



## CLASSROOM ACTIVITY 1

### IMITATION OF FOREIGN ACCENTS IN THE LEARNERS' VEHICULAR LANGUAGE

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#### OBJECTIVES

Improve English (or other foreign language) pronunciation.

#### TIME REQUIRED

50 minutes.

#### NUMBER OF PEOPLE

Individual or collective.

#### TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

A tape recorder or a mobile phone to record oral productions (optional).

#### INSTRUCTIONS

This foreign accent imitation task consists of imitating the speech of a native (or very advanced) speaker of the foreign language (L2) the student is learning while speaking their own language (L1) with a strong foreign accent. In other words, students speak their own language (e.g. Catalan) as a native English speaker with a strong English accent would speak it if they were native English speakers with a low level of linguistic competence in Catalan. With this imitation exercise we train how to modify the articulation of the sounds of our language (L1) to make them similar to those of the L2 we are learning, and at the same time, we develop phonological awareness of the differences between L1 and L2. It also allows us to automatize articulatory gestures in the production of English (or other foreign language) sounds at basic levels of proficiency where there is insufficient command of the language to speak it fluently and thus enable such automatization.

Teachers should provide materials in auditory or audio-visual format to learners. These materials may consist of single words, phrases, short texts (100-150 words) and short dialogues in Catalan and/or Spanish depending on their needs. They can be recorded by native English speakers if available or English teachers who

can imitate an English accent when speaking Catalan and Spanish. These audio or audio-visual materials serve to train learners to imitate an English accent and it is therefore important that they contain the typical phonetic features that differentiate English from Catalan or Spanish. Teachers should also monitor learners' imitation by paying attention to the correct production of an English accent.

As this is an exercise using the L1, it is a way of practising the pronunciation of L2 sounds at any level of L2 proficiency (even at beginning levels). When this pronunciation with L2 accent has been integrated, we can do communicative conversational exercises in pairs to facilitate the automatization of articulatory gestures for the pronunciation of L2 sounds through the production of sounds with L2 features during speaking performance.

The procedure consists of two main phases. During the first phase, learners must be exposed to the L2 accent in their language. This can be done first from isolated words and phrases and then, from continuous speech samples or dialogues. The aim is to imitate these speech samples by looking at the accent features they contain. When the phonetic features of the L2 have been integrated into the learners' vehicular L1 speech, communicative tasks of all kinds can be implemented where learners practise the English accent while speaking fluently in their own language. This can be done occasionally once a week and combined with monitored speaking activities in L2 which allow them to integrate articulatory practice based on accent imitation into their L2 speech. Learners can record their spoken productions in L1 with an accent and also in L2 and compare them and decide to what extent they have succeeded in producing an authentic L2 accent in their language.

## **SELF-EVALUATION AND REFLECTION GUIDE**

In order to make the best use of this accent imitation task, it is important to reflect on what learners do at the articulatory level in order to impose a foreign accent on their language. For example:

- What things do you do at the articulatory level to make this word sound as if it were pronounced by an English person?
- What have you found easiest and most difficult about speaking your language in a foreign accent?
- To what extent could you pass for an English student of Catalan?

Any kind of supplementary question or activity aimed at developing awareness of phonetic differences between the foreign language and your own will be useful in developing pronunciation in the foreign language.