



ELSEVIER



Available online at [www.sciencedirect.com](http://www.sciencedirect.com)

ScienceDirect

Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences 178 (2015) 180 – 184

Procedia  
Social and Behavioral Sciences

15th International Conference of the Spanish Association of Language and Literature Education,  
15th International Conference SEDLL, 19-21 November 2014, Valencia, Spain

## Spanish/FL in Slovakia. A historical and methodological approach

Miquel A. Oltra-Albiach<sup>a</sup>, Rosa M. Pardo-Coy<sup>a</sup>, Elena Delgadová<sup>b\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Facultat de Magisteri - Universitat de València, Avda. Tarongers, 4, 46022 Valencia, Spain*

<sup>b</sup>*Fakulty sociálno-ekonomických vzt'ahov - Trenčianska Univerzita Alexandra Dubčeka v Trenčíne. Študentská, 2, 911 50 Trenčín, Slovakia*

### Abstract

The present investigation forms part of the draft of study in comparative perspective of the perception of the target language among students of Spanish from different universities and countries in Europe, from the perspective of teaching languages as a cultural fact and the importance of the social, political and economic factors in the evolution and perception of the importance of SFL learning in the European context. We want to carry out an approach to investigation of various authors on the evolution of the study of Spanish as a foreign language in Central and Eastern Europe, and specifically to the teaching of Spanish at Slovak universities. We have taken as a reference the evolution of the teaching of Spanish in Slovakia and other countries in that environment, and the role that methodology has occupied overtime and the different perspectives on teaching and learning languages that have been introduced.

© 2015 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the Universidad Politécnica de Valencia, Departamento de Lingüística Aplicada.

**Keywords:** Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL); Languages in Europe; Teaching and learning languages; Slovakia

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 96 398 38 25; fax: +34 96 386 40 02  
E-mail address: [miquel.oltra@uv.es](mailto:miquel.oltra@uv.es), [rosa.pardo@uv.es](mailto:rosa.pardo@uv.es), [elena.delgadova@tuni.sk](mailto:elena.delgadova@tuni.sk)

## 1. Introduction

As Javier Alfaya recalls, it would be a mistake to separate the teaching of languages from external factors to the linguistic system, such as the political, economic, cultural, demographic or geographic situation (Alfaya, 2004: 151). All these reflections reaffirm, on the one hand, the need to consider the grammar in relation to usage (Cuenca,

2003; Rodríguez Gonzalo, 2011), and on the other hand the importance of attitudes on language learning: the ideas, beliefs, stereotypes, prejudices...about languages. Similarly, Dosal (2013) has addressed specifically the affective dimension in SFL lessons and the affectiveness of techniques such as the dynamics of groups to overcome negative attitudes, stereotypes and prejudices with regard to the target language.

In the scope of foreign languages, we follow the interesting journey that makes Martín Sánchez (2010) from the most traditional approaches such as the grammar-translation method to communicative approaches. This author insists on consideration of this process as a scientific evolution and not so much as a *revolution*, since “most of the methods take as point of departure for their thoughts, ideas, proposals, beliefs, techniques and procedures of previous methods that precede” (Martín Sánchez, 2010: 64).

## 2. The teaching of languages in Europe. Approaches and methodological changes

The current configuration of the European Union and the indications of the Council of Europe on the need to deepen in knowledge of languages have resulted in the convergence of the education policies of the Member States, at the time some differences caused by different historical, economic, social or political factors are maintained (Morales Gálvez, 2009). There is no doubt that the publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference* was a milestone in educational policies and the convergence on objectives, criteria, approaches, contents and forms of evaluation and language learning objectification, although it was actually the continuation of a series of earlier proposals in which it was already arosed the necessity that the European citizen knew at least two (or even three) languages in addition to their own. In terms of the evolution and current trends in teaching-learning of European languages, Carmen Morales Gálvez has dealt this topic in depth: for this author, the evolution has been marked, on the one hand, by the convergence between educational policies in the EU and, on the other hand, the maintenance of some differences which can be explained by the circumstances of each country; these differences include (Morales Gálvez, 2009: 29):

- a) The linguistic reality of the country that is, the number of languages that are spoken in each of the states either official or not.
- b) The different degree of need for the population of a determined country with regard to the learning of foreign languages, i.e., the number of speakers that their mother tongue has in other countries (with the UK and Ireland as an example in a case, and countries like Sweden or Slovakia at the other end).
- c) The differences caused by the existence of different traditions in terms of the methodological approach of teaching and in consideration of the societies towards foreign languages.

