Metalinguistic knowledge at play: using Common Core *en Español* to develop teaching-specific Spanish competencies in bilingual teacher education in the U.S.A.

Cristian R. Aquino-Sterling, Ph.D.[1], San Diego, State University

Abstract

The present article describes how "Common Core en Español" (CC-E) standards can be employed as didactic resources for facilitating the development of teaching-specific (professional) Spanish competencies in bilingual teacher education. After describing the U.S. context of CC-E, and addressing the language and metalinguistic demands these new standards denote for K-12 students and teachers, the author provides a description of a content-based and task-based instructional activity implemented in a bilingual teacher education course he designed and facilitated. The activity served to develop future bilingual teachers' metalinguistic knowledge (difference between the Spanish "diptongo" and "hiato") and functional teaching-specific Spanish competencies (explanation of the main differences between the metalinguistic concepts outlined). The article then focuses on the analysis of a written student response resulting from the activity. It concludes by outlining curricular and pedagogical implications for developing professional Spanish competencies in bilingual teacher education within a U.S. context.

Resumen

CONOCIMIENTO METALINGÜÍSTICO EN JUEGO: USO DEL NÚCLEO COMÚN EN ESPAÑOL PARA DESARROLLAR COMPETENCIAS DIDÁCTICAS ESPECÍFICAS EN LA EDUCACIÓN DE PROFESORES BILINGÜES EN ESTADOS UNIDOS DE AMÉRICA

El presente artículo describe como los estándares del "Núcleo Común en Español" (CC.E, sigla en español) se pueden utilizar como recursos didácticos para facilitar el desarrollo de competencias (profesionales) didácticas específicas en español en la educación didáctica bilingüe Después de describir el contexto del CC-E en Estados Unidos y reseñar las exigencias lingüísticas y metalingüísticas que estos nuevos estándares denotan para los estudiantes y profesores de primaria (K-12), el autor brinda una descripción de una actividad instruccional basada en tareas (Task-based) y basada en contenidos (content-based) implementada en un curso bilingüe para docentes que él diseñó y condujo. La actividad sirvió para desarrollar el conocimiento metalingüístico de futuros profesores bilingües (la diferencia entre el diptongo y el hiato en español) y las competencias funcionales específicas para la didáctica (explicación de las principales diferencias entre los conceptos metalingüísticos presentados). El artículo luego se enfoca en el análisis de respuesta escrita de parte de los estudiantes como resultado de la actividad. Se concluye con la reseña de las implicaciones curriculares y pedagógicas para desarrollar competencias profesionales en español para la educación de profesores bilingües en el contexto de los Estados Unidos.

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1   El doctor Cristian R. Aquino-Sterling es graduado en Filosofía Occidental, de la Universidad Fordham, una maestría en Estudios Culturales Hispánicos y Literarios, de la Universidad de Columbia y un doctorado en Currículo e Instrucción Interdisciplinaria, de la Universidad del Estado de Arizona. Es profesor asistente de la Universidad del Estado de San Diego.

Language is a critical and pervasive component of pedagogical practice. Every aspect of a teacher's work —from establishing the social and disciplinary climate of the classroom to communicating the intricate details of complex concepts —relies on the effective use of language.

—Mariage et al., 2000[1]

The need to design and implement professionally relevant courses geared toward developing future bilingual teachers' teaching-specific Spanish competencies—the language and discourse skills required to teach in Spanish across the content areas in K-12 bilingual schools (Aquino-Sterling, forthcoming; Aquino-Sterling & Rodríguez-Valls, forthcoming)—is one of the more pressing issues affecting bilingual teacher education in the United States.[2] As leading scholars in the field attest, "[w]hile many certified bilingual education teachers are perfectly fluent in all modalities of the Spanish language, a fair number express a sense of tentativeness about being able to deliver instruction across the curriculum in Spanish, and some lack specific skills to do so" (Guerrero & Valadez, 2011, p. 59). Brecht (2002) sheds light on some of the causes of these dynamics when he writes:

> "[i]n English-speaking countries like the United States, the study of languages other than English (LOTEs) does not occupy a central place in the educational system […]. The education system in the United States often struggles simply to justify and then provide instruction in LOTEs since the need for such competence is less obvious to U.S. educational policy makers and to the general citizenry in light of the perceived status of English around the world" (p. xi). (p. xi).

