

4. PHONETIC DESCRIPTION OF THE ENGLISH AND SPANISH CONSONANTS. COMPARATIVE STUDY. PRONUNCIATION ERRORS AND HOW TO AVOID THEM.

The following table shows the system and general phonetic specifications of the RP consonants:

Note: where consonants appear in pairs, the one on the left is voiceless (i.e. typically without vibration of the vocal folds) and that on the right is voiced (i.e. with vibration). This classification is proposed by Daniel Jones and A. C. Gimson in their English Pronouncing Dictionary.

Next we are going to define all the phonetic terms that we are using to classify and describe each consonant.

- The action of the vocal folds or cords:

Voiced (lenis): a sound produced with vibration of the vocal folds.

Voiceless (fortis): a sound produced without vibration of the vocal folds.

- The action of the velum:

Oral sounds: produced when the velum is raised and the outlet through the nose is shut off, so the air goes out through the mouth.

Nasal sounds: produced when the velum is lowered, allowing the air stream to escape through the nose.

3) Manner of articulation: it makes reference to the type of closure or narrowing at the point of articulation. We can distinguish the following:

Plosive: there is a complete closure at some point of the vocal track. After this, the air is released explosively.

Affricate: there is a complete closure at some point of the vocal track, after this the air is released slowly through a narrowing. The first stage is plosive and the second stage is fricative.

Fricative: there is a close approximation of the articulators, and central passage of the air-stream.

Nasal: there is a complete closure at some point in the mouth, but the soft palate being lowered, the air escapes through the nose.

Lateral: a part closure is made at some point in the mouth, the air-stream being allowed to escape on one or both sides of the contact.

Approximant or semi-vowel: a type of consonant rather difficult to describe. We can say that it is an articulation in which the articulators approach each other but do not get sufficiently close to each other to produce a complete consonant as a plosive, nasal or fricative.

- Place of articulation: at what point or points and between what organs the closure or narrowing takes place when the air-stream passes through.

Bilabial: the lips are articulators.

Labiodental: the upper teeth are passive articulators; the lower lip is active articulator.

Dental: the upper front teeth are passive articulators and the point or blade of the tongue are active articulators.

Alveolar: the teeth ridge is passive articulator and the point or blade of the tongue is active articulator.

Post-alveolar : the tip and rims of the tongue are active articulators and the back part of the alveolar ridge is passive articulator.

Palato-alveolar: the junction of the teeth ridge and hard palate is passive articulator, and the blade of the tongue is active.

Palatal: the hard palate is passive articulator and the front of the tongue is active.

Glottal: an obstruction or narrowing causing friction but not vibration of the vocal folds.

Next we are going to describe each sound both in English and in Spanish.

- /p/: plosive, bilabial, voiceless, oral.
- /p/: plosive, bilabial, voiceless, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

p, pp ripe, copper /'raip/, /'kop /

gh hiccough /' h k p/

Positions:

. Initial: pay, pet, pear. With stronger aspiration in initial position and in an accented syllable. This is also to be applied to /t/ and /k/. Such an aspiration does not exist in Spanish.

. Medial: open, April, apple. With weaker aspiration.

. Final: map, cop, stop.

So the pronunciation of this consonant is not very difficult for Spanish speakers. A trick to know if we are pronouncing it well in English is to do so with a lit match or lighter close to your lips. If you put it out the aspiration is right. A Spanish /p/ won't be able to put it out. The phoneme /p/ is easier to pronounce when it occurs in initial and medial position, but in final position it is a bit more difficult because Andalusians tend to leave out final phonemes, for example: solda(d)o, to(do), na(da), la(s) casa(s). We are not used to utter that sound as the last one in a word, because we have not got words such words ending in /p/.

- /b/: plosive, bilabial, voiced, oral.
- /b/: plosive, bilabial, voiced, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

b, bb boat, rubber /b ut/, /'r b /

Positions:

. Initial: bright, bird, bottle. Less voiced in initial position.

. Medial: subnormal, table, baby.

. Final: pub, club, Bob.

Easy pronunciation for Spanish speakers who must pronounce it stronger than in Spanish, with the same sort of aspiration than initial /p/. The pronunciation of /b/ depends on the sound which surrounds it, as always happens in phonetics. For example: pin, preach. Obviously the quality of the vowel in `pin´ makes the phoneme /p/ different from that in `preach´, which is influenced by the /r/.

