

LINGUISTICS AND THE SPANISH CURRICULUM

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Perhaps the most noteworthy contribution of linguistics to the foreign language curriculum has been the development of highly specific descriptive models, which while perhaps shunned as unsatisfactory in contemporary theoretical linguistics, nonetheless provide the language teacher with a viable alternative to rambling, impressionistic and anecdotal accounts of language structure. The descriptive methodology reached its apogee in contrastive linguistics, which continues to offer valuable insights into the manner in which the student's native language affects and interferes with his learning of additional languages. Without such a comparative approach the language teacher is often reduced to enforcing meaningless imitation, with neither teacher nor student being aware of the precise areas of difficulty and the means of remedying them. Even remaining within a single-language approach, with no overt comparative strategies, descriptive linguistics has often streamlined textbook presentations by organizing materials according to valid syntactic and/or lexical groupings. In most such cases, the fruits of linguistic application are passed along to the student in the form of (hopefully) improved presentations, while the details of the applications are reserved for the teachers, or sometimes only for the teacher-trainers. The general feeling has often been that explicit mention of linguistic ideas may unduly frighten the student to the point of distracting or deflecting him from the task at hand.

This last undercurrent of hesitation has not always extended to more advanced foreign language classes where, just as in advanced courses in any other discipline, teachers have often felt free to introduce a variety of linguistic topics. Such classes are usually reserved for the language major and/or the prospective teacher, who is told that learning all about applied linguistics is for his own good. To judge by the reaction of many teacher candidates upon running the gauntlet of applied linguistics, there is certainly a

divergence of opinion as to what constitutes their best interests. Classes in practical phonetics, for example, teach phonetic transcription, via the international phonetic alphabet, and frequently present the sounds of a language in terms of phonemes and allophones (although avoiding the more difficult problems of phonemic determination and morphophonemics), and frequently courses in advanced syntax have attempted to use some sort of transformation-generative framework to offer an alternative to traditional taxonomic presentations. The results in advanced classes are mixed, and yet few would suggest that the incorporation of linguistic matters into advanced language courses be entirely eliminated. What is urgently needed is a reassessment of the role of linguistics in the training of teachers and the feasibility or desirability of linguistics classes for advanced students of foreign languages. At the present time, these matters remain unresolved, and in most university curricula work continues without any thought of comprehensive revision.

There are several ways in which students' awareness of an interest in their own and other languages may be sharpened through the addition of curricular materials which in the best of circumstances may be both interesting and useful. The following remarks will be devoted largely to the teaching of Spanish, since it is the field with which I am most personally familiar, and also because in a certain sense it enjoys a privileged position in the United States due to the high proportion of Spanish speakers in many parts of the country. It should be apparent, nonetheless, that many of the comments may be applied equally well to other foreign language classes, and some even to the English classes (for native speakers of English).

In addition to teaching foreign language classes, I have also taught general linguistics courses, both formally and informally, and I have made a dual observation which is no doubt familiar to most linguists. The first is that a large percentage of the students in such classes already know or are actively studying one or more languages other than their native language. The second is that for those students who know no language other than English, it is often quite difficult and painful to bring to the surface for explicit discussion the native speaker 'intuitions' which we are all presumed to have. Returning to the first point, there appears to be a chicken and egg situation. On the one hand, it is unquestioned that certain

individuals have both a facility for learning foreign languages (and here should also be included artificial languages such as computer compilers, Morse code, and formal logics) and the desire to do so; an interest in learning languages would naturally be expected to evolve into an interest in learning about languages in general, i.e. in linguistics. On the other hand, it surely cannot be coincidental that exposure to languages other than the native language, particularly if the second language is learned after childhood, appears together with an interest in learning more about the structure of language. As for the students who know no foreign language, and for at least some of those who have been bilingual since childhood, differing language structures have never been brought to their attention and as a consequence they may find it difficult to explicitly discuss that which they have previously taken for granted. The foreign language student is, whether he knows it or not (and most do not), in a uniquely advantageous position vis-a-vis the study of linguistics. On the one hand he is the speaker of a language, fully developed, in use since infancy, with all its subtleties, nuances, and has the rich intuitions which one associates with university-level adults. On the other hand, the student has more recently been exposed to a second, perhaps widely differing language, often through an explicit step-by-step comparison. In some way or another, the message has been brought home that the manner of thinking and organizing structures in the native language is not the only way, and that other radically different ways of organizing conceptual data into linguistic form may be equally valid, and indeed may present distinct advantages in certain areas over the native language. Many monolingual students have considerable difficulty when they first begin the study of a foreign language, even one, such as Spanish or French, which has both a high percentage of recognizable lexical items and a syntactic system which shares much in common with English. Once the initial hurdles are overcome, such students usually find it much easier to learn another language, even one not from the Romance group; several of our students have, through the kind offices of the MSU Linguistics Department, gone on to learn non-Indo-European languages.

