Espero: Spanish Grammar in the Context of Personal and Cultural Identity

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Synopsis

Mastery of the subjunctive mood in any language is particularly difficult for speakers of English. The subjunctive mood is very weak in contemporary English usage. In Spanish, the subjunctive is very much alive, and critical to almost any expression of wish, desire, or conjecture. The Spanish subjunctive clearly demarcates whether the speaker is talking about something real or conjectural, and conveys shades of meaning inaccessible to the Anglophone speaker who fails to comprehend it.

Using the theme *Espero* ["I hope"] as a starting point, students will compose a narrative talking about their hopes and aspirations for the future. While the structure of the assignment gives ample opportunity for practice of a wide range of grammatical forms and structures, I intend to concentrate on the subjunctive as a focal point. In this way, concentrating on one particular modality of the language will allow me to use the autobiographical narrative as a pre-assessment or benchmark with which to compare students' later output, after they have had the opportunity for structured interaction with native speakers. In order to enhance the students' motivation, the personal essay will reach its final form as a Microsoft Photo Story document.

Next, my students will partner with a volunteer native speaker of Spanish from my high school's English as a Second Language program. The structure of the oral history interview will intentionally mirror the pattern established in the students' own personal narratives. My students will invite their volunteers to speak about hopes and aspirations for the future and will document their responses. My students will prepare a brief biographical profile for each volunteer and will produce transcripts of excerpted portions of the interview they find particularly illustrative. My students will also compose an essay or character sketch summarizing the interview, along with a brief personal reflection on what they learned from the experience. The final essays I will evaluate for correct use of the subjunctive. I'm hoping to see an increase in accuracy over the first segment.

By encouraging students to express themselves, and by embedding the learning experience in the context of a real exchange with a peer, I am hoping to elevate and enrich the students' learning experience. The unit is targeted at teaching a particular facet of the language, the subjunctive. Beyond that, and more importantly, I hope to teach students what a second language (or indeed, a first language) is for: to express ourselves, to communicate, to make connections, and to access the experience and wisdom of others.

My Unit

I will be teaching a unit on the uses of the subjunctive mood for expressing hope and desire

aimed at high school students in their third year of Spanish. The first segment, a composition exercise, will begin around the first week in November and will continue until Thanksgiving. The second segment, an oral history project, will begin after Thanksgiving and will conclude the second week in December.

Introduction

"When you use object pronouns incorrectly, you sound uneducated. When you use verb tenses incorrectly, you sound like a foreigner. When you use the subjunctive incorrectly, you sound like a mental defective." My professor went on. "It's not a problem of grammar. It's a defect in character."

I was sharing a taxi in Madrid with the director of the international school where I was studying, two or three days after the fall of the Berlin Wall. She went on. "Americans never learn to use the subjunctive correctly. You can explain the rules of the subjunctive mood to an American a thousand times, but he will never get it right. The problem is not the grammar. The grammar is very simple. The American doesn't make mistakes because he doesn't understand the rule. He knows the rule. He makes mistakes in the subjunctive because he doesn't understand the difference between wishes and reality. He can't distinguish between what he hopes for and what is real. It's a delusional state. It's hubris. It's the reason the whole world hates you so much."

That, and seatbelts, evidently. She went on to reprimand me for using a seat belt. "I know you wear seat belts in the United States, but you mustn't wear one in Spain. You can't imagine how effeminate it looks to see a man afraid to ride in a car. If you're afraid to ride in a car, you should take the metro. A seat belt is not going to help you. When it's your time, it's your time. Americans are unbelievable. You drop seven million tons of bombs on Vietnamese women and children, but you're afraid to ride across town in a taxi. It's why everyone hates you."

"I thought it was because of the subjunctive," I said.

She sighed. "There are so many reasons. Take the war. You didn't beat us. It was the weather. Yet you take all the credit."

"The war of 1898?" I was puzzled. "Or the war with Mexico?"

"The Armada," she said.

"That wasn't us," I said. "That was the English."

"It's the same thing."

"It's not at all!"

"It's exactly the same thing. You Anglo-Saxons."

"I'm American," I said. "I'm not Anglo-Saxon."

"Of course you are!"

"I'm Irish," I said. "The Anglo-Saxons don't like us."

"Impossible."

I gave up. "*Dudo que el mundo realmente nos odia.* [I doubt the world really hates us.]" I said.

