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ABSTRACT

In an effort to bridge the gap between Spanish foreign language classes for the monolingual English speaker and the needs of the Hispanic bilingual student wishing to have Spanish instruction, a bilingual teacher trainer has designed Spanish courses specifically for the Hispanic bilingual. To give recognition to bilinguals' existing linguistic repertoire, "biloquial" approach is taken, placing value on both the students' existing language and the standard Spanish being taught. The aim is to build on students' substantial Spanish skills rather than trying to eradicate nonstandard usages. Written work is emphasized. Students are graded on progressively higher expectations, and are taught that effective communication rather than perfectionism in composition is valued. (MSE)

Theoretical and Practical Aspects of Teaching Spanish to Bilingual Students

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In recent years progress has been made in the field of teaching Spanish to bilingual students (SBS); however, much remains to be done. I will discuss the task of composition assignment and correction in a first-year, two semester course designed for college level bilingual speakers of Puerto Rican Spanish (PRS). The majority of these students wish to become bilingual education teachers, a fact that often underscores their need to learn a standard variety of Spanish. In many cases, this need leads to an over-zealous attitude on the part of instructors as well as the students themselves to ensure mastery of the standard variety. While there is no doubt that future professionals, who will be contributing to the over-all development of bilingual children, must have adequate linguistic proficiency in standard varieties of English and Spanish, there are conflicting theories as to what the teaching of the standard variety to these speakers entails. Thus, I will first discuss some attitudes about PRS and relate them to some specific theories of teaching SBS. I will discuss the role of composition writing and correction in the classroom, giving examples from my personal experience.

It is a well-known fact that PRS does not enjoy a prestigious status in the Spanish speaking world. As Guitart (1981:49) observes:

> Puerto Rico is perhaps the only linguistic community in the Hispanic world where the speech of educated speakers shows certain phonetic traits that are stigmatized by those speakers themselves. The two most salient of these traits are the use of velar r (R) and the so-called confusion of /l/ and /r/ in syllable and word final position. The reason why these sounds are stigmatized is that they are associated with the speech of the uneducated, where they occur with much greater frequency. In addition,

> educated Puerto Ricans are aware that the educated of other Hispanic countries do not show these traits at all in their speech. This situation adds to the linguistic insecurity of a community long under assault by the English language.

It is not surprising then, that many language teachers, whether or not they are native speakers of PRS or another variety of Spanish, are loathe to equate the native speech of the bilingual student with any standard variety.

The negative attitude of instructors is compounded by the poor self-concept the students have about their language. The linguistic situation of these speakers is characterized by constant pressure from English, limited contact with educated speakers of their native language, and feelings of inferiority about their own speech and culture. As Feliciano (1981:197) has aptly put it:

> (US Hispanic minority speakers) command an informal variety of Spanish. Often it is the language they spoke before entering school. Once they begin their formal education in English, Spanish is relegated to a secondary position in their linguistic repertoire remaining almost exclusively in the home domain. They have limited access to a formal variety of Spanish. Unlike the American students in the United States or the Spanish monolinguals in a Spanish-speaking country, they are infrequently exposed to language and communication standardization gained through the academic process and the mass media. Most of their concepts and abstract thinking are developed in English. The students are generally aware that the language they speak is not the same variety as that used by educated Spanish speakers. They are also aware that the Hispanic minorities do not enjoy a prominent position in the Anglo society. They then relegate their language, and by extension, their culture and themselves to an inferior position in their hierarchy of values. This creates a conflict in their identity and promotes a poor self-image.

Persons involved in teaching Spanish to bilingual speakers of PRS are unable to divorce temselves from these negative attitudes about this variety. This pervasive attitude

becomes even more significant when it is juxtaposed with current theory on the teaching of SBS.

Valdés (1981) has pointed out that three competing philosophical approaches to teaching SBS exist. Following Shuy's (1970) terminology, we call these philosphical positions eradication, biloquialism and appreciation of dialect differences. The eradication perspective seeks to extinguish what it regards as unsavory elements in the variety spoken by the students and replace them with the corresponding forms used in the prestige standard dialect. Proponents of the biloquialism perspective seek to add the standard variety as a second dialect, giving equal status to the regional or social variety for the purpose of preserving the speaker's cultural identity and by extension, his positive self-concept. Appreciation of dialect differences purports merely to educate persons about the nature of language, in particular, that different varieties do exist and that none is better than the other. The biloquial approach seems to be preferred by scholars with linguistic training as evidenced by the recent anthology, Teaching Spanish to the Hispanic Bilingual: Issues, Aims, and Methods (Valdés, Lozano and García-Moya, eds, 1981) and by some materials currently available on the market, e.g. Español escrito: curso para hispanohablantes bilingües, (Valdes-Fallis & Teschner 1978) and El español y su estructura: lectura y escritura para bilingües (Burunat & Starçevic 1983). However, we should not assume that persons involved in teaching Spanish as a second dialect are aware of biloquialism or can even formulate what their position is.