Special difficulty present those words with a mute : climb, doubt, comb.

When a Spanish speaker decides `ir al pub´, that final /b/ is left out once again. The same applies to `club´, words that our language has taken from English. There are no Spanish words ending in -b, so it is difficult to get used to pronouncing it properly.

- /t/: plosive, alveolar, voiceless, oral.
- /t/: plosive, dental, voiceless, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

t, tt top, butter /top/, /'b t /

th Anthony /' nton /

-ed worked, watched /w :kt/, /wot t/

Positions:

. Initial: table, tobacco, together.

. Medial: cotton, letter, contact.

. Final: cat, bent, suit.

Easy sound for Spanish speakers, but we must be careful to make it alveolar instead of dental. /t/, like /p/, is aspirated when followed by a stressed vowel : take, tea. /t/ is less stressed when used in unstressed positions: letter, quantity, and after /s/: stool, stand.

Especial difficulty presents the mute <t> in words such as: whistle, castle, fasten. In some proper names it is spelt <th>: Thomas, Thames.

We have also to pay special attention to the pronunciation of the final -ed in the past and past participle of regular verbs. If the verb ends with a voiceless sound, that morpheme is pronounced /t/: walked, worked.

- /d/: plosive, alveolar, voiced, oral.
- /d/: plosive, dental, voiced, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

d, dd doubt, ladder /d ut/, /'l d /

–ed loved, earned /l vd/, / :nd/

Positions:

. Initial: dog, duty, dance. Less voiced in initial position.

. Medial: medium, middle, sadness.

. Final: sad, second, good.

What has already said about /b/ can also be applied to this sound.

It is not aspirated. /d/ has several allophones, the main one is a dental /d/, pronounced when 0 or o follow, a /d/ with nasal plosion is used when followed by t, d, t , or d .

Some difficulty is to be found when we have to pronounce the final –ed in verbs ending with a voiced sound: live, love, earn. In this case –ed is pronounced /d/.

The fact that English /d/ is alveolar and not dental, as in Spanish. This implies a slight difficulty when pronouncing the English sound. E.g. third, the tip of the tongue pressing against the alveolar ridge, not against the upper teeth.

Let's pay attention to mute <d>: Wednesday, sandwich.

- /k/: plosive, velar, voiceless, oral.
- /k/: plosive, velar, voiceless, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

c, cc coat, accord /k t/, / 'k :d/

ck pack /p k/

cq acquit / 'kw t/

qu quick /kw k/

ch choir /kw i /

k keep /ki:p/

x explosion / ks'pl n/

Positions:

. Initial: king, cat, cake.

. Medial: action, school, uncle.

. Final: talk, walk, pink.

English

This is not a difficult sound for Spanish speakers, we just have to be careful when pronouncing the strong occlusion.

English /k/ has several allophones, depending on the sounds around it. /k/ before a stressed vowel is aspirated as in: key, come. Unstressed /k/, for example `baker´, is less aspirated and also when <k> is preceded by /s/: scare, school. Special difficulty present those words with a mute <k>: know, muscle.

Some times /k/ involve more lip–rounding than others, for instance. /k/ before /w/ is pronounced with rounded lips: queer /kw /, queen /kwi:n/.

- /g/: plosive, velar, voiced, oral.
- /g/: plosive, velar, voiced, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

g, gg girl, bigger /g :l/, /'b g /

gu guest, guard /gest/, /ga:d/

gh ghost /g st/

x exist / g'z st/

Positions:

. Initial: garage, go, game. Less voiced in initial position.

. Medial: target, cognate, trigger.

. Final: frog, dog, pig.

This sound shares the characteristic already said about /b/ and /d/ as far as difficulty of pronunciation is concerned.

A nasal g is pronounced when followed by <n>: gnome.

Special attention has to be paid to mute <g>: sign, reign.

– /t /: affricate, palato–alveolar, voiceless, oral.

- /c/: affricate, linguo–palatal, voiceless, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

ch * church /t :t /

tch match /m t /

t picture /' p kt /

ti question /'kwɛst n/

* This grapheme can also be pronounced as /k/, for example in character, choir, chemistry.

