



11-4-2005

Teaching Pronunciation in High School Spanish Classes: A Focus on Vowels

Ellen Waisanen

Western Michigan University, ewaisanen@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses



Part of the Education Commons

Recommended Citation

Waisanen, Ellen, "Teaching Pronunciation in High School Spanish Classes: A Focus on Vowels" (2005). *Honors Theses*. 1311.

https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses/1311

This Honors Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.





THE CARL AND WINIFRED LEE HONORS COLLEGE

CERTIFICATE OF ORAL EXAMINATION

Ellen Waisanen, having been admitted to the Carl and Winifred Lee Honors College in Fall 2001 successfully presented the Lee Honors College Thesis on November 4, 2005.

The title of the paper is:

"Teaching Pronunciation in High School Spanish: A Focus on Vowels"

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Holly Nibert', written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Holly Nibert, Spanish

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Michael Braun', written over a horizontal line.

Mr. Michael Braun, Spanish

Teaching pronunciation in high school Spanish classes:

A focus on vowels

Ellen Waisanen

**Honors Thesis
December 2005**

**Advisors: Holly Nibert
Michael Braun**

Table of Contents

Introduction / About me	2
Three errors to address when teaching pronunciation.....	4
Beginning Spanish	
Notes on the vowels.....	5
Exercises.....	7
Advanced Spanish	
Table of phonetic symbols.....	9
Notes	
[a].....	11
[e].....	14
[i].....	18
[o].....	21
[u].....	25
Exercises	
[a].....	13
[e].....	16
[i].....	20
[o].....	23
[u].....	27
Teacher Key for [a].....	31
Teacher Key for [e].....	32
Teacher Key for [i].....	33
Teacher Key for [o].....	34
Teacher Key for [u].....	35
Yo quiero Taco Bell	28
Vote for Pedro.....	29
Check the páginas amarillas.....	30
Sources Referenced	36

Introduction

With the growing use of Spanish in the United States, it is increasingly valuable to have a knowledge of the language. Accurate pronunciation is an integral component of effectively speaking Spanish and attaining native-like mastery of the language, yet it is neglected by many high school teachers. For this reason, I chose to use my honors thesis project to emphasize accurate pronunciation and create a resource for teaching it more thoroughly. With this collection of notes and exercises, I hope to provide a foundation for high school Spanish teachers to highlight pronunciation in their classes. More specifically, I have focused on vowels, because in my experience they often are misunderstood and mispronounced elements in second language speech.

There are two target levels for this project: beginning (Spanish 1-2), and advanced (Spanish 3+). I organized it this way after I began my student teaching at North Farmington High School, because I came to the realization that most students in Spanish 1 and 2 already have enough on their shoulders. The specifics of how to symbolize and physically produce sounds are an information overload while students are learning a new alphabet, focusing on vocabulary, and attempting to grasp grammatical concepts that are entirely foreign to them.

For this reason, I created some very basic notes and exercises that can be easily used with beginning Spanish classes. These allow the students to practice their pronunciation of the vowels, without overloading them with phonetic information. The first exercise is a type of diction; it asks students to write words as the teacher speaks them slowly in class, which helps them identify the vowels as they hear them. The second exercise is simply repetition—this makes them practice the Spanish vowel sounds. It can be done with “fun” words that are more interesting to the students than the standard vocabulary (*libro*, *mesa*, etc.), or with words that look similar to their English equivalents so the students will see that the English vowel sounds do not transfer over to Spanish. The third exercise is a few tongue-twisters, which let students work through difficult text in a more relaxed environment; knowing that it’s a tongue-twister, they won’t be embarrassed in class if they trip up (even the teacher might stumble on some of the *trabalenguas!*).

For the more advanced levels, I provide more detailed notes on each of the five vowels, as well as exercises to practice the use of Spanish vowels and minimize English vowel habits. The notes provided will use the phonetic symbols for the vowels, but will also provide a thorough explanation so that a teacher without an education in Spanish phonetics can still understand and apply the concepts presented here in his or her classroom.

For each vowel, there are three exercises. The first one is intended to help students identify the target sound as it occurs in the English language and recognize that the English letter “a” is different from the Spanish “a.” The second exercise takes a more linguistic approach, and encourages students to pull away from the tendency to pronounce the Spanish “a” like any of the ways to pronounce the English “a.” The third exercise for each vowel is a slightly “goofier” exercise that takes big, “scary” words and makes the students break them down and practice saying them slowly at first. This helps them gradually get more comfortable with pronouncing unfamiliar words as they pick up the pace.

Finally, there are three brief lesson plans at the end of the unit that incorporate all five vowels. Each one includes an objective, a rationale, a materials list, and a procedure that are complete enough to be picked up and used by a substitute teacher. These exercises can be used with either beginning Spanish or advanced Spanish classes.

About Me

I am a senior double majoring in Secondary Education Spanish and Secondary Education English, although I consider Spanish to be my primary major. I have had a long history of exposure to Spanish: my mother is a Spanish teacher at U of M Dearborn; in 1999, I studied for two weeks in Mexico at Cuahuanahuac in Cuernavaca; I visited Costa Rica for a week in 2001; and I studied abroad at the University of Burgos in Burgos, Spain for the fall semester of 2003. I have been engrossed in the language since the first class I ever took, skipping a year of Spanish in high school and even taking an AP class for it my senior year. As this project makes its way through the final stages, I am doing my student teaching at North Farmington High School in Farmington, Michigan. I teach five classes: three Spanish 1 classes and two Spanish 2 classes.

