

Conciencia Fonémica en Español (Phonemic Awareness in Spanish)

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Encouraging English-language learners to build phonemic awareness in their native language leads to gains in their English reading skills.

Literacy in English for all students is a national goal in the United States, and children who have a primary language other than English make up a sizeable portion of the nation's students. Recent demographic data indicate that English-language learners (ELLs) in public pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade schools number more than 5 million, or 10.1% of total enrollment. In some states, such as California, the number of ELLs exceeds 25% of total enrollment, and in many schools and classrooms ELLs make up 100% of the student population. The primary language of the vast majority (nearly 80%) of ELL students in the United States is Spanish (Capps et al., 2005; National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition and Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2006). With the percentage of ELLs promising to increase in the years ahead, more and more teachers and school districts will be charged with providing quality education for students who are new to the English language. A fundamental part of that education involves learning to read.

Reading is a complex process, and many factors—linguistic, cognitive, affective, sociocultural, and political—contribute to students' reading achievement. This article focuses on only one aspect of reading development: phonemic awareness. We begin with a definition of phonemic awareness, then discuss its role in reading for English speakers and speakers of other languages, describe its development, share information on

its cross-language transfer, and conclude with suggestions for supporting its development in Spanish.

Phonemic Awareness

Phonemic awareness is the insight that the speech stream consists of individual sounds, or phonemes. It is the ability to attend to, and manipulate, these smallest sounds of spoken language. Students who are phonemically aware can unpack a spoken word into its constituent sounds, telling us that the spoken word *fish* consists of three separate sounds: /f/-/i/-/sh/. They can blend individual sounds into words; that is, they respond with *cup* when asked what word these three sounds form when combined: /k/-/u/-/p/. Matching, identifying, and deleting phonemes from spoken utterances are also indicators of phonemic awareness. Phonemic awareness is the most difficult aspect of *phonological awareness*—a term that encompasses awareness of phonemes and larger units of spoken language—and typically is attained after students develop an awareness of rhyming words, syllables, and onset-rime units (Cossu, Shankweiler, Liberman, Katz, & Tola, 1988; de Manrique & Gramigna, 1984; González & González, 1993).

Phonemic Awareness and Reading

Ample evidence indicates that phonemic awareness in English speakers is significantly related to success in learning to read. In fact, phonemic awareness is one of the most potent predictors of reading acquisition, more so than traditional measures of intelligence or reading readiness (Juel, Griffith, & Gough, 1986; Share, Jorm, Maclean, & Matthews, 1984; Stanovich, 1986),

and a lack of phonemic awareness is related to difficulties in learning to read (Adams, 1990).

Why is this ability to mentally capture the smallest sounds of speech related to learning to read in English? The answer lies in the nature of the written system. English has an alphabetic orthography; it maps speech to print at the level of sounds. That is, the symbols we use to write in English largely represent the individual sounds of the spoken language. The letters *c-a-t*, for example, stand for /k/-/a/-/t/, the sounds of the word that usually refers to a furry mammal that purrs. The letters *b-t-a-n-k-e-t* stand for /b/-/t/-/a/-/ng/-/k/-/e/-/t/, the sounds of the word that usually refers to a soft fabric covering. (Although considered an alphabetic orthography, English is not as transparent as some orthographies in that the symbols are not completely consistent one-to-one matches with sounds. Note, too, that English makes use of some symbols that are morphemic in nature rather than phonemic: The symbols %, \$, #, and & represent *ideas*, not sounds; they cannot be “sounded out” regardless of how hard you try.)

Knowing that speech is made up of individual sounds appears to be the key to unlocking the logic of an alphabetic code. If individuals whose cultures make use of alphabetic orthographies do not notice that their speech stream consists of individual sounds, then the written system based on these sounds will make little sense. Print will be viewed as a random string of straight and curved lines that simply must be memorized.

Although much of the research on the relationship between phonemic awareness and reading has been conducted with English monolinguals, a growing body of evidence indicates the relationship holds true for speakers of other languages as well, particularly alphabetic languages. Studies conducted in the United States and elsewhere provide evidence of the relationship between an awareness of the sound structure of spoken language and reading acquisition in Danish (Lundberg, Frost, & Petersen, 1988), French (Alegria, Pignot, & Morais, 1982), German (Naslund, 1990), Italian (Cossu et al., 1988), Portuguese (Cardoso-Martins, 1991), Spanish (Carrillo, 1994; Durgunoglu, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993; González & González, 1993), Swedish (Lundberg, Olofsson, & Wall, 1980), and Turkish (Durgunoglu & Oney, 1999).

