

12-2001

Review of: Gramática para la composición

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Recommended Citation

Hoffman, Joan M., "Review of: Gramática para la composición" (2001). *Modern & Classical Languages*. 11.
https://cedar.wwu.edu/mcl_facpubs/11

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intervocalic *-g-*. In the latter case, however, the minimal explication that “the glottis does not completely close” (275) is inadequate to the needs of students for whom this much-neglected sound is totally foreign and who must, in order to master it, blindly imitate what they hear on the cassette or CD that accompanies the text.

Six substantial reading assignments are presented in even-numbered chapters, starting with Rosario Castellanos’ fairly demanding poem “Valium 10,” that requires eighteen footnotes, and including short fiction by Gregorio López y Fuentes (“*Una carta a Dios*”) and Horacio Quiroga (“*Hombre muerto*”) and a timely journalistic essay on the challenges facing Internet users in Latin America.

Chapter 3 delves deeply into the world of sports, distinguishing the various words for ball (*pelota, bola, balón*) and even providing a table of some of the most recent *Copa mundial* championships. A list of six sports affords the opportunity to practice such reverse construction verbs as *te fascina, te molesta, no te gusta* by having students survey the attitudes of other students toward them.

Food is the subject of chapter 6, which distinguishes between such “confusibles” as *torta/tarta* and *banana/plátano*, coaches dinner guests how to compliment their hosts, and encourages students to describe the preparation of their favorite dishes.

Chapter 7 is devoted to the environment, and its treatment of the names of animals could hardly be more thorough. The point is rightfully made that not all have contrasting male/female forms and sometimes seemingly contradictory periphrastics such as *el guepardo hembra* or *la jirafa macho* must be used. The irregular plural of *jaguar* is noted as *jaguars*. We learn that Costa Rica has more species of birds than any other country and is tragically losing its rain forest at a significantly faster annual rate than Brasil (3.9% vs. .4%). The chapter on spirituality offers vocabulary representing all the world’s major religions, a discussion of women’s names associated with Catholicism (e.g., *Asunción, Concepción, Socorro*), and cleverly uses the theological origin of *Ojalá* to expand upon the uses of the subjunctive mood.

Chapter 11 contains a section on morphology and derivation (prefixes, suffixes, diminutives and compound words). To practice some of the more colorful compound formations, the author suggests a game of charades, so that, for example, the mimed action of unscrewing a cork will elicit *sacacorchos*.

Coverage of the preterit versus the imperfect tense in chapter 5 is exemplary. A color-coded summary box contrasts the same four sentences in both tenses with a clarifying explanation that follows the literal translation (e.g., *Reinaldo iba al dentista a las diez* is explained as “We don’t know from this if he actually went, but he was on his way or was supposed to go” 116). Another grammar point whose coverage is excellent concerns prepositions and pronouns. Students are informed that while most prepositions take prepositional pronouns, an exception is made for the foursome of *entre, hasta, excepto* and *según*, which require subject pronouns.

There is an admirable concision in Thomas’ grammatical explanations that more often than not goes right to the heart of the matter. For this author, grammar is a means to an end and he therefore maximizes the space he allots to it in order to get on with what really matters—using it for communication.

Packaged with each copy of this text is a cassette tape or CD keyed to the pronunciation sections. The student workbook offers exercises for independent practice, and an Audio Lab Program, available either on cassette or audio CD, supports the workbook with supplemental comprehension activities.

At the beginning of the text there are maps of Spain, Central and South America, and at the end, a seven-page appendix of irregular verbs and an exhaustive forty-page vocabulary that includes virtually all words from the readings, even such technical and dialectal terms as *chirca* (euphorbia) and *locro* (an Andean stew). With only a few modest black-and-white illustrations limited primarily to authors such as Sor Juana and Rosario Castellanos, this is a no-nonsense review grammar distinguished by its precision, practicality, and profusion of classroom-tested topics, hypothetical situations and activities.

Jack Shreve

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Whitley, Stanley M. and Luis González. *Gramática para la composición*. Washington DC: Georgetown UP, 2000. ISBN: 0-87840-778-2. 378 pp.

