

Overcoming the American Accent in Spanish (Part II)

The barrier of listening to Spanish

FOR A NATIVE SPEAKER OF ENGLISH, the exact pronunciation by a native speaker of Spanish of any of the words in the list below is almost impossible to hear (Table 1). The inability to hear is not a matter of exposure to the language. Consider the recent discovery of an English speaker of Spanish who has lived most of his life in Mexico (see insert).

I appreciated your lesson on *domin-go* and *domin-guez*. I tried it out on Lourdes and heard the correct split for the first time.

How could someone like me with a musical ear have gone for 45 years without picking this up?

This report is in a series on the linguistic interface between Mexico and the English-speaking oil, power and chemical industries. The report identifies elements of the accent in Spanish of the native English speaker (and weighted in Fig. 1).

The discussion in this report is meant primarily for the benefit of the native speaker of English; there are also benefits for Spanish speakers.

Table 1

Words that cannot be easily heard by the native English speaker

Domínguez	is heard as dom-ming-guez (with the 'z' of "zebra")
Muñoz	is heard as mun-yoz (with the 'z' pronounced as 's' as in "same")
Tú	is heard as "two," "too," or "to"
Sí	is heard as "sea" or "see"
Usted	is heard as "us-stead" (the second syllable as in "homestead" or "instead")
Como	is heard as in the family name of the 1950s pop singer Perry Como, with the vowel sound of "boat"
Los Angeles	is heard as "los-angle-les" or "los-an-hell-les"
Risible	is heard as "rees-seeble" (with the vowel sound of "see")
Español	is heard as "es-span-yol."

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