My professor erupted. "*¡Tonto! ¡Te mato! 'Dudo que el mundo realmente nos* odie.*'* [Idiot! I slay you! I doubt the world really *hate* us.] You see what I'm talking about?"

Rationale

Mastery of the subjunctive mood in any language is particularly difficult for speakers of English. Unlike most other modern European languages, the English subjunctive mood has been in steady decline since the fourteenth century. In her doctoral dissertation, Evangelina María Pando Solís asks whether the subjunctive mood even exists in English. According to Anita Auer's reading of grammarian John White (1761), by the eighteenth century the use of the subjunctive in English served mainly as a status marker in the upper echelons of society. Whether or not one agrees with L. Kip Wheeler's opinion that the subjunctive mood in English is "fossilized" in a few stock phrases and virtually extinct, it is fair to say the subjunctive mood in English does not enjoy the place of prominence it holds in some other languages.

To an English speaker, the inflected subjunctive mood is the relic of a relic, a Baroque archaism, and something of a nuisance. After all, who says *wert* anymore? Doesn't the conditional mood serve just as well? In Spanish, though, it is another story altogether. In Spanish, the subjunctive is used to express the entire realm of wish, hypothesis, conjecture, and doubt. It is used in all registers of speech, instinctively, with little regard for educational background. As one commentator said,

No recuerdo nunca haber estudiado los casos en que obligatoriamente debamos usar el subjuntivo. Creo que lo asimilamos inconscientemente con el aprendizaje del idioma.

[I don't ever remember having studied the cases in which we are obligated to use the subjunctive. I think we assimilate it unconsciously with the learning of the language.]

Carmela Hernández García, my mentor in Spanish grammar, pointed out the importance of the difference in the use of the subjunctive mood between Spanish and English for English speaking learners of Spanish. In Spanish, where the use of the subjunctive is intuitive and natural to most speakers, an inability to use the subjunctive correctly comes across not simply as a grammatical limitation, but as a cognitive one. According to Hernández, it makes it sound as though the speaker cannot ascertain between the real and the imaginary or conjectural, contributing to negative cultural stereotypes of English speakers as being uniquely childlike, obstinate, and simple minded, living in a sort of dream state.

Even the way language is taught within a given language community would appear to shape cultural perceptions. It wasn't until years later—working on this curriculum unit, actually—that I understood why my professor made the leap, which appeared a non sequitur to me, from Anglophones' poor command of the subjunctive to our alleged lily-livered temperaments. Growing up studying in the United States, listings I saw of the conditions where the Spanish subjunctive is used always started with "doubt," usually followed by "conjecture." However, I found when I quizzed educated native Spanish speakers about circumstances when the subjunctive is used, the list always began with "*temor*"—"fear."

It is a case where a user's grammatical precision bears unexpected ontological weight, well beyond a "mere" marker of social standing—unexpected, at least, to an Anglophone raised in the optimistic, egalitarian milieu of North American comprehensive schooling.

Pando Solís points out that the use of the subjunctive is by no means uniform across the Spanish-speaking world, especially among bilingual speakers. Still, no native speaker would confuse

Busco a una mujer que tiene una pierna ortopédica.

[I'm looking for a woman who has a prosthetic leg.]

with

Busco a una mujer que tenga una pierna ortopédica.

[I'm looking for a woman who have a prosthetic leg.]

In the first case, I'm looking for a specific woman whom I know to have a prosthetic leg. In the second, I'm simply hoping, for whatever reason, to meet a woman with a prosthetic leg. Distinctions like this are made all the time in Spanish, and it's important my intermediate students recognize them and are able to communicate them.

Objectives

Regardless of the standards referred to, whether national or state, the three main objectives addressed are: communicate using the L2, interpret language in the L2, and present information in the L2. These will be amply addressed in the course of the unit.

Thematically, in terms of specific course content, the formation and especially the uses of the subjunctive mood are the single largest element of the Spanish III curriculum my district uses.

Additionally, although the actual work will take place in a classroom setting, I believe this unit addresses standards for community involvement and participation, since students will be interacting with native speakers from outside their own classroom.

Students and Setting

I teach at Independence High School, a large urban high school in Charlotte, North Carolina. Our enrolment is listed online at 2,695, but I believe this year it's closer to 2,200. 28.6% of students receive free or reduced lunch. The student body is 48% African American, 40% Caucasian, and 8% Hispanic. Data on the percentage of migrant students are not available.

