A Comparative Approach for Pronunciation Instruction in English[1]

(Aproximación comparativa para la enseñanza de la pronunciación en inglés)

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ABSTRACT

A tool is proposed to reinforce the pronunciation of vowels and consonants for the instruction of adult learners in Costa Rica. A critical review of literature on approaches to teaching vowels and consonants is followed by a comparative discussion of two transcription systems: that of the International Phonetic Association,

and those found in textbooks, dictionaries and pronunciation websites. This is complemented by a brief comparison of English and Spanish vowels and consonants, and descriptions of common pronunciation challenges for Spanish speakers. Open problems are explored, as are ethical reflections on the teaching of English pronunciation.

Resumen

Se plantea un modelo para tratar la pronunciación de las vocales y las consonantes inglesas en entornos de enseñanza para adultos en Costa Rica. Se ofrece una revisión bibliográfica crítica sobre distintos enfoques para la enseñanza de la pronunciación de las vocales y las consonantes; se comparan dos sistemas de transcripción fonética: el de la Asociación Fonética Internacional y el de libros de texto, diccionarios o sitios web. Sigue un estudio comparativo entre las vocales y las consonantes del inglés y el español, así como algunos asuntos éticos y problemas abiertos en materia de pronunciación inglesa para hablantes del español.

Keywords: vowels, consonants, EFL, World Englishes, Costa Rica, phonemes
Palabras clave: vocales, consonantes, ILE, lenguas inglesas del mundo, fonemas

Introduction

With a focus on vowels and consonants, this study has led to the development of a tool which can foster continuing, and eventually autonomous, pronunciation improvement in English. Pronunciation instruction has long attracted scholarly attention and has led to fruitful efforts to help instructors and theoreticians devise suitable practices for classroom application. More recently, Baker has focused on pronunciation instruction before the communicative language teaching (CLT) era; Levis and Sonsaat surveyed advancements in the early CLT times; Murphy has dealt with the relevant issue of teacher training in pronunciation instruction; Derwing has critically discussed the role and efficacy of pronunciation instruction; and Foote has outlined ethical issues around this subject, with particular attention to the unregulated

business of L2 (second language) pronunciation instruction.[5] From these and other theoretical advances, it has become clear that the teaching of pronunciation today is vindicated as a pivotal element in second and foreign language teaching and learning. In the words of Yoshida, "if students need or want to speak English understandably, pronunciation is important."[6] Nowadays, students use English to interact in real-life scenarios not only with native speakers of the language but also with non-native speakers, who are increasingly using English as a lingua franca (ELF) or English as an international language (EIL).[7] Therefore, learners must develop the skills necessary to communicate successfully in the target language. Otherwise, they may face discrimination, or as Yoshida contends, "even if students' grammar and vocabulary are strong, if their pronunciation isn't easy to understand, their communication will fail."[8]

As with many other areas of language education, the teaching of pronunciation has not been free of methodological shifts to meet specific instructional goals. For Yoshida, these changes are comparable to "a swinging pendulum," at times emphasizing the teaching of segmentals and at others moving toward suprasegmentals.[9] The rapid spread of global varieties of English, the advancement of cyber communication and a growing demand for business transactions worldwide make pronunciation competencies a vital element in English proficiency. Despite

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5   Amanda A. Baker, "Pronunciation Teaching in the Pre-CLT Era," pp. 249-266; John Levis and Sinem Sonsaat, "Pronunciation Teaching in the Early CLT Era," pp. 267-283; John M. Murphy, "Teacher Training in Teaching of Pronunciation," pp. 298-319; Tracey M. Derwing, "The Efficacy of Pronunciation Instruction," pp. 320-334; and Jennifer A. Foote, "Ethics in the Business of Pronunciation Instruction," pp. 284-297, *The Routledge Handbook of Contemporary English Pronunciation,* Okim Kang, Ron I. Thomson and John M. Murphy, Eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

6   Marla Tritch Yoshida, *Beyond Repeat After Me: Teaching Pronunciation to English Learners* (San Francisco: TESOL Press, 2016) 1.

7   Jolanta Szpyra-Kozłowska, "Instructional Models in the Global Context" (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 232-246 (232); Subrata Kumar Bhomik, "World Englishes and English Language Teaching: A Pragmatic and Humanistic Approach," *Colombian Applied Linguistics* 17, 1 (2015): 142-157 (143, 155). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14483/udistrital.jour.calj.2015.1.a10.

8   Yoshida, 1.

9   Yoshida, 8.

sustained efforts to fulfill pronunciation needs, many uncertainties exist regarding the application of pedagogical principles in the foreign language classroom. Yoshida has addressed an evident problem:

> books and articles about teaching pronunciation have almost always been written with an audience of mainly native speakers of English in mind [… and] most books don't touch on many issues that teachers who have learned English as a second language want and need to know about—questions that may not occur to native-speaker teachers.[10]

In addition to the previous ethical issues (see also our section on "Ethical Considerations"), current pronunciation resources are often designed with models that are no longer representative of the status of English around the world. In English Language Teaching (ELT) and EIL settings, the typical varieties of British versus General American English may not fully represent the scenarios where speakers are likely to interact. In countries where English as a foreign language (EFL) is taught, instructors often face the dilemma of whether—or to what extent—adopting World-Englishes-based resources can help solve the everyday teaching problems of their local populations. Where EFL is used to prepare future foreign language teachers, pedagogical priorities must be considered even more carefully. These situations raise a number of questions: Should instructors follow rules dictated by inner-circle countries (the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand and Australia), outer-circle regions (e.g., India, South Africa, Singapore, Nigeria), or expanding-circle countries like Brazil, China, Korea, or Japan? Should intelligibility be the priority, and if so, to what extent and under what standards? Are new epistemological framings required for instruction and assessment, and if so, who is expected to set them? These questions for which no conclusive answers appear available for now are part of the reflections that can provide insights for the teaching of pronunciation.

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10 Yoshida, 9.

Specifically when teaching segmentals, additional challenges should be considered. As tools for short- and long-term pronunciation improvement become increasingly available, learners are confronted with many slightly different phonetic symbols in textbooks, dictionaries and other material, where reference is often made to the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA).[11] Based on diverse monolingual, bilingual or multilingual criteria underlying these sources, the sets of symbols used do not correspond exactly to the needs of Costa Rican EFL learners. Due to the importance of the phonological systems of learners' first and the second languages, a customized tool is required to enable them to record similarities and significant differences between phonemes in both languages, and at times between allophones as well, as a basis for continuing improvement and growth.

As an initial approximation to the topic, this study begins with a critical review of literature on approaches to teaching vowels and consonants. This representative review is followed by a comparative discussion of current transcription systems: (a) that of the International Phonetic Association and (b) others found in textbooks, dictionaries, pronunciation websites and other sources. As a basis for a tool tailored to the needs of Costa Rican EFL students, the analysis concludes with a simplified comparison of English and Spanish vowels and consonants, and brief descriptions of common pronunciation challenges for Spanish speakers. Finally, ethical considerations in the teaching of English pronunciation are examined as further grounds for the use of the symbols proposed.

Comparing English and Spanish Vowels and Consonants

Various pronunciation sources aim to provide instructors and EFL students with a means of comprehending and assimilating

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11 International Phonetic Association. "The International Phonetic Alphabet (revised to 2020). https://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/IPAcharts/IPA_chart_orig/pdfs/IPA_Kiel_2020_full.pdf.

different phonemes and allophones of English.[12] Others have gone a step further providing users with comprehensive guides that compare and contrast English and Spanish sounds to offer a scholarly account of Spanish-English pronunciation differences.[13] However, despite these attempts to make the understanding of English segmentals less complex for learners, to date few sources effectively correspond to the Costa Rican context, especially if the linguistic heterogeneity of Costa Rican Spanish is considered. Thus, even when material based on Received Pronunciation (RP) or Standard American English (SAE) is imported into the national ELT curriculum, challenges regarding specific phonetic realizations (such as the rhotic variation observed in the speech of people from different geographical regions of Costa Rica) still need to be considered for pedagogical practice.

