

INTRODUCTION

TEACHING AND LEARNING SPANISH FOR CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

The Latvian Academy of Culture (LAC) has been acknowledged as one of the key institutions contributing to the consolidation of Spanish language teaching in Latvia. Nowadays this institution of higher education and research is one of the main agents in the configuration of the role that both Spanish language and culture play in the Baltic States.

In 2015, a proposal from the Department of Cross-Cultural Communication and Foreign Languages to organize and host an International Conference on Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (*Jornadas de Enseñanza de Español como Lengua Extranjera en Riga*) was approved and encouraged by the Rector of LAC, *Prof. Dr.art.* Rūta Muktupāvela. As a result, since 2015 every year in October the Theatre House of the LAC (*Zirgu Pasts*) has become a home for Spanish language professors, researchers and teachers from different countries and institutions (around 300 attendees and 50 speakers from over a dozen countries have been registered within the five editions of the Conference).

In October 2019, on the occasion of the 5th anniversary, *Prof. Dr.sc.soc.* Anda Laķe, Head of the LAC Research Center, offered to release a special volume of *Culture Crossroads* in order to provide an insight into the main research lines presented at the Conference over the years of its existence. After six months of rigorous work, ten manuscripts were selected for the publication. Their authors are seventeen professors, researchers and teachers from different institutions located in seven countries (Czechia, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Russian Federation and Spain).

In this special issue of *Culture Crossroads* all articles have been written in Spanish not only because it is the official language of the Conference, but also to underline the contribution of plurilingualism to engage individuals in cross-cultural communication. According to the last report released by the Cervantes Institute (*Instituto Cervantes*), Spanish language is spoken by more than 580 million people in the world. Moreover, close to 483 million people speak Spanish as a native language, which qualifies it to hold second place among world languages by number of native speakers. These figures confirm that, beyond certificates or degrees, by learning Spanish language students receive a master key to connect with a vast number of Spanish speakers belonging to different cultures. The reflection on this idea made the motto underlying the present volume to emerge: teaching and learning Spanish for cross-cultural communication.

The first contribution, by **Ana León-Manzanero** and **José Hernández Ortega**, presents the theoretical framework for intercultural communicative competence and reflects on the importance of engaging students in intercultural encounters as a part of

the foreign language (FL) learning process. The authors point at project-based learning as an optimal methodological approach to promote activities and attitudes that shape the intercultural speaker.

The work presented by **Juan Albá Duran**, **Gerdientje Oggel**, **Olivia Espejel Nonell** and **Joan-Tomàs Pujolà Font** illustrates the potential of telecollaborative projects and a way to make the most of these learning experiences. In this article the authors describe the preparation and implementation phases of an international telecollaboration project between two universities and, in addition, they identify the main success factors for this type of projects. Their analysis highlights the importance of reciprocity between learners to establish common learning goals and strengthen their commitment to the project. This is precisely the intention of the proposal that **Olvido Andújar-Molina** presents in her paper. The work is based upon the didactic potential of traditional oral literature, specifically folk-tales. As a cultural manifestation, these stories offer multiple learning opportunities to develop cross-cultural skills in the FL classroom. By comparing different traditions of oral literature, students become aware of the differences between them as well as what they share and what they have in common.

The ability to recognize common traits between cultures is a determining capacity in the intercultural speaker shaping process, who should also manage an image of the other free of prejudices and stereotypes. The article by **Genny Bonilla Latorre** and **Ernesto Puertas Moya** invites teachers to reflect on this issue from the area of teaching Spanish to immigrants. Particularly, their work brings the reality of immigrant women SFL students closer to the teachers, by means of analyzing learner's needs and offering some pedagogical guidelines to promote students' interest towards the language and culture of the host country. The authors focus their attention on gamification as a pedagogical tool, as well as on the affective and emotional component of language learning.

The affective dimension in learning FLs is also addressed in the contribution of **María del Carmen Méndez Santos** through a study on the demotivation of adult SFL students. From the results obtained in this work, the author presents a set of observations that might help to improve the SFL teaching process. Knowing what causes demotivation in students is an essential starting point for teachers to develop precise and effective teaching strategies. The benefits of making well-founded pedagogical decisions might potentially be reflected both in the attitude of the students as well as in the process of language acquisition itself.

The study by **Iban Mañas Navarrete** and **María José Centelles Cuart** focuses on the development of written expression in SFL based on the analysis of texts by adolescents, participants in an international exchange project between two schools. The research supposes a description of the productions written by Spanish and Russian adolescents in terms of complexity, correction, and textual adequacy. The analysis of the written productions collected within the framework of an intercultural project implies as well the possibility of evaluating the results of the project and weighing its contribution to the development of the linguistic competence of the students.

In addition to student performance, any attempt to determine the scope of a pedagogical initiative such as intercultural projects should take into account the available learning tools and the necessary skills on the part of the teachers involved. **Alfonso Rascón Caballero's** proposal focuses on the first element. The author analyses several dictionaries for SFL students, both monolingual and bilingual, with the aim of identifying the criteria for preparing lexical verb entries, and specifically information on their syntactic combinatory. The dictionary as a learning tool can be an enhancer of learner autonomy as long as it is adjusted to their needs and didactic objectives. Other learning tools perhaps less extensive but equally powerful can be found in **Vicente J. Marcet Rodríguez's** work, which collects proposals and teaching materials encouraging SFL teachers to harmoniously present both linguistic and cultural content throughout ancient texts illustrating the history of the language. However, identifying the sociocultural elements involved in the evolution of a language demands from FL teachers a certain training, in order to adequately manage the basic aspects of the discipline and accurately present this knowledge in the classroom.

An essential part of teacher training relies on linguistic knowledge, specifically, on mastering the elements and the rules of the language system. The last two contributions of this monograph emphasize precisely this aspect. In the study by **Dámaso Izquierdo-Alegría**, an in-depth analysis of the treatment of epistemic modality expressions in SFL teaching materials is conducted. After a detailed semantic description of a set of lexical units, the author draws attention to some inconsistencies detected in the treatment of these units in the analyzed manuals. Given this evidence, the need for SFL teachers to develop a critical metalinguistic awareness is incontestable, as supports the study by **María Martínez-Atienza de Dios** and **Alfonso Zamorano Aguilar**. In their work, the authors describe three tenses of the Spanish verbal system in a corpus of grammars and reference works for the SFL teacher and student. From the analysis of the examples and the terminology presented by the materials, the authors reconstruct the underlying linguistic theory. This reflective work directly challenges language teachers and highlights the need for a solid linguistic training to offer solvent and appropriate explanations to students.

We would like to close this preface with a sincere congratulation to the authors on their excellent research works and with the expression of our deep gratitude to the Latvian Academy of Culture for encouraging the International Conference on Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language (*Jornadas de ELE en Riga*) to become a multicultural meeting point, which is open to innovative research and continuous reflection on teaching practice.

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