

## Introduction

The set “Español de negocios” includes a video + workbook and a CD-ROM. Both video and CD-ROM cover similar topics. The workbook indicates ways of working with the video. The CD-ROM includes video and other activities. We assume both author and publisher thought that presenting the materials of the video and some others in a multimedia environment could enhance the product. In this evaluation we will try to analyse the advantages, novelties, potentialities and implications of integrating these materials in a multimedia product.

### 1. Software Description and Overview.

“Español de negocios”, both the video and the CD-ROM were designed by a team of people from the following institutions: *Instituto Cervantes* (Spanish Cultural institute), *Instituto de Ciencias de la Educación* (Universidad de Barcelona) and *Difusion* (one of the main publishers of Spanish as second language materials). The EU Lingua Program founded the project.

The content of this CD-ROM is divided in 8 units, each of them dealing with a different business topic such as the job interview, the Stock, launching a product, etc.

- The initial screen presents three business cases. Clicking on one of them will lead us to the **8 units** index. Another one allows the user to start an **evaluation** section. The third case provides a **list of contents**, functional contents for face to face conversation and functional contents for “on the phone” section. Each one of the functions has a link to the unit or units in which it is presented. Some of them have a symbol you may click on and read some sociolinguistic or cultural information about that particular utterance. As we will say further on, this allows a different type of usage of the package.

- The core of the unit is a **video dialogue** (5-7 minutes) on the topic of the unit. While playing the video the options of transcription and translation (English, German and French) are available. There are two **language exercises** for each video (True or false and gap filling). Students give their answers by dragging the mouse from the word to the gap. The possibilities of watching the video again, checking the answers or getting the solution are offered.

- Each unit has a **video monologue** (3-4 minutes) with the options of translation or transcription and exercises in the format already mentioned.

- The third option offered is to listen to a **phone conversation (3-4 minutes)**, again with the options of translation and transcription. Linguistic aims in this section are not topic based but function based. There are also exercises with all the options already described.

- Finally, there is an **authentic text** based on the topic of the unit. It simply provides reading practice, as there is no sound.

## 2. Hardware Requirements.

For a Macintosh : Macintosh LCIII or higher, system 7.0 or superior, 6Mb of RAM, 13 inches and 256 colours screen. QuickTime 2.1, soundcard and microphone.

Windows: 486 or Pentium, Windows 3.1 or Windows 95- , 8Mb RAM, 256 colours, SoundBlaster, speakers, double speed CD-ROM reader.

My students used a 386, Windows 95 PC with a soundcard. This PC is located in SALLU (Semi Autonomous Language Learning Unit) a facility of the School of Applied Language and Intercultural Studies.

This CD-ROM could also be played in a PC with no soundcard and still it would be very useful (as we said transcriptions are available). Needless to say that the sound card allows to exploit the maximum potential of the application.

## 3. Reasons for choosing this package.

For the last five academic courses I have taught a module called “Spanish Minor”. This module is offered in the final year of the International Marketing and International Business degrees. Students who take it are usually those who spent their year abroad in a French or German speaking country. Back in DCU they have to “revive” the level of their minor language in the first semester because Spanish Minor is not anymore offered in the second semester. Students are concerned about how they will keep learning the language till the end of the course. As graduates of Marketing/Business and Languages, they are aware of the importance of fluency in the two languages, though one may be at a minor level. They know that in a not very far future they will have to show fluency in Spanish in job interviews. If the module is not offered, autonomous work is the other possibility for keeping the language. Could this package be one of the tools recommended to this students for the autonomous work?. Could I use it for the teaching of the module?.

My evaluation of this CD-ROM tries to find out if this application would be suitable for this group of students in this particular context. At the same time, I aim to analyse the possibilities of using in multimedia products like this in that module.