The Development of Phonemic Awareness

Given the robust relationship between phonemic awareness and reading in many languages, it is vital to explore how children develop this insight on their speech stream. Although there is little doubt that learning to read itself contributes to an awareness of language sounds (Morais, Cary, Alegria, & Bertelson, 1979; Perfetti, Beck, Bell, & Hughes, 1987), longitudinal and training studies conducted in the past several decades reveal that efforts to directly stimulate students' phonemic awareness result in better developed phonemic awareness and also in enhanced reading achievement (e.g., Ball & Blachman, 1991; Lundberg et al., 1988). In other words, phonemic awareness can be taught, and providing instruction in phonemic awareness is causally related to gains in reading. These gains take the form of increased word recognition and comprehension, the latter likely because the awareness of the internal structure of spoken words contributes to the fluent operation of word recognition skills, which, in turn, facilitate reading comprehension. (See Ehri et al., 2001, for a review, and see Torgesen & Davis, 1996, for a discussion of individual differences in response to phonemic awareness training.) Due to the compelling research about the role of phonemic awareness in reading acquisition and the finding that most children enter kindergarten with little phonemic awareness (Ehri et al., 2001), many state, national, and international educational agencies and organizations call for instruction in phonemic awareness for young children (e.g., California Department of Education, 1999; International Reading Association, 1998; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000).

Transfer of Phonemic Awareness From One Language to Another

Given the number of ELLs in the United States, it's important to understand whether the ability to attend to the sounds of spoken language transfers from one language to another. This topic has both theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, evidence of transfer from one language to another would suggest that phonemic awareness is a general understanding about the nature of the speech stream, rather than a

language-specific ability (Cisero & Royer, 1995). In addition, it would provide support for Cummins's (1979) linguistic interdependence hypothesis, which states that skills in a second language are influenced by skills in the first language. In terms of practical implications, instructional decisions are likely to differ depending on whether developing phonemic awareness in a child's native language facilitates, interferes with, or is unrelated to success in English.

A growing body of work with children from a range of ages, as young as 3 years (López & Greenfield, 2004) up to 11 years of age (Riccio et al., 2001), has suggested that phonemic awareness does, indeed, transfer from one language to another. For example, a longitudinal study with Latino children in a Texas border town established that sound matching and rhyming in Spanish in kindergarten was significantly related to English sound matching and elision (i.e., deletion) in first grade (Manis, Lindsey, & Bailey, 2004). Likewise, a study conducted with 4-year-old Head Start students in the northeastern and southeastern United States revealed a strong transfer of performance on phoneme deletion detection and rhyme recognition tasks from Spanish to English and vice versa (Dickinson, McCabe, Clark-Chiarelli, & Wolf, 2004). Transfer of phonemic awareness from one language to another also has been documented between French and English (Comeau, Cormier, Grandmaison, & Lacroix, 1999). Thus, the hypothesis that phonemic awareness is a general rather than language-specific cognitive mechanism is supported (Cisero & Royer, 1995; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2005), as is Cummins's (1979) linguistic interdependence hypothesis. Apparently, an understanding of the phonemic basis of spoken language, once developed, can be applied to any language. (However, it should be noted that new sounds will have to be learned. For instance, although phonemically aware Spanish-speaking individuals may bring phonemic insight with them to a second language, some of the sounds in the second language will be new to them. An example is the



short /i/ sound we hear in the English words *him* and *it*. This sound does not exist in Spanish phonology. When individuals learn a new language, part of what they learn is to hear and pronounce new sounds.)

The data indicate that phonemic awareness in the native language is not only related to phonemic awareness in the second language, but also to reading acquisition. Children who are phonemically aware in their native language demonstrate word recognition skills (Comeau et al., 1999; Durgunoglu et al., 1993; Manis et al., 2004) and passage comprehension (Lindsey, Manis, & Bailey, 2003) in a second language superior to that of their native-language counterparts who lack phonemic awareness in their native language. Some research suggests that this effect is long lasting: Manis et al. (2004) discovered that Spanish-speaking kindergarteners' performance on Spanish phonological measures was significantly related to English word recognition and English passage comprehension two years later.

Converging data from a number of studies, then, support the conclusion that developing students' awareness of the sound structure of spoken language in their native language can facilitate their ability to read in English. The practical implication is significant: Devoting attention to the development of ELLs' phonemic awareness in their native language is worthwhile, whether the children are in classrooms where the language of reading instruction is the native language *or* in English-only classrooms.

