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Adapting Narratives for Skits to Teach Language through Drama

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I. Rationale:

Every year teaching, I have found that students “love” to put on skits and to make “fools” of themselves especially in front of an audience. Learning to speak a language may be a long and tedious process. The teacher, as a facilitator, could change this by being highly motivated and innovative. The students must carefully repeat models and imitate the fluent instructor. Memorization may be involved in order to gain greater confidence. Through memorization, students retain more. Rehearsing and practicing are all preliminary activities necessary for actual conversation. On stage, the student acquires a “feeling” for the spoken language. At the same time, mastery of the idioms is facilitated. Students, also, fulfill a need to communicate in the language as performers. Thus, performance, as well as the other activities, described within, will aim to accomplish vocalization by presenting the students with an enjoyable and sound method in which to learn a foreign language.

This unit is offered as an aid to teachers of a second language, especially in the implementation of oral skills. It has been most frustrating each year to encounter so much enthusiasm on the part of the students and so little material available for dramatic productions. Hopefully, this unit will fill this void by providing a guide for teachers who are in the same predicament and who are pressed for time. This curriculum project will provide a series of lesson plans influenced by time-on-task. Concurrently, it will provide a series of skits which progressively get more difficult and longer for the students. The annotated bibliography will also provide a list of other possible sources for adaptation and/or complete use.

The unit will also provide examples of other methods which could be used to induce the material in the instruction of not only the spoken language, but also, the grammar, the culture, and the writing components of the language.

II. Strategies:

The samples of the adapted skits could easily be implemented within a month or two. As soon as the students understand the goals, I suggest that they be allowed to work either individually or in groups to “recreate or create” their own adaptations. In these times of budgetary constraints, this would be an excellent method to save on funds since existing classroom texts and materials could be used. The instructor should also assign projects which would mandate the use of the library facilities.

At times, when students memorize skits, they learn their lines, but they do not learn the meaning of the

lexicon. An excellent technique which would avoid such situations would be the inclusion of some English vocabulary to project the main idea. This method would also assist the audience who may not be familiar with the target language.

When instructing the students on adapting narratives for short skits, suggest that they concentrate on pertinent information only. Have them fantasize by providing sensory stimuli. Have them incorporate their imagination when they are not content with the story. This simple technique is known as diversified copying. It is so called because it utilizes what is already available to provide students with opportunities to improve on their own particular undeveloped styles while also providing access for development of unique new modes of writing. For example, take the fairy tales; everyone is familiar with them. Have the students change the endings. What would it be like if prince Charming fit the glass slipper on the wrong sister? Have the students modify the personalities of the characters. How would Snow White look and what would she say if she spoke using today's modern jargon.

Students should begin to recognize that what they are basically doing is paraphrasing. There is more than one way of saying the same thing or making the same point even in a foreign language. For example, "La se-orita Mar'a Fulana tiene treinta y cinco a-os de edad," can easily be converted to "Mira, Mar'a Fulana, tú ya tienes treinta y cinco a-os de edad," in a dialogue to get the idea across.

Before assigning the parts, try turning the vocabulary of the skits into games. This in turn could lend itself to checking on the comprehension skills. Some of the games that could serve this purpose are: Password, Jeopardy, the Pyramid, one could even provide categories for all the vocabulary in the skit, "Para qué necesito un marido?"

In a language class, it is extremely important that the students execute the instructor's orders through a physical response. In order for a learning experience to be truly effective, all the senses must take an active part. Before the real acting takes place, have the students set up the scenes on a flannel board. This would give the slower student an opportunity to catch up. Another method that could assist the student would be providing dittoes of the narratives with the mixed up events depicted. Then, ask the students to write numbers on the pictures which would demonstrate the proper order.

We have already implied that using familiar stories facilitates the learning process. Use of illustrated story books as well as tapes can certainly give the students a greater feel for the language. Printed translations can also assist the students in learning their vocabulary.

Also, read the familiar material aloud and by all means use gestures. Bring in current magazines and periodicals. Get a Spanish TV Guide and read the write up as it appears in the target language. Have the students critique their favorite shows. Start a second language newsletter.

