

SPANISH PHONOLOGY

Introduction

Spanish spelling and pronunciation is often touted as 'easy', with a consistent representation in sound-to-symbol correspondence. This may be somewhat true in comparison to Fr. or Eng., but once the conventions have been mastered, it's relatively easy to read aloud the written lang., but transcribing from speech is altogether trickier. "Spanish has often been quoted as a textbook example of a syllable-timed, with a delivery sometimes likened to a recalcitrant machine gun" (our book). My phonological focus will be synchronic with emphasis on basic modern terminology pertinent to this "perfect segment timed" language.

The alphabet: contains 25 simple and 3 compound letters. *W* and *k* are part of the alphabet but usually appears in foreign words only. The compound letters *ch*, *ll*, and *rr* are never separated and *rr* never begins a word. The letters are all feminine: a, b, c, **ch**, d, e, f, g, h, j, k, l, **ll**, m, n, ñ, o, p, q, r, **rr**, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z (see green chart of European alphabets)

Vowels system

Characteristics: Open, stable and of same direction, short tense

Five vowels (phonemes) that are represented with five letters. The pronunciation of these 5 vowels are so well represented by normal orthography regardless of their position within the word, unlike Fr. or Eng.

1. **a** [a] → *papa* (potato) (Eng. hot; Fr. chat; It. cane)
2. **e** [e] → *bebé* (baby) (Eng. set; Fr. clef; It. seno)
3. **i** [i] → *difícil* (difficult) (Eng. meat; Fr. ami; It. lima)
4. **o** [o] → *tonto* (dumb) (Eng. ore; Fr. faux; It. moda)
5. **u** [u] → *tuntún* ((Eng. boot; Fr. fou; It. uva)

Consonant system

There are 25 consonants, two being semiconsonants: *i*, *y* → [j] and *u* → [w]

Two distinct pronunciations for *b/v* depending on position and context:

1. *b/v* → [b] at the start of the breath-group and after written *m* and *n* (pronounced [m]) the sound is plosive like Eng. /b/. *boda* (wedding), *bomba* (bomb), *bobo* (silly)
2. *b/v* → [β] intervocalic and all other positions and the sound is a bilabial fricative and lips don't touch: *enviar* (to send) *avion* (airplane), *yo voy* (I'm going) *hablo* (I speak), *bobo* (silly)

The letter *b* is usually not pronounced (is dropping) in groups with *s*: *o(b)scuro* (obscure), *su(b)stituir* (to sub), *subjuntivo* (retains spelling).

Two diff. values for letter *c*:

1. *c* → [k] before *a*, *o*, *u*: *casa* (house), *cosa* (thing), *cuna* (crib)
2. *c* → [θ] before *e*/*i*: *cinco* (five), *cerveza* (beer)

In words like *acción*, *sección* both types of *c*-sound are heard [kθ], while *ll*, *ch* and *rr* have their own values. The exception to double consonants is the *-nn-* in VL/OS as prefix *in-*: *innato*, *innovador*, and occasionally *con-*, *sin-*, as in *connatural*, *sinnúmero*. In these cases the *n* is pronounced double and must split into separate syllables. Not to be confused with the historical *-nn-* of VL/OS until the development of the printing press: *ninno* → *niño* (boy), *anno* → *año* (year)

Manners of articulation: how the consonants are produced

1. nasal: m, n, ñ, ŋ
2. stops: p, t, k, b, d, g
3. fricatives: s, f, j, w, x, θ
4. affricates: č, ĵ
5. vibrants: r, r
6. lateral: l
7. liquids: y, w

Yeísmo:

y= ll with almost identical pronunciation. Most natives do not distinguish the phones and often creates confusion, especially in the spellings.

Valla () vs. vaya () pollo (chicken) vs. poyo (bench)
Callo () vs. callo ()

Seseo: the unification in sound of z, s and c (before e/i) in S. Spain and L. Am.: zapato (shoe), salón (class), cello (stamp)

Ceceo: the unification in sound of z, s and c (before e/i) in S. Spain, mainly country people (see map)

Distinction: the unification in sound of c (before e/i) and z in the N. central Spain, including the capital: cerveza (beer), luz (light), Zaragoza

Allophones: have a slight change of sound but do not change the meaning of the word, do not form minimal pairs. Allophones capture all the details in pronunciation and give an exact representation of the sounds.. In Spanish, at least two articulations are possible for the voiced stops /d, g, b/ and the alveolar nasal /n/. These allophones are not in *free variation*. Natives do not articulate phonemes but allophones, in other words, natives only pronounce allophones and these represent phonemes:

