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Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/56m5k8ff>

Journal

L2 Journal, 14(3)

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Publication Date

2022

DOI

10.5070/L214356254

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Peer reviewed

Beyond the Crime Scene: Designing a Criminalistics Module in a Legal Spanish Course

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One of the major challenges for any L2 teacher is to integrate vocabulary components into a course. Determining what words to select in order to satisfy the goals of the course and what instructional methodology best suits the purpose of vocabulary learning are not easy tasks. Even more difficult is dealing with the formulaic terminology of a domain-specific vocabulary that students have not previously encountered. In this paper, I describe a criminalistics module within a Legal Spanish course that has a mock trial as a final assignment. In order to learn the terminology for the final assignment, incidental vocabulary learning through reading, watching a movie, and listening to a talk was seen as complementary, but not sufficient. Instead, intentional vocabulary learning has proven more effective because it reinforces retention of novel vocabulary and leads to its eventual production in the final task.

INTRODUCTION

In general, students with a high-intermediate proficiency level who take a Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) course have some knowledge of the field, although this varies among students, excellent observation and analysis skills, great motivation (Ainciburu & Suñén, 2019, p. 41), and often specific communicative objectives (Calahorro, 2015, p. 78). In identifying these motivations and learning objectives, I have observed after years of teaching Legal Spanish that most students relate “law” to criminal law. When I first designed the course, I covered a broad range of legal areas, including, for example, contract and family law, until it was clear that students’ knowledge of the field was so limited that it presented a real constraint to learning the language. If motivation triggered their yearning to study legal vocabulary, and they had no previous exposure to general legal matters, I used students’ familiarity with criminal movies or thriller novels. Focusing on criminal cases could potentially stimulate, increase, and help maintain strong motivation for learning a foreign language. Additionally, students already knew the meaning of many words related to criminal affairs. In contrast, it was much more problematic to give definitions, translations, and proper contextual information about tort or inheritance law, for instance. Motivation and foreknowledge were both advantages that helped better identify a proper methodology for the development of a criminalistics module.

This legal Spanish course meets three days a week in 50-minute periods for six weeks. The first three weeks are devoted to introducing new vocabulary related to justice, rights and law, and discrimination, as well as to the description of a courtroom and its personnel. After these preparatory lessons, the criminalistics module begins. The first time I taught it, I had ten participants with a lower-intermediate to advanced proficiency level. They were all

undergraduates in various majors. A few planned to attend law school. Thus, the difficulty lay in really knowing what their learning needs were. Apart from the short time available for the course, another crucial obstacle was the nature of the language to be taught: legal terminology is neither easy nor user-friendly, even for native speakers. When students do not know a word in English (or in their native language other than English), the instructor needs to explain both what it means in the context where it is used and provide them with background, synonyms, examples, and translations. This endeavor would not be particularly demanding if textbooks were available to help teachers. Published materials, however, are not always a good fit for teaching American undergraduate students. Most Spanish handbooks on legal vocabulary target foreign law students who will spend an exchange year in Spain or lawyers who want to practice law in Spain. Some others contain mainly word lists, or are dictionaries or legal phrasebooks. Therefore, the obvious limitations on the prior legal knowledge of the students, time constraints, and the shortfall in materials sum up the overall picture of these specific teaching circumstances.

INSTRUCTIONAL METHODOLOGY

A lexical approach (as coined by Lewis, 1993), with a focus on teaching words and word combinations to foster learners' proficiency, seemed the best fit for designing this criminalistics module. The key goal was that L2 learners would be able to recognize form, comprehend meaning, and produce lexical phrases as units in the last assignment, instead of only focusing on the language acquisition of single words. Following Nation (2013), who emphasizes the need to include the vocabulary component while designing the curriculum for a language course, first, two main elements need to be determined: word selection and instructional methodology.

The first element is the number and range of words for the course. Ideally, the corpus of words needs to match the uses that students need (Gardner, 2013). In essence, the selected words must function in a way that best prepares students for the final task. In the case of this module, the word choice was inspired by the criminal procedure and the ultimate mock trial. Knowing that students have a proficiency level of B1-C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), I benefited from the *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes*, a tool for teachers that makes grammar and word corpora available according to the levels of proficiency. It includes a section on legal vocabulary that I used as a basis for my choices.

