# Spanish Language Learning and Cultural Diversity

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## Introduction

Language is a process of expressing and communicating ideas and emotions in the form of signs and symbols. Therefore, signs and symbols are used to communicate and convey particular information. There are many different languages in the world. Therefore, the first language that a child learns from his or her parents is called the mother tongue. Thus, any language acquired through learning and training is known as a second language. The process of learning and acquisition of other languages rather than the mother tongue is known as Second Language Acquisition (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2016). The process of learning and acquiring a second language is complex and challenging. This assertion can be confirmed by those whose first language is not English and who are involved in learning and training processes. Therefore, it's important for English teachers to understand the cultural and language backgrounds of students who speak other languages in order to help them comprehend English successfully. Teachers will require information about the student's language background and the level of their English proficiency. As a student involved in the learning and training process of a second language acquisition program, the author has acquired information about the relationship between English and Spanish with the aim of evaluating the language learning of a Spanish-speaking English language learner student (Saville-Troike & Barto 2016).

## A Comparative Study

### Spanish

Spanish is an ancient Romance language, and it is a native language for more than 360 million people in the world. Thus, Spanish is one of the ancient Romance languages known as Espanol. The Spanish dialect arose in the 9th century in the town of Burgos in Spain. Spanish is the official language of 20 countries in the world (Kwintessential, 2018). Most of the countries that use Spanish as their national language are mainly from South America. Therefore, Spanish is spoken by all states of Central and South America except Brazil. Also, in Equatorial Guinea and Spain, people speak Spanish as their official language. Therefore, the Spanish language has different regional dialects, and all the dialects are acquired from Castilian. The most commonly known dialects are Latin American Spanish and European Spanish. Latin American Spanish has a different phonology at some points from European Spanish. Latin American Spanish uses the /s/ sound, while Castilian has the /th/ sound for words with the letter z or c before the vowels e or i. Overall, the Spanish language is common and the same

among its users. It is a unique language and is considered the world's most spoken native language (Kwintessential 2018).

There are twenty-seven letters in the Spanish language with 30 different sounds. The letters include ch (che), the ll (elle), the r, the rr, and the ñ. R is a single vibration, and RR is multiple vibrations. The letters "k" and "w" are listed in the Spanish alphabet; they only appear in borrowed words such as karate and wolframio. Spanish began to appear in writing in Latin religious texts, Glosas Emilianenses, in the form of notes. The notes date back to the 12th century.

In Spanish, nouns are used to mark masculine or feminine gender. The plural of Spanish words ends with the addition of s or es; adjectives change the endings in order to agree with nouns. Therefore, since nouns are based on gender, the adjectives must change to match the gender in writing. Spanish verbs are complex but regular; they use infinitives and conjugations; thus, they use imperative, indicative, and subjunctive moods. Also, they use a variety of progressive tenses. For example, infinitives in Spanish end in -er, -ar, or –ir, e.g., Tomar (to drink). The Spanish verbs are based on present and past participles, Common Auxiliaries and Modals, and Transitive vs. Intransitive Verbs. Therefore, Spanish is a highly orthographic language. From a writing perspective, Spanish can be recorded in Latin script.

## Differences between Spanish and English

The distinctions between the Spanish and English languages are various, thus making it difficult for Spanish-speaking students to learn English as a second language. The contrasts mainly arise from the alphabet, phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and miscellaneous. First, Spanish uses the Latin alphabet, which differs slightly from the English alphabet. This is because the Latin alphabet vowels take an acute accent, and there is an additional letter ñ. Therefore, Spanish-speaking students will have a challenge in writing English words with vowels a, e, and i. Also, Spanish students will make mistakes when using the consonants h, j, r, and y since they are different names in Spanish.

