

■ RICK HESSE, Feature Editor, Pepperdine University

# Teaching Classes in Two Languages Simultaneously

by Ernest C. Jewell and Natasa Christodoulidou,  
California State University, Dominguez Hills

"Good morning and welcome to our new class."

"Buenos días y bienvenidos a nuestra nueva clase."

This is how a bilingual leadership training class sponsored by Cal-State Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) starts each session. Ernest Jewell has been conducting these classes as part of Extended Education at CSUDH or contracted training. Natasa Christodoulidou has been observing classes and collecting data and was instrumental in writing up this experience as a prelude to study the effectiveness of bilingual training classes. In most large U.S. cities diversified cultures are now common, providing an opportunity to teach in more than one language. Typically, classes include students whose first language is not English. A recent article in the "Opinion" section of the *Los Angeles Times* offers insights about what is happening in the U.S. population today. "Currently, the U.S. population is 73.6 percent white, 12 percent black, 10.2 percent Latino and 3.3 percent Asian. By the year 2050, according to the Census Bureau projections, America will be 52.8 percent white, 24.5 percent Latino, 13.6 percent black and 8.2 percent Asian" (source: *Los Angeles Times*, Commentary/Analysis/Times Interview "Opinion" by Joe R. Hicks, July 20, 1997).

## The Problem

In the Los Angeles area the majority of students in these training classes which we teach are from Latin American countries. Generally 60 percent from Mexico, 20 percent from Guatemala, 15 percent from other Central America countries,

and 5 percent from various nations in South America. Classes in two languages are useful for those whose first language is not English, especially for those found in the diverse environment of Southern California. More and more students who take classes include employees whose first language is Spanish.

When students begin to learn new concepts, they naturally turn to their first language. In order to reason through a situation, they mentally translate it to their first language. If this process takes too much time they simply give up following the lecture. Frequently, the time needed for the translation process frustrates them because they lose track of the pertinent points. They do not participate and fail to understand how to incorporate the new concepts into their work.

## Keep It Short and Simple

When class is taught in both English and Spanish simultaneously, it is essential that moving back and forth between the two languages is quick so that students remain attentive. This is possible by using short sentences or statements, seven to twelve words, first in English and then the same in Spanish. Sometimes this varies by speaking fewer words in one language than the other and sometimes changing the rhythm so it is not too predictable. It is important to include a specific idea in each of the short sentences with sufficient detail to make it meaningful.

Some executives have said they are worried about a class that is taught in both languages because they believe it will make the class twice as long. They



### Ernest Jewell

is a management consultant assisting businesses operating in both international and domestic markets. He teaches in the MBA program at California State University

Dominguez Hills on campus and in the distance learning programs on TV and the Internet. He conducted studies of the national port operations of Mexico and Ecuador, and has taught training seminars for the American Association of Port Authorities.

[ejewell@online.csudh.edu](mailto:ejewell@online.csudh.edu)



### Natasa Christodoulidou

is an assistant professor of marketing in the Marketing Department at California State University Dominguez Hills. Her research interests are in the areas of technology, electronic commerce, and hospitality electronic distribution. Her work has appeared in academic and professional journals.

[nchristodoulidou@csudh.edu](mailto:nchristodoulidou@csudh.edu)

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refer to company meetings held with both Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups. In these meetings the time hovers monotonously when the speaker has to stop and wait for someone to interpret. In these situations the speaker often talks too long before stopping for the interpretation. When the speaker talks for long periods before the interpretation is done, the interpreter cannot remember all that was said and some of the message is lost. In some situations the interpreter will ask the speaker to repeat something and this makes the process slower and longer.

The way to approach this timing problem is to imitate the presentation flow of the United Nations. The United Nations has interpreters who translate to a second language while the speaker continues his discourse. This is a good technique to duplicate. In addition, people who speak Spanish often speak faster than English speakers, so it is recommended to speed up the tempo switching into Spanish. Both techniques serve as time savers.

Sometimes it is useful to refer to a topic in one language up to the point of naming things that both groups understand in either language, and then use the familiar words in just the one language before going on. For instance, when giving one's background you can state: "Once I worked for a management consulting firm where we prepared seminars for port administrators. En un tiempo trabajé por una empresa de asesoría donde preparábamos seminarios para administradores de puertos. It was my assignment to study the ports of: La asignación que tenía era estudiar los puertos de: San Diego, Long Beach, Los Angeles and San Francisco." Whenever there are topics in the training that all the employees understand in just one of the languages, there is no need to repeat them in the other. This maximizes class time. It can be argued that the class may run 10 percent to 15 percent longer, but the class time certainly does not double as some company executives may fear.

### Instructor Qualifications

In order to qualify for this kind of teaching the instructors need substantial experience doing simultaneous interpretation. For example, the first author has worked as a simultaneous interpreter for a number of years, originally building skills with the American Association of Port Authorities which includes the ports in both North and South America. He interpreted for Port Administrator seminars as well as for their annual Port Authority conventions held in San Francisco, Houston, Philadelphia and Montreal.

Additionally it is crucial during class that the instructor interprets all participants' comments. When discussions are interpreted, (a) each student's comments need to be monitored, and (b) the students need to be interrupted so that the instructor can interpret when they make important points rather than waiting for them to complete their thoughts. Although the students may be interrupted for interpretation, they catch on to how the interpretation flows with the comments and they adapt quickly. Using this strategy, very little time is lost, and in this way the group can enjoy an active discussion.

