Linguistics: An Asset in Teaching Spanish

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The linguist takes language and breaks it down into sentences, phrases, words, and then sounds. He is concerned with the function of the language and its derivation. In the world of everyday reality, conversations or written words are seldom broken down in this fashion. People are concerned with communicating ideas rather than finding out what parts of speech they are using or how the words relate to one another. These two worlds relate to one another mainly through the language teacher. With a knowledge of linguistics, i.e., with a basic understanding of the development and function of segments in the language, a teacher is better able to understand both his mother tongue and the target language and is better able to teach the target language. A knowledge of linguistics is not the one and only requirement or means to effective teaching, but it is an asset since the more informed a teacher is the more confidence he has in his teaching ability. More confidence in himself increases the teacher's competence which results in a better teacher.

Linguistics contributes to the preparation of teaching materials in three ways. First, by contrasting the native language of the learner with the target language, major difficulties can be noted and teaching and testing materials can be systematically constructed to give emphasis to these points of difficulty. Secondly, linguistic analysis may enable the teacher to simplify the task of the learner by describing the language to be learned more simply or economically than is done in conventional grammars. Thirdly, linguistic analysis furnishes rules for the spoken language which are often simpler than many traditional grammar rules. Linguistic analysis also gives excellent clues as to what units of behavior should be taught in individual exercises since it breaks utterances down into the basic "building blocks" of the language. (11, pp. 1-2.)

In an applied linguistics approach, the starting point of instruction is the construction in the foreign language. The student is given a sentence like:

| Yo | quiero | que | usted | aprenda | el | español. |

and through exercises replaces building blocks with others of the same category (e.g., replacing quiero by deseo , aprenda by sepa , español by francés , etc.) Thus the student learns how the construction fits together, what the value of each building block is, and the categories of the building blocks. Through all these changes the pattern remains the same and becomes firmly imprinted in the student's mind. (11, p. 7.)

Building blocks can also be used to compare two patterns which differ from each other only through the building blocks. For example:

| Hablo | español. |

| No | hablo | español. (11, p. 7.)

In this way the student learns the construction of the foreign language while working within the foreign language.

"The teaching of derivation suffixes or prefixes can be approached in two complementary ways: either through the teaching of "word families," words formed of the same root, or the teaching of series of words formed with the same derivational morpheme. Thus the meaning of azo can be made clear by teaching to the student a word series like balazo , codazo , and sablazo , and then inviting him to guess the meaning of puñazo and zapatazo. Or a series like hablador, bebedor, and dador can be presented in sentences in which the student guesses the meaning of trabajador, amenazador, etc.

"In the word family approach the student is presented with sentences which use the family in a meaningful context: El librero vende libros en la librería., El relojero vende relojes en la relojería, etc.

Basically this method represents the extension of the pattern practice approach to vocabulary learning." (11, pp. 88-89.)

In learning vocabulary, a mnemonic procedure called the keyword method has proven highly effective. The method divides the study of a vocabulary item into two stages: 1) association of the spoken foreign word to an English word that sounds like some part of the foreign word, and 2) the forming (by the student) of a mental image or picture of the keyword interacting with the English translation. This links the word acoustically to the keyword and at the same time links it by a mental image to the English translation.

Raugh, reporting on the outcome of comparisons of the keyword method for learning a Spanish vocabulary with various control procedures, found the keyword method to be highly effective in all cases. In one experiment, a final score of 88% correct for the keyword group contrasted with 28% correct for the control group. (12, p. 1.) The folling are some of the keywords used as well as performance ratings from one experiment:

| SPANISH | KEYWORD | TRANSLATION | PERFORMANCE | |
			KEYWORD	CONTROL
cordero	cord	lamb	.67	.13
huevo	wave	egg	.67	.60
tijeras	t-hairs	scissors	.67	.47
silbido	sill	whistle	.60	.07
piso	pea	floor	.60	.33
charco	charcoal	puddle	.80	.27
muneca	moon	doll	.67	.20
bombero	bomb	fireman	.87	.53
toalla	toe-eyed	towel	.80	.27
bolsillo	boll	pocket	.95	.00

(12, pp. 14,54.)

In connection with this or separately, an "Aids to Correct English
Spelling" notebook may be kept. Here the student may list those
words whose difficult English spelling can be learned through correct
Spanish pronunciation:

cal<u>endar</u>io	calend<u>ar</u>
feb<u>rero</u>	feb<u>ru</u>ary
dicci<u>onari</u>o	dicti<u>ona</u>ry
h<u>é</u>ro<u>es</u>	hero<u>es</u>

<div align="right">(10, pp. 30-31.)</div>

An extremely effective means of motivation is to record the students'
voices at regular, but not to frequent intervals. If the same passage
for reading is used each time, the students will be pleasantly suprised
by the improvement which they have made, and will be encouraged to
try harder on the succeeding recording. At the same time it gives them
excellent practice in auditory discrimination.

