



Milton M. Azevedo. *President's Message: Fall, 2009*. The American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese: <<http://www.aatsp.org>>.

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*Greetings, saludos, saudações.* It was a pleasure to see so many of you at our 91st Conference in Albuquerque, and I thank again all those persons and entities that made that event possible.<sup>i</sup>[i]

Our profession — all of us who teach at K-12 schools, community colleges, baccalaureate colleges, and universities — currently faces a number of serious challenges, some of which affect everyone in the teaching profession: a financial crisis that has eliminated many courses, programs, and teaching positions; a dearth of jobs for new graduates, MAs, and PhDs,<sup>ii</sup>[ii] and a disquieting trend to replace tenure-track positions with non-tenure or part-time positions,<sup>iii</sup>[iii] thus seriously undermining the collegiality among faculty by creating a divided two-tier professoriate. As this is a situation that can be extremely damaging to everyone in the profession, we should do our utmost to criticize and oppose it.

Other challenges, which affect Spanish teachers specifically, paradoxically derive from the current boom of this language, which plays a uniquely prominent public role in our society. According to the U.S. Census, in the year 2000, 28,101,052 people declared to speak Spanish at home. This figure, which represented an increment of over 10.5 million in relation to the 1990 census, would make the United States the fifth country in number of Spanish speakers, after Mexico, Spain, Colombia, and Argentina. Furthermore, the Hispanic/Latino population is expected to reach 47.8 million by July 2010.<sup>iv</sup>[iv] With Hispanics/Latinos making up 15 percent

of the nation's population (not counting about 3.9 million Puerto Rico residents) we can expect a substantial increase in the number of Spanish speakers in the next census, unless the financial crisis forces a large number of recent immigrants to return to their countries.<sup>v[v]</sup> Be that as it may, in the last two decades the presence of Spanish has grown considerably in the media and in business, as well as in government agencies and politics. The [U.S. Postal Service](#) and the FBI issue Spanish language posters; since the Clinton Administration, presidential speeches and the [State of the Union Address](#) have been translated into Spanish; and the federal Administration, including the White House, maintains a variety of Web pages in Spanish, such as [www.Whitehouse.gov](http://www.Whitehouse.gov). Some congressmen, state legislators, and local politicians fluent in Spanish use it regularly to address their constituencies, others have reportedly hired Spanish language consultants, and still others have allegedly been taking classes in Spanish. All of this, which would have been unimaginable a short while ago, amounts to *de facto* recognition of Spanish as a public language in the United States, to the extent that some scholars believe it should no longer be considered a foreign language.<sup>vi[vi]</sup>

College-level enrollments in Spanish are second only to those in English. According to MLA figures, in fall 2006 there were 750,000 college-level enrollments in Spanish,<sup>vii[vii]</sup> while the next most popular language, French, had about 200,000 enrollments.<sup>viii[viii]</sup> For the record, Portuguese was listed by the MLA in 2006 as having 10,207 enrollments, an increase of 22.4% in relation to 2002 levels. The government has declared Portuguese a critical language,<sup>ix[ix]</sup> and its teaching has increased at the service academies. There has also been an increase of interest in the teaching of Portuguese to speakers of Spanish, which was the topic of three recent symposia.<sup>x[x]</sup> Furthermore, due to the presence of immigrants from Brazil, the teaching of Portuguese has reportedly increased in areas of Florida, Georgia, Massachusetts, New Jersey,

and Texas.<sup>xi</sup>[xi] Given the effects of the present crisis on immigration, however, it is too early to determine how this situation will turn out.

As regards the "P" in the AATSP, our Conference offered a record nineteen sessions with a total of twenty-five papers/presentations on topics related to the Portuguese language and Luso-Brazilian literatures and cultures. Following recommendations of an ad-hoc planning group that met during our Conference, the Executive Council has appointed a committee, presided by its Portuguese representative, charged with fomenting activities related to Portuguese.

