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*English pronunciation teaching and learning:
a focus on connected speech*

Relatore
Prof. Katherine Ackerley

Laureanda
Anna Visentin
n° matr.1202992 / LMLLA

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Tell me and I forget,

teach me and I remember,

involve me and I learn.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS – RINGRAZIAMENTI

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INTRODUCTION

Although the importance of pronunciation is usually recognised by many students and teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), phonological research seems not to be particularly applied to pedagogy. Indeed, pronunciation is traditionally described as the "Cinderella" area of foreign-language teaching (Kelly, 1969 in Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 2) alluding to the neglect shown towards it by many teachers. Grammar and vocabulary, for example, have been studied and taught much longer than pronunciation. Derwing and Munro affirm that 'the study of pronunciation has been marginalized within the field of applied linguistics' (2005: 379) and for this reason, little direction or guidance is given to teachers who are often left to rely on their own intuitions. As a result, pronunciation is not always successfully taught and sometimes it is not even included in students' curricula. Harmer (2001: 183) agrees that in general little attempt to teach pronunciation is made while 'almost all English teachers get students to study grammar and vocabulary, practice functional dialogues, take part in productive skill activities and become competent in listening and reading'. Consequently, input language skills (i.e. listening and reading) tend to be honed in class, as well as writing, whereas speaking, the other basic output language skill, seems to be overshadowed.

Living in a globalized world in which English plays the important role of Lingua Franca and communication is encouraged by political and economic relations among states, the possibility of travelling easily and social media, spoken English should be at the centre of any English course, especially in EFL contexts. While talking in English with speakers of different first languages, it is important to be as intelligible and comprehensible as possible in order not to have communication breakdowns. Indeed, intelligibility and comprehensibility should be considered the real goal of pronunciation teaching and learning and not the less realistic native-like acquisition. Moreover, pronunciation should be given greater consideration since it 'is possibly the greatest single barrier to successful communication' (Jenkins, 2000: 83) and languages diverge the most from each other linguistically precisely in the area of pronunciation. As a result, it is pronunciation that most threatens intelligibility. However, pronunciation lessons, when included in students' curricula, are usually only based on segments, since 'many traditional approaches tend to focus more on language segments than on

suprasegmentals' (Busà, 2008a:168). Consequently, teachers report a lack of competence teaching suprasegmentals and tend to focus on single sounds not covering, for example, stress and intonation. Busà (2008b:118) suggests that:

> 'because, in speech, segmentals and suprasegmentals overlap and contribute to each other in many important ways, in pronunciation classes they should be taught together rather than separately. Focusing on stress, rhythm and intonation can help learners to improve their overall pronunciation, and to sound more natural, and can lead to more comprehensible speech as well as better understanding of other people's speech'.

This strong interaction between segmental and suprasegmental features can be noticed in the frequently overlooked connected speech. Connected speech refers to continuous sequences of sounds that form utterances or conversations in spoken language. It is commonly described in terms of different connected speech processes (CSPs) which are important in a number of areas including teaching English to second or foreign language learners (Reed and Levis, 2015: 159). Both students' listening comprehension and speaking can benefit from CSPs training. Various studies have investigated the effectiveness of connected speech teaching on the perception and production of ESL/EFL learners obtaining positive results. Accordingly, Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 21) affirm that connected speech processes 'should be a part of the language teaching curriculum, and yet they have received little attention in practice'. In particular, 'very little research has been conducted on CSPs production' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 169).

As suggested by the title, this dissertation attempts to explore English pronunciation teaching and learning focusing on connected speech in order to contribute to filling the gap in CSPs research and practice. Indeed, a study was conducted for the purpose of this dissertation and it aims to answer the following research question: What impact does CSPs training have on the pronunciation of intermediate proficiency learners of English?

In the first chapter, English pronunciation with its segmental and suprasegmental features will be discussed. Definitions and examples of vowels, diphthongs, consonants, stress, intonation and rhythm all related to the English language in contrast with other languages such as Italian will be found.

The second chapter, on the other hand, will concern entirely connected speech giving more than one definition of this relatively unknown topic and analysing the various connected speech processes (CSPs). In particular, Alameen and Levis' categorisation of CSPs (Reed and Levis, 2015: 162) will be presented. The six categories identified by these researchers are linking, deletion, insertion, modification, reduction and multiple processes.

After these two introductory chapters on linguistic topics, two chapters on language teaching will follow. Indeed, the third chapter will deal with English pronunciation teaching in general. Before discussing its history along with the various teaching methods and approaches, the global status of English will be introduced in order to explain why English pronunciation is usually considered important. The concepts of English as a Lingua Franca and World Standard Englishes will be discussed. At the end of the chapter, how English pronunciation is taught today will be analysed referring to the most recent *Common European Framework of Reference* (Council of Europe, 2018) in which phonological control descriptors were finally included showing that the interest towards pronunciation teaching and learning is officially growing. Moreover, the related concepts of intelligibility and comprehensibility will be described as the authentic goal that students should pursue in learning pronunciation.

The fourth and last chapter will cover connected speech teaching through the above-mentioned online classroom study. Before analysing this linguistic study in detail, the reason why connected speech should be taught will be explained referring to studies on the topic. Then, my own experience of an online internship with a second-year high school class composed by nineteen Italian students will be described. Together with four lessons on pronunciation and connected speech, students were asked to do a connected speech test as homework. The test was composed by a pre-test and a post-test and students' opinion about the test and the CSPs training was investigated through an online survey. Consequently, the last subsections of chapter four will concern the connected speech test with its method, results and discussion, and the student opinion survey. Through the analysis of the collected data, this dissertation will show what impact CSPs training has on the pronunciation of the nineteen B1 level EFL students. More in general, this dissertation aims to contribute to researches on connected speech teaching and learning made by linguists until this time.

CHAPTER 1 – Pronunciation: segmental and suprasegmental features of English.

1.1 What is pronunciation?

Pronunciation commonly refers to the way in which sounds are pronounced in speaking and it includes different aspects, such as articulation, stress, linking and intonation. Speech can be described as a series of meaningful sounds and silences; in this regard, an important subdivision can be found in linguistics between phonetics and phonology. The former represents 'the scientific description of speech sounds across languages' and the latter refers to 'the study of these sounds patterns within a particular language', (Rogerson-Revell, 2011: 2). In other words, 'the phonetics of a language concerns the concrete characteristics (articulatory, acoustic, auditory) of the sounds used in languages while phonology concerns how sounds function in a systemic way in a particular language' (Cruttenden, 2014: 3). Both phonetics and phonology are covered by the term 'pronunciation', which is typically described as consisting of segmentals and suprasegmentals, better known as prosody (Levis and Munro, 2018; Reed and Levis, 2015; Cruttenden, 2014; Underhill, 2005). David Crystal, in *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2008: 426), explains the above-mentioned concepts as follows:

> **segment** (n.) [...] The term is especially used in phonetics, where the smallest perceptible discrete unit is referred to as a phone. [...] In phonology, a major division is often made into segmental and suprasegmental (or non-segmental) categories. Segmental phonology analyses the speech into distinctive units, or phonemes (= 'segmental phonemes'), which have a fairly direct correspondence with phonetic segments (alternative approaches involve analysis in terms of distinctive features and prosodies). Suprasegmental or non-segmental phonology analyses those features of speech which extend over more than one segment, such as intonation or (in some theories) vowel harmony. [...]

In this chapter, both the segmental and the suprasegmental features related to the pronunciation of the English language will be discussed. First, individual sounds and phonemes such as vowels, diphthongs and consonants will be explained, and then larger chunks of speech that span a number of segments will be analysed considering length, loudness, pitch, stress, intonation and rhythm. Moreover, examples of whole words and phrases will be provided and analysed.

1.2 Segmental features.

The idea of the segmentation and transcription of single sounds dates back to 1886 when the International Phonetic Association was founded in Paris with the aim of creating an international phonetic alphabet (Smith, 2000; Reed and Levis, 2015: 71-71). In fact, this first attempt consisted in the development of three phonetic alphabets designed primarily for English, French, and German, in order to facilitate the teaching of the pronunciation of these foreign languages in schools. Many charts that included other European and non-European languages with a more international approach were elaborated over time and culminated with the publication of the last instalment in the series *The Principles of the International Phonetic Association* in 1949. *The Principles* was then superseded by the *Handbook of the IPA* in 1999, year in which the currently used International Phonetic Alphabet was created after the so-called Kiel Convention which consisted in the revision of the alphabet and the principles.
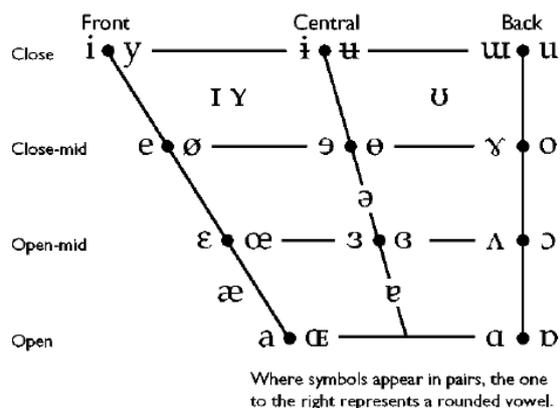
Figure 1: *The International Phonetic Alphabet: vowels and consonants.* Cruttenden (2014: 33).

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k g	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	N		
Trill	B			r					R		
Tap or Flap		ⱱ		ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	L			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

Figure 1 shows the vowel trapezium and the consonant chart that constitute the IPA and that were published in the 2005 revised version of the handbook. The IPA was conceived as, and it continues to be, an important tool that gives the opportunity to use

the same symbols for the same or similar sounds in all the languages existing in the world. In terms of transcription (Reed and Levis, 2015: 72-73), language-independent sounds are transcribed using IPA symbols enclosed in phonetic square brackets: [ ]. Phonemic slashes, on the other hand, are used to specify the contrastive sounds that can be found in a specific language. These sounds are called phonemes and they are responsible for creating new words. When two words differ by a single sound, they constitute a minimal pair, for example /p/ and /b/ in the words *pat* and *bat*. Another important concept is that of the allophone, that is variants of a phoneme such as the alveolar /t/ in *eight* in contrast to the dental /t/ in *eighth* (Crystal, 2008: 20).

In the following subsections, the segmental features typical of the English language will be discussed. However, before analysing the English vowels, diphthongs and consonants, it is important to consider three essential parameters used to classify a sound: manner of articulation, place of articulation and voicing (Graffi and Scalise, 2002: 75-111; Underhill, 2015: 2). The first one refers to the different positions of the phonetic organs during the production of a sound in the vocal tract. The second one gives information about the place where the air flow is modified, that is blocked or released. The last one, voicing, is created by the vibrations of the vocal cords, so that a sound can be voiced or, if there is no vibration, unvoiced. Manner of articulation, place of articulation and voicing are strictly connected with the human vocal tract, which is called phonetic apparatus and it includes many organs such as the lips, tongue and soft palate (see Figure 2). A sound normally consists in the air released by the lungs that rises along the trachea and through the larynx where the vocal cords are located. Then the air rises through the pharynx and it arrives in the oral cavity where it can be released only through the mouth if the soft palate rises or, if it remains still, also through the nasal cavity creating nasal sounds.
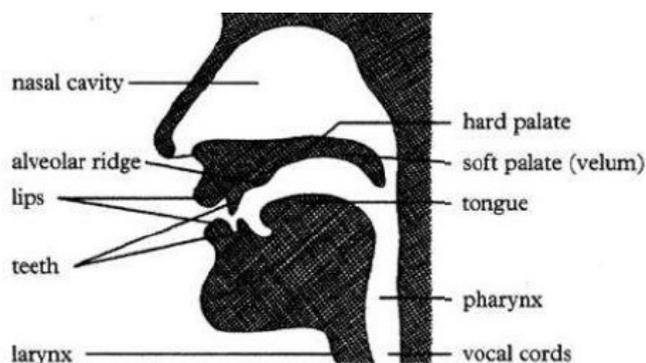
Figure 2: *The phonetic apparatus.* Underhill (2005: 2).

1.2.1 Vowels.

Simple vowels are also called monophthongs and they all consist in voiced sounds with no obstruction to the exit of air through the mouth. Underhill (2005: 4) affirms that 'the distinguishing quality of each vowel is produced by the shape and size of the resonant space in the mouth, which is controlled by the position and shape of the tongue, lips and jaw'. In particular, each sound is determined by the combination of different variables: depending on the horizontal tongue position, a vowel can be front, centre or back; it can be high, mid or low according to the vertical tongue position; and depending on the lip position, a vowel can be rounded, neutral or spread. Moreover, a vowel can be long or short according to its length or duration. In the first case, it is marked by a colon in the IPA as for the long [i:] present in the word "sheep".

Every language has a different phonological system that includes just some of the phonemes present in the IPA. English is very rich in vowel sounds since it includes 12 different vowels which are arranged in the vowel trapezium, the traditional mouth shaped scheme devised by Daniel Jones in his *Cardinal Vowel* system at the beginning of the 20th century (Cruttenden, 2014: 36). Figure 3 clearly shows how the English vowels are divided according to the tongue position since it takes in consideration both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. In this respect, Reed and Levis (2015: 76) affirm that 'the quality of the vowels can be shown on a vowel quadrilateral in which the front vowels are towards the left while the back vowels are on the right and closed vowels are at the top while open vowels are near the bottom'.
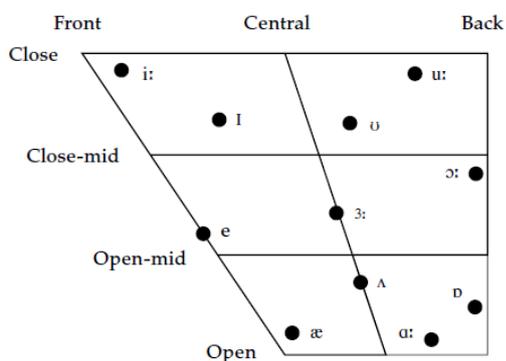
Figure 3: *The vowel trapezium of the English monophthongs.* Reed and Levis (2015: 77).

Regarding lip movement, Underhill (2005: 13) states that this variable is 'easier to detect visually, and for many people easier to sense internally than the movement of the tongue'. Indeed, lip position is not shown in the vowel trapezium, but other models such

as the one in Figure 4, show that in English /uː/, /ʊ/, /ɔː/, and /ɒ/ are all rounded (Reed and Levis, 2015: 76, Underhill, 2005: 15), while the other 8 vowels have a more spread or neutral position .
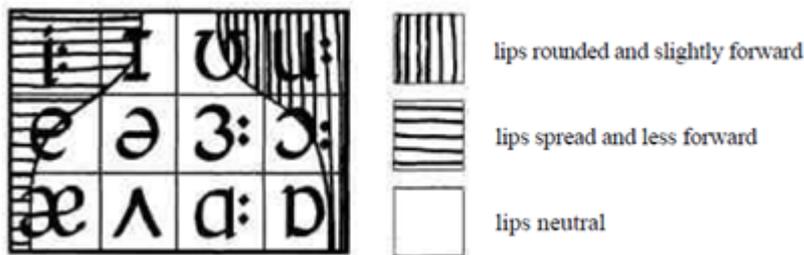
Figure 4: *Lip position superimposed on the monophthong chart.* Underhill (2005: 15).

Considering all the above-mentioned variables, a detailed list (Baker, 2006; Cruttenden, 2014) that includes an example for each English vowel is provided:

- /**i**ː/ is the long, high-front and unrounded (with spread lips) vowel present in the word *sheep*;

- /**ɪ**/ is the short, high-front and unrounded (with loosely spread lips) vowel present in the word *ship*;

- /**e**/ is the short, mid-front and unrounded (with loosely spread lips) vowel present in the word *men*;

- /**æ**/ is the short, low-front and unrounded (with neutrally open lips) vowel present in the word *cat*;

- /**ɑː**/ is the long, low-back and unrounded (with neutrally open lips) vowel present in the word *part*;

- /**ɒ**/ is the short, low-back and rounded vowel (with slightly rounded lips) present in the word *but*;

- /**ɔː**/ is the long, mid-back and rounded (with medium lip-rounding) vowel present in the word *sport*;

- /**ʊ**/ is the short, high-back and rounded vowel (with loosely rounded lips) present in the word *book*;

- /**u**ː/ is the long high-back and rounded (with closely rounded lips) vowel present in the word *room*;

- /**ʌ**/ is the short, low-central and unrounded vowel (with neutrally open lips) present in the word *but*;

- /**ɜ**ː/ is the long, mid-central and unrounded (with neutrally open lips) vowel present in the word *bird*;

- /ə/ is the short, mid-central and unrounded (with neutrally open lips) vowel present in the word *about*.

As Underhill (2005: 11) affirms, the last vowel of the previous list, that is 'the central vowel /ə/, can claim to be the "smallest" English vowel sound and yet it is the only phoneme with its own name' and it is called schwa. David Crystal, in *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2008: 424), describes this vowel sound as follows:

> **schwa/shwa** /ʃwɑː/ (n.) The usual name for the neutral vowel [ə], heard in English at the beginning of such words as ago, amaze, or in the middle of afterwards; sometimes called the indefinite vowel. It is a particularly frequent vowel in English, as it is the one most commonly heard when a stressed vowel becomes unstressed, e.g. telegraph becoming telegraphy /'teləgrɑːf / v. /tə'legrəfi /. It is also the usual pronunciation of the vowel in such words as the, a, an, and. The term 'schwa' comes from the German name of a vowel of this central quality found in Hebrew.

As hinted in the previous description, the schwa sound /ə/ is the most common vowel sound in the English language (Underhill, 2005: 11; Levis and Munro, 2018 Vol.I:1). Indeed, it coincides with the pronunciation of any written vowel (a, e, i, o, u) when they are unstressed, since it is 'the unstressed reflex of most vowel phonemes' (Levis and Munro, 2018 Vol.I:1). The alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables is particularly important in English since it is a stress-timed language. This means that English pronunciation displays a particular type of rhythm determined by the fact that 'the stressed syllables recur at regular intervals of time regardless of the number of intervening unstressed syllables' (Crystal, 2008: 456).

1.2.2 Diphthongs.

Diphthongs are also called gliding vowels because they share the features of vowel sounds being composed by the combination of two vowels. However, unlike monophthongs that are considered relatively pure because of their constancy, diphthongs have a shifting quality since they 'glide from one vowel to another within a single syllable' (Underhill, 2005: 22). Underhill (2005: 4) explains that the difference lies in the fact that 'there is one mouth posture at the beginning of the vowel sound, and another at the end'. Therefore, 'the resulting glide between these two tongue and lip positions gives the diphthongs its characteristic "two-sound" quality'. A definition by David Crystal (2008: 146) of these complex vowel sounds follows:

> **diphthong** (n.) A term used in the phonetic classification of vowel sounds on the basis of their manner of articulation: it refers to a vowel where there is a single (perceptual) noticeable change in quality during a syllable, as in English *beer, time, loud*. [...] Diphthongs, or 'gliding vowels', are usually classified into phonetic types, depending on which of the two elements is the more sonorous: 'falling' (or 'descending') diphthongs have the first element stressed, as in the majority of the examples; on the other hand, 'rising' (or 'ascending') diphthongs have the second element stressed, as in a possible analysis of English *cue* [kiu]. Other classifications of diphthongal types exist, in terms of the extent of their movement (e.g. whether it is 'wide' or 'narrow') and their direction (whether the diphthong is 'centring' or not, i.e. ending with a central vowel). [...] Diphthongs are transcribed using symbols which represent the extremes of vowel movement between the two positions, as in [aɪ] for the unit in *fine*.

Eight diphthongs can be found in the English language and they can be divided into three categories depending on the vowel they glide towards (Underhill, 2005: 22-28; Reed and Levis, 2015: 77-79). First, /ɪə/, /ʊə/ and /eə/ are centring diphthongs since they all glide towards the mid-central schwa sound /ə/. Examples of these three gliding vowels can be found in <u>ear</u>, <u>tour</u> and <u>air</u>. Second, the diphthongs /eɪ/, /ɔɪ/ and /aɪ/ are present, for example, in the English words <u>day</u>, <u>boy</u>, and <u>I</u>, and they all glide towards the high-front /ɪ/ vowel. Third, /əʊ/ and /aʊ/ are the two diphthongs gliding to the high-back vowel /ʊ/ and examples of these two sounds can be found in <u>so</u> and <u>out</u>. In Figure 5, the vowel trapezium on the left shows the typical movement from one vowel sound to another present in each diphthong, whereas the chart on the right shows the eight diphthongs grouped in three vertical columns according to their second element.

Figure 5: The *English diphthongs.* Underhill (2005: 22).

Concerning length and stress, diphthongs tend to have 'about the duration of a long vowel, and most of this duration is focused on the first element' (Underhill, 2005: 27).

1.2.3 Consonants.

In the previous subsections, vowels and diphthongs have been described as voiced sounds that 'require the vocal tract to be open so that the air escapes unobstructed' (Underhill, 2005: 29). By contrast, consonants are made by 'restricting or blocking the

air flow in some physical way, and this restriction, or the release of the restriction, is what gives the consonant its characteristic sound' (Underhill, 2005: 29). Moreover, Underhill gives another definition that underlines the different role of consonants and vowels in determining syllables, that is units 'of pronunciation typically larger than a sound and smaller than a word' (Crystal, 2008: 467). While vowels represent the centres or focal points of syllables being found either on their own or between consonants, single consonants or clusters of consonants tend to define the beginnings and ends of syllables.

Figure 6: *The English consonants.* Underhill (2005: 30).

Figure 6 shows the 24 IPA symbols that compose the consonants present in most English varieties. As already mentioned, consonants are typically described considering three variables (Underhill, 2005: 30; Reed and Levis, 2015: 73), i.e. voicing, place of articulation and manner of articulation. According to Cruttenden (2014: 28), consonantal articulations are so complex that a description needs to include answers to the following questions in order to be considered complete:

1. Is the airstream set in motion by the lungs or by some other means? (pulmonic or non-pulmonic);

2. Is the airstream forced outwards or sucked inwards? (egressive or ingressive)

3. Do the vocal cords vibrate or not? (voiced or unvoiced);

4. Is the soft palate raised, directing the airstream wholly through the mouth, or lowered, allowing the passage of air through the nose? (oral, or nasal or nasalised);

5. At what point or points and between what organs does closure or narrowing take place? (place of articulation);

6. What is the type of closure or narrowing at the point of articulation? (manner of articulation).

As for vowels, detailed lists describing English consonants will be provided starting from the first row of the phonemic chart (see Figure 6 and Figure 7).
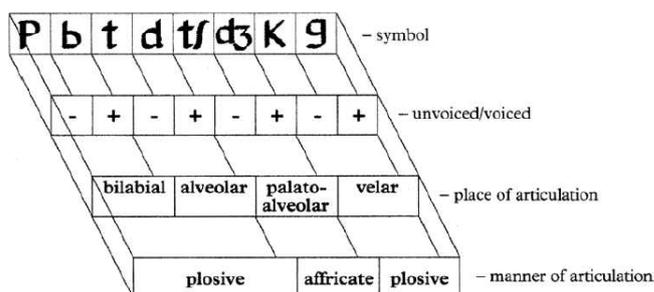
Figure 7: *Diagrammatic summary of plosives and affricates.* Underhill (2005: 36).

Figure 7 clearly shows the English plosives and affricates, names that come from the manner of articulation of these consonants. The former are the consonant sounds 'made when a complete closure in the vocal tract is suddenly released; the air pressure which had built up behind the closure rushes out with an explosive sound, hence the term' (Crystal, 2008: 372). The latter are 'made when the air-pressure behind a complete closure in the vocal tract is gradually released; the initial release produces a plosive, but the separation which follows is sufficiently slow to produce audible friction, and there is thus a fricative element in the sound also' (Crystal, 2008: 16). Indeed, the phonemic symbols of the affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ show that they are composed by the merging together of two consonants that happen almost at the same time, unlike diphthongs in which the two distinctive vowel sounds are clearly audible. Concerning the place of articulation (Cruttenden, 20014: 29; Underhill, 2005: 35; Reed and Levis, 2015: 73-75), these first eight consonants are divided into four categories depending on where air flow on the initial consonants is blocked and released: on the two lips coming together (bilabial); on the alveolar ridge with the blade, i.e. the front part of the tongue (alveolar); on the junction between the alveolar ridge and the hard palate with the blade (palato-alveolar); on the soft palate or velum with the back of the tongue (velar). For each pair of consonants, the first one is unvoiced and the second one voiced.

The following list summarizes the features of the first-row consonants providing an example for each one.

- /**p**/ is the unvoiced, bilabial plosive present in the word *pie*;
- /**b**/ is the voiced, bilabial plosive present in the word *by*;
- /**t**/ is the unvoiced, alveolar plosive present in the word *too*;

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- **/d/** is the voiced, alveolar plosive present in the word _do_;

- **/tʃ/** is the unvoiced, palato-alveolar affricate present in the word _cheese_;

- **/dʒ/** is the voiced, palato-alveolar affricate present in the word _jam_;

- **/k/** is the unvoiced, velar plosive present in the word _Kate_;

- **/g/** is the voiced, velar plosive present in the word _gate_.

Another unvoiced plosive present in some varieties of English is the glottal stop /ʔ/. Underhill (2005: 37) describes it as follows:

> The glottal stop is a plosive produced by a complete block of air flow at the glottis (the space between the vocal cords). The air pressure is then suddenly released. The stop itself is perceived as a silence beginning with the sudden cessation of the previous sound and ended by the sudden onset of the following sound. It can be described as an unvoiced glottal plosive (or stop), and is denoted by the symbol /ʔ/.

Being more a silence or a voiceless sound that cannot change the meaning of a word, it is not given a phonemic status and for this reason it is not included on the phonemic chart. However, Underhill (2005:37) affirms that the glottal stop is frequently used especially in rapid colloquial speech and he provides a list with examples of use stating that the glottal stop can be used:

1. to give emphasis to a syllable beginning with a vowel, e.g. _Am I?_ /ʔæm aɪ/, _Excellent!_ /ʔeksələnt/, _It's easy!_ /ɪtsʔ iːzi/;

2. between adjacent vowels belonging to different syllables (instead of a glide), e.g. co-operate /kəʊʔɒpəreɪt/;

3. to avoid an intrusive /r/, e.g. I saw it /aɪ sɔːʔ ɪt/

4. to replace or reinforce an unvoiced plosive /p, t, k/ at the end of words, e.g. what /wɒʔ/, shock /ʃɒʔ/, sip /sɪʔ/.
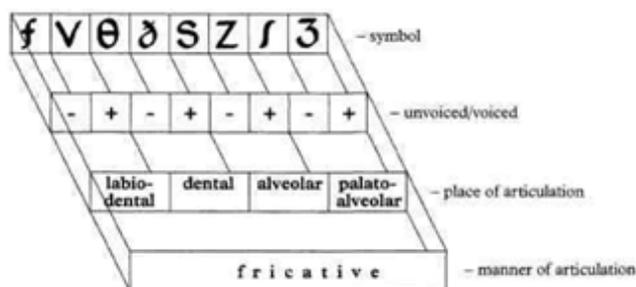
Figure 8: _Diagrammatic summary of fricatives._ Underhill (2005: 41).

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The second row of the phonemic chart (see Figure 6 and 8) includes the fricatives. The name comes from the manner of articulation of these consonants, which characterized by an audible air friction that is produced when two organs come close together without having a complete closure (Crystal, 2008: 199; Reed and Levis, 2015: 31). These eight fricatives are divided into four categories according to the place of articulation, since there are 'four places in the mouth where the restriction to the air flow is made, each place yielding two phonemes, one voiced and one unvoiced' (Underhill, 2005: 39). The first type of friction is placed between the bottom lip and the top front teeth (labio-dental), the second one between the tongue tip and the upper teeth (dental), the third one between the blade of the tongue and the alveolar ridge (alveolar) and the last one between the centre of the tongue and the hard palate (palato-alveolar).

The following list summarizes the features of the second-row consonants providing an example for each consonant sound.

- /**f**/ is the unvoiced, labio-dental fricative present in the word _fire_;

- /**v**/ is the voiced, labio-dental fricative present in the word _via_;

- /**θ**/ is the unvoiced, dental fricative present in the word _three_;

- /**ð**/ is the voiced, dental fricative present in the word _then_;

- /**s**/ is the unvoiced, alveolar fricative present in the word _sue_;

- /**z**/ is the voiced, alveolar fricative present in the word _zoo_;

- /**ʃ**/ is the unvoiced, palato-alveolar fricative present in the word _sure_;

- /**ʒ**/ is the voiced, palato-alveolar fricative present in the word _measure_.
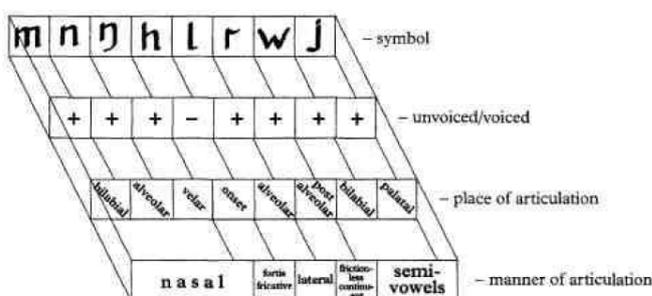
Figure 9: _Diagrammatic summary of nasals, /h/, /l/, /r/ and semi-vowels._ Underhill (2005: 47).

The third row of the phonemic chart (see Figure 6 and 9) consists of different categories of consonants always based on the manner of articulation: three nasals called in this

way because in producing them 'the soft palate is lowered to allow an audible escape of air through the nose' (Crystal, 2008: 320); the fortis fricative /h/, that is a fricative 'made with a relatively strong degree of muscular effort and breath force' (Crystal, 2008: 197) with the friction located 'in the vocal tract, which is already shaped in readiness for the following vowel' (Underhill, 2005: 43); the lateral /l/, produced by the air emission over each side of the tongue; the frictionless continuant /r/, call in this way because it is produced without a friction and with an incomplete closure of the vocal tract (Crystal, 2008: 110); the last two consonants of the row are called semivowels since they are produced without friction, closure or air flow restriction as vowels, but 'they function as consonants in that they precede the main vowel of a syllable' (Underhill, 2005: 46). Concerning voicing, these consonants are all voiced except for the unvoiced /h/. As far as the place of articulation is concerned, the third row contains three new places: the onset in the /h/ sound, term that means "beginning" and it indicates that the mouth shape takes on the shape of the following vowel (Underhill, 2005: 43); the post-alveolar, since in producing the /r/ sound the tip of the tongue is 2raised towards the back of the alveolar ridge in a curled upwards position without friction (Crystal, 2008: 22; Underhill, 2005: 45); and the palatal position of the /j/ sound, 'characterized by the tongue being close to the palate' (Underhill, 2005: 46) and then it assumes the position of the following vowel since it always occurs initially.

The following list summarizes the features of the third-row consonants providing an example for each consonant sound.

- /**m**/ is the voiced, bilabial nasal present in the word _mum_;
- /**n**/ is the voiced, alveolar nasal present in the word _nanny_;
- /**ŋ**/ is the voiced, velar nasal present in the word _song_;
- /**h**/ is the unvoiced, fortis fricative onset present in the word _home_;
- /**l**/ is the voiced, alveolar lateral present in the word _love_;
- /**r**/ is the voiced, post alveolar frictionless continuant present in the word _room_;
- /**w**/ is the voiced, bilabial semivowel present in the word _wine_;
- /**j**/ is the voiced, palatal semivowel present in the word _you_.

