

Best practices in designing and teaching ***Spanish in the United States***

9th Workshop on Spanish Sociolinguistics (WSS9)
Queens College, NYC, April 4-7, 2018

Session Description

Justification of the session

Right after English, Spanish is the second most commonly spoken language in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau 2016). 40 million of United States residents age 5 and older spoke Spanish at home in 2015, and 13.3% of residents age 5 and older speak Spanish at home. Among languages other than English, Spanish is projected to remain the most commonly spoken language in the United States over the next decades.

In this context, teaching diversity in all its forms is crucial in higher education. There is a need of shared experiences and more empirical research on teaching diversity-related content in educational settings. This is especially true in the case of a course discussing the different dimensions of the use of Spanish in the United States. Let us call such course *Spanish in the United States*.

Taught either in English or Spanish, and designed as an undergraduate or graduate course, *Spanish in the United States* usually covers the linguistic, sociolinguistic, historical, educational and political aspects of the current status of the Spanish language in the United States (see Escobar & Potowski 2015, Fuller 2012, Lipski 2008, Roca & Colombi 2003, a.o.).

Goal of the session

The goal of this session is to share experiences and to exchange information and resources regarding such a course. Among others, the session will address the following questions:

1. What arguments justify the creation of this course and integrate it into an undergraduate or graduate program curriculum?
2. What criteria are applied to select and organize the relevant topics of the course?
3. What practices help incorporate the knowledge and skills of the students and their communities into the course?
4. What strategies are useful to connect students to current political events and increase their awareness about diversity issues?
5. What pedagogical approaches are useful to diversify teaching strategies for specific topics?

Format of the session

The session will have a duration of 117-120 minutes, and is organized as follows (times are tentative):

1. A chair, allotted 5-8 minutes for introducing the session and the presenters
2. Four presenters, allotted 18 minutes each
3. Four Q&A sessions, one right after each presenter is done, allotted 10 minutes each

Presentations abstracts

1. Integrating *Spanish in the U.S.* as part of the curriculum in an intermediate Spanish language course Anais Holgado Lage (Princeton University)

Spanish in the U.S. is becoming a more prominent course in the Spanish linguistics curriculum and recent publications like Escobar & Potowski (2015) are making it more accessible to our students. The relevance of this topic is indisputable, as over forty million people in the United States speak Spanish and, apart from its sociolinguistic value, it brings important current issues to the classroom such as diversity inclusion, immigration policies, etc.

When taught in the target language, *Spanish in the U.S.* is usually designed as an advanced course. However, in this proposal I will focus on how to design an introduction to this topic as part of a wider curriculum in an intermediate Spanish course with a strong emphasis on cultural content. The core of the course, taught with an online platform, is an analysis of the current situation of the Latino/Hispanic community in the U.S. and their use of Spanish is one of the discussed topics. Some of the discussions revolve around the definition of a dialect, myths about code-switching, the position and views of the Spanish language in public policy, and the future of the Spanish language. Including these issues in a third-semester Spanish course can be challenging but it is also very rewarding, as many students have never thought about them before.

Teaching *Spanish in the U.S.* is an important task and we encourage our students to take a more advanced course on the subject. However, we believe that discussing this topic from an early level has a positive impact on the students and provides them with a better preparation for higher-level classes.

2. Spanish in the South as a Springboard for *Spanish in the U.S.* Cecilia Montes-Alcalá (Georgia Institute of Technology)

I have been teaching *Spanish in the U.S.* as a fundamental component of undergraduate courses on either Spanish sociolinguistics or bilingualism in the Spanish-speaking world at two different universities (private and public) in the South of the U.S. for over fifteen years. One of the core arguments for integrating such module into the curriculum is the fact that Hispanic population has grown tremendously in the South in the last few decades. This state ranks #10 among the fastest growing states for Hispanics in the U.S. increasing from just 1% of the population in 1980 to almost 10% nowadays.

