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OF SPANISH DEPARTMENTS AND TEACHING SPANISH.

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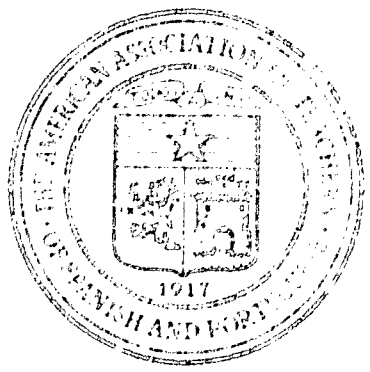
AN INCREASING NUMBER OF SPANISH PROFESSORS, ASKED TO ESTABLISH A FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT IN A NEW COLLEGE OR UNIVERSITY, ARE SERIOUSLY APPRAISING THE AIMS AND FUNCTIONS OF THEIR DEPARTMENTS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO MAINTAIN A BALANCE BUT NOT A SEPARATION BETWEEN TEACHING AND RESEARCH, BETWEEN NATIVE SPANISH SPEAKERS AND NATIVE AMERICANS WITH NEAR-NATIVE FLUENCY IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE, BETWEEN LATIN AMERICAN AND SPANISH CULTURE AND LITERATURE, AND BETWEEN LANGUAGE, LINGUISTICS, AND TEACHING METHODS ON THE ONE HAND AND LITERATURE AND SCHOLARLY METHODS ON THE OTHER. EFFECTIVE TEACHER EDUCATION MUST OFFER COURSES IN METHODS, TESTING, TECHNIQUES, AND APPLIED LINGUISTICS WITH TRAINING CONTINUED IN SERVICE UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF MASTER TEACHERS. TO INTEGRATE FURTHER ALL PHASES OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE TEACHING, THE FACULTY SHOULD ENCOURAGE DISCUSSION OR TRAINING GROUPS, WHICH WOULD BENEFIT ALL DEPARTMENT MEMBERS FROM THE APPRENTICE TEACHERS TO THE SENIOR MEMBERS DEVOTING CONSIDERABLE TIME TO RESEARCH, AND WHICH MIGHT EVEN BE OPEN TO SPANISH MAJORS WHO PLAN TO TEACH. THIS ARTICLE APPEARED IN "HISPANIA," VOLUME 49, NUMBER 4, DECEMBER 1966, PAGES 808-813. (GJ)

A JOURNAL DEVOTED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE TEACHING OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE

HISPANIA



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SHOP-TALK

Conducted by RICHARD BARRUTIA*

OF SPANISH DEPARTMENTS AND TEACHING SPANISH

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In these days of accelerated expansion of our student body, more and more Spanish professors will find themselves in the heretofore unique situation of helping to establish a new college or university. As members of Curriculum Committees, or Committees on Academic Affairs they will be involved in college-wide planning, while as language teachers they may be charged with establishing a department of foreign languages. As a result of this dual responsibility they may be obliged to spend more time than ever before, thinking about the role of language studies in a university, the type of teaching which would be most desirable in the basic courses, and the best means of attracting and preparing Spanish majors.

People who find themselves in such positions will surely discover that it is necessary to remind their colleagues constantly of a fact that we language teachers all know, but which can never be stated too often or too forcefully: language courses are different from other courses. They are different in the size of classes that can be handled (they must be smaller than most classes); they are different in the type of activity that goes on in the classroom (little or no lecturing); they are different in the amount of unsupervised work a student can handle (classroom and laboratory time should be maximal—homework is less important); they are different in the kind of instructional personnel that must be employed (the *sine qua non*, a native or near-native ability to speak the language is not necessarily related to academic training or scholarly production); they are different, at least on the first-year level, in that the textbook, to a large extent, *is* the course; and finally, they are different in the large percentage of majors who go on to teach their specialty.

In addition to all these distinguishing factors, there is a further complication which pertains only to departments of Spanish. We are teaching a language which is spoken in nineteen countries. Even if we divide the language and culture into two areas—those of Spain and Spanish America—we have the problem of deciding how to divide our attention and our efforts.

All these important differences force anyone who is attempting to set up a department of Spanish into a rather complicated appraisal of his personnel needs. Having recently gone through such an appraisal, I should like to offer the following observations. First, every department which is large enough should employ at least two native speakers from widely separate areas, preferably from Spain and Spanish America. This is not so they can teach two versions of Spanish—the Peninsular and the American. I happen to believe that, granted a native speaks the Spanish of an educated person whose speech is not permeated with provincialisms, it makes little difference which type of Spanish he teaches. The reason for having at least one Spaniard and one Spanish American is that an American teacher in the same department could utilize his Spanish-speaking colleagues as a mine of idiomatic usage and as a source of information on customs which would contrast some of the fundamental cultural differences between the mother country and its offspring.