Supporting ELLs' Phonemic Awareness in the Native Language

Language of instruction is a topic of considerable debate in the United States, with policy determined by the states and, sometimes, individual school districts. In some classrooms, the language of instruction is the native language of the child. In fact, national data indicate that nearly 60% of ELL prekindergarteners and about 50% of ELL kindergarteners and first graders are in classrooms in which the language of instruction is their native language (Kindler, 2002). Programs for these children should include attention to the development of phonemic awareness; the students will benefit in terms of native-language reading, and ultimately in terms of English reading. (The timing of the introduction of English reading instruction depends upon the type of program in which the student is participating.)

The approximately 40% of prekindergarteners and 50% of kindergarteners and first graders who are in classrooms in which instruction is provided exclusively in English can also benefit from support in native-language phonemic awareness—support offered by their families. Most educators believe that home support affects students' achievement, and promoting parent involvement was one of the national goals for the year 2000 (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). Indeed, Goldenberg (2001, p. 221) noted, "parent involvement seems to hold considerable promise for helping improve the achievement of children who our schools have traditionally not served well" (i.e., children from low income and linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds). In fact, one study revealed that the more teachers attempted to involve parents in children's learning during the kindergarten year (through activities sent home, phone calls, and messages), the higher the students' literacy performance at the end of the year (Goldenberg & Arzubia, cited in Goldenberg, 2001).

Yet some teachers, particularly those who provide instruction exclusively in English, are unsure about enlisting home support when approximately 85% of ELL students live in households where the adults themselves are ELLs (Capps et al., 2005). Teachers may be concerned that the parents do not speak English well enough to support the classroom instruction, and they may believe that native-language support at home will interfere with what is happening at school. However, the evidence regarding phonemic awareness reveals that, as with many aspects of reading development, native-language support at home is appropriate and desirable. In fact, researchers (e.g., Dickinson et al., 2004) encourage parents to draw on their stronger home language to engage their youngsters in activities that foster sensitivity to sounds in speech, even when the children are participating in English reading programs at school.

Suggestions for Phonemic Awareness in Spanish

Classroom teachers and adults at home can facilitate the development of phonemic awareness by intentionally drawing children's attention to the phonemic basis of their spoken language and deliberately providing opportunities for them to reflect on, manipulate, and experiment with sounds. One way to begin building young children's phonemic awareness is by

providing language-rich environments in which playful experiences with the sounds of spoken language—and talk about those experiences—occur frequently. Indeed, reading authorities recommend that phonemic awareness instruction be motivating and playful (Shanahan, 2006) and include songs and games (Adams, Foorman, Lundberg, & Beeler, 1997).

Oral language activities that engage children in the exploration of sounds in spoken English have been described elsewhere in the pages of *The Reading Teacher* (Griffith & Olson, 1992; Lewkowicz, 1994; Yopp, 1992, 1995; Yopp & Yopp, 2000). They include sharing, innovating on, and talking about the sound play that is fundamental to certain poems, songs, and read-aloud books. In addition, it has been recommended that children be exposed to tongue twisters (Yopp & Yopp, 2002) because tongue twisters by their very nature draw attention to sounds. Similar activities in any language are likely to build sensitivity to the sound structure of spoken language. In the remainder of this article, we share some Spanish selections that will stimulate young children's attention to, experimentation with, and conversations about sounds. These selections are intended to be shared with children by individuals—teachers, teaching assistants, or parents—who are fluent in Spanish.

Figure 1 presents traditional Spanish songs and poems that are composed around sound manipulations. Also provided in the figure are the type of sound play (e.g., use of rhyme) and an example of the sound play. Some of the selections substitute sounds in each repetition of a verse. For instance, reminiscent of the sound substitutions the English song "Apples and Bananas" (which becomes "ay-pples and ba-nay-nays" and "ee-pples and bee-nee-nees" in subsequent verses), "Una Mosca" repeats a verse multiple times, each time replacing all the vowels, first with *a*, then *e*, *i*, *o*, and *u*. *Una mosca* becomes *ana masca*, *ene mesque*, and so on. Other songs and poems are built around rhymes. In "Los Pollitos," for example, we hear *pío* and *frío* and *trigo* and *abrigo*. Many native Spanish speakers will recognize the songs and poems. If not, any of the songs may be chanted with the same enjoyment and effectiveness as if they were sung. Families should be encouraged to share with their children and with the class other traditional songs and poems that manipulate sounds.

