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THE ROLE OF HISPANIC AMERICA IN THE TEACHING OF SPANISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE: REPRESENTATIONS OF STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

We believe that with the positioning of Spanish as an international language and the prominent role of Hispano-American countries in the vitality and projection of this language (Mora-Figueroa, 1998), there is a need for the inclusion of linguistic and cultural varieties in the teaching and learning process of Spanish as Foreign Language, in a context where the Spanish varieties in course books and practices still prevail (cf. Kraviski, 2007).

In this paper we propose an analysis of the representations of both students and teachers about the place of Hispanic America in the teaching and learning of Spanish as Foreign Language at Secondary School level (Altmann and Vences, 2004; Pérez, 2003) through questionnaires. At the same time, we will focus on the approaches of the different linguistic and cultural varieties of Spanish (Alvar, 2002), arising in the most used course books in secondary education (initial levels).

Moreover, following a qualitative methodological perspective, we undertook a case study (Benson, Chik, Gao, Huang and Wang, 2009) which includes the use of different techniques and instruments, i.e., a methodological triangulation of different sources (namely, questionnaires and course books assessment grids) in order to interpret the obtained data (Pérez, 2003; Altmann & Vences, 2004).

On the one hand, the results show that a lot of the course books entail topics related to cultural varieties but some of them fail in addressing aspects related to the linguistic diversity within the Spanish language. On the other hand, students reveal cultural representations which are somewhat stereotypical and show at the same time a sincere desire to learn more about Hispano-American cultural and linguistic diversity, whereas teachers are quite aware of the existence of Spanish cultural and linguistic varieties but some of them are not so eager to work with these varieties within the classroom walls. According to our findings, the study of Spanish language and cultural varieties can be done by making use of vocabulary exercises of contrastive nature, research activities based on audiovisual and online resources, reflexive exercises about poetry and novels and semi-real production tasks.

The Linguistic and Cultural Miscegenation of Hispanic America

Spanish is an international language and this has much to do with the economic and cultural projection of Hispano-American countries in the world, which has been growing during the last decades (Mora-Figueroa, 1998). Therefore, it is of utmost relevance to focus on studies related to linguistic and cultural varieties of Spanish and its importance to the learning and teaching process.

As stated by authors such as Pérez (2003) or De la Vega (2001), the region of Hispanic America is a mixture of races of linguistic and cultural richness, which has started since the discovery of the American continent and has deepened economically speaking until nowadays. In fact, there is a strong cultural and economical dynamism which has a lot to do with the creation of MERCOSUR and the role of tourism. We believe that the linguistic and cultural varieties of Spanish should be addressed within the Spanish language classroom as soon as possible and in an integrated way because as Alvar (2002, p.251) refers: the cultural aspects are Europe transferred and America poured, i.e., the intercultural interchanges have permanently occurred since the very first contact between the Spanish and Hispano-American cultures, culminating in the adaptation of songs, architecture styles, literary forms, etc.

According to many authors, namely Salvador (2001) or Alvar (2002), one shall be cautious when dealing with the issue of differentiation between the Spanish one speaks in Spain and the one people speak in American countries, due to the fact that a lot of efforts were done in order to incorporate Americanisms in Spanish language dictionaries, as for example: *Atlas Lingüístico de Hispanoamérica*.

As Silva and Castedo (2008, pp.68-69) suggest, one shall make it very clear within the classroom walls that despite the language heterogeneity, Spanish has a common and homogeneous ground, which allows the communication among all Hispanics. In fact, the language structure is almost the same and the linguistic varieties related to geographical factors are not so much different as in comparison to the unity the language itself offers. Some studies also show us that both teachers and students share the idea that the preferable Spanish variety shall be the one we encounter in Spain. Even Hispano-American people share this representation, i.e., that the best variety is that of the Castilian prototype.

Moreover, as stated by Marín (2001, pp.70-73), the intercomprehension between Spanish-speaking peoples is quite more simple and immediate than the one which occurs among English-speaking communities. By focusing on the language varieties within the classroom walls one is training students to become attentive listeners to the richness of that language scope itself. In this way, as suggested by Pérez (2003), we shall create a holistic learning and teaching process which includes Pan-Hispanic uses and is based on the learning of geographic and social distinct uses but focusing on a common ground. The students themselves shall become plurilingual within the knowledge they have of this historic language, speaking in a differentiated way according to the contexts and corresponding speaking levels.

Taking all this into consideration and as a way to make the encounter between learners and linguistic and cultural varieties easier, it is of great importance that we develop skills based on an intercultural approach (either physical or virtual) and on the use of strategies and real materials, which allow them to become conscious citizens of a globalized world, in which Spanish has got a very important role.

Linguistic and Cultural Varieties of Spanish Language in The Classroom

According to Instituto Cervantes (2010), Spanish has more than 450 millions of native speakers and learners. Moreover, we know that Spanish is recognized as an official or co-official language in more than 20 countries. All of these countries have their own linguistic and cultural variety. In this way, we should not disregard phonetical, morphosyntactic, semantic and pragmatic varieties of the Spanish language. As referred by Fernández (2010), these diatopic varieties can be divided into two regions: Spain and Latin America. Regarding Spain itself, the author proposes a subdivision based on the norms used in the urban centres, namely: Andalusian region, Canarian region and Castilian region. The diatopic variety of Latin America includes the following subregions:

Caribbean region	Mexican and Central America region	Andes region	Río de la Plata and Chaco region	Chile
Cuba Panama Puerto Rico Dominican Republic Venezuelan Coasts Colombia	Guatemala Honduras El Salvador Costa Rica Nicaragua	Venezuela Colombia Ecuador Peru Bolivia	Argentina Paraguay Uruguay	Chile and surrounding areas

