

The English schwa sound in a Spanish versus a Catalan linguistic dominant English student.

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This brief study compares the values of F1 and F2 of initial non-stressed English schwa by one bilingual Catalan linguistic dominant student of English compared to that of a bilingual Spanish linguistic dominant student of English. Both participants are females in their 50s, they have both been students of the same advanced English course (C1.2) at the EOI Palma during this school year 2020/21.

The participants undertook three tasks. The first was a reading production task of a total of 15 items: 5 words with initial a-, 5 words with initial o-, and 5 words with initial u-. The second was an imitation production task with the same word list of task 1. The third was a combination of the first and second task. A British born lady in her 60s was recorded for the imitation task sample. All tasks were recorded using *Praat*.

Schwa is a sound that is expected to vary regarding its position and the contact with other vowels or consonants. Since this sound is also present in the L1 language of the participants, according to Flege (1987) and his Speech Learning Model, native Catalan speakers would not have to create a new category in their language system in order to produce the schwa sound. When comparing bilingual students, it is also interesting to study the impact of language dominance in the production of a very same sound in a foreign language.

Hypothesis: Should the production of the two students be expected to be different according to their language dominance? Are advanced students of English aware of the schwa sound in words regardless of the phonetical representation (a, e, o) or is there a tendency to only reproduce the schwa sound with only one or two vowels, a or e, as it would happen in the Catalan language? Does the spelling have an impact on the correct production? Does it still have an impact, even if the task is an imitation one?

The distance in Hz in F1 and F2 values for both participants compared to the British production sample has been measured for all tasks and interesting tendencies have been found regarding spelling, type of task and language dominance.