

Language Transfer in Spanish-speaking ELLs



Spanish-speaking ELLs may struggle to hear and produce certain sounds in English. These struggles may carry over to reading and writing. English has more consonant and vowel sounds than Spanish, but a similar number of letters, making English spelling rules more complex. Spanish also has few blends (consonant clusters) such as 'pl', 'bl', 'pr' and only one silent letter 'h'. English on the other hand has many blends and many silent letters.

SPANISH
~27 Letters = 25 Sounds

ENGLISH
26 Letters = 44 Sounds

POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES

th

The 'th' sounds (the two different sounds in 'bath' and 'bathe') do not exist in Spanish. Students may replace these sounds with 'd' or 't'.

they → day

thing → ting

z

Latin American Spanish speakers pronounce English sounds 'z' and 's' the same (as 's'). If a student does not hear or pronounce the difference in English, this may also be seen in interchangeable use of the letters.

zoo → sue

zip → sip

sh

Spanish does not natively have the 'sh' sound, making the 'sh' and 'ch' sounds interchangeable. Students may therefore use either sound in place of the other.

watch → wash

share → chair

y

In Spanish, the English 'y' sound (as in 'yes' and 'yellow') and the 'j' sound (as in 'Jess' and 'jello') are interchangeable. Students may therefore use either sound in place of the other.

yellow → jello

just → yust
yus

cc

Spanish speakers may not be able to pronounce certain English blends (consonant clusters) at the beginning of a word. Students may insert a vowel ('e') before the cluster. At the end of a word, students may drop one of the consonants.

Spanish → espanish

best → bes_

r

The English 'r' sound does not exist in Spanish. Spanish uses the rolled (trilled) 'r'. The English 'r' may be difficult to pronounce and students may therefore use the trilled 'r' in its place.

h

The letter 'h' is silent in the Spanish writing system. When reading English, a student may drop the 'h' ('hand' pronounced as 'and'). When writing English, a student may use the Spanish representation of this sound, 'j' ('hand' written as 'jand').