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Teaching Spanish Readers to Read in English

■ This article presents linguistic and applied psycholinguistics information that can help teachers teach Spanish literate ESL/EFL learners to read English more effectively. It describes the starting point, or the learner's existing knowledge state, if the learner is a successful reader in Spanish. The knowledge and strategies for reading Spanish are outlined, a few of which transfer to English reading. It then describes the ending point, or the learner's knowledge state that is necessary to be an expert English reader. The knowledge and low-level strategies for reading in English are not the same as those needed for Spanish reading; therefore the transition between literacy in Spanish and literacy in English may not proceed automatically. The article then briefly describes the learning stages that the Spanish-to-English learner traverses, and the implications for ESL/EFL methodology, curriculum, and materials.

Introduction

Some ESL/EFL learners never become comfortable with reading in English, no matter how carefully ESL/EFL teachers select reading passages, no matter how much background knowledge they provide for their learners, and no matter how many high-level cognitive reading strategies they suggest. For some learners English reading is always a struggle, never a pleasure.

Sometimes the problem is not with what the teacher is doing, but with what the teacher is *not* doing. Often teachers don't focus enough attention on the differences between reading in Spanish and reading in English because they have certain misconceptions (Freeman & Freeman,1999). One common misunderstanding is that low-level Spanish knowledge and skills will automatically help learners read English because the writing systems use the same alphabet. Teachers also have misgivings about teaching low-level reading strategies; in particular, they feel unsure about whether phonics instruction will help or what type of phonics to teach.

Linguistics and applied psycholinguistics can help ESL or EFL teachers teach Spanish readers to read in English more effectively. These fields of study and research give teachers a new, more realistic, perspective on the pedagogical task, clearing away any misconceptions and misgivings. The new perspective includes a clear picture of:

- The starting point or the learner's existing knowledge state;
- The ending point or the learner's final knowledge state;
- The learner's task or how teachers can help learners get from point one to point two in the most effective way.

This background information can inform teachers as they select balanced curricula and materials for the classroom and design effective lessons and activities.

In an ideal world, people would learn to read their first language first and then become excellent readers in their second and third languages. This is what happens for many Spanish readers, because they grow up in a Spanish-speaking country and only later begin learning English. In the Spanish-speaking areas of the US this sometimes happens if there is a strong bilingual emphasis that allows learners to begin their schooling in Spanish and make a later transition to English. However, in other areas of the US, some children speak and understand Spanish when they come to school, but they don't learn to read and write it because they are immersed in English from the beginning. There are other situations; in fact, probably every child or adult learner has a slightly different background. Therefore, each student will have a different starting state for learning to read in English. In this paper, I will mainly focus on Spanish-literate children or adults, that is, those who already have experience with one writing system but who must make the transition to another writing system, but I will also say a little here and there about ESL/EFL children or adults who are illiterate in Spanish.

The Starting Point

Teachers are correct in thinking that the child who knows how to read in Spanish has some information that will transfer to reading in English. What can transfer includes both knowledge and low-level reading strategies. Knowledge includes but is not limited to information about the writing system, a set of facts about letters and sounds. The lowest-level reading strategies are the conscious and unconscious procedures that allow the reader to decode the print on the page, access knowledge of the writing system, and recognize the words on the page.

Transferable knowledge includes the fact that both the Spanish and the English writing systems are based on the *alphabetic principle*—that each written symbol (or *grapheme*) corresponds to a phonetic symbol (or *phoneme*) in the spoken language. Therefore, because the basis for each writing system is the grapheme-phoneme relationship, *phonemic awareness* is important for both writing systems. Phonemic awareness is the knowledge that spoken

words are composed of a series of phonemes and the knowledge of the set of phonemes in the language. Research supporting the existence of phonemic awareness and its importance for reading continues to be criticized (e.g., Krashen, 2003, in *Language Magazine*, distributed at the 2003 CATESOL conference). Despite the criticism, the evidence is ample from infants learning their first language that babies as young as 1 month old can distinguish between different phonemes, even though they don't yet recognize them; that is, phonemic differences don't *mean* anything to babies. Recognition comes later, when children unconsciously acquire the concept of the phoneme from exposure to their native language.