Already in 1976 (25 years before the publication of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching, evaluation*) The Council of Europe and the EU requested the States Members to promote the learning of at least one foreign language; in 1995 the European Commission’s White book: *Teaching and learning: towards the knowledge society*, set language learning among its five objectives and recommended that citizens were able to express themselves –at the end of compulsory schooling- as a minimum in two foreign languages (Morales Gálvez, 2009: 18). Without a doubt, the appearance in 2001 of CEFR had a great impact on the teaching of foreign languages: although it is not a binding document, the majority of countries mention it in their curricula and recommend its use for the evaluation of linguistic levels.

The result of the progressive introduction of foreign languages (in number and in variety) at various levels of education is a more communicative competence and also a bigger linguistic awareness (Morales Gálvez, 2009: 24). As far as learning is concerned, the majority of European curricula establish broad frameworks that make reference to the acquisition of the four skills (in some cases with oral preference) and the student as the center of the process.

In terms of the learning of Spanish as FL, authors such as Sánchez Lobato (1994) have developed over the years several works in which stands out the shift in focus that it has suffered, from the more traditional approaches that

have been outlined above until the current approach, more focused on communication and acquisition of communicative competence without ignoring the grammatical competence.

For Sánchez lobato (1994), there is not an ideal linguistic model that results in the perfect learning mechanism, and he underlines that the conception of a method for the teaching of second languages must necessarily be eclectic (Sánchez Lobato, 1994: 176), “and should start – as it cannot be another way – from language as a system of social communication, the synchronous shaft, the most alive and fresh language but always teaching and learning have to take root in the standard register, in the educated norm” (Sánchez Lobato, 1994: 177).

### 3. Central and Eastern European countries

In central and Eastern Europe, the political, social and economic circumstances have influenced no doubt in the configuration of SFL studies, as has been highlighted by Alfaya (2004) among other authors.

In these countries, as in the rest of the continent it will be in the 19th century the moment it was established the basis for the teaching of foreign languages, mostly because of the industrial revolution and commerce. On the other hand, the nationalist component and the multilingualism of some states (such as the Austro-Hungarian Empire) will affect the interest of Germany and Russia in the area, which will result in the implementation of their respective languages in compulsory education in Central Europe for long periods in the 19th and 20th centuries (Alfaya, 2004: 152).

Since the Second World War the preponderance of Russian in the Soviet orbit states will be evident until 1989, although, in some of these countries (e.g. Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania) are established bilingual schools in other languages and are prepared projects for early teaching of foreign languages from the 60's, which makes us thinking that the differences with the rest of Europe are not as significant as we might think at first. Neither the majority of these countries will be apart from the general trend that spreads from the 1970's and that is embodied in the adoption of the communicative approach (Alfaya, 2004: 153-154). Some examples of this early adoption of the communicative approach would be Estonia (1961), Poland (1965) or Romania (1974) among others. During the 1980's this approach will be gradually introduced in all countries, and as a result, the methodological changes in the 1990's. In any case, what is obvious is the fact that the political changes affected the new methodological guidelines, and, on the other hand, will include information on the culture and society of the foreign language chosen as well as the values of western societies (Alfaya, 2004: 154).

In terms of skills (Alfaya, 2004: 162-163), at the beginning, it is a priority the spoken language, and then a new trend will suggest a balance of the four skills. In short, in the author's words:

In general, learning a foreign language is understood not as a learning about the language but as preparation for students to be able to use and communicate in the language used. The main methodological recommendation is that education must respect the needs and interests of the student. Games are set to lower the error, and the use of the mother tongue is recommended mainly for grammatical explanations (Alfaya, 2004: 172).

