

FACT AND OPINION

WHY NOT BASIC SPANISH?

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Twenty-five years ago, the development of Basic English by Ogden and Richards was of great interest to linguists, and, in fact, stimulated the study of semantics in the English language particularly. Not much has been said or written about this experiment of late. Was it not successful, or did it outlive its success to be replaced by much more extensive linguistic studies which are still developing?

Whatever the reasons for its fading from prominence, the experiment did provoke discussion at many levels. Many articles were written pro and con about the advisability of adopting a living language rather than using a synthetic one, and about the relative qualities of current languages. The main argument for a living language is that it is a national idiom and presents a body of literature and cultural associations. So, in learning a living language in preference to a synthetic one, the student advances along many fronts. Which, then, of the living languages should be the basis of a simplified world tongue?

In support of his choice, Richards poses five requisites for the language to be selected and finds that English is the most appropriate.¹ In this discussion he judges Spanish inappropriate because of its complex verb structure! To a Hispanophile this is a challenge which we now accept, albeit somewhat tardily, but fortified by a recent assertion of Mario Pei, who writes, "Nationalism is still abroad in the world, and language is one of nationalism's chief standard-bearers. Rightly or wrongly, English-speakers are accused of not only military and economic but also cultural and linguistic imperialism. As these accusations mount, the rosy path of international English may acquire a few brambles and briars as yet unsuspected by those who claim that the trend to English is irreversible."²

It is impossible to prove out one position

against another without extensive experimentation to form a pattern and list, such as was practiced in developing Basic English. However, since language is personal, and therefore subjective, we can hypothesize about the merits of Spanish and ask, "Why not Basic Spanish?"

A more positive way to approach the subject is to ask instead: *Why Basic Spanish?*

- (1) Spanish is already spoken in many parts of the world by some hundred million persons.
- (2) Its Latin base facilitates its use by people who speak other Romance languages with similar structure and vocabulary.
- (3) Its grammar is relatively simple, usually more simple than that of the other Romance languages.
- (4) Its orthography is faithful to its phonology. (It looks the way it sounds!)
- (5) It is eloquent and euphonious.

How does one establish a basic vocabulary? It would seem natural to turn to a frequency list. The studies now in progress with benefit of computers promise a sound approach. Accordingly, we turned to the *Frequency Dictionary of Spanish Words* for a contemporary well-documented list.³ Against the Basic English list of 850 words⁴ were matched the first thousand words of the Spanish list. This was a remarkably impractical exercise, for several reasons:

- (1) The Spanish list is based entirely on literary sources.
- (2) The Spanish list in some cases is based on texts forty years old, and therefore not completely current. (As far as we know, there is no frequency list of current spoken Spanish.)
- (3) There are numerous synonyms (*hallar, encontrar, descubrir*, etc.)

for some concepts and no word at all for others. It is apparent that *frequency* is not the essential criterion for basic listings: A word may not be so frequently used as another. But if it is necessary, it must be included. It would be hard to live today without *tinta*, *lata*, *corcha*, or *gancho*.

Our Basic Spanish list has been developed in this way:

To find equivalents for the English list, which served as model, the first thousand words of the *Frequency Dictionary* were combed first. If they did not furnish an adequate Spanish form, it was supplied from current usage. Where there are synonyms in Spanish, the commonest, or simplest, is the form retained. (*Hallar* in preference to *encontrar*, though not having as broad an interpretation, avoids the radical change.) Most of the words in the Basic English list were translated because they represent essential items or ideas of contemporary western life. But it did seem important to add such abstractions basic to Spaniards as *honor* and *matrimonio*.

Mr. Richards states that the key to the simplicity of Basic English is the limitation of verbs to eighteen. When one examines his list, however, it is clear that many words such as *offer*, *sleep*, *use*, *touch*, *guide*, and *cry*, which he lists as nouns, would occur to us equally as verbs. And there are other forms in *-ing* (*driving*, *n.*, *hanging*, *adj.*), which are certainly verbs. So we have listed 500 Spanish nouns in contrast to his 600 English nouns and have listed eighty-two verbs, recognizing that all are capable also of being used in the infinitive form as nouns and that adjectives may also be used as substantives.

