

AN INQUIRY INTO SOURCES OF INTERFERENCE IN
THE PRONUNCIATION OF AMERICAN ENGLISH BY
COLOMBIANS

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
THE NATIVE TONGUE.....	3
THE TARGET LANGUAGE.....	8
VOWELS OF ENGLISH AND THEIR POSSIBLE PROBLEMS FOR COLOMBIANS.....	15
CONSONANTS OF ENGLISH AND THEIR POSSIBLE PROBLEMS FOR COLOMBIANS.....	19
STRESS, RHYTHM, AND INTONATION.....	31
STRESS.....	31
PITCH CONTOURS.....	32
TERMINAL JUNCTURE.....	32
RHYTHM.....	33
INTONATION.....	34
PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS.....	35
NOTES.....	41
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	42
APPENDIX - SYMBOLS AND DIACRITICS.....	44

INTRODUCTION

When learning a second language one faces uncountable difficulties due to the habits one has acquired in the production of the native tongue. Those difficulties arise at all levels of performance, and a perfect mastery of a second language, although not impossible, is extremely hard to reach, especially if the training has taken place at a later stage of our life. The competence one has acquired in the native language will try to supply for the difficulties encountered whenever one attempts to use the second language at the level of performance. That is to say, the phonological, morphological and syntactic system of the native tongue will act upon the phonological, morphological and syntactic system of the foreign language. Thus, the normal transmission of our messages undergoes alterations which often result in serious distortions. These distortions are given by linguists the name of interference.

According to Wilga Rivers (1968:112) the acquisition of a near native articulation and intonation by the students is one of the most difficult problems for teachers of certain languages. She says that the problem is "of greater or less importance according to the degree of differences between the sound system of the native and the foreign language." Robert Lado, considered the initiator of the contrastive analysis studies, recognizes that the errors and difficulties that occur in our learning and use of a foreign language are caused by interferences of our mother tongue. In *Linguistics Across Cultures* (1957:2) he says that "the fundamental assumption of this book is that individuals tend to transfer

the forms and meanings and the distributions of forms and meanings of their native tongue and culture to the foreign language and culture."

Examples of interference caused by the mother tongue in the learning of a second language are clearly pointed out by D. A. Wilkins (1972:191-2). He explains how French people learning English substitute /i/ for /I/ and /d/ or /z/ for /ð/ and /θ/. A German will pronounce old as /əUlt/. A Spaniard will have difficulty pronouncing the /s/ in wants, etc. He attributes the mispronunciation of English to the differences in the point and manner of articulation between the mother tongue and the language that is being acquired. "If we look at the speech and writing of the foreign language learners, there is little reason to doubt that we will find many mistakes which can be traced back to the mother tongue."

Mary Finocchiaro (1969:363) is also aware of the phenomenon that causes foreign language learners to continually be misusing the articulators in the production of English speech. She recognizes the value of contrastive analysis as a means to diagnose possible interference. "Awareness of similarities between English and the native language and knowing in advance what the problem features of English may be for them will alert us to prepare more intensive drills to overcome them."

My discussion is based upon experience gained in trying to imitate English points and manner of articulation while attending phonetic classes in Colombia and more seriously in the United States. Of course, one does not expect every Colombian learning English to face the same difficulties, but in general we suppose that individuals with the same language background tend to be uniform concerning the kind of mistakes they make.

THE NATIVE TONGUE

We all know that the Spanish language is spoken in several countries and by many people. Therefore, important differences in pronunciation are to be expected not only among the different countries, but among different regions of the same country. Geographical variations may cause the language either to remain more or less stable or to be exposed to permanent change. Of course, the role which the "Real Academia de la Lengua" has played should be taken into account when one approaches any inquiry concerning the pronunciation of the Spanish language.

In this part of my report I will try to point out some of the most important features of a certain country or region. The aim is to localize the Spanish spoken in Colombia and to situate it in one of the zones of differentiation. After that, we will be able to compare the articulation and intonation used by Colombians with the articulation and intonation used by the speakers of English in the United States. This approach will help us find and understand the phenomena that interfere in the pronunciation of English when taught as a second language in Colombia.

Let's begin our inquiry by quoting Navarro Toma's (1957:6). He says that the Spanish American pronunciation is in general terms more similar to that of Andalucía than to any other region of Spain. He adds that the similarity is based not only in the phenomena called "seseo" and "yeísmo", but in the evolution of the consonants in final position, in the relaxation undergone by the /X/, in the tendency of certain vowels to take a more open timbre and in qualities less concrete and not well

defined which affect the articulation in general.

The aspiration that /s/ undergoes in certain positions or even its complete omission is another of the outstanding characteristics in the pronunciation of Spanish in certain regions. Donald Walsh (1969:39) says that the phenomenon is common in almost every country of Spanish America, being especially prevalent in large parts of Central America and Venezuela, the River Plate area, and in parts of Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Mexico and Cuba.

The pronunciation of /s/ as [h] occurs before a consonant and in final position, as in [pahto] instead of [pasto] (grass), [libroh] instead of [libros] (books), etc. Even more, in final position the /s/ is frequently omitted, as in [kantamo] instead of [kantamos] (we sing), [amigo] instead of [amigos] (friends), etc. This last phenomenon is very common in the rapid speech of those who live in the Colombian coasts (Atlantic and Pasific). The aspiration of /s/ is not only common in the coast but also spread in other regions of the country.

Another phenomenon, limited in Colombia to the coasts, consists in the pronunciation of /l/ instead of /r/ intervocalically, in final position and before a consonant, as in [komel] instead of [komer] (to eat), [kala] instead of [kara] (face), [puelta] instead of [puerta] (door), etc. I have observed this change in the pronunciation of /r/ in the speech of all the Puerto Ricans and some of the Venezuelan students with whom I have talked here in Kansas State University. Navarro Tomás says that the phenomenon is common in several regions of Spain and America (1957:119).

The lack of the fricative allophone of /d/ is a common feature in

the speech of Nariño and Putumayo, Colombian regions located on the border of Ecuador. The Nariñenses and Putumayenses pronounce words like dedo (finger) and caldo (broth) as [dedo] and [kaldo] instead of [dedo] and [kaldo], which are the common patterns, as Navarro Tomás (1957:80) points out. The fact that the phenomenon appears in Colombia only on the border of Ecuador suggests that the feature is found in that country too; in fact, I have observed that the speech of Ecuadorians and even Bolivians with whom I have talked presents the characteristic in mention.

