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Teaching Pronunciation to Young Learners in an ELF Context
An Analysis of Pronunciation Activities in English Coursebooks for the Primary School

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Abstract This paper deals with the teaching of English pronunciation in the primary classroom. It starts from two major premises. First, the Lingua Franca status of English (ELF), which has prompted a shift in pronunciation teaching from the attainment of a native accent to the achievement of mutual intelligibility. Second, the features of today's primary classroom, which is *de facto* an ELF context, the school population being characterised by a growing number of multilingual pupils and of non-native teachers of English. Three English coursebooks for the primary school are analysed to investigate: 1) if and which pronunciation-focussed activities are suggested; 2) if and what support is provided to the primary teacher to make the most of the activities; 3) whether any of such activities/support show a trend towards an early inclusion of ELF-aware pronunciation pedagogy.

Keywords English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). English for Young Learners (EYL). Primary School. Pronunciation Pedagogy. English Language Teaching (ELT) Material Design. Multilingualism.

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1 Introduction

Over the last 20 years, one of the most significant educational reforms in many non-English-speaking countries across the world has been the introduction of the compulsory teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in publicly funded primary schools.[1] In most countries, the reform took place with the turn of the 21st century, fostered by the willingness to keep up with globalisation objectives and with the resulting need for a new educational policy for the future 'global citizen'. Given its long-lasting dominance at all levels of communication, and its undisputed status of 'global language' (Crystal 2003), English was automatically acknowledged as the means that would make it possible to cater for this need. Indeed, the knowledge of English was perceived as an asset, the gateway to international communication, social integration, professional development and personal success. Ultimately, as a life-changer (Rixon 2015). Such highly instrumental role of the English language not only encouraged the introduction of the teaching of English into the very initial stages of schooling, but also boosted the parents' demand for English instruction for their children from a very early age, including pre-school education.

The decision to introduce EFL teaching into mainstream primary school was not informed only by the homogenization policies of most educational systems around the world, but also by the increasingly shared recognition that "for young children learning another language has an educational value in itself" (Arnold, Rixon 2008, 39). Indeed, even though there may not be full agreement amongst scholars that 'younger-is-better' always means "easier and faster linguistic progress" (Tsukada et al. 2005), on the other hand, introducing a second language[2] in the child's linguistic experience by embedding foreign-language learning in the curriculum from the very start is in itself 'better', for the simple reason that it helps develop "an enthusiasm for learning languages, as well as [a change in] cultural perceptions about the centrality of languages to education" (Myles 2017, 4).

As a consequence of the introduction of EFL teaching into mainstream primary school, the first decades of the 21st century have seen the proliferation of English for Young Learners (EYL) materials and resources worldwide, both in print and online format (Lipińska 2017b). Yet, the speed at which the reform has been implemented "has often outpaced teacher education and the creation of suitable

1 In Italy, the teaching of EFL from the first year or primary school became compulsory with Legislative Decree 59/2004.

2 Although there is a distinction between 'second language' (L2) and 'foreign language' (FL), in this paper the terms are used interchangeably. As discussed herein, with reference to the English language the distinction between ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) is no longer clear cut.

materials that ideally should prepare the ground for such an innovation" (Arnold, Rixon 2008, 39).

The main issue concerning the 'suitability' of EYL materials and resources has to do with the fact that in most countries primary school teachers themselves – rather than language experts – are given the task of teaching English to young learners.[3] This brings about two major questions. The first one is a merely linguistic concern, that is, whether or not the level of English proficiency achieved by primary school teachers by the end of their Degree in Primary Education[4] is enough for them to teach the language and to manage a language class (Butler 2004). The second question relates to primary education itself, that is, whether or not primary school teachers receive adequate training in teaching English to young learners (YLs), which unquestionably implies acquiring the knowledge of the appropriate EYL methodology (Guerin 2018). Given that EYL class materials have to be first of all *child-friendly*, the repercussion of such concerns on EYL teacher resources is that these must be *teacher-friendly* by providing the appropriate support to boost non-language-experts' self-confidence and help them cope with the teaching of a second language in a child-friendly fashion. This means that such resources should take into account the needs of teachers whose command of the English language may be poor, and whose knowledge of the appropriate EYL methodology may be insufficient, or even lacking at all. In other words, EYL teacher resources should respond to the needs of teachers who are (still) inexperienced in the field, and therefore they should be "clearly written, comprehensive and full of teaching advice" (Arnold, Rixon 2008, 40), thus providing a (highly requested) "good informative teacher's guide" (Arnold, Rixon 2008, 46) for the very specific setting of primary education.

As for the linguistic competence, it seems reasonable to argue that pronunciation is one of the aspects primary education practitioners entrusted with the teaching of a foreign language should have good command of, as this will allow them to exploit the ease with which children can develop their pronunciation skills in a second language. Two features of pronunciation may be particularly relevant to the teaching of a second language to YLs. First, knowing how the articulation of sounds works (Roohani 2013). This can enable teachers to control their own pronunciation, and to produce clear input for children to make the most of their innate ability to easily learn

3 As for Italy, at the beginning language experts were entrusted with the teaching, but later on, in 2005, the task was passed on to regular primary school teachers in compliance with art. 1(128) of Financial Law 311/2004, which was designed to reduce public expenditure. For an overview of the Italian situation see Balboni 2012.

4 In Italy, the Degree in Primary Education is a 5-year single-cycle Master's Degree, at the end of which students are supposed to have achieved level B2 in English.

the ambient language(s) "with appropriate phonetic details" and to recognise "the articulatory properties of the speech around them" (Best 1994, 170-1). Indeed, it has been shown that "early exposure to an L2 can lead to more accurate speech perception and production in that L2 than late exposure" (Neri et al. 2008, 393). Secondly, being familiar with the notions of accent and language variation can make teachers aware of the new reality of the classroom context (Gallo 2022). This is increasingly characterised by a culturally and linguistically heterogeneous student population, which is posing new challenges to the teaching profession, and especially to the teaching of languages. Such awareness may help primary teachers cope not only with the number of languages other than the first language (L1) that they are likely to find in the classroom, but also with the wide range of accents that pupils may bring with themselves into the school setting.

Against this background, it follows that when it comes to teaching *English* to YLs in non-English-speaking countries, primary teacher education on the one hand and primary teacher materials and resources on the other hand should provide practitioners with all the support and scaffolding that is necessary to 1) consolidate the teacher's own pronunciation skill, 2) expand his/her knowledge of how to capitalise on children's capacity to develop their pronunciation skill with little effort, and, 3), help teachers face the challenge of teaching a *global lingua franca* which is no longer the 'monolithic ownership' of its native speakers, but rather, "an unstable, plurilithic, de-standardised language" (Grazzi 2021, 57) reflecting the impact of language contact in an increasingly mobile global community. In this latter regard, it must be said that, as Thomson and Derwing highlight:

> despite a move towards emphasizing speech intelligibility and comprehensibility, most research [in the field of pronunciation instruction] […] [has so far] promoted native-like pronunciation as the target. (2015, 326)

This is why, in the light of the global-language status of contemporary English, it seems worthwhile to explore not only if and what pronunciation support is provided by materials and resources for primary education, but also if such materials and resources do contribute to foster teachers' and learners' awareness of the 'flexible' features of English as the primary world lingua franca. These features do include pronunciation (Szpyra-Kozłowska 2015), which has now become a moving target (Newbold 2021), just like lexico-grammar features have (Ranta, 2022). Both EFL teachers and learners therefore need to develop an ear for the broad range of accents in the real world, which are no longer present only in out-of-class settings, but also in the classroom itself.

