

TEACHING SPANISH SLANG, FAMILIAR LANGUAGE, AND ELECTRONIC
LANGUAGE IN THE CLASSROOM

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To Debbie

This paper details my rationale for developing lessons on teaching Spanish slang, familiar language, and electronic language in the world language classroom. Following this rationale is a description of the research that I did in order to prepare for this project. Also included in this work are the five lessons which I created for use in a sixth, seventh, or eighth grade classroom, as well as the results I obtained when I employed these lessons in my own classes.

Language Styles
Language Teachers
Language Variation
Linguistic Competence
Modern Languages Curriculum
Oral Language
Second Languages

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CHAPTER 1

RATIONALE

As a Spanish teacher, my students always ask me, “How do you say ‘cool’ in Spanish?” as well as many other slang words. For them, this type of language is very important in their daily lives and they want to incorporate it into their Spanish speech. In addition, my students use computers, email, instant messaging (IM), and text messaging on cellular phones regularly. These forms of communication have their own sets of language which consist, in large part, of abbreviations which speed up the “conversation” by making typing quicker and easier. More recently, as technology has grown, my students have begun to ask me how email messages are written in Spanish and how instant and text messaging is done. Although I knew a little bit about these types of electronic communications in English, I knew almost nothing about them in the Spanish system.

In addition to electronic Spanish slang, I also possessed very little knowledge of oral Spanish slang. I am not a native speaker of the language nor did I have exposure to any such informal language during my time in the classroom as a student. Although I had lived and studied in Spain, I knew only a few expressions from this country and many of them were already out-dated. My students wanted to learn more than two or three words and, unfortunately, my knowledge was not sufficient to teach them what they

wanted to learn. With this impetus, I decided to embark upon a process to learn more Spanish slang, both oral and electronic.

The first thing I needed to do in order to begin my investigation was define the term “slang.” For the purposes of my project I chose a definition which explained slang as “a set of expressions that is characteristic of informal language style, tends to change rapidly, and often serves to indicate solidarity within a given social group.”¹ With this in mind I set off to find pedagogical information on how to incorporate teaching slang into my classroom repertoire. However, there was very little information available, and the little that there was, I found on the Internet. What’s more is that these resources were generally comprised of lists of oral slang. Some of the resources that I had found had to do with the use of email or “chat rooms” in the instruction of a foreign language, but even these did not focus on the use of slang. Instead, the authors of those articles intended that students use the standard language that they were learning in the classroom in order to establish and maintain electronic communication with another person. I had no success in finding resources which combined the three concepts in which I was interested; oral slang, electronic slang, and the teaching of these types of language in the classroom.

After finding such few resources, I started to think about the reasons why there was such a lack of information on this topic. The lack of books on slang was easy to explain. Because of the inherently changing nature of slang, it is almost impractical to publish a book of slang, in any language. The slang that a culture or population uses changes very rapidly and what was a popular expression a few years ago may not even be in use today. It is much easier to create and periodically update a website dedicated to

¹ Adrian Akmajian et al., *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and Communication*, 4th ed., (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1987), 560.

composing lists of the current slang in a particular language, which accounts for my finding the majority of my information on the Internet.

Further, email, and especially IM and text messaging, are relatively new phenomena. For this reason there have not been many investigations into its use in the foreign language classroom. Also, through my own process of investigation I found that email, IM, and text messaging are not quite as popular in Spanish-speaking countries as they are in the US. This, too, contributes to the lack of information written about this type of slang.

Part of what I had hoped to find was lesson plans written by other teachers who had also thought it important to teach slang in their foreign language classrooms. However, as I stated previously, there were precious few resources of this nature. I think that one reason for this lack of information is the hesitation, on the part of teachers, to teach informal language in their classrooms. This hesitation is especially prevalent when it comes to the topic of the slang used in email, instant messaging, and text messaging.

In the US these methods of communication have become central in the lives of children and adolescents. The majority of my students, for example, spend hours in front of the computer screen and their cellular phones, writing and receiving messages through email, instant messaging, and text messaging, respectively. In her article, “BTW LOL: A BAD Trend, or A-OK?” Melissa Trujillo describes what the critics of these methods of communication say. One such critic, Naomi Baron, an American University linguistics professor, says “So much of the American society has become sloppy or laissez-faire

about the mechanics of writing. Problems arise when people use the casual language in other forms of written communication.”²

I agree that children use this type of language too much. I have seen my students use such language in their writing and I have even heard them use this written form of slang in their oral conversations. However, it is my belief that as teachers of language part of our job is to teach them when it is appropriate to use this type of language and when it is not. To ignore the existence of this method of communication and its body of language is irresponsible. As language teachers we must expose our students to authentic language. And, since the internet is a reality in the lives of our students, and in our own lives, it is not appropriate to ignore it. Instead, we must teach them to learn to use it to learn and communicate. Trujillo also cites the defenders of the use of this electronic language. One such defender, Carolyn Adger, the director of the Language in Society Division of the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, says “Language and languages change... innovating with language isn’t dangerous. And besides... text messaging, like email and instant messaging, is making it easier for people to communicate.”³ As teachers, our goal should be to teach students appropriate communication in a given context. In this era in which technology is so pervasive, we cannot ignore it or ignore the fact the languages change. To perpetuate the idea to our students that language is static is to perpetuate a falsity. Through their own experience

² Melissa Trujillo. “BTW LOL: A Bad Trend, or A-OK?” in CBS News On-line [database on-line] Milwaukee, Wi.: 2003, accessed 13 February 2005), available from <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/02/13/tech/main540529.shtml>; Internet.

³ Ibid.

our students know that language evolves and I believe that they would have more confidence in a teacher who accepts this fact and bases part of his or her teaching on it.

Many times when teachers, and people in general, think about slang, inappropriate and negative words tend to come to mind. While it is true that many slang expressions are not appropriate to teach in a classroom, there are many that are. In fact, the majority of the words and phrases that my students ask about are not only appropriate for the classroom, but rather enhance the quality of the class, as they add an authentic element to the language which is being studied. Unfortunately, I think that the negative reputation of slang has limited the production of written information on how to use it in the classroom.

One factor that prevented me from teaching slang in my own classroom was my lack of knowledge about Spanish slang. My limited knowledge was the result of the fact that I am not a native speaker of the language and the limited list of words and phrases I learned during my stay in Spain was out dated. I think that many foreign language teachers who are not native speakers of the target language do not include slang in their teaching because of a similar lack of knowledge. As a result of this lack of use in the classroom, there is a resultant lack of written resources on the subject. However, I realize that it is necessary to learn more about this kind of informal language as it plays an important role in the teaching of a foreign language for many reasons.

Firstly, as teachers we are professionals. As professionals it is necessary to possess a profound knowledge of our disciplines. I realized that without a solid understanding of informal language, there was a gap in my repertoire that made me less

effective as a teacher. In order to be able to respond to the needs of my students, I would have to learn more.

Secondly, is the idea that a teacher should be a “life-long learner.” This concept is critical in teaching. In my opinion, it is necessary that a teacher serves as a model for his or her students. Part of this modeling is showing them how to be a “life-long learner” and showing them that the process of learning does not end when school ends. Also, through this act of modeling, students can see that they have to take responsibility for their own learning.

Thirdly, much of the linguistic input that people receive in their daily lives contains informal language. If students do not have experience with this type of input in the classroom, they are going to have more difficulty with the informal input they receive in the target language outside of class. For this reason it is necessary that teachers have a thorough knowledge of this type of language so that they can teach it to their students.

Fourthly, as I stated before, the language of slang is pervasive in the lives of our students. Further, it is a topic generated by the students themselves when they ask such questions as “how do you say ‘cool’ in Spanish?” Because young people are very interested in learning about slang, this helps to ensure that they will enjoy the lessons on the topic. In addition, because this is often a student-generated topic, students will have the chance to feel as though they have some control over what happens in the classroom, and thus, their own learning. This, too, helps to ensure more enjoyment of the lessons and the learning process that occurs during them.

Finally, it is important to learn and include slang in our teaching because language and culture cannot be separated from one another. Instead of a language and a culture,

there exists, instead, a “linguaculture”⁴ of which slang is a part. To learn such informal language is to learn an aspect of the culture and people from which it comes. In his article, Takashi Mochizuki cites Kathy Leonard, a Spanish teacher, saying, “Learning slang words in other languages can be helpful for breaking cultural barriers... and incorporating slang into one’s communication skills allows the speaker to bond with the new culture at a faster pace.”⁵ As teachers, one of our goals should be to help our students to arrive at a communicative competence. This competence involves knowing the appropriate register for a given context and the having the ability to recognize words from a particular register when a person uses them. Knowledge of slang can help students in informal contexts in which the participants use language from an informal register. This knowledge can help them to understand the discourse and to participate in it like a member of the culture in which it occurs. Being able to do this more easily can help alleviate some of the frustration which my students have told me they have experienced when listening to Spanish radio, watching Spanish television, or having a conversation with a native speaker. After these sorts of experiences many of my students have told me that they feel as though they put a lot of time into studying and learning Spanish, but still don’t understand “real Spanish.” By “real Spanish” they are referring, in part, to the informal, every day language that they hear but cannot understand. Of course, some of their difficulty in comprehension lies in the fact that they are beginning

⁴ Alvino E. Fantini, ed., *New Ways of Teaching Culture* (Bloomington: Pantagraph Press, 1997), 10.