Here at Western Michigan University, my interest in phonetics and pronunciation was sparked by an introductory class to Spanish Linguistics. I found that understanding the sounds and how to physically produce them vastly improved my speaking abilities, as well as my ability to understand native speakers. The experience greatly added to my semester in Spain, and I feel that a study in phonetics, however brief, would have similar benefits for anyone else learning the language. With this in mind, I began the project you see here.

Three errors to address when teaching pronunciation

- In English, we learn the alphabet with the hard sounds A, E, I, O, U, but those five **letters** can produce any of *twelve* different vowel **sounds**. In Spanish, the letters “a, e, i, o, u” are *always* the sounds [a, e, i, o, u]. If students are not taught that the five Spanish vowels are always the same, what is to stop them from assuming that the Spanish vowels, like their native English vowels, can be pronounced in a variety of ways? This is an important point to keep in mind, especially for the beginning levels.
- Spanish vowels are much “shorter” than English vowels. For example, the English “no” could be phonetically written as [nooooo], because English has a tendency to elongate the vowels at the end of a word. In Spanish, although the sound is the same, it is cut much shorter and the word becomes much more staccato: [no]. While this is not as integral to learning pronunciation as the first concept given, it is important to understand and apply this in spoken Spanish if a native-like speaking ability is desired.
- English-speakers have a tendency to add a diphthong to the end of the vowel sounds [e] and [o] in Spanish; instead of pronouncing a single, clear vowel, they attach a second vowel sound to the end of it, creating a new vowel sequence [eɪ] or [oʊ]. In Spanish, this gives you a very “foreign” accent and can change the meaning of the word you are trying to say. While “accidental” diphthongs may seem like a small point to address, it is still important to ensure you are producing the correct sound in order to work toward a more native-like accent and avoid miscommunications. Diphthongs will likely be more effectively addressed in the advanced classes, and are discussed with the letters “e” and “o.”

Notes on the vowels for beginning Spanish

In English, there are many ways to pronounce the five vowels.
 In Spanish, each vowel produces *only one sound*.



“a” always sounds like the “a” in **father**.



It *never* sounds like the “a” in **cat**,
 approach,
 blame,
 or awe.



“e” always sounds like the “e” in **hey**, but slightly shorter and without an inclination toward the “ee” sound at the end.



It *never* sounds like the “e” in **English**,
 need,
 ever,
 or Evelyn.



“i” always sounds like the “e” in **be**.



It *never* sounds like the “i” in **hid**,
 hide,
 I,
 or if.



“o” always sounds like the “o” in **oh**, but shorter and without the tendency to make an “oo” sound at the end.




It *never* sounds like the “o” in **opportunity**,
 hot,
 or other.



“u” always sounds like the “u” in **flute**;



It *never* sounds like the “u” in **flutter**
 or ultimate.

 Another important difference between Spanish and English vowels is that the Spanish vowels are much shorter; they are pronounced like a staccato note.

[a] is not drawn out, like when a doctor asks you to stick out your tongue: “Aaaaaaaaaa.” *It is short, like when you tell someone, “Careful, don’t touch that hot dish.”*

[e] is not long, like when you see a good friend after a long time: “Heeeeeeeey! How are you?” *It is short, as in, “Dang! I forgot today’s the test.”*

[i] is not lengthened, like in the phrase, “Dude, this car is sweeeeeeeet.” *It is short, like in the phrase, “Let’s get something to eat soon!”*

[o] is not extended, like the sound actors make they are in slow motion, diving in front of the bullet that is aimed for the president: “Noooooooooooooooooo!” *It is short, like when someone asks if you have started your homework yet, and you say, “Nope, not yet!”*

[u] is not drawn out, like the sound cows make: “Mooooooooo.” *It is short, like “Oh no! What are we going to do about this?”*

Exercises to practice pronunciation (beginning Spanish)

Diction: Slowly read the following Spanish words aloud to students while they listen carefully and write the words with correct spelling, based upon the vowels they hear.

abejo	deslucido	celeste
cucú	figar	rima
entelerido	fruslería	insistir
engorde	galopar	soldado
delirio	gorgoteo	futuro
denostar	plaga	cucurucho

This exercise can also be done with Spanish words that are similar to English words, so that the students will see that the English vowels do not transfer over to Spanish.

actual	letra	chocolate
actor	importante	opción
atención	crimen	última
blanco	delicioso	nocturno
excelente	información	consultación
teléfono	oportunidad	ocurrir
super	positive	

Speaking: Have the students practice saying these words aloud. This could be done in several ways:

- have them repeat the words after you
- have them work in groups to create sentences with the words, then present them to class
- have them form two circles; the inner circle holds a card with the word on it, while the outer circle rotates around and has to figure out how to say each one
- have them work in groups to “present” the words to the rest of the class, with skits, repetition, sentence formation, TPR, etc.

baraja (*pack of cards*)
 babear (*to babble, dribble*)
 albóndiga (*meatball*)
 españolizar (*to “Spanishize”*)
 escaliche (*pig latin*)
 desdeñable (*insignificant*)
 ilegal (*illegal*)
 bikini (*bikini*)

tintinear (*to tinkle/jingle*)
 mono (*monkey*)
 rombo (*rhombus*)
 gorgoteo (*gurgling*)
 runrún (*murmur*)
 futuro (*future*)
 bufón (*clown*)

Trabalenguas: Put students in groups or pairs and give them a tongue-twister. Let them work practice for a few minutes, checking up on the groups to make sure they are pronouncing the vowels right, and have each student say their tongue twister for the class. **These trabalenguas and their meanings are from <http://www.uebersetzung.at/twister/es.htm>.*

Tres tristes tigres tragaban trigo en un trigal.

