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AN INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM
FOR BASIC SPANISH STUDENTS:
SPANISH IN THE PROFESSIONS:
BILINGUALISM IN THE U.S.

ABSTRACT

In an attempt to align required general education courses in foreign language with students' most likely applications for language and culture knowledge, a fourth-semester survey course entitled Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S. has been developed at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. This article describes the rationale for the course, the curriculum developed, authentic materials developed for the course, and innovative features of the curriculum.

RATIONALE

Existing Spanish for Specific Purposes curricula tend to be Spanish *for* the professions, providing specific vocabulary and speaking skills for use in the workplace. These "Spanish for the Professions" courses are frequently variations of Business Spanish, but some institutions and civic organizations offer Medical Spanish, Legal Spanish, and other profession-specific language training. This article argues that before students study Spanish for a specific profession, it is important to raise their awareness of the use of the Spanish language across the professions within the United States. The Spanish *in* the Professions course at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign was born out of the belief, derived from both experience and research, that it does not suffice to say that Spanish is a foreign language in the United States. Today's university graduates will likely use Spanish in their professions, regardless of which profession chosen. And if they can speak Spanish in the workplace they will have more job possibilities and earn more money than their monolingual counterparts.

Available textbooks do not fit the Spanish in the Professions curriculum. The first problem is that all available textbooks are profession-specific, so using any one publisher's Spanish textbooks for professionals would mean students would have to buy a whole series of books, such as *Spanish for Health Care*, *Spanish for School Personnel*, *Spanish for Law Enforcement*, and *Spanish for Business* (Houston and Rush, 2003). Rather than fitting into a broad language- and culture-learning curriculum, textbooks for professionals who

need Spanish at work have clearly been designed either as last-minute interventions that provide the most basic vocabulary and grammar (for example, *Spanish for Health Care Professionals* by W. C. Harvey) or as intermediate texts for students already focused on a field of study (for example, *Exito comercial* by M. S. Doyle, R. C. Cere, and T. B. Fryer). One quickly discovers that “basic” vocabulary varies from one specialty to another within a general field such as “business” or “medicine,” so that practicing professionals only need a fraction of the abundant vocabulary offered in these texts.

Most students who take basic language classes have as a goal the ability to communicate in the target language (Mandell) and it has been shown that language is best acquired when learners are engaged in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon). Information exchange tasks that require learners to get new information from each other and put that information to use in some way serve that purpose (Lee and VanPatten). Task-based communicative language materials must provide linguistic support for cycles of input and output so that students are provided with both the linguistic materials they need to communicate and opportunities to put those materials to use in communicative exchanges (Lee and VanPatten).

The Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S. curriculum takes a communicative task-based approach that uses cycles of input and output rather than focusing on productive skills and scripted dialogues. Instead of contrived conversations in the form of practice dialogues that are unlikely to actually occur in most professional contexts, students work on development of strategies for handling conversations that do not fit a specific pattern. Rather than simple biographies of bilingual professionals and additive cultural materials (Banks), the readings specifically address issues related to bilingualism and culture in the US. Issues addressed in this curriculum include:

- Realization that Spanish is a language of the US, despite differing opinions
- Analysis of problems, opportunities, and resources in various professional situations
- Provision of basic services when there are linguistic and cultural barriers
- Interpretation situations of children in their own school conferences
- Employment practices
- Speaking a second or foreign language under stressful circumstances

- Discussion of community membership and diversity
- Implications of differing legal systems for something as simple as driving
- Money management and access to financial institutions.

Although many university programs have begun to embrace Spanish in the United States in their programs for minors and majors, we have neglected the captive audience that is the typical fourth semester language student fulfilling a foreign language requirement. The approach used in Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S. shows basic language students where linguistic and cultural knowledge is needed in professional contexts. The curriculum exposes students to linguistic and cultural issues relevant to professional contexts while also providing them with a foundation in communicative skills and critical thinking that they can apply throughout their academic and professional careers.

While the specific needs of the language learners become clear later in their academic careers, time constraints, logistics, and available resources may limit their accessibility to language and culture instruction. Providing training at the basic language level can address some of these specific needs (cultural knowledge, development of oral/aural skills along with the strategies necessary to continue their development) while alerting students to the possibility that context-specific needs may arise later in their careers. Another advantage to this basic language curriculum is that it can coincide with the fulfillment of general education requirements at the early stages of academic careers, before academic and professional demands have increased to such a point that the flexibility to fit in language and culture instruction no longer exists.