Second, there is a significant contrast between the phonological system of Spanish and English, especially in vowel sounds and sentence stress. Therefore, the difference in phonology poses a serious challenge to Spanish students in acquiring proper English accents. This obstacle arises from the fact that Spanish has pure vowels and five diphthongs, contrary to English, which has twelve pure vowels and eight diphthongs (Kwintessential, 2018). Also, grammar differences arise from verbs and tenses. Spanish is an inflected language, which is not the case with English. One of the major distinctions is that there is no correspondence between the two languages in the use of tenses. Therefore, this causes Spanish learners to use simple tense rather than progressive tense. For instance, a Spanish learner might use "she has a pen" instead of "she has a pen.

Consequently, miscellaneous language causes a contrast between Spanish and English. Thus, the Spanish sound of the word and its spelling are almost similar, with great correspondence. The English words do not necessarily correspond with their spelling; thus, the Spanish learner will have a problem

in writing the words they encounter in spoken language (Penny, 2002). Also, problems will arise with the spelling of English words, especially words with cc, ll, and rr. Also, Spanish nouns have a gender, which influences the type of adjectives that are used, while in English, this is not the case. There are more possessive nouns in Spanish. Moreover, the negation in Spanish is simpler than in English. The negation in English is complicated since it has different prefixes like “non”, “un”, “dis”, or “in” (Penny, 2002). Therefore, Spanish allows the putting of a “no” word in front of the verb to negate. The Spanish preposition is “en,” while English has different prepositions. Thus, there are significant distinctions between English and Spanish.

## Social and Cultural Contexts of Spanish

Spanish society’s way of life, from the cultural and social perspective, is much different from American life. Although they are members of the same society, there are social and cultural differences that exist between the two social groups. First, Hispanic society possesses high regard for authority. The Hispanics respect authoritative figures, which is not the case for the Americans. Therefore, Hispanics respect doctors, lawyers, managers, executive directors, etc. For instance, Hispanics cannot argue with a doctor by telling him that they saw an advert on TV recommending the use of certain medications (World Travel Guide, 2018). Therefore, average Latinos respect authority.

Also, Hispanics are more emotional and welcoming than average Americans. The Hispanics are kind and easy to mingle with compared with Americans. Thus, they are accommodating, and they tend to be more open and direct. Additionally, their degree of intimacy is much higher compared to average Americans.

Hispanics tend to be friendlier in recognizing the presence of others. Most likely, people like their presence to be recognized; this cultural aspect is pronounced in the cultural context of Hispanics. Thus, Hispanics show more gratitude when agreeing to meet them; they maintain eye contact throughout the conversation with a tone of genuineness (World Travel Guide, 2018). Thus, they are different from the average Americans. Also, they are more comfortable in maintaining social harmony. Thus, it’s difficult for Hispanics to share their problems with outsiders since they try to avoid social awkwardness. Therefore, it is hard for Hispanics to separate personal feelings from the person they are interacting with, which is different from American society. In fact, Americans can disagree, but this doesn’t affect their personal relationship.

In social circumstances, Hispanics’ personal contacts are extremely common. Thus, their level of interaction is higher than that of American society. Therefore, Hispanics tend to have extreme personal contact; thus, they like to hug, kiss on the cheek, and use effusive handshakes during their personal interactions. This behavior is very different in American society, especially for people outside their families and relationships (World Travel Guide, 2018). Hispanics will hug and kiss on the cheek even if the people they are interacting with are little known to them. Thus, there are social and cultural differences between the two societies.

# Specific Case Analysis

## Background Information

Gloria Hernandez (a Pseudonym) is a seventh-grade student who attends a parochial school in Norfolk, Virginia. She relocated to America at the age of twelve, and she has lived here for the last year. Both of Gloria's parents are Argentinean. Thus, Spanish is her mother tongue. She continues to speak her native language at home. Her father is well conversant with the English language, while her mother possesses little skill in English.

Gloria went to schools in Argentina, where all the instructions and studies were conducted using the Spanish language. Also, in her previous school, she attended three English lessons every week. Currently, Gloria is a student in an American school. She can communicate, understand, and write in English in the majority of her classes, except science. She is having difficulties in Language Arts, particularly English grammar. Once per week, Gloria is subjected to a learning English as a second language (ESL) test, which the teacher uses to help her improve her reading and writing skills. At the beginning of school, she was tested and was found to be in need of ESL services.

