

And Who Assesses the Bilingual Teacher's Language Proficiency?

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Described here is a Spanish language proficiency test that, according to these authors, is "practical, inexpensive, and relatively quickly and easily administered."

In bilingual education circles, when one is addressing the question of language, language dominance, and/or language proficiency, one has in mind the student who is involved in some form of bilingual bicultural instruction either in the elementary or secondary classroom. Admittedly, this is an urgent and important issue; however, it is also necessary to look at the language proficiency of the person most directly involved with the student. Obviously, it is the classroom teacher we have in mind.

Universities and colleges involved in training teachers for bilingual bicultural programs must deal with this issue, particularly as it relates to the second language. In the training program at the University of Arizona, the second language involved is Spanish. What competencies in the second language do those involved in the program have? What competencies do they need? What criteria will be used to evaluate each individual's competencies? Is there a systematic measure that is practical, inexpensive, and relatively quickly and easily administered?

Before answering these questions, it is prudent to look directly at the institution itself and the programs offered to the students interested in bilingual bicultural education.

The College of Education at the University of Arizona is an upper division college as well as a graduate school. For undergraduates, this means that the freshman and sophomore years are completed in another college before seeking admission to the College of Education. It is important to know that there are three basic population groups directly involved with the bilingual bicultural program.

The first includes those undergraduate students who are pursuing either a dual program in elementary and bilingual bicultural education or are seeking a minor in bilingual, bicultural education at the secondary level. For those in the Department of Elementary Education, this means that an individual completing the program will be able to function effectively in either a bilingual bicultural English/Spanish classroom or a monolingual English classroom. For those pursuing a minor in secondary education, this implies that an individual will be able to function both in English and Spanish in two areas generally taught in secondary schools. A mathematics and science combination serves as an example.

As these students seek admission to the programs it is crucial to know the following:

Do they know Spanish? The programs make the assumption that the enrolling student has a basic command of the structure of the Spanish language in the four areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This is *not* the time to begin the second language.

What is their level of proficiency in each of the four areas? Some of the students have a good grasp of the aural-oral portions of the language; most can read well; and some have a good command of the writing skills needed. Competency in one of the areas does not mean competency in the four areas.

Because the teacher will be expected to facilitate bicognitive learning and not just bilingual instruction, the program is designed to further the language skills needed in the specific content areas. At the elementary level, this is done primarily in an eighteen-hour block program where in the needed skills in language arts, mathematics, social studies, science, art, and music are studied both in the classroom along with field-based experience. The Department of Secondary Education also offers a specific class in methods designed to further the specific language skills needed for the particular content areas.

In terms of language proficiency, areas of weakness as diagnosed can be corrected systematically throughout the two years that a student is enrolled in the undergraduate program. Perhaps it might be appropriate to require a further course in conversational Spanish; at times, a course specifically designed for improving the written skills can be suggested. Some specific competencies in terms of spelling and/or written accent marks can be improved through independent modules. An enormous improvement in a language can happen if diagnosed and systematically pursued. The need for open lines of communication between the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts is obvious. This is especially true of the Mexican American Studies Committee and the Department of Modern Languages both housed in the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Arizona. In part, the Mexican American Studies Committee serves as the pivot that positively fosters the ambience between the

Department of Modern Languages and those departments most directly concerned with the bilingual, bicultural programs within the College of Education.

In short, for the undergraduate student, the two basic questions are:

1. Does the student seeking admission to the bilingual bicultural program have the competencies needed to enter the program? If the answer to number one is "yes," then one proceeds to the second question:

2. How can the competencies be improved? We have two entire years to upgrade proficiencies in the second language.

Those pursuing a Master's Degree in Bilingual Education comprise the second population

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group. Often, they are already classroom teachers. Some are involved in bilingual bicultural instruction; some would like to be. As a prerequisite for entering the program, it is necessary to establish some basic competencies in the second language, in this case Spanish. In no instance can one assume that a teacher already involved in a bilingual, bicultural instruction is somehow automatically proficient in the second language. Nor can one allow those who would like to jump onto the "bilingual bandwagon" do so without the necessary basic competencies in the second language. Some sort of measure, then, is also needed at this level.

The third group includes those persons who are certified already in the state of Arizona and are solely seeking a type of bilingual endorsement. As yet, there is no bilingual certification required in Arizona. What is required of these teachers is fifteen semester hours divided among the general areas of culture, methodology, and language. A letter attesting to the proficiency in

the second language is required by the state. In order to establish some guidelines, some concrete measure in determining proficiency is needed.

The need for a Spanish language proficiency exam becomes increasingly more crucial if we are to meet the needs of the three population groups already described. This dilemma has led to the

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development of the Zepeda/Saldate Spanish Language Proficiency Exam, which is designed to assist in determining the competency of classroom teachers and potential classroom teachers in the use of the Spanish language. The proficiency exam can determine the ability to receive and transmit information in Spanish via the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The central rationale of the Zepeda/Saldate proficiency exam is to predict with reasonable accuracy the ability of the examinee to function in Spanish within a *real-life* teaching ambience. The items selected for the proficiency exam reflect interaction in the four areas of language commonly found in a classroom situation.