Positions:

. Initial: chew, Chinese, chin.

. Medial: catching, watched, achievement.

. Final: March, which, match.

This particular sound is the one which is nearer to our Spanish /c/, although there are three more sounds that are similar to this. That makes it very difficult for Spanish speakers to distinguish them. These sounds are /d /, // and //. As they make change the meaning of similar words, it is essential to pronounce them properly, for example:

cheap /t i:p/ , sheep / i:p/, jeep /d i:p/

- /d /: affricate, palato–alveolar, voiceless, oral.
- No equivalent sound in Spanish. This makes difficult for Spanish speakers to pronounce it accurately.

Graphic equivalents:

ge gentle /'d ɛntl/

gi Gibraltar /d 'br :lt /

gy gypsy /' d ps /

gg exaggeration / gz d 're n/

j jewel /d u: l/

dg bridge /br d /

dj adjacent / 'd e s nt/

de grandeur /'gr nd /

di soldier /'s ld /

This is sound presents many difficulties to Spanish people, who tend to pronounce it as Spanish /j/. Also the amount of possible graphic equivalents makes it more difficult for us to identify them, although we can remember that it is the normal sound of the English <j> and <g> before e, i and y: judge, jam, gin, gypsy.

At the end of a word or in the middle of it, it is most often spelt <dge>: bridge. It is also spelt finally with <ge>: age, large. The ending <-age> is usually pronounced /id /: village, marriage, sausage.

- /: fricative, palato–alveolar, voiceless, oral.

- In Spanish there is not such a phoneme, but we can find an allophone of /c/ in Andalucia, for instance:

`muchacho´ /mu a o/.

Graphic equivalents:

sh ash //

s sure / u /

ss pressure /' pre /

ch machine /m ` i:n/

sch schwepps / weps/

The following graphemes, if they go before an unstressed syllable or silabic consonant:

ce ocean /' n/

ci special /'spe l/

si Asia /' e /

ti condition /k n'd n/

It is spelt <ch> in some words of French origin: moustache, machine.

<-ssion> is pronounced / n/ in: passion, mission, discussion., but <-sion> preceded by a vowel is pronounced / n/: decision, television.

People from the north of Spain find it a bit more difficult to pronounce this fricative sound, although it is not very difficult to imitate. This feature is considered vulgar in Spanish, but it is very useful when learning English pronunciation.

– / /: fricative, palato–alveolar, voiced, oral.

– There is no such a sound in Spanish, and we tend to pronounce it as //, that is, without vibration of the vocal cords.

Graphic equivalents:

s leisure /'le /

si occasion / `kei n/

z seizure /'si: /

ge garage /'g ra: /

Positions:

This sound occurs medially and finally in English, but it never occurs at the beginning of a word. It is found in some words borrowed from the French: rouge, beige, garage.

- /f/: fricative, labio–dental, voiceless, oral.
- /f/: fricative, labio–dental, voiceless, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

f, ff leaf, offer /li:f/, /'of /

gh laugh /la:f/

ph Philip /'fɪlɪp/

Positions:

. Initial: five, face, forget.

. Medial: left, infinitive, afford.

. Final: off, chief, roof.

Being very similar to the Spanish sound, no problems are detected when learners produce this English sound.

- /v/: fricative, labio–dental, voiced, oral.
- The grapheme <v> in Spanish is pronounced as /b/. So it is not a phoneme.

Graphic equivalents:

v live /l v/

f of /ov/, weak form / v/

ph nephew /'nevju:/

Positions:

. Initial: victory, very, van.

. Medial: even, clever, never.

. Final: brave, love, live.

Although this phoneme /v/ doesn't exist in Spanish, it is easy to imitate. We can remember that not long ago, elder people used to make the distinction between /v/ and /b/. But nowadays this contrast is considered old–fashioned.

- /θ/: fricative, dental, voiceless, oral.
- /θ/: fricative, inter–dental, voiceless, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

th north /n :θ/

Positions:

. Initial: think, thunder, throw.

. Medial: Mathew, mathematics.

. Final: breathe, teeth, bath.

This sound is easily reproduced by Spanish speakers. The difficulty of it lies in the fact that it can also be spelt / o /.

– /o/: fricative, dental, voiced, oral.