Why should Mr. Richards find Spanish verb inflections difficult? He lists among his eighteen Basic English verbs *come* (*came*), *get* (*got*, *gotten*), *go* (*went*, *gone*), *will* (*would*, defective), *be* (*am*, *is*, *are*, *was*, *been*), *send* (*sent*), *have* (*had*), *keep* (*kept*), *take* (*took*, *taken*). Is a Spanish verb system, in which many forms have been "regularized" to a greater extent than in their original Latin, and the second plural may legitimately be omitted, really more difficult?

The Basic English list contains a number of words which have multiple meanings, although Mr. Richards indicates that initially only one meaning will be attached to each term. Such words would be *note*, *turn*, *tax*, etc. The Spanish also would have a number of terms, although not equivalents: *coche*, *derecho*, *ensayo*, *tiempo*, *vapor*. The frequency of such terms would seem comparable.

There follows, then, a list of some 850 Spanish words nominated for use in the pursuit of Basic Spanish. As with the Basic English list, this would be expanded by numerals, metric measurements, currency, calendar (days, months), international terms, personal pronouns, and articles. We have not separated the nouns into "general" and "picturable," as in the English listing, finding the basis for distinction sometimes elusive. Recognizing that "Basic is a system of . . . words and the way they are used together,"⁵ we have tried to pattern it as an all-purpose language. Undoubtedly, with testing it will have to be revised. Perhaps some brave teacher with a pioneering group of students and time to experiment will be willing to take it from here.

NOUNS—560

abeja	acuerdo	alambre	anillo	árbol
abrigo	adición	alfiler	animal	arco
aceite	agua	aliento	año	arena
acero	aguja	algodón	aparato	arma
ácido	agujero	amigo	apoyo	armonía
acontecimiento	aire	amor	aprobación	arroz
acto	ala	ángulo	arado	arte

aseguranza	cárcel	cuento	espalda	hembra
asiento	carne	cuerda	esperanza	herida
asunto	carril	cuerno	esponja	hermano -a
ataque	carro	cuero	esposo-a	hielo
atención	carta	cuerpo	estación	hierba
atracción	casa	cuesta	estado	hierro
aumento	castigo	cuidado	este	hijo -a
autoridad	causa	curva	estornudo	hilo
ave	centro	choque	estómago	historia
avión	cepillo	daño	estrella	hoja
ayuda	cera	decisión	estructura	hombre
azúcar	cerrojo	declaración	expansión	honor
bandeja	cesta	dedo	éxito	hora
bandera	cielo	derecho	experiencia	hormiga
baño	ciencia	desaguadero	explosión	horno
barba	círculo	desarrollo	falda	hospital
barco	ciudad	descanso	familia	hueso
báscula	clase	descubrimiento	favor	huevo
base	clavo	deseo	fe	humo
bebida	cobre	destrucción	ficción	humor
beso	cocinero	detalle	fiesta	idea
biblioteca	coche	deuda	filo	iglesia
billete	color	día	fin	impuesto
boca	comida	diente	flor	impulso
bolsillo	comienzo	digestión	fondo	industria
bomba	comité	dinero	forma	insecto
botella	cómoda	dios	fracaso	instrumento
botón	compañía	dirección	freno	interés
brazo	comparación	disco	frente	invención
bulto	competencia	discusión	fruta	invierno
burla	condición	disgusto	fuego	isla
caballo	conducto	distancia	fuerite	jabón
cabeza	consejo	distribución	fuerza	jardín
cabo	convento	diversión	gancho	joya
cabra	corazón	división	garganta	juez
cadena	corcha	dolor	gato	labio
café	corriente	ducha	gerente	ladrillo
caja	corte	duda	gobierno	lana
cajón	cortina	dueño	golpe	lápiz
calcetín	cosa	edificio	gota	lástima
caldera	costumbre	educación	grado	lata
calor	creación	efecto	granja	lección
calle	crédito	ejemplo	grano	lectura
cama	criado	ejército	grieta	leche
cámara	crimen	elemento	grito	lengua
cambio	crystal	enfermedad	grupo	ley
camino	cuadro	ensayo	guante	libre
camisa	cualidad	equilibrio	guardia	lienzo
campana	cubierto	error	guerra	límite
campo	cubo	erudición	gusano	línea
canción	cuchara	escala	gusto	lino
cantidad	cuchillo	escena	habitación	líquido
cara	cuello	escuela	hambre	lista
carbón	cuenta	espacio	hecho	lucha