The foreign language teacher is in a position to capitalize upon the students' expanded awareness, to further the process of making explicit linguistic intuitions, and it will usually be found

that students are receptive to ideas couched in a linguistically oriented framework. For example, one of the major differences between first language learning and formalized university foreign language instruction is the degree of explicit grammatical analysis that is often present in the latter. To be sure, the grammatical structural analyses of elementary language texts are neither as profound nor as complete and accurate as a professional linguist might desire, but at the same time they do offer the consequence that students may be assumed to have at least a working acquaintance with simple sentence parsing. At one point it could be assumed that all high school graduates, regardless of whether or not they had studied a foreign language, would have received such training through their English classes, but alas, apparently such is no longer the case in many schools, and students entering university level foreign language classes are often exposed for the first time to logical and syntactic analysis of sentences. Whatever the source of the students' grammatical awareness, however, it may be either a boon or a bane to their further learning, depending upon the course structure, the instructor, and the students' own motivation. Every language teacher has had the ambivalent experience of the student who is so eager to learn the why and the how behind each new construction that class presentations are diverted by excessive questions, and the student's performance on exams may indicate that the interest in grammatical analysis has not been matched by an equal attention to other details, such as vocabulary, morphology and the like. However, it appears that at the university level the majority of students feel more comfortable with at least a modicum of grammatical analysis, to the point where they become uneasy if no indication is given at any point of the structural motives behind what they are learning.

In the particular case of Spanish, the overall syntactic patterns present few major problems to the English-speaking student, since they are nearly the same in both languages. Aside from the everpresent question of vocabulary, Spanish differs substantially from English in having a much more developed morphological system, including more and more varied verb conjugations, familiar vs. formal second-person pronouns and adjectives, and three levels of demonstrative distance. Such matters may be taught in a purely descriptive memorization approach, but at times the presentation may be improved, particularly

in second and third year classes, by showing alternate forms and providing insights into the dynamic structure of the language, as well as offering well-founded comparisons with English. At the basic level, it is too easy to confuse students with a wealth of detail, including alternative forms, stylistic levels and excessive comparisons and explanations, and many an otherwise excellent textbook has failed for precisely this reason. On the other hand, second and third year courses presuppose that the student, while certainly not having mastered the basic grammatical elements, has been exposed to all of them at least once before, and something new must be added to challenge the interest and stimulate new enthusiasm. Frequently second year review grammar courses consist of nothing more than a simple repetition, faster and more condensed, of the first year material, and third year courses, when not simply involved in reading, often require sentence and composition writing utilizing grammatical structures that are not significantly more advanced than those presented in the first year. What is lacking (among other things) is a fresh approach to presenting the same material, an approach that acknowledges the students' greater linguistic sophistication, merely by virtue of having passed once through the material and formed implicit contrasts with English. This sophistication, embryonic as it may be, can be stimulated rather than insulted, by placing the basic grammatical facts in perspectives that reflect more extensive areas of the language. The ways in which this can be done are virtually endless, and depend largely on the interests of the instructor, the receptiveness of the students, and the limitations of the syllabus. I will mention a few examples, none of which from a technical point of view is highly sophisticated, and yet which in practice have proved at least moderately successful in intermediate Spanish courses.