Yet, due to the steady increase in the number of bilingual schools in the nation (McKay Wilson, 2011), and as a way to continue to improve bilingual teacher education practices, it is vital that these programs continue to work to reverse this troubling trend. An important strategy identified in this endeavor is for research in the field to shift from "trying to understand why so many bilingual education teachers are poorly prepared to teach across the curriculum in Spanish"

(Guerrero, 2003, p. 160) to inquiry into curricular and pedagogical practices being employed for meeting the general and the teaching-specific (professional) language needs of prospective K-12 bilingual teachers, including their teaching-specific or professional English competencies, an important issue not addressed in this article.

From a reflective practitioner standpoint (Shon, 1984), and as a response to the need to provide examples of effective practices being implemented in the field of bilingual teacher education for developing teaching-specific language competencies—what I also refer to as "pedagogical Spanish" (Aquino-Sterling, forthcoming)—in this article I provide a description of an instructional activity implemented in a Foundations of Biliteracy course I facilitated for a group of pre-service K-12 bilingual teachers. This professionally relevant activity was aimed at developing the metalinguistic knowledge (the difference between the Spanish "diptongo" and "hiato," in this particular case) and the functional teaching-specific Spanish competencies required for performing a simulated (yet realistic) pedagogical task: that of explaining the main differences between the metalinguistic concepts addressed above to an imaginary 5th grade bilingual student I named Sofia.[3] In particular, I focus on how I employed a 5th grade metalinguistic knowledge standard in Common Core *en Español* (CC-E), and content/task-based language instruction strategies, as resources for designing and implementing the activity. After describing the context of CC-E, and briefly examining the language demands CC-E exemplifies for both students and their teachers, I engage in the analysis of a prospective bilingual teacher's response to the professionally relevant role assigned. I then assess the value of the activity and conclude by outlining curricular and pedagogical implications for developing teaching-specific or professional Spanish competencies in bilingual teacher education within a U.S. context.

COMMON CORE EN ESPAÑOL: LANGUAGE DEMANDS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS

Along with accountability and high-stakes testing, standards-based reform represents one of the hallmark strategies for improving public education in the United States (Author, 2009). The development

of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) is the most recent effort to establish high-quality mathematics and English language arts standards to ensure all students in the U.S. graduate from high school with the skills, knowledge and critical orientations needed to succeed in college, career and life (Common Core Initiative, 2014).

Given the commitment to provide leadership, assistance, and resources designated to help emergent bilingual children in K-12 schools access an education that meets CCSS standards, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the California Department of Education (CDE), and the San Diego County Office of Education (SDCOE) embarked on the Common Core Translation Project. The rationale for translating the CCSS into Spanish is explained in the project's website as follows: "As we prepare to build capacity to implement the new California Common Core Standards (CCCS), stakeholders have identified the need for the translation and linguistic augmentation of the California Common Core ELA/Literacy Standards and Math Standards to Spanish. This translated and linguistically augmented version of the CCSS is important because it establishes a guide for equitable assessment and curriculum development."[4]

