



Hispanic Linguistics Instruction: How Should We Teach It?

La instrucción en Lingüística Hispánica: ¿Cómo deberíamos enseñarla?

Instrução de Linguística Hispânica: Como devemos ensiná-la?

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Abstract

Despite the increasing demand for Hispanic Linguistics courses in Spanish programs across US universities, there is scarce research on how to implement communicative and content-based instruction. This article introduces an overview of best practices for introductory courses on Hispanic Linguistics with a focus on problem-solving activities and collaborative learning since instructors must always have in mind the course objectives; in the same vein, they have to be able to provide a descriptive approach to Linguistics to eradicate the myths that exist about language.

Keywords: teaching methods; descriptive approach; collaborative learning; best practices.

Resumen

A pesar del aumento en la demanda de cursos de Lingüística Hispánica en programas de español en las universidades americanas, hay escasa investigación en cómo implementar instrucción comunicativa y basada en el contenido. Este artículo presenta una vista preliminar de las mejores prácticas para cursos introductorios en Lingüística Hispánica con un enfoque en actividades de resolución de problemas y aprendizaje colaborativo, ya que los instructores siempre deben tener en cuenta los objetivos del curso; asimismo, ser capaces de proveer un enfoque descriptivo a la Lingüística para erradicar los mitos que existen sobre el lenguaje.

Palabras clave: métodos de enseñanza; enfoque descriptivo; aprendizaje colaborativo; mejores prácticas.

Resumo

Apesar da crescente procura de cursos de Linguística Hispânica em programas espanhóis nas universidades americanas, há pouca investigação sobre como implementar uma instrução comunicativa e baseada no conteúdo. Este artigo apresenta uma antevisão das melhores práticas para cursos introdutórios de Linguística Hispânica com foco em actividades de resolução de problemas e aprendizagem colaborativa, pois os instrutores devem ter sempre em mente os objectivos do curso e ser capazes de fornecer uma abordagem descritiva da Linguística a fim de dissipar mitos sobre a língua.

Palavras-chave: métodos de ensino; abordagem descritiva; aprendizagem colaborativa; melhores práticas.

Recibido: 15/10/2022

Aceptado: 11/01/2023

Publicado: 12/05/2023

1. Introduction

Most Spanish programs in higher education institutions have been offering Hispanic Linguistics courses as part of their requirements or electives for their majors or minors in the last decades (Hualde, 2006). Training in Hispanic Linguistics is crucial in order for future educators in foreign languages to understand dialectal variation mainly for two reasons: so that they do not favor one dialect over the others and to develop a descriptivist perspective on Linguistics instead of a prescriptivist one (Arteaga and Llorente, 2009).

However, there is not much research on how to teach Hispanic Linguistics courses, such as the introductory or core courses like Phonology and Phonetics, Syntax, or Sociolinguistics, considering that many Spanish language learners take Linguistics courses without prior knowledge of the discipline. Knouse *et al.* (2015) claim that this might be problematic for students not only at the linguistic level, but also at the conceptual level. This difficulty might demotivate the students to take Linguistics courses, especially if textbooks do not prepare the students to reduce this gap. The objectives of these courses have nothing to do with those of language courses; language is the tool and not the goal (Correa, 2010).

Villa (2003) also argues that there are two main challenges to the teaching of Linguistics: the need for more literacies to work in these content courses and the lack of pedagogical resources to teach these courses. Thus, there is an increasing need to suggest best practices to teach Hispanic Linguistics courses. Knouse *et al.* (2015) started this in *Introduction to Linguistics*, where they extend this discussion to other common Linguistics courses in Spanish curricula. Also, these courses might represent a real challenge for instructors as well, since they usually receive training to only teach Spanish as a second language (L2) and as a heritage language (HL). In the next section, there is a review of the main literature on the teaching of Hispanic Linguistics, mainly Phonetics and Phonology.

