

“EFL Teachers don’t stop to Teach Pronunciation”: an interpretation of Learner Beliefs on Pronunciation Learning at an English Teacher Preparation Programme

"Los docentes de ILE (ingles como lengua extranjera) no detienen la clase para enseñar pronunciación": una interpretación de las creencias del alumno sobre el aprendizaje de la pronunciación en un profesorado de ingles

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Abstract

There is little information about learner beliefs concerning pronunciation (henceforth PR) in FL (foreign language) learning contexts (Toyama, 2015), even more so in specific environments such as teacher preparation programs. Ellis (2008) suggests the need for teachers to find out about learners’ beliefs, to become aware of and evaluate them, as beliefs influence the actions undertaken by students. In the present study, first-year students were asked to write personal narratives regarding their journey through the subject “English Phonetics & Phonology I”. Data were approached using the narrative methodology. Findings entail the novelty implied in PR-related matters (mainly phonetic transcription) and the shortness of the academic term as major learning obstacles. Rehabilitation of fossilized pronunciations, a recurrent topic in most stories, was viewed as a positive issue of PR learning by participants. The likely connection between these findings and the fact that PR teaching is overlooked in several EFL courses around the world (Gilbert, 2010) is discussed. Finally, a course of action is suggested to attempt to revert the marginalized situation of PR in the ELT field as a long-term goal. The aim of the paper is to find out about learners’ beliefs regarding PR learning by interpreting students’ personal narratives.

Keywords: teacher preparation programme; pronunciation; learner beliefs; narrative methodology

Resumen

Existe poca información sobre las creencias de los alumnos en relación con la pronunciación (en adelante PR) en contextos de aprendizaje de una LE (lengua extranjera) (Toyama 2015), más aún en entornos específicos como los programas de preparación de profesores. Ellis (2008) sugiere la necesidad de que los profesores averigüen las creencias de los alumnos, para tomar conciencia de ellas y evaluarlas, ya que las creencias influyen en las acciones emprendidas por los estudiantes. En el presente estudio, se pidió a los estudiantes de primer año que escribieran narrativas personales sobre su paso por la asignatura "Fonética y Fonología Inglesa I". Los datos se abordaron utilizando la metodología narrativa. Los hallazgos señalan lo novedoso de los temas relacionados con la PR (principalmente la transcripción fonética) y la brevedad del período académico como principales obstáculos para el aprendizaje. La rehabilitación de las pronunciaciones fosilizadas, un tema recurrente en la mayoría de los relatos, fue considerada por los participantes como una cuestión positiva del aprendizaje de la PR. Se discute la probable conexión entre estos hallazgos y el hecho de que la enseñanza de PR se pasa por alto en varios

cursos de EFL en todo el mundo (Gilbert, 2010). Por último, se sugiere una línea de acción para intentar revertir la situación de marginación de la PR en el ámbito de la enseñanza de la lengua extranjera como objetivo a largo plazo. El objetivo de este trabajo es conocer las creencias de los alumnos sobre el aprendizaje de la PR mediante la interpretación de las narraciones personales de los estudiantes.

Palabras clave: programa de preparación de profesores; pronunciación; creencias de los estudiantes; metodología narrativa

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Introduction

The pronunciation (henceforth PR) instructor in teacher preparation programmes is not likely to possess enough data regarding students' views about the various aspects involved in their learning process. The reason is that instructors hardly ever ask students about their learning experiences in a systematic way, yet it is vital for teachers to find out about students' feelings and beliefs concerning their learning experiences as teachers may have to review and maybe modify certain aspects of their teaching practices (Barkhuizen, 1998). Most of the times the teacher has to rely on informal assessments on students' beliefs in teacher preparation contexts, keeping in mind sections of private talks or fragments of group discussions (Horwitz, 1985). Identifying students' beliefs is a good starting point to begin paying attention to learners' views and obtain valuable information.

Loosely, learner beliefs account for the conceptions, ideas and opinions held by learners about language itself and language teaching and learning (Kalaja, Barcelos & Aro, 2017). Their undisputed importance lies on the fact that beliefs considered as true by learners guide their interpretations of their experiences and their behaviour (Mercer, 2011). Students' beliefs about learning have been referred to as "preconceived ideas" or "preconceptions" (Horwitz, 1985), even as myths (Horwitz, 1988). Barcelos (2003) discusses the complex and paradoxical nature of beliefs, which makes them hard to define.

Learner beliefs should not be ignored by teachers as they are likely to increase the instructors' comprehension of the way students approach tasks and eventually promote the use of appropriate learning strategies in them (Horwitz, 1988). Beliefs have the capacity to change students' actions as learners (Horwitz, 1999), besides understanding students' beliefs should also lead to planning appropriate language instruction (Horwitz, 1999).

