement in free communicative contexts. Recommendations based on these findings are provided in the hope that pronunciation instructors may give more attention to this neglected area in mainstream ELT instruction.

Research tells us that many pronunciation teachers around the world have been using what some would typify as a traditional drill-based approach for teaching English pronunciation. Under this methodology, learners tend

to retain some critical deviant phonological forms, which may lead to unintelligibility. This concern calls for a change in methodology whereby tasks function as a central focus for phonological acquisition to occur (Luchini, 2005).

This paper reports the evaluation of effectiveness of a set of tasks with a focus on accuracy and fluency for the acquisition of the English plosive consonants. Fifteen low-intermediate/intermediate adult learners of English -whose first language is Spanish- participated in this study. These learners were enrolled in a general English course at the Language Laboratory in a university in Argentina.

The first part of this paper deals with the literature review and the theoretical principles used for the design and evaluation of the teaching tasks. Next, the context, the participants and the procedures are described. Finally, the results of the study are shown, followed by a discussion of the findings. Based on these results some recommendations are given.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Contrastive Analysis, which was developed and practiced in the 1950's and 1960's, outlined differences between L1 and L2 systems and so, located areas of difficulty between them. While it did not provide solutions and answers to pronunciation problems, it pointed out to researchers the right directions to follow. Below is a brief description of the main areas of divergence in the production of English and Spanish plosive consonants, and the major problems encountered by Spanish speakers when dealing with them (Ladefoged, 1993).

The English consonants can be classified and described according to their place of articulation (the point(s) of articulation in the oral tract at which there is a closure or narrowing), and the manner of articulation (the type of closure or narrowing at the point of articulation), vocal fold vibration (voiced / voiceless), muscular energy (lenis / fortis), position of the soft palate (oral / nasal) (O'Connor, 1980).

/p/, /t/, /k/, /b/, /d/, /g/ are the English plosive sounds. Their production requires a complete closure at some point in the vocal tract, behind which the air pressure builds up and can be released explosively. These consonants have different places of articulation. /p/ and /b/ are bilabial, /t/ and /d/ are alveolar and /k/ and /g/ are velar (O'Connor, 1980). All six consonants can occur in word initial, medial or final positions. Depending on this, they can have different voicing realizations. /p/, /t/, /k/ are always

voiceless and /b/, /d/, /g/ are sometimes fully voiced, sometimes partly voiced and sometimes voiceless. Also, the voiceless plosives are fortis consonants, because they are produced with great breath force and muscular energy. Voiced plosives, on the other hand, are lenis consonants, since they are produced with a small degree of breath force and muscular energy.

Voiced plosives may lose their voice, either partly or fully, according to their environments, thus becoming devoiced. Likewise, the English plosives are not always released in the same way; they may present any of the following alternatives: oral release (when followed by vowels or semi-vowels), non-audible release (for final plosives before pauses or in clusters formed by two consecutive plosives, or an affricate and a plosive), with glottal reinforcement (fortis plosives can be reinforced by the glottal stop /ʔ/), nasal release (when a plosive is followed by a homorganic nasal consonant), lateral release (when /t/ and /d/ are followed by /l/) (Roach, 2001).

When the English voiceless plosives /p/, /t/, /k/ precede vowel sounds in an accented syllable, the voicing of the vowel does not begin together with the release stage of the plosive. The voiceless interval between the release of the plosive and the voicing of the vowel sound is called *aspiration*, an essential phonological feature to achieve intelligibility. Finch & Ortiz Lira (1982) outline a set of rules for aspiration. /p/, /t/, /k/ are strongly aspirated in initial accented syllables. They are weakly aspirated in unaccented syllables, and generally in word final positions. They are unaspirated when /s/ precedes them. There are two other phonological features, besides aspiration, which contribute to intelligibility: the devoicing of /l/, /r/, /w/ and /j/ when they occur after aspirated plosives, and the reduction of vowel quantity, when pure vowels and diphthongs occur before the fortis plosives /p/ /t/ /k/.