2. Literature review

The extensive literature has already emphasized the existing need to offer Hispanic Linguistics courses in Spanish programs, and it is of vital importance that students understand how language works from a descriptive perspective instead of a prescriptive one, and to improve students' linguistic skills (e.g., Phonetics and Phonology to polish pronunciation and oral skills). As one of the course goals, the instructor must incorporate changing student attitudes towards language by providing them with an alternative point of view (Milambiling, 2001). When Spanish majors and minors take this introductory course, they can understand how language works and how to analyze it.

Milambiling (2001) claims that instructors must take on an advocacy role and explain the difference between descriptive and prescriptive grammar so that students can understand the process. Linguistics should be a discipline ideologically in line with higher education teaching standards. Ultimately, one of the objectives is for students to acquire higher-order critical thinking skills. In fact, a linguistic pedagogy forum should be created (Petray, 2004).

An example is a case study conducted by Lenze (1995). She selected two Linguistics professors to analyze their pedagogical content knowledge. These professors used argumentation so that students

can appreciate linguistic complexity. According to these professors, through argumentation, students should be able to think critically and understand what Linguistics is about.

Some of the first proposals on teaching Hispanic Linguistics are those of Correa (2014) and Knouse *et al.* (2015). Correa (2014) proposes friendly approaches to teaching Linguistics. An introductory course should include the main areas (Phonology, Syntax, etc.), the Applied Linguistics areas (Second Language Acquisition, Sociolinguistics...), and Language for Specific Purposes. Regarding the teaching approach, she suggests engaging students in discovering the material by themselves via open-ended questions, so that they can obtain a better understanding of how languages work and relate to each other. In sum, she recommends avoiding lecture-based approaches.

Grundstrom (2017) wrote a textbook for an undergraduate introductory French Linguistics course based on the following guidelines: it was written in the target language for an audience of advanced majors, it included Phonology, Morphology, and Syntax, and it contained well-developed activities after the explanations with a focus on the analysis of the target language with an analytical approach.

There have also been proposals for online Linguistics courses. Students showed improvement in all Linguistics areas, but their gains were limited in the application and extension of their knowledge in these areas (Levis and LeVelle, 2011). Knouse *et al.* (2015) suggested student-centered activities instead of a traditional instructor-centered model. These activities allow the students to improve their linguistic skills (beyond the oral and writing skills in class discussions or papers) and acquire linguistics concepts. Additionally, problem-solving activities are recommended as daily homework so that students have the chance to experience hands-on work with projects and fieldwork; for example, the sociolinguistic interview or an ethnographic project based on daily observations. Collaborative learning is enhanced through an online discussion board on several topics or through a reflective journal. These researchers also put forth a proposal regarding other Linguistics courses, such as Spanish Phonetics or Phonology. In a course with these characteristics, one of the objectives is to improve pronunciation. This might be the reason why this topic is almost exclusively the one subject studied in the Hispanic Linguistics field. When a Spanish major program only offers one Linguistics course, this is usually on Phonetics and/or Phonology. Thus, as an important activity, they suggest measuring the progress of their pronunciation through self-assessment practice and self-reflection on their performance over time. In addition, they propose differentiated instruction for heritage language learners (HLLs). Since these learners are usually native-like in terms of their pronunciation in Spanish, they can focus on acquiring metalinguistic awareness of the language, such as dialectal variation via analyses of speech samples.

At a conceptual level, Correa (2011) argued that in teaching this subject, her main objective was for students to understand complex concepts and the relationship between phonetics and phonology through metaphors and analogies (such as Plato's allegory of the cave). Nevertheless, it is important to remember that we should not abandon the communicative approach when possible, for ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages) guidelines are always valuable. One way of doing so is using authentic materials or resources. Another way is applying phonemic contrasts to acquire phonemic awareness (Gregory, 2005).

