A Student-Centered Spanish-for-Native-Speakers Program: Theory, Curriculum Design, and Outcome Assessment

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Introduction
Methodology in Spanish-for-Native-Speakers (SNS) programs has undergone a transformation over the last two decades, moving from a normative approach aimed at "correcting" the variety of speech spoken in the student's community, to a comprehensive approach based on developing communicative competency through literacy. However, as Faltis (1990) points out, although these two approaches differ in significant ways, they share two common characteristics: promoting learning about language before using it for authentic purposes and employing a teacher-centered knowledge base, the "banking" concept identified by Freire (1970). The alternative that Faltis proposes employs both Freirian and Vygotskyan constructs of learning; in these, the student assumes a central position in the learning process, becoming in effect both teacher and student, instead of playing a passive role in the classroom.

The synthesis of Freirian and Vygotskyan concepts of learning is particularly suited to an SNS program because the students who enter such programs possess widely varying degrees of language skills, from the
English-dominant speaker who understands only a few words and phrases in Spanish to the Spanish-dominant speaker who has had little or no formal education in Spanish. Continued immigration from Spanish-speaking countries and the tendency toward intergenerational language loss serve to increase the variance in the degree of language skills of the student. Focusing on the individual learner in a multisection SNS program takes into account this continuum of language skills and facilitates the accommodation of instruction to the individual’s needs and capabilities. Thus, in designing a student-centered SNS program it is necessary to: (1) establish a theoretical base for program development, (2) suggest a curriculum that meets the individual needs of native speakers, and (3) measure the results of changes in the curriculum.

One Student-Centered SNS Program: Background and Theoretical Perspectives

At New Mexico State University (NMSU) a student-centered SNS program is currently being developed that aims to classify the individual speaker’s knowledge of Spanish, to identify his or her instructional needs, and to design a curriculum that recognizes the diverse language abilities of all students and enriches those abilities. Faltsis (1990, pp. 117–18) observes that a normative view of the Spanish a native speaker brings to class holds that it is somehow “deficient” or “substandard,” and that a principal goal of an SNS class is to “correct” such varieties of language. This attitude is reflected in the titles of SNS classes offered at NMSU since their inception in 1945. The SNS course offered from 1945 to 1960 was labeled “Corrective Spanish”; the catalog description states that this course is “for Spanish American students only. Especially designed for those who speak Spanish, but who need drills in grammar, reading and diction to correct errors common to New Mexican Spanish.” In 1962 the SNS course title changed to “Remedial Spanish,” with the course description now reading: “For Spanish speaking students only. Especially designed for those who can speak Spanish but need drills in grammar, reading and diction.” In 1968 “Spanish for Spanish Speaking Students” appeared, with the corresponding description: “For Spanish speaking students only. Exercises in grammar, speech correction and vocabulary building.” It is not until 1975 that “speech correction” was dropped from the course description.

The recent changes in course title and description (and course content) reflect the implementation of the comprehensive approach, as suggested by Valdés-Fallís (1978). However, despite the growing awareness among language teachers that the Spanish a native speaker brings to a class is a valuable asset, advocates of the comprehensive approach persist in the attitude that some spoken norm, often not that of the student, must be achieved. This attitude conflicts with Freire’s (1970) suggestion for resolving the teacher–student contradiction because the student must accept a passive role in assimilating the “standard” variety. Hidalgo (1990), while examining the question of what variety of language to employ for teaching Hispanic college students, presents a traditional view of the use of a “standard”:

Changing the status of Spanish from a vernacular to a semiofficial language will not only institutionalize it but create the appropriate use domains that will guarantee its preservation. Until this happens, we should be committed to teaching the standard, to discovering the areas of major morphosyntactic discrepancies between standard and dialect, and to transmitting the most practical orientation for the acquisition of the former and the retention of the latter. (p. 123)

