

Castilian Spanish

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Spanish is by far the most widely spoken Romance language, used by about 350 million people mainly in the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America. The language variety described below is formal Spanish spoken in Castile (Central Spain) by educated middle-aged speakers.

Consonants

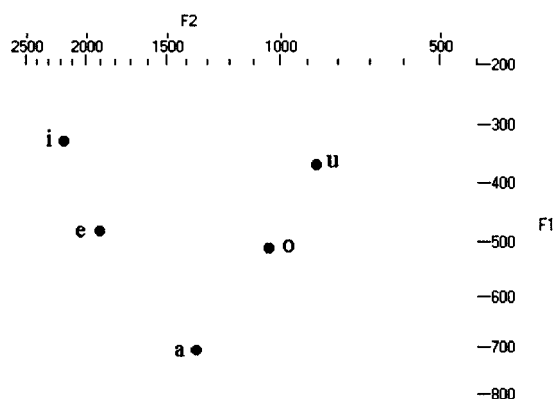
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	p b		t d			k g
Affricate					tʃ ʝ	
Nasal		m		n	ɲ	
Tap or flap				r		
Trill				r		
Fricative		f	θ	s		x
Lateral approximant				l	ʎ	

p 'pelo <i>pelo</i> 'hair'	t 'topo <i>topo</i> 'mole'	k 'kasa <i>casa</i> 'house'
b 'boka <i>boca</i> 'mouth'	d 'dar <i>dar</i> 'to give'	g 'gato <i>gato</i> 'cat'
		tʃ 'kotʃe <i>coche</i> 'car'
		ʝ 'ʝate <i>yate</i> 'yacht'
m mā'ma <i>mamá</i> 'mother'	n 'nuka <i>nuca</i> 'nape'	ɲ 'kaɲa <i>caña</i> 'cane'
	r 'pero <i>perro</i> 'dog'	
	r 'pero <i>pero</i> 'but'	
f 'feo <i>feo</i> 'ugly'	θ 'θona <i>zona</i> 'zone'	x xa'ron <i>jarrón</i> 'vase'
	s 'sola <i>sola</i> 'alone'	
	l 'luθ <i>luz</i> 'light'	ʎ a'xi <i>allí</i> 'there'

Vowels

Spanish has five vowels, which may occur in both stressed and unstressed syllables: /i/, /e/, /a/, /o/, /u/. Navarro Tomás (1918) described open variants of /i/, /e/, /o/, /u/ in some contexts. In the case of the open central vowel, he distinguished palatal and velar variants in certain contexts. However, later experimental studies do not seem to confirm such variants.

Vowels have nasalized variants when they appear between two nasal consonants or followed by a nasal consonant in syllabic coda.



Stressed vowels

i	'piso	<i>piso</i>	'I step'
e	'peso	<i>peso</i>	'I weigh'
a	'paso	<i>paso</i>	'I pass'
o	'poso	<i>poso</i>	'I pose'
u	'puso	<i>puso</i>	'S/he placed'

Unstressed vowels

i	pi'so	<i>pisó</i>	'S/he stepped'
e	pe'so	<i>pesó</i>	'S/he weighed'
a	pa'so	<i>pasó</i>	'S/he passed'
o	po'so	<i>posó</i>	'S/he posed'
u	pu'χo	<i>pujó</i>	'S/he struggled'

Diphthongs

Spanish has rising diphthongs, formed by the glides [j] or [w] plus a syllabic nucleus, and falling diphthongs, formed by a syllabic nucleus plus the glides [i] or [u]. In fast speech, sequences of vowels in hiatus reduce so that one becomes [-syllabic]. If both vowels have the same timbre they fuse: *la Alhambra* [la 'lambra]. There are also triphthongs, like *buey* 'ox' [bweɣ̃]. Some examples of diphthongs are:

je	'pjel	<i>piel</i>	'skin'	eḷ	'peḷne	<i>peine</i>	'comb'
ja	'aθja	<i>hacia</i>	'towards'	aḷ	'aḷre	<i>aire</i>	'air'
jo	'raðjo	<i>radio</i>	'radio'	oḷ	'soḷ	<i>soy</i>	'I am'
ju	'bjuða	<i>viuda</i>	'widow'				
wi	'fwimos	<i>fuiimos</i>	'we went'	eḷ	'neḷtro	<i>neutro</i>	'neutral'
we	'bweno	<i>bueno</i>	'good'	aḷ	'paḷsa	<i>pausa</i>	'break'
wa	'kwaðro	<i>cuadro</i>	'picture'	oḷ	'boḷ	<i>bou</i>	'seine fishing'
wo	'kwota	<i>cuota</i>	'quota'				

Besides, when two non-close vowels clash in the string, one of them becomes non-syllabic. In the following examples, theoretical three-syllable words become two-syllable words: *poeta* ‘poet’ [pøeta], *maestro* ‘teacher’ [maestro].