Three sad tigers were swallowing wheat on a wheat field.

Poquito a poquito Paquito empaca poquitas copitas en pocos paquetes.

Little by little Paquito is packing some wine glasses in a few boxes.

Del pelo al codo y del codo al pelo, del codo al pelo y del pelo al codo.

From the hair to the elbow and from the elbow to the hair, from the elbow to the hair and from the hair to the elbow.

Debajo de la puente de Guadalajara había un conejo debajo de la agua.

Under the bridge of Guadalajara there was a rabbit under the water.

Si la sierva que te sirve, no te sirve como sierva, de que sirve que te sirvas de una sierva que no sirve.

If the servant that serves you, doesn't serve as a servant, of what use is the service of a servant that doesn't serve.

Una cacatrepa trepa tiene tres cacatrepitos. Cuando la cacatrepa trepa trepan los tres cacatrepitos.

A caterpillar that climbs has three baby caterpillars. When the caterpillar climbs the baby caterpillars climb.

Mi mamá me mima, y yo mimo a mi mamá.

My mother spoils me, and I spoil my mother.

Que col colosal colocó en aquel local el loco aquél. Que colosal col colocó el loco aquél en aquel local.

What a colossal cauliflower that crazy man put in that place. What a colossal cauliflower that crazy man put in that place.

Riqui tiqui tembo nosarembo cherri berri rucci quiperipembo.

Name used in the book Tikki Tikki Tembo by Arlene Mosel, claimed to be a Chinese name ""Tikki tikki tembo-no sa rembo-chari bari ruchi-pip peri pembo"" meaning ""the most wonderful thing in the whole wide world"".

El amor es una locura, que solo el cura lo cura, pero el cura que lo cura, comete una gran locura.

Love is a crazy thing that only a priest can cure, but the priest who cures it commits a great error.

Phonetic guide (advanced Spanish)

It may be helpful to make copies of the following guide for students. It gives the phonetic symbols used to represent each sound, and outlines the letters that correspond to each sound in Spanish and English. It then gives examples of words in each language that contain that particular sound.

It is important to note to students that while more than one English vowel letter can give a vowel sound, this is not the case in Spanish.

It is also necessary to explain the difference between a *letter*, marked by quotation marks (“a”), and a *sound*, marked by brackets ([a]). A letter is the written symbol that occurs in context of actual writing, and can have more than one sound associated with it. A sound, expressed with brackets, is a symbol for the specific sound that is heard.

For example, the *letter* “a” can have several *sounds* in English:

- “a” → [a] as in father
- [æ] as in bat
- [eɪ] as in hay
- [ʌ] as in approach

Phonetic Symbols for vowel sounds	Letters for written vowels	Words in English	Words in Spanish
[a]	English: a, o Spanish: a	Hot, bottle, father	Casa, antes, actual, la letra
[æ]	English: a	Had, bat, after	<i>This sound does not exist in Spanish!</i>
[aj̃]	English: e, i Spanish: ai, ay	I, hide, sigh, eye	Paraguay, paisano, mayo, aislar
[e]	Spanish: e	*This sound does not exist alone in English. See diphthongs, page 14, and the sound [ej̃].	Pena, letra, triste, excelente
[ej̃]	English: a, e, ai, ei Spanish: ei, ey	Hey, hay, maid, made, sleigh	Peina, reina, rey
[ɛ]	English: e, ea,	Head, bet, ever	<i>This sound does not exist in Spanish!</i>
[ʌ]	English: u, a, o	Hut, ultimate, approach, front	<i>This sound does not exist in Spanish!</i>
[ɪ]	English: i,	Him, bit, important	<i>This sound does not exist in Spanish!</i>
[i]	English: ee, ea, ie, y, e Spanish: i	Heed, beat, English, slowly, piece	Hijo, existe, importante, inglés
[ɔ]	English: a, ou	Hawed, bought	<i>This sound does not exist in Spanish!</i>
[o]	Spanish: o	*This sound does not exist alone in English. See diphthongs, page 21, and the sound [oũ].	Cosa, otro, oportunidad
[oũ]	English: o, oa Spanish: o	Hope, boat	genitourinario (very rare)
[u]	English: oo	Hood, book	<i>This sound does not exist in Spanish!</i>
[u]	English: u, oo, ou, oe, ue Spanish: u	Who, boot, flute, super, route, shoe, glue	Última, bruja, punto
[ə]	English: a, e, i, o, u	California, telephone, university, consultation	<i>This sound does not exist in Spanish!</i>

The letter “a” and the sound [a]

1. Sounds produced by the letter “a”

In English, several sounds are produced by the letter “a”, such as:

[a] father	}	Letter “a”
[æ] cat		
[^] approach		
[eɪ] blame		
[ɔ] awe		

➤ In Spanish, only one sound is produced by the letter “a.”

This sound is the [a] as in “father.”

[a] casa, alto, la letra → Letter “a”

2. Letters that produce the sound [a]

In English, more than one letter produces the sound [a].

Letter “a” → [a] as in father
 Letter “o” → [a] as in hot

➤ In Spanish, only one letter produces the sound [a].