In the NMSU program, we go beyond the idea that some external spoken “standard” must be imposed on the learner in order to increase his or her oral language skills. We hold the view that the retention of the spoken language by the individual, reflecting the speech of the community of which that individual forms a part, is a central and valuable goal in and of itself, and must play a central role in any SNS program. This corresponds to Faltsis’s (1990, p. 119) idea that “a reconciliation of set roles for students and teacher can occur only if there is an opportunity for dialog.” He continues by quoting Freire, who states that “[in] an encounter among men who name the world, it must not be a situation where some men name on behalf of others” (1970, p. 66). Similarly, Fishman (1991, p. 342) writes that “the standard variety need not be as obligatory in speech as in writing. Indeed, all dialects should remain valid in speech, particularly in informal and intimate speech within their [native speakers’] own traditional speech networks and communities.”

We do not suggest that the study of a formal written variety of a language be excluded—a point to which we will return—but that the basic foundation of a culturally and linguistically appropriate SNS program should contain a positive emphasis on the language of the community in
which it exists. Fishman (1991), while discussing the role of Spanish language programs in U.S. universities, observes that

Spanish is taught and offered as both a graduate and an undergraduate major in hundreds of institutions of higher education throughout the USA. Although many Hispanic students attend these courses and constitute the bulk of the country's Spanish majors . . . this entire realm is not linked to Hispanic community life and generally is not designed to (and does not) produce individuals who are committed to or involved in either language maintenance or RLS [reversing language shift]. (p. 215)

In order to avoid this situation, we seek to establish a connection between our SNS program and the Spanish-speaking community (specific methodology is discussed below).

Another assumption that appears to have driven the design of SNS programs is that the student controls the language variety of the community; it is this variety that is to be "corrected" or used as a bridge to some standard form. We do not find this to be the case for many students in our SNS program. Various researchers have documented the shift from Spanish to English among U.S. Hispanics, including López (1978), Yeltman (1988), Solé (1990), and Bills, Hernandez-Chávez, and Hudson (1993), among others. We observe this trend among students in our program; a recent survey of self-reported Spanish language use indicates a general pattern of language shift from Spanish to English (Villa 1993). As a result, one student may have only a vaguely receptive capability, being able to produce but a few words or phrases, while another may communicate in Spanish only in restricted domains, such as concrete, "day-to-day" family matters.

Hence, the SNS program faces a general pattern of language shift. There is a growing recognition of this phenomenon in the literature on SNS programs that indicates a concern for maintaining the student's home language (see Valdés 1981). Following our assertion that maintaining the community's spoken language should be a goal in and of itself, we emphasize that the variety to be reacquired is that of the individual's own community.

We base this conclusion on Fishman's (1991) observation that in order to maintain a language, there must exist a pattern of intergenerational maintenance. He employs what he calls a "Graded Intergenerational Interruption Scale" (GIDS) that measures varying degrees of language loss or maintenance, with stage 8 representing the greatest degree of interruption and stage 1 the least (pp. 87-109). Fishman considers stage 6 to be a crucial point, in that "the lion's share of the world's intergenerationally continuous languages are at this very stage and they continue to survive and, in most cases, even to thrive, without going on to subsequent ('higher') stages" (p. 92). The student's community-language variety—that spoken by parents, relatives, friends, and other community members—in effect establishes the standard to be acquired. With regards to defining what this standard might be, the student becomes his or her own researcher and teacher, investigating the linguistic norms of his or her community, and communicating this information to peers and the instructor in the classroom setting.

Finally, with regards to Hidalgo's (1990) assertion that we must wait until the student's language variety is validated with some "semiofficial" status before implementing it in instruction, Fishman (1991, p. 111) asserts that "the most crucial ameliorative steps that are undertaken are and must be those that pro-RLS [Reversing Language Shift] 'forces' can reasonably support and attempt by dint of their own time, funds and devotion." It is unclear when, if ever, the varieties of Spanish spoken in the United States will be extended semiofficial status. The amount of time, effort, and funds needed to bring about the social, political, and economic changes for the "legitimizing" of U.S. Spanish are beyond the grasp of those involved in working with the SNS program at NMSU. However, changes in SNS theory and curriculum are possible; it is here that language shift can be affected, to whatever degree that might be. Therefore, we do not believe it necessary for some external consensus to "legitimate" the variety of Spanish that the student brings to the classroom. It is we ourselves who legitimate it.