In a study meant to determine the extent to which researchers directed their attention to the acquisition of second language phonology, results indicate that only 5% of 2912 articles discussed teacher preparation for teaching PR (Deng, Holtby & Howden-Weaver, 2009). Yet,

most of the research on SLTE (Second Language Teacher Education) environments focuses on graduate instructors (Baker, 2016; Couper, 2016; Burri & Baker, 2020) rather than undergraduate teachers to be, as it is the case of the present article. Furthermore, such studies concern training programmes based on countries where English is the official language, hence the mother tongue of most participants. Teacher beliefs are also known as Teacher Cognition (TC), and are defined by Borg (2003) as “what teachers think, know and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom”.

There is a void of studies on learner beliefs involving PRL (Pronunciation Learning) using interpretative approaches in EFL Teacher Preparation Programs, as will be discussed later on. The aim of the present study is to analyse and interpret the PR learning beliefs of 11 undergraduate first-year students at an English teacher preparation college in Argentina.

Literature review

Research carried out by Rotti & Barbeito (2013) focused on first-year prospective teachers’ learning and teaching PR beliefs in a teacher-preparation context in Argentina. Concerning the approaches used by their instructors to teach PR, 32 % indicated “repetition”, 28.5 % answered “no methods” as they did not approach PR at all, while 6.5 % did not reply. The rest of the answers involved reading aloud (9.5 %) and phonetic training (7.5%). The remaining 16% showed emerging classes like using alternative symbols (6.5 %), correction as a teaching technique and further unidentified teaching methods (6%). The authors concluded that the beliefs held by the students who took part of the study were favourable towards PR teaching, yet some contradictions were uncovered.

Chien (2014) conducted an analysis of the narratives of elementary-level EFL pre-service teachers regarding PR teaching and learning in Taiwan. Data were approached using content analysis. Findings revealed that the participants learnt PR through phonics and phonetic instruction. The main PR problems involved accent, /r/, vowels, intonation and word and sentence stress, which were tackled by listening to English-related programs, imitating the PR of NSEs and practice. According to the results of the study, clear theoretical concepts about phonics, instructional strategies on PR instruction and knowledge about the target language need to be included in preparation programs.

Set in a teacher preparation context in Argentina, Rotti & Barbeito’s study seems to be the most relevant of all, though data retrieved through open questions are approached by content analysis. The investigation undertaken by Chien also looks germane enough as data were collected through oral narratives, yet they were inspected by content analysis as well. Hence, even in studies where data happen to be collected applying instruments from the qualitative paradigm, information is examined using content analysis, which aims at classifying and conceptualizing data. There is a void in research on learner beliefs about PR learning in teacher-preparation settings using an interpretative perspective, which will be discussed in the following section.

Methodology

Language learning histories (or recollective studies) are introspective research narratives written by learners about their own language learning. Introspection as self-reflection is a kind of verbal report to investigate the learners' mental processes concerning cognitive and emotional states (Oxford, 1996). Riessman (in Chase, 2015) employs the phrase “personal narrative” to describe a convincing story on a particular topic. This kind of narrative can be collected through journals, letters and auto-biographical stories.

In this study, students' self-narratives involving their experiences as PR learners while taking the course in question aid us to comprehend how they position themselves and their activities in the world. Learners' stories about their experiences are utilized as data and as an instrument of data analysis. Narratives are set within a broader topic which is more extensive than the specific point the narrator means to transmit: in the context of the present research, learning PR in an English teacher preparation program, the particular point of the overwhelming experience of learning PR, “fits into” the first one (Barkhuizen, 2013)

The data collected as 11 self-narratives have the following features: they are written texts, stemming from individuals who have something to tell (their PR learning beliefs as students of “English Phonetics & Phonology I” (IF1)), situated in space and time (English Teacher preparation program, second academic term 2019), involving a temporal development (their PR learning experiences since August 2019 till November 2019 and previous terms/studies if relevant), they define a point the writer wants to make (undertaking an introspective/retrospective analysis of PR learning style and techniques, learning barriers and how they are tackled in a specific and personal context), they have a purpose (unveiling what learners think about all the elements contributing to their own PR learning process) and certain meaning within the context of the story.

The information regarding learner beliefs is confronted with their performance during the term when relevant (marks concerning mid-term and make-up examinations, compulsory assignments and attendance as well as previous terms they had taken the course), so as to corroborate and make sense of their stories in the particular context of the subject. Such data are available in social media platforms, thus students' academic activity could be traced back as far as 4 years owing to the fact that a couple of the participants had started the course in March 2016.

