

Chapter 1

Why Learn Spanish?

One in seven United States citizens and residents is Spanish speaking. Spanish is an important world language. Only Chinese is spoken by more people. The United States is rapidly becoming a bilingual, or dual-language, nation. Bilingual education and English as a second language education programs are helping facilitate this transition. Spanish-language information permeates our everyday environment, making basic Spanish language accession more facile for everyone. Hispanic cultural development has played a key role in molding modern-day written and spoken Spanish. Although there are many dialects around the world, Latin-based Spanish is universally comprehensible to all.

OBJECTIVES

1. Appreciate that the Spanish language is the primary language of one in seven people in the United States.
2. Recognize why and how the United States is rapidly becoming a bilingual, or dual language, nation.
3. Examine the sociocultural aspects of the Spanish-speaking world.
4. Explore the various dialects of Spanish speakers.
5. Practice a basic exercise involving a Spanish-speaking patient and an English-speaking health care professional.
6. Fulfill fiduciary duties owed to patients under care, including the duty to impart fundamental care-related information and disclosure in patients' primary languages, with or without intermediaries.

VOCABULARY

Andalucian Spanish	<i>Llamar</i> (to call)
<i>Bajo latín</i> (common medieval Latin)	<i>Lo siento</i> (I'm sorry)
Bilingual education	<i>Mío</i> (mine)
<i>Bilingüe</i> (bilingual)	<i>Nada</i> (nothing)
Castilian Spanish	<i>La niña, el niño</i> (girl, boy)
<i>La chamaca, el chamaco</i> (girl, boy)[Mexico]	Primary language
<i>La cita</i> (appointment)	<i>Repetir</i> (to repeat)
<i>La clínica</i> (clinic)	Scaffolding
<i>Coger</i> (to get or obtain) [Spain only]	Secondary language
<i>La comunicación</i> (communication)	<i>Señor, Señora</i> (Mr., Mrs.)
<i>El consultorio pediatra particular</i> (pediatric private practice)	Sheltered instruction
<i>El correo electrónico</i> (e-mail)	<i>Sí</i> (yes), <i>Si</i> (if)
<i>Difícil</i> (difficult)	Sociocultural theory
English as a second language (ESL)	<i>Tener</i> (to have)
English language learners	<i>La/el terapeuta ocupacional</i> (occupational therapist)
<i>Español</i> (Spanish)	<i>La terapia</i> (therapy)
<i>Fácil</i> (easy)	<i>El traductor, la traductora</i> (translator, male/female)
Fiduciary duty	Transitional bilingual education
<i>Hablar</i> (to talk)	<i>Tú</i> (you, familiar, singular)
<i>La/el hispanohablante</i> (Spanish-speaker)	<i>Usted</i> (you, formal, singular)
Latin-American Spanish	<i>El volante</i> (referral order)
Limited English proficiency	<i>Vos</i> (you, familiar, singular) [Argentina]
	<i>Vosotros</i> (you, familiar, plural)
	Zone of proximal development

Demographics

As of July 1, 2006, there were 298,444,215 people living in the United States, according to the Central Intelligence Agency.¹ Of those, nearly

300 million people, some 40 million, are Spanish speakers (*hispanohablantes*).²

The United States has the fifth-largest Spanish-speaking population in the world, behind Argentina, Columbia, Mexico, and Spain.³ Some 400 million people around the world speak Spanish,⁴ making it the second most-frequently spoken language on Earth, behind Chinese and ahead of English.⁵

Everyone everywhere has the basic human right to health care services, explained and delivered in languages that patients understand. Health care professionals in the United States must know enough elemental Spanish to communicate effectively with their Spanish-speaking patients in order to fulfill this duty owed to patients under their care.

Health care professionals must be able to communicate effectively with all patients, with or without intermediaries, in order to fulfill the fiduciary duties they owe to patients under their care.

We Are a Bilingual Nation

Look around, and you will see evidence that the United States is a bilingual, or dual language, nation. What continues to make the United States such an attractive place to visit and live are the factors of choice, diversity, and freedom. Using the analogy of a food dish, the United States may not be a true melting pot, as it has been labeled so often in the past, but it is like a delicious rice bowl, adorned with a wide range of diverse condiments.

