



Spanish 429 – Spanish Phonetics & Phonology University of Kansas Fall 2023



Instructor: Antônio R.M. Simões, Professor
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Office hours: MW 1:50PM – 2:50PM; 4:20PM – 5:00 PM, or by appointment
Class Place: Wescoe 4012, in-person;
<https://kansas.zoom.us/j/3783677491>, online
Class ID number: 18973 (in-person); 24292 (online)
Class Time: MW 12:30PM – 1:45PM
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Textbook required:

Sonidos en contexto, by Terrell A. Morgan. Yale University Press: 2010 or a more recent one.

ISBN 978-0-300-14959-3

Credit hours: 3.0

Prerequisites: The prerequisite for the course is SPAN 424 and SPAN 428, or consent of instructor.

Course Description

SPAN 429 is an analytical and practical study of contemporary Spanish pronunciation (Phonetics and Phonology). The instructor will present course content through a combination of lecture and interactive style. However, this class is primarily conducted as a student-centered course. This means that students will present assignments, lead class discussions through regular PowerPoint presentations while actively interacting with their classmates during their presentations. During student presentations, the instructor will participate as a moderator and provide guidance as needed. All intellectual activities in this course are expected to occur as a result of **critical readings**. A critical reading requires active reading in the sense that students must search for word meanings as necessary to understand their readings and pay attention to the rhetorical strategies used by the authors studied. Passive reading must be avoided.

The overall objective of this course is to understand the basic concepts of the physical characteristics of Spanish sounds as compared to English, and the phonological processes that form syllables, words, and sentences in authentic contexts. Students are expected to apply what they have learned from class discussions to their interactions in the classroom and oral presentations. Phonetics and Phonology are powerful tools for improving listening and speaking skills in Spanish or any other language.

In addition to the study of phonetics and phonology, we will also examine some of the regional characteristics of Spanish pronunciation, such as **seseo**, **lleísmo**, **yeísmo**, different types of **phonemic distinction**, **ceceo**, **zheísmo**, **sheísmo**, and some others as the class progresses. Class discussions will be in Spanish and **regular attendance is mandatory**.

All discussions about general language characteristics and varieties ("dialects") in this class are based on the general and idealized mainstream pronunciation of Spanish. In Spanish, most of these conventional reference speakers come from the regions often called the "highlands" of Latin America, which are, for some of them, former colonial centers of Spanish vicerealties (for example, Mexico City, Guadalajara, Bogotá, La Paz, Lima (although this city is at sea level), Quito, and the Spanish spoken in the mountainous areas of Latin America between Colombia and Bolivia. Finally, these reference speakers have university or higher education.

This convention in no way means or implies that one variety of Spanish is "better" than another. It is simply a useful convention for us and this class. It is nothing more than a practical and useful option, especially considering the large number of speakers who fit this description. It is based on a conventional way of speaking Spanish.

It is pedagogically useful to use mainstream Spanish as a reference in Spanish classrooms if other varieties are used for comparison, and of course respected. There are many advantages to this approach. One is that both teachers and students can easily refer to this main variety, given the relatively easier access to national television broadcasts in any region, or through Open Educational Resources (OERs) in today's classrooms. Additionally, conventional Spanish tends to be closer to written language while still sounding natural. On the other hand, we must be cautious with this approach because sometimes we can find native speakers who misunderstand this approach. In their misunderstanding, they may end up worrying too much about maintaining a "pure speaking style" and consequently speak in a pedantic or artificial way. This is NOT the idea here. Our main reference is a natural and unpretentious pronunciation.

The same idea can be applied to any language. Let's take English, for example. I speak English with a foreign accent. If I spoke English like some American television presenters such as Lester Holt, Sheppard Smith, or actors George Clooney, Will Smith, Bruce Willis, Morgan Freeman, Matthew McConaughey, Ben Affleck, our former president Barack Obama, to name a few, I would probably improve my chances of finding employment if I were in the job market. The accent of these celebrities, when not pretentious, gives us an idea of what a reference variety (register) means, despite the risks of making such an analogy. Unfortunately or not, our society tends to train us to embrace these accents. In this class, we simply use a conventional prestigious accent as a reference to observe the variability of the language, not to insult or denigrate anyone's accent. All varieties of native languages are good for a classroom, but we need to use one of them as a reference, despite the controversy that any choice will generate.