Other features that we have to locate are "seseo" and "yeísmo".¹ Colombia is not an exception to the almost general phenomenon called "seseo". Nobody in the country pronounces /θ/; rather we have an /s/. Yeísmo is common in Colombia in several regions, especially in the Departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Quindío and Rizaralda. It is important to notice that the lack of distinction between [ɫ] and /y/ is different in Colombia from the Argentinian "yeísmo". In Colombia we say [kabayo]; in Argentina they have an affricate [ɧ] and say [kabaɣo] (horse).

Up to now we have seen the most outstanding distinguishing features that the Spanish language presents in its pronunciation. We have located the phenomena in their corresponding geographical zones and have been acquainted with the distribution of those phenomena in Colombia. However, we cannot say that the zones which we have mentioned are the only ones in which the characteristics occur. The authors often disagree in the treatment of this matter. Some of them approach the theme in terms of political boundaries and some others take into account geographical zones. Here and there they find difficulties in the localization of a

certain feature, and get rid of the problem by a simple generalization which says for example that the phenomenon is found in Spain and America.

The extraordinary geographical complexity of the zones under consideration and other alternating factors such as the influence of aboriginal languages in America, the frequent or null exposure to foreign tongues or to dialects of the same tongue have to be taken into account.

The Spanish spoken in Colombia is not an exception to the above considerations. The geographical situation of the country, with coasts on the Caribbean sea and the Pacific ocean, and with three important mountain ranges which cross the country from South to North, should be taken into account in any approach dealing with speech variations. We have seen for example, that the population of Colombian coasts speak more like the Caribbeans than like the uplanders, and that the Colombian Southerners (Nariño and Putumayo) speak like the Ecuadorians who don't distinguish [d] from [ð].

William Bull (1965:51) in his study of the Spanish language with the purpose of inquiring into the most advisable dialect to be taught, finds that the Spanish spoken in the upland of Colombia has "sufficient international prestige" to be selected. I agree with Bull if by upland Colombian Spanish he means the language spoken in Boyacá and Cundinamarca, and those other Departments in which the speakers make a clear distinction between the phonemes /l/ and /y/, that prefer the pronoun "tu" to the pronoun "vos" for "you (sg.)", and in general, that use a pronunciation in which the following phenomena are absent: a) aspiration or omission of /s/. b) Pronunciation of /l/ instead of /r/. c) Null distinction between [d] and [ð]. In general, that dialect uses a

paused pronunciation and rhythmic intonation which contrasts clearly with the very rapid speech heard in the Atlantic coast, and with the strident intonation of other dialects, say the Caldense.

Upland Colombian Spanich like that described above is the language that I intend to compare with American Midland English. That is the language taught in our schools and used by our educated people.

THE TARGET LANGUAGE

When one undertakes the task of teaching a second language one should be aware of dialectal differences existing in the target language. The teacher of English has to know that the label 'English' is a cover term for several varieties of the language spoken in different parts of the world. But among the varieties, the teacher has to decide on the type of pronunciation he wants his students to practice. That decision has to be made not only according to the teacher's background, but also taking into account the needs of the student.

In this section of my paper I will try to point out the most important differences that characterize the language spoken in the United States compared with the speech of England. However, I don't pretend to discuss fully the dialects that exist in England and the United States, but rather to describe in a broad way the most significant differences between the two national languages.

Before moving forward to the aspects that differentiate the speech of the two communities under consideration, I feel obliged to say a few words about the feeling that certain teachers have in Colombia concerning these two varieties of English. If we take into account the influence of the "Real Academia Española" and similar institutions in Latin America, which dictate norms of correctness, we can understand better why certain people in Colombia feel that American English, a colonial variety, has lower prestige than the mother tongue, British English. It is also true that certain linguistic considerations like the facility that Colombian speakers of Spanish find in pronouncing British English, i.e. /a/ and /r/, favor the language spoken in England. But political and economic

considerations make it necessary that the English taught in Colombia be the language spoken in the United States.

Pyles (1947:223-224) says that the English spoken in the United States is essentially a development of seventeenth century British English. He attributes the conservatism of American English to the isolation suffered by colonizers from their mother country.

Marckwardt (1958:89) points out, among others, the following differences:

1. In words of the type: fast, bath, calf, aunt, etc. the English spoken in most areas of the United States has retained the older pronunciation feature. The words in mention are pronounced with /a/ in British English, while with /æ/ in American English. Utterances which vary between /a/ and /æ/ are those in which the vowel is followed by a voiceless fricative /f/, /s/, /θ/ or by /n/.
2. The phoneme /r/ is losing its retroflex quality in England, while in the English spoken in the United States that retroflex quality has been retained.
3. In British English the stressed vowel of words of the type sun and cut is more open than the American sound. It is made more like that of the sound /a/.
4. Concerning the sound of /o/ pronounced in the United States with an /a/-like quality in words like got, crop, hot, frog, stock, etc., the difference between American and British English is one of lip rounding; Americans spread their lips and pronounce /a/, while Englishmen pronounce /ɒ/ with rounded lips.

5. The initial "wh" combination in words like whale, wharf, etc., is regularly simplified to /w/ in British English. In the United States there is a strong tendency to retain the initial /h/.

Mencken (1977:516-47) points out among others, the following differences:

1. Many words have long vowels or diphthongs in British English instead of the short vowels that are usual in American English; i.e., evolution is pronounced in England with /i/, but with /ɛ/ in the United States.
2. In words ending in -ary and -ory the vowels 'a' and 'o' are pronounced [ɛ] and [o] in American English, while in British English they are omitted most of the time; i.e., laboratory, secretary, etc.
3. British English usually prefers a /t/ sound in words like actual, punctuate, etc., while in the United States the pronunciation tends to be with /č/.
4. The substitution of /n/ for /ŋ/ in the suffix '-ing' seems to be more widespread in England than in the United States.

