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# **Shall I Compare Thee to a Native Speaker? The Imitation and Instruction of English Poetry with EFL Learners**

Through the in-class analysis of poetry and the at-home multiple accented imitation of poetry by native online models, EFL students have the double educative benefits of being exposed to English language literary culture as well as having their pronunciation, stress and intonation improved.

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**Abstract:**

This report concerns a 6 week specific methodological intervention to better the pronunciation of 7 Spanish EFL secondary students via the autonomous, at-home poetic imitation of native English speaking models. For 6 weeks, an intact class of EFL learners (number 15) in a Spanish secondary school were presented with an analysis and discussion of contemporary and 20th century poetry, related to love, death and poems of adolescence. After initially being presented with the native models in class, 7 participating students imitated the recitals (from a multi-accented variety of online resources) at home. In order to measure students' gains in terms of pronunciation, one initial and one final imitation of a specific poem, as well as a thematically specific free speech sample were delivered by every student. More specifically, at weeks 1 and 6, the same topic for both poetry and free speech was recorded. Also, an additional free speech topic and poem were also recorded at week 6 in order to see if the improvements observed in a specific content were also applied to a new piece of language. The recordings were examined and evaluated by 2 native evaluators. The results indicate that the students had better quality pronunciation when imitating and talking about the same free speech topic but, when given an unrehearsed poem and different free speech topic, they seemed unable to assign the improvements to the unpractised poetry and unfamiliar free speech topic. Whole class impressions were also investigated by means of a final questionnaire. Here, all students testified to the importance of pronunciation; they believed the activity to be helpful their pronunciation; they found it enjoyable and would enthusiastically welcome more poetry and literature into their EFL classes.

**Keywords:** reading aloud; imitation; teaching pronunciation; prosody; suprasegmentals; poetry; literature.

**Introduction: The Imitation and Study of English Poetry: The educative and pronunciational merits of Literature in the EFL classroom.**

EFL teaching has long been in the thrall of the contemporary communicative approach; a practice, which would value the direct method alone, as its quintessential historical antecedent. Indeed, more recent vanguard methodologies, which similarly attempt to augment communicative competence<sup>1</sup>, are likewise, keen debunkers of their non-communicatively orientated methodological forerunners. It is this thesis' approach to reinstate and rehabilitate two aspects of EFL methodologies which have gone by the wayside since the 1970s. The approaches we wish appropriate then, are the instruction of L2 literature which originated from the Grammar Translation method

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<sup>1</sup>.Such as learning strategy training, cooperative learning; as well as the focus on, multiple intelligence, content-based, task-based and participatory approaches. See Larsen-Freeman (2000: 180)

and the uses of reading aloud and imitation which came to the fore in the Audio Lingual method.

Hence, here we argue that through the in-class analysis of poetry and the at-home multiple accented imitation of poetry by native online models, students have the double educative benefits of being exposed to English language literary culture as well as having their pronunciation, stress and intonation improved.

We begin with a contemporary and chronological survey of pronunciation in EFL methodologies and culminate by calling for its use in today's EFL classroom. Then, we continue our overview of the theoretical background, with an analysis of both imitation and reading aloud and look at their pronunciations merits. This theoretical triumvirate is concluded by with a survey of, literature's in general but, poetry's specific, place in EFL instruction.

### **Theoretical background I: The Place of Pronunciation in the EFL Classroom:**

#### ***The importance of native- like pronunciation:***

To paraphrase one of English Literature's most famous opening lines<sup>2</sup>: It is a truth universally acknowledged that a non-native speaker in possession of a good L2 accent must not have any communication difficulties. Irony aside, an acceptable level of intelligible pronunciation is an essential part of second language learning. Indeed, it is no surprise that non-native like pronunciation can cause communication obstacles and mix-ups amongst speakers; to put it quite simply, "a non-native speaker with serious pronunciation deficits can encounter great difficulty in communicating with native speakers" (Jimenez Biles, 2011: 5). There is a recent undisputed acknowledgement that good pronunciation plays a paramount role in the acquisition of a foreign language (Lázaro 2011). Moreover, Lázaro asserts that "there also exists an impressive wealth of empirical research showing that instruction has beneficial effects on pronunciation. Likewise, there is an equally impressive profusion of pedagogical works focusing on teaching pronunciation (Lázaro 2011: 49).

So, it would seem obvious that the instruction of pronunciation in the language classroom would take a prime position on the EFL agenda. Yet, the great irony is, sadly, this is not so. A whole host of contemporary investigations identify the paradox that despite the mounting volumes of empirical and pedagogical studies being published, they have little influence on what goes on in the vast majority of EFL classrooms, where there is scant evidence of active pronunciation instruction (Barrera Pardo, 2004; Brown, 1991; Samuda, 1993; Walker, 1999). Mixing metaphors, we can conclude that pronunciation issues seem not even to have been considered 'the elephant in the [EFL

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<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

class] room,' they seem quite simply to have been swept under the (communicative) carpet.

***Pronunciation in the communicative method:***

Jimenez Biles (2011) studied the experience and preparation of many American language teachers, and found that the development of native-like pronunciation, as well as the development of listening skills in second language learning, to be two of the least explored skills among the four essential language domains of listening, reading, writing, and speaking. She discovered that in teacher preparation, practice, and instructional materials, teachers were given a variety of ideas to promote conversation, vocabulary learning, as well as reading and writing strategies. Yet, native-like pronunciation and listening comprehension, seemed to be domains that were only occasionally addressed. While she accepts that second language teachers routinely offer opportunities for speaking and listening practice in the classroom, specific pedagogy based on experimental research did not necessarily address what teachers do on a daily basis to promote the skills of pronunciation and listening” (Jimenez Biles, 2011: 1 ). She cites Elliott (1997) as providing a possible reason for such neglect, as “...teachers tend to view pronunciation as the least useful of the basic language skills and therefore they generally sacrifice teaching pronunciation in order to spend valuable class time on other areas of the language.” (Jimenez Biles, 2011: 2).

***Pronunciation: a brief methodological synopsis:***

The reasons for pronunciations’ omission in contemporary communicative classes warrant a brief overview of ESL methodology and its place within it. Direct pronunciation instruction only came to the fore with the audio-lingual and direct methods “as a reaction against the artificiality of the grammar-translation method, [such] methods attached great importance to pronunciation and achieved very important goals in this respect” (Lázaro 2011: 50). Such canonical acceptance was the high-water mark of pronunciations’ predominance, but it soon came under attack with onset of the communicative approach in the 1970s, which, as its very name implies, urged the communicative value of languages and not such imitation-based methodologies founded on behaviourist psychology.

The communicative approach then, sublimated pronunciation instruction to communicative activities. While it wasn’t wholly ostracised, “pronunciation per se stopped being taught; instead it was assumed that students would pick up the pronunciation while learning to communicate in the language” (Lázaro 2011: 51). The best pronunciation could hope for would be for it to be relegated “to a subsidiary role of broader language performance skills such as speaking and listening” (Barrera Pardo,

2004:6) Yet, the consequences of such omission, is that “[a student’s] verbal expression may be laboured, segmented, and non-native, sometimes leading to unintelligibility of their message”(Jimenez Biles, 2011: 2). In short, bad pronunciation is usually deemed to be the chief justification for miscommunication among EFL students (Celce-Murcia et al. 1996).

Direct based phonological instruction was researched by Simoes (1996), Diaz-Campos (2004), and Elliott (1995) who have effectively argued that it improved students’ native-like pronunciation (Jimenez Biles, 2011: 2). Indeed, Jimenez Biles (2011) explored its effects as a strategy to increase [Spanish] learners’ native like pronunciation, as well as their ability to listen and comprehend native speakers, and found that direct phonological instruction, not only encourages pronunciation improvement, but also slightly increases the listening skills of adolescent second language learners (Jimenez Biles, 2011: 2).

The paradox then at the heart of the of the communicative approach is that “intelligible pronunciation is a sine qua non condition for oral communication (Jenkins, 2000) and the communicative approach, whose main aim is successful communication, neglects to teach it” (Lázaro 2011: 51). When pronunciation is taught, it is rarely in secondary education but in theoretical phonology courses for teachers and university students which focus on the segmental analysis of phonemes and pay scant regard to either suprasegmental features or to speech practice. As Lázaro succinctly puts it “they teach about pronunciation but they do not teach students to pronounce. As it was the case with general communicative skills, it should not be assumed that the phonological background will automatically mean better pronunciation” (Lázaro 2011: 51).

### ***The case for pronunciation instruction:***

A native speaker learning a second language after puberty often has difficulty pronouncing specific sounds of the second language, and a consequent accent is noted when the target language is produced. The Critical Period hypothesis explains the phenomenon “that individuals past a certain age are worse at learning a language than younger individual . . . for pronunciation and grammar learning” (DeKeyser, 2000: 500). The Critical Period hypothesis is especially strong in relation to acquiring and imitating the L2 language sound system or phonology. Thus, after a certain critical age, it becomes increasingly difficult for a non-native speaker to internalize and imitate the sounds of a non-native language (Freeman & Freeman, 2004 cited by Jimenez Biles, 2011: 3). A precise age for such deterioration has not been established but it does seem to take place gradually from ages 6-7 to 16 or 17 and beyond (DeKeyser, 2000).

This does not mean that a learner past puberty should avoid learning a new language. While the Critical Period may present challenges, “with the implementation of proper pedagogy based on research, post-adolescent learners may develop native-like pronunciation” (Derwing & Munro, 2010). So, not in spite of, but because of the so-called Critical Period, there is support that direct phonological instruction is necessary to facilitate and accelerate a both student’s pronounciational prowess as well as their awareness of the L2’s phonetic idiosyncrasies.

It would be wrong to paint the current EFL landscape so bleakly with regard to pronunciation instruction (though to reiterate, phonological instruction seems to be the denizen of tertiary education). There is indeed a wealth of current scholarship published on methodology in this field. However, the problem may be that a glass ceiling of sorts may exist between academia and the EFL classroom. Indeed, Derwing and Munro are of the same mind on this point when stating: “while some English teachers are successful in assisting their students with pronunciation, many often lack training and confidence to teach pronunciation and therefore neglect this area (Derwing and Munro, 2005).” We follow Lázaro’s (2011) lead by stating a necessary caveat to this particular investigation: we do not dispute that either comprehensive EFL courses related to oral communication skills and phonology courses facilitate pronunciation improvement, we, like she, “just want to make it clear that they focus on something else (general oral skills or phonology) and pronunciation can be acquired on the way but is not placed at the heart of teaching (Lázaro 2011: 52).” The corollary that is offered in this study is that a focus on suprasegmental elements of language, through imitation of native models by reading aloud, not only aids phonological awareness, but also makes the speaker sound more native-like in the imitation process, and tentatively in their free speech too. It then should be considered as “another tool for teachers and does not compete with transcription or speaking activities. On the contrary, it is just one more alternative in the colourful mosaic of activities that can help students with the complexities of English pronunciation (Lázaro 2011: 52)”.

## **Theoretical background II: Reading Aloud:**

### ***An overview and the arguments against its use:***

Reading Aloud (RA) is a common EFL/ESL classroom activity, “for a large number of teachers worldwide reading aloud constitutes a staple of the classroom diet” (Gabrielatos, 2002: 1) Indeed, numerous researchers have played up its worth for the language classroom (Birch, 2002; Gibson, 2008). Yet, general EFL teaching methodology does not recommend reading aloud. On the one hand, it is generally considered to impede comprehension, and accordingly it is not considered to be an effective technique for developing reading skills (Dwyer, 1983; Gabrielatos, 2002). On

the other hand, Wallace (1992) notes that student can also read aloud correctly without understanding what they are reading. According to Amer (1997: 43), in class Oral Reading or Reading Aloud (RA) is often seen as a cop-out for the teacher and a pure and simple waste of class time by both EFL teachers and methodology specialists alike. Such a viewpoint is succinctly articulated by Hill and Dobbyn (1979: 69) upbraiding it as 'merely a way of passing 45 minutes or so with as little trouble as possible for the teacher: it does not help the pupils'.

Gibson (2008) agrees with Amer (1997) on how general ELT methodology literature does not endorse the practice of RA. The roots of such snubbing are found in the - never the twain shall meet- methodological melee between contemporary communicative teaching and the considered old-school, old hat use of RA. If a single grievance is to be laid at the feet of RA classroom use, it is the use of unprepared reading around the class, echoing Hill and Dobbyn's, scathing appraisal, where it is "commonly perceived as an unimaginative and easy time filler for the teacher" (Gibson, 2008: 29). Amongst the litany of other adjectives railed against RA are those deeming it to be: tedious, uninteresting, as well as being anxiety-provoking for certain students. In short, previous ELT methodology specialists have identified the dubious benefits for both reader and listener of RA.

There are certainly many caveats to the use of RA. It ought to be used parsimoniously to ensure student ennui is eschewed; the listeners should be instructed to listen for specific information: be it for errors or for specific information (as in a jigsaw exercise or perhaps in the imitation of native models via poetry which would include identifying nuances in tone on certain lines). Potential nervousness might be reduced by using RA with smaller classes/ groups and/or the length of the reading material (here again the brevity of lyrical poetry is advantageous). A supportive classroom atmosphere needs to be cultivated too, and in it, students should have sufficient preparation time. Student correction ought to be indirect, rather than direct, to alleviate potential embarrassment as well as anxiety. Finally, as comprehension seems to be compromised by RA, it then, should not be its principal purpose (Gibson, 2008: 33). Though, as Amer (1997) will show us, following an apt model (narrative texts in his case, poetry in this project) does indeed contribute to greater comprehension via choice diction and enunciation which underpins narrative meaning.

