TEACHING GRAMMAR AND CULTURE USING THE TOPIC OF IMMIGRATION

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Abstract - My presentation will be a pragmatic one on the topic of language in multicultural contexts in a Spanish Intermediate course. From an applied linguistic perspective, and second language acquisition, I will discuss on my research the teaching of the subjunctive mood, and from a cultural point of view, I will use the context of immigration to integrate the grammar component. My presentation includes an explanation of a teaching module, which contents two articles and three songs. The two journalistic articles are about immigration and are written by Mario Vargas Llosa, the Nobel Prize Winner of Literature of 2010. The three songs are from Mexico, Spain and France. The authors are a Mexican group Maná, Manu Chao: a French singer whose parents are from Spain, and Pedro Guerra: a singer and composer from Spain, and learners will listen the version of his song in interpretation of Ana Belén and Víctor Manuel: a duo, also from Spain. My students will read the articles and listen to the songs outside the classroom. Then in class we will discuss first as a whole the three songs, then in pairs they will discuss in detail each song and later both of the articles. After that, in small groups students will produce a poster using the subjunctive mood in which they will reflect their thoughts, doubts, hopes and concerns. Finally, individually they will write a composition about immigration using the subjunctive mood.

Keywords - Affective Filter- Cultural Contextualization-Immigration- Realia-Subjunctive Mode

When teaching Intermediate Spanish courses the emphasis, is usually, on the practice of the Subjunctive Mood, especially on the present tense, which happens to be the most difficult Spanish Mood to master, and in general, one of the most challenging components of the structure of the Spanish grammar.

On my presentation, I will reflect on the importance of the use of contextualization and realia in order to make the teaching of the Subjunctive Mood less stressful for the students. Indeed, my focus will be in commenting how cultural contextualization and realia are pertinent tools in the teaching of world languages. This use of realia and cultural contextualization not only makes more meaningful and relevant the lessons for the learners but also lowers the affective filter with the purpose of maximizing their learning possibilities while acquiring the pertinent skills and doing significant practice to use properly the present tense of the subjunctive mood.

There are four moods in the Spanish language and the Subjunctive is the most used after the Indicative Mood. As its name indicates, the Subjunctive Mood is associated to a subjective reality. In Spanish, and in all the Romance languages (the ones which were originated from Latin) the Subjunctive Mood is used to express actions that are either hypothetical, hopeful, doubtful, actions that are mainly desires, hopes, recommendations, prohibitions, expressions of solidarity, feelings, emotions, when trying to influence someone, etc. In other words, the Subjunctive Mood is the one used when we are not referring to an objective reality. This mood serves to communicate a speaker's subjectivity. Unlike English, the Subjunctive Mood is widely used in Spanish. Is pertinent that now I explain briefly the meaning of cultural contextualization, affective filter, and realia in applied linguistics. Cultural contextualization refers to a meaningful cultural background, which places in a real perspective any verbal interaction. By having the target language as part of a cultural context, the learning experience of the students enhances because language does not exist in a vacuum, but as a vibrant part of a cultural continuum and daily interactions with speakers. Realia is used in applied linguistics to refer to real life activities or objects such as authentic teaching materials like newspapers articles, songs, poems, TV ads, etc. Affective filter is a term created by the linguist Stephen Krashen, specialized in applied linguistic and second language acquisition. This term refers to one of his hypothesis about second language acquisition, which states that some negative emotions such as anxiety, stress, nervousness, etc., could be an impediment to acquire a second language by increasing the imaginary affective filter. Krashen suggests that when we lower the affective filter, learners are more relaxed and then language acquisition takes place.

The two articles and three songs related to immigration will be assign to students after they have had several lessons, at least five of them, on the use of the Subjunctive Mood. Students will have an introduction to the Subjunctive Mood on the first class dedicated to this mood. In such introduction, they will be exposed to the forms of the present subjunctive of the regular verbs, and they will start practicing with some task based communicative activities such as