There is some confusion about what a phoneme is. The phoneme is an abstract mental unit of language; all of the "real life" speech sounds that we produce and hear are actually only physical examples or representations of these abstract mental units. So, in an important sense, a phoneme is not a sound at all but the mental image of a sound that allows the native speaker to perceive and classify the sounds that occur in the environment. Real life speech sounds are called "phones." For example, on days when I have a sinus infection, I may not pronounce /m/[1] correctly. Instead it may sound more like a [b][2]. The sinusitis affects my pronunciation of the "phone" that day, but not my knowledge of the phoneme /m/, which remains the same, safely stored in my head. To comprehend our native language, we must have an inventory of these mental units of sound so that we can recognize them as phones in speech. By approximately 1 year of age, a baby has such an inventory. It is in this sense that phonemes exist and we are at least *unconsciously* aware of them because we use them to understand our native language.

Some children develop a *conscious* phonemic awareness before learning to read because people read to them, play rhyming games with them, and instruct them in other language-related activities in preschool and kindergarten. Having prior conscious phoneme awareness gives learners a leg up as they learn to read because they realize that individual spoken words can be segmented into component pieces, thus making it easier for them to associate the individual sounds with the letters that they learn in preschool or kindergarten. This realization leads directly to an awareness of the alphabetic principle: that a small set of letters occurs over and over again to represent the sounds of language. An alphabet is a very early form of technology: The grapheme represents the phoneme to make a visual language record.

For a number of reasons, however, some children do not acquire conscious phonemic awareness before learning to read. For them, it is reading instruction itself that brings their awareness into consciousness. However, they need time to learn that words can be segmented into component sounds; that is, they need time to learn the alphabetic principle. This initial lack of knowledge may put some of these children at a disadvantage, but many of them catch up quickly. Some children "induce" this information from whole language instruction, but some do not seem to. For the children who do not acquire this knowledge from whole language activities, overt instruction in letter-to-sound correspondences and low-level word identification strategies

may help. But this instruction should not be at the expense of other reading activities: listening to stories and books, looking at pictures and guessing the story from the pictures, drawing pictures and telling stories, engaging in language-experience approach activities, and so on. A balanced reading approach includes all of these.

If ESL/EFL learners have learned to read successfully in Spanish, teachers can count on the fact that they have general phonemic awareness and knowledge of the alphabetic principle, both of which will transfer to English reading. But there is even more knowledge that will transfer. Spanish is written with an alphabet similar to the English alphabet. Although this transferred knowledge is an important shortcut, it is crucial for teachers not to overlook the big differences between the Spanish writing system and the English writing system. Here's where linguistics can inform teachers.

An alphabet is a set of written symbols from which graphemes are constructed. The precise list of symbols comprising the Spanish alphabet is somewhat controversial since some people do not consider the symbols in parentheses part of the alphabet for purposes of alphabetization. Nevertheless, they definitely function as graphemes, since they are used as symbols in spelling words.

a, b, c, (ch), d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, (ll), m, n, ñ, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z

