

# A Contrastive Approach in Teaching European Spanish and European Portuguese Pronunciation to Slovene Students

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## 1. Introduction

This paper deals with a specific situation of Slovene students studying Spanish as their main subject (L2) and Portuguese as a second foreign language (L3). Although the pronunciation of Spanish (particularly American Spanish) is usually not considered problematic for Slovenes, Slovene students nevertheless need a relatively large amount of training to master the sounds that have no near equivalent in Slovene. The situation of Portuguese is different. To master Portuguese pronunciation, particularly the European Portuguese, they need much more practice to reach an acceptable level of pronunciation. In trying to identify the problem areas of Portuguese and Spanish pronunciation training the teacher must identify the interaction between the mother tongue and the two languages in question and also take into consideration the interaction between the two foreign languages, L2 and L3. In this sense contrastive analysis can have an important role in students awareness of their pronunciation errors and in improving their production of L2 and L3 sounds. The paper describes in a contrastive manner the main features of the sound systems of European Spanish (L2), European Portuguese (L3) and Slovene (L), in particular from the points of view of place and manner of articulation. Some common errors of Slovene students resulting from the systemic differences between Slovene and European Spanish and European Portuguese are explained.

## 2. The sound systems of standard Slovene, European Portuguese and European Spanish

### 2.1 Vowels

The vowel system in Spanish, in comparison with the Slovene vowel system, is simpler and generally speaking does not present great pronunciation difficulties for Slovene speakers.

The Spanish vowel system consists of five phonemes in stressed and unstressed position: / i, e, a, o, u/.

Examples of the five vowels in stressed and unstressed position in Spanish (Quilis, 1997:40):

Stressed			Unstressed		
ˈpiso	piso	ground	piˈso	pisó	(he) stepped
ˈpeso	peso	weight	peˈso	pesó	(he) weighed
ˈpaso	paso	step	paˈso	pasó	(he) went by
ˈposo	poso	sediment	poˈso	posó	(he) placed
ˈpuso	puso	(he) put	buˈkal	bucal	oral

Spanish vowel system (Quilis, 1997:40):

	Front	Central	Back
Closed	i		u
Mid	e		o
Open		a	

Slovene speakers tend to pronounce Spanish *e*, *o* vowels as too close or too open due to the influence of Slovene close and open vowels. This is to be pointed out to students, because they should be aware of the difference and should be trained to achieve the intermediate degree of opening when pronouncing Spanish vowels.

### 2.1.1 The European Portuguese vowel system

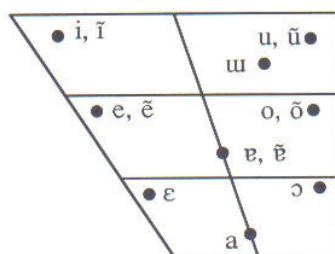
For Slovene speakers, the European Portuguese vowel system is much more complex than the Spanish vowel system. Slovene speakers tend to pronounce Spanish *e*, *o* vowels as too close or too open due to the influence of Slovene close and open vowels. This is to be pointed out to students, because they should be aware of the difference and should be trained to achieve the intermediate degree of opening when pronouncing Spanish vowels.

European Portuguese has 14 vowels, 9 oral and 5 nasalized. Slovene speakers have no difficulty distinguishing and pronouncing open and close oral vowels but they should pay attention to distinguish /ɐ/ and /u/, which occur in unstressed position. In Slovene there is a similar sound /ə/, but it does not correspond exactly to any of these two European Portuguese sounds. The vowel /u/ “occurs only in unstressed syllables and is often represented by /ə/ but does not correspond to the mid central quality associated with schwa. It is a fronted and lowered high back unrounded vowel.” (Cruz-Ferreira, 1999:127). Slovene students do have to learn the pronunciation of nasalized vowels as there are no equivalents in Slovene and they tend to pronounce them as oral vowels.