Spanish learners are advised to pay attention to the feature of aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/ when these sounds occur in initial accented syllables. Jenkins (2000) points out that without the aid of this puff of air, a listener may find it more difficult to identify these sounds as voiceless. Thus, an unaspirated /p/ may be mistaken for /b/, /t/ for /d/, and /k/ for /g/ in word pairs like, *pig – big*, *teen – dean*, *cap – gap*. An experimental study conducted by Luchini (2004a) with 268 senior Chinese college students at Shanghai Normal University revealed the importance of incorporating aspiration of /p/, /t/, and /k/ in initial stressed syllables for the attainment of global intelligibility.

Finch & Ortiz Lira (1982) outline a number of differences between English and Spanish consonants. Spanish consonants are generally articulated with weaker muscular tension. In general, Spanish consonants are shorter and normally devoiced in the same circumstances as their English counterparts. Just like in English, there are six Spanish plosive consonants which have different places of articulation. /p/ and /b/ are bilabial, /t/ and /d/ are dental and /k/ and /g/ are velar. They all share the same voicing features as their equivalent sounds in English.

Finch & Ortiz Lira (1982) highlight the following differences between the English and Spanish plosives. Spanish plosives do not occur together very frequently. Therefore, non-audible, nasal and lateral types of release are of exceptional occurrence. Aspiration of /p/, /t/ /k/ is considered non-existent. /b/ and /k/ are of rare occurrence in final position. /b/, /d/ and /g/ are realized as fricatives [β], [ð] and [ɣ], or their corresponding approximants between vowels as in 'abogado' [aβoɣaðo] and between a vowel and /r/ as in 'obra' [oβra]. In initial position fricative and plosive variants are in free variation. Spanish /d/ is realized as a plosive after /l/, and as a fricative in final position as in 'maldad' [maldað]. In English, on the other hand, /b/, /d/ and /g/ are realized as plosives and /θ/ as a fricative sound, in all positions.

ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TEACHING IN ARGENTINA

As a result of L1 interference, Argentinean Rioplatense speakers make several pronunciation errors at the segmental level, which prove highly detrimental to their intelligibility in the target language (Finch & Ortiz Lira, 1982). Rioplatense Spanish is a dialectal variant of the Spanish language which is mainly spoken in the areas in and around the Rio de la Plata basin, between Argentina and Uruguay. Rioplatense Spanish distinguishes itself from other dialects of Spanish by the pronunciation of certain consonants. Like many other dialects, Rioplatense features yeísmo: the sounds represented by *ll* (the palatal lateral /ʎ/) and *y* (historically the palatal approximant /j/) have fused into one. This merged phoneme is generally pronounced as a post-alveolar fricative, either voiced [ʒ] in the central and western parts of the dialect region, or voiceless [ʃ] in and around Buenos Aires. These are the sounds in English *measure* and *mission*. The fricative /s/ has a tendency to become aspirated before another consonant. That is, *esto es lo mismo* (this is the same) is pronounced something like [ˈɛh.to ˈɛh lo ˈmih.mɔ].

In fifteen years of teaching, we have noticed that in most Argentinean classrooms, English pronunciation instruction has been neglected only to concentrate on grammar and vocabulary to develop oral communication skills. However, when teachers pay some degree of attention to pronunciation issues, the training given derives from traditional decontextualised drill-based methodologies, which provide practice in sounds selected randomly (Kenworthy, 1987). The use of these drill-like activities has been criticized overtly and regarded as “techniques of the past which have never yielded very good results” (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994: 132). As a result, when learners engage in free communicative practice, they tend to fall back on L1 transfer errors to the detriment of phonological intelligibility.

