



“I Know More Spanish Than I Thought:” TPRS vs. Textbooks at a Hispanic-Serving Institution¹

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INTRODUCTION

Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS) (Ray and Seely) is a language teaching method based on Krashen’s and Terrell’s Monitor Model (30). Students are given comprehensible input and ample opportunities to produce language in fun and original contexts. Grammatical explanations are avoided, and vocabulary is limited to necessary words and phrases.

TPRS appears to be successful in terms of student gains, attitudes, and interest in language learning (Lichtman “Appendix C”). However, it is not free of criticism. Claims of success are often anecdotal and not always supported by data. TPRS’ focus on communication leaves little room for the inclusion of culture. Additionally, most of the research shows TPRS’ effectiveness in preK-12 introductory classes for students from monolingual backgrounds (Castro 24; Davidheiser 33; Lichtman “Appendix C” 300). However, a growing population in Spanish classes throughout the United States consists of heritage speakers that come from bilingual families and/or communities (Beaudrie et al. 61; Ducar 1). It seems likely that these students have different levels of knowledge, needs, and goals than monolingual Anglophone students.

This article examines the effectiveness of TPRS vs. a textbook-based method in a second-year Spanish class at a Hispanic-Serving university. Data collected through multiple instruments allow comparison of gains in grammatical knowledge and speaking ability, plus any change in students’ motivation, attitudes, and anxiety. The results offer recommendations for teaching intermediate-level heritage speakers of Spanish, regardless of the method used.

BACKGROUND

What is TPRS?

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TPRS (Ray and Seely) was developed in the 1990s and based on Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher) and the Monitor Model (Krashen and Terrell 30). TPRS, like its predecessors, postulates that second language acquisition is similar to first language acquisition, and that adults learn a language better if done naturally, as children do.

TPRS is guided by Krashen's and Terrell's Input Hypothesis (32), Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis (26), and Affective Filter Hypothesis (37). The Input Hypothesis states that learners require comprehensible input, slightly above their current knowledge, in order to improve. According to the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, learners have two different systems – acquisition, an unconscious meaning-focused process, and learning, conscious knowledge of grammatical rules. Acquisition leads to fluency, whereas learning serves only as a check on the acquired system. The Affective Filter Hypothesis, proposed by Dulay and Burt (100) and later adopted by Krashen (21-22), finds that if learners' affect – their anxiety, lack of motivation, negative attitude, and lack of self-confidence (Gass and Selinker 402; Krashen and Terrell 38) – rises to a high enough point, it blocks input from reaching them. To lower the affective filter, anxiety must be lowered and motivation increased.

TPRS responds to these hypotheses through the use of storytelling. The method has evolved over the years (e.g., Davidheiser 26-27; Lichtman "Teaching" 46-47; Oliver 54-55; Printer "Student Perceptions" 2; Roof and Kreutter 2-3), but in general, it focuses on spontaneous and interactive oral communication, limits input to the most commonly-used lexical and phrasal elements, avoids grammatical explanations, and creates an atmosphere of fun, creative, and original storytelling. Printer explains the procedure:

- (1) Show ... high frequency, target language structures.
- (2) Ask ... specific details such as the characters' names and locations.
- (3) Read ... various versions ... and also write it. ("Student Perceptions" 2)

Vocabulary is limited to the words and phrases needed to tell the story, the focus of instruction is the story's meaning rather than its grammar, repetitions and variations provide scaffolding, and students feel a sense of ownership in the stories that they co-create.

Does TPRS Work?

Considerable information online (Alley and Overfield 17; Lichtman "Appendix C" 299; Rapstine 1) suggests that TPRS is incredibly successful helping students make gains that surpass those of students in traditional classrooms, improving attitudes toward learning, and increasing numbers in the classroom. However, these claims are not always supported by empirical evidence; rather, they rely on enthusiastic anecdotes.

Lichtman reviews TPRS research and argues that TPRS is clearly superior, citing studies that show gains in skills and attitudes (Lichtman "Appendix C" 318).

Some of these studies compared TPRS with a traditional pedagogical method. Dzedzic's (6) TPRS students performed as well as traditional students on listening and reading and were better at speaking and writing. In Watson (23) and Oliver (56), TPRS students received significantly higher final exam scores than traditional students. Roberts' and Thomas' (3) and Muzammil's and Andy's (29) TPRS students also outperformed traditional students. Spangler's TPRS students scored similarly to traditional students on reading, writing, and anxiety, and were better at speaking (129). In Beal, TPRS students outperformed traditional students in middle school; however, the trend reversed in high school (85). Other conflicting results come from Blanton, who concluded that TPRS students had greater motivation and better speaking skills,

but traditional students were better at reading, writing, and listening (102-104). Merinnage de Costa found that TPRS students showed greater engagement and listening skills, whereas traditional students were better at grammar and writing (47). In general, TPRS students achieved greater gains than traditional students, particularly in speaking.

Other studies analyzed students' and teachers' opinions. Both adult ESL students (Braunstein 7) and middle school Spanish students (Roof and Kreutter 5) were enthusiastic and engaged in TPRS. Other studies showed similar positive signs. TPRS students demonstrated increased confidence and less anxiety, preferring storytelling to textbooks (Dukes 47; Wenck 113; Whitaker 168). Printer found that students who had previously had negative experiences in the classroom showed greater autonomy, competence, engagement, and classroom relations under a teacher well-trained in TPRS ("Positive Emotions" 13-18). Teachers likewise were enthusiastic, seeing increased participation, motivation, and acquisition, improved speaking skills and cultural awareness, and greater numbers in TPRS classrooms (Espinoza 68; Nguyen et al. 36; Patrick 52; Printer "Positive Emotions" 15).

Despite enormous support for TPRS (Alley and Overfield 13; Lichtman "Appendix C"), it is not without problems. Published research is lacking in rigor (Printer "Student Perceptions" 2; Rapstine 28). Other issues include adherence to the idea of unconscious acquisition, lack of cultural elements, and application to limited learner types.