Table 1. Diatopic varieties of Latin American Spanish

Mollica (2007, p.9) states that the teaching of these linguistic varieties is quite relevant at present days because all languages present an inherent dynamism and heterogeneity, being pertinent to consider it in a specific social and economic context. At the same time one shall consider the fact that students shall feel free to speak in the language classroom, independently from the used code: the norm or non-norm (Bortoni-Ricardo, 2005, p.197). Moreover, it is important to reflect upon the correction of the students who may use the linguistic varieties in the Spanish language classroom. Most of the cases students feel insecure when using a specific word or accent which is different from the norm (even if it is correct), opting not to participate. The teacher shall identify the difference in the uses of Spanish, letting students become conscious of that valid variety (Bortoni-Ricardo, 2005, p.42).

We should not forget that these linguistic varieties have to be addressed within a cultural framework. As Fernández (2010) states, it is important that the teacher recognizes the different uses in relation to its nature and contexts. This kind of work shall be arranged focusing on a linguistic diversity, letting students get to know words, expressions, accentuation, etc., which do not make part of the norm, but make part of the diatopic uses of Spanish language.

The linguistic variation shall accomplish two functions: one the one hand, amplify the effectiveness of communication on learner's counterpart in a specific context; on the other hand, mark and make him/her feel the cultural and social identity of the native speaker, who makes part of the linguistic variety of the target language. However, the fact that a teacher uses and addresses a specific variety over and over again does not mean that he/she should hide the other varieties. In fact, the teacher should address other varieties as much as possible, due to the fact they are as rich and valid as the one used in the learning and teaching context. Only in this way will it be possible to eliminate linguistic and sociocultural stereotypes.

By focusing on the study we have developed during last year, we wanted to raise the following questions: a) Which representations and knowledge do secondary school students of Spanish have about linguistic and cultural varieties of Hispano-American countries? How are these addressed in the teaching process in Portuguese Secondary School System? Which practices can be addressed in learning contexts in order to foster the rebuilding of representations and sociocultural and sociolinguistic knowledge of Spanish and its varieties?

Following an ethnographic approach, we undertook a qualitative research methodology including different techniques and analysis instruments, which culminated in a methodological triangulation of sources in order to compare and interpret the data and the results (cf. Pérez, 2003; Altman and Vences, 2004). The essential corpus of our research is focused on the responses to questionnaires, course book analysis grids, field notes and projects/assessment worksheets undertaken by students, but in this article we will only focus on the first two data collection instruments. Let us now focus on the analysis of some course books which were being used in the area in which we were implementing our study (in the north-western part of Portugal).

In fact, the classroom work in Portugal is quite a lot based on the use of the course book and this resource is one of the most important ones which influence the learning practices. According to Rodrigues (2005), the course book should give students more opportunities of interaction with situations in which they are able to contemplate the foreign language varieties, focusing on a specific region and communication contexts. Pontes (2009) points out that in the course books the Iberian Spanish varieties still prevail in comparison to the Hispano-American ones, and even when the course books entail the latter they explore it in a superficial way, by focusing on curiosities and letting students know things through footnotes (Kraviski, 2007). Moreover, the course books do not quite offer an experiential communicative approach, which implies an effective work with the language, i.e., lead students to reflect upon the uses and adequateness to specific contexts.

As we can see from Table 2, the course books scarcely address Spanish language varieties and they never do it explicitly. There is even a course book which does not deal with it at all and some categories, such as expressions or accent are not even worked upon.

Language Varieties	<i>Contigo.es 1</i>	<i>Endirecto.com 1</i>	<i>Endirecto.com 2</i>	<i>ES-PA-ÑOL</i>
pronunciation		"El hijo de Hernández" (p.25)	"La historia de Juan" (p.151)	"A Dios le pido" (p.45)
vocabulary			"A la mesa" (pp.110-111)	"Tirita de Mafalda" (p.24)
expressions				
grammar		El voseo (p.25)		El voseo (p.24, p.45)
accent				

Table 2. Occurrences of language varieties in four Spanish course books

Regarding the cultural varieties, the course books deal with them in a more incisive way. The categories *society*, *geography*, *history* and *arts* show a lot of occurrences within the books (see Table 3, for more details). Some course books, such as *Endirecto.com 1* and *Endirecto.com 2* offer a more systematic and broaden work with the Spanish language varieties, going beyond the simple presentation of stereotyped information.

Van Dijk (2004) tells us that we may classify the way the different Spanish-speaking cultures, appear in course books as the following: a) exclusion, because a lot of cultures do not come up in course books and these usually offer a monocultural view of the language; b) differentiation, as a great deal of cultures appear in opposition towards others

and as different, emphasizing these differences and not focusing on the similarities; c) exotization, because the course books sometimes emphasize anything that implies a positive differentiation and strangeness to the eyes of the learner; d) stereotyping, due to the representation of the Other according to a rigid and pre-conceived way (see Figure 1, for an example); e) lack of voice of the cultures and subcultures, opting to address them but not giving voice to the individuals who belong to that specific cultures.