The area which students most readily respond to, and one having little to do with technical analysis, is the sociolinguistic dimension, including stylistic levels, dialect differences, speech of men and women, and, significantly, speech of Hispanics in the United States. Unlike French and even unlike English as taught in the United States or Britain, there is no single universally accepted dialect of Spanish taught as 'standard', especially from the standpoint of pronunciation and non-technical vocabulary. True, in Europe most courses center around an educated Madrid pronunciation (the seat of

the Royal Academy) while most courses in the Americas rely on a version which might be typically found among educated speakers in several inland Latin American capitals, including Mexico City, Lima, Quito and Bogotá. Due to several phonological peculiarities (particularly an apical /s/ and the presence of the interdental fricative /θ/) the Castilian variety is readily perceived as 'foreign' to American students of Spanish, but even the 'Pan-American' or 'general American Spanish' (a nonexistent entity, but a convenient fiction for textbook writers) is not at all typical of the brands of Spanish that the American student is most likely to encounter close to home. Leaving aside questions of colloquial style and level of education, this urban highlands Spanish differs in several significant phonological, prosodic and of course lexical details from the speech of first or second generation Mexican Americans (the majority of whom come from northern Mexico or the southwestern United States) or Americans of Cuban or Puerto Rican background. The latter dialects differ most significantly from the type of Spanish most usually encountered in textbooks, language lab tapes, prepared films and lectures, etc.; for example, syllable final /s/ is strongly aspirated or disappears, initial /y/ is affricated, final /n/ is velarized, and the patterns of intonation are different from those usually taught to beginning students. The speech of those Mexican Americans designated as 'Chicanos' preserves more consonantal articulations, although cases of aspiration and deletion do occur, but there are also phonological peculiarities, as well as a variety of archaic verb forms and other items, found sometimes even in the speech of educated speakers. Encountering such speakers represents both a challenge and a source of potential confusion for the beginning Spanish student; he wishes to relate the Spanish he has learned in his classes to that which he hears about him, and is led to the conclusion that one of the variants is somehow 'wrong' or 'substandard'. If the student has been taught by a native speaker of English who has learned Spanish, there may be a certain amount of mistrust of the authenticity of the teacher's model, which is usually based on similar normative textbook experiences. In the case, typical at the university level, where the student has been taught by a sequence of teaching assistants from various countries, he nearly always will have encountered the omnipresent prejudices and connotations surround-

ing certain varieties, and may be led to form conclusions which are factually erroneous.

It would be out of place in most language-skills courses to overburden the student with a wealth of dialectal variants or possibilities for each item or style of pronunciation. Nonetheless, the instructor can profitably introduce those items most characteristic of the Spanish dialects in question and can, in the course of classroom drills, show the student the differences between the textbook version and the forms most likely to be encountered in the nearby environment.¹ In this fashion the student can develop his own template, matching new utterances heard outside the classroom with those he has learned formally. Such an awareness comes only with time, but if a systematic comparison is built into the course structures, the time for such learning will automatically be set aside.

The sociolinguistic dimension may also be approached via other channels, for example speech differences conditioned by sex or educational level. Sex-related differences, while not numerous (unless such factors as intonation and gestures are considered) nonetheless occur, and the male student who has unconsciously or unknowingly appropriated feminine-type forms from a female instructor may be the object of ridicule or misunderstanding later. It is easy enough to point out, when appropriate, differential choices of words, forms more likely to be preferred by one sex or the other. In general there are more forms reserved for women than for men (curses apart) and thus perhaps it is only necessary to point out these 'marked' forms. The teacher must of course be aware of such differences in order for the presentation to be authentic, but surely any conscientious teacher would want to investigate such areas, even if initially possessing little competence in the field. As for the question of educational level, I tell my students that in the proper circumstances, which is to say nearly always to one degree or another, it is acceptable to speak 'sloppy' Spanish, provided that it is done as a native speaker would do it, and not utilizing carryovers from English. They are shown how artificial and stilted perfectly formed and enunciated English sentences can sound in casual situations, and the stage is set for dropping hints, now and then, as to how to relax the style in Spanish. It is impossible to convey the full repertoire

of stylistic ranges for foreign language students, but certain salient ideas may be pointed out, including types of phonetic erosion and a few morphological variants considered less formal. Syntactically, once the students have struggled to master the intricacies of the Spanish subjunctive, a truly masterful achievement by any reckoning, they may be shown how native speakers themselves avoid or misuse it in less guarded moments. Such lessons in blunting the edge of grammatical precision must come far enough along in the learning process so as not to cause confusion and must be presented in such a fashion that the students' linguistic maturity will enable them to slip in and out of more casual styles at the proper moments.

