

Spanish is a Merengue: Techniques for Teaching L2 Spanish Rhythm

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Abstract

Rhythm is an important aspect of second language pronunciation instruction and practice with which adult learners of L2 Spanish with L1 English need support. The L1 transfer of the *stress-timed* rhythm of English results in undesirable vowel reductions in the L2 (i.e., the use of [ə, ɪ]) that contribute to a heavy, non-native accent in Spanish. Awareness-raising about the *syllable-timed* rhythm of Spanish is critical to gains in L2 pronunciation, especially as concerns clear L2 vowels. Yet the topic of rhythm oftentimes is “glossed over” or not addressed at all in the Spanish L2 classroom.

This teaching tip follows the explicit four-step approach to pronunciation instruction previously outlined in Nibert (2014): 1) awareness-raising about the notion of interest (in this case, rhythm), 2) awareness of the facts of the L1, 3) awareness of the facts of the L2, and 4) application and practice. In the case of rhythm in particular, its very nature requires teaching and learning techniques *beyond* language alone. The recommended techniques of chanting, Total Physical Response (TPR), including clapping, tapping, dancing, or marching, and choral group work will be demonstrated, followed by an example of a transcription exercise with oral practice.

In sum, while speech is uniquely human, rhythm is not; it is found in music, movement, and various other realms. Thus, we can integrate fuller sensory and motor techniques into our repertoire of instructional tools in order to better support L2 learners with this important difference between English L1 and Spanish L2 prosody.

Works Cited

Nibert, Holly J. 2014. “Disassociating English [ɑ, ɔ, ʌ, ə] from Spanish ‘o’.” Retrieved from D. Eric Holt & Gillian Lord, IGNITE: CASPSLaP Resources. www.ignite-caspslap-2014.weebly.com, {May 6, 2014}.