### 4. Studies of SFL in the Slovak Republic

Lenghardtová (2002) and Montoro Cano (2013) have dealt with the issue on, so we obtain a very interesting diachronic perspective of the process and the current situation. We can place the beginning of hispanism in Czechoslovakia in 1838, when *Novelas Ejemplares* (Exemplary novels) by Miguel de Cervantes were translated into Czech; among the translators we highlight Vladimir Oleriny and Ladislav Franek. However, before 1940 there is no academic qualification that prepares Spanish teachers (they are prepared, since 1919, in studies in Romance Philology at the Carolina University in Prague or at the Masaryk University in Brno (Montoro Cano, 2013).

In terms of superior teaching centers, Spanish studies date back to the 1940-1941 course; at this time the government of Slovakia (separated from the Czech Republic after the Nazi occupation) joined the study of Spanish to the Superior School of Commerce in Bratislava (predecessor of the University of Economics). Degree in Hispanic Philology will come in 1955 at the Faculty of Letters at the Comenius University in Bratislava (Montoro Cano, 2013).

Gonzalo Álvarez (2007: 312) assesses as moments of special interest for the study of SFL the resonance of the Cuban revolution in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, as well as the revolution of 1989 and the incorporation of Slovakia to the European institutions and NATO in 2004. The velvet Revolution (1989) started a trend of replacement of the Slovak teachers of Spanish to native teachers, fact that entailed multiple advantages, but

no doubt also comport – as noted – ignorance of the most frequent problems that could have L1 Slovak students in their learning of Spanish. On the other hand, the arrival of mostly Spanish teachers resulted in a change in general in relation to the standard, and in many cases put Slovak students for the first time in front of the Castilian standard of Spanish (as opposed to the Atlantic one, common up to that time). According to the methodology, and in Montoro Cano's words (2013: 7):

The methodology for the teaching- learning process of the Spanish language in Eastern European countries and Slovakia, in particular, is based on the comparative method of the two linguistic systems, Spanish and Slovak, for several decades. (...) the dissolution of the Soviet Union coincided with the establishment of a new discipline based on the methodological study of the Spanish teaching. This meant the drafting of new manuals and new didactic units whose methods were far from the traditional method of translation. (...) the authentic manuals of Spanish origin, actual contact with the Iberian Peninsula, that beat Latin American ties in this new era of the Spanish teaching, and the incorporation of new information technologies, imply a change in the form of acquisition of the Spanish language and the results, compared to the first time. Therefore, it is currently more frequent that students express themselves with the Castilian standard and not the Atlantic.

Today Spanish in Slovakia is a language of the future, which is studied in all educational levels (although in primary is much lower than English, German, French or Russian). In high schools, it is interesting to mention the existence of seven bilingual centers (Nitra, Bratislava, Kosice, Trstená, Žilina, Banská, Bystrica and Nové Mesto) in which students attend half of the subjects in Spanish and the other half is Slovak. In terms of the superior studies there are six universities where students can study the degree in Hispanic Philology and three others where they can study Spanish for specific purposes as FL.

## 5. Conclusions

- There is a recent demand for Spanish as a foreign language in university studies, for various reasons, among them we must note the European integration (Erasmus and job prospects) and the existing tradition in Slovakia since the 1940's that is intensified with the Cuban Revolution.
- Changes in the approach of SFL teaching almost in parallel to the West changes before 1989, and since then, convergence in terms of objectives and teaching approaches, above all from the entry into the EU. However, already before 1989 there is a penetration of communicative approaches in the teaching of languages in these countries, contrary to what has been commonly thought.
- The passage from a method mainly comparative to strictly communicative practices has not been without difficulties.
- The political and economic changes have been definitive for the implementation of the communicative approach, the intercultural dimension (this may be one of the most innovative aspects) and the use of Castilian standard more often than Atlantic (reverse trend from the previous period).