### Purpose of Study

The author has learned about Gloria's native language and seen some of her reading and writing as a linguistic graduate student; the author became interested in understanding the areas in which Gloria is experiencing difficulties. Therefore, the study assists in identifying particular areas where Gloria is having difficulties and makes suggestions to address the identified issues in the future. The phonology, syntax, pragmatics, and semantics were areas of interest. The author familiarized the ESL instructors with the situation and allowed them to conduct the study.

### Data

The author acquired samples of Gloria's work in both written and oral forms. Also, the author observed and listened to Gloria reading aloud to the teacher while in class. Moreover, a copy of her ESL test was evaluated. Her writing tests were used to conduct the analysis below.

### Analysis

Gloria had difficulties in pronouncing "weight"; thus, she couldn't pronounce the vowels 'ei'. Thus, the word "weight" was pronounced as "wit." Therefore, there were no contrasts between "ei" vowels and 'i'. Also, she had difficulty with the 'sh' sound, and she pronounced it as an 's' sound, for instance, in the word fashion.

When evaluating syntax, it was acknowledged that her work lacked prepositions, but when they were there, she misused them. In Spanish, there is a common preposition, 'en'; thus, she lacked knowledge about prepositions. She also demonstrated strengths in negating; thus, she properly used prefixes "non", "un", "dis", or "in" well, although many Spanish ELLs have a problem using negation prefixes.

From reviewing her writing test and writing samples, it was clear that Gloria had a good comprehension of conventions of writing. She didn't have a problem with punctuation, use of vocabulary, and abbreviations. Therefore, the author noted that Gloria had a problem with the pronunciation of words, but she was good at writing. Overall, Gloria is an active student who is attentive and engaging.

# Conclusion

There are several undertakings that would benefit Gloria in improving her second language (English) skills. First, she should practice pronunciation of /sh/ and /s/ to help her differentiate the two sounds. She should use words like sheet/sit, shun/sun, and shoot/sort to help her differentiate and pronounce the words correctly. Therefore, both Gloria and the ESL instructor should consider recording the pronunciations on tape so that, by replaying them, she can hear two different phonemes.

Also, she should focus on the use of nouns and adjectives. She should consider more literature books to understand the use of nouns and adjectives. Furthermore, she should familiarize herself with the prepositions since her work lacks prepositions. Thus, she should also focus on understanding where to insert the correct prepositions. Moreover, Gloria should read about sentence connectors to help her improve her sentence structure and allow fluency. To improve her oral skills, she should make sure that her flow when reading is smooth. By doing so, she will be able to recognize the words she has difficulty with. Then, research them for a better understanding. On the same note, she should allocate some time to undertaking vocabulary improvement activities to improve her writing.

# Reflection

The author and researcher of the activity highly benefited from the activity undertakings. Also, the insights from the activity benefitted both Gloria and her teacher. The activity presented an opportunity for the author to understand Spanish language concepts. Thus, after learning the basics of Spanish, the author got to work with a student. Therefore, the activity entailed research to identify particular areas where a Spanish student was having difficulties and areas where she was performing well. Thus, the student benefited from understanding the areas on which she should focus. Thus, the analysis of student writing and oral samples facilitated the outcome of the activity.

The author helped in compiling the areas where Spanish students experience challenges while studying English. Therefore, the author's professional suggestions are important not only to Gloria but also to other Spanish-speaking English learners. This fact was enlightening. The teacher

acknowledged the author's work and asserted that the work would help in understanding other Spanish students' learning issues. Since the author had already researched the Spanish language aspects, it was easier to identify a particular area for observation and analysis.

There were challenges in conducting research, but it was worthwhile since the author learned how to apply linguistic studies in real situations. Also, the activity helped the author to learn the social and cultural aspects of the Spanish-speaking people. Furthermore, the act of helping someone understand her English learning challenges made the author feel accomplished. In general, the activity goals and objectives were met.

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