One limitation regarding many resources is that, for the most part, they use a variety of English called SSB (Standard Southern British) or

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12 See, for example: Joan Morley, *Improving Spoken English* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1979); Martin Hewings and Sharon Goldstein, *Pronunciation Plus: Practice through Interaction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Beverly A. Lujan, *The American Accent Guide,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Lingual Arts, 2004). Paulette Dale and Lillian Poms, *English Pronunciation Made Simple* (London: Longman, 2005); Ann Baker and Sharon Goldstein. *Pronunciation Pairs*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Peter Avery and Susan Ehrlich, *Teaching American English Pronunciation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Don L. F. Nilsen and Alleen Pace Nilsen, *Pronunciation Contrasts in English*, 2 ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2010); Yoshida; and Adam Brown, *Activities and Exercises for Teaching English Pronunciation* (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).

13 Diana F. Finch and Héctor Ortiz Lira, *A Course in English Phonetics for Spanish Speakers* (London: Heinemann, 1982); Robert P. Stockwell and J. Donald Bowen. *The Sounds of English and Spanish* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965); John B. Dalbor, *Spanish Pronunciation: Theory and Practice* (New York, Toronto, and London: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1969); Rose Nash, *Comparing English and Spanish. Patterns in the Phonology and Orthography* (New York: Regents, 1977); Rafael Monroy Casas, *La pronunciación del inglés R. P. para hablantes del español* (Madrid: Paraninfo, 1980); Francisco Sánchez Benedito, *Manual de pronunciación inglesa comparada con la española* (Madrid: Alhambra, 1980); M. Stanley Whitley, *A Course in Spanish Linguistics: Spanish/English Contrasts,* 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002); Brian Mott, *English Phonetics and Phonology for Spanish Speakers,* 2nd ed. (Barcelona: Publicacions i Edicions Universitat de Barcelona, 2011); María de los Ángeles Gómez González and Teresa Sánchez Roura, *English Pronunciation for Speakers of Spanish: From Theory to Practice* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2016); and Shawn Moksvold, *English Pronunciation: A Brief Guide for Spanish Speakers* (2020).

RP English, which they consider "the most widely taught British English accent due to its high degree of intelligibility, lack of regional characteristics, and general social acceptability."[14] For Mott, "SSB or RP ... now constitute the prestige variety reflecting basically the features of the educated accents of the south-east of England," and as such this language variety has become one of those often chosen for educational purposes.[15] Therefore, coursebooks and other teaching materials have been adopting this English variety in an attempt to help foreign language learners attain "near-native English pronunciation."[16] Implemented directly in the Costa Rican ELT curriculum, this choice can represent a challenge for both instructors and students who most likely have not been trained in this English variety for geographical reasons.

Another possible limitation is the array of IPA symbols found in these books to represent the same phoneme. The lack of consistency can easily become a source of confusion for instructors and students alike. This is clearly observable with the phoneme symbols chosen by different authors for the high, front, tense vowel sound in words such as *beat, feet* and *key*. Table 1 illustrates the symbols found in three of the books analyzed.

Table 1. Different Symbols Used for the Same Phoneme[17]

Symbol	Book
/i:/	*English Phonetics and Phonology for Spanish Speakers* (Mott)
/iy/	*Pronunciation Pairs: An Introduction to the Sounds of English* (Baker and Goldstein)
/i/	*The American Accent Guide* (Lujan)

Table developed by the authors for illustrative purposes.

Dale and Poms use /i/ to refer to this complex vowel, but they do note that this same symbol ("i") is used to represent the high, front,

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14 Finch and Ortiz, 188.
15 Mott, 108. This was stated earlier by the International Phonetic Association, *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 4.
16 Finch and Ortiz, vii.
17 Mott, 108; Baker and Goldstein, 4; and Lujan, 2.6.

lax sound in *sit, pin* and *it* in most monolingual English dictionaries.[18] It can therefore be assumed that presenting learners with a variant of IPA symbols to represent the same sound (see table 5), as well as other symbols that can be used to represent two different phonemes (as "i" for /i/ as in *seat* and /ɪ/ as in *sit*) can only lead to confusion.

As far as other teaching problems present in some of the books examined, the level of detail and metalanguage regarding the description of segmentals and the information provided in these descriptions take center stage. *A Course in English Phonetics for Spanish Speakers* is designed for "all learners of English who have Spanish as their mother tongue and specially those who have occasion to teach English pronunciation to such students" (Windsor in Finch and Ortiz).[19] The authors not only describe the different vowel sounds in terms of height, backness and roundedness, but they also focus on length variations for some of the vowels. For example, when describing high, front, tense, spread /iy/ as in "b<u>ee</u>," they even mention [ɪi], as in the following account:

> Front, between close and half-close. The most common realization, though, is a slight diphthong [ɪi], especially in accented open syllables. Furthermore, it is subject to quantity variations, e.g. [i:] as in *tea, leave*; [iˈ] as in *seat, reader, litre.*[20]

Without proper pedagogical intervention, the additional descriptions ("between close and half-close" and the various IPA representations, for example) could be confusing for both learners and instructors. Instead of using one symbol to represent the intended phoneme, the authors introduce subtle variations of the same sound and their corresponding diacritical marks to represent the suggested pronunciation

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18 Paulette Dale and Lillian Poms. *English Pronunciation for Spanish Speakers: Vowels* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1985) 7.
19 Finch and Ortiz, vi.
20 Finch and Ortiz, 35-36.

variants, i.e. "[iː] as in *tea, leave*; [iˈ] as in *seat, reader, litre.*"[21] Similarly, when describing consonants, besides the customary criteria related to voicing, place of articulation, and manner of articulation, Finch and Ortiz also include a more exhaustive inventory of possible allophones for each consonant phoneme. The following description, for instance, is provided for the voiceless velar stop (plosive) /k/[22]:

/k/   voiceless-fortis bilabial plosive
     [kʰ]   aspirated: card, account, claim, across, cue, quite
     [k]   weakly aspirated and unaspirated: talker; whisky
     [k̚]   with non-audible and delayed release: baked, picture;
           black coffee
     [k̚]   with nasal release: thickness, pick-me-up
     [k̟]   pre-velar: key, queue
     [k̠]   post-velar: cool, question

The above description might not be a problem for a linguist or a specialist in phonology, but it can clearly intimidate a novice language learner who, in addition to the already complex process of developing pronunciation fluency and accuracy, must also grapple with terminological nuances of articulatory phonetics and the overwhelming array of symbols to describe vowels and consonants.

Along these same lines, the *English Phonetics for Spanish Speakers* aims to "serve both beginners and more advanced students and teachers alike... [as well as] students and academics from other institutions [who] will be able to adapt the book to their own needs."[23] However, when providing the details for the different English phonemes, the descriptions are exhaustive and resort to other languages, such as French, to compare and contrast the sounds; this type of descriptions could jeopardize

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21 Finch and Ortiz, 35.
22 Finch and Ortiz, 59. This contrasts with other pronunciation textbooks such as Paulette Dale and Lillian Poms. *English Pronunciation for Spanish Speakers: Consonants* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1986) 103, which gives no suggestion beyond stating that in the initial position, "it must be said with a strong puff of air."
23 Mott, 26.

comprehension. For example, to introduce the high, front, lax, slightly spread /ɪ/ as in "sit," Mott provides the following description: "Nearer to centre than front, between close and half-close, but almost half-close, unrounded. Relatively close in tongue height to Cardinal Vowel no. 2; thus somewhat similar to French [e] in both syllables été 'summer.' "[24] If the intended audience does involve beginners, as the author claims, understanding and realization of the phoneme may be hindered due to the complexity of the explanation and the comparison of the English sound with French phonemes that for some learners might be irrelevant if they do not speak the language being used for comparison purposes. Mott also contrasts English segments with those of German, Portuguese, Swedish, Norwegian,[25] which, as argued, will not necessarily help the average Costa Rican student improve their English pronunciation.