Pyles (1971:35) says that the pronunciation of a given word which is largely current in American English may occur in British English as a less frequently used variant. Among other differences, Pyles notices the following:

1. The words either and neither are pronounced with /i/ by the great majority of Americans, but, /ay/ is the common pronunciation in England.
2. British English has no /r/ before a consonant sound like in farm, or in final position like in far.

Partridge and Clark (1968:327) point out that in the United States the phoneme /t/ before an unstressed syllable tends to be pronounced

as /d/. Clearly, they are referring to the fact that in American English the phonemes /t/ and /d/ in words like better, butter, ladder, madder etc., develop into a voiced flap.

Another aspect which shows important differences in the pronunciation system of the two countries is stress. Referring to this, Marckwardt (1958:74) says that in the matter of unstressed syllables the chief difference is to be found in the greater retention of secondary stress in American English. British English tends to collapse the third syllable of words like secretary, necessary, military, etc., and at times to reduce secondary stress of such other polysyllables as circumstance, corroborate, etc.

Intonation is another of the aspects of speech production which carries important differences. Pyles points out that the risings and fallings in pitch and the timbre of voice distinguish British from American English far more than individual words. Pyles also says that the fundamental difference is to be found in questions and requests. The following examples illustrate his appreciation.

B E. Where are you going to be

A E. Where are you going to be

B E. Are you sure

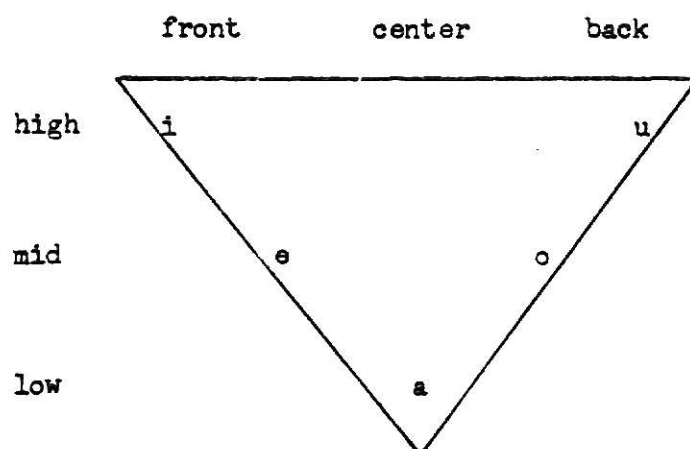
A E. Are you sure

Differences in voice quality have not been much investigated, but one can guess at the unequalities in that respect if one takes into account the following considerations made by Partridge and Clark. In effect they say that the English spoken in the United States emphasizes the most sonorous sounds (the vowels) and the voiceless consonants, that

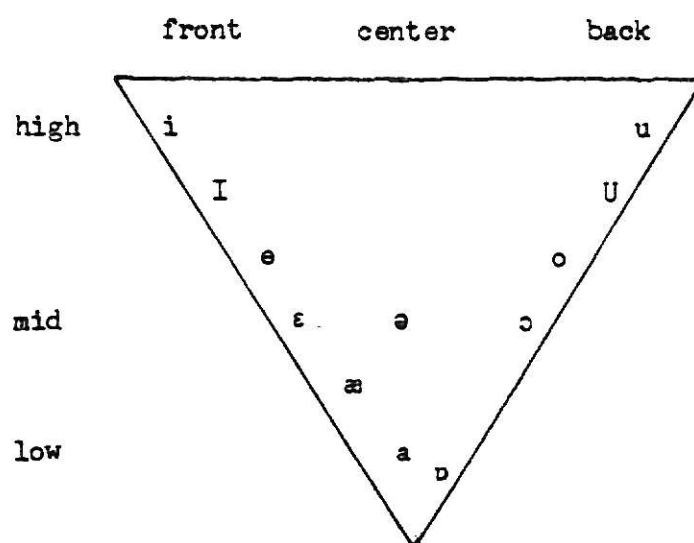
it uses a high pitch and reinforces oral quality with nasal resonance.

Those who have been concerned with dialects, like Francis (1958: 540), say that in England as well as in the United States, there exist many important differences in the use that people make of the same linguistic heritage, and that the dialects existing in England are more numerous than those existing in the United States. Of the US regional dialects (Northern, Southern and Midland) I will focus on the last because it appears to be growing while the others seem to be regionally limited.

VOWELS OF SPANISH



VOWELS OF ENGLISH



DIPHTHONGS OF SPANISH

/ey/ like in peinar

/ay/ like in bailar

/oy/ like in heroico

/uy/ like in ciudar

/yo/ like in labio

/ye/ like pie

/ya/ like in piamonte

/iw/ like in ciudad

/ew/ like in deuteronomio

/aw/ like in cauce

/ow/ like in bow

/wa/ like in guante

/we/ like bueno

/wo/ like in perpetuo

DIPHTHONGS OF ENGLISH

/ay/ like in high

/aw/ like in how

/oy/ like in boy

/yu/ like in cue

VOWELS OF ENGLISH AND THEIR POSSIBLE PROBLEMS FOR COLOMBIANS

One of the most serious difficulties a Colombian student faces when learning English pronunciation is the production of vowel sounds. There is a great difference in the quality of these sounds in the two languages. Errors are very frequent, and a lot of practice is needed to avoid transferring habits of articulation from Spanish to English.

/i/ - Is a high front tense vowel in both languages, but Spanish /i/ is not as high and tense as its English counterpart. However this difference in articulation does not constitute a serious problem.

/I/ - Is a high front lax vowel in English. Spanish lacks this phoneme, and this causes a serious problem to Colombian students. They don't easily learn to distinguish between /i/ and /I/. Thus, a great amount of drilling is required to distinguish pairs of the type it vs. eat, etc.

/e/ - Is a mid front tense vowel in both languages. However, English speakers pronounce this phoneme in a way that a short diphthong /ey/ results. The difference between English and Spanish /e/ is perceptible when an English speaker pronounces Spanish words like bebé (baby), José (Joe), etc. Spanish has only long diphthongs like in eufónico (euphonic), huérfano (orphan) etc. Colombians cannot pronounce accurately the short English diphthongs in words like sale, late, etc. and the consequence is a heavy accent.

/ɛ/ - Is a mid front lax vowel in English, and does not exist in Spanish. Colombians do not find, however, any difficulty to pronounce English /ɛ/.