In contexts like this, a shift towards more communicative approaches for the teaching of English pronunciation calls for a change in instructional styles to allot more classroom time for students to actively communicate with one another. This change reveals the principle that a communicative syllabus should combine accuracy and fluency aspects of the target language (Johnson, 1995). Following this approach, pronunciation teachers should use a wide selection of form- and meaning-focused tasks with the intention of helping learners eradicate L1 transfer phonological deviations and thus converge purposefully and successfully with one another (Luchini, 2004c).

According to our own experience as former L2 learners and now teachers of English, and the literature on second language acquisition of phonology, in this study, we concentrated on the training of the English plosive consonants. This decision was not made arbitrarily. Based on our learners’ needs and on the results emerging from their oral production in class, we noticed that many of them failed to produce most of the English plosive consonants accurately. This failure had a detrimental effect on their oral interactional skills. Although we observed other segmental deviations that oftentimes obscured intelligibility and comprehensibility (for example, a change in the quality and quantity of /ɜ:/, and the lack of sufficient lengthening of certain vowels), in this project we only focused on the training and evaluation of the English plosive consonants, taking into account aspiration and place of articulation of individual sounds and clusters in initial stressed syllables.

Based on these criteria, our pedagogical proposal consists of the following teaching principles:

Teaching should be learner-driven: It should meet learners' needs, which are related to their abilities, styles, interests, cognitive and linguistic developments, and educational contexts. The pronunciation tasks provided to students were selected according to the learners' level of competence, individual characteristics and needs (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994).

Language should be used to construct meanings: The fluency-based tasks used in this research were designed with the objective of encouraging learners to put language into use in a natural way. The accuracy-based activities, on the other hand, aimed at helping learners to adjust their L2 articulatory system to communicate effectively (Jenkins, 2000).

Learning is aided when students work independently: Learner autonomy was one of the underlying objectives of the pronunciation tasks, which focused on learner training and encouraged students to assume responsibility for learning.

Language learners take full advantage of their exposure to the target language in use: Participants were presented with comprehensible input and were encouraged to negotiate meaning.

Motivation triggers successful language acquisition: Students were encouraged to adopt a positive attitude towards pronunciation learning by being exposed to real-life situations (Kenworthy, 1987).

Guided by these principles, we designed a battery of comprehensible tasks¹ following the accuracy-fluency continuum. The sample tasks 6 & 7 below taken from this set of activities (see also Appendix A) illustrate the principles discussed above:

¹ The methodology devised in this proposal, and the materials and activities used in the pronunciation lessons were strongly influenced by the literature in the area (see Luchini, 2004a, b, c, 2005, 2007a, 2007b), and the authors' teaching experiences as L2 learners and pronunciation instructors.

TASK 6: The Three Little Pigs

A) Controlled practice: Read the revolting rhyme: “*The Three Little Pigs*” by Dahl (1982) and identify words containing plosive consonants that, if mispronounced, might threaten intelligibility.

B) Imitative practice: Listen carefully to the recording of this rhyme and use it as a model to emulate, as close as possible, the speaker’s production of the English plosive consonants. Then, record yourself on tape. Listen to your own recording paying special attention to your production of these sounds. How close did you get to the speaker’s model?

C) Less-controlled practice: In groups, create your own rhymes following the patterns in the original revolting rhyme. You must include words pronounced with the target sounds in different environments.

TASK 7: Dramatization

In groups of three, you will be assigned to read a different version of the tale “*The Three Little Pigs*”.

- Group A: *The true story of the three little pigs*
- Group B: *The classical story*
- Group C: *The three little wolves and the big bad pig*

A) As a planning stage, each group should centre on what happened to the pigs and the wolves in each version of the tale. Talk about the areas of convergence and divergence among the three stories.

B) Each group appoints one participant who will play the role of the wolf in each version. Have the three wolves, one from each version, get together over a cup of coffee and chat about their experiences with their pigs. The rest of the participants (audience) will listen to their classmates’ performance with a special focus on the appropriate use of the English plosives.

