

Teach English Like You Know Spanish

Strategies for Overcoming the Linguistic & Cultural Challenges of Native Spanish-Speaking ESL Learners

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QUIZ TIME!!

1. Adults and children acquire second language in different ways. **True or False.**
2. Language acquisition occurs only in the left hemisphere of the brain. **True or False.**
3. It is difficult to impossible to learn a second language accent-free after the age of 12 or 13. **True or False.**
4. The first language actually hinders the learning of the second language. **True or False.**
5. If an ELL doesn't speak or write well in English, then he/she most likely doesn't comprehend English well either. **True or False.**

QUIZ TIME!!

6. Learners acquire language by being surrounded by talk.
True or False.
7. Oral language must develop before written. **True or False.**
8. Learners acquire language primarily through imitation.
True or False.
9. Just because an ELL uses BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) well doesn't mean he/she has mastered CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency). **True or False.**
10. A linear progression (from phonology to morphology to syntax) isn't necessary for learning to occur. **True or False.**

Language Acquisition Facts

1. Adults and children acquire second language in different ways. **True.** *If adults learning a foreign language by rote methods are compared with children learning a second language in a natural, meaningful context, the child's learning will seem to be superior. But, the cause of such superiority may not be in the age of the person, but in the context of learning.*
2. Language acquisition occurs only in the left hemisphere of the brain. **False.** *Although language acquisition has been traditionally considered a task for the left hemisphere of the brain, there is evidence (Genesee, 1982, pg. 321) that "there may be greater right hemisphere involvement in language processing in bilinguals who acquire their second language late relative to their first language and in bilinguals who learn it in informal contexts."*

Language Acquisition Facts

3. It is difficult to impossible to learn a second language accent-free after the age of 12 or 13. **True.** *The classical argument is that this critical period occurs around puberty. This has led some to assume, incorrectly, that by the age of 12 or 13 you are "over the hill" when it comes to the possibility of successful second language learning. Such assumptions must be viewed in the light of what it means to be "successful" in learning a second language. It is pretty universally agreed that learning a second-language accent-free is very difficult after this point, but it's arguable that this is the least important part of second language learning.*

Language Acquisition Facts

4. The first language actually hinders the learning of the second language. **False.** *Adult second language linguistic processes are more vulnerable to the effect of the first language on the second, especially the farther apart the two events are. They approach the second language systemically, and they attempt to formulate linguistic rules on the basis of whatever linguistic information is available to them: information from their native language, the second language, teachers, classmates, and peers. However, this interference is NOT the most relevant or crucial factor in adult second language acquisition. The first language may be more readily used to bridge gaps that the adult learner cannot fill by generalization within the second language. Remember the first language can be a facilitating factor, and not just an interfering one.*

Language Acquisition Facts

5. If an ELL doesn't speak or write well in English, then he/she most likely doesn't comprehend English well either. **False.** *The inability to produce an item should not be taken to mean that the learner cannot comprehend the item. Comprehension (listening, reading) is often equated with competence, while production is performance (speaking, writing). It is important to recognize that this is not the case: production is of course more directly observable, but comprehension is as much performance—a "willful act," to use Saussure's term—as production is. Adult second language learners will, like children, often hear a distinction but not be able to produce it.*

Language Acquisition Facts

6. Learners acquire language by being surrounded by talk. **False.** *Talk occurs in a social context, not in a vacuum. People learn to talk when meaningful talk is directed to them and when they're involved in a response. Being treated like a "language partner" is what counts—and it's the same for written language.*
7. Oral language must develop before written. **False.** *Oral language supports written language but is not a prerequisite. They develop simultaneously to support each other. There was an old audiolingual precept that said that speaking and listening had to develop before reading and writing. But, that view is no longer held.*