2 Children and L2 Pronunciation

Although it has been argued that:

> learning an L2 in childhood does not guarantee a nativelike perception of L2 vowels, nor does the establishment of a sound system for the L1 preclude a functionally nativelike perception of L2 vowels. (Flege, MacKay 2004, 1)

empirical research in the area of L2 pronunciation acquisition has shown that children are faster and most successful when it comes to acquiring L2 speech sounds (Lipińska, 2017a). Indeed, despite the impact that the exposure to their first language may have on their speech perception – an impact that becomes greater as time goes on (Kuhl et al. 1992)[5] – it seems that children can easily discriminate phonetic information, which results in the production of fairly accurate L2 sounds. The ease and success in the production of sounds is undoubtedly related to children's greater articulatory plasticity, which makes it easier for them to acquire new articulatory patterns (Giannakopoulou et al. 2013; Taimi et al. 2014). At the same time, compared to adults, children are better at identifying and discerning phonemes (Tsukada et al. 2005;) and "more likely to 'pick up' detailed information concerning the specification of L2 sounds" (Flege, 1995, 265), which helps them produce phones with a higher level of accuracy (e.g. Piske et al. 2002) and achieve a more native-like performance in pronunciation (e.g. Mackay et al.2001; Flege et al. 2003; Oh et al. 2011).

Most studies on the efficacy of second language pronunciation instruction have suggested that children are

> highly efficient and successful L2 *learners*, who can modify their pronunciation according to L2 phonetic information extracted from natural language exposure situations or from more *explicit training situations*. (Immonen, Peltola 2018, 28; emphasis added)

It must be remarked that research in this field has mainly focused on learning environments of immersion in the foreign language,[6] rather than on more traditional (and, in fact, more numerous) school settings, where children are taught the FL as a separate school subject

5 "At the beginning of life infants exhibit a similar pattern of phonetic perception regardless of the language environment in which they are born. They discern differences between the phonetic units of many different languages, including languages they have never heard" (Kuhn et al. 1992, 255).

6 Including reference to immigrant communities.

only from one to three hours a week on average,[7] and therefore have a much more limited exposure to the FL itself. For example, the significantly higher pronunciation accuracy in the production of RP vowel sounds achieved by the Finnish-speaking 'early-learner group' in Immonen and Peltola's study (2018) could be explained, according to the scholars, as the result of both the group's longer exposure to English (the group members having started to learn English at an earlier age compared to the Finnish-speaking control group), and of their having studied all the school subjects in English (the early-learner group members having attended immersion classes in English). Based on their findings, Immonen and Peltola conclude that not only the age of acquisition, but also "the manner of learning" (2018, 31) do have an impact on the attainment of L2 pronunciation. The results of this and of similar studies (e.g. Nixon, Tomlinson 2005; Lipińska 2017b; Szyszka 2018) seem to confirm that there are two major factors affecting the pronunciation quality attained by EFL learners. On the one hand, the age factor, for an early start guarantees a longer exposure to the L2. Indeed, irrespective of the debate on the actual extension of the Critical Period (Lenneberg 1967), there appears to be general consensus over the benefits of being exposed to L2 sounds as early as possible (Johnson, Newport 1989), orality being central in the teaching of an L2 to young learners (Canepari, Simionato 2012). On the other hand, a significant role is played also by the style and quality of the learning experience in the target language, which, as far as classroom instruction is concerned, does include, for example, the number of teaching hours, the type of activities performed during the L2 class, the type of instructional input, the actual opportunities of interaction in the L2 and, of course, the teaching materials and the aids and resources in the educational environment (Stukalina, 2010). We can then claim, to put it in Immonen and Peltola's words, that "children [..] [can] benefit from earlier L2 teaching in terms of pronunciation *even if* [..] provided only in separate L2 lessons" (2018, 32; emphasis added) and that "teaching phonetics to young learners is advisable and may be really effective" (Lipińska 2018, 97).

It goes without saying that there may be many further factors, besides age and learning environment, influencing the child's overall pronunciation performance in the L2. Variables can include, for example, differences in ear perception, individual phonological competence and/or memory, personality, attitude, motivation, social and cultural background, to mention but a few. However, given the proven ease with which children can 'absorb' and produce sounds, it seems worth focussing on the importance of exploiting the acknowledged

7 In Italian primary schools, English is taught one hour in the first year, two hours in the second year, and three hours from the third through to the fifth year.

benefits of early exposure to the L2 – English, in our case – in the school setting and, specifically, to explore the extent to which EYL resource materials do provide solid support, if any at all, for both teachers and young learners to make the most of such benefits.

3 The Teaching of English Pronunciation

Interest in L2 pronunciation instruction has fluctuated over the years, depending on the prevailing theories in the field of L2 teaching, with peaks between the 50s and the 60s, during the heyday of the audiolingual method, and dips between the 60s and the 70s, as a result of the influence of the cognitive approach. Since the introduction of communication-oriented approaches (Hymes 1972) in the 70s/early 80s, phonetics and phonology have been brought back into the language classroom. Communicative Language teaching (CLT) methods and curricula acknowledge "the key role of pronunciation in improving the learner's oral skills, and in contributing to ensuring the success of oral communication" (Busà 2008, 166).

For it seems undeniable that in order to communicate successfully in a target language, learners need to acquire intelligible pronunciation in that language, which will allow them to convey the intended message (Lipińska, 2017b). Since then, pronunciation has been regarded as a key feature in overall oral communication skills, as "[w]ithout adequate pronunciation skills language learners might be misunderstood in communicative situations" (Peltola et al. 2014, 86). Indeed, the occurrences of communicative situations requiring the use of a second language, especially English, have dramatically increased as a result of people's growing mobility. Neri et al. maintain that because

> the number of professionals who regularly communicate in a foreign language for their work has increased with globalization, in order to ensure that these learners are able to efficiently communicate in the L2, it is imperative that language teaching methods include pronunciation training. (Neri et al. 2002, 442)

As already remarked, the lingua franca used in the vast majority of these communicative situations in the globalized community is English. Which is why not only are good pronunciation skills in English of paramount importance today, but, since such skills are meant to assure *successful* oral communication with both native and (far more frequently) non-native speakers of English, they have to enable EFL learners to become "internationally intelligible" (Reed 2012). As a consequence, while in the past the main (if not the only) goal of English pronunciation teaching was the eradication of the learn-

er's foreign accent and the achievement of a native-like one (usually either General British or General American), today there seems to be greater awareness of the need to shift the focus of pronunciation instruction towards the attainment of intelligible – rather than native-like – speech as an essential component of communicative competence (Levis 2005; Busà 2008; 2021; Newbold 2021). In this vein, ELF research on pronunciation (e.g. Jenkins 2000; 2002; 2005; Seidlhofer 2004; Pickering 2006; Walker 2010) has long been advocating that "English pronunciation teaching should be based on English as an international language and the style of the language as it is utilized internationally" (Hismanoglu, Hismanoglu 2013, 507).

