

## TEACHING TIP

### OYE MI CANTO, MI SON USING TONGUE TWISTERS AND SONGS

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This teaching tip was developed to be used with middle and high school students at the beginning of week 2 in level I Spanish. The practice was for all learners within the classroom to practice at the same time. Class sizes ranged from 27 to 35. The tip was first implemented in 2000 and modified as students improved in performance and increased their willingness to participate. Because of its success, it was also applied at levels II and III with students who were not exposed to the tip in level I. These students also reacted with a strong willingness to participate. Starting in 2008 the principles of the *30 Million Word Initiative* (Suskind, 2015) were added: high repetition in a meaningful way with negotiated meaning. From this sprang the concept for the *1 Million Word Initiative* (the author's initiative). This initiative has the goal that by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of high school exposure, students should have the opportunity to hear and react to 1 million words with repetition in their L2 Spanish experience.

The approach began as an attempt to reconcile 2 different writing conventions, English and Spanish, that use the same symbols. Sound-symbol correspondences differ in both languages. Spanish has a more transparent correspondence, while English has a more opaque one. This particular teaching tip applies to the letter <o> in Spanish, and is for L1 English speakers.

The tip recognizes that connecting sound and spelling needs experiential practice to modulate the vocal chords to tune, reproduce and differentiate the [o]. Minimizing the length of the text and high repetition within the text are critical to making this connection automatic. The repetition of a specific sound also allows for frequent self-evaluation by the learner. The initial use of the sample is for sound-symbol correlation. But repetition continues into discussion and other practice, encouraging more meaningful repetition. For example, a simple translation should be orally provided. Kinesthetic practice can be employed and a discussion can follow. As learners become more comfortable with the text, they may be able to negotiate meaning. Other themes presented by the selections may also be brought up for discussion as the selection is used again in subsequent classes.

There are several ways to practice sound-symbol correspondences for L2 Spanish. The chosen series for the teaching tip is specific to the pronunciation of the <o>. All practices follow the same format: Select a tongue twister or song with multiple examples of the sound to be practiced.

1. Use of kinesthetic movement to encourage listening
2. Discussion of the text
3. Repetition of the text several times in subsequent days in its full context.

A key component for my success with this technique is the high number of repetitions of a particular sound in rich context. This is a process that occurs in within 70 to 100 milliseconds (Christiansen, 2016) when the brain begins to initiate longer term memory.

Two different exercises are provided to fulfill the goals of the teaching tip. To reiterate, there are 3 goals for this specific teaching tip.:

1. To demonstrate examples and practice of the sound-symbol correspondence for <o>
2. To provide specific samples for the <o> as the final sound of a word, a difficult context for L1 English speakers learning Spanish
3. To provide samples the new sound-symbol correlation in a manner compatible with ideas of comprehensible input to begin automatization of pronunciation skills.

**Exercise 1:** This uses the idea of strip stories to help learners engage in listening to the L2. Choose a tongue twister or song with the sound-symbol correspondence to be practiced.

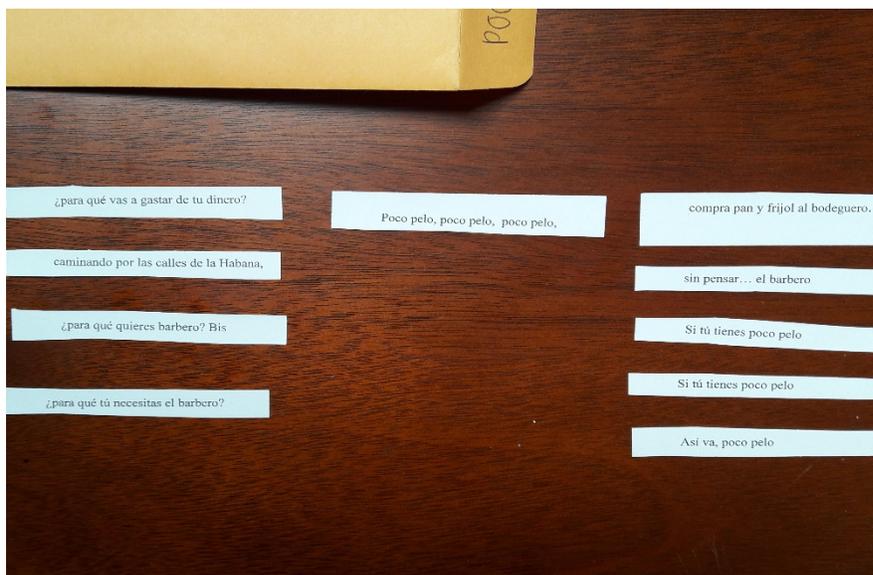
Preparation: Select the lyrics for the song or tongue twister and check for conventional spelling and other symbols such as commas, etc. In accessing lyrics on-line, care needs to be taken because words are often misspelled for various reasons.