### Using a Whiteboard

In addition to the verbal presentation, a whiteboard or blackboard can be used to visually highlight the most important concepts. Both languages are shared on the whiteboard, with the words of one right under the same words of the other, or putting them side by side. It is also advantageous to write in one language while speaking in the other.

In one of the classes there were three languages represented: Spanish, English and Vietnamese. One young man could speak both English and Vietnamese fluently, so the instructor asked him to translate to Vietnamese each time the instructor spoke in Spanish. At first the student had to be reminded to start his interpretation at the same time the instructor did, but he quickly caught on and the class proceeded well.

### Class Participant's Reaction

We regularly talk to students about their experiences with the class and ask them how they feel about being in a class taught in two languages. Responses include: "I find it interesting because I am trying to learn Spanish and this helps me a lot," "It really helps me with my English because I hear the words in my language and in the one I need to learn," "This gives me a chance to think about the concepts I hear before I have to listen to another." Generally, the majority find it useful and not at all inconvenient. Even those who speak both languages feel that it is interesting and useful. Occasionally, someone who speaks both languages mentions that the repetition of the same thought is not useful to them.

A surprising experience occurred one morning when the instructor walked into class a few minutes early. A buyer for Ready Pac Corporation announced, "Here comes the real Spanish teacher." The instructor asked her what she meant. She explained that she was enrolled in a Spanish class at one of the local community colleges, but that she was learning a lot more Spanish in our Supervisor Training class.

The following are a few of the comments emailed to us by class participants:

*"I would like to thank you for the class I took with you. The Leadership class taught in English and translating it to Spanish during the training helped me tremendously. It helped me and the rest of my peers to understand the subject matter better. It helped most us in the way that English is our second language made it easier and enjoyable to follow your class. It also helped our peers to brush up on their Spanish language according to their comments mentioned during this time. Thank you for your excellent work you provide to us." IT Technical Support Manager, Ready Pac Produce, Inc.*

*"I attended one of Ernest Jewell's classes and I was amazed on how he spoke two languages (English and Spanish) during the training. The reason that it amazed me was that I have attended other classes*

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## Why Not Skip the DVD Player Entirely?

This is not encouraging. After all, why don't you skip the DVD player and get your content from the Internet? A few download sites are now in existence including AmazonUnbox, CinemaNow, MovieFlix, NetFlix, and Vongo. Right now, they may be similar to quality as a regular DVD, but wait awhile and they will provide high-def content as well.

Of course it is human nature to buy and store items for a library, but you may overcome that urge if it means you don't have to purchase a new DVD player.

## Just Another New "Standard?"

Oh, just one more thing. Now that you have comfortably made your decision and purchased your new high-definition television, you may want to take note that a new standard has been accepted.

The new standard, unveiled in 2005, is called Ultra High Definition Video (UHDV). It has a resolution of  $7,680 \times 4,320$  pixels, significantly more than existing High Definition TV (HDTV), which has a resolution of  $1920 \times 1080$  pixels in the United States. It is also a whopping 110 times the amount of pixels delivered by a "standard", ordinary NTSC DVD player we use today.

Don't get too excited, because a full-length feature would consume about 25 terabytes of memory, so until memory gets smaller and cheaper, you won't be download any UHDV programs from the Internet for some time.

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*where both English and Spanish were required and it was not only boring but it took up so much time for the translation the crowd lost their energy, Ernest Jewell is great at what he does. The difference in his work compared to what I have seen in with other trainers is that he says something in English and immediately repeats the same thing in Spanish so he is doing this simultaneously with no extra time taken, and he did not lose the attention of the group. To me it was enjoyable.* [Training Specialist, Superior Warehouse Company]

*"I feel that Ernest's English/Spanish combo method of instruction was very effective and is a must for training in our area. I think that one of the critical issues to making this work is short, straight to the point sentences. This assures that you don't lose the attention of your English speaking students during the interpretation. Ernest is very good at keeping your attention and keeping everyone involved in the topic. Thank You."* [VP Cutting & Raw Materials]

There are scores of students graduating in business and education who are bilingual. Many of them are the children of workers in the factories of Southern California. Because of the changing mix of the U.S. population and the availability of those who are bilingual, the future opportunities for teaching training classes in two languages simultaneously are growing. These bilingual students can learn to teach classes through internships, allowing them to receive college credit as well as on the job experience.

## Conclusions

*Many DSI members do training as part of consulting and also as part of collecting data or as service to the community. As the U.S. population continues to diversify, it is advantageous to teach classes in two languages at the same time. It is natural for people to think in their primary language so whenever they attend a class*

*taught in a language other than their first they spend time translating the concepts in their mind, thus losing track of the presentation. They do not capture the new concepts, and cannot apply them when they return to work. The instructor needs to make the presentation first in one language and then in the other speaking in short sentences so that he can keep the class involved and make it interesting for both groups. Materials written on a whiteboard or blackboard should be written in both languages placed side by side. It is important to interpret students' comments creating active participation during class discussions. Teaching training classes in two languages simultaneously can be very effective in training today.* ■