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Trabajo de Fin de Grado

Eurythmy Applied to Teaching English as a  
Foreign Language in Students with Hearing  
Impairments and Other Disabilities

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## ABSTRACT

This essay bears upon the teaching of English as a foreign language to students with different disabilities, specially to those with hearing impairments. It will mainly focus on Eurythmy, a methodology which is based on the visual production of different phonemes through body movements. This investigation proposes a new way of teaching, especially in the competences of oral production and expression, by mixing speech eurythmy and tone eurythmy with other methods and techniques, such as visible speech, lip-reading and the use of phonetic alphabets.

**KEY WORDS:** Eurythmy, Rudolf Steiner, visible speech, deafness, tone eurythmy, phoneme, speech organs, EFL.

## RESUMEN

Este Trabajo de Final de Grado aborda la enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera a alumnos con diferentes capacidades, en particular aquellos con problemas auditivos. Articula principalmente su exposición a través de la Eurytmia, metodología que se basa en la producción visual de diferentes fonemas mediante movimientos corporales. Esta investigación propone una nueva manera de enseñar, especialmente las áreas de producción y expresión oral, mezclando el canto visible y la eurytmia tonal con otros métodos y técnicas, como la lectura de labios y el uso de alfabetos fonéticos.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Eurytmia, Rudolf Steiner, canto visible, eurytmia tonal, sordera, fonema, órganos del habla, inglés como lengua extranjera.

*"If a human being reveals through eurythmy-gestures  
what his being inherently possesses as language, and  
enables the entire soul experience to become visible,  
then the mysteries of the world may be artistically  
expressed." - Rudolf Steiner.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, there have been many attempts to enhance the education of students with diverse disabilities. In the realm of hearing disabilities, I have come across with many educational methodologies used so as to teach these pupils. But, surprisingly for me, there were very few related to the teaching of foreign languages. This is the reason why this project will focus on a specific methodology – Eurythmy – with which I will be attempting to prove how the use of different body positions and movements will improve, or at least make it possible for the student to produce, as accurately as possible, foreign sounds. As many languages are almost like songs – in terms of intonation – I will also profit from tone eurythmy to put some mixed exercises forward.

I have decided to use eurythmy among other methodologies on the grounds that “what substantially distinguishes eurythmy from other artistic movement forms is its therapeutic value and the psychophysiological theory upon which it is based” (Ogletree 307). In this work, we will also see how eurythmy has served as a therapeutic alternative for learners with other disabilities or problems, such as ADHD students. It should be important to bear in mind that gymnastics differs from this methodology in that the aim of the latter is to express inward messages, feelings and ideas outwardly through movement, avoiding the use of arbitrary positions. As it is a short project, it will be mostly focused on the theoretical part, however giving some potential advice and exercises which could be used in a further, wider study.

## 2. SHORT DEVELOPMENT OF THE THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Eurythmy is an artistic, expressive methodology created by Rudolf Steiner – while it is true that his wife, Marie Steiner, contributed to its development too – at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Albeit being in the first place a performative art, eurythmy has developed to the extent of leading therapeutic purposes in medicine, education, music, and many other realms. Indeed, within this methodology we find the Anthroposophy, defined by John Ralph as the “individual path of learning that leads the human spirit towards community with the spirit in the world” (13). Just as we find anthroposophy in medicine, the impellers of this methodology in education were the Waldorf schools. The first school was opened in Stuttgart in 1919 and, since then, eurythmy has been part of its programme, shaping and enhancing the students’ education. In his ‘Speech Eurythmy Course’, Steiner gave a clear example of what lessons at Waldorf schools were like: “the entire course had the character of an immediate fresh improvisation. Drawings were quickly made on the blackboard; exercises for exemplification were carried out [...]; everything came about in the form of conversation and collaboration, not in mere lecturing” (6, 7). The main goal of eurythmy was to educate children through the enrichment of their artistic endowments. And all these enhancements were based upon a series of body movements.