Examples of European Portuguese vowels (Cruz-Ferreira, 1999:127):

Oral vowels				Nasalized vowels			
i	vi	vi	saw (1 sg)	ĩ	ĩi	vim	came (1 sg)
e	ve	vê	see (3 sg)	ẽ	ẽtru	entro	enter (1 sg)
ɛ	sɛ	sé	cathedral	ẽ	ẽ tru	antro	den
a	va	vá	go (3 sg)	õ	sõ	som	sound
ɔ	sɔ	só	alone	ũ	ũmũdu	mundo	world
o	so	sou	I am				
u	ũmudu	mudo	mute				
ɐ	pɐ'gar	pagar	to pay				
u	puu'gar	pegar	to grip				

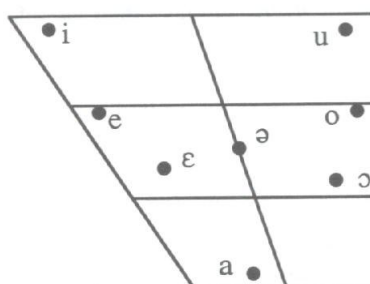
Portuguese vowel system (Cruz-Ferreira, 1999:127):



### 2.1.2 The Slovene vowel system

The Slovene vowel system consists of eight phonemes /i, e, ɛ, ə, a, o, ɔ, u/ as shown on the chart and the examples below. All vowels occur in both stressed and unstressed positions, but /e/ and /o/ occur in unstressed position in a few grammatical words only (Šuštaršič et al., 1999:137). The length is no more considered a distinctive feature: long vowels occur in stressed and short vowels in unstressed position.

Slovene vowel system (Šuštaršič et al., 1999:137):



Examples of the Slovene vowel system (Šuštaršič et al., 1999:137):

Stressed				Unstressed			
i:	mi:t	<i>mit</i>	(myth)	i	ˈmi:ti	<i>miti</i>	(myths)
e:	me:t	<i>med</i>	(honey)	e	ʒeˈve:	<i>že ve</i>	(already knows)
ɛ:	ˈpe:ta	<i>peta</i>	(heel)	ɛ	ˈpe:te	<i>pete</i>	(heel, gen)
a:	ma:t	<i>mat</i>	(checkmate)	a	ˈma:ta	<i>mata</i>	(checkmate, gen)
ɔ:	ˈpɔ:ten	<i>poten</i>	(sweaty)	ɔ	pɔˈte:m	<i>potem</i>	(then)
o:	po:t	<i>pot</i>	(path)	o	boˈʃ lo	<i>bo šlo</i>	(will go)
u:	pu:st	<i>pust</i>	(carnival)	u	ˈpu:stu	<i>pustu</i>	(carnival, dat)
ə:	pə:s	<i>pes</i>	(dog)	ə	ˈdo:bər	<i>dober</i>	(good)

### 2.1.3 Spanish and Portuguese diphthongs and triphthongs

Spanish and Portuguese are very rich in diphthongs. Spanish has 8 rising diphthongs formed by the glides [j] and [w] plus a syllabic nucleus and 6 falling diphthongs formed by a syllabic nucleus plus the glides [i] and [u].

Rising diphthongs in Spanish:

je	ˈtjene	tiene
ja	ˈasja	Asia
jo	saˈljo	salió
ju	ˈbjuða	viuda

wi	ˈkwiða	cuida
we	ˈbweno	bueno
wa	ˈkwaðro	cuadro
wo	ˈbakwo	vacuo

Falling diphthongs in Spanish:

eḡ	ˈpeḡne	peine
aḡ	ˈaḡ	hay
oi	ˈoi	hoy
eḡ	eḡˈropa	Europa
aḡ	ˈaḡla	aula
ou	ˈbou	bou

There are also triphthongs formed by the glides [j] and [w] plus a syllabic nucleus plus the glides [ḡ] and [uḡ].

jai	siˈtjaiḡs	sitiáis
jei	siˈtjeḡs	sitiéis
wei	ˈbweiḡ	buey
wai	uruˈɣwaiḡ	Uruguay

Because of the “anti-hiatus tendency” in Spanish, many vowel sequences (hiatus vowels) become diphthongs, especially in fast speech, e.g., poeta [pœta].

