

CHAPTER

2

Structure of Spanish

what?

Spanish Letter/Sound System



Most Spanish speakers in North, Central, and South America pronounce both *ll* and *y* as */y/*.

From a phonetic standpoint, Spanish is a much simpler language than English. There is a nearly one-to-one correspondence between the 22 phonemes in the Spanish that is spoken in the Americas and the 29 letters that represent these sounds. One significant difference between Spanish and English is the ease with which students are able to learn the letter/sound correspondences of the five Spanish vowels. Each vowel letter has a distinct and relatively consistent sound that forms the nucleus of every syllable. The five vowels are categorized as open (/a/), semi-open (/e/, /o/), and closed (/i/, /u/), depending on how wide the mouth is opened and the position of the tongue and lips. Because of the grapheme/phoneme consistency and structural importance of vowels, beginning Spanish readers are taught vowel letters and their corresponding sounds before they are introduced to consonant letters and their sounds.

The phonetic variations of Spanish consonants are a challenge for many beginning readers. As the chart of Spanish consonants later in this chapter shows, the *c* and *g* (like their English counterparts) have both a “hard” and a “soft” sound (e.g., *cocina* and *gigante*). In addition, the Spanish consonant phonemes /s/, /b/, and /y/ have more than one spelling. Students typically take several years to master these contrasts, drawing on visual memory specific to words or word families (Moran and Calfee 1993). Although the spelling of the con-

SEE ALSO . . .
Spanish Phonic Elements with Positive Transfer to English, p. 62

sonant phonemes /k/, /g/, and /x/ varies, it follows predictable rules that are governed by the vowel sound that follows the consonant phoneme. Therefore, students can be taught how to use syllabic context to decode and spell words with these sounds.

Spanish Vowels				
Vowel Type	Letter	Phoneme*	Key Words	Notes
Open	a	/a/	ama, casa	This is the short-o sound in <i>father</i> and <i>spa</i> .
Semi-Open	e	/e/	edad, mesa	This is the short-e sound in <i>messy</i> .**
	o	/o/	oso, mono	This is the long-o sound in <i>no</i> and <i>old</i> .
Closed	i	/i/	iba, niña	This is the long-e sound in <i>machine</i> .
	u	/u/	uno, duda	This is the long-oo sound in <i>ruby</i> and <i>July</i> .
	y	/i/	y	This is the long-e sound in <i>city</i> .

*Phonemes are represented by phonetic symbols used in Spanish. **Commonly taught in U.S. schools as the long-a sound in *weigh*.



Spanish Vowel Combinations

Hiatos

Hiatos are two consecutive vowels that appear in different syllables. There is a pause between two distinct sounds.

- One open and one semi-open, or two semi-open

ae ao ea eo ee oa oe

Key words: trae, real, leo, cree, toalla

- One open or semi-open, and one accented closed

ía íe ío úa úe úo aí eí oí aú eú

Key words: día, río, actúo, país, leí, Raúl

Diptongos

Diptongos are two consecutive vowels that appear in the same syllable. The sounds are blended together.

- One open or semi-open, and one closed

ai/ay ei/ey oi/oy au eu ou

ia ie io ua ue uo

Key words: baile, voy, aunque, lluvia, cielo, cuando, puede

- Two closed

iu ui/uy

Key words: ciudad, ruido, muy

Triptongos

Triptongos are three consecutive vowels that are blended within one syllable.