Rapstine stated that research "is virtually non-existent. Teachers appear to be adopting TPRS as the method of choice merely by word-of-mouth, with little empirical evidence to back their decisions" (1). Nearly two decades later, Printer repeated this criticism: "In many cases, publications are only available in the form of non-peer-reviewed book sections or theses and are often biased towards the approach and lacking in academic rigour" ("Student Perceptions" 2). Lichtman's summary appears in the book written by the method's creator ("Appendix C"), suggesting that findings should be interpreted with some caution.

A central tenet of TPRS is that second language acquisition occurs unconsciously, like first language acquisition. However, this is not given (Gass and Selinker 405), calling TPRS' theoretical underpinnings into question. Alley and Overfield (20) see TPRS as more in line with older methodologies such as the Direct Method (Koike and Klee 6), rather than newer ones that focus on learners' sociocultural context. Rapstine claims that unconscious acquisition and input are not the only requirements for successful learning (39). Recent articles by some TPRS proponents now advocate for explicit grammatical instruction, briefly and as needed, within the story (Baker 266; Davidheiser 27; Dziedzic 4; Lichtman "Teaching" 47; Pippins and Krashen 26; Watson 21).

Another criticism is that TPRS does not include authentic cultural elements (e.g., Alley and Overfield 21; Baker 264; Lichtman "Teaching" 47; Rapstine 59). Alley and Overfield assert: "Rather than selecting pre-existing authentic folktales or children's stories from the target culture, the TPRS teacher creates stories that are bizarre, exaggerated, and personalized" (19). This bizarreness and personalization are done purposefully, to lower students' affective filter (e.g., Lichtman "Teaching" 47; Printer "Student Perceptions" 9-10), but this means that authentic culture is lacking.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' five goal areas for language students (or the 5 C's) include communication, but also culture and cultural comparisons ("World-Readiness Standards"). TPRS fails to address these 5 C's, complying only with communication (Alley and Overfield 22; Baker 264; Rapstine 62). This is deliberately done.

We believe that communication is the important one, that nearly all of class time should in some way be devoted to this one. This is what language classes are for. It is fine to include the other four [C's] within communication, but it is counterproductive to work on

any of them in class time without at the same time mainly focusing on the development of communicative proficiency. (Ray and Seely xxvi)

However, there is movement toward more cultural inclusion. Lichtman agrees that student-created stories are not likely to be authentic, as students are not culturally aware. Culture needs to come from the teacher, through folktales, current events, and/or novellas (“Teaching” 47). The teachers surveyed in Nguyen et al. mixed personalized stories with fairy tales and literary stories from Chinese culture (35), and Kim and McGarry (2014) included folktales told by professional storytellers. However, Davidheiser’s university-level German students found outside readings to be beyond their ability (32-33). In response, Welch (2014) adapted Hispanic literature to TPRS, simplifying and providing scaffolding; and *Look, I Can Talk* (TPRS Books, 2020) includes adapted readings about target culture people, practices, and products.

Most TPRS research focuses specifically on beginning-level preK-12 learners from monolingual backgrounds. TPRS’ effectiveness with other types of learners is less clear. Davidheiser did not find it advantageous to continue TPRS beyond the first year of university (33), and Kim’s and McGarry’s higher-level students found storytelling less interesting and effective than lower-level students (25), implying that advanced students might require a more structured class. In contrast, Pippins and Krashen found that TPRS used through 11th grade prepared students to achieve AP scores similar to the national average (29).

Few studies have examined TPRS’s effectiveness with adult learners. In Lichtman (“Appendix C”), only Davidheiser (28), Bustamante (25), Oliver (54), Merinnage de Costa (19), Muzammil and Andy (23), and Bernal Numpaque and García Rojas (152), university-level learners were included, with none clearly beyond the first year. Other studies examined non-university adults (Braunstein 9; Castro 25; Nguyen et al. 30; Roberts and Thomas 4), but in most investigations, the focus was preK-12.

While the majority of the research shows TPRS’ effectiveness for learners from monolingual backgrounds, there are some exceptions. For example, Printer’s Swiss secondary students “had vast prior experience of FL learning, with Spanish being their third or fourth language” (“Student Perceptions” 6). However, he provided no information on the effects that their backgrounds may have had on their learning. Given the presence of heritage speakers in Spanish classrooms, it seems worthwhile to examine their experience with TPRS, paying particular attention to factors like motivation, anxiety, and culture.

TPRS with Hispanic Students

Although there is no research on TPRS with heritage speakers, some studies analyzed native Spanish speakers’ culturally based responses to storytelling.

Braunstein (9) and Castro (25) examined adult Hispanic ESL learners. Braunstein focused on expectations, as Hispanic students tend to prefer grammar-driven instruction (Braunstein 9; Gault 101), and her Mexican students initially preferred grammar exercises and writing to storytelling and games. After two TPR/TPRS lessons, opinions changed. Students expressed interest and enthusiasm, and no one felt bored, stupid, or afraid (15). Castro included a survey on his Hispanic students’ preferences regarding English learning, which revealed that TPRS was preferred because students enjoyed the lesson and felt comfortable interacting (41). However, they were divided in terms of which method they believed was more effective, with half identifying TPRS and the other half identifying Grammar-Translation (41).

Bernal Numpaque and García Rojas examined Colombian EFL learners. Describing TPRS as “appealing, suitable and powerful” (153), they nonetheless proposed adaptations to suit the

Colombian context. These included using meaningful stories rather than bizarre ones, and incorporating visual aids and movement rather than reading (160).

These studies acknowledge that adult ESL/EFL learners are culturally different from preK-12 L2 learners. The same might be said of university-level heritage speakers. A considerable body of work explores this population, and current best practices take a critical approach to teaching Spanish as a heritage language. It recognizes that students are active participants in learning who can help maintain and celebrate Spanish in the community (Beaudrie et al. 65; Ducar 4; Leeman 43; Martínez 11; Pascual y Cabo et al. 81). At the same time, their anxiety is affected by the criticism that they speak an incomplete and inauthentic Spanish that is too influenced by English (Beaudrie et al. 62; Sánchez-Muñoz 213-214; Showstack 15-16; Urciuoli 268; Zentella 31).