In summary, the SNS program at NMSU is based on the following precepts:

1. The program has as a principal goal the reversing of language shift. Doing so will enrich a student's language skills in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner.
2. The student is both learner and teacher, assuming an active role in language enrichment.
3. The spoken standard of the classroom reflects that of the students' community.

Recognizing the Bilingual Continuum: Placing the Student in the SNS Program

The first step in matching instruction to the individual's language abilities is placing the student in an appropriate level of study. In order to facilitate this process, the Spanish Component administers the University of Texas at El
Paso Department of Languages and Linguistics Spanish Placement Exam, developed by Armando Armengol, Richard Teschner, and Richard Ford at UTEP, to all incoming students before registration in their first Spanish class in the lower-division sequence. The placement instrument includes sections on elementary and advanced grammar, elementary and advanced vocabulary, orthography, and grammar theory. In addition, there are ten native-speaker indicators; Teschner (1990, p. 817) describes these as “colloquial words or expressions that are characteristic of Mexican-origin Spanish, and that seldom if ever make their way into Spanish-as-foreigner-second-language textbooks.” If a student who has acquired Spanish in a native-speaking environment employs six of the ten native-speaker indicators correctly, he or she is automatically placed in the SNS program. Further analysis of other sections of the evaluation help in determining specifically what level of the SNS sequence the student should enter. A student who identifies fewer than six indicators is scheduled for an interview, in order to form a more accurate assessment of that student’s language skills. The placement evaluation was first applied on a programwide basis at NMSU in the fall semester of 1993 and resulted in 106 students placing in the first-semester SNS class, with 65 entering the second semester of the current sequence.

Background information on students in the program shows that they may be broadly classified as follows: (1) immigrant and first-generation students who are Spanish-dominant, (2) second-generation bilinguals fluent in English and Spanish to varying degrees, and (3) third- and fourth-generation students who prefer to speak English, using Spanish only with monolinguals or in limited domains on limited topics (e.g., greeting a grandparent in Spanish). We believe that this last group of students, those with varied receptive skills and “lost” Spanish language productivity, merits as much attention in the SNS program as do the first and second groups, who are able to communicate in the target language. These students, in spite of the lack of oral productivity, bring cultural and linguistic knowledge to the classroom, knowledge that is not shared by the nonnative speaker studying Spanish as a second language.

As Valdés (1992) points out, there may be many differences in language abilities even within the same generation due to numerous factors such as the amount of access to both English and the immigrant language and the lack of opportunities for reading and writing in Spanish, among others. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that bilingual students who are misplaced in the nonnative track be given guidance to build their confidence in a program that will help them develop at their own pace with other students who have had similar experiences with the heritage language.

The importance of this last observation lies in the fact that many students with limited productive capabilities are reluctant to enroll in “native-speaker” classes, as they do not consider themselves “native speakers.” We find that most second-generation students whose language experiences at home are predominantly in Spanish feel quite secure in registering in the SNS track. However, there are a few second- and many third-generation bilinguals who feel uncomfortable entering the SNS class because they are English-dominant and lack sufficient Spanish language experiences to produce the language. These students tend to register for first-year Spanish in the nonnative track. When their exam results indicate placement in the native track, their responses are varied: “I don’t speak good Spanish,” “I speak a lot of Spanglish,” “My parents don’t speak Spanish to me very often,” or “I don’t know how to speak it correctly.” Such responses show that the students feel that their heritage language has little value or use in society, that only “correct” Spanish merits usage, and that one must have a good command of the language to be able to enroll in an SNS program.