Other criticisms laid against RA hinge on its use to improve pronunciation claiming that RA can sound slightly different from spontaneous speech. Gibson cites Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and Goodwin's assertion of the frequent choice of controlled and somewhat atypical texts which are found in more recent ELT pronunciation manuals and do not necessarily help pronunciation in spontaneous speech as they usually "edit the redundancy, fragmentation, and incompleteness which feature in everyday speech"

(Gibson, 2008: 33). Yet, Gibson asserts there is no evidence to suggest that the oral artificiality of RA is transferred to free speech (Gibson 2008). Indeed, the slower reading pace evinced in RA may help more careful and precise word articulation generally.

Finally, this litany against RA is concluded by declaring the specific and significant difference in the approach to RA in this project. The line taken here, related the use of reading aloud, differs from such aforementioned canonical (mis-)uses of the practice, as RA, via the imitation of native speakers, is implemented not with the purpose of teaching reading, but only with purpose teaching pronunciation (Lázaro 2011). Students do not concentrate on comprehension (which is dealt with in the class sessions on the poetry) but with correctly sounding out the words in an individual autonomous and out of class basis. RA then, is not being use in the traditional sense in this project but is employed more akin to its use by direct/ audio linguistic imitative methods: students read the texts aloud after having listened to and imitated them texts as many times as feel to be necessary.

Moreover, the dramatic and performative nature of the poetry recordings is in contrast with the unnatural texts often used in traditional reading activities (Celce-Murcia et al., 1996) that have been often dubbed monotonous, dreary and synthetic by Gibson (2008). RA, here, offers advantages at purely linguistic and motivational levels (as the results from the post project questionnaire testified for the latter benefits).

### **The Value of Reciting (Reading Aloud) as a Tool to Improve Pronunciation**

Amer (1997) argues for the benefits in RA in the EFL classroom, especially for learners with low level proficiency, as it “helps them read larger semantic units rather than focusing on graphic cues” (Amer 1997: 43). In his inquiry into the effect of the teacher's RA on the reading comprehension of EFL students reading a story, he postulated that RA by the teacher may have a significant positive effect on learners' reading comprehension as his experimental group performed better in two tests than the control group. Hence in this study, the benefits of the effect of the teacher's reading aloud which he analyses, could be substituted for the use of online native models provided by various sources <sup>3</sup>

While we argue for RA's pronunciatonal benefits, Amer (1997) convincingly contends that it may benefit comprehension too: “reading aloud by the teacher helps EFL readers discover units of meaning that should be read as phrases rather than word by

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<sup>3</sup> The Poetry Archive, You Tube, Lingua Vox etc. to name some of the websites used in the project, All found here: <http://nick-kennedy5.webnode.es/>

word. The proper production by the teacher of punctuation signals, stress, and intonation, may play an important role in this process (Amer, 1997: 43).” If we include the online native model reciting to the in-class examples given by the teacher we see the RA then, not only has pronunciational payback, but also potentially aids understanding too.

Amer (1997) believes that “reading aloud by the teacher is particularly significant with narratives” (Amer, 1997: 44). This is due to the fact that “narratives are characterized by the frequent occurrence of certain communicative elements (e.g. direct speech and dialogues). The proper oral production of prosodic features in these elements helps EFL learners to realize the feelings, mood, and emotions of the characters in the text. This, in turn, may facilitate their overall comprehension of the text, and enhance their appreciation of narratives” (Amer, 1997: 44).

In a similar way, narrative texts and lyrical poetry share a common RA impetus, considering the common importance of the correct communication of inherent sentiment, temperament and passion in both oral story-telling and poetry. When telling a story or reading a poem then, attention to the suprasegmental features of the language (stress, intonation and tone) is fundamental to its understanding. While poetry may be read silently, it, like a good storybook tale or indeed dramatic texts, requires an oral rendition, a performance, for a fuller appreciation.

Therefore, the advantages of RA could offset any drawbacks, and such perceived shortcomings could be allayed by the chary and apposite use of an activity that is nevertheless used by many ELT practitioners, despite its seemingly bad reputation. Recent research and specialist literature recommend using RA for the following purposes. The principal arguments for its use are outlined here, with specific reference to how it pronunciation may be improved.

**1. It can help reading by reinforcing graphemic-phonemic correspondences:**

Gibson cites Stanovich (1991) on how the ability to make correct connections between graphemes and phonemes is essential for reading as it speeds up word recognition, aids both pronunciation and the retention of new words (Stanovich 1991). When readers read (silently) to themselves the temptation is to pass over this procedure “and so be less likely to understand what they have read because they have not been able to make semantic propositions effectively,” whereas RA compels readers to make and practise these connections (Gibson, 2008: 31). Moreover, considering “the very complex grapho-phonemic rules of the English language” for learners whose L1 doesn’t present such problems, shows us that any help with this problematic aspect would be more than welcome (Lázaro, 2011: 53).

2. **It can aid the acquisition of prosodic features of English:** RA has been argued convincingly to aid the acquisition of prosodic features (Beaken, 2009; Gibson, 2008 cited by Lázaro 2011: 53). Also, known as suprasegmental linguistic features, they are commonly heard in one's intonation, rhythm and stress. It has been said that suprasegmental features very significantly influence comprehensibility, even more strongly than segmental features (Derwing and Rossiter, 2003; Gibson, 2008 cited by Lázaro 2011: 53). Yet, there has not been much investigation either carried out (Chun, 1988, 2002; Trofimovich & Baker, 2006 cited by Lázaro 2011: 53) or teaching material published (Gilbert, 2008 cited by Lázaro 2011: 53) on these matters.

Lázaro (2011) mentions that psychological factors have also been claimed to negatively affect acquisition of speech rhythms: “[students] feel uneasy when they hear themselves speak with the rhythm of a second language (L2)” (Gibson, 2008:1 cited by Lázaro 2011: 53). Indeed, “EFL classroom practices disregarded teaching of prosodic features even more than the teaching of pronunciation” (Lázaro 2011: 53).

Teachers and publishing houses alike seem to agree on the pronunciational benefits of RA. Yet their focus is largely on specific sounds, thus leading to a concentration on isolated words, or single sentences at best, being read aloud. Such specific phoneme practice, or segmental bias, ignores the prosodic features of target language speech patterns. Why is this so?

Such a lack of attention to suprasegmentals might be clarified by the simple truth, that suprasegmentals are extremely important but extremely difficult to teach (Celce-Murcia, 1987; Roach, 1991). Some authors and teachers even hold the radical opinion that prosodic features are not teachable and have referred to intonation as “the problem child of pronunciation teaching” (Dalton & Seidlhofer, 1994:76).

Yet, as English is a stress, rather than, syllable timed language, the value of attention to these suprasegmental elements cannot be denied. Indeed, as they are evident not only in RA but also in Free Speech, students ought to be made aware of the errors of transferring their innate L1 speech patterns to the target language, which consequently would impede natural sounding L2 speech.

Moreover, by using longer texts rather than single words/sentences, students have the manuscript (or poem) in front of them, and accordingly are not forced to remember what needs to be imitated. They are thus able to attend to the correct articulation in the sweep of sounds before them rather than dwell on

recollection. This is in contrary to “pronunciation books [which] tend to recommend that students should not look at the text whilst practising sounds”, [for] whilst it is not too difficult to remember one or two words to repeat, a sentence can be more of a challenge, especially to those with poor auditory memories” (Gibson, 2008: 31). Indeed, visual learners here, have their grapheme/ phoneme connections reinforced by this aural/ textual method.

Gibson cites Chun’s (2002) words of warning related to how listening and imitating “should be used sparingly, as students quickly tire of it . . . Texts should be authentic and from different genres, including real conversations, so that students become aware of a broad range of speech patterns” (Gibson, 2008: 31). Yet, Chun’s form of imitation centres around role-playing dialogues and not on the specific benefits of poetic imitation.

Citing both Celce-Murcia and Underhill, Gibson lends support to my thesis: the former “favours the use of jazz chants to focus students’ attention on rhythm and stress” while the latter similarly, “advocates that students should practise reading aloud traditional English rhymes to help familiarize them with stress-timed patterns” (Gibson, 2008: 32). As Lázaro succinctly puts it “If pronunciation in general has been pushed to the background of EFL classrooms, prosodic or suprasegmental features have been pushed to the background of the background” (Lázaro 2011: 54). As with her imitation based project, “the specific task reported here can help students to become aware of, and to train themselves in, this forgotten yet crucial aspect of the English language” (Lázaro 2011: 54). Thus, we subscribe here to her assessment that EFL classroom practices need not only to rehabilitate the instruction of pronunciation in general, but also to incorporate the teaching of prosodic features too.

### **3. RA can also be used as a technique for autonomous learning/ Individual language learning strategies**

The use of RA on an autonomous basis is backed up by a number of specialist area books which recommend “extension activities in language laboratories involving simultaneous listening and reading” (Gibson, 2008: 32). Gibson (2008) refers to Earl Stevick’s research (1989) where he interviewed seven particularly successful language learners and noted that most of them, himself included, used RA as a learning technique outside the classroom.

Among the subjective benefits mentioned by the interviewees were that RA enabled students to feel that it improved their overall pronunciation and was a means to practise intonation, to “get the sound and flow of the language”

(Gibson, 2008: 32). It also was claimed that RA facilitated comprehension as well as the memorization of new words. Learners also testified to how the visual information aided meaning for them, and how the act of repeating words aloud to themselves contributed to the memorization process.

**4. RA may help some anxious students to feel more able to speak:**

While some students may feel that RA in class may cause distress Foss and Reitzel (1988) recommendation of RA as a way of reducing communication anxiety: "RA might be the only speaking that shy students will consent to do in class. Controlled, imitative activities can make students feel secure enough to make their first utterances". Thus, an argument could be made that RA may help shy or unconfident students with initial speaking practice, until confidence is gained for them speak more freely.

**5. RA for diagnostic purposes:**

RA has ever been a diagnostic feature of the EFL/ language classroom. Employing it, teachers can assess a student's particular pronunciation problems and thus identify their ensuing understanding of grapheme-phoneme connections and decoding skills. Indeed, Gibson cites Underhill (1994) who found that RA could "be a powerful tool for diagnosing a student's comprehension of the text" she goes on to specify that "the intonation the student uses can indicate where understanding is not complete" (Gibson, 2008: 31). This again is especially true in the case of (lyrical) poetry and narrative fiction, as the tone in which a poem is read aloud ought to portray its intended thematic import.

The benefits of a teacher's RA are, according to Amer (1997), not solely related to comprehension, but may foster positive attitudes to reading in general and, indeed, may motivate students to read for pleasure in the future (Amer, 1997: 46). Gibson too acknowledges that "RA may be popularly believed to consist of old-fashioned, dull reading around the class and that it is part of outdated methodologies, but this does not mean that it is no longer useful in language learning. (Gibson 2008: 35)". Hence, the choice of material, from literature in general and poetry specifically, is crucial for student enjoyment, enthusiasm and indeed, for their enlightenment.

Amer (1997) strikes a cautionary note on its use though when he mentions "unplanned occasional reading aloud may not have a positive effect. Moreover, learners should be consciously aware of the objective of reading aloud (Amer, 1997: 46)." Gibson echoes his sentiments about the insensitive and inappropriate misuse of RA and notes "that if RA is to be used successfully; it needs to be used sparingly, sensitively and

appropriately, with clear learning objectives, and should be regarded as only one of the many tools in a teacher's kit." (Gibson 2008: 35)

Lázaro (2011) mentions too that the logistical advantages of RA for teachers should not be overlooked either as it is not preparation intensive for the teacher, it can be carried out with learners without basic phonological knowledge and agreeing with Amer (1997), RA can be very motivating to boot. The motivational factor in my project would come from the universal emotional truths dealt with in poetry; Lázaro's (2011), from perhaps whether students would be allowed to imitate self-selected texts, related to subjective interests. New technologies too, she tells us advantageously provide us with: "recordings of English texts of all kinds are easily accessible and this wide range of recordings can also include different English accents" (Lázaro 2011: 54).

Lázaro (2011) also stresses the need to analyse the how the aforementioned ostensible benefits of RA might transfer to the students' free speech. She states "it would be necessary to analyse whether the prosodic and segmental features that students are said to develop in text reading are really internalised and remain when students are asked to speak freely" (Lázaro 2011: 54). Thus, the subjects were recorded imitating both native poetic models and delivering free speech samples too. The evaluators were asked to give separate marks for both the practised poetic imitation and free speech samples in both recordings too. Moreover, an extra poem and free speech sample were also recorded at the end of the project as well. Amer (1997) concludes his investigation of 'The effect of the teacher's reading aloud on the reading comprehension of EFL students' by stating "further research is needed in this area with different age groups and different types of text (Amer, 1997: 46)". It is my hope that the present study is an answer to his demographic (he dealt with sixth-grade EFL students) and textual (using narrative texts) call and, to Lázaro's (2011) enquiry into whether RA benefits endure and become internalised for the students' spontaneous speech production.

## **Theoretical background III: Poetry and literature's place in EFL**

### ***Why use literature in the language classroom?***

There are a plethora of reasons for the use of literature in the EFL classroom. Holten (1997) informs us, quite simply, that it is quintessential language content. Hess (2003) adds that "for language teaching, we might keep in mind that it is possibly the only text written for the primary purpose of reading enjoyment" (Hess 2003: 19). Indeed, she argues that "entering a literary text, under the guidance of appropriate teaching, brings about the kind of participation almost no other text can produce. When we read, understand, and interpret a poem we learn language through the expansion of our experience with a larger human reality (Hess 2003: 20).

