A COMMON GOAL

Our common goal in the classroom is to use Spanish as much as possible. Two especially key reasons are:

1. We want to use our valuable classroom time as effectively as possible.
2. We want to learn vocabulary expressions in terms of the concepts that they actually represent and structures in terms of the information that they actually help to convey, rather than as translations of another language (see the Algunas ideas handout for more on this).

There may be appropriate times to use English in the classroom, but they are far and few between. If one should arise, I will be the one to initiate it.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMING TO CLASS PREPARED AND OF STAYING ON TASK

If you come to class prepared, with your textbook in hand and having completed the assigned homework (even if you don’t fully understand what you’ve studied yet), you come with some of the tools that you’ll need to perform the in-class tasks. Often, once in class, I’ll present vocabulary, and, as long as you pay attention, you’ll then have additional tools to perform the tasks. It is not expected that you’ll have a command of all the material, so it’s important that you have your textbook with you—this is yet another tool.

The activities that you’ll do in class (often in groups) are appropriate for the structures and vocabulary that you’ll have seen. Therefore, as long as you stay on task, you should have the language (= tools) required to complete them.

So, for example, in first-semester Spanish, if you’ve studied the verb ser and learned about adjective agreement at home, and then I present terms such as alto, bajo, gordo, delgado, viejo, joven, etc., in class, and then ask you to describe yourself to your compañeros, you should have the tools to do so (even if it means referring to your book for vocabulary that you haven’t yet fully learned). However, if you want to start describing other aspects of yourself—such as your personality, your family, your goals—you’ll likely struggle, because you haven’t yet learned the structures and vocabulary necessary to express those concepts (i.e., you don’t yet have the necessary tools). But, I haven’t asked you to discuss those aspects; it’s not the assigned task. In this class, you will not be asked to perform tasks for which you do not have the tools.

STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING A CONCEPT WHEN YOU DON’T KNOW A WORD

When in class, if you can’t remember an appropriate word to express a concept, or if there’s a relevant word that you haven’t yet learned that you wish to use, you may be tempted to ask:

¿Cómo se dice [English word] en español?  Ex. ¿Cómo se dice “middle-aged” en español?
In the same way, however, that we would never ask that particular question were we speaking with a group of Spanish-speakers (and, obviously, we’re learning Spanish to communicate with Spanish-speakers, and we shouldn’t assume that they’ll understand us if we use English), we’re going to avoid asking that question in our Spanish classroom.

What can you say instead? Here are some alternatives that you should utilize in the classroom.

If the word refers to a concrete object that you can point to or draw:

1. If possible, **point to the actual object** and say: ¿Cómo se dice eso* en español?
   * Use esto if the object’s very close to you; use eso if it’s a little bit away from you.

2. If the object’s not nearby, quickly **draw a picture of the actual object**, point to your drawing, and say: ¿Cómo se dice esto en español?

If the word refers to something that you can’t easily point to or draw (or you prefer not to):

3. Say ¿Cómo se dice...? and then **use facial expressions or body movements** to communicate the concept. This can work for a variety of concepts (think of how you might express emotions like happy or angry, states like tired or confused, actions like to eat or to run), and also objects (how might you convey the idea of a skirt, a heart, a square, a phone, etc.).

4. Say ¿Cómo se dice, por ejemplo...? and then **create a list** that will lead your listener to guess the concept you’re referring to. For example, to express the idea of an actress, you could say: ¿Cómo se dice... Meryl Streep, Penélope Cruz, Viola Davis, Sofía Vergara...?

5. Say ¿Cómo se dice ...? and then **use the Spanish that you’ve already learned to describe or explain** the concept. When describing or explaining, you can mention:

   - **Categories and subcategories**: Does the word refer to a person (una persona), a thing (una cosa), a place (un lugar), an activity (una actividad), etc.? Is it a color, clothing, furniture, a type of food, etc.? As you learn vocabulary expressions, pay special attention to terms that refer to categories so that you can use them to describe or explain other terms.

   - **Physical description**: Is it big or small, short or long? What color is it? What shape is it?

   - **Function**: What is its purpose? For example, to express the idea of kitchen sink, you could say: ¿Cómo se dice el lugar donde lavas los platos?

   - **Usage**: When and where is it used? In the morning? In the evening? During the summer? In a house? In school? In a particular country? By whom is it used? Why is it used? By parents? By a particular animal? Because it’s easy? Because it’s traditional?

   - **Something related or similar**: Is it like something else? How is it different? For example, for a truck: Es como un carro, pero es más grande. Or, for a nurse: Es una profesión. Trabaja en el hospital. No es la doctora. Or, for silver: Es un color-- más o menos gris, pero metal.