The study

Context of research

“English Phonetics & Phonology I” (IF1 henceforth) is one of the four subjects that freshmen are expected to take in the first term of a teacher preparation programme at a state university of the Buenos Aires province in Argentina. The subject fits the “phonology-centered” (PC) category, as it

focuses on the description, acquisition and instruction of L2 phonology and devotes around 90% of the time to topics related to phonology, mainly phonetics, sound systems, PR and spelling-to-sound relationships (Murphy, 1997)

Students entering the course are already quite proficient in the TL, with a level close to the FCE (First Certificate in English, Cambridge University) examination. The subject is taught in the first term (March-July) of a five-year program and the hourly load is 8 (eight) hours a week. Throughout the four-month term, students are gradually introduced to the IPA (broad phonetic transcriptions and dictations) and articulatory phonetics, alongside diction practice at a digital language lab. One of the main aims of IF1 is to enable learners to achieve accurate articulatory habits at segmental level. In order to pass the course, learners need to get through two MTEs during the term: MTE 1 (mid-May) and MTE 2 (late June) or their respective make-up exams. Each MTE consists of two parts, a 120-word long phonetic transcription plus an exam featuring questions on theory (MTE 1) and a 250-word long dictation along with a paper on theory (MTE 2). Both MTEs are complemented by oral examinations assessing students in pairs. Besides, learners have to comply with at least 3 (three) compulsory assignments (transcription, dictation and diction). Those students who score 6 (six) or more in the MTEs or respective MUEs, do not need to sit for the final exam and pass the course, whereas learners who get lower grades are expected to sit for a final examination.

Procedure

The study was undertaken in November 2019, on week 12 of a 15-week course, two weeks before the second MTE (mid-term exam). Eleven students out of a total of 28 were present on that day. Only two were true beginners (freshmen), six were false beginners (retaking the course), one was taking the course for the third time and two were taking it for the fourth time. Students were informed about the nature and goals of the study in Spanish, their L1. The instructor handed them in a form featuring the sort of information they were supposed to provide and the aim of the task (Chart 1). The activity was non- compulsory and anonymous, yet no one refused to undertake it. Learners were expected to come up with a password in case the researchers needed to reach them to request further data once the term was over. In February of the following year students were contacted via social media to match usernames and actual identities.

Chart 1 - Template for students’ self-narratives about PR learning beliefs

Personal Narratives: Learning Pronunciation at “English Phonetics & Phonology I”

Write a brief biography telling your particular story about your journey through the subject, mentioning all the aspects of your learning process that you can recall (e.g. obstacles in your learning task as well as favourable events, studying techniques, learning styles, personal circumstances and the like). Please write in Spanish.

Aim of the activity: to collect data about students' thoughts regarding their pronunciation learning process to reach a better understanding of it.

(The contribution is voluntary and anonymous, yet a “username” is requested as you might be contacted during the summer break in case extra information is needed)

The Narrative Reports

Beyonce offers a detailed account of the learning challenges she had to face the three previous times she had taken the course. The following thoughts illustrate recurring learning barriers: phonetic script, shortage of time for true commitment and her PR variety.

...At first I struggled very hard to incorporate the IPA correctly

...My experience with the subject was not very good, which is connected to the lack of time I was able to devote to it...

..The first time I took IF1 I was doing other subjects as well, and I got more involved with them as I found the IPA too difficult to handle...

She had spent several months working in the US and had picked up a bunch of phonetic features of American English, though she still kept many characteristics of British English PR acquired during her previous instruction at school.

...It was three times harder for me to learn to pronounce British English, as my American PR was deeply rooted by then

The negative tone of her story seems to be related to the frustration produced by persistent failures. Hers was the second longest report, which makes sense considering the number of times she had taken the course. PR learning techniques are missing in her story, same as approaches used with the purpose of overcoming learning difficulties. She seems to be too focused on her learning obstacles to consider further aspects for discussion. Features hampering her learning process dominate her narration as the elements having the strongest impact on her learning account.

Dante's story is mostly retrospective as he recalls his first experience with PR and his concern for this sub-skill, using fairly specific terminology to refer to PR teaching techniques, probably

because he had done two subjects belonging to the teacher education area which students are expected to do in second year.

I started working on my PR by 10 years old...At 14 I sat for the FCE, and PR was vital to pass the oral section...However, PR was taught by repetition and trial and error, never using the IPA...

The IPA prevails in his story as a missing PR learning aid while he was a young EFL student and as one of the most effective approaches for teaching PR. His early interest in PR is consistent with the high marks obtained in diction assessments.

The best tools to exercise PR in young learners apart from the IPA are the media...

The IPA should be introduced in the early stages of EFL instruction to avoid fossilization in young learners...

Overlooking his current experiences as a student of IF1 involving aspects like learning style and techniques, or issues related to his own performance, Dante's account lacks introspection. As one of the two students who do not refer to any PR learning barriers, Dante does not seem willing to open up to discuss his prior failures or his current approach to PR learning,

After a metacognitive reflection entailing learner style and learning strategies, Irene concludes that her approach for learning PR as an EFL learner, copying other people's PR, is the result of her auditory memory, which she illustrates as she employs the anchoring mnemonic technique to recall the auditory features of vowel # 12

...With the purpose of memorizing the English phonemes, particularly vowel phonemes, I tried to associate words which sounded alike, for instance the vowel "the roof" as in sun, come and cut...

