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### USING TECHNOLOGY AS CONTEXT IN THE BUSINESS SPANISH PROGRAM: THE TASK-BASED APPROACH

This article discusses the use of technology to integrate the acquisition of business and communicative skills in a business Spanish program. It presents ways in which technology offers sources to contextualize language and business lessons, and reviews issues of context and its attendant research literature. In addition, this article reports on a task-based course project in which e-mail, the Internet, and Power Point are implemented as means to enhance the acquisition of both language and business skills. The aim of these task-based activities is to involve the students in a hands-on project to learn business principles and business language in a meaningful environment. The students will learn to:

- Apply Internet research skills for business using search engines specific to the target language,
- Acquire business vocabulary specific to the students' professional interests,
- Write at least two business letters,
- Discuss and negotiate how to organize information for the purpose of creating a coherent business plan,
- Improve writing through e-mail exchanges of messages,
- Work as a group,
- Develop skills for platform speaking appropriate to a professional audience: language patterns, protocol and the use of Power Point.

The first order of business in planning the use of technology as a serviceable tool in the classroom was to determine learning objectives. This was done to facilitate the choice of technology tools and functions in

order to develop a coherent teaching plan. It was determined that technology would be used as part of the contextual environment in which the students learn the language, not as an alternative delivery system for traditional lessons. Answers to the following questions guided the development of the objectives: What is going to be learned and what need will technology fulfill? How might technology enhance the delivery methods? Will technology be used only to enhance the delivery methods? Does the instructor improve student learning by using technology in her/his delivery, or will the students benefit more if they themselves use technology? How can technology be made a part of the contextual environment?

#### THE CONTEXT AND ITS ATTENDANT FACTORS

The general agreement in today's multiple approaches to teaching the acquisition of communicative skills in a foreign language centers around two issues: (1) language is best acquired when taught in meaningful environments (context); (2) the language of content that enhances the students career plans serves as a motivating variable which, in turn, improves learning (Tremblay; Rivers; Liow, Betts, and Leong; Ramage; Nostrand; Di Pietro; Gardner). Such conclusions do not surprise most language professionals, given today's environment in higher education in which the practical role of learning has emerged as an important component of the aims of traditional education in student decisions to pursue Foreign Language studies in academia.

Teaching in the artificial environment of the traditional classroom—a drawback in most types of instruction—poses special limitations for foreign language instruction because speech takes place in an inauthentic *physical* context. The classroom cannot duplicate the real, multiple contexts which are natural to language development: the country where the language is spoken, and the psychological/cultural space specific to the language (Fryer). The “context problem” for foreign language instruction—not being able to replicate the natural context in which language is developed and acquired—was and still is considered a challenge for the foreign language instructor. This challenge is increased by other forces, such as the social and professional reluctance to accept alternative delivery methods and teaching styles, and the lack of appropriate funding to encourage and support innovation, travel abroad and language camps.

Although the resistance to change prevails, a variety of pressures have created a demand for innovation and change. Among the sources of pres-

sure for change are a generalized demand from the public for improvements in teaching and learning, the assessment movement, accreditation bodies, and state legislatures. In recent times, active components of foreign language education have come to include *finding*, *inventing*, *recreating*, and *appropriating* contexts and contents in which a foreign language flourishes as a learnable skill in the classroom, at home, or in the office (Kasper; Kauffman; Kramersch 1993; McCain and Ray; Rivers 1992; Araiza; Boyle; Collins and Green; Galloway). The adoption of new methodologies by FL teachers has increased success in achieving the enduring goal of the profession: language acquisition for communication.

The use of authentic texts and contexts figures prominently among the teaching techniques that have produced improved performance and acquisition of language. Language is no longer taught in isolation: cultural frames or constructs, and particular cultural expressions other than literature have emerged to aid in the learning process. Authentic contexts have been discovered all around us. Reviewing the conference programs, titles of presentations of many national language associations, and titles of publications, it is readily apparent that there is progress toward bringing authenticity to the classroom, creating a veritable explosion in innovative approaches. What seemed to have been just another classroom fad is proving to be a staple of language teaching. Traditionally, contextualization of lessons has been difficult without travel abroad, or language immersion offered through language houses or language camps.

