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. 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." 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. Against the Basic English list of 850 words* 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 (hellar, 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," 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

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aseguración  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
bálsamo  ciencia  desaguadero  explosión  horno
barba  circulo  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  frasco  instrumento
botón  compañía  dirección  freno  interés
brazo  comparación  disco  frente  invención
bulto  competencia  discusión  fruta  invierno
burla  condición  disgusto  fuego  isla
caballo  conducto  distancia  fuente  jabón
cabeza  consejo  distribución  fuerza  jardín
cabo  convento  diversión  gancho  joya
cabra  corazón  división  garganta  juez
cadena  corcho  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  ejercicio  grieta  leche
cámara  crimen  elemento  grito  lengua
cambio  cristal  enfermedad  grupo  ley
camino  cuadro  ensayo  guante  libre
camisa  cualidad  equilibrio  guardia  lienzo
campana  cubierto  error  guerra  límite
campo  cubo  erudición  gusano  líquido
canción  cucharita  escala  gusto  lino
cantidad  cuchillo  escena  habitación  línea
cara  cuello  escuela  hambre  lista
carbón  cuenta  espacio  hecho  lucha
lugar
luna
luz
llama
llave
lluvia
madera
madre
maestro -a
manera
mano
mantequilla
manzana
mapa
máquina
mar
marco
martillo
media
matrimonio
medida
medio
mente
mercado
mes
mesa
metal
miedo
mina
minuto
mirada
misa
mono
montaña
mordida
mosca
mozo -a
muchacho -a
muerte
mujer
mundo
muero
músculo
música
naranja
nariz
necesidad
negocio
nervio
niebla
nieve
niño -a
nivel
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puesto
pulgar
pulimento
punto
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religión
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respeto
respuesta
resultado
reunión
ríña
rio
ritmo
rodilla
rueda
ruído
saco
tornillo
torta
tos
trabajo
trabajo
transporte
tren
trueño
unidad
uña
vacía
valor
vapor
vara
varón
vasija
vela
veneno
ventana
verano
verdad
vergüenza
vestido
vez
viaje
vida
viento
vino
vista
voc
vuelo
vuelta
zapato
(Plurals in -s or -es)
### VERBS—82

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### ADVERBS—42

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### PREPOSITIONS—18

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<td>sabio</td>
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<td>mi</td>
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<tr>
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<td>público</td>
<td>sano</td>
<td>tonto</td>
<td>tu</td>
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<td>puro</td>
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<td>tranquilo</td>
<td>nuestro</td>
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<td>pequeño</td>
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<td>seguro</td>
<td>triste</td>
<td>su</td>
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<td>pobre</td>
<td>rápido</td>
<td>semejante</td>
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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

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 continued 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