1.3 Suprasegmental features.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the adjective "suprasegmental" refers to 'a vocal effect which extends over more than one sound segment in an utterance' (Crystal, 2008: 466) and 'suprasegmentals include features such as word stress, rhythm, intonation and tone' (Levis and Munro, 2018 Vol.I:1). Indeed, singular segments such as phonemes or even syllables (i.e. units of pronunciation typically larger that a single sound and smaller than a word) and words, are the units that people use together in speech in order to give meaning to their thoughts. However, communication is usually characterized by complex sentences and the message is not simply derived from the mathematical addition of each unit, since other suprasegmental factors intervene carrying important meanings with them. In this regard, Levis and Munro (2018 Vol.I:1) state that 'segmentals and suprasegmentals are interdependent' and Cruttenden (2014: 18) affirms:

> When we listen a continuous utterance, we perceive an ever-changing pattern of sound. When it is a question of our own language, we are not conscious of all the complexities of pattern which reach our ears: we tend consciously to perceive and interpret only those sound features which are relevant to the intelligibility of our language. Nevertheless, despite this linguistic selection that we ultimately make, we are aware that this changing pattern consists of variations of different kinds: of sound quality – we hear a variety of vowels and consonants; of pitch – we appreciate the melody, or intonation, of the utterance; of amplitude – some sounds or syllables sound 'louder' than others; and of length – some sound will be longer to our ears than others.

A recurring term used in suprasegmental phonetics and phonology is prosody. Prosody is used as a synonym for suprasegmental 'to refer collectively to variations in pitch, loudness, tempo and rhythm' (Crystal, 2008: 393) and for this reason the expression *prosodic features* will be encountered. In the following subsections, the three main prosodic features and the concepts of stress, rhythm and intonation will be explained in more detail always referring to the English language. The last suprasegmental feature, that is connected speech, will be fully covered in the second chapter since the study illustrated at the end of this dissertation is focused on this teaching topic, as the title itself suggests.

1.3.1 Length, loudness and pitch.

The main suprasegmental or prosodic features of speech are those of length, pitch, and loudness. The rhythm of speech is created by the combination of these three elements

together with pauses which break up the flow of speech. Cruttenden (1997: 2) describes the three prosodic features as follows:

> Pitch concerns the varying height of the pitch of the voice over one syllable or over a number of successive syllables; length concerns the relative duration of a number of successive syllables or the duration of a given syllable in another environment; loudness concerns changes of loudness within one syllable or the relative loudness of a number of successive syllables.

Therefore, length regards the duration of the linguistic units and apart from the innate length of vowels and the fact that syllables tend to be longer before a pause, unaccented syllables are always shorter that the accented ones. Loudness, on the other hand, is related to the breath-force used by a speaker and also this intensity is generally focused on accented syllables. Finally, pitch depends on the rate of vibration of the vocal cords within the larynx and this variation is caused by the length and tension of the vocal cords combined with the pressure of air below the larynx. Linguistically speaking, those 'ups' and 'downs' are significant because they carry meanings which can even change the sense of the whole sentence. Length, loudness and pitch are not the only prosodic features, for example there are also tempo, i.e. the speed of speaking, and pause. However, the relationship between these three elements is the most important and complex one while speaking because 'they conspire in varying degrees in many languages to give some syllables prominence when compared with other syllables' (Cruttenden, 1997: 7).

1.3.2 Stress.

As mentioned at the end of 1.2.1, English is a stress-timed language meaning that there normally is a regular pattern of stressed syllables in each utterance because of vowel reduction which occurs in unstressed syllables and function words (i.e. determiners, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, modals, qualifiers, and question words). On the contrary, other languages have different rhythmic patterns as Figure 10 shows using different colours and, in particular, stress-timed languages are marked in red. Italian and French are syllable-timed languages (marked in green), that is syllables tend to have the same weight, while Japanese is a mora-timed language (marked in blue) in which the minimal unit is not the syllable, but the mora and the duration of every mora is equal as for syllable-timed languages. Other rhythmic patterns are mixed,

such as Brazilian Portuguese which is a mix mora-syllable timed language (marked in orange) and Turkish is a mix stress-syllable timed language (marked in yellow).
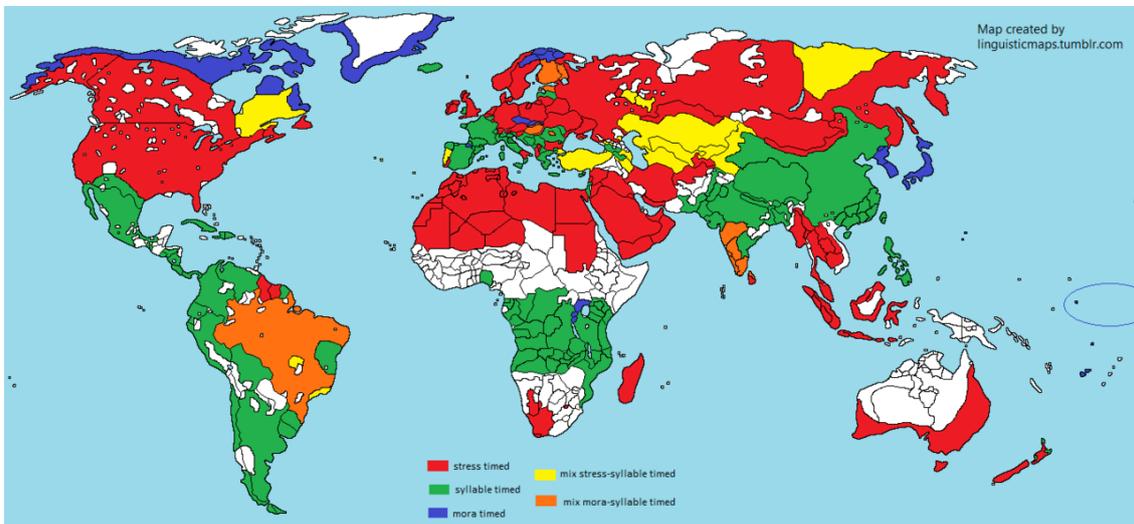
Figure 10: *Rhythmic patterns in languages.*

Being a stress-timed language, it seems clear that stress is particularly important in English and it contributes to creating its peculiar rhythm. According to Derwing and Munro (2015), stress can be seen as the prominence that a particular element receives within a word or longer utterance and which causes it to stand out from other unstressed elements. As a result, stressed syllables tend to be longer, louder and higher pitched, but not necessarily all three together. Crystal (2008: 454) defines this suprasegmental feature as follows:

> **stress** (n.) A term used in phonetics to refer to the degree of force used in producing a syllable. The usual distinction is between stressed and unstressed syllables, the former being more prominent than the latter (and marked in transcription with a raised vertical line [']. The prominence is usually due to an increase in loudness of the stressed syllable, but increases in length and often pitch may contribute to the overall impression of prominence. In popular usage, 'stress' is usually equated with an undifferentiated notion of 'emphasis' or 'strength'. From the viewpoint of phonology, the main function of stress is to provide a means of distinguishing degrees of emphasis or contrast in sentences (**sentence stress**), as in *The big man looks angry*; the term **contrastive stress** is often used for this function. Many pairs of words and word sequences can also be distinguished using stress variation (**lexical stress** or **word stress**) as in the contrast between *An increase in pay is needed* and *I'm going to increase his pay* – /ˈɪŋkriːs/ v. /ɪŋˈkriːs/– or the distinction between '*black* '*bird* and '*black-bird*. [...]

Word-stress is also called primary stress and it refers to the pronunciation of one syllable of a multisyllabic word with greater emphasis than the other syllables in the

word. In many languages, word-stress is easily predictable because almost all words have it regularly in a certain position (Graffi and Scalise, 2002: 104-107). For example, in Czech and Finnish word-stress is typically on the first syllable; in Italian and Spanish, it is typically on the penultimate syllable; and in French and Turkish it falls on the final syllable. Other languages, such as English, have variable stress, that is they have little predictability in their word-stress. Moreover, as Wells (2006: 3) points out, 'some languages use stress placement lexically' in order to distinguish between different words in the dictionary. For example, many words in English are written in the same way referring to both the noun and the verb. However, pronouncing them correctly with the stress on the first syllable for most 2-syllable nouns and on the last one for most 2-syllable verbs, it is possible to distinguish between word classes, as Table 1 shows.

NOUN	VERB
<u>ex</u>port	ex<u>port</u>
<u>im</u>port	im<u>port</u>
<u>in</u>crease	in<u>crease</u>
<u>in</u>sult	in<u>sult</u>
<u>per</u>mit	per<u>mit</u>
<u>pro</u>duce	pro<u>duce</u>
<u>pro</u>gress	pro<u>gress</u>
<u>trans</u>fer	trans<u>fer</u>

Table 1: *Stress variation in pairs of English words.*

Cruttenden (1997: 15) affirms that English uses stress to indicate differences in grammatical class (see Table 1) or lexical meaning, such as the pairs of words *defer* (postpone) – *differ* (disagree, be different) and *billow* (swell) – *below* (lower than), which are differentiated solely by stress while speaking (Wells, 2006: 3). Regarding compounds, it can generally be stated that compound nouns usually have main stress on the first item, i.e. *framework*, *carpark*, *airbag*, while compound adjectives on the second part of the compound, i.e. bad-*tempered*, old-*fashioned*.

To some extent, both stress and accent can be related to syllable prominence. The difference between the two, as Cruttenden (1997) suggests, is that stress means prominence more in general while accent is limited to prominences where the pitch is

involved, that is the scale from low to high of a sound that can be noticed in a whole sentence (Crystal, 2008: 369). For this reason, sentence stress is linked with the concept of intonation explained in the following subsection.

1.3.3 Intonation.

Intonation can be described as the melody of speech and for this reason it is strictly linked with the concepts of sentence stress and pitch pattern, that is the way the voice goes up and down while speaking. Crystal (2008: 252) describes intonation as follows:

> **intonation** (n.) A term used in the study of suprasegmental phonology, referring to the distinctive use of patterns of pitch, or melody. The study of intonation is sometimes called intonology. Several ways of analysing intonation have been suggested: in some approaches, the pitch patterns are described as contours and analysed in terms of levels of pitch as pitch phonemes and morphemes; in others, the patterns are described as tone units or tone groups, analysed further as contrasts of nuclear tone, tonicity, etc. The three variables of pitch range, height and direction are generally distinguished. [...]

Regarding tone units, Halliday (1967 in Cruttenden, 1997) defines some important aspects of intonation as *the three T's*, that is tonality, tonicity and tone.

Firstly, tonality represents the division of the spoken material into chunks with an intonation pattern or tune for each intonation phrase (IP). The symbol | is usually used to divide IPs of the same utterance while the double symbol ‖ is used to divide IPs of different utterances. IP divisions depend on what the speaker wishes to highlight, whether the subject or a negation for example, and for this reason fixed rules are not observed.

Secondly, tonicity is the intentional emphasis that speakers decide to put on 'some words as important for the meaning they wish to convey' (Wells, 2006: 7). As a result, the important word is highlighted and more precisely its stressed syllable is accented. The last and most important accent in the IP is called the nucleus, that is the point in which a change in pitch occurs. What follows the nucleus is called the tail, while the accent that precedes the nucleus, if present, is the onset. The prehead is the part before the onset, while the head comes between the onset and the nucleus. The following sentence exemplifies the division of an IP into its different parts.

We are (') **plan**ning to fly to (') <u>It</u>aly.

⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇	⬇
prehead	onset	head	nucleus	tail

Finally, tone can be described as the kind of pitch movement the speaker associates with the nucleus: fall (\), rise (/), fall-rise (∨). Wells (2006: 10) describes the meaning of the different tones in the English language as follows:

> 'In general, a fall tends to indicate that the information conveyed is, or could be, complete, whereas a rise or fall-rise tends to indicate that there is something more to come (either from the same speaker, or from a different speaker). The default tone (= the tone used if there are no special circumstances) for statements, exclamations, commands and wh-questions is a fall, but for yes-no questions it is a rise. A fall-rise often signals particular implications'.

Some languages use tone lexically, changing the meaning of a word with the use of different tones. Thai, Mandarin, Japanese and Norwegian are examples of tone languages. The following is an example from Mandarin Chinese.

[ma] means: 1) 'mother' with a high tone;
2) 'hemp' with a rising tone;
3) 'horse' with a low fall-rise tone;
4) 'to scold' with a falling tone.

Most western languages, such as English, use tone intonationally and not lexically because the choice of tone does not alter the lexical identity of the word, but the non-lexical meaning may change through the use of different tones. Therefore, regarding standard English, a fall (\) may indicate definiteness and it is typical of Wh-word questions, declaratives, imperatives, exclamations and Question-Tags (chat or confirmation). A rise (/) may be sign of incompleteness and it is typical of Yes/No questions, Question-Tags (check or doubt) and Tag questions. A fall-rise (∨) usually expresses contrastive meaning and for example, it can be used in Yes/No questions. A rise-fall (/\) tends to be used in lists and choices.

Wells (2006: 1) argues that 'in studying intonation we study how the pitch of the voice rises and falls, and how speakers use this pitch variation to convey linguistic and pragmatic meaning'. Indeed, intonation covers several functions to signal meaning in the English language (Roach, 2009; Wells, 2006):

- The attitudinal function, i.e. the expression of feelings and emotions through different tones;
- The grammatical function, i.e. the signalling of the beginning and the end of grammatical units through tonality (demarcative function) and of clause types, such as statement vs. question, through tone (syntactic function);

- The accentual function, i.e. the indication of the focus of the information through the combination of tonicity and tone (tonic stress);
- The discourse function, i.e. the division of different sentences and paragraphs and the regulation of turn-taking in conversation;
- The psychological function, i.e. the organisation of speech into short units in order to be easily perceived, memorised and performed;
- The indexical function; i.e. the use of intonation as a marker of personal or social identity (sex, age, sexual orientation, origin, etc.).

1.3.4 Rhythm.

All the above-mentioned features contribute in creating the peculiar rhythm of the English language. The term "rhythm" refers to 'the perceived regularity of prominent units in speech' that 'may be stated in terms of patterns of stressed vs. unstressed syllables, syllable length (long vs. short) or pitch (high vs. low) – or some combination of the three (Crystal, 2008: 417). It has already been said that the rhythm of speech is created by the combination of the three main prosodic features together, that is length, loudness and pitch. However, it is also both stresses and the number of syllables that influence rhythm in all languages. Languages do not behave in the same way regarding rhythm, since some tend to give greater or lesser weight to the stress factor. As mentioned in the subsection about stress, there are stress-timed languages and syllable-timed languages. English, German and Russian are examples of stress-timed languages. Being stress-timed means that there is an equal amount of time from one stressed syllable to the next, not considering how many non-stressed syllables there are between them. Consequently, the English rhythm is characterized by the strong prominence of some syllables and for this reason even long sentences are pronounced quite fast. On the contrary, syllable-timed languages, such as French, Spanish and Italian, take an equal amount of time over each syllable because they are more or less always the same length, creating a more monotonic rhythm.

CHAPTER 2 – Connected Speech in the English language.

2.1 What is connected speech?

Connected Speech refers to continuous sequences of sounds that form utterances or conversations in spoken language. The tendency of words to "run together" is also called 'sandhi-variation – a term that derives from Sanskrit and refers to the "placing together" of sounds within and between words' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 163-164). Indeed, linear sequences of phonemes, as described in the part about segmental features in chapter 1, are abstractions 'from the continuously changing material of speech' because 'in reality speech is an ever-changing continuum of qualities, quantities, pitches and intensities' (Cruttenden, 2014: 239). In this regard, Reed and Levis (2015: 159) highlight the importance of connected speech for its strong interaction between segmental and suprasegmental features, which should be considered together in order to understand how speech really works. A clear and complete description of connected speech can be found in *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* by Crystal (2008: 101):

> **connected speech** A term used in linguistics to refer to spoken language when analysed as a continuous sequence, as in normal utterances and conversations. Its significance lies in the contrast implied with studies of linguistic units seen in isolation, such as an individual sound, word or phrase, which were the subject-matter of much traditional linguistic enquiry. It is now realized that important changes happen to these units when they are used in connected speech, as demonstrated by such processes as assimilation and elision, e.g. *and* becoming /n/ in such phrases as *boys and girls*.

As stated above, a clear difference can be noticed between words spoken in context and individual words spoken in isolation present for example in their citation forms, whose pronunciation is called dictionary pronunciation (Reed and Levis, 2015: 159). Underhill (2005: 58) states that as 'a word is not just the sum of its individual sounds [...], so connected speech is not just the sum of its individual words'. Indeed, 'continuous connected speech consists of a flow of sounds which are modified by a system of simplifications through which phonemes are connected, grouped and modified' (ibid). In everyday conversations, people tend to speak faster connecting the words present in their speech in order to simplify the articulation of adjacent sounds and 'the degree of simplification of sounds depends largely on the speed and context of the utterance, as

well as on the characteristics of the speaker' (Underhill, 2005: 59). Traditionally, a distinction is made between careful colloquial speech and rapid or casual colloquial speech (Cruttenden, 2014: 305; Underhill, 2005: 59; Reed and Levis, 2015: 159; Levis and Munro 2018 Vol.I:1). The former is mainly used in formal settings during which speakers tend to shape utterances in a more slow and careful way, while the latter occurs in less formal settings when speakers talk faster and informally to one another paying less care and attention to precise articulation. Reed and Levis (2015: 160) affirm that 'the more casual and informal the speech register is, the more the citation forms of words may change'. In connected speech, words may differ from citation forms in different ways concerning for example 'the word as a whole, e.g. weak forms in an unaccented situation; or [...] a word's accentual pattern, e.g. loss or movement of an accent due to its position in a larger accentual pattern; or [...] the sounds used at word boundaries' may be involved (Cruttenden, 2014:305). Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin (2010) affirm that changes in pronunciation occur within and between words because of juxtaposition with neighbouring sounds since it is the environment in which sounds occur that determines the different characteristics that they take while spoken in an utterance. Pronunciation changes in connected speech are the result of 'a simple law of economy, whereby the organs of speech, instead of taking a new position for each sound, tend to draw sounds together with the purpose of saving time and energy' (Clarey and Dixson, 1963 in Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 164). Indeed, many of the connected speech processes (CSPs) are 'the natural result of the various speech organs "cutting corners" as they perform their complex sequence of movements' (Underhill, 2005: 61). CSPs are defined by Hieke (1987 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 160) as 'the changes which conventional word forms undergo due to the temporal and articulatory constraints upon spontaneous, casual speech', and by Lass (1984 in Reed and Levis 2015: 160) as 'the processes that words undergo when their border sounds are blended with neighbouring sounds'. CSPs may be found to different extent in all languages as long as real spoken language is considered, as Pinker (1995 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 160) claims:

> In speech sound waves, one word runs into the next seamlessly; there are no little silences between spoken words the way there are white spaces between written words. We simply hallucinate word boundaries when we reach the edge of a stretch of sound that matches

some entry in our mental dictionary. This becomes apparent when we listen to speech in a foreign language: it is impossible to tell where one word ends and the next begins.

For example, French is notably known for its "liaison", that is the pronunciation of two consecutive words together by linking the final written consonant of the first word, which is usually silent, to the initial sound of the second one; the liaison occurs only if the second word begins with a vowel or a silent /h/ making this connected speech process possible (Crystal, 2008: 280). However, the stress-timed English is one of the languages that has a fairly substantial number of CSPs. Referring back to suprasegmental features, connected speech seems to be essential for both intonation and rhythm since the different connected speech processes allow a more fluid articulation of sounds and some adjustments are necessary to maintain the English prosodic and rhythmic patterns. In this regard, Clark and Yallop (1995 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 161) affirm that 'the primary function of CSPs in English is to promote the regularity of English rhythm by compressing syllables between stressed elements and facilitating their articulation so that regular running speech timing can be maintained'. For example, closed class words such as pronouns, conjunction and prepositions are always "reduced" in unstressed contexts and this is rhythmically necessary; consequently, the great majority of CSPs in English are 'completely acceptable, natural and a very essential part of speech' and 'not just the result of sloppy speech' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 160). Indeed, reduced forms are not only present in certain registers or styles of language because 'the truth is that connected speech is commonly used in all registers and styles, [...] but to varying degrees depending on the register and style involved' (Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006 : 5). For this reason, connected speech should not be underestimated, but further studied and taught. Nevertheless, studies on English connected speech are inconsistent as Reed and Levis (2015: 161) affirm:

> One problem that is noticeable in work on connected speech is the types of features that are included in the overall term. Both the names given to the connected speech processes and the phenomena included in connected speech vary widely in research and in ESL/EFL textbooks. Not only are the types and frequency of processes dependent on rhythmic constraints, speech register, and linguistic environment, the types of connected speech processes may vary among different varieties of English.

The two main problems concerning connected speech regard the different terminology used to identify the processes present in the English language and the infrequency of

relevant research in this linguistic area. Reed and Levis (2015: 161) state that 'not only do different researchers and material designers use different terms for CSPs (e.g. sandhi variations, reduced forms, absorption), they also do not always agree on how to classify them'. Indeed, a unique and widely shared classification of connected speech processes seems not to exist. For the purpose of the study conducted for this dissertation, the categorization designed by Alameen and Levis (see Figure 11) has been chosen for its clear and schematic organization of CSPs. Moreover, the terms used by the above-mentioned linguists can be considered didactically more suitable for their simplicity.
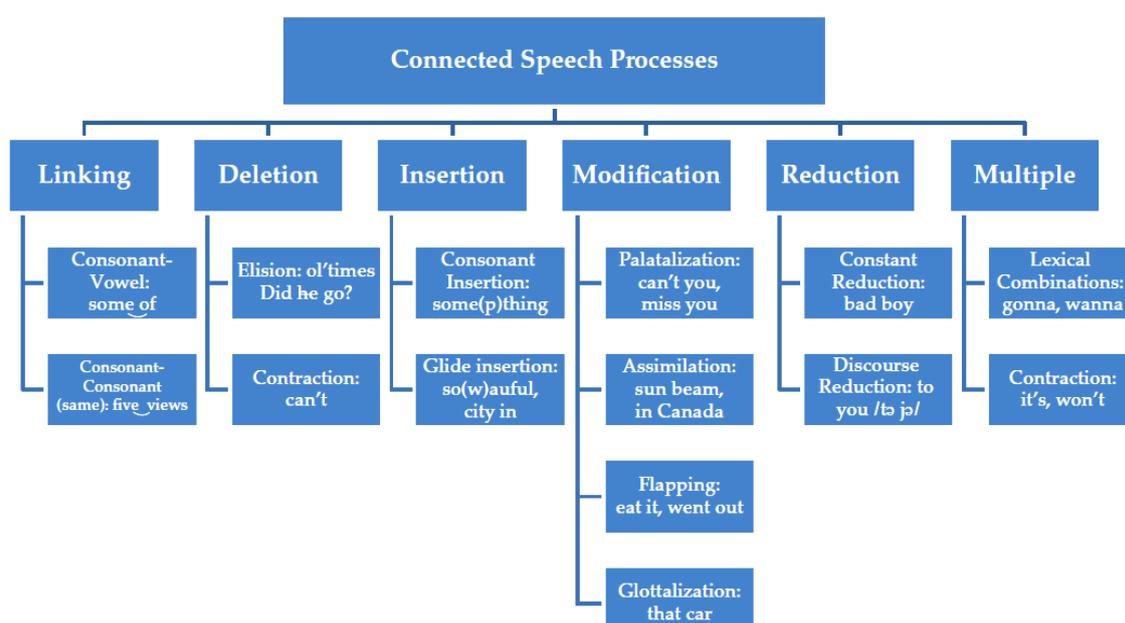
Figure 11: *A categorization of Connected Speech Processes (CSPs)*. Alameen and Levis (Reed and Levis, 2015: 162).

2.2 Connected Speech Processes (CSPs).

In the following subsections, the six main categories proposed by Alameen and Levis in Figure 11 will be explained always referring to other classifications and definitions which will integrate the original categorization with further material. For example, according to Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 163-174), 'the typical reductions in connected speech that occur in the day-to-day spoken discourse of English speakers' include:

- Contractions, blends and reductions: the written and/or oral distortions of word boundaries;

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- Linking: the smooth connection of sounds;

- Assimilation: the change in adjacent sounds to resemble each other more closely;

- Dissimilation: the change whereby adjacent sounds become less similar to each other;

- Deletion: the disappearance of a sound;

- Epenthesis: the addition of a sound.

Cruttenden (2014: 305-318), on the other hand, classifies CSPs in a more technical way. The variations that occur between isolated forms and context-influenced forms are organized in three categories on the basis of the following criteria: the first one concerns the neutralisation of weak forms, the second one the variation in the accentual patterns of words, and the last one the phonetic variations within words and at boundaries. In the last category, Cruttenden (2014: 308-318) includes:

- Allophonic variations;

- Phonemic variations;

- Voiced/voiceless variations;

- Nasality and labialisation;

- Variations of place;

- Elision;

- Liaison;

- Juncture.

Another example of classification of sounds and simplifications in connected speech can be found in Underhill (2005: 60-68) who covers the following CSPs:

- Assimilation;

- Elision;

- Vowel reduction;

- Strong and weak forms;

- Liaison;

- Contractions;

- Juncture.

The above-mentioned classifications show how connected speech terminology varies. Clarity and simplicity are at the basis of the teaching aim of this dissertation and, for this reason, the six categories identified by Alameen and Levis will be discussed below.

2.2.1 Linking.

The first category described by Alameen and Levis (see Figure 11) is linking, which is also referred as liaison by other researchers (Cruttenden, 2014; Underhill, 2005), that is the smooth connection of sounds. According to this categorisation, changes to the segments of the words are not involved for this connected speech process since it just refers to 'the connecting of the final sound of one word or syllable to the initial sound of the next' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 165). Reed and Levis (2015: 162) describe linking as follows:

> Its function in connected speech is to make two words sound like one without changes in segmental identity, as in the phrases *some_of* [sʌm əv] and *miss_Sarah* [mɪs sɛɹə]. Linking can result in resyllabification of the segments without changing them [sʌ.məv] or in lengthening of the linked segments in cases where both segments are identical, e.g., [mɪsːɛɹə]. Our description of linking is narrower than that used by many writers. We restrict linking to situations in which the ending sound of one word joins the initial sound of the next (a common enough occurrence) but only when there is no change in the character of the segments. Other types of links include changes, and we include them in different categories. For example, the /t/ in the phrase *hat band* would be realized as a glottal stop and lose its identity as a [t], i.e., [hæʔbænd]. We classify this under our category of modifications. In addition, in the phrase *so awful*, the linking [w] glide noticeably adds a segment to the pronunciation, i.e., [sowɔfəɫ]. We classify this under insertion.

For example, as far as Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 165-166), Cruttenden (2014: 316) and Underhill (2005: 65) are concerned, they all include the intrusive or inserted /w/, /j/ and /r/ in this category. However, it was preferred to classify these CSPs separately in order not to confuse middle-level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students since insertion of sounds can generally be considered more complicated than the smooth and more natural linking of sounds which is at the basis of connected speech. Three different types of linking without changes to the segments can be identified:

1. Final consonants > initial vowel sounds (C-V linking);
2. Final consonants > initial consonant sounds (C-C linking);
3. Final vowels > initial vowel sounds (V-V linking).

First, C-V linking is usually characterized by resyllabification (Reed and Levis, 2015: 162), i.e. the 'reanalysis which alters the location of syllable boundaries' (Crystal, 2008: 467), especially when the word or syllable ending in consonant is preceded by another consonant (consonant cluster). Consequently, 'the final consonant of the cluster is often pronounced as part of the following syllable' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 167), as in *lef/t͜ arm* and *fin/d͜ out*. When the consonant is situated after a vowel, it 'is often produced intervocalically, as if it belonged to both syllables' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 166), as in *kee͜ p͜ out* and *drea͜ m͜ on*. Second, C-C linking has two possible outcomes: lengthening and first consonant dropping. The former occurs 'when two identical, or geminate, consonants come together as a result of the juxtaposition of two words' resulting in 'one single, elongated articulation of the consonant' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 167) as in *short͜ time* [t:] and *bad͜ dog* [d:]. The latter occurs 'when a stop consonant is followed by another stop or by an affricate' (ibid.), thus facilitating the linking since the first stop is not released, as in *big͜ church* and *good͜ jury*. Third, V-V linking is characterized by the joined pronunciation of the two vowels without a break in the flow of speech as is *be͜ able* and *three͜ eggs*. This last type of linking is the one also involved in the above-mentioned connected speech process, that is insertion. For this reason, intrusive /w/, /j/ and /r/ will be discussed in the third subsection of this section. The last important aspect related to this first connected speech process is linking /r/ (Cruttenden, 2014:315; Underhill, 2005: 66). Linking /r/ is significantly important especially in non-rhotic varieties of English such as standard British English, also called Received Pronunciation (RP). The phonological term rothic (Crystal, 2008: 417) refers to the pronunciation of the /r/ sound after a vowel, as in the words *car* and *brother*, that is found in North American, Canadian , Scottish and Irish English (red coloured states in Figure 12). On the contrary, in England, Wales, New Zealand, Australia and South Africa (blue coloured states in Figure 12) 'the letter *r* in the spelling of a word is not pronounced unless it is followed by a vowel sound' (Underhill, 2005: 66), so that it is silent in *car crash*, but pronounced as a linking /r/ in *car͜ engine*. In this regard, Cruttenden (2014: 315-316) affirms that non-rhotic varieties of English introduce 'word-final post-vocalic /r/ as a linking form when the following word begins with a vowel' and that 'the vowel endings to which an /r/ link may be added are /ɜ:,ɑ:,ɔ:/ and those single or complex vowels which may have a final

[ə] (/ə,ɪə,ʊə,eə/), e.g. in *far off*, *four aces*, *answer it*, *wear out*, *fur inside*, *near it*, *secure everything*'.
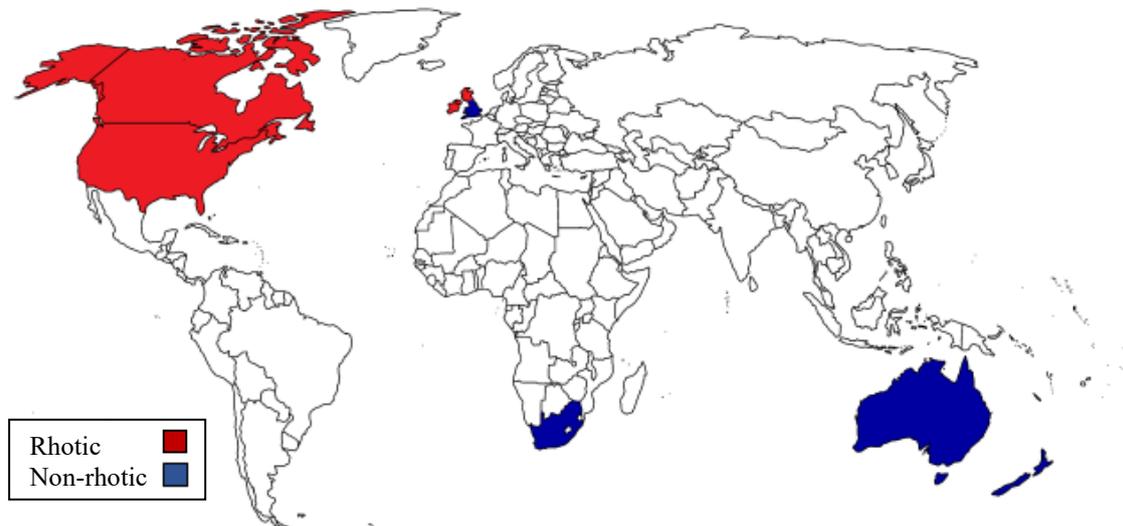
Figure 12: *Rhotic and non-rhotic varieties of English*.