Cultural Varieties	<i>Contigo.es 1</i>	<i>Endirecto.com 1</i>	<i>Endirecto.com 2</i>	<i>ES-PA-ÑOL</i>
society		"Fiestas en América Latina" (p.99) "Secretos de un curandero" (p.118) "Farmacias mapuches" (p.127) "Sudamérica, un viaje inolvidable" (pp.146-147) "Vacaciones" (Cuba/Costa Rica/Patagonia) (p. 156-157)	Pág. 89 "Ruta Quetzal" (p.89) Pág. 131/132 "Los Amazonas" (p.131-132)	"Testimonio de una mujer peruana" (p.66)
geography	Latinoamérica (p.11) Nacionalidades (pp.30-31) Hispanohablantes (p.34)	"Mapa hispanohablante/atracciones", nacionalidades (pp.9-15)	"Quiz sobre el mundo hispanohablante" (p.6-9) "Vuelos en un panel informativo" (p.85) "Buenos Aires, Argentina" (p.155) "Canaima" (p.161) "República Dominicana" (p.165) "Xcaret, México" (p.179) "Patrimonio natural del mundo hispanohablante" (p.193)	"Más de 400 millones de personas hablan español" (p.64)
history		"Pueblos indígenas" (Incas, Aztecas) (p.29) Chichén Itzá/ Machu Picchu (p.169)	"Los Mayas, los Aztecas y los Incas" (p.33)	"Retrato de una familia de inmigrante mexicanos en los EE. UU de los años 70 (p.33)
arts	Salma Hayek Jimenez (p.20) Isabel Allende (p.80) "bolso de Ecuador", "flauta de Perú, "pimientos o	"Cantantes hispánicos" (p.20-30) "Signos maya" (p.42) "Personajes hispanicos"/"Pueblo Mapuche" (p.43)	"Autores de países latinoamericanos" (p.44) León Greco (p.73) "A la mesa" (p.110-111)	"Mafalda y su historia" (p.24) "A dios le pido"/Juanes (p.45) "Vivir adrede"/Mario Benedetti (p.59) "Oda al tomate" (p.112)

	chiles de México" (p.94)	"Vestimenta de la mujer Mapuche" (p.140) Juanes (P.151)		
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Table 3. Occurrences of cultural varieties in four Spanish course books

In fact, as pointed out by Andrade (2011, p.35), Spain ranks first in relation to the attention the course books give to its regions and cities, but the Hispano-American countries are less addressed and sometimes in a hierarchical way, always showing the same places, namely: Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Nicaragua, Peru and Venezuela. In this way students may end their Spanish language courses without getting a full view of the richness of the Hispanic world, by focusing on an ethnocentric view of the language (Cerdeira and Vicente, 2009, p.369). At the same time, Spain is always associated to positive aspects, such as recreation activities (football, night life), whereas Hispano-American countries are conceived as places full of problems, such as: poverty, inequality and child labour (idem).



Figure 1. Products and its nationalities in the course book *Contigo.es 1*

Once the teachers do not know all the linguistic varieties of Spanish language, Pinto (2006) recommends that one should divide the teaching of these into two types: the direct contact zones and the indirect contact zones. The first is related to the regions to which the learner will be in contact with, due to the frontier proximity. The latter are the ones that are not in the proximity of the country the learner makes part of. In this case, the author suggests the adoption of a specific variety and the progressive integration of other varieties. Nevertheless, one shall listen to the interests of students themselves, who may demand an even more holistic approach due to traveling, work, study purposes, among other reasons).

Following the view of Pinto (idem), let us now listen to the voices of students and teachers, i.e., the representations they have which portray the approaches we may use and resources we may build to tackle the linguistic and cultural varieties of Spanish within the classroom walls.

How to Tackle Linguistic and Cultural Varieties of Spanish in The Classroom: Learners and Teachers' Representations

In the previous chapter we had the chance to see the role course books may have in directing both students and teachers' representations. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the teachers find ways to go further than an ethnocentric view of Spanish language, by acting as an intercultural mediator between learner's culture and the target one.

In fact, by focusing on the peninsular version of Spanish language too much, we are not giving students the chance to access other cultural views which may be useful in their future lives as speakers of Spanish in a globalized world.

A comparative work of the ways other cultures understand and act upon the world, regarding the learner's culture and the target one, shall be a common practice within the classroom (Miquel and Sans, 1992, p.56).

Nowadays, there are a lot of other authentic sources which may enrich the classroom work, namely: narrative, poetry, music, plastic arts and even ICT resources (Mercau, 2014, p.7). Mercau (2014, pp.20-21) considers that the Hispano-American narrative is a never-ending source for the Spanish teacher. In fact, the list of authors of novels and short stories is immense: Borges, García Márquez, Cortázar, Rulfo, Vargas Llosa, etc. They are authors who offer different narrative styles but the teacher may select what to address, namely: linguistic facts (grammar, syntax, lexis, etc.) or cultural aspects (geography, history, gastronomy, etc.).

The same occurs with music. Due to the influences of Amerindians, African slaves and Spanish colonizers, the rich Latin-American music and its rhythms may provoke some strangeness and curiosity, and in this way they may act as an interesting cultural resource to work within the classroom walls (Mercau, 2014, p.40.), by showing them a *guajira*, a *salsa*, a *cumbia*, a *chacarero* or even a *cueca*.

Taking the ICT 2.0 tools into account, learners may become more producers than consumers, contributing to the diffusion of cultural knowledge related to the Latin-American countries, by following practices based on a critical hyperdagogy (Cruz, 2015). The teacher shall foster practices which integrate cultural resources in the classroom activities, by trying to connect the cultural with the linguistic aspects, so that the student may build up a cognitive map of the Spanish-speaking world (Lerner, 2000).