- There is no equivalent sound in Spanish, so there is a tendency to equal it to the sound /O/.

Graphic equivalents:

th that, there, with /o t/, /oe /, /w o/

Positions:

. Initial: they, then, those.

. Medial: mother, brother, brother.

. Final: breathe, smooth, teethe.

There are no exact rules about when <th> is pronounced /O/ or /o/, but in general:

- <th> is /O/ at the beginning of a word (except for the pronouns: this, that, and the adverbs: there, etc.
- <th> is /O/ at the end of a word: breath, mouth, south, etc. Exceptions include: smooth /smu:o/, with /w o/.
- In the middle of non-Germanic words or in the middle of a word between a consonant and a vowel: healthy, anthem.

In other cases /o/ is used, for example between vowels: rather, weather.

- /s/: fricative, alveolar, voiceless, oral.
- /s/: fricative, alveolar, voiceless, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

s, ss sit, pass /s t/, /pa:s/

c (+ e,i,y) peace, cinema, fancy /pi:s/, /'s n m /,

/'f ns /

x = (ks) box, taxi /boks/, /'t ks /

Positions:

. Initial: sad, smoke.

. Medial: crisis, thesis.

. final: gas, bus, shops.

There are several variants of /s/ and these depend on the region of the speaker and partly on individual pronunciation.

At the beginning of words <s> is always pronounced /s/, but in the middle or at the end of words it is often /z/, e.g. absolve /b'zlv/, please /pli:z/.

- /z/: fricative, alveolar, voiced, oral.
- This phoneme does not exist in Spanish as such a phoneme, but just as an allophone, that is, a different realisation of a phoneme, they can never make a difference of meaning between one word and another.

Graphic equivalents:

z, zz zone, puzzle, zoo /z n/, /'p zl/, /zu:/'

s trees, is /tri:z/, /i:z/

ss possess /p 'zes/

Positions:

. Initial: zoo, zone.

. Medial: puzzle

. final: Cadiz

There exist very complicated rules regarding whether an <s> should be voiced or not and there are frequent exceptions to these rules. Some useful points to note are:

- /s/ is used in the endings –ess, –is, and –ous: waitress, crisis, jealous.
- –es is pronounced /i:z/ in:
 - classical names (e.g. Hades)
 - plurals of words which take –is in the singular: crisis/crises, thesis/theses.
- –s when it is a plural suffix of nouns of the third person singular of verbs is pronounced /s/ when preceded by a voiceless consonant: cat/cats, take/takes.
- The endings –sive, –sity, are usually pronounced /s/: expensive, university.
- Final –s preceded by a, i, o, u or y is pronounced /s/ except when mute (as in corps): gas, this, chaos, us, Gladys.
- /h/: fricative, glottal, voiceless, oral.

– The grapheme <h> in Spanish does not sound, it is mute, although in southern parts there exists an allophone, with an aspiration, that makes it easier for Andalusian people to imitate this English sound, but it is considered vulgar.

Graphic equivalents:

h hot /hot/

wh who /hu:/

But note: what /wot/, where, why, etc.

Positions:

. Initial: house, hat, hurt.

. Medial: enhance, inhibition.

<h> is silent in: heir /e /, hour / /, honour /'on / <h> is silent in unstressed syllables, particularly when there are stressed words with h in the same sentence:

She had her hat in her hand / i: h d : `h t in : `h nd/

It is also silent in: vehicle, annihilate; also in names ending in – ham: Tottenham, Wickham.

In uneducated speech h is frequently omitted both from unstressed and stressed words.

The quality of /h/ depends on the vowels next to it. There are as many varieties of h as there are vowels.

- /m/: nasal, bilabial, voiced.
- /m/: nasal, bilabial, voiced.

Graphic equivalents:

m, mm more, summer /m :/, /'s m /

mn solemn, hymn /'sol m/, /'h m/

Position:

. Initial: man, mother, main.

. Medial: coming, female, Amen.

. Final: mum, rhythm, ham.

Note that m is silent in initial mn– : mnemonic.

Due to its similarity with the Spanish phoneme /m/, it does not present any difficulty for Spanish speakers.

- /n/: nasal, alveolar, voiced.
- /n/: nasal, alveolar, voiced.