Another of my concerns when evaluating the package is learning more about multimedia language learning products. Our School has a facility for students to work on their own using CD-ROMs, videos and tapes. Software is the lesser used and recommended, in my opinion because the language teachers themselves are not familiar with the applications or are not aware of their potential. Lectures in our

School have been encouraged to promote the usage of SALLU among there students. Unfortunately nobody got us started. The Multimedia module and this evaluation are a training session for me.

#### 4. Goals and objectives of the package.

“Español de negocios” is targeted to intermediate and advance learners of Spanish as a foreign language, concretely to those who need to know how to communicate and perform in Spanish in a business context.

Linguistic aims.

This evaluation would not be a complete one if we did not include any comment on the linguistic approach used in the application and its linguistic aims. The communicative approach of the CD-ROM is obvious. There is no reference to grammar, drilling practices or similar structuralist trends. Students noticed that immediately and one of them thought it was a fault of the package.

The language is taught is a real **communicative context**: a dialogue, a phone conversation or an authentic text. The learner may choose a topic based learning and then proceed to the different activities in each unit, or may as well prefer a function based style. For that, they should start in the contents screen, choose their function and go to the units/sections where that function is used.

Some of these functions have a strong cultural component. For example, as the CD-ROM indicates, when somebody in a business context apologises for being late, the correct attitude should be undermining the importance of the delay. Some of the items listed in the table of contents provide cultural information of this kind. This is showing that **cross-cultural awareness** is included in these materials. Current language teaching approaches stress this factor, left aside or completely ignored in the past. If there is any particular type of materials that needs to emphasise this issue, these are the materials for Business language.

Another key issue in language teaching is the **integration of the four skills**: reading, writing, listening and speaking. The package fosters reading and listening. There is no reference to writing at all, and the only oral production would be reading aloud the last one of the text. This is not explicitly required or suggested by the package itself. It is a possibility that occurs to me when considering how the skills could be integrated here. Even if we make use of that possibility, reading the text aloud for oral practice, there is no interaction at all, and without interaction there is not a real oral practice.

In brief, the package is based on a communicative approach, including relevant factors for the business context, but lacking some essential elements of language teaching practice. I do not make this last statement with a negative critical intention, but just to describe the reality. The question is: should the package put more emphasis on the oral skill?. Definitely it could have more oral practice, or could encourage more oral practice. Perhaps if it does not it is because it was never thought to do so. Catalogues of Spanish materials describe “Español de los negocios” with the following sentence: “Ocho unidades para desenvolverse en los negocios” (8 units to

function in business situations). “Desenvolverse” refers to a minimum or intermediate level of fluency and a considerable understanding. ‘Desenvolverse’ suggests very good passive knowledge and good active knowledge. Therefore, it seems the package was not designed aiming at a proficiency level.

## 5. Software classification.

Though most software packages do not fit into one single category, this one could be an exception. I would classify it as a **multimedia language learning tool**.

- Multimedia because includes text, video, images, graphics and sound. It also has some interactive features, such as selecting transcription or translation, using the mouse for dragging the answers to the exercises etc.
- It is a tool, not a method. It is a means to aid the learner, to reinforce, to help acquisition, but not a way of learning.
- And finally, a language learning tool, language understood in the context described in section four when describing the linguistic aims.

## 6. Criteria to judge the effectiveness and suitability of the package.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness, suitability, quality and potential uses of the packaged I used two sources:

- First one, my own evaluation of the package with a particular target group of users in mind, the minor language module.
- Second one, the voice of some of the students in this module.

The criteria applied are those presented to us by our lecturer in a handout and the ones listed in the BECTA web site. It has to be said that these criteria are somehow constrained to the target users and their context.

### 1. Content and coverage.

- Text, image and audio are balanced. However, the screen is a bit crowded with the video and the text.
- Font is very small and a bit difficult to read in the transcription and translations.
- The 8 units cover a variety of business situations and text. The vocabulary and structures are relevant to them.
- French, English and German translations are available, which shows that the product was designed having a wide target market in mind.
- It addresses various learning styles and intelligences. Weaker students have the aid of the translation and the transcription. Those interested in how to perform a particular function can work from the table of contents. If there is interest in sociolinguistic and cultural issues, the information is also provided.
- The information is current, but perhaps in future editions they should consider to introduce references to electronic commerce and Internet.