Double space the lines of the text.

1. Print the lyrics, choosing paper of different colors. Quite often lines will end up on the floor, different colors aid in retrieving them.
2. Cut the lines without giving obvious hints as to how they go together. The photograph gives an example of how this is done.
3. Provide one set to each learner.
4. When finished with one class, keep each set in separate envelopes so that the exercise is ready for the next group of learners.

Implementing the strategy:

1. When the learner receives the envelope and places the lines on the table, suggest that half the lines go to the left and half to the right with enough space in-between to move the lines as they are identified.



2. Instructor reads the tongue twister at normal speed or plays the song all the way from beginning to end without stopping.
3. Encourage learners to place any identified line in the middle. The other lines will be placed above or below as they are identified in subsequent reading of tongue twister or playing the song. In the beginning, this process needs from 5 to 8 repetitions before learners have sequenced the lines. As the year progresses, students may need fewer repetitions to sequence the lines.
4. When just a few learners need to finish, place a correct version of the item in question on the board and have learners compare with the correct version.
5. Discuss any words with unclear meanings or pronunciation.
6. Provide a short translation.
7. Discuss the selected reading.
8. Have students place the paper strips in their envelopes and collect them.
9. From the version on the board, repeat the text chorally.
10. On following days, only step 9 needs to be performed.

Paco Peco	(Boy's nickname)
chico rico	rich child
le gritaba	yelled
como loco	crazyly
5 a su tío	at his uncle
Federico,	Frederick,
y este dijo,	and this one said,
no por poco,	without exaggerating, (not by much)
Paco Peco	(boy's nickname)
10 poco pico.	says little (little beak)

With repeated practice, some learners may need to know that:

1. Like English, Spanish uses upper case letters in proper names and the initial word of a sentence or title.
2. Each line has 4 syllables.
3. An accent mark identifies 2 separate syllables, not a blending or a diphthong.
4. According to Spanish pronunciation conventions, line 7 also has 4 syllables. (When a word ends in a vowel and the next word begins with a vowel, the vowel is pronounced as a diphthong.)
5. Pronouncing with 4 syllables per line helps with producing the tongue twister more quickly.

### The assessment

The learner reads aloud the tongue twister twice, once at normal speed for accurate sound production, and the second as fast as possible, as any tongue twister. Though there are 22 words, by the time the learner finishes the assessment, the odds are that these words have been repeated more than 10 times each. I use a grading scale of 90% for the letter <o> and 10% for the rest of the tongue twister, combined for both attempts.

**Exercise 2:** To help the learner improve the new sound-symbol correspondence a new exercise is introduced after the tongue twister and before the assessment.

Repeat the different stages described in Exercise 1 above. I use the Orquesta Aragón version of *Poco pelo*. This helps the students repeat the <o> words in a new, yet largely familiar context. It also opens the class to greater discussion of grammar, culture, and contextual meaning. For more information, please contact the author.

Poco pelo, poco pelo, poco pelo,  
¿para qué necesitas el barbero? (bis)  
(repeat)

Little bit of hair(x3)  
why do you need the barber?

¿Si tú tienes poco pelo,  
para qué vas a gastar de tu dinero?  
¿Si tú tienes poco pelo,  
para qué tú necesitas el barbero?

If you have little hair,  
Why are you going to spend your money?  
If you have Little hair,  
Why do you need the barber?

Así va... poco pelo  
caminando por las calles de la Habana,  
sin pensar... el barbero,  
compra pan y frijol al bodeguero.

So he goes... little hair  
wandering the streets of Havana  
without thinking... the barber.  
Buys bread and beans from the shopkeeper

On a subsequent day, when the song is presented the fifth time, or later, a variation in its performance induce the learners to re-engage with the pronunciation and content. For example, the class could read the lyrics aloud as a chorus and as an orchestra, with the instructor identifying by hand the different group of learners to read aloud as subgroups, paying attention to where the artist is in the song. An understanding of sound-symbol correlation is reinforced by staying synchronized with the artist as the song is performed. As can be seen, the sound-spelling practice with <o> is extremely rich in usable information that furthers access to the L2 culture and therefore to communication.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Douglas Bowman is a retired Spanish teacher with 30 years of experience at Head Start and secondary levels. He has tutored in Japanese and German and is the editor of [linguisticsnapshot.org](http://linguisticsnapshot.org). He is interested in the maintenance of endangered languages. He has presented internationally in Canada, Puerto Rico, Costa Rica and Panama. He has presented at state organizations in Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, Oregon and Virginia, as well as Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (CSC) and AATSP national in New Mexico and Florida.

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