However, not all the selected vocabulary may be new to the students, who may already comprehend some legal words in writing or speech due to their varying competence levels. Much more complex is the transfer of this passive L2 knowledge into production. According to a previous study, it is much easier to develop a receptive mastery level of a language from zero knowledge than develop from a receptive to a productive mastery level of vocabulary knowledge (Schmitt, 2019). As research has shown, this transfer "is far from linear" and depends "on factors such as L2 learning context, length of study, word frequency and learners' proficiency levels" (Chacón-Beltrán et al., 2010, pp. 7–8). Few studies have focused, however, on how to help students achieve a productive mastery of target vocabulary (Teng & Xu, 2022; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020), and the series of sessions presented in the present paper are a modest attempt to facilitate the production of highly specialized terminology. Once the word selection is determined, then, the second element to examine is what instructional

methodology most effectively encourages meaningful engagement with words and is best suited for the final task.

It has been shown that learning by guessing the meaning of new words from the context (written or oral) or incidental learning is insufficient for programs aimed at rapid vocabulary expansion (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Paribakht & Wesche, 1998). Reading texts is an efficient way to learn how to recognize the written form of words, see how the word fits into a text, and infer its meaning. Even more effective for vocabulary acquisition is when these texts have the target items highlighted with different formatting (understood as *semi-incidental learning conditions* by Pellicer-Sánchez & Boers, 2019). Thus, this criminalistics module employs the reading of a text that has enhanced vocabulary in bold as a first encounter with words, to start familiarizing students with specialized vocabulary and expose them to meaning and form. Listening to videos, hearing a talk, or watching a movie are other approaches to incidental vocabulary learning used in this module. Students watch a movie with captions, which helps them recognize the form of words they hear and connect them with meaning, and sharpen their listening skills, pronunciation, and register. Actually, “research has largely demonstrated that L2 incidental learning from viewing does occur” (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020, p. 151). However, the gains are small and seem not to influence meaning memorization (Montero-Pérez et al. 2014). In general, research has demonstrated that the pick-up rate from incidental learning for L2 learners is low (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020, p. 141), unless there is a follow-up with intentional tasks to promote the frequency of occurrence that fosters form and meaning recall (Teng & Xu, 2022; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020; Pellicer-Sánchez & Boers, 2019; Le-Thi et al., 2017).

Particularly important is repetition through varied assignments when students need to learn formulaic language (Pellicer-Sánchez & Boers, 2019; Bastidas García, 2016; Webb & Chang, 2012; Conklin & Schmitt, 2012; Foster, 2001). In the context of the criminalistics task-based module discussed here, I present students with explicit activities that encourage the learning of a wide range of word combinations, also named multiword units (Nation, 2013, p. 479), formulaic sequences (Wray, 2002) or free combinations, conventionalized forms, idiomatic phrases, routine formulae, collocations, and phrasal units, among many others (Wray, 2002 lists about 50 terms, all based on various criteria). Studies have considered the pedagogical effects of teaching Spanish lexical collocations as an L2 (Álvarez Cavanillas & Chacón Beltrán, 2003), as well as the effects when teaching an LSP, when the precision of lexicon plays a leading role (González Grueso, 2006, highlights its importance in teaching business Spanish, and Bastidas García, 2016 & 2019, in teaching legal Spanish). Indeed, different lexical combinations abound in legal Spanish due to its formulaic expressions (Alcaraz Varó et al., 2014), such as *presunto culpable* (“alleged offender”).

Formulaic language is important to teach because “to an important extent vocabulary choice is predictable” (Hill, 2000, p. 53), and the existing high degree of restricted word choices requires little mental effort and furthermore facilitates production (Erman & Warren, 2000). There is evidence that formulaic language is processed faster (in comprehension and in production) than single-word knowledge in non-native speakers who are proficient and not beginners (Conklin and Schmitt, 2012, pp. 47, 56). Idioms that have a figurative meaning and are harder to guess are particularly difficult. In general, though, it is easier to learn words that are combined and presented as *lexical chunks* (Bastidas García, 2016, p. 131).