Writing systems are sets of graphemes that are formed by combining alphabet letters. The Spanish writing system is very similar to the inventory of alphabet letters; it has only a few additional graphemes for diphthongs (e.g., *ue, oy*).
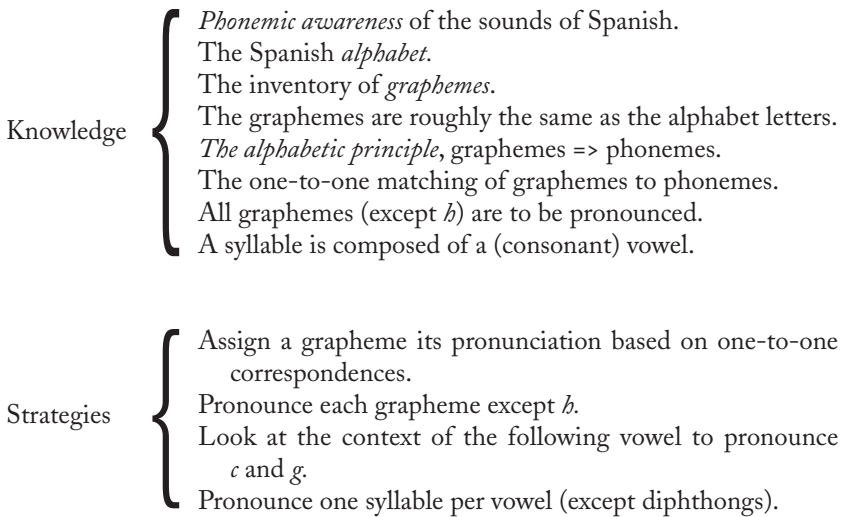
The Spanish writing system is also very *transparent*, meaning that graphemes correspond to phonemes in a one-to-one relationship, as in the example below.

/a/ ⟷ A, a
/b/ ⟷ B, b   etc.

If a Spanish reader has phonemic awareness, knowledge of the alphabetic principle, and knowledge of the inventory of graphemes used in Spanish, that reader can read aloud any word because the graphemes relate to each corresponding phoneme in a simple and consistent way with few exceptions *(c, g, h)*.

Spanish readers develop a variety of low-level processing strategies that are applied consciously at the beginning, but the strategies become more and more unconscious as the readers become automatic and efficient in expert reading. Readers know that they need to pronounce all graphemes except *h*. They use their knowledge of the correspondences between graphemes and phonemes to assign a pronunciation to each grapheme. To pronounce *c* and *g*, they learn to look at the following vowel. They also learn a syllabic strategy: Each consonant-vowel sequence or vowel by itself indicates a single syllable. In Figure 1, the areas of knowledge and low-levels strategies that transfer to reading in English appear in italic print.
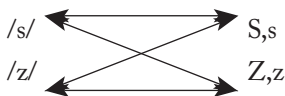
Figure 1
The Starting State:
Knowledge and Low-Level Reading Strategies for Spanish

Knowledge
{
Phonemic awareness of the sounds of Spanish.
The Spanish *alphabet.*
The inventory of *graphemes.*
The graphemes are roughly the same as the alphabet letters.
The alphabetic principle, graphemes => phonemes.
The one-to-one matching of graphemes to phonemes.
All graphemes (except *h*) are to be pronounced.
A syllable is composed of a (consonant) vowel.

Strategies
{
Assign a grapheme its pronunciation based on one-to-one correspondences.
Pronounce each grapheme except *h*.
Look at the context of the following vowel to pronounce *c* and *g*.
Pronounce one syllable per vowel (except diphthongs).

Naturally, ESL/EFL children or adults who are illiterate in Spanish do not have this background knowledge to transfer to English reading. They may know the sounds of Spanish and even the alphabet letters, but they don't know the graphemes, the alphabetic principle, the syllable, or any of the processing strategies. If circumstances permit, teachers might begin by teaching the learner to read in Spanish so that they can develop essential knowledge and strategies more easily. However, if this is not possible, they need to teach learners to read in English after they have achieved low-intermediate fluency with speaking and listening.

The Final State

The final state for the Spanish reader who is learning to read English can best be understood by looking at the English writing system, which, in contrast to the Spanish, is a complex nontransparent system. However, most people's brains can handle the complexity (except for people with reading disorders). Writing systems that are not transparent are called *opaque*; graphemes and phonemes are in a many-to-many relationship. The English writing system is an opaque system in which there are more graphemes than alphabet letters and the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes is not one-to-one, as illustrated.

