Spanish 520 – Structure of Spanish
University of Kansas
Fall 2023
University of Kansas
Department of Spanish and Portuguese

Instructor: Antônio R.M. Simões, Professor
Office: WES 2638, 785-864-0285, 785-864-3851
Office hours: MW 1:50PM–2:50PM; 4:300PM–5:00 PM
    or by appointment;
    Virtual hours: https://kansas.zoom.us/j/3783677491
Class Place: Wescoe 4034
Course ID number: 22386
Class Time: MW 3:00PM – 4:15PM
E-mail: asimoes@ku.edu;
https://spanport.ku.edu/people/antonio-roberto-monteiro-simoes
Textbook REQUIRED:
En otras palabras: Perfeccionamiento del español por medio de la traducción, TERCERA edición, Patricia V. Lunn and Ernest J. Lunsford, Georgetown University Press; 2021. ISBN: 9781647120092 (1647120098)
http://press.georgetown.edu/book/languages/en-otras-palabras-0
Prerequisite: SPAN 424 and SPAN 428, or consent of the instructor.
Credit hours: 3.0

Course Description

SPAN 520 is a very basic Linguistics course for language students on Spanish grammar. It is designed for upper-level undergraduate students and graduate students with little or no prior experience in linguistics. We will review Spanish grammar from a Linguistics point of view. The Linguistics focus in this class will be accomplished through English-Spanish-English translation, as presented in our textbook. Please note that we will be using the third edition of our textbook.

The instructor will present the course content in a combination of lecture and interactive style. However, this class is predominantly conducted as a student-centered course. This means students will submit assignments, lead class discussions through regular Power Point presentations while actively interacting with their classmates during their presentations. During student presentations, the instructor will participate as a moderator and provide guidance as needed.

As we review Spanish grammar through translation, we will study how Spanish grammar varies by region, social group, and the situation in which Spanish is developed. This vision goes beyond the so-called "correct" or traditional textbook grammars. Through investigations of grammatical variability, students will learn grammatical terminology and how to identify categories and constructions in

Spanish (e.g., subject vs. object pronoun). We will also examine why some varieties of both Spanish and English are considered prestigious while others are not, based on current and historical sociopolitical contexts. These exams will lead us to discuss and question our linguistic attitudes.

What does "structure of Spanish" mean? Everything in life has a structure. It is inescapable. Structures are everywhere in the universe, in our lives. We find structure in the solar system, in trees, insects, birds, governments, families, in our bodies, in languages, in our speech, syllables, vowels, prosodies, speech, etc. Spanish, like any language, has a structure, a living structure. The main components of the structure of Spanish are shown in the image below, that is, Phonetics and Phonology, Syntax, Morphology, Semantics and Pragmatics. The lexicon is not included but is part of the structure of Spanish. I separated it, because the Lexicon is learned in series while the other components are learned in parallel.
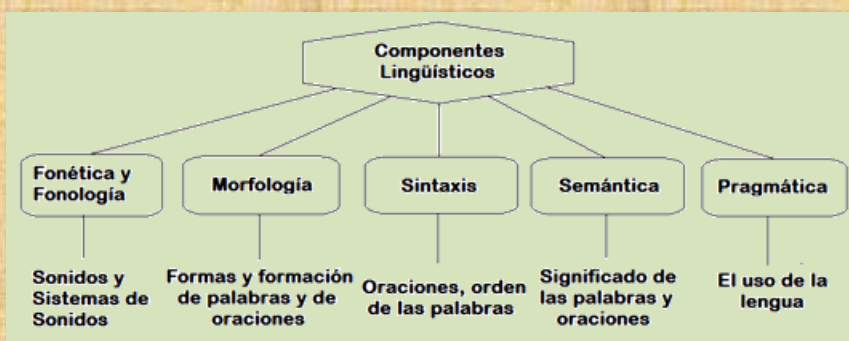
All discussions about general language characteristics and varieties ("dialects") in this class are based on the general and idealized mainstream pronunciation of Spanish. In Spanish, most of these conventional reference speakers come from the regions often called the "highlands" of Latin America, which are, for some of them, former colonial centres of Spanish viceroyalties (for example, Mexico City, Guadalajara, Bogotá, La Paz, Lima (although this city is at sea level), Quito, and the Spanish spoken in the mountainous areas of Latin America between Colombia and Bolivia. Finally, these reference speakers have university or higher education.

This convention in no way means or implies that one variety of Spanish is "better" than another. It is simply a useful convention for us and this class. It is nothing more than a practical and useful option, especially considering the large number of speakers who fit this description. It is based on a conventional way of speaking Spanish.

It is pedagogically useful to use mainstream Spanish as a reference in Spanish classrooms if other varieties are used for comparison, and of course respected. There are many advantages to this approach. One is that both teachers and students can easily refer to this main variety, given the relatively easier access to national television broadcasts in any region, or through Open Educational Resources (OERs) in today's classrooms. Additionally, conventional Spanish tends to be closer to written language while still sounding natural. On the other hand, we must be cautious with this approach because sometimes we can find native speakers who misunderstand this approach. In their misunderstanding, they may end up worrying too much about maintaining a "pure speaking style" and consequently speak in a pedantic or artificial way. This is NOT the idea here. Our main reference is a natural and unpretentious pronunciation.

The same idea can be applied to any language. Let's take English, for example. I speak English with a foreign accent. If I spoke English like some American television presenters such as Lester Holt, Sheppard Smith, or actors George Clooney, Will Smith, Bruce Willis, Morgan Freeman, Matthew McConaughey, Ben Affleck, our former president Barack Obama, to name a few, I would probably improve my chances of finding employment if I were in the job market. The accent of these celebrities, when not pretentious, gives us an idea of what a reference variety (register) means, despite the risks of making such an analogy. Unfortunately or not, our society tends to train us to embrace these accents. In this class, we simply use a conventional prestigious accent as a reference to observe the variability of the language, not to insult or denigrate anyone's accent. All varieties of native languages are good for a classroom, but we need to use one of them as a reference, despite the controversy that any choice will generate.