Language Acquisition Facts

8. Learners acquire language primarily through imitation.
False. *Through the learner's own activity and thinking, they construct how language works, when those cognitive schemas contact materials and people, the learners restructure the language to meet their needs using the resources they have at hand.*
9. Just because an ELL uses BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) well doesn't mean he/she has mastered CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency). **True.** *Important for teachers not to mistake good BICS for proficient CALP—often see teachers "fooled" into thinking a learner isn't struggling with L2 acquisition issues because in a social context they're very adept. CALP takes 5-10 years to master.*

Language Acquisition Facts

10. A linear progression (from phonology to morphology to syntax) isn't necessary for learning to occur. **True.** *Babies don't follow a linear progression like this. They don't start with one sound and then move up to a morpheme and then two morphemes. That's not the way it works, and that's not the way we teach a second language either. However, this order of second language acquisition (posited by Dulay & Burt, 1979) is very similar to the order of first language acquisition that Brown posited in 1973.*

FUN FACT: English is an international language; it is used by more people as a second or third language than as a native language, many of whom read it but do not speak it.

Educational Differences: Mexico & the U.S.

Primaria—Elementary School (1st-6th grades)—paid for by government. Country-wide, standardized curriculum. Children go to school 4 hours a day either, 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. or 2-6 p.m. Teacher instructs both shifts. More holidays, no “school” lunches, and no transportation provided.

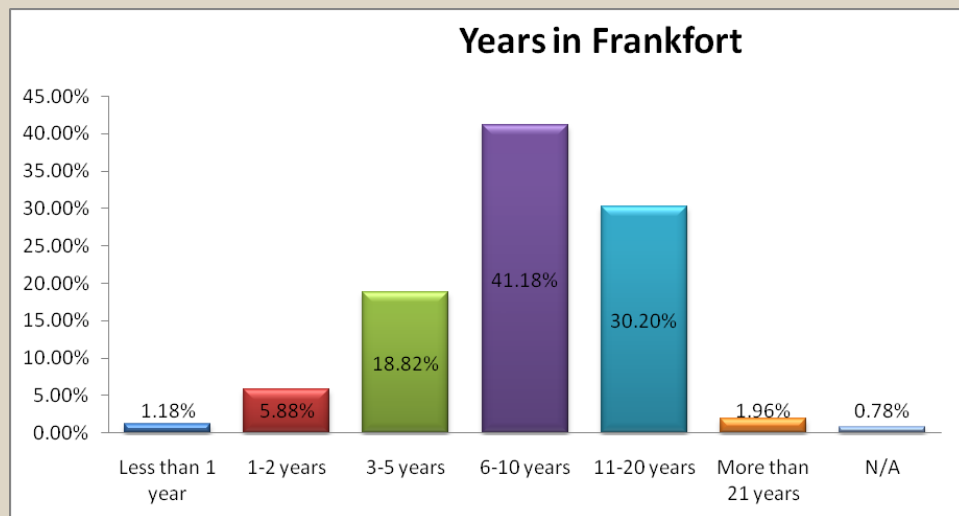
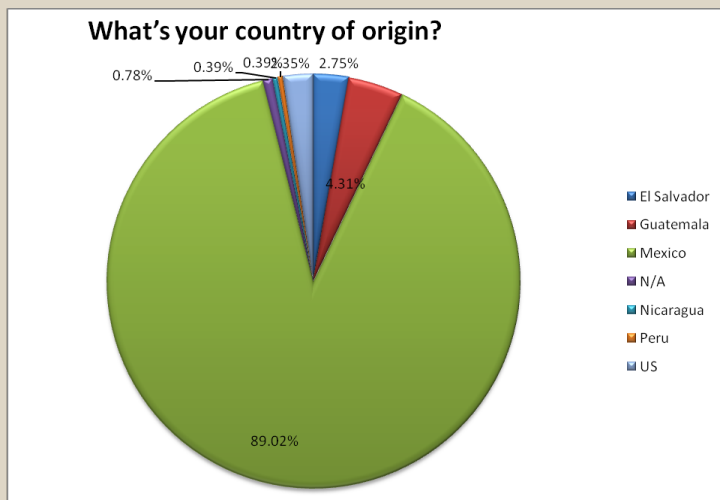
Secundaria—Middle School (7th-9th grades)—subsidized by government; students often must move from villages to cities to attend (some villages have small secundarias). Must pay for uniforms and books, sometimes tuition.