- As we have already said, the language learning approach behind the application is a current one.
- It is relevant for the International Marketing/Business and Languages curriculum, both for the Spanish Major/Minor modules.
- We cannot really say the content is nationally biased, but we should notice that: 1) variety spoken is the peninsular Spanish; 2) the actor in the video monologues has a Latin-American accent. Including regional varieties of the language is another current trend in language teaching; 3) the application was thought for a European market, as it provides translations in European languages and actors look very European. Some of the texts refer explicitly to Spanish legislation. This is not surprising Difusion is one of the publishers for Europe. There are many publishers in America, and I dare say the European products are not very much sold in the USA.
- The sample dialogues, monologues and texts contained centred around a particular topic, for example how to launch a new product to the market. Vocabulary, structures and functions presented are good examples but by no mean exhaustive.

## 2. Presentation.

- There is a variety of screen displays, but all within the same frame, producing a crowded screen and, at moments, not very user friendly.
- Some students found the sound quality very poor. This is not an objective data as the problem might have been in the hardware.
- Pronunciation and speed do not seem to discourage students, as they know that Spaniards speak that fast. Students showed positive attitudes to the videos. We did not do any video work in our module and perhaps the novelty attracted to them.
- Information is presented in a logical way.
- The students and myself suggest that some kind of guidance for the navigation would be useful. We only see the icons but there is no information about what the icons could be used for.

## 3. Documentation and supplementary materials.

- The only documentation accompanying the CD-ROM is a user registration card and a brief description of the package at the back of the box. As we have already said there is no on screen help. The result of this is that the user has to test the navigation possibilities. It is not difficult to navigate the CD-ROM, but this initial user “unfriendliness” is a small fault of the package.
- The videotape “Español de negocios” has a very complete workbook. Perhaps the authors considered this was not necessary in the multimedia package as it also includes some exercises. This would not be that easy in the video.

## 4. Effectiveness

- The program, no doubt, prepares students for future real world experiences (dialogues, phone conversation, dealing with authentic business texts).
- They found it interesting and recognised its potential. (see next section)

- As I have already said, one of my intentions is to analyse the possibilities of recommending this application for autonomous work. Having in mind the feedback received from the students we dare to say this package could be effective as long as it is supplemented with other tools and materials.

## 5. Audience appeal & suitability

- The CD-ROM matches interest level of the students, though language might be a bit challenging for the minor group.
- The possibility of the transcription helps students with weaker listening skills.
- Translation option allows checking new vocabulary, always in context.
- We could say the program branches to remediation or enrichment as, for example, in the exercises section, one can check the answers, get feed back on how many are wrong and watch/listen to the materials another time to try again.

## 6. Practice /Assessment/Feedback

- Practice is provided to accomplish objectives. We have said that the application aims mainly at giving the students a wide passive knowledge of these business situations. The exercises presented test the reading comprehension skills and the capacity to place missing items to form complete sentences (not to generate those complete sentences).
- As we have already said, it lacks encouragement for oral practice.
- The main screen can lead us the section “Evaluación”. I did not asked the students to navigate through this option because this possibility is only useful if you have studied the vocabulary and functions in the unit. This test is very difficult and it could be a bit frustrating not to do well. The standard in this section is so high that I did not do very well myself!
- When checking the exercises, colours and flashing give feedback on success or failure, in my opinion a feature that reinforces we are in an interactive environment.