- Open or semi-open, and two closed

iaí ieí iau ioí uai/uay uei/uey uau

Key words: apreciáis, miau, averiguáis, buey, guau

Spanish Consonants

Letter	Phoneme*	Key Words	Notes
b	/b/	boca, baño	
c	/k/	cama, cosa, cuna	Phoneme /k/ is spelled <i>c</i> before <i>a, o,</i> and <i>u</i> and <i>qu</i> before <i>e</i> and <i>i</i> .
	/s/	cena, cita	
ch	/ch/	chato, ocho	
d	/d/	deja, dos	Similar to /th/ between vowels (<i>nada</i>) and at the end of words (<i>pared</i>)
f	/f/	fiesta, fecha	
g	/g/	gato, guerra, guía	Hard <i>g</i> before <i>a, o, ue, ui</i>
	/x/	giro, gente	Spanish phoneme /x/ is a guttural sound, similar to English /h/.
h	silent	hijo, hermano	
j	/x/	jabón, rojo, jugo dije, jinete	Spanish phoneme /x/ is spelled <i>j</i> before <i>a, o,</i> and <i>u</i> . It can be spelled <i>j</i> or <i>g</i> before <i>e</i> and <i>i</i> . (See note for phoneme /x/ spelled <i>x</i> .)
l	/l/	loma, malo	
ll	/y/	llama, pollo	Although <i>ll</i> and <i>y</i> represent two distinct phonemes, most Spanish speakers say both /y/.
m	/m/	más, ama	
n	/n/	nido, una	
ñ	/ñ/	año, niño	Phoneme /ñ/ has a sound similar to that of the letters <i>ni</i> in the English word <i>onion</i> .

*A simplified system of phonetic symbols has been used to represent the sounds of *ch, ll, ñ, rr,* and *y*.

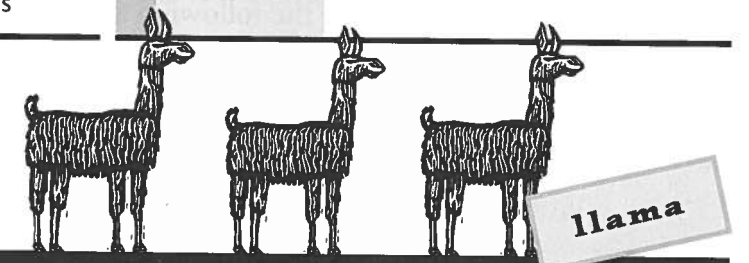
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Spanish Consonants			
Letter	Phoneme*	Key Words	Notes
p	/p/	papá, pera	
q	/k/	queso, quita	For /kw/ sound in Spanish, <i>cu</i> + vowel
r	/r/	oro, cara	More forcibly rolled than English /r/
	/rr/	rosa, alrededor, barro	Initial <i>r</i> has /rr/ sound, as does <i>r</i> after <i>l</i> , <i>n</i> , or <i>s</i> . When phoneme /rr/ occurs between two vowels, it is spelled <i>rr</i>
s	/s/	sapo, silla, mesa	Similar to the <i>s</i> of <i>cause</i> when followed by <i>b</i> , <i>d</i> , <i>g</i> , <i>l</i> , <i>m</i> , <i>n</i>
t	/t/	tú, todo, pata	Softer than English /t/
v	/b/	vaca, oveja	There is no Spanish phoneme /v/.
x	/s/	xilófono	The letter <i>x</i> can be pronounced four different ways.
	/x/	México	
	/gs/	excavar	
	/ks/	taxi	
y	/y/	yema, yo	
z	/s/	zapato, paz	
k	/k/	kilogramo, kiosco	Only appears in words of foreign origin
w	/ōo/ or /b/	wat, wáter	Only appears in words of foreign origin

*A simplified system of phonetic symbols has been used to represent the sounds of *ch*, *ll*, *ñ*, *rr*, and *y*.

Spanish Consonant Blends

	Sounds	Spelling	Key Words		Sounds	Spelling	Key Words
R - BLENDS	/br/	br	brazo, abrigo	L - BLENDS	/bl/	bl	blusa, habla
	/cr/	cr	crema, crudo		/cl/	cl	clase, aclara
	/dr/	dr	drama, dragón		/fl/	fl	flaco, flores
	/fr/	fr	frío, ofrece		/gl/	gl	globo, glaciar
	/gr/	gr	gris, agregar		/pl/	pl	plancha, pluma
	/pr/	pr	primo, aprende		/tl/	tl	nahautl, tlacuache
	/tr/	tr	traigo, atrás				



Spanish Consonant Digraphs

Phoneme	Spelling	Key Words	Notes
/ch/	ch	choque, ancho	Usually taught as part of the Spanish alphabet
/y/	ll	llama, calle	Usually taught as part of the Spanish alphabet
/rr/	rr	perro, barril	

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Spanish Sound/Spelling Sequence



General Sequence for Teaching Phonic Elements, p. 178, for information about the English sound/spelling sequence

