Suggestions are offered here for effecting a smooth transition in Spanish FLES classes from the audiolingual skills level to a level of reading competence which allows for proper pronunciation and both oral and silent reading comprehension. The discussion centers on creating reading readiness at the pre-reading level and considered such aspects as (1) the effective use of pattern drills, especially in verb presentation, (2) the counteraction of interference from English speech and reading habits, and (3) the selection of appropriate primary reading materials. (DS)
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"Readiness," in the sense in which the word is currently employed in the teaching of English reading to native speakers, obviously has little meaning when applied to an English-speaking child who begins to read Spanish in the third or fourth grade. Yet there undoubtedly exists the need for readiness of a somewhat different order, for the development of basic audio-lingual skills is essential before the teaching of reading in Spanish is begun. Of primary importance to both audio-lingual facility and reading is the student's need to become familiar and comfortable with the sound system of Spanish. Toward this end, rhymes, tongue-twisters, poems, and songs can be of inestimable value in heightening the child's phonetic sensitivity. The usefulness of such devices in the teaching of reading has been noted by many experts in the field, among them Gertrude Hilbreth, who advises teachers to "Intensify the children's acuity for sounds in words through rhymes, poems, and songs." For example, nursery rhymes built around the pronunciation of the Spanish vowels are extremely useful in training youngsters in their aural discrimination and articulation.

Yet as every FLES teacher concerned with reading instruction in Spanish knows, there is much more involved in the development of "readiness." There are other considerations related to the reading process itself, to the nature of the Spanish language, and to those speech and reading habits characteristic of English-speaking American children.

There is a great temptation, when working audio-lingually with children, to place exaggerated emphasis upon the learning of nouns, with a resultant impoverishment of drill in the more abstract concepts expressed by other parts of speech. Because so many nouns designate concrete objects, they are more readily demonstrated (either through use of the object itself or by means of models, cut-outs, or drawings) in the classroom and are, with a minimum of repetition, easily learned and retained by the student. Yet such drills, even when couched in the context of a simple sentence ("Aqui está el lápiz," "Aqui está el libro," etc.) may ultimately degenerate into little more than name calling, a process which, regardless of the number of words thus mastered, does very little to prepare the child for useful communication in Spanish, and leaves him almost totally unequipped to learn to read. And yet, with the exercise of a little ingenuity, it is possible to present nonobjective concepts in such a manner as to insure that they will be learned with relative ease and painlessness. (There are, admittedly, a great many concepts in Spanish, as in any other language, not susceptible of demonstration by any means save those of translation and exegesis in the mother tongue. The fact remains that many of the most frequently employed nonobjective words and constructions are demonstrable in one way or another, and offer a fertile field of material for learning at the elementary level.)

Verbs, where possible, should be acted out by the student employing them in drill, so that a vivid motor experience is immediately associated with their use. Thus, a teacher might, directing himself to a pupil, give the command, "Salta, Miguel." The child thus addressed would react with the appropriate movement while giving the response, "Yo salto." The question, "¿Salta Miguel?" might then be directed to other members of the class to elicit the third person use of the verb in the response, "Si, Miguel salta." Verbs not amenable to such treatment can often be demon-
stratified by means of simple but graphic stick figure drawings and suitable conversational material woven around the situations depicted.

Similarly, positive and negative verbal commands can be presented in the form of games that greatly facilitate their mastery. The one described below is merely illustrative; an imaginative teacher would have no difficulty in devising many more along the same lines.

*Tira la pelota.* Object: to familiarize the student with positive and negative familiar command forms of regular -ar verbs. First, pupils are taught the following rhyme, while the teacher manipulates a large, colorful ball so that the rhyme is associated with its meaningful dramatization: "Tengo una pelota que salta y que bota porque no está rota. ¡Tirala otra vez!" At the appropriate point in the rhyme, the teacher throws the ball to a child who will in turn bounce the ball until he reaches the final line, when he must toss the ball to another. When this much has been thoroughly mastered, a variation is introduced into the game. The children are told that upon throwing the ball to a classmate, they may instruct that person either to bounce the ball or *not* to bounce it, as they choose. Thus, if the recipient of the ball hears "¡Rebota la pelota!" he proceeds as before, bouncing the ball while reciting the rhyme. But if he is told, "¡No rebotes la pelota!", then he must immediately pass the ball to a classmate, telling him whether or not he is to bounce the ball.