Graphic equivalents:

n, nn name, manner /ne m/, /'m n /

Positions:

. Initial: no, nice, nine.

. Medial: sunny, candle, can't.

. final: fun, sun, one.

A final -n, following m is silent: autumn, solemn, hymn; also in damn, damned and damning.

Once again, this sound is very easy to pronounce for Spanish speakers, because our /n/ shares its characteristics.

- /n/: nasal, velar, voiced.
- Spanish do not have these sound as phoneme, although we can find a very similar sound as allophone, for example in words such as: ángulo, ancla, ángel.

Graphic equivalents:

ng sing /s n/

n (+ g , k) England, uncle /' ngl nd/, /' nkl/

Position:

. Medial: singer, Anglosaxon

. Final: all verbs in gerund, i.e: playing, eating.

dog, pig, slang, gang.

There are several varieties of n depending on the surrounding sounds. For example, the prefix <con-> followed by a syllable beginning with /k/ or /g/ is usually pronounced /n /: congregation, concord.

The prefixes <en->, <in->, <un-> are usually pronounced with /n/ even when /k/ follows: unkind, include, encourage.

As we have mentioned above, we have an allophone, but even so, it gives us some problems when it occurs at the end of a word and specially after a vowel, for example `dog´. It is easier to pronounce it in: singing.

- /l/: lateral, alveolar, voiced, oral.
- /l/: lateral, alveolar, voiced, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

l, ll light, call /l t/, /k :l/

Positions:

. Initial: lorry, lovely, laugh.

. Medial: yellow, below, belong.

. Final: fall, tall, full.

In Spanish we only have a single /l/ phoneme, but in English there are two kinds of /l/:

- `Clear l´: before vowels and j (bottle, candle). Clear l is used in initial position and medially before a vowel and j.
- `Dark l´: before all other consonants and finally if a pause follows (bell, build).

`Clear´ and `dark´ l are allophones of the l-phoneme. That is, they do not distinguish meaning.

Written l is sometimes silent before certain consonants, especially: f, k, m, d. E.g. calf, half, talk, walk, yolk, fork, palm, would, should, could, etc.

Spanish and English /l/ share the same articulatory description, but we have to pay attention to the back position of the tongue when pronouncing the English sound, very similar to the /l/ pronounced in Catalonia.

- /w/: semi-vowel, bilabial, voiced, oral.
- There is no /w/ sound in Spanish, so it causes problems to the learners of English, who tend to pronounce it as a sort of /g/ in `gusano´.

Graphic equivalents:

w west /west/

u quite, language /kw t/, /l ngw d /

o choir, one /kw /, /w n/

Positions:

. Initial: woman, warrior, water.

. Medial: reward, tower, Edward.

The sound of /w/ varies according to the vowel that follows it. Spanish speakers find it particularly difficult to pronounce this sound when it is followed by the vowel <o>: womb, woman, wool, wood... To try to utter it properly we can start by producing a long u: , but immediately we should change to another vowel position. On the other hand it is easier when it is followed by -h, for example the question words: what, where, which.

Note: /w/ is silent in the cluster <sw> in some words: sword

/s :d/, answer /a:ns /.

- /j/: semi-vowel, palatal, voiced, oral.
- The closest sound in Spanish is that of the first part of diphthongs such as: indio, radio. To pronounce it properly we should start by uttering a quick /i:/ and then, changing very fast to the position of the following sound.

Graphic equivalents:

y yes, year /jes/, /j /

i senior, opinion /'s nj /, / `p nj n/

u usual /'ju: u l/

eau beauty /'bju:t /

eu feud /'fju:d/

ew few /fju:/

hu huge /hju:d /

ui suit /sju:t/

The sound /j/ is frequently spelt <y> in initial position: yes, yield, you. In the middle of a word it is most often written <i>: behaviour, companion; or <e>: simultaneous. Sometimes /j/ is placed before /u:/. This occurs in words spelt with: <u, ue, ui, ew, eu> (all of them represent long /u:/).

/j/ is inserted regularly after:

a) p pew, pewter

b) b beautiful, bureau

c) t tutor, Tuesday

d) d dual, duty

e) k cure, queue, curiosity

f) g argue

g) m music

h) n new

i) f few, fuel

j) v view, revue

k) h huge, human

Though for Spanish speakers it is not difficult to pronounce this sound, we tend to pronounce it like the initial sounds of: llevar, llamar, yate, yugo.