   - **Opposite**: What is its opposite (el antónimo or lo opuesto)?
POSSIBLE RESULTS OF USING THE STRATEGIES DESCRIBED ABOVE

In an interaction with another person during which one person doesn't know an appropriate word to express a concept and uses the strategies described above to try to communicate the message to the listener, there are at least four possible outcomes:

1. Estudiante 1 uses one or more of the strategies to communicate the concept. Estudiante 2 actually knows an appropriate word in Spanish to express the concept and tells E1 the word. Communication is successful and E1 learns a new word! Yay! 😊

2. E1 uses the strategies to communicate the concept. E2 doesn’t know the word either, but understands what E1 is trying to express. E1 doesn’t learn a new word, but communication is still successful! Yay! 😊

3. E1 uses the strategies to communicate the concept. E2 doesn’t know the word either, and doesn’t understand what E1 is trying to express. E1 raises her/his hand, and la profesora, who’s used to figuring out what students are trying to say, comes over and is able to tell E1 an appropriate word. Communication is successful and E1 learns a new word! Yay! 😊

4. E1 uses the strategies to communicate the concept. E2 doesn’t know the word either, and doesn’t understand what E1 is trying to express. La profesora isn’t available, or E1 doesn’t want to ask for help at that moment for whatever reason. Communication is unsuccessful and E1 doesn’t learn a new word! Oh well! Fortunately, it’s a classroom setting and it’s not crucial that the communication take place right at that particular moment, so E1 can just say, *No importa* or *Más tarde*, and then E1 and E2 can move on to the next question or task. 😊

Note that, for both outcomes #3 and #4, E1 can take advantage of the last 10 minutes of class, when English is allowed, to ask *la profesora* what an appropriate word might be (and maybe explore what other strategies might have worked to communicate the concept).

STRATEGIES FOR WHEN YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND THE MATERIAL OR YOU’RE CONFUSED

Sometimes, a student’s desire to use English comes when s/he doesn’t understand what we’re doing in class. It may be that the student doesn’t understand the instructions for a particular activity, or the structure that we’re using. Here are some strategies to use in those situations:

1. Make sure to complete your preparation homework (the Infórmate sections of the textbook that you complete in your printed packets) before coming to class. These are your tools.

2. If you don’t understand a structure from your preparation homework, you can **e-mail me or stop by my office to ask specific questions**. You can also check with a friend, or stop by for drop-in tutoring at the Student Success Center (see OCC website). On the other hand, it’s also possible to just come to class with your confusion, and see if it resolves as we begin to work with the material (that often happens).

3. Before entering the classroom, **take a moment to remind yourself what structures you prepared for that day**. This will help you be aware of what we’ll be working on that day.

D. Cabanel-Bleuer, February 2016
4. In class, if you’re unsure if you’re saying something correctly, you can raise your hand and, when I come over, check with me by asking: ¿Es posible decir...? or ¿Está bien decir...? and then say the word or sentence.

5. If you have a possibly complicated question about the material, or a question that’s related but not directly related to what we’re doing, wait till the last 10-15 minutes of class when English is allowed. (If you’re concerned that you might forget to ask, you can write your question-- in English-- and then give me the paper for me to answer at the end of class).

5. If you don’t understand the instructions that I’ve given to the class regarding how to do a particular activity, you can raise your hand when I ask “¿Todos comprenden?” so that I know that you don’t and I can give you individual attention.

6. If it looks like the other members of your group understand what to do, you can let them begin the activity and see if you can figure out what to do by watching your compañeros.

USEFUL EXPRESSIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Expression</th>
<th>English Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tengo una pregunta.</td>
<td>I have a question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo se dice ___?</td>
<td>How do you say ___?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Qué significa ___?</td>
<td>What does ___ mean? (to be answered with a definition, not a translation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Es posible decir ___?</td>
<td>Is it possible to say ___?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Está bien decir ___?</td>
<td>Is it OK to say ___?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo se escribe ___?</td>
<td>How do you spell ___?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo se pronuncia esta palabra?</td>
<td>How do you pronounce this word?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cuál es la diferencia entre ___ y ___?</td>
<td>What’s the difference between ___ and ___?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¿Cómo? ¿Mande?</td>
<td>What?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No comprendo.</td>
<td>I don’t understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No lo sé.</td>
<td>I don’t know.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repite (más despacio), por favor.</td>
<td>Repeat (more slowly), please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Más o menos.</td>
<td>More or less.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No importa.</td>
<td>It’s not important; nevermind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Más tarde.</td>
<td>Later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Al final de la clase.</td>
<td>At the end of class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Me encanta el español!</td>
<td>I love Spanish!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>