/s/   S,s
/z/   Z,z

The 21 English consonant alphabet letters are used to form 43 common and uncommon consonant graphemes. See Figure 2. Each grapheme corresponds to at least one phoneme, but often to more than one. For example, *s* can be pronounced as /s/ or /z/. Each phoneme in English usually corresponds to more than one grapheme. For example, /b/ is usually written *b* or *bb*, and /f/ is usually written *f, ff, ph,* or *gh*. This situation can be described as many-to-many.

Figure 2
The Main English Consonant Graphemes

English Consonant Graphemes

Simple						*Compound*
b	g	kh	q	t	wh	ck
c	gh	l	r	th	y	dg
ch	h	m	s	u	z	tch
d	j	n	sh	v		x
f	k	p	sch	w		all doubled consonants (pp, tt, ll, ck, tch)

Note: From Venezky, 1970.

As English readers become more and more experienced and expert, their knowledge of these consonant graphemes seems to be stored as knowledge of the *correspondence probabilities* (an example appears in Figure 3) that a certain grapheme will be read a certain way in a certain context (Birch, 2002). We also learn common exceptions called sight words.

Figure 3
Some Hypothetical Grapheme-to-Phoneme
Correspondence Probabilities

f → /f/ 99.9% of the time
ff → /f/ 100% of the time
ph → /f/ 99.9% (except where a syllable or morpheme boundary is a barrier, as in *shepherd, haphazard*)

This many-to-many probabilistic system is complex, but learnable. In time, English readers unconsciously learn the correspondence probabilities; they implicitly know that a grapheme will be pronounced a certain way in a certain context. This knowledge is not conscious and cannot be learned through direct instruction. Rather, it can be acquired only through experience with extensive practice of reading, until reading becomes effortless and automatic.

Most American English dialects have a small number of spoken (simple and diphthong) vowel phonemes, which are represented in writing with the 30 written graphemes listed in Figure 4. Unlike consonant grapheme-to-

phoneme correspondences, the correspondences between vowel graphemes and vowel phonemes approach random, although some correspondence probabilities are higher than others. As a result, probabilistic reasoning is not sufficient for accurate reading in English.

Figure 4
The Main English Vowel Graphemes

Primary	Secondary		
a	ai/ay	ie	ue
e	au/aw	oa	ui
i	ea	oe	ae
o	ee	oi/oy	eau
u	ei/ey	oo	eo
y	eu/ew	ou/ow	uy

Note: From Venezky, 1970.

To read vowels, English readers develop a different knowledge store, a store of common spelling patterns such as these, matched with their pronunciation:

-it, bit, fit, mitt, nit, kit, lit, etc.
-an, ban, fan, can, Dan, ran, etc.
-ake, rake, cake, wake, take, etc.
-ick, sick, tick, Mick, wick, etc.

There are probably a little more than 100 of these common spelling patterns stored in our heads. With this store, we assign pronunciations and syllable structures to new and unknown words by *analogy*. English readers also learn helpful hints, for example, that some graphemes (such as "silent" *e*) are not pronounced and merely serve as markers of the pronunciation of other graphemes (the preceding vowel). Figure 5, on the next page, details the knowledge base and processing strategies that allow readers to accurately read English.

The Learning Process

Ehri (1998, p. 18) hypothesizes that there are four stages in the acquisition of expert reading in English, illustrated in Figure 6. At first, readers "read" by remembering certain features of the way words look and matching the image with something about the meaning of the word; this "reading" is non- or prealphabetic. As readers learn the alphabet, they begin to use their growing knowledge to connect the graphs on the page to the corresponding phonemes in their heads. Early on, the connections between graphs and graphemes and phonemes are partial, but later the connections are more complete and sophisticated. At this third, fully alphabetic, stage, we might

hypothesize that readers have a good knowledge of probabilities and contingencies that allow them to read consonants accurately and automatically. They have become adept at using *probabilistic reasoning* to read graphemes, calculating the probabilities that a certain grapheme corresponds to a certain phoneme. But it is at this stage when English readers realize that probabilistic reasoning is not very useful for English vowels, because the probabilities that a vowel grapheme will be pronounced a certain way approaches 50%.