However, “most instruction does not focus on formulaic language to any degree” (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020, p. 142), and the research done so far shows that the formulaic language L2 beginner learners produce is often flawed, inaccurate, inappropriate, or wrong (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020, p. 96). Yet that does not mean that L2 proficient students or heritage

speakers, such as the students in this course, cannot achieve productive mastery of formulaic sequences and develop nativelike fluency. However, this goal requires substantial exposure (Schmitt, 2019) or/and instructed contexts (Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020, p. 101). Extensive reading exposure is complicated due to time constraints, and even if possible, authentic texts do not usually repeat collocations (Pellicer-Sánchez & Boers, 2019). Listening appears to be more productive because it provides more repetition of word combinations than texts (Nation, 2013, p. 498).

The module discussed here uses various intentional learning tasks to work on meaning, form, word parts, pronunciation, and grammatical characteristics, especially for domain-specific vocabulary, to increase the number of encounters and add to the extensive exposure necessary for substantial vocabulary gains. The more we pay attention to form and meaning through diverse activities, the richer are the associations that students can make with existing knowledge and the greater their chances of retention (what Laufer and Hulstijn refer to as the Involvement Load Hypothesis, 2001). No particular practices are perfect for teaching technical words and formulaic language, but the module comprises a vast range of possibilities, such as ideograms, conceptual and semantic maps, charts to relate blocks of words, brainstorming, organization by concepts, synonyms, expansion of basic structures with given words, or the use of new multiword units in communicative situations, to name a few.

Memorization is further enhanced through a vocabulary quiz and the preparation for the mock trial that the students conduct on their own. They develop greater fluency throughout the module with role-play scenarios that prepare them for the last assignment.

A CRIMINALISTICS MODULE

With the mock trial in mind, an eight-session criminalistics module (*Taller de criminalística*) was conceived within the broader legal Spanish course, which functions as context-embedded scaffolding. In the module, students learn vocabulary by following the flow of a criminal case: all the steps from the committing of a crime to the final ruling (including investigation of the crime scene, evidence gathering, the procedure, and the people involved in court). As is always the case with an LSP, the module does not focus on criminal law or procedural law but rather on vocabulary, linguistic structures, types of discourse, and professional interaction with legal parties. The module is organized as described below in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Criminalistics Module Activities

<p>Session 1: Criminology vs. Criminalistics. Vocab. on criminal procedure. <i>Activities:</i> Concept mapping.</p>	<p>Session 4: Movie presentation. Vocab. on crime scene, actors, context. Use of “LO” and prepositions + que. <i>Activities:</i> Translations. Fill-in-the-blank.</p>	<p>Session 7: Vocab./ Expressions of doubt, and probabilities. Past perfect subjunctive. <i>Activities:</i> Finding conditions and consequences. Fill-in-the-blank with verb tenses</p>
<p>Session 2: Initial investigation.</p>	<p>Session 5: Revision. Short quiz.</p>	<p>Session 8: The final stage. Vocab. on circumstances</p>

<p>Vocab. on people, spaces, crimes. <i>Activities:</i> Matching pairs and writing original sentences.</p>	<p><i>Activities:</i> Preparation for the mock trial. Working on the script.</p>	<p>of the crime. Types of verdicts. <i>Activities:</i> Table, fill-in-the-blank, matching definitions, and matching verbs/nouns</p>
<p>Session 3: Further inquiries, intermediate stage. Vocab. on evidence: weapons, witnesses. Advice in present and past. <i>Activities:</i> Matching definitions, role-play</p>	<p>Session 6: Guest speaker. Federal prosecutor in Philadelphia – talk in Spanish on real crime investigations. Vocab. on crimes, actors, weapons, evidence, rulings.</p>	<p>Session 9: Mock trial.</p>

Session 1

The module starts with a clear distinction between Criminology (the scientific study of crime and criminals) and Criminalistics or Forensics (techniques used in the detection of crime). Students have been more exposed to the latter, due to the large selection of crime television series/movies easily available to them. This provides me with a particular context that is familiar to the students and, consequently, paves the way to the introduction of new language. As a starting point, a diagram is used to introduce students to the structure of a criminal procedure. Students can see all the stages of Mexican criminal procedural law on a graphic,¹ and based on this, small groups are assigned to conduct minimal research on what is done in each stage. A visual chart (with different colors for each stage, arrows, and explanations) gives them a straightforward idea of a procedure, and it is an excellent way to introduce them to the jargon of procedural law: Initial investigation, Further inquiry, Intermediate stage, Trial, and Implementation Phase.