In San Antonio, Texas, where I live, Spanish is routinely spoken and seen everywhere—in movie theaters, outdoor advertising, restaurants, stores, and health care facilities. There are at least six Spanish-language television stations in the city and suburbs—including CNN-Español, Galavision, HBO-Latino, Telemundo, and Univision, which are watched by Spanish speakers and Spanish language learners alike. With near-constant audiovisual stimulation, the entire population of the area is slowly becoming elementally bilingual. The same situation exists in many urban areas in the United States, from Chicago to Miami to New York City to Phoenix to Salt Lake City. In these areas, and throughout the nation, Spanish-language information permeates the environment, making basic Spanish language accession more facile (easily attainable).

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Canada represents the most classic example of a well-working dual-language nation. French has been an official Canadian language since 1968. The French language is predominant in Quebec Province, and is regularly spoken in other mostly eastern provinces, including New Brunswick, the only official bilingual province in Canada. Other languages spoken by Canadians, including Gaelic, have also enjoyed what are called “minority language educational rights” under the Canadian Constitution since 1982.⁶

There are several French-speaking enclaves in the United States, as well. Two of them are along the Maine-Canadian and Michigan-Canadian borders. Another is Louisiana, where French-Acadian (Cajun) immigrants settled in the 1700s.

Spanish is spoken nearly universally by 40 million people across the United States. Because of extensive internal migration of Spanish-speaking American citizens and residents, Spanish-speaking clubs, media, restaurants, schools, and other venues can be seen at all corners of the lower 48 and everywhere in between.

The United States’ territory of Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Sea is a great example of a primary Spanish-speaking society within the United States. English and Spanish are both primary languages in Puerto Rico. While the vast majority of the population (3.8 million) list Spanish as their primary language, most Puerto Ricans in urban areas speak fluent English. However, primary-, secondary-, and post-secondary education in Puerto Rico is conducted in Spanish.

Bilingual education is both extensive and politically controversial in the United States. English language learners with limited English proficiency are given the opportunity to acquire English language competency over time. The most common type of bilingual education is transitional bilingual education, in which children learn academic subjects in a primary language other than English for up to three years while they incrementally acquire English language proficiency. The goal of this type of sheltered instruction is to mainstream students in the programs to English-only instruction as soon as possible. The autonomous English speaker is theoretically and practically developed through scaffolding, or temporary support—by teachers, fellow students, and families—along the way. According to education consultant Kathleen Kenfield, sheltered instruction is optimally useful for intermediate-level English language learners.⁷

Another type of bilingual education is late-exit or developmental bilingual education. In this mode, learners with limited English proficiency continue to receive academic education in their primary language, and progressively in English, for extended periods of time (beyond three years).

Still another model of bilingual education is dual language or two-way bilingual/biliterate education, in which English-speaking students interact on an ongoing basis with non-English-speaking classmates. Through this interaction and bilingual teaching/learning, all students learn English and a minority language simultaneously. This is considered highly effective for optimizing learning and long-term performance of English language learners.⁸

Bilingual education is common around the world, not just in the United States and Canada. One prominent example is the plurilingualism promotion plan that showcases bilingual education in the province of Andalusia in southern Spain. English, French, and German have been taught in 400 dual-language, bilingual school programs since 1998 as part of the province's initiative. (To see a complete copy of Andalusia's plurilingualism promotion plan, do a search on that phrase at www.wikipedia.org.⁹)

English as a Second Language, or ESL, is a teaching/learning method that supplements or follows sheltered bilingual content education. It consists of daily subject-specific speaking, reading, and writing drills intended to improve the skills of English language learners. ESL is classified by proficiency level (e.g., beginner, intermediate, and advanced), rather than by grade level.

The antithesis of bilingual education or learning is immersion language learning. Immersion learning is “cold turkey” exposure to a new language. For immigrants—and especially for their children in public schools—this method can be a frightening and unjust way to acclimate them to English.

Sociocultural Considerations

This section presents two levels of sociocultural considerations. The first level addresses sociocultural theory. The second focuses on sociocultural aspects of Hispanic people around the world.

Sociocultural theory, according to Vygotsky, holds that learning is embedded in social events. An individual's development of higher order

thinking and functioning directly correlates with that individual's social interactions with other people, objects, and events in his or her environment. Social interactions are primarily cultural in nature. Infants and toddlers learn principally from their family members and caregivers. Young people are cultural apprentices who learn and develop from interactions with family, teachers and other authority figures, and peers. Everyone—including Spanish language learners like you—learns, is supported or scaffolded, and develops within a zone of proximal development.¹⁰

Culture refers to the beliefs, folklore, history, language(s), mores, norms, practices, and values of a defined social group and of individuals within that group.¹¹ Hispanic culture has two co-primary influences—Spain and its people, and Latin America and its indigenous societies. The cultural presentation of Hispanics around the world is a composite of their influences.