Bachillerato—High School (10th-12th grades)—not paid for by the government; students choose a career path and study either specific skills or academics. After bachillerato, students either attend a vo-tech school like CECATI to complete their occupational training or preparatoria (at a university) to obtain their “licencia.”

Origin / Location

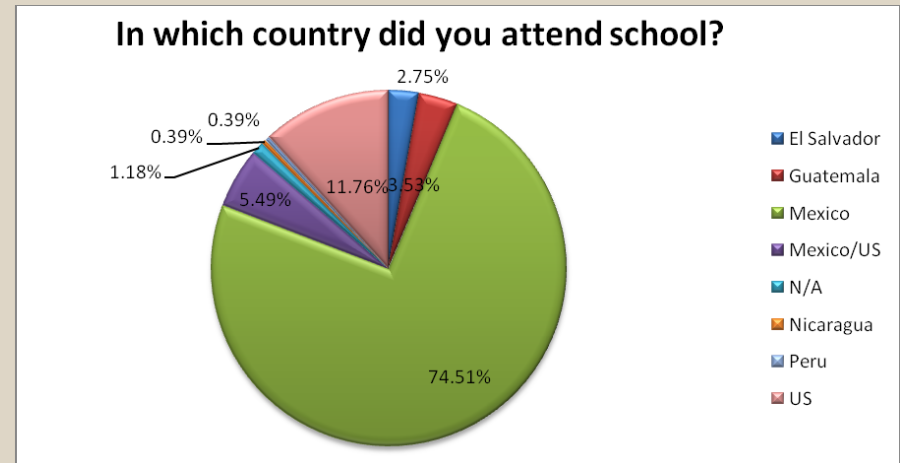
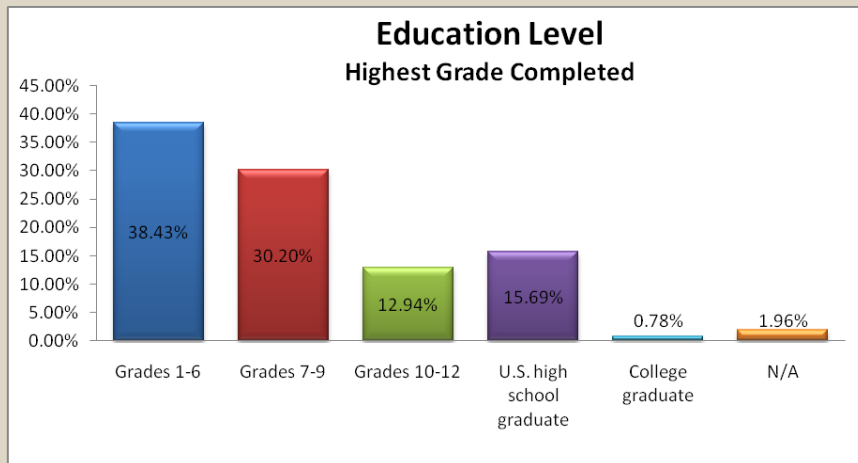
- **89.02% are from Mexico originally**