Because a student must be able to hear and comprehend befor he
can imitate and speak, auditory discrimination needs to be the starting
point for speaking. The contrasts within Spanish should be exercised
by series of drills. The following are some examples given by Politzer
and Staubach:

b	b̷]
<u>vez</u>	la <u>vez</u>
<u>voz</u>	la <u>voz</u>
<u>boca</u>	la <u>boca</u>
etc.	
un <u>bus</u>	este <u>bus</u>
un <u>baile</u>	este <u>baile</u>
etc.	
d	d'
día	ese día

un disco   este disco

etc.

´   ´
gato   este gato

un gusto   mi gusto

etc.

(11, p. 50.)

Similar drills should be used for r - rr, t - d, etc.

The most systematic approach to pronunciation teaching involves
the use of contrasting minimal pairs. This insures that the pupil does
not simply substitute the nearest mother tongue suplement for the one
he is acquiring and it enables him to descriminate the phonemic
contrasts of the foreign language when he hears them and when he pro-
duces them.

Wilkins points out that English pupils will attempt to sub-
stitute the dipthong /ei/ for the /e/ of Spanish. This substitution
may cause difficulties for the Spanish listener since in Spanish there
is also a dipthong /ey/. It is through these differences that any
language operates. What makes le and ley different words is the difference
between /e/ (one phoneme) and /ey/ (two phonemes). However English
does not have /e/ and confuses both this sound and Spanish /ey/ with
the English dipthong |ey . This makes these sounds both hard to dif-
ferentiate and hard to produce. "It is precisely because certain
nearly similar sounds are heard as the same in one language, but
as different in another, that the comprehension and pronunciation of
foreign language is so difficult. Our entire mechanism of perception
and projection of speech sounds is geared ot differentiating the
phonemic contrasts of our own language without conscious concern for
the allophonic variations; and unconsciously we try to project the

same system of contrast into the foreign language which organizes sounds differently into its own system of phonemes." (11, p. 44.)

To establish this distinction between the Spanish /e/ and /ey/ and the English ey , Wilkins gives these examples of phonetically contrasting pairs:

1) say   sei   <u>se</u>   se

     bay   <u>be</u>

     fay   <u>fe</u>

     may   <u>me</u>

and

2) lay   lei   <u>ley</u>   ley

     day   <u>dey</u>

     base   <u>veis</u>

     ray   <u>rey</u>

(17, p. 191.)

In his effort to communicate in the foreign language the learner is influenced not only by the sounds that exist in his mother tongue, but also by their distribution and phonological status. For example, the Spanish speaker would have difficulty with this sentence, "His wife wants him to pay her grandfather a visit in the old people's home," because it requires him to produce a syllable in which 3 consonants follow the vowel, while in his native language a syllable may have no more than one consonant after a vowel. Therefore he will say /won/ in place of /wonts/. This is often interpreted as a grammatical mistake when it is, in actuality, a phonological mistake. (17, p. 190-191.)

Using the comparative tables of English and Spanish Phonemes (Consonants)

SPANISH

	BI-LABIAL	LABIO-DENTAL	DENTAL	ALVELAR	AFFRICATIVE	VELAR	GLOTTAL
STOP	P b		t d		[c]	k g	
FRICATIVE (SLIT)	þ		θ đ			ǧ	
FRICATIVE (GROOVE)		f	s	z			h
LATERAL			t	l			
NASAL	m		n	n	ñ	ŋ	
TRILL				rr			
TAP				r			
SEMI-VOWEL	w					y	

ENGLISH

	BI-LABIAL	LABIO-DENTAL	DENTAL	ALVEOLAR	AFFRICATIVE	VELAR	GLOTTAL
STOP	P b			t d	č ǰ	k g	
FRICATIVE (SLIT)		f v	θ ð				h
FRICATIVE (GROOVE)				s z	š ž		
LATERAL				l			
NASAL	m			n		ŋ	
SEMI-VOWEL	w			r	y		

it is easy to see where difficulties may arise for the native English
speaker learning Spanish. First, he has to learn several new sounds:
the /rr/ of carro, the /r/ of caro, the /h/ of hijo and the allophones
β in parvo and g in agua. This is complicated by the fact that he
has a serious auditory discrimination problem; a number of sounds
which are quite similar in the two languages are allophones in Spanish,
but separate phonemes in English. Sometimes sounds which have some sort
of counterpart in the native language of the learner are more difficult
to learn than the completely new sounds because the interference of
the native language is likely to be even greater than the completely
new ones. (11, p. 48.)