Figure 2 provides some popular Spanish tongue twisters. By definition, tongue twisters are difficult to

say due to the placement of particular sounds in the phrases, and thus they draw attention to sounds in the speech stream as children find themselves stumbling over, confusing, mixing, and deliberately reorganizing sounds. Children should be encouraged to learn the tongue twisters and then try to say them with increas-

ing speed. Adults should model the humor and pleasure in stumbling over and then succeeding in saying the tongue twisters rapidly.

English translations are provided in Figures 1 and 2 solely so teachers who do not speak Spanish and wish to pass these on to families or other adults (e.g.,

Figure 1
Traditional Spanish Songs and Poems That Play With Sounds

Spanish	English translation	Sound play (with an example)
<p><u>Los Pollitos</u> Los pollitos dicen: Pío, pío, pío, Cuando tienen hambre, Cuando tienen frío.</p> <p>La gallina busca El maíz y el trigo, Les da la comida Y les presta abrigo.</p> <p>Bajo sus dos alas Acurrucaditos Hasta el otro día Duermen los pollitos.</p>	<p><u>The Chicks</u> Baby chicks say, "Peep, peep, peep" When they are hungry, When they are cold.</p> <p>The mother hen looks for Corn and wheat She gives them food And gives them shelter.</p> <p>Beneath her two wings They tuck themselves in. The chicks sleep until the morning.</p>	<p>Rhyme (pío-frío)</p>
<p><u>Una Mosca</u> Una mosca parada en la pared, en la pared, en la pared. Una mosca parada en la pared, en la pared, en la pared. Una mosca, una mosca, Una mosca parada en la pared. Una mosca, una mosca, Una mosca parada en la pared.</p> <p>Repeat with the following vowel substitutions: Ana masca parada an la parad Ene mesque perede en le pered Ini misqui piridi in li pirid Ono mosco porodo on lo porod</p>	<p><u>A Fly</u> A fly on the wall, on the wall, on the wall. A fly on the wall, on the wall, on the wall. A fly, a fly A fly on the wall A fly, a fly A fly on the wall.</p>	<p>Sound substitution (mosca-masca)</p>

An extended version of this figure is available online at www.reading.org/publications/journals/rt/v61/i5/

Figure 2
Spanish Tongue Twisters (Trabalenguas)

Spanish	English translation
<p>Como poco coco como, poco coco compro. Tres tristes tigres tragaban trigo en tres tristes trigales.</p>	<p>Since I eat little coconut, little coconut I buy. Three sad tigers were gobbling wheat in three sad wheat fields.</p>
<p>Ñoño Yáñez come ñame en las mañanas con el niño. Pepe puso un peso en el piso del pozo.</p>	<p>Ñoño Yáñez eats yams in the mornings with the boy. Pepe put a peso on the bottom of the well.</p>

An extended version of this figure is available online at www.reading.org/publications/journals/rt/v61/i5/

teaching specialists or assistants) will know the content of the songs, poems, and tongue twisters. The translations lose the element of play with language sounds and so they are not useful for stimulating phonemic awareness in English.

Figure 3 offers an annotated bibliography of Spanish children's books that exploit the sounds of language, either through rhyme, alliteration, substitution, or other sound manipulation. Each book offers an opportunity for adults and children together to attend to and talk about the form of language as well as the content.

How should these songs, poems, tongue twisters, and books be used? If there is native-language support in the classroom, we recommend that teachers share them often with students—during music, language arts, story time, and transitions. We encourage teachers to build a classroom culture in which language play is frequent, stimulating, and enjoyable, and in which teachers welcome children's silliness with sounds. If there is not native-language support in the classroom, we recommend that the songs, poems, tongue twisters, and books be sent home for parents

to share with their children. Figure 4 provides a sample letter of explanation to parents.

As adults share the songs, poems, tongue twisters, and books, they should point out the sound manipulation and encourage children to participate. For instance, consider the following fictional vignettes. When Ms. Jimenez first shared with a group of Spanish-speaking kindergarteners the song "Una Mosca" she taught them only the first verse, singing it to them a couple of times. Then she sang each line one at a time and asked her students to repeat after her. Ms. Jimenez ensured that her students could sing the verse with confidence and invited small groups of children to perform for the class. She sang the first verse with her students several times over the course of a week, allowing volunteers to sing in groups or alone if they wished. Later Ms. Jimenez revisited the song and told her students she was going to do something silly with the sounds in the words. She sang the song with all the vowel sounds replaced with the /a/ sound. Ms. Jimenez's students were surprised and laughed as they tried to sing along. Together they repeated the new verse several times and talked about how the words had changed. Ms.

