DESIGNING A DIGITAL THEORY AND PRACTICE GUIDE FOR THE INTERMEDIATE GRAMMAR SUBJECT (BPTLI22) OF THE MODERN LANGUAGES DEGREE AT UNIVERSIDAD METROPOLITANA

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Abstract

The general objective of the following research is to design a digital, theoretical and practical material for learning English grammar in the subject Intermediate Grammar (BPTLI22) from the Modern Languages degree at Universidad Metropolitana. This research is projective, since it consists on the elaboration of a proposal aimed at solving a specific situation or need, in this case, a didactic material that helps to reinforce the teaching and learning process of the subject. It is also a mixed research, since it is documentary and field, with a sample of three (3) professors and eighteen (18) students who studied the subject in the 1819-2 period, that

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is, a total of twenty-one (21). A survey was applied in order to determine the learning activities to be included in the material as well as the appropriate graphic design for it, based on visual resources such as key words and concept maps. The answers of the students served as a guide for the learning activities to be included in the digital manual. Based on the above, a digital theoretical-practical guide was elaborated for the Intermediate Grammar subject.

Keywords: design, guide, digital, learning, Intermediate Grammar.

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Introduction

Grammar is a fundamental aspect of any language. It represents the norms and conventions of the language that its speakers know intuitively (Chomsky, 1964, cited in Allen & Corder, 1975). Concerning the English language's grammar specifically, it is worth noting that the importance of its mastery for students' academic and professional performance is constantly on the rise, since it boosts their capacity for comprehending and producing logical, coherent sentences.

The Intermediate Grammar subject is one of the first in the English chain, and it plays a relevant role within the Modern Languages degree, as it provides students with the basic tools needed to highly develop their competencies in the field of the English language's grammar. The current method consists of sharing links and presentations prepared by the professor, which serve as supporting material for the students. The importance of adding more material and, above all, unifying it all in a guide that includes both theory and practice, so that the work of both teachers and students becomes easier, has been recognized. As such, this research paper has the main objective of designing a digital theory and practice guide that complements the teaching and learning process of this subject.

Problem Statement

English is considered an international language, and its relevance surpasses borders and expands to many fields of work; it is often seen as the official language of international business and relations (Jaimechango, 2009, cited in Zambrano, Vivas & Dueñas, 2017).

Because of this, Ortiz (2013, cited in Zambrano et al., 2017) highlights the importance of this language by pointing to recent estimations that show that English has 402 million native speakers, and more than 1000 million non-native speakers. As such, it is worth noting that its usage is fundamentally for the working environment, and it has become a necessity.

When learning a language, such as English, the different communicative competencies (listening, reading, speaking and writing) that the student must develop have to be taken into account. Oxford (2001) affirms that learning it also includes associated or related competencies, such as vocabulary, orthography, pronunciation, syntax, among others.

Among the associated competencies listed by Oxford (2001), grammar stands out. According to Allen, Newsom, Wetmore, Throckmorton & Borgh (1966), linguists define grammar as the description of a language as a system. However, the popular notion that relates it to

the usage of language and its context also exists. This notion establishes that grammar is a fundamental aspect of any language, since it reflects the capacity of the speaker to comprehend and produce any sentence in their language that is easily understood by receptors, according to situation and context. Chomsky (1964, cited in Allen & Corder, 1975) states that the aim of grammar is to present, in a precise and explicit manner, those facts about a language that its speakers know intuitively.

On the other hand, Allen & Corder (1975) point out the opinion of many people about grammar, as one of the darkest and most boring subjects in the curriculum. Since it is one of the most important elements of a language, it is important to give it an attractive and friendly spin with the goal of generating interest in the students.

In this regard, Graells (2000) affirms that teaching materials help in organizing information, relating knowledge, creating new knowledge and applying it. Likewise, the author highlights that some students absorb iconic, concrete information better than verbal, abstract information (Graells, 2000). This means that they understand better through images and outlines.