- d** [ð] → nada (nothing), lado (side), nido (nest), verdad (truth)
g [v] → hago (I do), mago (magician), lago (lake)
b [β] → debo (I owe), bebo (I drink), pavo (turkey)
n [ŋ] → tengo (I have), tranca (door stop), tango

The fricative soft [ð] is the most frequent, except in cases of pause (punctuation) or preceded by a nasal (*ando*--I walk, *manda*--send, *sandía*--watermelon, *fondos*--funds) or a lateral (*caldo*--broth, *aldea*--village, *sueldo*--salary), in these conditions, not a single native would use its fricative counterpart.

Yo dudo que dé diez dólares → /jo ðúðo ke ðé ðiez ðólares/ I doubt that I give ten dollars
Dudo que hayan dado fondos → /dúðo ke ájan dáðo fónðos/ I doubt that funds were given.

Rules of accentuation

If the word ends in a **vowel**, or **n** or **s** (often the signs of the plural of verbs and nouns respectively), the next to last (penultimate) syllable is stressed: zapato (shoe), zapatos, dividen, (divide) (such words are called *llanas* or *graves*)

If the word ends in a consonant other than n or s, the last (ultimate) syllable is stressed: verdad (truth), practicar, decibel, virrey (viceroy), coñac, (such words are called *agudas*). The final y as part of a diphthong is treated as a consonant: virrey, Carey, Paraguay

Only one primary stress per word, except the adverbs ending in *-mente* retain the original stress (VL/OE) of the root word as well as the adverbial ending: *claramente* (clearly), *correctamente*, *difícilmente* (hardly), *últimamente* (lately)

The written accent:

If a word has a written accent, it shows that the stress does not conform to these rules. A written accent is not a decoration, but rather an important part of the spelling of the language. Use the written accent for the following cases: Words that end in vowel and n or s: **café**, **talón** (heel); words that end in a consonant (except n or s): **árbol** (tree), **carácter**; all words that stress the third to last (antepenultimate) syllable: **máximo** (maximum), **página** (page), **éxito** (success), **matemáticas**.

To distinguish between two words with the same spelling but different meaning (homonyms): *el* (the) vs. **él** (he); *si* (if) vs. **sí** (yes); **como** (like, I eat) vs. **cómo** (how?); **solo** (alone) vs. **sólo** (only); **porque** (because) vs. **por qué** (why?)

Interrogative/exclamatory pronouns: *cuál* (which), *dónde* (where), *cuándo* (when); when these same interrogatives are used as nouns: *sin qué ni para qué*, *el cómo y el cuándo*; *Aún* (yet) when it's interchangeable with *todavía* (yet): *no ha llegado aún*; the weak vowels (i, u) are accented when they are preceded or followed by another vowel, usually a strong one (a, e, o) and form a separate stressed syllable (hiatus): *río* (river), *día* (day), *baúl* (); the conjunction *o* takes the written accent when it comes between two Arabic numerals to avoid mistaking it for zero (0): 3 ó 4.

Syllabification: the syllable is a rhythmic unit and gives Spanish its rhythm, intonation, and musicality. --Spanish has the tendency/prefers the open syllable—CV (consonant vowel); VCV → V+CV, where the consonant goes always with the second syllable. Possible syllables: V → a (to); CV → *sí*, *no*; VC → *al*, *al-go* (to the, something); CVC → *tal*, *pen-sar* (such as, to think); CCV → *ple-no*, *pro-ble-ma* (full, problem); VCC → *ins-truc-tor*, *ins-tan-te*; CCVC → *tran-si-ción*; CVCC → *pers-pec-ti-va*; CCVCC → *trans-por-te*.

In Spanish, there are never more consonants at the end of a syllable than at the beginning of a syllable.

Consonants groups (tr-, br-, fr-, pr-, pl-, dr-, cr-, gr-, etc.), if they can start the word, don't divide them.

CCC → C+CC **siem-pre** (always), **am-plito** (spacious); except C+s+C → Cs+C **cons-ta**
CCCC → CC+CC **ins-truc-tor**, **ins-cri-bir**, **abs-trac-to**

Syllabication of continuous vowels: (Pa-ra-guay, dí-a)

Hiatus: a weak and strong vowel together, where the weak vowel strengthens itself with a tilde (written accent) and becomes equal to the strong vowel and the split up: *dí-a* (day), *mí-o* (mine), *grú-a* (tow-truck).

