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# Spanish (L3) Games and Activities that Reinforce, Review, and Reexamine English (L2)

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*Introducing and implementing a foreign language to L3 learners is a challenging task. Although the modern day teacher has more materials and more knowledge of student learning, some of the same problems (e.g., large classes, appropriate teaching materials, adherence to traditional methods) persist. Certainly, the importance of acquiring vocabulary for modern day students requires new methods and strategies. In my paper I attempt to explain how different activities and games can enhance and stimulate vocabulary acquisition.*

## Introduction

Five years ago my university invited me to teach an elective course in elementary Spanish. This would be in addition to teaching English conversation classes. The faculty, administration, and I myself had concerns about having a non-native Japanese or non-native Spanish teacher teaching the class. How receptive would the students be to having most explanations in English? Almost half of the students would be studying English with me in addition to Spanish. How would this work out? These were all questions we would have to address if we wanted to offer a successful and challenging Spanish course. We have recognized that a study of the “big three” languages of Mandarin Chinese, English, and Spanish is important. In order for students about Spanish and the twenty-one countries that speak it, a two-year program was initiated. Although “contact time” would be at a premium (only one class a week), the four skills would be taught but emphasis would be on listening and speaking. Teaching materials would include references to sociolinguistic comparisons and the customs of the Spanish speaking world. All activities would utilize the languages as a means of communication and “rote” learning, especially concerning vocabulary acquisition, would be kept to a minimum.

## Initial questions

Several factors influenced the decision to use English as the language of explanation: 1. There was a desire and a need to give more exposure to spoken English since the number of English conversation classes was limited. 2. There was a desire to find out if teaching a content course, in this case another language, in English would be popular.

By eliminating the “fear factor” would students improve their English as well as learn Spanish? 3. The similarity between Spanish and English would give students a different approach to grammar, vocabulary, and concepts. 4. The dearth of Spanish-Japanese texts and supplementary materials would necessitate creating and modifying teacher and student generated materials.

## Livening up the course

In this part, I introduce some of the measures taken in face of the limited accessible material in order to come to positive answers to the initial questions:

In order to make the course “come alive” I realized that I would have to utilize colorful and stimulating activities. One of the early problems encountered was the choice of a textbook. The insatiable market for English learning has obviously spawned a variety of texts but in Spanish there seems to be two choices for the Japanese student: a pedantic, grammar focused text with mediocre listening tapes or CDs, or a glossy Spanish text for tourists or businessmen with more realistic dialogues. I chose the latter because of the quality of the CD and the practicality of the language. In retrospect I don’t think the choice of text mattered.

Experimenting with a “natural method” with a smattering of explanations was hoped to ameliorate the drudgery and tedium of studying a third foreign language. In short I tried not to teach the language as I was taught. The book and blackboard approach would defer to the CD, OHP, Internet, and video. In order not to fall into the trap of just popularizing the class by teaching mostly culture, grammar, vocabulary, and idioms were presented in a new manner, mostly through exercises and games. Since the difference between an activity and a game is

not clear, for convenience sake, let us say an activity is one that supplements or reinforces the lesson while the game is a lesson in itself—something extraneous to the text or lesson but with structure and rules. The following are examples that could fall into both categories.

## The hidden word puzzle

I must admit I thought this simple puzzle would be a waste of time—just a mental gymnastic filler for the ten or twenty minutes left in class. Little did I know how challenging it could be. It took me fewer than twenty minutes to compose one and it took over a class period for the students to solve it, go over corrections, ask questions, and implement it. The word puzzle was not only a good reinforcer of vocabulary but also a great learning tool per se. It was especially beneficial for teaching the main problems in both languages, namely verb inflections, pronouns, and definite articles. While teaching these parts of speech in Spanish with commentary in English the students got a double dose. The OHP is a big help in going over the word puzzle since it affords greater teacher control and student concentration.