Furthermore, Orozco & Henao (2013) state that teaching materials are not limited only to the enrichment and evaluation of the transmitted knowledge, but they also support that process of dynamic or didactic learning. The authors highlight that the teacher appropriates the materials while teaching, and their usage becomes intentional and didactic as long as it allows the student to actively interact with their knowledge and stimulates physical, cognitive and affective development, which acts dynamically from motivation (Orozco & Henao, 2013).

Regarding Universidad Metropolitana, specifically the Modern Languages School, this is where the Intermediate Language subject, which constitutes one of the first in the English chain, is taught. Currently, the method used in the subject consists on sending links and presentations about the subjects, which serve as supporting material for the professor and students.

Because of this, it is considered that counting on a compact material could benefit the effective development of the subject and, as such, allow for more advantage to be taken from it. This is because, as pointed out by Bustillo (2005), this material functions as a tool to select those aspects the professor wishes to work on. Because of this, for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22), the employment of an updated supporting material containing all of the subject's contents in a redacted, organized and coherent manner, according to students' needs, which helps to facilitate and improve the process of teaching and learning the subject, is appropriate.

As such, the following research question is proposed: how to design a digital theory and practice guide for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22) of the Modern Languages Degree at Universidad Metropolitana?

Objectives

General Objective

To design a digital theory and practice guide for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22) of the Modern Languages Degree at Universidad Metropolitana.

Specific Objectives

1. To determine the learning strategies that will be included in the digital theory and practice guide for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22) of the Modern Languages Degree at Universidad Metropolitana.

2. To define the theoretical and practical contents of the digital guide, taking the program of the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22) of the Modern Languages Degree at Universidad Metropolitana into account.

3. To establish the content sequence for the digital theory and practice guide for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22) of the Modern Languages Degree at Universidad Metropolitana.

4. To make the digital theory and practice guide for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22) of the Modern Languages Degree at Universidad Metropolitana.

Justification

The educational practice, according to García, Loredo & Carranza (2008), is a dynamic and reflexive activity that includes the events that occur in the interaction between teacher and students. Because of this, it is worth noting that, in order to successfully develop this practice, it is necessary for the teacher to count on a set of techniques, more commonly known as teaching strategies. The Centro de Capacitación en Educación a Distancia (2013) defines them as actions planned by the teacher with the aim of helping the student to construct learning and achieve the proposed objectives. The aforementioned techniques imply different activities with a specific purpose: significant learning.

An article by the Federación de Enseñanza CC.OO. de Andalucía (2009) highlights that teaching materials are essential means or instruments for educational practice. In relation to language learning, teaching supporting materials play a relevant role. In fact, Peris (2000) affirms that languages are learned by using them, and as such, practice is fundamental. However, due to the technological boom, teachers have needed to design and use digital teaching materials.

Meanwhile, it is appropriate to highlight that education in the technological era is subjected to constant change and challenges. Among them, the new student's profile stands out, since, in this new technological race, students tend to be more visual and kinesthetic, with short attention spans (Araya, 2017). As such, teachers must resort to functional and adequate

teaching resources that allow their students to focus on the contents and, as a result, achieve significant and constructive learning.

Taking the aforementioned reasoning into account, the design and creation of a digital theory and practice material for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BTLI22) that includes theoretical content as well as a set of activities that allow acute development of the skills included within the field of the English language's grammar, was proposed. This guide would align with the goals and components included in the subject's program, as well as bring the specific objectives of this paper together. The instrument's structure and design corresponds to specific teaching strategies, such as combined learning, significant learning and self instruction. For this reason, the proposed material is presented as a resource that accompanies the student in their path through the subject's five units.

Topics and activities were proposed in such a way that the student will overcome challenges of increasing difficulty, from the most simple to the most complex. As for the activities, diverse techniques, such as questionnaires, exercise solving and outline making, were employed. Likewise, since the subject is cumulative, it was essential to add knowledge evaluation sections at the end of each unit that included content of prior units.

This guide's added value includes the fact that it is digital and the presentation of the contents that allows it to be used as a support for learning.