Yet, the awareness of the need for this shift may not be supported by adequate training and resources for English-language teachers (native and non-native alike) to turn it into 'concrete' ELF-oriented pronunciation instruction in the classroom, as this paper seeks to investigate.

Indeed, despite the recent growing interest in pronunciation and pronunciation skill, "the results obtained from various studies are surprisingly seldom applied in practice" (Lipińska, 2018, 98). The teaching of English pronunciation appears to be not only still heavily informed by notions of 'standardness' and 'nativespeakerism' (Grazzi 2014; Newbold 2017), with no consideration, in fact, of the findings provided by ELF research, but even largely ignored (Kelly 2000) or marginalised (Levis 2005), especially at education levels lower than university (e.g. Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2008; Coates et al. 2017; Kralova, Kucerka 2019). Several studies[8] have shown that one of the problems related to the lack of interest in pronunciation development is that non-native EFL teachers often have a very low phonetic competence, which leads them to neglect both pronunciation instruction *per se* and the correction of their learners' errors in this area, with obvious repercussions on the development of the learner's own pronunciation skill (Petsy 2022). The question arises as to why many EFL teachers – "who (theoretically) should speak […][English]fluently as they serve as models for their students […] with regard to pronunciation" (Lipińska, 2018, 98) – show such a low phonetic competence, which is accompanied by a profound unwillingness to include pronunciation in their syllabus (Petsy 2022). The reasons may be manifold, but it appears appropriate to believe that these may include two major factors, namely the inadequacy of both teacher education programs (Derwing 2010), and of the materials and resources upon which teachers can rely. Yet, research in the field (e.g. Derwing, Rossiter 2003; Derwing, Munro 2005; Lord 2005; Couper 2006; 2011) has revealed that L2 pronunciation skills can be fostered by explicit pronunciation teaching and training, and that, as Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu (2013, 508) highlight, there is "a

8 For an overview, see Henderson et al. 2012.

significant relationship between formal instruction and L2 learners' pronunciation improvement". Likewise, Thomson and Derwing's (2015) analysis of 75 studies on the effectiveness of L2 pronunciation instruction has allowed them to conclude that "explicit instruction of phonological forms can have a significant impact, likely because it orients learners' attention to phonetic information, which promotes learning in a way that naturalistic input does not" (Thomson, Derwing 2015, 339). Therefore, exploring the factors that may lead teachers to neglect pronunciation instruction appears to be more than advisable. This is especially worthwhile when the underestimation of the importance of pronunciation teaching prevents the exploitation of the benefits connected to an early exposure to the L2 sounds.

4 Teaching English at Primary School

As already remarked, in most non-English-speaking countries all over the world the teaching of English is now compulsory from the very first year of primary school. In publicly funded primary education institutes, EFL instruction is provided by non-native primary school teachers, who may be teaching English alongside one or more further subjects, like Maths, History, Geography, etc. It goes without saying that primary school teachers specialise in teaching YLs, and that they are supposed to know the subject-specific methodologies which are mostly suitable for teaching children, even though they are not specialists in any of the subjects they teach, including English. Yet, it appears that English is the subject teachers are mostly worried about. They often claim they do not feel confident enough to teach it (Reid 2014b), and they would prefer "English to be taught to their pupils by another (qualified) person" (Petsy 2022, 225). This is even more so when it comes to English *pronunciation*, which seems to be a widespread matter of concern (e.g. Hismanoglu and Hismanoglu 2013; Petsy 2022). One may wonder why primary school teachers are far more worried about teaching English than they are about teaching any other subject, considering that English is one of the disciplines included in all Primary Education curricula, just like Maths, History, Geography, etc. As already highlighted, this 'fear of English' may be the result of insufficient or inadequate teacher training in English teaching during the degree, although the reasons are more likely to be rooted in the kind of English instruction primary teachers themselves received as students before entering university. This goes beyond the specific aim of the present paper, though it is strictly related to it, as the repercussions of university students' persisting low

proficiency in English despite high-school English instruction[9] cannot be ignored when it comes to degrees that will officially qualify students for the teaching English. In Italy, for example, according to the already mentioned Italian law (Financial Law 311/2004), graduates in Primary Education are officially the only ones who can teach English in publicly funded primary schools, while language specialists are (paradoxically) *non abilitati*.[10] This is quite common in most non-English-speaking countries, which is why it seems reasonable to reflect on what one can objectively expect from primary teachers when it comes to teaching English (Petsy 2022), and to focus on whether – and possibly how – non-native primary teachers are supported in their role of English instructors, especially with regard to pronunciation, a widely neglected area. An exploration of this issue could shed light on any possible weaknesses of primary education curricula and training in EFL, and on any possible flaws of ELT (English Language Teaching) materials and resources for YLs and YLs' teachers alike. In this regard, it seems important to highlight the fact that as non-specialists in English and ELT, primary school teachers may understandably not be aware of the enormous changes that the English language is undergoing as a result of its being a global lingua franca. However, this is an aspect that can no longer be ignored by those who are involved in the teaching of English at any level. The awareness that the student population has been changing also in Expanding-Circle countries (Kachru 1982) – like Italy, for example – is a must for all stakeholders in the educational field, especially with reference to the teaching and learning of languages, and of English in particular (Santipolo 2012). At all levels of education, even starting from pre-school, classes are no longer L1-monolingual. Rather, they have become real ELF settings (Lopriore 2014), where English is much more than a mere school subject, and should no longer be compared to any other discipline, not even if the 'other discipline' is a language other than English itself.

5 Pronunciation in English Textbooks for the Primary Classroom

The ELT market offers a wealth of materials (coursebooks, grammar books, dictionaries, pedagogical guides, and the like) for national and international EFL teachers and learners, available both in print format and as online resources. Most EFL materials generally include phonetic/phonological instruction and offer opportunities to practise

9 Thirteen years in Italy.

10 Not qualified.

pronunciation. This is especially true with online resources (Agarwal, Chakraborty 2019), where teachers and learners alike can find lots of interactive ways to reinforce – in class or through self-study at home – both speech perception and production.