Some instructors appear to be openly opposed to the eradication philosophy and seemingly in favor of biloquialism; nonetheless, what they actually do betrays their conscious efforts to respect the native variety while teaching the standard. The view of PRS as inherently inferior transcends the degree of empathy an instructor may have for her students; even those with a good rapport with students and a great deal of empathy for their language and culture often unwittingly impose a negative attitude toward PRS. This attitude is apparent in a recent comment made to me by a well-intentioned colleague, while discussing her experience in teaching Spanish to bilingual students, "I wish I could erase everything they've learned incorrectly. For example, when the say /fuistes/ they have to unlearn a non-standard form. I wish I could just start from the beginning."[1] Obviously, this instructor, and others like her, fail to recognize the advantage such speakers have in their study of Spanish. Even though she cheerfully added, "At least I don't have to spend hours teaching the difference between the imperfect and preterite tenses!", the attitude that /fuistes/ would need to be erased in order to add /fuiste/ conveys a basic ignorance of the linguistic competence of bilingual speakers of PRS. It also conveys that 'bad' forms need to be eliminated so that 'good' forms can be added, i.e. PRS is full of non-standard features that need to be replaced by standard ones. In short, it represents a philosophical stance that is eradicative rather than biloquialist

Recently, Miguel, a student in the aforementioned colleague's class, proudly asserted to me, " I am beginning to be able to avoid speaking PRS. I'm conscious of my choice of pronunciation and vocabulary. I'm starting to speak real Spanish! [2] Sadly, my effort to convince Miguel that his mastery of 'real' Spanish was no more valid than his native variety fell on deaf ears. Underscoring the irony of the situation, the reaction of my colleague to Miguel's words was one of shock and dismay. She obviously had no conscious awareness that her subtle attitudes about PRS were contributing to the students' poor linguistic self-concept. These are only two examples; If we had time, I could give you many more.

It seems to me that there is an urgent need to bridge the gap between theoretical studies relating to the nature and scope of teaching Spanish to bilingual students with the practical everyday realities experienced by both instructors and students alike. While any attempt to unite theory and practice is inevitable a lenghthy process, there are methods that can be used at the theoretical as well as the practical levels that can assist in easing the process. This effort becomes especially important when persons who are not familiar with linguistic theory are involved in the teaching of Spanish to bilingual students.[3] I want to emphasize that we should not take for granted that a majority of persons involved in teaching SBS are fully aware of proposals and recommendations put forth by linguists.

One area of instruction comm[illegible] courses is composition assignment. Therefore, I have selected this area as one example of the way methodological strategies can be modified to accomodate a bilŋoquialist approach.

My experience has been that many Spanish teachers more often than not correct and/or grade the written compositions of bilingual students based on their adherence to standard criteria. That is, they conduct a type of contrastive analysis between the written code of the native variety and the standard variety in the textbook. In doing so, they tend to lump together all miscues or errors as needing eradication. Students get back papers with so many red marks they feel discouraged, or worse, humilliated at their lack of proficiency in writing. They feel as if they are failures and question their potential ability to function as bilingual educators. They are unaware of the resource they already possess in having mastered a local variety of Spanish. On the contrary, they consider it to be a liability.

While I feel it would be deceptive to tell students that writing a standard variety of Spanish is not essential to their role as educators, at the same time, I make every effort to build upon their exisiting linguistic competence. It is futile to spend time on oral pronunciation drills, so I limit any instruction on standard elements to the written code. Students are relived to know that they will be 'allowed' to speak what they term their'normal' language in class.

Composition assignments are never made in a vacuum. My experience in teaching both English and Spanish has been that students will write with greater ease if they have a point of departure for the task. Hence, classroom activities, such as seeing films or reading essays, magazine articles, short stories or poems are conducted first. They are then ready to write an essay, composition or even a brief paragrapgh related to the topic at hand.

Students always write a rough draft of their compositions. They know that the preliminary version is not graded and they feel less pressure to write 'correctly'. Moreover, I inform students that only certain errors will need to be corrected for each writing assignment (although I do not specify which beforehand). Therefore, no student essay is filled with red correction to the extent that the student feels hopelessly lost in a maze of incorrect forms. After I have signalled what errors to correct, using a certain correction key that I have, students self-correct their essays. Students know that their performance will be graded upon a progressive hierarchy of expectation. They know that I will anticipate gradual mastery of standard elements in written versions only. Moreover, classroom lessons on particular elements are presented <u>before</u> students are expected to correct them. In designing lessons, attention is given to popular forms and usage and an effort is made to build upon these as opposed to subtracting from them. Follow-up and/or review lessons are presented as needed. Finally, some lessons are initiated as a result of an analysis of student miscues. In all, ~~error~~ analysis provides the basis for a non-prescriptive, <u>biloquialist</u> approach to teaching SBS.