Within this context, I approach the subject from a mainly sociolinguistic perspective covering topics such as language maintenance and shift, language variation, linguistic attitudes, the language situation of the main U.S. Latino groups (Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and Cuban Americans) and the so-called Spanglish. Mixing classic

(canonical) readings with more recent studies works best to give students a historical outlook while incorporating technology in the form of radio interviews, YouTube videos, blogs, newspaper and/or magazine articles, documentaries, etc. makes it more accessible to them.

Native speakers in the classroom are encouraged to share their experiences as Spanish speakers in the U.S., which is appreciated by their peers since they are able to compare real-life situations with the theory behind the academic articles. For a special lecture, the author of one of the assigned readings joins our discussion via Skype so students can ask them questions directly. Homework assignments and research projects are designed to make students apply the concepts learned in class to the outside world. Thus, students are required to carry out fieldwork and explore the ever-growing local Hispanic community in order to expand both their cultural and linguistic knowledge.

3. *Spanish in the U.S.* at a major State University in the East Coast

Paola Cépeda (Stony Brook University) & Francisco Ordóñez (Stony Brook University)

At a major state university in the East Coast, *Spanish in the U.S.* provides a critical overview of (1) the linguistic aspects of the different Spanish-speaking communities in the United States, (2) the linguistic, sociolinguistic and historical aspects of the use of Spanish in the United States, and (3) their impact on the individual and the American society. The course focuses on the Hispanic communities, as well as on other migrant population with similar characteristics. In doing so, the course analyzes important aspects of the today's society: bilingualism, discrimination, identity, immigration, education, ethnicity, government, multilingualism, race, etc.

We will present our experience in teaching this course during four semesters at such major state university. We share what worked, what did not work, and what was of greatest value. In particular, our experience has taught us that such a course opens discussion about social and political issues in today's U.S. society from a more linguistic angle. Previously unknown to young students, concepts such as language contact, language attitudes, bilingualism and multilingualism, and language shift and maintenance offer students the vocabulary and linguistic perspective to reflect, compare and talk about their experiences, knowledge and skills, or those found in their communities. At the same time, students are challenged to analyze a small sample of the situation of Spanish in the American society by conducting a small data collection research. The two approaches (discussion and research) certainly increase students' awareness of their own worldview, cultural differences and social relations. In doing so, students are able to connect linguistic discussion to current political events and diversity issues.

4. Engaging Public Health in *Spanish in the U.S.*

Glenn Martínez (The Ohio State University) & Dalia Magaña (University of California at Merced)

Courses on Spanish in the United States strive to convey the impacts of Spanish language use and Spanish language ideologies across a spectrum of social and political spaces including education, politics and migration. Notwithstanding the growing presence of Spanish within the health delivery system in the U.S., older textbooks on Spanish in the U.S. (Lipski 2008, Martínez 2006) include no mention of this domain of Spanish language use and newer textbooks (Escobar & Potowski 2015, Fuller 2013) embed it in a more general discussion of Spanish in public services. A sustained and robust focus on Spanish in the U.S. health delivery system, however, offers a unique opportunity to increase the appeal of courses on Spanish in the U.S. among a wider audience of

undergraduate students, particularly those in health science and pre-professional degree programs. At the same time, this focus can help address an urgent public health issue, language and cultural barriers that compromise health care delivery for Latin@s.

In this presentation, we will present and discuss numerous activities focused on the incorporation of public health concepts at the intersection of Spanish in the U.S. For example, we will present activities to demonstrate the salience of Spanish as a social determinant of health, the economic impacts of Spanish utilization and underutilization in health care organizations, and the role of translanguaging and transcultural practices in health care. These activities engage students with multiple sources of information including health care interactions, illness narratives, community health assessments, large secondary data repositories, and the literature on public health research; the goal is for students to develop analytic skills that link analyses of language with social, economic, epidemiologic and public health perspectives and methodologies. This approach also promotes the need for sociolinguistic awareness in health care given that such knowledge can equip learners in forming stronger interpersonal relationships with Spanish-speaking patients in the U.S.

References

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