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## **FAIR DINKUM: L2 SPANISH PRONUNCIATION IN AUSTRALIA BY THE BOOK**

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William Steed<sup>1</sup> and Manuel Delicado Cantero<sup>2</sup>  
James Cook University<sup>1</sup> and Australian National University<sup>2</sup>

While Spanish teaching in the United States is a well-established field, it is still maturing in Australia. Clear evidence of this is the absence of materials aimed at the Australian English-speaking market. While for the most part foreign textbooks are fine, problems arise immediately when it comes to addressing L2 Spanish pronunciation in a pronunciation course, as the models and examples are aimed at an audience with a different language or dialect background. The result is that students report it as difficult to get the most benefit from the materials. Just like the pedagogy of general phonetics is best achieved using Australian-focused materials, the same focus is necessary for effective L2 pronunciation materials. This study aims to review well-known textbooks for pronunciation courses, all primarily and even explicitly written for American students – arguably the largest market for Spanish pedagogical materials. Our review only measures appropriateness to the Australian university classroom context not the quality of the texts. We divide our approach into two main aspects: phonological and phonetic content (segmental and suprasegmental) and level of appropriateness to the linguistic awareness of Australian learners of Spanish.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The US market for learning Spanish is much greater than that of Australia. Its proximity to Spanish-speaking countries and its own Spanish-speaking population mean that most residents are exposed to Spanish frequently through their lives. Unsurprisingly, it has become a leading producer of materials for learning Spanish. Although Spanish is one of the most widely spoken non-English languages in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013), there are comparatively fewer Australian learners of Spanish (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Spanish Government 2012), and, as a result, few resources specifically targeted to them.

Grammatical instruction materials targeted at North American, English-speaking learners are generally suitable for Australian learners of Spanish – there are no major syntactic or morphological differences between US and Australian English standards. Pronunciation, on the other hand, differs substantially. Although US and Australian English are easily mutually intelligible, the differences lead to different accents in Spanish and different needs when working towards an acceptable and comprehensible pronunciation. Thus, materials produced for American learners of Spanish pronunciation will not necessarily target the phonetic and phonological characteristics of an Australian-Spanish interlanguage.

Furthermore, North American and Australian university majors are also structured differently, especially in the number of subjects per major, potentially leading to relevant differences in knowledge of the target language.

In light of the absence of Australian-targeted pronunciation pedagogy resources, the aim here is working towards meeting the needs of the Australian students: to review the suitability of

Australian learners of Spanish. Our research question is, to what extent are US-targeted Spanish pronunciation textbooks suitable for use in Australian university classrooms? We must emphasise that it is not the intent here to review the pedagogical styles, nor the quality of the content per se, but only to view them in the context of an Australian Spanish university classroom in order to locate and discuss any potential difficulties.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Selection**

The texts in question were chosen by several criteria:

- intended use as a pronunciation textbook for a pronunciation/phonetics course
- availability
- popularity
- publication date
- publication place
- written in Spanish

It is practical to review texts that will be easily accessible in a Spanish university classroom in Australia, thus availability in the Australian market is an important factor. A recent publication date (2003 or later) ensures that only current and up-to-date publications are considered. The publication place criterion considers only textbooks written for the large North American market, rather than those marketed to Spanish learners who are not necessarily English speakers. Choosing popular texts (that is, those that are currently used in North American Spanish programs) ensures that we are comparing texts that are considered appropriate in their target market. We selected only books written in Spanish as it is expected that the class will be taught in the target language. Other texts may be equally or more appropriate choices as pronunciation textbooks, but do not contribute to answering the question at hand. The five books reviewed in this article matching the criteria are as follows:

Guitart, J. M. (2004). *Sonido y Sentido: Teoría y práctica de la pronunciación del español*. Washington DC: Georgetown University Press.

Morgan, T. (2010). *Sonidos en contexto: Una introducción a la fonética del español con especial referencia a la vida real*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Piñeros, C. (2008). *Estructura de los sonidos del español*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Schwegler, A., Kempff, J., and Ameal Guerra, A. (2010). *Fonética y fonología españolas*, Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley.

Stokes, J. D. (2005). *¡Qué bien suena!: Mastering Spanish Phonetics and Phonology*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

### **Analysis criteria**

The texts were rated according to two sets of criteria: content and context appropriateness. The content criteria are designed to determine whether the texts cover the topics that Australian learners of Spanish need to know in order to reach an appropriate level of Spanish pronunciation. The context appropriateness criteria examines them within a typical Australian

The content criteria were developed through auditory and basic acoustic analysis of typical Australian L2 Spanish learners, collected from recordings of end-of-semester oral examinations of first- and second-year learners of Spanish at an Australian university, and self-recordings of second- and third-years students of a single text as baseline benchmarks for a pronunciation course. Recurring errors were regarded as necessary features of pronunciation instruction. Cox (2012) served as the reference for Australian English pronunciation. We also considered attitudinal survey data from students at the same university with regards to the difficulty of aspects of pronunciation, triangulating it with the recorded data, and anecdotal reported errors from teachers of Spanish working in Australia.

