Activities with Spanish-English Cognates

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A True Story

Andrés and many of his English Language Learner (ELL) classmates followed the Winter Olympic games religiously on television every night they were telecast. They discussed them in the cafeterias, on the playgrounds, and before the start of almost every class. Seeing an opportunity to provide students with reading materials that her class might enjoy, Ms. Smith passed out a brief informational article on the Winter Olympics she had found on the Internet.
A True Story (cont’d)

Much to the students’ dismay (and Ms. Smith’s!), the text was laden with words such as “edgy,” “looms,” “jagged,” and “laden.” There were at least thirty words on the one-page handout that the majority of the ELL students weren’t familiar with! It would be too time consuming for Ms. Smith to review the many vocabulary words with the students and it would be brutal for her to have the students look up each word in the dictionary. Putting them in groups to jigsaw the article would be equally unsatisfactory. Everyone was frustrated and disappointed.
Spanish-English Cognate Scaffolds

• Morphological Analyses (Prefixes, Suffixes, Root Words)
• Context Clues
• Scaffold teaching of many reading skills with Spanish-English cognates
**Cognates** are words in English and Spanish that

(1) possess same or nearly the same orthography

(2) semantic meaning *and*

(3) share the same etymology.
Spanish-English Cognates

More than 20,000 Spanish-English Cognates
Cognates & Academic Vocabulary

- Latin was once the language of scholarship;
- Academic vocabulary is comprised of words that originated from the Latin and Greek;
- Many words in textbooks and textbook glossaries are cognates:

  democracy, microscope, literary
## Cognates at all levels of Word Frequency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency Range</th>
<th>Cognates</th>
<th>Noncognates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>327</td>
<td>511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>356</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-19</td>
<td>1144</td>
<td>1043</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2393</td>
<td>2569</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Frequency distribution in syllables for the 5,000 most Frequent Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of syllables</th>
<th>Cognates</th>
<th>Noncognates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>691</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1,115</td>
<td>864</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>1,390</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Montelongo, 2002)
Orthographic Transparency

• There are different levels of orthographic transparency:

• natural-natural  senate-senado  chief-jefe

• [http://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/lib_fac/26/]
Many cognates are in the listening and reading vocabularies of ELLs because of Spanish backgrounds.

Teacher’s goal is to help Spanish-speaking ELL students recognize these vocabulary words.
Cognates & English Morphology

- Many of the Latin and Greek root words can be used to generate hundreds and hundreds of words, many of which are Spanish-English cognates. Use morphology exercises to make Spanish-Speaking ELLs aware of cognates.

- For instance, the root word (-audi-) give us: inaudible (*inaudible*), auditorium (*auditorio*), audience (*audiencia*),
Cognates & English Morphology

- Root Word (-port-)
  import, export, transport, portal ...
- Root Word (-form)
  reform, transformation, formation
- Root Word (-rupt)
  corrupt, erupt, rupture
- There are many prefix and word-initial regularities.

  \( \text{ch}^- = \text{c} \)
  \( \text{character} = \text{carácter} \quad \text{charity} = \text{caridad} \)

- There are also many suffix and word-ending regularities.

  \( -\text{ity} = -\text{idad} \)
  \( \text{honesty} = \text{honestidad} \quad \text{infinity} = \text{infinidad} \)
-al = -al
national = national    initial = inicial

-ant = -ante
instant = instante     elephant = elefante

-ary = -ario
ordinary = ordinario   glossary = glosario
Teaching students to use Cognates with words they don’t know

What can students do when they come upon unknown words?

1. Break words down into roots, prefixes, and suffixes
2. Guess at the meaning of words using the context.
Using Context Clues

- Synonyms
- Antonyms
- The verb to be
- Appositive phrases
- Punctuation

Montelongo, Hernandez, and Herter (under review)
1. Synonym analogies
2. Antonym analogies
3. Function analogies
4. Part-to-whole analogies
5. Categorization analogies
Help students understand what a **simile** is without having to worry about their comprehension of every word:

- The advice was like a map.
- The problem was like an elephant.
- The ballerina was like a robot.
- The desert was like an ocean.
Help students understand what a Metaphor is without having to worry about their comprehension of every word:

The instructor was a dictator.
The ideas were pearls.
The adolescent was an island.
The princess was a tiger.
Word Walls—Cognates
Find-a-Cognate website

http://www.angelfire.com/ill/monte/findacognate.html