Such a facility for making collective human connections in poetry are touched upon by Lazar (1993) who considers the themes which are dealt with in literature to be both three-dimensional and universal, engaging students in the intricacies of the human condition, and thus occasioning authentic emotional responses coupled with connections with the text from them. Indeed, this humanistic aspect is, we believe, the reason for literature's very existence, as these words attributed to C.S. Lewis attest: "we read to know we are not alone"<sup>4</sup>. In short, "if the materials are carefully chosen, students will feel that what they do in the classroom is relevant and meaningful to their own lives" (Lazar 1993 15).

Lazar outlines other reasons for the case of literature in the EFL classroom. Literature's motivational impetus; use of authentic material; general educational value are mentioned. She also cites how it helps students to understand aspects of other cultures. Literature is also seen to act as a spur for language acquisition. Moreover, she identifies how it develops students' interpretative abilities and even expands their language awareness. We are reminded how highly valued literature is, as she alludes to its high international status and how literature is thus found on L1 language syllabuses the world over. Other benefits of using literature are noted in how it encourages students to talk about their own opinions and feelings and, last, but by no means least, by the way students simply "enjoy it and it is fun" (Lazar 1993: 14, 15). While most of these benefits are self-explanatory, some of them shall be expounded more specifically here.

### ***Literature's high status:***

The aforementioned high status of literature in a students' native language could foster "a real sense of achievement" if a student dealt with literature in their EFL classroom (Lazar, 1993: 15). Moreover, if thematically similar literature was studied

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/305767-we-read-to-know-we-are-not-alone>

comparatively between the native and target languages, the motivational and stimulating points of comparison would surely enrich the learning process.

### ***Cultural factors:***

While acknowledging the New Historicist approach, that each piece of art is the product of its time and place, it would be fallacious to deem a piece of literature as wholly representative of a specific culture. Literature not only incorporates the zeitgeist of its publication date but also the subjective, conscious and subconscious biases of its author. To use literature randomly in the classroom for the sake of automatically lending some cultural kudos, would be mistaken, so we ascribe to Lazar's (1993) prescription that "our response to the cultural aspect of literature should always be a critical one, so that the underlying cultural and ideological assumptions in the texts are not merely accepted and reinforced, but are questioned, evaluated and, if necessary, subverted (Lazar, 1993: 15)". Such (Marxist, feminist, deconstructionist-esque) forms of analysis might have the additional benefit of lending fascinating discussion or other communication-based activities in the EFL classroom to boot. And if the instructor takes in account the literary rich pickings literature in English offers- the very amount of cultures who use English as (one of) their mother tongue(s)- any fallacious ethnocentric focus on a single dominant English speaking culture should and would be diminished.

### ***Language acquisition incentives:***

Lazar (1993) acknowledges how literature acts as a stimulus for language acquisition by providing "meaningful and memorable contexts for processing and interpreting new language" (Lazar, 1993: 17). These contexts can and ought to exist outside of the classroom enabling the student to further their learning and autonomy. Class time is worthily spend on literature, as literature's multiple meanings would serve as a spring board for a myriad of class based discussion and pair/ group work communicative activities.

### ***Fostering of students' language awareness abilities:***

A typical complaint against the use of literature in general, and poetry specifically, is that "literary language is somehow different from other forms of discourse in that it breaks the more usual rules of syntax, collocation and even cohesion" (Lazar, 1993: 18). While poetry may often bend, if not quite break the rules, of language that students strive to learn, this should not be considered a negative factor. By comparing and contrasting the prosaic standard to the poetic deviant, students may appreciate the myriad of meanings such deviation may imply.

Moreover, Tomlinson (1986) articulates a common objection by EFL teachers to the use of poetry in their class rooms by stating: "We are trying to help our learners to

communicate in contemporary colloquial English, not in stilted poetical terms” (Tomlinson, 1986: 33). His counterargument is that the main exposure during his poetry lessons would be to the contemporary colloquial English of the group, and in the plenary interactions which precede and follow the reading of the poem(s). The poem then should be a stimulus, not a model for emulation (Tomlinson, 1986), a springboard not only for thematic textual discussion, but also as a foundation for a whole host of communicative activities to be built around it.

### ***Development of students’ interpretative abilities:***

Literary analysis in the classroom brings out the innate detective in each student. Poetry provides especially fertile ground to foster students’ interpretative abilities due to that fact that “in a poem, a word may take on a powerful figurative meaning beyond its fixed dictionary definition. Trying to ascertain the significance provides an excellent opportunity for students to discuss their own interpretations, based on the evidence in the text. Thus, by encouraging our students to grapple with the multiple ambiguities of the literary text, we are helping to develop their overall capacity to infer meaning (Lazar 1993: 19)”. Such a skill is transferrable to other situations where students have to deduce meanings from tacit or couched circumstances. Moreover, this pluralistic quality intrinsic in poetry means that most viewpoints, referring, of course, to textual evidence, can be contended. With poetry there is no right or wrong interpretation, the limits imposed generally are only by the exegetists’ own imagination.

Tomlinson (1986) similarly assents with this unique benefit of poetry when he states that “poems more than any other type of text can give valuable opportunity for learners to use and develop such important skills as deduction of meaning from linguistic and situational context; prediction; relating text to knowledge and experience of the world; reading creatively; and the recognition and interpretation of assumptions and inferences (Tomlinson, 1986: 35). Indeed, it is his belief that “the earlier L2 learners engage their intellect and imagination as well as their knowledge, memory, and mechanical skills, the more likely it is that they will become truly literate in the foreign language (Tomlinson, 1986: 35). Ever since Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex<sup>5</sup>, readers and protagonists alike have been cast as detectives: the lyrical ‘I’ in poetry takes on the same role as the aforementioned ancient eponymous Greek king, trying to discover the truth that John Keats deemed to be both beautiful and the essence of

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<sup>5</sup> Oedipus’s persistent questioning of his origins leads him finally to fulfil the prophesy. Although “Oedipus’s enquiry is based on supernatural, pre-rational methods that are evident in most narratives of crime until the development of Enlightenment thought in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries”, this narrative has “all of the central characteristics and formal elements of the detective story, including a mystery surrounding a murder, a closed circle of suspects, and the gradual uncovering of a hidden past.” Scaggs, John (2005). *Crime Fiction (The New Critical Idiom)*. Routledge. pp. 9–11.

existence: "Beauty is truth, truth beauty," - that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."<sup>6</sup>

### ***Educating the whole person:***

Finally, we believe all teachers are not just instructors of their specific subjects but educators of the whole person. The linguistic benefits for literature have been looked at, but we should mention how it may "have a wider educational function in the classroom in that it can help to stimulate the imagination of our students, to develop their critical abilities and to increase their emotional awareness" (Lazar, 1993 19). Poetry, with its tugs on empathetic heart strings, would serve as a perfect agent in such holistic pedagogies.

### **The arguments (and counterarguments) against the use of poetry in the EFL classroom**

While we agree broadly with the fact that "Literature is used most effectively with learners from intermediate level upwards (Lazar, 1993 xiii), there are numerous arguments against the specific use in the ESL classroom regardless of the students' language proficiency. We have already alluded to how some EFL teachers reject the use of poetry in their class rooms by the uselessness of the inherently perceived 'stilted poetical terms,' in favour of a criteria to enable their students communicate in contemporary colloquial English. Other objections commonly cited by EFL teachers include the fact that (teenage) learners 'find poetry difficult and boring in their own language, never mind in a foreign one,' that 'most authentic poems are very difficult to understand, even for native speakers, as their meaning is rarely overt and their use of language is idiosyncratic,' and perhaps most commonly that '[they] only have a few hours a week to teach [their] learners the basics of English, and so poetry is a luxury [they] cannot afford (Tomlinson, 1986: 33, 34)'

The counter arguments to such notions centre on the way poetry is approached in the language classroom. Poetry's purpose in an EFL classroom should be to enable the learners to use their language skills "in an active and creative way, and thus to contribute to the development of their communicative competence (Tomlinson, 1986: 33)." The principal aim then, is not to teach students to write poetry, nor even to recognise its literary and cultural value, simply said, poetry should be employed as a text to get students talking.

To combat students who may have been put off L1 poetry nightmares (perhaps due to hyper-analysis), whose feeling may echo Wordsworth's own when he wrote the lines: "Our meddling intellect/ Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things/ We murder to

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<sup>6</sup> From John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," 1819.

dissect<sup>7</sup>". Students then, should be required to respond essentially to universality of the human emotions in a poem and make empathetic connections with the subject matter.

The issue of poetry's perceived problematic comprehensibility to native and non-native learners alike can be dealt with by the instruction of "stylistic devices (e.g. of pace, stress, focus, repetition, onomatopoeia, etc.) which facilitate global comprehension and effective response, and help the learners to discover covert meaning" (Tomlinson, 1986: 33). Such a pedagogical process, would be ideal in an integrated cross-departmental treatment of languages where the study of poetry could aid in the development of students' language awareness, with the additional benefit of the honing of their interpretative abilities in the field of linguistic pragmatics.

The age old teacher's complaint of time constraints, and consequent content prioritization at the expense of literature, was rebuked by Tomlinson with the claim that he "found that sometimes using poetry (and other forms of literature) as the basis for intelligent communication activities has contributed far more to the acquisition of language and the development of language skills than a total concentration on the presentation and practice of language items (Tomlinson, 1986: 34). Poetry thus, should be the means to communication, not necessarily the ends of communication.

### **The positive returns to be felt from the use of poetry in the EFL Classroom**

#### ***Educational Worth***

Just as Lazar (1993) cited the value of educating the whole person beyond the objectives of specific subject competences, Tomlinson too, considers language teachers to be "fundamentally educationalists and not just instructors, and it is [their] duty to contribute to the emotional, imaginative, and intellectual development of our learners" (Tomlinson, 1986: 34). Indeed, he rails against "the recent focus on language functions [which have] unfortunately led to courses consisting almost entirely of the learning and practice of exponents of such functions as inviting, instructing, accepting, declining, greeting, and inquiring, and such interactional 'routines' as ordering a meal, buying a ticket, and asking for directions (Tomlinson, 1986: 34). Do-Seon Eur chimes with Tomlinson (1986) in his critique of "this overemphasis on form-focused literacy, task-oriented communicative exercises, vocabulary-grammar-translation lessons at the expense of interactive uses and creative uses of language" which has occasioned the publication of English language materials "which are loaded with psychologically meaningless information and facts that are hardly relevant to students' lives<sup>8</sup>". While Tomlinson (1986) may acknowledge the survival benefits in a L2 milieu attributed to

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<sup>7</sup> William Wordsworth's 'The Tables Turned', Lyrical Ballads, 1798

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.uop.edu.io/download/research/members/0619\\_handout.pdf](https://www.uop.edu.io/download/research/members/0619_handout.pdf) p: 3.

such approaches, he nevertheless is damning on the trivial educational value of such methods, claiming they have “contributed to a narrowing and restricting of the content of language lessons and to a diminishment of language learners” (Tomlinson, 1986: 34). Poetry, he claims, “[if chosen carefully and used intelligently] can open and enrich the content of language lessons, can provide useful opportunities for gaining experience of the world, and can contribute to the development of the ‘whole person’ as well as the ‘learner of a language’” (Tomlinson, 1986: 34 *ibid*).

We coincide wholly with such noble aspirations for poetry in the EFL classroom. Indeed, this single reason for the EFL teacher to educate the student holistically, and not just linguistically, may be most important of the benefits, which shall be outlined directly, for using poetry in the language classroom. A Whitman-esque “O Captain! My Captain!” ought to be uttered in acknowledgment of his trailblazing case for the educative instruction of poetry in the EFL classroom.

### ***Affective importance:***

The principal reaction to a poem should be an immediate emotive chord tugged with the reader. In fact, Tomlinson (1986) states from subjective experience that “‘average’ language learners are most motivated, most open to language intake, and most eager to use language when their emotions, feelings, and attitudes are engaged” (Tomlinson, 1986: 34). This sentiment is echoed by the Nobel Prize winning physicist Dennis Gabor when he noted: “Poetry is plucking at the heartstrings, and making music with them.<sup>9</sup>” While it may seem a daunting task to ensure student’s ‘get’ the poem, teachers ought to consider a poem essentially like the telling of a good story or indeed, as the contemporary American poet W.S. Merwin believes, like a good joke: “Poetry is like making a joke. If you get one word wrong at the end of a joke, you’ve lost the whole thing<sup>10</sup>”. All the teacher needs to do then, is to set up the poem’s presentation adequately, by dealing with potential thematic and lexical concerns first, before delving into the poem itself, the veritable punchline of the activity.

### ***Achievement value:***

Related to the aforementioned high status given to poetry in syllabus around the world and its perceived complexity, “most language learners are initially daunted by poetry in a foreign language and would certainly put up barriers if told they were going to ‘do’ poetry (Tomlinson, 1986: 34).” Nevertheless, Tomlinson (1986) has found that if poems are used as the kernel of larger communication activities, and if the teacher helps their accessibility through pre-reading activities “focused on content rather than language, then many learners are able to give valid responses to poems and thus to gain a considerable sense of achievement (Tomlinson, 1986: 34).”