Moreover, most of the books analyzed compare and contrast the vowels and consonants of RP English with Spanish from Spain, leaving Latin American variations of Spanish unattended and broadening the gap for Costa Rican students trying to learn the target language. Although the English language has no academy to systematize information about the pronunciation of different social and regional variants (as does Spanish, in the *Nueva gramática de la lengua española: fonética y fonología*[26]), academics and recognized publishing houses, such as Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press,[27] shed light on the variety that *should* be taught. Mark Hancock, in *Pronunciation Games*, stresses: "phonetic transcriptions of words provided in this book are as given in British-published dictionaries. These represent the accent called Received Pronunciation or RP"; and although he later explains that "there is no implication that other accents are in any way wrong," those varieties are not covered.[28]

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24 Mott, 111.
25 Mott, 71-72.
26 Real Académica Española, *Nueva gramática de la lengua española. Fonética y fonología* (Madrid: Espasa, 2011).
27 Mott, 108.
28 Mark Hancock, *Pronunciation Games* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 1. Others include: Gerald Kelly, *How to Teach Pronunciation* (London: Longman, 2007); and Joanne Kenworthy, *Teaching English Pronunciation* (London: Longman, 1987).

As can be expected, other books are based more on the General American English, of which *Pronunciation Pairs*, *English Pronunciation Made Simple*, and *The American Accent Guide* are but examples.[29] Unlike the sources by Mott, Finch and Ortiz, and Whitley mentioned above,[30] to name a few, the descriptions provided at times are overly simplified, and depending on the students' expertise on segmentals, may appear rather superficial. Another important aspect not covered by authors such as Baker and Goldstein, Dale and Poms, and Lujan refers to comparisons between English and Spanish. In addition, since these texts do not target specific Spanish-speaking sociolinguistic groups, indications often fail to describe the use of articulators for a certain phoneme accurately enough for students training to become English instructors of native Spanish speakers. Thus, when describing the high, front, tense sound in words such as *beat, feet* and *key,* Baker and Goldstein provide the following explanation:

> Open your mouth just a little for the sound /iy/.
> Spread your lips into a smile.
> Push your tongue forward in your mouth.
> /iy/ is a long sound.
> Move your tongue up a little as you say it.[31]

For Costa Rican language learners, the instruction "spread your lips into a smile" often causes them to adopt a somewhat unnatural lip position, considering that for similar sounds in Spanish, differently from other languages, the lips are already spread, perhaps even *more* than necessary for English. Although they do remind the learner to move their "tongue up a little" while pronouncing the complex /iy/, the mention of it being "long" can be confusing, given the existence

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29 Baker and Goldstein; Dale and Poms (2005); and Lujan. Others include: Lisa Mojsin, *Mastering the American Accent* (New York: Barron's, 2009); Gertrude F. Orion, *Pronouncing American English* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1988); and Clifford H. Prator and B. A. Robinett, *Manual of American English Pronunciation,* 4th ed. (New York: Holt-Rinehart-Winston, 1985).

30 Mott; Finch and Ortiz; and Whitley.

31 Baker and Goldstein, 4.

of long and short vowel *allophones* and the importance of length in English rhythm for clarity and comprehension.[32]

If attention is focused on the Costa Rican context, efforts have been made to assist teachers in pronunciation instruction. For example, in 2008, Villalobos Ulate[33] carried out a small-scale study using English songs to help students improve the pronunciation of certain segmental and suprasegmental features of the target language. In 2015, Alvarado Castillo and Barrantes Elizondo[34] conducted a qualitative study to examine the importance of teaching pronunciation explicitly to young learners. Pizarro Chacón and Cordero Badilla also worked with a group of undergraduate students developing an awareness of difficult sounds.[35] Four years later, Garita Sánchez, González Lutz, and Solís Pérez[36] presented the results of a longitudinal study where they explored the most troublesome pronunciation areas for 57 EFL learners from Costa Rica. That same year, Gordon[37] shared the findings of a case study in which he had investigated the knowledge base of an experienced non-native in-service English instructor using Shulman's knowledge base framework. More recently, in 2020, Sevilla-Morales and Chaves-Fernández[38] systematized their experiences related to the teaching of suprasegmental features of English using a register-based approach to instruction.

32 Judy B. Gilbert, *Teaching Pronunciation*: *Using the Prosody Pyramid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 15-17.

33 Nuria Villalobos Ulate, "Using Songs to Improve EFL Students' Pronunciation," *Letras* 44 (2007): 93-108. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15359/rl.2-44.5.

34 Yendry Alvarado Castillo and Lena Barrantes Elizondo, "Teaching Explicit English Pronunciation to Young Learners," *Memoria II Congreso de Lingüística Aplicada (CONLA)*, Joe Montenegro Bonilla and Jacqueline Araya Ríos, Eds. (Pérez Zeledón, Universidad Nacional, Sede Regional Brunca, 2015) 52-67. https://repositorio.una.ac.cr/handle/11056/19038?show=full.

35 Ginneth Pizarro Chacón and Damaris Cordero Badilla. "Problemas fonológicos en aprendientes costarricenses de inglés," *Letras* 58 (2015): 141-171. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15359/rl.2-58.7.

36 María del Rosario Garita Sánchez, María Isabel González Lutz, and Nathalia Solís Pérez, "English Vowel Sounds: Pronunciation Issues and Student and Faculty Perceptions," *Actualidades Investigativas en Educación* 19, 3 (2019): 1-32. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15517/aie.v19i3.38629.

37 Joshua Gordon, "The Knowledge Base of L2 Pronunciation Teaching: The Case of a Non-Native-Speaking Teacher," *TESL Canada* 36, 2, (2019): 93-108. DOI: https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v36i2.1315.

38 Henry Sevilla-Morales, and Lindsay Chaves-Fernández, "A Register-Based Perspective to Suprasegmentals in ELT," *Pensamiento Actual* 20, 35 (2020): 32-42. DOI: 10.15517/PA.V20I35.44375.

Initiatives have also been taken to aid the teaching of pronunciation to Spanish speakers in a Costa Rican high school: Acuña Aguilar and Quirós Cordero[39] ran a study using the multistage frame technique to enhance students' pronunciation of Standard American English vowel sounds, as part of their graduation project in applied linguistics. Despite this research and these instructional attempts, to date there are few tools designed specifically to cater to the needs of Costa Rican students who are learning English.

Thus far, this exploration has exemplified the type of information commonly available in English pronunciation books and has provided an overview of some of the areas that lead to conflict when using these resources for educational purposes in a Costa Rican context. To exemplify the situation faced, the section below features a brief comparison of selected English and Spanish vowels and consonants, and describes common pronunciation challenges for Spanish speakers as a basis for a customized tool that will suit the needs of Costa Rican EFL students.

IPA-Based Symbols

Attention is given here to IPA-based symbols. Actually, this issue could be further complicated by linguists' theoretical discussions of symbols and what they represent, as Pullum and Ladusaw have made clear for over 350 symbols.[40] Common sources using symbols of some sort to represent the pronunciation of words in English may be grouped into three different types of text: 1) dictionaries, 2) pronunciation textbooks, and 3) linguistics books and articles. In the case of dictionaries two main types of symbols are usually encountered: those based on the traditional system found in monolingual English dictionaries,

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39 Elian Acuña Aguilar, and Johanna Quirós Cordero, *Implementation of the Multistage Frame Technique to Enhance Students' Pronunciation of Standard American English Vowel Sounds in Group 10-1A at Canaán High School,* Licentiate thesis (Universidad Nacional, Costa Rica,1970. https://repositorio.una.ac.cr/handle/11056/18097.

40 Geoffrey K. Pullum and William A Ladusaw, *Phonetic Symbol Guide*, 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

originating from standard spelling-pronunciation patterns (such as in *The American Heritage College Dictionary*[41]), and those based on slightly different forms of IPA (such as *Collins Cobuild Diccionario de inglés-español para estudiantes de inglés*, among many others).[42] Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin provide an appendix presenting the use of diverse phonemic and phonetic symbols.[43] Further evidence can be found in less formal references such as "Pronunciation Respelling for English" (Wikipedia) which includes some 24 different sets of symbols found in diverse dictionaries.[44] In the case of pronunciation textbooks—such as those cited above—many also refer to IPA and use different variants of IPA symbols; this causes students to ask which is "correct." The same situation is present in many linguistics references,[45] also using variants of IPA and often reflecting RP because they are published in the United Kingdom.