Prosody

Lexical stress

Lexical stress is distinctive. Stress provides very productive contrasts, such as those between the first person singular of the present tense and the third person singular of the past in verbs of the first conjugation, like: *amo-amó* ‘I love-s/he loved’, *lavo-lavó* ‘I wash-s/he washed’, *cambio-cambió* ‘I change-s/he changed’, etc. It is also possible to contrast three words, a noun and two verbal forms, such as *límite-limite-limité* ‘boundary-limit (imperative)-I limited’, *depósito-deposito-depositó* ‘deposit-I deposit-he deposited’, etc. In these cases the need for the written accent is evident so as to mark these differences in the spelling.

Most Spanish words bear the stress on the penultimate syllable but any of the three final syllables may be stressed. In verb forms with enclitic personal pronouns, even the fourth syllable, starting from the end, can be stressed, which is the case of *cuéntaselo* (cuenta-se-lo) ‘tell that to him/her’, *acábatelo* (acaba-te-lo) ‘finish it off’, etc.

Rhythm

Spanish can be considered, in general, a syllable-timed language without an outstanding vowel reduction in unstressed syllables: ‘stresses separated by different numbers of unstressed syllables will be separated by different intervals of time’ (Abercrombie 1967: 98).

Intonation

The nuclear tone is situated on the last stressed syllable in the intonation group. When the nuclear syllable is not the last syllable in the group, the nuclear pitch movement is spread across any following weak syllables.

The low fall is generally the neutral tone for statements and *wh*-questions, and the high rise is the tone for yes/no questions.

The most common pre-nuclear pattern found for declarative and interrogative sentences is the progressively descending pattern. The pitch begins rather high and it progressively steps down at each peak until it reaches the tonal baseline with the final low fall.

In the pre-nuclear contours, the stressed syllable is frequently low, followed by a high tone on the subsequent unstressed syllable, even across words and syntactic phrases (Sosa 1999).

Conventions

The stops /t/ and /d/ are laminal denti-alveolar and not purely dental. To represent this faithfully, the diacritic [̪] would be necessary, but their place of articulation remains unambiguous without it.

The sounds /b/, /d/ and /g/ are complete stops only after a pause or after a nasal consonant and, in the case of /d/, after a lateral too. In other positions they are pronounced as their approximant variants [β], [ð] and [ɣ], respectively. The approximant [ð] is interdental.

[ɣ] / [u̞]: the symbol [u̞] is not adequate for Spanish because it represents an unrounded semivowel that requires spread lips. This semivowel does not exist in Spanish. There are plenty of words in Spanish with a velar approximant as in *la gorra* ‘the cap’, *algo* ‘something’, *este*

gusano ‘these worm’, *el guante* ‘the glove’, etc. Before back vowels or the semivowel [w], the sound is rounded through coarticulation. Therefore it is impossible to pronounce Spanish *algo* as *[alwo], [alʎo] being more phonetically feasible because the approximant [ʎ] is not marked for the rounded/unrounded feature, like the approximants [β] and [ð].

In Spanish there are two voiced palatal variants of the phoneme /j/ (which Alarcos (1950) transcribed as /y/ and Quilis (1993) as /j/): an affricate variant [tʃ], after a nasal, [l] or a pause, and an approximant [j] in all other contexts: [elⁱ tʃate] *el yate* ‘the yacht’, [miⁱ jate] *mi yate* ‘my yacht’.

It is possible to suppress the diacritic from approximants in broad transcription because these consonants do not exist as fricatives.

/p/, /t/ and /k/ are unaspirated. They are fortis in syllabic onset and lenis in syllabic coda and in this position they can be voiced.

/b/, /d/ and /g/ in syllabic codas have several realisations: *absurdo* ‘absurd’ [aβ’surðo] [aβ’surðo] [a’surðo].

[θ] has an interdental place of articulation. This fricative, like [s], becomes voiced before a voiced consonant. For instance, *rasgo* ‘feature’ [razɣo], *jazmín* ‘jasmine’ [xaθmín]. The alveolar fricative [s], on the other hand, often becomes dental before a denti-alveolar consonant. The velar fricative [x] can be pronounced uvular before a back vowel and the semivowel [w]: *junio* ‘June’ [χunjo].

The trill appears in word onset and after [l], [n] and [s] and in intervocalic position where it contrasts with the tap: *caro-carro* ‘expensive-car’ [‘karo]-[‘karo]. In other contexts, the tap is usual.