Diphthong: opposite of hiatus. A syllable with two vowels—a weak and a strong: *pi-e* (foot), *pei-ne* (comb), *a-diós* (bye), *sau-na*, *mie-do* (afraid), *puer-co* (pig), *au-to*.

| | | |
|--------------|-----|---------------|
| hiatus | vs. | diphthong |
| [í] | | [i] |
| rí-o (river) | | rió (laughed) |

| | |
|----------------|----------------------|
| Da-rí-o | diá-rio (daily) |
| mí-a (mine) | Mia-mi |
| dí-a (day) | dia-gra-ma (diagram) |
| se-cre-ta-rí-a | se-cre-ta-ria |

The hiatus [i] is longer and doesn't glide, while the diphthong [i] is not as long and glides.

Triphthong: a syllable with three vowels, where the primary stress is in the center, and the two side vowels become semi-vowels: **bu**ey (ox), Pa-ra-guay.

Nucleus: the primary/tonic stress of a diphthong and a triphthong that dominate phonetically over the other vowels, turning them into semivowels.

Semivowels: phonetically are represented by [i] and [u]; they never initiate syllable; always in the interior of the syllable and require the presence of other vowels. The semivowels have a shorter duration than their counterparts /i/ and /u/ and is very noticeable in **a-hí/hay** (there//there is/are).

Semivowels are not strong enough to form separate syllables in contrast to the vowels "i" and "u" that can: pu-do (was able to), pi-to (whistle), pun-ta (point).

Yod: the semivowel [i] becomes a palatal slit fricative [j]: hielo /jelo/ (ice); hierba /jerba/ (weed, herb)

Waw: the semivowel [u] becomes the bilabial/velar slit fricative [w] (2 organs participate simultaneously in the articulation): **hu**erta /wérta/ (garden); **Ju**ana /wána/; **ju**icio /wísio/ (trial); **gü**ero /wéro/ (Mex. white).

The *yod* and *waw* always occur in syllable initial and are consonants by means of the "weak" (semivowel) in regular to fast speech. [j] and [w] are always followed by a nucleus/primary vowel of the syllable.

| | | | | | |
|--------|--------|------------|--------|------------|--------|
| i/u | | | | | |
| vowels | | semivowels | | consonants | |
| [i/u] | | [i/u] | | [j/w] | |
| digo | mucho | adiós | puerta | hielo | huevo |
| dicho | puntas | peine | auto | hierba | huerta |

The syllable, the vowels and the rhythm

The open syllable dominates: VCV → V-CV, the consonant always joins the vowel on the right.

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---------------------------|---|---------------------|
| Gran amigo (great friend) | → | gra-na-mi-go | → | CCV-CV-CV-CV |
| Al haber ido (having gone) | → | a-l(h)a-be-ri-do | → | V-CV-CV-CV-CV |
| El hotel en el Alamo | → | e-l(h)o-te-le-ne-la-la-mo | → | V-CV-CV-CV-CV-CV-CV |

This fact of the language gives the impression/perception that Spanish is a very fast language. Syllabification rules are applied not only in interior of the word but also between words, treating an entire sentence as a single word, pausing only for grammatical punctuation. By doing this, closed syllables automatically become open.

In regular to fast speech, the vowel /o/ turns into a semivowel [u] when it doesn't initiate the syllable. Hablo español (I speak Spn.) → [á-blues-pa-ñól] → /o/ → [u]
Sigo así (I go on like that) → [sí-gua-sí] → /o/ → [u]

The /o/ changes into consonant [w] (*waw*) when it does start the syllable. Notice that the letter following the /o/ is a strong vowel.

O es así (or it's like that) → [we-sa-sí] → /o/ → [w]

O habla el otro
(or the other one talks) → [o-we-sa-sí]
→ [wá-bla-e-ló-tro] → /o/ → [w]

Prosodic/primary stress: Each syllable in Spn. is either atonic (weak) or tonic (primary). Each word in Spn. has only one primary stress, with the exception of the adverbs ending in *-mente* (see rules of accentuation). If the word is long, then it has several atonic syllables:

Universidad → u-ni-ver-si-dad (-dad = tonic; 1st 4 = weak/atic))

Naturaleza → na-tu-ra-le-za (-le = tonic; 1st 3 and last are weak/atic))

Matemáticas → ma-te-ma-ti-cas (-ma = tonic; 1st 2 and last 2 are weak/atic))

The tonic vowels carry the primary stress that most of the times is not written. Weak and strong syllables have identical duration, the difference is pitch (stress).

