

## The Use of Voiced Labiodental Fricative /v/ among American L2 Learners of Spanish

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**Introduction.** In the literature of foreign language (FL) it is agreed that, traditionally, pronunciation has been viewed as the least useful of the basic language skills. Therefore, it is often given little attention during class time (Elliott, 1997). This is especially true of the widely-used Communicative Approach (CA), which puts a heavy weight on FL input that students receive and relies entirely on the students' experience with the language for their improvement of FL pronunciation (Elliott, 1997). This tendency has been found to be a flaw in the CA, since a number of previous researches on the topic found that FL pronunciation improves more efficiently with explicit instruction (Canfield, 1940; Zampini, 1994; Elliott, 1997; and Arteaga, 2000).

**Purpose of the Study.** The present study focuses on the use of the voiced labiodental fricative /v/, which is nonexistent in Spanish, among American L2 learners of Spanish. Its purpose is to investigate whether students indeed significantly improve their Spanish pronunciation over time with the CA. The study also tries to search for possible alternative instruction methods for improvement in student pronunciation of Spanish.

**Methodology.** The subjects of the present study were 80 student volunteers at Kenyon College (where CA is the base of FL instruction) who were taking Spanish courses of various levels. Individually, they completed two experimental tasks, a reading task and a picture-naming task. The data set was analyzed on the basis of the subjects' mispronunciations of the words with the letter "v". The two tasks reveal the effects of different possible sources of mispronunciation error among the subjects; namely, the orthography and their L1 lexicon, which is compatible with previous studies (Zampini, 1994).

**Results.** Advanced students performed significantly better than those in lower levels ( $F=5.22$  and  $P=0.003$ ). However, the values of the coefficients of determination were so low that there appears to be no correlation between the students' performance in pronunciation and the level of their current Spanish course with the CA (0.073 for bilabial stop [b] and 0.142 for bilabial fricative [β]). This suggests that, under the CA, the effect of instruction for pronunciation is minimal. Moreover, it was found that students who have not studied abroad in Spanish-speaking countries have performed as well as others in the same course level, who have been to those countries (e.g.  $T=-0.36$  and  $P=0.722$  for [b] among Level 4 students). This result further supports the hypothesis that students do not improve their FL pronunciation without being explicitly taught. Students who are abroad usually are not explicitly taught FL pronunciation, which is similar to what is seen in the CA.

**Implications.** Comparing the results from the present study and those from previous ones, it can be concluded that CA has limited ability in terms of the instruction of FL pronunciation. It is clear that merely sending FL input to students does not lead to the improvement in their FL pronunciation and therefore, FL pronunciation has to be taught explicitly

### References

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