According to Carabobo es Noticia (2017), due to the country's current situation, the enterprises that have managed to obtain even a small amount of foreign currency are few, which has led the educational trade to have less than 30% of this supply. As such, given the difficulty in acquiring imported, printed materials, the digital presentation of the proposed material ensures that all the students will be able to access it easily.

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that presenting the topics with a visually attractive design can open the way towards a more pleasant and effective learning environment. This is complemented by clear examples and a section containing the most common grammar mistakes, as well as exercises with a space reserved for self-evaluation that emphasizes the student's metacognition by way of error detection. Additionally, since the knowledge acquired in this subject will be useful to the student for the rest of the major, the subject's relevance must be highlighted by instilling the idea of studying in advance and in an organized manner.

Methodological Framework

Type of Research

Hurtado (2000) proposes different types of research, and among them, it is worth highlighting projective research, which is done with the objective of designing or creating proposals directed at solving specific situations. In other words, projective research consists of presenting a tangible proposal, such as a specific material or model, to satisfy a population's need in a practical and

effective manner. This paper subscribes to this formulation, since its main objective was to create and design a digital theory and practice guide for the Intermediate Grammar subject which, based on a prior study and a specific context, will improve the student's experience and, as a result, boost knowledge acquisition and achieve a good professional training which meets the goals of the major and the university.

Population and Sample

A population is a set of elements, beings or events, similar to each other in some regards, from which some information is desired (Arnau, 1980, cited in Hurtado, 2000). Meanwhile, a sample is a portion of the population, which is considered representative, taken in order to carry the study out (Hurtado, 2000).

In order to carry out a complete study, this paper's population is composed of the two professors who taught Intermediate Grammar in the last two terms, the coordinator and the 35 students who took the subject in the 1819-2 term. From this population, 21 persons who answered two questionnaires were taken as the sample. The first questionnaire was answered by 18 students who took the subject in the 1819-2 trimester, the subject's coordinator and the two professors that have been in charge of it for the last academic year. This instrument was administered with the purpose of determining the characteristics of the digital theory and practice guide, considering the content as well as its design, so that it can support the subject's teaching and learning process.

Afterwards, the second questionnaire was applied to the three professors with the aim of identifying the most ideal combination and typography for the guide. In this way, the academic needs of both the teachers and students in this subject were detected and analyzed, with the objective of approaching them successfully in the making and design of the proposed digital theory and practice guide.

Research Design

1. *Temporality.* It is cross-sectional since the study was carried out during a specific period of time, from the 1819-1 to the 1819-3 trimesters.

2. *Data analysis process.* The data collection process is qualitative and quantitative. A survey was carried out in order to determine the necessary foundations for the design of the proposed teaching material and then analyze those results. This survey went over aspects such as the guide's contents, the types of exercises considered necessary, the learning visual resources, the design and layout, and as a result, interest on the subject and expectations respondents had of the guide could be measured.

3. *Source and context.* This study required a mixed research design, combining documentary and field research. Documentary research is a process based on

the search, retrieval, analysis, critique and interpretation of secondary data (Arias, 2006). In other words, it is about using different bibliographic resources to search for information that is applicable to the field with the aim of supporting the paper. On the other hand, field research consists of collecting data directly from the research subjects or the environment where the events take place (Arias, 2006). That is, it is due to the need for obtaining information from the professors and students in their specific context.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

A data collection instrument, according to Sabino (1992), is any resource the researcher uses to approach the phenomena and extract information from them. In this way of carrying out a study, it is important for the researcher to take the means through which the necessary information to achieve the proposed objectives can be obtained into account (Hurtado, 2000). In other words, the data collection process must be carried out carefully and conscientiously. After considering different instruments, a survey was settled upon, since it is a technique of sociological interest which is carried out by way of a previously prepared form or questionnaire, through which the opinion and assessment of the chosen subject or group may be known. This survey was applied to the English coordinator as well as the professors who taught the Intermediate Grammar subject during the last academic year. The students who took the subject during this time were also included, with the object of determining the subject's specific needs, as well as their opinions and general comments. (For more information about the survey, click the following link: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1omkXlvNBQn2XVQ6vfbffdkEVTK70mJG-NYIgzUMceT-g/edit).