Prior to the emergence of new technologies, various creative suggestions for teaching language in context were implemented. Boyle states that “contextualizing vocabulary, making it meaningful to our students, together with pleasurable practice time and challenging, communicative activities are fundamental...” (231). Kasper believes in associating techniques through the development of the mnemonic keyword method which makes use of “acoustic and imagery links between the foreign word and its English translation” (244). Others, such as Brooks, urge us to recreate an environment of “real functional language” in order to produce competent users. He joins the call from many others, such as Halliday; Collins, and Green; Kramersch; and Sinclair and Coulthard to urge creation of “social context[s] in which the foreign language is to be learned” (237). Di Prieto sums up the fundamental premise for such a movement toward *authenticity* of contexts, in the opening lines of his book on scenarios: “Learning a new language should be as meaningful as

any other social activity. It should entail the same dynamic tension that enlivens real-life encounters” (vii). The author explains the ways in which verbal interactions can be planned for the foreign language classroom using what he has called the “scenarios.”<sup>1</sup> The Vygotskian model of learning serves as the theoretical foundation of Di Pietro’s approach. As Di Pietro asserts, Vygotsky proposed that language interaction should be regulated by three factors: **the object** or “forms and structures of the target language;” **the other**, which refers to the teacher and all the other learners involved in the class; and **the self**, which refers to the individual learner. The scenarios involve these three factors to create real-life encounters in which all parties are closely involved. Another form of active participation develops with the use of any method that allows “real life” problems to be resolved by the students, such as analyzing cases in the foreign language classroom, solving a mystery, or proposing solutions to real contemporary problems.

New technologies radically change the historic impediments to language learning. They offer opportunities to recreate the context in the classroom, at home, or better yet, in the learner’s mind. The possibilities are endless. The now primitive, but always reliable, audio-tapes and videos, and the interactive CD-ROM, which at some point might be expected to work flawlessly, will yield to virtual reality programs. While virtual reality technology for recreating contexts in the classroom has not yet been sufficiently developed, it is definitely within the range of the possible. In the meantime, there are readily available tools which, if they are used well and are carefully integrated into the language objectives, aid in the acquisition of both the language and business skills.

#### TECHNOLOGY AS CONTEXT

Since the times of the language laboratory, which primarily used audiotapes, it has been the hope of language professionals that the technology would increase contact with the spoken language and this would yield better FL proficiency and L2 acquisition. The idea of using technology as a support system for foreign language learning has always offered an alternative to the missing natural context. In the absence of a natural context for performing in the target language, recordings, and

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between a scenario and a simulation or dramatization in the classroom is the element of unpredictability or surprise. The term scenario is used by the author, as he suggests “to give a label to real-life happenings that entail the unexpected and require the use of language to resolve them” (Di Prieto, vii).

later the structured language lab, came to the rescue. But the language lab, although effective for some students, results in a very dull experience for many, becoming more a hurdle for both the instructor and the learner than a useful tool (Smith, Otto). In spite of its drawbacks, the lab became a permanent feature in foreign language programs. Where else, or how else, might a student improve aural/oral language skills by hearing native speakers and gain unlimited opportunities to practice the language? Other than travel abroad, this was the only resource available to gain listening comprehension.

Television magic soon arrived, with the advent of the videocassette and the VCR, making culture and language portable commodities. Discussions and publications relating to the integration of video technology into the curriculum became a fixed component of our profession. One collection of selected papers presented at a Project for International Communication Studies conference on Video in Language Teaching stands out because their assertions about the usefulness of videos in the classroom remain viable today (Smith). The conference was sponsored by the Annenberg/CPB Project, the Goethe Institute, the U.S. Department of Education and the French Cultural Services. The prominence of the sponsoring groups underlines the fact that video technology as a teaching tool, whether as an aid for instruction or as the main teaching vehicle, is still taken seriously in today's curriculum. Moreover, it seems that the trend has already reached a stage beyond merely using video as teaching for delivery of information; instead, interactive uses of video technology, interfaced with written text and other activities, have become increasingly common.

Video technology, as a permanent feature of language teaching, has been used since the decade of the 80's. This video revolution was possible because—finally—copying, transmitting and presenting videos became easier and far more accessible. Soon this was followed with the interactive videodisc, distance learning through both telephone and television hook-ups, and, of course, the full-blown computer age. The foreign language profession now has endless possibilities, including interactive multimedia with its combination of sound, image and text. However, others still believe that because of the relative inaccessibility of foolproof technology, using it in the classroom is not yet within reach of the general teaching and learning populations.

Computer assisted language learning, in the guise of multimedia programs, access to the Internet or even distance learning classes, is at present a must in any foreign language curriculum. The support that technology can provide in the classroom is limited only by the imagination. It is what the instructor does with technology that will ultimately lead to learning.<sup>2</sup> Since creating and maintaining a course that uses technology can be a labor-intensive and costly experience, Orlando Kelm reminds us, “in a very real sense, if the use of technology does not increase performance, it may not be worth our investment in time, money, and energy” (230). The issues at present seem to relate to the use of available technology to improve learning, or, how to insure a proper fit between technology and the pedagogical aims of a particular course. In other words, we need to develop ways to use technology to enhance learning, rather than merely to jump on the bandwagon.

