

C O N T E N T S

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P R O N U N C I A T I O N

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1. INTRODUCTION

This Pronunciation module consists of this Description and a set of computerised listening exercises: it teaches you all the speech-sounds of Spanish. The variety taught is Castilian Spanish, the official language of Spain and the variety spoken in Madrid and in the central regions of Spain.

2. INDIVIDUAL SOUNDS

2.1. Plosives

p Voiceless bilabial plosive, unaspirated.

Like English *p*, but without the following puff of breath. 'paʎa *for*.

b Voiced bilabial plosive.

Like English *b*, but with more buzz. ba'stante *enough*.

t Voiceless denti-alveolar plosive, unaspirated.

Like English *t*, but with the tongue pushed against the front teeth and without the following puff of breath. 'tarde *afternoon*.

d Voiced denti-alveolar plosive.

Like English *d*, but with the tongue pushed against the front teeth and with more buzz. an'daʎ *walk*.

k Voiceless velar plosive, unaspirated.

Like English *k*, but without the following puff of breath. 'kaʎe *street*.

g Voiced velar plosive.

Like English *g*, but with more buzz. 'graθias *thank you*.

2.2. Affricates

tʃ Voiceless post-alveolar affricate, laminal.

Like *ch* in English *church*, but using the blade of the tongue (the part behind the tip), rather than the tip as in English. 'tʃiste *joke*.

dʒ Voiced post-alveolar affricate, laminal.

Like *j*, *dg* in English *judge*, but using the blade of the tongue (the part behind the tip), rather than the tip as in English. 'dʒo *I*.

2.3. Nasals

m Voiced bilabial nasal.

Like English *m*. 'mas *more*.

ɱ Voiced labio-dental nasal.

Like English *m*, but with the upper teeth pushing in front of the lower lip and biting down on it; the lips do not meet. Some English speakers use this sound when an *f* sound follows an *m*, as in the word *emphasis*. eɱ'fin *in short*.

n Voiced alveolar nasal.

Like English *n*. 'naða *nothing*.

ɲ Voiced palatal nasal.

Like the *ny* sound in English *onion*. ma'ɲana *tomorrow*.

ŋ Voiced velar nasal.

Like *ng* in English *long*. eŋkɔn'tʃaʎ *meet*.

2.4. Tap and trill

ɾ Voiced alveolar tap.

Like a very old-fashioned pronunciation of English *r* in *very*, made by tapping the tongue against the ridge behind the teeth. pa'ʎaʎ *stop*.

r: Voiced alveolar trill, prolonged.

Like a heavily rolled *r* that continues for a long time. θe'r:ʎaʎ *close*.

2.5. Fricatives

- f Voiceless labio-dental fricative.
Like English *f*. fa'miɫja *family*.
- θ Voiceless interdental fricative.
Like *th* in English *thick*. 'θeɾka *nearby*.
- s Voiceless alveolar fricative.
Like *ss* in English *hiss*. sa'βeɾ *know*.
- z Voiced alveolar fricative.
Like *z* in English *lazy*. 'mi zmo *same*.
- x Voiceless velar fricative.
Like the *ch* sound in Scottish *loch*. 'xente *people*.

2.6. Approximants

- β Voiced bilabial approximant.
Halfway between English *b* and English *w*; a buzzing sound made by bringing the two lips together without touching. a'βaxo *below*.
- ð Voiced interdental approximant.
Like *th* in English *this*, but with the tongue not touching the teeth. aju'ðar *help*.
- ɣ Voiced velar approximant.
Like *g* in English *good*, but with the tongue not touching the roof of the mouth. lu'ɣar *place*.
- j Voiced palatal approximant.
Like *y* in English *yoyo*. a'jeɾ *yesterday*.
- l Voiced alveolar lateral-approximant.
Like English *l*. 'laðo *side*.
- ʎ Voiced palatal lateral-approximant.
Like the *ly* sound in English *million*. 'ʎaβe *key*.
- w Voiced labial-velar approximant.
Like English *w*. 'gwapa *pretty*.

2.7. Vowels

- i Close front unrounded vowel.
Like *ee* in English *flee*, but shorter. i f go.
- ɪ Close front unrounded vowel, extra-short.
Like *ee* in English *flee*, but too short to count as a syllable. 'noβja *girlfriend*.
- e Mid front unrounded vowel.
Like *e* in English *dress*, but with the front of the tongue raised a little. 'eso *that-thing*.
- a Open central unrounded vowel.
Like *a* in English *path*, but shorter, and with the tongue further forward. 'alto *tall*.
- ɔ Mid back rounded vowel.
Like the vowel-sound in English *thought*, but with the tongue a little higher. 'ɔmbɾe *man*.
- u Close back rounded vowel.
Like *oo* in English *moon*, but using an old-fashioned pronunciation with strongly rounded lips and the middle of the tongue pushed down, and shorter. 'uno *one*.
- ʊ Close back rounded vowel, extra-short.
Like *oo* in English *moon*, but too short to count as a syllable. 'pausa *break*.