/æ/ - Is a low front lax vowel in English. It does not exist in Spanish. To try to master this sound requires a great effort. Colombian students rarely achieve a correct articulation of it in words like bat, map, etc.

/a/ - Is a low center lax vowel in both languages. This phoneme as well as /ɛ/ are perhaps the only two English vowels which do not constitute difficulty for Colombians.

/ə/ - Is a mid center lax vowel in English. It does not occur in Spanish. Colombian students are almost never able to pronounce correctly this phoneme in words like cut, predator etc.

/ɔ/ - Is a mid back lax vowel in English. It does not exist in Spanish. Colombians often use their phoneme /o/ to pronounce words like small, saw, etc.

/o/ - Is a mid ~~back~~ tense vowel in both languages. This phoneme is articulated in English in a way that a short diphthong /ow/ results. The difference with Spanish /o/ is perceptible when an English speaker pronounces Spanish words like año (garlic), rojo (red), etc. Colombians often fail to pronounce this short English diphthong in words like Chicago, Wamego, etc.

/U/ - Is a high back lax vowel in English. It does not exist in Spanish. Colombians fail to distinguish it from its tense counterpart /u/ in

utterances like full, beautiful, etc.

/u/ - Is a high back tense vowel in both languages. Like English /i/, it seems that /u/ is also higher and tenser than Spanish /u/. No difficulty is, however, found by Colombians in the articulation of this phoneme in English.

/ɒ/ - Ladefoged (1975:69) describes this vowel as a "lower, more back and slightly more rounded than /a/." The Spanish language doesn't use this vowel, but interference is not predicted in the learning of English pronunciation.

CONSONANTS OF SPANISH

		bilabial	l-dental	dental	alveolar	alveopal	velar
stop	vl	p		t			k
	vd	b		d			g
fricative	vl		f		s		x
affricate	vl					ʧ	
nasal	vd	m			n	ɲ	
lateral	vd				l	ɭ	
flap	vd				r		
semivowel	vd	w				y	w

CONSONANTS OF ENGLISH

		bilabial	l-dent	dent	alveol	alveopal	velar	glottal
stop	vl	p			t		k	
	vd	b			d		g	
fricative	vl		f	θ	s	ʃ		h
	vd		v	ð	z	ʒ		
affricate	vl					ʧ		
	vd					ʤ		
nasal	vd	m			n		ŋ	
lateral	vd				l			
retroflex	vd				r			
semivowel	vd	w				y	w	

CONSONANTS OF ENGLISH AND THEIR POSSIBLE PROBLEMS
FOR COLOMBIANS

/p/ - Both in English and in Spanish this phoneme is a voiceless bilabial stop. In English, it is aspirated in initial position and before a stressed vowel except after /s/. This causes a problem for a Spanish speaker because in his language, /p/ is never aspirated. Hence, he will be misunderstood when pronouncing words like pay, apportion, etc. which will probably sound to the native speaker of English as bay, abortion, etc, due to the lack of aspiration in the articulation of the phoneme /p/. Another difficulty is caused by the environment in which the phoneme /p/ appears in both languages. In Spanish, it never occurs in final position, while in English, it is frequent. Thus, Colombians fail to pronounce the /p/ that appears in words like map, tape, etc. Instead, they tend to say [mæb], [teyb], etc.

/t/ - In English, this is a voiceless alveolar stop, aspirated in initial position and before a stressed vowel except after /s/. In Spanish, it is a voiceless dental stop, but unaspirated. The problem in this case is caused by the difference in point and manner of articulation. The /t/ of utterances like team, tie, etc. will be dental and pronounced without aspiration. Therefore, the speaker of English will probably hear [dim], [day], etc. There are other allophones to be considered: in English the /t/ is dentalized before a dental fricative, for example in eighth, which is articulated by placing the tip of the tongue between the teeth. Spanish speakers will probably use their /t/ by placing the tip of the tongue against the inner side of the upper teeth. However,

the degree of difficulty is not high. A difficulty for the Spanish speaker occurs with the allophone of /t/ whenever it appears intervocalically before an unstressed syllable. In this environment English /t/, especially in American Midland pronunciation, is flapped [ɾ], as in better, pity, etc. There is no allophone of Spanish /t/ that is flapped in this manner. The Spanish speaker can approximate the pronunciation of this English intervocalic /t/ by rendering Spanish intervocalic /r/; the medial consonants in English matter and Spanish maro are very similar. This solution will not occur by itself, however; most often the Spanish speakers will pronounce words like matter with the stop rather than the flap. (There is still another allophone of English /t/, the glottal stop occurring in some dialects in words like mitten and little; this is not often found in the American Midland dialect which is our target phonology, however, so I will merely mention it in passing.)

The distribution in which /t/ appears both in English and in Spanish is also a source of interference. In Spanish, a /t/ rarely ends a word, and this causes difficulty in pronunciation. Colombian students often fail to distinguish pairs like [stey] vs. [steyt], etc.

/k/ - Is a voiceless velar stop in both languages. In English, it is aspirated in initial position and before a stressed vowel except after /s/. This causes a problem for the speakers of Spanish because /k/ is never aspirated in this language. As with /p/ and /t/, the phoneme /k/ rarely appears in final position in Spanish; therefore, difficulty is expected in this environment. Colombian students fail to pronounce the /k/ in stick, stock, etc. They tend to say [stɪg], [stag], etc.

/b/ - Is a voiced bilabial stop in both languages. No interference is expected if we look at it only at the phonemic level. However, the Spanish phoneme /b/ has a fricative allophone [β] which occurs internally in words or phrases, except after a nasal, as in nabo (turnip), el vaso (the glass), etc. This allophonic distribution of Spanish /b/ will cause the speakers to transfer the same allophone to the pronunciation of English utterances like ability, cabin, etc. which will be pronounced [əβiliti], [kəβən], etc.

/d/ - Is a voiced alveolar stop in English. In Spanish, it is a voiced dental stop. Interference is expected due to the difference in the point of articulation. The Spanish speaker will substitute a dental /d/ in words like day, dot, etc.

In Spanish /d/ has a fricative allophone [ð], occurring in a position neither initial nor preceded by /n/ or /l/, as in todo (all) bondad (goodness) etc. When pronouncing English words like laddie, ladder, etc. the Spanish speaker is likely to use this allophone and articulate [læðər], [lædi], etc.

