Consumer.gov / Consumidor.gov Teacher Resources
Teacher Resource Series #3

Using Consumidor.gov to Scaffold English Instruction for Native Spanish Speakers

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For educators working with adult English learners who are native speakers of Spanish, the parallel websites Consumidor.gov and Consumer.gov offer opportunities to use learners' first language (Spanish) to support development of skills in their second or additional one (English). By providing guided practice activities that draw on learners' existing knowledge, teachers and tutors can help learners build confidence in their emerging knowledge and can promote development of the higher order metalinguistic skills that underlie the ability to move between languages effectively.

The activities described below can be used in class groups or with individual learners in tutorial settings. The activities can be done on a smartphone, tablet, or laptop computer, as available resources and learner access / familiarity dictate. When possible, however, a desktop computer should be used because a larger screen can be more accessible to users with limited Internet experience and literacy skills. The content and language activities can also be done using paper copies of the Consumidor.gov and Consumer.gov web material.

In all these activities, start with the learners rather than the websites, and keep activities focused to ensure that they are connected to learners' lives and therefore meaningful and memorable. Pace instruction carefully to ensure that learners are able to develop understanding over time and perceive themselves as successful. Activities can be repeated multiple times so that learners' comfort levels and sense of control increase.

The activities below are based in research and practitioner experience in the language learning and literacy development of adults, and build on the evidence-based principles outlined in the Framework for the Consumer.gov/Consumidor.gov Lesson Plan Series. For more information on the evidence base on adult literacy acquisition, see the following resources:

Burt, M., & Peyton, J. (2003). *Reading and adult English language learners: The role of the first language.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Available at http://www.cal.org/caela/esl_resources/digests/reading.html

Kruidenier, J. R. (2002). *Research-based principles for adult basic education reading instruction.* Portsmouth, NH: RMC Research Corporation. Available at http://www.sabes.org/info-center/research-resources/

Kruidenier, J. R., MacArthur, C. A., & Spruck Wrigley, H. (2010). *Adult education literacy instruction: A review of the research*. Washington, DC: National Institute for Literacy. Available at http://www.sabes.org/info-center/research-resources/

Vinogradov, P., & Bigelow, M. (2010). *Using oral language skills to build on the emerging literacy of adult English language learners.* Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. Available at http://www.cal.org/caelanetwork/resources/using-oral-language-skills.html

See also the resources listed in the References section of the Framework.

Development of Content Knowledge

Asking learners to read new or unfamiliar content in a language that they are learning imposes a heavy cognitive load that can interfere with achievement of both content learning objectives and language learning objectives. Giving learners opportunities to develop content knowledge in their first language can reduce the load; when content presented in the new language is familiar, learners can use their content knowledge to help themselves understand and use the features of the new language.

- For content that is mostly or completely new to learners, start with reading and discussing a section in Spanish. Use the activities and materials in the relevant Consumidor.gov lesson plan as appropriate to guide development of understanding. When learners clearly understand the content, move to the parallel English material and the relevant Consumer.gov lesson plan to focus on language skill development.

- For content that is more familiar, or with learners at higher levels in English, start with the English material on Consumer.gov and the relevant Consumer.gov lesson plan. After learners have answered comprehension questions in English, encourage them to check the Spanish site to be sure they have understood. When discussing the site content, encourage learners to use both the English site and the Spanish site to support their conclusions.

In all activities, allow time for discussion of the differences between the way things work in the United States and the way they are in the learners' countries of origin. This will be particularly important when working with the material on credit and loans, where rules and processes may differ from country to country, and the material on scams against immigrants, where learners may have misconceptions based on the nature of the *notario* in Mexico or elsewhere (see the notes on false cognates below).

Development of English Language Skills

Native speakers of Spanish have an excellent store of linguistic knowledge that can help them develop English vocabulary and language skills. It can also mislead them when they do not realize that some things are similar but not exactly the same. Teachers and tutors can use

vocabulary items and sentences from Consumidor.gov and Consumer.gov to help learners apply their knowledge of Spanish to the learning of English and be aware of important differences between the two languages.

- Vocabulary: Spanish and English share many vocabulary items that derive from the same root or origin. These shared items, or cognates, can help native Spanish speakers understand material in English that they hear or read, and can aid them in developing English speaking and writing skills. The Consumidor.gov and Consumer.gov websites contain many such words. As you use the vocabulary materials in the lesson plans, encourage learners to identify Spanish cognates for the English vocabulary items that come up, and draw their attention overtly to the similarities and differences. If you are focusing on oral skills, address the pronunciation differences that affect both listening comprehension and speaking ability; if your focus is reading and writing, take time to look at the similarities and differences in spelling.

- False cognates: An important subset of the vocabulary that Spanish and English share is the group of false cognates: words that meet the criteria for cognate status in terms of their spelling, but not their meaning. For Consumidor.gov and Consumer.gov, the most important false cognate that appears is on the Estafas contra inmigrantes / Scams Against Immigrants pages, which address notario fraud. The lesson plans for these sections includes activities that help learners understand the difference between a notario in Mexico and a notary in the United States. In addition, you can use this material to talk with learners more generally about other false cognates that they know, situations in which cognate confusion arises, and how such confusion can be used to take advantage of people.

- Grammar and sentence structure: Native speakers of Spanish who are learning English often are challenged by fundamental differences in the grammars of the two languages. Consumidor.gov and Consumer.gov provide excellent opportunities to address one such challenge: the fact that English requires an overt subject in most cases, whereas Spanish does not. You can demonstrate this overtly to your learners by having them compare the Spanish and English versions of one webpage. For example, the Su historial de crédito / Your Credit History pages contain texts such as the following:

  o Su historial de crédito describe cómo usa su dinero.
  o Your credit history describes how you use money.

  You can ask learners to compare the two sentences and mark the places where they see differences, or describe the differences that they see. Then have them see what other examples of the same phenomenon they can find on the websites. [This can be facilitated by having two windows open at the same time, one on Consumidor.gov and the other on Consumer.gov, so learners can toggle back and forth easily.] Develop a code word or sign with the learners that means "you forgot to state the subject," and use it in future lessons and discussions.

- Word parts: In addition to vocabulary, Spanish and English share a number of prefixes and suffixes that carry both grammatical and lexical meaning. The –s suffixes for plural nouns are one example that occurs throughout the Consumidor.gov and Consumer.gov websites. Few others occur on the sites because the English site, in particular, uses everyday vocabulary that comes mostly from the non-Latin roots of the language. However, when particular vocabulary items come up (information/información, for example) you can use them as the base for raising learners' awareness of these similarities.

Development of Web Navigation Skills

For learners with limited experience with the use of the Internet, using Consumidor.gov, with its Spanish-language labels for the function links such as imprimir, escuchar, and búsqueda, can facilitate development of web use and web navigation skills. Have learners use the Spanish site first and then compare how the English site labels the same function; or have them predict what the English labels mean and then check themselves using the Spanish site.