The basic language classroom also may be the last opportunity to reach college students who are fulfilling general education requirements, but it is early enough in academic careers to accommodate those students who wish to pursue Spanish for professional purposes as they continue with their professional preparation.

THE CURRICULUM

The Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S. curriculum addresses four fields that represent popular majors among university students: business professions, law and law enforcement professions, medical professions, and education and social service professions.

At the start of the course, students orient themselves to its context by describing themselves (using present tense), identifying their academic and professional likes and dislikes (*gustar* and other verbs), how those preferences were formed (past tense), and revealing their professional aspirations (future tense). In pairs or groups, students ask and answer questions about each others' professional biographies so that they can draw comparisons, react, and make recommendations. As students acclimate themselves to the content of the course in this way, they also are made explicitly aware of the grammatical structures that they will work with throughout the rest of the course (structures to which they were presumably exposed in previous Spanish classes) so that when they move to the first unit on business vocabulary, they expect to apply all the structures to the new materials they encounter.

Each of the four fields covered in the curriculum (business, law and law enforcement, medical, and education and social services) has been divided into two units, each of which provides support for the following features of the curriculum:

- Strategy-based instruction. Students practice communication techniques that can be applied to make them understood and to understand others. Specific strategies include offering information, activating background knowledge, circumlocution, and identifying specific problems.
- A focus on bilingualism *in* the professions rather than an attempt to provide vocabulary and speaking skills *for* the professions.
- Readings from the Spanish-language press in the United States. This raises awareness of the existence of the language's presence in this country while also providing relevant cultural and professional information.
- Authentic audio and video recordings that bring bilingual professionals into the classroom.
- Cyclical linguistic structures, so that students hear and use the same core language repeatedly in each chapter.
- An introduction to entrepreneurial concepts presented through examination of available resources, unmet needs, and products and services that meet those needs in a given situation.
- The case method, in which students are presented with a problematic real-world situation that they must analyze and synthesize before deciding on a recommended action for the key player.

The first chapter for each profession is “Spanish *for* the professions,” providing some basic vocabulary and grammar practice along with important cultural information. This unit includes vocabulary relevant to the field, readings in Spanish about the profession as well as the importance of bilingualism in the field, and authentic audio recordings in which Spanish-speakers discuss their experiences in various commercial, legal, medical, and academic situations.

The second chapter within each field focuses on applying the language and grammar to reading, listening, speaking, and viewing activities. Students examine, discuss, and reflect on the work of professionals who use Spanish regularly in their work in the United States. In addition to written materials from the Spanish-language press, interviews with bilingual professionals are brought into the classroom via video.

An important principle of this curriculum is the idea that production skills are easily acquired on-the-job if students already possess adequate communicative competence in Spanish and can concentrate on their specific professional vocabulary needs. Thus, rather than guessing at the productive repertoire that students may or may not need once in the workplace, this course focuses on building the communicative competence that will allow them to continue the acquisition process long after the course has ended.

MATERIALS

Materials for the Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S. course were developed with a grant from the CIBER at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign toward development of written texts, audio recordings, and video recordings.

All readings come from the Spanish-language press in the US, such as *People en español* and *Hola Hoy*, a Spanish-language newspaper published in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Although bad translations of English-language news invariably appear in these publications, they are nevertheless one type of print publication available to Spanish-speakers in the US. The practical reality is that these materials are what is readily accessible and therefore read by many Spanish-speakers in the US. The readings address relevant cultural and professional issues related to the professional unit. This raises students’ awareness of the existence of a Spanish-language press in the US, reinforces the idea that there is an application for Spanish in the professions in the US and also highlights the centrality of culture by revealing cultural assumptions. Problematizing those assumptions allows for the contemplation of other models.

Authentic audio recordings were made for the course; native Spanish-speaking Spanish-English bilinguals were asked to recount bilingual experiences in the four professional contexts covered in the curriculum. There was no scripting, and curricular materials were then developed around the spontaneous audio recordings.