While this operation may seem needlessly simple-minded, the response of youngsters up to the age of ten or eleven is gratifying enthusiastic. It is a game that a great many have been known to take home with them, and the repetitions thus secured will, when reinforced by one or two other games employing the use of positive and negative commands, secure the habitual employment of the -a, -es morphemes. With little difficulty, similar games can be invented to expedite the teaching of prepositions and adverbs.

In the elaboration of any language-teaching technique intended for use with young children, it is important to avoid drilling in a vacuum; drill that is unrelated to the child's immediate experience is not only boring but largely unproductive. Drill responses not made meaningful within the context of an activity situation all too easily become nothing more than mindless chanting. To the extent that a teacher succeeds in engaging the child's intellect, senses, and motor abilities in the process, he may be reasonably certain that language learned will be functional and not easily forgotten.

It is likewise in the pre-reading period that the Spanish teacher will be compelled to anticipate and seek solutions to another problem that arises from the English-speaking child's speech and reading habits in his native language. Numerous authorities in the field of English reading have observed that American children are inclined to focus their attention upon the foreparts and middleparts of words, displaying considerably greater accuracy in these areas than in endings.\(^2\) This tendency, transferred to a highly inflected language such as Spanish, can present a formidable obstacle to the youthful learner. Indeed, unless adequate steps are taken to correct this defect, verb and adjective agreement may never be handled acceptably. Here again, rhyme is valuable because it focuses attention upon endings. The teacher will of course insist that students listen carefully and pronounce with the greatest accuracy of which they are capable to increase their sensitivity to sounds within words. At this point, a brief explanation in English of the necessity for "hearing words through to see how they end" can pay handsome dividends in increased accuracy and fluency.

Great care must also be exercised to assure that the child maintains proper patterns of stress within words as they are combined to form complete utterances. Misplaced stress is a frequently encountered problem at this stage of learning and is one that often plagues children whose performance is, in every other respect, excellent. Illustrative of this is the difficulty experienced with the verb *estar* when it appears in sentence context. In isolation, the word will be correctly pronounced with stress on the final syllable;
yet when the student is required to produce an utterance such as, "¿Cómo estás Ud.?", the accent shifts to the first syllable. This error is often accompanied by an analogous shift in accent in usted, and probably results from a strong inclination on the part of the child to make the phrase conform to the regular sing-song rhythm of a trochaic stress pattern. Another common source of difficulty is to be found in cognate interference from English (i.e., telephone, teléfono).

Brief sentences on the blackboard concerning such things as the date and weather conditions are probably the most natural means of introducing reading to an elementary Spanish class. At first the teacher will probably wish to do no more than write these simple materials and read them aloud to the class herself, with no fanfare or explanations. When it seems that students are secure in their association of speech and printed word, they will take turns "reading" them to the rest of the class. Thus far, of course, it is clever that while the child is beginning to associate print with sounds, he is not, in any true sense of the word, actually reading; the written material being nothing more than the graphic representation of well-worn formulae previously memorized on the audio-lingual level.