When English /d/ occurs intervocalically before an unstressed syllable, it becomes a flap [ɾ]. In the last two examples the speakers of Spanish will fail to pronounce the American flap due to the interference of the Spanish allophone [ð]. Another Allophone of /d/ in English is the dental [d̪] which occurs before a dental, as in width. The speaker of Spanish will tend to use his dental fricative, but a perfect substitution is not achieved because /ð/ in English tends to be interdental while Spanish [ð] is articulated with the tip of the tongue against

the inner side of the upper teeth.

/g/ - Both English and Spanish have a voiced velar stop phoneme /g/. It is virtually identical in both languages. However, Spanish has a fricative allophone [ɣ] which occurs internally in words or phrases except after a nasal. Colombian pronunciation of English utterances like again, ago, etc. will tend to be [əɣɛn], [əɣow], etc.

/f/ - Is a voiceless labiodental fricative in both languages. Colombian students tend to pronounce /b/ whenever English /f/ occurs in final position as in life, snuff, etc. This substitution is caused by the fact that in Spanish, /f/ rarely occurs in final position.

/v/ - Is a voiced labiodental fricative in English. Although the letter "v" appears in Spanish orthography, it merely represents the phoneme /b/, as in vaso (glass) and venir (to come), phonetically [baso] and [benir]. That is to say, there is no phoneme /v/ in Spanish.² Its absence causes the speakers in Colombia to pronounce [b] instead of [v] in words like vacation, vision, etc. and what is worse, where English distinguishes semantic pairs like bowel and vowel, the Spanish speaker may be misunderstood because of the null distinction he makes in the pronunciation of the two words.

/θ/ - Is a voiceless interdental fricative in English. In Spanish, it exists only in Castilian, and has the same point and manner of articulation as in English. Other dialects of Spanish don't have the phoneme /θ/, having only /s/ where Castilian has /θ/ and /s/. The problem for the non Castilians consists in a slight shift of the point of articulation from

interdental to dental and an addition of voicing. Colombians will tend to pronounce words like thumb, thing, etc. with initial Spanish /d/ due to the similarity between their /d/ and English /θ/.³ When English /t/ is dentalized before a dental fricative like in eighth, the speakers in Colombia tend to use their allophone [ð̪], thus pronouncing [eytð̪] due to the similarity between Spanish [ð̪] and English /θ/.

/ð/ - Is a voiced dental fricative in English. It does not exist in Spanish. However, the existence of the fricative [ð̪] allophone of the stop /d/ in certain environments will cause the speakers of Spanish to try to use [ð̪] instead of /ð/. As said before, this approximation does not solve completely the difficulty due to the difference in the position of the tip of the tongue. Words like brother, father, etc. will tend to be pronounced [brøð̪ər], [fæð̪ər], etc.

/s/ - Is a voiceless alveolar fricative in English and Spanish. The difficulty for the speakers of Spanish is caused by the distribution in which it occurs. In Spanish, an /s/ never appears before another consonant in the same syllable, whereas in English, it frequently does. Colombians cannot easily pronounce words in which /s/ appears before a consonant in initial position without putting an /e/ in front of it. Words like speak, Spanish, etc. are frequently pronounced [espiyk], [espənish], etc. Another difficulty is caused by the voicing that /s/ often undergoes in intervocalic position in English. The same does not happen in Spanish; consequently, words like presence, president, etc. are very often pronounced by Colombians [prɛsəns], [prɛsədɛnt], etc.

In Spanish, /s/ becomes a dental [s̪] whenever it appears before /t/ or /d/, which are dental. This dentalization of /s/ in Spanish will

interfere with the correct pronunciation of English words like posted, Lester, etc. in which Colombians will have not only dental $\left[\frac{t}{d} \right]$ but also dental $\left[\frac{s}{z} \right]$. A lightly voiced allophone $\left[\frac{s}{z} \right]$ results in Spanish when an /s/ appears before a voiced consonant like in asno (donkey), isla, (island), etc. English words like disdain, disgrace, etc. are likely to be heard by the native speaker of English $\left[\text{dizdeyn} \right]$, $\left[\text{dizgreys} \right]$, etc. when pronounced by a Colombian.

/z/ - Is a voiced alveolar fricative in English. It does not appear as a phoneme in Spanish. The voiced allophone $\left[\frac{s}{z} \right]$ of /s/ occurs in the position described above, which does not help to avoid difficulty but rather interfere with accurate pronunciation. In the Spanish spelling system the letter "z" appears either to distinguish semantic contrasts like casar (to marry) vs. cazar (to hunt), or to spell words in which a semantic distinction is not important, like in zorro (fox), zanahoria (carrot), etc. Castilian Spanish distinguishes the pronunciation of /s/ from that of "z". Colombian Spanish as well as all others non Castilian dialects does not make a differentiation. The same is true for the letter "c" before e or i like in hacer (to do), hice (I did), etc. The Castilian pronunciation of the former words, therefore, is $\left[\text{kasar} \right]$, $\left[\text{kaθar} \right]$, $\left[\text{θoɾo} \right]$, $\left[\text{aθer} \right]$, $\left[\text{iθe} \right]$. Colombian Spanish as well as all the other dialects pronounces an $\left[s \right]$ in the above words. It is obvious to anticipate that the pronunciation of English words like zebra, zoo, etc. will be $\left[\text{sibre} \right]$, $\left[\text{su} \right]$, etc. by Colombians and the other non Castilians.

/š/ - Is a voiceless alveo-palatal fricative in English. It does not appear in Spanish. Interference is expected with Spanish /č/ and /s/ due to the neighboring articulation of these last two Spanish phonemes with English /s/. Colombian students often assimilate /š/ to /č/ in initial, medial and final position, like in should, wished, fish, etc., they also assimilate /š/ to /s/ in final position like in English, finish etc.

/ž/ - Is a voiced alveo-palatal fricative in English. It does not occur in Spanish. Interference is expected in the pronunciation of utterances that in English are pronounced with /z/ like the ones exemplified. Later they overcorrect and pronounce a Spanish /y/ in the place where a /ž/ should be produced. The phenomenon is explainable if we take into account the proximity of Spanish /s/ and /y/ with English /ž/.