The questionnaires were created having into consideration sociobiographical aspects and sociolinguistic and sociocultural representations, which both students and teachers have in relation to learning itself and their relation to the Hispanic World. In fact, in the first part of the questionnaire students had the chance to share some personal details regarding their schooling and languages learning. In the second part of the questionnaire they had to focus on issues related to social, historical and language aspects within the Spanish-speaking world. Their creation was based on studies by Duarte (2012), Senos (2011), Altman and Vences (2004) and Pérez. In relation to the type of questions, we have created open, close and multiple-choice questions.

The students' questionnaires, which can be accessed at <https://app.box.com/s/7z7oi88h4qm7dp72bgcumymdz0jvaitd>, were filled in during the lessons anonymously and we were careful throughout the whole process so that students did not exchange ideas. In relation to the teachers' questionnaires, they were built on Google Forms and were filled in directly at the following webpage: <https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1UoLgGGN3CGn5bKUegTj5lRaPiLfnzfJSX-QWVG92h3Ko/viewform>.

Focusing on students's questionnaires, we would like to start analyzing the results by drawing a characterization of the group of students. This group of students is composed of 41 individuals who are learning Spanish as a foreign language at a public secondary school in Portugal. Their ages range from 14 to 19 years old. Most of the students are women (35 students) and almost all of them have got Portuguese nationality, though there are two Brazilian and one Romanian students. Portuguese language is also the native language of all students. However, it coexists with two other languages: Romanian and Papiamentu in case of two students.

Moreover, we can also notice that most of the students did not live abroad, but 4 of the students lived in the following countries: Romania (3 years), Ireland (1 year), Dutch Antilles (3 years) and Portugal (one of the foreign students has been living in Portugal for one year and another one for 6 years). We can also verify that 32 students have already been to Spain, 1 student to Paraguay and two other students to Mexico.

Focusing on question number 30, we can see that most students selected the following peoples to classify: Mexicans, Venezuelans and Argentines. The Spanish are one of the least selected people, together with the Peruvian, Cuban, Chilean, Puerto Ricans and Paraguayans. The representations that students share are the following: a) the Mexicans, Argentines, Cubans and Venezuelans are seen as very cheerful, friendly but noisy people, still relatively organized and open to the Other; b) the Spanish are also seen as a cheerful, friendly and organized people, but relatively noisy and more or less open to the Other; c) as to the other people identified by the students they show diverse opinions, which makes us believe that few have had contacts with them.

With regard to question number 31, it is interesting that the students show a great curiosity towards Hispano-American countries, heading the list countries such as Venezuela (15 students), Mexico (13 students), Argentina (11 students), Cuba (8 students) and Peru (5 students). Focusing on the choice of Venezuela, it seems that it is related to the fact that the Spanish teacher comes from this country. As Romo states (2009: 2), the actions of the teachers are related to their life story, their professional development and even a specific sociocultural and historical context. Therefore, presumably arose linguistic and cultural issues during the lessons, which contributed to the students' curiosity towards this specific Latin American country.

As to question number 32, and focusing on cultural representations of historical nature, we can observe that many of the students see the conquest of America by the Spaniards as a meeting of cultures (45%), although 32% of students consider that as a conquest of territory. Some of the students go further and indicate that this achievement represented a loss of identity on the Amerindians counterpart.

Crossing the cultural representations of historical nature with the answers given by learners about the presence of the Spanish conquerors in America, most students have no opinion (53%), but 29% consider it as positive and 18% as negative. There is therefore a large swing in the type of answers given by students. Some students justify their negative opinion, stating that "the Spaniards did not treat people who were already there with respect"; "The Spanish destroyed the Amerindian culture but also developed mentalities"; "It was a violent conquest in general"; "Conquerors destroyed the identity of peoples, enslaved them and took care of a territory that was not theirs"; "The only positive thing is the language they left". These representations contrast with an observation of one of the learners who states that the Spanish "taught new things to Amerindians".

Most learners (46%) do not have an opinion about the current relations between Spain and the Hispano-American countries. Those who believe that they are good refer that "countries have good relations" and a "shared culture". However, some students mention that they are neither good nor bad (33%), and one of the student's states that "cultures are very different and the contact between them was scarce."

Taking question number 36 of our questionnaire into account, which is related to general culture, we verify that 42% students can correctly identify the date of America's discovery, but most students are unaware of the date, selecting the wrong option. Considering their opinion on the pre-Columbian cultures present in America before 1492, only 27% of students do not identify some of these cultures. In fact, students accurately point out specific names of these cultures, namely: The Incas, Mayas and Aztecs. However, a few students mention Indians as one of the cultures (14%).

In question 38, learners are faced with the issue of linguistic diversity during the discovery of America's period of time. We come to the conclusion that the students' representations range from the number 20, 200 to ignorance. In fact, only 3% of them selected number 2000 for the languages and dialects which were spoken at the time. If we focus on the answers given by students to number questions 39 and 40, we find that most students consider that the Spanish and Castilian are not the same language (26 students) and, at the same time, they also reveal that the Iberian Spanish and American Spanish are not the same language (also 26 students).

