

## **Bettering Pronunciation through Reading Aloud and Peer Appraisal**

***Gloria Tost***

*Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain*

---

Peer appraisal during repeated English reading aloud is a procedure for improving students' English language for reading clarity and pronunciation. The current study evaluates the feasibility and impact of partner reading out loud to improve English pronunciation, fluency and expression with three adult students of level 1 of English in the Official School of Languages located in a town near Barcelona. This study used recorded materials during the interactions, the transcript of the reading of three students and students' observations to evaluate and reflect upon the impact of peer appraisal among participants. Results indicated that peer-mediated repeated oral reading interventions carried out by students' cooperation was effective in assisting students to begin to improve their levels of reading pronunciation and fluency. The findings herewith analysed should be the base to further on the effects of meditated oral reading to better English speaking and reading at large.

### **Introduction and Focus of Observation**

The aim of the present study is to evaluate the development and influence of peer appraisal in oral reading skills. In partners or small groups of three people, oral reading students are placed together for the purpose of supporting each other through repeated oral reading of a given text. Partners listen, follow along and provide pronunciation of words or assistance while taking turns reading out loud, switching roles every time the text ends. Partner oral reading is used in this study as a strategy to promote the development of better English pronunciation and fluency, based on the effort students need to make for clarity and intonation when reading to others.

Repeated partner oral reading may be a key component to aim at facilitating the development of reading fluency skills, including reading aloud with appropriate expression, accuracy and with a reasonable speed. The present study suggests that oral reading with partner appraisal may be a useful instructional strategy to improve English pronunciation and fluency.

The effectiveness on repeated partner oral reading is observed and examined on the following grounds. More capable readers were paired with less capable readers, but each student may alert his or her partner/s to errors on pronunciation, clarity and provide feedback among the group. Students were obliged to fill in a form of self- and peer-

assessment. This process allowed students to be much involved in the process of assessment and this in itself may lead to learners' autonomy and higher motivation (Dickinson, 1987).

The study was based on two hypotheses: 1) there would be a difference in the reading aloud achievement/improvement between the first oral reading and the third; 2) students' cooperation would benefit in the overall oral reading improvement. From these hypotheses, the following research questions were formulated: Do students improve their English pronunciation and fluency by reading out loud to a partner? Do pairs of asymmetric students bring benefits to the improvement of English pronunciation and fluency?

In light of the above questions, the goal of the present article is to reason through the cooperative oral reading task betterment in English pronunciation, fluency and expression. It is argued that reading out loud to peers improves vocabulary pronunciation and specific vocabulary is better acquired. The current study addresses gaps in the literature by examining the effectiveness of peer-appraisal repeated oral reading among adult beginners of L2 of English when implemented in pairs or small group of students. The teacher implementing the research hypothesised that peer-appraisal in oral repeated reading would lead to improvement in reading pronunciation and fluency performance.

## **Context**

The present study was performed in the Official School of Language in a town close to Barcelona with a class of over twenty students. The participants were enrolled in level 1 English. The students' ages ranged between 18 to 55 years. Most of the students had studied English at one point or another in their lives and they had decided to start over in order to set proper grounds of their English and progress in their learning.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The influence of social interaction in the classrooms and positive relationships among peers is examined, using partner oral reading as a cooperative way of learning strategy to promote the development of better English pronunciation, fluency and automatic reading throughout an exercise of oral reading. The degree to which the partners displayed social cooperation is important in the analysis of the learning process examined in this paper.

The study highlights the importance of the advantages of working with peers in order to improve English reading aloud which benefits the overall students' English skills. Ginsburg-Block, Rohrbeck, & Fantuzzo (2006) have identified a range of learning gains in oral reading –when carried out with a partner- which include reading accuracy in expression, fluidity and pronunciation. Topping (2001) conducted a project in Scotland which supports the idea that pair oral reading has overall advantages in learning for students. Improvements are reported from this study in motivation, confidence and enjoyment, and also benefits in relation to self-esteem.

Repeated oral reading is a strategy that works by rereading aloud a short and meaningful text a few times; this allows the acquisition of a satisfactory level of expression and fluency in reading (NICHHD, 2000; Samuels, 1979). Begeny and Marterns (2006) explain the effectiveness of oral reading improvement through peer-mediated approach of reading out loud when implemented by students reading passages to one another for a predetermined number of repetitions or until a level of fluency is acquired. Many studies have found that oral Repeated Reading (RR) results in increased fluency. Freeland, Skinner, Jackson, McDaniel, and Smith (2000), and Therrien (2004) found that oral RR improved the reading fluency and comprehension of students when repeated exercises were performed during a considerable period of time.

Peer-mediated strategies have received a lot of research support; among the advantages of peer-mediated strategies are the identification of errors, the practising of giving responses to problems, problem solving, correction, feedback and encouragement from peers (Utley & Mortweet, 1997). Yurick and colleagues (2006) conducted three experiments to examine the effects of peer-mediated oral RRs on students; the findings suggested that the improvement of reading aloud fluency became generalised due to repeated performance.

