Strategizing about Your Grammar: A New Website for Learners of Spanish
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Language Learner Strategies
- A survey to determine the use of terminology by 19 world experts on language learner strategies (Cohen, 2007).
- Finding that some disagreement as to whether a behavior has to have a mental component, a goal, an action, a metacognitive component, and a potential that it will lead to learning.

The good language learner
- Chapters in the Griffiths volume deal with the "good language learner" from various vantage points:

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<td>16. Reading</td>
<td>17. Writing</td>
<td>18. Teaching / Learning Method</td>
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Strategy Instruction
- Raising awareness about the strategies that learners are already using.
- Presenting and modeling strategies so that learners become increasingly aware of their own thinking and learning processes.
- Providing multiple practice opportunities to help learners move towards autonomous use of the strategies through gradual withdrawal of teacher scaffolding.
- Getting learners to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used and efforts they make to transfer these strategies to new tasks.

- There are also teachers' guides that provide numerous examples of activities to be used by an instructor for the purpose of strategy instruction.
- The Cohen and Weaver volume for learners of all ages (2006) and that by Chamot for K-12 (in press) are examples of these kinds of volumes, where teachers provide strategy instruction, which includes administering and then and supervising a series of activities.
A Strategic Approach to the Learning and Performance of Pragmatics

- Website for Learners of Japanese Pragmatics
  Constructed to include instructional units for five speech acts – requests, refusals, compliments, thanks, and apologies (see Cohen & Ishihara, 2005; Ishihara, 2007). The website was intended to be used either on a stand-alone basis or as a supplement to an intermediate course in Japanese: http://www.iles.umn.edu/IntroToSpeechActs

- Spanish Pragmatics Website, Dancing with Words

Spanish Grammar Strategies Website – The Rationale

- While attention is focused on the teaching of grammar, not very much attention is paid to how learners are to go about learning and performing it.
- Grammar forms are not just magically acquired.
- Learners encounter grammar forms that are problematic, regardless of how well they are presented in textbooks or in class.
- "At heart, learning depends on the student" (Oxford & Lee, 2008).

Where do these grammar strategies come from?

- The website features strategies deployed successfully by learners, including strategies from non-native teachers of Spanish – who need to learn Spanish grammar in order to teach it.
- So, rather than being a repository of Spanish grammar rules (which can be found elsewhere on the web), this website is intended to offer suggested strategies from others who have "been there and done that" successfully. (We've checked to make sure of that!)

Website for Spanish L2 Pragmatics

Dancing with Words: Strategies for Learning Pragmatics in Spanish

Main Objective

This website is dedicated to the pursuit of ways to enhance learners' control of Spanish grammar.

How?

By providing examples of strategies students of Spanish have found successful for them in dealing with problematic grammar. Grammar strategies are deliberate thoughts and actions students consciously employ for learning and getting better control over the use of grammar structures.

People involved in the project

- Web support: Marlene Johnshoy & Chris Brandsey
  CARLA – U. of Minnesota
- Support staff: Kristin Powell & Angela George
  Graduate students in Hispanic Linguistics
- Evaluational research: Jonathan Thompson & Lance Witzig
  Recipients of UROP grants
- National advisor: Rebecca Oxford
  U. of Maryland
**Organization of the Website**

- **Introduction**
  - Purpose of the website
  - Definition and example of a grammar strategy
  - Questions to promote self-awareness of current language strategy use
  - Factors that influence the choice and effectiveness of grammar strategies

- **Learning Style Survey (to come)**

- **How can I use this website?**

  - "I need a strategy for a particular grammar form"
  - "I need to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire"
"I need a strategy for a particular grammar form"

**Tenses**
- Preterite
- imperfect
- Preterite vs. imperfect

**Moods**
- Commands
- Subjunctive
- Imperfect subjunctive
- Conditional
- Conditional perfect and pluperfect subjunctive

**Pronouns**
- Simultaneous use of direct and indirect object pronouns
- Reflexive pronouns in present perfect constructions
- Direct and indirect object pronouns in affirmative and negative tú commands

**Ser and estar**

**Relative pronouns**

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"I need to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire"

**Making associations**
- Linking grammar to situations and/or friends
- Linking mood of verb to weather
- Endings as band names

**Playing with verbs**
- Organizing your verb chart according to what works for you
- Drawing blank and remembering "go-go" verbs