## 7. Usability

- The users can navigate the program without difficulty, but it would have been very useful if the icons had been explained somewhere on the screen or in the collateral materials.
- The index screen for the 8 units could offer some extra information. It only says, for example, “ Unidad 8: en la empresa de informática” (Unit 8, the computer company). The only relationship between title and contents is that in the video and text they refer to a computer company. The real content and context of the unit is that of job applications and job interviews. The same could be said of the other 7 units. I made a list of the topics of each unit and this list was presented to the students when they had to choose a unit to work with. Several chose unit 8 because they were interested in interview skills, not in the computer company. The unit index should provide this information, in my opinion.
- There are no screen directions at all in the exercise section. Students knew they had to drag the mouse because I told them. I cannot recall how I discovered it.
- No help options offer at any stage.

- In theory users could exit from any screen, as the initial screen with the three cases is available. Doing this caused technical problems and I recommended following a more sequential way of navigation.

#### 8. User interface and media quality.

- We have already mentioned the concentration of media on the screen
- The video screen is very small, quality is not the best.

#### 9. Facilities and features.

- No possibility of printing, saving or marking information. One of the students noticed printing was not possible and mentioned so in the questionnaire. Probably she found texts very useful and wanted to have hardcopies for further study.
- No possibility for the user to introduce their own data.

#### 7. The students' voice.

The students' opinion has briefly been introduced in the previous sections. In the present one we focus our attention on the students' answers to the questionnaire, the second main source for our evaluation.

The 16 students of the module Spanish Minor were invited to use the CD-ROM in SALLU for half an hour and then fill a questionnaire. Eleven wrote down their names for the "experiment" but only 9 of them carried it out.

In order to give a quick overview of their answers, we will present the questionnaire and report the most frequent or interesting responses.

##### **1) Did you find it easy to navigate the CD-ROM? Is the screen user friendly?**

Navigation was easy. Suggestions: text in the icons, some kind of on screen help.

##### **2) The videos. Did you choose translation or transcription? Why? What do you think of these options being offered to the learner? Comment on speed and pronunciation.**

All of them chose transcription because listening in Spanish and reading in English would be confusing. Some check the translation to find out vocabulary. Options are a good idea. Necessary. Helpful  
Fast speed seen as an aim not as an obstacle.

##### **3) The exercises. What do you think of the possibility of easily checking the solutions? What about the way of answering the questions (dragging your answers)? Is it more attractive / useful than the exercises in paper?**

Difficult to know that you have to drag the answers.  
The possibility of checking answers in very useful when working on one's own.  
Possibility of watching the video once more and trying again is beneficial  
Livelier, original, more interesting than paper exercises. Quicker, convenient,

#### **4) Phone conversation. Why do you think there is a section for phone skills?**

They all saw the importance of acquiring phone skills for the business world, and also mentioned that this skills are different from those needed in face to face conversation.

#### **5) Contenidos. Why is that information there?**

This question refers to the sociolinguistic and cultural information about some items in the table of contents. This is one of the points at which we find something unexpected. I expected the students would see the point of that information and respond relevantly to the question. None of them did. Did I not explain it clearly enough when giving them a quick tour around the package? Did the linguistic utterances chosen have such trivial connotations that the information read meant nothing to the students? Or they do not see why it is important to pay attention to cultural differences that may affect our linguistic behavior? Unfortunately I do not have evidence enough to prove any of the three.

#### **6) In your opinion, this application would be better for class usage or for self-learning? Would it be useful for yourself?**

General consensus on self-learning. Advantages: learner's own pace, learner's own interest. Disadvantage: no time to use these supplementary activities, CD-ROMs can give technical troubles (and we had several during our "experiment")

#### **7) Imagine there is a book with exactly the same contents and sections. What do you think the CD-ROM offers that would be different from a book?**

The CD-ROM allows you to listen to the spoken language. More original, interesting. Hearing better than just reading. Interactive element holds your attention.

#### **8) What could a language class with a teacher offer you that a multimedia package cannot?**

Personal feedback, interaction, explanations to you doubts.

A teacher motivates you to work, it would be tempting to get lazy using a CD-ROM.

More personal with a teacher, could get tired or bored easily with multimedia packages. They are good for complementing/facilitating learning in class but not as a substitution.