## References

- Alfaya Hurtado, F. J. (2004). La enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras: los países de Europa central y oriental (1974-2004), *Revista Española de Educación Comparada*, 10, pp. 151-178.
- Alvarado, S. (1995). *Gramática de eslovaco para eslavistas*. Madrid: Universidad Complutense.
- Borsuková, H. (2004). Interkultúrny aspekt cudzojazyčného vyučovania (intercultural aspect of foreign language teaching), *Zborník z medzinárodnej konferencie MVD*. Nitra: SPU, pp. 270-273.
- Delgado, E., Šajgaliková, H. (2008). Transparency in the acquired language competences, *Actas del V Congreso ACLES*. Pamplona: Universidad de Navarra. pp. 24-29.
- (2010). *Španielčina pre samoukov a pre jazykové kurzy*. 1. vyd. Bratislava: Aktuell.
- Dosal Pelayo, A. (2013). La dimensión afectiva en la clase de ELE: la dinámica de grupos, *Actas del XVI Encuentro de Profesores de Español de Eslovaquia*. Bratislava: Embajada de España en Eslovaquia, pp. 34-42.
- González Álvarez, V. (2007). El español en Eslovaquia, *El español en el mundo. Anuario 2006-2007*. Madrid: Instituto Cervantes, pp. 312-316.
- Jančovičová, L'. (2004). The role of motivation in foreign language education, *Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice, Faculty of Humanities, Supplement 10*. Pardubice: Fakulta Humanitních Studií, pp. 67-70.
- (2003). Európska dimenzia v jazykovom vzdelávaní, in *Slovenské školstvo v kontexte európskej integrácie*. Nitra: Útv Pfkuf v Nitre. 1.vyd.s prílohou CD ROM.

- Kucharčík, R. (2002). Reforma EÚ / dôraz na reformu inštitúcií, in *Európa medzi identitou a integritou*. Prešov: Filozofická fakulta Prešovskej Univerzity, pp. 179-185.
- Lenghardtová, J. (1998). El español en las universidades eslovacas, *Cuadernos Cervantes de la lengua española*, vol. 4, 21, pp. 7-16.
- (2002). Los estudios iberoamericanos en Eslovaquia, *Revista de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, 72, pp. 95-103.
- Martín Sánchez, M. A. (2008). El papel de la gramática en la enseñanza-aprendizaje de ELE, *Ogigia. Revista electrónica de estudios hispánicos*, 3, pp. 29-41.
- (2010). Apuntes a la historia de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras: la enseñanza de la gramática, *Tejuelo*, 8, pp. 59-75.
- Montoro Cano, E. (2013). Los estudios de español como E/LE en Eslovaquia, *Tonos Digital. Revista Electrónica de Estudios Filológicos*, 25 [on line] <http://www.um.es/tonosdigital/znum26/00index.htm> December, 20, 2013.
- Morales Gálvez, C. (2009). La enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en la Unión Europea, *Educación y Futuro*, 20, pp. 17-30.
- Muñoz Restrepo, A. P. (2010). Metodología para la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. Hacia una perspectiva crítica, *Revista Universitaria EAFIT*. vol. 46, 159, pp. 71-85.
- Pauliny, E. (1981). *Slovenská gramatika*. Bratislava: SPN.
- Rodríguez Gonzalo, C. (2011). La reflexión sobre la lengua y la enseñanza de la gramática, *Textos de Didáctica de la Lengua y la Literatura*, 58, pp. 60-73.
- (2012). La enseñanza de la gramática: las relaciones entre la reflexión y el uso lingüístico, *Revista Iberoamericana de Educación*, 59, pp. 87-118.
- Romero Farfán, C. A. (2012). Lingüística, gramática y aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras, *Cuadernos de Lingüística Hispánica*, 19. pp. 169-184.
- Sánchez Lobato (1994). Aspectos metodológicos en la enseñanza del español como lengua extranjera ASELE. *Actas IV*. Centro Virtual Cervantes [on line] [http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca\\_ele/asele/pdf/04/04\\_0175.pdf](http://cvc.cervantes.es/ensenanza/biblioteca_ele/asele/pdf/04/04_0175.pdf) January, 14, 2014.