Bring in tapes of the previous night's newscasts in the foreign language to the class. Since most students are aware of current events, the foreign language newscast can be easily understood. If the students do not keep abreast of current events, this will provide them with an opportunity to do so. It would be wise to stick to international events which deal with well-known places as well as prominent names. Also, have the students set up a broadcasting station which could be video-taped someday.

Other techniques to improve listening comprehension would be eavesdropping, listening to recorded passages, etc. In eavesdropping, students would be expected to infer certain information from what they hear. Ask questions in the target languages and then have students listen to the recorded passages and begin to

answer the questions.

If you cannot take the students to see foreign films, bring the movies to the students. Perhaps, through the foreign language club, funds could be raised to rent some of these films and even make a profit when it is opened up to the public at a Foreign Film Festival Week.

To improve the writing component of learning a second language, the teacher could set up some prepared questions or situations with alternate blank lines. Begin a situation and have the pupils end it. Assign a project which calls for a magazine cut-out and have the students write some true statements. A few false statements should also be included. The other students should raise their hands when they hear the false statements or they should try to repeat the inaccurate declarations.

At times, students fail to enjoy plays because they fail to visualize the action. Through the use of the flannel board and of course performance, the students can actively bring the work to life.

The skits can also be used to concentrate on a study of idioms or figures of speech. Have the students search for metaphors and similes. But, before they embark on this assignment, be certain that these terms have been taught. Skits and plays also lend themselves to the study of plot development and also to the study of themes. Which are the recurring ones? Which are the most important? Characterization can be taught by having the students make lists of adjectives which the characters use to describe one another. How is the character seen by others?

Finally, as already stated, it would behoove us, as educators, to provide as many methods and techniques as possible in order to foster growth and creativity in our students. Through scrambled dialogue sentences, filling in the blanks, sentence completion, etc., we provide practice for our students. And through adaptation and ultimately performance, the students are given an opportunity to learn the language and not to forget the experience.

In my next section, I have provided the instructor with samples of short Spanish skits which have been adapted from well-known American and European anecdotes. These works are all in the public domain. The adaptations are examples which demonstrate that almost any work can be adapted to a skit, even jokes and popular fairy tales and fables. Also, the sketches are written in a style which lends itself to further modification and amplification. Many more characters could be included. For example, in "Buen Viaje," the guys could exchange some good, old-fashioned "pirópos" about the young lady. Hence, the dialogue could either be shortened or lengthen depending on level and/or need.

III. Skits (The following samples of short Spanish skits are adaptations of well-known American and European anecdotes.)

Para qué necesito un marido?

Cristina: (La escena empieza con dos amigas hablando.) Pero, Mar'ía Fulana, tú ya tienes treinta y cinco años de edad y estás viviendo aquí sola . . . Eres de buena familia, tienes un poco de dinero y además eres bastante bonita. Por qué te niegas a tomar marido?

Mar'ía: ¿Casarme yo? Para qué necesito un hombre? Yo tengo un perro, un loro, y un gato.

Cristina: Yo no entiendo. ¿Pero qué tiene que ver eso con un marido?

Mar'ía: Mucho. El perro duerme dentro de la casa todo el día. El loro hace ruido y dice malas

palabras todo el tiempo. Y el gato pasa todas las noches fuera de casa andando por las calles igual que un marido. Con eso me basta.

(With this first skit, I have provided the English narrative version to demonstrate the many different possibilities that are available.)

Why Do I Need a Husband?

Jane Doe and Sally Smith are two good friends who are discussing the advantages and the disadvantages of Marriage. Sally cannot understand why her friend, Jane refuses to get married. Sally tells Jane that she is still young at thirty-five and that living alone can be very lonely and expensive. She also states that it would be very easy for Jane to get married since she has a good dowry. Jane responds by telling her friend that she does not need a husband because her dog, her parrot, and her cat are more than enough for her.

Sally does not understand this statement, and she seems to be somewhat perplexed. She then proceeds to ask Jane to explain herself better. She wonders what animals have in common with a husband.