To go back to Spanish. Under normal circumstances, the enrollment figures just quoted would mean a golden opportunity for Spanish departments to have a major impact on their students' education. This could be achieved, among other means, by seriously discussing how the suggestions of the 2007 Report of the MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages<sup>xii</sup>[xii] might be implemented to offer a broad curriculum which, going beyond the traditional teaching of language and literatures, would include a coherent view of the cultural narratives of Hispanic/Latino groups. Seizing this opportunity, however, has been made difficult by financial limitations on faculty hiring in general, with the unforeseen result that a growing proportion of upper-division courses are taught by graduate students or part-time instructors instead of regular faculty.<sup>xiii</sup>[xiii] So we find ourselves in a particularly odd quandary: while there have never been so many students enrolled in elementary and intermediate Spanish courses, universities—particularly large state institutions—are experiencing difficulties in providing them with the quality instruction they expect.

Furthermore, our understanding of the implications of the situation of Spanish and Portuguese in the United States is not as comprehensive as would be desirable. Although research on these languages has grown in the last three decades, it has been carried out under a

variety of theoretical frameworks, and consequently it is not always easy to interpret and compare results and draw general conclusions. In some areas, such as phonology, we have a great deal of information, but in others, such as syntax and pragmatics, we have a lot to learn. In sociolinguistics—which is crucial for understanding the dynamics of everyday communication—research has focused on specific issues, but a comprehensive study—something in the scope of the research carried out by William Labov and his associates on nonstandard English in the United States, for example—has yet to be undertaken. Systematic research is needed on how Spanish and Portuguese in the United States contrast with other varieties of those languages, on dialectal and social variation, on the social and cultural consequences of continuing contact with English, and on the implications of bilingualism, not only for the growing segment of U.S.-born speakers, but also for our society as a whole. We need to find out more about the processes of language simplification among third- and fourth-generation speakers and the role that code-switching may play in language shift. Since research projects often focus on relatively small numbers of subjects, we should keep in mind that analyzing the speech of a group of college students—by definition a pre-selected group—is not the same as studying the speech of a group of youngsters randomly chosen from a representative sample of their community.

We also need to develop viable policies for the education of heritage speakers at all school levels. Although some universities have developed programs on Hispanic/Latino topics, those efforts tend to remain within the boundaries of individual departments, usually Spanish or Chicano Studies. It is crucial, however, to devise ways to integrate Hispanic/Latino studies into the broader scope of all educational areas, as it is to decide whether Spanish should remain within the confines of Spanish departments, or occupy a broader role across the curriculum. As

an academic field, Spanish in the United States holds a complex interdisciplinary potential that calls for coordinated efforts by specialists in anthropology, economics, education, linguistics, literature, political science, public policy, sociology, and other related fields.

The enrollment of heritage speakers in Spanish courses has reached an all-time high, creating a diversified constituency and raising questions about which methodologies are appropriate to teach such a differentiated student body. Current research [xiv](#) [\[xiv\]](#) supports the view, shared by many practicing teachers, that heritage speakers' linguistic background entails specific pedagogical requirements, in part because their proficiency in Spanish tends to be restricted to informal registers, due to lack of opportunities to acquire the formal registers required for academic work. This situation should encourage us, as an association, to address topics such as language maintenance and shift, languages and dialects in contact, bilingualism, bidialectalism, diglossia, and standard vs. nonstandard varieties, to mention only a few.

While there is no dearth of professional challenges, there are also hopes. Professional institutions are active, as witnessed by the memorandum of understanding recently signed between the AATSP and the Academia Norteamericana de la Lengua Española (ANLE), setting up a foundation for cooperative projects between these two major institutions concerned with Spanish in the United States. Another sign of hope is the fact that people continue to carry on with their teaching and research on culture, linguistics, literature, and pedagogy. Over five hundred persons registered for our Conference, which featured over two hundred sessions—a pretty good turnout under normal circumstances, and all the more so at a time of diminishing travel budgets. Such participation bespeaks our unshakeable determination to remain engaged in the essential activity of presenting the results of our work and exchanging ideas through papers, round tables, workshops, and poster presentations. Yet another reason for hope is that the

AATSP, with nearly a century of teaching and research to its credit, constitutes a vast repository of expertise that enables it to maintain a leadership role in matters related to Spanish and Portuguese in the United States.

