Teaching the Relatedness of Spanish and Portuguese

David L. Garrison


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sign to fulfill the basic needs of any non-specialized intermediate course. If nothing else, such variety shows that authors and editors make an effort to address themselves to the fact that such courses indeed vary as regards goals, scope, duration, and (unfortunately, but perhaps inevitably, in this day and age of mass education) intellectual caliber. What is not so evident is whether there is a unifying element (besides grammar review) which might serve as fulcrum for a general theory of what the intermediate course should be. The need for reviewing elementary level material notwithstanding, the primary function of an intermediate course should be to provide for a smooth transition from the structured activities of an elementary course into real language use, that is, from contrived dialogues to free conversation, from structural exercises to free expression, from edited reading selections to any type of reading materials. This means that there should be some marked qualitative difference between first- and second-year materials, but this is not always the case. The great variation one observes in the distribution of topics also indicates that, in the intermediate level more than in the elementary one, our ideas are far from clear as to what would be the ideal sequence for maximizing the opportunities for learning and retaining language material in a fully integrated way. It is not so much that we lack appropriate teaching methodology, but rather that the specific goals of the intermediate level have yet to be defined with precision. While granting that some contemporary texts look attractive and pedagogically sound (after all, we use them, and they render us good services), it should be acknowledged that a good deal of research will be needed, particularly on the characteristics and needs of intermediate learners, before those texts can be considered fully satisfactory pedagogical grammars.

"Texts for use in specialized courses—Spanish for medical personnel, for business, etc.—are outside the scope of this survey.

Teaching the Relatedness of Spanish and Portuguese

DAVID L. GARRISON, University of Kansas

STUDENTS are often told that the Romance Languages are related and that learning one will help them learn another, but they are rarely shown how this is true. Focusing on Spanish and Portuguese, I have found a way to show them and would like to share my experience.

"Gente, bom dia. Hoje vamos estudar as diferenças e as semelhanças entre o português e o espanhol. São línguas muito parecidas, como vocês estão vendo. Eu estou falando português, mas vocês me entendem perfeitamente." With these words in Portuguese I opened my undergraduate class in Advanced Spanish Conversation one day. The students understood me and gave their full attention; they were excited to realize, by direct experience, that they could comprehend a language similar to Spanish without ever having studied it. I went on to introduce a Brazilian friend whom I had invited to help me teach the class.

Switching into Spanish, I re-explained that we were going to compare the two languages. I did this to make sure everyone fully understood and

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also to emphasize, through the example of the two similar speeches, my main point—the conspicuous similarity of Spanish and Portuguese. To demonstrate their similarities and differences, I passed out dittoed sheets of words and idioms my friend and I had chosen as illustrations. Our list was designed to make general comparisons of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar that would provide insight into the relationships of the languages but not overwhelm the students with detailed linguistic analysis. I include it below as an example which teachers may wish to follow in preparing a presentation such as ours.¹

It should be noted that the degree and kind of similarity in usage and pronunciation will of course vary with the accent used in both languages. My guest and I both speak a Brazilian “Mineiro” dialect of Portuguese and I speak Castilian Spanish; these accents are reflected in the International Phonetic Association (IPA) transcriptions. In a few cases we mentioned the different comparisons other dialects would create, but we did not discuss this matter in detail for the sake of simplicity and because our main point was the fundamental similarity that transcends regional dialects of the two languages. My Brazilian guest did most of the talking, pronouncing and repeating all the Portuguese words, giving other examples, explaining in Portuguese the origin and connotations of some words, encouraging the students to try pronouncing the sounds that were unfamiliar to them. In order to emphasize the different sounds of the languages, I pronounced some of the Spanish words and asked the students to say the rest. Since they already knew most of the Spanish, I made only a few comments to bring out the comparisons with Portuguese.

1) Most Portuguese words—probably eighty per cent or more of them—have a cognate in Spanish.² Many will be easily recognizable in their written and spoken forms to the Spanish student:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>montaña</td>
<td>montanha</td>
<td>mountain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saber</td>
<td>saber</td>
<td>to know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alegre</td>
<td>alegre</td>
<td>glad, joyful</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although cognates may be spelled exactly or almost exactly alike, they are not always pronounced in a recognizably similar fashion:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portuguese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>verde</td>
<td>green</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>divertirse</td>
<td>to enjoy oneself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gerente</td>
<td>manager</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2) Differences in cognates frequently fall into patterns which, when studied carefully, facilitate the learning of vocabulary. For example, Spanish often has an h where Portuguese has an f, a j where Portuguese has an lh:

