

Third Language Acquisition: Spanish-Speaking Students in the Latin Classroom

The argument that Gessica deAngelis makes in her 2007 book Third or Additional Language Acquisition (Clevedon; Buffalo: Multilingual Matters) is that the proficiency of the third language learner is dependent upon the working vocabulary and proficiency of the knowledge of the second language. In other words, the ability of the student to learn a third (or any additional) language is highly dependent upon the student's grasp on the second language. I believe some of what she and other linguistics scholars have to say could certainly be applied to Spanish-speaking students in the Latin classroom at both the high school and college levels.

It has been my own experience in ten years of teaching Latin in the community college and university settings that I have had few successful Hispanic students. Being from Texas and now teaching in California – both places where the demographics should indicate otherwise – I started out my research for this paper by wondering why I had so few Hispanic students who could succeed in the Latin classroom. For the purposes of this paper, I will present the method which I have developed and seems to work with abbreviated case study discussions. Although this paper's discussion about third language acquisition (known as L3) will primarily use examples from Hispanic students, it could certainly apply to students who speak other languages.

This paper will detail several field-tested approaches for the improvement of Latin language acquisition among native Spanish-speaking students. First, I will discuss the identification and assessment of potential problems and/or difficulties; next, I will share my approach for conducive communication between instructor and student, and finally I will delineate strategies for improved learning for the ESL student.