When inquired about the linguistic representations they have about the main differences between the Iberian Spanish and American Spanish, 25 students select the pronunciation and vocabulary as those aspects that really set them apart (see Chart 1). As for the accent and grammar, fewer students identify these aspects and about 19 students do not know what the main differences are:

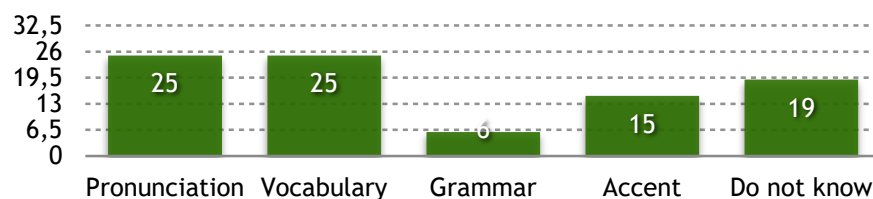


Chart 1. Students' representations about the differences between Iberian Spanish and American Spanish

Addressing our attention to the answers given by the students to question 42, in which they had to identify words from American origin which are present in the Iberian Spanish, we found that students identify some words easier than others, even though most of them reveal great difficulty in recognizing them:

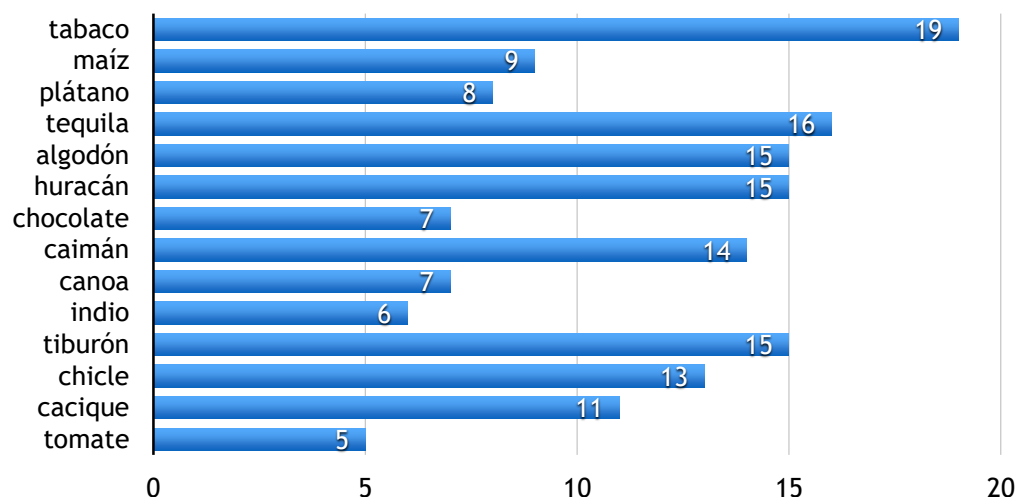


Chart 2. Students' representations of words of Hispano-American origin

But when asked about the linguistic phenomenon of "voseo" students reveal linguistic representations of grammatical nature somewhat unbalanced. In fact, only 23% of students were able to identify the true use of the "voseo" typical linguistic phenomenon in places such as Argentina's *Río de la Plata* region. Most considers that the "voseo" refers to the use of "vosotros" or "ustedes" (40%) and others confused it even with the use of "vos" meaning "todos" (37%).

As regards the question number 44 of the questionnaire, learners had to identify groups of words which are either predominant in Spain and or in America. Through the analysis of chart 3, we can see that the number of correct matches between the pairs of words and their diatopical prevalence ranges between 12 to 30 valid responses. This leads us to think that students can easily associate the prevalence of a given word to a region when they are shown another word which they already know.

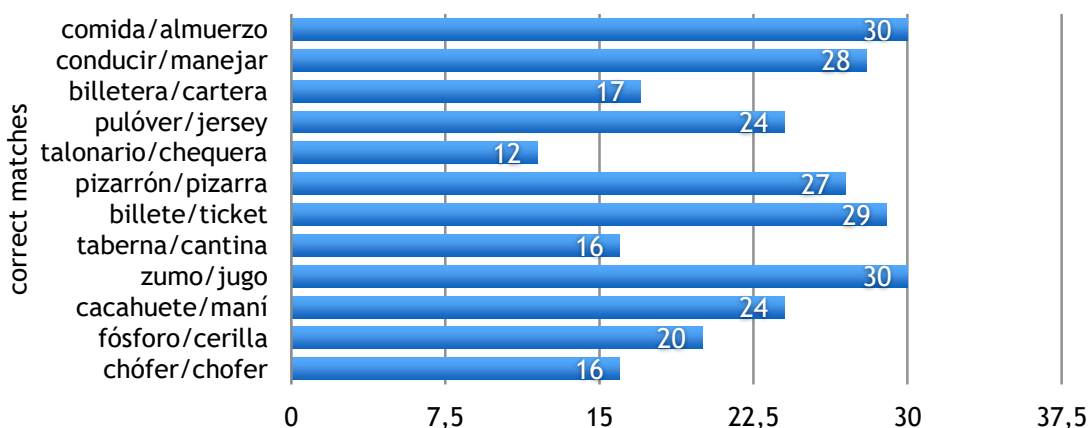


Chart 3. Students' correct matches between Iberian Spanish and American Spanish

In relation to question 45, in which learners have to identify words that are most used in Spain by selecting them, students reveal more difficulties. In fact, we can see that 25 students select "Ahora" as the most commonly used word, which contrasts with the choice on the word "ahorita" (chosen by 6 students). Something similar happens with the words "elevador" and "ascensor".

The difficulty increases when we consider the representations that students sketch in question 46 of our questionnaire regarding the "translation" or equivalent search for the words "boleto", "colectivo", "camión" and "manejar". With regard to the words "boleto" and "colectivo", 90% of students can not indicate their Iberian equivalent. Among those trying to register a possible "translation", we find that few can reach its correct equivalent. In the case of "boleto", 7% of learners identified it correctly, as in the case of "colectivo" only 2% have succeeded.

However, students show a greater number of attempts to "translation" of the words "camión" (79% got it correct) and "manejar" (78% got it correct) perhaps because they had prior contact with them in formal or/and non-formal contexts.