The place of articulation of nasal consonants in syllabic codas is always the same as that of any following consonant. So we can find labiodental [m̠], interdental [n̠], dental [ɲ̠], palatalised [nʲ], velar [ŋ] and uvular [ɴ] nasals. For instance, *ánfora* ‘amphora’ [‘amjora], *encia* ‘gum’ [en̠θia], *antes* ‘before’ [‘aɲtes], *ancha* ‘wide’ [‘an̠tʃa], *banco* ‘bank’/‘bench’ [‘baɲko], *enjuto* ‘dry’ [en̠χuto].

The place of articulation of the lateral approximant /l/ is typically alveolar but, like the alveolar nasal, it can become interdentalised, dentalised or palatalised before consonants with these places of articulation, as in *alzar* ‘to raise’ [aɭθar], *alto* ‘high/tall’ [aɭto], *colcha* ‘quilt’ [kolʲtʃa].

Dialectal differences

The alveolar fricative [s] presents some important dialectal differences. In most of the Iberian Peninsula it is usually apical. However, in Andalusia, the Canary Islands and Latin America it is laminal. In these areas it usually becomes a glottal fricative in syllabic coda and word-final position, as in: *los hombres* ‘the men’ /los+ombres/ [lo^hombreh]. Sometimes it is lost. On the other hand, in some areas of Andalusia, in the Canary Islands and in Latin America, the interdental fricative [θ] does not exist, so when it appears in Castilian Spanish, a laminal alveolar sibilant [s] is pronounced, a phenomenon known as SESEO, for instance *zapato* ‘shoe’ [sa’pato]. The opposite, the non-existence of the laminal alveolar sibilant [s], is found in some other areas of Andalusia, where only [θ] occurs. This phenomenon is known as CECEO.

The velar fricative [x] usually becomes glottal [h] in some areas of Andalusia, the Canary Islands and Latin America, as in *jarrón* ‘vase’ [‘ha’ron].

Finally, it is necessary to point out that the lateral palatal [ʎ] is usually changed to a central palatal in all the large cities in the Iberian Peninsula: *pollo* ‘chicken’ [pojo]. In some countries of South America [ʎ], [tʃ] and [j] become a postalveolar fricative: [pɔʒo].

Transcription of the recorded passage

Semi-narrow transcription

[el 'βjɛnto 'norte j el 'sol por'fjaβan soβre 'kwal 'de'lo's era ɛl 'mas 'fwerte | kwando aθer'to a pa'sar um bja'xero em'bwe|tɔ e'n ãn'tʃa 'kapall kombi'njeron ɛŋ ke kje 'n ãntez lo'ɣrara oβli'ɣar al βja'xero a ki'tarse la 'kapa | se'ria konsiðe'raðo 'mas poðe'roso || el 'βjɛnto 'norte so'plo koŋ gram 'furja | 'pero kwanto 'ma so'plaβa | 'ma sɛ areβu'xaβa ɛn su 'kapa ɛl βja'xero || por 'fin | el 'βjɛnto 'norte aβãndo'no la ɛmp'resa || ɛ̃n'toŋθez βri'ʎo ɛl 'sol kon ar'ðor | e ʎ'me,ðjata'mɛ̃nte se ðespo'ɣo ðe su 'kapa ɛl βja'xero || por lo ke l 'βjɛnto 'norte 'uβo ðe rekono'θer la superjori'da ðel 'sol].

We also offer, under 'Broad transcription' below, one of the versions published by Jones & Dahl (1944: 16) for Spanish of Buenos Aires.

Broad transcription

el bjento norte j el sol porfjaban sobre kwal de ezos era el mah fwerte, kwando aserto a pa'sar um bjaxero embwelto en anca kapa. kombinjeron en ke kjen anteh lograra obli'gar al bjaxero a kitarse la kapa seria considerado mah poderoso, el bjento norte so'plo kon gram furja, pero kwanto mas soplaba, mas se arrebuxaba en su kapa el bjaxero; por fin el bjento norte abando'no la empresa. entonseh bri'zo el sol kon ar'dor, e immedjatamente se dehpo'xo de su kapa el bjaxero; por lo ke l bjento norte ubo de rrekono'ser la superjori'dad del sol.

Orthographic version

El viento norte y el sol porfiaban sobre cuál de ellos era el más fuerte, cuando acertó a pasar un viajero envuelto en ancha capa. Convinieron en que quien antes lograra obligar al viajero a quitarse la capa sería considerado más poderoso. El viento norte sopló con gran furia, pero cuanto más soplaba, más se arrebujaba en su capa el viajero; por fin el viento norte abandonó la empresa. Entonces brilló el sol con ardor, e inmediatamente se despojó de su capa el viajero; por lo que el viento norte hubo de reconocer la superioridad del sol.

The Spanish text and words contained in this paper can be listened to at www.ub.es/labfon/princip.htm

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