2.2.2 Deletion.

The second category can be found under the following names: deletion, elision or omission. It 'occurs when a sound which would be present in a word spoken in isolation is omitted in connected speech' (Underhill, 2005: 61). Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 172) state that 'in this process, sounds disappear or are not clearly articulated in certain contexts' as a 'natural result of the speech organs "cutting corners" in connected speech, mainly at word boundaries' (Underhill, 2005: 62). The following are the two most typical environments for deletion:

1. Loss of /h/ in non-initial position pronouns, determiners and auxiliaries, e.g. *Did he do his homework?; Their friends have already left; Ask her; Tell him.* (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 173; Cruttenden, 2014: 314; Reed and Levis, 2015: 163);

2. Loss of word-final /t/ and /d/ in clusters of two at a word boundary when the following word begins with a consonant other than /h, y, w, r/, e.g. *the best gift; I don't know; next please; East side; old times; you and me; stand there.* (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 172; Cruttenden, 2014: 314-315; Reed and Levis, 2015: 163; Underhill, 2008: 61).

Moreover, Alameen and Levis (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163) include some types of contractions in this category, mainly the ones in which one or more sounds are deleted as for the contraction *can't* that comes from *cannot*. However, all types of contraction will be fully discussed in the last subsection of this section which is about multiple processes.

2.2.3 Insertion.

The third category, that is insertion or intrusion, is usually included among the linking CSPs (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 165-166; Cruttenden, 2014: 316 and Underhill, 2005: 65). However, according to Alameen and Levis, insertion diverges from the more traditional linking since segmental changes 'involving modifications that add sounds' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163) can be noticed. The main difference lies in the fact that the intrusive sounds are not part of the spelling, but they are added to better fuse words together. The following are the three most added sounds at word boundaries, especially between vowels:

1. Intrusive /r/;
2. Intrusive /w/;
3. Intrusive /j/.

First, intrusive /r/ 'refers to the /r/ sound an English speaker may insert between two words where the first ends in /ə/ or /ɔ:/ and the following word begins with a vowel sound' (Underhill, 2005: 66), as in *the idea*[**r**]*of* and *I saw*[**r**]*it*. The addition of this consonant is not compulsory, but characteristic of non-rhotic varieties of English while it is rather infrequent in rhotic accents where 'r' in the spelling is always pronounced (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163; Underhill, 2005: 66) as Cruttenden (2014: 316) affirms:

> As might be expected, in those regions where post-vocalic /r/ is pronounced and *pour* and *paw* are identified as separate word forms in isolation, the tendency to introduce intrusive /r/s is less marked than in GB or in GB-influenced types of speech.

The last two insertions are examples of how the semivowels or glides /w/ and /j/ are used to combine two vowels across words, as it was previously stated in the V-V linking part. Indeed, 'in vocalic junctures where the first word ends in /iː/, /ɪ/, /i/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, or /ɔɪ/, a slight [j] may be heard between the two vowels' (Cruttenden, 2014:317),

as in *he*[**j**]*is* and *my*[**j**]*arms*, and 'a linking [w] may be heard between a final /u:/, /əʊ/ and /aʊ/ and a following vowel' (Cruttenden, 2014: 317), as in *you*[**w**]*are* and *go*[**w**]*off*.

Similarly, Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 165-166) state what follows:

> Linking with a /j/ or /w/ glide commonly occurs when a word or syllable ends in a tense vowel or diphthong and the next word or syllable begins with a vowel. Insertion of a /j/ glide follows /iy/, /ey/, /ay/, and /ɔy/, either word-internally or between words:
>
> > Word-internally: b<u>ei</u>ng; st<u>ay</u>ing; cr<u>y</u>ing; t<u>oy</u>ing
> > Between words: be[**y**]able; stay[**j**]up; try[**j**]out; Roy[**j**]Adams
>
> Insertion of a /w/ glide follows /uw/, /ow/, and /aw/, either word-internally or between words:
>
> > Word-internally: bl<u>ui</u>sh; g<u>oi</u>ng; h<u>owe</u>ver
> > Between words: do[**w**]it; go[**w**]away; now[**w**]is

Traditionally, the term epenthesis is the one used to describe word-internally insertion, i.e. 'a type of intrusion where an extra sound has been inserted in a word' (Crystal, 2008: 171). It is also described as 'a process whereby a vowel or consonant is inserted in an existing sequence' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 173) and it diverges from insertion CSPs because it occurs at the lexical level and not across word boundaries (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163). The following are the different epenthetic insertions of a sound that exist: intervocalically, interconsonantally, word or syllable initially and word or syllable finally. Examples of consonant epenthesis are *ham*[**p**]*ster* and *com*[**p**]*fortable*, while *fil*[**ə**]*m* and *p*[**ə**]*lease* represent vowel epenthesis. The schwa sound /ə/ is usually inappropriately inserted by some EFL students taking the name of epenthetic or intrusive schwa. For example, Spanish EFL students tend to add a schwa at the beginning of some words as in [ə]*sport*, while Italian EFL students tend to insert it at the end of words accentuating final consonants as in *spor<u>t</u>*[**ə**] (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 173-174).

2.2.4 Modification.

Modification is the fourth category identified by Alameen and Levis (see Figure 11) and it involves 'modifications to pronunciation that substitute one phoneme for others (e.g. *did you* pronounced as [dɪdʒu] rather than [dɪd**j**u]), or less commonly, modifications that are phonetically (allophonically) but not phonemically distinct (e.g. *can you* pronounced as [kəɲju] rather than [kə**n**ju])' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163).

According to Alameen and Levis modification include the following CSPs:

1. Palatalization;

2. Assimilation;

3. Flapping;

4. Glottalization.

First, palatalization is described as 'a general term referring to any articulation involving a movement of the tongue towards the hard palate' (Crystal, 2008: 347), thus changing the original place of articulation of sounds into a palato-alveolar one, i.e. /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/. Normally, it is the sound /j/ that causes the modification of the two adjacent sounds in connected speech. For example, *did you* becomes /dɪdʒu/, *bless you* /bleʃu/ and *meet you* /miːtʃu/. Palatalization is typically described as the most frequent type of a specific assimilation process called coalescence (Cruttenden, 2014: 313; Underhill, 2005: 61) or coalescent assimilation (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 170-171). The term coalescence derives from the merging of the final sound of a word with the initial sound of the following word that, fused together, create a third sound with features from both original sounds. Indeed, in palatalization, 'the final alveolar consonants /s, z, t, d/ or the final alveolar consonant sequences /ts, dz/ are followed by initial palatal /j/' and because of this specific context, 'these alveolar sounds become the palatalized fricatives /ʃ, ʒ/ or affricates /tʃ, dʒ/, respectively' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 171), as the examples present in Table 2 show.

Rule			Example
/s/		/ʃ/	He's coming thi<u>s y</u>ear.
/z/		/ʒ/	Does <u>y</u>our mother know?
/t/	+ /j/ →	/tʃ/	Is tha<u>t y</u>our dog?
/ts/		/tʃ/	She le<u>ts y</u>ou stay up late.
/d/		/dʒ/	Woul<u>d y</u>ou mind moving?
/dʒ/		/dʒ/	She nee<u>ds y</u>our help.

Table 2: *Palatalization*. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 171).

The second connected speech process included in the modification category is assimilation which, according to Alameen and Levis, can be of place, manner or voicing, 'e.g. *on point*, where the /n/ becomes [m] before the bilabial stop' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163). Underhill (2005: 60) affirms that 'assimilation occurs when a phoneme changes its quality due to the influence of a neighbouring sound [...] to become more like the neighbouring sound, or even identical to it'. Indeed, except for palatalization which is coalescent, an assimilating sound and a conditioning one can be found in assimilation, which is a universal feature of spoken languages resulting from the 'various speech organs "cutting corners" as they perform their complex sequence of movements' (Underhill, 2005: 61). Both progressive and regressive assimilation are frequently found in English (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 168-170; Cruttenden, 2014: 312-313). The former is also called perseverative and it is characterized by the conditioning sound that precedes and influences the following sound which is the assimilating one. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 168) provide the following examples: 'the regular plural /s/ versus /z/ alternation, in which the final sound of the stem conditions the voiced and voiceless form of the suffix', and 'the regular past tense /t/ versus /d/ alternation' (see Table 3).

	Conditioning sound	**Assimilated sound**
-s ending		
bags	/g/	/bæg → z/
backs	/k/	/bæk → s/
-d ending		
moved	/v/	/muwv → d/
fished	/ʃ/	/fɪʃ → t/

Table 3: *Assimilation in plural and regular past-tense verb endings*.
Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 168).

The latter, that is regressive assimilation, is also called anticipatory and it is even more common in English than the previous one. This connected speech process is identified as regressive since it is the assimilated sound that precedes and is affected by the conditioning sound. The following are some examples of regressive assimilation (Cruttenden, 2014: 312-313; Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 168-170):

- /n/ → /m/ before /p, b, m/, e.g. *ten players*, *ten boys*, *ten men*;

- /n/ → /ŋ/ before /k, g/, e.g. *ten cups*, *ten girls*;

- /v/ → /f/ before the voiceless /t/, e.g. *have to*

- /z/ → /s/ before the voiceless /t/, e.g. *has to*

Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 170) affirm that 'these examples of regressive assimilation all involve a change in place of articulation or in voicing, which are the most common types'. However, there are also 'some cases of regressive assimilation with a change in manner of articulation which tend to occur in informal speech', e.g. *give me* pronounced as /gɪmi/ and *let me* as /lemi/.

Regarding the last two modification CSPs, that is flapping and glottalization (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163), a first distinction in terms of frequency of use in different varieties of English should be drawn. Indeed, flapping is a phonological process typical of North American, Ulster, Australian and New Zealand English, while glottalization tend to be more frequent in British English. Flapping consists in the pronunciation of the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ as an alveolar flap [ɾ], similar to the voiced alveolar stop /d/, especially when placed in an intervocalic environment (Crystal, 2008: 191), e.g. *sit [ɾ] around*, *went [ɾ] outside* and *sort [ɾ] of*. On the other hand, glottalization refers to the pronunciation of the voiceless alveolar stop /t/ as a glottal stop [ʔ], that is a sound made 'while the glottis is closed' and 'without the direct involvement of air from the lungs' (Crystal, 2008: 213), e.g. *can't [ʔ] make it*, *that [ʔ] car* and *what [ʔ] is it?*. It seems important to remember that these last two modification processes are not compulsory in connected speech. However, they usually denote extralinguistic information such as origin and they contribute in smoothly connecting sounds in spoken English.

2.2.5 Reduction.

Reduction is the fifth category identified by Alameen and Levis and it primarily involves vowels in English, as already discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation. Vowel reduction is segmentally linked with unstressed syllable and suprasegmentally as a connected speech process especially with 'word classes such as one-syllable determiners, pronouns, prepositions and auxiliaries' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163). Underhill (2005: 62-63) describes vowel reduction as follows:

Unaccented vowels in the stream of speech are characterized by a reduction in length, and a change in quality towards a less distinct, more central vowel sound. Most monophthongs reduce towards /ə/. This process is sometimes called centralization since the /ə/ sound is pronounced with the lips and jaw relaxed and the tongue in a central, neutral position. However, the two monophthongs /i:/ and /u:/ are often only partially centralized, /i:/ towards /ɪ/ and /u:/ reducing towards /ʊ/. [...] Diphthongs are also likely to be reduced when unaccented in connected speech. The length of the glide quality itself may even disappear resulting in a "greyish" neutral diphthong in which the first and second elements are dissolved into one composite monophthong.

It is important to remember that vowel reduction is the process that enables the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables, thus determining the characteristic rhythm of English as a stress-timed language. Examples of vowel reduction can be found in the following sentences in which the stressed word is underlined, while vowel reduction occurs in the other unstressed words: *I wish you would tell me*, *Go out!* and *Did you know that?*. Table 4 shows the difference between the strong, prominent form and the weak, reduced form of some function words, showing how the schwa sound /ə/ is the prevalent one in unstressed syllables.

	Strong form	**Weak form(s)**
and	/ænd/	/ənd, ən/
at	/æt/	/ət/
of	/ɒv/	/əv, ə/
you	/ju:/	/jʊ, jə/
me	/mi:/	/mɪ/
she	/ʃi:/	/ʃɪ/
would	/wʊd/	/wəd, əd/
do	/du:/	/dʊ, də/
does	/dʌz/	/dəz/
have	/hæv/	/həv, əv/
has	/hæz/	/həz, əz, z/
can	/kæn/	/kən/
must	/mʌst/	/məst, məs/

Table 4: *Strong versus weak forms in some function words*.

2.2.6 Multiple processes.

The last category identified by Alameen and Levis (see Figure 11) includes contractions and lexical combinations, that is 'highly salient lexical chunks that are known for exhibiting multiple CSPs in each lexical combination' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163). Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 165) describe the first typology as follows:

> Related to the larger phenomenon of reduced speech in English is the process of blending, which refers to any two-word sequence in which word boundary is blurred. Typically, blending consists of **contractions** and **blends**. Contractions are word boundaries where the blurring is indicated via a conventionalized written form, such as *we've*, *he's*, *I'm*. Blends, on the other hand, are contracted spoken forms that do not have a conventional written form, for example, *there're* (from *there are*), *who'll* (from *who will*), *this's* (from *this is*). [...] Thus, we can say that contractions form a subset of blendings, since all written contractions represent a spoken blending, but not all spoken blendings are conventionalized as orthographic contractions.

Contractions and blendings can be categorized as multiple processes since they usually involve at least two CSPs together, e.g. *they're*, *you're*, *it's* and *won't* 'involve not only deletions but modifications such as vowel changes and voicing assimilation' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163). Regarding lexical combinations, they are also called phrase reductions (Weinstein, 2001 in Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 165) since they 'result from word boundaries blurring together'. Many chunks of this kind can be found in spoken English, such as *gonna* (from *going to*), *wanna* (from *want to*), *hafta* (from *have to*), *kinda* (from *kind of*), *whatcha/whaddya* (from *what do you/what are you*). As for contractions, various types of CSPs occur together in lexical combination, for example in *gonna* the vowel [o] present in going becomes [ʌ], the original sound [ŋ] becomes [n], the function word *to* is subjected to vowel reduction, and the [t] is deleted.

Clearly, all the connected speech processes discussed in this chapter one at a time tend to occur together in spoken English. Indeed, the combination of the various types of CSPs is a common feature in all kinds of languages (Reed and Levis, 2015: 163).

CHAPTER 3 – English pronunciation teaching.

3.1 The global status of English.

Before introducing English pronunciation teaching along with its history, the approaches and research, it seems important to understand why English is considered an essential language to be taught in schools all over the world.

While surfing the net or travelling abroad, both in English-speaking countries and in others where different languages are considered the national and official ones, one may perceive that English does not sound in the same way everywhere. The reason behind this variability lies in the role that English has acquired over the years, that is the role of international language whose importance is globally recognised as fundamental. Indeed, the high number of varieties is considered to be the price of being a popular language (Santipolo, 2014: 11). Janson (2002, in Santipolo 2014: 14) affirms that nowadays, while being abroad, there is a high chance of running into a person who knows more than one language and most of the time this other language is English, especially among the younger generations. This is because, as Crystal (2003: 59-61) claims, English is not only the first language of many countries, such as the UK, the USA, Ireland, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa where it is spoken as a Native Language (ENL) by 320-380 million speakers, but it also has an official or co-official status in a third of the world's countries having between 300-500 million ESL (English as Second Language) speakers. India, Nigeria, Ghana, Singapore are examples of former British colonies in which English is still present as an official language in many public domains. Moreover, as stated above, English has become a global language with more than 1 billion speakers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Crystal (2003: 3-4) describes what a global language is as follows:

> A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country. [...] Such role will be most evident in countries where large numbers of the people speak the language as a mother tongue. [...] However, no language has ever been spoken by a mother-tongue majority in more than a few countries [...], so mother-tongue use by itself cannot give a language global status. To achieve such a status, a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give it a special place within their communities, even though they may have few (or no) mother-tongue speakers.

Crystal (2003: 4) continues by presenting two main ways in which a language can achieve global status:

1. A language can be made the official language of a country, to be used as a medium of communication in such domains as government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. To get on in these societies, it is essential to master the official language as early in life as possible. Such a language is often described as a 'second language', because it is seen as a complement to a person's mother tongue, or 'first language'.

2. A language can be made a priority in a country's foreign-language teaching, even though this language has no official status. It becomes the language which children are most likely to be taught when they arrive in school, and the one most available to adults who – for whatever reason – never learned it, or learned it badly, in their early educational years.

However, English has become more than a mere 'foreign' language. It is generally referred both as a global language and a Lingua Franca (ELF) for being a common means of communication for speakers of different first languages. Indeed, UNESCO defined the concept of "lingua franca" in 1953 as 'a language which is used habitually by people whose first languages are different in order to facilitate communication between them' (Santipolo, 2014: 15). For example, nowadays English is the language of international diplomacy and media communication. To answer the question why English was chosen for this important role, one must go back in history. Indeed, English was not chosen because of language-internal qualities, it simply was at the right place at the right time (Crystal, 2003: 120-122). British imperialism contributed to its initial spread, then the USA became a major global power and a dominating country when globalization gathered steam. Quirk (1985 in Santipolo, 2014: 16) elaborated the following expansionist model divided into three main phases:

- Colonial expansion (17th - 19th century, mainly in Asia and Africa);
- Demographic expansion (20th century, mainly in America and Australia);
- Economic-cultural expansion (21st century, mainly through the USA).

Figure 13 summarises what has been said so far by displaying the scheme made by the Indian linguist Braj Kachru in 1988. Kachru (1988 in Crystal, 2003: 60-61) identified three concentric circles to classify the use of English throughout the world after all these expansions: English spoken as mother tongue or native language (ENL) was placed in the Inner Circle, English as a second language (ESL) in the Outer Circle, and finally, all those countries where English is learnt as a foreign language (EFL), such as Italy, were included in the Expanding Circle.
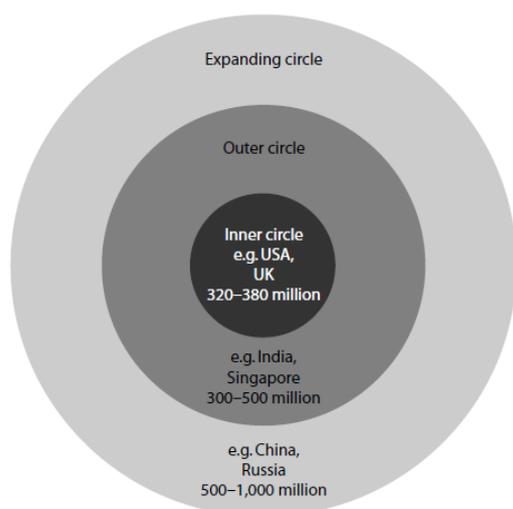
Figure 13: *The three 'circles' of English*, (Kachru, 1988 in Crystal, 2003:61).

As a result, new varieties of English, called World Englishes, started to be born, especially if data showing that there are more non-native speakers of English (both ESL and EFL speakers) than native speakers is considered (see Figure 13). These varieties tend to be strongly influenced by the first language of the people who use English as a medium of communication or as a Lingua Franca. In this regard, Crystal (2003: 144) states that:

> these new Englishes are somewhat like the dialects we all recognize within our own country, except that they are on an international scale, applying to whole countries or regions. Instead of affecting mere thousands of speakers, as is typically the case with rural or urban regional dialects, they apply to millions. They are an inevitable consequence of the spread of English on a world scale.

Even if new varieties of English are constantly emerging, it is always the Inner Circle that provides the norms since a unified means of communication, that is a standard language, is needed to understand one another. Trask (1997: 207) describes Standard English as 'that particular variety of English which is considered to be appropriate in formal contexts and which is considered by many educated English-speakers to be

appropriate in all contexts' and Crystal (2008: 450) as 'the variety of English used as a communicative norm throughout the English-speaking world'. Figure 14 shows that in England and Wales, the term Standard English is associated with British English, the Received Pronunciation (RP) accent, and the United Kingdom Standard English (UKSE) grammar and vocabulary. In Scotland and Ireland, the standard language is Scottish and Irish Standard English respectively. In the United States and Canada, the American English is the standard language with General American (GA) as the standard accent, that is 'that form of American which does not have marked regional characteristics and is sometimes referred to as "Network English" (Cruttenden, 2014: 87). In the Asian and African continents, Australian English, New Zealand English, or South African English can be found. British English and American English are the most popular Standard English varieties, since the former is the one related to the ex-colonies or British Empire and, according to Kachru (1988 in Crystal, 2003), generally the most learned by EFL speakers, and the latter is spoken in the biggest and most powerful country of the American continent, the USA, whose influence reaches the whole world especially through the media. In this regard, Cruttenden (2014: 83) affirms that:

> If a model is used at all, the choice is still effectively between General British (GB) and General American (GA) or some amalgam or "cut-down" version of either or both. Some sort of model based primarily on GB is more common than one based on GA; some form of British English is generally the target in Europe, in Africa, in the Indian subcontinent and increasingly in other parts of Asia and in South America.
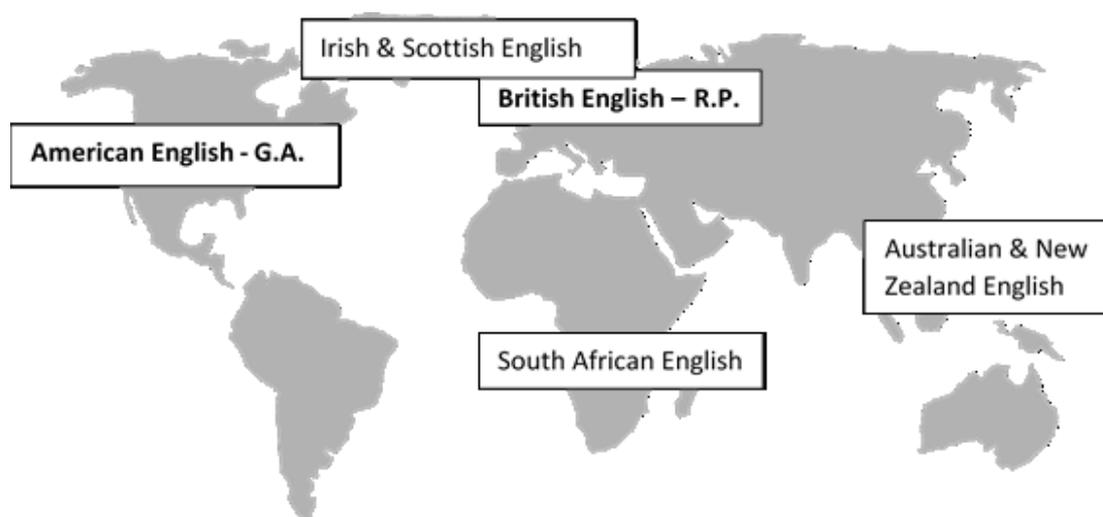

Figure 14: *World Standard Englishes.*

Regarding pronunciation, Trask (1997: 207) reports that 'pronunciation is not considered part of standard English which may be spoken with almost any kind of regional accent'. This means that there is a great difference between spoken and written English and consequently, the presence of all these varieties makes it more difficult to teach pronunciation which is traditionally considered 'the "Cinderella" area of foreign-language teaching' (Kelly, 1969 in Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 2) for being neglected by many teachers because of its variability and consequent complexity. However, as seen in the first two chapters, even spoken English has its rules. Focusing on British English, for instance, Received Pronunciation (RP) is considered the most prestige norm in England. RP is the type of pronunciation most often described in reference books in the UK and most often taught to learners of English. This accent is also called BBC English, Queen's English or Oxford English (Cruttenden, 2014: 78-79). Actually, this contrived variety is used by a small minority of speakers in the UK and for this reason many linguists prefer to refer at it as *English English* rather than British English. Trudgill and Hannah (1985: 2) comment on Received Pronunciation as follows:

> The RP accent, which is taught to foreigners, is actually used by perhaps only 3 per cent to 5 per cent of the population of England. The RP accent has its origins in the south-east of England but is currently a social accent associated with the BBC, the Public Schools in England, and with members of the upper-middle and upper classes.

It may be stated that the idea of standard language is a controversial one. It emerged at the turn of the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries with the rising need of nationalism to create modern nation-states. The ideology of "one language, one nation, one people" was at the basis of nationalism and this "common language" was created only as a result of erasure of linguistic diversity via education, media and propaganda. As Crowley (1989: 194) affirms, early modern linguists thought that the importance of the standard language was due to its prestige and intrinsic value, giving to it a sense of superiority and purity. This idea was later revised thanks to the recognition that all languages have an equal linguistic status, while standards are mainly recognized for their important social role. Indeed, the knowledge of the standard language is necessary to live in a specific society, but it is merely a class dialect as opposed to a local form. Living in a globalized world in which English has the role of Lingua Franca, it seems essential to learn it and be able to communicate following a standard in order to be understood, commonly either British English or American English.

3.2 The history of English pronunciation teaching.

This subsection summarises the most important stages of English pronunciation teaching in order to show the improvements in this field over time. The table in Appendix 1 can be considered an important tool to understand and compare the various methods and approaches that came in succession from the 19th century onwards. Regarding pronunciation teaching, Reed and Levis (2015: 38-58) identify four waves:

-   First wave (1850s – 1880s) = Direct Method;

-   Second wave (1880s – early 1900s) = Reform Movement;

-   Third wave (mid-1980s – 1990s) = Communicative Approach;

-   Fourth wave (mid-1990s – present) = empirical research.

Before discussing the main teaching methods, the two general approaches to the teaching of pronunciation, which have been developed over the years in the field of modern language teaching, should be introduced: the first category concerns the Intuitive-Imitative Approaches, whereas the second one includes the Analytic-Linguistic Approaches (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 2; Reed and Levis, 2015: 40). The first type of approach is the one that characterizes the first wave of pronunciation teaching, while the last one started to be applied by the end of the nineteenth century thanks to the Reform Movement. Kelly (1969: 61) describes the two approaches as follows:

> The ways of teaching pronunciation fall into two groups: intuitive and analytical. The first group depends on unaided imitation of models; the second reinforces the natural ability by explaining to the pupil the phonetic basis of what he is to do.

In particular, the Intuitive-Imitative Approaches depend on the ability of the learners 'to listen to and imitate the rhythms and sounds of the target language without the intervention of any explicit information' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 2). On the other hand, the Analytic-Linguistic Approaches 'utilize information and tools such as a phonetic alphabet, articulatory descriptions, charts of the vocal apparatus, contrastive information, and other aids to supplement listening, imitation, and, production' informing the learner of and focusing attention on 'the sounds and rhythms of the target language' (ibid.). It was called "analytic" since the teacher was 'responsible for doing the analysing of the language system while, implicitly, learners were expected to

resynthesize (in modern terms) what had been presented to them in order to apply what they were learning to their own pronunciation' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 44). In reality, the aim of the second teaching approach was not to replace the first one, but to complement it by incorporating some intuitive-imitative aspects into the practice phase of a typical analytic-linguistic language lesson. In this regard, Reed and Levis (2015: 42) state that 'two or more orientations toward pronunciation teaching are often in play concurrently' as the observed 'coexistence of intuitive-imitative and analytic-linguistic orientations [...] at the start of the twentieth century' shows. Indeed, the two approaches can be seen as 'complementary and overlapping perspectives, representing potentially compatible means of understanding the complex reality of pronunciation teaching' (Hyland, 2003 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 42).

3.2.1 Grammar-Translation and Reading-Based Approaches.

English language teaching (ELT) dates back to the 19th century thanks to the study of grammar and vocabulary by many Western philologists and linguists and the following systematisation of teaching materials. The language-teaching methods largely used in those years were the Grammar-Translation and the Reading-Based Approaches, in which the teaching of pronunciation was largely irrelevant. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 3) affirm that 'in such methods, grammar or text comprehension is taught through the medium of the learner's native language, and oral communication in the target language is not a primary instructional objective'. In this regard, Reed and Levis (2015: 37) state that 'reflecting ways of teaching Latin to children and young adults of the 1600s-1800s, variations of classical methods, which focused on the rigorous study of grammar and rhetoric, dominated in Europe and Americas until at least the 1880s'. Below, they describe the Grammar-Translation method as follows:

> Teaching methods of the nineteenth century prioritized attention to the written language. While learners were expected to be able to read, understand, and translate literary texts, there was little expectation to speak the language of study. Historians surmise that during this period L2 teachers were not focusing learners' attention on pronunciation at all and for most of the nineteenth century the teaching of pronunciation was "largely irrelevant".

Regarding the Italian school system, this approach seems to have dominated much longer, at least until the 1970s-80s. According to Balboni (2015: 21) this traditional method is still used nowadays in many Italian universities and schools as an unintentional integration to more communicative approaches, which will be discussed at

the end of this section. Indeed, teaching practices of the 1800s seem to be 'widely practised in many parts of the world today', for instance in China and Korea, and 'when pronunciation is taught through such approaches, it typically involves simple repetition of sounds or words (Reed and Levis, 2015: 37). Written language was prioritised over spoken language also in the first half of the twentieth century because of the First and the Second World War. In particular, the twenty years between the two wars were characterized by the American isolationism, the Great Depression of the 1930s and the rising of the European right-wing dictatorships with the limitation of the free trade and the following decrease in the use of the living oral language between nations (Balboni, 2015: 24-25). Consequently, foreign languages such as English were only partially taught and mainly through the Reading-Based approach, i.e. a method that focused mainly on the ability of reading foreign texts completely neglecting the oral dimension.

3.2.2 Direct Method.

Pronunciation started to be considered in the late 1800s and early 1900s when the Direct Method started to gain popularity. This approach was referred as "natural" since 'this instructional method was based on observations of children learning their first language and of children and adults learning foreign languages in noninstructional settings' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 3). Indeed, pronunciation was taught through intuition and imitation of a model, i.e. a mother-tongue teacher or recordings containing "authentic materials" (Wilkins, 1976 in Balboni, 2015: 23), and the students' task was to 'do their best to approximate the model through imitation and repetition' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 3). Reed and Levis (2015: 38-39) state that this first wave of pronunciation teaching had in reality 'limited impact within language classrooms of that era and failed to reach beyond specialist circles'. The influence of the Direct Method was minimal at the time because of the lack of teaching infrastructures such as professional associations, annual conferences and serial publications. Consequently, the teaching theories of early innovators (Berlitz, 1882; Gouin, 1880; Marcel, 1853; Predergast, 1864 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 38) were only applied in private schools where privileged students were taught to converse extemporaneously in the language of study for the first time. Berlitz is probably the only scholar whose name had a significant diffusion first in the United States where, as a German immigrant teaching foreign languages, he opened the first Berlitz language school in Rhode Island (Providence) in 1878, and then also

abroad thanks to the creation of the Berlitz franchise which nowadays includes more than '550 Berlitz language schools in at least 70 countries worldwide' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 39). The Direct Method is often linked to this important historical figure since Berlitz was a German native speaker teaching how to communicate using a foreign language prioritizing in this way speaking abilities. Despite the limited influence that the direct method had at the end of the 1800s, the scholarship of these early innovators 'helped set the stage for the emergence of a focus on pronunciation teaching during the next decades' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 39). Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 3) affirm that 'successors to this approach are the many so-called Naturalist Methods, including comprehension-based methods that devote a period of instruction solely to listening before any speaking is allowed'. Some examples of Naturalist Methods (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 3; Reed and Levis, 2015: 38) are the Situational Language Teaching (Palmer 1917), the Total Physical Response (Asher 1977) and the Natural Approach (Terrell 1977 and Krashen 1983).

3.2.3 Reform Movement.

The transition from the Intuitive-Imitative approaches to the more inclusive Analytic-Linguistic ones would not have been possible without the Reform Movement, which emerged in Europe between the 1880s and the early 1900s. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 3) affirm that 'this movement was influenced greatly by phoneticians such as Henry Sweet, Wilhelm Viëtor, and Paul Passy, who formed the International Phonetic Association in 1886 and developed the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA)'. According to Setter and Jenkins (2005: 2), IPA was originally designed as a system of symbols 'capable of representing the full inventory of sounds of all known languages' and 'the pervasiveness of the IPA in pronunciation teaching and research is attested by the fact that, over a hundred years later, it is still the universally acknowledged system of phonetic transcription'. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 3) describe the IPA as follows:

> This alphabet resulted from the establishment of phonetics as a science dedicated to describing and analysing the sound systems of languages. A phonetic alphabet made it possible to represent the sounds of any language visually and accurately because, for the first time, there was a consistent one-to-one relationship between a written symbol and the sound it represented.