Letter “a” → [a] as in casa

3. Pronunciation Reminder for Vowels

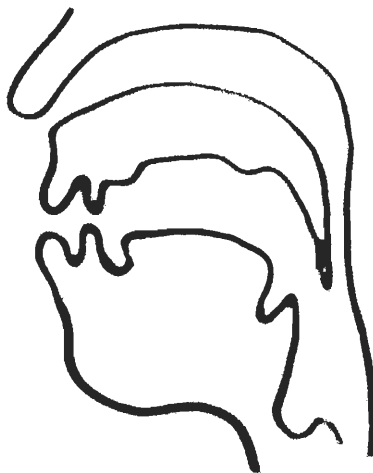
Spanish vowels are “short” in duration in comparison to English vowels.

The Spanish [a] sound is not drawn out, like the sound made when a doctor asks you to stick out your tongue: “**Aaaaaaaaaaaaa**.” It is short, like when you tell someone, “Careful, don’t touch that hot dish.”

The English tendency is to make the Spanish [a] longer than what is native-like, and this creates a distinct foreign accent.

4. Making the Sound

The sound [a] is called a low central vowel. The tongue is low in the oral cavity, the jaw drops, and the lips are not tensed in any way (they remain neutral). The drawing below illustrates the approximate position of the tongue while producing the sound [a].



Exercises to practice the Spanish [a]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [a] sound like the Spanish letter “a.”

F ather	D ock	A ppropriate
R ath er	S ta pler	H a
C as t	B l ack	A we
H a t	R o bot	B a rbecue
K a rate	B a throom	G a me

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “a.”

English		Spanish	
1. A ctual	[_____]	A ctual	[_____]
2. B l ank	[_____]	B l anco	[_____]
3. A ctor	[_____]	A ctor	[_____]
4. S p anish	[_____]	E s pañol	[_____]
5. A ccess	[_____]	A ceso	[_____]
6. R a dio	[_____]	R a dio	[_____]
7. A ttention	[_____]	A tención	[_____]
8. M a ma	[_____]	M a má	[_____]

C. Look at the following long words. Sound them out slowly with correct vowel pronunciation, then practice saying them faster while maintaining correct pronunciation.

A for tu na damente	(fortunately)
A fr ances a rse	(to become Frenchified)
E ng uayab a do	(homesick)
M an comun a damente	(together)
P a jare a rse	(to goof)
Y a nquil a ndia	(the States)

The letter “e” and the sound [e]

1. Sounds produced by the letter “e”

In English, several sounds are produced by the letter “e”; for example:

[e̞̩] hey*	}	Letter “e”
[i] English, need		
[ɛ] ever		

*Notice that in English, the sound is a combination of a vowel and a semivowel, [e] and [ɪ]. The pure [e] does not exist in English (see **diphthong explanation**).

➤ **In Spanish, only one sound is produced by the letter “e.”**

This sound is the [e] as in “hey,” but without the glide at the end.

[e] letra, español, triste → Letter “e”

2. Letters that produce the sound [e̞̩]

In English, more than one letter can produce the sound [e̞̩].

Letter “e”	→	[e̞̩] as in hey
Letter “a”	→	[e̞̩] as in made
Letters “ai”	→	[e̞̩] as in maid
Letters “ei”	→	[e̞̩] as in sleigh

➤ **In Spanish, only one letter produces the sound [e].**

Letter “e” → [e] as in letra

3. Diphthong Explanation

The English tendency for pronouncing the sound [e] in Spanish is to add on [ɪ] at the end, making it into the diphthong [e̞̩].* As noted above, the pure [e] doesn’t exist in English; it is

* The diphthong is denoted by a curve (̞̩) under the semivowel.

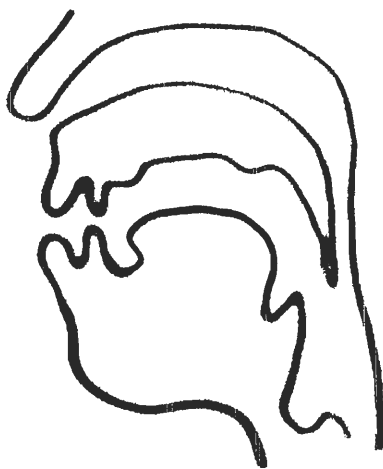
is always pronounced as the diphthong, so the Spanish sound [e] is easily mispronounced as [eɪ]. It is important to keep the sounds short and distinct to prevent confusion, because while the sound does not affect the meaning in English, in Spanish the sounds [e] and [eɪ] signify different meanings. For example, the Spanish word “pena” (pain) is pronounced [pé.na]. With the English accent, it becomes [péɪ.na]. Although the sounds are very close, they are distinct, and with the diphthong it becomes a new word: “peina” (he/she combs). For this reason, *it is important to make sure the Spanish [e] is pronounced as just [e].*

4. Pronunciation Reminder

The Spanish vowels are “short” in duration in comparison to English; [e] is not long like when you see a good friend after a long time: “Heeeeeeeey! How are you?” It is short, as in, “Dang! I forgot today’s the test.”

5. Making the Sound

The sound [e] is called an unrounded front middle vowel. The tongue raises about halfway up in the oral cavity, pushing toward the front of the mouth. The lips are tensed, almost like a smile. The drawing below illustrates the approximate position of the tongue while producing the sound [e].



Exercises to practice the Spanish [e]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [e̞] sound closest to the [e] for the Spanish letter “e.”

English	Ever	Eight
Heyday	Detain	Letter
Mermaid	Festive	Echo
Hat	Even	Essay
Freight	Rest	Blame

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and focus on the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for each bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “e.”