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41 *The American Heritage College Dictionary* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2007).

42 *Collins Cobuild Diccionario de inglés-español para estudiantes de inglés* (Nashville, TN: Harper-Collins, 2016).

43 Marianne Celce-Murcia, Donna M. Brinton and Janet M. Goodwin, "Appendix 2: Comparison of Phonetic and Phonemic Alphabets," *Teaching Pronunciation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 171-172.

44 Wikipedia, "Pronunciation Respelling for English." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pronunciation_respelling_for_English.

45 In addition to the pronunciation textbooks reviewed, phonetics and phonology references informed the decisions made in the development of this proposal: Lauren J. Brinton, *The Structure of Modern English* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2010); Adam Brown, *Pronunciation and Phonetics: A Practical Guide for English Language Teachers* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015); Paul Carley and Inger M. Mees, *American English Phonetics and Pronunciation Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); Philip Carr, *English Phonetics and Phonology: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019); John C. Clark, Colin Yallup and Janet Fltecher, *An Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology,* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Beverley Collins, Inger M. Mees and Paul Carley. *Practical English Phonetics and Phonology: A Resource Book for Students*, 4th ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2019); Mike Davenport and S. J. Hannahs. *Introducing Phonetics and Phonology*, 4.ª ed. (London and New York: Routledge, 2020); Rachel-Anne Knight, *Phonetics: A Coursebook* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Peter Ladefoged and Keith Johnson. *A Course in Phonetics,* 7th ed. (Boston: Cengage, 2014); Willian O'Grady, John Archibald, Mark Aronoff and Jamie Rees-Miller. *Contemporary Linguistics: Applied Introduction* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010); Peter Roach, *English Phonetics and Phonology: A Practical Course*, 4th ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Mehmet Yavas, *Applied English Phonology,* 3rd ed. (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016); and Elizabeth C. Zsiga, *Phonetics/Phonology Interface* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020).

In this article attention is focused on the use of IPA, rather than on the traditional system found in monolingual English dictionaries, due to the prevalence of IPA in EFL material. However, the existence of these two systems can become a major source of confusion for EFL students and instructors, especially when they constantly must deal with material using them. Even when references state that they use the IPA, the versions used are slightly different. It is also likely that the authors of these sources have selected IPA symbols corresponding to a given regional variety of English (often varieties used in the US or the UK) to fit the needs of their perceived readership, which in some cases includes specific language groups of EFL learners.

This situation leads to cases where the same symbol may be used in various sources to represent entirely different English phonemes, as mentioned above; for example: the symbol "i," which may be used to refer to the vowel sound in "eat" in some sources or to that of "it" in others, as pointed out by Dale and Poms.[46] For classroom use, it is essential to be able to refer *unambiguously* to a given sound in English. This provides the learner with a consistent way to take note of the pronunciation of words and promotes continuing pronunciation improvement. This alternative should also correspond to learners' need to refer unambiguously to selected sounds of their *native language* as well. Using "i" as a symbol could cause additional confusion for the Spanish-speaking learner, where it could represent still another sound.

So far in this discussion, reference has been made at times to "sound" rather than to "phoneme" or "allophone" in order to encompass both of these concepts. As an initial basis for the proposal of a tool for classroom use, the *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association* (HIPA) provides guidelines for the use of the IPA.[47] Several aspects are of particular importance: When clarifying the difference between *phonemic* transcription and *allophonic* transcription (or their

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46 Dale and Poms (1985) 7.
47 International Phonetic Association (1999).

"near equivalents" *broad* and *narrow* transcription, respectively),[48] they point out that the transcriptions of a given word or phrase may vary *according to the needs of any particular task* (our emphasis): "…it is possible, and customary, to be selective about the information which is explicitly incorporated into the allophonic transcription"; and add that "narrowness is regarded as a continuum."[49] Further on, they continue: "There can be many systems of phonemic transcription for the same variety of a language, all of which confirm fully to the principles of the IPA."[50] They conclude this explanation by pointing out that there is no single "correct" transcription," but that their purpose is to provide "the resources to express any analysis so that it is widely understood."[51] The above remarks not only show why so many different forms of IPA are used in dictionaries, textbooks and other references, but also "authorize" the development of a variant, such as that proposed here, to facilitate the comparison of English and Spanish phonological systems for EFL learners, many of whom will work as English instructors at some point in their lives.

For university students of English in Costa Rica, and in particular for those who will become teachers themselves, the tool has been developed as a response to the needs detected. It has evolved over many years and in its most recent format has been used for several years by different instructors in various university pronunciation courses at the Escuela de Literatura y Ciencias del Lenguaje (ELCL), Heredia, Costa Rica. Table 2, on vowel symbols, is one of the results of this work. This proposal consists of a selection of symbols and is accompanied by other frequently used equivalent symbols; it also suggests *names*, in a broad sense, which may be used to refer to the symbols. The HIPA does not provide names, as such, but rather "Phonetic

48 International Phonetic Association, 28-29.
49 International Phonetic Association, 29.
50 International Phonetic Association, 30.
51 International Phonetic Association, 30.

Descriptions."[52] Other sources sometimes also refer to names for the symbols themselves.[53]

The pronunciation of vowels varies greatly in the different areas where English is spoken. These differences are sometimes reflected in the symbols used in dictionaries, or in the descriptions of vowels provided in different textbooks. Even the number of vowel phonemes varies according to the regional variety considered. The selection proposed in table 2 is broad enough to include those most commonly found in pronunciation material prepared using American English as a basis. However, no attempt has been made here to include symbols commonly found in monolingual English dictionaries, based on the spelling-pronunciation conventions of the English language.[54]

Table 2. Vowel Phoneme Symbols[55]

2a. Vowel Phoneme Symbols: Front Vowels				
PHONETIC DESCRIPTION	ELCL IPA	Other IPA	COMMON NAMES[56] FOR THE SYMBOLS	EXAMPLES
complex, high, front, tense, spread	/iy/	/i/ or /ij/	complex "I"; tense "I"	l**ea**ve
simple, high, front, lax, slightly spread	/ɪ/		simple "I"; lax "I",	l**i**ve
complex, mid, front, tense, spread	/ey/	/e/, /ej/, /eɪ/	complex "A"	b**ai**t
simple, mid, front, lax, slightly spread	/ɛ/		epsilon	b**e**t
simple, low, front, lax, spread	/æ/		ash; ash digraph (never *"diagraph")	b**a**t

Table developed by the authors based on the present analysis.

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52   International Phonetic Association, 164.
53   Pullum and Ladusaw.
54   Detailed information of this nature can be found in: Farlex Group. *Complete English Spelling and Pronunciation Rules*. Farlex International, 2017.
55   In this and subsequent tables, /w/ indicates *bilabialized*; /y/ indicates *palatalized* (HIPA, 163).
56   Uppercase letters used here and in subsequent tables) refer to the name of the letter in the alphabet. Whenever possible, reference should be made to the sound itself rather than to the letter or to the name.

2b. Vowel Phoneme Symbols: Central Vowels				
PHONETIC DESCRIPTION	ELCL IPA	Other IPA	COMMON NAMES FOR THE SYMBOLS	EXAMPLES
high, central, tense, rounded	/ɜr/	/ɝ/, /ər/	rhotic (right-hook) reversed epsilon, used in stressed syllables	b**ir**d
high, central, lax, unrounded	/ər/	/ɚ/	rhotic schwa; "schwa + r"; "schwar," used in unstressed syllables	bett**er**
simple, mid, central-to-back, lax, unrounded	/ʌ/	/ə/	turned "v"; wedge (NOT "stressed schwa"), used in stressed syllables	c**u**t
simple, mid, central-to-back, lax, unrounded	/ə/		schwa (as used in unstressed syllables)	**a**bout
simple, low, central, lax, unrounded	/ɑ/	/a/	Latin "A," script "A"	f**a**ther
complex, low, central, tense, unrounded	/ay/	/aj/, /aɪ/	diphthong /ay/	b**uy**
complex, low, central, tense, unrounded	/aw/	/aʊ/, /au/	diphthong /aw/	c**ow**

Table developed by the authors based on the present analysis.

