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## **TEACHING SPANISH CONVERSATION TO ADVANCED LEVEL STUDENTS: A DIALOGUE-BASED ORAL APPROACH**

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### **Abstract**

This work presents a method of teaching Spanish conversation at the advanced level. It is based mainly on teaching through dialogues, but using as reference the content learned in other supporting classes such as Spanish grammar, composition, reading, and others. This advanced level is the last step in the progressive acquisition of speaking skills. The course comprises a two-semester beginning level, followed by the two-semester intermediate level, and the advanced level consists of two semesters as well. The content of this course corresponds to the fifth semester out of six at university level. The modality is that of Spanish as a foreign language taught and learned through the incentive of an oral approach based on dialogues. These dialogues show or express everyday situations in the lives of South Korean university students. This particular oral approach helps students grasp the content under study rather naturally and helps them internalize new concepts without major conflicts. The objective of this dialogue-based approach is to give university students the opportunity to learn to speak a new language through oral production in the classroom, with abundant oral practice and repetition. The aim of this teaching modality is to assist students in the development of their oral skills in a regular, effortlessly manner.

**Keywords:** Teaching Spanish conversation, oral approach, dialogues, oral production, communication skills

### **Introduction**

The situational teaching of a language is a teaching form that arose as a result of the need to learn how to use a language in a more communicative way. This oral approach uses various situational contexts to present words, expressions, grammatical structures and many other aspects of the language under study, considered important for the learner to be able to communicate. This method uses structure as an essential element to teach a language, and focuses on grammar inductively. All this, coupled with the practice of dialogues presented in a situational way leads to a highly productive classroom experience. Grammatical and lexical elements plus structures are presented gradually. Intense oral practice in the classroom with the help of the instructor results in the memorization of structures, when the intention is not to memorize the material.

Teaching Spanish conversation to university students in South Korea can be presented in different ways and from different perspectives and approaches. Spanish and Korean are two distant languages that have almost no common aspects that bring them together. Based on that knowledge, experience has taught that approaching the learning from an oral perspective with the right method can be highly positive and produce promising results. Depending of the instructor's ability to lead and guide the students in their oral language acquisition, the outcome can make an impacting difference. This work presents the work done during a semester in the classroom of an Advanced Spanish Conversation 1 Class in South Korea. It is a class that meets once a week with a Spanish native speaker instructor who does not speak Korean, but has a basic knowledge of the sounds of the language. At this advanced stage, students have already been exposed to two years of the same methodology of learning through dialogs and oral practice. Thus, by the time they reach this level, they are knowledgeable of the manner of learning, what is expected of them, and how to approach their personal learning.

It becomes critically important to count on the appropriate material adapted to this type of methodology. The Spanish Conversation Course consists of three levels —elementary, intermediate, and advanced— that are related through the material taught for three years. This material takes students from the very basic level, from saying “Hola” (“Hello”) through to their being able to express themselves fluently in Spanish. The material referred to here is **¿QUÉ ONDA?**, which comes in three volumes for the three different levels. In this particular case, this study presents **¿QUÉ ONDA? VOLUME III – Comprehensive Spanish**, as it is taught in the first semester of the third year. This third volume of the series contains ample information about the Spanish speaking world, and exposes students more directly to cultural aspects through places of interest, Hispanic cuisine, literature, history, music and representative singers of the Spanish speaking world. Besides that, students get to experience the flavor of the language through the dialogues and readings. Following is the presentation of the material and the method of teaching.

### 1. The text material used in class

**¿QUÉ ONDA?–Comprehensive Spanish– VOLUME III** is a textbook containing ten lessons, five of which are studied in the first semester of the course, from March to June, and the next five in the second semester, from September to December. This teaching tool is based on the contents of grammar, composition, reading, and other disciplines taught at the university Spanish major course. That background constitutes a strong support for the oral part of the course, because students use in their conversation class the content they are learning in those classes as a solid reference. In this way, students are familiar with the content of the lessons being learned orally, and feel comfortable using the vocabulary, expressions, grammatical structures, and other details they bring to the conversation class from the other disciplines being taught and learned at the moment. This feature also aids the instructor to progress at a faster speed, not having to spend too much time in grammatical explanations or information concerning details of the lessons.