This receptive bilingual population has traditionally been lost in the crowd. They do not belong in the nonnative track or in a traditionally grammar-based SNS program at the university level. Due to this situation, the SNS program at NMSU is focusing attention on these students after the language placement and assessment is administered. Such students answer four or five native indicators and have average scores on the elementary grammar and advanced vocabulary sections. An oral interview given by the director indicates that many of these receptive bilinguals have good listening skills because there is a monolingual relative in the home environment or a fluent bilingual who consistently uses Spanish to interact with them. Many of these receptive bilinguals have had limited opportunities to listen in a wide variety of contexts and topics in the Spanish language environment and few opportunities to produce their heritage language. This population, with its limited productive abilities and varied receptive skills, offers a special challenge to the profession to design much-needed instruction in the area of language maintenance and retrieval. In order to integrate these individuals into the SNS program at NMSU, the program itself has been redesigned; the following section sketches the new program and offers a brief description of the foci of different class levels.
A Suggested Curriculum for a Student-Centered SNS Program

Since its inception in 1945, the SNS program has consisted of a two-semester sequence. However, we do not feel that such a sequence adequately addresses the wide variety of language skills that the students bring to the classroom. Therefore, the program is being expanded to meet the linguistic diversity found among native speakers. This expanded curriculum includes an entry-level course for students who have not maintained their heritage language and need to develop their receptive and productive skills and to expand their active vocabulary. The second and third semesters in the sequence continue this process while promoting reading and writing skills. The fourth semester emphasizes study of the structure of Spanish, both prescriptively and descriptively; this class corresponds to what has been traditionally called a “grammar” class.

The first-semester course devotes class time to activities that stimulate students' pride in their cultural heritage and language. Classroom instruction for this course has been designed to create a nonthreatening context with language and cultural activities that provide: (1) the opportunity for students to use the variety of the heritage language found in their community, emphasizing its inherent legitimacy so that it forms a solid foundation on which further language skills may be built; (2) authentic tasks to improve their varied receptive skills, such as the use of videos, audiotaped narratives, and dialogues; (3) interaction with other bilinguals outside the classroom with various authentic activities designed in class groups that guide them through basic speaking tasks they can successfully accomplish. Upon completion of this first course, students have had numerous language experiences with their class peers, the instructor, and immediate community members, as well as a variety of contextualized listening opportunities that expand their vocabulary range and functional skills, in preparation to expand contacts in the nonimmediate community. We define “immediate community” as the extended family and close friends; the “nonimmediate community” comprises those who share linguistic and cultural experiences similar to those of the student’s immediate community, but who are minimally acquainted with the student, if at all.

In the second semester of the sequence students are encouraged to expand their functional range in the heritage language through a variety of activities. Those oriented toward development of vocabulary and oral productivity are discussed below. At this level, students are exposed to listening activities in a wide range of contexts, some of which are not heard in the home domain. In line with Fishman’s (1991) assertion that intergenerational communication is a key to language maintenance, native speakers of the community language are invited to the class to give presentations. Valdés (1992) states that for language maintenance to take place, students who have strong receptive and productive skills require access to a wide and full range of domains and functions. She suggests monolingual contexts such as television, radio, video materials, and other genres for which English may also be used in the language community. Since there are numerous radio and television stations in Las Cruces, El Paso, and Juárez that offer a wide variety of monolingual contexts, we are exploring Valdés’s suggestions for designing instructional activities for multiple levels of language use. Regular access to the monolingual resources found in the community allows students to listen to voices other than that of their instructor. Students develop their community variety by exposure to authentic speech that is beyond their productive skills in a variety of domains and contexts. Hence, upon completion of the second course, students have continued language experiences with their class peers, instructor, and immediate community members, and in addition have begun to expand receptive capabilities to include the nonimmediate community. Reading skills are introduced, using authentic Spanish materials from the United States.