Figure 3 Spanish Read-Aloud Books That Play With Language

- Guarino, D. (1993). *¿Tu Mamá es una llama?* Ill. S. Kellogg. (A.E. Marcuse, Trans.). New York: Scholastic. In this Spanish language version of *Is Your Mama a Llama?*, whimsical rhyming riddles describe how Lloyd, the baby llama, tries to locate his mother. Through predictable and humorous rhyming patterns, the author plays with language.
- Jaramillo, N.P. (1994). *Las nanas de abuelita: Canciones de cuna, trabalenguas y adivinanzas de Suramérica*. Ill. Elivia. New York: Henry Holt. Accompanied by bright illustrations, the text contains lullabies, tongue twisters, and riddles from South America. The author provides helpful information about several of the selections. For example: "This rhyme involves a play on the words for sawdust, candy, and fireworks" (n.p.) and "This is a rhyme to get children to roll their R's" (n.p.). The English translation is presented alongside the Spanish text.
- Robleda, M. (2003). *Números tragaldabas*. Ill. N. Gurovich. Mexico City, Mexico: Planeta/Destino. Accompanied by fanciful illustrations, the numbers 1 "A la una...cucharadas de luna" (p. 4) to 20 "A las veinte...muy feliz se siente" (p. 23) are introduced in this predictable, rhyming text.
- Rosen, M. (1993). *Vamos a cazar un oso*. Ill. H. Oxenbury. Caracas, Venezuela: Ediciones Ekaré. In this Spanish translation of *Going on a Bear Hunt*, a father and his four children venture forth to find a bear. Sounds of their travel are highlighted at each point in their journey, from the sound of rustling grass as they pass through tall grasslands, to the gurgling of the water as they cross a deep, cold river. The imaginative text makes use of predictable language, rhythm, and rhyme, and children love the sound effects.
- Tabor, N.M.G. (1992). *Albertina anda arriba: El abecedario*. Ill. by the author. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge. The Spanish alphabet is introduced by a humorous assortment of animals. Alliteration is used to describe the actions of the animals. ("Albertina anda arriba en el avión," n.p.). The sound of each letter is highlighted as listeners are challenged to examine the illustration to find objects that begin with the letter sound: la araña, la abeja, los árboles. The English translation is presented alongside of the Spanish text.

An extended version of this figure is available online at www.reading.org/publications/journals/rt/v61/i5/

Figure 4
Sample Letter to Families

Estimados Padres,

Una de las muchas maneras importantes en que ustedes pueden apoyar el desarrollo de la lectura en sus hijos es jugar con los sonidos del idioma. Investigaciones demuestran que el reconocimiento de los niños de que el habla está compuesta de sonidos individuales está relacionado al progreso en aprender a leer. ¡Ustedes pueden ayudar a realizar en sus hijos el reconocimiento de los sonidos! Aquí hay unas sugerencias:

- Lean libros que ponen atención a los sonidos. Hablen de cómo el autor juega con los sonidos. Por ejemplo, ¿Tiene el libro palabras que riman? ¿Repite los mismos sonidos muchas veces? ¿Deliberadamente mezcla los sonidos? ¿Disfruten el lenguaje del libro con sus hijos! Adjunto hay una lista de libros que tal vez encuentren en su biblioteca. También son bienvenidos a pedir prestado estos libros de nuestra biblioteca de la clase. Mandaré de vez en cuando uno a la casa. Disfruten estos libros muchas veces con sus hijos.
- Canten canciones y compartan poemas con sus hijos. Muchas canciones tradicionales y poemas juegan con los sonidos. Hablen de las rimas que se usan. Ríanse de los juegos chistosos de los sonidos. Inventen sus propias versiones de las canciones y poemas. Adjunto a esta carta hay una lista de canciones y poemas. Es muy probable que reconozcan muchas de ellas. Si no saben la melodía de las canciones, con las manos pueden hacer un ritmo. ¡Es igual de divertido!
- Compartan trabalenguas con sus hijos. Los trabalenguas ayudan a poner atención a los sonidos porque es difícil decirlos rápidamente. Tenemos que decirlos más despacito y concentrarnos en lo que estamos diciendo para poder recitarlos. Ríanse de ellos con sus hijos cuando traten de decirlos. Unos trabalenguas populares están adjuntos. Probablemente ustedes conocerán algunos que pueden compartir con sus hijos. ¡Inventen unos juntos!