- /r/: depending on the author it can be described as a semi-vowel, postalveolar, voiced, oral sound or as a fricative, postalveolar, voiced, oral sound.

– /r/ or /r/: `vibrante simple` or `vibrante múltiple`, alveolar, voiced, oral.

Graphic equivalents:

r, rr red, carrot /red/, /'k r t/

wr write /r t/

rh rhyme /r m/

Positions:

. Initial: roses, round, really.

. Medial: sorry, worry, carry.

. Final: river, car, star.

English /r/ is easy to pronounce for Spanish speakers as we have got a similar sound: the `vibrante simple´/r/, as in `cara´, `pero´.

We can call it a `one-tap r´ in English.

Note: -r in final position or before a consonant is not pronounced: far, fair, part, cart, cord, four, etc.

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SOME PRACTICAL ADVICES TO SOLVE PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS,

The main idea when speaking a foreign language is to be able to **communicate**, and communication does not mean necessarily to pronounce as a native speaker does, we cannot be like them. We are not English and the way we speak is actually part of our identity. So the principal objective is **intelligibility**, that is, **the ability to be understood by a listener**.

Next we are going to give some practical exercises for Spanish speakers of English in order to avoid our typical mistakes, which can make communication very difficult.

We cannot forget that we can work with sounds in isolation, then words, sentences and finally connected

speech. Let's start at the beginning.

- Pair work: we can spell our name to one of our class mates.
- Classify the English alphabet, according to the vocalic sounds:

/i:/ /ei/ /ai/ /a:/ / u/ /e/ /ju:/

b a i r o f q

c h y l u

d j m w

e k n

g s

p x

t z

v

We have already said that we cannot speak like native speakers, but we can **improve** certain areas. Although we cannot count **sounds** (they are endless), we know there are 44 phonemes. (See phonemic chart at the end). Which of these are more or less difficult for Spanish speakers? Let's talk about vowels, for example:

EASY LESS EASY DIFFICULT

i: i e

u: o

u a: ɜ:

e

o:

- Throwing a phoneme: this exercise consists of saying one of these difficult phonemes, but without sound. Students have to guess it.
- Articulatory setting: imitate an English speaker speaking Spanish to realize the different position of the articulatory organs. This is called the **mouth setting**, the way we have to 'put' our mouths, for example:
 - Don't open your mouths so much, English speakers seem to 'swallow words' or 'mumble'.
 - Don't open, spread or round your lips too much.
 - The cheeks are loose.
 - The jaws are close together.
 - **Relaxation** is the key word, except for the tongue tip. So even inside the mouth, muscular effort is minimal.

It is said that English faces lack animation. Is this true?

- Phoneme exchange: to do this exercise we need cards with different sound on them. Then we choose one card and practise the sound we have got. When we think we pronounce it correctly, we pass our card to other student while saying it.
- Sound race: this is a group activity. We have to write in two minutes as many words as possible with the sound /3:/ for example:

Bird verb purse first church purple skirt burn pearl shirt girl

term learn turn ...

Mistakes are also part of the learning, and can make the activity even funnier.

7) Sound search: we can hear a conversation at normal speech (live or recorded) and then try to find, for instance, all the // and /ai/ sounds.

- Odd man out: we have to circle the word that does not belong to each line of five words. Four are similarly pronounced, the other one is the 'odd man out'

a) washed watched wished walked waved

b) wanted painted founded missed hunted

c) pushed pulled filled begged lived

d) misses watches pulls washes judges

- Grouping sounds: in this exercise we have to classify words according to their vocalic sound, for example, the following words are given.

Work woke walk look luck shirt stone hope hop stuck port cough tough ought book bird stop rock put word
call phone sun pull

3: u o: u o

work woke walk luck look hop

shirt stone port stuck book stop

bird hope ought tough put rock

word phone call sun pull cough

10) Sounds hangman: this is a very well-known activity to learn vocabulary. It can also be used to work with sounds. Write a word with at least 5 sounds. Try to guess it in pairs. For example: o:lt ge .

11) Discrimination exercises: decide between 1 and 2 as you hear.