This work presents in sequential form the application of **¿QUÉ ONDA? III**. The purpose is to aid students in the advancement and enhancement of their oral Spanish language production. The book contains a series of elements which build the students’ oral production step by step. Those diverse elements taken as a whole and applied to the students’ oral practice by means of dialogues and readings is what plays a major role in the learning and handling of the oral language. There is a well-delineated sequence in the oral exercises that guides the lesson to the final section of the book, which is in actuality the real oral exposure and production. That final section of the lesson, presented through dialogues, is the focal point of this didactic material **¿QUÉ ONDA? III**. This section is the culmination of the points learned in the lesson. This is the moment of the actual speaking and putting into practice what the lesson has taught.

#### 1. 1. Technical features of the text material

**Name of text:** ¿QUÉ ONDA? -ESPAÑOL INTEGRAL- Tomo III [¿QUÉ ONDA? -COMPREHENSIVE SPANISH- Volume III]

**Content:** 10 complete lessons

**Division of the book:** 5 lessons to be taught in the first semester and 5 in the second semester

**LECCIÓN # 1** ¿Quieres que repasemos lo que hemos aprendido?

**LECCIÓN # 2** ¿Cómo se prepara el ceviche?

**LECCIÓN # 3** ¿Sabes cómo preparar una carta en español?

**LECCIÓN # 4** ¿Quieres aprender otros usos del subjuntivo?

**LECCIÓN # 5** ¿Qué te pidió que hicieras tu mamá?

In the foreword of the book, the author states that “all languages are beautiful because they contain a particular perspective of the world in which we live. Spanish is not the exception and it has a unique charm.” It is his hope that this book “ends up making students fall in love with Spanish and that they adopt it as their own language: because languages do not belong only to native speakers, but to all those who speak them.” He concludes by saying “I am sure that at the end of this volume, you will not only have opened the door to the world of Spanish, but entered through it, too. However, you will have to open your heart to let the Spanish culture enter in you, and in this way, you will see that your life will be filled with many wonderful things.” So, students are about to enter into the last volume of their Spanish conversation classes.

### 2. Outline of the lesson (model)

Lesson #1, as its title indicates, is a review lesson —it reviews the whole of Volume II learned the previous year. Students are coming back from a two-month break, and during that time they do not usually revise their Spanish material, but rather study English or travel.

Due to that time lapse in which they are not exposed to the oral language, it becomes necessary to resort to some type of ordered and sequenced review. For that reason, Lesson #1 is the answer to that felt need. In this first lesson, then, students are guided step by step through topics they have already learned, that they already know, and maybe even remember well. So Lesson #1 runs smoothly, and offers the students an opportunity to review the whole of the content of the previous year. The new content is introduced in the dialogs and the reading section. Using old content, dialogs with new content are presented. Following is the text's typical lesson outline.

**Lesson # 1** ¿Quieres que repasemos lo que hemos aprendido? [Would you like to review what we have learned?]

**Oral practice of grammatical structures Section**

- The simple present and the present continuous - indicative mood
- Aches, illnesses and the senses
- Wishes and personal plans
- Asking for the material things are made of
- The simple preterit - The imperfect preterit - The simple preterit and the imperfect preterit
- Description of living quarters
- The reflex passive voice
- The subjunctive - Probability expressed with the subjunctive – The use of “ojalá” + subjunctive – Wish expressed by the subjunctive – The use of the subjunctive with expressions and specific conjunctions - The purpose expressed with the subjunctive in a subordinate sentence – The use of subjunctive for petitions – The use of subjunctive for negative imperative
- The imperative