<div align="center">

Figure 5
Final State: Knowledge and Low-Level Reading Strategies for English

</div>

Knowledge {
Phonemic awareness of the sounds of English.
The alphabet letters.
The approximately 73 consonant and vowel graphemes.
The alphabetic principle, graphemes → sounds.
Not all graphemes are pronounced.
Final *e* marks the previous vowel as "long."
Each grapheme may have more than one pronunciation.
The probabilities that a grapheme will be pronounced a certain way.

Processing strategies {
Don't pronounce all graphemes.
Use some graphemes (e.g., *e*) as markers of the pronunciation of other graphemes.
Assign a consonant grapheme its pronunciation based on the correspondence probabilities.
Look at the context to know how to pronounce *c* and *g* and some other graphemes.
Read vowels by analogy with known spelling patterns.
Use known spelling patterns to syllabify.

By the fourth stage of reading, the consolidated alphabetic stage, English readers have acquired extensive knowledge of known spelling patterns that hold true for a number of words and in this final stage, this knowledge becomes consolidated into units that can be used for *reasoning by analogy* (Goswami, 1998). These units are called *onsets* or *rimes*, common grapheme combinations that occur over and over again with a consistent pronunciation. Onsets are the graphemes that occur at the beginning of a syllable (s, p, sp, spl, spr, etc.); rimes are the vowel/consonant combination that forms the syllable (-at, -it, -ut, -ot, etc.).

But what about readers of other writing systems? Chitiri and Willows (1994) found that Greek readers use the fully alphabetic strategy to read and do not develop the consolidated alphabetic strategy. Although the Greek alphabet and the Spanish alphabet are different, their writing systems are

Figure 6
Developmental Stages in the Acquisition of
Low-Level Reading Strategies in English Readers

Prealphabetic stage   **L   O   O   K**

Partial alphabetic stage   S   P   O   O   N

                                 | |

                            /s/   /n/

Fully alphabetic stage   S   P   OO   N

                               | | | |

                          /s/ /p/   /u/   /n/

Consolidated alphabetic stage   SP   OON

                               | |

                          /sp/   /un/

Note: Adapted from Ehri, 1998, p. 18.

both highly transparent. Since the systems work very similarly, Spanish reading probably involves the same reading strategies as Greek reading. So we can hypothesize that Spanish readers read successfully with the fully alphabetic strategy too. It is only the more complex opaque system of English writing that causes readers to develop the consolidated alphabetic strategy. This explains why many teachers find that children learn to read Spanish much sooner than children learn to read English.

    It might take a Spanish reader attempting to learn to read in English a full year or so to make the transition from the fully alphabetic stage to the use of consolidated strategies because they need to learn or acquire:

- The 73 English graphemes;
- The many-to-many English writing system;
- Probabilistic reasoning;
- Knowledge of correspondence probabilities;
- The function of "silent" graphemes;
- Reasoning by analogy;
- The common spelling patterns in English;
- A new syllabic strategy based mainly on rimes and only partially on syllables.

Effective Methodology

Some Spanish readers make the transition to English knowledge and processing strategies on their own through exposure to English instruction and ample reading practice. If they learn enough to make reading a pleasurable experience, they will read sufficiently on their own and improve even more. If reading is difficult, if people avoid reading, they don't become proficient readers. They don't gain enough experience with English reading to advance into the consolidated alphabetic stage; instead, they continue to try to read using alphabetic and syllabic strategies, and then mentally convert what they have read to English words. As a result, reading English will remain complex and difficult because there is so much processing involved. Failure to advance from the fully alphabetic stage to the consolidated alphabetic stage is one reason why many advanced ESL learners still read slowly and laboriously and why they can't learn new vocabulary as they read. Such readers often need direct instruction to improve. How can teachers help their learners move from Stage 3 reading to Stage 4 reading?