Then she shares a lively and optimistic report of the several hands-on PR learning techniques acquired during the term, which dominate her narration. Irene is able to relate theory (articulation of speech organs) and practice (the actual production of speech sounds) in a meaningful way.

...Relating speech sounds with the articulations involved during their production helped improve my PR....

Throughout her introspective narration, Irene recalls a learning obstacle concerning the anticipation of the PR of new words and also how she managed to tackle it.

...Yet I was in trouble when I had to identify the sounds of written words I had never heard before...which I solved by learning spelling rules so I was able to work out the PR of new words...

Rehabilitation of fossilized forms is a further learning tool supplied by the subject, for which she feels grateful. As she takes responsibility for her own learning, Irene closes her report explaining that the reason she had failed the prior term was the lack of time to practice transcriptions at home, which was consistent with her marks then.

Lanni starts her brief account by sharing several optimistic comments, including de-fossilization of fossilized forms

...The subject not only helped me grasp several aspects of PR which I wrongly assumed were right...

Further comments entail learning tactics and strategies which are not restricted to the field of practical phonetics

...but it also taught me to organize my schedule and retrieve studying habits like summarizing and note-taking which I had lost during my last years in high school

The PR learning techniques, featured by Lanni only involve those approaching declarative knowledge rather than practice issues like phonetic notation, which she does not even mention.

A further positive aspect of the subject is the use of Power Point presentations, which are then uploaded to social media...

A true beginner, she does not name any previous techniques to PR learning. The tone of her story is optimistic and grateful on account of the knowledge acquired in the course. The reason why she was the only participant referring to teachers' strikes as a learning barrier may be that she attended a private school in a small town and she was not used to them. Her concern for learning techniques approaching theoretical topics is consistent with her performance, as theory seems to be her problem spot, for she had failed the theory section of both MTEs. Eventually, this participant is one of the two students who failed the subject that term.

Magetch writes the most extensive and thorough account of the study, showing a clear-cut organization: while the first half involves issues related to her life as an EFL learner prior to joining college, the second part details her experience as a student of IF1. She refers to singing as a PR learning tactic, which has potential as a learning resource because both productive and receptive skills are involved.

...I believe what helped me the most at school was trying to sing songs in English, trying to imitate the sounds and pronounce them with fluency is a valuable aid for improving PR...

She goes even further as she would notice phonetic and phonological features of sounds in songs, even the singer's variety of English, which shows that she had started developing phonological awareness as a school girl.

...in songs, you can even tell if the singer is American or British, and I started to notice that in the American variety, the /t/ sound is not so strong, but rather sounds like a /d/...

Her optimistic report is the result of a careful retrospective/introspective job, the only negative point in her account is the newness the subject involves

...when I got here and took up IF1 for the first time I found a new and unknown world, it was very hard for me to adapt and understand...

Nevertheless, learning the IPA and the spelling-rules “opened her many doors” as she was able to grow less dependent on the dictionary and solve several issues by anticipating pronunciations of new words. It is worth pointing out that Magetch mainly values the procedural kind of knowledge acquired as a student of IF1 like making hypotheses about the PR of new words, which makes sense when considering the way she approaches tasks is on the open-oriented side.

...I’ve been keen on the language for a while, learning it on my own more than anything, watching films and the like. I went to an institute for a year but I found formal instruction uninteresting....

Her narration is organized and well-planned and includes items no other participant mentioned. This story reveals quite an exceptional student, owner of a unique awareness of herself as a learner, from her schooldays to the present. Magetch is a grateful student who makes reference to the various aspects that raised awareness of her PR.

Mailen shares a concise, clear and optimistic narration. Just like Dante, she thinks that phonetics should be taught in all levels of ELT as it takes so long to be acquired. This is the only student who mentions a studying partner as a learning resource (social learning strategy), yet she alludes to no PR techniques used before joining the course.

...Having a studying buddy helps a lot, so you can have another perspective of yourself and outside opinions...

The effectiveness of training in articulatory phonetics as an approach for improving PR is recurrent in her story. An awareness of the articulation of sounds allows for the identification of mistakes and the eventual rehabilitation of fossilized forms

...This is a beautiful subject, as it assists learners not only in the acquisition of PR but also in the identification of muscles for achieving a better PR...

...Sometimes I found it hard to articulate certain words, and as I was unaware of muscles and articulations to utter them, I was not able to comprehend the nature of the mistake...As a student of IF1, I was able to grasp the reasons for several PR problems and managed to move overcome them...

Her performance throughout the course was fairly steady as she passed both MTEs, it also matches her enthusiastic account as an IF1 student. The novelty implied in the various topics making up the subject and the limited time available for grasping them are featured as further learning barriers.

Marcos is one of the two students who has taken the course four times, yet her story is rather short but reasonable as it points out the pros and cons of the course as she sees them. On the one hand she is very grateful for the knowledge acquired,

...I’ve had a good experience with IF1, I’ve found it interesting from the beginning as it’s a hands-on subject and I like that a lot...I’ve learnt a lot and I feel very grateful....