According to Jespersen (1904 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 43), 'the use of phonetics [...] in teaching of modern languages must be considered one of the most important advances

in modern pedagogy, because it ensures both considerable facilitation and an exceedingly large gain in exactness'. The following four points (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 3) represent the core principles established by the Reform Movement in 1886, which can still be considered valid nowadays:

- The spoken form of a language is primary and should be taught first.
- The findings of phonetics should be applied to language teaching.
- Teachers must have solid training in phonetics.
- Learners should be given phonetic training to establish good speech habits.

Commenting on the success that the Reform Movement obtained throughout the first half of the twentieth century, Reed and Levis (2015: 40) state that 'increasing numbers of language teachers explored and applied the International Phonetic Association's four core principles along with an evolving set of analytic-linguistic instructional techniques for teaching pronunciation', for instance they started to use IPA charts in order to have a visual transcription system and to demonstrate the articulation of sounds. Reed and Levis (2015: 41-42) state that, between 1888 and 1910, the Reform Movement introduced important innovations about pronunciation teaching. For example, they applied findings of phonetics to language teaching and teacher training; they started to use analytic-linguistic instructional techniques and the IPA chart as a classroom tool for teaching pronunciation. At the beginning, they focused instruction explicitly on sound segments (consonants and vowels) with learners listening to language samples first before seeing written forms and teachers providing detailed phonetic information. Later, 'teachers realized learners could easily become overwhelmed and a focus on phonemic (broader, less detailed) rather than strictly phonetic information became the norm' (ibid). The techniques of mimicry and imitation typical of the first wave continued to be used by the Reform Movement incorporating phonemic/phonetic information as a support and learners were guided to listen carefully before trying to imitate. Regarding Reform Movement's innovations, Kelly (1969: 66 in Reed and Levis, 2015) affirms that:

> As one way of practising problematic vowel phonemes, ESL learners might be taught to say quickly and repeatedly two vowel sounds that are near, though not immediately adjacent to, each other on the English phonemic vowel chart. As a practice sequence of rapid repetitions of the two sounds continued the teacher would aim to "harness human laziness" until

learners eventually began to produce an intermediate sound located between the two sounds initially introduced;

Another way to raise phonological awareness, highlighting the differences across languages, was to ask students to pronounce a sentence from their L1 as if a strongly accented native speaker of English were saying it. Similarly, to illustrate pronunciation characteristics to be avoided, the teacher might pronounce a sentence in English as if it were spoken by a heavily accented L1 non-native speaker of English. Jespersen (1904: 154 in Reed and Levis, 2015) states that 'later, the teacher would be able to 'refer to this sentence now and again in speaking of the single sounds, as it will serve to warn the students against the kind of mistakes that they themselves are to avoid'. To conclude, Kelly (1969: 66-67 in Reed and Levis, 2015) affirms that learners were taught to use exaggeratedly slow motion speaking on purpose as a way of 'minimizing interference from the native phonemes and phonological systems' and resyllabification (i.e., It's a pencil → It –sa pencil; He's a friend → He –sa friend) was used for difficulties with consonant clusters in word-final position in order not to insert sounds typical of the L1.

The years between the 1920s and the 1950s are considered important as a period of consolidation during which phoneticians interested in English were incredibly productive and focused on documenting how the sound system of English operated through research into its linguistic code (Reed and Levis, 2015: 44-45). Descriptions of both the American English (Pike 1945) and the British English (Kingdon 1958a; O'Connor and Arnold 1961) intonation and stress system started to be published achieving great success.

3.2.4 Audiolingual Method (ALM) and Oral Approach.

The second half of the twentieth century started with a controversial period of conflicting theoretical perspectives. The Imitative-Intuitive Approaches became prominent again thanks to the new classroom materials and technologies which evolved from the first phonograph records to tape recorders and language labs. During the 60s, two new and similar pronunciation teaching methods became widely adopted: Audiolingualism or the Audiolingual Method (ALM) in the United States and the Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching in Great Britain. These methods were based on the new technological tools of the time, such as language laboratories and

portable cassette tape players, which allowed a more direct and precise listening to the models, either the teacher or a recording, and the imitation was immediately followed by the repetition with the possibility of recording and relistening in order to get used to new sounds and improve the pronunciation of specific terms. Moreover, teachers often used 'a technique derived from the notion of contrast in structural linguistics – the minimal-pair drill (see Table 5), which uses words that differ only by a single sound in the same position of words' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 4). At the basis of this still popular and used technique lays the concept of the phoneme as a minimally distinctive sound elaborated by Bloomfield in 1933, which is used for both listening practice and guided oral production in order to discriminate sounds. Reed and Levis (2015: 47) affirm that 'ALM prioritized attention to spoken forms, though it did so by organizing instruction around oral pattern practice drills and through the intentional overuse (literally) of repetition, mimicry, and memorization'. Table 5 shows a sample of minimal-pair teaching materials which can be focused either on word or sentence drills. In this case, the difference between the long phoneme /iː/ and the short one /ɪ/ is explored.

Word Drills	
/iː/	**/ɪ/**
sheep	ship
green	grin
least	list
meet	mitt
deed	did

Sentence Drills

I. Syntagmatic drills (contrast within a sentence)

Don't <u>sit</u> in that <u>seat</u>.

II. Paradigmatic drills (contrast across two sentences)

Don't <u>slip</u> on the floor. / Don't <u>sleep</u> on the floor.

Table 5: *Sample minimal-pair teaching materials.*
Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 4).

The Audiolingual Method and the Oral Approach can be considered as part of the more general Structuralist Approach, i.e. the result of the interaction between taxonomic linguistics and behavioural psychodidactics (Balboni, 2015: 30). The former reduces language to microstructures, while the latter considers learning as the result of an intensive series of pattern drills. Moreover, the availability of new recording technologies in the 50s and 60s was essential for this approach. In particular, a famous psychologist of the time, Skinner (1904-1990), deserves to be mentioned for the elaboration of pattern drills, that is structural exercises based on stimulus-response-confirmation sequences used as a psychodidactic tool in the USA for the *Army Specialized Training Program* (ASTP). Another noteworthy structural linguist is Robert Lado (1915-1995), i.e. the founder of TESOL, *Teaching English to Speaker of Other Languages*, and one of the leading exponents of contrastive linguistics (Balboni, 2015: 28). Considering contrastive analysis (CA) strongly influential as a motivation of audio-lingual methods of language teaching, Crystal (2008: 112) describes it as follows:

> A general approach to the investigation of language (contrastive linguistics), particularly as carried on in certain areas of applied linguistics, such as foreign-language teaching and translation. In a contrastive analysis of two languages, the points of structural difference are identified, and there are then studied as areas of potential difficulty (interference or "negative transfer") in foreign-language learning. The claim that these differences are the source of difficulty in foreign-language learning, and thus govern the progress of the learner, is known as the contrastive analysis hypothesis.

The Audiolingual Method and the Oral Approach started to decline in the 1960s-70s and pronunciation was temporarily ignored because of the influence of the Cognitive Approach, which was based on transformational-generative grammar (Chomsky 1957, 1965) and cognitive psychology (Neisser 1967). According to the Cognitive Approach, indeed, language is a rule-governed behaviour rather than habit formation. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 5) affirm that the Cognitive Approach 'deemphasized pronunciation in favour of grammar and vocabulary because, its advocates argued, (1) nativelike pronunciation was an unrealistic objective and could not be achieved (Scovel 1969); and (2) time would be better spent on teaching more learnable objectives, such as grammatical structures and words'.

3.2.5 Designer or Naturalistic Methods.

During the 1970s new methods based on the importance of psychological factors in language learning came to attention bringing language teaching closer to the communicative approach. These methods were later referred as Designer Methods (David Nunan, 1989) or Naturalistic Methods. The term "designer" refers to the fact that these methods tend to take a "one-size-fits-all" approach paying attention to the characteristics of each student. On the other hand, the term "naturalistic" highlights the important parallel that these methods draw between first language acquisition in children and foreign language learning following the tradition started with Berlitz and the Direct Method (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 3). For instance, according to Reed and Levis (2015: 50), Designer or Naturalistic Methods include the Silent Way, Community Language Learning (CLL), Total Physical Response (TPR), Suggestopedia, and the Natural Approach among others and they are chronologically presented in the following paragraphs.

Regarding the **Silent Way**, this method was invented by Caleb Gattegno in 1963 and it consists in the use of silence by the teacher in order to encourage the production of spontaneous utterances in students. Richards and Rodgers (2001: 81) affirm that 'the learning hypotheses underlying Gattegno's work could be stated as follows:

1. Learning is facilitated if the learner discovers or creates rather than remembers and repeats what is to be learned;
2. Learning is facilitated by accompanying (mediating) physical objects.
3. Learning is facilitated by problem solving involving the material to be learned'.

According to the Silent Way, indeed, Teacher Talking Time (TTT) should be relatively low using gestures, charts and coloured rods during learner-centred lessons. The attention on the sound system, both individual sounds and words combined in phrases (connected speech, stress, intonation), seems to be central since the Silent Way is characterised by 'accuracy of production of both the sounds and structures of the target language from initial stage of instruction' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 5). During Silent Way lessons, the teacher tends to remain in the background while peer assistance both in suggesting alternatives and monitoring the utterances produced by the students is

encouraged. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 7) highlight the importance that the Silent Way gives to pronunciation:

> The method appears to have a special focus on teaching pronunciation, and many language educators agree that the principle of sound-colour correspondence, which the Silent Way invokes, provides learners with an "inner resource to be used" (Stevick, 1980: 46), which helps to establish a true feel for the language, "its diction, rhythm, and melody" (Blair, 1991: 32)

Community language learning (CLL), was developed by Charles A. Curran in 1976 as a method to be used in classrooms where second and foreign languages are taught. Reed and Levis (2015: 50) state that some of 'CLL's explicit purposes [...] were to foster an affectively comfortable classroom, learner-centred lessons, learner-controlled practice opportunities, as well as analytic-linguistic opportunities to focus on language form (including pronunciation)'. The feeling of community during CLL lessons is typically recreated by the fact that students sit around a table with a tape recorder which is used as key tool to practice oral communication and be aware of the production of students (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 7-8). The teacher behaves like a counsellor giving instructions to students who have to pay attention as in everyday communication in order to maintain the conversation with the group. Richards and Rodgers (2001: 95) explain that the role of the counsellor in the early stages is to 'respond calmly and nonjudgmentally, in a supportive manner [...] providing target-language translations and a model for imitation on request of the clients'. When the students become more familiar with the language, the teacher simply monitors learner utterances since the interaction is typically initiated by the students on their own while the teacher provide assistance when requested. The following list contains the typical CLL tasks and activities: translation, group work, recording, transcription, analysis, reflection and observation, listening, free conversation. (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 93-94). The technique typically used in CLL classrooms to focus on pronunciation is called "human computer" (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 8; Reed and Levis, 2015: 51), since the teacher behaves as a computer that can be turned on or off at will by the student, who can request the correct pronunciation of a given phrase or piece of a phrase from the computer. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 8) affirm that 'this provides the raw data for the student to mimic and repeat until he or she is satisfied with the pronunciation'.

In 1977 the psychology professor James Asher published the book *Learning Another Language through Actions* in which he elaborated a method based on the coordination between speech and action. Indeed, this method is known as **Total Physical Response** (TPR) since 'it attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity' (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 73). According to Asher, successful adult second language learning can be seen as a parallel process to child first language acquisition. Since children start responding to commands physically before producing verbal responses, adults should imitate the same acquisition processes in learning a foreign language. The positive mood created in class by focusing the lesson more on game-like movements than linguistic production is central to this method which, in this way, reduces stress in students facilitating learning. As a consequence, learners in TPR have the 'primary roles of listener and performer' since they firstly 'listen attentively' and then 'respond physically to commands given by the teacher' (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 76). The teacher, on the other hand, is seen as a parental figure that provides opportunities for learning by exposing the students to real language. Moreover, a TPR teacher typically waits for speaking abilities to develop on learners without pressure and according to the time of each student avoiding to much correction in the early stages as parents would do. The teaching material used in TPR lessons includes physical objects, pictures, slides and word charts, while the most common technique is role-play focused on specific situations (Reed and Levis, 2015: 50). Total Physical Response became particularly popular in the 1980s when Stephen Krashen (Balboni, 2015: 47-50) elaborated the *Second Language Acquisition Theory* (SLAT). Krashen highlighted the importance of the provision of comprehensible and gradually more complex input, according to a natural order of acquisition. Moreover, the need for stress reduction (affective filter) in order to achieve successful language acquisition is central to the SLAT. Indeed, Krashen considered TPR and its performance of 'physical actions in the target language as a means of making input comprehensible and minimizing stress (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 79). Total Physical Response, as many other Designer Methods, was designed to be used in association with other methods and techniques, since it is compatible with other approaches to teaching.

In 1978, the Bulgarian psychiatrist-educator Georgi Lozanov presented a method called **Suggestopedia**. It can be described as 'a specific set of learning recommendations

derived from Suggestology, which Lozanov describes as a "science [...] concerned with the systematic study of the nonrational and/or nonconscious influences" that human beings are constantly responding' (Stevik, 1976: 42, in Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 100). By controlling these influences through specific environments and techniques, learning can be significantly improved. Balboni (2015: 51) affirms that Suggestopedia can be considered the "clinical" method par excellence, since its lessons can be compared to group psychotherapy sessions. Indeed, autogenous training moments begin and end this kind of language lessons, baroque music serves as a musical and rhythmic background for learning purposes, the learning material should be practiced before bedtime and as soon as students get up in the morning. Lozanov (1978: 27, in Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 100) states that 'memorization in learning by the suggestopedic method seems to be accelerated 25 times over that in learning by conventional methods' and for this reason he is known as "the father of accelerated learning". However, after a first period of interest especially in the Soviet Union, USA and Germany, Suggestopedia was later not very popular since it was considered a bizarre method and because of the need for special teaching rooms, a small number of students, and specialised teachers (Balboni, 2015: 52).

In 1983, the American linguists Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell published *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*, in which this method based on naturalistic language acquisition in a classroom setting is presented. Indeed, the **Natural Approach** requires that the learning of second or foreign languages follows the same path of mother tongue acquisition thanks to a *Language Acquisition Support System* consisted of the teacher and the didactic materials (Balboni, 2015: 49). At the basis of this method, the important hypothesis elaborated by Krashen during the 1970s-80s can be found, such as the acquisition-learning hypothesis, the input hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the affective filter, and the natural order hypothesis. Moreover, the teaching experience of Terrell as professor of many languages, such as Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Greek and Dutch, has been fundamental for the elaboration of the Natural Approach offering a more practical point of view (Terrell, 1986: 213). As in many other Designer Methods, communication is emphasised in the Natural Approach, while conscious grammar study and explicit correction of student errors tend to be avoided. Another central point is the creation of a stress-free learning environment

in order to encourage permanent acquisition. The teaching techniques are based on authentic material and the lesson topics should follow the natural order. For this reason, in the early stages, language comprehension is more important than oral production, which is not forced since interaction will emerge spontaneously after students have attended to large amounts of comprehensible language input (Balboni, 2015: 49).

Regarding the impact of most of the above-mentioned naturalistic methods on nowadays ESL/EFL teaching, Reed and Levis (2015: 51) affirm that 'following a path charted by Berlitz in the nineteenth century, several of the designer methods became business enterprises, which by the mid-1980s had drifted to the periphery of ESL teaching where they remain today'. However, Designer Methods are considered an essential step towards how English pronunciation is taught today for the importance that they gave to spoken language.

3.2.6 Communicative Approach.

According to Reed and Levis (2015: 51), the third wave of pronunciation teaching started at the end of the 1980s, a period characterized by the considerable expansion of impact of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, also called the Communicative Approach. Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 8) affirm that 'the Communicative Approach took hold in the 1980s and is currently the dominant method in language teaching'. Indeed, the name of this most recent method dates back to 1967 when Hymes coined the term "communicative competence", in reaction to Chomsky's theory of competence (mental dimension of language) and performance (real realization of the language). Talking about Hymes' theory, Richards and Rodgers (2001: 159) state that:

> For Chomsky, the focus of linguistic theory was to characterize the abstract abilities speakers possess that enable them to produce grammatically correct sentences in a language. Hymes held that such a view of linguistic theory was sterile, that linguistic theory needed to be seen as part of a more general theory incorporating communication and culture.

The original theory of communicative competence was elaborated by Hymes (1972), who defined 'what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community' (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 159). According to Hymes, linguistic competence alone is not enough to be communicatively competent, since both

knowledge and ability for language use are essential. This theory was later extended by Canale and Swain (1980 in Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 160) who identified four dimensions of communicative competence:

1. *Grammatical competence*, i.e. the domain of grammatical and lexical capacity;

2. *Sociolinguistic competence*, i.e. an understanding of the social context in which communication takes place;

3. *Discourse competence*, i.e. the interpretation of individual message elements;

4. *Strategic competence*, i.e. the coping strategies that communicators employ to initiate, terminate, maintain, repair and redirect communication.

Richards and Rodgers (2001: 160) state that 'the usefulness of the notion of communicative competence is seen in the many attempts that have been made to refine the original notion of communicative competence'. For example, Figure 15 is an adaptation of the structural diagram elaborated by the Italian linguist and professor Balboni in order to summarise the complex structure of communicative competence.
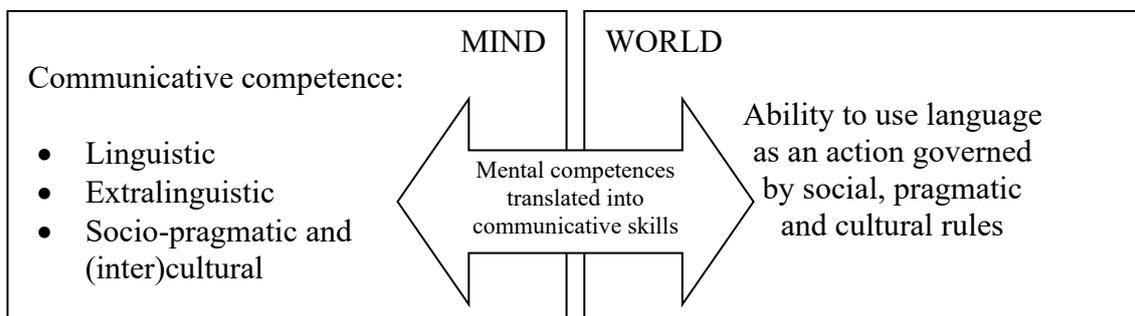
Figure 15: *Structural diagram of communicative competence*
Balboni (2015: 34)

According to Balboni, the concept of communicative competence is quite elaborate since it includes other sub-competences distributed on different levels. Communicative competence is described as a mental reality that is performed as an action in the world during communicative events realized in social contexts (Balboni, 2015: 34). The first level is the mental one that refers to the ability of producing language and it includes the following three sub-competences:

- *Linguistic competence*, i.e. morphosyntactic, phonological, textual and discursive, lexical and semantic competence;

- *Extralinguistic competences*, i.e. kinesics, proxemics, haptics and vestemics;

- *Socio-pragmatic competence*, i.e. sociolinguistic, pragmatic and (inter)cultural competence.

In the second level of the communicative competence, the above-listed mental competences are traduced in communicative actions such as the four basic skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) and the interactive one that takes place during a dialogue that can be oral (listening + speaking) or written (reading + writing). Moreover, other skills such as summarising, translating, paraphrasing, taking notes and writing under dictation are taken into account and called manipulative since they require a further elaboration (Balboni, 2015: 35). In the last level of the communicative competence, language is considered as an action governed by social, pragmatic and cultural rules that should be learned in order to really be able to master a language in all contexts.

Richards and Rodgers (2001: 158) affirm that 'Communicative Language Teaching is a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use, and that seeks to translate this into a design for an instructional system, for materials, for teacher and learner roles and behaviours, and for classroom activities and techniques. Indeed, the Communicative Approach is based on the following set of principles (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: 161, 172):

- Language is a system for the expression of meaning.

- The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.

- The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.

- The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse.

- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.

- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.

- Fluency is an important dimension of communication.

- Communication involves the integration of different language skills.

- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error.

Considering what has been said so far about CLT, it follows that pronunciation becomes a key aspect in language teaching thanks to this communicative view of language. In the following subsection, the Communicative Approach will be further discussed since it represents the basis of today's pronunciation teaching (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010; Reed and Levis, 2015; Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

3.3 English Pronunciation Teaching today.

The Communicative Approach or the so-called Integrated Approach, i.e. a learner-centred teaching method mainly based on communication, but also on the interconnectedness and interrelationships between the curriculum areas, is nowadays considered the dominant method in language teaching. This approach is based on the above-mentioned theories that had the important merit of having given equal attention to all the components of the language, not just the linguistic one. In this regard, Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 8) claim:

> It holds that since the primary purpose of language is communication, using language to communicate should be central in all classroom language instruction. This focus on language as communication brings renewed urgency to the teaching of pronunciation, since both empirical and anecdotal evidence indicates that there is a threshold level of pronunciation for non-native speakers of English; if they fall below this threshold level, they will have oral communication problems no matter how excellent and extensive their control of English grammar and vocabulary might be.

3.3.1 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Indeed, another important innovation elaborated in the 1970s, but officially introduced into language teaching only in the 21st century, is the introduction of the Threshold Level (B1) in 1975 by the European Council as part of the *Modern Language Project* (Balboni, 2015: 31-33). The purpose of the project was to promote educational transparency using a shared language-neutral scale and to stimulate foreign language students to reach the communicative competence in another European language. Indeed, the B1 level represents the threshold of communicative autonomy, i.e. the first important goal of a language student. Figure 16 shows the six levels of foreign language proficiency, which can be grouped into three broad categories: Basic user, i.e. A1 (Breakthrough) and A2 (Waystage); Independent user, i.e. B1 (Threshold Level) and B2

(Vantage); and Proficient user, i.e. C1 (Effective Operational Proficiency) and C2 (Mastery).
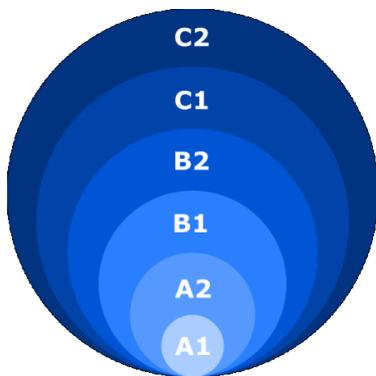

Figure 16: *The six levels of foreign language proficiency.*
Council of Europe (2018: 34)

As Reed and Levis (2015: 53) affirm, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has European roots with the 'publication of many high-quality resource books dedicated to the preparation of ESL [and EFL] pronunciation teachers' during the 1990s first by British specialists (Bowen and Marks, 1992; Hancock, 1996; Laroy, 1995) and then also by American ones (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996). Fundamental for the elaboration of CLT classroom textbooks was the publication of the *Common Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment* (CEFR) in 2001 considered the European Year of Languages. The first CEFR was published 'after a comprehensive process of drafting, piloting and consultation undertaken by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg' as a 'project to establish a European Indicator of Language Competence' available in 40 languages (Council of Europe, 2018: 21). The engagement in languages by the Council of Europe has been continuous since the opening of the treaty in 1964 in order to 'increase international understanding, promote lifelong learning and increase the quality and practicality of language education in schools' (ibid.). The concept of the Threshold Level with the other competence levels were placed at the core of the CEFR, which is famous for its illustrative descriptor scales of second/foreign language proficiency divided into different competences, activities and strategies as shown in Figure 17. In particular, the CEFR describes what learners can do across five language skills: Spoken Interaction, Spoken Production, Listening, Reading and Writing. For all five skills at each level, there are sets of detailed 'Can Do' statements which are useful both for students and the teacher in order to be aware of precise abilities and set achievable goals (Balboni, 2015: 55-57).
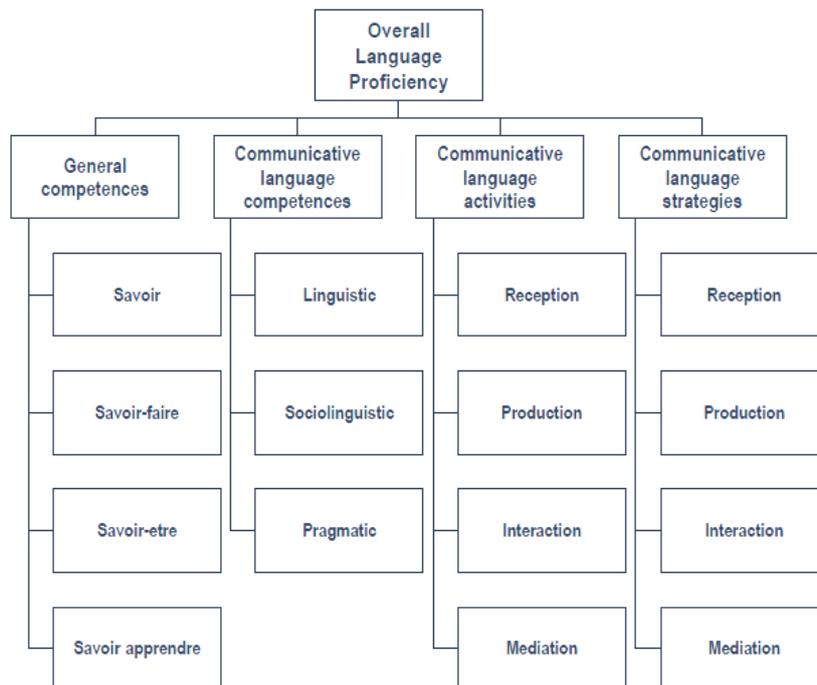
Figure 17: *The structure of the CEFR descriptive scheme.*
Council of Europe (2018: 30)

In 2018, a *Companion Volume with New Descriptor* with respect to the original CEFR was published in order to change some descriptors and add new ones. For example, new descriptors regarding online interaction, collaborative learning, mediating text, sign language, and plurilingual/pluricultural competence were added and all these changes 'reflect the increasing awareness of the need for an Integrated Approach to language education across the curriculum' in order to achieve 'inclusive education for all' (Council of Europe, 2018: 22). Another important change particularly relevant for the purposes of this dissertation regards pronunciation, which is part of phonology and is to be found in the linguistic subcategory of communicative language competences (see Figure 17). Indeed, in the 2018 CEFR version, new attention is given to phonological control as stated in the following paragraph (Council of Europe, 2018: 47):

> For Phonological Control, an existing CEFR scale, a completely new set of descriptors was developed [by Enrica Piccardo in the *Phonological Scale Revision: Process Report*, 2016]. Phonology had been the least successful scale developed in the research behind the original descriptors. The phonology scale was the only CEFR illustrative descriptor scale for which a native speaker norm, albeit implicit, had been adopted. In an update, it appeared more appropriate to focus on intelligibility as the primary construct in phonological control, in line with current research, especially in the context of providing descriptors for building on plurilingual/pluricultural repertoires.

In the *Companion Volume,* it is claimed that the progression in the 2001 scale appeared unrealistic, particularly in moving from B1 (*Pronunciation is clearly intelligible even if a foreign accent is sometimes evident and occasional mispronunciations occur*) to B2 (*Has a clear, natural, pronunciation and intonation*). The new scale was redeveloped from scratch since the traditional target used in language teaching for the phonological control was an idealised native speaker 'with accent being seen as a marker of poor phonological control' (Council of Europe, 2018: 134). Moreover, it is believed that the former 'focus on accent and accuracy instead of intelligibility has been detrimental to the development of the teaching of pronunciation' (ibid.). The key concepts identified for phonological control by Piccardo (2016: 15-16) are:

- *Articulation*, including pronunciation of sounds/phonemes;

- *Prosody,* including intonation, rhythm and stress – both word stress and sentence stress – and speech rate/chunking;

- *Accentedness,* i.e. accent and deviation from a 'norm';

- *Intelligibility*, i.e. actual understanding of an utterance by a listener;

- *Comprehensibility,* i.e. listener's perceived difficulty in understanding an utterance.

In order to avoid a certain overlapping between sub-categories, since 'accentedness as well as intelligibility and perceived comprehensibility are meant to be transversal across different levels' (Piccardo, 2015: 16), these five concepts have been operationalized into the following three scales (see the original CEFR table with all the descriptors in Appendix 2), with only the first one replacing the 2001 version:

1. *Overall phonological control*: intelligibility, the extent of influence from other languages spoken, the control of sounds and prosodic features;

2. *Sound articulation* (pronunciation): the range of sounds a speaker can articulate and with what degree of clarity and precision;

3. *Prosodic features* (prosody): control of intonation, stress and rhythm, and ability to exploit and/or vary them to highlight a particular message.

3.3.2 Intelligibility and comprehensibility.

From a cognitive level, a new-born can potentially learn to speak all the existing languages. However, growing up children start to develop the characteristics related to the language(s) they are exposed to. Regarding pronunciation, they develop specific mouth muscles linked with the sounds present in their mother tongue and, for this reason, guided pronunciation learning of a foreign language is considered essential. L1, age, exposure, context, phonetic ability, sense of identity, motivation and attitude can be considered as some of the main factors that affect pronunciation learning (Frabbo, 2004). Concerning age, the commonplace "the sooner the better" seems to prevail in language acquisition theories and a "critical period", in which human beings are more predisposed to acquire a language similarly to native speakers, has been identified. This period usually affects 0 to 8-year-old children, since people emigrated before this age seem not to have any foreign accent while speaking English as a Second Language, as the results of a study conducted in North America to immigrants show (see Table 6). On the contrary, people emigrated after the critical period show a progressive deterioration in the pronunciation of the L2.

Foreign accent related to age in L2 English speakers emigrated to North America (USA and Canada).
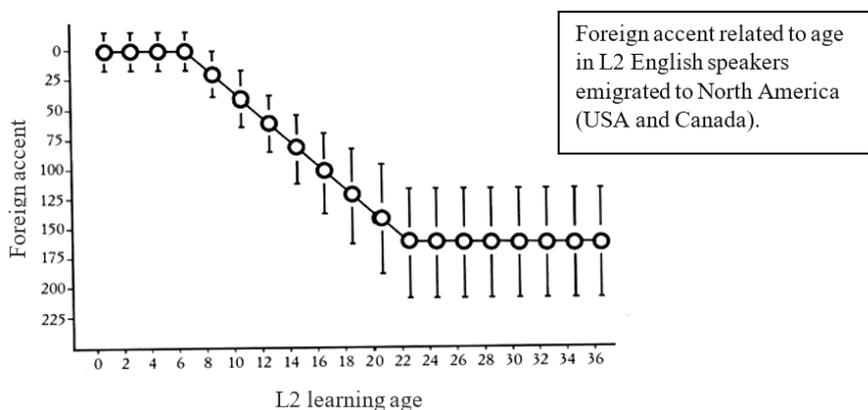
Table 6: *Foreign accent in L2 English speakers*. (Frabbo, 2004: 84)

Given the status of English as Lingua Franca, English pronunciation teaching should be essential both when it is taught to foreigners living in an English-speaking country (English as L2) and especially when it is studied abroad as a foreign language, since EFL learners may have less opportunities to be directly exposed to the language and to practice their spoken English in real situations. However, pronunciation often fails to be taught to EFL students. When it is taught, more emphasis tends to be placed on the

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production and discrimination of individual sounds (segmental level) than on how sounds are organised in different types of sentences (suprasegmental level). Rogerson-Revell (2011: 1) lists three main reasons that might be behind teachers' neglect of pronunciation teaching:

1. Uncertainty about how to tackle it systematically;
2. Lack of time in a busy curriculum;
3. Lack of confidence in their own pronunciation or subject knowledge.

