



Phoneme Similarities and Differences in Spanish and English

Vowel Phoneme Similarities

Vowel phonemes are classified by the way they are produced. All vowel phonemes are open, unobstructed sounds. All vowel phonemes are continuous and voiced sounds. Vowels are categorized based on the height of the tongue, the location of the tongue, and whether the tongue is tense or lax.

Vowel Phoneme Differences

The English language has 19 vowel phonemes including 3 r-controlled vowels and schwa. In English, the presence of consonants before or after the vowels will affect the way the vowel sounds are pronounced. The Spanish language has 5 vowel sounds. The 5 Spanish vowels are represented by consistent spellings, and it is common for two vowels to be together in words (e.g., diphthongs/diptongos).

Consonant Phoneme Similarities

In both languages, consonant phonemes are categorized by three features. Phonemes are distinguished by the place of articulation, manner of articulation, and voicing. The place of articulation is the location in the mouth where the phoneme is produced. The manner of articulation is how the air moves through the mouth and if our vocal cords are engaged to make a phoneme. If vocal cords are engaged, then that phoneme is voiced. If our vocal cords are not engaged that phoneme is unvoiced. All consonant phonemes are formed by obstructing the flow of air through the mouth in some manner.

Consonant Phoneme Differences

The English language has 25 consonant sounds (phonemes). The Spanish language has 16-20 consonant phonemes. The English and Spanish language share approximately 15 phonemes.

Cross-Linguistic Transfer

Cross-linguistic transfer is the process of using knowledge from one language to aid in learning a second language. Multilingual learners may require explicit instruction and linguistic support for some English phonemes. The orthographic transparency of Spanish makes it easier to transfer knowledge to English, largely due to shared orthographic representations (Geva & Siegel, 2000).

Consonant Phonemes:

- Are all closed (airflow is obstructed)
- Can be stops or continuants
- Can be voiced or unvoiced

Multilingual Learners may need explicit instruction in:

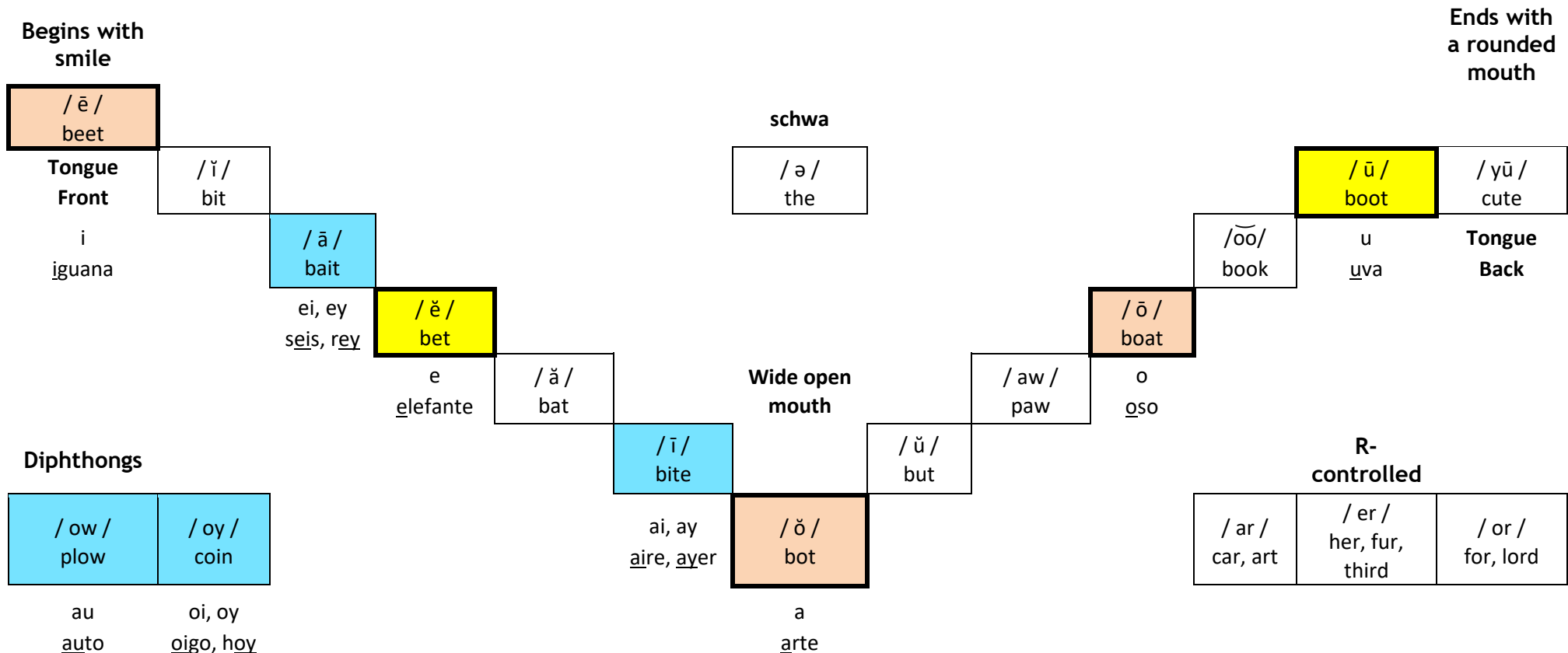
- Graphemes that are identical in both Spanish and English can be represented by different or slightly different phonemes, such as v, z, h, j, r, w, and y
- Consonant digraphs in English: sh, th (voiced and unvoiced), wh, ph
- Initial sounds in English such as kn, qu, wr, sk
- Final sounds in English such as ck, ng, gh
- Silent -e spellings and r-controlled vowels
- Endings such as -ed, which can be pronounced as / d /, / t / or / ed /
- Endings such as -s, which can be pronounced as / z /, / s /, / iz / or / is /