lugar	nieve	pelo	religión	teatro
luna	niño -a	pelota	reloj	techo
luz	nivel	pensamiento	relación	tela
llama	noche	pérdida	representativo	tendencia
llave	nombre	perro	respeto	tenedor
lluvia	norte	persona	respuesta	teoría
madera	nota	pescado	resultado	término
madre	noticia	peso	reunión	tiempo
maestro -a	nube	pie	riña	tienda
manera	nudo	piedra	río	tierra
mano	nuez	piel	ritmo	tijeras
mantequilla	número	pila	rodilla	tinta
manzana	obra	pintura	rueda	tipo
mapa	observación	pipa	ruido	tiza
máquina	odio	plan	saco	tornillo
mar	oeste	planta	sal	torta
marco	oficina	plata	salto	tos
martillo	oído	plato	sangre	trabajo
media	ojo	pliego	secretario	transporte
matrimonio	ola	pluma	secreto	tren
medida	olor	polvo	seda	trueno
medio	olla	precio	selección	unidad
mente	operación	pregunta	sello	uña
mercado	opinión	premio	semana	vaca
mes	orden	primavera	semilla	valor
mesa	organización	procedimiento	sentido	vapor
metal	ornamento	propiedad	sentimiento	vara
miedo	oro	prosa	señal	varón
mina	otoño	provecho	sexo	vasija
minuto	oveja	prueba	silbo	vela
mirada	padre	pueblo	sistema	veneno
misa	página	puente	sociedad	ventana
mono	pago	puerco	sol	verano
montaña	país	puerta	sombra	verdad
mordida	palabra	puerto	sombrero	vergüenza
mosca	palo	puesto	sonido	vestido
mozo -a	pan	pulgar	sonrisa	vez
muchacho -a	pantalones	pulimento	sopa	viaje
muerte	papel	punto	sorpresa	vida
mujer	paraguas	quemadura	substancia	viento
mundo	parte	queso	suelo	vino
muro	partido	raíz	sueño	vista
músculo	paseo	ramo	suerte	voz
música	paso	rayo	sur	vuelo
naranja	pata	razón	tabla	vuelta
nariz	patata	reacción	tallo	zapato
necesidad	paz	receta	tamaño	
negocio	pecho	recuerdo	tapa	(Plurals in
nervio	peine	red	tarjeta	-s or -es)
niebla	peligro	regla	taza	

VERBS—82

abrir	dar	hallar	nacer	sentir
atrever	deber	huir	ofrecer	separar
buscar	decir	ir	oír	ser
caber	dejar	jugar	parar	servir
caer	dormir	lavar	parecer	sufrir
callar	echar	levantar	pasar	tener
cansar	enfadar	lograr	pedir	tirar
casar	entrar	llamar	perder	tocar
cerrar	equivocar	llegar	poder	tomar
comer	escribir	llevar	poner	tratar
complicar	esperar	mandar	quedar	usar
comprar	estar	mezclar	quitar	vender
comprender	gastar	mojar	recibir	venir
conocer	guiar	molestar	reír	ver
correr	haber	morir	saber	vivir
cortar	hablar	mover	sacar	volver
creer	hacer			