My Spanish III Honors class falls within the Academy for International Studies at Independence High School (AIS). The AIS is a school within a school, part of the International Studies Schools Network of schools funded by the Asia Society, which in turn is funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Academy for International Studies has about 300 students. The demographics of the students in my class reflect more or less what I would have in a sampling of students from the larger school population.

The Academy for International Studies is a magnet program. It is my subjective impression that students here face higher parental and peer expectations regarding academic achievement than do similar students in the larger school. The exact impact of such pressure on learner motivation and language acquisition remains unclear. The prior knowledge of Spanish is comparable to what I would expect in a regular third-year Spanish class. There is a considerable range. We have one native speaker—a college educated native speaker, no less. We have more than one student who struggles with formation and comprehension of stock phrases from the first year of Spanish. We have a substantial mass of learners in between.

The motivation the students express for learning Spanish is almost exclusively extrinsic: students want a good grade in Spanish so they can win admission to college and scholarship money. A few have expressed or demonstrated a more personal and less utilitarian motivation. For example, I do have students who report interacting with Spanish speaking friends and neighbors and attending concerts of Spanish language artists. I have a pair of guitarists to whom I am indebted for bringing live performance of Spanish language music into the classroom. One is even learning the accordion to master the Tijuana sound. There are signs overall in the classroom of the integrative motivation that Norris cites as characterising successful L2 learners.

To my discouragement, a large number of the students have expressed a desire *only* to learn enough Spanish to get a good grade, and have explicitly stated they do *not* wish to become fluent. I have a hunch this relates to students' ethnic identity. This brings to mind the studies of Elizabeth Gatbonton and others on the relationship between ethnic identity and affiliation and second language acquisition. Gatbonton's research discusses the impact on L2 *pronunciation* when learners belong to an ethnic group that perceives itself as threatened or challenged. Comments my students have made would seem to link the same process to mastery of grammar as well, suggesting that students see grammar as much of a marker of group identity as pronunciation.

Part One of the Unit: The Personal Narrative

Using the theme *Espero* ["I hope"] as a starting point, students will compose a narrative talking

about their hopes and aspirations for the future. In the first half of the narrative they will:

identify themselves
- establish their current geographical and social setting
- give a brief biographical background
- describe themselves: discuss their interests, preferences, and hobbies.

In the second part of the narrative, students will discuss their hopes and aspirations for the future. While the structure of the assignment gives ample opportunity for practice of a wide range of grammatical forms and structures, I intend to concentrate on the subjunctive as a focal point. In this way, concentrating on one particular modality of the language will allow me to use the autobiographical narrative as a pre-assessment or benchmark with which to compare students' later output, after they have had the opportunity for structured interaction with native speakers.

In order to enhance the students' motivation, the personal essay will reach its final form as a Microsoft Photo Story document. Photo Story allows creators to blend photographs and other images together with text and audio into an integrated video clip. Photo Story files are fully portable across platforms. Students will be able to view each other's work in class on the Promethean interactive white board. While there have been administrative delays of late in our system impeding the establishment of class web sites, it is my hope to clear any bureaucratic hurdles and post my students' work online. Creating such a document will be a very different experience from a traditional static essay that has no life apart from completing the requirements of a particular assignment in order to satisfy a particular teacher.

Part Two of the Unit: The Oral History Project

For the second segment, my students will partner with a volunteer native speaker of Spanish from my high school's English as a Second Language program. I have partnered with the ESL program creating oral histories in the past. Both teachers and students are eager to participate in such a project again. The project received favorable attention last year and enjoys the support of school administration.

The ESL student volunteers represent a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Some will be relative or complete newcomers; others will have been in the United States for some time and indeed may have participated in last year's oral history project. Among the volunteers are students who immigrated to the United States flying first class and others who walked across the desert on foot. Some have educational backgrounds analogous to those of students at top high schools in our district, while others have experienced interruptions in their education due to the demands of agricultural labor. The volunteers, in sum, are as diverse a group as my own students. The structure of the oral history interview will intentionally mirror the pattern established in the students' own personal narratives. In the initial segment of the interview, my students will ask questions to establish their volunteer's

identity
- point of origin

current geographical and social setting
biographical background, in brief
interests, preferences, and hobbies.

Next, the students will invite their volunteers to speak about hopes and aspirations for the future and will document their responses. My students will prepare a brief biographical profile for each volunteer and will produce transcripts of those excerpted portions of the interview which they find particularly illustrative. My students will also compose an essay or character sketch summarizing the interview, along with a brief personal reflection on what they learned from the experience.

