

## How Australian students pronounce Spanish vowels over time

### What this research was about and why it is important

This article analysed changes in the pronunciation of Spanish vowels (i.e., the sounds commonly represented by the letters <a, e, i, o, u>) by Australian students of Spanish at university level across six semesters.

The rationale of this study stems from several aspects. First, despite a growing body of research showing the positive effects of explicit pronunciation teaching, there remain some beliefs disfavouring it, notably the belief that regular speaking during class time is enough. In addition, long-term studies are underrepresented in language acquisition research despite their usefulness and pronunciation acquisition is also underrepresented in language acquisition studies.

Four Australian students of Spanish were recorded after their first, third and sixth semester of study during their Spanish major at an Australian university and their vowels were analysed using a computer software called Praat, which helps to map where vowels are pronounced in the mouth. The study shows that the pronunciation of the students does not improve across their three years of study; the limited improvements observed are consistent across their major. The results suggest that speaking during class is not enough to improve pronunciation and provides additional support for explicit pronunciation teaching in the language classroom.

### What the researchers did

- Four students of Spanish as a foreign language with Australian English as their first language were recorded after their first, third and sixth semester of study.
- Their vowels were analysed to find out how the pronunciation of their vowels changed across the years.
- Intelligibility is linked to stability of vowel pronunciation and variability and stability of vowel pronunciation across the semesters were analysed.
- Graphs can show minimal improvement in pronunciation as vowels become slightly more stable throughout their major but these changes were not meaningful when analysed statistically.

### What the researchers found

- The students improved their pronunciation of vowels slightly over the course of their major but the improvements were not meaningful when analysed statistically.
- The data for the four students combined showed no improvement on vowel pronunciation and this was consistent for the five Spanish vowels.
- If each student is analysed separately, only one out of the four students displayed some statistically meaningful improvement, but this is limited.
- Second language Spanish vowel pronunciation did not improve with time in Australian students when there is no explicit pronunciation training.

### Things to consider

- Speaking in class is not enough to improve second language Spanish pronunciation, even after several semesters of study.
- Explicit pronunciation teaching should be incorporated in the Spanish as a foreign language classroom.
- The results of this study may be extendable to other foreign language classroom settings in Australia and maybe even in other countries.

**Material, data, open access article:** [N/A.]

**How to cite this summary:** Herrero de Haro, Alfredo and Manuel Delicado Cantero. (2022). How Australian students pronounce Spanish vowels over time. *OASIS Summary* of Herrero de Haro & Delicado Cantero (2022) in *Language Teaching Research*, <https://oasis-database.org>

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