Similarly, curricular materials were developed around the results of a series of videos produced specifically for the Spanish in the Professions. The videos revisit the grammatical structures covered in the course while exposing students to bilinguals in their own community who use both Spanish and English on the job. They were interviewed in the workplace and asked to address the following issues in Spanish: introduce themselves with name, origin, and profession; describe their jobs or professions; talk about the advantages of being bilingual by comparing their work to that of monolingual professionals; tell how they first became interested in their chosen careers; offer suggestions or recommendations to students interested in similar careers; and describe the future of their profession. The linguistic structures that are addressed in each unit coincide with the content of the interviews: describing, comparing, narrating in the past, offering recommendations and reactions, and talking about the future.

FEATURES OF THE CURRICULUM

An illustration of the three features described below can be found in the Appendix.

Gramática

At the beginning level, development of basic language skills is a top priority and this course focuses on traditional basic language structures: the present tense and Spanish verbs for *to be*, comparisons and superlatives, *gustar* and other verbs that share the same structure, the present subjunctive, both aspects of the past tense, and the future tense and the expression *ir + a + infinitive*. Unlike traditional curricula in which students review the present tense in the first chapter, then cover comparisons and superlatives in the second, and so on until they reach the “most difficult” structures late in the course, the Spanish in the Professions course uses each of the six structures covered in the course in every chapter, as relevant to the context.

The six grammar concepts that are used repeatedly throughout the entire text are presented together in a grammar guide, to which students are referred as they complete the textbook materials. Students are alerted to the grammati-

cal functions they will need to complete a given activity by the “*gramática*” box, which is followed by reference to the relevant pages of the grammar guide. This allows for a more organic flow in the activities that have been developed around the authentic textual, audio, and video materials while also providing repeated opportunities to use specific language functions to complete tasks.

Estrategias

R. Oxford (2001) defined learning strategies as “operations employed by the learner to aid the acquisition, storage, retrieval and use of information, specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective and more transferable to new situations” (166). They vary depending on the learner, the task, and the goals. From a cognitive learning perspective, strategies are important because they both promote learner autonomy and help learners to link new information with existing background knowledge instead of learning by rote memorization. Through repeated application, strategy use can become automatic, thus easing “the burden on short-term memory, which can then focus on the meaning of the incoming language” (Chamot and O’Malley 378–79). This view empowers both teachers and learners to actively participate in improving language acquisition. It also promotes ongoing learning beyond the classroom setting (Oxford and Nyikos). The cyclical use of grammatical structures in this course models the kind of repeated application of strategy use that also forms part of the course.

Explicit strategy instruction is another unique aspect of the Spanish in the Professions curriculum. At the beginning of the course, students complete a survey created by Andrew Cohen and Julie Chi (2003) entitled “Language Strategy Use Inventory,” originally published in the Maximizing Study Abroad series by the Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota (see: <http://www.carla.umn.edu/maxsa/guides.html>). The survey makes students explicitly aware of the listening, vocabulary, speaking, and reading strategies they deploy in learning a language. In addition to learning about their own approaches to language learning, the strategies on the survey offer learners new ideas that they can incorporate into their language-learning endeavors.

In the course materials for Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S., a *strategies* box precedes all vocabulary, listening, and reading activities in the text with suggestions for how to develop and apply strategies to a given

task. Each strategy box is followed by tasks to which the suggested strategy can be applied. For example, even before the traditional pre-reading activities, students in Spanish in the Professions see a shaded *strategies* box that might remind them of the importance of thinking about the context and examining any titles, subtitles, images, or graphics that accompany the reading. Such a *strategies* box is then followed by pre-reading questions that ask students to describe the context and form hypotheses about both the content and conclusion of the reading. These hypotheses are revisited at the conclusion of the post-reading activities. Similarly, before a listening passage students might be provided with a three- or four-item table to fill in that draws students' attention to the importance of focusing on meaning. The instructions state that the passage will only be played once, but the instructor will answer specific questions about the content of the passage. Before listening, students use the table to anticipate the questions they may have after hearing the passage once. At the conclusion of each unit, students write essays in which they reflect on their strategy use, including distinguishing between strategies that they have always used and new strategies that they have tried in the course.