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/Lang\\_Arts/quotes/quotes\\_about\\_poetry.htm](http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/Lang_Arts/quotes/quotes_about_poetry.htm)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/43951-poetry-is-like-making-a-joke-if-you-get-one>

### ***Subjective value:***

The multiplicities of meaning in poetry cause readers to respond in different ways to it. Such subjective reactions depend on what a reader individually takes from it or indeed, brings to it. The plurality of meaning enables a single text to be able to facilitate a sense of achievement across a non-homogenous student spectrum: “the weakest can achieve at least a superficial but satisfying global response to the poem [even if it is only a vaguely felt emotion or attitude], whereas the ‘middle’ learners can get further into the poem, and the brightest can gain the great satisfaction of imaginative and individual insights into the potential meanings of a poem” (Tomlinson, 1986: 34). Such prisms of interpretation are unique to poetry and add to the richness of it as EFL classroom material.

### **Some prerequisites to the use of poetry in the EFL classroom**

We, like Tomlinson, do not advocate “the exclusive use of poetry (or any other form of literature), but suggesting that it can play a valuable role in a balanced programme which could also include the overt teaching of specific structures, functions, and lexical items, and the overt teaching of communication skills” (Tomlinson, 1986: 35).

While not all poems are suitable for EFL learners, and not all will strike an emotional chord with all readers, when “an appropriate poem is used intelligently by a teacher who believes in the potential value of poetry, then that poem is capable of achieving what few EFL texts can achieve, i.e. different but equally valid motivations and responses and the rare engagement of the ‘whole person’ regardless of the language knowledge, experience, and ability of each learner.” (Tomlinson, 1986: 35).

Tomlinson (1986) also cautions against the focus on the difficult aspects of language but rather urges emphasis on responses to what has been understood. In his experience the “pre-teaching difficult items and setting questions on vocabulary and structures can kill a poem as an affective experience and can reinforce the students’ negative view of poetry as difficult and alien (Tomlinson, 1986: 35).”

In the forthcoming ‘Criteria for the selection of poetry’ section, it will be seen how Tomlinson’s criteria influenced the selection of the 10 poems for this project. Indeed, his recommendation of the use of “interesting pre-reading activities which focus on the topic(s) and ‘feelings’ of the poem [are able to] help the learners to take ‘knowledge’ and experience to the poem and to gain access to it, without worrying about the words and structures they do not fully understand.” For an example of how the latter tactic was used in the in-class presentation of the poetry, see page one of *Annex III Sessions 3 & 4: Poems on Death (PDFs from original Power Points)* where the students were presented with various quotations on the topic and were invited to talk about their impressions of them, initially in pairs, and later as a whole class discussion.

## Criteria for the selection of poetry for the EFL classroom

To get the maximum gains from the use of poetry in the EFL classroom Tomlinson (1986) states that a number of provisos ought to be adhered to, in the selection of the specific verse. These guidelines include the universal appeal of certain topics, in order to entice as many students as possible. For this reason, poetry was chosen on the grand themes of love and death, as well as verse specific to the adolescent audience too.

Surface linguistic and thematic simplicity is a particularly significant factor to be borne in mind when using poetry with a mixed ability group as well. Tomlinson (1986) cautions that “the poems used are linguistically accessible for the weakest members of the group and that there is nothing in the title or opening lines which might frighten off such members of the group” (Tomlinson, 1986: 35). Yet, the flip side of the coin must be that the selected poetry contains “potential depths of meaning” and can thus challenge “the brighter members of the group who have no problems in responding to the linguistic surface of the poems” (Tomlinson, 1986: 35).

Contemporary language and lyrical poetry<sup>11</sup> would also be advisable as “poems which express strong emotions, attitudes, feelings, opinions, or ideas are usually more ‘productive’ than those which are gentle, descriptive, or neutral (Tomlinson, 1986: 36).” Indeed, here he echoes Wordsworth’s own poetical concept which he articulated in the ‘Advertisement’ to 1798 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*:

“The majority of the following poems are to be considered as experiments. They were written chiefly with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purpose of poetic pleasure<sup>12</sup>”

This contemporary use of language should also be contained in a relatively compact form. Such attention to succinctness enables the teacher to present the poem in class with suitable pre and post reading activities. Moreover, the autonomous student may to practice imitation techniques, such as are outlined in this project, or indeed to learn the poem by heart, if so desired.

A final aspect well worth considering, in addition to what has just been delineated, would be a poem that “lends itself to visual, auditory, or tactile illustration through the use of realia (e.g. slides, films, objects, photographs, music or specially designed aids (e.g. drawings, sound effects, mime).

Such thinking then, has greatly influenced the subjective selection of the three topics and 10 poems for this project. Indeed, one of the answers to a questionnaire inquiry specific to the poetry used in the project, indicated that the most popular poems

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<sup>11</sup> Lyrical poetry with its focus on the personal and the emotional fulfils the affective criteria

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/lbprose.html>

seemed to testify to the soundness of such advice as they were very visual, short, and affective with hidden depths lurking below seeming surface simplicity. While Tomlinson (1986) gives great practical advice on both pre and post reading activities, the time constraints of this project limited the exploitation of the full communicative potential. Thus, barring pair and group discussion, dealing with an average of two poems per class, over the five sessions, meant unfortunately that a great deal of communicative activities could not be created around them. In his conclusion, he notes that “most students have had enjoyable experiences of ‘poetry’ through songs, but many of them resent and fear poems as irrelevant, boring, and difficult, and see them as models of inappropriate English which can only help them by teaching them a few new words” (Tomlinson, 1986: 41).

Indeed, most of the answers to question 8A of the post project questionnaire testified to the importance of songs as an autonomous learning strategy (12 votes) which they actively use to improve their pronunciation. Question 8B of the questionnaire also touches upon the belief, which Tomlinson mentioned, that poetry at best “[could] only help them by teaching them a few new words.” The question specifically asked them about the benefits of both reading aloud and imitation, and the joint top response, with 12 votes, was that the task would enrich their vocabulary (the improvement in their pronunciation of specific words also scored 12 votes) but interestingly, to ‘improve my intonation, rhythm and stress’ surprisingly only scored 6 votes. Testifying to a lack of suprasegmental awareness amongst these, and we would imagine most, adolescent EFL learners.

So in short, if poems are selected, ‘prepared’, and used in the way Tomlinson (1986) outlines we too believe “they can break down the barriers and involve the learners in thinking, feeling, and interacting in ways which are conducive to language acquisition” (Tomlinson, 1986: 41).

Other benefits of using poetry are identified by Susan Ramsaran who showed how poetry may assist with phonological matters of pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation; as well as with vocabulary; grammar and meaning. She summed up her survey of “Poetry in the language classroom” by issuing the following pointers: “where a poem reflects conversational spoken English, it might be used for rhythm and intonation practice. Where it deviates in any respect from everyday English, the deviation may be used as a point of departure for discussion or drill concerned with any chosen grammatical structure. It may be used for expanding vocabulary at the simplest level or for distinguishing between near synonyms which differ stylistically” (Ramsaran, 1983: 42). Such phonological concerns are at the heart of this project and lead us now to specify the research questions.

## The Study and Research Questions:

### Research Questions:

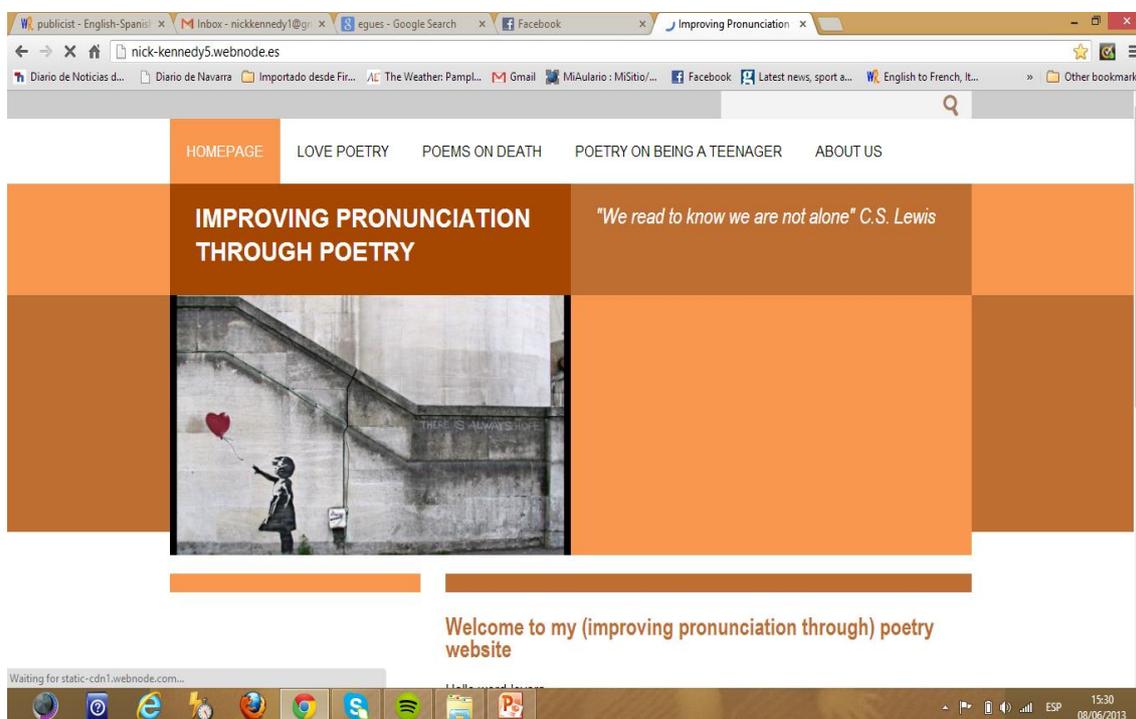
- a. Does using poetry (and literature in general) have a place in the EFL classroom?
- b. Does reading poetry via imitation of native models help EFL learners in secondary school to improve their pronunciation?

### Methodology:

Research was carried out in the semi-private, coeducational, religious Hijas de Jesús secondary school in Pamplona over a 5 week period in the spring of 2013. The study was conducted on a class composed of 15 science branch students aged between 17/18 in their final year of non-obligatory secondary school studies (*2º Bachillerato*).

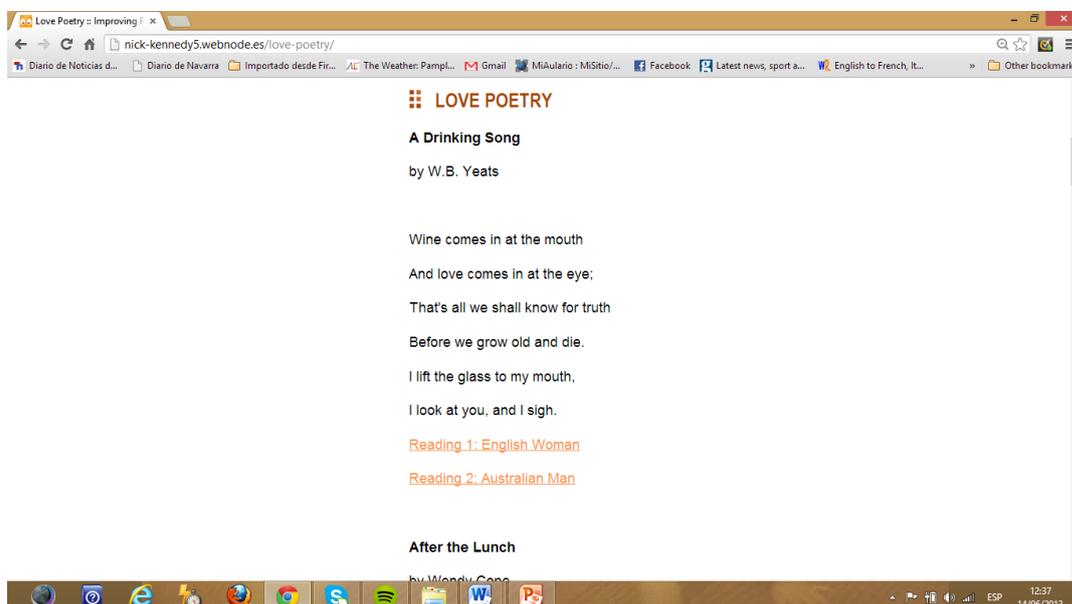
The project consisted of two principal parts: the aforementioned 5 week whole class in-class poetry sessions and parallel individual homework activities involving the imitation of native models through reading aloud sessions by 7 volunteers.

For the purpose of the pupils practising the poetry at home, I created a website (<http://nick-kennedy5.webnode.es>) comprising of three principal sections (containing the 10 poems we would be dealing with): love poetry, poems on death and poetry about being a teenager.



In each section the selection of poetry related to each theme was both in rhyming (6) and free verse (4), by male (7) and female (3) 20<sup>th</sup> /21<sup>st</sup> century poets.

Under each poem on the webpage there was a link to enable the students listen to diverse accented (American, Australian, English {northern, midlands and Received Pronunciation} and Irish) native speakers recite the poems (at least half of which by the authors themselves).



The volunteers were recorded twice, once after the introductory session and again after the final class. In the first recording the 7 participants read an as yet unpractised rhyming poem (Wendy Cope's *After the Lunch*) as well being given a free speech exercise on what they do in their free time. In the second recording 5 weeks later they recited the same poem as in their first recording in March-though by now they had seen the poem in class and had practised it as many times as deemed necessary at home- as well as talking about same free speech topic related to what they do in their free time. Later, in the second recording, the participants were also given an additional and previously unseen rhyming poem, *Scaffolding*, by the Irish Nobel laureate Seamus Heaney and an additional free speech topic about somebody who was important to them (best friend, partner, family member or hero).