C) In the feedback session, along with your instructor analyse and reflect on the benefits and drawbacks of doing this type of activity in relation to the development of the English plosive consonants.

This type of pedagogy is aligned with a multidimensional approach to the teaching of pronunciation, where target phonological discrete items and oral communicative practice are integrated by means of comprehensible progressive tasks. By combining traditional with communicative, task-based methodologies, this new proposal seeks to meet three essential conditions for learning to take place: i) necessary amount of comprehensible input, ii) opportunities for learners to use the target language to negotiate meaning, and iii) motivating tasks for learners to feel engaged in the process of learning (Luchini 2005; Willis, 1996).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central questions that guided this study were the following:

1. Can a new methodology for teaching pronunciation that combines accuracy- with fluency-based tasks help learners improve learners' perception and production of the English plosives in both controlled and free communicative settings?
2. Where is evidence of greater improvement: in controlled or free tasks?

METHODS

Procedures and Measures

A pre- and post-test technique (Appendix B) was used to measure the impact of the new methodology proposed. The tasks in this test were a minimal pairs exercise, a reading passage and a problem-solving situation. A battery of tasks was designed for the teaching and training of the English plosive consonants.

The procedure for test marking consisted in giving each student an individual mark in each independent section of the test, based on a scale of a maximum number of errors allowed (minimal pairs: 30, reading passage: 36, and free speech: 10). Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the degree of improvement in each section of the pre- and post-tests.

Participants

Fifteen adult learners attending the fourth year of a General English course at the Language Laboratory in a university in Mar del Plata participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 42 (average: 27.27), and in the group there were 10 women and 5 men. Their teacher and the other author of this article also participated in this project as researchers.

RESULTS

The statistical analysis was done using the software SPSS version 10. We ran a one-tailed *t*-test including all three sections of the pre- and post- test. The minimal pairs task (MP) showed the greatest improvement in the students' production of the target sounds. The average error in this task was 10.2 in the pre-test and 4.9 in the post-test, against a 9.6 - 5.8 difference in the reading task (RP), and a 9.8 - 6.4 difference in the free speech task (FS). Table 1 shows the mean number of errors before and after the training.

Table 1. Mean Number of Errors Before and After the Training

The test	Pre-test	Post-test	<i>t</i> -test
MP (Max. # of mistakes: 30)	10.2	4.9	5.94
RP (Max. # of mistakes: 36)	9.6	5.8	9.67
FS (Max. # of mistakes: 10)	9.8	6.4	8.50

In the test of related samples (Table 2), the difference between means for the minimal pair task was 5.26 (95% CI: 3.36-7.16). For the reading passage task, the difference was 3.80 (95% CI: 4.64 - 9.67), while for the free speech task it was 3.40 (95% CI: 2.54-4.25).

Table 2. Related Samples

	The test	Media	Number of students	SD	Error of the mean
MP	Pre-test	10,2000	15	3,16679	,81766
	Post-test	4,9333	15	2,01660	,52068
RP	Pre-test	9,6000	15	2,52982	,65320
	Post-test	5,8000	15	1,61245	,41633
FS	Pre-test	9,8667	15	2,16685	,55948
	Post-test	6,4667	15	1,64172	,42389

Table 3. Test for Related Samples

		Related samples					t-test	Degree of freedom	Significance (bilateral)
		Mean	Standard deviation	Error of the mean	95% Confidence interval for the mean		Mean	Standard deviation	Error of the mean
The test									
MP	Pre- & Post-test	5,266	3,432	,886	3,365	7,167	5,943	14	,000
RP	Pre- & Post-test	3,800	1,521	,392	2,957	4,642	9,674	14	,000
FS	Pre- & Post-test	3,400	1,549	,400	2,542	4,257	8,500	14	,000