- **41.18% have lived in Frankfort 6-10 years**



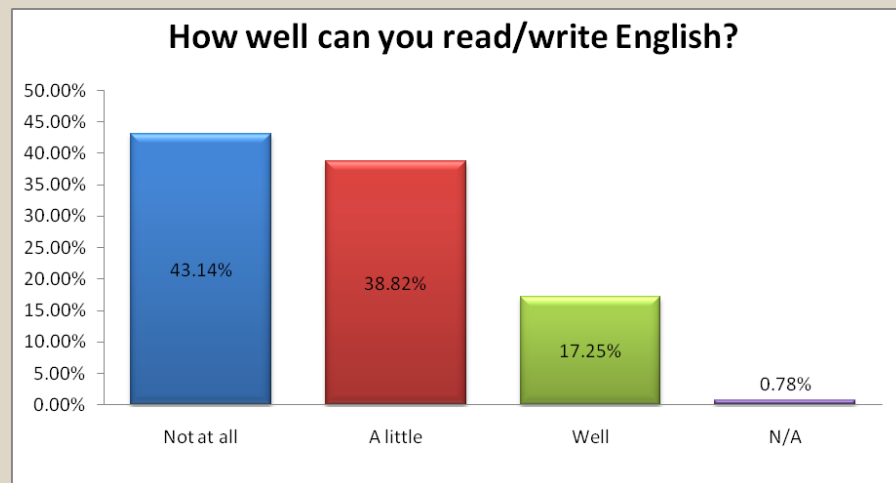
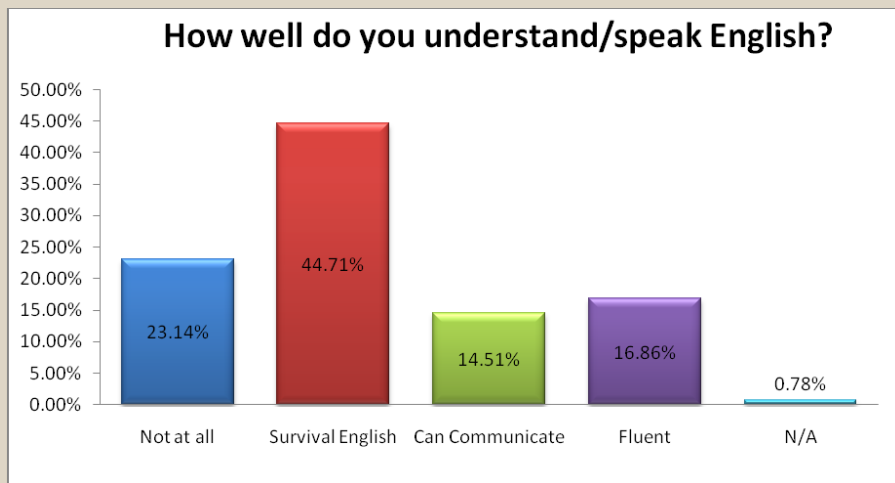
Education Level