The context criteria are collated from several sources. Survey data provided information about the linguistic experience of Spanish students at an Australian university (see Steed & Delicado Cantero, 2014). This was supplemented by an informal investigation of Spanish language major requirements at nine Australian university websites. The criteria used here examine the prerequisite knowledge of the textbooks in terms of metalinguistic awareness, conscious linguistic knowledge, level of Spanish and cultural knowledge for both Spanish speaking countries and the United States. It also examines the diversity of examples given, in light of the different cultural make-up of Spanish speakers that students will encounter in Australia compared to the US.

## RESULTS

### Segmentals

The simple articulation of vowels is an essential part of understanding Spanish pronunciation. Although we expected that all texts would include basic information about the articulation of Spanish vowels, we include it to ensure that the texts cover the simplest aspects for the student. The three most common vowel differences between L1 Spanish and Australian L2 Spanish are neutralisation, diphthongisation of monophthongs, and different realisation of diphthongs. All three are also common to US L2 Spanish, but the realisations of diphthongs differ in the two L2 interlanguages.

Table 1 shows the results for vowel content in each text. Each text has detailed description of the articulation of vowels and diphthongs in Spanish. The texts all describe the relative height, backness and rounding of the vowel phonemes. Where examples are given, they are typically US English, e.g. Schwegler et al.'s (2010) comparing Spanish /e/ to the vowel in 'bait' (in US English typically [e ~ eɪ], but [æɪ] in Australian English), Spanish /u/ to the vowel in Sue ([u ~ ʊ] in the US and [u:] in Australia), and Spanish /o/ to the vowel in 'sow' (in US English typically [o ~ oʊ], but [əʊ] in Australian English) (see Cox 2012).

Each text also advises readers about two common vowel errors in US and Australian L2 Spanish – neutralisation of vowels (particularly /e/) in unstressed syllables and diphthongization of mid-vowels at the end of words. However, none of the texts has exercises for the realisation /er/ as /ɜr/ in stressed syllables typical of Australian English.

As for consonants, we selected seven features for evaluation, primarily about phonetic realisations of phonemes rather than phonological contrasts. Although each of the texts includes descriptions of each phoneme, most of the L1 Spanish/Australian L2 Spanish differences do not relate to neutralisation of phonological contrasts.

Table 1  
Information on segmentals

<i>Textbook</i>	<i>VOT</i>	<i>Place of articulation</i>	<i>Rhotic articulation</i>	<i>Approximant [β ð γ]</i>	<i>Post-vocalic /r/</i>	<i>/t d/ neutralization</i>	<i>/s/ aspiration</i>	<i>Articulatory differences (vowels)</i>	<i>Neutralization (schwa)</i>	<i>Diphthongization</i>	<i>Diphthong comparison (Eng – Sban)</i>
<i>Guitart</i>	2	2	2	2	<b>0</b>	2	2	2	2	2	<b>1</b>
<i>Morgan</i>	2	2	2	2	<b>0</b>	2	2	2	2	2	<b>0</b>
<i>Piñeros</i>	2	2	2	2	<b>0</b>	2	2	2	2	2	<b>0</b>
<i>Schwegler et al.</i>	2	2	2	2	<b>0</b>	2	2	2	2	2	2
<i>Stokes</i>	2	2	2	2	<b>0</b>	2	2	2	2	2	2

Note. 0=content absent; 1=some information or indirect information; 2=clear information and explanation (with varying degrees of depth).

All five texts have excellent coverage of most aspects of consonant articulation relevant to Australian Spanish learners, with one important exception: the lack of information and practice for /r/-deletion in the syllable coda. While this is understandably the result of most North American English dialects being rhotic, it is characteristic of Australian L2 Spanish.

### Suprasegmentals

The suprasegmental content (see Table 2) results contrast sharply with recent research, which remarks the need to pay due attention to prosodic information in the language classroom at all levels (Cortés, 2002; Lahoz, 2012; Santamaría, 2007), including the recommendation that prosody be the first content to be covered and practiced in class (Gil, 2007; Lahoz, 2012; see also the Curriculum Plan for the Instituto Cervantes in Instituto Cervantes, 2007). The content and exercises contained in Lahoz (2012) and the series of online materials in the Centro Virtual Cervantes – e.g., Santamaría (2008a, b) and their continuations – serve as models for the teaching of suprasegmentals in a Spanish class.

