

3-1989

## Review of: Mexican-American Language: Usage, Attitudes, Maintenance, Instruction, and Policy

Shaw N. Gynan

Western Washington University, [shaw.gynan@wwu.edu](mailto:shaw.gynan@wwu.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl\\_facpubs](https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs)



Part of the [Modern Languages Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Gynan, Shaw N., "Review of: Mexican-American Language: Usage, Attitudes, Maintenance, Instruction, and Policy" (1989). *Modern & Classical Languages*. 3.

[https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl\\_facpubs/3](https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs/3)

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in Modern & Classical Languages by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact [westerncedar@wwu.edu](mailto:westerncedar@wwu.edu).

places great value in the creativity and self-expression of the individual learner. In this environment, cooperation and sharing lead to negotiated rather than predetermined outcomes.

The bottom half of the model translates these goals into more concrete objectives which encompass expanded areas of language content, process, and product areas. The course should stress function and use rather than form and analysis while maintaining a balance of fluency and accuracy. It centers around themes for meaningful and appropriate communication as opposed to structural or grammatical topics; it utilizes global workouts and deemphasizes drills composed of discrete elements; it stresses increased skill in using the language and not the formal properties of language. The authors advise against selecting a particular method such as the Silent Way, TPR, the Natural Approach or Strategic Interaction, because they fail to provide enough basis on which to found an entire course. They regard them more as fragments of a whole known as communicative language teaching.

Dubin and Olshtain do not provide you with a syllabus for all of your classes at each level. Rather, they offer a skeletal outline plus a set of all the variables to be considered when designing a L2 course. At one point, the authors mention the importance of timing in having materials published. Being too early—when there exists little interest in an idea—or too late—when the idea has been exhausted—is poor timing. By now, we have all read the rationale for a communicative approach to language teaching. Many of us have begun to implement, if somewhat haphazardly, such techniques into our classes, although they still tend, I believe, to be structured around grammatical instead of thematic topics. *Course Design: Developing Programs and Materials for Language Learning* can ensure a smooth transition to a truly global approach to effective L2 teaching.

William D. Baker  
William Penn High School,  
New Castle, Delaware

**Green, George K. and Jacob L. Ornstein-Galicia**, editors. *Mexican-American Language: Usage, Attitudes, Maintenance, Instruction, and Policy*. Brownsville, Texas: Pan American University, 1986. 159 pp.

The prologue to this collection indicates the contributors' enthusiasm. The quality of some papers is good, but more than enthusiasm is needed to make certain selections valuable.

Christian hypothesizes that the Spanish reading ability of Mexican-American students in Texas should be utilized as a resource. Evidence of this ability is provided.

Green's first article is basically a statement that archaic Spanish forms in the Southwest are found throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Green's

second work documents pairs of archaic and modern forms (veyo/veo, vido/vio/ and postulates that parallel archaic words realize a ponderative function, one stressing emotion. Green's third article proposes that ponderatives such as the -y- and -d- of the above pairs are "nuancing infixes." These short articles should be combined, but the result would be unsatisfactory since the "ponderative" function is never demonstrated. Spanish speakers may use these forms when less guarded about speech.

In Denning's transformational-generative description of interference of English restrictive adjective plus noun word order on Mexican-American Spanish (as in *hermosas casas*, where the adjective is restrictive), removal of a constraint blocking movement to the pre-nominal position is suggested as the cause, but one may assert the constraint is missing in the Spanish of some bilinguals.

Cotton and Sharp summarize positive attitudes toward Spanish gleaned from Mexican-Americans' compositions and defend maintenance of Spanish.

Binder and Green describe a survey of school teachers and counselors, who recognize the usefulness and non-standardness of Spanish. These results are characterized as inconsistent but the theory is not explicit enough to justify this conclusion.

Bergen reports on oral proficiency interviews of Hispanic police officers in Albuquerque, New Mexico. A modified foreign service examination is used. Nearly 70% is bilingual or native. Their proficiency is correlated with background factors.

Hart-González presents a good analysis of data from Mexican-Americans in Texas that reveals stable bilingualism. A problem is the speculation that the decrease of importance of English to educational attainment is due to bilingual education or automatic grade-passing. Today's young Mexican-Americans may know more English than their predecessors.

Medrano demonstrates that bilingual education does not affect reading or math ability (in English) negatively. Medrano analyzes variance in achievement, discovering that preachievement is a predictor and bilingual education predicts only improved math scores. Had the *interaction* of the independent variables been analyzed, the fact that the predictive power of prior ability decreases in bilingual education, as other correlations in the article indicate, would have been discovered.