The test for related samples (Table 3) indicates low correlation between the results of the pre- and post- tests in the minimal pairs tasks, while in the other two the correlation is high and statistically significant ($<.000$ and $.004$). The value pre- and post-test for the last two tasks indicates resistance to the formal instruction of the target sounds. By contrast, the results of the pedagogic intervention yielded more noticeable results in the minimal pairs task. Table 4 shows these correlations:

Table 4. Correlations

	The test	# of students	Correlation	Significance
MP	Pre-test & Post-test	15	,181	,518
RP	Pre-test & Post-test	15	,819	,000
FS	Pre-test & Post-test	15	,701	,004

Table 5. Ranges of Errors and Standard Deviations

	The test	# of students	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
MP	Pre-test	15	6,00	16,00	10,2000	3,16679
	Post-test	15	2,00	8,00	4,9333	2,01660
RP	Pre-test	15	3,00	13,00	9,6000	2,52982
	Post-test	15	2,00	8,00	5,8000	1,61245
FS	Pre-test	15	6,00	13,00	9,8667	2,16685
	Post-test	15	3,00	9,00	6,4667	1,64172

In the minimal pairs task the range of errors in the pre-test was 10, while in the post-test this range scored 6. In this case, the number of errors decreased and the dispersion was condensed. In the reading task, the range of errors in the pre-test was 10; while in the post-test the score was 6. Here too, the number of errors decreased and the dispersion was concentrated. In the free speech task, the range of errors in the pre-test was 7, while in the post-test it amounted to 6. In this case, the number of errors decreased more significantly than in the other two tasks, but the dispersion was maintained. This indicates that both the minimal pairs and reading tasks proved more effective than the free speech task in that they showed better results of completion. The minimal pairs task was, however, the most efficient task as learners, making the least effort in producing the target sounds in an extremely controlled setting, achieved

better results. Table 5 illustrates the ranges of errors and the standard deviations observed.

DISCUSSION

These findings reveal that this group of participants in this particular context and under these set conditions showed a significant improvement in the production of the English plosive consonants in all three test tasks. Nevertheless, it was in an extremely controlled setting (minimal pairs) that learners made the greatest improvements.

Based on these results, a number of assumptions can be made. These learners need to be provided with more opportunities to use their English spontaneously. However, such specific training on impromptu speech production may not fully transform into noticeable improvement in their phonological L2 output. For this reason, we, by no means, make a claim to completion and suggest further research on this field.

This study was limited in its scope in a number of ways. It was carried out with a small group of participants. A wider population would have allowed the researchers to make stronger claims applicable to other contexts. It would have been interesting to have gathered and analyzed qualitative data in the form of interviews or questionnaires to cross-reference the quantitative findings obtained in this project.

Only one rater listened to and judged the recorded samples. Therefore, inter-rater reliability should have been used to compare results and thus assure the validity of these findings. However, this procedure had to be disregarded due to time constraints.

Although the tasks used in this study seem likely to have been useful, a true test should have compared the gains reported here to those made by a comparison group. There is still room for further research in the field of pronunciation teaching so as to fully claim that this methodology is beneficial for the teaching of pronunciation in all EFL contexts. This study should be considered as a modest start from which more important findings could be obtained.

CONCLUSION

With learners' need to become more efficient speakers of English, an interest in pronunciation teaching has emerged. Thus, a number of

innovative pedagogical trends aligned with communicative approach principles have appeared. Contrary to these principles, the empirical results of this study have demonstrated otherwise. The benefits of incorporating a balance of accuracy- and fluency-based tasks for the training of the English plosives has proved beneficial *only* for the production of these sounds in extremely controlled settings. As a conclusion, we lay claim to conducting more studies of this type with a wider population in other contexts to verify the advantages of incorporating accuracy and fluency task-based instruction for the training and development of pronunciation of the target segments in less controlled environments and in spontaneous speech.