⁵ Mochizuki, Takashi. “Hey Baby, Wanna Minchia?” The Sagebrush 14 September 2004: n. pag. Online. Internet. 26 July 2005. Available: <http://www.nevadasagebrush.com/media/storage/paper553/news/2004/09/14/News/hey-Baby.Wanna.Minchia-718692.shtml?nrewrite200608221515& sourcedomain = www.nevadasagebrush.com>

language-learners, but I believe that some of it stems from not being exposed to the notion of slang, its characteristics and uses, as well as some examples of such language.

In order to be able to teach Spanish slang to my students, I first had to learn more about it. In the next part of this work, I will discuss the design of the investigation I employed in order to do so.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH AND PREPARATION

My investigation into Spanish slang and “netiquette” began during my second summer semester at the School for International Training (SIT). What started as a project for a linguistics class turned into a school-wide conference presentation and, ultimately, the topic of this thesis. Initially, I found a few books on the topic of Spanish slang and then found similar, but up-dated, information on the internet. The information contained in those books and websites was, essentially, lists of slang. This was a helpful start. However, based on personal experiences, I tend to be skeptical about aspects of the language I learn from books, the internet, or even, sometimes, in the classroom. When the language being taught is devoid of the culture(s) of which it is a part it can sometimes be inauthentic. I can remember traveling to Spain and realizing there that some of what I had learned in the classroom was grammatically correct, but not widely used, as well as the fact that much of what was widely used was difficult for me to understand because I had not heard it before that trip.

Even at SIT, as I began the second stage of my investigation, I realized how limited, in a particular sense, my Spanish was. While I considered myself fluent in Spanish, I was not able to make much sense of the slang or non-standard language which I was continually privy to conversations with many of my university classmates who were native speakers. During these conversations I often felt as though I was missing

something even though the general message was clear. It was in large part from these and other similar experiences that the idea to work on this project came from.

At SIT I was fortunate to have many native speakers both as classmates and professors. I opted to learn as much as I could from them about this type of language that was so often elusive to me, and I think, to many non-native language learners. I began my investigation by interviewing as many of those native speakers as I could. I made a list with their names and explained to them why I was doing this project and asked if they could share with me (and ultimately my students) any slang expressions from their native countries that they could think of that were popular. I interviewed six people from the countries of Argentina, Ecuador, Spain, Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Venezuela. This sample contained information from each of the four Spanish-speaking regions; North America, Central America/the Caribbean, South America, and Europe.

The classmates and professors that I interviewed were of various age groups, ranging from those in their twenties to those in their forties or fifties. Although I was looking for slang for middle school students and none of those interviewed were of that age bracket, all of the people interviewed work with students and some even had children. Based on these backgrounds the people that I interviewed were able to provide me with age-appropriate, current words and phrases that I could use with my students.

As I conducted these interviews I found that my classmates and professors were generally very happy to talk to me about this and that they usually ended up with a smile on their faces. I hoped that when I shared this with my students that they too would also enjoy it.

As I noted the words and expressions my classmates and professors thought of, I realized that I would have to review the lists and edit them. Though my criteria were not entirely scientific in nature I felt that they served me well. Essentially, I asked myself three questions when considering whether or not to remove an item from my list. The first question was “does this item qualify as slang?” In order to answer this question I had to refer back to the definition of slang that I had opted to use and which I cited in the first chapter of this paper. Once I determined that a given word or expression was indeed a slang expression, I then had to ask the second of my three questions which was “is this appropriate for a sixth to eighth grade audience?” My third and final sorting question was “is this an expression that my students would find enjoyable either because it would be considered useful or because it would be funny or interesting to them?”

I realized that many of the words and expressions that my classmates and professors generated were not necessarily “slang” in the strictest sense of the word’s definition. Instead, they were words and expressions that were widely used, but were not typically found in textbooks. Some of these expressions included “ouch,” “oops,” and “pain in the neck.” These, and many other expressions that were taught to me during the interview process, were part of a body of familiar language that was often used by speakers of the language, but in my experience not generally taught in the classroom. My students often asked me about such language and again I would find myself with very little knowledge in the area and unable to satisfactorily answer their questions. By doing this project I found that I was learning much more about this type of language and I wanted to share this with my students, especially as they had generated many questions about it themselves. My goal for the unit that I would create was to peak students’

interest in an aspect of authentic language that is not typically found in textbooks and that is relevant to them as adolescents. I felt that these words and expressions would help me to achieve that goal and as such, I decided to include this type of language on the master list I was creating.

I also had to make a decision as to what to do with country-specific or even city-specific items. One example of such expressions is those which I learned are used in the city of Quito, Ecuador. The classmate who mentioned these expressions told me that they were special expressions used in that city only. I found them to be quite interesting and quite fun to use as they were simply a collection of sounds. “Ay, ay, ay” (meaning ouch), “ay, chay, chay” (meaning I’m very cold) and “ay, ray, ray” (meaning I’m burning hot) seemed to me not only useful, but also enjoyable for my students. As such, they fit my criteria and I decided to include such country or region-specific items in the list that I would share with my students. I would simply explain to them the limited scope of these expressions as my interviewee had done for me. After editing my list from each person I spoke to, I was finally able to create a large list containing slang words and expressions as well as familiar language from their countries. That list can be found in the appendix to this paper.

While I still don’t know every expression from every country, I now have more of a sense of this type of language. Learning these expressions has helped in my overall understanding of the variants of the Spanish that is spoken in various countries as well as helping me to be more open to learning, understanding, and enjoying this type of language. I hoped, in turn, that my students would experience the same outcome.

In addition to gaining an increased comfort level with this aspect of the language, I also began to make inferences and conjectures about the information that I had been given. Easiest to notice were the similarities among the expressions that were generated. One such similarity that I observed was that the people I interviewed always mentioned at least one way of saying “cool” or “awesome.” Many of my interviewees mentioned several. I realized how prevalent these expressions were, not only in the US, but abroad as well. Work was another common theme among three of the lists which I compiled. The people that I interviewed from the Dominican Republic, Mexico, as well as one of the interviewees from Spain listed expressions that referred to jobs, work load, or working. I thought this was interesting as it seemed to be a logical topic to be so prevalent in these lists. Work is such an important aspect of the lives of most people and it is often wrought with stress and struggle, to which these expressions make reference.

In addition to these similarities I also noticed many differences which I found quite interesting. For example, the two people from Spain that I interviewed had generated quite different lists with no identical words or expressions being mentioned. Some of the ideas behind the expressions they shared with me could be thought of as similar, such as that of situations being difficult or in which there is struggle to accomplish something. Although I knew before I began this project that slang (and familiar language) can be not only country-specific, but region-specific, or even person-specific, the process of compiling this list made me revisit this idea.

As such, I began to think about some of the expressions I learned which come from Venezuela. Many of those expressions have to do with social class and social standing. I learned from my interviewee that these concepts are very important in her

country and that, of course, is why they are so prevalent. This list in particular made me think about what kind of list I would provide for someone who was doing a project like this, but with a focus on English slang and/or familiar language. I began to think about how my list would not only reflect my country, but also the region of it from which I come as well as my own position in that society. By making these lists I learned much more than I had originally thought I would. Once I had completed them I began to wonder with anticipation what kinds of thoughts they would stir in my students.

After had I gathered this information for my list of oral slang and familiar language, I began to focus on the next part of my project, researching and creating lesson plans. As I have stated before, there were very few lesson plans on this topic readily available for me to use in my classroom. Therefore, I set about creating a five lesson unit on oral Spanish slang and familiar language which I would then present to my sixth, seventh and eighth grade classes and note the results of each presentation. However, as I began to research and prepare my unit, I began to find information on the language used in emails, instant messaging, and text messaging. Immediately, I was fascinated and realized that my students, many of whom use these forms of communication regularly, would also be highly interested.

Once I became aware of this type of communication as a feasible addition to my unit, I was able to find a lot of information on the internet about it. I also learned about this type of language through instant messaging itself by means of internet “chats” a friend and colleague of mine had conducted with native speakers who use this type of computer language. I used the information that I learned from websites and these chats to compile lists of the words and expressions used in communication through email, instant

messaging, and text messaging. Through the information I garnered from websites and “chats” I learned about the characteristics and uses of these expressions. However, by then compiling my own list of these expressions, I was able to make my own inferences and observations.

One important and immediate distinction that I noted was the difference in the amount of usage of such computer language. It seems to me that, in general, electronic modes of communication are used much more in the US than in Spanish-speaking countries. Many of the people that offered information about electronic language stated that they did not use many special words or phrases. It was only after interviewing many others that I garnered information about the expressions unique to communicating in Spanish via electronic means.