In the last two decades serious challenges for teachers have been presented by teaching business language, also known as foreign languages for the professions, discipline-based foreign languages, or content-based foreign language teaching. Some of these challenges, fundamental to the profession, can be summarized as follows: (1) The content of the courses is based on the language of professions in which the language instructor, for the most part, lacks experience or academic preparation in the content area. (2) The language of business changes very rapidly. (3) The available textbooks age very rapidly. (4) The students’ preferences are to acquire communication skills and skills for their chosen professions. Taking into consideration these factors, how can available technology, in combination with clear pedagogical objectives, facilitate learning in the business FL classroom?

#### USING E-MAIL, THE INTERNET AND POWER POINT: AN EXAMPLE

Three major activities take place in an Advanced Business Spanish class in which the students use e-mail, the Internet and Power Point. The virtues of adapting these three features of modern technology are several. Relatively inexpensive, they are accessible to most students in university libraries, computer centers, dorms, and in public libraries. They are nearly always available in the homes of students, and most importantly, all three are features of the modern world, which form part of the concept

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<sup>2</sup> “It is hard for us to remember that it is not what the teacher does but what he or she gets the students to do that results in learning” (Glick). As quoted by Orlando R. Kelm, p. 229.

known as “computer literacy.” Contrary to the old-style language lab, e-mail, the Internet, and Power Point are not “teaching” tools per se, but tools routinely used in the workplace and in daily life. The demystification of technology works in the learner’s favor when it becomes a teaching tool. The context in which learners develop their classroom tasks is a “natural” environment akin to the way we perform certain acts in daily life such as sending and receiving messages (e-mail), gathering information (Internet) and presenting information (Power Point).

#### INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY AND LANGUAGE: CLASSROOM TASKS

As a class project, groups of two, three or four students, depending upon class size, are assigned to research a major topic, which they present at the end of the term. The preparation of the project is part of the course activities, since the project requires the use of business functional skills. The topics always consist of a particular industry in relation to a Spanish speaking country. The students may choose several scenarios for their project. They might choose to enter a market of an established product (“Selling Communication Satellites in Mexico”), introduce a product in a new market (“Internet Cafés in the Mexican Market”), find a market in the U.S. for a product which is produced in a foreign market (“Importing Tequila Coolers”), or manufacture a product in a foreign country for export to other countries, including the U.S. (“Making Uniforms for Health Professionals”).

The first day of class the students begin developing their projects. Practice using e-mail begins immediately. They exchange e-mail messages summarizing their discussions about the topic. All messages are sent with a copy to the instructor. The instructor forwards them to the entire class. The second day, the students e-mail the instructor, describing the project they wish to research and explaining their rationale. The process is repeated, as they send messages to the instructor, and messages are forwarded to all. Once individual students have chosen a topic to research for a particular country and an industry, they make use of Internet resources. The students send reports of their findings to the instructor with the hyperlink, indicating the source of the information. The project consists of the steps students must follow, using the Internet and e-mail, to accomplish their research objectives. The final report, using Power Point, is presented to the whole class.

The class determines which areas need to be researched according to the project. For example, a project relating to a country might cover several of these areas: the country's regulatory climate, the local and foreign competition, transportation, storage, political and cultural risks, indigenous culture and its values, government structure and role in business, the industry, the target market, market research needs, attempts by other entrepreneurs, project financing, the stability of the country's currency, the general health of the economy, domestic reports about industry, foreign reports about industry (in libraries and from the U.S. government agencies about the industry or about the country), or anecdotes about national idiosyncrasies.

Since the students know about each other's projects, they are all able to participate in discussions. Other readings, furnished by the teacher, strengthen, clarify, or expand on the topics they are researching. For example, a published report might forecast Argentinean consumer trends for the year 2000. The students need to send letters of inquiry regarding several matters. The class determines what kind of letter should be sent. With guidance from the teacher, they determine that they might need letters to request information about an industry. For example, requesting information from the Chilean government about regulatory policies regarding the wine industry or requesting a report from the government of Puerto Rico about the status of the law which allows U.S. manufacturers to defer the taxes on profits from establishing factories in Puerto Rico.

The task requires active integration between students and instructor, and among the students themselves. Students need to have a clear understanding of the requirement that they use computers to undertake class tasks when they register for the course.