There are other studies which confirm the moderate to strong relationship between students' fluency when reading out loud and his/her achievement in reading performance (Wood, 2006). The value of oral reading is described by Shinn & Good (1992) as the ability of decoding oral texts automatically with accurate word recognition, speed and prosody. Fuchs, Fuchs, Hosp & Jenkins (2001) explain oral reading fluency as a “direct measure of phonological segmentation and recoding skill as well as rapid word recognition” (p. 241)

Self, along with peer assessment is also valued in the learning process. There are many researchers who give evidence of the importance of such processes. Buchanan (2004) acknowledges that such assessments can be a force that pushes students to engage more actively in their own learning. She says: “self and peer assessment can promote more active engagement with the course than simply sitting back and waiting for a grade” (p. 169). Buchanan quotes Schunk (2000) saying “developing self and peer evaluation strategies help students gain control over their learning... [and] allows them to focus more effort in studying those areas where they need more time” (p. 379).

Roberts (2006) stresses the advantages of working in a group to promote higher level of achievement; he mentions the work of Bransford, Brown, & Cocking (1999) who emphasise the importance of peer review and negotiation for its social dimension of cognition. Slavin (1996) expresses the benefits in higher-order thinking while Cohen (1994) improves communication and conflict management. Johnson & Johnson (1994), and strategic problem-solving skills. Furthermore, small-group students' collaboration in reading aloud has been proven to enhance motivation to learn, it favours skill's improvement and work persistence (Bruffee, 1999). Peer evaluation is an important component of collaborative learning because it allows students to give feedback to each other. Cooperative groups have been proven to facilitate development and interpersonal skills, increase retention of information and generate higher achievement among students overall (Johnson & Johnson, 1987).

In order to analyse the benefits of reading aloud in second language in a framework of collaborative learning, it is important to look at the relevance interdependence among peers and their social interaction. Learning to read out loud fluently and automatically with decent pronunciation in a second language is important in order to gain control over oral reading speed and improve speaking pronunciation.

## **Method**

For the evaluation of the effectiveness of cooperative reading aloud to peers and the improvement in English pronunciation, fluency and clarity students are first given specific activities which are related to the expression of the text and comprehension of background. To do so, students are presented a power point of phonetic sounds where they have to practise aspiration by placing a piece of paper in front of their lips to feel the air puff movement when aspirating. They have to practise voicing by feeling the vibration in

their throat when using voiced vowels and by contrast feeling how the air escapes with voiceless sounds. They also have to practise silent L, long vowels and diphthongs. Moreover, grammatical forms worked on previous sessions are to assist students to the understanding of the text. Students are asked questions related to the topic they are going to read in order to engage in oral discussions, and begin to use spontaneously some vocabulary that may be present in the reading text. Once ready to begin the task students join in asymmetric groups, decided by them (and the teacher's judgement), of one strong reader and two weak readers. The reading session may be conducted in the classroom or in the school library. Students are provided with a reading text designed for the task and purpose of improving specific vocabulary pronunciation. Students are also given an assessment sheet to write short observations. Students may also join other groups in the class in order to comment, contrast and verify different points of view.

The goal of the activities is to evaluate the effectiveness of cooperative reading aloud to peers. Effectiveness is measured by students' mutual assistance to improve in English pronunciation, fluency and clarity. Self-assessment and peer-assessment are also considered which include students' self-evaluation with comments sent by e-mail to the teacher (this is used to value the efficacy of the exercises).

About twenty students from an adult English school in a town close to Barcelona participated in this study. All students were in Level 1 English and were between 18 to 55 years of age. None of the participants indicated any prior experience with oral reading peer cooperation. Partners were chosen asymmetrically in order to test if they could be of assistance to each other. The teacher made a random selection of stronger and weaker readers considering her knowledge of the students and the students' criterion. Students were to help and assess one another for better English pronunciation, fluency, clarity and expression.

Prior to the oral reading students were given a power point on basic phonetics to encourage better pronunciation, and also they were given comprehension background on the actual reading. Grammatical forms had been worked on previous sessions. The oral reading session was conducted in the class and in the school's library.

The reading text was created by the teacher with careful consideration of students' progression of English, words and grammatical expressions which were of relevance. Students were provided with an assessment sheet to assess themselves and their partner/s and provide with positive or improvement comments only. Students may read the

comments at the end of the session for self-awareness. Additional materials included a camera for recording the students' conversations and for any other relevant data which may be of use to analyse students' learning process.

The data were recorded with a video camera set up near the students. The study focuses on one class which lasted two hours. Permission was granted by the school with previous consent of the students. Before the research session the teacher in practice had introduced the use of camera recording in many other activities i.e. class discussions, role play, etc. The names of the participants have been changed to a fictitious name that is similar to the original names in order to indicate whether the participants are of Spanish or Catalan origin.

