

Teaching Methods FL 598

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Grammar Mapping

I am choosing to focus on the progressive tense in Spanish, specifically with regards to the present progressive tense. There is obviously a disagreement as to when a student should learn this and at what level of proficiency a student needs to be at in which to be educated on this grammatical feature. The ACTFL guidelines tell us that the present progressive tense should be monitored or at least seen in a persons speech at the Advanced Plus level. This grammatical feature is not even mentioned until a student is one level below the Superior level. This is ironic because in many first year texts the present progressive is one of the first tenses that are taught in Spanish language courses in both high-school and college. In the first year high-school text entitled Dime Uno written by McDougal Littell, the book introduces the concept of present progressive in the 12th chapter midway through the first year of Spanish. This may seem like a long way into the course but even though the course does not comply with the ACTFL guidelines, it seems to attempt to bring the first year student only to an Intermediate Low or maybe Mid level. The text book is grammar driven and this can be seen in the way that it emphasizes structure over proficiency. When it talks about a specific

grammatical feature it attempts to explain it in its entirety. This can be seen in the way it teaches the verb "estar." It goes into great detail as to the differences between "ser" and "estar" as well as showing how to use "estar" with other adjectives then going straight into the present progressive tense. According to the ACTFL guidelines students should only be using regular present tense verbs somewhat regularly and just beginning the concept of using a few past tenses. But the present progressive tense is not even mentioned until probably second year. It seems as though Dime is geared more towards writing the language and understanding the grammar, rather than being proficiency based and geared towards speaking as well.

This was a great exercise, because it allowed me to compare the ACTFL guidelines with not only a first year high school text that is grammar oriented, but also with my first year college text which claims is proficiency oriented. Como waits until the very last chapter to just touch on and mention the present progressive tense. It attempts to follow right along with the ACTFL proficiency guidelines only adding small "bites" of grammar that coincide the students ability to produce the language.

As one can see, the chart below gives a rundown of the ACTFL guidelines with special emphasis on verbs until the progressive tense is mentioned. The second two columns show the flow of grammar at the targeted level of proficiency throughout the first years of Spanish. On appearance, the two texts coincide although in reality with Dime every

grammar section is thoroughly studied down to the detail whereas the Como text touches, and then comes back to the topic in more detail later on. The present progressive tense is mentioned halfway through the year with the Dime text when it is introduced as part of the verb *estar*. The progressive tense in Como is only presented at the very end and therefore does not have much emphasis placed on it.

I have several theories as to why the present progressive tense is so widely debated as to where it should appear in a Spanish textbook. One reason as to why it should be introduced early on in a learner's education is because it is such an easy concept to grasp as well as it is used very often in the English language. The only problem here is that this is precisely the reason why it is not emphasized until later in the Como text. The reason for this is that the present progressive tense in Spanish is also expressed using the regular present tense. Instead of "El está estudiando.", one could say "El estudia". Actually many non-native speakers when learning the progressive tense early on, tend to misuse it by overusing it, and therefore don't use the regular present tense correctly. In Spanish it is only used when giving emphasis or raising your voice. This in turn would clarify the reasoning as to why the ACTFL guidelines don't mention the use of the progressive tense until much later in the development of the student when they reach Advanced Plus.

This exercise in grammar mapping has caused me to better understand the ACTFL guidelines and the strategies involved when

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writing a text book. It has caused me to become more critical in my own teaching and to also value a more proficiency oriented teaching style rather than a grammar oriented style.

Verb Tenses (with emphasis on the Present Progressive) Guidelines

Text Books

	College	High-school
Novice-Low	<p>ACTFL Isolated Words/ No use of verbs</p>	<p>DIME UNO First Semester/ Enter the course at this level</p>
Novice-Mid	<p>Sentences are fragmented/ verbs are usually used in the infinitive form/there is little or no subject-verb agreement.</p>	<p>Teaches isolated phrases, and how to use the verb ser, as well as some common irregular verbs such as tener but only in first and third person singular.</p>
Novice-High	<p>Most utterances are telegraphic, and errors often occur when word endings and verbs are omitted or confused./</p> <p>There is some concept of the present tense forms of regular verbs, particular -ar verbs, and some common irregular verbs (ser, querer, tener) although use is limited primarily to first person singular.</p>	<p>estiar and ir +a as well as -ar -er -ir verbs introducing the plural forms as well. Intransitive verbs. Other irregular irregular verbs. (Middle Chapter) Present Progressive.</p>
Intermediate-Low	<p>There is some control over the present tense of regular and some common irregular verbs, and of subject verb agreement.</p>	<p>Midterm Commands/ other less common irregular verbs. (salir, dar). Stem changing verbs. Preterit tense with -ir/ other irregular preterit forms.</p>
Intermediate-Mid	<p>Some grammatical accuracy in basic constructions i.g., subject verb agreement, and present tense of regular and some irregular verbs such as tener, poner, ser, estar, ir. Can express future time by using ir a plus infinitive. May have a concept of past time, but can use only isolated past tense forms which have been learned as vocabulary items.</p>	<p>Reflexive verbs. Complete explanation of preterit tense.</p>
Intermediate-High	<p>Can provide sporadically, although not consistently, simple description and narration of present, past, and future events. Has basic knowledge of the differences between ser and estar (physical description, nationality, profession, vs. location, temporary health condition), although errors are frequent. Can control the present tense of most regular and the</p>	<p>College COMO First Semester/ Enter the course at this level</p> <p>Teaches isolated phrases, and how to use the verb ser, as well as certain regular -ar verbs</p> <p>Begin to learn other more common irregular verbs as well as estar and regular -er and -ir verbs. Is mainly limited to first and third person.</p> <p>Introduction to future tense with ir+a.</p> <p>Second semester More irregular verbs, introduction to the preterit. More stem changing verbs. Using Fui, Fue, the preterit of -ir. Intransitive verbs. (gustar, molestar)</p> <p>Beginning of third Semester. preterit of -er and -ir verbs. Some preterit forms of some of the more common irregular preterit verbs. More about intransitive verbs. More difficult forms of preterit that are less common. Intro to the present subjunctive. Intro to the imperfect tense. Continuing work with both the present subjunctive and imperfect tense. (Last chapter) present progressive tense. End of first year of Spanish.</p> <p>Some students touching this level.</p>

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common irregular verbs, and has some control of basic reflexive verbs. Occasionally uses the preterit of some regular and common irregular verbs (fui./fue, vi /vto), but uses them only sporadically.

Advanced

Can narrate, describe, and explain in past, present, and future time. Can usually handle elementary constructions quite accurately such as the present tense of regular and irregular verbs, and preterit and imperfect forms. Can use imperative forms and can occasionally use the subjunctive in indirect commands. Grasps but does not control the basic differences in usage between the preterit and the imperfect so that many mistakes are expected.

Advanced Plus

Can narrate, describe and explain in past, present and future time. Areas of weakness in grammar can range from simple constructions such as subject-verb agreement to more complex structures such as tense usage (imperfect vs. preterit) ser and estar. Only sporadic ability to use the present subjunctive. Can regularly use the simple future, or ir a plus infinitive to express the future, **as well as the present progressive and past progressive tenses.**

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