The heritage Spanish classroom should not ignore the sociocultural context, nor learners' own experiences. TPRS' focus on lowering the affective filter may help students who have developed anxiety that results from the aforementioned criticism. However, the lack of cultural and/or social context may not appeal to students from Spanish-speaking communities. Students might also have culturally based expectations about pedagogy that TPRS may or may not fulfill (Bernal Numpaque and García Rojas 160; Braunstein 9; Castro 41; Gault 101).

This study examines a population ignored in the literature and considers these questions:

- (1) a. Do HSI students in intermediate Spanish show greater gains in grammatical knowledge in classes that use TPRS or a textbook?
- b. Do they show greater gains in speaking ability in classes that use TPRS or a textbook?
- c. Do they show less anxiety and more motivation to use Spanish in classes that use TPRS or a textbook?
- d. Is there a preferred method?
- e. Does the fact that this study was carried out in intermediate-level classes at an HSI play a role in the results?

METHODS

Courses and Participants

This study compares two intermediate Spanish classes, taught over two semesters, at a medium-sized, private, Hispanic-Serving Institution in San Antonio, Texas. The classes represented second-year Spanish, with two sections of the third semester (Span3) taught in the Fall 2020 semester, and two sections of the fourth semester (Span4) taught in Spring 2021. All four sections were taught by the same professor, a full-time, tenured faculty member with 15 years of experience, five of those at the HSI. One section each semester was taught using TPRS (SpanTPRS) and the other using a textbook (SpanText).

The university required that students who had taken at least one year of secondary Spanish be placed into at least Span3, or higher. Students who had learned Spanish in the home were encouraged (but not required) to skip the Span3/Span4 sequence and take advanced courses. At the beginning of Span3, students took the WebCAPE adaptive reading/grammar test

(Emmersion) as a diagnostic tool. Any students who scored above 400 were also encouraged (but not required) to skip Span3/Span4 and take advanced courses. The university’s only requirement was that students with at least a year of secondary Spanish take at least Span3/Span4. This meant that students who received lower WebCAPE scores were still required to take Span3/Span4. The result was a diverse group, ranging from beginners to advanced students, despite being enrolled in a course that was nominally intermediate level.

Tables 1 and 2 show the number of students enrolled in each section, their ethnicity,² gender, and the number of students who took both semesters with the same professor.

Span3Text (Fall 2020)			Span4Text (Spring 2021)			
Number	Ethnicity	Gender	Number	Ethnicity	Gender	Continued?
21	12 Hispanic	9 Female	22	18 Hispanic	13 Female	12 continued from Span3Text
	9 Non-Hispanic	12 Male		4 Non-Hispanic	9 Male	

Table 1. Students in SpanText

Span3TPRS (Fall 2020)			Span4TPRS (Spring 2021)			
Number	Ethnicity	Gender	Number	Ethnicity	Gender	Continued?
21	15 Hispanic	17 Female	23	18 Hispanic	17 Female	15 continued from Span3TPRS
	6 Non-Hispanic	4 Male		5 Non-Hispanic	6 Male	

Table 2. Students in SpanTPRS

PROCEDURES

The classes met for three 50-minute periods a week. They were meant to be face-to-face, but COVID-19 necessitated the use of Zoom. Students were permitted to use any of Zoom’s functions – speaking, interacting in breakout rooms, writing in the chat, gesturing on camera, and/or responding to polls – to demonstrate participation.

SpanText

SpanText used the textbook *Enfoques* (Blanco), which had been used by the university for four years. Five chapters were covered each semester. These were organized around a theme (e.g., relationships, medicine, art), with a corresponding vocabulary list and cultural video. Three grammatical points and an authentic cortometraje were included in each chapter.

Class time was devoted to practicing the material, through writing activities and question-and-answer sessions. Brief grammatical explanations were provided, but the class was largely

² Non-Hispanic students are grouped together to protect their anonymity. The student body is 70% Hispanic; listing non-Hispanic students by race would make them identifiable to others on campus.

interactive. PowerPoints were used to present examples, grammar explanations, and activity prompts. The class was conducted almost entirely in Spanish. The PowerPoints were written in Spanish, and the professor nearly always spoke in Spanish. Students were strongly encouraged to use Spanish, although the extent to which individuals did so varied.

Students completed biweekly homework in the online workbook. A test given after each chapter included vocabulary, grammar, two videos, and listening comprehension. Tests also included a brief conversation with the professor individually over Zoom. At the end of the semester, students completed a 30-minute conversation with a Spanish speaker using TalkAbroad, an online platform that connects language students with native speakers for conversation practice and cultural exchange.

SpanText was the control group, as it represented the type of pedagogy typical of the university and the professor's training. The experimental group, SpanTPRS, was taught in an entirely different manner.

SpanTPRS

Class meetings in SpanTPRS were largely organized around storytelling, using *Look, I Can Talk* (TPRS Books, 2020). Unlike SpanText, there was no prior determination of how many stories would be completed each semester. Rather, what could be observed of students' interest and comprehension determined how much time was spent on any story.

For example, the first story presented a boy named George who wanted a Coca-Cola but did not have one. He traveled to Chicago and then Brooklyn, where he found a Coca-Cola and was happy (TPRS Books, 2020). The story was simple, repetitive, and included high-frequency verbs *ser* and *estar* [to be], *tener* [to have], *querer* [to want], and *ir* [to go].

Class participation was elicited through a variety of activities that could be modified for students' level. These included yes-no questions (*¿Tiene George una Coca-Cola?* [Does George have a Coca-Cola?]), alternative questions (*¿Vive en California o Chicago?* [Does he live in California or Chicago?]), and *wh*-questions (*¿Qué quiere?* [What does he want?]). More complicated questions requested original details (*¿Por qué quiere una Coca-Cola?* [Why does he want a Coca-Cola?]). Students imagined and acted out conversations between the characters. Lower-level, more anxious students could repeat phrases from the story, and higher-level, more risk-taking students could improvise, allowing all to participate.