**Using archetypal sentences**
- Silly contrary-to-fact statements
- Archetypal sentences in context (tú commands)

**Acronyms**
- WEIRD (Subjunctive)
- PRINT & LITE (Ser and estar)
- DUWIT

**Rhymes**
- How to form the subjunctive
- When to use estar

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"I need to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire"

**Quick grammar references**
- Tense toolbox
- Cheat sheet

**Songs and chants**
- Irregular preterite forms to the tune of "Twinkle, twinkle little star"
- Irregular tú commands chant

**Note cards**
- Creating note cards to make studying easier
- Note cards for distinguishing tenses

**Phrases as memory aids**
- Hollywood actor as mnemonic device (Irregular tú commands)
- A mnemonic phrase (When to use se)

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Examples from the Website

"I need a strategy for a particular grammar form."

"I need to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire"
Two rhymes

Subjunctive (strategy)

Sam uses a rhyme to remember how to form the subjunctive verbs. She says, “Think yo, drop the -o, -a to -e, and -e to -e.” This rhyme helps her to remember that, “in order to form the subjunctive, I have to think in the yo form, drop the -o at the end of it and then change the -ar verbs to -er verbs and the -ar and -er verbs to -ar endings.”

Anne uses a similar rhyme to remember how to form the subjunctive. Her rhyme goes like this: “Go yo, drop -o, add op.”

A mnemonic device using initials

DOP and IOP in commands (strategy)

Jaclyn knows that when using commands along with direct and indirect pronouns, sometimes she has to attach them to the end of the command form, but that at other times she doesn’t. In order to remember when to do what, she uses a mnemonic device that revolves around initials:

Affirmative $\Rightarrow$ Attached
Negative $\Rightarrow$ No attached

From having used this strategy, Jaclyn is now used to attaching the pronoun(s) to the end of affirmative commands and not attaching them when she uses negative commands. Listen to her talk about this strategy.

Moreover, she also remembers that when the direct and indirect pronouns are not attached, they precede the negative command.

Direct and indirect object pronouns in affirmative and negative commands

(Main page)

When you give commands in Spanish, you not only have to produce the correct verb form, but also need to determine whether to attach the direct or indirect object pronoun, and if so, how.

Here’s a strategy that Jaclyn has for remembering the position of pronouns when giving commands.

Remembering when to attach the pronoun(s) to the commands

A mnemonic device using initials

Let’s look at two examples from the website:

- You have a Costa Rican friend who is very enthusiastic about the Spanish Grammar Strategies Website and you want him to give you the web address (la dirección). In order to do this, you need the affirmative command da, the indirect object me, and the feminine direct object la. Consequently, you say:

  Dámeela.
  ‘Give it to me.’

(Affirmative $\Rightarrow$ Attached)

- A few days later, you run into a classmate who coincidentally wants to give you the Spanish Grammar Strategies Website address because he’s found it very useful. Since you already have the web address, you thank him and tell her that you don’t need it (since you already have it). In order to do this, you need the word no, the negative command das, the indirect object me, and the feminine direct object la. Consequently, you say:

  No, gracias. No me la das.
  ‘No thanks. Don’t give it to me.’

(Negative $\Rightarrow$ No attached)

Imperfect

(Main page)

Feeling a bit imperfect when talking about past events in Spanish?

When narrating in the past, you often have to choose between two verb tenses: the preterite and the imperfect. Here are a few strategies that students have used to remember how to form the imperfect and when to use it.

Remembering the endings for imperfect verbs

Endings as band names

Remembering when to use the imperfect tense

An acronym
Preterite vs. Imperfect

Spanish makes use of a distinction between an action that happened habitually in the past and one that had a definite starting and ending point in the past. The two verb tenses that communicate this information are the preterite and the imperfect. However, it's not always easy for native English speakers to distinguish between the two. The following strategies can help you get a better handle on when to use which tense.

- **Determining the appropriate tense for describing specific actions, ongoing actions, and states of being**
  - A decision map
  - A mental image
  - Flashcards describing personal events

- **Thinking in English**
  - Remembering the appropriate tense for an ongoing action and the tense for an interrupting verb
  - A drawing

- **A rhyme**
  - Remembering the appropriate tense to describe specific actions and background information

Thinking in English

Kris' teachers have always told him to "think in Spanish," but he finds it helpful to think in English when distinguishing between the preterite and imperfect. He tries to think of imperfect verbs communicating "used to."