- 2

slip sleep

hit heat work walk

shirt short

firm form

full fool

hut hot

run ran

vowels bowels

cheap jeep

The teacher says 1 or 2 and the students decide what they hear. Or each student chooses and reads one word. Then the teacher decides.

Let's pay attention to the last word `jeep'. The initial sound is pronounced as /dz/. This is a common problem for Spanish speakers, particularly when we confuse it with the sound of the letter y in initial position. So `yes' is uttered as `jess', for example. One possible solution is to think that the initial sound is an /i:/, paying special attention to lip position (they are spread). We can begin by pronouncing /i:/ with spread lips and to hold this sound for a few seconds before adding /es/. Each time we pronounce it we should shorten the length of the initial /i:/

- Exercises with sentences containing alliteration are also a good practice, especially with those sounds that are difficult for us, let's say /w/:
 - Which warm white Welsh woollie will we wear on Wednesday?
 - Welsh whiskey was once widely wanted.
 - Where and when will Wendy wear the white woolen waist-coat we want her to wear?

The pronunciation of /w/ is very difficult for many of us, particularly in initial position as in `would' or `woman'. One solution here is to think of /w/ as a combination of the two vowel sounds /u:/ and //, and to try to pronounce each in turn, but quicker each time until we get a sound very close to /w/, if not /w/ itself. Focus particularly on the rounded lip position at the beginning of the sound.

- Write two lists, one with English and other with Spanish sounds:

No no * Say one from any column. The rest of the group decide if

K que it is Spanish or English.

See sí

Train tren * Learners can decide by raising hands too.

Two tu

L el

Maria María

Call col

Van van

- Dictation: to see the way words go together:

Elision 1 n fish and chip fish`n`chips

Elision 2 kn Can you help me? (vowel restriction)

Assimilation 3 gu Goodbye! /gubbai/

Assimilation 4 gug Goog grief! /guggrief/

Elis. Assim. 5 /dz/ Do you (know)... D'you

Assimilation 6 /di / This should... /di ud.../

Elision 7 / wi/ Shall I go?

Then we have to listen to these kind of expressions in real speech. Dictations of complete sentences like these are also very useful. Try to exaggerate the links, for example:

`Put it in the newspaper´ putitin pu ti tin

- The opposite of elision is addition, and a common error for Spanish learners is to add an extra /e/ before `st´ or `sp´ in initial position: stop, Spain become `estop´ and `espain´. One solution is to try to link the last sound of the previous word to the initial /s/ of the consonant cluster. So, in the sentence `I live in Spain´, we can say `ins´ followed by `pain´. At the beginning it will sound a bit strange, but when we are able to pronounce it quicker it will sound more natural.

Another possible solution is to pronounce /s/ in isolation (hissing like a snake) and then to add, for example, `pain´, `tudent´, etc.

- In Spanish the phonemes /t/ and /d/ are dental and not alveolar, as they are in RP English. So we pronounce them very softly. One solution is simply to pay attention and focus on the place of articulation in English on a mouth diagram and realize that the tongue touches the alveolar ridge, and they should not touch the teeth. Try this with words like *tent*, *try*, *red*, etc.
- Let's explain another difficulty of the English sounds /d/ and /O/ for Spanish speakers. Again the best method is to be aware of the way they are pronounced. They should not be uttered by placing the tip of our tongue at the back of our teeth, because in that case we will get a Spanish /d/, especially //. If we put our finger up to our mouth when we pronounce these two English sounds we should be able to feel our tongue touch our finger.
- Other sounds that present a special difficulty for Spanish speakers are the plosives when they are at the beginning of a word. They are pronounced with a strong aspiration that we have not got in Spanish. A trick to know if the aspiration has been correctly made is to put a lit match in front of your mouth and pronounce English words such as: pen, tin, came, boat, dental, etc. If we are able to put the match out, our pronunciation will be right. Sometimes it is quite difficult for us to distinguish between `bin´ and `pin´ in

isolation. Within a context it is easier.