Students built upon the story, providing new characters with their own particular problems. All contributions were welcome, the only stipulation being that no English be used, except for proper nouns. Therefore, storytelling was conducted entirely in Spanish.

Cultural readings were also included. They used the same high-frequency vocabulary as the stories and presented elements from the Spanish-speaking world (e.g., Shakira, quinceañeras, and the Recycled Orchestra of Cateura) ("*Look, I Can Talk*"). Students orally translated readings, and subsequent question-and-answer sessions were done in Spanish. These questions ranged from simple yes/no questions to more complicated *wh*-questions in which students could provide original answers and additional details.

Participation was the most important element of the grade, which included several other assessments. Biweekly assignments included translations, cloze questions, listening, and writing. These were created ad hoc and always related to the current story. Tests, given whenever students completed a story, included items assessing listening, reading, writing, and knowledge of the cultural reading. Students conversed individually with the professor over Zoom as part of each test and completed a 30-minute conversation on TalkAbroad at the end of the semester.

ANALYSIS

All participants took various surveys throughout the year. These instruments were used to assess their grammatical knowledge, speaking skills, anxiety, motivation, and opinions about the course at different points in time.

Students took the WebCAPE Spanish reading/grammar test (Grammar Test) and the Immersion Spanish speaking test (Speaking Test) at the beginning of the Fall 2020 semester (Time 1), the end of Fall 2020 (Time 2), and the end of Spring 2021 (Time 3). Both tests yielded numeric scores that allowed statistical comparisons between times and sections.

They were given a survey (Motivation Survey), based on Gardner’s (2004) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB), at the beginning and end of the first semester (Times 1 and 2). The Motivation Survey contained questions with Likert scale responses that allowed for statistical comparisons, as well as open-ended questions.

They received university-created course evaluations (Evaluations) at the end of both semesters (Times 2 and 3). The Evaluations included questions about the professor and the course, with Likert scale responses, as well as additional open-ended questions.

RESULTS

Tables 3 and 4 show the number of responses received on each instrument.

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Grammar Test	21/21	8/21	12/22
Speaking Test	10/21	6/21	6/22
Evaluations	---	5/21	5/22
Motivation Survey	15/21	14/21	---

Table 3. Number of SpanText students who completed surveys

	Time 1	Time 2	Time 3
Grammar Test	21/21	9/21	6/23
Speaking Test	21/21	6/21	7/23
Evaluations	---	8/21	8/23
Motivation Survey	17/21	15/21	---

Table 4. Number of SpanTPRS students who completed surveys

Grammar Test

Results from Time 1 showed that the two groups began the academic year with similar grammatical knowledge. Although the 21 students in SpanTPRS ($M = 347.24$, $SD = 164.24$) outperformed the 21 students in SpanText ($M = 259.95$, $SD = 115.35$), the difference between the sections were not significant.³

³ Alpha was .05.

Paired t-tests were done on the students who completed the Grammar Test at Times 1 and 2, to determine if there were any significant improvements over the semester. Improvements were observed in the SpanText group from Time 1 ($M = 284.57$) to Time 2 ($M = 341.29$), and SpanTPRS showed improvements from Time 1 ($M = 296.00$) to Time 2 ($M = 313.11$). However, none of these improvements showed any significant difference. An unpaired t-test was done on the Grammar Test scores at Time 2, to determine if there was a significant difference in gains between the two sections. Although SpanText ($M = 378.13$) achieved higher average scores than SpanTPRS ($M = 314.11$), the difference between the two sections was not significant.

Paired t-tests were done on the students who completed the Grammar Test at Times 1 and 3 to determine if there were any significant improvements over the academic year. Again, no significant differences were found. SpanText improved from Time 1 ($M = 246.14$) to Time 3 ($M = 347.00$), and SpanTPRS improved from Time 1 ($M = 211.17$) to Time 3 ($M = 319.00$). An unpaired t-test done on the two sections at Time 3 showed that, although SpanText achieved a higher average score ($M = 381.58$) than SpanTPRS ($M = 319.00$), they were not significantly different.

The Grammar Test revealed no significant differences between sections at Time 1, Time 2, or Time 3. Likewise, the gains that each section made throughout the academic year were not significantly different from their performance at the outset. Both sections showed improvements over the year, SpanText more than SpanTPRS, but they were not significantly different.

Speaking Test

Speaking Test results at Time 1 showed that the two groups began the academic year with similar abilities. The 21 students in SpanTPRS scored higher ($M = 4.862$) than the 10 students in SpanText who completed the Speaking Test ($M = 4.510$), but the difference was not significant.

Paired t-tests were done on the students who completed the Speaking Test at Times 1 and 2, to determine if there were any significant improvements over the first semester. SpanText showed improvement from Time 1 ($M = 4.600$) to Time 2 ($M = 5.750$), and SpanTPRS showed improvement from Time 1 ($M = 4.800$) to Time 2 ($M = 5.567$), but these differences were not significant. An unpaired t-test compared the students' speaking ability at Time 2 in order to determine if there were any significant differences in their gains. SpanText scored slightly higher ($M = 5.620$) than SpanTPRS ($M = 5.567$), but not significantly so.

The students' gains in speaking ability at Times 1 and 3 were subjected to paired t-tests. The students in SpanText who completed the Speaking Test showed no gains between Time 1 ($M = 5.200$) and Time 3 ($M = 5.200$). SpanTPRS showed improvement between Time 1 ($M = 4.000$) and Time 3 ($M = 4.200$), but these scores were not significantly different. Of the Speaking Tests given at Time 3, an unpaired t-test showed that, although SpanTPRS showed improvement ($M = 4.200$) and SpanText had higher scores ($M = 5.200$), there was no significant difference between the two sections at the end of the academic year.

Like the Grammar Test, the Speaking Test revealed no significant differences between sections at Time 1, Time 2, or Time 3. Likewise, the gains that each section made throughout the academic year were not significantly different from the beginning of the year. SpanText presented slightly higher scores, and SpanTPRS showed more improvement over the year, but they were not significantly different.