Cross-Linguistic Connections:

- Consonant blends that are similar across Spanish and English: pl, cl, fl, bl, gl, pr, cr, fr, br, tr, gr, dr

English Vowel Phonemes

- There are 19 English vowel phonemes: / ē / beet, / ĭ / bit, / ā / bait, / ě / bet, / ă / bat, / ī / bite, / ǒ / bot, / ŭ / but, / aw / paw, / ȳ / boat, / ȳ / book, / ū / boot, / yū / cute, / ə / the, / ar / car and art, / er / her, fur, third, / or / for and lord, / ow / plow, and / oy / coin.
- There are 5 Spanish vowel phonemes, represented in bold: / ē /, / ě /, / ǒ /, / ȳ /, and / ū /. Below the English vowel phoneme boxes are the corresponding Spanish graphemes that represent each phoneme: / ē / = i iguana, / ě / = e elefante, / ǒ / = a arte, / ȳ / = o oso, / ū / = u uva.
- There are two shared phonemes and graphemes between English and Spanish that are **highlighted in yellow**: / ě / = e, / ū / = u. There are three shared vowel phonemes, which are represented by different graphemes in Spanish **highlighted in orange**: / ē / = i, / ǒ / = a, / ȳ / = o.
- Phonemes that partially transfer from English to Spanish are **highlighted in blue**: / ā / = ei or ey, / ow / = au, / oy / = oi or oy, / ī / = ai or ay.