Through this practice with strategy awareness and application, students develop an arsenal of basic strategies such as guessing, hypothesizing, inferring, deploying background knowledge, and circumlocution. Additionally, they may develop the metacognitive skills to talk about them. This emphasis on strategy instruction provides students with learning tools that can be applied in the long term and across disciplines to continue the learning process beyond the classroom, both temporally and spatially.

Aplicación y análisis

The “aplicación y análisis” sections tie together all the major features of the text: the linguistic content comes together with use of the case method, higher-order thinking skills, and entrepreneurial concepts. Students apply the vocabulary and grammar to situations or cases that have been derived from an authentic audio or video. Many of the terms used to talk about teaching with the case method are familiar to language educators: student-centered classes, experiential learning, higher-order thinking skills (analysis and synthesis), inductive reasoning, and process orientation. Students have an opportunity to show their Spanish-language production skills as well as their higher-order thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis of information.

After students interpret and analyze the case in class and present a plan of action based on the best decision they envision for the case, they must

apply entrepreneurial concepts to the case. Entrepreneurship forms part of the Spanish in the Professions curriculum in the sense that students repeatedly describe available and/or necessary resources and then identify unmet needs. In every context possible, students are asked to consider important resources, whether explicitly mentioned in the text being studied or not, whether available or not, and describe the unmet needs that could be fulfilled through provision of a product or service. These activities can include simple tasks such as describing their own qualifications for a job announcement, describing the resources used by successful bilingual professionals to fulfill an unmet need and succeed in the workplace, and making suggestions based on readings about products and services.

CONCLUSION

Spanish in the Professions: Bilingualism in the U.S. is a fourth-semester language course offered as an alternative to the traditional fourth-semester core language course. It offers students insight into the importance of bilingualism in the United States by exploring four professional areas: business, law and law enforcement, medicine, and education and social service professions. Authentic materials for the course come from the Spanish-language press in the US, audio recordings of bilinguals' experiences in various professional contexts, and video recordings of local bilingual professionals who use both Spanish and English in the workplace. While reviewing relevant language through applying the same linguistic structures in every unit, the course also focuses on strategies for lifelong language learning and entrepreneurial applications for the skills acquired in this course.

APPENDIX

Aplicación y Análisis

Ahora tienes que pensar en los casos en que el idioma es una barrera en las reuniones de padres y maestros.

A escuchar: El idioma como barrera en las reuniones de padres y maestros

“Un niño bilingüe en las escuelas”

EN CLASE

Antes de escuchar**A. Repaso de la lectura**

Antes de escuchar la experiencia de un niño bilingüe en las reuniones de padres y maestros, contesta las siguientes preguntas sobre la lectura, “La importancia de las Reuniones de Padres y Maestros.”

1. En las reuniones hablan del progreso de los:

padres. maestros. niños.

2. Hay reuniones de padres y maestros:

dos veces al año. tres veces al año. cuatro veces al año.

3. Hay reuniones en escuela:

elemental. intermedia. secundaria.

4. Hay intérpretes en el caso de que el idioma sea una barrera.

Sí No

Gramática: el futuro

Consulta la página xiii de la guía gramatical:
“EL FUTURO”

B. Predicciones

¿Cuáles van a ser las diferencias entre la lectura y la experiencia de Alejandro?

Haz dos predicciones:

MODELO: *Para Alejandro habrá menos reuniones.*

1. _____.

2. _____.

A escuchar

Estrategias: Cuando escuchas, es importante utilizar información que ya tienes sobre el tema (en este caso, la lectura “La Importancia de las Reuniones de Padres y Maestros”) y escuchar para la información específica que necesitarás. Primero, repasa la información que ya sabes sobre las reuniones de padres y maestros basándote en las actividades anteriores. Luego lee la actividad A para anticipar la información específica que necesitarás.

A. La experiencia de Alejandro

Contesta las siguientes preguntas sobre la experiencia de Alejandro como un niño bilingüe en las escuelas de Chicago.