A few concrete examples will illustrate this method. The following sentences are taken from student compositions written last semester. Lessons on syllabication, accentuation and concordance (number, gender; noun, adjective, verbs) had previously been taught. Students had read articles about bilingual education, both in textbooks and magazines. Role playing and discussion were stimulated by classroom 'debates' on the pros and cons of bilingual education and by situational conversations, i.e. one student played the role of a mono-lingual principal of a school while another enacted the part of the parent of a bilingual student requesting services for his child. Finally, students wrote letters to various individuals stating their views on bilingual education.

1. Es mi opinión absoluto que usted no sabe nada de los asuntos de educación bilingüe.

   (It is my absolute opinion that you don't know anything about matters about bilingual education)

2. Educación bilingüe existe para ayudar niños como sobrevivir en los Estados Unidos.

   (Bilingual education exists to help students survive in the United States)

3. Usted es un excepción a la regla de los milones de niños que no tienen exitó porque no tienen ayuda especial.

   (You are an exception to the rule of the millions of children who are not successful because they do not have special help.)

In the first example, */absoluto/ is bracketed and marked with "C" (concordance). On their correction guide, students refer to this code and are advised to check for gender and number agreement in nouns and adjectives, ie /casa blanca/ or /casas blancas/ and they check person-verb agreement, ie /los niños son/ or /el niño es/. The omission of the definite article, */educación bilingüe/ for /la educación bilingüe/ is not signalled.

In the second example, there are no corrections. Errors in the omission of the definite article from the subject (*educación bilingüe for la educación bilingue); the use of */ayudar como/ and the omission of the personal a and the definite article (ayudar a los niños), indicating some apparent interference from English, were not signalled at this point. However, I keep a card file of such errors in order to plan future lessons.

In the third example, the indefinte article */un/ must be corrected to /una/, using the same "C" indicator as in example one. The misplaced accent mark on */exito/ is coded "A" for accent mark: students refer to their correction guide and check rules of accentuation to correct to /éxito/. I did not require the student to correct */milones/ to /millones/ because I had not taught them about numerals and further, the use of /l/ for /ʎ/ is not prevalent among the students.

←—The error card file I maintain did not contain any other similar error for that entire semester. This semester, I taught numerals and there were no further instances of */milones/ for /millones/. We must realize that some student 'errors' are caused by the student's lack of experience with a word or phrase. Some are manifestations of the oral competence of the student in the popular variety. The use of /s/ as a

second person preterite marker, ie */fuistes/ for /fuiste/ is wide-spread among speakers of PRS and of other varieties as well. Only after I have reviewed preterite tense forms with students do I have them correct their written code. By then, they have established a growing awareness of the existence and usefullness of their popular variety. They do not feel inferior for saying */fuistes/ and they know they should omit the final /s/ in the written code.

It should be noted that in examples 1,2, and 3, there is no communicative interference in the meaning of the sentences, from the errors manifested. That is, communication efforts are not hampered by the errors committed. It is important to point this out to students in helping them to realize the linguistic competence they do in fact possess.

I believe that a composition correction guide can be 'variant-sensitive' in the sense of Teschner (1981), while at the same time, providing examples from the standard variety. By requiring limited correction of errors, that is, only those on which students have had previous lessons, instructors can build upon the linguistic competence already possessed by students.

The method of error analysis I have described serves the instructor's purpose in providing an inventory of student needs, based on actual performance. I believe that this type of error analysis is more effective in having the students acquire the written standard as a second dialect than the blanket contrastive approach between standard and popular , especially when, in my opinion, the goal of every instructor of SBS, whether trained specifically for the task or not, is to assist bilingual students in acquiring

the standard variety without degrading the popular variety. In an especially difficult situation, as in the case of PRS spoken on the mainland, in which a negative attitude toward it is pervasive even among its speakers themselves, it is especially important to ensure the fostering of a positive self-concept of the student in his quest to add the standard to his linguistic repertoire. Educators and linguists must work together to brdige the gap between theory and practice to help realize our common goals.

Notes

1. Informal conversation, March, 1983. The instructor is a native Spanish speaker and teaches courses in Spanish for bilingual as well as monolingual students. There are bilingual students who enroll for courses designed primarily for monolingual students, and it may well be that this is the primary locus of such atitudes.

2. Informal conversation, March, 1983. This student, in fact, is enrolled in a Spanish course that is designed for monolingual students, at his own choice. Students can not be forced to enroll in SBS courses; often they are convinced that they are so English dominant, they must take courses designed for monolingual students.

3. It is a well-known fact that all teachers of Spanish are not trained in linguistics. A great deal of them are specialists in literature and have had minimal exposure to linguistic theory.

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