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APPENDIX A: THE BATTERY OF TASKS

By completing the activities below learners are expected to:

- Review concepts related to the articulation features which underlie the production of the English plosive consonants.
- Identify and produce plosive consonants and their allophonic variations.
- Practice the production of plosive consonants in meaningful and communicative real-life like contexts.
- Develop reflective and monitoring strategies and skills.
- Be given opportunities for independent learning by encouraging inductive learning, self-monitoring and collaborative work.

TASK 1: Sounds and spelling

A) Work in pairs. Put the words in these sentences in the correct order. Then, transcribe them into phonetic script with the help of a dictionary and your instructor.

a- skating-rink / Birmingham / at a / white dancing / Aunt Angela / a tango / her ankle / banged / with Uncle Frank.

.....

b- at the pretty young woman / in a single's bar / winked / drinking gin / the Hong Kong banker / romantic songs / who was singing.

.....

B) Add the words containing plosive sounds to the chart above and review spelling-to-sound rules for each consonant.

C) In one word in each group, the 'p', 'b', 't', 'd', 'k', or 'g' is not pronounced. Circle the word. Then, practice reading them aloud with your partner (adapted from Baker, 1999).

- | | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1- <i>lamb</i> | <i>label</i> | <i>lab</i> |
| 2- <i>double</i> | <i>doubt</i> | <i>Dublin</i> |
| 3- <i>cup</i> | <i>cupboard</i> | <i>copy</i> |
| 4- <i>recipe</i> | <i>repeat</i> | <i>receipt</i> |
| 5- <i>possibly</i> | <i>psychology</i> | <i>special</i> |

TASK 2

A) Positions where the English plosives occur: Transcribe and classify the words below according to word initial, medial or final position.

Dole - Toll - Rip - Rib - Bigger - Rick - Goal - Coal - Writer - Rider - Caber - Bowl - Pole - Rig - Bicker - Caper - Rid

	/p/	/b/	/t/	/d/	/k/	/g/
Initial						
Medial						
Final						

B) Now, in pairs practice reading the words out loud (adapted from Bowen & Marks, 1992).

TASK 3

A) The organs of speech: Visit the following website and follow the instruction to complete the activities suggested:

http://www.rsc-ne-scotland.ac.uk/eolympics/organs_of_speech/index.htm

B) 'Stop' consonants: *Identification and consolidation*

A basic distinction between consonants is whether they are *stop sounds* or *continuant sounds*. Practice feeling the difference:
Say the word 'is' and hold the 's' sounds as long as you can. That is a continuant sound. Now, say 'it'. Can you hold the 't'? 't' is a stop consonant.

C) Discuss the following questions in groups:

- 1- Why is 't' a stop consonant? What difference can you feel between the production of 't' and 's'?
- 2- Decide which of the following words begin with 'stop' consonants:

- | | |
|-----------|---------|
| a) pine | vine |
| b) taught | thought |
| c) cart | heart |
| d) boat | vote |
| e) dam | ram |
| f) gun | fun |

D) What is the meaning of 'plosive'?

/p/ /t/ /k/ /b/ /d/ /g/ are the six English plosive consonants. This means that to make these sounds, part of the mouth is completely closed, and then the air behind it is suddenly released producing a noise called 'plosion'.

E) How are plosives formed? Visit the following website and click on 'Choose a language: American English', then on stop consonants.

<http://www.uiowa.edu/%7Eacadtech/phonetics/#>. Study the different animations and video recordings and do the following matching exercise:

/p/	/b/	The back of your tongue is placed against the soft part of the roof of the mouth.
/t/	/d/	The lips are put together.
/k/	/g/	The front of your tongue is placed against the hard bump behind your teeth.

F) Voiced versus Voiceless sounds: Hypothesis building/checking

Sounds can be classified into '**voiced**' (the vocal folds vibrate) and '**voiceless**' (the vocal folds do not vibrate). You can get to know if a sound is voiced or voiceless by placing your fingers against your Adam's Apple. Try making the following sounds keeping your fingers against your Adam's Apple:

ss (voiceless)

zz (voiced)

Can you feel the difference? The vibration you feel is called 'voicing'.