The oral history project is a more traditional project than the first part of the unit, insofar as oral history is a discipline of its own with its own conventions. I want students to understand that they are not simply fulfilling the requirements of one assignment for one course. They are participating in the wider discipline of oral history, documenting the American experience and the global experience of transnational migration from the point of view of ordinary people. I will give students incentive to submit at least one element of the oral history project in digital audio, video, or other non-print medium.

The final essays I will evaluate for correct use of the subjunctive. I'm hoping to see an increase in accuracy over the first segment. I am intrigued by Long and Porter's suggestion that pairing of *non*-native speakers may be more effective than the pairing of a native speaker with a second language learner. Since my students do a good deal of peer pair work already, it will be interesting to ask them to compare and contrast their experiences with native and non-native speakers.

The question of effectiveness depends in large part on the criteria by which we define effectiveness. In theory, a primary end purpose of learning a second language is communication and meaningful interaction with others who are L1 speakers of that language. In terms of teaching culture in the classroom, the trend when I was a novice learner was a holidays and handicrafts approach, mostly involving "fun" activities to expose students to superficial elements of cultural celebrations. Later, this gave way to "realía," bringing in authentic samples of artifacts and media to highlight particular elements of culture, more like show and tell. The trend that I'm hearing more and more of at workshops is a "communication first" model for teaching culture: teachers should not necessarily seek to teach a culture not their own at all, but should rather teach students to communicate with native speakers so that students may then experience cultures of the L2 first hand. On the surface it is an ambitious approach, though I suspect it is more driven by the emergence of standardized testing in the field of world languages. It is relatively easy to predict what vocabulary and structures will be on a given test, whereas culture is not likely to be tested at all. Nonetheless, I do think it important to create situations where students have the opportunity to communicate with native speakers in ways that are meaningful to both.

Activities

In addition to providing me with an opportunity to make baseline observations about the

students' proficiency, the personal narrative assignment that comprises the first half of this curriculum unit serves an organizational and social purpose. As a means of helping the students with the oral history component later, the autobiographical assignment introduces the structure of the interview process that will follow later by having the students ask themselves the same questions they will later ask of another. Socially, the public and performance nature of the project will hopefully sensitize them to the kinds of feelings their interviewees may experience later.

Activity 1: The Personal Narrative

I will introduce the personal narrative activity by showing the students multimedia personal narratives composed by students at other schools and posted on the Internet. Showing them the quality of work that can be created through digital storytelling media by even novice language learners should motivate the class.

The Script

Next, I'll start them on a rough draft of their script. My hope is that couching the description of the writing component of this activity in the terminology of a dramatic script or teleplay will evoke a different response from the students than telling them they're going to "write an essay using the subjunctive."

On the first day, students will be asked to write a prologue to their script introducing themselves and establishing the setting. They should tell their names, ages, and place of birth. Students should state where they now live and how long they have lived here. Students should make a brief statement of their family and educational backgrounds—with whom they live and their school and year in school. Students should give a brief description of themselves, their tastes, and their preferences. The majority of this will be in the present indicative and will reflect subject matter they have addressed orally and in writing in the past, which should provide a non-threatening introduction to the unit.

On subsequent days, students will develop the main body of their narratives. We will brainstorm as a class about personal ambitions and aspirations and then later they will write individually, with an emphasis on fluidity of expression rather than on grammar. As a separate exercise, students will review the use of the subjunctive for expressing wish and desire, and will be invited to polish their scripts accordingly.

Above all I aim to emphasize to the students that they are writing for performance. Formal correctness is not an end to itself, hopefully, but should be understood as one tool among many the students employ to deliver a more compelling and expressive performance. For the sake of illustration, I may give them a brief selection of dialogue in English from a work known to most of them and show them how the impact of the passage would be changed by significantly altering the grammar. By asking students to take roles and act out the original and grammatically adulterated versions, I think the importance and impact of accurate grammatical structures could be driven home to no small comedic effect. We generally want to avoid using the L1, of course, but I think this method might convey in ten minutes of class time what otherwise might take me

eighteen weeks to get across—if ever.

