Introduction

Learning pronunciation of a foreign language can be:

- Confusing
- Time-consuming
- Frustrating for both learners and instructors

Our research attempts to resolve this issue by testing different techniques for teaching French pronunciation at an early stage. We believe that the International Phonetics Alphabet (IPA) can help solve this problem.

Example: “exemple” is pronounced [egzãpl] in French. You can help teach pronunciation using the IPA as a reference.

With a minimal amount of time, foreign language instructors would be able to teach pronunciation using the IPA as a reference.

Participants

- Two sections of a French 101 course taught by the same professor
- Participation strictly voluntary and confidential
- To date, 13 UW-Eau Claire students are actively engaged in this project

Students have a varied background, which can affect the results of this study: previous experience with French and/or phonetics, time spent in a francophone area, motivation towards learning French, etc. To take those external factors into consideration, participants answer a survey providing us with that information.

Methods

1. Pre-test survey
2. Experimental treatment
3. Post-test survey

Questionnaire:
- Yes/no questions
- Open-ended questions
- Likert scales

One section of French 101 was taught pronunciation using a control method, while the other section was taught the same sounds using phonetics from weeks 3 through 8. The groups were switched weeks 9 through 14.

Questionnaire:
- Identical to pre-test survey to see evolution of attitude
- One question to learn which teaching technique learners favor

Participants are recorded twice in the semester
They read a list of words containing the French target sounds
An non-intrusive high quality digital recorder is used (M-Audio Microtrack II)

Discussion

Although this research project is still a work in progress and results are unavailable for the moment, we have learned valuable information pertaining to teaching and doing research in a classroom setting.

- Organization
- Participants
- Technology
- Qualitative or Quantitative?

In a controlled experiment with human subjects, the testers are truly dependent on the participants to cooperate throughout the experiment. It is important to be mindful of this while designing the experiment, so as to keep the time commitment very minimal on behalf of the participants. It is difficult to recruit and retain volunteers. If for some reason the participants decide not to cooperate, the experiment could be in jeopardy.

Technology is a valuable tool. Although the subject of phonetics is not directly correlated to technology, we still used it in our experiment. We used a digital recorder to gather spoken data, and we will use computer software to analyze our quantitative and qualitative corpus.

Qualitative and quantitative data complement each other. The information provided from answers to open-ended questions is valuable in determining the validity of the results. Questions must be carefully worded so as not to bias the participants’ responses.

References


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