The culture of Spain has been heavily influenced by the Romans, Visigoths, and Moors who conquered, dominated, and shaped it, and by the Catholic reconquerors and Hebraic scholars (and their wives and significant others) who sustained it during those periods. Spain, or Hispania, at the southwestern edge of the Roman empire, was a center of commerce and culture. Seneca, the Roman dramatist, philosopher, and statesman, was born in Cordoba.¹²

The Visigoths invaded and took control of Spain in 414, ushering in the Middle Ages.¹³ The Moors wrested control from the Visigoths in 711; renamed the caliphate *Al-Andalus*, and held the country until the last city, Granada, was recaptured in 1492, and the Catholic monarchs, Isabel and Ferdinand, expelled them (along with Spain's Jews).¹⁴ The Arabs and Jews left Spain a framework for further development, including brilliant advances in architecture, literature, mathematics, and philosophy.

Spain sustained a Golden Age from approximately 1550 to 1650, in which it was the dominant world power. It led the world in art, commerce, drama, law, and politics. Its principal novelist, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra (1547–1616), wrote and published *Don Quijote* in two installments (1605 and 1616). More copies of *Don Quijote* have been sold than any other book except the Bible and the Koran.

Spain went on to conquer most of the New World (North, Central, and South America). Its goals were to convert native populations to Christianity and to make Spain rich through mineral and other natural resources. In the process, many native cultures disappeared. Others melded into the existing milieu.

As happens with all world powers, competition, complacency, military defeats, and a series of unfortunate events led to the diminution of Spain's power. Spain lost most of its colonies through revolution. Simón Bolívar became the great liberator of South American countries, including Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru, and Venezuela.¹⁵

Two devastating wars sealed Spain's fate as a defeated world power. In the Spanish-American War between Spain and the United States (1898), Spain lost most of its remaining colonies, including Cuba, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. A national melancholy ensued, from which the great Spanish writers, called the Generation of '98, emerged—among them, Azorín, Baroja, Jiménez, Machado, and Unamuno.¹⁶

The Spanish Civil War raged from 1936–1939.¹⁷ During that battle of ideologies between right and left, in which my father-in-law was a combatant, 1,000,000 Spanish died, and a fascist dictatorship, led by Francisco Franco, put a stranglehold on the “restoration” of Spain that the Generation of '98 had envisioned. Franco died in 1975; democracy returned, and Spain regained much of its world influence and mystique.

Spanish Dialects Throughout the World

As the second most-spoken language on Earth, Spanish is relatively easy to learn and to listen to. Like French, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian, Spanish is a Latin-based romance language. In the western Roman Empire (including Hispania), *bajo latín* (vulgar Latin)¹⁸ was spoken instead of the classic Latin of Caesar and Cicero.

By the time an autonomous Spain was firmly established, five distinct languages were in place: Castilian (modern-day Spanish), spoken by the majority; Catalan, spoken in Barcelona and throughout the province of Catalonia; Basque, spoken in Bilbao and throughout the Basque country; Galician, a derivative language of Celtic-influenced Galician-Portuguese, spoken in northwestern Spain; and Romani, spoken by Spain's nearly one million gypsies.¹⁹

Spanish peninsular dialects carry minor differences. Castilian Spanish, spoken in Madrid, pronounces the letter “z” as “th.” As a result, Castilians pronounce the city name Zaragoza as “Tharagotha.” Andalusian Spanish also has interesting distinct colloquial variants, as do the dialects of the other 14 autonomous provinces of Spain.²⁰

Latin American Spanish has co-opted the flavor of indigenous societies and of English. Latin Americans are more likely to use the term

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“e-mail,” rather than the pure Spanish phrase *correo electrónico* used in Spain. Most of the world’s Spanish speakers—300,000 of 400,000 people—live in Latin America and the United States.

Latin American dialects include, among others, Argentine, Caribbean, Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican. Argentines use *vos* instead of *tú* for the singular version of you (familiar). Inhabitants of Buenos Aires speak with Neapolitan Italian accents. Mexican Spanish is infused with Nahuatl (Aztec) words, like *chamaco*, for *niño* (boy). Spoken Puerto Rican Spanish often displays a subtle blend of r’s and l’s, as in *Puelto Rico* and *Señol* (for *Señor*, Mr.). Throughout Latin America, grammatical use of *vosotros*, the complex informal “you” plural verb form is avoided.