Yet she complains about practice material (mainly phonetic transcriptions and dictations) getting repeated in both terms. However her criticism is constructive, for she suggests that instructors

should try to change the practice material to avoid the boredom and frustration which repetition is bound to cause in learners. Her major learning obstacle is having no background in PR learning

...I had not had any previous contact with the subject, as teachers do not usually stop to teach PR, so I had to learn to pronounce words I already knew...

A persistent and bold learner, Marcos is also the only student who proposes recording teachers’ dictations in class to work with them at home as a very effective technique. Her performance during the last term was spotless as she comfortably passed all the MTEs. Unlike Beyonce, who also took IF1 four times, Marcos is able to touch upon different aspects of the course, even to offer recommendations, while Beyonce simply sticks to describing the reasons for every failure.

In a lively and enthusiastic narration, Rigo shares a brief and chronological report of her story as an EFL learner and the PR of English. While attending lessons at institutes, she learnt PR through the corrections that her instructors pointed out. Before joining IF1 she was sure she would enjoy the course as she *“had always wanted to learn the phonemes”*. Just like so many other participants of this study, Rigo also found out about her unexpected fossilized pronunciations

...I was really surprised to find out that the PR of several words was totally different from the way I was pronouncing them...

She provides a comprehensive account of the useful approaches for PR learning related to both declarative and procedural knowledge acquired in the course, like identifying instances of assimilation in spontaneous speech and the importance of the articulation of the speech organs to develop awareness of one’s PR. Regarding her marks, phonetic notation was a problem area for her as she failed the first MTE, yet she would rather not discuss it in her story, probably because she was able to overcome it passing the first MUE.

The major learning barriers Sofia had to face were related to the novelty of the information supplied by the subject and the fast pace of the course

...The first time I took the course I was a bit lost as the pace was rather fast, and it was a whole lot of new information...

While theory is not an issue for her, the following remark shows she is able to grasp the complexity involved in phonetic notation

...learning phonetic transcriptions and dictations is a skill in itself...

Yet, she was able to overcome the challenge posed by phonetic notation by completing a whole notebook of phonetic transcriptions. Reading aloud at home also helped. A resourceful learner, Sofia managed to borrow summaries of all the notes on theory from a former student she happened to know. She seemed to work at home a lot, which may be key for her success. Sofia was also surprised when finding out about all the fossilized pronunciations she carried with her. Still, her performance throughout the course was rather uneven, as she started off alright but then her marks dropped considerably in MTE # 2. The optimistic tone of her report makes sense as data were collected before the second MTE.

After pointing out that IF1 is a very interesting subject, Ultimatum gets started by highlighting his learning barriers. Obstacles like the length of the course cannot be modified, at least not in the near future.

...this subject might be overwhelming as it only lasts one term and not a whole year, there are lots of concepts, like phonetic transcriptions, which require long hours of practice at home, it may be time that you do not have when taking other subjects as well....

His narration lacks any sort of introspective analysis, not even after taking the subject for the third time. There is no reference to previous failures or reasons why, yet it becomes clear that his problem area is phonetic notation rather than theory. As he has heard students complaining about certain theoretical points (such as concepts involving vowels and consonants) as challenging topics, he claims that

...I’m sure there are better ways of introducing such concepts to new students, I’d even like to be an instructor myself to try new methods...

Having said this, Ultimatum is the only participant who alludes to the remote idea of becoming a teacher one day, such omission sounds rather unusual in a learning environment where students are supposed to desire to become teachers in the near future. He does not seem to take responsibility for his learning, as he focuses on challenges involving external factors like teaching methods (teaching approaches for introducing features of vowels and consonants) and curricular matters (subject length) rather than discussing his own approach to learning PR. The negative tone of his narration seems to go hand in hand with his performance: while he had barely passed the three parts of the first MTE, he failed dictation and theory of MTE # 2 and eventually lost the course. His marks in compulsory assignments were poor as well (passed transcription, missed dictation, failed theory and diction).

Although Vida Natural passed the course in her first attempt and with very high marks, the data collected through her story is mostly adverse, as there is not a single trace of optimism in her narration.

...I never dealt with anything connected to PR in high school, at an institute I was briefly introduced to a handful of vowel phonemes, but that was it...

The origin of her discontent seems to be related to the absence of PR learning during her EFL education both at school and institutes, so the large amount of information received at college was rather shocking as it happened altogether.

...It wasn’t till I started off college that I realized that English vowels were not the same as Spanish ones”

The fact that she became aware of such opposition so late makes her feel betrayed in a way, as if someone had been hiding it from her. A further challenge appears to be the shortage of time available for learning phonetic notation, as the transition from doing transcriptions to taking dictations does not seem to be smooth enough for her. Vida Natural’s story is peculiar in that

Instead of discussing the plethora of knowledge gained during the course, she feels sorry for herself about the knowledge she was deprived of as an EFL learner.