Using the technique suggested above, classify the English plosive consonants into voiced and voiceless

Voiced	Voiceless

If you have any doubts as regards your classification, check your work by consulting the webpage: <http://www.uiowa.edu/%7Eacadtech/phonetics>. Click on 'Choose a language: American English', then on consonants: voice. Pay special attention to vocal fold work in the animations.

TASK 4

A) Voice quality feature: Aspiration

'Aspiration' is a voice quality feature of English. It's an extra puff of air that helps to distinguish between pairs of sounds. If you hold a piece of paper in front of your mouth, you can test it yourself. The paper should move when you produce, for example, the consonant /p/. The paper will not move without the puff of air. You can also test it yourself by holding your hand in front of your mouth. You should feel the difference between the presence and absence of the puff of air (Rogerson & Gilbert, 1990)

B) Identification/Presentation: (Video session) "Friends"

Silent-viewing: Watch the following extract with the sound off and describe what is happening. **Now, watch the scene again and complete the spaces with the missing words.**

The Director: Okay, all right. Let's do it. And...Action!

Joey: We have to find the rest of the!

Richard: Forget the! The is gone!

Joey: What?!

Richard: Theis dead! Face facts!

Joey: So what are we gonna do?! We have no reinforcements! No-no food!

Richard: No, we still have food in the basement! I saw and some dry!

The Director: Hang on a minute! Joey, you keep touching your face. Is something wrong?

Joey: No. Nope, I uh...I th—I thought it might be kind of a cool character thing. Y'know? He's uh, he's a face toucher.

The Director: I don't think so. Let's take it back to Richard's last line. Action!

Richard: We may not have any weapons, but we still have food. In the basement I saw and some dry, and a few tins of!

C) The words that you inserted in the spaces above contain examples of the aspirated voiceless plosives. Look at the next lines said by Richard in the following scenes. Decide which words Joey might have problems with and decide why.

"Hey Joey, could you uh, go through these lines with me?"

"I found the picture!"

"The picture of my wife! In your pack!"

"Why do you have a picture of Paulette in your pack?!"

D) Practice adding 'the puff of air'.

oo ... too	ee ... tea
eye ... pie	ay ... pay
old ... cold	ow ... cow

E) Classification and hypothesis building/checking: In pairs, work out the rule for 'aspiration' in English:

- ➔ Which plosive consonants bear the feature of 'aspiration'?
- ➔ Where in the word does 'aspiration' take place?

F) After thinking of a possible rule, check it with the notes below. Were your guesses right?

Rule: The voiceless plosives /p/, /t/, /k/ have an extra puff of air (aspiration) at the beginning of an accented syllable except when /p/ /t/ /k/ are preceded by an 's'.

Note: Remember that /p/, /t/, /k/ are not aspirated when they are placed at the end of words or unstressed syllables in rapid, natural speech.

G) Decide whether the consonants underlined are aspirated or not.

Words	Aspirated	Not aspirated
<u>K</u> ettle		
<u>B</u> ig		
<u>P</u> ear		
<u>A</u> pple		
Me <u>ch</u> anic		
S <u>p</u> ace		
P <u>o</u> tato		

TASK 5

- A) In pairs read and decipher part of this rhyme called “The Pig” written in phonetic script. Then, listen to this same extract and complete the blanks below using ordinary spelling.**

_____ slais baɪ slais
 tə sel ət ə _____!
 ðeɪ wɒnt maɪ dʒu:si tʃɒps
 _____!
 ðeɪ wɒnt maɪ pɔ:k tə meɪk ə rəʊst
 ənd ðæts ðə _____!
 ðeɪ wɒnt maɪ sɒsɪdʒɪz _____!
 ðeɪ i:vɪn wɒnt maɪ tʃɪtəlɪŋz!
 ðə bʊtʃəz _____! ðə _____
 _ naɪf!
 ðæt ɪz ðə ri:zn fə maɪ laɪf!
 sʌtʃ θɔ:ts əz ði:z _____