Evaluations

Evaluations were given at Times 2 and 3 to both sections. They were created and administered by the university, so not all questions were relevant.⁴ The relevant ones are given

⁴ E.g., questions about access to technology during the pandemic.

in (2), separated into questions that related to the professor’s delivery of the course (2a), and questions related to the course itself (2b).

- (2) a. Questions about professor
 - 1. Communicates the subject material effectively
 - 2. Provides freedom to ask questions, disagree, and express ideas
 - 3. Provides responsive clear answers to student questions
 - 4. Provides adequate opportunity for interactions among students
 - 5. Seems to enjoy teaching and is enthusiastic about the subject
- b. Questions about course
 - 6. Course objectives were clearly defined.
 - 7. Course responsibilities were clearly defined.
 - 8. Texts and related materials were appropriate and beneficial to my learning.
 - 9. Graded assignments and tests were beneficial to my learning.
 - 10. Course was organized clearly.
 - 11. I learned a great deal in this course.

Each question provided a Likert scale response, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). Following these questions were three open-ended questions, shown in (3).

- (3) a. Describe the strengths of this class and/or instructor.
- b. Describe any weaknesses of this class and/or instructor.
- c. Additional comments.

Figure 1 shows the average response from each section to each of the 11 questions in (2), at Times 2 and 3.

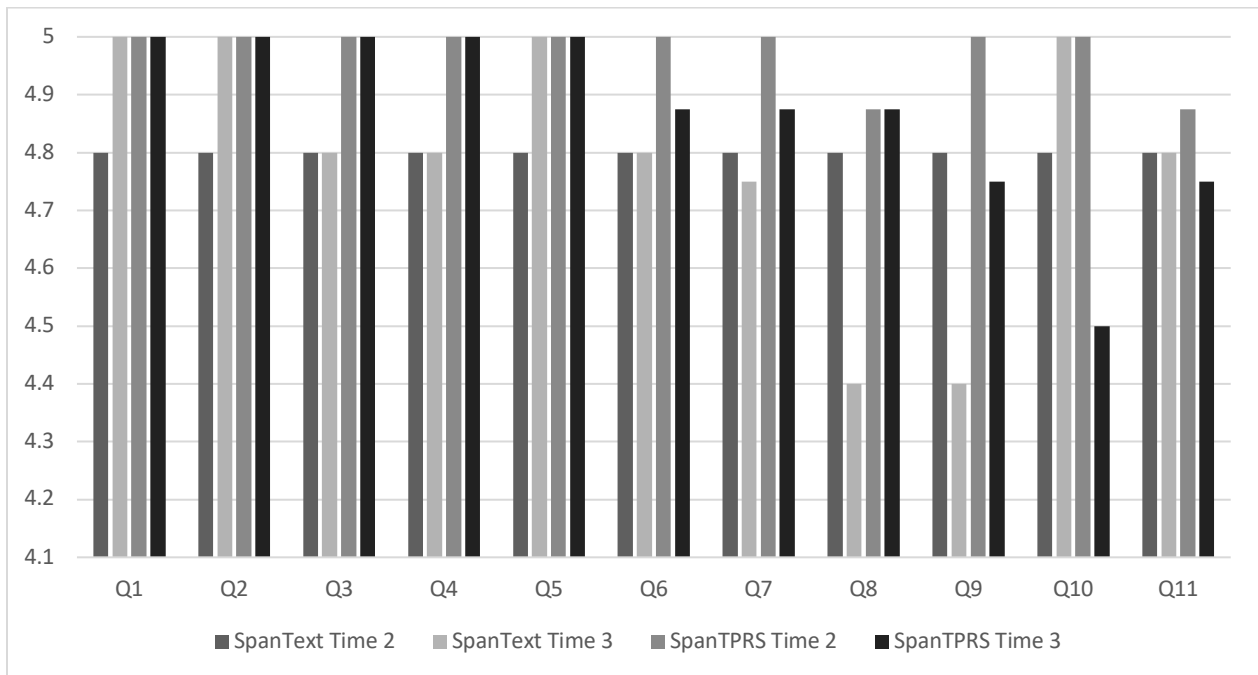


Figure 1. Responses to Evaluations from SpanText and SpanTPRS at Times 2 and 3

Figure 1 shows minimal differences in the two sections' responses over the academic year. The first five questions, about the professor, showed consistently high ratings from SpanTPRS and improvement over time from SpanText. The next six questions, about the course, presented more variable responses, but all were relatively positive, with the lowest average response being 4.4/5 on Q8 and Q9 from SpanText at Time 3. Overall, the professor and course were rated positively.

A one-way, between-subjects MANOVA was carried out on the data at Time 2, to determine if there were any significant differences between the two sections in their responses to the eleven questions. The omnibus test was not statistically significant, and no dependent variables showed significance at the univariate level. A second one-way, between-subjects MANOVA was carried out on the data at Time 3. The omnibus test was not statistically significant, nor were the individual dependent variables. The students' responses on the Evaluations at Times 2 and 3 showed no significant difference due to section.⁵

(4) provides a sample of responses to the open-ended questions, separated into those that express positive feelings about each class and those that express negative feelings.