Discussion

All 11 stories display unique features concerning PR learning beliefs as each and every student went through different experiences and come from different learning and socio-cultural backgrounds. Learner beliefs stem from a broad range of sources such as past experiences, general education and language learning, cultural background and personality (Ellis, 2008). In this study, learner beliefs also derive from previous experiences involving PR learning. Uniqueness turns each narration into a personal and insightful report as every story makes sense in its particular context. Learner beliefs contribute valuable knowledge which is bound to increase teaching awareness of learners' perspectives concerning PR learning in an English teacher preparation environment. Ellis (2008) suggests that researchers who desire to inspect learner beliefs should apply qualitative methodology like journals and interviews instead of surveys. Likewise, Bailey (1991) remarks on the importance of inspecting individual learners in depth.

The mood of the beliefs retrieved regarding PR learning at “IF1” are mostly optimistic, as participants tend to focus on the handy PR skills acquired through the new declarative and procedural knowledge obtained during the course. Almost all the participants address PR learning obstacles as well, yet an upbeat mood predominates in their narrations. Only 2 (two) learners (Dante and Rigo) refrain from sharing PR learning barriers: while Dante never gets too personal about himself as a learner of the subject, Rigo chooses to address only the bright side of EFL and PR learning. Mercer (2011) warns us against the temptation to classify beliefs as positive or negative, as she claims on the usefulness of describing a system of beliefs as suitable for a specific individual immersed in a particular sociocultural and educational environment, within the individual's personal history and experience

The beliefs of the stories shared by the students who did the course three times or more (Beyonce, Marcos and Ultimatum) are mostly adverse as they underscore the negative aspects of their PR learning experiences as students of IF1. Beyonce features a detailed and chronological account of the reasons why she failed the course on three previous occasions, disregarding other dimensions like learner styles and techniques, and overlooking any explanation of the approach(es) used to overcome her learning barriers, as she highlights all the obstructing issues. Marcos discusses the reasons for her failures as well, but unlike Beyonce, some of her critical comments are also constructive as she proposes a course of action for improvement. Despite her criticism, Marcos' story looks more balanced than Beyonce's, for she covers further dimensions of her learning, as she expresses gratefulness and discusses the approaches applied for tackling learning challenges. Ultimatum also has a critical attitude regarding several aspects of the course, but offers no suggestions for improving them, failing to undertake a metacognitive position regarding his own approach as a learner of the subject. Vida Natural's account revolves around her disappointment at not receiving training in PR as an EFL student. Unlike Beyonce, Marcos and Ultimatum, who had to endure multiple failures throughout several terms, Vida Natural is a

true beginner who has passed all the sections of the MTE very comfortably, nevertheless deception is predominant in her story. Instead of focusing on everything she has learnt, she highlights all the points she was unaware of before taking IF1.

Major obstacles were the newness involved in learning PR, mainly the overwhelming novelty of the IPA and phonetic notation (Magetch, Marcos, Sofía and Vida Natural), followed by the restricted length of the term (Irene and Ultimatum). Beyonce and Mailen, regard both the novelty involved in the subject and the shortness of time as challenging factors. Further learning obstacles entail external factors like teachers' strikes (Lanni), features of course design like PR variety used as reference (Beyonce) and repetition of practice material in both terms (Marcos).

The novelty conveyed by the subject is related to the fact that learners were unaware of the existence of the IPA and phonetic notation, had not been taught PR systematically or at all, and finally the lack of familiarity with the theoretical concepts underlying phonetics and phonology. Only two participants had been introduced to the IPA before: Beyonce and Vida Natural. The experience did not prove to be helpful though, Beyonce had been introduced to all 44 symbols of the IPA in high school, but she was never instructed about the real value of each phoneme. Vida Natural knew about the existence of a few symbols, but that was all. This is certainly a consequence of the fact that EFL teachers do not address PR as a sub-skill the way they approach other areas like grammar or vocabulary. Most instructors in adult ESL environments devote less than 6% of class time on PR teaching and taking care of PR-related errors (Foote, Holtby & Derwing, 2011 in Jones, 2016), besides most ESL/EFL programs fail to offer a systematic training in PR teaching (Grant & Van Dyke-Kao, 2016). In a study undertaken by Murphy (2014) concerning teacher readiness to teach PR, findings indicate that EFL/ESL teachers feel unprepared to teach PR as they believe that further training in the area is necessary.

The shortage of time which concerns students so much is also a consequence of the fact that EFL teachers do not usually address PR teaching in their lessons: students have only one term to catch up with all the PR learning they missed during 5 or 10 years as EFL students, which can be exciting because of all the awareness gained, but also overwhelming owing to the huge amount of information to process. Hence, learners are encouraged to “invest” long hours practicing phonetic transcriptions at home both extensively and intensively (checking the PR dictionary systematically) as a way of making up for the missing PR instruction as EFL learners. It is the out-of-class practice time that makes a difference in improving phonetic transcription skills.

