

# THE MOST IMPORTANT DIFFICULTIES WHEN TEACHING SPANISH PHONETICS TO CZECH

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## ABSTRACT

The most important difficulties when teaching Spanish phonetics to Czech native speakers are closely related to the rhythmical segmentation of the Spanish utterance. The differences between the two languages are relevant both on the segmental and the suprasegmental levels and become important not only from the point of view of the production of the speech signal, but also from the point of view of its perception.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of our paper is to point some problems which students of Spanish, whose mother tongue is Czech, grapple with. We will pay our attention to the problems linked up with different continuous speech segmentation into rhythmical units in Spanish and in Czech. The problem can be seen on two levels:

- a) speech production;
- b) speech perception.

## 2. SPEECH PRODUCTION

When analyzing the segmentation of the Spanish continuous speech into rhythmical units, among the sound means,

the suprasegmental phenomena are almost exclusively taken into account. The rhythmical units are, as a rule defined exclusively on the basis of only suprasegmental means conceived abstractly regardless of their concrete realizations in the flow of the speech, and on defining the rhythmical unit, exclusively one suprasegmental phenomenon is often taken into consideration. If the phenomena concerning the definition of the rhythmical unit delimitation are taken into account, only the pauses, which stand, in fact, outside the rhythmical unit itself, are considered. Therefore the so defined rhythmical units become more likely a theoretical construct serving for the language description and only seldom represents the unit being perceived like that by listener. On the other hand, when defining the rhythmical unit as a rhythmical semantic group, it must be conceived as a sound unit corresponding to a grammatical and a semantic unit, whose sound boundaries are marked by an interruption of the flow of speech potentially realized by a pause, by differences in the distribution of the position-

nal variants of voiced consonantal phonemes, by glottal stop, by other sound phenomena or their combinations which, at the same time, carries suprasegmental means (stress, intonation, quantity) functioning, in accordance with the role the rhythmical unit play within the levels of the structure of the utterance, as modulations of connected speech. On the basis of the analysis of single features of the so conceived rhythmical unit in Spanish to some partial aspects which may cause difficulties in teaching Spanish as second language on the basis of Czech as the mother tongue can be described.

### 2.1. Rhythmical-semantic group delimitations

Important features differing Spanish from Czech are the differences in the distribution of variants of voiced consonantal phonemes /b/, /d/, /g/. These phonemes present in Spanish the occlusive b, d, g and the fricative variants, . The distribution of these differ from one another in accordance with their position in the rhythmical semantic group: at the beginning and inside the unit after nasals the occlusive variants are used; the fricative variants appear in other positions. There is thus a difference in the pronunciation of Goya goya and de Goya [dejoja], Barcelona [bartelona] and de Barcelona [deβartelona], etc. Czech native speakers do not respect this phenomenon and often pronounce the occlusive variants [b], [d], [g] in both positions. Other phenomenon which is connected with the problem

of delimitations of the rhythmical unit is the glottal stop. Considering that in Czech the glottal stop occurs automatically at the beginning of utterance if the first phone is a vowel and the literary pronunciation requires the glottal stop after non-syllabic prepositions and in other cases the pronunciation of the glottal stop is motivated phonostylistically, Czech native speakers try to transfer their pronunciation with the glottal stop in all these positions into Spanish. Instead of en abir ena ríl they pronounce en a ríl .

### 2.2. Syllable structure of connected speech

Other problems related to the syllable structure of connected speech are closely linked up with the above mentioned problem of distribution of the occlusive and the fricative variants of voiced consonantal phonemes. When analyzing the syllable structure within the rhythmical unit in Spanish, we find that the sound coherence of the rhythmical-semantic group determines its division into syllables. It means that if a consonant, within the scope of the rhythmical-semantic group, occurs in an intervocalic position, it links to the next vowel and the syllabic division realises regardless of the boundaries of lexical units. The reverse in the phrase han acabado the following syllabic [a/na/ka/βá/ðo]. Besides the importance of the syllable as a component of the rhythmical-semantic group, we consider necessary to mention above all one of the features of the Spanish syllable: the tendency to

its openness. One of the manifestations of this phenomenon is after all the superiority of the syllable structure to the lexical one within the scope of the rhythmical-semantic group, as mentioned above, but also several assimilation phenomena become very important.

As for the type and the direction of assimilation, the articulation assimilation occurs more frequently, especially as for the place of articulation. The unstability of the place of articulation of nasals and laterals may be considered as a manifestation of this fonosyntactic phenomenon: con todo [kɔntodo] - assimilation of the place of articulation, etc.

In the Czech language, the situation is rather different: the fundamental type of assimilation is the assimilation of voice. Owing to these differences, the Czech native speakers

- a) do not respect the assimilation of the place of articulation in Spanish;
- b) pronounce these consonants with the assimilation of voice.

Other problem of the syllable structure of connected speech is closely related to the above mentioned glottal stop, because of its absence in Spanish, due to the phonosyntactic phenomenon called synalepha.

It means that the Czech native speakers do not avoid the pronunciation of expressions like a Ana [a.na] with the glottal stop [a'ana].

### 2.3. Stress

Further problems are linked up with the word stress

within the scope of the rhythmical-semantic group. Unlike the Czech stress is fixed and has a delimitative function, Spanish is a language where the stress falls on different syllables, is considered as that of a given word category, and therefore has a distinctive function. On the other hand, not all "distinctive" stresses are realized with the same intensity. In the flow of the speech can even be stressed syllable which do not carry the distinctive stress (so called unstressed words - conjunctions, prepositions, unstressed forms of personal pronouns, etc.) In these cases, the stress is considered contrastive and it is realized within the scope of the rhythmical-semantic group.

### 2.5. Quantity

The problem of quantity is also closely linked up with the problem of stress. If we start from the statement of incompatibility of free stress and phonological quantity, we find that other difference between Spanish and Czech consists inter alia in the fact that the quantity is phonological in the Czech language, while in Spanish the quantity (duration) is sometimes closely linked up with the stress position. But considering the quantity as a sound means of connected speech, we find that the relation between both studied languages seems to be more complex. Changes of quantity (duration) in Spanish may be observed from two points of view: as a phonosyntactic phenomenon, i. e. as a consequence of synalepha, or it can be considered also regarding the position of

the respective syllable with reference to the stress. The fact that the quantity has no phonological validity in Spanish often causes that Czech speakers do not respect differences in duration of Spanish vowels in different positions.

### 3. REMARKS ON THE SPEECH PERCEPTION

When analyzing the problem of the Spanish fluent speech perception by Czech native speakers, we must deal with difficulties caused mainly by two features of the above mentioned rhythmical-semantic group, both related with the syllable structure within it: by synalepha and by the assimilation phenomena. Both phenomena complicate the determination of the lexical units as components of the rhythmical-semantic group, and therefore the comprehension of its sense.

### 4. CONCLUSIONS

When summarizing the notes concerning the aspects defining the rhythmical-semantic group in Spanish from the Czech native speakers point of view, it can be seen that the selection of sound qualities of the rhythmical-semantic unit is the starting point for doing analysis of an inadequate pronunciation of Spanish as foreign language, and it enables to find a common denominator for interpretation of a number of sound phenomena which would be otherwise correlated with difficulty.

The emphasis on understanding of sound relation within the rhythmical-semantic group is important not

only for explanation and training of the correct pronunciation of suprasegmental means, but it also enables a more profound view even on relations between segmental means, e. g. where a mere comparison of articulatory and acoustic features and repertory of consonants in Spanish and in Czech, differences in assimilation, etc. is not sufficient.

### 5. REFERENCES

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