The transition from this stage of what might be termed "recitation supported and prompted by print" to true reading poses several problems, not the least of which concerns the choice of materials. Every teacher of English reading is acutely aware of the importance of the emotional element in words and the stories woven from them as a factor in learning to read. Words that call up pleasurable sensations, words that arouse feelings of satisfaction, words associated in the young learner's mind with agreeably exciting experiences—these are more easily mastered and remembered than a vocabulary which does not fulfill these requirements. Yet this fact has all too often been ignored in the rather drab tales of the ubiquitous Juan and María served up in readers for the young beginner in Spanish. The euphoric advertisements to be found in any professional journal—for texts, tapes, readers, records, "methods" and all the other paraphernalia currently dear to commercial purveyors of learning—would seem in fact to be only remotely related to reality in a field where the dearth of creative and stimulating teaching materials remains as a significant problem to be resolved by language teachers at nearly all levels, but particularly by those in the primary grades. A survey of the reading materials now available for use in elementary school Spanish classes leaves one with the disheartening and disagreeable impression that in many instances we have only succeeded in translating some of the more deadly inanities of our English basal readers into a foreign tongue, creating in the process vast quantities of print that neither instruct nor entertain. Likewise, the sometimes suffocating banality of much of the dialog material currently in use argues against its usefulness in the reading program. Indeed, there arises the question of whether we have not been guilty of a serious confusion of goals in assuming that the teaching of culture and of reading must be undertaken simultaneously, with Spanish texts limiting themselves exclusively to the depiction of people and events within a Spanish or Hispanoamerican context. While such accounts are not without value, the young American learner does not easily identify with the characters and situations portrayed—a fact that may detract from their efficacy.

For these reasons, the imaginative teacher may find that at least in the beginning he is better advised to create much of his own reading material. The author has found that the folk story approach has certain distinct advantages that are further enhanced by the availability of excellent film editions of classics such as Los tres osos, La gallinita roja, and Caperucita roja. The selection of a film such as Los tres osos as the point of departure for an initial reading experience provides the teacher with a fine audio-visual aid to teaching and reinforcement which has the additional happy consequence of exciting student enthusiasm for the material.

Once students have been prepared audio-
lingually in the simple, carefully controlled vocabulary and sentence structure of such a film, they may be introduced to vocabulary and sentence structure of such
lingually in the simple, carefully controlled amounts of their repetition without bore-
dom—a factor whose importance will not
be underestimated by those who teach audio-lingual classes at the elementary
level.
When children have made a reasonably good start in learning to read, the Spanish
teacher all too often retires to the back-
ground and trusts that the process will
continue to move forward of its own
momentum, limiting himself to correcting mispronunciations as they occur, facilitat-
ing and checking comprehension through questioning. Yet it is precisely at this stage
that the teacher's real work properly be-
gins: assuring that reading skills are con-
solidated and that new vocabulary does
not languish and disappear.
In line with current pedagogical prac-
tice, based upon research which indicates
that an analytic approach is to be preferred
to the older synthetic method, the child
has learned whole words, comprehended
within the context of short, meaningful
units. Hopefully, such a method of pre-
sentation assures that reading will, from
the very beginning, function for the child
as a tool of communication rather than as a
somewhat irritating form of puzzle de-
cipherment. Yet the question of compre-
henhension is a complicated one, and the situa-
tion described by Buswell in his pioneering
research effort is one that persists in many
Spanish classrooms today, though for dif-
ferent reasons.
The oral reading of foreign languages presents
an interesting problem for study because there
are two distinct difficulties involved—one the
difficulty of comprehending what is read and the
other the difficulty of properly pronouncing the
words. One of the most interesting observations
made during the investigation relates to the
attitude of students toward comprehension in
oral reading. Although in every case they
were directed to read the paragraph orally to
find out what it was about, one of the most
common responses of the students when the
comprehension questions were asked was as fol-
lows: "I was paying special attention to the
pronunciation of the words and I didn't get the
meaning." This was generally offered as a per-
fectly satisfactory excuse and no apologies were
made for the explanation. Furthermore, this ex-
planation was obtained not only from the ele-
mentary-school pupils but also from the high-
school and college students. This is
radically different from the concept that reading
is essentially a process of comprehension, a proc-
ess of fusing word units into thought wholes...