Digital Storytelling

By way of a small miracle and a grant my department won this year, I have access to a collection of laptops with headphones and microphones for classroom use, all equipped with Audacity and Microsoft Photo Story. The students will be asked to pair up on the laptops at times. Strategic pairing of partners should insure a level of linguistic and technological assistance and positive peer support for those who need it, not to mention adding a social and companionable element to the assignment.

To the extent that there is a "traditional" digital storytelling format, the model I most often see employed uses a voiceover accompanied by images thematically strung together to create a brief motion picture of five minutes or so. Some work on the digital storytelling unit will be done solo, in shifts, particularly the audio recording component where students give voice to their scripts. This should alleviate some of the anxiety students may feel delivering a personal narrative directly in the presence of another.

Students will be encouraged to create or collect the images they use for the visual component at home or on their own time, though some class time is likely to be necessary. We will have a session, using the Promethean board for display, demonstrating how to search the Internet for appropriate images. The element that concerns me the most is getting students to properly credit any images they have not created themselves. Unfortunately, in the student digital storytelling units I'm accustomed to seeing from other subject areas, the intellectual property issues involved in using images taken from the Internet are seldom addressed when doing this type of project. My students have had a number of workshops on correct citation format and the use of online citation generators, and should have another before this project begins. Given the chance, though, students love to take pictures, and I'm hoping they can be persuaded the easiest course of action is to create their own images.

As a conclusion to this segment of the assignment, I will bill the due date not as a deadline, but as the Fall Semester Spanish Three Film Festival. I have a Promethean interactive white board which can lend an atmosphere reminiscent of a small art house cinema to a room, with a little imagination. The students will no doubt see through my ruse—a deadline is a deadline—but I think it's a worthwhile experiment. I'm hoping that concluding the first segment on a fun note will generate enthusiasm for the second activity, which is admittedly a little daunting.

Rubric

For scoring purposes, I will evaluate the digital storytelling project as such:
Is the story in standard Spanish, generally? 1-5 points; 1=very limited intelligibility; 5=near native proficiency
Does the story properly employ the subjunctive? 1-5 points; 1=not at all; 5=completely
Does the narrative relate the required information? 15 points
Identity and point of origin
Geographical and social setting

Biographical background, in brief
Interests, preferences, and hobbies.
Hopes and aspirations for the future
Are sources properly cited? 5 points

Activity Two: The Interview and Oral History Project

This can be a tough sell at first, but the sooner the students get the idea that a large part of the assignment involves sitting around talking with another student—another student, for that matter, who is probably willing to teach them Spanish words which, while potentially useful, their teacher is professionally bound *not* to teach them—they warm up to the idea.

What is Oral History?

In the past, I've expended significant effort explaining to students the concept of oral history and its social, intellectual, and political implications for the study of history over the course of the last century. I've also discovered that during the last block of the day that's a sure way to put at least fifteen of them into a deep slumber, so this semester I'll just lead off by showing them samples of previous student work and challenging my current students to do better. Given the corpus of student work I collected last year, I should be able to show them a sample that will inspire them along with a couple others to convince them the bar isn't set too high.

Jumping in With Both Feet

The social and collaborative element to this project is the key to its success. Rather than spinning our wheels with a lot of buildup and preparation, I will introduce students to Spanish L1 student volunteers I collect from our school's ESL classes and from the Spanish Club. I can offer to sign volunteers off on school mandated community service hours for participating if I have to, but I do not have difficulty finding native speakers of Spanish who wish to be treated as a subject matter expert and get interviewed like celebrities. It's a lot of fun for the volunteers.

I find it profitable to prepare my students with a brief review of interview etiquette, as much as cross-cultural etiquette. Especially in the context of this assignment, it's a good idea for my students to be just a little more polite than they normally would be. I explain to them that they'll get better material out of their interviewee, and with less effort, if their volunteer feels important and appreciated. From a cross-cultural standpoint, many Spanish L1 teenagers do not habitually observe classic conventions of etiquette such as standing whenever one is introducing someone or when introduced to another. Nonetheless, they are aware of those conventions and appreciate being on the receiving end of such gestures.

In the first session with the Spanish L1 volunteers, my students will pair off with a partner who seems like a safe bet. Volunteers will be given a standard waiver for an oral history project. Any number of such waivers are in the public domain online, made available by different oral history initiatives. (I list a couple of downloadable samples in English and Spanish in the section Teacher Resources.) Most volunteers, as minors, will take the forms home to have them signed.