Session 2

The session begins by students learning the actors who are involved in an initial crime investigation. Some students might already know many of the common words in Spanish (such as *abogado/a* (“lawyer”, masculine/feminine forms [hereby masc./fem.]), *juez/jueza* (“judge”, masc./fem.), or *policía* (“police officer”), but the lesson goes beyond those words to analyze words that are not obvious at first glance, such as *testigo de cargo y de descargo* (“witness against and in favor of the accused”), *imputado* (“suspect”), *reo* (“defendant”, “prisoner”), *forenses* (“forensic surgeon”), *inculpado* (“accused”). These words will be repeated throughout the module in different tasks, to facilitate students remembering, assimilating, and eventually producing them both orally and in writing. In this initial phase, students are constantly

¹ Since 2008, Mexico has undergone a constitutional reform that has changed the way the criminal justice system operates. The country moved from the inquisitorial model (commonly found in civil law countries like in Spain) to an adversarial system (such as in the United States). In this system (more familiar to US students), the judge remains neutral until the very end and is bound by precedent cases. In the inquisitorial system, the judge takes a much more active role in preparing evidence.

reminded of an important adjective that often precedes “the accused”: *presunto* (“alleged”), since nothing is proven or sure at this stage of the procedure.

After the students know the main characters in a criminal setting, the process turns to discovering spaces. For this activity, brainstorming is a practical way for students to come up with ideas on the whiteboard about places where the initial investigation unfolds. If students do not think of all those spaces that will be mentioned later (in readings, in the movie, in other activities), I need to provide the vocabulary, such as *dependencias judiciales* (judiciary premises) or *escenario del crimen* (crime scene). Brainstorming about what a possible crime scene might look like is a particularly fun activity because students enter into a comfort zone, for they remember movie scenes and know how to describe them in English. Therefore, it is easier for them to come up with single words that can be translated into Spanish (such as *víctima* “victim”, *cámaras* “cameras”, *móviles/celulares* “mobile/cell phones”), and multiword units (*delatarse al dejar huellas* “give yourself away by leaving traces behind”, *cómo deshacerse de un cadáver* “how to get rid of a corpse”).

Before this session, students are exposed for the first time to completely new words and word combinations, and associate them with the concept of crime through a text in Spanish that describes the elements of a crime and enhances the vocabulary in bold (action, inaction, typicality, illegality or *antijuricidad*, degree of culpability, imputability, criminal liability, punishability). In class, the concept of crime is analyzed. For example, it is important at this stage to differentiate between crimes and misdemeanors, and to learn verbs associated with them. Synonyms for the verb “to commit” (*cometer* “to commit”, *perpetrar* “to perpetrate”, *incurrir en* “to incur, commit”, *hacer* “to make”) are displayed on a concept map. The same is done for verbs that go with “law/right” (like “disobey” or “violate”) as well as synonyms for the verbs “damage,” “harm,” and “injure”.

In relation to this contextualized vocabulary, students carry out a linguistic activity by matching word combinations, specifically, nouns with verbs that are often used together, such as: *cometer un crimen* (“to commit a crime”), *interponer una denuncia* (“to file a complaint”), *hacer parte a un seguro* (“to file a claim with your insurance company”), *entablar una acción judicial* (“to bring an action”), *citar a declarar* (“to summon”), *prestar declaración* (“to testify”). To help students recognize that these words occur more often than they might think, they read some news headlines in local papers. Then, in small groups, they have to come up with a creative journalistic headline describing a crime and using as much vocabulary as possible as they have seen in class.

Session 3

This lesson is devoted to terminology during the intermediate stage, that is, the period of evidence gathering. First, students need to learn the main types of evidence that are generally used in a criminal procedure, and they do this by finding their definitions through a matching exercise. As consistently done so far, words are not introduced in isolation but rather as multiword units in a particular context:

Noun + de + noun:

interrogatorio de parte/de testigo (“witness interrogation”)

Noun + adjective:

prueba pericial (“expert evidence”), *prueba documental* (“documentary evidence”), *reconocimiento judicial* (“judicial recognition”).