¹The teacher may wish to modify this list, use it as is, or consider it as background material in preparing a new one. For lengthier, more systematic treatment of the relationship between Spanish and Portuguese, cf. Jack L. Ulsh, From Spanish to Portuguese (Foreign Service Institute: Washington, D. C., 1971). This is a government document (stock number: 044-000-013631) which can be obtained for $1.60 from the Superintendent of Documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C. 20402. For a shorter but also excellent piece, see David Feldman and F. Hensey, “Portuguese for the Spanish Speaker,” in the teacher’s manual accompanying the MLA textbook by Fred P. Ellison, et al., Modern Portuguese (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1974). Unfortunately, the teacher’s manual is out of print now and may be difficult to get, though the textbook is available. A detailed contrastive study which deals primarily with peninsular Portuguese and Castilian Spanish is Pilar Vázquez Cuesta and Maria Albertina Mendes da Luz, Gramática Portuguesa, 2nd enlarged edition (Madrid: Gredos, 1961). David Feldman’s Portuguese for Speakers of Spanish (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Office of Education, 1966) is also helpful.


²Ulsh suggests that “probably upwards of 85 per cent of Portuguese words have a cognate in Spanish” (p. x), but I think his estimate is high.
Some common words of different gender do not fall into any clear pattern:

- el dolor a dor
- la leche o leite
- la sonrisa o sorriso
- the pain
- the milk
- the smile

5) Portuguese has -ar, -er, and -ir verbs, plus some -or verbs — *por 'to place' (poner in Spanish) and all its compounds. Most cognates share the same kind of verb ending:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>tomar</td>
<td>tomar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comer</td>
<td>comer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>venir</td>
<td>vir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This is not always the case, however. Several common -ir verbs in Spanish end in -er in Portuguese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vivir</td>
<td>viver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>morir</td>
<td>morrer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recibir</td>
<td>receber</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6) Although the verbs frequently have distinctive differences in pronunciation, tense formation is closely analogous in the two languages, as can be seen in this brief sample of the verb *mandar*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yo mando [mando]</td>
<td>eu mando [mándu]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tu mandabas [mandabas]</td>
<td>tu mandavas [mandavas]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ud. mandaba [mandaba]</td>
<td>vocé mandava [mándava]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(The familiar *tu* form is not ordinarily used in Brazil except in the state of Rio Grande do Sul. It is used in Portugal and in African countries where Portuguese is spoken.)
RELATEDNESS OF SPANISH AND PORTUGUESE

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si yo mandara, mandase
[mandar'a, mandase]
he/she sent
we will send
they would send
(present participle)
(past participle)
(present subjunctive)
(past subjunctive)

se eu mandasse
[mandasi]
he/she sent
we will send
they would send
(present participle)
(past participle)
(present subjunctive)
(past subjunctive)

Except in certain formal or literary contexts, Portuguese uses ter to form the perfect tenses, instead of haber as a Spanish student might expect:

hábían escrito
[abian eskrito]
they had written
we would have gone
he/she will have left

tinham escrito
[seyma eskritu]
they had written
we would have gone
he/she will have left

Verb forms are not always exact equivalents; there are sometimes subtle differences in usage and meaning. For example, the present perfect tense in Portuguese usually does not correspond in meaning with the Spanish:

he escrito [e eskrito]
I have written
I have been writing

Isto escrito
[istj eskritu]
this written

7) A major structural difference between the languages is that Portuguese has a vigorous use of the future subjunctive, a mode which has for the most part died out of Spanish. After conjunctions such as quando, assim que, logo que, depois que, and se, Portuguese employs a future subjunctive when the reference is to future time. Spanish uses a present subjunctive in the parallel expressions except those following si, which take the present:

8) The common ue and ie Spanish diphthongs frequently correspond to e (è) and o (ó) in Portuguese:

puede [pwe'de]
he/she can
outside
party
foot

pode [p'zdzil]
fora [forsa]

fiesta [fista]

festa [f'esta]

pie [p'je]

pe [p'je]

Where Spanish has an e, an ei, a diphthong often appears in Portuguese:

hecho [e'xo]
done, made (past
participle)

feito [feju]
subject
to allow

sujeto [suxeto]

sujeito [suzetju]

dejar [dxar]
deixar [dejaxar]

The ei diphthong is frequently not pronounced as such in many dialects of Portuguese, however. It often has an e sound just like the Spanish:

manera [mane'a]
manner, way

maneira [manefa]

primero [pime'ro]
first

primeiro [pime'ro]

dinero [dinezru]
money

dinheiro [dinezru]