#### CLOSING REMARKS

The reluctance to use technology in the classroom among some sectors of the teaching profession is due to well-known reasons: (1) The Instructor lacks familiarity with computer systems and mistrusts their efficiency; (2) The system fails to perform as expected too many times; (3) The instructor's frustration with the equipment soon turns into rejection of all use of technology; (4) The Instructor lacks proper training; (5) The instructor does not know how technology can improve learning; (6) The students question the benefit of technology and, (7) The task presents too much trouble. These are all legitimate misapprehensions, but

they can and should be dispelled. Technology need not intrude in the classroom just to give the appearance of modernity or innovation. Technology alone does not lead to learning simply because the instructor presents material with Power Point. However, if it facilitates learning, Power Point does have a place in the classroom. If it reaches beyond the aesthetics of presentation, and aids in learning, then the students should use Power Point.

The potential positive role that technology can play in the improvement of foreign language acquisition raises the hopes of many professionals in the field who eagerly await the next breakthrough in better language learning applications. The expectations that in the future, multimedia lessons will turn classrooms and homework into largely enjoyable and successful learning experiences are a tangible dream in many instructors' minds. Technology in foreign language programs, and in particular the business FL classroom, can solve many problems, it is believed. The tools of technology are everywhere and the desire to use them well is also present among many educators. Their actual application into a coherent classroom plan that would ultimately benefit the student does not take place by adding class activities using technology. The next step seems to follow common sense: to find ways to adapt technology to the learning/teaching processes. However, to arrive at such an obvious conclusion does not guarantee that those interested in using technology will choose an approach conducive to positive learning for the student, and a satisfying teaching experience for the instructor, in spite of good intentions and after endless hours of training and preparation. The answer seems to be the appropriate combination of sound curricular materials packaged in commercially available CD-ROM format, or in the Internet, combined with a well-serviced, technologically equipped classroom and technologically trained instructors.

There are some multimedia programs available on the market that are specifically designed for the Spanish business classroom, such as *Español de negocios*, which comes in both video format and CD-ROM. The program, designed and made in Spain, presents short video clips, accompanied by the Spanish text and English translations. The content, exclusively business topics, is of excellent quality. Short skits cover topics such as finance, marketing, human resources, hiring and firing, and fraud using a background specific to the culture. Another program, available through the CIBER at the University of Texas-Austin, is Orlando

Kelm's program on business Spanish, available in CD-ROM and on the Internet. It is a very good program; at this point in time it is possibly the best available through the Internet, and very affordable in its CD-ROM format. This program features cases and video clips with anecdotes on issues of both business and culture by students from all of Latin America. It is an innovative program that offers the opportunity to hear multiple accents of spoken Spanish. The written texts, and their translation in English, are furnished for all video clips.

An excellent Internet source for business Spanish can be found at <http://www.businessspanish.com/>. This comprehensive, user-friendly site covers more than 100 business themes as well as cultural notes on business etiquette of the Spanish speaking countries. It includes recorded audio, grammar lessons, useful links, and a complete dictionary of business terms. The site also offers excellent links to economic and business news in leading newspapers from all Spanish speaking countries (except Cuba). Radio news summaries, with very clear audio are also available. A student may access the radio by choosing a country through the site's links. After selecting Argentina, for example, they might proceed to select the newspaper *Clarín* and then click on one of the radio choices found by scrolling on the left of the screen. This site is free of charge.

The book *El plan de empresa* (Oller et al), with its accompanying document in a Word 6.1 diskette, is another excellent source for the business Spanish classroom. The students find in the diskette a Word document with questions guiding them in developing a business, or a business plan. One file guides them through all the steps to develop the business, and a second file with Excel documents for budgets and other types of documents requiring graphics and tables. The file offers an opportunity for students to practice writing, while offering (through the questions, graphics and tables) the lexicon that students need.

All the programs mentioned above combine activities that enhance the acquisition of language, as well as business skills. They are either free or easily available on the market, and can be used in the classroom with task-based activities. These programs integrate the business content with communicative skills and can be delivered in meaningful and familiar contexts which are features of the modern world: the Internet, e-mail, and Power Point.

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## APPENDIX

## Syllabus

Spanish 4200 (Advanced Business language)  
Dr. Carmen Vega Carney

DML 116 - Teléfonos 978-7282, 978-7255, Fax 439-1435  
correo electrónico: carneyc@t-bird.edu  
Horas de oficina: Martes 12:00 - 4:00

## I. Course

In Spanish 4200 we study the language of business as it appears in contemporary Spanish. We study the lexicon and language protocols appropriate to the basic functions of business.