Over the last decades there has been an extraordinary increase in the provision of EYL materials worldwide, including an overwhelming growth of English language textbooks (Reid, Kavacikova 2017). It goes without saying that the approach to the teaching of phonetics and phonology needs to be appropriately adapted when it comes to teaching young learners (Komorowska 2016; Reid 2016), and that primary school teachers, as non-language-experts, need 'special' guidelines and practical recommendations to deal with pronunciation instruction. As is known, the most popular activities proposed in EYL coursebooks are songs and rhymes (Ghanbari, Hashemian 2014). These are deemed particularly useful to teach pronunciation. Indeed, as Davis maintains:

> pedagogical materials have long promoted songs and rhymes as effective for improving learners' pronunciation of both individual speech sounds and supporting the acquisition of stress and intonation patterns. (2017, 451)

Further techniques proposed by EYL textbooks to teach pronunciation to YLs typically include "copious repetition and drilling" (Arnold, Rixon 2008, 42), ear training – for example minimal pairs and listening tasks (Reid 2014b; Kralova, Kucerka 2019) – chants, and tongue twisters (Gonzáles 2009). The above-mentioned activities are usually supported by native speakers' recordings provided with the teacher's pack. In order to avoid taking risks (Medgyes 1992), most teachers tend to exclusively rely on these recordings as a model of pronunciation for their pupils, without focussing on any specific features of phonetics. It seems undeniable, however, that the teacher's good command of pronunciation, and his/her confidence in their own pronunciation skill, could be an added value to the class. Through his/her direct involvement in the teaching of pronunciation, the teacher would have the chance to *actively* (and interactively) guide and monitor the pupils' communicative performance, thus enhancing the learning process. Moreover, confidence in his/her pronunciation skill would allow the teacher to exploit further activities that may be used in the classroom to provide abundant exposure to pronunciation, at the same time facilitating natural and unconscious acquisition of L2 sounds. One such activity, for example, is storytelling (Masoni 2019) and the related use of 'real books'[11] (Arnold, Rixon 2008), which, how-

11 "Authentic picture storybooks not originally written for teaching purposes" (Arnold, Rixon 2008, 52).

ever, do not seem to be included or suggested in EYL class coursebooks as often as songs, rhymes, drilling and repetition tasks. Neither are storytelling and 'real books' usually employed spontaneously by teachers themselves (Garton et al. 2011), independently from the coursebook suggestions. We may well assume that one of the reasons why teachers are reluctant to use these activities could be their feeling insecure about their own pronunciation.

To the author's knowledge, scant research has been conducted so far to investigate whether EYL materials do *in fact* provide support for the teaching of English pronunciation to young learners. In particular, a very limited number of studies (e.g. Tergujeff 2013; Panezai, Channa 2017; Soradova et al. 2018; Kralova, Kucerka 2019) have explicitly explored if and how pronunciation instruction is provided in English textbooks for the primary classroom, and even fewer have investigated into the provision of ELF-oriented activities in EYL textbooks for the primary classroom (Nikolov et al. 2008; Zoletto 2016). What is more, no studies have specifically focussed on the presence of ELF-oriented pronunciation instruction in the primary classroom textbook, a gap that the present paper aims to bring to the fore.

Empirical research on the nature of the pronunciation activities provided in EYL textbooks seems to be worthwhile, given that the vast majority of non-language-specialist primary school teachers still largely (and sometimes only) rely on the textbook for their EFL classes (Derwing, Munro 2005). Research in this field could help shed light on the extent to which pronunciation support, if provided, may not only allow teachers to reinforce self-confidence in their own pronunciation skills as non-native speakers, but also an awareness of the repercussions of ELF on the teaching of English pronunciation itself. In turn, this would provide them with the knowledge they need to make informed choices about how to *actively* use YL pronunciation resources in a variety of ways, including the implementation of ELF-oriented activities. Indeed, it appears that the rationales behind both the design and the use of EYL coursebooks can be traced to "common practice in general primary education" (Arnold, Rixon 2008, 40) rather than to a research-informed plan designed to respond to the needs of inexperienced EYL teachers facing the additional challenge of teaching a *global* language (Copland et al. 2014). Indeed, as already remarked, it can no longer be ignored that the primary school classroom today has become a multilingual and multicultural setting (Reid 2014a; Papadopoulos, Papadopoulos 2021) also in the so-called 'Expanding-Circle' countries, like Italy, with more and more young learners bringing with themselves their own multilingual identities (Forbes, Rutgers 2021). In such a context, English increasingly functions a shared pedagogical lingua franca (PLF) for learner-to-teacher and peer-to-peer communication (Kohn 2020).

6 Analysis of Three English Coursebooks

To empirically explore the issues addressed in the previous sections, this paper reports on the analysis of the pronunciation activities and materials proposed by three English coursebooks designed for the primary school market. The analysed textbooks are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Analysed Coursebooks.

Title	Authors	Levels	Year	Publisher
The Story Garden (printed Student's Book and Teacher's Book)	Bertarini, M.G.; Huber, M.	1,2	2021	Eli
I like English (printed Student's Book and Teacher's Book)	Testa, C.; Testa, B.; Jones C.	1,2	2019	Giunti ELT
Go! (printed Student's Book and Teacher's Book)	Foster, F.; Brown, B.; Spatara, V.	1,2	2018	LANG Pearson Italia

The three textbooks taken into account were chosen based on the fact that they are commonly used in Italian primary schools. Levels 1 and 2 were chosen to see whether and how pronunciation instruction is provided from the very first years of primary school. The books were analysed with the following research questions in mind:

Q1. What pronunciation-focussed activities are proposed, and based on what model accent?

Q2. How are primary school teachers guided and supported to make the most of the pronunciation activities?

Q3. Do any of the proposed activities show a trend towards an early inclusion of ELF-aware pronunciation pedagogy?

6.1 *The Story Garden*

Q1. Pronunciation-focussed activities

Level 1. Listening activities based on the choral drill and repetition of single words ('Listen and say'; 'Listen, mime and say') or phrases/simple sentences in mini dialogues ('Listen and play'); songs and chants, sometimes in the karaoke version ('Listen and sing'); speech reception ('Listen and find'; 'Listen and circle/trace'; 'Listen and check'; 'Listen and match'; 'Listen and colour'), and the acting out of traditional fairy tales like *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Hansel and Gretel*, etc. ('Listen to the story' followed by 'Act out the story'). In the Workbook section, there are no pronunciation activities. Instead, all the activities are based on the recognition of the right spelling of single words.

Level 2. The same activities as those proposed in Level 1, with further speech reception tasks ('Listen and tick'; 'Listen and draw'; 'Listen and point'). In each of the 6 units, there is a section entitled *The Sound Game*. In each section, the focus is on one single sound (respectively, from Unit 1 to Unit 6, [d], [h], [m], [b], final [ə], [ʃ]) and the phone/grapheme correspondence (respectively <d>, <h>, <m>, <b>, final <er>, <sh>). Like Level 1, there are no pronunciation activities in the Workbook section.