In the third course of the sequence, in addition to expanding their communicative skills, students increase their writing abilities. Students begin to express themselves in a nonformal written context. Organization, transitions between ideas, and the expression of affective themes, among others, are developed in this level. Increased attention is paid to prescriptive norms of orthography, with the exception of texts written for affective expression (poetry, journals or diaries, short stories, etc.). The basic use of a metalanguage is also introduced at this level. Community-based communication is integrated into the development of writing skills. In short, this level places an increased emphasis on the reading and writing areas of the four skills. Upon completion of the third level of the sequence, the students have developed ties with the nonimmediate as well as the immediate community, and have continued to broaden their awareness of the community language as it exists in literary form. They also develop the ability to express themselves, both affectively and instrumentally, with the written form of the language.

The fourth-semester class is designed to closely study metalanguage introduced in the second and third semesters, and to learn how it is applied to an understanding of both written and spoken language. A traditional component of prescriptive grammar, contextualized in written exercises, is
intended to focus the student on skills needed to employ Spanish in formal written contexts. At the same time, the metalanguage is studied as a linguistic tool that can be used to better understand the community language. For example, the concept of person and number markers can be used to analyze the second-person singular variants -tes or -tles (e.g., hablantes or hablantes) in the preterite. The study of verb morphology helps in understanding bow items such as puchar, espelear, monear, and zichear form a legitimate part of the community’s language variety. Additionally, such concepts as the dynamics of lexical borrowing and codeswitching are introduced, so that the student is given the opportunity to recognize that what he or she has often heard labeled as “Spanglish,” “slang,” “pocho,” or “mochito” forms part of the dynamics that occur whenever two (or more) languages come in contact. A historical component illustrates the truth that even “proper” Spanish is a product of certain developmental tendencies and that what is observed in the heritage language community in fact represents the evolution of the Spanish language in general.

We note here that the validity of the community language variety is asserted at all levels of the SNS program. As Grosjean (1982, p. 192) observes, a language minority may internalize the negative opinions of the language majority toward the minority’s language variety. The students in our SNS program have had a lifetime of hearing their community language variety referred to disparagingly. Such entrenched negative opinions must be carefully weeded out, a task that requires constant repetition at all levels in the sequence.

Thus, the design of the program aims to develop the productive and receptive abilities of the receptive bilingual and to expand the language skills of the productive bilingual, enriching whatever language skills are brought to the program and encouraging positive attitudes toward the heritage language, while encouraging analytical skills that aid the student to better understand the dynamics of the linguistic community of which he or she forms a part. Upon finishing the sequence, the student may elect further studies in Spanish language and/or literature, all of which fall outside the SNS program, or may discontinue the classroom study of the language; in either case, the foundations that provide a better understanding of and respect for the heritage language will have been created.

These foundations are important for career opportunities for native speakers of Spanish. The SNS program is presently working with the Department of Social Work at NMSU to train students to work with the local Spanish-speaking community. There is a dearth of social workers who can address the needs of this community in its language variety, and those who can do so have an advantage in the job market. Similarly, there is a need for those who speak the local variety of the language in a variety of careers, for example, in the banking industry, health care, law enforcement, court systems, food services, and, most significantly, bilingual education in the public school systems.

Common wisdom has held that students must master a “good” variety of Spanish in order to obtain a good job; perhaps those who adhere to this view perceive “good” jobs to be those working with corporate executives in Mexico City or some other metropolis in Latin America or Spain. While these types of jobs do exist, it is much more probable that the students who study in the SNS program at NMSU will look for employment in the regional economy, where there is a strong demand for bilinguals. We have not yet tracked the careers of those who have studied in the SNS program, but we can offer anecdotal evidence of this demand. A student enrolled in the fourth-semester “grammar” class during spring semester 1994 was hired at the end of the semester as an administrative assistant for an attorney who handles public defense for the federal court system. The job entails interpreting for the monolingual English-speaking attorney who defends monolingual Spanish-speaking clients; it goes without saying that the language variety encountered among these clients is not of a literary type. In sum, the local language variety may well be advantageous to the student in the search for employment after finishing university studies. This is another area that demands further research; at present, no studies suggest what “real-world” Spanish language skills are needed in the private and public sectors.

