

'Flipped Phonetics': video lectures as a means of improving the teaching/learning of phonetics at a Moroccan university

Context

'Flipped Phonetics' is an innovative method we adopted in teaching introductory phonetics, a component of a Semester 4 linguistics module – *Introduction to Linguistics* – offered to undergraduate students of the Department of English at the Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, Mohammed V University in Rabat, Morocco. Focus is on articulatory phonetics, i.e. the details of consonant and vowel sound articulation (auditory and acoustic phonetics are treated only cursorily). Introductory phonetics is also a prerequisite to the phonology and morphology components of the same module. After completing *Introduction to Linguistics* and a related module, students can then opt for the linguistics major.

Drivers

The main drive was to improve the teaching/learning of phonetics. The introductory course to phonetics is challenging to both the teacher and the students. Our students mostly have a literary orientation background and are generally poor at scientific subjects, which makes their performance in linguistics courses poor. Regarding the teachers, the content is difficult to teach given its inherent complexity and the limited time allotted to introductory phonetics (three sessions of three hours, at best). In addition, the teachers most often have to deal with large classes. The teachers' and students' task is all the more difficult since phonetics is a basic component of the linguistics program, a poor understanding of which generally has a snowball effect, especially in phonology and morpho-phonology. Students also encounter phonetics for their very first time, a first encounter that is generally likely to be the last one in the curriculum. In later semesters of the undergraduate program and all semesters of the Linguistics Master's program, no phonetics is provided, except perhaps in short, timely reviews.

What we blended

We prepared our own video lectures to be viewed by students (online) as pre-class preparation for the face-to-face, class discussion and hands-on activities, including what is assigned traditionally as homework. Having decided to flip all aspects of the course, we examined PowerPoint presentations we had delivered in the past, and after making sure that the content we wanted to deliver was adequate, we split it over individual presentations to ensure that the content was at the same time unified and not overwhelming to the students. Given that phonetics content is better delivered using graphics, we included as many as necessary, mostly hand reproductions of the vocal tract enhanced with Paint. Also, some of the slides contained basic PowerPoint animations for a better visualisation

of the actions of certain vocal organs (e.g. successive movements of the tongue downwards and upwards to illustrate the three different levels of aperture in stops, fricatives and approximants). Once the design of all the slide presentations was unified, we screencast them with narration using the free version of Screencast-O-Matic. The guiding principle was to develop videos that were four to five minutes long, although one video was slightly longer, around ten minutes, to ensure thematic unity. The end product was five videos posted on YouTube for easy access by the students. Another possibility to share the videos with students was through flash drives, CDs or DVDs.

Challenges and how we overcame them

The first challenge is that developing Digital Learning Resources, such as video lectures, is both expensive and time-consuming, in addition to requiring teachers to be conversant with technology. To design videos at the least possible cost, we resorted to user-friendly, open source programs or programs readily available. The second challenge was related to students' access to technology, as some would come to class unprepared because they had not managed to watch the video lectures, thus compromising the entire flipped learning approach. For the students with real difficulty in accessing the videos online, we provided some time at the beginning of the session to review the lectures and suggested making the video lectures available through flash drives, CDs or DVDs. As far as the teachers are concerned, video lectures require more preparation, and they are accordingly more time-consuming. Another difficulty was related to the face-to-face activities with large classes, which we solved by splitting the class into smaller groups for better hand-on activities.

Benefits

Flipped Phonetics is a learner-centered approach that provides more face-to-face time, which is beneficial to students in large classes. In this approach, teachers have more control over the materials they design and more time for in-class, face-to-face activities. They can also provide more just-in time teaching for their students. The students can watch the video lectures at leisure, replay the parts they find difficult to understand, and be more engaged with the materials. Finally, most of our students find it easier and less time-consuming to watch a video lecture than to read the corresponding materials, and they can afford more time for class activities.

What we learnt and considerations for the future

Flipped Phonetics is a better methodology than the traditional one we used in the past as it both saves time and gives a better opportunity to reach out to all the students in large classes. So far, all the practical activities are done in face-to-face meetings, and we are considering including some activities in the videos, as well as developing videos that deal with procedural knowledge. We are also considering flipping other components of the module.

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