

**Request for Proposals for Innovations in Uses of Technology in Instruction  
2007 – 2008**

Title of Project

**Using multimedia technology to improve foreign language pronunciation**

Introduction

In spite of agreement on the importance of correct pronunciation and evidence from a growing body of research indicating that there are benefits to including pronunciation training in foreign language classes, Spanish pronunciation is rarely -if ever- taught in introductory or intermediate classes. Some textbooks present cursory descriptions of how to articulate some basic sounds, although teachers are overwhelmed with the massive amounts of grammar and vocabulary they have to cover and rarely take time for these asides. In the best cases, students in their third or fourth college semester take a Spanish phonetics and phonology class, but this often comes too late to make a difference in the learners' pronunciation. (I know, because I teach this course here at UF, and have listened to my students fail to make true improvements, and have listened to them wishing they had received this kind of phonetic information much earlier.)

Project Goals

The ideal place to incorporate pronunciation training may be SPN 2240: Intensive Communication Skills<sup>1</sup>. Students in this course visit the Language Learning Lab (1317 Turlington Hall) on six occasions throughout the semester; currently they have been using these visits to view the short films that accompany their textbook. However, given the technological tools available in virtually every classroom on campus now, these viewing sessions could take place in the regular class periods. **I therefore propose that we use these six lab visits to instruct students in the essentials of Spanish pronunciation.** With materials I have already developed as well as my knowledge of Spanish phonetics and of what techniques work well for teaching pronunciation, I propose creating a series of multimedia modules to deliver pronunciation instruction to the students who so desperately need it at this level. With these modules we would not need to rely on the TAs to provide such information, as many of them have never studied or been taught the specifics of Spanish phonetics/phonology.

The product of this grant will consist of the six short web-based Flash modules. Students will be able to proceed at their own pace through the components of each module: an explanation of the sounds in question in non-linguistic terms; a diagram/illustration of the points and manner of articulation of those sounds (for example, something similar to the visuals provided here: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/>); examples of the sounds in Spanish, as well as contrasts with English; activities for perception and production practice; and a final activity in which students record and replay their speech to analyze their errors. The six proposed modules encompass what most teachers and researchers consider to be the pronunciation errors that are either most distracting or most annoying to native speakers of Spanish: vowels and diphthongs; voiceless plosive consonants /p, t, k/; voiced plosive consonants /b, d, g/; non-lateral liquids /r/, /P/; assimilation of /n/ before other consonants; and prosody (stress, intonation, rhythm).

---

<sup>1</sup> I am the Director of the Intermediate Spanish Program and therefore have the authority to modify the syllabus of this course.

**Improvements to learning**

This project will enable students at the intermediate level to begin to become aware of and to practice the most difficult features of the Spanish language. In this way, they will begin improving their pronunciation before they carry out coursework for their major/minor, before they go abroad, and, essentially, before they are too ingrained in their bad habits to fix them. Unfortunately, without a project such as this one, we have neither the time nor the instructors to accomplish this in our program.

**Innovation**

The product would take advantage of the technologies available in the Language Learning Lab (audio/visual, etc.), something students could not complete in a regular classroom. However, for maximum benefit to the widest audience (see below), I propose housing the modules on a website where they can be accessed by anyone at any time. The innovation is in the delivery of this material in a way that is accessible to students for self-paced learning and practice.

**Student audience reached**

As stated above, students enrolled in SPN 2240 would be the original beneficiaries of these materials. This course is required of all Spanish majors and minors and is offered every semester to approximately 150 students (6 sections per semester). I hope to implement the completed modules into a preliminary pilot study (see Assessment) in the Fall 2007 semester and, after analysis and any necessary revisions, to implement the project course-wide for the Fall of 2008 onward.

**Portability**

The modules developed here could theoretically be used by any intermediate-level (or beyond) Spanish language learner. Students in other classes who need pronunciation help could be referred to the lab (or to a website) for out-of-class help with their pronunciation. Other SPN teachers at lower levels could also incorporate lessons, as needed, into their courses (in class or as homework) if they see that their students need help in those particular areas. As modules, each of the units is self-sufficient, so learners can access only those they need, when and where they are needed.

**Potential for reducing costs**

I expect no direct reduction of any expenses with this project. However, it would fulfill a demand that could not be otherwise met, given the limitations of our course offerings and our small number of faculty. (I am the only one qualified to create these materials, but am not available to teach this topic to lower levels of learners, as I have to teach graduate and upper level courses.)

**Assessment**

When the modules are completed, they will be implemented in 3 of the 6 sections of SPN 2240 offered the first semester, while the other three sections will continue to view movies in the lab, thereby serving as a control group. Students will fill out a survey at the beginning and end of the semester asking them about their attitudes towards pronunciation. All students will carry out oral recordings of their speech at the beginning and end of the semester as well. In addition, the experimental group, as stated above, will receive the explicit pronunciation training six times throughout the semester, and the oral data collected at each of the six sessions will also be collected for analysis. At the end of the semester these data will enable an assessment of the project in terms of its effectiveness at teaching accurate pronunciation as well as its effect on students' attitudes toward pronunciation and accuracy in their second language.

**Sustainability**

Once created, these materials will be self-sufficient. They could continue to be implemented in SPN 2240 and other courses after their creation, with no changes or modifications needed. (The content material does not change.)