It may be interesting to notice that in neither Level the *Contents* page includes a pronunciation section, but only *Main Vocabulary*, *Main Structures*, *Special Pages*. Likewise, no pronunciation features are present as a specific focus within these three main sections. Therefore, from the *Contents* page it would appear that pronunciation is not the object of any specific teaching, but is, instead, embedded in the teaching of vocabulary and structures.

Q2. Pronunciation guidance and support for teachers

Levels 1 and 2. As explained in the *Introduction* to all Teacher's Books (ITB), this is "supplied with 1 Audio CD which contains all the recordings of the listening texts, songs, and chants. The audio texts are all recorded by native English speakers and the songs are sung by English-speaking pupils" (ITB, 7). In this regard, it is worth noticing that the authors deem it important to highlight the fact that the audio material is all recorded by *native* English speakers.

In the section *Educational Objectives at the end of year 3*, teachers are reminded that at the end of year 3, pupils are supposed to know the "correct pronunciation of common words and phrases learnt", and to be able to "understand expressions and sentences pronounced slowly and correctly about self, friends and family" (ITB, 11). No clarification of what is meant by 'correct' pronunciation is provided. In the section *Educational Objectives at the End of Year 6,* we still read about "correct pronunciation" (ITB, 12), and with reference to the acquired skills, teachers are reminded that pupils should be able to "interact in a comprehensible way" (ITB, 12), although, again, no explanation is provided about what interacting in a 'comprehensible' way concretely means. Since, as said, all the listening activities are supported by recordings made by English native speakers, one might reasonably conclude that both 'correct' and 'comprehensible' mean 'corresponding to the model provided through the Audio CD', that is, Standard British English. Still concerning the skills, among these there is explicit reference to the fact that at the end of year 6, pupils are supposed to be able to "distinguish between pairs of words with similar sounds" (ITB, 12). It is not clear whether these words 'with similar sounds' are, in fact, meant to be minimal pairs, since the examples provided in *The Sound Game* section, for example, are not usually examples of minimal pairs.

With reference to the cartoon stories, the book authors remark that the stories are fairy tales "well-known in many countries, with very few variations, so that they can be recognised by pupils from all over the world". (ITB, 9)

Teachers are instructed to "tell the story to the pupils in the original version (in L1) before diving into the retelling of the stories presented in each unit" (ITB, 10).

In the section *How to Get the Most Out of the Cartoon Stories*, it is suggested that teachers should not translate the story from English into the pupil's L1. Rather, the authors say:

> Translation takes place from the English language to the 'acting out' combined with English sounds. People learn the meaning of what they hear and see written down […] by assimilating the sentences and sounds association withing a particular communicative context. (ITB, 15)

A three-phase procedure is recommended, which includes listening to and watching the video, acting out the story, going back to the text to learn the written form. This latter phase seems to encourage teachers to use phonics – and the association between graphemes and sounds – from the very early stages of English teaching at primary school, rather than letting children focus on the target L2 sound independently of the grapheme. About the acting out phase, the teach-

er is instructed to ask pupils to 'repeat the dialogues', and to monitor whether a repetition or modelling of the lines is necessary. No instruction is given, however, on if and what pronunciation criteria the teacher should use to make decisions about the need to repeat or model the lines. Later on, the teacher is asked to let pupils decide whether they want to

> say all the lines of the characters, changing their voices as appropriate (choral reading) or each pupil can choose a character to voice (selective reading) […] assum[ing] the appropriate intonation. (ITB, 15)

Again, it seems that by encouraging 'reading' the focus is more on the visual rather than on the aural recognition of words. Moreover, one would infer that the intonation of the acted-out lines should be the imitation of the one heard from the CD (that is, the native speaker's intonation). Indirect reference to the imitation of the provided native speaker model is made through the suggestion of asking pupils to "learn the story by heart and act it out for the class" (ITB, 15).

As for the use of songs and chants, in the dedicated section (ITB, 14) there is no mention of nor comment on the connection between songs and pronunciation, and of how songs can foster the consolidation of children's natural ability to absorb and to discriminate sounds.

With regard to *The Sound Game* section which is present in all units from Level 2 onwards, the *Introduction* to all Teacher's Books describes it as a "phonetic section", and precisely as "a collection of phonetic activities and exercises with phonemes and common sounds in the English language" (ITB, 18). The authors say that

> the consonants p, d, h, n, t, d, j, s, sh, the monophthongs and diphthongs are presented in minimal pairs through games and tongue twisters, allowing pupils to imitate and then to consciously internalise the L2 sounds. Particular attention is given to sounds which are difficult to tell apart for pupils with different L1s and SEN pupils. (ITB, 18)

The information provided in the *Introduction*, however, may not be precise and clear enough to be useful for non-language specialists. Firstly, no information and/or support is provided to the primary school teacher about the basics of phonetics and phonology, like the difference between phonemes, phones and graphemes, the notions of monophthongs, diphthongs, and minimal pairs.[12] Secondly, it seems

12 Primary teachers may already be familiar with these notions as teachers of the L1, too. However, a further explanation and specific examples in the L2 could be helpful,

questionable to state that through imitation pupils internalise L2 sounds 'consciously'. Thirdly, one may wonder which sounds are 'difficult' to tell apart, and based on what criteria *The Sound Game* sections in each unit have selected some specific sounds and not others. In this regard, an ELF-oriented perspective would probably directly or indirectly refer to Jenkins' *Lingua Franca Core* (LFC, Jenkins 2000), of which there is no mention anywhere in the Teacher's Books.

All in all it seems that *The Story Garden* acknowledges the importance of learning sounds, pronunciation and intonation. However, the only support provided to the teacher is the recordings from the Audio CD, where the proposed model is exclusively that of Standard British English. The teacher is left out as an agent and model of pronunciation instruction. For this passive role, he/she does not seem to need any support other than ready-to-use material. Indeed, a non-language-specialist teacher would not know *what* to monitor, *how* to monitor, and *when* to possibly adjust the pupil's performance in the production of the L2 sounds.

Q3. Inclusion of ELF-aware pronunciation pedagogy

Levels 1 and 2. In the *Introduction* to all Teacher's Books, we read that

> the English language represents the wings which enable us to encounter and discover what is new in academic, scientific, artistic and social spheres. Not providing roots for our pupils is depriving them of a safe haven, clipping their wings and stopping them from realising their dreams and ambitions. (ITB, 9)

In this regard, teachers are reminded that one of the aims of the coursebook is to help young learners become "above all proficient in communicating in English and become a citizen of the world" (ITB, 15). About the *Living English* section which is present in each unit, the authors claim that:

> the English language isn't only a game, fantasy or school activity, but a world language that other children use to express and share their daily lives, feelings and themselves. The English language crosses the borders of the school and becomes an instrument to communicate and make friends with the world. (ITB, 17)

especially for those instructors who feel insecure about their own English pronunciation and find it difficult to apply the same concepts to a language other than their L1.