(4) a. Positive responses: SpanText

"I feel comfortable speaking knowing that I will not be teased or laughed at."
(Time 2)

"I took Spanish from 4th grade to 12th grade and I just could not comprehend it. I know that I am not fluent, but I do know more Spanish than before, and my confidence has increased." (Time 2)

"I love how she was able to make Spanish fun. Her PowerPoints are very helpful."
(Time 3)

b. Positive responses: SpanTPRS

"This class was very very fun and I learned a lot. [Professor] made sure that each of us understood what we were doing before she moved on. Making the stories was very fun and made class 10 times more enjoyable than a normal, out-of-the-book Spanish class would have been." (Time 2)

"This was one of my favorite classes. It was very interactive and allowed for me to learn a lot." (Time 2)

"I was able to learn Spanish in a way that wasn't just memorization, it was real life use and extremely practical." (Time 2)

"[Professor] makes sure everyone is on the same page before moving forward. Goes over everything multiple times until you understand it. Does comprehension checks often." (Time 3)

"Students who need a little more time to create a sentence were given that time and [Professor] was there to help them and encourage them." (Time 3)

"I am proud to say that this class not only helped me to learn a lot of Spanish but it also motivated me to learn more because it seems a lot more enjoyable and possible than it did before this class." (Time 3)

⁵ No analyses were done comparing the same sections at Times 2 and 3. The responses were anonymous, so individual students could not be linked.

c. Negative responses: SpanText

“I would suggest having students practice their Spanish speaking skills.” (Time 3)

“The [homework website] is the most ridiculous thing because there were way too many assignments and the website provides inadequate instructions.” (Time 3)

d. Negative responses: SpanTPRS

“Starting off with straight Spanish was a bit intimidating. I was much more nervous when the class started, but on the other hand, it helped me realize that I know more Spanish than I thought.” (Time 2)

“No textbook - Any new vocabulary was on our own - Did not feel like a formal education” (Time 3)

“I’d recommend more book work, written essays, or Spanish movies.” (Time 3)

Students in both classes felt comfortable, enjoyed the activities and interactions, and believed that their Spanish improved. SpanTPRS students provided additional positive comments; the stories were fun, the comprehension checks and adaptable material were helpful, and the lack of structure/textbook made the class more interesting. However, one SpanTPRS student requested more formal work. Other negatives included the SpanText online workbook and the speaking requirements. A SpanText student wanted more time spent speaking, and a SpanTPRS student was anxious about it. However, students had more positive comments than negative ones.

Motivation Survey

The Motivation Survey was administered at Time 1 to get a baseline sense of the students’ levels of motivation, and at Time 2 to determine if any changes occurred over the first semester. The Motivation Survey, based on Gardner’s (2004) AMTB, included 78 items, with questions in the following categories:

- (5)
 - a. Interest in languages
 - b. Desire to learn Spanish
 - c. Motivational intensity
 - d. Attitudes toward Spanish and Spanish-speaking people
 - e. Anxiety
 - f. Parental encouragement
 - g. Integrative orientation
 - h. Instrumental orientation
 - i. Enjoyment of Spanish courses

Each question had a Likert scale response, with six options, ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” For the analysis, these were converted into a numerical scale, with 6 (the highest score) representing positive attitudes, high motivation, high levels of encouragement and interest, and low anxiety. Two additional open-ended questions at Time 2 asked students to share anything from the class that had positively or negatively impacted their motivation.

Figure 2 shows the average response from each section to each of the nine categories in (5) at Times 1 and 2.

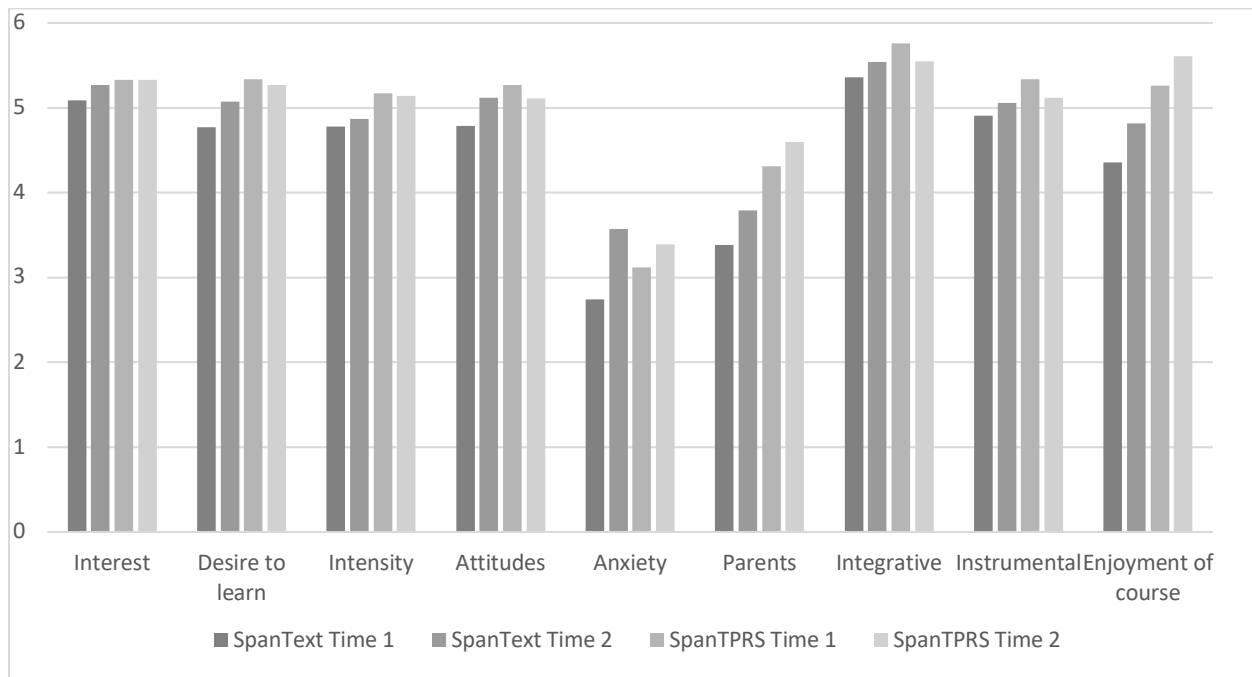


Figure 2. Responses to Motivation Survey from SpanText and SpanTPRS at Times 1 and 2

Scores of four or greater represent higher motivation, greater interest and enjoyment, and lower anxiety, whereas scores of three or lower represent the opposite. The lowest scores showed anxiety about using Spanish and a lack of parental encouragement, though both categories improved from Time 1 to Time 2. Improvement over time was observed in most of the categories, with SpanTPRS, in general, showing higher scores than SpanText.