For the English speaker whose target language is Spanish,
William E. Bull in Spanish For Teachers, pages 53 to 76, gives an
extremely complete detailed analysis of each sound and the interferences
which native English speakers encounter as well as tips for eliminating
the interference and achieving the correct pronunciation and spelling.

Spanish students in the U. S. who are native speakers of Spanish
need courses designed to meet their specific linguistic needs. The
Spanish speaking student consistently speaks more than he writes and
consequently, he writes as he speaks. To compensate for spoken dialect
irregularities spelling rules need to be taught; many spelling errors
can be corrected to a large extent by teaching Spanish sound and symbol
correspondences. Guadalupe Valdes Fallis groups his spelling errors as
follows:

" 1) errors caused by the interference of English spelling conventions,

2) writing of incomplete forms (taba, lo vía visto, etc.)

3) correctly spelled forms which seem unusual to the reader accus-
tomed to Standard Spanish (estabanos, awela, puedimos, etc.) "

(5, p. 5.)

The student will have little or no problem with many sounds, however Fallis lists the following partial list of principal problems which will need close attention:

#	PHONEME	WRITTEN SPANISH	EXAMPLES
1)	/k/	c, qu, k	casa, Cuca, cosa
			kilo, kepi
			queso, quinto.

It will be important to point out the following:

a) The only possible spellings for the sounds [ka] and [ki] are "que" and "qui".

b) K will be overused. It must be pointed out that it is used rarely in Spanish and that all other possibilities should be considered before using K.

c) There will be a tendency toward the use of Q in such words as cuatro and cuando. It should be made clear that the only possible combinations using Q are "que" and "qui".

d) Since U after C is not silent, words with the sounds of [k] must be spelled busque and not buscue*.

| e) | /b/ | b or v | tubo, tuvo |

The student must be made aware of the fact that he must not aspirate these sounds in order to use the written symbol V. Because of the natural difficulty in this area, much drill will be necessary.

| 3) | /g/ | g (+a, +o, +u) | gato, goma, gusto |
| | | gu (+e, +i) | Guillermo, sigue |

The student must be made to see that while English will spell the sounds [gi] and [ge] as in give and get, Spanish must spell the same sounds: gui and gue, as in siguen, llegue.

4)	/x/	j (befor all vowels)	joven, jarra, jura
			mujer, jirafa
		g (+e, +i)	gente, página

Drills involving the phonome /x/ befor the sounds [e] and [i] will be especially helpful here. Indeed the student must be shown that this is one of the areas in which sound by itself is not an exact clue as to the spelling of a particular word. He must rely on memory as well."

(5, p. 7-8.)

Students will also need work constasting /ñ/ and /n/ and /e/ and /a/ . Drilling must be done to emphasize the "h" found in such words as hasta, ahora, hoy, hielo, huevo, etc.

It should be remembered that any speaker's individual linguistic system is probably different from the group linguistic system or standard system to some degree. The amount of overlap indicates the amount of similarity of one's idiolect and the target language. This does not however make ones idiolect "wrong" simply because it differs from the standard speech.

The fact that error may be caused both by contrastive differences and by the structure of the target language means that it is imposible to base the content of language teaching entirely on the results of contrastive analysis; having placed heavy emphasis on interference theory, teachers have failed to notice that they were dealing with common errors. Students learning Spanish as a second language will make many of the same mistakes Spsnish-speaking infants will make in learning their native speech. Thus these errors can be viewed as a learning process. The teacher must look at the learner's total output as a system, a system with rules. The language learner creates a tentative system of rules from the language data he is exposed to and it is this system of rules that allows him to use the language. Just as with a young child, it is necessary to correct some of these rules. to delete some, and to add others. A thorough knowledge of linguistics will better enable the teacher to understand and correct the errors made.

Linguistics then 1) helps to develop a more competent teacher, 2)

aids in selecting and constructing teaching materials, 3) gives the student clear rules for pronunciation, 4) helps the student to better understand both his mother tongue and the target language and therefore helps in the acquisition of the target language, and 5) aids in the detection and correction of errors. As previously mentioned, linguistics is not the one and only requirement or means to effective teaching, but it is an asset.

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