- **38.43% have completed 6th grade**
- **74.51% attended school in Mexico**

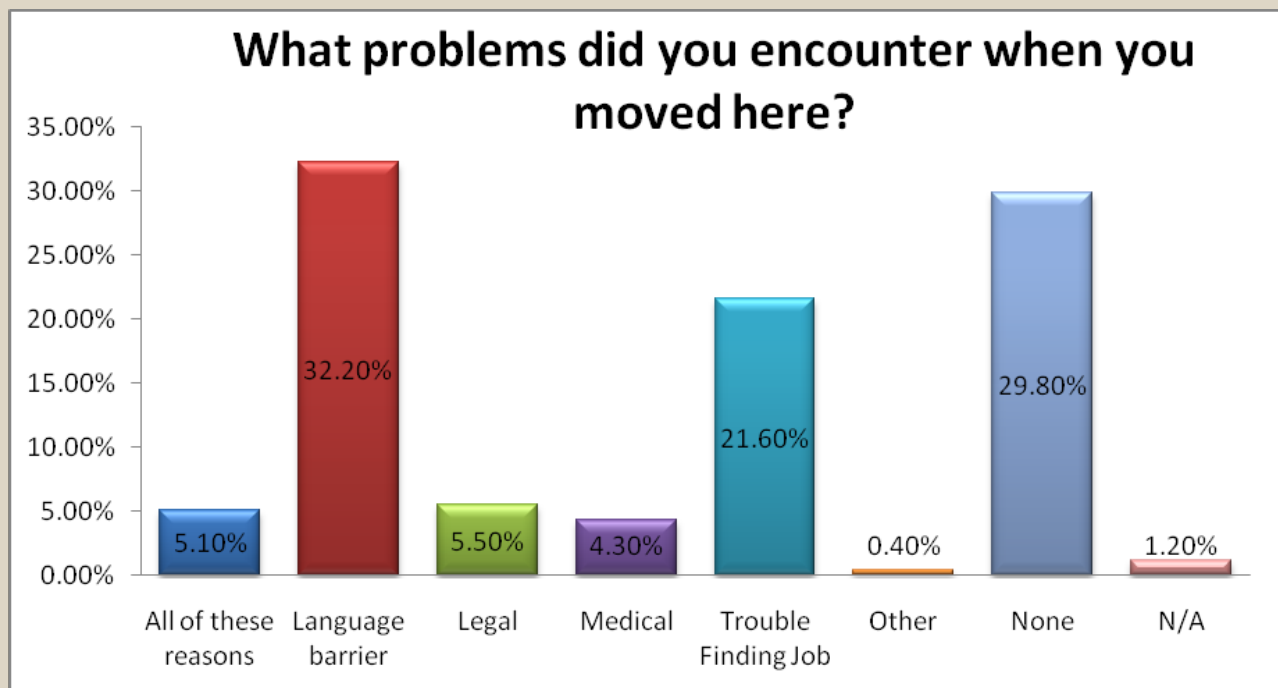


Literacy Rate

- **44.71% only have “survival” English-speaking skills**
- **43.14% can’t read or write English at all**



Acculturation Issues



- **30.20% still encounter these problems sometimes**
- **6.67% still encounter these problems all the time**

L1 to L2 Transfer

As education level rises, the ease of learning English increases:

- understand more about sentence structure
- have more vocabulary
- are adept in a wider range of social genres

Second-language acquisition theory supports the idea of deeper-rooted literacy in the first language allows for quicker/easier transfer to the second language.

L1 to L2 Transfer

Because many immigrants lack formal education background, they lack exposure to structured educational rigor such as grammar and higher mathematics. Consequently, basic sentence components, such as capital letters and periods that teachers often take for granted, need to be the starting point for many immigrant English learners. The task is to build language structure as a scaffold for LEP adults to learn English.



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Order of Second Language Acquisition (Dulay & Burt, 1979)

1. **Present progressive** (ing)--Spanish uses present tense more frequently than progressive.
2. **in** (position prepositions)--the word "en" is used for on, in & at
3. **on** (position prepositions)--the word "en" is used for on, in & at
4. **Plural** —everything correlates in gender and number in Spanish
5. **Past irregular** —difficult because it's not the typical "ed" ending
6. **Possessive**--in Spanish, possession is a long string of "de"s
7. **Uncontractible copula** (is, am, are)—often translates to have/has which makes this difficult verb even trickier

Order of Second Language Acquisition (Dulay & Burt, 1979)

8. **Articles** (a, the)--Spanish-speakers insert articles where they're unnecessary in English
9. **Past regular**--Spanish-speakers struggle with the pronunciation of the "ed" as "t" or "d" sound
10. **Third-person regular** (-s)--Spanish-speakers who have been speaking English for a long time will still leave off the present tense "s" on a third-person regular verb because in Spanish the subject is implied in the verb and the "s" is linguistically "redundant" in English (grammatically speaking)
11. **Third-person irregular**--both in present and past tense these are hard to master

Order of Second Language Acquisition (Dulay & Burt, 1979)

1. Present progressive
2. in
3. on
4. Plural
5. Past irregular
6. Possessive
7. Uncontractible copula
8. Articles
9. Past regular
10. Third-person regular
11. Third-person irregular

Order the Acquisition Errors!!

My daughters is intelligent (instead of "are")

I breaked that vase (instead of "broke")

My wife walk to work (instead of "walks")

You scare me last night! (instead of "scared")

I work in a pig farm (instead of "on")

My son riding his bike. (Or, My son is ride his bike.)