In the instructions referring to the *Welcome Unit* of Level 1, the *Letter to Parents* states that "English is no longer the language". At the same time, however, the authors remark how the *Living English* section is: "a starting point to learn about British traditions" while showing at the same time "how important and incredible it is […] to become a citizen of the world", which, the authors continue, "can only happen through English, shared throughout the world" (ITB, 17).

Altogether, in *The Story Garden* English is acknowledged as the gatekeeper to personal and professional success, in that it is the language that connects the whole world by bringing people from different cultures and ethnicities together. Nevertheless, no explicit reference to the findings of ELF research is made, neither in general terms nor with regard to pronunciation issues in particular. In fact, English is still presented as the language of native speakers, in particular of British native speakers, whose pronunciation is still proposed as *the* model to drill, imitate, and 'learn by heart', so much so that the all the audio material is markedly presented as "recorded by native English speakers". One may come to the conclusion that it is the English of the British that provides pupils with the 'wings' they need to realise their dreams. Indeed, the teacher cannot find in *The Story Garden* any hints the repercussions of ELF on the language as such and on the goals of English teaching. Evidence to this is that no ELF-oriented activities are proposed for the teaching of English pronunciation, for example the inclusion of listening material produced by speakers of non-native varieties and accents.

6.2 *I like English*

Q1. Pronunciation-focussed activities

Level 1. Listening activities based on the choral drill and repetition of single words ('Listen and repeat'); songs (also in the karaoke version) and rhymes ('Song time. Sing'; 'Rhyme time. Repeat'); speech reception ('Look and listen'; 'Listen and colour'; 'Listen and point'; 'Listen and match', 'Listen and check'; 'Listen and do'; 'Listen and tick'; 'Watch the video'); speech production ('Act out the story'; 'Colour and say'). In the Workbook section there are some pronunciation activities, and the instructions for pupils are in Italian ('Join the dots and say the name of the object', '*Unisci i puntini e dì il nome degli oggetti'*; 'Colour in and say the name of the colour. Then listen and check', *'Colora e dì il colore. Poi ascolta e controlla'*; 'Follow the instructions. Listen and check', '*Segui le istruzioni. Ascolta e controlla').*

Level 2. The same activities as those proposed in Level 1. Repetition is extended to phrases and sentences in mini dialogues, with the sup-

port of the written word ('Listen and read'). From Level 2, each Unit includes a *Sound* section. This focuses each time on a sound (respectively, from Unit 1 to Unit 6, [h], [w], [k], [dʒ], [j], [ks]) and the correspondence between phone and grapheme (respectively <h>, <w>, <k>, <j>, <y>, <x>), the latter aspect being the actual focal point of the activity. Pronunciation activities in the Workbook section are the same as in Level 1, although fewer in number.

The *Contents* page of both Levels does not include a pronunciation section, but only *Vocabulary*, *Structures*, and *Star bene a scuola*, nor is any pronunciation feature present as a specific focus within the main sections. However, a pronunciation section appears in the Teachers' Book of Level 2, which is the level from which each unit has the *Sound* space mentioned above.

Q2. Pronunciation guidance and support for teachers

Levels 1 and 2. Both Teacher's Books are written in Italian. A considerable number of pages in the Teacher's Book of Level 1 (TB1) are devoted to a comprehensive presentation of the coursebook, which includes the discussion of a remarkably wide range of issues, strategies and methodologies related to teaching primary school learners. Yet very little is said about pronunciation. There is a small section entitled *Phonetics, songs and rhymes* in which the authors highlight that all the listening texts presented in the Student's Book and available on an Audio CD are recorded by native speakers "to allow learners to implement the quality of pronunciation and intonation" (TB1, 7; '*per consentire agli alunni di implementare la qualità della pronuncia e dell'intonazione*'). Apart from the unclear meaning of the unusual collocation 'implement the quality of pronunciation and intonation', we can notice the authors' concern to reassure teachers about the quality of the pronunciation and intonation model provided, here, again, the Standard British accent. In another small section devoted to pronunciation entitled *LS e insegnamento del lessico e della pronuncia* (*Foreign Language and the teaching of vocabulary and pronunciation*), the authors state that the correctness of pronunciation should never restrain learners from learning and communicating in the L2 (TB1, 72). At the same time, they claim that the plasticity of children's speech and auditory organs makes pupils naturally inclined to hear and reproduce sounds with little or no effort, which is why the provision of a 'negative model' (*modello negativo*) may negatively affect the learning of pronunciation by consolidating wrong phonetic habits that will be difficult to correct or remove in the future. Since the teacher is supposed to provide a model, he/she is therefore encouraged to achieve an "appropriate phonetic-phonological competence" ('*competenza fonetico-fonologia appropriata*')

in terms of "sound combination and linking, word pronunciation and stress, rhythm, weak forms, accent and sentence stress and intonation" (TB1, 72; '*combinazione e collegamento dei suoni; pronuncia e accento delle singole parole; ritmo, forme deboli, accento e intonazione della frase*'). In this regard, besides there being no clarification on what is meant exactly by 'appropriate competence', the only suggestion given to those teachers who "are aware of not having such competence yet" (TB1, 72; '*che avessero la consapevolezza di non averla ancora acquisita*')is to rely as much as possible on the audio material provided by the coursebook. Again, the presupposition is that the Standard British model proposed through the audio materials is *the* English that pupils need to be exposed to. Moreover, no criteria are provided for the teacher to measure his/her competence, neither against which yardsticks.

In the instructions referring to the *Welcome Unit* of Level 1, it is suggested that the teacher should assess the pupils' pre-knowledge of English vocabulary by asking them if they already know some words in English. In this regard, the teacher is instructed to "accept approximate pronunciation of the words" (TB1, 93, '*accettate che le pronuncino con approssimazione*'), and then to "repeat the words with the correct pronunciation, prompting a choral drill afterwards" ('*ripetetele in maniera corretta sollecitando l'intera classe a fare altrettanto*'). Again, no clarification is given on what is meant by 'approximate pronunciation', neither on how the teacher should assess 'approximate' against 'correct' pronunciation.

Finally, in the instructions referring to the *Sound* section of each Unit in Level 2, the Teacher's Book explains that the section is aimed at helping pupils "gain command of the phonic-acoustic features of English" ('*appropriarsi degli aspetti fonico-acustici della lingua inglese*') by "focussing on some distinctive sounds pupils have already had the chance to hear"('*focalizz[ando] l'attenzione su alcuni suoni caratteristici che hanno già avuto modo di ascoltare*') while performing the Unit tasks (TB2, 31, 41, 51, 71, 81). The teacher is instructed to let pupils hear the sound again and again and to get them to repeat it "as precisely as they can" (TB2, 41; '*nella maniera più precisa possibile*'). No help is given to the teacher with regard to the articulation of the sound – which may support him/her when monitoring the level of 'preciseness' of the child's performance. Neither is the teacher informed about which sounds are in fact 'distinctive' of the English language. Of the ones presented in Level 2, for example, one may wonder whether [w], [k], [dʒ], [j] can be considered 'distinctive' sounds of English.[13]

13 These sounds are present also in the Italian language and their articulation is not different from the English sounds.