Strategies for Connecting the SNS Program with the Spanish-Speaking Community

Many strategies have been proposed for instructional purposes in SNS programs, yet few have been included in textbooks with the goal of connecting the student with the heritage language and culture in contextualized and interactive activities in the community. Many of the instructional techniques proposed by researchers in the field of SNS, and the steps needed to achieve positive results, have not been sufficiently elaborated in the professional literature to establish their effectiveness. We seek here to suggest relevant techniques; detailed elaboration of step-by-step implementation falls outside the scope of this chapter.
We find that successful exercises in the NMSU program center on a high degree of interaction between students, teacher, and community. Instructional materials do not attempt to “lump” a diverse population of native speakers in the SNS classroom into one level of language ability or another. Each student has opportunities to develop individual strengths. The ethnographic interview is an effective technique that focuses on student/teacher/community interaction, the “four skills,” and heritage culture. Other techniques, such as the sociolinguistic survey, the oral history interview, and the dialogue journal, also give students opportunities to explore their language and culture in the community context. These techniques also address the multiple levels of proficiencies of the native-speaker student population and offer interesting and challenging avenues to retrieve and maintain the heritage language, while developing the four skills at the individual’s level.

Ethnography, the work of describing a culture or a way of life from the native point of view, has been effectively used by the social sciences to obtain cultural information. With regards to the implementation of this type of study, Trueba (1993) states that language must be included since language and culture are inseparable and intertwined: one cannot be acquired without the other. Robinson (1988, pp. 73–84) observes that ethnography takes place in a “real-world” environment, not in a laboratory setting, and therefore must use techniques that do not prestructure or pre-categorize what is to be observed. She also notes that we do not have any good ethnographies of cultures commonly taught in American schools and universities; the cultural studies that have been collected and interpreted by ethnographers describe exotic cultures rather than those that would be relevant to local communities and societies. Merino and Samaniego (1993) suggest that the ethnographic interview is an instructional strategy that has not been explored in SNS classes; they go on to say that the bilingual community's cultural resources can become the focus for a SNS course.

Thus we consider ethnographic studies an excellent starting point in the SNS program (Rodríguez Pino 1994). Students begin to interact in the classroom and participate in structured activities in their immediate communities with the goal of studying their local culture and its language variety. There exists in Las Cruces and the surrounding communities a rich linguistic research environment for the study of social and cultural topics relevant to students in the SNS programs. During the past academic year, SNS classes at NMSU have been exploring the use of the ethnographic study to learn about their own native language and culture by using community resources.

Rodríguez Pino states in her newsletter (funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities) that in implementing the ethnographic interview students should first be introduced to the definition of the study of ethnography and what role it plays in researching their native language and culture. The notion that ethnography is a useful method for obtaining cultural information from the native’s point of view and that its purpose is to explore how people within the target culture group their experiences and prioritize them are stressed. The selection of topics for the ethnographic research project can be taken care of in various ways. The class can “brainstorm” in groups or as a whole class after the instructor provides a brief overview of the historical, social, and cultural background of Las Cruces and the surrounding areas.

Students are asked to volunteer family members to speak on several topics. In addition, the instructor provides a list of potential consultants in order to facilitate contacts in the community. We note here that immediate community members are preferred when beginning an ethnographic study, but if an individual identifies someone in the extended community with whom he or she can comfortably work, no attempt should be made to discourage such contact. Indeed, it is at such a juncture that the instructor must be aware of each individual’s level of confidence in his or her language competency, so that an appropriate community member (or members) is identified. Strategies for carrying out the ethnographic interview are then discussed in class among students, and sample interviews with peers are conducted as a “priming” activity. Students then conduct the interview in the community, resulting data are analyzed in class.