Four subtests make up the exam: Aural-Oral Comprehension; Reading Analysis; Reading Comprehension; and Writing. The test is designed to be administered in one session. Both the aural-oral comprehension and the reading analysis components are to be administered individually. The reading comprehension and writing components can be administered individually or in a group setting. Approximately twenty-five minutes are needed to complete the test.

Like most tests, a proficiency test can only sample appropriate stimuli and responses. The Zepeda/Saldate Language Proficiency Test is a direct proficiency test, in that the testing format and procedure attempt to duplicate as closely as possible the setting and operation of real-life situations in which the proficiency is that normally needed by classroom teachers in a bilingual bicultural program.

The aural-oral subtest requires communicative dialogue of topics pertinent to education.

The reading components use a verbatim literary text, a government document, and an educational text actually encountered in real-life reading situations for classroom teachers.

The writing subtests require both translation and the formulation of an original letter, both skills appropriate and needed by classroom teachers.

A major component of any testing procedure is scoring. This test is a combination of "mechanical" and "human" scoring.

The aural-oral test and the reading analysis require "human" and "simultaneous" scoring. "Human" scoring means that the examiner must listen to the examinee's responses and arrive at a rating of the examinee's performance. "Simultaneous" scoring is carried out on the spot, and there is no need to record the examinee's responses.

The reading comprehension subtest and the writing subtests require "mechanical" scoring.

In order to clarify the criteria for evaluation used in the Zepeda/Saldate Spanish Language Proficiency Test, the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) definitions for speaking and reading have been used as a point of reference. On the FSI test, degrees of proficiency are represented on a scale ranging from zero to five. Zero represents no language competency and five implies complete fluency comparable to that of an educated native speaker. In reading, a rating of five would imply the examinee's ability to read extremely difficult colloquial and literary forms of the language.

The Zepeda/Saldate Test does not choose to test the two extremes. Rather it concentrates on the minimal levels necessary for a practicing classroom teacher. Figure 1 compares the Zepeda/Saldate Language Proficiency Test Scale with its FSI counterpart on the aural-oral component.

For those who are not acquainted with the FSI ratings, a further clarification is needed. A closer look at the aural-oral component would serve as an example. A one on the Zepeda/Saldate scale would signify that errors in pronunciation and language structure are frequent and that the vocabulary is inadequate except for the most elementary needs. Only routine social needs and

minimum courtesy requirements can be expected of anyone scoring at this end of the scale.

Figure 1.

Z/S Scale	1	2	3	4	5
FSI Scale	1	1+	2	2+	3

A rating of five on the aural-oral component of the Zepeda/Saldate Test implies that the examinee's pronunciation never interferes with understanding and does not disturb the native speaker. In terms of structure, the examinee's control of the grammar is good, and the scope of vocabulary is broad enough so that the examinee rarely has to grope for a word. Such is the range of competencies measured by the aural-oral component.

The reading analysis component involves a range of ability from being able to read elementary lesson materials or common public signs (rating of 1) to the ability to read all styles and forms of the language pertinent to professional educational needs with a proficiency equivalent to that of an educated native speaker (rating of 5).

The criteria for writing are based on the number of errors. Appropriate language structure, spelling, and written accents are considered. In the writing of an original letter, appropriate content is additionally weighed.

This Spanish language proficiency test has been pilot tested on students currently enrolled in one of the bilingual programs offered at the University of Arizona or classroom teachers currently involved in bilingual bicultural instruction. In some instances, an examinee fits both categories.

It is felt that, based on our experience in this program, the Zepeda/Saldate test does predict with reasonable accuracy the ability of the examinee to function in Spanish within a real-life teaching ambience. The items selected for the exam reflect interaction in the areas of listening, speaking, reading, and writing commonly found in a classroom situation.

In summary, the Zepeda/Saldate Language Proficiency Exam has proved to be of value in helping to answer some of the following proverbial questions often asked of those charged with the operation of training bilingual teachers: Does the student seeking admission have the competencies needed to enter a bilingual bicultural training

program? What competencies need upgrading? Does the individual have the language competencies needed to function in a bilingual bicultural classroom now? After all, the proficiency demonstrated in the classroom will affect the lives of many children. We cannot afford to be haphazard in our approach.

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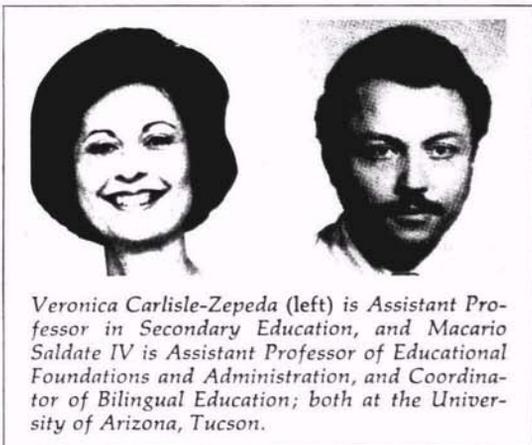
This Spanish language proficiency test is one systematic measure that is practical, inexpensive, and relatively quickly and easily administered. It does determine a student's proficiency at a specific point in time. It is not the only way, but it is a good way. ²⁵

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