The Portuguese eu diphthong appears in the third person singular preterites of the -er verbs as well as in the number of other common words:

bebi6 [bebio]
he/she drank

bebeu [bebeu]

escribi6 [eskribio]
he/she wrote

escreveu [esk'feveu]

yo [jo]
I

me [meu]

mi [mi]
my, mine

meu [meu]

adios [adios]
goodbye

The Portuguese eu diphthong appears in

9) Sometimes similar words appear in different grammatical constructions or in different order. For example, to say "I like" in Spanish we ordinarily use an indirect object ("It is pleasing to me"), while in Portuguese the "I" is the subject of the sentence, as in English:

A mi me gusta(n) . . .
Eu gosto de . . .

I like . . .

Object pronouns used with an infinitive and auxiliary verb can go immediately before the in-
finitive in Portuguese and normally do in everyday speech, whereas they never appear in that position in Spanish:

Juan va a levantarse.     João vai levantar-se.
Juan se va a levantar.    João vai se levantar.
Juan quiere llevarme al centro.    João quer levar-me ao centro.
Juan me quiere llevar al centro.    João quer me levar ao centro.

John is going to get up.
John wants to take me downtown.

10) Some words are completely different in the two languages:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ayer</td>
<td>ontem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sastre</td>
<td>alfaiate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piña</td>
<td>abacaxi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, certain cognates are used differently in Spanish than in Portuguese. “La gente” in Spanish usually means “the people”; however, in Portuguese, “a gente” often simply means “we” or “us”; Spanish “sacar fotografías” means “to take pictures,” but the Portuguese equivalent is “tirar fotografias.” Some false cognates are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>apellido</td>
<td>apelido</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>aula</td>
<td>aula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rato</td>
<td>rato</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acordarse</td>
<td>acordar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rubio</td>
<td>ruivo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Several students asked questions and commented on other comparisons within these examples. They noticed at once the letter ç, which modern Spanish doesn’t have, and they especially enjoyed their first try at the nasal sounds. They found it amusing to learn that an automobile which constantly breaks down is an abacaxi ‘pineapple’ in Portuguese, rather than a ‘lemon’. When the discussion was over, I asked my friend to say a few words in Portuguese about herself and her country. She began by pointing out her home city of Belo Horizonte on a map. In her brief talk she described her city and state, the varied geography and climate of Brazil, the mixture of races, and the native music. I interrupted a few times to explain expressions that I felt the students would not understand, but for the most part this was unnecessary.

Playing a samba record as background, I then showed slides of my recent trip to Brazil. I alternated between Spanish, Portuguese, and occasionally, English, in order to keep their attention level high and make sure that they were understanding everything. The students showed much interest through their questions and observations. They asked for details about life on a fazenda (‘farm, coffee plantation’). And they remarked upon the contrast between the modern city of São Paulo and the well-preserved baroque town of Ouro Preto. To conclude the lesson, my friend taught them the first few lines of “A Garota de Ipanema”—a song they all knew in English as “The Girl from Ipanema”—and we played that record.

I have described these activities to recommend them for use in Spanish and Portuguese classes. Perhaps similar presentations could be done with other languages, but this would indeed be more complex: few languages are as closely related as Spanish and Portuguese. But even if this kind of presentation is not feasible, we should all be aware of the comparisons between languages which can occasionally be pointed out and explained even to beginning students with good results. Along this line I have found, for example, that it comes as a revelation to students to learn that almost all European languages have an Indo-European origin that becomes apparent in words such as mother (mutter, madre, mère). Learning is in large part a process of relating new things to things we already know, and we should always bear this in mind in teaching languages.

Besides making the students more conscious of the relatedness of languages and hence the value and different applications of what they are learning, this kind of class can stimulate their interest in studying another language. It also provides a pleasant break from routine for the students and a challenging experience in preparation for the teacher. In our case, the presentation was so successful that we repeated it in all my classes. Later in the semester almost all the students praised it on their evaluation forms in response to the question, “What things have you enjoyed most in this class so far?” A fifth of them registered to take Portuguese next semester!1

1I would like to thank my Brazilian guest, Eliana Rodrigues Pereira, and the following professors who read this paper and offered suggestions: Gilda Alvarez, Anthony Caprio, Dana Carton, Fred Ellison, Antonio Fornazaro, Heitor Martins, and Jon Vincent.
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