According to Rogerson-Revell (2011: 5), this limited knowledge of and interest in pronunciation learning should be overcome, since 'native speakers (NS) are more sensitive to pronunciation errors than lexical or syntactic ones' and 'in contexts where English is used as a Lingua Franca between non-native speakers (NNS) of English, research suggests that the majority of communication breakdowns are due to pronunciation errors'. In 2000 Jennifer Jenkins created a set of unifying features called *Lingua Franca Core* (LFC) suggesting that some sort of international core for phonological intelligibility is needed. LFC can be described as 'a scaled-down list of supposedly more teachable and learnable pronunciation targets' and it is based on Jenkins' own research on intelligibility errors among NNSs (Dauer, 2005: 544). Table 7 includes some examples of not native-like, but still intelligible pronunciation according to the LFC.

Consonants

- All consonants (except /θ, ð/ (*thin, then*), which can be replaced by /f, v/).

- Final /r/ as in AmE (do not drop /r/ in *here, hair*, etc., as in BrE).

- Medial /t/ as in BrE (do not voice /t/ in *matter* nor delete it in *winter* as in AmE).

- Approximations of core sounds are acceptable as long as they will not be heard as another sound (e.g., phonemic distinctions must be maintained).

- Aspiration of word initial voiceless stops /p, t, k/ (*pin, tin, kin*).

- No omission of consonants in word initial clusters (*promise, string*).

- Omission in medial and final clusters only according to inner circle English rules (*facts = fax, bands = bans*).

- Addition (vowel epenthesis) is preferable to omission (*product* as [pər'adʌkʊtə], not ['padʌk]).

Vowels
- Contrast between so-called long and short vowels (*seat, sit* /iː-ɪ/ or /i-ɪ/; *cooed, could* /uː-ʊ/ or /u-ʊ/; *cart, class, cot, caught* / ɑː-ɒ-ɔː/ BrE or / ɑr-æ-ɑ-ɔ/ AmE).
- No substitutions for the vowel in *bird*, /ɜː/ (AmE /ɝ/; e.g., *heard* distinct from *hard*) but other non-native regional qualities are acceptable as long as they are consistent (e.g., it is not necessary to diphthongize /eɪ, əʊ/ in *say, so*).
- Vowels shortened before voiceless consonants and lengthened before voiced consonants (*sat, sad* /sæt-sæːd/, *pick, pig* /pɪk-pɪːg/).
Prosody
- Correct placement and production (lengthening) of nuclear stress and contrastive stress (*You deserve to be SACKED* vs. *You deSERVE to be sacked*).
- Division of the speech stream into word groups.

Table 7: *Core areas in Jenkins' LFC.* (Dauer, 2006: 544-545)

Jenkins elaborated the LFC because she believes that 'pronunciation is possibly the greatest single barrier to successful communication' (2000: 83), especially when English is used in international settings. Indeed, L2 varieties diverge the most from each other linguistically precisely in the area of pronunciation (Jenkins, 2000: 1). As a result, it is pronunciation that most threatens intelligibility and for this reason the CEFR scale about phonological control is the most significant revision to be found in the 2018 *Companion Volume*. On this point, Harmer (2001: 183) affirms that:

> Pronunciation teaching not only makes students aware of different sounds and sound features (and what these mean), but can also improve their speaking immeasurably. Concentrating on sounds showing where they are made in the mouth, making students aware of where words should be stressed – all these things give them extra information about spoken English and help them achieve the goal of improved comprehension and intelligibility.

The term **intelligibility** can be described as the degree of match between a speaker's intended message and the listener's comprehension, whereas **comprehensibility** refers to the ease or difficulty a listener experiences in understanding an utterance. Intelligibility and comprehensibility may be considered the two keywords for effective communication and, according to many experts in the field, they should together constitute the real goal of pronunciation teaching. Indeed, they were recognised as key concepts also in the elaboration of the 2018 CEFR descriptors for phonological control. In fact, Levis (2005: 370) explains that pronunciation research and pedagogy have long

been influenced by two contradictory principles in the past: on the one hand, the nativeness principle 'holds that it is both possible and desirable to achieve native-like pronunciation in a foreign language'; on the other, the intelligibility principle 'holds that learners simply need to be understandable'. While the former principle may be very demanding and biologically unrealistic for learners considering the effects on time related to the afore-mentioned "critical period", the latter represents the current dominant ideology in pronunciation teaching. Over the years, it became clear that pronunciation teaching should be tailored to the students' needs and based on realistic goals more than desirable ones. Derwing and Munro (2005: 384) talking about setting goals, state that:

> Though all learners should be encouraged to reach their full potential, which may well exceed the minimum required for basic intelligibility, it may do more harm than good for teachers to lead learners to believe that they will eventually achieve native pronunciation or to encourage them to expend time and energy working toward a goal that they are unlikely to achieve.

For this reason, realistic pedagogical goals should be set and an accurate understanding of the target language's phonological system is considered the first essential priority, since it can be very diverse from that of the students' mother tongue. A contrastive method that highlights the phonological differences between the students' L1 and L2 could be very effective in order to be aware of the difficulties that the students will encounter, referring in this way to the so called "expectancy grammar" (see Balboni, 2015). Other techniques and practice materials that are currently used to teach pronunciation according to the Communicative Approach (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 9-10) are listed below:

- *Listen and imitate*;
- *Phonetic training* (articulatory descriptions or diagrams, phonetic alphabet);
- *Minimal-pair drills* (first word-level drills and then sentence-level drills);
- *Contextualized minimal pairs* (established setting and vocabulary);
- *Visual aids* (sound-colour charts, rods, pictures, mirrors, etc.);
- *Tongue twisters* (ex. "She sells seashells by the seashore");
- *Developmental approximation drills*
- *Practice of vowel shifts and stress shift related by affixation*

- *Reading aloud and recitation* (speeches, poems, plays, scripts, dialogue);

- *Recordings of learners' production* (audio and video recordings of rehearsed and spontaneous speeches, free conversations, and role plays).

Many of the above-mentioned techniques have been taken from outdated methods, adapted focusing on communication and then enhanced by the use of modern technological devices such as audio and video recordings, computer labs, and Multimedia Interactive Whiteboards (MIW).

As acknowledged by Reed and Levis (2015: 56), a fourth wave of English pronunciation teaching can be recognised in the emergence of recent empirical research 'investigating topics in three macro-level areas of focus: (1) what features of ESL phonology are necessary to teach; (2) how to effectively teach them, and (3) what teachers and students believe and know about pronunciation instruction'. For this reason, a study about the teaching of connected speech was conducted for the purpose of this dissertation. The study and the collected data will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4 – Connected Speech teaching: an online classroom study.

Connected Speech has been described in Chapter 2 as continuous sequences of sounds that form utterances or conversations in spoken language. In Reed and Levis (2015: 159), a clear and schematic list of Connected Speech Processes (CSP), i.e. 'the differences from citation pronunciations that occur when words occur in normal spoken discourse', can be found. In this last chapter, CSPs will be included in the teaching and learning of English pronunciation as important features of ESL/EFL phonology. Nevertheless, it seems that connected speech is often overlooked by English teachers for several reasons. Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 21) affirm that 'the possible reasons why language teachers are less likely to teach reduced forms even though studies have clearly suggested that reduced forms are one factor causing difficulties in L2 learning' might be the three following ones:

1. Unfamiliarity with reduced forms;
2. Lack of time;
3. Lack of adequate teaching materials.

It is significant to highlight that these motivations behind teachers' neglect follow those concerning the more general teaching of pronunciation identified by Rogerson-Revell (see Chapter 3). Before suggesting a way to teach CSPs, that is through the study carried out for the purposes of this dissertation, the reasons behind the importance of connected speech teaching and consequently learning will be discussed to provide a solid foundation for the online classroom study that will be presented in the next subsections. Indeed, in the study the impact that CSPs training has on the pronunciation of intermediate proficiency learners of English will be investigated. First, the experience of the online internship will be described. Second, the connected speech test will be explained considering the method used, the results obtained and the ensuing discussion. Third, the answers to a survey on students' opinion about the CSPs training will be analysed.

4.1 Why should connected speech be taught?

Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 5-6) believe that language teachers should teach connected speech because it is a very real part of language and an important subset of new information for students who 'need to learn more than the traditional grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation that many language teachers present'. Moreover, they consider the ability to understand and use connected speech essential for making style and register adjustments in using the language, since 'connected speech is not just lazy, sloppy, careless, or slovenly language; rather, it occurs in all levels of speech, including the most formal manners of speaking' (ibid). Moreover, Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 5) affirm that:

> In all levels of formality, connected speech takes on what Gimson (2001: 249) describes as an important "accentuation" function; the understanding of connected speech can therefore help language learners understand aural language input and produce spoken language output that is more comprehensible.

Another reason why connected speech should be taught is that the majority of language learners tend to have problems in understanding and producing connected speech (Bley-Vroman & Kweon, 2002; Bowen, 1976; Brown & Hilferty, 1986a, 1986b; Henrichsen, 1984; Ito in Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006; Kim, 1995; Kweon, 2000). Nevertheless, research also indicates that non-native speakers of English can learn connected speech (Brown & Hilferty, 1986a, 1986b). Furthermore, Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 6) state that their 'experience is that students enjoy learning about reduced forms because it is mostly new information that they find interesting'. Similarly, Reed and Levis (2015: 165-170) affirm that Connected Speech teaching can have positive results both in students' perception and production, as shown by several studies conducted for example by Brown & Hilferty (1986), Henrichsen (1984) and Ito (2006) about CSPs for listening comprehension, and by Hieke (1984, 1987), Anderson-Hsieh et al. (1994) and Alameen (2007) about CSPs for pronunciation.

Regarding **perception**, research demonstrates the effectiveness of CSPs training on listening comprehension. Indeed, a common belief among learners of English as an L2 is that 'native speakers talk too fast' (Gilbert, 1995: 97 in Brown and Kondo Brown, 2006: 17). Although the use of authentic materials in classrooms has become a current trend in language teaching nowadays, 'learners often find themselves being unable to

understand the language outside the classroom where they encounter the real use of the language' (Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006: 17). A possible reason why EFL students are unable to 'decipher spontaneous speech is that they develop their listening skills based on the adapted English-speaking styles they experience in an EFL class' (Alameen, 2014: 16) either because of the teacher or the textbooks. Regarding teachers, Santipolo (2006: 168) identifies a simplified variety of English used by some EFL teachers called Teacher Talk (TT), which should be limited to beginning-proficiency students only, in order not to get them used to a non-authentic variety. Regarding ESL/EFL textbooks, Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 22) affirm that 'these texts rarely develop the systematic linguistic and pragmatic constraints of reduced forms, rather focusing solely on common examples' and they 'do not necessarily present dialogues or interaction that take place in real conversations'. Consequently, while communicating with an English native speaker, frustrating misunderstandings 'may arise because NSs do not pronounce English the way L2 learners are taught in the classroom' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 165). Indeed, English native 'speakers often like to convey their meaning with the least articulatory effort' (Ladefoged, 2000: 250) naturally producing in this way connected speech processes in spoken language. Ladefoged (2000: 251) state that:

> Except when they [i.e. speakers] are striving for clarity of articulation, they tend to produce utterances with a large number of assimilations, with some segments left out, and with the differences between other segments reduced to a minimum. Producing utterances in this way requires a speaker to follow a principle of *ease of articulation*.

Since connected speech is a feature of spoken English regardless of the speed or the register of speech, 'L2 learners need to become familiar with reduced forms in order to comprehend English' (Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006: 19). Indeed, studies based on dictation tests show that ESL/EFL students have more difficulty in understanding speech with many CSPs than a less connected one because of the 'hypothesis that reduced forms in listening input would decrease the saliency of the words' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 166). For example, the studies conducted by Henrichsen (1984) and Ito (2006) show that 'non-native participants scored statistically significantly higher on the dictation test when reduced forms were absent than when they were present, while native speakers' scores did not differ for the two conditions' (Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006: 19-20; Reed and Levis, 2015: 167). In order to render connected speech teaching meaningful for listening comprehension, other studies investigated 'whether L2

perceptual training can improve learners' perceptual accuracy of CSPs' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 167). Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 20) discuss about the studies conducted by Brown and Hilferty (1986) and Matsuzawa (2006). Both studies suggest that instruction on reduced forms can improve L2 learners' listening comprehension skills. In particular, the first study was composed by three tests given as pre-test and post-test both to a control and a treatment group. The results of the two groups were then compared discovering that the treatment group obtained higher scores thanks to the 4-week training (Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006: 20).

Regarding **production**, another group of studies examined connected speech in L2 learners' pronunciation. Concerning precisely pronunciation, this second category can be considered more relevant for the purposes of this dissertation that is aimed at discussing about connected speech teaching and learning as a way to improve students' intelligibility and comprehensibility while speaking in English. Reed and Levis (2015: 168) report the studies conducted by Hieke (1984, 1987), Anderson-Hsieh et al. (1994) and Alameen (2007) who investigated aspects of connected speech production first in American native speakers and then in non-native speakers of English (especially Japanese) finding a significant difference in use between them. For example, the results of Alameen's study on C-V and V-V linking show that 'beginning-proficiency and intermediate-proficiency participants linked their words significantly less often than NS participants did' (Reed and Levis, 2015: 169). Regarding the effectiveness of CSP training on production, very little research has been conducted so far, especially if compared with the numerous studies on the effectiveness of teaching CSP on listening perception and comprehension (ibid). The reason behind this choice may lie in the fact that ESL/EFL teachers prioritise the teaching of listening since many acquisition theorists claim that perception precedes production (Sheldon and Strange, 1982 in Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006: 20). Moreover, Reed and Levis (2015: 169) affirm that 'ESL students are more likely to listen than to speak in ESL contexts' and there is 'a general belief that CSPs are only a complementary topic in pronunciation teaching and sometimes markers of "sloppy speech" '. Nevertheless, studies (Anderson-Hsieh et al., 1994 in Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006: 20; Melenca, 2001; Kuo, 2009; Sardegna, 2011 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 169-170) show that by giving a test composed by reading aloud and elicited free-speech monologues both to an experimental and a

control group, significant improvements on one or more CSPs were to be found in the first group. For example, Kuo (2009 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 170) states that 'after receiving instruction, the experimental group significantly improved their speech production and developed phonological awareness'. To conclude, the above-mentioned studies show that CSPs' training can help NNSs of English improve their pronunciation both immediately after the training and in delayed post-tests as in the study conducted by Sardegna (2011 in Reed and Levis, 2015: 170) who repeated the test again five months to two years after the course ended.

In brief, connected speech should be taught both to enhance ESL/EFL students' listening comprehension and pronunciation skills. As stated in chapter 3, intelligibility and comprehensibility are considered more realistic goals for language students in comparison to the native-like principle (Derwing and Munro, 2005; Levis, 2005). Reed and Levis (2015: 171) state that 'intelligibility is important both for acquisition of perception and for acquisition of production' and as revealed in the studies discussed in this section, ESL/EFL students experience difficulties when they encounter reduced forms in both listening comprehension and pronunciation. Brown and Kondo-Brown (2006: 21) affirm that, accordingly, 'reduced forms should be part of the language teaching curriculum, and yet they have received little attention in practice'.

4.2 The online classroom study.

In order to contribute to and try to compensate for the limited research and practice in the teaching and learning of connected speech to EFL students, an online study was conducted for the purposes of this dissertation. The study was carried out in the form of an optional internship for my degree course in *European and American Languages and Literatures* at the University of Padova. The research question at the basis of this study was: What impact does CSPs training have on the pronunciation of intermediate proficiency learners of English?

4.2.1 The internship context: distance teaching.

After months of applying for various authorisations, the internship was finally carried out in May 2020 at the Primo Levi High School in Montebelluna (TV) thanks to the

collaboration with the English teacher Nicoletta Galante. The internship was divided into four lessons that could only take place online because, at that time, the Italian school system experienced the rise of e-learning as the only possibility to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, both during the national quarantine (9 March – 18 May) and the last weeks of the school year (until 10 June), teaching in Italy was undertaken remotely on digital platforms, such as *Zoom* and *Google Meet*, for the first time.

4.2.2 The description of the participants.

The study participants were part of a class composed by nineteen Italian students aged 15-16 years. All nineteen participants were studying English as a Foreign Language, since their L1 was Italian except for two bilingual students, one of Chinese and the other of South American origins, who include also Mandarin and Spanish respectively in their linguistic repertoire. The class was selected thanks to the collaboration with their English teacher, Nicoletta Galante, who thought that a project on pronunciation perfectly fit that "liceo classico"[1] second-year class. Indeed, the class had previously started to work on pronunciation in the first half of the school year concluding with a film dubbing activity in pairs in which students generally achieved good results. For this this reason, the students were considered as motivated by the teacher. In line with what expected by the Italian school system[2], the general English language proficiency level of the class was B1, i.e. the Threshold level. It is important to highlight that before the COVID-19 pandemic, the class had no previous experience of distance learning. According to the teacher, the students were suffering from the situation they were experiencing. They were in general less motivated in participating during the lesson and they tended to keep their webcams off.

4.2.3 The four lessons on the *Zoom* platform.

The four internship lessons on English pronunciation and connected speech were conducted online on the *Zoom* platform and students were strongly recommended to participate and keep their webcams on, which they all accepted. Each lesson lasted 50

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[1] Italian high school whose main subjects are ancient Greek and Latin.
[2] According to the Italian school system, the teaching of English is not compulsory until the age of 6. At the end of the Primary School (from 6 to 11), Italian students officially achieve an A1 level in English. At the Secondary School 1st level (from 11 to 14), the official English level students reach at the end of the three years is A2. At the Secondary School 2nd level (from 14 to 19), the official final English level is B2

minutes and they were held together with the official English teacher of the class, Nicoletta Galante, who was responsible for observing as internship tutor. Together with the four lessons, students were asked to do a connected speech test divided in a pre-test and post-test, which will be discussed in the following subsections.

The first lesson was aimed at (1) getting to know the students, (2) introducing the topic of pronunciation, (3) explaining the structure and the instructions of the pre-test. A warm-up activity (see Figure 18) was carried out at the beginning of the lesson in order to give students the opportunity to introduce themselves in an original way and speak to each other in English about familiar topics. Indeed, the web app *Padlet*, an online virtual "bulletin" board, was used to let students anonymously answer to the following instruction: Write down an object that best represents you. Students could also share images, videos or links as shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18: *Warm-up activity PowerPoint slide and Padlet board.*
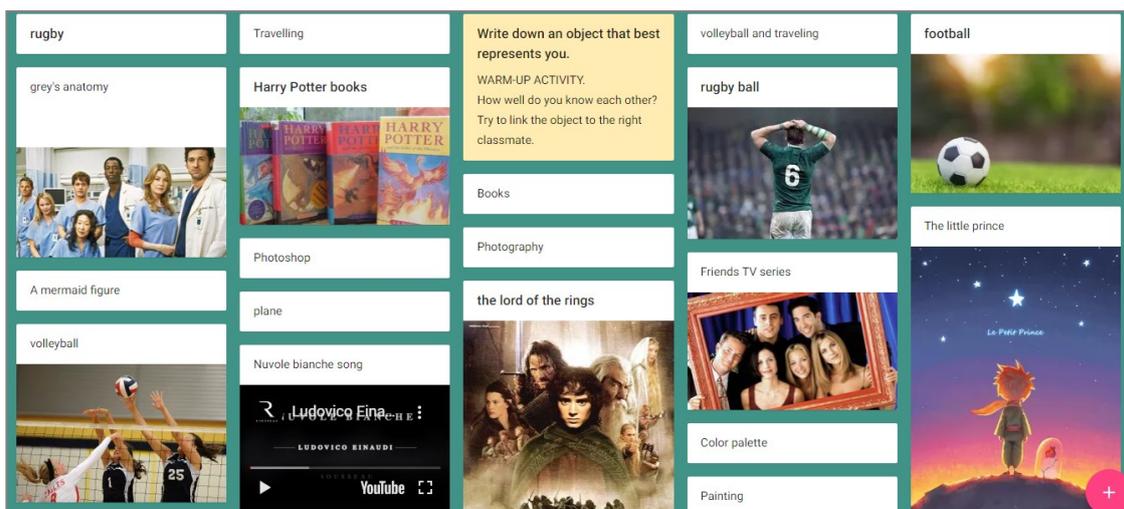
After having shared the notes in the digital wall, one at a time, students were asked to try to link one object to the right classmate as in a detective game. When they took the floor to guess a classmate, students introduced themselves explaining their object too. This activity was idealised as a motivational part to let students communicate in English using also images and videos. Balboni (2015: 155-156) talks about motivation as an essential phase towards acquisition in which the *teacher's talking time* (TTT) should be limited to questions in order to encourage students' participation. The warm-up activity was followed by a brainstorming one in which students were asked to think about some keywords for effective communication. The concepts of intelligibility and comprehensibility were later introduced highlighting that it is not important to sound like a native speaker, but to be easily understood in order not to let communication breakdowns happen. Pronunciation was identified as a central aspect for successful communication and a brief definition of pronunciation together with its components, i.e. articulation, stress, intonation, connected speech, was provided. At the end of the lesson, students were asked to do the pre-test as homework before the second lesson.

In the second lesson, the IPA sounds typical of the English language were presented and analysed in contrast with the Italian one. Vowels were visually explained and then repeated by students by using a Vowel Trapezium (see Figure 19) in which Standard Italian monophthongs were marked in red and Standard British English monophthongs in blue, while English consonants were presented using the English Phonemic Chart. Students were asked to particularly concentrate on the four circled sounds in Figure 19 since the phonemes /θ, ð, ʒ, h/ are not present in the Italian language. The exemplifying words present on the slide were read and repeated by the students asking them to concentrate on the movements of the mouth while they articulated each sound.
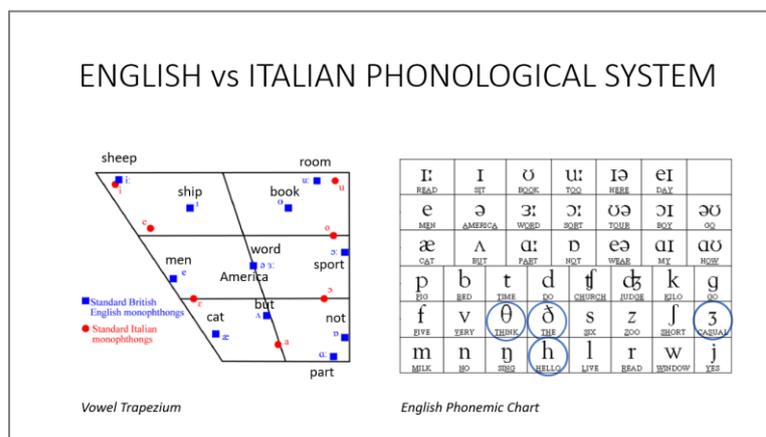

Figure 19: *English vs Italian phonological system PowerPoint slide.*

Particular attention was paid to the schwa sound /ə/, described to the students as the most common sound in the English language. A BBC Learning English video from *Tim's Pronunciation Workshop*[3] was used as explanation because it contains many examples to listen and repeat. Furthermore, the following list with some Italians' typical pronunciation problems was given to students in order to raise awareness of their possible weaknesses in pronunciation on a segmental level. Indeed, they were told that Italian EFL learners tend to:

- Add a schwa sound after words ending with consonants, ex. sto**p(ə)**;

- Substitute the schwa sound /ə/ for another one based on spelling, ex. pers**o**nality;

- Substitute the sound /æ/ for another one based on spelling, ex. **a**ddress;

- Replace the sound /ɪ/ with /iː/ due to spelling and melodic reasons, ex. sh**ee**p vs sh**i**p;

- Replace the sounds /θ/ and /ð/ with the sounds /t/ and /d/, ex. **th**in and **th**en;

- Delate the aspirated /h/ at the beginning of words ("h" is silent in Italian);

- Insert the aspirated /h/ before a vowel sound, ex. hair vs eyes, ears;

- Exaggerate the English /r/ rolling it too much;

In order to introduce suprasegmentals, the concepts of rhythm, stress and intonation were then introduced highlighting the difference between the syllable-timed Italian and the stress-timed English. Another short video from *Rachel's English Academy*[4], an American pronunciation teacher, was shown to better understand how a stress-timed language works. At the end of the lesson, a definition of connected speech was provided and Alameen and Levis' categorization of connected speech processes, as found in Reed and Levis (2015: 162), was schematically presented using the two charts in Figure 20. The first two CSPs, that is linking and deletion, were explained both by using examples written in the slides and videos from *Tim's Pronunciation Workshop* and *Rachel's English Academy*.

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[3] https://www.bbc.co.uk/learningenglish/english/features/pronunciation
[4] https://www.rachelsenglishacademy.com/
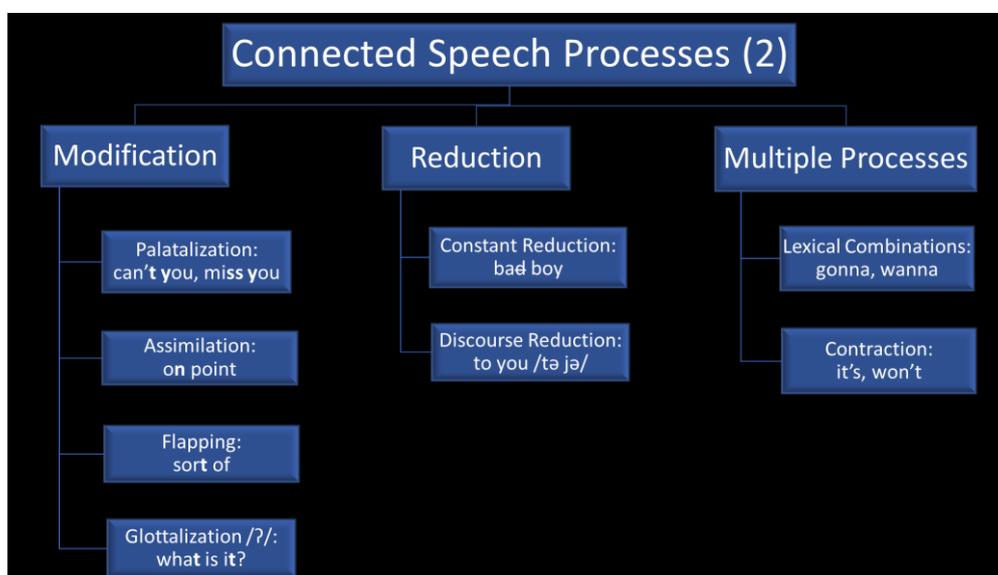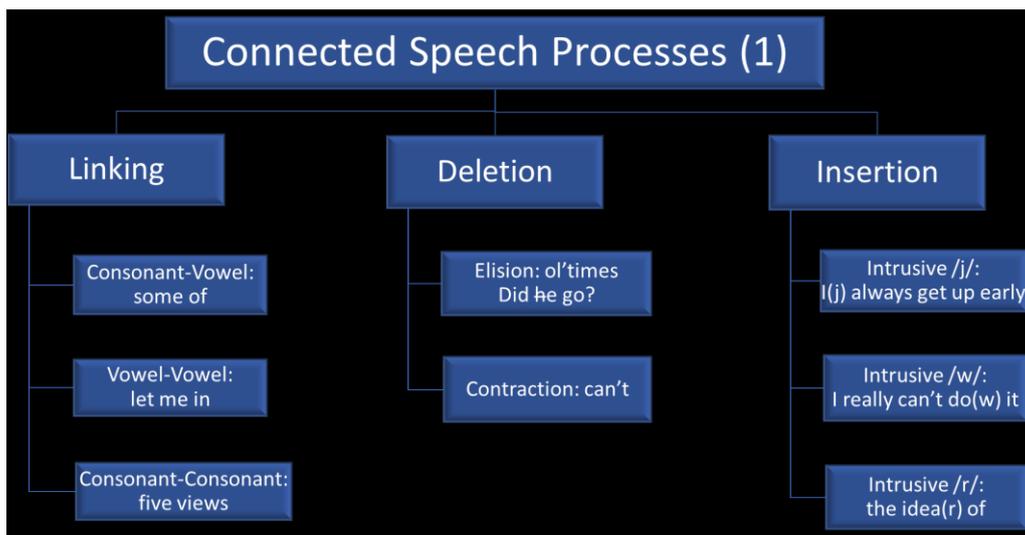
Figure 20: *Adaptation of Alameen and Levis' categorization of Connected Speech Processes (CSPs).*

The third lesson was entirely focused on CSPs. Students asked for more examples of linking and deletion, then the remaining CSPs were explained, that is insertion, modification, reduction and multiple processes. Written examples were always alternated by audio-visual examples present in videos taken from the two above-mentioned sources. While talking about intrusive /j, w, r/, a digression concerning rhoticity, i.e. the pronunciation of the rhotic /r/ that is found in the USA, Canada, Scotland and Ireland (Santipolo, 2014), was made. The purpose of this digression was to understand the difference between intrusive /r/ and linking /r/ in non-rhotic varieties

of English, spoken in England, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. Moreover, students listened to some interviews of actors and actresses coming from different English-speaking countries in order to be more aware of how /r/ is pronounced in different English varieties. Particular attention was paid to three CSPs: linking, deletion and reduction. Indeed, the dialogue present in the connected speech test analysed in the next subsection, was read together in class highlighting the sounds at word boundaries (linking and deletion) and the vowels (reduction) that they should focus on. Students were told to do the post-test as homework following the same instructions of the pre-test, but with a new awareness of CSPs. Figure 21 shows the slide used in class to revise the three selected CSPs at the end of the lessons.