Explicit Spanish phonics instruction has been shown to improve Spanish-speaking students' reading achievement in both Spanish and English (Carrillo 1994; Durgunoglu, Nagy, and Hancin-Bhatt 1993). Although there is no "set in stone" sequence for teaching Spanish sound/spelling relationships, the following are some general guidelines:

- Unlike phonics instruction in English, Spanish phonics instruction should begin with the five vowels.
- Instruction should progress from simple to more complex sounds. Consonant sounds should be taught before digraphs (*ch, ll, rr*), blends (*cr, tr, bl, pl*, etc.), and vowel combinations (*hiatos* and *diptongos*).
- Consonants should be taught in combination with vowels so that students can apply what they learn to decodable text. Instruction should begin with the consonants that are most useful in generating and decoding Spanish words.
- The sequence of instruction should stagger consonant sounds to vary the type of articulation:
 - Bilabial (/p/, /b/, /m/)
 - Labiodental (/f/)
 - Dental (/t/, /d/)
 - Alveolar (/s/, /n/, /l/, /r/, /rr/)
 - Palatal (/ch/, /ñ/, /y/)
 - Velar (/k/, /x/, /g/)

In addition, students should receive systematic instruction that includes constant review and repetition of sound/spelling relationships. With these guidelines in mind, the following chart presents a possible sequence of Spanish phonics instruction.

Suggested Spanish Sound/Spelling Sequence		
Vowels	Initial vowel	o, a, i, u, e
Consonants and Consonant Digraphs	Open syllables with	m, s, p, t, c (/k/), n, b, l, f, r (initial) & rr, g (/g/), d, v, ch, ñ, j, ll, r (medial), c (/s/), g (/x/), y, q, gu + e or i (/g/), z, h, güe & güi, k, x, w
	Closed syllables ending in	l, m, n, r, s, d, z, x
Consonant Blends	Open syllables with	cr, pr, tr, br, gr, fr, bl, cl, fl, pl
	Closed syllables with	cr, pr, tr, br, gr, fr, bl, cl, fl, pl
Vowel Combinations	Hiatos	ae, ea, ee, eo
	Diphthongs in open syllables	ia, ie, ua, ue, ui & uy, io, ai & ay, oy
	Diphthongs in closed syllables	ie, ua, ue

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Spanish Syllable Types and Patterns

SEE ALSO . . .
Syllables, p. 36, for information about English syllable types and patterns

Spanish is in many respects a syllabic language: the spoken language is built upon a relatively small collection of distinctive syllables, and the printed language is easily decoded syllable by syllable (Moran and Calfee 1993). The vast majority of Spanish syllables fall into two categories: open CV (55.94 percent) and closed CVC (20.16 percent) (Guirao and Manrique 1972).

In Spanish, the guiding principle in syllable division is to make syllables end in a vowel as far as possible, so a single consonant between vowels is joined to the vowel or vowels that follow: *ca•la•ba•za*. The digraphs *ch*, *ll*, *rr* are considered single consonants and never separated: *ca•rre•te•ra*. Prepositional prefixes form separate syllables, except when the prefix is followed by *s* + a consonant: *con•sul•tar* vs. *cons•tan•te*. Vowels forming a diphthong or triphthong must not be separated: *llu•via*. Hiatus as well as diphthongs and triphthongs that are dissolved by an accent mark form separate syllables: *le•er* and *dí•a*. The liquids *l* and *r* when preceded by any consonant other than *s* are not separated from that consonant unless the consonant is part of a prefix: *a•bra•zo* vs. *sub•ra•yar*. Two separate consonants standing between vowels are divided: *pron•to*.