These movements are not arbitrary, that is, there is a specific one for the representation of each sound, as well as for each therapeutic purpose. There are even biased personal exercises based on each patient. Steiner thought that “Eurythmy shape[d] and move[d] the human organism in a way that furnishes direct external proof of our participation in the suspensory world. In having people do eurythmy, we link them directly to the suspensory world” (17). He believed there was a direct

relationship between the etheric body – the physical body – and the astral body. Only by doing eurythmy would we be capable of developing a full understanding of a message. And this is how Speech Eurythmy arose. He sought movements that would be capable of uttering the sounds we use in spoken speech. After having studied the different movements made by our organs of speech when we produce different sounds, Steiner came across with different body movements that were akin to the speech organs' movements.

These formative movements would be particularly articulated with the arms and the hands, although the whole body would be used, too. They tend to recreate what the organs of speech and the larynx do when we produce a sound. Thereupon I find this methodology the most accurate for a student with hearing impairments to produce sounds never uttered before by his mouth, and never heard either. Steiner acknowledged that these movements were related not only to the different sounds, but also to feelings and moods. In his essay *About the Essence of Gesture*, he claimed that

the aim of Eurythmy is to represent in the movement of the individual human limb or the whole human being what language represents in the air formed by the human organism. And Eurythmy was indeed created in such a way that the same impulses that the human organism transfers into the formed air as a mediator of language or song are translated into movement. (44)

In the fourth part of this dissertation, it will be shown how Speech Eurythmy can be used as a proper educational programme for students with hearing impairments and other disabilities.



### 3. DIFFERENT REALMS OF APPLICATION

As it has been explained in the previous point, eurythmy is a wider methodology applicable to many other realms. Among them, we can highlight four.

#### 3.1. Medicine.

In the field of medicine, it is used as a therapy led by doctors previously trained in anthroposophical medicine. It has had positive effects in oncology, ophthalmology, internal medicine, psychiatry, dentistry and cardiology.

#### 3.2. Music.

In music, Steiner developed Tone Eurythmy. In his book *Eurythmy Forms for Tone Eurythmy*, he explains the aims and the procedures of this branch of eurythmy. As if it were a “Pygmalion” experiment, the teacher should look for different body movements representing the height, the pitch, and the raises and falls of the intonation patterns when pronouncing a word or a sentence. Indeed, tone eurythmy could be used in several exercises for students with hearing impairments, as it will be shown later on. Besides, Steiner divided human body and soul into seven parts, the same parts we find in a musical scale. He affirmed that “as astral beings we have been created out of the cosmos according to musical laws. [...] We are ourselves an instrument” (Steiner 33).

#### 3.3. Therapy.

As a therapy, eurythmy has proved to bring about positive effects in patients. “Research in neuro-physiology confirms that there are intimate links between our movement and the development and stimulation of the brain. [...] Eurythmy therapy can [...] bring harmony and relaxation to the body, and stimulate spatial awareness and mindfulness that brings an ease and enthusiasm to participants” (Ralph

14).

### 3.4. Education.

Finally, in the field of education, eurythmy was introduced in Waldorf Schools as an integral part of the curriculum. Pedagogically, this methodology has proved to enhance the expressive and artistic capacities of the child. It stimulates their imagination, their concentration – which has been demonstrated to be effective with ADHD students – and their perception of the physical space around them.

## 4. “EURYTHMY AS VISIBLE SPEECH”

Although many scholars have attempted to define Speech Eurythmy, it is Rudolf Steiner who gave the best description. In his essays, he explains it as follows:

Now just as in speech a sound, a phrase, the turning of a phrase, a question, an exclamation, an ordinary statement [...] correspond to experiences of the soul, so we can find in exactly the same way an expression of the human organism in movement. Moreover, this movement can be just as unequivocal as the sound itself. Here we have one kind of eurythmy –speech eurythmy. (46)