The video was converted into audio by a program called SUPER and then the audio was transcribed by the teacher in practice using the program ELAN. Selection of data was with the following criteria taken into consideration: 1) Clarity of audio; 2) Grade of difficulty students had in expressing themselves during the reading of the text; 3) Discussions among the group (content); 4) Resolutions taken. The recorded data have been carefully transcribed in a way that reflects how it was phonetically read by the students and all the significant data which makes relevant the students' cooperation and efforts to better English pronunciation, crucial for determining the questions for which I want to find an answer.

The materials that were used for the study consisted of, principally, a didactic unit prepared by the teacher with specific vocabulary and grammar 'A Decade of Revindication Ruled by Alternative: The 80s.' Students were presented with a power point on basic phonetics to practise certain English vowels and consonants then they watched four short videos on phonetic sounds. Following this, students were provided with a short letter to read out loud and they were given an assessment sheet to write comments. A camera was also used to record students' activities, a computer to process the information and the e-mails to the teacher with comments.

### **Better Pronunciation for Better Communication: Analysis of Transcripts**

The studies reported in the theoretical framework indicate that peer cooperation among students can support better English learning, and in this case improvement in English reading aloud. The approach taken in this research resolves around the achievements of asymmetric partners which help each other during group interaction. The groups also

interact in making agreements and by giving each other feedback by means of an evaluation sheet. In the activities carried out in this study, students had to agree in word recognition and pronunciation. Agreement was reached through discussions; students expressed opinions, reflected over word pronunciation, meaning and grammar, and debated their answers if necessary.

One feature that stands out in the analysis is the efforts of the three participants in the conversation as they engaged in a joint purpose which was essential for shared understanding in order to make the most of the activity. Another curious element observed is the element of trust. Trust is placed in the stronger reader, but it can also be challenged by certain contributions during the interventions, allowing weaker readers to make use of his/her reasoning (see excerpt 1 below).

The activity shown in the analysis is one in which the students are engaged in a carefully prepared oral reading activity. During the activity students are able to recognise and practise elements studied in a previous class. Previous to the oral reading activity students had been presented with a power point which allowed them to understand and practise a few simple steps for improving their pronunciation towards a more native-like level. Students also had the chance to practise in groups the phonetic aspects worked during the class; before the reading aloud activity students could check with the teacher unknown vocabulary for better understanding of the text.

**Activity:** Reading out loud to peers

**Length of clip:** 2:59

**Participants' nicknames:** Maria, Teresa and Pedro

### **Excerpt 1**

In the fragment we see below a small group of three students are involved in the oral reading activity. Maria and Pedro are the weaker readers while Teresa is the stronger reader. Teresa is not fluent in English, she has English level 1 just as the rest of her companions, but she has the challenge of assisting her peers during the intervention. The key to the transcription symbols is in the annex. The transcript imitates the participants' utterances' phonetically.

1. Maria: <-I yus-sed tu lov->
2. Teresa: yusd tu(.)

3. Maria: <-yusd tu lov>-  
 4. Maria: <-tu rid->  
 5. Maria: <-mai buks(..)->  
 6. (0.1)  
 7. Maria: <+wiz Mozzar prayin in the bakgraun->  
 8. (0.92)  
 9. Maria: <-now yu nou a lot mor about mi->  
 10. Maria: <+wat about yu-+?>  
 11. Maria: <-wat di yu laik->  
 12. Maria: <+as a xil->  
 13. Teresa: +chaild+  
 14. Maria: +chaild+  
 15. (0.4)  
 16. Maria: <-di yu hav eni feivoret toy-?>  
 17. Maria: music buks?  
 18. Maria: <+meibi wi kud mit somtain->  
 19. Maria: <+an sher som fotográf->  
 20. Teresa: fótografs  
 21. Maria: fotografs  
 22. (0.86)  
 23. Maria: <-rait tu mi sun->  
 24. Maria: <+best wais->  
 25. Teresa: wishes  
 26. Maria: <best best wises>(..  
 27. (0.14)  
 28. Maria: +signature+  
 29. (0.1)

In the fragment above Maria has started to read with difficulty, we can see it by the way she reads very slowly; she needs time to do it and to think how to pronounce each word. What is important to observe in this excerpt is the amount of effort Maria needs in order to read and pronounce in a way that can be understood. One of the recurrent errors that can be observed and keep coming up is the *-ed* form at the end of a verb pronounced



as it is spelled which Maria reads in the verb *used to*. Teresa, acquainted with the pronunciation of the *-ed* segment after verbs, corrects Maria's pronunciation. This correction gives Maria a chance to benefit from peer feedback in two ways: by listening to her peer correct pronunciation and by having the opportunity to repeat the correct pronunciation after Teresa.

Maria reads slowly and carefully; we can appreciate it by the way she takes her time to pronounce every word and repeats it when she realises she has not pronounced properly. She is concentrated looking intensively at her page<sup>1</sup>, making an effort to produce proper vocabulary. Maria is trying to process internally each word before making a decision to pronounce it; as evidence we have line 7 where she makes a pause of 0.92 seconds and line 21 where she makes another pause of 0.86 seconds. She is thinking and processing the information on the page. We observe how Maria is reading very slowly and carefully to her peers in order to make the least possible mistakes. She appears to feel doubtful of words she has little practise of pronouncing.