In European Portuguese there are 14 diphthongs, 10 oral and 4 nasalized as shown below.

ei	ɐˈneiʃ	anéis
ai	sai	sai
ɐi	sɐi	sei
ɔi	mɔi	mói
oi	ˈmoitɐ	moita
ui	ɐˈnuiʃ	anuis
iu	viu	viu
eu	meu	meu
ɛu	vɛu	véu
au	mau	mau

ẽi	sẽi	cem
õi	ɐˈnõiʃ	anões
ũi	ˈmũitɐ	muita
ẽu	mẽu	mão

(Cruz-Ferreira, 1999:127-128)

The diphthongs, the triphthongs and the hiatus vowels in Spanish and Portuguese very rarely cause difficulties in the pronunciation of Slovene learners. There are diphthongs also in Slovene, as well as such combinations as *joj*, *jej* similar to Spanish triphthongs. Phonetic diphthongs in Slovene occur when “the approximants /v/ and /j/ are preceded by a vowel and followed by a consonant or a word boundary. The labiodental /v/ in these positions becomes a rounded second element of a diphthong, i.e., [u], and /j/ becomes [i].” (Šuštaršič et al., 1999:137).

ei	glei	glej	(look, imp)
ai	dai	daj	(give, imp)
oi	tvoi	tvoj	(your, masc sing)
ɔi	bɔi	boj	(battle)
ui	tui	tuj	(foreign)

iu	piu	pil	(drank)
eu	peu	pel	(sang)
ɛu	lɛu	lev	(lion)
au	pau	pav	(peacock)
ou	pou	pol	(half)

əu    ˈtopəu    topel    (warm)  
(Šuštaršič et al., 1999:137)

## 2.2 Consonants in European Spanish, European Portuguese and Slovene

If we compare the systems of consonants in European Spanish, European Portuguese and Slovene, we can deduce the main problems in pronunciation of the two foreign languages for Slovene speakers.

Slovene consonants (Šuštaršič, et al., 1999:135):

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	p b		t d				k g
Affricate				ts	tʃ dʒ		
Nasal	m		n				
Tap				r			
Fricative		f		s z	ʃ ʒ		x
Approximant		v				j	
Lateral				l			
Approximant							

Spanish consonants (Quilis, 1999:54):

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Dental	Interdental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Plosive	p b		t d			tʃ dʒ	k g
Affricate							
Nasal	m	ɱ	ɲ	ɳ	n	ɲ	ŋ
Trill					r		
Tap					ɾ		
Fricative	β	f		θ ð	s ʃ	j	x ɣ
Lateral			ɬ	ɬ̥	l	ʎ	
Approximant							

Portuguese consonants (Cruz-Ferreira, 1993:126):

	Bilabial	Labio-Dental	Dental	Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Uvular
Plosive	p b		t d				k g	
Nasal	m		n			ɲ		
Fricative		f v		s z	ʃ ʒ			χ
Tap				ɾ				
Lateral			l			ʎ		
Approximant								

### 3. Conclusions

Slovene learners at all levels find it very difficult to pronounce the fricative allophone [β] of the bilabial voiced plosive phoneme /b/. The Slovene language has the phonemes /b/ and /v/, while in Spanish the labiodental voiced fricative /v/ has disappeared. The bilabial plosive /b/ has two realizations in Spanish: the voiced bilabial plosive [b], which occurs in initial position and after a nasal consonant, and the fricative voiced bilabial [β], which occurs in all other positions. In addition to this, both sounds have the same orthographic representations (b and v) regardless of their pronunciation. This fact adds to the confusion of students, as they must learn to pronounce, for example, the *b* in *caber* [ka'βeɾ] and the *v* in *cavar* [ka'βaɾ], while *vino* is pronounced differently in different surroundings: *el vino* / *un vino* : [el'βino] / [um'βino]. They pronounce automatically the labiodental /v/ because it exists in their mother tongue. It is not easy to assimilate the bilabial voiced fricative, so it is important to explain the differences between the two systems. A similar problem occurs with the Spanish voiced interdental fricative allophone [ð] of the plosive voiced dental phoneme /d/, and the voiced velar fricative allophone [ɣ] of the plosive voiced velar phoneme /g/ : *dedo* (*finger*): [ˈdeðo]; *pagar* (*to pay*): [pa'ɣaɾ], which occur in all positions except after a pause and before a nasal, and /d/ also before a lateral. Students must make an effort to avoid pronouncing the plosive variant every time they see *d* or *g*.

In Portuguese both phonemes, the labiodental voiced fricative /v/ and the bilabial voiced plosive /b/, exist, therefore the pronunciation of these two sounds, with equivalents in Slovene, is not difficult for Slovene learners. Nevertheless, the Portuguese voiced plosives /b, d, g/ are normally pronounced as fricatives [β, ð, ɣ] in all positions except in word-initial position and after nasalized vowels.