Phonemic Awareness

Young beginning literate (and all illiterate) readers can begin with phonemic awareness activities in English as soon as they have learned some English sounds and words, since these activities don't involve any reading or spelling. Phonemic awareness activities involve only listening and pronunciation. Phonemic awareness can be acquired through oral/aural rhyming stories, games, and poetry. Learners learn the inventory of phonemes in English through typical listening discrimination and pronunciation activities such as the following. Teachers need to be careful not to overdo it since a little bit of these activities goes a long way; they will also want to make sure to use words that learners already know in these activities.

Listening:

Odd man out:	Which is different? sue, sue, zoo? bit, beet, bit?
Which is which:	Which is something you eat? Chip, cheap? Ship, chip? Which is an animal? Ship, sheep? Sheep, cheap?
Phoneme counting:	Clap your hands for each phoneme you hear: shell (three claps), bell (three claps), well (three claps).
Which word:	Which word rhymes with gas? Mass, boss? Which word has the same vowel as gas? Bat, bought? Which word has the same beginning sound as zoo? Cedar, zebra?

Pronunciation:

Phoneme manipulation:	What word is left if I take the *s* away from the word beginning of *stake*? *Take.*
	What word is left if I take the *t* away from the middle of *stake*? *Sake.*
	What word is left if I take the *d* away from the end of the word *paid*? *Pay.*
Reverse order:	What word is *cat* if the sounds are reversed? *Tack.*
Substitution:	What word is *sat* if you use the consonant *p* at the end? *Sap.*

Early Reading Instruction

Literate L1 learners of L2, especially older ones, often want to see new words written down from the very start so that they can copy the words to learn better. Teachers should not fight this tendency. Literate people have already grown to depend on these visual skills to facilitate their learning. Late beginning/early intermediate learners can benefit from instruction about the English alphabet, including English graphemes, their regular correspondences with consonant phonemes, and the common spelling patterns for vowels. This instruction should take place within the context of other activities, as simple commentaries about words as they are presented visually. Teachers need not incorporate reading and spelling lessons at this point but should just point these things out in a matter-of-fact manner.

Literate learners may skip Ehri's prealphabetic stage and move immediately into the partial alphabetic stage. At this point, readers (both Spanish and English) sometimes try to guess what the word is based on a few graphemes and the possible meaning of the word from the context. When reading out loud, they might substitute a similar word for the one that is actually in the text. If a reader makes frequent mistakes of this type, instructors can point out the correct word and focus for a time on the letters and spelling. With some instruction and a lot of entertaining easy reading, readers will move into the fully alphabetic stage. Teachers can help readers advance to the consolidated phase through direct instruction in onsets and rimes. Direct instruction in grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences and in common spelling patterns is frequently called *phonics*.

Smart Phonics

Many teachers find that supplementing their whole language methodology with a phonics approach can help learners master knowledge and low-level reading strategies for English reading faster and more easily. However, there is still some confusion about what phonics is. Modern phonics is not learning rules such as *When there are two vowels side by side, the long sound of the first one is heard and the second one is usually silent.* From our current ESL perspective, we can see that learning rules such as this one is learning *about*

the language rather than acquiring the *use* of the language. And learning about the language doesn't always help the learner.

Modern instruction in phonics is based on knowledge and reading strategies that children learn and apply through experience with reading and need not take much class time. Children do need to learn the consonant letter-to-sound correspondences because they are fairly consistently read. The letter *b*, for instance, is almost always read /b/; *bb* is always read /b/. Consonant letters and sounds do not correspond one-to-one, but the correspondence is not too hard to learn. There are a few problem letters, *c, g,* and *s*, but even then, the context of the following vowel in the word gives a good clue to pronunciation. Through extensive exposure to print, readers can learn the 100 or so common spelling patterns that are most useful for them. Many phonics materials are available; teachers should choose materials based on onsets and rimes, and not those based on learning rules.