Aligned with Common Core State Standards (CCSS), Common Core *en Español* (CC-E) focuses on three interrelated language areas: (1) language as a key contributor to the requirements in all subject areas; (2) the development of communicative and academic language skills within Spanish Language Arts (SLA) and across subject areas; and (3) knowledge of language, linguistic conventions, and vocabulary acquisition (van Lier & Walqui, 2012, p. 2). In addition, CC-E shares the academic language demands of CCSS in that in order to meet the standards, students and teachers are required to (1) reason abstractly and quantitatively; (2) construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others; (3) construct explanations and design solutions; (4) engage in argument from evidence; and (5) ask questions and define problems (O'Hara, Pritchard, & Zwiers, 2012). The CC-E academic language demands described above provide bilingual teacher education programs in the United States with a clear understanding of some of the language tasks and functions K-12 students and teachers are required to perform to meet the new stan-

dards. As I demonstrate in this article, CC-E served as an indispensable and relevant resource for facilitating the teaching and learning of content-area knowledge and teaching-specific language competencies in the course I implemented.

THE CC-E SLA/LITERACY STANDARD GUIDING THE ACTIVITY

As indicated in Figure 1, CC-E standards differ from CCSS in that these include "Linguistic Augmentation" or "Adaptación lingüística" sections meant to account for the orthographic and grammatical idiosyncrasies particular to the Spanish language. When translating the CCSS Grade Five Reading Standards into the CC-E *Quinto Grado Estándares de Lectura*, translators found the need to augment the Spanish version with a section on "*La acentuación.*" As we read, the CCSS 5th grade reading standards were mainly "[…] directed toward fostering students' understanding and working knowledge of concepts of print, the alphabetic principle, and other basic conventions of the *English* writing system […]," while the CC-E *estándares de lectura* (*5to grado*) were mainly "dirigidos a ayudar a los estudiantes a fomentar la comprensión y el conocimiento de los conceptos de lo impreso, el principio alfabético y otras normativas básicas del sistema de la escritura en español"[5].

The 5th grade Spanish Language Arts CC-E standard that served as the basis for the design of the teaching-specific Spanish activity here presented, *Reconocen cuando una vocal fuerte (a, e, o) y una vocal débil (i, u) o dos vocales débiles forman hiato y no diptongo* (Figure 1), addressed the following two CCSS/CCS-E language areas identified in van Lier & Walqui (2012): (1) "the development of communicative and academic language skills within Spanish Language Arts […]" and (2) "knowledge of language [and] linguistic conventions […]." As such, the teaching-specific Spanish activity implemented in the course was contextualized based on the actual content and language exigencies of the CC-E SLA/Literacy standard 5th grade students and teachers are required to meet per CC-E standards. In this sense the activity, framed from a Spanish–for-specific-purpose orientation—"[a] distinctive approach to [Spanish] language education based on identification of specific language features, discourse practices, and communicative

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)	Common Core en Español (CC-E)
Grade Five Reading Standards: Foundational Skills	Quinto Grado Estándares de Lectura: Destrezas Fundamentales
	Adaptación Lingüística: "La Acentuación" c. Usan correctamente el acento escrito de acuerdo con el acento tónico en palabras al nivel de grado aplicando un análisis sistemático: 1. Cuentan el número de sílabas. 2. Nombran la sílaba que lleva el énfasis (última, penúltima, antepenúltima). 3. Categorizan la palabra según su acento tónico (aguda, grave, esdrújula, sobreesdrújula). 4. Determinan el sonido o la letra en que termina la palabra (vocal, consonante, /n/ o /s/). 5. Escriben el acento ortográfico si es necesario. 6. Justifican la acentuación de palabras de acuerdo a las reglas ortográficas. d. ***Reconocen cuando una vocal fuerte (a, e, o) y una vocal débil (i, u) o dos vocales débiles forman hiato y no diptongo.*** Ponen correctamente el acento escrito sobre la vocal en la que cae el acento tónico de acuerdo con su significado en contexto (hacia/hacía, sabia /sabía, rio/río).