But a Spanish department must employ American teachers as well. Even a highly cultured, sensitive native speaker, who knows English well and has the necessary linguistic training, would need help in understanding the problems of American-English speaking students. Thus, if a balance is maintained between native

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Americans and native Spanish speakers, a linguistic and cultural give-and-take would be possible within a department.

Then there is the question of scholarly production. We have recently seen many words, and a few deeds, in the attempt to reestablish a balance between teaching and research—a balance which seems to have been tipped heavily in favor of research.[1] While I agree with the general thesis that the main distinction between a high school teacher and a professor is that the professor is expected to engage in research, and that we should not do anything which would widen the dichotomy between teaching and research, we again have to note that language teaching is different. As long as we are faced with large numbers of students studying foreign languages as a requirement, a department is going to have to devote the bulk of its work to teaching language. A good teacher of a foreign language must start, as I have indicated above, with a near-native ability to speak that language. He should learn, and keep up with, the latest developments in applied linguistics and new methods of teaching his language, and he should refresh himself frequently in a cultural sense by reading the literature of, and traveling in, the country whose language he is teaching. Language and how to teach it should be his main interest, and although he should not be discouraged from contributing to scholarly journals, he should not be required to do so. The good language teacher could conceivably make a career within a college or university department by teaching Advanced Composition and Conversation, Applied Linguistics, Methods of Teaching Spanish, and Spanish or Latin-American Civilization courses.

Incidentally, it is very desirable to have at least one member of the department who has enough knowledge of music and dancing to handle club and departmental programs. There is nothing like the sound of a guitar or a pair of castanets for stimulating interest in Spanish.

Of course, no one would question the need for advanced literature courses, and for those professors who are going to teach these courses and direct graduate theses, scholarly endeavors are essential, and the proof of success in such endeavors will lie first in the attainment of the Ph.D., and then in continuing publication. But we must remember that it is only at this point, and with students who are aiming in this direction (that is, of becoming scholar-professors) that scholarly research and publication takes on as much significance in the field of Spanish as it does in other areas. It is unfortunately still true that a department could be made up entirely of people with Ph.D.'s from the top graduate schools, with long lists of publications to their credit, and yet be a mediocre department. Too many scholarly Spanish professors give their courses in English. If we develop our students' ability sufficiently, they should certainly be able to take a literature course which is not only conducted in Spanish, but which also requires the writing of examinations in that language.

As for the courses we offer, we should realize that not all students attain sufficient ability in Spanish within the same time span. We should have a wide variety of literature courses for those who are ready to handle them. However, we should not be so fatuous as to expect our majors to know all areas of Spanish and Latin American literature upon graduation. It is better to maintain a balance between Peninsular and Latin American culture than to attempt to saturate a student in one or the other. This must also be taken into account in selecting personnel for the department.

From the above it can readily be seen that in the establishment of a Spanish department the watchword should be balance —balance between teaching and scholarship; balance between native Spanish speakers and native Americans; balance between Latin American and Spanish cultural and literary offerings; and balance between language, linguistics, and teaching methods on the one hand, and literature and scholarly methods on the other. Please note, however, that balancing these elements does not mean separating them; cultural material should be tied in with language courses on all levels, and language should be an important element even in the

most advanced literature courses. In fact, the perfect department would be made up of people who were bilingual, who had lived an equal amount of time in the United States and a Spanish-speaking country, who had all the knowledge and personality traits of a master teacher, who published scholarly works, and who were equally knowledgeable about Spanish and Latin-American culture.[2] Such persons would obviously be rare, if not non-existent, but with careful selection of personnel, the total quality of a department could be made to approach such an ideal.

But what of the teaching itself? The majority of our teachers, even in college, are still engaged primarily in teaching Spanish to students who know little or nothing of the language. Many who are already teaching have been helped, and will continue to be helped by the NDEA institutes. Some graduate assistants who expect to go into teaching are being helped through training programs at the institutions where they are studying. But many teachers cannot attend NDEA institutes, and many graduate schools do not yet have good training programs for their teaching assistants. And what of the vast number of native speakers of Spanish who are not in a position to take courses in linguistics and methods, but who could certainly be utilized in our ever-tightening need for language teachers? And finally, what of the large numbers of Spanish majors who are studying in departments which have not yet developed these courses?