### An overview of the project:

<b>Session:</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>Participants:</b>	<b>Specific Poet and Poem(s):</b>
<b>Class 1:</b> What is Poetry and why study it?	Tuesday 26/03/13	Whole class	W.B Yeats: <i>A Drinking Song</i>
<b>Recording 1</b> (R1P & R1FS)	Wednesday 27/03/13	7 Participants	Wendy Cope: <i>After the Lunch</i> ; Free Speech on Free Time
<b>Class 2:</b> Love Poetry	Wednesday 10/04/13	Whole class	Wendy Cope: <i>After the Lunch</i> ; Dorothy Parker: <i>One Perfect Rose</i> ; Billy Collins: <i>Nightclub</i>
<b>Class 3:</b> Poems on Death I	Tuesday 16/04/13	Whole class	Billy Collins: <i>The Dead</i> ; W.H. Auden: <i>Funeral Blues</i> ;
<b>Class 4:</b> Poems on Death II ( <i>half a class</i> )	Tuesday 23/04/13	Whole class	Tony Harrison: <i>Long Distance II</i> ;
<b>Class 5:</b> Poetry on being a teen	Wednesday 24/4/13	Whole class	John Foster: <i>Four O'clock Friday</i> ; Billy Collins: <i>To my favourite 17-Year-Old High School Girl</i> ; Audre Lorde: <i>Hanging Fire</i>
<b>Recording 2</b> (R2P & R2FS + R2PX & R2FSX)	Wednesday 30/4/13	7 Participants	Wendy Cope: <i>After the Lunch</i> ; Free Speech on Free Time + Seamus Heaney: <i>Scaffolding</i> ; Free Speech on Personal Hero

In the final class the whole class was also given an 11 question questionnaire on their background with poetry, their attitudes to it, to literature in general and finally to English pronunciation (See Appendix V: Poetry, Pronunciation and Literature Questionnaire). The research questions then, relate to whether poetry (and literature in general) have a place in the EFL classroom and if reading poetry via imitation of native models can help EFL learners improve their pronunciation.

To illustrate the methodology used in the poetry sessions, session 1 will be described here. In the Annexes section, PDFs of the PowerPoints on all the three themed poetry sessions as well as the introductory class and the final questionnaire can be found (Annex II. Session 2: Love Poetry; Annex III. Sessions 3 & 4: Poems on Death; Annex IV. Session 5: Poetry about being a Teenager; Annex V. Poetry, Pronunciation and Literature Questionnaire)

The analogous fashion the sessions took was thus: all classes used PowerPoint and involved pair, more often, whole-class discussion questions. Audio visual clips of the poems being read by native speakers and/or the authors themselves were presented after the researcher and students analysed the poetry and the tone of the recitals was invariably commented upon.

### **Description of Session One: What is Poetry and why study it?**

This session began with the projection on the white board the first slide which asked about was the common link between the following people (and the year in parenthesis):

*T.S. Eliot (1948), W.B. Yeats (1923), Seamus Heaney (1995), Juan Ramon Jiménez (1956), Pablo Neruda (1971), Octavio Paz (1990), Gabriela Mistral (1945), Wisława Szymborska (1996) and Herta Müller (2009)*

Then, when the students guessed that the common thread was literature, they were asked to be a more specific and, from Juan Ramon Jiménez's inclusion in the list, they guessed poetry was the link and eventually, the correct answer of Nobel Prize for literature winners was suggested. Then they were asked the following two questions that were to be discussed in pairs over a 3 minute period:

1. *What is Poetry?*
2. *How can poetry improve you pronunciation?*

Their answers were varied but generally related to form (*how poetic language was different to prose, being more complicated, shorter, using rhyme*), and content (*dealing with major themes like love and death etc. and concentrating on emotions*) as well as how the use of a rhyme scheme could improve pronunciation.

They then were shown a series of quotations on slide two which verified the veracity of their feedback, presenting poetry's content and form in the best possible light (e.g. *"One merit of poetry few persons will deny: it says more and in fewer words than prose"* from Voltaire and Rita Dove's *"Poetry is language at its most distilled and most powerful"*).

Next, they were asked how poetry might improve their English and after 2 minutes of pair-work brainstorming together, they mentioned its pronunciatonal as well as lexical and grammatical benefits.

They then were shown slide three which identified 6 arguments in favour of the in-class use of poetry<sup>13</sup>:

1. *Themes: common areas of all human experiences, differs from culture to culture.*

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.uop.edu.jo/download/research/members/0619\\_handout.pdf](https://www.uop.edu.jo/download/research/members/0619_handout.pdf) p.5

2. *Subject: non-trivial areas of human experience.*
3. *Language: fresh and unexpected ('poetic' or 'creative') uses of language, beyond one dimensional prose texts and have multiple layers of meaning.*
4. *Oral Production: poetry perfect for in-class group discussions and activities.*
5. *Sound & memory: sense of the rhythms and melodies of a language. Rhythm and rhymes are easily remembered*
6. *Difference between written & spoken word: English stretches, shortens, blends, and often drops sounds- required to acquire for fluency.*

Now the stage was set to illustrate to them how poetry could improve their pronunciation. They were told how there are far more phonemes in English than in Spanish (some sources <sup>14</sup>claiming as many as 20 with English having 44 and Spanish 24) and that sentence stress in English is very different to Spanish as the latter is a syllable-timed language<sup>15</sup> whereas English is a stress-timed tongue <sup>16</sup>and has an “accentual rhythm of speech in which the accented syllables have a longer duration than the unaccented syllable” On top of that in Spanish, “pitch does not vary as often as it does in English either”<sup>17</sup>. Indeed, according to Coe (1987):“European Spanish speakers, in particular, probably find English pronunciation harder than speakers of any other European language<sup>18</sup>.”

Unlike Spanish, English doesn't have a strong correspondence between the sound of a word and its spelling. The irregularity of English in this grapheme-phoneme relationship causes predictable problems when Spanish learners write a word they first meet in spoken language or say a word first met in written language<sup>19</sup>. To illustrate the many difficulties of pronouncing an unfamiliar English word, they were asked to suggest how they would pronounce the invented word Ghoti (attributed to G.B. Shaw to illustrate the illogicality of English spelling to its pronunciation). They universally argued for it being a homophone of 'goatee' /gəʊ'ti:/. They then were presented with two possible ways of it being pronounced:

<sup>14</sup> <http://perso.limsi.fr/Individu/mareuil/publi/1209.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> “When Spanish speakers transfer the intonation patterns of their mother tongue into English, which is a stress-timed language, the result can be barely comprehensible to native English speakers. This is because the meaning or information usually conveyed in English by the combination of stress, pitch and rhythm in a sentence is flattened or evened out by the Spanish learner”:  
<http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/spanish.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Although according to Jenkins (1996) “rigid stress-timing is no more than a convenient fiction for classroom practice and, if David Crystal's (1996) tentative prediction is correct, English may be moving towards the syllable-timed end of the stress/syllable-timing continuum, under the influence of other world languages in general and of rap music in particular”p. 123.

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/82\\_commonArticulation.pdf](http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/82_commonArticulation.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Coe, N. in Swan, M. & Smith, B. *Learner English: A teacher's guide to interference and other problems.* (1987) Cambridge University Press, quoted in <http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/spanish.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <http://esl.fis.edu/grammar/langdiff/spanish.htm>

Option A: “fish” (/fɪʃ/):

gh, pronounced /f/ as in tough /tʌf/; o, pronounced /ɪ/ as in women /'wɪmɪn/; and ti, pronounced /ʃ/ as in nation /'neɪʃən/.

Option B: “ ”: being a ‘silent’ word:

gh pronounced as in though (/ðoʊ/); o as in people (/ˈpi pl/) ; t as in ballet (/ˈbæleɪ/) ; i as in business (/ˈbɪznəs/).

Then they were told “So, as you can see anything that can help with English Pronunciation is positive” and the process of using poetry to help pronunciation began in earnest by looking at a poem by one of the Nobel Prize winning poets, W.B. Yeats’ *A Drinking Song*.

Firstly the poem was presented (by reading it aloud) omitting the last words of the 2<sup>nd</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> lines (but they were given the first letter) and the group was asked to predict what those missing words could be based on the context in the poem.

A Drinking Song

By W.B. Yeats

1<sup>st</sup> : Wine comes in at the mouth **A**

2<sup>nd</sup>: And love comes in at the e\_\_\_\_\_ ; **B**

3<sup>rd</sup>: That's all we shall know for truth **A**

4<sup>th</sup>: Before we grow old and d\_\_\_\_\_. **B**

5<sup>th</sup>: I lift the glass to my mouth, **A**

6<sup>th</sup>: I look at you, and I s\_\_\_\_\_. **B**

From the context the students guessed the rhyming final words in the second and fourth lines. Then they were presented with the ABABAB rhyme scheme and asked them what the final words, at the ends of lines 2, 4 and 6 could be. They had no difficulty with the missing words for lines 2 and 4, however they struggled with the final word. As they knew the words had to be monosyllabic, rhyming with /aɪ/ and started with the letter ‘s,’ they were asked how they thought word would have to be pronounced. Based on the information at their disposal, they universally said /saɪ/, though they didn’t know what the word meant nor did they know how to spell it.

After demonstrating what the word meant (by sighing!) they were shown the slide with the complete poem. Due to the rhyme scheme and the non-phonetic spelling of words like ‘sigh’ the students recognised at once how poetry could be beneficial to

their pronunciation of English. They were then played two recordings of the poem with two distant authentic English accents (Reading 1: English Woman, Reading 2: Australian Man both taken from <http://librivox.org/>).

Finally as a whole class activity, the poem was analysed concentrating on questions which related more to content (1. *Do you think 'love comes in at the eye'? Do you believe in love at first sight?* 2. *When would you recite a poem like this one?* 3. *Do you think the voice is a male or female one or does it matter?* 5. *The poet seems to be saying that in life all we ultimately know is that we need (food) drink and love to survive. Do you agree?*) than on the poem's form (4. *If you didn't know how to pronounce the last words on each line, which words could you guess were pronounced in the same way and why? Which words would be more difficult to guess their pronunciation and why?* 6. *Can you think of any other words that have exactly the same pronunciation as 'eye' or 'die' but have different spellings and meanings?* 7. *What are these types of words called?*).

The purpose of this introductory class, with its overview on what poetry is and how the study of poetry might benefit the study of English, as well as specifically aid pronunciation, was to seek out volunteers for the Master's thesis project. At the end of the class they were asked to spend the night thinking about who would like to participate in it and inform the instructor in class the following day.

Out of that first class, just before the Easter break, the idea was sold to 7 volunteers who were subsequently recorded reciting Wendy Cope's poem *After the Lunch* and speaking about their free time (they were taken one by one to another class room to make 2-3' recordings of each one). They had not seen the poem before.

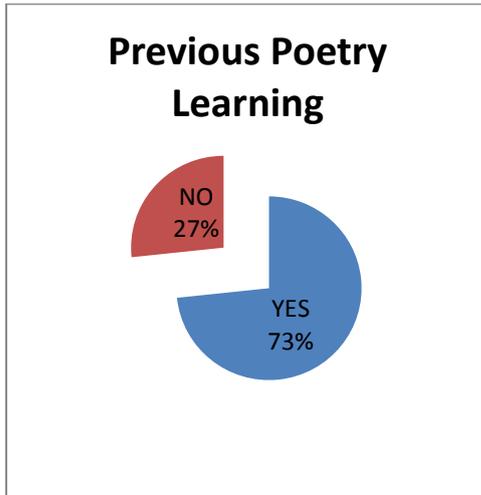
After the Easter holidays, the researcher began instructing that entire 2<sup>o</sup> *Bachillerato* class (15 students strong) poetry based on the themes of love, death and being a teenager. In the first post Easter class love poetry (including a proper in depth analysis of Wendy Cope's poem *After the Lunch*) was dealt with. Then poetry on death (over two classes) was analysed, and finally the sessions concluded by looking at the adolescent theme focused poetry.

## Results and Discussion

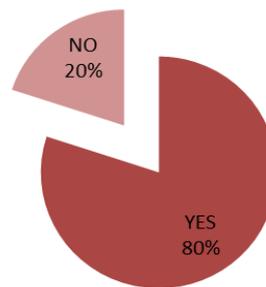
### Answering the Research Questions:

- a. Does using poetry specifically (and literature in general) have a place in the EFL classroom?