**Dialogues Section - Expressions and vocabulary to keep in mind**

- Dialogue #1 - Dialogue #2 - Dialogue #3
- Questions to review Lesson # 1
- Reading # 1

**Information of interest**

**Special activity**

**Lists of vocabulary to memorize**

**2. 1. General lesson plan**

According to what the author of the book states in his first book of the ¿QUÉ ONDA? series, “this text is designed to slowly set solid bases for the use of professional Spanish.” He also states that he is “convinced that the learning of this language is a process that requires much dedication and effort; however, if all of us try to make it fun, it will be easier for us to reach our objective, which is to be fully fluent in Spanish in the future.” With that objective in mind, the lesson is developed orally with the students’ active and constant participation in class. The whole content of the lesson is presented in bilingual form to the students, that is, the book comes in Spanish, with the corresponding translation in Korean. This is a practical aspect of the book because it allows the instructor to keep on and not stopping to explain things written in Spanish that the students might not understand.

When the teaching time starts, the instructor proceeds to guide the students in every point of the lesson. At all times he will be checking pronunciation, whether students are saying new words correctly, whether they are linking words correctly so as to form expressions, then whole sentences, and has them repeat many times. For every new teaching point there is a set of exercises to be done orally. This exercise activity is carried out until the instructor perceives that the group is doing well and in good command of pronunciation, intonation and the fluency with which the students express themselves. During all this time, the activity is developed in a dynamic way, and the purpose of this particular time is to have students enjoy the practice, the oral repetition, and feeling comfortable interacting with their peers in challenging ways. Korean students are usually a little shy, but they respond very well when they are guided in meaningful and productive ways. When they perceive that there are no threats to their participation, they usually enjoy their learning time, mistakes and all.

The purpose of all this practice and repetition in class from the first page on points towards the *Dialogues* section, which is dedicated in its entirety to oral interaction and acting out what is learned at this early stage of the lesson.

The instructor always plays an active role leading the students step by step towards the best oral linguistic acquisition and production. Normally the new teaching points are presented through an example sentence, used as a model, written in italics to highlight the expression. This phrase or model is fundamental and serves as a guide for students to develop from that structure on. Students are generally asked to highlight these examples or models colorfully, so that they always stand out on the page whenever the students want to review or study for an exam. The numerous repetitions of these models, over and over again, ensure that in the end students can say them naturally and with fluency. The immediate result of so much repetition and practice come as the internalization of those model structures that will always be useful for the students in any Spanish speaking situation.

The lesson continues in this dynamic, students always repeating, doing the oral exercises guided by their instructor. The oral activity occurs in different modalities, be it in pairs, or the instructor asking students, or one student asking the next in a circle. When students have already gained enough skill in oral practice, with all models enhanced in color, and repeated structures have been memorized because of constant repetition, it is time to start with the following section, the *Expressions and Vocabulary to consider in the dialogues*. This section of the lesson presents new vocabulary, expressions with examples of use, and grammar structures that will be used in the following dialogue section. Some of that new material presented here will also be used in the *Lectura* (Reading) section. That section is a complementary material that challenges students a bit further in their oral production, taking them and the lesson to a more personal level. Here they will personalize the points taught in the lesson.

In this section, before the dialogues are tackled, the instructor has to guide the class again, explaining the new words through several examples, showing students the use of the word or expressions, relating them to material they already know. This section has to be covered in such a way that when the time comes to face the dialogues, students can say everything in a natural way, linking sounds and not pronounce harshly or in a staccato way. By the time students are done with this section, they are then prepared to engage with the situational dialogues. In these dialogues they will come up with all the things they have been learning so far. The moment of surprise comes when students realize they can understand the dialogues, because they have already learned and practiced mostly everything. When they read a dialogue for the first time, their reaction is noticeable—they understand. These students are very used to learning by reading and writing, their oral skills being almost null. At the very beginning it is not easy for them to let go of their paper and pen, but little by little they get used to relying on their listening and speaking skills.

