

Comparison Chart for LD and EL Learning and Behavior

	Learning/Behavior Often Associated with Learning Disability	Learning/Behavior Expected from English Learners
Language	Preschool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ slow speech development ▪ pronunciation problems ▪ difficulty learning new words ▪ difficulty following simple directions ▪ difficulty understanding questions ▪ difficulty expressing needs ▪ difficulty rhyming words 	The Silent Period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ speaks very little English ▪ may not respond when spoken to ▪ difficulty expressing needs ▪ pronunciation problems ▪ difficulty identifying and isolating phonemes not common or present in native language
	Elementary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ slow learning sound-symbol correspondence ▪ difficulty remembering sight words ▪ difficulty retelling a story in sequence 	Early Production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ speaks in single words and phrases ▪ phrases may contain notable grammatical errors ▪ difficulty with unfamiliar language structures Intermediate Stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ learner is approaching proficiency ▪ may still make frequent errors in speech ▪ may be confused by idioms or slang
Cognition	Preschool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ trouble memorizing ▪ difficulty with cause and effect ▪ difficulty with basic concepts 	The Silent Period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ difficulty following directions ▪ difficulty understanding questions
	Elementary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ poor working memory ▪ trouble organizing thoughts ▪ inconsistency over time 	Early Production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may be easily frustrated ▪ may lack specific vocabulary or struggle with the “right” words ▪ may struggle with even simple writing tasks
		Intermediate Stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may appear more proficient than is ▪ speech may have surpassed other skills ▪ may be slow processing challenging language ▪ may understand more than s/he is able to demonstrate
Attention	Preschool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ high distractibility ▪ impulsive behaviors ▪ unusually restless ▪ difficulty staying on task ▪ difficulty changing activities 	The Silent Period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may exhibit poor attention ▪ may exhibit poor concentration ▪ may overly rely on visual cues
	Elementary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ difficulty concentrating ▪ difficulty following multiple directions ▪ difficulty finishing work on time 	Early Production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may seem to have trouble concentrating ▪ may seem unmotivated to complete tasks (especially independently) Intermediate Stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may seem to have poor auditory memory
Social	Preschool <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ trouble interacting with peers ▪ easily frustrated ▪ withdrawn ▪ poor self-control 	The Silent Period <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may be withdrawn ▪ may prefer to play by self or only with children who have the same native language ▪ may have low self-esteem
	Elementary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ difficulty interpreting facial expressions ▪ difficulty understanding social situations ▪ apparent lack of common sense ▪ misinterpreting behavior of peers 	Early Production <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may not know social norms ▪ may be uncomfortable participating in class discussions
		Intermediate Stage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ may attempt to hide deficiencies from peers and adults ▪ may use avoidance behaviors to avoid embarrassment

English Learner Behaviors that Mimic Disabilities

The road to acquiring a second language is fraught with potholes for many students. While classroom teachers may be laser-focused on academics, it is easy to forget that along with the new language, students must also learn a new culture. Many have left their homes and all that is familiar, faced severe trauma and loss, are struggling with social issues associated with limited English proficiency, come from families living in poverty, and/or lack access to optimal nutritional and medical care. With a broader lens, often issues that seem to be solely academic can be seen as a part of a larger complex interaction of factors, many of which may be out of the student's control. A lack of language can manifest as symptomatic of other disabilities to teachers who are unfamiliar with the second language acquisition process. The chart below compares some common struggles English learners have with the disabilities the behaviors mimic.

Typical Second Language Learners	Disability Behaviors Mimic
Trouble with speech patterns not present in first language (ex. passive voice)	Intellectual Disability- comprehension
Trouble with phonemes not present in first language	Dyslexia- Lack of phonemic awareness Auditory Processing Disorder
Lack of letter knowledge	Dyslexia- letter reversals, poor working memory
Incomprehensible	Auditory Processing Disorder
A lack of English vocabulary	Learning Disability- comprehension
Inattentiveness, distractibility, or disengagement	ADHD
Disorganization, forgetfulness	ADHD
Poor retention	Intellectual Disability –poor working memory
Slow work pace	Intellectual Disability
Low motivation	Learning Disability, ADHD, Intellectual Disability
Refusal to participate, avoidance, or misbehavior	Learning Disability, ADHD, Intellectual Disability, Behavioral Disorder
Inappropriate classroom behaviors (but may be typical of that cultural group)	Behavioral Disorder
Poor relationships with peers	Behavioral Disorder
Refusal to ask questions or for help	Learning Disability, ADHD, Intellectual Disability
Frustration and/or giving up	Learning Disability, ADHD, Intellectual Disability