Figure 1: CC-E SLA/Literacy Standards

skills of target groups, and on teaching practices that recognize the particular subject matter-needs and expertise of learners" (Hyland, 2009, p. 201)—can be said to be realistic and professionally relevant. The goal was for future bilingual teachers to become acquainted with the 5th grade CC-E Spanish Language Arts/Literacy standard here included in order for them to acquire the knowledge and language skills required for helping their future (5th grade) students meet the standard. As such, our class served as a content and language lab where future bilingual teachers performed language functions while at the same time drawing on content knowledge learned for a specific and professional purpose and beyond the sentence level of language performance (Aquino-Sterling, 2014). The next section describes the language teaching strategies employed to facilitate the performance of this task.

CBI AND TBI AS PROFESSIONALLY RELEVANT LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION STRATEGIES

Language as a form of human action (van Lier & Walqui, 2012) is an approach that considers language beyond its formal (e.g., grammatical/orthographic rules, sentence structure, parts of speech, word formation) and functional properties (e.g., describe, explain, question, formulate an opinion, make requests, make claims, etc.) in order to emphasize the use of language for specific purposes (e.g., carry out a project, conduct a negotiation, or facilitate the learning of metalinguistic concepts within a 5th grade classroom setting). As further indicated in van Lier & Walqui (2012, p. 4), "in a classroom context, an action-based perspective means that [students] engage in meaningful activities (projects, presentations, investigations) that engage their interest and that encourage language growth through perception, interaction, planning, research, discussion, and co-construction

of academic products of various kinds." As exemplified in the activity here described, this basic principle is applicable not only to emergent bilingual students in K-12 classrooms, but also to future K-12 bilingual teachers acquiring teaching-specific forms of Spanish within bilingual teacher preparation contexts. In engaging in the activity I implemented, my students were able to carry out an interesting and meaningful project designed for them to accomplish a specific and professionally relevant task (explaining the difference between the Spanish *diptongo* and *hiato* to an imaginary 5th grade bilingual student).

Content-Based Instruction (CBI) (Met, 1999) and Task-Based Instruction (TBI) (Ellis, 2003) are in useful alignment with an "action-based" perspective on language development. CBI and TBI served as relevant approaches for designing the activity and facilitating the development of *teaching-specific* Spanish competencies in the course. The main principles of CBI relevant to the activity pertained to (a) an emphasis on the teaching and learning of language and content simultaneously; (b) the use of authentic didactic materials relevant to the professional needs of pre-service bilingual teachers; and (c) the evaluation of the content-knowledge and language use of future teachers (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). TBI principles pertained to (a) a concern for engaging future bilingual teachers in the performance of a meaningful and [realistic/professionally relevant] communicative task; (b) the identification of task outcomes that were clear and that could be assessed; and (3) the need to increase the motivation of future teachers by engaging them in tasks that prepared them for their future careers as bilingual teachers (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC PROFILES

Foundations of Biliteracy is a pre-requisite course for students seeking a K-12 bilingual teaching certification from the State of California and offered at a Hispanic-serving university located near the U.S.-Mexico (Tijuana) border. The course had two interrelated objectives: (a) to familiarize future bilingual teachers with contemporary theories informing the practice of biliteracy development in K-12 bilingual schools while, simultaneously, (b) developing their *general* and *teaching-specific* Spanish competencies and metalinguistic knowledge. See Figure 2 for a detailed list of course requirements.

Per survey results, students registered in the course (n=45) exhibited three distinct linguistic identities: (a) native speakers of Spanish living and studying in the U.S. and generally born and raised in Mexico (26 or 58%); (b) heritage speakers of Spanish — students raised in homes where Spanish is spoken and who are to some degree bilingual in English and Spanish (see Valdés, 2001)— generally of Mexican descent (6 or 13%); and (c) Spanish as a Second Language (L2) speakers born and raised in the U.S. and generally of European descent (13 or 29%). In order to obtain a sense of students' self-estimated oral Spanish proficiency, where asked to respond if they "strongly disagreed, disagreed, neither agreed nor disagreed, agreed, or strongly agreed" with the following two statements: (a) I am able to use Spanish for instructional purposes, and (b) I have a strong knowledge of Spanish grammar that enables me to explain grammatical concepts to students. Both of these statements are relevant to the teaching-specific Spanish activity designed and implemented