Jane contests by saying that her three animals are such that she does not need a husband. She has the dog who sleeps in the house all day long. The parrot makes a lot of noise and swears all the time. And the cat spends every night out prowling and making the rounds in the street just like a husband. "That's more than enough for me," she quips.

?Quién paga la cuenta del perro?

El carnicero: (éste está hablando con un vecino suyo que es abogado.) Se-or abogado, si un perro toma un pedazo de carne de mi tienda, ¿puedo yo pedirle el valor de la carne al due-o del animal?

El abogado: ¡Por supuesto!, Ud. tiene todo el derecho.

El carnicero: Pues, el perro que ha robado la carne de que hablamos es suyo. La carne pesaba cinco kilogramas, y tengo el honor de pedirle a Usted un peso y medio, que es el valor del pedazo de carne.

El abogado: Está bien. Aqu' tiene su dinero.

(D'a siguiente)

El cartero: (Viene cantando La Cucaracha.) Buenos d'as, amigo . . . una carta para Ud.

El carnicero: ¡Ah, qué bien! Muchas gracias. (La abre y la lee en voz alta.) El se-or Garc'a, carnicero, debe al se-or Rojas, abogado, la cantidad de tres pesos por una consulta.

Una visita al médico.

El joven: (Un día, un joven va a ver a un médico de muy buena fama. El joven parece estar muy cansado y se deja caer en un sofá delante del médico.) ¡ Ah, qué cansancio!

El médico: Otro que sufre de la anemia (a sí mismo). Vamos a ver la lengua. ¡Hum! Su lengua tiene muy mal aspecto. Ahora, el corazón. ¡Hum! ¡Está muy irregular!

El joven: ¿Qué tengo, se-or doctor?

El médico: (Con aire de mucha importancia.) Es siempre lo mismo. Todos tratan de vivir sin aire fresco, pero no es posible. Amigo mío, ¿se da cuenta de la buena salud que tengo yo? Pues, si uno se queda sentado todo el día, se muere pronto. Hay que tomar el aire fresco. Hay que andar mucho a pie todos los días. Puedo ofrecerle a Usted varios remedios que cuestan mucho dinero, pero no . . . , mi única recomendación es andar mucho a pie.

El joven: Pero, se-or doctor . . .

El médico: (Cortándole la palabra, exclama:) Eso es. Usted quiere entrar en discusiones. Usted cree que sabe más que yo. Le repito que lo que usted necesita es andar mucho a pie y salir a tomar el fresco varias veces al día.

El joven: Pero, se-or doctor, yo ando mucho . . .

El médico: (Sin darle tiempo para decir otra palabra, exclama:) Sí, ya lo sé. Como todos los demás, usted anda mucho. Bueno, hay que andar diez veces más.

El joven: En mi trabajo . . .

El médico: Por supuesto; su trabajo no le permite andar a pie. Pues entonces hay que buscar otro trabajo. ¡La salud antes de todo! Y a propósito, ¿qué oficio tiene usted?

El joven: Soy cartero.

El médico: ¡Oh! ¡Sí, sí! Vamos a ver . . . Voy a verle la lengua otra vez.

Pablo paga

Pablo Machado: (Un joven con mucha gracia se presenta a la puerta de una casa un día y le pregunta al criado:) ¿Está aquí el se-or Pablo Machado?

El criado: No se-or, no esté aquí. No vive aquí.

Pablo: Yo sé que está aquí. Está aquí, puesto que yo mismo soy el se-or Pablo Machado. (Sin

decir más se va, dejando al pobre criado sin comprender la burla.)

(D'a siguiente)

Pablo: (Con la cara disfrazada y vestido de un modo distinto, vuelve a la misma casa y le pregunta otra vez al criado:) ¿Está aquí el se-or Pablo Machado?

El criado: No, se-or, no está aquí. No vive aquí.

Pablo: S', está. Está aquí puesto que yo mismo soy el se-or Pablo Machado, y yo estoy aquí. (Y se va Pablo Machado, riéndose del pobre criado, que se queda allí más sorprendido que antes.)