We have found that this process provides a tremendous amount of material for both class-internal and class-external study. Ethnography works well as a first step in retrieving language; students record accounts about their heritage culture so that they may describe, interpret, and evaluate events that have not been recorded or documented anywhere else in rich and vivid detail from the native speaker’s point of view. It is at this point that students assume their role as teachers. The ethnographic interview is an important tool for obtaining information about the cultural diversity of the Hispanic population’s language and culture, reclaiming heritage, and interpreting accounts of relevant topics with background data from native speakers’ accounts to native speaker student researchers. This occurs in a nonthreatening setting, when students who have minimal productive abilities can focus on the “task at hand” rather than on language production. At the same time, they are exposed to an increased
amount of the community's language variety, providing them with the opportunity outside the classroom to enrich their language skills.

An extension of the ethnographic interview is the oral history. This activity is aimed at the student's re-creation of a personal or family history, a "microhistory," within a broader historical context, the "macrohistory." With regards to language skills, the student is encouraged to conduct the oral history interview while using as much of the target language as possible. In-class background discussion provides a macrohistory of the area, including such topics as the Tratado de Guadalupe Hidalgo, the Mexican Revolution, indigenous populations, and economic development, among others. In addition, methods for conducting interviews are discussed to avoid problems such as closed questions. In-class interviews are held to develop interviewing skills. Students then conduct an initial interview in order to begin gathering data from a community member or members. Again, in light of the goal of developing oral productivity, students are encouraged to work with members of the immediate community.

A third activity for developing an awareness of a student's community language norms, in this case through defining the standard of the community, is the linguistic survey. The use of such an approach has been suggested by Solé (1981), Gutiérrez-Marrone (1981), and Merino (1989). Solé suggests providing students with print and visual media to observe the usage of "standard" and "nonstandard" varieties of language so that they may distinguish between the two; Gutiérrez-Marrone proposes techniques for students to discover differences in standard lexical variants in specific semantic domains through print media or interviews with consultants. Merino's interview techniques in the design of the linguistic survey includes questions on lexical items by semantic category and individual word listing by domain, activities carried out in the classroom.

We suggest a different approach. We ask our students to go out into the community, both immediate and nonimmediate, in order to establish what the community norms are in a variety of domains, some of which are chosen so as to be out of the student's day-to-day contact with the heritage language. For example, we have noticed that lexical items usually not included in students' vocabularies concern the flora and fauna commonly found in the area. In discovering these terms, students not only enrich their vocabulary, but do so with words used commonly in the community rather than in other variants of Spanish, thereby recognizing the importance of one group not naming the world for another group.

The basis for this survey is the instrument developed at the University of New Mexico by Garland Bills and Neddy Vigil (1992) for the New Mexico/Colorado Spanish Survey. This is an extensive collection of photos and realia designed to elicit lexical items in a wide range of domains. The instrument is too extensive to be employed in its entirety by the student/researcher, so collaboration in class between students and instructor is essential for designing a workable instrument. Following the techniques developed by Bills and Vigil, a portion of the interview consists of free conversation, so that the student does not simply elicit a list of items, but must interact with the consultant on a personal basis, thereby developing his or her communicative skills and increasing social interaction in the community. Again, the goal of this activity is to establish a standard variety that corresponds to that with which the students are in contact, be they from Las Cruces, Española, El Paso, Silver City, or Clovis; we do not wish our local variety to be converted into some sort of overarching standard.