The reason adduced by Buswell for this
failure to comprehend when reading orally
was the then current practice of meaning-
less English declamation in American
classrooms; today this custom no longer
exists, but the nature of audio-lingual
training and concern with accuracy of
pronunciation in the foreign language
pose a difficulty very similar to that faced
by the students in Buswell's experiment.
Several means of helping the child cope
with this dilemma suggest themselves. The
teacher will of course emphasize the idea
that reading is above all an information-
gaining process and stress the need to read
for meaning. He will make frequent
pauses in the reading of a passage to
assess student understanding through skill-
fully worded questions that do not require
that the student use Spanish creatively to
frame an original utterance (something
that very few beginners are able to do)
but only that he have understood what
he has read to the extent that he can
answer with material lifted from the text.
In addition, it is essential to allow a few
moments for silent perusal of new material
before requiring that it be read aloud. In
this way, the child is not asked to read for
meaning and concentrate upon correct pro-
nunciation simultaneously, but is permitted
to fix his attention upon first one and then
the other of two very different skills.
Once the teacher feels that youngsters
are comfortable in their reading and show
evidence of fluency and comprehension,
he should begin to devote some class time
to word analysis, vocabulary drill, and
phonetic practice. If satisfactory progress is
to be maintained, attention must be given
to the development of certain critical and
analytical skills. As Gray contends, "Most of the evidence now available supports the view that guidance in word discrimination should be provided from the beginning, with increasing emphasis as the pupil advances on word attack skills." And Gertrude Hildreth notes that "Children make faster progress when they learn to watch for recurring syllables and words within words... Dividing a word into syllables, seeing each syllable as a part of the whole, pronouncing words slowly, by syllables, helps the young reader see, hear, and say the words correctly."

This process of oral sounding by syllables assumes great importance in a language such as Spanish.

In the alphabetic language... the learner notes that the same letters occur repeatedly in different words. He thus comes to distinguish one letter from another. In... languages [such as Spanish] he discovers shortly that a given letter always has the same sound. With guidance, he learns to apply this fact in the recognition of new words. In Spanish, in which the syllables are simple, prominent, and frequently repeated, the learner may focus attention on syllables at first rather than on individual letters. Ultimately all the details of form and sound are noted and their significance as elements of words is recognized.8

Syllable study is given a prominent place in classes conducted with Spanish-speaking children, where the use of the silabario* for beginning readers is universal. Such exercises are easily adapted for use in American classrooms, and the author has found that time devoted to them is more than repaid in increased reading accuracy. When presented in a sprightly manner, they take on the aspect of a game in which students participate readily and eagerly.

Reading in Spanish is a skill which could, with little difficulty or expense, continue to enrich the lives of great numbers of our students long after formal study has ended. Such skill, far from being exclusively literary, may also be expected to function in the maintenance of audio-lingual skills, especially in circumstances where active employment of these is not possible. In spite of the increased attention received by foreign languages in recent years, their inclusion in the curricula of public schools, especially at the elementary level, is by no means assured, and those of us who are convinced of their importance and committed to their teaching cannot permit ourselves the luxury of complacency. The child who can read Spanish is justifiably proud of having acquired yet another skill in his new language, and the readers and workbooks that he takes home with him are tangible evidence of accomplishment. These two factors, the child’s pleasure in his accomplishment and visible proof of achievement, should not be overlooked for their importance in winning parental and community support for Spanish instruction in the elementary schools.

NOTES
2Hildreth, p. 52.
3Hildreth, pp. 130-31.
4All three produced in color by Film Associates of California. These elementary Spanish films are, in spite of an occasional egregious technical blunder, among the very best available.
5G. T. Burnell, A Laboratory Study of the Reading of Modern Foreign Languages (New York, 1927), pp. 40-41.
7Hildreth, p. 152.
8Gray, p. 66.
9In a typical silabario, the children are first introduced to the sounds of the vowels in isolation. The vowels are then combined with consonants and with each other in a presentation of progressive difficulty (first the so-called directas, then the inversas, followed by the compuestas and otherwise dificiles). Throughout, learning is facilitated by colorful illustrations that help make new word meanings clear.