In the first meeting, my students will collect only the most basic information. They'll obtain their volunteer's basic biographical data, the same data my students gave about themselves when they began their digital storytelling project. They'll get their volunteers' names, place of origin, the length of time they've been in the United States, and a brief sketch of their family situation and educational background. They'll thank the student volunteers and the volunteers will go back to their regular classrooms. My students will write up this information in a good succinct paragraph, thus concluding the first stage of the oral history project. It will be a few days before they see their volunteers in the classroom again, giving us time to sort out any major issues of personal compatibility. We'll proofread and edit our paragraphs, and before they know it they'll be done with what will form the preface to their oral history project when it reaches its final form.

Question Writing

It's worth spending the better part of a class period getting students to work on creating good questions. Effort up front truly pays off in the final project. If they happen to get paired with an unexpectedly reticent interviewee, good question writing can save the day.

It helps to get students thinking about the dramatic arc by asking them about the arc other events follow. Is there a pattern or series of stages to a meal in a mid-priced chain restaurant? We'll brainstorm: of course there is. Start with a beverage, followed by an incredibly fattening salty appetizer, followed by a fattening salty salad with bread of some kind which satiate the diners before they even receive the salty, fattening entrée, and finish with a dessert which is not only fattening but which also, surprisingly, may contain as much sodium as the preceding meal. What about…a movie? A couple examples are sufficient, and with familiar subject matter, this isn't too hard for them to do in the target language.

We then review the literary dramatic arc as it relates to our particular genre, the oral history interview, and to this particular project:

Exposición: greet the volunteer, thank the volunteer for his or her time and participation, and restate the purpose of the interview—"I'm going to ask you to tell a little about yourself and the things you like to do, and then we'll talk about your hopes and aspirations for the future."
Acción ascendente: starting off with simple factual questions with low emotional import, gradually build up to questions requiring more elaboration. Here, volunteers will describe themselves and will tell what they wish to tell of their migration to the United States, leading up to their present situation.
Climax: ask the volunteer to talk about his or her hopes and aspirations for the future. Here it will be helpful to have gathered a little information about personal interests in the initial meeting.
Acción descendente: follow up with questions on a few specific additional details about something the interviewee said earlier. Move once again towards simpler questions asking for concrete details about matters of positive or neutral emotional import.
Desenlace: thank the interviewees again for participating. Wish volunteers a good afternoon and offer your hopes for their success in reaching their goals.

Students will work in groups to compose sample questions which they will post on poster paper. Students will be invited to borrow or steal for themselves questions they think will help them with their own interviewee, and will be asked to have a list of at least twenty good questions to ask before the interview session.

The Interview

For the day of the interview we'll be back to the laptops. I'm trying to avoid using audio cassette recorders if possible. We'll bring back the volunteers—possibly in shifts—and my students will conduct their interviews, recording them either in a video or audio format. Since the laptops have camera capability, a video format may be the best option, as it will offer my students visual cues when working on their transcriptions. Working from a disembodied voice on the phone or in a recording is very difficult for the novice learner.

Once they conclude the interview, my students will immediately get to work on their transcripts. Students need not transcribe the whole interview, only a few salient questions and answers, or about three quarters of a page. Students closer to low to middle novice level Spanish proficiency may want to get direct feedback from their volunteers on the accuracy of the transcription.

The Biographical Essay

Once the transcription is complete, my students will write a biographical essay summarizing the findings of interview. They'll describe their interviewees, just as they described themselves earlier, and give a recounting of some of their interviewee's hopes and aspirations for the future. In the final form, this will serve as a synopsis to accompany the transcript. This part of the assignment should determine whether students are able to make the transition in tense from statements in the first or second person to statements in the third person. It's also where I get to check for real comprehension and the ability to synthesize information. It can be especially telling to compare and contrast a student's transcription section with the summary biographical essay. At times a student who struggles with the transcription may still produce a summary essay showing remarkable comprehension, and vice versa. This may reflect difficulties with the mechanics of spelling in the L2, especially where there is contamination from English spelling conventions. More often, it can be an indicator that the student completed one section or another with substantial assistance. Two paragraphs should give me a sufficient sample to assess any progress my students have made in their developing understanding of the subjunctive mood.

Reflection

My students will conclude the project with a paragraph of reflection on what they have learned, gained, or experienced in the course of completing the oral history portion of this unit. This portion of the assignment is intended to nudge students towards an admission that they actually experienced learning, personal growth, or both in a classroom setting.