Kissling (2013) suggests calling students' attention to the phonetic system via exposure, dictation, or transcriptions rather than explicit instruction. In order to acquire Spanish Phonology, Bullock and Lord (2003) proposed using analogy. As the learners' vocabulary grows, they gradually improve since they become more accurate with their predictions. They start making an analogy with a similar word in the L2 for words that they do not know how to pronounce; if the word is odd, then they make an analogy in their L1 repertoire.

At a more sophisticated level, Lord (2005) focused on acquiring nine Spanish phonemes that are difficult for L2 learners (such as Spanish diphthongs between and within words) through voice analysis software and oral projects. This study provides evidence of support for explicit phonetics instruction via activities to guide students towards awareness of phonological differences between their L1 and L2. The results lead Lord (2005) to recommend teaching Phonetics in the Spanish language at basic levels.

Morin (2007) advocated for including pronunciation instruction in all levels of Spanish. Arteaga (2000) proposed a method that combines the communicative approach (through the exposure to at least one dialect) and formal instruction of the phonological processes. She denounced how little attention has been paid to Phonetics instruction in the Spanish classroom and supported using meaningful activities for both self-monitoring and sound production. An important issue to consider is differentiating between the teaching of Phonetics and pronunciation. According to Carbó *et al.* (2003), the teaching of Phonetics is a metalinguistic reflection on the sound system of the language, and it should be part of the training of the teaching of pronunciation.

Other ways of introducing Phonetics to the students are through a contrastive analysis of the phonological systems of two languages (e.g. English and Spanish) to foresee potential errors, then the analysis of the students' interlanguage to establish a hierarchy of the most common errors (Llisterri, 2003).

Despite all the attempts to teach Phonology, one aspect consistently ignored is prosody (Santamaría Busto, 2007). As Darcy (2018) claims, Phonology and Phonetics are directly related to speaking. Training in pronunciation has a direct impact on improving speaking abilities. This researcher suggests that pronunciation should be linked to all skills, including improving reading and writing; however, it is hardly taught. This is referred to as the pronunciation teaching paradox. There is resistance to teaching it despite all the potential gains. Darcy (2018) suggests that the origin of this resistance should be identified. Since pronunciation instruction has been marginalized, instructors have not had a guide to teach it. Consequently, many decide not to teach it (Derwing and Munro, 2005).

Due to this lack of phonetic instruction in language skills courses, when students take a Phonetics content course, they still struggle with the pronunciation of their L2. Those who were aware of their need to improve it enrolled in a Phonetics course (Saalfeld, 2011). There are also students who need to improve their pronunciation and need to be aware of it since communicative conversation courses do not focus on perfect pronunciation. In short, communication is more important than perfect grammar or pronunciation. In this sense, this may relate to the pronunciation teaching paradox. On the other hand, explicit phonetic instruction seems to be effective in the identification of specific phones and distinguishing between them (Kissling, 2012).

Furthermore, it has been found that there are benefits in using writing strategies to teach pronunciation (Hubert and Vigil, 2017). As these authors argue, writing may enhance noticing targeted phones and promote metalinguistic reflection. In the end, one aspect that has not been mentioned yet is the importance of instructors' background in Linguistics (especially in phonetics) so that native speakers can better understand the challenges that students have to face. They would benefit from explicit knowledge of Phonetics and Phonology (Cunningham, 2015).

In Sociolinguistics, however, the typical methodological tool is the sociolinguistic interview. Students usually have their first experience with a hands-on fieldwork project analyzing or describing the characteristics of a dialect or studying linguistic change. Moreover, they might use other tools such as oral histories to collect the testimonies of a community on a more anthropological level. In a Sociolinguistics course, there should also be training in research methods and statistical analysis. Sociolinguistics is often taught with Dialectology in the same course. Pearson (2006) used digital audio technology to enhance student learning. Students used audio recordings to collect Spanish dialect samples. In the same way that explicit instruction along with exposure is encouraged to improve students' pronunciation (Lord, 2010), this is also the case to acquire dialectal awareness and perception (Schoonmaker-Gates, 2017).