Intonation

The intonation gives the language its musical element and melody and it includes volume, pitch, duration, and rhythm. The most important is the PITCH, having nothing to do with volume. Pitch is determined by the frequency of the sound waves, the number of vibrations or cycles per second. It is determined by the tension of the vocal cords. The tighter they are, the faster the sound waves vibrate, and the higher the resulting pitch. Intonational pitch is so important that it not only controls grammatical meaning to a large extent, but it also conveys the attitude of the speaker even more effectively than the words he chooses. Intonation varies and is a lot more complex than pronunciation and one of the hardest thing for non-native to master. Since pronunciation is so minimal, intonation plays a vital role in determining dialects.

There are three ways to finish a Spn. sentence:

Declaratives: Nosotros estudiamos mucho ↓ (we study a lot)

1. Falling pitch → Interrogatives: ¿Cuánto cuesta? ↓ (How much does it cost?)

2. Rising pitch → Yes no questions: ¿Tienes hambre? ↑ (Are you hungry?)

3. Neutral pitch → More info. follows: Estela trajo pan, dulces y chocolates para todos. →

(Chain of events) (Estela brought bread, sweets and chocolate for everyone)

Pitch inside the sentence: Normally Spn. has three levels of pitch within the sentence. The highest pitch is used to correct, contradict, or to be emphatic.

Initial pitch:

In unstressed initial syllables, start with low pitch (level 1) and continue until the first stressed syllable where it goes to a normal level (level 2) and stays there depending on the type of sentence.

El papá dijo que así no era. (the father said it wasn't like that)

¿Mi papá dijo que así no era? (did my father say it wasn't like that?)

¡Mi papá dijo que así no era! (my father said it wasn't like that!)

AL OIDO DEL LECTOR

to the ear of the reader

No fue pasión aquello

no was passion that

Fue una ternura vaga...

It was a tender vague

La que inspiran los niños enfermizos,

the that inspire the children sick

Los tiempos idos y las noches pálidas

the times gone and the nights pales

El espíritu solo

the spirit alone

Al conmoveerse canta:

the shake sing

Cuando el amor lo agita poderoso

when the love it waves powerful

Tiembla, medita, se recoge y calla

shiver meditate self pick up and hush

Pasión hubiera sido

passion would have been

En verdad; estas páginas

in truth these pages

En otro tiempo más feliz escritas,

in another time more happy written.

No tuvieran estrofas sino lágrimas.

not had stanzas but tears

/a-lo-í-ðo-ðe-lek-tór/

/no-fue-pa-sjó-na-ké-jo,

fʏéʏ-na-ter-nú-ra-βá-ɣa...

la-kéʏns-pí-ran-los-ní-ño-sen-fer-mí-sos

los-tjém-po-sí-ðo-si-las-nó-çes-pá-li-ðas.

e-les-pí-ri-tu-só-lo

al-con-mo-vér-se-cán-ta:

kuán-ðue-la-mór-lua-xí-ta-po-ðe-ró-so

tjém-bla,-me-ðí-ta,-se-re-kó-xej-ká-ja

pa-sjó-nu-βjé-ra-sí-ðʏen

ber-ðáð;-és-tas-pá-xi-na

se-nó-tro-tjém-po-más-fe-lí-ses-krí-tas,

no-tu-βjé-ra-nes-tró-fas-sí-no-lá-ɣri-mas/

AL OIDO DEL LECTOR

No fue pasión aquello,

Fue una ternura vaga...

La que inspiran los niños enfermizos,

Los tiempos idos y las noches pálidas.

El espíritu solo

Al conmoveerse canta:

Cuando el amor lo agita poderoso

Tiembla, medita, se recoge y calla.

Pasión hubiera sido

En verdad; estas páginas

En otro tiempo más feliz escritas,

No tuvieran estrofas sino lágrimas.



¡Viva la letra Ñ!

"THE LETTER 'Ñ' IS SAFE AND SOUND!" So declared Federico Ibáñez, Director General for Books and Libraries for the Government of Spain on April 23, National Book Day, when royal decree went into effect making it compulsory to include the "ñ" (pronounced "EN-yeh) on the keyboards of all computers, printers and typewriters offered for sale on Spanish territory. This decree put an end to a protracted dispute between Spain and the rest of the European Community, easing the concerns of Spanish-speakers everywhere who were extremely worried about the fate of this ubiquitous little character with the jaunty hat.