English		Spanish	
1. Excellent	[_____]	Excelente	[_____]
2. Letter	[_____]	Letra	[_____]
3. Returnable	[_____]	Retornable	[_____]
4. Telephone	[_____]	Teléfono	[_____]
5. Rest	[_____]	Resto	[_____]
6. Super	[_____]	Super	[_____]
7. Mexico	[_____]	México	[_____]
8. Thesis	[_____]	Tesis	[_____]

C. Look at the following really long words. Sound them out slowly with correct vowel pronunciation, then practice saying them faster while maintaining correct pronunciation.

Condescendencia	(condescension)
Ensoberbecerse	(to become arrogant, haughty)
Permanentemente	(permanently)
Quebrantahuesos	(white-tailed eagle)
Verdaderamente	(honestly)
Tarjetahabiente	(cardholder)

D. Practice saying the following Spanish words with [e]. Focus particularly on avoiding the [ej] diphthong where it should be a short and pure [e].

Café
Alegre
Excelente
Español
Pena

Estar
Importante
Teléfono
Padre
Cafetería

Mente
Vale
Yacer
Reserva
Delante

The letter “i” and the sound [i]

1. Sounds produced by the letter “i”

In English, several sounds are produced by the letter “i”, such as:

[ɪ] hid	}	Letter “i”
[aɪ] hide		

➤ **In Spanish, only one sound is produced by the letter “i.”**

This sound is the [i] as in the letter “e” in “be.”

[i] **h**ijo, **i**mportante, triste → Letter “i”

2. Letters that produce the sound [i]

In English, more than one letter can produce the sound [i].

Letter “e”	→	[i] as in E nglish
Letter “y”	→	[i] as in slowly
Letters “ee”	→	[i] as in h eed
Letters “ea”	→	[i] as in h eat

➤ **In Spanish, only one letter produces the sound [i].**

Letter “i” → [i] as in **h**ijo

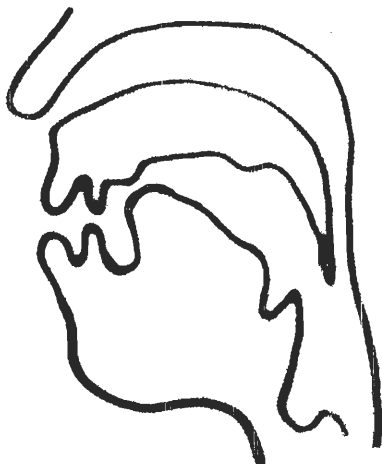
3. Pronunciation Reminder

The Spanish vowels are “cut short” in comparison to English; the sound is not lengthened, like in the phrase “Dude, this car is sw**eeeeee**et.” It is short, like in the phrase, “Let’s get something to **ea**t soon!”

4. Making the Sound

The sound [i] is called a high unrounded anterior vowel. The tongue approaches the roof of the mouth near the front of the oral cavity. The lips are tensed more than in the sound [e]; it

The sound [i] is called a high unrounded anterior vowel. The tongue approaches the roof of the mouth near the front of the oral cavity. The lips are tensed more than in the sound [e]; it is as if the corners of the mouth are being pulled. The drawing below illustrates the approximate position of the tongue while producing the sound [i].



Exercises to practice the Spanish [i]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [i] sound like the Spanish letter “i.”

Th i ble	R i nger	S i de
Re m ind	Span i sh	Elated
H i t	E a gle	I d ol
Fe e d	Im o rtant	Th i nk
Qu i ckly	Qu i ckly	R i ght

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “i.”

<u>English</u>	<u>Spanish</u>
1. I mportant [_____]	Importante [_____]
2. I talian [_____]	Italiano [_____]
3. C rime [_____]	Crimen [_____]
4. F amily [_____]	Familia [_____]
5. D elicious [_____]	Delicioso [_____]
6. T hesis [_____]	Tesis [_____]
7. M exico [_____]	México [_____]
8. I nformation [_____]	Información [_____]

C. Look at the following really long words. Sound them out slowly with correct vowel pronunciation, then practice saying them faster while maintaining correct pronunciation.

Antirreglamentario	(against regulations)
Desvalorización	(devaluation)
Ininterrumpidamente	(without a break)
Occidentalizarse	(to become westernized)
Sentimentalismo	(sentimentalism)
Sobrealimentación	(overfeeding)
Vitivinicultor	(grape grower/wine producer)

The letter “o” and the sound [o]

1. Sounds produced by the letter “o”

In English, several sounds are produced by the letter “o”, including:

[o̩] hope*	}	Letter “o”
[a] hot		

*Notice that in English, the sound is a combination of a vowel and a semivowel, [o] and [̩]. The pure [o] does not exist in English (see **diphthong explanation**).

➤ **In Spanish, only one sound is produced by the letter “o.”**

This sound is the [o] as in “hope,” but without the glide at the end.

[o] ojo, cosa, oportunidad, gato → Letter “o”

2. Letters that produce the sound [o]

In English, more than one letter can produce the sound [o̩].

Letter “o”	→	[o̩] as in hope
Letters “oa”	→	[o̩] as in boat
Letters “ou”	→	[o̩] as in though

➤ **In Spanish, only one letter produces the sound [o].**

Letter “o” → [o] as in ojo

3. Diphthong Explanation

The English tendency for pronouncing the sound [o] in Spanish is to add on [u] at the end, making it into the diphthong [o̩], because the pure [o] doesn’t exist in English—it is always pronounced as [o̩]*. It is important to distinguish the sounds to prevent confusion, because pronouncing [o] as [o̩] is an incorrect pronunciation and it gives you a distinct foreign

* The diphthong is marked by a curve (̩) under the diphthongized vowel.

