

## Troubleshooting

**Problem:** You say, “tuh-MAY-toe,” and I say, “tuh-MAH-toe.”

**Solution:** English, as spoken in the United States, is somewhat flexible when it comes to pronunciation, and this flexibility is widely accepted. New Yorkers, Bostonians, Texans, and Californians, for example, can all have distinctly different pronunciations for the same words. Thus, you can say, “tuh-MAY-toe” and I can say, “tuh-MAH-toe.” In Spanish, however, each letter of every word is supposed to be pronounced the same way, all the time. Thus, *tomate* (tomato) should always be pronounced “toh-mah-teh.” Pronunciation is a key factor in becoming (or at least sounding) fluent, and perception is reality. If you sound fluent, you’ve already established some degree of credibility. The better you nail the accent down, the more efficiently and effectively you will master the language.

**Problem:** You say, “restroom,” and I say, “bathroom.”

**Solution:** Like in English, almost everything in the Spanish language can be expressed in more than one way, so don’t just learn one word and shut the door on the synonyms. Otherwise, you may know the word *piscina* (swimming pool) like the back of your hand but have no clue what someone is saying when he or she asks you to go to the *alberca* (another word for swimming pool). To make matters more complicated, it is important to note that different countries (and even different regions within the same country) often use the same word differently. Take the word *camión*, for example. In Mexico, this word is generally understood to mean “bus.” In many other Latin American countries, however, it means “truck.” This may appear to be only a minor difference, but should you use the word *camión* to ask where the bus stops to someone who understands this word to mean “truck,” you could find yourself stranded for quite some time.

**Problem:** I'm confused by all the changes in verb conjugations, pronunciation, formal versus informal, and masculine and feminine forms. To me, it's all mumbo jumbo.

**Solution:** If the ABCs of Spanish grammar are what you need, then maybe you should consider making this the *second* Spanish book you read. *Speaking Spanish Like a Native* assumes some prior knowledge of all these areas. Go back and review as needed.

**Problem:** I feel overwhelmed with all the information and can't seem to take it all in.

**Solution:** Rome wasn't built in a day. This book wasn't written in a day, and you won't understand everything in this book in a day. This is not a computer program that can be downloaded into your mind with the click of a button. Relax and take your time.

**Problem:** I've never heard of many of the words and phrases in this book and for those I am familiar with, I know a much easier way to say the same thing.

**Solution:** That's great because you need to know them all, but this book purposely omits many of the basic words you may already know. *Speaking Spanish Like a Native* contains words that a native speaker uses, and it's meant for those who want to be able to *blend* into a conversation, not stick out.

**Problem:** That's not how we say it in English.

**Solution:** Thinking that *everything* in English should literally translate into equal words in Spanish is a common mistake (See item 2 under "Instructions"). For a good example of this, see "Ton" in chapter 5.

**Problem:** A lot of the words and phrases contained in this book are not in the dictionary.

**Solution:** That's why they're in this book. A dictionary is a dictionary and that's all it is. It is not divine scripture. The fact that a word or phrase may not be in a dictionary does not mean that it doesn't exist. In the same way, if a particular store is not listed in the Yellow Pages, does that mean the store doesn't exist? If you study Spanish as spoken by native speakers, you won't hear them speaking strictly according to the principles outlined in any Spanish grammar or vocabulary book. Like any language, after the basics the language sort of runs on its own and evolves. The words and phrases contained in this book are all valid and in wide circulation.

**Problem:** The definitions of many of the words and phrases in this book are totally different from those given in the dictionary.

**Solution:** Don't panic. That's the difference between writing and speaking. We simply use spoken words more loosely and creatively, and there is less fear of being misunderstood because we can always clarify ourselves by using other terms. Dictionaries do not provide the same luxury.