Diagnostic Language Assessments: Speaking, Reading, Writing, Grammar/Orthography.	n/a
Attendance and Active/Informed Participation.	10%
Metalinguistic Awareness Quizzes (2 x 5 = 10).	10%
Teaching-Specific or *Pedagogical Spanish* Activities.	20%
Field Experience Reflective Journal Entries (4 x 5 = 20%).	20%
Formal Oral Presentation on Field Experience.	10%
Comprehensive Final Exam (Content, Pedagogical Spanish, and Metalinguistic Awareness).	30%

Figure 2: Course Requirements

in the course. For statement "a" (ability to use Spanish for instructional purposes) results indicated 1 student (2%) indicated s/he strongly disagreed, 2 (4%) indicated they disagreed; 5 (11%) were neutral (neither agreed nor disagreed), 17 (37%) agreed, and 20 (44%) strongly agreed. With regard to statement "b" (knowledge of Spanish grammar for explaining grammatical concepts to students), results indicated one student (2%) strongly disagreed, while 16 (35%) disagreed, 10 (22%) were neutral, 12 (26%) agreed, and 6 (13%) strongly agreed.

What these self-estimation results indicate is that 81% of students across linguistic identities and ethnicities believed they could use Spanish for instructional purposes; however, only 37% indicated they had a strong enough knowledge of grammar to enable them to explain grammatical concepts to students, and 22% were neutral. The discrepancy here was useful in addressing these issues with course participants and validating the need to implement a

teaching-specific Spanish content/task-based activity geared toward facilitating the teaching and learning of metalinguistic content knowledge (classification of words, syllabic division, and distinction between *el diptongo* and *el hiato*) and the language structures and vocabulary needed to perform a task relevant to their future work as teachers and required by Common Core *en Español* standards (Figure 1).

TEACHING-SPECIFIC SPANISH: EXPLANATION OF METALINGUISTIC CONCEPTS DISTINCTIONS

The implemented activity assisted students in acquiring a strong foundation in basic Spanish grammar/orthography and facilitated their performance of a professionally relevant task originating in a 5th grade Common Core *en Español* standard (as indicated in Figure 1). The task aimed at explaining the difference between two of the metalinguistic concepts learned in the course (*el diptongo* and *el hiato*) to an imaginary 5th grade student I named Sofia. The explanation

Instructions	Sofia's Request
Sofía, una de sus estudiantes de 5° curso le expone el siguiente escenario con relación a la tarea que Ud. le asignó. Formule una respuesta adecuada para ayudar a Sofía a cumplir con los deberes de la clase. Además, use por lo menos un ejemplo que ilustre cada concepto que menciona Sofía (diptongo, hiato) y use dos ejemplos para ilustrar cuándo o no dos vocales se convierten en dos sílabas. **OJO**: Antes de empezar a formular su intervención, familiarícese con los criterios que aparecen en la grilla de autoevaluación de la informativa.	**Sofía**: *Querida maestra-o: Ayer no pude hacer mi tarea porque no comprendo muy bien cuál es la distinción entre un "diptongo" y un "hiato". Además, no entiendo cómo dividir las palabras en sílabas. Por ejemplo, no entiendo muy bien si la palabra "galería" tiene tres o cuatro sílabas. ¿Podría Ud. por favor explicarme esto para entonces poder hacer mi tarea?*
Sofía, one of your fifth grade students gives you the following scenario related to the homework you assigned. Formulate an adequate response to help Sofia complete `her class assignment. Furthermore, use at least one example to illustrate each concept that Sofia mentions (diphthong, hiatus) and use two examples to illustrate whether two vowels become two syllables or not. Before you begin to formulate your response, familiarize yourself with the self-evaluation criteria found in the rubric.	**Sofía**: *Dear Mrs. [XXXX]: I could not do my homework yesterday because I don't understand clearly the difference between a "diphthong" and a "hiatus." Plus, I don't understand how to separate words in syllables. For example, I cannot figure out if the word "galería" (gallery) has three or four syllables. Could you please explain this to me so that I can do my homework?*

