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# Potential Impact of Spanish Syntax and Phonology on English Language Learners

Multicultural & ESOL Program Services Education







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## Potential Impact of Spanish Syntax on English Grammar

Native Spanish speakers often transfer rules of grammar (syntax) from their first language onto the second language. This is a normal process and not a case of impaired language learning. A child may make an error in English syntax due to the influence of grammar rules from Spanish. In order to accurately assess the English language skills of a native Spanish-speaking child, the following examples of common errors may be useful.



Potential Impact of Spanish Syntax on English Grammar

Potential Impact of Spanish Phonology on English Pronunciation

## Spanish Syntactical Structure

## This may result in the following errors in English:

1. Descriptive adjectives come after nouns.
2. For negation, the "no" is placed before the verb.
3. Double negatives are used for negation.
4. Subject pronouns are omitted when the subject has been identified in the previous sentence.
5. For possessive forms, the modifier is placed after the noun.
6. When speaking in the third person present, "s" is not used.
7. Intonation is used to ask a question rather than inverting the noun and verb.
8. Superiority is generally shown by placing the word "more" in front of the adjective rather than using the comparative form.
9. Articles are frequently used with body parts rather than possessives.

The car red is on the left.

He no help.

She no write nothing.

My mother ate a sandwich.  
Was hungry.

This is the homework of my brother.

She eat too much.

Karen is going to the beach?

This book is more long.

I cut the finger.

## Potential Impact of Spanish Phonology on English Pronunciation

For native Spanish speakers, the systematic rules governing sound production may have an impact on the pronunciation of English words. A majority of the pronunciation differences are related to the unique characteristic of the Spanish sound system and thus, are considered to be normal. In order to accurately assess the articulation skills of a native Spanish-speaking child, the following examples of common errors may be helpful. Issues of maturational readiness also contribute to correct sound production.





## Spanish Phonological Patterns

## English Examples

## Developmental Norms for Articulation for Native English Speakers\*

1. In Spanish, there is no "j" (e.g., just) sound.
2. Spanish words generally end in the following consonants: l, r, n, s, d, y.
3. The schwa (eh) sound is placed before word initial consonant clusters.
4. In words that begin with /h/, the /h/ is silent.
5. The Spanish /s/ is produced more frontally than its English counterpart.

Speakers may substitute "y" (e.g., yellow for jello).

Speakers may omit sounds at the ends of words (e.g., loss for lost).

eschool for school  
estrong for strong

air for hair

Many speakers may sound like they have a lisp.

| SOUNDS   | UPPER AGE LEVELS** |
|--|--------------------|
| h, w, m, n, d, vowels  | 4.0                |
| f, k, b, g, "y" (e.g., "yellow"),<br>p, "ng" (e.g., "ring")  | 4.6                |
| t  | 5.0                |
| l, l - blends, "j" (e.g., "just")                            | 6.6                |
| v, r, r-blends, "ch," "sh,"<br>voiced "th" (e.g., "brother") | 7.0                |
| unvoiced "th" (e.g., "both"),<br>z, s, s-blends              | 7.6                |

## Common Sound Substitutions:

- |                               |  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| 1. "ch" for "sh"              | e.g., chair for share, match for mash      |
| 2. /s/ for /z/                | e.g., sip for zip, price for prize         |
| 3. /t/ for /th/               | e.g., tin for thin, bat for bath           |
| 4. /b/ for /v/                | e.g., bat for vat, bacuum for vacuum       |
| 5. /n/ for "ng" (e.g., "ing") | e.g., rin for ring, thin for thing         |
| 6. /n/ for /m/                | e.g., sontin for something, enty for empty |

\* Adapted by H. M. Melius (2005) from Exceptional Student Education (2003). Speech and Language Program Handbook. Ft. Lauderdale: The School Board of Broward County, Florida.

\*\* Upper age at which 90% of the subjects correctly articulated the sound in initial and final positions of words. Derived from the Arizona Articulation Proficiency Scale.