Pragmatics is an area of Linguistics that is essential for L2 learners. Therefore, it is important to include this component in a Spanish language class along with the Linguistics class from the very beginning at the most basic levels. According to Thomas (1983), there are two main reasons why Pragmatics is not usually taught in the L2 classroom: due to its lack of precision and clear methods to do so. Nevertheless, instruction is more effective than just exposure to acquiring pragmatic competence (Rose and Kasper, 2001). When the input is not salient, instruction in Pragmatics is needed.

In the specific case of requests, they are better taught at an intermediate level (Langer, 2013). It is essential to combine the analysis of Linguistics in a cultural context (Shively, 2010). L2 textbooks are insufficient in covering the pragmatics of the language. There is little explicit information, and authentic samples are usually missing (Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Although both explicit and implicit instruction are needed, explicit teaching has been shown to be more effective (Kasper and Rose, 2002). Explicit instruction is encouraged to analyze speech act behavior and to acquire awareness, and implicit instruction is received by being exposed to authentic speech samples.

Martínez-Flor and Usó-Juan (2006) suggest a model of instruction based on 6 Rs: **R**esearching what Pragmatics is about and collecting samples from their L1, **R**eflecting on social factors that influence pragmatic behavior, **R**eceiving explicit instruction about how to behave in the L2, **R**easoning about the context and the participants, **R**ehearsing through communicative activities, and **R**evising their pragmatic performance.

On the other hand, Ishihara and Cohen (2010) propose an explanatory approach as part of Critical Pragmatics. In Spanish for HLLs' courses, oral and written discourse completion tasks were used to assess requests in the same way that they were used with L2 learners (Barros García and Bachelor, 2018). These researchers concluded that HLLs do not need to be taught pragmatics. However, not

all HLLs are the same and there are regional differences. In fact, many times they study abroad in non-heritage countries and they need to be aware of their pragmatic norms.

Another objective in the teaching of Pragmatics is the acquisition of grammar along with promoting pragmatic awareness (Pearson, 2018). This area of Linguistics is often absent because of the lack of training in Pragmatics. According to Cohen (2005), a strategies-based approach is needed to learn speech acts, to use the already known speech acts, with meta-pragmatic considerations to learn how to use them. These strategies will allow the student to handle a variety of contextual situations successfully. Compared to grammatical errors, students do not realize the seriousness of pragmatic errors unless they are exposed to explicit or implicit instruction on them, with more benefits associated with explicit instruction, as mentioned previously in Kasper and Rose (2002). This explicit instruction shows students how particular grammar forms can be used to perform a communicative action. This is especially useful when teaching apologies and refusals (Langer, 2011).

Koike and Pearson (2005) found that explicit instruction and feedback had an effect on making the appropriate pragmatic decisions (understanding the pragmatics). However, implicit instruction affected students' open-ended responses in dialogues, producing successfully pragmatically speaking.

After reviewing most of the literature on teaching Hispanic Linguistics, a list of activities is provided in the following section, so that instructors can use them as a guide in the classroom.

3. Activities for a Hispanic Linguistics course

It is well known that teaching Linguistics of an L1 is not the same as teaching the Linguistics of an L2 (Correa, 2014). In the latter, learning Linguistics is not just a mere way of learning about cognition, but also a facilitator of L2 acquisition (Treffers-Daller, 2003). Thus, this needs to be considered when creating activities for a Hispanic Linguistics class. Fortunately, there are other advantages to learning Linguistics like learning how language works, which is valuable for future instructors of the L2. Hence, this next section provides a list of 17 suggested activities for a Linguistics class taught in Spanish:

- (1) Workshops: They are essential to become familiar with conducting fieldwork. When students take Linguistics for the first time, they need some time to adjust and understand what this science is about.
- (2) Problem-solving activities: Students can share the results of these activities on forums. These activities are particularly beneficial if they arrive at different conclusions, testing and challenging the given hypotheses. Also, students work on their analytical skills and get motivated to understand what the study of Linguistics consists of (Levin, 2017).
- (3) Authentic materials: They are expected in any given communicative class. When teaching phonetics, poems or songs could be used to focus on phonetic features. Podcasts can serve to practice pronunciation. Once students receive feedback from their instructors, they can work with tutors to improve their pronunciation of common errors or as a supplement to podcasts. Ducate and Lomicka (2009) propose the use of computer-assisted visual feedback.

When teaching Pragmatics, learners are given the opportunity to become ethnographers, collecting natural data and analyzing real samples. However, collecting natural data is not strictly necessary. Instead, they can use curated data for analysis since curated samples can provide a useful model in designing an ethnographic interview. It is worth noting that the observer's paradox happens when interviewers are not native speakers. Interviewees unnecessarily accommodate their speech, and this is rarely authentic. This is why many researchers do not conduct interviews themselves.

Lastly, when teaching dialectal variation, authentic materials such as magazines, news, videos, or literature can be used to expose students to diverse dialects so that they communicate successfully in Spanish-speaking countries (Gallego and Conley, 2013).

- (4) **Reflective journals:** Journal writing can become an essential tool in an Introduction to Hispanic Linguistics course. Journals can be written, audio, or video-recorded with the students' opinions on topics in Linguistics and summaries of the material. This tool (journals, portfolios, diaries, or logs) may also help in acquiring intercultural competence and improving writing skills (Rollin, 2006).
- (5) **Cross-cultural comparisons:** These activities develop the skills to acquire the pragmatic knowledge of a language (Shively, 2010). A good activity for this would be performing audio recordings of interactions with local people. By performing cross-cultural comparisons, students can better understand the nature of language and the concept of culture itself (Rose, 2012).
- (6) **Awareness-raising activities:** In Pragmatics, instructors can explain to students how we accomplish communicative actions daily such as requests, apologies, invitations, or refusals. In these situations, students should be aware of their language use and the degree of politeness (Félix-Brasdefer and Cohen, 2012). These activities would be fruitful so that learners become aware of how language works. This is particularly useful in teaching Pragmatics or Phonetics for phonological awareness. These activities should make learners aware of the cultural values and expectations of the target culture (Félix-Brasdefer and McKinnon, 2016). These researchers recommend the implementation of metapragmatic discussions and cross-cultural comparisons of speech acts.
- (7) **Extensive reading:** In content-based instruction, extensive reading is usually expected. By allowing students to be exposed to more readings and different types of readings, we promote students' independence and empowerment (Dupuy, 2000). Lee (2010) promoted the Content-Based Reading Approaches (COBRA) framework for teaching reading in content subjects with comprehensive and effective methods.
- (8) **Peer editing:** In order to encourage cooperative learning, there are some recommended activities such as peer editing or small group activities, which allow students to interact and exchange ideas. Byrd (2003) offered practical

tips for implementing peer editing in the FL classroom, and Insai and Poonlarp (2017) for peer editing in the translation classroom.