As is exemplified in the excerpt above, a reading out loud exercise is a chance for students to practise vocabulary that otherwise they would hardly ever have the chance to use in a Catalan or Spanish setting and to practise its pronunciation. Reading aloud in the way students are doing in this activity forces students to work a system of word-sound recognition that is not required in silent reading. Students need to reach phonological awareness in order to be understood by their peers. In this way, peer work is important because it makes people conscious of the efforts required to be understood when listening to something that is being read.

While reading aloud clarity, pausing, proper phrasing and expressiveness are just as important as when speaking to help the audience to understand what is being read or spoken. In excerpt 2, Teresa appears to be aware of the need to be clear to her audience. She expresses a level of difficulty in her oral reading which reflects how she possibly struggles in her speaking. She needs to make regular pauses to break up sentences to give herself some time to reflect upon what she is reading and saying at the same time. Pedro who is also listening, and makes no obvious contributions, is actually taking notes (as observed in the video) everything she says which will result in effective problem-solving dialogue in the next excerpt.

**Excerpt 2**

30. Pedro: dos dos cosas
31. Pedro: +gil es gerl no+-?
32. Teresa: gerl
33. Pedro: claro, claro
34. Teresa: claro
35. Pedro: luego está el +rid+
36. Pedro: que era el pasado +red+-
37. Teresa: +red+
38. (0.7)
39. Pedro: que ahora hay varios pasados por aquí y es +red+
40. (0.59)
41. Maria: bueno despues del ( stil ese tu) no eee
42. Maria: del +yussed+ tu
43. Pedro: no este no
44. Pedro: había uno aquí que no, este
45. Pedro: +tu laik tu rid+
46. Pedro: +yusd to laik to red+-
47. Teresa: +yusd to laik to red+
48. Teresa: +yusd tu+ es pasado
49. Teresa: +laik tu red+ está hablando de un infinitivo
50. Eva: +laik tu rid+
51. (0.02)
52. Maria: és tu +rid+, és el present

The fragment above is significant because it illustrates how the trio cooperates with each other and learns from one another; they are engaged in cooperative work, even Teresa who is the stronger reader will be somehow *assisted* by Maria in an important bit of pronunciation information.

In the fragment (excerpt 3) below we see how the students engage in collective thinking because there is a level of trust that allows students to interact and exchange opinions and disagreements. The participants freely agree or object to each other's ideas

and question statements. This proves their cognitive awareness, highlights the students' reflective consciousness and their communication, and social skills which are important in order to make effective collective thinking among the group.

These fragments highlight how thinking together can help create opportunities for successful group talk so that students solve questions and problems together. In these fragments, the individuals interchange opinions and viewpoints but also, and very importantly, assert their knowledge or understandings, question their own reasoning and ask for help when they do not know something. Pedro, who has been listening carefully to Maria's reading, wants to know the right pronunciation of *girl*. Pedro uses this opportunity to check what he believes is correct. This is an important exercise of collaborative work: to be able to verify or double check one's knowledge with other students in order to assert one's perceptions.

A significant point of discussion is reached in line 35 where students engage in a successful group discussion about the pronunciation of the verb *read* in the past. The verb *read* in the past causes general problems in pronunciation since it is spelled exactly the same as the present form but pronounced differently. Here the collaboration is shared: Pedro wants to confirm the difference of pronunciation between the present and the past of *read*, line 35, 36 and 39. In line 41 Maria points out at the difference in the verb pronunciation and she exhibits points of doubt when Teresa line 46-49 says confidently that [*tu red*] is the infinitive form and pronounced as such. The teacher who is near by hears her and she quickly corrects the mispronunciation to which Maria, line 52 repeats: "és [*tu rid*], és el present!" Maria feels she knew it all along as her tone denotes.

### Excerpt 3

53. Pedro:     /+diar pen-pal+ ((spanish p))-/  
 54. Teresa:    +pen-pal+ (aspirated p) (.)  
 55. Pedro:     +pen-pal+  
 56. Pedro:     +ai am estuding level guan in dis skul (..)/+  
 57.           (0.34)  
 58. Pedro:     +ai wud laik to tel-+  
 59. Teresa:    wued laik  
 60. Pedro:     />ai wued laik to tel yuu</  
 61. Pedro:     >a fiu zigs about mi<
-