writing a response letter to a potential person in need of a romantic advice of some sort. Learners will start their recommendations by saying statements like this: "I suggest that you think well what you want to do" (Sugiero que pienses bien qué es lo que quieres hacer). On the second lesson devoted to the uses of the Subjunctive Mood, students will be exposed to some of the very important irregular verbs on the present tense of the Subjunctive Mood such as: "to do" (Hacer), "to be" (Ser/Estar), "to have" (Tener, Haber), "to give" (Dar), etc. Learners will have as well a listening comprehension activity in which they will have to fill up the missing words of the song: "Sólo le pido a Dios" by the Columbian singer Juanes (I only ask God) in which most of the verbs are in the present tense of the subjunctive mood. Then they will need to write in groups of two their own prayer or list of wishes - if they are not believers- following the structure of the song of Juanes. On the third lesson dedicated to the present tense of the Subjunctive Mood, students will be expose to the uses of the subjunctive while attempting to influence someone's behavior. They will have several play roles in which they will need to be persuasive while using the Subjunctive Mood. First, all the learners will write in a piece of paper all sort of problems, and then by lottery some of those problems will be chosen to be discuss in class, and to come up with ideas to influence the owner or potential owner of the problem. On the fourth day devoted to the Subjunctive Mood, students will practice how to express doubt, disbelief and denial using the Subjunctive Mood. In order to practice this particular use of the Subjunctive Mood, learners will first, in pairs have to write a list of fabulous dreams, inventions, the cure of some illnesses, etc. Then they will exchange their list with other groups, and they will share their doubts and disbelieves about what their classmates have stated as possible. On the fifth day dedicated to the Subjunctive Mood, learners will be writing in pairs five of the worst worldwide problems such as, poverty, wars, pollutions, injustice, inequality, or any other type of problem they considered among the five worst. Then the whole class will come up with phrases of solidarity as their genuine reaction to those crucial problems. The best phrases will be part of a poem. As a homework for the following class, students will write individually a composition titled: "My Ideal World". In the composition learners will list the kind of things they would like to have in their ideal world, as well as what they wish does not exist on their dream world. Their compositions will start with "I want a world that….." (Quiero un mundo que……..then the subjunctive mood has to be used). If another lesson is needed before introducing the topic of immigration to keep using in a cultural context the subjunctive mood, that will be determined according to the learner's performance. If, on the other hand, students are ready for the next task, then they will have to listen at home the song: "Clandestino":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7AzimrAgWbA

This song was composed and sang by the French singer: Manu Chao, son of immigrants from Spain. This song's lyrics are less complicated than the other two songs students will listen, analyze, and discuss later on, and that is the very reason for why this song comes first for them. The logic is to try to avoid as much as possible, the feeling of frustration students could start developing if the first song contained an arduous vocabulary, one rather demanding that could make them perceive as if the analysis of the song was an impossible task to complete. This way the affective filter does not increase. Learners will be encouraged to reflect in all the geographic places involved in the song: "Clandestino" such as Ceuta, Gibraltar, Africa, Babylon, Peru, etc., and then they should be prepared to answering the following questions in the target language during class and in groups:

1. What is the tone of the lyrics, are there examples of irony?
2. What is the symbolism of "sea" (mar) on the song? Do you see any connection between "sea" and "freedom"?
3. Why the song states, "to run is my destiny" (correr es mi destino), in what context people have to run?
4. Why the song states: "my life is forbidden" (mi vida va prohibida)?
5. What is the overall vision of the immigrant in this song?
6. How the vision of the immigrants differs or not with the vision the US media currently projects in America and the world?

Is interesting to underline that the fact that Manu Chao: the singer and composer of "Clandestino" mentions several parts of the world on his happy song is quite relevant not only because many of Montgomery College students come from different continents but also because the feeling of inclusivity is a key one for the discussion on immigration.

At the end of this lesson, which will be the number six on the use of the present tense of the Subjunctive Mood, students will have an overall position about the song and this position will depend of their own ideas, political views, prejudices, stereotypes, or lack of them. My job as facilitator consists in not trying to shape their beliefs as they are totally entitled to have their own views.

The goal is to create a safe space where learners feel free to express their views in the target language without any fear of being criticize for thinking one way or another, and much less for not having a perfect

pronunciation or a perfect use of the present tense of the Subjunctive Mood.
The second song learners will have to listen at home will be, "Contamíname":
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvtyugdol14

This song created by Pedro Guerra; and interpreted by the singers: Ana Belén and her husband Víctor Manuel, from Spain. While listening to the song at home they will need to reflect on the title of the song "Contaminated me" and to start thinking in the following questions which they will respond in class and in groups:

1. Why the following nouns are meaningful on the context of the song: "árbol dátil" (date three), "desiertos" (desserts), "mezquitas" (mosques), "darbuctas" (Arab instrument of percussion), "cadenas" (chains), "buzuquis" (Greek instrument similar to mandolin)?
2. What is the relevance of the word: "humo" (smoke), on the song?
3. Does the song state that all immigrants are welcome? If not, which ones are not and why?
4. What is the meaning of the sentence: "mézclate conmigo que bajo mi rama tendrás abrigo" (mix with me that under my branch you will find shelter")?
5. Why the use of the following verbs are prevalent on the song: " cuéntame", "ven" "contamíname", "mézclate", "tendrás", "anuncian", and why most of them are used on the Imperative Mood?
6. How immigrants are portrayed in this song?

Students usually like this song as well as the song "Clandestino" for their rapid rhythms and contagious melody, but are often surprised about the deep meaning of their lyrics. Learners will use their critical thinking skills while analyzing; "Contamíname" as they will have to start thinking in why, according to the song, some immigrants are welcome and why some others are rejected.

The third and last song learners have to listen at home is "Pobre Juan":

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EVd0KvJm6WE

This song is interpreted and created by the Mexican group: Maná. Learners will need to reflect on the meaning of the title of the song, in the story that the official video of the song –which is placed in YouTube- tells very graphically, then they will be prepared to reply to the following questions in class and in groups:

1. - Why Juan went to the north?
2. - What happened to Juan's fiancée?
3. - What was Juan's dream? Was his dream too ambitious?
4. - What were the obstacles Juan encountered while pursuing his dream?
5. - How could have been Juan' and his fiancée María' lives if Juan was able to achieve his version of the American dream?
6. - How immigrants are portrayed on this song?