(Dos días después)

Pablo: (Disfrazada la cara y vestido de un modo distinto, Pablo vuelve a la misma casa.) ¿Está el se-or Pablo Machado?

El criado: No se-or, no está.

Pablo: S', está. Yo soy Pablo Machado.

El criado: Si vuelve usted por acá una vez más (dice entonces, perdiendo la paciencia) y pregunta otra vez por Pablo Machado, no le contesto con palabras sino echándole a patadas a la calle.

¿Entiende usted?

Pablo: (Se ríe y no dice nada. Vuelve a su casa y escribe una carta a un amigo a quien le debe dinero desde hace mucho tiempo.)

(D'a siguiente)

El amigo: (Un cartero aparece a la puerta del amigo de Pablo con una carta. El la abre y la lee en voz alta:)

“Querido amigo:

Acabo de cambiar de casa y que si se presenta al día siguiente, a las dos de la tarde en la calle Carlos V, número noventa y nueve, puede recibir su dinero que yo le debo con un poco de interés incluido para mostrar mi gratitud.

Su amigo,

Pablo”

¡Ah, qué bien! Finalmente, puedo cobrarle a ése.

(D'a siguiente)

El amigo: ¿Está el se-or Pablo Machado?

El criado: ¿El se-or Pablo Machado? Otra vez usted, ¿eh? Ya no puedo más. (Y le echa a patadas a la calle.)

¡Buen viaje!

(Tres hombres están en una estación de ferrocarriles esperando un tren. El tren va a partir de aquella ciudad a las cuatro de la tarde, y los tres hombres han llegado un poco temprano.)

Miguel: Se-ores, todav'a nos quedan quince minutos antes de la salida del tren, y esta ocasión debe ser celebrada de una manera digna de su importancia. Vamos a entrar en el bar para tomar un cocktail de despedida.

(Entran en el bar y se sientan.)

La mesera: ¿En qué puedo servirles, se-ores?

Enrique: Tres daiquir's, por favor.

La mesera: En seguida.

José: Bonita, verdad.

Miguel: S', tiene los ojos muy lindos. (Regresa ella con las bebidas.)

Enrique: Se-ores, ¡Salud y pesetas!

José: ¡Y mucho tiempo para gastar las pesetas!

Miguel: Sólo son las cuatro menos diez; me parece que tenemos bastante tiempo para otro daiquir'.

José y Enrique: ¡Vale! ¡Vale! ¡Otro más! (La mesera reaparece con tres bebidas más. Se beben las bebidas con mucho más entusiasmo.)

La mesera: ¿En qué puedo servirles más?

José: La cuenta, por favor. (Al terminar las bebidas, son las cuatro menos cinco, y se levantan para salir.)

Enrique: (A la puerta.) ¡Se-ores, otro daiquir'! Podemos beberlo pronto y todav'a queda el tiempo para coger el tren.

Los otros: ¡Muy buena idea! ¡Vale!

José: Rellene los vasos, por favor, se-orita.

La mesera: Como usted mande se-or. (Y regresa con las tres bebidas.)

Miguel: (Estén bebiendo con más entusiasmo que nunca, pero cuando Miguel vuelve la cabeza y ve que el tren ya se va saliendo de la estación, él empieza a gritar.) ¡Miren! Se va el tren. (Los tres se levantan con mucha prisa y salen corriendo hacia el tren.)

Todos: ¡Espera! ¡Espera!

José: (éste regresa al bar y empieza a re'irse.)

La mesera: Ya que usted no ha podido coger el tren, ¿por qué se r'e tanto?

José: (Riéndose) Usted no comprende, se-orita. Soy yo él que ten'a que partir en ese tren. Esos dos se-ores que se subieron en el tren solo ven'an a decirme adiós.

Caperucita Encarnada

Escena primera: (En casa de la madre.)

La madre: Caperucita, Caperucita. ¿Dónde estás, hija?

Caperucita: Aquí estoy madre mía; ¿qué quiere Ud. que yo haga?

La madre: Véte a llevar esta cestita a la abuela. Ella ha estado enferma. Aquí dentro hay unos bizcochos y una olla con mantequilla.