Figure 3: Activity Instructions

of the main distinctions between these concepts was the culminating activity of a two-week long lesson I conducted on key grammatical/orthographic aspects of the Spanish language. As I taught the formal Spanish grammar/orthography lessons, students knew they were learning the content in order to perform the task of explaining what they learned to an imaginary 5th grade student. Prior to engaging in the lesson, I provided instructions the teaching-specific task students would need to complete via the following prompt (Figure 3):

Students were also asked to become familiar with the self-evaluation criteria (content and language) provided in the rubric below (Figure 4):

After discussing the content and relevance of Sofia's inquiry, students proceeded to discuss possible explanations with classmates and then to formulate an adequate written response. As a class, we then focused on a discussion of specialized concepts and discourse structures/styles required for providing a formal spoken response to Sofia. Students then edited their written responses based on our discussion and then recorded their explanations orally. The significance of this activity for developing teaching-specific Spanish competencies pertains as much to the learning of orthographic/grammatical concepts and their distinctions, as to the opportunity given to prospective K-12 bilingual teachers to learn language and discourse structures and styles required for defining and explaining the difference between concepts in

professionally relevant ways or by using specialized vocabulary in ways that make the content comprehensible to 5th grade students (exemplified by Sofia) and using discourse forms and styles that help future teachers formulate an explanation that takes into consideration particular ways with words relevant to the task. This type of language development and practice is not generally provided in regular Spanish grammar/orthographic courses. However, the practice of defining concepts and explaining their differences relevant to a particular K-12 context is crucial to the professionally relevant formation of future bilingual teachers. Through this activity, teachers become conscious of what they know as well as conscious of the language/discourse tools at their disposal to make content comprehensible to students. When teachers are given opportunities to take into consideration the content, form, and style employed while performing professionally relevant language tasks, they come to a closer understanding of the role language plays in their professionalization. In learning how to employ language/discourse in pedagogically sound ways within the Spanish classroom context (learning what to say, how, to whom, and when) future K-12 bilingual teachers acquire a competitive advantage.

FUTURE BILINGUAL TEACHER: "*LA MAESTRA* MELISSA"

Although the objectives of this article are to (1) describe the curricular orientations and language strategies that led me to design and implement a

Criterios de (auto)evaluación	Excelente	Muy bien	Bien	Satisfactorio
1. Exhibe dominio de conocimientos metalingüístico acerca de la distinción entre los conceptos de *diptongo* e *hiato* (manejo de contenidos).				
Comentarios:				
2. Explica la distinción de forma clara y precisa, empleando estructuras gramaticales y vocabulario adecuados y orientados a una estudiante de 5to grado (manejo de la lengua para fines específicos).				
Comentarios:				

Figure 4: Criterios de (auto) evaluación

teaching-specific Spanish activity in a bilingual teacher education, (2) provide an example and analysis of a student response to the activity, and (3) identify implications for pedagogical practice (and not to provide comparisons between the educational and linguistic profiles of future bilingual teachers and their language performance, or an analysis of language performance across educational, linguistic, and/or ethnic profiles), in this section I share some relevant aspects of Melissa's (pseudonym) demographic background, the pre-service *Multiple Subject* (elementary)

bilingual teacher who produced the teaching-specific Spanish exemplar showcased below. As Melissa indicated in the initial Qualtrics course survey, she migrated from Mexico to the U.S. as an infant and attended English-only public school programs. As a child, Melissa spoke mostly Spanish at home and was immersed in English at school. She considered herself a "heritage language speaker" of Spanish. I selected Melissa's response as an exemplar of the typical responses heritage language speakers of Spanish registered in the course produced.