On the other hand, James Emmott described Visible Speech as “a universal alphabet because it claimed to enumerate and symbolize every sound, linguistic and no linguistic, that the vocal organs themselves were theoretically capable of producing,” and indeed, it “claimed to hold the universal key to the representation of all vocal sounds” (128). In both cases, they try to portray the idea of representing the different qualities of the sound. However, Emmott’s group came across with a universal problem. They had to deal with the difficulties found when trying to

arrange and organise all human sounds used in speech in every language. In order to achieve this, they had to move beyond conventional alphabets and create a new system built on completely new symbols. “Melville Bell’s own phonetic system, Visible Speech, [...], was one of the major debts of the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) in the late 1880s, which, based on physiological principles, marks the consolidation of the mechanical approach that defined modern vocal science” (Emmott 126). Graham Bell was actually able to create a new alphabet in which each character could reveal how the sounds are formed in the different speech organs. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that a diagram is always needed to fully explain the position of the tongue (animated diagrams will be more helpful).

I find this idea very important in relation to students with hearing impairments learning English as a foreign language, for most of them have probably never heard many of the phonetic sounds, and in this manner, showing these pupils the position of the different organs of speech could make it easier for them to produce phonemes as precisely as possible. Encompassed with a phonetic alphabet, there is a need for eurythmy too, for each of the movements represents the position of the organs of speech. Images can be seen, as Bakker puts it, “as aggregates of visual information [that] are easier to remember than verbal, sequential information” (56). Thus, for a learner with hearing impairments it will be easier to decode and remember an image – or rather a movement – that represents the actual position of the organs of speech.



**The consonant "r" movement is a forward rolling, rotating, or cartwheel motion of 360° with both arms.**

Fig. 1. Eurythmic representation of R (Ralph).



**The consonant "k" movement is a downward, cutting gesture with one or both arms fully extended.**

Fig. 2. Eurythmic representation of K (Ralph).



The consonant "l" movement is a vertical, upward gesture using both arms in unison. The motion is similar to the cascading of a water fountain, beginning at a single source at the base and dispersing at the crest in manifold arcs.

Fig. 3. Eurythmic representation of L (Ralph).



The consonant "b" movement is an embracing or cradling gesture, similar to cradling a small infant.

Fig. 4. Eurythmic representation of B (Ralph).

There is a clear differentiation between visible speech and visible singing, in so far as visible speech tries to represent in terms of gestures the movements found within our organs of speech, while in visible singing, these movements represent the different features of the sound. Yet, English language is also made up

of music, pitch, tones and intervals. That is why I think it would be very important to include visible singing in eurythmic exercises for deaf students. Indeed, the person doing eurythmy with the hands and the rest of the body experiences earlier something artistically inwardly. Then, a relationship arises from this experience and the movement made: the student receiving the eurythmic movements will perceive with the eyes what is speech, something similar as what the ear perceives as hearing. As Ralph explains, the main goal of eurythmy is “to speak and sing through movements and gestures that reveal to the eye what language and music bring to the ear. [...] The elegance and capacity for revealing the innermost experiences of the human larynx is extended to become whole-body movement” (4). Only by using our body and intending to recreate the position of the different organs will the student be able to incarnate and imitate the sound or the word.