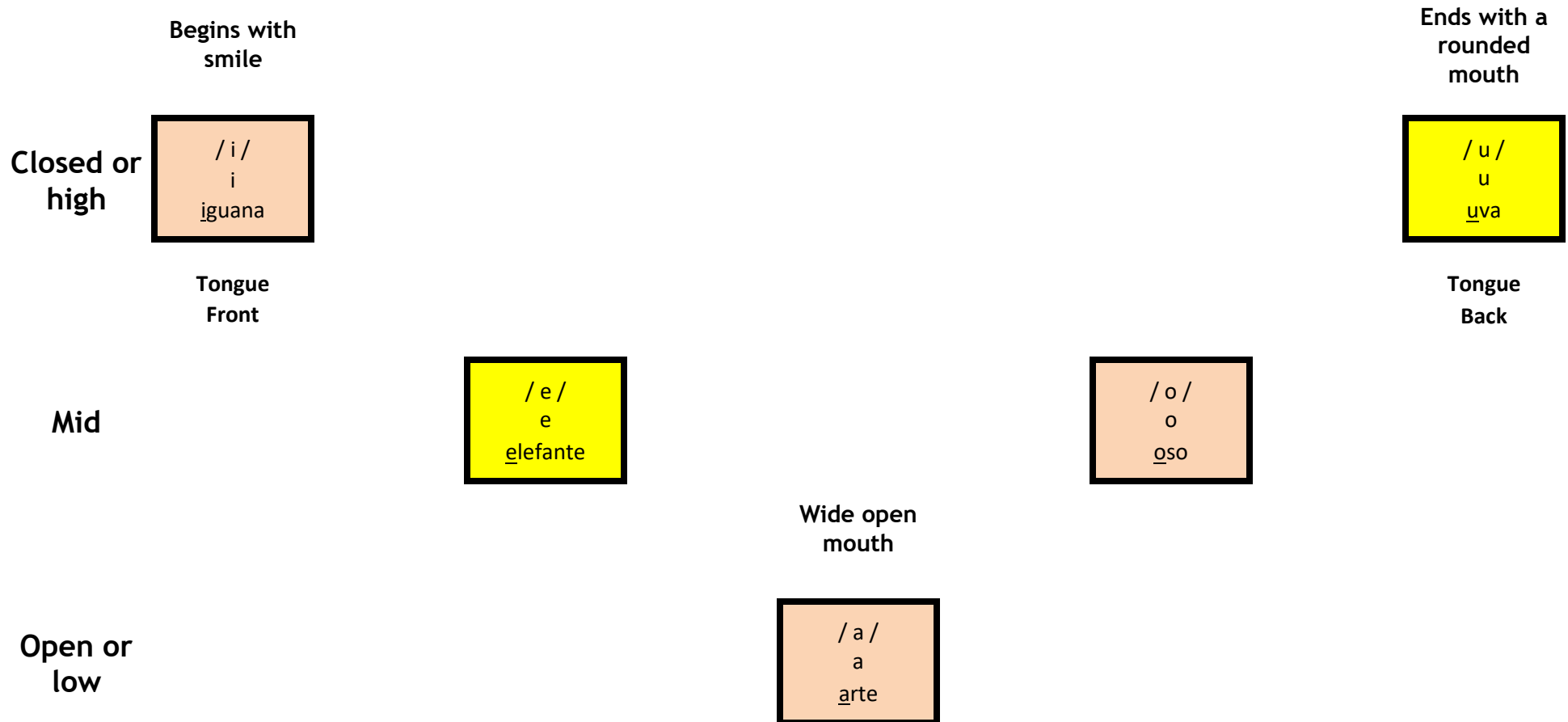


Adapted from Moats, Louisa Cook. Speech to Print: Language Essentials for Teachers. Paul H. Brookes Pub., 2000.

Adapted from Gierka, Ed.D., M., & Ormandy, M.S.Ed., N. (2024). 5 Marginal Shifts for English Learners in Any Classroom. *AIM Institute for Learning & Research*.

Spanish Vowel Phonemes

- There are 5 Spanish vowel phonemes, represented in bold: / i / = i iguana, / e / = e elefante, / a / = a arte, / o / = o oso, / u / = uva. There are three open vowels (vocales abiertas): / a /, / e /, and / o /, and two closed vowels (vocales cerradas): / i / and / u /.
- There are two shared phonemes and graphemes in English and Spanish that are highlighted in yellow: / e / = e, / u / = u. . There are three shared vowel phonemes, which are represented by different graphemes in Spanish highlighted in orange: / i / = i, / a / = a, / u / = o.



English Consonant Phoneme Chart

Shared or similar phonemes and graphemes in English and Spanish are **highlighted in yellow**, accompanied by cognate examples in both languages: / p / persona or person, / t / tigre or tiger, / k / carro or car, / b / bate or bat, / d / diamante or diamond, / g / gorila or gorilla, / f / fantástico or fantastic, / s / serpiente or serpent, / ch / chocolate or chocolate, / m / museo or museum, / n / nota or note, and / l / limón or lemon. Consonant phonemes unique to English are: / v / vacuum, / th / thumb, / th / feather, / z / zebra, / sh / sheep, / zh / treasure, / j / juice, / ng / sing, / r / ran, and / hw / whisper. Phonemes or graphemes that partially transfer from English to Spanish are **highlighted in blue**: / h / represented by h in English and j in Spanish, / w / waffle or waffle, and / y / yoyó or yo-yo.