Spanish Syllable Types		
Syllable Type	Definition	Key Words
Open	An open syllable ends in a vowel. In Spanish, most syllables are open and begin with a consonant.	la, de, ojo, hilo, sopa, corre, abeja, bonito, muchacho, graciosa
Closed	A closed syllable ends in a consonant.	el, ir, vez, pon, árbol, tambor, saltan, barcos, puentes, comparten

Spanish Syllable Patterns (from Most to Least Frequent)		
Pattern	Division	Key Words
CV	CV/C	so • pa, mu • cha • cho
CVC	CVC/C	ven • der, tor • men • tas
V	V/CV, CV/V	u • va, e • cha, tí • o, le • a
CCV	CCV/C CCV/CC	cla • se, glo • bos pro • ble • ma
VC	VC/C	us • ted, ár • bol, im • por • tan • tes
CCVC	CCVC/C	gran • de, cris • tal
VCC	VCC/CC VCC/C	abs • trac • to ins • pi • rar
CVCC	CVCC/C	cons • tan • te, pers • pec • ti • va
CCVCC	CCVCC/C	trans • for • mar



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English/Spanish Language Differences



SEE ALSO . . .

Pronunciation of English and Spanish Letter Names, p.85

The following chart identifies important differences between English and Spanish phonology and orthography. Teachers of Spanish-speaking students can use this information to better understand students' performance in both reading and spelling. When teachers recognize that a particular error is a result of a student correctly applying the rules of Spanish, they can work with the student to identify differences between the two language systems and thereby build on the student's existing repertoire of literacy skills.

English/Spanish Language Differences	
b & v	In Spanish <i>b</i> and <i>v</i> are pronounced with the same sound, like the letter <i>b</i> in <i>balloon</i> . Therefore, students may have problems spelling words with the letter <i>v</i> .
c, s, z	In Spanish the following letters have the same sound, like the sound of the letter <i>s</i> in <i>sent</i> : • <i>c</i> preceding <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> • <i>s</i> • <i>z</i> Students may be confused when spelling words with any of these three letters.
ch & sh	The <i>sh</i> digraph does not exist in Spanish. Therefore, students may pronounce <i>sh</i> as /s/ and have difficulty spelling words with <i>sh</i> , possibly substituting <i>ch</i> . The <i>ch</i> consonant digraph is usually taught as part of the Spanish alphabet. It has the /ch/ sound in <i>cheese</i> .
Double Consonants	The only double consonants in Spanish where both letters are pronounced are <i>cc</i> —pronounced like /ks/ in <i>accent</i> —and <i>nn</i> . In Spanish <i>ll</i> and <i>rr</i> are not considered double consonants because they represent a single sound. English words containing double consonants may be difficult to read and spell.
-ed	The variations in the sound of <i>-ed</i> in past-tense verbs may be confusing, especially when <i>-ed</i> has the soft-t sound as in <i>wrapped</i> .

English/Spanish Language Differences

Final Consonant Blends	Because Spanish words do not usually end with final consonant blends, English words that do may cause confusion in spelling. Students will generally pronounce the first consonant and not the second. The most common combinations that can create difficulties are <i>ng</i> , <i>nd</i> , <i>st</i> , <i>nk</i> , <i>mp</i> , <i>nt</i> , <i>ft</i> , and <i>rl</i> .
g & j	In Spanish, <i>g</i> before <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> , and <i>j</i> represent a strong guttural sound with no equivalent in English. The English <i>h</i> has a sound that most closely approximates the Spanish consonant sound /x/. Students may pronounce words such as <i>general</i> as <i>heneral</i> , <i>giraffe</i> as <i>hiraffe</i> , and <i>juvenile</i> as <i>hjuvenile</i> . These pronunciation differences can lead to spelling confusion.
h (initial position)	The only silent letter in Spanish is <i>h</i> . Students may not write the letter <i>h</i> in the initial position of words and may not pronounce it when reading.
k	In Spanish, the letter <i>k</i> is found only in words of foreign origin and may, therefore, be unfamiliar to students. They may use the letter <i>c</i> or <i>qu</i> followed by <i>e</i> or <i>i</i> to write the sound for the letter <i>k</i> .
Plurals	English plural words are likely to cause problems in both pronunciation and spelling for Spanish-speaking students. First, the pronunciation of the final <i>-s</i> in English varies. It can have the /s/ sound of <i>books</i> or the /z/ sound of <i>stores</i> . Second, students may have problems writing the plurals of English words ending in consonants, as most take <i>-s</i> and not <i>-es</i> as is the case in Spanish.
q	The /kw/ sound in the English word <i>question</i> is always written <i>cu</i> plus a vowel in Spanish. The letter <i>q</i> always appears with <i>ue</i> or <i>ui</i> in Spanish and has the /k/ sound as in <i>kite</i> .
s-Blends	There are no Spanish words that begin with <i>s</i> -blends. A vowel always precedes consonant clusters with <i>s</i> , so Spanish-speaking students may add the sound of the letter <i>e</i> (/ã/) when they pronounce words that begin with <i>sc</i> , <i>sk</i> , <i>sl</i> , <i>sm</i> , <i>sn</i> , <i>sp</i> , <i>sq</i> , <i>st</i> , or <i>sw</i> .
th	The <i>th</i> digraph does not exist in Spanish spoken in the Americas. Students may pronounce <i>th</i> as <i>d</i> since its sound is similar to the soft <i>d</i> in Spanish. For example, <i>that</i> might become <i>dat</i> .
Vowels	In Spanish, vowels have a single and relatively invariable sound: • <i>a</i> as in <i>spa</i> • <i>e</i> as in <i>weigh</i> • <i>i</i> as in <i>marine</i> • <i>o</i> as in <i>open</i> • <i>u</i> as in <i>tune</i> Spanish-speaking students may have trouble with the various English vowel sounds and vowel combinations, substituting them with Spanish vowel sounds and combinations.
w & wh	The letter <i>w</i> and the digraph <i>wh</i> do not exist in Spanish, except in words of foreign origin. The pronunciation of the letter <i>w</i> depends on the language the word comes from and is either the /ō/ or /b/ sound. This may cause confusion in spelling. In addition, students may pronounce and write <i>wh</i> as <i>w</i> .