For years professors have been decrying the type of methods courses required by departments of Education, and rightly so. One of the more obvious objections is that, except on the most elementary levels, emphasis should not be on a general method of teaching, but how to teach a particular discipline—and such a course should clearly be taught by an expert teacher of the subject which the student plans to teach. But even here we run a risk of placing excessive emphasis on the *how-to* courses. At the time when we begin to train a student to teach Spanish we should think of him as an apprentice rather than as a student. The courses in Methods and Applied Linguistics should be considered a part of the prospective teacher's education rather than as a part of a training program. In this sense, training is actually showing a student how to present his materials. Since this does not necessarily require courses, it would appear possible to help students and young teachers who do not have the opportunity to take special programs without spending a great deal of time on it.

If we grant that on the elementary level the textbook is the course, we may assume that the selection of a textbook and advice on how to use it are important elements in the training of a new teacher. Many teachers have refused to use *Modern Spanish* for various reasons.[3] It is undeniable, however, that the authors of this book have made a great contribution to the teaching of foreign languages. It is not just a textbook; it is a method of teaching. The prime elements of the system are the dialog—which certainly should be learned by heart—the substitution, response, and conversion drills, the introduction of important grammatical constructions before they are consciously studied, and the totally contextual teaching of vocabulary and idioms. These, plus the use of language laboratories and other devices, constitute the very essence of the language-teaching revolution we have been undergoing in recent years. It is not my place to urge anyone to use a particular text, but a teacher who refuses to use a book of the *Modern Spanish* type is turning his back on the latest developments in both the application of linguistics to teaching and the audio-lingual method itself. By studying the instructor's manual for *Modern Spanish* one can absorb, almost without realizing it, many of the recent contributions of linguists to the teaching of Spanish. Using such a book under the guidance of someone who had already used it could be considered as a short training program in the teaching of Spanish. In other words, showing someone how to use such a book is a demonstration of a teaching method. (Let me hasten to point out here that when I say the textbook is the course, or is a method of teaching, I do

not mean that a teacher should let the text dominate his performance in the classroom, or prevent the exercise of original or individual approaches to his presentation of the material.)

It seems to me that the principal ingredients of a future Spanish teacher's training are contained in the program developed at Harvard University's Department of Romance Languages and Literatures under the able direction of Professor Dwight Bolinger. Some important elements of this program are an orientation period which includes a demonstration by a master teacher, training in language laboratory techniques; the use of other electronic equipment which includes a device which enables the student-teacher to record an entire class performance, which he then plays back to himself in order to make a thorough self-criticism; and supervision by outside teachers.

Of these items the demonstration by a master teacher is, in my opinion, the most important. I had the pleasure of witnessing such a demonstration last fall, and my principal reaction was a new awareness that, no matter how much experience we have had in teaching foreign languages, we can always learn more by observing a master in action.[4] But what is the difference between a master teacher and one who is merely an experienced teacher? In a way this is like asking the difference between a beautiful woman and one who is merely pretty; most of us would have difficulty in articulating the difference, but we would probably easily recognize both a beautiful woman and a master teacher when we see one.

The quality which distinguishes a master teacher might be called *galvanism*. Such a teacher should exude energy; he should rarely, if ever, sit down; he should be as close as possible to the class and to whatever individual student he happens to be addressing; he should never appear to be wondering what to do; and he should galvanize the class into a constant series of reactions between himself and the class, between himself and an individual student, between two or three segments of the class, or between two or three students. Finally, the master teacher must be very conscious of what he is doing so that he can articulate his method when he is demonstrating it. The future teachers witnessing the demonstration will not only be impressed, but they will also be able to take intelligent notes based on the teacher's analysis, thereby enabling themselves to review the experience from time to time.

As a matter of fact, in a brief description which contrasted an imaginary good teacher with an imaginary poor one, Professor Bolinger was, in a sense, describing a master teacher. The description appeared in the "Newsletter of the Harvard Graduate Society for Advanced Study and Research," and it was reprinted in *Hispania*, Sept., 1965 (pp. 560-561). This letter is given to all the graduate assistants, along with a confidential rating sheet which they use in making a self-analysis based on a recorded class session. This sheet contains some penetrating questions which would be of benefit to some teachers with long experience who might have developed the unfortunate attitude that they can teach elementary courses without thinking of what they are going to do with a particular lesson. Here are some of the questions:

1. Does the instructor get down to business immediately with an activity that concentrates the attention and interest of all the students and sets the pace for the rest of the hour?