2c. Vowel Phoneme Symbols: Back Vowels				
PHONETIC DESCRIPTION	ELCL IPA	Other IPA	COMMON NAMES FOR THE SYMBOLS	EXAMPLES
complex, high, back, tense, rounded	/uw/	/u/ or / uw/	complex "U"; tense "U"	p**oo**l
simple high, back, lax, unrounded	/ʊ/		upsilon	p**u**ll
complex, mid, back, tense, rounded	/ow/	/o/, / oʊ/[57]	complex "O"	p**o**le
simple, mid, back, lax, rounded	/ɔ/		open "O"	p**au**l
complex, mid, back, tense, rounded	/ɔy/	/oj/, /oɪ/	diphthong /ɔy/	b**oy**

Table developed by the authors based on the present analysis.
/w/ indicates bilabialized; /y/ indicates palatalized (HIPA, 163).

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57 The other symbol /əʊ/ found in many sources has not been included because it is based mainly on SSB (RP).

In the case of the symbols proposed (column 2, table 2), attention has been given to the need for symbols which enable users to distinguish easily between similar vowels, as a tool for pronunciation improvement. This means that there must be a simple way, for example, to differentiate between the English vowels in "meal," or "mill," and the Spanish vowel in "mil." A careful choice of symbols enables instructors to take note of the sound used by a student, as a basis for providing additional practice with certain sounds which may limit clear communication. The basis is the use of the symbol /i/ for the Spanish vowel and of the symbols /iy/ and /ɪ/ for the English sounds which differ slightly. The use of /iy/ reminds users that one of the most outstanding distinguishing features in American English is the fact that it is a *complex vowel*, different from the other two simple vowels (Spanish /i/ and English /ɪ/).[58] Consideration was given to other symbols found in diverse sources to identify symbols which are easy to use and facilitate communication among users about appropriate pronunciation.

Column 1 provides a standard description for each vowel, following a conventional order: *complexity* (simple or complex), *height* (high, mid, low), *tongue position* (backness or frontness: front, central, back), *tenseness* (tense, lax), and *lip position* (roundedness or roundness: rounded, unrounded, spread). Aspects such as "tenseness" may vary slightly from one region to another, as can the exact position of the tongue.

The equivalents and names provided in columns 3 and 4, respectively, are those also commonly found in pronunciation books and *apps,* in linguistics books and in dictionaries, such as those mentioned above. While not an exhaustive list, it is intended to satisfy the needs

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58 Pronunciation textbook authors (such as Celce-Murcia, Brinton and Goodwin, 94-97; Morley, 128, 130; Nash, 126; Nilsen and Nilsen, 45; Orion, 55; Prator and Robinett, 10-12; and Yoshida, 42-43) have used the symbol /iy/ to emphasize the small upward, *forward* tongue movement common in American English, which differentiates /iy/ as in "see" from /i/ as in "sí." This glide is similar to other complex vowels (/ey/ and /ay/, for instance), where the tongue movement is more easily perceived. Likewise, the symbol /uw/ is used to represent the small upward, *backward* tongue movement similar to that of the more noticeable glide in /ow/.

of language instructors and learners. These equivalents also facilitate the transition toward the unambiguous symbols chosen for common usage (in column 2), and special care has been given to the sounds which are a source of difficulties for clear communication. Referring once more the example of the symbol "i," if it is used in a linguistics book written for an English-speaking readership (who naturally uses a complex vowel without being aware of it), there is no need to emphasize the characteristic pronunciation of the vowel /i/ as in "eat." That symbol therefore will be found as one of the equivalents for /iy/. Each source seeks a balance between simplicity and precision. If the symbol "i" is used in material prepared for Spanish speakers, it could cause confusion. If the symbols are to be used for comparative purposes, different symbols must be used.

For the names suggested in column 4, the proposal combines those used in the *Handbook of the International Phonetic Association,*[59] with others which facilitate the acquisition of English phonemes or allophones. They are often names that emphasize certain key characteristics of the given English sounds and similar Spanish ones. Illustrating once again with the phoneme /iy/, the name "complex-i" reminds the user of the most outstanding difference between this vowel and other similar vowels. Other names commonly found—such as "long-i"—lead in the end to confusion and to errors introduced during the learning process. Attention will be given below to the concept of vowel *lengthening* due to its importance for clear communication. Since lengthened and unlengthened forms exist for all vowels, the use of the word "long" can confuse the learner and even lead to difficulties in aural discrimination. In addition, the terms "long-i" and "short-i" have distinct meanings for different users. For a monolingual speaker of English, a "long-i" refers to the sound represented by letter "i," as

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59   International Phonetic Association, 165-181.

in the word "ice,"[60] whereas in books prepared for non-native learn-
ers, "long-i" refers to the sound often represented by the letters "ee"
as in "meet" or by the letters "ea" as in "meat."[61]

A closer look at table 1 illustrates how these symbols facilitate
comparison with Spanish vowels, as follows: /i/ as in "finito," /e/ as in
"querer," /a/ as in "parada," /o/ as in loro," and /u/ as in "luna." This
makes it possible to clarify the vowel if someone has used a Spanish
vowel when pronouncing an English word, such as "soon," saying
*[sun] with a simple Spanish /u/, instead of the complex English /uw/.

Attention must also be given to certain English vowel *allophones*.
The use of allophone symbols enables us to discuss additional significant
details about vowels, which may affect intelligibility. There is a lengthened
and unlengthened allophone for *every* vowel phoneme. The *lengthened*
vowel allophone is used in stressed syllables, before voiced consonants
and in the word final position.[62] The *unlengthened* vowel allophone is used
in unstressed syllables and before voiceless consonants. Lengthening can
conventionally be indicated by a colon, or the IPA length mark [:]. This
can be observed in the following examples: for /æ/—unlengthened [æ] as
in "sat" [sæt], and lengthened [æ] as in "sad [sæːd]"; for /iy/—unlength-
ened [iy] as in "seat" [siyt], and lengthened [iy:] as in "seed" [siy:d], or
"seeded" [ˈsiy:dɪd], and "see" [siy:]; or for /ɪ/—unlengthened [ɪ] as in
"sit" [sɪt], and lengthened [ɪ:] as in the name "Sid" [sɪ:d], or "Sidney"
[ˈsɪ:dniy]. This seemingly unimportant detail can interfere with clear
aural perception of different vowels because a lengthened [ɪ:] can be
perceived as the phoneme /iy/ if a student has been taught that the main
difference between the two high front vowel phonemes is length. This
can cause further communication difficulties because the monolingual
English speaker unconsciously depends on these lengthened vowels in
the stressed syllables of important words (as a key to meaning), and to
distinguish between voiceless and voiced consonants following the vowels.

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60 Dale and Poms (1985), 11, 196.
61 Yoshida, 158.
62 Yoshida, 45-46.

Table 3. Consonant Phoneme Symbols

PHONETIC DESCRIPTION	ELCL IPA	NAMES	EXAMPLES
voiceless bilabial stop (or plosive)	/p/	"P"	**P**aul
voiced bilabial stop (or plosive)	/b/	"B"	**b**all
voiceless alveolar stop (or plosive)	/t/	"T"	**t**en
voiced alveolar stop (or plosive)	/d/	"D"	**d**en
voiceless velar stop	/k/	"K"	**K**ate
voiced velar stop	/g/	"G"	**g**ate
voiceless labiodental fricative	/f/	"F"	belie**f**
voiced labiodental fricative	/v/	"V"	belie**v**e
voiceless interdental fricative	/θ/	theta	ba**th**
voiced interdental fricative	/ð/	eth	ba**th**e
voiceless alveolar fricative	/s/	"S"	**S**ue
voiced alveolar fricative	/z/	"Z"	**z**oo
voiceless post-alveolar fricative	/ʃ/	esh	**sh**eep
voiced post-alveolar fricative	/ʒ/	yogh or ezh	ver**s**ion
voiceless glottal fricative	/h/	"H"	**h**air
voiced bilabial (velar or labio-velar) approximant	/w/	"W"	**w**ere
voiceless bilabial (velar or labio-velar) approximant (regional use)	/hw/ /ʍ/*[63]	"HW" turned-w	**wh**at
voiced alveolar lateral approximant	/l/	"L"	**l**ate
voiced post-alveolar approximant (or retroflex)	/r/ /ɹ/*	"R" turned-r	**r**ate
voiced palatal approximant	/y/ /j/*	"Y" "J"	**y**ellow
voiceless post-alveolar affricate	/tʃ/	t-esh (digraph)	**ch**eap
voiced post-alveolar affricate	/dʒ/	d-yogh (digraph)	vir**g**in
voiced bilabial nasal	/m/	"M"	Ti**m**
voiced alveolar nasal	/n/	"N"	si**n**
voiced velar nasal	/ŋ/	eng; velar-n	si**ng**

Table developed by the authors based on the present analysis.