| | | | PLACE | | | | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--------------------|--|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------|
| | | | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Dental | Alveolar | Palatal | Velar | Glottal |
| MANNER | | Voicing | Two Lips | Lower lip, upper teeth | Tongue between teeth | Alveolar ridge, tongue | Tongue, hard palate | Tongue, soft palate | Larynx |
| Stop (stop) | Cuts off airflow | Voiceless | / p / persona person | | | / t / tigre tiger | | / k / carro car | |
| (stop) | | Voiced | / b / bate bat | | | / d / diamante diamond | | / g / gorila gorilla | |
| Fricative (continuant) | Narrow channel of airflow | Voiceless | | / f / fantástico fantastic | / th / thumb | / s / serpiente serpent | / sh / sheep | | / h / ham |
| (continuant) | | Voiced | | / v / vacuum | / th / feather | / z / zebra | / zh / treasure | | |
| Affricate (stop) | Combination of stop & fricative | Voiceless | | | | | / ch / chocolate chocolate | | |
| (stop) | | Voiced | | | | | / j / juice | | |
| Nasal | Block airflow through mouth, passes through nose | Voiced | / m / (continuant) museo museum | | | / n / (continuant) nota note | | / ng / (stop) sing | |
| Liquid (continuant) | Tongue blocks middle of mouth, air passes around sides | Voiced | | | | / l / limón lemon | / r / ran | | |
| Glide (continuant) | Produced with little obstruction of the airstream | Voiced & Voiceless | / w / waffle waffle | | | | / y / yoyó yo-yo | / hw / (voice-less) whisper | |

Adapted from IPA Chart, <http://www.internationalphoneticassociation.org/content/ipa-chart>, International Phonetic Association, 2015.

Spanish Consonant Phoneme Chart

Shared or similar phonemes and graphemes in English and Spanish are **highlighted in yellow**, accompanied by cognate examples in both languages: / p / persona or person, / t / tigre or tiger, / k / carro or car, / b / bate or bat, / d / diamante or diamond, / g / gorila or gorilla, / f / fantástico or fantastic, / s / serpiente or serpent, / ch / chocolate or chocolate, / m / museo or museum, / n / nota or note, and / l / limón or lemon. Consonant phonemes unique to Spanish are: / ñ / ñandú, / rr / perro or rosa, / r / cortar. Phonemes or graphemes that partially transfer from English to Spanish are **highlighted in blue**: / h / represented by h in English and j in Spanish, / w / waffle or waffle, and / y / yoyó or yo-yo.

| | | | PLACE | | | | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------|--|----------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| | | | Bilabial | Labio-dental | Dental | Alveolar | Postalveolar | Palatal | Velar |
| MANNER | | Voicing | Two Lips | Lower lip, upper teeth | Tongue between teeth | Alveolar ridge, tongue | Tongue behind alveolar ridge | Tongue, hard palate | Tongue, soft palate |
| Stop (stop) | Cuts off airflow | Voiceless | / p / persona person | | / t / tigre tiger | | | | / k / carro car |
| (stop) | | Voiced | / b / bate bat | | / d / diamante diamond | | | | / g / gorila gorilla |
| Fricative (continuant) | Narrow channel of airflow | Voiceless | | / f / fantástico fantastic | | / s / serpiente serpent | | | / j / jamón |
| Affricate (stop) | Combination of stop & fricative | Voiceless | | | | | / ch / chocolate chocolate | | |
| Nasal | Block airflow through mouth, passes through nose | Voiced | / m / (continuant) museo museum | | | / n / (continuant) nota note | | / ñ / ñandú | |
| Liquid (continuant) | Tongue blocks middle of mouth, air passes around sides | Voiced | | | | / l / limón lemon | | | |
| Trill | Tongue trill | Voiced | | | | / rr / perro rosa | | | |
| Flap | Tongue tap or flap | Voiced | | | | / r / cortar | | | |
| Glide (approximant) | Produced with little obstruction of the airstream | Voiced & Voiceless | / w / waffle waffle | | | | | / y / yoyó yo-yo | |

Adapted from MULTICSD - Spanish (Latin American standard). MultiCSD - Spanish (Latin American Standard). (n.d.). <https://sites.google.com/view/multicsd/global-languages/spanish-latin-american-standard>

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