As I began to gather a long list of instant message, email, and text message language I noticed that it was very similar to what is used in English. Abbreviations are by far the most common feature of the expressions and they, like English expressions, sometimes incorporated oral slang. For example, “xfa” stands for “por fa,” which is an oral shortening or “por favor” (ie please).

One very unique aspect of electronic language in Spanish is the use of the “@” symbol. In Spanish it is used to represent masculine and feminine gender with the use of one character. Rather than using an “o” to indicate that a word is masculine or an “a” to indicate that a word is feminine the “@” represents both. For example, when “chatting” with a group of people, one may say “Hola, tod@s,” which indicates a welcome to a group of all males, all females, or a combination of both. This symbol allows the user the

freedom from having to consider the gender of the message's recipients. This comes in particularly handy when one is new to a "chat" and does not know who else is involved.

Though this character is also an abbreviation used to speed up the typing process, it is unique to Spanish and other languages that have gendered words in them. The more I learned about this Spanish electronic language, the more I enjoyed it and the more I began to make my own conjectures and inferences about it. As I did so, I hoped that my students would do the same throughout the course of the unit that I was creating for them.

As I presented these lessons to my sixth, seventh, and eighth graders I took notes on the proceedings and outcomes of each lesson. I noted what I did and said during the lesson, the comments and observations my students made, as well as their general reaction to the lesson itself. The similarities as well as the differences between the responses of the students in each grade level to the lessons were sometimes subtle, sometimes obvious, but always quite interesting and even surprising.

CHAPTER 3

LESSON ONE

I began my unit with the following lesson on oral slang and familiar, everyday language which I created.

1. Choose Spanish slang sayings and familiar language expressions that are appropriate for your students and create (or look for) drawings that represent the literal meaning of those sayings and expressions. Examples of this sort of drawing can be found in the book, *Street Spanish I: The Best of Spanish Slang*, by David Burke. I have included those that I used from that book in the appendix.

2. Before presenting these drawings to your students, ask them to define slang.

Reinforce that it is “a set of expressions that is characteristic of informal language style, tends to change rapidly, and often serves to indicate solidarity within a given social group.” Ask them to next think about how this type of language is different than familiar, everyday language. To help them think about the characteristics of such language, create a dialogue in English which highlights the features of both types of language. (The dialogue that I used can be found in the appendix.) Have

students read the dialogue aloud to begin the discussion on what the two subsets of language are and how they are both similar and different.

3. Next, ask your students why it is relevant and important to learn about slang as well as familiar, everyday language. (Refer to my discussions in chapter one and two of this paper.)
4. Show the drawings you selected (or created) to your students so that they can try to determine the figurative meaning of these expressions.
5. Next, reveal the correct meanings and have your students compare these Spanish expressions with English slang and everyday language expressions.
6. Now, students should create their own drawings that represent the literal significance of slang expressions and familiar language expressions in English.
7. Afterward, the students can look at their classmates' drawings in order to guess what expression is being depicted. (Examples of student drawings can be found in the appendix of this paper.)
8. The students can then discuss the connection between the language used in these expressions and the culture from which they come and that they represent.
9. Finally, they can compare the Hispanic and US cultures from which these expressions come.

I first presented this lesson to my sixth grade class. I had mentioned earlier in the school year that we would later be embarking upon a unit on oral and computer slang.

My sixth grade students were immediately interested and asked me on many occasions during the course of the year when we would be starting on that unit. I chose to begin my unit during the third (and final) term of our school year, as it is a time when teachers and students are wrapping up the formal curriculum and this sort of non-traditional lesson peaks their interest and captures their attention.

As stated in the above lesson plan, I began by asking my sixth graders how they would define slang. The discussion that ensued was quite interesting. They managed to mention the items that are contained in the definition that I cited in the above lesson plan and earlier in this paper. They noted that slang is informal language that does not follow “proper” linguistic conventions. One student noted that non-native speakers of a language would probably have difficulty understanding slang expressions. After asking them their opinion on a word like “groovy” they stated that it was “old-fashioned.” I then asked about the more recent slang expression, provided to me by students from two or three years ago, “mad” as in “mad funny.” I included this expression in a mocked-up dialogue in English. The expression is meant to denote that something or someone is very, very funny. Although this expression is only a few years old, my students laughed when I used it and promptly told me that it, too, is “old.” Based on this consensus I asked them what else they could determine about the nature of slang and they then told me that slang expressions become out-dated very quickly and that they can reveal how old a person is.

During this discussion on slang I presented my students with a sample dialogue in English which contained such expressions as “mad funny” as well as familiar language that is widely used, but is not slang like “pain in the neck.” One of my students asked me

about that very expression, “pain in the neck,” pondering whether it could truly be defined as slang. Before this point in my lesson I had decided to not bother explaining the distinction between these two types of language, slang and everyday familiar language, but at this moment I realized it was important to include. This student sparked a discussion amongst his classmates and many weighed in with their opinions. They finally decided that the expressions which comprised the body of familiar language would be more difficult for a non-native speaker to understand, but were not used with just one group such as children or adults. They reasoned that they were widely used and were more long-lasting than their slang counterparts. They also mentioned that these expressions, like slang expressions, were also not typically found in textbooks or taught in the classroom.

The next thing that I asked my students to do was to tell me why they thought I had prepared this unit on Spanish slang and everyday language for them. They began by saying that many of them used slang, familiar language, and computer slang in their daily lives and that it was, therefore, useful to learn in Spanish. One student spoke of a friend from Spain and was eager to learn some of this informal language to better communicate with and understand her friend. This last comment spoke to my belief that it is important to teach children how to connect with people from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds and that learning this type of language is helpful in that pursuit.

At one point in this discussion one student commented on computer slang used in IM and how this brand of written slang often makes its way into people’s speech. This was an interesting and accurate observation. I have heard many students use expressions such as J/K (just kidding) or LOL (laugh out loud) in their conversations with other

students. Some have even used it when speaking to teachers. Some students indicated that they did not like this mix of written and oral and some said that they did not mind it and even used it themselves. I let my students know that part of this unit would involve studying computer slang as well as the relevance of audience and register in one's speech and written expression.

After this discussion I showed the transparencies I had of selected slang expressions and familiar language. My students enjoyed reading and trying to figure out the figurative meanings of the expressions they were seeing in picture and print. Again, they said that some of the expressions were "old-fashioned". Although some of these expressions were old-fashioned to them, they prompted questioning about where and how these expressions might have originated. At first they thought they were strange as they generally do not make much sense when thought of literally. One example of this is the expression "pez gordo" which means literally means "fat fish" in English. One student determined that a figurative equivalent in English is the expression "big cheese." Once students heard this they began to think about their own language and how expressions such as this do not necessarily make literal sense. They began to wonder aloud how each of these expressions came about in each language. In order to continue with this theme I asked them to think about slang or familiar language expressions in English, pick one, and draw it on a piece of transparency film.

My students were extremely enthusiastic about creating these drawings. For some students it was very easy to think of an expression to depict. For others, they needed some help, which I provided by showing examples from my classmates and professors

from SIT which they produced during my culminating conference presentation. These helped those who were having difficulty and they were then able to create a picture.

My students then shared their pictures and some asked if they could create more than one. The students enjoyed guessing what expressions were being depicted and they came to realize that much like the Spanish expressions that had seemed strange to them, the English expressions were also comprised of phrases which were just as arbitrary. It was interesting to watch these students think not only about the Spanish language, but also about their own native language. One of the students in my sixth grade class is from England and began to lead the class in thinking about the similarities and differences between the English spoken in England, Australia, and the US. The other students in my class got quite involved in thinking of such expressions. They began to become acutely aware of their own language. They saw the similarities and differences between variants of English and between English and Spanish and that language develops based on the culture(s) from which it comes.

It was at this stage in the lesson that students began to make the connection that culture and language cannot truly be separated. Students began to realize that though we do not often know how certain expressions came into the English or Spanish language there is often some reason that can be traced to a country's history and the resultant cultural product of that history. As students began to ponder and create theories about how various expressions found their way into Spanish or how some found their way into English speaking countries but not others I again felt satisfied with the lesson. To answer questions about the Spanish language students began to offer hypotheses that included such historical and cultural factors such as the conquistadors in Latin America. This in

turn caused students to think about variants of English between the US and England and they began to create hypotheses about the US originally being a colony and how this stage was similar to and different from the situation in Latin America.

Prior to this, students often asked me about Spanish expressions and how they came about as if there were an easy answer. It sometimes seemed as if some of my students thought Spanish was created in a laboratory devoid of any cultural influences and that it should therefore not have any of the resultant irregularities. However, after working through this lesson they seemed to realize that like English the Spanish language also went through complex changes that were the result of historical and cultural influences.

Once again I found that this lesson ran itself in the sense that I did not have to prompt students to begin such a discussion about culture and its influence on language. Instead, they simply did it on their own. It seems to me that they were beginning to answer many of the questions about language and linguistics that they had prior to these lessons.