Second, they look for verbs associated with evidence:

Noun + verb (synonyms):

la prueba “the evidence” + *acredita* “confirms” + *un argumento/hecho* “an argument/fact”
prueba “proves”
revela “reveals”
evidencia “shows”
corrobora “confirms”
refuerza “reinforces”

An additional brainstorming session then follows that is related to evidence. Students write ideas on the board about weapons they know and that can be used in a murder (*arma blanca/cuchillo/navaja* “knife”, *revólver/pistola* “revolver/handgun”, *cuerda* “rope”, *auto/coche/carro* “car”, *bomba* “bomb”, *un palo/objeto contundente* “a stick/a blunt object”).

To further prepare for the mock trial, eyewitnesses’ and expert witnesses’ interrogations are introduced. To that end, the classic formula for asking questions in a hearing (*no es cierto que ...?* “isn’t it true that...?”) is presented and students practice various role-play scenarios in pairs. Some students perform as lawyers who need to prepare clients and witnesses for their interrogations/depositions in court and others perform as witnesses.

To aid students in succeeding in this role-play activity, I introduce a key grammatical point: how to give advice using the subjunctive. First, students work on some sentences that require subjunctive in the present tense and then they transform the same sentences into the past tense. This grammar exercise is at a highly advanced level, and it is difficult even for heritage speakers, but it is particularly important for the last oral assignment, when students need to relate events that occurred in the past and understand the use of present and past tense.

Session 4

After the three sessions described above, in which a great deal of vocabulary has been presented and practiced, students watch a Spanish thriller, *The Invisible Guest (Contratiempo)*. The film provides students with extra-linguistic culture-bound elements on top of the pure linguistic ones: another country, people’s relationships, their customs, their legal system. The movie is not about a court hearing, which would be useful in preparation for the final mock trial, because this is not a typical genre in Spanish movies. Although many American and British classic court movies could be watched dubbed in Spanish, this one was selected because the authenticity of the actors, places, and atmosphere is radically different from a dubbed version. But most importantly, while watching the movie, students have the perfect opportunity to recognize and listen to vocabulary they have been learning in a real scenario (*asesino* “murderer”, *sospechoso* “suspect”, *presunto culpable* “alleged perpetrator”, *huellas dactilares* “fingerprints”, etc.), and this frequency of word encounters enhances meaning recall.

Another advanced grammatical point that is introduced during this session is the use of subordinate clauses employing *lo/lo de/lo que* (“that; that which”). This is not a random choice and it is a critical one, not only for students to better understand the conversations in the movie, but also to help them produce these sentences and reach more native-like fluency. For that purpose, students do some translations of English sentences into Spanish, where they use these subordinate clauses. This is not an easy assignment, so to reinforce retention, another

fill-in-the-blank activity is included that asks students to use prepositions and *que* in relative clauses with film excerpts and repeated word combinations.

Session 5

This session is divided into two parts. In the first part, students take a vocabulary quiz in order to encourage memorization. I test them on recognition of form and meaning of the words and combinations of words that are more salient and appropriate for the mock trial. As preparation, I give them a glossary in advance. Most questions have a multiple choice and matching format, including translations to L1 and matching definitions to check whether learners know the concept or whether they would understand the word in a text.

The second part is devoted to preparing for the mock trial and rehearsing the students' performance. The most important feature of this assignment consists of prior preparation. All the students need to collaborate, do research on the crime they are interested in (they can choose from a given list), find all the characters involved, and look for details that can be of use. They have permission to alter the facts and details of the crime to make it more special and particular to their case. Additionally, they get together to rehearse out loud (to practice pronunciation) in and outside the classroom. I help the students during this session and encourage their use of the grammar and the vocabulary expressions learned up to this point. As a basis they are given a script with all the procedural steps that are involved in a hearing, including the multiword units and special wording that judges use (*se declara abierto el juicio* "the trial is declared open", *ante esta sala comparecen* "appear before this Court...") and that the defendants and prosecutors use (*con la venia* "with the permission of the Court..."), as well as video clips with fragments of trials.