Los niños que se fijan en los sonidos en el habla y quienes pueden jugar con los sonidos están progresando más en la lectura. ¡Los padres pueden ayudar divirtiéndose con el lenguaje en la casa!

¡Gracias!

Dear Parents,

One of the many important ways that you can support your child's reading development is to play with the sounds of language. Research shows that children's awareness that speech is made up of individual sounds is related to their progress in learning to read. You can help heighten your child's awareness of sounds! Here are some suggestions:

- Read aloud books that draw attention to sounds. Talk about the author's play with sounds. For example, does the book have rhyming words? Does it repeat some sounds a lot? Does it deliberately mix up sounds? Enjoy the language of the book with your child! I have attached a list of books that you may find in the library. You are also welcome to borrow any of these books from our classroom library. I will send one home occasionally with your child. Be sure to enjoy these books many times.
- Sing songs and share poems with your child. Many traditional Spanish songs and poems play with sounds. Talk about the rhymes that are used. Laugh about the silly play with sounds. Create your own versions of the songs and poems. Attached to this note is a handout of songs and poems. You will likely recognize many of them. If you do not know the melody of the songs, chant them! It's just as fun!
- Share tongue twisters with your child. Tongue twisters help to draw our attention to sounds because we have trouble saying them quickly. We have to slow down and concentrate on what we are saying in order to recite them. Laugh about them with your child as you work to say them. Some popular tongue twisters are attached to this note. You probably know more that you can share with your child. Invent some together!

Children who notice the sounds in speech and who can play with those sounds are making progress toward reading. You can help by having fun with language at home!

Thank you!

Jimenez noted that *una* had been changed to *ana* and *mosca* had changed to *masca*, emphasizing the vowels. Then she told them she was going to try it another silly way: this time as "Ene Mesce." The children laughed and when they could sing the new verse, Ms. Jimenez invited them to anticipate the lyrics if the song was changed once again, this time to "Ono Mosco."

Much enthusiasm ensued and a few students led the way as the group made many attempts to construct the new lyrics. Some suggested other manipulations of sounds in the song, which Ms. Jimenez applauded.

When Mr. Casas read aloud the page "Jorge juega en el jardín" from *Albertina Anda Arriba* (Tabor, 1992, n.p.) to his child, he spoke about the illustration and

then commented that the author used several words that begin with the same sound on each of the pages—*Jorge, juega, jardín*—emphasizing the initial sound of the words. Then, Mr. Casas suggested that he and his child together think of more words that begin with the /j/ sound. Together they generated quite a few words (e.g., *jirafa, joven, joya, jueves*). For some time after the reading of the book, the two drew one another's attention to the first sounds in words, even when engaged in other activities, such as in the following exchange. (¿Donde esta tu pelota? Ah, allá. Dámela, por favor. Pelota. /p/, /p/, /p/! Pelota empieza con /p/, como en el libro, ¿verdad?) [Where is your ball? Ah, over there. Give it to me, please. Ball. /b/, /b/, /b/! Ball begins with /b/, like in the book, right?]

After sharing the first few pages of *¿Tu Mamá es una Llama?* (Guarino, 1993), a rhyming text, preschool teacher Dolores Franco asked her students to listen closely to the author's language. The author provides rhyming clues to help listeners anticipate the next animal to be introduced, as llama searches for its mama (“...si no tiene ni siquiera un tizne.... Crea que tu mamá es un...¡cisne!” and “Si eso es lo que la destaca, tu mamá es una...¡vacá!”). [“If she does not have even a smudge.... Believe that your mother is a...swan!” and “If this is what distinguishes her, your mother is a...cow!”] (n.p.). The teacher shared her appreciation for and pleasure in the language of the book and stated that the author was very clever to use words that sound alike. Near the end of the book, she paused before reading the second word in a rhyming pair and her students enthusiastically contributed it. She extended the lesson by generating with her students rhyming words for animals that were not a part of the story.

Support Phonemic Awareness in the Native Language to See It Flourish in English

Phonemic awareness is an insight on the nature of spoken language that contributes to emergent readers' success in negotiating an alphabetic orthography. A growing body of research provides evidence that this insight transfers from one language to another. Educators of ELLs can support students' phonemic awareness in their native language and encourage family engagement in native-language activities that play with sounds, confident that such efforts are beneficial for their students.

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