Materials—In addition to the OHP all one needs is a puzzle sheet with new and review vocabulary. One example for beginning Spanish students was this one:

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O A S E N O R X
B D I R A R S U
F I N I N O O O
O O P O O B Y O
T S S P R T Q U
O L E S E N O R
S C O N O Z C O

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Students were told that words could be found looking across or down, not diagonally. From the exercise students learned that the letters “a”, “o”, and “u” were not only vowels but words themselves. We used them in sentences. Acquiring vocabulary in this way seemed to be more enjoyable and impressionable than just learning lists from a book or chart. Also I weighted the puzzle with different types of pronouns. In both English and Spanish Japanese students have difficulty with the concept of pronouns. In this exercise we get an indirect pronoun “le”, a reflexive “se”, and a possessive “su”. Another “teaching moment” was picking out the words “se” and “conozco” which both mean “to know” and showing how they are analogous to “wakarimasu” and “shirimasu” in Japanese.

### Regular bingo and picture bingo

Bingo is an especially good listening drill for L3, however, traditional bingo in English for Japanese college students is probably too easy and time consuming. The advantage to this game is that the regular cards are cheap and obtainable at most convenient or one coin shops and can be easily modified for class lessons. The key here is to call the number within a sentence and to give an English translation. For example, instead of just calling B-7, the caller states, “Tengo siete libros” ( I have seven books) or “Hay siete libros” (There are seven books). In addition to reviewing the numbers in both L2 and L3, the students are reviewing verb inflections in both languages.

Another classroom favorite is the picture bingo game. This is both a lesson and activity since it involves both teaching vocabulary and pronunciation. Before calling the bingo, the teacher should prepare copies of the master calling sheets for students. The teacher then preteaches all the vocabulary which

can be penciled in beforehand. Students refer to these while they play. Again, the caller should use the target word within a sentence so the students can recognize the word in context.

### Vocabulary acquisition game

Realia is a great way to motivate and stimulate. It is a novel way not only for students of L2 and L3 to accrue vocabulary, but also to see the many etymological patterns and cognates between English and L3. Another advantage is that the world is one’s laboratory and collecting brochures, pamphlets, newspapers, menus, and flight magazines can be enjoyable. The many metropolitan centers in Japan are teeming with ethnic foods, foreign language newspapers, and cultural information. Indeed, one has to become a “pack rat” while accruing a library of realia and memorabilia.

The materials for this activity are easily obtained from a community center or a travel bureau. A local newsletter or a travel brochure written in Japanese with L2 and L3 on it will suffice. A 5x7 colored note card or something that stands out showing this is a “special exercise” is helpful. Students are asked to write down words that they think they know the meaning of. Since the newsletters we use are written in Spanish, English, Japanese, Korean, and Thai, they can check their own answers. We try to encourage the students to look for Spanish/English cognates which reinforce their Spanish and English vocabulary. Some examples of commonality words like hospital, color, gusto, golf, and hotel are obvious, while connections can be made with words like *aniversario*, *atencion*, *nacion*, and *arte*. After about thirty minutes, students put their words on the blackboard, or preferably an overhead projector. Then students share their answers and we check the meaning

and pronunciation in both languages. Students like this activity because it puts the students in the role of teachers.

Food of course is always an effective catalyst for generating interest. Finding imported foodstuffs with several languages on it is no longer a scavenger hunt. We use coffee labels from Columbia, paella instructions from Spain, descriptions from coca mate from Peru, and warnings on tequila from Mexico. Some of the labels themselves are interesting and generate vocabulary we would not study otherwise. *Tia Maria* (aunt Mary) vanilla liqueur, *sangre de toro* (bull blood) wine, and *Buendia* (good day) coffee are favorites.

## Conclusion

It is advantageous for students to gain an understanding of the linguistic and cultural heritages of as many countries as possible. After the momentous events of the past few years, there can be no dispute that learning about foreign countries, foreign politics, and foreign languages is critical. The internet and the global village mindset have opened a new world of innovations and creativity for the student and teacher. In general, this has been a boon to language teaching; in particular, it has enhanced and facilitated the need for acquiring foreign language vocabulary quickly.

Because the knowledge of both technical and practical English is important, we have decided to teach L3 by using English L2 as the language of instruction with only a minimum of Japanese thrown in. Student questionnaires showed no aversion to English in the classroom, but only a few said their English had improved a lot as they learned Spanish. Most said their English had improved a little. When it came to the area of using games

and activities, the students were almost unanimous in their approval. They stated the text, although necessary, was the least helpful medium in learning the language. What was more memorable were some of the games and activities such as Spanish monopoly, email Christmas cards, Simon Says, Spanish holiday songs, composing maps of Spain and Latin America, and commercial and raw videos. Ole for games and activities.

## References

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