My husband is mechanic. (Or, I go to the Wal-Mart every day)

The house of my friend is nearby (instead of "friend's")

I live at town (instead of "in")

They sees the girls out the window (instead of "see")

His blues jeans are wet (instead of "blue")

Spanish-English Differences: *Point out the consistencies, not the inconsistencies, of English*

People seek patterns to make sense of experience. What is needed is exposure, opportunity to actively seek these patterns, and the kinds of “built-in” biological structures that underlie human language development. Need routine interactions so that the familiar language can become grammatically encoded.

Spanish-English Differences: *Don't "sound out" to spell*

Spanish:

Pure vowels: aeiou
(all tense, no lax)

Same sound: b & v

Few blends (ch)

Grapheme-Phonemes
closely correspond

English:

Long & short vowels
(tense and lax)

Different sounds: b & v

Many blends (sl, br, th)

Grapheme-Phonemes
frequently differ (20%)

Spanish-English Differences:

English irregularities

Examples from (Nash, 4):

- Vowels in the words see, sea, cede are pronounced the same, but spelled differently
- Vowels in the words blood, wood, soon, floor are pronounced differently, spelled same

Classic, oft-quoted example from (Nash, 5):

- rough (rhymes with muff)
- cough (rhymes with off)
- though (rhymes with go)
- through (rhymes with true)
- bough (rhymes with now)
- thought (rhymes with caught)

Spanish-English Differences: *Solution: Show patterns*

Don't teach these
words together:

Write

Sight

Height

In English, consonants are somewhat stable but vowels can really vary (five sounds for letter "a").

In Spanish, the vowel system is more stable but the pronunciation of consonants varies.

Spanish-English Differences: *Syllable Canons*

These syllable patterns don't occur in Spanish:

VCC—ask

CVCC—wind

CCVCC--trust

Sometimes, if Spanish is first language, they may leave off the final consonant because it's not a familiar sequence. Relying on what you hear/say is a faulty strategy.

Spanish-English Differences: *Voiceless & Voiced Sounds*

These look the same
(-ed, same ending,
same form), but they
sound completely
different:

Lacked (voiceless)-t

Lagged (voiced)-d

Help learners see
relationships between
words:

electric

electrician

electrical

electricity

Corrective Feedback

Corrective feedback is the way to correct grammar, pronunciation, and writing (as well as some of the last skills to develop in the order of acquisition).

Spanish-speaking learner says: He has 10 years. Teacher replies: Yes, he is 10 years old.

- Must be positive and non-punitive, keeping the affective filter low.
- Correct with writing exercises, such as group dictation /group board editing sessions, and audio-feedback

Affective Filter

A phenomenon called the “language ego” accounts for the identity a person develops in reference to the language he or she speaks (Guiora, 1972). Guiora suggested that the language ego may account for the difficulties that adults have in learning a second language. The language ego, which becomes part and parcel of self-identity, is threatened and thus a context develops in which the learner must be willing to make a fool of himself/herself in the trial-and-error struggle of speaking and understanding a foreign language. Making the leap to a new or second identity is no simple matter; it can be successful only when one musters the necessary ego strength to overcome inhibitions.

ESL Conversation Partners

Consider enlisting the help of community volunteers to be “ESL conversation partners” to work with your adult ELLs one-on-one, meeting weekly. Or, host an “Amigo Hour.” Spanish-speakers learning English need affirmation, encouragement to learn.

There is a multitude of cognitive, psychological, and strategic variables affecting the ultimate attainment of proficiency in a second language (Moyer, 2004). Teaching is not a set of procedures. **It is a set of relationships.**







Credits & Contact Information

Credit to:

*Professor Susan Britsch, Purdue University
Professor Alejandro Cruz, Purdue University
Colleagues Esmeralda Cruz & Claudia Houchen
The 200+ adult ELLs I have taught since 2005*

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