Another important difference and therefore a cause of many mistakes is the Spanish opposition between the tap and the trill. The trill in Spanish occurs at the beginning of a word, after *n* or *l* and when the orthographic representation is *rr*. There is no equivalent in Slovene for the Spanish phoneme /r/, so the tendency is to pronounce every *r* as /r/ and to make no difference between *perra* (dog – bitch) [ˈpera] and *pera* (pear) [ˈpera]. In Portuguese there is no such a phonemic distinction between /r/ and /r/. In European Portuguese the alveolar tap /ɾ/ occurs in all the positions except for word-initial, where the uvular fricative /ʁ/ is pronounced. The latter causes problems to Slovene learners as there is no equivalent in Slovene for the Portuguese /ʁ/, so the tendency is to pronounce every *r* as /r/.

The Slovene system of consonants, as the Portuguese, lacks the dental fricative phoneme of the European Spanish /θ/, which represents another difficulty for Slovene learners. Many students apply the English dental fricative /θ/, since they mostly studied English since primary school and assimilated this sound. However, the pronunciation of the Spanish /θ/ requires more articulatory tension than the English equivalent. The phenomenon of *seseo*, however, is widely spread in the Spanish speaking world (American Spanish and parts of Spain, as Andalusia and the Canary Islands). It involves neutralization of the opposition between the phonemes /θ/ and /s/ to the detriment of /θ/. Thus, /s/ is pronounced e.g. in /ˈkasa/, *casa*, *house* : /ˈkasa/, *caza*, *game*, *hunting*.

There is no voiced counterpart to /s/ in Spanish, there is only a partly voiced allophonic variant of /s/: [ʃ] when /s/ precedes a voiced consonant: [ˈmuʃlo], *muslo*, *thigh*. The constant mistake of Slovene learners is the pronunciation of the voiced alveolar fricative instead of the voiceless one when /s/ is between vowels: instead of pronouncing [ˈmesa], they would pronounce incorrectly [ˈmeza]. This mistake is probably due to the Italian influence, a language with which the Slovenians are more familiar because of the contact with Italians during long periods of time in history and still today. In Portuguese the opposition /s/:/z/ (voiceless end voiced alveolar fricatives) exists, as it does in Slovene, therefore there are no pronouncing difficulties in this case.

The Portuguese palato-alveolar fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ do not present any difficulties for Slovene speakers as the Slovene language has these sounds: [ʒiˈveti], *živeti* (to live); [ʃivati], *šivati* (to sew). But, in European Portuguese:

/ʃ, ʒ/ are weakly fricated in syllable-final position. Syllable final /ʃ/ occurs as /ʒ/ before a voiced consonant (except before /ʒ/ itself, where it is deleted), and as [z] before a syllable initial vowel both within and across word boundaries, as in [kʷal duʒ doiz ˈeɾɔ] *qual dos dois era o* (which of the two was the) in the transcript passage. (Cruz-Ferreira 1993:128)

The Portuguese and Spanish palatal lateral /ɭ/ and palatal nasal /ɲ/ do not present any difficulties to the Slovenes as Slovene has these sounds (the combinations of [l] and [j] and of [n] and [j] in words such as *Ljubljana* – the capital city of Slovenia, *njena* – her). The yeísmo (neutralization of /ɭ/ and /j/ in /j/ or /ʒ/ in Argentina) is quickly assimilated by Slovene learners as Slovene has the same sounds in its system.

Comparing the pronunciation difficulties of Slovene students learning Spanish (L2) and Portuguese (L3) it seems that some Spanish consonants cause considerably more difficulties in learning the correct pronunciation than European Portuguese consonants because the Portuguese consonant system is similar to the Slovene, while the European Spanish consonant system has some sounds unfamiliar to Slovene speakers. As far as vowels are concerned the situation is the opposite: the Spanish vowel system is very simple and easy to learn for Slovene students, while the European Portuguese vowel system demands much more learning to reach correct perception and production of European Portuguese sounds. In this paper, the American variants of Spanish and Portuguese, which are in many regards closer to Slovene pronunciation, were not analysed.

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