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**Course: LT5401 Phonetics and Phonology**

**Assignment title: Comparison of the sound systems of English and Spanish**

With over 570 million speakers from all over the world, Spanish is considered as the third most commonly spoken language in the world. Spanish is mostly spoken in Spain and Latin America. The language shares some similarities with English as a member of the same Indo-European language family. However, there are also a large number of differences between the two languages that circuitously, if not directly, cause difficulties for the native Spanish speakers to learn English, and vice versa.

### **Extra alphabets in Spanish**

Latin alphabets are used in both English and Spanish. However, while there are 26 alphabets present in both English and Spanish, Spanish has one more extra alphabet 'Ñ', called 'eñe' in Spanish. The palatal nasal 'Ñ' owns its position between 'N' and 'M'. In the past, there were a total of 26 identical alphabets with English in Spanish, with 4 extra alphabets as follows:

1. 'CH': /tʃ/ occurs after C, named 'che' in Spanish
2. 'Ñ': /ɲ/ occurs after N, named 'eñe' in Spanish
3. 'LL': /j/ occurs after L, named 'elle' in Spanish
4. 'RR': Alveolar trill, occurs after R, named 'erre' in Spanish.

Among the four extra alphabets, only 'Ñ' is kept and still being considered as a standard alphabet in Spanish.

### **Differences in vowels**

Spanish has the same 5 main vowels /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/ just like those in English. However, while the 5 vowels in English can be pronounced in over 15 different ways, those in Spanish, on the other hand, are pronounced purely as what they sound like on the surface. Therefore, when the Spaniards learn English, it is not surprising to notice that they cannot distinguish the pronunciation of 'chip' (/tʃɪp/) and 'cheap' (/tʃi:p/) and the pronunciation of 'goose' (/gu:s/) and 'goods' (/gʊd/), and hence find spelling English words much more difficult than doing so in Spanish. This is especially obvious when it comes to the English words that contain /a/, /e/, and /i/, as the three vowels have a number of variations. The pure vowels in Spanish also make the diphthongs a lot easier to be mastered than those in English.

### **Differences in stress**

Unlike English, the rule for stressing is more or less fixed in Spanish. For words that end with the five vowels or the consonants 'n' and 's', the stress of the words will fall on the penultimate syllable, i.e., the second syllable counting from the end of the word. If the words end with other consonants, the stress of the words will then fall on the final syllable. If the stress falls neither on the penultimate or final syllable, the vowel of the stressed syllables will then carry an acute accent mark above it to indicate the stressing. For example, the word 'plátanos', which means 'bananas', ends with a consonant 's', which in usual case indicates the stress should fall on the penultimate syllable /ta/. However, with the presence of an acute accent mark above /a/ in the first syllable, the stress of this word hence falls on the first syllable.

## Common confusions on consonants

There are certain consonant phonemes that L2 Spanish learners might find confusing.

Firstly, /v/ and /b/ are two distinct phonemes in English. /v/ is a voiced labiodental fricative while /b/ is a voiced bilabial plosive. The two phonemes in Spanish, however, are pronounced as a voiced bilabial plosive /b/ instead of /v/. For example, the word 'voz', which means 'voice', is pronounced as /boθ/ instead of /voθ/.

Secondly, the voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ and voiced alveolar fricative /z/ differ in voicing in English. The two phonemes in Spanish, on the other hand, differ in place of articulation in the speech for the speakers from Spain instead of Latin America. The fricative /s/ in Spanish remains to have the same VPM (voice, place, and manner) as that in English. The fricative /z/ changes its place of articulation from alveolar to dental in Spanish, making its pronunciation to change from /z/ to the voiceless dental fricative /θ/. For example, the word 'zapatos', which means 'shoes', is pronounced as /θa`patos/. If the place of articulation of /z/ remains unchanged as alveolar, it will sound more like 'sábados', which means 'Saturday'. However, for the speakers from Latin America, the difference between the two consonants is much less distinct.

Thirdly, for the bilabial plosives /p/ and /b/ as well as the alveolar plosives /t/ and /d/, the phonemes in both groups sound completely distinct in English with their counterpart in terms of voicing. These phonemes, despite the fact that they still have differences in terms of voicing, come out much less distinct when being uttered in Spanish. The voiceless plosives /p/ and /t/ in Spanish are much weaker when compared with those in English, which causes the two phonemes to sound more like their voiced plosive counterpart. For example, the words 'book' and 'poke' sound completely distinct in English in terms of the voicing of the initial /b/ and /p/. However, the Spanish words 'poca' and 'boca', which mean 'little' (when used as an adjective and followed by a feminine noun) and 'mouth' respectively, do not sound distinct, as the initial plosive /p/ comes out much weaker in the language, which makes it sound more like /b/. The same saying also applies to the voiced and voiceless alveolar plosives /d/ and /t/. The plosives /t/ and /d/ in Spanish are articulated by the upper front teeth and the tip of the tongue, making them sound alike. For example, the words 'ti' and 'di', which means 'you' (used as the object after a preposition) and 'tell' (2<sup>nd</sup> person affirmative imperative), sound very much alike to each other.

Fourthly, the letter 'j' has significant difference when being pronounced in Spanish and English. In English, the letter 'j' is mostly pronounced as /dʒ/, as in the word 'jelly' (/dʒe.li/). In Spanish, the letter 'j' has its own name as 'jota' (/ˈhota/), where it is no longer /dʒ/ but changes to the voiceless glottal fricative /h/. For example, the name of a famous cocktail drink 'mojito' is pronounced as /mo`hito/ rather than /mo`dʒito/.

Fifthly, the letter 'g' in Spanish also differs from that in English when following certain vowels. In Spanish, the letter 'g' has its own name as 'ge' (/xe/). When the letter 'g' is following /a/, /o/, or /u/, it is pronounced as a normal voiced velar plosive /g/. For example, the word 'gordo', which means 'fat', is pronounced as /ˈgordo/. However, when it is following /e/ or /i/, the consonant 'g' in Spanish is pronounced as a voiceless velar fricative /x/ instead of /g/. For example, the word 'gente', which means 'people', is pronounced as /ˈxente/ instead of /ˈgente/.

Lastly, the letter 's' in Spanish has its name as 'ese' (/ese/). It is not surprising to notice the fact that the Spaniards find it difficult to pronounce the English words that start with the letter 's' without adding a preceding vowel phoneme /e/ in front of the letter 's'. For example, they will pronounce 'Spain' as /espein/ and 'Spa' as /espa/.

All in all, the phonological systems of Spanish and English can somehow be quite distinct and learners of both languages may find it hard to master the other language at the first sight. However, by interacting closer to the native speakers and getting to know the rules that lie in the two phonological systems, they may start finding Spanish to be an interesting European language to learn.