62. Pedro: +from the taim+  
63. (0.58)
64. Pedro: +wen ai was a chaild+  
65. (0.37)
66. Pedro: \+a yaung gerl+\
67. Pedro: +during deee+
68. Pedro: +du-e-ring dee-+
69. Teresa: +duering+
70. Pedro: +eitiss+  
71. (0.14)
72. Pedro: <+I wued tel yu som+>
73. Teresa: +sam+
74. Pedro: -+sam of mai memoris+-
75. Pedro: +waat+(..)  
76. (0.25)
77. Pedro: +i used+
78. Teresa: +ai+
79. Pedro: /+ai ussed tu du+/  
80. Pedro: +an wat ai yus tuuu+
81. Pedro: \+laik bak den+\  
82. (0.81)
83. Pedro: \+wen ai was a litl gerl+\  
84. (0.58)
85. Pedro: -+ti vi had not many shanel+-  
86. (0.03)
87. Pedro: +xanel+, perdon
88. Pedro: <+an very fiu program for xildren+>
89. Teresa: -+an very fiu program for xildren+-  
90. (0.75)
91. Pedro: +so wen ever+
92. Pedro: +der wer cártuuns+
93. Pedro: <+on ti vi, cartuúns on ti vi-+>
94. Teresa: +cartuns+  
95. (2.01)

- 
96. Pedro: +ai was suir+  
 97. (0.81)
98. Pedro: +tu watx dem+(..)  
 99. (0.32)
100. Pedro: +de ti vi programs+
101. Pedro: +ai yus tu laik+
102. Pedro: -+de mos wer heidi an tom soyer+-(..)  
 103. (0.57)

In the excerpt above it can be observed how Teresa gives assistance to Pedro for better pronunciation when a word he has pronounced is unintelligible or sounds too Spanish-like. This is the case of line 53, 54. Dealing with the word *perhaps* –as a result of the previous exercise related to phonetics– Teresa is able to correct Pedro in the word *pen-pal* in the pronunciation of the *p* unaspirated in Spanish and pronounced with aspiration in English. Other difficulties for Pedro are the pronunciation of diphthongs where Teresa clearly provides an assisting hand to Pedro (Lines 58-59, 68-69, 78-79.)

The fact that Pedro has the opportunity to be corrected when he has pronounced something wrong gives him the opportunity to start reformulating pronunciation for himself. In line 73 we observe how Teresa corrects Pedro and he immediately corrects himself (line 74), and, as it will be observed in excerpt 4, Pedro is starting a process of self-correction thanks to his effort and concentration in listening and reading to pronounce intelligibly.

In excerpt 3 the students can be regarded as engaging in “mutual labour”. Teresa’s aid is welcome because she is accepted as the stronger reader of the trio. This is important; her help is viewed as participation and cooperation in peer appraisal. Pedro and Maria are happy to be valued and measured by Teresa’s point of view, she is at the same level as they both are, but she has the opportunity to appraise her peers’ English phonological awareness and expressiveness and in return learn from this experience.

The next excerpt (4) illustrates Pedro’s third oral reading; even without examining his first oral reading attempt, we can value that the speed at which Pedro is reading may be due to practise; the emphasis and the automatic decoding he expresses in this fragment of speech is not due to mere chance. Rereading for accurate word recognition and fluency appears to have raised awareness about what is really needed in order to read aloud *or speak* meaningfully; clarity and expression when reading to others are just as important as

---

when speaking. The interaction among peers in this excerpt is an initiation of transforming knowledge, it may prove to be a slow process, but the benefits of the communication between Teresa and Pedro if constant should be noted further in time.

#### Excerpt 4

104. Pedro: /+der was olso ti vi series+/  
 105. Pedro: -+ai yus to laik wen ai wos a litl bit older+-  
 106. Pedro: +dis wer+  
 107. Pedro: +de gritest+  
 108. Teresa: +greatest+  
 109. Pedro: /+greitest american hiro+/(..)  
 110. Pedro: +hiru+  
 111. (0.04)  
 112. Pedro: <+an magnum pi+>  
 113. (1.37)  
 114. Pedro: +pi ai+  
 115. (0.6)  
 116. Pedro: /+ai yus to laik tu red+/  
 117. Pedro: +rid+  
 118. Pedro: \+ai yus to laik to ri:d+\  
 119. Pedro: +a lot, as wel+  
 120. Pedro: -+ai stil du de first novel+-(..)  
 121. (0.1)  
 122. Pedro: +ai red+  
 123. Pedro: <+was a riset+>  
 124. Teresa: +reduus+  
 125. Pedro: +version+  
 126. (0.24)  
 127. Pedro: -+reduus version of deivid coperfild+-  
 128. (0.2)  
 129. Pedro: \+en dis was de biginin+\ (..)  
 130. (0.2)  
 131. Pedro: +of mai admireshion+  
 132. Pedro: /+en pasion for chals dikens+/  
 133. (0.23)

134. Pedro: +ai hav red+  
 135. (0.16)
136. Pedro: +meny of his buks sens+  
 137. (0.19)
138. Pedro: +sins+  
 139. (0.81)
140. Pedro: +wen ai becom+-
141. Teresa: +bikeim+
142. Pedro: +bikeim+
143. Pedro: /+wen ai bikeim a tineger+/  
 144. Pedro: \+miusic was very important tu mi+\

The small advancements shown in this excerpt rely on Pedro's capacity to begin self-correction. This is significant because it allows the researcher to observe that through this exercise Pedro has triggered his own automatic mental switch which has begun to be turned on every time he says something the "old way" and he recognises as wrong which he now can repeat in a "new way" –that is, correctly. Line 116-118 show this mental process, as well as lines 135-137. The peer oral reading activity has given the opportunity to students to approach a process of self-observance and consequently of self-correction.