Q3. Inclusion of ELF-aware pronunciation pedagogy

High emphasis is placed on the importance of English, a language whose learning is presented as fundamental, given its "highly educational value" (TB1, 63; '*spiccata valenza educativa*'). At the same time the authors quote the remark made in the Italian National Guidelines (2012)[14] about the relevance of plurilinguistic and intercultural competence to the linguistic, cognitive and social development of pupils. Indeed, expressions such as 'intercultural' and 'multilingual and multicultural competence' are used quite often throughout the Teacher's Books, including a further reference to a remark made in the Italian National Guidelines about the relevance of raising awareness of the linguistic repertoire of each pupil to "the development of a plurilingual and intercultural education" (TB1, 63-4; '*al fine dell'educazione plurilingue e interculturale*'). At the same time, however, just like in *The Story Garden*, no explicit reference to the findings of ELF research is made, neither in general terms nor with regard to pronunciation issues in particular, for example by providing information about the already mentioned LFC. Again, English is presented as the language of native speakers, in particular of British native speakers, whose pronunciation is still proposed as the only model for the teacher to rely on, and for pupils to imitate. Indeed, there is no mention of ELF and of its repercussions on the teaching of English, including the teaching of its pronunciation. As with *The Story Garden*, no ELF-oriented activities are proposed for the teaching of pronunciation, which may have suggested the use of listening material produced by speakers of non-native varieties and accents, or instructions for the teacher to exploit the linguistic repertoires of multilingual pupils, including any varieties of World-Englishes they may be used to and that they may wish to adopt also in the classroom.

6.3 *Go!*

Q1. Pronunciation-focussed activities

Level 1. Listening activities based on songs ('Listen and sing') and rhymes ('Listen and repeat the rhyme'); choral drill and repetition of single words ('Listen, point and repeat'; 'Listen and repeat'); speech reception ('Listen and number'; 'Listen and point'; 'Listen and colour'; 'Listen and draw'; 'Listen and connect'; 'Listen and circle'; 'Listen and check'); speech production ('Show and say'; 'Colour and say";

14 Available at: https://www.miur.gov.it/documents/20182/51310/DM+254_2012.pdf/1f967360-0ca6-48fb-95e9-c15d49f18831?version=1.0&t=1480418494262.

'Listen and say'; 'Trace and say', 'Point and say'). In the Workbook section there are very few activities. Some of them include speech production and the instructions for pupils are in Italian ('Colour, point and say the colour', '*Colora, indica e dì il colore';* 'Join the dots and say the word'*, 'Traccia e dí il nome*'; 'Listen and repeat the rhyme'*, 'Ascolta e ripeti la filastrocca*'). The Teacher's Book is provided with further worksheets. Again, the instructions are in Italian, and only a small part of the activities involve listening or speaking.

Level 2. The same activities as in level 1. Further activities involving speech production beyond the word level ('Listen and answer', '*Ascolta e rispondi*'), based on mini-dialogue patterns ('What's your name/surname? My name/surname is…'; 'How are you today? I'm…'; 'What's your favourite colour? My favourite colour is…'; 'Is it a …? Yes, it is – No, it isn't; 'Are they…? Yes, they are – No, they aren't'; 'Have you got a …? Yes, I have – no, I haven't'; 'How old are you? I'm…') and further speech reception activities involving short phrases and/or simple sentences ('Tick the right sentences. Listen and check'), listening to stories ('Listen and follow along') and True/False tasks ('Listen and colour T for True and F for False'). As for the Workbook, the features are the same as for Level 1.

Q2. Pronunciation guidance and support for teachers

Level 1. Instructions to the teacher are provided in Italian. In the Teacher's Book (TB1, X), amongst the learning objectives to be achieved at the end of year 3 and 5 respectively we read that with reference to the listening skill the pupil will be able to understand words, instructions, expressions and everyday simple language 'pronounced clearly and slowly' ('*pronunciati chiaramente e lentamente*'), the adverb 'slowly' being no longer present in the objectives for the 5th year. No specific explanation is given about the actual meaning of 'clearly', so that one may well assume it refers to the relevance of achieving intelligibility rather than native-likeness.

The coursebook is provided with supplementary materials for the teacher, namely 4 booklets, and *Pearson Primary Photocards*. As for the booklets, one is entitled *Songs and more – rhymes, songs and phonetics for children*. This is said to present songs, rhymes and phonetics together, which will allow pupils

> to familiarise with the sounds of the English language in a cheerful learning environment and to memorise words and simple sentences in a playful way". (TB1-2, XIII; '*familiarizzare con i suoni della lingua inglese in un contesto giocoso e divertente e di memorizzare parole e frasi in modo ludico*')

Indeed, the booklet is a praiseworthy attempt to provide some support to the teacher who may be struggling with pronunciation instruction. The sounds covered in the booklet are [ɪ] vs [iː]; [s] vs [z]; [ʌ] vs [æ]; [əʊ] vs [ɛ]; [aʊ] vs [ɒ]; [tʃ] vs [ʃ]; [f] vs [θ], although there is no explanation for the teacher of the reasons why these particular sounds were chosen. A look at the content of the booklet will show that some of the pieces of information therein is not precise, sometimes even wrong. For example, on page 3, there is a nice minimal-pair activity to help pupils discriminate between the sounds [ɪ] and [iː]. Yet, the sound [ɪ] is presented as corresponding to the phoneme /ɪ/, which of course could be confusing and misleading for the non-language-specialist primary teacher. The information in the phonics section is not always correct/precise either. For example, still referring to the [ɪ] vs [iː] case, the second sound is said to correspond to the grapheme <ee> or <ea>, which, again, is incomplete and could be misleading, as we may have other graphemes corresponding to this sound (for instance <ie> or <ei>, as in 'piece' and 'ceiling') and, vice-versa, the graphemes <ea> may correspond to other sounds (for instance, [ɛ], as in 'bread'). Interestingly, the book also offers some tips about articulatory phonetics that teachers can exploit both to improve their own pronunciation and to show pupils how to produce the target sound. Here again, however, we find some incorrect information. For example, instructions for the articulation of the sound [ɒ] claim that the tip of the tongue will touch the lips, that the sound [ɒ] is long, and that it is similar to the Italian <o> in the word '*rosso*'.

As for the *Pearson Primary Photocards*, these are presented as useful cards suggesting a number of questions (each of which is marked with 1 to 3 stars depending on the level of difficulty) that the teacher can use to interact with the children in the classroom. Some of the suggested questions have to do with pronunciation, but many of them are not clearly/correctly worded. For example, one two-star question reads 'What is the sound of the word grey?' to elicit the answer [g]. One may object that in fact there are three sounds in the word 'grey', and that if the aim is that of eliciting the sound [g], the question should be 'What is the initial/first sound of the word grey?', or any other question that may reasonably lead the pupils to focus on and answer [g].