Focusing on our last question, students reveal representations of grammatical nature, by "translating" Latin American Spanish phrases into Iberian Spanish. There are almost no registered entries because few students dared to write the equivalent, perhaps due to the lack of understanding of the sentences themselves. However, some students can understand the meaning of the terms, which makes us think about the continuity of the understanding that is felt in the Spanish language, which is spoken by an Iberian citizen, a Mexican, Colombian or Argentinian individual, or even non-native speakers. These students were able to translate the expressions as follows: "¡Ella estuvo muy feliz!", "¡Ella estuvo muy guapa!", "¿Sabes que hice el fin de semana?", "¡No imaginas que hice el fin de semana!", "¿Aún no sabes que hice el fin de semana?", "Ahora he cocinado un huevo" and, at the same time, "¡Venga!", "¡Hasta!", "¡Dale prisa!", "¡Anda!", "¡Vámonos!".

Focusing on the questionnaires filled in by teachers, 25 individuals answered the questionnaire online. Most of them are women (19 teachers) and have Portuguese nationality (21 teachers). The majority of teachers' age range from 36-40 (10 people), 41-50 (7 people) and 31-35 (8 people). There are four teachers who have Spanish nationality. Only 4 of the teachers never lived in a Spanish speaking country. The rest of the teachers either lived in Spain (from 3 months to 25 years) or in Hispano-american countries, such as Venezuela or Colombia (up to 5 years).

If we focus on professional data, we may say that most of the teachers have been teaching Spanish from 5 years onwards (16 teachers) in Portugal. The rest of the teachers have less experience, ranging from 1 to 4 years (9 teachers). Only one of the teachers taught Spanish in another European country. Regarding their qualifications, we may say that most of the teachers has either a *licenciatura* (11 teachers) or a master's degree in teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (10 teachers), being prepared to teach other languages, namely: Portuguese (17 teachers), English (10 teachers), French (4 teachers) and German (4 teachers). Few have got a scientific master's degree (only 3 teachers) or a PhD (only 2 teachers) in the field.

Most of them are teaching A1 (60%), A2 (76%) and B1 (72%) levels but few are teaching either B2 (40%) or C1 (8%). Only 16% of the teachers are working in university level and the rest of the teachers are working at middle or secondary schools. Only one of teachers is working at primary level. In relation to the course books, most of the teachers uses *Ahora Español*, *Endirecto.com*, *Pasapalabra*, *Mochila*, *En Acción*, *Contigo.es*, *Club Prisma* and *Nos Vemos*. Most of these course books are of Portuguese authors, and three of them were analyzed by us previously.

Let us now analyze the way these teachers relate to Spanish language. By focusing on the very first question from this topic, we can see that most teachers do not identify any differences between Spanish or Castilian, saying that "they are the same language", "they are synonyms in Spain" and "Spanish is the name by which one refers to Castilian all over the world, including its varieties". However, some of them point out some differences, such as: "It exists due to the influence of Brazil in Latin America" or "According to RAE, Castilian is the variety one speaks in Castela y León, whereas Spanish is the language one speaks in the rest of Spain and other countries". When asked to focus on the variety of Spanish they talk, most of the teachers identify themselves with the Spanish variety (24 teachers). Only one of the teachers identifies himself/herself with the Venezuelan variety. The same occurs with the question "Where one speaks the best Spanish?". Most of the teachers refer Spain (70%) and a few percentage other places, such as Argentina (20%), Venezuela (5%), Colombia (8%) and Mexico (2%).

When inquired about the linguistic representations they have about the main differences between the Iberian Spanish and American Spanish, most teachers select the pronunciation and vocabulary as those aspects that really set them apart (see Chart 4). As for the accent and grammar, the same occurs as with students, i.e., fewer teachers identify these aspects:

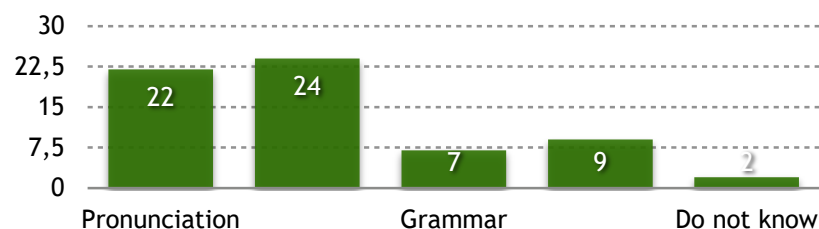


Chart 4. Teachers' representations about the differences between Iberian Spanish and American Spanish

Addressing our attention to the answers given by teachers in relation to question 18, in which they had to identify words from Hispano-American origin, we may say that most of them identify these words quite easily (see Chart 5). However, when one compares the results with the ones from the students, we can not see many differences (see Chart 2) and in some cases students can identify much more words.

When asked about the linguistic phenomenon of "voseo", almost all teachers were able to identify the true use of the "voseo" typical linguistic phenomenon (96%). 4% of the teachers consider that the "voseo" refers to the use of "vosotros" instead of "ustedes". This also contrasts with the students' representations as a very low percentage were able to identify the true use of "voseo".