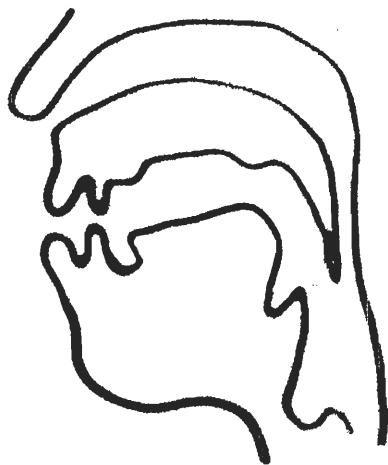
accent. To sound more like a native speaker, it is necessary to keep the [o] sound short and clear.

4. Pronunciation Reminder

The Spanish vowels are “short” in duration in comparison to English; the sound is not extended, like the sound actors make they are in slow motion, diving in front of the bullet that is aimed for the president: “**Noooooooooooooooooooo!**” It is short, like when someone asks if you have started your homework yet, and you say, “**Nope**, not yet!”

5. Making the Sound

The sound [o] is called a rounded back middle vowel. The tongue raises about halfway up in the oral cavity, and the tongue pushes toward the back of the mouth. The lips form a rounded shape when making this sound. The drawing below illustrates the approximate position of the tongue while producing the sound [o].



Exercises to practice the Spanish [o]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [ou] sound closest to the [o] from the Spanish letter “o.”

P oker	S pot	F ortunate
C ough	T hough	E nough
R ose	O ptional	R oom
H ome	R obot	R obot
M icroscope	O atmeal	O pen

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “o.”

<u>English</u>	<u>Spanish</u>
1. O ppportunity [_____]	O portunidad [_____]
2. P ositive [_____]	P ositivo [_____]
3. O ther [_____]	O tro [_____]
4. Tele ph one [_____]	Tele f ono [_____]
5. Ch o colate [_____]	Ch o colate [_____]
6. Imp o ssible [_____]	Imp o sible [_____]
7. O ption [_____]	O pción [_____]
8. A ctor [_____]	A ctor [_____]

C. Look at the following really long words. Sound them out slowly with correct vowel pronunciation, then practice saying them faster while maintaining correct pronunciation.

Gentileshombres	(gentlemen)
Nacionalsocialismo	(national socialism)
Obligatoriedad	(obligatory nature)
Otorrinolaringólogo	(Eye, Nose, and Throat specialist)
Estacionamiento	(parking)
Rimbombante	(ostentations, grandiose)
Salchiconería	(delicatessen)
Servodirección	(power steering)
Zangolotear	(to shake)

D. Practice saying the following Spanish words with [o]. Focus particularly on avoiding the [ou] diphthong where it should be a short and pure [o].

Hermano
Mayor
Original
Trabajo
Ojo

Ocho
Colmena
Ordenador
Cocina
Español

Roco
Hosco
Dinero
Postal
Modelo

The letter “u” and the sound [u]

1. Sounds produced by the letter “u”

In English, several sounds are produced by the letter “u”:

[u] flute	}	Letter “u”
[ʌ] flutter		

➤ In Spanish, only one sound is produced by the letter “u.”

This sound is the [u] as in “flute.”

[u] última, bruja, punto → Letter “u”

2. Letters that produce the sound [u]

In English, more than one letter can produce the sound [u].

Letter “u”	→	[u] as in fl <u>u</u> te
Letter “o”	→	[u] as in wh <u>o</u>
Letters “ou”	→	[u] as in r <u>ou</u> te
Letters “oo”	→	[u] as in h <u>oo</u> t
Letters “oe”	→	[u] as in sh <u>oe</u>
Letters “ue”	→	[u] as in gl <u>ue</u>

➤ In Spanish, only one letter produces the sound [u].

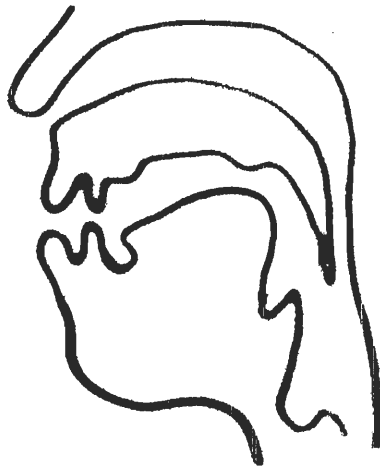
Letter “u” → [u] as in última

3. Pronunciation Reminder

The Spanish vowels are “short” in duration in comparison to English; the sound is not drawn-out, like the sound cows make: “moooooo.” It is short, like “Oh no! What are we going to do about this?”

4. Making the Sound

The sound [u] is called a rounded back high vowel. The tongue approaches the roof of the mouth, while pushing toward the back of the mouth. When making the sound [u], the lips form a rounded shape that is tighter than [o]. The drawing below illustrates the approximate position of the tongue while producing the sound [u].



Exercises to practice the Spanish [u]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [u] sound like the Spanish letter “u.”

R oommate	A loud	B ut
U tter	W ho	B lue
S hoe	U ncouth	U ncouth
T hrough	H ouse	B oost
S hoe	T hus	B rute

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “u.”