Caperucita: Pues bien, ya me voy. (Se va.)

Escena segunda : (En el bosque.)

El lobo: ¿A dónde va Ud., muchachita?

Caperucita: Voy a la casa de mi abuela a llevarle unos bizcochos, y una olla con mantequilla que mi madre le manda.

El lobo: ¿Vive muy lejos de aquí?

Caperucita: Sí, cerca del molino. Se puede ver allá abajo.

El lobo: Pues, voy a visitarla también; yo voy por este camino y Ud. por aquél y nos veremos más tarde. (Se va el lobo.)

Caperucita: (Caminando) ¡Oh, qué bonitas flores! ¡Qué hermosas mariposas!

Escena tercera : (En casa de la abuela.)

El lobo: (Llamando a la puerta.) ¡Toc! ¡Toc!

La abuela: (Se oye la voz solamente.) ¿Quién es?

El lobo: Soy yo, querida abuela, Caperucita; le traigo unos bizcochos y una olla con mantequilla.

La abuela: (Se oye la voz.) Tira el cordón y la puerta se abrirá. (El lobo entra y la abuela se salva escapándose por una ventana.)

Escena cuarta : (El mismo lugar.)

Caperucita: (Llamando a la puerta.) ¡Toc! ¡Toc!

El lobo: (Fingiendo la voz de la abuela.) ¿Quién es?

Caperucita: Soy yo, Caperucita; le traigo unos bizcochos y una olla de mantequilla.

El lobo: Tira del cordón y la puerta se abrirá.

Caperucita: (Abriendo la puerta.) ¡Oh! abuelita, ¡qué largos brazos tiene Ud!

El lobo: Es para mejor abrazarte, hija mía.

Caperucita: Y abuela, ¡qué largas piernas tiene Ud. también.

El lobo: Es para correr más ligeramente.

Caperucita: Abuela mía, ¡qué grandes son sus orejas!

El lobo: Es para mejor escucharte, querida.

Caperucita: Abuela, Y qué ojos tan grandes!

El lobo: Es para mejor verte, amor.

Caperucita: Abuela, ¡qué largos son sus dientes!

El lobo: ¡Es para mejor masticarte! (Se levanta y empieza a correr detrás de ella. En este momento, aparece la abuela con un cazador que asusta al lobo con su hacha. El lobo brinca por la ventana y desaparece para siempre.)

Hopefully, these samples will prove to be a spring board for the innovative instructor. Let me reiterate that it is extremely important to have the students take an active part in their learning experience. By adapting narratives, fairy tales, fables, jokes, etc. to the students' particular style and level, the students participate totally in every facet of their education. Adaptation can be done with almost anything.

IV. Sample Lesson Plans:

Day One

A. Provide students with copies of short narratives.

1. Introduce the vocabulary.
2. Pronunciation drill on new words.
3. Have students begin changing the narratives to a dialogue. (For example, provide dittoed sheets with directions: Escribe la conversación entre Paco y Pepe.

Paco:

Pepe:

Paco:

Pepe:

4. Have the students write their dialogues on the board for comparison and discussion.

B. Have some students practice orally in front of the class.

C. Assignment: Have the students change the point of views around.

Day Two

A. Have students discuss how they went about changing the points of views. Select a couple of good ones and have the students write them out on the overhead projector.

B. Have the students change from the present to the past tense employing the preterite and the imperfect.

1. Practice the usage of these tenses.
2. Review vocabulary.
3. Ask direct questions on the narratives.

C. Assignment: Take any narrative and transform to a dialogue.

Day Three

- A. Discuss any of the difficulties encountered while doing the assignments.
- B. If the students finally understand what narrative transformation is all about, then . . .
 - 1. Divide students into groups.
 - 2. Prepare for the foreign language festival.
 - 3. Discuss props.
 - 4. Involve culture.
- C. Assignment: Have students prepare a flannel board with scenes of the different skits for oral presentation.

V. Teachers' Bibliography

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VI. Classroom materials

Over-head projector

Blackboard

flannel board

Map

tape recorder

video machine

records

magazines

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