The controversy began in May 1991, when the EC demanded that Spain annul three royal decrees published in June and November 1985, which required that the letter "ñ" be provided on the printers, keyboards and screens of computers sold in Spain. The EC based its demand on certain articles in the Treaty of Rome mandating the standardization of keyboards sold in Spain and those of other Community countries. The world of Spanish and Latin American letters reacted instantly, making it quite clear that it was not prepared to do without a character that had given faithful service to the language since the 15th century.

The Director of the Spanish Royal Academy, Fernando Lázaro Carreter, flatly announced that rather than give up the "ñ," "we would have to leave the European Community." Latin American intellectuals of the stature of Gabriel García Márquez and Mario Vargas Llosa put their signatures to an impassioned manifesto in defense of the beleaguered "ñ." After a series of negotiations, agreement was reached. Spain cited, in support of the "ñ," the Treaty of Maastricht, which protects the cultural diversity of the member-states of the EC and guarantees them the right to maintain their national heritage.

Thus, the indispensable "ñ," which is also use in Basque, Galician, Tagalo, and several indigenous languages of the New World, must by law appear on all keyboards sold in Spain. A happy ending, all things considered, because, as you might say, Spanish would really not be *español*, with its "ñ." ¡No, señor!

Germans, beware: *mañana* perhaps, the battle for the "ß"!

From Accents, newsletter of the Illinois Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