<u>English</u>		<u>Spanish</u>	
1. U ltimate	[_____]	Ú ltima	[_____]
2. M uch	[_____]	M ucho	[_____]
3. No ct urnal	[_____]	No ct urno	[_____]
4. Insti tu tion	[_____]	Insti tu cional	[_____]
5. D uke	[_____]	D uque	[_____]
6. J une	[_____]	J unio	[_____]
7. Occ u r	[_____]	Occ u rir	[_____]
8. Cons u ltation	[_____]	Cons u ltación	[_____]

C. Look at the following long words. Sound them out slowly with correct vowel pronunciation, then practice saying them faster while maintaining correct pronunciation.

Aerofumigación	(crop-dusting)
Estadounidense	(American)
Hamburguesería	(hamburger restaurant)
Malacostumbrarse	(to become spoiled)
Pluscuamperfecto	(perfect subjunctive)

Exercises to integrate all five vowels

After studying and practicing the five vowels independently, it is necessary to have exercises combining all of them. A language cannot be taught as individual components isolated from each other; the various elements must flow together to create a dynamic set of knowledge, where all learning affects the overall understanding of the language. Therefore, students must have exercises that synthesize their knowledge of the five vowels in one context to allow progress to the next level of Spanish.

#1: Yo quiero Taco Bell

Objective

Students will be able to identify Spanish words and their correct pronunciation, as well as to notice words or letters that might be problematic for them to consider outside of an English context.

Rationale

This would easily work with any Hispanic restaurant, but I chose Taco Bell because it's a very common restaurant where the kids have most likely eaten at least once. Because its menu items are very frequently mispronounced, it provides a fun and relevant foundation for a focus on pronunciation.

Materials

- Photocopies of a Taco Bell menu (or the menu from any local Hispanic restaurant where the items' names are in Spanish)
- "Teacher version" of the menu with "trouble spots" highlighted and a pronunciation key

Procedure

1. Make photocopies of a menu from Taco Bell and pass them out to students in the class.
2. Read the items aloud as a class, pronouncing words as you normally would in English.
3. Go back and read the items with the correct Spanish vowels.
4. Have students circle at least five spots they previously mispronounced, and discuss them in class or small groups.
5. Create a list on the board of all the words that students had trouble with. You may want to write them down for future reference, or post the list on a bulletin board as a reminder for kids to check in class.

A fun follow-up to this class activity would be to take them to an authentic Hispanic restaurant and have them order foods with Spanish names they don't know (with correct pronunciation, of course), or to have a "food day" in class where you have them use the Spanish names for all of the food.

For an assessment/test activity, have another copy of the menu with five items circled on it. Have each student read the items aloud to you, using the correct Spanish pronunciation as best they can.

#2: Vote for Pedro

Objective

This activity encourages students to look at English from the Spanish-speaker's point of view and see what errors occur when English is the second language. It also promotes an understanding of *why* Spanish-speakers have those tendencies, reinforcing the knowledge of vowels and their corresponding sounds. This activity is also a brief introduction to multiculturalism, pointing out the difficulty of learning a second language and generating understanding and sensitivity toward students learning English as a Second Language.

Rationale

By pushing students to think outside of their usual bubble, students can grasp a more thorough understanding of Spanish and its pronunciation.

This could also work with other movies or television shows containing characters whose first language is Spanish (such as *Spanglish* or *Mucha Lucha*). I chose *Napoleon Dynamite* because its rating is acceptable for school use and it is a newer movie that kids have probably seen.

Materials

- Copy of *Napoleon Dynamite*, cued to the appropriate scene

Procedure

1. Watch the 20-minute clip of *Napoleon Dynamite* as a class.
2. Tell kids to listen to Pedro's accent when he speaks English, and write down a few words that he mispronounces.
3. After you have watched the clip, make a list on the board of the words they wrote down.
4. Discuss what errors Pedro makes with his English; ask them how he pronounced words and why he pronounced them that way.
5. Ask them what errors they catch themselves making; have them think about why they do it and discuss it as a class.
6. Generate a list of their common errors. You could write it down and post it somewhere in the room as a quick reference, or perhaps make a handout for them to keep in their notes.
7. This could be followed by a discussion of what they think when they hear English mispronounced, and what they think Hispanics might think when they hear Spanish mispronounced.

#3: Check the páginas amarillas

Objective

This exercise not only asks students to recognize parts of their daily lives that relate to Spanish, but it pushes them to identify errors in pronunciation they previously made. By reading the lists aloud, they are practicing their pronunciation with others, and by spelling the words they hear they are creating a mental correlation between listening and writing in Spanish.

Rationale

Getting students to think critically about their learning is an important part to teaching any area. Additionally, to learn a new language, students need to practice the words aloud and to practice listening. Taking the names from the local phone books brings to light any Hispanic elements in the community, which helps students realize that even if there is not a large Hispanic population, there is still an influence present.

Materials

- Copies of old phone books (or have students use phone books at home)
- Large sheets of paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils

Procedure

1. Discuss with students the Spanish pronunciation of names such as “California,” “Los Angeles,” and “Santa Barbara.”
2. Have students look through phone books or directories to find Spanish names that are commonly “Americanized” and pronounced as in English rather than Spanish.
3. Have students make a list of ten street, building, park, and company names in the local community that are Hispanic.
4. Have students create a map of a town using their list.
5. In class, have students present their maps to each other in groups of four or five students.
6. They should pronounce the words with correct Spanish pronunciation, while the group members write down the words they hear, spelling them based on the sounds they hear.
7. Save the maps on a bulletin board or in a folder—they can be reused as students learn new vocabulary (la biblioteca, la oficina, etc.) and directions (a la derecha)

For an assessment/test activity, select five to ten of the names listed by students in class. Read them aloud to the class and have each student write down the names, spelling the words as best they can with their knowledge of Spanish vowels.