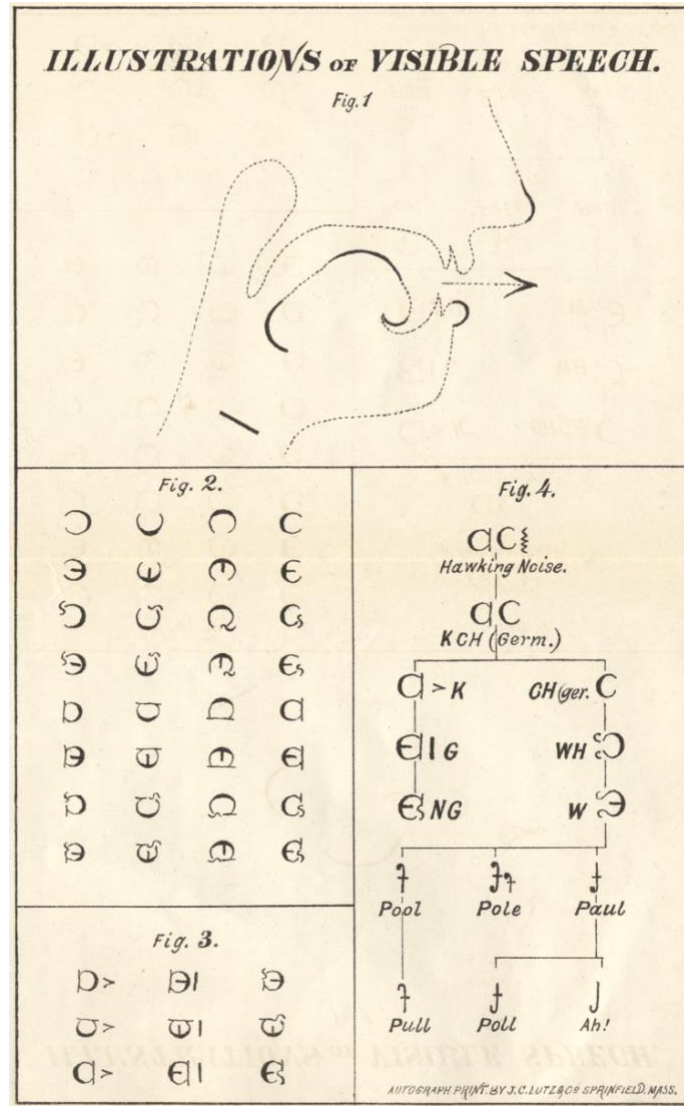


Fig. 5. Illustrations of Visible Speech made by Graham Bell (‘Visible Speech as Means of Communicating and Articulation to Deaf-Mutes’)

In this figure, Graham tried to represent the position of the different organs of speech through simplified symbols. His aim was to make every deaf student be capable of uttering any new sound just by looking at the graphs –having previously explained the mechanism of the alphabet.

## 5. APPLICATION OF EURYTHMY

Once having explained the use of eurythmy as a means of representing visible speech, we will discuss the importance of its application to deaf students, as well as to students with other disabilities. Steiner thought that the only way in which gesture can become the genuine speech was through eurythmy. Thus, the student must look not only for an imitation of the body action, but also for a reproduction of that body movement in his or her own speech organs. Only by these means will the student be able to fully reproduce the phoneme. Although it can be applicable to students with many disabilities – as it will be explained later on – we will focus on eurythmy applied to students with hearing impairments.

### 5.1. To deaf students.

Students with hearing impairments, that is, deaf students, will have to rely on several, alternative resources to learn a foreign language. However, among the four domains in which the learning is divided (oral comprehension, oral production, written comprehension and written production), deaf people are especially unable to acquire and develop oral comprehension and production as hearing people do. Since we are born, we rely on imitation of the sounds we hear, being able to reproduce them later. Indeed, the human being “has gained then faculty to be able to imitate in sounds of speech everything that he hears, what moves through his soul. Basically with his sounds he covers everything in the acoustic world” (Gorenflo 14). In this sense, the alternative resource that substitutes the commonly used is Eurythmy and the Visible Speech. For Graham, his object was to maintain the previous knowledge acquired by the semi-mute regarding spoken speech, teaching them at the same time the pronunciation of the new phonemes. However, this “instrument of speech” must



be educated step by step, as an actual instrument, because the student has never used his vocal organs this way. In any case, students with hearing impairments need to be acquainted in the first place with the movements used in eurythmy and the alphabet of phonetic symbols – remember that a deaf student will only be able to perceive and perfectly produce a sound combining the eurythmy movements, a phonetic alphabet and a diagram of the positions of the speech organs. Once it happens, we will be ready to conduct experiments. Among other resources, we should not forget the importance of lip-reading, as it is a very important part in the production of the sound. Deaf-mutes need to be taught to modulate their voices, and to read with expression too. With this aim, the teacher should use the methodology of Tone Eurythmy.