The reading aloud activity seems to show that self-repair is exercised in both activities: reading out loud and speaking. This also suggests that both skills are closely interconnected, and therefore learning to read aloud efficiently in a cooperative way should reflect in the students speaking level of fluency; since students, while reading aloud, explore and analyse their language production and experience self-repair.

Within this approach, students must focus on one thing at a time rather than too many tasks within the reading activity; otherwise the exercise may result in failure; if students are asked to focus on pronunciation and clarity they should not be concentrating on comprehension or visa versa. While students' oral reading rate is very slow they will have enormous difficulty to understand what they are reading. In the above excerpt, lines 119 and 120 show that Pedro may not have completely understood the phrase he is reading between brackets because he is reading it jointly with the next sentence. This proves once again the need to work the text reasonably well before the pronunciation and fluency

activity in order for students to focus mainly on reading properly, and gradually start to focus on comprehension of the given text as a whole.

As indicated in this study, it is not a question that students should read their text to others quickly, they should focus on being fluent and intelligible to others, make proper use of phrases and sentences when reading, and understanding the words used –this is key for the reader and the listener. This is what makes cooperative work effective: the fact that the reader is trying to convey and display a message that she/he has to decode from the reading text and in turn the listener has to pay enough attention to the reader to understand what is being read, to be able to grasp and understand what the reader is trying to say. In this way the listener may assist in the pronunciation of words and phrases when required. This is demonstrated in excerpt 4, lines 123-124 where Teresa gives the pronunciation of the word *reduced*, which Pedro has pronounced unintelligibly.

Peer collaboration in better pronunciation and clarity reflected in the overall transcript give positive evidence of instrumental support among the trio by helping each other to decode a word in the text or clarifying pronunciation when required. The transcript also reflects the need to improve this working technique by further teachings on pronunciation and intonation.

### **Better Pronunciation for Better Communication: Student Interviews**

The students' perspective on the activity provides evidence of shared knowledge construction. Pedro, Teresa and Maria illustrate this in their interviews:

Pedro: “Para empezar te diré que nunca había leído en voz alta, quitando el ejercicio que nos mandó O. grabado en MP3. En la primera lectura yo me vi bastante bien, en la segunda T. y M. decían que había mejorado mucho y en la tercera good. Creo que se puede mejorar más si te corrigen en el momento los errores.”<sup>2</sup>

Maria: “It has been very useful for me this task because I have learnt very much. El hecho de escuchar a mis compañeros me ha ayudado a afianzar mis conocimientos. A medida que ellos iban mejorando en su lectura y después de mis pequeñas correcciones he visto que leían con mayor fluidez y soltura, incluso haciendo pausa y dando entonación. Eso me ha servido mucho porque yo misma he podido corregir mis fallos al escucharles a ellos e incluso mejorar mis pausas al fijarme en ellos. El ser capaz de hacer comentarios a mis compañeros sobre su lectura me ha dado seguridad, ha despejado algunas dudas y ha reforzado mis conocimientos. Incluso después de ver su progresión después de la segunda y tercera lectura me ha resultado muy satisfactorio porque he visto que nuestros comentarios no han ayudado a mejorar este tipo de ejercicio donde pueden trabajar un strong reader junto con otros que empiezan, supone una ayuda recíproca. En definitiva: To teach is learning (enseñar aprendiendo)”<sup>3</sup>



Teresa: “me sirvió mucho leer en inglés, al principio un poco difícil para mi, pero con la ayuda de M. muy bien. I think it is a good idea to read it aloud and to hear the accent you have.”<sup>4</sup>

As it can be seen by these results, agreement is reached through discussions; students express opinions, reflect over word pronunciation, meaning and grammar, and debate if necessary. The element of trust placed in the stronger reader is significant in the learning process but there is also space to question words and voice doubts. Peer feedback is accomplished in two ways: by listening to peers’ correct pronunciation and by having the opportunity to repeat the correct pronunciation after the stronger reader. This activity forced students to work a system of word-sound recognition and phonological awareness which is not required in silent reading; clarity, pausing, proper phrasing and expressive behaviour have been achieved successfully. Collective thinking is another important element; thinking together shows how a successful group talk helps students to solve questions and problems together. Individuals exchange opinions and viewpoints but also, and very importantly, assert their knowledge and understandings. The students question their own reasoning and ask for help when they do not know something.