/h/ - Is a voiceless glottal fricative in English. It does not exist in Spanish. The letter "h" appears in the spelling system, but without phonetic or phonemic value. When Colombian students are introduced into the reading of English, they fail to pronounce the /h/. However, with little effort, Colombians learn to equate English /h/ with Spanish /x/, which is a voiceless velar fricative.⁴ It is important to notice that Spanish /x/ is pronounced with considerably more friction than English /h/. Another important difference is that English /h/ tends to assimilate to the characteristics of the vowel which follows it. The same is not true of Spanish /x/, and this produces an accent when Colombians pronounce English words in which /h/ appears.

/ç/ - Is a voiceless alveo-palatal affricate in both languages. Colombians don't find any difficulty pronouncing English utterances in which /ç/ appears.

/ʝ/ - Is a voiced alveo-palatal affricate in English. It does not exist in Spanish. Interference is expected in the pronunciation of utterances like juice, danger, etc. in which the Spanish speakers will tend to use their /y/ which is a voiced palatal semivowel, different from its English counterpart /y/ in having more tension and closure of timbre. I would say that its articulation is intermediate between English /ʝ/ and Spanish /y/. These differences in the manner of articulation obviously produce an accent. (For the Argentinians who pronounce a voiced palatal affricate [ɣ̞] no problem is expected.)

/m/ - Is a voiced bilabial nasal in both languages. Interference is expected due to distribution. In English, it appears in final position, while in Spanish, it does not. Colombians often tend to pronounce a final /n/ instead of /m/ in utterances like team, steam, etc.

/n/ - Is a voiced alveolar nasal in both languages. No interference is predictable. /n/ seems to undergo the same kind of assimilation in both languages. In effect, /n/ in Spanish becomes: palatal [ɲ] like in rancho, dental [ɳ] like in cantar, velar [ŋ] like in domingo, labio-dental [ɱ] like in conformidad, bilabial [ɹ̠] like in "está en paz". In English, /n/ undergoes the same assimilations, plus devoicing caused by contact after a voiceless like in snow, snuff, etc. This analysis suggests that since the same phenomena occur in both languages, except

for the devoicing in English, which seems to be of no significant importance, no real difficulty arises for a speaker of Spanish in his pronunciation of English.

/ŋ/ - Is a voiced velar nasal in English. It does not exist in Spanish. However, there exists the velar [ŋ] described above. Interference is expected not because of the phoneme /ŋ/ in itself but because of the environment in which it occurs. In English /ŋ/ occurs freely in final position, while in Spanish [ŋ] occurs there only as a conditioned allophone of /n/ before a velar consonant. This causes difficulty in the pronunciation of words like sing, song, etc. where Colombian student often pronounce [n] instead of [ŋ].

/l/ - Is a voiced alveolar lateral in both languages. Interference is expected if one looks at the point and manner of articulation. Colombians make their /l/ with the tongue high and front in the mouth, with the tip and blade in contact with the alveolar ridge; the back of the tongue is held as to pronounce /i/. In English the /l/ is made with less tongue contact with the alveolar ridge; the center and back of the tongue are held as to pronounce /e/. These differences cause a lot of difficulty for those Colombians who struggle to avoid carrying an accent.

In Spanish /l/ tends to assimilate to the point of articulation of the consonant that follows it. There is a dental [l̪] like in alto, a palatal [ʎ] like in colchón, a velarized [ɫ] like in algo, etc. In English, /l/ becomes dental like in wealth, velarized like in bell, and voiceless like in sled. If there existed equivalence in the two languages concerning the distribution of all allophones of all phonemes, no

interference would occur. However, as we have seen, that is not true. For example, in the word altimeter, Colombians will automatically produce a dental [t̪], and then because of it a dentalized [l̪] as well.

/r/ - Is a voiced alveolar retroflex in English. In Spanish, it is a voiced alveolar flap. In English, it is very smooth, articulated with the tip of the tongue turned upward and back toward the roof of the mouth, with little or no contact between the articulators involved. In Spanish, it is pronounced by a rapid motion of the tongue from behind the lower teeth across the alveolar ridge toward the hard palate. To pronounce American English /r/ is difficult for Colombians due to these differences in articulation.

The allophonic distribution of Spanish /r/ is as follows: a flapped [r] is pronounced in the following cases. a) Before a consonant other than /r/, like in arco (bow), cuerno (horn), etc. b) After a consonant other than /r/, /n/, /l/ or /s/, like in ladrón (thief), pronto (soon), etc. c) Intervocalically, as in pero (but), caro (expensive) etc. A trill [r̄] is pronounced in the following situations: a) In syllable initial position after pause or another consonant like in roto (broken), ruido (noise), etc. b) After /n/, /l/ or /s/, like in Enrique (Henry), alrota (residue), desrizar (to uncurl) etc. c) /rr/ (/r/ + /r/) becomes a trill [r̄], like in agarrar (to catch), ahorrar (to save) etc. In the written system the trills that appear in syllable initial position are spelled with a single "r", while the trills that appear between vowels are written with a double "rr".

In Colombian Spanish, /r/ may become fricative [ʁ] at any position in a word, but mainly in intervocalic and final position, like in poro (pore), calor (heat, etc. The inhabitants of Colombian Atlantic and Pacific coasts confuse /l/ with fricative [ʁ] in the positions described above. That explains pronunciations like [puela] (door) instead of [puerta], [kalo] (expensive) instead of [karo], etc.

The allophonic distribution of /r/ will affect Colombians' learning to pronounce American English, mainly when a perfect mastery of the phoneme has not been achieved.

/w/ - Is a voiced labiovelar semivowel in both languages. No interference is expected for those Colombians whose pronunciation is careful. Those who tend to pronounce [gw] for /w/, like in [gwebo] (egg) instead of [webo], [gweso] (bone) instead of [wesos], etc. will tend to transfer this pronunciation to English wall [gwəl], way [gwey] etc. They even assimilate expressions like "one way ticket" to [gwən gwey] ticket. However, teachers of Spanish in Colombia insist on the use of [w] instead of [gw] in situations like this.