Gramática para la composición reflects the understanding that written communication is more than a final product to be completed and forgotten. It is, instead, a process involving prewriting, composition and revision that must have a sound basis in grammatical knowledge and practice. The text is meant for students progressing from

the intermediate to the advanced ACTFL proficiency levels in Spanish.

The text, developed for a semester program meeting for one hour three times per week, is divided into six chapters, each consisting of 6 lessons, for a total of thirty-six lessons. This format allows completing one lesson per day with some days set aside for testing if desired. Of the six lessons per chapter, five are grammar lessons culminating in a sixth prewriting/writing lesson out of which is to be produced a composition, outside of class. Because the text presupposes an overlap between writing one composition and preparing for the next, including opportunities for revision, it also includes four additional grammar lessons, in a seventh chapter for use at the end of the semester.

In all aspects, *Gramática para la composición* emphasizes the proper sequencing of skills from basic to complex; its organization is functional rather than thematic, highlighting *types* of writing, beginning with description in chapter 1; reporting in chapter 2; simple narration in chapter 3; complex narration in chapter 4; exposition in chapter 5; and finally, argumentation in chapter 6. Grammar lessons are well-sequenced in the same way, progressing from a basic review of spelling and punctuation in a *Lección preliminar* through such typical grammar lessons as present indicative, preterit/imperfect, and subjunctive and on to more complex writing-centered issues such as syntax, passive, conjunctions, gerunds, and nominalization, to name just a few. Exercises also progress from self-checked skill development to pair and group work; from manipulation of sentences and paragraphs to guided essays and finally to free composition.

The text also includes a sample composition correction key and an ample bibliography. In addition, several appendices contain an answer key to the self-checked exercises, *Distinciones problemáticas*, a review of verb conjugations, and a bilingual glossary of grammatical terms.

Unfortunately, this bilingual glossary highlights one weakness of this text. Although the authors explain in their preface that since the course is to be taught in Spanish, difficult grammatical terminology will be presented in Spanish and explained in the glossary, the grammar explanations are sometimes far more technical and convoluted than is necessary, using and teaching terminology that is overly complex. Following is a particularly egregious example from an explanation of direct objects, involving the doing versus the receiving of an action:

Aunque no todo sujeto "hace", sí es más consistentemente el VERBADOR o sea el *verber*; y aunque no todo complemento directo "recibe" la acción, sí es más consistentemente el VERBADO, o sea el *verbed*, como se puede verificar repasando los ejemplos. (61)

This explanation uses invented terminology in both English and Spanish, making an often perplexing grammar point doubly so.

Furthermore, while true to its title, this text's clear emphasis on its grammar portion can be viewed as a weakness. Only one out of every six lessons is dedicated to composition skills while students and teachers alike may feel overwhelmed by a profusion of grammar exercises, far too many to actually use, even in the recommended five of six class periods. According to this format, skills specifically related to the writing process, involving such matters as purpose, tone, point of view, theme selection, organization, and writing strategies are touched on only once every two weeks in a course that meets three times a week. Such elements as introductions, conclusions, thesis statements, or outline development are barely mentioned, if at all. Moreover, because the text is not thematic in nature, no context or vocabulary is provided to the student for the selection or development of writing topics.

The physical format of the text is also problematic. The book is so replete with helpful information, exercises, charts, and diagrams that the margins seem overly-narrow; and there is very little white space on the pages. Combine this with small, closely-spaced print and the content is very difficult to read and use effectively.

In short, while it is apparent that much thought, time, and effort has gone into the development of this text, the result is rather unbalanced; in some aspects it is overwhelming and in others, deficient. Clearly, as the authors well point out, composition is a process from which grammar practice must not be extricated; but it could be argued that *Gramática para la composición* offers too much grammar for a grammar course and not enough composition for a composition course.

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■ NEW FICTION

Mendicutti, Eduardo. *El beso del cosaco*. Barcelona: Tusquets Editores, 2000. ISBN: 84-8310-127-0. 262 pp.

Eduardo Mendicutti, a quien se puede etiquetar