Figure 21: *Post-test focus: linking, deletion, reduction.*

The fourth lesson was aimed at (1) giving a general feedback on the two exercises present in the connected speech test, (2) doing listening comprehension activities based on the same test, (3) receiving students' opinions about these lessons through an online survey. In order to listen to different people reading the dialogue present in the test, an audio file containing the voices of seven native-speakers (two from Massachusetts, two from California, one from Sydney and one from Liverpool) was played in class and students were asked to highlight the CSPs they were able to identify. The other activity was based on the second task of the test, that is the free-speech monologue. The recordings of four of the previous native-speakers about their hobbies and free time were used to create a multiple-choice quiz using the game-based learning platform *Kahoot!*. First, the students had the chance to read the 15 questions in advanced, as the slide in Figure 22 shows. Then, they listened to the four recordings twice taking notes and, at last, the *Kahoot!* quiz was played. As stated in subsection 4.1, connected speech

teaching and learning can help improve both perception and production. Being pronunciation the main field of this dissertation, the connected speech test was based on production. Nevertheless, perception was included in the last lesson of the internship through the two above-mentioned activities in order to show students that connected speech teaching and learning can help improve not only pronunciation, but also listening comprehension. At the end of the lesson, students were asked to complete an online survey (see Appendix 5) created with *Google Forms* in order to answer to some questions about the lessons, the connected speech test and all the activities done in class leaving their comments on the experience. The connected speech test and the student opinion survey will be discussed below.
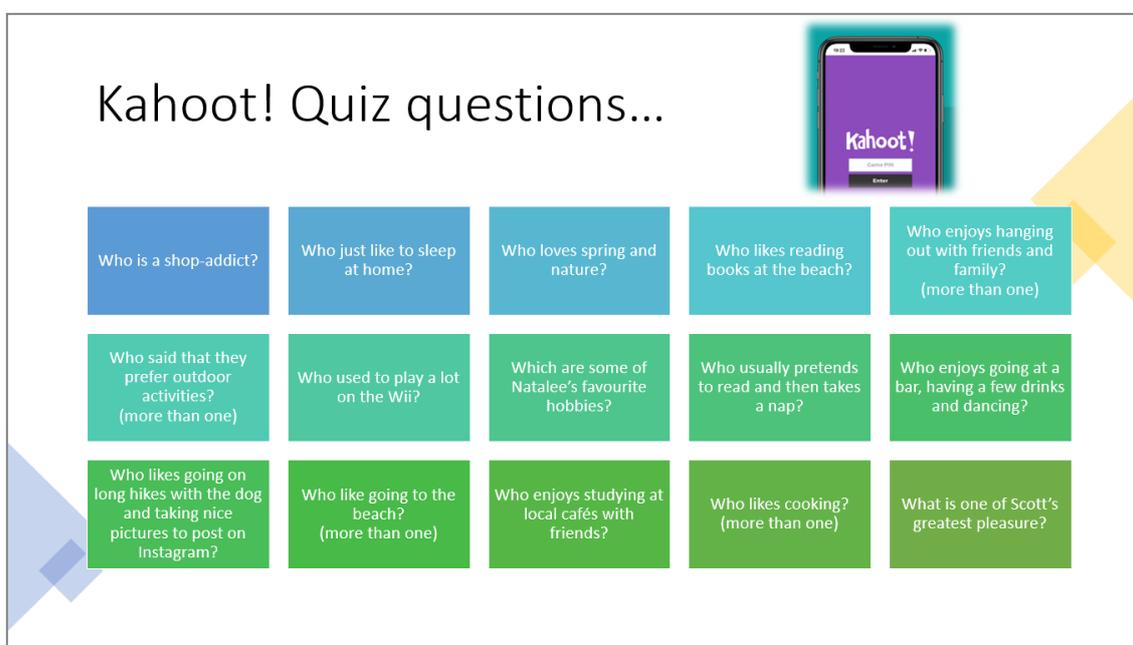
Figure 22: *Kahoot! quiz questions slide.*

4.3 The connected speech test.

The connected speech test (see Appendix 3) can be considered the core of the study conducted for the purpose of this dissertation. Indeed, the internship was based on this test and on the following underlying research question: What impact does CSPs training have on the pronunciation of intermediate-proficiency English learners?

In order to answer this question, the connected speech test was given to the 19 students as a pre-test to do before the two lessons on connected speech processes, and they had

to repeat it when the lessons about CSPs was finished. In this way, the pre-test results show how students normally speak and connect sounds, while the post-test results, compared with the first ones, should show whether the lessons on CSPs may lead to some improvements on students' pronunciation. The connected speech test was idealised following the studies mentioned in 4.1, especially that based on CSPs for production which all included either sentence or dialogue reading and spontaneous speech tasks (Brown and Kondo-Brown, 2006:20; Reed and Levis, 2015: 169-170). Indeed, the connected speech test was divided into two parts: a read aloud task and a free-speech monologue task. Both tasks were considered essential to investigate the use of CSPs by students. Indeed, the dialogue was specifically written to contain a significant number of linking, deletion and reduction processes, that is the three CSPs on which students were asked to focus. Reed and Levis (2015: 171) affirm that 'since practicing many types of CSPs during the same training period can be confusing to students, CSPs that are likely to make the greatest difference should be emphasised in instruction'. **Linking** was chosen for the following reasons (Reed and Levis, 2015: 169):

1) It is the simplest and "mildest" CSP (Hieke, 1987) since word boundaries are left almost intact;

2) It is present in all speech styles, while other CSPs are more frequent in more informal styles, e.g. palatalization;

3) L2 problems in linking production can render speech disconnected and choppy, and hence, difficult for NS to understand (Dauer, 1992) and unlinked speech can sometimes be viewed as aggressive and abrupt (Anderson-Hsieh et al., 1994; Hatch, 1992).

Deletion was identified as important because it is a 'radical, pervasive form of adjustment in connected speech' (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010: 172). In particular, deletion of word-final /t/ or /d/ in 'clusters of two at a word boundary when the following word begins with a consonant other than /h, y, w, r/' (ibid) were tested, since this rule was considered useful and not too difficult to be understood and used by B1 level students. Regarding **reduction**, a better knowledge and use of the schwa sound /ə/ was seen as essential being the most common sound in the English language and the one that determines the alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables. Indeed, as seen in chapter 1, vowel reduction is strictly linked with rhythm and intonation in English,

which is a syllable-timed language. Presenting a controlled environment, the read aloud task was fundamental in order to count the differences in linking, deletion and reduction processes between pre- and post-test. Indeed, many expressions present in the dialogue such as "what's up?", "dead tired", "ten hours a day", "cup of tea", "split personality", "wait a minute" and "credit card" were taken from the videos showed in class, so that students would have already been familiar with them. Dialogue reading was preferred to sentence reading because a dialogue presents a more realistic and contextualised situation in which communication takes place between two or more people. Indeed, the task instructions specify that it is a dialogue between two university students at the library, giving a clear context right from the start. Nevertheless, a free-speech monologue task was added to the connected speech test in order to analyse spontaneous speech as well. Students were asked to talk about their hobbies and what they like doing in their free time for about 1-2 minutes. The familiar topic and the short amount of time were considered suited for the students' B1 level. Indeed, this task was inspired by the general conversation part of the Speaking Test for the CAMBRIDGE B1 Preliminary for Schools certification, in which students are usually asked to discuss likes, dislikes, experiences, opinions, habits, etc. (Ashton and Thomas, 2006: 96).

4.3.1 Method.

The connected speech test was explained to students at the end of the first lesson asking them to follow the instructions and do the test as homework before the second lesson. Concerning the read aloud task, students had first to read the dialogue on their own in order to become familiar with it and then read it aloud recording themselves using a recording device, such as the one present in their smartphones. Dialogue reading was originally intended as a role-play activity in pairs, but social distancing during the quarantine did not allow students to meet each other and for this reason each student worked on their own. After having recorded their voice, students were asked to rename the audio file as pretest1_(surname).

Concerning the free-speech monologue task, students were asked to talk about their hobbies and what they like doing in their free time for about 1-2 minutes (see Appendix 3 for the list of ideas). While doing this second task, students had to record themselves and rename their audio file as pretest2_(surname). After having completed the test,

students uploaded their two audio files in a specific Drive folder, whose link was shared with the students during the lesson. For the pre-test, students were simply instructed to speak as they usually do in English. The connected speech test was repeated by the students immediately after the two lessons on CSPs. The tasks and instructions of the post-test were exactly the same of the pre-test. The only difference between pre- and post-test instructions is that students were specifically told to focus on linking, deletion and vowel reduction for the post-test revising their notes and using the material provided during the lessons. Moreover, students renamed the two recording as posttest1_(surname) and posttest2_(surname) this time in order not to confuse them with the pre-test audio files.

The pre- and post-test recordings were then downloaded and organised in folders. The read aloud exercise was first analysed listening to the pre- and post-test of each student and taking notes of their pronunciation and use of the selected connected speech processes: linking, deletion and vowel reduction. It is important to remember that in doing the pre-test students did not have any information about CSPs, while the post-test was recorded after the two lessons on connected speech. Indeed, during the second and third lessons, the dialogue was read and analysed in class using different colours for each CSP: linking (L) was marked in yellow, deletion (D) in green and vowel reduction (R) in light blue. Figure 23 shows the highlighted slides used in class in order to explain how the sounds in the dialogue could be better connected. Moreover, contractions were marked in bold and some words frequently mispronounced in the pre-test, such as "tired", "break", "leisure" and "whole", were underlined and checked together in class using the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online. It is important to mention that the dialogue for Read Aloud task was specifically written for this connected speech test on linking, deletion and vowel reduction. Moreover, the two lessons about connected speech contained many examples taken from the dialogue which was analysed highlighting with different colours the linking, deletion and vowel reduction processes as shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23: *Highlighted slides with the linking, deletion and reduction processes present in the dialogue of the Read Aloud Task.*

The same material, that is the dialogue with the three CSPs highlighted in different colours (L in yellow, D in green and R in blue), was used to count how many linking, deletion and vowel reduction processes students used in the pre- and post-test. Each highlighted group of sounds was given a number, so that the total number of CSPs obtained in the pre-test was then compared with that of the post-test. The total number of linking processes highlighted in the dialogue was 70, that of deletion processes was 12 and that of vowel reduction 60. Regarding the free-speech monologue task, on the

other hand, the pre- and post-test recordings of each student were not based on the exact same speech since they were spontaneous. For this reason, an accurate comparison between pre- and post-test of each student was not possible. However, all the recordings were transcribed and analysed in contrast in order to have a general idea of how the use of CSPs changed between pre- and post-test. The transcription of students' free-speech monologues is displayed in Appendix 4, first showing what they said in the pre-test and then in the post-test. For this task, it was decided to analyse four students in detail selecting two students who used a great amount of CSPs in the first exercise reaching the highest percentages (100-90% in L and D, 80-70% in R) in the post-test, and two students who reached medium-low percentages (90-80% in L, 80-70% in D and 60-50% or 40-30% in R) in the Read Aloud post-test..

4.3.2 Results.

In this subsection, the results of the connected speech test will be presented. In order to show the impact that CSPs training had on the pronunciation of the nineteen B1 level students, as indicated in the research question, the post-test results will be shown in contrast with that of the pre-test.

Regarding the Read Aloud task, the results were organised in the following three tables each containing a selected CSP: linking (L) is shown in Results Table 1, deletion (D) in Results Table 2 and vowel reduction (R) in Results Table 3. In the tables, each student is represented by a number indicated in the header row and the quantity of the selected CSPs used by students in the header column. It was decided to express the quantity of CSPs as percentages to give a clearer idea of the ratio between the total number of CSPs highlighted in the dialogue (L = 70, D = 12, R = 60) and the actual number used by each student. A different scale was used for Results Table 1 since students seemed to be more familiar with linking using more than 50% of the highlighted linking processes already in the pre-test. Indeed, student 17 obtained the lowest pre-test result using 41 out of 70 linking processes, that is 59% of them. For this reason, the lowest percentage in Results Table 1 is less than 60%. The descriptors used to fill the tables are "pre" for the pre-test results, "post" for the post-test results and "NC" for no change between the pre- and post-test results. The descriptor "post" is marked in green and bold if there was an improvement between the pre- and post-test.

L	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
100% - 90%	NC	post						post	NC		post		NC	post		NC		NC	
90% - 80%		pre	post	NC	NC	post	post	pre		post	pre	post		pre					NC
80% - 70%			pre				pre								post		post		
70% - 60%						pre				pre		pre			pre				
less than 60%																	pre		

Results Table 1: *Percentage of total number of Linking processes used by each student in the Read Aloud pre-test and post-test*

D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
100% - 90%	post	post		post	post	post	post	post	post	post	post		post			post	post	post	post
80% - 70%			post		pre	pre		pre	pre		pre	post	pre	post					pre
60% - 50%	pre						pre			pre		pre			post		pre	pre	
40% - 30%		pre		pre										pre	pre	pre			
less than 20%			pre																

Results Table 2: *Percentage of total number of Deletion processes used by each student in the Read Aloud pre-test and post-test.*

R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
100% - 90%																			
80% - 70%	post							post	post		post		post					post	
60% - 50%	pre	NC	post	post	post	post	post	pre	pre	post	pre		pre	post		post	post	pre	post
40% - 30%			pre	pre	pre	pre	pre			pre		post		pre	post	pre	pre		pre
less than 20%												pre			pre				

Results Table 3: *Percentage of total number of vowel Reduction processes used by each student in the Read Aloud pre-test and post-test.*

As stated at the end of the method section, the Free-speech Monologue pre- and post-tests of four students were analysed in detail. The recordings were first transcribed (see Appendix 4) and then relistened to several times in order to check students' pronunciation focusing on their use of linking, deletion and vowel reduction. Student number 3 and 12 were chosen because they were among those who showed some difficulties in the first exercise of the connected speech test. On the contrary, student number 8 and 18 were chosen for their high use of CSPs in the Read Aloud task. Results Table 4 contains the comments on the use of CSPs by the four above-mentioned students in the Free-speech Monologue pre-test and post-test.

	Student 3	Student 8	Student 12	Student 18
Pre-test	Words are not well connected (only some instances of linking) and hesitation and schwa insertions abound. Grammatical and phonological inaccuracies are present too. In particular, the sounds /θ/ and /ð/ are mispronounced as /t/ and /d/. Vowel reduction is not persistent.	Very good linking with only few unlinked words, but only two instances of deletion because of some hesitation and schwa insertions at the end of words accentuating final consonants. Good reduction that results in an intelligible speech with only one misplaced accent.	Words are not well connected (only some instances of linking) and hesitation abound. Grammatical and phonological inaccuracies are present too. Sometimes the student seems breathless and vowel reduction is not persistent.	Very good linking and deletion (only few unconnected words) and good reduction that results in an intelligible speech with only one misplaced accent.
Post-test	Words sound a little more connected thanks to the presence of more linking processes. Vowel reduction still needs improvements. The student seems more confident and, indeed, there are less hesitation and schwa insertions.	Very good linking and reduction. Deletion processes are more present (four instances) and the student seems more confident and fluent. Indeed, there are less hesitation and schwa insertions.	Words sound a little more connected thanks to the presence of more linking and deletion processes. Vowel reduction still needs improvements and the same grammatical and phonological inaccuracies are present.	Very good linking and deletion and good reduction that results in an intelligible speech with only two misplaced word accents.

Results Table 4: *Comments on the use of CSPs by the four selected students in the Free-speech Monologue pre-test and post-test.*

4.3.3 Discussion.

In general, it appears that the CSPs training has had a positive impact on the pronunciation of the nineteen students. Thanks to the possibility of revising their notes and studying or directly reading from the highlighted slides (see Figure 23) before or while doing the post-test (see question 14 of the student opinion survey), students' use of CSPs increased. Indeed, Results Table 1 shows that 11 out of 19 students improved in the use of linking processes during the post-test, while the remaining 8 students displayed little evidence of improvement slightly increasing their use of linking between the pre- and post-test. However, these students marked with NC were already classified as proficient users of linking processes using more than 80% of this first connected speech process' total quantity already in the pre-test. As already mentioned, students obtained the greatest results for this first category possibly because they were already familiar with sounds linking at word boundaries. In particular, students used many C-V linking especially in formulaic expressions such as "what's up?", "what about?", "come on", "I can imagine" and "wait a minute". In the post-test, the use of linking processes increased also in less known expressions or non-fixed combinations of sounds.

Regarding deletion processes (see Results Table 2), all nineteen students improved a lot in the use of this second category during the post-test. A possible explanation for this great improvement lies in the fact that the number of deletion processes highlighted in the dialogue was much smaller than that of the other two processes. Encouraged by the presence of only 12 of these CSPs, students may have concentrated their energy mainly on studying or memorising this second category because of its simplicity or limited quantity. Moreover, the disappearance of a sound is easier to learn and reproduce than sound modification or insertion (Reed and Levis, 2015: 162-163). On the contrary, vowel reduction seemed to be the most difficult category for the nineteen EFL learners, as shown in Results Table 3. Indeed, in the pre-test students tended to use the strong form of function words instead of using the weak and reduced schwa sound /ə/. It appears that Italian students tend to pronounce English in the same way as Italian, that is as a syllable-timed language in which syllables tend to have the same weight. In this regard, Busà (2008b:115) affirms that 'notoriously, one of the big problems for Italian learners of English is the production of vowels'. If vowel reduction is not respected, the stress-timed English loses its typical rhythm that carries important information with it.

Even in this case, CSPs training seems to have slightly helped students in improving their pronunciation since all students but one used more vowel reduction processes while doing the post-test. Other pronunciation problems noticed while listening to the students' Read Aloud task include:

- schwa insertion at the end of words accentuating final consonants, i.e. 'tired/ə/', 'up/ə/', 'talk/ə/', 'dad/ə/', 'stressed/ə/', 'with/ə/', 'but/ə/', 'that/ə/';

- strong aspirated 'h' in words with silent h such as 'hours' and in pronouns present in the middle of a sentence not employing deletion;

- misplaced word-accent in some words, i.e. 'ph<u>o</u>tography', '<u>e</u>xam', '<u>i</u>magine';

- mispronunciation of some sounds, i.e. 'm<u>a</u>d', 'br<u>ea</u>k', '<u>wh</u>ole', 't<u>e</u>n', 'gr<u>ea</u>t', 'gr<u>a</u>b', 'f<u>air</u>', 'cl<u>u</u>b', 't<u>i</u>r<u>e</u>d', 'se<u>ss</u>ion', 'l<u>ei</u>sure';

- pronunciation of the sounds /θ/ and /ð/ as /t/ and /d/, as in 'every<u>th</u>ing', '<u>th</u>ere';

- flat and monotonous intonation resulting in pronunciation that seemed robotic at times.

These features were more frequent during the pre-test because the correct pronunciation of some words was checked in class during the connected speech lessons using the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online.* Moreover, other problems, such as schwa insertion, strong aspirated 'h' and intonation, improved in the post-test thanks to the use of more linking, deletion and vowel reduction processes. Concerning the Free-speech Monologue task, students tended to make mistakes similar to those mentioned above. In the spontaneous speeches of students 3 and 12 (see Figure 24), i.e. the ones who had more difficulties in the first exercise, words are not well connected, and hesitation and schwa insertions abound. Vowel reduction is not persistent and some grammatical and phonological inaccuracies are present too. Nevertheless, the use of linking and deletion processes slightly increased in the post-test, while the students should focus more on vowel reduction. Despite some difficulties, it can be affirmed that students 3 and 12 recorded a more intelligible and fluent monologue for the post-test and the presence of less hesitation and more linking and deletion processes prove this.

Student 3:

[0:57] In my free time, I like to play volleyball, this is my favourite sport and I hem...play it three (/t/ instead of /θ/) times a week. I like this sport because I stay with my friends and I love the spor...the team sports. In this period, I... love the indoor activities like reading, watching series, listen music or play the piano. At the moment, I (am) reading... The Lord Of The King and this is my favourite book because I love the characters (/tʃ/ instead of /k/). I like to read the (/d/ instead of /ð/) novels and the fantasy books like Harry Potter. I play the piano because this is my passion and I love it ver...very much.

[1:00] In my free time, I play volleyball/ə/ and I love to play this sport because I stay with my friends and I love the team sports. In this period, I prefer the indoor activities, like reading books, watching series or films and/ə/ listen music. My favourite book is The Lord of the King and/ə/ eh...in this book, I love the characters and the places, but I read/ə/ novels or fantasy books like Harry Potter. I like watching series or films with my family, hem...in particular, comics films. I like to listen music like pop music or jazz music.

Student 12:

[1:43] My house is surrounded by the fields and this is one of the reasons why I prefer to be outdoor. In fact, stay outdoor is very important for me. When I don't know what I can do or I'm anxious, then lots of times I can go out and unwind on the garden. In that moment, I loo...I watch the...the sky and I can hear the singing of birds or I can see the flowers and the tree (pronounced as three) and it's a beautiful thing to do. Then when eh...I want to play, I can go out and play with my neighbours and them...and they are my friends. In fact, this moment is very funny because we laugh and stay together. And stay with friends and stay outdoor is two the most important of things in the life of teenager, and I'm very...very luckly because eh...I have eh...all... these things.

[1:55] If eh...someone asks me I prefer to be outdoors or indoors, without doubts I...say I prefer to be outdoors. In fact, my house is surrounded by the fields and since I was young, I has been outdoor. Usually, when I don't know what can I do or I'm anxious, stressed or frightened, I go out and I sit on the garden and eh... I heard the singing of the birds, watch the sky with clouds and sun or watch the flowers and trees (pronounced as three). And that moment, are very peaceful (pronounced as /ei/) for me. Then, when I wanna play volleyball I go out and I meet my neighbours. My neighbours are also my friends and eh...they are beautiful people and play with them is very funny and this is eh... very important for me. In my opinion, stay with friends and stay outdoor are the most important things for teenager and I very luckly because I have all things.

Figure 24: *Free-speech Monologue task's analyses of students 3 and 12.*

Students 8 and 18 (i.e. the ones who obtained very good results in the first exercise) recorded their spontaneous speeches using good linking, deletion and vowel reduction already in the pre-test. However, some hesitation, schwa insertions and misplaced word-accents were also present. As shown in Figure 25, they improved their pronunciation in the post-test using more CSPs and speaking in a more confident and fluent way.

Student 8:

[1:42] So, I usually spend my free time painting, this is my passion and I think it is a great way to eh... let everybody see how I feel with a...with hem...painting, with colours and images (wrong word stress). In my city, there's also a place where the...some artists like to paint...like painting together and we always listen to music while we are working, and I think music is a great way to relax myself too. Another of my passions is dancing, I have been doing dance since I was four and I have never left it. Some years ago, I also used/ə/ to... dance with the pointed shoes but nowadays I'm trying to learn something different. And at last, I don't think it is really an hobby (aspirated /h/ missing), but... when I'm at home I always...I'm always trying new types...of braids, I usually use my sister's hair and/ə/...but she isn't always happy about that. That's all.

[1:14] I usually spend my free time painting, this is my passion and I think this is a really good way to express myself with colours and images (wrong word stress). I started painting when I was like ten when I discovered that in my city there was a place where some artist like working together and nowadays, I'm part of this group. (pause) We usually paint while we are listening to music and I think this also a really good way to relax myself. Another of my passion is dancing, I've been dancing since I was four. A few years ago, I also used to dance with the pointed shoes but nowadays I'm trying to learn something different. I also like reading outside under trees while the sun is shining and birds are singing. And at last, even if I don't think this is really an hobby (aspirated /h/ missing), I like trying to do new types of...new types of braids on my sister's hair, that's all.

Student 18:

[1:18] One of my favourite hobbies is reading, I really love reading especially hem... historical books or fantasy book. I am not, absolutely not, a very sporty person, but I actually play...I actually do athletics even if I'm not very good at it. However, eh... I prefer indoor activities like watching film or TV series. I don't like very much playing videogames because... I think that... they are boring and not interesting (misplaced word accent) for me. Hem...at the moment, TV series are my favourite activity. Now, I'm watching Gray's Anatomy, Downtown Abbey and The Handmaid's Tale. When I have some free time, I... love, I like writing and when I was a child, I wanted to be a writer. Now, I have changed my mind, but I like writing very much.

[1:10] I am very lazy, so... I don't like very much doing sports or physical activities in general, but anyway I do athletics, even if I'm not very good at it. I prefer to stay at home lying (/ei/ instead of /ai/) on the couch and watching films or TV series. I don't like very much videogames because I don't find them interesting (misplaced word accent), I actually think they are very boring. At the moment, my favourite eh...my favourite activity is watching TV series, I'm watching Gray's Anatomy, Downtown Abbey and The Handmaid's Tale and I really really like films too. Hem...I also like writing. In the past, when I was very little, I wanted to be a writer, but now I have changed my mind. But I still love very much writing fantasy adventures or similar things.

Figure 25: *Free-speech Monologue task's analyses of students 8 and 18.*

To conclude, the connected speech test showed that CSPs training can have a positive impact on the pronunciation of intermediate proficiency learners of English, as the

nineteen students who participated in the study. Indeed, all students significantly improved their speech production and developed phonological awareness thanks to the lessons on connected speech using more linking, deletion and vowel reduction processes in the post-test. This improvement can clearly be noticed in the results of the Read Aloud task (see Results Table 1, 2, 3) since dialogue reading represents a controlled environment easier for students to be studied and for researchers to be analysed. However, students slightly improved also in the Free-speech Monologue task showing that they were able to put into practice what learned during the connected speech lessons even in a new spontaneous speech. Further researches on this topic considering a higher number of participants and other connected speech processes could enrich the research on CSPs production. Moreover, as stated by Reed and Levis (2015: 170), 'the effectiveness of the training cannot be fully evaluated without examining the long-term effects of such training'. Indeed, a possible way to attempt to fill this gap could be the repetition of the connected speech test not only immediately after the training, but also some months later in order to see if students maintained a significant improvement over time.

4.4 The student opinion survey.

During the last lesson of the internship, students were asked to complete an online opinion survey on the just concluded experience. The survey was created with *Google Forms* and the sixteen questions are shown in Appendix 5. In the student opinion survey, open questions are alternated with multiple-choice questions about the lessons, the connected speech test and all the activities done in class asking their comments on the experience.

After having verified students' L1, i.e. Italian for everyone except for two bilingual students speaking also Mandarin and Spanish, students were asked how important it is for them to focus on the pronunciation of English. On a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot), only one student answered with a neutral 3, while seven students considered pronunciation important and the other eleven students said it is very important.

Regarding survey question 3, 70% of students said that that they have already had lessons on English pronunciation, while 10% said no and 20% was not sure.

In order to investigate their perception on the attention that English teachers tend to pay to pronunciation, the survey question 4 was asked. 20% of students said that, in their experience, there is not enough attention on pronunciation in English, 40% was not sure and the other 40% said yes. These answers show that students do not have a clear awareness on pronunciation teaching, possibly because it is dealt with sporadically or when it is strictly necessary.

Indeed, students did not seem very satisfied with their English pronunciation since only three students gave a 4 on a satisfaction scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot), while six students gave a 2 and all the others a neutral 3.

To the open question number 6 "Would you like to work more on your English pronunciation? Why?", all students answered yes adding that, in their opinion, pronunciation is important and useful in order to express themselves and be better understood both by English native and non-native speakers. Moreover, some of them believe that fluency depends on pronunciation and other reasons for improving it regard travelling, studying abroad and be more connected with people in other parts of the world. Only two students said they want to have a native-like pronunciation in order to be judged as good speakers of English.

Regarding survey questions 7 to 11, 80% of students stated that connected speech was a new topic for them while the rest was not sure, and they all found the lessons on pronunciation and connected speech interesting and useful answering with a 4 or a 5. The videos and examples showed in class, as well as the test activity, were considered helpful and useful by the great majority of students who answered with a 4 or a 5.

With survey questions 12 and 13, it was decided to investigate students' motivation in doing the pre- and post-test in order to see their will to improve and the interest showed for this activity. Figure 26 shows on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot) that their motivation increased significantly after the lessons on connected speech, possibly because they were more aware of the activity and thus motivated to improve their pronunciation.
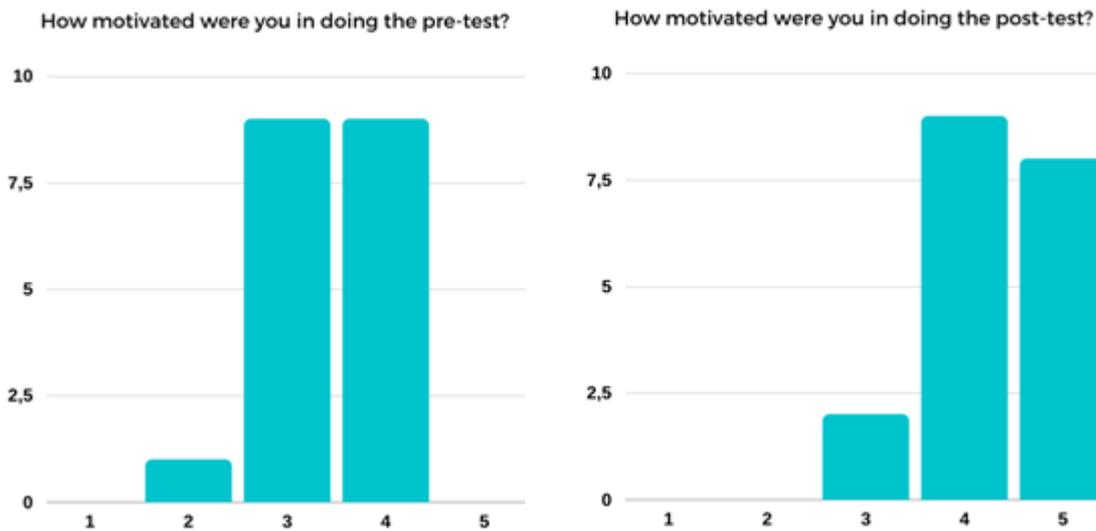
Figure 26: *Students' motivation in doing the pre- and post-test in survey questions 12 and 13.*

Figure 27 shows that 67% of the students declared in question 14 that they studied their notes and the highlighted slides for the Read Aloud task before doing the post-test and then they read from the dialogue in the post-test file. On the contrary, 33% of them directly read the dialogue of the first exercise directly from the highlighted slides. Nevertheless, students made an effort to improve their pronunciation meaning that the goal of the study reached them. Indeed, no students read the dialogue in the post-test file without studying at least the highlighted slides (see third option in Appendix 5).
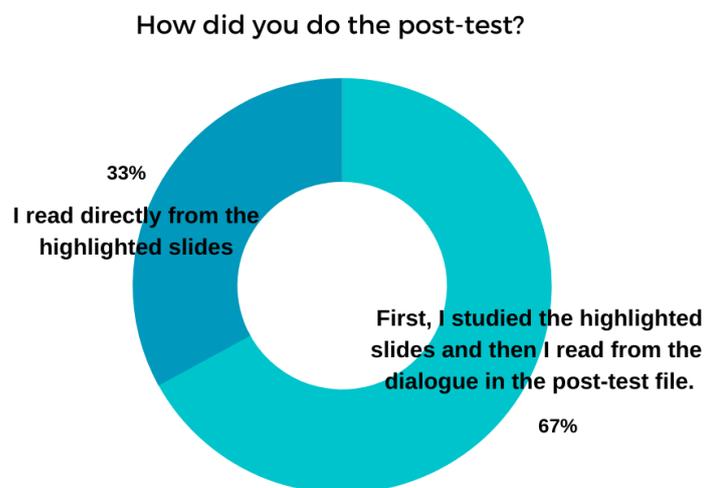
Figure 27: *How students did the post-test in survey question 14.*

Figure 28, likewise, shows that the great majority of students expressed in question 15 that their pronunciation improved a little bit or quite a lot after the CSPs training. Only 5% was not sure of the answer, while nobody said "a lot" or "not at all".

Do you think your pronunciation improved after these lessons on pronunciation and connected speech?
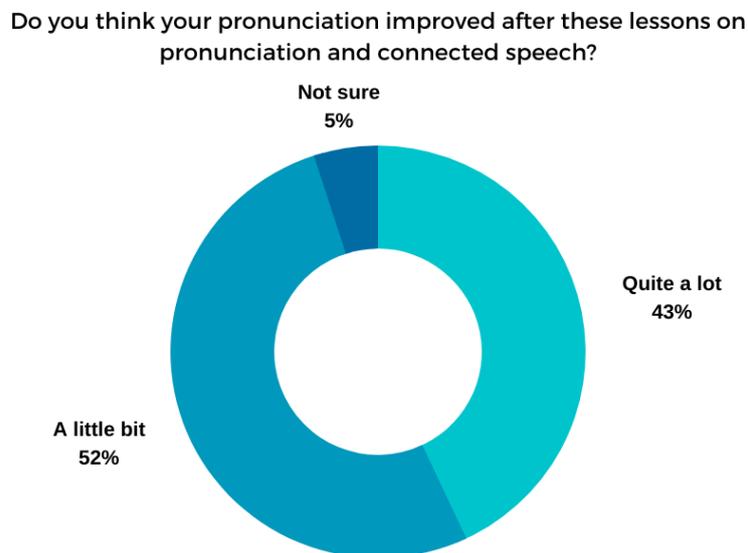
Figure 28: *Students' awareness about their pronunciation improvement in survey question number 15.*

At the end of the survey, students were asked to leave their comments on this experience specifying what they liked and what they did not like. In general, the topic of the lessons was appreciated because of its originality. A student said: 'I liked these lessons because it was a new topic I've never done' and another one affirmed: 'I didn't know the rules explained in class and I found them useful'. In particular, students liked the *PowerPoint* slides with examples, the videos showed in class, the pre- and post-test activity and the *Kahoot!* quiz played during the last lesson. They used the positive adjectives 'useful', 'nice', 'interesting', 'organised' and 'clear' to describe these activities. On the other hand, one student did not like the warm-up activity so much, while another would have preferred to listen to more examples. Another negative comment on the second lesson was that one student found it a little bit difficult to understand all the new information. In general students would have preferred to have these lessons in person and not online behind a screen. However, they appreciated the technology used to diversify the activities.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, the importance of English pronunciation teaching and learning, especially in those contexts where it is spoken as a foreign language (EFL), such as in Italy, was investigated. Intelligibility and comprehensibly were described as the two keywords for effective communication, since the most important thing while speaking English as a Lingua Franca with people of different first languages is not to sound native-like, but to be understood. For this reason, pronunciation teaching should be tailored to the students' needs and backgrounds, and it should be based on realistic goals. However, this key aspect of communication tends to be overshadowed in class because of teachers' uncertainty about how to tackle pronunciation systematically, lack of time in a busy curriculum and lack of confidence in their own pronunciation or subject knowledge (Rogerson-Revell, 2011: 1). Even connected speech, described as a suprasegmental feature of pronunciation which is particularly important in English both for perception and production, seems to receive little attention in research and practice. Indeed, similarly to pronunciation, connected speech tends to be overlooked in class because of teachers' unfamiliarity with connected speech processes, lack of time and of adequate teaching materials (Kondo-Brown, 2006: 21).