The beauty of spoken and written Spanish is that it is fungible throughout the world, that is, all of its dialectal variants are readily understood by all. It is often said that among the many regional English accents found in the United States, Californians speak virtually without any accent. As a new elemental Spanish learner, you too should strive to speak without any particular accent.

When you are learning and using Spanish with patients, be careful to avoid using words and phrases that are unacceptable in specific regions. One prominent example is the Spanish verb *coger* (to get or obtain). The use of *coger* is indispensable in Spain, just as its English analog “to get” is in the United States. Yet in Latin America, it often carries the negative colloquial connotation “to fornicate.”

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Three excellent references on Spanish slang and sexually-oriented language are: D Burke, *Street Spanish 1 (Slang)* and *Street Spanish 3 (Naughty Spanish)*, 1997, New York, John Wiley and Sons, and I Mendoza, *Hide This Spanish Book*, 2004, Singapore, Berlitz.

When speaking Spanish with your patients, take care to avoid using words and phrases that may be unacceptable in specific regions. Example: coger (“to get”) [Spain], (“to fornicate”) [Mexico].

Exercise #1: Read the following instructions. Translate the English dialogue into Spanish to the best of your ability, based on what you might say to the person at the other end of the telephone connection.

Background:

You are an occupational therapist (*terapeuta ocupacional*) in a pediatric private practice (*consultorio pediatra particular*). [Notice how the word order for words and phrases is sometimes reversed in Spanish, compared to English.] A patient named *Señora* (Mrs.) *Velázquez* calls for an appointment for her daughter *Ángela*.

Dialogue:

[Ring]

OT: ABC Pediatric Clinic. How may I help you?

Sra. Velázquez: *Buenos días. Tengo un volante para mi hija Ángela, para una cita con su clínica.*

OT: Hello? [Realizing that the person on the other end of the line may be speaking in Spanish] [Slowly] I'm sorry. I don't speak Spanish. Do you speak English?

Sra. Velázquez: *No, lo siento, no hablo inglés.*

OT: [Quickly fumbling for the key phrase—"telephone number"—in a Spanish dictionary.] *Número de teléfono?*

Sra. Velázquez: *El mío? Dos-cero-uno-cinco-cinco-cinco-uno-nueve-ocho-cinco.*

OT: I'm sorry, I didn't get that. Could you repeat it, please? Repeat-o?

Sra. Velázquez: *Repítalo?* [Slowly] *Dos-cero-uno-cinco-cinco-cinco-uno-nueve-ocho-cinco.*

OT: [Trying to spell out the number phonetically] *Dos-cero-uno-cinco-cinco-cinco-uno-nueve-ocho-cinco?*

Sra. Velázquez: *Sí.*

OT: [From the bilingual dictionary again, using the key phrase "May I call you back?" within the dictionary term "call back,"] *¿Puedo llamarte más tarde?*

Sra. Velázquez: *Sí, por favor.*

[End conversation.]

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Discussion: You don't understand much Spanish at this point, so there is little you can say in response to Sra. Velázquez's request for an appointment for her daughter Ángela. You were able to bridge with your Spanish dictionary. You need a Spanish-speaking receptionist or other staff member in your practice at this point, to take calls from Spanish-speaking clients, and to translate for you during patient care activities.

As a practical matter, are you going to be equally understood by Spanish-speaking patients if you inadvertently identify yourself using the incorrect word *terapista* instead of *terapeuta*? Yes. The goal of interpersonal communication at this elemental level is simply to be understood.

SUMMARY

Learning elemental Spanish is relatively easy, and necessary in a modern-day medical or health professional practice. One in seven of your potential clientele is Spanish speaking. Augmenting self-study to crash courses to formal language study, constant exposure to Spanish in everyday media promotes language acquisition. Hispanic history and culture gave and give rise to a dynamic Latin-based language that is predictable and easy to speak and write. Be careful in practice to avoid overfamiliarity with patients, and even the accidental use of prohibited or precautionary words such as *coger*, which means "to get" in Spain, but "to fornicate" in Mexico.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is the United States truly a bilingual nation? Why or why not? If so, what are the consequences of that conclusion?
2. Should Spanish be made an official language of the United States, or of any particular states or regions? Why or why not?
3. How do you feel about the Pledge of Allegiance being recited, or the Star-Spangled Banner being sung, in Spanish?
4. Should workers be permitted by law to speak in their primary languages in the workplace? Why or why not? If so, what qualifiers, if any, should be placed on this practice?
5. What is your opinion of bilingual education in the United States?

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