3. SOUNDS IN FLUENT SPEECH

3.1. Mouth position

All languages have a characteristic position of the mouth, a way of holding the vocal organs that colours the overall sound. For Spanish, the focus is slightly

4.2. Voiceless fricatives

When the voiceless fricatives *s* and *θ* are followed by voiced consonants, they change to their voiced counterparts *z* and *ð* respectively:

bwenɔs 'ðias changes to *bwenɔz* 'ðias *good morning*
la 'kɾuθ 'r:ɔxa changes to *la* 'kɾuð 'r:ɔxa *the Red Cross*

4.3. Varieties of *n* and *l*

When *n* comes before the labial consonants *p* or *b*, it changes to its labial equivalent *m*; before *f*, it changes to *ɱ*; before the palatals *tʃ*, *dʒ* and *ʎ* it changes to *ɲ*; and before the velar consonants *k*, *g* and *x* it changes to *ŋ*:

un 'mes changes to *um* 'mes *one month*
en fa'mili̯a changes to *eɱ* fa'mili̯a *in the family*
un 'tʃiste changes to *uɲ* 'tʃiste *a joke*
un ka'fe changes to *uŋ* ka'fe *a coffee*
kɔn xa'mɔn changes to *kɔŋ* xa'mɔn *with ham*

When *l* is followed by a palatal consonant, it changes to *ʎ*:

el 'tʃiste changes to *eʎ* 'tʃiste *the joke*
el 'dʒer:ɔ changes to *eʎ* 'dʒer:ɔ *the iron*

4.4. Use of *r* and *r*:

The *r*-sound can be either a tap (*r*) or a long trill (*r*:). In the middle of a word between vowels, the tap and the trill create different meanings - 'kaɾɔ *dear*, 'kar:ɔ *cart* - so you have to learn that with the word. At the start of a word (irrespective of where it falls in the phrase), and after *n*, *l* and *s*, only the long trill is used: 'r:aði:ɔ *radio*, enr:ɔ'laɾ *enlist*. Elsewhere either the tap or the trill may be used (this course shows only the tap in these other positions).

4.5. Use of *ʎ* and *j*

Some speakers do not always differentiate between *ʎ* and *j*, saying (for example) 'kaje *street* instead of 'kaʎe. This change is not further dealt with in this course.

4.6. Double consonants

When two identical consonants come together, one of them is removed:

em 'beð ðe changes to *em* 'be ðe *instead of*
'dɔs se'manas changes to *'dɔ* se'manas *two weeks*

4.7. Sequences of vowels

In general, when two identical vowels come together, one is lost; and when two different vowels come together, they coalesce into one syllable:

una a'mi ɣa changes to *una* 'mi ɣa
una 'ɔfa changes to *u* 'naɔfa

If one of the vowels is unstressed *i* or *u*, however, it becomes *ɨ* or *ʉ* respectively (or *w* if it is *u* and first in the pair):

'graθi̯as *thank you*
 sei̯s *six*
 'pausa *break*
 asta'lweɣɔ *see you later*

But when *i* falls between two vowels, it changes to *j*:

'tɪenta i 'unɔ changes to 'tɪenta j 'unɔ *thirty-one*

5. NON-CASTILIAN VARIETIES OF SPANISH

The following features may be heard in Spain outside Castile, or in South America:

- h for s: lɔh ehpa'ɲɔleh for lɔs espa'ɲɔles *the Spaniards*
- s for θ: a'sukaɪ for a'θukaɪ *sugar*
- θ for s: θu 'kaθa for su 'kasa *his house*
- dʒ for λ: 'pɔdʒɔ for 'pɔλɔ *chicken*
- ŋgw for nw: uŋ'gweβɔ for un'weβɔ *an egg*

6. LETTER-TO-SOUND RULES

The letter-to-sound rules of a language tell you how to translate its written form into sounds that you can pronounce. This is easier to do if you know what the possible sounds are, so this Description has dealt with that subject in depth. The translation is best thought of as a two-stage process: first noting the direct equivalent for a letter, and then applying the relevant fluent-speech changes. So, for example, **recibir** gives reθi 'biɪ at the first stage and r:ieθi 'βiɪ at the second stage.

6.1. Stressed syllable

In Spanish, the position of the stress in a word makes a difference to the meaning; so you need to establish which syllable is stressed. The rules are straightforward:

- if the word carries an acute accent, the stress falls on that syllable: fábrica 'faβɪka *factory*.
- if the word carries no accent but ends in a vowel or **n** or **s**, it is stressed on the penultimate syllable: muchachos mu'tʃatʃɔs *boys*.
- if it carries no accent and does not end in a vowel or **n** or **s**, it is stressed on the last syllable: buscar bus'kaɪ *to look for*.