## 2. 2. The lesson applied to the dialogues

Each lesson in the book is made up of three dialogues, each of which contains what has been learned previously in the lesson. The purpose of these dialogues is to put together what the students have already learned in a situational conversation. All the dialogues content is what has been practiced and repeated so many times, to the point that students are familiar with the vocabulary and expressions. The dialogues usually have some sixteen lines or more, the characters that interact in them are generally students, and the topics usually have to do with university life. Following is a model in Lesson #1, Dialogue #3, entitled *En un restaurante lujoso: después de comer* [At a fancy restaurant: after eating], with English translation. The characters participating are Novio [boyfriend] and Novia [girlfriend], and the title comes both in Spanish and Korean for students to understand.

### **Diálogo #3 (En un restaurante lujoso: después de comer 고급 레스토랑에서, 식사 후에)**

**Novio:** ¿Comiste bien, mi amor?

[Did you enjoy your meal, my love?].

**Novia:** Sí, estoy llena. ¿Porqué me invitaste a este restaurante tan lujoso?

[Yes, I am full. Why did you invite me to this fancy restaurant?].

**Novio:** Es que tengo un regalo y una pregunta para ti. Aquí tienes el regalo.

[Because I have a present and a question for you. Here's the present].

**Novia:** ¿Qué es...? ¡Guau! Es un anillo. ¿Es de plata?

[What is it...? Wow! It's a ring. Is it made of silver?].

**Novio:** No, está hecho de oro blanco. ¿Te gusta?

[No, it is made of white gold. Do you like it?].

**Novia:** Me encanta. ¿Y la pregunta?

[I love it! And the question?].

**Novio:** ¿Quieresser mi esposa?

[Do you want to be my wife?].

**Novia:** ¡Diosmío! ¡Qué sorpresa! ¡Claro que sí! ¡Te amo, mi amor! ♥♥♥

[Oh my gosh! What a surprise! Of course I do! I love you, my love!♥♥♥].

**Novio:** ¡Yo también, te amo! ♥♥♥ ¿Adónde quieres que vayamos de luna de miel?

[I love you too! ♥♥♥ Where do you want us to go on our honeymoon?].

**Novia:** Deseo que vayamos de luna de miel a Cancún, ¿qué te parece la idea?

[I want us to go to Cancun on our honeymoon, what do you think of the idea?].

**Novio:** Me parece excelente. ¡Vamos a Cancún!

[I think it's an excellent idea! Let's go to Cancun!].

**Novia:** Pero todavía estás estudiando la maestría.

[But you're still doing your master's degree].

**Novio:** No importa. Tan pronto como la termine, nos casaremos.

[Never mind. As soon as I finish, we will get married].

**Novia:** ¿Y cuándo te graduarás?

[And when will you graduate?].

**Novio:** No lo sé exactamente. Quizás me gradúe el próximo año. ¿Me esperarás, corazón?

[I don't know exactly. Perhaps I will graduate next year. Will you wait for me, darling?].

**Novia:** Claro que sí, cariño. No te preocupes y toma tu tiempo. Mientras tanto, yo prepararé nuestra boda.

[I sure will, honey. Don't worry and take your time. Meanwhile, I will prepare the wedding].

This is the third dialog of the three presented in Lesson #1. It presents several elements contained in the lesson. This being a review lesson, the elements are mainly from the second volume of *¿QUÉ ONDA?* This Dialogue #3 contains features such as the simple past, the subjunctive in its various forms, the future, the present continuous, the imperative, the material things are made of, and personal plans. Besides all that, there are elements such as vocabulary and expressions from the lesson and from the previous book. The situation is new to the students, whereas the vocabulary and expressions with the different verb tenses appear in a new context. But students are able to understand, or can even infer the meaning in the general context of the dialogue. This dialogue is then tackled by the instructor, who will deal with this activity in a variety of ways that will help students engage in the situation and interact among themselves practicing this real-life conversation, as if they were the characters in the dialogue.