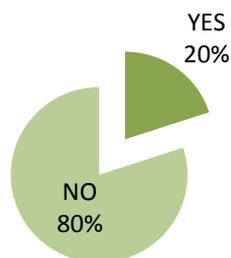
The results and conclusions that have been drawn from the questionnaire can be seen in the following figures:



### LEARN A POEM BY HEART

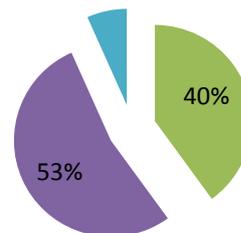


### Previous Poems learnt in English



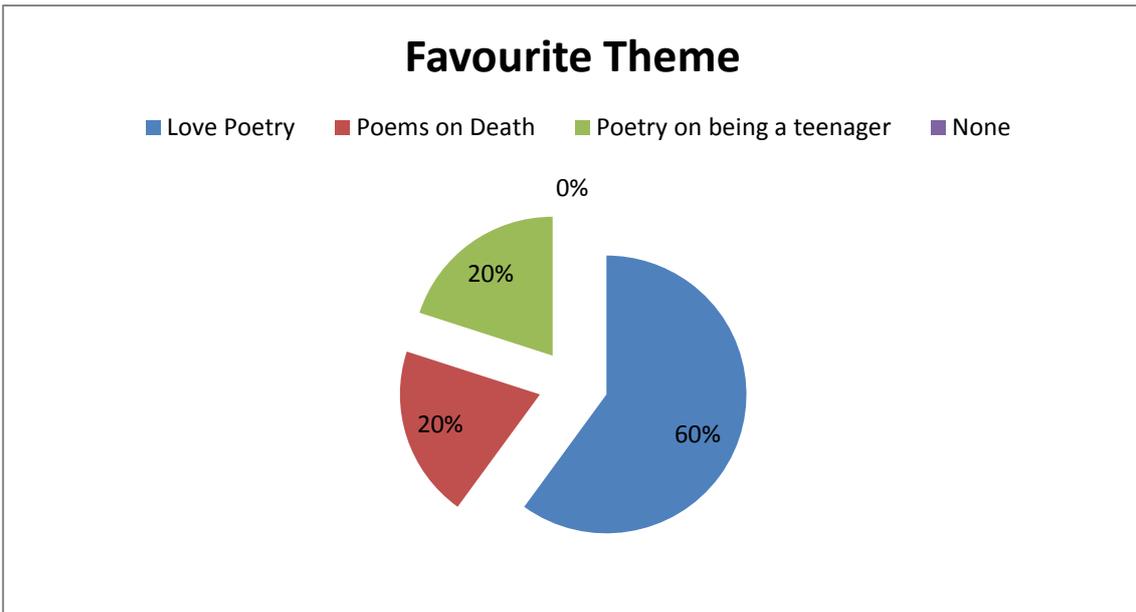
### Enjoy the experience

■ Not at all 0% ■ A bit 0% ■ Moderately 40%  
■ Quite a lot 53% ■ Extremely 7%



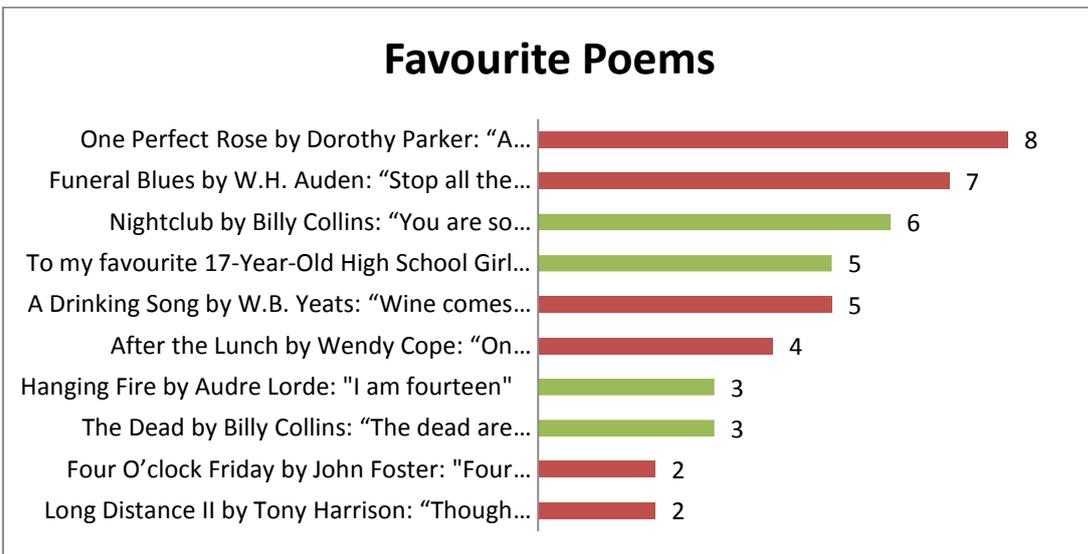
As can be seen in the figures, Spanish/ Basque poetry is evidently a part of their secondary school education experience (11 Yes/ 4 No). Indeed, the vast majority of students have experience memorizing poetry in either language (12 Yes/ 3 No) but students do not usually study poetry in the EFL classroom (12 No/ 3 Yes). As students were positive about reading poetry in English (6 moderately, 8 quite a lot and 1 extremely) a case therefore can be made for, not only a place for poetry in the EFL classroom, but also the integrated teaching of poetry across language classes.

In the following figure we show students' preferences for the three themes:



Of the three themes, Love Poetry, as one could expect, proved to be the most popular (9 votes with 3 each for Poems on Death and Poetry on being a Teenager). The most popular poem was by a female poet: Dorothy Parker’s ironic treatment of romantic love in “One Perfect Rose” (8 votes). The second was W.H. Auden’s bitter lament for lost love in “Funeral Blues” (7 votes). The third was Billy Collins’ ironic meditation on modern love in “Nightclub” (6 votes).

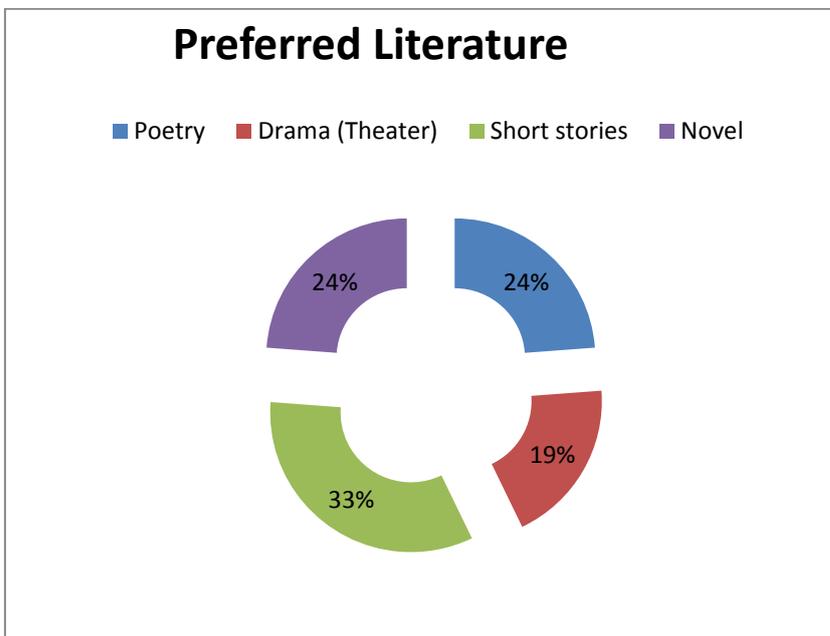
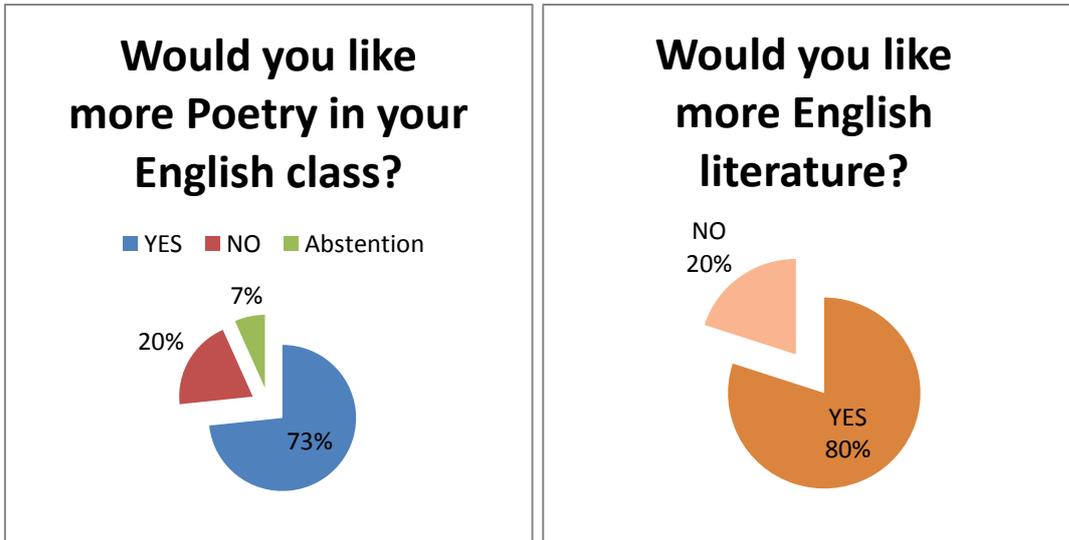
To offer a deeper insight into students’ preferences, the following figure shows the ranking poem by poem:



As can be seen in this ranking, of the top three poems, the 1st and 3rd were on the subject of love and the 1st and 2nd rhymed. Indeed, of the most popular poems

scoring 4 or more votes, 4 rhymed and only two were in free verse. Therefore and, once more unsurprisingly, rhyming love poetry seems to have touched a chord with these adolescent subjects<sup>20</sup>.

Finally, the students were also asked to decide if they would like to have more poetry and more literature in the English class and, if so, what genre. Their answers can be seen in the following figures:



The students overwhelmingly voted both to have more poetry in their EFL classes (11 Yes, 3 No, 1 abstention) and to have more literature in English as well (12 Yes, 3 No). Of the four subdivisions of literature that they indicated they would like to see, short

<sup>20</sup> This preferential predominance of rhyming poetry may hark back to the linguistic enjoyment provided by the repeating patterns first encountered in nursery rhymes (from Spanish’s “Cinco Lobitos” to English’s “This Little Piggy”).

stories proved to be the most popular with 7 votes, poetry and novels tied at 5 votes and drama had just one less. Hence it can be argued that there is a vacuum in the EFL classroom that is not being filled by traditional communicative activities.

### **Answering the Second Research Question:**

#### **b. Does reading poetry via imitation of native models help EFL learners in secondary school to improve their pronunciation?**

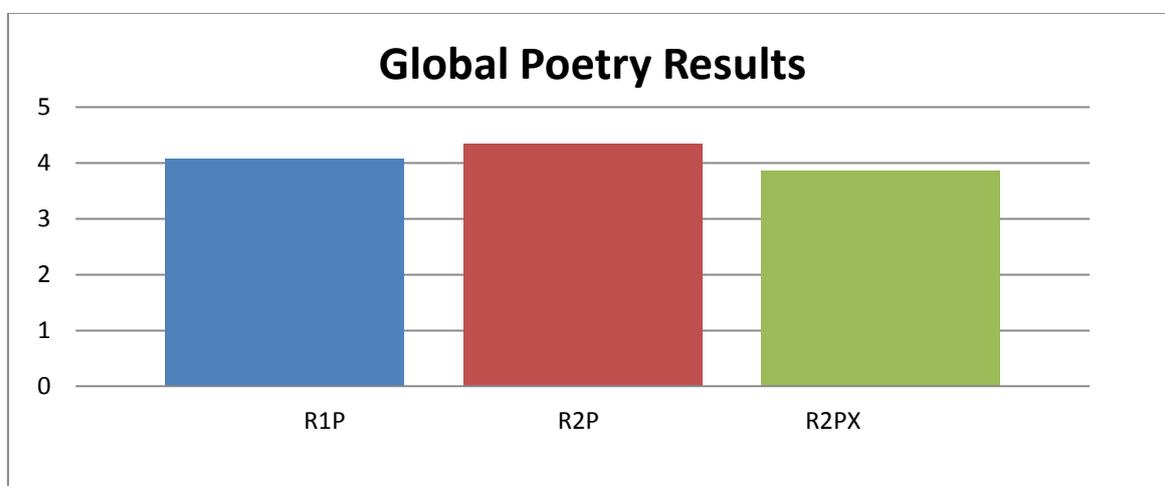
##### ***The evaluation of the recordings:***

For the evaluation process two assessors were used. They were two experienced bilingual English and Irish native male EFL teachers in their forties (indeed, the former is also a Cambridge oral Examiner).

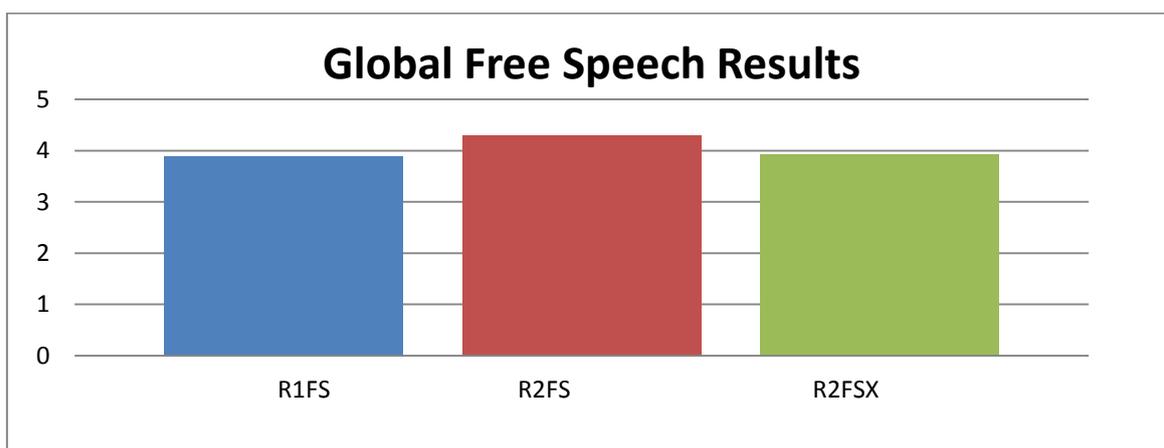
In the evaluation session, they evaluated six recordings (the three instances of poetic imitation and three free speech samples) from each of the seven subjects on a 1-5 scale by comparing and contrasting the recordings based on their overall impressions concerning intelligibility and accent and native-like quality (see TFM Evaluators Hand-out in the appendixes). In order to enable the evaluators to be able to compare the samples on a 'like' with 'like' basis, the recordings, were played thematically (i.e. the three poetry recordings grouped together followed by the three free speech samples) but in a random order within their subdivisions.