In more advanced classes, particularly phonetics classes, where explicit mention is made of linguistic matters, the crucial role of syllabic structure in determining dialect differences and stylistic levels should be emphasized. Unlike English, Spanish exhibits few differences in the pronunciation of vowels among dialects; variant consonantal articulations characterize the majority of dialect differences. These variations frequently depend upon relative position within the syllable. Moreover, stylistic variation, including relative strength of consonants (deletion, aspiration, consonantal substitutions, affrication, assimilation, etc.) make critical reference to syllabic structure. Syllabic structure also enters into the formation, modification, dissolution and division of consonantal groups, following the simple but essential rule that a group of consonants can begin a syllable if and only if it can begin a word. This fact, coupled with the general desire for open syllables and the subordinate rule that a consonant may end a syllable only if it may end a word, accounts for the large amount of modification and deletion of syllable-final consonants. A further fact relating to syllabic structure is the hierarchy of positional strength, which relates to the predominance of reinforced (affricated or occlusive) pronunciations; in Spanish the hierarchy is approximately: absolute initial, syllable-initial after a consonant, syllable-medial, intervocalic, and syllable-final. These rudimentary facts, when built into phonetics and pronunciation courses, serve the additional function of allowing the student to understand the range of phonetic possibilities found among all dialects of Spanish.

Another area in which linguistic matters may be discussed is the

phenomenon which, for lack of a better title, I call 'conflict between syntax and semantics'² or for the more timorous, 'conflict between grammatical form and meaning'. In simplest terms, this means that some phrases or constructions, while being analyzed according to the syntactic model in one fashion, may actually be perceived as 'meaning' something quite different in the popular analysis. As an example, consider the verb haber in its existential function, corresponding to English there is, there are, etc. In the present tense, the sole form is hay (regular third-person singular of haber plus the archaic locative adverb y which is not a current morpheme). Haber in this function remains invariant with respect to person and number in all tenses. Grammarians, both classical and modern, have debated the syntactic structure of constructions with haber³. The accompanying noun is clearly not the subject of the verb, but the matter is still far from resolution. In nearly all other sentences consisting only of a noun and a verb (in the absence of other syntactic markers) the two words stand in the relation subject + verb. Whence the popular analysis, that wishes to make haber agree in number with the accompanying noun, despite grammatical proscriptions. In the present tense, the morpheme y inhibits such false concordance, which however frequently occurs in other tenses. Students of an English language background often make the same 'mistake'; rather than simply correcting their error, one may point out not only the interference from English (which does make the verbal concordance) but the conflict within the Spanish language itself, which induces even native speakers to commit the same transgression, albeit for different reasons. Somehow the knowledge that Spanish speakers themselves may in unguarded moments fall into the same traps seems to encourage the student, while at the same time the increased awareness of the difficult situation motivates him to learn the more acceptable forms.

Among the many similar cases of syntactical-semantic conflict, another which causes intractable difficulties for English-speaking students involves the verb gustar, lit. 'to be pleasing to', and similar verbs. This verb corresponds semantically to English 'to like' but formally the structure is that of something being pleasing to someone.⁴ In particular, gustar agrees with the objects which please, rather than with the individual pleased, in contrast with

English. Naturally enough, students are tempted to conjugate such verbs in a transitive fashion corresponding to the English verbs. Unlike with haber, Spanish speakers do not make this erroneous analysis. However, when instances of gustar and similar verbs are embedded in more complex sentences, the great deal of hesitation, variation and outright error that occurs indicates that many speakers may 'think' of gustar as some sort of transitive verb.⁵

In more advanced classes, syntactic models may be developed to explain these deviations and hesitations, but even in more elementary classes the students' linguistic insights may be developed. It appears nowadays that the majority of students entering the university have little or no formal awareness of the syntactic structure of English, and therefore such syntactic training may serve a dual function.

There is another area which has drawn many students into pursuing courses in linguistics, an area which the instructor trained in linguistics or philology must often put down to keep from overpowering the entire course. This is the area of language history, etymology and lexical similarities. At the graduate level, courses in the history of Spanish are frequently so taxonomic and detailed as to bore all but the most dedicated students. Interspersed into undergraduate courses, however, etymological information of a high degree of sophistication may be presented, in a suitable anecdotal form, in such a way as to facilitate learning of Spanish and at the same time to whet the appetite for further knowledge. Spanish shares a large cognate vocabulary with English; the Latinate roots arrived in English both through learned borrowing and through contact with French. Greek elements took the former route. A number of the better elementary texts contain correspondences of morphology, to enable the student to more readily identify cognate forms, and even this treatment may often be expanded, with no significant loss of precious lesson time. For just one example, the process of diphthongization in certain verb stems ('stem-changing verbs') is usually treated as specific only to the verbal system. In reality it is nothing of the sort, for the diphthongization, which occurs under stress, extends integrally to adjectives and nouns, and many nominal paradigms exhibiting the same alternations may be found. Often the cognate English forms are more readily identified in the non-diphthongized forms;

thus a further value accrues to the teaching of cognate forms. The students learn at once a new set of related forms, a bit of comparative Romance philology and a bit of Spanish historical linguistics, all relatively painlessly, and in a fashion more significant than simply memorizing lists of vocabulary.