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63 (*): In each of the items marked with an asterisk, the second symbol in each pair is the accepted IPA symbol found in more formal texts. The first symbol is recommended for beginning students and for convenience. The symbol /j/ in particular is confusing for native Spanish-speakers, as it is often associated with /h/ from the Spanish letter "J."

Although the consonant symbols introduced in table 3 may be less problematical, this guide is still useful for classroom purposes. In the phonetic description common terms are used, and others which will eventually be encountered in more advanced courses are also included. This also applies to certain symbols for which a familiar symbol is used initially and another may be found later on. Convenient names have also been provided as a reference to facilitate classroom communication.

The IPA-based allophone symbols presented in table 4 may be found in specific environments (that is, in certain positions in a word, such as initial position, medial, intervocalic, or final position). Others may be found in regional variants.

Table 4. Selected Consonant Allophone Symbols

PHONETIC DESCRIPTION	SYMBOLS	NAMES OF ALLOPHONE SYMBOLS	EXAMPLE WORDS
aspirated voiceless bilabial stop	[pʰ]	aspirated "P"	**p**est, a**pp**ear
aspirated voiceless alveolar stop	[tʰ]	aspirated "T"	**t**en, a**tt**end
aspirated voiceless velar stop	[kʰ]	aspirated "K"	**c**ase, a**cc**ord
unaspirated voiceless bilabial stop	[p]	unaspirated "P"	wra**pp**er
unaspirated voiceless alveolar stop	[t]	unaspirated "T"	ci**t**y (mainly UK)
unaspirated voiceless velar stop	[k]	unaspirated "K"	be**ck**on
voiced alveolar tap or flap	[ɾ]	flap (or tap) "T"	ci**t**y (mainly US)
unreleased voiceless bilabial stop	[p̚]	unreleased "P"	to**p**
unreleased voiceless alveolar stop	[t̚]	unreleased "T"	hi**t**
unreleased voiceless velar stop	[k̚]	unreleased "K"	pa**ck**
syllabic consonant	[m̩], [n̩], [l̩], [ɹ̩]	vocalic consonant	rhyth**m**, happe**n** titl**e**, docto**r**
voiceless glottal stop	[ʔ]	glottal stop	moun**t**ain
voiced post-alveolar lateral approximant	[ɫ]	dark "L"	a**ll**
lengthened voiceless fricatives	[s:], [f:], [ʃ:], [θ:]	lengthened consonants	ma**ss**, li**f**e, sa**sh**, pa**th**

Table developed by the authors based on the present analysis.

In table 5, additional symbols have been selected for the purpose of having a simple way to take note of sounds which may affect clarity and ease of comprehension in English. Native speakers of Spanish are not necessarily aware of certain features of Spanish sounds, which when used in English, can interfere with clear communication. These symbols correspond to the most frequent aspects requiring attention and provide a convenient way to direct attention to them if required.

Table 5. Selected Spanish Allophones Which May Interfere with Clear Communication in English

PHONETIC DESCRIPTION	IPA SYMBOLS	NAMES OF ALLO-PHONES	EXAMPLES
dental voiceless stop (instead of *alveolar*)	[t̪]	dental "T"	**t**en *[t̪ɛ:n]
dental voiced stop (instead of *alveolar*)	[d̪]	dental "D"	**d**en *[d̪ɛ:n]
devoiced (instead of *voiced*) bilabial stop	[b̥]	devoiced "B"	la**b** *[læ:b̥]
devoiced (instead of *voiced*) alveolar stop	[d̥]	devoiced "D"	ba**d** *[bæ:d̥]
devoiced (instead of *voiced*) velar stop	[g̥]	devoiced /g/	do**g***[dɑ:[g̥]]
voiced bilabial *fricative* (instead of *stop*)	[β]	fricative "B"	a**b**out *[əβaw:t]
voiced velar *fricative* (instead of *stop*)	[ɣ]	fricative /g/	a**g**o *[əɣow:]
voiced *velar* nasal (instead of *alveolar* or *bilabial*)	[ŋ]	eng; velar-n	si**n** *[sɪ:ŋ]; na**m**e *[ney:ŋ]

Table developed by the authors based on the present analysis.

At the instructor's discretion, additional allophones may be found useful to target the needs of a particular group.

This proposal would not be complete without a general discussion of an ethical framework for the teaching of English pronunciation. This is done below considering current advancements in the field of World Englishes (WE). However, the section warns against uncritically adopting theories based on their popularity, especially where

theoretical precept appears to clash with the specific learning context of pronunciation instruction.

Ethical Considerations

Much progress has been made in ELT in general, including pronunciation pedagogy. However, academic discussions on ethical issues and guiding principles for more ethical practices in the teaching of pronunciation are yet to be strengthened. The subject has attracted special attention in the unregulated business of L2 pronunciation instruction, where speakers seeking to improve, neutralize or otherwise modify their pronunciation are charged large sums of money.[64] This section addresses theoretical rationale and practical implications of ethical standards in pronunciation pedagogy, considering current developments in the field of WE. Wherever possible, the discussion focuses on, but is not restricted to, vowels and consonants.

Along more theoretical lines, recent advancements in WE[65] have contributed to the understanding of the complexities surrounding the teaching of English pronunciation. At the core of these developments are the emergence of teaching models focused on global perspectives of ELT,[66] and a growing awareness of fallacious claims behind the notion of standard English.[67] A vindication of regional accents as processes naturally resulting from diachronic variation[68] has led to the conclusion that the teaching of English pronunciation is anything but an agreed upon enterprise. The traditional British-versus-American-English pronunciation binary is prevalent in most ELT curricula in outer and expanding circle countries (such as Costa Rica); nonetheless, it has proven insufficient to represent the wide range of English

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64 Foote (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 84.
65 Deterding and Gardiner (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 218.
66 Szpyra-Kozłowska (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 23; and Robin Walker, *Teaching Pronunciation of English as a Lingua Franca* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).
67 Raihan and Deterding (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 203.
68 Kirk Hazen, "Standards of Pronunciation and Regional Accents" (Kang Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 189-202 (190).

accents in most occupational fields across the globe. This awareness raises questions on whether or to what extent other varieties of English pronunciation should be taking center stage in the L2 curriculum, as well as on the pedagogical implications that inevitably would come with a more WE-based ELT agenda. As English varieties continue to evolve at an unprecedented rate, making it difficult even to trace the evolutions of the so-called standard English, native-to-native encounters are systematically being overtaken by non-native-to-non-native interactions.[69] This cause educators to rethink the role of the native speaker as the ideal model for expanding circle ELT curricula.[70] The L2 classroom thus becomes a site of struggle where theory clashes with classroom reality in an interplay of student, methodological, sociocultural, institutional, corporate, and teacher rationalities.[71] For Raihan and Deterding, overreliance on General American English or British RP leads to lack of exposure to other varieties of English, thus leaving learners "ill prepared to interact with a range of speakers in the real world."[72]

On a practical level, these theoretical issues require critical solutions when teaching vowels and consonants in an ELT classroom. Some fundamental considerations include desired pronunciation benchmarks, intended instructional goals, the notion of intelligibility, consistency between pronunciation content, and students' proficiency levels and linguistic backgrounds in actual pedagogical practice.