Session 6

In this session, I invite a guest speaker to the class to deliver a presentation in Spanish about real criminal cases. A federal prosecutor from Philadelphia explains criminal courts and the procedure as well as types of evidence. Listening again to formulaic sequences that have been the focus of attention in the previous sessions (*cometer un delito/una falta* "commit a crime/a misdemeanor", *presentar el escrito de acusación* "present charges") reinforces the learners' knowledge of these word combinations. This is an exceptional event for students that helps them realize that their previous knowledge of criminalistics is often not as close to reality as they believe (for instance, DNA analyses, which are so present in movies and not so much in real cases). Students also become aware of the importance of speaking another language in the profession (in this case, Spanish) to be able to communicate with defendants and their relatives.

Session 7

A peculiar thing about the thriller the students watch is that it presents different versions of what happened in the same crime scene. This opens up the potential to talk in this session about the likelihood of certain situations using expressions of doubt, probabilities, and conditional sentences, in particular, conditions that can happen ("if you drink, don't drive"), conditions that are less likely to happen ("if I drank, I wouldn't drive"), and conditions that never happened in the past and that may have repercussions in the present ("if I hadn't drunk, you wouldn't now be in the hospital"). Students match conditions and consequences in

sentences. Then, they look for the best tense (present or past, indicative or subjunctive) according to the sense/meaning of the sentence. Finally, they match situations that happened in the past with their repercussions in the present by using vocabulary they have previously seen. In the last activity they have to be more creative and, as a good practice for the mock trial, write what could have occurred in a particular setting if events had been different (“what would have happened if” ...), using again as many formulaic sequences as they can.

Session 8

In the final stage of the criminal procedure one important matter to decide is whether any special circumstances were present during the commission of a crime. These can make a particular crime unique. For this occasion, I show the students a table with the main circumstances listed and they must think about their importance, i.e., exculpatory, aggravating, or mitigating, and whether any circumstance is applicable to the crime in the mock trial. Many of these circumstances are word combinations (such as *actuar en legítima defensa* “act in self-defense”, *impulsado por miedo insuperable* “out of insurmountable fear”, *bajo los efectos de embriaguez o de sustancias tóxicas* “under the influence of alcohol or drugs”).

Finally, the students do some vocabulary activities related to the word “judgment.” The students must find synonyms for *sentencia* – sentence (*fallo* “ruling”, *resolución* “decision”, *veredicto* “verdict”), and match the corresponding verbs (*se dicta* “to pass sentence”, *se pronuncia* “to pronounce”, *se emite* “to announce”). In relation to this topic, students need to match actions that a ruling can cause to be carried out, for instance, doing time in prison, paying a fine, or paying restitution. Since part of the vocabulary is new to them, students are given the words with their definitions, and they do not have to write original phrases. As is often the case, some words might be common, such as to punish or reward (*castigar* “to punish/penalize”, *premiar* “to reward”, *condenar/absolver* “to convict/to acquit”, *declarar culpable/inocente* “to find guilty/not guilty”), so to some students, this is just a repetition of vocabulary that is good for retention. Other words, though, belong to legal jargon (*imponer* “to impose”, *rehabilitar* “to restore”, *reprimir* “to repress”, *prevenir* “to prevent”, *penalizar/sancionar* “to penalize”) and their production may be harder to manage.

Session 9

In this last session, each student performs a role in a formal mock hearing. When I taught this module, I had exactly ten students, each performing a role as the judge, two prosecutors, two lawyers, one defendant, two witnesses (a neighbor and a police officer), and two expert witnesses (a psychologist and a doctor). This assignment was the culmination of what they had learned during the course and a chance to appreciate the efficacy of enhancing the frequency of word encounters by doing different intentional vocabulary tasks, accompanied by a text reading and a movie.