Analogical Strategy

A conscious application of the analogical strategy can help learners read. Take the letter *o*. When we see it in isolation, we cannot assign it a pronunciation with accuracy. It could be pronounced as in *hope, top, office*, or *women*. However, as soon as we provide the bare letter *o* with a context: *_ot*, we instantly seem to know how to pronounce it. We have stored the chunk *_ot* with a strong connection to its pronunciation /_at/, so that as soon as we see it, we know how to pronounce it.

If teachers teach the words that contain the spelling patterns and model a strategy for sounding out new words, children can acquire the strategy quickly because the human brain loves analogies. For example, the new word *spunklerkin* (say, a sweet potato and anchovy muffin) can be read by analogy with *spunk–hunk, ler–her, kin–fin*. Through time, the conscious use of the strategy can become unconscious and automatic, as in other types of learning.

The strategy of sounding out unknown words is important for English language learners because they may know orally a word that appears in a text. If they can sound out the new word, they might recognize it even if the pronunciation is a little off-target. Similarly, if they can assign a pronunciation to a new word, they are more likely to try to use the word and remember it. If their pronunciation is not entirely accurate, they will be corrected or they will notice the way others pronounce it. This activity thus helps students increase their vocabularies, one of the main problems English language learners have in reading English. They will certainly not improve their vocabularies if they merely skip over all of the words they don't think they know.

Easy Reading

So that learners don't acquire the habit of skipping words they don't know, early reading material must be simple, using known vocabulary, and with only a few new words to be learned. Teachers are often tempted to have learners read material that is too difficult for them. Reading material that is

interesting and relevant to the learner is best, but interest and relevance must not overshadow proficiency level. If reading material is too complex, learners cannot or will not read it; it's as simple as that. Some highly motivated individuals might be able to read complex material with the use of a dictionary, but *ample quantity* rather than *a little quality* is more beneficial to the reader. Learners can read the same books and materials several times.

Silent Reading

One methodological question that teachers often have is whether or not poor pronunciation can have an effect on reading. Silent reading has more in common with listening comprehension than it does with pronunciation. Here's why: English learners recognize spoken phones if their listening comprehension is good. If they can comprehend spoken English and understand many speakers of English, they must have stored mental images of the phonemes of the second language in memory. That image can be used for silent reading because the grapheme on the page is matched with the mental image of the grapheme and its phoneme, as in Number 1 of Figure 7. If they proceed to recall memories of the actual phones associated with the abstract phoneme, readers will have the experience of "hearing" the words, as in Number 2. Some people report this phenomenon when reading, but it is actually more mental work than just associating the grapheme with a phoneme. It also slows reading down.

Figure 7
Different Skills Used in Different Reading Tasks
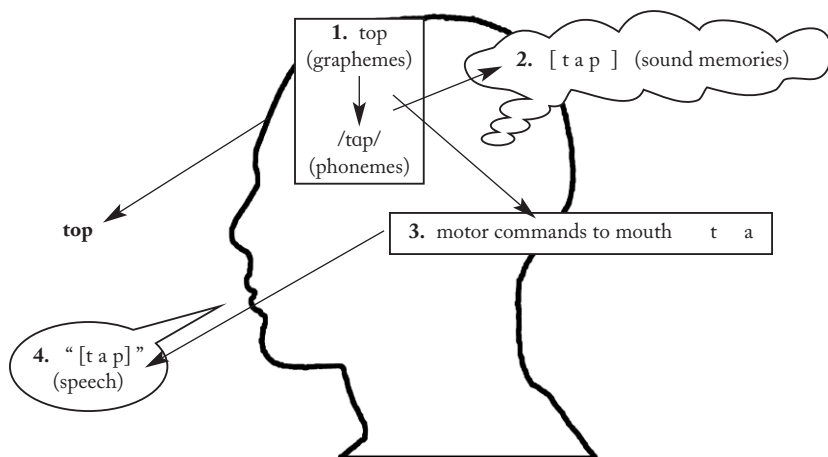
1. Silent reading 2. Reading while "hearing" sounds (1 and 2). 3. Reading with subvocalizing (1 and 3, sometimes with lips moving) 4. Reading out loud (1, 3, and 4).