In less than a year we will meet again in Mexico, a country which, as we all know, has since the mid-nineteenth century had a dynamic and productive —if not always easy— relationship with the United States. As there is no doubt that the surge of the Spanish language in the United States is intimately linked to immigration from Mexico, I would like to suggest that we make the linguistic, literary, and cultural relations between Mexico and the United States a major topic for a very successful 92nd AATSP Conference in Guadalajara.

I wish you all a very pleasant and productive end of summer.

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<sup>i</sup>[\[i\]](#) This essay is a revised version of the speech made at the AATSP Conference's Awards Luncheon (July 11, 2009).

<sup>ii</sup>[\[ii\]](#) Some major private universities supposedly have plans to enroll fewer graduate students in fall 2009 <<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2009/05/13/doctoral>>, accessed July 2nd 2009.

<sup>iii</sup>[\[iii\]](#) See "American Academic: The State of the Higher Education Workforce," <[http://www.aftface.org/storage/face/documents/ameracad\\_report\\_97-07for\\_web.pdf](http://www.aftface.org/storage/face/documents/ameracad_report_97-07for_web.pdf)>, accessed July 2nd 2009.

<sup>iv</sup>[\[iv\]](#) <[http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/hispanic\\_pop\\_presentation.html](http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hispanic/hispanic_pop_presentation.html)>

<sup>v</sup>[\[v\]](#) "Growth of Hispanic, Asian Population Slows Unexpectedly, Census Reports," by Hope Yen. *Washington Post*, May 14 2009. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/05/13/AR2009051303821.html>>, accessed June 29 2009.

<sup>vi</sup>[\[vi\]](#) See Carlos J. Alonso, "Spanish: The Foreign National Language," *Profession 2007*. New York: MLA, 218-228.

<sup>vii</sup>[\[vii\]](#) Spanish had 822,985 enrollments, representing 52.2% of all language enrollments, and an increase of 10.3% in relation to 2002 figures. <[http://www.mla.org/pdf/release11207\\_ma\\_feb\\_update.pdf](http://www.mla.org/pdf/release11207_ma_feb_update.pdf)> accessed June 29 2009.

<sup>viii</sup>[\[viii\]](#) [Burton Bollag, "A failure to communicate," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, April 27 2009, <<http://chronicle.com/weekly/v53/i34/34a02401.htm>> accessed May 22 2009.

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ix[xix] See < <http://www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/announcements/2008-3/092408b.html>>.

x[x] At the U of Arizona (2003), at Stanford U (2006) and at the State U of Campinas (Brazil, 2008).

xi[xi] A major contribution to the study of this topic is *Becoming Brazuca. Brazilian Immigration to the United States*. Edited by Clémence Jouët-Pastré and Leticia J. Braga. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies, 2008.

xii[xii] "Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World." MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages. *Profession 2007*. New York: MLA, 234-245.

xiii[xiii] Carol A. Klee, "An Unforeseen Consequence of the Boom in Spanish: Who is Teaching the Majors?" *ADFL Bulletin*, 37: 2-3, 2006, 22-25.

xiv[xiv] See Guadalupe Valdés, Joshua A. Fishman, Rebecca Chávez, and William Pérez. *Developing Minority Language Resources: The Case of Spanish in California*. Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 58. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, (2006); and Guadalupe Valdés, Joshua A. Fishman, Rebecca Chávez y William Pérez. "Maintaining Spanish in the United States: Steps Toward the Effective Practice of Heritage Language Re-acquisition/Development." *Hispania* 91.1 (2008), 4-24.