After having done this lesson with my sixth graders, I then proceeded to do it with my seventh graders. From sixth to seventh grade there were only slight differences in how the lesson proceeded.

Like my sixth graders, my seventh graders also seemed to enjoy this topic and were also very enthusiastic about creating pictures to depict the English slang and familiar language expressions that they were thinking of. Many of them also asked if they could make more than one picture. As they began to draw their pictures, I noticed that in general, they had less difficulty thinking of an expression to draw than did my

sixth grade students. I also noted that the students in seventh grade knew more modern, up- to- the- minute slang than did my sixth graders.

Of course, before beginning work on these pictures, my seventh grade students and I discussed the definition of slang and its nature. However, after having done the lesson with my sixth graders I learned that it was important to discuss the difference between slang and familiar language. The discussion that ensued when I brought up this topic was very similar to the discussion which occurred in my sixth grade class. My seventh grade students offered many opinions and arrived at a definition just like that of my sixth grade students.

We also discussed why I was presenting such a unit to them and why it is relevant, just as we did in the sixth grade class. They answered my discussion-guiding questions easily and then they began to add their own comments and questions, just as my sixth grade students had. One of the students asked a unique question that was of particular concern to her. She asked me if it were possible to learn slang in the classroom. I was not expecting such a question, but found it rather interesting. As I thought about where her question may have originated, I began to understand why she had asked it. Like my experience in the classroom, I imagine that she has thus far learned proper, standard language. This shift to studying slang, or non-standard expressions, must have seemed strange to her. I took this opportunity to explain to her, and the rest of the class, that I had worked hard to make this unit as authentic as possible by interviewing real people who are native speakers of Spanish to provide my students with language that is truly used in various Hispanic countries. I also “spoke” with native Spanish speakers over the internet, asking them about oral as well as computer slang. As

I explained all of this to the student who had asked me the question she seemed satisfied that slang could, in fact, be learned in the classroom. I then told her that if she was interested in remaining current with such language that it was entirely possible, especially since one of her close friend's family is from Colombia.

At this point in the lesson a student commented on travel abroad and how important he thought it was in learning another language. Many of the other students in the class agreed and cited family members who had spent time living abroad in a Spanish-speaking country. They said that those family members were fluent in the language and also knew many things about the various cultures of the countries they had visited. Students began to exchange stories and discuss tidbits of Hispanic culture. They also began to compare and contrast it to the culture in the US. They brought up such things as "siesta" and the differences in the work day schedule. They began to think about meals and food and began speculating about the differences between Spanish-speaking countries and the US in such matters. They then began to think about all of the language that is used to discuss such concepts in both languages. As they did so they too began to realize that language and culture are not separate, but intimately connected. Although my seventh graders took the discussion a different way than did my sixth graders, they ultimately arrived at similar conclusions.

As a result of this lesson my student's friend who is from Columbia began to come to our classroom during "team time" (an hour in the middle of the day that is used for enrichment, catching up on homework, and getting extra help.) During our weekly team time meetings she would conduct informal chat groups with my students and because of the informal nature of these chats, my students learned both standard language

and slang as well as many things about life in Colombia. In addition to these benefits for students, I was also afforded the opportunity to speak with this student and practice my own Spanish as well as learn about her country of origin.

Finally, I proceeded to present this lesson to my eighth grade students. I found that their discussion was more similar to that of my seventh graders than that of my sixth graders. A student in this class also had a friend who is a native speaker of Spanish. He met this friend from Argentina through summer camp and he told me that this friend sometimes used words and expressions that he didn't know because as his friend would explain to him, they were slang. He was happy to be learning some words and expressions that he could use with his friend. Again my students showed me how important it was to them to be able to connect with their Spanish-speaking friends in a way similar to that in which they connect with their English-speaking friends. I believe part of being able to forge such a connection is knowledge of the language that I sought to teach students through this lesson.

In general, I found that my eighth graders were interested in the topic of slang and familiar language, but like their responses to many other topics, I found that they were not quite as enthusiastic as were the students in the other two grades. I believe that this is characteristic of most eighth grade students, but it is not to say that they were not interested or invested in the topic. In fact, they expressed that they thought it was "cool" that we were studying such a topic.

I again began the lesson with a discussion of the definitions of slang and familiar language as well as why I would I would present such a lesson to them. My eighth grade

students arrived at similar conclusions to those students in my other classes. They were able to answer my questions and add comments of their own.

In my eighth grade class we also discussed the expression “pez gordo” (literally “fat fish” and figuratively “big cheese.”) In my sixth and seventh grade classes students had pondered why the expressions were different. Why a fish in Spanish and why cheese in English. In sixth and seventh grade students were very willing and eager to share their hypotheses as to why this is the case. In eighth grade I found that students were not as apt to offer up their theories, but they did shed a different light on the topic. Rather than thinking about how the two expressions might have arisen and why they might be different, they thought instead focused intently on the fact that the two languages had expressions that essentially meant the same thing. They began to think about the fact that concepts such as “the big cheese” must exist in other cultures and what those cultures might be like. Though a few students began to speculate about the cultural links between the languages and offer up their own theories, the flow was much less prolific than during the discussions in my sixth and seventh grade classes. It seemed that my eighth grade students seemed to already know that language and culture are linked and therefore little discussion was needed on the topic.

The next step in the lesson was to have the students draw pictures of slang and/or familiar language expressions in English. As I stated in the first chapter of this paper many teachers hesitate to teach slang and everyday language in their classrooms because of the many expressions that exist in this body of language that are inappropriate for their classrooms. I worried about this as well at this stage in the lesson where students were free to draw an expression of their choosing. I was particularly concerned about this with

my eighth grade class, as they are the oldest and tend to have the most knowledge of this type of language. However, I simply stated (in each grade) that I did not want to see anything inappropriate and that I would be checking their pictures before displaying them to the whole class. I was pleasantly surprised in each of the three grades when none of the students tried to depict any inappropriate expressions.

After completing this first lesson with all three grades I found that I was quite impressed with my students. Their discussions were extremely interesting to me and I found how much they had already thought about and how much they already knew astonishing. I was also glad to learn that so many of them had Spanish-speaking friends and could relate to the lesson on a personal level. To be personally invested in learning something makes it a more appealing and important pursuit. I believe that my students came away from this lesson with the information and food for thought that I had hoped they would.

CHAPTER 4
LESSON TWO

The following lesson plan is that of the second lesson in my unit. This lesson focuses on the teaching of actual words and expressions I learned from the native speakers I interviewed.

1. Review information from the previous lesson by asking students what the definitions of slang and familiar language are and why it is important to learn them.
2. Once this information has been reviewed, ask students if they know what the terms “register” and “audience” mean when referring to language. If students need help defining these words give them some examples of discourse between a variety of people (audience) in various registers (i.e. levels of informality/formality) to help them arrive at a set of definitions.
3. Next, tell students that you want them to imagine that they are talking to the people that you will mention and that they should consider what type of register they would use; formal or informal. If they feel that they would be speaking in a more informal manner they will display some kind of signal; perhaps remaining seated or raising one hand. If they feel that they would use a more formal register they will display another type of signal such as standing or raising both hands. You may mention any person with whom your students are likely to have conversations on a regular basis. For example, I mentioned parents, grandparents, friends, acquaintances who are the same

- age as my students, acquaintances who are older, siblings, the school principal, the president of the US, a waiter/waitress, and a pen pal.
4. Show students an abridged list of Spanish slang and familiar language expressions (I chose about ten or twelve) and have them see if they can determine the literal meaning of any of the words/expressions. (Again, the complete list of expressions that I compiled can be found in the appendix.)
 5. If students cannot determine any or all of the literal meanings of the words/expressions give them this information.
 6. Go through each word one by one and have students hypothesize about what the figurative meaning might be.
 7. Have students discuss the similarities and differences between the Spanish slang/familiar language expressions which they learned in this lesson and the English slang/familiar language expressions which they already know.

As with the first lesson, I also began this one with my sixth graders. We started by reviewing the definitions of slang and familiar language. Next, we worked on register and audience. I asked students to define these terms and had to give them some help with register. I then read to them a list of people (see above lesson plan for specific list) with whom they might be likely to have conversations with in their daily lives. I asked them to consider whether they would be more inclined to speak to these people in more of an

informal or formal register. If they chose informal I asked that they remain seated. If they chose formal I asked them to stand.

For some of the people mentioned, such as the president of the US, there were unanimous decisions as to what register would be employed. All of my students stood to show a choice a formal register for this situation. For other situations there was a bit of a split and this led to interesting discussions. Some of these situations included speaking to a grandparent, the school principal, as well as teachers. It was very interesting to both me and my students how their choices of register could vary even when speaking to the same person.