A one-way, between-subjects MANOVA was carried out on the data at Time 1, to determine if there were any significant differences between the two sections at the beginning of the year. The omnibus test was not statistically significant ($F(9, 21) = 1.22, p = .336$; Wilks' Lambda = 0.657, partial $\eta^2 = .34$), however, analyses at the univariate level found statistically significant differences in several categories. These were "Desire to learn Spanish" ($F(1, 29) = 4.73; p = .038$; partial $\eta^2 = .14$), "Parental encouragement" ($F(1, 29) = 5.21; p = .030$; partial $\eta^2 = .15$), "Integrative orientation" ($F(1, 29) = 5.78; p = .023$; partial $\eta^2 = .23$) and "Enjoyment of Spanish courses" ($F(1, 29) = 8.76; p = .006$; partial $\eta^2 = .20$). At the start of the year, SpanTPRS students reported a greater desire to learn Spanish, higher parental encouragement, higher integrative orientation, and greater enjoyment of Spanish courses.

A second one-way, between-subjects MANOVA was carried out on the data at Time 2, to determine if there were any significant difference between the sections after having completed the first semester. The omnibus test was statistically significant ($F(9, 18) = 2.79, p = .031$; Wilks' Lambda = 0.418, partial $\eta^2 = .58$), and subsequent analyses at the univariate level found one significant difference. This was "Enjoyment of Spanish courses" ($F(1, 26) = 7.99; p = .009$; partial $\eta^2 = .24$). Almost all the differences between SpanTPRS and SpanText observed at the start of the semester had disappeared by the end, with the exception of this one. SpanTPRS students reported significantly greater enjoyment of their course than did the SpanText students.

The Motivation Survey was anonymous, but a question that asked the students' birthdate allowed linking surveys done by the same participants without revealing their identity. A one-

way, within-subjects MANOVA was carried out on the 11 SpanText participants who completed the survey at Times 1 and 2. The omnibus test was not statistically significant ($F(9, 1) = 3.37, p = .401$; Wilks' Lambda = 0.032, partial $\eta^2 = .97$), however, analyses at the univariate level found a significant difference on "Anxiety" ($F(1, 9) = 38.67; p < .0005$; partial $\eta^2 = .81$). A one-way, within-subjects MANOVA was carried out on the 12 SpanTPRS participants who completed the survey at both times. The omnibus test was not statistically significant ($F(9, 3) = 0.50, p = .814$; Wilks' Lambda = 0.399, partial $\eta^2 = .60$), however, analyses at the univariate level found significant differences in two categories. These were "Anxiety" ($F(1, 11) = 8.68; p = .013$; partial $\eta^2 = .44$) and "Enjoyment of Spanish courses" ($F(1, 11) = 10.89; p = .007$; partial $\eta^2 = .50$). Looking at change over time, both SpanText students and SpanTPRS students experienced a significant lowering of anxiety throughout the semester. Additionally, SpanTPRS experienced a significant increase in enjoyment.

On the Motivation Survey given at Time 2, the students were asked to share anything that had positively or negatively affected their motivation. A sample of their responses is shown in (6), separated into the positive and the negative responses for each class.

(6) a. Positive responses: SpanText

"I felt comfortable speaking knowing that my peers would not laugh at me."

"The many opportunities in class to speak up and practice Spanish"

"The class structure and textbook use were helpful."

"The videos that were shown, I feel that I can understand a show or movie in Spanish better now."

"The conversation with a native speaker in TalkAbroad boosted my confidence in speaking Spanish."

b. Positive responses: SpanTPRS

"The style of class is really fun, interactive, and a great learning space. The best way I learn is to being pushed to speak. I feel like I can be wrong in that class in front of everyone and there is no judgment."

"It was conversation-based and not all textbook."

"The storytelling was a great way for me because I learned a lot of new things that I didn't know beforehand and it was very engaging."

"The translation, when we read in Spanish and translated to English."

"TalkAbroad helped me realize I know more Spanish than previously thought"

c. Negative responses: SpanText

"When people participate and give the correct answer, it makes me feel like I know less Spanish than everyone else."

"There was a lot of confusing grammar rules"

"It was a little too fast-paced for a beginner"

d. Negative responses: SpanTPRS

“The fluent Spanish speakers made it difficult to understand all aspects of the class or feel confident in my small wins.”

“I was really anxious about the TalkAbroad conversation. This really lowered my Spanish speaking confidence because I did not think it went well.”

Comments were largely positive. Students liked interacting with their classmates and Talk-Abroad partners, and they appreciated the judgment-free environment. However, several mentioned feeling insecure in the face of more-fluent peers or native speakers. The desire to speak and its accompanying anxiety were common to both sections.

DISCUSSION

Research Questions

This study investigated if students at a Hispanic-Serving university would show greater gains in grammatical knowledge, speaking ability, and motivation after completing two intermediate Spanish courses taught using either TPRS or a textbook. It attempted to determine which method they preferred, and what role their status as HSI students played.

The Grammar Test and Speaking Test showed minimal change over time and between sections. Students showed improvement, but nothing significantly different. There were no significant differences between SpanText and SpanTPRS. Based on these results, it does not seem to matter for students’ grammatical knowledge or their speaking abilities if they learn via TPRS or a textbook.

The only significant differences were found in the Motivation Survey. SpanTPRS started the semester with significantly higher motivation. At the end of the first semester, these differences had disappeared, apart from students’ enjoyment of the course. SpanTPRS reported significantly greater enjoyment than did SpanText. Examining individual students’ change over time found significant lowering of anxiety in both sections, and a significant increase of enjoyment in SpanTPRS. Both courses helped students feel less anxious and more motivated to learn Spanish, but only the students in TPRS showed significantly greater enjoyment of the class. These results align with Printer, whose students showed increased emotional engagement and enjoyment after having experienced TPRS (“Positive Emotions” 1).

The Motivation Survey indicated a preference for TPRS over the traditional course, although students seemed to enjoy both classes. This is supported by the evaluations, in which students rated the professor and courses positively. In both sections, they expressed a desire to improve their speaking, despite anxiety, and they felt that the classes gave them more confidence interacting with others.