##### ***The Global Poetry and Free Speech Results:***

If we look at the global poetry and free speech results (R1P V R2P and R1FS V R2FS) we see that the conclusions both evaluators came to were that in all 7 instances the second recordings (R2P and R2FS, i.e. those taken at the end of the project with the same poem and free speech topic) were identified as being slightly better than the initial ones (R1P and R1FS). Thus, unilaterally but tentatively proving the thesis that imitation improves overall native-like pronunciation.



R1P = (Recording One Poem):	The first (unpractised) poem recorded: “ <i>After the Lunch</i> ”: week 1
R2P = (Recording Two Poem):	The same poem, “ <i>After the Lunch</i> ,” recorded: week 6
R2PX = (Recording Two Extra Poem):	An unpractised poem, “ <i>Scaffolding</i> ”, recorded: week 6



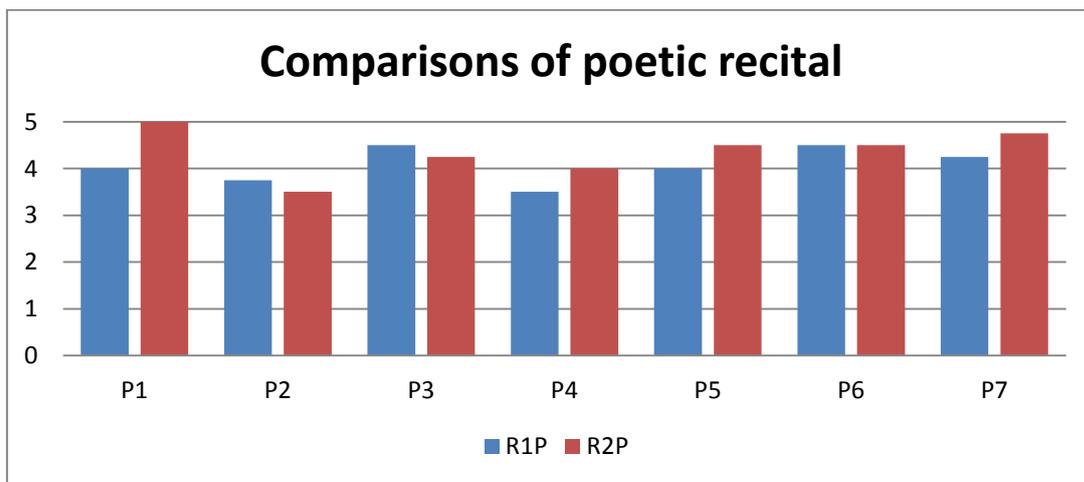
R1FS = (Recording One Free Speech):	The first sample of free speech recorded on the subject of free time: week 1
R2FS = (Recording Two Free Speech):	The same free speech topic on free time, recorded week 6
R2FSX = (Recording Two Extra Free Speech)	An unrehearsed FS topic on topic of Personal Hero, recorded week 6

However, the third set of results from the R2 concerned the second and unfamiliar poem, *Scaffolding* (R2PX) and the as yet unseen free speech topic on the subject of a personal hero/ role-model (R2FSX). Here, seemingly strangely for a recording taking place on the same day, the evaluators universally gave fewer marks than either R2P or R2FS for these extra samples. Indeed, R2PX scored slightly less marks than to those given to R1P, but the R2FSX was deemed to be of slightly better standard than R1FS.

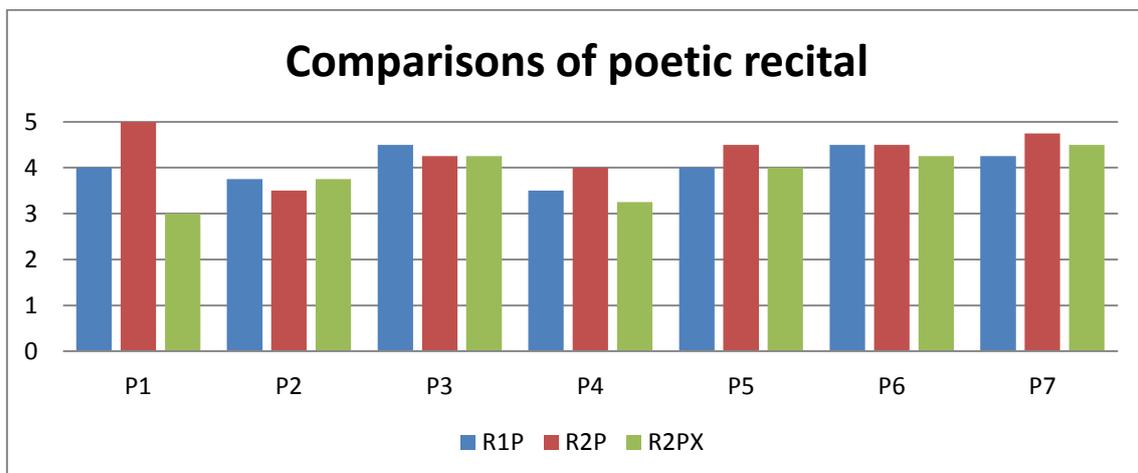
These low marks could be accountable to the fact that the evaluators mentioned in the post test interview that the poem *Scaffolding* was perhaps a little too complicated (lots of technical vocabulary) and a poem more similar to *After the Lunch* would have been better to use. The poem was originally chosen due to its rhyme scheme echoing that of *After the Lunch* and its thematic love poetry genre similarities. After studying the poem more closely and listening to the recordings, the researcher agrees with their suggestions.

### ***The Individual Poetry Results:***

If we compare the individual performances by each participant with the same poem and free speech topic (R1P v R2P) we see that RP2 is better than RP1, on four occasions, worse twice, same only once. These results again cautiously validate the thesis that imitation improves pronunciation. However, the three individual samples which run against the thesis do not guarantee its universality and it would be interesting to carry out close observations of what students did during their imitations in order to identify the individual factors that led some of them to get better and some of them to get worse.



When we introduce the results from R2's extra poem and extra free speech sample we see that R2P is better than R2PX on 5 occasions, worse on one occasion, and the same once. Indeed, R2PX is better than RP1 on only one occasion, same as RP1 twice and worse four times. These results corroborated the global tendency of the unpractised poem doing worse or similar to R1P (and almost totally worse than RP2).

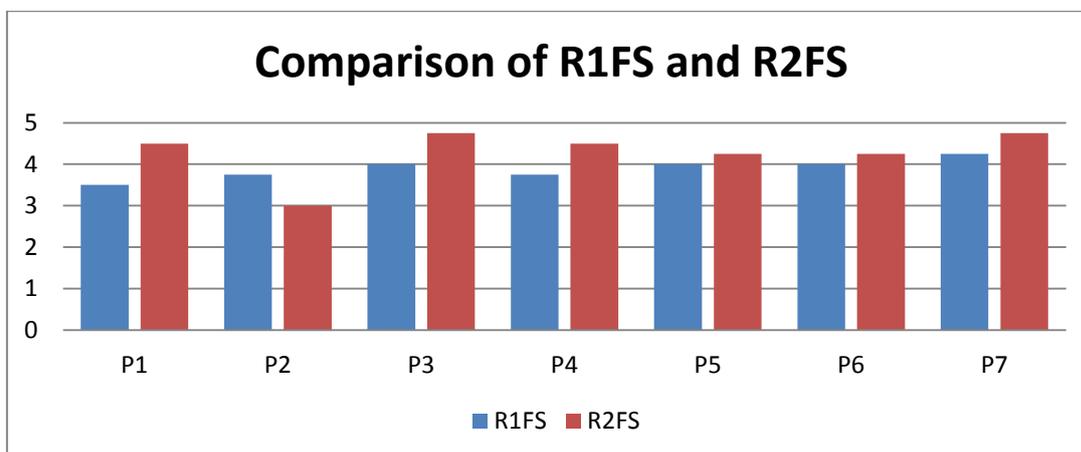


While the inherent difficulty (technical vocabulary following a construction conceit) of the R2PX poem has been alluded to already, it must also be recognised that the

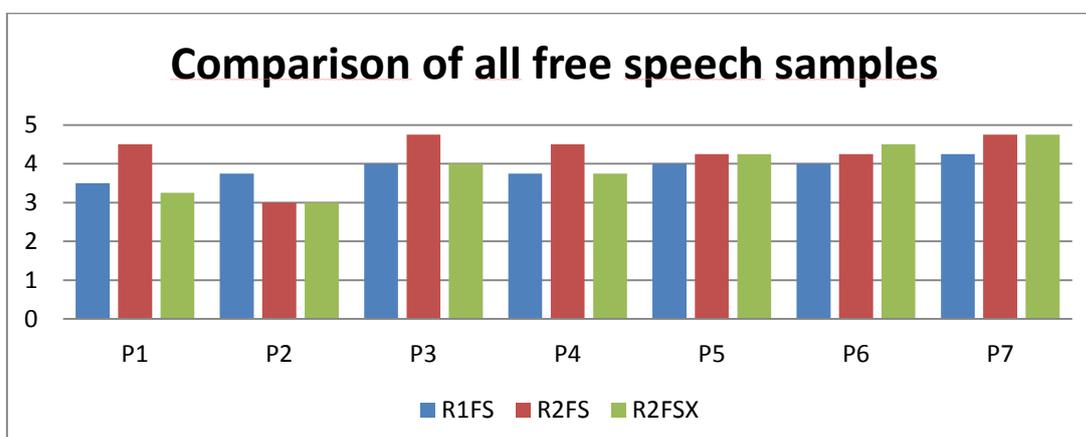
transfer of suprasegmental elements to first time poetic recital is a fraught affair: the student's had not read, never mind, analysed the poem before and thus could not have adapted their tone adequately to its thematic concerns. As imitation work with Wendy Cope's *After the Lunch* has shown, similar practice with Scaffolding would doubtless pay pronounciational dividends. As mentioned above, it would be interesting to have specific data on the imitation process of each of the 7 participants to see how their modus operandi might have influenced their improvement of lack thereof.

***The Individual Free Speech Results:***

Now, let's turn thoughts to free speech and remind ourselves that in the aforementioned global free speech results both R2FS and R2FSX proved to score slightly better than R1FS. If we break down the results participant by participant we note that R2FS is better than R1FS, a whopping 6 times and worse only on one occasion.



When we include the additional recordings from R2, we see that R2FSX is better than R1FS on three occasions; it scored the same, twice and was worse on two occasions. R2FS scored better than R2FSX on three occasions; the same three times, and worse once. Generally then we can surmise that due to the imitation of poetry and familiarity with subject matter a student's suprasegmental elements of speech are enhanced.



### ***Some final thoughts on the Evaluators' results:***

The conclusions that can be drawn here are, while the results are not astoundingly different, there is some evidence to suggest that imitation of both poetry and indeed the imitation of free speech too (R1FS and R2FS used the same topic) improves the native like qualities of a learner's speech via their acquisition of the L2's prosodic features.

Such inconclusive, but highly suggestive, findings might be more resolute in different circumstances. A principal methodological limitation of the present work was the project's short duration: It lasted for only 6 weeks and we feel that over a longer time-frame students might show significant differences in their R1 and R2 results. Moreover, similar poetic imitation sources would ensure a more level playing field to judge whether suprasegmental features internalised from poetry would be transferrable to other poems as well. Yet, as previously mentioned, it must also be recognised that the transfer of suprasegmental elements to first time poetic recital is a big ask: to read poetry correctly the student must be familiar with the poem's theme and thus be able to channel it adequately into their tone when reading it. As Robert Frost said "A poem begins with a lump in the throat,"<sup>21</sup> this lump should come with an emotional connection with the poem not from nervousness originating from unfamiliarity with the text or indeed from any anxiety felt from having an audience, be it provided by the teacher alone or with the reader's peers.

Such anxiety could be avoided by the students being permitted to record themselves as often as desired at home and then to send their recordings to the researcher/teacher. Thus, multiple recordings might be obtained enabling the researcher/teacher more precise and wide-ranging stress-free analytical data. The two recordings obtained in this project could not ever accurately reflect a student's pronunciation abilities but do show the beginnings of a promising trend which would be worthy of close monitoring over a longer period of time. We also feel that the school environment from which the recorded samples were taken might also have negatively affected their potential quality. So, any further research in this field ought to embrace the autonomous and long-term nature of the imitation process.

The evaluators did not receive any specific training in my bid to have natives 'lend me their ears' to obtain pure or clean instinctual impressions. Perhaps, some instruction might be of use to an evaluation team in the future to ensure all criteria are met unilaterally (i.e. not being overtly influenced by the first recording that is heard or concentrating on a single pronunciation mishap).