Coming back to the idea of imitation and memory, it is important for the deaf student to be introduced, step by step, all the sounds and movements. In his dialogue with Cratylus, Socrates said: “wouldn’t it be most correct for us to divide off the letters or elements first, just as those who set to work on speech rhythms first divide off the forces or powers of the letters or elements, then those of syllables, and only then investigate rhythms themselves?” (141). This quotation is the clear example that we cannot teach English as a foreign language to a learner with hearing impairments beginning by speech and intonation patterns, without having taught how to produce the different phonemes first. Cornelia Jantzen, a specialist in working with dyslexic and deaf children, wonders “why should it not be possible to offer deaf pupils support for literacy through ‘making language visible’ with symbol mastery of words?”. She proposes a methodology with which the child learns through images representing symbols and words, instead of sounds.

5.2. To students with other disabilities.

Apart from students with hearing disabilities, eurythmy could be applied to other disabled students. Therapeutic eurythmy has proved to be very effective with ADHD students. A pilot case study led by Majorek, Tüchelmann and Heusser has demonstrated that “when used with people with ADHD, the therapy aims to develop an individual’s ability to concentrate and be aware of feelings in a controlled, coordinated and skilful manner. In turn, this promotes psychosocial development” (48). It is usually harder for these students to focus on new patterns and sounds in a foreign language. Thus, eurythmy could serve both as a representation of the sound and as a means of enhancing their concentration abilities.

## 6. POTENTIAL ACTIVITIES

Before developing this section, I would like to make it clear that these are just potential activities based on theoretical works. It would be advisable to develop each of the activities in depth, before being put into practice with students with hearing impairments.

As we have seen, the aim of this therapy is to “highlight speech and musical activity in relation to movement. The basic elements of the therapy focus on the development and use of vowels and consonants in speech and tones and intervals in music” (Majorek *et. al* 48). These activities will be founded on a mixture of different methodologies. There will be speech eurythmy, tone eurythmy, lip-reading, phonetic alphabet and diagram representations.



Fig. 6. Transversal diagram of the vowel /a/.

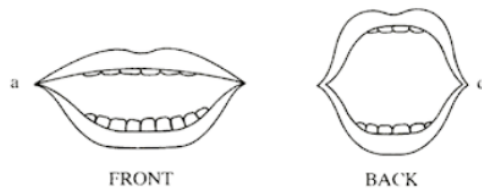


Fig. 7. Drawing of the vowel /a/ used in lip reading (UCL).

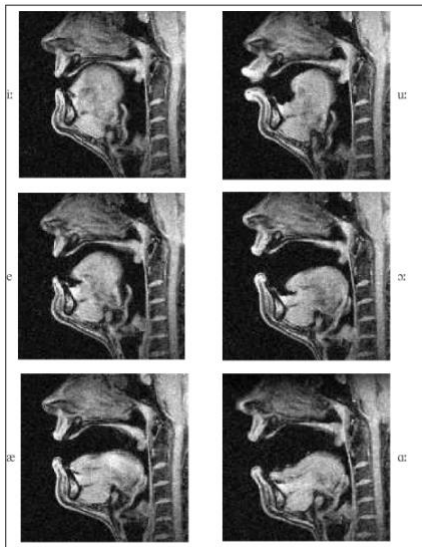


Fig. 8. MRI images of the production of vowels (UCL).

As we saw in the dialogue of Socrates, we should start with the most basic unit: the phoneme. The student will be given a transversal diagram of the position of the phoneme, with the correspondent symbol of the phonetic alphabet. Then, he

or she will look at a teacher performing the eurythmy movement, being asked to repeat it himself at the end. As “cada emoción se sitúa en un lugar concreto del cuerpo, [...] la voz vibrará de distinta manera según la zona corporal en la que el actor esté instalado. [...] [La voz] se percibirá de forma distinta en el espacio” (Bustos 201)<sup>1</sup>. It will be necessary to study in depth which body part is in charge of the production of the sound and its vibration to produce the most convenient movement. When we do eurythmy, the whole human body transmutes different movements into ordinary speech. Hence, the teacher will be able to develop correlatives between each phoneme or sound and a concrete movement.