LA MAESTRA MELISSA'S WRITTEN RESPONSE TO SOFÍA:

[Trans.: Sofía, diphthongs occur when there is a weak and a strong vowel together. It is said that it is a diphthong when a stressed syllable is found on the strong vowel and it does not require a written accent mark. For example, "traigo" (I bring), "a" is a strong syllable and "i" is a weak syllable but the stressed syllable falls on the strong syllable (a), then there is no written accent mark and the hiatus is not broken. In the same way, they are in the same syllable because the hiatus was not broken. A hiatus consists of two vowels together, a strong one and a weak one (the same as a diphthong), but the stressed syllable is found on the weak vowel and the weak syllable is accentuated and separated in two syllables. For example, your name So-fí-a, the i is a weak syllable and the a is a strong vowel, but when you pronounce Sofía, the stressed vowel is the "i", then the weak syllable is accentuated and separated from the other vowel to make two different syllables. To separate words into syllables, you have to listen for the sound of words and syllables keeping in mind hiatus and diphthongs. Remember that when you break a hiatus, you make it into two different syllables and the diphthong stays in one syllable. For example, So-fí-a, as we mentioned has a hiatus, making it two different syllables and the part of So-fí-a makes your name into 3 syllables. Another example, ga-le-rí-a has 4 syllables. In the same way, it breaks the hiatus and adds a new syllable, ending with 4 syllables as a result.

Trai-go is a diphthong which is why it only has two syllables.]

The exemplar above is an example of Melissa's (future bilingual teacher) unedited written response to Sofía's (her imaginary 5th grade student) request. Here I highlight some of Melissa's teaching-specific language strengths and needs in relation to the task assigned. With regard to the content criteria employed to evaluate Melissa's metalinguistic content knowledge (e.g., "*Exhibe dominio de conocimientos metalingüístico acerca de la distinción entre los conceptos de diptongo e hiato*"), it is evident that although Melissa includes relevant and valid assessments that illustrate a correct understanding of the main differences between the concepts (the name *So-fí-a* is indeed an example of an *hiato*), the response lacks clarity and preciseness given that Melissa at times provides conflicting information when defining the concepts and articulating their differences, as we see illustrated in the underlined sections of the following statements:

(1) […] *Los diptongos se forman cuando hay una vocal débil y otra fuerte juntas. Se dice que es diptongo cuando la vocal tónica <u>se encuentra en la vocal</u> fuerte y no se acentúa"* […] *por ejemplo tu nombre So/fí/a, la "i" es una vocal débil y la "a" una vocal fuerte, pero al pronunciar Sofía la vocal tónica es la "i", entonces se acentúa la vocal débil y se separa de la otra vocal para hacer dos diferentes sílabas"*.

(2) *"Se dice que es diptongo cuando <u>la vocal tónica se encuentra <u>en la vocal</u> fuerte y no se acentúa"*.

As the excerpts above indicate, although Melissa demonstrates a working understanding of the concepts of *diptongo* and *hiato*, she has difficulty formulating a clear and precise (and to an extent "valid") definition and explanation of the differences between these concepts. For example, in statement (1) she indicates that "a "diphthong" is formed when the stressed vowel <u>is found in the</u> strong vowel," rather than saying it is formed "*cuando en una silaba tónica la mayor fuerza de acentuación recae sobre la vocal fuerte*," such as in the correct example (yet not precisely correct explanation) she provides when she writes: "*Por ejemplo, 'traigo' 'a' es una sílaba fuerte e 'i' es una <u>sílaba</u> débil pero la sílaba tónica recae*

en la sílaba fuerte (a), entonces no se acentúa y no rompe el <u>hiato</u>." Although once again Melissa confuses key concepts while formulating her explanation, she uses the right example to demonstrate what the concept means. This, however, is not enough to help Sofía (her imaginary 5th grade bilingual student) understand distinctions between the concepts in order to complete her homework assignment.