Focusing on question 20, which is similar to the one in students' questionnaire, teachers had to if the following words were either predominant in Spain or in America: *comida, manejar, zumo, pulóver, cerilla, chofer, maní, pizarra, talonario de cheques, conducir, ticket, jersey, almuerzo, chófer, conozco, pizarrón, chequera, conosco, billetera, cartera*. 92% of the teachers were able to identify them correctly either with Spain or with Hispanic America, but 8% of them either do not know or select the incorrect region. In case of words which show phonetic differences such as *chófer/chofer* and *conozco/conosco* more teachers reveal more difficulties in identifying their corresponding regions. In relation to question 21, in which teachers had to identify words which are mostly used in Spain by selecting them, teachers easily identify *ascensor, chequear, agora, tiritas*, but again a small percentage (it ranges from 4% to 8%) identifies some of the words incorrectly. It seems that teachers are highly aware of the words which one uses more in Spain in opposition to the words one uses more in Hispano-American countries (see Chart 5. for more detail).

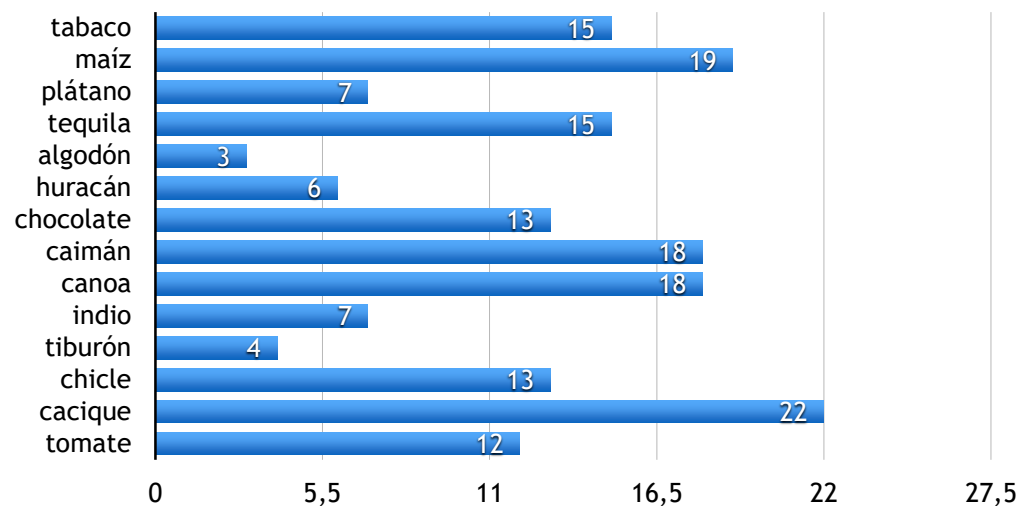


Chart 5. Teachers' representations of words of Hispano-American origin

Focusing on our last question, teachers had also the chance to reveal representations of grammatical nature, by "translating" American Spanish phrases into Iberian Spanish. In comparison to students they were much more adventurous, trying to "translate" as many phrases as possible. In fact, most of the teachers (85%) were able to modify the phrases quite correctly, giving answers such as: "Ella estuvo genial. Acabo de cocinar un huevo. ¡Venga!". However, 15% of the teachers could not translate expressions such as "muy padre", mentioning "I don't know" or even trying to "translate" it incorrectly ("Ella estuvo muy mal", "¡Ella era/estuvo muy amiga!" or "Ella estuvo muy entretenida").

The last section of the questionnaire focuses on the experience with the Spanish varieties within the classroom walls. By focusing on the answers to the first questions of this section, most teachers agree students are curious about Spanish language varieties and one of the teachers refers that "in this way they will be able to get to know and understand the phonological, lexical, semantic, pragmatic and colloquial differences between Iberian Spanish and American Spanish". However, some of them refer that "it is important to teach them those varieties but in upper levels" because "in initial levels those varieties may confound them". One of the teachers shows an extremist point of view mentioning that he or she agrees with teaching them these varieties "but after they learn Castilian".

92% of the teachers have taught some varieties during the year in which the study was being developed, focusing on the ones which can be seen in the following chart:

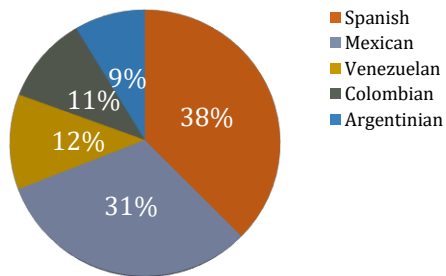


Chart 6. Varieties teachers have used within the classroom walls

During the last school year most of the teachers have been teaching some of these varieties at once or at the same time ("I am teaching the Peruvian variety", "I have been teaching diverse varieties: Spanish, Mexican, Colombian, Peruvian, Uruguayan, Chilean, Venezuelan, etc.", "Students have already dealt with vocabulary varieties", "Usually I teach about "voseo" and some aspects of the Venezuelan variety"). However, some of the teachers give some answers which contrast with these ones, namely: "I teach the ones that come up in the course book. It is important that students get to know them but I do not feel that they are so that important", "Here in Portugal we always teach the Spanish variety, the Castilian one", "None, I work with standard Spanish".

When one focuses on the ways we should approach varieties with the classroom walls, most teachers (72%) consider that the topics of Latin America can be dealt with specific vocabulary from the region, but 28% of the teachers do not necessarily agree. American Spanish can be presented through vocabulary (84%), comprehension exercises (40%), texts (16%) and other ways (28%). If one focus on the course books, once again a great part of the teachers considers that all countries should be represented (see Chart 7).