- B) Identify the English plosive consonants in this excerpt and classify them according to their position within the word (initial, medial and final) and according to their voicing features (voiced-voiceless).**

TASK 6: The Three Little Pigs

A) Controlled practice: Read the revolting rhyme: “The Three Little Pigs” by Dahl (1982) and identify words containing plosive consonants that, if mispronounced, might threaten intelligibility.

B) Imitative practice: Listen carefully to the recording of this rhyme and use it as a model to emulate, as closely as possible, the speaker’s production of the English plosive consonants. Then, record yourself on tape. Listen to your own recording paying special attention to your production of these sounds. How close did you get to the speaker’s model?

C) Less-controlled practice: In groups, create your own rhymes following the patterns in the original revolting rhyme. You must include words pronounced with the target sounds in different environments.

TASK 7: Dramatization

In groups of three, you will be assigned to read a different version of the tale “The Three Little Pigs”.

Group A: *The true story of the three little pigs*

Group B: *The classical story*

Group C: *The three little wolves and the big bad pig*

A) As a planning stage, each group should centre on what happened to the pigs and the wolves in each version of the tale. Talk about the areas of convergence and divergence among the three stories.

B) Each group appoints one participant who will play the role of the wolf in each version. Have the three wolves, one from each version, get together over a cup of coffee and chat about their experiences with their pigs. The rest of the participants (audience) will listen to their classmates’ performance with a special focus on the appropriate use of the English plosives.

C) In the feedback session, along with your instructor analyse and reflect on the benefits and drawbacks of doing this type of activity in relation to the development of the English plosive consonants.

APPENDIX B: THE TEST

Record yourself doing these tasks (pre & post test)

Task 1: Minimal pairs. Read the following list of words:

- | | | |
|-----------|--------|------------|
| 1. pick | big | |
| 2. pack | back | |
| 3. port | bought | |
| 4. pride | bride | |
| 5. pit | bit | |
| 6. two | do | |
| 7. ten | den | |
| 8. ton | done | |
| 9. tie | die | |
| 10. town | down | |
| 11. cave | gave | |
| 12. curl | girl | |
| 13. cap | gap | |
| 14. class | glass | |
| 15. could | good | [30 words] |

Task 2: Read the following passage: (from Celce-Murcia, 1996: 398)

If English is not your native language, people may have noticed that you come from another country because of your “foreign accent.” Why do people usually have an accent when they speak a second language? Several theories address this issue. Many people believe that only young children can learn a second language without an accent, but applied linguists have reported cases of older individuals who have mastered a second language without an accent. Another common belief is that your first language influences your pronunciation in a second language. Most native speakers of English can, for example, recognise people from France by their French accents. They may also be able to identify Spanish or Arabic speakers over the telephone, just by listening carefully to their pronunciation. Does this mean that accents can’t be changed? Not at all! But old habits won’t change without a lot of work, will they? In the end, the path to learning to speak a second language without an accent appears to be a combination of hard work, a good ear, and a strong desire to sound like a native speaker. You also need accurate information about the English sound system and lots of exposure to the spoken language. Will you manage to make progress, or will you just give up? Only time will tell, I’m afraid. Good luck, and don’t forget to work hard!

36 words

Task 3: Free speech.

In groups of 3, solve the following problem:

Imagine you and your partner are going to Australia for a holiday. You would like to arrange one special trip while you are there and these are the options that the travel agent has suggested:

- A) A four-day cruise
- B) Across Australia by train
- C) Five-day learn to dive course
- D) Five-day camping safari

Talk together to decide which is the most interesting and enjoyable option.