During the next phase of the lesson I began to show, one word at a time, the list of slang expressions that I had gathered the summer before. I mentioned to my sixth graders that I had collected this list from native speakers only a few months ago. I wanted them to know that the list was authentic as well as up to date. However, I found that they had no concerns or questions about this. One student was very happy to learn that I had gathered expressions from the Dominican Republic. He is a baseball fanatic whose hero is the Red Sox player David Ortiz, who is from that country. He told me that he wanted to learn these expressions so that he could talk to David Ortiz. Again, this unit touched on personal connections for students and made them very eager to participate in it.

Many of the words and expressions used language that was unfamiliar to my sixth graders and I helped them with the literal meaning of many of the expressions. However, once we had established that information, they were more than willing to hypothesize

about what each of the expressions might mean in a figurative sense. I found that they eventually came up with most of the meanings, but that it took a while for them to arrive at those definitions. Once they determined the meanings, though, they immediately began to discuss how these expressions may have originated as well as the similarities between Spanish and English. As in the last lesson, they began to become aware of the idiosyncrasies of their own language. To me, this is an important lesson for a beginning language learner. I have heard many times students saying that they can't understand why a particular expression or grammatical structure is the way it is in Spanish, or that Spanish is "weird." By seeing that English is just as unpredictable and "weird" students learn that Spanish is no different than any other language and they become a little less frustrated by these irregularities.

I next presented the lesson to my seventh graders. I began the lesson in the same way with a review of the previous lesson and then proceeded to discuss my process of acquiring the information with them. It seemed more important to these students that the list of words be authentic and up to date, more so than was the case with my sixth grade students. It was a seventh grader who asked me during the last lesson whether or not slang could actually be taught in the classroom. I find that seventh graders use much more slang in their daily speech than do sixth graders and I think for that reason were much more concerned that this Spanish slang be authentic and current. They did not want to invest time in learning words and expressions that could not really be used in everyday life with the many Spanish-speaking friends I would learn that they had.

During the discussion of register and audience I again had to aid my students in defining register. As in the sixth grade, there was sometimes a consensus as to what type of register should be used in conversation with certain people, but there were also some where there was disparity. Again, this created an animated conversation in which students were very engaged. Students were eager to explain their opinions and to ask each other about how they arrived at their conclusions about whether to be more or less formal in particular situations. I believe students found it to be an interesting window into the backgrounds of their classmates.

As we went through the list of slang words and expressions one at a time, I found that my seventh graders were able to determine both their literal and figurative meanings a bit more easily than were my sixth grade students. They too enjoyed learning the expressions and immediately began trying them out. By the end of the lesson they were requesting the unabridged list of slang that I had compiled. This request was particularly gratifying to me, as it showed that they were invested, on a personal level, and wanted to try using these expressions in authentic conversations with Spanish speakers.

Finally, I presented this second lesson to my eighth grade students. As with the previous lesson, I found that their response to this one was similar to that of my seventh grade students. One difference that I noted was their take on the topic of register. After we established a definition for this term, I proceeded to take them through the same exercise that I had done with my sixth and seventh graders. Again, the results were similar and an animated discussion ensued. However, in their discussion they talked

about not only their conclusions, but also about why they arrived at those conclusions. This “why” question came up as they began to ask each other about their backgrounds and upbringing. They began to draw their own inferences and conclusions about the question of register and its subjective nature.

They also began to discuss the concept of “tú” versus “Ud.” in Spanish. These two words both mean “you,” but the “tú” is used in informal situations and the “Ud.” is used in formal situations. They began to discuss how some situations are questionable and it is up to the speaker of the language to determine which to use. While discussing this they made a connection to the term “tutear” which they had learned through a movie series we had been watching in class. In Spanish, this verb means to use the “tú,” or informal, form of a verb with someone. These connections were important to me as they showed students the relevance of what they study in class and how it can be used in real-life situations. I then told them that the distinction between a formal and informal “you” once existed in English. One student was able to tell the class before I did that this distinction existed in the forms of “thee” and “thou.” Students wondered aloud why this distinction was retained in Spanish, but not in English. Hypotheses included elaborate theories that had to do with the Spanish conquest of the Americas as well as what one student termed “the lazy nature of English.”

Another difference that I noted was that the ability of my eighth grade students to determine the literal and figurative meanings of the slang expressions was much greater than that of my sixth or seventh grade students. In part this facility is due to the fact that

they simply know more language than do my younger students. However, the other factor that plays a role in this ability is that they are more able to think abstractly and this aids them in determining the figurative meanings of these expressions. After discussing their meanings students spoke a bit about the similarities and differences between Spanish and English as well as why and how the slang expression in each language may have originated. However, I found that they were less inclined to do this than were my sixth and seventh grade students. I think this is because after three years of studying Spanish they are more able to accept that fact that all languages have differences and idiosyncrasies and that Spanish is no different.

Overall, I found this lesson to be enjoyable at all grade levels. Seeing the personal connections that students were continuing to make was particularly gratifying. I was also again impressed by the quality of the discussions that students initiated with very little direction from me. Finishing up the presentation of this lesson with my eighth grader students asking for the complete list of slang expressions let me know that I had succeeded in creating a lesson that was interesting, engaging, and useful to students. I began to look forward to presenting my next lesson on email, instant messaging, and text messaging.

CHAPTER 5
LESSON THREE

The third lesson in my unit dealt with the language of text messaging, instant messaging, and email.

1. Begin by asking students if slang and familiar language exist only in oral forms.
2. If they are not sure ask them if they use email, instant messaging, or text messaging and if these forms of communication can be considered a written form of slang or at the very least, informal English.
3. Write up a list of English expressions used in such methods of communication and/or ask students to provide some examples of such expressions.
4. Next, show a transparency of a sample text message in Spanish. (A copy of this transparency is located in the appendix of this paper.)
5. Ask a student to read the message out loud, exactly as it is written on the transparency.
6. Next, have the same or another student try to read the message, this time “translating” the text messaging language into standard English. If the student has trouble, ask another student to give him or her a hint, or you may provide help.
7. Ask students what they notice about the language in the message, making sure that they note it is short, contains no accent marks or articles, and is code-like.

8. Next, have students work in pairs to create a sample English instant messaging conversation. If some students are not familiar with instant messaging, pair them with students who are familiar with this type of communication language.
9. Have students read their conversations to the class as they are literally written. You may also have students write these conversations on transparencies so that students can see as well as hear them.
10. After students hear/see the literal conversation, have them try to “translate” these conversations into standard English. (Examples of these conversations can be found in the appendix.)
11. Finally, ask them what similarities and/or differences they notice between the instant messaging language of English and Spanish.

I decided to present this lesson to my eighth graders first rather than starting with my sixth graders. This decision was not based on the content of the lesson, but simply a desire to see what would happen if I started a lesson with a different grade level.

When I asked my eighth graders if slang and familiar language exist only in oral forms they immediately said no and brought up instant messaging without any further prompting from me. I then asked them to generate a list of instant messaging and text messaging expressions that are widely used. I was flooded with a variety of expressions and as I received them I wrote them on a transparency film. Some of these expressions I knew, but there were many I did not know, such as “tfn,” which means “ta ta for now.”

Students enjoyed teaching me these expressions and were hesitant to stop even after I had reached the bottom of my transparency film and could not fit any more.

As students were providing these expressions they also began to comment on them and how some are outdated and how some of them have multiple meanings. Students also pointed out to me, in a very respectful way, that there are some expressions which contain profanity and advised me that we should stay away from those expressions. This made me smile, as my students truly took on the role of teacher and were being careful to keep inappropriate material out of the realm of discussion.

As students were providing these expressions some of them mentioned that conversations through instant messaging are widely used and fun, but can easily become redundant. They and their friends will often have conversations that consist of a dialogue similar or identical to the following: “Hi.”/“What’s up?”/“Nothing much, you?”/“Nothing much.”/“Got to go.” The interesting thing about this comment is that even those students who agreed with it still said that they used instant messaging to talk to friends. When I asked them about this, they simply answered that so many of their friends use it that they end up using it, too. In fact, they told me that people use instant messaging so much that friends often call one another by their screen names. One student said that his screen name is “idude” and that his friends often refer to him as such.

After this discussion, I asked a student to read the Spanish text message that I had on a transparency film just as it was written. The student who did this had trouble reading the message as it was literally written. He kept switching back and forth between

what was literally written and what the message was intended to say in standard English. It seemed that he was able to easily interpret most of the message and was more likely to “translate” the message when he understood its intended message. He was able to stick with a literal reading of the message more often when he seemed unsure of what the message’s author was trying to get across to his/her audience. After he finished reading the message another student took a shot at filling in the gaps; reading her “translation” of the message.

With very little help from me students were able to read and interpret the message correctly and they seemed to enjoy doing so. From doing this activity with my eighth students I realized just how adept they are at deciphering this type of abbreviated, code-like language because they use it so often in their native language. Though there were a few words that students did not know, the jump from English to Spanish was not very difficult for them.