In order to contribute to the research on connected speech teaching and learning, a way to teach CSPs was suggested through a study conducted for the purpose of this dissertation. The study aimed to answer the following research question: What impact does CSPs training have on the pronunciation of intermediate proficiency learners of English? In order to answer that, my own experience of an online internship with a second-year high school class composed by nineteen Italian students of B1 level was described. Together with four lessons via Zoom on pronunciation and connected speech, students were asked to do a connected speech test as homework. The test was divided into two identical parts: a pre-test to be done between the first and the second lesson and a post-test between the third and the fourth. The instructions provided for the recording of students' voices first while reading aloud a dialogue, and second while spontaneously talking about their hobbies and free time for about 1-2 minutes. The Read Aloud and the Free-speech Monologue tasks were specifically idealised to investigate students' use of

three CSPs: linking, deletion and vowel reduction. These three processes were selected because of their utility and relative simplicity accordingly to the B1 level of the students. Indeed, Reed and Levis (2015: 171) affirm that 'since practicing many types of CSPs during the same training period can be confusing to students, CSPs that are likely to make the greatest difference should be emphasised in instruction'. While for the pre-test students were told to speak as they usually do in English, for the post-test they were asked to revise their notes and the highlighted slides used in class trying to focus on the three above-mentioned CSPs. Students recordings were then transcribed and analysed paying attention to the amount of linking, deletion and vowel reduction processes used by each student making a comparison between the pre- and the post-test.

Results Tables 1, 2, 3 show the quantity in percentage of the CSPs used by each student in the Read Aloud task. The results clearly demonstrate that the CSPs training was effective since 11 out of 19 students used more linking processes in the post-test, all students employed more deletion processes, and 18 out of 19 students slightly improved their use of vowel reduction. The class obtained the highest percentages for the linking and deletion processes. In the first case, students were possibly already familiar with sounds linking at word boundaries. Indeed, in the post-test nine students reached 100-90% of the total amount of the linking processes present in the dialogue, eight students used 90-80% of this CSP and two students 80-70%. Regarding deletion, the greatest improvement between pre- and post-test was to be found in this category, since the average for the pre-test was 50% and for the post-test 90%.The possible reason may be that students were encouraged by the low number of occurrences of this CSP in the dialogue and by the fact that the disappearance of a sound is generally easier to learn and reproduce (Reed and Levis, 2015: 162-163). Vowel reduction seemed to be the most difficult CSP for the students who tended to use the strong form instead of the schwa sound, for example in the function words 'h<u>a</u>ve t<u>o</u>', 'c<u>a</u>n', 'y<u>ou</u>', 'b<u>u</u>t'. Vowel mispronunciation and schwa insertion seem to be a constant trait for EFL students, especially for Italians. Indeed, the analysis of the second task confirmed that students improved the most in the use of linking and deletion processes while their vowel reduction was not always so accurate.

Results Table 4 show the comments on the use of CSPs by four selected students in the Free-speech Monologue pre-test and post-test. Despite their different language skills, all

four students achieved improvements in the post-test demonstrating that the positive impact of CSPs training persists not only in a controlled environment such as the dialogue, but also in spontaneous speech. Indeed, the great majority of students sounded more fluent and intelligible in the post-tests. The experience was mainly evaluated positively by students through an online survey in which they reported that the lessons with the videos and examples were interesting and useful, and the test activity was helpful. Indeed, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (a lot), they answered with a 4 or a 5 to these opinion questions. Moreover, students felt more motivated in doing the connected speech test after the lessons on pronunciation and connected speech showing that they were involved, and they developed phonological awareness. Moreover, all students thought that their pronunciation improved 'a little bit' (52%) or 'quite a lot' (43%) after these lessons on pronunciation and connected speech.

However, the long-term effect of the CSPs training on students' pronunciation should be investigated and a larger sample size including students of different classes and different levels of English should be used to analyse the use of CSPs in more detail. Since research and practice in this field are not very widespread, especially in Italy, this study has helped to fill the gap in connected speech teaching and learning.

To conclude, by giving the right importance to connected speech, and to pronunciation more in general, the often heavily accented production of English by EFL learners may be improved to the benefit of good quality communication, which seems to be essential in today's global world.

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APPENDIX 1: Methodological variation in pronunciation teaching.

Method	Focus	Tolerance of pronunciation errors	Method used	Summary
Grammar-Translation	N/A	Relatively tolerant	Teacher correction via lecture/ explanation.	Little or no attention is paid to pronunciation.
Direct Method	Accuracy	Relatively tolerant	Teacher correction and repetition.	Student learn to pronounce by listening to and repeating the teacher's model of a word or phrase.
Audiolingual Method (ALM) and Oral Approach	Accuracy	Relatively tolerant	Teacher correction; repetition drill and practice in the language lab; minimal-pair drill.	Pronunciation is emphasized and taught from the beginning.
Silent Way	Accuracy first, then fluency	Not tolerant	Teacher correction cued by sound-colour charts and Fidel charts; use of gesture and facial expression.	There is a strong emphasis on accuracy of production; words and phrases are repeated until they are near nativelike.
Community Language Learning (CLL)	Fluency, then accuracy	Somewhat tolerant	Teacher correction via repetition.	Learner decides what degree of accuracy in pronunciation to aim for.

Total Physical Response (TPR) and Natural Approach	N/A	Very tolerant	Native-speaker input	Production is delayed until learners are ready to speak, which gives them time to internalize the sounds of the new language; thus, good pronunciation is assumed to come naturally.
Communicative Approach	Fluency obligatory; accuracy optional	Relatively tolerant	Learner engagement in authentic listening and speaking tasks	Communicatively adequate pronunciation is generally assumed to be a by-product of appropriate practice over a sufficient period of time.

Celce-Murcia et al. (2010: 449).

APPENDIX 2: Phonological control descriptors in 2018 CEFR.

PHONOLOGICAL CONTROL	OVERALL PHONOLOGICAL CONTROL	SOUND ARTICULATION	PROSODIC FEATURES
C2	Can employ the full range of phonological features in the target language with a high level of control – including prosodic features such as word and sentence stress, rhythm and intonation – so that the finer points of his/her message are clear and precise. Intelligibility and effective conveyance of and enhancement of meaning are not affected in any way by features of accent that may be retained from other language(s).	Can articulate virtually all the sounds of the target language with clarity and precision.	Can exploit prosodic features (e.g. stress, rhythm and intonation) appropriately and effectively in order to convey finer shades of meaning (e.g. to differentiate and emphasise).
C1	Can employ the full range of phonological features in the target language with sufficient control to ensure intelligibility throughout. Can articulate virtually all the sounds of the target language; some features of accent retained from other language(s) may be noticeable, but they do not affect intelligibility.	Can articulate virtually all of the sounds of the target language with a high degree of control. He/she can usually self-correct if he/she noticeably mispronounces a sound.	Can produce smooth, intelligible spoken discourse with only occasional lapses in control of stress, rhythm and/or intonation, which do not affect intelligibility or effectiveness. Can vary intonation and place stress correctly in order to express precisely what he/she means to say.
B2	Can generally use appropriate intonation, place stress correctly and articulate individual sounds clearly; accent tends to be influenced by other language(s) he/she speaks, but has little or no effect on intelligibility.	Can articulate a high proportion of the sounds in the target language clearly in extended stretches of production; is intelligible throughout, despite a few systematic mispronunciations. Can generalise from his/her repertoire to predict the phonological features of most unfamiliar words (e.g. word stress) with reasonable accuracy (e.g. whilst reading).	Can employ prosodic features (e.g. stress, intonation, rhythm) to support the message he/she intends to convey, though with some influence from other languages he/she speaks.
B1	Pronunciation is generally intelligible; can approximate intonation and stress at both utterance and word levels. However, accent is usually influenced by other language(s) he/she speaks.	Is generally intelligible throughout, despite regular mispronunciation of individual sounds and words he/she is less familiar with.	Can convey his/her message in an intelligible way in spite of a strong influence on stress, intonation and/or rhythm from other language(s) he/she speaks.
A2	Pronunciation is generally clear enough to be understood, but conversational partners will need to ask for repetition from time to time. A strong influence from other language(s) he/she speaks on stress, rhythm and intonation may affect intelligibility, requiring collaboration from interlocutors. Nevertheless, pronunciation of familiar words is clear.	Pronunciation is generally intelligible when communicating in simple everyday situations, provided the interlocutor makes an effort to understand specific sounds. Systematic mispronunciation of phonemes does not hinder intelligibility, provided the interlocutor makes an effort to recognise and adjust to the influence of the speaker's language background on pronunciation.	Can use the prosodic features of everyday words and phrases intelligibly, in spite of a strong influence on stress, intonation and/or rhythm from other language(s) he/she speaks. Prosodic features (e.g. word stress) are adequate for familiar, everyday words and simple utterances.
A1	Pronunciation of a very limited repertoire of learnt words and phrases can be understood with some effort by interlocutors used to dealing with speakers of the language group concerned. Can reproduce correctly a limited range of sounds as well as the stress on simple, familiar words and phrases.	Can reproduce sounds in the target language if carefully guided. Can articulate a limited number of sounds, so that speech is only intelligible if the interlocutor provides support (e.g. by repeating correctly and by eliciting repetition of new sounds).	Can use the prosodic features of a limited repertoire of simple words and phrases intelligibly, in spite of a very strong influence on stress, rhythm, and/or intonation from other language(s) he/she speaks; his/her interlocutor needs to be collaborative.

APPENDIX 3: The connected speech test.

PRE-TEST: speak as you usually do in English.
POST-TEST: focus on linking, deletion and reduction.

READ ALOUD TASK

Read aloud the following dialogue between two university students at the library. While doing this activity, record yourself and rename your audio file as follows: pretest1_(surname) / posttest1_(surname)

T: Hi Rachel, what's up?

R: I'm dead tired, Tim. I have to study ten hours a day to pass all these exams.

T: That's too much, have a break! It's not the end of the world if you don't take an exam immediately, there's always another exam session.

R: That's what I thought in my first year of university, but now my dad is calling me the queen of procrastination. He has already set a deadline for my graduation and I have to hurry up with everything.

T: That's not fair. Parents tend to underestimate our efforts. Do you exercise anymore?

R: 'Well you can forget about that' is what my dad says to me whenever we talk about the leisure activities I used to do.

T: He must be mad. Someone has to tell him he's exaggerating. What about your volleyball team?

R: Left it.

T: No way. And your photography club?

R: Gone forever.

T: Come on, tell me it's a joke!

R: I'm serious, Tim. I've never been so stressed in my whole life.

T: I can imagine. I'm so sorry, Rachel. Do you want a cup of tea? Tea makes everything better. And friends too.

R: Thank you for trying to cheer me up, Tim. But I really don't have time.

T: After a short break you'll study way better, I'm telling you.

R: Okay, I'm in the mood for a tea with you now. Sometimes I think I have a split personality.

T: You must be tired. Wait a minute, my mum is calling me. "Mum? Uh-huh. Okay, I'll be there in half an hour. Bye". Sorry Rachel, I don't have much time...my mum needs me at home.

R: We can have it to take away so that I can quickly get on with my studying and you can go home.

T: Sounds great! I'll grab it for you. Do you put milk in it?

R: Of course. But please pay with my credit card! You have been so nice to me today. I really feel better now.

T: Nooooo! What are friends for, right?

R: Okay, but next time it's on me.

T: Done.

FREE-SPEECH MONOLOGUE TASK

Talk about your hobbies and what you like doing in your free time for about 1-2 minutes. While doing this activity, record yourself and rename your audio file as follows: pretest2_(surname) / posttest2_(surname)

Use these ideas:

- Say whether you prefer to be indoors or outdoors.
- Say if you like to be active and do sport or not.
- Talk about any outdoor or indoor hobbies you have.
- Say what you like doing when you're at home.
- Say if you like spending time playing on video games or watching TV series.

Upload your 2 audio files in the specific Drive folder.

APPENDIX 4: Transcription of students' free-speech monologues.

- Student 1

[0:54] I love to stay at home. In fact, I go out only once or twice a month because I don't really like to stay with other people except my friends. When I'm at home, I stay in my bedroom and I read books. I usually read like adventure books or fantasy books because they are my favourite. Sometimes I listen to music while I clean my bookshelves where all my actual figures are. But in the evening, I usually play videogames with my brother, that is so funny! Some, some people thought...some people think that I'm a bit stupid because I don't go out much and I don't really have a lot of friends. But I don't really care about what people say, it's only me and it's...and I'm fine with it.

[0:41] I don't...I don't like to go outside. In fact, I prefer to stay at home. I don't practice any sport because I hate them. I usually stay in my bedroom and I read a book. I also love to listen to music because I think is very relaxing. When I'm not studying, I usually watch some videos in YouTube because...because they are really funny and so, so relaxing sometimes. I love to do all these things by myself and I don't like when one, maybe my brother, comes to my room. It's really annoying.

- Student 2

[1:07] In this quarantine I have a lot of time to spend for myself and so in my free time I like to watch to some TV series and films on Netflix. Then, when there are sunny days, I also like to go out with my dog for a walk or going with the bicycle around the...around my little town. In this period, I'm trying to cook some cakes by my own and I also everyday talk with my friends in video calls using Skype or WhatsApp. Another thing I like to do in this period it's...is to listen to music and also to read books. When I have time, I also like to do some workout with my mum and I'm starting to...I'm starting doing yoga and I think it's a very relaxing way to meditate and think about yourself.

[1:07] In my free time I prefer to stay outdoor because I like to sunbathe and to go out for walks with my dog or with the bicycle. Then I like to read some books or listen to some music while I'm lying on my garden. I'm a very active person so I like to do some workout or yoga when I have time, and the last one is very relaxing for me and like to...to do it. Then I also like some indoor activities, like watching to TV series or films, and I love this. Hem...then, I also like to cook; in fact, I'm trying to cook some cakes by my own, even if it's very hard for me. The last thing I like to do is to take care of my body, like doing some scrubs or also take cake care of my nails.

- Student 3

[0:57] In my free time, I like to play volleyball, this is my favourite sport and I hem...play it three times a week. I like this sport because I stay with my friends and I love the spor...the team sports. In this period, I... love the indoor activities like reading, watching series, listen music or play the piano. At the moment, I [am] reading... The Lord Of The King and this is my favourite book because I love the characters. I like to read the novels and the fantasy books like Harry Potter. I play the piano because this is my passion and I love it ver...very much.

[1:00] In my free time, I play volleyball and I love to play this sport because I stay with my friends and I love the team sports. In this period, I prefer the indoor activities, like reading books, watching series or films and listen music. My favourite book is The Lord of the King and eh...in this book, I love the characters and the places, but I read novels or fantasy books like Harry Potter. I like watching series or films with my family, hem...in particular comics films. I like to listen music like pop music or jazz music.

- Student 4

[2:38] Hello, I'm [student's name]. I play rugby with the Montebelluna rugby club. I have been doing this sport for 7 years. I play rugby four times a week on Monday, on Tuesday, Thursday, Wednesday and Sunday we play game with others team. Hem... I'm really passionate about rugby, I've never missed any Six Nations Game, that is a tournament that is played by the best team in Europe like Ireland, Italy, England, France, Wales and Scotland. This year, for the Covid19 they have failed to end all the matches which were postponed until September if...if all goes well. Every rugby player has a favourite team, mine is Benetton, a club in which I would like to play when I grow up, but even if it is an Italian team, as a national I prefer Ireland. Ireland has a type of game that I likes very much. Many would call it orthodox because the player[s] always following the instruction[s] of the flyhalf who commands the attach...the attack action, always manage to break through the opponents' line so they can score the try and I have a favourite player that is Peter O'Mahony who play...who plays with the Munster, an Irish team and the Ireland National team. I also reflect a lot...a lot in him because I play in the same role, the blindside flanker in the scrum. And that's all.

[3:40] Hello, my name is [student's name], I'm sixteen years old and I practice rugby with Montebelluna-Asolo rugby club. I started when I was nine, at the time I was in the second year of the under8. I like playing rugby because in my opinion it was a game in which respect for the opponent was the most important thing. Growing up, under [?], I become stronger and three times in a row captain of my team. My teammates and I have won many tournaments, medals and even international matches. I remember an English team that arrived in Montebelluna when I was still playing in under14. They seemed calm seen from outside, but when entered the field we discovered a model players which we couldn't contain. After a first half under their dominion, we returned to the field playing as if it had happened [?]. After a comeback which lasted the entire second half of the game the result stopped at 17 for them and 11 for us. Tackles on tackles, rack on rack, paces on paces, but we never managed to penetrate their defensive line. He played for 3 minutes keeping possession until Cross, a partner of mine, with the assistance of Battaglia, managed to pass to get to the 5 meter line where, with a come and go, I throw myself to mark the try to reach 16 points. With the new formation kick [?] we could win. I went to our kicker and said: 'let's send these prudents [?] at home! We're second of ten before the kick that went in the middle of the goal. When the referee whistled the end, we shoot for joy. But one thing that struck was when one of the opponents called me and shook my hand saying that I was a good captain. I asked him why and he replied that unlike other captains he met I was able to keep all my companions calm before the game ended. That's also why I like rugby, for the people and the stories that everyone brings with them.

- Student 5

[1:01] One of my favourite hobbies to do inside is play the piano and I've been playing the piano since I was 8 years old and over time that become my passion. In last two years I've been attending a new school in Castelfranco, where we mainly study classical music and now, I'm studying Mozart. But my favourite piece an...is Nuvole Bianche, white clouds, a piece of contemporary music. The author of this piece is Ludovico Einaudi and he is one of my favourite musician[s]. Playing the piano relaxes me, makes me feel good and that's why even if I have to spend enough time on it every day, like half an hour or an hour every day, I enjoy it because it's one of the things I like to do.

[1:09] The thing I like to do inside is playing the piano. I've been playing the piano since I was 8 years old and it started out as a joke and then it became my passion. For three years I studied in a school in Altivole and then in the middle school I was in a music section where I could play the piano as a school subject and now by...for two years I have been attended a school in Castelfranco where we mainly study classical music. My favourite song is Nuvole Bianche, it's a contemporary piece and the author is Ludovico Einaudi, one of my favourite musicians. I spend enough time every day to play the piano usually half an hour or an hour every day, but I like to do it because playing the piano relaxes me and makes me feel good a lot, and yes...it is my passion.

- Student 6

[1:01] I don't have many hobbies, but the few hobbies I have, I really like them. I don't like to stay that much indoor, maybe because I'm claustrophobic. For this, I do everything to stay outdoor, but I'm not a very active person or sport. And...I don't practice them. My favourite hobby was travelling to different countries and city and knew a new languages and culture and meet new person. But in Italy with the quarantine, the few things I can do are watching TV serials or films and reading a lot of books and eat...I really like eat[ing].

[1:00] Hi, I don't have many hobbies, but the few hobbies I have I really like them. I don't like to stay at home that much, maybe because I am claustrophobic. For this, I do everything to stay outdoors, but I'm not a very active person. In fact, I don't practice sport. My favourite activities were travelling to different country and city and knew new culture and new languages. But now with the quarantine, the few things I usually do outdoors are deleted. So, hem... now I... usually read~~ing~~ and watch~~ing~~ TV series or films.

- Student 7

[1:01] In my free time, I like doing a lot of things. For example, I play volleyball three times a week for two hours and Saturday afternoon or Sunday I play a match against other teams. When I don't play volleyball, I like spending time with my friends or my boyfriend. When it's winter I like reading and watching series TV on Netflix, instead in summer I like very much spending time outdoor. In fact, in summer, I often go to the swimming pool and to the sea. Sometimes I ride a bike for example when I am nervous, and I want to relax. Obviously, in summer I spend more time with my friends than in winter. I often go visit them at home to chat or play video games.

[1:02] Hi, I'm [student's name] and in my free time I like doing a lot of things. My favourite hobby is volleyball, I play this sport three times a week for two hours and Saturday afternoon or Sunday morning I play a match against other teams. When I don't play volleyball, I spend a lot of time with my friends or boyfriend. I love reading, watching films and series TV on Netflix in winter. Instead in summer I prefer to be outdoor. In fact, I often go to the sea or to the swimming pool in this season and sometimes I ride my bike. In summer I spend more time with my friends than in winter. I often go visit them at home to chat, watch films, listen to music and play videogames.

- Student 8

[1:42] So, I usually spend my free time painting, this is my passion and I think it is a great way to eh... let everybody see how I feel with a...with hem...painting, with colours and images. In my city, there's also a place where the...some artists like to paint...like painting together and we always listen to music while we are working, and I think music is a great way to relax myself too. Another of my passions is dancing, I have been doing dance since I was four and I have never left it. Some years ago, I also used to... dance with the pointed shoes but nowadays I'm trying to learn something different. And at last, I don't think it is really an hobby, but... when I'm at home I always...I'm always trying new types...of braids, I usually use my sister's hair and...but she isn't always happy about that. That's all.

[1:14] I usually spend my free time painting, this is my passion and I think this is a really good way to express myself with colours and images. I started painting when I was like ten when I discovered that in my city there was a place where some artist like working together and nowadays, I'm part of this group. [pause] We usually paint while we are listening to music and I think this also a really good way to relax myself. Another of my passion is dancing, I've been dancing since I was four. A few years ago, I also used to dance with the pointed shoes but nowadays I'm trying to learn something different. I also like to reading outside under trees while the sun is shining and birds are singing. And at last, even if I don't think this is really an hobby, I like trying to do new types of...new types of braids on my sister's hair, that's all.

- Student 9

[1:39] I usually don't have so much free time, but I have some hobbies and in this quarantine time I'm doing a lot of things so I prefer to stay outdoor but of course some of my hobbies are indoors. I like to play the piano because I can listen to music and play it at the same time. Then I love to do sports because it make[s] me happy and my favourite sport is volleyball. Hem...I really like read[ing] and books...every kind of books and watch TV, but I don't watch TV only sometimes because I don't have time. And I really enjoy to go for a walk with my dogs or my friends. And another things that I love to do is learn languages because I don't know why maybe because I love travel[ling].

[1:55] I don't have so much hobbies, but I really like to play the piano and my favourite song is River Flows in You. Some of my friends think that it's too funny because my favourite music is rap music, but I play the piano. And it's...so strange. Hem...then, I really love to do sports and my favourite sport is doing volleyball. I play it three times or four times a week, it depends. And I like it because I can stay with my friends and at the same time, I can do what I want. Then, sometimes I love to painting, hem...things

like nature or animals, but I'm not really good and so I prefer to read a book or watch TV, but I don't have a favourite book or a favourite series. Hem...but in this quarantine time I'm watching a lot of films and I prefer drama films. Then, I really like of course to go out with my friends and...my favourite hobby is travel. I like travelling so much because I can see the world and...I don't know, I really love it.

- Student 10

[1:04] Usually, I don't have much free time because I am busy, but generally I prefer outdoor activities because they are more relaxing and healthier, but I'm not a very sporty and active person. I usually like to play with my family or my dog outside the house or just spend time relaxing. Hem...I like playing videogames or watching TV indoor my house. I also like playing videogames with my friends because in this period is for me impossible to meet them.

[1:00] I usually prefer to spend my free time outdoors because it is healthier and more natural. I like to play with my dog or with my friends, we do outdoor activities or sport. And...I'm not a very sporty person, but I still like, hem...to be outside. Inside I like to relax on the sofa or play videogames with my friends. Or chat with them during this difficult time.

- Student 11

[1:11] I'm not a very sporty person and I prefer to stay indoors. But when I go out, I like to go for long walks or meet my friends. When I stay at home, I like to spend my free time reading a book. In particular, I like fantasy books and horror stories because I think they are very interesting and engaging. Sometimes in the evening I chat with my friends, play videogame and rarely watching TV. When I turn on the TV, I often watch films, but I don't really like to watch TV series cause in my opinion they are quite boring.

[1:22] I often stay at home cause I don't really like doing sports and when I go out I like to meet my friends. And sometimes I do long walks cause I think they are so relaxing, in particular when I have a stressful day. So... I prefer to stay indoors and my favourite activity when I'm at home is reading. In general, I read everything, but I prefer fantasy books like Harry Potter and The Lord of the Ring for example. Sometimes, especially when I'm bored, when I have nothing to read, I play videogames. And, in the evening, I spend my free time watching TV. I often watch films, but sometimes I watch TV series too, but I think they're not so engaging.

- Student 12

[1:43] My house is surrounded by the fields and this is one of the reasons why I prefer to be outdoor. In fact, stay outdoor is very important for me. When I don't know what I can do or I'm anxious, then lots of times I can go out and unwind on the garden. In that moment, I loo...I watch the...the sky and I can hear the singing of birds or I can see the flowers and the tree and it's a beautiful thing to do. Then when eh...I want to play, I can go out and play with my neighbours and them...and they are my friends. In fact, this moment is very funny because we laugh and stay together. And stay with friends and stay outdoor is two the most important of things in the life of teenager, and I'm very...very luckly because eh...I have eh...all... these things.

[1:55] If eh...someone asks me I prefer to be outdoors or indoors, without doubts I...say I prefer to be outdoors. In fact, my house is surrounded by the fields and since I was young, I has been outdoor. Usually, when I don't know what can I do or I'm anxious, stressed or frightened, I go out and I sit on the garden and eh... I heard the singing of the birds, watch the sky with clouds and sun or watch the flowers and trees. And that moment, are very peaceful for me. Then, when I wanna play volleyball I go out and I meet my neighbours. My neighbours are also my friends and eh...they are beautiful people and play with them is very funny and this is eh... very important for me. In my opinion, stay with friends and stay outdoor are the most important things for teenager and I very luckly because I have all things.

- Student 13

[1:17] Hi! I'm [student's name], I'm 15 years old and the first thing that you need to know about me is that I live in Italy, in Montebelluna very close to Venice. I've lived here since I was born and I actually live here with all my family: my mum, my dad and my sister. And I attend the high school and in particular I study ancient Greek and Latin, but I also study other subjects like maths and English but also Italian of course. I really really like to go out for a run session, cause running is one of my passions. But I also have other passions like travelling and also watching TV series and my favourite is Gray's Anatomy. And that's all, this is me.

[1:05] Hi everybody! I'm [student's name], I'm 15 years old. I live in Italy closed to Venice and I attend the high school. I'm actually studying a lot of subjects, and in particular ancient Greek, Latin and Italian and also English. And one of my hobbies is... running, yeah, cause when I'm outdoors I like to go for a run session. When I'm indoors I prefer to watch TV series, yeah, and my favourite one is Gray's Anatomy cause I really like the plot and the characters. But I also like other TV series that I've just started this week, like The 100 and Lucifer. That's all, this is a little bit of me.

- Student 14

[00:53] In my free time when I'm home I really like to draw. I like drawing since I was a kid and, in particular, I like drawing portraits of people. When I'm drawing I enjoy listening to music. I don't really have a favourite genre of music maybe I prefer pop and reg music, but I listen to whatever I like. I like watching TV series and films as well. During quarantine I've watched a lot of films because I had the time that I didn't have during school. When I'm outdoors in my free time I like hanging out with my friends and go to the centre of the city, eating and ice cream or eating sushi and maybe do some shopping.

[00:45] In my free time, I enjoy drawing because this is my passion and I mostly draw portraits of people. While I'm drawing, I used to listen to music, so I am a multitasking person and at this moment, I really like pop and rap music. During quarantine, I've watched a lot of films and now I don't know what films to watch anymore. And I've also watched some TV series that I really liked. When I'm outdoors, I usually hang out with my friends and we go to the centre of the city together or we go for a walk.

- Student 15

[1:39] In my free times, I like to stay indoor, but the last summer I went every time outdoor because I went every week out with my friends, we went to Piave, we went to eat an ice cream or do things like that, but during this quarantine we can't. So we...so I do things indoor like surfing in internet, watching TV or listening music, because listening music is the...is the things that makes me relaxing the most because when I'm really stressed I usually eh...open Spotify and I play a song. I don't play sport, not now, so I and, I don't like do sport. And when I'm at home I usually study but it's not my free time, so I usually help my mum and that's all.

[1:07] In my free time, I like to stay indoor, but the last summer I stayed outdoor because during the summer I like staying in the nature. Last summer I went with my friends to the Piave or to eat a ice cream or something like that to... for stay together, but this year, because of the quarantine and the last month, I can't...I can't do this so I...do things indoor like surfing on internet, watching TV or hem...play with the videogames or listen the music, hem, or...things like that. And in my free times I like to help my mum too, so that's all.

- Student 16

[1:08] Well about my hobbies they are mainly indoors. In fact, I prefer to be indoors, I'm not a very active person and I don't do sport. When I'm at home I like reading books or manga. Manga are typical Japanese comics, I think they are very nice. I also like listening to music and watching TV series, sometimes I draw. Lately, I have been watching Chinese dramas. In this way, I can improve my Chinese and my English because there are often English subtitles. Instead, when I'm out I just walk around Montebelluna while I'm listening to the music. Sometimes in summer I go to the park to play volano [badminton] with my sister or I go out to skate.

[1:01] Well, I have some indoors hobbies, for example I love reading book or manga, typical Japanese comics. So, when I'm at home I like listening to music, drawing, writing, watching TV series. Recently, I have been watching a Chinese drama and I think this is great because I can improve my Chinese and also my English, there are often English subtitles. I'm not a very active person, in fact, I prefer to be indoors and I don't do sport. But, sometimes especially in summer I go out to walk in park, to skate or to play volano with my sister.

- Student 17

[1:00] In my free time I like playing football with my dad and my little brother. I would like to play football with my friends and with my teammates, but it...in this difficult period that's not possible. I prefer to be outdoors because there are sunny days. If I am indoors, I like spending my time watching TV movies with my father; we usually watch action movies or comic movies, like Mission Impossible, Fasten Furious and Die Hard. Another hobby that I love is listening to music.

[1:05] In my free time I like playing football with my dad and my little brother. I would like to play football with my friends and with my teammates, but in this difficult period, unfortunately, that's not possible. I prefer to play outdoors because these days are sunny. If I am indoors, I like spending my time to watching TV movies with my dad.

We usually watch action movies or comic movies, like Mission Impossible, Fasten Furious and Die Hard. Another hobby for me is listening to music.

- Student 18

[1:18] One of my favourite hobbies is reading, I really love reading especially hem... historical books or fantasy book. I am not, absolutely not, a very sporty person, but I actually play...I actually do athletics even if I'm not very good at it. However, eh... I prefer indoor activities like watching film or TV series. I don't like very much playing videogames because... I think that... they are boring and not interesting for me. Hem...at the moment, TV series are my favourite activity. Now, I'm watching Gray's Anatomy, Downtown Abbey and The Handmaid's Tale. When I have some free time, I... love, I like writing and when I was a child, I wanted to be a writer. Now, I have changed my mind, but I like writing very much.