As one of the objectives of the course as stated in the syllabuses “To correct PR flaws”, rehabilitation of fossilized PR as an asset is another recurrent theme along most of the narratives. Except for Marcos, who refers to it as a liability, more than half the participants embrace awareness of fossilized PR and the opportunity to rehabilitate them through the approaches and resources provided by the course. These results are validated by findings by Derwing & Munro (2014), who confirm the fact that fossilized PR can be rehabilitated in a short period despite several years of incorrect pronunciations. Irene, Lanni, Magetch, Mailén, and Sofía are enthusiastic about this awareness, while Rigo is surprised to realize that she was mispronouncing several words. Marcos finds the task rather frustrating as “I had to learn the PR of words I already knew again”. Findings by Derwing & Munro (2014) confirm the fact that PR

can be rehabilitated in a short period despite years of incorrect PR. Fossilized PR also appears to be a direct consequence of the lack of attention EFL instructors pay to PR: as teachers do not usually correct mispronunciations, students acknowledge them as the correct forms, and stick to them.

An essential concept in interlanguage phonology, a fossilized PR involves the PR of an advanced ESL learner who may be fluent but inaccurate, as his/her PR is resistant to change (Acton, 1984). One of the reasons why many teachers avoid addressing fossilized PR in the classroom is that they believe that PR accuracy lies beyond the control of a language instructor, i.e. that it may not be effective. A further motif is related to the pedagogical theory involving SLA (Second Language Acquisition): while the CLT (communicative language teaching) approach disregarded formal PR instruction for being disruptive for communication, several learners developed fossilized pronunciations as explicit correction was missing in the classroom. The third reason is the absence of sound PR pedagogy in teacher preparation and teacher training contexts, as instructors had little or no training in PR pedagogy and were not comfortable applying materials for PR teaching (Derwing & Munro, 2014).

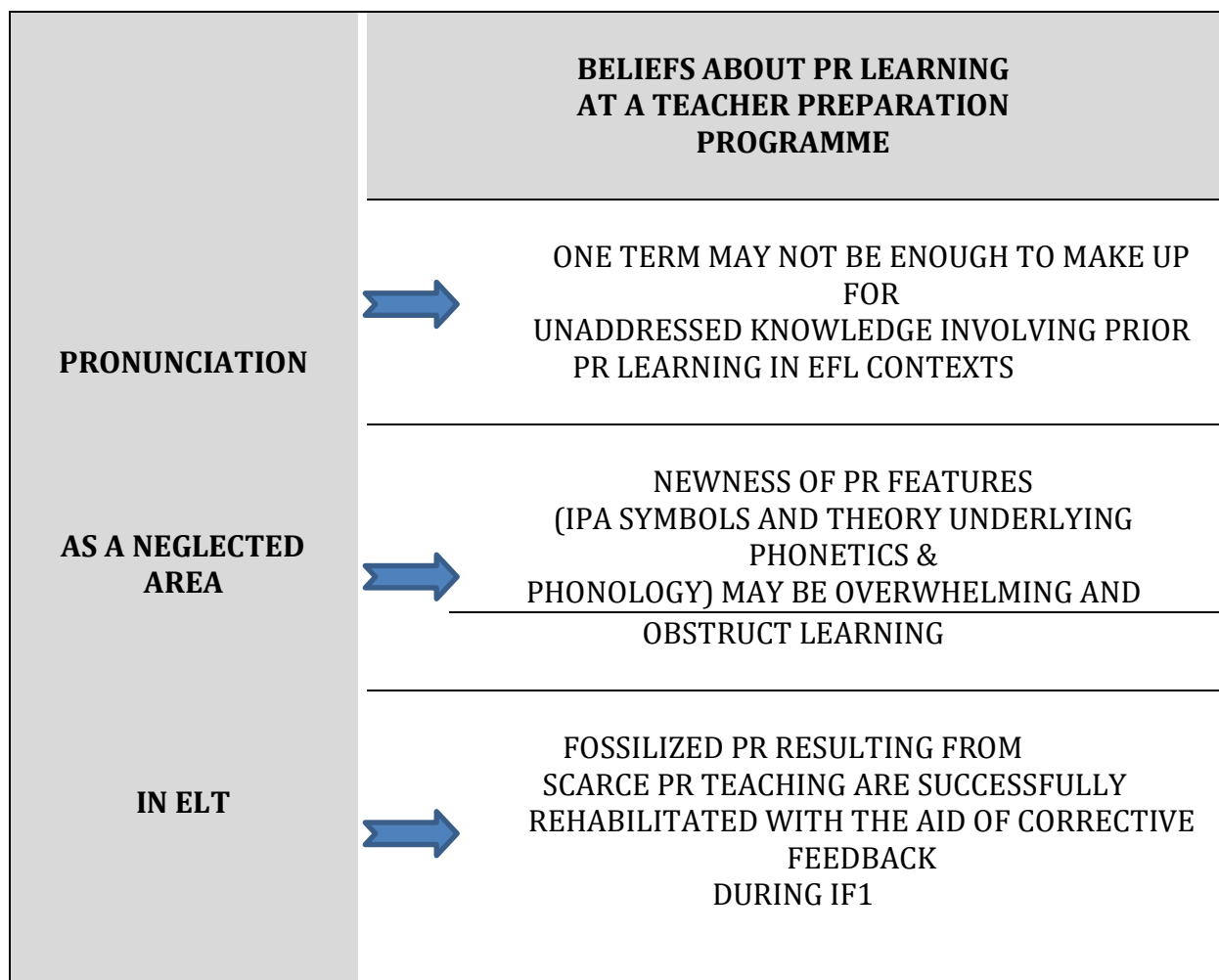
Fossilized pronunciations, the term which feels too short and the missing PR learning approaches featured by the participants all have one thing in common: the neglect of PR teaching in EFL teaching and teachers' reluctance to address PR matters. Far from being a local issue, the predicament of PR as the EFL/ESL orphan seems to be world-wide, as confirmed by studies in the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the US, Poland and Spain (Gilbert, 2010)