The video and the song "Pobre Juan" are both very moving, however realistic, and learners will comprehend many of the immigrants' needs of after analyzing this song and watching the video.

After discussing the three songs in class, students will have pre-reading activities dealing with new vocabulary for each of the two journalist articles they will need to read at home for the following classes. The first article they will read will be "Los inmigrantes" (The Immigrants):

https://elpais.com/diario/1996/08/25/opinion/840924004_850215.html

The 2010 Nobel Prize winner of Literature wrote this article on 1996: Mario Vargas Llosa.

Learners will reflect on the following questions to discuss them in groups during class:

1. - What is the perspective of the author about immigration and immigrants?
2. - What was the trajectory of the Peruvian couple who the author met in Spain?
3. - Is the author stating any reasons to support immigration? If so, which are those reasons?
4. - What are the adjectives the author uses to refer to immigrants?
5. - Which is the best effective help, according to Vargas Llosa, which the modern democratic countries can offer to the poor countries?
6. - If you do not agree with what Vargas Llosa suggests in his article as far as the best way that modern democratic countries can help the poor ones, what would be your proposal and why?

After discussing this article, learners will read at home the second and last article by Mario Vargas Llosa: "Los pies de Fataumata," wrote on 1999:

https://elpais.com/diario/1999/07/25/opinion/932853606_850215.html

Students will reflect in the symbolism of "pies" (feet) in this article, and will be prepared to discuss in class and in groups the following questions:
1. - Why Fataumata was attacked and by whom?
2. - From where Fataumata emigrated and why?

3. -What were the living conditions of Fataumata according to what the author imagines?
4. - Was Fataumata a danger to the Spanish society, to the Catalonians in particular?
5. - Why do you think Vargas Llosa mentions in his article the emigration by the Spaniards more than fifty years ago?

After the discussion of the three songs and the two articles, learners will choose the song or article that has affected them the most –in positive or negative ways-. After that, they will create a poster in groups of three or four students in which they will use the subjunctive mood to either agree or disagree with the chosen song or article and present it to the class explaining their views and justifying them. If students agree with their chosen song or article they will use the subjunctive mood to suggest, recommend, or express their wishes and hopes, as well to share their solidarity and their emotions while presenting to the class. If to the contrary the learners disagree with their chosen song or article they with express their doubts, and disagreements when presenting their poster to the class. In either way, the use of the present tense of the subjunctive mood will be use.

After all the groups have the chance to present their posters, then learners will need to write a composition individually consisting of at least two hundred fifty words (250) in which they will answer the following question: "What recommendations you will give to immigrants that want to start a new life?" Learners will know that they do not need to agree with any of the positions stated on the articles or songs, and they will be assure that there will not be a right or wrong political position in this matter. This way they can freely express their view because they will not be judge on their political views but on the arguments, they will be using to support their perspectives on immigration as well as in the correct use of the subjunctive mood.

The linguistic proficiency level chosen to incorporate this teaching module is the intermediate one due to the degree of difficulty of the topic of immigration, and the level of sophistication in which Mario Vargas Lola wrote these articles, which were, addressed, after all, to native Spanish-speakers. Learners will have to reflect in the lyrics of the three mentioned songs and learners will realize that the topic of immigration is not only a political charged one but also that the perspectives on immigration can differ depending of the different countries, cultures, and political views. In addition, learners will be inform after listening and analyzing the three songs and reading and discussing the two articles that the author of the articles: Mario Vargas Llosa has political views that can be associated with the right and yet he supports immigration. Learners will compare how the authors of the songs who are politically speaking from the left, expressed their feelings and positions in immigration in similar ways of the position stated by the right-wing famous author Vargas Llosa. Perhaps they will conclude that no matter what the political position of someone is, still is possible to share some common ground when talking about immigration.

Learners of Intermediate Spanish have already studied in a previous course the subjunctive mood but not in deep. On the Intermediate course, at least half of the semester is used to practice the subjunctive mood. Therefore, is crucial to look for several activities, which will help students to acquire well the use of this challenging mood. The use of meaningful cultural contextualization is one of the effective ways to reduce stress and therefore, lower the affective filter from learners, which is otherwise quite high since learners are studying a difficult aspect of the Spanish grammar. The topic of immigration was chosen because everybody has an opinion about it, moreover, in a college such as Montgomery College where we are very fortunate to have students from different parts of the world. Many of my students feel a personal connection with immigration because it has affected them very closely, and often has even changed their lives dramatically. When students focus, on the topic, they do not focus on the grammar, and therefore their stress, which is normal when learning a world language in high school or college level, diminishes a great deal and with that lowering of the affective filter the language acquisition, is more effective and the learning adventure much more pleasant.

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