Albeit intentionally or unintentionally, ELT programs have traditionally aimed for pronunciation benchmarks derived from an

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69 Bhowmik, Subrata Kumar, "World Englishes and English Language Teaching: A Pragmatic and Humanistic Approach," *Colombian Applied Linguistics* 17, 1 (2015): 142-157 (143, 155). DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.14483/udistrital.jour.calj.2015.1.a10.

70 Christian Fallas Escobar, "EFL Learners' Self-concept: Repercussions of Native Speakerism," *International Journal for 21st Century Education* 5, 1 (2018): 19-35 (20). DOI: 10.21071/ij21ce.v5i1.5796.

71 Ian Tudor, *The Dynamics of the Language Classroom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 33-39.

72 Raihan and Deterding (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 214.

exonormative native speaker model.[73] That is, they assume that British RP or different North American accents are appropriate models to adopt in an L2 pronunciation classroom.[74] Although those approaches are still dominant in most L2 programs, a growing theoretical orientation toward mutual intelligibility, materialized through a lingua franca approach, appears to be en route. In this multilingual view, pronunciation competencies are geared mainly toward speakers' intelligibility, ensuring that segmental and suprasegmental elements are crafted to aid communication with different speakers across various communicative events. The rationale behind this theoretical lens is that a native speaker model is not only unrealistic, but also often costly and, as reported by recent research, hazardous to self-concept; in the words of Fallas, "EFL learners develop a tendency to characterize their own English as deficient, unfinished, unpolished, and inadequate."[75] Raihan and Deterding argue that some WE features can increase intelligibility, especially when English is used as a lingua franca. Such features include "the use of syllable-based rhythm and also the avoidance of reduced vowels in function words such as <of>, <as> and <than> and in the unstressed first syllable of polysyllabic words like <computer> and <advice>."[76]

The ethics of pronunciation instruction cannot be complete without a reasonable dose of skepticism of emerging theories. It would not be ethical to adopt fashionable theories without critical examination, for instance, even if they are promoted by a majority of scholars. Theoretical precept must survive the test of confrontation and empirical observation, and grassroots research should accompany the adoption

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73 The title of pronunciation textbooks such as the following illustrate this orientation: Susan Cameron, *Perfecting Your English Pronunciation* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012); Rebecca A. Dauer, *Accurate English: A Complete Course in Pronunciation* (Hoboken, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents, 1993); and Jean Yates, *Pronounce It Perfectly in English* (New York: Barron's, 2013).

74 Mohammad Amin Mozaheb and Abbas Monfared, "Exonormativity, Endonormativity or Multilingualism: Teachers' Attitudes towards Pronunciation Issues in Three Kachruian Circles," *Journal of English as an International Language* 15, 2 (2020): 27-51 (29).

75 Fallas, 23.

76 Raihan and Deterding (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 203.

of any pronunciation approach, be it endonormative, exonormative, lingua franca,[77] or otherwise. As emerging theories claim to be better than others with seemingly obsolete ideals, many previously pedagogical trends have been modified or entirely abandoned; it is therefore an ethical hazard to reduce required pronunciation benchmarks to the newest theoretical discussion. Intelligibility-based approaches thus appear to be a feasible option for the teaching of pronunciation, but only insofar as they are not arbitrarily imposed on those involved in pronunciation training.

Another ethical consideration in the teaching of segmentals—or pronunciation in general—is defining clear instructional goals so that decisions remain reasonable and grounded. Whereas universal formulas of the *tips-and-tricks* sort are hardly a categorical solution, a pragmatic view can be adopted to guide specific purposes, needs and wants of those involved in the pronunciation enterprise. Pronunciation practitioners should become acquainted with the theoretical developments around the subject and assess the reasons and contexts for teaching English pronunciation. For business or commerce-based interactions with speakers from various backgrounds, there is no need to restrict pedagogical agendas to the so-called standard varieties because the encounters will involve speakers from many parts of the world, both native and non-native. However, if the purpose is to train professionals for customer service within specific geographical areas where a particular form of English is used, instructors could orient their pedagogical efforts in that direction. In Costa Rica, segmental competence should be approached even more carefully due to the wide array of ELT programs currently offered (TESOL, EFL, ESP, EAP, EGP, among others). Most students in these contexts are adults and young adults likely to have embarked on their English learning process more formally after puberty, a factor that has implications for pronunciation competence since "adult language learners rarely, if

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77 Such as Walker, as mentioned previously.

ever, achieve fully native-like pronunciation," as Munro and Derwing
have suggested (echoing Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam, 2009; Flege,
Munro and MacKay, 1995; and many others).[78] Munro and Derwing
explain that the *nativeness* principle in pronunciation is not a viable
instructional goal. Instead, they advocate a pragmatic outlook to ac-
count for speakers' intelligibility: "learners should aim to develop
speaking patterns that allow them to communicate with ease, even
if their accent retains non-native characteristics."[79] An approach like
this, however, does pose pedagogical challenges that should not be
ignored. Institutional authorities and stakeholders must discuss ques-
tions dealing with instructors' profiles, assessment methods, the choice
of instructional materials, funding opportunities, the definition of
linguistic policies around pronunciation instruction, and the prevalent
digital inequality and accessibility to online resources, to name a few.

Caution is also advised when interpreting the concept of in-
telligibility. Popularly acclaimed ideas like Smith and Rafiqzad's
(1983) argument, "Since native speaker phonology doesn't appear to
be more intelligible than non-native phonology, there seems to be no
reason to insist that the performance target in the English classroom
be a native speaker," need to be contextualized.[80] This is necessary
because the premise, *native speaker phonology doesn't appear to be
more intelligible than non-native phonology*, may be manipulated into
the fallacious claim that, in English pronunciation, "anything goes."
English pronunciation teachers should ensure a solid understanding
of the varieties of English around the world and help their students to
refine their articulation so that predictable communication problems
can be tackled and prevented.[81] Likewise, language identity can be

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78   Murray J. Munro and Tracey M. Derwing, "Intelligibility in Research and Practice: Teaching Pri-
     orities," *The Handbook of English Pronunciation,* Marnie Reed and John M. Levis, Eds. (West
     Sussex: Wiley Blackwell, 2015) 377-396 (377).
79   Munro and Derwing (Reed and Levis, Eds.), 377.
80   Cited by Cecil L. Nelson, and Seong-Yoon Kang, "Pronunciation and World Englishes" (Reed and
     Levis, Eds.), 320-330 (322).
81   Arthur Hughes, Peter Trudgill and Dominie Watt, *English Accents and Dialects*. 5th ed. (London
     and New York: Routledge, 2012); and Walt Wolfram and Natalie Schilling, *American English:*

embraced by simultaneously facing (and preventing) real-life problems arising while developing pronunciation competencies. Within this context, it would not be ethical to oversimplify the principle of intelligibility and neglect the implications that poor segmental articulation could have in vital settings. Examples include highly demanding call-center-based customer service, court trials where the defendant's testimony depends on an interpreter's clear speech, or foreign language classrooms where students rely on the instructor's pronunciation competencies to build their own.

For many, the notion that "Accents are not something to be eliminated; they are to be celebrated as an integral part of humanity, language and society" is simply common-sense.[82] Yet, for pronunciation instructors, translating this into actual practice requires theoretical and practical considerations that should not be underestimated. In discussing instructional models in the global landscape, Szpyra-Kozłowska[83] has identified two polar tendencies that influence pronunciation instruction, particularly in inner and outer circle settings:

> On the one hand, with the growing number of users of English worldwide and the resulting formation of new localized varieties, one type of pressure is to recognize such varieties as legitimate teaching models. On the other hand, in view of the pervasive use of English for purposes of international communication, there is a strong need to adopt teaching models which would guarantee a sufficient degree of phonetic uniformity to maintain mutual intelligibility between English users of different L1 backgrounds.