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Spanish/English Cross-Language Transfer



For those Spanish-speaking ELLs who are literate in their first language, much of their native language reading skills can be applied to their reading in the second language.

Students who can read in Spanish have mastered a number of important skills. Even beginning Spanish readers have learned that letters represent the different sounds of spoken language and that individual sounds can be blended into meaningful units. Rather than being a deficit, literacy in Spanish provides a strong foundation for learning English phonics.

As teachers introduce Spanish readers to English phonics, they can draw on a large number of phonic elements that are common to both languages. The following chart lists these common sound/spelling patterns.

Spanish Phonic Elements with Positive Transfer to English*		
/b/ spelled <i>b</i>	/m/ spelled <i>m</i>	/ch/ spelled <i>ch</i>
/d/ spelled <i>d</i>	/n/ spelled <i>n</i>	<i>l</i> -blends (bl, cl, fl, gl, pl)
/f/ spelled <i>f</i>	/p/ spelled <i>p</i>	<i>r</i> -blends (br, cr, dr, fr, gr, pr, tr)
/g/ spelled <i>g</i> in <i>ga, go, gu</i>	/s/ spelled <i>s</i> and <i>c</i> in <i>ce, ci</i>	/ō/ spelled <i>o</i>
/g/ spelled <i>gu</i> in <i>gue, gui</i>	/t/ spelled <i>t</i>	/ōō/ spelled <i>u</i>
/k/ spelled <i>c</i> in <i>ca, co, cu</i>	/y/ spelled <i>y</i>	diphthong /oi/ spelled <i>oi, oy</i>
/l/ spelled <i>l</i>		

*Sound/spelling patterns are the same in both languages.

Certain features of the Spanish letter/sound system are likely to cause difficulties for students who are transitioning from reading in Spanish to reading in English. Teachers can use the following chart to identify these elements with “negative transfer” and help students understand the differences between Spanish and English. In addition, there are many features of the English sound/spelling system that don’t exist in Spanish. The second chart lists the phonic elements that have no counterparts in Spanish and thus have “zero transfer.”

Spanish Phonic Elements with Negative Transfer to English*

- ▶ *g* before *e* and *i*, and *j* represent the guttural sound /x/, similar to English /h/.
- ▶ *h* is a silent letter.
- ▶ *ll* is a consonant digraph, usually taught as part of the Spanish alphabet. Most Spanish speakers pronounce *ll* as /y/.
- ▶ *que* and *qui* are pronounced /k/, never /kw/.
- ▶ *rr* is a consonant digraph that represents the forcibly rolled phoneme /rr/.
- ▶ *v* is pronounced /b/.
- ▶ *z* is pronounced /s/ by Spanish speakers in the Americas.
- ▶ The five Spanish vowels are relatively invariable in sound:
 - a* represents the short-*a* sound in *watch* and *father*.
 - e* represents the long-*e* sound in *eight*.
 - i* represents the long-*i* sound in *machine*.
 - o* represents the long-*o* sound in *no, old, rose*.
 - u* represents the long-*u* sound in *July, tube*.