The dialogues have a dynamic *per se*. The instructor guides students in such a way that they actually feel motivated to respond following his lead. He starts the activity by reading the dialogue line by line, and having students repeat after him. Through repetition on the part of the students, the instructor checks pronunciation, intonation and fluency. Then he divides the roles and he becomes one character, the class being the other character, and they read their parts many times. Then, they exchange the roles, and again read the dialogue many times, until it sounds very natural. They can practice in this way, until reading the conversation becomes fluent. When the instructor hears that everything is well done, he then proceeds to assign the dialogue roles to individual students. Under this exposure, students start to act out their part. At this particular point, however, intonation becomes a focal point. Students have to speak as if they are doing it in a real situation, that is to say, they have to sound like normal Spanish speakers.

All the time up to now, the dialogue dynamic has been done with open books. But since the students have become well acquainted with the dialogue by so much repetition, they are now ready for the next step. The instructor will now approach the dynamic with books closed. He proceeds in the same way as he did with books open. He then starts by saying the first line, and the group responds with the second, and so they go until they finish. They repeat as much as it may be necessary for students to feel they have mastered the dialogue lines. Then they exchange lines, and proceed in the same way. In the end, the instructor once again will assign two students —the ones he knows to be confident and quick learners— to act out the dialogue without any written help. Then some other two students will do the same, until everybody has had the chance to participate.

The assignment for the following class will be precisely to practice that dialogue, or the three dialogues of the lesson, so that the students may feel comfortable speaking out the lines fluently. In the following class the instructor will make sure that the students did their homework checking randomly two or three times. He will take care that the students do not become bored by so much repetition, and will carry on the assignment as nonchalantly as possible. He can take this opportunity to give out little tokens to the students who are called to act the dialogues, and the ones who volunteer. It might be chocolate or a candy, something small but special. And when the instructor feels the class has achieved success with the dialogues, they will proceed to the following activity, the section that revises the whole lesson in order to make sure the students remember the content of the lesson after one or two weeks.

### 3. Reviewing the lesson through questions

The next step after the dialogue dynamic comes as a review of the lesson, *Preguntas para repasar* (Questions for Review). The instructor can explore this section using his own creativity to remind students of what they have covered in the lesson. He can even broaden the scope of the lesson by referring to material already learned, but that the students know well. This is the moment the instructor will see whether there are any difficulties, doubts, or problems that need to be dealt with. He will make sure students are sure of what they review. The instructor can approach the activity either orally, or use the section in written form, to check afterwards the students' answers. This review section usually contains 30 or 35 questions, with space for the students to answer written form.

The instructor can use a variety of methods to tackle this section of the lesson. He can do it with books open or closed, for instance. He can also assign students to do the activity orally in pairs. It will all depend on what he considers best for the group at that particular moment. But the general idea is to ask a question for students to answer if they have no difficulty in understanding or remembering from the lesson. A typical question is, for instance, "Where did you use to live when you were a child?", in which aspects of the imperfect preterit are clearly seen. If the students understand, they will of course answer the question with a verb in the imperfect preterit, which is the aim of the question. So, the instructor can lead the activity asking the questions one by one, always referring to the lesson whenever any student cannot respond satisfactorily. That is the actual purpose of this activity—to review the lesson by means of the questions.

When the instructor assigns the activity to be done in pairs, the students can freely browse through the book searching for the best answers. They probably feel less threatened when they work by themselves, and in that way that can become a very productive time for them. Besides that, the students like to jot down their answers, so when working in pairs they go ahead and answer orally and also in writing form in their books. It becomes necessary that the instructor walk about the classroom, checking on the students' progress. He can ask questions to different pairs of students, making sure they are getting it right. Sometimes, if this is the last period of class, for instance, he can allow a pair to leave when they are done with the exercise. Students usually like this very much and strive to finish quickly and well. This activity constitutes a good review for exams, since all exams are oral in form, and students are expected to respond to questions like the ones they have just answered both orally and in written form.