According to this author, there is currently no agreement on how to harmonize these two polar choices. The first vindicates the role of localized varieties of English whereas the latter seeks to safeguard intelligibility in the rapidly emerging contexts of international

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Dialects and Variation (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016).
82 Hazen (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 190.
83 Szpyra-Kozłowska (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.), 244.

communication. In Costa Rica, additional complexities must be considered because instruction occurs (with the exception of the nativized Limonese English[84]) mostly within EFL situations; that is, an expanding circle framework with its own traits and vicissitudes.

One last ethical point to be made involves two interrelated aspects: students' proficiency levels and their linguistic backgrounds. When teaching segmentals, transcription systems range from simplified phonics symbols in dictionaries and online resources to more complex phonetic symbols often based on the HIPA. These symbols have specific diacritical marks to indicate speech phenomena such as lengthening, primary and secondary stress, syllable break, absence of syllable break, and even unreleased sounds. In classroom practice, instructors should be mindful of the students' readiness (or absence thereof) for these complexities. When teaching vowels and consonants, instructors may resort to specialized descriptions to characterize consonant and vowel segments. However, this is useful only if students already possess a minimum level of English to understand, for instance, the components of the speech apparatus and how sounds are produced. Otherwise, uses of metalanguage such as *voiceless interdental fricative* (/θ/), *voiced velar nasal* /ŋ/, or *simple, mid, central, lax, unrounded* (/ə/) may do more harm than good for actual pronunciation improvement. Learners' linguistic background also plays a fundamental role in the instructional choices a language teaching practitioner makes. As the world moves toward multiculturalism and linguistic barriers are blurred by cybercommunication and social media, classrooms become more heterogeneous, and even a Spanish-speaking country like Costa Rica can expect increasing linguistic diversity. Bilingual and multilingual students are likely to have a wider range of sounds than monolinguals do. Some of those sounds can be used to their own advantage, and others must be dealt with so that they do not interfere with intelligibility. For example, French students taking English pronunciation classes will

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84 For a recent description of the linguistic setting, see Jorge Aguilar-Sánchez, "Diglossia and Language Contact in Limón, Costa Rica," *Letras* 72 (2022): 129-161. DOI: https://doi.org/10.15359/rl.2-72.6.

certainly find no difficulty pronouncing the voiced post-alveolar frica-
tive /ʒ/ because that is a common phoneme in French. Nevertheless, they
may find it more difficult to produce the voiced and voiceless interdental
fricative sounds /ð/ and /θ/, because they do not exist in that language.[85]
Similarly, a Costa Rican student will find no difficulty pronouncing the
voiceless post-alveolar affricate /t͡ʃ/ because it appears in Spanish words
like "chatarra" or "choza." However, they will certainly experience is-
sues with the voiced post-alveolar fricative /ʒ/. The ethical commitment
of the pronunciation instructor is to keep metalanguage and the students'
proficiency level aligned; never assuming that "one size fits all" when
dealing with a linguistically diverse classroom.

The analysis presented here is by no means exhaustive. As
diachronic variation continues to accelerate across the many English
varieties all over the world, an awareness of the ethical elements
discussed in this section becomes perhaps more vital than before.
Long-held ideas of standard accents (summarized by Raihan and
Deterding), regional variations and their social attributes (addressed
by Hazen), emerging pronunciations and WE (examined by Deterd-
ing and Gardiner), and the choice of instructional models to suit the
global expansion of English (analyzed by Szpyra-Kozłowska) require
attention.[86] These are but a few of the ethically bound topics that will
spark debate and call for careful consideration in the years to come,
along with the variables affecting L2 pronunciation development (as
described by Trofimovich, Kennedy and Foote).[87] The overwhelming
spread of unregulated L2 pronunciation programs promising to neu-
tralize or reduce non-native English-speaking accents (discussed by
Foote) also requires attention, both in theory and in praxis.[88]

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85 Amy Markey, "A Contrastive Analysis of French and American English," BA thesis (Swarthmore, PA: Swarthmore College, 1998) 4. http://hdl.handle.net/10066/10534.4.
86 Raihan and Deterding, 203-217; Hazen 189; Deterding and Gardiner. 218-231; and Szpyra-Kozłowska, 232-246 (Kang, Thomson and Murphy, Eds.).
87 Pavel Trofimovich, Sara Kennedy and Jennifer Ann Foote, "Variables Affecting L2 Pronunciation Development" (Reed and Levis, Eds.) 353-374.
88 Foote, 284-297.

Concluding Remarks

The overall aim of this paper was twofold. On the one hand, it analyzed a set of symbols which led to the creation of a tool to reinforce the pronunciation of English vowels and consonants in Costa Rica. On the other, it discussed ethical considerations surrounding the teaching of English pronunciation, with a focus on sound segments wherever possible. A brief contrastive analysis of various transcription systems was presented, selected English and Spanish vowels were compared, and theoretical and practical issues linked to ethics in pronunciation instruction were outlined.

Given that the focus was on the teaching of segmental features, the analysis has led to two broad conclusions. In the first place, the choice of symbols is based on pedagogical priorities likely to exist in the Spanish-speaking context of Costa Rican ELT, particularly—but not exclusively—in higher education programs. The tool proposed here replaces symbols expected to pose challenges for students, such as the voiced palatal approximant /j/ currently used by the International Phonetic Association, with others more readily recognizable by Spanish-speaking learners. Standard descriptions for vowels have also been expanded to include the criteria of complexity and tenseness, thus providing a fuller picture of vowel segments for more detailed guidance on the realization of these phonemes. Other common symbols found in print and online resources have been incorporated for comparison, and common symbol names have been added for reference. Furthermore, symbols for English consonant allophones have been made available, and a selected inventory of allophones which may interfere with clear communication in English has been included. Adjustments are suggested for various contexts of EFL instruction present in Costa Rica, such as ESP, EAP, EOP and EGP. Within the diversifying perspectives of English pronunciation, clear instructional goals are also vital to ensure congruence between policy and practice, and flexibility is advised to account for the increasing global presence of English varieties observed in recent decades.

Secondly, the selection, development, and evaluation of materials may well start incorporating a more contrastive approach into the teaching of vowels and consonants. This will help accurately present similarities and differences between the various English varieties and Costa Rican Spanish. The implications of this approach naturally extend to teachers, department authorities, and stakeholders. Careful assessment of the goals, symbols used, English varieties endorsed, and several other aspects are necessary to balance simplicity and precision in selecting specialized or customized references for non-expert readerships. Although less common thus far in Costa Rica, classroom populations with bilingual or multilingual students with a background in linguistics or the teaching of segmentals would require different approaches. The point was made earlier that comparative approaches for pronunciation improvement should be adjusted according to the students' native language. English pronunciation instructors do not necessarily need to learn their students' native languages, but they do require some knowledge of the phonetic systems underlying these languages so that appropriate symbols can be employed in pedagogical practice. Adoption, adaptation, or creation of materials must be done knowingly and with a solid understanding of the theoretical and practical aspects involved.

Although this study focuses on Costa Rica, the tool proposed here may serve pronunciation instruction developments in other Spanish-speaking countries, with the corresponding adjustments for regional speech. The proposal expands on available literature on teaching segmentals from a global perspective that addresses both local pronunciation needs and the diverse forms of English all over the world. Nonetheless, caution is required regarding the significance of theoretical advancements around pronunciation instruction, as popular trends (whether endonormative, exonormative, lingua franca, or others) must not be assumed to be empirically supported proposals. As theoretical developments on WE parallel the massive production

of classroom materials, the ethical obligation is to submit both ends of the spectrum to scrutiny and sound reasoning.

Future work could be oriented toward concrete goals; for example, systematic empirical evidence should be gathered on the effectiveness of the proposed tool. Qualitative and quantitative studies may examine its effectiveness, focusing on consonant and vowel segments that represent greater challenges for learners so that practical solutions can be anticipated. Research should also expand on the ethical side of pronunciation instruction, including suprasegmental features, to generate empirical evidence to study the issue from different perspectives such as those of students, teachers, institutional authorities, employers, scholars, and theoreticians. For now, this contribution provides a flexible basis to meet the linguistic profile of Costa Rican EFL learners and paves the way for similar initiatives regarding the demands for continuing pronunciation improvement.