**Outcome Assessment of the SNS Program**

The principal goal of the SNS program at NMSU is to enrich the native speaker's language abilities. We have suggested a theoretical base, a curriculum, and activities that can be used to achieve that end. However, we recognize that such a program cannot be implemented strictly as a result of a priori musings based solely upon anecdotal experience. Steps must be taken that measure the impact of theory and methodology so that the program benefits from "real-world" data for further programmatic refinement. That is, we do not view the program as a finished product, but instead as a work in progress that demands concrete data to support its validity.

However, on choosing a means of outcome assessment, problems immediately arise. One could possibly use some type of oral language proficiency instrument, such as the ACTFL-ETS oral proficiency interview; a dramatic increase in measurable oral proficiency would surely be a hallmark of success. Unfortunately, Barnwell (1989) eloquently points out fundamental flaws in the ACTFL-ETS instrument that call into question its validity. Furthermore, even if these problems could be satisfactorily resolved in the near future, it would not be clear whether the ACTFL-ETS interview could be used to measure SNS students' oral proficiency, as Valdés (1989) points out. She proposes three alternatives:
(1) we can attempt to change the language attitudes of the [ACTFL-ETS] testers and to modify their notions of "correctness" by launching a profession-wide campaign; (2) we can present our evidence to ACTFL and insist that it be made clear that existing standards and guidelines cannot be used validly with ethnic native speakers; or (3) we can design an oral proficiency rating scale for bilingual speakers that differs, not only in the way in which the rating scale is applied, but which is based on an entirely different set of assumptions about the developing ability of bilingual native speakers as they progress through direct instruction in their first language. (p. 400)

For the purposes of assessing the progress students make in our program, any one of the three alternatives suggested above is not a viable solution. For short-term program assessment. We cannot wait some undetermined length of time until an ideal assessment becomes available; our program demands immediate evaluation.

The alternative proposed here, and the one that is currently being implemented at NMSU, is twofold. One assessment is the use of a sociolinguistic instrument that measures the student's self-reported use of the heritage language, using a Likert-type scale. The instrument also elicits data on intergenerational communication in Spanish, if the student considers that he or she is using more Spanish than before entering the program, and affective and instrumental attitudes toward the community variant, among other variables. We feel that if an increase in self-reported language use and intergenerational communication can be established, that in itself would provide important support for our program design. If this is not the case, then our theory, instructional techniques, and measures must be reviewed and revised, in order to improve them. Toward this assessment goal, the sociolinguistic instrument itself is undergoing revision and refinement, in conjunction with the Department of Experimental Statistics at NMSU, in order to create as statistically reliable a measure as possible.

However, we do not wish to rely solely upon statistics, which can never present a complete picture of that which is being analyzed. Included in our program evaluation are written comments of students who have participated in the program. We feel that if the student is to be recognized as a central, active figure in the learning process, then that student must be recognized in the outcome assessment. In order to achieve this goal, written comments are elicited from the students in every level at the end of each semester and analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively with regard to both positive and negative comments about class activities, field-

work, readings, and more. These results are then compiled into a single document that records both successes and failures in the program. We stress that these comments form an integral part of outcome assessment and are not something to be elicited and then archived in the "round file."

Finally, we recognize that these assessments do not directly measure the progress of a student in the program. However, faced as we are with the need to refine the program each semester, we employ what assessment tools we have until a well-researched, culturally, and linguistically appropriate system is available. There is indeed much work to be done in this area.

Conclusion

The teaching of Spanish to native speakers at New Mexico State University has experienced dramatic changes since its inception in 1945. Changes in the program reflect the advances in the field during the last two decades, both in theory and in practice. It is our intent to continue the development of New Mexico State's SNS program by examining the theory that underlies this effort, refining class internal and class external activities that encourage the reacquisition and maintenance of heritage language skills, and measuring the effectiveness of the program in meeting its stated goals. Dedicated researchers have invested tremendous amounts of time and energy toward improving SNS programs, and so far have made impressive strides. Researchers and educators at New Mexico State will continue to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the field, to whatever degree possible, so that SNS programs in general will continue to become more oriented toward the students they serve.

Works Cited