We then began a discussion about the nature of the language in the text message that I had shown them. Students noted that it in English and in Spanish it is generally made up of abbreviations to speed up typing so that messages can be relayed faster. My eighth graders also noticed in this Spanish text message many of the abbreviations used omit only one letter such as “bsos” for “besos” (kisses), whereas in English the abbreviations tend to be acronyms like “lol” (laugh out loud). They also noted that though there are some phrases abbreviated in both languages like “b/c” (because) and “pq” (porque= because), there were also many different ones used as well.

I next had students create their own instant messaging conversations in English. I asked that they keep them short and simple; no more than six lines. My eighth graders had a very easy time working on these and there were no students who had never used the medium. My eighth graders were so adept at writing these that some of them were already thinking ahead to a Spanish conversation. As they were imagining such a conversation, those students were using the little that they had seen from the text message that I had shown them as well as creating their own expressions. One student asked about “¿ks?” which would stand for “¿Qué es?” (“What is it?”) I found this stage of the lesson particularly satisfying as students were using what I had shown them and combining that with their background knowledge to hypothesize about an aspect of the Spanish language.

During the last stage of the lesson students read the conversations they had written exactly as they appeared on the transparency film. The other students then had to follow along with their classmates conversations, orally and visually, and then “translate” the meaning of the conversation into standard English. My eighth grade students were quite adept at doing this and did so quickly and easily.

I next proceeded to do this lesson with my sixth grade students. Much like my eighth graders they were very excited to generate a list of instant messaging terms for me and take on the role of teacher. As they mentioned expression after expression they began to discuss amongst themselves variants and what was out-dated and what was not. Some students asked questions about the expressions; one stating that he thought “brb”

was an abbreviation for the noise produced when one belches. Through this discussion I learned that two students in the class had not had much exposure to this form of communication and for the conversation writing activity I paired them with students who were well-versed in instant messaging language in English.

My sixth grade students had a bit more difficulty with translating the Spanish text message than did my eighth grade students. This was to be expected, as they know less of the language and have collectively had less experience using instant messaging than do my eighth graders. For those reasons they needed a bit of help from me when they attempted to “translate” the message. However, just like the eighth graders they were able to easily note the similarities and differences between the Spanish and English versions of such electronic language.

My sixth graders did the final activity of the lesson and wrote conversations using the language of instant messaging. They found this activity quite enjoyable and were very enthusiastic about sharing their conversations. Although my sixth graders did a very good job on their conversations, they did not make the leap to Spanish as did my eighth grade students. From this difference I was able to see how sixth graders and eighth graders think differently. Eighth grade students tend to take the next step (or two) by themselves without direction or prompting from me which underscores their relative maturity and mental development as compared to sixth grade students.

I next proceeded to present this lesson to my seventh grade students. As I began to work through the lesson with them I noticed how expert they seemed to be at

electronic language, as were my eighth graders, but also how excited they were about it, as were my sixth graders. They did not say, as my eighth graders had, that conversations done through instant messaging could become redundant. They seemed to really enjoy the medium and take pride in their ability at using it.

All of the students in my seventh grade classes had used, and most still used, instant messaging or text messaging language to talk to friends. When I asked for them to list various instant and text messaging expressions they mentioned many more than I could write down. In addition to listing these expressions they also wanted to explain to me that thought they were extremely adept at communicating through such electronic means, their parents found it rather difficult to make sense of it. This was important as it showed that this method of communication is geared toward the youth subset of the population.

Although most aspects of the lesson tended to unfold in a manner similar to that in the other grades I found that my seventh grade students added what I thought was an interesting spin to the presentation of their conversations. Instead of simply reading their conversations many of the students created skits in which they imitated sitting at their computers typing out their messages. They made the conversations complete by adding in the signing off process, using their screen names, and by using emoticons. Emoticons are symbols made up of characters from the computer keyboard and are put together in such a way as to create a picture which depicts the feeling or emotion with which a

particular comment was said. For example :) indicates happiness, as it looks like a sideways smiling face.

I thought that this addition which appeared in many of the seventh grade conversations showed just how much they use instant message to communicate and that they know that they must use such symbols to compensate for the inability to directly show the feeling intended when relaying a message.

As I finished this lesson I felt as though my students were teaching me as much as, if not more, than I was teaching them. Before presenting this lesson I had anticipated this, but the extent to which my students enjoyed taking on the role of teacher surprised me, pleasantly. I also found that students continued to make linguistic connections and inspire interesting discussions. I think such discussions which deal with linguistic phenomena, culture, and aspects of language which are seldom talked about are important for students. I believe these discussions spark students' interest in language and are, of their own merit, worthy material for the classroom.

CHAPTER 6

LESSON FOUR

In the fourth lesson of my unit students learn some current IM language in Spanish and practice using it. The following is the plan for this lesson:

1. Assemble a list of up-to-date instant/text messaging language in Spanish. (The list that I created and used appears in the appendix of this paper.)
2. Make a transparency of this list and show it to students. Select a few expressions (about 10) and ask students to try to determine what they mean. If students have trouble, give them a bit of assistance.
3. Next, pass out the complete list of the instant messaging expressions to students to see if they have any questions about other expressions on the list.
4. Ask students if they notice any similarities or difference between English and Spanish versions of IM expressions that they did not think of in the previous lesson.
5. Have students work in partners (or small groups) to write short conversations (about six lines) using the Spanish IM language that they now know. Have students write these conversations on transparency films.
6. Next, have students present their conversations to the class, reading exactly what is on their transparency film while their classmates follow along.

7. Those students who were following along with their classmates' conversation should now try to "translate" the message that the authors of the conversation intended to get across. (Examples of my students' conversations can be found in the appendix.)

I decided to begin this lesson with my seventh graders because I had not done so thus far in the course of my unit. As soon as I began this lesson I once again noticed the personal connection it brought about for my students and the resultant eagerness to learn what I was about to teach that it inspired in them. Some of them said things like, "Wow! This is cool!" Some again mentioned friends who are native speakers of Spanish with whom they could use these expressions during their IM chats. As we began to look at a few of the words that I had selected from the list I had compiled I noticed that many of my seventh graders were trying to write down all of those expressions. Once I saw this I let them know that I would be passing out a long list with all of the expressions that I had collected the summer before school began. Students were excited about this and eager to receive that list.

As we began to go through the list I found that my students had a bit of trouble figuring out what some of the expressions meant. However, by helping each other they were able to get many of them. With those that they were unsure of I offered small hints and that was usually enough to for them to determine the meanings of these expressions. I found that many of my students were asking clarifying questions to be sure that they had understood the correct meaning of each expression. This showed me that my seventh grade students were genuinely interested in learning these words and phrases because

many of intended to use them in their IM conversations with their Spanish-speaking friends.

The next step in the lesson was to pass out the unabridged list of IM expressions to my students. While I gave each of them a list there was a quiet in which students read through the list of expressions. Occasionally this quiet was interrupted by students trying out the expressions and asking questions about some of the expressions on that list. Once students were satisfied with their understanding of these words and phrases I asked students if they noted any differences or similarities between Spanish IM expressions and English expressions that they had not mentioned in the previous lesson. They offered a few observations. They noted that some of the Spanish expressions made use of English pronunciation of letters such as “k” which stands for “que” (that) or “¿qué?” (what?). However, they could not think of any English expressions that incorporated Spanish pronunciation of letters or Spanish words.

My students also noted that some abbreviations in English like “w8” (wait) include numbers just as some of the Spanish abbreviations do. One example of a Spanish instant messaging expression that contains numbers is “ning1” (“ninguno”) which means no/none. In my opinion these types of expressions are the most fun, but the majority of my seventh graders did not seem to share my feelings. Many of them were more interested in the other expressions, perhaps because they felt that they would be of more use to them in their actual IM conversations with friends.

Finally, as we were looking at the list and comparing expressions in English and Spanish, one of my seventh grade students began to think about creating his own expressions, just as one of my eighth grade students had done in the previous lesson. He

came up with “locnto,” combining the Spanish pronunciations of “lo” and “to” with the English pronunciation of the letters “c” and “n” to make the Spanish phrase “lo siento” (I’m sorry). This was interesting to me, as it showed the difference in ability for abstract thinking that increases from grade to grade. Where as some of my eighth graders were making this leap to creating their own expressions during the last lesson it took my seventh graders one more lesson to get there.

After this discussion they then began to work in pairs or groups of three to create possible IM conversations using these expressions. I asked that they keep the conversations to about six lines and to use as many of the new expressions as would sensibly fit into their conversations. Students were eager to begin the assignment and to subsequently show the fruits of this labor to their classmates.

For the most part, students were able to understand the messages that their classmates were trying to get across in each of the conversations they heard (and saw on the overhead projector.) As each group presented the literal versions of their conversations students became more and more adept at “translating” them. Near the end of the presentations, many students were able to interpret the conversations without looking at the list that I had provided for them.

My seventh graders seemed to have a lot of fun with this lesson, especially since many of them were practicing for actual conversations they would later have with friends through the computer. I would next proceed to work on this lesson with my eighth graders and hoped for similar results.