Although the exercise was aimed at betterment in English oral reading pronunciation, fluency and expression, participants also expressed that with repeated oral reading and gained fluency, comprehension of the text was also increased. Although the text was worked in class previous to the reading exercise in order to tackle comprehension, it was clear that some students did not grasp fully the meaning of the text until read several times. One student states: “la encontré una actividad muy apropiada y realmente me sirvió para mejorar en comprensión y soltura a la hora de expresarme en hablar.”<sup>5</sup> This quote expresses how there is a close connection between repeated oral English reading and better English speaking, and text comprehension. And finally, as seen in the interviews, a further finding is the awareness of the students concerning the need to make pauses when reading, and taking into consideration phrase and sentence structure even when there are not commas or full stops to mark a break. Another student explains:

“la lectura del texto con mi compañera me sirvió para darme cuenta de cómo se pronunciaban algunas palabras que yo desconocía y sobretodo para darme cuenta de las pausas que se hacen cuando estas leyendo aunque no existan puntos o comas”<sup>6</sup>

---

## Conclusions

Overall, this short oral reading experiment, using peer appraisal, among adult students of English level 1, strongly suggests that students *do* benefit from reading out loud to a partner. Students were able to put to test their English pronunciation and were able to practise vocabulary that otherwise they would find difficult to practise since there is little chance of speaking in English in a Catalan/Spanish environment. Through repeated oral reading and by listening to others read the text students were able to analyse and practice words and phrases of the reading which needed improvement.

The findings from the present study show that it is possible to improve English pronunciation by peer-appraisal; differences were noted between the first reading and the third. A trio of asymmetric students was helpful because weaker readers were able to receive assistance on pronunciation and clarity and on the other hand the stronger reader was able to strengthen and reinforce her knowledge. The members analysed in the group showed that their mutual help was beneficial for gradual improvement in their English fluency and pronunciation and that peer-assessment was effective in helping students to begin to improve oral reading performance.

The results also indicate that comprehension of the text was also increased and that students became more aware of the need for pauses when reading –even when they were not indicated by the punctuation. This indicates a metalinguistic awareness of phrase and sentence structure.

Oral English reading, accompanied by peer-appraisal, calls for an increased focus on a continuum of academic support for students who have difficulty in English fluency in reading aloud and speaking. Results from this study are encouraging in light of the increased need for lower levels of English to practise reading aloud in groups in order to improve fluency and pronunciation in oral reading and speaking. The observations carried out in this study, along with the students' own judgements shed considerable light into the benefits of peer-appraisal in oral reading activities.

The study supports the pedagogical framework presented here – collaborative, peer-supported reading aloud can help students to eventually become better speakers of English. Further investigation is needed, however, and ideally a study of this sort would analyse, over a period of two to three months time, the effects of reading out loud while advancing phonological word recognition, expression, clarity and fluency, and the effect these would have in students' speaking progress.

---

It would make a significant contribution to this study and give more conclusive evidence, to further this experiment in a larger more concrete longitudinal study, thus providing more decisive data on the benefits of oral reading among lower levels of adult students of English, using peer appraisal and to test those benefits among students in English speaking performance in other contexts. This study aims to provide a beginning step in that direction.

## References

- Begeny, J. C., & Martens, B.K. (2006). Assisting low-performing reading with a group-based reading fluency intervention. *School Psychology Review*, 35, 91-107.
- Bransford, J. D., Brown, A. L., & Cocking, R. R. (Eds.) (1999). *How people learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Buchanan, E. A. (2004). Online assessment in higher education: Strategies to systematically evaluate student learning. In C. Howard, K. Schenk & R. (Eds.) *Distance learning and university effectiveness: Changing educational paradigms for online learning* (pp. 63-177). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.
- Bruffee, K.A. (1999) *Collaborative learning: Higher education, interdependence, and the authority of knowledge*. 2nd Edition. Baltimore, MA: John Hopkins University.
- Cohen, W.W. (1994). Grammatically biased learning: Learning logic programs using an explicit antecedent description language in *Artif. Intell.* 68 (2), 303-366.
- Dickinson, L. (1987). *Self-instruction in language learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Fuchs, L., Fuchs, D., Hosp, M., & Jenkins, J. (2001). Oral reading fluency as an indicator of reading competence: A theoretical, empirical, and historical analysis. *Scientific Studies of Reading*, 5(3), 239-256
- Freeland, J. T., Skimmer, C., Jackson, B., McDaniel, E. C., & Smith, S. (2000). Measuring and increasing silent reading comprehension rates: Empirically validating a repeated reading intervention. *Psychology in the Schools*, 37, 415-429.
- Ginsburg-Block, M.D., Rohrbeck, C.A., & Fantuzzo, J.W. (2006). A meta-analytical review of social, self-concept and behavioural outcomes of peer-assisted learning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 98 (4), 937-947.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, F.P. (1987). *Learning together and alone: Cooperation, competition, and individualization*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R.T. (1992). Positive interdependence: Key to effective cooperation. Interaction in cooperative groups (pp. 174-199). In R. Hertz-Lazarowitz & N. Miller (Eds.) *Interaction in cooperative groups* (pp. 174-199). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, D.W., & Johnson, R.T. (1994). *Learning together and alone, cooperative, competitive, and individualistic learning*. Needham Heights, MA: Prentice-Hall.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R.T. (1999). 'Making cooperative learning work.' *Theory into practise*, 38, 67-74