Pronunciation, on the other hand, means that the stored images of phonemes must be converted into motor commands to the mouth to produce

phones, as in Number 3. If the motor commands are not carried out or if readers move their lips while reading "silently," they are subvocalizing. This is more effort and also slows reading down. Finally, the motor commands can be carried out and words pronounced. Motor commands to the mouth are habits; that's why many English learners have accents even if they are otherwise very fluent in English. Luckily, the ability to pronounce is not related to the ability to read, unless they are reading out loud, as in Number 4.

Reading Aloud

To learn and practice English grapheme-to-phoneme correspondences, acquire probabilistic reasoning for consonants, and use the analogical strategy, learners need to read out loud. But reading out loud is very problematic for many early English learners because converting mental images of phonemes to actual phones through motor commands and movements is very hard. For example, in reading aloud the word *top*, the English learner associates the letters in the word with the phonemes /tɑp/, decides what the word is, converts the phonemes into motor commands as accurately as possible, and then tries to get the tongue to move in such a way as to be comprehensible. A reader must avoid pronouncing the words as they would be pronounced according to the spelling conventions in the native language, and the reader must be doing this all the while feeling the anxiety of making a mistake and looking silly. Not surprisingly, for many readers, reading out loud is very stressful.

Luckily, some techniques facilitate the acquisition of reading and minimize the problems that learners have and the stress they feel. First, learners need to hear the teacher read the material while they follow along in the text. Learners can also listen to tapes or more advanced readers and follow along in the text. The reader or the tape provides a model that is matched with the words in the text. This activity can also improve listening, pronunciation, and intonation. A similar activity is called *shadowing*. In shadowing, an advanced reader reads a simple text while the learner follows along orally a few milliseconds later. Learners hear and mimic the advanced reader's pronunciation just as the reading takes place. At the same time, the learner looks at the word and pronounces it as accurately as possible.

Despite these excellent methodologies, learners still need to read out loud by themselves at times to practice if they are to get from the partial alphabetic to the fully alphabetic stage and then finally to the consolidated stage. To reduce anxiety and make reading out loud a more pleasant task, readers need ample practice time; they can read by themselves or to a supportive partner, or they can read in a one-on-one session with the teacher. They can tape their reading at home and submit it to the instructor. Only very good readers who want to volunteer should read aloud to the whole class. Few people enjoy listening to someone who cannot read well.

Teachers sometimes ask a learner to say what a paragraph is about after she or he has just finished reading it. If the learner cannot say what the paragraph is about, the teacher often thinks that the learner has not really "read" the

paragraph. The fact that learners don't comprehend the passage is sometimes taken as an indication that phonics doesn't work or doesn't really teach learners to read. What it more likely means is that the reader is focused so intently on decoding the words that the message is lost. The reader needs more practice to be able to read effortlessly, automatically, and for the meaning.

The suggested methods and activities are designed to enhance the learner's low-level knowledge and reading strategies and to supplement (not replace) those whole language methods and activities that enhance the learner's higher-level background knowledge and reading strategies. With any misconceptions cleared up and with an accurate idea of the learner's task, teachers can easily add these methods to their familiar whole language curriculum.

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Endnotes

[1] Phonemes are written between slashes.

[2] Phones are written in square brackets.

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