Table 2  
*Information on suprasegmentals*

<i>Textbook</i>	<i>Intonation</i>	<i>Neutral intonation</i>	<i>Emotive intonation</i>	<i>Sentence level stress</i>	<i>Lexical stress</i>	<i>Tonic group/phonological word</i>	<i>Phonic group, pause</i>	<i>Rhythm</i>	<i>Syllabification</i>	<i>Synalepha, synaeresis</i>	<i>Resyllabification</i>
<i>Guitart</i>	2	1	0	0	2	2	2	1	2	2	2
<i>Morgan</i>	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	2	2
<i>Piñeros</i>	2	2	2	0	2	2	2	0	2	2	2
<i>Schwegler et al.</i>	2	2	1	0	2	1	2	2	2	2	2
<i>Stokes</i>	2	2	0	0	2	1	0	2	2	2	2

*Note.* 0=content absent; 1=some information or indirect information; 2=clear information and explanation (with varying degrees of depth).

We note variable coverage of prosodic information and practice. On the one hand, all cover syllabification and resyllabification, synalepha/synaeresis, and lexical stress; the latter is usually linked to accent mark explanations, as is the case in Morgan (2010, chapter 4), for instance. On the other hand, however, most lack adequate information on pauses, phonic groups (that is, prosodic intonation groups), tonic groups and the phonological word, and sentence level stress, content that is necessary for any Spanish student across the world. In certain cases, the information is introduced briefly: tonic groups in Stokes (2005, pp. 52-53) are introduced indirectly by way of listing categories that will usually be unaccented (clitic pronouns, short prepositions, determiners, etc.). While almost all of them cover intonation, only two go beyond the basic neutral use of intonation (declarative sentence, basic interrogation, etc.) to cover emotive uses. Piñeros (2008, chapter 23) abounds in details, while Schwegler et al. (2010, pp. 325-326) is brief. Finally, information and practice on rhythm and tempo are present in three textbooks, again with varying degrees of detail.

While this problem will be equally important for US learners, Australian learners have less exposure to Spanish in their everyday life and thus potentially lower awareness of the prosodic structure of L1 Spanish. This may require more specific instruction in the classroom.

## Context

For a pronunciation course to be successful, it is important to discern whether students will be able to a) understand the Spanish level of the text, and b) follow the linguistic terminology used in the text. It is also important to the students that the content is covered to an appropriate depth for an Australian university level course.

In addition, the level of Americentrism was gauged by considering to what extent the examples occurring in the texts used North American Spanish, and whether the examples had the potential to be confusing for a non-linguistically aware Australian English speaker.

Some of these criteria are subjective in measure and are judged from the researchers' experience in Spanish learners' reading and comprehension ability at the prerequisite level for a pronunciation course. The results are summarized in Table 3:

Table 3  
*Information on context*

<i>Textbook</i>	<i>Variable English in examples</i>	<i>Explanation of phonology</i>	<i>Explanation of phonetics</i>	<i>Articulation</i>	<i>Spanish dialectal variation</i>	<i>Diversity of Spanish examples</i>	<i>Glossary of terms</i>	<i>No linguistics background</i>	<i>Spanish proficiency</i>	<i>No specific English as model</i>	<i>No specific student target</i>
<i>Guitart</i>	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	0	2	0	0
<i>Morgan</i>	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0
<i>Piñeros</i>	0	2	2	2	2	2	0	0	2	1	0
<i>Schwegler et al.</i>	0	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	0	0
<i>Stokes</i>	0	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0

*Note.* 0=content absent; 1=some information or indirect information; 2=clear information and explanation (with varying degrees of depth).

With regards to level of Spanish, Spanish university majors in Australia are not completely comparable to US college majors. Firstly, typical Australian university majors comprise 6-9 semesters of study (300-450 hours) across three to four years. Even as an advanced subject, Australian students taking a specific pronunciation course may have as little as three semesters (150 hours) of instruction experience in Spanish.

Secondly, while in the US basic language classes are typically part of the general education courses (GECs) before declaring and thus beginning the actual major, no such requirement exists in Australian degrees. A practical difference is that while a US student may not be allowed to count any credits taken as GECs as part of their Spanish major, an Australian student will typically include all university-level credits towards their major. Our own review of Spanish programs in Australia shows that a typical language major consists of about 7 or 8 subjects, including basic language classes, much less than a typical US major.

Thirdly, in the case of the US, while there are there are too many programs to perform an exhaustive analysis, all programs will include at least some type of advanced grammar as part of their requirements. An online look at a number of well-known programs in Spanish in some US universities (Ohio State, University of New Mexico, UCLA, University of Wisconsin-Madison, Pennsylvania State, Indiana, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and University of Texas-Austin) reveals that it is clear that a Spanish pronunciation course of some denomination is present, at least as an elective, if not as a requirement for all students declaring a Spanish major or minor. The existence of these courses explains the existence of the textbooks. While we are aware that not all US Spanish programs require or even offer a pronunciation course, it is clear that this is an offering that is common and expected. Such is not the case in Australia, given the competence-focussed nature of Australian language majors.