All in all, although containing some inaccuracy in the provision of technical information about pronunciation, *Go!* seems to pay more attention to pronunciation as a skill that can be also taught *per se*, and not only indirectly through activities of the 'listen-and-repeat' type. It therefore proposes some support to the primary teacher by giving him/her the opportunity to become an active agent of pronunciation instruction, rather than only rely on recorded materials.

Q3. Inclusion of ELF-aware pronunciation pedagogy

In the Teacher's Book of both Level 1 and Level 2, English is said to be the language with which today's students will have to deal for the rest of their life, and the teacher is encouraged to support his/her pupils in developing a competence in English that will help them in the 'real life'. However, with reference to intercultural issues, English is still presented as the language of Anglophone countries, rather than a shared common language all around the globe. Also the section *English Around the World,*[15] which becomes part of the teacher's pack only from the third year, focuses on Anglophone countries, and not on other parts of the world where English may have a role other than that of a native language. Indeed, there is no mention of the role of English as a lingua franca, and its repercussions on ELT, neither are there any (pronunciation) activities that could be described as ELF-oriented. Although *Go!* does not seem to be concerned with highlighting the 'nativeness' of the authors, in fact the audio materials in the CDs that are used for the listening tasks, songs, and rhymes in the book are recorded by British native speakers.

7 Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the three coursebooks considered in the previous section seems to show a certain degree of marginalisation of pronunciation instruction in ELT textbooks for the primary classroom. Pronunciation appears to be a taken-for-granted skill for the primary teacher, maybe on the assumption that he/she receives pronunciation instruction as part of the Primary Education curriculum. The teacher is not provided with any specific guidance and/or practical recommendations on how to deal with pronunciation, the only suggestion, for those teachers who do not feel competent enough, to totally rely on the audio material. This is exclusively recorded by native speakers and provides only the Standard British accent as a pronunciation model. No explicit clarification is given about what is meant by 'appropriate competence' in English pronunciation, nor by 'negative model', and one can only infer that 'appropriate' means 'native', and 'negative' means 'non-native'.

As for the teaching of pronunciation *per se*, the analysis has shown that pronunciation is regarded simply as a 'servant skill' (Levis 2018) to be learnt indirectly through the performance of very simple listening and speaking tasks, whose main objective is not the learning

15 This was not analysed in the present study because it is not part of the Student's and Teacher's Books for Levels 1 and 2 which the study examined.

of sounds in itself, but the learning of vocabulary and of grammatical structures. Yet, as remarked by Canepari (1979), it seems that to make the most of one's pronunciation skills, it is important to specifically focus on sounds, which implies not only 'developing an ear' for the different sounds of an L2, but also working regularly on the articulation of the sounds themselves. This is particularly true in the case of L2 sounds that are not present in the learner's L1, and for the articulation of which the learner's speech organs do need specific and systematic practice. Instead, in the books examined in this study, more attention is devoted to phonics and the association grapheme/sound, even though the Levels (1 and 2) analysed are for the first and second year of primary school, when pupils may still be struggling with spelling in their own language. However, as Canepari (2006) argues, 'doing phonetics' does not mean finding an association between a letter, or a combination of letters, and a sound. On the contrary, starting from orthographical features in an attempt to 'rationalise' the relationship between graphemes and phonemes might be a dead-end street. More than that, focussing on phonics rather than on mere segmental features of phonetics may not be the most fruitful way of exploiting the ease with which children can produce, absorb and discriminate sounds. In addition, it appears that in the first years of primary school the focus in the analysed texts is mainly, or almost exclusively, on consonant sounds, and to a much letter extent on vowel sounds. The latter, however, may be crucial when it comes to discriminating vowel-based minimal pairs, an area of phonetics which seems to be especially problematic for English learners who are native speakers of some romance languages, like Italian for example (Canepari 2007). As is known, the number of vowel sounds in the phonological system of standard Italian (i, e, ɛ, a, o, ɔ, u) nearly corresponds to the number of vowel letters in the alphabet (i, e, a, o, u), and the association phoneme/grapheme is highly, if not totally, predictable. In English, instead, while the number of vowel letters in the alphabet is the same as in Italian, the number of vowel sounds in, say, standard British English is much higher. More than that, attempts to 'rationalise' the relationship between graphemes and phonemes (in itself highly unpredictable in English) are not only distracting from what should be the central focus of pronunciation, but also misleading. Moreover, there is not a distinction between long and short vowel sounds in the Italian phonological system, whereas vowel length is a crucial feature in English. Third, the articulation of standard Italian vowel sounds (Canepari 2004, 2008) often differs from that of standard (British) English, with central vowel sounds like /ʌ/ or /ə/. A focus on the specific articulatory features of vowel sounds, and of sounds in general, may therefore be useful from the very first approach to L2 pronunciation, especially when the phonological system of the L2 significantly differs from that of the L1, as discussed above with reference to

English versus Italian vowel sounds. With children in particular, a focus on articulatory phonetics would allow to make the most of their articulatory plasticity and support them in the development of phonetic awareness and sensitivity (Piske 2008). Instead, from the analysis of the coursebooks considered in the present study one may infer that the sounds 'selected' for a focus on pronunciation were simply some of the sounds 'accidentally' present in the vocabulary of the Unit itself, rather than the sounds that may in fact be worth focussing on, for example because they may be crucial for intelligibility, as in the case of minimal pairs.

What is striking and worth highlighting is that neither the teacher nor the pupil do have an active role in the teaching and learning of pronunciation respectively. The teacher, as seen, is not directly involved in providing pronunciation instruction; the pupil is almost exclusively asked to perform repetition activities of single words or prefabricated chunks, devoid of any authentic interactional dimension, and therefore is not involved in real interactive and communicative tasks.

Finally, in none of the analysed books there is any mention of the role of English as a lingua franca, neither any suggestions for ELF-oriented pronunciation pedagogy, for example by proposing the listening of non-native-speakers' recordings, or the direct involvement of bilingual pupils who may already have a variety of English in their linguistic repertoire. All in all, despite the acknowledgment of the important role that English has outside the classroom and for the future of the 'global citizen', the analysed books appear to be still proposing English as a mere school subject, and not as a pedagogical lingua franca.

8 Conclusions

Though the number of textbooks taken into account in this paper is arguably too small to draw any general conclusions, it seems worth mentioning the implications of what discussed so far. Firstly, there is a need to promote more focussed pronunciation teaching as an important component of L2 learning, especially at an early age. This can happen also by means of materials specifically designed for the teaching of pronunciation to young learners. Secondly, it seems advisable to consider the actual extent to which Primary Education curricula provide adequate pronunciation instruction, if any, for the primary teacher to be able to teach it. Thirdly, primary school teachers should be made aware of the new reality of English today by being at least informed about (if not trained in) the findings of ELF research and their implications for ELT. Finally, the design of EYL materials should start taking into account the new composition of the student population in the primary classroom, which, as repeatedly remarked herein, is *de facto* an ELF setting.

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