The preceding suggestions seem to be nothing but a patchwork of isolated linguistic examples, having nothing in common except for the fact that they introduce, in some form or another, linguistic matters into the foreign language class. In fact this impression is absolutely correct, for after all a foreign language class is not, in our current university systems, a linguistics class, nor is there any indication that it should be. At the same time, whether or not they go on to take linguistics classes, foreign language students may profit by some insights into their own language, as well as that which they are studying. Studies have suggested that bilingual individuals (here usually referring to those raised bilingually) often do significantly better than their monolingual counterparts in such non-verbal areas as mathematics,⁶ indicating perhaps that the inherent power of abstraction which comes from knowing more than one language, the ability to separate the sign from its referent, may have additional benefits. Linguistic training is one way of facilitating this abstraction, by bringing to the forefront latent ideas which are waiting to be developed. As for the concrete implementation of these ideas, every instructor will have developed individual means of presentation. In my own case, I prefer to sprinkle appropriate comments and examples at strategic points throughout most of my courses; these examples are more or less technical according to the level and nature of the course, but are never officially part of the course unless the course itself is linguistically oriented. That is to say, the students are not expected to memorize and be tested over these items; they are passed out free and the interested students take them, develop them and frequently ask for more. When, as often happens, the desire for 'more' exceeds the practical limitations of the foreign language class, they are steered toward classes in general linguistics; hence the relevance of these remarks to the present conference. It would be impossible and undesirable to convert a beginning language class into a linguistic forum, but it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that higher priority be attached to

hiring language teachers with training in linguistics, training which exceeds the usual one or two courses in methodology. Traditionally language teachers have been recruited from the ranks of literary scholars, unless hired specifically for teaching upper division linguistics courses, and there is nothing objectionable in this practice. Every qualified teacher, particularly the teacher who is also a scholar in the same discipline, brings to the classroom some unique qualifications which cannot be duplicated on a mass scale, and which serve to enrich the experience of those students who study with that particular teacher. For the teacher with training in linguistics, and it is to be hoped that the percentage of such teachers will increase, one should encourage, rather than discourage or merely be indifferent to, the dividends which result from slanting the course in the direction of the structures of language. Instead of turning language departments into divided camps representing 'language' and 'literature', there is no reason why the former cannot be seen, rather than merely a tool required to reach the latter, as a valid pursuit in its own right, and one which may be combined with literary studies to produce students and scholars fully equipped to handle the language they use.

NOTES

1. Some suggestions along these lines are given in J. Lipski, 'Teaching spoken Spanish' Hispania 59 (1976), 871-877.
2. Some interesting examples of this phenomenon are given by Erica García, 1975, The Role of Theory in Linguistic Analysis: The Spanish Pronoun System (Amsterdam: North Holland). In particular, García (48) refers to the 'least inappropriate meaning available' in many circumstances.
3. See for example S. Gili Gaya, 1973, Curso superior de sintaxis española (Barcelona: Vox, 11th ed.), p. 78; A. Bello and R. Cuervo, 1973, Gramática de la lengua castellana (Buenos Aires: Sopena, 9th ed.), pp. 480-482.
4. See for example J. Lipski, 1975, 'A semantic-syntactic shift in Spanish', Folia Linguistica 7: 149-163.
5. An example would be sentences of the type 'Whoever doesn't like linguistics can drop this class' or 'There are people who don't like linguistics'; the presence of the relative pronoun in the Spanish version causes problems concerning the correct analysis of gustar vis-a-vis the relative system, and bizarre and erroneous sentences often result.

6. The classic study in this area is E. Peal and W. Lambert, 1962, 'The relation of bilingualism to intelligence', Psychological Monographs v. 76, no. 27, 1-23. More recent data may be found in most current works on bilingual education.