However, for preterite verbs he says, "you can't use 'used to' anymore" because the equivalent Spanish form would call for the imperfect. For example, "Ayer fuimos al cine" would not translate as "Yesterday I used to go to the movies" but rather as "Yesterday I went to the movies."

A mental image

Mandy says: "When I'm trying to decide whether I need the imperfect or the preterite in the past and it's something with simultaneous actions or an interrupting action, I often make a mental image in my head."

A rhyme

Susan remembers a rhyme and a model sentence from her initial learning of Spanish.

"El preterito especifica y el imperfecto explica."

"Me Duché a las siete... el agua estaba tibia" ('I showered at seven... the water was warm.)

She adds, "in this case you have 'me duché a las siete' specifying when you took a shower. But when you're talking about the fact that the water was warm, this is more background information to your story, and so imperfect is used there."

Note cards

Note cards are great tools not only because they provide relevant information in a concise way, but also because you can use them in all sorts of places (e.g., on a train or plane, waiting on line at the bank, or over a latte at your favorite coffee shop).

The amount of information you include on a note card and its organization is likely to depend on:

- the complexity of the grammar form in question,
- the information of concern - e.g., an alert about a confusing point or an explanation as to what makes some grammatical form difficult,
- personal preference as to how best to deal with grammar forms, and
- knowledge of dialect variation and pragmatics

If you are curious about ways that students use note cards strategically, then click on the links below:

Creating note cards to make studying easier

Note cards for distinguishing tenses

Flash cards describing personal events
Note cards for distinguishing tenses
Claire knows that she often confuses tenses. For her, it is difficult to distinguish a) the preterite from the conditional, and b) the conditional from the imperfect.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Form</th>
<th>Preterite</th>
<th>Conditional</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dormir</td>
<td>dormi</td>
<td>dormía</td>
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<tr>
<td>(ye)</td>
<td>preterite</td>
<td>conditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dormir</td>
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<td>(ye)</td>
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<td>Imperfect</td>
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Songs and chants
Some forms – especially irregulars – can be challenging. Because such forms are not easily learned with simple rules, you have to figure out ways to memorize and retrieve them. One way is through songs or chants.

Check our “grammar concert repertoire” below!
A song (Irregular tú commands)
A chant (Irregular tú commands)
A song (Negative tú commands)
A chant (Irregular subjunctive forms)
A chant (Preterite endings)
A song (Irregular preterite forms)

A song (Irregular tú commands)
Sam explains how singing the irregular tú commands to the tune of “Row, row, row your boat” helps her remember the irregular forms. Notice that she uses repetition in her song to help her remember the forms.

"I get stuck with... informal tú commands when they are affirmative because they have some irregulars that don’t make sense."

"Haz, sal, ve y ven di, ten, sé y pon"

Ocho mandatos afirmativos
Irregulares son

A chant (Irregular subjunctive forms)
Angela sings a chant to remember the irregular subjunctive forms for the verbs saber, ser, ir, dar, estar, and haber. Click on the button if you want to listen to her.

Sepa, sea, vaya, a, esté, haya

Comments about the Website
"This is a trustworthy, friendly website."
"The information is credible because it’s from people who have studied Spanish."
"Good, detailed introduction."
"I liked the way you presented the strategies": (1) for a particular grammar form and (2) to enhance my grammar strategy repertoire.
"The website is pretty easy to navigate, especially if you know what you’re looking for."
"The language is good. It’s not too academic."
"It’s personable."

Comments About the Website
"I like that students explain their own methods. They sounded smart."
"I like the pictures. I like the hand-drawn stuff."
"I like the note pad writing a lot. It’s more personal than a website telling you how to conjugate the verbs."
"The audio and video files keep it interesting. It’s better than just reading."
"These videos are interesting to watch."
"Other observations to come after the 2nd round of usability testing."
"Website address while in development: dev-carla.umn.edu/strategies/sp_grammar/"
Concluding Remarks

- This website showcases one way to bring technology into the learning of a second or foreign language.
- The strategies on the website were generated by learners themselves and not by experts.
- Their use of the website may encourage learners to take more responsibility for their own learning.
- We welcome the replication of this website with other languages, and would also like to see work done in other skill areas (e.g., vocabulary).

References