Multimedia

Students will submit actual written documents to me for the preface introducing the oral history, the transcription, the biographical essay, and the summative paragraph of personal reflection. In the spirit of keeping the project engaging and dynamic, though, students will be rewarded in the scoring of their work for submitting a multimedia segment along with the text. This could be an audio clip of the actual interview, a supplementary video clip of the interviewee, or a recording of the students' personal reflections on the experience. While I don't want this to be an empty "bonus" section, I do want to give my students some autonomy and free choice.

Rubric

I will score the oral history project out of 40 points:

Does the project include all the elements? 25 points
Biographical paragraph
Transcription
Biographical essay summarizing interview
Interviewer reflections on the process
Multimedia component
Does the project reflect adequate care and attention to formal detail, including proofreading? 5 points
Did the interviewer obtain a signed waiver? 5 points
Does the final project engage the reader's interest? 5 points
Are the questions compelling? 2 points
What is the aesthetic quality of the multimedia element? 1 point
Is this something I would want to read, hear, or watch? 2 points

Further Thoughts

In my initial prospectus, I proposed to finish the unit with a videoconference with a classroom of native speakers in another country or another part of the United States. I have had to re-examine that proposition, at least regarding implementation in the short term. I think the challenges of the unit in the form outlined here will be more than adequate for both students and teacher, but I would aspire to create such opportunities for interaction at a later date.

I am indebted to my colleague from the International Studies Schools Network, Catherine Schwenkler of the Global Learning Collaborative in New York City, for introducing me to the use of Photo Story as a composition and presentation tool for second language learners. I strongly encourage teachers venturing into new modes of teaching and learning, such as digital storytelling and oral history, to seek out collaborators in their own and other disciplines.

Notes

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The Center for Digital Storytelling is a good place to start for an introduction to the medium. The site features some first rate presentations as samples.

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A comprehensive online guide with links to many resources.

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The Austin History Center, a division of the Austin Public Library, has an oral history program going back forty years. This Spanish language release form provides a useful model.

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"Creative Commons Search." November 30, 2010. http://search.creativecommons.org/ (accessed

November 30, 2010).
To avoid potential issues of copyright infringement, students should use their own images for the digital storytelling presentation or use images with a Creative Commons license. The site is easy to use and indexes more images than they will need.

"Hammer on the Grammar - Using the Present Subjunctive in Spanish - 1st Hour." December 1, 2008. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8v8KIjMWPws (accessed November 30, 2010).
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A simple, student-friendly guide to becoming an oral historian.

"Oral History Project: Guidelines for Recording an Interview." November 30, 2010. http://www.youthsource.ab.ca/teacher_resources/oral_interview.html (accessed November 30, 2010).
From Alberta, Canada, a comprehensive and student-friendly guide to conducting an oral history interview.

"Telling Their Stories." November 30, 2010. http://www.tellingstories.org/ (accessed November 30, 2010).
The Telling Their Stories Oral History Archives Project of the Urban School of San Francisco provides video examples (in English) of outstanding oral history interviews conducted by teens.

Appendix A

North Carolina State Standards Addressed.

The following listing is not intended to be exhaustive.

Competency Goal 1: Interpersonal Communication. The learner will engage in conversation and exchange information and opinions orally and in writing in the target language.
Objective 1.01: Interact using original thoughts orally and in writing by employing increasingly complex structures and expanded vocabulary in present, past, and future times.
Objective 1.02: Interact using original thoughts orally and in writing by employing increasingly complex structures and expanded vocabulary in present, past, and future times.
Objective 1.04: Demonstrate evidence of self-correction in communication with others.

Competency Goal 2: Interpretive Communication. The learner will understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of topics in the target language.
Objective 2.04: Identify main ideas and significant details from longer authentic spoken passages from the target cultures (e.g., live and recorded discussions, presentations, lectures) or from materials being studied in another class.

Competency Goal 3: Presentational Communication. The learner will present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics in the target language.
Objective 3.01: Narrate and describe with detail in present, past and future time orally and in writing.
Objective 3.02: Compose and present stories, poems, and skits.
Objective 3.05: Summarize and interpret information from authentic material orally and in writing.

Competency Goal 7: Communities. The learner will use language and/or demonstrate cultural knowledge and understanding within and beyond the school setting for personal, educational, and professional growth and enrichment.
Objective 7.03: Interact with people of other cultures in the target language about familiar topics.