1. En las reuniones hablaban del progreso de:

<input type="checkbox"/> los padres.	<input type="checkbox"/> los maestros.	<input type="checkbox"/> el niño.
--------------------------------------	--	-----------------------------------
2. Hay reuniones de padres y maestros:

<input type="checkbox"/> dos veces al año.	<input type="checkbox"/> tres veces al año.	<input type="checkbox"/> cuatro veces al año.
--	---	---
3. Hay reuniones en escuela:

<input type="checkbox"/> elemental.	<input type="checkbox"/> intermedia.	<input type="checkbox"/> secundaria.
-------------------------------------	--------------------------------------	--------------------------------------
4. Hay intérpretes en el caso de que el idioma sea una barrera.

<input type="checkbox"/> Sí	<input type="checkbox"/> No
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Gramática: las comparaciones

Consulta la página v de la guía gramatical:
“COMPARAR Y CONTRASTAR”

B. La lectura y la experiencia de Alejandro

¿Cuáles son las semejanzas y las diferencias entre la experiencia de Alejandro y la lectura, “La Importancia de las Reuniones de Padres y Maestros?”
Apunta algunas comparaciones.

MODELO: *Los dos son sobre las reuniones de padres y maestros.*

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Después de escuchar

A. Las semejanzas y las diferencias

En grupos, comparen las respuestas a la Actividad B y apunten las semejanzas más importantes y las diferencias más importantes. ¿Por qué son importantes?

Las semejanzas:

1. _____
2. _____

Las diferencias:

1. _____
2. _____

B. Los niños como intérpretes

Alejandro plantea un problema importante: los niños bilingües que hacen el papel de intérpretes para sus padres. Van a analizar la situación en grupos.

Paso 1. Las reuniones de padres y maestros y las emociones de los participantes. ¿Qué emociones sienten los participantes en las reuniones de padres y maestros?

Grupo A:

el / la estudiante:

- miedo
- alegría
- emoción
- alivio
- estrés
- nerviosismo
- otro:

Grupo B:

los padres:

- miedo
- alegría
- emoción
- alivio
- estrés
- nerviosismo
- otro:

Grupo C:

los maestros:

- miedo
- alegría
- emoción
- alivio
- estrés
- nerviosismo
- otro:

Paso 2. Las reacciones a las reuniones de padres y maestros. En los mismos grupos apunten dos reacciones posibles.

MODELO: *No me gusta que no haya intérprete desinteresado.*

Es sorprendente que. . . Temo que. . . (No) Me alegro de que. . .

Es interesante que. . . No es verdad que. . . (No) Me gusta que. . .

1. _____.

2. _____.

Paso 3. En grupos, contesten la pregunta: ¿Cuáles pueden ser los problemas (o ventajas) si un niño interpreta en las reuniones entre sus padres y sus maestros?

Paso 4. Compartan las respuestas al Paso 3 con el resto de la clase para generar una lista de los mayores problemas y ventajas de tener niños interpretando entre sus padres y sus maestros.

Las ventajas:

1. _____.

2. _____.

Los problemas:

1. _____.
2. _____.

C. Recursos y necesidades

Piensen en el tema del idioma como barrera en las reuniones de padres y maestros. Basándose en lo que hemos estudiado, ¿qué necesitan las personas que enfrentan esta situación? ¿Qué recursos ya existen?

	<i>necesidades:</i>	<i>recursos:</i>
MODELO:	<i>folletos escritos en español e inglés</i>	<i>los niños bilingües</i>

D. Oportunidades

Refiriéndose a las respuestas que apuntaron en la actividad C, ¿Cuáles son algunos de los productos o servicios que se podrían desarrollar para satisfacer algunas de las necesidades?

productos o servicios:
el imprimo de información escrita para los padres

E. Toda la clase

Hagan una lista en la pizarra; cada grupo debe contribuir un elemento a cada columna:

<i>recursos:</i>	<i>necesidades:</i>	<i>productos o servicios:</i>
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Gramática *gustar* y los verbos parecidos

Consulta la página xii de la guía gramatical:
“LOS GUSTOS Y LAS PREFERENCIAS”

F. El producto o servicio preferido

De la lista de posibles productos o servicios producida en la actividad E, escoge una idea. ¿Qué aspecto o aspectos te gusta(n) más? ¿Qué aspecto o aspectos te gusta(n) menos? ¿Por qué?

MODELO: *Me gusta la idea del imprimir de información en español para los padres, pero no me gusta que no ayude que se comuniquen los padres y los maestros durante la reunión.*

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