It would also be interesting to carry out a similar project with greater numbers of participants as with only 7 participants individual differences of all kinds (abilities,

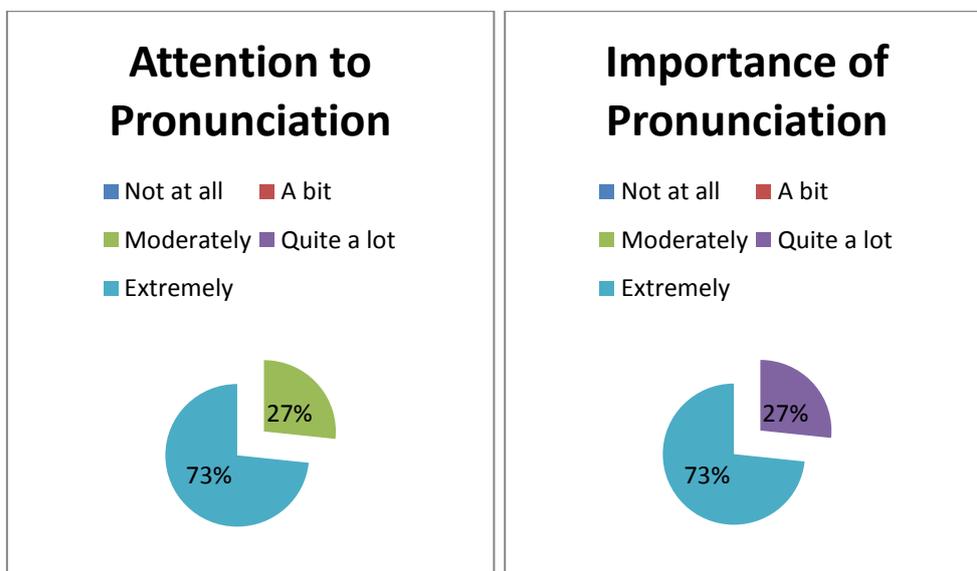
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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/Lang\\_Arts/quotes/quotes\\_about\\_poetry.htm](http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/Lang_Arts/quotes/quotes_about_poetry.htm)

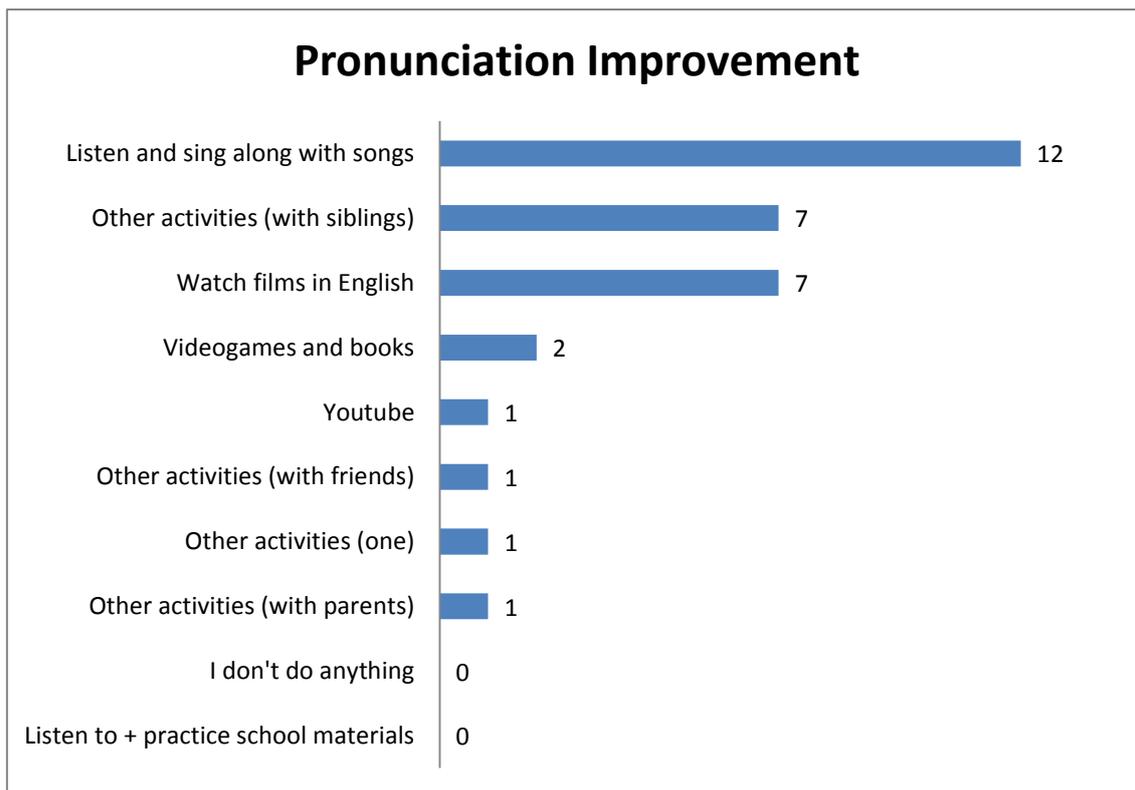
motivation, quantity and quality of the time devoted to the imitation) may have played a strong subjective influential role. Echoing Lázaro’s conclusion to this project’s source study: “Future research could also explore to what extent, as it has been claimed, this type of task helps learners to establish correct connections between written and oral English. Finally, it would be extremely interesting to try this task out with participants from different language backgrounds, different ages, different levels, different learning contexts, etc.” (Lázaro, 2011: 60).

**Conclusions drawn from the Questionnaire related to Pronunciation:**

According to the questionnaire though, when asked whether attention was paid to their pronunciation when speaking English, the answers were universally in the affirmative (4 moderately, 11 extremely). When asked whether they thought pronunciation was important when learning English the students, the answers were even more emphatic (4 quite a lot, 11 extremely).



When asked how they improved their pronunciation, significantly all of the students stated that they actively tried to improve their pronunciation. This shows us that autonomous learning strategies are being used consciously by adolescent learners today (using both new technologies [You Tube clips, Video Games] and more traditional methods [reading, talking to siblings, parents and even themselves])



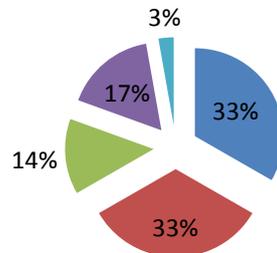
Notably, none of the students stated that they listened to and practiced using school materials (textbooks with CDs and Readers), which tells us that such materials are not engaging their target audience for some reason or other, be it by insufficient exploitation by teachers or an inherent flaw within such materials.

When asked how they improved their pronunciation, as previously mentioned, the majority choose listening to and singing along with songs (12). This I feel is highly significant, as the poetry in some singer-songwriters' lyrics (Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen, Tom Waits, Ben Harper, Natalie Merchant), could be a springboard into both introducing poetry and to using songs more meaningfully in the EFL classroom.

When asked what would be improved by imitation, most answered that it would be their pronunciation of specific words (e.g. '-ed' endings/ silent letters: 12 votes) and that their vocabulary would be enriched (12 votes) by equal measure. Strangely, that only 17% (6 votes) believe that their suprasegmental features are improved, portraying perhaps the sad status quo for L2 prosodic awareness in the contemporary EFL classroom.

## By Imitation & RA, I believe I can . . .

- improve my pronunciation of specific words
- enrich my vocabulary
- make me aware of grammatical structures
- improve my intonation, rhythm, stress
- Other



To sum up, the evidence strongly points to the need to use pronunciation actively and consciously in the language classroom, for learners to be aware of the prosodic elements of English, and to encourage learning strategies to practise at home (while this class was highly autonomous, this researcher doubts whether such adolescent autonomy is the norm).

### ***Personal opinions of Class Teacher on the project:***

Alicia Galvan has had a mixed experience using literature in class room with graded readers (“Pride and Prejudice” and “Emma”). Not everybody did the required pre-class reading and thus it was difficult to carry out the planned activities. She feels that teen motivation for reading literature is not evident even in their native language. She also says that these sessions were an “eye-opener” though and believes that poetry could be an activity she sees that could work in the class due to non-dependence on the whole class preparing the text beforehand i.e. a poem’s brevity enables it to be used effectively in the time constraints of a class. Alicia also feels that poetry would work well on themed units (e.g. relationships) and works better with *Bachillerato* students. She holds the opinion that poetry would be difficult to implement in *T.I.L* due to time constraints for cross-departmental collaboration. She also believes that imitation helps pronunciation.

### ***My personal opinions on the project:***

I truly believe that the project was a success. The students were very receptive and, as I loved teaching what I am passionate about, I feel the pupils picked up on my enthusiasm.

With only one session a week though, and trying to crowbar 2/3 poems into each one, I felt the classes were quite condensed and there was not enough time to exploit

potential communicative activities based around the poems. Indeed, one week I needed an extra half class to finish the second theme (Poetry on death).

There were technical glitches with the recordings as well, due to a malfunctioning microphone coupled with certain students who have a low tone of voice.

Notwithstanding these problems, the evidence strongly points to the need to use pronunciation actively and consciously in the language classroom and for pronunciation learner strategies to be fostered at home too.

### **Conclusion:**

Methodologies, as nations, rise and fall, and what was once flavour of the month, soon falls out of favour. Just as the venerable Grammar Translation Method was an anathema to the nascent Direct Method emerging from *fin de siècle* France; two generations later saw Chomsky's attacks on the behavioural tenets of Audio Lingual method cause a reactionary 'big bang' of sorts in canonical EFL methodologies. Out of this grand epoch of methodological miscellany in the 1970s and early 1980s came a plethora of "innovative' methods, such as the Silent Way (1972), Community Language Learning (1976), Total Physical Response (1977), Suggestopedia (1978), and the Natural Approach (1983)" (Larsen-Freeman, 2004: 179). Yet, after this initial methodological explosion, the particles were sucked back together as "interest in developing students communicative competence reunified this field in the 1980s" (Larsen-Freeman, 2004: 179).

In her conclusion to her survey of language teaching methodology, Larsen-Freeman (2004) comes up with three principal ideological similarities amongst the diverse approaches she analysed. They are:

1. the goal of enabling students to communicate in the target language
2. the overwhelming focus on in-class instruction
3. And how "most of these methods seem to treat culture implicitly, having no clearly articulated view of it or its teaching" (Larsen-Freeman, 2004: 180).

While, we too agree with her first supposition about the communicative impetus underlying all instruction, we feel that the rehabilitation of some aspects of the Grammar Translation and Audio Lingual methods, namely the twin pariahs of literature and imitation, would only augment the content and delivery of such communication. Her second belief could be amended by the at-home multiple accented imitation of poetry by native (online) models, which would enable learners to take their learning out of the classroom, to become more autonomous and in control of their own learning, on their own terms. Finally, the in-class analysis of poetry would serve to amend the third ideological similarities on cultural oversight as students would have

the doubly educative benefits of being exposed to English language literary culture as well as having their pronunciation, stress and intonation improved.

Larsen-Freeman (2004) hints at how the EFL teacher of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should deal with the language teacher's methodological legacy. She states "teachers who have a consistent philosophy and pick in accordance with it (which may very well make allowances for differences among students), could be said to be practising *principled eclecticism*. They are in effect creating their own method by blending aspects of others in a principled manner" (Larsen-Freeman, 2004: 183). The autonomous use of imitation as a learning strategy, as well as the in-class instruction of poetry, in this short-term project, have been validated tentatively, by the empirical and tremendously, by the emotional evidence obtained. What is more, there are cultural benefits, autonomous learning ones, as well as those involving the use of imitation as a life-long learning tool.

Other potential pedagogical implications of the process have been noted: on the phonetic front, the project promotes students' phonological awareness of both the segmental and suprasegmental aspects (Lázaro 2011). Students' thus are not only made conscious of the variety of English accents but also how both the segmental and prosodic elements are at play in them. The use of recorded poetry has proven in this project to be extremely motivating and it offers samples of English in its most magnificent manifestation, which is read with according reverence. Moreover, this study of poetry in the EFL classroom could be thematically paralleled with what students are doing in their native/ other language classes to facilitate an across the board integrated treatment of content.

The project also aids listening comprehension, and to quote as well as to echo Lázaro's sentiments "although we did not analyse the improvements in discrimination, understanding and pronouncing usually go hand in hand (Lázaro 2011: 60). Finally, for the hard-working 21<sup>st</sup> EFL century teacher, bombarded with innumerable resources and methodologies "the task offers logistical advantages. It is not very demanding for teachers since it does not require too much time to prepare, especially nowadays when recordings are easily accessible from different sources" (Lázaro 2011: 60).

The present study had two principal aims; to encourage the teaching of pronunciation in EFL classrooms using the tactic of reading aloud in the imitation of native English poetry models and to promote poetry as viable, and indeed enjoyable, subject matter for the EFL classroom. Bearing the evaluators results in mind, we can attest to an improvement, however minor, in the use of imitation over a short period of time on the quality of the participants' spoken production. The qualitative benefits though, obviously outweigh the quantitative ones in this present study: such strong, positive and motivating feedback for the use of poetry in and literature in the language

classroom could provide us with a bridge between linguistics and culture hitherto shunned by recent EFL trends.

Lázaro concludes this project's mother-study, by citing her strong belief "that the cautiously positive results [we have] found together with the feasibility of the task, make reading aloud imitating native texts worth a try. If pronunciation has been often described as the Cinderella of language teaching this experiment has set off in the pursuit of at least one well-fitting shoe!" (Lázaro 2011: 60).

Pronunciation instruction has indeed been the long-time woebegone poor relation of the communicative approach. The teaching of literature hasn't fared much better in such utilitarian methodologies either. To continue Lázaro's Cinderella metaphor, perhaps it is time to offer a complete set of glass slippers to the fair maiden: one of them may be provided by her offer of imitation, the other shoe might be best bestowed by the use of poetry in the classroom. Whatever role the EFL teacher of the 21st Century takes on, I strongly endorse their playing Fairy Godmother, or shoemaker, to both poetry and pronunciation, they would make a fine matching pair, "more lovely and more temperate"<sup>22</sup>, "than you might even expect.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.shakespeares-sonnets.com/sonnet/18>

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/306451-you-don-t-have-to-suffer-to-be-a-poet-adolescence>

<sup>24</sup> 'as spring does to the cherry trees,' Pablo Neruda in "Juegas Todos los Días", in *Veinte Poemas de Amor y una Canción Desesperada*, 1924.

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