[1:10] I am very lazy, so... I don't like very much doing sports or physical activities in general, but anyway I do athletics, even if I'm not very good at it. I prefer to stay at home lying on the couch and watching films or TV series. I don't like very much videogames because I don't find them interesting, I actually think they are very boring. At the moment, my favourite eh...my favourite activity is watching TV series, I'm watching Gray's Anatomy, Downtown Abbey and The Handmaid's Tale and I really really like films too. Hem...I also like writing. In the past, when I was very little, I wanted to be a writer, but now I have changed my mind. But I still love very much writing fantasy adventures or similar things.

- Student 19

[1:00] Hi, I'm [student's name]. The first thing you must know about my hobbies is that I really love spending time on videogames, online videogames like Grand Theft Auto and League of Legends, but only with my friends. I don't really like TV series, but sometimes when I find a nice TV series, I must finish it. I'm watching Stranger Things in this period. When I'm at home I like to cook and I like reading, listen to music and chatting with my friends. As you can see, I'm not very sportly, but I get to the gym and I really like it. And I take walk and ride bike too.

[1:00] Hi, I'm [student's name]. In my free time I like to play online videogames like Grand Theft Auto and League of Legends with my friends. In fact, I prefer videogames instead watching TV series, but I like some series too. I'm still watching Lucifer. Indoor I also like cooking, reading and listening to music. Often I hang out with my friends, not in this period obviously. I'm not very sportly, I'm not doing any sports, but every day I get more walk or I ride the bike and I go...get to the gym too, or I went. That's I.

APPENDIX 5: The Student Opinion Survey

1. Which is/are your first language(s)?

   (This refers to the language(s) you speak the best. For most people it is the language that they learnt to speak from birth, ex. the first language of most Italians is Italian.)

2. Do you think it is important to focus on the pronunciation of English?

   Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

3. Have you already had any lessons on English pronunciation?

   o Yes

   o No

   o Not sure

4. In your experience, do you think there is enough attention on pronunciation in English? (Think also about your experience in primary and middle schools.)

   o Yes

   o No

   o Not sure

5. To what extent are you satisfied with your English pronunciation?

   Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

6. Would you like to work more on your English pronunciation? Why?

7. Was connected speech a new topic for you?

   o Yes

   o No

   o Not sure

8. How interesting did you find the lessons on pronunciation and connected speech?

   Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

9. How useful did you find the lessons on pronunciation and connected speech?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

10. How helpful did you find the videos and examples showed in class?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

11. How useful did you find the test activity?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

12. How motivated were you in doing the pre-test?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

13. How motivated were you in doing the post-test?

    Not at all   1   2   3   4   5   A lot

14. How did you do the post-test?

    o   First, I studied the highlighted slides and then I read from the dialogue in the post-test file.

    o   I read directly from the highlighted slides.

    o   I read the dialogue in the post-test file without studying the highlighted slides.

15. Do you think your pronunciation improved after these lessons on pronunciation and connected speech?

    o   A lot

    o   Quite a lot

    o   A little bit

    o   Not at all

    o   Not sure

16. What did you like and what didn't you like about these lessons on pronunciation? Please, leave your comments.

SUMMARY – RIASSUNTO

L'argomento principale della tesi di laurea *English pronunciation teaching and learning: a focus on connected speech*, è per l'appunto lo studio della pronuncia inglese in relazione al suo insegnamento ed apprendimento nei contesti in cui è parlata come lingua straniera, quindi da persone con una L1 diversa dall'inglese. In particolare, è stato scelto di concentrarsi su un aspetto specifico della pronuncia detto in inglese *connected speech*, ossia sequenze continue di suoni che formano espressioni o conversazioni nel linguaggio parlato. In italiano questo concetto può essere tradotto con "discorso connesso" o "discorso collegato" ed è solitamente contrapposto alla forma di citazione (*citation form*), detta anche canonica o di isolamento, che si trova ad esempio nelle singole parole presenti nei dizionari. Nella lingua inglese, le parole possono cambiare sensibilmente dalla *citation form* al *connected speech* in quanto una serie di processi detti *connected speech processes* (CSPs) si mettono in atto nel momento in cui le parole vengono accostate in un discorso. Determinati suoni, infatti, tendono a fondersi ai confini delle parole, oppure scompaiono o si modificano. Questo aspetto della pronuncia inglese è fondamentale nell'insegnamento e apprendimento dell'inglese parlato. Diversi studi dimostrano come il *connected speech* sia utile a studenti EFL (*English as a Foreign Language*) per migliorare le loro abilità di comprensione e di produzione in inglese. Ciononostante, i CSPs hanno ricevuto poca attenzione nella pratica venendo inseriti raramente nei programmi di lingua inglese. In particolare, sono state condotte poche ricerche su come i CSPs influiscono nella produzione orale di studenti EFL.

Per contribuire a colmare la lacuna nello studio dei *connected speech processes* e la relativa messa in pratica di questi processi in contesti didattici di inglese come lingua straniera, è stato condotto uno studio di tipo linguistico e didattico. Il presente studio, infatti, mira a rispondere alla seguente domanda di ricerca: Quale impatto ha l'insegnamento dei CSPs sulla pronuncia di studenti di livello intermedio di inglese?

Al fine di rispondere a questa domanda e organizzare al meglio i vari argomenti, la tesi di laurea è stata suddivisa in quattro capitoli principali a loro volta organizzati in sotto-capitoli.

Il **primo capitolo** tratta il tema della pronuncia inglese in modo generale concentrandosi principalmente sulle caratteristiche segmentali e soprasegmentali. Il concetto di pronuncia si riferisce al modo in cui i suoni sono prodotti nella lingua parlata e include diversi aspetti quali l'articolazione, l'accento, l'intonazione e il discorso connesso. La pronuncia è di solito legata a due aspetti simili della linguistica generale, ovvero la fonetica e la fonologia. La prima si riferisce all'aspetto fisico dei suoni in quanto ne studia la produzione e la percezione, e presenta alcune sottocategorie (fonetica articolatoria, acustica e uditiva). La seconda è invece la funzione astratta dei suoni e stabilisce quali sono i fonemi in una data lingua, ovvero quei suoni che possono fare la differenza di significato tra diverse parole. Come afferma Cruttenden (2014: 3), la fonetica di una lingua riguarda le caratteristiche concrete (articolatorie, acustiche, uditive) dei suoni utilizzati nelle lingue, mentre la fonologia riguarda il funzionamento sistemico dei suoni in una determinata lingua. Sia la fonetica che la fonologia fanno parte del concetto di pronuncia, in quanto essa comprende caratteristiche segmentali e soprasegmentali, dette anche prosodiche.

L'aggettivo segmentale si riferisce allo studio di singoli segmenti detti fonemi, cioè tutte le unità distintive di cui una lingua è composta. Si tratta infatti di singoli suoni quali le vocali, i dittonghi e le consonanti. L'idea di segmentazione risale alla fine del 19° secolo quando venne fondata a Parigi l'Associazione Internazionale della Fonetica. Quest'idea venne poi realizzata nel corso degli anni con l'ideazione di un alfabeto fonetico internazionale (*International Phonetic Alphabet* – IPA). L'ultima revisione del manuale IPA risale al 2005 e contiene tutti i fonemi delle lingue esistenti nel mondo. Si tratta di uno strumento utilissimo soprattutto nello studio delle lingue straniere in quanto consente di usare gli stessi simboli per confrontare suoni simili o uguali tra una lingua e un'altra. È importante ricordare che in fonetica i suoni vengono classificati in base a tre parametri: modo di articolazione (come si posizionano gli organi dell'apparato fonatorio), luogo di articolazione (dove l'aria viene modificata, bloccata o rilasciata) e sonorizzazione (un suono è sonoro se le corde vocali vibrano). In questo primo capitolo, sono stati descritti tutti i suoni presenti nella lingua inglese seguendo questi parametri e trattando vocali, dittonghi e consonanti della lingua inglese separatamente. Per quanto riguarda le vocali, l'inglese è una lingua ricca di questi suoni esclusivamente sonori. L'alfabeto fonetico relativo all'inglese è infatti composto da ben 12 suoni vocalici

trascritti con i seguenti simboli IPA: /iː, ɪ, e, æ, ɑː, ɒ, ɔː, ʊ, uː, ʌ, ɜː, ə/. Ogni vocale è determinata dalla combinazione di diverse variabili: in base alla posizione orizzontale della lingua, può essere anteriore, centrale o posteriore; in base alla posizione verticale della lingua, può essere alta, media o bassa; in base alla posizione delle labbra, può essere arrotondata, neutrale o distesa; infine, una vocale può essere lunga (contrassegnata da due punti) o corta in base alla sua durata. In particolare, la vocale /ə/, chiamata schwa, è stata descritta come il suono più frequente dell'inglese. Per quanto riguarda i dittonghi, cioè quei suoni composti dall'unione di due vocali, l'inglese ne presenta 8: /ɪə, ʊə, eə, eɪ, ɔɪ, aɪ, əʊ, aʊ/. A differenza delle vocali considerate relativamente pure a causa della loro costanza, Underhill (2005: 22) afferma che i dittonghi hanno una qualità mutevole poiché "scivolano da una vocale all'altra all'interno di una singola sillaba". Infine, la maggior parte delle varietà della lingua inglese presenta 24 simboli IPA per descrivere le consonanti. In base al modo di articolazione, esse si dividono in occlusive (/p, b, t, d, k, g/), affricate (/tʃ, dʒ/), fricative (/f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ/), nasali (/m, n, ŋ/), fricativa fortis (/h/), laterale (/l/), consonante continua senza attrito (/r/), semivocali (/w, j/). Il luogo di articolazione (bilabiale, labio-dentale, dentale, alveolare, post-alveolare, palato-alveolare, palatale, velare) e la sonorizzazione, invece, possono variare da consonante a consonante.

L'aggettivo soprasegmentale, invece, si riferisce a quelle caratteristiche del parlato che si estendono oltre al singolo segmento. Infatti, la comunicazione è solitamente caratterizzata da frasi complesse date dall'unione non matematica dei singoli suoni precedentemente riassunti. Quando parliamo, altri fattori soprasegmentali intervengono portando con sé significati importanti. Fondamentali sono la lunghezza, il tono, l'intensità e il volume, ovvero le principali caratteristiche soprasegmentali o prosodiche del suono. Inoltre, l'accento e il ritmo risultano essere particolarmente importanti per l'inglese in quanto è una lingua isoaccentuale (*stress-timed language*), cioè la durata tra due sillabe accentate è uguale grazie alla riduzione delle vocali che avviene nelle sillabe non accentate. L'italiano, al contrario, è una lingua isosillabica (*syllable-timed language*) in cui la durata di ogni sillaba è uguale. In inglese, l'alternanza tra sillabe accentuate e non accentuate è importante sia a livello di parola (*word-stress*), in quanto permette di distinguere tra vocaboli differenti, che a livello di frase (*sentence stress*) per enfatizzare le parti più importanti del discorso ricche di significato rispetto a quelle più

funzionali (*content words* vs. *function words*). Anche l'intonazione è particolarmente centrale nell'inglese parlato in quanto permette di distinguere tra diverse tipologie di frasi (domande wh-, domande sì/no, dichiarative, imperative, esclamative, ecc.) ed esprime anche l'intenzione o l'atteggiamento del parlante. All'ultima e meno conosciuta caratteristica soprasegmentale della pronuncia inglese, ossia il discorso connesso, è stato dedicato un intero capitolo per accentuare l'importanza che questa tesi di laurea dà a questo argomento.

Il **secondo capitolo**, infatti, tratta interamente e più nello specifico il concetto di *connected speech*. Crystal (2008: 101) lo descrive come un termine usato in linguistica per riferirsi al linguaggio parlato quando viene analizzato come sequenza continua, come nei normali enunciati e nelle conversazioni. Si può notare, infatti, una chiara differenza tra un insieme di parole pronunciate all'interno di un contesto e singole parole pronunciate in modo isolato presenti ad esempio nelle loro forme citazionali, la cui pronuncia è chiamata pronuncia da dizionario. Underhill (2005: 58) afferma che il discorso connesso consiste in un flusso di suoni che vengono modificati da un sistema di semplificazioni attraverso il quale i fonemi vengono collegati, raggruppati e modificati. Il *connected speech* non è sintomo di un parlato fortemente informale e sgrammaticato, anzi viene utilizzato, anche se in modo diverso, in tutti i registri. I cambiamenti di pronuncia nel discorso connesso sono infatti il risultato di una semplice legge di economia per cui gli organi fonatori, invece di prendere una nuova posizione per ogni suono, tendono a unire i suoni con lo scopo di risparmiare tempo ed energia. Per ogni lingua si possono individuare dei *connected speech processes* (CSPs) che hanno appunto il compito di fondere i confini tra le parole o semplificare l'articolazione di determinati suoni al fine di velocizzare il processo articolatorio. La liaison francese, ad esempio, è un caso particolarmente conosciuto. Tuttavia, anche l'inglese essendo una lingua *stress-timed* presenta un numero abbastanza consistente di CSPs. Reed e Levis (2015: 161) sostengono che la funzione primaria dei CSPs in inglese, infatti, sia quella di promuovere la regolarità del ritmo inglese comprimendo le sillabe tra gli elementi accentuati e facilitando la loro articolazione in modo da poter mantenere una regolare sincronizzazione del parlato. Ciononostante, gli studi sul *connected speech* inglese sono limitati e presentano terminologia differente per identificare i vari processi creando confusione nella loro classificazione. Ai fini dello studio condotto per questa tesi di

laurea, è stato scelto di seguire la categorizzazione progettata da Alameen e Levis per la loro organizzazione chiara e schematica dei CSPs. Inoltre, i termini utilizzati dai suddetti linguisti possono essere considerati didatticamente più adatti per la loro semplicità. Alameen e Levis dividono infatti i CSPs in sei categorie principali:

1. *Linking*, cioè il collegamento del suono finale di una parola o sillaba con quello iniziale della seguente che può avvenire tra consonante-vocale, consonante-consonante o vocale-vocale;

2. *Deletion*, cioè l'omissione di un suono come, ad esempio, /h/ in posizione non iniziale di pronomi e ausiliari o /t, d/ a fine di parola seguita da un'altra consonante;

3. *Insertion*, cioè l'inserimento di fonemi che non fanno parte dello spelling come ad esempio /r, w, j/ per unire meglio i suoni nel confine di alcune parole;

4. *Modification*, cioè la sostituzione di un fonema per altri fonemi modificandone la pronuncia al fine di collegare i suoni ai confini di parole più velocemente (questa categoria comprende la palatalizzazione, l'assimilazione, la /t/ angloamericana vibrante [ɾ] e l'occlusiva glottidale sorda [ʔ]);

5. *Reduction*, cioè la riduzione di vocali forti che diventano deboli riducendosi verso la vocale centrale schwa /ə/ per consentire l'alternanza tra sillabe accentate e sillabe non accentate che caratterizzano il ritmo della lingua inglese;

6. *Multiple processes*, cioè quei processi che prevedono l'unione di uno o più CSPs sopraelencati, quali le contrazioni (es. *I'm, can't, won't*) e le combinazioni lessicali (es. *wanna, gonna, kinda*).

In seguito a questi due capitoli introduttivi su argomenti di linguistica, la presente tesi di laurea prosegue con due capitoli sulla didattica della lingua inglese.

Il **terzo capitolo**, infatti, tratta l'argomento dell'insegnamento della pronuncia inglese in generale. In primo luogo, è stato fatto un excursus sullo status globale della lingua inglese al fine di spiegare il motivo per il quale la pronuncia in inglese è considerata particolarmente importante. Si tratta, infatti, di una lingua ricca di varietà perché parlata come L1 in diverse parti del mondo (Gran Bretagna, Irlanda, Stati Uniti, Australia, Nuova Zelanda, Sud Africa). Inoltre, l'inglese è tuttora considerata lingua ufficiale di diversi stati ex-coloniali dell'impero britannico quali India, Nigeria e Singapore. Più recentemente e in seguito all'espansione prima coloniale della Gran Bretagna (17°-19° secolo), poi demografica in America e Australia (20° secolo) e infine

economico-culturale degli Stati Uniti (21° secolo), l'inglese si è diffuso in tutto il mondo come Lingua Franca. Questo termine si riferisce all'uso dell'inglese come mezzo di comunicazione tra parlanti di diverse L1. L'inglese è diventato, infatti, una lingua globale studiata in tutto il mondo con oltre 1 miliardo di persone che lo parlano come lingua straniera (EFL). Ne consegue che lo studio della pronuncia inglese è fondamentale per riuscire a comunicare in modo efficace tenendo conto dell'estrema variabilità che caratterizza questa lingua. Ciononostante, la pronuncia è tradizionalmente considerata l'area "Cenerentola" dell'insegnamento delle lingue straniere in quanto molti insegnanti tendono a trascurarla per la sua variabilità e conseguente complessità. Vivendo in un mondo globalizzato in cui l'inglese ha il ruolo di Lingua Franca, è essenziale impararlo ed essere in grado di comunicare secondo uno standard per essere compreso, comunemente seguendo le regole di pronuncia dell'inglese britannico o inglese americano, cioè dei due standard più conosciuti.

In seguito, nel capitolo è stata presentata la storia dell'insegnamento della pronuncia inglese analizzando come essa è stata considerata e studiata nei vari metodi e approcci a partire dal 19° secolo. Reed e Levis (2015: 38-58) hanno identificato quattro ondate principali:

- Prima ondata (1850 – 1880) = Metodo Diretto;
- Seconda ondata (1880 – inizio 1900) = *Reform Movement*;
- Terza ondata (metà 1980 – 1990) = Approccio Comunicativo;
- Quarta ondata (metà 1990 – oggi) = ricerca empirica.

Gli approcci nei confronti dell'insegnamento della pronuncia si dividono in intuitivi-imitativi, introdotti per la prima volta con il Metodo Diretto, e analitici-linguistici applicati a partire dalla fine del 19° secolo grazie ai nuovi studi di fonetica e fonologia iniziati dal *Reform Movement*. Se nel primo caso lo studio della pronuncia inglese prevedeva l'imitazione e ripetizione meccanica di modelli nativi, il secondo approccio includeva anche un'analisi linguistica dei suoni attraverso strumenti quali l'alfabeto fonetico internazionale (IPA). La maggior parte degli approcci che precedono quello più recente e attualmente usato, detto comunicativo, non davano particolare importanza alla lingua parlata e quindi alla pronuncia. Essi si concentravano, infatti, più sulla grammatica, la traduzione e la comprensione dei testi scritti mettendo in secondo piano

la lingua viva. Verso la fine del 20° secolo, grazie al concetto di competenza comunicativa introdotto da Hymes nel 1967, si è iniziato a ragionare in termini di conoscenze di cui un parlante ha bisogno per essere competente in una comunità di parlanti. A partire da questo momento, la sola competenza linguistica, infatti, non è vista come sufficiente in quanto anche quella extralinguistica, socio-pragmatica e (inter)culturale sono necessarie per saper padroneggiare le varie abilità comunicative. All'Approccio Comunicativo viene dato il merito di aver dato importanza all'interazione e alla comunicazione come funzioni primarie della lingua. Ne consegue che la pronuncia è diventata un aspetto fondamentale nell'insegnamento dell'inglese grazie a questa visione comunicativa della lingua.

Alla fine del capitolo, si è cercato di analizzare come la pronuncia inglese viene insegnata oggi. L'Approccio Integrato su base comunicativa sembrerebbe infatti il metodo dominante nell'insegnamento odierno delle lingue straniere e quindi dell'inglese. Si tratta di un metodo didattico che pone lo studente e la comunicazione al centro basandosi sull'interconnessione e le interrelazioni tra le varie aree curricolari e le tecniche usate negli anni. In particolare, si è fatto riferimento al più recente *Common European Framework of Reference* (CEFR) del 2018. In esso sono stati finalmente inclusi dei descrittori per il controllo fonologico a dimostrazione di come l'interesse verso l'insegnamento e l'apprendimento dell'inglese stia ufficialmente crescendo. I vari livelli di competenza di una lingua (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2) riconosciuti a livello europeo, se non mondiale, comprendono anche le abilità che uno studente dovrebbe saper padroneggiare per quanto riguarda la pronuncia. I concetti chiave riguardanti il controllo fonologico sono: l'articolazione di singoli fonemi, la prosodia (intonazione, ritmo, accento), l'intelligibilità e la comprensibilità. L'essere intelligibili e comprensibili quando si parla una lingua straniera viene individuato come l'obiettivo autentico che gli studenti dovrebbero perseguire nell'apprendimento della pronuncia a discapito del principio purista e poco realistico che prevede come obiettivo quello di parlare esattamente come i nativi di lingua inglese. Tutto questo risulta essere particolarmente importante nell'apprendimento della lingua inglese in quanto, essendo Lingua Franca e globale, dovrebbe essere insegnata dando particolare attenzione al parlato e quindi alla pronuncia. Ciononostante, secondo Rogerson-Revell (2011: 1), gli insegnanti tendono a trascurare l'insegnamento della pronuncia per tre motivi:

1. Incertezza su come trattarla sistematicamente;
2. Mancanza di tempo in programmi didattici già pieni;
3. Mancanza di sicurezza nella propria pronuncia o nella conoscenza della materia.

Diverse tecniche possono essere usate in classe per lavorare sulla pronuncia, quali ascolta e imita, studio della fonetica attraverso l'IPA, coppie minime, lettura ad alta voce, recitazione, registrazioni audio o video di produzioni orali degli studenti. Inoltre, le tecnologie odierne dovrebbero essere sfruttate per fornire materiale autentico e sempre aggiornato agli studenti sfruttando, ad esempio, i laboratori linguistici e la lavagna interattiva multimediale (LIM) sempre più diffusi nelle scuole.

Il **quarto ed ultimo capitolo** si concentra invece sull'insegnamento del *connected speech* attraverso lo studio appositamente svolto ai fini di questa tesi di laurea. Prima di analizzare nel dettaglio lo studio linguistico da me svolto, il motivo per cui il discorso connesso dovrebbe essere insegnato viene spiegato facendo riferimento a diversi studi sull'argomento. Brown e Kondo-Brown (2006: 5-6) ritengono che i docenti di inglese dovrebbero insegnare il *connected speech* in quanto si tratta di una parte molto reale della lingua e di un importante sottoinsieme di nuove informazioni per gli studenti che "hanno bisogno di imparare di più rispetto alla tradizionale grammatica, lessico e pronuncia trattati da molti insegnanti". Inoltre, la maggior parte degli studenti di *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL) tendono ad avere problemi nel comprendere e produrre discorso connesso, sebbene sia dimostrato che essi possano apprenderlo. Come per la pronuncia in generale, i *connected speech processes* (CSPs) vengono raramente insegnati agli studenti di EFL per tre motivi principali legati ai docenti:

1. Poca familiarità con l'argomento;
2. Mancanza di tempo;
3. Mancanza di materiale didattico adeguato.

In realtà, i relativamente pochi studi condotti finora sull'argomento hanno dimostrato che gli studenti trovano interessante l'apprendimento dei CSPs in quanto materiale nuovo che può avere esiti positivi sia nella percezione che nella produzione in lingua inglese degli studenti. Per quanto riguarda la comprensione orale, nella presente tesi di laurea sono stati citati gli studi di Brown & Hilferty (1986), Henrichsen (1984) e Ito (2006). Per quanto riguarda lo studio dei CSPs per migliorare la pronuncia, sono stati

portati come esempio gli studi di Hieke (1984, 1987), Anderson-Hsieh et al. (1994) and Alameen (2007). Sebbene questi studi dimostrino l'importanza dell'insegnamento e apprendimento del *connected speech* per migliorare sia le abilità di comprensione orale che di pronuncia, i CSPs hanno ricevuto poca attenzione nella pratica.

Al fine di contribuire alla limitata ricerca e pratica nell'insegnamento e nell'apprendimento del *connected speech* a studenti di EFL, è stato condotto uno studio online ai fini di questa tesi di laurea. Lo studio è stato svolto sottoforma di tirocinio opzionale per il mio corso di laurea magistrale in *Lingue e Letterature Europee e Americane* presso l'Università di Padova. La domanda di ricerca alla base dello studio è la seguente: Che impatto ha l'insegnamento dei CSPs sulla pronuncia di studenti di livello intermedio di inglese?

A causa della pandemia COVID-19, il tirocinio si è potuto svolgere solo online nel mese di maggio 2020 sottoforma di didattica a distanza grazie al consenso della 2°A del *Liceo Primo Levi* di Montebelluna (TV). La classe era composta da 19 studenti parlanti italiano come L1 e inglese come lingua straniera con un livello generale di conoscenza della lingua inglese B1 (livello soglia). La loro docente, Nicoletta Galante, ha assunto il compito di tutor aziendale facendo da tramite tra la sottoscritta e gli studenti. Il tirocinio è stato suddiviso in quattro lezioni da 50 minuti ciascuna, le quali sono state svolte attraverso la piattaforma web *Zoom*. Oltre ad attività motivazionali extra per conoscere la classe durante la prima lezione in modo creativo (*warm-up activity* attraverso *Padlet*) e per concludere l'esperienza attraverso un momento di gioco formativo e riassuntivo nell'ultima lezione (*quiz game* attraverso *Kahoot!*), le lezioni centrali si sono concentrate nell'insegnamento e apprendimento ded CSPs. Attraverso una presentazione PowerPoint, gli studenti hanno avuto modo di famigliarizzare con la categorizzazione di Alameen e Levis analizzando ogni categoria nel dettaglio. Infatti, per ogni CSP sono stati letti, analizzati e ripetuti ad alta voce diversi esempi e sono stati mostrati in classe dei video didattici realizzati da *Tim's Pronunciation Workshop* della BBC e da *Rachel's English Academy*. Come compito per casa, è stato chiesto agli studenti di fare un *connected speech test* diviso in due parti identiche: un pre-test, da completare prima della seconda lezione, e un post-test da consegnare prima dell'ultima lezione. Il test è stato idealizzato appositamente per questo studio tenendo conto del livello della classe e focalizzandosi su tre CSPs in particolare: *linking*, *deletion*, e *reduction*. Sono stati

selezionati solo tre processi per non sovraccaricare i ragazzi e in particolare i tre sopracitati per la loro utilità e relativa semplicità in base al livello intermedio della classe. Il primo esercizio (*Read Aloud Task*) consisteva nel leggere ad alta voce un dialogo tra due studenti registrando la propria voce con un registratore. Il secondo esercizio (*Free-speech Monologue Task*) prevedeva invece che gli studenti parlassero dei propri hobby e tempo libero per circa 1-2 minuti sempre registrando la propria produzione orale. Per il pre-test, è stato detto agli studenti di parlare come solitamente fanno in inglese, mentre per il post-test è stato chiesto loro di rivedere i loro appunti e le slide con i tre CSPs evidenziati utilizzate in classe cercando di concentrarsi appunto su *linking*, *deletion*, e *reduction*. Le registrazioni degli studenti sono state poi trascritte e analizzate prestando attenzione alla quantità di processi utilizzati da ogni studente, facendo un confronto tra il pre-test e il post-test. I risultati sono poi stati organizzati in tabelle e confrontati mostrando a contrasto i risultati del pre-test e del post-test.

Results Tables 1, 2, 3 (pag. 88) mostrano la quantità in percentuale dei CSP utilizzati da ogni studente nel primo esercizio. I risultati dimostrano chiaramente che le lezioni sui CSP sono state efficaci poiché 11 studenti su 19 hanno utilizzato più *linking* nel post-test, tutti gli studenti hanno impiegato più *deletion*, e 18 su 19 studenti hanno migliorato leggermente l'uso della riduzione delle vocali (*reduction*). La classe ha ottenuto le percentuali più alte per i primi due processi. Nel primo caso, gli studenti avevano probabilmente già familiarità con l'uso di processi di *linking* ai confini delle parole. Infatti, nel post-test nove studenti hanno raggiunto il 100-90% del totale dei processi di *linking* presenti nel dialogo, otto studenti hanno utilizzato il 90-80% di questo CSP e due studenti l'80-70%. Per quanto riguarda i processi di *deletion*, il miglioramento maggiore tra pre-test e post-test è stato riscontrato in questa categoria, poiché la media nell'uso di questo CSP è stata del 50% per il pre-test e del 90% per il post-test. Probabilmente, gli studenti sono stati incoraggiati dal basso numero di occorrenze di questo CSP nel dialogo e dal fatto che la scomparsa di un suono è generalmente più facile da imparare e riprodurre (Reed e Levis, 2015: 162-163). *Vowel reduction* è risultata la categoria più difficile per gli studenti che tendevano ad usare la forma forte delle vocali non accentate al posto del suono schwa, per esempio nelle parole funzionali *'have to'*, *'can'*, *'you'*, *'but'*. Il fatto di sbagliare la pronuncia delle vocali e di inserire il suono schwa alla fine delle parole sembra essere una caratteristica frequente per gli studenti di EFL, soprattutto per quelli italiani. Infatti, l'analisi del secondo esercizio ha

confermato che gli studenti hanno aumentato maggiormente l'uso dei processi di *linking* e *deletion*, mentre la riduzione delle vocali (*reduction*) non è sempre stata così accurata.

Results Table 4 (pag. 89) mostra i commenti sull'uso dei CSPs nel pre-test e post-test del *Free-speech Monologue Task* da parte di quattro studenti appositamente selezionati. Nonostante le loro diverse competenze linguistiche, tutti quattro gli studenti hanno ottenuto miglioramenti nel post-test dimostrando che l'impatto positivo delle lezioni sui CSPs persiste non solo in un ambiente controllato come quello del dialogo, ma anche in un discorso più spontaneo. Infatti, la grande maggioranza degli studenti è risultata più intelligibile e comprensibile nel post-test in quanto i momenti di esitazione sono diminuiti grazie all'uso del *connected speech*. Durante l'ultima lezione, l'esperienza è stata valutata positivamente dagli studenti attraverso un sondaggio online in cui hanno riportato che le lezioni con i video e gli esempi sono state interessanti e utili, come anche l'attività per casa del *connected speech test*. Infatti, su una scala da 1 (per niente) a 5 (molto), hanno risposto con un 4 o un 5 a queste domande valutative. Inoltre, gli studenti hanno affermato di essere stati più motivati a fare il *connected speech test* dopo le lezioni sulla pronuncia e sul discorso connesso, dimostrando di essersi sentiti coinvolti, e di aver sviluppato una consapevolezza fonologica. Inoltre, tutti gli studenti ritenevano che la loro pronuncia fosse migliorata "un po'" (52%) o "abbastanza" (43%) dopo le lezioni sulla pronuncia e sul *connected speech*.

Tuttavia, sarebbe opportuno studiare l'effetto a lungo termine dell'insegnamento e apprendimento dei CSPs sulla pronuncia degli studenti. Inoltre, si dovrebbe utilizzare un campione più ampio che comprenda studenti di classi diverse e livelli di competenza dell'inglese diversi al fine di analizzare l'uso dei processi di *connected speech* in modo più dettagliato. Poiché la ricerca e la pratica in questo campo non sono molto comuni, soprattutto in Italia, questo studio ha comunque contribuito a colmare le lacune nell'insegnamento e nell'apprendimento del *connected speech* e della relativa pronuncia in inglese.

Per concludere, dando la giusta importanza al *connected speech*, e più in generale alla pronuncia, la produzione in lingua inglese da parte degli studenti EFL, spesso fortemente accentuata, può essere migliorata. Tutto questo andrebbe a vantaggio di una comunicazione più intelligibile e comprensibile, qualità essenziali del modo di comunicare nel mondo globale in cui viviamo.