## Conclusions

- **Recording the expected.** As I have already said, I applied the evaluation criteria always having the Minor module in mind. My expectations were that the students were to see in this package a very useful tool, different from what we have done in class. I could also foresee that they were not going to see much usefulness in it for the class, but they could get a taste of its **potential for autonomous work**.

- **Enhancing the product.** Some of the faults and improvement possibilities mentioned in the essay emerge from the students' responses and observations. When evaluating or testing, always consider the end-user.

- **Applying what was learnt.** In this case, I do not refer to the students but to myself. From their answers I received ideas to enhance the module and to promote the usage of multimedia language tools among my students (always keeping in mind what they said about what a class provides). One possibility of introducing the package in the module would be asking them in pairs to investigate about the phone conversation in a unit. Then report to the class functions, vocabulary etc. and reproduce a similar language sample.

- **Hypermedia and the traditional approach.** Students see and benefit from the hypermedia quality of the materials. However, these benefits are confined at moments.

**The novelty of multimedia.** Many of them say this way of learning is more original than the book. The motivation factor comes into scene. Perhaps this applications are not that good, but just because they are different they succeed. Shortly the fourth year students will be the ones who at the age of 4 were playing with this technology. Will the motivation still be there?

“One of the most important aspects when discussing technology enhanced resources for language learning is the question of how to evaluate and test the functionality and effectiveness of such materials”<sup>1</sup> Our evaluation, though with a not very wide scope, is a small example of how one of these resources could be studied. We are aware that it is not an exhaustive one, but we hope it is a contribution

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<sup>1</sup> Bernd Rüschoff,(1998). “Evaluating and testing”, *CALL Courseware Development: a Handbook*. Eurocall..

## **appendix A**

### **Spanish Minor, Software evaluation. Maryan Martin**

The following questionnaire is only for research purposes and it will not be assessed. I am not evaluating the language or the content of the CD-ROM. I am evaluating how learners may benefit from multimedia language tools (usability, user friendliness, clear presentation of contents, good structure etc.)

#### **INSTRUCCIONES**

\*En SALLU, realizar una de las siguientes unidades del CD-ROM “Español de negocios”, según el tema que te interese.

- Unidad 1: en el restaurante, preparar una reunión
- unidad 3: en la empresa Import-Export S.A, presentar un producto
- unidad 4 En la oficina del agente de Bolsa: opinar sobre los movimientos de la Bolsa
- unidad 5: en la sala de reuniones de una zapatería: preparar una nueva campaña.
- unidad 6: en el punto de venta de Panadera SA, historia de una empresa
- unidad 8: en la empresa de informática, una entrevista de trabajo

## appendix B

### FORMATO DE CADA UNIDAD

Video diálogo. Puedes ver transcripción o traducción (alemán, inglés, francés)

Hacer los Ejercicios y comprobar la solución.

Video monólogo (transcripción o traducción). Mirar rápidamente los ejercicios.

Conversación por teléfono. Escuchar (transcripción o traducción) . Ejercicios

Leer un artículo (traducción)

**Contenidos:** Cara a cara// por teléfono. Hacer click en uno de los que tienen el símbolo (información sociolingüística y cultural).

Responder a las preguntas (en inglés)

1) Did you find it easy to navigate the CD-ROM?

Is the screen user friendly?

2) The videos. Did you choose translation or transcription? Why?

What do you think of these options being offered to the learner?

Comment on speed and pronunciation.

3) The exercises. What do you think of the possibility of easily checking the solutions?

What about the way of answering the questions (dragging your answers)?

Is it more attractive / useful than the exercises in paper?

4) Phone conversation. Why do you think there is a section for phone skills?

5) Contenidos. Why is that information there?

6) In your opinion, this application would be better for class usage or for self-learning?

Would it be useful for yourself?

7) Imagine there is a book with exactly the same contents and sections. What do you think the CD-ROM offers that would be different from a book?

8) What could a language class with a teacher offer you that a multimedia package cannot?