- Just to finish with difficult sounds, we must talk about the final /g/ in words such as `dog´, `frog´, etc. That final -g does not exist in Spanish, so we must practise it by getting the back of our tongue to make the sound at the velar position. Again a mouth diagram may help a lot.
- What about rhythm? English speech is similar to music because both have a beat. There are groups of syllables and in each group there are strong and weaker ones. The words that have the strong beat are: nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Prepositions, articles and pronouns have weak beat. A very useful practice to improve our English rhythm is to listen to and sing English songs. In fact there are some books that are written specially for this. We are talking about Jazz Chants, Rhythms of American English for Students of English as a Second Language, written by Carolyn Graham. As she explains: `The selection of a particular beat in jazz may convey powerful and varied emotions, the rhythm, stresses and intonation patterns of the spoken language are **essential elements for the expression of feelings and the intent of the speaker**´. The method consists of repeating each line of the chant, establishing a clear, strong beat (by counting, clapping, etc) So we can conclude that songs are a very effective way to improve the rhythm of a foreign language.
- Now we can talk about the difficulty that English stress presents for Spanish speakers. In Spanish each syllable has more or less the same duration, that is why it is a `syllabic language´. But in English, speech is characterized by stress, that is, a syllable that is pronounced louder than others or with more length, at regular periods of time. For example:

o o o o

He wrote a letter Take John

He wrote a long letter Take it to John

He wrote a very long letter (very quickly)

(very quickly)

In connected speech (when we say sentences, not single words) many vowels become reduced because complete words are unstressed. So it is a very good piece of advice to practice short expressions or sentences like the following ones. They can be dictated:

Look at us /'lʌk t ` s/

I ate bread and cheese /ai eit `bred'n `t i:z/

Rock'n roll

- A good exercise to practice stress is to try to make the following sentences meaningful by means of placing stress in the right place and also by using the appropriate rhythm:

If you write `write´, `w-r-i-t-e,

You write `write´ right,

But if you write `write´ `r-i-g-h-t´,

You write `write´ wrong.

- Video viewing is also a very useful way to practise stress and rhythm. We must find a video extract in which someone is seen emphasizing the rhythm of their speech with gestures, etc. (E.g. Basil, the main character of 'Fawlty Towers' or Jim Carrey). Then we can play the extract without sound twice and try to imitate the body language of the speaker. We can play the extract as many times as necessary. Next, if it seems possible from the context, we can try to guess what the speaker is saying. Finally we may play the extract with sound, and try to imitate the body language again, but this time adding the speech. We can practise this all the times we think are necessary.
- To get the right stress we may learn some accent rules:
 - – `ese: Chinese, Japanese
 - – `ometer: thermometer, kilometer/tre
 - – `ee: referee, employee
 - – able: it is always unstressed: changeable, eatable
 - – tion & – sion: the stress always comes before these syllables
 - Another good exercise is to contrast very similar sentences, the element that changes

their meanings is stress, for example:

- What is this thing called love?
- What is this thing called, love?
- Written texts are also very useful to improve our pronunciation. For instance, we can choose a written text and then:
 - find all the two-syllable words (arrived, very, people...)
 - find all the words with this stress pattern o O (about, before, because, alone...)
 - find examples of this diphthong /ei/ (day, faith, May...)
 - find all the spellings in the text for the phoneme /3:/
 - how many different vowel sounds can you find?
- We can also find some rules for intonation (that is, the melody of speech). There are two basic melodies: raising and falling (high and low)
 - orders usually go down: Open the door!
 - Wh- questions usually go down: What did you see?
 - When we list a series of elements all of them have rising intonation except for the last one: I've been to Germany, Spain, Italy, Greece and France.
 - Exclamations have a raising intonation: Oh my God!
 - Suggestions also go down: Let's go to the cinema / Shall we go to the museum? / Why don't we go to the disco? / How about going to the theatre?
 - Yes/No questions usually have a raising intonation: Is David there?
 - Maybe, perhaps, yes, OK have raising intonation
 - Questions tags.

1. You are not German, are you? Raising int. to show surprise.

2. You are not German, are you? Falling int. Waiting for a confirmation

- Finally we propose a funny activity. Just imagine two married couples, the first one has been married for 18 years, the second one for just two weeks. Would they have the same conversation using identical intonation?

Wife: Mrs. Bowen died yesterday.

Husband's answer: Did she?

The answer is obviously NO. In the first case the husband, to show that he is not interested at all in what his wife is telling him, will use a falling intonation in his 'Did she?' while in the second one the husband will show a logical interest in his wife's words by using a rising intonation.

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