/y/ - Is a voiced palatal semivowel in both languages, but there are differences. English /y/ is shorter than Spanish /y/ and does not glide to the same high position reached by Spanish /y/. Furthermore, there is more friction in the articulation in Spanish than in English. Even more, there is an affricate allophone [ʝ] which is pronounced in the Spanish spoken in Argentina. Interference can be predicted in utterances like yellow, yesterday, etc. in which the speaker of English will probably hear an approximation between /y/ and /ʝ/ if the speaker is a Colombian, but a full /ʝ/ if the speaker is an Argentinian.

STRESS, RHYTHM, AND INTONATION

The differences in the patterns of stress, rhythm and intonation are remarkable from one language to another. Colombians fail to master these items properly and the consequence is a heavy accent. Stockwell and Bowen (1965:19-34) present a detailed discussion of these items which I will try to summarize.

STRESS

English has three degrees of stress: strong, medial and weak. Spanish has only two: strong and weak. English vowels in unstressed syllables acquire certain characteristics very difficult for the Spanish speaker to master. Spanish does not vary the quality of a vowel that is in unstressed position. Patterns of stress in English words are varied, and sometimes words with contrasts in stress differ in vocabulary as réfer vs. refé, billow vs. below, etc. Nouns are distinguished from verbs, like in insult vs. insúlt, pérmit vs. permit, etc. In Spanish the patterns of word stress are less varied and the minimal pairs exemplifying stress contrasts are of different kinds. Probably the most common source of such pairs is provided by certain verb endings, like o (first person singular present) and o (third person singular preterit) or e (first person singular present subjunctive) and e (first person singular preterit). Examples:

ámo	I love
amó	he loved
áme	that I love
amé	I loved

Spanish regularly has long sequences of weak-stressed syllables uninterrupted by strong stress. In English there is a fairly regular alternation between syllables under weak stress and syllables under one of the stronger stresses, thus English còncentrátion, Spanish concentraciòn, English domésticàte, Spanish domesticár. This distribution is complicated by the fact that in borrowings from one language to the other or from a common source the strong stress in English is often on a syllable which is adjacent to the syllable that receives the strong stress in Spanish, like in English állophòne, Spanish alófono; English spínach, Spanish espináca.

PITCH CONTOURS

The rise and fall of the pitch through a phrase is important among the features of the sound system of Spanish and English. English has four significant pitch levels, while Spanish has only three. Examples:

English

He went home↓	² ^{3 1}	(simple statement)
He went home↓	² ^{4 1}	(emphatic statement)
He went home↑	² ^{3 3}	(question)

Spanish

No es verdad↓	² ¹¹	(simple statement)
No es verdad↓	² ³¹	(emphatic statement)
No es verdad↑	² ²²	(question)

TERMINAL JUNCTURE

The phenomena which characterize phrase endings are called terminal junctures. Both English and Spanish make use of three terminal junctures.

They are distributed differently in the languages, and this constitutes a problem for the speaker of Spanish. Those terminal junctures are:

- 1) Terminal falling /↓/. Its presence results in the maximum degree of slowing down.
- 2) Terminal rising /↑/. Its presence results in an intermediate degree of slowing down.
- 3) Terminal level /|/. Its presence results in less slowing down than for the other two terminal junctures.

The terminal level /|/ occurs more frequently in Spanish than in English. Terminal rising /↑/ is shorter and faster in Spanish, and rarely occurs except before pause, while in English it often appears internally, not before pause. Examples:

English	Spanish
He is a man eating tiger↑	Pedro juega futbol↑
He is a man eating tiger↓	Pedro juega futbol↓
He is a man eating tiger↓	Pedro juega futbol↓
He is a man eating tiger↓	Pedro juega futbol Luis↓

RHYTHM

Like word stress, sentence stress or rhythm is very different in the two languages. To a Spanish speaking person the rhythm of English does not sound uniform. This is because in Spanish there is more regularity in the rhythm of the syllables- a series of little bursts of sound - all about the same size and force. The unit of tempo in Spanish is the syllable. The unit of tempo in English is the stress group. The rhythm of an English sentence can be represented graphically in the

following way:

English speaker. Does she think he is mad?

Spanish speaker. Does she think he is mad?⁵

In English, syllables are longer when they are under strong stress or at the center of the intonation pattern. The same is not true for Spanish.

INTONATION

The intonation pattern consists of the pitch contour of the sentence and the concluding terminal juncture. There are important differences in the distribution of pitch levels and the place where they occur in the sentence. In English there is an optional choice of strong stress to serve as the center of the phrase. No strong stress after the center is a significant pitch point, unless of course it happens also to be the last syllable. In Spanish the last strong stress of the sentence is the most prominent, except under especial circumstances. Examples:

English
² ³¹
 There were lots

Spanish
^{1 2} ^{1 1}
 Habia muchos

(statements and information questions)

² ^{3 3}
 Have you got another

^{1 2} ^{2 2}
 Usted tiene otro

(yes/no questions and echo-information questions).

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

In the preceding discussion I have pointed out the most outstanding difficulties that the English language presents in its phonological system to Colombian students. The instructor will have to be trained to be able to develop in his students the skills they will need to master the articulation of English sounds. The first step is that of training the students' ear. Therefore, the instructor is the model to be imitated. Success or failure depends on his good or bad performance. He should pronounce phrases containing pairs of words with minimal contrasts in order for the students to recognize minimal differences either in the sounds of the English language, or differences between the sound system of English and Spanish. After the listening process the students have to produce what they have heard. This step requires that the instructor be very attentive to correct mistakes.

The repetition must begin in the whole class, proceed through small groups and finish in the individual. When correcting a mistake the instructor must model again in order for the student who is having problems to have more reinforcement. The class, group, or individual can help by repeating again. Finally, the student who has made the mistake must be able to produce the exercise in the proper way. The modeling should be made without varying the quality of the sounds. Stress, rhythm and intonation have to be maintained at the same level.

The areas to be more emphasized are those in which the differences in the phonological systems of the two languages cause the students to make mistakes more frequently. In this respect the vowel sounds take

priority. Contrasts can be made between words containing for example /i/ vs. /I/, /æ/ vs. /a/, /ɛ/ vs. /ə/, etc. As for the consonants, contrasts can be made between phonemes presenting minimal differences, like /p/ vs. /b/, /t/ vs. /d/, etc. Mistakes caused by allophonic differences are more difficult to eradicate. To teach these differences would result in an expenditure of time and tedious practice for the students. If the phonemes of the target language are well mastered, mistakes caused by allophonic differences are reduced, e.g., the possibility of assimilating wrong points of articulation in words of the types of altimeter will be minimized.