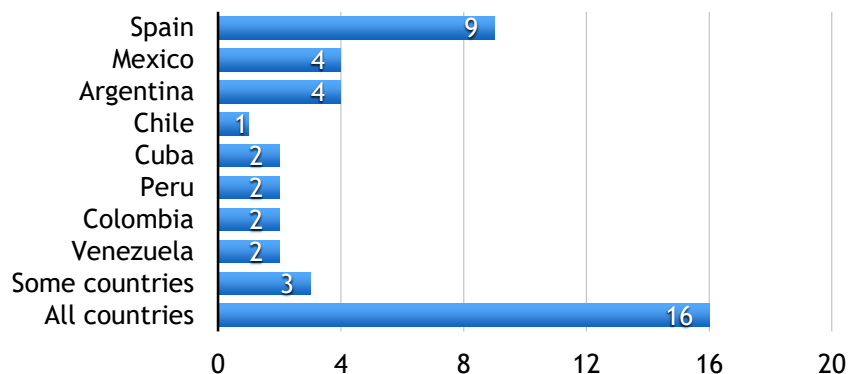


Chart 7. Varieties teachers consider that should be represented within course books

In relation to the importance of topics related to Hispano-American culture, history, politics, society, literature, economy, environment, linguistic aspects, geography, teachers consider that the most relevant ones are: culture (88%), society (88%), literature (84%), linguistic aspects (92%) and geography (88%). Regarding history, politics, economics and environment, these are considered as either not relevant or less relevant in comparison to the above stated.

As we can see from the following chart, most teachers undertake some interesting activities which focus on the real use of the language and authentic material about Hispanic America, as most of them use artistic products, namely movies/short films or music in their classes:

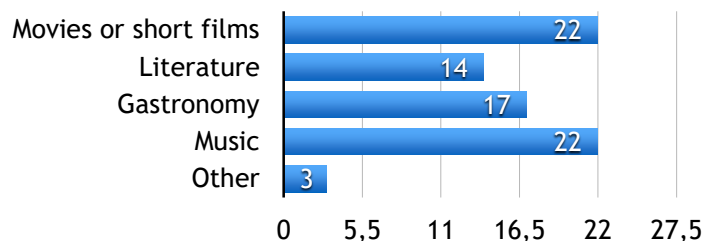


Chart 8. Activities teachers use in lessons regarding Spanish language and cultural varieties

When asked about other topics they would like to see in course books, teachers refer the following aspects: “more cultural topics”, “arts”, “Guatemala”, “Some words derivation as in the case of “tomar” (to drink) or “manejar” (to drive)”.

CONCLUSIONS

Having focused on course books at first, we figured out that: a) they entail more topics related to the cultural varieties than language ones; b) language varieties are addressed in an informative way and almost always implicitly given; c) they address cultural varieties by associating them to geographic or artistic matters; d) some course books reveal an effort to focus on issues related to the societies of Hispanio-American cities and/or countries, with some content about the life of Amerindian communities.

At first we focused on the representations that students have of Hispanic America, in relation to the cultural and linguistic varieties of Spanish. We found that students show a sincere desire to learn more about Hispanic America, but they tend to portray representations somewhat stereotypical and limited, which are consistent with those disclosed in the course books. These deal with some cultural aspects but forget issues related to language varieties (cf. Mercau, 2014; Coello, 2011).

As for the cultural representations students: a) reveal a taste for countries like Venezuela, Mexico, Argentina and Cuba; b) positively associate the conquest of America to a meeting of cultures, but many of the students recognize this event as a loss of identity and some even as a conquest; c) associate friendliness and happiness as positive moods to some Hispanio-American countries, together with stereotyped views, such as spicy food, entertainment and tourism; d) associate certain negative representations to Hispanio-American countries such as crime, poverty and drug cartels; e) know historical facts such as the date of the arrival of Columbus and the existence of some pre-Columbian cultures, being though unaware of the high linguistic diversity present in the region at the time.

In relation to the representations of linguistic nature, we can say that many of the students: a) consider that the Iberian Spanish and American one are not the same language, as well as differentiate Spanish and Castilian, showing ignorance of the terms and their origin; b) show that the main differences between the Iberian Spanish and American Spanish is in pronunciation and vocabulary; c) are able to identify some words of American origin without great difficulty. It is also noted that, in general, students are able to identify differences concerning vocabulary quite easily, but have difficulties with regard to grammar and phenomena as *el voseo*.

As for the teachers, we may say that most of them are using the same course books we analyzed and this may have influenced the way they approach Spanish language and cultural varieties within the classroom walls. In fact, they identify themselves with the Iberian Spanish variety the most and they consider that the place where people speak the best Spanish is the Iberian Peninsula. When drawing a comparison between Iberian and American Spanish teachers somewhat coincide with students by referring vocabulary and pronunciation. Almost all teachers are capable of identifying words from American origin and linguistic phenomena, which are related to some specific Hispanio-American countries, as *el voseo*. However, they reveal some difficulties in rewriting American Spanish phrases into Iberian Spanish ones and illustrating their true meaning.

Teachers also give hints towards the ways one should address the Spanish language and cultural varieties in the classroom, which some teachers consider being of utmost importance. However, some of them refer that they should be studied in upper levels due to the fact that if one does it in initial levels one may harm students' learning.

By linking these representations with the scientific literature we read and the course books we analyzed, we may conclude that the study of Spanish language and cultural varieties can be done by making use of: a) linking-words exercises between the Iberian variant and another Hispanio-American variants; b) research activities through the use of Web 2.0 applications; c) reviewing tasks of literary works, which are rich in cultural content and contain the live

voices of social actors of the target cultures; d) semi-real production tasks, both written and oral, simulating everyday situations students may experience; e) audiovisual resources to make them aware of interaction contexts of the Hispano-American peoples, their societies and cultures; f) a project work approach, of interdisciplinary nature by interweaving of different areas of knowledge such as history, geography, economics, arts, etc.

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