- (9) Role plays: They are very useful as a communicative strategy to acquire pragmatics since they are simulations of daily communication. An example of this would be Bataller (2013). In this study, data were collected via role plays and natural interactions to analyze the strategies used by L2 Spanish learners to ask for a coffee in a cafeteria in Spain.
- (10) Phonetic training: This is a technique suggested by Rasmussen and Zampini (2010) to increase intelligibility. We could also include ear training to discriminate sounds in this category.
- (11) Reading aloud: Reading aloud is a technique for pronunciation practice.
- (12) Dictation: Dictation is recommended to teach and learn pronunciation in a Phonetics course.
- (13) Definitions through examples: This strategy proposed by Levin (2017) is based on the idea that students should create their own definitions through the analyses of examples.
- (14) Input-enhancement techniques: For students to acquire sociolinguistic competence, Witten (2000) suggested input-enhancement techniques when viewing videos along with consciousness-raising activities, precisely because the consequences for sociolinguistic or pragmatic errors are more serious for L2 learners than grammatical errors. In fact, Witten (2000) underlines the fact that input enhancement techniques are more effective in pragmatics than in grammar acquisition.
- (15) Socio-pragmatic analyses: These analyses are based on authentic conversations in Spanish to teach Pragmatics.
- (16) Virtual social platforms: These platforms encourage language socialization across online communities to learn language use in social interactions through real exchanges and opportunities to practice speech acts. Students can feel more motivated when emotionally involved in these interactions (Taguchi, 2011). Web-based tutorials may also be helpful for teaching speech acts such as complaints and requests (Russell and Vásquez, 2011). They showed native speakers performing real speech acts.
- (17) Conversation or coffee hours: The objective of these conversations is to use language in context and to teach and acquire Pragmatics. These conversations can be led by the instructor providing students with a context so that they can perform a specific task.

After exposing this list of activities, some suggestions for instructors are offered in the following section.

4. Suggestions for instructors

In order to facilitate the study of Linguistics for the students, instructors should reduce formalism and provide the students with good definitions of new concepts (Levin, 2017). Additionally, according to this researcher, it is crucial to clarify their misconceptions about language instead of lecturing.

The instruction of Phonetics and Pronunciation should not be relegated only to L2 learners; HLLs would also benefit from overt instruction (Arteaga and Llorente, 2009), especially in the transfer of literacy skills including orthography. In a study of Hispanic Linguistics' courses for future teachers of Spanish, Gregory (2005) focused on the aspects of Linguistics that, according to her criteria, would be the most useful when teaching: a description of sound production, Morphology, Syntax, Semantics, Dialectology, sociocultural knowledge, and Pragmatics. She highlights the importance of teaching teachers the value of training in Phonetics and Phonology since this usually needs to be included in methodology courses. On top of this, a pronunciation component and how it relates to orthography is not usually part of Spanish textbooks. Therefore, teachers need to acquire this knowledge to teach it to their students efficiently.

5. Conclusions

Despite all the research on teaching methods to teach Spanish for L2 learners or HLLs, the literature is scarce on teaching methods to teach Hispanic Linguistics, and most of the studies have focused on the instruction of Phonetics or pronunciation. There are also studies on the teaching of Pragmatics, however, it seems that there are no studies on how to teach other areas such as Morphology or Syntax. This is particularly relevant since many undergraduate Spanish majors or minors have to fulfill a requirement in Linguistics (e.g. Introduction to Hispanic Linguistics or Spanish Phonetics and Phonology) with no previous background in the discipline. It is recommended that readers examine the literature on foreign language teaching to find ideas on techniques that could be adapted to other areas of Linguistics such as Syntax or Morphology. At the same time, even though instructors are usually required to take a course on teaching methods of Spanish as an L2, they receive no training in teaching any Linguistics courses. In fact, despite instructors' and students' awareness of their need to improve their pronunciation in the target language, they do not generally receive explicit instruction on this, in part because their instructors did not receive any orientation on how to do so. There is a need for a forum where instructors can share materials or teaching strategies to teach Linguistics courses in Spanish. This article attempts to fill that gap in the literature and provide instructors with a list of activities for the different areas of study in Hispanic Linguistics so that instructors can have a guide on what to do in these classes to promote critical thinking and discussion on different topics in Linguistics. These strategies may be particularly useful for students with no previous knowledge of the subject.

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Author Contributions

Clara Burgo has participated in the elaboration and writing of this article. The author approves the version of the article published in the journal.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their edits and comments to improve the manuscript. A special thanks to my friend and colleague Janine Matts for her continuous support and help.

Financing

This research was done without any financing.

Conflicts of Interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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