PERFORMANCE

The script that the students created and then read during the trial, contained many of the word combinations that we worked on during the weeks prior to this last session. I included some of the original sentences exactly as the students wrote them (in italics), and word combinations are marked in bold: *desea hacer un **alegato de apertura***? (“do you want to make an **opening**

statement?”), *más allá de una duda razonable* (“beyond a reasonable doubt”), *la verdadera víctima fue la niña* (“the real victim was the girl”), *permítame recordarle que ha jurado decir la verdad* (“let me remind you that you have sworn to tell the truth”), *nunca causamos daño* (“we never caused harm”), *que ella cometiera el crimen* (“that she committed the crime”), *está mintiendo sobre su coartada* (“she is lying about her alibi”), *huellas dactilares* (“fingerprints”), *la casa podría ser una escena del crimen* (“the house could be a crime scene”), among others. However, other words that were taught in context but without word combinations, such as *presunto* (“alleged”), *inculpado* (“indicted”), *imputado* (“accused”), and *forense* (“forensic”), were not used. They also used a few literal translations from English for highly technical words or non-native-like patterns (a frequent tendency among L2 learners, as highlighted by Yamashita & Jiang, 2010), such as: Prosecutor: *Objeción!* (“Objection!”) Judge: *Objeción aceptada* (“Sustained!”), when it would be *objeción* (or *protesta*) *procedente/estimada/ha lugar* (“sustained objection”).

Students often quite fluently used *lo que* (what/whatever), though not *lo de* or *lo de que* (the thing that/that thing about), which are much more difficult for L2 learners: *la apoyamos en todo lo que hizo* (“we supported her in everything she did”); *Cuidaste más de A. de lo que cuidó R. a su hija?* (“Did you take better care of A. than R. took care of her daughter?”); *Puede decirle al Jurado lo que vio la noche del asesinato?* (“Could you tell the jury what you saw the night of the murder?”); *Lo que estoy tratando de decir* (“What I am trying to say is that...”); *ingirió aproximadamente veintisiete pastillas, lo que es un gran número de pastillas* (“She took approximately twenty-seven pills, which is a large number of pills”).

Another interesting observation is that students changed the tone and register according to the characters they were performing, so it was more casual when witnesses were speaking rather than when expert witnesses answered questions or when lawyers or prosecutors presented their oral pleadings and closing arguments. For instance:

N. (lawyer): *Y finalmente, ¿Puede decirle al jurado lo que vio la noche del asesinato, según el informe oficial de la policía?* (“And finally, could you tell the jury what you saw the night of the murder, according to the official police report?”)

S. (a neighbor): *(con vacilación) Sí, R. y A. salieron de su apartamento alrededor de las nueve por la noche, no estoy seguro de qué hora regresó a casa porque estaba dormida. El coche estaba de vuelta cuando me desperté por la mañana.* (hesitantly: “Yes, R. and A. left the apartment around nine at night, I’m not sure what time she came back home because I was asleep. The car was back when I woke up in the morning.”)

N. (lawyer): *Gracias (al jurado). Para ser claros, el testigo acaba de revelar que A. no estaba sola en el apartamento la noche del asesinato, como ella testificó bajo juramento anteriormente.* (“Thank you [to the jury]. To be clear, the witness has just revealed that A. was not alone in the apartment on the night of the murder, as she previously testified under oath.”)

As a final point is also worth mentioning the use of expressions of doubt, probabilities, and conditional sentences in context that were previously seen in session 7, as in these two examples below:

J. (policeman): *Esto me hace pensar que podría haber una posibilidad de que A. fuera el instigador, y ella pudo haber sido un cómplice involuntario* (“This makes me think that there might be a chance that A. was the instigator, and that she may have been an unwitting accomplice.”)

J. (expert witness, doctor): *Sí, sus muñecas estaban atadas, lo que sugiere que su muerte pudo haber sido violenta* (“Yes, her wrists were tied, suggesting that her death might have been violent.”)

CONCLUSION

In sum, this criminalistics module has proven valuable as a way to keep students engaged and introduce them to a world that they might be familiar with in English but not in Spanish. In about eight sessions, the module provides an ideal setting for introducing and working on a new lexicon taught with an intentional vocabulary learning approach with a wide range of activities and stressing the importance of word combinations in legal language. The fact that students watch a movie and can listen to the expressions and vocabulary we work on in class, reinforces their learning and provides them with confidence to use these terms in appropriate registers. The authenticity of the film also shows them an extralinguistic aspect that should not be disregarded. This approach has turned out to be effective for improving the fluency of the students, who were able to use in the mock trial a large percentage of the new vocabulary they learned in class. All in all, it has been a successful exercise for integrating a wide range of new single words and multiword units into a curriculum within a circumscribed framework.

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