

PhD thesis defense report

Name of PhD candidate	Ricardo Gabriel Gómez de la Fuente
Title of thesis	Estudio contrastivo de los cuantificadores de cantidad y grado del castellano, guaraní paraguayo y japonés. Propuesta pedagógica para hablantes de japonés
Director and members of evaluating committee	Montserrat Sanz Yagüe (神戸市外国語大学) 成田瑞穂 (神戸市外国語大学) Juan Romero Díaz (神戸市外国語大学) Miguel Ángel Verón Gómez (Universidad Nacional de Asunción/ Secretaría de Ambiente, Gobierno de la República de Paraguay).
Date	February 1 st 2024. 9:25-11:40. Classroom 308 and online.

Summary of the thesis
<p>The Japanese International Cooperation Agency sends staff around the world to collaborate in projects leading to the advancement of developing countries. Part of the training of the cooperants involves intensive language courses. The staff assigned to Paraguay receives Spanish lessons. However, Paraguay is linguistically different from other Latin-American countries in that the indigenous language Guaraní is very much alive and used, affects the Spanish spoken in the country and is even the only language in rural areas where the cooperants exercise their duties. The author of this thesis identified certain difficulties in his classes in the training center for these cooperants on the use of quantifier structures in Spanish and started a thesis to explore the root of these difficulties, with the intention to help these students acquire quantification better. After the analysis had started, he received the assignment of teaching Guaraní, given the demands of the cooperants assigned to Paraguay, who, upon arrival in the country, realized the need for training in this language too. The study of quantificational structures in Spanish was then expanded in this thesis to include a comparison with these constructions in Guaraní. As far as we are aware of, this is the first attempt to find more efficient ways to teach Guaraní together with Spanish in Japan, to courses with special circumstances and difficulties, like the training center above described.</p> <p>The author identifies three possible sources of the difficulty that Japanese speakers in these intensive courses face with regards to quantificational structures, especially degree constructions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Quantifiers in Spanish are difficult to analyze linguistically. Even linguists are immersed in a debate about this syntactic category. The author presents a thorough review of the literature, in which it becomes clear that quantifiers can be viewed from a variety of syntactic and semantic angles.

2. The constructions themselves vary profoundly between Spanish and the native language of the students, Japanese, due to the non-correspondence between syntactic categories (what is expressed with a noun in Spanish may correspond to an adjective in Japanese, for instance, nouns and adjectives have different patterns of quantification, and Japanese has hybrid categories that are absent in Spanish). The author covers these differences and offers an analysis of some errors found in compositions and conversations in search for the differences between the languages.

3. The materials used of the teaching of Spanish to Japanese speakers, in general, obviate these differences and difficulties, and offer little or no coverage of these constructions. The author provides an analysis of some textbooks, both published in Japan and in Spain, and shows the scarcity of discussion, explanation and practice concerning quantifiers. Furthermore, the learning strategies of this kind of adult student population in an intensive program are mostly focused on direct comparison with Japanese, and the students usually demand grammatical explanations, even if they cannot understand them.

Thus, the author saw the need to develop materials that would include comparisons and explanations of the linguistic differences with Japanese. Hence, the comparative analysis of the dissertation. Having been asked to teach Guaraní also, he started an exploration of the same structures in this language and its influence in Paraguayan Spanish, and discovered the rich variety of constructions that can express quantification in Guaraní. Therefore, he included a comparison with this language too.

In order to verify the correspondences between Spanish and Guaraní's quantifiers, he realized a survey among speakers of Guaraní, who confirmed the enormous variety of ways in which this language can express degree quantification. Discussions on Guaraní can be found in the thesis, and the examples for comparison are included in the sections in which he compares Spanish and Japanese. He also includes the survey and the results of the survey in an Annex.

The author offers some charts that can be used for teaching, and poses the directions for better teaching of this constructions in the future, but does not provide with a complete pedagogical proposal.

Notes about the defense

The defense took place on February 1st, 2024, from 9:00 to 11:40 in Classroom 308. One of the members of the evaluating committee, Dr. Verón, could not travel to Japan for an in-person defense, and therefore the defense was held online simultaneously. Given some technical difficulties connecting to Zoom, the defense started at around 9:25. The author had 30 minutes to present his dissertation (although his presentation lasted 45 minutes and had to be interrupted by the committee president, Prof. Sanz, before the conclusions, because he had exceeded the time allowed), after which the members of the committee asked questions and offered comments and criticism.

The study was praised as the first study in Japan dealing with the issue of Guaraní and the teaching of this language. It was also praised for the efforts by the author to place himself in the circumstances of the cooperants in training and for trying to develop more efficient methods of teaching Spanish to them. The job of the cooperants is very demanding and stressful, and the candidate stated that his intention is to contribute to smoothing the burden of acquiring a certain level, not only in one, but in two foreign languages in three months.

The dissertation was criticized in several places for containing linguistic explanations that were not fully developed, or examples that did not reflect the problems accurately. For instance, the explanation of Japanese hybrid categories is incomplete, some places cited a mixture of adjectives and nominal adjectives without specifying the differences, the technical terminology to refer to the two categories in Japanese was not consistent throughout the thesis, and some statements established some equivalences between Japanese and Spanish constructions that needed further explanation. Also, some syntactic and morphological facts about Guaraní had not been reflected accurately in the thesis (for instance, the pronunciation of consonants in the chart containing the alphabet had been omitted, the reference to gender in the morphological chart should be eliminated, and the author should add that the degree quantification can be applied to all categories in Guaraní, which was stated in the oral presentation but was not in the written manuscript). The candidate was asked to review these and other issues in the final version of the dissertation. Furthermore, he was asked to organize the information in a different way in several places, and to add more explanations about the survey that he conducted in Guaraní. Neither of these corrections change the main proposal in a major way, and can be fixed without difficulties.

The candidate was asked to clarify the format of the intensive courses which are the focus of the dissertation, the choice of mistakes and of textbooks that he analyzed in the thesis. The candidate explained the format of the course, the lack of motivation and time of the students, the resistance to learning that some of them show, and the poverty of the materials. He explained why errors of some sort were dominant, and why he had chosen those textbooks for analysis.

Finally, the author was asked to provide a more specific account of the materials used in the pedagogical proposal that is presented in the thesis and that the committee considered quite interesting.

Evaluation

Overall, the committee expressed that the thesis needs the corrections stated above, but the value of the work as a PhD dissertation was accepted without dissension. On the one hand, the issue of quantification is indeed a difficult one and it helps having some linguistic facts summarized for the teachers. On the other, it establishes a bridge between Japan and the linguistic situation of Paraguay and it is a first attempt to cover some aspects of Guaraní in a more rigorous way in the training. It is important to note that Guaraní is not usually used as a written language, that the enormous expressive power of its 40 modes cannot be reflected

accurately in Japanese or Spanish, and that linguistic analyses of Guaraní are scarce, but that it is important to teach these differences and make an attempt to teach Guaraní to the Japanese speakers who will have to work in Paraguay. The study presented in this dissertation should lead to further lines of research and pedagogy.

In sum, the thesis and the defense that the candidate did of it is worthy of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy for Ricardo Gabriel Gómez de la Fuente.