ADVERBS—42

abajo	bastante	después	lejos	sí
ahora	bien	detrás	mal	siempre
allí	casi	donde	mañana	también
antes	cuando	entonces	muy	tampoco
aquí	cuanto	fuera	no	tan
arriba	cerca	hoy	nunca	tanto
así	debajo	jamás	poco	todavía
aun	delante	junto	pronto	ya
ayer	dentro			

PREPOSITIONS—18

a	con	en	mientras	según
ante	contra	entre	para	sin
bajo	de	hacia	por	sobre
como	desde	hasta		

ADJECTIVES—135

abierto	cada	despierto	fértil	igual
actual	caliente	diverso	físico	importante
agudo	capaz	dulce	fotográfico	izquierdo
alto	caro	duro	frecuente	joven
amable	completo	elástico	fuerte	largo
amargo	común	eléctrico	futuro	lento
amarillo	consciente	enfermo	general	libre
ancho	contrario	especial	gordo	limpio
automático	corto	espeso	grande	liso
azul	cruel	estrecho	gris	listo
bajo	curvo	fácil	hermoso	lleno
barato	débil	falso	hirviente	malo
blanco	delgado	famoso	hondo	material
bueno	dependiente	feliz	hueco	médico

militar	poco	redondo	sencillo	último
mismo	político	religioso	serio	verde
mucho	popular	responsable	sólido	viejo
natural	posible	rico	solo	violento
negro	preciso	rígido	sucio	vivo
nuevo	primero	rojo	suelto	este
normal	principal	roto	tarde	ese
oscuro	probable	ruidoso	temprano	aquel
paralelo	propio	sabio	todo	mi
particular	público	sano	tonto	tu
pegoso	puro	seco	tranquilo	nuestro
pequeño	químico	seguro	triste	su
pobre	rápido	semejante		

CONJUNCTIONS AND INDEFINITES—18

aunque	porque	alguien	cuyo	otro
ni	que	algo	nada	quien
o (u)	si	alguno	nadie	tal
pero	y (e)	cualquier(a)		

For adverbs of manner, add *-mente* to feminine of adjectives.

Comparisons with *más* or *menos*.

Questions by inversion or intonation.

Demonstrative adjectives with accent form pronouns.

NOTES

¹I. A. Richards, *Basic English and Its Uses* (New York, 1934), p. 18.

²Mario Pei, "The Revolt Against English," *Saturday Review*, April 6, 1968, pp. 16-17.

³Alphonse Juilland & E. Chang-Rodríguez,

ed., *Frequency Dictionary of Spanish words* (The Hague, 1964).

⁴I. A. Richards, op. cit., pp. 30-31.

⁵I. A. Richards, "Basic English and its applications," *Basic English*, compiled by Julia E. Johnsen (New York, 1944), p. 11.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE CURRENTS

Conducted by THOMAS F. SOUSA*

"FL Annals." The following abstracts from the March and May issues of *Foreign Language Annals* are of special interest:

"The Importance of the Attitude Factor in Language Dropout: A Preliminary Investigation of Group and Sex Differences"—The Foreign Language Attitude Scale (a Likert type scale developed by Dr. Mary DuFort in 1962) was administered to eighth-grade pupils in September and March. The pupils were then divided into two groups according to whether they con-

tinued or dropped foreign language in the ninth grade. Mean attitude scores for both groups were computed and tests of significance of differences between means were performed. The attitude of the "dropout" group was significantly lower than that of the continuing group in September as well as in March. The attitude of the dropout group also deteriorated significantly from September to March while that of the continuing group remained stable. A probability distribution was calculated whereby potential "language dropouts" could thus be detected by low attitude scores as well as by deterioration of attitude scores during the 1966-67 school year.

"An Experiment in Individualized Advanced French"—An Arizona high school has demonstrated that, with certain limitations, advanced

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