TPRS at an HSI

Several implications of this study are the similar gains, the students’ anxiety, their expectations, and the role of culture and community.

Lichtman’s (“Appendix C” 318) claim that TPRS is superior is not substantiated here. TPRS students showed gains that were not significantly different from the gains in the traditional course. This may have been due to their prior exposure to Spanish. All participants had completed beginning-level Spanish classes, the majority came from Hispanic families, and their university is majority Hispanic. If students have already been exposed to Spanish, it may not matter which method is used if there are ample opportunities to use language in a safe space.

Another consideration is the fact that the classes were taught on Zoom during a pandemic. Students may not have achieved the same gains that they would in a face-to-face setting.

Anxiety played an important role. Like other heritage speakers (Sánchez-Muñoz 213; Showstack 14; Urcioli 265), these students felt anxious speaking Spanish. Although this lessened significantly, it remained the lowest category in the Motivation Survey, and student comments revealed that interacting with fluent speakers was very stressful for them. Whichever method is used with heritage speakers must recognize that anxiety will almost assuredly be present, and that students' affective filter must be lowered. TPRS is one method, but, as the results show, it is not the only way.

Adult Hispanic learners seem to prefer traditional instruction (Braunstein 9; Castro 41; Gault 101), but anecdotal evidence from the participants in this study suggests that they did not feel the same way. Only one student in SpanTPRS indicated wanting a more formal class, whereas several classmates were happy to not have book work. One student in SpanText liked the textbook, but others complained about it. These responses are not significant nor generalizable, but they indicate a preference for non-traditional instruction, for both personal enjoyment and Spanish improvement. Of course, these students shared only their Hispanic background with the learners in previous studies. Unlike the ESL learners in the previous studies, these participants were fluent in English and had been educated in the United States, which could have led to different expectations. In any case, conclusions about learners' ethnicity with respect to TPRS should be made with extreme caution.

The role of culture is one of the most important considerations. Most TPRS students are not culturally aware, but this is not accurate for heritage speakers. A benefit of TPRS is the freedom to include culturally and/or linguistically authentic materials. To a certain degree, this occurred in SpanTPRS. A list of rejoinders provided to the students presented *¡Qué chévere!* [How cool!] ("Look, I Can Talk" 2020), but the class changed it to the more regionally-appropriate *¡Qué padre!* after discussing how the word "cool" varies in the Spanish-speaking world. Students incorporated other regional slang into the stories, such as *cheve* [beer]. While these were isolated examples, they show that TPRS allows heritage learners to incorporate elements from their culture and community as they see fit.

The stories in SpanTPRS were provided by TPRS Books ("Look, I Can Talk" 2020). The students liked them, and the outlandish details added, finding them fun and helpful. However, unlike Bernal Numpaque and García Rojas (160), Kim and McGarry (2014), and Nguyen et al. (35), no authentic material was included in the storytelling. Although only one student in SpanTPRS criticized this lack, it is an area that ought to be given more attention, regardless of pedagogy. Both sections were learning Spanish within a Spanish-speaking community, but no real attention was paid to that community in either class.

TPRS can be effective in intermediate Spanish classes at Hispanic-Serving universities. It is enjoyable, reduces anxiety, and provides freedom for students to incorporate regionally-appropriate language. However, it is by no means the only acceptable option. Textbook-based courses can provide similar gains in grammatical knowledge and speaking abilities, as well as anxiety reduction. Regardless of the method used, classes ought to focus on speaking, which students clearly want, while creating an environment in which they feel safe taking risks and in which their culture is given recognition.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Work

A major limitation is the attrition over time in the responses to the instruments. This was likely a consequence of the virtual format mandated by COVID-19. Students regularly expressed

computer-related fatigue, plus anxiety about completing their coursework, which may have led to a lack of time, ability, and/or desire to respond to additional online surveys. Therefore, the results must be interpreted with caution, as they represent only a portion of the classes. Future work might consider incorporating similar instruments into the course itself.

The lack of observed differences between the two sections' gains could have been due to the professor's background. She was experienced in textbook-based pedagogies but had never taught using TPRS. Therefore, only one section had a professor experienced in their particular pedagogy. Perhaps a professor with similar experience using both methods may have helped TPRS students achieve greater gains.

Future studies would do well to include culture, particularly the heritage speakers' culture, in a more purposeful way than these courses did. A major criticism of TPRS is its lack of culture, and a major component of critical pedagogy is its inclusion of culture. Given this, any study that seeks to examine the effectiveness of TPRS with heritage speakers must have a clear plan for the inclusion of culture in the curriculum.

CONCLUSIONS

TPRS has been found to be effective in teaching language, reducing anxiety, giving students opportunities to produce language, and producing gains in oral/aural skills (Blanton 102-104; Braunstein 7; Dukes 47; Dziedzic 6; Lichtman "Appendix C" 318; Merinnage de Costa 47; Muzammil & Andy 29; Oliver 56; Printer "Positive Emotions" 13-18; Roberts and Thomas 3; Roof & Kreutter 5; Watson 23; Wenck 113; Whitaker 168). However, research has been largely anecdotal and lacking in rigor, and it tends to be limited to monolingual preK-12 students (Lichtman "Appendix C"; Printer "Student Perceptions" 2; Rapstine 1, 28).

This article examined the use of TPRS vs. textbook-based pedagogy in intermediate Spanish classes at a Hispanic-Serving university. The results show minimal differences between the two methods. Students demonstrated comparable gains in speaking and grammatical knowledge, and they evaluated the course and professor similarly positively. Anxiety and enjoyment were the only significant differences. Both classes experienced significantly reduced anxiety over the semester, and the TPRS students enjoyed their course significantly more.

TPRS seems effective for use among intermediate-level heritage speakers of Spanish. These students want to speak, but their anxiety prevents them from doing so. A class that lowers their affective filter and gives them ample opportunities to be creative with language meets these needs. However, TPRS is not the only option. A textbook-based class can likewise provide an environment in which students feel secure taking risks and experimenting with language. Whichever method is used, however, must incorporate significant elements of culture, particularly from the students' own community.

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