English Phonic Elements with Zero Transfer from Spanish**

- ▶ all short vowels and schwa
- ▶ long vowels with silent *e*
- ▶ long-vowel digraphs and double vowels (except the diphthongs *oy* and *oi*)
- ▶ /j/ spelled *j* and *g* in words like *jump, giant, and cage*
- ▶ /k/ spelled *k* (In Spanish, the letter *k* only appears in a small number of borrowed words.)
- ▶ /w/ (Letter *w* only appears in Spanish in a limited number of borrowed words and is pronounced /b/ or /ōō/.)
- ▶ /v/ spelled *v*
- ▶ digraphs *sh, th, wh, ph, gh, -ng*
- ▶ *s*-blends
- ▶ consonants in final position (A limited number of consonants can appear at the end of Spanish words: *n, s, l, m, r, x, t, d, z, j*.)
- ▶ final consonant blends
- ▶ three-letter consonant blends

*Letter/sound correspondences are different. **Sound/spelling patterns do not exist in Spanish.

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English/Spanish Cognates

64 **COGNATES**
words in two languages that share a similar spelling, pronunciation, and meaning

FALSE COGNATES
pairs of words that are spelled the same or nearly the same in two languages but do not share the same meaning

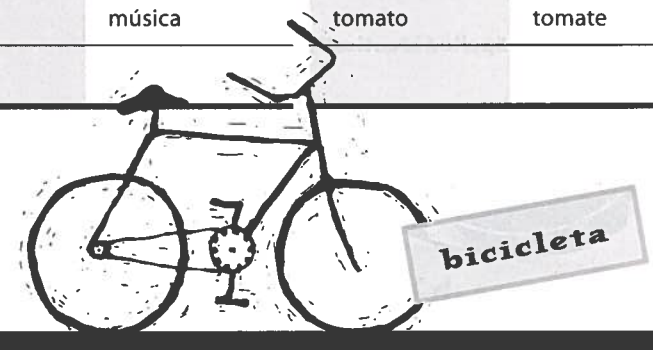
Cognates are words in two languages that share a similar spelling, pronunciation, and meaning. Students often can draw on their knowledge of words in their native language to figure out the meanings of cognates in English. Because of their common Latin and Greek roots, as well as the close connections between English and the Romance languages, English and Spanish share a large number of cognate pairs. English/Spanish cognates fall into several different categories: cognates that are spelled identically, cognates that are spelled nearly the same, cognates that are pronounced nearly the same, and false cognates. False cognates are pairs of words that are spelled identically or nearly the same in two languages but do not share the same meaning.

English/Spanish Cognates Spelled Identically

English	Spanish	English	Spanish	English	Spanish
accidental	accidental	confusion	confusión	hotel	hotel
animal	animal	coyote	coyote	idea	idea
area	área	director	director	metal	metal
banana	banana	doctor	doctor	natural	natural
banjo	banjo	extra	extra	piano	piano
cable	cable	flexible	flexible	radio	radio
cafeteria	cafetería	gas	gas	television	televisión
cereal	cereal	honor	honor	terrible	terrible
chocolate	chocolate	hospital	hospital	triple	triple
color	color				

English/Spanish Cognates Spelled Nearly the Same

English	Spanish	English	Spanish	English	Spanish
accident	accidente	distance	distancia	part	parte
active	activo/activa	discrimination	discriminación	perfect	perfecto/perfecta
adult	adulto/adulta	family	familia	planet	planeta
adventure	aventura	favorite	favorito/favorita	plant	planta
artist	artista	future	futuro	plate	plato
brilliant	brillante	history	historia	police	policía
cause	causa	important	importante	program	programa
class	clase	insect	insecto	possible	posible
cognate	cognado	map	mapa	restaurant	restaurante
culture	cultura	minute	minuto	temperature	temperatura
different	diferente	music	música	tomato	tomate
dinosaur	dinosaurio				