- National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD). (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel (NIH Publication No. 00-4769)*. Washington, DC: U.S Government Printing Office.
- National reading panel (2000). *Report of the National Reading Panel*. Washington, DC: National Institute for child Health and Human Development.
- Roberts, T.S., (2006). *Self, peer and group assessment in e-learning*. London: Information Science Publishing.
- Samuels, S. J. (1979). The method of repeated reading. *The Reading Teacher*, 32, 403-408.
- Shinn, M. & Good III, R. (1992). Curriculum-based measurement of oral reading fluency: A confirmatory analysis of its relation to reading. *School Psychology Review*, 21(3), 1-21.
- Slavin, R.E. (1996). Research on cooperative learning and achievement: What we know, what we need to know. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 21, 43-69.
- Therrien, W. J. (2004). Fluency and comprehension gains as a result of repeated reading. *Remedial and Special Education*, 25, 252-261
- Topping, K. J. (2001). Paired reading with peers and parents: Factors in effectiveness and new developments. In C. Harrison & M. Coles (Eds.) *The reading for real handbook*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (pp. 170-185). London/New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Utley, C.A., & Mortweet, S. L. (1997). Peer – mediated instruction and interventions, *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 29 (5), 1-23.
- Wood, D. (2006). Modelling the relationship between oral reading fluency and performance on a statewide reading test. *Educational Assessment*, 11 (2), 85-104.
- Yurick, A. L., Robinson, P. D., Cartledge, G., Lo, Y., & Evans, T. L. (2006). Using peer-mediated repeated reading as a fluency-building activity for urban learners, *Education and Treatment of Children*, 29(3), 469- 506.

---

<sup>1</sup> As observed in the video data.

<sup>2</sup> To start with, I will say that I had never read aloud before, except for the exercise given to us by O. which we recorded in a MP3. In the first reading I thought I did pretty well, in the second T. and M. said I had improved a lot and the third was good. I think you can improve more if you correct errors right then and there.

<sup>3</sup> It has been very useful for me this task because I have learnt very much. Just listening to my colleagues helped me to enhance my own knowledge. As they were improving in their reading and after I saw my small corrections, they read more smoothly and fluently, pausing and giving even intonation. That has helped me because I have been able to notice and correct my mistakes by listening to them and even improve my pauses noticing them. Being able to make comments to my colleagues about their reading has given me more confidence, has cleared up some doubts and strengthened my knowledge. Even after seeing his progress after the second and third reading I found it very satisfying because I have seen that our comments have helped to improve this type of exercise where one strong reader can work with other starters, there is mutual aid. In short: To teach is to learn.

<sup>4</sup> It has served me well to read in English, at first it was a little difficult for me, but with the help of M., very well. I think it is a good idea to read it aloud and to hear the accent you have.

<sup>5</sup> I found it a very appropriate activity and it really helped me to improve understanding and to be fluent in expressing myself when talking.

<sup>6</sup> reading the text with my partner helped me realize how to pronounce some words I didn't know and especially to realize the pauses you have to do when you're reading even if there are no full stops or commas

**Annex:*****Symbols used in transcription***

• Speakers are anonymously named	ABC:
• Rising intonation	/
• Descending intonation	\
• Intonation maintained	—
• Short pause	(.)
• Medium pause	(..) more than half a second
• Long pause	(n° of sec.)
• Overlap	[text]
• Chained speech	=
• Interruptions	text-
• Previous turn is kept	>
• Intensity piano	°test°
• Intensity forte	TEXT
• Hasten tempo	>text<
• Slow tempo	<text>
• Statements delivered laughing	((laughing) test)
• Language alternation	play with bold and italics
• Phonetic approximation	+test+
• Incomprehensible fragments	xxx
• Doubtful fragments	(?text)

**Author references:**

**Gloria Tost** graduated from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in June 2012 with a master's degree in teaching in secondary schools, vocational training centres and language schools in the speciality of English. She also holds a degree in English literature from the same university, following on her emerging interest in English poetry and the English Language which began during secondary education at St. Dominic's College (Dublin, Ireland). She has taught elementary and intermediate English in the official School of Language, to adults and also taken part in teaching primary and secondary continued education. She presently teaches English in Les Dominiques de l'Ensenyament (Barcelona, Spain) to students between the ages of 14 and 18. Her research interests centre in the analysis of better English acquisition through literature, using narrative to optimise better oral production of English.

**Email:** [gloria\\_adhabell@ymail.com](mailto:gloria_adhabell@ymail.com)

**To cite this article**

Tost, G. (2013). Bettering Pronunciation through Reading Aloud and Peer Appraisal. *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature*, 6(1), 35-55.