Rosenberg defends the theatre for development of language. Examples of activities and reference to studies of the importance of context would be helpful.

Ornstein-Galicia outlines the sociolinguistic condition of U.S. Spanish and shows that American language planning follows no explicit model, being subject to the vagaries of politics.

The editing was not as careful as possible. There are several mistakes (pages 40, 93, 112,

and 114 among others). The errors and inconsistent quality of the articles notwithstanding, some interesting information is presented, especially with regard to bilingual education.

Shaw N. Gynan  
Western Washington University

**Marqués, Sarah.** *La lengua que heredamos: Curso de español para bilingües.* New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1986. xiii + 369 pp.

There is no plethora of textbooks designed for use in the Spanish for native speakers classroom, but a sufficient number have appeared over the past few years at least to give teachers some choice. *La lengua que heredamos* is a most welcome addition to the list of possible selections, for it is a well intended book that is distinct from other works on the market.

The author's general conception of the purpose of the textbook shows a realistic awareness of the needs of the Spanish-speaking student raised in the United States: "The goal of the book is to improve the students' command of the Spanish language while providing them with cultural insights about the Hispanic world that is part of their inheritance" (viii). Although the importance of all four language skills is recognized and incorporated into the design of the book, the emphasis is correctly placed on the written language—both reading and writing. Special consideration is given to expanding the students' command of standard vocabulary; Marqués's intent in this regard is to respect local resources and at the same time "to add the standard forms known to monolinguals of other Spanish-speaking countries to the linguistic repertoire the students already have" (vii).

Such a positive perspective may be crucial for a good textbook in the field. It is not, however, sufficient to ensure that the contribution be one of exceptional quality. There are several difficulties of design and of execution which the potential user will need to consider. Chief among these difficulties is a lack of clarity regarding the type of student for whom the text is intended. No indication is given of the level for which the book is designed; it appears to be intended for college use, though it might also be employed in high school classes. The author does suggest, however, that it may be used in either beginning or intermediate courses. More so than for the typical textbook, the interested teacher is forced to evaluate independently the content of the text to ascertain its suitability for a particular situation.

The book is divided into twenty-two chapters, each constructed around a reading selection related to one of the Spanish-speaking countries. The readings are usually rather bland: an essay on the history of the Spanish language for the leadoff chapter on Spain, a description of the Copán ruins and Mayan culture for the Honduras chapter, capsule descriptions of the tour guide type for several coun-

tries. The choice of Cantinflas as the topic for the Mexico reading is, I think, a bit insensitive. The readings are not simplified. Nor are they graded for difficulty. Like the rest of the book, which is entirely in Spanish—from exercise instructions to grammar explanations—these selections represent standard formal Spanish, largely of the academic stripe. Because of these characteristics, the work is unsuitable, I believe, for the high school level. Indeed, the style and content of the readings render them appropriate only for students beyond the beginning stage—students far more steeped in formal Spanish than the typical Spanish speaker in, say, the Southwest.

Following each reading are various exercises related principally to reading comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing. Each chapter also contains very brief and very traditional treatments of several grammatical topics, as well as presentation of orthographical problems and selected contrasts with English. At the end of every fifth chapter there is also a set of review exercises dealing with the grammatical topics. There are some very good communicative exercises, particularly questions concerning the readings, related questions suggested by the readings, and topics for composition and conversation. The more discrete grammatical exercises tend to be ordinary and unimaginative, and some are downright poor, especially due to vague instructions. Each chapter contains several English-Spanish translation tasks, a practice I find extremely ill-advised in a course for native speakers.

In addition to the twenty-two chapters, the work includes a thirteen-page introductory section containing basic reading readiness drills: recognition of sight words, perception of orthographic differences, synonym recognition, and such. Since the Spanish alphabet is introduced only later, in Chapter 1, these exercises leave the impression of having been added on as an afterthought, perhaps to add weight to the author's claims of emphasis on reading and suitability for an elementary course. These exercises are, however, very simple and cursory and unlikely to provide by themselves the bridge necessary to venture into the rather advanced readings.

This quick overview of the nature of the textbook has pointed out a number of limitations, some quite severe. Nevertheless, on balance—and particularly in consideration of the limitations of other available texts—*La lengua que heredamos* is a significant additional title in the growing list of Spanish for the native speaker texts. Its major strengths are that it is written entirely in Spanish, it presents the cultivated standard of written Spanish without undermining the students' own variety, and it attempts to provide a broad understanding of the great scope of the Hispanic presence in the world today. These are important strengths. The book merits serious consideration for any inter-