As I began this lesson with my eighth grade students they too seemed interested and instantly asked if I could make a list of IM expression for them to keep. I told them

that I had one prepared that would be given to them later in the lesson. As we looked at some of the expressions I had chosen for the overhead my eighth grade students, like my seventh graders, also had a bit of trouble figuring out what some of the IM expressions meant. Again, by talking to each other and by getting a few hints from me they were eventually able to determine most of the meanings. However, I found that these students were less inclined to offer guesses or hypotheses about what these expressions might mean. I often find this to be the case in eighth grade as it tends to become more intimidating for students to take a risk and give what could be an incorrect answer.

After determining the meanings of the expressions that I had chosen I then started the same discussion about similarities and differences that I had with my seventh graders. One student noted the use of the English pronunciation of letters in some of the expressions, as had one of my seventh graders. After this comment another student began to think about the expression “k” which had also been brought up in my seventh grade class. However, in this class this expression prompted a student to ask about accent marks. She noted that in Spanish the word “que” without an accent mark means “that” and with an accent mark it means “what?” She asked if accent marks were used and I responded that from what I have observed that they are generally not. Another student took up the conversation and stated that just like in many instances in what she termed “regular” Spanish the context of the message must be taken into account in order to determine the intended meaning of a given message. For me it was satisfying to hear students having this conversation, as using context to determine meaning is something that we had discussed prior to this unit and here it was being employed in a way that was especially meaningful to students.

After my students got into pairs or groups of three they too worked on their conversations and then presented them to their classmates just as the seventh graders had done. I found that they also enjoyed working on these conversations and presenting them. My eighth graders were even quicker than my seventh graders at becoming adept enough to interpret the conversations without having to refer to their lists. Overall, they too had fun working on this lesson and once again I felt as though this was due to the relevance to their lives and the personal connections many of them had to the material at hand.

The final group that I was to present this lesson to was my sixth graders. Though much of how the lesson proceeded was similar to what occurred in the two other grades, there were some things that surprised me. The first of these surprises was how quickly my sixth graders were able to determine the meanings of the expressions that I had picked for the overhead transparency. I think that this was due in large part to their lack of inhibition in terms of hypothesizing and using each others' hypotheses to eventually figure out the meanings. The students in my sixth grade class were by far the most cooperative during this stage of the lesson and felt the least intimidated about venturing guesses about the meanings of the expressions that could possibly be incorrect.

Another aspect of the lesson with my sixth graders that was different from the lessons with the other two grades was how much they enjoyed the expressions that contained letters and numbers. Like me, many of the students in my sixth grade class thought that this type of expressions was the most interesting. As we talked about the meanings of these expressions my sixth graders were adamant about not wanting any

hints. They were determined to figure out what they meant on their own, which they eventually succeeded in doing.

Like the students in the other two grades, my sixth graders enjoyed this lesson very much. Many mentioned Spanish-speaking friends with whom they would use these expressions in their actual IM conversations. Even the students who had not had experience with this electronic method of communication were interested in learning these expressions. In fact, in some instances they were even more eager to learn the meanings of these words and phrases as they were a novelty to them. Over all, I was quite pleased with how enjoyable my sixth graders found the lesson and how well they worked together throughout the lesson.

It seems as though the students in each of the three grades that I teach found the lesson to be relevant to them and worked hard to learn the material at hand. Even though this was the fourth lesson in my unit of five, I found that students were still enthusiastic about the topic. I enjoyed teaching this lesson to the students in each of the three grades and found their comments about, observations on, and reactions to the material quite interesting.

CHAPTER 7
LESSON FIVE

This final lesson of the unit focuses on register and audience and its significance in written communication. The following is the plan for this lesson:

1. Review the terms “register” and audience with students.
2. Remind students of the activity that they did in lesson two of this unit in which they had to determine whether to use a formal or informal tone with a variety of people in various circumstances. Give them an example by naming a person or group of people that was used in that activity and ask them to tell or show what register (formal or informal) they would use with that particular audience.
3. Tell students that the concepts of audience and register are not only important in spoken language, but also in written language and that we are going to work on their implication in the written word in this lesson.
4. Have students divide into pairs. Then, pass out a list of writing prompts that are written on index cards. I created eleven situations in which my students might be likely to find themselves. The eleven situations that I created included writing a letter to one’s family describing one’s first day as an exchange student, a thank you letter to one’s aunt for a birthday gift she gave, a letter to the editor of the *Boston Globe*, a pen pal letter, and an article for the school newspaper.

5. Tell students that their task is to write an appropriate text in Spanish for the prompt on the index card which they received. (Examples of what my students wrote can be found in the appendix.)
6. While students are working on their pieces, post a list of all the writing prompts so that all students can see them.
7. Once students have finished writing have them read their texts to the rest of the class.
8. When each pair has read their texts to the class the rest of the class should look at the list and see if they can determine which writing prompt the students had received.
9. Once the correct response has been determined ask students if there is anything in the text that seems to be inappropriate in terms of selecting an appropriate register for the intended audience.

For me this was an important part of my unit as well as my curriculum in general as I find that students tend to find one format for writing that they are comfortable using and tend to rely on this format for all types of writing situations. Of course, just as in English, there are many audiences for which various texts are intended. Because of this there are also many formats and levels of formality or informality that are appropriate or inappropriate for particular circumstances. I feel that it is important for students to realize this and have their writing reflect this knowledge. Although my students are beginning language learners and have a somewhat small amount of language I believe that they can still be held accountable for their text reflecting audience and register appropriately. All they need is the knowledge and a bit of a push to work at it.

In addition to this belief I also feel that the taking into account of audience and register is important because of the pervasive nature of instant messaging and its

expressions. Many of my students have said to me, as I have mentioned in previous chapters, that they or their friends often use IM language in spoken communication and I have even seen this type of language creep into some students' writing. I feel that it is important for me to help students differentiate between appropriate and inappropriate instances in which to use such informal language.

I began this lesson with my sixth graders by asking them to define "register" and "audience." I was pleased to see that they had remembered the definitions of these terms. After giving them an example situation as I had in lesson two where they were to decide between a formal and informal register, I told them that we were going to explore how these concepts were important in written communication as well as spoken communication.

I then had my sixth graders break up into pairs and I gave each pair an index card with a writing prompt on it. I explained to them that they were to write a text based on the situation that was presented to them on the card. I also told them to remember to take into account who their audience was and to write accordingly. As students received their cards some pairs were able to begin writing quite easily while others were having a bit more difficulty getting started. This was to be expected for a few reasons; some of the students have more of a facility with writing than others and some of the writing prompts were a bit more difficult than others. By talking with their partners most students were able to begin writing and the few who were not needed only a few words of encouragement from me.

As I walked around the classroom I was able to overhear some of the conversations students were having with their partners. In a few instances there were disagreements

about how to go about writing the piece which students were able to resolve rather easily with one another. This sort of discussion showed that students were truly thinking about writing in an appropriate fashion which was quite satisfying to me.

Although I had debated whether to have students write in pairs or on their own I was glad that I had chosen the pair format for the lesson. I had wanted students to try to figure out on their own how to best write in response to the prompts I had given them. I did not want to be the source of answers to their questions and by employing a pair format students' peers became the source of these answers. For the students who were not sure how to begin writing their text having a partner with whom they could discuss their strategy for tackling the assignment was powerful.

While students were finishing their writing assignments I posted the list of all eleven writing prompts. Because I had written eleven prompts for my largest class, which was a seventh grade class, I had a few prompts that were not used in my sixth grade. I decided to leave those on the master list and show them to my sixth graders as well.

After students were done writing I asked them to read their texts. I had initially worried about what my sixth grade students would be able to come up with in Spanish in response to these prompts. However, as I heard more and more of what they had written I was truly impressed. They had written creative texts and had done their best to take into account to whom they were writing and for what reason.

My sixth graders were able to correctly determine which writing prompt each pair had received almost all of the time. There were a few instances in which some students had chosen the wrong prompt, but for the most part my students had written texts whose purpose and audience could easily be determined.

The next step was to determine whether the authors of these texts had written in an appropriate register and format for their intended audiences. Much of what my sixth graders were able to write was done in an appropriate register and format which is quite a feat, considering the small amount of language they possess. However, as I asked students if there were any instances in which they would change aspects of the texts to align better with a more appropriate register they offered some suggestions. For example, one of the prompts that I had given to students was to write a letter to your family about your first day as an exchange student. The pair that wrote in response to this prompt had ended their letter by signing their first and last names. Aptly, one student commented that if you are writing a letter to your family you do not normally sign your last name and that including a last name is reserved for more formal situations.

Another comment was made about the note to a friend in which you let him or her know where you would be after school and where you would meet later on. The students who wrote this began it with “Hola, amiga” (Hi, friend) and one of their classmates commented that if you were leaving a note for your friend you would most likely start it with his or her name rather than saying “Hi, friend.” Again, this comment was accurate and showed a thoughtfulness on the part of my sixth graders. I found that the authors were quite easily able to accept and learn from the critiques of their texts. I hoped that this sense of willingness to learn from one another would be present in the seventh and eighth grade permutations of this lesson.