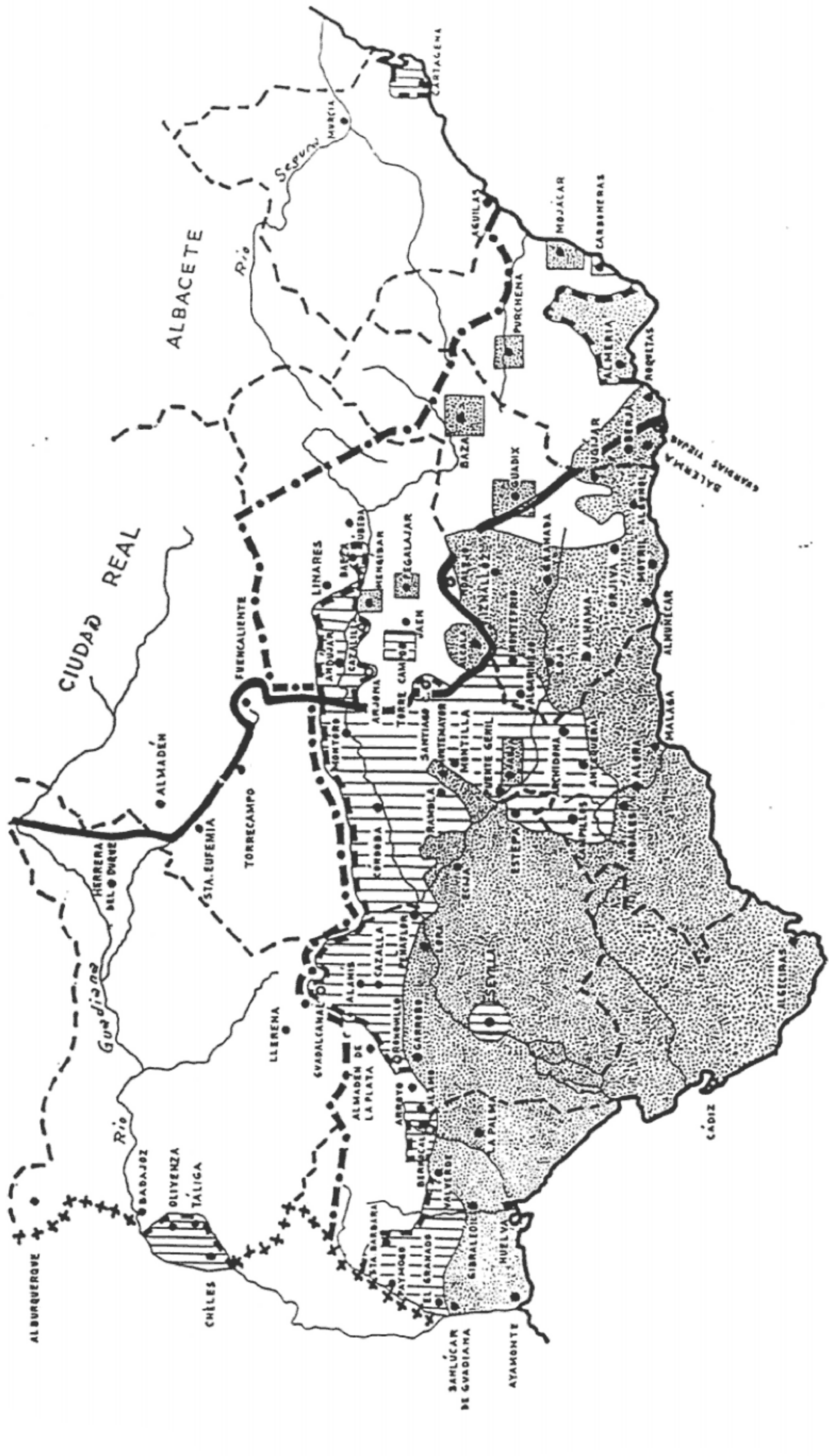


INTERNACIONAL

La "ch" y la "ll"

Las letras "ch" y "ll" desaparecerán como letras autónomas y volverán al orden alfabético latino universal, como recomienda la UNESCO, por lo que en las próximas ediciones de los diccionarios se incluirán dentro de la "c" y la "l", respectivamente.

ESPAÑA 94.



■ LÍMITE DE LA ASPIRACIÓN DE f = INICIAL LATINA, SE MANTIENE AL OCCIDENTE DE LA LÍNEA. (VEASE MAPA NUMERO 9).
 - - - LÍMITE DE LA S APICAL CASTELLANA.
 ● ZONA DE CECEO.
 ▨ ZONA DE SESEO.

□ ZONA DE DISTINCIÓN.
 ▩ LÍMITE DEL SESEO.
 ▨ CECEO NO INTENSO NI GENERALIZADO.

XXI.— Algunos límites fonéticos del andaluz.

CUADRO 6. Alfabetos de las principales lenguas

| Min. | May. | Español | Gallego | Catalán | Euskera | Portugués | Italiano | Francés | Inglés | Alemán |
|-------|--------|------------|---------|-----------|---------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|---------|
| a | A | a | a | a | a | á | a | a | a | a |
| b | B | be | be | be | be | bé | bi | be | be | be |
| c | C | ce | ce | ce | | cé | ci | se | ce | tse |
| ch | Ch, CH | che | che | | | | | | | |
| d | D | de | de | de | de | dè | di | de | de | de |
| e | E | e | e | e | e | è | e | e | e | e |
| f | F | efe | efe | efa | efe | efe, fê | effe | ef | ef | ef |
| g | G | ge | gue | ge | ge | gé, guè | gi | je | ge | ge |
| h | H | hache | hache | hac | hatxe | agá | acca | ach | ach | ha |
| i | I | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i | i |
| j | J | jota | | jota | iota | jota | | ji | ja | iot |
| k | K | ka | | ca | ka | | | ka | ka | ka |
| l | L | ele | ele | ela | ele | ele, lê | elle | el | el | el |
| ll | Ll, LL | elle | elle | | | | | | | |
| m | M | eme | eme | ema | eme | eme, mè | emme | èm, me | em | em |
| n | N | ene | ene | ena | ene | ene, nè | enne | èn, ne | en | en |
| ñ | Ñ | eñe | eñe | | eñe | | | | | |
| o | O | o | o | o | o | ó | o | o | o | o |
| p | P | pe | pe | pe | pe | pê | pi | pe | pe | pe |
| q | Q | cu | cu | cu | ku | què | qu | ku, ke | ku | ku |
| r, rr | R, RR | erre | erre | erra | erre | erre, rè | erre | èr, re | er | er |
| s | S | ese | ese | essa | ese | esse | esse | ès, se | es | es |
| t | T | te | te | te | te | tê | ti | te | te | te |
| u | U | u | u | u | u | u | u | u | u | u |
| v | V | uve, ve | uve | ve | u | vê | vu | ve | u | u |
| w | W | uve doble | | ve doble | | | | double ve | double-u | fau |
| x | X | equis | xe | ics, xeix | ixa | xis | iks | iks | eks | ve |
| y | Y | griega, ye | | i grega | | | i grec | i grec | wi. wye | üpsilon |
| z | Z | zeta, ceta | ceta | zeta | zeta | zê | zeta | zed | ze | tset |