Teacher key to exercises to practice the Spanish [a]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [a] sound like the Spanish letter “a.”

F ather	D ock	Appropriate
R a ther	St a pler	H a
C a st	Bl a ck	A we
H a t	R obot	B arbecue
K arate	B a throom	G a me

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “a.”

English		Spanish	
1. A ctual	[__æ__]	A ctual	[__a__]
2. B lank	[__ei__]	Bl a nco	[__a__]
3. A ctor	[__æ__]	A ctor	[__a__]
4. S panish	[__æ__]	Es p añol	[__a__]
5. A ccess	[__æ__]	A ceso	[__a__]
6. R adio	[__ej__]	R a dio	[__a__]
7. A ttention	[__^__]	A tención	[__a__]
8. M ama	[__a__]	M a má	[__a__]

Teacher key to exercises to practice the Spanish [e]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [e̞] sound closest to the [e] for the Spanish letter “e.”

English	Ever	Eight
Heyday	Detain	Letter
Mermaid	Festive	Echo
Hat	Even	Essay
Freight	Rest	Blame

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and focus on the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for each bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “e.”

<u>English</u>		<u>Spanish</u>	
1. Excellent	[__ε__]	Excelente	[__e__]
2. Letter	[__ε__]	Letra	[__e__]
3. Returnable	[__ə__]	Retornable	[__e__]
4. Telephone	[__ε__]	Teléfono	[__e__]
5. Rest	[__ε__]	Resto	[__e__]
6. Super	[__ə__]	Super	[__e__]
7. Mexico	[__ε__]	México	[__e__]
8. Thesis	[__i__]	Tesis	[__e__]

Teacher key to exercises to practice the Spanish [i]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [i] sound like the Spanish letter “i.”

Thimble	R inger	Slide
Rem i nd	Spanish	E lated
Hit	E agle	I dol
F eed	Important	T hink
Quickly	Q uickly	Right

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “i.”

English		Spanish	
1. I mportant	[__ I __]	Importante	[__ i __]
2. I talian	[__ I __]	Italiano	[__ i __]
3. C rime	[__ ai __]	C rimen	[__ i __]
4. F amily	[__ ə __]	Fam i lia	[__ i __]
5. D elicious	[__ I __]	Del i cioso	[__ i __]
6. T hesis	[__ I __]	Tes i s	[__ i __]
7. M exico	[__ ə __]	Mé x ico	[__ i __]
8. I nformation	[__ I __]	I nformación	[__ i __]

Teacher key to exercises to practice the Spanish [o]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [ou] sound closest to the [o] from the Spanish letter “o.”

P oker	Spot	Microsc o pic
C ough	T hough	En o ugh
R ose	O ptional	R oom
H ome	Robot	R obot
F ortunate	O atmeal	O pen

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “o.”

<u>English</u>		<u>Spanish</u>	
1. O ppportunity	[__a__]	O portunidad	[__o__]
2. P ositive	[__a__]	Posit o	[__o__]
3. O ther	[__^__]	O tro	[__o__]
4. Tele ph one	[__ou__]	Teléf o no	[__o__]
5. Ch ocolate	[__a__] or [__o__]	Ch ocolate	[__o__]
6. Imp o ssible	[__a__]	Imp o sible	[__o__]
7. O ption	[__a__]	O pción	[__o__]
8. R ose	[__ou__]	Rosa	[__o__]

Teacher key to exercises to practice the Spanish [u]

A. For the following list of English words, look at the bold vowel. Say the words aloud, and circle the words with bold vowels that produce the [u] sound like the Spanish letter “u.”

R oommate	A loud	B ut
U tter	W ho	B lue
S hoe	U ncouth	M urder
T hrough	H ouse	B ust
S how	T hus	B rute

B. Look at the following pairs of words in English and Spanish. Listen to them aloud and note the different pronunciations of the bold vowels. Using the phonetic guide table, choose the correct phonetic symbol for the bold vowel and write it on the line next to the word. Try to use correct pronunciation of all the vowels, but focus particularly on the letter “u.”

English		Spanish	
1. U ltimate	[__^__]	Ú ltima	[__u__]
2. M uch	[__^__]	M ucho	[__u__]
3. I nstitution	[__u__]	I nstitucional	[__u__]
4. D uke	[__u__]	D uque	[__u__]
5. J une	[__u__]	J unio	[__u__]
6. C onsultation	[__ə__]	C onsultación	[__u__]

Sources

- Allen, Edith M., and Laurel H. Turk. *El español al día 1*. Lexington: D.C. Heath & Co., 1985.
- Barrutia, Richard, and Armin Schwegler. *Fonética y fonología española*. New York: John Wiles & Sons, Inc., 1994.
- Briggs, Sandra J., and Paul T. Griffith. *Churros y chocolate*. Glenview: Scott, Foresman & Co., 1984.
- Carvajal, Carol Styles (Ed.). *The Oxford Spanish Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- Dueber, Julianne and Marion P. Holt. *Barron's 1001 Pitfalls in Spanish*. New York: Barron's Educational Series, 1997.
- Nibert, Holly. Advanced Spanish Phonetics Lectures. Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo. Spring 2004.
- Reck, Michael. Spanish Tongue Twisters. 8 January 2004. First International Collection of Tongue Twisters. 10 October 2005 <<http://www.uebersetzung.at/twister/es.htm>>.