Operationalization of the Study Events

The study unit, also known as the analysis unit, is the context. Hurtado (2000) clarifies that it is important for it to be well defined so that, through it, the research question may be answered completely and satisfactorily. Because of this, with the research being about the creation of a digital theory and practice guide for the Intermediate Grammar subject (BPTLI22), and considering this research's objectives, among which one of the main ones is determining the contents of the guide, the chosen study unit was the subject's program, which was taken as a base for the design and production of the digital material.

On the other hand, Hurtado (2000) defines the study events as situations that are likely to be subjected to study in a research project. Taking this definition as a base and considering that the research is about the design and creation of a digital theory and practice material for a subject, it is worth highlighting that the likely situations to be subjected to study were the following: first, the learning strategies that the study guide is based on, as well as the contents of the guide, the topic sequence and, lastly, the design and creation of the digital theory and practice material.

1. *Learning strategies.* The general objective of the subject and, by extension, of the guide as well, is to develop in the students the necessary linguistic competencies to achieve a good grasp of written and spoken language. Another objective is for the students to be able to construct grammatically correct sentences.

2. *Contents of the guide.* The guide is composed of the five units proposed in the subject's program, namely: the noun phrase, the prepositional phrase, the verb phrase, the clause and the sentence. Additionally, based on the survey's results, an introductory unit including the eight parts of speech and their functions was added.

3. *Sequence.* The aforementioned contents, including both theory and practice, are presented with increasing difficulty, from the most simple, such as the elements of the introductory unit which serve as a base for the following units, to the fourth and last, which contains the topics mentioned above.

4. *Design and creation.* According to Hurtado (2000), it is about a process through which aspects that can be discerned in the study events are determined. Based on this, these events were operationalized, and then the design and creation of the digital theory and practice study guide was carried out.

On the other hand, Hurtado (2000) has expressed that the operationalization process is complex, but fundamental for the project or research, as it allows the study events to be established clearly. As such, the information about them is organized through an operationalization table.

Results and Conclusions

This research paper served as the base for designing the digital theory and practice guide, since, according to the results of the applied instrument, the guide's characteristics regarding its contents and the kinds of exercises that are desired in the material, as well as visual elements, color palette and typography, could be determined.

As for the learning strategies that should be included, it was decided that the most appropriate ones for this kind of material are cognitive and memory strategies, according to the taxonomy created by Oxford (1990).

It was determined that the students wanted the study guide to contain basic information about the Intermediate Grammar subject as well as exercises at the end of each unit that allow them to reinforce their knowledge and to put the topics gone over in class into practice.

Likewise, based on the obtained responses, it was determined that the guide should keep the same topic sequence as the subject's program, and an introductory unit was added. As such, the sequence presented in the guide is the following:

Unit 0: Parts of a Speech.

Unit 1: Noun Phrase.

Unit 2: Prepositional Phrase.

Unit 3: Verb Phrase.

Unit 4: The Clause.

Unit 5: The Sentence.

Finally, it was concluded that the surveyed students showed great interest in the inclusion of a digital theory and practice guide in the Intermediate Grammar subject that helps reinforce and facilitate the learning and teaching process. Therefore, it was created, taking all these aspects into account.

Design Process: *Intermediate Grammar*

Herein the proposal for the digital theory and practice guide *Intermediate Grammar 101* is presented. The guide's objective is to reinforce the learning and teaching process of the English language's grammar in the subject in question, specifically regarding the parts of speech, phrases, clauses, and the sentence itself.

The guide's specific objectives are the following:

- To reinforce the student's knowledge regarding parts of speech: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions and interjections.

- To provide all the necessary theoretical information about noun phrases, prepositional phrases, verb phrases, clauses and sentences.

- To incentivize the student to practice the presented theory in its entirety.

- To motivate the student to evaluate themselves through the activities proposed in the guide in order to achieve significant learning.