### 4. Personalizing the lesson through a reading activity (Lectura)

The time has now come to conclude the oral part of the lesson with an activity that will take students to personalize what they have been practicing previously. This activity is made up of a short reading text that wraps up the lesson taking the content a step further into the students' exposure to the language. In the *Reading* (Lectura) section, they encounter a text that complements and/or further develops the lesson, but in a more personal way. Students read a brief text narrated by a young university student, telling of his activities of the day. Everything went wrong since the moment that person got up in the morning. He is, of course, narrating everything in the simple past tense, and using also the preterit past. It is a short, enjoyable and relatable text. Students can see themselves in that type of narration. There are new elements in this text, but they are words that appear before in the *Vocabulary Section*.

Students read the text, and the instructor guides them into all new things they can identify from the lesson, highlighting them in color. Then, the instructor checks comprehension by asking questions or by comparing the text's content with Korean university culture. When it is clear that the students have grasped all the content, the instructor calls two or three students to read the text but exchanging the name of the character in the reading by their own name, and substituting the actions with their personal experience of a day when things did not go very well.

In this manner, students are once again reviewing important content that will always be helpful when they speak Spanish. This activity lasts for a short period of time. And finally, the instructor can assign homework by telling students to bring their personal version of the reading for the following class, when he can spend time listening to students one by one.

### **5. Cultural approach to the language – Information of general interest**

Following the *Reading* (Lectura) section, the students are now exposed to reading for general cultural information. In this lesson, the reading is about the Seven Wonders of the Hispanic World, seven places that tourists around the world visit and admire. The instructor can use this reading material as he sees fit, to the convenience of the group. Depending on time, he can do without it as well, or he can also expect students to talk about those places in the exams. The instructor's creativity is a factor that can enhance the learning situation. This section can also be used for a Project, having students prepare their own virtual tours and telling the class about the places.

### **6. Special activity**

Every lesson contains at the end a special activity section in which the students engage in a meaningful activity that relates to the Hispanic culture. It can be preparing a simple meal, learning a song in Spanish, do small projects, and the like. In this lesson, students are asked to prepare a list of the ten things they would like to do during their lifetime, before they die. They have to think this over and prepare their lists, and then present them either to the class or to the instructor, as he sees more helpful and fitting to the group. This activity can be done if there is enough time, or be dropped altogether, but it is a great opportunity for the instructor to hear the students express their wishes and desires, something that it is not very easy to do in the language that one is learning.

### **7. List of Vocabulary to memorize**

To close the lesson, the final topic presented is the list of all the vocabulary that appears in the lesson. Here again, the instructor is free to adapt this content. Since the class has been working hard on learning how to speak, it can be assumed that by now they probably know the vocabulary and expressions presented during all this time of their learning. So, it is up to the instructor to decide whether to use this section, or to drop it, or assign it as homework. Once again, the instructor is free to make decisions based on how he sees the group is progressing. Time also is a pressing factor, so this last section of the lesson has to be considered seriously and wisely. Korean students are masterful in memorizing material, so for them it might not be an issue.

### **Conclusion**

¿QUÉ ONDA? is just like any other language learning book, but its focus is predominantly oral and conversational, in a communicative approach. It certainly contains grammatical elements and structures, but it is a content oriented to students' oral acquisition and production. Korean students like to learn in a dynamic and structured manner, so this material can be appropriate and of great assistance to them. The role of the instructor for this type of course is a very special one. Much energy is required of this person when it comes to so much oral activities and exercises in the class. All material taught in a language class with creativity and professionalism will render the expected results by the instructor. ¿QUÉ ONDA? provides those tools for the professional who wants to have fruitful results in the life of the students. The reward he gets is seeing and hearing those students speaking fluently in Spanish, even when this language is so distant and different from their own.

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