With regard to the language-for-specific-purpose criteria employed to evaluate Melissa's teaching-specific Spanish language performance (e.g., "*Explica la distinción de forma clara y precisa, empleando estructuras gramaticales y vocabulario adecuados y orientados a una estudiante de 5to grado*"), it is evident she has difficulties with formulating correct sentence constructions and using correct mood and verb tenses, as demonstrated in the underlined sections of the following examples: (1) "*<u>Al igual</u> están en la misma sílaba porque no se <u>rompió</u> el hiato*" and (2) "*[…] un hiato consiste en <u>que</u> dos vocales <u>estén</u> juntas […].*" In terms of vocabulary, Melissa at times does not employ accurate words. For example she confuses *hiato* with *diptongo* when she writes statement (2) above. In addition her use of "*juntas*" could be replaced with the more accurate "*la unión*" as in "*un diptongo consiste en la unión de dos vocales.*"

Although Melissa's written response provides evidence of difficulty when explaining the distinction between the two metalinguistic concepts, she provided examples that illustrated the correct distinctions. She exhibited a breakdown regarding the use of accurate vocabulary words and verb moods/tenses yet was able to construct sentences that were intelligible to a native speaker. The feedback Melissa received focused on making her aware of the fact that she needed to (a) acquire a more substantive understanding of the key concepts (*diptongo* and *hiato*); (b) make correct use of Spanish grammar (use of subjunctive); and (c) use language and organize her response in ways that would make it comprehensible to her 5th grade student, Sofía.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Although the simulated task of explaining the difference between the concepts of *diptongo* and *hiato* to an imaginary 5th grade student here

named Sofia proved to be challenging (to different degrees) for most students in the course, one must keep in mind that this was the first time most were being given the opportunity to perform such a professionally relevant task in Spanish. In addition, in designing and implementing a content-based and task-based activity from the perspective of "language as action" and grounded in current Common Core *en Español* standards, I model for my students an effective approach to teaching language and content simultaneously and for a meaningful, realistic purpose.

The teaching-specific Spanish development activity here described contrasts with the common practice of simply implementing bilingual teacher education courses in Spanish aimed at developing general and academic language competencies. Developing teaching-specific Spanish language competencies in bilingual teacher education requires a language development model/framework aligned with research-based practices and that draws on professionally relevant language tasks future teachers will be required to perform in light of Common Core *en Español* standards and other language exigencies of K-12 bilingual contexts. In other words, the practice of teaching Spanish to future bilingual teachers needs to be strategically contextualized. In providing models for conducting this work (Author, forthcoming), my aim is to continue to advance the field in its intent to "find ways to improve our Spanish language-related teacher preparation practices" (Guerrero & Valadez, 2011). Ultimately, the importance and urgency of this work can be found in its ethical dimension for preparing linguistically qualified bilingual teachers and is, fundamentally, a matter of equity and social justice as teachers' classroom discourse "affects the equality, or inequality, of [emergent bilingual] students' educational opportunities" (Cazden, 2001, p. 3).

NOTAS

1   Quoted in Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2013), p. 6.

2   I have chosen to employ the term "bilingual education" and "bilingual teachers" throughout the manuscript —rather than "dual language education" or "dual language teachers"— in order to

highlight the value of *dynamic* forms of bilingualism versus *compartmentalized* and *monoglossic* notions that generally tend to inform teaching and learning practices in so-called "dual language" programs (García, 2014a/b).

3   At the time during which this activity was implemented, students registered in the course (prospective bilingual teachers) were conducting field *observations* in K-12 bilingual classrooms. Because they were not yet allowed to co-teach or teach a lesson, the activity had to be implemented in the form of a simulated role play; a *realistic* rather than an *authentic* language development activity.

4   See https://commoncore-espanol.sdcoe.net.

5   See: https://commoncore-espanol.sdcoe.net/Portals/commoncore-espanol/Documents/NA_ELA_SBS_Grade5.pdf

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