Features of Spanish That May Influence Learning to Speak and Read in English

Sounds and Spellings

- On the whole, spelling in Spanish is far more regular than it is in English, particularly with regard to the spelling of vowel sounds. However, the conventions for the spelling of consonant sounds in the two languages can cause confusion for a Spanish speaker trying to read or spell English words.
- In Spanish *b* and *v* are both used to spell /b/.
- Spanish /d/ between vowels sounds very much like English voiced *th*, /th/ as in *the* or *other*, so English /d/ and /th/ may be confused. In English the /t/ is pronounced like a /d/ sound in words like *better* and *meeting*; thus, *mudder*, *mother*, and *mutter* could be confused.
- In Spanish *g* before *a*, *o* and *u* always spells a “hard” *g* sound as in *gave*, *get*, *give*, *go* or *gum*, never a “soft” *g* as in *gem*. However, Spanish *g* before *e* or *i* is pronounced with an /h/ sound with a lot of friction, so when trying to read an English word like *gem*, the Spanish speaker might produce something that sounds more like *hem*.
- American dialects of Spanish don’t have voiceless *th* sound like the English /th/ in *things*; as a result, pairs of English words such as *thing/sing* and *math/mass* may be confused.
- The English /s/ and /z/ sounds may be confused, because in American dialects of Spanish *s* and *z* stand for the same sound. This sound is usually /s/, but before a voiced consonant (for example, *mismo*, *desgracia*) it may sound more like /z/.
- The only nasal sound that occurs at the end of a word in Spanish is /n/. Therefore, the three English nasal sounds may be confused (for example, *some*, *son*, and *sung*).
- English vowels are challenging for two reasons: the inconsistencies of English spelling and the lack of similar sounds across the two languages. Spanish speakers commonly confuse the vowel sounds in pairs of words like *seat/sit*, *get/gate*, *hat/hot*, *not/nut*, *luck/look*, *pull/pool*, and *cot/caught*.

Vocabulary

- Spanish-English cognates are usually helpful when it comes to guessing the meaning of new words, but sometimes they can cause confusion.
 - The cognate relationship may be disguised by spelling differences: *sección*/section, *énfasis*/emphasis.
 - There may be a style difference: Spanish *edificio* doesn’t necessarily mean “edifice,” as the cognate would suggest; it may mean simply “building.”
 - There are false friends- cognate words that have come to have quite different meanings in the two languages. Spanish *lectura* means “reading,” not “lecture.” Spanish *embarazar* may mean “to embarrass,” but it is more likely to mean “to make pregnant,” and *excitado* may look like *excited*, but it is translated as aroused.
- The fact that English can use a word as a noun or verb without changing the form of the word (e.g. *play*) can cause confusion for a Spanish speaker, because in Spanish nouns and verbs have different sets of endings (inflections) that usually make them look quite different from each other.

Features of Spanish That May Influence Learning to Speak and Read in English Continued

Vocabulary Continued...

- Compound nouns are much less common in Spanish than in English. In English, while the parts of a compound may be understandable, the meaning of the compound as a whole may not be obvious. Pairs like *lamp table* and *table lamp*, or *wind mill* and *coffee mill*, may be confusing.

Grammar

- Gender pronoun confusion is very common for native Spanish speakers learning English. *Him/her, she/he, his/hers* can be confused because the pronoun *su* represents both the masculine and the feminine forms in Spanish.
- In English sentences containing an indirect object, there are often two ways to indicate the indirect object: *Sue showed the picture to Tom* or *Sue showed Tom the picture*. For a Spanish speaker the second version of the sentence (which uses what is sometimes called the “unmarked” indirect object) could be hard to interpret, because in Spanish the indirect object is marked by a pronoun preceding the verb and a preposition before the noun: *Susana le mostró a Tomás la pintura* (Literally: Sue him showed to Tom the painting).
- The time reference of English compound tenses can be difficult to pin down, for example, the difference in meaning and use of *studies* versus *is studying*, or *studies* versus *has studied* versus *had studies*. Spanish has similar compound tenses, but their uses do not exactly parallel the corresponding English tenses.
- English modals can also be a problem, especially when occurring as a part of more complex verb forms. The meaning and use of forms such as the following are difficult to sort out: *would study, would have studied, should study, should have studied, could study, could have studied, may study, may be studying, should have been studying*, and the like. Corresponding forms in Spanish are expressed by full-fledged inflected verbs.
- There are parallels between Spanish and English with regard to noun clauses, but one feature of English might interfere with reading comprehension for a Spanish speaker. In English, *that* introducing a noun clause may be omitted in sentences such as *as I thought (that) Pete was going to the movies*. In such cases in Spanish, the corresponding conjunction is required.
- Word order can be confusing for native Spanish speakers. Word order in Spanish is flexible, while in English it is set subject-verb-object. In Spanish the adjective comes after the noun. In English adjectives come before and in a set order (size, age, shape, color).
- Many Spanish speakers may confuse words such as *this* and *these*, since they may be pronounced the same by a native Spanish speaker. *Make* and *do* may also be confused or misused since the verb *hacer* is used for both words in Spanish, while *in* and *on* might be confused since *en* is used for both.
- In English the subject is always included. In Spanish, however, the subject may be dropped, thus Spanish speakers may unknowingly drop it in English.
- Double negatives are acceptable in Spanish but not in English. A native Spanish speaker may not see anything wrong with saying, “I don’t want nothing.”