Fourthly, as already mentioned, Australian learners of Spanish have a much lower level of exposure to L1 Spanish compared to their North American counterparts. While there is a substantial Spanish-speaking community in Australia (ABS, 2013), there is far less widespread public use of Spanish, for example in media and social interaction.

As a result of these differences, the instructor needs to take into consideration that the level of Spanish of the average Australian student is likely to be lower than that of US learners. A tangible consequence of this is that the level of Spanish in three of the texts, namely Piñeros (2008), Guitart (2004) and possibly Schwegler et al. (2010), will be difficult for students, especially those who are struggling. The level of Spanish in Stokes (2005) is at a more appropriate level for the students who are enrolled in Australian pronunciation courses.

Another conflictive fact has to do with the English used in the textbooks. As they are targeted at American students, it comes as no surprise that the model is US English. However, this fact leads to difficulties when it comes to benefitting from the input and especially from the comparisons English-Spanish a number of exercises rely on. When vowels, alveolar trill in coda, dark /l/, etc. are put together, the result is the decreased effectiveness of a number of sections and exercises in the books. A case in point from our teaching experience is the English/Spanish contrast in Morgan (2010, p. 346); students were not satisfied with the American English models for comparison.

The instructor of a pronunciation course will also find that linguistics is not a required field of study for Spanish students in most Australian Spanish majors. We surveyed Spanish students at one university, finding that only 1/3 of students at all levels were taking or had taken a course in linguistics (Steed & Delicado Cantero 2014). It cannot be expected, then, that students have metalinguistic awareness, particularly surrounding pronunciation. While they may have learned about some topics (such as English syllables, stressed syllables, rhyming, etc.) in school, students are not typically accustomed to critically assessing pronunciation,

and most linguistic concepts (phonetic transcription, phonemes, intonational awareness, etc.) must also be explicitly taught.

The texts, for the most part, explain the vocabulary and concepts that students typically find unfamiliar, in varying detail: while Piñeros (2008) is thorough and complex, Stokes's (2005) explanations are briefer. Save for Piñeros (2008), all include a glossary.

Australian universities are regulated by the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Assurance (TEQSA) using the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Undergraduate courses are expected to lead to level 7 outcomes, "broad and coherent knowledge and skills for professional work and/or further learning" (AQF, 2013). It is thus important that a text used to teach pronunciation to higher level students be aiming for level 7 comprehension of the topic.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

As stated earlier, the aim of this study is not to review the textbooks for pedagogical quality, nor is it to assess how well the texts achieve their own aim – that is, teaching North American students about Spanish phonetics and phonology. Our aim is to assess how well the textbooks can be adapted to a purpose they were not specifically designed for – teaching Australian students.

Our results show that the texts do not cover all of the typical errors that Australian students make in pronouncing Spanish. In addition, examples given from US English may mislead Australian learners without expert guidance from their instructor. Learners may even unintentionally acquire mismatched correspondences between English and standard Spanish pronunciation and, in our experience, will also find the US English input inadequate to their purpose. Furthermore, without the background of basic linguistics, which is not typical for students of Spanish in Australia, or the higher level of Spanish that can be expected toward the end of a US Spanish major, the texts may be too difficult to follow, or have too much content for a single course's content. On the other hand, a simpler textbook may not have a deep enough content to satisfy the higher cognitive requirements of an Australian university-level course. The result is a conflict between appropriate level of Spanish and presumed knowledge of linguistics and depth and breadth of explanations and activities. We can confirm, then, that there is a substantial gap which needs to be covered in order to use these texts effectively in Australian subjects.

Teachers who are choosing an appropriate text can use the results of our investigation to guide their selection. Our conclusions suggest that, although the texts are of good quality and teachers can use any of them in a pronunciation class, no one text examined stands out as particularly better than the others in terms of content and context appropriateness. A student needs analysis for their specific teaching context is best to guide them to the best choice for their students. Due to the lack of Australian-focussed materials, however, Australian teachers will need to supplement their choice with additional materials.

## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

William Steed is Lecturer in Linguistics for the Speech Pathology program at James Cook University. He received his PhD from the Australian National University in 2011 for his



teaching and research, along with the fact of being both a native speaker of Australian English and a speaker of L2 Spanish, lead him to co-found the *Australian Spanish Pronunciation Pedagogy Project* to improve the state of research into L2 Spanish in Australia.

Manuel Delicado Cantero is Lecturer of Spanish at the Australian National University. As part of his research-led teaching, he co-founded the *Australian Spanish Pronunciation Project*, which aims to research L2 Spanish pronunciation in this part of the world. The researchers in this team seek to understand the production and perception issues Australian students face in this area and to produce the necessary materials to meet their needs. His research interests also include Spanish formal syntax and historical syntax.

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