La enseñanza de la cultura en la clase de español de los negocios. Manuel Fernández-Conde Rodríguez

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This book, written completely in Spanish, appeals to a wide audience, ranging from high school instructors who may have never taught a Spanish-for-Business course, to university professors who have taught such courses many times. The book deals with a subject matter extensively examined in books on second language methodology in the US and Europe, but not usually examined from the perspective of teaching Spanish for Business: the teaching of culture in Spanish-for-Business classes, both Culture with a large C as in films, literature, and cinema and culture with a small c as in the ways and mores of different companies in the Spanish-speaking world.

Clearly written and with both a sound theoretical base and many practical examples, this text provides a European perspective on methodology. Although based on current theories popular worldwide, the work provides a corpus of ideas formed from the experience of teaching Peninsular Spanish instead of Latin American Spanish and mainly to non-American students. The author uses his extensive experience in Teaching Spanish as a Second Language only from the superficial aspects and does not analyze underlying factors. Nevertheless, this type of study of cultural aspects examines culture, such as improvisación, los tópicos, la personalización, las relaciones personales, la jerarquía, and culture, such as respeto a la norma. It relates these to the nine different videos, nine different aspects of Hispanic business culture, such as la enseñanza de la cultura en la clase de español de los negocios.

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The Spanish business world that many teachers of Spanish for Business in the United States may not have.


The first two sections provide the theoretical basis for the rest of the book. In section one, the author presents his theories for teaching culture in the Spanish-for-Business classroom, which are based on the use of Fernando Poyato’s theories of nonverbal communication. He believes that in many Spanish-for-Business texts, sociocultural elements are presented as totally separate from the linguistic objectives of the text or as only a way of presenting certain preselected examples of the language. He also mentions that in linguistic theory, culture is so much a part of language that one of the main expressions of culture is language. He emphasizes the need to develop cultural competence as an integral part of the popular language-learning methodology of communicative competence.

In his second section, Fernández-Conde Rodríguez talks about the relationship of languages for special purposes with discourse analysis and he proposes specific ways of studying languages for special purposes such as cases studies, simulations, and group projects. He gives us a brief history of the Spanish-for-Business classroom, which are based on the use of Fernando Poyato’s theories of nonverbal communication. He believes that in many Spanish-for-Business texts, sociocultural elements are presented as totally separate from the linguistic objectives of the text or as only a way of presenting certain preselected examples of the language. He also mentions that in linguistic theory, culture is so much a part of language that one of the main expressions of culture is language. He emphasizes the need to develop cultural competence as an integral part of the popular language-learning methodology of communicative competence.

The third section, “Rasgos socioculturales del español de los negocios,” mentions techniques taken from communication theory and pragmatics and states that it is not enough to learn a shared set of symbols but that the student must understand also the cultural meaning of these signs. A large part of this chapter is dedicated to nonverbal communication with scattered examples of differences between Spanish and other cultures. He mentions that since...
personal space is not as important in Spain as in other cultures, there are fewer words in Spanish with which to ask permission for invading someone’s personal space. He illustrates these differences with descriptions of various ways of sitting or standing and crossing arms.

The most interesting part of this section, albeit now outdated, describes the author’s study of the inclusion of culture in texts for Spanish for Business published in Spain between 1987 and 2003. He believes that only 35% of these texts refer to sociocultural factors in their tables of contents. In addition, most of these texts study culture only from the superficial aspects and do not analyze underlying factors. The texts usually concentrate on three topics: different customs for business negotiation in different countries, greetings and farewells, and the different concepts of time in different cultures.

The last section describes the methodology recommended by the author to teach Spanish for Business, which he bases mostly on ways of teaching nonverbal communication. His appendix includes four activities that can be used to teach culture in the Spanish-for-Business classroom. Three of them are based on contemporary Spanish and Argentine films. I find this the most useful part of the book, since he teaches forms of nonverbal communication through business situations in these three “propuestas practicas.”

The book provides an overview of methodology and the theoretical framework used in teaching culture in the Spanish-for-Business classroom from a European perspective. It is part of a series of books published in Spain called Cuadernos de didáctica del español that includes such interesting titles asenseñasenseñar, and La enseñanza del español a hispanohablantes by Kim Potowski, both topics of practical interest to teachers of Spanish for Business in the United States and not often dealt with in academic studies in the United States. The series is a valuable resource that should be consulted by all those working in the area of Spanish for Business.

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