The *Intermediate Grammar 101* guide is also based on student autonomy. As such, it allows them to reinforce the topics gone over in each unit in and out of the classroom, since it contains both the theory and the review and practice exercises, accompanied by an answers section so that the student can evaluate themselves. The goal of this student autonomy is to facilitate and reinforce the teaching and learning process of the English language's grammar, as well as to make this process a dynamic, enriching experience. The guide presents the theoretical contents in a visually attractive manner in order to maintain the student's attention, and it also fosters review and practice in order to strengthen the topics gone over. This material intends to give a new spin to the study of grammar through the use of eye-catching visual resources, examples from daily life and different types of exercises.

Likewise, each unit is introduced with a section that allows the student to reflect upon what they know, what they wish to master, and what they really learned in order to internalize the knowledge and carry a complete self-evaluation out. To this effect, the guide includes a practice section that complements the theory. Because of this, different types of exercises were incorporated in an organized manner, following a specific sequence. Based on this, the learning activities in the theory and practice guide are divided into two levels: strengthening the acquired knowledge and putting it into practice. Likewise, an answers section titled "Answer Key" is presented, so that the student can evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in each unit.

The guide stands out for being elegant and eye-catching at the same time, with a simple but delicate cover so as to not distract the student from their goal: significant learning of the English language's grammar.

Finally, it is worth noting that the theory and practice will be distributed completely free of charge, since it is digital, and so the teacher will distribute it through the digital platform used to teach the Intermediate Grammar subject. Here ends this research paper.

Guide: *Intermediate Grammar 101*

As mentioned above, the digital material has two main elements: theory and practice. The theoretical part stands out for presenting all the necessary information accompanied by visually eye-catching resources and examples from daily life that make understanding the contents

easier (as shown in the image). This way, the student is provided with all the tools they need to achieve a good grasp of the English language's grammar.

As for the practical part, it is titled "Do it yourself," and it includes different kinds of activities to complement the theoretical part. It is divided in two sections: "Demonstrating your knowledge" and "Exercising your mind." The first section, "Demonstrating your knowledge," is composed of activities based on the cognitive and memorization strategies to strengthen the knowledge acquired in the unit. The second section, "Exercising your mind," contains exercises to put the acquired knowledge into practice, which include daily life situations and passages from current texts and articles to keep the student motivated while doing these exercises.

To this effect, the "Demonstrating your knowledge" section employs several methods:

- Comparative tables to fill out, as in the case of types of nouns, dependent vs. independent clauses, among others.

- Pairing activities to connect conjunctions with their respective functions.

- Questions in which the student must provide definitions, examples and indicate the main differences between the different elements.

In the material, questions alternate with tables in order to make this theoretical section more attractive to the student. Likewise, colors that call to action, such as yellow and orange, are used.

On the other hand, regarding "Exercising your mind," exercises such as the following can be found:

- Identifying elements in a sentence or paragraph.

- Identifying types of nouns, phrases, clauses, among others.

- Providing examples of specific cases.

- Completing or filling in the blanks with the different parts of speech.

- Sentence or paragraph construction, given certain conditions.

Some of these exercises are also presented in the form of tables, using colors like yellow and orange. Likewise, others make use of authentic texts which may interest the student, such as articles about film premieres, passages from famous speeches and speeches from movies, among others. Additionally, at the end of this section, a subsection containing motivational and inspiring phrases can be found, with the goal of fostering the student's desire to learn and, as such, making the teaching and learning process a more dynamic experience.

The aforementioned activities have an "Answer Key" at the end of the guide. It is an answers section which allows the student to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in each unit, so they can make progress in their learning.

The self-evaluation process is presented in the subsection titled "Motivating yourself." It contains a table that introduces each unit, which the students must fill out, since it will allows them to reflect upon what they are actually learning. To this effect, the process is herein described: At the beginning of each unit, the students must fill out the first two columns with what they know and what they wish to know, and then, after having gone over all the information and done all the exercises, they fill out the third column with what they actually learned.

The *Intermediate Grammar 101* guide is available as a PDF document in the following Google Drive link: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xQttLA1eC5xtHo-D8AlLxkeaKtDVmFj/view?usp=sharing

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