## II. Objectives

The students who successfully complete this course will be able to:

1. integrate language, culture and business skills
2. use language which is appropriate in a given business context
3. develop other communicative behaviors pertinent to a specific context, such as a job interview, a professional presentation, negotiating details of a business plan
4. use contemporary business vocabulary in class discussions
5. write a curriculum vitae
6. write two business letters
7. demonstrate professional presentation skills for a business environment (body language, vocabulary, expressions, and use of "Power Point")
8. complete a research project
9. analyze and summarize business articles
10. use the Internet in a Spanish environment to research the business climate of a specific industry

## III. Outline (See enclosed Course Grid)

## IV. Textbooks

Woodford & Schmitt. *Comercio y Márketing*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.

En reserva:

Ollé, Monserrat et al. *El plan de Empresa. Cómo planificar la creación de una empresa*. Barcelona: Alfaomega, 1998.

The professor will furnish other readings.

Articles will be taken from various journals, magazines, and newspapers. We will use two movie clips. An "article" could be read or presented through an alternative visual medium.

V. Procedures and methods (See "Instrucciones")

VI. Grading

Grade Scale

A	95 - 100
A-	90 - 94
B+	87 - 89
B	83 - 86
B-	80 - 82
C+	77 - 79
C	73 - 76
C-	70 - 72
D+	67 - 69
D	63 - 66
D-	60 - 62
F	59 and below

VII. Course Instructions (See "Instrucciones")

1. Please type all written assignments. Use double space.
2. Final presentations
  - Use Power Point
  - Avoid grammatical errors
  - No reading is allowed. Please use the text in the slides to guide your presentation

VIII. Attendance

1. Only justified and excused absences.
2. Missing assignments due to unexcused absences will be recorded as "0".
3. Late assignments will not be graded.
4. Absences due to job interview will be excused with written verification.

IX. Honor Code

The provisions of the Honor Code found in your student handbook will be observed.

**INSTRUCCIONES**

TODAS LAS TAREAS ESCRITAS SE PREPARAN “A MÁQUINA.”  
(COMPUTADORA, COMPUTADOR, ORDENADOR, PC)

NO SE ACEPTARÁN TAREAS FUERA DE LA FECHA INDICADA.

**TAREAS PARA ENTREGAR**

1. Bosquejos sobre el proyecto final (Para presentación en clase)
2. Copia del proyecto final (máximo de unas 15 páginas)
3. Algunas tareas extraordinarias, por ejemplo: ejercicio gramaticales o ejercicios del libro de texto, otros . . .
4. Currículum Vitae
5. Composición en que usted describe sus atributos personales y profesionales
6. Cartas

**PROYECTO FINAL**

1. Dos personas por proyecto
2. ENTREGUE TITULO POR ESCRITO
3. Entregue bosquejo (outline) el domingo 6 de septiembre durante la descripción de su proyecto

En la presentación final usen apoyos tecnológicos como, “Power Point.” La presentación visual debe estar libre de errores gramaticales.

Esta es una presentación formal. NO PUEDEN LEER DE NOTAS.

**VALOR DE LAS ACTIVIDADES**

Examen # 1	100 puntos
Curriculum	50
Dramatización	50
Cartas	100
Informes - proyecto final	100
Examen # 2	100
Proyecto de fin de curso	200
Participación en clase	100
Tareas especiales	100
Examen Final	100
Total	1000 puntos

**ACTIVIDADES**

Lecturas y discusión – Lecturas asignadas para la discusión en clase.

Pronunciación – Repetición de algunos sonidos. Se leen en clase algunos renglones del texto de las lecturas asignadas. La profesora corrige la pronunciación.

“En sus propias palabras” – Los alumnos preparan diálogo o conversación usando el vocabulario y temas de las lecturas asignadas.

Los alumnos presentan informes sobre el desarrollo de su proyecto final.

Internet – Los alumnos presentan informes sobre los sitios relacionados con su proyecto final.

Correo electrónico – Los alumnos envían mensajes en que discuten el desarrollo del proyecto de fin de curso. Negocian el tema, título, la industria y la manera en que se acercarán al proyecto.

Noticias – Discusión breve de alguna noticia del momento.

Otras Actividades – Actividades tanto escritas como orales. Tienen como objetivo el desarrollo de destrezas prácticas de la lengua y de la comunicación profesional.

Proyecto final – Esta es una actividad de grupo. Los alumnos harán una presentación oral.

Dramatización – La entrevista de trabajo. Dramatización en clase.