Rhythm and intonation should be presented in sentences containing the items in which more difficulty arises. Perhaps it is here where the contrasts between the two languages are most useful. The same is true for the teaching of stress; this can be taught by means of words containing differences, as for example, stratégie vs. estratégia; polution vs. polución, etc.

The age of the students plays an important role in the selection of techniques. If the students are youngsters, a lot of repetition in class is possible. The minimal pairs containing items of the same language are more advisable. For adults, capable of more reasoning, the contrasts between the two languages prove to be of great importance. The laboratory is also more important for them than the repetition in class.

The sound forms or word sequences must be taught and practiced in a progression and order which will permit the learners to associate each segment of newly acquired language with every other segment they

have already acquired.

The following are some models for the pronunciation of English sounds.

/i/ vs. /I/

This is a ['šiyp]

[liyd]

[kiyn]

[liyv]

This is a ['šIp]

[lId]

[kIn]

[lIv] etc.

/a/ vs. /æ/

He has a [sak]

[hat]

[kat]

[pat]

He has a [sæk]

[hæp]

[kæt]

[pæt] etc.

/a/ vs. /ə/

There is a [dak]

[nat]

[sak]

[lak]

There is a [dək]

[nət]

[sək]

[lək] etc.

/t/ vs. /d/

He is going to [tay]

[ta]

[to]

[tu]

He is going to [day]

[da]

[do]

[du] etc.

/v/ vs. /b/

I am going to he [muviz]

[væt]

[vow]

[vɛri]

I am going to Ann [arber].

[bæt]

[bo]

[bɛri] etc.

/y/ vs. /j/

He is going to [yeyl]

[yelow]

[yard]

[yo]

He is goint to [jeyl]

[jelow]

[jard]

[jo] etc.

Some models containing contrasts between the two languages.

English /ey/

say

bay

lay

Spanish /e/

se

ve

le

English /ow/

know

low

yoe

Spanish /o/

no

lo

yo

English /I/

office

decimal

fabric

Spanish /i/

oficina

décima

fábrica

English /p^h/

pace

par

Peru

Spanish /p/

pez

par

Perú

English /t^h/

ten

tea

taboo

Spanish /t/

ten

ti

tabú

English /z/

visit

reason

proposition

etc.

Spanish /s/

visitar

razón

propósito

Certain special techniques are required for the drilling of minimal pairs. The teacher can pronounce the words in each column several times, then pronounce the words in the two columns a few times. After that, the instructor should pronounce two words from either list and ask the students to indicate whether the words are same or different. The teacher can also pronounce three words from either list and ask the students to indicate which two are the same and which one is different. Next it is time for the students to pronounce. They should do that, following the instructor's pronunciation model. This step can be done following the same order as for the modeling step. Now the students by themselves should pronounce the words. They have heard the instructor

enough times as to be able to produce without imitation. Finally the instructor should insert the words in meaningful sentences, model them again and ask for group and individual repetition. (Of course, the minimal pairs should be practiced as a result of problems encountered in the pronunciation of meaningful sentences.)

NOTES

1. "Seseo" consists in the historical merger of the phoneme /θ/ with /s/. Thus words like citar, corazón and mesa are pronounced with /s/ all of them. Those who distinguish between /s/ and /θ/ pronounce [θitar], [koraθon], [mesa]. "Yeísmo" is the merger of the phoneme /ɻ/ with the phoneme /y/. Speakers who don't make the distinction pronounce caballo (horse) and mayo (May) with /y/. Those who make the distinction pronounce the first word with /ɻ/ and the second with /y/.
2. Historically, Spanish had both /b/ and /v/, but the latter was lost in favor of /b/.
3. The spelling system of Spanish represents /θ/ with "c" before "e" and "i", and "z" elsewhere.
4. Historically in Spanish there existed the phoneme /h/. Something like it still appears in the speech of illiterate Colombians who pronounce words like humo (smoke), hilo (thread), etc. [xumo], [xilo], etc.
5. The length of the lines is intended to illustrate syllable duration.

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APPENDIX

SYMBOLS AND DIACRITICS

- _ The phonemic segments are placed between slanting lines / /.
- Phonetic transcription, or the phonetic segments that are actually pronounced, are placed between brackets [].
- Brackets are also used to place the allophones, i.e., the variations of the same phoneme.
- The mark [~] through the middle of a consonant means that the consonant becomes velar.
- A dash [-] through the middle of a consonant means that the consonant becomes fricative.
- Palatalization is shown by placing the diacritic [j] below the consonant.
- The mark [ɲ] below a consonant symbolizes dentalization.
- The voicing of a consonant is shown by placing the diacritic [ʱ] below the consonant.
- The mark [ʌ] placed over a consonant indicates that the consonant becomes affricate.
- A consonant that becomes labiodental is represented by the diacritic [ɸ] below the consonant.
- Trills are represented by placing a small circle [°] over the phoneme /r/.
- Spanish "elle" is represented by placing the diacritic [v] below the phoneme /l/.
- Spanish "eñe" is represented by placing the mark [~] over the phoneme /n/.

AN INQUIRY INTO SOURCES OF INTERFERENCE IN
THE PRONUNCIATION OF AMERICAN ENGLISH BY
COLOMBIANS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to identify the difficulties which may be encountered by Colombian students in the learning of English pronunciation, by comparing two models of spoken language: Upland Colombian Spanish and Midland American English. As such an approach is not possible without finding out the characteristics of the two languages considered, I discuss briefly the main aspects that differentiate the pronunciation of American English from the British English pronunciation. As for Spanish, I made a short discussion of the language spoken in Colombia.

Once the possible generators of interference are discovered by means of contrastive analysis which embraces the phonemes of Spanish and English, as well as the intonation patterns of the two languages, I consider some pedagogical implications, and point out the need for well-trained teachers, capable of handling the methods required in the teaching of American English pronunciation to Colombian students.