

Phonetic Problems Linked to Students' First Language

The following table focuses on some of the main pronunciation problems English-Language Learners from eight language groups may encounter while learning English. The purpose of this table is to help teachers decide which steps to take in order to address chronic pronunciation problems. The table is by no means exhaustive and is meant to serve only as a guide. It shows pronunciation variances that students may make while learning English. For example, a student whose first language is Spanish may say something like *cot* when trying to pronounce the word *cat*. An empty cell indicates that the English sound listed poses no particular problem for students from the given language group.

English Element	Spanish	Vietnamese
/a/ <i>cat</i>	/o/ <i>cot</i>	/o/ <i>cot</i>
/ē/ <i>tea</i>		
/e/ <i>bet</i>	/ā/ <i>baít</i>	/a/ <i>bat</i>
/i/ <i>ship</i>	/ē/ <i>sheep</i>	/ē/ <i>sheep</i>
/ō/ <i>cloak</i>		
/o/ <i>clock</i>	/ô/ <i>clawk</i>	
/u/ <i>cup</i>	/o/ <i>cop</i> , /ōō/ <i>coop</i>	
/ōō/ <i>pull</i>	/ōō/ <i>pool</i>	/ōō/ <i>pool</i>
/ə/	Nonexistent. Replaced by another vowel sound.	
/b/ <i>bad</i>		
/f/ <i>fan</i>		
/j/ <i>jar</i>	/h/ <i>har</i> , /y/ <i>yar</i>	/z/ <i>zar</i>
/n/ <i>need</i>		
/r/ <i>rock, terrible</i>	Rolled or trilled.	
/v/ <i>vet</i>	/b/ <i>bet</i> , /f/ <i>fet</i>	
/w/ <i>week</i>	/v/ <i>veek</i> , /ōō/ <i>ooeek</i>	
/z/ <i>zoo</i>	/s/ <i>soo</i>	
/zh/ <i>measure</i>	/z/ <i>meazure</i>	
/th/ <i>think</i>	/s/ <i>sink</i> , /t/ <i>tink</i>	/s/ <i>sink</i> , /t/ <i>tink</i>
/tʃ/ <i>though</i>	/d/ <i>doe</i>	/d/ <i>doe</i> , /z/ <i>zoh</i>
/sh/ <i>shoe</i>	/ch/ <i>chew</i>	/s/ <i>sue</i> , /ch/ <i>chew</i>
Initial /s/ <i>stop</i>	Adds /e/ <i>estop</i>	
Final consonants /f/, /th/, etc. <i>life, path...</i>		Final consonants unpronounced. <i>lie, pa...</i>
Final /p/, /t/, /k/ <i>tip, sit, sick</i>		
Final /s/ after consonants. <i>cats, rocks</i>		None. <i>cat, rock</i>
Final /v/ <i>love</i>		/b/ <i>lub</i> , /p/ <i>lup</i>
Final consonant blends	Rare. One or more sounds dropped	None. One or more sounds dropped.
Polysyllabic words		None. All words monosyllabic.
Intonation of sentences		None. Tone of individual words changes meaning.

1 The sound contrasts for Hmong are based on information about Thai-Lao/English contrasts.

2 The sound contrasts for Haitian Creole are based on information about French/English contrasts.

	Hmong ¹	Cantonese	Tagalog	Haitian Creole ² (French)	Portuguese	Khmer
	/o/ <i>cot</i>		/o/ <i>cot</i>	/o/ <i>cot</i>	/o/ <i>cot</i>	/w/ <i>cut</i> , /e/ <i>yet</i>
	/ü/ like French <i>tu</i>			/i/ <i>ti</i>		
		All vowel sounds will vary, depending on the consonant sounds combined with them.	/ā/ <i>bait</i>		/ā/ <i>bait</i>	
			/ē/ <i>sheep</i>	/ē/ <i>sheep</i>	/ē/ <i>sheep</i>	/ē/ <i>sheep</i>
	/o/ <i>clock</i>					/o/ <i>clock</i>
			/ô/ <i>clawk</i>		/ō/ <i>cloak</i>	
			/o/ <i>cop</i>	/ā/ (father) <i>cap</i>	/a/ <i>cap</i> , /ā/ (father) <i>cäp</i>	
			/ōō/ <i>pool</i>	/ōō/ <i>pool</i>	/ōō/ <i>pool</i>	
	Nonexistent. Replaced by another vowel sound.		Nonexistent. Replaced by another vowel sound.		Sound difficult, especially at the beginning of the word.	Nonexistent. Replaced by another vowel sound.
	/p/ <i>pad</i>				May sound close to /y/.	
			/p/ <i>pan</i>			Sound difficult. May be dropped.
			/y/ <i>yar</i>	/zh/ <i>zher</i> (as in <i>measure</i>) <i>zher</i>	/y/ <i>yar</i>	/ch/ <i>char</i>
		/l/ <i>leed</i>				
		/l/ <i>lock, tellable</i>		Pronounced as uvular r.	Pronounced too far back, close to /h/.	
		/f/ <i>fet</i>	/b/ <i>bet</i> , /f/ <i>fet</i>		/w/ <i>wet</i> , /b/ <i>bet</i>	/w/ <i>wet</i> , /b/ <i>bet</i>
	/h/ <i>heek</i>		/v/ <i>veek</i> , /ōō/ <i>ooek</i>			
	/s/ <i>soo</i>	/s/ <i>soo</i>	/s/ <i>soo</i>		/s/ <i>soo</i>	/s/ <i>soo</i>
		/z/ <i>meazure</i> , /sh/ <i>meashur</i>	/z/ <i>meazure</i>		/z/ <i>meazure</i> , /s/ <i>meassure</i>	/j/ <i>meajure</i>
	/t/ <i>tink</i>	/t/ <i>tink</i>	/t/ <i>tink</i>	/s/ <i>sink</i>	/s/ <i>sink</i> , /t/ <i>tink</i>	/t/ <i>tink</i>
	/d/ <i>doe</i>	/d/ <i>doe</i>	/d/ <i>doe</i>	/z/ <i>zoe</i>	/d/ <i>doe</i>	/d/ <i>doe</i>
		/s/ <i>sue</i>			/ch/ <i>chew</i>	/ch/ <i>chew</i>
					Adds /e/ <i>estop</i>	May sound close to /h/.
	Many final consonants dropped. <i>lifuh, pathuh</i>	Many final consonants dropped or vocalized.				Difficult. Often dropped
	/b/ <i>tib</i> , /d/ <i>sid</i> , /g/ <i>sig</i>	Often dropped or vocalized. <i>situh</i>		Not aspirated. Confusion with <i>b</i> , <i>d</i> , and <i>g</i> .		Often dropped.
	None. <i>cat, rock</i>	None. <i>cat, rock</i>	None. <i>cat, rock</i>			
	Often dropped.	Often dropped.				Often dropped.
	None. One or more sounds dropped.	None. One or more sounds dropped.			Rare. One or more sounds dropped.	None. One or more sounds dropped
	Rare. Most words monosyllabic.	Rare. Most words monosyllabic				
	None. Tone of individual words changes meaning.	None. Tone of individual words changes meaning.				