English/Spanish Cognates Pronounced Nearly the Same

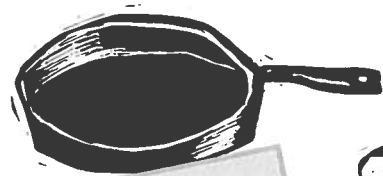
English	Spanish	English	Spanish	English	Spanish
baby	bebé	equal	igual	north	norte
bicycle	bicicleta	famous	famoso/famosa	object	objeto
blouse	blusa	fruit	fruta	park	parque
breeze	brisa	group	grupo	peace	paz
coast	costa	hour	hora	route	ruta
common	común	interesting	interesante	surprise	sorpresa
desert	desierto	leader	líder	telephone	teléfono
difficult	difícil	lemon	limón		

English/Spanish False Cognates

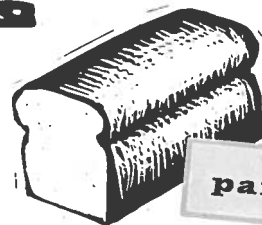
English	Spanish	English	Spanish
actual	actual (current)	camp	campo (countryside)
arena	arena (sand)	embarrassed	embarazada (pregnant)
mayor	mayor (older)	exit	éxito (success)
once	once (eleven)	fabric	fábrica (factory)
pan	pan (bread)	football	fútbol (soccer)
papa	papa (potato)	lecture	lectura (reading)
pie	pie (foot)	rare	raro (odd)
pretender	pretender (to try)	rope	ropa (clothing)
red	red (net)	soap	sopa (soup)
sensible	sensible (sensitive)	vase	vaso (drinking glass)

Spelled Identically

Spelled Nearly the Same



pan (English)

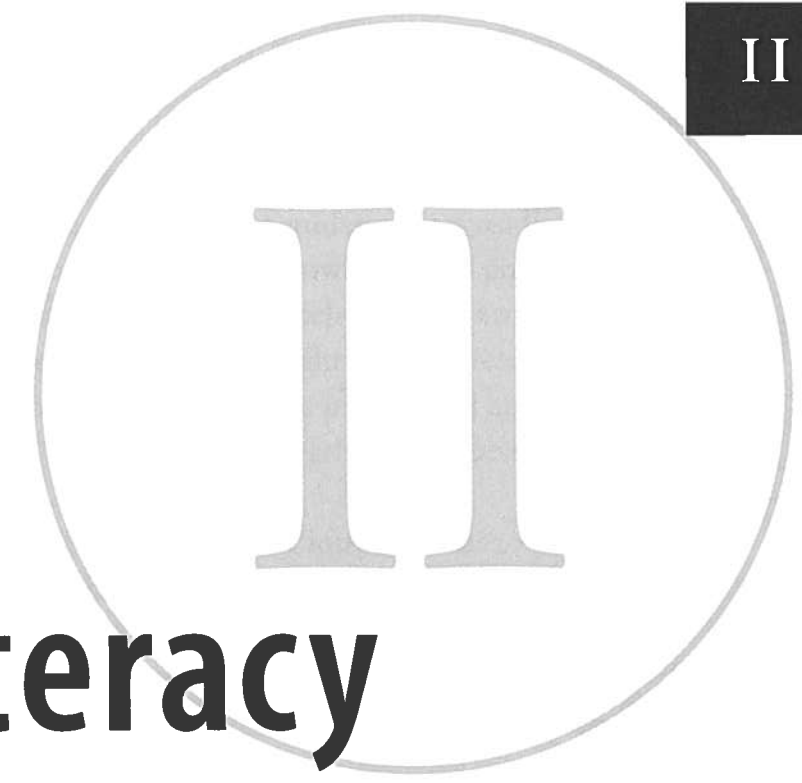


pan (Spanish)

Sources

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SECTION II

Early Literacy

CHAPTER 3

Print Awareness

CHAPTER 4

Letter Knowledge

CHAPTER 5

Phonological Awareness