To implement these rules, you need to know what counts as a syllable. Normally each vowel forms the centre of a separate syllable, so **pronto** *soon* has two syllables, and **piscina** *swimming-pool* has three. Where two vowels come together, and neither of them is **i** or **u**, they form two syllables for the purpose of determining where the stress falls: leo 'le.ɔ *I read*, desea de'se.a *she wants*. (The dot marks a syllable break. Note however that the two syllables may subsequently be reduced to one in fluent speech.) If one of the two vowels is **i** or **u**, they form two syllables if the **i** or **u** carries a written accent, but one syllable if it does not:

- país pa'is *country* - **aí** forms two syllables.
- aire 'ai.ɾe *air* - **ai** forms one syllable.
- continuo konti'nu.ɔ *I continue* - **úo** forms two syllables.
- pausa 'pa.ʊsa *pause* - **au** forms one syllable.

6.2. Letters to sounds

- a** spells a. mañana ma'ɲana *tomorrow*.
- b** spells b/β. bebo 'beβɔ *I drink*.
v spells the same pair of sounds.
- c** spells k or θ.
In **ca**, **co**, **cu**, **c** spells k. calle 'kaɫe *street*, comer kɔ'meɪ *to eat*, Cuba 'kuβa *Cuba*, cuanto 'kwantɔ *as much*.
In **ce**, **ci**, **c** spells θ. cerrar θe'r:ɪɪ *to shut*, cinco 'θiŋkɔ *five*.
- ch** spells tʃ. muchacho mu'tʃatʃɔ *boy*.
- d** spells d/ð. dedo 'deðɔ *finger*.
- e** spells e. elemento ele'mentɔ *element*.
- f** spells f. en fin eŋ'fin *in short*.
- g** spells g/ɣ or x.
In **ga**, **go**, **gu**, **g** spells g/ɣ. galgo 'galɣɔ *greyhound*, gordo 'gɔɪðɔ *fat*, gustar gus'tar *to please*, agudo a'ɣuðɔ *sharp*.
In **ge**, **gi**, **g** spells x. gente 'xente *people*, ginebra xi'neβɾa *gin*.
The letters **gua** spell gwa (*guarda* 'gwarða *guard*), but **gue**, **gui** spell ge, gi (**u** is there to indicate that **g** represents g, not x). guerra 'ger:a *war*, guitarra gi'tar:a *guitar*.

- Denti-alveolar:** a sound in which the tongue articulates simultaneously with the back of the upper front teeth and the alveolum. See 'Alveolum'.
- Extra-short:** an extra-short vowel is one where the sound is heard for a very short period of time - perhaps one-tenth of a second.
- Fricative:** the air-stream through the mouth is made sufficiently narrow to cause hiss, but not completely blocked.
- Front:** a vowel where the front part of the tongue is tense.
- Interdental:** the tongue is thrust forward between the front teeth.
- Labial-velar:** the sound is made with the two lips, but the back of the tongue is also raised.
- Labio-dental:** the upper front teeth articulate with the lower lip.
- Laminal:** using the blade of tongue (the part immediately behind the tip).
- Lateral-approximant:** the centre of the tongue touches the roof of the mouth at the specified point; the sides of the tongue are retracted.
- Mid:** a vowel where the tense part of the tongue is halfway between the floor and the roof of the mouth.
- Nasal:** of a consonant, one in which the breath passes through the nose (the articulators block the passage through the mouth). Of a vowel, one in which the breath passes partly through the nose and partly through the mouth. See 'Oral'.
- Open:** a vowel where the tense part of the tongue is near the floor of the mouth.
- Oral:** a vowel that is pronounced wholly through the mouth (i.e. no breath passes through the nose). See 'Nasal'.
- Palatal:** the tongue articulates with the palate, the hard middle part of the roof of the mouth.
- Plosive:** the air-stream through the mouth is blocked: pressure is built up and released suddenly.
- Post-alveolar:** the tongue articulates with the area behind the alveolum, where it joins the palate. See 'Alveolum'.
- Rounded:** a vowel where the lips are rounded (by pulling in the corners of the mouth).
- Short:** a short vowel is one where the sound continues for only a brief period - say about one-fifth of a second.
- Tap:** a consonant where one articulator touches the other briefly while in movement.
- Trill:** a consonant where one articulator vibrates against the other.
- Unaspirated:** an unaspirated plosive does not have the puff of breath that accompanies most plosives in English. See 'Aspirated'.
- Unrounded:** a vowel where the lips are spread, not rounded.
- Velar:** the tongue articulates with the velum. See 'Velum'.
- Velum:** the soft back part of the roof of the mouth.
- Voiced:** with a voiced sound, the vocal chords vibrate: the sound can be sung; if you put your hands over your ears, you can hear a buzz; if you touch your larynx lightly, you can feel vibrations. See 'Voiceless'.
- Voiceless:** with a voiceless sound, the vocal chords do not vibrate: the sound cannot be sung; if you put your hands over your ears, you do not hear a buzz; and if you touch your larynx lightly, you feel no vibrations. See 'Voiced'.