2. Are his classroom activities well organized, with a plan that has obviously been conceived beforehand, and not left to the spur of the moment?

3. Is there a good variety of activities, with neither too much nor too little time devoted to any one?

4. Have enough activities been planned so that the instructor is not left wondering what to do in the last few minutes?

5. Are mistakes noted promptly and corrected efficiently, without wasting the time of the class as a whole, but with a return to the same student later to make sure the correction has "taken"?

With a basic method provided by a good textbook, a demonstration by a master teacher, a questionnaire such as the one mentioned above, and supervision by a veteran teacher, almost anyone with the requisite knowledge of the language and a

certain amount of intelligence and sensitivity (to students) can be trained as he teaches, in much the same way as graduate assistants are trained where a good program is available. Of course the novice teacher, be he a recent graduate or a qualified native speaker, would have to have continual help in matters over and above the presentation of the material in the text. The frequency and the quality of quizzes, both oral and written, is of extreme importance, as is the problem of grading the students' performance. Hour examinations and finals should also come in for a great deal of scrutiny. As a matter of fact, this is another area in which veteran teachers sometimes permit themselves to stagnate. Frequent discussions about such testing, with constant experimentation with the type of questions and evaluation of responses is an absolute must for a department which wishes to maintain a high level of teaching. At the same time it would be an important element in the training of the inexperienced.

Many other facets of language teaching should be considered and explored by the veteran who wishes to help the newcomer to the profession. Some examples would be the type of materials selected, and the method of presenting, dictations and oral comprehension exercises; the choice of outside reading materials; suggestions on what kinds of digressions from the text might be useful; and the type of questions to ask students in spontaneous conversational interludes.

This latter point is very important, for no teacher who claims he is using an audio-lingual approach should permit a class to go by without at least a brief period of impromptu questions and answers, either between himself and individual students or between two or more students. All of the drilling on the dialogs and textbook exercises are but a prelude to the actual purpose of an oral method of teaching—the development of the ability to converse intelligently and correctly in Spanish. But the new teacher may need help in determining the type of questions to ask. There are many different kinds of questions, and each type serves a different purpose. For instance, there are questions designed to put the student at ease, to utilize new vocabulary, to develop grammatical points, to demonstrate and fortify the cultural material used in class, to elicit thoughtful responses, and, possibly most important, questions which make the students feel that they do, indeed, know how to speak Spanish.

All these things, and more, would be dealt with at length in a methods course, but it is my firm opinion that we run a risk of committing the Educationists' sin all over again if we think we can convert students into teachers merely by telling them in a course all we know about teaching Spanish. Furthermore, we are rapidly reaching a point where we shall have to utilize people who did not realize that they would some day be teaching Spanish. I refer to native speakers who have studied in Latin American or Spanish universities and educated housewives who have majored in Spanish and have kept up their contact with the language by travel or residence in a Spanish-speaking country.

Lawyers, doctors, engineers, and architects receive their education while studying for their degrees, but they work under supervision when they join a firm or a hospital for the first time. Similarly, it is the duty of a department head to see that there is constant interplay between his experienced teachers and those with little or no experience. However, this on-the-job-training need not be confined entirely to the new, inexperienced staff members and one or two junior members who are supervising. On the contrary, meetings which are dedicated to helping new teachers should include those professors who are engaged primarily in teaching advanced literature courses and doing scholarly research. We might also open them to Spanish majors who plan to teach, perhaps as part of a Methods course. In short, we should conceive of teacher training as an undertaking which involves everyone with a professional interest in Spanish, from the department chairman to the Spanish major. The linguists and master teachers who have developed the modern textbooks, and who are now

developing the training programs for graduate assistants, have shown us the way. Let us utilize their timely contributions to the full.

NOTES

[1] The Danforth Foundation has made several grants to aid in this effort. See the *New York Times* education page, (E 11) Jan. 9, 1966.

[2] See Prof. Robert G. Mead's AATSP Presidential Address in the March, 1966 *Hispania* for further elaboration of the ideal teacher.

[3] I am referring to the original, 1960 edition. As of this writing, publication of the revision of *Modern Spanish* is scheduled for April, 1966. [Editor's Note: the revision is reviewed in this number.]

[4] The demonstration was by Prof. Hugo Montero of Harvard. He is now writing an article in which he explains his method. Although I do not know when and where it will be published, I am certain that it will be very useful in an on-the-job-training program, and I urge all teachers of Spanish to read it when it appears, or to look it up if it has already appeared.