I next proceeded to work on this lesson with my seventh graders. Like my sixth graders they too were able to come up with the definitions of audience and register which was pleasing. After doing an example from the lesson two activity which I mentioned

earlier in the chapter students got into pairs and received their index cards. Again there were some pairs which had received prompts which were more difficult than others and the students who received these were a bit slower to begin than their classmates. However, after discussing their plan with their partners all of the pairs were able to begin. In general, I found that the discussions between partners in my seventh grade were even more animated than those that occurred in my sixth grade. There were more disagreements and it took longer for some students to collaboratively decide how to write the text in response to the prompt they had received.

One of the exciting things that happened during this lesson with my seventh graders was how proud they felt being able to write exclusively in Spanish. Some of my students told me how “awesome” it was to be able to do this as I walked around the classroom. This was incredibly gratifying as it is my belief that encouraging and expecting students to communicate only in (or at least mostly in) Spanish while in the classroom is crucial. I felt that their ability to do so was due in part to my pushing them throughout the year as well as the enthusiasm and sense of pride they had about being able to do so.

After students finished writing they read them one at a time to their classmates. As in the sixth grade there were a few times when students chose the wrong writing prompt, but for the most part the intended audience of each piece was clear. After determining the correct writing prompt on which a particular pair had based their text students then discussed whether the register and format were appropriate.

One example where students found something that didn't seem quite right was in the letter to the editor text. This happened to be one of the prompts that none of my sixth grade students had received and it also happened to be one of the more difficult prompts.

The students who received this prompt began their letter with “Hola, Bob” (“Hello, Bob”). Their classmates commented that this is not a formal enough register for such a text which was an accurate statement. However, when I then asked them how such a letter should be started students were unsure. I then decided that for homework they should find the answer to this question by finding examples of letters to the editor. This was a particularly helpful assignment as I feel that it will help students to remember the information they needed because they found it themselves.

I felt that this lesson was a success with my seventh graders as they learned a lot from it. Their enthusiasm about using only Spanish was extremely gratifying and the discussion they had about each piece of writing was interesting and showed that they were trying hard to improve upon their writing. I think for many of them this desire to improve their writing stemmed from a love of writing in English and once again shows how much interest can be generated by a topic that is relevant to students and to which they have personal connections.

I was now ready to present this lesson for the last time to my eighth grade students and thusly finish the unit that I had created. I started the lesson the same way I had in the other two grades and then had students break into pairs. Similar discussions about how to begin writing ensued, though I found my eighth graders’ discussions to be closer in nature to that of my sixth graders. There were some disagreements, but they seemed to be more easily resolved than those in my seventh grade. However, as students began writing I noticed the relative ease with which they were able to use language. It is impressive to see how much students grow as Spanish speakers from just sixth to eighth

grade. Although they had questions for one another and a few for me they were more able and more content to write on their own than students in the other two grades were.

In my eighth grade there was no confusion over which writing prompt each pair had received. The ability of these students to write appropriately for their intended audience was high. However, as in the other grades there were instances in which students found areas that could be improved in terms of register and format. One such example was the text written in response to the prompt in which students were to write a thank you letter to an aunt for a birthday gift. The students who wrote this letter started out with “Gracias, tía” (Thank you, aunt) and a classmate commented that such a letter would likely start out with “Dear aunt so-and-so.”

In my eighth grade this and other such comments produced a discussion about register and personal differences similar to that which occurred in the second lesson of this unit. This sort of discussion also emerged in the other grades and again sparked interest in students. Students in each of the grades began to discuss personal factors that can influence one’s use of register and if there are certain forms of writing that have little room for interpretation and instead have one correct format. Although this discussion was interesting in each of the three grades I felt that it was most in depth in my eighth grade class.

The final presentation of this lesson to my eighth graders was a nice way to end the unit for me. It made me see that I had sparked and maintained interest in a topic that was a combination of untraditional and customary classroom material. I also felt that I had created a lesson that was relevant and important to my students. Each of the three grades

seemed to have learned a lot from this lesson. I was pleased by this and felt that the lesson was a success.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

When I originally thought about creating this unit I had hoped to inspire students' interest in language that is traditionally not taught in the classroom. Initially I began identifying this language as slang. However, as I interviewed native speakers, asking them to let me know of any slang that is current and popular in their respective countries I realized that in addition to slang expressions they were also mentioning familiar language expressions. At first I perceived this as a setback, but I began to realize that it was not a setback, but a chance to expand the breadth of my project. As it turned out, not only was this a way to include more language, but the differences and similarities of these types of language produced some lively discussions in my classes.

As the project continued to evolve I once again broadened its scope to include electronic messaging language. Serendipitously, as I was conducting personal interviews and doing research for this project I came across information on Spanish instant/text messaging. I had never used this type of language myself and found it fascinating. I then thought about my students, many of whom use this type of electronic language in English quite often, and felt that such language would be a relevant and engaging aspect of my unit for them.

Indeed, this electronic aspect of my unit did capture the attention of my students. Many of them have Spanish-speaking friends with whom they were excited to use this newly learned language. For others, the topic generated a sense of enthusiasm because it was novel and not typically taught in the classroom. Some enjoyed the code-like aspect of the language and trying to decipher its meanings. Still others, for whom language is already an area of interest, enjoyed comparing and contrasting the English and Spanish forms of this method of communication.

I found the same sense of enjoyment and investment with other aspects of the unit. When I taught the lessons on slang and familiar language students enjoyed the learning process and brought to it the same level of excitement and engagement. Particularly gratifying to me was the quality of the discussions that students in each of my three grades were having. Some of their insights surprised me and it turned out that I was learning a great deal from them as I taught my lessons.

The students in each of the three grades brought their own unique points of view to bear on each lesson. This was one of the things that kept me motivated throughout each lesson and the entire unit. Before I presented a lesson to a particular grade level I would wonder how this presentation would turn out and how it would differ from the last presentation to another grade level.

I don't think that I could pick any one of the three grade levels I taught as the best one to teach this unit to. My sixth grade students brought a sense of true excitement, hard work, and determination to the unit. My seventh graders brought to it a feeling of knowledge and worldliness coupled with an excitement similar to that of my sixth graders. Lastly, I felt that my eighth grade students created an environment of abstract

thought on the topic at hand and a focus on linguistics in general. I was continually impressed with how much all of my students knew and were thinking about. I was also satisfied to see what they are capable of producing if given a bit of a push. Their writing in the last lesson of the unit speaks to this.

In addition, I feel that working on this unit helped my students to significantly increase their ability to comprehend slang and familiar language in Spanish. Whether they actually use the slang or familiar language expressions from this unit is of secondary concern to me, given this gain in their receptive abilities. With this fortified ability I believe that they will be able to better understand native speakers and, therefore, be better able to be active, comprehending members of discussions involving native speakers.

Although they will not know every expression from every Spanish-speaking country they will have acquired a sense of these expressions and their existence, which I hope will make them less intimidating when my students encounter them in a conversation. With less of a feeling of intimidation or incompetence I believe that my students will be more likely to conduct conversations with native speakers, be better able to understand those native speakers, and connect with them.

I am glad that I had the chance to work on this unit with the students in each of the three grades that I teach. I believe that they learned a lot and I know that I learned a tremendous amount from my research, personal interviews, and conducting the lessons with my students. It is my hope that other Spanish teachers will find the material in this paper intriguing and the lessons in it to be of use in their classrooms.

In an effort to make my lessons plans clearer and to help other teachers incorporate them into their classrooms, I have included in the appendix to this paper

samples of some of the materials that I used or collected as I conducted these lessons in my classroom. To accompany lesson one are examples of pictures that I used which represent the literal meaning of slang and familiar language expressions, the sample dialogue in English containing slang and familiar language that I used, as well as examples of my students' drawing which depict the literal meaning of various slang and familiar expressions in English. To go along with the second lesson is a complete list of the slang and familiar expressions which I learned through the personal interviews that I conducted. For lesson three I added a copy of the text message that I used to expose students to such Spanish language as well as examples of my students' instant messaging conversations in English. I have also included the list of the IM and text messaging language that I compiled for use in the fourth lesson as well as examples of my students' IM conversations in Spanish which they created during that lesson. Finally, the last item in the appendix is a sampling of my students' writing which they did in lesson five in response to the writing prompts I gave to them.

While conducting these lessons I began to become more sure that the time I had spent during the summer of 2005 was an investment in my teaching, as I would likely use this unit each year in my teaching. In the future I hope to expand this unit by creating more lessons and activities for it. For me, the topic of the unit is relevant and important and one to which I feel students should be exposed. By participating in these lessons, my students have gained a greater sense of their own language and culture as well as those of Spanish-speaking countries. My students have also gained a better sense of the notions of register and audience and can use this knowledge in their writing in Spanish as well as in English. Finally, through a fun and interesting unit, my students learned to think

critically about language in a way that they perhaps had not before. Both they and I enjoyed participating in this unit and we both learned a great deal from one another.

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