Optimistic beliefs entailing PR learning mainly involve skills resulting from the novel procedural K acquired throughout the term, i.e. “know how to” like Identifying assimilations in spontaneous authentic speech (Rigo), spelling- to- sound rules to anticipate the pronunciation of new words (Magetch), working at home with dictations recorded in class (Marcos), working out phoneme-to-grapheme correspondence to identify words in oral discourse (Rigo), applying the anchoring technique to recall the quality of vowel phonemes (Irene) and using concepts from articulatory phonetics to produce speech sounds accurately (Irene). EFL learners are often enthusiastic about PR learning as they regard it as a sub-skill that would enable them to improve communication in the target language (Kelly 2001). As discussed before, most of the learners are dealing with this knowledge for the first time ever, so they find it overwhelming but also exciting and overpowering as it enables them to gain control over their PR skills like never before. They learn matters about English PR which in turn enable them to modify their own PR, so it is a huge step forwards.

Irene, Lanni, Mailen, Marcos, Sofia and Ultimatum fail to name any PR learning experience prior to entering the preparation programme. Beyonce had been introduced to the IPA in high school but was never instructed about the real value of each symbol, while Dante had learnt PR through trial and error and repetition. Magetch learnt PR by imitation with a private tutor, and Vida Natural only knew a few symbols but was never taught issues concerning PR in high school. Rigo was the only participant who was corrected by her instructor at an institute. These findings suggest that in their experiences, most of the participants' teachers were reluctant to teach PR, which may account for the amount of fossilized pronunciations participants had to rehabilitate.

The way the marginalization of PR in ELT impacts on learner beliefs in a teacher preparation context is shown in Chart 2 below:

Chart 2 - Impact of marginalization of ELT PR on learner beliefs



Conclusions

With the hope of reversing the marginalization undergone by PR teaching in the ELT field as a long-term goal, a course of action is proposed: the introduction of the pedagogic current in our phonetic-oriented PR course, which is the general theme of most contemporary discussion concerning EFL/ESL language teacher education and teacher development (Murphy, 2018). In Murphy’s words, it is never too early to introduce the pedagogic component in a PR course for prospective EFL instructors. In teacher education/preparation programmes there are two major currents involved, and the challenge is to maintain them running in parallel rather than in opposite directions. The first dimension concerns the clear comprehension prospective teachers of EFL need to possess of the sound system of the TL, which is the traditional focus of phonetics and phonology courses, yet it is not enough as this current is likely to be overemphasized to the

neglect of the second one. The second current is just as important, as it concerns the teaching of the components of phonology of the TL. Addressing the second dimension renders the first one more attainable and clearer for teachers-to-be. If not, the first current may appear too detached from language classroom matters for the future teacher. It is the teacher educator role to begin filling in the missing pedagogical elements, as the methods courses they will do in a year or two are not likely to give much attention to phonology anyways. In short, both currents should support each other, (declarative) knowledge about phonetics and phonology together with (procedural) pedagogical knowledge are complementing aspects/areas of teacher knowledge (Murphy, 2018)

This is the first study entailing PR learner beliefs in a teacher preparation environment approaching data with a narrative inquiry methodology. Stories of language learning are meaningful resources as subjective interpretations, yet they should not be treated as actual reports (Barkhuizen, 2013). Limitations of the present study concern the shortness of the stories and the restricted number of participants. Besides, as the context of research is so specific, the results may not be relevant for general ELT contexts.

Kalajas, Barcelos & Aro (2017) suggest raising learners' beliefs as it is an unexplored area. Students can become aware of their beliefs through reflection, they may thus consider and perhaps reconsider them. The authors point out that assisting students to become more aware of their beliefs is one of the teachers' roles, which can be carried out by turning beliefs explicit in class by class discussions, questionnaires, completion tasks, language learning histories, drawings, photos and collages/posters.

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