Apart from all these techniques, the eurythmist also has to use specific colours in the fabric depending on the sound (bright colours for closed sounds and high pitches and viceversa). Besides, eurythmists recommend to use loose costumes to accentuate the movement of the sound.



Fig. 9: The different drawings representing eurythmy movements corresponding to the vowels (Steiner).

Among other exercises that do not have to do with eurythmy, the student

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by Marina Lacasta Millera: “each emotion is located in a concrete part of the human body, [...], the voice will vibrate differently depending on the place in which the actor is installed. [...] Voice will be perceived differently in space”.

with hearing impairments should make use of the hand and the eyes. It is crucial to feel the vibrations in the cavities while producing the new sounds. Besides, exercises with the lungs are essential in terms of intonation patterns and rhythm. In a study led by Harriet B. Rogers, Sarah Fuller and Abel S. Clark, it was also found that “senseless exercises gave great pleasure to deaf children when the syllables were arranged rhythmically” (93). Thus, it should be more important to focus more on the rhythm – as in nursery rhymes – than in the meaning of the words. Indeed, in the book *Therapeutic Eurythmy for Children* there are some tips and hints about the methods that should be picked up while using eurythmy in class. And, although many of these exercises were, in the first place, designed as therapeutic, we could use many of the rhythmic movements to enhance the intonation patterns and rhythms not noticeable by deaf students. Some of the examples are the following:

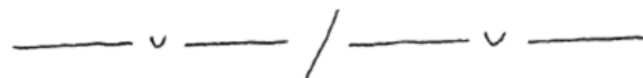
### 3. *Stepping rhythms and clapping* (Ilse Rolofs)

Morning: short-long-short / short-long-short (while walking and clapping)



In therapeutic eurythmy one should slowly get faster and quickly get slower. (Ilse Rolofs)

Evening: long-short-long / long-short-long (while walking and clapping)



### 7. *Trochee with different vowels; if necessary*



on long, free stepping; on short, the vowel with one step

Fig. 6. Different rhythm patterns designed by Steiner (Tone Eurythmy).

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

This work encompasses eurythmy applied to the teaching of English as a foreign language to students with hearing impairments. As it is a wider methodology – comprising from medicine to metaphysics – I wanted to profit from different elements of tone eurythmy and speech eurythmy, which will be bound to be very useful for these students. The conditioning of deaf learners, as they basically depend on visual memory to utter sounds never heard before, has served as a motivation to seek a facilitation and a smoothing of new ways of teaching them English.

Among these eurythmic elements, we should highlight the incorporation of body movements that try to mimic the different sounds and the position of the organs of speech, as well as exercises from tone eurythmy, through which the deaf student can include or enhance the intonation patterns used in the English language. These conclusions have been grounded in several positive results found in different experiments, in which this sort of students has shown an improvement of their capacities and personal motivations.

I deem Eurythmy itself isolated will not produce any big changes or achievements in the learning of the student. Hence, it will be very important for the teacher to include – as far as possible – in the exercises used in class, pedagogical materials of visual aids such as transversal diagrams and MRI images which represent the position of the different organs of speech; just as the teaching or enhancement of different techniques – as it is the case of lip-reading. When a person listens to a sound, neuronal connections take place within our brain, which at the same time allow us to decode a linguistic message. Thereupon, what I want to achieve with the use of these exercises is the same neuronal connections, but through images and movements made

by the teacher, instead of through sounds. All this will eventually help the student with hearing impairments to improve the two language competences in which they present more drawbacks: oral production and oral comprehension.

We should bear in mind that these same patterns and exercises could prove to be useful when teaching other foreign languages, without the necessity of sharing linguistic traits with English. Thanks to the importance of the patterns of intonation in English language, tone Eurythmy will be notably relevant to achieve our goal.

Finally, a further and deeper investigation would be desirable, in which several exercises could be developed, always relying on this theoretical framework; and once developed, they could be put into practice in a real context with students with hearing impairments.

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