Workshop title: Towards A Spanish Proficiency Ratings Scale In Australia

Andrew Munro & Hugo Hortiguera
Griffith University

Abstract

The ability to communicate effectively with persons speaking languages other than one's own is increasingly important. The benefits of multilingualism are now apparent in domains as diverse as education, commerce and tourism. Australia's particular geographic situation and its changing social composition demand that its population acquire a sound knowledge of a second language and demonstrate a sound communicative proficiency when interacting with members of other cultural and linguistic groups.

Spanish is arguably a key second language choice for people in Australia. The fact that 13 of the 39 universities in Australia have a Spanish Studies program, attests to this growing interest here in learning Spanish. However, this interest does not necessarily equate with a marked improvement in proficiency. Australian reports on language education policy over the last decade have drawn attention to the comparatively poor proficiency levels of graduates in languages other than English (LOTE). Moreover, in the case of Spanish, there currently exist no uniform testing protocols in Australian universities to certify the competency of Australian students of Spanish as a Second Language (SSL). This project seeks to redress this situation.

The development of evaluative guidelines to describe the proficiency with which an SSL learner can perform activities in the four major skill areas (viz. speaking, listening, reading and writing) at elementary, intermediate, advanced and superior levels, would be invaluable both within and without the university context. Such evaluative guidelines would be employed in elaborating a set of criteria to assess speakers' competency in Spanish. Such criteria, if then used broadly by Australian universities, would benefit students both in terms of their being properly placed in classes and curriculum reform. Similarly, these guidelines would constitute an important instrument of evaluation to be used by our programs in order to assess our courses, determining and on occasion reorienting our goals and strategies.